Complete Works of

Aldous Huxley

DELPHI CLASSICS

Series Nine

The Complete Works of

ALDOUS HUXLEY

(1894-1963)

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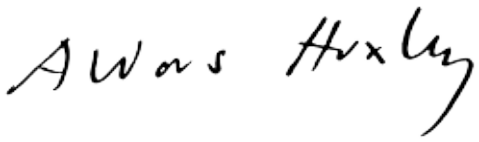

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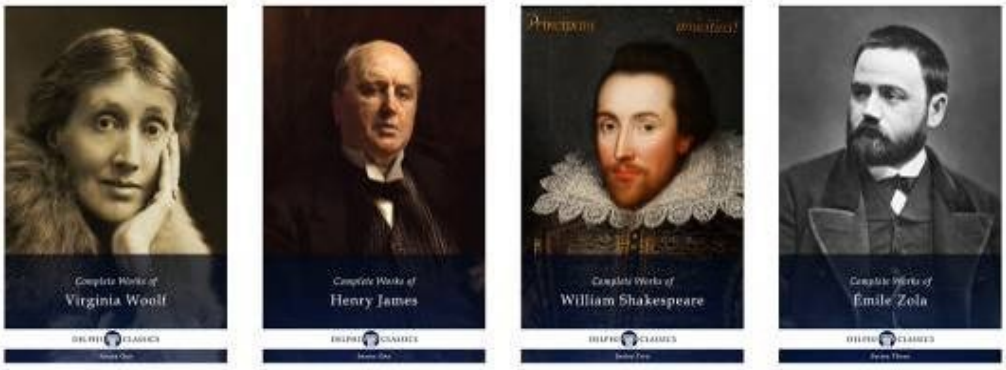

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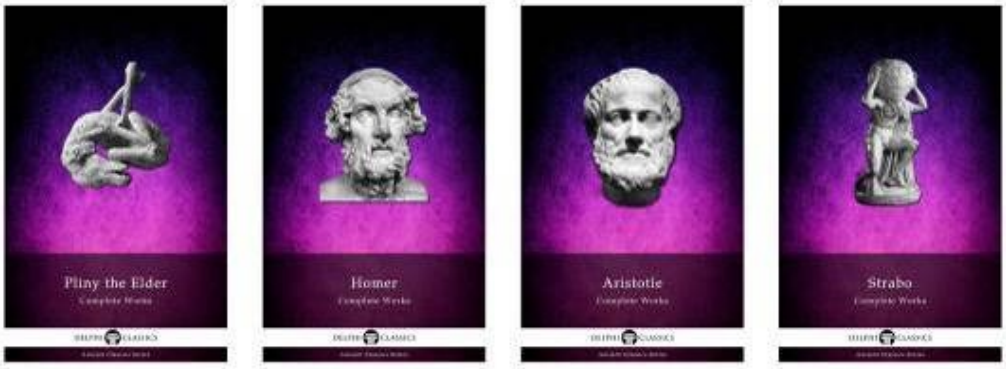

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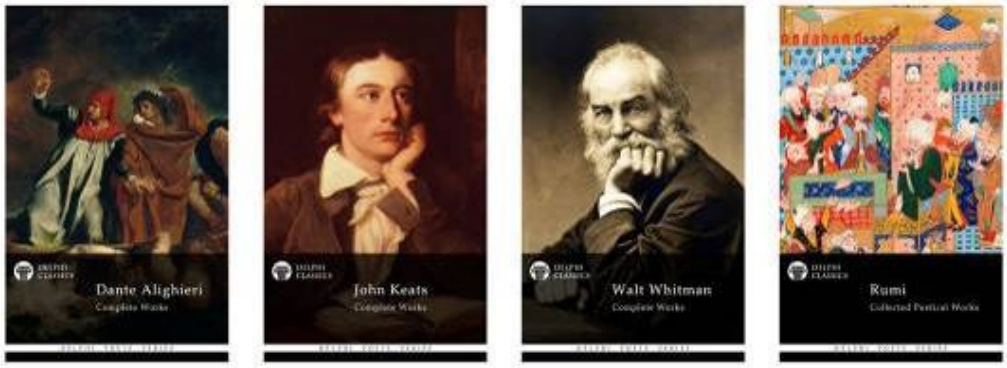

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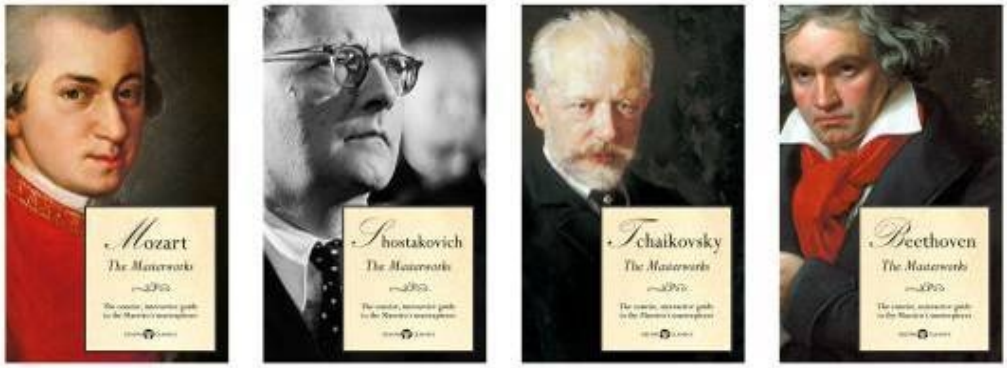

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CLASSICS

The Complete Works of

ALDOUS HUXLEY

By Delphi Classics, 2018

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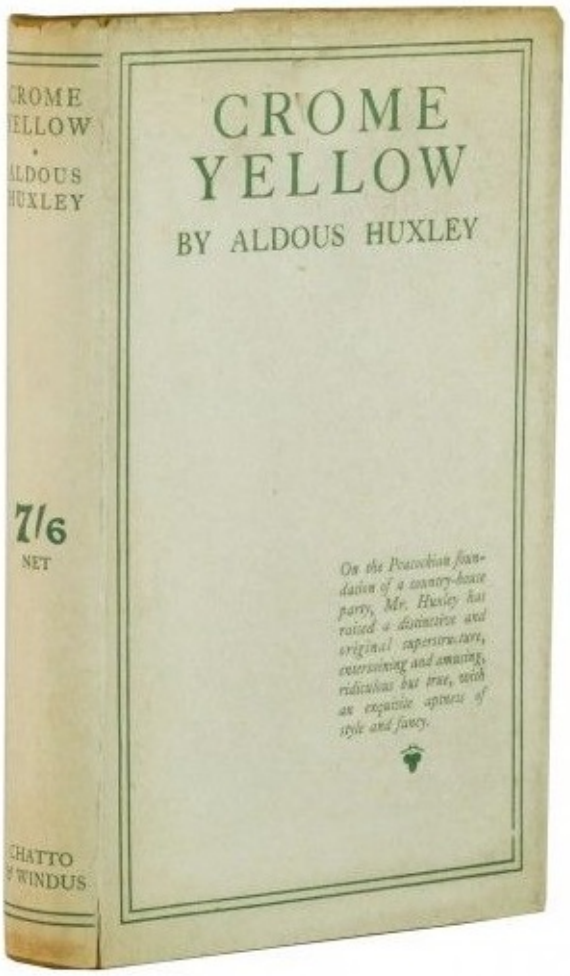
The Novels

Huxley was born in Godalming, Surrey, on 26 July 1894

Crome Yellow

As a young boy he was taught by his mother, but after she became ill, he attended Eton College and then graduated from Oxford University in 1916. He had attempted to join the British Army at the start of 1916, but had been rejected due to his severely impaired vision. After graduation, he took a position at the Air Ministry before acquiring a teaching position at Eton for a year. One of his students was George Orwell, who considered Huxley an incompetent teacher in many regards, but commended him for his excellent mastery of French. Towards the end of the First World War, Huxley worked for Lady Ottoline Morrell at Garsington Manor, where he encountered members of the 'Bloomsbury Group', which included Virginia Woolf, Clive Bell, Duncan Grant and John Maynard Keynes.

Crome Yellow was first published in Britain by Chatto and Windus in 1921. It was the author's debut novel, although he had completed an unpublished book when he was only seventeen years old. It centres around a young poet, Denis Stone, who is searching for literary validation from more experienced writers. He visits Crome Yellow, a manor, where an array of authors and artists gather to socialise and network. The book is satirical and takes aim at those Huxley knew from his time at Garsington Manor. He creates a host of amusing and ridiculous characters that typified the self-obsession of the literary scene at that time, such as Priscilla Wimbush, who is an obvious depiction and mockery of Lady Ottoline Morrell.



The first edition

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Lady Ottoline Morrell

Bloomsbury Group members — left to right: Lady Ottoline Morrell, Maria Nys, Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell

CHAPTER I.

ALONG THIS PARTICULAR stretch of line no express had ever passed. All the trains — the few that there were — stopped at all the stations. Denis knew the names of those stations by heart. Bole, Tritton, Spavin Delawarr, Knipswich for Timpany, West Bowlby, and, finally, Camlet-on-the-Water. Camlet was where he always got out, leaving the train to creep indolently onward, goodness only knew whither, into the green heart of England.

They were snorting out of West Bowlby now. It was the next station, thank Heaven. Denis took his chattels off the rack and piled them neatly in the corner opposite his own. A futile proceeding. But one must have something to do. When he had finished, he sank back into his seat and closed his eyes. It was extremely hot.

Oh, this journey! It was two hours cut clean out of his life; two hours in which he might have done so much, so much — written the perfect poem, for example, or read the one illuminating book. Instead of which — his gorge rose at the smell of the dusty cushions against which he was leaning.

Two hours. One hundred and twenty minutes. Anything might be done in that time. Anything. Nothing. Oh, he had had hundreds of hours, and what had he done with them? Wasted them, spilt the precious minutes as though his reservoir were inexhaustible. Denis groaned in the spirit, condemned himself utterly with all his works. What right had he to sit in the sunshine, to occupy corner seats in third-class carriages, to be alive? None, none, none.

Misery and a nameless nostalgic distress possessed him. He was twenty-three, and oh! so agonizingly conscious of the fact.

The train came bumpingly to a halt. Here was Camlet at last. Denis jumped up, crammed his hat over his eyes, deranged his pile of baggage, leaned out of the window and shouted for a porter, seized a bag in either hand, and had to put

them down again in order to open the door. When at last he had safely bundled himself and his baggage on to the platform, he ran up the train towards the van.

“A bicycle, a bicycle!” he said breathlessly to the guard. He felt himself a man of action. The guard paid no attention, but continued methodically to hand out, one by one, the packages labelled to Camlet. “A bicycle!” Denis repeated. “A green machine, cross-framed, name of Stone. S-T-O-N-E.”

“All in good time, sir,” said the guard soothingly. He was a large, stately man with a naval beard. One pictured him at home, drinking tea, surrounded by a numerous family. It was in that tone that he must have spoken to his children when they were tiresome. “All in good time, sir.” Denis’s man of action collapsed, punctured.

He left his luggage to be called for later, and pushed off on his bicycle. He always took his bicycle when he went into the country. It was part of the theory of exercise. One day one would get up at six o’clock and pedal away to Kenilworth, or Stratford-on-Avon — anywhere. And within a radius of twenty miles there were always Norman churches and Tudor mansions to be seen in the course of an afternoon’s excursion. Somehow they never did get seen, but all the same it was nice to feel that the bicycle was there, and that one fine morning one really might get up at six.

Once at the top of the long hill which led up from Camlet station, he felt his spirits mounting. The world, he found, was good. The far-away blue hills, the harvests whitening on the slopes of the ridge along which his road led him, the treeless sky-lines that changed as he moved — yes, they were all good. He was overcome by the beauty of those deeply embayed combes, scooped in the flanks of the ridge beneath him. Curves, curves: he repeated the word slowly, trying as he did so to find some term in which to give expression to his appreciation. Curves — no, that was inadequate. He made a gesture with his hand, as though to scoop the achieved expression out of the air, and almost fell off his bicycle. What was the word to describe the curves of those little valleys? They were as fine as the lines of a human body, they were informed with the subtlety of art...

Galbe. That was a good word; but it was French. Le galbe evase de ses hanches: had one ever read a French novel in which that phrase didn’t occur? Some day he would compile a dictionary for the use of novelists. Galbe, gonfle, goulu: parfum, peau, pervers, potele, pudeur: vertu, volupte.

But he really must find that word. Curves curves...Those little valleys had the lines of a cup moulded round a woman’s breast; they seemed the dinted imprints of some huge divine body that had rested on these hills. Cumbrous locutions, these; but through them he seemed to be getting nearer to what he wanted. Dinted, dimpled, wimpled — his mind wandered down echoing corridors of assonance and alliteration ever further and further from the point. He was enamoured with the beauty of words.

Becoming once more aware of the outer world, he found himself on the crest of a descent. The road plunged down, steep and straight, into a considerable valley. There, on the opposite slope, a little higher up the valley, stood Crome, his destination. He put on his brakes; this view of Crome was pleasant to linger over. The facade with its three projecting towers rose precipitously from among the dark trees of the garden. The house basked in full sunlight; the old brick rosily glowed. How ripe and rich it was, how superbly mellow! And at the same time, how austere! The hill was becoming steeper and steeper; he was gaining speed in spite of his brakes. He loosed his grip of the levers, and in a moment was rushing headlong down. Five minutes later he was passing through the gate of the great courtyard. The front door stood hospitably open. He left his bicycle leaning against the wall and walked in. He would take them by surprise.

CHAPTER II.

HE TOOK NOBODY by surprise; there was nobody to take. All was quiet; Denis wandered from room to empty room, looking with pleasure at the familiar pictures and furniture, at all the little untidy signs of life that lay scattered here and there. He was rather glad that they were all out; it was amusing to wander through the house as though one were exploring a dead, deserted Pompeii. What sort of life would the excavator reconstruct from these remains; how would he people these empty chambers? There was the long gallery, with its rows of respectable and (though, of course, one couldn't publicly admit it) rather boring Italian primitives, its Chinese sculptures, its unobtrusive, dateless furniture. There was the panelled drawing-room, where the huge chintz-covered arm-chairs stood, oases of comfort among the austere flesh-mortifying antiques. There was the morning-room, with its pale lemon walls, its painted Venetian chairs and rococo tables, its mirrors, its modern pictures. There was the library, cool, spacious, and dark, book-lined from floor to ceiling, rich in portentous folios. There was the dining-room, solidly, portwinily English, with its great mahogany table, its eighteenth-century chairs and sideboard, its eighteenth-century pictures — family portraits, meticulous animal paintings. What could one reconstruct from such data? There was much of Henry Wimbush in the long gallery and the library, something of Anne, perhaps, in the morning-room. That was all. Among the accumulations of ten generations the living had left but few traces.

Lying on the table in the morning-room he saw his own book of poems. What tact! He picked it up and opened it. It was what the reviewers call "a slim volume." He read at hazard: "...But silence and the topless dark

Vault in the lights of Luna Park;

And Blackpool from the nightly gloom

Hollows a bright tumultuous tomb.”

He put it down again, shook his head, and sighed. “What genius I had then!” he reflected, echoing the aged Swift. It was nearly six months since the book had been published; he was glad to think he would never write anything of the same sort again. Who could have been reading it, he wondered? Anne, perhaps; he liked to think so. Perhaps, too, she had at last recognised herself in the Hamadryad of the poplar sapling; the slim Hamadryad whose movements were like the swaying of a young tree in the wind. “The Woman who was a Tree” was what he had called the poem. He had given her the book when it came out, hoping that the poem would tell her what he hadn’t dared to say. She had never referred to it.

He shut his eyes and saw a vision of her in a red velvet cloak, swaying into the little restaurant where they sometimes dined together in London — three quarters of an hour late, and he at his table, haggard with anxiety, irritation, hunger. Oh, she was damnable!

It occurred to him that perhaps his hostess might be in her boudoir. It was a possibility; he would go and see. Mrs. Wimbush’s boudoir was in the central tower on the garden front. A little staircase cork-screwed up to it from the hall. Denis mounted, tapped at the door. “Come in.” Ah, she was there; he had rather hoped she wouldn’t be. He opened the door.

Priscilla Wimbush was lying on the sofa. A blotting-pad rested on her knees and she was thoughtfully sucking the end of a silver pencil.

“Hullo,” she said, looking up. “I’d forgotten you were coming.”

“Well, here I am, I’m afraid,” said Denis deprecatingly. “I’m awfully sorry.”

Mrs. Wimbush laughed. Her voice, her laughter, were deep and masculine. Everything about her was manly. She had a large, square, middle-aged face, with a massive projecting nose and little greenish eyes, the whole surmounted by a lofty and elaborate coiffure of a curiously improbable shade of orange. Looking at her, Denis always thought of Wilkie Bard as the cantatrice.

“That’s why I’m going to
Sing in op’ra, sing in op’ra,
Sing in op-pop-pop-pop-pop-popera.”

Today she was wearing a purple silk dress with a high collar and a row of pearls. The costume, so richly dowagerish, so suggestive of the Royal Family, made her look more than ever like something on the Halls.

“What have you been doing all this time?” she asked.

“Well,” said Denis, and he hesitated, almost voluptuously. He had a tremendously amusing account of London and its doings all ripe and ready in his mind. It would be a pleasure to give it utterance. “To begin with,” he said...

But he was too late. Mrs. Wimbush’s question had been what the grammarians call rhetorical; it asked for no answer. It was a little conversational flourish, a gambit in the polite game.

“You find me busy at my horoscopes,” she said, without even being aware that she had interrupted him.

A little pained, Denis decided to reserve his story for more receptive ears. He contented himself, by way of revenge, with saying “Oh?” rather icily.

“Did I tell you how I won four hundred on the Grand National this year?”

“Yes,” he replied, still frigid and mono-syllabic. She must have told him at least six times.

“Wonderful, isn’t it? Everything is in the Stars. In the Old Days, before I had the Stars to help me, I used to lose thousands. Now” — she paused an instant— “well, look at that four hundred on the Grand National. That’s the Stars.”

Denis would have liked to hear more about the Old Days. But he was too discreet and, still more, too shy to ask. There had been something of a bust up; that was all he knew. Old Priscilla — not so old then, of course, and sprightlier — had lost a great deal of money, dropped it in handfuls and hatfuls on every race-course in the country. She had gambled too. The number of thousands varied in the different legends, but all put it high. Henry Wimbush was forced to sell some of his Primitives — a Taddeo da Poggibonsi, an Amico di Taddeo, and

four or five nameless Sienese — to the Americans. There was a crisis. For the first time in his life Henry asserted himself, and with good effect, it seemed.

Priscilla's gay and gadding existence had come to an abrupt end. Nowadays she spent almost all her time at Crome, cultivating a rather ill-defined malady. For consolation she dallied with New Thought and the Occult. Her passion for racing still possessed her, and Henry, who was a kind-hearted fellow at bottom, allowed her forty pounds a month betting money. Most of Priscilla's days were spent in casting the horoscopes of horses, and she invested her money scientifically, as the stars dictated. She betted on football too, and had a large notebook in which she registered the horoscopes of all the players in all the teams of the League. The process of balancing the horoscopes of two elevens one against the other was a very delicate and difficult one. A match between the Spurs and the Villa entailed a conflict in the heavens so vast and so complicated that it was not to be wondered at if she sometimes made a mistake about the outcome.

"Such a pity you don't believe in these things, Denis, such a pity," said Mrs. Wimbush in her deep, distinct voice.

"I can't say I feel it so."

"Ah, that's because you don't know what it's like to have faith. You've no idea how amusing and exciting life becomes when you do believe. All that happens means something; nothing you do is ever insignificant. It makes life so jolly, you know. Here am I at Crome. Dull as ditchwater, you'd think; but no, I don't find it so. I don't regret the Old Days a bit. I have the Stars..." She picked up the sheet of paper that was lying on the blotting-pad. "Inman's horoscope," she explained. "(I thought I'd like to have a little fling on the billiards championship this autumn.) I have the Infinite to keep in tune with," she waved her hand. "And then there's the next world and all the spirits, and one's Aura, and Mrs. Eddy and saying you're not ill, and the Christian Mysteries and Mrs. Besant. It's all splendid. One's never dull for a moment. I can't think how I used to get on before — in the Old Days. Pleasure — running about, that's all it was; just running about. Lunch, tea, dinner, theatre, supper every day. It was fun, of

course, while it lasted. But there wasn't much left of it afterwards. There's rather a good thing about that in Barbecue-Smith's new book. Where is it?"

She sat up and reached for a book that was lying on the little table by the head of the sofa.

"Do you know him, by the way?" she asked.

"Who?"

"Mr. Barbecue-Smith."

Denis knew of him vaguely. Barbecue-Smith was a name in the Sunday papers. He wrote about the Conduct of Life. He might even be the author of "What a Young Girl Ought to Know".

"No, not personally," he said.

"I've invited him for next week-end." She turned over the pages of the book. "Here's the passage I was thinking of. I marked it. I always mark the things I like."

Holding the book almost at arm's length, for she was somewhat long-sighted, and making suitable gestures with her free hand, she began to read, slowly, dramatically.

"'What are thousand pound fur coats, what are quarter million incomes?'" She looked up from the page with a histrionic movement of the head; her orange coiffure nodded portentously. Denis looked at it, fascinated. Was it the Real Thing and henna, he wondered, or was it one of those Complete Transformations one sees in the advertisements?

"'What are Thrones and Sceptres?'"

The orange Transformation — yes, it must be a Transformation — bobbed up again.

"'What are the gaieties of the Rich, the splendours of the Powerful, what is the pride of the Great, what are the gaudy pleasures of High Society?'"

The voice, which had risen in tone, questioningly, from sentence to sentence, dropped suddenly and boomed reply.

"'They are nothing. Vanity, fluff, dandelion seed in the wind, thin vapours of fever. The things that matter happen in the heart. Seen things are sweet, but

those unseen are a thousand times more significant. It is the unseen that counts in Life.’”

Mrs. Wimbush lowered the book. “Beautiful, isn’t it?” she said.

Denis preferred not to hazard an opinion, but uttered a non-committal “H’m.”

“Ah, it’s a fine book this, a beautiful book,” said Priscilla, as she let the pages flick back, one by one, from under her thumb. “And here’s the passage about the Lotus Pool. He compares the Soul to a Lotus Pool, you know.” She held up the book again and read. “‘A Friend of mine has a Lotus Pool in his garden. It lies in a little dell embowered with wild roses and eglantine, among which the nightingale pours forth its amorous descant all the summer long. Within the pool the Lotuses blossom, and the birds of the air come to drink and bathe themselves in its crystal waters...’ Ah, and that reminds me,” Priscilla exclaimed, shutting the book with a clap and uttering her big profound laugh— “that reminds me of the things that have been going on in our bathing-pool since you were here last. We gave the village people leave to come and bathe here in the evenings. You’ve no idea of the things that happened.”

She leaned forward, speaking in a confidential whisper; every now and then she uttered a deep gurgle of laughter. “...mixed bathing...saw them out of my window...sent for a pair of field-glasses to make sure...no doubt of it...” The laughter broke out again. Denis laughed too. Barbecue-Smith was tossed on the floor.

“It’s time we went to see if tea’s ready,” said Priscilla. She hoisted herself up from the sofa and went swishing off across the room, striding beneath the trailing silk. Denis followed her, faintly humming to himself: “That’s why I’m going to

Sing in op’ra, sing in op’ra,

Sing in op-pop-pop-pop-pop-popera.”

And then the little twiddly bit of accompaniment at the end: “ra-ra.”

CHAPTER III.

THE TERRACE IN front of the house was a long narrow strip of turf, bounded along its outer edge by a graceful stone balustrade. Two little summer-houses of brick stood at either end. Below the house the ground sloped very steeply away, and the terrace was a remarkably high one; from the balusters to the sloping lawn beneath was a drop of thirty feet. Seen from below, the high unbroken terrace wall, built like the house itself of brick, had the almost menacing aspect of a fortification — a castle bastion, from whose parapet one looked out across airy depths to distances level with the eye. Below, in the foreground, hedged in by solid masses of sculptured yew trees, lay the stone-brimmed swimming-pool. Beyond it stretched the park, with its massive elms, its green expanses of grass, and, at the bottom of the valley, the gleam of the narrow river. On the farther side of the stream the land rose again in a long slope, chequered with cultivation. Looking up the valley, to the right, one saw a line of blue, far-off hills.

The tea-table had been planted in the shade of one of the little summer-houses, and the rest of the party was already assembled about it when Denis and Priscilla made their appearance. Henry Wimbush had begun to pour out the tea. He was one of those ageless, unchanging men on the farther side of fifty, who might be thirty, who might be anything. Denis had known him almost as long as he could remember. In all those years his pale, rather handsome face had never grown any older; it was like the pale grey bowler hat which he always wore, winter and summer — unageing, calm, serenely without expression.

Next him, but separated from him and from the rest of the world by the almost impenetrable barriers of her deafness, sat Jenny Mullion. She was perhaps thirty, had a tilted nose and a pink-and-white complexion, and wore her brown hair plaited and coiled in two lateral buns over her ears. In the secret tower of her deafness she sat apart, looking down at the world through sharply

piercing eyes. What did she think of men and women and things? That was something that Denis had never been able to discover. In her enigmatic remoteness Jenny was a little disquieting. Even now some interior joke seemed to be amusing her, for she was smiling to herself, and her brown eyes were like very bright round marbles.

On his other side the serious, moonlike innocence of Mary Bracegirdle's face shone pink and childish. She was nearly twenty-three, but one wouldn't have guessed it. Her short hair, clipped like a page's, hung in a bell of elastic gold about her cheeks. She had large blue china eyes, whose expression was one of ingenuous and often puzzled earnestness.

Next to Mary a small gaunt man was sitting, rigid and erect in his chair. In appearance Mr. Scogan was like one of those extinct bird-lizards of the Tertiary. His nose was beaked, his dark eye had the shining quickness of a robin's. But there was nothing soft or gracious or feathery about him. The skin of his wrinkled brown face had a dry and scaly look; his hands were the hands of a crocodile. His movements were marked by the lizard's disconcertingly abrupt clockwork speed; his speech was thin, fluty, and dry. Henry Wimbush's school-fellow and exact contemporary, Mr. Scogan looked far older and, at the same time, far more youthfully alive than did that gentle aristocrat with the face like a grey bowler.

Mr. Scogan might look like an extinct saurian, but Gombauld was altogether and essentially human. In the old-fashioned natural histories of the 'thirties he might have figured in a steel engraving as a type of Homo Sapiens — an honour which at that time commonly fell to Lord Byron. Indeed, with more hair and less collar, Gombauld would have been completely Byronic — more than Byronic, even, for Gombauld was of Provencal descent, a black-haired young corsair of thirty, with flashing teeth and luminous large dark eyes. Denis looked at him enviously. He was jealous of his talent: if only he wrote verse as well as Gombauld painted pictures! Still more, at the moment, he envied Gombauld his looks, his vitality, his easy confidence of manner. Was it surprising that Anne

should like him? Like him? — it might even be something worse, Denis reflected bitterly, as he walked at Priscilla's side down the long grass terrace.

Between Gombauld and Mr. Scogan a very much lowered deck-chair presented its back to the new arrivals as they advanced towards the tea-table. Gombauld was leaning over it; his face moved vivaciously; he smiled, he laughed, he made quick gestures with his hands. From the depths of the chair came up a sound of soft, lazy laughter. Denis started as he heard it. That laughter — how well he knew it! What emotions it evoked in him! He quickened his pace.

In her low deck-chair Anne was nearer to lying than to sitting. Her long, slender body reposed in an attitude of listless and indolent grace. Within its setting of light brown hair her face had a pretty regularity that was almost doll-like. And indeed there were moments when she seemed nothing more than a doll; when the oval face, with its long-lashed, pale blue eyes, expressed nothing; when it was no more than a lazy mask of wax. She was Henry Wimbush's own niece; that bowler-like countenance was one of the Wimbush heirlooms; it ran in the family, appearing in its female members as a blank doll-face. But across this dollish mask, like a gay melody dancing over an unchanging fundamental bass, passed Anne's other inheritance — quick laughter, light ironic amusement, and the changing expressions of many moods. She was smiling now as Denis looked down at her: her cat's smile, he called it, for no very good reason. The mouth was compressed, and on either side of it two tiny wrinkles had formed themselves in her cheeks. An infinity of slightly malicious amusement lurked in those little folds, in the puckers about the half-closed eyes, in the eyes themselves, bright and laughing between the narrowed lids.

The preliminary greetings spoken, Denis found an empty chair between Gombauld and Jenny and sat down.

"How are you, Jenny?" he shouted to her.

Jenny nodded and smiled in mysterious silence, as though the subject of her health were a secret that could not be publicly divulged.

“How’s London been since I went away?” Anne inquired from the depth of her chair.

The moment had come; the tremendously amusing narrative was waiting for utterance. “Well,” said Denis, smiling happily, “to begin with...”

“Has Priscilla told you of our great antiquarian find?” Henry Wimbush leaned forward; the most promising of buds was nipped.

“To begin with,” said Denis desperately, “there was the Ballet...”

“Last week,” Mr. Wimbush went on softly and implacably, “we dug up fifty yards of oaken drain-pipes; just tree trunks with a hole bored through the middle. Very interesting indeed. Whether they were laid down by the monks in the fifteenth century, or whether...”

Denis listened gloomily. “Extraordinary!” he said, when Mr. Wimbush had finished; “quite extraordinary!” He helped himself to another slice of cake. He didn’t even want to tell his tale about London now; he was damped.

For some time past Mary’s grave blue eyes had been fixed upon him. “What have you been writing lately?” she asked. It would be nice to have a little literary conversation.

“Oh, verse and prose,” said Denis— “just verse and prose.”

“Prose?” Mr. Scogan pounced alarmingly on the word. “You’ve been writing prose?”

“Yes.”

“Not a novel?”

“Yes.”

“My poor Denis!” exclaimed Mr. Scogan. “What about?”

Denis felt rather uncomfortable. “Oh, about the usual things, you know.”

“Of course,” Mr. Scogan groaned. “I’ll describe the plot for you. Little Percy, the hero, was never good at games, but he was always clever. He passes through the usual public school and the usual university and comes to London, where he lives among the artists. He is bowed down with melancholy thought; he carries the whole weight of the universe upon his shoulders. He writes a novel of

dazzling brilliance; he dabbles delicately in Amour and disappears, at the end of the book, into the luminous Future."

Denis blushed scarlet. Mr. Scogan had described the plan of his novel with an accuracy that was appalling. He made an effort to laugh. "You're entirely wrong," he said. "My novel is not in the least like that." It was a heroic lie. Luckily, he reflected, only two chapters were written. He would tear them up that very evening when he unpacked.

Mr. Scogan paid no attention to his denial, but went on: "Why will you young men continue to write about things that are so entirely uninteresting as the mentality of adolescents and artists? Professional anthropologists might find it interesting to turn sometimes from the beliefs of the Blackfellow to the philosophical preoccupations of the undergraduate. But you can't expect an ordinary adult man, like myself, to be much moved by the story of his spiritual troubles. And after all, even in England, even in Germany and Russia, there are more adults than adolescents. As for the artist, he is preoccupied with problems that are so utterly unlike those of the ordinary adult man — problems of pure aesthetics which don't so much as present themselves to people like myself — that a description of his mental processes is as boring to the ordinary reader as a piece of pure mathematics. A serious book about artists regarded as artists is unreadable; and a book about artists regarded as lovers, husbands, dipsomaniacs, heroes, and the like is really not worth writing again. Jean-Christophe is the stock artist of literature, just as Professor Radium of 'Comic Cuts' is its stock man of science."

"I'm sorry to hear I'm as uninteresting as all that," said Gombauld.

"Not at all, my dear Gombauld," Mr. Scogan hastened to explain. "As a lover or a dipsomaniac, I've no doubt of your being a most fascinating specimen. But as a combiner of forms, you must honestly admit it, you're a bore."

"I entirely disagree with you," exclaimed Mary. She was somehow always out of breath when she talked. And her speech was punctuated by little gasps. "I've known a great many artists, and I've always found their mentality very

interesting. Especially in Paris. Tschuplitski, for example — I saw a great deal of Tschuplitski in Paris this spring...”

“Ah, but then you’re an exception, Mary, you’re an exception,” said Mr. Scogan. “You are a femme superieure.”

A flush of pleasure turned Mary’s face into a harvest moon.

CHAPTER IV.

DENIS WOKE UP next morning to find the sun shining, the sky serene. He decided to wear white flannel trousers — white flannel trousers and a black jacket, with a silk shirt and his new peach-coloured tie. And what shoes? White was the obvious choice, but there was something rather pleasing about the notion of black patent leather. He lay in bed for several minutes considering the problem.

Before he went down — patent leather was his final choice — he looked at himself critically in the glass. His hair might have been more golden, he reflected. As it was, its yellowness had the hint of a greenish tinge in it. But his forehead was good. His forehead made up in height what his chin lacked in prominence. His nose might have been longer, but it would pass. His eyes might have been blue and not green. But his coat was very well cut and, discreetly padded, made him seem robuster than he actually was. His legs, in their white casing, were long and elegant. Satisfied, he descended the stairs. Most of the party had already finished their breakfast. He found himself alone with Jenny.

“I hope you slept well,” he said.

“Yes, isn’t it lovely?” Jenny replied, giving two rapid little nods. “But we had such awful thunderstorms last week.”

Parallel straight lines, Denis reflected, meet only at infinity. He might talk for ever of care-charmer sleep and she of meteorology till the end of time. Did one ever establish contact with anyone? We are all parallel straight lines. Jenny was only a little more parallel than most.

“They are very alarming, these thunderstorms,” he said, helping himself to porridge. “Don’t you think so? Or are you above being frightened?”

“No. I always go to bed in a storm. One is so much safer lying down.”

“Why?”

“Because,” said Jenny, making a descriptive gesture, “because lightning goes downwards and not flat ways. When you’re lying down you’re out of the current.”

“That’s very ingenious.”

“It’s true.”

There was a silence. Denis finished his porridge and helped himself to bacon. For lack of anything better to say, and because Mr. Scogan’s absurd phrase was for some reason running in his head, he turned to Jenny and asked:

“Do you consider yourself a femme superieure?” He had to repeat the question several times before Jenny got the hang of it.

“No,” she said, rather indignantly, when at last she heard what Denis was saying. “Certainly not. Has anyone been suggesting that I am?”

“No,” said Denis. “Mr. Scogan told Mary she was one.”

“Did he?” Jenny lowered her voice. “Shall I tell you what I think of that man? I think he’s slightly sinister.”

Having made this pronouncement, she entered the ivory tower of her deafness and closed the door. Denis could not induce her to say anything more, could not induce her even to listen. She just smiled at him, smiled and occasionally nodded.

Denis went out on to the terrace to smoke his after-breakfast pipe and to read his morning paper. An hour later, when Anne came down, she found him still reading. By this time he had got to the Court Circular and the Forthcoming Weddings. He got up to meet her as she approached, a Hamadryad in white muslin, across the grass.

“Why, Denis,” she exclaimed, “you look perfectly sweet in your white trousers.”

Denis was dreadfully taken aback. There was no possible retort. “You speak as though I were a child in a new frock,” he said, with a show of irritation.

“But that’s how I feel about you, Denis dear.”

“Then you oughtn’t to.”

“But I can’t help it. I’m so much older than you.”

“I like that,” he said. “Four years older.”

“And if you do look perfectly sweet in your white trousers, why shouldn’t I say so? And why did you put them on, if you didn’t think you were going to look sweet in them?”

“Let’s go into the garden,” said Denis. He was put out; the conversation had taken such a preposterous and unexpected turn. He had planned a very different opening, in which he was to lead off with, “You look adorable this morning,” or something of the kind, and she was to answer, “Do I?” and then there was to be a pregnant silence. And now she had got in first with the trousers. It was provoking; his pride was hurt.

That part of the garden that sloped down from the foot of the terrace to the pool had a beauty which did not depend on colour so much as on forms. It was as beautiful by moonlight as in the sun. The silver of water, the dark shapes of yew and ilex trees remained, at all hours and seasons, the dominant features of the scene. It was a landscape in black and white. For colour there was the flower-garden; it lay to one side of the pool, separated from it by a huge Babylonian wall of yews. You passed through a tunnel in the hedge, you opened a wicket in a wall, and you found yourself, startlingly and suddenly, in the world of colour. The July borders blazed and flared under the sun. Within its high brick walls the garden was like a great tank of warmth and perfume and colour.

Denis held open the little iron gate for his companion. “It’s like passing from a cloister into an Oriental palace,” he said, and took a deep breath of the warm, flower-scented air. “‘In fragrant volleys they let fly...’ How does it go?”

“‘Well shot, ye firemen! Oh how sweet
And round your equal fires do meet;
Whose shrill report no ear can tell,
But echoes to the eye and smell...’”

“You have a bad habit of quoting,” said Anne. “As I never know the context or author, I find it humiliating.”

Denis apologized. “It’s the fault of one’s education. Things somehow seem more real and vivid when one can apply somebody else’s ready-made phrase about them. And then there are lots of lovely names and words — Monophysite, Iamblichus, Pomponazzi; you bring them out triumphantly, and feel you’ve clinched the argument with the mere magical sound of them. That’s what comes of the higher education.”

“You may regret your education,” said Anne; “I’m ashamed of my lack of it. Look at those sunflowers! Aren’t they magnificent?”

“Dark faces and golden crowns — they’re kings of Ethiopia. And I like the way the tits cling to the flowers and pick out the seeds, while the other loutish birds, grubbing dirtily for their food, look up in envy from the ground. Do they look up in envy? That’s the literary touch, I’m afraid. Education again. It always comes back to that.” He was silent.

Anne had sat down on a bench that stood in the shade of an old apple tree. “I’m listening,” she said.

He did not sit down, but walked backwards and forwards in front of the bench, gesticulating a little as he talked. “Books,” he said— “books. One reads so many, and one sees so few people and so little of the world. Great thick books about the universe and the mind and ethics. You’ve no idea how many there are. I must have read twenty or thirty tons of them in the last five years. Twenty tons of ratiocination. Weighted with that, one’s pushed out into the world.”

He went on walking up and down. His voice rose, fell, was silent a moment, and then talked on. He moved his hands, sometimes he waved his arms. Anne looked and listened quietly, as though she were at a lecture. He was a nice boy, and to-day he looked charming — charming!

One entered the world, Denis pursued, having ready-made ideas about everything. One had a philosophy and tried to make life fit into it. One should have lived first and then made one’s philosophy to fit life...Life, facts, things were horribly complicated; ideas, even the most difficult of them, deceptively simple. In the world of ideas everything was clear; in life all was obscure, embroiled. Was it surprising that one was miserable, horribly unhappy? Denis

came to a halt in front of the bench, and as he asked this last question he stretched out his arms and stood for an instant in an attitude of crucifixion, then let them fall again to his sides.

“My poor Denis!” Anne was touched. He was really too pathetic as he stood there in front of her in his white flannel trousers. “But does one suffer about these things? It seems very extraordinary.”

“You’re like Scogan,” cried Denis bitterly. “You regard me as a specimen for an anthropologist. Well, I suppose I am.”

“No, no,” she protested, and drew in her skirt with a gesture that indicated that he was to sit down beside her. He sat down. “Why can’t you just take things for granted and as they come?” she asked. “It’s so much simpler.”

“Of course it is,” said Denis. “But it’s a lesson to be learnt gradually. There are the twenty tons of ratiocination to be got rid of first.”

“I’ve always taken things as they come,” said Anne. “It seems so obvious. One enjoys the pleasant things, avoids the nasty ones. There’s nothing more to be said.”

“Nothing — for you. But, then, you were born a pagan; I am trying laboriously to make myself one. I can take nothing for granted, I can enjoy nothing as it comes along. Beauty, pleasure, art, women — I have to invent an excuse, a justification for everything that’s delightful. Otherwise I can’t enjoy it with an easy conscience. I make up a little story about beauty and pretend that it has something to do with truth and goodness. I have to say that art is the process by which one reconstructs the divine reality out of chaos. Pleasure is one of the mystical roads to union with the infinite — the ecstasies of drinking, dancing, love-making. As for women, I am perpetually assuring myself that they’re the broad highway to divinity. And to think that I’m only just beginning to see through the silliness of the whole thing! It’s incredible to me that anyone should have escaped these horrors.”

“It’s still more incredible to me,” said Anne, “that anyone should have been a victim to them. I should like to see myself believing that men are the highway to divinity.” The amused malice of her smile planted two little folds on either side

of her mouth, and through their half-closed lids her eyes shone with laughter. “What you need, Denis, is a nice plump young wife, a fixed income, and a little congenial but regular work.”

“What I need is you.” That was what he ought to have retorted, that was what he wanted passionately to say. He could not say it. His desire fought against his shyness. “What I need is you.” Mentally he shouted the words, but not a sound issued from his lips. He looked at her despairingly. Couldn’t she see what was going on inside him? Couldn’t she understand? “What I need is you.” He would say it, he would — he would.

“I think I shall go and bathe,” said Anne. “It’s so hot.” The opportunity had passed.

CHAPTER V.

MR. WIMBUSH HAD taken them to see the sights of the Home Farm, and now they were standing, all six of them — Henry Wimbush, Mr. Scogan, Denis, Gombauld, Anne, and Mary — by the low wall of the piggery, looking into one of the styes.

"This is a good sow," said Henry Wimbush. "She had a litter of fourteen.

"Fourteen?" Mary echoed incredulously. She turned astonished blue eyes towards Mr. Wimbush, then let them fall onto the seething mass of elan vital that fermented in the sty.

An immense sow reposed on her side in the middle of the pen. Her round, black belly, fringed with a double line of dugs, presented itself to the assault of an army of small, brownish-black swine. With a frantic greed they tugged at their mother's flank. The old sow stirred sometimes uneasily or uttered a little grunt of pain. One small pig, the runt, the weakling of the litter, had been unable to secure a place at the banquet. Squealing shrilly, he ran backwards and forwards, trying to push in among his stronger brothers or even to climb over their tight little black backs towards the maternal reservoir.

"There ARE fourteen," said Mary. "You're quite right. I counted. It's extraordinary."

"The sow next door," Mr. Wimbush went on, "has done very badly. She only had five in her litter. I shall give her another chance. If she does no better next time, I shall fat her up and kill her. There's the boar," he pointed towards a farther sty. "Fine old beast, isn't he? But he's getting past his prime. He'll have to go too."

"How cruel!" Anne exclaimed.

"But how practical, how eminently realistic!" said Mr. Scogan. "In this farm we have a model of sound paternal government. Make them breed, make them

work, and when they're past working or breeding or begetting, slaughter them."

"Farming seems to be mostly indecency and cruelty," said Anne.

With the ferrule of his walking-stick Denis began to scratch the boar's long bristly back. The animal moved a little so as to bring himself within easier range of the instrument that evoked in him such delicious sensations; then he stood stock still, softly grunting his contentment. The mud of years flaked off his sides in a grey powdery scurf.

"What a pleasure it is," said Denis, "to do somebody a kindness. I believe I enjoy scratching this pig quite as much as he enjoys being scratched. If only one could always be kind with so little expense or trouble..."

A gate slammed; there was a sound of heavy footsteps.

"Morning, Rowley!" said Henry Wimbush.

"Morning, sir," old Rowley answered. He was the most venerable of the labourers on the farm — a tall, solid man, still unbent, with grey side-whiskers and a steep, dignified profile. Grave, weighty in his manner, splendidly respectable, Rowley had the air of a great English statesman of the mid-nineteenth century. He halted on the outskirts of the group, and for a moment they all looked at the pigs in a silence that was only broken by the sound of grunting or the squelch of a sharp hoof in the mire. Rowley turned at last, slowly and ponderously and nobly, as he did everything, and addressed himself to Henry Wimbush.

"Look at them, sir," he said, with a motion of his hand towards the wallowing swine. "Rightly is they called pigs."

"Rightly indeed," Mr. Wimbush agreed.

"I am abashed by that man," said Mr. Scogan, as old Rowley plodded off slowly and with dignity. "What wisdom, what judgment, what a sense of values! 'Rightly are they called swine.' Yes. And I wish I could, with as much justice, say, 'Rightly are we called men.'"

They walked on towards the cowsheds and the stables of the cart-horses. Five white geese, taking the air this fine morning, even as they were doing, met them in the way. They hesitated, cackled; then, converting their lifted necks into rigid,

horizontal snakes, they rushed off in disorder, hissing horribly as they went. Red calves paddled in the dung and mud of a spacious yard. In another enclosure stood the bull, massive as a locomotive. He was a very calm bull, and his face wore an expression of melancholy stupidity. He gazed with reddish-brown eyes at his visitors, chewed thoughtfully at the tangible memories of an earlier meal, swallowed and regurgitated, chewed again. His tail lashed savagely from side to side; it seemed to have nothing to do with his impassive bulk. Between his short horns was a triangle of red curls, short and dense.

“Splendid animal,” said Henry Wimbush. “Pedigree stock. But he’s getting a little old, like the boar.”

“Fat him up and slaughter him,” Mr. Scogan pronounced, with a delicate old-maidish precision of utterance.

“Couldn’t you give the animals a little holiday from producing children?” asked Anne. “I’m so sorry for the poor things.”

Mr. Wimbush shook his head. “Personally,” he said, “I rather like seeing fourteen pigs grow where only one grew before. The spectacle of so much crude life is refreshing.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so,” Gombauld broke in warmly. “Lots of life: that’s what we want. I like pullulation; everything ought to increase and multiply as hard as it can.”

Gombauld grew lyrical. Everybody ought to have children — Anne ought to have them, Mary ought to have them — dozens and dozens. He emphasised his point by thumping with his walking-stick on the bull’s leather flanks. Mr. Scogan ought to pass on his intelligence to little Scogans, and Denis to little Denises. The bull turned his head to see what was happening, regarded the drumming stick for several seconds, then turned back again satisfied, it seemed, that nothing was happening. Sterility was odious, unnatural, a sin against life. Life, life, and still more life. The ribs of the placid bull resounded.

Standing with his back against the farmyard pump, a little apart, Denis examined the group. Gombauld, passionate and vivacious, was its centre. The others stood round, listening — Henry Wimbush, calm and polite beneath his

grey bowler; Mary, with parted lips and eyes that shone with the indignation of a convinced birth-controller. Anne looked on through half-shut eyes, smiling; and beside her stood Mr. Scogan, bolt upright in an attitude of metallic rigidity that contrasted strangely with that fluid grace of hers which even in stillness suggested a soft movement.

Gombauld ceased talking, and Mary, flushed and outraged, opened her mouth to refute him. But she was too slow. Before she could utter a word Mr. Scogan's fluty voice had pronounced the opening phrases of a discourse. There was no hope of getting so much as a word in edgeways; Mary had perforce to resign herself.

"Even your eloquence, my dear Gombauld," he was saying— "even your eloquence must prove inadequate to reconvert the world to a belief in the delights of mere multiplication. With the gramophone, the cinema, and the automatic pistol, the goddess of Applied Science has presented the world with another gift, more precious even than these — the means of dissociating love from propagation. Eros, for those who wish it, is now an entirely free god; his deplorable associations with Lucina may be broken at will. In the course of the next few centuries, who knows? the world may see a more complete severance. I look forward to it optimistically. Where the great Erasmus Darwin and Miss Anna Seward, Swan of Lichfield, experimented — and, for all their scientific ardour, failed — our descendants will experiment and succeed. An impersonal generation will take the place of Nature's hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear; society, sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, will flit like a gay butterfly from flower to flower through a sunlit world."

"It sounds lovely," said Anne.

"The distant future always does."

Mary's china blue eyes, more serious and more astonished than ever, were fixed on Mr. Scogan. "Bottles?" she said. "Do you really think so? Bottles..."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. BARBECUE-SMITH ARRIVED in time for tea on Saturday afternoon. He was a short and corpulent man, with a very large head and no neck. In his earlier middle age he had been distressed by this absence of neck, but was comforted by reading in Balzac's "Louis Lambert" that all the world's great men have been marked by the same peculiarity, and for a simple and obvious reason: Greatness is nothing more nor less than the harmonious functioning of the faculties of the head and heart; the shorter the neck, the more closely these two organs approach one another; argal...It was convincing.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith belonged to the old school of journalists. He sported a leonine head with a greyish-black mane of oddly unappetising hair brushed back from a broad but low forehead. And somehow he always seemed slightly, ever so slightly, soiled. In younger days he had gaily called himself a Bohemian. He did so no longer. He was a teacher now, a kind of prophet. Some of his books of comfort and spiritual teaching were in their hundred and twentieth thousand.

Priscilla received him with every mark of esteem. He had never been to Crome before; she showed him round the house. Mr. Barbecue-Smith was full of admiration.

"So quaint, so old-world," he kept repeating. He had a rich, rather unctuous voice.

Priscilla praised his latest book. "Splendid, I thought it was," she said in her large, jolly way.

"I'm happy to think you found it a comfort," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith.

"Oh, tremendously! And the bit about the Lotus Pool — I thought that so beautiful."

"I knew you would like that. It came to me, you know, from without." He waved his hand to indicate the astral world.

They went out into the garden for tea. Mr. Barbecue-Smith was duly introduced.

“Mr. Stone is a writer too,” said Priscilla, as she introduced Denis.

“Indeed!” Mr. Barbecue-Smith smiled benignly, and, looking up at Denis with an expression of Olympian condescension, “And what sort of things do you write?”

Denis was furious, and, to make matters worse, he felt himself blushing hotly. Had Priscilla no sense of proportion? She was putting them in the same category — Barbecue-Smith and himself. They were both writers, they both used pen and ink. To Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s question he answered, “Oh, nothing much, nothing,” and looked away.

“Mr. Stone is one of our younger poets.” It was Anne’s voice. He scowled at her, and she smiled back exasperatingly.

“Excellent, excellent,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith, and he squeezed Denis’s arm encouragingly. “The Bard’s is a noble calling.”

As soon as tea was over Mr. Barbecue-Smith excused himself; he had to do some writing before dinner. Priscilla quite understood. The prophet retired to his chamber.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith came down to the drawing-room at ten to eight. He was in a good humour, and, as he descended the stairs, he smiled to himself and rubbed his large white hands together. In the drawing-room someone was playing softly and ramblingly on the piano. He wondered who it could be. One of the young ladies, perhaps. But no, it was only Denis, who got up hurriedly and with some embarrassment as he came into the room.

“Do go on, do go on,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. “I am very fond of music.”

“Then I couldn’t possibly go on,” Denis replied. “I only make noises.”

There was a silence. Mr. Barbecue-Smith stood with his back to the hearth, warming himself at the memory of last winter’s fires. He could not control his interior satisfaction, but still went on smiling to himself. At last he turned to Denis.

“You write,” he asked, “don’t you?”

“Well, yes — a little, you know.”

“How many words do you find you can write in an hour?”

“I don’t think I’ve ever counted.”

“Oh, you ought to, you ought to. It’s most important.”

Denis exercised his memory. “When I’m in good form,” he said, “I fancy I do a twelve-hundred-word review in about four hours. But sometimes it takes me much longer.”

Mr. Barbecue-Smith nodded. “Yes, three hundred words an hour at your best.” He walked out into the middle of the room, turned round on his heels, and confronted Denis again. “Guess how many words I wrote this evening between five and half-past seven.”

“I can’t imagine.”

“No, but you must guess. Between five and half-past seven — that’s two and a half hours.”

“Twelve hundred words,” Denis hazarded.

“No, no, no.” Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s expanded face shone with gaiety. “Try again.”

“Fifteen hundred.”

“No.”

“I give it up,” said Denis. He found he couldn’t summon up much interest in Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s writing.

“Well, I’ll tell you. Three thousand eight hundred.”

Denis opened his eyes. “You must get a lot done in a day,” he said.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith suddenly became extremely confidential. He pulled up a stool to the side of Denis’s arm-chair, sat down in it, and began to talk softly and rapidly.

“Listen to me,” he said, laying his hand on Denis’s sleeve. “You want to make your living by writing; you’re young, you’re inexperienced. Let me give you a little sound advice.”

What was the fellow going to do? Denis wondered: give him an introduction to the editor of “John o’ London’s Weekly”, or tell him where he could sell a

light middle for seven guineas? Mr. Barbecue-Smith patted his arm several times and went on.

“The secret of writing,” he said, breathing it into the young man’s ear— “the secret of writing is Inspiration.”

Denis looked at him in astonishment.

“Inspiration...” Mr. Barbecue-Smith repeated.

“You mean the native wood-note business?”

Mr. Barbecue-Smith nodded.

“Oh, then I entirely agree with you,” said Denis. “But what if one hasn’t got Inspiration?”

“That was precisely the question I was waiting for,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. “You ask me what one should do if one hasn’t got Inspiration. I answer: you have Inspiration; everyone has Inspiration. It’s simply a question of getting it to function.”

The clock struck eight. There was no sign of any of the other guests; everybody was always late at Crome. Mr. Barbecue-Smith went on.

“That’s my secret,” he said. “I give it you freely.” (Denis made a suitably grateful murmur and grimace.) “I’ll help you to find your Inspiration, because I don’t like to see a nice, steady young man like you exhausting his vitality and wasting the best years of his life in a grinding intellectual labour that could be completely obviated by Inspiration. I did it myself, so I know what it’s like. Up till the time I was thirty-eight I was a writer like you — a writer without Inspiration. All I wrote I squeezed out of myself by sheer hard work. Why, in those days I was never able to do more than six-fifty words an hour, and what’s more, I often didn’t sell what I wrote.” He sighed. “We artists,” he said parenthetically, “we intellectuals aren’t much appreciated here in England.” Denis wondered if there was any method, consistent, of course, with politeness, by which he could dissociate himself from Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s “we.” There was none; and besides, it was too late now, for Mr. Barbecue-Smith was once more pursuing the tenor of his discourse.

“At thirty-eight I was a poor, struggling, tired, overworked, unknown journalist. Now, at fifty...” He paused modestly and made a little gesture, moving his fat hands outwards, away from one another, and expanding his fingers as though in demonstration. He was exhibiting himself. Denis thought of that advertisement of Nestle’s milk — the two cats on the wall, under the moon, one black and thin, the other white, sleek, and fat. Before Inspiration and after.

“Inspiration has made the difference,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith solemnly. “It came quite suddenly — like a gentle dew from heaven.” He lifted his hand and let it fall back on to his knee to indicate the descent of the dew. “It was one evening. I was writing my first little book about the Conduct of Life— ‘Humble Heroisms’. You may have read it; it has been a comfort — at least I hope and think so — a comfort to many thousands. I was in the middle of the second chapter, and I was stuck. Fatigue, overwork — I had only written a hundred words in the last hour, and I could get no further. I sat biting the end of my pen and looking at the electric light, which hung above my table, a little above and in front of me.” He indicated the position of the lamp with elaborate care. “Have you ever looked at a bright light intently for a long time?” he asked, turning to Denis. Denis didn’t think he had. “You can hypnotise yourself that way,” Mr. Barbecue-Smith went on.

The gong sounded in a terrific crescendo from the hall. Still no sign of the others. Denis was horribly hungry.

“That’s what happened to me,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. “I was hypnotised. I lost consciousness like that.” He snapped his fingers. “When I came to, I found that it was past midnight, and I had written four thousand words. Four thousand,” he repeated, opening his mouth very wide on the “ou” of thousand. “Inspiration had come to me.”

“What a very extraordinary thing,” said Denis.

“I was afraid of it at first. It didn’t seem to me natural. I didn’t feel, somehow, that it was quite right, quite fair, I might almost say, to produce a literary composition unconsciously. Besides, I was afraid I might have written nonsense.”

“And had you written nonsense?” Denis asked.

“Certainly not,” Mr. Barbecue-Smith replied, with a trace of annoyance. “Certainly not. It was admirable. Just a few spelling mistakes and slips, such as there generally are in automatic writing. But the style, the thought — all the essentials were admirable. After that, Inspiration came to me regularly. I wrote the whole of ‘Humble Heroisms’ like that. It was a great success, and so has everything been that I have written since.” He leaned forward and jabbed at Denis with his finger. “That’s my secret,” he said, “and that’s how you could write too, if you tried — without effort, fluently, well.”

“But how?” asked Denis, trying not to show how deeply he had been insulted by that final “well.”

“By cultivating your Inspiration, by getting into touch with your Subconscious. Have you ever read my little book, ‘Pipe-Lines to the Infinite’?”

Denis had to confess that that was, precisely, one of the few, perhaps the only one, of Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s works he had not read.

“Never mind, never mind,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. “It’s just a little book about the connection of the Subconscious with the Infinite. Get into touch with the Subconscious and you are in touch with the Universe. Inspiration, in fact. You follow me?”

“Perfectly, perfectly,” said Denis. “But don’t you find that the Universe sometimes sends you very irrelevant messages?”

“I don’t allow it to,” Mr. Barbecue-Smith replied. “I canalise it. I bring it down through pipes to work the turbines of my conscious mind.”

“Like Niagara,” Denis suggested. Some of Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s remarks sounded strangely like quotations — quotations from his own works, no doubt.

“Precisely. Like Niagara. And this is how I do it.” He leaned forward, and with a raised forefinger marked his points as he made them, beating time, as it were, to his discourse. “Before I go off into my trance, I concentrate on the subject I wish to be inspired about. Let us say I am writing about the humble heroisms; for ten minutes before I go into the trance I think of nothing but orphans supporting their little brothers and sisters, of dull work well and

patiently done, and I focus my mind on such great philosophical truths as the purification and uplifting of the soul by suffering, and the alchemical transformation of leaden evil into golden good." (Denis again hung up his little festoon of quotation marks.) "Then I pop off. Two or three hours later I wake up again, and find that inspiration has done its work. Thousands of words, comforting, uplifting words, lie before me. I type them out neatly on my machine and they are ready for the printer."

"It all sounds wonderfully simple," said Denis.

"It is. All the great and splendid and divine things of life are wonderfully simple." (Quotation marks again.) "When I have to do my aphorisms," Mr. Barbecue-Smith continued, "I prelude my trance by turning over the pages of any Dictionary of Quotations or Shakespeare Calendar that comes to hand. That sets the key, so to speak; that ensures that the Universe shall come flowing in, not in a continuous rush, but in aphorismic drops. You see the idea?"

Denis nodded. Mr. Barbecue-Smith put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a notebook. "I did a few in the train to-day," he said, turning over the pages. "Just dropped off into a trance in the corner of my carriage. I find the train very conducive to good work. Here they are." He cleared his throat and read:

"The Mountain Road may be steep, but the air is pure up there, and it is from the Summit that one gets the view."

"The Things that Really Matter happen in the Heart."

It was curious, Denis reflected, the way the Infinite sometimes repeated itself.

"Seeing is Believing. Yes, but Believing is also Seeing. If I believe in God, I see God, even in the things that seem to be evil."

Mr. Barbecue-Smith looked up from his notebook. "That last one," he said, "is particularly subtle and beautiful, don't you think? Without Inspiration I could never have hit on that." He re-read the apophthegm with a slower and more solemn utterance. "Straight from the Infinite," he commented reflectively, then addressed himself to the next aphorism.

"The flame of a candle gives Light, but it also Burns."

Puzzled wrinkles appeared on Mr. Barbecue-Smith's forehead. "I don't exactly know what that means," he said. "It's very gnomic. One could apply it, of course to the Higher Education — illuminating, but provoking the Lower Classes to discontent and revolution. Yes, I suppose that's what it is. But it's gnomic, it's gnomic." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The gong sounded again, clamorously, it seemed imploringly: dinner was growing cold. It roused Mr. Barbecue-Smith from meditation. He turned to Denis.

"You understand me now when I advise you to cultivate your Inspiration. Let your Subconscious work for you; turn on the Niagara of the Infinite."

There was the sound of feet on the stairs. Mr. Barbecue-Smith got up, laid his hand for an instant on Denis's shoulder, and said:

"No more now. Another time. And remember, I rely absolutely on your discretion in this matter. There are intimate, sacred things that one doesn't wish to be generally known."

"Of course," said Denis. "I quite understand."

CHAPTER VII.

AT CROME ALL the beds were ancient hereditary pieces of furniture. Huge beds, like four-masted ships, with furled sails of shining coloured stuff. Beds carved and inlaid, beds painted and gilded. Beds of walnut and oak, of rare exotic woods. Beds of every date and fashion from the time of Sir Ferdinando, who built the house, to the time of his namesake in the late eighteenth century, the last of the family, but all of them grandiose, magnificent.

The finest of all was now Anne's bed. Sir Julius, son to Sir Ferdinando, had had it made in Venice against his wife's first lying-in. Early seicento Venice had expended all its extravagant art in the making of it. The body of the bed was like a great square sarcophagus. Clustering roses were carved in high relief on its wooden panels, and luscious putti wallowed among the roses. On the black ground-work of the panels the carved reliefs were gilded and burnished. The golden roses twined in spirals up the four pillar-like posts, and cherubs, seated at the top of each column, supported a wooden canopy fretted with the same carved flowers.

Anne was reading in bed. Two candles stood on the little table beside her, in their rich light her face, her bare arm and shoulder took on warm hues and a sort of peach-like quality of surface. Here and there in the canopy above her carved golden petals shone brightly among profound shadows, and the soft light, falling on the sculptured panel of the bed, broke restlessly among the intricate roses, lingered in a broad caress on the blown cheeks, the dimpled bellies, the tight, absurd little posteriors of the sprawling putti.

There was a discreet tap at the door. She looked up. "Come in, come in." A face, round and childish, within its sleek bell of golden hair, peered round the opening door. More childish-looking still, a suit of mauve pyjamas made its entrance.

It was Mary. “I thought I’d just look in for a moment to say good-night,” she said, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

Anne closed her book. “That was very sweet of you.”

“What are you reading?” She looked at the book. “Rather second-rate, isn’t it?” The tone in which Mary pronounced the word “second-rate” implied an almost infinite denigration. She was accustomed in London to associate only with first-rate people who liked first-rate things, and she knew that there were very, very few first-rate things in the world, and that those were mostly French.

“Well, I’m afraid I like it,” said Anne. There was nothing more to be said. The silence that followed was a rather uncomfortable one. Mary fiddled uneasily with the bottom button of her pyjama jacket. Leaning back on her mound of heaped-up pillows, Anne waited and wondered what was coming.

“I’m so awfully afraid of repressions,” said Mary at last, bursting suddenly and surprisingly into speech. She pronounced the words on the tail-end of an expiring breath, and had to gasp for new air almost before the phrase was finished.

“What’s there to be depressed about?”

“I said repressions, not depressions.”

“Oh, repressions; I see,” said Anne. “But repressions of what?”

Mary had to explain. “The natural instincts of sex...” she began didactically. But Anne cut her short.

“Yes, yes. Perfectly. I understand. Repressions! old maids and all the rest. But what about them?”

“That’s just it,” said Mary. “I’m afraid of them. It’s always dangerous to repress one’s instincts. I’m beginning to detect in myself symptoms like the ones you read of in the books. I constantly dream that I’m falling down wells; and sometimes I even dream that I’m climbing up ladders. It’s most disquieting. The symptoms are only too clear.”

“Are they?”

“One may become a nymphomaniac if one’s not careful. You’ve no idea how serious these repressions are if you don’t get rid of them in time.”

“It sounds too awful,” said Anne. “But I don’t see that I can do anything to help you.”

“I thought I’d just like to talk it over with you.”

“Why, of course; I’m only too happy, Mary darling.”

Mary coughed and drew a deep breath. “I presume,” she began sententiously, “I presume we may take for granted that an intelligent young woman of twenty-three who has lived in civilised society in the twentieth century has no prejudices.”

“Well, I confess I still have a few.”

“But not about repressions.”

“No, not many about repressions; that’s true.”

“Or, rather, about getting rid of repressions.”

“Exactly.”

“So much for our fundamental postulate,” said Mary. Solemnity was expressed in every feature of her round young face, radiated from her large blue eyes. “We come next to the desirability of possessing experience. I hope we are agreed that knowledge is desirable and that ignorance is undesirable.”

Obedient as one of those complaisant disciples from whom Socrates could get whatever answer he chose, Anne gave her assent to this proposition.

“And we are equally agreed, I hope, that marriage is what it is.”

“It is.”

“Good!” said Mary. “And repressions being what they are...”

“Exactly.”

“There would therefore seem to be only one conclusion.”

“But I knew that,” Anne exclaimed, “before you began.”

“Yes, but now it’s been proved,” said Mary. “One must do things logically. The question is now...”

“But where does the question come in? You’ve reached your only possible conclusion — logically, which is more than I could have done. All that remains is to impart the information to someone you like — someone you like really rather a lot, someone you’re in love with, if I may express myself so baldly.”

“But that’s just where the question comes in,” Mary exclaimed. “I’m not in love with anybody.”

“Then, if I were you, I should wait till you are.”

“But I can’t go on dreaming night after night that I’m falling down a well. It’s too dangerous.”

“Well, if it really is TOO dangerous, then of course you must do something about it; you must find somebody else.”

“But who?” A thoughtful frown puckered Mary’s brow. “It must be somebody intelligent, somebody with intellectual interests that I can share. And it must be somebody with a proper respect for women, somebody who’s prepared to talk seriously about his work and his ideas and about my work and my ideas. It isn’t, as you see, at all easy to find the right person.”

“Well” said Anne, “there are three unattached and intelligent men in the house at the present time. There’s Mr. Scogan, to begin with; but perhaps he’s rather too much of a genuine antique. And there are Gombauld and Denis. Shall we say that the choice is limited to the last two?”

Mary nodded. “I think we had better,” she said, and then hesitated, with a certain air of embarrassment.

“What is it?”

“I was wondering,” said Mary, with a gasp, “whether they really were unattached. I thought that perhaps you might...you might...”

“It was very nice of you to think of me, Mary darling,” said Anne, smiling the tight cat’s smile. “But as far as I’m concerned, they are both entirely unattached.”

“I’m very glad of that,” said Mary, looking relieved. “We are now confronted with the question: Which of the two?”

“I can give no advice. It’s a matter for your taste.”

“It’s not a matter of my taste,” Mary pronounced, “but of their merits. We must weigh them and consider them carefully and dispassionately.”

“You must do the weighing yourself,” said Anne; there was still the trace of a smile at the corners of her mouth and round the half-closed eyes. “I won’t run

the risk of advising you wrongly."

"Gombauld has more talent," Mary began, "but he is less civilised than Denis." Mary's pronunciation of "civilised" gave the word a special and additional significance. She uttered it meticulously, in the very front of her mouth, hissing delicately on the opening sibilant. So few people were civilised, and they, like the first-rate works of art, were mostly French. "Civilisation is most important, don't you think?"

Anne held up her hand. "I won't advise," she said. "You must make the decision."

"Gombauld's family," Mary went on reflectively, "comes from Marseilles. Rather a dangerous heredity, when one thinks of the Latin attitude towards women. But then, I sometimes wonder whether Denis is altogether serious-minded, whether he isn't rather a dilettante. It's very difficult. What do you think?"

"I'm not listening," said Anne. "I refuse to take any responsibility."

Mary sighed. "Well," she said, "I think I had better go to bed and think about it."

"Carefully and dispassionately," said Anne.

At the door Mary turned round. "Good-night," she said, and wondered as she said the words why Anne was smiling in that curious way. It was probably nothing, she reflected. Anne often smiled for no apparent reason; it was probably just a habit. "I hope I shan't dream of falling down wells again to-night," she added.

"Ladders are worse," said Anne.

Mary nodded. "Yes, ladders are much graver."

CHAPTER VIII.

BREAKFAST ON SUNDAY morning was an hour later than on week-days, and Priscilla, who usually made no public appearance before luncheon, honoured it by her presence. Dressed in black silk, with a ruby cross as well as her customary string of pearls round her neck, she presided. An enormous Sunday paper concealed all but the extreme pinnacle of her coiffure from the outer world.

"I see Surrey has won," she said, with her mouth full, "by four wickets. The sun is in Leo: that would account for it!"

"Splendid game, cricket," remarked Mr. Barbecue-Smith heartily to no one in particular; "so thoroughly English."

Jenny, who was sitting next to him, woke up suddenly with a start. "What?" she said. "What?"

"So English," repeated Mr. Barbecue-Smith.

Jenny looked at him, surprised. "English? Of course I am."

He was beginning to explain, when Mrs. Wimbush vailed her Sunday paper, and appeared, a square, mauve-powdered face in the midst of orange splendours. "I see there's a new series of articles on the next world just beginning," she said to Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "This one's called 'Summer Land and Gehenna.'"

"Summer Land," echoed Mr. Barbecue-Smith, closing his eyes. "Summer Land. A beautiful name. Beautiful — beautiful."

Mary had taken the seat next to Denis's. After a night of careful consideration she had decided on Denis. He might have less talent than Gombauld, he might be a little lacking in seriousness, but somehow he was safer.

"Are you writing much poetry here in the country?" she asked, with a bright gravity.

"None," said Denis curtly. "I haven't brought my typewriter."

“But do you mean to say you can’t write without a typewriter?”

Denis shook his head. He hated talking at breakfast, and, besides, he wanted to hear what Mr. Scogan was saying at the other end of the table.

“...My scheme for dealing with the Church,” Mr. Scogan was saying, “is beautifully simple. At the present time the Anglican clergy wear their collars the wrong way round. I would compel them to wear, not only their collars, but all their clothes, turned back to frantic — coat, waistcoat, trousers, boots — so that every clergyman should present to the world a smooth facade, unbroken by stud, button, or lace. The enforcement of such a livery would act as a wholesome deterrent to those intending to enter the Church. At the same time it would enormously enhance, what Archbishop Laud so rightly insisted on, the ‘beauty of holiness’ in the few incorrigibles who could not be deterred.”

“In hell, it seems,” said Priscilla, reading in her Sunday paper, “the children amuse themselves by flaying lambs alive.”

“Ah, but, dear lady, that’s only a symbol,” exclaimed Mr. Barbecue-Smith, “a material symbol of a h-piritual truth. Lambs signify...”

“Then there are military uniforms,” Mr. Scogan went on. “When scarlet and pipe-clay were abandoned for khaki, there were some who trembled for the future of war. But then, finding how elegant the new tunic was, how closely it clipped the waist, how voluptuously, with the lateral bustles of the pockets, it exaggerated the hips; when they realized the brilliant potentialities of breeches and top-boots, they were reassured. Abolish these military elegances, standardise a uniform of sack-cloth and mackintosh, you will very soon find that...”

“Is anyone coming to church with me this morning?” asked Henry Wimbush. No one responded. He baited his bare invitation. “I read the lessons, you know. And there’s Mr. Bodiham. His sermons are sometimes worth hearing.”

“Thank you, thank you,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. “I for one prefer to worship in the infinite church of Nature. How does our Shakespeare put it? ‘Sermons in books, stones in the running brooks.’” He waved his arm in a fine gesture towards the window, and even as he did so he became vaguely, but none the less insistently, none the less uncomfortably aware that something had gone

wrong with the quotation. Something — what could it be? Sermons? Stones? Books?

CHAPTER IX.

MR. BODIHAM WAS sitting in his study at the Rectory. The nineteenth-century Gothic windows, narrow and pointed, admitted the light grudgingly; in spite of the brilliant July weather, the room was sombre. Brown varnished bookshelves lined the walls, filled with row upon row of those thick, heavy theological works which the second-hand booksellers generally sell by weight. The mantelpiece, the over-mantel, a towering structure of spindly pillars and little shelves, were brown and varnished. The writing-desk was brown and varnished. So were the chairs, so was the door. A dark red-brown carpet with patterns covered the floor. Everything was brown in the room, and there was a curious brownish smell.

In the midst of this brown gloom Mr. Bodiham sat at his desk. He was the man in the Iron Mask. A grey metallic face with iron cheek-bones and a narrow iron brow; iron folds, hard and unchanging, ran perpendicularly down his cheeks; his nose was the iron beak of some thin, delicate bird of rapine. He had brown eyes, set in sockets rimmed with iron; round them the skin was dark, as though it had been charred. Dense wiry hair covered his skull; it had been black, it was turning grey. His ears were very small and fine. His jaws, his chin, his upper lip were dark, iron-dark, where he had shaved. His voice, when he spoke and especially when he raised it in preaching, was harsh, like the grating of iron hinges when a seldom-used door is opened.

It was nearly half-past twelve. He had just come back from church, hoarse and weary with preaching. He preached with fury, with passion, an iron man beating with a flail upon the souls of his congregation. But the souls of the faithful at Crome were made of india-rubber, solid rubber; the flail rebounded. They were used to Mr. Bodiham at Crome. The flail thumped on india-rubber, and as often as not the rubber slept.

That morning he had preached, as he had often preached before, on the nature of God. He had tried to make them understand about God, what a fearful thing it was to fall into His hands. God — they thought of something soft and merciful. They blinded themselves to facts; still more, they blinded themselves to the Bible. The passengers on the “Titanic” sang “Nearer my God to Thee” as the ship was going down. Did they realise what they were asking to be brought nearer to? A white fire of righteousness, an angry fire...

When Savonarola preached, men sobbed and groaned aloud. Nothing broke the polite silence with which Crome listened to Mr. Bodiham — only an occasional cough and sometimes the sound of heavy breathing. In the front pew sat Henry Wimbush, calm, well-bred, beautifully dressed. There were times when Mr. Bodiham wanted to jump down from the pulpit and shake him into life, — times when he would have liked to beat and kill his whole congregation.

He sat at his desk dejectedly. Outside the Gothic windows the earth was warm and marvellously calm. Everything was as it had always been. And yet, and yet...It was nearly four years now since he had preached that sermon on Matthew xxiv. 7: “For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.” It was nearly four years. He had had the sermon printed; it was so terribly, so vitally important that all the world should know what he had to say. A copy of the little pamphlet lay on his desk — eight small grey pages, printed by a fount of type that had grown blunt, like an old dog’s teeth, by the endless champing and champing of the press. He opened it and began to read it yet once again.

“‘For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.’

“Nineteen centuries have elapsed since Our Lord gave utterance to those words, and not a single one of them has been without wars, plagues, famines, and earthquakes. Mighty empires have crashed in ruin to the ground, diseases have unpeopled half the globe, there have been vast natural cataclysms in which thousands have been overwhelmed by flood and fire and whirlwind. Time and

again, in the course of these nineteen centuries, such things have happened, but they have not brought Christ back to earth. They were ‘signs of the times’ inasmuch as they were signs of God’s wrath against the chronic wickedness of mankind, but they were not signs of the times in connection with the Second Coming.

“If earnest Christians have regarded the present war as a true sign of the Lord’s approaching return, it is not merely because it happens to be a great war involving the lives of millions of people, not merely because famine is tightening its grip on every country in Europe, not merely because disease of every kind, from syphilis to spotted fever, is rife among the warring nations; no, it is not for these reasons that we regard this war as a true Sign of the Times, but because in its origin and its progress it is marked by certain characteristics which seem to connect it almost beyond a doubt with the predictions in Christian Prophecy relating to the Second Coming of the Lord.

“Let me enumerate the features of the present war which most clearly suggest that it is a Sign foretelling the near approach of the Second Advent. Our Lord said that ‘this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.’ Although it would be presumptuous for us to say what degree of evangelisation will be regarded by God as sufficient, we may at least confidently hope that a century of unflagging missionary work has brought the fulfilment of this condition at any rate near. True, the larger number of the world’s inhabitants have remained deaf to the preaching of the true religion; but that does not vitiate the fact that the Gospel HAS been preached ‘for a witness’ to all unbelievers from the Papist to the Zulu. The responsibility for the continued prevalence of unbelief lies, not with the preachers, but with those preached to.

“Again, it has been generally recognised that ‘the drying up of the waters of the great river Euphrates,’ mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of Revelation, refers to the decay and extinction of Turkish power, and is a sign of the near approaching end of the world as we know it. The capture of Jerusalem and the successes in Mesopotamia are great strides forward in the destruction of the

Ottoman Empire; though it must be admitted that the Gallipoli episode proved that the Turk still possesses a ‘notable horn’ of strength. Historically speaking, this drying up of Ottoman power has been going on for the past century; the last two years have witnessed a great acceleration of the process, and there can be no doubt that complete desiccation is within sight.

“Closely following on the words concerning the drying up of Euphrates comes the prophecy of Armageddon, that world war with which the Second Coming is to be so closely associated. Once begun, the world war can end only with the return of Christ, and His coming will be sudden and unexpected, like that of a thief in the night.

“Let us examine the facts. In history, exactly as in St. John’s Gospel, the world war is immediately preceded by the drying up of Euphrates, or the decay of Turkish power. This fact alone would be enough to connect the present conflict with the Armageddon of Revelation and therefore to point to the near approach of the Second Advent. But further evidence of an even more solid and convincing nature can be adduced.

“Armageddon is brought about by the activities of three unclean spirits, as it were toads, which come out of the mouths of the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. If we can identify these three powers of evil much light will clearly be thrown on the whole question.

“The Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet can all be identified in history. Satan, who can only work through human agency, has used these three powers in the long war against Christ which has filled the last nineteen centuries with religious strife. The Dragon, it has been sufficiently established, is pagan Rome, and the spirit issuing from its mouth is the spirit of Infidelity. The Beast, alternatively symbolised as a Woman, is undoubtedly the Papal power, and Popery is the spirit which it spews forth. There is only one power which answers to the description of the False Prophet, the wolf in sheep’s clothing, the agent of the devil working in the guise of the Lamb, and that power is the so-called ‘Society of Jesus.’ The spirit that issues from the mouth of the False Prophet is the spirit of False Morality.

“We may assume, then, that the three evil spirits are Infidelity, Popery, and False Morality. Have these three influences been the real cause of the present conflict? The answer is clear.

“The spirit of Infidelity is the very spirit of German criticism. The Higher Criticism, as it is mockingly called, denies the possibility of miracles, prediction, and real inspiration, and attempts to account for the Bible as a natural development. Slowly but surely, during the last eighty years, the spirit of Infidelity has been robbing the Germans of their Bible and their faith, so that Germany is to-day a nation of unbelievers. Higher Criticism has thus made the war possible; for it would be absolutely impossible for any Christian nation to wage war as Germany is waging it.

“We come next to the spirit of Popery, whose influence in causing the war was quite as great as that of Infidelity, though not, perhaps, so immediately obvious. Since the Franco-Prussian War the Papal power has steadily declined in France, while in Germany it has steadily increased. To-day France is an anti-papal state, while Germany possesses a powerful Roman Catholic minority. Two papally controlled states, Germany and Austria, are at war with six anti-papal states — England, France, Italy, Russia, Serbia, and Portugal. Belgium is, of course, a thoroughly papal state, and there can be little doubt that the presence on the Allies’ side of an element so essentially hostile has done much to hamper the righteous cause and is responsible for our comparative ill-success. That the spirit of Popery is behind the war is thus seen clearly enough in the grouping of the opposed powers, while the rebellion in the Roman Catholic parts of Ireland has merely confirmed a conclusion already obvious to any unbiased mind.

“The spirit of False Morality has played as great a part in this war as the two other evil spirits. The Scrap of Paper incident is the nearest and most obvious example of Germany’s adherence to this essentially unchristian or Jesuitical morality. The end is German world-power, and in the attainment of this end, any means are justifiable. It is the true principle of Jesuitry applied to international politics.

“The identification is now complete. As was predicted in Revelation, the three evil spirits have gone forth just as the decay of the Ottoman power was nearing completion, and have joined together to make the world war. The warning, ‘Behold, I come as a thief,’ is therefore meant for the present period — for you and me and all the world. This war will lead on inevitably to the war of Armageddon, and will only be brought to an end by the Lord’s personal return.

“And when He returns, what will happen? Those who are in Christ, St. John tells us, will be called to the Supper of the Lamb. Those who are found fighting against Him will be called to the Supper of the Great God — that grim banquet where they shall not feast, but be feasted on. ‘For,’ as St. John says, ‘I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried in a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the Great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.’ All the enemies of Christ will be slain with the sword of him that sits upon the horse, ‘and all the fowls will be filled with their flesh.’ That is the Supper of the Great God.

“It may be soon or it may, as men reckon time, be long; but sooner or later, inevitably, the Lord will come and deliver the world from its present troubles. And woe unto them who are called, not to the Supper of the Lamb, but to the Supper of the Great God. They will realise then, but too late, that God is a God of Wrath as well as a God of Forgiveness. The God who sent bears to devour the mockers of Elisha, the God who smote the Egyptians for their stubborn wickedness, will assuredly smite them too, unless they make haste to repent. But perhaps it is already too late. Who knows but that to-morrow, in a moment even, Christ may be upon us unawares, like a thief? In a little while, who knows? The angel standing in the sun may be summoning the ravens and vultures from their crannies in the rocks to feed upon the putrefying flesh of the millions of unrighteous whom God’s wrath has destroyed. Be ready, then; the coming of the

Lord is at hand. May it be for all of you an object of hope, not a moment to look forward to with terror and trembling."

Mr. Bodiham closed the little pamphlet and leaned back in his chair. The argument was sound, absolutely compelling; and yet — it was four years since he had preached that sermon; four years, and England was at peace, the sun shone, the people of Crome were as wicked and indifferent as ever — more so, indeed, if that were possible. If only he could understand, if the heavens would but make a sign! But his questionings remained unanswered. Seated there in his brown varnished chair under the Ruskinian window, he could have screamed aloud. He gripped the arms of his chair — gripping, gripping for control. The knuckles of his hands whitened; he bit his lip. In a few seconds he was able to relax the tension; he began to rebuke himself for his rebellious impatience.

Four years, he reflected; what were four years, after all? It must inevitably take a long time for Armageddon to ripen to yeast itself up. The episode of 1914 had been a preliminary skirmish. And as for the war having come to an end — why, that, of course, was illusory. It was still going on, smouldering away in Silesia, in Ireland, in Anatolia; the discontent in Egypt and India was preparing the way, perhaps, for a great extension of the slaughter among the heathen peoples. The Chinese boycott of Japan, and the rivalries of that country and America in the Pacific, might be breeding a great new war in the East. The prospect, Mr. Bodiham tried to assure himself, was hopeful; the real, the genuine Armageddon might soon begin, and then, like a thief in the night...But, in spite of all his comfortable reasoning, he remained unhappy, dissatisfied. Four years ago he had been so confident; God's intention seemed then so plain. And now? Now, he did well to be angry. And now he suffered too.

Sudden and silent as a phantom Mrs. Bodiham appeared, gliding noiselessly across the room. Above her black dress her face was pale with an opaque whiteness, her eyes were pale as water in a glass, and her strawy hair was almost colourless. She held a large envelope in her hand.

"This came for you by the post," she said softly.

The envelope was unsealed. Mechanically Mr. Bodiham tore it open. It contained a pamphlet, larger than his own and more elegant in appearance. “The House of Sheeny, Clerical Outfitters, Birmingham.” He turned over the pages. The catalogue was tastefully and ecclesiastically printed in antique characters with illuminated Gothic initials. Red marginal lines, crossed at the corners after the manner of an Oxford picture frame, enclosed each page of type, little red crosses took the place of full stops. Mr. Bodiham turned the pages.

“Soutane in best black merino. Ready to wear; in all sizes. Clerical frock coats. From nine guineas. A dressy garment, tailored by our own experienced ecclesiastical cutters.”

Half-tone illustrations represented young curates, some dapper, some Rugbeian and muscular, some with ascetic faces and large ecstatic eyes, dressed in jackets, in frock-coats, in surplices, in clerical evening dress, in black Norfolk suitings.

“A large assortment of chasubles.

“Rope girdles.

“Sheeny’s Special Skirt Cassocks. Tied by a string about the waist...When worn under a surplice presents an appearance indistinguishable from that of a complete cassock...Recommended for summer wear and hot climates.”

With a gesture of horror and disgust Mr. Bodiham threw the catalogue into the waste-paper basket. Mrs. Bodiham looked at him; her pale, glaucous eyes reflected his action without comment.

“The village,” she said in her quiet voice, “the village grows worse and worse every day.”

“What has happened now?” asked Mr. Bodiham, feeling suddenly very weary.

“I’ll tell you.” She pulled up a brown varnished chair and sat down. In the village of Crome, it seemed, Sodom and Gomorrah had come to a second birth.

CHAPTER X.

DENIS DID NOT dance, but when ragtime came squirting out of the pianola in gushes of treacle and hot perfume, in jets of Bengal light, then things began to dance inside him. Little black nigger corpuscles jigged and drummed in his arteries. He became a cage of movement, a walking palais de danse. It was very uncomfortable, like the preliminary symptoms of a disease. He sat in one of the window-seats, glumly pretending to read.

At the pianola, Henry Wimbush, smoking a long cigar through a tunnelled pillar of amber, trod out the shattering dance music with serene patience. Locked together, Gombauld and Anne moved with a harmoniousness that made them seem a single creature, two-headed and four-legged. Mr. Scogan, solemnly buffoonish, shuffled round the room with Mary. Jenny sat in the shadow behind the piano, scribbling, so it seemed, in a big red notebook. In arm-chairs by the fireplace, Priscilla and Mr. Barbecue-Smith discussed higher things, without, apparently, being disturbed by the noise on the Lower Plane.

“Optimism,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith with a tone of finality, speaking through strains of the “Wild, Wild Women”— “optimism is the opening out of the soul towards the light; it is an expansion towards and into God, it is a h-piritual self-unification with the Infinite.”

“How true!” sighed Priscilla, nodding the baleful splendours of her coiffure.

“Pessimism, on the other hand, is the contraction of the soul towards darkness; it is a focusing of the self upon a point in the Lower Plane; it is a h-piritual slavery to mere facts; to gross physical phenomena.”

“They’re making a wild man of me.” The refrain sang itself over in Denis’s mind. Yes, they were; damn them! A wild man, but not wild enough; that was the trouble. Wild inside; raging, writhing — yes, “writhing” was the word,

writhing with desire. But outwardly he was hopelessly tame; outwardly — baa, baa, baa.

There they were, Anne and Gombauld, moving together as though they were a single supple creature. The beast with two backs. And he sat in a corner, pretending to read, pretending he didn't want to dance, pretending he rather despised dancing. Why? It was the baa-baa business again.

Why was he born with a different face? Why WAS he? Gombauld had a face of brass — one of those old, brazen rams that thumped against the walls of cities till they fell. He was born with a different face — a woolly face.

The music stopped. The single harmonious creature broke in two. Flushed, a little breathless, Anne swayed across the room to the pianola, laid her hand on Mr. Wimbush's shoulder.

"A waltz this time, please, Uncle Henry," she said.

"A waltz," he repeated, and turned to the cabinet where the rolls were kept. He trod off the old roll and trod on the new, a slave at the mill, uncomplaining and beautifully well bred.

"Rum; Tum; Rum-ti-ti; Tum-ti-ti..."

The melody wallowed oozily along, like a ship moving forward over a sleek and oily swell. The four-legged creature, more graceful, more harmonious in its movements than ever, slid across the floor. Oh, why was he born with a different face?

"What are you reading?"

He looked up, startled. It was Mary. She had broken from the uncomfortable embrace of Mr. Scogan, who had now seized on Jenny for his victim.

"What are you reading?"

"I don't know," said Denis truthfully. He looked at the title page; the book was called "The Stock Breeder's Vade Mecum."

"I think you are so sensible to sit and read quietly," said Mary, fixing him with her china eyes. "I don't know why one dances. It's so boring."

Denis made no reply; she exacerbated him. From the arm-chair by the fireplace he heard Priscilla's deep voice.

"Tell me, Mr Barbecue-Smith — you know all about science, I know—" A deprecating noise came from Mr. Barbecue-Smith's chair. "This Einstein theory. It seems to upset the whole starry universe. It makes me so worried about my horoscopes. You see..."

Mary renewed her attack. "Which of the contemporary poets do you like best?" she asked. Denis was filled with fury. Why couldn't this pest of a girl leave him alone? He wanted to listen to the horrible music, to watch them dancing — oh, with what grace, as though they had been made for one another! — to savour his misery in peace. And she came and put him through this absurd catechism! She was like "Mangold's Questions": "What are the three diseases of wheat?"— "Which of the contemporary poets do you like best?"

"Blight, Mildew, and Smut," he replied, with the laconism of one who is absolutely certain of his own mind.

It was several hours before Denis managed to go to sleep that night. Vague but agonising miseries possessed his mind. It was not only Anne who made him miserable; he was wretched about himself, the future, life in general, the universe. "This adolescence business," he repeated to himself every now and then, "is horribly boring." But the fact that he knew his disease did not help him to cure it.

After kicking all the clothes off the bed, he got up and sought relief in composition. He wanted to imprison his nameless misery in words. At the end of an hour, nine more or less complete lines emerged from among the blots and scratchings.

"I do not know what I desire
When summer nights are dark and still,
When the wind's many-voiced quire
Sleeps among the muffled branches.
I long and know not what I will:

And not a sound of life or laughter stanches
Time’s black and silent flow.
I do not know what I desire,
I do not know.”

He read it through aloud; then threw the scribbled sheet into the waste-paper basket and got into bed again. In a very few minutes he was asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. BARBECUE-SMITH WAS gone. The motor had whirled him away to the station; a faint smell of burning oil commemorated his recent departure. A considerable detachment had come into the courtyard to speed him on his way; and now they were walking back, round the side of the house, towards the terrace and the garden. They walked in silence; nobody had yet ventured to comment on the departed guest.

"Well?" said Anne at last, turning with raised inquiring eyebrows to Denis.

"Well?" It was time for someone to begin.

Denis declined the invitation; he passed it on to Mr Scogan. "Well?" he said.

Mr. Scogan did not respond; he only repeated the question, "Well?"

It was left for Henry Wimbush to make a pronouncement. "A very agreeable adjunct to the week-end," he said. His tone was obituary.

They had descended, without paying much attention where they were going, the steep yew-walk that went down, under the flank of the terrace, to the pool. The house towered above them, immensely tall, with the whole height of the built-up terrace added to its own seventy feet of brick façade. The perpendicular lines of the three towers soared up, uninterrupted, enhancing the impression of height until it became overwhelming. They paused at the edge of the pool to look back.

"The man who built this house knew his business," said Denis. "He was an architect."

"Was he?" said Henry Wimbush reflectively. "I doubt it. The builder of this house was Sir Ferdinando Lapith, who flourished during the reign of Elizabeth. He inherited the estate from his father, to whom it had been granted at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries; for Crome was originally a cloister of monks and this swimming-pool their fish-pond. Sir Ferdinando was not content

merely to adapt the old monastic buildings to his own purposes; but using them as a stone quarry for his barns and byres and outhouses, he built for himself a grand new house of brick — the house you see now."

He waved his hand in the direction of the house and was silent, severe, imposing, almost menacing, Crome loomed down on them.

"The great thing about Crome," said Mr. Scogan, seizing the opportunity to speak, "is the fact that it's so unmistakably and aggressively a work of art. It makes no compromise with nature, but affronts it and rebels against it. It has no likeness to Shelley's tower, in the 'Epipsychidion,' which, if I remember rightly __"

"'Seems not now a work of human art,
But as it were titanic, in the heart
Of earth having assumed its form and grown
Out of the mountain, from the living stone,
Lifting itself in caverns light and high.'

"No, no, there isn't any nonsense of that sort about Crome. That the hovels of the peasantry should look as though they had grown out of the earth, to which their inmates are attached, is right, no doubt, and suitable. But the house of an intelligent, civilised, and sophisticated man should never seem to have sprouted from the clods. It should rather be an expression of his grand unnatural remoteness from the cloddish life. Since the days of William Morris that's a fact which we in England have been unable to comprehend. Civilised and sophisticated men have solemnly played at being peasants. Hence quaintness, arts and crafts, cottage architecture, and all the rest of it. In the suburbs of our cities you may see, reduplicated in endless rows, studiedly quaint imitations and adaptations of the village hovel. Poverty, ignorance, and a limited range of materials produced the hovel, which possesses undoubtedly, in suitable surroundings, its own 'as it were titanic' charm. We now employ our wealth, our technical knowledge, our rich variety of materials for the purpose of building

millions of imitation hovels in totally unsuitable surroundings. Could imbecility go further?"

Henry Wimbush took up the thread of his interrupted discourse. "All that you say, my dear Scogan," he began, "is certainly very just, very true. But whether Sir Ferdinando shared your views about architecture or if, indeed, he had any views about architecture at all, I very much doubt. In building this house, Sir Ferdinando was, as a matter of fact, preoccupied by only one thought — the proper placing of his privies. Sanitation was the one great interest of his life. In 1573 he even published, on this subject, a little book — now extremely scarce — called, 'Certaine Priuy Counsels' by 'One of Her Maiestie's Most Honourable Priuy Counsels, F.L. Knight', in which the whole matter is treated with great learning and elegance. His guiding principle in arranging the sanitation of a house was to secure that the greatest possible distance should separate the privy from the sewage arrangements. Hence it followed inevitably that the privies were to be placed at the top of the house, being connected by vertical shafts with pits or channels in the ground. It must not be thought that Sir Ferdinando was moved only by material and merely sanitary considerations; for the placing of his privies in an exalted position he had also certain excellent spiritual reasons. For, he argues in the third chapter of his 'Priuy Counsels', the necessities of nature are so base and brutish that in obeying them we are apt to forget that we are the noblest creatures of the universe. To counteract these degrading effects he advised that the privy should be in every house the room nearest to heaven, that it should be well provided with windows commanding an extensive and noble prospect, and that the walls of the chamber should be lined with bookshelves containing all the ripest products of human wisdom, such as the Proverbs of Solomon, Boethius's 'Consolations of Philosophy', the apophthegms of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, the 'Enchiridion' of Erasmus, and all other works, ancient or modern, which testify to the nobility of the human soul. In Crome he was able to put his theories into practice. At the top of each of the three projecting towers he placed a privy. From these a shaft went down the whole height of the house, that is to say, more than seventy feet,

through the cellars, and into a series of conduits provided with flowing water tunnelled in the ground on a level with the base of the raised terrace. These conduits emptied themselves into the stream several hundred yards below the fish-pond. The total depth of the shafts from the top of the towers to their subterranean conduits was a hundred and two feet. The eighteenth century, with its passion for modernisation, swept away these monuments of sanitary ingenuity. Were it not for tradition and the explicit account of them left by Sir Ferdinando, we should be unaware that these noble privies had ever existed. We should even suppose that Sir Ferdinando built his house after this strange and splendid model for merely aesthetic reasons."

The contemplation of the glories of the past always evoked in Henry Wimbush a certain enthusiasm. Under the grey bowler his face worked and glowed as he spoke. The thought of these vanished privies moved him profoundly. He ceased to speak; the light gradually died out of his face, and it became once more the replica of the grave, polite hat which shaded it. There was a long silence; the same gently melancholy thoughts seemed to possess the mind of each of them. Permanence, transience — Sir Ferdinando and his privies were gone, Crome still stood. How brightly the sun shone and how inevitable was death! The ways of God were strange; the ways of man were stranger still...

"It does one's heart good," exclaimed Mr. Scogan at last, "to hear of these fantastic English aristocrats. To have a theory about privies and to build an immense and splendid house in order to put it into practise — it's magnificent, beautiful! I like to think of them all: the eccentric milords rolling across Europe in ponderous carriages, bound on extraordinary errands. One is going to Venice to buy La Bianchi's larynx; he won't get it till she's dead, of course, but no matter; he's prepared to wait; he has a collection, pickled in glass bottles, of the throats of famous opera singers. And the instruments of renowned virtuosi — he goes in for them too; he will try to bribe Paganini to part with his little Guarnerio, but he has small hope of success. Paganini won't sell his fiddle; but perhaps he might sacrifice one of his guitars. Others are bound on crusades — one to die miserably among the savage Greeks, another, in his white top hat, to

lead Italians against their oppressors. Others have no business at all; they are just giving their oddity a continental airing. At home they cultivate themselves at leisure and with greater elaboration. Beckford builds towers, Portland digs holes in the ground, Cavendish, the millionaire, lives in a stable, eats nothing but mutton, and amuses himself — oh, solely for his private delectation — by anticipating the electrical discoveries of half a century. Glorious eccentrics! Every age is enlivened by their presence. Some day, my dear Denis," said Mr Scogan, turning a beady bright regard in his direction— "some day you must become their biographer— 'The Lives of Queer Men.' What a subject! I should like to undertake it myself."

Mr. Scogan paused, looked up once more at the towering house, then murmured the word "Eccentricity," two or three times.

"Eccentricity...It's the justification of all aristocracies. It justifies leisured classes and inherited wealth and privilege and endowments and all the other injustices of that sort. If you're to do anything reasonable in this world, you must have a class of people who are secure, safe from public opinion, safe from poverty, leisured, not compelled to waste their time in the imbecile routines that go by the name of Honest Work. You must have a class of which the members can think and, within the obvious limits, do what they please. You must have a class in which people who have eccentricities can indulge them and in which eccentricity in general will be tolerated and understood. That's the important thing about an aristocracy. Not only is it eccentric itself — often grandiosely so; it also tolerates and even encourages eccentricity in others. The eccentricities of the artist and the new-fangled thinker don't inspire it with that fear, loathing, and disgust which the burgesses instinctively feel towards them. It is a sort of Red Indian Reservation planted in the midst of a vast horde of Poor Whites — colonials at that. Within its boundaries wild men disport themselves — often, it must be admitted, a little grossly, a little too flamboyantly; and when kindred spirits are born outside the pale it offers them some sort of refuge from the hatred which the Poor Whites, en bons bourgeois, lavish on anything that is wild or out of the ordinary. After the social revolution there will be no Reservations;

the Redskins will be drowned in the great sea of Poor Whites. What then? Will they suffer you to go on writing villanelles, my good Denis? Will you, unhappy Henry, be allowed to live in this house of the splendid privies, to continue your quiet delving in the mines of futile knowledge? Will Anne..."

"And you," said Anne, interrupting him, "will you be allowed to go on talking?"

"You may rest assured," Mr. Scogan replied, "that I shall not. I shall have some Honest Work to do."

CHAPTER XII.

BLIGHT, MILDEW, AND Smut...” Mary was puzzled and distressed. Perhaps her ears had played her false. Perhaps what he had really said was, “Squire, Binyon, and Shanks,” or “Childe, Blunden, and Earp,” or even “Abercrombie, Drinkwater, and Rabindranath Tagore.” Perhaps. But then her ears never did play her false. “Blight, Mildew, and Smut.” The impression was distinct and ineffaceable. “Blight, Mildew...” she was forced to the conclusion, reluctantly, that Denis had indeed pronounced those improbable words. He had deliberately repelled her attempts to open a serious discussion. That was horrible. A man who would not talk seriously to a woman just because she was a woman — oh, impossible! Egeria or nothing. Perhaps Gombauld would be more satisfactory. True, his meridional heredity was a little disquieting; but at least he was a serious worker, and it was with his work that she would associate herself. And Denis? After all, what WAS Denis? A dilettante, an amateur...

Gombauld had annexed for his painting-room a little disused granary that stood by itself in a green close beyond the farmyard. It was a square brick building with a peaked roof and little windows set high up in each of its walls. A ladder of four rungs led up to the door; for the granary was perched above the ground, and out of reach of the rats, on four massive toadstools of grey stone. Within, there lingered a faint smell of dust and cobwebs; and the narrow shaft of sunlight that came slanting in at every hour of the day through one of the little windows was always alive with silvery motes. Here Gombauld worked, with a kind of concentrated ferocity, during six or seven hours of each day. He was pursuing something new, something terrific, if only he could catch it.

During the last eight years, nearly half of which had been spent in the process of winning the war, he had worked his way industriously through cubism. Now he had come out on the other side. He had begun by painting a formalised

nature; then, little by little, he had risen from nature into the world of pure form, till in the end he was painting nothing but his own thoughts, externalised in the abstract geometrical forms of the mind's devising. He found the process arduous and exhilarating. And then, quite suddenly, he grew dissatisfied; he felt himself cramped and confined within intolerably narrow limitations. He was humiliated to find how few and crude and uninteresting were the forms he could invent; the inventions of nature were without number, inconceivably subtle and elaborate. He had done with cubism. He was out on the other side. But the cubist discipline preserved him from falling into excesses of nature worship. He took from nature its rich, subtle, elaborate forms, but his aim was always to work them into a whole that should have the thrilling simplicity and formality of an idea; to combine prodigious realism with prodigious simplification. Memories of Caravaggio's portentous achievements haunted him. Forms of a breathing, living reality emerged from darkness, built themselves up into compositions as luminously simple and single as a mathematical idea. He thought of the "Call of Matthew," of "Peter Crucified," of the "Lute players," of "Magdalen." He had the secret, that astonishing ruffian, he had the secret! And now Gombauld was after it, in hot pursuit. Yes, it would be something terrific, if only he could catch it.

For a long time an idea had been stirring and spreading, yeastily, in his mind. He had made a portfolio full of studies, he had drawn a cartoon; and now the idea was taking shape on canvas. A man fallen from a horse. The huge animal, a gaunt white cart-horse, filled the upper half of the picture with its great body. Its head, lowered towards the ground, was in shadow; the immense bony body was what arrested the eye, the body and the legs, which came down on either side of the picture like the pillars of an arch. On the ground, between the legs of the towering beast, lay the foreshortened figure of a man, the head in the extreme foreground, the arms flung wide to right and left. A white, relentless light poured down from a point in the right foreground. The beast, the fallen man, were sharply illuminated; round them, beyond and behind them, was the night. They were alone in the darkness, a universe in themselves. The horse's body filled the

upper part of the picture; the legs, the great hoofs, frozen to stillness in the midst of their trampling, limited it on either side. And beneath lay the man, his foreshortened face at the focal point in the centre, his arms outstretched towards the sides of the picture. Under the arch of the horse's belly, between his legs, the eye looked through into an intense darkness; below, the space was closed in by the figure of the prostrate man. A central gulf of darkness surrounded by luminous forms...

The picture was more than half finished. Gombauld had been at work all the morning on the figure of the man, and now he was taking a rest — the time to smoke a cigarette. Tilting back his chair till it touched the wall, he looked thoughtfully at his canvas. He was pleased, and at the same time he was desolated. In itself, the thing was good; he knew it. But that something he was after, that something that would be so terrific if only he could catch it — had he caught it? Would he ever catch it?

Three little taps — rat, tat, tat! Surprised, Gombauld turned his eyes towards the door. Nobody ever disturbed him while he was at work; it was one of the unwritten laws. "Come in!" he called. The door, which was ajar, swung open, revealing, from the waist upwards, the form of Mary. She had only dared to mount half-way up the ladder. If he didn't want her, retreat would be easier and more dignified than if she climbed to the top.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"Certainly."

She skipped up the remaining two rungs and was over the threshold in an instant. "A letter came for you by the second post," she said. "I thought it might be important, so I brought it out to you." Her eyes, her childish face were luminously candid as she handed him the letter. There had never been a flimsier pretext.

Gombauld looked at the envelope and put it in his pocket unopened. "Luckily," he said, "it isn't at all important. Thanks very much all the same."

There was a silence; Mary felt a little uncomfortable. "May I have a look at what you've been painting?" she had the courage to say at last.

Gombauld had only half smoked his cigarette; in any case he wouldn't begin work again till he had finished. He would give her the five minutes that separated him from the bitter end. "This is the best place to see it from," he said.

Mary looked at the picture for some time without saying anything. Indeed, she didn't know what to say; she was taken aback, she was at a loss. She had expected a cubist masterpiece, and here was a picture of a man and a horse, not only recognisable as such, but even aggressively in drawing. Trompe-l'oeil — there was no other word to describe the delineation of that foreshortened figure under the trampling feet of the horse. What was she to think, what was she to say? Her orientations were gone. One could admire representationalism in the Old Masters. Obviously. But in a modern...? At eighteen she might have done so. But now, after five years of schooling among the best judges, her instinctive reaction to a contemporary piece of representation was contempt — an outburst of laughing disparagement. What could Gombauld be up to? She had felt so safe in admiring his work before. But now — she didn't know what to think. It was very difficult, very difficult.

"There's rather a lot of chiaroscuro, isn't there?" she ventured at last, and inwardly congratulated herself on having found a critical formula so gentle and at the same time so penetrating.

"There is," Gombauld agreed.

Mary was pleased; he accepted her criticism; it was a serious discussion. She put her head on one side and screwed up her eyes. "I think it's awfully fine," she said. "But of course it's a little too...too...trompe-l'oeil for my taste." She looked at Gombauld, who made no response, but continued to smoke, gazing meditatively all the time at his picture. Mary went on gaspingly. "When I was in Paris this spring I saw a lot of Tschuplitski. I admire his work so tremendously. Of course, it's frightfully abstract now — frightfully abstract and frightfully intellectual. He just throws a few oblongs on to his canvas — quite flat, you know, and painted in pure primary colours. But his design is wonderful. He's getting more and more abstract every day. He'd given up the third dimension when I was there and was just thinking of giving up the second. Soon, he says,

there’ll be just the blank canvas. That’s the logical conclusion. Complete abstraction. Painting’s finished; he’s finishing it. When he’s reached pure abstraction he’s going to take up architecture. He says it’s more intellectual than painting. Do you agree?” she asked, with a final gasp.

Gombauld dropped his cigarette end and trod on it. “Tschuplitski’s finished painting,” he said. “I’ve finished my cigarette. But I’m going on painting.” And, advancing towards her, he put his arm round her shoulders and turned her round, away from the picture.

Mary looked up at him; her hair swung back, a soundless bell of gold. Her eyes were serene; she smiled. So the moment had come. His arm was round her. He moved slowly, almost imperceptibly, and she moved with him. It was a peripatetic embracement. “Do you agree with him?” she repeated. The moment might have come, but she would not cease to be intellectual, serious.

“I don’t know. I shall have to think about it.” Gombauld loosened his embrace, his hand dropped from her shoulder. “Be careful going down the ladder,” he added solicitously.

Mary looked round, startled. They were in front of the open door. She remained standing there for a moment in bewilderment. The hand that had rested on her shoulder made itself felt lower down her back; it administered three or four kindly little smacks. Replying automatically to its stimulus, she moved forward.

“Be careful going down the ladder,” said Gombauld once more.

She was careful. The door closed behind her and she was alone in the little green close. She walked slowly back through the farmyard; she was pensive.

CHAPTER XIII.

HENRY WIMBUSH BROUGHT down with him to dinner a budget of printed sheets loosely bound together in a cardboard portfolio.

"To-day," he said, exhibiting it with a certain solemnity, "to-day I have finished the printing of my 'History of Crome'. I helped to set up the type of the last page this evening."

"The famous History?" cried Anne. The writing and the printing of this Magnum Opus had been going on as long as she could remember. All her childhood long Uncle Henry's History had been a vague and fabulous thing, often heard of and never seen.

"It has taken me nearly thirty years," said Mr. Wimbush. "Twenty-five years of writing and nearly four of printing. And now it's finished — the whole chronicle, from Sir Ferdinando Lapith's birth to the death of my father William Wimbush — more than three centuries and a half: a history of Crome, written at Crome, and printed at Crome by my own press."

"Shall we be allowed to read it now it's finished?" asked Denis.

Mr. Wimbush nodded. "Certainly," he said. "And I hope you will not find it uninteresting," he added modestly. "Our muniment room is particularly rich in ancient records, and I have some genuinely new light to throw on the introduction of the three-pronged fork."

"And the people?" asked Gombauld. "Sir Ferdinando and the rest of them — were they amusing? Were there any crimes or tragedies in the family?"

"Let me see," Henry Wimbush rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I can only think of two suicides, one violent death, four or perhaps five broken hearts, and half a dozen little blots on the scutcheon in the way of misalliances, seductions, natural children, and the like. No, on the whole, it's a placid and uneventful record."

“The Wimbushes and the Lapiths were always an unadventurous, respectable crew,” said Priscilla, with a note of scorn in her voice. “If I were to write my family history now! Why, it would be one long continuous blot from beginning to end.” She laughed jovially, and helped herself to another glass of wine.

“If I were to write mine,” Mr. Scogan remarked, “it wouldn’t exist. After the second generation we Scogans are lost in the mists of antiquity.”

“After dinner,” said Henry Wimbush, a little piqued by his wife’s disparaging comment on the masters of Crome, “I’ll read you an episode from my History that will make you admit that even the Lapiths, in their own respectable way, had their tragedies and strange adventures.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Priscilla.

“Glad to hear what?” asked Jenny, emerging suddenly from her private interior world like a cuckoo from a clock. She received an explanation, smiled, nodded, cuckooed at last “I see,” and popped back, clapping shut the door behind her.

Dinner was eaten; the party had adjourned to the drawing-room.

“Now,” said Henry Wimbush, pulling up a chair to the lamp. He put on his round pince-nez, rimmed with tortoise-shell, and began cautiously to turn over the pages of his loose and still fragmentary book. He found his place at last. “Shall I begin?” he asked, looking up.

“Do,” said Priscilla, yawning.

In the midst of an attentive silence Mr. Wimbush gave a little preliminary cough and started to read.

“The infant who was destined to become the fourth baronet of the name of Lapith was born in the year 1740. He was a very small baby, weighing not more than three pounds at birth, but from the first he was sturdy and healthy. In honour of his maternal grandfather, Sir Hercules Occam of Bishop’s Occam, he was christened Hercules. His mother, like many other mothers, kept a notebook, in which his progress from month to month was recorded. He walked at ten months, and before his second year was out he had learnt to speak a number of words. At three years he weighed but twenty-four pounds, and at six, though he

could read and write perfectly and showed a remarkable aptitude for music, he was no larger and heavier than a well-grown child of two. Meanwhile, his mother had borne two other children, a boy and a girl, one of whom died of croup during infancy, while the other was carried off by smallpox before it reached the age of five. Hercules remained the only surviving child.

"On his twelfth birthday Hercules was still only three feet and two inches in height. His head, which was very handsome and nobly shaped, was too big for his body, but otherwise he was exquisitely proportioned, and, for his size, of great strength and agility. His parents, in the hope of making him grow, consulted all the most eminent physicians of the time. Their various prescriptions were followed to the letter, but in vain. One ordered a very plentiful meat diet; another exercise; a third constructed a little rack, modelled on those employed by the Holy Inquisition, on which young Hercules was stretched, with excruciating torments, for half an hour every morning and evening. In the course of the next three years Hercules gained perhaps two inches. After that his growth stopped completely, and he remained for the rest of his life a pigmy of three feet and four inches. His father, who had built the most extravagant hopes upon his son, planning for him in his imagination a military career equal to that of Marlborough, found himself a disappointed man. 'I have brought an abortion into the world,' he would say, and he took so violent a dislike to his son that the boy dared scarcely come into his presence. His temper, which had been serene, was turned by disappointment to moroseness and savagery. He avoided all company (being, as he said, ashamed to show himself, the father of a lusus naturae, among normal, healthy human beings), and took to solitary drinking, which carried him very rapidly to his grave; for the year before Hercules came of age his father was taken off by an apoplexy. His mother, whose love for him had increased with the growth of his father's unkindness, did not long survive, but little more than a year after her husband's death succumbed, after eating two dozen of oysters, to an attack of typhoid fever.

"Hercules thus found himself at the age of twenty-one alone in the world, and master of a considerable fortune, including the estate and mansion of Crome.

The beauty and intelligence of his childhood had survived into his manly age, and, but for his dwarfish stature, he would have taken his place among the handsomest and most accomplished young men of his time. He was well read in the Greek and Latin authors, as well as in all the moderns of any merit who had written in English, French, or Italian. He had a good ear for music, and was no indifferent performer on the violin, which he used to play like a bass viol, seated on a chair with the instrument between his legs. To the music of the harpsichord and clavichord he was extremely partial, but the smallness of his hands made it impossible for him ever to perform upon these instruments. He had a small ivory flute made for him, on which, whenever he was melancholy, he used to play a simple country air or jig, affirming that this rustic music had more power to clear and raise the spirits than the most artificial productions of the masters. From an early age he practised the composition of poetry, but, though conscious of his great powers in this art, he would never publish any specimen of his writing. ‘My stature,’ he would say, ’is reflected in my verses; if the public were to read them it would not be because I am a poet, but because I am a dwarf.’ Several MS. books of Sir Hercules’s poems survive. A single specimen will suffice to illustrate his qualities as a poet.”

“‘In ancient days, while yet the world was young,
Ere Abram fed his flocks or Homer sung;
When blacksmith Tubal tamed creative fire,
And Jabal dwelt in tents and Jubal struck the lyre; Flesh grown corrupt brought forth a monstrous birth And obscene giants trod the shrinking earth,
Till God, impatient of their sinful brood,
Gave rein to wrath and drown’d them in the Flood.
Teeming again, repeopled Tellus bore
The lubber Hero and the Man of War;
Huge towers of Brawn, topp’d with an empty Skull,
Witlessly bold, heroically dull.
Long ages pass’d and Man grown more refin’d,

Slighter in muscle but of vaster Mind,
Smiled at his grandsire’s broadsword, bow and bill, And learn’d to wield the Pencil and the Quill.
The glowing canvas and the written page
Immortaliz’d his name from age to age,
His name emblazon’d on Fame’s temple wall;
For Art grew great as Humankind grew small.
Thus man’s long progress step by step we trace;
The Giant dies, the hero takes his place;
The Giant vile, the dull heroic Block:
At one we shudder and at one we mock.
Man last appears. In him the Soul’s pure flame
Burns brightlier in a not inord’nate frame.
Of old when Heroes fought and Giants swarmed,
Men were huge mounds of matter scarce inform’d;
Wearied by leavening so vast a mass,
The spirit slept and all the mind was crass.
The smaller carcase of these later days
Is soon inform’d; the Soul unwearied plays
And like a Pharos darts abroad her mental rays.
But can we think that Providence will stay
Man’s footsteps here upon the upward way?
Mankind in understanding and in grace
Advanc’d so far beyond the Giants’ race?
Hence impious thought! Still led by GOD’S own Hand, Mankind proceeds towards the Promised Land.
A time will come (prophetic, I descry
Remoter dawns along the gloomy sky),
When happy mortals of a Golden Age
Will backward turn the dark historic page,
And in our vaunted race of Men behold

A form as gross, a Mind as dead and cold,
As we in Giants see, in warriors of old.
A time will come, wherein the soul shall be
From all superfluous matter wholly free;
When the light body, agile as a fawn's,
Shall sport with grace along the velvet lawns.
Nature's most delicate and final birth,
Mankind perfected shall possess the earth.
But ah, not yet! For still the Giants' race,
Huge, though diminish'd, tramps the Earth's fair face; Gross and repulsive, yet perversely proud,
Men of their imperfections boast aloud.
Vain of their bulk, of all they still retain
Of giant ugliness absurdly vain;
At all that's small they point their stupid scorn
And, monsters, think themselves divinely born.
Sad is the Fate of those, ah, sad indeed,
The rare precursors of the nobler breed!
Who come man's golden glory to foretell,
But pointing Heav'nwards live themselves in Hell.'

"As soon as he came into the estate, Sir Hercules set about remodelling his household. For though by no means ashamed of his deformity — indeed, if we may judge from the poem quoted above, he regarded himself as being in many ways superior to the ordinary race of man — he found the presence of full-grown men and women embarrassing. Realising, too, that he must abandon all ambitions in the great world, he determined to retire absolutely from it and to create, as it were, at Crome a private world of his own, in which all should be proportionable to himself. Accordingly, he discharged all the old servants of the house and replaced them gradually, as he was able to find suitable successors, by others of dwarfish stature. In the course of a few years he had assembled about

himself a numerous household, no member of which was above four feet high and the smallest among them scarcely two feet and six inches. His father's dogs, such as setters, mastiffs, greyhounds, and a pack of beagles, he sold or gave away as too large and too boisterous for his house, replacing them by pugs and King Charles spaniels and whatever other breeds of dog were the smallest. His father's stable was also sold. For his own use, whether riding or driving, he had six black Shetland ponies, with four very choice piebald animals of New Forest breed.

"Having thus settled his household entirely to his own satisfaction, it only remained for him to find some suitable companion with whom to share his paradise. Sir Hercules had a susceptible heart, and had more than once, between the ages of sixteen and twenty, felt what it was to love. But here his deformity had been a source of the most bitter humiliation, for, having once dared to declare himself to a young lady of his choice, he had been received with laughter. On his persisting, she had picked him up and shaken him like an importunate child, telling him to run away and plague her no more. The story soon got about — indeed, the young lady herself used to tell it as a particularly pleasant anecdote — and the taunts and mockery it occasioned were a source of the most acute distress to Hercules. From the poems written at this period we gather that he meditated taking his own life. In course of time, however, he lived down this humiliation; but never again, though he often fell in love, and that very passionately, did he dare to make any advances to those in whom he was interested. After coming to the estate and finding that he was in a position to create his own world as he desired it, he saw that, if he was to have a wife — which he very much desired, being of an affectionate and, indeed, amorous temper — he must choose her as he had chosen his servants — from among the race of dwarfs. But to find a suitable wife was, he found, a matter of some difficulty; for he would marry none who was not distinguished by beauty and gentle birth. The dwarfish daughter of Lord Bemboro he refused on the ground that besides being a pigmy she was hunchbacked; while another young lady, an orphan belonging to a very good family in Hampshire, was rejected by him

because her face, like that of so many dwarfs, was wizened and repulsive. Finally, when he was almost despairing of success, he heard from a reliable source that Count Titimalo, a Venetian nobleman, possessed a daughter of exquisite beauty and great accomplishments, who was by three feet in height. Setting out at once for Venice, he went immediately on his arrival to pay his respects to the count, whom he found living with his wife and five children in a very mean apartment in one of the poorer quarters of the town. Indeed, the count was so far reduced in his circumstances that he was even then negotiating (so it was rumoured) with a travelling company of clowns and acrobats, who had had the misfortune to lose their performing dwarf, for the sale of his diminutive daughter Filomena. Sir Hercules arrived in time to save her from this untoward fate, for he was so much charmed by Filomena's grace and beauty, that at the end of three days' courtship he made her a formal offer of marriage, which was accepted by her no less joyfully than by her father, who perceived in an English son-in-law a rich and unfailing source of revenue. After an unostentatious marriage, at which the English ambassador acted as one of the witnesses, Sir Hercules and his bride returned by sea to England, where they settled down, as it proved, to a life of uneventful happiness.

"Crome and its household of dwarfs delighted Filomena, who felt herself now for the first time to be a free woman living among her equals in a friendly world. She had many tastes in common with her husband, especially that of music. She had a beautiful voice, of a power surprising in one so small, and could touch A in alt without effort. Accompanied by her husband on his fine Cremona fiddle, which he played, as we have noted before, as one plays a bass viol, she would sing all the liveliest and tenderest airs from the operas and cantatas of her native country. Seated together at the harpsichord, they found that they could with their four hands play all the music written for two hands of ordinary size, a circumstance which gave Sir Hercules unfailing pleasure.

"When they were not making music or reading together, which they often did, both in English and Italian, they spent their time in healthful outdoor exercises, sometimes rowing in a little boat on the lake, but more often riding or driving,

occupations in which, because they were entirely new to her, Filomena especially delighted. When she had become a perfectly proficient rider, Filomena and her husband used often to go hunting in the park, at that time very much more extensive than it is now. They hunted not foxes nor hares, but rabbits, using a pack of about thirty black and fawn-coloured pugs, a kind of dog which, when not overfed, can course a rabbit as well as any of the smaller breeds. Four dwarf grooms, dressed in scarlet liveries and mounted on white Exmoor ponies, hunted the pack, while their master and mistress, in green habits, followed either on the black Shetlands or on the piebald New Forest ponies. A picture of the whole hunt — dogs, horses, grooms, and masters — was painted by William Stubbs, whose work Sir Hercules admired so much that he invited him, though a man of ordinary stature, to come and stay at the mansion for the purpose of executing this picture. Stubbs likewise painted a portrait of Sir Hercules and his lady driving in their green enamelled calash drawn by four black Shetlands. Sir Hercules wears a plum-coloured velvet coat and white breeches; Filomena is dressed in flowered muslin and a very large hat with pink feathers. The two figures in their gay carriage stand out sharply against a dark background of trees; but to the left of the picture the trees fall away and disappear, so that the four black ponies are seen against a pale and strangely lurid sky that has the golden-brown colour of thunder-clouds lighted up by the sun.

“In this way four years passed happily by. At the end of that time Filomena found herself great with child. Sir Hercules was overjoyed. ‘If God is good,’ he wrote in his day-book, ‘the name of Lapith will be preserved and our rarer and more delicate race transmitted through the generations until in the fullness of time the world shall recognise the superiority of those beings whom now it uses to make mock of.’ On his wife’s being brought to bed of a son he wrote a poem to the same effect. The child was christened Ferdinando in memory of the builder of the house.

“With the passage of the months a certain sense of disquiet began to invade the minds of Sir Hercules and his lady. For the child was growing with an

extraordinary rapidity. At a year he weighed as much as Hercules had weighed when he was three. ‘Ferdinando goes crescendo,’ wrote Filomena in her diary. ‘It seems not natural.’ At eighteen months the baby was almost as tall as their smallest jockey, who was a man of thirty-six. Could it be that Ferdinando was destined to become a man of the normal, gigantic dimensions? It was a thought to which neither of his parents dared yet give open utterance, but in the secrecy of their respective diaries they brooded over it in terror and dismay.

“On his third birthday Ferdinando was taller than his mother and not more than a couple of inches short of his father’s height. ‘To-day for the first time’ wrote Sir Hercules, ‘we discussed the situation. The hideous truth can be concealed no longer: Ferdinando is not one of us. On this, his third birthday, a day when we should have been rejoicing at the health, the strength, and beauty of our child, we wept together over the ruin of our happiness. God give us strength to bear this cross.’

“At the age of eight Ferdinando was so large and so exuberantly healthy that his parents decided, though reluctantly, to send him to school. He was packed off to Eton at the beginning of the next half. A profound peace settled upon the house. Ferdinando returned for the summer holidays larger and stronger than ever. One day he knocked down the butler and broke his arm. ‘He is rough, inconsiderate, unamenable to persuasion,’ wrote his father. ‘The only thing that will teach him manners is corporal chastisement.’ Ferdinando, who at this age was already seventeen inches taller than his father, received no corporal chastisement.

“One summer holidays about three years later Ferdinando returned to Crome accompanied by a very large mastiff dog. He had bought it from an old man at Windsor who had found the beast too expensive to feed. It was a savage, unreliable animal; hardly had it entered the house when it attacked one of Sir Hercules’s favourite pugs, seizing the creature in its jaws and shaking it till it was nearly dead. Extremely put out by this occurrence, Sir Hercules ordered that the beast should be chained up in the stable-yard. Ferdinando sullenly answered that the dog was his, and he would keep it where he pleased. His father, growing

angry, bade him take the animal out of the house at once, on pain of his utmost displeasure. Ferdinando refused to move. His mother at this moment coming into the room, the dog flew at her, knocked her down, and in a twinkling had very severely mauled her arm and shoulder; in another instant it must infallibly have had her by the throat, had not Sir Hercules drawn his sword and stabbed the animal to the heart. Turning on his son, he ordered him to leave the room immediately, as being unfit to remain in the same place with the mother whom he had nearly murdered. So awe-inspiring was the spectacle of Sir Hercules standing with one foot on the carcase of the gigantic dog, his sword drawn and still bloody, so commanding were his voice, his gestures, and the expression of his face that Ferdinando slunk out of the room in terror and behaved himself for all the rest of the vacation in an entirely exemplary fashion. His mother soon recovered from the bites of the mastiff, but the effect on her mind of this adventure was ineradicable; from that time forth she lived always among imaginary terrors.

“The two years which Ferdinando spent on the Continent, making the Grand Tour, were a period of happy repose for his parents. But even now the thought of the future haunted them; nor were they able to solace themselves with all the diversions of their younger days. The Lady Filomena had lost her voice and Sir Hercules was grown too rheumatical to play the violin. He, it is true, still rode after his pugs, but his wife felt herself too old and, since the episode of the mastiff, too nervous for such sports. At most, to please her husband, she would follow the hunt at a distance in a little gig drawn by the safest and oldest of the Shetlands.

“The day fixed for Ferdinando’s return came round. Filomena, sick with vague dreads and presentiments, retired to her chamber and her bed. Sir Hercules received his son alone. A giant in a brown travelling-suit entered the room. ‘Welcome home, my son,’ said Sir Hercules in a voice that trembled a little.

“‘I hope I see you well, sir.’ Ferdinando bent down to shake hands, then straightened himself up again. The top of his father’s head reached to the level of his hip.

“Ferdinando had not come alone. Two friends of his own age accompanied him, and each of the young men had brought a servant. Not for thirty years had Crome been desecrated by the presence of so many members of the common race of men. Sir Hercules was appalled and indignant, but the laws of hospitality had to be obeyed. He received the young gentlemen with grave politeness and sent the servants to the kitchen, with orders that they should be well cared for.

“The old family dining-table was dragged out into the light and dusted (Sir Hercules and his lady were accustomed to dine at a small table twenty inches high). Simon, the aged butler, who could only just look over the edge of the big table, was helped at supper by the three servants brought by Ferdinando and his guests.

“Sir Hercules presided, and with his usual grace supported a conversation on the pleasures of foreign travel, the beauties of art and nature to be met with abroad, the opera at Venice, the singing of the orphans in the churches of the same city, and on other topics of a similar nature. The young men were not particularly attentive to his discourses; they were occupied in watching the efforts of the butler to change the plates and replenish the glasses. They covered their laughter by violent and repeated fits of coughing or choking. Sir Hercules affected not to notice, but changed the subject of the conversation to sport. Upon this one of the young men asked whether it was true, as he had heard, that he used to hunt the rabbit with a pack of pug dogs. Sir Hercules replied that it was, and proceeded to describe the chase in some detail. The young men roared with laughter.

“When supper was over, Sir Hercules climbed down from his chair and, giving as his excuse that he must see how his lady did, bade them good-night. The sound of laughter followed him up the stairs. Filomena was not asleep; she had been lying on her bed listening to the sound of enormous laughter and the tread of strangely heavy feet on the stairs and along the corridors. Sir Hercules drew a chair to her bedside and sat there for a long time in silence, holding his wife’s hand and sometimes gently squeezing it. At about ten o’clock they were startled by a violent noise. There was a breaking of glass, a stamping of feet,

with an outburst of shouts and laughter. The uproar continuing for several minutes, Sir Hercules rose to his feet and, in spite of his wife's entreaties, prepared to go and see what was happening. There was no light on the staircase, and Sir Hercules groped his way down cautiously, lowering himself from stair to stair and standing for a moment on each tread before adventuring on a new step. The noise was louder here; the shouting articulated itself into recognisable words and phrases. A line of light was visible under the dining-room door. Sir Hercules tiptoed across the hall towards it. Just as he approached the door there was another terrific crash of breaking glass and jangled metal. What could they be doing? Standing on tiptoe he managed to look through the keyhole. In the middle of the ravaged table old Simon, the butler, so primed with drink that he could scarcely keep his balance, was dancing a jig. His feet crunched and tinkled among the broken glass, and his shoes were wet with spilt wine. The three young men sat round, thumping the table with their hands or with the empty wine bottles, shouting and laughing encouragement. The three servants leaning against the wall laughed too. Ferdinando suddenly threw a handful of walnuts at the dancer's head, which so dazed and surprised the little man that he staggered and fell down on his back, upsetting a decanter and several glasses. They raised him up, gave him some brandy to drink, thumped him on the back. The old man smiled and hiccoughed. 'To-morrow,' said Ferdinando, 'we'll have a concerted ballet of the whole household.' 'With father Hercules wearing his club and lion-skin,' added one of his companions, and all three roared with laughter.

"Sir Hercules would look and listen no further. He crossed the hall once more and began to climb the stairs, lifting his knees painfully high at each degree. This was the end; there was no place for him now in the world, no place for him and Ferdinando together.

"His wife was still awake; to her questioning glance he answered, 'They are making mock of old Simon. To-morrow it will be our turn.' They were silent for a time.

"At last Filomena said, 'I do not want to see to-morrow.'

“‘It is better not,’ said Sir Hercules. Going into his closet he wrote in his day-book a full and particular account of all the events of the evening. While he was still engaged in this task he rang for a servant and ordered hot water and a bath to be made ready for him at eleven o’clock. When he had finished writing he went into his wife’s room, and preparing a dose of opium twenty times as strong as that which she was accustomed to take when she could not sleep, he brought it to her, saying, ‘Here is your sleeping-draught.’

“Filomena took the glass and lay for a little time, but did not drink immediately. The tears came into her eyes. ‘Do you remember the songs we used to sing, sitting out there sulla terrazza in the summer-time?’ She began singing softly in her ghost of a cracked voice a few bars from Stradella’s ‘Amor amor, non dormir piu.’ ‘And you playing on the violin, it seems such a short time ago, and yet so long, long, long. Addio, amore, a rivederti.’ She drank off the draught and, lying back on the pillow, closed her eyes. Sir Hercules kissed her hand and tiptoed away, as though he were afraid of waking her. He returned to his closet, and having recorded his wife’s last words to him, he poured into his bath the water that had been brought up in accordance with his orders. The water being too hot for him to get into the bath at once, he took down from the shelf his copy of Suetonius. He wished to read how Seneca had died. He opened the book at random. ‘But dwarfs,’ he read, ‘he held in abhorrence as being lusus naturae and of evil omen.’ He winced as though he had been struck. This same Augustus, he remembered, had exhibited in the amphitheatre a young man called Lucius, of good family, who was not quite two feet in height and weighed seventeen pounds, but had a stentorian voice. He turned over the pages. Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero: it was a tale of growing horror. ‘Seneca his preceptor, he forced to kill himself.’ And there was Petronius, who had called his friends about him at the last, bidding them talk to him, not of the consolations of philosophy, but of love and gallantry, while the life was ebbing away through his opened veins. Dipping his pen once more in the ink he wrote on the last page of his diary: ‘He died a Roman death.’ Then, putting the toes of one foot into the water and finding that it was not too hot, he threw off his dressing-gown and,

taking a razor in his hand, sat down in the bath. With one deep cut he severed the artery in his left wrist, then lay back and composed his mind to meditation. The blood oozed out, floating through the water in dissolving wreaths and spirals. In a little while the whole bath was tinged with pink. The colour deepened; Sir Hercules felt himself mastered by an invincible drowsiness; he was sinking from vague dream to dream. Soon he was sound asleep. There was not much blood in his small body."

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR THEIR AFTER-LUNCHEON coffee the party generally adjourned to the library. Its windows looked east, and at this hour of the day it was the coolest place in the whole house. It was a large room, fitted, during the eighteenth century, with white painted shelves of an elegant design. In the middle of one wall a door, ingeniously upholstered with rows of dummy books, gave access to a deep cupboard, where, among a pile of letter-files and old newspapers, the mummy-case of an Egyptian lady, brought back by the second Sir Ferdinando on his return from the Grand Tour, mouldered in the darkness. From ten yards away and at a first glance, one might almost have mistaken this secret door for a section of shelving filled with genuine books. Coffee-cup in hand, Mr. Scogan was standing in front of the dummy book-shelf. Between the sips he discoursed.

"The bottom shelf," he was saying, "is taken up by an Encyclopaedia in fourteen volumes. Useful, but a little dull, as is also Caprimulge's 'Dictionary of the Finnish Language'. The 'Biographical Dictionary' looks more promising. 'Biography of Men who were Born Great', 'Biography of Men who Achieved Greatness', 'Biography of Men who had Greatness Thrust upon Them', and 'Biography of Men who were Never Great at All'. Then there are ten volumes of 'Thom's Works and Wanderings', while the 'Wild Goose Chase, a Novel', by an anonymous author, fills no less than six. But what's this, what's this?" Mr. Scogan stood on tiptoe and peered up. "Seven volumes of the 'Tales of Knockespotch'. The 'Tales of Knockespotch'," he repeated. "Ah, my dear Henry," he said, turning round, "these are your best books. I would willingly give all the rest of your library for them."

The happy possessor of a multitude of first editions, Mr. Wimbush could afford to smile indulgently.

“Is it possible,” Mr. Scogan went on, “that they possess nothing more than a back and a title?” He opened the cupboard door and peeped inside, as though he hoped to find the rest of the books behind it. “Phooh!” he said, and shut the door again. “It smells of dust and mildew. How symbolical! One comes to the great masterpieces of the past, expecting some miraculous illumination, and one finds, on opening them, only darkness and dust and a faint smell of decay. After all, what is reading but a vice, like drink or venery or any other form of excessive self-indulgence? One reads to tickle and amuse one’s mind; one reads, above all, to prevent oneself thinking. Still — the ‘Tales of Knockespotch’...”

He paused, and thoughtfully drummed with his fingers on the backs of the non-existent, unattainable books.

“But I disagree with you about reading,” said Mary. “About serious reading, I mean.”

“Quite right, Mary, quite right,” Mr. Scogan answered. “I had forgotten there were any serious people in the room.”

“I like the idea of the Biographies,” said Denis. “There’s room for us all within the scheme; it’s comprehensive.”

“Yes, the Biographies are good, the Biographies are excellent,” Mr Scogan agreed. “I imagine them written in a very elegant Regency style — Brighton Pavilion in words — perhaps by the great Dr. Lempriere himself. You know his classical dictionary? Ah!” Mr. Scogan raised his hand and let it limply fall again in a gesture which implied that words failed him. “Read his biography of Helen; read how Jupiter, disguised as a swan, was ‘enabled to avail himself of his situation’ vis-a-vis to Leda. And to think that he may have, must have written these biographies of the Great! What a work, Henry! And, owing to the idiotic arrangement of your library, it can’t be read.”

“I prefer the ‘Wild Goose Chase’,” said Anne. “A novel in six volumes — it must be restful.”

“Restful,” Mr. Scogan repeated. “You’ve hit on the right word. A ‘Wild Goose Chase’ is sound, but a bit old-fashioned — pictures of clerical life in the fifties, you know; specimens of the landed gentry; peasants for pathos and

comedy; and in the background, always the picturesque beauties of nature soberly described. All very good and solid, but, like certain puddings, just a little dull. Personally, I like much better the notion of ‘Thom’s Works and Wanderings’. The eccentric Mr. Thom of Thom’s Hill. Old Tom Thom, as his intimates used to call him. He spent ten years in Thibet organising the clarified butter industry on modern European lines, and was able to retire at thirty-six with a handsome fortune. The rest of his life he devoted to travel and ratiocination; here is the result.” Mr. Scogan tapped the dummy books. “And now we come to the ‘Tales of Knockespotch’. What a masterpiece and what a great man! Knockespotch knew how to write fiction. Ah, Denis, if you could only read Knockespotch you wouldn’t be writing a novel about the wearisome development of a young man’s character, you wouldn’t be describing in endless, fastidious detail, cultured life in Chelsea and Bloomsbury and Hampstead. You would be trying to write a readable book. But then, alas! owing to the peculiar arrangement of our host’s library, you never will read Knockespotch.”

“Nobody could regret the fact more than I do,” said Denis.

“It was Knockespotch,” Mr. Scogan continued, “the great Knockespotch, who delivered us from the dreary tyranny of the realistic novel. My life, Knockespotch said, is not so long that I can afford to spend precious hours writing or reading descriptions of middle-class interiors. He said again, ‘I am tired of seeing the human mind bogged in a social plenum; I prefer to paint it in a vacuum, freely and sportively bombinating.’”

“I say,” said Gombauld, “Knockespotch was a little obscure sometimes, wasn’t he?”

“He was,” Mr. Scogan replied, “and with intention. It made him seem even profounder than he actually was. But it was only in his aphorisms that he was so dark and oracular. In his Tales he was always luminous. Oh, those Tales — those Tales! How shall I describe them? Fabulous characters shoot across his pages like gaily dressed performers on the trapeze. There are extraordinary adventures and still more extraordinary speculations. Intelligences and emotions, relieved of all the imbecile preoccupations of civilised life, move in intricate and

subtle dances, crossing and recrossing, advancing, retreating, impinging. An immense erudition and an immense fancy go hand in hand. All the ideas of the present and of the past, on every possible subject, bob up among the Tales, smile gravely or grimace a caricature of themselves, then disappear to make place for something new. The verbal surface of his writing is rich and fantastically diversified. The wit is incessant. The..."

"But couldn't you give us a specimen," Denis broke in— "a concrete example?"

"Alas!" Mr. Scogan replied, "Knockespotch's great book is like the sword Excalibur. It remains struck fast in this door, awaiting the coming of a writer with genius enough to draw it forth. I am not even a writer, I am not so much as qualified to attempt the task. The extraction of Knockespotch from his wooden prison I leave, my dear Denis, to you."

"Thank you," said Denis.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE TIME of the amiable Brantome," Mr. Scogan was saying, "every debutante at the French Court was invited to dine at the King's table, where she was served with wine in a handsome silver cup of Italian workmanship. It was no ordinary cup, this goblet of the debutantes; for, inside, it had been most curiously and ingeniously engraved with a series of very lively amorous scenes. With each draught that the young lady swallowed these engravings became increasingly visible, and the Court looked on with interest, every time she put her nose in the cup, to see whether she blushed at what the ebbing wine revealed. If the debutante blushed, they laughed at her for her innocence; if she did not, she was laughed at for being too knowing."

"Do you propose," asked Anne, "that the custom should be revived at Buckingham Palace?"

"I do not," said Mr. Scogan. "I merely quoted the anecdote as an illustration of the customs, so genially frank, of the sixteenth century. I might have quoted other anecdotes to show that the customs of the seventeenth and eighteenth, of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries, and indeed of every other century, from the time of Hammurabi onward, were equally genial and equally frank. The only century in which customs were not characterised by the same cheerful openness was the nineteenth, of blessed memory. It was the astonishing exception. And yet, with what one must suppose was a deliberate disregard of history, it looked upon its horribly pregnant silences as normal and natural and right; the frankness of the previous fifteen or twenty thousand years was considered abnormal and perverse. It was a curious phenomenon."

"I entirely agree." Mary panted with excitement in her effort to bring out what she had to say. "Havelock Ellis says..."

Mr. Scogan, like a policeman arresting the flow of traffic, held up his hand. “He does; I know. And that brings me to my next point: the nature of the reaction.”

“Havelock Ellis...”

“The reaction, when it came — and we may say roughly that it set in a little before the beginning of this century — the reaction was to openness, but not to the same openness as had reigned in the earlier ages. It was to a scientific openness, not to the jovial frankness of the past, that we returned. The whole question of Amour became a terribly serious one. Earnest young men wrote in the public prints that from this time forth it would be impossible ever again to make a joke of any sexual matter. Professors wrote thick books in which sex was sterilised and dissected. It has become customary for serious young women, like Mary, to discuss, with philosophic calm, matters of which the merest hint would have sufficed to throw the youth of the sixties into a delirium of amorous excitement. It is all very estimable, no doubt. But still” — Mr. Scogan sighed.— “I for one should like to see, mingled with this scientific ardour, a little more of the jovial spirit of Rabelais and Chaucer.”

“I entirely disagree with you,” said Mary. “Sex isn’t a laughing matter; it’s serious.”

“Perhaps,” answered Mr. Scogan, “perhaps I’m an obscene old man. For I must confess that I cannot always regard it as wholly serious.”

“But I tell you...” began Mary furiously. Her face had flushed with excitement. Her cheeks were the cheeks of a great ripe peach.

“Indeed,” Mr. Scogan continued, “it seems to me one of few permanently and everlastingly amusing subjects that exist. Amour is the one human activity of any importance in which laughter and pleasure preponderate, if ever so slightly, over misery and pain.”

“I entirely disagree,” said Mary. There was a silence.

Anne looked at her watch. “Nearly a quarter to eight,” she said. “I wonder when Ivor will turn up.” She got up from her deck-chair and, leaning her elbows on the balustrade of the terrace, looked out over the valley and towards the

farther hills. Under the level evening light the architecture of the land revealed itself. The deep shadows, the bright contrasting lights gave the hills a new solidity. Irregularities of the surface, unsuspected before, were picked out with light and shade. The grass, the corn, the foliage of trees were stippled with intricate shadows. The surface of things had taken on a marvellous enrichment.

“Look!” said Anne suddenly, and pointed. On the opposite side of the valley, at the crest of the ridge, a cloud of dust flushed by the sunlight to rosy gold was moving rapidly along the sky-line. “It’s Ivor. One can tell by the speed.”

The dust cloud descended into the valley and was lost. A horn with the voice of a sea-lion made itself heard, approaching. A minute later Ivor came leaping round the corner of the house. His hair waved in the wind of his own speed; he laughed as he saw them.

“Anne, darling,” he cried, and embraced her, embraced Mary, very nearly embraced Mr. Scogan. “Well, here I am. I’ve come with incredulous speed.” Ivor’s vocabulary was rich, but a little erratic. “I’m not late for dinner, am I?” He hoisted himself up on to the balustrade, and sat there, kicking his heels. With one arm he embraced a large stone flower-pot, leaning his head sideways against its hard and lichenous flanks in an attitude of trustful affection. He had brown, wavy hair, and his eyes were of a very brilliant, pale, improbable blue. His head was narrow, his face thin and rather long, his nose aquiline. In old age — though it was difficult to imagine Ivor old — he might grow to have an Iron Ducal grimness. But now, at twenty-six, it was not the structure of his face that impressed one; it was its expression. That was charming and vivacious, and his smile was an irradiation. He was forever moving, restlessly and rapidly, but with an engaging gracefulness. His frail and slender body seemed to be fed by a spring of inexhaustible energy.

“No, you’re not late.”

“You’re in time to answer a question,” said Mr. Scogan. “We were arguing whether Amour were a serious matter or no. What do you think? Is it serious?”

“Serious?” echoed Ivor. “Most certainly.”

“I told you so,” cried Mary triumphantly.

“But in what sense serious?” Mr. Scogan asked.

“I mean as an occupation. One can go on with it without ever getting bored.”

“I see,” said Mr. Scogan. “Perfectly.”

“One can occupy oneself with it,” Ivor continued, “always and everywhere. Women are always wonderfully the same. Shapes vary a little, that’s all. In Spain” — with his free hand he described a series of ample curves— “one can’t pass them on the stairs. In England” — he put the tip of his forefinger against the tip of his thumb and, lowering his hand, drew out this circle into an imaginary cylinder— “In England they’re tubular. But their sentiments are always the same. At least, I’ve always found it so.”

“I’m delighted to hear it,” said Mr. Scogan.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LADIES HAD left the room and the port was circulating. Mr. Scogan filled his glass, passed on the decanter, and, leaning back in his chair, looked about him for a moment in silence. The conversation rippled idly round him, but he disregarded it; he was smiling at some private joke. Gombauld noticed his smile.

"What's amusing you?" he asked.

"I was just looking at you all, sitting round this table," said Mr. Scogan.

"Are we as comic as all that?"

"Not at all," Mr. Scogan answered politely. "I was merely amused by my own speculations."

"And what were they?"

"The idlest, the most academic of speculations. I was looking at you one by one and trying to imagine which of the first six Caesars you would each resemble, if you were given the opportunity of behaving like a Caesar. The Caesars are one of my touchstones," Mr. Scogan explained. "They are characters functioning, so to speak, in the void. They are human beings developed to their logical conclusions. Hence their unequalled value as a touchstone, a standard. When I meet someone for the first time, I ask myself this question: Given the Caesarean environment, which of the Caesars would this person resemble — Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero? I take each trait of character, each mental and emotional bias, each little oddity, and magnify them a thousand times. The resulting image gives me his Caesarean formula."

"And which of the Caesars do you resemble?" asked Gombauld.

"I am potentially all of them," Mr. Scogan replied, "all — with the possible exception of Claudius, who was much too stupid to be a development of anything in my character. The seeds of Julius's courage and compelling energy, of Augustus's prudence, of the libidinousness and cruelty of Tiberius, of

Caligula's folly, of Nero's artistic genius and enormous vanity, are all within me. Given the opportunities, I might have been something fabulous. But circumstances were against me. I was born and brought up in a country rectory; I passed my youth doing a great deal of utterly senseless hard work for a very little money. The result is that now, in middle age, I am the poor thing that I am. But perhaps it is as well. Perhaps, too, it's as well that Denis hasn't been permitted to flower into a little Nero, and that Ivor remains only potentially a Caligula. Yes, it's better so, no doubt. But it would have been more amusing, as a spectacle, if they had had the chance to develop, untrammelled, the full horror of their potentialities. It would have been pleasant and interesting to watch their tics and foibles and little vices swelling and burgeoning and blossoming into enormous and fantastic flowers of cruelty and pride and lewdness and avarice. The Caesarean environment makes the Caesar, as the special food and the queenly cell make the queen bee. We differ from the bees in so far that, given the proper food, they can be sure of making a queen every time. With us there is no such certainty; out of every ten men placed in the Caesarean environment one will be temperamentally good, or intelligent, or great. The rest will blossom into Caesars; he will not. Seventy and eighty years ago simple-minded people, reading of the exploits of the Bourbons in South Italy, cried out in amazement: To think that such things should be happening in the nineteenth century! And a few years since we too were astonished to find that in our still more astonishing twentieth century, unhappy blackamoors on the Congo and the Amazon were being treated as English serfs were treated in the time of Stephen. To-day we are no longer surprised at these things. The Black and Tans harry Ireland, the Poles maltreat the Silesians, the bold Fascisti slaughter their poorer countrymen: we take it all for granted. Since the war we wonder at nothing. We have created a Caesarean environment and a host of little Caesars has sprung up. What could be more natural?"

Mr. Scogan drank off what was left of his port and refilled the glass.

"At this very moment," he went on, "the most frightful horrors are taking place in every corner of the world. People are being crushed, slashed,

disembowelled, mangled; their dead bodies rot and their eyes decay with the rest. Screams of pain and fear go pulsing through the air at the rate of eleven hundred feet per second. After travelling for three seconds they are perfectly inaudible. These are distressing facts; but do we enjoy life any the less because of them? Most certainly we do not. We feel sympathy, no doubt; we represent to ourselves imaginatively the sufferings of nations and individuals and we deplore them. But, after all, what are sympathy and imagination? Precious little, unless the person for whom we feel sympathy happens to be closely involved in our affections; and even then they don't go very far. And a good thing too; for if one had an imagination vivid enough and a sympathy sufficiently sensitive really to comprehend and to feel the sufferings of other people, one would never have a moment's peace of mind. A really sympathetic race would not so much as know the meaning of happiness. But luckily, as I've already said, we aren't a sympathetic race. At the beginning of the war I used to think I really suffered, through imagination and sympathy, with those who physically suffered. But after a month or two I had to admit that, honestly, I didn't. And yet I think I have a more vivid imagination than most. One is always alone in suffering; the fact is depressing when one happens to be the sufferer, but it makes pleasure possible for the rest of the world."

There was a pause. Henry Wimbush pushed back his chair.

"I think perhaps we ought to go and join the ladies," he said.

"So do I," said Ivor, jumping up with alacrity. He turned to Mr. Scogan. "Fortunately," he said, "we can share our pleasures. We are not always condemned to be happy alone."

CHAPTER XVII.

IVOR BROUGHT HIS hands down with a bang on to the final chord of his rhapsody. There was just a hint in that triumphant harmony that the seventh had been struck along with the octave by the thumb of the left hand; but the general effect of splendid noise emerged clearly enough. Small details matter little so long as the general effect is good. And, besides, that hint of the seventh was decidedly modern. He turned round in his seat and tossed the hair back out of his eyes.

"There," he said. "That's the best I can do for you, I'm afraid."

Murmurs of applause and gratitude were heard, and Mary, her large china eyes fixed on the performer, cried out aloud, "Wonderful!" and gasped for new breath as though she were suffocating.

Nature and fortune had vied with one another in heaping on Ivor Lombard all their choicest gifts. He had wealth and he was perfectly independent. He was good looking, possessed an irresistible charm of manner, and was the hero of more amorous successes than he could well remember. His accomplishments were extraordinary for their number and variety. He had a beautiful untrained tenor voice; he could improvise, with a startling brilliance, rapidly and loudly, on the piano. He was a good amateur medium and telepathist, and had a considerable first-hand knowledge of the next world. He could write rhymed verses with an extraordinary rapidity. For painting symbolical pictures he had a dashing style, and if the drawing was sometimes a little weak, the colour was always pyrotechnical. He excelled in amateur theatricals and, when occasion offered, he could cook with genius. He resembled Shakespeare in knowing little Latin and less Greek. For a mind like his, education seemed supererogatory. Training would only have destroyed his natural aptitudes.

"Let's go out into the garden," Ivor suggested. "It's a wonderful night."

“Thank you,” said Mr. Scogan, “but I for one prefer these still more wonderful arm-chairs.” His pipe had begun to bubble oozily every time he pulled at it. He was perfectly happy.

Henry Wimbush was also happy. He looked for a moment over his pince-nez in Ivor’s direction and then, without saying anything, returned to the grimy little sixteenth-century account books which were now his favourite reading. He knew more about Sir Ferdinando’s household expenses than about his own.

The outdoor party, enrolled under Ivor’s banner, consisted of Anne, Mary, Denis, and, rather unexpectedly, Jenny. Outside it was warm and dark; there was no moon. They walked up and down the terrace, and Ivor sang a Neapolitan song: “Stretti, stretti” — close, close — with something about the little Spanish girl to follow. The atmosphere began to palpitate. Ivor put his arm round Anne’s waist, dropped his head sideways onto her shoulder, and in that position walked on, singing as he walked. It seemed the easiest, the most natural, thing in the world. Denis wondered why he had never done it. He hated Ivor.

“Let’s go down to the pool,” said Ivor. He disengaged his embrace and turned round to shepherd his little flock. They made their way along the side of the house to the entrance of the yew-tree walk that led down to the lower garden. Between the blank precipitous wall of the house and the tall yew trees the path was a chasm of impenetrable gloom. Somewhere there were steps down to the right, a gap in the yew hedge. Denis, who headed the party, groped his way cautiously; in this darkness, one had an irrational fear of yawning precipices, of horrible spiked obstructions. Suddenly from behind him he heard a shrill, startled, “Oh!” and then a sharp, dry concussion that might have been the sound of a slap. After that, Jenny’s voice was heard pronouncing, “I am going back to the house.” Her tone was decided, and even as she pronounced the words she was melting away into the darkness. The incident, whatever it had been, was closed. Denis resumed his forward groping. From somewhere behind Ivor began to sing again, softly: “Phillis plus avare que tendre

Ne gagnant rien à refuser,

Un jour exigea à Silvandre

Trente moutons pour un baiser.”

The melody drooped and climbed again with a kind of easy languor; the warm darkness seemed to pulse like blood about them.

“Le lendemain, nouvelle affaire:
Pour le berger le troc fut bon...”

“Here are the steps,” cried Denis. He guided his companions over the danger, and in a moment they had the turf of the yew-tree walk under their feet. It was lighter here, or at least it was just perceptibly less dark; for the yew walk was wider than the path that had led them under the lea of the house. Looking up, they could see between the high black hedges a strip of sky and a few stars.

“Car il obtint de la bergere...”

Went on Ivor, and then interrupted himself to shout, “I’m going to run down,” and he was off, full speed, down the invisible slope, singing unevenly as he went: “Trente baisers pour un mouton.”

The others followed. Denis shambled in the rear, vainly exhorting everyone to caution: the slope was steep, one might break one’s neck. What was wrong with these people, he wondered? They had become like young kittens after a dose of cat-nip. He himself felt a certain kittenishness sporting within him; but it was, like all his emotions, rather a theoretical feeling; it did not overmasteringly seek to express itself in a practical demonstration of kittenishness.

“Be careful,” he shouted once more, and hardly were the words out of his mouth when, thump! there was the sound of a heavy fall in front of him, followed by the long “F-f-f-f-f” of a breath indrawn with pain and afterwards by a very sincere, “Oo-ooh!” Denis was almost pleased; he had told them so, the

idiots, and they wouldn't listen. He trotted down the slope towards the unseen sufferer.

Mary came down the hill like a runaway steam-engine. It was tremendously exciting, this blind rush through the dark; she felt she would never stop. But the ground grew level beneath her feet, her speed insensibly slackened, and suddenly she was caught by an extended arm and brought to an abrupt halt.

"Well," said Ivor as he tightened his embrace, "you're caught now, Anne."

She made an effort to release herself. "It's not Anne. It's Mary."

Ivor burst into a peal of amused laughter. "So it is!" he exclaimed. "I seem to be making nothing but floaters this evening. I've already made one with Jenny." He laughed again, and there was something so jolly about his laughter that Mary could not help laughing too. He did not remove his encircling arm, and somehow it was all so amusing and natural that Mary made no further attempt to escape from it. They walked along by the side of the pool, interlaced. Mary was too short for him to be able, with any comfort, to lay his head on her shoulder. He rubbed his cheek, caressed and caressing, against the thick, sleek mass of her hair. In a little while he began to sing again; the night trembled amorously to the sound of his voice. When he had finished he kissed her. Anne or Mary: Mary or Anne. It didn't seem to make much difference which it was. There were differences in detail, of course; but the general effect was the same; and, after all, the general effect was the important thing.

Denis made his way down the hill.

"Any damage done?" he called out.

"Is that you, Denis? I've hurt my ankle so — and my knee, and my hand. I'm all in pieces."

"My poor Anne," he said. "But then," he couldn't help adding, "it was silly to start running downhill in the dark."

"Ass!" she retorted in a tone of tearful irritation; "of course it was."

He sat down beside her on the grass, and found himself breathing the faint, delicious atmosphere of perfume that she carried always with her.

"Light a match," she commanded. "I want to look at my wounds."

He felt in his pockets for the match-box. The light spurted and then grew steady. Magically, a little universe had been created, a world of colours and forms — Anne's face, the shimmering orange of her dress, her white, bare arms, a patch of green turf — and round about a darkness that had become solid and utterly blind. Anne held out her hands; both were green and earthy with her fall, and the left exhibited two or three red abrasions.

"Not so bad," she said. But Denis was terribly distressed, and his emotion was intensified when, looking up at her face, he saw that the trace of tears, involuntary tears of pain, lingered on her eyelashes. He pulled out his handkerchief and began to wipe away the dirt from the wounded hand. The match went out; it was not worth while to light another. Anne allowed herself to be attended to, meekly and gratefully. "Thank you," she said, when he had finished cleaning and bandaging her hand; and there was something in her tone that made him feel that she had lost her superiority over him, that she was younger than he, had become, suddenly, almost a child. He felt tremendously large and protective. The feeling was so strong that instinctively he put his arm about her. She drew closer, leaned against him, and so they sat in silence. Then, from below, soft but wonderfully clear through the still darkness, they heard the sound of Ivor's singing. He was going on with his half-finished song: "Le lendemain Phillis plus tendre,

Ne voulant deplaire au berger,

Fut trop heureuse de lui rendre

Trente moutons pour un baiser."

There was a rather prolonged pause. It was as though time were being allowed for the giving and receiving of a few of those thirty kisses. Then the voice sang on: "Le lendemain Phillis peu sage

Aurait donne moutons et chien

Pour un baiser que le volage

À Lisette donnait pour rien."

The last note died away into an uninterrupted silence.

“Are you better?” Denis whispered. “Are you comfortable like this?”

She nodded a Yes to both questions.

“Trente moutons pour un baiser.” The sheep, the woolly mutton — baa, baa, baa...? Or the shepherd? Yes, decidedly, he felt himself to be the shepherd now. He was the master, the protector. A wave of courage swelled through him, warm as wine. He turned his head, and began to kiss her face, at first rather randomly, then, with more precision, on the mouth.

Anne averted her head; he kissed the ear, the smooth nape that this movement presented him. “No,” she protested; “no, Denis.”

“Why not?”

“It spoils our friendship, and that was so jolly.”

“Bosh!” said Denis.

She tried to explain. “Can’t you see,” she said, “it isn’t...it isn’t our stunt at all.” It was true. Somehow she had never thought of Denis in the light of a man who might make love; she had never so much as conceived the possibilities of an amorous relationship with him. He was so absurdly young, so...so...she couldn’t find the adjective, but she knew what she meant.

“Why isn’t it our stunt?” asked Denis. “And, by the way, that’s a horrible and inappropriate expression.”

“Because it isn’t.”

“But if I say it is?”

“It makes no difference. I say it isn’t.”

“I shall make you say it is.”

“All right, Denis. But you must do it another time. I must go in and get my ankle into hot water. It’s beginning to swell.”

Reasons of health could not be gainsaid. Denis got up reluctantly, and helped his companion to her feet. She took a cautious step. “Ooh!” She halted and leaned heavily on his arm.

“I’ll carry you,” Denis offered. He had never tried to carry a woman, but on the cinema it always looked an easy piece of heroism.

“You couldn’t,” said Anne.

“Of course I can.” He felt larger and more protective than ever. “Put your arms round my neck,” he ordered. She did so and, stooping, he picked her up under the knees and lifted her from the ground. Good heavens, what a weight! He took five staggering steps up the slope, then almost lost his equilibrium, and had to deposit his burden suddenly, with something of a bump.

Anne was shaking with laughter. “I said you couldn’t, my poor Denis.”

“I can,” said Denis, without conviction. “I’ll try again.”

“It’s perfectly sweet of you to offer, but I’d rather walk, thanks.” She laid her hand on his shoulder and, thus supported, began to limp slowly up the hill.

“My poor Denis!” she repeated, and laughed again. Humiliated, he was silent. It seemed incredible that, only two minutes ago, he should have been holding her in his embrace, kissing her. Incredible. She was helpless then, a child. Now she had regained all her superiority; she was once more the far-off being, desired and unassailable. Why had he been such a fool as to suggest that carrying stunt? He reached the house in a state of the profoundest depression.

He helped Anne upstairs, left her in the hands of a maid, and came down again to the drawing-room. He was surprised to find them all sitting just where he had left them. He had expected that, somehow, everything would be quite different — it seemed such a prodigious time since he went away. All silent and all damned, he reflected, as he looked at them. Mr. Scogan’s pipe still wheezed; that was the only sound. Henry Wimbush was still deep in his account books; he had just made the discovery that Sir Ferdinando was in the habit of eating oysters the whole summer through, regardless of the absence of the justifying R. Gombauld, in horn-rimmed spectacles, was reading. Jenny was mysteriously scribbling in her red notebook. And, seated in her favourite arm-chair at the corner of the hearth, Priscilla was looking through a pile of drawings. One by one she held them out at arm’s length and, throwing back her mountainous orange head, looked long and attentively through half-closed eyelids. She wore a pale sea-green dress; on the slope of her mauve-powdered decolletage diamonds twinkled. An immensely long cigarette-holder projected at an angle from her face. Diamonds were embedded in her high-piled coiffure; they glittered every

time she moved. It was a batch of Ivor's drawings — sketches of Spirit Life, made in the course of tranced tours through the other world. On the back of each sheet descriptive titles were written: "Portrait of an Angel, 15th March '20;" "Astral Beings at Play, 3rd December '19;" "A Party of Souls on their Way to a Higher Sphere, 21st May '21." Before examining the drawing on the obverse of each sheet, she turned it over to read the title. Try as she could — and she tried hard — Priscilla had never seen a vision or succeeded in establishing any communication with the Spirit World. She had to be content with the reported experiences of others.

"What have you done with the rest of your party?" she asked, looking up as Denis entered the room.

He explained. Anne had gone to bed, Ivor and Mary were still in the garden. He selected a book and a comfortable chair, and tried, as far as the disturbed state of his mind would permit him, to compose himself for an evening's reading. The lamplight was utterly serene; there was no movement save the stir of Priscilla among her papers. All silent and all damned, Denis repeated to himself, all silent and all damned...

It was nearly an hour later when Ivor and Mary made their appearance.

"We waited to see the moon rise," said Ivor.

"It was gibbous, you know," Mary explained, very technical and scientific.

"It was so beautiful down in the garden! The trees, the scent of the flowers, the stars..." Ivor waved his arms. "And when the moon came up, it was really too much. It made me burst into tears." He sat down at the piano and opened the lid.

"There were a great many meteorites," said Mary to anyone who would listen. "The earth must just be coming into the summer shower of them. In July and August..."

But Ivor had already begun to strike the keys. He played the garden, the stars, the scent of flowers, the rising moon. He even put in a nightingale that was not there. Mary looked on and listened with parted lips. The others pursued their occupations, without appearing to be seriously disturbed. On this very July day, exactly three hundred and fifty years ago, Sir Ferdinando had eaten seven dozen

oysters. The discovery of this fact gave Henry Wimbush a peculiar pleasure. He had a natural piety which made him delight in the celebration of memorial feasts. The three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the seven dozen oysters...He wished he had known before dinner; he would have ordered champagne.

On her way to bed Mary paid a call. The light was out in Anne's room, but she was not yet asleep.

"Why didn't you come down to the garden with us?" Mary asked.

"I fell down and twisted my ankle. Denis helped me home."

Mary was full of sympathy. Inwardly, too, she was relieved to find Anne's non-appearance so simply accounted for. She had been vaguely suspicious, down there in the garden — suspicious of what, she hardly knew; but there had seemed to be something a little louche in the way she had suddenly found herself alone with Ivor. Not that she minded, of course; far from it. But she didn't like the idea that perhaps she was the victim of a put-up job.

"I do hope you'll be better to-morrow," she said, and she commiserated with Anne on all she had missed — the garden, the stars, the scent of flowers, the meteorites through whose summer shower the earth was now passing, the rising moon and its gibbosity. And then they had had such interesting conversation. What about? About almost everything. Nature, art, science, poetry, the stars, spiritualism, the relations of the sexes, music, religion. Ivor, she thought, had an interesting mind.

The two young ladies parted affectionately.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEAREST ROMAN Catholic church was upwards of twenty miles away. Ivor, who was punctilious in his devotions, came down early to breakfast and had his car at the door, ready to start, by a quarter to ten. It was a smart, expensive-looking machine, enamelled a pure lemon yellow and upholstered in emerald green leather. There were two seats — three if you squeezed tightly enough — and their occupants were protected from wind, dust, and weather by a glazed sedan that rose, an elegant eighteenth-century hump, from the midst of the body of the car.

Mary had never been to a Roman Catholic service, thought it would be an interesting experience, and, when the car moved off through the great gates of the courtyard, she was occupying the spare seat in the sedan. The sea-lion horn roared, faintlier, faintlier, and they were gone.

In the parish church of Crome Mr. Bodiham preached on 1 Kings vi. 18: “And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops” — a sermon of immediately local interest. For the past two years the problem of the War Memorial had exercised the minds of all those in Crome who had enough leisure, or mental energy, or party spirit to think of such things. Henry Wimbush was all for a library — a library of local literature, stocked with county histories, old maps of the district, monographs on the local antiquities, dialect dictionaries, handbooks of the local geology and natural history. He liked to think of the villagers, inspired by such reading, making up parties of a Sunday afternoon to look for fossils and flint arrow-heads. The villagers themselves favoured the idea of a memorial reservoir and water supply. But the busiest and most articulate party followed Mr. Bodiham in demanding something religious in character — a second lich-gate, for example, a stained-glass window, a monument of marble, or, if possible, all three. So far, however, nothing had been done, partly because

the memorial committee had never been able to agree, partly for the more cogent reason that too little money had been subscribed to carry out any of the proposed schemes. Every three or four months Mr. Bodiham preached a sermon on the subject. His last had been delivered in March; it was high time that his congregation had a fresh reminder.

"And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops."

Mr. Bodiham touched lightly on Solomon's temple. From thence he passed to temples and churches in general. What were the characteristics of these buildings dedicated to God? Obviously, the fact of their, from a human point of view, complete uselessness. They were unpractical buildings "carved with knops." Solomon might have built a library — indeed, what could be more to the taste of the world's wisest man? He might have dug a reservoir — what more useful in a parched city like Jerusalem? He did neither; he built a house all carved with knops, useless and unpractical. Why? Because he was dedicating the work to God. There had been much talk in Crome about the proposed War Memorial. A War Memorial was, in its very nature, a work dedicated to God. It was a token of thankfulness that the first stage in the culminating world-war had been crowned by the triumph of righteousness; it was at the same time a visibly embodied supplication that God might not long delay the Advent which alone could bring the final peace. A library, a reservoir? Mr. Bodiham scornfully and indignantly condemned the idea. These were works dedicated to man, not to God. As a War Memorial they were totally unsuitable. A lich-gate had been suggested. This was an object which answered perfectly to the definition of a War Memorial: a useless work dedicated to God and carved with knops. One lich-gate, it was true, already existed. But nothing would be easier than to make a second entrance into the churchyard; and a second entrance would need a second gate. Other suggestions had been made. Stained-glass windows, a monument of marble. Both these were admirable, especially the latter. It was high time that the War Memorial was erected. It might soon be too late. At any moment, like a thief in the night, God might come. Meanwhile a difficulty stood in the way. Funds were inadequate. All should subscribe according to their means. Those who had lost

relations in the war might reasonably be expected to subscribe a sum equal to that which they would have had to pay in funeral expenses if the relative had died while at home. Further delay was disastrous. The War Memorial must be built at once. He appealed to the patriotism and the Christian sentiments of all his hearers.

Henry Wimbush walked home thinking of the books he would present to the War Memorial Library, if ever it came into existence. He took the path through the fields; it was pleasanter than the road. At the first stile a group of village boys, loutish young fellows all dressed in the hideous ill-fitting black which makes a funeral of every English Sunday and holiday, were assembled, drearily guffawing as they smoked their cigarettes. They made way for Henry Wimbush, touching their caps as he passed. He returned their salute; his bowler and face were one in their unruffled gravity.

In Sir Ferdinando's time, he reflected, in the time of his son, Sir Julius, these young men would have had their Sunday diversions even at Crome, remote and rustic Crome. There would have been archery, skittles, dancing — social amusements in which they would have partaken as members of a conscious community. Now they had nothing, nothing except Mr. Bodiham's forbidding Boys' Club and the rare dances and concerts organised by himself. Boredom or the urban pleasures of the county metropolis were the alternatives that presented themselves to these poor youths. Country pleasures were no more; they had been stamped out by the Puritans.

In Manningham's Diary for 1600 there was a queer passage, he remembered, a very queer passage. Certain magistrates in Berkshire, Puritan magistrates, had had wind of a scandal. One moonlit summer night they had ridden out with their posse and there, among the hills, they had come upon a company of men and women, dancing, stark naked, among the sheepcotes. The magistrates and their men had ridden their horses into the crowd. How self-conscious the poor people must suddenly have felt, how helpless without their clothes against armed and booted horsemen! The dancers were arrested, whipped, gaoled, set in the stocks; the moonlight dance is never danced again. What old, earthy, Panic rite came to

extinction here? he wondered. Who knows? — perhaps their ancestors had danced like this in the moonlight ages before Adam and Eve were so much as thought of. He liked to think so. And now it was no more. These weary young men, if they wanted to dance, would have to bicycle six miles to the town. The country was desolate, without life of its own, without indigenous pleasures. The pious magistrates had snuffed out for ever a little happy flame that had burned from the beginning of time.

“And as on Tullia’s tomb one lamp burned clear,
Unchanged for fifteen hundred year...”

He repeated the lines to himself, and was desolated to think of all the murdered past.

CHAPTER XIX.

HENRY WIMBUSH'S LONG cigar burned aromatically. The "History of Crome" lay on his knee; slowly he turned over the pages.

"I can't decide what episode to read you to-night," he said thoughtfully. "Sir Ferdinando's voyages are not without interest. Then, of course, there's his son, Sir Julius. It was he who suffered from the delusion that his perspiration engendered flies; it drove him finally to suicide. Or there's Sir Cyprian." He turned the pages more rapidly. "Or Sir Henry. Or Sir George...No, I'm inclined to think I won't read about any of these."

"But you must read something," insisted Mr. Scogan, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

"I think I shall read about my grandfather," said Henry Wimbush, "and the events that led up to his marriage with the eldest daughter of the last Sir Ferdinando."

"Good," said Mr. Scogan. "We are listening."

"Before I begin reading," said Henry Wimbush, looking up from the book and taking off the pince-nez which he had just fitted to his nose— "before I begin, I must say a few preliminary words about Sir Ferdinando, the last of the Lapiths. At the death of the virtuous and unfortunate Sir Hercules, Ferdinando found himself in possession of the family fortune, not a little increased by his father's temperance and thrift; he applied himself forthwith to the task of spending it, which he did in an ample and jovial fashion. By the time he was forty he had eaten and, above all, drunk and loved away about half his capital, and would infallibly have soon got rid of the rest in the same manner, if he had not had the good fortune to become so madly enamoured of the Rector's daughter as to make a proposal of marriage. The young lady accepted him, and in less than a year had become the absolute mistress of Crome and her husband.

An extraordinary reformation made itself apparent in Sir Ferdinando's character. He grew regular and economical in his habits; he even became temperate, rarely drinking more than a bottle and a half of port at a sitting. The waning fortune of the Lapiths began once more to wax, and that in despite of the hard times (for Sir Ferdinando married in 1809 in the height of the Napoleonic Wars). A prosperous and dignified old age, cheered by the spectacle of his children's growth and happiness — for Lady Lapith had already borne him three daughters, and there seemed no good reason why she should not bear many more of them, and sons as well — a patriarchal decline into the family vault, seemed now to be Sir Ferdinando's enviable destiny. But Providence willed otherwise. To Napoleon, cause already of such infinite mischief, was due, though perhaps indirectly, the untimely and violent death which put a period to this reformed existence.

"Sir Ferdinando, who was above all things a patriot, had adopted, from the earliest days of the conflict with the French, his own peculiar method of celebrating our victories. When the happy news reached London, it was his custom to purchase immediately a large store of liquor and, taking a place on whichever of the outgoing coaches he happened to light on first, to drive through the country proclaiming the good news to all he met on the road and dispensing it, along with the liquor, at every stopping-place to all who cared to listen or drink. Thus, after the Nile, he had driven as far as Edinburgh; and later, when the coaches, wreathed with laurel for triumph, with cypress for mourning, were setting out with the news of Nelson's victory and death, he sat through all a chilly October night on the box of the Norwich 'Meteor' with a nautical keg of rum on his knees and two cases of old brandy under the seat. This genial custom was one of the many habits which he abandoned on his marriage. The victories in the Peninsula, the retreat from Moscow, Leipzig, and the abdication of the tyrant all went uncelebrated. It so happened, however, that in the summer of 1815 Sir Ferdinando was staying for a few weeks in the capital. There had been a succession of anxious, doubtful days; then came the glorious news of Waterloo. It was too much for Sir Ferdinando; his joyous youth awoke again within him. He hurried to his wine merchant and bought a dozen bottles of 1760

brandy. The Bath coach was on the point of starting; he bribed his way on to the box and, seated in glory beside the driver, proclaimed aloud the downfall of the Corsican bandit and passed about the warm liquid joy. They clattered through Uxbridge, Slough, Maidenhead. Sleeping Reading was awakened by the great news. At Didcot one of the ostlers was so much overcome by patriotic emotions and the 1760 brandy that he found it impossible to do up the buckles of the harness. The night began to grow chilly, and Sir Ferdinando found that it was not enough to take a nip at every stage: to keep up his vital warmth he was compelled to drink between the stages as well. They were approaching Swindon. The coach was travelling at a dizzy speed — six miles in the last half-hour — when, without having manifested the slightest premonitory symptom of unsteadiness, Sir Ferdinando suddenly toppled sideways off his seat and fell, head foremost, into the road. An unpleasant jolt awakened the slumbering passengers. The coach was brought to a standstill; the guard ran back with a light. He found Sir Ferdinando still alive, but unconscious; blood was oozing from his mouth. The back wheels of the coach had passed over his body, breaking most of his ribs and both arms. His skull was fractured in two places. They picked him up, but he was dead before they reached the next stage. So perished Sir Ferdinando, a victim to his own patriotism. Lady Lapith did not marry again, but determined to devote the rest of her life to the well-being of her three children — Georgiana, now five years old, and Emmeline and Caroline, twins of two."

Henry Wimbush paused, and once more put on his pince-nez. "So much by way of introduction," he said. "Now I can begin to read about my grandfather."

"One moment," said Mr. Scogan, "till I've refilled my pipe."

Mr. Wimbush waited. Seated apart in a corner of the room, Ivor was showing Mary his sketches of Spirit Life. They spoke together in whispers.

Mr. Scogan had lighted his pipe again. "Fire away," he said.

Henry Wimbush fired away.

"It was in the spring of 1833 that my grandfather, George Wimbush, first made the acquaintance of the 'three lovely Lapiths,' as they were always called.

He was then a young man of twenty-two, with curly yellow hair and a smooth pink face that was the mirror of his youthful and ingenuous mind. He had been educated at Harrow and Christ Church, he enjoyed hunting and all other field sports, and, though his circumstances were comfortable to the verge of affluence, his pleasures were temperate and innocent. His father, an East Indian merchant, had destined him for a political career, and had gone to considerable expense in acquiring a pleasant little Cornish borough as a twenty-first birthday gift for his son. He was justly indignant when, on the very eve of George's majority, the Reform Bill of 1832 swept the borough out of existence. The inauguration of George's political career had to be postponed. At the time he got to know the lovely Lapiths he was waiting; he was not at all impatient.

"The lovely Lapiths did not fail to impress him. Georgiana, the eldest, with her black ringlets, her flashing eyes, her noble aquiline profile, her swan-like neck, and sloping shoulders, was orientally dazzling; and the twins, with their delicately turned-up noses, their blue eyes, and chestnut hair, were an identical pair of ravishingly English charmers.

"Their conversation at this first meeting proved, however, to be so forbidding that, but for the invincible attraction exercised by their beauty, George would never have had the courage to follow up the acquaintance. The twins, looking up their noses at him with an air of languid superiority, asked him what he thought of the latest French poetry and whether he liked the 'Indiana' of George Sand. But what was almost worse was the question with which Georgiana opened her conversation with him. 'In music,' she asked, leaning forward and fixing him with her large dark eyes, 'are you a classicist or a transcendentalist?' George did not lose his presence of mind. He had enough appreciation of music to know that he hated anything classical, and so, with a promptitude which did him credit, he replied, 'I am a transcendentalist.' Georgiana smiled bewitchingly. 'I am glad,' she said; 'so am I. You went to hear Paganini last week, of course. "The prayer of Moses" — ah!' She closed her eyes. 'Do you know anything more transcendental than that?' 'No,' said George, 'I don't.' He hesitated, was about to go on speaking, and then decided that after all it would be wiser not to say —

what was in fact true — that he had enjoyed above all Paganini's Farmyard Imitations. The man had made his fiddle bray like an ass, cluck like a hen, grunt, squeal, bark, neigh, quack, bellow, and growl; that last item, in George's estimation, had almost compensated for the tediousness of the rest of the concert. He smiled with pleasure at the thought of it. Yes, decidedly, he was no classicist in music; he was a thoroughgoing transcendentalist.

"George followed up this first introduction by paying a call on the young ladies and their mother, who occupied, during the season, a small but elegant house in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square. Lady Lapith made a few discreet inquiries, and having found that George's financial position, character, and family were all passably good, she asked him to dine. She hoped and expected that her daughters would all marry into the peerage; but, being a prudent woman, she knew it was advisable to prepare for all contingencies. George Wimbush, she thought, would make an excellent second string for one of the twins.

"At this first dinner, George's partner was Emmeline. They talked of Nature. Emmeline protested that to her high mountains were a feeling and the hum of human cities torture. George agreed that the country was very agreeable, but held that London during the season also had its charms. He noticed with surprise and a certain solicitous distress that Miss Emmeline's appetite was poor, that it didn't, in fact, exist. Two spoonfuls of soup, a morsel of fish, no bird, no meat, and three grapes — that was her whole dinner. He looked from time to time at her two sisters; Georgiana and Caroline seemed to be quite as abstemious. They waved away whatever was offered them with an expression of delicate disgust, shutting their eyes and averting their faces from the proffered dish, as though the lemon sole, the duck, the loin of veal, the trifle, were objects revolting to the sight and smell. George, who thought the dinner capital, ventured to comment on the sisters' lack of appetite.

"'Pray, don't talk to me of eating,' said Emmeline, drooping like a sensitive plant. 'We find it so coarse, so unspiritual, my sisters and I. One can't think of one's soul while one is eating.'

“George agreed; one couldn’t. ‘But one must live,’ he said.

“‘Alas!’ Emmeline sighed. ‘One must. Death is very beautiful, don’t you think?’ She broke a corner off a piece of toast and began to nibble at it languidly. ‘But since, as you say, one must live...’ She made a little gesture of resignation. ‘Luckily a very little suffices to keep one alive.’ She put down her corner of toast half eaten.

“George regarded her with some surprise. She was pale, but she looked extraordinarily healthy, he thought; so did her sisters. Perhaps if you were really spiritual you needed less food. He, clearly, was not spiritual.

“After this he saw them frequently. They all liked him, from Lady Lapith downwards. True, he was not very romantic or poetical; but he was such a pleasant, unpretentious, kind-hearted young man, that one couldn’t help liking him. For his part, he thought them wonderful, wonderful, especially Georgiana. He enveloped them all in a warm, protective affection. For they needed protection; they were altogether too frail, too spiritual for this world. They never ate, they were always pale, they often complained of fever, they talked much and lovingly of death, they frequently swooned. Georgiana was the most ethereal of all; of the three she ate least, swooned most often, talked most of death, and was the palest — with a pallor that was so startling as to appear positively artificial. At any moment, it seemed, she might loose her precarious hold on this material world and become all spirit. To George the thought was a continual agony. If she were to die...

“She contrived, however, to live through the season, and that in spite of the numerous balls, routs, and other parties of pleasure which, in company with the rest of the lovely trio, she never failed to attend. In the middle of July the whole household moved down to the country. George was invited to spend the month of August at Crome.

“The house-party was distinguished; in the list of visitors figured the names of two marriageable young men of title. George had hoped that country air, repose, and natural surroundings might have restored to the three sisters their appetites and the roses of their cheeks. He was mistaken. For dinner, the first

evening, Georgiana ate only an olive, two or three salted almonds, and half a peach. She was as pale as ever. During the meal she spoke of love.

"'True love,' she said, 'being infinite and eternal, can only be consummated in eternity. Indiana and Sir Rodolphe celebrated the mystic wedding of their souls by jumping into Niagara. Love is incompatible with life. The wish of two people who truly love one another is not to live together but to die together.'

"'Come, come, my dear,' said Lady Lapith, stout and practical. 'What would become of the next generation, pray, if all the world acted on your principles?'

"'Mamma!...' Georgiana protested, and dropped her eyes.

"'In my young days,' Lady Lapith went on, 'I should have been laughed out of countenance if I'd said a thing like that. But then in my young days souls weren't as fashionable as they are now and we didn't think death was at all poetical. It was just unpleasant.'

"'Mamma!...' Emmeline and Caroline implored in unison.

"'In my young days—' Lady Lapith was launched into her subject; nothing, it seemed, could stop her now. 'In my young days, if you didn't eat, people told you you needed a dose of rhubarb. Nowadays...'

"There was a cry; Georgiana had swooned sideways on to Lord Timpany's shoulder. It was a desperate expedient; but it was successful. Lady Lapith was stopped.

"The days passed in an uneventful round of pleasures. Of all the gay party George alone was unhappy. Lord Timpany was paying his court to Georgiana, and it was clear that he was not unfavourably received. George looked on, and his soul was a hell of jealousy and despair. The boisterous company of the young men became intolerable to him; he shrank from them, seeking gloom and solitude. One morning, having broken away from them on some vague pretext, he returned to the house alone. The young men were bathing in the pool below; their cries and laughter floated up to him, making the quiet house seem lonelier and more silent. The lovely sisters and their mamma still kept their chambers; they did not customarily make their appearance till luncheon, so that the male

guests had the morning to themselves. George sat down in the hall and abandoned himself to thought.

“At any moment she might die; at any moment she might become Lady Timpany. It was terrible, terrible. If she died, then he would die too; he would go to seek her beyond the grave. If she became Lady Timpany...ah, then! The solution of the problem would not be so simple. If she became Lady Timpany: it was a horrible thought. But then suppose she were in love with Timpany — though it seemed incredible that anyone could be in love with Timpany — suppose her life depended on Timpany, suppose she couldn’t live without him? He was fumbling his way along this clueless labyrinth of suppositions when the clock struck twelve. On the last stroke, like an automaton released by the turning clockwork, a little maid, holding a large covered tray, popped out of the door that led from the kitchen regions into the hall. From his deep arm-chair George watched her (himself, it was evident, unobserved) with an idle curiosity. She pattered across the room and came to a halt in front of what seemed a blank expense of panelling. She reached out her hand and, to George’s extreme astonishment, a little door swung open, revealing the foot of a winding staircase. Turning sideways in order to get her tray through the narrow opening, the little maid darted in with a rapid crab-like motion. The door closed behind her with a click. A minute later it opened again and the maid, without her tray, hurried back across the hall and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. George tried to recompose his thoughts, but an invincible curiosity drew his mind towards the hidden door, the staircase, the little maid. It was in vain he told himself that the matter was none of his business, that to explore the secrets of that surprising door, that mysterious staircase within, would be a piece of unforgivable rudeness and indiscretion. It was in vain; for five minutes he struggled heroically with his curiosity, but at the end of that time he found himself standing in front of the innocent sheet of panelling through which the little maid had disappeared. A glance sufficed to show him the position of the secret door — secret, he perceived, only to those who looked with a careless eye. It was just an ordinary door let in flush with the panelling. No latch nor handle betrayed its position, but

an unobtrusive catch sunk in the wood invited the thumb. George was astonished that he had not noticed it before; now he had seen it, it was so obvious, almost as obvious as the cupboard door in the library with its lines of imitation shelves and its dummy books. He pulled back the catch and peeped inside. The staircase, of which the degrees were made not of stone but of blocks of ancient oak, wound up and out of sight. A slit-like window admitted the daylight; he was at the foot of the central tower, and the little window looked out over the terrace; they were still shouting and splashing in the pool below.

“George closed the door and went back to his seat. But his curiosity was not satisfied. Indeed, this partial satisfaction had but whetted its appetite. Where did the staircase lead? What was the errand of the little maid? It was no business of his, he kept repeating — no business of his. He tried to read, but his attention wandered. A quarter-past twelve sounded on the harmonious clock. Suddenly determined, George rose, crossed the room, opened the hidden door, and began to ascend the stairs. He passed the first window, corkscrewed round, and came to another. He paused for a moment to look out; his heart beat uncomfortably, as though he were affronting some unknown danger. What he was doing, he told himself, was extremely ungentlemanly, horribly underbred. He tiptoed onward and upward. One turn more, then half a turn, and a door confronted him. He halted before it, listened; he could hear no sound. Putting his eye to the keyhole, he saw nothing but a stretch of white sunlit wall. Emboldened, he turned the handle and stepped across the threshold. There he halted, petrified by what he saw, mutely gaping.

“In the middle of a pleasantly sunny little room— ‘it is now Priscilla’s boudoir,’ Mr. Wimbush remarked parenthetically — stood a small circular table of mahogany. Crystal, porcelain, and silver, — all the shining apparatus of an elegant meal — were mirrored in its polished depths. The carcase of a cold chicken, a bowl of fruit, a great ham, deeply gashed to its heart of tenderest white and pink, the brown cannon ball of a cold plum-pudding, a slender Hock bottle, and a decanter of claret jostled one another for a place on this festive

board. And round the table sat the three sisters, the three lovely Lapiths — eating!

“At George’s sudden entrance they had all looked towards the door, and now they sat, petrified by the same astonishment which kept George fixed and staring. Georgiana, who sat immediately facing the door, gazed at him with dark, enormous eyes. Between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand she was holding a drumstick of the dismembered chicken; her little finger, elegantly crooked, stood apart from the rest of her hand. Her mouth was open, but the drumstick had never reached its destination; it remained, suspended, frozen, in mid-air. The other two sisters had turned round to look at the intruder. Caroline still grasped her knife and fork; Emmeline’s fingers were round the stem of her claret glass. For what seemed a very long time, George and the three sisters stared at one another in silence. They were a group of statues. Then suddenly there was movement. Georgiana dropped her chicken bone, Caroline’s knife and fork clattered on her plate. The movement propagated itself, grew more decisive; Emmeline sprang to her feet, uttering a cry. The wave of panic reached George; he turned and, mumbling something unintelligible as he went, rushed out of the room and down the winding stairs. He came to a standstill in the hall, and there, all by himself in the quiet house, he began to laugh.

“At luncheon it was noticed that the sisters ate a little more than usual. Georgiana toyed with some French beans and a spoonful of calves’-foot jelly. ‘I feel a little stronger to-day,’ she said to Lord Timpany, when he congratulated her on this increase of appetite; ‘a little more material,’ she added, with a nervous laugh. Looking up, she caught George’s eye; a blush suffused her cheeks and she looked hastily away.

“In the garden that afternoon they found themselves for a moment alone.

“You won’t tell anyone, George? Promise you won’t tell anyone,’ she implored. ‘It would make us look so ridiculous. And besides, eating IS unspiritual, isn’t it? Say you won’t tell anyone.’

“‘I will,’ said George brutally. ‘I’ll tell everyone, unless...’

“‘It’s blackmail.’

“‘I don’t care, said George. ‘I’ll give you twenty-four hours to decide.’

“Lady Lapith was disappointed, of course; she had hoped for better things — for Timpany and a coronet. But George, after all, wasn’t so bad. They were married at the New Year.

“My poor grandfather!” Mr. Wimbush added, as he closed his book and put away his pince-nez. “Whenever I read in the papers about oppressed nationalities, I think of him.” He relighted his cigar. “It was a maternal government, highly centralised, and there were no representative institutions.”

Henry Wimbush ceased speaking. In the silence that ensued Ivor’s whispered commentary on the spirit sketches once more became audible. Priscilla, who had been dozing, suddenly woke up.

“What?” she said in the startled tones of one newly returned to consciousness; “what?”

Jenny caught the words. She looked up, smiled, nodded reassuringly. “It’s about a ham,” she said.

“What’s about a ham?”

“What Henry has been reading.” She closed the red notebook lying on her knees and slipped a rubber band round it. “I’m going to bed,” she announced, and got up.

“So am I,” said Anne, yawning. But she lacked the energy to rise from her arm-chair.

The night was hot and oppressive. Round the open windows the curtains hung unmoving. Ivor, fanning himself with the portrait of an Astral Being, looked out into the darkness and drew a breath.

“The air’s like wool,” he declared.

“It will get cooler after midnight,” said Henry Wimbush, and cautiously added, “perhaps.”

“I shan’t sleep, I know.”

Priscilla turned her head in his direction; the monumental coiffure nodded exorbitantly at her slightest movement. “You must make an effort,” she said.

“When I can’t sleep, I concentrate my will: I say, ‘I will sleep, I am asleep!’ And pop! off I go. That’s the power of thought.”

“But does it work on stuffy nights?” Ivor inquired. “I simply cannot sleep on a stuffy night.”

“Nor can I,” said Mary, “except out of doors.”

“Out of doors! What a wonderful idea!” In the end they decided to sleep on the towers — Mary on the western tower, Ivor on the eastern. There was a flat expanse of leads on each of the towers, and you could get a mattress through the trap doors that opened on to them. Under the stars, under the gibbous moon, assuredly they would sleep. The mattresses were hauled up, sheets and blankets were spread, and an hour later the two insomniasts, each on his separate tower, were crying their good-nights across the dividing gulf.

On Mary the sleep-compelling charm of the open air did not work with its expected magic. Even through the mattress one could not fail to be aware that the leads were extremely hard. Then there were noises: the owls screeched tirelessly, and once, roused by some unknown terror, all the geese of the farmyard burst into a sudden frenzy of cackling. The stars and the gibbous moon demanded to be looked at, and when one meteorite had streaked across the sky, you could not help waiting, open-eyed and alert, for the next. Time passed; the moon climbed higher and higher in the sky. Mary felt less sleepy than she had when she first came out. She sat up and looked over the parapet. Had Ivor been able to sleep? she wondered. And as though in answer to her mental question, from behind the chimney-stack at the farther end of the roof a white form noiselessly emerged — a form that, in the moonlight, was recognisably Ivor’s. Spreading his arms to right and left, like a tight-rope dancer, he began to walk forward along the roof-tree of the house. He swayed terrifyingly as he advanced. Mary looked on speechlessly; perhaps he was walking in his sleep! Suppose he were to wake up suddenly, now! If she spoke or moved it might mean his death. She dared look no more, but sank back on her pillows. She listened intently. For what seemed an immensely long time there was no sound. Then there was a patter of feet on the tiles, followed by a scrabbling noise and a whispered

“Damn!” And suddenly Ivor’s head and shoulders appeared above the parapet. One leg followed, then the other. He was on the leads. Mary pretended to wake up with a start.

“Oh!” she said. “What are you doing here?”

“I couldn’t sleep,” he explained, “so I came along to see if you couldn’t. One gets bored by oneself on a tower. Don’t you find it so?”

It was light before five. Long, narrow clouds barred the east, their edges bright with orange fire. The sky was pale and watery. With the mournful scream of a soul in pain, a monstrous peacock, flying heavily up from below, alighted on the parapet of the tower. Ivor and Mary started broad awake.

“Catch him!” cried Ivor, jumping up. “We’ll have a feather.” The frightened peacock ran up and down the parapet in an absurd distress, curtseying and bobbing and clucking; his long tail swung ponderously back and forth as he turned and turned again. Then with a flap and swish he launched himself upon the air and sailed magnificently earthward, with a recovered dignity. But he had left a trophy. Ivor had his feather, a long-lashed eye of purple and green, of blue and gold. He handed it to his companion.

“An angel’s feather,” he said.

Mary looked at it for a moment, gravely and intently. Her purple pyjamas clothed her with an ampleness that hid the lines of her body; she looked like some large, comfortable, unjointed toy, a sort of Teddy-bear — but a Teddy bear with an angel’s head, pink cheeks, and hair like a bell of gold. An angel’s face, the feather of an angel’s wing...Somehow the whole atmosphere of this sunrise was rather angelic.

“It’s extraordinary to think of sexual selection,” she said at last, looking up from her contemplation of the miraculous feather.

“Extraordinary!” Ivor echoed. “I select you, you select me. What luck!”

He put his arm round her shoulders and they stood looking eastward. The first sunlight had begun to warm and colour the pale light of the dawn. Mauve pyjamas and white pyjamas; they were a young and charming couple. The rising

sun touched their faces. It was all extremely symbolic; but then, if you choose to think so, nothing in this world is not symbolical. Profound and beautiful truth!

“I must be getting back to my tower,” said Ivor at last.

“Already?”

“I’m afraid so. The varletry will soon be up and about.”

“Ivor...” There was a prolonged and silent farewell.

“And now,” said Ivor, “I repeat my tight-rope stunt.”

Mary threw her arms round his neck. “You mustn’t, Ivor. It’s dangerous. Please.”

He had to yield at last to her entreaties. “All right,” he said, “I’ll go down through the house and up at the other end.”

He vanished through the trap door into the darkness that still lurked within the shuttered house. A minute later he had reappeared on the farther tower; he waved his hand, and then sank down, out of sight, behind the parapet. From below, in the house, came the thin wasp-like buzzing of an alarum-clock. He had gone back just in time.

CHAPTER XX.

IVOR WAS GONE. Lounging behind the wind-screen in his yellow sedan he was whirling across rural England. Social and amorous engagements of the most urgent character called him from hall to baronial hall, from castle to castle, from Elizabethan manor-house to Georgian mansion, over the whole expanse of the kingdom. To-day in Somerset, to-morrow in Warwickshire, on Saturday in the West riding, by Tuesday morning in Argyll — Ivor never rested. The whole summer through, from the beginning of July till the end of September, he devoted himself to his engagements; he was a martyr to them. In the autumn he went back to London for a holiday. Crome had been a little incident, an evanescent bubble on the stream of his life; it belonged already to the past. By tea-time he would be at Gobley, and there would be Zenobia's welcoming smile. And on Thursday morning — but that was a long, long way ahead. He would think of Thursday morning when Thursday morning arrived. Meanwhile there was Gobley, meanwhile Zenobia.

In the visitor's book at Crome Ivor had left, according to his invariable custom in these cases, a poem. He had improvised it magisterially in the ten minutes preceding his departure. Denis and Mr. Scogan strolled back together from the gates of the courtyard, whence they had bidden their last farewells; on the writing-table in the hall they found the visitor's book, open, and Ivor's composition scarcely dry. Mr. Scogan read it aloud: "The magic of those immemorial kings,

Who webbed enchantment on the bowls of night.

Sleeps in the soul of all created things; In the blue sea, th' Acroceraunian height, In the eyed butterfly's auricular wings

And orgied visions of the anchorite;

In all that singing flies and flying sings, In rain, in pain, in delicate delight.

But much more magic, much more cogent spells Weave here their wizardries about my soul.

Crome calls me like the voice of vesperal bells, Haunts like a ghostly-peopled necropole.

Fate tears me hence. Hard fate! since far from Crome My soul must weep, remembering its Home."

"Very nice and tasteful and tactful," said Mr. Scogan, when he had finished. "I am only troubled by the butterfly's auricular wings. You have a first-hand knowledge of the workings of a poet's mind, Denis; perhaps you can explain."

"What could be simpler," said Denis. "It's a beautiful word, and Ivor wanted to say that the wings were golden."

"You make it luminously clear."

"One suffers so much," Denis went on, "from the fact that beautiful words don't always mean what they ought to mean. Recently, for example, I had a whole poem ruined, just because the word 'carminative' didn't mean what it ought to have meant. Carminative — it's admirable, isn't it?"

"Admirable," Mr. Scogan agreed. "And what does it mean?"

"It's a word I've treasured from my earliest infancy," said Denis, "treasured and loved. They used to give me cinnamon when I had a cold — quite useless, but not disagreeable. One poured it drop by drop out of narrow bottles, a golden liquor, fierce and fiery. On the label was a list of its virtues, and among other things it was described as being in the highest degree carminative. I adored the word. 'Isn't it carminative?' I used to say to myself when I'd taken my dose. It seemed so wonderfully to describe that sensation of internal warmth, that glow, that — what shall I call it? — physical self-satisfaction which followed the drinking of cinnamon. Later, when I discovered alcohol, 'carminative' described for me that similar, but nobler, more spiritual glow which wine evokes not only in the body but in the soul as well. The carminative virtues of burgundy, of rum, of old brandy, of Lacryma Christi, of Marsala, of Aleatico, of stout, of gin, of champagne, of claret, of the raw new wine of this year's Tuscan vintage — I

compared them, I classified them. Marsala is rosily, downily carminative; gin pricks and refreshes while it warms. I had a whole table of carmination values. And now" — Denis spread out his hands, palms upwards, despairingly— "now I know what carminative really means."

"Well, what DOES it mean?" asked Mr. Scogan, a little impatiently.

"Carminative," said Denis, lingering lovingly over the syllables, "carminative. I imagined vaguely that it had something to do with carmen-carminis, still more vaguely with caro-carnis, and its derivations, like carnival and carnation. Carminative — there was the idea of singing and the idea of flesh, rose-coloured and warm, with a suggestion of the jollities of mi-Careme and the masked holidays of Venice. Carminative — the warmth, the glow, the interior ripeness were all in the word. Instead of which..."

"Do come to the point, my dear Denis," protested Mr. Scogan. "Do come to the point."

"Well, I wrote a poem the other day," said Denis; "I wrote a poem about the effects of love."

"Others have done the same before you," said Mr. Scogan. "There is no need to be ashamed."

"I was putting forward the notion," Denis went on, "that the effects of love were often similar to the effects of wine, that Eros could intoxicate as well as Bacchus. Love, for example, is essentially carminative. It gives one the sense of warmth, the glow.

'*And passion carminative as wine...*'

was what I wrote. Not only was the line elegantly sonorous; it was also, I flattered myself, very aptly compendiously expressive. Everything was in the word carminative — a detailed, exact foreground, an immense, indefinite hinterland of suggestion.

'*And passion carminative as wine...*'

I was not ill-pleased. And then suddenly it occurred to me that I had never actually looked up the word in a dictionary. Carminative had grown up with me from the days of the cinnamon bottle. It had always been taken for granted. Carminative: for me the word was as rich in content as some tremendous, elaborate work of art; it was a complete landscape with figures.

‘*And passion carminative as wine...*’

It was the first time I had ever committed the word to writing, and all at once I felt I would like lexicographical authority for it. A small English-German dictionary was all I had at hand. I turned up C, ca, car, carm. There it was: ‘Carminative: windtreibend.’ Windtreibend!” he repeated. Mr. Scogan laughed. Denis shook his head. “Ah,” he said, “for me it was no laughing matter. For me it marked the end of a chapter, the death of something young and precious. There were the years — years of childhood and innocence — when I had believed that carminative meant — well, carminative. And now, before me lies the rest of my life — a day, perhaps, ten years, half a century, when I shall know that carminative means windtreibend.

‘Plus ne suis ce que j’ai ete
Et ne le saurai jamais etre.’

It is a realisation that makes one rather melancholy.”

“Carminative,” said Mr. Scogan thoughtfully.

“Carminative,” Denis repeated, and they were silent for a time. “Words,” said Denis at last, “words — I wonder if you can realise how much I love them. You are too much preoccupied with mere things and ideas and people to understand the full beauty of words. Your mind is not a literary mind. The spectacle of Mr. Gladstone finding thirty-four rhymes to the name ‘Margot’ seems to you rather pathetic than anything else. Mallarmé’s envelopes with their versified addresses

leave you cold, unless they leave you pitiful; you can't see that 'Apte à ne point te cabrer, hue!

Poste et j'ajouterai, dia!
Si tu ne fuis onze-bis Rue
Balzac, chez cet Hérédia,'

is a little miracle."

"You're right," said Mr. Scogan. "I can't."

"You don't feel it to be magical?"

"No."

"That's the test for the literary mind," said Denis; "the feeling of magic, the sense that words have power. The technical, verbal part of literature is simply a development of magic. Words are man's first and most grandiose invention. With language he created a whole new universe; what wonder if he loved words and attributed power to them! With fitted, harmonious words the magicians summoned rabbits out of empty hats and spirits from the elements. Their descendants, the literary men, still go on with the process, morticing their verbal formulas together, and, before the power of the finished spell, trembling with delight and awe. Rabbits out of empty hats? No, their spells are more subtly powerful, for they evoke emotions out of empty minds. Formulated by their art the most insipid statements become enormously significant. For example, I proffer the constatation, 'Black ladders lack bladders.' A self-evident truth, one on which it would not have been worth while to insist, had I chosen to formulate it in such words as 'Black fire-escapes have no bladders,' or, 'Les echelles noires manquent de vessie.' But since I put it as I do, 'Black ladders lack bladders,' it becomes, for all its self-evidence, significant, unforgettable, moving. The creation by word-power of something out of nothing — what is that but magic? And, I may add, what is that but literature? Half the world's greatest poetry is simply 'Les echelles noires manquent de vessie,' translated into magic significance as, 'Black ladders lack bladders.' And you can't appreciate words. I'm sorry for you."

“A mental carminative,” said Mr. Scogan reflectively. “That’s what you need.”

CHAPTER XXI.

PERCHED ON ITS four stone mushrooms, the little granary stood two or three feet above the grass of the green close. Beneath it there was a perpetual shade and a damp growth of long, luxuriant grasses. Here, in the shadow, in the green dampness, a family of white ducks had sought shelter from the afternoon sun. Some stood, preening themselves, some reposed with their long bellies pressed to the ground, as though the cool grass were water. Little social noises burst fitfully forth, and from time to time some pointed tail would execute a brilliant Lisztian tremolo. Suddenly their jovial repose was shattered. A prodigious thump shook the wooden flooring above their heads; the whole granary trembled, little fragments of dirt and crumbled wood rained down among them. With a loud, continuous quacking the ducks rushed out from beneath this nameless menace, and did not stay their flight till they were safely in the farmyard.

“Don’t lose your temper,” Anne was saying. “Listen! You’ve frightened the ducks. Poor dears! no wonder.” She was sitting sideways in a low, wooden chair. Her right elbow rested on the back of the chair and she supported her cheek on her hand. Her long, slender body drooped into curves of a lazy grace. She was smiling, and she looked at Gombauld through half-closed eyes.

“Damn you!” Gombauld repeated, and stamped his foot again. He glared at her round the half-finished portrait on the easel.

“Poor ducks!” Anne repeated. The sound of their quacking was faint in the distance; it was inaudible.

“Can’t you see you make me lose my time?” he asked. “I can’t work with you dangling about distractingly like this.”

“You’d lose less time if you stopped talking and stamping your feet and did a little painting for a change. After all, what am I dangling about for, except to be

painted?”

Gombauld made a noise like a growl. “You’re awful,” he said, with conviction. “Why do you ask me to come and stay here? Why do you tell me you’d like me to paint your portrait?”

“For the simple reasons that I like you — at least, when you’re in a good temper — and that I think you’re a good painter.”

“For the simple reason” — Gombauld mimicked her voice— “that you want me to make love to you and, when I do, to have the amusement of running away.”

Anne threw back her head and laughed. “So you think it amuses me to have to evade your advances! So like a man! If you only knew how gross and awful and boring men are when they try to make love and you don’t want them to make love! If you could only see yourselves through our eyes!”

Gombauld picked up his palette and brushes and attacked his canvas with the ardour of irritation. “I suppose you’ll be saying next that you didn’t start the game, that it was I who made the first advances, and that you were the innocent victim who sat still and never did anything that could invite or allure me on.”

“So like a man again!” said Anne. “It’s always the same old story about the woman tempting the man. The woman lures, fascinates, invites; and man — noble man, innocent man — falls a victim. My poor Gombauld! Surely you’re not going to sing that old song again. It’s so unintelligent, and I always thought you were a man of sense.”

“Thanks,” said Gombauld.

“Be a little objective,” Anne went on. “Can’t you see that you’re simply externalising your own emotions? That’s what you men are always doing; it’s so barbarously naive. You feel one of your loose desires for some woman, and because you desire her strongly you immediately accuse her of luring you on, of deliberately provoking and inviting the desire. You have the mentality of savages. You might just as well say that a plate of strawberries and cream deliberately lures you on to feel greedy. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred women are as passive and innocent as the strawberries and cream.”

“Well, all I can say is that this must be the hundredth case,” said Gombauld, without looking up.

Anne shrugged her shoulders and gave vent to a sigh. “I’m at a loss to know whether you’re more silly or more rude.”

After painting for a little time in silence Gombauld began to speak again. “And then there’s Denis,” he said, renewing the conversation as though it had only just been broken off. “You’re playing the same game with him. Why can’t you leave that wretched young man in peace?”

Anne flushed with a sudden and uncontrollable anger. “It’s perfectly untrue about Denis,” she said indignantly. “I never dreamt of playing what you beautifully call the same game with him.” Recovering her calm, she added in her ordinary cooing voice and with her exacerbating smile, “You’ve become very protective towards poor Denis all of a sudden.”

“I have,” Gombauld replied, with a gravity that was somehow a little too solemn. “I don’t like to see a young man...”

“...being whirled along the road to ruin,” said Anne, continuing his sentence for him. “I admire your sentiments and, believe me, I share them.”

She was curiously irritated at what Gombauld had said about Denis. It happened to be so completely untrue. Gombauld might have some slight ground for his reproaches. But Denis — no, she had never flirted with Denis. Poor boy! He was very sweet. She became somewhat pensive.

Gombauld painted on with fury. The restlessness of an unsatisfied desire, which, before, had distracted his mind, making work impossible, seemed now to have converted itself into a kind of feverish energy. When it was finished, he told himself, the portrait would be diabolic. He was painting her in the pose she had naturally adopted at the first sitting. Seated sideways, her elbow on the back of the chair, her head and shoulders turned at an angle from the rest of her body, towards the front, she had fallen into an attitude of indolent abandonment. He had emphasised the lazy curves of her body; the lines sagged as they crossed the canvas, the grace of the painted figure seemed to be melting into a kind of soft decay. The hand that lay along the knee was as limp as a glove. He was at work

on the face now; it had begun to emerge on the canvas, doll-like in its regularity and listlessness. It was Anne’s face — but her face as it would be, utterly unillumined by the inward lights of thought and emotion. It was the lazy, expressionless mask which was sometimes her face. The portrait was terribly like; and at the same time it was the most malicious of lies. Yes, it would be diabolic when it was finished, Gombauld decided; he wondered what she would think of it.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR THE SAKE of peace and quiet Denis had retired earlier on this same afternoon to his bedroom. He wanted to work, but the hour was a drowsy one, and lunch, so recently eaten, weighed heavily on body and mind. The meridian demon was upon him; he was possessed by that bored and hopeless post-prandial melancholy which the coenobites of old knew and feared under the name of "accidie." He felt, like Ernest Dowson, "a little weary." He was in the mood to write something rather exquisite and gentle and quietist in tone; something a little droopy and at the same time — how should he put it? — a little infinite. He thought of Anne, of love hopeless and unattainable. Perhaps that was the ideal kind of love, the hopeless kind — the quiet, theoretical kind of love. In this sad mood of repletion he could well believe it. He began to write. One elegant quatrain had flowed from beneath his pen:

"A brooding love which is at most
The stealth of moonbeams when they slide,
Evoking colour's bloodless ghost,
O'er some scarce-breathing breast or side..."

when his attention was attracted by a sound from outside. He looked down from his window; there they were, Anne and Gombauld, talking, laughing together. They crossed the courtyard in front, and passed out of sight through the gate in the right-hand wall. That was the way to the green close and the granary; she was going to sit for him again. His pleasantly depressing melancholy was dissipated by a puff of violent emotion; angrily he threw his quatrain into the waste-paper basket and ran downstairs. "The stealth of moonbeams," indeed!

In the hall he saw Mr. Scogan; the man seemed to be lying in wait. Denis tried to escape, but in vain. Mr. Scogan's eye glittered like the eye of the Ancient Mariner.

"Not so fast," he said, stretching out a small saurian hand with pointed nails — "not so fast. I was just going down to the flower garden to take the sun. We'll go together."

Denis abandoned himself; Mr. Scogan put on his hat and they went out arm in arm. On the shaven turf of the terrace Henry Wimbush and Mary were playing a solemn game of bowls. They descended by the yew-tree walk. It was here, thought Denis, here that Anne had fallen, here that he had kissed her, here — and he blushed with retrospective shame at the memory — here that he had tried to carry her and failed. Life was awful!

"Sanity!" said Mr. Scogan, suddenly breaking a long silence. "Sanity — that's what's wrong with me and that's what will be wrong with you, my dear Denis, when you're old enough to be sane or insane. In a sane world I should be a great man; as things are, in this curious establishment, I am nothing at all; to all intents and purposes I don't exist. I am just Vox et praeterea nihil."

Denis made no response; he was thinking of other things. "After all," he said to himself— "after all, Gombauld is better looking than I, more entertaining, more confident; and, besides, he's already somebody and I'm still only potential..."

"Everything that ever gets done in this world is done by madmen," Mr. Scogan went on. Denis tried not to listen, but the tireless insistence of Mr. Scogan's discourse gradually compelled his attention. "Men such as I am, such as you may possibly become, have never achieved anything. We're too sane; we're merely reasonable. We lack the human touch, the compelling enthusiastic mania. People are quite ready to listen to the philosophers for a little amusement, just as they would listen to a fiddler or a mountebank. But as to acting on the advice of the men of reason — never. Wherever the choice has had to be made between the man of reason and the madman, the world has unhesitatingly followed the madman. For the madman appeals to what is fundamental, to

passion and the instincts; the philosophers to what is superficial and supererogatory — reason."

They entered the garden; at the head of one of the alleys stood a green wooden bench, embayed in the midst of a fragrant continent of lavender bushes. It was here, though the place was shadeless and one breathed hot, dry perfume instead of air — it was here that Mr. Scogan elected to sit. He thrived on untempered sunlight.

"Consider, for example, the case of Luther and Erasmus." He took out his pipe and began to fill it as he talked. "There was Erasmus, a man of reason if ever there was one. People listened to him at first — a new virtuoso performing on that elegant and resourceful instrument, the intellect; they even admired and venerated him. But did he move them to behave as he wanted them to behave — reasonably, decently, or at least a little less porkishly than usual? He did not. And then Luther appears, violent, passionate, a madman insanely convinced about matters in which there can be no conviction. He shouted, and men rushed to follow him. Erasmus was no longer listened to; he was reviled for his reasonableness. Luther was serious, Luther was reality — like the Great War. Erasmus was only reason and decency; he lacked the power, being a sage, to move men to action. Europe followed Luther and embarked on a century and a half of war and bloody persecution. It's a melancholy story." Mr. Scogan lighted a match. In the intense light the flame was all but invisible. The smell of burning tobacco began to mingle with the sweetly acrid smell of the lavender.

"If you want to get men to act reasonably, you must set about persuading them in a maniacal manner. The very sane precepts of the founders of religions are only made infectious by means of enthusiasms which to a sane man must appear deplorable. It is humiliating to find how impotent unadulterated sanity is. Sanity, for example, informs us that the only way in which we can preserve civilisation is by behaving decently and intelligently. Sanity appeals and argues; our rulers persevere in their customary porkishness, while we acquiesce and obey. The only hope is a maniacal crusade; I am ready, when it comes, to beat a tambourine with the loudest, but at the same time I shall feel a little ashamed of

myself. However" — Mr. Scogan shrugged his shoulders and, pipe in hand, made a gesture of resignation— "It's futile to complain that things are as they are. The fact remains that sanity unassisted is useless. What we want, then, is a sane and reasonable exploitation of the forces of insanity. We sane men will have the power yet." Mr. Scogan's eyes shone with a more than ordinary brightness, and, taking his pipe out of his mouth, he gave vent to his loud, dry, and somehow rather fiendish laugh.

"But I don't want power," said Denis. He was sitting in limp discomfort at one end of the bench, shading his eyes from the intolerable light. Mr. Scogan, bolt upright at the other end, laughed again.

"Everybody wants power," he said. "Power in some form or other. The sort of power you hanker for is literary power. Some people want power to persecute other human beings; you expend your lust for power in persecuting words, twisting them, moulding them, torturing them to obey you. But I divagate."

"Do you?" asked Denis faintly.

"Yes," Mr. Scogan continued, unheeding, "the time will come. We men of intelligence will learn to harness the insanities to the service of reason. We can't leave the world any longer to the direction of chance. We can't allow dangerous maniacs like Luther, mad about dogma, like Napoleon, mad about himself, to go on casually appearing and turning everything upside down. In the past it didn't so much matter; but our modern machine is too delicate. A few more knocks like the Great War, another Luther or two, and the whole concern will go to pieces. In future, the men of reason must see that the madness of the world's maniacs is canalised into proper channels, is made to do useful work, like a mountain torrent driving a dynamo..."

"Making electricity to light a Swiss hotel," said Denis. "You ought to complete the simile."

Mr. Scogan waved away the interruption. "There's only one thing to be done," he said. "The men of intelligence must combine, must conspire, and seize power from the imbeciles and maniacs who now direct us. They must found the Rational State."

The heat that was slowly paralysing all Denis's mental and bodily faculties, seemed to bring to Mr. Scogan additional vitality. He talked with an ever-increasing energy, his hands moved in sharp, quick, precise gestures, his eyes shone. Hard, dry, and continuous, his voice went on sounding and sounding in Denis's ears with the insistence of a mechanical noise.

"In the Rational State," he heard Mr. Scogan saying, "human beings will be separated out into distinct species, not according to the colour of their eyes or the shape of their skulls, but according to the qualities of their mind and temperament. Examining psychologists, trained to what would now seem an almost superhuman clairvoyance, will test each child that is born and assign it to its proper species. Duly labelled and docketed, the child will be given the education suitable to members of its species, and will be set, in adult life, to perform those functions which human beings of his variety are capable of performing."

"How many species will there be?" asked Denis.

"A great many, no doubt," Mr. Scogan answered; "the classification will be subtle and elaborate. But it is not in the power of a prophet to go into details, nor is it his business. I will do more than indicate the three main species into which the subjects of the Rational State will be divided."

He paused, cleared his throat, and coughed once or twice, evoking in Denis's mind the vision of a table with a glass and water-bottle, and, lying across one corner, a long white pointer for the lantern pictures.

"The three main species," Mr. Scogan went on, "will be these: the Directing Intelligences, the Men of Faith, and the Herd. Among the Intelligences will be found all those capable of thought, those who know how to attain a certain degree of freedom — and, alas, how limited, even among the most intelligent, that freedom is! — from the mental bondage of their time. A select body of Intelligences, drawn from among those who have turned their attention to the problems of practical life, will be the governors of the Rational State. They will employ as their instruments of power the second great species of humanity — the men of Faith, the Madmen, as I have been calling them, who believe in

things unreasonably, with passion, and are ready to die for their beliefs and their desires. These wild men, with their fearful potentialities for good or for mischief, will no longer be allowed to react casually to a casual environment. There will be no more Caesar Borgias, no more Luthers and Mohammeds, no more Joanna Southcotts, no more Comstocks. The old-fashioned Man of Faith and Desire, that haphazard creature of brute circumstance, who might drive men to tears and repentance, or who might equally well set them on to cutting one another's throats, will be replaced by a new sort of madman, still externally the same, still bubbling with a seemingly spontaneous enthusiasm, but, ah, how very different from the madman of the past! For the new Man of Faith will be expending his passion, his desire, and his enthusiasm in the propagation of some reasonable idea. He will be, all unawares, the tool of some superior intelligence."

Mr. Scogan chuckled maliciously; it was as though he were taking a revenge, in the name of reason, on enthusiasts. "From their earliest years, as soon, that is, as the examining psychologists have assigned them their place in the classified scheme, the Men of Faith will have had their special education under the eye of the Intelligences. Moulded by a long process of suggestion, they will go out into the world, preaching and practising with a generous mania the coldly reasonable projects of the Directors from above. When these projects are accomplished, or when the ideas that were useful a decade ago have ceased to be useful, the Intelligences will inspire a new generation of madmen with a new eternal truth. The principal function of the Men of Faith will be to move and direct the Multitude, that third great species consisting of those countless millions who lack intelligence and are without valuable enthusiasm. When any particular effort is required of the Herd, when it is thought necessary, for the sake of solidarity, that humanity shall be kindled and united by some single enthusiastic desire or idea, the Men of Faith, primed with some simple and satisfying creed, will be sent out on a mission of evangelisation. At ordinary times, when the high spiritual temperature of a Crusade would be unhealthy, the Men of Faith will be quietly and earnestly busy with the great work of education. In the upbringing of the Herd, humanity's almost boundless suggestibility will be scientifically

exploited. Systematically, from earliest infancy, its members will be assured that there is no happiness to be found except in work and obedience; they will be made to believe that they are happy, that they are tremendously important beings, and that everything they do is noble and significant. For the lower species the earth will be restored to the centre of the universe and man to pre-eminence on the earth. Oh, I envy the lot of the commonality in the Rational State! Working their eight hours a day, obeying their betters, convinced of their own grandeur and significance and immortality, they will be marvellously happy, happier than any race of men has ever been. They will go through life in a rosy state of intoxication, from which they will never awake. The Men of Faith will play the cup-bearers at this lifelong bacchanal, filling and ever filling again with the warm liquor that the Intelligences, in sad and sober privacy behind the scenes, will brew for the intoxication of their subjects."

"And what will be my place in the Rational State?" Denis drowsily inquired from under his shading hand.

Mr. Scogan looked at him for a moment in silence. "It's difficult to see where you would fit in," he said at last. "You couldn't do manual work; you're too independent and unsuggestible to belong to the larger Herd; you have none of the characteristics required in a Man of Faith. As for the Directing Intelligences, they will have to be marvellously clear and merciless and penetrating." He paused and shook his head. "No, I can see no place for you; only the lethal chamber."

Deeply hurt, Denis emitted the imitation of a loud Homeric laugh. "I'm getting sunstroke here," he said, and got up.

Mr. Scogan followed his example, and they walked slowly away down the narrow path, brushing the blue lavender flowers in their passage. Denis pulled a sprig of lavender and sniffed at it; then some dark leaves of rosemary that smelt like incense in a cavernous church. They passed a bed of opium poppies, dispetaled now; the round, ripe seedheads were brown and dry — like Polynesian trophies, Denis thought; severed heads stuck on poles. He liked the fancy enough to impart it to Mr. Scogan.

“Like Polynesian trophies...” Uttered aloud, the fancy seemed less charming and significant than it did when it first occurred to him.

There was a silence, and in a growing wave of sound the whir of the reaping machines swelled up from the fields beyond the garden and then receded into a remoter hum.

“It is satisfactory to think,” said Mr. Scogan, as they strolled slowly onward, “that a multitude of people are toiling in the harvest fields in order that we may talk of Polynesia. Like every other good thing in this world, leisure and culture have to be paid for. Fortunately, however, it is not the leisured and the cultured who have to pay. Let us be duly thankful for that, my dear Denis — duly thankful,” he repeated, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

Denis was not listening. He had suddenly remembered Anne. She was with Gombauld — alone with him in his studio. It was an intolerable thought.

“Shall we go and pay a call on Gombauld?” he suggested carelessly. “It would be amusing to see what he’s doing now.”

He laughed inwardly to think how furious Gombauld would be when he saw them arriving.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GOMBAULD WAS BY no means so furious at their apparition as Denis had hoped and expected he would be. Indeed, he was rather pleased than annoyed when the two faces, one brown and pointed, the other round and pale, appeared in the frame of the open door. The energy born of his restless irritation was dying within him, returning to its emotional elements. A moment more and he would have been losing his temper again — and Anne would be keeping hers, infuriatingly. Yes, he was positively glad to see them.

"Come in, come in," he called out hospitably.

Followed by Mr. Scogan, Denis climbed the little ladder and stepped over the threshold. He looked suspiciously from Gombauld to his sitter, and could learn nothing from the expression of their faces except that they both seemed pleased to see the visitors. Were they really glad, or were they cunningly simulating gladness? He wondered.

Mr. Scogan, meanwhile, was looking at the portrait.

"Excellent," he said approvingly, "excellent. Almost too true to character, if that is possible; yes, positively too true. But I'm surprised to find you putting in all this psychology business." He pointed to the face, and with his extended finger followed the slack curves of the painted figure. "I thought you were one of the fellows who went in exclusively for balanced masses and impinging planes."

Gombauld laughed. "This is a little infidelity," he said.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Scogan. "I for one, without ever having had the slightest appreciation of painting, have always taken particular pleasure in Cubismus. I like to see pictures from which nature has been completely banished, pictures which are exclusively the product of the human mind. They give me the same pleasure as I derive from a good piece of reasoning or a mathematical problem

or an achievement of engineering. Nature, or anything that reminds me of nature, disturbs me; it is too large, too complicated, above all too utterly pointless and incomprehensible. I am at home with the works of man; if I choose to set my mind to it, I can understand anything that any man has made or thought. That is why I always travel by Tube, never by bus if I can possibly help it. For, travelling by bus, one can't avoid seeing, even in London, a few stray works of God — the sky, for example, an occasional tree, the flowers in the window-boxes. But travel by Tube and you see nothing but the works of man — iron riveted into geometrical forms, straight lines of concrete, patterned expanses of tiles. All is human and the product of friendly and comprehensible minds. All philosophies and all religions — what are they but spiritual Tubes bored through the universe! Through these narrow tunnels, where all is recognisably human, one travels comfortable and secure, contriving to forget that all round and below and above them stretches the blind mass of earth, endless and unexplored. Yes, give me the Tube and Cubismus every time; give me ideas, so snug and neat and simple and well made. And preserve me from nature, preserve me from all that's inhumanly large and complicated and obscure. I haven't the courage, and, above all, I haven't the time to start wandering in that labyrinth."

While Mr. Scogan was discoursing, Denis had crossed over to the farther side of the little square chamber, where Anne was sitting, still in her graceful, lazy pose, on the low chair.

"Well?" he demanded, looking at her almost fiercely. What was he asking of her? He hardly knew himself.

Anne looked up at him, and for answer echoed his "Well?" in another, a laughing key.

Denis had nothing more, at the moment, to say. Two or three canvases stood in the corner behind Anne's chair, their faces turned to the wall. He pulled them out and began to look at the paintings.

"May I see too?" Anne requested.

He stood them in a row against the wall. Anne had to turn round in her chair to look at them. There was the big canvas of the man fallen from the horse, there

was a painting of flowers, there was a small landscape. His hands on the back of the chair, Denis leaned over her. From behind the easel at the other side of the room Mr. Scogan was talking away. For a long time they looked at the pictures, saying nothing; or, rather, Anne looked at the pictures, while Denis, for the most part, looked at Anne.

“I like the man and the horse; don’t you?” she said at last, looking up with an inquiring smile.

Denis nodded, and then in a queer, strangled voice, as though it had cost him a great effort to utter the words, he said, “I love you.”

It was a remark which Anne had heard a good many times before and mostly heard with equanimity. But on this occasion — perhaps because they had come so unexpectedly, perhaps for some other reason — the words provoked in her a certain surprised commotion.

“My poor Denis,” she managed to say, with a laugh; but she was blushing as she spoke.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IT WAS NOON. Denis, descending from his chamber, where he had been making an unsuccessful effort to write something about nothing in particular, found the drawing-room deserted. He was about to go out into the garden when his eye fell on a familiar but mysterious object — the large red notebook in which he had so often seen Jenny quietly and busily scribbling. She had left it lying on the window-seat. The temptation was great. He picked up the book and slipped off the elastic band that kept it discreetly closed.

"Private. Not to be opened," was written in capital letters on the cover. He raised his eyebrows. It was the sort of thing one wrote in one's Latin Grammar while one was still at one's preparatory school.

"Black is the raven, black is the rook,
But blacker the thief who steals this book!"

It was curiously childish, he thought, and he smiled to himself. He opened the book. What he saw made him wince as though he had been struck.

Denis was his own severest critic; so, at least, he had always believed. He liked to think of himself as a merciless vivisector probing into the palpitating entrails of his own soul; he was Brown Dog to himself. His weaknesses, his absurdities — no one knew them better than he did. Indeed, in a vague way he imagined that nobody beside himself was aware of them at all. It seemed, somehow, inconceivable that he should appear to other people as they appeared to him; inconceivable that they ever spoke of him among themselves in that same freely critical and, to be quite honest, mildly malicious tone in which he was accustomed to talk of them. In his own eyes he had defects, but to see them

was a privilege reserved to him alone. For the rest of the world he was surely an image of flawless crystal. It was almost axiomatic.

On opening the red notebook that crystal image of himself crashed to the ground, and was irreparably shattered. He was not his own severest critic after all. The discovery was a painful one.

The fruit of Jenny's unobtrusive scribbling lay before him. A caricature of himself, reading (the book was upside-down). In the background a dancing couple, recognisable as Gombauld and Anne. Beneath, the legend: "Fable of the Wallflower and the Sour Grapes." Fascinated and horrified, Denis pored over the drawing. It was masterful. A mute, inglorious Rouveyre appeared in every one of those cruelly clear lines. The expression of the face, an assumed aloofness and superiority tempered by a feeble envy; the attitude of the body and limbs, an attitude of studious and scholarly dignity, given away by the fidgety pose of the turned-in feet — these things were terrible. And, more terrible still, was the likeness, was the magisterial certainty with which his physical peculiarities were all recorded and subtly exaggerated.

Denis looked deeper into the book. There were caricatures of other people: of Priscilla and Mr. Barbecue-Smith; of Henry Wimbush, of Anne and Gombauld; of Mr. Scogan, whom Jenny had represented in a light that was more than slightly sinister, that was, indeed, diabolic; of Mary and Ivor. He scarcely glanced at them. A fearful desire to know the worst about himself possessed him. He turned over the leaves, lingering at nothing that was not his own image. Seven full pages were devoted to him.

"Private. Not to be opened." He had disobeyed the injunction; he had only got what he deserved. Thoughtfully he closed the book, and slid the rubber band once more into its place. Sadder and wiser, he went out on to the terrace. And so this, he reflected, this was how Jenny employed the leisure hours in her ivory tower apart. And he had thought her a simple-minded, uncritical creature! It was he, it seemed, who was the fool. He felt no resentment towards Jenny. No, the distressing thing wasn't Jenny herself; it was what she and the phenomenon of her red book represented, what they stood for and concretely symbolised. They

represented all the vast conscious world of men outside himself; they symbolised something that in his studious solitariness he was apt not to believe in. He could stand at Piccadilly Circus, could watch the crowds shuffle past, and still imagine himself the one fully conscious, intelligent, individual being among all those thousands. It seemed, somehow, impossible that other people should be in their way as elaborate and complete as he in his. Impossible; and yet, periodically he would make some painful discovery about the external world and the horrible reality of its consciousness and its intelligence. The red notebook was one of these discoveries, a footprint in the sand. It put beyond a doubt the fact that the outer world really existed.

Sitting on the balustrade of the terrace, he ruminated this unpleasant truth for some time. Still chewing on it, he strolled pensively down towards the swimming-pool. A peacock and his hen trailed their shabby finery across the turf of the lower lawn. Odious birds! Their necks, thick and greedily fleshy at the roots, tapered up to the cruel inanity of their brainless heads, their flat eyes and piercing beaks. The fabulists were right, he reflected, when they took beasts to illustrate their tractates of human morality. Animals resemble men with all the truthfulness of a caricature. (Oh, the red notebook!) He threw a piece of stick at the slowly pacing birds. They rushed towards it, thinking it was something to eat.

He walked on. The profound shade of a giant ilex tree engulfed him. Like a great wooden octopus, it spread its long arms abroad.

“Under the spreading ilex tree...”

He tried to remember who the poem was by, but couldn’t.

“The smith, a brawny man is he,
With arms like rubber bands.”

Just like his; he would have to try and do his Muller exercises more regularly.

He emerged once more into the sunshine. The pool lay before him, reflecting in its bronze mirror the blue and various green of the summer day. Looking at it, he thought of Anne's bare arms and seal-sleek bathing-dress, her moving knees and feet.

"And little Luce with the white legs,
And bouncing Barbary..."

Oh, these rags and tags of other people's making! Would he ever be able to call his brain his own? Was there, indeed, anything in it that was truly his own, or was it simply an education?

He walked slowly round the water's edge. In an embayed recess among the surrounding yew trees, leaning her back against the pedestal of a pleasantly comic version of the Medici Venus, executed by some nameless mason of the seicento, he saw Mary pensively sitting.

"Hullo!" he said, for he was passing so close to her that he had to say something.

Mary looked up. "Hullo!" she answered in a melancholy, uninterested tone.

In this alcove hewed out of the dark trees, the atmosphere seemed to Denis agreeably elegiac. He sat down beside her under the shadow of the pudic goddess. There was a prolonged silence.

At breakfast that morning Mary had found on her plate a picture postcard of Gobley Great Park. A stately Georgian pile, with a facade sixteen windows wide; parterres in the foreground; huge, smooth lawns receding out of the picture to right and left. Ten years more of the hard times and Gobley, with all its peers, will be deserted and decaying. Fifty years, and the countryside will know the old landmarks no more. They will have vanished as the monasteries vanished before them. At the moment, however, Mary's mind was not moved by these considerations.

On the back of the postcard, next to the address, was written, in Ivor's bold, large hand, a single quatrain.

“Hail, maid of moonlight! Bride of the sun, farewell!
Like bright plumes moulted in an angel’s flight,
There sleep within my heart’s most mystic cell
Memories of morning, memories of the night.”

There followed a postscript of three lines: “Would you mind asking one of the housemaids to forward the packet of safety-razor blades I left in the drawer of my washstand. Thanks. — Ivor.”

Seated under the Venus’s immemorial gesture, Mary considered life and love. The abolition of her repressions, so far from bringing the expected peace of mind, had brought nothing but disquiet, a new and hitherto unexperienced misery. Ivor, Ivor...She couldn’t do without him now. It was evident, on the other hand, from the poem on the back of the picture postcard, that Ivor could very well do without her. He was at Gobley now, so was Zenobia. Mary knew Zenobia. She thought of the last verse of the song he had sung that night in the garden.

“Le lendemain, Phillis peu sage
Aurait donne moutons et chien
Pour un baiser que le volage
A Lisette donnait pour rien.”

Mary shed tears at the memory; she had never been so unhappy in all her life before.

It was Denis who first broke the silence. “The individual,” he began in a soft and sadly philosophical tone, “is not a self-supporting universe. There are times when he comes into contact with other individuals, when he is forced to take cognisance of the existence of other universes besides himself.”

He had contrived this highly abstract generalisation as a preliminary to a personal confidence. It was the first gambit in a conversation that was to lead up to Jenny’s caricatures.

“True,” said Mary; and, generalising for herself, she added, “When one individual comes into intimate contact with another, she — or he, of course, as the case may be — must almost inevitably receive or inflict suffering.”

“One is apt,” Denis went on, “to be so spellbound by the spectacle of one’s own personality that one forgets that the spectacle presents itself to other people as well as to oneself.”

Mary was not listening. “The difficulty,” she said, “makes itself acutely felt in matters of sex. If one individual seeks intimate contact with another individual in the natural way, she is certain to receive or inflict suffering. If on the other hand, she avoids contacts, she risks the equally grave sufferings that follow on unnatural repressions. As you see, it’s a dilemma.”

“When I think of my own case,” said Denis, making a more decided move in the desired direction, “I am amazed how ignorant I am of other people’s mentality in general, and above all and in particular, of their opinions about myself. Our minds are sealed books only occasionally opened to the outside world.” He made a gesture that was faintly suggestive of the drawing off of a rubber band.

“It’s an awful problem,” said Mary thoughtfully. “One has to have had personal experience to realise quite how awful it is.”

“Exactly.” Denis nodded. “One has to have had first-hand experience.” He leaned towards her and slightly lowered his voice. “This very morning, for example...” he began, but his confidences were cut short. The deep voice of the gong, tempered by distance to a pleasant booming, floated down from the house. It was lunch-time. Mechanically Mary rose to her feet, and Denis, a little hurt that she should exhibit such a desperate anxiety for her food and so slight an interest in his spiritual experiences, followed her. They made their way up to the house without speaking.

CHAPTER XXV.

I HOPE YOU all realise," said Henry Wimbush during dinner, "that next Monday is Bank Holiday, and that you will all be expected to help in the Fair."

"Heavens!" cried Anne. "The Fair — I had forgotten all about it. What a nightmare! Couldn't you put a stop to it, Uncle Henry?"

Mr. Wimbush sighed and shook his head. "Alas," he said, "I fear I cannot. I should have liked to put an end to it years ago; but the claims of Charity are strong."

"It's not charity we want," Anne murmured rebelliously; "it's justice."

"Besides," Mr. Wimbush went on, "the Fair has become an institution. Let me see, it must be twenty-two years since we started it. It was a modest affair then. Now..." he made a sweeping movement with his hand and was silent.

It spoke highly for Mr. Wimbush's public spirit that he still continued to tolerate the Fair. Beginning as a sort of glorified church bazaar, Crome's yearly Charity Fair had grown into a noisy thing of merry-go-rounds, cocoanut shies, and miscellaneous side shows — a real genuine fair on the grand scale. It was the local St. Bartholomew, and the people of all the neighbouring villages, with even a contingent from the county town, flocked into the park for their Bank Holiday amusement. The local hospital profited handsomely, and it was this fact alone which prevented Mr. Wimbush, to whom the Fair was a cause of recurrent and never-diminishing agony, from putting a stop to the nuisance which yearly desecrated his park and garden.

"I've made all the arrangements already," Henry Wimbush went on. "Some of the larger marquees will be put up to-morrow. The swings and the merry-go-round arrive on Sunday."

"So there's no escape," said Anne, turning to the rest of the party. "You'll all have to do something. As a special favour you're allowed to choose your

slavery. My job is the tea tent, as usual, Aunt Priscilla...”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Wimbush, interrupting her, “I have more important things to think about than the Fair. But you need have no doubt that I shall do my best when Monday comes to encourage the villagers.”

“That’s splendid,” said Anne. “Aunt Priscilla will encourage the villagers. What will you do, Mary?”

“I won’t do anything where I have to stand by and watch other people eat.”

“Then you’ll look after the children’s sports.”

“All right,” Mary agreed. “I’ll look after the children’s sports.”

“And Mr. Scogan?”

Mr. Scogan reflected. “May I be allowed to tell fortunes?” he asked at last. “I think I should be good at telling fortunes.”

“But you can’t tell fortunes in that costume!”

“Can’t I?” Mr. Scogan surveyed himself.

“You’ll have to be dressed up. Do you still persist?”

“I’m ready to suffer all indignities.”

“Good!” said Anne; and turning to Gombauld, “You must be our lightning artist,” she said. “‘Your portrait for a shilling in five minutes.’”

“It’s a pity I’m not Ivor,” said Gombauld, with a laugh. “I could throw in a picture of their Auras for an extra sixpence.”

Mary flushed. “Nothing is to be gained,” she said severely, “by speaking with levity of serious subjects. And, after all, whatever your personal views may be, psychical research is a perfectly serious subject.”

“And what about Denis?”

Denis made a deprecating gesture. “I have no accomplishments,” he said, “I’ll just be one of those men who wear a thing in their buttonholes and go about telling people which is the way to tea and not to walk on the grass.”

“No, no,” said Anne. “That won’t do. You must do something more than that.”

“But what? All the good jobs are taken, and I can do nothing but lisp in numbers.”

“Well, then, you must lisp,” concluded Anne. “You must write a poem for the occasion — an ‘Ode on Bank Holiday.’ We’ll print it on Uncle Henry’s press and sell it at twopence a copy.”

“Sixpence,” Denis protested. “It’ll be worth sixpence.”

Anne shook her head. “Twopence,” she repeated firmly. “Nobody will pay more than twopence.”

“And now there’s Jenny,” said Mr Wimbush. “Jenny,” he said, raising his voice, “what will you do?”

Denis thought of suggesting that she might draw caricatures at sixpence an execution, but decided it would be wiser to go on feigning ignorance of her talent. His mind reverted to the red notebook. Could it really be true that he looked like that?

“What will I do,” Jenny echoed, “what will I do?” She frowned thoughtfully for a moment; then her face brightened and she smiled. “When I was young,” she said, “I learnt to play the drums.”

“The drums?”

Jenny nodded, and, in proof of her assertion, agitated her knife and fork, like a pair of drumsticks, over her plate. “If there’s any opportunity of playing the drums...” she began.

“But of course,” said Anne, “there’s any amount of opportunity. We’ll put you down definitely for the drums. That’s the lot,” she added.

“And a very good lot too,” said Gombauld. “I look forward to my Bank Holiday. It ought to be gay.”

“It ought indeed,” Mr Scogan assented. “But you may rest assured that it won’t be. No holiday is ever anything but a disappointment.”

“Come, come,” protested Gombauld. “My holiday at Crome isn’t being a disappointment.”

“Isn’t it?” Anne turned an ingenuous mask towards him.

“No, it isn’t,” he answered.

“I’m delighted to hear it.”

“It’s in the very nature of things,” Mr. Scogan went on; “our holidays can’t help being disappointments. Reflect for a moment. What is a holiday? The ideal, the Platonic Holiday of Holidays is surely a complete and absolute change. You agree with me in my definition?” Mr. Scogan glanced from face to face round the table; his sharp nose moved in a series of rapid jerks through all the points of the compass. There was no sign of dissent; he continued: “A complete and absolute change; very well. But isn’t a complete and absolute change precisely the thing we can never have — never, in the very nature of things?” Mr. Scogan once more looked rapidly about him. “Of course it is. As ourselves, as specimens of Homo Sapiens, as members of a society, how can we hope to have anything like an absolute change? We are tied down by the frightful limitation of our human faculties, by the notions which society imposes on us through our fatal suggestibility, by our own personalities. For us, a complete holiday is out of the question. Some of us struggle manfully to take one, but we never succeed, if I may be allowed to express myself metaphorically, we never succeed in getting farther than Southend.”

“You’re depressing,” said Anne.

“I mean to be,” Mr. Scogan replied, and, expanding the fingers of his right hand, he went on: “Look at me, for example. What sort of a holiday can I take? In endowing me with passions and faculties Nature has been horribly niggardly. The full range of human potentialities is in any case distressingly limited; my range is a limitation within a limitation. Out of the ten octaves that make up the human instrument, I can compass perhaps two. Thus, while I may have a certain amount of intelligence, I have no aesthetic sense; while I possess the mathematical faculty, I am wholly without the religious emotions; while I am naturally addicted to venery, I have little ambition and am not at all avaricious. Education has further limited my scope. Having been brought up in society, I am impregnated with its laws; not only should I be afraid of taking a holiday from them, I should also feel it painful to try to do so. In a word, I have a conscience as well as a fear of gaol. Yes, I know it by experience. How often have I tried to take holidays, to get away from myself, my own boring nature, my insufferable

mental surroundings!" Mr. Scogan sighed. "But always without success," he added, "always without success. In my youth I was always striving — how hard! — to feel religiously and aesthetically. Here, said I to myself, are two tremendously important and exciting emotions. Life would be richer, warmer, brighter, altogether more amusing, if I could feel them. I try to feel them. I read the works of the mystics. They seemed to me nothing but the most deplorable claptrap — as indeed they always must to anyone who does not feel the same emotion as the authors felt when they were writing. For it is the emotion that matters. The written work is simply an attempt to express emotion, which is in itself inexpressible, in terms of intellect and logic. The mystic objectifies a rich feeling in the pit of the stomach into a cosmology. For other mystics that cosmology is a symbol of the rich feeling. For the unreligious it is a symbol of nothing, and so appears merely grotesque. A melancholy fact! But I divagate." Mr. Scogan checked himself. "So much for the religious emotion. As for the aesthetic — I was at even greater pains to cultivate that. I have looked at all the right works of art in every part of Europe. There was a time when, I venture to believe, I knew more about Taddeo da Poggibonsi, more about the cryptic Amico di Taddeo, even than Henry does. To-day, I am happy to say, I have forgotten most of the knowledge I then so laboriously acquired; but without vanity I can assert that it was prodigious. I don't pretend, of course, to know anything about nigger sculpture or the later seventeenth century in Italy; but about all the periods that were fashionable before 1900 I am, or was, omniscient. Yes, I repeat it, omniscient. But did that fact make me any more appreciative of art in general? It did not. Confronted by a picture, of which I could tell you all the known and presumed history — the date when it was painted, the character of the painter, the influences that had gone to make it what it was — I felt none of that strange excitement and exaltation which is, as I am informed by those who do feel it, the true aesthetic emotion. I felt nothing but a certain interest in the subject of the picture; or more often, when the subject was hackneyed and religious, I felt nothing but a great weariness of spirit. Nevertheless, I must have gone on looking at pictures for ten years before I would honestly admit to myself

that they merely bored me. Since then I have given up all attempts to take a holiday. I go on cultivating my old stale daily self in the resigned spirit with which a bank clerk performs from ten till six his daily task. A holiday, indeed! I'm sorry for you, Gombauld, if you still look forward to having a holiday."

Gombauld shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said, "my standards aren't as elevated as yours. But personally I found the war quite as thorough a holiday from all the ordinary decencies and sanities, all the common emotions and preoccupations, as I ever want to have."

"Yes," Mr. Scogan thoughtfully agreed. "Yes, the war was certainly something of a holiday. It was a step beyond Southend; it was Weston-super-Mare; it was almost Ilfracombe."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LITTLE CANVAS village of tents and booths had sprung up, just beyond the boundaries of the garden, in the green expanse of the park. A crowd thronged its streets, the men dressed mostly in black — holiday best, funeral best — the women in pale muslins. Here and there tricolour bunting hung inert. In the midst of the canvas town, scarlet and gold and crystal, the merry-go-round glittered in the sun. The balloon-man walked among the crowd, and above his head, like a huge, inverted bunch of many-coloured grapes, the balloons strained upwards. With a scythe-like motion the boat-swings reaped the air, and from the funnel of the engine which worked the roundabout rose a thin, scarcely wavering column of black smoke.

Denis had climbed to the top of one of Sir Ferdinando’s towers, and there, standing on the sun-baked leads, his elbows resting on the parapet, he surveyed the scene. The steam-organ sent up prodigious music. The clashing of automatic cymbals beat out with inexorable precision the rhythm of piercingly sounded melodies. The harmonies were like a musical shattering of glass and brass. Far down in the bass the Last Trump was hugely blowing, and with such persistence, such resonance, that its alternate tonic and dominant detached themselves from the rest of the music and made a tune of their own, a loud, monotonous see-saw.

Denis leaned over the gulf of swirling noise. If he threw himself over the parapet, the noise would surely buoy him up, keep him suspended, bobbing, as a fountain balances a ball on its breaking crest. Another fancy came to him, this time in metrical form.

“My soul is a thin white sheet of parchment stretched Over a bubbling cauldron.”

Bad, bad. But he liked the idea of something thin and distended being blown up from underneath.

“My soul is a thin tent of gut...”

or better —

“My soul is a pale, tenuous membrane...”

That was pleasing: a thin, tenuous membrane. It had the right anatomical quality. Tight blown, quivering in the blast of noisy life. It was time for him to descend from the serene empyrean of words into the actual vortex. He went down slowly. “My soul is a thin, tenuous membrane...”

On the terrace stood a knot of distinguished visitors. There was old Lord Moleyn, like a caricature of an English milord in a French comic paper: a long man, with a long nose and long, drooping moustaches and long teeth of old ivory, and lower down, absurdly, a short covert coat, and below that long, long legs cased in pearl-grey trousers — legs that bent unsteadily at the knee and gave a kind of sideways wobble as he walked. Beside him, short and thick-set, stood Mr. Callamay, the venerable conservative statesman, with a face like a Roman bust, and short white hair. Young girls didn’t much like going for motor drives alone with Mr. Callamay; and of old Lord Moleyn one wondered why he wasn’t living in gilded exile on the island of Capri among the other distinguished persons who, for one reason or another, find it impossible to live in England. They were talking to Anne, laughing, the one profoundly, the other hootingly.

A black silk balloon towing a black-and-white striped parachute proved to be old Mrs. Budge from the big house on the other side of the valley. She stood low on the ground, and the spikes of her black-and-white sunshade menaced the eyes of Priscilla Wimbush, who towered over her — a massive figure dressed in purple and topped with a queenly toque on which the nodding black plumes recalled the splendours of a first-class Parisian funeral.

Denis peeped at them discreetly from the window of the morning-room. His eyes were suddenly become innocent, childlike, unprejudiced. They seemed, these people, inconceivably fantastic. And yet they really existed, they functioned by themselves, they were conscious, they had minds. Moreover, he was like them. Could one believe it? But the evidence of the red notebook was conclusive.

It would have been polite to go and say, “How d’you do?” But at the moment Denis did not want to talk, could not have talked. His soul was a tenuous, tremulous, pale membrane. He would keep its sensibility intact and virgin as long as he could. Cautiously he crept out by a side door and made his way down towards the park. His soul fluttered as he approached the noise and movement of the fair. He paused for a moment on the brink, then stepped in and was engulfed.

Hundreds of people, each with his own private face and all of them real, separate, alive: the thought was disquieting. He paid twopence and saw the Tatooed Woman; twopence more, the Largest Rat in the World. From the home of the Rat he emerged just in time to see a hydrogen-filled balloon break loose for home. A child howled up after it; but calmly, a perfect sphere of flushed opal, it mounted, mounted. Denis followed it with his eyes until it became lost in the blinding sunlight. If he could but send his soul to follow it!...

He sighed, stuck his steward’s rosette in his buttonhole, and started to push his way, aimlessly but officially, through the crowd.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. SCOGAN HAD been accommodated in a little canvas hut. Dressed in a black skirt and a red bodice, with a yellow-and-red bandana handkerchief tied round his black wig, he looked — sharp-nosed, brown, and wrinkled — like the Bohemian Hag of Frith's Derby Day. A placard pinned to the curtain of the doorway announced the presence within the tent of "Sesostris, the Sorceress of Ecbatana." Seated at a table, Mr. Scogan received his clients in mysterious silence, indicating with a movement of the finger that they were to sit down opposite him and to extend their hands for his inspection. He then examined the palm that was presented him, using a magnifying glass and a pair of horn spectacles. He had a terrifying way of shaking his head, frowning and clicking with his tongue as he looked at the lines. Sometimes he would whisper, as though to himself, "Terrible, terrible!" or "God preserve us!" sketching out the sign of the cross as he uttered the words. The clients who came in laughing grew suddenly grave; they began to take the witch seriously. She was a formidable-looking woman; could it be, was it possible, that there was something in this sort of thing after all? After all, they thought, as the hag shook her head over their hands, after all...And they waited, with an uncomfortably beating heart, for the oracle to speak. After a long and silent inspection, Mr. Scogan would suddenly look up and ask, in a hoarse whisper, some horrifying question, such as, "Have you ever been hit on the head with a hammer by a young man with red hair?" When the answer was in the negative, which it could hardly fail to be, Mr. Scogan would nod several times, saying, "I was afraid so. Everything is still to come, still to come, though it can't be very far off now." Sometimes, after a long examination, he would just whisper, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," and refuse to divulge any details of a future too appalling to be envisaged without despair. Sesostris had a success of horror. People stood in a queue

outside the witch's booth waiting for the privilege of hearing sentence pronounced upon them.

Denis, in the course of his round, looked with curiosity at this crowd of suppliants before the shrine of the oracle. He had a great desire to see how Mr. Scogan played his part. The canvas booth was a rickety, ill-made structure. Between its walls and its sagging roof were long gaping chinks and crannies. Denis went to the tea-tent and borrowed a wooden bench and a small Union Jack. With these he hurried back to the booth of Sesostris. Setting down the bench at the back of the booth, he climbed up, and with a great air of busy efficiency began to tie the Union Jack to the top of one of the tentpoles. Through the crannies in the canvas he could see almost the whole of the interior of the tent. Mr. Scogan's bandana-covered head was just below him; his terrifying whispers came clearly up. Denis looked and listened while the witch prophesied financial losses, death by apoplexy, destruction by air-raids in the next war.

"Is there going to be another war?" asked the old lady to whom he had predicted this end.

"Very soon," said Mr. Scogan, with an air of quiet confidence.

The old lady was succeeded by a girl dressed in white muslin, garnished with pink ribbons. She was wearing a broad hat, so that Denis could not see her face; but from her figure and the roundness of her bare arms he judged her young and pleasing. Mr. Scogan looked at her hand, then whispered, "You are still virtuous."

The young lady giggled and exclaimed, "Oh, lor'!"

"But you will not remain so for long," added Mr. Scogan sepulchrally. The young lady giggled again. "Destiny, which interests itself in small things no less than in great, has announced the fact upon your hand." Mr. Scogan took up the magnifying-glass and began once more to examine the white palm. "Very interesting," he said, as though to himself— "very interesting. It's as clear as day." He was silent.

"What's clear?" asked the girl.

“I don’t think I ought to tell you.” Mr. Scogan shook his head; the pendulous brass ear-rings which he had screwed on to his ears tinkled.

“Please, please!” she implored.

The witch seemed to ignore her remark. “Afterwards, it’s not at all clear. The fates don’t say whether you will settle down to married life and have four children or whether you will try to go on the cinema and have none. They are only specific about this one rather crucial incident.”

“What is it? What is it? Oh, do tell me!”

The white muslin figure leant eagerly forward.

Mr. Scogan sighed. “Very well,” he said, “if you must know, you must know. But if anything untoward happens you must blame your own curiosity. Listen. Listen.” He lifted up a sharp, claw-nailed forefinger. “This is what the fates have written. Next Sunday afternoon at six o’clock you will be sitting on the second stile on the footpath that leads from the church to the lower road. At that moment a man will appear walking along the footpath.” Mr. Scogan looked at her hand again as though to refresh his memory of the details of the scene. “A man,” he repeated— “a small man with a sharp nose, not exactly good looking nor precisely young, but fascinating.” He lingered hissingly over the word. “He will ask you, ‘Can you tell me the way to Paradise?’ and you will answer, ‘Yes, I’ll show you,’ and walk with him down towards the little hazel copse. I cannot read what will happen after that.” There was a silence.

“Is it really true?” asked white muslin.

The witch gave a shrug of the shoulders. “I merely tell you what I read in your hand. Good afternoon. That will be sixpence. Yes, I have change. Thank you. Good afternoon.”

Denis stepped down from the bench; tied insecurely and crookedly to the tentpole, the Union Jack hung limp on the windless air. “If only I could do things like that!” he thought, as he carried the bench back to the tea-tent.

Anne was sitting behind a long table filling thick white cups from an urn. A neat pile of printed sheets lay before her on the table. Denis took one of them

and looked at it affectionately. It was his poem. They had printed five hundred copies, and very nice the quarto broadsheets looked.

“Have you sold many?” he asked in a casual tone.

Anne put her head on one side deprecatingly. “Only three so far, I’m afraid. But I’m giving a free copy to everyone who spends more than a shilling on his tea. So in any case it’s having a circulation.”

Denis made no reply, but walked slowly away. He looked at the broadsheet in his hand and read the lines to himself relishingly as he walked along: “This day of roundabouts and swings,

Struck weights, shied cocoa-nuts, tossed rings, Switchbacks, Aunt Sallies, and all such small

High jinks — you call it ferial?
A holiday? But paper noses
Sniffed the artificial roses
Of round Venetian cheeks through half
Each carnival year, and masks might laugh
At things the naked face for shame
Would blush at — laugh and think no blame.
A holiday? But Galba showed
Elephants on an airy road;
Jumbo trod the tightrope then,
And in the circus armed men
Stabbed home for sport and died to break
Those dull imperatives that make
A prison of every working day,
Where all must drudge and all obey.
Sing Holiday! You do not know
How to be free. The Russian snow
Flowered with bright blood whose roses spread
Petals of fading, fading red
That died into the snow again,

Into the virgin snow; and men
From all ancient bonds were freed.
Old law, old custom, and old creed,
Old right and wrong there bled to death;
The frozen air received their breath,
A little smoke that died away;
And round about them where they lay
The snow bloomed roses. Blood was there
A red gay flower and only fair.
Sing Holiday! Beneath the Tree
Of Innocence and Liberty,
Paper Nose and Red Cockade
Dance within the magic shade
That makes them drunken, merry, and strong
To laugh and sing their ferial song:
‘Free, free...!’

But Echo answers
Faintly to the laughing dancers,
‘Free’ — and faintly laughs, and still,
Within the hollows of the hill,
Faintlier laughs and whispers, ‘Free,’
Fadingly, diminishingly:
‘Free,’ and laughter faints away...
Sing Holiday! Sing Holiday!”

He folded the sheet carefully and put it in his pocket. The thing had its merits. Oh, decidedly, decidedly! But how unpleasant the crowd smelt! He lit a cigarette. The smell of cows was preferable. He passed through the gate in the park wall into the garden. The swimming-pool was a centre of noise and activity.

“Second Heat in the Young Ladies’ Championship.” It was the polite voice of Henry Wimbush. A crowd of sleek, seal-like figures in black bathing-dresses surrounded him. His grey bowler hat, smooth, round, and motionless in the midst of a moving sea, was an island of aristocratic calm.

Holding his tortoise-shell-rimmed pince-nez an inch or two in front of his eyes, he read out names from a list.

“Miss Dolly Miles, Miss Rebecca Balister, Miss Doris Gabell...”

Five young persons ranged themselves on the brink. From their seats of honour at the other end of the pool, old Lord Moleyn and Mr. Callamay looked on with eager interest.

Henry Wimbush raised his hand. There was an expectant silence. “When I say ‘Go,’ go. Go!” he said. There was an almost simultaneous splash.

Denis pushed his way through the spectators. Somebody plucked him by the sleeve; he looked down. It was old Mrs. Budge.

“Delighted to see you again, Mr. Stone,” she said in her rich, husky voice. She panted a little as she spoke, like a short-winded lap-dog. It was Mrs. Budge who, having read in the “Daily Mirror” that the Government needed peach stones — what they needed them for she never knew — had made the collection of peach stones her peculiar “bit” of war work. She had thirty-six peach trees in her walled garden, as well as four hot-houses in which trees could be forced, so that she was able to eat peaches practically the whole year round. In 1916 she ate 4200 peaches, and sent the stones to the Government. In 1917 the military authorities called up three of her gardeners, and what with this and the fact that it was a bad year for wall fruit, she only managed to eat 2900 peaches during that crucial period of the national destinies. In 1918 she did rather better, for between January 1st and the date of the Armistice she ate 3300 peaches. Since the Armistice she had relaxed her efforts; now she did not eat more than two or three peaches a day. Her constitution, she complained, had suffered; but it had suffered for a good cause.

Denis answered her greeting by a vague and polite noise.

“So nice to see the young people enjoying themselves,” Mrs. Budge went on. “And the old people too, for that matter. Look at old Lord Moleyn and dear Mr. Callamay. Isn’t it delightful to see the way they enjoy themselves?”

Denis looked. He wasn’t sure whether it was so very delightful after all. Why didn’t they go and watch the sack races? The two old gentlemen were engaged at the moment in congratulating the winner of the race; it seemed an act of supererogatory graciousness; for, after all, she had only won a heat.

“Pretty little thing, isn’t she?” said Mrs. Budge huskily, and panted two or three times.

“Yes,” Denis nodded agreement. Sixteen, slender, but nubile, he said to himself, and laid up the phrase in his memory as a happy one. Old Mr. Callamay had put on his spectacles to congratulate the victor, and Lord Moleyn, leaning forward over his walking-stick, showed his long ivory teeth, hungrily smiling.

“Capital performance, capital,” Mr. Callamay was saying in his deep voice.

The victor wriggled with embarrassment. She stood with her hands behind her back, rubbing one foot nervously on the other. Her wet bathing-dress shone, a torso of black polished marble.

“Very good indeed,” said Lord Moleyn. His voice seemed to come from just behind his teeth, a toothy voice. It was as though a dog should suddenly begin to speak. He smiled again, Mr. Callamay readjusted his spectacles.

“When I say ‘Go,’ go. Go!”

Splash! The third heat had started.

“Do you know, I never could learn to swim,” said Mrs. Budge.

“Really?”

“But I used to be able to float.”

Denis imagined her floating — up and down, up and down on a great green swell. A blown black bladder; no, that wasn’t good, that wasn’t good at all. A new winner was being congratulated. She was atrociously stubby and fat. The last one, long and harmoniously, continuously curved from knee to breast, had been an Eve by Cranach; but this, this one was a bad Rubens.

“...go — go — go!” Henry Wimbush’s polite level voice once more pronounced the formula. Another batch of young ladies dived in.

Grown a little weary of sustaining a conversation with Mrs. Budge, Denis conveniently remembered that his duties as a steward called him elsewhere. He pushed out through the lines of spectators and made his way along the path left clear behind them. He was thinking again that his soul was a pale, tenuous membrane, when he was startled by hearing a thin, sibilant voice, speaking apparently from just above his head, pronounce the single word “Disgusting!”

He looked up sharply. The path along which he was walking passed under the lee of a wall of clipped yew. Behind the hedge the ground sloped steeply up towards the foot of the terrace and the house; for one standing on the higher ground it was easy to look over the dark barrier. Looking up, Denis saw two heads overtopping the hedge immediately above him. He recognised the iron mask of Mr. Bodiham and the pale, colourless face of his wife. They were looking over his head, over the heads of the spectators, at the swimmers in the pond.

“Disgusting!” Mrs. Bodiham repeated, hissing softly.

The rector turned up his iron mask towards the solid cobalt of the sky. “How long?” he said, as though to himself; “how long?” He lowered his eyes again, and they fell on Denis’s upturned curious face. There was an abrupt movement, and Mr. and Mrs. Bodiham popped out of sight behind the hedge.

Denis continued his promenade. He wandered past the merry-go-round, through the thronged streets of the canvas village; the membrane of his soul flapped tumultuously in the noise and laughter. In a roped-off space beyond, Mary was directing the children’s sports. Little creatures seethed round about her, making a shrill, tinny clamour; others clustered about the skirts and trousers of their parents. Mary’s face was shining in the heat; with an immense output of energy she started a three-legged race. Denis looked on in admiration.

“You’re wonderful,” he said, coming up behind her and touching her on the arm. “I’ve never seen such energy.”

She turned towards him a face, round, red, and honest as the setting sun; the golden bell of her hair swung silently as she moved her head and quivered to rest.

“Do you know, Denis,” she said, in a low, serious voice, gasping a little as she spoke— “do you know that there’s a woman here who has had three children in thirty-one months?”

“Really,” said Denis, making rapid mental calculations.

“It’s appalling. I’ve been telling her about the Malthusian League. One really ought...”

But a sudden violent renewal of the metallic yelling announced the fact that somebody had won the race. Mary became once more the centre of a dangerous vortex. It was time, Denis thought, to move on; he might be asked to do something if he stayed too long.

He turned back towards the canvas village. The thought of tea was making itself insistent in his mind. Tea, tea, tea. But the tea-tent was horribly thronged. Anne, with an unusual expression of grimness on her flushed face, was furiously working the handle of the urn; the brown liquid spurted incessantly into the proffered cups. Portentous, in the farther corner of the tent, Priscilla, in her royal toque, was encouraging the villagers. In a momentary lull Denis could hear her deep, jovial laughter and her manly voice. Clearly, he told himself, this was no place for one who wanted tea. He stood irresolute at the entrance to the tent. A beautiful thought suddenly came to him; if he went back to the house, went unobtrusively, without being observed, if he tiptoed into the dining-room and noiselessly opened the little doors of the sideboard — ah, then! In the cool recess within he would find bottles and a siphon; a bottle of crystal gin and a quart of soda water, and then for the cups that inebriate as well as cheer...

A minute later he was walking briskly up the shady yew-tree walk. Within the house it was deliciously quiet and cool. Carrying his well-filled tumbler with care, he went into the library. There, the glass on the corner of the table beside him, he settled into a chair with a volume of Sainte-Beuve. There was nothing, he found, like a Causerie du Lundi for settling and soothing the troubled spirits.

That tenuous membrane of his had been too rudely buffeted by the afternoon’s emotions; it required a rest.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOWARDS SUNSET THE fair itself became quiescent. It was the hour for the dancing to begin. At one side of the village of tents a space had been roped off. Acetylene lamps, hung round it on posts, cast a piercing white light. In one corner sat the band, and, obedient to its scraping and blowing, two or three hundred dancers trampled across the dry ground, wearing away the grass with their booted feet. Round this patch of all but daylight, alive with motion and noise, the night seemed preternaturally dark. Bars of light reached out into it, and every now and then a lonely figure or a couple of lovers, interlaced, would cross the bright shaft, flashing for a moment into visible existence, to disappear again as quickly and surprisingly as they had come.

Denis stood by the entrance of the enclosure, watching the swaying, shuffling crowd. The slow vortex brought the couples round and round again before him, as though he were passing them in review. There was Priscilla, still wearing her queenly toque, still encouraging the villagers — this time by dancing with one of the tenant farmers. There was Lord Moleyn, who had stayed on to the disorganised, passoverish meal that took the place of dinner on this festal day; he one-stepped shamblingly, his bent knees more precariously wobbly than ever, with a terrified village beauty. Mr. Scogan trotted round with another. Mary was in the embrace of a young farmer of heroic proportions; she was looking up at him, talking, as Denis could see, very seriously. What about? he wondered. The Malthusian League, perhaps. Seated in the corner among the band, Jenny was performing wonders of virtuosity upon the drums. Her eyes shone, she smiled to herself. A whole subterranean life seemed to be expressing itself in those loud rat-tats, those long rolls and flourishes of drumming. Looking at her, Denis ruefully remembered the red notebook; he wondered what sort of a figure he was cutting now. But the sight of Anne and Gombauld swimming past — Anne with

her eyes almost shut and sleeping, as it were, on the sustaining wings of movement and music — dissipated these preoccupations. Male and female created He them...There they were, Anne and Gombauld, and a hundred couples more — all stepping harmoniously together to the old tune of Male and Female created He them. But Denis sat apart; he alone lacked his complementary opposite. They were all coupled but he; all but he...

Somebody touched him on the shoulder and he looked up. It was Henry Wimbush.

“I never showed you our oaken drainpipes,” he said. “Some of the ones we dug up are lying quite close to here. Would you like to come and see them?”

Denis got up, and they walked off together into the darkness. The music grew fainter behind them. Some of the higher notes faded out altogether. Jenny’s drumming and the steady sawing of the bass throbbed on, tuneless and meaningless in their ears. Henry Wimbush halted.

“Here we are,” he said, and, taking an electric torch out of his pocket, he cast a dim beam over two or three blackened sections of tree trunk, scooped out into the semblance of pipes, which were lying forlornly in a little depression in the ground.

“Very interesting,” said Denis, with a rather tepid enthusiasm.

They sat down on the grass. A faint white glare, rising from behind a belt of trees, indicated the position of the dancing-floor. The music was nothing but a muffled rhythmic pulse.

“I shall be glad,” said Henry Wimbush, “when this function comes at last to an end.”

“I can believe it.”

“I do not know how it is,” Mr. Wimbush continued, “but the spectacle of numbers of my fellow-creatures in a state of agitation moves in me a certain weariness, rather than any gaiety or excitement. The fact is, they don’t very much interest me. They’re aren’t in my line. You follow me? I could never take much interest, for example, in a collection of postage stamps. Primitives or seventeenth-century books — yes. They are my line. But stamps, no. I don’t

know anything about them; they're not my line. They don't interest me, they give me no emotion. It's rather the same with people, I'm afraid. I'm more at home with these pipes." He jerked his head sideways towards the hollowed logs. "The trouble with the people and events of the present is that you never know anything about them. What do I know of contemporary politics? Nothing. What do I know of the people I see round about me? Nothing. What they think of me or of anything else in the world, what they will do in five minutes' time, are things I can't guess at. For all I know, you may suddenly jump up and try to murder me in a moment's time."

"Come, come," said Denis.

"True," Mr. Wimbush continued, "the little I know about your past is certainly reassuring. But I know nothing of your present, and neither you nor I know anything of your future. It's appalling; in living people, one is dealing with unknown and unknowable quantities. One can only hope to find out anything about them by a long series of the most disagreeable and boring human contacts, involving a terrible expense of time. It's the same with current events; how can I find out anything about them except by devoting years to the most exhausting first-hand study, involving once more an endless number of the most unpleasant contacts? No, give me the past. It doesn't change; it's all there in black and white, and you can get to know about it comfortably and decorously and, above all, privately — by reading. By reading I know a great deal of Caesar Borgia, of St. Francis, of Dr. Johnson; a few weeks have made me thoroughly acquainted with these interesting characters, and I have been spared the tedious and revolting process of getting to know them by personal contact, which I should have to do if they were living now. How gay and delightful life would be if one could get rid of all the human contacts! Perhaps, in the future, when machines have attained to a state of perfection — for I confess that I am, like Godwin and Shelley, a believer in perfectibility, the perfectibility of machinery — then, perhaps, it will be possible for those who, like myself, desire it, to live in a dignified seclusion, surrounded by the delicate attentions of silent and graceful

machines, and entirely secure from any human intrusion. It is a beautiful thought."

"Beautiful," Denis agreed. "But what about the desirable human contacts, like love and friendship?"

The black silhouette against the darkness shook its head. "The pleasures even of these contacts are much exaggerated," said the polite level voice. "It seems to me doubtful whether they are equal to the pleasures of private reading and contemplation. Human contacts have been so highly valued in the past only because reading was not a common accomplishment and because books were scarce and difficult to reproduce. The world, you must remember, is only just becoming literate. As reading becomes more and more habitual and widespread, an ever-increasing number of people will discover that books will give them all the pleasures of social life and none of its intolerable tedium. At present people in search of pleasure naturally tend to congregate in large herds and to make a noise; in future their natural tendency will be to seek solitude and quiet. The proper study of mankind is books."

"I sometimes think that it may be," said Denis; he was wondering if Anne and Gombauld were still dancing together.

"Instead of which," said Mr. Wimbush, with a sigh, "I must go and see if all is well on the dancing-floor." They got up and began to walk slowly towards the white glare. "If all these people were dead," Henry Wimbush went on, "this festivity would be extremely agreeable. Nothing would be pleasanter than to read in a well-written book of an open-air ball that took place a century ago. How charming! one would say; how pretty and how amusing! But when the ball takes place to-day, when one finds oneself involved in it, then one sees the thing in its true light. It turns out to be merely this." He waved his hand in the direction of the acetylene flares. "In my youth," he went on after a pause, "I found myself, quite fortuitously, involved in a series of the most phantasmagorical amorous intrigues. A novelist could have made his fortune out of them, and even if I were to tell you, in my bald style, the details of these adventures, you would be amazed at the romantic tale. But I assure you, while

they were happening — these romantic adventures — they seemed to me no more and no less exciting than any other incident of actual life. To climb by night up a rope-ladder to a second-floor window in an old house in Toledo seemed to me, while I was actually performing this rather dangerous feat, an action as obvious, as much to be taken for granted, as — how shall I put it? — as quotidian as catching the 8.52 from Surbiton to go to business on a Monday morning. Adventures and romance only take on their adventurous and romantic qualities at second-hand. Live them, and they are just a slice of life like the rest. In literature they become as charming as this dismal ball would be if we were celebrating its tercentenary." They had come to the entrance of the enclosure and stood there, blinking in the dazzling light. "Ah, if only we were!" Henry Wimbush added.

Anne and Gombauld were still dancing together.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IT WAS AFTER ten o'clock. The dancers had already dispersed and the last lights were being put out. To-morrow the tents would be struck, the dismantled merry-go-round would be packed into waggons and carted away. An expanse of worn grass, a shabby brown patch in the wide green of the park, would be all that remained. Crome Fair was over.

By the edge of the pool two figures lingered.

"No, no, no," Anne was saying in a breathless whisper, leaning backwards, turning her head from side to side in an effort to escape Gombauld's kisses. "No, please. No." Her raised voice had become imperative.

Gombauld relaxed his embrace a little. "Why not?" he said. "I will."

With a sudden effort Anne freed herself. "You won't," she retorted. "You've tried to take the most unfair advantage of me."

"Unfair advantage?" echoed Gombauld in genuine surprise.

"Yes, unfair advantage. You attack me after I've been dancing for two hours, while I'm still reeling drunk with the movement, when I've lost my head, when I've got no mind left but only a rhythmical body! It's as bad as making love to someone you've drugged or intoxicated."

Gombauld laughed angrily. "Call me a White Slaver and have done with it."

"Luckily," said Anne, "I am now completely sobered, and if you try and kiss me again I shall box your ears. Shall we take a few turns round the pool?" she added. "The night is delicious."

For answer Gombauld made an irritated noise. They paced off slowly, side by side.

"What I like about the painting of Degas..." Anne began in her most detached and conversational tone.

"Oh, damn Degas!" Gombauld was almost shouting.

From where he stood, leaning in an attitude of despair against the parapet of the terrace, Denis had seen them, the two pale figures in a patch of moonlight, far down by the pool's edge. He had seen the beginning of what promised to be an endless passionate embracement, and at the sight he had fled. It was too much; he couldn't stand it. In another moment, he felt, he would have burst into irrepressible tears.

Dashing blindly into the house, he almost ran into Mr. Scogan, who was walking up and down the hall smoking a final pipe.

"Hullo!" said Mr. Scogan, catching him by the arm; dazed and hardly conscious of what he was doing or where he was, Denis stood there for a moment like a somnambulist. "What's the matter?" Mr. Scogan went on. "you look disturbed, distressed, depressed."

Denis shook his head without replying.

"Worried about the cosmos, eh?" Mr. Scogan patted him on the arm. "I know the feeling," he said. "It's a most distressing symptom. 'What's the point of it all? All is vanity. What's the good of continuing to function if one's doomed to be snuffed out at last along with everything else?' Yes, yes. I know exactly how you feel. It's most distressing if one allows oneself to be distressed. But then why allow oneself to be distressed? After all, we all know that there's no ultimate point. But what difference does that make?"

At this point the somnambulist suddenly woke up. "What?" he said, blinking and frowning at his interlocutor. "What?" Then breaking away he dashed up the stairs, two steps at a time.

Mr. Scogan ran to the foot of the stairs and called up after him. "It makes no difference, none whatever. Life is gay all the same, always, under whatever circumstances — under whatever circumstances," he added, raising his voice to a shout. But Denis was already far out of hearing, and even if he had not been, his mind to-night was proof against all the consolations of philosophy. Mr. Scogan replaced his pipe between his teeth and resumed his meditative pacing. "Under any circumstances," he repeated to himself. It was ungrammatical to begin with; was it true? And is life really its own reward? He wondered. When

his pipe had burned itself to its stinking conclusion he took a drink of gin and went to bed. In ten minutes he was deeply, innocently asleep.

Denis had mechanically undressed and, clad in those flowered silk pyjamas of which he was so justly proud, was lying face downwards on his bed. Time passed. When at last he looked up, the candle which he had left alight at his bedside had burned down almost to the socket. He looked at his watch; it was nearly half-past one. His head ached, his dry, sleepless eyes felt as though they had been bruised from behind, and the blood was beating within his ears a loud arterial drum. He got up, opened the door, tiptoed noiselessly along the passage, and began to mount the stairs towards the higher floors. Arrived at the servants' quarters under the roof, he hesitated, then turning to the right he opened a little door at the end of the corridor. Within was a pitch-dark cupboard-like boxroom, hot, stuffy, and smelling of dust and old leather. He advanced cautiously into the blackness, groping with his hands. It was from this den that the ladder went up to the leads of the western tower. He found the ladder, and set his feet on the rungs; noiselessly, he lifted the trap-door above his head; the moonlit sky was over him, he breathed the fresh, cool air of the night. In a moment he was standing on the leads, gazing out over the dim, colourless landscape, looking perpendicularly down at the terrace seventy feet below.

Why had he climbed up to this high, desolate place? Was it to look at the moon? Was it to commit suicide? As yet he hardly knew. Death — the tears came into his eyes when he thought of it. His misery assumed a certain solemnity; he was lifted up on the wings of a kind of exaltation. It was a mood in which he might have done almost anything, however foolish. He advanced towards the farther parapet; the drop was sheer there and uninterrupted. A good leap, and perhaps one might clear the narrow terrace and so crash down yet another thirty feet to the sun-baked ground below. He paused at the corner of the tower, looking now down into the shadowy gulf below, now up towards the rare stars and the waning moon. He made a gesture with his hand, muttered something, he could not afterwards remember what; but the fact that he had said

it aloud gave the utterance a peculiarly terrible significance. Then he looked down once more into the depths.

“What ARE you doing, Denis?” questioned a voice from somewhere very close behind him.

Denis uttered a cry of frightened surprise, and very nearly went over the parapet in good earnest. His heart was beating terribly, and he was pale when, recovering himself, he turned round in the direction from which the voice had come.

“Are you ill?”

In the profound shadow that slept under the eastern parapet of the tower, he saw something he had not previously noticed — an oblong shape. It was a mattress, and someone was lying on it. Since that first memorable night on the tower, Mary had slept out every evening; it was a sort of manifestation of fidelity.

“It gave me a fright,” she went on, “to wake up and see you waving your arms and gibbering there. What on earth were you doing?”

Denis laughed melodramatically. “What, indeed!” he said. If she hadn’t woken up as she did, he would be lying in pieces at the bottom of the tower; he was certain of that, now.

“You hadn’t got designs on me, I hope?” Mary inquired, jumping too rapidly to conclusions.

“I didn’t know you were here,” said Denis, laughing more bitterly and artificially than before.

“What IS the matter, Denis?”

He sat down on the edge of the mattress, and for all reply went on laughing in the same frightful and improbable tone.

An hour later he was reposing with his head on Mary’s knees, and she, with an affectionate solicitude that was wholly maternal, was running her fingers through his tangled hair. He had told her everything, everything: his hopeless love, his jealousy, his despair, his suicide — as it were providentially averted by her interposition. He had solemnly promised never to think of self-destruction

again. And now his soul was floating in a sad serenity. It was embalmed in the sympathy that Mary so generously poured. And it was not only in receiving sympathy that Denis found serenity and even a kind of happiness; it was also in giving it. For if he had told Mary everything about his miseries, Mary, reacting to these confidences, had told him in return everything, or very nearly everything, about her own.

“Poor Mary!” He was very sorry for her. Still, she might have guessed that Ivor wasn’t precisely a monument of constancy.

“Well,” she concluded, “one must put a good face on it.” She wanted to cry, but she wouldn’t allow herself to be weak. There was a silence.

“Do you think,” asked Denis hesitatingly— “do you really think that she...that Gombauld...”

“I’m sure of it,” Mary answered decisively. There was another long pause.

“I don’t know what to do about it,” he said at last, utterly dejected.

“You’d better go away,” advised Mary. “It’s the safest thing, and the most sensible.”

“But I’ve arranged to stay here three weeks more.”

“You must concoct an excuse.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“I know I am,” said Mary, who was recovering all her firm self-possession. “You can’t go on like this, can you?”

“No, I can’t go on like this,” he echoed.

Immensely practical, Mary invented a plan of action. Startlingly, in the darkness, the church clock struck three.

“You must go to bed at once,” she said. “I’d no idea it was so late.”

Denis clambered down the ladder, cautiously descended the creaking stairs. His room was dark; the candle had long ago guttered to extinction. He got into bed and fell asleep almost at once.

CHAPTER XXX.

DENIS HAD BEEN called, but in spite of the parted curtains he had dropped off again into that drowsy, dozy state when sleep becomes a sensual pleasure almost consciously savoured. In this condition he might have remained for another hour if he had not been disturbed by a violent rapping at the door.

"Come in," he mumbled, without opening his eyes. The latch clicked, a hand seized him by the shoulder and he was rudely shaken.

"Get up, get up!"

His eyelids blinked painfully apart, and he saw Mary standing over him, bright-faced and earnest.

"Get up!" she repeated. "You must go and send the telegram. Don't you remember?"

"O Lord!" He threw off the bed-clothes; his tormentor retired.

Denis dressed as quickly as he could and ran up the road to the village post office. Satisfaction glowed within him as he returned. He had sent a long telegram, which would in a few hours evoke an answer ordering him back to town at once — on urgent business. It was an act performed, a decisive step taken — and he so rarely took decisive steps; he felt pleased with himself. It was with a whetted appetite that he came in to breakfast.

"Good-morning," said Mr. Scogan. "I hope you're better."

"Better?"

"You were rather worried about the cosmos last night."

Denis tried to laugh away the impeachment. "Was I?" he lightly asked.

"I wish," said Mr. Scogan, "that I had nothing worse to prey on my mind. I should be a happy man."

"One is only happy in action," Denis enunciated, thinking of the telegram.

He looked out of the window. Great florid baroque clouds floated high in the blue heaven. A wind stirred among the trees, and their shaken foliage twinkled and glittered like metal in the sun. Everything seemed marvellously beautiful. At the thought that he would soon be leaving all this beauty he felt a momentary pang; but he comforted himself by recollecting how decisively he was acting.

“Action,” he repeated aloud, and going over to the sideboard he helped himself to an agreeable mixture of bacon and fish.

Breakfast over, Denis repaired to the terrace, and, sitting there, raised the enormous bulwark of the “Times” against the possible assaults of Mr. Scogan, who showed an unappeased desire to go on talking about the Universe. Secure behind the crackling pages, he meditated. In the light of this brilliant morning the emotions of last night seemed somehow rather remote. And what if he had seen them embracing in the moonlight? Perhaps it didn’t mean much after all. And even if it did, why shouldn’t he stay? He felt strong enough to stay, strong enough to be aloof, disinterested, a mere friendly acquaintance. And even if he weren’t strong enough...

“What time do you think the telegram will arrive?” asked Mary suddenly, thrusting in upon him over the top of the paper.

Denis started guiltily. “I don’t know at all,” he said.

“I was only wondering,” said Mary, “because there’s a very good train at 3.27, and it would be nice if you could catch it, wouldn’t it?”

“Awfully nice,” he agreed weakly. He felt as though he were making arrangements for his own funeral. Train leaves Waterloo 3.27. No flowers...Mary was gone. No, he was blowed if he’d let himself be hurried down to the Necropolis like this. He was blowed. The sight of Mr. Scogan looking out, with a hungry expression, from the drawing-room window made him precipitately hoist the “Times” once more. For a long while he kept it hoisted. Lowering it at last to take another cautious peep at his surroundings, he found himself, with what astonishment! confronted by Anne’s faint, amused, malicious smile. She was standing before him, — the woman who was a tree, — the

swaying grace of her movement arrested in a pose that seemed itself a movement.

“How long have you been standing there?” he asked, when he had done gaping at her.

“Oh, about half an hour, I suppose,” she said airily. “You were so very deep in your paper — head over ears — I didn’t like to disturb you.”

“You look lovely this morning,” Denis exclaimed. It was the first time he had ever had the courage to utter a personal remark of the kind.

Anne held up her hand as though to ward off a blow. “Don’t bludgeon me, please.” She sat down on the bench beside him. He was a nice boy, she thought, quite charming; and Gombauld’s violent insistences were really becoming rather tiresome. “Why don’t you wear white trousers?” she asked. “I like you so much in white trousers.”

“They’re at the wash,” Denis replied rather curtly. This white-trouser business was all in the wrong spirit. He was just preparing a scheme to manoeuvre the conversation back to the proper path, when Mr. Scogan suddenly darted out of the house, crossed the terrace with clockwork rapidity, and came to a halt in front of the bench on which they were seated.

“To go on with our interesting conversation about the cosmos,” he began, “I become more and more convinced that the various parts of the concern are fundamentally discrete...But would you mind, Denis, moving a shade to your right?” He wedged himself between them on the bench. “And if you would shift a few inches to the left, my dear Anne...Thank you. Discrete, I think, was what I was saying.”

“You were,” said Anne. Denis was speechless.

They were taking their after luncheon coffee in the library when the telegram arrived. Denis blushed guiltily as he took the orange envelope from the salver and tore it open. “Return at once. Urgent family business.” It was too ridiculous. As if he had any family business! Wouldn’t it be best just to crumple the thing up and put it in his pocket without saying anything about it? He looked up;

Mary's large blue china eyes were fixed upon him, seriously, penetratingly. He blushed more deeply than ever, hesitated in a horrible uncertainty.

"What's your telegram about?" Mary asked significantly.

He lost his head, "I'm afraid," he mumbled, "I'm afraid this means I shall have to go back to town at once." He frowned at the telegram ferociously.

"But that's absurd, impossible," cried Anne. She had been standing by the window talking to Gombauld; but at Denis's words she came swaying across the room towards him.

"It's urgent," he repeated desperately.

"But you've only been here such a short time," Anne protested.

"I know," he said, utterly miserable. Oh, if only she could understand! Women were supposed to have intuition.

"If he must go, he must," put in Mary firmly.

"Yes, I must." He looked at the telegram again for inspiration. "You see, it's urgent family business," he explained.

Priscilla got up from her chair in some excitement. "I had a distinct presentiment of this last night," she said. "A distinct presentiment."

"A mere coincidence, no doubt," said Mary, brushing Mrs. Wimbush out of the conversation. "There's a very good train at 3.27." She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. "You'll have nice time to pack."

"I'll order the motor at once." Henry Wimbush rang the bell. The funeral was well under way. It was awful, awful.

"I am wretched you should be going," said Anne.

Denis turned towards her; she really did look wretched. He abandoned himself hopelessly, fatalistically to his destiny. This was what came of action, of doing something decisive. If only he'd just let things drift! If only...

"I shall miss your conversation," said Mr. Scogan.

Mary looked at the clock again. "I think perhaps you ought to go and pack," she said.

Obediently Denis left the room. Never again, he said to himself, never again would he do anything decisive. Camlet, West Bowlby, Knipswich for Timpany,

Spavin Delawarr; and then all the other stations; and then, finally, London. The thought of the journey appalled him. And what on earth was he going to do in London when he got there? He climbed wearily up the stairs. It was time for him to lay himself in his coffin.

The car was at the door — the hearse. The whole party had assembled to see him go. Good-bye, good-bye. Mechanically he tapped the barometer that hung in the porch; the needle stirred perceptibly to the left. A sudden smile lighted up his lugubrious face.

"'It sinks and I am ready to depart,'" he said, quoting Landor with an exquisite aptness. He looked quickly round from face to face. Nobody had noticed. He climbed into the hearse.

Antic Hay

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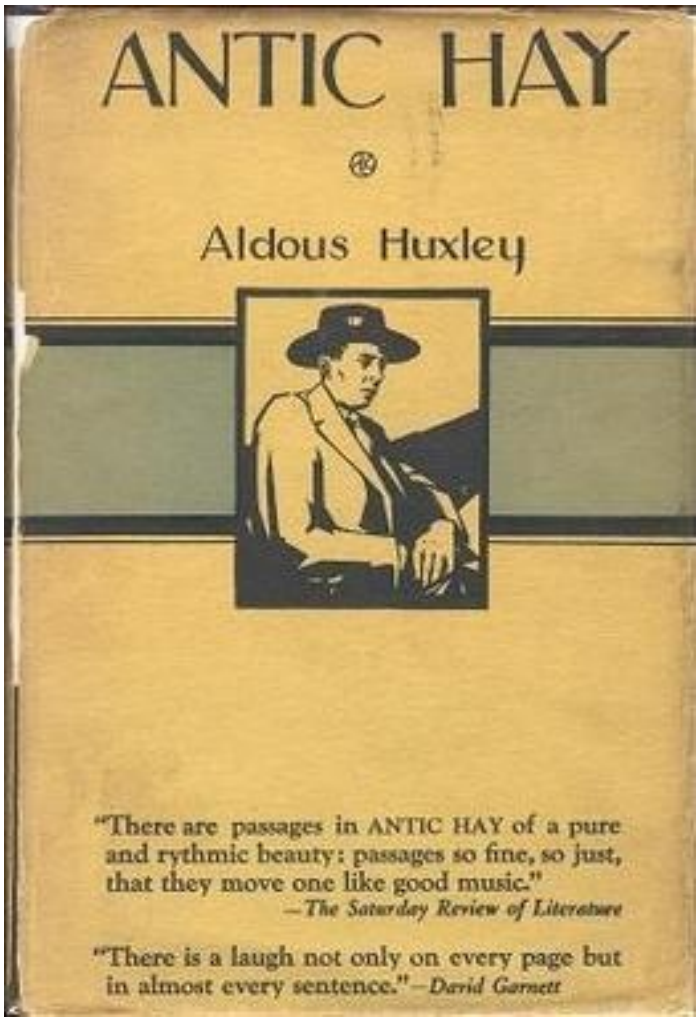

The first edition

My men like satyrs grazing on the lawns
Shall with their goat-feet dance the Antic Hay

MARLOWE

CHAPTER I

GUMBRIL, THEODORE GUMBRIL Junior, B.A.Oxon., sat in his oaken stall on the north side of the School Chapel and wondered, as he listened through the uneasy silence of half a thousand schoolboys to the First Lesson, pondered, as he looked up at the vast window opposite, all blue and jaundiced and bloody with nineteenth-century glass, speculated in his rapid and rambling way about the existence and the nature of God.

Standing in front of the spread brass eagle and fortified in his convictions by the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy (for this first Sunday of term was the Fifth after Easter), the Reverend Pelvey could speak of these things with an enviable certainty. ‘Hear, O Israel,’ he was booming out over the top of the portentous Book: ‘the Lord our God is one Lord.’

One Lord; Mr Pelvey knew; he had studied theology. But if theology and theosophy, then why not theography and theometry, why not theognomy, theotrophy, theotomy, theogamy? Why not theophysics and theo-chemistry? Why not that ingenious toy, the theotrope or wheel of gods? Why not a monumental theodrome?

In the great window opposite, young David stood like a cock, crowing on the dunghill of a tumbled giant. From the middle of Goliath’s forehead there issued, like a narwhal’s budding horn, a curious excrescence. Was it the embedded pebble? Or perhaps the giant’s married life?

‘... with all thine heart,’ declaimed the Reverend Pelvey, ‘and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.’

No, but seriously, Gumbril reminded himself, the problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought — that was all right. But God as truth, God as 2+2=4 — that wasn’t so clearly all right.

Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds? And could it be that the Reverend Pelvey, M.A., foghorning away from behind the imperial bird, could it be that he had an answer and a clue? That was hardly believable. Particularly if one knew Mr Pelvey personally. And Gumbril did.

‘And these words which I command thee this day,’ retorted Mr Pelvey, ‘shall be in thine heart.’

Or in the heart, or in the head? Reply, Mr Pelvey, reply. Gumbril jumped between the horns of the dilemma and voted for other organs.

‘And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.’

Diligently unto thy children. ... Gumbril remembered his own childhood; they had not been very diligently taught to him. ‘Beetles, black beetles’ — his father had a really passionate feeling about the clergy. Mumbo-jumbery was another of his favourite words. An atheist and an anti-clerical of the strict old school he was. Not that, in any case, he gave himself much time to think about these things; he was too busy being an unsuccessful architect. As for Gumbril’s mother, her diligence had not been dogmatic. She had just been diligently good, that was all. Good; good? It was a word people only used nowadays with a kind of deprecating humorousness. Good. Beyond good and evil? We are all that nowadays. Or merely below them, like earwigs? I glory in the name of earwig. Gumbril made a mental gesture and inwardly declaimed. But good in any case, there was no getting out of that, good she had been. Not nice, not merely molto simpatica — how charmingly and effectively these foreign tags assist one in the great task of calling a spade by some other name! — but good. You felt the active radiance of her goodness when you were near her. ... And that feeling, was that less real and valid than two plus two?

The Reverend Pelvey had nothing to reply. He was reading with a holy gusto of ‘houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not.’

She had been good and she had died when he was still a boy; died — but he hadn’t been told that till much later — of creeping and devouring pain. Malignant disease — oh, caro nome!

‘Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God,’ said Mr Pelvey.

Even when the ulcers are benign; thou shalt fear. He had travelled up from school to see her, just before she died. He hadn’t known that she was going to die, but when he entered her room, when he saw her lying so weakly in the bed, he had suddenly begun to cry, uncontrollably. All the fortitude, the laughter even, had been hers. And she had spoken to him. A few words only; but they had contained all the wisdom he needed to live by. She had told him what he was, and what he should try to be, and how to be it. And crying, still crying, he had promised that he would try.

‘And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes,’ said Mr Pelvey, ‘for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.’

And had he kept his promise, Gumbril wondered, had he preserved himself alive?

‘Here endeth the First Lesson.’ Mr Pelvey retreated from the eagle, and the organ presaged the coming Te Deum.

Gumbril hoisted himself to his feet; the folds of his B.A. gown billowed nobly about him as he rose. He sighed and shook his head with the gesture of one who tries to shake off a fly or an importunate thought. When the time came for singing, he sang. On the opposite side of the chapel two boys were grinning and whispering to one another behind their lifted Prayer Books. Gumbril frowned at them ferociously. The two boys caught his eye and their faces at once took on an expression of sickly piety; they began to sing with unction. They were two ugly, stupid-looking louts, who ought to have been apprenticed years ago to some useful trade. Instead of which they were wasting their own and their teacher’s and their more intelligent comrades’ time in trying, quite vainly, to acquire an elegant literary education. The minds of dogs, Gumbril reflected, do not benefit by being treated as though they were the minds of men.

‘O Lord, have mercy upon us: have mercy upon us.’

Gumbril shrugged his shoulders and looked round the chapel at the faces of the boys. Lord, indeed, have mercy upon us! He was disturbed to find the sentiment echoed on a somewhat different note in the Second Lesson, which was drawn from the twenty-third chapter of St Luke. ‘Father, forgive them,’ said Mr Pelvey in his unvaryingly juicy voice; ‘for they know not what they do.’ Ah, but suppose one did know what one was doing? suppose one knew only too well? And of course one always did know. One was not a fool.

But this was all nonsense, all nonsense. One must think of something better than this. What a comfort it would be, for example, if one could bring air cushions into chapel! These polished oaken stalls were devilishly hard; they were meant for stout and lusty pedagogues, not for bony starvelings like himself. An air cushion, a delicious pneu.

‘Here endeth,’ boomed Mr Pelvey, closing his book on the back of the German eagle.

As if by magic, Dr Jolly was ready at the organ with the Benedictus. It was positively a relief to stand again; this oak was adamantine. But air cushions, alas, would be too bad an example for the boys. Hardy young Spartans! it was an essential part of their education that they should listen to the word of revelation without pneumatic easement. No, air cushions wouldn’t do. The real remedy, it suddenly flashed across his mind, would be trousers with pneumatic seats. For all occasions; not merely for church-going.

The organ blew a thin Puritan-preacher’s note through one of its hundred nostrils. ‘I believe ...’ With a noise like the breaking of a wave, five hundred turned towards the East. The view of David and Goliath was exchanged for a Crucifixion in the grand manner of eighteen hundred and sixty. ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ No, no, Gumbril preferred to look at the grooved stonework rushing smoothly up on either side of the great east window towards the vaulted roof; preferred to reflect, like the dutiful son of an architect he was, that Perpendicular at its best — and its best is its largest — is the finest sort of English Gothic. At its worst and smallest, as in most of the colleges of Oxford, it is mean, petty, and, but for a certain picturesqueness, almost wholly

disgusting. He felt like a lecturer: next slide, please. ‘And the life everlasting. Amen.’ Like an oboe, Mr Pelvey intoned: ‘The Lord be with you.’

For prayer, Gumbril reflected, there would be Dunlop knees. Still, in the days when he had made a habit of praying, they hadn’t been necessary. ‘Our Father ...’ The words were the same as they were in the old days; but Mr Pelvey’s method of reciting them made them sound rather different. Her dresses, when he had leaned his forehead against her knee to say those words — those words, good Lord! that Mr Pelvey was oboeing out of existence — were always black in the evenings, and of silk, and smelt of orris root. And when she was dying, she had said to him: ‘Remember the Parable of the Sower, and the seeds that fell in shallow ground.’ No, no. Amen, decidedly. ‘O Lord, show thy mercy upon us,’ chanted oboe Pelvey, and Gumbril trombone responded, profoundly and grotesquely: ‘And grant us thy salvation.’ No, the knees were obviously less important, except for people like revivalists and housemaids, than the seat. Sedentary are commoner than genuflectory professions. One would introduce little flat rubber bladders between two layers of cloth. At the upper end, hidden when one wore a coat, would be a tube with a valve: like a hollow tail. Blow it up — and there would be perfect comfort even for the boniest, even on rock. How did the Greeks stand marble benches in their theatres?

The moment had now come for the Hymn. This being the first Sunday of the Summer term, they sang that special hymn, written by the Headmaster, with music by Dr Jolly, on purpose to be sung on the first Sundays of terms. The organ quietly sketched out the tune. Simple it was, uplifting and manly.

One, two, three, four; one, two three — 4.

One, two-and three-and four-and; One, two three — 4.

One — 2, three — 4; one — 2 — 3 — 4,

and-one — 2, three — 4; one — 2 — 3 — 4.

One, two-and three, four; One, two three — 4.

Five hundred flawed adolescent voices took it up. For good example’s sake, Gumbril opened and closed his mouth; noiselessly, however. It was only at the third verse that he gave rein to his uncertain baritone. He particularly liked the

third verse; it marked, in his opinion, the Headmaster's highest poetical achievement.

(f) For slack hands and (dim.) idle minds

(mf) Mischief still the Tempter finds.

(ff) Keep him captive in his lair.

At this point Dr Jolly enriched his tune with a thick accompaniment in the lower registers, artfully designed to symbolize the depth, the gloom and general repulsiveness of the Tempter's home.

(ff) Keep him captive in his lair.

(f) Work will bind him. (dim.) Work is (pp) prayer.

Work, thought Gumbril, work. Lord, how passionately he disliked work! Let Austin have his swink to him reserved! Ah, if only one had work of one's own, proper work, decent work — not forced upon one by the griping of one's belly! Amen! Dr Jolly blew the two sumptuous jets of reverence into the air; Gumbril accompanied them with all his heart. Amen, indeed.

Gumbril sat down again. It might be convenient, he thought, to have the tail so long that one could blow up one's trousers while one actually had them on. In which case, it would have to be coiled round the waist like a belt; or looped up, perhaps, and fastened to a clip on one's braces.

'The nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, part of the thirty-fourth verse.' The Headmaster's loud, harsh voice broke violently out from the pulpit. 'All with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.'

Gumbril composed himself as comfortably as he could on his oaken seat. It was going to be one of the Headmaster's real swingeing sermons. Great is Diana. And Venus? Ah, these seats, these seats!

Gumbril did not attend evening chapel. He stayed at home in his lodgings to correct the sixty-three Holiday Task Papers which had fallen to his share. They lay, thick piles of them, on the floor beside his chair: sixty-three answers to ten questions about the Italian Risorgimento. The Risorgimento, of all subjects! It had been one of the Headmaster's caprices. He had called a special masters'

meeting at the end of last term to tell them all about the Risorgimento. It was his latest discovery.

‘The Risorgimento, gentlemen, is the most important event in modern European history.’ And he had banged the table; he had looked defiantly round the room in search of contradictors.

But nobody had contradicted him. Nobody ever did; they all knew better. For the Headmaster was as fierce as he was capricious. He was for ever discovering something new. Two terms ago it had been singeing; after the hair-cut and before the shampoo, there must be singeing.

‘The hair, gentlemen, is a tube. If you cut it and leave the end unsealed, the water will get in and rot the tube. Hence the importance of singeing, gentlemen. Singeing seals the tube. I shall address the boys about it after chapel to-morrow morning; and I trust that all house-masters’ — and he had glared around him from under his savage eyebrows— ‘will see that their boys get themselves regularly singed after cutting.’

For weeks afterwards every boy trailed behind him a faint and nauseating whiff of burning, as though he were fresh from hell. And now it was the Risorgimento. One of these days, Gumbril reflected, it would be birth control, or the decimal system, or rational dress.

He picked up the nearest batch of papers. The printed questions were pinned to the topmost of them.

‘Give a brief account of the character and career of Pope Pius IX, with dates wherever possible.’

Gumbril leaned back in his chair and thought of his own character, with dates. 1896: the first serious and conscious and deliberate lie. Did you break that vase, Theodore? No, mother. It lay on his conscience for nearly a month, eating deeper and deeper. Then he had confessed the truth. Or rather he had not confessed; that was too difficult. He led the conversation, very subtly, as he thought, round through the non-malleability of glass, through breakages in general, to this particular broken vase; he practically forced his mother to repeat her question. And then, with a burst of tears, he had answered, yes. It had always been

difficult for him to say things directly, point-blank. His mother had told him, when she was dying. ... No, no; not that.

In 1898 or 1899 — oh, these dates! — he had made a pact with his little cousin, Molly, that she should let him see her with no clothes on, if he would do the same by her. She had fulfilled her part of the bargain; but he, overwhelmed at the last moment by a passion of modesty, had broken his promise.

Then, when he was about twelve and still at his preparatory school, in 1902 or 1903 he had done badly in his exams, on purpose; he had been frightened of Sadler, who was in the same form, and wanted to get the prize. Sadler was stronger than he was, and had a genius for persecution. He had done so badly that his mother was unhappy; and it was impossible for him to explain.

In 1906 he had fallen in love for the first time — ah, much more violently than ever since — with a boy of his own age. Platonic it had been and profound. He had done badly that term, too; not on purpose, but because he had spent so much time helping young Vickers with his work. Vickers was really very stupid. The next term he had ‘come out’ — Staphylococcus pyogenes is a lover of growing adolescence — with spots and boils all over his face and neck. Gumbril’s affection ceased as suddenly as it had begun. He finished that term, he remembered, with a second prize.

But it was time to be thinking seriously of Pio Nono. With a sigh of disgusted weariness, Gumbril looked at his papers. What had Falarope Major to say of the Pontiff? ‘Pius IX was called Ferretti. He was a liberal before he was a Pope. A kindly man of less than average intelligence, he thought that all difficulties could be settled by a little goodwill, a few reforms and a political amnesty. He wrote several encyclicals and a syllabus.’ Gumbril admired the phrase about less than average intelligence; Falarope Major should have at least one mark for having learnt it so well by heart. He turned to the next paper. Higgs was of opinion that ‘Pius the Ninth was a good but stupid man, who thought he could settle the Risorgimento with a few reforms and a political armistice.’ Beddoes was severer. ‘Pius IX was a bad man, who said that he was infallible, which showed he had a less than average intelligence.’ Sopwith Minor shared the general

opinion about Pio's intelligence, and displayed a great familiarity with the wrong dates. Clegg-Weller was voluminous and informative. 'Pius IX was not so clever as his prime minister, Cardinal Antonelli. When he came to the tiara he was a liberal, and Metternich said he had never reckoned on a liberal pope. He then became a conservative. He was kindly, but not intelligent, and he thought Garibaldi and Cavour would be content with a few reforms and an amnesty.' At the top of Garstang's paper was written: 'I have had measles all the holidays, so have been unable to read more than the first thirty pages of the book. Pope Pius IX does not come into these pages, of the contents of which I will proceed to give the following précis.' And the précis duly followed. Gumbril would have liked to give him full marks. But the business-like answer of Appleyard called him back to a better sense of his duty. 'Pius IX became Pope in 1846 and died in 1878. He was a kindly man, but his intelligence was below the ...'

Gumbril laid the paper down and shut his eyes. No, this was really impossible. Definitely, it couldn't go on, it could not go on. There were thirteen weeks in the summer term, there would be thirteen in the autumn and eleven or twelve in the spring; and then another summer of thirteen, and so it would go on for ever. For ever. It wouldn't do. He would go away and live uncomfortably on his three hundred. Or, no, he would go away and he would make money — that was more like it — money on a large scale, easily; he would be free and he would live. For the first time, he would live. Behind his closed eyes, he saw himself living.

Over the plushy floors of some vast and ignoble Ritz slowly he walked, at ease, with confidence: over the plushy floors and there, at the end of a long vista, there was Myra Viveash, waiting, this time, for him; coming forward impatiently to meet him, his abject lover now, not the cool, free, laughing mistress who had lent herself contemptuously once to his pathetic and silent importunity and then, after a day, withdrawn the gift again. Over the plushy floors to dine. Not that he was in love with Myra any longer: but revenge is sweet.

He sat in his own house. The Chinese statues looked out from the niches; the Maillols passionately meditated, slept, and were more than alive. The Goyas

hung on the walls, there was a Boucher in the bathroom; and when he entered with his guests, what a Piazzetta exploded above the dining-room mantelpiece! Over the ancient wine they talked together, and he knew everything they knew and more; he gave, he inspired, it was the others who assimilated and were enriched. After dinner there were Mozart quartets; he opened his portfolios and showed his Daumiers, his Tiepolos, his Canaletto sketches, his drawings by Picasso and Lewis, and the purity of his naked Ingres. And later, talking of Odalisques, there were orgies without fatigue or disgust, and the women were pictures and lust in action, art.

Over the empty plains forty horses impelled him towards Mantua: rubadub — adubadub, with the silencer out. Towards the most romantic city in all the world.

When he spoke to women — how easily and insolently he spoke now! — they listened and laughed and looked at him sideways and dropped their eyelids over the admission, the invitation, of their glance. With Phyllis once he had sat, for how long? in a warm and moonless darkness, saying nothing, risking no gesture. And in the end they had parted, reluctantly and still in silence. Phyllis now was with him once again in the summer night; but this time he spoke, now softly, now in the angry breathless whisper of desire, he reached out and took her, and she was naked in his arms. All chance encounters, all plotted opportunities recurred; he knew, now, how to live, how to take advantage of them.

Over the empty plains towards Mantua, towards Mantua, he slid along at ease, free and alone. He explored the horrors of Roman society; visited Athens and Seville. To Unamuno and Papini he conversed familiarly in their own tongues. He understood perfectly and without effort the quantum theory. To his friend Shearwater he gave half a million for physiological research. He visited Schoenberg and persuaded him to write still better music. He exhibited to the politicians the full extent of their stupidity and their wickedness; he set them working for the salvation, not the destruction, of humanity. Once in the past when he had been called upon to make a public speech, he had felt so nervous that he was sick; the thousands who listened to him now bent like wheat under

the wind of his eloquence. But it was only by the way and occasionally that he troubled himself to move them. He found it easy now to come to terms with everyone he met, to understand all points of view, to identify himself with even the most unfamiliar spirit. And he knew how everybody lived, and what it was like to be a mill-girl, a dustman, an engine-driver, a Jew, an Anglican bishop, a confidence-trickster. Accustomed as he was to being swindled and imposed upon without protest, he now knew the art of being brutal. He was just dressing down that insolent porter at the Continental, who had complained that ten francs wasn't enough (and had got, as a matter of historic fact, another five in addition), when his landlady gave a knock, opened the door and said: 'Dinner's ready, Mr Gumbril.'

Feeling a little ashamed at having been interrupted in what was, after all, one of the ignobler and more trivial occupations of his new life, Gumbril went down to his fatty chop and green peas. It was the first meal to be eaten under the new dispensation; he ate it, for all that it was unhappily indistinguishable from the meals of the past, with elation and a certain solemnity, as though he were partaking of a sacrament. He felt buoyant with the thought that at last, at last, he was doing something about life.

When the chop was eaten, he went upstairs and, after filling two suit-cases and a Gladstone bag with the most valued of his possessions, addressed himself to the task of writing to the Headmaster. He might have gone away, of course, without writing. But it would be nobler, more in keeping, he felt, with his new life, to leave a justification behind — or rather not a justification, a denouncement. He picked up his pen and denounced.

CHAPTER II

GUMBRIL SENIOR OCCUPIED a tall, narrow-shouldered and rachitic house in a little obscure square not far from Paddington. There were five floors, and a basement with beetles, and nearly a hundred stairs, which shook when any one ran too rudely down them. It was a prematurely old and decaying house in a decaying quarter. The square in which it stood was steadily coming down in the world. The houses, which a few years ago had all been occupied by respectable families, were now split up into squalid little maisonnettes, and from the neighbouring slums, which along with most other unpleasant things the old bourgeois families had been able to ignore, invading bands of children came to sport on the once-sacred pavements.

Mr Gumbril was almost the last survivor of the old inhabitants. He liked his house, and he liked his square. Social decadence had not affected the fourteen plane-trees which adorned its little garden, and the gambols of the dirty children did not disturb the starlings who came, evening by evening in summertime, to roost in their branches.

On fine evenings he used to sit out on his balcony waiting for the coming of the birds. And just at sunset, when the sky was most golden, there would be a twittering overhead, and the black, innumerable flocks of starlings would come sweeping across on the way from their daily haunts to their roosting-places, chosen so capriciously among the tree-planted squares and gardens of the city and so tenaciously retained, year after year, to the exclusion of every other place. Why his fourteen plane-trees should have been chosen, Mr Gumbril could never imagine. There were plenty of larger and more umbrageous gardens all round; but they remained birdless, while every evening, from the larger flocks, a faithful legion detached itself to settle clamorously among his trees. They sat and chattered till the sun went down and twilight was past, with intervals every now

and then of silence that fell suddenly and inexplicably on all the birds at once, lasted through a few seconds of thrilling suspense, to end as suddenly and senselessly in an outburst of the same loud and simultaneous conversation.

The starlings were Mr Gumbril's most affectionately cherished friends; sitting out on his balcony to watch and listen to them, he had caught at the shut of treacherous evenings many colds and chills on the liver, he had laid up for himself many painful hours of rheumatism. These little accidents did nothing, however, to damp his affection for the birds; and still on every evening that could possibly be called fine, he was always to be seen in the twilight, sitting on the balcony, gazing up, round-spectacled and rapt, at the fourteen plane-trees. The breezes stirred in his grey hair, tossing it up in long, light wisps that fell across his forehead and over his spectacles; and then he would shake his head impatiently, and the bony hand would be freed for a moment from its unceasing combing and clutching of the sparse grey beard to push back the strayed tendrils, to smooth and reduce to order the whole ruffled head. The birds chattered on, the hand went back to its clutching and combing; once more the wind blew, darkness came down, and the gas-lamps round the square lit up the outer leaves of the plane-trees, touched the privet bushes inside the railings with an emerald light; behind them was impenetrable night; instead of shorn grass and bedded geraniums there was mystery, there were endless depths. And the birds at last were silent.

Mr Gumbril would get up from his iron chair, stretch his arms and his stiff cold legs and go in through the french window to work. The birds were his diversion; when they were silent, it was time to think of serious matters.

To-night, however, he was not working; for always on Sunday evenings his old friend Porteous came to dine and talk. Breaking in unexpectedly at midnight, Gumbril Junior found them sitting in front of the gas fire in his father's study.

'My dear fellow, what on earth are you doing here?' Gumbril Senior jumped up excitedly at his son's entrance. The light silky hair floated up with the movement, turned for a moment into a silver aureole, then subsided again. Mr Porteous stayed where he was, calm, solid and undishevelled as a seated pillar-

box. He wore a monocle on a black ribbon, a black stock tie that revealed above its double folds a quarter of an inch of stiff white collar, a double-breasted black coat, a pair of pale checked trousers and patent-leather boots with cloth tops. Mr Porteous was very particular about his appearance. Meeting him casually for the first time, one would not have guessed that Mr Porteous was an expert on Late Latin poetry; and he did not mean that you should guess. Thin-limbed, bent and agile in his loose, crumpled clothes, Gumbril Senior had the air, beside Mr Porteous, of a strangely animated scarecrow.

‘What on earth?’ the old gentleman repeated his question.

Gumbril Junior shrugged his shoulders. ‘I was bored, I decided to cease being a schoolmaster.’ He spoke with a fine airy assumption of carelessness. ‘How are you, Mr Porteous?’

‘Thank you, invariably well.’

‘Well, well,’ said Gumbril Senior, sitting down again, ‘I must say I’m not surprised. I’m only surprised that you stood it, not being a born pedagogue, for as long as you did. What ever induced you to think of turning usher, I can’t imagine.’ He looked at his son first through his spectacles, then over the top of them; the motives of the boy’s conduct revealed themselves to neither vision.

‘What else was there for me to do?’ asked Gumbril Junior, pulling up a chair towards the fire. ‘You gave me a pedagogue’s education and washed your hands of me. No opportunities, no openings. I had no alternative. And now you reproach me.’

Mr Gumbril made an impatient gesture. ‘You’re talking nonsense,’ he said. ‘The only point of the kind of education you had is this, it gives a young man leisure to find out what he’s interested in. You apparently weren’t sufficiently interested in anything—’

‘I am interested in everything,’ interrupted Gumbril Junior.

‘Which comes to the same thing,’ said his father parenthetically, ‘as being interested in nothing.’ And he went on from the point at which he had been interrupted. ‘You weren’t sufficiently interested in anything to want to devote

yourself to it. That was why you sought the last refuge of feeble minds with classical educations, you became a schoolmaster.'

'Come, come,' said Mr Porteous. 'I do a little teaching myself; I must stand up for the profession.'

Gumbril Senior let go his beard and brushed back the hair that the wind of his own vehemence had brought tumbling into his eyes. 'I don't denigrate the profession,' he said. 'Not at all. It would be an excellent profession if every one who went into it were as much interested in teaching as you are in your job, Porteous, or I in mine. It's these undecided creatures like Theodore, who ruin it by drifting in. Until all teachers are geniuses and enthusiasts, nobody will learn anything, except what they teach themselves.'

'Still,' said Mr Porteous, 'I wish I hadn't had to learn so much by myself. I wasted a lot of time finding out how to set to work and where to discover what I wanted.'

Gumbril Junior was lighting his pipe. 'I have come to the conclusion,' he said, speaking in little jerks between each suck of the flame into the bowl, 'that most people ... ought never ... to be taught anything at all.' He threw away the match. 'Lord have mercy upon us, they're dogs. What's the use of teaching them anything except to behave well, to work and obey? Facts, theories, the truth about the universe — what good are those to them? Teach them to understand — why, it only confuses them; makes them lose hold of the simple real appearance. Not more than one in a hundred can get any good out of a scientific or literary education.'

'And you're one of the ones?' asked his father.

'That goes without saying,' Gumbril Junior replied.

'I think you mayn't be so far wrong,' said Mr Porteous. 'When I think of my own children, for example ...' he sighed, 'I thought they'd be interested in the things that interested me; they don't seem to be interested in anything but behaving like little apes — not very anthropoid ones either, for that matter. At my eldest boy's age I used to sit up most of the night reading Latin texts. He sits up — or rather stands, reels, trots up — dancing and drinking. Do you remember

St Bernard? “Vigilet tota nocte luxuriosus non solum patienter” (the ascetic and the scholar only watch patiently); “sed et libenter, ut suam expleat voluptatem.” What the wise man does out of a sense of duty, the fool does for fun. And I’ve tried very hard to make him like Latin.’

‘Well, in any case,’ said Gumbril Junior, ‘you didn’t try to feed him on history. That’s the real unforgivable sin. And that’s what I’ve been doing, up till this evening — encouraging boys of fifteen and sixteen to specialize in history, hours and hours a week, making them read bad writers’ generalizations about subjects on which only our ignorance allows us to generalize; teaching them to reproduce these generalizations in horrid little “Essays” of their own; rotting their minds, in fact, with a diet of soft vagueness; scandalous it was. If these creatures are to be taught anything, it should be something hard and definite. Latin — that’s excellent. Mathematics, physical science. Let them read history for amusement, certainly. But for Heaven’s sake don’t make it the staple of education!’ Gumbril Junior spoke with the greatest earnestness, as though he were an inspector of schools, making a report. It was a subject on which, at the moment, he felt very profoundly; he felt profoundly on all subjects while he was talking about them. ‘I wrote a long letter to the Headmaster about the teaching of history this evening,’ he added. ‘It’s most important.’ He shook his head thoughtfully, ‘Most important.’

‘Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus,’ said Mr Porteous, in the words of St Peter Damianus.

‘Very true,’ Gumbril Senior applauded. ‘And talking about bad times, Theodore, what do you propose to do now, may I ask?’

‘I mean to begin by making some money.’

Gumbril Senior put his hands on his knees, bent forward and laughed, ‘Ha, ha, ha!’ He had a profound bell-like laugh that was like the croaking of a very large and melodious frog. ‘You won’t,’ he said, and shook his head till the hair fell into his eyes. ‘You won’t,’ and he laughed again.

‘To make money,’ said Mr Porteous, ‘one must be really interested in money.’

‘And he’s not,’ said Gumbril Senior. ‘None of us are.’

‘When I was still uncommonly hard up,’ Mr Porteous continued, ‘we used to lodge in the same house with a Russian Jew, who was a furrier. That man was interested in money, if you like. It was a passion, an enthusiasm, an ideal. He could have led a comfortable, easy life, and still have made enough to put by something for his old age. But for his high abstract ideal of money he suffered more than Michelangelo ever suffered for his art. He used to work nineteen hours a day, and the other five he slept, lying under his bench, in the dirt, breathing into his lungs the stink and the broken hairs. He is now very rich indeed and does nothing with his money, doesn’t want to do anything, doesn’t know what one does do with it. He desires neither power nor pleasure. His desire for lucre is purely disinterested. He reminds me of Browning’s “Grammarian”. I have a great admiration for him.’

Mr Porteous’s own passion had been for the poems of Notker Balbulus and St Bernard. It had taken him nearly twenty years to get himself and his family out of the house where the Russian furrier used to lodge. But Notker was worth it, he used to say; Notker was worth even the weariness and the pallor of a wife who worked beyond her strength, even the shabbiness of ill-dressed and none too well-fed children. He had readjusted his monocle and gone on. But there had been occasions when it needed more than the monocle and the careful, distinguished clothes to keep up his morale. Still, those times were over now; Notker had brought him at last a kind of fame — even, indirectly, a certain small prosperity.

Gumbril Senior turned once more towards his son. ‘And how do you propose,’ he asked, ‘to make this money?’

Gumbril Junior explained. He had thought it all out in the cab on the way from the station. ‘It came to me this morning,’ he said, ‘in chapel, during service.’

‘Monstrous,’ put in Gumbril Senior, with a genuine indignation, ‘monstrous these medieval survivals in schools! Chapel, indeed!’

‘It came,’ Gumbril Junior went on, ‘like an apocalypse, suddenly, like a divine inspiration. A grand and luminous idea came to me — the idea of Gumbril’s Patent Small-Clothes.’

‘And what are Gumbril’s Patent Small-Clothes?’

‘A boon to those whose occupation is sedentary’; Gumbril Junior had already composed his prospectus and his first advertisements: ‘a comfort to all travellers, civilization’s substitute for steatopygism, indispensable to first-nighters, the concert-goers’ friend, the ...’

‘Lectulus Dei floridus,’ intoned Mr Porteous.

‘Gazophylacium Ecclesiæ,

Cithara benesonans Dei,

Cymbalum jubilationis Christi,

Promptuarium mysteriorum fidei, ora pro nobis.

Your Small-Clothes sound to me very like one of my old litanies, Theodore.’

‘We want scientific descriptions, not litanies,’ said Gumbril Senior. ‘What are Gumbril’s Patent Small-Clothes?’

‘Scientifically, then,’ said Gumbril Junior, ‘my Patent Small-Clothes may be described as trousers with a pneumatic seat, inflateable by means of a tube fitted with a valve; the whole constructed of stout seamless red rubber, enclosed between two layers of cloth.’

‘I must say,’ said Gumbril Senior in a tone of somewhat grudging approbation, ‘I have heard of worse inventions. You are too stout, Porteous, to be able to appreciate the idea. We Gumbrils are all a bony lot.’

‘When I have taken out a patent for my invention,’ his son went on, very business-like and cool, ‘I shall either sell it to some capitalist, or I shall exploit it commercially myself. In either case, I shall make money, which is more, I may say, than you or any other Gumbril have ever done.’

‘Quite right,’ said Gumbril Senior, ‘quite right’; and he laughed very cheerfully. ‘And nor will you. You can be grateful to your intolerable Aunt Flo for having left you that three hundred a year. You’ll need it. But if you really want a capitalist,’ he went on, ‘I have exactly the man for you. He’s a man who

has a mania for buying Tudor houses and making them more Tudor than they are. I've pulled half a dozen of the wretched things to pieces and put them together again differently for him.'

'He doesn't sound much good to me,' said his son.

'Ah, but that's only his vice. Only his amusement. His business,' Gumbril Senior hesitated.

'Well, what is his business?'

'Well, it seems to be everything. Patent medicine, trade newspapers, bankrupt tobacconist's stock — he's talked to me about those and heaps more. He seems to flit like a butterfly in search of honey, or rather money.'

'And he makes it?'

'Well, he pays my fees and he buys more Tudor houses, and he gives me luncheons at the Ritz. That's all I know.'

'Well, there's no harm in trying.'

'I'll write to him,' said Gumbril Senior. 'His name is Boldero. He'll either laugh at your idea or take it and give you nothing for it. Still,' he looked at his son over the top of his spectacles, 'if by any conceivable chance you ever should become rich; if, if, if ...' And he emphasized the remoteness of the conditional by raising his eyebrows a little higher, by throwing out his hands in a dubious gesture a little farther at every repetition of the word, 'if — why, then I've got exactly the thing for you. Look at this really delightful little idea I had this afternoon.' He put his hand in his coat pocket and after some sorting and sifting produced a sheet of squared paper on which was roughly drawn the elevation of a house. 'For any one with eight or ten thousand to spend, this would be — this would be ...' Gumbril Senior smoothed his hair and hesitated, searching for something strong enough to say of his little idea. 'Well, this would be much too good for most of the greasy devils who do have eight or ten thousand to spend.'

He passed the sheet to Gumbril Junior, who held it out so that both Mr Porteous and himself could look at it. Gumbril Senior got up from his chair and, standing behind them, leant over to elucidate and explain.

‘You see the idea,’ he said, anxious lest they should fail to understand. ‘A central block of three stories, with low wings of only one, ending in pavilions with a second floor. And the flat roofs of the wings are used as gardens — you see? — protected from the north by a wall. In the east wing there is the kitchen and the garage, with the maids’ rooms in the pavilion at the end. The west is a library, and it has an arcaded loggia along the front. And instead of a solid superstructure corresponding to the maids’ rooms, there’s a pergola with brick piers. You see? And in the main block there’s a Spanish sort of balcony along the whole length at first-floor level; that gives a good horizontal line. And you get the perpendiculars with coigns and raised panels. And the roof’s hidden by a balustrade, and there are balustrades along the open sides of the roof gardens on the wings. All in brick it is. This is the garden front; the entrance front will be admirable too. Do you like it?’

Gumbril Junior nodded. ‘Very much,’ he said.

His father sighed and taking the sketch put it back in his pocket. ‘You must hurry up with your ten thousand,’ he said. ‘And you, Porteous, and you. I’ve been waiting so long to build your splendid house.’

Laughing, Mr Porteous got up from his chair. ‘And long, dear Gumbril,’ he said, ‘may you continue to wait. For my splendid house won’t be built this side of New Jerusalem, and you must go on living a long time yet. A long, long time,’ Mr Porteous repeated; and carefully he buttoned up his double-breasted coat, carefully, as though he were adjusting an instrument of precision, he took out and replaced his monocle. Then, very erect and neat, very soldierly and pillar-boxical, he marched towards the door. ‘You’ve kept me very late to-night,’ he said. ‘Unconscionably late.’

The front door closed heavily behind Mr Porteous’s departure. Gumbril Senior came upstairs again into the big room on the first floor smoothing down his hair, which the impetuosity of his ascent had once more disarranged.

‘That’s a good fellow,’ he said of his departed guest, ‘a splendid fellow.’

‘I always admire the monocle,’ said Gumbril Junior irrelevantly. But his father turned the irrelevance into relevance.

‘He couldn’t have come through without it, I believe. It was a symbol, a proud flag. Poverty’s squalid, not fine at all. The monocle made a kind of difference, you understand. I’m always so enormously thankful I had a little money. I couldn’t have stuck it without. It needs strength, more strength than I’ve got.’ He clutched his beard close under the chin and remained for a moment pensively silent. ‘The advantage of Porteous’s line of business,’ he went on at last, reflectively, ’is that it can be carried on by oneself, without collaboration. There’s no need to appeal to any one outside oneself, or to have any dealings with other people at all, if one doesn’t want to. That’s so deplorable about architecture. There’s no privacy, so to speak; always this horrible jostling with clients and builders and contractors and people, before one can get anything done. It’s really revolting. I’m not good at people. Most of them I don’t like at all, not at all,’ Mr Gumbril repeated with vehemence. ‘I don’t deal with them very well; it isn’t my business. My business is architecture. But I don’t often get a chance of practising it. Not properly.’

Gumbril Senior smiled rather sadly. ‘Still,’ he said, ‘I can do something. I have my talent, I have my imagination. They can’t take those from me. Come and see what I’ve been doing lately.’

He led the way out of the room and mounted, two steps at a time, towards a higher floor. He opened the door of what should have been, in a well-ordered house, the Best Bedroom, and slipped into the darkness.

‘Don’t rush in,’ he called back to his son, ‘for God’s sake don’t rush in. You’ll smash something. Wait till I’ve turned on the light. It’s so like these asinine electricians to have hidden the switch behind the door like this.’ Gumbril Junior heard him fumbling in the darkness; there was suddenly light. He stepped in.

The only furniture in the room consisted of a couple of long trestle tables. On these, on the mantelpiece and all over the floor, were scattered confusedly, like the elements of a jumbled city, a vast collection of architectural models. There were cathedrals, there were town halls, universities, public libraries, there were three or four elegant little sky-scrapers, there were blocks of offices, huge

warehouses, factories, and finally dozens of magnificent country mansions, complete with their terraced gardens, their noble flights of steps, their fountains and ornamental waters and grandly bridged canals, their little rococo pavilions and garden houses.

‘Aren’t they beautiful?’ Gumbril Senior turned enthusiastically towards his son. His long grey hair floated wispily about his head, his spectacles flashed, and behind them his eyes shone with emotion.

‘Beautiful,’ Gumbril Junior agreed.

‘When you’re really rich,’ said his father, ‘I’ll build you one of these.’ And he pointed to a little village of Chatsworths clustering, at one end of a long table, round the dome of a vaster and austerer St Peter’s. ‘Look at this one, for example.’ He picked his way nimbly across the room, seized the little electric reading-lamp that stood between a railway station and a baptistery on the mantelpiece, and was back again in an instant, trailing behind him a long flex that, as it tautened out, twitched one of the crowning pinnacles off the top of a sky-scraper near the fireplace. ‘Look,’ he repeated, ‘look.’ He switched on the current, and moving the lamp back and forth, up and down in front of the miniature palace. ‘See the beauty of the light and shade,’ he said. ‘There, underneath the great, ponderous cornice, isn’t that fine? And look how splendidly the pilasters carry up the vertical lines. And then the solidity of it, the size, the immense, impending bleakness of it!’ He threw up his arms, he turned his eyes upwards as though standing overwhelmed at the foot of some huge precipitous façade. The lights and shadows vacillated wildly through all the city of palaces and domes as he brandished the lamp in ecstasy above his head.

‘And then,’ he had suddenly stooped down, he was peering and pointing once more into the details of his palace, ‘then there’s the doorway — all florid and rich with carving. How magnificently and surprisingly it flowers out of the bare walls! Like the colossal writing of Darius, like the figures graven in the bald face of the precipice over Behistun — unexpected and beautiful and human, human in the surrounding emptiness.’

Gumbril Senior brushed back his hair and turned, smiling, to look at his son over the top of his spectacles.

‘Very fine,’ Gumbril Junior nodded to him. ‘But isn’t the wall a little too blank? You seem to allow very few windows in this vast palazzo.’

‘True,’ his father replied, ‘very true.’ He sighed. ‘I’m afraid this design would hardly do for England. It’s meant for a place where there’s some sun — where you do your best to keep the light out, instead of letting it in, as you have to do here. Windows are the curse of architecture in this country. Your walls have to be like sieves, all holes, it’s heart-breaking. If you wanted me to build you this house, you’d have to live in Barbados or somewhere like that.’

‘There’s nothing I should like better,’ said Gumbril Junior.

‘Another great advantage of sunny countries,’ Gumbril Senior pursued, ’is that one can really live like an aristocrat, in privacy, by oneself. No need to look out on the dirty world or to let the dirty world look in on you. Here’s this great house, for example, looking out on the world through a few dark portholes and a single cavernous doorway. But look inside.’ He held his lamp above the courtyard that was at the heart of the palace. Gumbril Junior leaned and looked, like his father. ‘All the life looks inwards — into a lovely courtyard, a more than Spanish patio. Look there at the treble tiers of arcades, the vaulted cloisters for your cool peripatetic meditations, the central Triton spouting white water into a marble pool, the mosaic work on the floor and flowering up the walls, brilliant against the white stucco. And there’s the archway that leads out into the gardens. And now you must come and have a look at the garden front.’

He walked round with his lamp to the other side of the table. There was suddenly a crash; the wire had twitched a cathedral from off the table. It lay on the floor in disastrous ruin as though shattered by some appalling cataclysm.

‘Hell and death!’ said Gumbril Senior in an outburst of Elizabethan fury. He put down the lamp and ran to see how irreparable the disaster had been. ‘They’re so horribly expensive, these models,’ he explained, as he bent over the ruins. Tenderly he picked up the pieces and replaced them on the table. ‘It might have been worse,’ he said at last, brushing the dust off his hands. ‘Though I’m afraid

that dome will never be quite the same again.' Picking up the lamp once more, he held it high above his head and stood looking out, with a melancholy satisfaction, over his creations. 'And to think,' he said after a pause, 'that I've been spending these last days designing model cottages for workmen at Bletchley! I'm in luck to have got the job, of course, but really, that a civilized man should have to do jobs like that! It's too much. In the old days these creatures built their own hovels, and very nice and suitable they were too. The architects busied themselves with architecture — which is the expression of human dignity and greatness, which is man's protest, not his miserable acquiescence. You can't do much protesting in a model cottage at seven hundred pounds a time. A little, no doubt, you can protest a little; you can give your cottage decent proportions and avoid sordidness and vulgarity. But that's all; it's really a negative process. You can only begin to protest positively and actively when you abandon the petty human scale and build for giants — when you build for the spirit and the imagination of man, not for his little body. Model cottages, indeed!'

Mr Gumbril snorted with indignation. 'When I think of Alberti!' And he thought of Alberti — Alberti, the noblest Roman of them all, the true and only Roman. For the Romans themselves had lived their own actual lives, sordidly and extravagantly in the middle of a vulgar empire. Alberti and his followers in the Renaissance lived the ideal Roman life. They put Plutarch into their architecture. They took the detestable real Cato, the Brutus of history, and made of them Roman heroes to walk as guides and models before them. Before Alberti there were no true Romans, and with Piranesi's death the race began to wither towards extinction.

'And when I think of Brunelleschi!' Gumbril Senior went on to remember with passion the architect who had suspended on eight thin flying ribs of marble the lightest of all domes and the loveliest.

'And when of Michelangelo! The grim, enormous apse ... And of Wren and of Palladio, when I think of all these—' Gumbril Senior waved his arms and was silent. He could not put into words what he felt when he thought of them.

Gumbril Junior looked at his watch. ‘Half-past two,’ he said. ‘Time to go to bed.’

CHAPTER III

‘MISTER GUMBRIL!’ SURPRISE was mingled with delight. ‘This is indeed a pleasure!’ Delight was now the prevailing emotion expressed by the voice that advanced, as yet without a visible source, from the dark recesses of the shop.

‘The pleasure, Mr Bojanus, is mine.’ Gumbril closed the shop door behind him.

A very small man, dressed in a frock-coat, popped out from a canyon that opened, a mere black crevice, between two stratified precipices of mid-season suitings, and advancing into the open space before the door bowed with an old-world grace, revealing a nacreous scalp thinly mantled with long, damp creepers of brown hair.

‘And to what, may I ask, do I owe this pleasure, sir?’ Mr Bojanus looked up archly with a sideways cock of his head that tilted the rigid points of his waxed moustache. The fingers of his right hand were thrust into the bosom of his frock-coat and his toes were turned out in the dancing-master’s First Position. ‘A light spring great-coat, is it? Or a new suit? I notice,’ his eye travelled professionally up and down Gumbril’s long, thin form, ‘I notice that the garments you are wearing at present, Mr Gumbril, look — how shall I say? — well, a trifle negleejay, as the French would put it, a trifle negleejay.’

Gumbril looked down at himself. He resented Mr Bojanus’s negleejay, he was pained and wounded by the aspersion. Negleejay? And he had fancied that he really looked rather elegant and distinguished (but, after all, he always looked that, even in rags) — no, that he looked positively neat, like Mr Porteous, positively soldierly in his black jacket and his musical-comedy trousers and his patent-leather shoes. And the black felt hat — didn’t that add just the foreign, the Southern touch which saved the whole composition from banality? He regarded himself, trying to see his clothes — garments, Mr Bojanus had called them;

garments, good Lord! — through the tailor's expert eyes. There were sagging folds about the overloaded pockets, there was a stain on his waistcoat, the knees of his trousers were baggy and puckered like the bare knees of Hélène Fourmont in Rubens's fur-coat portrait at Vienna. Yes, it was all horribly negleejay. He felt depressed; but looking at Mr Bojanus's studied and professional correctness, he was a little comforted. That frock-coat, for example. It was like something in a very modern picture — such a smooth, unwrinkled cylinder about the chest, such a sense of pure and abstract conic-ness in the sleekly rounded skirts! Nothing could have been less negleejay. He was reassured.

'I want you,' he said at last, clearing his throat importantly, 'to make me a pair of trousers to a novel specification of my own. It's a new idea.' And he gave a brief description of Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes.

Mr Bojanus listened with attention.

'I can make them for you,' he said, when the description was finished. 'I can make them for you — if you really wish, Mr Gumbril,' he added.

'Thank you,' said Gumbril.

'And do you intend, may I ask, Mr Gumbril, to wear these ... these garments?'

Guiltily, Gumbril denied himself. 'Only to demonstrate the idea, Mr Bojanus. I am exploiting the invention commercially, you see.'

'Commercially? I see, Mr Gumbril.'

'Perhaps you would like a share,' suggested Gumbril.

Mr Bojanus shook his head. 'It wouldn't do for my cleeantail, I fear, Mr Gumbril. You could 'ardly expect the Best People to wear such things.'

'Couldn't you?'

Mr Bojanus went on shaking his head. 'I know them,' he said, 'I know the Best People. Well.' And he added with an irrelevance that was, perhaps, only apparent, 'Between ourselves, Mr Gumbril, I am a great admirer of Lenin ...'

'So am I,' said Gumbril, 'theoretically. But then I have so little to lose to Lenin. I can afford to admire him. But you, Mr Bojanus, you, the prosperous bourgeois — oh, purely in the economic sense of the word, Mr Bojanus ...'

Mr Bojanus accepted the explanation with one of his old-world bows.

‘... you would be among the first to suffer if an English Lenin were to start his activities here.’

‘There, Mr Gumbril, if I may be allowed to say so, you are wrong.’ Mr Bojanus removed his hand from his bosom and employed it to emphasize the points of his discourse. ‘When the revolution comes, Mr Gumbril — the great and necessary revolution, as Alderman Beckford called it — it won’t be the owning of a little money that’ll get a man into trouble. It’ll be his class-habits, Mr Gumbril, his class-speech, his class-education. It’ll be Shibboleth all over again, Mr Gumbril; mark my words. The Red Guards will stop people in the street and ask them to say some such word as “towel”. If they call it “towel”, like you and your friends, Mr Gumbril, why then ...’ Mr Bojanus went through the gestures of pointing a rifle and pulling the trigger; he clicked his tongue against his teeth to symbolize the report. ... ‘That’ll be the end of them. But if they say “tèaul”, like the rest of us, Mr Gumbril, it’ll be: “Pass Friend and Long Live the Proletariat.” Long live Tèaul.’

‘I’m afraid you may be right,’ said Gumbril.

‘I’m convinced of it,’ said Mr Bojanus. ‘It’s my clients, Mr Gumbril, it’s the Best People that the other people resent. It’s their confidence, their ease, it’s the habit their money and their position give them of ordering people about, it’s the way they take their place in the world for granted, it’s their prestige, which the other people would like to deny, but can’t — it’s all that, Mr Gumbril, that’s so galling.’

Gumbril nodded. He himself had envied his securer friends their power of ignoring the humanity of those who were not of their class. To do that really well, one must always have lived in a large house full of clockwork servants; one must never have been short of money, never at a restaurant ordered the cheaper thing instead of the more delicious; one must never have regarded a policeman as anything but one’s paid defender against the lower orders, never for a moment have doubted one’s divine right to do, within the accepted limits, exactly what one liked without a further thought to anything or any one but

oneself and one's own enjoyment. Gumbril had been brought up among these blessed beings; but he was not one of them. Alas? or fortunately? He hardly knew which.

'And what good do you expect the revolution to do, Mr Bojanus?' he asked at last.

Mr Bojanus replaced his hand in his bosom. 'None whatever, Mr Gumbril,' he said. 'None whatever.'

'But Liberty,' Gumbril suggested, 'equality and all that. What about those, Mr Bojanus?'

Mr Bojanus smiled up at him tolerantly and kindly, as he might have smiled at some one who had suggested, shall we say, that evening trousers should be turned up at the bottom. 'Liberty, Mr Gumbril?' he said; 'you don't suppose any serious-minded person imagines a revolution is going to bring liberty, do you?'

'The people who make the revolution always seem to ask for liberty.'

'But do they ever get it, Mr Gumbril?' Mr Bojanus cocked his head playfully and smiled. 'Look at 'istory, Mr Gumbril, look at 'istory. First it's the French Revolution. They ask for political liberty. And they gets it. Then comes the Reform Bill, then Forty-Eight, then all the Franchise Acts and Votes for Women — always more and more political liberty. And what's the result, Mr Gumbril? Nothing at all. Who's freer for political liberty? Not a soul, Mr Gumbril. There was never a greater swindle 'atched in the 'ole of 'istory. And when you think 'ow those poor young men like Shelley talked about it — it's pathetic,' said Mr Bojanus, shaking his head, 'reelly pathetic. Political liberty's a swindle because a man doesn't spend his time being political. He spends it sleeping, eating, amusing himself a little and working — mostly working. When they'd got all the political liberty they wanted — or found they didn't want — they began to understand this. And so now it's all for the industrial revolution, Mr Gumbril. But bless you, that's as big a swindle as the other. How can there ever be liberty under any system? No amount of profit-sharing or self-government by the workers, no amount of hyjeenic conditions or cocoa villages or recreation grounds can get rid of the fundamental slavery — the necessity of working.

Liberty? why, it doesn't exist! There's no liberty in this world; only gilded caiges. And then, Mr Gumbril, even suppose you could somehow get rid of the necessity of working, suppose a man's time were all leisure. Would he be free then? I say nothing of the natural slavery of eating and sleeping and all that, Mr Gumbril; I say nothing of that, because that, if I may say so, would be too 'air-splitting and metaphysical. But what I do ask you is this,' and Mr Bojanus wagged his forefinger almost menacingly at the sleeping partner in this dialogue: 'would a man with unlimited leisure be free, Mr Gumbril? I say he would not. Not unless he 'appened to be a man like you or me, Mr Gumbril, a man of sense, a man of independent judgment. An ordinary man would not be free. Because he wouldn't know how to occupy his leisure except in some way that would be forced on 'im by other people. People don't know 'ow to entertain themselves now; they leave it to other people to do it for them. They swallow what's given them. They 'ave to swallow it, whether they like it or not. Cinemas, newspapers, magazines, gramophones, football matches, wireless, telephones — take them or leave them, if you want to amuse yourself. The ordinary man can't leave them. He takes; and what's that but slavery? And so you see, Mr Gumbril,' Mr Bojanus smiled with a kind of roguish triumph, 'you see that even in the purely 'ypothetical case of a man with indefinite leisure, there still would be no freedom. ... And the case, as I have said, is purely 'ypothetical; at any rate so far as concerns the sort of people who want a revolution. And as for the sort of people who do enjoy leisure, even now — why I think, Mr Gumbril, you and I know enough about the Best People to know that freedom, except possibly sexual freedom, is not their strongest point. And sexual freedom — what's that?' Mr Bojanus dramatically inquired. 'You and I, Mr Gumbril,' he answered confidentially, 'we know. It's an 'orrible, 'ideous slavery. That's what it is. Or am I wrong, Mr Gumbril?'

'Quite right, quite right, Mr Bojanus,' Gumbril hastened to reply.

'From all of which,' continued Mr Bojanus, 'it follows that, except for a few, a very few people like you and me, Mr Gumbril, there's no such thing as liberty.

It’s an ‘oax, Mr Gumbril. An ‘orrible plant. And if I may be allowed to say so,’ Mr Bojanus lowered his voice, but still spoke with emphasis, ‘a bloody swindle.’

‘But in that case, Mr Bojanus, why are you so anxious to have a revolution?’ Gumbril inquired.

Thoughtfully, Mr Bojanus twisted to a finer point his waxed moustaches. ‘Well,’ he said at last, ‘it would be a nice change. I was always one for change and a little excitement. And then there’s the scientific interest. You never quite know ’ow an experiment will turn out, do you, Mr Gumbril? I remember when I was a boy, my old dad — a great gardener he was, a regular floriculturist, you might say, Mr Gumbril — he tried the experiment of grafting a sprig of Gloire de Dijon on to a black currant bush. And, would you believe it? the roses came out black, coal black, Mr Gumbril. Nobody would ever have guessed that if the thing had never been tried. And that’s what I say about the revolution. You don’t know what’ll come of it till you try. Black roses, blue roses— ‘oo knows, Mr Gumbril, ‘oo knows?’

‘Who indeed?’ Gumbril looked at his watch. ‘About those trousers ...’ he added.

‘Those garments,’ corrected Mr Bojanus. ‘Ah, yes. Should we say next Tuesday?’

‘Let us say next Tuesday.’ Gumbril opened the shop door. ‘Good morning, Mr Bojanus.’

Mr Bojanus bowed him out, as though he had been a prince of the blood.

The sun was shining and at the end of the street between the houses the sky was blue. Gauzily the distances faded to a soft, rich indistinctness; there were veils of golden muslin thickening down the length of every vista. On the trees in the Hanover Square gardens the young leaves were still so green that they seemed to be alight, green fire, and the sooty trunks looked blacker and dirtier than ever. It would have been a pleasant and apposite thing if a cuckoo had started calling. But though the cuckoo was silent it was a happy day. A day, Gumbril reflected, as he strolled idly along, to be in love.

From the world of tailors Gumbril passed into that of the artificial-pearl merchants, and with a still keener appreciation of the amorous qualities of this clear spring day, he began a leisured march along the perfumed pavements of Bond Street. He thought with a profound satisfaction of those sixty-three papers on the Risorgimento. How pleasant it was to waste time! And Bond Street offered so many opportunities for wasting it agreeably. He trotted round the Spring Exhibition at the Grosvenor and came out, a little regretting, he had to confess, his eighteenpence for admission. After that, he pretended that he wanted to buy a grand piano. When he had finished practising his favourite passages on the magnificent instrument to which they obsequiously introduced him, he looked in for a few moments at Sotheby's, sniffed among the ancient books and strolled on again, admiring the cigars, the lucid scent-bottles, the socks, the old masters, the emerald necklaces — everything, in fact, in all the shops he passed.

'Forthcoming Exhibition of Works by Casimir Lypiatt.' The announcement caught his eye. And so poor old Lypiatt was on the warpath again, he reflected, as he pushed open the doors of the Albemarle Galleries. Poor old Lypiatt! Dear old Lypiatt, even. He liked Lypiatt. Though he had his defects. It would be fun to see him again.

Gumbril found himself in the midst of a dismal collection of etchings. He passed them in review, wondering why it was that, in these hard days when no painter can sell a picture, almost any dull fool who can scratch a conventional etcher's view of two boats, a suggested cloud and the flat sea should be able to get rid of his prints by the dozen and at guineas apiece. He was interrupted in his speculations by the approach of the assistant in charge of the gallery. He came up shyly and uncomfortably, but with the conscientious determination of one ambitious to do his duty and make good. He was a very young man with pale hair, to which heavy oiling had given a curious greyish colour, and a face of such childish contour and so imberb that he looked like a little boy playing at grown-ups. He had only been at this job a few weeks and he found it very difficult.

‘This,’ he remarked, with a little introductory cough, pointing to one view of the two boats and the flat sea, ’is an earlier state than this.’ And he pointed to another view, where the boats were still two and the sea seemed just as flat — though possibly, on a closer inspection, it might really have been flatter.

‘Indeed,’ said Gumbril.

The assistant was rather pained by his coldness. He blushed; but constrained himself to go on. ‘Some excellent judges,’ he said, ‘prefer the earlier state, though it is less highly finished.’

‘Ah?’

‘Beautiful atmosphere, isn’t it?’ The assistant put his head on one side and pursed his childish lips appreciatively.

Gumbril nodded.

With desperation, the assistant indicated the shadowed rump of one of the boats. ‘A wonderful feeling in this passage,’ he said, redder than ever.

‘Very intense,’ said Gumbril.

The assistant smiled at him gratefully. ‘That’s the word,’ he said, delighted. ‘Intense. That’s it. Very intense.’ He repeated the word several times, as though to make sure of remembering it for use when the occasion next presented itself. He was determined to make good.

‘I see Mr Lypiatt is to have a show here soon,’ remarked Gumbril, who had had enough of the boats.

‘He is making the final arrangements with Mr Albemarle at this very moment,’ said the assistant triumphantly, with the air of one who produces, at the dramatic and critical moment, a rabbit out of the empty hat.

‘You don’t say so?’ Gumbril was duly impressed. ‘Then I’ll wait till he comes out,’ he said, and sat down with his back to the boats.

The assistant returned to his desk and picked up the gold-belted fountain pen which his aunt had given him when he first went into business, last Christmas. ‘Very intense,’ he wrote in capitals on a half-sheet of notepaper. ‘The feeling in this passage is very intense.’ He studied the paper for a few moments, then folded it up carefully and put it away in his waistcoat pocket. ‘Always make a

note of it.’ That was one of the business mottoes he had himself written out so laboriously in Indian ink and old English lettering. It hung over his bed between ‘The Lord is my Shepherd’, which his mother had given him, and a quotation from Dr Frank Crane, ‘A smiling face sells more goods than a clever tongue’. Still, a clever tongue, the young assistant had often reflected, was a very useful thing, especially in this job. He wondered whether one could say that the composition of a picture was very intense. Mr Albemarle was very keen on the composition, he noticed. But perhaps it was better to stick to plain ‘fine’, which was a little commonplace, perhaps, but very safe. He would ask Mr Albemarle about it. And then there was all that stuff about plastic values and pure plasticity. He sighed. It was all very difficult. A chap might be as willing and eager to make good as he liked; but when it came to this about atmosphere and intense passages and plasticity — well, really, what could a chap do? Make a note of it. It was the only thing.

In Mr Albemarle’s private room Casimir Lypiatt thumped the table. ‘Size, Mr Albemarle,’ he was saying, ‘size and vehemence and spiritual significance — that’s what the old fellows had, and we haven’t. ...’ He gesticulated as he talked, his face worked and his green eyes, set in their dark, charred orbits, were full of a troubled light. The forehead was precipitous, the nose long and sharp; in the bony and almost fleshless face, the lips of the wide mouth were surprisingly full.

‘Precisely, precisely,’ said Mr Albemarle in his juicy voice. He was a round, smooth, little man with a head like an egg; he spoke, he moved with a certain pomp, a butlerish gravity, that were evidently meant to be ducal.

‘That’s what I’ve set myself to recapture,’ Lypiatt went on: ‘the size, the masterfulness of the masters.’ He felt a warmth running through him as he spoke, flushing his cheeks, pulsing hotly behind the eyes, as though he had drunk a draught of some heartening red wine. His own words elated him, and drunkenly gesticulating, he was as though drunken. The greatness of the masters — he felt it in him. He knew his own power, he knew, he knew. He could do all that they had done. Nothing was beyond his strength.

Egg-headed Albemarle confronted him, impeccably the butler, exacerbatingly serene. Albemarle too should be fired. He struck the table once more, he broke out again:

‘It’s been my mission,’ he shouted, ‘all these years.’

All these years. ... Time had worn the hair from his temples; the high, steep forehead seemed higher than it really was. He was forty now; the turbulent young Lypiatt who had once declared that no man could do anything worth doing after he was thirty, was forty now. But in these fiery moments he could forget the years, he could forget the disappointments, the unsold pictures, the bad reviews. ‘My mission,’ he repeated; ‘and by God! I feel, I know I can carry it through.’

Warmly the blood pulsed behind his eyes.

‘Quite,’ said Mr Albemarle, nodding the egg. ‘Quite.’

‘And how small the scale is nowadays!’ Lypiatt went on, rhapsodically. ‘How trivial the conception, how limited the scope! You see no painter-sculptor-poets, like Michelangelo; no scientist-artists, like Leonardo; no mathematician-courtiers, like Boscovitch; no impresario-musicians, like Handel; no geniuses of all trades, like Wren. I have set myself against this abject specialization of ours. I stand alone, opposing it with my example.’ Lypiatt raised his hand. Like the statue of Liberty, standing colossal and alone.

‘Nevertheless,’ began Mr Albemarle.

‘Painter, poet, musician,’ cried Lypiatt. ‘I am all three. I ...’

‘... there is a danger of — how shall I put it — dissipating one’s energies,’ Mr Albemarle went on with determination. Discreetly, he looked at his watch. This conversation, he thought, seemed to be prolonging itself unnecessarily.

‘There is a greater danger in letting them stagnate and atrophy,’ Lypiatt retorted. ‘Let me give you my experience.’ Vehemently, he gave it.

Out in the gallery, among the boats, the views of the Grand Canal, and the Firth of Forth, Gumbril placidly ruminated. Poor old Lypiatt, he was thinking. Dear old Lypiatt, even, in spite of his fantastic egotism. Such a bad painter, such a bombinating poet, such a loud emotional improviser on the piano! And going

on like this, year after year, pegging away at the same old things — always badly! And always without a penny, always living in the most hideous squalor! Magnificent and pathetic old Lypiatt!

A door suddenly opened and a loud, unsteady voice, now deep and harsh, now breaking to shrillness, exploded into the gallery.

‘... like a Veronese,’ it was saying; ‘enormous, vehement, a great swirling composition’ (‘swirling composition’ — mentally, the young assistant made a note of that), ‘but much more serious, of course, much more spiritually significant, much more—’

‘Lypiatt!’ Gumbril had risen from his chair, had turned, had advanced, holding out his hand.

‘Why, it’s Gumbril. Good Lord!’ and Lypiatt seized the proffered hand with an excruciating cordiality. He seemed to be in exuberantly good spirits. ‘We’re settling about my show, Mr Albemarle and I,’ he explained. ‘You know Gumbril, Mr Albemarle?’

‘Pleased to meet you,’ said Mr Albemarle. ‘Our friend, Mr Lypiatt,’ he added richly, ‘has the true artistic temp—’

‘It’s going to be magnificent.’ Lypiatt could not wait till Mr Albemarle had finished speaking. He gave Gumbril a heroic blow on the shoulder.

‘... artistic temperament, as I was saying,’ pursued Mr Albemarle. ‘He is altogether too impatient and enthusiastic for us poor people. ...’ a ducal smile of condescension accompanied this graceful act of self-abasement ... ‘who move in the prosaic, practical, workaday world.’

Lypiatt laughed, a loud, discordant peal. He didn’t seem to mind being accused of having an artistic temperament; he seemed, indeed, to enjoy it, if anything. ‘Fire and water,’ he said aphoristically, ‘brought together, beget steam. Mr Albemarle and I go driving along like a steam engine. Psh, psh!’ He worked his arms like a pair of alternate pistons. He laughed; but Mr Albemarle only coldly and courteously smiled. ‘I was just telling Mr Albemarle about the great Crucifixion I’ve just been doing. It’s as big and headlong as a Veronese, but much more serious, more. ...’

Behind them the little assistant was expounding to a new visitor the beauties of the etchings. ‘Very intense,’ he was saying, ‘the feeling in this passage.’ The shadow, indeed, clung with an insistent affection round the stern of the boat. ‘And what a fine, what a—’ he hesitated for an instant, and under his pale, oiled hair his face became suddenly very red— ‘what a swirling composition.’ He looked anxiously at the visitor. The remark had been received without comment. He felt immensely relieved.

They left the galleries together. Lypiatt set the pace, striding along at a great rate and with a magnificent brutality through the elegant and leisured crowd, gesticulating and loudly talking as he went. He carried his hat in his hand; his tie was brilliantly orange. People turned to look at him as he passed and he liked it. He had, indeed, a remarkable face — a face that ought by rights to have belonged to a man of genius. Lypiatt was aware of it. The man of genius, he liked to say, bears upon his brow a kind of mark of Cain, by which men recognize him at once— ‘and having recognized, generally stone him,’ he would add with that peculiar laugh he always uttered whenever he said anything rather bitter or cynical; a laugh that was meant to show that the bitterness, the cynicism, justifiable as events might have made them, were really only a mask, and that beneath it the artist was still serenely and tragically smiling. Lypiatt thought a great deal about the ideal artist. That titanic abstraction stalked within his own skin. He was it — a little too consciously, perhaps.

‘This time,’ he kept repeating, ‘they’ll be bowled over. This time. ... It’s going to be terrific.’ And with the blood beating behind his eyes, with the exultant consciousness and certainty of power growing and growing in him with every word he spoke, Lypiatt began to describe the pictures there would be at his show; he talked about the preface he was writing to the catalogue, the poems that would be printed in it by way of literary complement to the pictures. He talked, he talked.

Gumbril listened, not very attentively. He was wondering how any one could talk so loud, could boast so extravagantly. It was as though the man had to shout in order to convince himself of his own existence. Poor Lypiatt; after all these

years, Gumbril supposed, he must have some doubts about it. Ah, but this time, this time he was going to bowl them all over.

‘You’re pleased, then, with what you’ve done recently,’ he said at the end of one of Lypiatt’s long tirades.

‘Pleased?’ exclaimed Lypiatt; ‘I should think I was.’

Gumbril might have reminded him that he had been as well pleased in the past and that ‘they’ had by no means been bowled over. He preferred, however, to say nothing. Lypiatt went on about the size and universality of the old masters. He himself, it was tacitly understood, was one of them.

They parted near the bottom of the Tottenham Court Road, Lypiatt to go northward to his studio off Maple Street, Gumbril to pay one of his secret visits to those rooms of his in Great Russell Street. He had taken them nearly a year ago now, two little rooms over a grocer’s shop, promising himself goodness only knew what adventures in them. But somehow there had been no adventures. Still, it had pleased him, all the same, to be able to go there from time to time when he was in London and to think, as he sat in solitude before his gas fire, that there was literally not a soul in the universe who knew where he was. He had an almost childish affection for mysteries and secrets.

‘Good-bye,’ said Gumbril, raising his hand to the salute. ‘And I’ll beat up some people for dinner on Friday.’ (For they had agreed to meet again.) He turned away, thinking that he had spoken the last words; but he was mistaken.

‘Oh, by the way,’ said Lypiatt, who had also turned to go, but who now came stepping quickly after his companion. ‘Can you, by any chance, lend me five pounds? Only till after the exhibition, you know. I’m a bit short.’

Poor old Lypiatt! But it was with reluctance that Gumbril parted from his Treasury notes.

CHAPTER IV

LYPIATT HAD A habit, which some of his friends found rather trying — and not only friends, for Lypiatt was ready to let the merest acquaintances, the most absolute strangers, even, into the secrets of his inspiration — a habit of reciting at every possible opportunity his own verses. He would declaim in a voice loud and tremulous, with an emotion that never seemed to vary with the varying subject-matter of his poems, for whole quarters of an hour at a stretch; would go on declaiming till his auditors were overwhelmed with such a confusion of embarrassment and shame, that the blood rushed to their cheeks and they dared not meet one another's eyes.

He was declaiming now; not merely across the dinner-table to his own friends, but to the whole restaurant. For at the first reverberating lines of his latest, 'The Conquistador', there had been a startled turning of heads, a craning of necks from every corner of the room. The people who came to this Soho restaurant because it was, notoriously, so 'artistic', looked at one another significantly and nodded; they were getting their money's worth, this time. And Lypiatt, with a fine air of rapt unconsciousness, went on with his recitation.

'Look down on Mexico, Conquistador' — that was the refrain.

The Conquistador, Lypiatt had made it clear, was the Artist, and the Vale of Mexico on which he looked down, the towered cities of Tlacopan and Chalco, of Tenochtitlan and Iztapalapan symbolized — well, it was difficult to say precisely what. The universe, perhaps?

'Look down,' cried Lypiatt, with a quivering voice.

'Look down, Conquistador!

There on the valley's broad green floor,

There lies the lake; the jewelled cities gleam;

Chalco and Tlacopan

Await the coming Man.

Look down on Mexico, Conquistador,

Land of your golden dream.'

'Not "dream",' said Gumbril, putting down the glass from which he had been profoundly drinking. 'You can't possibly say "dream", you know.'

'Why do you interrupt me?' Lypiatt turned on him angrily. His wide mouth twitched at the corners, his whole long face worked with excitement. 'Why don't you let me finish?' He allowed his hand, which had hung awkwardly in the air above him, suspended, as it were, at the top of a gesture, to sink slowly to the table. 'Imbecile!' he said, and once more picked up his knife and fork.

'But really,' Gumbril insisted, 'you can't say "dream". Can you now, seriously?' He had drunk the best part of a bottle of Burgundy and he felt good-humoured, obstinate and a little bellicose.

'And why not?' Lypiatt asked.

'Oh, because one simply can't.' Gumbril leaned back in his chair, smiled and caressed his drooping blond moustache. 'Not in this year of grace, nineteen twenty-two.'

'But why?' Lypiatt repeated, with exasperation.

'Because it's altogether too late in the day,' declared precious Mr Mercaptan, rushing up to his emphasis with flutes and roaring, like a true Conquistador, to fall back, however, at the end of the sentence rather ignominiously into a breathless confusion. He was a sleek, comfortable young man with smooth brown hair parted in the centre and conducted in a pair of flowing curves across the temples, to be looped in damp curls behind his ears. His face ought to have been rather more exquisite, rather more refinedly dix-huitième than it actually was. It had a rather gross, snouty look, which was sadly out of harmony with Mr Mercaptan's inimitably graceful style. For Mr Mercaptan had a style and used it, delightfully, in his middle articles for the literary weeklies. His most precious work, however, was that little volume of essays, prose poems, vignettes and paradoxes, in which he had so brilliantly illustrated his favourite theme — the pettiness, the simian limitations, the insignificance and the absurd

pretentiousness of Homo soi-disant Sapiens. Those who met Mr Mercaptan personally often came away with the feeling that perhaps, after all, he was right in judging so severely of humanity.

‘Too late in the day,’ he repeated. ‘Times have changed. Sunt lacrymae rerum, nos et mutamur in illis.’ He laughed his own applause.

‘Quot homines, tot disputandum est,’ said Gumbril, taking another sip of his Beaune Supérieure. At the moment, he was all for Mercaptan.

‘But why is it too late?’ Lypiatt insisted.

Mr Mercaptan made a delicate gesture. ‘Ça se sent, mon cher ami,’ he said, ‘ça ne s’explique pas.’ Satan, it is said, carries hell in his heart; so it was with Mr Mercaptan — wherever he was, it was Paris. ‘Dreams in nineteen twenty-two. ...’ He shrugged his shoulders.

‘After you’ve accepted the war, swallowed the Russian famine,’ said Gumbril. ‘Dreams!’

‘They belonged to the Rostand epoch,’ said Mr Mercaptan, with a little titter. ‘Le Rève — ah!’

Lypiatt dropped his knife and fork with a clatter and leaned forward, eager for battle. ‘Now I have you,’ he said, ‘now I have you on the hip. You’ve given yourselves away. You’ve given away the secret of your spiritual poverty, your weakness and pettiness and impotence. ...’

‘Impotence? You malign me, sir,’ said Gumbril.

Shearwater ponderously stirred. He had been silent all this time, sitting with hunched shoulders, his elbows on the table, his big round head bent forward, absorbed, apparently, in the slow meticulous crumbling of a piece of bread. Sometimes he put a piece of crust in his mouth and under the bushy black moustache his jaw moved slowly, ruminatively, with a sideways motion, like a cow’s. He nudged Gumbril with his elbow. ‘Ass,’ he said, ‘be quiet.’

Lypiatt went on torrentially. ‘You’re afraid of ideals, that’s what it is. You daren’t admit to having dreams. Oh, I call them dreams,’ he added parenthetically. ‘I don’t mind being thought a fool and old-fashioned. The word’s shorter and more English. Besides, it rhymes with gleams. Ha, ha!’ And

Lypiatt laughed his loud Titan's laugh, the laugh of cynicism which seems to belie, but which, for those who have understanding, reveals the high, positive spirit within. 'Ideals — they're not sufficiently genteel for you civilized young men. You've quite outgrown that sort of thing. No dream, no religion, no morality.'

'I glory in the name of earwig,' said Gumbril. He was pleased with that little invention. It was felicitous; it was well chosen. 'One's an earwig in sheer self-protection,' he explained.

But Mr Mercaptan refused to accept the name of earwig at any price. 'What there is to be ashamed of in being civilized, I really don't know,' he said, in a voice that was now the bull's, now the piping robin's. 'No, if I glory in anything, it's in my little rococo boudoir, and the conversations across the polished mahogany, and the delicate, lascivious, witty little flirtations on ample sofas inhabited by the soul of Crebillon Fils. We needn't all be Russians, I hope. These revolting Dostoievskys.' Mr Mercaptan spoke with a profound feeling. 'Nor all Utopians. Homo au naturel—' Mr Mercaptan applied his thumb and forefinger to his, alas! too snout-like nose, 'ça pue. And as for Homo à la H.G. Wells — ça ne pue pas assez. What I glory in is the civilized, middle way between stink and asepsis. Give me a little musk, a little intoxicating feminine exhalation, the bouquet of old wine and strawberries, a lavender bag under every pillow and potpourri in the corners of the drawing-room. Readable books, amusing conversation, civilized women, graceful art and dry vintage, music, with a quiet life and reasonable comfort — that's all I ask for.'

'Talking about comfort,' Gumbril put in, before Lypiatt had time to fling his answering thunders, 'I must tell you about my new invention. Pneumatic trousers,' he explained. 'Blow them up. Perfect comfort. You see the idea? You're a sedentary man, Mercaptan. Let me put you down for a couple of pairs.'

Mr Mercaptan shook his head. 'Too Wellsian,' he said. 'Too horribly Utopian. They'd be ludicrously out of place in my boudoir. And besides, my sofa is well enough sprung already, thank you.'

‘But what about Tolstoy?’ shouted Lypiatt, letting out his impatience in a violent blast.

Mr Mercaptan waved his hand. ‘Russian,’ he said, ‘Russian.’

‘And Michelangelo?’

‘Alberti,’ said Gumbril, very seriously, giving them all a piece of his father’s mind— ‘Alberti was much the better architect, I assure you.’

‘And pretentiousness for pretentiousness,’ said Mr Mercaptan, ‘I prefer old Borromini and the baroque.’

‘What about Beethoven?’ went on Lypiatt. ‘What about Blake? Where do they come in under your scheme of things?’

Mr Mercaptan shrugged his shoulders. ‘They stay in the hall,’ he said. ‘I don’t let them into the boudoir.’

‘You disgust me,’ said Lypiatt, with rising indignation, and making wilder gestures. ‘You disgust me — you and your odious little sham eighteenth-century civilization; your piddling little poetry; your art for art’s sake instead of for God’s sake; your nauseating little copulations without love or passion; your hoggish materialism; your bestial indifference to all that’s unhappy and your yelping hatred of all that’s great.’

‘Charming, charming,’ murmured Mr Mercaptan, who was pouring oil on his salad.

‘How can you ever hope to achieve anything decent or solid, when you don’t even believe in decency or solidity? I look about me,’ and Lypiatt cast his eyes wildly round the crowded room, ‘and I find myself alone, spiritually alone. I strive on by myself, by myself.’ He struck his breast, a giant, a solitary giant. ‘I have set myself to restore painting and poetry to their rightful position among the great moral forces. They have been amusements, they have been mere games for too long. I am giving my life for that. My life.’ His voice trembled a little. ‘People mock me, hate me, stone me, deride me. But I go on, I go on. For I know I’m right. And in the end they too will recognize that I’ve been right.’ It was a loud soliloquy. One could fancy that Lypiatt had been engaged in recognizing himself.

‘All the same,’ said Gumbril with a cheerful stubbornness, ‘I persist that the word “dreams” is inadmissible.’

‘Inadmissible,’ repeated Mr Mercaptan, imparting to the word an additional significance by giving it its French pronunciation. ‘In the age of Rostand, well and good. But now. ...’

‘Now,’ said Gumbril, ‘the word merely connotes Freud.’

‘It’s a matter of literary tact,’ explained Mr Mercaptan. ‘Have you no literary tact?’

‘No,’ said Lypiatt, with emphasis, ‘thank God, I haven’t. I have no tact of any kind. I do things straightforwardly, frankly, as the spirit moves me. I don’t like compromises.’

He struck the table. The gesture startlingly let loose a peal of cracked and diabolic laughter. Gumbril and Lypiatt and Mr Mercaptan looked quickly up; even Shearwater lifted his great spherical head and turned towards the sound the large disk of his face. A young man with a blond, fan-shaped beard stood by the table, looking down at them through a pair of bright blue eyes and smiling equivocally and disquietingly as though his mind were full of some nameless and fantastic malice.

‘Come sta la Sua Terribiltà?’ he asked; and, taking off his preposterous bowler hat, he bowed profoundly to Lypiatt. ‘How I recognize my Buonarrotti!’ he added affectionately.

Lypiatt laughed, rather uncomfortably, and no longer on the Titanic scale. ‘How I recognize my Coleman!’ he echoed, rather feebly.

‘On the contrary,’ Gumbril corrected, ‘how almost completely I fail to recognize. This beard’ — he pointed to the blond fan— ‘why, may I ask?’

‘More Russianism,’ said Mr Mercaptan, and shook his head.

‘Ah, why indeed?’ Coleman lowered his voice to a confidential whisper. ‘For religious reasons,’ he said, and made the sign of the cross.

‘Christlike is my behaviour,

Like every good believer,

I imitate the Saviour,

And cultivate a beaver.

There be beavers which have made themselves beavers for the kingdom of heaven's sake. But there are some beavers, on the other hand, which were so born from their mother's womb.' He burst into a fit of outrageous laughter which stopped as suddenly and as voluntarily as it had begun.

Lypiatt shook his head. 'Hideous,' he said, 'hideous.'

'Moreover,' Coleman went on, without paying any attention, 'I have other and, alas! less holy reasons for this change of face. It enables one to make such delightful acquaintances in the street. You hear some one saying, "Beaver", as you pass, and you immediately have the right to rush up and get into conversation. I owe to this dear symbol,' and he caressed the golden beard tenderly with the palm of his hand, 'the most admirably dangerous relations.'

'Magnificent,' said Gumbril, drinking his own health. 'I shall stop shaving at once.'

Shearwater looked round the table with raised eyebrows and a wrinkled forehead. 'This conversation is rather beyond me,' he said gravely. Under the formidable moustache, under the thick, tufted eyebrows, the mouth was small and ingenuous, the mild grey eyes full of an almost childish inquiry. 'What does the word "beaver" signify in this context? You don't refer, I suppose, to the rodent, Castor fiber?'

'But this is a very great man,' said Coleman, raising his bowler. 'Tell me, who he is?'

'Our friend Shearwater,' said Gumbril, 'the physiologist.'

Coleman bowed. 'Physiological Shearwater,' he said. 'Accept my homage. To one who doesn't know what a beaver is, I resign all my claims to superiority. There's nothing else but beavers in all the papers. Tell me, do you never read the Daily Express?'

'No.'

'Nor the Daily Mail?'

Shearwater shook his head.

‘Nor the Mirror? nor the Sketch? nor the Graphic? nor even (for I was forgetting that physiologists must surely have Liberal opinions) — even the Daily News?’

Shearwater continued to shake his large spherical head.

‘Nor any of the evening papers?’

‘No.’

Coleman once more lifted his hat. ‘O eloquent, just and mighty Death!’ he exclaimed, and replaced it on his head. ‘You never read any papers at all — not even our friend Mercaptan’s delicious little middles in the weeklies? How is your delicious little middle, by the way?’ Coleman turned to Mr Mercaptan and with the point of his huge stick gave him a little prod in the stomach. ‘Ça marche — les tripes? Hein?’ He turned back to Shearwater. ‘Not even those?’ he asked.

‘Never,’ said Shearwater. ‘I have more serious things to think about than newspapers.’

‘And what serious thing, may I ask?’

‘Well, at the present moment,’ said Shearwater, ‘I am chiefly preoccupied with the kidneys.’

‘The kidneys!’ In an ecstasy of delight, Coleman thumped the floor with the ferrule of his stick. ‘The kidneys! Tell me all about kidneys. This is of the first importance. This is really life. And I shall sit down at your table without asking permission of Buonarrotti here, and in the teeth of Mercaptan, and without so much as thinking about this species of Gumbril, who might as well not be there at all. I shall sit down and—’

‘Talking of sitting,’ said Gumbril, ‘I wish I could persuade you to order a pair of my patent pneumatic trousers. They will—’

Coleman waved him away. ‘Not now, not now,’ he said. ‘I shall sit down and listen to the physiologue talking about runions, while I myself actually eat them — sautés. Sautés, mark my words.’

Laying his hat and stick on the floor beside him, he sat down at the end of the table, between Lypiatt and Shearwater.

‘Two believers,’ he said, laying his hand for a moment on Lypiatt’s arm, ‘and three black-hearted unbelievers — confronted. Eh, Buonarrotti? You and I are both croyants et pratiquants, as Mercaptan would say. I believe in one devil, father quasi-almighty, Samael and his wife, the Woman of Whoredom. Ha, ha!’ He laughed his ferocious, artificial laugh.

‘Here’s an end to any civilized conversation,’ Mr Mercaptan complained, hissing on the c, labiating lingeringly on the v of ‘civilized’ and giving the first two i’s their fullest value. The word, in his mouth, seemed to take on a special and a richer significance.

Coleman ignored him. ‘Tell me, you physiologue,’ he went on, ‘tell me about the physiology of the Archetypal Man. This is most important; Buonarotti shares my opinion about this, I know. Has the Archetypal Man a boyau rectum, as Mercaptan would say again, or not? Everything depends on this, as Voltaire realized ages ago. “His feet,” as we know already on inspired authority, “were straight feet; and the soles of his feet were like the sole of a calf’s foot.” But the viscera, you must tell us something about the viscera. Mustn’t he, Buonarrotti? And where are my rognons sautés?’ he shouted at the waiter.

‘You revolt me,’ said Lypiatt.

‘Not mortually, I ‘ope?’ Coleman turned with solicitude to his neighbour; then shook his head. ‘Mortually I fear. Kiss me ‘Ardy, and I die happy.’ He blew a kiss into the air. ‘But why is the physiologue so slow? Up, pachyderm, up! Answer. You hold the key to everything. The key, I tell you, the key. I remember, when I used to hang about the biological laboratories at school, eviscerating frogs — crucified with pins, they were, belly upwards, like little green Christs — I remember once, when I was sitting there, quietly poring over the entrails, in came the laboratory boy and said to the stinks usher: “Please, sir, may I have the key of the Absolute?” And, would you believe it, that usher calmly put his hand in his trouser pocket and fished out a small Yale key and gave it him without a word. What a gesture! The key of the Absolute. But it was only the absolute alcohol the urchin wanted — to pickle some loathsome fœtus in, I suppose. God rot his soul in peace! And now, Castor Fiber, out with your

key. Tell us about the Archetypal Man, tell us about the primordial Adam. Tell us all about the boyau rectum.'

Ponderously, Shearwater moved his clumsy frame; leaning back in his chair he scrutinized Coleman with a large, benevolent curiosity. The eyes under the savage eyebrows were mild and gentle; behind the fearful disguise of the moustache he smiled poutingly, like a baby who sees the approaching bottle. The broad, domed forehead was serene. He ran his hand through his thick brown hair, scratched his head meditatively and then, when he had thoroughly examined, had comprehended and duly classified the strange phenomenon of Coleman, opened his mouth and uttered a little good-natured laugh of amusement.

'Voltaire's question,' he said at last, in his slow, deep voice, 'seemed at the time he asked it an unanswerable piece of irony. It would have seemed almost equally ironic to his contemporaries, if he had asked whether God had a pair of kidneys. We know a little more about the kidneys nowadays. If he had asked me, I should answer: why not? The kidneys are so beautifully organized; they do their work of regulation with such a miraculous — it's hard to find another word — such a positively divine precision, such knowledge and wisdom, that there's no reason why your archetypal man, whoever he is, or any one else, for that matter, should be ashamed of owning a pair.'

Coleman clapped his hands. 'The key,' he cried, 'the key. Out of the trouser pocket of babes and sucklings it comes. The genuine, the unique Yale. How right I was to come here to-night! But, holy Sephiroth, there's my trollop.'

He picked up his stick, jumped from his chair and threaded his way between the tables. A woman was standing near the door. Coleman came up to her, pointed without speaking to the table, and returned, driving her along in front of him, tapping her gently over the haunches with his stick, as one might drive a docile animal to the slaughter.

'Allow me to introduce,' said Coleman. 'The sharer of my joys and sorrows. La compagne de mes nuits blanches et de mes jours plutôt sales. In a word, Zoe.

Qui ne comprend pas le français, qui me déteste avec une passion égale à la mienne, et qui mangera, ma foi, des rognons pour faire honneur au physiologue.'

'Have some Burgundy?' Gumbril proffered the bottle.

Zoe nodded and pushed forward her glass. She was dark-haired, had a pale skin and eyes like round blackberries. Her mouth was small and floridly curved. She was dressed, rather depressingly, like a picture by Augustus John, in blue and orange. Her expression was sullen and ferocious, and she looked about her with an air of profound contempt.

'Shearwater's no better than a mystic,' fluted Mr Mercaptan. 'A mystical scientist; really, one hadn't reckoned on that.'

'Like a Liberal Pope,' said Gumbril. 'Poor Metternich, you remember? Pio Nono.' And he burst into a fit of esoteric laughter. 'Of less than average intelligence,' he murmured delightedly, and refilled his glass.

'It's only the deliberately blind who wouldn't reckon on the combination,' Lypiatt put in, indignantly. 'What are science and art, what are religion and philosophy but so many expressions in human terms of some reality more than human? Newton and Boehme and Michelangelo — what are they doing but expressing, in different ways, different aspects of the same thing?'

'Alberti, I beg you,' said Gumbril. 'I assure you he was the better architect.'

'Fi donc!' said Mr Mercaptan. 'San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane—' But he got no further. Lypiatt abolished him with a gesture.

'One reality,' he cried, 'there is only one reality.'

'One reality,' Coleman reached out a hand across the table and caressed Zoe's bare white arm, 'and that is callipygous.' Zoe jabbed at his hand with her fork.

'We are all trying to talk about it,' continued Lypiatt. 'The physicists have formulated their laws, which are after all no more than stammering provisional theories about a part of it. The physiologists are penetrating into the secrets of life, psychologists into the mind. And we artists are trying to say what is revealed to us about the moral nature, the personality of that reality, which is the universe.'

Mr Mercaptan threw up his hands in affected horror. ‘Oh, barbaridad, barbaridad!’ Nothing less than the pure Castilian would relieve his feelings. ‘But all this is meaningless.’

‘Quite right about the chemists and physicists,’ said Shearwater. ‘They’re always trying to pretend that they’re nearer the truth than we are. They take their crude theories as facts and try to make us accept them when we’re dealing with life. Oh, they are sacred, their theories. Laws of Nature they call them; and they talk about their known truths and our romantic biological fancies. What a fuss they make when we talk about life! Bloody fools!’ said Shearwater, mild and crushing. ‘Nobody but a fool could talk of mechanism in face of the kidneys. And there are actually imbeciles who talk about the mechanism of heredity and reproduction.’

‘All the same,’ began Mr Mercaptan very earnestly, anxious to deny his own life, ‘there are eminent authorities. I can only quote what they say, of course. I can’t pretend to know anything about it myself. But—’

‘Reproduction, reproduction,’ Coleman murmured the word to himself ecstatically. ‘Delightful and horrifying to think they all come to that, even the most virginal; that they were all made for that, little she-dogs, in spite of their china-blue eyes. What sort of a mandrake shall we produce, Zoe and I?’ he asked, turning to Shearwater. ‘How I should like to have a child,’ he went on without waiting for an answer. ‘I shouldn’t teach it anything; no language, nothing at all. Just a child of nature. I believe it would really be the devil. And then what fun it would be if it suddenly started to say “Bekkos”, like the children in Herodotus. And Buonarroti here would paint an allegorical picture of it and write an epic called “The Ignoble Savage”. And Castor Fiber would come and sound its kidneys and investigate its sexual instincts. And Mercaptan would write one of his inimitable middle articles about it. And Gumbril would make it a pair of patent trousers. And Zoe and I would look parentally on and fairly swell with pride. Shouldn’t we, Zoe?’ Zoe preserved her expression of sullen, unchanging contempt and did not deign to answer. ‘Ah, how delightful it would be! I long for posterity. I live in hopes. I stope against Stopes. I—’

Zoe threw a piece of bread, which caught him on the cheek, a little below the eye. Coleman leaned back and laughed and laughed till the tears rolled down his face.

CHAPTER V

ONE AFTER ANOTHER, they engaged themselves in the revolving doors of the restaurant, trotted round in the moving cage of glass and ejected themselves into the coolness and darkness of the street. Shearwater lifted up his large face and took two or three deep breaths. ‘Too much carbon dioxide and ammonia in there,’ he said.

‘It is unfortunate that when two or three are gathered together in God’s name, or even in the more civilized name of Mercaptan of the delicious middle,’ Mercaptan dexterously parried the prod which Coleman aimed at him, ‘it is altogether deplorable that they should necessarily empest the air.’

Lypiatt had turned his eyes heavenwards. ‘What stars,’ he said, ‘and what prodigious gaps between the stars!’

‘A real light opera summer night.’ And Mercaptan began to sing, in fragmentary German, the ‘Barcarolle’ from the Tales of Hoffmann. ‘Liebe Nacht, du schöne Nacht, oh stille mein tumpty-tum. Te, tum, Te tum. ... Delicious Offenbach. Ah, if only we could have a third Empire! Another comic Napoleon! That would make Paris look like Paris again. Tiddy, tumpty-ti-tum.’

They walked along without any particular destination, but simply for the sake of walking through this soft cool night. Coleman led the way, tapping the pavement at every step with the ferrule of his stick. ‘The blind leading the blind,’ he explained. ‘Ah, if only there were a ditch, a crevasse, a great hole full of stinging centipedes and dung. How gleefully I should lead you all into it!’

‘I think you would do well,’ said Shearwater gravely, ‘to go and see a doctor.’

Coleman gave vent to a howl of delight.

‘Does it occur to you,’ he went on, ‘that at this moment we are walking through the midst of seven million distinct and separate individuals, each with distinct and separate lives and all completely indifferent to our existence? Seven

million people, each one of whom thinks himself quite as important as each of us does. Millions of them are now sleeping in an empested atmosphere. Hundreds of thousands of couples are at this moment engaged in mutually caressing one another in a manner too hideous to be thought of, but in no way differing from the manner in which each of us performs, delightfully, passionately and beautifully, his similar work of love. Thousands of women are now in the throes of parturition, and of both sexes thousands are dying of the most diverse and appalling diseases, or simply because they have lived too long. Thousands are drunk, thousands have over-eaten, thousands have not had enough to eat. And they are all alive, all unique and separate and sensitive, like you and me. It's a horrible thought. Ah, if I could lead them all into that great hole of centipedes.'

He tapped and tapped on the pavement in front of him, as though searching for the crevasse. At the top of his voice he began to chant: 'O all ye Beasts and Cattle, curse ye the Lord: curse him and vilify him for ever.'

'All this religion,' sighed Mercaptan. 'What with Lypiatt on one side, being a muscular Christian artist, and Coleman on the other, howling the black mass. ... Really!' He elaborated an Italianate gesture, and turned to Zoe. 'What do you think of it all?' he asked.

Zoe jerked her head in Coleman's direction. 'I think 'e's a bloody swine,' she said. They were the first words she had spoken since she had joined the party.

'Hear, hear!' cried Coleman, and he waved his stick.

In the warm yellow light of the coffee-stall at Hyde Park Corner loitered a little group of people. Among the peaked caps and the chauffeurs' dust-coats, among the weather-stained workmen's jackets and the knotted handkerchiefs, there emerged an alien elegance. A tall tubed hat and a silk-faced overcoat, a cloak of flame-coloured satin, and in bright, coppery hair a great Spanish comb of carved tortoiseshell.

'Well, I'm damned,' said Gumbril as they approached. 'I believe it's Myra Viveash.'

'So it is,' said Lypiatt, peering in his turn. He began suddenly to walk with an affected swagger, kicking his heels at every step. Looking at himself from

outside, his divining eyes pierced through the veil of cynical je-m'en-fichisme to the bruised heart beneath. Besides, he didn't want any one to guess.

'The Viveash, is it?' Coleman quickened his rapping along the pavement. 'And who is the present incumbent?' He pointed at the top hat.

'Can it be Bruin Opps?' said Gumbril dubiously.

'Opps!' Coleman yelled out the name. 'Opps!'

The top hat turned, revealing a shirt front, a long grey face, a glitter of circular glass over the left eye. 'Who the devil are you?' The voice was harsh and arrogantly offensive.

'I am that I am,' said Coleman. 'But I have with me' — he pointed to Shearwater, to Gumbril, to Zoe— 'a physiologue, a pedagogue and a priapagogue; for I leave out of account mere artists and journalists whose titles do not end with the magic syllable. And finally,' indicating himself, 'plain Dog, which, being interpreted kabbalistically backwards, signifies God. All at your service.' He took off his hat and bowed.

The top hat turned back towards the Spanish comb. 'Who is this horrible drunk?' it inquired.

Mrs Viveash did not answer him, but stepped forward to meet the newcomers. In one hand she held a peeled, hard-boiled egg and a thick slice of bread and butter in the other, and between her sentences she bit at them alternately.

'Coleman!' she exclaimed, and her voice, as she spoke, seemed always on the point of expiring, as though each word were the last, utterly faintly and breakingly from a death-bed — the last, with all the profound and nameless significance of the ultimate word. 'It's a very long time since I heard you raving last. And you, Theodore darling, why do I never see you now?'

Gumbril shrugged his shoulders. 'Because you don't want to, I suppose,' he said.

Myra laughed and took another bite at her bread and butter. ... She laid the back of her hand — for she was still holding the butt end of her hard-boiled egg — on Lypiatt's arm. The Titan, who had been looking at the sky, seemed to be

surprised to find her standing there. ‘You?’ he said, smiling and wrinkling up his forehead interrogatively.

‘It’s to-morrow I’m sitting for you, Casimir, isn’t it?’

‘Ah, you remembered.’ The veil parted for a moment. Poor Lypiatt! ‘And happy Mercaptan? Always happy?’

Gallantly Mercaptan kissed the back of the hand which held the egg. ‘I might be happier,’ he murmured, rolling up at her from the snouty face a pair of small brown eyes. ‘Puis-je espérer?’

Mrs Viveash laughed expiringly from her inward death-bed and turned on him, without speaking, her pale unwavering glance. Her eyes had a formidable capacity for looking and expressing nothing; they were like the pale blue eyes which peer out of the Siamese cat’s black-velvet mask.

‘Bellissima,’ murmured Mercaptan, flowering under their cool light.

Mrs Viveash addressed herself to the company at large. ‘We have had the most appalling evening,’ she said. ‘Haven’t we, Bruin?’

Bruin Opps said nothing, but only scowled. He didn’t like these damned intruders. The skin of his contracted brows oozed over the rim of his monocle, on to the shining glass.

‘I thought it would be fun,’ Myra went on, ‘to go to that place at Hampton Court, where you have dinner on an island and dance. ...’

‘What is there about islands,’ put in Mercaptan, in a deliriously whimsical parenthesis, ‘that makes them so peculiarly voluptuous? Cythera, Monkey Island, Capri. Je me demande.’

‘Another charming middle.’ Coleman pointed his stick menacingly; Mr Mercaptan stepped quickly out of range.

‘So we took a cab,’ Mrs Viveash continued, ‘and set out. And what a cab, my God! A cab with only one gear, and that the lowest. A cab as old as the century, a museum specimen, a collector’s piece.’ They had been hours and hours on the way. And when they got there, the food they were offered to eat, the wine they were expected to drink! From her eternal death-bed Mrs Viveash cried out in unaffected horror. Everything tasted as though it had been kept soaking for a

week in the river before being served up — rather weedy, with that delicious typhoid flavour of Thames water. There was Thames even in the champagne. They had not been able to eat so much as a crust of bread. Hungry and thirsty, they had re-embarked in their antique taxi, and here, at last, they were, at the first outpost of civilization, eating for dear life.

‘Oh, a terrible evening,’ Mrs Viveash concluded. ‘The only thing which kept up my spirits was the spectacle of Bruin’s bad temper. You’ve no idea, Bruin, what an incomparable comic you can be.’

Bruin ignored the remark. With an expression of painfully repressed disgust he was eating a hard-boiled egg. Myra’s caprices were becoming more and more impossible. That Hampton Court business had been bad enough; but when it came to eating in the street, in the middle of a lot of filthy workmen — well, really, that was rather too much.

Mrs Viveash looked about her. ‘Am I never to know who this mysterious person is?’ She pointed to Shearwater, who was standing a little apart from the group, his back leaning against the park railings and staring thoughtfully at the ground.

‘The physiologue,’ Coleman explained, ‘and he has the key. The key, the key!’ He hammered the pavement with his stick.

Gumbril performed the introduction in more commonplace style.

‘You don’t seem to take much interest in us, Mr Shearwater,’ Myra called expiringly. Shearwater looked up; Mrs Viveash regarded him intently through pale, unwavering eyes, smiling as she looked that queer, downward-turning smile which gave to her face, through its mask of laughter, a peculiar expression of agony. ‘You don’t seem to take much interest in us,’ she repeated.

Shearwater shook his heavy head. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I don’t think I do.’

‘Why don’t you?’

‘Why should I? There’s not time to be interested in everything. One can only be interested in what’s worth while.’

‘And we’re not worth while?’

‘Not to me personally,’ replied Shearwater with candour. ‘The Great Wall of China, the political situation in Italy, the habits of Trematodes — all these are most interesting in themselves. But they aren’t interesting to me; I don’t permit them to be. I haven’t the leisure.’

‘And what do you allow yourself to be interested in?’

‘Shall we go?’ said Bruin impatiently; he had succeeded in swallowing the last fragment of his hard-boiled egg. Mrs Viveash did not answer, did not even look at him.

Shearwater, who had hesitated before replying, was about to speak. But Coleman answered for him. ‘Be respectful,’ he said to Mrs Viveash. ‘This is a great man. He reads no papers, not even those in which our Mercaptan so beautifully writes. He does not know what a beaver is. And he lives for nothing but the kidneys.’

Mrs Viveash smiled her smile of agony. ‘Kidneys? But what a memento mori! There are other portions of the anatomy.’ She threw back her cloak, revealing an arm, a bare shoulder, a slant of pectoral muscle. She was wearing a white dress that, leaving her back and shoulders bare, came up, under either arm, to a point in front and was held there by a golden thread about the neck. ‘For example,’ she said, and twisted her hand several times over and over, making the slender arm turn at the elbow, as though to demonstrate the movement of the articulations and the muscular play.

‘Memento vivere,’ Mr Mercaptan aptly commented. ‘Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus.’

Mrs Viveash dropped her arm and pulled the cloak back into place. She looked at Shearwater, who had followed all her movements with conscientious attention, and who now nodded with an expression of interrogation on his face, as though to ask: what next?

‘We all know that you’ve got beautiful arms,’ said Bruin angrily. ‘There’s no need for you to make an exhibition of them in the street, at midnight. Let’s get out of this.’ He laid his hand on her shoulder and made as if to draw her away. ‘We’d better be going. Goodness knows what’s happening behind us.’ He

indicated with a little movement of the head the loiterers round the coffee-stall. ‘Some disturbance among the canaille.’

Mrs Viveash looked round. The cab-drivers and the other consumers of midnight coffee had gathered in an interested circle, curious and sympathetic, round the figure of a woman who was sitting, like a limp bundle tied up in black cotton and mackintosh, on the stall-keeper’s high stool, leaning wearily against the wall of the booth. A man stood beside her drinking tea out of a thick white cup. Every one was talking at once.

‘Mayn’t the poor wretches talk?’ asked Mrs Viveash, turning back to Bruin. ‘I never knew any one who had the lower classes on the brain as much as you have.’

‘I loathe them,’ said Bruin. ‘I hate every one poor, or ill, or old. Can’t abide them; they make me positively sick.’

‘Quelle âme bien-née,’ piped Mr Mercaptan. ‘And how well and frankly you express what we all feel and lack the courage to say.’

Lypiatt gave vent to indignant laughter.

‘I remember when I was a little boy,’ Bruin went on, ‘my old grandfather used to tell me stories about his childhood. He told me that when he was about five or six, just before the passing of the Reform Bill of ‘thirty-two, there was a song which all right-thinking people used to sing, with a chorus that went like this: “Rot the People, blast the People, damn the Lower Classes”. I wish I knew the rest of the words and the tune. It must have been a good song.’

Coleman was enraptured with the song. He shouldered his walking-stick and began marching round and round the nearest lamp-post chanting the words to a stirring march tune. ‘Rot the People, blast the People ...’ He marked the rhythm with heavy stamps of his feet.

‘Ah, if only they’d invent servants with internal combustion engines,’ said Bruin, almost pathetically. ‘However well trained they are, they always betray their humanity occasionally. And that is really intolerable.’

‘How tedious is a guilty conscience!’ Gumbril murmured the quotation.

‘But Mr Shearwater,’ said Myra, bringing back the conversation to more congenial themes, ‘hasn’t told us yet what he thinks of arms.’

‘Nothing at all,’ said Shearwater. ‘I’m occupied with the regulation of the blood at the moment.’

‘But is it true what he says, Theodore?’ She appealed to Gumbril.

‘I should think so.’ Gumbril’s answer was rather dim and remote. He was straining to hear the talk of Bruin’s canaille, and Mrs Viveash’s question seemed a little irrelevant.

‘I used to do cartin’ jobs,’ the man with the teacup was saying. ‘ ’Ad a van and a nold pony of me own. And didn’t do so badly neither. The only trouble was me lifting furniture and ‘eavy weights about the place. Because I ‘ad malaria out in India, in the war ...’

‘Nor even — you compel me to violate the laws of modesty — nor even,’ Mrs Viveash went on, smiling painfully, speaking huskily, expiringly, ‘of legs?’

A spring of blasphemy was touched in Coleman’s brain. ‘Neither delighteth He in any man’s legs,’ he shouted, and with an extravagant show of affection he embraced Zoe, who caught hold of his hand and bit it.

‘It comes back on you when you get tired like, malaria does.’ The man’s face was sallow and there was an air of peculiar listlessness and hopelessness about his misery. ‘It comes back on you, and then you go down with fever and you’re as weak as a child.’

Shearwater shook his head.

‘Nor even of the heart?’ Mrs Viveash lifted her eyebrows. ‘Ah, now the inevitable word has been pronounced, the real subject of every conversation has appeared on the scene. Love, Mr Shearwater!’

‘But as I says,’ recapitulated the man with the teacup, ‘we didn’t do so badly after all. We ‘ad nothing to complain about. ‘Ad we, Florrie?’

The black bundle made an affirmative movement with its upper extremity.

‘That’s one of the subjects,’ said Shearwater, ‘like the Great Wall of China and the habits of Trematodes, I don’t allow myself to be interested in.’

Mrs Viveash laughed, breathed out a little ‘Good God!’ of incredulity and astonishment, and asked, ‘Why not?’

‘No time,’ he explained. ‘You people of leisure have nothing else to do or think about. I’m busy, and so naturally less interested in the subject than you; and I take care, what’s more, to limit such interest as I have.’

‘I was goin’ up Ludgate ‘Ill one day with a vanload of stuff for a chap in Clerkenwell. I was leadin’ Jerry up the ‘ill — Jerry’s the name of our ole pony. ...’

‘One can’t have everything,’ Shearwater was explaining, ‘not all at the same time, in any case. I’ve arranged my life for work now. I’m quietly married, I simmer away domestically.’

‘Quelle horreur!’ said Mr Mercaptan. All the Louis Quinze Abbé in him was shocked and revolted by the thought.

‘But love?’ questioned Mrs Viveash. ‘Love?’

‘Love!’ Lypiatt echoed. He was looking up at the Milky Way.

‘All of a sudden out jumps a copper at me. “ ’Ow old is that ‘orse?” ’e says. “It ain’t fit to drawr a load, it limps in all four feet,” ’e says. “No, it doesn’t,” I says. “None of your answerin’ back,” ’e says. “Take it outer the shafts at once.” ’

‘But I know all about love already. I know precious little still about kidneys.’

‘But, my good Shearwater, how can you know all about love before you’ve made it with all women?’

‘Off we goes, me and the cop and the ‘orse, up in front of the police-court magistrate. ...’

‘Or are you one of those imbeciles,’ Mrs Viveash went on, ‘who speak of women with a large W and pretend we’re all the same? Poor Theodore here might possibly think so in his feebler moments.’ Gumbril smiled vaguely from a distance. He was following the man with the teacup into the magistrate’s stuffy court. ‘And Mercaptan certainly does, because all the women who ever sat on his dix-huitième sofa certainly were exactly like one another. And perhaps Casimir does too; all women look like his absurd ideal. But you, Shearwater, you’re intelligent. Surely you don’t believe anything so stupid?’

Shearwater shook his head.

‘The cop, ’e gave evidence against me. “Limping in all four feet,” ’e says. “It wasn’t,” I says, and the police-court vet, ’e bore me out. “The ‘orse ‘as been very well treated,” ’e says. “But ‘e’s old, ‘e’s very old.” “I know ‘e’s old,” I says. “But where am I goin’ to find the price for a young one?” ’

‘x-y,’ Shearwater was saying, ‘=(x+y)(x-y). And the equation holds good whatever the values of x and y. ... It’s the same with your love business, Mrs Viveash. The relation is still fundamentally the same, whatever the value of the unknown personal quantities concerned. Little individual tics and peculiarities — after all, what do they matter?’

‘What indeed!’ said Coleman. ‘Tics, mere tics. Sheep ticks, horse ticks, bed bugs, tape worms, taint worms, guinea worms, liver flukes. ...’

‘ ”The ‘orse must be destroyed,” says the beak. “ ’E’s too old for work.” “But I’m not,” I says. “I can’t get a old age pension at thirty-two, can I? ‘Ow am I to earn my living if you take away what I earns my living by?” ’

Mrs Viveash smiled agonizingly. ‘Here’s a man who thinks personal peculiarities are trivial and unimportant,’ she said. ‘You’re not even interested in people, then?’

‘ ”I don’t know what you can do,” ’e says. “I’m only ’ere to administer the law.” “Seems a queer sort of law,” I says. “What law is it?” ’

Shearwater scratched his head. Under his formidable black moustache he smiled at last his ingenuous, childish smile. ‘No,’ he said. ‘No, I suppose I’m not. It hadn’t occurred to me, until you said it. But I suppose I’m not. No.’ He laughed, quite delighted, it seemed, by this discovery about himself.

‘ ”What law is it?” ’e says. “The Croolty to Animals law. That’s what it is,” ’e says.’

The smile of mockery and suffering appeared and faded. ‘One of these days,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘you may find them more absorbing than you do now.’

‘Meanwhile,’ said Shearwater ...

‘I couldn’t find a job ’ere, and ‘aving been workin’ on my own, my own master like, couldn’t get unemployment pay. So when we ‘eard of jobs at

Portsmouth, we thought we'd try to get one, even if it did mean walkin' there.'

'Meanwhile, I have my kidneys.'

' "'Opeless," 'e says to me, "quite 'opeless. More than two hundred come for three vacancies." So there was nothing for it but to walk back again. Took us four days it did, this time. She was very bad on the way, very bad. Being nearly six months gone. Our first it is. Things will be 'arder still, when it comes.'

From the black bundle there issued a sound of quiet sobbing.

'Look here,' said Gumbril, making a sudden irruption into the conversation. 'This is really too awful.' He was consumed with indignation and pity; he felt like a prophet in Nineveh.

'There are two wretched people here,' and Gumbril told them breathlessly what he had overheard. It was terrible, terrible. 'All the way to Portsmouth and back again; on foot; without proper food; and the woman's with child.'

Coleman exploded with delight. 'Gravid,' he kept repeating, 'gravid, gravid. The laws of gravidy, first formulated by Newton, now recodified by the immortal Einstein. God said, Let Newstein be, and there was light. And God said, Let there be Light; and there was darkness o'er the face of the earth.' He roared with laughter.

Between them they raised five pounds. Mrs Viveash undertook to give them to the black bundle. The cabmen made way for her as she advanced; there was an uncomfortable silence. The black bundle lifted a face that was old and worn, like the face of a statue in the portal of a cathedral; an old face, but one was aware, somehow, that it belonged to a woman still young by the reckoning of years. Her hands trembled as she took the notes, and when she opened her mouth to speak her hardly articulate whisper of gratitude, one saw that she had lost several of her teeth.

The party disintegrated. All went their ways: Mr Mercaptan to his rococo boudoir, his sweet barocco bedroom in Sloane Street; Coleman and Zoe towards goodness only knew what scenes of intimate life in Pimlico; Lypiatt to his studio off the Tottenham Court Road, alone, silently brooding and perhaps too consciously bowed with unhappiness. But the unhappiness, poor Titan! was real

enough, for had he not seen Mrs Viveash and the insufferable, the stupid and loutish Opps driving off in one taxi? ‘Must finish up with a little dancing,’ Myra had huskily uttered from that death-bed on which her restless spirit for ever and wearily exerted itself. Obediently, Bruin had given an address and they had driven off. But after the dancing? Oh, was it possible that that odious, bad-blooded young cad was her lover? And that she should like him? It was no wonder that Lypiatt should have walked, bent like Atlas under the weight of a world. And when, in Piccadilly, a belated and still unsuccessful prostitute sidled out of the darkness, as he strode by unseeing in his misery when she squeaked up at him a despairing ‘Cheer up, duckie,’ Lypiatt suddenly threw up his head and laughed titanically, with the terrible bitterness of a noble soul in pain. Even the poor drabs at the street corners were affected by the unhappiness that radiated out from him, wave after throbbing wave, like music, he liked to fancy, into the night. Even the wretched drabs. He walked on, more desperately bowed than ever; but met no further adventure on his way.

Gumbril and Shearwater both lived in Paddington; they set off in company up Park Lane, walking in silence. Gumbril gave a little skip to get himself into step with his companion. To be out of step, when steps so loudly and flat-footedly flapped on empty pavements, was disagreeable, he found, was embarrassing, was somehow dangerous. Stepping, like this, out of time, one gave oneself away, so to speak, one made the night aware of two presences, when there might, if steps sounded in unison, be only one, heavier, more formidable, more secure than either of the separate two. In unison, then, they flapped up Park Lane. A policeman and the three poets, sulking back to back on their fountain, were the only human things besides themselves under the mauve electric moons.

‘It’s appalling, it’s horrible,’ said Gumbril at last, after a long, long silence, during which he had, indeed, been relishing to the full the horror of it all. Life, don’t you know.

‘What’s appalling?’ Shearwater inquired. He walked with his big head bowed, his hands clasped behind his back and clutching his hat; walked clumsily, with sudden lurches of his whole massive anatomy. Wherever he was,

Shearwater always seemed to take up the space that two or three ordinary people would normally occupy. Cool fingers of wind passed refreshingly through his hair. He was thinking of the experiment he meant to try, in the next few days, down at the physiological laboratory. You'd put a man on an ergometer in a heated chamber and set him to work — hours at a time. He'd sweat, of course, prodigiously. You'd make arrangements for collecting the sweat, weighing it, analyzing it and so on. The interesting thing would be to see what happened at the end of a few days. The man would have got rid of so much of his salts, that the blood composition might be altered and all sorts of delightful consequences might follow. It ought to be a capital experiment. Gumbril's exclamation disturbed him. 'What's appalling?' he asked rather irritably.

'Those people at the coffee-stall,' Gumbril answered. 'It's appalling that human beings should have to live like that. Worse than dogs.'

'Dogs have nothing to complain of.' Shearwater went off at a tangent. 'Nor guinea-pigs, nor rats. It's these blasted anti-vivisection maniacs who make all the fuss.'

'But think,' cried Gumbril, 'what these wretched people have had to suffer! Walking all the way to Portsmouth in search of work; and the woman with child. It's horrifying. And then, the way people of that class are habitually treated. One has no idea of it until one has actually been treated that way oneself. In the war, for example, when one went to have one's mitral murmurs listened to by the medical board — they treated one then as though one belonged to the lower orders, like all the rest of the poor wretches. It was a real eye-opener. One felt like a cow being got into a train. And to think that the majority of one's fellow-beings pass their whole lives being shoved about like maltreated animals!'

'H'm,' said Shearwater. If you went on sweating indefinitely, he supposed, you would end by dying.

Gumbril looked through the railings at the profound darkness of the park. Vast it was and melancholy, with a string, here and there, of receding lights. 'Terrible,' he said, and repeated the word several times. 'Terrible, terrible.' All the legless soldiers grinding barrel-organs, all the hawkers of toys stamping their

leaky boots in the gutters of the Strand; at the corner of Cursitor Street and Chancery Lane, the old woman with matches, for ever holding to her left eye a handkerchief as yellow and dirty as the winter fog. What was wrong with the eye? He had never dared to look, but hurried past as though she were not there, or sometimes, when the fog was more than ordinarily cold and stifling, paused for an instant with averted eyes to drop a brown coin into her tray of matches. And then there were the murderers hanged at eight o'clock, while one was savouring, almost with voluptuous consciousness, the final dream-haunted doze. There was the phthisical charwoman who used to work at his father's house, until she got too weak and died. There were the lovers who turned on the gas and the ruined shopkeepers jumping in front of trains. Had one a right to be contented and well-fed, had one a right to one's education and good taste, a right to knowledge and conversation and the leisurely complexities of love?

He looked once more through the railings at the park's impenetrable, rustic night, at the lines of beaded lamps. He looked, and remembered another night, years ago, during the war, when there were no lights in the park and the electric moons above the roadway were in almost total eclipse. He had walked up this street alone, full of melancholy emotions which, though the cause of them was different, were in themselves much the same as the melancholy emotions which swelled windily up within him to-night. He had been most horribly in love.

'What did you think,' he asked abruptly, 'of Myra Viveash?'

'Think?' said Shearwater. 'I don't know that I thought very much about her. Not a case for ratiocination exactly, is she? She seemed to me entertaining enough, as women go. I said I'd lunch with her on Thursday.'

Gumbril felt, all of a sudden, the need to speak confidentially. 'There was a time,' he said in a tone that was quite unreally airy, off-hand and disengaged, 'years ago, when I totally lost my head about her. Totally.' Those tear-wet patches on his pillow, cold against his cheek in the darkness; and oh, the horrible pain of weeping, vainly, for something that was nothing, that was everything in the world! 'Towards the end of the war it was. I remember walking up this dismal street one night, in the pitch darkness, writhing with jealousy.' He was

silent. Spectrally, like a dim, haunting ghost, he had hung about her; dumbly, dumbly imploring, appealing. ‘The weak, silent man,’ she used to call him. And once for two or three days, out of pity, out of affection, out of a mere desire, perhaps, to lay the tiresome ghost, she had given him what his mournful silence implored — only to take it back, almost as soon as accorded. That other night, when he had walked up this street before, desire had eaten out his vitals and his body seemed empty, sickeningly and achingly void; jealousy was busily reminding him, with an unflagging malice, of her beauty — of her beauty and the hateful, ruffian hands which now caressed, the eyes which looked on it. That was all long ago.

‘She is certainly handsome,’ said Shearwater, commenting, at one or two removes, on Gumbril’s last remark. ‘I can see that she might make any one who got involved with her decidedly uncomfortable.’ After a day or two’s continuous sweating, it suddenly occurred to him, one might perhaps find sea-water more refreshing than fresh water. That would be queer.

Gumbril burst out ferociously laughing. ‘But there were other times,’ he went on jauntily, ‘when other people were jealous of me.’ Ah, revenge, revenge. In the better world of the imagination it was possible to get one’s own back. What fiendish vendettas were there carried to successful ends! ‘I remember once writing her a quatrain in French.’ (He had written it years after the whole thing was over, he had never sent it to any one at all; but that was all one.) ‘How did it go? Ah, yes.’ And he recited, with suitable gestures:

‘ ”Puisque nous sommes là, je dois
Vous avertir, sans trop de honte,
Que je n’égale pas le Comte
Casanovesque de Sixfois.”
Rather prettily turned, I flatter myself. Rather elegantly gross.’

Gumbril’s laughter went hooting past the Marble Arch. It stopped rather suddenly, however, at the corner of the Edgware Road. He had suddenly remembered Mr Mercaptan, and the thought depressed him.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS BETWEEN Whitfield Street and the Tottenham Court Road, in a ‘heavenly Mews’, as he liked to call it (for he had a characteristic weakness for philosophical paronomasia), that Casimir Lypiatt lived and worked. You passed under an archway of bald and sooty brick — and at night, when the green gas-lamp underneath the arch threw livid lights and enormous architectural shadows, you could fancy yourself at the entrance of one of Piranesi’s prisons — and you found yourself in a long cul-de-sac, flanked on either side by low buildings, having stabling for horses below and, less commodiously, stabling for human beings in the attics above. An old-fashioned smell of animals mingled with the more progressive stink of burnt oil. The air was a little thicker here, it seemed, than in the streets outside; looking down the mews on even the clearest day, you could see the forms of things dimming and softening, the colours growing richer and deeper with every yard of distance. It was the best place in the world, Lypiatt used to say, for studying aerial perspective; that was why he lived there. But you always felt about poor Lypiatt that he was facing misfortune with a jest a little too self-consciously.

Mrs Viveash’s taxi drove in under the Piranesian arch, drove in slowly and as though with a gingerly reluctance to soil its white wheels on pavements so sordid. The cabman looked round inquiringly.

‘This right?’ he asked.

With a white-gloved finger Mrs Viveash prodded the air two or three times, indicating that he was to drive straight on. Halfway down the mews she rapped the glass; the man drew up.

‘Never been down ’ere before,’ he said, for the sake of making a little conversation, while Mrs Viveash fumbled for her money. He looked at her with a polite and slightly ironic curiosity that was frankly mingled with admiration.

‘You’re lucky,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘We poor decayed gentlewomen — you see what we’re reduced to.’ And she handed him a florin.

Slowly the taxi-man unbuttoned his coat and put the coin away in an inner pocket. He watched her as she crossed the dirty street, placing her feet with a meticulous precision one after the other in the same straight line, as though she were treading a knife edge between goodness only knew what invisible gulfs. Floating she seemed to go, with a little spring at every step and the skirt of her summery dress — white it was, with a florid pattern printed in black all over it — blowing airily out around her swaying march. Decayed gentlewomen indeed! The driver started his machine with an unnecessary violence; he felt, for some reason, positively indignant.

Between the broad double-doors through which the horses passed to their fodder and repose were little narrow human doors — for the Yahoos, Lypiatt used to say in his large allusive way; and when he said it he laughed with the loud and bell-mouthed cynicism of one who sees himself as a misunderstood and embittered Prometheus. At one of these little Yahoo doors Mrs Viveash halted and rapped as loudly as a small and stiff-hinged knocker would permit. Patiently she waited; several small and dirty children collected to stare at her. She knocked again, and again waited. More children came running up from the farther end of the mews; two young girls of fifteen or sixteen appeared at a neighbouring doorway and immediately gave tongue in whoops of mirthless, hyena-like laughter.

‘Have you ever read about the Pied Piper of Hamelin?’ Mrs Viveash asked the nearest child. Terrified, it shrank away. ‘I thought not,’ she said, and knocked again.

There was a sound, at last, of heavy feet slowly descending steep stairs; the door opened.

‘Welcome to the palazzo!’ It was Lypiatt’s heroic formula of hospitality.

‘Welcome at last,’ Mrs Viveash corrected, and followed him up a narrow, dark staircase that was as steep as a ladder. He was dressed in a velveteen jacket

and linen trousers that should have been white, but needed washing. He was dishevelled and his hands were dirty.

‘Did you knock more than once?’ he asked, looking back over his shoulder.

‘More than twenty times,’ Mrs Viveash justifiably exaggerated.

‘I’m infinitely sorry,’ protested Lypiatt. ‘I get so deeply absorbed in my work, you know. Did you wait long?’

‘The children enjoyed it, at any rate.’ Mrs Viveash was irritated by a suspicion, which was probably, after all, quite unjustified, that Casimir had been rather consciously absorbed in his work; that he had heard her first knock and plunged the more profoundly into those depths of absorption where the true artist always dwells, or at any rate ought to dwell; to rise at her third appeal with a slow, pained reluctance, cursing, perhaps, at the importunity of a world which thus noisily interrupted the flow of his inspiration. ‘Queer, the way they stare at one,’ she went on, with a note in her dying voice of a petulance that the children had not inspired. ‘Does one look such a guy?’

Lypiatt threw open the door at the head of the stairs and stood there on the threshold, waiting for her. ‘Queer?’ he repeated. ‘Not a bit.’ And as she moved past him into the room, he laid his hand on her shoulder and fell into step with her, leaving the door to slam behind them. ‘Merely an example of the mob’s instinctive dislike of the aristocratic individual. That’s all. “Oh, why was I born with a different face?” Thank God I was, though. And so were you. But the difference has its disadvantages; the children throw stones.’

‘They didn’t throw stones.’ Mrs Viveash was too truthful, this time.

They halted in the middle of the studio. It was not a very large room and there were too many things in it. The easel stood near the centre of the studio; round it Lypiatt kept a space permanently cleared. There was a broad fairway leading to the door, and another, narrower and tortuously winding between boxes and piled-up furniture and tumbled books, gave access to his bed. There was a piano and a table permanently set with dirty plates and strewed with the relics of two or three meals. Bookshelves stood on either side of the fireplace, and lying on the floor were still more books, piles on dusty piles. Mrs Viveash stood looking

at the picture on the easel (abstract again — she didn't like it), and Lypiatt, who had dropped his hand from her shoulder, and had stepped back the better to see her, stood earnestly looking at Mrs Viveash.

'May I kiss you?' he asked after a silence.

Mrs Viveash turned towards him, smiling agonizingly, her eyebrows ironically lifted, her eyes steady and calm and palely, brightly inexpressive. 'If it really gives you any pleasure,' she said. 'It won't, I may say, to me.'

'You make me suffer a great deal,' said Lypiatt, and said it so quietly and unaffectedly, that Myra was almost startled; she was accustomed, with Casimir, to noisier and more magniloquent protestations.

'I'm very sorry,' she said; and, really, she felt sorry. 'But I can't help it, can I?'

'I suppose you can't,' he said. 'You can't,' he repeated, and his voice had now become the voice of Prometheus in his bitterness. 'Nor can tigresses.' He had begun to pace up and down the unobstructed fairway between his easel and the door; Lypiatt liked pacing while he talked. 'You like playing with the victim,' he went on; 'he must die slowly.'

Reassured, Mrs Viveash faintly smiled. This was the familiar Casimir. So long as he could talk like this, could talk like an old-fashioned French novel, it was all right; he couldn't really be so very unhappy. She sat down on the nearest unencumbered chair. Lypiatt continued to walk back and forth, waving his arms as he walked.

'But perhaps it's good for one to suffer,' he went on, 'perhaps it's unavoidable and necessary. Perhaps I ought to thank you. Can an artist do anything if he's happy? Would he ever want to do anything? What is art, after all, but a protest against the horrible inclemency of life?' He halted in front of her, with arms extended in a questioning gesture. Mrs Viveash slightly shrugged her shoulders. She really didn't know; she couldn't answer. 'Ah, but that's all nonsense,' he burst out again, 'all rot. I want to be happy and contented and successful; and of course I should work better if I were. And I want, oh, above everything, everything, I want you: to possess you completely and exclusively

and jealously and for ever. And the desire is like rust corroding my heart, it's like moth eating holes in the fabric of my mind. And you merely laugh.' He threw up his hands and let them limply fall again.

'But I don't laugh,' said Mrs Viveash. On the contrary, she was very sorry for him; and, what was more, he rather bored her. For a few days, once, she had thought she might be in love with him. His impetuosity had seemed a torrent strong enough to carry her away. She had found out her mistake very soon. After that he had rather amused her: and now he rather bored her. No, decidedly, she never laughed. She wondered why she still went on seeing him. Simply because one must see some one? or why? 'Are you going to go on with my portrait?' she asked.

Lypiatt sighed. 'Yes,' he said, 'I suppose I'd better be getting on with my work. Work — it's the only thing. "Portrait of a Tigress".' The cynical Titan spoke again. 'Or shall I call it, "Portrait of a Woman who has never been in Love"?'

'That would be a very stupid title,' said Mrs Viveash.

'Or, "Portrait of the Artist's Heart Disease"? That would be good, that would be damned good!' Lypiatt laughed very loudly and slapped his thighs. He looked, Mrs Viveash thought, peculiarly ugly when he laughed. His face seemed to go all to pieces; not a corner of it but was wrinkled and distorted by the violent grimace of mirth. Even the forehead was ruined when he laughed. Foreheads are generally the human part of people's faces. Let the nose twitch and the mouth grin and the eyes twinkle as monkeyishly as you like; the forehead can still be calm and serene, the forehead still knows how to be human. But when Casimir laughed, his forehead joined in the general disintegrating grimace. And sometimes even when he wasn't laughing, when he was just vivaciously talking, his forehead seemed to lose its calm and would twitch and wrinkle itself in a dreadful kind of agitation. 'Portrait of the Artist's Heart Disease' — she didn't find it so very funny.

'The critics would think it was a problem picture,' Lypiatt went on. 'And so it would be, by God, so it would be. You are a problem. You're the Sphinx. I wish

I were Œdipus and could kill you.'

All this mythology! Mrs Viveash shook her head.

He made his way through the intervening litter and picked up a canvas that was leaning with averted face against the wall near the window. He held it out at arm's length and examined it, his head critically cocked on one side. 'Oh, it's good,' he said softly. 'It's good. Look at it.' And, stepping out once more into the open, he propped it up against the table so that Mrs Viveash could see it without moving from her chair.

It was a stormy vision of her; it was Myra seen, so to speak, through a tornado. He had distorted her in the portrait, had made her longer and thinner than she really was, had turned her arms into sleek tubes and put a bright, metallic polish on the curve of her cheek. The figure in the portrait seemed to be leaning backwards a little from the surface of the canvas, leaning sideways too, with the twist of an ivory statuette carved out of the curving tip of a great tusk. Only somehow in Lypiatt's portrait the curve seemed to lack grace, it was without point, it had no sense.

'You've made me look,' said Mrs Viveash at last, 'as though I were being blown out of shape by the wind.' All this show of violence — what was the point of it? She didn't like it, she didn't like it at all. But Casimir was delighted with her comment. He slapped his thighs and once more laughed his restless, sharp-featured face to pieces.

'Yes, by God,' he shouted, 'by God, that's right! Blown out of shape by the wind. That's it: you've said it.' He began stamping up and down the room again, gesticulating. 'The wind, the great wind that's in me.' He struck his forehead. 'The wind of life, the wild west wind. I feel it inside me, blowing, blowing. It carries me along with it; for though it's inside me, it's more than I am, it's a force that comes from somewhere else, it's Life itself, it's God. It blows me along in the teeth of opposing fate, it makes me work on, fight on.' He was like a man who walks along a sinister road at night and sings to keep up his own spirits, to emphasize and magnify his own existence. 'And when I paint, when I write or improvise my music, it bends the things I have in my mind, it pushes

them in one direction, so that everything I do has the look of a tree that streams north-east with all its branches and all its trunk from the root upwards, as though it were trying to run from before the Atlantic gale.'

Lypiatt stretched out his two hands and, with fingers splayed out to the widest and trembling in the excessive tension of the muscles, moved them slowly upwards and sideways, as though he were running his palms up the stem of a little wind-wizened tree on a hilltop above the ocean.

Mrs Viveash continued to look at the unfinished portrait. It was as noisy and easy and immediately effective as a Vermouth advertisement in the streets of Padua. Cinzano, Bonomelli, Campari — illustrious names. Giotto and Mantegna mouldered meanwhile in their respective chapels.

'And look at this,' Lypiatt went on. He took down the canvas that was clamped to the easel and held it out for her inspection. It was one of Casimir's abstract paintings: a procession of machine-like forms rushing up diagonally from right to left across the canvas, with as it were a spray of energy blowing back from the crest of the wave towards the top right-hand corner. 'In this painting,' he said, 'I symbolize the Artist's conquering spirit — rushing on the universe, making it its own.' He began to declaim:

'Look down, Conquistador,
There on the valley's broad green floor,
There lies the lake, the jewelled cities gleam,
Chalco and Tlacopan
Await the coming Man;
Look down on Mexico, Conquistador,
Land of your golden dream.

Or the same idea in terms of music—' and Lypiatt dashed to the piano and evoked a distorted ghost of Scriabin. 'You see?' he asked feverishly, when the ghost was laid again and the sad cheap jangling had faded again into silence. 'You feel? The artist rushes on the world, conquers it, gives it beauty, imposes a moral significance.' He returned to the picture. 'This will be fine when it's finished,' he said. 'Tremendous. You feel the wind blowing there, too.' And

with a pointing finger he followed up the onrush of the forms. ‘The great south-wester driving them on. “Like leaves from an enchanter fleeing.” Only not chaotically, not in disorder. They’re blown, so to speak in column of four — by a conscious wind.’ He leaned the canvas against the table and was free again to march and brandish his conquering fists.

‘Life,’ he said, ‘life — that’s the great, essential thing. You’ve got to get life into your art, otherwise it’s nothing. And life only comes out of life, out of passion and feeling; it can’t come out of theories. That’s the stupidity of all this chatter about art for art’s sake and the æsthetic emotions and purely formal values and all that. It’s only the formal relations that matter; one subject is just as good as another — that’s the theory. You’ve only got to look at the pictures of the people who put it into practice to see that it won’t do. Life comes out of life. You must paint with passion, and the passion will stimulate your intellect to create the right formal relations. And to paint with passion, you must paint things that passionately interest you, moving things, human things. Nobody, except a mystical pantheist, like Van Gogh, can seriously be as much interested in napkins, apples and bottles as in his lover’s face, or the resurrection, or the destiny of man. Could Mantegna have devised his splendid compositions if he had painted arrangements of Chianti flasks and cheeses instead of Crucifixions, martyrs and triumphs of great men? Nobody but a fool could believe it. And could I have painted that portrait if I hadn’t loved you, if you weren’t killing me?’

Ah, Bonomelli and illustrious Cinzano!

‘Passionately I paint passion. I draw life out of life. And I wish them joy of their bottles and their Canadian apples and their muddy table napkins with the beastly folds in them that look like loops of tripe.’ Once more Lypiatt disintegrated himself with laughter; then was silent.

Mrs Viveash nodded, slowly and reflectively. ‘I think you’re right,’ she said. Yes, he was surely right; there must be life, life was the important thing. That was precisely why his paintings were so bad — she saw now; there was no life in them. Plenty of noise there was, and gesticulation and a violent galvanized

twitching; but no life, only the theatrical show of it. There was a flaw in the conduit; somewhere between the man and his work life leaked out. He protested too much. But it was no good; there was no disguising the deadness. Her portrait was a dancing mummy. He bored her now. Did she even positively dislike him? Behind her unchanging pale eyes Mrs Viveash wondered. But in any case, she reflected, one needn't always like the people with whom one associates. There are music-halls as well as confidential boudoirs; some people are admitted to the tea-party and the tête-à-tête, others, on a stage invisible, poor things! to themselves, do their little song-and-dance, roll out their characteristic patter, and having provided you with your entertainment are dismissed with their due share of applause. But then, what if they become boring?

'Well,' said Lypiatt at last — he had stood there, motionless, for a long time, biting his nails, 'I suppose we'd better begin our sitting.' He picked up the unfinished portrait and adjusted it on the easel. 'I've wasted a lot of time,' he said, 'and there isn't, after all, so much of it to waste.' He spoke gloomily, and his whole person had become, all of a sudden, curiously shrunken and deflated. 'There isn't so much of it,' he repeated, and sighed. 'I still think of myself as a young man, young and promising, don't you know. Casimir Lypiatt — it's a young, promising sort of name, isn't it? But I'm not young, I've passed the age of promise. Every now and then I realize it, and it's painful, it's depressing.'

Mrs Viveash stepped up on to the model's dais and took her seat. 'Is that right?' she asked.

Lypiatt looked first at her, then at his picture. Her beauty, his passion — were they only to meet on the canvas? Opps was her lover. Time was passing; he felt tired. 'That'll do,' he said, and began painting. 'How young are you?' he asked after a moment.

'Twenty-five, I should imagine,' said Mrs Viveash.

'Twenty-five? Good Lord, it's nearly fifteen years since I was twenty-five. Fifteen years, fighting all the time. God, how I hate people sometimes! Everybody. It's not their malignity I mind; I can give them back as good as they give me. It's their power of silence and indifference, it's their capacity for

making themselves deaf. Here am I with something to say to them, something important and essential. And I've been saying it for more than fifteen years, I've been shouting it. They pay no attention. I bring them my head and heart on a charger, and they don't even notice that the things are there. I sometimes wonder how much longer I can manage to go on.' His voice had become very low, and it trembled. 'One's nearly forty, you know. ...' The voice faded huskily away into silence. Languidly and as though the business exhausted him, he began mixing colours on his palette.

Mrs Viveash looked at him. No, he wasn't young; at the moment, indeed, he seemed to have become much older than he really was. An old man was standing there, peaked and sharp and worn. He had failed, he was unhappy. But the world would have been unjuster, less discriminating if it had given him success.

'Some people believe in you,' she said; there was nothing else for her to say.

Lypiatt looked up at her. 'You?' he asked.

Mrs Viveash nodded, deliberately. It was a lie. But was it possible to tell the truth? 'And then there is the future,' she reassured him, and her faint death-bed voice seemed to prophesy with a perfect certainty. 'You're not forty yet; you've got twenty, thirty years of work in front of you. And there were others, after all, who had to wait — a long time — sometimes till after they were dead. Great men; Blake, for instance. ...' She felt positively ashamed; it was like a little talk by Doctor Frank Crane. But she felt still more ashamed when she saw that Casimir had begun to cry, and that the tears were rolling, one after another, slowly down his face.

He put down his palette, he stepped on to the dais, he came and knelt at Mrs Viveash's feet. He took one of her hands between his own and he bent over it, pressing it to his forehead, as though it were a charm against unhappy thoughts, sometimes kissing it; soon it was wet with tears. He wept almost in silence.

'It's all right,' Mrs Viveash kept repeating, 'it's all right,' and she laid her free hand on his bowed head, she patted it comfortingly as one might pat the head of a large dog that comes and thrusts its muzzle between one's knees. She felt, even as she made it, how meaningless and unintimate the gesture was. If she

had liked him, she would have run her fingers through his hair; but somehow his hair rather disgusted her. ‘It’s all right, all right.’ But, of course, it wasn’t all right; and she was comforting him under false pretences and he was kneeling at the feet of somebody who simply wasn’t there — so utterly detached, so far away she was from all this scene and all his misery.

‘You’re the only person,’ he said at last, ‘who cares or understands.’

Mrs Viveash could almost have laughed.

He began once more to kiss her hand.

‘Beautiful and enchanting Myra — you were always that. But now you’re good and dear as well, now I know you’re kind.’

‘Poor Casimir!’ she said. Why was it that people always got involved in one’s life? If only one could manage things on the principle of the railways! Parallel tracks — that was the thing. For a few miles you’d be running at the same speed. There’d be delightful conversation out of the windows; you’d exchange the omelette in your restaurant car for the vol-au-vent in theirs. And when you’d said all there was to say, you’d put on a little more steam, wave your hand, blow a kiss and away you’d go, forging ahead along the smooth, polished rails. But instead of that, there were these dreadful accidents; the points were wrongly set, the trains came crashing together; or people jumped on as you were passing through the stations and made a nuisance of themselves and wouldn’t allow themselves to be turned off. Poor Casimir! But he irritated her, he was a horrible bore. She ought to have stopped seeing him.

‘You can’t wholly dislike me, then?’

‘But of course not, my poor Casimir!’

‘If you knew how horribly I loved you!’ He looked up at her despairingly.

‘But what’s the good?’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘Have you ever known what it’s like to love some one so much that you feel you could die of it? So that it hurts all the time. As though there were a wound. Have you ever known that?’

Mrs Viveash smiled her agonizing smile, nodded slowly and said, ‘Perhaps. And one doesn’t die, you know. One doesn’t die.’

Lypiatt was leaning back, staring fixedly up at her. The tears were dry on his face, his cheeks were flushed. ‘Do you know what it is,’ he asked, ‘to love so much that you begin to long for the anodyne of physical pain to quench the pain in the soul? You don’t know that.’ And suddenly, with his clenched fist, he began to bang the wooden dais on which he was kneeling, blow after blow, with all his strength.

Mrs Viveash leant forward and tried to arrest his hand. ‘You’re mad, Casimir,’ she said. ‘You’re mad. Don’t do that.’ She spoke with anger.

Lypiatt laughed till his face was all broken up with the grimace, and proffered for her inspection his bleeding knuckles. The skin hung in little white tags and tatters, and from below the blood was slowly oozing up to the surface. ‘Look,’ he said, and laughed again. Then suddenly, with an extraordinary agility, he jumped to his feet, bounded from the dais and began once more to stride up and down the fairway between his easel and the door.

‘By God,’ he kept repeating, ‘by God, by God. I feel it in me. I can face the whole lot of you; the whole damned lot. Yes, and I shall get the better of you yet. An Artist’ — he called up that traditional ghost and it comforted him; he wrapped himself with a protective gesture within the ample folds of its bright mantle— ‘an Artist doesn’t fail under unhappiness. He gets new strength from it. The torture makes him sweat new masterpieces. ...’

He began to talk about his books, his poems and pictures; all the great things in his head, the things he had already done. He talked about his exhibition — ah, by God, that would astonish them, that would bowl them over, this time. The blood mounted to his face; there was a flush over the high projecting cheek-bones. He could feel the warm blood behind his eyes. He laughed aloud; he was a laughing lion. He stretched out his arms; he was enormous, his arms reached out like the branches of a cedar. The Artist walked across the world and the mangy dogs ran yelping and snapping behind him. The great wind blew and blew, driving him on; it lifted him and he began to fly.

Mrs Viveash listened. It didn’t look as though he would get much further with the portrait.

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS PRESS Day. The critics had begun to arrive; Mr Albemarle circulated among them with a ducal amiability. The young assistant hovered vaguely about, straining to hear what the great men had to say and trying to pretend that he wasn't eavesdropping. Lypiatt's pictures hung on the walls, and Lypiatt's catalogue, thick with its preface and its explanatory notes, was in all hands.

'Very strong,' Mr Albemarle kept repeating, 'very strong indeed!' It was his password for the day.

Little Mr Clew, who represented the Daily Post, was inclined to be enthusiastic. 'How well he writes!' he said to Mr Albemarle, looking up from the catalogue. 'And how well he paints! What impasto!'

Impasto, impasto — the young assistant sidled off unobtrusively to the desk and made a note of it. He would look the word up in Grubb's Dictionary of Art and Artists later on. He made his way back, circuitously, and as though by accident, into Mr Clew's neighbourhood.

Mr Clew was one of those rare people who have a real passion for art. He loved painting, all painting, indiscriminately. In a picture-gallery he was like a Turk in a harem; he adored them all. He loved Memling as much as Raphael, he loved Grünewald and Michelangelo, Holman Hunt and Manet, Romney and Tintoretto; how happy he could be with all of them! Sometimes, it is true, he hated; but that was only when familiarity had not yet bred love. At the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition, for example, in 1911, he had taken a very firm stand. 'This is an obscene farce,' he had written then. Now, however, there was no more passionate admirer of Matisse's genius. As a connoisseur and kunstforscher, Mr Clew was much esteemed. People would bring him dirty old pictures to look at, and he would exclaim at once: Why, it's an El Greco, a Piazzetta, or some other suitable name. Asked how he knew, he would shrug his

shoulders and say: But it's signed all over. His certainty and his enthusiasm were infectious. Since the coming of El Greco into fashion, he had discovered dozens of early works by that great artist. For Lord Petersfield's collection alone he had found four early El Grecos, all by pupils of Bassano. Lord Petersfield's confidence in Mr Clew was unbounded; not even that affair of the Primitives had shaken it. It was a sad affair: Lord Petersfield's Duccio had shown signs of cracking; the estate carpenter was sent for to take a look at the panel; he had looked. 'A worse-seasoned piece of Illinois hickory,' he said, 'I've never seen.' After that he looked at the Simone Martini; for that, on the contrary, he was full of praise. Smooth-grained, well-seasoned — it wouldn't crack, no, not in a hundred years. 'A nicer slice of board never came out of America.' He had a hyperbolical way of speaking. Lord Petersfield was extremely angry; he dismissed the estate carpenter on the spot. After that he told Mr Clew that he wanted a Giorgione, and Mr Clew went out and found him one which was signed all over.

'I like this very much,' said Mr Clew, pointing to one of the thoughts with which Lypiatt had prefaced his catalogue. ' "Genius," ' he adjusted his spectacles and began to read aloud, ' "is life. Genius is a force of nature. In art, nothing else counts. The modern impotents, who are afraid of genius and who are envious of it, have invented in self-defence the notion of the Artist. The Artist with his sense of form, his style, his devotion to pure beauty, et cetera, et cetera. But Genius includes the Artist; every Genius has, among very many others, the qualities attributed by the impotents to the Artist. The Artist without genius is a carver of fountains through which no water flows." Very true,' said Mr Clew, 'very true indeed.' He marked the passage with his pencil.

Mr Albemarle produced the password. 'Very strongly put,' he said.

'I have always felt that myself,' said Mr Clew. 'El Greco, for example ...'

'Good morning. What about El Greco?' said a voice, all in one breath. The thin, long, skin-covered skeleton of Mr Mallard hung over them like a guilty conscience. Mr Mallard wrote every week in the Hebdomadal Digest. He had an immense knowledge of art, and a sincere dislike of all that was beautiful. The

only modern painter whom he really admired was Hodler. All others were treated by him with a merciless savagery; he tore them to pieces in his weekly articles with all the holy gusto of a Calvinist iconoclast smashing images of the Virgin.

‘What about El Greco?’ he repeated. He had a peculiarly passionate loathing of El Greco.

Mr Clew smiled up at him propitiatingly; he was afraid of Mr Mallard. His enthusiasms were no match for Mr Mallard’s erudite and logical disgusts. ‘I was merely quoting him as an example,’ he said.

‘An example, I hope, of incompetent drawing, baroque composition, disgusting forms, garish colouring and hysterical subject-matter.’ Mr Mallard showed his old ivory teeth in a menacing smile. ‘Those are the only things which El Greco’s work exemplifies.’

Mr Clew gave a nervous little laugh. ‘What do you think of these?’ he asked, pointing to Lypiatt’s canvases.

‘They look to me very ordinarily bad,’ answered Mr Mallard.

The young assistant listened appalled. In a business like this, how was it possible to make good?

‘All the same,’ said Mr Clew courageously, ‘I like that bowl of roses in the window with the landscape behind. Number twenty-nine.’ He looked in the catalogue. ‘And there’s a really charming little verse about it:

“O beauty of the rose,

Goodness as well as perfume exhaling!

Who gazes on these flowers,

On this blue hill and ripening field — he knows

Where duty leads and that the nameless Powers

In a rose can speak their will.”

Really charming!’ Mr Clew made another mark with his pencil.

‘But commonplace, commonplace.’ Mr Mallard shook his head. ‘And in any case a verse can’t justify a bad picture. What an unsubtle harmony of colour! And how uninteresting the composition is! That receding diagonal — it’s been

worked to death.’ He too made a mark in his catalogue — a cross and a little circle, arranged like the skull and cross-bones on a pirate’s flag. Mr Mallard’s catalogues were always covered with these little marks: they were his symbols of condemnation.

Mr Albemarle, meanwhile, had moved away to greet the new arrivals. To the critic of the Daily Cinema he had to explain that there were no portraits of celebrities. The reporter from the Evening Planet had to be told which were the best pictures.

‘Mr Lypiatt,’ he dictated, ’is a poet and philosopher as well as a painter. His catalogue is a — h’m — declaration of faith.’

The reporter took it down in shorthand. ‘And very nice too,’ he said. ‘I’m most grateful to you, sir, most grateful.’ And he hurried away, to get to the Cattle Show before the King should arrive. Mr Albemarle affably addressed himself to the critic of the Morning Globe.

‘I always regard this gallery,’ said a loud and cheerful voice, full of bulls and canaries in chorus, ‘as positively a mauvais lieu. Such exhibitions!’ And Mr Mercaptan shrugged his shoulders expressively. He halted to wait for his companion.

Mrs Viveash had lagged behind, reading the catalogue as she slowly walked along. ‘It’s a complete book,’ she said, ‘full of poems and essays and short stories even, so far as I can see.’

‘Oh, the usual cracker mottoes.’ Mr Mercaptan laughed. ‘I know the sort of thing. “Look after the past and the future will look after itself.” “God squared minus Man squared equals Art-plus-life times Art-minus-Life.” “The Higher the Art the fewer the morals” — only that’s too nearly good sense to have been invented by Lypiatt. But I know the sort of thing. I could go on like that for ever.’ Mr Mercaptan was delighted with himself.

‘I’ll read you one of them,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘ ”A picture is a chemical combination of plastic form and spiritual significance.” ’

‘Crikey!’ said Mr Mercaptan.

‘ ”Those who think that a picture is a matter of nothing but plastic form are like those who imagine that water is made of nothing but hydrogen.” ’

Mr Mercaptan made a grimace. ‘What writing!’ he exclaimed; ‘le style c’est l’homme. Lypiatt hasn’t got a style. Argal — inexorable conclusion — Lypiatt doesn’t exist. My word, though. Look at those horrible great nudes there. Like Caraccis with cubical muscles.’

‘Samson and Delilah,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘Would you like me to read about them?’

‘Certainly not.’

Mrs Viveash did not press the matter. Casimir, she thought, must have been thinking of her when he wrote this little poem about Poets and Women, crossed genius, torments, the sweating of masterpieces. She sighed. ‘Those leopards are rather nice,’ she said, and looked at the catalogue again. ‘ ”An animal is a symbol and its form is significant. In the long process of adaptation, evolution has refined and simplified and shaped, till every part of the animal expresses one desire, a single idea. Man, who has become what he is, not by specialization, but by generalization, symbolizes with his body no one thing. He is a symbol of everything from the most hideous and ferocious bestiality to godhead.” ’

‘Dear me,’ said Mr Mercaptan.

A canvas of mountains and enormous clouds like nascent sculptures presented itself.

‘ ”Aerial Alps” ’ Mrs Viveash began to read.

‘ ”Aerial Alps of amber and of snow,

Junonian flesh, and bosomy alabaster

Carved by the wind’s uncertain hands ...” ’

Mr Mercaptan stopped his ears. ‘Please, please,’ he begged.

‘Number seventeen,’ said Mrs Viveash, ’is called “Woman on a Cosmic Background.” ’ A female figure stood leaning against a pillar on a hilltop, and beyond was a blue night with stars. ‘Underneath is written: “For one at least, she is more than the starry universe.” ’ Mrs Viveash remembered that Lypiatt had once said very much that sort of thing to her. ‘So many of Casimir’s things

remind me,' she said, 'of those Italian vermouth advertisements. You know — Cinzano, Bonomelli and all those. I wish they didn't. This woman in white with her head in the Great Bear. ...' She shook her head. 'Poor Casimir.'

Mr Mercaptan roared and squealed with laughter. Bonomelli,' he said; 'that's precisely it. What a critic, Myra! I take off my hat.' They moved on. 'And what's this grand transformation scene?' he asked.

Mrs Viveash looked at the catalogue. 'It's called "The Sermon on the Mount",' she said. 'And really, do you know, I rather like it. All that crowd of figures slanting up the hill and the single figure on the top — it seems to me very dramatic.'

'My dear,' protested Mr Mercaptan.

'And in spite of everything,' said Mrs Viveash, feeling suddenly and uncomfortably that she had somehow been betraying the man, 'he's really very nice, you know. Very nice indeed.' Her expiring voice sounded very decidedly.

'Ah, ces femmes,' exclaimed Mr Mercaptan, 'ces femmes! They're all Pasiphaes and Ledas. They all in their hearts prefer beasts to men, savages to civilized beings. Even you, Myra, I really believe.' He shook his head.

Mrs Viveash ignored the outburst. 'Very nice,' she repeated thoughtfully. 'Only rather a bore ...' Her voice expired altogether.

They continued their round of the gallery.

CHAPTER VIII

CRITICALLY, IN THE glasses of Mr Bojanus's fitting-room, Gumbril examined his profile, his back view. Inflated, the Patent Small-Clothes bulged, bulged decidedly, though with a certain gracious opulence that might, in a person of the other sex, have seemed only deliciously natural. In him, however, Gumbril had to admit, the opulence seemed a little misplaced and paradoxical. Still, if one has to suffer in order to be beautiful, one must also expect to be ugly in order not to suffer. Practically, the trousers were a tremendous success. He sat down heavily on the hard wooden bench of the fitting-room and was received as though on a lap of bounding resiliency; the Patent Small-Clothes, there was no doubt, would be proof even against marble. And the coat, he comforted himself, would mask with its skirts the too decided bulge. Or if it didn't, well, there was no help for it. One must resign oneself to bulging, that was all.

'Very nice,' he declared at last.

Mr Bojanus, who had been watching his client in silence and with a polite but also, Gumbril could not help feeling, a somewhat ironical smile, coughed. 'It depends,' he said, 'precisely what you mean by "nice".' He cocked his head on one side, and the fine waxed end of his moustache was like a pointer aimed up at some remote star.

Gumbril said nothing, but catching sight once more of his own side view, nodded a dubious agreement.

'If by nice,' continued Mr Bojanus, 'you mean comfortable, well and good. If, however, you mean elegant, then, Mr Gumbril, I fear I must disagree.'

'But elegance,' said Gumbril, feebly playing the philosopher, 'is only relative, Mr Bojanus. There are certain African negroes among whom it is considered elegant to pierce the lips and distend them with wooden plates, until the mouth looks like a pelican's beak.'

Mr Bojanus placed his hand in his bosom and slightly bowed. ‘Very possibly, Mr Gumbril,’ he replied. ‘But if you’ll pardon my saying so, we are not African negroes.’

Gumbril was crushed, deservedly. He looked at himself again in the mirrors. ‘Do you object,’ he asked after a pause, ‘to all eccentricities in dress, Mr Bojanus? Would you put us all into your elegant uniform?’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Mr Bojanus. ‘There are certain walks of life in which eccentricity in appearance is positively a sine qua non, Mr Gumbril, and I might almost say de rigueur.’

‘And which walks of life, Mr Bojanus, may I ask? You refer, perhaps, to the artistic walks? Sombreros and Byronic collars and possibly velveteen trousers? Though all that sort of thing is surely a little out of date, nowadays.’

Enigmatically Mr Bojanus smiled, a playful Sphinx. He thrust his right hand deeper into his bosom and with his left twisted to a finer needle the point of his moustache. ‘Not artists, Mr Gumbril.’ He shook his head. ‘In practice they may show themselves a little eccentric and negleejay. But they have no need to look unusual on principle. It’s only the politicians who need do it on principle. It’s only de rigueur, as one might say, in the political walks, Mr Gumbril.’

‘You surprise me,’ said Gumbril. ‘I should have thought that it was to the politician’s interest to look respectable and normal.’

‘But it is still more to his interest as a leader of men to look distinguished,’ Mr Bojanus replied. ‘Well, not precisely distinguished,’ he corrected himself, ‘because that implies that politicians look distangay, which I regret to say, Mr Gumbril, they very often don’t. Distinguishable, is more what I mean.’

‘Eccentricity is their badge of office?’ suggested Gumbril. He sat down luxuriously on the Patent Small-Clothes.

‘That’s more like it,’ said Mr Bojanus, tilting his moustaches. ‘The leader has got to look different from the other ones. In the good old days they always wore their official badges. The leader ‘ad his livery, like every one else, to show who he was. That was sensible, Mr Gumbril. Nowadays he has no badge — at least not for ordinary occasions-for I don’t count Privy Councillors’ uniforms and all

that sort of once-a-year fancy dress. ‘E’s reduced to dressing in some eccentric way or making the most of the peculiarities of ’is personal appearance. A very ‘apazard method of doing things, Mr Gumbril, very ‘apazard.’

Gumbril agreed.

Mr Bojanus went on, making small, neat gestures as he spoke. ‘Some of them,’ he said, ‘wear ‘uge collars, like Mr Gladstone. Some wear orchids and eyeglasses, like Joe Chamberlain. Some let their ‘air grow, like Lloyd George. Some wear curious ‘ats, like Winston Churchill. Some put on black shirts, like this Mussolini, and some put on red ones, like Garibaldi. Some turn up their moustaches, like the German Emperor. Some turn them down, like Clemenceau. Some grow whiskers, like Tirpitz. I don’t speak of all the uniforms, orders, ornaments, ‘ead-dresses, feathers, crowns, buttons, tattooings, ear-rings, sashes, swords, trains, tiaras, urims, thummims and what not, Mr Gumbril, that ‘ave been used in the past and in other parts of the world to distinguish the leader. We, ‘oo know our ‘istory, Mr Gumbril, we know all about that.’

Gumbril made a deprecating gesture. ‘You speak for yourself, Mr Bojanus,’ he said.

Mr Bojanus bowed.

‘Pray continue,’ said Gumbril.

Mr Bojanus bowed again. ‘Well, Mr Gumbril,’ he said, ‘the point of all these things, as I’ve already remarked, is to make the leader look different, so that ’e can be recognized at the first coop d’oil, as you might say, by the ‘erd ’e ‘appens to be leading. For the ‘uman ‘erd, Mr Gumbril, is an ‘erd which can’t do without a leader. Sheep, for example: I never noticed that they ‘ad a leader; nor rooks. Bees, on the other ‘and, I take it, ‘ave. At least when they’re swarming. Correct me, Mr Gumbril, if I’m wrong. Natural ‘istory was never, as you might say, my forty.’

‘Nor mine,’ protested Gumbril.

‘As for elephants and wolves, Mr Gumbril, I can’t pretend to speak of them with first-’and knowledge. Nor llamas, nor locusts, nor squab pigeons, nor lemmings. But ‘uman beings, Mr Gumbril, those I can claim to talk of with

authority, if I may say so in all modesty, and not as the scribes. I ‘ave made a special study of them, Mr Gumbril. And my profession ‘as brought me into contact with very numerous specimens.’

Gumbril could not help wondering where precisely in Mr Bojanus’s museum he himself had his place.

‘The ‘uman ‘erd,’ Mr Bojanus went on, ‘must have a leader. And a leader must have something to distinguish him from the ‘erd. It’s important for ’is interests that he should be recognized easily. See a baby reaching out of a bath and you immediately think of Pears’ Soap; see the white ‘air waving out behind, and you think of Lloyd George. That’s the secret. But in my opinion, Mr Gumbril, the old system was much more sensible, give them regular uniforms and badges, I say; make Cabinet Ministers wear feathers in their ‘air. Then the people will be looking to a real fixed symbol of leadership, not to the peculiarities of the mere individuals. Beards and ‘air and funny collars change; but a good uniform is always the same. Give them feathers, that’s what I say, Mr Gumbril. Feathers will increase the dignity of the State and lessen the importance of the individual. And that,’ concluded Mr Bojanus with emphasis, ‘that, Mr Gumbril, will be all to the good.’

‘But you don’t mean to tell me,’ said Gumbril, ‘that if I chose to show myself to the multitude in my inflated trousers, I could become a leader — do you?’

‘Ah, no,’ said Mr Bojanus. ‘You’d ‘ave to ‘ave the talent for talking and ordering people about, to begin with. Feathers wouldn’t give the genius, but they’d magnify the effect of what there was.’

Gumbril got up and began to divest himself of the Small-Clothes. He unscrewed the valve and the air whistled out, dyingly. He too sighed. ‘Curious,’ he said pensively, ‘that I’ve never felt the need for a leader. I’ve never met any one I felt I could whole-heartedly admire or believe in, never any one I wanted to follow. It must be pleasant, I should think, to hand oneself over to somebody else. It must give you a warm, splendid, comfortable feeling.’

Mr Bojanus smiled and shook his head. ‘You and I, Mr Gumbril,’ he said, ‘we’re not the sort of people to be impressed with feathers or even by talking

and ordering about. We may not be leaders ourselves. But at any rate we aren't the 'erd.'

'Not the main herd, perhaps.'

'Not any 'erd,' Mr Bojanus insisted proudly.

Gumbril shook his head dubiously and buttoned up his trousers. He was not sure, now he came to think of it, that he didn't belong to all the herds — by a sort of honorary membership and temporarily, as occasion offered, as one belongs to the Union at the sister university or to the Naval and Military Club while one's own is having its annual clean-out. Shearwater's herd, Lypiatt's herd, Mr Mercaptan's herd, Mrs Viveash's herd, the architectural herd of his father, the educational herd (but that, thank God! was now bleating on distant pastures), the herd of Mr Bojanus — he belonged to them all a little, to none of them completely. Nobody belonged to his herd. How could they? No chameleon can live with comfort on a tartan. He put on his coat.

'I'll send the garments this evening,' said Mr Bojanus.

Gumbril left the shop. At the theatrical wig-maker's in Leicester Square he ordered a blond fan-shaped beard to match his own hair and moustache. He would, at any rate, be his own leader; he would wear a badge, a symbol of authority. And Coleman had said that there were dangerous relations to be entered into by the symbol's aid.

Ah, now he was provisionally a member of Coleman's herd. It was all very depressing.

CHAPTER IX

FAN-SHAPED, BLOND, MOUNTED on gauze and guaranteed undetectable, it arrived from the wig-maker, preciously packed in a stout cardboard box six times too large for it and accompanied by a quarter of a pint of the choicest spirit gum. In the privacy of his bedroom Gumbril uncoffined it, held it out for his own admiration, caressed its silkiness, and finally tried it on, holding it provisionally to his chin, in front of the looking-glass. The effect, he decided immediately, was stunning, was grandiose. From melancholy and all too mild he saw himself transformed on the instant into a sort of jovial Henry the Eighth, into a massive Rabelaisian man, broad and powerful and exuberant with vitality and hair.

The proportions of his face were startlingly altered. The podium, below the mouth, had been insufficiently massive to carry the stately order of the nose; and the ratiocinative attic of the forehead, noble enough, no doubt, in itself, had been disproportionately high. The beard now supplied the deficiencies in the stylobate, and planted now on a firm basement of will, the order of the senses, the aerial attic of ideas, reared themselves with a more classical harmoniousness of proportion. It only remained for him to order from Mr Bojanus an American coat, padded out at the shoulders as squarely and heroically as a doublet of the Cinquecento, and he would look the complete Rabelaisian man. Great eater, deep drinker, stout fighter, prodigious lover; clear thinker, creator of beauty, seeker of truth and prophet of heroic grandeurs. Fitted out with coat and beard, he could qualify for the next vacancy among the cœnobites of Thelema.

He removed his beard— ‘put his beaver up,’ as they used to say in the fine old days of chivalry; he would have to remember that little joke for Coleman’s benefit. He put his beaver up — ha, ha! — and stared ruefully at the far from Rabelaisian figure which now confronted him. The moustache — that was

genuine enough — which had looked, in conjunction with the splendid work of art below, so fierce and manly, served by itself, he now perceived, only droopily to emphasize his native mildness and melancholy.

It was a dismal affair, which might have belonged to Maurice Barrès in youth; a slanting, flagging, sagging thing, such as could only grow on the lip of an assiduous Cultivator of the Me, and would become, as one grew older, ludicrously out of place on the visage of a roaring Nationalist. If it weren't that it fitted in so splendidly with the beard, if it weren't that it became so marvellously different in the new context he had now discovered for it, he would have shaved it off then and there.

Mournful appendage. But now he would transform it, he would add to it its better half. Zadig's quatrain to his mistress, when the tablet on which it was written was broken in two, became a treasonable libel on the king. So this moustache, thought Gumbril, as gingerly he applied the spirit gum to his cheeks and chin, this moustache which by itself serves only to betray me, becomes, as soon as it is joined to its missing context, an amorous arm for the conquest of the fair sex.

A little far-fetched, he decided; a little ponderous. And besides, as so few people had read Zadig, not much use in conversation. Cautiously and with neat, meticulous finger-tips he adjusted the transformation to his gummed face, pressed it firmly, held it while it stuck fast. The portals of Thelema opened before him; he was free of those rich orchards, those halls and courts, those broad staircases winding in noble spirals within the flanks of each of the fair round towers. And it was Coleman who had pointed out the way; he felt duly grateful. One last look at the Complete Man, one final and definitive constatation that the Mild and Melancholy one was, for the time at least, no more; and he was ready in all confidence to set out. He selected a loose, light great-coat — not that he needed a coat at all, for the day was bright and warm; but until Mr Bojanus had done his labour of padding he would have to broaden himself out in this way, even if it did mean that he might be uncomfortably hot. To fall short of Complete Manhood for fear of a little inconvenience would be absurd. He

slipped, therefore, into his light coat — a toga, Mr Bojanus called it, a very neat toga in real West Country whipcord. He put on his broadest and blackest felt hat, for breadth above everything was what he needed to give him completeness — breadth of stature, breadth of mind, breadth of human sympathy, breadth of smile, breadth of humour, breadth of everything. The final touch was a massive and antique Malacca cane belonging to his father. If he had possessed a bulldog, he would have taken it out on a leash. But he did not. He issued into the sunshine, unaccompanied.

But unaccompanied he did not mean to remain for long. These warm, bright May days were wonderful days for being in love on. And to be alone on such days was like a malady. It was a malady from which the Mild and Melancholy Man suffered all too frequently. And yet there were millions of superfluous women in the country; millions of them. Every day, in the streets, one saw thousands of them passing; and some were exquisite, were ravishing, the only possible soul-mates. Thousands of unique soul-mates every day. The Mild and Melancholy one allowed them to pass — for ever. But to-day — to-day he was the complete and Rabelaisian man; he was bearded to the teeth; the imbecile game was at its height; there would be opportunities, and the Complete Man could know how to take them. No, he would not be unaccompanied for long.

Outside in the square the fourteen plane-trees glowed in their young, unsullied green. At the end of every street the golden muslin of the haze hung in an unwrinkled curtain that thinned away above the sky’s gauzy horizon to transparent nothing against the intenser blue. The dim, conch-like murmur that in a city is silence seemed hazily to identify itself with the golden mistiness of summer, and against this dim, wide background the yells of the playing children detached themselves, distinct and piercing. ‘Beaver,’ they shouted, ‘beaver!’ and, ‘Is it cold up there?’ Full of playful menace, the Complete Man shook at them his borrowed Malacca. He accepted their prompt hail as the most favourable of omens.

At the first tobacconist’s Gumbril bought the longest cigar he could find, and trailing behind him expiring blue wreaths of Cuban smoke, he made his way

slowly and with an ample swagger towards the park. It was there, under the elms, on the shores of the ornamental waters, that he expected to find his opportunity, that he intended — how confidently behind his Gargantuan mask! — to take it.

The opportunity offered itself sooner than he expected.

He had just turned into the Queen's Road and was sauntering past Whiteley's with the air of one who knows that he has a right to a good place, to two or three good places even, in the sun, when he noticed just in front of him, peering intently at the New Season's Models, a young woman whom in his mild and melancholy days he would have only hopelessly admired, but who now, to the Complete Man, seemed a destined and accessible prey. She was fairly tall, but seemed taller than she actually was, by reason of her remarkable slenderness. Not that she looked disagreeably thin, far from it. It was a rounded slenderness. The Complete Man decided to consider her as tubular — flexible and tubular, like a section of boa constrictor, should one say? She was dressed in clothes that emphasized this serpentine slimness: in a close-fitting grey jacket that buttoned up to the neck and a long, narrow grey skirt that came down to her ankles. On her head was a small, sleek black hat, that looked almost as though it were made of metal. It was trimmed on one side with a bunch of dull golden foliage.

Those golden leaves were the only touch of ornament in all the severe smoothness and unbroken tubularity of her person. As for her face, that was neither strictly beautiful nor strictly ugly, but combined elements of both beauty and ugliness into a whole that was unexpected, that was oddly and somehow unnaturally attractive.

Pretending, he too, to take an interest in the New Season's Models, Gumbril made, squinting sideways over the burning tip of his cigar, an inventory of her features. The forehead, that was mostly hidden by her hat; it might be pensively and serenely high, it might be of that degree of lowness which in men is villainous, but in women is only another — a rather rustic one perhaps, rather canaille even, but definitely another — attraction. There was no telling. As for her eyes, they were green, and limpid; set wide apart in her head, they looked out

from under heavy lids and through openings that slanted up towards the outer corners. Her nose was slightly aquiline. Her mouth was full-lipped, but straight and unexpectedly wide. Her chin was small, round and firm. She had a pale skin, a little flushed over the cheek-bones, which were prominent.

On the left cheek, close under the corner of the slanting eye, she had a brown mole. Such hair as Gumbril could see beneath her hat was pale and inconspicuously blond. When she had finished looking at the New Season's Models she moved slowly on, halting for a moment before the travelling-trunks and the fitted picnic-baskets; dwelling for a full minute over the corsets, passing the hats, for some reason, rather contemptuously, but pausing, which seemed strange, for a long pensive look at the cigars and wine. As for the tennis rackets and cricket bats, the school outfits and the gentleman's hosiery — she hadn't so much as a look for one of them. But how lovingly she lingered before the boots and shoes! Her own feet, the Complete Man noticed with satisfaction, had an elegance of florid curves. And while other folk walked on neat's leather she was content to be shod with nothing coarser than mottled serpent's skin.

Slowly they drifted up Queen's Road, lingering before every jeweller's, every antiquarian's, every milliner's on the way. The stranger gave him no opportunity, and indeed, Gumbril reflected, how should she? For the imbecile game on which he was relying is a travelling piquet for two players, not a game of patience. No sane human being could play it in solitude. He would have to make the opportunity himself.

All that was mild in him, all that was melancholy, shrank with a sickened reluctance from the task of breaking — with what consequences delicious and perilous in the future or, in the case of the deserved snub, immediately humiliating? — a silence which, by the tenth or twelfth shop window, had become quite unbearably significant. The Mild and Melancholy one would have drifted to the top of the road, sharing, with that community of tastes which is the basis of every happy union, her enthusiasm for brass candlesticks and toasting-forks, imitation Chippendale furniture, gold watch-bracelets and low-waisted summer frocks; would have drifted to the top of the road and watched her,

dumbly, disappearing for ever into the green park or along the blank pavements of the Bayswater Road; would have watched her for ever disappear and then, if the pubs had happened to be open, would have gone and ordered a glass of port, and sitting at the bar would have savoured, still dumbly, among the other drinkers, the muddy grapes of the Douro, and his own unique loneliness.

That was what the Mild and Melancholy one would have done. But the sight, as he gazed earnestly into an antiquary's window, of his own powerful bearded face reflected in a sham Heppelwhite mirror, reminded him that the Mild and Melancholy one was temporarily extinct, and that it was the Complete Man who now dawdled, smoking his long cigar, up the Queen's Road towards the Abbey of Thelema.

He squared his shoulders; in that loose toga of Mr Bojanus's he looked as copious as François Premier. The time, he decided, had come.

It was at this moment that the reflection of the stranger's face joined itself in the little mirror, as she made a little movement away from the Old Welsh dresser in the corner, to that of his own. She looked at the spurious Heppelwhite. Their eyes met in the hospitable glass. Gumbril smiled. The corners of the stranger's wide mouth seemed faintly to move; like petals of the magnolia, her eyelids came slowly down over her slanting eyes. Gumbril turned from the reflection to the reality.

'If you want to say Beaver,' he said, 'you may.'

The Complete Man had made his first speech.

'I want to say nothing,' said the stranger. She spoke with a charming precision and distinctness, lingering with a pretty emphasis on the n of nothing. 'N — n — nothing' — it sounded rather final. She turned away, she moved on.

But the Complete Man was not one to be put off by a mere ultimatum. 'There,' he said, falling into step with her, 'now I've had it — the deserved snub. Honour is saved, prestige duly upheld. Now we can get on with our conversation.'

The Mild and Melancholy one stood by, gasping with astonished admiration.

‘You are v — very impertinent,’ said the stranger, smiling and looking up from under the magnolia petals.

‘It is in my character,’ said the Complete Man. ‘You mustn’t blame me. One cannot escape from one’s heredity; that’s one’s share of original sin.’

‘There is always grace,’ said the stranger.

Gumbril caressed his beard. ‘True,’ he replied.

‘I advise you to pr — ray for it.’

His prayer, the Mild and Melancholy one reflected, had already been answered. The original sin in him had been self-corrected.

‘Here is another antique shop,’ said Gumbril. ‘Shall we stop and have a look at it?’

The stranger glanced at him doubtfully. But he looked quite serious. They stopped.

‘How revolting this sham cottage furniture is,’ Gumbril remarked. The shop, he noticed, was called ‘Ye Olde Farme House.’

The stranger, who had been on the point of saying how much she liked those lovely Old Welsh dressers, gave him her heartiest agreement. ‘So v — vulgar.’

‘So horribly refined. So refined and artistic.’

She laughed on a descending chromatic scale. This was excitingly new. Poor Aunt Aggie with her Arts and Crafts, and her old English furniture. And to think she had taken them so seriously! She saw in a flash the fastidious lady that she now was — with Louis whatever-it-was furniture at home, and jewels, and young poets to tea, and real artists. In the past, when she had imagined herself entertaining real artists, it had always been among really artistic furniture. Aunt Aggie’s furniture. But now — no, oh no. This man was probably an artist. His beard; and that big black hat. But not poor; very well dressed.

‘Yes, it’s funny to think that there are people who call that sort of thing artistic. One’s quite s — sorry for them,’ she added, with a little hiss.

‘You have a kind heart,’ said Gumbril. ‘I’m glad to see that.’

‘Not v — very kind, I’m af — fraid.’ She looked at him sideways, and significantly as the fastidious lady would have looked at one of the poets.

‘Well, kind enough, I hope,’ said the Complete Man. He was delighted with his new acquaintance.

Together they disembogued into the Bayswater Road. It was here, Gumbril reflected, that the Mild and Melancholy one would dumbly have slunk away to his glass of port and his loneliness among the alien topers at the bar. But the Complete Man took his new friend by the elbow, and steered her into the traffic. Together they crossed the road, together entered the park.

‘I still think you are v — very impertinent,’ said the lady. ‘What induced you to follow me?’

With a single comprehensive gesture, Gumbril indicated the sun, the sky, the green trees airily glittering, the grass, the emerald lights and violet shadows of the rustic distance. ‘On a day like this,’ he said, ‘how could I help it?’

‘Original sin?’

‘Oh,’ the Complete Man modestly shook his head, ‘I lay no claim to originality in this.’

The stranger laughed. This was nearly as good as a young poet at the tea-table. She was very glad that she’d decided, after all, to put on her best suit this afternoon, even if it was a little stuffy for the warmth of the day. He, too, she noticed, was wearing a great-coat; which seemed rather odd.

‘Is it original,’ he went on, ‘to go and tumble stupidly like an elephant into a pitfall, head over ears, at first sight ...?’

She looked at him sideways, then closed down the magnolia petals, and smiled. This was going to be the real thing — one of those long, those interminable, or, at any rate, indefinitely renewable conversations about love; witty, subtle, penetrating and bold, like the conversations in books, like the conversations across the tea-table between brilliant young poets and ladies of quality, grown fastidious through an excessive experience, fastidious and a little weary, but still, in their subtle way, insatiably curious.

‘Suppose we sit down,’ suggested Gumbril, and he pointed to a couple of green iron chairs, standing isolated in the middle of the grass close together and with their fronts slanting inwards a little towards one another in a position that

suggested a confidential intimacy. At the prospect of the conversation that, inevitably, was about to unroll itself, he felt decidedly less elated than did his new friend. If there was anything he disliked it was conversations about love. It bored him, oh, it bored him most horribly, this minute analysis of the passion that young women always seemed to expect one, at some point or other in one's relation with them, to make. How love alters the character for both good and bad; how physical passion need not be incompatible with the spiritual; how a hateful and tyrannous possessiveness can be allied in love with the most unselfish solicitude for the other party — oh, he knew all this and much more, so well, so well. And whether one can be in love with more than one person at a time, whether love can exist without jealousy, whether pity, affection, desire can in any way replace the full and genuine passion — how often he had had to thrash out these dreary questions!

And all the philosophic speculations were equally familiar, all the physiological and anthropological and psychological facts. In the theory of the subject he had ceased to take any interest. Unhappily, a discussion of the theory always seemed to be an essential preliminary to the practice of it. He sighed a little wearily as he took his seat on the green iron chair. But then, recollecting that he was now the Complete Man, and that the Complete Man must do everything with a flourish and a high hand, he leaned forward and, smiling with a charming insolence through his beard, began:

'Tiresias, you may remember, was granted the singular privilege of living both as a man and a woman.'

Ah, this was the genuine young poet. Supporting an elbow on the back of her chair and leaning her cheek against her hand, she disposed herself to listen and, where necessary, brilliantly to interpellate; it was through half-closed eyes that she looked at him, and she smiled faintly in a manner which she knew, from experience, to be enigmatic, and though a shade haughty, though a tiny bit mocking and ironical, exceedingly attractive.

An hour and a half later they were driving towards an address in Bloxam Gardens, Maida Vale. The name seemed vaguely familiar to Gumbril. Bloxam

Gardens — perhaps one of his aunts had lived there once?

‘It’s a dr — dreadful little maisonnette,’ she explained. ‘Full of awful things. We had to take it furnished. It’s so impossible to find anything now.’

Gumbril leaned back in his corner, wondering, as he studied that averted profile, who or what this young woman could be. She seemed to be in the obvious movement, to like the sort of things one would expect people to like; she seemed to be as highly civilized, in Mr Mercaptan’s rather technical sense of the term, as free of all prejudices as the great exponent of civilization himself.

She seemed, from her coolly dropped hints, to possess all the dangerous experience, all the assurance and easy ruthlessness of a great lady whose whole life is occupied in the interminable affairs of the heart, the senses and the head. But, by a strange contradiction, she seemed to find her life narrow and uninteresting. She had complained in so many words that her husband misunderstood and neglected her, had complained, by implication, that she knew very few interesting people.

The maisonnette in Bloxam Gardens was certainly not very splendid — six rooms on the second and third floors of a peeling stucco house. And the furniture — decidedly Hire Purchase. And the curtains and cretonnes — brightly ‘modern’, positively ‘futurist’.

‘What one has to put up with in furnished flats!’ The lady made a grimace as she ushered him into the sitting-room. And while she spoke the words, she really managed to persuade herself that the furniture wasn’t theirs, that they had found all this sordid stuff cluttering up the rooms, not chosen it, oh and with pains! themselves, not doggedly paid for it, month by month.

‘Our own things,’ she murmured vaguely, ‘are stored. In the Riviera.’ It was there, under the palms, among the gaudy melon flowers and the croupiers that the fastidious lady had last held her salon of young poets. In the Riviera — that would explain, now she came to think of it, a lot of things, if explanation ever became necessary.

The Complete Man nodded sympathetically. ‘Other people’s tastes,’ he held up his hands, they both laughed. ‘But why do we think of other people?’ he

added. And coming forward with a conquering impulsiveness, he took both her long, fine hands in his and raised them to his bearded mouth.

She looked at him for a second, then dropped her eyelids, took back her hands. ‘I must go and make the tea,’ she said. ‘The servants’ — the plural was a pardonable exaggeration— ‘are out.’

Gallantly, the Complete Man offered to come and help her. These scenes of intimate life had a charm all their own. But she would not allow it. ‘No, no,’ she was very firm, ‘I simply forbid you. You must stay here. I won’t be a moment,’ and she was gone, closing the door carefully behind her.

Left to himself, Gumbril sat down and filed his nails.

As for the young lady, she hurried along to her dingy little kitchen, lit the gas, put the kettle on, set out the teapot and the cups on a tray, and from the biscuit-box, where it was stored, took out the remains of a chocolate cake, which had already seen service at the day-before-yesterday’s tea-party. When all was ready here, she tip-toed across to her bedroom and sitting down at her dressing-table, began with hands that trembled a little with excitement to powder her nose and heighten the colour of her cheeks. Even after the last touch had been given, she still sat there, looking at her image in the glass.

The lady and the poet, she was thinking, the grande dame and the brilliant young man of genius. She liked young men with beards. But he was not an artist, in spite of the beard, in spite of the hat. He was a writer of sorts. So she gathered; but he was reticent, he was delightfully mysterious. She too, for that matter. The great lady slips out, masked, into the street; touches the young man’s sleeve: Come with me. She chooses, does not let herself passively be chosen. The young poet falls at her feet; she lifts him up. One is accustomed to this sort of thing.

She opened her jewel-box, took out all her rings — there were not many of them, alas! — and put them on. Two or three of them, on second thoughts, she took off again; they were a little, she suspected with a sudden qualm, in other people’s taste.

He was very clever, very artistic — only that seemed to be the wrong word to use; he seemed to know all the new things, all the interesting people. Perhaps he would introduce her to some of them. And he was so much at ease behind his knowledge, so well assured. But for her part, she felt pretty certain, she had made no stupid mistakes. She too had been, had looked at any rate — which was the important thing — very much at ease.

She liked young men with beards. They looked so Russian. Catherine of Russia had been one of the great ladies with caprices. Masked in the streets. Young poet, come with me. Or even, Young butcher's boy. But that, no, that was going too far, too low. Still, life, life — it was there to be lived — life — to be enjoyed. And now, and now? She was still wondering what would happen next, when the kettle, which was one of those funny ones which whistle when they come to the boil, began, fitfully at first, then, under full steam, unflaggingly, to sound its mournful, other-worldly note. She sighed and bestirred herself to attend to it.

'Let me help you.' Gumbril jumped up as she came into the room. 'What can I do?' He hovered rather ineptly round her.

The lady put down her tray on the little table. 'N — nothing,' she said.

'N — nothing?' he imitated her with a playful mockery. 'Am I good for n — nothing at all?' He took one of her hands and kissed it.

'Nothing that's of the l — least importance.' She sat down and began to pour out the tea.

The Complete Man also sat down. 'So to adore at first sight,' he asked, 'is not of the l — least importance?'

She shook her head, smiled, raised and lowered her eyelids. One was so well accustomed to this sort of thing; it had no importance. 'Sugar?' she asked. The young poet was safely there, sparkling across the tea-table. He offered love and she, with the easy heartlessness of one who is so well accustomed to this sort of thing, offered him sugar.

He nodded. 'Please. But if it's of no importance to you,' he went on, 'then I'll go away at once.'

The lady laughed her section of a descending chromatic scale. ‘Oh, no, you won’t,’ she said. ‘You can’t.’ And she felt that the grande dame had made a very fine stroke.

‘Quite right,’ the Complete Man replied; ‘I couldn’t.’ He stirred his tea. ‘But who are you,’ he looked up at her suddenly, ‘you devilish female?’ He was genuinely anxious to know; and besides, he was paying her a very pretty compliment. ‘What do you do with your dangerous existence?’

‘I enjoy life,’ she said. ‘I think one ought to enjoy life. Don’t you? I think it’s one’s first duty.’ She became quite grave. ‘One ought to enjoy every moment of it,’ she said. ‘Oh, passionately, adventurously, newly, excitingly, uniquely.’

The Complete Man laughed. ‘A conscientious hedonist. I see.’

She felt uncomfortably that the fastidious lady had not quite lived up to her character. She had spoken more like a young woman who finds life too dull and daily, and would like to get on to the cinema. ‘I am very conscientious,’ she said, making significant play with the magnolia petals and smiling her riddling smile. She must retrieve the Great Catherine’s reputation.

‘I could see that from the first,’ mocked the Complete Man with a triumphant insolence. ‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all.’

The fastidious lady only contemptuously smiled. ‘Have a little chocolate cake,’ she suggested. Her heart was beating. She wondered, she wondered.

There was a long silence. Gumbril finished his chocolate cake, gloomily drank his tea and did not speak. He found, all at once, that he had nothing to say. His jovial confidence seemed, for the moment, to have deserted him. He was only the Mild and Melancholy one foolishly disguised as a Complete Man; a sheep in beaver’s clothing. He entrenched himself behind his formidable silence and waited; waited, at first, sitting in his chair, then, when this total inactivity became unbearable, striding about the room.

She looked at him, for all her air of serene composure, with a certain disquiet. What on earth was he up to now? What could he be thinking about? Frowning like that, he looked like a young Jupiter, bearded and burly (though not, she noticed, quite so burly as he had appeared in his overcoat), making ready to

throw a thunderbolt. Perhaps he was thinking of her — suspecting her, seeing through the fastidious lady and feeling angry at her attempted deception. Or perhaps he was bored with her, perhaps he was wanting to go away. Well, let him go; she didn't mind. Or perhaps he was just made like that — a moody young poet; that seemed, on the whole, the most likely explanation; it was also the most pleasing and romantic. She waited. They both waited.

Gumbril looked at her and was put to shame by the spectacle of her quiet serenity. He must do something, he told himself; he must recover the Complete Man's lost morale. Desperately he came to a halt in front of the one decent picture hanging on the walls. It was an eighteenth-century engraving of Raphael's 'Transfiguration' — better, he always thought, in black and white than in its bleakly-coloured original.

'That's a nice engraving,' he said. 'Very nice.' The mere fact of having uttered at all was a great comfort to him, a real relief.

'Yes,' she said. 'That belongs to me. I found it in a second-hand shop, not far from here.'

'Photography,' he pronounced, with that temporary earnestness which made him seem an enthusiast about everything, 'is a mixed blessing. It has made it possible to reproduce pictures so easily and cheaply, that all the bad artists who were well occupied in the past, making engravings of good men's paintings, are now free to do bad original work of their own.' All this was terribly impersonal, he told himself, terribly off the point. He was losing ground. He must do something drastic to win it back. But what?

She came to his rescue. 'I bought another at the same time,' she said. ' "The Last Communion of St Jerome", by — who is it? I forget.'

'Ah, you mean Domenichino's "St Jerome"?' The Complete Man was afloat again. 'Poussin's favourite picture. Mine too, very nearly. I'd like to see that.'

'It's in my room, I'm afraid. But if you don't mind.'

He bowed. 'If you don't.'

She smiled graciously to him and got up. 'This way,' she said, and opened the door.

‘It’s a lovely picture,’ Gumbril went on, loquaciously now, behind her, as they walked down the dark corridor. ‘And besides, I have a sentimental attachment to it. There used to be a copy of an engraving of it at home, when I was a child. And I remember wondering and wondering — oh, it went on for years — every time I saw the picture; wondering why on earth that old bishop (for I did know it was a bishop) should be handing the naked old man a five-shilling piece.’

She opened a door; they were in her very pink room. Grave in its solemn and subtly harmonious beauty, the picture hung over the mantelpiece, hung there, among the photographs of the little friends of her own age, like some strange object from another world. From within that chipped gilt frame all the beauty, all the grandeur of religion looked darkly out upon the pink room. The little friends of her own age, all deliriously nubile, sweetly smiled, turned up their eyes, clasped Persian cats or stood jauntily, feet apart, hand in the breeches pocket of the land-girl’s uniform; the pink roses on the wallpaper, the pink and white curtains, the pink bed, the strawberry-coloured carpet, filled all the air with the rosy reflections of nakedness and life.

And utterly remote, absorbed in their grave, solemn ecstasy, the robed and mitred priest held out, the dying saint yearningly received, the body of the Son of God. The ministrants looked gravely on, the little angels looped in the air above a gravely triumphant festoon, the lion slept at the saint’s feet, and through the arch beyond, the eye travelled out over a quiet country of dark trees and hills.

‘There it is,’ she waved towards the mantelpiece.

But Gumbril had taken it all in long ago. ‘You see what I mean by the five-shilling piece.’ And stepping up to the picture, he pointed to the round bright wafer which the priest holds in his hand and whose averted disk is like the essential sun at the centre of the picture’s harmonious universe. ‘Those were the days of five-shilling pieces,’ he went on. ‘You’re probably too young to remember those large, lovely things. They came my way occasionally, and consecrated wafers didn’t. So you can understand how much the picture puzzled me. A bishop giving a naked old man five shillings in a church, with angels

fluttering overhead, and a lion sleeping in the foreground. It was obscure, it was horribly obscure.' He turned away from the picture and confronted his hostess, who was standing a little way behind him smiling enigmatically and invitingly.

'Obscure,' he repeated. 'But so is everything. So is life in general. And you,' he stepped towards her, 'you in particular.'

'Am I?' she lifted her limpid eyes at him. Oh, how her heart was beating, how hard it was to be the fastidious lady, calmly satisfying her caprice. How difficult it was to be accustomed to this sort of thing. What was going to happen next?

What happened next was that the Complete Man came still closer, put his arms round her, as though he were inviting her to the fox-trot, and began kissing her with a startling violence. His beard tickled her neck; shivering a little, she brought down the magnolia petals across her eyes. The Complete Man lifted her up, walked across the room carrying the fastidious lady in his arms and deposited her on the rosy catafalque of the bed. Lying there with her eyes shut, she did her best to pretend she was dead.

Gumbril had looked at his wrist watch and found that it was six o'clock. Already? He prepared himself to take his departure. Wrapped in a pink kimono, she came out into the hall to wish him farewell.

'When shall I see you again, Rosie?' He had learnt that her name was Rosie.

She had recovered her great lady's equanimity and detachment, and was able to shrug her shoulders and smile. 'How should I know?' she asked, implying that she could not foresee what her caprice might be an hour hence.

'May I write, then, and ask one of these days if you do know?'

She put her head on one side and raised her eyebrows, doubtfully. At last nodded. 'Yes, you can write,' she permitted.

'Good,' said the Complete Man, and picked up his wide hat. She held out her hand to him with stateliness, and with a formal gallantry he kissed it. He was just closing the front door behind him, when he remembered something. He turned round. 'I say,' he called after the retreating pink kimono. 'It's rather absurd. But how can I write? I don't know your name. I can't just address it "Rosie".'

The great lady laughed delightedly. This had the real capriccio flavour. ‘Wait,’ she said, and she ran into the sitting-room. She was back again in a moment with an oblong of pasteboard. ‘There,’ she said, and dropped it into his great-coat pocket. Then blowing a kiss she was gone.

The Complete Man closed the door and descended the stairs. Well, well, he said to himself; well, well. He put his hand in his coat pocket and took out the card. In the dim light of the staircase he read the name on it with some difficulty. Mrs James — but no, but no. He read again, straining his eyes; there was no question of it. Mrs James Shearwater.

Mrs James Shearwater.

That was why he had vaguely known the name of Bloxam Gardens.

Mrs James Shear — . Step after step he descended, ponderously. ‘Good Lord,’ he said out loud. ‘Good Lord.’

But why had he never seen her? Why did Shearwater never produce her? Now he came to think of it, he hardly ever spoke of her.

Why had she said the flat wasn’t theirs? It was; he had heard Shearwater talk about it.

Did she make a habit of this sort of thing?

Could Shearwater be wholly unaware of what she was really like? But, for that matter, what was she really like?

He was half-way down the last flight, when with a rattle and a squeak of hinges the door of the house, which was only separated by a short lobby from the foot of the stairs, opened, revealing, on the doorstep, Shearwater and a friend, eagerly talking.

‘... I take my rabbit,’ the friend was saying — he was a young man with dark, protruding eyes, and staring, doggy nostrils; very eager, lively and loud. ‘I take my rabbit and I inject into it the solution of eyes, pulped eyes of another dead rabbit. You see?’

Gumbril’s first instinct was to rush up the stairs and hide in the first likely-looking corner. But he pulled himself together at once. He was a Complete Man,

and Complete Men do not hide; moreover, he was sufficiently disguised to be quite unrecognizable. He stood where he was, and listened to the conversation.

‘The rabbit,’ continued the young man, and with his bright eyes and staring, sniffing nose, he looked like a poacher’s terrier ready to go barking after the first white tail that passed his way; ‘the rabbit naturally develops the appropriate resistance, develops a specific anti-eye to protect itself. I then take some of its anti-eye serum and inject it into my female rabbit; I then immediately breed from her.’ He paused.

‘Well?’ asked Shearwater, in his slow, ponderous way. He lifted his great round head inquiringly and looked at the doggy young man from under his bushy eyebrows.

The doggy young man smiled triumphantly. ‘The young ones,’ he said, emphasizing his words by striking his right fist against the extended palm of his left hand, ‘the young ones are born with defective sight.’

Thoughtfully Shearwater pulled at his formidable moustache. ‘H’m,’ he said slowly. ‘Very remarkable.’

‘You realize the full significance of it?’ asked the young man. ‘We seem to be affecting the germ-plasm directly. We have found a way of making acquired characteristics ...’

‘Pardon me,’ said Gumbril. He had decided that it was time to be gone. He ran down the stairs and across the tiled hall, he pushed his way firmly but politely between the talkers.

‘... heritable,’ continued the young man, imperturbably eager, speaking through and over and round the obstacle.

‘Damn!’ said Shearwater. The Complete Man had trodden on his toe. ‘Sorry,’ he added, absent-mindedly apologizing for the injury he had received.

Gumbril hurried off along the street. ‘If we really have found out a technique for influencing the germ-plasm directly ...’ he heard the doggy young man saying; but he was already too far away to catch the rest of the sentence. There are many ways, he reflected, of spending an afternoon.

The doggy young man refused to come in, he had to get in his game of tennis before dinner. Shearwater climbed the stairs alone. He was taking off his hat in the little hall of his own apartment, when Rosie came out of the sitting-room with a trayful of tea-things.

‘Well?’ he asked, kissing her affectionately on the forehead. ‘Well? People to tea?’

‘Only one,’ Rosie replied. ‘I’ll go and make you a fresh cup.’

She glided off, rustling in her pink kimono towards the kitchen.

Shearwater sat down in the sitting-room. He had brought home with him from the library the fifteenth volume of the Journal of Biochemistry. There was something in it he wanted to look up. He turned over the pages. Ah, here it was. He began reading. Rosie came back again.

‘Here’s your tea,’ she said.

He thanked her without looking up. The tea grew cold on the little table at his side.

Lying on the sofa, Rosie pondered and remembered. Had the events of the afternoon, she asked herself, really happened? They seemed very improbable and remote, now, in this studious silence. She couldn’t help feeling a little disappointed. Was it only this? So simple and obvious? She tried to work herself up into a more exalted mood. She even tried to feel guilty; but there she failed completely. She tried to feel rapturous; but without much more success. Still, he certainly had been a most extraordinary man. Such impudence, and at the same time such delicacy and tact.

It was a pity she couldn’t afford to change the furniture. She saw now that it wouldn’t do at all. She would go and tell Aunt Aggie about the dreadful middle-classness of her Art and Craftiness.

She ought to have an Empire chaise longue. Like Madame Récamier. She could see herself lying there, dispensing tea. ‘Like a delicious pink snake.’ He had called her that.

Well, really, now she came to think of it all again, it had been too queer, too queer.

‘What’s a hedonist?’ she suddenly asked.

Shearwater looked up from the Journal of Biochemistry. ‘What?’ he said.

‘A hedonist.’

‘A man who holds that the end of life is pleasure.’

A ‘conscientious hedonist’ — ah, that was good.

‘This tea is cold,’ Shearwater remarked.

‘You should have drunk it before,’ she said. The silence renewed and prolonged itself.

Rosie was getting much better, Shearwater reflected, as he washed his hands before supper, about not interrupting him when he was busy. This evening she had really not disturbed him at all, or at most only once, and that not seriously. There had been times in the past when the child had really made life almost impossible. There were those months at the beginning of their married life, when she had thought she would like to study physiology herself and be a help to him. He remembered the hours he had spent trying to teach her elementary facts about the chromosomes. It had been a great relief when she abandoned the attempt. He had suggested she should go in for stencilling patterns on Government linen. Such pretty curtains and things one could make like that. But she hadn’t taken very kindly to the idea. There had followed a long period when she seemed to have nothing to do but prevent him from doing anything. Ringing him up at the laboratory, invading his study, sitting on his knee, or throwing her arms round his neck, or pulling his hair, or asking ridiculous questions when he was trying to work.

Shearwater flattered himself that he had been extremely patient. He had never got cross. He had just gone on as though she weren’t there. As though she weren’t there.

‘Hurry up,’ he heard her calling. ‘The soup’s getting cold.’

‘Coming,’ he shouted back, and began to dry his large, blunt hands.

She seemed to have been improving lately. And to-night, to-night she had been a model of non-existence.

He came striding heavily into the dining-room. Rosie was sitting at the head of the table, ladling out the soup. With her left hand she held back the flowing pink sleeve of her kimono so that it should not trail in the plates or the tureen. Her bare arm showed white and pearly through the steam of lentils.

How pretty she was! He could not resist the temptation, but coming up behind her bent down and kissed her, rather clumsily, on the back of her neck.

Rosie drew away from him. ‘Really, Jim,’ she said, disapprovingly. ‘At meal-times!’ The fastidious lady had to draw the line at these ill-timed, tumbling familiarities.

‘And what about work-times?’ Shearwater asked laughing. ‘Still, you were wonderful this evening, Rosie, quite wonderful.’ He sat down and began eating his soup. ‘Not a sound all the time I was reading; or, at any rate, only one sound, so far as I remember.’

The great lady said nothing, but only smiled — a little contemptuously and with a touch of pity. She pushed away the plate of soup unfinished and planted her elbows on the table. Slipping her hands under the sleeves of her kimono, she began, lightly, delicately, with the tips of her fingers, to caress her own arms.

How smooth they were, how soft and warm and how secret under the sleeves. And all her body was as smooth and warm, was as soft and secret, still more secret beneath the pink folds. Like a warm serpent hidden away, secretly, secretly.

CHAPTER X

MR BOLDERO LIKED the idea of the Patent Small-Clothes. He liked it immensely, he said, immensely.

‘There’s money in it,’ he said.

Mr Boldero was a small dark man of about forty-five, active as a bird and with a bird’s brown, beady eyes, a bird’s sharp nose. He was always busy, always had twenty different irons in the fire at once, was always fresh, clear-headed, never tired. He was also always unpunctual, always untidy. He had no sense of time or of order. But he got away with it, as he liked to say. He delivered the goods — or rather the goods, in the convenient form of cash, delivered themselves, almost miraculously it always seemed, to him.

He was like a bird in appearance. But in mind, Gumbril found, after having seen him once or twice, he was like a caterpillar: he ate all that was put before him, he consumed a hundred times his own mental weight every day. Other people’s ideas, other people’s knowledge — they were his food. He devoured them and they were at once his own. All that belonged to other people he annexed without a scruple or a second thought, quite naturally, as though it were already his own. And he absorbed it so rapidly and completely, he laid public claim to it so promptly that he sometimes deceived people into believing that he had really anticipated them in their ideas, that he had known for years and years the things they had just been telling him, and which he would at once airily repeat to them with the perfect assurance of one who knows — knows by instinct, as it were, by inheritance.

At their first luncheon he had asked Gumbril to tell him all about modern painting. Gumbril had given him a brief lecture; before the savoury had appeared on the table, Mr Boldero was talking with perfect familiarity of Picasso and Derain. He almost made it understood that he had a fine collection of their works

in his drawing-room at home. Being a trifle deaf, however, he was not very good at names, and Gumbril's all-too-tactful corrections were lost on him. He could not be induced to abandon his Bacosso in favour of any other version of the Spaniard's name. Bacosso — why, he had known all about Bacosso since he was a schoolboy! Bacosso was an old master, already.

Mr Boldero was very severe with the waiters and knew so well how things ought to be done at a good restaurant, that Gumbril felt sure he must recently have lunched with some meticulous gormandizer of the old school. And when the waiter made as though to serve them with brandy in small glasses, Mr Boldero was so passionately indignant that he sent for the manager.

'Do you mean to tell me,' he shouted in a perfect frenzy of righteous anger, 'that you don't yet know how brandy ought to be drunk?'

Perhaps it was only last week that he himself, Gumbril reflected, had learned to aerate his cognac in Gargantuan beakers.

Meanwhile, of course, the Patent Small-Clothes were not neglected. As soon as he had been told about the things, Mr Boldero began speaking of them with a perfect and practised familiarity. They were already his, mentally his. And it was only Mr Boldero's generosity that prevented him from making the Small-Clothes more effectively his own.

'If it weren't for the friendship and respect which I feel for your father, Mr Gumbril,' he said, twinkling genially over the brandy, 'I'd just annex your Small-Clothes. Bag and baggage. Just annex them.'

'Ah, but they're my patent,' said Gumbril. 'Or at least they're in process of being patented. The agents are at work.'

Mr Boldero laughed. 'Do you suppose that would trouble me if I wanted to be unscrupulous? I'd just take the idea and manufacture the article. You'd bring an action. I'd have it defended with all the professional erudition that could be brought. You'd find yourself let in for a case that might cost thousands. And how would you pay for it? You'd be forced to come to an agreement out of court, Mr Gumbril. That's what you'd have to do. And a damned bad agreement it would be for you, I can tell you.' Mr Boldero laughed very cheerfully at the

thought of the badness of this agreement. ‘But don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘I shan’t do it, you know.’

Gumbril was not wholly reassured. Tactfully, he tried to find out what terms Mr Boldero was prepared to offer. Mr Boldero was nebulously vague.

They met again in Gumbril’s rooms. The contemporary drawings on the walls reminded Mr Boldero that he was now an art expert. He told Gumbril all about it — in Gumbril’s own words. Every now and then, it was true, Mr Boldero made a little slip. Bacosso, for example, remained unshakably Bacosso. But on the whole the performance was most impressive. It made Gumbril feel very uncomfortable, however, while it lasted. For he recognized in this characteristic of Mr Boldero a horrible caricature of himself. He too was an assimilator; more discriminating, no doubt, more tactful, knowing better than Mr Boldero how to turn the assimilated experience into something new and truly his own; but still a caterpillar, definitely a caterpillar. He began studying Mr Boldero with a close and disgustful attention, as one might pore over some repulsive memento mori.

It was a relief when Mr Boldero stopped talking art and consented to get down to business. Gumbril was wearing for the occasion the sample pair of Small-Clothes which Mr Bojanus had made for him. For Mr Boldero’s benefit he put them, so to speak, through their paces. He allowed himself to drop with a bump on to the floor — arriving there bruiseless and unjarred. He sat in complete comfort for minutes at a stretch on the edge of the ornamental iron fender. In the intervals he paraded up and down before Mr Boldero like a mannequin. ‘A trifle bulgy,’ said Mr Boldero. ‘But still ...’ He was, taking it all round, favourably impressed. It was time, he said, to begin thinking of details. They would have to begin by making experiments with the bladders to discover a model combining, as Mr Boldero put it, ‘maximum efficiency with minimum bulge’. When they had found the right thing, they would have it made in suitable quantities by any good rubber firm. As for the trousers themselves, they could rely for those on sweated female labour in the East End. ‘Cheap and good,’ said Mr Boldero.

‘It sounds ideal,’ said Gumbril.

‘And then,’ said Mr Boldero, ‘there’s our advertising campaign. On that I may say,’ he went on with a certain solemnity, ‘will depend the failure or success of our enterprise. I consider it of the first importance.’

‘Quite,’ said Gumbril, nodding importantly and with intelligence.

‘We must set to work,’ said Mr Boldero, ‘sci — en — tifically.’

Gumbril nodded again.

‘We have to appeal,’ Mr Boldero went on so glibly that Gumbril felt sure he must be quoting somebody else’s words, ‘to the great instincts and feelings of humanity. ... They are the sources of action. They spend the money, if I may put it like that.’

‘That’s all very well,’ said Gumbril. ‘But how do you propose to appeal to the most important of the instincts? I refer, as you may well imagine, to sex.’

‘I was just going to come to that,’ said Mr Boldero, raising his hand as though to ask for a patient hearing. ‘Alas! we can’t. I don’t see any way of hanging our Small-Clothes on the sexual peg.’

‘Then we are undone,’ said Gumbril, too dramatically.

‘No, no,’ Mr Boldero was reassuring. ‘You make the error of the Viennese. You exaggerate the importance of sex. After all, my dear Mr Gumbril, there is also the instinct of self-preservation; there is also,’ he leaned forward, wagging his finger, ‘the social instinct, the instinct of the herd.’

‘True.’

‘Both of them as powerful as sex. What are the Professor’s famous Censors but forbidding suggestions from the herd without, made powerful and entrenched by the social instinct within?’

Gumbril had no answer; Mr Boldero continued, smiling:

‘So that we shall be all right if we stick to self-preservation and the herd. Rub in the comfort and the utility, the hygienic virtues of our Small-Clothes; that will catch their self-preservatory feelings. Aim at their dread of public opinion, at their ambition to be one better than their fellows and their terror of being different — at all the ludicrous weaknesses a well-developed social instinct exposes them to. We shall get them, if we set to work scientifically.’ Mr

Boldero's bird-like eyes twinkled very brightly. 'We shall get them,' he repeated, and he laughed a happy little laugh, full of such a childlike diabolism, such an innocent gay malignity, that it seemed as though a little leprechaun had suddenly taken the financier's place in Gumbril's best arm-chair.

Gumbril laughed too; for this leprechaunish mirth was infectious. 'We shall get them,' he echoed. 'Oh, I'm sure we shall, if you set about it, Mr Boldero.'

Mr Boldero acknowledged the compliment with a smile that expressed no false humility. It was his due, and he knew it.

'I'll give you some of my ideas about the advertising campaign,' he said. 'Just to give you a notion. You can think them over, quietly, and make suggestions.'

'Yes, yes,' said Gumbril, nodding.

Mr Boldero cleared his throat. 'We shall begin,' he said, 'by making the most simple elementary appeal to their instinct of self-preservation: we shall point out that the Patent Small-Clothes are comfortable; that to wear them is to avoid pain. A few striking slogans about comfort — that's all we want. Very simple indeed. It doesn't take much to persuade a man that it's pleasanter to sit on air than on wood. But while we're on the subject of hard seats we shall have to glide off subtly at a tangent to make a flank attack on the social instincts.' And joining the tip of his forefinger to the tip of his thumb, Mr Boldero moved his hand delicately sideways, as though he were sliding it along a smooth brass rail. 'We shall have to speak about the glories and the trials of sedentary labour. We must exalt its spiritual dignity and at the same time condemn its physical discomforts. "The seat of honour", don't you know. We could talk about that. "The Seats of the Mighty." "The seat that rules the office rocks the world." All those lines might be made something of. And then we could have little historical chats about thrones; how dignified, but how uncomfortable they've been. We must make the bank clerk and the civil servant feel proud of being what they are and at the same time feel ashamed that, being such splendid people, they should have to submit to the indignity of having blistered hind-quarters. In modern advertising you must flatter your public — not in the oily, abject, tradesman-like style of the old

advertisers, crawling before clients who were their social superiors; that's all over now. It's we who are the social superiors — because we've got more money than the bank clerks and the civil servants. Our modern flattery must be manly, straight-forward, sincere, the admiration of equal for equal — all the more flattering as we aren't equals.' Mr Boldero laid a finger to his nose. 'They're dirt and we're capitalists. ...' He laughed.

Gumbril laughed too. It was the first time that he had ever thought of himself as a capitalist, and the thought was exhilarating.

'We flatter them,' went on Mr Boldero. 'We say that honest work is glorious and ennobling — which it isn't; it's merely dull and cretinizing. And then we go on to suggest that it would be finer still, more ennobling, because less uncomfortable, if they wore Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes. You see the line?'

Gumbril saw the line.

'After that,' said Mr Boldero, 'we get on to the medical side of the matter. The medical side, Mr Gumbril — that's most important. Nobody feels really well nowadays — at any rate, nobody who lives in a big town and does the kind of loathsome work that the people we're catering for does. Keeping this fact before our eyes, we have to make it clear that only those can expect to be healthy who wear pneumatic trousers.'

'That will be a little difficult, won't it?' questioned Gumbril.

'Not a bit of it!' Mr Boldero laughed with an infectious confidence. 'All we have to do is to talk about the great nerve-centres of the spine: the shocks they get when you sit down too hard; the wearing exhaustion to which long-protracted sitting on unpadded seats subjects them. We'll have to talk very scientifically about the great lumbar ganglia — if there are such things, which I really don't pretend to know. We'll even talk almost mystically about the ganglia. You know that sort of ganglion philosophy?'

Mr Boldero went on parenthetically. 'Very interesting it is, sometimes, I think. We could put in a lot about the dark, powerful sense-life, sex-life, instinct-life which is controlled by the lumbar ganglion. How important it is that that shouldn't be damaged. That already our modern conditions of civilization tend

unduly to develop the intellect and the thoracic ganglia controlling the higher emotions. That we're wearing out, growing feeble, losing our balance in consequence. And that the only cure — if we are to continue our present mode of civilized life — is to be found in Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes.' Mr Boldero brought his hand with an emphatic smack on to the table as he spoke, as he fairly shouted these last words.

'Magnificent,' said Gumbril, with genuine admiration.

'This sort of medical and philosophical dope,' Mr Boldero went on, 'is always very effective, if it's properly used. The public to whom we are making our appeal is, of course, almost absolutely ignorant on these, or, indeed, on almost all other subjects. It is therefore very much impressed by the unfamiliar words; particularly if they have such a good juicy sound as the word "ganglia".'

'There was a young man of East Anglia, whose loins were a tangle of ganglia,' murmured Gumbril, improvvisatore.

'Precisely,' said Mr Boldero. 'Precisely. You see how juicy it is? Well, as I say, they're impressed. And they're also grateful. They're grateful to us for having given them a piece of abstruse, unlikely information which they can pass on to their wives, or to such friends as they know don't read the paper in which our advertisement appears — can pass on airily, don't you know, with easy erudition, as though they'd known all about ganglia from their childhood. And they'll feel such a flow of superiority as they hand on the metaphysics and the pathology, that they'll always think of us with affection. They'll buy our breeks and they'll get other people to buy. That's why,' Mr Boldero went off again on an instructive tangent, 'that's why the day of secret patent medicines is really over. It's no good saying you have rediscovered some secret known only, in the past, to the Egyptians. People don't know anything about Egyptology; but they have an inkling that such a science exists. And that if it does exist, it's unlikely that patent-medicine makers should have found out facts unknown to the professors at the universities. And it's much the same even with secrets that don't come from Egypt. People know there's such a thing as medical science and they again feel it's improbable that manufacturers should know things ignored

by the doctors. The modern democratic advertiser is entirely above-board. He tells you all about it. He explains that the digestive juices acting on bismuth give rise to a disinfectant acid. He points out that lactic ferment gets destroyed before it reaches the large intestine, so that Metchnikoff's cure generally won't work. And he goes on to explain that the only way of getting the ferment there is to mix it with starch and paraffin: starch to feed the ferment on, paraffin to prevent the starch being digested before it gets to the intestine. And, in consequence, he convinces you that a mixture of starch, paraffin and ferment is the only thing that's any good at all. Consequently you buy it; which you would never have done without the explanation. In the same way, Mr Gumbril, we mustn't ask people to take our trousers on trust. We must explain scientifically why these trousers will be good for their health. And by means of the ganglia, as I've pointed out, we can even show that the trousers will be good for their souls and the whole human race at large. And as you probably know, Mr Gumbril, there's nothing like a spiritual message to make things go. Combine spirituality with practicality and you've fairly got them. Got them, I may say, on toast. And that's what we can do with our trousers; we can put a message into them, a big, spiritual message. Decidedly,' he concluded, 'we shall have to work those ganglia all we can.'

'I'll undertake to do that,' said Gumbril, who felt very buoyant and self-assured. Mr Boldero's hydrogenous conversation had blown him up like a balloon.

'And I'm sure you'll do it well,' said Mr Boldero encouragingly. 'There is no better training for modern commerce than a literary education. As a practical business man, I always uphold the ancient universities, especially in their teaching of the Humanities.'

Gumbril was much flattered. At the moment, it seemed supremely satisfying to be told that he was likely to make a good business man. The business man took on a radiance, began to glow, as it were, with a phosphorescent splendour.

'Then it's very important,' continued Mr Boldero, 'to play on their snobbism; to exploit that painful sense of inferiority which the ignorant and ingenuous

always feel in the presence of the knowing. We've got to make our trousers the Thing — socially right as well as merely personally comfortable. We've got to imply somehow that it's bad form not to wear them. We've got to make those who don't wear them feel rather uncomfortable. Like that film of Charlie Chaplin's, where he's the absent-minded young man about town who dresses for dinner immaculately, from the waist up — white waistcoat, tail coat, stiff shirt, top-hat — and only discovers, when he gets down into the hall of the hotel, that he's forgotten to put on his trousers. We've got to make them feel like that. That's always very successful. You know those excellent American advertisements about young ladies whose engagements are broken off because they perspire too freely or have an unpleasant breath? How horribly uncomfortable those make you feel! We've got to do something of the same sort for our trousers. Or more immediately applicable would be those tailor's advertisements about correct clothes. "Good clothes make you feel good." You know the sort of line. And then those grave warning sentences in which you're told that a correctly cut suit may make the difference between an appointment gained and an appointment lost, an interview granted and an interview refused. But the most masterly examples I can think of,' Mr Boldero went on with growing enthusiasm, 'are those American advertisements of spectacles, in which the manufacturers first assume the existence of a social law about goggles, and then proceed to invoke all the sanctions which fall on the head of the committer of a solecism upon those who break it. It's masterly. For sport or relaxation, they tell you, as though it was a social axiom, you must wear spectacles of pure tortoiseshell. For business, tortoiseshell rims and nickel ear-pieces lend incisive poise — incisive poise, we must remember that for our ads, Mr Gumbril. "Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes lend incisive poise to business men." For semi-evening dress, shell rims with gold ear-pieces and gold nose-bridge. And for full dress, gold-mounted rimless pince-nez are refinement itself, and absolutely correct. Thus we see, a social law has been created, according to which every self-respecting myope or astigmat must have four distinct pairs of glasses. Think if he should wear the all-shell sports model with full dress! Revolting solecism!

The people who read advertisements like that begin to feel uncomfortable; they have only one pair of glasses, they are afraid of being laughed at, thought low-class and ignorant and suburban. And since there are few who would not rather be taken in adultery than in provincialism, they rush out to buy four new pairs of spectacles. And the manufacturer gets rich, Mr Gumbril. Now, we must do something of the kind with our trousers. Imply somehow that they're correct, that you're undressed without, that your fiancée would break off the engagement if she saw you sitting down to dinner on anything but air.' Mr Boldero shrugged his shoulders, vaguely waved his hand.

'It may be rather difficult,' said Gumbril, shaking his head.

'It may,' Mr Boldero agreed. 'But difficulties are made to be overcome. We must pull the string of snobbery and shame: it's essential. We must find out methods for bringing the weight of public opinion to bear mockingly on those who do not wear our trousers. It is difficult at the moment to see how it can be done. But it will have to be done, it will have to be done,' Mr Boldero repeated emphatically. 'We might even find a way of invoking patriotism to our aid. "English trousers filled with English air for English men." A little far-fetched, perhaps. But there might be something in it.'

Gumbril shook his head doubtfully.

'Well, it's one of the things we've got to think about in any case,' said Mr Boldero. 'We can't afford to neglect such powerful social emotions as these. Sex, as we've seen, is almost entirely out of the question. We must run the rest, therefore, as hard as we can. For instance, there's the novelty business. People feel superior if they possess something new which their neighbours haven't got. The mere fact of newness is an intoxication. We must encourage that sense of superiority, brew up that intoxication. The most absurd and futile objects can be sold because they're new. Not long ago I sold four million patent soap-dishes of a new and peculiar kind. The point was that you didn't screw the fixture into the bathroom wall; you made a hole in the wall and built the soap-dish into a niche, like a holy water stoup. My soap-dishes possessed no advantages over other kinds of soap-dishes, and they cost a fantastic amount to instal. But I managed to

put them across, simply because they were new. Four million of them.' Mr Boldero smiled with satisfaction at the recollection. 'We shall do the same, I hope, with our trousers. People may be shy of being the first to appear in them; but the shyness will be compensated for by the sense of superiority and elation produced by the consciousness of the newness of the things.'

'Quite so,' said Gumbril.

'And then, of course, there's the economy slogan. "One pair of Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes will outlast six pairs of ordinary trousers." That's easy enough. So easy that it's really uninteresting.' Mr Boldero waved it away.

'We shall have to have pictures,' said Gumbril, parenthetically. He had an idea.

'Oh, of course.'

'I believe I know of the very man to do them,' Gumbril went on. 'His name's Lypiatt. A painter. You've probably heard of him.'

'Heard of him!' exclaimed Mr Boldero. He laughed. 'But who hasn't heard of Lydgate.'

'Lypiatt.'

'Lypgate, I mean, of course.'

'I think he'd be the very man,' said Gumbril.

'I'm certain he would,' said Mr Boldero, not a whit behindhand.

Gumbril was pleased with himself. He felt he had done some one a good turn. Poor old Lypiatt; be glad of the money. Gumbril remembered also his own fiver. And remembering his own fiver, he also remembered that Mr Boldero had as yet made no concrete suggestion about terms. He nerved himself at last to suggest to Mr Boldero that it was time to think of this little matter. Ah, how he hated talking about money! He found it so hard to be firm in asserting his rights. He was ashamed of showing himself grasping. He always thought with consideration of the other person's point of view — poor devil, could he afford to pay? And he was always swindled and always conscious of the fact. Lord, how he hated life on these occasions! Mr Boldero was still evasive.

'I'll write you a letter about it,' he said at last.

Gumbril was delighted. ‘Yes, do,’ he said enthusiastically, ‘do.’ He knew how to cope with letters all right. He was a devil with the fountain-pen. It was these personal, hand-to-hand combats that he couldn’t manage. He could have been, he always felt, such a ruthless critic and satirist, such a violent, unscrupulous polemical writer. And if ever he committed his autobiography to paper, how breath-takingly intimate, how naked — naked without so much as a healthy sunburn to colour the whiteness — how quiveringly a sensitive jelly it would be! All the things he had never told any one would be in it. Confession at long range — if anything, it would be rather agreeable.

‘Yes, do write me a letter,’ he repeated. ‘Do.’

Mr Boldero’s letter came at last, and the proposals it contained were derisory. A hundred pounds down and five pounds a week when the business should be started. Five pounds a week — and for that he was to act as a managing director, writer of advertisements and promoter of foreign sales. Gumbril felt thankful that Mr Boldero had put the terms in a letter. If they had been offered point-blank across the luncheon table, he would probably have accepted them without a murmur. He wrote a few neat, sharp phrases saying that he could not consider less than five hundred pounds down and a thousand a year. Mr Boldero’s reply was amiable; would Mr Gumbril come and see him?

See him? Well, of course, it was inevitable. He would have to see him again some time. But he would send the Complete Man to deal with the fellow. A Complete Man matched with a leprechaun — there could be no doubt as to the issue.

‘Dear Mr Boldero,’ he wrote back, ‘I should have come to talk over matters before this. But I have been engaged during the last few days in growing a beard and until this has come to maturity, I cannot, as you will easily be able to understand, leave the house. By the day after to-morrow, however, I hope to be completely presentable and shall come to see you at your office at about three o’clock, if that is convenient to you. I hope we shall be able to arrange matters satisfactorily. — Believe me, dear Mr Boldero, yours very truly,

Theodore Gumbril, Jr.’

The day after to-morrow became in due course to-day; splendidly bearded and Rabelaisianly broad in his whipcord toga, Gumbril presented himself at Mr Boldero's office in Queen Victoria Street.

'I should hardly have recognized you,' exclaimed Mr Boldero as he shook hands. 'How it does alter you, to be sure!'

'Does it?' The Complete Man laughed with a significant joviality.

'Won't you take off your coat?'

'No, thanks,' said Gumbril. 'I'll keep it on.'

'Well,' said the leprechaun, leaning back in his chair and twinkling, bird-like, across the table.

'Well,' repeated Gumbril on a different tone from behind the stooks of his corn-like beard. He smiled, feeling serenely strong and safe.

'I'm sorry we should have disagreed,' said Mr Boldero.

'So am I,' the Complete Man replied. 'But we shan't disagree for long,' he added, with significance; and as he spoke the words he brought down his fist with such a bang, that the inkpots on Mr Boldero's very solid mahogany writing-table trembled and the pens danced, while Mr Boldero himself started with a genuine alarm. He had not expected them. And now he came to look at him more closely, this young Gumbril was a great, hulking, dangerous-looking fellow. He had thought he would be easy to manage. How could he have made such a mistake?

Gumbril left the office with Mr Boldero's cheque for three hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket and an annual income of eight hundred. His bruised right hand was extremely tender to the touch. He was thankful that a single blow had been enough.

CHAPTER XI

GUMBRIL HAD SPENT the afternoon at Bloxam Gardens. His chin was still sore from the spirit gum with which he had attached to it the symbol of the Complete Man; he was feeling also a little fatigued. Rosie had been delighted to see him; St Jerome had gone on solemnly communicating all the time.

His father had gone out to dine, and Gumbril had eaten his rump steak and drunk his bottle of stout alone. He was sitting now in front of the open french windows which led from his father's workroom on to the balcony, with a block on his knee and a fountain-pen in his hand, composing advertisements for the Patent Small-Clothes. Outside, in the plane-trees of the square, the birds had gone through their nightly performance. But Gumbril had paid no attention to them. He sat there, smoking, sometimes writing a word or two — sunk in the quagmire of his own drowsy and comfortable body. The flawless weather of the day had darkened into a blue May evening. It was agreeable merely to be alive.

He sketched out two or three advertisements in the grand idealistic transatlantic style. He imagined one in particular with a picture of Nelson at the head of the page and 'England expects ...' printed large beneath it. 'England ... Duty ... these are solemn words.' That was how it would begin. 'These are solemn words, and we use them solemnly as men who realize what Duty is, and who do all that in them lies to perform it as Englishmen should. The Manufacturer's is a sacred trust. The guide and ruler of the modern world, he has, like the Monarch of other days, responsibilities towards his people; he has a Duty to fulfil. He rules, but he must also serve. We realize our responsibilities, we take them seriously. Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes have been brought into the world that they may serve. Our Duty towards you is a Duty of Service. Our proud boast is that we perform it. But besides his Duty towards Others, every man has a duty towards Himself. What is that Duty? It is to keep himself in the

highest possible state of physical and spiritual fitness. Gumbril's Patent Small-Clothes protect the lumbar ganglia. ...' After that it would be plain medical and mystical sailing.

As soon as he got to the ganglia, Gumbril stopped writing. He put down the block, sheathed his pen, and abandoned himself to the pleasures of pure idleness. He sat, he smoked his cigar. In the basement, two floors down, the cook and the house-parlourmaid were reading — one the Daily Mirror, the other the Daily Sketch. For them, Her Majesty the Queen spoke kindly words to crippled female orphans; the jockeys tumbled at the jumps; Cupid was busy in Society, and the murderers who had disembowelled their mistresses were at large. Above him was the city of models, was a bedroom, a servant's bedroom, an attic of tanks and ancient dirt, the roof and, after that, two or three hundred light-years away, a star of the fourth magnitude. On the other side of the party-wall on his right, a teeming family of Jews led their dark, compact, Jewish lives with a prodigious intensity. At this moment they were all passionately quarrelling. Beyond the wall on the left lived the young journalist and his wife. To-night it was he who had cooked the supper. The young wife lay on the sofa, feeling horribly sick; she was going to have a baby, there could be no doubt about it now. They had meant not to have one; it was horrible. And, outside, the birds were sleeping in the trees, the invading children from the slum tumbled and squealed. Ships meanwhile were walloping across the Atlantic freighted with more cigars. Rosie at this moment was probably mending Shearwater's socks. Gumbril sat and smoked, and the universe arranged itself in a pattern about him, like iron filings round a magnet.

The door opened, and the house-parlourmaid intruded Shearwater upon his lazy felicity, abruptly, in her unceremonious old way, and hurried back to the Daily Sketch.

'Shearwater! This is very agreeable,' said Gumbril. 'Come and sit down.' He pointed to a chair.

Clumsily, filling the space that two ordinary men would occupy, Shearwater came zigzagging and lurching across the room, bumped against the work-table

and the sofa as he passed, and finally sat down in the indicated chair.

It suddenly occurred to Gumbril that this was Rosie's husband: he had not thought of that before. Could it be in the marital capacity that he presented himself so unexpectedly now? After this afternoon. ... He had come home; Rosie had confessed all. ... Ah! but then she didn't know who he was. He smiled to himself at the thought. What a joke! Perhaps Shearwater had come to complain to him of the unknown Complete Man — to him! It was delightful. Anon — the author of all those ballads in the Oxford Book of English Verse: the famous Italian painter — Ignoto. Gumbril was quite disappointed when his visitor began to talk of other themes than Rosie. Sunk in the quagmire of his own comfortable guts, he felt good-humouredly obscene. The dramatic scabrousness of the situation would have charmed him in his present mood. Good old Shearwater — but what an ox of a man! If he, Gumbril, took the trouble to marry a wife, he would at least take some interest in her.

Shearwater had begun to talk in general terms about life. What could he be getting at, Gumbril wondered? What particulars were ambushed behind these generalizations? There were silences. Shearwater looked, he thought, very gloomy. Under his thick moustache the small, pouting, babyish mouth did not smile. The candid eyes had a puzzled, tired expression in them.

'People are queer,' he said after one of his silences. 'Very queer. One has no idea how queer they are.'

Gumbril laughed. 'But I have a very clear idea of their queerness,' he said. 'Everyone's queer, and the ordinary, respectable, bourgeois people are the queerest of the lot. How do they manage to live like that? It's astonishing. When I think of all my aunts and uncles ...' He shook his head.

'Perhaps it's because I'm rather incurious,' said Shearwater. 'One ought to be curious, I think. I've come to feel lately that I've not been curious enough about people.' The particulars began to peep, alive and individual, out of the vagueness, like rabbits; Gumbril saw them in his fancy, at the fringe of a wood.

'Quite,' he said encouragingly. 'Quite.'

‘I think too much of my work,’ Shearwater went on, frowning. ‘Too much physiology. There’s also psychology. People’s minds as well as their bodies. ... One shouldn’t be limited. Not too much, at any rate. People’s minds ...’ He was silent for a moment. ‘I can imagine,’ he went on at last, as in the tone of one who puts a very hypothetical case, ‘I can imagine one’s getting so much absorbed in somebody else’s psychology that one could really think of nothing else.’ The rabbits seemed ready to come out into the open.

‘That’s a process,’ said Gumbril, with middle-aged jocularity, speaking out of his private warm morass, ‘that’s commonly called falling in love.’

There was another silence. Shearwater broke it to begin talking about Mrs Viveash. He had lunched with her three or four days running. He wanted Gumbril to tell him what she was really like. ‘She seems to me a very extraordinary woman,’ he said.

‘Like everybody else,’ said Gumbril irritatingly. It amused him to see the rabbits scampering about at last.

‘I’ve never known a woman like that before.’

Gumbril laughed. ‘You’d say that of any woman you happened to be interested in,’ he said. ‘You’ve never known any women at all.’ He knew much more about Rosie, already, than Shearwater did, or probably ever would.

Shearwater meditated. He thought of Mrs Viveash, her cool, pale, critical eyes; her laughter, faint and mocking; her words that pierced into the mind, goading it into thinking unprecedented thoughts.

‘She interests me,’ he repeated. ‘I want you to tell me what she’s really like.’ He emphasized the word really, as though there must, in the nature of things, be a vast difference between the apparent and the real Mrs Viveash.

Most lovers, Gumbril reflected, picture to themselves, in their mistresses, a secret reality, beyond and different from what they see every day. They are in love with somebody else — their own invention. And sometimes there is a secret reality; and sometimes reality and appearance are the same. The discovery, in either case, is likely to cause a shock. ‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘How should I know? You must find out for yourself.’

‘But you know her, you know her well,’ said Shearwater, almost with anxiety in his voice.

‘Not so well as all that.’

Shearwater sighed profoundly, like a whale in the night. He felt restless, incapable of concentrating. His mind was full of a horrible confusion. A violent eruptive bubbling up from below had shaken its calm clarity to pieces. All this absurd business of passion — he had always thought it nonsense, unnecessary. With a little strength of will one could shut it out. Women — only for half an hour out of the twenty-four. But she had laughed, and his quiet, his security had vanished. ‘I can imagine,’ he had said to her yesterday, ‘I can imagine myself giving up everything, work and all, to go running round after you.’ ‘And do you suppose I should enjoy that?’ Mrs Viveash had asked. ‘It would be ridiculous,’ he said, ‘it would be almost shameful.’ And she had thanked him for the compliment. ‘And at the same time,’ he went on, ‘I feel that it might be worth it. It might be the only thing.’ His mind was confused, full of new thoughts. ‘It’s difficult,’ he said after a pause, ‘arranging things. Very difficult. I thought I had arranged them so well ...’

‘I never arrange anything,’ said Gumbril, very much the practical philosopher. ‘I take things as they come.’ And as he spoke the words, suddenly he became rather disgusted with himself. He shook himself; he climbed up out of his own morass. ‘It would be better, perhaps, if I arranged things more,’ he added.

‘Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s,’ said Shearwater, as though to himself; ‘and to God, and to sex, and to work. ... There must be a working arrangement.’ He sighed again. ‘Everything in proportion. In proportion,’ he repeated, as though the word were magical and had power. ‘In proportion.’

‘Who’s talking about proportion?’ They turned round. In the doorway Gumbril Senior was standing, smoothing his ruffled hair and tugging at his beard. His eyes twinkled cheerfully behind his spectacles. ‘Poaching on my architectural ground?’ he said.

‘This is Shearwater,’ Gumbril Junior put in, and explained who he was.

The old gentleman sat down. ‘Proportion,’ he said— ‘I was just thinking about it, now, as I was walking back. You can’t help thinking about it in these London streets, where it doesn’t exist. You can’t help pining for it. There are some streets ... oh, my God!’ And Gumbril Senior threw up his hands in horror. ‘It’s like listening to a symphony of cats to walk along them. Senseless discords and a horrible disorder all the way. And the one street that was really like a symphony by Mozart — how busily and gleefully they’re pulling it down now! Another year and there’ll be nothing left of Regent Street. There’ll only be a jumble of huge, hideous buildings at three-quarters of a million apiece. A concert of Brobdingnagian cats. Order has been turned into a disgusting chaos. We need no barbarians from outside; they’re on the premises, all the time.’

The old man paused and pulled his beard meditatively. Gumbril Junior sat in silence, smoking; and in silence Shearwater revolved within the walls of his great round head his agonizing thoughts of Mrs Viveash.

‘It has always struck me as very curious,’ Gumbril Senior went on, ‘that people are so little affected by the vile and discordant architecture around them. Suppose, now, that all these brass bands of unemployed ex-soldiers that blow so mournfully at all the street corners were suddenly to play nothing but a series of senseless and devilish discords — why, the first policeman would move them on, and the second would put them under arrest, and the passers-by would try to lynch them on their way to the police station. There would be a real spontaneous outcry of indignation. But when at these same street corners the contractors run up enormous palaces of steel and stone that are every bit as stupid and ignoble and inharmonious as ten brass bandsmen each playing a different tune in a different key, there is no outcry. The police don’t arrest the architect; the passing pedestrians don’t throw stones at the workmen. They don’t notice that anything’s wrong. It’s odd,’ said Gumbril Senior. ‘It’s very odd.’

‘Very odd,’ Gumbril Junior echoed.

‘The fact is, I suppose,’ Gumbril Senior went on, smiling with a certain air of personal triumph, ‘the fact is that architecture is a more difficult and intellectual

art than music. Music — that's just a faculty you're born with, as you might be born with a snub nose. But the sense of plastic beauty — though that's, of course, also an inborn faculty — is something that has to be developed and intellectually ripened. It's an affair of the mind; experience and thought have to draw it out. There are infant prodigies in music; but there are no infant prodigies in architecture.' Gumbril Senior chuckled with a real satisfaction. 'A man can be an excellent musician and a perfect imbecile. But a good architect must also be a man of sense, a man who knows how to think and to profit by experience. Now, as almost none of the people who pass along the streets in London, or any other city of the world, do know how to think or to profit by experience, it follows that they cannot appreciate architecture. The innate faculty is strong enough in them to make them dislike discord in music; but they haven't the wits to develop that other innate faculty — the sense of plastic beauty — which would enable them to see and disapprove of the same barbarism in architecture. Come with me,' Gumbril Senior added, getting up from his chair, 'and I'll show you something that will illustrate what I've been saying. Something you'll enjoy, too. Nobody's seen it yet,' he said mysteriously as he led the way upstairs. 'It's only just finished — after months and years. It'll cause a stir when they see it — when I let them see it, if ever I do, that is. The dirty devils!' Gumbril Senior added good-humouredly.

On the landing of the next floor he paused, felt in his pocket, took out a key and unlocked the door of what should have been the second best bedroom. Gumbril Junior wondered, without very much curiosity, what the new toy would turn out to be. Shearwater wondered only how he could possess Mrs Viveash.

'Come on,' called Gumbril Senior from inside the room. He turned on the light. They entered.

It was a big room; but almost the whole of the floor was covered by an enormous model, twenty feet long by ten or twelve wide, of a complete city traversed from end to end by a winding river and dominated at its central point by a great dome. Gumbril Junior looked at it with surprise and pleasure. Even

Shearwater was roused from his bitter ruminations of desire to look at the charming city spread out at his feet.

‘It’s exquisite,’ said Gumbril Junior. ‘What is it? The capital of Utopia, or what?’

Delighted, Gumbril Senior laughed. ‘Don’t you see something rather familiar in the dome?’ he asked.

‘Well, I had thought ...’ Gumbril Junior hesitated, afraid that he might be going to say something stupid. He bent down to look more closely at the dome. ‘I had thought it looked rather like St Paul’s — and now I see that it is St Paul’s.’

‘Quite right,’ said his father. ‘And this is London.’

‘I wish it were,’ Gumbril Junior laughed.

‘It’s London as it might have been if they’d allowed Wren to carry out his plans of rebuilding after the Great Fire.’

‘And why didn’t they allow him to?’ Shearwater asked.

‘Chiefly,’ said Gumbril Senior, ‘because, as I’ve said before, they didn’t know how to think or profit by experience. Wren offered them open spaces and broad streets; he offered them sunlight and air and cleanliness; he offered them beauty, order and grandeur. He offered to build for the imagination and the ambitious spirit of man, so that even the most bestial, vaguely and remotely, as they walked those streets, might feel that they were of the same race — or very nearly — as Michelangelo; that they too might feel themselves, in spirit at least, magnificent, strong and free. He offered them all these things; he drew a plan for them, walking in peril among the still smouldering ruins. But they preferred to re-erect the old intricate squalor; they preferred the mediæval darkness and crookedness and beastly irregular quaintness; they preferred holes and crannies and winding tunnels; they preferred foul smells, sunless, stagnant air, phthisis and rickets; they preferred ugliness and pettiness and dirt; they preferred the wretched human scale, the scale of the sickly body, not of the mind. Miserable fools! But I suppose,’ the old man continued, shaking his head, ‘we can’t blame them.’ His hair had blown loose from its insecure anchorage; with a gesture of

resignation he brushed it back into place. ‘We can’t blame them. We should have done the same in the circumstances — undoubtedly. People offer us reason and beauty; but we will have none of them, because they don’t happen to square with the notions that were grafted into our souls in youth, that have grown there and become a part of us. Experientia docet — nothing falser, so far as most of us are concerned, was ever said. You, no doubt, my dear Theodore, have often in the past made a fool of yourself with women. ...’

Gumbril Junior made an embarrassed gesture that half denied, half admitted the soft impeachment. Shearwater turned away, painfully reminded of what, for a moment, he had half forgotten. Gumbril Senior swept on.

‘Will that prevent you from making as great a fool of yourself again to-morrow? It will not. It will most assuredly not.’ Gumbril Senior shook his head.’ The inconveniences and horrors of the pox are perfectly well known to every one; but still the disease flourishes and spreads. Several million people were killed in a recent war and half the world ruined; but we all busily go on in courses that make another event of the same sort inevitable. Experientia docet? Experientia doesn’t. And that is why we must not be too hard on these honest citizens of London who, fully appreciating the inconveniences of darkness, disorder and dirt, manfully resisted any attempt to alter conditions which they had been taught from childhood onwards to consider as necessary, right and belonging inevitably to the order of things. We must not be too hard. We are doing something even worse ourselves. Knowing by a century of experience how beautiful, how graceful, how soothing to the mind is an ordered piece of town-planning, we pull down almost the only specimen of it we possess and put up in its place a chaos of Portland stone that is an offence against civilization. But let us forget about these old citizens and the labyrinth of ugliness and inconvenience which we have inherited from them, and which is called London. Let us forget the contemporaries who are making it still worse than it was. Come for a walk with me through this ideal city. Look.’

And Gumbril Senior began expounding it to them.

In the middle, there, of that great elliptical Piazza at the eastern end of the new City, stands, four-square, the Royal Exchange. Pierced only with small dark windows, and built of rough ashlars of the silvery Portland stone, the ground floor serves as a massy foundation for the huge pilasters that slide up, between base and capital, past three tiers of pedimented windows. Upon them rest the cornice, the attic and the balustrade, and on every pier of the balustrade a statue holds up its symbol against the sky. Four great portals, rich with allegory, admit to the courtyard with its double tier of coupled columns, its cloister and its gallery. The statue of Charles the Martyr rides triumphantly in the midst, and within the windows one guesses the great rooms, rich with heavy garlands of plaster, panelled with carved wood.

Ten streets give on to the Piazza, and at either end of its ellipse the water of sumptuous fountains ceaselessly blows aloft and falls. Commerce, in that to the north of the Exchange, holds up her cornucopia, and from the midst of its grapes and apples the master jet leaps up; from the teats of all the ten Useful Arts, grouped with their symbols about the central figure, there spouts a score of fine subsidiary streams. The dolphins, the sea-horses and the Tritons sport in the basin below. To the south, the ten principal cities of the Kingdom stand in a family round the Mother London, who pours from her urn an inexhaustible Thames.

Ranged round the Piazza are the Goldsmiths' Hall, the Office of Excise, the Mint, the Post Office. Their flanks are curved to the curve of the ellipse. Between pilasters, their windows look out on to the Exchange, and the sister statues on the balustrades beckon to one another across the intervening space.

Two master roads of ninety feet from wall to wall run westwards from the Exchange. New Gate ends the more northern vista with an Arch of Triumph, whose three openings are deep, shadowy and solemn as the entries of caverns. The Guildhall and the halls of the twelve City Companies in their livery of rose-red brick, with their lacings of white stone at the coigns and round the windows, lend to the street an air of domestic and comfortable splendour. And every two or three hundred paces the line of the houses is broken, and in the indentation of

a square recess there rises, conspicuous and insular, the fantastic tower of a parish church. Spire out of dome; octagon on octagon diminishing upwards; cylinder on cylinder; round lanterns, lanterns of many sides; towers with airy pinnacles; clusters of pillars linked by incurving cornices, and above them, four more clusters and above once more; square towers pierced with pointed windows; spires uplifted on flying buttresses; spires bulbous at the base — the multitude of them beckons, familiar and friendly, on the sky. From the other shore, or sliding along the quiet river, you see them all, you tell over their names; and the great dome swells up in the midst overtopping them all.

The dome of St. Paul's.

The other master street that goes westward from the Piazza of the Exchange slants down towards it. The houses are of brick, plain-faced and square, arcaded at the base, so that the shops stand back from the street and the pedestrian walks dry-shod under the harmonious succession of the vaultings. And there at the end of the street, at the base of a triangular space formed by the coming together of this with another master street that runs eastwards to Tower Hill, there stands the Cathedral. To the north of it is the Deanery and under the arcades are the booksellers' shops.

From St Paul's the main road slopes down under the swaggering Italianate arches of Ludgate, past the wide lime-planted boulevards that run north and south within and without the city wall, to the edge of the Fleet Ditch — widened now into a noble canal, on whose paved banks the barges unload their freights of country stuff — leaps it on a single flying arch to climb again to a round circus, a little to the east of Temple Bar, from which, in a pair of diagonally superimposed crosses, eight roads radiate: three northwards towards Holborn, three from the opposite arc towards the river, one eastward to the City, and one past Lincoln's Inn Fields to the west. The piazza is all of brick and the houses that compose it are continuous above the ground-floor level; for the roads lead out under archways. To one who stands in the centre at the foot of the obelisk that commemorates the victory over the Dutch, it seems a smooth well of

brickwork pierced by eight arched conduits at the base and diversified above by the three tiers of plain, unornamented windows.

Who shall describe all the fountains in the open places, all the statues and monuments? In the circus north of London Bridge, where the four roads come together, stands a pyramid of nymphs and Tritons — river goddesses of Polyolbion, sea-gods of the island beaches — bathing in a ceaseless tumble of white water. And here the city griffon spouts from its beak, the royal lion from between its jaws. St George at the foot of the Cathedral rides down a dragon whose nostrils spout, not fire, but the clear water of the New River. In front of the India House, four elephants of black marble, endorsed with towers of white, blow through their upturned trunks the copious symbol of Eastern wealth. In the gardens of the Tower sits Charles the Second, enthroned among a troop of Muses, Cardinal Virtues, Graces and Hours. The tower of the Customs-House is a pharos. A great water-gate, the symbol of naval triumph, spans the Fleet at its junction with the Thames. The river is embanked from Blackfriars to the Tower, and at every twenty paces a grave stone angel looks out from the piers of the balustrade across the water. ...

Gumbril Senior expounded his city with passion. He pointed to the model on the ground, he lifted his arms and turned up his eyes to suggest the size and splendour of his edifices. His hair blew wispily loose and fell into his eyes, and had to be brushed impatiently back again. He pulled at his beard; his spectacles flashed, as though they were living eyes. Looking at him, Gumbril Junior could imagine that he saw before him the passionate and gesticulating silhouette of one of those old shepherds who stand at the base of Piranesi’s ruins demonstrating obscurely the prodigious grandeur and the abjection of the human race.

CHAPTER XII

‘YOU? IS IT you?’ She seemed doubtful.

Gumbril nodded. ‘It’s me,’ he reassured her. ‘I’ve shaved; that’s all.’ He had left his beard in the top right-hand drawer of the chest of drawers, among the ties and the collars.

Emily looked at him judicially. ‘I like you better without it,’ she decided at last. ‘You look nicer. Oh no, I don’t mean to say you weren’t nice before,’ she hastened to add. ‘But — you know — gentler—’ She hesitated. ‘It’s a silly word,’ she said, ‘but there it is: sweeter.’

That was the unkindest cut of all. ‘Milder and more melancholy?’ he suggested.

‘Well, if you like to put it like that,’ Emily agreed.

He took her hand and raised it to his lips. ‘I forgive you,’ he said.

He could forgive her anything for the sake of those candid eyes, anything for the grave, serious mouth, anything for the short brown hair that curled — oh, but never seriously, never gravely — with such a hilarious extravagance round her head. He had met her, or rather the Complete Man, flushed with his commercial triumphs as he returned from his victory over Mr Boldero, had met her at the National Gallery. ‘Old Masters, young mistresses’; Coleman had recommended the National Gallery. He was walking up the Venetian Room, feeling as full of swaggering vitality as the largest composition of Veronese, when he heard, gigglingly whispered just behind him, his Open Sesame to new adventure, ‘Beaver’. He spun round on his tracks and found himself face to face with two rather startled young women. He frowned ferociously: he demanded satisfaction for the impertinence. They were both, he noticed, of gratifyingly pleasing appearance and both extremely young. One of them, the elder it seemed, and the more charming, as he had decided from the first, of the two, was dreadfully

taken aback; blushed to the eyes, stammered apologetically. But the other, who had obviously pronounced the word, only laughed. It was she who made easy the forming of an acquaintance which ripened, half an hour later, over the tea-cups and to the strains of the most classy music on the fifth floor of Lyons' Strand Corner House.

Their names were Emily and Molly. Emily, it seemed, was married. It was Molly who let that out, and the other had been angry with her for what was evidently an indiscretion. The bald fact that Emily was married had at once been veiled with mysteries, surrounded and protected by silences; whenever the Complete Man asked a question about it, Emily did not answer and Molly only giggled. But if Emily was married and the elder of the two, Molly was decidedly the more knowledgeable about life; Mr Mercaptan would certainly have set her down as the more civilized. Emily didn't live in London; she didn't seem to live anywhere in particular. At the moment she was staying with Molly's family at Kew.

He had seen them the next day, and the day after, and the day after that; once at lunch, to desert them precipitately for his afternoon with Rosie; once at tea in Kew Gardens; once at dinner, with a theatre to follow and an extravagant taxi back to Kew at midnight. The tame decoy allays the fears of the shy wild birds; Molly, who was tame, who was frankly a flirting little wanton, had served the Complete Man as a decoy for the ensnaring of Emily. When Molly went away to stay with friends in the country, Emily was already inured and accustomed to the hunter's presence; she accepted the playful attitude of gallantry, which the Complete Man, at the invitation of Molly's rolling eyes and provocative giggle, had adopted from the first, as natural and belonging to the established order of things. With giggling Molly to give her a lead, she had gone in three days much further along the path of intimacy than, by herself, she would have advanced in ten times the number of meetings.

'It seems funny,' she had said the first time they met after Molly's departure, 'it seems funny to be seeing you without Molly.'

‘It seemed funnier with Molly,’ said the Complete Man. ‘It wasn’t Molly I wanted to see.’

‘Molly’s a very nice, dear girl,’ she declared loyally. ‘Besides, she’s amusing and can talk. And I can’t; I’m not a bit amusing.’

It wasn’t difficult to retort to that sort of thing; but Emily didn’t believe in compliments; oh, quite genuinely not.

He set out to make the exploration of her; and now that she was inured to him, no longer too frightened to let him approach, now, moreover, that he had abandoned the jocular insolences of the Complete Man in favour of a more native mildness, which he felt instinctively was more suitable in this particular case, she laid no difficulties in his way. She was lonely, and he seemed to understand everything so well; in the unknown country of her spirit and her history she was soon going eagerly before him as his guide.

She was an orphan. Her mother she hardly remembered. Her father had died of influenza when she was fifteen. One of his business friends used to come and see her at school, take her out for treats and give her chocolates. She used to call him Uncle Stanley. He was a leather merchant, fat and jolly with a rather red face, very white teeth and a bald head that was beautifully shiny. When she was seventeen and a half he asked her to marry him, and she had said yes.

‘But why?’ Gumbril asked. ‘Why on earth?’ he repeated.

‘He said he’d take me round the world; it was just when the war had come to an end. Round the world, you know; and I didn’t like school. I didn’t know anything about it and he was very nice to me; he was very pressing. I didn’t know what marriage meant.’

‘Didn’t know?’

She shook her head; it was quite true. ‘But not in the least.’

And she had been born within the twentieth century. It seemed a case for the text-books of sexual psychology. ‘Mrs Emily X, born in 1901, was found to be in a state of perfect innocence and ignorance at the time of the Armistice, 11th November 1918,’ *etc.*

‘And so you married him?’

She had nodded.

‘And then?’

She had covered her face with her hands, she had shuddered. The amateur uncle, now professionally a husband, had come to claim his rights — drunk. She had fought him, she had eluded him, had run away and locked herself into another room. On the second night of her honeymoon he gave her a bruise on the forehead and a bite on the left breast which had gone on septically festering for weeks. On the fourth, more determined than ever, he seized her so violently by the throat, that a blood-vessel broke and she began coughing bright blood over the bedclothes. The amateur uncle had been reduced to send for a doctor and Emily had spent the next few weeks in a nursing home. That was four years ago; her husband had tried to induce her to come back, but Emily had refused. She had a little money of her own; she was able to refuse. The amateur uncle had consoled himself with other and more docile nieces.

‘And has nobody tried to make love to you since then?’ he asked.

‘Oh, lots of them have tried.’

‘And not succeeded?’

She shook her head. ‘I don’t like men,’ she said. ‘They’re hateful, most of them. They’re brutes.’

‘Anch’ io?’

‘What?’ she asked, puzzled.

‘Am I a brute too?’ And behind his beard, suddenly, he felt rather a brute.

‘No,’ said Emily, after a little hesitation, ‘you’re different. At least I think you are; though sometimes,’ she added candidly, ‘sometimes you do and say things which make me wonder if you really are different.’

The Complete Man laughed.

‘Don’t laugh like that,’ she said. ‘It’s rather stupid.’

‘You’re perfectly right,’ said Gumbril. ‘It is.’

And how did she spend her time? He continued the exploration.

Well, she read a lot of books; but most of the novels she got from Boots’ seemed to her rather silly.

‘Too much about the same thing. Always love.’

The Complete Man gave a shrug. ‘Such is life.’

‘Well, it oughtn’t to be,’ said Emily.

And then, when she was in the country — and she was often in the country, taking lodgings here and there in little villages, weeks and months at a time — she went for long walks. Molly couldn’t understand why she liked the country; but she did. She was very fond of flowers. She liked them more than people, she thought.

‘I wish I could paint,’ she said. ‘If I could, I’d be happy for ever, just painting flowers. But I can’t paint.’ She shook her head. ‘I’ve tried so often. Such dirty, ugly smudges come out on the paper; and it’s all so lovely in my head, so lovely out in the fields.’

Gumbril began talking with erudition about the flora of West Surrey: where you could find butterfly orchis and green man and the bee, the wood where there was actually wild columbine growing, the best localities for butcher’s broom, the outcrops of clay where you get wild daffodils. All this odd knowledge came spouting up into his mind from some underground source of memory. Flowers — he never thought about flowers nowadays from one year’s end to the other. But his mother had liked flowers. Every spring and summer they used to go down to stay at their cottage in the country. All their walks, all their drives in the governess cart had been hunts after flowers. And naturally the child had hunted with all his mother’s ardour. He had kept books of pressed flowers, he had mummified them in hot sand, he had drawn maps of the country and coloured them elaborately with different coloured inks to show where the different flowers grew. How long ago all that was! Horribly long ago! Many seeds had fallen in the stony places of his spirit, to spring luxuriantly up into stalky plants and wither again because they had no deepness of earth; many had been sown there and had died, since his mother scattered the seeds of the wild flowers.

‘And if you want sundew,’ he wound up, ‘you’ll find it in the Punch Bowl, under Hindhead. Or round about Frensham. The Little Pond, you know, not the Big.’

‘But you know all about them,’ Emily exclaimed in delight. ‘I’m ashamed of my poor little knowledge. And you must really love them as much as I do.’

Gumbril did not deny it; they were linked henceforth by a chain of flowers.

But what else did she do?

Oh, of course she played the piano a great deal. Very badly; but at any rate it gave her pleasure. Beethoven: she liked Beethoven best. More or less, she knew all the sonatas, though she could never keep up anything like the right speed in the difficult parts.

Gumbril had again shown himself wonderfully at home. ‘Aha!’ he said. ‘I bet you can’t shake that low B in the last variation but one of O so that it doesn’t sound ridiculous.’

And of course she couldn’t, and of course she was glad that he knew all about it and how impossible it was.

In the cab, as they drove back to Kew that evening, the Complete Man had decided it was time to do something decisive. The parting kiss — more of a playful sonorous buss than a serious embracement — that was already in the protocol, as signed and sealed before her departure by giggling Molly. It was time, the Complete Man considered, that this salute should take on a character less formal and less playful. One, two, three and, decisively, as they passed through Hammersmith Broadway, he risked the gesture. Emily burst into tears. He was not prepared for that, though perhaps he should have been. It was only by imploring, only by almost weeping himself, that Gumbril persuaded her to revoke her decision never, never to see him again.

‘I had thought you were different,’ she sobbed. ‘And now, now—’

‘Please, please,’ he entreated. He was on the point of tearing off his beard and confessing everything there and then. But that, on second thoughts, would probably only make things worse.

‘Please, I promise.’

In the end, she had consented to see him once again, provisionally, in Kew Gardens, on the following day. They were to meet at the little temple that stands on the hillock above the valley of the heathers.

And now, duly, they had met. The Complete Man had been left at home in the top right-hand drawer, along with the ties and collars. She would prefer, he guessed, the Mild and Melancholy one; he was quite right. She had thought him ‘sweeter’ at a first glimpse.

‘I forgive you,’ he said, and kissed her hand. ‘I forgive you.’

Hand in hand they walked down towards the valley of the heaths.

‘I don’t know why you should be forgiving me,’ she said, laughing. ‘It seems to me that I ought to be doing the forgiving. After yesterday.’ She shook her head at him. ‘You made me so wretched.’

‘Ah, but you’ve already done your forgiving.’

‘You seem to take it very much for granted,’ said Emily. ‘Don’t be too sure.’

‘But I am sure,’ said Gumbril. ‘I can see—’

Emily laughed again. ‘I feel happy,’ she declared.

‘So do I.’

‘How green the grass is!’

Green, green — after these long damp months it glowed in the sunlight, as though it were lighted from inside.

‘And the trees!’

The pale, high, clot-polled trees of the English spring; the dark, symmetrical pine trees, islanded here and there on the lawns, each with its own separate profile against the sky and its own shadow, impenetrably dark or freckled with moving lights, on the grass at its feet.

They walked on in silence. Gumbril took off his hat, breathed the soft air that smelt of the greenness of the garden.

‘There are quiet places also in the mind,’ he said meditatively. ‘But we build bandstands and factories on them. Deliberately — to put a stop to the quietness. We don’t like the quietness. All the thoughts, all the preoccupations in my head — round and round, continually.’ He made a circular motion with his hand. ‘And the jazz bands, the music-hall songs, the boys shouting the news. What’s it for? what’s it all for? To put an end to the quiet, to break it up and disperse it, to pretend at any cost it isn’t there. Ah, but it is; it is there, in spite of everything, at

the back of everything. Lying awake at night, sometimes — not restlessly, but serenely, waiting for sleep — the quiet re-establishes itself, piece by piece; all the broken bits, all the fragments of it we've been so busily dispersing all day long. It re-establishes itself, an inward quiet, like this outward quiet of grass and trees. It fills one, it grows — a crystal quiet, a growing, expanding crystal. It grows, it becomes more perfect; it is beautiful and terrifying, yes, terrifying as well as beautiful. For one's alone in the crystal and there's no support from outside, there's nothing external and important, nothing external and trivial to pull oneself up by or to stand on, superiorly, contemptuously, so that one can look down. There's nothing to laugh at or feel enthusiastic about. But the quiet grows and grows. Beautifully and unbearably. And at last you are conscious of something approaching; it is almost a faint sound of footsteps. Something inexpressibly lovely and wonderful advances through the crystal, nearer, nearer. And, oh, inexpressibly terrifying. For if it were to touch you, if it were to seize and engulf you, you'd die; all the regular, habitual, daily part of you would die. There would be an end of bandstands and whizzing factories, and one would have to begin living arduously in the quiet, arduously in some strange, unheard-of manner. Nearer, nearer come the steps; but one can't face the advancing thing. One daren't. It's too terrifying, it's too painful to die. Quickly, before it is too late, start the factory wheels, bang the drum, blow up the saxophone. Think of the women you'd like to sleep with, the schemes for making money, the gossip about your friends, the last outrage of the politicians. Anything for a diversion. Break the silence, smash the crystal to pieces. There, it lies in bits; it is easily broken, hard to build up and easy to break. And the steps? Ah, those have taken themselves off, double quick. Double quick, they were gone at the first flawing of the crystal. And by this time the lovely and terrifying thing is three infinities away, at least. And you lie tranquilly on your bed, thinking of what you'd do if you had ten thousand pounds, and of all the fornications you'll never commit.' He thought of Rosie's pink underclothes.

'You make things very complicated,' she said, after a silence.

Gumbril spread out his great-coat on a green bank and they sat down. Leaning back, his hands under his head, he watched her sitting there beside him. She had taken off her hat; there was a stir of wind in those childish curls, and at the nape, at the temples, where the hair had sleaved out thin and fine, the sunlight made little misty haloes of gold. Her hands clasped round her knees, she sat quite still, looking out across the green expanses, at the trees, at the white clouds on the horizon. There was quiet in her mind, he thought. She was native to that crystal world; for her, the steps came comfortingly through the silence and the lovely thing brought with it no terrors. It was all so easy for her and simple.

Ah, so simple, so simple; like the Hire Purchase System on which Rosie had bought her pink bed. And how simple it was, too, to puddle clear waters and unpetal every flower! — every wild flower, by God! one ever passed in a governess cart at the heels of a barrel-bellied pony. How simple to spit on the floors of churches! Si prega di non sputare. Simple to kick one's legs and enjoy oneself — dutifully — in pink underclothing. Perfectly simple.

'It's like the Arietta, don't you think?' said Emily suddenly, 'the Arietta of O.' And she hummed the first bars of the air. 'Don't you feel it's like that?'

'What's like that?'

'Everything,' said Emily. 'To-day, I mean. You and me. These gardens—' And she went on humming.

Gumbril shook his head. 'Too simple for me,' he said.

Emily laughed. 'Ah, but then think how impossible it gets a little farther on.' She agitated her fingers wildly, as though she were trying to play the impossible passages. 'It begins easily for the sake of poor imbeciles like me; but it goes on, it goes on, more and more fully and subtly and abstrusely and embracingly. But it's still the same movement.'

The shadows stretched farther and farther across the lawns, and as the sun declined the level light picked out among the grasses innumerable stipplings of shadow; and in the paths, that had seemed under the more perpendicular rays as

level as a table, a thousand little shadowy depressions and sun-touched mountains were now apparent. Gumbril looked at his watch.

‘Good Lord!’ he said, ‘we must fly.’ He jumped up. ‘Quick, quick!’

‘But why?’

‘We shall be late.’ He wouldn’t tell her for what. ‘Wait and see’ was all that Emily could get out of him by her questioning. They hurried out of the gardens, and in spite of her protests he insisted on taking a taxi into town. ‘I have such a lot of unearned increment to get rid of,’ he explained. The Patent Small-Clothes seemed at the moment remoter than the farthest stars.

CHAPTER XIII

IN SPITE OF the taxi, in spite of the gobbled dinner, they were late. The concert had begun.

‘Never mind,’ said Gumbril. ‘We shall get in in time for the minuetto. It’s then that the fun really begins.’

‘Sour grapes,’ said Emily, putting her ear to the door. ‘It sounds to me simply too lovely.’

They stood outside, like beggars waiting abjectly at the doors of a banqueting-hall — stood and listened to the snatches of music that came out tantalizingly from within. A rattle of clapping announced at last that the first movement was over; the doors were thrown open. Hungrily they rushed in. The Sclopis Quartet and a subsidiary viola were bowing from the platform. There was a chirrup of tuning, then preliminary silence. Sclopis nodded and moved his bow. The minuetto of Mozart’s G minor Quintet broke out, phrase after phrase, short and decisive, with every now and then a violent sforzando chord, startling in its harsh and sudden emphasis.

Minuetto — all civilization, Mr Mercaptan would have said, was implied in the delicious word, the delicate, pretty thing. Ladies and precious gentlemen, fresh from the wit and gallantry of Crebillon-haunted sofas, stepping gracefully to a pattern of airy notes. To this passion of one who cries out, to this obscure and angry argument with fate how would they, Gumbril wondered, how would they have tripped it?

How pure the passion, how unaffected, clear and without clot or pretension the unhappiness of that slow movement which followed! Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Pure and unsullied; pure and unmixed, unadulterated. ‘Not passionate, thank God; only sensual and sentimental.’ In the name of earwig. Amen. Pure, pure. Worshippers have tried to rape the statues of

the gods; the statuaries who made the images were generally to blame. And how deliciously, too, an artist can suffer! and, in the face of the whole Albert Hall, with what an effective gesture and grimace! But blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The instruments come together and part again. Long silver threads hang aerially over a murmur of waters; in the midst of muffled sobbing a cry. The fountains blow their architecture of slender pillars, and from basin to basin the waters fall; from basin to basin, and every fall makes somehow possible a higher leaping of the jet, and at the last fall the mounting column springs up into the sunlight, and from water the music has modulated up into a rainbow. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; they shall make God visible, too, to other eyes.

Blood beats in the ears. Beat, beat, beat. A slow drum in the darkness, beating in the ears of one who lies wakeful with fever, with the sickness of too much misery. It beats unceasingly, in the ears, in the mind itself. Body and mind are indivisible, and in the spirit blood painfully throbs. Sad thoughts droop through the mind. A small, pure light comes swaying down through the darkness, comes to rest, resigning itself to the obscurity of its misfortune. There is resignation, but blood still beats in the ears. Blood still painfully beats, though the mind has acquiesced. And then, suddenly, the mind exerts itself, throws off the fever of too much suffering and laughing, commands the body to dance. The introduction to the last movement comes to its suspended, throbbing close. There is an instant of expectation, and then, with a series of mounting trochees and a downward hurrying, step after tiny step, in triple time, the dance begins. Irrelevant, irreverent, out of key with all that has gone before. But man’s greatest strength lies in his capacity for irrelevance. In the midst of pestilences, wars and famines, he builds cathedrals; and a slave, he can think the irrelevant and unsuitable thoughts of a free man. The spirit is slave to fever and beating blood, at the mercy of an obscure and tyrannous misfortune. But irrelevantly, it elects to dance in triple measure — a mounting skip, a patter of descending feet.

The G minor Quintet is at an end; the applause rattles out loudly. Enthusiasts stand up and cry bravo. And the five men on the platform rise and bow their

acknowledgments. Great Sclopis himself receives his share of the plaudits with a weary condescension; weary are his poached eyes, weary his disillusioned smile. It is only his due, he knows; but he has had so much clapping, so many lovely women. He has a Roman nose, a colossal brow and, though the tawny musical mane does much to conceal the fact, no back to his head. Garofalo, the second fiddle, is black, beady-eyed and pot-bellied. The convex reflections of the electroliers slide back and forth over his polished bald head, as he bends, again, again, in little military salutes. Peperkoek, two metres high, bows with a sinuous politeness. His face, his hair are all of the same greyish buff colour; he does not smile, his appearance is monolithic and grim. Not so exuberant Knoedler, who sweats and smiles and embraces his ‘cello and lays his hand to his heart and bows almost to the ground as though all this hullabaloo were directed only at him. As for poor little Mr Jenkins, the subsidiary viola, he has slid away into the background, and feeling that this is really the Sclopis’s show and that he, a mere intruder, has no right to any of these demonstrations, he hardly bows at all, but only smiles, vaguely and nervously, and from time to time makes a little spasmodic twitch to show that he isn’t really ungrateful or haughty, as you might think, but that he feels in the circumstances — the position is a little embarrassing — it is hard to explain. ...

‘Strange,’ said Gumbril, ‘to think that those ridiculous creatures could have produced what we’ve just been hearing.’

The poached eye of Sclopis lighted on Emily, flushed and ardently applauding. He gave her, all to herself, a weary smile. He would have a letter, he guessed, to-morrow morning signed ‘Your little Admirer in the Third Row’. She looked a choice little piece. He smiled again to encourage her. Emily, alas! had not even noticed. She was applauding the music.

‘Did you enjoy it?’ he asked, as they stepped out into a deserted Bond Street.

‘Did I ... ?’ Emily laughed expressively. ‘No, I didn’t enjoy,’ she said. ‘Enjoy isn’t the word. You enjoy eating ices. It made me happy. It’s unhappy music, but it made me happy.’

Gumbril hailed a cab and gave the address of his rooms in Great Russell Street. ‘Happy,’ he repeated, as they sat there side by side in the darkness. He, too, was happy.

‘Where are we going?’ she asked.

‘To my rooms,’ said Gumbril, ‘we shall be quiet there.’ He was afraid she might object to going there — after yesterday. But she made no comment.

‘Some people think that it’s only possible to be happy if one makes a noise,’ she said, after a pause. ‘I find it’s too delicate and melancholy for noise. Being happy is rather melancholy — like the most beautiful landscape, like those trees and the grass and the clouds and the sunshine to-day.’

‘From the outside,’ said Gumbril, ‘it even looks rather dull.’ They stumbled up the dark staircase to his rooms. Gumbril lit a pair of candles and put the kettle on the gas ring. They sat together on the divan sipping tea. In the rich, soft light of the candles she looked different, more beautiful. The silk of her dress seemed wonderfully rich and glossy, like the petals of a tulip, and on her face, on her bare arms and neck the light seemed to spread an impalpable bright bloom. On the wall behind them, their shadows ran up towards the ceiling, enormous and profoundly black.

‘How unreal it is,’ Gumbril whispered. ‘Not true. This remote secret room. These lights and shadows out of another time. And you out of nowhere and I, out of a past utterly remote from yours, sitting together here, together — and being happy. That’s the strangest thing of all. Being quite senselessly happy. It’s unreal, unreal.’

‘But why,’ said Emily, ‘why? It’s here and happening now. It is real.’

‘It all might vanish, at any moment,’ he said.

Emily smiled rather sadly. ‘It’ll vanish in due time,’ she said. ‘Quite naturally, not by magic; it’ll vanish the way everything else vanishes and changes. But it’s here now.’

They gave themselves up to the enchantment. The candles burned, two shining eyes of flame, without a wink, minute after minute. But for them there were no longer any minutes. Emily leaned against him, her body held in the

crook of his arm, her head resting on his shoulder. He caressed his cheek against her hair; sometimes, very gently, he kissed her forehead or her closed eyes.

‘If I had known you years ago ...’ she sighed. ‘But I was a silly little idiot then. I shouldn’t have noticed any difference between you and anybody else.’

‘I shall be very jealous,’ Emily spoke again after another timeless silence. ‘There must never be anybody else, never the shadow of anybody else.’

‘There never will be anybody else,’ said Gumbril.

Emily smiled and opened her eyes, looked up at him. ‘Ah, not here,’ she said, ‘not in this real unreal room. Not during this eternity. But there will be other rooms just as real as this.’

‘Not so real, not so real.’ He bent his face towards hers. She closed her eyes again, and the lids fluttered with a sudden tremulous movement at the touch of his light kiss.

For them there were no more minutes. But time passed, time passed flowing in a dark stream, stanchlessly, as though from some profound mysterious wound in the world’s side, bleeding, bleeding for ever. One of the candles had burned down to the socket and the long, smoky flame wavered unsteadily. The flickering light troubled their eyes; the shadows twitched and stirred uneasily. Emily looked up at him.

‘What’s the time?’ she said.

Gumbril looked at his watch. It was nearly one o’clock. ‘Too late for you to get back,’ he said.

‘Too late?’ Emily sat up. Ah, the enchantment was breaking, was giving way, like a film of ice beneath a weight, like a web before a thrust of the wind. They looked at one another. ‘What shall I do?’ she asked.

‘You could sleep here,’ Gumbril answered in a voice that came from a long way away.

She sat for a long time in silence, looking through half-closed eyes at the expiring candle flame. Gumbril watched her in an agony of suspense. Was the ice to be broken, the web-work finally and for ever torn? The enchantment could still be prolonged, the eternity renewed. He felt his heart beating in his breast; he

held his breath. It would be terrible if she were to go now, it would be a kind of death. The flame of the candle flickered more violently, leaping up in a thin, long, smoky flare, sinking again almost to darkness. Emily got up and blew out the candle. The other still burned calmly and steadily.

‘May I stay?’ she asked. ‘Will you allow me?’

He understood the meaning of her question, and nodded. ‘Of course,’ he said.

‘Of course? Is it as much of course as all that?’

‘When I say so.’ He smiled at her. The eternity had been renewed, the enchantment prolonged. There was no need to think of anything now but the moment. The past was forgotten, the future abolished. There was only this secret room and the candle-light and the unreal, impossible happiness of being two. Now that this peril of a disenchantment had been averted, it would last for ever. He got up from the couch, crossed the room, he took her hands and kissed them.

‘Shall we sleep now?’ she asked.

Gumbril nodded.

‘Do you mind if I blow out the light?’ And without waiting for his answer, Emily turned, gave a puff, and the room was in darkness. He heard the rustling of her undressing. Hastily he stripped off his own clothes, pulled back the coverlet from the divan. The bed was made and ready; he opened it and slipped between the sheets. A dim greenish light from the gas lamp in the street below came up between the parted curtains illuminating faintly the farther end of the room. Against this tempered darkness he could see her, silhouetted, standing quite still, as if hesitating on some invisible brink.

‘Emily,’ he whispered.

‘I’m coming,’ Emily answered. She stood there, unmoving, a few seconds longer, then overstepped the brink. She came silently across the room, and sat down on the edge of the low couch. Gumbril lay perfectly still, without speaking, waiting in the enchanted timeless darkness. Emily lifted her knees, slid her feet in under the sheet, then stretched herself out beside him, her body, in the narrow bed, touching his. Gumbril felt that she was trembling; trembling, a sharp involuntary start, a little shudder, another start.

‘You’re cold,’ he said, and slipping one arm beneath her shoulders he drew her, limp and unresisting, towards him. She lay there, pressed against him. Gradually the trembling ceased. Quite still, quite still in the calm of the enchantment. The past is forgotten, the future abolished; there is only this dark and everlasting moment. A drugged and intoxicated stupor of happiness possessed his spirit; a numbness, warm and delicious, lay upon him. And yet through the stupor he knew with a dreadful anxious certainty that the end would soon be there. Like a man on the night before his execution, he looked forward through the endless present; he foresaw the end of his eternity. And after? Everything was uncertain and unsafe.

Very gently, he began caressing her shoulder, her long slender arm, drawing his finger-tips lightly and slowly over her smooth skin; slowly from her neck, over her shoulder, lingeringly round the elbow to her hand. Again, again: he was learning her arm. The form of it was part of the knowledge, now, of his finger-tips; his fingers knew it as they knew a piece of music, as they knew Mozart’s Twelfth Sonata, for example. And the themes that crowd so quickly one after another at the beginning of the first movement played themselves aerially, glitteringly in his mind; they became a part of the enchantment.

Through the silk of her shift he learned her curving side, her smooth straight back and the ridge of her spine. He stretched down, touched her feet, her knees. Under the smock he learned her warm body, lightly, slowly caressing. He knew her, his fingers, he felt, could build her up, a warm and curving statue in the darkness. He did not desire her; to desire would have been to break the enchantment. He let himself sink deeper and deeper into his dark stupor of happiness. She was asleep in his arms; and soon he too was asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS VIVEASH DESCENDED the steps into King Street, and standing there on the pavement looked dubiously first to the right and then to the left. Little and loud, the taxis rolled by on their white wheels, the long-snouted limousines passed with a sigh. The air smelt of watered dust, tempered in Mrs Viveash's immediate neighbourhood by those memories of Italian jasmines which were her perfume. On the opposite pavement, in the shade, two young men, looking very conscious of their grey top-hats, marched gravely along.

Life, Mrs Viveash thought, looked a little dim this morning, in spite of the fine weather. She glanced at her watch; it was one o'clock. Soon one would have to eat some lunch. But where, and with whom? Mrs Viveash had no engagements. All the world was before her, she was absolutely free, all day long. Yesterday, when she declined all those pressing invitations, the prospect had seemed delightful. Liberty, no complications, no contacts; a pre-Adamite empty world to do what she liked in.

But to-day, when it came to the point, she hated her liberty. To come out like this at one o'clock into a vacuum — it was absurd, it was appalling. The prospect of immeasurable boredom opened before her. Steppes after steppes of ennui, horizon beyond horizon, for ever the same. She looked again to the right and again to the left. Finally she decided to go to the left. Slowly, walking along her private knife-edge between her personal abysses, she walked towards the left. She remembered suddenly one shining day like this in the summer of 1917, when she had walked along this same street, slowly, like this, on the sunny side, with Tony Lamb. All that day, that night, it had been one long good-bye. He was going back the next morning. Less than a week later he was dead. Never again, never again: there had been a time when she could make herself cry, simply by saying those two words once or twice, under her breath. Never again, never

again. She repeated them softly now. But she felt no tears behind her eyes. Grief doesn't kill, love doesn't kill; but time kills everything, kills desire, kills sorrow, kills in the end the mind that feels them; wrinkles and softens the body while it still lives, rots it like a medlar, kills it too at last. Never again, never again. Instead of crying, she laughed, laughed aloud. The pigeon-breasted old gentleman who had just passed her, twirling between his finger and thumb the ends of a white military moustache, turned round startled. Could she be laughing at him?

'Never again,' murmured Mrs Viveash.

'I beg your pardon?' queried the martial gentleman, in a rich, port-winey, cigary voice.

Mrs Viveash looked at him with such wide-eyed astonishment that the old gentleman was quite taken aback. 'A thousand apologies, dear lady. Thought you were addressing ... H'm, ah'm.' He replaced his hat, squared his shoulders and went off smartly, left, right, bearing preciously before him his pigeon breast. Poor thing, he thought, poor young thing. Talking to herself. Must be cracked, must be off her head. Or perhaps she took drugs. That was more likely: that was much more likely. Most of them did nowadays. Vicious young women. Lesbians, drug-fiends, nymphomaniacs, dipsos — thoroughly vicious, nowadays, thoroughly vicious. He arrived at his club in an excellent temper.

Never again, never, never again. Mrs Viveash would have liked to be able to cry.

St James's Square opened before her. Romantically under its trees the statue pranced. The trees gave her an idea: she might go down into the country for the afternoon, take a cab and drive out, out, goodness only knew where! To the top of a hill somewhere. Box Hill, Leith Hill, Holmbury Hill, Ivinghoe Beacon — any hill where one could sit and look out over plains. One might do worse than that with one's liberty.

But not much worse, she reflected.

Mrs Viveash had turned up towards the northern side of the square and was almost at its north-western corner when, with a thrill of genuine delight, with a

sense of the most profound relief she saw a familiar figure, running down the steps of the London Library.

‘Theodore!’ she hallooed faintly but penetratingly, from her inward death-bed. ‘Gumbril!’ She waved her parasol.

Gumbril halted, looked around, came smiling to meet her. ‘How delightful,’ he said, ‘but how unfortunate.’

‘Why unfortunate?’ asked Mrs Viveash. ‘Am I of evil omen?’

‘Unfortunate,’ Gumbril explained, ‘because I’ve got to catch a train and can’t profit by this meeting.’

‘Ah no, Theodore,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘you’re not going to catch a train. You’re going to come and lunch with me. Providence has decreed it. You can’t say no to Providence.’

‘I must,’ Gumbril shook his head. ‘I’ve said yes to somebody else.’

‘To whom?’

‘Ah!’ said Gumbril, with a coy and saucy mysteriousness.

‘And where are you going in your famous train?’

‘Ah again,’ Gumbril answered.

‘How intolerably tiresome and silly you are!’ Mrs Viveash declared. ‘One would think you were a sixteen-year-old schoolboy going out for his first assignation with a shop girl. At your age, Gumbril!’ She shook her head, smiled agonizingly and with contempt. ‘Who is she? What sordid pick-up?’

‘Not sordid in the least,’ protested Gumbril.

‘But decidedly a pick-up. Eh?’ A banana-skin was lying, like a bedraggled starfish, in the gutter, just in front of where they were standing. Mrs Viveash stepped forward and with the point of her parasol lifted it carefully up and offered it to her companion.

‘Merci,’ Gumbril bowed.

She tossed the skin back again into the gutter. ‘In any case,’ she said, ‘the young lady can wait while we have luncheon.’

Gumbril shook his head. ‘I’ve made the arrangement,’ he said. Emily’s letter was in his pocket. She had taken the loveliest cottage just out of Robertsbridge,

in Sussex. Ah, but the loveliest imaginable. For the whole summer. He could come and see her there. He had telegraphed that he would come to-day, this afternoon, by the two o'clock from Charing Cross.

Mrs Viveash took him by the elbow. 'Come along,' she said. 'There's a post office in that passage going from Jermyn Street to Piccadilly. You can wire from there your infinite regrets. These things always improve with a little keeping. There will be raptures when you do go to-morrow.'

Gumbril allowed himself to be led along. 'What an insufferable woman you are,' he said, laughing.

'Instead of being grateful to me for asking you to luncheon!'

'Oh, I am grateful,' said Gumbril. 'And astonished.'

He looked at her. Mrs Viveash smiled and fixed him for a moment with her pale, untroubled eyes. ... She said nothing.

'Still,' Gumbril went on, 'I must be at Charing Cross by two, you know.'

'But we're lunching at Verrey's.'

Gumbril shook his head.

They were at the corner of Jermyn Street. Mrs Viveash halted and delivered her ultimatum, the more impressive for being spoken in that expiring voice of one who says in articulo the final and supremely important things. 'We lunch at Verrey's, Theodore, or I shall never, never speak to you again.'

'But be reasonable, Myra,' he implored. If only he'd told her that he had a business appointment. ... Imbecile, to have dropped those stupid hints — in that tone!

'I prefer not to be,' said Mrs Viveash.

Gumbril made a gesture of despair and was silent. He thought of Emily in her native quiet among the flowers; in a cottage altogether too cottagey, with honeysuckles and red ramblers and hollyhocks — though, on second thoughts, none of them would be blooming yet, would they? — happily, in white muslin, extracting from the cottage piano the easier sections of the Arietta. A little absurd, perhaps, when you considered her like that; but exquisite, but adorable, but pure of heart and flawless in her bright pellucid integrity, complete as a

crystal in its faceted perfection. She would be waiting for him, expecting him; and they would walk through the twiddly lanes — or perhaps there would be a governess cart for hire, with a fat pony like a tub on legs to pull it — they would look for flowers in the woods and perhaps he would still remember what sort of noise a whitethroat makes; or even if he didn't remember, he could always magisterially say he did. 'That's a whitethroat, Emily. Do you hear? The one that goes "Tweedly, weedly, weedledy dee".'

'I'm waiting,' said Mrs Viveash. 'Patiently, however.'

Gumbril looked at her and found her smiling like a tragic mask. After all, he reflected, Emily would still be there if he went down to-morrow. It would be stupid to quarrel with Myra about something that was really, when he came to think of it, not of enormous importance. It was stupid to quarrel with any one about anything; and with Myra and about this, particularly so. In this white dress patterned with flowing arabesques of black she looked, he thought, more than ever enchanting. There had been times in the past. ... The past leads on to the present. ... No; but in any case she was excellent company.

'Well,' he said, sighing decisively, 'let's go and send my wire.'

Mrs Viveash made no comment, and traversing Jermyn Street they walked up the narrow passage under the lee of Wren's bald barn of St James's, to the post office.

'I shall pretext a catastrophe,' said Gumbril, as they entered; and going to the telegraph desk he wrote: 'Slight accident on way to station not serious at all but a little indisposed come same train to-morrow.' He addressed the form and handed it in.

'A little what?' asked the young lady behind the bars, as she read it through, prodding each successive word with the tip of her blunt pencil.

'A little indisposed,' said Gumbril, and he felt suddenly very much ashamed of himself. 'A little indisposed,' — no, really, that was too much. He'd withdraw the telegram, he'd go after all.

'Ready?' asked Mrs Viveash, coming up from the other end of the counter where she had been buying stamps.

Gumbril pushed a florin under the bars.

‘A little indisposed,’ he said, hooting with laughter, and he walked towards the door leaning heavily on his stick and limping. ‘Slight accident,’ he explained.

‘What is the meaning of this clownery?’ Mrs Viveash inquired.

‘What indeed?’ Gumbril had limped up to the door and stood there, holding it open for her. He was taking no responsibility for himself. It was the clown’s doing, and the clown, poor creature, was non compos, not entirely there, and couldn’t be called to account for his actions. He limped after her towards Piccadilly.

‘Giudicato guarabile in cinque giorni,’ Mrs Viveash laughed. ‘How charming that always is in the Italian papers. The fickle lady, the jealous lover, the stab, the colpo di rivoltella, the mere Anglo-Saxon black eye — all judged by the house surgeon at the Misericordia curable in five days. And you, my poor Gumbril, are you curable in five days?’

‘That depends,’ said Gumbril. ‘There may be complications.’

Mrs Viveash waved her parasol; a taxi came swerving to the pavement’s edge in front of them. ‘Meanwhile,’ she said, ‘you can’t be expected to walk.’

At Verrey’s they lunched off lobsters and white wine. ‘Fish suppers,’ Gumbril quoted jovially from the Restoration, ‘fish suppers will make a man hop like a flea.’ Through the whole meal he clowned away in the most inimitable style. The ghost of a governess cart rolled along the twiddly lanes of Robertsbridge. But one can refuse to accept responsibility; a clown cannot be held accountable. And besides, when the future and the past are abolished, when it is only the present instant, whether enchanted or unenchanted, that counts, when there are no causes or motives, no future consequences to be considered, how can there be responsibility, even for those who are not clowns? He drank a great deal of hock, and when the clock struck two and the train had begun to snort out of Charing Cross, he could not refrain from proposing the health of Viscount Lascelles. After that he began telling Mrs Viveash about his adventure as a Complete Man.

‘You should have seen me,’ he said, describing his beard.

‘I should have been bowled over.’

‘You shall see me, then,’ said Gumbril. ‘Ah, what a Don Giovanni. La ci darem la mano, La mi dirai di si, Vieni, non e lontano, Partiam, ben mio, da qui. And they came, they came. Without hesitation. No “vorrei e non vorrei”, no “mi trema un poco il cor.” Straight away.’

‘Felice, io so, sarei,’ Mrs Viveash sang very faintly under her breath, from a remote bed of agony.

Ah, happiness, happiness; a little dull, some one had wisely said, when you looked at it from outside. An affair of duets at the cottage piano, of collecting specimens, hand in hand, for the hortus siccus. A matter of integrity and quietness.

‘Ah, but the history of the young woman who was married four years ago,’ exclaimed Gumbril with clownish rapture, ‘and remains to this day a virgin — what an episode in my memoirs!’ In the enchanted darkness he had learned her young body. He looked at his fingers; her beauty was a part of their knowledge. On the tablecloth he drummed out the first bars of the Twelfth Sonata of Mozart. ‘And even after singing her duet with the Don,’ he continued, ‘she is still virgin. There are chaste pleasures, sublimated sensualities. More thrillingly voluptuous,’ with the gesture of a restaurant-keeper who praises the speciality of the house, he blew a treacly kiss, ‘than any of the grosser deliriums.’

‘What is all this about?’ asked Mrs Viveash.

Gumbril finished off his glass. ‘I am talking esoterically,’ he said, ‘for my own pleasure, not yours.’

‘But tell me more about the beard,’ Mrs Viveash insisted. ‘I liked the beard so much.’

‘All right,’ said Gumbril, ‘let us try to be unworthy with coherence.’

They sat for a long time over their cigarettes; it was half past three before Mrs Viveash suggested they should go.

‘Almost time,’ she said, looking at her watch, ‘to have tea. One damned meal after another. And never anything new to eat. And every year one gets bored

with another of the old things. Lobster, for instance, how I used to adore lobster once! But to-day — well, really, it was only your conversation, Theodore, that made it tolerable.'

Gumbril put his hand to his heart and bowed. He felt suddenly extremely depressed.

'And wine: I used to think Orvieto so heavenly. But this spring, when I went to Italy, it was just a bad muddy sort of Vouvray. And those soft caramels they call Fiats; I used to eat those till I was sick. I was at the sick stage before I'd finished one of them, this time in Rome.' Mrs Viveash shook her head. 'Disillusion after disillusion.'

They walked down the dark passage into the street.

'We'll go home,' said Mrs Viveash. 'I really haven't the spirit to do anything else this afternoon.' To the commissionaire who opened the door of the cab she gave the address of her house in St James's.

'Will one ever recapture the old thrills?' she asked rather fatiguedly as they drove slowly through the traffic of Regent Street.

'Not by chasing after them,' said Gumbril, in whom the clown had quite evaporated. 'If one sat still enough they might perhaps come back of their own accord. ...' There would be the faint sound as it were of feet approaching through the quiet.

'It isn't only food,' said Mrs Viveash, who had closed her eyes and was leaning back in her corner.

'So I can well believe.'

'It's everything. Nothing's the same now. I feel it never will be.'

'Never more,' croaked Gumbril.

'Never again,' Mrs Viveash echoed. 'Never again.' There were still no tears behind her eyes. 'Did you ever know Tony Lamb?' she asked.

'No,' Gumbril answered from his corner. 'What about him?'

Mrs Viveash did not answer. What, indeed, about him? She thought of his very clear blue eyes and the fair, bright hair that had been lighter than his brown face. Brown face and neck, red-brown hands; and all the rest of his skin was as

white as milk. ‘I was very fond of him,’ she said at last. ‘That’s all. He was killed in 1917, just about this time of the year. It seems a very long time ago, don’t you think?’

‘Does it?’ Gumbril shrugged his shoulders. ‘I don’t know. The past is abolished. Vivamus, mea Lesbia. If I weren’t so horribly depressed, I’d embrace you. That would be some slight compensation for my’ — he tapped his foot with the end of his walking-stick— ‘my accident.’

‘You’re depressed too?’

‘One should never drink at luncheon,’ said Gumbril. ‘It wrecks the afternoon. One should also never think of the past and never for one moment consider the future. These are treasures of ancient wisdom. But perhaps after a little tea—’ He leaned forward to look at the figures on the taximeter, for the cab had come to a standstill— ‘after a nip of the tannin stimulant’ — he threw open the door— ‘we may feel rather better.’

Mrs Viveash smiled excruciatingly. ‘For me,’ she said, as she stepped out on to the pavement, ‘even tannin has lost its virtues now.’

Mrs Viveash’s drawing-room was tastefully in the movement. The furniture was upholstered in fabrics designed by Dufy — racehorses and roses, little tennis players clustering in the midst of enormous flowers, printed in grey and ochre on a white ground. There were a couple of lamp-shades by Balla. On the pale rose-stippled walls hung three portraits of herself by three different and entirely incongruous painters, a selection of the usual oranges and lemons, and a rather forbidding contemporary nude painted in two tones of green.

‘And how bored I am with this room and all these beastly pictures!’ exclaimed Mrs Viveash as she entered. She took off her hat and, standing in front of the mirror above the mantelpiece, smoothed her coppery hair.

‘You should take a cottage in the country,’ said Gumbril, ‘buy a pony and a governess cart and drive along the twiddly lanes looking for flowers. After tea you open the cottage piano,’ and suiting his action to the words, Gumbril sat down at the long-tailed Blüthner, ‘and you play, you play.’ Very slowly and with

parodied expressiveness he played the opening theme of the Arietta. ‘You wouldn’t be bored then,’ he said, turning round to her, when he had finished.

‘Ah, wouldn’t I!’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘And with whom do you propose that I should share my cottage?’

‘Any one you like,’ said Gumbril. His fingers hung, as though meditating over the keys.

‘But I don’t like any one,’ cried Mrs Viveash with a terrible vehemence from her death-bed. ... Ah, now it had been said, the truth. It sounded like a joke. Tony had been dead five years now. Those bright blue eyes — ah, never again. All rotted away to nothing.

‘Then you should try,’ said Gumbril, whose hands had begun to creep softly forward into the Twelfth Sonata. ‘You should try.’

‘But I do try,’ said Mrs Viveash. Her elbows propped on the mantelpiece, her chin resting on her clasped hands, she was looking fixedly at her own image in the glass. Pale eyes looked unwaveringly into pale eyes. The red mouth and its reflection exchanged their smiles of pain. She had tried; it revolted her now to think how often she had tried; she had tried to like someone, any one, as much as Tony. She had tried to recapture, to re-evoke, to revivify. And there had never been anything, really, but a disgust. ‘I haven’t succeeded,’ she added, after a pause.

The music had shifted from F major to D minor; it mounted in leaping anapæsts to a suspended chord, ran down again, mounted once more, modulating to C minor, then, through a passage of trembling notes to A flat major, to the dominant of D flat, to the dominant of C, to C minor, and at last, to a new clear theme in the major.

‘Then I’m sorry for you,’ said Gumbril, allowing his fingers to play on by themselves. He felt sorry, too, for the subjects of Mrs Viveash’s desperate experiments. She mightn’t have succeeded in liking them — for their part, poor devils, they in general only too agonizingly liked her. ... Only too ... He remembered the cold, damp spots on his pillow, in the darkness. Those hopeless, angry tears. ‘You nearly killed me once,’ he said.

‘Only time kills,’ said Mrs Viveash, still looking into her own pale eyes. ‘I have never made any one happy,’ she added, after a pause. ‘Never any one,’ she thought, except Tony, and Tony they had killed, shot him through the head. Even the bright eyes had rotted, like any other carrion. She too had been happy then. Never again.

A maid came in with the tea-things.

‘Ah, the tannin!’ exclaimed Gumbril with enthusiasm, and broke off his playing. ‘The one hope of salvation.’ He poured out two cups, and picking up one of them he came over to the fireplace and stood behind her, sipping slowly at the pale brewage and looking over her shoulder at their two reflections in the mirror.

‘La ci darem,’ he hummed. ‘If only I had my beard!’ He stroked his chin and with the tip of his forefinger brushed up the drooping ends of his moustache. ‘You’d come trembling like Zerlina, in under its golden shadow.’

Mrs Viveash smiled. ‘I don’t ask for anything better,’ she said. ‘What more delightful part! Felice, io so, sarei: Batti, batti, o bel Mazetto. Enviable Zerlina!’

The servant made another silent entry.

‘A gentleman,’ she said, ‘called Mr Shearwater would like—’

‘Tell him I’m not at home,’ said Mrs Viveash, without looking round.

There was a silence. With raised eyebrows Gumbril looked over Mrs Viveash’s shoulder at her reflection. Her eyes were calm and without expression, she did not smile or frown. Gumbril still questioningly looked. In the end he began to laugh.

CHAPTER XV

THEY WERE PLAYING that latest novelty from across the water ‘What’s he to Hecuba?’ Sweet, sweet and piercing, the saxophone pierced into the very bowels of compassion and tenderness, pierced like a revelation from heaven, pierced like the angel’s treacly dart into the holy Teresa’s quivering and ecstasiated flank. More ripely and roundly, with a kindly and less agonizing voluptuousness, the ‘cello meditated those Mohammedan ecstasies that last, under the green palms of Paradise, six hundred inenarrable years apiece. Into this charged atmosphere the violin admitted refreshing draughts of fresh air, cool and thin like the breath from a still damp squirt. And the piano hammered and rattled away unmindful of the sensibilities of the other instruments, banged away all the time, reminding every one concerned, in a thoroughly business-like way, that this was a cabaret where people came to dance the fox-trot; not a baroque church for female saints to go into ecstasies in, not a mild, happy valley of tumbling houris.

At each recurrence of the refrain the four negroes of the orchestra, or at least the three of them who played with their hands alone — for the saxophonist always blew at this point with a redoubled sweetness, enriching the passage with a warbling contrapuntal soliloquy that fairly wrung the entrails and transported the pierced heart — broke into melancholy and drawling song:

‘What’s he to Hecuba?

Nothing at all.

That’s why there’ll be no wedding on Wednesday week,

Way down in old Bengal.’

‘What unspeakable sadness,’ said Gumbril, as he stepped, stepped through the intricacies of the trot. ‘Eternal passion, eternal pain. Les chants désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux, Et j’en sais d’immortels qui sont de purs sanglots. Rum

tiddle-um-tum, pom-pom. Amen. What's he to Hecuba? Nothing at all. Nothing, mark you. Nothing, nothing.'

'Nothing,' repeated Mrs Viveash. 'I know all about that.' She sighed.

'I am nothing to you,' said Gumbril, gliding with skill between the wall and the Charybdis of a couple dangerously experimenting with a new step. 'You are nothing to me. Thank God. And yet here we are, two bodies with but a single thought, a beast with two backs, a perfectly united centaur trotting, trotting.' They trotted.

'What's he to Hecuba?' The grinning blackamoors repeated the question, reiterated the answer on a tone of frightful unhappiness. The saxophone warbled on the verge of anguish. The couples revolved, marked time, stepped and stepped with an habitual precision, as though performing some ancient and profoundly significant rite. Some were in fancy dress, for this was a gala night at the cabaret. Young women disguised as callipygous Florentine pages, blue-breeched Gondoliers, black-breeched Toreadors circulated, moon-like, round the hall, clasped sometimes in the arms of Arabs, or white clowns, or more often of untravestied partners. The faces reflected in the mirrors were the sort of faces one feels one ought to know by sight; the cabaret was 'Artistic'.

'What's he to Hecuba?'

Mrs Viveash murmured the response, almost piously, as though she were worshipping almighty and omnipresent Nil. 'I adore this tune,' she said, 'this divine tune.' It filled up a space, it moved, it jigged, it set things twitching in you, it occupied time, it gave you a sense of being alive. 'Divine tune, divine tune,' she repeated with emphasis, and she shut her eyes, trying to abandon herself, trying to float, trying to give Nil the slip.

'Ravishing little Toreador, that,' said Gumbril, who had been following the black-breeched travesty with affectionate interest.

Mrs Viveash opened her eyes. Nil was unescapable. 'With Piers Cotton, you mean? Your tastes are a little common, my dear Theodore.'

'Green-eyed monster!'

Mrs Viveash laughed. ‘When I was being “finished” in Paris,’ she said, ‘Mademoiselle always used to urge me to take fencing lessons. C’est un exercice très gracieux. Et puis,’ Mrs Viveash mimicked a passionate earnestness, ‘et puis, ça dévelope le bassin. Your Toreador, Gumbril, looks as though she must be a champion with the foils. Quel bassin!’

‘Hush,’ said Gumbril. They were abreast of the Toreador and her partner. Piers Cotton turned his long greyhound’s nose in their direction.

‘How are you?’ he asked across the music.

They nodded. ‘And you?’

‘Ah, writing such a book,’ cried Piers Cotton, ‘such a brilliant, brilliant, flashing book.’ The dance was carrying them apart. ‘Like a smile of false teeth,’ he shouted across the widening gulf, and disappeared in the crowd.

‘What’s he to Hecuba?’ Lachrymosely, the hilarious blackamoors chanted their question, mournfully pregnant with its foreknown reply.

Nil, omnipresent nil, world-soul, spiritual informer of all matter. Nil in the shape of a black-breeched moon-basined Toreador. Nil, the man with the greyhound’s nose. Nil, as four blackamoors. Nil in the form of a divine tune. Nil, the faces, the faces one ought to know by sight, reflected in the mirrors of the hall. Nil this Gumbril whose arm is round one’s waist, whose feet step in and out among one’s own. Nothing at all.

That’s why there’ll be no wedding. No wedding at St George’s, Hanover Square, — oh, desperate experiment! — with Nil Viveash, that charming boy, that charming nothing at all, engaged at the moment in hunting elephants, hunting fever and carnivores among the Tikki-tikki pygmies. That’s why there’ll be no wedding on Wednesday week. For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime. For the light strawy hair (not a lock left), the brown face, the red-brown hands and the smooth boy’s body, milk-white, milk-warm, are nothing at all, nothing, now, at all — nil these five years — and the shining blue eyes as much nil as the rest.

‘Always the same people,’ complained Mrs Viveash, looking round the room. ‘The old familiar faces. Never any one new. Where’s the younger generation,

Gumbril? We're old, Theodore. There are millions younger than we are. Where are they?'

'I'm not responsible for them,' said Gumbril. 'I'm not even responsible for myself.' He imagined a cottagey room, under a roof, with a window near the floor and a sloping ceiling where you were always bumping your head; and in the candle-light Emily's candid eyes, her grave and happy mouth; in the darkness, the curve, under his fingers, of her firm body.

'Why don't they come and sing for their supper?' Mrs Viveash went on petulantly. 'It's their business to amuse us.'

'They're probably thinking of amusing themselves,' Gumbril suggested.

'Well, then, they should do it where we can see them.'

'What's he to Hecuba?'

'Nothing at all,' Gumbril clownishly sang. The room, in the cottage, had nothing to do with him. He breathed Mrs Viveash's memories of Italian jasmines, laid his cheek for a moment against her smooth hair. 'Nothing at all.' Happy clown!

Way down in old Bengal, under the green Paradisiac palms, among the ecstatic mystagogues and the saints who scream beneath the divine caresses, the music came to an end. The four negroes wiped their glistening faces. The couples fell apart. Gumbril and Mrs Viveash sat down and smoked a cigarette.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLACKAMOORS HAD left the platform at the end of the hall. The curtains looped up at either side had slid down, cutting it off from the rest of the room—'making two worlds,' Gumbril elegantly and allusively put it, 'where only one grew before — and one of them a better world,' he added too philosophically, 'because unreal.' There was the theatrical silence, the suspense. The curtains parted again.

On a narrow bed — on a bier perhaps — the corpse of a woman. The husband kneels beside it. At the foot stands the doctor, putting away his instruments. In a beribboned pink cradle reposes a monstrous baby.

The HusbandMargaret! Margaret! :

The DoctorShe is dead. :

The HusbandMargaret! :

The DoctorOf septicæmia, I tell you. :

The HusbandI wish that I too were dead! :

The DoctorBut you won't to-morrow. :

The HusbandTo-morrow! But I don't want to live to see : to-morrow.

The DoctorYou will to-morrow. :

The HusbandMargaret! Margaret! Wait for me there; I shall : not fail to meet you in that hollow vale.

The DoctorYou will not be slow to survive her. :

The HusbandChrist have mercy upon us! :

The DoctorYou would do better to think of the child. :

The Husband(rising and standing menacingly over the cradle): Is that the monster?

The DoctorNo worse than others. :

The HusbandBegotten in a night of immaculate pleasure, : monster, may you live loveless, in dirt and impurity!

The DoctorConceived in lust and darkness, may your own : impurity always seem heavenly, monster, in your own eyes!

The HusbandMurderer, slowly the all your life long! :

The DoctorThe child must be fed. :

The HusbandFed? With what? :

The DoctorWith milk. :

The HusbandHer milk is cold in her breasts. :

The DoctorThere are still cows. :

The HusbandTubercular shorthorns. (:Calling.) Let Short-i'-the-horn be brought!

Voices(off): Short-i'-the-horn! Short-i'-the-horn! (Fadingly.) Short-i'the ...

The DoctorIn nineteen hundred and twenty-one, twenty-seven : thousand nine hundred and thirteen women died in childbirth.

The HusbandBut none of them belonged to my harem. :

The DoctorEach of them was somebody's wife. :

The HusbandDoubtless. But the people we don't know are : only characters in the human comedy. We are the tragedians.

The DoctorNot in the spectator's eyes. :

The HusbandDo I think of the spectators? Ah, Margaret! : Margaret! ...

The DoctorThe twenty-seven thousand nine hundred and : fourteenth.

The HusbandThe only one! :

The DoctorBut here comes the cow. :

(Short-i'-the-horn is led in by a Yokel.)

The HusbandAh, good Short-i'-the-horn! (:He pats the animal.) She was tested last week, was she not?

The YokelAy, sir. :

The HusbandAnd found tubercular. N :o?

The YokelEven in the udders, may it please you. :

The HusbandExcellent! Milk me the cow, sir, into this dirty : wash-pot.

The YokelI will, sir. (:He milks the cow.)

The HusbandHer milk — her milk is cold already. All the : woman in her chilled and curdled within her breasts. Ah, Jesus! what miraculous galactagogue will make it flow again?

The YokelThe wash-pot is full, sir. :

The HusbandThen take the cow away. :

The YokelCome, Short-i'-the-horn; come up, good Short-i'-the-horn. : (He goes out with the cow.) The Husband(pouring the milk into a long-tubed feeding-bottle): Here's for you, monster, to drink your own health in. (He gives the bottle to the child.) Curtain.

'A little ponderous, perhaps,' said Gumbril, as the curtain came down.

'But I liked the cow,' Mrs Viveash opened her cigarette-case and found it empty. Gumbril offered her one of his. She shook her head. 'I don't want it in the least,' she said.

'Yes, the cow was in the best pantomime tradition,' Gumbril agreed. Ah! but it was a long time since he had been to a Christmas pantomime. Not since Dan Leno's days. All the little cousins, the uncles and aunts on both sides of the family, dozens and dozens of them — every year they filled the best part of a row in the dress circle at Drury Lane. And buns were stickily passed from hand to hand, chocolates circulated; the grown-ups drank tea. And the pantomime went on and on, glory after glory, under the shining arch of the stage. Hours and hours; and the grown-ups always wanted to go away before the harlequinade. And the children felt sick from eating too much chocolate, or wanted with such extreme urgency to go to the W.C. that they had to be led out, trampling and stumbling over everybody else's feet — and every stumble making the need more agonizingly great — in the middle of the transformation scene. And there was Dan Leno, inimitable Dan Leno, dead now as poor Yorick, no more than a mere skull like anybody else's skull. And his mother, he remembered, used to laugh at him sometimes till the tears ran down her cheeks. She used to enjoy things thoroughly, with a whole heart.

‘I wish they’d hurry up with the second scene,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘If there’s anything that bores me, it’s entr’actes.’

‘Most of one’s life is an entr’acte,’ said Gumbril, whose present mood of hilarious depression seemed favourable to the enunciation of apophthegms.

‘None of your cracker mottoes, please,’ protested Mrs Viveash. All the same, she reflected, what was she doing now but waiting for the curtain to go up again, waiting, with what unspeakable weariness of spirit, for the curtain that had rung down, ten centuries ago, on those blue eyes, that bright strawy hair and the weathered face?

‘Thank God,’ she said with an expiring earnestness, ‘here’s the second scene!’

The curtain went up. In a bald room stood the Monster, grown now from an infant into a frail and bent young man with bandy legs. At the back of the stage a large window giving on to a street along which people pass.

The Monster[solus]: The young girls of Sparta, they say, used to wrestle naked with naked Spartan boys. The sun caressed their skins till they were brown and transparent like amber or a flask of olive oil. Their breasts were hard, their bellies flat. They were pure with the chastity of beautiful animals. Their thoughts were clear, their minds cool and untroubled. I spit blood into my handkerchief and sometimes I feel in my mouth something slimy, soft and disgusting, like a slug — and I have coughed up a shred of my lung. The rickets from which I suffered in childhood have bent my bones and made them old and brittle. All my life I have lived in this huge town, whose domes and spires are wrapped in a cloud of stink that hides the sun. The slug-dank tatters of lung that I spit out are black with the soot I have been breathing all these years. I am now come of age. Long-expected one-and-twenty has made me a fully privileged citizen of this great realm of which the owners of the Daily Mirror, the News of the World and the Daily Express are noble peers. Somewhere, I must logically infer, there must be other cities, built by men for men to live in. Somewhere, in the past, in the future, a very long way off. ... But perhaps the only street

improvement schemes that ever really improve the streets are schemes in the minds of those who live in them: schemes of love mostly. Ah! here she comes.

[The Young Lady enters. She stands outside the window, in the street, paying no attention to the Monster; she seems to be waiting for somebody.]

She is like a pear tree in flower. When she smiles, it is as though there were stars. Her hair is like the harvest in an eclogue, her cheeks are all the fruits of summer. Her arms and thighs are as beautiful as the soul of St Catherine of Siena. And her eyes, her eyes are plumbless with thought and limpidly pure like the water of the mountains.

The Young LadyIf I wait till the summer sale, the : crêpe de Chine will be reduced by at least two shillings a yard, and on six camisoles that will mean a lot of money. But the question is: can I go from May till the end of July with the underclothing I have now?

The MonsterIf I knew her, I should know the universe! :

The Young LadyMy present ones are so dreadfully middle-class. : And if Roger should ... by any chance. ...

The MonsterOr, rather, I should be able to ignore it, having : a private universe of my own.

The Young LadyIf — if he did — well, it might be rather : humiliating with these I have ... like a servant’s almost. ...

The MonsterLove makes you accept the world; it puts an end : to criticism.

The Young LadyHis hand already ... :

The MonsterDare I, dare I tell her how beautiful she is? :

The Young LadyOn the whole, I think I’d better get it now, : though it will cost more.

The Monster[desperately advancing to the window as though to assault a battery]: Beautiful! beautiful!

The Young Lady[looking at him]: Ha, ha, ha!

The MonsterBut I love you, flowering : pear tree; I love you, golden harvest; I love you, fruitage of summer; I love you, body and limbs, with the shape of a saint’s thought.

The Young Lady[redoubles her laughter]: Ha, ha, ha!

The Monster[taking her hand]: You cannot be cruel! [He is seized with a violent paroxysm of coughing which doubles him up, which shakes and torments him. The handkerchief he holds to his mouth is spotted with blood.]

The Young LadyYou disgust me! [:She draws away her skirts so that they shall not come in contact with him.]

The MonsterBut I swear to you, I love — I — [:He is once more interrupted by his cough.]

The Young LadyPlease go away. [:In a different voice.] Ah, Roger! [She advances to meet a snub-nosed lubber with curly hair and a face like a groom's, who passes along the street at this moment.]

RogerI've got the motor-bike waiting at the corner. :

The Young LadyLet's go, then. :

Roger [pointing to the Monster]: What's that?

The Young LadyOh, it's nothing in particular. : [Both roar with laughter. Roger escorts her out, patting her familiarly on the back as they walk along.]

The Monster[looking after her]: There is a wound under my left pap. She has deflowered all women. I cannot ...

'Lord!' whispered Mrs Viveash, 'how this young man bores me!'

'I confess,' replied Gumbril, 'I have rather a taste for moralities. There is a pleasant uplifting vagueness about these symbolical generalized figures which pleases me.'

'You were always charmingly simple-minded,' said Mrs Viveash. 'But who's this? As long as the young man isn't left alone on the stage, I don't mind.'

Another female figure has appeared in the street beyond the window. It is the Prostitute. Her face, painted in two tones of red, white, green, blue and black, is the most tasteful of nature-mortes.

The ProstituteHullo, duckie! :

The MonsterHullo! :

The ProstituteAre you lonely? :

The MonsterYes. :

The ProstituteWould you like me to come in to see : you?

The MonsterVery well. :

The ProstituteShall we say thirty bob? :

The MonsterAs you like. :

The ProstituteCome along then. :

[She climbs through the window and they go off together through the door on the left of the stage. The curtains descend for a moment, then rise again. The Monster and the Prostitute are seen issuing from the door at which they went out.]

The Monster[taking out a cheque-book and a fountain-pen]: Thirty shillings ...

The ProstituteThank you. Not a cheque. I don't want any : cheques. How do I know it isn't a dud one that they'll refuse payment for at the bank? Ready money for me, thanks.

The MonsterBut I haven't got any cash on me at the moment. :

The ProstituteWell, I won't take a cheque. Once bitten, twice : shy, I can tell you.

The MonsterBut I tell you I haven't got any cash. :

The ProstituteWell, all I can say is, here I stay till I get : it. And, what's more, if I don't get it quick, I'll make a row.

The MonsterBut this is absurd. I offer you a perfectly good : cheque ...

The ProstituteAnd I won't take it. So there! :

The MonsterWell then, take my watch. It's worth more than : thirty bob. [He pulls out his gold half-hunter.]

The ProstituteThank you, and get myself arrested as soon I : take it to the pop-shop! No, I want cash, I tell you.

The MonsterBut where the devil do you expect me to get it : at this time of night?

The ProstituteI don't know. But you've got to get it pretty : quick.

The MonsterYou’re unreasonable. :

The ProstituteAren’t there any servants in this house? :

The MonsterYes. :

The ProstituteWell, go and borrow it from one of them. :

The MonsterBut really, that would be too low, too humiliating. :

The ProstituteAll right, I’ll begin kicking up a noise. I’ll go : to the window and yell till all the neighbours are woken up and the police come to see what’s up. You can borrow it from the copper then.

The MonsterYou really won’t take my cheque? I swear to : you it’s perfectly all right. There’s plenty of money to meet it.

The ProstituteOh, shut up! No more dilly-dallying. Get me : my money at once, or I’ll start the row. One, two, three ... [She opens her mouth wide as if to yell.]

The MonsterAll right. [:He goes out.]

The ProstituteNice state of things we’re coming to, when : young rips try and swindle us poor girls out of our money! Mean, stinking skunks! I’d like to slit the throats of some of them.

The Monster[coming back again]: Here you are. [He hands her money.]

The Prostitute[examining it]: Thank you, dearie. Any other time you’re lonely ...

The MonsterNo, no! :

The ProstituteWhere did you get it finally? :

The MonsterI woke the cook. :

The Prostitute[goes off into a peal of laughter]: Well, so long, duckie. [She goes out.]

The Monster[solus]: Somewhere there must be love like music. Love harmonious and ordered: two spirits, two bodies moving contrapuntally together. Somewhere, the stupid brutish act must be made to make sense, must be enriched, must be made significant. Lust, like Diabelli’s waltz, a stupid air, turned by a genius into three-and-thirty fabulous variations. Somewhere ...

‘Oh dear!’ sighed Mrs Viveash.

‘Charming!’ Gumbril protested.

... love like sheets of silky flame; like landscapes brilliant in the sunlight against a background of purple thunder; like the solution of a cosmic problem; like faith ...

‘Crikey!’ said Mrs Viveash.

... Somewhere, somewhere. But in my veins creep the maggots of the pox ...

‘Really, really!’ Mrs Viveash shook her head. ‘Too medical!’

... crawling towards the brain, crawling into the mouth, burrowing into the bones. Insatiably.

The Monster threw himself to the ground, and the curtain came down.

‘And about time too!’ declared Mrs Viveash.

‘Charming!’ Gumbril stuck to his guns. ‘Charming! charming!’

There was a disturbance near the door. Mrs Viveash looked round to see what was happening. ‘And now on top of it all,’ she said, ‘here comes Coleman, raving, with an unknown drunk.’

‘Have we missed it?’ Coleman was shouting. ‘Have we missed all the lovely bloody farce?’

‘Lovely bloody!’ his companion repeated with drunken raptures, and he went into fits of uncontrollable laughter. He was a very young boy with straight dark hair and a face of Hellenic beauty, now distorted with tipsiness.

Coleman greeted his acquaintances in the hall, shouting a jovial obscenity to each. ‘And Bumbril-Gumbril,’ he exclaimed, catching sight of him at last in the front row. ‘And Hetaira-Myra!’ He pushed his way through the crowd, followed unsteadily by his young disciple. ‘So you’re here,’ he said, standing over them

and looking down with an enigmatic malice in his bright blue eyes. ‘Where’s the physiologue?’

‘Am I the physiologue’s keeper?’ asked Gumbril. ‘He’s with his glands and his hormones, I suppose. Not to mention his wife.’ He smiled to himself.

‘Where the hormones, there moan I,’ said Coleman, skidding off sideways along the slippery word. ‘I hear, by the way, that there’s a lovely prostitute in this play.’

‘You’ve missed her,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘What a misfortune,’ said Coleman. ‘We’ve missed the delicious trull,’ he said, turning to the young man.

The young man only laughed.

‘Let me introduce, by the way,’ said Coleman. ‘This is Dante,’ he pointed to the dark-haired boy; ‘and I am Virgil. We’re making a round tour — or, rather, a descending spiral tour of hell. But we’re only at the first circle so far. These, Alighieri, are two damned souls, though not, as you might suppose, Paolo and Francesca.’

The boy continued to laugh, happily and uncomprehendingly.

‘Another of these interminable entr’actes,’ complained Mrs Viveash. ‘I was just saying to Theodore here that if there’s one thing I dislike more than another, it’s a long entr’acte.’ Would hers ever come to an end?

‘And if there’s one thing I dislike more than another,’ said the boy, breaking silence for the first time, with an air of the greatest earnestness, ‘it’s ... it’s one thing more than another.’

‘And you’re perfectly right in doing so,’ said Coleman. ‘Perfectly right.’

‘I know,’ the boy replied modestly.

When the curtain rose again it was on an aged Monster, with a black patch over the left side of his nose, no hair, no teeth, and sitting harmlessly behind the bars of an asylum.

The MonsterAsses, apes and dogs! Milton called them that; : he should have known. Somewhere there must be men, however. The variations on Diabelli

prove it. Brunelleschi’s dome is more than the magnification of Cléo de Mérode’s breast. Somewhere there are men with power, living reasonably. Like our mythical Greeks and Romans. Living cleanly. The images of the gods are their portraits. They walk under their own protection. [The Monster climbs on to a chair and stands in the posture of a statue.] Jupiter, father of gods, a man, I bless myself, I throw bolts at my own disobedience, I answer my own prayers, I pronounce oracles to satisfy the questions I myself propound. I abolish all tetters, poxes, blood-spitting, rotting of bones. With love I recreate the world from within. Europa puts an end to squalor, Leda does away with tyranny, Danae tempers stupidity. After establishing these reforms in the social sewer, I climb, I climb, up through the manhole, out of the manhole, beyond humanity. For the manhole, even the manhole, is dark; though not so dingy as the doghole it was before I altered it. Up through the manhole, towards the air. Up, up! [And the Monster, suiting the action to his words, climbs up the runged back of his chair and stands, by a miraculous feat of acrobacy, on the topmost bar.] I begin to see the stars through other eyes than my own. More than dog already, I become more than man. I begin to have inklings of the shape and sense of things. Upwards, upwards I strain, I peer, I reach aloft. [The balanced Monster reaches, strains and peers.] And I seize, I seize! [As he shouts these words, the Monster falls heavily, head foremost, to the floor. He lies there quite still. After a little time the door opens and the Doctor of the first scene enters with a Warder.]

The WarderI heard a crash. :

The Doctor[who has by this time become immensely old and has a beard like Father Thames]: It looks as though you were right. [He examines the Monster.]

The WarderHe was for ever climbing on to his chair. :

The DoctorWell, he won’t any more. His neck’s broken. :

The WarderYou don’t say so? :

The DoctorI do. :

The WarderWell, I never! :

The DoctorHave it carried down to the dissecting-room. :

The WarderI’ll send for the porters at once. :

[Exeunt severally, and Curtain.]

‘Well,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘I’m glad that’s over.’

The music struck up again, saxophone and ‘cello, with the thin draught of the violin to cool their ecstasies and the thumping piano to remind them of business. Gumbril and Mrs Viveash slid out into the dancing crowd, revolving as though by force of habit.

‘These substitutes for the genuine copulative article,’ said Coleman to his disciple, ‘are beneath the dignity of hell-hounds like you and me.’

Charmed, the young man laughed; he was attentive as though at the feet of Socrates. Coleman had found him in a night club, where he had gone in search of Zoe, found him very drunk in the company of two formidable women fifteen or twenty years his senior, who were looking after him, half maternally out of pure kindness of heart, half professionally; for he seemed to be carrying a good deal of money. He was incapable of looking after himself. Coleman had pounced on him at once, claimed an old friendship which the youth was too tipsy to be able to deny, and carried him off. There was something, he always thought, peculiarly interesting about the spectacle of children tobogganing down into the cesspools.

‘I like this place,’ said the young man.

‘Tastes differ!’ Coleman shrugged his shoulders. ‘The German professors have catalogued thousands of people whose whole pleasure consists of eating dung.’

The young man smiled and nodded, rather vaguely. ‘Is there anything to drink here?’ he asked.

‘Too respectable,’ Coleman answered, shaking his head.

‘I think this is a bloody place,’ said the young man.

‘Ah! but some people like blood. And some like boots. And some like long gloves and corsets. And some like birch-rods. And some like sliding down slopes and can’t look at Michelangelo’s “Night” on the Medici Tombs without dying the little death, because the statue seems to be sliding. And some ...’

‘But I want something to drink,’ insisted the young man.

Coleman stamped his feet, waved his arms. ‘À boire! à boire!’ he shouted, like the newborn Gargantua. Nobody paid any attention.

The music came to an end. Gumbril and Mrs Viveash reappeared.

‘Dante,’ said Coleman, ‘calls for drink. We must leave the building.’

‘Yes. Anything to get out of this,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘What’s the time?’

Gumbril looked at his watch. ‘Half-past one.’

Mrs Viveash sighed. ‘Can’t possibly go to bed,’ she said, ‘for another hour at least.’

They walked out into the street. The stars were large and brilliant overhead. There was a little wind that almost seemed to come from the country. Gumbril thought so, at any rate; he thought of the country.

‘The question is, where?’ said Coleman. ‘You can come to my bordello, if you like; but it’s a long way off and Zoe hates us all so much, she’ll probably set on us with the meat-chopper. If she’s back again, that is. Though she may be out all night. Zoe mou, sas agapo. Shall we risk it?’

‘To me it’s quite indifferent,’ said Mrs Viveash faintly, as though wholly preoccupied with expiring.

‘Or there’s my place,’ Gumbril said abruptly, as though shaking himself awake out of some dream.

‘But you live still farther, don’t you?’ said Coleman. ‘With venerable parents, and so forth. One foot in the grave and all that. Shall we mingle hornpipes with funerals?’ He began to hum Chopin’s ‘Funeral March’ at three times its proper speed, and seizing the young stranger in his arms, two-stepped two or three turns on the pavement, then released his hold and let him go reeling against the area railings.

‘No, I don’t mean the family mansion,’ said Gumbril. ‘I mean my own rooms. They’re quite near. In Great Russell Street.’

‘I never knew you had any rooms, Theodore,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘Nobody did.’ Why should they know now? Because the wind seemed almost a country wind? ‘There’s drink there,’ he said.

‘Splendid!’ cried the young man. They were all splendid people.

‘There’s some gin,’ said Gumbril.

‘Capital aphrodisiac!’ Coleman commented.

‘Some light white wine.’

‘Diuretic.’

‘And some whisky.’

‘The great emetic,’ said Coleman. ‘Come on.’ And he struck up the March of the Fascisti. ‘Giovinezza, giovinezza, primavera di bellezza. ...’ The noise went fading down the dark, empty streets.

The gin, the white wine, and even, for the sake of the young stranger, who wanted to sample everything, the emetic whisky, were produced.

‘I like your rooms,’ said Mrs Viveash, looking round her. ‘And I resent your secrecy about them, Theodore.’

‘Drink, puppy!’ Coleman refilled the boy’s glass.

‘Here’s to secrecy,’ Gumbril proposed. Shut it tightly, keep it dark, cover it up. Be silent, prevaricate, lie outright. He laughed and drank. ‘Do you remember,’ he went on, ‘those instructive advertisements of Eno’s Fruit Salts they used to have when we were young? There was one little anecdote about a doctor who advised the hypochondriacal patient who had come to consult him, to go and see Grimaldi, the clown; and the patient answered, “I am Grimaldi.” Do you remember?’

‘No,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘And why do you?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Or rather, I do know,’ Gumbril corrected himself, and laughed again.

The young man suddenly began to boast. ‘I lost two hundred pounds yesterday playing chemin de fer,’ he said, and looked round for applause.

Coleman patted his curly head. ‘Delicious child!’ he said. ‘You’re positively Hogarthian.’

Angrily, the boy pushed him away. ‘What are you doing?’ he shouted; then turned and addressed himself once more to the others. ‘I couldn’t afford it, you know — not a bloody penny of it. Not my money, either.’ He seemed to find it

exquisitely humorous. ‘And that two hundred wasn’t all,’ he added, almost expiring with mirth.

‘Tell Coleman how you borrowed his beard, Theodore.’

Gumbril was looking intently into his glass, as though he hoped to see in its pale mixture of gin and Sauterne visions, as in a crystal, of the future. Mrs Viveash touched him on the arm and repeated her injunction.

‘Oh, that!’ said Gumbril rather irritably. ‘No. It isn’t an interesting story.’

‘Oh yes, it is! I insist,’ said Mrs Viveash, commanding peremptorily from her death-bed.

Gumbril drank his gin and Sauterne. ‘Very well then,’ he said reluctantly, and began.

‘I don’t know what my governor will say,’ the young man put in once or twice. But nobody paid any attention to him. He relapsed into a sulky and, it seemed to him, very dignified silence. Under the warm, jolly tipsiness he felt a chill of foreboding. He poured out some more whisky.

Gumbril warmed to his anecdote. Expiringly Mrs Viveash laughed from time to time, or smiled her agonizing smile. Coleman whooped like a Redskin.

‘And after the concert to these rooms,’ said Gumbril.

Well, let everything go. Into the mud. Leave it there, and let the dogs lift their hind legs over it as they pass.

‘Ah! the genuine platonic fumblers,’ commented Coleman.

‘I am Grimaldi,’ Gumbril laughed. Further than this it was difficult to see where the joke could go. There, on the divan, where Mrs Viveash and Coleman were now sitting, she had lain sleeping in his arms.

‘Towsing, in Elizabethan,’ said Coleman.

Unreal, eternal in the secret darkness. A night that was an eternal parenthesis among the other nights and days.

‘I feel I’m going to be sick,’ said the young man suddenly. He had wanted to go on silently and haughtily sulking; but his stomach declined to take part in the dignified game.

‘Good Lord!’ said Gumbril, and jumped up. But before he could do anything effective, the young man had fulfilled his own prophecy.

‘The real charm about debauchery,’ said Coleman philosophically, ’is its total pointlessness, futility, and above all its incredible tediousness. If it really were all roses and exhilaration as these poor children seem to imagine, it would be no better than going to church or studying the higher mathematics. I should never touch a drop of wine or another harlot again. It would be against my principles. I told you it was emetic,’ he called to the young man.

‘And what are your principles?’ asked Mrs Viveash.

‘Oh, strictly ethical,’ said Coleman.

‘You’re responsible for this creature,’ said Gumbril, pointing to the young man, who was sitting on the floor near the fireplace, cooling his forehead against the marble of the mantelpiece. ‘You must take him away. Really, what a bore!’ His nose and mouth were all wrinkled up with disgust.

‘I’m sorry,’ the young man whispered. He kept his eyes shut and his face was exceedingly pale.

‘But with pleasure,’ said Coleman. ‘What’s your name?’ he asked the young man, ‘and where do you live?’

‘My name is Porteous,’ murmured the young man.

‘Good lord!’ cried Gumbril, letting himself fall on to the divan beside Mrs Viveash. ‘That’s the last straw!’

CHAPTER XVII

THE TWO O'CLOCK snorted out of Charing Cross, but no healths were drunk, this time, to Viscount Lascelles. A desiccating sobriety made arid the corner of the third-class carriage in which Gumbril was sitting. His thoughts were an interminable desert of sand, with not a palm in sight, not so much as a comforting mirage. Once again he fumbled in his breast-pocket, brought out and unfolded the flimsy paper. Once more he read. How many times had he read it before?

'Your telegram made me very unhappy. Not merely because of the accident — though it made me shudder to think that something terrible might have happened, poor darling — but also, selfishly, my own disappointment. I had looked forward so much. I had made a picture of it all so clearly. I should have met you at the station with the horse and trap from the Chequers, and we'd have driven back to the cottage — and you'd have loved the cottage. We'd have had tea and I'd have made you eat an egg with it after your journey. Then we'd have gone for a walk; through the most heavenly wood I found yesterday to a place where there's a wonderful view — miles and miles of it. And we'd have wandered on and on, and sat down under the trees, and the sun would have set, and the twilight would slowly have come to an end, and we'd have gone home again and found the lamps lighted and supper ready — not very grand, I'm afraid, for Mrs Vole isn't the best of cooks. And then the piano; for there is a piano, and I had the tuner come specially from Hastings yesterday, so that it isn't so bad now. And you'd have played; and perhaps I would have made my noises on it. And at last it would have been time for candles and bed. When I heard you were coming, Theodore, I told Mrs Vole a lie about you. I said you were my husband, because she's fearfully respectable, of course; and it would dreadfully disturb her if you weren't. But I told myself that, too. I meant that you should be.

You see, I tell you everything. I'm not ashamed. I wanted to give you everything I could, and then we should always be together, loving one another. And I should have been your slave, I should have been your property and lived inside your life. But you would always have had to love me.

'And then, just as I was getting ready to go and call at the Chequers for the horse and trap, your telegram came. I saw the word "accident", and I imagined you all bleeding and smashed — oh, dreadful, dreadful. But then, when you seemed to make rather a joke of it — why did you say "a little indisposed"? that seemed, somehow, so stupid, I thought — and said you were coming to-morrow, it wasn't that which upset me; it was the dreadful, dreadful disappointment. It was like a stab, that disappointment; it hurt so terribly, so unreasonably much. It made me cry and cry, so that I thought I should never be able to stop. And then, gradually, I began to see that the pain of the disappointment wasn't unreasonably great. It wasn't merely a question of your coming being put off for a day; it was a question of its being put off for ever, of my never seeing you again. I saw that that accident had been something really arranged by Providence. It was meant to warn me and show me what I ought to do. I saw how hopelessly impracticable the happiness I had been imagining really was. I saw that you didn't, you couldn't love me in anything like the same way as I loved you. I was only a curious adventure, a new experience, a means to some other end. Mind, I'm not blaming you in the least. I'm only telling you what is true, what I gradually came to realize as true. If you'd come — what then? I'd have given you everything, my body, my mind, my soul, my whole life. I'd have twisted myself into the threads of your life. And then, when in due course you wanted to make an end to this curious little adventure, you would have had to cut the tangle and it would have killed me; it would also have hurt you. At least I think it would. In the end, I thanked God for the accident which had prevented you coming. In this way, Providence lets us off very lightly — you with a bruise or two (for I do hope it really is nothing, my precious darling), and me with a bruise inside, round the heart. But both will get well quite soon. And all our lives, we shall have an afternoon under the trees, an evening of music and in the darkness, a night, an

eternity of happiness, to look back on. I shall go away from Robertsbridge at once. Good-bye, Theodore. What a long letter! The last you'll ever get from me. The last — what a dreadful hurting word that is. I shall take it to post at once, for fear, if I leave it, I may be weak enough to change my mind and let you come to-morrow. I shall take it at once, then I shall come home again and pack up and tell some new fib to Mrs Vole. And after that, perhaps I shall allow myself to cry again. Good-bye.'

Aridly, the desert of sand stretched out with not a tree and not even a mirage, except perhaps the vague and desperate hope that he might get there before she started, that she might conceivably have changed her mind. Ah, if only he'd read the letter a little earlier! But he hadn't woken up before eleven, he hadn't been down before half-past. Sitting at the breakfast-table, he had read the letter through.

The eggs and bacon had grown still colder, if that was possible, than they were. He had read it through, he had rushed to the A.B.C. There was no practicable train before the two o'clock.

If he had taken the seven-twenty-seven he would certainly have got there before she started. Ah, if only he had woken up a little earlier! But then he would have had to go to bed a little earlier. And in order to go to bed earlier, he would have had to abandon Mrs Viveash before she had bored herself to that ultimate point of fatigue at which she did at last feel ready for repose. And to abandon Mrs Viveash — ah, that was really impossible, she wouldn't allow herself to be left alone. If only he hadn't gone to the London Library yesterday! A wanton, unnecessary visit it had been. For after all, the journey was short; he didn't need a book for the train. And the Life of Beckford, for which he had asked, proved, of course, to be out — and he had been utterly incapable of thinking of any other book, among the two or three hundred thousand on the shelves, that he wanted to read. And, in any case, what the devil did he want with a Life of Beckford? Hadn't he his own life, the life of Gumbril, to attend to? Wasn't one life enough, without making superfluous visits to the London Library in search of other lives? And then what a stroke of bad luck to have run into Mrs Viveash at that very

moment! What an abject weakness to have let himself be bullied into sending that telegram. ‘A little indisposed. ...’ Oh, my God! Gumbril shut his eyes and ground his teeth together; he felt himself blushing with a retrospective shame.

And of course it was quite useless taking the train, like this, to Robertsbridge. She’d be gone, of course. Still, there was always the desperate hope. There was the mirage across the desiccated plains, the mirage one knew to be deceptive and which, on a second glance, proved not even to be a mirage, but merely a few livery spots behind the eyes. Still, it was amply worth doing — as a penance, and to satisfy the conscience and to deceive oneself with an illusion of action. And then the fact that he was to have spent the afternoon with Rosie and had put her off — that too was highly satisfying. And not merely put her off, but — ultimate clownery in the worst of deliriously bad taste — played a joke on her. ‘Impossible come to you, meet me 213 Sloane Street, second floor, a little indisposed.’ He wondered how she’d get on with Mr Mercaptan; for it was to his rococo boudoir and Crébillon-souled sofa that he had on the spur of the clownish moment, as he dashed into the post office on the way to the station, sent her.

Aridly, the desiccated waste extended. Had she been right in her letter? Would it really have lasted no more than a little while and ended as she prophesied, with an agonizing cutting of the tangle? Or could it be that she had held out the one hope of happiness? Wasn’t she perhaps the one unique being with whom he might have learned to await in quietness the final coming of that lovely terrible thing, from before the sound of whose secret footsteps more than once and oh! ignobly he had fled? He could not decide, it was impossible to decide until he had seen her again, till he had possessed her, mingled his life with hers. And now she had eluded him; for he knew very well that he would not find her. He sighed and looked out of the window.

The train pulled up at a small suburban station. Suburban, for though London was already some way behind, the little sham half-timbered houses near the station, the newer tile and rough-cast dwellings farther out on the slope of the hill proclaimed with emphasis the presence of the business man, the holder of the season ticket. Gumbril looked at them with a pensive disgust which must

have expressed itself on his features; for the gentleman sitting in the corner of the carriage facing his, suddenly leaned forward, tapped him on the knee, and said, ‘I see you agree with me, sir, that there are too many people in the world.’

Gumbril, who up till now had merely been aware that somebody was sitting opposite him, now looked with more attention at the stranger. He was a large, square old gentleman of robust and flourishing appearance, with a face of wrinkled brown parchment and a white moustache that merged, in a handsome curve, with a pair of side whiskers, in a manner which reminded one of the photographs of the Emperor Francis Joseph.

‘I perfectly agree with you, sir,’ Gumbril answered. If he had been wearing his beard, he would have gone on to suggest that loquacious old gentlemen in trains are among the supernumeraries of the planet. As it was, however, he spoke with courtesy, and smiled in his most engaging fashion.

‘When I look at all these revolting houses,’ the old gentleman continued, shaking his fist at the snuggeries of the season-ticket holders, ‘I am filled with indignation. I feel my spleen ready to burst, sir, ready to burst.’

‘I can sympathize with you,’ said Gumbril. ‘The architecture is certainly not very soothing.’

‘It’s not the architecture I mind so much,’ retorted the old gentleman, ‘that’s merely a question of art, and all nonsense so far as I’m concerned. What disgusts me is the people inside the architecture, the number of them, sir. And the way they breed. Like maggots, sir, like maggots. Millions of them, creeping about the face of the country, spreading blight and dirt wherever they go; ruining everything. It’s the people I object to.’

‘Ah well,’ said Gumbril, ‘if you will have sanitary conditions that don’t allow plagues to flourish properly; if you will tell mothers how to bring up their children, instead of allowing nature to kill them off in her natural way; if you will import unlimited supplies of corn and meat: what can you expect? Of course the numbers go up.’

The old gentleman waved all this away. ‘I don’t care what the causes are,’ he said. ‘That’s all one to me. What I do object to, sir, is the effects. Why sir, I am

old enough to remember walking through the delicious meadows beyond Swiss Cottage, I remember seeing the cows milked in West Hampstead, sir. And now, what do I see now, when I go there? Hideous red cities pullulating with Jews, sir. Pullulating with prosperous Jews. Am I right in being indignant, sir? Do I do well, like the prophet Jonah, to be angry?'

'You do, sir,' said Gumbril, with growing enthusiasm, 'and the more so since this frightful increase in population is the world's most formidable danger at the present time. With populations that in Europe alone expand by millions every year, no political foresight is possible. A few years of this mere bestial propagation will suffice to make nonsense of the wisest schemes of to-day — or would suffice,' he hastened to correct himself, 'if any wise schemes were being matured at the present.'

'Very possibly, sir,' said the old gentleman, 'but what I object to is seeing good cornland being turned into streets, and meadows, where cows used to graze, covered with houses full of useless and disgusting human beings. I resent seeing the country parcelled out into back gardens.'

'And is there any prospect,' Gumbril earnestly asked, 'of our ever being able in the future to support the whole of our population? Will unemployment ever decrease?'

'I don't know, sir,' the old gentleman replied. 'But the families of the unemployed will certainly increase.'

'You are right, sir,' said Gumbril, 'they will. And the families of the employed and the prosperous will as steadily grow smaller. It is regrettable that birth control should have begun at the wrong end of the scale. There seems to be a level of poverty below which it doesn't seem worth while practising birth control, and a level of education below which birth control is regarded as morally wrong. Strange, how long it has taken for the ideas of love and procreation to dissociate themselves in the human mind. In the majority of minds they are still, even in this so-called twentieth century, indivisibly wedded. Still,' he continued hopefully, 'progress is being made, progress is certainly, though slowly, being made. It is gratifying to find, for example, in the latest statistics,

that the clergy, as a class, are now remarkable for the smallness of their families. The old jest is out of date. Is it too much to hope that these gentlemen may bring themselves in time to preach what they already practise?'

'It is too much to hope, sir,' the old gentleman answered with decision.

'You are probably right,' said Gumbril.

'If we were all to preach all the things we all practise,' continued the old gentleman, 'the world would soon be a pretty sort of bear-garden, I can tell you. Yes, and a monkey-house. And a wart-hoggery. As it is, sir, it is merely a place where there are too many human beings. Vice must pay its tribute to virtue, or else we are all undone.'

'I admire your wisdom, sir,' said Gumbril.

The old gentleman was delighted. 'And I have been much impressed by your philosophical reflections,' he said. 'Tell me, are you at all interested in old brandy?'

'Well, not philosophically,' said Gumbril. 'As a mere empiric only.'

'As a mere empiric!' The old gentleman laughed. 'Then let me beg you to accept a case. I have a cellar which I shall never drink dry, alas! before I die. My only wish is that what remains of it shall be distributed among those who can really appreciate it. In you, sir, I see a fitting recipient of a case of brandy.'

'You overwhelm me,' said Gumbril. 'You are too kind, and, I may add, too flattering.' The train, which was a mortally slow one, came grinding for what seemed the hundredth time to a halt.

'Not at all,' said the old gentleman. 'If you have a card, sir.'

Gumbril searched his pockets. 'I have come without one.'

'Never mind,' said the old gentleman. 'I think I have a pencil. If you will give me your name and address, I will have the case sent to you at once.'

Leisurely, he hunted for the pencil, he took out a notebook. The train gave a jerk forward.

'Now, sir,' he said.

Gumbril began dictating. 'Theodore,' he said slowly.

'The — o — dore,' the old gentleman repeated, syllable by syllable.

The train crept on, with slowly gathering momentum, through the station. Happening to look out of the window at this moment, Gumbril saw the name of the place painted across a lamp. It was Robertsbridge. He made a loud, inarticulate noise, flung open the door of the compartment, stepped out on to the footboard and jumped. He landed safely on the platform, staggered forward a few paces with his acquired momentum and came at last to a halt. A hand reached out and closed the swinging door of his compartment and, an instant afterwards, through the window, a face that, at a distance, looked more than ever like the face of the Emperor Francis Joseph, looked back towards the receding platform. The mouth opened and shut; no words were audible. Standing on the platform, Gumbril made a complicated pantomime, signifying his regret by shrugging his shoulders and placing his hand on his heart; urging in excuse for his abrupt departure the necessity under which he laboured of alighting at this particular station — which he did by pointing at the name on the boards and lamps, then at himself, then at the village across the fields. The old gentleman waved his hand, which still held, Gumbril noticed, the notebook in which he had been writing. Then the train carried him out of sight. There went the only case of old brandy he was ever likely to possess, thought Gumbril sadly, as he turned away. Suddenly, he remembered Emily again; for a long time he had quite forgotten her.

The cottage, when at last he found it, proved to be fully as picturesque as he had imagined. And Emily, of course, had gone, leaving, as might have been expected, no address. He took the evening train back to London. The aridity was now complete, and even the hope of a mirage had vanished. There was no old gentleman to make a diversion. The size of clergymen’s families, even the fate of Europe, seemed unimportant now, were indeed perfectly indifferent to him.

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO HUNDRED AND thirteen Sloane Street. The address, Rosie reflected, as she vaporized synthetic lilies of the valley over all her sinuous person, was decidedly a good one. It argued a reasonable prosperity, attested a certain distinction. The knowledge of his address confirmed her already high opinion of the bearded stranger who had so surprisingly entered her life, as though in fulfilment of all the fortune-tellers' prophecies that ever were made; had entered, yes, and intimately made himself at home. She had been delighted, when the telegram came that morning, to think that at last she was going to find out something more about this man of mystery. For dark and mysterious he had remained, remote even in the midst of the most intimate contacts. Why, she didn't even know his name. 'Call me Toto,' he had suggested, when she asked him what it was. And Toto she had had to call him, for lack of anything more definite or committal. But to-day he was letting her further into his secret. Rosie was delighted. Her pink underclothing, she decided, as she looked in the long glass, was really ravishing. She examined herself, turning first one way, then the other, looking over her shoulder to see the effect from behind. She pointed a toe, bent and straightened a knee, applauding the length of her legs ('Most women,' Toto had said, 'are like dachshunds'), their slenderness and plump suavity of form. In their white stockings of Milanese silk they looked delicious; and how marvellously, by the way, those Selfridge people had mended those stockings by their new patent process! Absolutely like new, and only charged four shillings. Well, it was time to dress. Good-bye, then, to the pink underclothing and the long white legs. She opened the wardrobe door. The moving glass reflected, as it swung through its half-circle, pink bed, rose-wreathed walls, little friends of her own age, and the dying saint at his last communion. Rosie selected the frock she had bought the other day at one of those little shops in Soho, where they sell

such smart things so cheaply to a clientage of minor actresses and cocottes. Toto hadn't seen it yet. She looked extremely distinguished in it. The little hat, with its inch of veil hanging like a mask, unconcealing and inviting, from the brim, suited her to perfection. One last dab of powder, one last squirt of synthetic lilies of the valley, and she was ready. She closed the door behind her. St Jerome was left to communicate in the untenanted pinkness.

Mr Mercaptan sat at his writing-table — an exquisitely amusing affair in papier mâché, inlaid with floral decorations in mother-of-pearl and painted with views of Windsor Castle and Tintern in the romantic manner of Prince Albert's later days — polishing to its final and gem-like perfection one of his middle articles. It was on a splendid subject — the 'Jus Primæ Noctis, or Droit du Seigneur'— 'that delicious droit,' wrote Mr Mercaptan, 'on which, one likes to think, the Sovereigns of England insist so firmly in their motto, Dieu et mon Droit — de Seigneur.' That was charming, Mr Mercaptan thought, as he read it through. And he liked that bit which began elegiacally: 'But, alas! the Right of the First Night belongs to a Middle Age as mythical, albeit happily different, as those dismal epochs invented by Morris or by Chesterton. The Lord's right, as we prettily imagine it, is a figment of the baroque imagination of the seventeenth century. It never existed. Or at least it did exist, but as something deplorably different from what we love to picture it.' And he went on, eruditely, to refer to that Council of Carthage which, in 398, demanded of the faithful that they should be continent on their wedding-night. It was the Lord's right — the droit of a heavenly Seigneur. On this text of fact, Mr Mercaptan went on to preach a brilliant sermon on that melancholy sexual perversion known as continence. How much happier we all should be if the real historical droit du Seigneur had in fact been the mythical right of our 'pretty prurient imaginations'! He looked forward to a golden age when all should be seigneurs possessing rights that should have broadened down into universal liberty. And so on. Mr Mercaptan read through his creation with a smile of satisfaction on his face. Every here and there he made a careful correction in red ink. Over 'pretty prurient imaginations' his pen hung for a full minute in conscientious hesitation. Wasn't it perhaps a

little too strongly alliterative, a shade, perhaps, cheap? Perhaps ‘pretty lascivious’ or ‘delicate prurient’ would be better. He repeated the alternatives several times, rolling the sound of them round his tongue, judicially, like a tea-taster. In the end, he decided that ‘pretty prurient’ was right. ‘Pretty prurient’ — they were the mots justes, decidedly, without a question.

Mr Mercaptan had just come to this decision and his poised pen was moving farther down the page, when he was disturbed by the sound of arguing voices in the corridor, outside his room.

‘What is it, Mrs Goldie?’ he called irritably, for it was not difficult to distinguish his housekeeper’s loud and querulous tones. He had given orders that he was not to be disturbed. In these critical moments of correction one needed such absolute tranquillity.

But Mr Mercaptan was to have no tranquillity this afternoon. The door of his sacred boudoir was thrown rudely open, and there strode in, like a Goth into the elegant marble vomitorium of Petronius Arbiter, a haggard and dishevelled person whom Mr Mercaptan recognized, with a certain sense of discomfort, as Casimir Lypiatt.

‘To what do I owe the pleasure of this unexpected ... ?’ Mr Mercaptan began with an essay in offensive courtesy.

But Lypiatt, who had no feeling for the finer shades, coarsely interrupted him. ‘Look here, Mercaptan,’ he said. ‘I want to have a talk with you.’

‘Delighted, I’m sure,’ Mr Mercaptan replied. ‘And what, may I ask, about?’ He knew, of course, perfectly well; and the prospect of the talk disturbed him.

‘About this,’ said Lypiatt; and he held out what looked like a roll of paper.

Mr Mercaptan took the roll and opened it out. It was a copy of the Weekly World. ‘Ah!’ said Mr Mercaptan, in a tone of delighted surprise, ‘The World. You have read my little article?’

‘That was what I wanted to talk to you about,’ said Lypiatt.

Mr Mercaptan modestly laughed. ‘It hardly deserves it,’ he said.

Preserving a calm of expression which was quite unnatural to him, and speaking in a studiedly quiet voice, Lypiatt pronounced with careful

deliberation: ‘It is a disgusting, malicious, ignoble attack on me,’ he said.

‘Come, come!’ protested Mr Mercaptan. ‘A critic must be allowed to criticize.’

‘But there are limits,’ said Lypiatt.

‘Oh, I quite agree,’ Mr Mercaptan eagerly conceded. ‘But, after all, Lypiatt, you can’t pretend that I have come anywhere near those limits. If I had called you a murderer, or even an adulterer — then, I admit, you would have some cause to complain. But I haven’t. There’s nothing like a personality in the whole thing.’

Lypiatt laughed derisively, and his face went all to pieces, like a pool of water into which a stone is suddenly dropped.

‘You’ve merely said I was insincere, an actor, a mountebank, a quack, raving fustian, spouting mock heroics. That’s all.’

Mr Mercaptan put on the expression of one who feels himself injured and misunderstood. He shut his eyes, he flapped deprecatingly with his hand. ‘I merely suggested,’ he said, ‘that you protest too much. You defeat your own ends; you lose emphasis by trying to be over-emphatic. All this folie de grandeur, all this hankering after terribiltà—’ sagely Mr Mercaptan shook his head, ‘it’s led so many people astray. And, in any case, you can’t really expect me to find it very sympathetic.’ Mr Mercaptan uttered a little laugh and looked affectionately round his boudoir, his retired and perfumed poutery within whose walls so much civilization had finely flowered. He looked at his magnificent sofa, gilded and carved, upholstered in white satin, and so deep — for it was a great square piece of furniture, almost as broad as it was long — that when you sat right back, you had of necessity to lift your feet from the floor and recline at length. It was under the white satin that Crébillon’s spirit found, in these late degenerate days, a sympathetic home. He looked at his exquisite Condor fans over the mantelpiece; his lovely Marie Laurencin of two young girls, pale-skinned and berry-eyed, walking embraced in a shallow myopic landscape amid a troop of bounding heraldic dogs. He looked at his cabinet of bibelots in the corner where the nigger mask and the superb Chinese phallus in sculptured rock

crystal contrasted so amusingly with the Chelsea china, the little ivory Madonna, which might be a fake, but in any case was quite as good as any mediæval French original, and the Italian medals. He looked at his comical writing-desk in shining black papier mâché and mother-of-pearl; he looked at his article on the ‘Jus Primæ Noctis’, black and neat on the page, with the red corrections attesting his tireless search for, and his, he flattered himself, almost invariable discovery of, the inevitable word. No, really, one couldn’t expect him to find Lypiatt’s notions very sympathetic.

‘But I don’t expect you to,’ said Lypiatt, ‘and, good God! I don’t want you to. But you call me insincere. That’s what I can’t and won’t stand. How dare you do that?’ His voice was growing louder.

Once more Mr Mercaptan deprecatingly flapped. ‘At the most,’ he corrected, ‘I said that there was a certain look of insincerity about some of the pictures. Hardly avoidable, indeed, in work of this kind.’

Quite suddenly, Lypiatt lost his self-control. All the accumulated anger and bitterness of the last days burst out. His show had been a hopeless failure. Not a picture sold, a press that was mostly bad, or, when good, that had praised for the wrong, the insulting reasons. ‘Bright and effective work.’ ‘Mr Lypiatt would make an excellent stage designer.’ Damn them! damn them! And then, when the dailies had all had their yelp, here was Mercaptan in the Weekly World taking him as a text for what was practically an essay on insincerity in art. ‘How dare you?’ he furiously shouted. ‘You — how dare you talk about sincerity? What can you know about sincerity, you disgusting little bug!’ And avenging himself on the person of Mr Mercaptan against the world that had neglected him, against the fate that had denied him his rightful share of talent, Lypiatt sprang up and, seizing the author of the ‘Jus Primæ Noctis’ by the shoulders, he shook him, he bumped him up and down in his chair, he cuffed him over the head. ‘How can you have the impudence,’ he asked, letting go of his victim, but still standing menacingly over him, ‘to touch anything that even attempts to be decent and big?’ All these years, these wretched years of poverty and struggle and courageous hope and failure and repeated disappointment; and now this last

failure, more complete than all. He was trembling with anger; at least one forgot unhappiness while one was angry.

Mr Mercaptan had recovered from his first terrified surprise. ‘Really, really,’ he repeated, ‘too barbarous. Scuffling like hobbledehoys.’

‘If you knew,’ Lypiatt began; but he checked himself. If you knew, he was going to say, what those things had cost me, what they meant, what thought, what passion — But how could Mercaptan understand? And it would sound as though he were appealing to this creature’s sympathy. ‘Bug!’ he shouted instead, ‘bug!’ And he struck out again with the flat of his hand. Mr Mercaptan put up his hands and ducked away from the slaps, blinking.

‘Really,’ he protested, ‘really. ...’

Insincere? Perhaps it was half true. Lypiatt seized his man more furiously than before and shook him, shook him. ‘And then that vile insult about the vermouth advertisement,’ he cried out. That had rankled. Those flaring, vulgar posters! ‘You thought you could mock me and spit at me with impunity, did you? I’ve stood it so long, you thought I’d always stand it? Was that it? But you’re mistaken.’ He lifted his fist. Mr Mercaptan cowered away, raising his arm to protect his head. ‘Vile bug of a coward,’ said Lypiatt, ‘why don’t you defend yourself like a man? You can only be dangerous with words. Very witty and spiteful and cutting about those vermouth posters, wasn’t it? But you wouldn’t dare to fight me if I challenged you.’

‘Well, as a matter of fact,’ said Mr Mercaptan, peering up from under his defences, ‘I didn’t invent that particular piece of criticism. I borrowed the apéritif.’ He laughed feebly, more canary than bull.

‘You borrowed it, did you?’ Lypiatt contemptuously repeated. ‘And who from, may I ask?’ Not that it interested him in the least to know.

‘Well, if you really want to know,’ said Mr Mercaptan, ‘it was from our friend Myra Viveash.’

Lypiatt stood for a moment without speaking, then putting his menacing hand in his pocket, he turned away. ‘Oh!’ he said non-committally, and was silent again.

Relieved, Mr Mercaptan sat up in his chair; with the palm of his right hand he smoothed his dishevelled head.

Airily, outside in the sunshine, Rosie walked down Sloane Street, looking at the numbers on the doors of the houses. A hundred and ninety-nine, two hundred, two hundred and one — she was getting near now. Perhaps all the people who passed, strolling so easily and elegantly and disengagedly along, perhaps they all of them carried behind their eyes a secret, as delightful and amusing as hers. Rosie liked to think so; it made life more exciting. How nonchalantly distinguished, Rosie reflected, she herself must look. Would any one who saw her now, sauntering along like this, would any one guess that, ten houses farther down the street, a young poet, or at least very nearly a young poet, was waiting, on the second floor, eagerly for her arrival? Of course they wouldn't and couldn't guess! That was the fun and the enormous excitement of the whole thing. Formidable in her light-hearted detachment, formidable in the passion which at will she could give rein to and check again, the great lady swam beautifully along through the sunlight to satisfy her caprice. Like Diana, she stooped over the shepherd boy. Eagerly the starving young poet waited, waited in his garret. Two hundred and twelve, two hundred and thirteen. Rosie looked at the entrance and was reminded that the garret couldn't after all be very sordid, nor the young poet absolutely starving. She stepped in and, standing in the hall, looked at the board with the names. Ground floor: Mrs Budge. First floor: F. de M. Rowbotham. Second floor: P. Mercaptan.

P. Mercaptan. ... But it was a charming name, a romantic name, a real young poet's name! Mercaptan — she felt more than ever pleased with her selection. The fastidious lady could not have had a happier caprice. Mercaptan ... Mercaptan. ... She wondered what the P. stood for. Peter, Philip, Patrick, Pendennis even? She could hardly have guessed that Mr Mercaptan's father, the eminent bacteriologist, had insisted, thirty-four years ago, on calling his first-born 'Pasteur'.

A little tremulous, under her outward elegant calm, Rosie mounted the stairs. Twenty-five steps to the first floor — one flight of thirteen, which was rather

disagreeably ominous, and one of twelve. Then two flights of eleven, and she was on the second landing, facing a front door, a bell-push like a round eye, a brass name-plate. For a great lady thoroughly accustomed to this sort of thing, she felt her heart beating rather unpleasantly fast. It was those stairs, no doubt. She halted a moment, took two deep breaths, then pushed the bell.

The door was opened by an aged servant of the most forbiddingly respectable appearance.

‘Mr Mercaptan at home?’

The person at the door burst at once into a long, rambling, angry complaint, but precisely about what Rosie could not for certain make out. Mr Mercaptan had left orders, she gathered, that he wasn’t to be disturbed. But some one had come and disturbed him, ‘fairly shoved his way in, so rude and inconsiderate,’ all the same. And now he’d been once disturbed, she didn’t see why he shouldn’t be disturbed again. But she didn’t know what things were coming to if people fairly shoved their way in like that. Bolshevism, she called it.

Rosie murmured her sympathies, and was admitted into a dark hall. Still querulously denouncing the Bolsheviks who came shoving in, the person led the way down a corridor and, throwing open a door, announced, in a tone of grievance: ‘A lady to see you, Master Paster’ — for Mrs Goldie was an old family retainer, and one of the few who knew the secret of Mr Mercaptan’s Christian name, one of the fewer still who were privileged to employ it. Then, as soon as Rosie had stepped across the threshold, she cut off her retreat with a bang and went off, muttering all the time, towards her kitchen.

It certainly wasn’t a garret. Half a glance, the first whiff of potpourri, the feel of the carpet beneath her feet, had been enough to prove that. But it was not the room which occupied Rosie’s attention, it was its occupants. One of them, thin, sharp-featured and, in Rosie’s very young eyes, quite old, was standing with an elbow on the mantelpiece. The other, sleeker and more genial in appearance, was sitting in front of a writing-desk near the window. And neither of them — Rosie glanced desperately from one to the other, hoping vainly that she might have overlooked a blond beard — neither of them was Toto.

The sleek man at the writing-desk got up, advanced to meet her.

‘An unexpected pleasure,’ he said, in a voice that alternately boomed and fluted. ‘Too delightful! But to what do I owe — ? Who, may I ask — ?’

He had held out his hand; automatically Rosie proffered hers. The sleek man shook it with cordiality, almost with tenderness.

‘I ... I think I must have made a mistake,’ she said. ‘Mr Mercaptan ... ?’

The sleek man smiled. ‘I am Mr Mercaptan.’

‘You live on the second floor?’

‘I never laid claims to being a mathematician,’ said the sleek man, smiling as though to applaud himself, ‘but I have always calculated that ...’ he hesitated ... ‘enfin, que ma demeure se trouve, en effet, on the second floor. Lypiatt will bear me out, I’m sure.’ He turned to the thin man, who had not moved from the fireplace, but had stood all the time motionlessly, his elbow on the mantelpiece, looking gloomily at the ground.

Lypiatt looked up. ‘I must be going,’ he said abruptly. And he walked towards the door. Like vermouth posters, like vermouth posters! — so that was Myra’s piece of mockery! All his anger had sunk like a quenched flame. He was altogether quenched, put out with unhappiness.

Politely Mr Mercaptan hurried across the room and opened the door for him. ‘Good-bye, then,’ he said airily.

Lypiatt did not speak, but walked out into the hall. The front door banged behind him.

‘Well, well,’ said Mr Mercaptan, coming back across the room to where Rosie was still irresolutely standing. ‘Talk about the furor poeticus! But do sit down, I beg you. On Crébillon.’ He indicated the vast white satin sofa. ‘I call it Crébillon,’ he explained, ‘because the soul of that great writer undoubtedly tenants it, undoubtedly. You know his book, of course? You know Le Sopha?’

Sinking into Crébillon’s soft lap, Rosie had to admit that she didn’t know Le Sopha. She had begun to recover her self-possession. If this wasn’t the young poet, it was certainly a young poet. And a very peculiar one, too. As a great lady she laughingly accepted the odd situation.

‘Not know Le Sopha?’ exclaimed Mr Mercaptan. ‘Oh! but, my dear and mysterious young lady, let me lend you a copy of it at once. No education can be called complete without a knowledge of that divine book.’ He darted to the bookshelf and came back with a small volume bound in white vellum. ‘The hero’s soul,’ he explained, handing her the volume, ‘passes, by the laws of metempsychosis, into a sofa. He is doomed to remain a sofa until such time as two persons consummate upon his bosom their reciprocal and equal loves. The book is the record of the poor sofa’s hopes and disappointments.’

‘Dear me!’ said Rosie, looking at the title-page.

‘But now,’ said Mr Mercaptan, sitting down beside her on the edge of Crébillon, ‘won’t you please explain? To what happy quiproquo do I owe this sudden and altogether delightful invasion of my privacy?’

‘Well,’ said Rosie, and hesitated. It was really rather difficult to explain. ‘I was to meet a friend of mine.’

‘Quite so,’ said Mr Mercaptan encouragingly.

‘Who sent me a telegram,’ Rosie went on.

‘He sent you a telegram!’ Mr Mercaptan echoed.

‘Changing the — the place we had fixed and telling me to meet him at this address.’

‘Here?’

Rose nodded. ‘On the s — second floor,’ she made it more precise.

‘But I live on the second floor,’ said Mr Mercaptan. ‘You don’t mean to say your friend is also called Mercaptan and lives here too?’

Rosie smiled. ‘I don’t know what he’s called,’ she said with a cool ironical carelessness that was genuinely grande dame.

‘You don’t know his name?’ Mr Mercaptan gave a roar and a squeal of delighted laughter. ‘But that’s too good,’ he said.

‘S — second floor, he wrote in the telegram.’ Rosie was now perfectly at her ease. ‘When I saw your name, I thought it was his name. I must say,’ she added, looking sideways at Mr Mercaptan and at once dropping the magnolia petals of her eyelids, ‘it seemed to me a very charming name.’

‘You overwhelm me,’ said Mr Mercaptan, smiling all over his cheerful, snouty face. ‘As for your name — I am too discreet a galantuomo to ask. And, in any case, what does it matter? A rose by any other name ...’

‘But, as a matter of fact,’ she said, raising and lowering once again her smooth, white lids, ‘my name does happen to be Rose; or, at any rate, Rosie.’

‘So you are sweet by right!’ exclaimed Mr Mercaptan, with a pretty gallantry which he was the first to appreciate. ‘Let’s order tea on the strength of it.’ He jumped up and rang the bell. ‘How I congratulate myself on this astonishing piece of good fortune!’

Rosie said nothing. This Mr Mercaptan, she thought, seemed to be even more a man of the great artistic world than Toto.

‘What puzzles me,’ he went on, ’is why your anonymous friend should have chosen my address out of all the millions of others. He must know me, or, at any rate, know about me.’

‘I should imagine,’ said Rosie, ‘that you have a lot of friends.’

Mr Mercaptan laughed — the whole orchestra, from bassoon to piccolo. ‘Des amis, des amies — with and without the mute “e”,’ he declared.

The aged and forbidding servant appeared at the door.

‘Tea for two, Mrs Goldie.’

Mrs Goldie looked round the room suspiciously. ‘The other gentleman’s gone, has he?’ she asked. And having assured herself of his absence, she renewed her complaint. ‘Shoving in like that,’ she said. ‘Bolshevism, that’s what I—’

‘All right, all right, Mrs Goldie. Let’s have our tea as quickly as possible.’ Mr Mercaptan held up his hand, authoritatively, with the gesture of a policeman controlling the traffic.

‘Very well, Master Paster.’ Mrs Goldie spoke with resignation and departed.

‘But tell me,’ Mr Mercaptan went on, ‘if it isn’t indiscreet — what does your friend look like?’

‘W — well,’ Rosie answered, ‘he’s fair, and though he’s quite young he wears a beard.’ With her two hands she indicated on her own unemphatic bosom

the contours of Toto's broad blond fan.

'A beard! But, good heavens,' Mr Mercaptan slapped his thigh, 'it's Coleman, it's obviously and undoubtedly Coleman!'

'Well, whoever it was,' said Rosie severely, 'he played a very stupid sort of joke.'

'For which I thank him. De tout mon cœur.'

Rosie smiled and looked sideways. 'All the same,' she said, 'I shall give him a piece of my mind.'

Poor Aunt Aggie! Oh, poor Aunt Aggie, indeed! In the light of Mr Mercaptan's boudoir her hammered copper and her leadless glaze certainly did look a bit comical.

After tea Mr Mercaptan played cicerone in a tour of inspection round the room. They visited the papier mâché writing-desk, the Condor fans, the Marie Laurencin, the 1914 edition of Du Côté de chez Swann, the Madonna that probably was a fake, the nigger mask, the Chelsea figures, the Chinese object of art in sculptured crystal, the scale model of Queen Victoria in wax under a glass bell. Toto, it became clear, had been no more than a forerunner; the definitive revelation was Mr Mercaptan's. Yes, poor Aunt Aggie! And indeed, when Mr Mercaptan began to read her his little middle on the 'Droit du Seigneur', it was poor everybody. Poor mother, with her absurd, old-fashioned, prudish views; poor, earnest father, with his Unitarianism, his Hibbert Journal, his letters to the papers about the necessity for a spiritual regeneration.

'Bravo!' she cried from the depths of Crébillon. She was leaning back in one corner, languid, serpentine, and at ease, her feet in their mottled snake's leather tucked up under her. 'Bravo!' she cried as Mr Mercaptan finished his reading and looked up for his applause.

Mr Mercaptan bowed.

'You express so exquisitely what we—' and waving her hand in a comprehensive gesture, she pictured to herself all the other fastidious ladies, all the marchionesses of fable, reclining, as she herself at this moment reclined, on upholstery of white satin, 'what we all only feel and aren't clever enough to say.'

Mr Mercaptan was charmed. He got up from before his writing-desk, crossed the room and sat down beside her on Crébillon. ‘Feeling,’ he said, ’is the important thing.’

Rosie remembered that her father had once remarked, in blank verse: ‘The things that matter happen in the heart.’

‘I quite agree,’ she said.

Like movable raisins in the suet of his snouty face, Mr Mercaptan’s brown little eyes rolled amorous avowals. He took Rosie’s hand and kissed it. Crébillon creaked discreetly as he moved a little nearer.

It was on the evening of the same day. Rosie lay on her sofa — a poor, hire-purchase thing indeed, compared with Mr Mercaptan’s grand affair in white satin and carved and gilded wood, but still a sofa — lay with her feet on the arm of it and her long suave legs exposed, by the slipping of the kimono, to the top of her stretched stockings. She was reading the little vellum-jacketed volume of Crébillon, which Mr Mercaptan had given her when he said ‘good-bye’ (or rather, ‘À bientôt, mon amie’); given, not lent, as he had less generously offered at the beginning of their afternoon; given with the most graceful of allusive dedications inscribed on the fly-leaf:

To
BY-NO-OTHER-NAME-AS-SWEET,
With Gratitude,
FROM
CRÉBILLON DELIVERED.

À bientôt — she had promised to come again very soon. She thought of the essay on the ‘Jus Primæ Noctis’ — ah! what we’ve all been feeling and none of us clever enough to say. We on the sofas, ruthless, lovely and fastidious. ...

‘I am proud to constitute myself’ — Mr Mercaptan had said of it— ‘l’esprit d’escalier des dames galantes.’

Rosie was not quite sure what he meant; but it certainly sounded very witty indeed.

She read the book slowly. Her French, indeed, wasn't good enough to permit her to read it anyhow else. She wished it were better. Perhaps if it were better she wouldn't be yawning like this. It was disgraceful: she pulled herself together. Mr Mercaptan had said that it was a masterpiece.

In his study, Shearwater was trying to write his paper on the regulative functions of the kidneys. He was not succeeding.

Why wouldn't she see me yesterday? he kept wondering. With anguish he suspected other lovers; desired her, in consequence, the more. Gumbril had said something, he remembered, that night they had met her by the coffee-stall. What was it? He wished now that he had listened more attentively.

She's bored with me. Already. It was obvious.

Perhaps he was too rustic for her. Shearwater looked at his hands. Yes, the nails were dirty. He took an orange stick out of his waistcoat pocket and began to clean them. He had bought a whole packet of orange sticks that morning.

Determinedly he took up his pen. 'The hydrogen ion concentration in the blood ...' he began a new paragraph. But he got no further than the first seven words.

If, he began thinking with a frightful confusion, if — if — if — Past conditionals, hopelessly past. He might have been brought up more elegantly; his father, for example, might have been a barrister instead of a barrister's clerk. He mightn't have had to work so hard when he was young; might have been about more, danced more, seen more young women. If he had met her years ago — during the war, should one say, dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Guards. ...

He had pretended that he wasn't interested in women; that they had no effect on him; that, in fact, he was above that sort of thing. Imbecile! He might as well have said that he was above having a pair of kidneys. He had only consented to admit, graciously, that they were a physiological necessity.

O God, what a fool he had been!

And then, what about Rosie? What sort of a life had she been having while he was being above that sort of thing? Now he came to think of it, he really knew

nothing about her, except that she had been quite incapable of learning correctly, even by heart, the simplest facts about the physiology of frogs. Having found that out, he had really given up exploring further. How could he have been so stupid?

Rosie had been in love with him, he supposed. Had he been in love with her? No. He had taken care not to be. On principle. He had married her as a measure of intimate hygiene; out of protective affection, too, certainly out of affection; and a little for amusement, as one might buy a puppy.

Mrs Viveash had opened his eyes; seeing her, he had also begun to notice Rosie. It seemed to him that he had been a loutish cad as well as an imbecile.

What should he do about it? He sat for a long time wondering.

In the end he decided that the best thing would be to go and tell Rosie all about it, all about everything.

About Mrs Viveash too? Yes, about Mrs Viveash too. He would get over Mrs Viveash more easily and more rapidly if he did. And he would begin to try and find out about Rosie. He would explore her. He would discover all the other things besides an incapacity to learn physiology that were in her. He would discover her, he would quicken his affection for her into something livelier and more urgent. And they would begin again; more satisfactorily this time; with knowledge and understanding; wise from their experience.

Shearwater got up from his chair before the writing-table, lurched pensively towards the door, bumping into the revolving bookcase and the arm-chair as he went, and walked down the passage to the drawing-room. Rosie did not turn her head as he came in, but went on reading without changing her position, her slippered feet still higher than her head, her legs still charmingly avowing themselves.

Shearwater came to a halt in front of the empty fireplace. He stood there with his back to it, as though warming himself before an imaginary flame. It was, he felt, the safest, the most strategic point from which to talk.

‘What are you reading?’ he asked.

‘Le Sopha,’ said Rosie.

‘What’s that?’

‘What’s that?’ Rosie scornfully echoed. ‘Why, it’s one of the great French classics.’

‘Who by?’

‘Crébillon the younger.’

‘Never heard of him,’ said Shearwater.

There was a silence. Rosie went on reading.

‘It just occurred to me,’ Shearwater began again in his rather ponderous, infelicitous way, ‘that you mightn’t be very happy, Rosie.’

Rosie looked up at him and laughed. ‘What put that into your head?’ she asked. ‘I’m perfectly happy.’

Shearwater was left a little at a loss. ‘Well, I’m very glad to hear it,’ he said. ‘I only thought ... that perhaps you might think ... that I rather neglected you.’

Rosie laughed again. ‘What is all this about?’ she said.

‘I have it rather on my conscience,’ said Shearwater. ‘I begin to see ... something has made me see ... that I’ve not. ... I don’t treat you very well ...’

‘But I don’t n — notice it, I assure you,’ put in Rosie, still smiling.

‘I leave you out too much,’ Shearwater went on with a kind of desperation, running his fingers through his thick black hair. ‘We don’t share enough together. You’re too much outside my life.’

‘But after all,’ said Rosie, ‘we are a civ — vilized couple. We don’t want to live in one another’s pockets, do we?’

‘No, but we’re really no more than strangers,’ said Shearwater. ‘That isn’t right. And it’s my fault. I’ve never tried to get into touch with your life. But you did your best to understand mine ... at the beginning of our marriage.’

‘Oh, then — n!’ said Rosie, laughing. ‘You found out what a little idiot I was.’

‘Don’t make a joke of it,’ said Shearwater. ‘It isn’t a joke. It’s very serious. I tell you, I’ve come to see how stupid and inconsiderate and un-understanding I’ve been with you. I’ve come to see quite suddenly. The fact is,’ he went on with a rush, like an uncorked fountain, ‘I’ve been seeing a woman recently

whom I like very much, and who doesn't like me.' Speaking of Mrs Viveash, unconsciously he spoke her language. For Mrs Viveash people always euphemistically 'liked' one another rather a lot, even when it was a case of the most frightful and excruciating passion, the most complete abandonments. 'And somehow that's made me see a lot of things which I'd been blind to before — blind deliberately, I suppose. It's made me see, among other things, that I've really been to blame towards you, Rosie.'

Rosie listened with an astonishment which she perfectly disguised. So James was embarking on his little affairs, was he? It seemed incredible, and also, as she looked at her husband's face — the face, behind its bristlingly manly mask, of a harassed baby — also rather pathetically absurd. She wondered who it could be. But she displayed no curiosity. She would find out soon enough.

'I'm sorry you should have been unhappy about it,' she said.

'It's finished now.' Shearwater made a decided little gesture.

'Ah, no!' said Rosie. 'You should persevere.' She looked at him, smiling.

Shearwater was taken aback by this display of easy detachment. He had imagined the conversation so very differently, as something so serious, so painful and, at the same time, so healing and soothing, that he did not know how to go on. 'But I thought,' he said hesitatingly, 'that you ... that we ... after this experience ... I would try to get closer to you ...' (Oh, it sounded ridiculous!) ... 'We might start again, from a different place, so to speak.'

'But, cher ami,' protested Rosie, with the inflection and in the preferred tongue of Mr Mercaptan, 'you can't seriously expect us to do the Darby and Joan business, can you? You're distressing yourself quite unnecessarily on my account. I don't find you neglect me or anything like it. You have your life — naturally. And I have mine. We don't get in one another's way.'

'But do you think that's the ideal sort of married life?' asked Shearwater.

'It's obviously the most civ — vilized,' Rosie answered, laughing.

Confronted by Rosie's civilization, Shearwater felt helpless.

'Well, if you don't want,' he said. 'I'd hoped ... I'd thought ...'

He went back to his study to think things over. The more he thought them over, the more he blamed himself. And incessantly the memory of Mrs Viveash tormented him.

CHAPTER XIX

AFTER LEAVING MR Mercaptan, Lypiatt had gone straight home. The bright day seemed to deride him. With its shining red omnibuses, its parasols, its muslin girls, its young-leaved trees, its bands at the street corners, it was too much of a garden party to be tolerable. He wanted to be alone. He took a cab back to the studio. He couldn't afford it, of course; but what did that matter, what did that matter now?

The cab drove slowly and as though with reluctance down the dirty mews. He paid it off, opened his little door between the wide stable doors, climbed the steep ladder of his stairs and was at home. He sat down and tried to think.

'Death, death, death, death,' he kept repeating to himself, moving his lips as though he were praying. If he said the word often enough, if he accustomed himself completely to the idea, death would come almost by itself; he would know it already, while he was still alive, he would pass almost without noticing out of life into death. Into death, he thought, into death. Death like a well. The stone falls, falls, second after second; and at last there is a sound, a far-off, horrible sound of death and then nothing more. The well at Carisbrooke, with a donkey to wind the wheel that pulls up the bucket of water, of icy water ... He thought for a long time of the well of death.

Outside in the mews a barrel-organ struck up the tune of 'Where do flies go in the winter-time?' Lypiatt lifted his head to listen. He smiled to himself. 'Where do flies go?' The question asked itself with a dramatic, a tragical appositeness. At the end of everything — the last ludicrous touch. He saw it all from outside. He pictured himself sitting there alone, broken. He looked at his hand lying limp on the table in front of him. It needed only the stigma of the nail to make it the hand of a dead Christ.

There, he was making literature of it again. Even now. He buried his face in his hands. His mind was full of twisted darkness, of an unspeakable, painful confusion. It was too difficult, too difficult.

The inkpot, he found when he wanted to begin writing, contained nothing but a parched black sediment. He had been meaning for days past to get some more ink; and he had always forgotten. He would have to write in pencil.

‘Do you remember,’ he wrote, ‘do you remember, Myra, that time we went down into the country — you remember — under the Hog’s Back at that little inn they were trying to make pretentious? “Hotel Bull” — do you remember? How we laughed over the Hotel Bull! And how we liked the country outside its doors! All the world in a few square miles. Chalk-pits and blue butterflies on the Hog’s Back. And at the foot of the hill, suddenly, the sand; the hard, yellow sand with those queer caves, dug when and by what remote villains at the edge of the Pilgrims’ Way? the fine grey sand on which the heather of Puttenham Common grows. And the flagstaff and the inscription marking the place where Queen Victoria stood to look at the view. And the enormous sloping meadows round Compton and the thick, dark woods. And the lakes, the heaths, the Scotch firs at Cutt Mill. The forests of Shackleford. There was everything. Do you remember how we enjoyed it all? I did, in any case. I was happy during those three days. And I loved you, Myra. And I thought you might, you might perhaps, some day, love me. You didn’t. And my love has only brought me unhappiness. Perhaps it has been my fault. Perhaps I ought to have known how to make you give me happiness. You remember that wonderful sonnet of Michelangelo’s, where he says that the loved woman is like a block of marble from which the artist knows how to cut the perfect statue of his dreams. If the statue turns out a bad one, if it’s death instead of love that the lover gets — why, the fault lies in the artist and in the lover, not in the marble, not in the beloved.

Amor dunque non ha, nè tua beltate,

O fortuna, o durezza, o gran disdegno,

Del mio mal colpa, o mio destino, o sorte,

Se dentro del tuo cor morte è pietate
Porti in un tempo, e ch'l mio basso ingegno
Non sappia ardendo trarne altro che morte.

Yes, it was my basso ingegno: my low genius which did not know how to draw love from you, nor beauty from the materials of which art is made. Ah, now you'll smile to yourself and say: Poor Casimir, he has come to admit that at last? Yes, yes, I have come to admit everything. That I couldn't paint, I couldn't write, I couldn't make music. That I was a charlatan and a quack. That I was a ridiculous actor of heroic parts who deserved to be laughed at — and was laughed at. But then every man is ludicrous if you look at him from outside, without taking into account what's going on in his heart and mind. You could turn Hamlet into an epigrammatic farce with an inimitable scene when he takes his adored mother in adultery. You could make the wittiest Guy de Maupassant short story out of the life of Christ, by contrasting the mad rabbi's pretensions with his abject fate. It's a question of the point of view. Every one's a walking farce and a walking tragedy at the same time. The man who slips on a banana-skin and fractures his skull describes against the sky, as he falls, the most richly comical arabesque. And you, Myra — what do you suppose the unsympathetic gossips say of you? What sort of a farce of the Boulevards is your life in their eyes? For me, Myra, you seem to move all the time through some nameless and incomprehensible tragedy. For them you are what? Merely any sort of a wanton, with amusing adventures. And what am I? A charlatan, a quack, a pretentious, boasting, rhodo-montading imbecile, incapable of painting anything but vermouth posters. (Why did that hurt so terribly? I don't know. There was no reason why you shouldn't think so if you wanted to.) I was all that — and grotesquely laughable. And very likely your laughter was justified, your judgment was true. I don't know. I can't tell. Perhaps I am a charlatan. Perhaps I'm insincere; boasting to others, deceiving myself. I don't know, I tell you. Everything is confusion in my mind now. The whole fabric seems to have tumbled to pieces; it lies in a horrible chaos. I can make no order within myself. Have I lied to myself? have I acted and postured the Great Man to persuade

myself that I am one? have I something in me, or nothing? have I ever achieved anything of worth, anything that rhymed with my conceptions, my dreams (for those were fine; of that, I am certain)? I look into the chaos that is my soul and, I tell you, I don't know, I don't know. But what I do know is that I've spent nearly twenty years now playing the charlatan at whom you all laugh. That I've suffered, in mind and in body too — almost from hunger, sometimes — in order to play it. That I've struggled, that I've exultantly climbed to the attack, that I've been thrown down — ah, many times! — that I've picked myself up and started again. Well, I suppose all that's ludicrous, if you like to think of it that way. It is ludicrous that a man should put himself to prolonged inconvenience for the sake of something which doesn't really exist at all. It's exquisitely comic, I can see. I can see it in the abstract, so to speak. But in this particular case, you must remember I'm not a dispassionate observer. And if I am overcome now, it is not with laughter. It is with an indescribable unhappiness, with the bitterness of death itself. Death, death, death. I repeat the word to myself, again and again. I think of death, I try to imagine it, I hang over it, looking down, where the stones fall and fall and there is one horrible noise, and then silence again; looking down into the well of death. It is so deep that there is no glittering eye of water to be seen at the bottom. I have no candle to send down. It is horrible, but I do not want to go on living. Living would be worse than ...'

Lypiatt was reaching out for another sheet of paper when he was startled to hear the sound of feet on the stairs. He turned towards the door. His heart beat with violence. He was filled with a strange sense of apprehension. In terror he awaited the approach of some unknown and terrible being. The feet of the angel of death were on the stairs. Up, up, up. Lypiatt felt himself trembling as the sound came nearer. He knew for certain that in a few seconds he was going to die. The hangmen had already pinioned him; the soldiers of the firing squad had already raised their rifles. One, two, ... he thought of Mrs Viveash standing, bare-headed, the wind blowing in her hair, at the foot of the flagstaff from the site of which Queen Victoria had admired the distant view of Selborne; he thought of her dolorously smiling; he remembered that once she had taken his

head between her two hands and kissed him: ‘Because you’re such a golden ass,’ she had said, laughing. Three ... There was a little tap at the door. Lypiatt pressed his hand over his heart. The door opened.

A small, bird-like man with a long, sharp nose and eyes as round and black and shining as buttons stepped into the room.

‘Mr Lydgate, I presume?’ he began. Then looked at a card on which a name and address were evidently written. ‘Lypiatt, I mean. A thousand pardons. Mr Lypiatt, I presume?’

Lypiatt leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. His face was as white as paper. He breathed hard and his temples were wet with sweat, as though he had been running.

‘I found the door down below open, so I came straight up. I hope you’ll excuse ...’ The stranger smiled apologetically.

‘Who are you?’ Lypiatt asked, reopening his eyes. His heart was still beating hard; after the storm it calmed itself slowly. He drew back from the brink of the fearful well; the time had not yet come to plunge.

‘My name,’ said the stranger, ’is Boldero, Herbert Boldero. Our mutual friend Mr Gumbril, Mr Theodore Gumbril, junior,’ he made it more precise, ‘suggested that I might come and see you about a little matter in which he and I are interested and in which perhaps you, too, might be interested.’

Lypiatt nodded, without saying anything.

Mr Boldero, meanwhile, was turning his bright, bird-like eyes about the studio. Mrs Viveash’s portrait, all but finished now, was clamped to the easel. He approached it, a connoisseur.

‘It reminds me very much,’ he said, ‘of Bacosso. Very much indeed, if I may say so. Also a little of ...’ he hesitated, trying to think of the name of that other fellow Gumbril had talked about. But being unable to remember the unimpressive syllables of Derain he played for safety and said— ‘of Orpen.’ Mr Boldero looked inquiringly at Lypiatt to see if that was right.

Lypiatt still spoke no word and seemed, indeed, not to have heard what had been said.

Mr Boldero saw that it wasn't much good talking about modern art. This chap, he thought, looked as though something were wrong with him. He hoped he hadn't got influenza. There was a lot of the disease about. 'This little affair I was speaking of,' he pursued, in another tone, 'is a little business proposition that Mr Gumbril and I have gone into together. A matter of pneumatic trousers,' he waved his hand airily.

Lypiatt suddenly burst out laughing, an embittered Titan. Where do flies go? Where do souls go? The barrel-organ, and now pneumatic trousers! Then, as suddenly, he was silent again. More literature? Another piece of acting? 'Go on,' he said, 'I'm sorry.'

'Not at all, not at all,' said Mr Boldero indulgently. 'I know the idea does seem a little humorous, if I may say so, at first. But I assure you, there's money in it, Mr Lydgate — Mr Lypiatt. Money!' Mr Boldero paused a moment dramatically. 'Well,' he went on, 'our idea was to launch the new product with a good swingeing publicity campaign. Spend a few thousands in the papers and then get it good and strong into the Underground and on the hoardings, along with Owbridge's and John Bull and the Golden Ballot. Now, for that, Mr Lypiatt, we shall need, as you can well imagine, a few good striking pictures. Mr Gumbril mentioned your name and suggested I should come and see you to find out if you would perhaps be agreeable to lending us your talent for this work. And I may add, Mr Lypiatt,' he spoke with real warmth, 'that having seen this example of your work' — he pointed to the portrait of Mrs Viveash— 'I feel that you would be eminently capable of ...'

He did not finish the sentence; for at this moment Lypiatt leapt up from his chair and, making a shrill, inarticulate, animal noise, rushed on the financier, seized him with both hands by the throat, shook him, threw him to the floor, then picked him up again by the coat collar and pushed him towards the door, kicking him as he went. A final kick sent Mr Boldero tobogganing down the steep stairs. Lypiatt ran down after him; but Mr Boldero had picked himself up, had opened the front door, slipped out, slammed it behind him, and was running up the mews before Lypiatt could get to the bottom of the stairs.

Lypiatt opened the door and looked out. Mr Boldero was already far away, almost at the Piranesian arch. He watched him till he was out of sight, then went upstairs again and threw himself face downwards on his bed.

CHAPTER XX

ZOE ENDED THE discussion by driving half an inch of penknife into Coleman's left arm and running out of the flat, slamming the door behind her. Coleman was used to this sort of thing; this sort of thing, indeed, was what he was there for. Carefully he pulled out the penknife which had remained sticking in his arm. He looked at the blade and was relieved to see that it wasn't so dirty as might have been expected. He found some cotton wool, mopped up the blood as it oozed out, and dabbed the wound with iodine. Then he set himself to bandage it up. But to tie a bandage round one's own left arm is not easy. Coleman found it impossible to keep the lint in place, impossible to get the bandage tight enough. At the end of a quarter of an hour he had only succeeded in smearing himself very copiously with blood, and the wound was still unbound. He gave up the attempt and contented himself with swabbing up the blood as it came out.

'And forthwith came there out blood and water,' he said aloud, and looked at the red stain on the cotton wool. He repeated the words again and again, and at the fiftieth repetition burst out laughing.

The bell in the kitchen suddenly buzzed. Who could it be? He went to the front door and opened it. On the landing outside stood a tall slender young woman with slanting Chinese eyes and a wide mouth, elegantly dressed in a black frock piped with white. Keeping the cotton wool still pressed to his bleeding arm. Coleman bowed as gracefully as he could.

'Do come in,' he said. 'You are just in the nick of time. I am on the point of bleeding to death. And forthwith came there out blood and water. Enter, enter,' he added, seeing the young woman still standing irresolutely on the threshold.

'But I wanted to see Mr Coleman,' she said, stammering a little and showing her embarrassment by blushing.

‘I am Mr Coleman.’ He took the cotton wool for a moment from his arm and looked with the air of a connoisseur at the blood on it. ‘But I shall very soon cease to be that individual unless you come and tie up my wounds.’

‘But you’re not the Mr Coleman I thought you were,’ said the young lady, still more embarrassed. ‘You have a beard, it is true; but ...’

‘Then I must resign myself to quit this life, must I?’ He made a gesture of despair, throwing out both hands. ‘Out, out, brief Coleman. Out, damned spot,’ and he made as though to close the door.

The young lady checked him. ‘If you really need tying up,’ she said, ‘I’ll do it, of course. I passed my First-Aid Exam in the war.’

Coleman reopened the door. ‘Saved!’ he said. ‘Come in.’

It had been Rosie’s original intention yesterday to go straight on from Mr Mercaptan’s to Toto’s. She would see him at once, she would ask him what he meant by playing that stupid trick on her. She would give him a good talking to. She would even tell him that she would never see him again. But, of course, if he showed himself sufficiently contrite and reasonably explanatory, she would consent — oh, very reluctantly — to take him back into favour. In the free, unprejudiced circles in which she now moved, this sort of joke, she imagined, was a mere trifle. It would be absurd to quarrel seriously about it. But still, she was determined to give Toto a lesson.

When, however, she did finally leave Mr Mercaptan’s delicious boudoir, it was too late to think of going all the way to Pimlico, to the address which Mr Mercaptan had given her. She decided to put it off till the next day.

And so the next day, duly, she had set out for Pimlico — to Pimlico, and to see a man called Coleman! It seemed rather dull and second-rate after Sloane Street and Mr Mercaptan. Poor Toto! — the sparkle of Mr Mercaptan had made him look rather tarnished. That essay on the ‘Jus Primæ Noctis’ — ah! Walking through the unsavoury mazes of Pimlico, she thought of it, and, thinking of it, smiled. Poor Toto! And also, she mustn’t forget, stupid, malicious, idiotic Toto! She had made up her mind exactly what she should say to him; she had even made up her mind what Toto would say to her. And when the scene was over

they would go and dine at the Café Royal — upstairs, where she had never been. And she would make him rather jealous by telling him how much she had liked Mr Mercaptan; but not too jealous. Silence is golden, as her father used to say when she used to fly into tempers and wanted to say nasty things to everybody within range. Silence, about some things, is certainly golden.

In the rather gloomy little turning off Lupus Street to which she had been directed, Rosie found the number, found, in the row of bells and cards, the name. Quickly and decidedly she mounted the stairs.

‘Well,’ she was going to say as soon as she saw him, ‘I thought you were a civilized being.’ Mr Mercaptan had dropped a hint that Coleman wasn’t really civilized; a hint was enough for Rosie. ‘But I see,’ she would go on, ‘that I was mistaken. I don’t like to associate with boors.’ The fastidious lady had selected him as a young poet, not as a ploughboy.

Well rehearsed, Rosie rang the bell. And then the door had opened on this huge bearded Cossack of a man, who smiled, who looked at her with bright, dangerous eyes, who quoted the Bible and who was bleeding like a pig. There was blood on his shirt, blood on his trousers, blood on his hands, bloody fingermarks on his face; even the blond fringe of his beard, she noticed, was dabbled here and there with blood. It was too much, at first, even for her aristocratic equanimity.

In the end, however, she followed him across a little vestibule into a bright, whitewashed room empty of all furniture but a table, a few chairs and a large box-spring and mattress, which stood like an island in the middle of the floor and served as bed or sofa as occasion required. Over the mantelpiece was pinned a large photographic reproduction of Leonardo’s study of the anatomy of love. There were no other pictures on the walls.

‘All the apparatus is here,’ said Coleman, and he pointed to the table. ‘Lint, bandages, cotton wool, iodine, gauze, oiled silk. I have them all ready in preparation for these little accidents.’

‘But do you often manage to cut yourself in the arm?’ asked Rosie. She took off her gloves and began to undo a fresh packet of lint.

‘One gets cut,’ Coleman explained. ‘Little differences of opinion, you know. If your eye offend you, pluck it out; love your neighbour as yourself. Argal: if his eye offend you — you see? We live on Christian principles here.’

‘But who are “we”?’ asked Rosie, giving the cut a last dressing of iodine and laying a big square of lint over it.

‘Merely myself and — how shall I put it? — my helpmate,’ Coleman answered. ‘Ah! you’re wonderfully skilful at this business,’ he went on. ‘You’re the real hospital-nurse type; all maternal instincts. When pain and anguish wring the brow, an interesting mangle thou, as we used to say in the good old days when the pun and the Spoonerismus were in fashion.’

Rosie laughed. ‘Oh, I don’t spend all my time tying up wounds,’ she said, and turned her eyes for an instant from the bandage. After the first surprise she was feeling her cool self again.

‘Brava!’ cried Coleman. ‘You make them too, do you? Make them first and cure them afterwards in the grand old homœopathic way. Delightful! You see what Leonardo has to say about it.’ With his free hand he pointed to the photograph over the mantelpiece.

Rosie, who had noticed the picture when she came into the room, preferred not to look at it too closely a second time. ‘I think it’s rather revolting,’ she said, and was very busy with the bandage.

‘Ah! but that’s the point, that’s the whole point,’ said Coleman, and his clear blue eyes were alive with dancing lights. ‘That’s the beauty of the grand passion. It is revolting. You read what the Fathers of the Church have to say about love. They’re the men. It was Odo of Cluny, wasn’t it, who called woman a saccus stercoris, a bag of muck. Si quis enim considerat quæ intra nares et quæ intra fauces et quæ intra ventrem lateant, sordes ubique reperiet.’ The Latin rumbled like eloquent thunder in Coleman’s mouth. ‘Et si nec extremis digitis flegma vel stercus tangere patimur, quomodo ipsum stercoris saccum amplecti desideramus.’ He smacked his lips. ‘Magnificent!’ he said.

‘I don’t understand Latin,’ said Rosie, ‘and I’m glad of it. And your bandage is finished. Look.’

‘Interesting mangle!’ Coleman smiled his thanks. ‘But Bishop Odo, I fear, wouldn’t even have spared you; not even for your good works. Still less for your good looks, which would only have provoked him to dwell with the more insistency on the visceral secrets which they conceal.’

‘Really,’ Rosie protested. She would have liked to get up and go away, but the Cossack’s blue eyes glittered at her with such a strange expression and he smiled so enigmatically, that she found herself still sitting where she was, listening with a disgusted pleasure to his quick talk, his screams of deliberate and appalling laughter.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed, throwing up his hands, ‘what sensualists these old fellows were! What a real voluptuous feeling they had for dirt and gloom and sordidness and boredom, and all the horrors of vice. They pretended they were trying to dissuade people from vice by enumerating its horrors. But they were really only making it more spicy by telling the truth about it. O esca vermium, O massa pulveris! What nauseating embracements! To conjugate the copulative verb, boringly, with a sack of tripes — what could be more exquisitely and piercingly and deliriously vile?’ And he threw back his head and laughed; the blood-dabbled tips of his blond beard shook. Rosie looked at them, fascinated with disgust.

‘There’s blood on your beard,’ she felt compelled to say.

‘What of it? Why shouldn’t there be?’ Coleman asked.

Confused, Rosie felt herself blushing. ‘Only because it’s rather unpl — leasant. I don’t know why. But it is.’

‘What a reason for immediately falling into my arms!’ said Coleman. ‘To be kissed by a beard is bad enough at any time. But by a bloody beard — imagine!’

Rosie shuddered.

‘After all,’ he said, ‘what interest or amusement is there in doing the ordinary things in the obvious way? Life au naturel.’ He shook his head. ‘You must have garlic and saffron. Do you believe in God?’

‘Not m — much,’ said Rosie, smiling.

‘I pity you. You must find existence dreadfully dull. As soon as you do, everything becomes a thousand times life-size. Phallic symbols five hundred feet high,’ he lifted his hand. ‘A row of grinning teeth you could run the hundred yards on.’ He grinned at her through his beard. ‘Wounds big enough to let a coach-and-six drive into their purulent recesses. Every slightest act eternally significant. It’s only when you believe in God, and especially in hell, that you can really begin enjoying life. For instance, when in a few moments you surrender yourself to the importunities of my bloody beard, how prodigiously much more you’d enjoy it if you could believe you were committing the sin against the Holy Ghost — if you kept thinking calmly and dispassionately all the time the affair was going on: All this is not only a horrible sin, it is also ugly, grotesque, a mere defecation, a—’

Rosie held up her hand. ‘You’re really horrible,’ she said. Coleman smiled at her. Still, she did not go.

‘He who is not with me is against me,’ said Coleman. ‘If you can’t make up your mind to be with, it’s surely better to be positively against than merely negatively indifferent.’

‘Nonsense!’ exclaimed Rosie feebly.

‘When I call my lover a nymphomaniacal dog, she runs the penknife into my arm.’

‘Well, do you enjoy it?’ asked Rosie.

‘Piercingly,’ he answered. ‘It is at once sordid to the last and lowest degree and infinitely and eternally significant.’

Coleman was silent and Rosie too said nothing. Futilely she wished it had been Toto instead of this horrible, dangerous Cossack. Mr Mercaptan ought to have warned her. But then, of course, he supposed that she already knew the creature. She looked up at him and found his bright eyes fixed upon her; he was silently laughing.

‘Don’t you want to know who I am?’ she asked. ‘And how I got here?’

Coleman blandly shook his head. ‘Not in the very least,’ he said.

Rosie felt more helpless, somehow, than ever. ‘Why not?’ she asked as bravely and impertinently as she could.

Coleman answered with another question. ‘Why should I?’

‘It would be natural curiosity.’

‘But I know all I want to know,’ he said. ‘You are a woman, or, at any rate, you have all the female stigmata. Not too sumptuously well-developed, let me add. You have no wooden legs. You have eyelids that flutter up and down over your eyes like a moving shutter in front of a signalling lamp, spelling out in a familiar code the letters: A.M.O.R., and not, unless I am very much mistaken, those others: C.A.S.T.I.T.A.S. You have a mouth that looks as though it knew how to taste and how to bite. You ...’

Rosie jumped up. ‘I’m going away,’ she said.

Coleman leaned back in his chair and hallooed with laughter. ‘Bite, bite, bite,’ he said. ‘Thirty-two times.’ And he opened and shut his mouth as fast as he could, so that his teeth clicked against one another with a little dry, bony noise. ‘Every mouthful thirty-two times. That’s what Mr Gladstone said. And surely Mr Gladstone’ — he rattled his sharp, white teeth again— ‘surely Mr Gladstone should know.’

‘Good-bye,’ said Rosie from the door.

‘Good-bye,’ Coleman called back; and immediately afterwards jumped to his feet and made a dash across the room towards her.

Rosie uttered a cry, slipped through the door and, slamming it behind her, ran across the vestibule and began fumbling with the latches of the outer door. It wouldn’t open, it wouldn’t open. She was trembling; fear made her feel sick. There was a rattling at the door behind her. There was a whoop of laughter, and then the Cossack’s hands were on her arms, his face came peering over her shoulder, and the blond beard dabbled with blood prickled against her neck and face.

‘Oh, don’t, don’t, don’t!’ she implored, turning away her head. Then all at once she began violently crying.

‘Tears!’ exclaimed Coleman in rapture, ‘genuine tears!’ He bent eagerly forward to kiss them away, to drink them as they fell. ‘What an intoxication,’ he said, looking up to the ceiling like a chicken that has taken a sip of water; he smacked his lips.

Sobbing uncontrollably, Rosie had never in all her life felt less like a great, fastidious lady.

CHAPTER XXI

‘WELL,’ SAID GUMBRIL, ‘here I am again.’

‘Already?’ Mrs Viveash had been reduced, by the violence of her headache, to coming home after her luncheon with Piers Cotton for a rest. She had fed her hungry pain on Pyramidon and now she was lying down on the Dufy-upholstered sofa at the foot of her full-length portrait by Jacques-Emile Blanche. Her head was not much better, but she was bored. When the maid had announced Gumbril, she had given word that he was to be let in. ‘I’m very ill,’ she went on expiringly. ‘Look at me,’ she pointed to herself, ‘and me again.’ She waved her hand towards the sizzling brilliance of the portrait. ‘Before and after. Like the advertisements, you know. Every picture tells a story.’ She laughed faintly, then made a little grimace and, sucking in the breath between her lips, she put her hand to her forehead.

‘My poor Myra.’ Gumbril pulled up a chair to the sofa and sat there like a doctor at his patient’s bedside. ‘But before and after what?’ he asked, almost professionally.

Mrs Viveash gave an all but imperceptible shrug. ‘I don’t know,’ she said.

‘Not influenza, I hope?’

‘No, I don’t think so.’

‘Not love, by any chance?’

Mrs Viveash did not venture another laugh; she contented herself with smiling agonizingly.

‘That would have been a just retribution,’ Gumbril went on, ‘after what you’ve done to me.’

‘What have I done to you?’ Mrs Viveash asked, opening wide her pale-blue eyes.

‘Merely wrecked my existence.’

‘But you’re being childish, Theodore. Say what you mean without these grand, silly phrases.’ The dying voice spoke with impatience.

‘Well, what I mean,’ said Gumbril, ’is merely this. You prevented me from going to see the only person I ever really wanted to see in my life. And yesterday, when I tried to see her, she was gone. Vanished. And here am I left in the vacuum.’

Mrs Viveash shut her eyes. ‘We’re all in the vacuum,’ she said. ‘You’ll still have plenty of company, you know.’ She was silent for a moment. ‘Still, I’m sorry,’ she added. ‘Why didn’t you tell me? And why didn’t you just pay no attention to me and go all the same?’

‘I didn’t tell you,’ Gumbril answered, ‘because, then, I didn’t know. And I didn’t go because I didn’t want to quarrel with you.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mrs Viveash, and patted his hand. ‘But what are you going to do about it now? Not quarrelling with me is only a rather negative satisfaction, I’m afraid.’

‘I propose to leave the country to-morrow morning,’ said Gumbril.

‘Ah, the classical remedy ... But not to shoot big game, I hope?’ She thought of Viveash among the Tikki-tikkis and the tsetses. He was a charming creature; charming, but ... but what?

‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed Gumbril. ‘What do you take me for? Big game!’ He leaned back in his chair and began to laugh, heartily, for the first time since he had returned from Robertsbridge, yesterday evening. He had felt then as though he would never laugh again. ‘Do you see me in a pith helmet, with an elephant gun?’

Mrs Viveash put her hand to her forehead. ‘I see you, Theodore,’ she said, ‘but I try to think you would look quite normal; because of my head.’

‘I go to Paris first,’ said Gumbril. ‘After that, I don’t know. I shall go wherever I think people will buy pneumatic trousers. I’m travelling on business.’

This time, in spite of her head, Mrs Viveash laughed.

‘I thought of giving myself a farewell banquet,’ Gumbril went on. ‘We’ll go round before dinner, if you’re feeling well enough, that is, and collect a few

friends. Then, in profoundest gloom, we'll eat and drink. And in the morning, unshaved, exhausted and filled with disgust, I shall take the train from Victoria, feeling thankful to get out of England.'

'We'll do it,' said Mrs Viveash faintly and indomitably from the sofa that was almost genuinely a death-bed. 'And, meanwhile, we'll have a second brew of tea and you shall talk to me.'

The tannin was brought in. Gumbril settled down to talk and Mrs Viveash to listen — to listen and from time to time to dab her brows with eau-de-Cologne, to take a sniff of hartshorn.

Gumbril talked. He talked of the marriage ceremonies of octopuses, of the rites intricately consummated in the submarine green grottos of the Indian Ocean. Given a total of sixteen arms, how many permutations and combinations of caresses? And in the middle of each bunch of arms a mouth like the beak of a macaw.

On the backside of the moon, his friend Umbilikoff, the mystic, used to assure him, the souls of the dead in the form of little bladders — like so much swelled sago — are piled up and piled up till they squash and squeeze one another with an excruciating and ever-growing pressure. In the exoteric world this squeezing on the moon's backside is known, erroneously, as hell. And as for the constellation, Scorpio — he was the first of all constellations to' have a proper sort of backbone. For by an effort of the will he ingurgitated his external armour, he compressed and rebuilt it within his body and so became the first vertebrate. This, you may well believe, was a notable day in cosmic history.

The rents in these new buildings in Regent Street and Piccadilly run to as much as three or four pounds a square foot. Meanwhile, all the beauty imagined by Nash has departed, and chaos and barbarism once more reign supreme, even in Regent Street. The ghost of Gumbril Senior stalked across the room.

Who lives longer: the man who takes heroin for two years and dies, or the man who lives on roast beef, water and potatoes till ninety-five? One passes his twenty-four months in eternity. All the years of the beef-eater are lived only in time. 'I can tell you all about heroin,' said Mrs Viveash.

Lady Capricorn, he understood, was still keeping open bed. How Rubens would have admired those silk cushions, those gigantic cabbage roses, those round pink pearls of hers, vaster than those that Captain Nemo discovered in the immemorial oyster! And the warm dry rustle of flesh over flesh as she walks, moving first one leg, then advancing the other.

Talking of octopuses, the swim-bladders of deep-sea fishes are filled with almost absolutely pure oxygen. C'est la vie — Gumbril shrugged his shoulders.

In Alpine pastures the grasshoppers start their flight, whizzing like clockwork grasshoppers. And these brown invisible ones reveal themselves suddenly as they skim above the flowers — a streak of blue lightning, a trailing curve of scarlet. Then the overwing shuts down over the coloured wing below and they are once more invisible fiddlers rubbing their thighs, like Lady Capricorn, at the foot of the towering flowers.

Forgers give patina to their mediæval ivories by lending them to stout young Jewesses to wear for a few months hanging, like an amulet, between their breasts.

In Italian cemeteries the family vaults are made of glass and iron, like greenhouses.

Sir Henry Griddle has finally married the hog-faced gentlewoman.

Piero della Francesca's fresco of the Resurrection at San Sepolcro is the most beautiful picture in the world, and the hotel there is far from bad. Scriabine = le Tschaikovsky de nos jours. The dullest landscape painter is Marchand. The best poet ...

'You bore me,' said Mrs Viveash.

'Must I talk of love, then?' asked Gumbril.

'It looks like it,' Mrs Viveash answered, and closed her eyes.

Gumbril told the anecdote about Jo Peters, Connie Asticot and Jim Baum. The anecdote of Lola Knopf and the Baroness Gnomon. Of Margherita Radicofani, himself, and the Pastor Meyer. Of Lord Cavey and little Toby Nobes. When he had finished these, he saw that Mrs Viveash had gone to sleep.

He was not flattered. But a little sleep would do her headache, he reflected, a world of good. And knowing that if he ceased to speak, she would probably be woken by the sudden blankness of the silence, he went on quietly talking to himself.

‘When I’m abroad this time,’ he soliloquized, ‘I shall really begin writing my autobiography. There’s nothing like a hotel bedroom to work in.’ He scratched his head thoughtfully and even picked his nose, which was one of his bad habits, when he was alone. ‘People who know me,’ he went on, ‘will think that what I write about the governess cart and my mother and the flowers and so on is written merely because I know in here,’ he scratched his head a little harder to show himself that he referred to his brain, ‘that that’s the sort of thing one ought to write about. They’ll think I’m a sort of dingy Romain Rolland, hopelessly trying to pretend that I feel the emotions and have the great spiritual experiences, which the really important people do feel and have. And perhaps they’ll be right. Perhaps the Life of Gumbril will be as manifestly an ersatz as the Life of Beethoven. On the other hand, they may be astonished to find that it’s the genuine article. We shall see.’ Gumbril nodded his head slowly, while he transferred two pennies from his right-hand trouser pocket to his left-hand trouser pocket. He was somewhat distressed to find that these coppers had been trespassing among the silver. Silver was for the right-hand, copper for the left. It was one of the laws which it was extremely unlucky to infringe. ‘I have a premonition,’ he went on, ‘that one of these days I may become a saint. An unsuccessful flickering sort of saint, like a candle beginning to go out. As for love — m’yes, m’yes. And as for the people I have met — I shall point out that I have known most of the eminent men in Europe, and that I have said of all of them what I said after my first love affair: Is that all?’

‘Did you really say that about your first love affair?’ asked Mrs Viveash, who had woken up again.

‘Didn’t you?’

‘No. I said: This is all — everything, the universe. In love, it’s either all or nothing at all.’ She shut her eyes and almost immediately went to sleep again.

Gumbril continued his lullaby-soliloquy.

‘ ”This charming little book.” ... The Scotsman. “This farrago of obscenity, slander and false psychology.” ... Darlington Echo. “Mr Gumbril’s first cousin is St Francis Xavier, his second cousin is the Earl of Rochester, his third cousin is the Man of Feeling, his fourth cousin is David Hume.” ... Court Journal.’ Gumbril was already tired of this joke. ‘When I consider how my light is spent,’ he went on, ‘when I consider! ... Herr Jesu, as Fraulein Nimmernein used to exclaim at the critical moment. Consider, dear cow, consider. This is not the time of year for grass to grow. Consider, dear cow, consider, consider.’ He got up from his chair and tiptoed across the room to the writing-table. An Indian dagger lay next to the blotting-pad; Mrs Viveash used it as a paper-knife. Gumbril picked it up, executed several passes with it. ‘Thumb on the blade,’ he said, ‘and strike upwards. On guard. Lunge. To the hilt it penetrates. Poniard at the tip’ — he ran the blade between his fingers— ‘caress by the time it reaches the hilt. Z-zip.’ He put down the knife and stopping for a moment to make a grimace at himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, he went back to his chair.

At seven o’clock Mrs Viveash woke up. She shook her head to feel if the pain were still rolling about loose inside her skull.

‘I really believe I’m all right,’ she said. She jumped up. ‘Come on,’ she cried. ‘I feel ready for anything.’

‘And I feel like so much food for worms,’ said Gumbril. ‘Still, Versiam’ a tazza piena il generoso umor.’ He hummed the Drinking Song out of Robert the Devil, and to that ingenuously jolly melody they left the house.

Their taxi that evening cost them several pounds. They made the man drive back and forth, like a shuttle, from one end of London to the other. Every time they passed through Piccadilly Circus Mrs Viveash leant out of the window to look at the sky signs dancing their unceasing St Vitus’s dance above the monument to the Earl of Shaftesbury.

‘How I adore them!’ she said the first time they passed them. ‘Those wheels that whizz round till the sparks fly out from under them: that rushing motor, and

that lovely bottle of port filling the glass and then disappearing and reappearing and filling it again. Too lovely.'

'Too revolting,' Gumbril corrected her. 'These things are the epileptic symbol of all that's most bestial and idiotic in contemporary life. Look at those beastly things and then look at that.' He pointed to the County Fire Office on the northern side of the Circus. 'There stands decency, dignity, beauty, repose. And there flickers, there gibbers and twitches — what? Restlessness, distraction, refusal to think, anything for an unquiet life ...'

'What a delicious pedant you are!' She turned away from the window, put her hands on his shoulders and looked at him. 'Too exquisitely ridiculous!' And she kissed him.

'You won't force me to change my opinion.' Gumbril smiled at her. 'Eppur' si muove — I stick to my guns like Galileo. They move and they're horrible.'

'They're me,' said Mrs Viveash emphatically. 'Those things are me.'

They drove first to Lypiatt's mews. Under the Piranesian arch. The clothes-lines looped from window to window across the street might have been those ropes which form so essential and so mysterious a part of the furniture of the Prisons. The place smelt, the children were shouting; the hyena-like laughter of the flappers reverberated between the close-set walls. All Gumbril's sense of social responsibility was aroused in a moment.

Shut up in his room all day, Lypiatt had been writing — writing his whole life, all his ideas and ideals, all for Myra. The pile of scribbled sheets grew higher and higher. Towards evening he made an end; he had written all that he wanted to write. He ate the remains of yesterday's loaf of bread and drank some water; for he realized suddenly that he had been fasting the whole day. Then he composed himself to think; he stretched himself out on the brink of the well and looked down into the eyeless darkness.

He still had his Service revolver. Taking it out of the drawer in which it was kept, he loaded it, he laid it on the packing-case which served him as a table at his bed's head, and stretched himself out on the bed. He lay quite still, his

muscles all relaxed, hardly breathing. He imagined himself dead. Derision! there was still the plunge into the well.

He picked up the pistol, looked down the barrel. Black and deep as the well. The muzzle against his forehead was a cold mouth.

There was nothing new to be thought about death. There was not even the possibility of a new thought. Only the old thoughts, the horrible old questions returned.

The cold mouth to his forehead, his finger pressing on the trigger. Already he would be falling, falling. And the annihilating crash would be the same as the far-away sound of death at the bottom of the well. And after that, in the silence? The old question was still the same.

After that, he would lie bleeding. The flies would drink his blood as though it were red honey. In the end the people would come and fetch him away, and the coroner's jury would look at him in the mortuary and pronounce him temporarily insane. Then he would be buried in a black hole, would be buried and decay.

And meanwhile, would there be anything else? There was nothing new to be thought or asked. And there was still no answer.

In the room it began to grow dark; colours vanished, forms ran together. The easel and Myra's portrait were now a single black silhouette against the window. Near and far were fused, become one and continuous in the darkness, became a part of the darkness. Outside the window the pale twilight grew more sombre. The children shouted shrilly, playing their games under the green gas lamps. The mirthless, ferocious laughter of young girls mocked and invited. Lypiatt stretched out his hand and fingered the pistol.

Down below, at his door, he heard a sharp knocking. He lifted his head and listened, caught the sound of two voices, a man's and a woman's. Myra's voice he recognized at once; the other, he supposed, was Gumbril's.

'Hideous to think that people actually live in places like this,' Gumbril was saying. 'Look at those children. It ought to be punishable by law to produce children in this street.'

‘They always take me for the Pied Piper,’ said Mrs Viveash. Lypiatt got up and crept to the window. He could hear all they said.

‘I wonder if Lypiatt’s in. I don’t see any sign of a light.’

‘But he has heavy curtains,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘and I know for a fact that he always composes his poetry in the dark. He may be composing poetry.’

Gumbril laughed.

‘Knock again,’ said Mrs Viveash.’ Poets are always absorbed, you know. And Casimir’s always the poet.’

‘Il Poeta — capital P. Like d’Annunzio in the Italian papers,’ said Gumbril. ‘Did you know that d’Annunzio has books printed on mackintosh for his bath?’ He rapped again at the door. ‘I saw it in the Corriere della Sera the other day at the club. He reads the Little Flowers of St Francis by preference in his bath. And he has a fountain-pen with waterproof ink in the soap-dish, so that he can add a few Fioretti of his own whenever he feels like it. We might suggest that to Casimir.’

Lypiatt stood with folded arms by the window, listening. How lightly they threw his life, his heart, from hand to hand, as though it were a ball and they were playing a game! He thought suddenly of all the times he had spoken lightly and maliciously of other people. His own person had always seemed, on those occasions, sacred. One knew in theory very well that others spoke of one contemptuously — as one spoke of them. In practice — it was hard to believe.

‘Poor Casimir!’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘I’m afraid his show was a failure.’

‘I know it was,’ said Gumbril. ‘Complete and absolute. I told my tame capitalist that he ought to employ Lypiatt for our advertisements. He’d be excellent for those. And it would mean some genuine money in his pocket.’

‘But the worst of it is,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘that he’ll only feel insulted by the suggestion.’ She looked up at the window.

‘I don’t know why,’ she went on, ‘this house looks most horribly dead. I hope nothing’s happened to poor Casimir. I have a most disagreeable feeling that it may have.’

‘Ah, this famous feminine intuition,’ laughed Gumbril. He knocked again.

‘I can’t help feeling that he may be lying there dead, or delirious, or something.’

‘And I can’t help feeling that he must have gone out to dinner. We shall have to give him up, I’m afraid. It’s a pity. He’s so good with Mercaptan. Like bear and mastiff. Or rather, like bear and poodle, bear and King Charles’s spaniel — or whatever those little dogs are that you see ladies in eighteenth-century French engravings taking to bed with them. Let’s go.’

‘Just knock once again,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘He might really be preoccupied, or asleep, or ill.’ Gumbril knocked. ‘Now listen. Hush.’

They were silent; the children still went on hallooing in the distance. There was a great clop-clopping of horse’s feet as a van was backed into a stable door near by. Lypiatt stood motionless, his arms still crossed, his chin on his breast. The seconds passed.

‘Not a sound,’ said Gumbril. ‘He must have gone out.’

‘I suppose so,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘Come on, then. We’ll go and look for Mercaptan.’

He heard their steps in the street below, heard the slamming of the taxi door. The engine was started up. Loud on the first gear, less loud on the second, whisperingly on the third, it moved away, gathering speed. The noise of it was merged with the general noise of the town. They were gone.

Lypiatt walked slowly back to his bed. He wished suddenly that he had gone down to answer the last knock. These voices — at the well’s edge he had turned to listen to them; at the well’s extreme verge. He lay quite still in the darkness; and it seemed to him at last that he had floated away from the earth, that he was alone, no longer in a narrow dark room, but in an illimitable darkness outside and beyond. His mind grew calmer; he began to think of himself, of all that he had known, remotely, as though from a great way off.

‘Adorable lights!’ said Mrs Viveash, as they drove once more through Piccadilly Circus.

Gumbril said nothing. He had said all that he had to say last time.

‘And there’s another,’ exclaimed Mrs Viveash, as they passed, near Burlington House, a fountain of Sandeman’s port. ‘If only they had an automatic jazz band attached to the same mechanism!’ she said regretfully.

The Green Park remained solitary and remote under the moon. ‘Wasted on us,’ said Gumbril, as they passed. ‘One should be happily in love to enjoy a summer night under the trees.’ He wondered where Emily could be now. They sat in silence; the cab drove on.

Mr Mercaptan, it seemed, had left London. His housekeeper had a long story to tell. A regular Bolshevik had come yesterday, pushing in. And she had heard him shouting at Mr Mercaptan in his own room. And then, luckily, a lady had come and the Bolshevik had gone away again. And this morning Mr Mercaptan had decided, quite sudden like, to go away for two or three days. And it wouldn’t surprise her at all if it had something to do with that horrible Bolshevik fellow. Though of course Master Paster hadn’t said anything about it. Still, as she’d known him when he was so high and seen him grow up like, she thought she could say she knew him well enough to guess why he did things. It was only brutally that they contrived to tear themselves away.

Secure, meanwhile, behind a whole troop of butlers and footmen, Mr Mercaptan was dining comfortably at Oxhanger with the most faithful of his friends and admirers, Mrs Speegle. It was to Mrs Speegle that he had dedicated his coruscating little ‘Loves of the Pachyderms’; for Mrs Speegle it was who had suggested, casually one day at luncheon, that the human race ought to be classified in two main species — the pachyderms, and those whose skin, like her own, like Mr Mercaptan’s and a few others, was fine and ‘responsive,’ as Mr Mercaptan himself put it, ‘to all caresses, including those of pure reason.’ Mr Mercaptan had taken the casual hint and had developed it, richly. The barbarous pachyderms he divided up into a number of subspecies: steatocephali, acephali, theolaters, industrious Judæorhynci — busy, compact and hard as dung-beetles — Peabodies, Russians and so on. It was all very witty and delicately savage. Mr Mercaptan had a standing invitation at Oxhanger. With dangerous pachyderms like Lypiatt ranging loose about the town, he thought it best to avail himself of

it. Mrs Speegle, he knew, would be delighted to see him. And indeed she was. He arrived just at lunch-time. Mrs Speegle and Maisie Furlonger were already at the fish.

‘Mercaptan!’ Mrs Speegle’s soul seemed to be in the name. ‘Sit down,’ she went on, cooing as she talked, like a ring-dove. There seemed to be singing in every word she spoke. She pointed to a chair next to hers. ‘N’you’re n’just in time to tell us all about n’your Lesbian experiences.’

And Mercaptan, giving vent to his fully orchestrated laugh — squeal and roar together — had sat down and, speaking in French partly, he nodded towards the butler and the footman, ‘à cause des valets,’ and partly because the language lent itself more deliciously to this kind of confidences, he had begun there and then, interrupted and spurred on by the cooing of Mrs Speegle and the happy shrieks of Maisie Furlonger, to recount at length and with all the wit in the world his experience among the Isles of Greece. How delicious it was, he said to himself, to be with really civilized people! In this happy house it seemed scarcely possible to believe that such a thing as a pachyderm existed.

But Lypiatt still lay, face upwards, on his bed, floating, it seemed to himself, far out into the dark emptinesses between the stars. From those distant abstract spaces he seemed to be looking impersonally down upon his own body stretched out by the brink of the hideous well; to be looking back over his own history. Everything, even his own unhappiness, seemed very small and beautiful; every frightful convulsion had become no more than a ripple, and only the fine musical ghost of sound came up to him from all the shouting.

‘We have no luck,’ said Gumbril, as they climbed once more into the cab.

‘I’m not sure,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘that we haven’t really had a great deal. Did you genuinely want very much to see Mercaptan?’

‘Not in the least,’ said Gumbril. ‘But do you genuinely want to see me?’

Mrs Viveash drew the corners of her mouth down into a painful smile and did not answer. ‘Aren’t we going to pass through Piccadilly Circus again?’ she asked. ‘I should like to see the lights again. They give one temporarily the illusion of being cheerful.’

‘No, no,’ said Gumbril, ‘we are going straight to Victoria.’

‘We couldn’t tell the driver to ... ?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Ah, well,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘Perhaps one’s better without stimulants. I remember when I was very young, when I first began to go about at all, how proud I was of having discovered champagne. It seemed to me wonderful to get rather tipsy. Something to be exceedingly proud of. And, at the same time, how much I really disliked wine! Loathed the taste of it. Sometimes, when Calliope and I used to dine quietly together, tête-à-tête, with no awful men about, and no appearances to keep up, we used to treat ourselves to the luxury of a large lemon-squash, or even raspberry syrup and soda. Ah, I wish I could recapture the deliciousness of raspberry syrup.’

Coleman was at home. After a brief delay he appeared himself at the door. He was wearing pyjamas, and his face was covered with red-brown smears, the tips of his beard were clotted with the same dried pigment.

‘What have you been doing to yourself?’ asked Mrs Viveash.

‘Merely washing in the blood of the Lamb,’ Coleman answered, smiling, and his eyes sparkling blue fire, like an electric machine.

The door on the opposite side of the little vestibule was open. Looking over Coleman’s shoulder, Gumbril could see through the opening a brightly lighted room and, in the middle of it, like a large rectangular island, a wide divan. Reclining on the divan an odalisque by Ingres — but slimmer, more serpentine, more like a lithe pink length of boa — presented her back. That big, brown mole on the right shoulder was surely familiar. But when, startled by the loudness of the voices behind her, the odalisque turned round — to see in a horribly embarrassing instant that the Cossack had left the door open and that people could look in, were looking in, indeed — the slanting eyes beneath their heavy white lids, the fine aquiline nose, the wide, full-lipped mouth, though they presented themselves for only the fraction of a second, were still more recognizable and familiar. For only the fraction of a second did the odalisque reveal herself definitely as Rosie. Then a hand pulled feverishly at the

counterpane, the section of buff-coloured boa wriggled and rolled; and, in a moment, where an odalisque had been, lay only a long packet under a white sheet, like a jockey with a fractured skull when they carry him from the course.

Well, really ... Gumbril felt positively indignant, not jealous, but astonished and righteously indignant.

‘Well, when you’ve finished bathing,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘I hope you’ll come and have dinner with us.’ Coleman was standing between her and the farther door; Mrs Viveash had seen nothing in the room beyond the vestibule.

‘I’m busy,’ said Coleman.

‘So I see.’ Gumbril spoke as sarcastically as he could.

‘Do you see?’ asked Coleman, and looked round. ‘So you do!’ He stepped back and closed the door.

‘It’s Theodore’s last dinner,’ pleaded Mrs Viveash.

‘Not even if it were his last supper,’ said Coleman, enchanted to have been given the opportunity to blaspheme a little. ‘Is he going to be crucified? Or what?’

‘Merely going abroad,’ said Gumbril.

‘He has a broken heart,’ Mrs Viveash explained.

‘Ah, the genuine platonic towsers?’ Coleman uttered his artificial demon’s laugh.

‘That’s just about it,’ said Gumbril, grimly.

Relieved by the shutting of the door from her immediate embarrassment, Rosie threw back a corner of the counterpane and extruded her head, one arm and the shoulder with the mole on it. She looked about her, opening her slanting eyes as wide as she could. She listened with parted lips to the voices that came, muffled now, through the door. It seemed to her as though she were waking up; as though now, for the first time, she were hearing that shattering laugh, were looking now for the first time on these blank, white walls and the one lovely and horrifying picture. Where was she? What did it all mean? Rosie put her hand to her forehead, tried to think. Her thinking was always a series of pictures; one after another the pictures swam up before her eyes, melted again in an instant.

Her mother taking off her pince-nez to wipe them — and at once her eyes were tremulous and vague and helpless. ‘You should always let the gentleman get over the stile first,’ she said, and put on her glasses again. Behind the glasses her eyes immediately became clear, piercing, steady and efficient. Rather formidable eyes. They had seen Rosie getting over the stile in front of Willie Hoskyns, and there was too much leg.

James reading at his desk; his heavy, round head propped on his hand. She came up behind him and threw her arms round his neck. Very gently, and without turning his eyes from the page, he undid her embrace and, with a little push that was no more than a hint, an implication, signified that he didn’t want her. She had gone to her pink room, and cried.

Another time James shook his head and smiled patiently under his moustache. ‘You’ll never learn,’ he said. She had gone to her room and cried that time too.

Another time they were lying in bed together, in the pink bed; only you couldn’t see it was pink because there was no light. They were lying very quietly. Warm and happy and remote she felt. Sometimes as it were the physical memory of pleasure plucked at her nerves, making her start, making her suddenly shiver. James was breathing as though he were asleep. All at once he stirred. He patted her shoulder two or three times in a kindly and business-like way. ‘I know what that means,’ she said, ‘when you pat me like that.’ And she patted him — pat-pat-pat, very quickly. ‘It means you’re going to bed.’ ‘How do you know?’ he asked. ‘Do you think I don’t know you after all this time? I know that pat by heart.’ And suddenly all her warm, quiet happiness evaporated; it was all gone. ‘I’m only a machine for going to bed with,’ she said. ‘That’s all I am for you.’ She felt she would like to cry. But James only laughed and said, ‘Nonsense!’ and pulled his arm clumsily from underneath her. ‘You go to sleep,’ he said, and kissed her on the forehead. Then he got out of bed, and she heard him bumping clumsily about in the darkness. ‘Damn!’ he said once. Then he found the door, opened, and was gone.

She thought of those long stories she used to make up when she went shopping. The fastidious lady; the poets; all the adventures.

Toto’s hands were wonderful.

She saw, she heard Mr Mercaptan reading his essay. Poor father, reading aloud from the Hibbert Journal!

And now the Cossack, covered with blood. He, too, might read aloud from the Hibbert Journal — only backwards, so to speak. She had a bruise on her arm. ‘You think there’s nothing inherently wrong and disgusting in it?’ he had asked. ‘There is, I tell you.’ He had laughed and kissed her and stripped off her clothes and caressed her. And she had cried, she had struggled, she had tried to turn away; and in the end she had been overcome by a pleasure more piercing and agonizing than anything she had ever felt before. And all the time Coleman had hung over her, with his blood-stained beard, smiling into her face, and whispering, ‘Horrible, horrible, infamous and shameful.’ She lay in a kind of stupor. Then, suddenly there had been that ringing. The Cossack had left her. And now she was awake again, and it was horrible, it was shameful. She shuddered; she jumped out of bed and began as quickly as she could to put on her clothes.

‘Really, really, won’t you come?’ Mrs Viveash was insisting. She was not used to people saying no when she asked, when she insisted. She didn’t like it.

‘No.’ Coleman shook his head. ‘You may be having the last supper. But I have a date here with the Magdalen.’

‘Oh, a woman,’ said Viveash. ‘But why didn’t you say so before?’

‘Well, as I’d left the door open,’ said Coleman, ‘I thought it was unnecessary.’

‘Fie,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘I find this very repulsive. Let’s go away.’ She plucked Gumbril by the sleeve.

‘Good-bye,’ said Coleman, politely. He shut the door after them and turned back across the little hall.

‘What! Not thinking of going?’ he exclaimed, as he came in. Rosie was sitting down on the edge of the bed pulling on her shoes.

‘Go away,’ she said. ‘You disgust me.’

‘But that’s splendid,’ Coleman declared. ‘That’s all as it should be, all as I intended.’ He sat down beside her on the divan. ‘Really,’ he said, admiringly, ‘what exquisite legs!’

Rosie would have given anything in the world to be back again in Bloxam Gardens. Even if James did live in his books all the time ... Anything in the world.

‘This time,’ said Mrs Viveash, ‘we simply must go through Piccadilly Circus.’

‘It’ll only be about two miles farther.’

‘Well, that isn’t much.’

Gumbril leaned out and gave the word to the driver.

‘And besides, I like driving about like this,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘I like driving for driving’s sake. It’s like the Last Ride Together. Dear Theodore!’ She laid her hand on his.

‘Thank you,’ said Gumbril, and kissed it.

The little cab buzzed along down the empty Mall. They were silent. Through the thick air one could see the brightest of the stars. It was one of those evenings when men feel that truth, goodness and beauty are one. In the morning, when they commit their discovery to paper, when others read it written there, it looks wholly ridiculous. It was one of those evenings when love is once more invented for the first time. That, too, seems a little ridiculous, sometimes, in the morning.

‘Here are the lights again,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘Hop, twitch, flick — yes, genuinely an illusion of jollity, Theodore. Genuinely.’

Gumbril stopped the cab. ‘It’s after half-past eight,’ he said. ‘At this rate we shall never get anything to eat. Wait a minute.’

He ran into Appenrodt’s, and came back in a moment with a packet of smoked salmon sandwiches, a bottle of white wine and a glass.

‘We have a long way to go,’ he explained, as he got into the taxi.

They ate their sandwiches, they drank their wine. The taxi drove on and on.

‘This is positively exhilarating,’ said Mrs Viveash, as they turned into the Edgware Road.

Polished by the wheels and shining like an old and precious bronze, the road stretched before them, reflecting the lamps. It had the inviting air of a road which goes on for ever.

‘They used to have such good peep-shows in this street,’ Gumbril tenderly remembered: ‘Little back shops where you paid twopence to see the genuine mermaid, which turned out to be a stuffed walrus, and the tattooed lady, and the dwarf, and the living statuary, which one always hoped, as a boy, was really going to be rather naked and thrilling, but which was always the most pathetic of unemployed barmaids, dressed in the thickest of pink Jaeger.’

‘Do you think there’d be any of those now?’ asked Mrs Viveash.

Gumbril shook his head. ‘They’ve moved on with the march of civilization. But where?’ He spread out his hands interrogatively. ‘I don’t know which direction civilization marches — whether north towards Kilburn and Golders Green, or over the river to the Elephant, to Clapham and Sydenham and all those other mysterious places. But, in any case, high rents have marched up here; there are no more genuine mermaids in the Edgware Road. What stories we shall be able to tell our children!’

‘Do you think we shall ever have any?’ Mrs Viveash asked.

‘One can never tell.’

‘I should have thought one could,’ said Mrs Viveash. Children — that would be the most desperate experiment of all. The most desperate, and perhaps the only one having any chance of being successful. History recorded cases ... On the other hand, it recorded other cases that proved the opposite. She had often thought of this experiment. There were so many obvious reasons for not making it. But some day, perhaps — she always put it off, like that.

The cab had turned off the main road into quieter and darker streets.

‘Where are we now?’ asked Mrs Viveash.

‘Penetrating into Maida Vale. We shall soon be there. Poor old Shearwater!’ He laughed. Other people in love were always absurd.

‘Shall we find him in, I wonder?’ It would be fun to see Shearwater again. She liked to hear him talking, learnedly, and like a child. But when the child is

six feet high and three feet wide and two feet thick, when it tries to plunge head first into your life — then, really, no ... ‘But what did you want with me?’ he had asked. ‘Just to look at you,’ she answered. Just to look; that was all. Music hall, not boudoir.

‘Here we are.’ Gumbril got out and rang the second floor bell.

The door was opened by an impertinent-looking little maid.

‘Mr Shearwater’s at the lavatory,’ she said, in answer to Gumbril’s question.

‘Laboratory?’ he suggested.

‘At the ‘ospital.’ That made it clear.

‘And is Mrs Shearwater at home?’ he asked maliciously.

The little maid shook her head. ‘I expected ’er, but she didn’t come back to dinner.’

‘Would you mind giving her a message when she does come in,’ said Gumbril. ‘Tell her that Mr Toto was very sorry he hadn’t time to speak to her when he saw her this evening in Pimlico.’

‘Mr who?’

‘Mr Toto.’

‘Mr Toto is sorry ’e ‘adn’t the time to speak to Mrs Shearwater when ’e saw ’er in Pimlico this evening. Very well, sir.’

‘You won’t forget?’ said Gumbril.

‘No, I won’t forget.’

He went back to the cab and explained that they had drawn blank once more.

‘I’m rather glad,’ said Mrs Viveash. ‘If we ever did find anybody, it would mean the end of this Last-Ride-Together feeling. And that would be sad. And it’s a lovely night. And really, for the moment, I feel I can do without my lights. Suppose we just drove for a bit now.’

But Gumbril would not allow that. ‘We haven’t had enough to eat yet,’ he said, and he gave the cabman Gumbril Senior’s address.

Gumbril Senior was sitting on his little iron balcony among the dried-out pots that had once held geraniums, smoking his pipe and looking earnestly out into the darkness in front of him. Clustered in the fourteen plane-trees of the square,

the starlings were already asleep. There was no sound but the rustling of the leaves. But sometimes, every hour or so, the birds would wake up. Something — perhaps it might be a stronger gust of wind, perhaps some happy dream of worms, some nightmare of cats simultaneously dreamed by all the flock together — would suddenly rouse them. And then they would all start to talk at once, at the tops of their shrill voices — for perhaps half a minute. Then in an instant they all went to sleep again and there was once more no sound but the rustling of the shaken leaves. At these moments Mr Gumbril would lean forward, would strain his eyes and his ears in the hope of seeing, of hearing something — something significant, explanatory, satisfying. He never did, of course; but that in no way diminished his happiness.

Mr Gumbril received them on his balcony with courtesy.

‘I was just thinking of going in to work,’ he said. ‘And now you come and give me a good excuse for sitting out here a little longer. I’m delighted.’

Gumbril Junior went downstairs to see what he could find in the way of food. While he was gone, his father explained to Mrs Viveash the secrets of the birds. Enthusiastically, his light floss of grey hair floating up and falling again about his head as he pointed and gesticulated, he told her; the great flocks assembled — goodness only knew where! — they flew across the golden sky, detaching here a little troop, there a whole legion, they flew until at last all had found their appointed resting-places and there were no more to fly. He made this nightly flight sound epical, as though it were a migration of peoples, a passage of armies.

‘And it’s my firm belief,’ said Gumbril Senior, adding notes to his epic, ‘that they make use of some sort of telepathy, some kind of direct mind-to-mind communication between themselves. You can’t watch them without coming to that conclusion.’

‘A charming conclusion,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘It’s a faculty,’ Gumbril Senior went on, ‘we all possess, I believe. All we animals.’ He made a gesture which included himself, Mrs Viveash and the invisible birds among the plane-trees. ‘Why don’t we use it more? You may well

ask. For the simple reason, my dear young lady, that half our existence is spent in dealing with things that have no mind — things with which it is impossible to hold telepathic communication. Hence the development of the five senses. I have eyes that preserve me from running into the lamp-post, ears that warn me I'm in the neighbourhood of Niagara. And having made these instruments very efficient, I use them in holding converse with other beings having a mind. I let my telepathic faculty lie idle, preferring to employ an elaborate and cumbrous arrangement of symbols in order to make my thought known to you through your senses. In certain individuals, however, the faculty is naturally so well-developed — like the musical, or the mathematical, or the chess-playing faculties in other people — that they cannot help entering into direct communication with other minds, whether they want to or not. If we knew a good method of educating and drawing out the latent faculty, most of us could make ourselves moderately efficient telepaths; just as most of us can make ourselves into moderate musicians, chess players and mathematicians. There would also be a few, no doubt, who could never communicate directly. Just as there are a few who cannot recognize "Rule Britannia" or Bach's Concerto in D minor for two violins, and a few who cannot comprehend the nature of an algebraical symbol. Look at the general development of the mathematical and musical faculties only within the last two hundred years. By the twenty-first century, I believe, we shall all be telepaths. Meanwhile, these delightful birds have forestalled us. Not having the wit to invent a language or an expressive pantomime, they contrive to communicate such simple thoughts as they have, directly and instantaneously. They all go to sleep at once, wake at once, say the same thing at once; they turn all at once when they're flying. Without a leader, without a word of command, they do everything together, in complete unison. Sitting here in the evenings, I sometimes fancy I can feel their thoughts striking against my own. It has happened to me once or twice: that I have known a second before it actually happened, that the birds were going to wake up and begin their half-minute of chatter in the dark. Wait! Hush.' Gumbril Senior threw back his head, pressed his hand over his mouth, as though by commanding

silence on himself he could command it on the whole world. ‘I believe they’re going to wake now. I feel it.’

He was silent. Mrs Viveash looked towards the dark trees and listened. A full minute passed. Then the old gentleman burst out happily laughing.

‘Completely wrong!’ he said. ‘They’ve never been more soundly asleep.’ Mrs Viveash laughed too. ‘Perhaps they all changed their minds, just as they were waking up,’ she suggested.

Gumbril Junior reappeared; glasses clinked as he walked, and there was a little rattle of crockery. He was carrying a tray.

‘Cold beef,’ he said, ‘and salad and a bit of a cold apple-pie. It might be worse.’

They drew up chairs to Gumbril Senior’s work-table, and there, among the letters and the unpaid bills and the sketchy elevations of archiducal palaces, they ate the beef and the apple-pie, and drank the one-and-ninepenny vin ordinaire of the house. Gumbril Senior, who had already supped, looked on at them from the balcony.

‘Did I tell you,’ said Gumbril Junior, ‘that we saw Mr Porteous’s son the other evening — very drunk?’

Gumbril Senior threw up his hands. ‘If you knew the calamities that young imbecile has been the cause of!’

‘What’s he done?’

‘Gambled away I don’t know how much borrowed money. And poor Porteous can’t afford anything — even now.’ Mr Gumbril shook his head and clutched and combed his beard. ‘It’s a fearful blow, but of course, Porteous is very steadfast and serene and ... There!’ Gumbril Senior interrupted himself, holding up his hand. ‘Listen!’

In the fourteen plane-trees the starlings had suddenly woken up.

There was a wild outburst, like a stormy sitting in the Italian Parliament. Then all was silent. Gumbril Senior listened, enchanted. His face, as he turned back towards the light, revealed itself all smiles. His hair seemed to have blown loose of its own accord, from within, so to speak; he pushed it into place.

‘You heard them?’ he asked Mrs Viveash. ‘What can they have to say to one another, I wonder, at this time of night?’

‘And did you feel they were going to wake up?’ Mrs Viveash inquired.

‘No,’ said Gumbril Senior with candour.

‘When we’ve finished,’ Gumbril Junior spoke with his mouth full, ‘you must show Myra your model of London. She’d adore it — except that it has no electric sky-signs.’

His father looked all of a sudden very much embarrassed. ‘I don’t think it would interest Mrs Viveash much,’ he said.

‘Oh, yes it would. Really,’ she declared.

‘Well, as a matter of fact it isn’t here.’ Gumbril Senior pulled with fury at his beard.

‘Not here? But what’s happened to it?’

Gumbril Senior wouldn’t explain. He just ignored his son’s question and began to talk once more about the starlings. Later on, however, when Gumbril and Mrs Viveash were preparing to go, the old man drew him apart into a corner and began to whisper the explanation.

‘I didn’t want to blare it about in front of strangers,’ he said, as though it were a question of the housemaid’s illegitimate baby or a repair to the water-closet. ‘But the fact is, I’ve sold it. The Victoria and Albert had wind that I was making it; they’ve been wanting it all the time. And I’ve let them have it.’

‘But why?’ Gumbril Junior asked in a tone of astonishment. He knew with what a paternal affection — no, more than paternal; for he was sure that his father was more whole-heartedly attached to his models than his son — with what pride he regarded these children of his spirit.

Gumbril Senior sighed. ‘It’s all that young imbecile,’ he said.

‘What young imbecile?’

‘Porteous’s son, of course. You see, poor Porteous has had to sell his library, among other things. You don’t know what that means to him. All these precious books. And collected at the price of such hardships. I thought I’d like to buy a few of the best ones back for him. They gave me quite a good price at the

Museum.’ He came out of his corner and hurried across the room to help Mrs Viveash with her cloak. ‘Allow me, allow me,’ he said.

Slowly and pensively Gumbril Junior followed him. Beyond good and evil? Below good and evil? The name of earwig ... The tubby pony trotted. The wild columbines suspended, among the shadows of the hazel copse, hooked spurs, helmets of aerial purple. The Twelfth Sonata of Mozart was insecticide; no earwigs could crawl through that music. Emily’s breasts were firm and pointed and she had slept at last without a tremor. In the starlight, good, true and beautiful became one. Write the discovery in books — in books quos, in the morning, legimus cacantes. They descended the stairs. The cab was waiting outside.

‘The Last Ride again,’ said Mrs Viveash.

‘Golgotha Hospital, Southwark,’ said Gumbril to the driver and followed her into the cab.

‘Drive, drive, drive,’ repeated Mrs Viveash. ‘I like your father, Theodore. One of these days he’ll fly away with the birds. And how nice it is of those starlings to wake themselves up like that in the middle of the night, merely to amuse him. Considering how unpleasant it is to be woken in the night. Where are we going?’

‘We’re going to look at Shearwater in his laboratory.’

‘Is that a long way away?’

‘Immensely,’ said Gumbril.

‘Thank God for that,’ Mrs Viveash piously and expiringly breathed.

CHAPTER XXII

SHEARWATER SAT ON his stationary bicycle, pedalling unceasingly like a man in a nightmare. The pedals were geared to a little wheel under the saddle and the rim of the wheel rubbed, as it revolved, against a brake, carefully adjusted to make the work of the pedaller hard, but not impossibly hard. From a pipe which came up through the floor issued a little jet of water which played on the brake and kept it cool. But no jet of water played on Shearwater. It was his business to get hot. He did get hot.

From time to time his dog-faced young friend, Lancing, came and looked through the window of the experimenting chamber to see how he was getting on. Inside that little wooden house, which might have reminded Lancing, if he had had a literary turn of mind, of the Box in which Gulliver left Brobdingnag, the scenes of intimate life were the same every time he looked in. Shearwater was always at his post on the saddle of the nightmare bicycle, pedalling, pedalling. The water trickled over the brake. And Shearwater sweated. Great drops of sweat came oozing out from under his hair, ran down over his forehead, hung beaded on his eyebrows, ran into his eyes, down his nose, along his cheeks, fell like raindrops. His thick bull-neck was wet; his whole naked body, his arms and legs streamed and shone. The sweat poured off him and was caught as it rained down in a waterproof sheet, to trickle down its sloping folds into a large glass receptacle which stood under a hole in the centre of the sheet at the focal point where all its slopes converged. The automatically controlled heating apparatus in the basement kept the temperature in the box high and steady. Peering through the damp-dimmed panes of the window, Lancing noticed with satisfaction that the mercury stood unchangingly at twenty-seven point five Centigrade. The ventilators at the side and top of the box were open; Shearwater had air enough. Another time, Lancing reflected, they’d make the box air-tight and see the effect

of a little carbon dioxide poisoning on top of excessive sweating. It might be very interesting, but to-day they were concerned with sweating only. After seeing that the thermometer was steady, that the ventilators were properly open, the water was still trickling over the brake, Lancing would tap at the window. And Shearwater, who kept his eyes fixed straight before him, as he pedalled slowly and unremittingly along his nightmare road, would turn his head at the sound.

'All right?' Lancing's lips moved and his eyebrows went up inquiringly.

Shearwater would nod his big, round head, and the sweat-drops, suspended on his eyebrows and his moustache, would fall like little liquid fruits shaken suddenly by the wind.

'Good,' and Lancing would go back to his thick German book under the reading-lamp at the other end of the laboratory.

Constant as the thermometer Shearwater pedalled steadily and slowly on. With a few brief halts for food and rest, he had been pedalling ever since lunch-time. At eleven he would go to bed on a shake-down in the laboratory and at nine to-morrow morning he would re-enter the box and start pedalling again. He would go on all to-morrow and the day after; and after that, as long as he could stand it. One, two, three, four. Pedal, pedal, pedal ... He must have travelled the equivalent of sixty or seventy miles this afternoon. He would be getting on for Swindon. He would be nearly at Portsmouth. He would be past Cambridge, past Oxford. He would be nearly at Harwich, pedalling through the green and golden valleys where Constable used to paint. He would be at Winchester by the bright stream. He would have ridden through the beech woods of Arundel out into the sea ...

In any case he was far away, he was escaping. And Mrs Viveash followed, walking swayingly along on feet that seemed to tread between two abysses, at her leisure. Pedal, pedal. The hydrogen ion concentration in the blood ... Formidably, calmly, her eyes regarded. The lids cut off an arc of those pale circles. When she smiled, it was a crucifixion. The coils of her hair were copper serpents. Her small gestures loosened enormous fragments of the universe and at

the faint dying sound of her voice they had fallen in ruins about him. His world was no longer safe, it had ceased to stand on its foundations. Mrs Viveash walked among his ruins and did not even notice them. He must build up again. Pedal, pedal. He was not merely escaping; he was working a building machine. It must be built with proportion; with proportion, the old man had said. The old man appeared in the middle of the nightmare road in front of him, clutching his beard. Proportion, proportion. There were first a lot of dirty rocks lying about; then there was St Paul's. These bits of his life had to be built up proportionably.

There was work. And there was talk about work and ideas. And there were men who could talk about work and ideas. But so far as he had been concerned that was about all they could do. He would have to find out what else they did; it was interesting. And he would have to find out what other men did; men who couldn't talk about work and not much about ideas. They had as good kidneys as any one else.

And then there were women.

On the nightmare road he remained stationary. The pedals went round and round under his driving feet; the sweat ran off him. He was escaping, and yet he was also drawing nearer. He would have to draw nearer. 'Woman, what have I to do with you?' Not enough; too much.

Not enough — he was building her in, a great pillar next to the pillar of work.

Too much — he was escaping. If he had not caged himself here in this hot box, he would have run out after her, to throw himself — all in fragments, all dissipated and useless — in front of her. And she wanted none of him. But perhaps it would be worse, perhaps it would be far, far worse if she did.

The old man stood in the road before him, clutching his beard, crying out, 'Proportion, proportion.' He trod and trod at his building machine, working up the pieces of his life, steadily, unremittingly working them into a proportionable whole, into a dome that should hang, light, spacious and high, as though by a miracle, on the empty air. He trod and trod, escaping, mile after mile into fatigue, into wisdom. He was at Dover now, pedalling across the Channel. He was crossing a dividing gulf and there would be safety on the other side; the

cliffs of Dover were already behind him. He turned his head as though to look back at them; the drops of sweat were shaken from his eyebrows, from the shaggy fringes of his moustache. He turned his head from the blank wooden wall in front of him over his left shoulder. A face was looking through the observation window behind him — a woman's face.

It was the face of Mrs Viveash.

Shearwater uttered a cry and at once turned back again. He redoubled his pedalling. One, two, three, four — furiously he rushed along the nightmare road. She was haunting him now in hallucinations. She was pursuing and she was gaining on him. Will, wisdom, resolution and understanding were of no avail, then? But there was always fatigue. The sweat poured down his face, streamed down the indented runnel of his spine, along the seam at the meeting-place of the ribs. His loin-cloth was wringing wet. The drops pattered continuously on the waterproof sheet. His calves and the muscles of his thighs ached with pedalling. One, two, three, four — he trod round a hundred times with either foot. After that he ventured to turn his head once more. He was relieved, and at the same time he was disappointed, to see that there was now no face at the window. He had exorcised the hallucination. He settled down to a more leisurely pedalling.

In the annexe of the laboratory the animals devoted to the service of physiology were woken by the sudden opening of the door, the sudden irruption of light. The albino guinea-pigs peered through the meshes of their hutch and their red eyes were like the rear-lights of bicycles. The pregnant she-rabbits lolloped out and shook their ears and pointed their tremulous noses towards the door. The cock into which Shearwater had engrafted an ovary came out, not knowing whether to crow or cluck.

'When he's with hens,' Lancing explained to his visitors, 'he thinks he's a cock. When he's with a cock, he's convinced he's a pullet.'

The rats who were being fed on milk from a London dairy came tumbling from their nest with an anxious hungry squeaking. They were getting thinner and thinner every day; in a few days they would be dead. But the old rat, whose diet was Grade A milk from the country, hardly took the trouble to move. He was as

fat and sleek as a brown furry fruit, ripe to bursting. No skim and chalky water, no dried dung and tubercle bacilli for him. He was in clover. Next week, however, the fates were plotting to give him diabetes artificially.

In their glass pagoda the little black axolotls crawled, the heraldry of Mexico, among a scanty herbage. The beetles, who had had their heads cut off and replaced by the heads of other beetles, darted uncertainly about, some obeying their heads, some their genital organs. A fifteen-year-old monkey, rejuvenated by the Steinach process, was discovered by the light of Lancing's electric torch, shaking the bars that separated him from the green-furred, bald-rumped, bearded young beauty in the next cage. He was gnashing his teeth with thwarted passion.

Lancing expounded to the visitors all the secrets. The vast, unbelievable, fantastic world opened out as he spoke. There were tropics, there were cold seas busy with living beings, there were forests full of horrible trees, silence and darkness. There were ferments and infinitesimal poisons floating in the air. There were leviathans suckling their young, there were flies and worms, there were men, living in cities, thinking, knowing good and evil. And all were changing continuously, moment by moment, and each remained all the time itself by virtue of some unimaginable enchantment. They were all alive. And on the other side of the courtyard beyond the shed in which the animals slept or uneasily stirred, in the huge hospital that went up sheer like a windowed cliff into the air, men and women were ceasing to be themselves, or were struggling to remain themselves. They were dying, they were struggling to live. The other windows looked on to the river. The lights of London Bridge were on the right, of Blackfriars to the left. On the opposite shore, St Paul's floated up as though self-supported in the moonlight. Like time the river flowed, silent and black. Gumbril and Mrs Viveash leaned their elbows on the sill and looked out. Like time the river flowed, stanchlessly, as though from a wound in the world's side. For a long time they were silent. They looked out, without speaking, across the flow of time, at the stars, at the human symbol hanging miraculously in the moonlight. Lancing had gone back to his German book; he had no time to waste looking out of windows.

‘To-morrow,’ said Gumbril at last, meditatively.

‘To-morrow,’ Mrs Viveash interrupted him, ‘will be as awful as to-day.’ She breathed it like a truth from beyond the grave prematurely revealed, expiringly from her death-bed within.

‘Come, come,’ protested Gumbril.

In his hot box Shearwater sweated and pedalled. He was across the Channel now; he felt himself safe. Still he trod on; he would be at Amiens by midnight if he went on at this rate. He was escaping, he had escaped. He was building up his strong light dome of life. Proportion, cried the old man, proportion! And it hung there, proportioned and beautiful in the dark, confused horror of his desires, solid and strong and durable among his broken thoughts. Time flowed darkly past.

‘And now,’ said Mrs Viveash, straightening herself up, and giving herself a little shake, ‘now we’ll drive to Hampstead and have a look at Piers Cotton.’

Those Barren Leaves

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PART I. AN EVENING AT MRS. ALDWINKLE’S

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE TOWN of Vezza stands at the confluence of two torrents that come down in two deep valleys from the Apuan mountains. Turbulently — for they still remember their mountain source — the united streams run through the town; silence in Vezza is the continuous sound of running waters. Then, gradually, the little river changes its character; the valley broadens out, soon the hills are left behind and the waters, grown placid as a Dutch canal, glide slowly through the meadows of the coastal plain and mingle with the tideless Mediterranean.

Dominating Vezza itself, a bold promontory of hill juts out like a wedge between the two valleys. Near the top of the hill and set in the midst of ilex trees and tall cypresses that rise up blackly out of the misty olives, stands a huge house. A solemn and regular façade, twenty windows wide, looks down over the terraced cypresses and the olive trees on to the town. Behind and above this façade one sees irregular masses of buildings climbing up the slopes beyond. And the whole is dominated by a tall slender tower that blossoms out at the top, after the manner of Italian towers, into overhanging machicolations. It is the summer palace of the Cybo Malaspina, one-time Princes of Massa and Carrara, Dukes of Vezza, and marquesses, counts and barons of various other villages in the immediate neighbourhood.

The road is steep that leads up from Vezza to the palace of the Cybo Malaspina, perched on the hill above the town. The Italian sun can shine most powerfully, even in September, and olive trees give but little shade. The young man with the peaked cap and the leather wallet slung over his shoulder pushed his bicycle slowly and wearily up the hill. Every now and then he halted, wiped his face and sighed. It was on an evil day, he was thinking, on a black, black day for the poor postmen of Vezza that the insane old English-woman with the impossible name bought this palace; and a blacker day still when she had elected

to come and live in it. In the old days the place had been quite empty. A couple of peasant families had lived in the out-houses; that was all. Not more than one letter a month between them, and as for telegrams — why, there had never been a telegram for the palace in all the memory of man. But those happy days were now over, and what with letters, what with packets of newspapers and parcels, what with expresses and telegrams, there was never a day and scarcely an hour in the day when some one from the office wasn't toiling up to this accursed house.

True, the young man went on thinking, one got a good tip for bringing a telegram or an express. But being a young man of sense, he preferred leisure, if a choice had to be made, to money. The expense of energy was not to be compensated for by the three francs he would receive at the end of the climb. Money brings no satisfaction if one has to work for it; for if one works for it one has no time to spend it.

The ideal, he reflected, as he replaced his cap and once more started climbing, the ideal would be to win a big prize in the lottery. A really immense prize.

He took out of his pocket a little slip of paper which had been given him only this morning by a beggar in exchange for a couple of soldi. It was printed with rhymed prophecies of good fortune — and what good fortune! The beggar had been very generous. He would marry the woman of his heart, have two children, become one of the most prosperous merchants of his city, and live till eighty-three. To these oracles he gave small faith. Only the last verse seemed to him — though he would have found it difficult to explain why — worthy of serious attention. The last verse embodied a piece of specific good advice.

Intanto se vuoi vincere
Un bel ternone al Lotto,
Giuoca il sette e il sedici,
Uniti al cinquantotto.

He read through the verse several times until he had got it by heart; then folded up the paper and put it away again. Seven, sixteen and fifty-eight — there certainly was something very attractive about those numbers.

Giuoca il sette e il sedici

Uniti al cinquantotto.

He had a very good mind to do as the oracle commanded. It was a charm, a spell to bind fate: one couldn't fail to win with those three numbers. He thought of what he would do when he had won. He had just decided on the make of car he would buy — one of the new 14-40 horse-power Lancias would be more elegant, he thought, than a Fiat and less expensive (for he retained his good sense and his habits of economy even in the midst of overflowing wealth) than an Isotta Fraschini or a Nazzaro — when he found himself at the foot of the steps leading up to the palace door. He leaned his bicycle against the wall and, sighing profoundly, rang the bell. This time the butler only gave him two francs instead of three. Such is life, he thought, as he coasted down through the forest of silver olive trees towards the valley.

The telegram was addressed to Mrs. Aldwinkle; but in the absence of the lady of the house, who had driven down with all her other guests to the Marina di Vezza for a day's bathing, the butler brought the telegram to Miss Thriplow.

Miss Thriplow was sitting in a dark little Gothic room in the most ancient part of the palace, composing the fourteenth chapter of her new novel on a Corona typewriter. She was wearing a printed cotton frock — huge blue checks ruled, tartan-fashion, on a white ground — very high in the waist, very full and long in the skirt; a frock that was at once old-fashioned and tremendously contemporary, school-girlish and advanced, demure and more than Chelsea-ishly emancipated. The face that she turned towards the butler as he came in was very smooth and round and pale, so smooth and round that one would never have credited her with all the thirty years of her age. The features were small and regular, the eyes dark brown; and their arched brows looked as though they had been painted on to the porcelain mask by an oriental brush. Her hair was nearly black and she wore it drawn sleekly back from her forehead and twined in a large knot at the base of her neck. Her uncovered ears were quite white and very small. It was an inexpressive face, the face of a doll, but of an exceedingly intelligent doll.

She took the telegram and opened it.

‘It’s from Mr. Calamy,’ she explained to the butler. ‘He says he’s coming by the three-twenty and will walk up. I suppose you had better have his room got ready for him.’

The butler retired; but instead of going on with her work, Miss Thriplow leaned back in her chair and pensively lighted a cigarette.

Miss Thriplow came down at four o’clock, after her siesta, dressed, not in the blue and white frock of the morning, but in her best afternoon frock — the black silk one, with the white piping round the flounces. Her pearls, against this dark background, looked particularly brilliant. There were pearls too in her pale small ears; her hands were heavily ringed. After all that she had heard of Calamy from her hostess she had thought it necessary to make these preparations, and she was glad that his unexpected arrival was to leave her alone with him at their first introduction. Alone, it would be easier for her to make the right, the favourable first impression which is always so important.

From what Mrs. Aldwinkle had said about him Miss Thriplow flattered herself that she knew just the sort of man he was. Rich, handsome, and what an amorist! Mrs. Aldwinkle had dwelt, of course, very lengthily and admiringly on that last quality. The smartest hostesses pursued him; he was popular in the best and most brilliant sets. But not a mere social butterfly, Mrs. Aldwinkle had insisted. On the contrary, intelligent, fundamentally serious, interested in the arts and so on. Moreover, he had left London at the height of his success and gone travelling round the world to improve his mind. Yes, Calamy was thoroughly serious. Miss Thriplow had taken all this with a grain of salt; she knew Mrs. Aldwinkle’s weakness for being acquainted with great men and her habit, when the admittedly Great were lacking, of promoting her common acquaintances to the rank of greatness. Deducting the usual seventy-five per cent. rebate from Mrs. Aldwinkle’s encomiums, she pictured to herself a Calamy who was one of Nature’s Guardsmen, touched, as Guardsmen sometimes are, with that awed and simple reverence for the mysteries of art, which makes these aristocratic autodidacts frequent the drawing-rooms where highbrows are to be found, makes them ask poets out to expensive meals, makes them buy cubist drawings, makes

them even try, in secret, to write verses and paint themselves. Yes, yes, Miss Thriplow thought, she perfectly knew the type. That was why she had made these preparations — put on that masterpiece of a fashionable black dress, those pearls, those rings; that was why she had donned, at the same time, the dashing manner of one of those brilliant, equivocal-looking, high-born young women at whose expense, according to Mrs. Aldwinkle, he had scored his greatest amorous triumphs. For Miss Thriplow didn't want to owe any of her success with this young man — and she liked to be successful with everybody — to the fact that she was a female novelist of good repute. She wanted, since he was one of Nature's Guardsmen with a fortuitous weakness for artists, to present herself to him as one of Nature's Guardswomen with a talent for writing equally fortuitous and unessential. She wanted to show him that, after all, she was quite up to all this social business, even though she had been poor once, and a governess at that (and, knowing her, Miss Thriplow was sure that Mrs. Aldwinkle couldn't have failed to tell him that). She would meet him on level terms, as Guardswoman to Guardsman. Afterwards, when he had liked her for her Guardish qualities, they could get down to art and he could begin to admire her as a stylist as well as a brilliant young woman of his own sort.

Her first sight of him confirmed her in her belief that she had been right to put on all her jewellery and her dashing manner. For the butler ushered into the room positively the young man who, on the covers of illustrated magazines, presses his red lips to those of the young woman of his choice. No, that was a little unfair. He was not quite so intolerably handsome and silly as that. He was just one of those awfully nice, well-brought-up, uneducated young creatures who are such a relief, sometimes, after too much highbrow society. Brown, blue-eyed, soldierly and tall. Frightfully upper class and having all the glorious self-confidence that comes of having been born rich and in a secure and privileged position; a little insolent, perhaps, in his consciousness of good looks, in his memory of amorous successes. But lazily insolent; the roasted quails fell into his mouth; it was unnecessary to make an effort. His eyelids drooped in a sleepy arrogance. She knew all about him, at sight; oh, she knew everything.

He stood in front of her, looking down into her face, smiling and with eyebrows questioningly raised, entirely unembarrassed. Miss Thriplow stared back at him quite as jauntily. She too could be insolent when she wanted to.

‘You’re Mr. Calamy,’ she informed him at last.

He inclined his head.

‘My name is Mary Thriplow. Everybody else is out. I shall do my best to entertain you.’

He bowed again, and took her extended hand. ‘I’ve heard a great deal about you from Lilian Aldwinkle,’ he said.

That she’d been a governess? Miss Thriplow wondered.

‘And from lots of other people,’ he went on. ‘Not to mention your books.’

‘Ah; but don’t let’s talk of those,’ she waved them airily away. ‘They’re irrelevant, one’s old books — irrelevant because they’re written by some one who has ceased to exist. Let the dead bury their dead. The only book that counts is the one one’s writing at the moment. And by the time that it’s published and other people have begun to read it, that too has become irrelevant. So that there never is a book of one’s own that it’s interesting to talk about.’ Miss Thriplow spoke languidly, with a little drawl, smiling as she spoke and looking at Calamy with half-closed eyes. ‘Let’s talk of something more interesting,’ she concluded.

‘The weather,’ he suggested.

‘Why not?’

‘Well, it’s a subject,’ said Calamy, ‘about which, as a matter of fact, I can speak at the moment with interest — I might almost say with warmth.’ He pulled out a coloured silk handkerchief and wiped his face. ‘Such an inferno as those dusty roads in the plain I never walked through before. Sometimes, I confess, in this Italian glare I pine for the glooms of London, the parasol of smoke, the haze that takes the edge off a building at a hundred yards and hangs mosquito netting half-way down every vista.’

‘I remember meeting a Sicilian poet,’ said Miss Thriplow, who had invented this successor of Theocritus on the spur of the moment, ‘who said just the same. Only he preferred Manchester. Bellissima Manchester!’ She turned up her eyes

and brought her hands together with a clap. ‘He was a specimen in that glorious menagerie one meets at Lady Trunion’s.’ That was a good name to drop casually like that. Lady Trunion’s was one of the salons where Nature’s Guardsmen and Guardswomen encountered the funnies and the fuzzy-wuzzies — in a word, the artists. By using the word ‘menagerie,’ Miss Thriplow put herself, with Calamy, on the Guardsmen’s side of the bars.

But the effect of the talismanic name on Calamy was not what she had expected. ‘And does that frightful woman still continue to function?’ he said. ‘You must remember I’ve been away for a year; I’m not up to date.’

Miss Thriplow hastily readjusted the expression of her face, the tone of her voice. Smiling with a knowing contempt, she said: ‘But she’s nothing to Lady Giblet, is she? For real horrors you must go to her. Why, the house is positively a mauvais lieu.’ She moved her jewelled hand from side to side with the gesture of a connoisseur in horror.

Calamy did not entirely agree. ‘Vulgarer, perhaps, at the Giblet’s; but not worse,’ he said — and in a tone of voice, with an expression on his face that showed Miss Thriplow that he meant what he said and didn’t at the bottom of his soul secretly adore these social delights. ‘After having been away, as I have, for a year or so, to come back to civilization and find the same old people doing the same idiotic things — it’s astonishing. One expects everything to be quite different. I don’t know why; perhaps because one’s rather different oneself. But everything is exactly the same. The Giblet, the Trunion and even, let’s be frank, our hostess — though I’m honestly very fond of poor dear Lilian. There’s not the slightest change. Oh, it’s more than astonishing — it’s positively terrifying.’

It was at this point in the conversation that Miss Thriplow became aware that she had made a huge mistake, that she was sailing altogether on the wrong tack. Another moment and she would have consummated a hideous error in social judgment, have irreparably made what she called, in her jovial undergraduatish moments, a ‘floater.’ Miss Thriplow was very sensitive about her floaters. Memories of floaters had a way of sticking deep in her spirit, making wounds that never thoroughly healed. Cicatrized, the old scars still hurt from time to

time. Suddenly, for no reason, in the middle of the night, or even in the middle of the jolliest party, she would remember an ancient floater — just like that, à propos de bottes — would remember and be overcome by a feeling of self-reproach and retrospective shame. And there was no remedy, no spiritual prophylaxis. One might do one's best to invent triumphantly right and tactful alternatives to the floater — imagine oneself, for example, whispering to sister Fanny the mollifying instead of the bitter, wounding phrase; might walk in fancy with the airiest dignity out of Bardolph's studio into the dirty little street, past the house with the canary hanging in the window (an exquisite touch the canary), away, away — when in fact (oh Lord, what a fool one had been, and how miserable, afterwards!), in actual fact one had stayed. One could do one's best; but one could never really persuade oneself that the floater hadn't happened. Imagination might struggle to annihilate the odious memory; but it never had power to win a decisive victory.

And now, if she wasn't careful, she'd have another floater rankling and suppurating in her memory. 'How could I have been so stupid?' she thought, 'how could I?' For it was obvious now that the dashing manner, the fashionable disguise were entirely inappropriate to the occasion. Calamy, it was clear, didn't appreciate that sort of thing at all; he might have once, but he didn't now. If she went on like this she'd have him putting her down as merely frivolous, worldly, a snob; and it would need time and enormous efforts to obliterate the disastrous first impression.

Surreptitiously Miss Thriplow slipped the opal ring from off the little finger of her right hand, held it for a moment, clenched out of sight in her left; then, when Calamy wasn't looking, pushed it down into the crevice between the padded seat and the back of her chintz-covered arm-chair.

'Terrifying!' she echoed. 'Yes, that's exactly the word. Those things are terrifying. The size of the footmen!' She held up one hand above her head. 'The diameter of the strawberries!' She brought both hands (still far too glittering, she regretfully noticed, with their freight of rings) to within a foot of one another in front of her. 'The inanity of the lion hunters! The roaring of the lions!' It was

unnecessary to do anything with her hands now; she dropped them back into her lap and took the opportunity to rid herself of the scarab and the brilliants. And like the conjuror who makes patter to divert attention from the workings of his trick, she leaned forward and began to talk very rapidly and earnestly. ‘And seriously,’ she went on, putting seriousness into her voice and smoothing the laughter out of her face, so that it was wonderfully round, earnest and ingenuous, ‘what rot the lions do roar! I suppose it’s awfully innocent of me; but I always imagined that celebrated people must be more interesting than other people. They’re not!’ She let herself fall back, rather dramatically, into her chair. In the process, one hand seemed to have got accidentally stuck behind her back. She disengaged it, but not before the scarab and the brilliants had been slipped into the cache. There was nothing left now but the emerald; that could stay. It was very chaste and austere. But she would never be able to take off her pearls without his noticing. Never — even though men are so inconceivably unobservant. Rings were easy enough to get rid of; but a necklace. . . . And they weren’t even real pearls.

Calamy, meanwhile, was laughing. ‘I remember making the same discovery myself,’ he said. ‘It’s rather painful at first. One feels as though one has been somehow swindled and done in. You remember what Beethoven said: “that he seldom found in the playing of the most distinguished virtuosi that excellence which he supposed he had a right to expect.” One has a right to expect celebrated people to live up to their reputations; they ought to be interesting.’

Miss Thriplow leaned forward again, nodding her assent with a child-like eagerness. ‘I know lots of obscure little people,’ she said, ‘who are much more interesting and much more genuine, one somehow feels, than the celebrated ones. It’s genuineness that counts, isn’t it?’

Calamy agreed.

‘I think it’s difficult to be genuine,’ Miss Thriplow went on, ‘if one’s a celebrity or a public figure, or anything of that sort.’ She became very confidential indeed. ‘I get quite frightened when I see my name in the papers and photographers want to take pictures of me and people ask me out to dinner. I’m

afraid of losing my obscurity. Genuineness only thrives in the dark. Like celery.' How little and obscure she was! How poor and honest, so to speak. Those roaring lions at Lady Trunion's, those boring lion huntresses . . . they had no hope of passing through the needle's eye.

'I'm delighted to hear you saying all this,' said Calamy. 'If only all writers felt as you do!'

Miss Thriplow shook her head, modestly declining the implied compliment. 'I'm like Jehovah,' she said; 'I just am that I am. That's all. Why should I make believe that I'm somebody else? Though I confess,' she added, with a greatly daring candour, 'that I was intimidated by your reputation into pretending that I was more mondaine than I really am. I imagined you as being so tremendously worldly and smart. It's a great relief to find you're not.'

'Smart?' repeated Calamy, making a grimace.

'You sounded so dazzlingly social from Mrs. Aldwinkle's accounts.' And as she spoke the words she felt herself becoming correspondingly obscurer and littler.

Calamy laughed. 'Perhaps I was that sort of imbecile once,' he said. 'But now — well, I hope all that's over now.'

'I pictured you,' Miss Thriplow went on, straining, in spite of her obscurity, to be brilliant, 'I pictured you as one of those people in the Sketch— "walking in the Park with a friend," you know; a friend who would turn out at the least to be a duchess or a distinguished novelist. Can you wonder that I was nervous?' She dropped back into the depths of her chair. Poor little thing! But the pearls, though not marine, were still rather an embarrassment.

CHAPTER II

MRS. ALDWINKLE, WHEN she returned, found them on the upper terrace, looking at the view. It was almost the hour of sunset. The town of Vezza at their feet was already eclipsed by the shadow of the great bluff which projected, on the further side of the westernmost of the two valleys, into the plain. But, beyond, the plain was still bright. It lay, stretched out beneath them like a map of itself — the roads marked in white, the pinewoods dark green, the streams as threads of silver, ploughland and meadowland in chequers of emerald and brown, the railway a dark brown line ruled along it. And beyond its furthest fringes of pinewoods and sand, darkly, opaquely blue, the sea. Towards this wide picture, framed between the projecting hills, of which the eastern was still rosily flushed with the light, the western profoundly dark, a great flight of steps descended, past a lower terrace, down, between columnar cypresses, to a grand sculptured gateway half-way down the hill.

They stood there in silence, leaning their elbows on the balustrade. Ever since she had jettisoned the Guardswoman they had got on, Miss Thriplow thought, most awfully well. She could see that he liked her combination of moral ingenuousness and mental sophistication, of cleverness and genuineness. Why she had ever thought of pretending she was anything but simple and natural she couldn’t now imagine. After all, that was what she really was — or at least what she had determined that she ought to be.

From the entrance court on the west flank of the palace came the hoot of a motor horn and the sound of voices.

‘There they are,’ said Miss Thriplow.

‘I rather wish they weren’t,’ he said, and sighing he straightened himself up and turned round, with his back to the view, towards the house. ‘It’s like heaving a great stone into a calm pool — all this noise, I mean.’

Mentally cataloguing herself among the tranquil charms of evening, Miss Thriplow took the remark to be complimentary to herself. ‘What smashings of crystal one has to put up with,’ she said. ‘Every other moment, if one’s at all sensitive.’

Through the huge echoing saloons of the palace the sound of an approaching voice could be heard. ‘Calamy,’ it called, ‘Calamy!’ mounting through the syllables of the name from a low to a much higher note, not, however, through any intervals known to music, but in a succession of uncertain and quite unrelated tones. ‘Calamy!’ It was as vague and tuneless as the call of an articulate wind. There were hurrying footsteps, a rustling of draperies. In the huge pompous doorway at the head of the steps leading down from the house to the terrace appeared the figure of Mrs. Aldwinkle.

‘There you are!’ she called in a rapture. Calamy walked to meet her.

Mrs. Aldwinkle was one of those large, handsome, old-masterish women who look as though they had been built up from sections of two different people — such broad shoulders they have, so Junonian a form; and growing from between the shoulders such a slender neck, such a small, compact and childish head. They look their best between twenty-eight and, shall we say, five-and-thirty, when the body is in its perfect maturity and the neck, the little head, the unravaged features seem still to belong to a young girl. Their beauty is made the more striking, the more attractive by the curious incongruousness of its components.

‘At thirty-three,’ Mr. Cardan used to say of her, ‘Lilian Aldwinkle appealed to all the instinctive bigamist in one. She was eighteen in the attics and widow Dido on the floors below. One had the impression of being with two women at the same time. It was most stimulating.’

He spoke, alas, in the past tense; for Mrs. Aldwinkle was no longer thirty-three, nor had been these twelve, these fifteen years or more. The Junonian form — that was still stately and as yet not too massive. And from behind, it is true, the head still looked like a child’s head set on those broad shoulders. But the face, which had once been so much the younger member of the partnership, had outstripped the body in the race through time and was old and worn beyond its

years. The eyes were the youngest feature. Large, blue and rather prominent, they stared very glitteringly and intently out of the face. But the setting of them was pouchy and crow's-footed. There were a couple of horizontal wrinkles across the broad forehead. Two deep folds ran down from the corner of the nose, past the mouth, where they were partially interrupted by another system of folds that moved with the movements of the lips, to the lower edge of the jaw, forming a sharp line of demarcation between the sagging cheeks and the strong, prominent chin. The mouth was wide, with lips of rather vague contour, whose indefiniteness was enhanced by Mrs. Aldwinkle's very careless reddening of them. For Mrs. Aldwinkle was an impressionist; it was the effect at a distance, the grand theatrical flourish that interested her. She had no patience, even at the dressing-table, for niggling pre-Raphaelite detail.

She stood there for a moment at the top of the steps, an imposing and majestic figure. Her long and ample dress of pale green linen hung down in stiff fluted folds about her. The green veil tied round her wide straw hat floated airily over her shoulders. She carried a large reticule over one arm and from her waist there dangled at the end of little chains a whole treasury of gold and silver objects.

'There you are!' she smiled at the approaching Calamy, smiled what had once been a smile of piercing sweetness, of alluring enchantment. Its interest now, alas, was chiefly historical. With a gesture at once theatrically exaggerated and inexpressive, Mrs. Aldwinkle suddenly stretched out both her hands in welcome and ran down the steps to meet him. Mrs. Aldwinkle's movements were as inharmonious and uncertain as her voice. She moved awkwardly and stiffly. The majesty of her repose was dissipated.

'Dear Calamy,' she cried, and embraced him. 'I must kiss you,' she said. 'It's such ages since I saw you.' Then turning with a look of suspicion to Miss Thriplow. 'How long has he been here?' she asked.

'Since before tea,' said Miss Thriplow.

'Before tea?' Mrs. Aldwinkle echoed shrilly, as though outraged. 'But why didn't you let me know in time when you were coming?' she went on, turning to Calamy. The thought that he had arrived when she was not there, and that he

had, moreover, spent all this time talking with Mary Thriplow, annoyed her. Mrs. Aldwinkle was perpetually haunted by the fear that she was missing something. For a number of years now the universe had always seemed to be conspiring to keep her away from the places where the exciting things were happening and the wonderful words being said. She had been loth enough, this morning, to leave Miss Thriplow behind at the palace; Mrs. Aldwinkle didn't want her guests to lead independent existences out of her sight. But if she had known, if she had had the slightest suspicion, that Calamy was going to arrive while she was away, that he would spend hours en tête à tête with Mary Thriplow — why then she would never have gone down to the sea at all. She'd have stayed at home, however tempting the prospect of a bathe.

'You seem to have made yourself extremely smart for the occasion,' Mrs. Aldwinkle went on, looking at Miss Thriplow's pearls and her black silk with the white piping round the flounces.

Miss Thriplow looked at the view and pretended not to have heard what her hostess had said. She had no wish to engage in a conversation on this particular subject.

'Well now,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle to her new guest, 'I must show you the view and the house and all that.'

'Miss Thriplow's already very kindly been doing that,' said Calamy.

At this piece of information Mrs. Aldwinkle looked extremely annoyed. 'But she can't have shown you everything,' she said, 'because she doesn't know what there is to show. And besides, Mary knows nothing about the history of the place, or the Cybo Malaspinas, or the artists who worked on the palace, or . . .' she waved her hand with a gesture indicating that, in fine, Mary Thriplow knew nothing whatever and was completely incapable of showing any one round the house and its gardens.

'In any case,' said Calamy, doing his best to say the right thing, 'I've seen enough already to make me think the place perfectly lovely.'

But Mrs. Aldwinkle was not content with this spontaneous and untutored admiration. She was sure that he had not really seen the beauty of the view, that

he had not understood it, not known how to analyse it into its component charms. She began to expound the prospect.

‘The cypresses make such a wonderful contrast with the olives,’ she explained, prodding the landscape with the tip of her parasol, as though she were giving a lantern lecture with coloured slides.

She understood it all, of course; she was entirely qualified to appreciate it in every detail. For the view was now her property. It was therefore the finest in the world; but at the same time, she alone had the right to let you know the fact.

We are all apt to value unduly those things which happen to belong to us. Provincial picture galleries are always stuffed with Raphaels and Giorgiones. The most brilliant metropolis in Christendom, according to its inhabitants, is Dublin. My gramophone and my Ford car are better than yours. And how pathetically boring are those poor but cultured tourists who show us their collection of picture postcards with as much pride as if they had been the original paintings themselves.

With the palace Mrs. Aldwinkle had purchased vast domains unmentioned in the contract. She had bought, to begin with, the Cybo Malaspina and their history. This family, whose only claim to fame is to have produced, a little before its extinction, that Prince of Massa Carrara to whom the Old Woman in ‘Candide’ — when she was young and a Pope’s ravishing daughter — was once engaged to be married, had now become for Mrs. Aldwinkle as splendid as the Gonzaga, the Este, the Medici, or the Visconti. Even the dull Dukes of Modena, the tenants of the palace (except during the brief Napoleonic interlude) between the extinction of the Cybo Malaspina and the foundation of the Kingdom of Italy, even the Dukes of Modena had so far profited by their connection with the place that for Mrs. Aldwinkle they were now patrons of letters and fathers of their people. And Napoleon’s sister, Elisa Bacciochi, who had, while Princess of Lucca, passed more than one hot summer on these heights, had come to be credited by the present owner with an unbounded enthusiasm for the arts and, what in Mrs. Aldwinkle’s eyes was almost more splendid, an unbounded

enthusiasm for love. In Elisa Buonaparte-Bacciochi Mrs. Aldwinkle had acquired a sister soul, whom she alone understood.

It was the same with the landscape. It was hers down to the remote horizon, and nobody but she could really give it its due, And then, how she appreciated the Italians! Ever since she had bought a house in Italy, she had become the one foreigner who knew them intimately. The whole peninsula and everything it contained were her property and her secret. She had bought its arts, its music, its melodious language, its literature, its wine and cooking, the beauty of its women and the virility of its Fascists. She had acquired Italian passion: cuore, amore and dolore were hers. Nor had she forgotten to buy the climate — the finest in Europe — the fauna — and how proud she was when she read in her morning paper that a wolf had devoured a Pistoiese sportsman within fifteen miles of home! — the flora — especially the red anemones and the wild tulips — the volcanoes — still so wonderfully active — the earthquakes. . . .

‘And now,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, when she had polished off the view, ‘now we must look at the house.’

She turned her back on the view. ‘This part of the palace,’ she said, continuing her lecture, ‘dates from about 1630.’ She pointed upwards with her parasol; the coloured slides were now architectural. ‘A very fine specimen of early baroque. What remains of the old castle, with the tower, constitutes the eastern wing of the present house. . . .’

Miss Thriplow, who had heard all this before, listened none the less with the rapt expression of interest that one sees on the faces of children at Royal Institution lectures; partly to atone in Mrs. Aldwinkle’s eyes for the offence of having been at home when Calamy arrived, and partly to impress Calamy himself with her capacity for being frankly, totally and uncritically absorbed in the little affairs of the moment.

‘Now I’ll show you the inside of the palace,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, mounting the steps that led from the terrace to the house; her treasures jingled at the end of their chains. Obediently Miss Thriplow and Calamy followed in her wake.

‘Most of the paintings,’ proclaimed Mrs. Aldwinkle, ‘are by Pasquale da Montecatini. A great painter — dreadfully underrated.’ She shook her head.

Miss Thriplow was somewhat embarrassed when, at this remark, her companion turned to her and made a hardly perceptible grimace. Whether to smile confidentially and ironically back, whether to ignore the grimace and preserve the Royal Institution expression — that was the question. In the end she decided to ignore the tacit confidence.

On the threshold of the great saloon they were met by a young girl dressed in a frock of pale pink linen, with a very young round face (otherwise ingenuous than Miss Thriplow’s) looking out of a rectangular window cut in a short smooth bell of copper-coloured hair. A pair of wide-open pale blue eyes looked out from beneath the straight metallic fringe. Her nose was small and delicately snubby. A short upper lip made her look at once pathetic and merry, like a child. It was Mrs. Aldwinkle’s niece, Irene.

She shook hands with Calamy.

‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘that I ought to tell you that you’ve grown up tremendously since I saw you last. But the truth is that I don’t think you have at all.’

‘I can’t help my appearance,’ she answered. ‘But inside . . .’ Inside Irene was older than the rocks on which she sat. It was not for nothing that she had passed the five most impressionable years of her life under her Aunt Lilian’s guardianship.

Mrs. Aldwinkle impatiently cut short the conversation. ‘I want you to look at this ceiling,’ she said to Calamy. Like hens drinking they stared up at the rape of Europa. Mrs. Aldwinkle lowered her gaze. ‘And the rustic work with the group of marine deities.’ In a pair of large niches, lined with shell-work and sponge-stone, two fishy groups furiously writhed. ‘So delightfully seicento,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle.

Irene, meanwhile, feeling herself excused by long familiarity from paying much attention to the marine deities, had noticed that the loose cretonne covers of the arm-chairs were crumpled. Being naturally tidy — and since she had lived

with Aunt Lilian she had had to be tidy for two — she tiptoed across the room to smooth them out. Bending down to the nearest of the chairs, she took hold of the loose cover near the front of the seat and gave it a smart pull down, so as to loosen it completely before she tucked it tidily in again. The stuff came forward like a suddenly bellying sail and with it there was shot out — from nowhere, as though Irene had been doing a conjuring trick — a glittering shower of jewels. They rattled on the floor, they rolled over the tiles. The noise disturbed Miss Thriplow in her rapt and child-like contemplation of the sponge-stone niches. She turned round just in time to see a scarab ring racing towards her, with the limp of an eccentric hoop, across the tiles. Arrived within a few feet of her it lost speed, it staggered, it fell on its side. Miss Thriplow picked it up.

‘Oh, it’s only my rings,’ she said airily, as though it were the most natural thing in the world for her rings to come jumping out of the chair when Irene straightened out the cover. ‘That’s all,’ she added reassuringly to Irene, who was standing, as though petrified by surprise, looking down at the scattered jewels.

Mrs. Aldwinkle was fortunately absorbed in telling Calamy about Pasquale da Montecatini.

CHAPTER III

DINNER WAS SERVED in the Saloon of the Ancestors. In Mrs. Aldwinkle's enthusiastic imagination what marvellous symposia had been held within those walls — centuries even before they were built — what intellectual feasts! Aquinas, here, had confided to an early Malaspina his secret doubt on the predictability of rollations, had twitted the robber marquess, over a goblet of wine, with the feebleness of his synderesis. Dante had insisted on the advantages of having a Platonic mistress whom one never met and who could, when necessary, be identified with Theology. Peter of Picardy, meanwhile, on his way to Rome had recited from his rhymed version of Physiologus the lines on the Hyaena, a beast which, besides being an hermaphrodite, carries in its eye a stone which, held by a man in his mouth, permits him to see the future; it symbolizes moreover avarice and lasciviousness. Learned Boccaccio had discoursed on the genealogy of the gods. Pico della Mirandola, over the boar's head, quoted the kabbala in support of the doctrine of the Trinity. Michelangelo had expounded his plans for the façade of San Lorenzo in Florence. Galileo had speculated why it is only up to thirty-two feet that Nature abhors a vacuum. Marini had astonished with his conceits. Luca Giordano, for a wager, had painted, between the roast and the dessert, a full-sized picture of Hannibal crossing the Alps. . . . And then, what brilliant ladies heightened the lustre of these feasts! Lovely, perennially young, accomplished as the protagonists of Castiglione's Courtier, amorous in the extreme — they inspired the men of genius to yet higher flights, they capped their hardiest sallies with a word of feminine grace.

It had been Mrs. Aldwinkle's ambition, ever since she bought the palace, to revive these ancient glories. She saw herself, unofficially a princess, surrounded by a court of poets, philosophers and artists. Beautiful women should swim through the great saloons and the gardens, glowing with love for the men of

genius. And periodically — for the apartment of the dwarfs, which the Cybo Malaspina, in imitation of the Gonzaga, had included in their palace, demanded appropriate inhabitants to furnish it — periodically they should bring forth, painlessly, children to the men of genius — all curly-headed, fully toothed and two years old on the day of birth, and all infant prodigies. Rows of little Mozarts. In a word, the palace of Vezza should re-become what it had never been except in Mrs. Aldwinkle's fancy.

What it had been in fact one could only guess by looking at the faces of the Ancestors who gave the banqueting-hall its name.

From circular niches set high in the walls of the huge square room the lords of Massa Carrara looked out, bust after bust, across the intervening centuries. Right round the room they went, beginning on the left of the fireplace and ending, with the penultimate Cybo Malaspina, who arranged the room, on the right. And as marquess succeeded marquess and prince, prince, an expression of ever profounder imbecility made itself apparent on the faces of the Ancestors. The vulture's nose, the formidable jaw of the first robber marquess transformed themselves by gradual degrees into the vague proboscides of ant-eaters, into criminally prognathous deformities. The foreheads grew lower with every generation, the marble eyes stared ever blanklier and the look of conscious pride became more and more strongly marked on every countenance. It was the boast of the Cybo Malaspina that they had never married beneath them and that their heirs had always been legitimate. One had only to look at the faces of the last three Princes to feel sure that the boast was amply justified. Were these the Muses' friends?

'You can imagine the splendour of the scene,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle rapturously as she entered the Saloon of the Ancestors on Calamy's arm. 'The innumerable candles, the silks, the jewels. And all the crowd manœuvring in the most stately manner according to the rules of etiquette.' The last representative, albeit adoptive, of these gorgeous beings, Mrs. Aldwinkle lifted her head still higher and with a still more swelling port sailed across the huge room towards

the little table where, in shrunken splendour, the successors of Cybo Malaspina were to dine. The train of her coral-coloured velvet dress rustled after her.

‘It must have been very fine,’ Calamy agreed. ‘Certainly, from the point of view of picturesqueness, we’ve lost by the passing of etiquette. One wonders how much further informality will go. Mr. Gladstone, in his old age, paid a visit to Oxford and was horrified to observe the new fashions in undergraduates’ dress. In his young days every young man who respected himself had at least one pair of trousers in which he never sat down for fear of making them bag at the knees, while the outfit in which he normally walked about the streets was never worth less than seventy or eighty pounds. And yet, in the time of Mr. Gladstone’s visit, the undergraduates still wore stiff collars and bowler hats. What would he have said if he could have seen them now? And what shall we say fifty years hence?’

The company disposed itself round the table. Calamy, as the new arrival, occupied the place of honour on Mrs. Aldwinkle’s right.

‘You’ve broached a very interesting subject,’ said Mr. Cardan, who sat opposite him, on their hostess’s left. ‘Very interesting,’ he repeated, as he unfolded his napkin. Mr. Cardan was a middle-sized, thickly built man. The upper hem of his trousers followed an ample geodesic; his shoulders were very broad, his neck short and powerful. The red face looked tough and knobbly like the head of a cudgel. It was an enigmatic and equivocal face, whose normal expression was at once gross and sensitively refined, serious and sly. The mouth was small and its thin lips fitted tightly together, as though they were the moving parts of a very well made piece of furniture. The line that marked the meeting of the lips was almost straight, but at one end its horizontal gravity was deflected a trifle downwards, so that Mr. Cardan seemed to be for ever in process of suppressing a wry smile that was for ever importunately troubling his demureness. The hair was smooth, silvery and saintly. The nose was short and straight, like a lion’s — but a lion’s that had become, with time and good living, rather bottled. Looking out from the midst of a web-work of fine wrinkles, the eyes were small, but bright and very blue. As the result, perhaps, of an illness —

or perhaps it was merely under the weight of five-and-sixty years — one white eyebrow had settled down permanently lower than the other. From the right side of his face Mr. Cardan looked at you mysteriously and confidentially through the gap in a kind of chronic wink. But from the left the glance was supercilious and aristocratic, as though the western socket had been stretched by an invisible monocle a size or so too large for it. An expression of benevolence mingled with malice shone in his glance while he was talking; and when he laughed, every polished red facet of his cudgel's face twinkled with mirth, as though suddenly illumined from within. Mr. Cardan was neither a poet nor a philosopher; nor of a remarkably brilliant family; but Mrs. Aldwinkle, who had known him intimately for many years, justified his inclusion among her courtiers on the ground that he was one of the obscure Great: potentially anything he chose to be, but actually, through indolence, unknown.

Mr. Cardan took a couple of spoonfuls of soup before proceeding. 'A very interesting subject,' he repeated yet again. He had a melodious voice, ripe, round, fruity and powdered, as it were, with a bloom of huskiness — the faint hoarseness of those who have drunk well, eaten well and copiously made love. 'Formality, external pomp, etiquette — their practical disappearance from modern life is really a most extraordinary thing, when you come to think of it. Formality and pomp were one of the essential features of ancient government. Tyranny tempered by transformation scenes — that was the formula of all governments in the seventeenth century, particularly in Italy. Provided you treated your people to a procession or some similarly spectacular function once a month or thereabouts, you could do whatever you pleased. It was the papal method par excellence. But it was imitated by every grand seigneur, down to the most piddling little count in the peninsula. Look how all the architecture of the period is conditioned by the need for display. The architect was there to make backgrounds for the incessant amateur theatricals of his employers. Huge vistas of communicating saloons to march down, avenues for processions, vast flights of steps to do the Grand Monarch descent from the skies. No comfort — since comfort is only private — but an immense amount of splendour to impress the

spectator from outside. Napoleon was the last ruler to practise it systematically and scientifically on the grand scale. Those reviews, those triumphal entries and exits, those coronations and weddings and christenings, all those carefully prepared stage effects — why, they were half his secret. And now these pomps are no more. Are our rulers so stupid and so regardless of the lessons of history that they neglect these aids to government? Or can it be that tastes have changed, that the public no longer demands these shows and is no longer impressed by them? I put the question to our political friends.' Mr. Cardan leaned forward, and looking past Miss Thriplow, who sat on his left, smiled at the young man who sat beyond her and at the older man occupying the corresponding place on the opposite side of the table, next to Irene Aldwinkle.

The young man, who looked even younger than he really was — and at best it was only two or three months since Lord Hovenden had attained his majority — smiled amiably at Mr. Cardan and shook his head, then turned hopefully to the person who sat opposite him. 'Ask me anover,' he said. Lord Hovenden still found it difficult to pronounce a th. 'What do you say, Mr. Falx?' An expression of respectful attention appeared on his boyish, freckled face as he waited for Mr. Falx's answer. Whatever the answer might be, it was obvious that Lord Hovenden would regard it as oracular. He admired, he revered Mr. Falx.

Mr. Falx, indeed, invited admiration and respect. With his white beard, his long and curly white hair, his large dark liquid eyes, his smooth broad forehead and aquiline nose, he had the air of a minor prophet. Nor were appearances deceptive. In another age, in other surroundings, Mr. Falx would in all probability have been a minor prophet: a denouncer, a mouthpiece of the Lord, a caller to salvation, a threatener of wrath to come. Having been born in the middle of the nineteenth century and having passed the years of his early manhood in the profession which, between three and seven, every male child desires to embrace — that of the engine driver — he had become not exactly a prophet, but a Labour leader.

Lord Hovenden, whose claim to figure in Mrs. Aldwinkle's court was the fact that she had known him since he was a baby, that he was descended from Simon

de Montfort, and that he was immensely rich, had added a further merit: he had become an ardent Guild Socialist. An earnest young schoolmaster had first apprised him of the fact — hitherto but very imperfectly realized by Lord Hovenden — that there are a great many poor people whose lives are extremely disagreeable and arduous and who, if justice were done, would be better off than they are at present. His generous impulses were stirred. Youthfully, he desired to precipitate an immediate millennium. Perhaps, too, a certain egotistical ambition to distinguish himself above his fellows had something to do with his enthusiasm. Among persons born in privileged positions and in the midst of wealth, snobbery often takes a form rather different from that which it commonly assumes. Not always, indeed; for there are plenty of rich and titled persons who regard wealth and title with the same abject respect as is shown by those whose acquaintance with the nobility and the plutocracy is only in fiction and the pages of the weekly papers. But others, whose ambition it is to climb out of the familiar surroundings into, at any rate intellectually, higher spheres, become infected with a passionate snobbery in regard to the artistic or political world. This snobbery — the snobbery of blood towards brain — had mingled without his being conscious of it with Lord Hovenden's purely humanitarian ardour, and had given it added strength. Lord Hovenden's pleasure at being introduced to Mr. Falx had been enormous, and the thought that he alone, of all his friends and relations, enjoyed the privilege of Mr. Falx's acquaintance, that he alone was free of the exciting political world in which Mr. Falx lived, had made him more than ever enthusiastic in the cause of justice. There had been occasions, however — and they had become more frequent of late — when Lord Hovenden had found that the demands made on him by a strenuous social life left him very little time for Mr. Falx or Guild Socialism. For one who danced as long and often as he did it was difficult to pay much attention to anything else. In lulls between the merrymaking he remembered with shame that he had not done his duty by his principles. It was to make up for arrears in enthusiasm that he had cut short his grouse shooting to accompany Mr. Falx to an International Labour Conference in Rome. The conference was to be held towards the end of

September; but Lord Hovenden had sacrificed a month's more shooting than was necessary by suggesting that, before the conference, Mr. Falx and he should go to stay for a few weeks with Mrs. Aldwinkle. 'Come when you like and bring whom you like.' Those were the words of Lilian's invitation. He telegraphed to Mrs. Aldwinkle to say that Mr. Falx needed a holiday and that he proposed to bring him; Mrs. Aldwinkle replied that she would be delighted to have him. There they were.

Mr. Falx paused for a moment before answering Mr. Cardan's question. He turned his bright dark eyes round the table, as though collecting everybody's attention; then spoke in the penetrating musical voice that had stirred so many audiences to enthusiasm. 'Twentieth-century rulers,' he said, 'respect the educated democracy too much to try to bamboozle it and keep it falsely contented by mere shows. Democracies demand reason.'

'Oh, come,' protested Mr. Cardan. 'What about Mr. Bryan's agitation against Evolution?'

'Moreover,' Mr. Falx went on, ignoring the point, 'we in the twentieth century have outgrown that sort of thing.'

'Perhaps we have,' said Mr. Cardan. 'Though I can't imagine how we should have. Opinions change, of course, but the love of a show isn't an opinion. It's founded on something deeper, something which has no business to change.' Mr. Cardan shook his head. 'It reminds me,' he went on after a little pause, 'of another, similarly deep-rooted change that I can never account for: the change in our susceptibility to flattery. It's impossible to read any ancient moralist without finding copious warnings against flatterers. "A flattering mouth worketh ruin" — it's in the Bible. And the reward of the flatterer is also specified there. "He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail" — though one would have thought that the vicariousness of the threatened punishment rendered it a little less formidable. But at any rate, in ancient days the great and the prosperous seem to have been fairly at the mercy of flatterers. And they laid it on so thick, they did their job, from all accounts, so extremely coarsely! Can it be that the educated plutocracy of those days was really taken in

by that sort of thing? It wouldn't be now. The flattery would have to be a great deal more subtle nowadays to produce the same effect. Moreover, I never find in the works of the modern moralists any warnings against flatterers. There's been some sort of change; though how it has come about, I really don't quite know.'

'Perhaps there has been a moral progress,' suggested Mr. Falx.

Lord Hovenden turned his eyes from Mr. Falx's face, on which, while he was speaking, they had been reverently fixed, and smiled at Mr. Cardan with an air of inquiring triumph that seemed to ask whether he had any answer to make to that.

'Perhaps,' repeated Mr. Cardan, rather dubiously.

Calamy suggested another reason. 'It's surely due,' he said, 'to the change in the position of the great and the prosperous. In the past they regarded themselves and were regarded by others as being what they were by divine right. Consequently, the grossest flattery seemed to them only their due. But now the right to be a prince or a millionaire seems a little less divine than it did. Flattery which once seemed only an expression of proper respect now sounds excessive; and what in the past was felt to be almost sincere is now regarded as ironical.'

'I think you may be right,' said Mr. Cardan. 'One result, at any rate, of this slump in flattery has been a great alteration in the technique of the parasite.'

'Has the technique of the parasite ever altered?' asked Mr. Falx. Lord Hovenden passed on his question to Mr. Cardan in an interrogating smile. 'Hasn't he always been the same — living on the labours of society without contributing to the common stock?'

'We are speaking of different sorts of parasites,' Mr. Cardan explained, twinkling genially at the minor prophet. 'Your parasites are the idle rich; mine are the idle poor who live on the idle rich. Big fleas have little fleas; I was referring to the tapeworms of tapeworms. A most interesting class, I assure you; and one that has never really had its due from the natural historians of humanity. True, there's Lucian's great work on the art of being a parasite, and a very fine work too; but a little out of date, particularly where flattery is concerned. Better than Lucian is Diderot. But the Neveu de Rameau deals with only a single type

of parasite, and that not the most successful or the most worthy of imitation. Mr. Skimpole in Bleak House isn't bad. But he lacks subtlety; he's not a perfect model for the budding tapeworm. The fact is that no writer, so far as I'm aware, has really gone into the question of parasites. I feel their remissness,' Mr. Cardan added, twinkling first at Mrs. Aldwinkle, then round the table at her guests, 'almost as a personal affront. Professing as I do — or perhaps trying to profess would be a more accurate description — the parasitical mystery, I regard this conspiracy of silence as most insulting.'

'How absurd you are,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle. The complacent references to his own moral defects and weaknesses were frequent in Mr. Cardan's conversation. To disarm criticism by himself forestalling it, to shock and embarrass those susceptible of embarrassment, to air his own freedom from the common prejudices by lightly owning to defects which others would desire to conceal — it was to achieve these ends that Mr. Cardan so cheerfully gave himself away. 'Absurd!' Mrs. Aldwinkle repeated.

Mr. Cardan shook his head. 'Not at all absurd,' he said. 'I'm only telling the truth. For alas, it is true that I've never really been a successful parasite. I could have been a pretty effective flatterer; but unfortunately I happen to live in an age when flattery doesn't work. I might have made a tolerably good buffoon, if I were a little stupider and a little more high-spirited. But even if I could have been a buffoon, I should certainly have thought twice before taking up that branch of parasitism. It's dangerous being a court fool, it's most precarious. You may please for a time; but in the end you either bore or offend your patrons. Diderot's Neveu de Rameau is the greatest literary specimen of the type; you know what a wretched sort of life he led. No, your permanently successful parasite, at any rate in modern times, belongs to an entirely different type — a type, alas, to which by no possible ingenuity could I make myself conform.'

'I should hope not,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle, standing up for Mr. Cardan's Better Self.

Mr. Cardan bowed his acknowledgments and continued. 'All the really successful parasites I have come across recently belong to the same species,' he

said. ‘They’re quiet, they’re gentle, they’re rather pathetic. They appeal to the protective maternal instincts. They generally have some charming talent — never appreciated by the gross world, but recognized by the patron, vastly to his credit of course; (that flattery’s most delicate). They never offend, like the buffoon; they don’t obtrude themselves, but gaze with dog-like eyes; they can render themselves, when their presence would be tiresome, practically non-existent. The protection of them satisfies the love of dominion and the altruistic parental instinct that prompts us to befriend the weak. You could write at length about all this,’ went on Mr. Cardan, turning to Miss Thriplow. ‘You could make a big deep book out of it. I should have done it myself, if I had been an author; and but for the grace of God, I might have been. I give you the suggestion.’

In words of one syllable Miss Thriplow thanked him. She had been very mousey all through dinner. After all the risks she had run this afternoon, the floaters she had stood on the brink of, she thought it best to sit quiet and look as simple and genuine as possible. A few slight alterations in her toilet before dinner had made all the difference. She had begun by taking off the pearl necklace and even, in spite of the chastity of its design, the emerald ring. That’s better, she had said to herself as she looked at the obscure little person in the simple black frock — without a jewel, and the hands so white and frail, the face so pale and smooth — who stood opposite her in the looking-glass. ‘How frankly and innocently she looks at you with those big brown eyes!’ She could imagine Calamy saying that to Mr. Cardan; but what Mr. Cardan would answer she couldn’t quite guess; he was such a cynic. Opening a drawer, she had pulled out a black silk shawl — not the Venetian one with the long fringes, but the much less romantic bourgeois, English shawl that had belonged to her mother. She draped it over her shoulders and with her two hands drew it together across her bosom. In the pier glass she seemed almost a nun; or better still, she thought, a little girl in a convent school — one of a hundred black-uniformed couples, with lace-frilled pantalettes coming down over their ankles, walking in a long, long crocodile, graded from five foot eight at the head to four foot nothing at the tail. But if she looped the thing up, hood fashion, over her head, she’d be still

more obscure, still poorer and honester — she'd be a factory girl, click-clicking along on her clogs to the cotton mill. But perhaps that would be carrying things a little too far. After all, she wasn't a Lancashire lass. Awfully cultured, but not spoilt; clever, but simple and genuine. That was what she was. In the end she had come down to dinner with the black shawl drawn very tightly round her shoulders. Very small and mousey. The head girl in the convent school had all the accomplishments; but, for the present, wouldn't speak unless she were spoken to. Modestly, then, demurely, she thanked him.

'Meanwhile,' Mr. Cardan continued, 'the sad fact remains that I have never succeeded in persuading anybody to become completely responsible for me. True, I've eaten quintals of other people's food, drunk hectolitres of their liquor' — he raised his glass and looking over the top of it at his hostess, emptied it to her health— 'for which I'm exceedingly grateful. But I've never contrived to live permanently at their expense. Nor have they, for their part, shown the slightest sign of wanting to take me for ever to themselves. Mine's not the right sort of character, alas. I'm not pathetic. I've never struck the ladies as being particularly in need of maternal ministrations. Indeed, if I ever had any success with them — I trust I may say so without fatuity — it was due to my strength rather than to my feebleness. At sixty-six, however . . .' He shook his head sadly. 'And yet one doesn't, by compensation, become any the more pathetic.'

Mr. Falx, whose moral ideas were simple and orthodox, shook his head; he didn't like this sort of thing. Mr. Cardan, moreover, puzzled him. 'Well,' he pronounced, 'all that I can say is this: when we've been in power for a little there won't be any parasites of Mr. Cardan's kind for the simple reason that there won't be any parasites of any kind. They'll all be doing their bit.'

'Luckily,' said Mr. Cardan, helping himself again to the mixed fry, 'I shall be dead by that time. I couldn't face the world after Mr. Falx's friends have dosed it with Keating's and vermifuge. Ah, all you young people,' he went on, turning to Miss Thriplow, 'what a fearful mistake you made, being born when you were!'

'I wouldn't change,' said Miss Thriplow.

'Nor would I,' Calamy agreed.

‘Nor I,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle echoed, ardently associating herself with the party of youth. She felt as young as they did. Younger indeed; for having been young when the world was younger, she had the thoughts and the feelings of a generation that had grown up placidly in sheltered surroundings — or perhaps had not grown up at all. The circumstances which had so violently and unnaturally matured her juniors had left her, stiffened as she already was by time into a definite mould, unchanged. Spiritually, they were older than she.

‘I don’t see that it would be possible to live in a more exciting age,’ said Calamy. ‘The sense that everything’s perfectly provisional and temporary — everything, from social institutions to what we’ve hitherto regarded as the most sacred scientific truths — the feeling that nothing, from the Treaty of Versailles to the rationally explicable universe, is really safe, the intimate conviction that anything may happen, anything may be discovered — another war, the artificial creation of life, the proof of continued existence after death — why, it’s all infinitely exhilarating.’

‘And the possibility that everything may be destroyed?’ questioned Mr. Cardan.

‘That’s exhilarating too,’ Calamy answered, smiling.

Mr. Cardan shook his head. ‘It may be rather tame of me,’ he said, ‘but I confess, I prefer a more quiet life. I persist that you made a mistake in so timing your entry into the world that the period of your youth coincided with the war and your early maturity with this horribly insecure and unprosperous peace. How incomparably better I managed my existence! I made my entry in the late fifties — almost a twin to The Origin of Species. . . . I was brought up in the simple faith of nineteenth-century materialism; a faith untroubled by doubts and as yet unsophisticated by that disquieting scientific modernism which is now turning the staunchest mathematical physicists into mystics. We were all wonderfully optimistic then; believed in progress and the ultimate explicability of everything in terms of physics and chemistry, believed in Mr. Gladstone and our own moral and intellectual superiority over every other age. And no wonder. For we were growing richer and richer every day. The lower classes, whom it was still

permissible to call by that delightful name, were still respectful, and the prospect of revolution was still exceedingly remote. True, we were at the same time becoming faintly but uncomfortably aware that these lower classes led a rather disagreeable life, and that perhaps the economic laws were not quite so unalterable by human agency as Mr. Buckle had so comfortingly supposed. And when our dividends came rolling in — I still had dividends at that time,' said Mr. Cardan parenthetically and sighed— 'came rolling in as regular as the solstices, we did, it is true, feel almost a twinge of social conscience. But we triumphantly allayed those twinges by subscribing to Settlements in the slums, or building, with a little of our redundant cash, a quite superfluous number of white-tiled lavatories for our workers. Those lavatories were to us what papal indulgences were to the less enlightened contemporaries of Chaucer. With the bill for those lavatories in our waistcoat pocket we could draw our next quarter's dividends with a conscience perfectly serene. It justified us, too, even in our little frolics. And what frolics we had! Discreetly, of course. For in those days we couldn't do things quite as openly as you do now. But it was very good fun, all the same. I seem to remember a quite phenomenal number of bachelor dinner parties at which ravishing young creatures used to come popping out of giant pies and dance pas seuls among the crockery on the table.' Mr. Cardan slowly shook his head and was silent in an ecstasy of recollection.

'It sounds quite idyl-lic,' said Miss Thriplow, drawlingly. She had a way of lovingly lingering over any particularly rare or juicy word that might find its way into her sentences.

'It was,' Mr. Cardan affirmed. 'And the more so, I think, because it was so entirely against the rules of those good old days, and because so much discretion did have to be used. It may be merely that I'm old and that my wits have thickened with my arteries; but it does seem to me that love isn't quite so exciting now as it used to be in my youth. When skirts touch the ground, the toe of a protruding shoe is an allurement. And there were skirts, in those days, draping everything. There was no frankness, no seen reality; only imagination. We were powder magazines of repression and the smallest hint was a spark.

Nowadays, when young women go about in kilts and are as bare-backed as wild horses, there's no excitement. The cards are all on the table, nothing's left to fancy. All's above-board and consequently boring. Hypocrisy, besides being the tribute vice pays to virtue, is also one of the artifices by which vice renders itself more interesting. And between ourselves,' said Mr. Cardan, taking the whole table into his confidence, 'it can't do without those artifices. There's a most interesting passage on this subject in Balzac's Cousine Bette. You remember the story?'

'Such a wonderful . . .!' exclaimed Mrs. Aldwinkle, with that large and indistinct enthusiasm evoked in her by every masterpiece of art.

'It's where Baron Hulot falls under the spell of Madame Marneffe: the old beau of the empire and the young woman brought up on the Romantic Revival and early Victorian virtues. Let me see if I can remember it.' Mr. Cardan thoughtfully frowned, was silent for a moment, then proceeded in an almost flawless French. ' "Cet homme de l'empire, habitué au genre empire, devait ignorer absolument les façons de l'amour moderne, les nouveaux scrupules, les différentes conversations inventées depuis 1830, et où la 'pauvre faible femme' finit par se faire considérer comme la victime des désirs de son amant, comme une sœur de charité qui panse des blessures, comme un ange qui se dévoue. Ce nouvel art d'aimer consomme énormément de paroles évangéliques à l'œuvre du diable. La passion est un martyre. On aspire à l'idéal, à l'infini de part et d'autre; l'on veut devenir meilleur par l'amour. Toutes ces belles phrases sont un prétexte à mettre encore plus d'ardeur dans la pratique, plus de rage dans les chutes (Mr. Cardan rolled out these words with a particular sonority) que par le passé. Cette hypocrisie, le caractère de notre temps a gangrené la galanterie." How sharp that is,' said Mr. Cardan, 'how wide and how deep! Only I can't agree with the sentiment expressed in the last sentence. For if, as he says, hypocrisy puts more ardour into the practice of love and more "rage in the chutes," then it cannot be said to have gangrened gallantry. It has improved it, revivified it, made it interesting. Nineteenth-century hypocrisy was a concomitant of nineteenth-century literary romanticism: an inevitable reaction,

like that, against the excessive classicism of the eighteenth century. Classicism in literature is intolerable because there are too many restrictive rules; it is intolerable in love because there are too few. They have this in common, despite their apparent unlikeness, that they are both matter-of-fact and unemotional. It is only by inventing rules about it which can be broken, it is only by investing it with an almost supernatural importance, that love can be made interesting. Angels, philosophers and demons must haunt the alcove; otherwise it is no place for intelligent men and women. No such personages were to be found there in classical times; still less in the neo-classic. The whole process was as straightforward, prosaic, quotidian, and terre à terre as it could be. It must really have become very little more interesting than eating dinner — not that I disparage that, mind you, particularly nowadays; but in my youth' — Mr. Cardan sighed— 'I set less stock in those days by good food. Still, even now, I have to admit, there's not much excitement, not much poetry in eating. It is, I suppose, only in countries where powerful taboos about food prevail that the satisfaction of hunger takes on a romantic aspect. I can imagine that a strictly-brought-up Jew in the time of Samuel might sometimes have been seized by almost irresistible temptations to eat a lobster or some similar animal that divides the hoof but does not chew the cud. I can imagine him pretending to his wife that he was going to the synagogue; but in reality he slinks surreptitiously away down a sinister alley to gorge himself illicitly in some house of ill fame on pork and lobster mayonnaise. Quite a drama there. I give you the notion, gratis, as the subject for a story.'

'I'm most grateful,' said Miss Thriplow.

'And then, remember, the next morning, after the most portentous dreams all the night through, he'll wake up tremendously strict, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and he'll send a subscription to the society for the Protection of Public Morals and another to the Anti-Lobster League. And he'll write to the papers saying how disgraceful it is that young novelists should be allowed to publish books containing revolting descriptions of ham being eaten in mixed company, of

orgies in oyster shops, with other culinary obscenities too horrible to be mentioned. He'll do all that, won't he, Miss Mary?'

'Most certainly. And you forgot to say,' added Miss Thriplow, forgetting that she was the head girl in the convent school, 'that he'll insist more strictly than ever on his daughters being brought up in perfect ignorance of the very existence of sausages.'

'Quite right,' said Mr. Cardan. 'All of which was merely meant to show how exciting even eating might become if religion were brought into it, if dinner were made a mystery and the imagination thoroughly stirred every time the gong sounded. Conversely, how tedious love becomes when it is taken as matter-of-factly as eating dinner. It was essential for the men and women of 1830, if they didn't want to die of pure boredom, to invent the pauvre faible femme, the martyr, the angel, the sister of charity, to talk like the Bible while they were consummating the devil's work. The sort of love that their predecessors of the eighteenth century and the empire had made was too prosaic a business. They turned to hypocrisy in mere self-preservation. But the present generation, tired of playing at Madame Marneffe, has reverted to the empire notions of Baron Hulot. . . . Emancipation is excellent, no doubt, in its way. But in the end it defeats its own object. People ask for freedom; but what they finally get turns out to be boredom. To those for whom love has become as obvious an affair as eating dinner, for whom there are no blushful mysteries, no reticences, no fancy-fostering concealments, but only plain speaking and the facts of nature — how flat and stale the whole business must become! It needs crinolines to excite the imagination and dragonish duennas to inflame desire to passion. Too much light conversation about the Oedipus complex and anal erotism is taking the edge off love. In a few years, I don't mind prophesying, you young people will be whispering to one another sublime things about angels, sisters of charity and the infinite. You'll be sheathed in Jaeger and pining behind bars. And love, in consequence, will seem incomparably more romantic, more alluring than it does in these days of emancipation.' Mr. Cardan spat out the pips of his last grape,

pushed the fruit plate away from him, leaned back in his chair and looked about him triumphantly.

‘How little you understand women,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, shaking her head. ‘Doesn’t he, Mary?’

‘Some women, at any rate,’ Miss Thriplow agreed. ‘You seem to forget, Mr. Cardan, that Diana is quite as real a type as Venus.’

‘Exactly,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘You couldn’t have put it more succinctly.’ Eighteen years ago, she and Mr. Cardan had been lovers. Elzevir, the pianist, had succeeded him — a short reign — to be followed by Lord Trunion — or was it Dr. Lecoing? — or both? At the moment Mrs. Aldwinkle had forgotten these facts. And when she did remember, it was not quite in the way that other people — Mr. Cardan, for example — remembered them. It was all wonderfully romantic, now; and she had been Diana all the time.

‘But I entirely agree with you,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I unequivocally admit the existence of Artemis. I could even prove it for you empirically.’

‘That’s very good of you,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, trying to be sarcastic.

‘The only figure on Olympus whom I have always regarded as being purely mythical,’ Mr. Cardan went on, ‘as having no foundation in the facts of life, is Athena. A goddess of wisdom — a goddess!’ he repeated with emphasis. ‘Isn’t that a little too thick?’

Majestically Mrs. Aldwinkle rose from the table. ‘Let us go out into the garden,’ she said.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. ALDWINKLE HAD even bought the stars.

‘How bright they are!’ she exclaimed, as she stepped out at the head of her little troop of guests on to the terrace. ‘And how they twinkle! How they palpitate! As though they were alive. They’re never like this in England, are they, Calamy?’

Calamy agreed. Agreeing, he had found, was a labour-saving device — positively a necessity in this Ideal Home. He always tried to agree with Mrs. Aldwinkle.

‘And how clearly one sees the Great Bear!’ Mrs. Aldwinkle went on, speaking almost perpendicularly upwards into the height of heaven. The Bear and Orion were the only constellations she could recognize. ‘Such a strange and beautiful shape, isn’t it?’ It might almost have been designed by the architect of the Malaspina palace.

‘Very strange,’ said Calamy.

Mrs. Aldwinkle dropped her eyes from the zenith, turned and smiled at him, penetratingly, forgetting that in the profound and moonless darkness her charm would be entirely wasted.

Miss Thriplow’s voice spoke softly, with a kind of childish drawl through the darkness. ‘They might be Italian tenors,’ she said, ‘tremoloing away like that so passionately in the sky. No wonder, with those stars overhead, no wonder life tends to become a bit operatic in this country at times.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle was indignant. ‘How can you blaspheme like that against the stars?’ she said. Then, remembering that she had also bought Italian music, not to mention the habits and customs of the whole Italian people, she went on: ‘Besides, it’s such a cheap joke about the tenors. After all, this is the only

country where bel canto is still . . .' She waved her hand. 'And you remember how much Wagner admired what's-his-name. . . .'

'Bellini,' prompted the little niece as self-effacingly as possible. She had heard her aunt speak of Wagner's admiration before.

'Bellini,' repeated Mrs. Aldwinkle. 'Besides, life isn't operatic in Italy. It's genuinely passionate.'

Miss Thriplow was, for a moment, rather at a loss for an answer. She had a faculty for making these little jokes; but at the same time she was so very much afraid that people might regard her as merely clever and unfeeling, a hard and glittering young woman. Half a dozen smart repartees were possible, of course; but then she mustn't forget that she was fundamentally so simple, so Wordsworthian, such a violet by a mossy stone — particularly this evening, in her shawl.

However much we should like to do so, however highly, in private, we think of our abilities, we generally feel that it is bad form to boast of our intelligence. But in regard to our qualities of heart we feel no such shame; we talk freely of our kindness, bordering on weakness, of our generosity carried almost to the point of folly (tempering our boasting a little by making out that our qualities are so excessive as to be defects). Miss Thriplow, however, was one of those rare people so obviously and admittedly clever that there could be no objection to her mentioning the fact as often as she liked; people would have called it only justifiable self-esteem. But Miss Thriplow, perversely, did not want to be praised or to praise herself for her intelligence. She was chiefly anxious to make the world appreciative of her heart. When, as on this occasion, she followed her natural bent towards smartness too far, or when, carried away by the desire to make herself agreeable in flashing company, she found herself saying something whose brilliance was not in harmony with the possession of simple and entirely natural emotions, she would recollect herself and hastily try to correct the misapprehension she had created among her hearers. Now, therefore, at the end of a moment's lightning meditation, she managed to think of a remark which admirably combined, she flattered herself, the most genuine feeling for Nature

with an elegantly recondite allusion — this last for the benefit particularly of Mr. Cardan, who as a scholarly gentleman of the old school was a great appreciator and admirer of learning.

‘Yes, Bellini,’ she said rapturously, picking up the reference from the middle of Mrs. Aldwinkle’s last sentence. ‘What a wonderful gift of melody! Casta diva — do you remember that?’ And in a thin voice she sang the first long phrase. ‘What a lovely line the melody traces out! Like the line of those hills against the sky.’ She pointed.

On the further side of the valley to westward of the promontory of hill on which the palace stood, projected a longer and higher headland. From the terrace one looked up at its huge impending mass. . . . It was at this that Miss Thriplow now pointed. With her forefinger she followed the scalloped and undulating outline of its silhouette.

‘Even Nature, in Italy, is like a work of art,’ she added.

Mrs. Aldwinkle was mollified. ‘That’s very true,’ she said; and stepping out, she began the evening’s promenading along the terrace. The train of her velvet robe rustled after her over the dusty flagstones. Mrs. Aldwinkle didn’t mind in the least if it got dirty. It was the general effect that mattered; stains, dust, clinging twigs and millepedes — those were mere details. She treated her clothes, in consequence, with a fine aristocratic carelessness. The little troop followed her.

There was no moon; only stars in a dark blue firmament. Black and flat against the sky, the Herculeses and the bowed Atlases, the kilted Dianas and the Venuses who concealed their charms with a two-handed gesture of alluring modesty, stood, like as many petrified dancers, on the piers of the balustrade. The stars looked between them. Below, in the blackness of the plain, burned constellations of yellow lights. Unremittingly, the croaking of frogs came up, thin, remote, but very clear, from invisible waters.

‘Nights like this,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, halting and addressing herself with intensity to Calamy, ‘make one understand the passion of the South.’ She had an alarming habit, when she spoke to any one at all intimately or seriously, of

approaching her face very close to that of her interlocutor, opening her eyes to their fullest extent and staring for a moment with the fixed penetrating stare of an oculist examining his patient.

Like trucks at the tail of a suddenly braked locomotive, Mrs. Aldwinkle's guests came joltingly to a stop when she stopped.

Calamy nodded. 'Quite,' he said, 'quite.' Even in this faint starlight, he noticed, Mrs. Aldwinkle's eyes glittered alarmingly as she approached her face to his.

'In this horrible bourgeois age' — Mrs. Aldwinkle's vocabulary (like Mr. Falx's, though for different reasons) contained no word of bitterer disparagement than 'bourgeois'— 'it's only Southern people who still understand or even, I believe, feel passion.' Mrs. Aldwinkle believed in passion, passionately.

From behind the glowing red end of his cigar Mr. Cardan began to speak. In the darkness his voice sounded more than ever ripe and fruity. 'You're quite right,' he assured Mrs. Aldwinkle, 'quite right. It's the climate, of course. The warmth has a double effect on the inhabitants, direct and indirect. The direct effect needs no explaining; warmth calls to warmth. It's obvious. But the indirect is fully as important. In a hot country one doesn't care to work too hard. One works enough to keep oneself alive (and it's tolerably easy to keep alive under these stars), and one cultivates long leisures. Now it's sufficiently obvious that practically the only thing that anybody who is not a philosopher can do in his leisure is to make love. No serious-minded, hard-working man has the time, the spare energy or the inclination to abandon himself to passion. Passion can only flourish among the well-fed unemployed. Consequently, except among women and men of the leisured class, passion in all its luxuriant intricacy hardly exists in the hard-working North. It is only among those whose desires and whose native idleness are fostered by the cherishing Southern heat that it has flourished and continues to flourish, as you rightly point out, my dear Lilian, even in this burgess age.'

Mr. Cardan had hardly begun to speak before Mrs. Aldwinkle indignantly moved on again. He outraged all her feelings.

Mr. Cardan talking all the way, they passed the silhouettes of modest Venus, of Diana and her attendant dog, of Hercules leaning on his club and Atlas bending under the weight of his globe, of Bacchus lifting to heaven the stump of a broken arm whose hand had once held the wine cup. Arrived at the end of the terrace, they turned and walked back again past the same row of symbols.

‘It’s easy to talk like that,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, when he had finished. ‘But it doesn’t make any difference to the grandeur of passion, to its purity and beauty and . . .’ She faded out breathlessly.

‘Wasn’t it Bossuet,’ asked Irene timidly, but with determination, for she felt that she owed it to Aunt Lilian to intervene; and besides, Aunt Lilian liked her to take part in the conversation, ‘wasn’t it Bossuet who said that there was something of the Infinite in passion?’

‘Splendid, Irene,’ Mr. Cardan cried encouragingly.

Irene blushed in the concealing darkness. ‘But I think Bossuet’s quite right,’ she declared. She could become a lioness, in spite of her blushes, when it was a question of supporting Aunt Lilian. ‘I think he’s absolutely right,’ she confirmed, after a moment of recollection, out of her own experience. She herself had felt most infinitely, more than once — for Irene had run through a surprising number of passions in her time. ‘I can’t think,’ her Aunt Lilian used to say to her, when Irene came in the evenings to brush her hair before she went to bed, ‘I can’t think how it is that you’re not wildly in love with Peter — or Jacques — or Mario.’ (The name might change as Mrs. Aldwinkle and her niece moved in their seasonal wanderings, backwards and forwards across the map of Europe; but, after all, what’s in a name?) ‘If I were your age I should be quite bowled over by him.’ And thinking more seriously now of Peter, or Jacques, or Mario, Irene would discover that Aunt Lilian was quite right; the young man was indeed a very remarkable young man. And for the remainder of their stay at the Continental, the Bristol, the Savoia, she would be in love — passionately. What she had felt on these occasions was decidedly infinite. Bossuet, there was no doubt of it, knew what he was talking about.

‘Well, if you think he’s right, Irene,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘why then, there’s nothing for me to do but retire from the argument. I bow before superior authority.’ He took the cigar out of his mouth and bowed.

Irene felt herself blushing once more. ‘Now you’re making fun of me,’ she said.

Mrs. Aldwinkle put her arm protectively round the young girl’s shoulders. ‘I won’t let you tease her, Cardan,’ she said. ‘She’s the only one of you all who has a real feeling for what is noble and fine and grand.’ She drew Irene closer to her, pressed her in a sidelong and peripatetic embrace. Happily, devotedly, Irene abandoned herself. Aunt Lilian was wonderful!

‘Oh, I know,’ said Mr. Cardan apologetically, ‘that I’m nothing but an old capripede.’

Meanwhile Lord Hovenden, humming loudly and walking a little apart from the rest of the company, was making it clear, he hoped, to every one that he was occupied with his own thoughts and had not heard anything that had been said for the last five minutes. What had been said disturbed him none the less. How did Irene know so much about passion, he wondered? Had there been, could there still be . . . other people? Painfully and persistently the question asked itself. With the idea of dissociating himself still more completely from all that had been said, he addressed himself to Mr. Falx.

‘Tell me, Mr. Falx,’ he said in a pensive voice, as though he had been thinking about the subject for some time before he spoke, ‘what do you think of the Fascist Trades Unions?’

Mr. Falx told him.

Passion, Calamy was thinking, passion. . . . One could have enough of it, good Lord! He sighed. If one could say: Never again, and be sure of meaning what one said, it would be a great comfort. Still, he reflected, there was something rather perversely attractive about this Thriplow woman.

Miss Thriplow meanwhile would have liked to say something showing that she too believed in passion — but in a passion of a rather different brand from Mrs. Aldwinkle’s; in a natural, spontaneous and almost childish kind of passion,

not the hot-house growth that flourishes in drawing-rooms. Cardan was right in not thinking very seriously of that. But he could hardly be expected to know much about the simple and dewy loves that she had in mind. Nor Mrs. Aldwinkle, for that matter. She herself understood them perfectly. On second thoughts, however, Miss Thriplow decided that they were too tenuous and delicate — these gossamer passions of hers — to be talked of here, in the midst of unsympathetic listeners.

Casually, as she passed, she plucked a leaf from one of the overhanging trees. Absent-mindedly she crushed it between her fingers. From the bruised leaf a fragrance mounted to her nostrils. She lifted her hand towards her face, she sniffed, once, again. And suddenly she was back in the barber's shop at Weltringham, waiting there while her cousin Jim had his hair cut. Mr. Chigwell, the barber, had just finished with the revolving brush. The shaft of the machine was still turning, the elastic driving band went round and round over the wheel, writhing from side to side as it went round, like a dying snake suspended, dangerously, above Jim's cropped head.

'A little brilliantine, Mr. Thriplow? Hair's rather dry, you know, rather dry, I'm afraid. Or the usual bay rum?'

'Bay rum,' said Jim in the gruffest, most grown-up voice he could get out of his chest.

And Mr. Chigwell would pick up a vaporizer and squirt Jim's hair with clouds made out of a clear brown liquid. And the air in the shop was filled with a fragrance which was the fragrance of this leaf, this leaf from Apollo's tree, that she held in her hand. It all happened years ago and Jim was dead. They had loved one another childishly, with that profound and delicate passion of which she could not speak — not here, not now.

The others went on talking. Miss Thriplow sniffed at her crushed bay leaf and thought of her girlhood, of the cousin who had died. Darling, darling Jim, she said to herself; darling Jim! Again and again. How much she had loved him, how terribly unhappy she had been when he died. And she still suffered; still, after all these years. Miss Thriplow sighed. She was proud of being able to suffer so

much; she encouraged her suffering. This sudden recollection of Jim, when he was a little boy, in the barber's shop, this vivid remembrance conjured up by the smell of a crushed leaf, was a sign of her exquisite sensibility. Mingled with her grief there was a certain sense of satisfaction. After all, this had happened quite by itself, of its own accord, and spontaneously. She had always told people that she was sensitive, had a deep and quivering heart. This was a proof. Nobody knew how much she suffered, underneath. How could people guess what lay behind her gaiety? 'The more sensitive one is,' she used to tell herself, 'the more timid and spiritually chaste, the more necessary it is for one to wear a mask.' Her laughter, her little railleries were the mask that hid from the outside world what was in her soul; they were her armour against a probing and wounding curiosity. How could they guess, for example, what Jim had meant to her, what he still meant — after all these years? How could they imagine that there was a little holy of holies in her heart where she still held communion with him? Darling Jim, she said to herself, darling, darling Jim. The tears came into her eyes. With a finger that still smelt of crushed bay leaves she brushed them away.

It suddenly occurred to her that this would make a splendid short story. There would be a young man and a young girl walking like this under the stars — the huge Italian stars, tremoloing away like tenors (she would remember to bring that into the description) overhead in the velvet sky. Their conversation edges nearer and nearer to the theme of love. He's rather a timid young man. (His name, Miss Thriplow decided, would be Belamy.) One of those charming young men who adore at long range, feel that the girl's too good for them, daren't hope that she might stoop from her divinity, and all that. He's afraid of saying definitely that he loves her for fear of being ignominiously rejected. She, of course, likes him most awfully and her name is Edna. Such a delicate, sensitive creature; his gentleness and diffidence are the qualities in him that particularly charm her.

The conversation gets nearer and nearer to love; the stars palpitate more and more ecstatically. Edna picks a leaf from the fragrant laurel as she passes. 'What must be so wonderful about love,' the young man is just saying (it's a set speech

and he's been screwing up his courage to get it out for the last half-hour), 'about real love, I mean, is the complete understanding, the fusion of spirits, the ceasing to be oneself and the becoming some one else, the . . .' But sniffing at the crushed leaf, she suddenly cries out, uncontrollably (impulsiveness is one of Edna's charms), 'Why, it's the barber's shop at Weltringham! Funny little Mr. Chigwell with the squint! And the rubber band still going round and round over the wheel, wriggling like a snake.' But the poor young man, poor Belamy, is most dreadfully upset. If that's the way she's going to respond when he talks about love, he may as well be silent.

There's a long pause; then he begins talking about Karl Marx. And of course she somehow can't explain — it's a psychological impossibility — that the barber's shop at Weltringham is a symbol of her childhood and that the smell of the crushed laurel leaf brought back her dead brother — in the story it would be a brother — to her. She simply can't explain that her apparently heartless interruption was prompted by a sudden anguish of recollection. She longs to, but somehow she can't bring herself to begin. It's too difficult and too elusive to be talked about, and when one's heart is so sensitive, how can one uncover it, how can one probe the wound? And besides, he ought somehow to have guessed, he ought to have loved her enough to understand; she has her pride too. Every second she delays, the explanation becomes more impossible. In a flat, miserable voice he goes on talking about Karl Marx. And suddenly, unrestrainedly, she begins sobbing and laughing at the same time.

CHAPTER V

THE BLACK SILHOUETTE that on the terrace had so perfunctorily symbolized Mr. Cardan transformed itself as he entered the lamp-lit saloon into the complete and genial man. His red face twinkled in the light; he was smiling.

‘I know Lilian,’ he was saying. ‘She’ll sit out there under the stars, feeling romantic and getting colder and colder, for hours. There’s nothing to be done, I assure you. To-morrow she’ll have rheumatism. We can only resign ourselves and try to bear her sufferings in patience.’ He sat down in an arm-chair in front of the enormous empty hearth. ‘That’s better,’ he said, sighing. Calamy and Miss Thriplow followed his example.

‘But don’t you think I’d better bring her a shawl?’ suggested Miss Thriplow after a pause.

‘She’d only be annoyed,’ Mr. Cardan answered. ‘If Lilian has said that it’s warm enough to sit out of doors, then it is warm enough. We’ve already proved ourselves fools by wanting to go indoors; if we brought her a shawl, we should become something worse than fools: we should be rude and impertinent, we should be giving her the lie. “My dear Lilian,” we’d be as good as saying, “it isn’t warm. And when you say that it is, you’re talking nonsense. So we have brought you your shawl.” No, no, Miss Mary. You must surely see yourself that it wouldn’t do.’

Miss Thriplow nodded. ‘How diplomatic!’ she said ‘You’re obviously right. We’re all children compared to you, Mr. Cardan. Only so high,’ she added irrelevantly — but it was all in the childish part — reaching down her hand to within a foot or two of the floor. Childishly she smiled at him.

‘Only so,’ said Mr. Cardan ironically; and lifting his right hand to the level of his eyes, he measured between his thumb and forefinger a space of perhaps half an inch. With his winking eye he peeped at her through the gap. ‘I’ve seen

children,' he went on, 'compared to whom Miss Mary Thriplow would be . . .' He threw up his hands and let them fall with a clap on to his thighs, leaving the sentence to conclude itself in the pregnant silence.

Miss Thriplow resented this denial of her child-like simplicity. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. But circumstances did not permit her to insist on the fact too categorically in Mr. Cardan's presence. The history of their friendship was a little unfortunate. At their first meeting, Mr. Cardan, summing her up at a glance (wrongly, Miss Thriplow insisted), had taken her into a kind of cynical and diabolic confidence, treating her as though she were a wholly 'modern' and unprejudiced young woman, one of those young women who not only do what they like (which is nothing; for the demurest and the most 'old-fashioned' can and do act), but who also airily and openly talk of their diversions. Inspired by her desire to please, and carried away by her facility for adapting herself to her spiritual environment, Miss Thriplow had gaily entered into the part assigned to her. How brilliant she had been, how charmingly and wickedly daring! until finally, twinkling benevolently all the time, Mr. Cardan had led the conversation along such strange and such outrageous paths that Miss Thriplow began to fear that she had put herself in a false position. Goodness only knew what mightn't, with such a man, happen next. By imperceptible degrees Miss Thriplow transformed herself from a salamander, sporting gaily among the flames, into a primrose by the river's brim. Henceforward, whenever she talked to Mr. Cardan, the serious young female novelist — so cultured and intelligent, but so unspoiled — put in an appearance. For his part, with that tact which distinguished him in all his social negotiations, Mr. Cardan accepted the female novelist without showing the least astonishment at the change. At most, he permitted himself from time to time to look at her through his winking eye and smile significantly. Miss Thriplow on these occasions pretended not to notice. In the circumstances, it was the best thing she could do.

'People always seem to imagine,' said Miss Thriplow with a martyr's sigh, 'that being educated means being sophisticated. And what's more, they never

seem to be able to give one credit for having a good heart as well as a good head.'

And she had such a good heart. Any one can be clever, she used to say. But what matters is being kind and good, and having nice feelings. She felt more than ever pleased about that bay-leaf incident. That was having nice feelings.

'They always seem entirely to misunderstand what one writes,' Miss Thriplow went on. 'They like my books because they're smart and unexpected and rather paradoxical and cynical and elegantly brutal. They don't see how serious it all is. They don't see the tragedy and the tenderness underneath. You see,' she explained, 'I'm trying to do something new — a chemical compound of all the categories. Lightness and tragedy and loveliness and wit and fantasy and realism and irony and sentiment all combined. People seem to find it merely amusing, that's all.' She threw out her hands despairingly.

'It's only to be expected,' said Mr. Cardan comfortingly. 'Any one who has anything to say can't fail to be misunderstood. The public only understands the things with which it is perfectly familiar. Something new makes it lose its orientation. And then think of the misunderstandings between even intelligent people, people who know one another personally. Have you ever corresponded with a distant lover?' Miss Thriplow slightly nodded; she was familiar, professionally, with every painful experience. 'Then you must know how easy it is for your correspondent to take the expression of one of your passing moods — forgotten long before the arrival of the letter at its destination — as your permanent spiritual condition. Haven't you been shocked to receive, by the returning post, a letter rejoicing with you in your gaiety, when in fact, at the moment, you are plunged in gloom; or astonished, when you come whistling down to breakfast, to find beside your plate sixteen pages of sympathy and consolation? And have you ever had the misfortune to be loved by somebody you do not love? Then you know very well how expressions of affection which must have been written with tears in the eyes and from the depth of the heart seem to you not merely silly and irritating, but in the worst possible bad taste. Positively vulgar, like those deplorable letters that are read in the divorce courts.

And yet these are precisely the expressions that you habitually use when writing to the person you yourself are in love with. In the same way, the reader of a book who happens to be out of tune with the author's prevailing mood will be bored to death by the things that were written with the greatest enthusiasm. Or else, like the far-away correspondent, he may seize on something which for you was not essential, to make of it the core and kernel of the whole book. And then, you admitted it yourself, you make it very hard for your readers. You write sentimental tragedies in terms of satire and they see only the satire. Isn't it to be expected?'

'There's something in that, of course,' said Miss Thriplow. But not everything, she added to herself.

'And then you must remember,' Mr. Cardan went on, 'that most readers don't really read. When you reflect that the pages which cost a week of unremitting and agonizing labour to write are casually read through — or, more likely, skipped through — in a few minutes, you cannot be surprised if little misunderstandings between author and reader should happen from time to time. We all read too much nowadays to be able to read properly. We read with the eyes alone, not with the imagination; we don't take the trouble to reconvert the printed word into a living image. And we do this, I may say, in sheer self-defence. For though we read an enormous number of words, nine hundred and ninety out of every thousand of them are not worth reading properly, are not even susceptible of being read except superficially, with the eye alone. Our perfunctory reading of nonsense habituates us to be careless and remiss with all our reading, even of good books. You may take endless pains with your writing, my dear Miss Mary; but out of every hundred of your readers, how many, do you suppose, ever take the pains to read what you write — and when I say read,' Mr. Cardan added, 'I mean really read — how many, I repeat?'

'Who knows?' said Miss Thriplow. But even if they did read properly, she was thinking, would they really unearth that Heart? That was the vital question.

'It's this mania for keeping up to date,' said Mr. Cardan, 'that has killed the art of reading. Most of the people I know read three or four daily newspapers,

look at half a dozen weeklies between Saturday and Monday, and a dozen reviews at the end of every month. And the rest of the time, as the Bible with justifiable vigour would put it, the rest of the time they are whoring after new fiction, new plays and verses and biographies. They've no time to do anything but skim along uncomprehendingly. If you must complicate the matter by writing tragedy in terms of farce you can only expect confusion. Books have their destinies like men. And their fates, as made by generations of readers, are very different from the destinies foreseen for them by their authors. Gulliver's Travels, with a minimum of expurgation, has become a children's book; a new illustrated edition is produced every Christmas. That's what comes of saying profound things about humanity in terms of a fairy story. The publications of the Purity League figure invariably under the heading "Curious" in the booksellers' catalogues. The theological and, to Milton himself, the fundamental and essential part of Paradise Lost is now so ludicrous that we ignore it altogether. When somebody speaks of Milton, what do we call to mind? A great religious poet? No. Milton means for us a collection of isolated passages, full of bright light, colour and thunderous harmony, hanging like musical stars in the lap of nothing. Sometimes the adult masterpieces of one generation become the reading of schoolboys in the next. Does any one over sixteen now read the poems of Sir Walter Scott? or his novels, for that matter? How many books of piety and morality survive only for their fine writing! and how our interest in the merely aesthetic qualities of these books would have scandalized their authors! No, at the end of the account it is the readers who make the book what it ultimately is. The writer proposes, the readers dispose. It's inevitable, Miss Mary. You must reconcile yourself to fate.'

'I suppose I must,' said Miss Thriplow.

Calamy broke silence for the first time since they had entered the room. 'But I don't know why you complain of being misunderstood,' he said, smiling. 'I should have thought that it was much more disagreeable to be understood. One can get annoyed with imbeciles for failing to understand what seems obvious to oneself; one's vanity may be hurt by their interpretation of you — they make

you out to be as vulgar as themselves. Or you may feel that you have failed as an artist, in so far as you haven't managed to make yourself transparently plain. But what are all these compared to the horrors of being understood — completely understood? You've given yourself away, you're known, you're at the mercy of the creatures into whose keeping you have committed your soul — why, the thought's terrifying. If I were you,' he went on, 'I'd congratulate myself. You have a public which likes your books, but for the wrong reasons. And meanwhile you're safe, you're out of their reach, you possess yourself intact.'

'Perhaps you're right,' said Miss Thriplow. Mr. Cardan understood her, she reflected, or at least understood part of her — an unreal, superficial part, it was true; but still, she had to admit, a part. And it certainly wasn't agreeable.

CHAPTER VI

TO BE TORN between divided allegiances is the painful fate of almost every human being. Pull devil, pull baker; pull flesh, pull spirit; pull love, pull duty; pull reason and pull hallowed prejudice. The conflict, in its various forms, is the theme of every drama. For though we have learnt to feel disgust at the spectacle of a bull-fight, an execution or a gladiatorial show, we still look on with pleasure at the contortions of those who suffer spiritual anguish. At some distant future date, when society is organized in a rational manner so that every individual occupies the position and does the work for which his capacities really fit him, when education has ceased to instil into the minds of the young fantastic prejudices instead of truths, when the endocrine glands have been taught to function in perfect harmony and diseases have been suppressed, all our literature of conflict and unhappiness will seem strangely incomprehensible; and our taste for the spectacle of mental torture will be regarded as an obscene perversion of which decent men should feel ashamed. Joy will take the place of suffering as the principal theme of art; in the process, it may be, art will cease to exist. A happy people, we now say, has no history; and we might add that happy individuals have no literature. The novelist dismisses in a paragraph his hero's twenty years of happiness; over a week of misery and spiritual debate he will linger through twenty chapters. When there is no more misery, he will have nothing to write about. Perhaps it will be all for the best.

The conflict which had raged during the last few months within Irene's spirit, though not so serious as some of the inward battles that have distracted strong men in their search for the salvation of integrity, was still for her a painful one. Put baldly in its most concrete form, the question at issue was this: should she paint pictures and write? or should she make her own underclothing?

But for Aunt Lilian the conflict would never have become serious; indeed, it would never, in all probability, have begun at all. For if it had not been for Aunt Lilian, the Natural Woman in Irene would have remained undisputed mistress of the field, and she would have passed her days in a placid contentment over the lacy intricacies of her undergarments. Aunt Lilian, however, was on the side of the Unnatural Woman; it was she who had practically called the writer and the painter of pictures into existence, had invented Irene's higher talents and ranged them against the homelier.

Mrs. Aldwinkle's enthusiasm for the arts was such that she wanted every one to practise one or other of them. It was her own greatest regret that she herself had no aptitude for any of them. Nature had endowed her with no power of self-expression; even in ordinary conversation she found it difficult to give utterance to what she wanted to say. Her letters were made up of the fragments of sentences; it was as though her thoughts had been blown to ungrammatical pieces by a bomb and scattered themselves on the page. A curious clumsiness of hand united with her native impatience to prevent her from drawing correctly or even doing plain sewing. And though she listened to music with an expression of rapture, she had an ear that could not distinguish a major from a minor third. 'I'm one of those unfortunate people,' she used to say, 'who have an artistic temperament without an artist's powers.' She had to content herself with cultivating her own temperament and developing other people's capacities. She never met a young person of either sex without encouraging him or her to become a painter, a novelist, a poet or a musician. It was she who had persuaded Irene that her little dexterity with camel's-hair brushes was a talent and that she ought on the strength of her amusing letters to write lyrics. 'How can you spend your time so stupidly and frivolously?' she used to ask, whenever she found Irene busy at her underlinen. And Irene, who adored her Aunt Lilian with the dog-like devotion that is only possible when one is eighteen, and rather young for one's age at that, put her sewing away and devoted all her energy to portraying in water-colours and describing in rhyme the landscape and the flowers of the garden. But the underclothing remained, none the less, a

permanent temptation. She found herself wondering whether her chain-stitch wasn't better than her painting, her button-holing superior to her verse. She asked herself whether nightdresses weren't more useful than water-colours. More useful — and besides she was so awfully particular about what she wore next her skin; and she adored pretty things. So did Aunt Lilian, who used to laugh at her when she wore ugly, dowdy ones. At the same time Aunt Lilian didn't give her much of an allowance. For thirty shillings Irene could make a garment that it would have cost her five or six guineas to buy in a shop. . . .

Underclothing became for Irene the flesh, became illicit love and rebellious reason; poetry and water-colour painting, invested by her adoration of Aunt Lilian with a quality of sacredness, became spirit, duty and religion. The struggle between her inclination and what Aunt Lilian considered good was prolonged and distressing.

On nights like this, however, the Natural Woman faded completely out. Under the stars, in the solemn darkness, how could one think of underclothing? And Aunt Lilian was being so affectionate. Still, it certainly was rather cool.

'Art's the great thing,' Mrs. Aldwinkle was saying earnestly, 'the thing that really makes life worth living and justifies one's existence.' When Mr. Cardan was away she let herself go more confidently on her favourite themes.

And Irene, sitting at her feet, leaning against her knee, couldn't help agreeing. Mrs. Aldwinkle stroked the girl's soft hair, or with combing fingers disordered its sleek surface. Irene shut her eyes; happily, drowsily, she listened. Mrs. Aldwinkle's talk came to her in gusts — here a phrase, there a phrase.

'Disinterested,' she was saying, 'disinterested . . .' Mrs. Aldwinkle had a way, when she wanted to insist on an idea, of repeating the same word several times. 'Disinterested . . .' It saved her the trouble of looking for phrases which she could never find, of making explanations which always turned out, at the best, rather incoherent. 'Joy in the work for its own sake. . . . Flaubert spent days over a single sentence. . . . Wonderful. . . .'

'Wonderful!' Irene echoed.

A little breeze stirred among the bay trees. Their stiff leaves rattled dryly together, like scales of metal. Irene shivered a little; it was downright cold.

‘It’s the only really creative . . .’ Mrs. Aldwinkle couldn’t think of the word ‘activity’ and had to content herself with making a gesture with her free hand. ‘Through art man comes nearest to being a god . . . a god. . . .’

The night wind rattled more loudly among the bay leaves. Irene crossed her arms over her chest, hugging herself to keep warm. Unfortunately, this boa of flesh and blood was itself sensitive. Her frock was sleeveless. The warmth of her bare arms drifted off along the wind; the temperature of the surrounding atmosphere rose by a hundred-billionth of a degree.

‘It’s the highest life,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘It’s the only life.’

Tenderly she rumpled Irene’s hair. And at this very moment, Mr. Falx was meditating, at this very moment, on tram-cars in the Argentine, among Peruvian guano-beds, in humming power-stations at the foot of African waterfalls, in Australian refrigerators packed with slaughtered mutton, in the heat and darkness of Yorkshire coal-mines, in tea-plantations on the slopes of the Himalaya, in Japanese banks, at the mouth of Mexican oil-wells, in steamers walloping along across the China Sea — at this very moment, men and women of every race and colour were doing their bit to supply Mrs. Aldwinkle with her income. On the two hundred and seventy thousand pounds of Mrs. Aldwinkle’s capital the sun never set. People worked; Mrs. Aldwinkle led the higher life. She for art only, they — albeit unconscious of the privilege — for art in her.

Young Lord Hovenden sighed. If only it were he whose fingers were playing in the smooth thick tresses of Irene’s hair! It seemed an awful waste that she should be so fond of her Aunt Lilian. Somehow, the more he liked Irene the less he liked Aunt Lilian.

‘Haven’t you sometimes longed to be an artist yourself, Hovenden?’ Mrs. Aldwinkle suddenly asked. She leaned forward, her eyes glittering with the reflected light of two or three hundred million remote suns. She was going to suggest that he might try his hand at poetical rhapsodies about political injustice

and the condition of the lower classes. Something half-way between Shelley and Walt Whitman.

‘Me!’ said Hovenden in astonishment. Then he laughed aloud: Ha, ha, ha! It was a jarring note.

Mrs. Aldwinkle drew back, pained. ‘I don’t know why you should think the idea so impossibly comic,’ she said.

‘Perhaps he has other work to do,’ said Mr. Falx out of the darkness. ‘More important work.’ And at the sound of that thrilling, deep, prophetical voice Lord Hovenden felt that, indeed, he had.

‘More important?’ queried Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘But can anything be more important? When one thinks of Flaubert . . .’ One thought of Flaubert — working through all a fifty-four hour week at a relative clause. But Mrs. Aldwinkle was too enthusiastic to be able to say what followed when one had thought of Flaubert.

‘Think of coal-miners for a change,’ said Mr. Falx in answer. ‘That’s what I suggest.’

‘Yes,’ Lord Hovenden agreed, gravely nodding. A lot of his money came from coal. He felt particularly responsible for miners when he had time to think of them.

‘Think,’ said Mr. Falx in his deep voice; and he relapsed into a silence more eloquently prophetical than any speech.

For a long time nobody spoke. The wind came draughtily and in ever chillier gusts. Irene clasped her arms still tightlier over her breast; she shivered, she yawned with cold. Mrs. Aldwinkle felt the shaking of the young body that leaned against her knees. She herself was cold too; but after what she had said to Cardan and the others it was impossible for her to go indoors yet awhile. She felt, in consequence, annoyed with Irene for shivering. ‘Do stop,’ she said crossly. ‘It’s only a stupid habit. Like a little dog that shivers even in front of the fire.’

‘All ve same,’ said Lord Hovenden, coming to Irene’s defence, ‘it is getting raver cold.’

‘Well, if you find it so,’ retorted Mrs. Aldwinkle, with overwhelming sarcasm, ‘you’d better go in and ask them to light a fire.’

It was nearly midnight before Mrs. Aldwinkle finally gave the word to go indoors.

CHAPTER VII

TO SAY GOOD-NIGHT definitely and for the last time was a thing which Mrs. Aldwinkle found most horribly difficult. With those two fatal words she pronounced sentence of death on yet another day (on yet another, and the days were so few now, so agonizingly brief); she pronounced it also, temporarily at least, on herself. For, the formula once finally uttered, there was nothing for her to do but creep away out of the light and bury herself in the black unconsciousness of sleep. Six hours, eight hours would be stolen from her and never given back. And what marvellous things might not be happening while she was lying dead between the sheets! Extraordinary happinesses might present themselves and, finding her asleep and deaf to their calling, pass on. Or some one, perhaps, would be saying the one supremely important, revealing, apocalyptic thing that she had been waiting all her life to hear. ‘There!’ she could imagine somebody winding up, ‘that’s the secret of the Universe. What a pity poor Lilian should have gone to bed. She would have loved to hear it.’ Good-night — it was like parting with a shy lover who had not yet ventured to declare himself. A minute more and he would speak, would reveal himself the unique soul-mate. Good-night, and he would remain for ever merely diffident little Mr. Jones. Must she part with this day too, before it was transfigured?

Good-night. Every evening she put off the saying of it as long as she possibly could. It was generally half-past one or two before she could bring herself to leave the drawing-room. And even then the words were not finally spoken. For on the threshold of her bed-chamber she would halt, desperately renewing the conversation with whichever of her guests had happened to light her upstairs. Who knew? Perhaps in these last five minutes, in the intimacy, in the nocturnal silence, the important thing really would be said. The five minutes often lengthened themselves out to forty, and still Mrs. Aldwinkle stood there,

desperately putting off and putting off the moment when she would have to pronounce the sentence of death.

When there was nobody else to talk to, she had to be content with the company of Irene, who always, when she herself had undressed, came back in her dressing-gown to help Mrs. Aldwinkle — since it would have been unfair to keep a maid up to such late hours — make ready for the night. Not that little Irene was particularly likely to utter the significant word or think the one apocalyptic thought. Though of course one never knew: out of the mouths of babes and sucklings . . . And in any case, talking with Irene, who was a dear child and so devoted, was better than definitely condemning oneself to bed.

To-night, it was one o'clock before Mrs. Aldwinkle made a move towards the door. Miss Thriplow and Mr. Falx, protesting that they too were sleepy, accompanied her. And like an attendant shadow, Irene silently rose when her aunt rose and silently walked after her. Half-way across the room Mrs. Aldwinkle halted and turned round. Formidable she was, a tragedy queen in coral-red velvet. Her little white muslin mirage halted too. Less patient, Mr. Falx and Miss Thriplow moved on towards the door.

'You must all come to bed soon, you know,' she said, addressing herself to the three men who remained at the further end of the room in a tone at once imperious and cajoling. 'I simply won't allow you, Cardan, to keep those poor young men out of their beds to all hours of the night. Poor Calamy has been travelling all day. And Hovenden needs all the sleep, at his age, that he can get.' Mrs. Aldwinkle took it hardly that any of her guests should be awake and talking while she was lying dead in the tomb of sleep. 'Poor Calamy!' she pathetically exclaimed, as though it were a case of cruelty to animals. She felt herself filled, all at once, with an enormous and maternal solicitude for this young man.

'Yes, poor Calamy!' Mr. Cardan repeated, twinkling. 'Out of pure sympathy I was suggesting that we should drink a pint or two of red wine before going to bed. There's nothing like it for making one sleep.'

Mrs. Aldwinkle turned her bright blue eyes on Calamy, smiled her sweetest and most piercing smile. 'Do come,' she said. 'Do.' She extended her hand in a

clumsy and inexpressive gesture. ‘And you, Hovenden,’ she added, almost despairingly.

Hovenden looked uncomfortably from Mr. Cardan to Calamy, hoping that one or other of them would answer for him.

‘We shan’t be long,’ said Calamy. ‘The time to drink a glass of wine, that’s all. I’m not a bit tired, you know. And Cardan’s suggestion of Chianti is very tempting.’

‘Ah well,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, ‘if you prefer a glass of wine . . .’ She turned away with a sad indignation and rustled off towards the door, sweeping the tiled floor with the train of her velvet dress. Mr. Falx and Miss Thriplow, who had been lingering impatiently near the door, drew back in order that she might make her exit in full majesty. With a face that looked very gravely out of the little window in her bell of copper hair, Irene followed. The door closed behind them.

Calamy turned to Mr. Cardan. ‘If I prefer a glass of wine?’ he repeated on a note of interrogation. ‘But prefer it to what? She made it sound as if I had had to make a momentous and eternal choice between her and a pint of Chianti — and had chosen the Chianti. It passes my understanding.’

‘Ah, but then you don’t know Lilian as well as I do,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘And now, let’s go and hunt out that flask and some glasses in the dining-room.’

Half-way up the stairs — they were a grand and solemn flight loping gradually upwards under a slanting tunnel of barrel vaulting — Mrs. Aldwinkle paused. ‘I always think of them,’ she said ecstatically, ‘going up, coming down. Such a spectacle!’

‘Who?’ asked Mr. Falx.

‘Those grand old people.’

‘Oh, the tyrants.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle smiled pityingly. ‘And the poets, the scholars, the philosophers, the painters, the musicians, the beautiful women. You forget those, Mr. Falx.’ She raised her hand, as though summoning their spirits from the abyss. Psychical eyes might have seen a jewelled prince with a nose like an ant-eater’s slowly descending between obsequious human hedges. Behind him a

company of buffoons and little hunch-backed dwarfs, stepping cautiously, sidelong, from stair to stair. . . .

‘I forget nothing,’ said Mr. Falx. ‘But I think tyrants are too high a price to pay.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle sighed and resumed her climbing. ‘What a queer fellow Calamy is, don’t you think?’ she said, addressing herself to Miss Thriplow. Mrs. Aldwinkle, who liked discussing other people’s characters and who prided herself on her perspicacity and her psychological intuition, found almost everybody ‘queer,’ even, when she thought it worth while discussing her, little Irene. She liked to think that every one she knew was tremendously complicated; had strange and improbable motives for his simplest actions, was moved by huge, dark passions; cultivated secret vices; in a word, was larger than life and a good deal more interesting. ‘What did you think of him, Mary?’

‘Very intelligent,’ thought Miss Thriplow.

‘Oh, of course, of course,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle agreed almost impatiently; that wasn’t anything much to talk about. ‘But one hears odd stories of his amorous tastes, you know.’ The party halted at the door of Mrs. Aldwinkle’s room. ‘Perhaps that was one of the reasons,’ she went on mysteriously, ‘why he went travelling all that time — right away from civilization. . . .’ On such a theme a conversation might surely be almost indefinitely protracted; the moment for uttering the final, fatal good-night had not yet come.

Downstairs in the great saloon the three men were sitting over their red wine. Mr. Cardan had already twice refilled his glass. Calamy was within sight of the bottom of his first tumbler; young Lord Hovenden’s was still more than half full. He was not a very accomplished drinker and was afraid of being sick if he swallowed too much of this young and generous brew.

‘Bored, you’re just bored. That’s all it is,’ Mr. Cardan was saying. He looked at Calamy over the top of his glass and took another sip, as though to his health. ‘You haven’t met any one of late who took your fancy; that’s all. Unless, of course, it’s a case of catarrh in the bile ducts.’

‘It’s neither,’ said Calamy, smiling.

‘Or perhaps it’s the first great climacteric. You don’t happen to be thirty-five, I suppose? Five times seven — a most formidable age. Though not quite so serious as sixty-three. That’s the grand climacteric.’ Mr. Cardan shook his head. ‘Thank the Lord, I got past it without dying, or joining the Church of Rome, or getting married. Thank the Lord; but you?’

‘I’m thirty-three,’ said Calamy.

‘A most harmless time of life. Then it’s just boredom. You’ll meet some little ravishment and all the zest will return.’

Young Lord Hovenden laughed in a very ventriloquial, man-of-the-worldly fashion.

Calamy shook his head. ‘But I don’t really want it to return, he said. ‘I don’t want to succumb to any more little ravishments. It’s too stupid; it’s too childish. I used to think that there was something rather admirable and enviable about being an homme à bonnes fortunes. Don Juan has an honoured place in literature; it’s thought only natural that a Casanova should complacently boast of his successes. I accepted the current view, and when I was lucky in love — and I’ve always been only too deplorably fortunate — I used to think the more highly of myself.’

‘We have all thought the same,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘The weakness is a pardonable one.’

Lord Hovenden nodded and took a sip of wine to show that he entirely agreed with the last speaker.

‘Pardonable, no doubt,’ said Calamy. ‘But when one comes to think it over, not very reasonable. For, after all, there’s nothing really to be very proud of, there’s nothing very much to boast about. Consider first of all the other heroes who have had the same sort of successes — more notable, very probably, and more numerous than one’s own. Consider them. What do you see? Rows of insolent grooms and pugilists; leather-faced ruffians and disgusting old satyrs; louts with curly hair and no brains, and cunning little pimps like weasels; soft-palmed young epicenes and hairy gladiators — a vast army composed of the

most odious specimens of humanity. Is one to be proud of belonging to their numbers?'

'Why not?' asked Mr. Cardan. 'One should always thank God for whatever native talents one possesses. If your talent happens to lie in the direction of higher mathematics, praise God; and if in the direction of seduction, praise God just the same. And thanking God, when one comes to examine the process a little closely, is very much the same as boasting or being proud. I see no harm in boasting a little of one's Casanovesque capacities. You young men are always so damned intolerant. You won't allow any one to go to heaven, or hell, or nowhere, whichever the case may be, by any road except the one you happen to approve of. . . . You should take a leaf out of the Indians' book. The Indians calculate that there are eighty-four thousand different types of human beings, each with its own way of getting through life. They probably underestimate.'

Calamy laughed. 'I only speak for my type,' he said.

'And Hovenden and I for ours,' said Mr. Cardan. 'Don't we, Hovenden?'

'Oh yes. Yes, of course,' Lord Hovenden answered; and for some reason he blushed.

'Proceed,' said Mr. Cardan, refilling his glass.

'Well then,' Calamy went on, 'belonging to the species I do belong to, I can't take much satisfaction in these successes. The more so when I consider their nature. For either you're in love with the woman or you aren't; either you're carried away by your inflamed imagination (for, after all, the person you're really violently in love with is always your own invention and the wildest of fancies) or by your senses and your intellectual curiosity. If you aren't in love, it's a mere experiment in applied physiology, with a few psychological investigations thrown in to make it a little more interesting. But if you are, it means that you become enslaved, involved, dependent on another human being in a way that's positively disgraceful, and the more disgraceful the more there is in you to be enslaved and involved.'

'It wasn't Browning's opinion,' said Mr. Cardan.

'The woman yonder, there's no use in life

But just to obtain her.'

'Browning was a fool,' said Calamy.

But Lord Hovenden was silently of opinion that Browning was quite right. He thought of Irene's face, looking out of the little window in the copper bell.

'Browning belonged to another species,' Mr. Cardan corrected.

'A foolish species, I insist,' said Calamy.

'Well, to tell the truth,' Mr. Cardan admitted, closing his winking eye a little further, 'I secretly agree with you about that. I'm not really as entirely tolerant as I should like to be.'

Calamy was frowning pensively over his own affairs, and without discussing the greater or less degree of Mr. Cardan's tolerance he went on. 'The question is, at the end of it all: what's the way out? what's to be done about it? For it's obvious, as you say, that the little ravishments will turn up again. And appetite grows with fasting. And philosophy, which knows very well how to deal with past and future temptations, always seems to break down before the present, the immediate ones.'

'Happily,' said Mr. Cardan. 'For, when all is said, is there a better indoor sport? Be frank with me; is there?'

'Possibly not,' said Calamy, while young Lord Hovenden smiled at Mr. Cardan's last remark, but unenthusiastically, in a rather painful indecision between amusement and horror. 'But the point is, aren't there better occupations for a man of sense than indoor sports, even the best of indoor sports?'

'No,' said Mr. Cardan, with decision.

'For you, perhaps, there mayn't be. But it seems to me,' Calamy went on, 'that I'm beginning to have had enough of sports, whether indoor or out-of-door. I'd like to find some more serious occupation.'

'But that's easier said than done.' Mr. Cardan shook his head. 'For members of our species it's precious hard to find any occupation that seems entirely serious. Eh?'

Calamy laughed, rather mournfully. 'That's true,' he said. 'But at the same time the sports begin to seem rather an outrage on one's human dignity. Rather

immoral, I would say, if the word weren't so absurd.'

'Not at all absurd, I assure you, when used as you use it.' Mr. Cardan twinkled more and more genially over the top of his glass. 'As long as you don't talk about moral laws and all that sort of thing there's no absurdity. For, it's obvious, there are no moral laws. There are social customs on the one hand, and there are individuals with their individual feelings and moral reactions on the other. What's immoral in one man may not matter in another. Almost nothing, for example, is immoral for me. Positively, you know, I can do anything and yet remain respectable in my own eyes, and in the eyes of others not merely wonderfully decent, but even noble.

Ah, what avail the loaded dice?

Ah, what the tubs of wine?

What every weakness, every vice?

Tom Cardan, all were thine.

I won't bore you with the rest of this epitaph which I composed for myself some little time ago. Suffice to say that I point out in the two subsequent stanzas that these things availed absolutely nothing and that, malgré tout, I remained the honest, sober, pure and high-minded man that every one always instinctively recognizes me to be.' Mr. Cardan emptied his glass and reached out once more for the fiasco.

'You're fortunate,' said Calamy. 'It's not all of us whose personalities have such a natural odour of sanctity that they can disinfect our septic actions and render them morally harmless. When I do something stupid or dirty I can't help feeling that it is stupid or dirty. My soul lacks virtues to make it wise or clean. And I can't dissociate myself from what I do. I wish I could. One does such a devilish number of stupid things. Things one doesn't want to do. If only one could be a hedonist and only do what was pleasant! But to be a hedonist one must be wholly rational; there's no such thing as a genuine hedonist, there never has been. Instead of doing what one wants to do or what would give one pleasure, one drifts through existence doing exactly the opposite, most of the time — doing what one has no desire to do, following insane promptings that

lead one, fully conscious, into every sort of discomfort, misery, boredom and remorse. Sometimes,' Calamy went on, sighing, 'I positively regret the time I spent in the army during the war. Then, at any rate, there was no question of doing what one liked; there was no liberty, no choice. One did what one was told and that was all. Now I'm free; I have every opportunity for doing exactly what I like — and I consistently do what I don't like.'

'But do you know exactly what you do like?' asked Mr. Cardan.

Calamy shrugged his shoulders. 'Not exactly,' he said. 'I suppose I should say reading, and satisfying my curiosity about things, and thinking. But about what, I don't feel perfectly certain. I don't like running after women, I don't like wasting my time in futile social intercourse, or in the pursuit of what is technically known as pleasure. And yet for some reason and quite against my will I find myself passing the greater part of my time immersed in precisely these occupations. It's an obscure kind of insanity.'

Young Lord Hovenden, who knew that he liked dancing and desired Irene Aldwinkle more than anything in the world, found all this a little incomprehensible. 'I can't see what vere is to prevent a man from doing what he wants to do. Except,' he qualified, remembering the teaching of Mr. Falx, 'economic necessity.'

'And himself,' added Mr. Cardan.

'And what's the most depressing of all,' Calamy went on, without paying attention to the interruption, 'is the feeling that one will go on like this for ever, in the teeth of every effort to stop. I sometimes wish I weren't externally free. For then at any rate I should have something to curse at, for getting in my way, other than my own self. Yes, positively, I sometimes wish I were a navvy.'

'You wouldn't if you had ever been one,' said Lord Hovenden, gravely and with a knowing air of speaking from personal experience.

Calamy laughed. 'You're perfectly right,' he said, and drained his glass. 'Shouldn't we think of going to bed?'

CHAPTER VIII

TO IRENE FELL the privilege every evening of brushing her aunt's hair. For her these midnight moments were the most precious in the day. True, it was sometimes an agony for her to keep awake and the suppression of yawns was always painful; three years of incessant practice had not yet accustomed her to her Aunt Lilian's late hours. Aunt Lilian used to twit her sometimes on her childish longing for sleep; at other times she used to insist, very solicitously, that Irene should rest after lunch and go to bed at ten. The teasing made Irene feel ashamed of her babyishness; the solicitude made her protest that she wasn't a baby, that she was never tired and could easily do with five or six hours' sleep a night. The important thing, she had found, was not to be seen yawning by Aunt Lilian and always to look fresh and lively. If Aunt Lilian noticed nothing there was neither teasing nor solicitude.

But in any case, every inconvenience was paid for a thousand times by the delights of these confidential conversations in front of the dressing-table mirror. While the young girl brushed and brushed away at the long tresses of pale golden-brown hair, Mrs. Aldwinkle, her eyes shut, and with an expression of beatitude on her face — for she took a cat's pleasure in the brushing — would talk, spasmodically, in broken sentences, of the events of the day, of her guests, of the people they had met; or of her own past, of plans for the future — hers or Irene's — of love. On all these subjects Mrs. Aldwinkle spoke intimately, confidentially, without reserve. Feeling that she was being treated by her Aunt Lilian as entirely grown-up and almost as an equal, Irene was proud and grateful. Without deliberately setting out to complete the subjugation of her niece, Mrs. Aldwinkle had discovered, in those midnight conversations, the most perfect means for achieving this end. If she talked like this to Irene, it was merely because she felt the need of talking intimately to some one, and because there

was nobody else to talk to. Incidentally, however, she had contrived in the process to make the girl her slave. Made her Aunt Lilian's confidante, invested, so to speak, with a title of honour, Irene felt a gratitude which strengthened her original childish attachment to her aunt.

Meanwhile, she had learned to talk with an airy familiarity of many things concerning which young girls are supposed to be ignorant, and of which, indeed, she herself knew, except intellectually and at second hand, nothing. She had learned to be knowing and worldly wise, in the void, so to speak, and with no personal knowledge of the world. Gravely, ingenuously, she would say things that could only be uttered out of the depths of the profoundest innocence, amplifying and making embarrassingly explicit in public things that Mrs. Aldwinkle had only fragmentarily hinted at in the confidential small hours. She regarded herself as immensely mature.

To-night Mrs. Aldwinkle was in a rather gloomy, complaining mood.

'I'm getting old,' she said, sighing, and opening her eyes for a moment to look at her image in the glass that confronted her. The image did not deny the statement. 'And yet I always feel so young.'

'That's what really matters,' Irene declared. 'And besides, it's nonsense; you're not old; you don't look old.' In Irene's eyes, moreover, she really didn't look old.

'People don't like one any more when one gets old,' Mrs. Aldwinkle continued. 'Friends are terribly faithless. They fall away.' She sighed. 'When I think of all the friends . . .' She left the sentence unfinished.

All her life long Mrs. Aldwinkle had had a peculiar genius for breaking with her friends and lovers. Mr. Cardan was almost the sole survivor from an earlier generation of friends. From all the rest she had parted, and she had parted with a light heart. It had seemed easy to her, when she was younger, to make new friends in place of the old. Potential friends, she thought, were to be found everywhere, every day. But now she was beginning to doubt whether the supply was, after all, so inexhaustible as she had once supposed. People of her own age, she found, were already set fast in the little social worlds they had made for

themselves. And people of the younger generation seemed to find it hard to believe that she felt, in her heart, just as young as they did. They mostly treated her with the rather distant politeness which one accords to a stranger and an elder person.

‘I think people are horrid,’ said Irene, giving a particularly violent sweep with the hair-brush to emphasize her indignation.

‘You won’t be faithless?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle.

Irene bent over and, for all answer, kissed her on the forehead. Mrs. Aldwinkle opened her glittering blue eyes and looked up at her, smiling, as she did so, that siren smile that, for Irene, was still as fascinating as it had ever been.

‘If only everybody were like my little Irene!’ Mrs. Aldwinkle let her head fall forward and once more closed her eyes. There was a silence. ‘What are you sighing about in that heart-breaking way?’ she suddenly asked.

Irene’s blush ran tingling up into her temples and disappeared under the copper-coloured fringe. ‘Oh, nothing,’ she said, with an off-handedness that expressed the depth of her guilty embarrassment. That deep intake of breath, that brief and passionate expiry were not the components of a sigh. She had been yawning with her mouth shut.

But Mrs. Aldwinkle, with her bias towards the romantic, did not suspect the truth. ‘Nothing, indeed!’ she echoed incredulously. ‘Why, it was the noise of the wind blowing through the cracks of a broken heart. I never heard such a sigh.’ She looked at the reflection of Irene’s face in the mirror. ‘And you’re blushing like a peony. What is it?’

‘But it’s nothing, I tell you,’ Irene declared, speaking almost in a tone of irritation. She was annoyed with herself for having yawned so ineptly and blushed so pointlessly, rather than with her aunt. She immersed herself more than ever deeply in her brushing, hoping and praying that Mrs. Aldwinkle would drop the subject.

But Mrs. Aldwinkle was implacable in her tactlessness. ‘I never heard anything that sounded so love-sick,’ she said, smiling archly into the looking-glass. Mrs. Aldwinkle’s humorous sallies had a way of falling ponderously, like

bludgeon strokes, on the objects of her raillery. One never knew, when she was being sprightly, whether to feel sorrier for the victim or for Mrs. Aldwinkle herself. For though the victim might get hard knocks, the spectacle of Mrs. Aldwinkle laboriously exerting herself to deliver them was sadly ludicrous; one wished, for her sake, for the sake of the whole human race, that she would desist. But she never did. Mrs. Aldwinkle always carried all her jokes to the foreseen end, and generally far further than was foreseeable by any one less ponderously minded than herself. ‘It was like a whale sighing!’ she went on with a frightful playfulness. ‘It must be a grand passion of the largest size. Who is it? Who is it?’ She raised her eyebrows, she smiled with what seemed to her, as she studied it in the glass, a most wickedly sly but charming smile — like a smile in a comedy by Congreve, it occurred to her.

‘But, Aunt Lilian,’ protested Irene, almost in despair, almost in tears, ‘it was nothing, I tell you.’ At moments like this she could almost find it in her to hate Aunt Lilian. ‘As a matter of fact, I was only . . .’ She was going to blurt it out courageously; she was just going to tell Aunt Lilian — at the risk of a teasing or an almost equally unwelcome solicitude: either were better than this — that she had been merely yawning. But Mrs. Aldwinkle, still relentlessly pursuing her fun, interrupted her.

‘But I guess who it is,’ she said, wagging a forefinger at the glass. ‘I guess. I’m not such a blind stupid old auntie as you think. You imagine I haven’t noticed. Silly child! Did she think I didn’t see that he was very assiduous and that she rather liked it? Did she think her stupid old auntie was blind?’

Irene blushed again; the tears came into her eyes. ‘But who are you talking about?’ she said in a voice that she had to make a great effort to keep from breaking and trembling out of control.

‘What an innocent!’ mocked Mrs. Aldwinkle, still very Congreve. And at this point — earlier than was usual with her on these occasions — she had mercy and consented to put poor Irene out of her agony. ‘Why, Hovenden,’ she said. ‘Who else should it be?’

‘Hovenden?’ Irene repeated with genuine surprise.

‘Injured innocence!’ Mrs. Aldwinkle momentarily renewed her trampling fun. ‘But it’s sufficiently obvious,’ she went on in a more natural voice. ‘The poor boy follows you like a dog.’

‘Me?’ Irene had been too much preoccupied in following her Aunt Lilian to notice that she in her turn was being followed.

‘Now don’t pretend,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘It’s so stupid pretending. Much better to be frank and straightforward. Admit, now, that you like him.’

Irene admitted. ‘Yes, of course I like him. But not . . . not in any special way. I’d really not thought of him like that.’

A shade contemptuously, benevolently amused, Mrs. Aldwinkle smiled. She forgot her depression, forgot her causes of personal complaint against the universal order of things. Absorbed in the uniquely interesting subject, in the sole and proper study of mankind, she was once more happy. Love — it was the only thing. Even Art, compared with it, hardly existed. Mrs. Aldwinkle was almost as much interested in other people’s love as in her own. She wanted every one to love, constantly and complicatedly. She liked to bring people together, to foster tender feelings, to watch the development of passion, to assist — when it happened; and Mrs. Aldwinkle was always rather disappointed when it did not — at the tragic catastrophe. And then, when the first love, growing old, had lingeringly or violently died, there was the new love to think of, to arrange, to foster, to watch; and then the third, the fourth. . . . One must always follow the spontaneous motions of the heart; it is the divine within us that stirs in the heart. And one must worship Eros so reverently that one can never be content with anything but the most poignant, most passionate manifestations of his power. To be content with a love that has turned in the course of time to mere affection, kindliness and quiet comprehension is almost to blaspheme against the name of Eros. Your true lover, thought Mrs. Aldwinkle, leaves the old, paralytic love and turns whole-heartedly to the young passion.

‘What a goose you are!’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘I sometimes wonder,’ she went on, ‘whether you’re capable of being in love at all, you’re so uncomprehending, so cold.’

Irene protested with all the energy of which she was capable. One could not have lived as long as she had in Mrs. Aldwinkle's company without regarding the imputation of coldness, of insensitiveness to passion, as the most damning of all possible impeachments. It was better to be accused of being a murderess — particularly if it were a case of crime passionnel. 'I don't know how you say that,' she said indignantly. 'I'm always in love.' Had there not been Peter, and Jacques, and Mario?

'You may think you have,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle contemptuously, forgetting that it was she herself who had persuaded Irene that she was in love. 'But it was more imagination than the real thing. Some women are born like that.' She shook her head. 'And they die like that.' One might have inferred from Mrs. Aldwinkle's words and the tone of her voice that Irene was a superannuated spinster of forty, proved conclusively, after twenty years of accumulated evidence, to be incapable of anything remotely resembling an amorous passion.

Irene made no answer, but went on brushing her aunt's hair. Mrs. Aldwinkle's aspersions were particularly wounding to her. She wished that she could do something startling to prove their baselessness. Something spectacular.

'And I've always thought Hovenden an extremely nice boy,' Mrs. Aldwinkle continued, with the air of pursuing an argument. She talked on. Irene listened and went on brushing.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE SILENCE and solitude of her room, Miss Thriplow sat up for a long time, pen in hand, in front of an open note-book. ‘Darling Jim,’ she wrote, ‘darling Jim. To-day you came back to me so suddenly and unexpectedly that I could almost have cried aloud in front of all those people. Was it an accident that I picked that stiff leaf from Apollo’s tree and crushed it to fragrance between my fingers? Or were you there? was it you who secretly whispered to the unconscious part of me, telling me to pick that leaf? I wonder; oh, I wonder and wonder. Sometimes I believe that there are no accidents, that we do nothing by chance. To-night I felt sure of it.

‘But I wonder what made you want to remind me of Mr. Chigwell’s little shop at Weltringham. Why did you want to make me see you sitting in the barber’s chair, so stiff and grown-up, with the wheel of the mechanical brush still turning overhead and Mr. Chigwell saying, “Hair’s very dry, Mr. Thriplow”? And the rubber driving band used always to remind me . . .’ Miss Thriplow recorded the simile of the wounded snake which had first occurred to her this evening. There was no particular reason why she should have antedated the conceit and attributed its invention to her childhood. It was just a question of literary tact; it seemed more interesting if one said that it had been made up when one was a child; that was all. ‘I ask myself whether there is any particular significance in this reminder. Or perhaps it’s just that you find me neglectful and unremembering — poor darling, darling Jim — and take whatever opportunity offers of reminding me that you existed, that you still exist. Forgive me, Jim. Everybody forgets. We should all be kind and good and unselfish if we always remembered — remembered that other people are just as much alive and individual and complicated as we are, remembered that everybody can be just as easily hurt, that everybody needs love just as much, that the only visible reason

why we exist in the world is to love and be loved. But that's no excuse for me. It's no excuse for any one to say that other people are just as bad. I ought to remember more. I oughtn't to let my mind be choked with weeds. It's not only the memory of you that the weeds choke; it's everything that's best and most delicate and finest. Perhaps you reminded me of Mr. Chigwell and the bay rum in order to remind me at the same time to love more, and admire more, and sympathize more, and be more aware. Darling Jim.'

She put down her pen, and looking out through the open window at the starry sky she tried to think of him, tried to think of death. But it was difficult to think of death. It was difficult, she found, to keep the mind uninterruptedly on the idea of extinction, of non-life instead of life, of nothingness. In books one reads about sages meditating. She herself had often tried to meditate. But somehow it never seemed to come to much. All sorts of little irrelevant thoughts kept coming into her head. There was no focussing death, no keeping it steadily under the mind's eye. In the end she found herself reading through what she had written putting in a stop here and there, correcting slips in the style, where it seemed to be too formal, too made-up, insufficiently spontaneous and unsuitable to the secret diary.

At the end of the last paragraph she added another 'darling Jim,' and she repeated the words to herself, aloud, again and again. The exercise produced its usual effect; she felt the tears coming into her eyes.

The Quakers pray as the spirit moves them; but to let oneself be moved by the spirit is an arduous business. Kindlier and more worldly churches, with a feeling for human weakness, provide their worshippers with rituals, litanies, beads and prayer wheels.

'Darling Jim, darling Jim.' Miss Thriplow had found the form of words for her worship. 'Darling Jim.' The tears did her good; she felt better, kinder, softer. And then, suddenly, she seemed to be listening to herself from outside. 'Darling Jim.' But did she really care at all? Wasn't it all a comedy, all a pretence? He had died so long ago; he had nothing to do with her now. Why should she care or remember? And all this systematic thinking about him, this writing of things in a

secret diary devoted to his memory — wasn't all that merely for the sake of keeping her emotions in training? Wasn't she deliberately scratching her heart to make it bleed, and then writing stories with the red fluid?

Miss Thriplow put away the thoughts as soon as they occurred to her: put them aside indignantly. They were monstrous thoughts, lying thoughts.

She picked up her pen again and wrote, very quickly, as though she were writing an exorcizing spell and the sooner it had been put on paper the sooner the evil thoughts would vanish.

'Do you remember, Jim, that time we went out in the canoe together and nearly got drowned? . . .'

PART II. FRAGMENTS from the AUTOBIOGRAPHY of FRANCIS CHELIFER

CHAPTER I

OLD GENTLEMEN IN clubs were not more luxuriously cradled than I along the warm Tyrrhenian. Arms outstretched, like a live cross, I floated face upwards on that blue and tepid sea. The sun beat down on me, turning the drops on my face and chest to salt. My head was pillowed in the unruffled water; my limbs and body dimpled the surface of a pellucid mattress thirty feet thick and cherishingly resilient through all its thickness, down to the sandy bed on which it was spread. One might lie paralysed here for a life-time and never get a bedsore.

The sky above me was filmy with the noonday heat. The mountains, when I turned towards the land to look for them, had almost vanished behind a veil of gauze. But the Grand Hotel, on the other hand, though not perhaps quite so grand as it appeared in its illustrated prospectus — for there the front door was forty feet high and four tall acrobats standing on one another's shoulders could not have reached to the sills of the ground-floor windows — the Grand Hotel made no attempt to conceal itself; the white villas glared out unashamedly from their groves of pines; and in front of them, along the tawny beach, I could see the bathing huts, the striped umbrellas, the digging children, the bathers splashing and wallowing in the hot shallows — half-naked men like statues of copper, girls in bright tunics, little boiled shrimps instead of little boys, and sleek ponderous walruses with red heads, who were the matrons in their rubber caps and their wet black bathing garments. Here and there over the surface of the sea moved what the natives called patini — catamarans made of a pair of boxed-in pontoons joined together near the ends and with a high seat for the rower in the middle. Slowly, trailing behind them as they went loud wafts of Italian gallantry, giggles and song, they crawled across the flat blueness. Sometimes, at the head of its white wake, its noise and its stink, a motor boat would pass, and suddenly my transparent mattress would rock beneath me, as the waves of its passage lifted

me and let me drop and lifted me up again, more and ever more languidly, till all was once more smooth.

So much for that. The description, as I see now that I come to re-read it, is not inelegant. For though I may not have played a hand of Bridge since I was eight and have never learned Mah Jong, I can claim at least to have studied the rules of style. I have learned the art of writing well, which is the art of saying nothing elaborately. I have acquired all the literary accomplishments. But then, if I may say so without fatuity, I also have a talent. 'Nothing profits more than self-esteem founded on just and right.' I have Milton on my side to justify me in my assertion. When I write well, it is not merely another way of writing badly about nothing. In this respect my effusions differ a little from those of my cultured colleagues. I occasionally have something to say, and I find that the elegant but florid saying of it is as easy to me as walking. Not, of course, that I attach the slightest importance to that. I might have as much to say as La Rochefoucauld and as much facility for saying it as Shelley. But what of that? It would be great art, you say. No doubt; but what of that? It's a queer prejudice, this one of ours in favour of art. Religion, patriotism, the moral order, humanitarianism, social reform — we have all of us, I imagine, dropped all those overboard long ago. But we still cling pathetically to art. Quite unreasonably; for the thing has far less reason for existence than most of the objects of worship we have got rid of, is utterly senseless, indeed, without their support and justification. Art for art's sake — halma for halma's sake. It is time to smash the last and silliest of the idols. My friends, I adjure you, put away the ultimate and sweetest of the inebriants and wake up at last completely sober — among the dustbins at the bottom of the area steps.

This little digression will suffice, I hope, to show that I labour, while writing, under no illusions. I do not suppose that anything I do has the slightest importance, and if I take so much pains in imparting beauty and elegance to these autobiographical fragments, it is chiefly from force of habit. I have practised the art of literature so long that it comes natural to me to take the pains I have always taken. You may ask why I write at all, if I regard the process as

being without importance? It is a pertinent question. Why do you do this inconsistent thing? I can only plead weakness in justification. On principle I disapprove of writing; on principle I desire to live brutishly like any other ordinary human being. The flesh is willing, but the spirit is weak. I confess I grow bored. I pine for amusements other than those legitimate distractions offered by the cinema and the Palais de Danse. I struggle, I try to resist the temptation; but in the end I succumb. I read a page of Wittgenstein, I play a little Bach; I write a poem, a few aphorisms, a fable, a fragment of autobiography. I write with care, earnestly, with passion even, just as if there were some point in what I were doing, just as if it were important for the world to know my thoughts, just as if I had a soul to save by giving expression to them. But I am well aware, of course, that all these delightful hypotheses are inadmissible. In reality I write as I do merely to kill time and amuse a mind that is still, in spite of all my efforts, a prey to intellectual self-indulgence. I look forward to a placid middle age when, having finally overcome the old Adam in me, finally quenched all the extravagant spiritual cravings, I shall be able to settle down in tranquillity to that life of the flesh, that natural human existence which still, I fear, seems to me so forbidding, so austerely monotonous, so tedious. I have not yet attained to that blessed state. Hence these divagations into art; let me beg forgiveness for them. And above all, let me implore you once more not to imagine that I attach the slightest importance to them. My vanity would be hurt if I thought you did.

Poor Mrs. Aldwinkle, for example — there was some one who could never believe that I was not an art-for-arter. ‘But Chelifer,’ she used to say to me in her aimed, intent, breathless way, ‘how can you blaspheme like that against your own talent?’ And I would put on my most Egyptian air — I have always been accused of looking like an Egyptian sculpture — my most Sphingine smile, and say: ‘But I am a democrat; how can I allow my talent to blaspheme against my humanity?’ — or something enigmatic of that kind. Poor Mrs. Aldwinkle! But I run on too fast. I have begun to talk of Mrs. Aldwinkle and you do not know who Mrs. Aldwinkle is. Nor did I, for that matter, as I reclined that morning along the soft resilient water — I knew no more, then, than her name; who does

not? Mrs. Aldwinkle the salonnière, the hostess, the giver of literary parties and agapes of lions — is she not classical? a household word? a familiar quotation? Of course. But in the flesh, till that moment, I had never seen her. Not through any lack of exertions on her part. For only a few months before, a telegram had arrived for me at my publisher's: 'PRINCE PAPADIAMANTOPOULOS JUST ARRIVED MOST ANXIOUS TO KNOW BEST LITERARY ARTISTIC INTELLECTUAL SOCIETY IN LONDON COULD YOU DINE MEET HIM THURSDAY EIGHT FIFTEEN 112 BERKELEY SQUARE LILIAN ALDWINKLE.' In this telegraphic form, and couched in those terms, the invitation had certainly seemed alluring. But a little judicious inquiry showed me that the prospect was not really quite so attractive as it appeared. For Prince Papadiamantopoulos turned out, in spite of his wonderfully promising title and name, to be a perfectly serious intellectual like the rest of us. More serious indeed; for I discovered, to my horror, that he was a first-class geologist and could understand the differential calculus. Among the other guests were to be at least three decent writers and one painter. And Mrs. Aldwinkle herself was rumoured to be quite well educated and not entirely a fool. I filled up the reply-paid form and took it to the nearest post office. 'MUCH REGRET NEVER DINE OUT EXCEPT IN LENT FRANCIS CHELIFER.' During Lent I confidently expected to receive another invitation. I was relieved, however, and a little disappointed, to hear no more from Mrs. Aldwinkle. I should have liked her to make, in vain, a further effort to lure me from my allegiance to Lady Giblet.

Ah, those evenings at Lady Giblet's — I never miss a single one if I can help it. The vulgarity, ignorance and stupidity of the hostess, the incredible second-rateness of her mangy lions — these are surely unique. And then those camp-followers of the arts, those delicious Bohemians who regard their ability to appreciate the paintings of the cubists and the music of Stravinsky as a sufficient justification for helping themselves freely to one another's wives — nowhere can you see such brilliant specimens of the type as at Lady Giblet's. And the conversations one hears within those marble halls — nowhere, surely, are

pretensions separated from justifying facts by a vaster gulf. Nowhere can you hear the ignorant, the illogical, the incapable of thought talking so glibly about things of which they have not the slightest understanding. And then you should hear them boasting parenthetically, as they express an imbecile's incoherent opinion, of their own clear-headedness, their modern outlook, their ruthless scientific intelligence. Surely you can find nothing so perfect in its kind as at Lady Giblet's — I at least know of nothing more complete. At Mrs. Aldwinkle's one might very likely hear a serious conversation; never by any chance in the salon of my choice.

But that morning in the blue Tyrrhenian was the last of my life to be passed beyond the pale of Mrs. Aldwinkle's acquaintanceship; it was also as nearly as possible the first of my future life. Fate seemed that morning to be in doubt whether to extinguish me completely or merely to make me acquainted with Mrs. Aldwinkle. Fortunately, as I like to think, it chose the latter alternative. But I anticipate.

I first saw Mrs. Aldwinkle on this particular morning without knowing who she was. From where I was lying on my mattress of blue brine I noticed a heavily laden patino bearing slowly down upon me from the shore. Perched high on the rower's bench a tall young man was toiling languidly at the oars. His back against the bench, his hairy legs stretched out along the prow of one of the pontoons, sat a thick-set oldish man with a red face and short white hair. The bow of the other pontoon accommodated two women. The elder and larger of them sat in front, trailing her legs in the water; she was dressed in a kilted bathing costume of flame-coloured silk and her hair was tied up in a pink bandana handkerchief. Immediately behind her there squatted, her knees drawn up to her chin, a very youthful slender little creature in a black maillot. In one of her hands she held a green parasol with which she kept off the sunlight from her elder companion. Within the cylinder of greenish shadow the pink and flame-coloured lady, whom I afterwards learnt to be Mrs. Aldwinkle herself, looked like a Chinese lantern lighted in a conservatory; and when an accidental movement of the young girl's umbrella allowed the sunlight for a moment to

touch her face, one could imagine that the miracle of the raising of Lazarus was being performed before one's eyes — for the green and corpse-like hue suddenly left the features, the colours of health, a little inflamed by the reflections from the bathing dress, seemed to rush back. The dead lived. But only for an instant; for the solicitous care of the young girl soon reversed the miracle. The sunshade swung back into position, the penumbra of the greenhouse enveloped the glowing lamp and the living face once more became ghastly, as though it belonged to some one who had lain for three days in the tomb.

At the stern, seen clearly only when the ponderous boat was already beginning to pass me, sat another young woman with a pale face and large dark eyes. A tendril of almost black hair escaped from under her bathing cap and fell, like a curling whisker, down her cheek. A handsome young man with a brown face and brown muscular arms and legs sprawled along the stern of the other pontoon, smoking a cigarette.

The voices that faintly came to me from the approaching boat sounded, somehow, more familiar than those I had heard from other patini. I became aware, all at once, that they were speaking English.

'The clouds,' I heard the old red-faced gentleman saying (he had just turned round, in obedience to a gesture from the Chinese lantern in the conservatory, to look at the piled-up masses of vapour that hung like another fantastic range above the real mountains), 'the clouds you so much admire are only made possible by the earth's excrementitious dust hanging in the air. There are thousands of particles to every cubic centimetre. The water vapour condenses round them in droplets sufficiently large to be visible. Hence the clouds — marvellous and celestial shapes, but with a core of dust. What a symbol of human idealism!' The melodious voice grew louder and louder as the young man dipped and dipped his oars. 'Earthy particles transfigured into heavenly forms. The heavenly forms are not self-existent, not absolute. Dust writes these vast characters across the sky.'

Preserve me, I thought. Did I come to Marina di Vezza to listen to this sort of thing?

In a voice loud but indistinct, and strangely unmusical, the Chinese lantern lady began to quote Shelley, incorrectly. ‘ ”From peak to peak in a bridge-like . . .” ’ she began, and relapsed into silence, clawing the air in search of the synonym for shape which ought to rhyme with peak. ‘ ”Over a something sea.” I think The Cloud is almost the loveliest of all. It’s wonderful to think that Shelley sailed in this sea. And that he was burnt only a little way off, down there.’ She pointed down the coast to where, behind the haze, the interminable sea-front of Viareggio stretched away mile after mile. Faintly now one might discern the ghost of its nearest outskirts. But at evening it would emerge; clear and sharp in the sloping light, as though they had been cut from gems, Palace and Grande Bretagne, Europe (già Aquila Nera) and Savoia would twinkle there, majestic toys, among the innumerable lesser inns and boarding-houses, reduced at this distance to an exquisite loveliness and so pathetically small and delicate that one could almost have wept over them. At this very moment, on the other side of the curtain of haze, a hundred thousand bathers were thronging the empty beaches where Shelley’s body had been committed to the fire. The pinewoods in which, riding out from Pisa, he hunted lovely thoughts through the silence and the fragrant shadows teemed now with life. Unnumbered country copulatives roamed at this moment through those glades. . . . And so forth. Style pours out of my fountain pen. In every drachm of blue-black ink a thousand mots justes are implicit, like the future characteristics of a man in a piece of chromosome. I apologize.

Youth, then, at the prow and pleasure at the helm — and the flesh was so glossy under the noonday sun, the colours so blazingly bright, that I was really reminded of Etty’s little ravishment — the laden boat passed slowly within a few yards of me. Stretched like a live cross on my mattress of brine I looked at them languidly through half-closed eyes. They looked at me; a blank incuriosity was on their faces — for a glimpse only, then they averted their eyes as though I had been one of those exhausted frogs one sees, after the breeding season, floating belly upwards on the surface of a pond. And yet I was what is technically known as an immortal soul. It struck me that it would have been more reasonable if they

had stopped their boat and hailed me across the water. ‘Good morning, stranger. How goes your soul? And what shall we do to be saved?’ But on the other hand, our habit of regarding strangers as being nothing more to us than exhausted frogs probably saves a good deal of trouble.

‘From cape to cape,’ emended the red-faced gentleman, as they receded from me.

And very diffidently, in a soft shy voice, the solicitous young creature suggested that the something sea was a torrent sea.

‘Whatever vat may be,’ said the young rower, whose exertions under the broiling sun entitled him to take the professionally nautical, commonsense view about the matter.

‘But it’s obvious what it is,’ said the Chinese lantern lady, rather contemptuously. The young man at the stern threw away his cigarette and started meditatively whistling the tune of ‘Deh, vieni alla finestra’ from Don Giovanni.

There was a silence; the boat receded, stroke after stroke. The last words I heard were uttered, drawlingly and in a rather childish voice, by the young woman in the stern. ‘I wish I could get brown more quickly,’ she said, lifting one foot out of the water and looking at the white bare leg. ‘One might have been living in a cellar. Such a dreadfully unwholesome look of blanched asparagus. Or even mushrooms,’ she added pensively.

The Chinese lantern lady said something, then the red-faced man. But the conversation had ceased to be articulately audible. Soon I could hear no more; they had gone, leaving behind them, however, the name of Shelley. It was here, along these waters, that he had sailed his flimsy boat. In one hand he held his Sophocles, with the other the tiller. His eyes looked now at the small Greek letters, now to the horizon, or landwards towards the mountains and clouds. ‘Port your helm, Shelley,’ Captain Williams would shout. And the helm went hard over to starboard; the ship staggered, almost capsized. Then, one day, flash! the black opaque sky split right across; crash and rumble! the thunder exploded overhead and with the noise of boulders being trundled over the surface of the metal clouds, the echoes rolled about the heavens and among the mountains—

‘from peak to peak,’ it occurred to me, adopting the Chinese lantern lady’s emendation, ‘from peak to peak with a gong-like squeak.’ (What an infamy!) And then, with a hiss and a roar, the whirl-blast was upon them. It was all over.

Even without the Chinese lantern lady’s hint I should probably have started thinking of Shelley. For to live on this coast, between the sea and the mountains, among alternate flawless calms and shattering sudden storms, is like living inside one of Shelley’s poems. One walks through a transparent and phantasmagorical beauty. But for the hundred thousand bathers, the jazz band in the Grand Hotel, the unbroken front which civilization, in the form of boarding-houses, presents for miles at a time to the alien and empty sea, but for all these, one might seriously lose one’s sense of reality and imagine that fancy had managed to transform itself into fact. In Shelley’s days, when the coast was all but uninhabited, a man might have had some excuse for forgetting the real nature of things. Living here in an actual world practically indistinguishable from one of imagination, a man might almost be justified for indulging his fancy to the extravagant lengths to which Shelley permitted his to go.

But a man of the present generation, brought up in typical contemporary surroundings, has no justifications of this sort. A modern poet cannot permit himself the mental luxuries in which his predecessors so freely wallowed. Lying there on the water, I repeated to myself some verses, inspired by reflections like these, which I had written some few months before.

The Holy Ghost comes sliding down
On Ilford, Golders Green and Penge.
His hosts infect him as they rot;
The victims take their just revenge.

For if of old the sons of squires
And livery stable keepers turned
To flowers and hope, to Greece and God,
We in our later age have learned

That we are native where we walk
Through the dim streets of Camden Town.
But hopeful still through twice-breathed air
The Holy Ghost comes shining down.

I wrote these lines, I remember, one dark afternoon in my office in Gog's Court, Fetter Lane. It is in the same office, on an almost perfectly similar afternoon, that I am writing now. The reflector outside my window reflects a faint and muddy light that has to be supplemented by electricity from within. An inveterate smell of printer's ink haunts the air. From the basement comes up the thudding and clanking of presses; they are turning out the weekly two hundred thousand copies of the 'Woman's Fiction Budget.' We are at the heart, here, of our human universe. Come, then, let us frankly admit that we are citizens of this mean city, make the worst of it resolutely and not try to escape.

To escape, whether in space or in time, you must run a great deal further now than there was any need to do a hundred years ago when Shelley boated on the Tyrrhenian and conjured up millennial visions. You must go further in space, because there are more people, more and faster vehicles. The Grand Hotel, the hundred thousand bathers, the jazz bands have introduced themselves into that Shelleian poem which is the landscape of Versilia. And the millennium which seemed in the days of Godwin not so very remote has receded further and further from us, as each Reform Bill, each victory over entrenched capitalism dashed yet another illusion to the ground. To escape, in 1924, one must go to Tibet, one must look forward to at least the year 3000; and who knows? they are probably listening-in in the Dalai Lama's palace; and it is probable that the millennial state of a thousand years hence will be millennial only because it has contrived to make slavery, for the first time, really scientific and efficient.

An escape in space, even if one contrives successfully to make one, is no real escape at all. A man may live in Tibet or among the Andes; but he cannot therefore deny that London and Paris actually exist, he cannot forget that there are such places as New York and Berlin. For the majority of contemporary human beings, London and Manchester are the rule; you may have fled to the

eternal spring of Arequipa, but you are not living in what is, for the mass of human consciousness, reality.

An escape in time is no more satisfactory. You live in the radiant future, live for the future. You console yourself for the spectacle of things as they are by the thought of what they will be. And you work, perhaps, to make them be what you think they ought to be. I know all about it, I assure you. I have done it all myself — lived in a state of permanent intoxication at the thought of what was to come, working happily for a gorgeous ideal of happiness. But a little reflection suffices to show how absurd these forward lookings, these labours for the sake of what is to be, really are. For, to begin with, we have no reason to suppose that there is going to be a future at all, at any rate for human beings. In the second place we do not know whether the ideal of happiness towards which we are striving may not turn out either to be totally unrealizable or, if realizable, utterly repellent to humanity. Do people want to be happy? If there were a real prospect of achieving a permanent and unvarying happiness, wouldn't they shrink in horror from the boring consummation? And finally, the contemplation of the future, the busy working for it, does not prevent the present from existing. It merely partially blinds us to the present.

The same objections apply with equal force to the escapes which do not launch out into space or time, but into Platonic eternity, into the ideal. An escape into mere fancy does not prevent facts from going on; it is a disregarding of the facts.

Finally there are those people, more courageous than the escapers, who actually plunge into the real contemporary life around them, and are consoled by finding in the midst of its squalor, its repulsiveness and stupidity, evidences of a widespread kindliness, of charity, pity and the like. True, these qualities exist and the spectacle of them is decidedly cheering; in spite of civilization, men have not fallen below the brutes. Parents, even in human society, are devoted to their offspring; even in human society the weak and the afflicted are sometimes assisted. It would be surprising, considering the origins and affinities of man, if this were not the case. Have you ever read an obituary notice of which the

subject did not possess, under his rough exterior and formidable manner, a heart of gold? And the obituarists, however cloying their literary productions, are perfectly right. We all have hearts of gold, though we are sometimes, it is true, too much preoccupied with our own affairs to remember the fact. The really cruel, the fundamentally evil man is as rare as the man of genius or the total idiot. I have never met a man with a really bad heart. And the fact is not surprising; for a man with a really bad heart is a man with certain instincts developed to an abnormal degree and certain others more or less completely atrophied. I have never met a man like Mozart for that matter.

Charles Dickens, it is true, managed to feel elated and chronically tearful over the existence of virtues among the squalor. ‘He shows,’ as one of his American admirers so fruitily puts it, ‘that life in its rudest forms may wear a tragic grandeur; that amidst follies and excesses the moral feelings do not wholly die, and that the haunts of the blackest crime are sometimes lighted up by the presence of the noblest souls.’ And very nice too. But is there any great reason to feel elated by the emergence of virtues in human society? We are not specially elated by the fact that men have livers and pancreases. Virtues are as natural to man as his digestive organs; any sober biologist, taking into consideration his gregarious instincts, would naturally expect to find them.

This being the case, there is nothing in these virtues à la Dickens to ‘write home about’ — as we used to say at a time when we were remarkably rich in such virtues. There is no reason to be particularly proud of qualities which we inherit from our animal forefathers and share with our household pets. The gratifying thing would be if we could find in contemporary society evidences of peculiarly human virtues — the conscious rational virtues that ought to belong by definition to a being calling himself Homo Sapiens. Open-mindedness, for example, absence of irrational prejudice, complete tolerance and a steady, reasonable pursuit of social goods. But these, alas, are precisely what we fail to discover. For to what, after all, are all this squalor, this confusion and ugliness due but to the lack of the human virtues? The fact is that — except for an occasional sport of Nature, born now here, now there, and always out of time —

we sapient men have practically no human virtues at all. Spend a week in any great town, and the fact is obvious. So complete is this lack of truly human qualities that we are reduced, if we condescend to look at reality at all, to act like Charles Dickens and congratulate the race on its merely animal virtues. The jolly, optimistic fellows who assure us that humanity is all right, because mothers love their children, poor folk pity and help one another, and soldiers die for a flag, are comforting us on the grounds that we resemble the whales, the elephants and the bees. But when we ask them to adduce evidence of human sapience, to give us a few specimens of conscious and reasonable well-doing, they rebuke us for our intellectual coldness and our general ‘inhumanity’ — which means our refusal to be content with the standards of the animals. However grateful we may feel for the existence in civilized society of these homely jungle virtues, we cannot justifiably set them off against the horrors and squalors of civilized life. The horrors and squalors arise from men’s lack of reason — from their failure to be completely and sapiently human. The jungle virtues are merely the obverse of this animalism, whose Heads is instinctive kindliness and whose Tails is stupidity and instinctive cruelty.

So much for the last consolation of philosophy. We are left with reality. My office in Gog’s Court is situated, I repeat, at the very heart of it, the palpitating heart.

CHAPTER II

GOG'S COURT, THE navel of reality! Repeating those verses of mine in the silence, I intimately felt the truth of it.

For if of old the sons of squires
And livery stable keepers turned
To flowers and hope, to Greece and God,
We in our later age have learned
That we are native where we walk.

My voice boomed out oracularly across the flat sea. Nothing so richly increases the significance of a statement as to hear it uttered by one's own voice, in solitude. 'Resolved, so help me God, never to touch another drop!' Those solemn words, breathed out in a mist of whiskey — how often, in dark nights, on icy mornings, how often have they been uttered! And the portentous imprecation seems to engage the whole universe to do battle on behalf of the Better Self against its besetting vice. Thrilling and awful moment! Merely for the sake of living through it again, for the sake of once more breaking the empty silence with the reverberating Stygian oath, it is well worth neglecting the good resolution. I say nothing of the pleasures of inebriation.

My own brief recital served to confirm for me the truth of my speculations. For not only was I uttering the substance of my thoughts aloud; I was voicing it in terms of a formula that had an element, I flatter myself, of magic about it. What is the secret of these verbal felicities? How does it come about that a commonplace thought embodied by a poet in some abracadabrical form seems bottomlessly profound, while a positively false and stupid notion may be made by its expression to seem true? Frankly, I don't know. And what is more, I have never found any one who could give an answer to the riddle. What is it that makes the two words 'defunctive music' as moving as the dead march out of the

Eroica and the close of Coriolan? Why should it be somehow more profoundly comic to ‘call Tullia’s ape a marmosite’ than to write a whole play of Congreve? And the line, ‘Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears’ — why should it in effect lie where it does? Mystery. This game of art strangely resembles conjuring. The quickness of the tongue deceives the brain. It has happened, after all, often enough. Old Shakespeare, for example. How many critical brains have been deceived by the quickness of his tongue! Because he can say ‘Shoughs, water-rugs and demi-wolves,’ and ‘defunctive music,’ and ‘the expense of spirit in a waste of shame’ and all the rest of it, we credit him with philosophy, a moral purpose and the most penetrating psychology. Whereas his thoughts are incredibly confused, his only purpose is to entertain and he has created only three characters. One, Cleopatra, is an excellent copy from the life, like a character out of a good realistic novel, say one of Tolstoy’s. The other two — Macbeth and Falstaff — are fabulous imaginary figures, consistent with themselves but not real in the sense that Cleopatra is real. My poor friend Calamy would call them more real, would say that they belong to the realm of Absolute Art. And so forth. I cannot go into poor Calamy’s opinions, at any rate in this context; later on, perhaps. For me, in any case, Macbeth and Falstaff are perfectly genuine and complete mythological characters, like Jupiter or Gargantua, Medea or Mr. Winkle. They are the only two well-invented mythological monsters in the whole of Shakespeare’s collection; just as Cleopatra is the only well-copied reality. His boundless capacity for abracadabra has deceived innumerable people into imagining that all the other characters are as good.

But the Bard, heaven help me, is not my theme. Let me return to my recitation on the face of the waters. As I have said, my conviction ‘that we are native where we walk’ was decidedly strengthened by the sound of my own voice pronouncing the elegant formula in which the notion was embalmed. Repeating the words, I thought of Gog’s Court, of my little room with the reflector at the window, of the light that burns in winter even at noon, of the smell of printer’s ink and the noise of the presses. I was back there, out of this

irrelevant poem of a sunshiny landscape, back in the palpitating heart of things. On the table before me lay a sheaf of long galleys; it was Wednesday; I should have been correcting proofs, but I was idle that afternoon! On the blank six inches at the bottom of a galley I had been writing those lines: ‘For if of old the sons of squires . . .’ Pensively, a halma player contemplating his next move, I hung over them. What were the possible improvements? There was a knock at the door. I drew a sheet of blotting paper across the bottom of the galley—‘Come in’ — and went on with my interrupted reading of the print. ‘. . . Since Himalayas were made to breed true to colour, no event has aroused greater enthusiasm in the fancier’s world than the fixation of the new Flemish-Angora type. Mr. Spargle’s achievement is indeed a nepoch-making one. . . .’ I restored the n of nepoch to its widowed a, and looked up. Mr. Bosk, the sub-editor, was standing over me.

‘Proof of the leader, sir,’ he said, bowing with that exquisitely contemptuous politeness which characterized all his dealings with me, and handed me another galley.

‘Thank you, Mr. Bosk,’ I said.

But Mr. Bosk did not retire. Standing there in his favourite and habitual attitude, the attitude assumed by our ancestors (of whom, indeed, old Mr. Bosk was one) in front of the half-draped marble column of the photographer’s studio, he looked at me, faintly smiling through his thin white beard. The third button of his waistcoat was undone and his right hand, like a half-posted letter, was inserted in the orifice. He rested his weight on a rigid right leg. The other leg was slightly bent, and the heel of one touching the toe of the other, his left foot made with his right a perfect right angle. I could see that I was in for a reproof.

‘What is it, Mr. Bosk?’ I asked.

Among the sparse hairs Mr. Bosk’s smile became piercingly sweet. He put his head archly on one side. His voice when he spoke was mellifluous. On these occasions when I was to be dressed down and put in my place his courtesy degenerated into a kind of affected girlish coquetry. ‘If you don’t mind my saying so, Mr. Chelifer,’ he said mincingly, ‘I think you’ll find that rabear in

Spanish does not mean “to wag the tail,” as you say in your leader on the derivation of the word “rabbit,” so much as “to wag the hind quarters.” ’

‘Wag the hind quarters, Mr. Bosk?’ I said. ‘But that sounds to me a very difficult feat.’

‘Not in Spain, apparently,’ said Mr. Bosk, almost giggling.

‘But this is England, Mr. Bosk.’

‘Nevertheless, my authority is no less than Skeat himself.’ And triumphantly, with the air of one who, at a critical moment of the game, produces a fifth ace, Mr. Bosk brought forward his left hand, which he had been keeping mysteriously behind his back. It held a dictionary; a strip of paper marked the page. Mr. Bosk laid it, opened, on the table before me; with a thick nail he pointed ‘ ”. . . or possibly,” I read aloud, “from Spanish rabear, to wag the hind quarters.” Right as usual, Mr. Bosk. I’ll alter it in the proof.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Mr. Bosk with a mock humility. Inwardly he was exulting in his triumph. He picked up his dictionary, repeated his contemptuously courteous bow and walked with a gliding noiseless motion towards the door. On the threshold he paused. ‘I remember that the question arose once before, sir,’ he said; his voice was poisonously honeyed. ‘In Mr. Parfitt’s time,’ and he slipped out, closing the door quietly behind him.

It was a Parthian shot. The name of Mr. Parfitt was meant to wound me to the quick, to bring the blush of shame to my cheek. For had not Mr. Parfitt been the perfect, complete and infallible editor? Whereas I . . . Mr. Bosk left it to my own conscience to decide what I was.

And indeed I was well aware of my short-comings. ‘The Rabbit Fanciers’ Gazette,’ with which, as every schoolboy knows, is incorporated ‘The Mouse Breeders’ Record,’ could hardly have had a more unsuitable editor than I. To this day, I confess, I hardly know the right end of a rabbit from the wrong. Mr. Bosk was a survivor from the grand old days of Mr. Parfitt, the founder and for thirty years the editor of the Gazette.

‘Mr. Parfitt, sir,’ he used to tell me every now and then, ‘was a real fancier.’ His successor, by implication, was not.

It was at the end of the war. I was looking for a job — a job at the heart of reality. The illusory nature of the position had made me decline my old college's offer of a fellowship. I wanted something — how shall I put it? — more palpitating. And then in The Times I found what I had been looking for. 'Wanted Editor of proved literary ability for livestock trade paper. Apply Box 92.' I applied, was interviewed, and conquered. The directors couldn't finally resist my testimonial from the Bishop of Bosham. 'A life-long acquaintance with Mr. Chelifer and his family permits me confidently to assert that he is a young man of great ability and high moral purpose, (signed) Hartley Bosh.' I was appointed for a probationary period of six months.

Old Mr. Parfitt, the retiring editor, stayed on a few days at the office to initiate me into the secrets of the work. He was a benevolent old gentleman, short, thick and with a very large head. His square face was made to seem even broader than it was by the grey whiskers which ran down his cheeks to merge imperceptibly into the ends of his moustache. He knew more about mice and rabbits than any man in the country; but what he prided himself on was his literary gift. He explained to me the principles on which he wrote his weekly leaders.

'In the fable,' he told me, smiling already in anticipation of the end of this joke which he had been elaborating and polishing since 1892, 'in the fable it is the mountain which, after a long and, if I may say so, geological labour, gives birth to the mouse. My principle, on the contrary, has always been, wherever possible, to make my mice parturate mountains.' He paused expectantly. When I had laughed, he went on. 'It's astonishing what reflections on life and art and politics and philosophy and what not you can get out of a mouse or a rabbit. Quite astonishing!'

The most notable of Mr. Parfitt's mountain thoughts still hangs, under glass and in an Oxford frame, on the wall above the editorial desk. It was printed in the Rabbit Fancier for August 8, 1914.

'It is not the readers of the Rabbit Fanciers' Gazette,' Mr. Parfitt had written on that cardinal date, 'who have made this war. No Mouse Breeder, I

emphatically proclaim, has desired it. No! Absorbed in their harmless and indeed beneficent occupations, they have had neither the wish nor the leisure to disturb the world's peace. If all men whole-heartedly devoted themselves to avocations like ours, there would be no war. The world would be filled with the innocent creators and fosterers of life, not, as at present, with its tigerish destroyers. Had Kaiser William the Second been a breeder of rabbits or mice, we should not find ourselves to-day in a world whose very existence is threatened by the unimaginable horrors of modern warfare.'

Noble words! Mr. Parfitt's righteous indignation was strengthened by his fears for the future of his paper. The war, he gloomily foreboded, would mean the end of rabbit breeding. But he was wrong. Mice, it is true, went rather out of fashion between 1914 and 1918. But in the lean years of rationing, rabbits took on a new importance. In 1917 there were ten fanciers of Flemish Giants to every one there had been before the war. Subscriptions rose, advertisements were multiplied.

'Rabbits,' Mr. Parfitt assured me, 'did a great deal to help us win the war.'

And conversely, the war did so much to help rabbits that Mr. Parfitt was able to retire in 1919 with a modest but adequate fortune. It was then that I took over control. And in spite of Mr. Bosk's contempt for my ignorance and incompetence, I must in justice congratulate myself on the way in which I piloted the concern through the evil times which followed. Peace found the English people at once less prosperous and less hungry than they had been during the war. The time had passed when it was necessary for them to breed rabbits; and they could not afford the luxury of breeding them for pleasure. Subscriptions declined, advertisements fell off. I averted an impending catastrophe by adding to the paper a new section dealing with goats. Biologically, no doubt, as I pointed out to the directors in my communication on the subject, this mingling of ruminants with rodents was decidedly unsound. But commercially, I felt sure, the innovation would be justified. It was. The goats brought half a dozen pages of advertisements in their train and several hundred

new subscribers. Mr. Bosk was furious at my success; but the directors thought very highly of my capacities.

They did not, it is true, always approve of my leading articles. ‘Couldn’t you try to make them a little more popular,’ suggested the managing director, ‘a little more practical too, Mr. Chelifer? For instance,’ and clearing his throat, he unfolded the typewritten sheet of complaints which he had had prepared and had brought with him to the board meeting, ‘for instance, what’s the practical value of this stuff about the use of the word “cony” as a term of endearment in the Elizabethan dramatists? And this article on the derivation of “rabbit” ’ — he looked at his paper again and coughed. ‘Who wants to know that there’s a Walloon word “robett”? Or that our word may have something to do with the Spanish rabear, to wag the hind quarters? And who, by the way,’ he added, looking up at me over his pince-nez with an air — prematurely put on — of triumph, ‘who ever heard of an animal wagging its hind quarters?’ ‘Nevertheless,’ I said, apologetically, but firmly, as befits a man who knows that he is right, ‘my authority is no less than Skeat himself.’

The managing director, who had hoped to score a point, went on, defeated, to the next count in the indictment. ‘And then, Mr. Chelifer,’ he said, ‘we don’t very much like, my fellow directors and I, we don’t much like what you say in your article on “Rabbit Fancying and its Lesson to Humanity.” It may be true that breeders have succeeded in producing domesticated rabbits that are four times the weight of wild rabbits and possess only half the quantity of brains — it may be true. Indeed, it is true. And a very remarkable achievement it is, Mr. Chelifer, very remarkable indeed. But that is no reason for upholding, as you do, Mr. Chelifer, that the ideal working man, at whose production the eugenist should aim, is a man eight times as strong as the present-day workman, with only a sixteenth of his mental capacity. Not that my fellow directors and I entirely disagree with what you say, Mr. Chelifer; far from it. All right-thinking men must agree that the modern workman is too well educated. But we have to remember, Mr. Chelifer, that many of our readers actually belong to that class.’

‘Quite.’ I acquiesced in the reproof.

‘And finally, Mr. Chelifer, there is your article on the “Symbology of the Goat.” We feel that the facts you have there collected, however interesting to the anthropologist and the student of folk-lore, are hardly of a kind to be set before a mixed public like ours.’

The other directors murmured their assent. There was a prolonged silence.

CHAPTER III

I REMEMBER AN advertisement — for some sort of cough drops I think it was — which used to figure very largely in my boyhood on the back covers of the illustrated weeklies. Over the legend, ‘A Pine Forest in every Home,’ appeared a picture of three or four magnificent Norway spruces growing out of the drawing-room carpet, while the lady of the house, her children and guests took tea, with a remarkable air of unconcern and as though it was quite natural to have a sequoia sprouting out of the hearth-rug, under their sanitary and aromatic shade. A Pine Forest in every Home. . . . But I have thought of something even better. A Luna Park in every Office. A British Empire Exhibition Fun Fair in every Bank. An Earl’s Court in every Factory. True, I cannot claim to bring every attraction of the Fun Fair into your place of labour — only the switchback, the water-shoot and the mountain railway. Merry-go-round, wiggle-woggle, flip-flap and the like are beyond the power of my magic to conjure up. Horizontal motion and a rotary giddiness I cannot claim to reproduce; my speciality is headlong descents, breathlessness and that delicious sickening feeling that your entrails have been left behind on an upper storey. Those who chafe at the tameness and sameness of office life, who pine for a little excitement to diversify the quotidian routine, should experiment with this little recipe of mine and bring the water-shoot into the counting-house. It is quite simple. All you have got to do is to pause for a moment in your work and ask yourself: Why am I doing this? What is it all for? Did I come into the world, supplied with a soul which may very likely be immortal, for the sole purpose of sitting every day at this desk? Ask yourself these questions thoughtfully, seriously. Reflect even for a moment on their significance — and I can guarantee that, firmly seated though you may be in your hard or your padded chair, you will feel all at once that the void has opened beneath you, that you are sliding headlong, fast and faster, into nothingness.

For those who cannot dispense with formularies and fixed prayers, I recommend this little catechism, to be read through in office hours whenever time hangs a little heavy.

Q. Why am I working here?

A. In order that Jewish stockbrokers may exchange their Rovers for Armstrong-Siddeleys, buy the latest jazz records and spend the week-end at Brighton.

Q. Why do I go on working here?

A. In the hope that I too may some day be able to spend the week-end at Brighton.

Q. What is progress?

A. Progress is stockbrokers, more stockbrokers and still more stockbrokers.

Q. What is the aim of social reformers?

A. The aim of social reformers is to create a state in which every individual enjoys the greatest possible amount of freedom and leisure.

Q. What will the citizens of this reformed state do with their freedom and leisure?

A. They will do, presumably, what the stockbrokers do with these things to-day, *e.g.* spend the week-end at Brighton, ride rapidly in motor vehicles and go to the theatre.

Q. On what condition can I live a life of contentment?

A. On the condition that you do not think.

Q. What is the function of newspapers, cinemas, radios, motorbikes, jazz bands, etc?

A. The function of these things is the prevention of thought and the killing of time. They are the most powerful instruments of human happiness.

Q. What did Buddha consider the most deadly of the deadly sins?

A. Unawareness, stupidity.

Q. And what will happen if I make myself aware, if I actually begin to think?

A. Your swivel chair will turn into a trolley on the mountain railway, the office floor will gracefully slide away from beneath you and you will find

yourself launched into the abyss.

Down, down, down! The sensation, though sickening, is really delightful. Most people, I know, find it a little too much for them and consequently cease to think, in which case the trolley reconverts itself into the swivel chair, the floor closes up and the hours at the desk seem once more to be hours passed in a perfectly reasonable manner; or else, more rarely, flee in panic horror from the office to bury their heads like ostriches in religion or what not. For a strong-minded and intelligent person both courses are inadmissible; the first because it is stupid and the second because it is cowardly. No self-respecting man can either accept unreflectingly or, having reflected upon it, irresponsibly run away from the reality of human life. The proper course, I flatter myself, is that which I have adopted. Having sought out the heart of reality — Gog's Court, to be explicit — I have taken up my position there; and though fully aware of the nature of the reality by which I am surrounded, though deliberately keeping myself reminded of the complete imbecility of what I am doing, I yet remain heroically at my post. My whole time is passed on the switchback; all my life is one unceasing slide through nothing.

All my life, I insist; for it is not merely into Gog's Court that I magically introduce the fun of the fair. I so arrange my private life that I am sliding even out of office hours. My heart, to borrow the poetess's words, is like a singing bird whose nest is permanently in a water-shoot. Miss Carruthers's boardinghouse in Chelsea is, I assure you, as suitable a place to slither in as any east of Temple Bar. I have lived there now for four years. I am a pillar of the establishment and every evening, when I sit down to dinner with my fellow guests, I feel as though I were taking my place in a specially capacious family trolley on the switchback railway. All aboard! and away we go. With gathering momentum the trolley plunges down into vacancy.

Let me describe an evening on the Domestic water-shoot. At the head of the table sits Miss Carruthers herself; thirty-seven, plump though unmarried, with a face broadening towards the base and very flabby about the cheeks and chin — bull-doggy, in a word; and the snub nose, staring at you out of its upward-tilted

nostrils, the small brown eyes do not belie the comparison. And what activity! never walks, but runs about her establishment like a demoniac, never speaks but shrilly shouts, carves the roast beef with scientific fury, laughs like a giant woodpecker. She belongs to a distinguished family which would never, in its days of glory, have dreamed of allowing one of its daughters to become what Miss Carruthers calls, applying to herself the most humiliating of titles and laughing as she does so, to emphasize the picturesque contrast between what she is by birth and what circumstance has reduced her to becoming, ‘a common lodging-house keeper.’ She is a firm believer in her class, and to her more distinguished guests deplores the necessity under which she labours to admit into her establishment persons not really, really . . . She is careful not to mix people of different sorts together. Her most genteel guests sit the closest to her at table; it is implied that, in the neighbourhood of Miss Carruthers, they will feel at home. For years I have had the honour of sitting at her left hand; for if less prosperous than Mrs. Cloudesley Shove, the broker’s widow (who sits in glory on the right), I have at least attended in my youth an ancient seat of learning.

The gong reverberates; punctually I hurry down to the dining-room. With fury and precision, like a conductor immersed in a Wagner overture, Miss Carruthers is carving the beef.

‘Evening, Mr. Chelifer,’ she loudly calls, without interrupting her labours. ‘What news have you brought back with you from the city to-day?’

Affably I smile, professionally I rub the hands. ‘Well, I don’t know that I can think of any.’

‘Evening, Mrs. Fox. Evening, Mr. Fox.’ The two old people take their places near the further end of the table. They are not quite, quite . . . ‘Evening, Miss Monad.’ Miss Monad does responsible secretarial work and sits next to the Fox’s. ‘Evening, Mr. Quinn. Evening, Miss Webber. Evening, Mrs. Crotch.’ But the tone in which she responds to Mr. Dutt’s courteous greeting is much less affable. Mr. Dutt is an Indian — a black man, Miss Carruthers calls him. Her ‘Evening, Mr. Dutt’ shows that she knows her place and hopes that the man of

the inferior race knows his. The servant comes in with a steaming dish of greens. Crambe ripetita — inspiring perfume! Mentally I burst into song.

These like remorse inveterate memories,
Being of cabbage, are prophetic too
Of future feasts, when Mrs. Cloudesley Shove
Will still recall lamented Cloudesley.
Still
Among the moonlit cedars Philomel
Calls back to mind, again, again,
The ancient pain, the everlasting pain;
And still inveterately the haunted air
Remembers and foretells that roses were
Red and to-morrow will again be red,
But, 'Cloudesley, Cloudesley!' Philomel in vain
Sobs on the night; for Cloudesley Shove is dead. . . .

And in the flesh, as though irresistibly summoned by my incantation, Mrs. Cloudesley Shove blackens the doorway with her widowhood.

'Not a very naice day,' says Mrs. Cloudesley, as she sits down.

'Not at all,' Miss Carruthers heartily agrees. And then, without turning from the beef, without abating for an instant the celerity of her carving, 'Fluffy!' she shouts through the increasing din, 'don't giggle like that.'

Politely Mr. Chelifer half raises himself from his chair as Miss Fluffy comes tumbling, on the tail end of her giggle, into the chair next to his. Always the perfect gent.

'I wasn't giggling, Miss Carruthers,' Fluffy protests. Her smile reveals above the roots of her teeth a line of almost bloodless gums.

'Quite true,' says young Mr. Brimstone, following her less tumultuously from the door and establishing himself in the seat opposite, next to Mrs. Cloudesley. 'She wasn't giggling. She was merely cachinnating.'

Everybody laughs uproariously, even Miss Carruthers, though she does not cease to carve. Mr. Brimstone remains perfectly grave. Behind his rimless pince-

nez there is hardly so much as a twinkle. As for Miss Fluffy, she fairly collapses.

‘What a horrible man!’ she screams through her laughter, as soon as she has breath enough to be articulate. And picking up her bread, she makes as though she were going to throw it across the table in Mr. Brimstone’s face.

Mr. Brimstone holds up a finger. ‘Now you be careful,’ he admonishes. ‘If you don’t behave, you’ll be put in the corner and sent to bed without your supper.’

There is a renewal of laughter.

Miss Carruthers intervenes. ‘Now don’t tease her, Mr. Brimstone.’

‘Tease?’ says Mr. Brimstone, in the tone of one who has been misjudged. ‘But I was only applying moral suasion, Miss Carruthers.’

Inimitable Brimstone! He is the life and soul of Miss Carruthers’s establishment. So serious, so clever, such an alert young city man — but withal so exquisitely waggish, so gallant! To see him with Fluffy — it’s as good as a play.

‘There!’ says Miss Carruthers, putting down her carving tools with a clatter. Loudly, energetically, she addresses herself to her duties as a hostess. ‘I went to Buszard’s this afternoon,’ she proclaims, not without pride. We old county families have always bought our chocolate at the best shops. ‘But it isn’t what it used to be.’ She shakes her head; the high old feudal times are past. ‘It isn’t the same. Not since the A B C took it over.’

‘Do you see,’ asks Mr. Brimstone, becoming once more his serious self, ‘that the new Lyons Corner House in Piccadilly Circus will be able to serve fourteen million meals a year?’ Mr. Brimstone is always a mine of interesting statistics.

‘No, really?’ Mrs. Cloudesley is astonished.

But old Mr. Fox, who happens to have read the same evening paper as Mr. Brimstone, takes almost the whole credit of Mr. Brimstone’s erudition to himself by adding, before the other has time to say it: ‘Yes, and that’s just twice as many meals as any American restaurant can serve.’

‘Good old England!’ cried Miss Carruthers patriotically. ‘These Yanks haven’t got us beaten in everything yet.’

‘So naice, I always think, these Corner Houses,’ says Mrs. Cloudesley. ‘And the music they play is really quite classical, you know, sometimes.’

‘Quite,’ says Mr. Chelifer, savouring voluptuously the pleasure of dropping steeply from the edge of the convivial board into interstellar space.

‘And so sumptuously decorated,’ Mrs. Cloudesley continues.

But Mr. Brimstone knowingly lets her know that the marble on the walls is less than a quarter of an inch thick.

And the conversation proceeds. ‘The Huns,’ says Miss Carruthers, ‘are only shamming dead.’ Mr. Fox is in favour of a business government. Mr. Brimstone would like to see a few strikers shot, to encourage the rest; Miss Carruthers agrees. From below the salt Miss Monad puts in a word for the working classes, but her remark is treated with the contempt it deserves. Mrs. Cloudesley finds Charlie Chaplin so vulgar, but likes Mary Pickford. Miss Fluffy thinks that the Prince of Wales ought to marry a nice simple English girl. Mr. Brimstone says something rather cutting about Mrs. Asquith and Lady Diana Manners. Mrs. Cloudesley, who has a profound knowledge of the Royal Family, mentions the Princess Alice. Contrapuntally to this, Miss Webber and Mr. Quinn have been discussing the latest plays and Mr. Chelifer has engaged Miss Fluffy in a conversation which soon occupies the attention of all the persons sitting at the upper end of the table — a conversation about flappers. Mrs. Cloudesley, Miss Carruthers and Mr. Brimstone agree that the modern girl is too laxly brought up. Miss Fluffy adheres in piercing tones to the opposite opinion. Mr. Brimstone makes some splendid jokes at the expense of co-education, and all concur in deploring cranks of every variety. Miss Carruthers, who has a short way with dissenters, would like to see them tarred and feathered — all except pacifists, who, like strikers, could do with a little shooting. Lymphatic Mrs. Cloudesley, with sudden and surprising ferocity, wants to treat the Irish in the same way. (Lamented Cloudesley had connections with Belfast.) But at this moment a deplorable incident occurs. Mr. Dutt, the Indian, who ought never, from his lower sphere, even to have listened to the conversation going on in the higher, leans forward and speaking loudly across the intervening gulf ardently espouses

the Irish cause. His eloquence rolls up the table between two hedges of horrified silence. For a moment nothing can be heard but ardent nationalistic sentiments and the polite regurgitation of prune stones. In the presence of this shocking and unfamiliar phenomenon nobody knows exactly what to do. But Miss Carruthers rises, after the first moment, to the occasion.

‘Ah, but then, Mr. Dutt,’ she says, interrupting his tirade about oppressed nationalities, ‘you must remember that Mrs. Cloudesley Shove is English. You can hardly expect to understand what she feels. Can you?’

We all feel inclined to clap. Without waiting to hear Mr. Dutt’s reply, and leaving three prunes uneaten on her plate, Miss Carruthers gets up and sweeps with dignity towards the door. Loudly, in the corridor, she comments on the insolence of black men. And what ingratitude, too!

‘After I had made a special exception in his case to my rule against taking coloured people!’

We all sympathize. In the drawing-room the conversation proceeds. Headlong the trolley plunges.

A home away from home — that was how Miss Carruthers described her establishment in the prospectus. It was the awayness of it that first attracted me to the place. The vast awayness from what I had called home up till the time I first stayed there — that was what made me decide to settle for good at Miss Carruthers’s. From the house where I was born Miss Carruthers’s seemed about as remote as any place one could conveniently find.

‘I remember, I remember . . .’ It is a pointless and futile occupation, difficult none the less not to indulge in. I remember. Our house at Oxford was dark, spiky and tall. Ruskin himself, it was said, had planned it. The front windows looked out on to the Banbury Road. On rainy days, when I was a child, I used to spend whole mornings staring down into the thoroughfare. Every twenty minutes a tram-car drawn by two old horses, trotting in their sleep, passed with an undulating motion more slowly than a man could walk. The little garden at the back once seemed enormous and romantic, the rocking-horse in the nursery a beast like an elephant. The house is sold now and I am glad of it. They are

dangerous, these things and places inhabited by memory. It is as though, by a process of metempsychosis, the soul of dead events goes out and lodges itself in a house, a flower, a landscape, in a group of trees seen from the train against the sky-line, an old snapshot, a broken pen-knife, a book, a perfume. In these memory-charged places, among these things haunted by the ghosts of dead days, one is tempted to brood too lovingly over the past, to live it again, more elaborately, more consciously, more beautifully and harmoniously, almost as though it were an imagined life in the future. Surrounded by these ghosts one can neglect the present in which one bodily lives. I am glad the place is sold; it was dangerous. Evviva Miss Carruthers!

Nevertheless my thoughts, as I lay on the water that morning, reverted from the Home Away to the other home from which it was so distant. I recalled the last visit I had paid to the old house, a month or two since, just before my mother finally decided herself to move out. Mounting the steps that led up to the ogival porch I had felt like an excavator on the threshold of a tomb. I tugged at the wrought-iron bell pull; joints creaked, wires wheezily rattled, and far off, as though accidentally, by an afterthought, tinkled the cracked bell. In a moment the door would open, I should walk in, and there, there in the unrifled chamber the royal mummy would be lying — my own.

Nothing within those Gothic walls ever changed. Imperceptibly the furniture grew older; the wall-papers and the upholstery recalled with their non-committal russets and sage-greens the refinements of another epoch. And my mother herself, pale and grey-haired, draped in the dateless dove-grey dresses she had always worn, my mother was still the same. Her smile was the same dim gentle smile; her voice still softly modulated, like a studied and cultured music, from key to key. Her hair was hardly greyer — for it had whitened early and I was a late-born child — than I always remember it to have been. Her face was hardly more deeply wrinkled. She walked erect, seemed still as active as ever, she had grown no thinner and no stouter.

And she was still surrounded by those troops of derelict dogs, so dreadfully profuse, poor beasts! in their smelly gratitude. There were still the same moth-

eaten cats picked up starving at a street corner to be harboured in luxury — albeit on a diet that was, on principle, strictly vegetarian — in the best rooms of the house. Poor children still came for buns and tea and traditional games in the garden — so traditional, very often, that nobody but my mother had ever heard of them; still came, when the season happened to be winter, for gloves and woolly stockings and traditional games indoors. And the writing-table in the drawing-room was piled high, as it had always been piled, with printed appeals for some deserving charity. And still in her beautiful calligraphy my mother addressed the envelopes that were to contain them, slowly, one after another — and each a little work of art, like a page from a mediaeval missal, and each destined, without reprieve, to the waste-paper basket.

All was just as it had always been. Ah, but not quite, all the same! For though the summer term was in full swing and the afternoon bright, the little garden behind the house was deserted and unmelodious. Where were the morris dancers, where the mixolydian strains? And remembering that music, those dances, those distant afternoons, I could have wept.

In one corner of the lawn my mother used to sit at the little harmonium; I sat beside her to turn the pages of the music. In the opposite corner were grouped the dancers. My mother looked up over the top of the instrument; melodiously she inquired:

‘Which dance shall we have next, Mr. Toft? “Trenchmore”? Or “Omnium Gatherum”? Or “John come kiss me now”? Or what do you say to “Up tails all”? Or “Rub her down with straw”? Or “An old man’s a bed full of bones”? Such an embarras de richesse, isn’t there?’

And Mr. Toft would break away from his little company of dancers and come across the lawn wiping his face — for ‘Hoite-cum-Toite’ a moment before had been a most furious affair. It was a grey face with vague indeterminate features and a bright almost clerical smile in the middle of it. When he spoke it was in a very rich voice.

‘Suppose we try “Fading,” Mrs. Chelifer,’ he suggested. ‘ ”Fading is a fine dance” — you remember the immortal words of the Citizen’s Wife in the Knight

of the Burning Pestle? Ha ha!' And he gave utterance to a little laugh, applausive of his own wit. For to Mr. Toft every literary allusion was a joke, and the obscurer the allusion the more exquisite the waggery. It was rarely, alas, that he found any one to share his merriment. My mother was one of the few people who always made a point of smiling whenever Mr. Toft laughed at himself. She smiled even when she could not track the allusion to its source. Sometimes she even went so far as to laugh. But my mother had no facility for laughter; by nature she was a grave and gentle smiler.

And so 'Fading' it would be. My mother touched the keys and the gay, sad mixolydian air came snoring out of the harmonium like a strangely dissipated hymn tune. 'One, two, three . . .' called Mr. Toft richly. And then in unison all five — the don, the two undergraduates, the two young ladies from North Oxford — would beat the ground with their feet, would prance and stamp till the garters of little bells round the gentlemen's grey flannel trousers (it went without saying, for some reason, that the ladies should not wear them) jingled like the bells of a runaway hansom-cab horse. One, two, three. . . . The Citizen's Wife (ha ha!) was right. Fading is a fine dance indeed. Everybody dances Fading. Poor Mr. Toft had faded out of Oxford, had danced completely out of life, like Lycidas (tee-hee!) before his prime. Influenza had faded him. And of the undergraduates who had danced here, first and last, with Mr. Toft — how many of them had danced Fading under the German barrage? Young Flint, the one who used always to address his tutor as 'Mr. Toft — oh, I mean Clarence' (for Mr. Toft was one of those genial boyish dons who insisted on being called by their Christian names), young Flint was dead for certain. And Ramsden too, I had a notion that Ramsden too was dead.

And then there were the young women from North Oxford. What, for example, of Miss Dewball's cheeks? How had those cabbage roses weathered the passage of the years? But for Miss Higlett, of course, there could be no more fading, no further desiccation. She was already a harebell baked in sand. Unwithering Higlett, blowsy Dewball. . . .

And I myself, I too had faded. The Francis Chelifer who, standing by the dissipated harmonium, had turned the pages of his mother's music, was as wholly extinct as Mr. Toft. Within this Gothic tomb reposed his mummy. My week-end visits were archaeological expeditions.

'Now that poor Mr. Toft's dead,' I asked as we walked, my mother and I, that afternoon, up and down the little garden behind the house, 'isn't there any one else here who's keen on morris dancing?' Or were those folky days, I wondered, for ever past?

My mother shook her head. 'The enthusiasm for it is gone,' she said sadly. 'This generation of undergraduates doesn't seem to take much interest in that kind of thing. I don't really know,' she added, 'what it is interested in.'

What indeed, I reflected. In my young days it had been Social Service and Fabianism; it had been long hearty walks in the country at four and a half miles an hour, with draughts of Five X beer at the end of them, and Rabelaisian song and conversations with yokels in incredibly picturesque little wayside inns; it had been reading parties in the Lakes and climbing in the Jura; it had been singing in the Bach Choir and even — though somehow I had never been able quite to rise to that — even morris dancing with Mr. Toft. . . . But Fading is a fine dance, and all these occupations seemed now a little queer. Still, I caught myself envying the being who had lived within my skin and joined in these activities.

'Poor Toft!' I meditated. 'Do you remember the way he had of calling great men by little pet names of his own? Just to show that he was on terms of familiarity with them, I suppose. Shakespeare was always Shake-bake, which was short, in its turn, for Shake-Bacon. And Oven, tout court, was Beethoven.'

'And always J. S. B. for Bach,' my mother continued, smiling elegiacally.

'Yes, and Pee Em for Philipp Emanuel Bach. And Madame Dudevant for George Sand, or, alternatively, I remember, "The Queen's Monthly Nurse" — because Dickens thought she looked like that the only time he saw her.' I recalled the long-drawn and delighted laughter which used to follow that allusion.

‘You were never much of a dancer, dear boy.’ My mother sadly shook her head over the past.

‘Ah, but at any rate,’ I answered, ‘at any rate I was a Fabian. And I went for hearty long walks in the country. I drank my pint of Five X at the Red Lion.’

‘I wish you could have gone without the beer,’ said my mother. That I had not chosen to be a total abstainer had always a little distressed her. Moreover, I had a taste for beefsteaks.

‘It was my substitute for morris dancing, if you follow me.’

But I don’t think she did follow me. We took two or three turns up and down the lawn in silence.

‘How is your paper doing?’ she asked at last.

I told her with a great show of enthusiasm about the cross between Angoras and Himalayans which we had just announced.

‘I often wish,’ she said after a pause, ‘that you had accepted the college’s offer. It would have been so good to have you here, filling the place your dear father occupied.’

She looked at me sadly. I smiled back at her as though from across a gulf. The child, I thought, grows up to forget that he is of the same flesh with his parents; but they do not forget. I wished, for her sake, that I were only five years old.

CHAPTER IV

AT FIVE YEARS old, among other things, I used to write poems which my mother thoroughly and whole-heartedly enjoyed. There was one about larks which she still preserves, along with the locks of my pale childish hair, the faded photographs, the precocious drawings of railway trains and all the other relics of the period.

Oh lark, how you do fly Right up into the sky.
How loud he sings
And quickly wags his wings.
The sun does shine,
The weather is fine.
Father says, Hark,
Do you hear the lark?

My mother likes that poem better, I believe, than anything I have written since. And I dare say that my father, if he had lived, would have shared her opinion. But then he was an ardent Wordsworthian. He knew most of the Prelude by heart. Sometimes, unexpectedly breaking that profound and god-like silence with which he always enveloped himself, he would quote a line or two. The effect was always portentous; it was as though an oracle had spoken.

I remember with particular vividness one occasion when Wordsworth broke my father's prodigious silence. It was one Easter time, when I was about twelve. We had gone to North Wales for the holidays; my father liked walking among hills and even amused himself occasionally with a little mild rock climbing. Easter was early that year, the season backward and inclement; there was snow on all the hills. On Easter Sunday my father, who considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of church-going, suggested that we should climb to the top of Snowdon. We started early; it was cold; white misty clouds shut off

the distant prospects. Silently we trudged upwards through the snow. Like the page of King Wenceslas I followed in my father's footsteps, treading in the holes he had kicked in the snow. Every now and then he would look round to see how I was getting on. Icy dewdrops hung in his brown beard. Gravely he smiled down on me as I came panting up, planting my small feet in his large tracks. He was a huge man, tall and broad-shouldered, with a face that might have been the curly-bearded original of one of those Greek busts of middle-aged statesmen or philosophers. Standing beside him, I always felt particularly small and insignificant. When I had come up with him, he would pat me affectionately on the shoulder with his large heavy hand, then turning his face towards the heights he addressed himself once more to the climb. Not a word was spoken.

As the sun mounted higher, the clouds dispersed. Through the rifted mist we saw the sky. Great beams of yellow light went stalking across the slopes of snow. By the time we reached the summit the sky was completely clear; the landscape opened out beneath us. The sun was shining brightly, but without heat; the sky was pale blue, remote and icy. Every northern slope of the glittering hills was shadowed with transparent blues or purples. Far down, to the westward, was the scalloped and indented coast, and seeming in its remoteness utterly calm, the grey sea stretched upwards and away towards the horizon. We stood there for a long time in silence, gazing at the astonishing landscape. Sometimes, I remember, I stole an anxious look at my father. What was he thinking about? I wondered. Huge and formidable he stood there, leaning on his ice-axe, turning his dark bright eyes slowly and meditatively this way and that. He spoke no word. I did not dare to break the silence. In the end he straightened himself up. He raised his ice-axe and with an emphatic gesture dug the pointed ferrule into the snow. 'Bloody fine!' he said slowly in his deep, cavernous voice. He said no more. In silence we retraced our steps towards the Pen-y-pass Hotel.

But my father had not, as I supposed, spoken his last word. When we were about half-way down I was startled and a little alarmed to hear him suddenly begin to speak. 'For I have learned,' he began abruptly (and he seemed to be speaking less for my benefit than to himself), 'to look on nature, not as in the

hour of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes the still sad music of humanity, not harsh, nor grating, but of ample power to chasten and subdue. And I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns and the round ocean and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the minds of men.' I listened to him with a kind of terror. The strange words (I had no idea at that time whence they came) reverberated mysteriously in my mind. It seemed an oracle, a divine revelation. My father ceased speaking as abruptly as he had begun. The words hung, as it were, isolated in the midst of his portentous silence. We walked on. My father spoke no more till on the threshold of the inn, sniffing the frozen air, he remarked with a profound satisfaction: 'Onions!' And then, after a second sniff: 'Fried.'

'A sense of something far more deeply interfused.' Ever since that day those words, pronounced in my father's cavernous voice, have rumbled through my mind. It took me a long time to discover that they were as meaningless as so many hiccoughs. Such is the nefarious influence of early training.

My father, however, who never contrived to rid himself of the prejudices instilled into him in childhood, went on believing in his Wordsworthian formulas till the end. Yes, he too, I am afraid, would have preferred the precocious larks to my maturer lucubrations. And yet, how competently I have learned to write! In mere justice to myself I must insist on it. Not, of course, that it matters in the least. The larks might be my masterpiece; it would not matter a pin. Still, I insist. I insist. . . .

CHAPTER V

‘QUITE THE LITTLE poet’ — how bitterly poor Keats resented the remark! Perhaps because he secretly knew that it was just. For Keats, after all, was that strange, unhappy chimaera — a little artist and a large man. Between the writer of the Odes and the writer of the letters there is all the gulf that separates a halma player from a hero.

Personally, I do not go in for heroic letters. I only modestly lay claim to being a competent second-class halma player — but a good deal more competent, I insist (though of course it doesn’t matter), than when I wrote about the larks. ‘Quite the little poet’ — always and, alas, incorrigibly I am that.

Let me offer you a specimen of my matured competence. I select it at random, as the reviewers say, from my long-projected and never-to-be-concluded series of poems on the first six Caesars. My father, I flatter myself, would have liked the title. That, at any rate, is thoroughly Wordsworthian; it is in the great tradition of that immortal ‘Needle Case in the form of a Harp.’ ‘Caligula crossing the bridge of boats between Baiae and Puteoli. By Peter Paul Rubens (b. 1577: d. 1640).’ The poem itself, however, is not very reminiscent of the Lake District.

Prow after prow the floating ships
Bridge the blue gulph; the road is laid.
And Caesar on a piebald horse
Prances with all his cavalcade.

Drunk with their own quick blood they go.
The waves flash as with seeing eyes;
The tumbling cliffs mimic their speed,
And they have filled the vacant skies

With waltzing Gods and Virtues, set
The Sea Winds singing with their shout,
Made Vesta’s temple on the headland
Spin like a twinkling roundabout.

The twined caduceus in his hand,
And having golden wings for spurs,
Young Caesar dressed as God looks on
And cheers his jolly mariners;

Cheers as they heave from off the bridge
The trippers from the seaside town;
Laughs as they bang the bobbing heads
And shove them bubbling down to drown.

There sweeps a spiral whirl of gesture
From the allegoric sky:
Beauty, like conscious lightning, runs
Through Jove’s ribbed trunk and Juno’s thigh,

Slides down the flank of Mars and takes
From Virtue’s rump a dizzier twist,
Licks round a cloud and whirling stoops
Earthwards to Caesar’s lifted fist.

A burgess tumbles from the bridge
Headlong, and hurrying Beauty slips
From Caesar through the plunging legs
To the blue sea between the ships.

Reading it through, I flatter myself that this is very nearly up to international halma form. A little more, and I shall be playing in critical test-matches against Monsieur Cocteau and Miss Amy Lowell. Enormous honour! I shrink from beneath its impendence.

But ah! those Caesars. They have haunted me for years. I have had such schemes for putting half the universe into two or three dozen poems about those monsters. All the sins, to begin with, and complementarily all the virtues. . . . Art, science, history, religion — they too were to have found their place. And God knows what besides. But they never came to much, these Caesars. The notion, I soon came to see, was too large and pretentious ever to be realized. I began (deep calls to deep) with Nero, the artist. ‘Nero and Sporus walking in the gardens of the Golden House.’

Dark stirrings in the perfumed air
Touch your cheeks, lift your hair.
With softer fingers I caress,
Sporus, all your loveliness.
Round as a fruit, tree-tangled, shines
The moon; and fire-flies in the vines,
Like stars in a delirious sky,
Gleam and go out. Unceasingly
The fountains fall, the nightingales
Sing. But time flows and love avails
Nothing. The Christians smoulder red;
Their brave blue-hearted flames are dead.
And you, sweet Sporus, you and I,
We too must die, we too must die.

But the soliloquy which followed was couched in a more philosophic key. I set forth in it all the reasons for halma’s existence — reasons which, at the time when I composed the piece, I almost believed in still. One lives and learns. Meanwhile, here it is.

The Christians by whose muddy light

Dimly, dimly I divine
Your eyes and see your pallid beauty
Like a pale night-primrose shine

Colourless in the dark, revere
A God who slowly died that they
Might suffer the less; who bore the pain
Of all time in a single day,

The pain of all men in a single
Wounded body and sad heart.

The yellow marble smooth as water
Builds me a Golden House; and there
The marble gods sleep in their strength
And the white Parian girls are fair.

Roses and waxen oleanders,
Green grape bunches and the flushed peach, —
All beautiful things I taste, touch, see,
Knowing, loving, becoming each.

The ship went down, my mother swam:
I wedded and myself was wed;
Old Claudius died of emperor-bane:
Old Seneca too slowly bled.

The wild beast and the victim both,
The ravisher and the wincing bride;
King of the world and a slave's slave,
Terror-haunted, deified —

An artist, O sweet Sporus, an artist,
All these I am and needs must be.
Is the tune Lydian? I have loved you.
And you have heard my symphony

Of wailing voices and clashed brass,
With long shrill flutings that suspend
Pain o’er a muttering gulf of terrors,
And piercing breathless joys that end

In agony — could I have made
My song of Furies were the bane
Still sap within the hemlock stalk,
The red swords virgin bright again?

Or take a child’s love that is all
Worship, all tenderness and trust,
A dawn-web, dewy and fragile — take
And with the violence of lust

Tear and defile it. You shall hear
The breaking dumbness and the thin
Harsh crying that is the very music
Of shame and the remorse of sin.

Christ died; the artist lives for all;
Loves, and his naked marbles stand
Pure as a column on the sky,
Whose lips, whose breast and thighs demand

Not our humiliation, not
The shuddering of an after shame;
And of his agonies men know
Only the beauty born of them.

Christ died, but living Nero turns
Your mute remorse to song; he gives
To idiot fate eyes like a lover's,
And while his music plays, God lives.

Romantic and noble sentiments! I protest, they do me credit.

And then there are the fragments about Tiberius; Tiberius, need I add, the representative in my symbolic scheme of love. Here is one. 'In the gardens at Capri.' (All my scenes are laid in gardens, I notice, at night, under the moon. Perhaps the fact is significant. Who knows?) Hour after hour the stars

Move, and the moon towards remoter night
Averts her cheek.
Blind now, these gardens yet remember
That there were crimson petals glossy with light,
And their remembrance is this scent of roses.
Hour after hour the stars march slowly on,
And year by year mysteriously the flowers
Unfold the same bright pattern towards the sky.

Incurious under the streaming stars,
Breathing this new yet immemorial perfume
Unmoved, I lie along the tumbled bed;
And the two women who are my bedfellows,
Whose breath is sour with wine and their soft bodies
Still hot and rank, sleep drunkenly at my side.

Commendable, I should now think, this fixture of the attention upon the relevant, the human reality in the centre of the pointless landscape. It was just at

the time I wrote this fragment that I was learning the difficult art of this exclusive concentration on the relevant. They were painful lessons. War had prepared me to receive them; Love was the lecturer.

Her name was Barbara Waters. I saw her first when I was about fourteen. She was a month or two older than I. It was at one of those enormous water picnics on the Cherwell that were organized from time to time during the summer vacation by certain fiery and energetic spirits among the dons' wives. We would start out at seven, half a dozen punt-loads of us, from the most northerly of the Oxford boat-houses and make our way up-stream for an hour or so until night had fairly set in. Then, disembarking in some solitary meadow, we would spread cloths, unpack hampers, eat hilariously. And there were so many midges that even the schoolboys were allowed to smoke cigarettes to keep them off — even the schoolgirls. And how knowingly and with what a relish we, the boys, puffed away, blowing the smoke through our noses, opening our mouths like frogs to make rings! But the girls always managed to make their cigarettes come to pieces, got the tobacco into their mouths and, making faces, had to pick the bitter-tasting threads of it from between their lips. In the end, after much giggling, they always threw their cigarettes away, not half smoked; the boys laughed, contemptuously and patronizingly. And finally we packed ourselves into the punts again and floated home, singing; our voices across the water sounded praeter-naturally sweet. A yellow moon as large as a pumpkin shone overhead; there were gleamings on the crests of the ripples and in the troughs of the tiny waves, left in the wake of the punts, shadows of almost absolute blackness. The leaves of the willow trees shone like metal. A white mist lay along the meadows. Corncrakes incessantly ran their thumbs along the teeth of combs. A faint weedy smell came up from the river; the aroma of tobacco cut violently across it in pungent gusts; sometimes the sweet animal smell of cows insinuated itself into the watery atmosphere, and looking between the willows, we would see a company of the large and gentle beasts kneeling in the grass, their heads and backs projecting like the crests of mountains above the mist, still hard at work, though the laborious day was long since over, chewing and

chewing away at a green breakfast that had merged into luncheon, at the tea that had become in due course a long-drawn-out vegetarian dinner. Munchily, squelchily, they moved their indefatigable jaws. The sound came faintly to us through the silence. Then a small clear voice would begin singing ‘Drink to me only with thine eyes’ or ‘Greensleeves.’

Sometimes, for the fun of the thing, though it was quite unnecessary, and if the weather happened to be really warm, positively disagreeable, we would light a fire, so that we might have the pleasure of eating our cold chicken and salmon mayonnaise with potatoes baked — or generally either half baked or burnt — in their jackets among the glowing cinders. It was by the light of one of these fires that I first saw Barbara. The punt in which I came had started some little time after the others; we had had to wait for a late arrival. By the time we reached the appointed supping place the others had disembarked and made all ready for the meal. The younger members of the party had collected materials for a fire, which they were just lighting as we approached. A group of figures, pale and colourless in the moonlight, were standing or sitting round the white cloth. In the black shadow of a huge elm tree a few yards further off moved featureless silhouettes. Suddenly a small flame spurted from a match and was shielded between a pair of hands that were transformed at once into hands of transparent coral. The silhouettes began to live a fragmentary life. The fire-bearing hands moved round the pyre; two or three new little flames were born. Then, to the sound of a great hurrah, the bonfire flared up. In the heart of the black shadow of the elm tree a new small universe, far vivider than the ghostly world of moonlight beyond, was suddenly created. By the light of the bright flames I saw half a dozen familiar faces belonging to the boys and girls I knew. But I hardly noticed them; I heeded only one face, a face I did not know. The leaping flame revealed it apocalyptically. Flushed, bright and with an air of being almost supernaturally alive in the quivering, changing light of the flames, it detached itself with an incredible clarity and precision from against a background of darkness which the fire had made to seem yet darker. It was the face of a young girl. She had dark hair with ruddy golden lights in it. The nose was faintly aquiline. The openings

of the eyes were narrow, long and rather slanting, and the dark eyes looked out through them as though through mysterious loopholes, brilliant, between the fringed eyelids, with an intense and secret and unutterable happiness.

The mouth seemed to share in the same exquisite secret. Not full, but delicately shaped, the unparted lips were curved into a smile that seemed to express a delight more piercing than any laughter, any outburst of joy could give utterance to. The corners of the mouth were drawn upwards so that the line of the meeting of the lips was parallel with her tilted eyes. And this slanting close-lipped smile seemed as though suspended on two little folds that wrinkled the cheeks at the corners of the mouth. The face, which was rather broad across the cheek-bones, tapered away to a pointed chin, small and firm. Her neck was round and slender; her arms, which were bare in her muslin dress, very thin.

The punt moved slowly against the current. I gazed and gazed at the face revealed by the flickering light of the fire. It seemed to me that I had never seen anything so beautiful and wonderful. What was the secret of that inexpressible joy? What nameless happiness dwelt behind those dark-fringed eyes, that silent, unemphatic, close-lipped smile? Breathlessly I gazed. I felt the tears coming into my eyes — she was so beautiful. And I was almost awed, I felt something that was almost fear, as though I had suddenly come into the presence of more than a mere mortal being, into the presence of life itself. The flame leapt up. Over the silent, secret-smiling face the tawny reflections came and went, as though wild blood were fluttering deliriously beneath the skin. The others were shouting, laughing, waving their arms. She remained perfectly still, close-lipped and narrow-eyed, smiling. Yes, life itself was standing there.

The punt bumped against the bank. ‘Catch hold,’ somebody shouted, ‘catch hold, Francis.’

Reluctantly I did as I was told; I felt as though something precious were being killed within me.

In the years that followed I saw her once or twice. She was an orphan, I learned, and had relations in Oxford with whom she came occasionally to stay. When I tried to speak to her, I always found myself too shy to do more than

stammer or say something trivial or stupid. Serenely, looking at me steadily between her eyelids, she answered. I remember not so much what she said as the tone in which she spoke — cool, calm, assured, as befitted the embodiment of life itself.

‘Do you play tennis?’ I would ask in desperation — and I could have wept at my own stupidity and lack of courage. Why are you so beautiful? What do you think about behind your secret eyes? Why are you so inexplicably happy? Those were the questions I wanted to ask her.

‘Yes, I love tennis,’ she gravely answered.

Once, I remember, I managed to advance so far along the road of coherent and intelligent conversation as to ask her what books she liked best. She looked at me unwaveringly while I spoke. It was I who reddened and turned away. She had an unfair advantage ever me — the advantage of being able to look out from between her narrowed eyelids as though from an ambush. I was in the open and utterly without protection.

‘I don’t read much,’ she said at last, when I had finished. ‘I don’t really very much like reading.’

My attempt to approach, to make contact, was baffled. At the same time I felt that I ought to have known that she wouldn’t like reading. After all, what need was there for her to read? When one is life itself, one has no use for mere books. Years later she admitted that she had always made an exception for the novels of Gene Stratton-Porter. When I was seventeen she went to live with another set of relations in South Africa.

Time passed. I thought of her constantly. All that I read of love in the poets arranged itself significantly round the memory of that lovely and secretly smiling face. My friends would boast about their little adventures. I smiled unenviously, knowing not merely in theory but by actual experience that that sort of thing was not love. Once, when I was a freshman at the university, I myself, at the end of a tipsy evening in a night club, lapsed from the purity in which I had lived up till then. Afterwards, I was horribly ashamed. And I felt that I had made myself unworthy of love. In consequence — the link of cause

and effect seems to me now somewhat difficult to discover, but at the time, I know, I found my action logical enough — in consequence I overworked myself, won two university prizes, became an ardent revolutionary and devoted many hours of my leisure to ‘social service’ in the college Mission. I was not a good social servant, got on only indifferently well with fierce young adolescents from the slums and thoroughly disliked every moment I spent in the Mission. But it was precisely for that reason that I stuck to the job. Once or twice, even, I consented to join in the morris dancing in my mother’s garden. I was making myself worthy — for what? I hardly know. The possibility of marriage seemed almost infinitely remote; and somehow I hardly desired it. I was fitting myself to go on loving and loving, and incidentally to do great things.

Then came the war. From France I wrote her a letter, in which I told her all the things I had lacked the power to say in her presence. I sent the letter to the only address I knew — she had left it years before — not expecting, not even hoping very much, that she would receive it. I wrote it for my own satisfaction, in order to make explicit all that I felt. I had no doubt that I should soon be dead. It was a letter addressed not so much to a woman as to God, a letter of explanation and apology posted to the universe.

In the winter of 1916 I was wounded. At the end of my spell in hospital I was reported unfit for further active service and appointed to a post in the contracts department of the Air Board. I was put in charge of chemicals, celluloid, rubber tubing, castor oil, linen and balloon fabrics. I spent my time haggling with German Jews over the price of chemicals and celluloid, with Greek brokers over the castor oil, with Ulstermen over the linen. Spectacled Japanese came to visit me with samples of crêpe de Chine which they tried to persuade me — and they offered choice cigars — would be both better and cheaper than cotton for the manufacture of balloons. Of every one of the letters I dictated first eleven, then seventeen, and finally, when the department had flowered to the height of its prosperity, twenty-two copies were made, to be noted and filed by the various sub-sections of the ministry concerned. The Hotel Cecil was filled with clerks. In basements two stories down beneath the surface of the ground, in attics above

the level of the surrounding chimney-pots, hundreds of young women tapped away at typewriters. In a subterranean ball-room, that looked like the setting for Belshazzar's feast, a thousand cheap lunches were daily consumed. In the hotel's best bedrooms overlooking the Thames sat the professional civil servants of long standing with letters after their names, the big business men who were helping to win the war, the staff officers. A fleet of very large motor cars waited for them in the courtyard. Sometimes, when I entered the office of a morning, I used to imagine myself a visitor from Mars. . . .

One morning — it was after I had been at the Air Board for several months — I found myself faced with a problem which could only be solved after consultation with an expert in the Naval Department. The naval people lived in the range of buildings on the opposite side of the courtyard from that in which our offices were housed. It was only after ten minutes of labyrinthine wanderings that I at last managed to find the man I was looking for. He was a genial fellow, I remember; asked me how I liked Bolo House (which was the nickname among the knowing of our precious Air Board office), gave me an East Indian cheroot and even offered whiskey and soda. After that we settled down to a technical chat about non-inflammable celluloid. I left him at last, much enlightened.

'So long,' he called after me. 'And if ever you want to know any mortal thing about acetone or any other kind of bloody dope, come to me and I'll tell you.'

'Thanks,' I said. 'And if by any chance you should happen to want to know about Apollonius Rhodius, shall we say, or Chaucer, or the history of the three-pronged fork . . .'

He roared very heartily. 'I'll come to you,' he concluded.

Still laughing, I shut the door behind me and stepped out into the corridor. A young woman was hurrying past with a thick bundle of papers in her hand, humming softly as she went. Startled by my sudden emergence, she turned and looked at me. As though with fear, my heart gave a sudden thump, then seemed to stop for a moment altogether, seemed to drop down within me.

'Barbara!'

At the sound of the name she halted and looked at me with that steady unwavering gaze between the narrowed eyelids that I knew so well. A little frown appeared on her forehead; puzzled, she pursed her lips. Then all at once her face brightened, she laughed; the light in the dark eyes joyously quivered and danced.

‘Why, it’s Francis Chelifer,’ she exclaimed. ‘I didn’t know you for the first minute. You’ve changed.’

‘You haven’t,’ I said. ‘You’re just the same.’

She said nothing, but smiled, close-lipped, and from between her lashes looked at me as though from an ambush. In her young maturity she was more beautiful than ever. Whether I was glad or sorry to see her again, I hardly know. But I do know that I was moved, profoundly; I was shaken and troubled out of whatever equanimity I possessed. That memory of a kind of symbolic loveliness for which and by which I had been living all these years was now reincarnated and stood before me, no longer a symbol, but an individual; it was enough to make one feel afraid.

‘I thought you were in South Africa,’ I went on. ‘Which is almost the same as saying I thought you didn’t exist.’

‘I came home a year ago.’

‘And you’ve been working here ever since?’

Barbara nodded.

‘And you’re working in Bolo House too?’ she asked.

‘For the last six months.’

‘Well I never! And to think we never met before! But how small the world is — how absurdly small.’

We met for luncheon.

‘Did you get my letter?’ I summoned up courage to ask her over the coffee.

Barbara nodded. ‘It was months and months on its way,’ she said; and I did not know whether she made the remark deliberately, in order to stave off for a moment the inevitable discussion of the letter, or if she made it quite spontaneously and without afterthought, because she found it interesting that the

letter should have been so long on its way. ‘It went to South Africa and back again,’ she explained.

‘Did you read it?’

‘Of course.’

‘Did you understand what I meant?’ As I asked the question I wished that I had kept silence. I was afraid of what the answer might be.

She nodded and said nothing, looking at me mysteriously, as though she had a secret and profound comprehension of everything.

‘It was something almost inexpressible,’ I said. Her look encouraged me to go on. ‘Something so deep and so vast that there were no words to describe it. You understood? You really understood?’

Barbara was silent for some time. Then with a little sigh she said: ‘Men are always silly about me. I don’t know why.’

I looked at her. Could she really have uttered those words? She was still smiling as life itself might smile. And at that moment I had a horrible premonition of what I was going to suffer. Nevertheless I asked how soon I might see her again. To-night? Could she dine with me to-night? Barbara shook her head; this evening she was engaged. What about lunch to-morrow? ‘I must think.’ And she frowned, she pursed her lips. No, she remembered in the end, to-morrow was no good. Her first moment of liberty was at dinner-time two days later.

I returned to my work that afternoon feeling particularly Martian. Eight thick files relating to the Imperial Cellulose Company lay on my desk. My secretary showed me the experts’ report on proprietary brands of castor oil, which had just come in. A rubber tubing man was particularly anxious to see me. And did I still want her to get a trunk call through to Belfast about that linen business? Pensively I listened to what she was saying. What was it all for?

‘Are men often silly about you, Miss Masson?’ it suddenly occurred to me to ask. I looked up at my secretary, who was waiting for me to answer her questions and tell her what to do.

Miss Masson became surprisingly red and laughed in an embarrassed, unnatural way. ‘Why, no,’ she said. ‘I suppose I’m an ugly duckling.’ And she added: ‘It’s rather a relief. But what makes you ask?’

She had reddish hair, bobbed and curly, a very white skin and brown eyes. About twenty-three, I supposed; and she wasn’t an ugly duckling at all. I had never talked to her except about business, and seldom looked at her closely, contenting myself with being merely aware that she was there — a secretary, most efficient.

‘What makes you ask?’ A strange expression that was like a look of terror came into Miss Masson’s eyes.

‘Oh, I don’t know. Curiosity. Perhaps you’ll see if you can get me through to Belfast some time in the afternoon. And tell the rubber tubing man that I can’t possibly see him.’

Miss Masson’s manner changed. She smiled at me efficiently, secretarially. Her eyes became quite impassive. ‘You can’t possibly see him,’ she repeated. She had a habit of repeating what other people had just said, even reproducing like an echo opinions or jokes uttered an instant before as though they were her own. She turned away and walked towards the door. I was left alone with the secret history of the Imperial Cellulose Company, the experts’ report on proprietary brands of castor oil, and my own thoughts.

Two days later Barbara and I were dining very expensively at a restaurant where the diners were able very successfully to forget that the submarine campaign was in full swing and that food was being rationed.

‘I think the decorations are so pretty,’ she said, looking round her. ‘And the music.’ (Mrs. Cloudesley Shove thought the same of the Corner Houses.) While she looked round at the architecture, I looked at her. She was wearing a rose-coloured evening dress, cut low and without sleeves. The skin of her neck and shoulders was very white. There was a bright rose in the opening of her corsage. Her arms without being bony were still very slender, like the arms of a little girl; her whole figure was slim and adolescent.

‘Why do you stare at me like that?’ she asked, when the fascination of the architecture was exhausted. She had heightened the colour of her cheeks and faintly smiling lips. Between the darkened eyelids her eyes looked brighter than usual.

‘I was wondering why you were so happy. Secretly happy, inside, all by yourself. What’s the secret? That’s what I was wondering.’

‘Why shouldn’t I be happy?’ she asked. ‘But, as a matter of fact,’ she added an instant later, ‘I’m not happy. How can one be happy when thousands of people are being killed every minute and millions more are suffering?’ She tried to look grave, as though she were in church. But the secret joy glittered irrepressibly through the slanting narrow openings of her eyes. Within its ambush her soul kept incessant holiday.

I could not help laughing. ‘Luckily,’ I said, ‘our sympathy for suffering is rarely strong enough to prevent us from eating dinner. Do you prefer lobster or salmon?’

‘Lobster,’ said Barbara. ‘But how stupidly cynical you are! You don’t believe what I say. But I do assure you, there’s not a moment when I don’t remember all those killed and wounded. And poor people too: the way they live — in the slums. One can’t be happy. Not really.’ She shook her head.

I saw that if I pursued this subject of conversation, thus forcing her to continue her pretence of being in church, I should ruin her evening and make her thoroughly dislike me. The waiter with the wine list made a timely diversion. I skimmed the pages. ‘What do you say to a quart of champagne cup?’ I suggested.

‘That would be delicious,’ she said, and was silent, looking at me meanwhile with a questioning, undecided face that did not know how to adjust itself — whether to continued gravity or to a more natural cheerfulness.

I put an end to her indecision by pointing to a diner at a neighbouring table and whispering: ‘Have you ever seen anything so like a tapir?’

She burst into a peal of delighted laughter; not so much because what I had said was particularly funny, but because it was such a tremendous relief to be

allowed to laugh again with a good conscience.

‘Or wouldn’t you have said an ant-eater?’ she suggested, looking in the direction I had indicated and then leaning across the table to speak the words softly and intimately into my ear. Her face approached, dazzlingly beautiful. I could have cried aloud. The secret happiness in her eyes was youth, was health, was uncontrollable life. The close lips smiled with a joyful sense of power. A rosy perfume surrounded her. The red rose between her breasts was brilliant against the white skin. I was aware suddenly that under the glossy silk of her dress was a young body, naked. Was it for this discovery that I had been preparing myself all these years?

After dinner we went to a music hall, and when the show was over to a night club where we danced. She told me that she went dancing almost every night. I did not ask with whom. She looked appraisingly at all the women who came in, asked me if I didn’t think this one very pretty, that most awfully attractive; and when, on the contrary, I found them rather repulsive, she was annoyed with me for being insufficiently appreciative of her sex. She pointed out a red-haired woman at another table and asked me if I liked women with red hair. When I said that I preferred Buckle’s History of Civilization, she laughed as though I had said something quite absurdly paradoxical. It was better when she kept silence; and fortunately she had a great capacity for silence, could use it even as a defensive weapon, as when, to questions that at all embarrassed or nonplussed her, she simply returned no answer, however often they were repeated, smiling all the time mysteriously and as though from out of another universe.

We had been at the night club about an hour, when a stoutish and flabby young man, very black-haired, very dark-skinned, with a large fleshy nose and a nostril curved in an opulent oriental volute, came sauntering in with a lordly air of possession. He wore a silver monocle in his left eye, and among the irrepressible black stubbles of his chin the grains of poudre de riz glittered like little snowflakes. Catching sight of Barbara he smiled, lavishly, came up to our table and spoke to her. Barbara seemed very glad to see him.

‘Such a clever man,’ she explained, when he had moved away to another table with the red-haired lady to whom I preferred the History of Civilization. ‘He’s a Syrian. You ought to get to know him. He writes poetry too, you know.’

I was unhappy the whole evening; but at the same time I wished it would never end. I should have liked to go on for ever sitting in that stuffy cellar, where the jazz band sounded so loud that it seemed to be playing inside one’s head. I would have breathed the stale air and wearily danced for ever, I would even have listened for ever to Barbara’s conversation — for ever, so that I might have been allowed to be near her, to look at her, to speculate, until she next spoke, on the profound and lovely mysteries behind her eyes, on the ineffable sources of that secret joy which kept her faintly and yet how intently and how rapturously smiling.

The weeks passed. I saw her almost every day. And every day I loved her more violently and painfully, with a love that less and less resembled the religious passion of my boyhood. But it was the persistent memory of that passion which made my present desire so parching and tormenting, that filled me with a thirst that no possible possession could assuage. No possible possession, since whatever I might possess, as I realized more and more clearly each time I saw her, would be utterly different from what I had desired all these years to possess. I had desired all beauty, all that exists of goodness and truth, symbolized and incarnate in one face. And now the face drew near, the lips touched mine; and what I had got was simply a young woman with a ‘temperament,’ as the euphemists who deplore the word admiringly and lovingly qualify the lascivious thing. And yet, against all reason, in spite of all the evidence, I could not help believing that she was somehow and secretly what I had imagined her. My love for her as a symbol strengthened my desire for her as an individual woman.

All this, were it to happen to me now, would seem perfectly natural and normal. If I were to make love to a young woman, I should know precisely what I was making love to. But that, in those days, was something I still had to learn. In Barbara’s company I was learning it with a vengeance. I was learning that it is

possible to be profoundly and slavishly in love with some one for whom one has no esteem, whom one does not like, whom one regards as a bad character and who, finally, not only makes one unhappy but bores one. And why not, I might now ask, why not? That things should be like this is probably the most natural thing in the world. But in those days I imagined that love ought always to be mixed up with affection and admiration, with worship and an intellectual rapture, as unflagging as that which one experiences during the playing of a symphony. Sometimes, no doubt, love does get involved with some or all of these things; sometimes these things exist by themselves, apart from love. But one must be prepared to swallow one's love completely neat and unadulterated. It is a fiery, crude and somewhat poisonous draught.

Every hour I spent with Barbara brought fresh evidence of her inability to play the ideal part my imagination had all these years been assigning to her. She was selfish, thirsty for pleasures of the most vulgar sort, liked to bask in an atmosphere of erotic admiration, amused herself by collecting adorers and treating them badly, was stupid and a liar — in other words, was one of the normal types of healthy young womanhood. I should have been less disturbed by these discoveries if only her face had been different. Unfortunately, however, the healthy young woman who now revealed herself had the same features as that symbolic child on the memory of whose face I had brooded through all an ardent adolescence. And the contrast between what she was and what — with that dazzling and mysteriously lovely face — she ought to have been, what in my imagination she indeed had been, was a perpetual source of surprise and pain. And at the same time the nature of my passion for her had changed — changed inevitably and profoundly, the moment she ceased to be a symbol and became an individual. Now, I desired her; before, I had loved her for God's sake and almost as though she were herself divine. And contrasting this new love with the love I had felt before, I was ashamed, I fancied myself unworthy, base, an animal. And I tried to persuade myself that if she seemed different it was because I felt differently and less nobly towards her. And sometimes, when we sat silent through long summer twilights under the trees in the Park, or at my Chelsea

rooms, looking out on to the river, I could persuade myself for a precarious moment that Barbara was what she had been in my imagination and that I felt towards her now what I had felt towards the memory of her. In the end, however, Barbara would break the magic silence and with it the illusion.

‘It’s such a pity,’ she would say pensively, ‘that July hasn’t got an r in it. Otherwise we might have had supper in an oyster bar.’

Or else, remembering that I was a literary man, she would look at the gaudy remains of the sunset and sigh. ‘I wish I were a poet,’ she would say.

And I was back again among the facts, and Barbara was once more a tangible young woman who bored me, but whom I desired — with what a definite and localized longing! — to kiss, to hold fast and caress.

It was a longing which, for some time, I rigorously suppressed. I fought against it as against an evil thing, too horribly unlike my previous love, too outrageously incompatible with my conception of Barbara’s higher nature. I had not yet learned to reconcile myself to the fact that Barbara’s higher nature was an invention of my own, a figment of my proper imagination.

One very hot evening in July I drove her to the door of the house in Regent Square, Bloomsbury, in which she occupied a little flat under the roof. We had been dancing and it was late; a hunch-backed moon had climbed a third of the way up the sky and was shining down into the square over the shoulder of the church that stands on its eastern side. I paid off the cabman and we were left alone on the pavement. I had been bored and irritated the whole evening; but at the thought that I should have to bid her good-night and walk off by myself I was filled with such an anguish that the tears came into my eyes. I stood there in silent irresolution, looking into her face. It was calmly and mysteriously smiling as though to itself and for some secret reason; her eyes were very bright. She too was silent, not restlessly, not irresolutely as I was silent, but easily, with a kind of majesty. She could live in silence, when she so desired, like a being in its proper element.

‘Well,’ I brought myself to say at last, ‘I must go.’

‘Why not come in for a final cup of tea?’ she suggested.

Actuated by that spirit of perversity which makes us do what we do not want to do, what we know will make us suffer as much as it is possible in the given circumstance to suffer, I shook my head. ‘No,’ I said. ‘I must get back.’

I had never longed for anything more passionately than I longed to accept Barbara’s invitation.

She repeated it. ‘Do come in,’ she said. ‘It won’t take a minute to make tea on the gas ring.’

Again I shook my head, in too much anguish, this time, to be able to speak. My trembling voice, I was afraid, would have betrayed me. Instinctively I knew that if I went into the house with her we should become lovers. My old determination to resist what had seemed the baser desires strengthened my resolution not to go in.

‘Well, if you won’t,’ she shrugged her shoulders, ‘then good-night.’ Her voice had a note of annoyance in it.

I shook her hand and walked dumbly away. When I had gone ten yards my resolution abjectly broke down. I turned. Barbara was still standing on the doorstep, trying to fit the latchkey into the lock.

‘Barbara,’ I called in a voice that sounded horribly unnatural in my own ears. I hurried back. She turned to look at me. ‘Do you mind if I change my mind and accept your invitation after all? I find I really am rather thirsty.’ What a humiliation, I thought.

She laughed. ‘What a goose you are, Francis.’ And she added in a bantering tone: ‘If you weren’t such a silly old dear I’d tell you to go to the nearest horse-trough and drink there.’

‘I’m sorry,’ I said. Standing once more close to her, breathing once again her rosy perfume, I felt as I had felt when, a child, I had run down from my terrifying night nursery to find my mother sitting in the dining-room — reassured, relieved of a hideous burden, incredibly happy, but at the same time profoundly miserable in the consciousness that what I was doing was against all the rules, was a sin, the enormity of which I could judge from the very mournful tenderness of my mother’s eyes and the severe, portentous silence out of which,

as though from a thundercloud, my huge and bearded father looked at me like an outraged god. I was happy, being with Barbara; I was utterly miserable because I was not with her, so to speak, in the right way: I was not I; she, for all that the features were the same, was no longer herself. I was happy at the thought that I should soon be kissing her; miserable because that was not how I wanted to love my imaginary Barbara; miserable too, when I secretly admitted to myself the existence of the real Barbara, because I felt it an indignity to be the slave of such a mistress.

'Of course, if you want me to go,' I said, reacting feebly again towards revolt, 'I'll go.' And desperately trying to be facetious, 'I'm not sure that it wouldn't be best if I drowned myself in that horse-trough,' I added.

'As you like,' she said lightly. The door was open now; she walked into the darkness. I followed her, closing the door behind me carefully. We groped our way up steep dark stairs. She unlocked another door, turned a switch. The sudden light was dazzling.

'All's well that ends well,' she said, smiling at me, and she slipped the cloak from off her bare shoulders.

On the contrary, I thought, it was the tragedy of errors. I stepped towards her, I stretched out my hands and gripped her by her two thin arms a little below the shoulder. I bent down and kissed her averted cheek; she turned her face towards me, and it was her mouth.

There is no future, there is no more past;
No roots nor fruits, but momentary flowers.
Lie still, only lie still and night will last
Silent and dark, not for a space of hours,
But everlastingly. Let me forget
All but your perfume, every night but this,
The shame, the fruitless weeping, the regret.
Only lie still: this faint and quiet bliss
Shall flower upon the brink of sleep and spread
Till there is nothing else but you and I

Clasped in a timeless silence. But like one
Who, doomed to die, at morning will be dead,
I know, though night seem dateless, that the sky
Must brighten soon before to-morrow's sun.

It was then that I learned to live only in the moment — to ignore causes, motives, antecedents, to refuse responsibility for what should follow. It was then that I learned, since the future was always bound to be a painful repetition of what had happened before, never to look forward for comfort or justification, but to live now and here in the heart of human reality, in the very centre of the hot dark hive. But there is a spontaneous thoughtlessness which no thoughtful pains can imitate. Being what I am, I shall never rival with those little boys who throw their baby sisters over the cliff for the sake of seeing the delightful splash; never put a pistol to my head and for the mere fun of the thing pull the trigger; never, looking down from the gallery at Covent Garden at the thronged Wagnerites or Saint-Saënsians in the stalls below, lightly toss down that little hand-grenade (however piercingly amusing the jest might be), which I still preserve, charged with its pound of high explosive, in my hat-box, ready for all emergencies. Such gorgeous carelessness of all but the immediate sensation I can only remotely imitate. But I do my best, and I did it always conscientiously with Barbara. Still, the nights always did come to an end. And even during them, lapped in the temperament, I could never, even for an instant, be quite unaware of who she was, who I was and had been and would be to-morrow. The recollection of these things deprived every rapture of its passionate integrity and beneath the surface of every calm and silent trance spread out a profound uneasiness. Kissing her I wished that I were not kissing her, holding her in my arms I wished that it were somebody else I was holding. And sometimes in the dark quiet silences I thought that it would be better if I were dead.

Did she love me? At any rate she often said so, even in writing. I have all her letters still — a score of scribbled notes sent up by messenger from one wing of the Hotel Cecil to the other and a few longer letters written when she was on her holiday or week-ending somewhere apart from me. Here, I spread out the sheets.

It is a competent, well-educated writing; the pen rarely leaves the paper, running on from letter to letter, from word to word. A rapid writing, flowing, clear and legible. Only here and there, generally towards the ends of her brief notes, is the clarity troubled; there are scrawled words made up of formless letters. I pore over them in an attempt to interpret their meaning. ‘I adore you, my beloved . . . kiss you a thousand times . . . long for it to be night . . . love you madly.’ These are the fragmentary meanings I contrive to disengage from the scribbles. We write such things illegibly for the same reason as we clothe our bodies. Modesty does not permit us to walk naked, and the expression of our most intimate thoughts, our most urgent desires and secret memories, must not — even when we have so far done violence to ourselves as to commit the words to paper — be too easily read and understood. Pepys, when he recorded the most scabrous details of his loves, is not content with writing in cipher; he breaks into bad French as well. And I remember, now that I mention Pepys, having done the same sort of thing in my own letters to Barbara; winding up with a ‘Bellissima, ti voglio un bene enorme,’ or a ‘Je t’embrasse un peu partout.’

But did she love me? In a kind of way I think she did. I gratified her vanity. Her successes so far had mostly been with genial young soldiers. She had counted few literary men among her slaves. And being infected with the queer snobbery of those who regard an artist, or any one calling himself by that name, as somehow superior to other beings — she was more impressed by a Café Royal loafer than by an efficient officer, and considered that it was a more arduous and finer thing to be able to paint, or even appreciate, a cubist picture or play a piece by Bartok on the piano than to run a business or plead in a court of law — being therefore deeply convinced of my mysterious importance and significance — she was flattered to have me abjectly gambolling around her. There is a German engraving of the sixteenth century, made at the time of the reaction against scholasticism, which represents a naked Teutonic beauty riding on the back of a bald and bearded man, whom she directs with a bridle and urges on with a switch. The old man is labelled Aristotle. After two thousand years of slavery to the infallible sage it was a good revenge. To Barbara, no doubt, I

appeared as a kind of minor Aristotle. But what made the comparison somewhat less flattering to me was the fact that she was equally gratified by the attentions of another literary man, the swarthy Syrian with the blue jowl and the silver monocle. Even more gratified, I think; for he wrote poems which were frequently published in the monthly magazines (mine, alas, were not) and, what was more, he never lost an opportunity of telling people that he was a poet; he was for ever discussing the inconveniences and compensating advantages of possessing an artistic temperament. That, for a time at any rate, she preferred me to the Syrian was due to the fact that I was quite unattached and far more hopelessly in love with Barbara than he. The red-haired and, to me, inferior substitute for Buckle's History engrossed the greater part of his heart at this time. Moreover, he was a calm and experienced lover who did not lose his head about trifles. From me Barbara got passion of a kind she could not have hoped for from the Syrian — a passion which, in spite of my reluctance, in spite of my efforts to resist it, reduced me to a state of abjection at her feet. It is pleasant to be worshipped, to command and inflict pain; Barbara enjoyed these things as much as any one.

It was the Syrian who in the end displaced me. I had noticed in October that friends from South Africa, with whom it was necessary for Barbara to lunch and dine, kept arriving in ever increasing quantities. And when it wasn't friends from South Africa it was Aunt Phoebe, who had become suddenly importunate. Or old Mr. Goble, the one who had known her grandfather so well.

When I asked her to describe these festivities, she either said: 'Oh, it was dreadfully dull. We talked about the family,' or merely smiled, shrugged her shoulders and retired into her impregnable silence.

'Why do you lie to me?' I asked.

She preserved her silence and her secret smile.

There were evenings when I insisted that she should throw over the friends from South Africa and dine with me. Reluctantly she would consent; but she took her revenge on these occasions by talking about all the jolly men she had known.

One evening, when, in spite of all my entreaties, my threats and commands, she had gone to dine with Aunt Phoebe in Golders Green and stay the night, I kept watch in Regent Square. It was a damp, cold night. From nine o'clock till past midnight I remained at my post, marching up and down opposite the house where she lived. As I walked I ran the point of my stick with a rattling noise along the railings which surrounded the gardens in the middle of the square; that rattling accompanied my thoughts. From the dank black trees overhead an occasional heavy drop would fall. I must have walked twelve miles that evening.

In those three hours I thought of many things. I thought of the suddenly leaping bonfire and the young face shining in the darkness. I thought of my boyish love, and then how I had seen that face again and the different love it had inspired in the man. I thought of kisses, caresses, whispers in the darkness. I thought of the Syrian with his black eyebrows and his silver monocle, his buttery dark skin damply shining through the face-powder, and the powder snowy white among the black stubbles of his jowl. She was probably with him at this moment. Monna Vanna, Monna Bice— 'Love's not so pure and abstract as they use to say, who have no mistress but their Muse.' Reality gives imagination the lie direct. Barbara is the truth, I thought, and that she likes the man with the silver monocle is the truth, and that I have slept with her is the truth, and that he has too is quite probably the truth.

And it is the truth that men are cruel and stupid and that they suffer themselves to be driven even to destruction by shepherds as stupid as themselves. I thought of my passion for universal justice, of my desire that all men should be free, leisured, educated, of my imaginations of a future earth peopled by human beings who should live according to reason. But of what use is leisure, when leisure is occupied with listening-in and going to football matches? freedom, when men voluntarily enslave themselves to politicians like those who now rule the world? education, when the literate read the evening papers and the fiction magazines? And the future, the radiant future — supposing that it should differ from the past in anything but the spread of material comfort and spiritual uniformity, suppose it conceivably were to be in

some way superior, what has that to do with me? Nothing whatever. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

I was interrupted in my meditations by a policeman who came up to me, politely touched his helmet and asked me what I was doing. ‘I seen you walking up and down here for the last hour,’ he said. I gave him half a crown and told him I was waiting for a lady. The policeman laughed discreetly. I laughed too. Indeed, the joke was a marvellously good one. When he was gone, I went on with my walking.

And this war, I thought. Was there the slightest prospect that any good would come of it? The war to end war! The argument was forcible enough this time; it was backed up with a kick in the breech, the most terrific kick ever administered. But would it convince humanity more effectively than any other argument had ever done?

Still, men are courageous, I thought, are patient, kind, self-sacrificing. But they are all the contradictory things, as well — and both, good and bad, because they can’t help it. Forgive them, for they know not what they do. Everything arises from a great primeval animal stupidity. That is the deepest of all realities — stupidity, the being unaware.

And the aware, the not stupid — they are the odd exceptions, they are irrelevant to the great reality, they are lies like the ideal of love, like dreams of the future, like belief in justice. To live among their works is to live in a world of bright falsehoods, apart from the real world; it is to escape. Escape is cowardly; to be comforted by what is untrue or what is irrelevant to the world in which we live is stupid.

And my own talents, such as they are, are irrelevant. So is the art to whose service I devote them, a lying consolation. A Martian would find the writing of phrases containing words of similar sound at fixed recurrent intervals as queer as buying castor oil for the lubrification of machines of destruction. I remembered the lines I had written for Barbara — the cheerful comic-amorous lines — at the time of the last epidemic of air raids. The octo-syllables jingled in my head.

But when the next full moon invites

New bugaboos and fly-by-nights,
Let us seek out some deep alcove,
Some immemorial haunt of love.
There we'll retire with cakes and wine
And dare the imbecile to shine. . . .

I was just repeating them to myself, when a taxi turned into the quiet square, rolled slowly along the curb and came to a halt in front of the house where Barbara lived. By the dim light of a muffled street lamp I saw two people stepping out of it, a man and a woman. The masculine silhouette moved forward and, bending over his hand, began to count money by the light of the little lamp at the recording clock-face. In the narrow beam I saw the glitter of a monocle. Money clinked, the taxi drove away. The two figures mounted the steps; the door opened before them, they passed into the house.

I walked away, repeating to myself every injurious and abusive word that can be applied to a woman. I felt, if anything, rather relieved. It pleased me to think that all was over, all was now definitely and for ever done with.

' 'Night, sir.'

It was the friendly policeman; I thought I heard an almost imperceptible note of amusement in his voice.

For the next four days I made no sign of life. Every day I hoped that she would write or telephone to ask what had become of me. She did nothing of the kind. My sense of relief had turned into a feeling of misery. On the fifth day, as I was going out to lunch, I met her in the courtyard. She made no reference to the unprecedented length of my silence. I said none of the bitter things that I had planned to say in the event of just such an accidental meeting as this. Instead, I asked her, I implored her even, to come to lunch. Barbara declined the invitation; she had a South African engagement.

'Come to dinner, then,' I abjectly begged. Humiliation, I felt, could go no further. I would give anything to be received back into grace.

Barbara shook her head. 'I wish I could,' she said. 'But that tiresome old Mr. Goble . . .'

CHAPTER VI

SUCH, THEN, WERE the phantoms that my recitation called up to dance on the surface of the Tyrrhenian. Salutarily they reminded me that I was only on my holiday, that the landscape in the midst of which I was now floating was hardly better than an illusion and that life was only real and earnest during the eleven months of each year which I spent between Gog's Court and Miss Carruthers's. I was a democratic Englishman and a Londoner at that, living in an age when the Daily Mail sells two million copies every morning; I had no right to so much sunlight, so tepid and clear a sea, such spiky mountains, such clouds, such blue expanses of sky; I had no right to Shelley; and if I were a true democrat, then I ought not even to think. But again I must plead my congenital weakness.

Couched on the water, I was dreaming of the ideal democratic state where no irrelevant Holy Ghost-possessed exception should trouble the flat serenity of the rule — the rule of Cloudesley and Carruthers, Fluffy and the alert, inimitable Brimstone — when all at once I became aware that a sailing-boat was coming up behind me, was right on top of me, in fact. The white sail towered over me; with a little sizzling ripple at the prow, with a clop clop of tiny waves against its flanks, the brown varnished boat bore quickly down on me. It is a horrible thing to be afraid, to be shaken by that sudden spasm of fear which cannot be controlled because it comes so quickly that the controlling forces of the mind are taken unaware. Every cell in the body, it seems, feels terror; from a man one is humiliated for a moment into a congeries of shrinking amoebae. One descends the scale of being; one drops down the evolutionary gamut to become for a second no more than a startled and terrified beast. One moment I had been dozing on my translucent mattress, like a philosopher; the next I was inarticulately shouting, frantically moving my limbs to escape from the approaching and now inevitable peril.

‘Hi!’ I was yelling, and then something caught me a fearful crack on the side of the head and pushed me down into the water. I was conscious of swallowing a vast quantity of brine, of breathing water into my lungs and violently choking. Then for a time I knew nothing; the blow must momentarily have stunned me. I became more or less conscious again, to find myself just coming to the surface, my face half in, half out of water. I was coughing and gasping — coughing to get rid of the water that was in my lungs, gasping for air. Both processes, I now perceive, achieved exactly the contrary of what they were intended to achieve. For I coughed up all the stationary air that was in my lungs and, my mouth being under water, I drew in fresh gulps of brine. Meanwhile my blood, loaded with carbonic acid gas, kept rushing to my lungs in the hope of exchanging the deadly stuff for oxygen. In vain; there was no oxygen to exchange it for.

I felt an extraordinary pain in the back of my neck — not excruciating, but dull; dull and far-reaching and profound, and at the same time strangely disgusting — a sickening, revolting sort of pain. The nerves controlling my respiratory system were giving up in despair; that disgusting pain in my neck was their gesture of farewell, their last spasm of agony. Slowly I ceased to be conscious; I faded gradually out of life like the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland. The last thing that was left of me, that continued to hang in my consciousness when everything else had vanished, was the pain.

In the circumstances, I know, it would have been the classical thing if all my past life had unwound itself in a flash before the mind’s eye. Whiz — an uninteresting drama in thirty-two reels ought duly to have run its course and I should have remembered everything, from the taste of the baby food in my bottle to the taste of yesterday’s marsala at the Grand Hotel, from my first caning to my last kiss. In point of fact, however, none of the correct things happened. The last thoughts I remember thinking as I went down were about the Rabbit Fanciers’ Gazette and my mother. In a final access of that conscientiousness which has haunted and handicapped me all my life long, I reflected that I ought to have another leading article ready by next Friday. And it struck me very forcibly that my mother would be most seriously inconvenienced when she

arrived in a few days' time to find that I was no longer in a position to accompany her on her journey to Rome.

When I next came to my senses I was lying face downwards on the beach with somebody sitting astride of my back, as though we were playing horses, using Professor Schaefer's method of producing artificial respiration. 'Uno, due, tre, quattro' — and at every 'quattro' the man on my back threw his weight forward on to his hands, which were resting, one on either side of the spine, on my lower ribs. The contents of my lungs were violently expelled. Then my rescuer straightened himself up again, the pressure was relaxed and my lungs replenished themselves with air. 'Uno, due, tre, quattro' — the process began again.

'He's breathing! He's all right. He's opening his eyes!'

Carefully, as though I were a crate of very valuable china, they turned me right way up. I was aware of the strong sunshine, of a throbbing headache centred somewhere above the left temple, of a crowd of people standing round. With deliberation and consciously I breathed the air; loud voices shouted instructions. Two people began to rub the soles of my feet. A third ran up with a child's bucket full of sun-scorched sand and poured it on the pit of my stomach. This happy thought immediately had an immense success. All the curious and sympathetic spectators who had been standing round my corpse, looking on while Professor Schaefer was being applied to me and wishing that they could do something to help, now discovered that there was actually something helpful that they could do. They could help to restore my circulation by sprinkling hot sand on me. In a moment I had a dozen sympathizers busy around me, skimming the cream off the hot tideless beach in little buckets, with spades or in the palms of their scooping hands, to pour it over me. In a few seconds I was almost buried under a mound of burning grey sand. On the faces of all my good Samaritans I noticed an expression of child-like earnestness. They rushed backwards and forwards with their little buckets as though there were nothing more serious in life than building sand castles on the stomachs of drowned men. And the children themselves joined in. Horrified at first by the spectacle of my limp and

livid corpse, they had clung to paternal hands, shrunk away behind protecting skirts, looking on while Professor Schaefer was being practised on me, with a reluctant and disgusted curiosity. But when I had come alive again, when they saw their elders burying me with sand and understood that it was really only a tremendously good game, then how violent was their reaction! Shrilly laughing, whooping with excitement and delight, they rushed on me with their little implements. It was only with difficulty that they could be prevented from throwing handfuls of sand in my face, from pouring it into my ears, from making me eat it. And one small boy, ambitious to do something that nobody else had done, rushed down to the sea, filled his bucket with water and stale foam, ran back and emptied its contents, with what a shout of triumph! plop, from a height on to my solar plexus.

That was too much for my gravity. I began to laugh. But I did not get very far with my laughter. For after the first outburst of it, when I wanted to take breath for the next, I found that I had forgotten how to breathe, and it was only after a long choking struggle that I managed to reacquire the art. The children were frightened; this was no part of the delightful game. The grown-ups stopped being helpful and allowed themselves to be driven away from my corpse by the competent authorities. An umbrella was planted in the sand behind me. Within its rosy shadow I was left in peace to make secure my precarious footing on existence. For a long time I lay with my eyes shut. An immensely long way off, it seemed, somebody was still rubbing my feet. Periodically, somebody else pushed a spoon with brandy and milk in it into my mouth. I felt very tired, but wonderfully comfortable. And it seemed to me at that moment that there could be nothing more exquisitely pleasurable than merely breathing.

After a while, I felt sufficiently strong and sufficiently safe in my strength to open my eyes again and look about me. How novel, how wonderfully charming everything seemed! The first thing I saw was a half-naked young giant crouching obsequiously at my feet, rubbing my bloodless soles and ankles. Under his shining copper skin there was a sliding of muscles. His face was like a Roman’s, his hair jet black and curly. When he noticed that I had opened my eyes and was

looking at him he smiled, and his teeth were brilliantly white, his brown eyes flashed from a setting of shiny bluish enamel.

A voice asked me in Italian how I was feeling. I looked round. A stout man with a large red, rubbery face and a black moustache was sitting beside me. In one hand he held a teacup, in the other a spoon. He was dressed in white duck. The sweat was pouring off his face; he looked as though he had been buttered. From all round his very bright black eyes little wrinkles spread out like rays from a gloria. He proffered the spoon. I swallowed. The backs of his large brown hands were covered with fine hairs.

'I am the doctor,' he explained, and smiled.

I nodded and smiled back. It seemed to me that I had never seen such a lovely doctor before.

And then, when I looked up, there was the blue sky, beautifully scalloped by the edge of the pink umbrella. And lowering my eyes I saw people standing round looking at me — all smiling. Between them I caught glimpses of the blue sea.

'Belli sono,' I said to the doctor, and shut my eyes again.

And many men so beautiful. . . . In the blood-red darkness behind my eyelids I listened to their voices. Slowly, voluptuously, I breathed the salty air. The young giant went on rubbing my feet. With an effort I lifted one of my hands and laid it on my chest. Lightly, like a blind man feeling for the sense of a page of Braille, I ran my fingers over the smooth skin. I felt the ribs and the little depressions between them. And all at once, under my finger tips, I was aware of a hardly perceptible throbbing — pulse, pulse, pulse — it was that I had been searching for. The blind fingers creeping across the page had spelled out a strange word. I did not try to interpret it. It was enough to be glad that the word was there. For a long time I lay quite still, feeling my beating heart.

'Si sente meglio?' asked the doctor.

I opened my eyes. 'Mi sento felice.' He smiled at me. The rays round the twin bright glories of his eyes emphasized themselves. It was as though the holy symbol had somehow suddenly become more holy.

‘It is good not to be dead,’ he said.

‘It is very good.’

And I looked once more at the sky and the pink umbrella overhead. I looked at the young giant, so strong and yet so docile at my feet. I turned my eyes to right and left. The circle of curious spectators had dissolved. Out of danger, I had ceased to be an object of sympathy or curiosity. The holiday-makers were going about their business as usual. I watched them, happily.

A young couple in bathing dresses walked slowly past me towards the sea. Their faces, their necks and shoulders, their bare arms and legs were burned to a soft transparent brown. They walked slowly, holding hands, walked with such a grace, such an easy majesty that I felt like weeping. They were very young, they were tall, slender and strong. They were beautiful as a couple of young thoroughbred horses; gracefully, idly, majestically they seemed to be walking in a world that was beyond good and evil. It did not matter what they might do or say; they were justified by the mere fact that they existed. They paused, looked at me for a moment, one with brown eyes, one with grey, flashed at me with their white teeth, asked how I was, and when I told them that I was better, smiled again and passed on.

A little girl dressed in a primrose-coloured garment that was paler in tone than her dark face and limbs came running up, halted two or three yards away and began to look at me earnestly. Her eyes were very large and fringed by absurdly long black lashes. Above them there expanded an immense domed forehead that would have done credit to a philosopher. Her snub nose was so small that you hardly noticed it was there at all. Black and frizzy, her hair stood out, in a state of permanent explosion, round her head. For a long time she stared at me. I stared back.

‘What do you want?’ I asked at last.

And suddenly, at the sound of my voice, the child was overwhelmed by shyness. She covered her face with her forearm as though she were warding off a blow. Then, after a second or two, she peeped out at me cautiously from under her elbow. Her face had become quite red. I called again. It was once too often.

She turned and ran away, ran back to her family, who were sitting, twenty yards down the beach, in the precarious and shifting oasis of shadow cast by a large striped umbrella. I saw her hurl herself into the arms of a large placid mother in white muslin. Then, having successfully abolished my existence by burying her face in the comfortable bosom, she slid down again from her mother's knee and went on playing with her little sister, serenely, as though the untoward incident had never occurred.

Mournfully, from somewhere in the distance, came the long, suspended cry of the vendor of doughnuts. 'Bomboloni.' Two young American marchesas in purple bathing gowns went past, talking together on one note, in indefatigable even voices. '. . . and he has such a lovely mentality,' I heard one of them saying. 'But what I like,' said the other, who seemed to have acquired more completely the Latin habit of mind, 'what I like is his teeth.' A middle-aged man, with the large stomach that comes of too much pasta, and a very thin little boy of twelve now entered my field of vision, all wet and shiny from the sea. The hot sand burned their feet and they went hopping across the scorching beach with an agility which it was good to see. But the soles of mad Concetta's feet were made of hornier stuff. Barefooted, she walked down every morning from the mountains, carrying her basket of fruit over one arm and holding in the other hand a long staff. She hawked her wares along the beach, she went the round of the villas until her basket was empty. Then she walked back again, across the plain and up into the hills. Turning from the fat man and the little thin boy I saw her standing before me. She was dressed in a stained and tattered old dress. Her grey hair escaped in wisps from under a wide straw hat. Her old face was eager, thin and sharp; the wrinkled skin was like brown parchment stretched over the bones. Leaning on her staff, she looked at me for a little in silence.

'So you're the drowned foreigner,' she said at last.

'If he were drowned, how could he be alive?' asked the doctor. The young giant found this exquisitely witty; he laughed profoundly, out of the depths of his huge chest. 'Go away now, Concetta,' the doctor went on. 'He must be kept quiet. We can't have you treating him to one of your discourses.'

Concetta paid no attention to him. She was used to this sort of thing.

‘The mercy of God,’ she began, shaking her head, ‘where should we be without it? You are young, signorino. You still have time to do much. God has preserved you. I am old. But I lean on the cross.’ And straightening herself up, she lifted her staff. A cross-piece of wood had been nailed near the top of it. Affectionately she kissed it. ‘I love the cross,’ she said. ‘The cross is beautiful, the cross is . . .’ But she was interrupted by a young nurserymaid who came running up to ask for half a kilo of the best grapes. Theology could not be allowed to interfere with business. Concetta took out her little steelyard, put a bunch of grapes in the pan and moved the weight back and forth along the bar in search of equilibrium. The nurserymaid stood by. She had a round face, red cheeks, dimples, black hair and eyes like black buttons. She was as plump as a fruit. The young giant looked up at her in frank admiration. She rolled the buttons towards him — for an instant, then utterly ignored him, and humming nonchalantly to herself as though she were alone on a desert island and wanted to keep her spirits up, she gazed pensively away at the picturesque beauties of nature.

‘Six hundred grammes,’ said Concetta.

The nurserymaid paid for them, and still humming, still on her desert island, she walked off, taking very small steps, undulating rotundly, like a moon among wind-driven clouds. The young giant stopped rubbing my feet and stared after her. With the moon’s beauty and the moon’s soft pace the nurserymaid tottered along, undulating unsteadily on her high heels across the sand.

Rabear, I thought: old Skeat was perfectly right to translate the word as he did.

‘Bella grassa,’ said the doctor, voicing what were obviously the young giant’s sentiments. Mine too; for after all, she was alive, obeyed the laws of her nature, walked in the sun, ate grapes and rabear’d. I shut my eyes again. Pulse, pulse, pulse; the heart beat steadily under my fingers. I felt like Adam, newly created and weak like a butterfly fresh from its chrysalis — the red clay still too wet and limp to allow of my standing upright. But soon, when it had dried to firmness, I

should arise and scamper joyously about this span new world, and be myself a young giant, a graceful and majestic thoroughbred, a child, a wondering Bedlamite.

There are some people who contrive to pass their lives in a state of permanent convalescence. They behave at every moment as though they had been miraculously preserved from death the moment before; they live exhilaratedly for the mere sake of living and can be intoxicated with happiness just because they happen not to be dead. For those not born convalescent it may be that the secret of happiness consists in being half-drowned regularly three times a day before meals. I recommend it as a more drastic alternative to my 'water-shoot-in-every-office' remedy for ennui.

'You're alone here?' asked the doctor.

I nodded.

'No relations?'

'Not at present.'

'No friends of any kind?'

I shook my head.

'H'm,' he said.

He had a wart growing on one side of his nose where it joined the cheek. I found myself studying it intently; it was a most interesting wart, whitish, but a little flushed on its upper surface. It looked like a small unripe cherry. 'Do you like cherries?' I asked.

The doctor seemed rather surprised. 'Yes,' he said, after a moment's silence and with great deliberation, as though he had been carefully weighing the matter in his mind.

'So do I.' And I burst out laughing. This time, however, my breathing triumphantly stood the strain. 'So do I. But not unripe ones,' I added, gasping with mirth. It seemed to me that nothing funnier had ever been said.

And then Mrs. Aldwinkle stepped definitely into my life. For, looking round, still heaving with the after-swell of my storm of laughter, I suddenly saw the Chinese lantern lady of the patino standing before me. Her flame-coloured

costume, a little less radiant now that it was wet, still shone among the aquarium shadows of her green parasol, and her face looked as though it were she who had been drowned, not I.

‘They tell me that you’re an Englishman,’ she said in the same ill-controlled, unmusical voice I had heard, not long since, misquoting Shelley.

Still tipsy, still light-headed with convalescence, I laughingly admitted it.

‘I hear you were nearly drowned.’

‘Quite right,’ I said, still laughing; it was such a marvellous joke.

‘I’m most sorry to hear . . .’ She had a way of leaving her sentences unfinished. The words would tail off into a dim inarticulate blur of sound.

‘Don’t mention it,’ I begged her. ‘It isn’t at all disagreeable, you know. Afterwards, at any rate . . .’ I stared at her affectionately and with my convalescent’s boundless curiosity. She stared back at me. Her eyes, I thought, must have the same bulge as those little red lenses one screws to the rear forks of bicycles; they collected all the light diffused around them and reflected it again with a concentrated glitter.

‘I came to ask whether I could be of any assistance,’ said the Chinese lantern lady.

‘Most kind.’

‘You’re alone here?’

‘Quite, for the present.’

‘Then perhaps you might care to come and stay a night or two at my house, until you’re entirely . . .’ She mumbled, made a gesture that implied the missing word and went on. ‘I have a house over there.’ She waved her hand in the direction of the mountainous section of the Shelleian landscape.

Gleefully, in my tipsy mood, I accepted her invitation. ‘Too delightful,’ I said. Everything, this morning, was too delightful. I should have accepted with genuine, unmixed pleasure an invitation to stay with Miss Carruthers or Mr. Brimstone.

‘And your name?’ she asked. ‘I don’t know that yet.’

‘Chelifer.’

‘Chelifer? Not Francis Chelifer?’

‘Francis Chelifer,’ I affirmed.

‘Francis Chelifer!’ Positively, her soul was in my name. ‘But how wonderful! I’ve wanted to meet you for years.’

For the first time since I had risen intoxicated from the dead I had an awful premonition of to-morrow’s sobriety. I remembered for the first time that round the corner, only just round the corner, lay the real world.

‘And what’s your name?’ I asked apprehensively.

‘Lilian Aldwinkle,’ said the Chinese lantern lady; and she shaped her lips into a smile that was positively piercing in its sweetness. The blue lamps that were her eyes glittered with such a focussed intensity that even the colour-blind chauffeurs who see green omnibuses rolling down Piccadilly and in the Green Park blood-coloured grass and vermilion trees would have known them for the danger signals they were.

An hour later I was reclining on cushions in Mrs. Aldwinkle’s Rolls-Royce. There was no escape.

CHAPTER VII

NO ESCAPE. . . . But I was still tipsy enough not seriously to desire escape. My premonition of sobriety had been no more than a momentary flash. It came and it passed again, almost immediately, as I became once more absorbed in what seemed to me the endless and lovely comedy that was being acted all around me. It was enough for me that I existed and that things were happening to me. I was carried by two or three young giants to the hotel, I was dressed, my clothes were packed for me. In the entrance hall, while I was waiting for Mrs. Aldwinkle to come and fetch me, I made some essays at walking; the feebleness of my legs was a source to me of delighted laughter.

Dressed in pale yellow tussore with a large straw hat on her head, Mrs. Aldwinkle finally appeared. Her guests, she explained, had gone home in another machine; I should be able to lie flat, or very nearly, in her empty car. And in case I felt bad — she shook a silver brandy flask at me. Escape? I did not so much as think of it, I was enchanted.

Luxuriously I reclined among the cushions. Mrs. Aldwinkle tapped the forward-looking window. The chauffeur languidly moved his hand and the machine rolled forward, nosing its way through the crowd of admiring car-fanciers which, in Italy, collects as though by magic round every stationary automobile. And Mrs. Aldwinkle's was a particularly attractive specimen. Young men called to their friends: 'Venite. È una Ro-Ro.' And in awed voices little boys whispered to one another: 'Una Ro-Ro.' The crowd reluctantly dispersed before our advance; we glided away from before the Grand Hotel, turned into the main street, crossed the piazza, in the centre of which, stranded high and dry by the receding sea, stood the little pink fort which had been built by the Princes of Massa Carrara to keep watch on a Mediterranean made

dangerous by Barbary pirates, and rolled out of the village by the road leading across the plain towards the mountains.

Shuffling along in a slowly moving cloud of dust, a train of white oxen advanced, shambling and zig-zagging along the road to meet us. Eight yoke of them there were, a long procession, with half a dozen drivers shouting and tugging at the leading ropes and cracking their whips. They were dragging a low truck, clamped to which was a huge monolith of flawless white marble. Uneasily, as we crawled past them, the animals shook their heads, turning this way and that, as though desperately seeking some way of escape. Their long curving horns clashed together; their soft white dewlaps shook; and into their blank brown eyes there came a look of fear, an entreaty that we should take pity on their invincible stupidity and remember that they simply could not, however hard they tried, get used to motor cars.

Mrs. Aldwinkle pointed at the monolith. ‘Imagine what Michelangelo could have made out of that,’ she said. Then, noticing that her pointing hand still grasped the silver flask, she became very solicitous. ‘You’re sure you wouldn’t like a sip of this?’ she asked, leaning forward. The twin blue danger signals glittered in my face. Her garments exhaled a scent in which there was ambergris. Her breath smelt of heliotrope cachous. But even now I did not take fright; I made no effort to escape. Guided by their invincible stupidity, the white oxen had behaved more sensibly than I.

We rolled on. The hills came nearer. The far-away peaks of bare limestone were hidden by the glowing mass of the tilled and wooded foot-hills. Happily I looked at those huge hilly forms. ‘How beautiful!’ I said. Mrs. Aldwinkle seemed to take my words as a personal compliment.

‘I’m so glad you think so. So awfully . . .’ she replied in the tone of an author to whom you have just said that you enjoyed his last book so much.

We drew nearer; the hills towered up, they opposed themselves like a huge wall. But the barrier parted before us; we passed through the gates of a valley that wound up into the mountain. Our road now ran parallel with the bed of a torrent. In the flanks of the hill to our right a marble quarry made a huge bare

scar, hundreds of feet long. The crest of the hill was fringed with a growth of umbrella pines. The straight slender tree trunks jetted up thirty feet without a branch; their wide-spreading flattened domes of foliage formed a thin continuous silhouette, between which and the dark mass of the hill one could see a band of sky, thinly barred by the bare stems. It was as though, to emphasize the outlines of his hills, an artist had drawn a fine and supple brush stroke parallel with the edge of the silhouette and a little apart from it.

We rolled on. The high road narrowed into the squalid street of a little town. The car crept along, hooting as it went.

‘Vezza,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle explained. ‘Michelangelo used to come here for his marbles.’

‘Indeed?’ I was charmed to hear it.

Over the windows of a large shop filled with white crosses, broken columns and statues, I read the legend: ‘Anglo-American Tombstone Company.’ We emerged from the narrow street on to an embankment running along the edge of a river. From the opposite bank the ground rose steeply.

‘There,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle on a note of triumph as we crossed the bridge, ‘that’s my house.’ She pointed up. From the hill-top a long façade stared down through twenty windows; a tall tower pricked the sky. ‘The palace was built in 1630,’ she began. I even enjoyed the history lesson.

We had crossed the bridge, we were climbing by a steep and winding road through what was almost a forest of olive trees. The abrupt grassy slope had been built up into innumerable little terraces on which the trees were planted. Here and there, in the grey luminous shadow beneath the trees, little flocks of sheep were grazing. The barefooted children who attended them came running to the side of the road to watch us passing.

‘I like to think of these old princely courts,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle was saying. ‘Like abbeys of . . . abbeys of . . .’ She shook her brandy flask impatiently. ‘You know . . . in Thingumy.’

‘Abbeys of Thelema,’ I suggested.

‘That’s it,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘Sort of retiring-places where people were free to live intelligently. That’s what I want to make this house. I’m so delighted to have met you like this. You’re exactly the sort of person I want.’ She leaned forward, smiling and glittering. But even at the prospect of entering the Abbey of Thelema I did not blench.

At this moment the car passed through a huge gateway. I caught a glimpse of a great flight of steps, set between cypresses, mounting up past a series of terraced landings to a carved doorway in the centre of the long façade. The road turned, the car swung round and the vista was closed. By an ilex avenue that wound round the flank of the hill we climbed more gradually towards the house, which we approached from the side. The road landed us finally in a large square court opposite a shorter reproduction of the great façade. At the head of a double flight of steps, curving horse-shoe fashion from the landing at its threshold, a tall pompous doorway surmounted by a coat of arms cavernously invited. The car drew up.

And about time too, as I notice on re-reading what I have written. Few things are more profoundly boring and unprofitable than literary descriptions. For the writer, it is true, there is a certain amusement to be derived from the hunt for apt expressive words. Carried away by the excitement of the chase he dashes on, regardless of the poor readers who follow toilsomely through his stiff and clayey pages like the runners at the tail of a hunt, seeing nothing of the fun. All writers are also readers — though perhaps I should make exceptions in favour of a few of my colleagues who make a speciality of native wood-notes — and must therefore know how dreary description is. But that does not prevent them from inflicting upon others all that they themselves have suffered. Indeed I sometimes think that some authors must write as they do purely out of a desire for revenge.

Mrs. Aldwinkle’s other guests had arrived and were waiting for us. I was introduced and found them all equally charming. The little niece rushed to Mrs. Aldwinkle’s assistance; the young man who had rowed the patino rushed in his turn to the little niece’s and insisted on carrying all the things of which she had relieved her aunt. The old man with the red face, who had talked about the

clouds, looked on benevolently at this little scene. But another elderly gentleman with a white beard, whom I had not seen before, seemed to view it with a certain disapproval. The young lady who had talked about the whiteness of her legs and who turned out to be my distinguished colleague, Miss Mary Thriplow, was now dressed in a little green frock with a white turned-down collar, white cuffs and buttons, which made her look like a schoolgirl in a comic opera by Offenbach. The brown young man stood near her.

I got out of the car, refused all proffered assistance and contrived, a little wamblingly, it is true, to mount the steps.

‘You must be very careful for a little,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle with a maternal solicitude. ‘These,’ she added, waving her hand in the direction of a vista of empty saloons, the entrance to which we were just then passing, ‘these are the apartments of the Princesses.’

We walked right through the house into a great quadrangle surrounded on three sides by buildings and on the fourth, towards the rising hill, by an arcade. On a pedestal in the centre of the court stood a more than life-sized marble statue, representing, my hostess informed me, the penultimate Prince of Massa Carrara, wearing a very curly full-bottomed wig, Roman kilts, buskins, and one of those handsome classical breastplates which have the head of a Gorgon embossed in the middle of the chest and a little dimple to indicate the position of the navel in the middle of the round and polished belly. With the expression of one who is about to reveal a delightful secret and who can hardly wait until the moment of revelation comes to give vent to his pleasure, Mrs. Aldwinkle, smiling as it were below the surface of her face, led me to the foot of the statue. ‘Look!’ she said. It was one of those pretty peep-shows on which, for the sake of five minutes’ amusement and titillation of the eye, Grand Monarchs used to spend the value of a rich province. From the central arch of the arcade a flight of marble steps climbed up to where, set against a semi-circle of cypresses, at the crest of the hill, a little round temple played gracefully at paganism, just as the buskined and corseleted statue in the court below played heroically at Plutarch.

‘And now look here!’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle; and taking me round to the other side of the statue, she led me towards a great door in the centre of the long range of buildings opposite the arcade. It was open; a vaulted corridor, like a tunnel, led clean through the house. Through it I could see the blue sky and the remote horizon of the sea. We walked along it; from the further threshold I found myself looking down the flight of steps which I had seen from below, at the entrance gate. It was a stage scene, but made of solid marble and with growing trees.

‘What do you think of that?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle.

‘Magnificent,’ I answered, with an enthusiasm that was beginning to be tempered by a growing physical weariness.

‘Such a view,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, poking at it with the tip of her sunshade. ‘The contrast between the cypresses and the olive trees . . .’

‘But the view’s still lovelier from the temple,’ said the little niece, who was evidently very anxious to make me realize the full pricelessness of her Aunt Lilian’s possessions.

Mrs. Aldwinkle turned on her. ‘How utterly thoughtless you are!’ she said severely. ‘Do try to remember that poor Mr. Chelifer is still suffering from the effects of his accident. And you expect him to go climbing up to the temple!’

The little niece blushed and drooped beneath the reproach. We sat down.

‘How are you feeling now?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle, remembering once more to be solicitous. . . . ‘Too appalling to think,’ she added, ‘how nearly . . . And I’ve always so enormously admired your work.’

‘So have I,’ declared my colleague in the green frock. ‘Most awfully. Still, I confess, I find some of your things a little, how shall I say, a little alembicated. I like my poetry to be rather straightforwarder.’

‘A very sophisticated desire,’ said the red-faced gentleman. ‘Really simple, primitive people like their poetry to be as complicated, conventional, artificial and remote from the language of everyday affairs as possible. We reproach the eighteenth century with its artificiality. But the fact is that Beowulf is couched in a diction fifty times more complicated and unnatural than that of the Essay on Man. And when you compare the Icelandic Sagas with Dr. Johnson, you find

that it’s the Doctor who lisps and prattles. Only the most complicated people, living in the midst of the most artificial surroundings, desire their poetry to be simple and straightforward.’

I shut my eyes and allowed the waves of conversation to roll over me. And what a classy conversation! Prince Papadiamantopoulos could hardly have kept the ball rolling on a higher level. Fatigue was sobering me.

Fatigue, the body’s weariness — some industrious little scientific emmet ought to catalogue and measure all its various effects. All — for it isn’t enough to show that when wage-slaves have worked too long they tend to fall into the machines and get pulped. The fact is interesting, no doubt; but there are other facts of no less significance. There is the fact, for example, that slight fatigue increases our capacity for sentiment. Those compromising love letters are always written in the small hours; it is at night, not when we are fresh and reposed, that we talk about ideal love and indulge our griefs. Under the influence of slight fatigue we feel more ready than at other times to discuss the problems of the universe, to make confidences, to dogmatize about the nature of God and to draw up plans for the future. We are also inclined to be more languidly voluptuous. When, however, the fatigue is increased beyond a certain point, we cease entirely to be sentimental, voluptuous, metaphysical or confiding. We cease to be aware of anything but the decrepitude of our being. We take no further interest in other people or the outside world — no further interest unless they will not leave us in peace, when we come to hate them with a deep but ineffectual loathing, mingled with disgust.

With me, fatigue had almost suddenly passed the critical point. My convalescent’s delight in the world evaporated. My fellow beings no longer seemed to me beautiful, strange and amiable. Mrs. Aldwinkle’s attempts to bring me into the conversation exasperated me; when I looked at her, I thought her a monster. I realized, too late (which made the realization the more vexatious), what I had let myself in for when I accepted Mrs. Aldwinkle’s invitation. Fantastic surroundings, art, classy chats about the cosmos, the intelligentsia, love. . . . It was too much, even on a holiday.

I shut my eyes. Sometimes, when Mrs. Aldwinkle interpellated me, I said yes or no, without much regard to the sense of her remark. Discussion raged around me. From the alembication of my poetry they had gone on to art in general. Crikey, I said to myself, crikey. . . . I did my best to close the ears of my mind; and for some little time I did, indeed, contrive to understand nothing of what was said. I thought of Miss Carruthers, of Fluffy and Mr. Brimstone, of Gog's Court and Mr. Bosk.

Mrs. Aldwinkle's voice, raised by irritation to a peculiar loudness, made itself audible to my muffled mind. 'How often have I told you, Cardan,' it said, 'that you understand nothing of modern art?'

'At least a thousand times,' Mr. Cardan replied cheerfully. 'But bless your heart,' he added (and I opened my eyes in time to see his benevolent smile), 'I never mind at all.'

The smile was evidently too much for Mrs. Aldwinkle's patience. With the gesture of a queen who implies that the audience is at an end she rose from her seat. 'Just time,' she said, looking at her watch, 'there's just time. I really must give Mr. Chelifer some idea of the inside of the palace before lunch. You'd like to come?' She smiled at me like a siren.

Too polite to remind her of her recent outburst against the little niece, I declared myself delighted by the idea. Wamblingly I followed her into the house. Behind me I heard the young rower exclaiming on a note of mingled astonishment and indignation: 'But a moment ago she was saying that Mr. Chelifer was too ill to . . .'

'Ah, but that was different,' said the voice of the red-faced man.

'Why was it different?'

'Because, my young friend, the other fellow is in all cases the rule; but I am invariably the exception. Shall we follow?'

Mrs. Aldwinkle made me look at painted ceilings till I almost fell down from giddiness. She dragged me through room after baroque room; then drove me up dark stairs into the Middle Ages. By the time we were back in the trecento I was so much exhausted that I could hardly stand. My knees trembled, I felt sick.

‘This is the old armoury,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle with mounting enthusiasm. ‘And there are the stairs leading up to the tower.’ She pointed to a low archway, through which, in a dusty twilight, the bottom of a steep stair could be seen corkscrewing up to unknown heights. ‘There are two hundred and thirty-two steps,’ she added.

At this moment the gong for luncheon rumbled remotely from the other end of the huge empty house.

‘Thank God!’ said the red-faced man devoutly.

But our hostess, it was evident, had no feeling for punctuality. ‘What a bore!’ she exclaimed. ‘But never mind. We can make time. I wanted just to run up the tower before lunch. There’s such a wonderful bird’s-eye . . .’ She looked inquiringly round. ‘What do you think, all of you? Shouldn’t we just dash up? It won’t take a minute.’ She repeated the siren smile. ‘Do let’s. Do!’ And without waiting for the result of her plebiscite she walked rapidly towards the stairs.

I followed her. But before I had taken five steps, the floor, the walls of the room seemed to fade into the distance. There was a roaring in my ears. It grew suddenly dark. I felt myself falling. For the second time since breakfast I lost consciousness.

When I came to, I was lying on the floor, with my head on Mrs. Aldwinkle’s knees; and she was dabbing my forehead with a wet sponge. The first objects of which I was aware were her bright blue eyes hanging over me, very close, very bright and alarming. ‘Poor fellow,’ she was saying, ‘poor fellow.’ Then, looking up, she shouted angrily to the owners of the various legs and skirts which I distinguished mistily to right and left of me: ‘Stand back, you must stand back! Do you want to suffocate the poor fellow?’

PART III. THE LOVES OF THE PARALLELS

CHAPTER I

DO ALL HE could, Lord Hovenden had somehow found it impossible, these last few days, to get Irene for a moment to himself. The change had come about almost suddenly, just after that fellow Chelifer had made his appearance. Before he came, there had been a time — beginning, strangely enough, almost as suddenly as it had ended — a time of blissful happiness. Whenever during those days an opportunity for a tête-à-tête presented itself Irene had been always at hand and, what was more, always delighted to seize the opportunity. They had been for long walks together, they had swum together far out into the sea, sat together in the gardens, sometimes talking, sometimes silent; but very happy, whether they spoke or not. He had talked to her about motoring and dancing and shooting, and occasionally, feeling rather shamefaced and embarrassed by the disquieting gravity of the subject, about the working classes. And Irene had listened with pleasure to everything he said and had talked too. They found that they had many tastes in common. It had been an enchantment while it lasted. And then, all at once, with the coming of that creature Chelifer, it all came to an end. Irene was never on the spot when opportunities offered, she never suggested spontaneously, as once or twice, during the heavenly time, she had actually done, that they should go for a walk together. She had no time to talk to him; her thoughts, it seemed, were elsewhere, as with grave and preoccupied face she hurried mysteriously about the palace and the gardens. With an extreme anguish of spirit Lord Hovenden observed that it was always in the direction of Chelifer that Irene seemed to be hurrying. Did he slip out unobtrusively into the garden after lunch, Irene was sure, a moment later, to slip out after him. When he proposed a stroll with Calamy or Mr. Cardan, Irene always asked, shyly but with the pallid resolution of one who by an effort of will overcomes a natural weakness for the sake of some all-important cause, to be allowed to join the

party. And if ever Chelifer and Miss Thriplow happened to find themselves for a moment together, Irene was always certain to come gliding silently after them.

For all this Lord Hovenden could find only one explanation. She was in love with the man. True, she never made any effort to talk to him when she was in his company; she seemed even rather intimidated by his polished silences, his pointedly insincere formulas of courtesy and compliment. And for his part Chelifer, as far as his rival could see, behaved with a perfect correctitude. Too correctly, indeed, in Hovenden's opinion. He couldn't tolerate the fellow's sarcastic politeness; the man ought to be more human with little Irene. Lord Hovenden would have liked to wring his neck; wring it for two mutually exclusive offences — luring the girl on and being too damned stand-offish. And she looked so wretched. Looking out of its square window in the thick bright bell of copper hair, the little face, so childish in the largeness and limpidity of the eyes, in the shortness of the upper lip, had been, these last days, the face of a pathetic, not a merry child. Lord Hovenden could only suppose that she was pining with love for that creature — though what the devil she contrived to see in him he, for one, couldn't imagine. And it was so obvious, too, that old Lilian was also quite gone on the fellow and making a fool of herself about him. Did she want to compete with her Aunt Lilian? There'd be the devil and all to pay if Mrs. Aldwinkle discovered that Irene was trying to cut her out. The more he thought of the wretched business, the wretcheder it seemed. Lord Hovenden was thoroughly miserable.

So too was Irene. But not for the reasons Lord Hovenden supposed. It was true that she had spent most of her days since Chelifer's arrival in following the new guest like an unhappy shadow. But it had not been on her own account, not at her own desire. Chelifer did indeed intimidate her; so far Lord Hovenden had guessed aright. He had been hopelessly at fault in imagining that Irene adored the man in spite of her fear of him. If she followed him about, it was because Mrs. Aldwinkle had asked her to. And if she looked unhappy, it was because Aunt Lilian was unhappy — and a little, too, because the task which Aunt Lilian had set her was a disagreeable one; disagreeable not only in itself, but because it

prevented her from continuing those pleasant talks with Hovenden. Ever since that evening when Aunt Lilian twitted her on her coldness and her blindness, Irene had made a point of seeing Hovenden as much as she could. She wanted to prove that Aunt Lilian had been wrong. She wasn't cold, she wasn't blind; she could see as clearly as any one when people liked her, and she could be as warmly appreciative. And really, after the episodes with Jacques, Mario and Peter, it wasn't fair of Aunt Lilian to tease her like that. It simply wasn't. Moved by an indignant desire to confute Aunt Lilian as quickly as possible, she had positively made advances to Hovenden; he was so shy that, if she hadn't, it would have been months before she could have offered her aunt anything like convincing rebuttal of her imputation. She had talked with him, gone for walks with him, quite prepared to feel at any moment the infinitude of passion. But the affair passed off, somehow, very differently from the others. She began to feel something indeed, but something quite unlike that which she had felt for Peter and Jacques. For them it had been a fizzy, exciting, restless feeling, intimately connected with large hotels, jazz bands, coloured lights and Aunt Lilian's indefatigable desire to get everything out of life, her haunting fear that she was missing something, even in the heart of the fun. 'Enjoy yourself, let yourself go,' Aunt Lilian was always telling her. And 'How handsome he is! what a lovely fellow!' she would say as one of the young men passed. Irene had done her best to take Aunt Lilian's advice. And it had seemed to her, sometimes, when she was dancing and the lights, the music, the moving crowd had blended together into a single throbbing whole, it had seemed to her that she had indeed climbed to the peak of happiness. And the young man, the Peter or Jacques whom Aunt Lilian had hypnotized her into thinking a marvel among young men, was regarded as the source of this bliss. Between the dances, under the palm trees in the garden, she had even suffered herself to be kissed; and the experience had been rather momentous. But when the time came for them to move on, Irene departed without regret. The fizzy feeling had gone flat. But with Hovenden it was different. She just liked him quietly, more and more. He was so nice and simple and eager and young. So young — she liked that particularly. Irene felt

that he was really younger, in spite of his age, than she. The other ones had all been older, more knowing and accomplished; all rather bold and insolent. But Hovenden wasn't in the least like that. One felt very secure with him, Irene thought. And there was somehow no question of love when one was with him — at any rate the question wasn't at all pressing or urgent. Aunt Lilian used to ask her every evening how they were getting on and if it were getting exciting. And Irene never quite knew what to answer. She found very soon that she didn't want to talk about Hovenden; he was so different from the others, and their friendship had nothing infinite about it. It was just a sensible friendship. She dreaded Aunt Lilian's questions; and she found herself almost disliking Aunt Lilian when, in that dreadful bantering way of hers, she ruthlessly insisted on putting them. In some ways, indeed, the coming of Chelifer had been a relief; for Aunt Lilian became at once so profoundly absorbed in her own emotions that she had no time or inclination to think of any one else's. Yes, that had been a great relief. But on the other hand, the work of supervision and espionage to which Aunt Lilian had set her made it all but impossible for Irene ever to talk to Hovenden. She might as well not be there, Irene sadly reflected. Still, poor Aunt Lilian was so dreadfully unhappy. One must do all one could for her. Poor Aunt Lilian!

'I want to know what he thinks of me,' Aunt Lilian had said to her in the secret hours of the night. 'What does he say about me to other people?' Irene answered that she had never heard him say anything about her. 'Then you must listen, you must keep your ears open.'

But however much she listened, Irene never had anything to report. Chelifer never mentioned Aunt Lilian. For Mrs. Aldwinkle that was almost worse than if he had spoken badly of her. To be ignored was terrible. 'Perhaps he likes Mary,' she had suggested. 'I thought I saw him looking at her to-day in a strange, intent sort of way.' And Irene had been ordered to watch them. But for all she could discover, Mrs. Aldwinkle's jealousies were utterly unfounded. Between Chelifer and Mary Thriplow there passed no word or look that the most suspicious imagination could interpret in terms of amorous intimacy. 'He's queer, he's an extraordinary creature.' That was the refrain of Mrs. Aldwinkle's talk about him.

‘He seems to care for nothing. So cold, such a fixed, frigid mask. And yet one has only to look at him — his eyes, his mouth — to see that underneath . . .’ And Mrs. Aldwinkle would shake her head and sigh. And her speculations about him would go rambling on and on, round and round, treading the same ground again and again, arriving nowhere. Poor Aunt Lilian! She was dreadfully unhappy.

In her own mind Mrs. Aldwinkle had begun by saving Chelifer’s life. She saw herself standing there on the beach between sea and sky, and with the mountains in the middle distance, looking like one of those wonderfully romantic figures who, in the paintings of Augustus John, stand poised in a meditative and passionate ecstasy against a cosmic background. She saw herself — a John down even to her flame-coloured tunic and her emerald-green parasol. And at her feet, like Shelley, like Leander washed up on the sands of Abydos, lay the young poet, pale, naked and dead. And she had bent over him, had called him back to life, had raised him up and, figuratively speaking, had carried him off in maternal arms to a haven of peace where he should gather new strength and, for his poetry, new inspiration.

Such were the facts as they appeared to Mrs. Aldwinkle, after passing through the dense refractive medium of her imagination. Given these facts, given the resultant situation, given her character, it was almost necessary and inevitable that Mrs. Aldwinkle should feel romantically towards her latest guest. The mere fact that he was a new arrival, hitherto unknown, and a poet at that, would have been enough in any circumstances to make Mrs. Aldwinkle take a lively interest in the young man. But seeing that she had saved him from a watery grave and was now engaged in supplying him with inspiration, she felt something more than interest. She would have been disobeying the laws of her being if she had not fallen in love with him. Moreover, he made it easier for her by being so darkly and poetically handsome. And then he was queer — queer to the point of mysteriousness. His very coldness attracted while it filled her with despair.

‘He can’t really be so utterly indifferent to everything and everybody as he makes out,’ she kept insisting to Irene.

The desire to break down his barriers, enter into his intimacy and master his secret quickened her love.

From the moment of her discovery of him, in those romantic circumstances which her imagination had made so much more romantic, Mrs. Aldwinkle had tried to take possession of Chelifer; she had tried to make him as much her property as the view, or Italian art. He became at once the best living poet; but it followed as a corollary that she was his only interpreter. In haste she had telegraphed to London for copies of all his books.

‘When I think,’ she would say, leaning forward embarrassingly close and staring into his face with those bright, dangerous eyes of hers, ‘when I think how nearly you were drowned. Like Shelley . . .’ She shuddered. ‘It’s too appalling.’

And Chelifer would bend his full Egyptian lips into a smile and answer: ‘They’d have been inconsolable on the staff of the Rabbit Fancier,’ or something of the sort. Oh, queer, queer, queer!

‘He slides away from one,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle complained to her young confidante of the small hours.

She might try to take his barriers by storm, might try to creep subtly into his confidence from the flank, so to speak; but Chelifer was never to be caught napping. He evaded her. There was no taking possession of him. It was for nothing, so far as Mrs. Aldwinkle was concerned, that he was the best living poet and she his prophetess.

He evaded her — evaded her not merely mentally and spiritually, but even in the flesh. For after a day or two in the Cybo Malaspina palace he developed an almost magical faculty for disappearing. One moment he’d be there, walking about in the garden or sitting in one of the saloons; something would distract Mrs. Aldwinkle’s attention, and the next moment, when she turned back towards the place where he had been, he was gone, he was utterly vanished. Mrs. Aldwinkle would search; there was no trace of him to be found. But at the next meal he’d walk in, punctual as ever; he would ask his hostess politely if she had had an agreeable morning or afternoon, whichever the case might be, and when

she asked him where he had been, would answer vaguely that he'd gone for a little walk, or that he'd been writing letters.

After one of these disappearances Irene, who had been set by her aunt to hunt for him, finally ran him to earth on the top of the tower. She had climbed the two hundred and thirty-two steps for the sake of the commanding view of the whole garden and hillside to be obtained from the summit. If he was anywhere above ground, she ought to see him from the tower. But when at last, panting, she emerged on to the little square platform from which the ancient marquesses had dropped small rocks and molten lead on their enemies in the court below, she got a fright that nearly made her fall backwards down the steps. For as she came up through the trap-door into the sunlight, she suddenly became aware of what seemed, to eyes that looked up from the level of the floor, a gigantic figure advancing, toweringly, towards her.

Irene uttered a little scream; her heart jumped violently and seemed to stop beating.

'Allow me,' said a very polite voice. The giant bent down and took her by the hand. It was Chelifer. 'So you've climbed up for a bird's-eye view of the picturesque beauties of nature?' he went on, when he had helped her up through the hatchway. 'I'm very partial to bird's-eye views myself.'

'You gave me such a start,' was all that Irene could say. Her face was quite pale.

'I'm exceedingly sorry,' said Chelifer. There was a long and, for Irene, embarrassing silence.

After a minute she went down again.

'Did you find him?' asked Mrs. Aldwinkle, when her niece emerged a little while later on to the terrace.

Irene shook her head. Somehow she lacked the courage to tell Aunt Lilian the story of her adventure. It would make her too unhappy to think that Chelifer was prepared to climb two hundred and thirty-two steps for the sake of getting out of her way.

Mrs. Aldwinkle tried to guard against his habit of vanishing by never, so far as it was practicable, letting him out of her sight. She arranged that he should always sit next to her at table. She took him for walks and drives in the motor car, she made him sit with her in the garden. It was with difficulty and only by the employment of stratagems that Chelifer managed to procure a moment of liberty and solitude. For the first few days of his stay Chelifer found that ‘I must go and write’ was a good excuse to get away. Mrs. Aldwinkle professed such admiration for him in his poetical capacity that she could not decently refuse to let him go. But she soon found a way of controlling such liberty as he could get in this way by insisting that he should write under the ilex trees, or in one of the mouldering sponge-stone grottoes hollowed in the walls of the lower terrace. Vainly Chelifer protested that he loathed writing or reading out of doors.

‘These lovely surroundings,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle insisted, ‘will inspire you.’

‘But the only surroundings that really inspire me,’ said Chelifer, ‘are the lower middle class quarters of London, north of the Harrow Road, for example.’

‘How can you say such things?’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle.

‘But I assure you,’ he protested, ‘it’s quite true.’

None the less, he had to go and write under the ilexes or in the grotto. Mrs. Aldwinkle, at a moderate distance, kept him well in sight. Every ten minutes or so she would come tip-toeing into his retreat, smiling, as she imagined, like a sibyl, her finger on her lips, to lay beside his permanently virgin sheet of paper a bunch of late-flowering roses, a dahlia, some Michaelmas daisies or a few pink berries from the spindle tree. Courteously, in some charming and frankly insincere formula, Chelifer would thank her for the gift, and with a final smile, less sibylline, but sweeter, tenderer, Mrs. Aldwinkle would tip-toe away again, like Egeria bidding farewell to King Numa, leaving her inspiration to do its work. It didn’t seem to do its work very well, however. For whenever she asked him how much he had written, he regularly answered ‘Nothing,’ smiling at her meanwhile that courteous and Sphingine smile which Mrs. Aldwinkle always found so baffling, so pre-eminently ‘queer.’

Often Mrs. Aldwinkle would try to lead the conversation upwards on to those high spiritual planes from which the most satisfactory and romantic approach to love is to be made. Two souls that have acclimatized themselves to the thin air of religion, art, ethics or metaphysics have no difficulty in breathing the similar atmosphere of ideal love, whose territory lies contiguous to those of the other inhabitants of high mental altitudes. Mrs. Aldwinkle liked to approach love from the heights. One landed, so to speak, by aeroplane on the snowy summit of Popocatepetl, to descend by easy stages into the tropical tierra caliente in the plains below. But with Chelifer it was impossible to gain a footing on any height at all. When, for example, Mrs. Aldwinkle started rapturously on art and the delights of being an artist, Chelifer would modestly admit to being a tolerable second-rate halma player.

‘But how can you speak like that?’ cried Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘How can you blaspheme so against art and your own talent? What’s your talent for?’

‘For editing the Rabbit Fanciers’ Gazette, it appears,’ Chelifer answered, courteously smiling.

Sometimes she started on the theme of love itself; but with no greater success. Chelifer just politely agreed with everything she said, and when she pressed him for a definite opinion of his own replied, ‘I don’t know.’

‘But you must know,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle insisted, ‘you must have some opinion. You have had experience.’

Chelifer shook his head. ‘Alas,’ he deplored, ‘never.’

It was hopeless.

‘What am I to do?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle despairingly in the small hours.

Wise in the experience of eighteen years, Irene suggested that the best thing to do would be to think no more about him — in that way.

Mrs. Aldwinkle only sighed and shook her head. She had started loving because she believed in love, because she wanted to love and because a romantic opportunity had presented itself. She had rescued a Poet from death. How could she help loving him? The circumstances, the person were her invention; she had fallen in love, deliberately almost, with the figments of her own imagination. But

there was no deliberately falling out again. The romantic yearnings had aroused those profounder instincts of which they were but the polite and literary emanation. The man was young, was beautiful — these were facts, not imaginings. These deep desires once started by the conscious mind from their sleep, once made aware of their quarry, how could they be held back? ‘He is a poet. For the love of poetry, for the love of passion and because I saved him from death, I love him.’ If that had been all, it might have been possible for Mrs. Aldwinkle to take Irene’s advice. But from the obscure caves of her being another voice was speaking. ‘He is young, he is beautiful. The days are so few and short. I am growing old. My body is thirsty.’ How could she cease to think of him?

‘And suppose he did come to love me a little,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle went on, taking a perverse delight in tormenting herself in every possible way, ‘suppose he should come to love me just a little for what I am and think and do — should come to love me because, to begin with, I love him and admire his work, and because I understand what an artist feels and can sympathize with him — suppose all that, wouldn’t he be repelled at the same time by the fact that I’m old?’ She peered into the mirror. ‘My face looks terribly old,’ she said.

‘No, no,’ protested Irene encouragingly.

‘He’d be disgusted,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle went on. ‘It would be enough to drive him away even if he were attracted in some other way.’ She sighed profoundly. The tears trickled slowly down her sagging cheeks.

‘Don’t talk like that, Aunt Lilian,’ Irene implored her. ‘Don’t talk like that.’ She felt the tears coming into her own eyes. At that moment she would have done anything, given anything to make Aunt Lilian happy. She threw her arms round Mrs. Aldwinkle’s neck and kissed her. ‘Don’t be unhappy,’ she whispered. ‘Don’t think any more about it. What does it matter about that man? What does it matter? You must think only of the people who do love you. I love you, Aunt Lilian. So much, so much.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle suffered herself to be a little comforted. She dried her eyes. ‘I shall make myself look still uglier,’ she said, ‘if I go on crying.’ There was a

silence. Irene went on brushing her aunt's hair; she hoped that Aunt Lilian had turned her thoughts elsewhere.

'At any rate,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle at last, breaking the long silence, 'my body is still young.'

Irene was distressed. Why couldn't Aunt Lilian think of something else? But her distress turned into an uneasy sense of embarrassment and shame as Mrs. Aldwinkle pursued the subject started by her last words into more and more intimate detail. In spite of her five years' training in Aunt Lilian's school, Irene felt profoundly shocked.

CHAPTER II

‘WE TWO,’ SAID Mr. Cardan one late afternoon some fortnight after Chelifer’s arrival, ‘we two seem to be rather left out of it.’

‘Left out of what?’ asked Mr. Falx.

‘Out of love,’ said Mr. Cardan. He looked down over the balustrade. On the next terrace below, Chelifer and Mrs. Aldwinkle were walking slowly up and down. On the terrace below that strolled the diminished and foreshortened figures of Calamy and Miss Thriplow. ‘And the other two,’ said Mr. Cardan, as if continuing aloud the enumeration which he and his companion had made in silence, with the eye alone, ‘your young pupil and the little niece, have gone for a walk in the hills. Can you ask what we’re left out of?’

Mr. Falx nodded. ‘To tell you the truth,’ he said, ‘I don’t much like the atmosphere of this house. Mrs. Aldwinkle’s an excellent woman, of course, in many respects. But . . .’ he hesitated.

‘Yes; but . . .’ Mr. Cardan nodded. ‘I see your point.’

‘I shall be rather glad when I have got young Hovenden away from here,’ said Mr. Falx.

‘If you get him alone I shall be surprised.’

Mr. Falx went on, shaking his head: ‘There’s a certain moral laxity, a certain self-indulgence. . . . I confess I don’t like this way of life. I may be prejudiced; but I don’t like it.’

‘Every one has his favourite vice,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘You forget, Mr. Falx, that we probably don’t like your way of life.’

‘I protest,’ said Mr. Falx hotly. ‘Is it possible to compare my way of life with the way of life in this house? Here am I, working incessantly for a noble cause, devoting myself to the public good . . .’

‘Still,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘they do say that there’s nothing more intoxicating than talking to a crowd of people and moving them the way you want them to go; they do say, too, that it’s piercingly delicious to listen to applause. And people who have tried both have told me that the joys of power are far preferable, if only because they are a good deal more enduring, to those one can derive from wine or love. No, no, Mr. Falx; if we chose to climb on to our high horses we should be as amply justified in disapproving of your laxity and self-indulgence as you are in disapproving of ours. I always notice that the most grave and awful denunciations of obscenity in literature are to be found precisely in those periodicals whose directors are most notoriously alcoholic. And the preachers and politicians with the greatest vanity, the most inordinate itch for power and notoriety, are always those who denounce most fiercely the corruptions of the age. One of the greatest triumphs of the nineteenth century was to limit the connotation of the word “immoral” in such a way that, for practical purposes, only those were immoral who drank too much or made too copious love. Those who indulged in any or all of the other deadly sins could look down in righteous indignation on the lascivious and the gluttonous. And not only could but can — even now. This exaltation of two out of the seven deadly sins is most unfair. In the name of all lechers and boozers I most solemnly protest against the invidious distinction made to our prejudice. Believe me, Mr. Falx, we are no more reprehensible than the rest of you. Indeed, compared with some of your political friends, I feel I have a right to consider myself almost a saint.’

‘Still,’ said Mr. Falx, whose face, where it was not covered by his prophetical white beard, had become very red with ill-suppressed indignation, ‘you won’t persuade me out of my conviction that these are not the most healthy surroundings for a young fellow like Hovenden at the most impressionable period of his life. Be as paradoxical and ingenious as you like: you will not persuade me, I repeat.’

‘No need to repeat, I assure you,’ said Mr. Cardan, shaking his head. ‘Did you think I ever supposed I could persuade you? You don’t imagine I’d waste my

time trying to persuade a full-grown man with fixed opinions of the truth of something he doesn't already believe? If you were twelve years old, even if you were twenty, I might try. But at your age — no, no.'

'Then why do you argue, if you don't want to persuade?' asked Mr. Falx.

'For the sake of argument,' Mr. Cardan replied, 'and because one must murder the time somehow.

Come ingannar questi noiosi e lenti

Giorni di vita cui si lungo tedio

E fastidio insoffribile accompagna

Or io t'insegnero.

I could write a better handbook of the art than old Parini.'

'I'm sorry,' said Mr. Falx, 'but I don't know Italian.'

'Nor should I,' said Mr. Cardan, 'if I had your unbounded resources for killing time. Unhappily, I was born without much zeal for the welfare of the working classes.'

'Working classes . . .' Mr. Falx swooped down on the words. Passionately he began to talk. What was that text, thought Mr. Cardan, about the measure with which ye mete? How fearfully applicable it was! For the last ten minutes he'd been boring poor old Mr. Falx. And now Mr. Falx had turned round and was paying him back with his own measure — but, oh Lord, pressed down and, heaven help us! running over. He looked down over the balustrade. On the lower terraces the couples were still parading up and down. He wondered what they were saying; he wished he were down there to listen. Boomingly, Mr. Falx played his prophetic part.

CHAPTER III

IT WAS A pity that Mr. Cardan could not hear what his hostess was saying. He would have been delighted; she was talking about herself. It was a subject on which he specially loved to hear her. There were few people, he used to say, whose Authorized Version of themselves differed so strikingly from that Revised, formed of them by others. It was not often, however, that she gave him a chance to compare them. With Mr. Cardan she was always a little shy; he had known her so long.

‘Sometimes,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle was saying, as she walked with Chelifer on the second of the three terraces, ‘sometimes I wish I were less sensitive. I feel everything so acutely — every slightest thing. It’s like being . . . like being . . .’ she fumbled in the air with groping fingers, feeling for the right word, ‘like being flayed,’ she concluded triumphantly, and looked at her companion.

Chelifer nodded sympathetically.

‘I’m so fearfully aware,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle went on, ‘of other people’s thoughts and feelings. They don’t have to speak to make me know what they’ve got in their minds. I know it, I feel it just by seeing them.’

Chelifer wondered whether she felt what was going on in his mind. He ventured to doubt it. ‘A wonderful gift,’ he said.

‘But it has its disadvantages,’ insisted Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘For example, you can’t imagine how much I suffer when people round me are suffering, particularly if I feel myself in any way to blame. When I’m ill, it makes me miserable to think of servants and nurses and people having to sit up without sleep and run up and down stairs, all because of me. I know it’s rather stupid; but, do you know, my sympathy for them is so . . . so . . . profound, that it actually prevents me from getting well as quickly as I should. . . .’

‘Dreadful,’ said Chelifer in his polite, precise voice.

‘You’ve no idea how deeply all suffering affects me.’ She looked at him tenderly. ‘That day, that first day, when you fainted — you can’t imagine . . .’

‘I’m sorry it should have had such a disagreeable effect on you,’ said Chelifer.

‘You would have felt the same yourself — in the circumstances,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, uttering the last words in a significant tone.

Chelifer shook his head modestly. ‘I’m afraid,’ he answered, ‘I’m singularly stoical about other people’s sufferings.’

‘Why do you always speak against yourself?’ asked Mrs. Aldwinkle earnestly. ‘Why do you malign your own character? You know you’re not what you pretend to be. You pretend to be so much harder and dryer than you really are. Why do you?’

Chelifer smiled. ‘Perhaps,’ he said, ‘it’s to re-establish the universal average. So many people, you see, try to make themselves out softer and damper than they are. Don’t they?’

Mrs. Aldwinkle ignored his question. ‘But you,’ she insisted, ‘I want to know about you.’ She stared into his face. Chelifer smiled and said nothing. ‘You won’t tell me?’ she went on. ‘But it doesn’t matter. I know already. I have an intuition about people. It’s because I’m so sensitive. I feel their character. I’m never wrong.’

‘You’re to be envied,’ said Chelifer.

‘It’s no good thinking you can deceive me,’ she went on. ‘You can’t. I understand you.’ Chelifer sighed, inwardly; she had said that before, more than once. ‘Shall I tell you what you are really like?’

‘Do.’

‘Well, to begin with,’ she said, ‘you’re sensitive, just as sensitive as I am. I can see that in your face, in your actions. I can hear it when you speak. You can pretend to be hard and . . . and . . . armour-plated, but I . . .’

Wearily, but with patience, Chelifer listened. Mrs. Aldwinkle’s hesitating voice, moving up and down from note to unrelated note, sounded in his ears. The words became blurred and vague. They lost their articulateness and sense. They

were no more than the noise of the wind, a sound that accompanied, but did not interrupt his thoughts. Chelifer's thoughts, at the moment, were poetical. He was engaged in putting the finishing touches to a little 'Mythological Incident,' the idea of which had recently occurred to him and to which, during the last two days, he had been giving its definite form. Now it was finished; a little polishing, that was all it needed now.

Through the pale skeleton of woods
Orion walks. The north wind lays
Its cold lips to the twin steel flutes
That are his gun and plays.

Knee-deep he goes where, penny-wiser
Than all his kind who steal and hoard,
Year after year, some sylvan miser
His copper wealth has stored.

The Queen of Love and Beauty lays
In neighbouring beechen aisles her baits —
Bread-crumbs and the golden maize.
Patiently she waits.

And when the unwary pheasant comes
To fill his painted maw with crumbs,
Accurately the sporting Queen
Takes aim. The bird has been.

Secure, Orion walks her way.
The Cyprian loads, presents, makes fire.
He falls. 'Tis Venus all entire
Attached to her recumbent prey.

Chelifer repeated the verses to himself and was not displeased. The second stanza was a little too ‘quaint,’ perhaps; a little too — how should he put it? — too Walter-Crane’s-picture-book. One might omit it altogether, perhaps; or substitute, if one could think of it, something more perfectly in harmony with the silver-age, allusive elegance of the rest. As for the last verse, that was really masterly. It gave Racine his raison d’être; if Racine had never existed, it would have been necessary to invent him, merely for the sake of those last lines.

He falls. ’Tis Venus all entire

Attached to her recumbent prey.

Chelifer lingered over them in ecstasy. He became aware, all at once, that Mrs. Aldwinkle was addressing herself to him more directly. From inharmoniously Aeolian, her voice became once more articulate.

‘That’s what you’re like,’ she was saying. ‘Tell me I’m right. Say I understand you.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Chelifer, smiling.

Meanwhile, on the terrace below, Calamy and Miss Thriplow strolled at leisure. They were discussing a subject about which Miss Thriplow professed a special competence; it was — to speak in the language of the examination room — her Special Subject. They were discussing Life. ‘Life’s so wonderful,’ Miss Thriplow was saying. ‘Always. So rich, so gay. This morning, for instance, I woke up and the first thing I saw was a pigeon sitting on the window sill — a big fat grey pigeon with a captive rainbow pinned to his stomach.’ (That phrase, peculiarly charming and felicitous, Miss Thriplow thought, had already been recorded for future reference in her note-books.) ‘And then high up on the wall above the washstand there was a little black scorpion standing tail-upwards, looking quite unreal, like something out of the signs of the Zodiac. And then Eugenia came in to call me — think of having one’s hot water brought by a maid called Eugenia to begin with! — and spent a quarter of an hour telling me about her fiancé. It seems that he’s so dreadfully jealous. So should I be, if I were engaged to a pair of such rolling eyes. But think of all that happening before

breakfast, just casually! What extravagance! But Life's so generous, so copious.' She turned a shining face to her companion.

Calamy looked down at her, through half-closed eyes, smiling, with that air of sleepy insolence, of indolent power, characteristic of him, especially in his relations with women. 'Generous!' he repeated. 'Yes, I should think it was. Pigeons before breakfast. And at breakfast it offers you.'

'As if I were a broiled kipper,' said Miss Thriplow, laughing.

But Calamy was not disturbed by her laughter. He continued to look at her between his puckered eyelids with the same steady insolence, the same certainty of power — a certainty so complete that he could afford to make no exertions; placidly, drowsily, he could await the inevitable triumph. He disquieted Miss Thriplow. That was why she liked him.

They strolled on. Fifteen days ago they could never have walked like this, two on a terrace, talking at leisure of Miss Thriplow's Special Subject. Their hostess would have put an end to any such rebellious attempt at independence in the most prompt and ruthless fashion. But since the arrival of Chelifer Mrs. Aldwinkle had been too much preoccupied with the affairs of her own heart to be able to take the slightest interest in the doings, the sayings, the comings and goings of her guests. Her gaoler's vigilance was relaxed. Her guests might talk together, might wander off alone or in couples, might say good-night when they pleased; Mrs. Aldwinkle did not care. So long as they did not interfere with Chelifer, they might do what they liked. Fay ce que vouldras had become the rule in Cybo Malaspina's palace.

'I can never understand,' Miss Thriplow went on, meditatively pursuing her Special Subject, 'I can never understand how it is that everybody isn't happy — I mean fundamentally happy, underneath; for of course there's suffering, there's pain, there are a thousand reasons why one can't always be consciously happy, on the top, if you see what I mean. But fundamentally happy, underneath — how can any one help being that? Life's so extraordinary, so rich and beautiful — there's no excuse for not loving it always, even when one's consciously miserable. Don't you think so?' She was fairly carried away by her love of Life.

She was young, she was ardent; she saw herself as a child who goes and turns head over heels, out of pure joy, in the perfumed haycocks. One could be as clever as one liked, but if one had that genuine love of Life it didn't matter; one was saved.

'I agree,' said Calamy. 'It's always worth living, even at the worst of times. And if one happens to be in love, it's really intoxicating.'

Miss Thriplow glanced at him. Calamy was walking with bent head, his eyes fixed on the ground. There was a faint smile on his lips; his eyelids were almost closed, as though he were too drowsy to keep them apart. Miss Thriplow felt annoyed. He made a remark like that and then didn't even take the trouble to look at her.

'I don't believe you've ever been in love,' she said.

'I can't remember ever having been out of it,' Calamy answered.

'Which is the same thing as saying that you've never really been in. Not really,' Miss Thriplow repeated. She knew what the real thing was like.

'And you?' asked Calamy.

Mary Thriplow did not answer. They took two or three turns in silence. It was a folly, Calamy was thinking. He wasn't really in love with the woman. It was a waste of time and there were other things far more important to be done, to be thought about. Other things. They loomed up enormously behind the distracting bustle of life, silently on the further side of the noise and chatter. But what were they? What was their form, their name, their meaning? Through the fluttering veil of movement it was impossible to do more than dimly guess; one might as well try to look at the stars through the London smoke. If one could stop the movement, or get away from it, then surely one would be able to see clearly the large and silent things beyond. But there was no stopping the movement and there was, somehow, no escaping from it. To check it was impossible; and the gesture of escape was ludicrous. The only sensible thing to do was to go on in the usual way and ignore the things outside the world of noise. That was what Calamy tried to do. But he was conscious, none the less, that the things were still there. They were still calmly and immutably there, however much he might

agitate himself and distractedly pretend to ignore them. Mutely they claimed attention. They had claimed it, of late, with a most irritating persistence. Calamy's response had been to make love to Mary Thriplow. That was something which ought to keep him well occupied. And up to a point it did. Up to a point. The best indoor sport, old Cardan had called it; but one demanded something better. Could he go on like this? Or if not, what should he do? The questions exasperated him. It was because the things were there, outside the tumult, that he had to ask them. They forced themselves on him, those questions. But it was intolerable to be bullied. He refused to let himself be bullied. He'd do what he damned well liked. But then, did he really like philandering with Mary Thriplow? In a way, no doubt, up to a point. But the real answer was no; frankly, no. But yes, yes, he insisted with another part of his mind. He did like it. And even if he didn't, he'd damned well say that he did. And if necessary he'd damned well do what he didn't like — just because he chose to. He'd do what he didn't like; and that was the end of it. He worked himself up into a kind of fury.

'What are you thinking about?' Miss Thriplow suddenly asked.

'You,' he said; and there was a savage exasperation in his voice, as though he passionately resented the fact that he was thinking about Mary Thriplow.

'Tiens!' she said on a note of polite curiosity.

'What would you say if I told you I was in love with you?' he asked.

'I should say that I didn't believe you.'

'Do you want me to compel you to believe?'

'I'd be most interested to know, at any rate, how you proposed to set about it.'

Calamy halted, put his hand on Mary Thriplow's shoulder and turned her round towards him. 'By force, if necessary,' he said, looking into her face.

Miss Thriplow returned his stare. He looked insolent still, still arrogantly conscious of power; but all the drowsiness and indolence that had veiled his look were now fallen away, leaving his face bare, as it were, and burning with a formidable and satanic beauty. At the sight of this strange and sudden transformation Miss Thriplow felt at once exhilarated and rather frightened. She

had never seen that expression on a man's face before. She had aroused passions, but never a passion so violent, so dangerous as this seemed to be.

'By force?' By the tone of her voice, by the mockery of her smile she tried to exasperate him into yet fiercer passion.

Calamy tightened his grip on her shoulder. Under his hand the bones felt small and fragile. When he spoke, he found that he had been clenching his teeth. 'By force,' he said. 'Like this.' And taking her head between his two hands he bent down and kissed her, angrily, again and again. Why do I do this? he was thinking. This is a folly. There are other things, important things. 'Do you believe me now?' he asked.

Mary Thriplow's face was flushed. 'You're insufferable,' she said. But she was not really angry with him.

CHAPTER IV

‘WHY HAVE YOU been so funny all vese days?’ Lord Hovenden had at last brought himself to put the long-premeditated question.

‘Funny?’ Irene echoed on another note, trying to make a joke of it, as though she didn’t understand what he meant. But of course she did understand, perfectly well.

They were sitting in the thin luminous shadow of the olive trees. The bright sky looked down at them between the sparse twi-coloured leaves. On the parched grass about the roots of the trees the sunlight scattered an innumerable golden mintage. They were sitting at the edge of a little terrace scooped out of the steep slope, their legs dangling, their backs propped against the trunk of a hoary tree.

‘You know,’ said Hovenden. ‘Why did you suddenly avoid me?’

‘Did I?’

‘You know you did.’

Irene was silent for a moment before she admitted: ‘Yes, perhaps I did.’

‘But why,’ he insisted, ‘why?’

‘I don’t know,’ she answered unhappily. She couldn’t tell him about Aunt Lilian.

Her tone emboldened Lord Hovenden to become more insistent. ‘You don’t know?’ he repeated sarcastically, as though he were a lawyer carrying out a cross-examination. ‘Perhaps you were walking in your sleep all ve time.’

‘Don’t be stupid,’ she said in a weary little voice.

‘At any rate, I’m not too stupid to see vat you were running after vat fellow Chelifer.’ Lord Hovenden became quite red in the face as he spoke. For the sake of his manly dignity, it was a pity that his th’s should sound quite so childish.

Irene said nothing, but sat quite still, her head bent, looking down at the slanting grove of olives. Framed within the square-cut hair, her face was sad.

‘If you were so much interested in him, why did you suggest vat we should go for a walk vis afternoon?’ he asked. ‘Perhaps you fought I was Chelifer.’ He was possessed by an urgent desire to say disagreeable and hurting things. And yet he was perfectly aware, all the time, that he was making a fool of himself and being unfair to her. But the desire was irresistible.

‘Why do you try to spoil everything?’ she asked with an exasperating sadness and patience.

‘I don’t try to spoil anyfing,’ Hovenden answered irritably. ‘I merely ask a simple question.’

‘You know I don’t take the slightest interest in Chelifer,’ she said.

‘Ven why do you trot after him all day long, like a little dog?’

The boy’s stupidity and insistence began to annoy her. ‘I don’t,’ she said angrily. ‘And in any case it’s no business of yours.’

‘Oh, it’s no business of mine, is it?’ said Hovenden in a provocative voice. ‘Fanks for ve information.’ And he was pointedly silent.

For a long time neither of them spoke. Some dark brown sheep with bells round their necks came straying between the trees a little way down the slope. With set, sad faces the two young people looked at them. The bells made a tinkling as the creatures moved. The sweet thin noise sounded, for some reason, extremely sad in their ears. Sad, too, was the bright sky between the leaves; profoundly melancholy the redder, richer light of the declining sun, colouring the silver leaves, the grey trunks, the parched thin grass. It was Hovenden who at last broke silence. His anger, his desire to say hurting, disagreeable things had utterly evaporated; there remained only the conviction that he had made a fool of himself and been unfair — only that and the profound aching love which had given his anger, his foolish cruel desire such force. ‘You know I don’t take the slightest interest in Chelifer.’ He hadn’t known but now that she had said so, and in that tone of voice, now he knew. One couldn’t doubt; and even if one could, was it worth doubting?

‘Look here,’ he said at last, in a muffled voice, ‘I made a fool of myself, I’m afraid. I’ve said stupid things. I’m sorry, Irene. Will you forgive me?’

Irene turned towards him the little square window in her hair. Her face looked out of it smiling. She gave him her hand. ‘One day I’ll tell you,’ she said.

They sat there hand in hand for what seemed to them at once a very long time and a timeless instant. They said nothing, but they were very happy. The sun set. A grey half-night came creeping in under the trees. Between the black silhouetted leaves the sky looked exceedingly pale. Irene sighed.

‘I think we ought to be getting back,’ she said reluctantly.

Hovenden was the first to scramble to his feet. He offered Irene his hand. She took it and raised herself lightly up, coming forward as she rose towards him. They stood for a moment very close together. Lord Hovenden suddenly took her in his arms and kissed her again and again. Irene uttered a cry. She struggled, she pushed him away.

‘No, no,’ she entreated, averting her face, leaning back, away from his kisses. ‘Please.’ And when he let her go, she covered her face with her hands and began to cry. ‘Why did you spoil it again?’ she asked through her tears. Lord Hovenden was overwhelmed with remorse. ‘We’d been so happy, such friends.’ Irene dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief; but her voice still came sobbingly.

‘I’m a brute,’ said Hovenden; and he spoke with such a passion of self-condemnation that Irene couldn’t help laughing. There was something positively comic about a repentance so sudden and whole-hearted.

‘No, you’re not a brute,’ she said. Her sobs and her laughter were getting curiously mixed up together. ‘You’re a dear and I like you. So much, so much. But you mustn’t do that, I don’t know why. It spoils everything. I was a goose to cry. But somehow . . .’ She shook her head. ‘I like you so much,’ she repeated. ‘But not like that. Not now. Some day, perhaps. Not now. You won’t spoil it again? Promise.’

Lord Hovenden promised devoutly. They walked home through the grey night of the olive orchard.

That evening at dinner the conversation turned on feminism. Under pressure from Mr. Cardan, Mrs. Aldwinkle reluctantly admitted that there was a considerable difference between Maud Valerie White and Beethoven and that Angelica Kauffmann compared unfavourably with Giotto. But she protested, on the other hand, that in matters of love women were, definitely, treated unfairly.

‘We claim all your freedom,’ she said dramatically.

Knowing that Aunt Lilian liked her to take part in the conversation, and remembering — for she had a good memory — a phrase that her aunt used at one time to employ frequently, but which had recently faded out of the catalogue of her favourite locutions, Irene gravely brought it out. ‘Contraception,’ she pronounced, ‘has rendered chastity superfluous.’

Mr. Cardan leaned back in his chair and roared with laughter.

But across the prophetical face of Mr. Falx there passed a pained expression. He looked anxiously at his pupil, hoping that he had not heard, or at least had not understood what had just been said. He caught Mr. Cardan’s winking eye and frowned. Could corruption and moral laxity go further? his glance seemed to inquire. He looked at Irene; that such a youthful, innocent appearance should be wedded to so corrupt a mind appalled him. He felt glad, for Hovenden’s sake, that their stay in this bad house was not to last much longer. If it were not for the necessity of behaving politely, he would have left the place at once; like Lot, he would have shaken the dust of it from his feet.

CHAPTER V

‘WHEN THE BUTCHER’S boy tells you in confidence, and with an eye to a tip, that the grocer’s brother has a very fine piece of very old sculpture which he is prepared to part with for a moderate consideration, what do you suppose he means?’ Walking slowly up-hill among the olive trees, Mr. Cardan meditatively put the question.

‘I suppose he means what he says,’ said Miss Thriplow.

‘No doubt,’ said Mr. Cardan, halting for a moment to wipe his face, which shone, even though the sun came only slantingly through the thin foliage of the olive trees, with an excess of heat. Miss Thriplow in the green uniform of the musical comedy schoolgirl looked wonderfully cool and neat beside her unbuttoned companion. ‘But the point is this: what exactly is it that he says? What is a butcher’s boy likely to mean when he says that a piece of sculpture is very beautiful and very old?’ They resumed their climbing. Below them, through a gap in the trees, they could see the roofs and the slender tower of the Cybo Malaspina palace, and below these again the dolls’ village of Vezza, the map-like plain, the sea.

‘I should ask him, if you want to know.’ Miss Thriplow spoke rather tartly; it was not to talk of butchers’ boys that she had accepted Mr. Cardan’s invitation to go for a walk with him. She wanted to hear Mr. Cardan’s views on life, literature and herself. He knew a thing or two, it seemed to her, about all these subjects. Too many things, and not exactly the right ones at that, about the last. Too many — it was precisely for that reason that Miss Thriplow liked to talk with him. Horrors always exercise a fascination. And now, after the prolonged silence, he was starting on butchers’ boys.

‘I have asked him,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘But do you suppose there’s anything intelligible to be got out of him? All I can gather is that the sculpture represents a

man — not a whole man, part of a man, and that it's made of marble. Beyond that I can discover nothing.'

'Why do you want to discover?' asked Miss Thriplow.

Mr. Cardan shook his head. 'Alas,' he said, 'for sordid reasons. You remember what the poet wrote?

I have been in love, in debt and in drink
This many and many a year;
And these are three evils too great, one would think,
For one poor mortal to bear.
'Twas love that first drove me to drinking,
And drinking first drove me to debt,
And though I have struggled and struggled and strove,
I cannot get out of them yet.
There's nothing but money can cure me
And ease me of all my pain;
'Twill pay all my debts and remove all my lets,
And my mistress who cannot endure me
Will turn to and love me again,
Will turn to and love me again.

There's a summary of a lifetime for you. One has no regrets, of course. But still, one does need cash — needs it the more, alas, the older one grows, and has less of it. What other reason, do you think, would send me sweating up this hill to talk with the village grocer about his brother's statuary?'

'You mean that you'd buy it if it were worth anything?'

'At the lowest possible price,' confirmed Mr. Cardan. 'And sell it at the highest. If I had ever adopted a profession,' he continued, 'I think it would have been art dealing. It has the charm of being more dishonest than almost any other form of licensed brigandage in existence. And dishonest, moreover, in a much more amusing way. Financiers, it is true, can swindle on a larger scale; but their swindling is mostly impersonal. You may ruin thousands of trusting investors; but you haven't the pleasure of knowing your victims. Whereas if you're an art

dealer, your swindling, though less extensive, is most amusingly personal. You meet your victims face to face and do them down. You take advantage of the ignorance or urgent poverty of the vendor to get the work for nothing. You then exploit the snobbery and the almost equally profound ignorance of the rich buyer to make him take the stuff off your hands at some fantastic price. What huge elation one must feel when one has succeeded in bringing off some splendid coup! bought a blackened panel from some decayed gentleman in need of a new suit, cleaned it up and sold it again to a rich snob who thinks that a collection and the reputation of being a patron of the ancient arts will give him a leg up in society — what vast Rabelaisian mirth! No, decidedly, if I were not Diogenes and idle, I would be Alexander, critic and dealer. A really gentlemanly profession.'

'Can you never be serious?' asked Miss Thriplow, who would have preferred the conversation to turn on something more nearly related to her own problems.

Mr. Cardan smiled at her. 'Can anybody fail to be serious when it's a question of making money?'

'I give you up,' said Miss Thriplow.

'I'm sorry,' Mr. Cardan protested. 'But perhaps it's all for the best. Meanwhile, what about that butcher's boy? What does he mean by a bit of very old sculpture? Is it the head of some rich Etruscan cheese-monger of Lunae that they've dug up? Some long-nosed primitive oriental with a smile of imbecile rapture on his face? Or a fragment of one of his Hellenized posterity, reclining on the lid of his sarcophagus as though along his prandial couch and staring blankly out of a head that might, if Praxiteles had carved it, have been Apollo's, but which the Etruscan mason has fattened into an all too human grossness? Or perhaps it's a Roman bust, so thoroughly real, life-like and up-to-date that, but for the toga, we might almost take it for our old friend Sir William Midrash, the eminent civil servant. Or perhaps — and I should like that better — perhaps it dates from that strange, grey Christian dawn that followed the savage night into which the empire went down. I can imagine some fragment from Modena or Toscanella — some odd, unpredictable figure bent by excess of faith into the

most profoundly expressive and symbolic of attitudes: a monster physically, a barbarism, a little mumbo-jumbo, but glowing so passionately with inward life — it may be lovely, it may be malignant — that it is impossible to look at it with indifference or merely as a shape, ugly or beautiful. Yes. I should like the thing to be a piece of Romanesque carving. I'd give the butcher's boy an extra five francs if it were. But if it turned out to be one of those suave Italian Gothic saints elegantly draped and leaning a little sideways, like saplings in the mystical breeze — and it might be, you never can tell — I'd deduct five francs. Not but what it mightn't fetch just as much in the American market. But how they bore me, those accomplished Gothicisms, how they bore me!'

They were at the top of the hill. Emerging from the sloping forest of olive trees, the road now ran along a bare and almost level ridge. Some little way off, where the ground began to rise once more towards further heights, one could see a cluster of houses and a church tower. Mr. Cardan pointed.

'There,' he said, 'we shall find out what the butcher's boy really did mean. But in the meantime it's amusing to go on speculating. For example, suppose it were a chunk of a bas-relief designed by Giotto. Eh? Something so grand, so spiritually and materially beautiful that you could fall down and worship it. But I'd be very well pleased, I assure you, with a bit of a sarcophagus from the earliest renaissance. Some figure marvellously bright, ethereal and pure, like an angel, but an angel, not of the kingdom of heaven; an angel of some splendid and, alas, imaginary kingdom of earth. Ah,' pursued Mr. Cardan, shaking his head, 'that's the kingdom one would like to live in — the kingdom of ancient Greece, purged of every historical Greek that ever existed, and colonized out of the imaginations of modern artists, scholars and philosophers. In such a world one might live positively, so to speak — live with the stream, in the direction of the main current — not negatively, as one has to now, in reaction against the general trend of existence.'

Positive and negative living. Miss Thriplow made a mental note of the notions. It might be an idea to work up in an article. It might even throw light on her own problems. Perhaps what one suffered from was the sense of being

negative and in reaction. More positiveness — that was what one needed. The conversation, she thought, seemed to be growing more serious. They walked on for a moment in silence. Mr. Cardan broke it at last.

‘Or can it possibly be,’ he said, ‘that the grocer’s brother has lighted on some fragmentary rough-hewing by Michelangelo, begun in a frenzy while he was living among these mountains and abandoned when he left them? Some tormented Slave, struggling to free himself more of his inward than his outward chains; straining with more than human violence, but at the same time pensively, with a passion concentrated upon itself instead of explosively dissipated, as in the baroque, which all too fatally and easily developed out of him? And after all our hopes and speculations, that’s what my treasure will probably resolve itself into — a bit of seventeenth-century baroque. I picture the torso of a waltzing angel in the middle of a whirlwind of draperies turning up to heaven the ecstatic eye of the clergyman in a Lyceum melodrama; or perhaps a Bacchus, dancing by a miracle of virtuosity on one marble leg, his mouth open in a tipsy laugh and the fingers of both hands splayed out to their fullest extent, just to show what can be done by a sculptor who knows his business; or the bust of a prince, prodigiously alive and characteristic, wearing a collar of Brussels lace imitated in stone down to the finest thread. The butcher’s boy kept on insisting that the thing was very beautiful as well as very old. And it’s obvious, now I come to think of it, that he’d really and sincerely like baroque and baroque only, just because it would be so familiar to him, because it would be just like everything he had been brought up to admire. For by some strange and malignant fate the Italians, once arrived at baroque, seem to have got stuck there. They are still up to the eyes in it. Consider their literature, their modern painting and architecture, their music — it’s all baroque. It gesticulates rhetorically, it struts across stages, it sobs and bawls in its efforts to show you how passionate it is. In the midst, like a huge great Jesuit church, stands d’Annunzio.’

‘I should have thought,’ said Miss Thriplow with barbed ingenuousness, ‘that you’d have liked that sort of elaboration and virtuosity. It’s “amusing” — isn’t that the word?’

‘True,’ answered Mr. Cardan, ‘I like being amused. But I demand from my art the added luxury of being moved. And, somehow, one can’t feel emotion about anything so furiously and consciously emotional as these baroque things. It’s not by making wild and passionate gestures that an artist can awake emotion in the spectator. It isn’t done that way. These seventeenth-century Italians tried to express passion by making use of passionate gestures. They only succeeded in producing something that either leaves us cold — though it may, as you say, amuse us — or which actually makes us laugh. Art which is to move its contemplator must itself be still; it is almost an aesthetic law. Passion must never be allowed to dissipate itself in wild splashings and boilings over. It must be shut up, so to speak, and compressed and moulded by the intellect. Concentrated within a calm, untroubled form, its strength will irresistibly move. Styles that protest too much are not fit for serious, tragical use. They are by nature suited to comedy, whose essence is exaggeration. That is why good romantic art is so rare. Romanticism, of which the seventeenth-century baroque style is a queer sub-species, makes violent gestures; it relies on violent contrasts of light and shade, on stage effects; it is ambitious to present you with emotion in the raw and palpitating form. That is to say, the romantic style is in essence a comic style. And, except in the hands of a few colossal geniuses, romantic art is, in point of historical fact, almost always comic. Think of all the hair-raising romances written during the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries; now that the novelty has worn off them, we perceive them for what they are — the broadest comedies. Even writers of a great and genuine talent were betrayed by the essentially comic nature of the style into being farcical when they meant to be romantically tragical. Balzac, for example, in a hundred serious passages; George Sand in all her earlier novels; Beddoes, when he tries to make his Death’s Jest Book particularly blood-curdling; Byron in Cain; de Musset in Rolla. And what prevents Herman Melville’s Moby Dick from being a really great book is precisely the pseudo-Shakespearean idiom in which what are meant to be the most tragical passages are couched — an idiom to whose essential suitability to comedy the exceptional tragic successes of Shakespeare

himself, of Marlowe and a few others has unfortunately blinded all their imitators. Moreover, if the romantic style is essentially fitted to comedy, it is also true, conversely, that the greatest comic works have been written in a romantic style. Pantagruel and the Contes Drolatiques; the conversation of Falstaff and Wilkins Micawber; Aristophanes' Frogs; Tristram Shandy. And who will deny that the finest passages in Milton's reverberating prose are precisely those where he is writing satirically and comically? A comic writer is a very large and copious man with a zest for all that is earthy, who unbuttons himself and lets himself freely go, following wherever his indefatigably romping spirit leads him. The unrestrained, exaggerated, wildly gesticulating manner which is the romantic manner exactly fulfils his need.'

Miss Thriplow listened with growing attention. This was serious; moreover, it seemed really to touch her own problems. In her new novel she had done her best to throw off the light satiric vestments in which, in the past, she had clothed her tendernesses; this time, she had decided to give the public her naked heart. Mr. Cardan was making her wonder whether she wasn't exposing it in too palpitating a manner.

'When you come to pictorial art,' Mr. Cardan went on, 'you find that seriousness and romanticism are even less frequently combined than in literature. The greatest triumphs of the nineteenth-century romantic style are to be found precisely among the comedians and the makers of grotesques. Daumier, for example, produced at once the most comic and the most violently romantic pictures ever made. And Doré, when he ceased from trying to paint serious pictures in the romantic style — with what involuntarily ludicrous results I leave you to recall to mind — and applied himself to illustrating Don Quixote and the Contes Drolatiques in the same romantic terms, Doré produced masterpieces. Indeed, the case of Doré quite clinches my argument. Here was a man who did precisely the same romantic things in both his serious and his comic works, and who succeeded in making what was meant to be sublime ludicrous and what was meant to be ludicrous sublime in its rich, extravagant, romantic grotesqueness.'

They had passed the outlying houses of the village and were walking slowly up its single, steep street.

‘That’s very true,’ said Miss Thriplow pensively. She was wondering whether she oughtn’t to tone down a little that description in her new novel of the agonies of the young wife when she discovers that her husband had been unfaithful to her. A dramatic moment, that. The young wife has just had her first baby — with infinite suffering — and now, still very frail, but infinitely happy, lies convalescent. The handsome young husband, whom she adores and who, she supposes, adores her, comes in with the afternoon post. He sits down by her bed, and putting the bunch of letters on the counterpane begins opening his correspondence. She opens hers too. Two boring notes. She tosses them aside. Without looking at the address, she opens another envelope, unfolds the sheet within and reads: ‘Doodlums darling, I shall be waiting for you to-morrow evening in our love-nest. . . .’ She looks at the envelope; it is addressed to her husband. Her feelings . . . Miss Thriplow wondered; yes, perhaps, in the light of what Mr. Cardan had been saying, the passage was a little too palpitating. Particularly that bit where the baby is brought in to be suckled. Miss Thriplow sighed; she’d read through the chapter critically when she got home.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Cardan, interrupting the course of her thoughts, ‘here we are. It only remains to find out where the grocer lives, and to find out from the grocer where his brother lives, and to find out from the brother what his treasure is and how much he wants for it, and then to find some one to buy it for fifty thousand pounds — and we’ll live happily ever after. What?’

He stopped a passing child and put his question. The child pointed up the street. They walked on.

At the door of his little shop sat the grocer, unoccupied at the moment, taking the sun and air and looking on at such stray drops from the flux of life as trickled occasionally along the village street. He was a stout man with a large fleshy face that looked as though it had been squeezed perpendicularly, so broadly it bulged, so close to one another the horizontal lines of eyes, nose and mouth. His cheeks and chin were black with five days’ beard — for to-day was Thursday and

shaving-time only came round on Saturday evening. Small, sly, black eyes looked out from between pouchy lids. He had thick lips, and his teeth when he smiled were yellow. A long white apron, unexpectedly clean, was tied at neck and waist and fell down over his knees. It was the apron that struck Miss Thriplow's imagination — the apron and the thought that this man wore it, draped round him like an ephod, when he was cutting up ham and sausages, when he was serving out sugar with a little shovel. . . .

'How extraordinarily nice and jolly he looks!' she said enthusiastically, as they approached.

'Does he?' asked Mr. Cardan in some surprise. To his eyes the man looked like a hardly mitigated ruffian.

'So simple and happy and contented!' Miss Thriplow went on. 'One envies them their lives.' She could almost have wept over the little shovel — momentarily the masonic emblem of pre-lapsarian ingenuousness. 'We make everything so unnecessarily complicated for ourselves, don't we?'

'Do we?' said Mr. Cardan.

'These people have no doubts, or after-thoughts,' pursued Miss Thriplow, 'or — what's worse than after-thoughts — simultaneous-thoughts. They know what they want and what's right; they feel just what they ought to feel by nature — like the heroes in the Iliad — and act accordingly. And the result is, I believe, that they're much better than we are, much gooder, we used to say when we were children; the word's more expressive. Yes, much gooder. Now you're laughing at me!'

Mr. Cardan twinkled at her with benevolent irony. 'I assure you I'm not,' he declared.

'But I shouldn't mind if you were,' said Miss Thriplow. 'For after all, in spite of all that you people may say or think, it's the only thing that matters — being good.'

'I entirely agree,' said Mr. Cardan.

'And it's easier if you're like that.' She nodded in the direction of the white apron.

Mr. Cardan nodded, a little dubiously.

‘Sometimes,’ Miss Thriplow continued, with a gush of confidence that made her words come more rapidly, ‘sometimes, when I get on a bus and take my ticket from the conductor, I suddenly feel the tears come into my eyes at the thought of this life, so simple and straightforward, so easy to live well, even if it is a hard one — and perhaps, too, just because it is a hard one. Ours is so difficult.’ She shook her head.

By this time they were within a few yards of the shopkeeper, who, seeing that they were proposing to enter his shop, rose from his seat at the door and darted in to take up his stand, professionally, behind the counter.

They followed him into the shop. It was dark within and filled with a violent smell of goat’s milk cheese, pickled tunny, tomato preserve and highly flavoured sausage.

‘Whee-ew!’ said Miss Thriplow, and pulling out a small handkerchief, she took refuge with the ghost of Parma violets. It was a pity that these simple lives in white aprons had to be passed amid such surroundings.

‘Rather deafening, eh?’ said Mr. Cardan, twinkling. ‘Puzza,’ he added, turning to the shopkeeper. ‘It stinks.’

The man looked at Miss Thriplow, who stood there, her nose in the oasis of her handkerchief, and smiled indulgently. ‘I forestieri sono troppo delicati. Troppo delicati,’ he repeated.

‘He’s quite right,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘We are. In the end, I believe, we shall come to sacrifice everything to comfort and cleanliness. Personally, I always have the greatest suspicion of your perfectly hygienic and well-padded Utopias. As for this particular stink,’ he sniffed the air, positively with relish, ‘I don’t really know what you have to object to it. It’s wholesome, it’s natural, it’s tremendously historical. The shops of the Etruscan grocers, you may be sure, smelt just as this does. No, on the whole, I entirely agree with our friend here.’

‘Still,’ said Miss Thriplow, speaking in a muffled voice through the folds of her handkerchief, ‘I shall stick to my violets. However synthetic.’

Having ordered a couple of glasses of wine, one of which he offered to the grocer, Mr. Cardan embarked on a diplomatic conversation about the object of his visit. At the mention of his brother and the sculpture, the grocer's face took on an expression of altogether excessive amiability. He bent his thick lips into smiles; deep folds in the shape of arcs of circles appeared in his fat cheeks. He kept bowing again and again. Every now and then he joyously laughed, emitting a blast of garlicky breath that smelt so powerfully like acetylene that one was tempted to put a match to his mouth in the hope that he would immediately break out into a bright white flame. He confirmed all that the butcher's boy had said. It was all quite true; he had a brother; and his brother had a piece of marble statuary that was beautiful and old, old, old. Unfortunately, however, his brother had removed from this village and had gone down to live in the plain, near the lake of Massaciuccoli, and the sculpture had gone with him. Mr. Cardan tried to find out from him what the work of art looked like; but he could gather nothing beyond the fact that it was beautiful and old and represented a man.

'It isn't like this, I suppose?' asked Mr. Cardan, bending himself into the attitude of a Romanesque demon and making a demoniac grimace.

The grocer thought not. Two peasant women who had come in for cheese and oil looked on with a mild astonishment. These foreigners . . .

'Or like this?' He propped his elbow on the counter and, half reclining, conjured up, by his attitude and his fixed smile of imbecile ecstasy, visions of Etruscan revelry.

Again the grocer shook his head.

'Or like this?' He rolled his eyes towards heaven, like a baroque saint.

But the grocer seemed doubtful even of this.

Mr. Cardan wiped his forehead. 'If I could make myself look like a Roman bust,' he said to Miss Thriplow, 'or a bas-relief of Giotto, or a renaissance sarcophagus, or an unfinished group by Michelangelo, I would. But it's beyond my powers.' He shook his head. 'For the moment I give it up.'

He took out his pocket-book and asked for the brother's address. The grocer gave directions; Mr. Cardan carefully took them down. Smiling and bowing, the

grocer ushered them out into the street, Miss Thriplow vailed her handkerchief and drew a breath of air — redolent, however, even here, of organic chemistry.

‘Patience,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘tenacity of purpose. One needs them here.’

They walked slowly down the street. They had only gone a few yards when the noise of a violent altercation made them turn round. At the door of the shop the grocer and his two customers were furiously disputing. Voices were raised, the grocer’s deep and harsh, the women’s shrill; hands moved in violent and menacing gestures, yet gracefully withal, as was natural in the hands of those whose ancestors had taught the old masters of painting all they ever knew of expressive and harmonious movement.

‘What is it?’ asked Miss Thriplow. ‘It looks like the preliminaries of a murder.’

Mr. Cardan smiled and shrugged his shoulders. ‘It’s nothing,’ he said. ‘They’re just calling him a robber; that’s all.’ He listened for a moment more to the shouting. ‘A little question of short weight, it seems.’ He smiled at Miss Thriplow. ‘Should we go on?’

They turned away; the sound of the dispute followed them down the street. Miss Thriplow did not know whether to be grateful to Mr. Cardan for saying nothing more about her friend in the white apron. These simple folk . . . the little shovel for the sugar . . . so much better, so much gooder than we. . . . In the end she almost wished that he would say something about it. Mr. Cardan’s silence seemed more ironic than any words.

CHAPTER VI

THE SUN HAD set. Against a pale green sky the blue and purple mountains lifted a jagged silhouette. Mr. Cardan found himself alone in the middle of the flat plain at their feet. He was standing on the bank of a broad ditch, brimming with gleaming water, that stretched away in a straight line apparently for miles across the land, to be lost in the vague twilight distance. Here and there a line of tall thin poplars marked the position of other dykes, intersecting the plain in all directions. There was not a house in sight, not a human being, not even a cow or a grazing donkey. Far away on the slopes of the mountains, whose blue and purple were rapidly darkening to a uniform deep indigo, little yellow lights began to appear, singly or in clusters, attesting the presence of a village or a solitary farm. Mr. Cardan looked at them with irritation; very pretty, no doubt, but he had seen it done better on many musical comedy stages. And in any case, what was the good of a light six or seven miles away, on the hills, when he was standing in the middle of the plain, with nobody in sight, night coming on, and these horrible ditches to prevent one from taking the obvious bee-line towards civilization? He had been a fool, he reflected, three or four times over: a fool to refuse Lilian's offer of the car and go on foot (this fetish of exercise! still, he would certainly have to cut down his drinking if he didn't take it); a fool to have started so late in the afternoon; a fool to have accepted Italian estimates of distance; and a fool to have followed directions for finding the way given by people who mixed up left and right and, when you insisted on knowing which they meant, told you that either would bring you where you wanted to go. The path which Mr. Cardan had been following seemed to have come to a sudden end in the waters of this ditch; perhaps it was a suicides' path. The lake of Massaciuccoli should be somewhere on the further side of the ditch; but where? and how to get across? The twilight rapidly deepened. In a few minutes the sun

would have gone down its full eighteen degrees below the horizon and it would be wholly dark. Mr. Cardan swore; but that got him no further. In the end he decided that the best thing to do would be to walk slowly and cautiously along this ditch, in the hope that in time one might arrive, at any rate somewhere. Meanwhile, it would be well to fortify oneself with a bite and a sup. He sat down on the grass and opening his jacket, dipped into the capacious poacher's pockets excavated in its lining, producing first a loaf, then a few inches of a long polony, then a bottle of red wine; Mr. Cardan was always prepared against emergencies.

The bread was stale, the sausage rather horsey and spiced with garlic; but Mr. Cardan, who had had no tea, ate with a relish. Still more appreciatively he drank. In a little while he felt a little more cheerful. Such are the little crosses, he reflected philosophically, the little crosses one has to bear when one sets out to earn money. If he got through the evening without falling into a ditch, he'd feel that he had paid lightly for his treasure. The greatest bore was these mosquitoes; he lighted a cigar and tried to fumigate them to a respectful distance. Without much success, however. Perhaps the brutes were malarial, too. There might be a little of the disease still hanging about in these marshes; one never knew. It would be tiresome to end one's days with recurrent fever and an enlarged spleen. It would be tiresome, for that matter, to end one's days anyhow, in one's bed or out, naturally or unnaturally, by the act of God or of the King's enemies. Mr. Cardan's thoughts took on, all at once, a dismal complexion. Old age, sickness, decrepitude; the bath-chair, the doctor, the bright efficient nurse; and the long agony, the struggle for breath, the thickening darkness, the end, and then — how did that merry little song go?

More work for the undertaker,

'Nother little job for the coffin-maker.

At the local cemetery they are

Very very busy with a brand new grave.

He'll keep warm next winter.

Mr. Cardan hummed the tune to himself cheerfully enough. But his tough, knobbly face became so hard, so strangely still, an expression of such bitterness,

such a profound melancholy, appeared in his winking and his supercilious eye, that it would have startled and frightened a man to look at him. But there was nobody in that deepening twilight to see him. He sat there alone.

At the local cemetery they are

Very very busy with a brand new grave . .

He went on humming. ‘If I were to fall sick,’ he was thinking, ‘who would look after me? Suppose one were to have a stroke. Hemorrhage on the brain; partial paralysis; mumbling speech; the tongue couldn’t utter what the brain thought; one was fed like a baby; clysters; such a bright doctor, rubbing his hands and smelling of disinfectant and eau-de-Cologne; saw nobody but the nurse; no friends; or once a week, perhaps, for an hour, out of charity; ‘Poor old Cardan, done for, I’m afraid; must send the old chap a fiver — hasn’t a penny, you know; get up a subscription; what a bore; astonishing that he can last so long. . . .’

He’ll keep warm next winter.

The tune ended on a kind of trumpet call, rising from the dominant to the tonic — one dominant, three repeated tonics, drop down again to the dominant and then on the final syllable of ‘winter’ the last tonic. Finis, and no da capo, no second movement.

Mr. Cardan took another swig from his bottle; it was nearly empty now.

Perhaps one ought to have married. Kitty, for example. She would be old now and fat; or old and thin, like a skeleton very imperfectly disguised. Still, he had been very much in love with Kitty. Perhaps it would have been a good thing if he had married her. Pooh! with a burst of mocking laughter Mr. Cardan laughed aloud savagely. Marry indeed! She looked very coy, no doubt; but you bet, she was a little tart underneath, and lascivious as you make them. He remembered her with hatred and contempt. Portentous obscenities reverberated through the chambers of his mind.

He thought of arthritis, he thought of gout, of cataract, of deafness. . . . And in any case, how many years were left him? Ten, fifteen, twenty if he were exceptional. And what years, what years!

Mr. Cardan emptied the bottle and replacing the cork threw it into the black water beneath him. The wine had done nothing to improve his mood. He wished to God he were back at the palace, with people round him to talk to. Alone, he was without defence. He tried to think of something lively and amusing; indoor sports, for example. But instead of indoor sports he found himself contemplating visions of disease, decrepitude, death. And it was the same when he tried to think of reasonable, serious things: what is art, for example? and what was the survival value to a species of eyes or wings or protective colouring in their rudimentary state, before they were developed far enough to see, fly or protect? Why should the individuals having the first and still quite useless variation in the direction of something useful have survived more effectively than those who were handicapped by no eccentricity? Absorbing themes. But Mr. Cardan couldn't keep his attention fixed on them. General paralysis of the insane, he reflected, was luckily an ailment for which he had not qualified in the past; luckily! miraculously, even! But stone, but neuritis, but fatty degeneration, but diabetes. . . . Lord, how he wished he had somebody to talk to!

And all at once, as though in immediate answer to his prayer, he heard the sound of voices approaching through the now complete darkness. 'Thank the Lord!' said Mr. Cardan, and scrambling to his feet he walked in the direction from which the voices came. Two black silhouettes, one tall and masculine, the other, very small, belonging to a woman, loomed up out of the dark. Mr. Cardan removed the cigar from his mouth, took off his hat and bowed in their direction.

'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,' he began,

'mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,

che la diritta via era smarrita.'

How lucky that Dante should also have lost his way, six hundred and twenty-four years ago! 'In a word,' Mr. Cardan went on, 'ho perso la mia strada — though I have my doubts whether that's very idiomatic. Forse potrebbero darmi qualche indicazione.' In the presence of the strangers and at the sound of his own voice conversing, all Mr. Cardan's depression had vanished. He was delighted by the fantastic turn he had managed to give the conversation at its

inception. Perhaps with a little ingenuity he would be able to find an excuse for treating them to a little Leopardi. It was so amusing to astonish the natives.

The two silhouettes, meanwhile, had halted at a little distance. When Mr. Cardan had finished his macaronic self-introduction, the taller of them answered in a harsh and, for a man's, a shrill voice: 'There's no need to talk Italian. We're English.'

'I'm enchanted to hear it,' Mr. Cardan protested. And he explained at length and in his mother tongue what had happened to him. It occurred to him, at the same time, that this was a very odd place to find a couple of English tourists.

The harsh voice spoke again. 'There's a path to Massarosa through the fields,' it said. 'And there's another, in the opposite direction, that joins the Viareggio road. But they're not very easy to find in the dark, and there are a lot of ditches.'

'One can but perish in the attempt,' said Mr. Cardan gallantly.

This time it was the woman who spoke. 'I think it would be better,' she said, 'if you slept at our house for the night. You'll never find the way. I almost tumbled into the ditch myself just now.' She laughed shrilly and more loudly, Mr. Cardan thought, at greater length, than was necessary.

'But have we room?' asked the man in a tone which showed that he was very reluctant to receive a guest.

'But you know we've got room,' the feminine voice answered in a tone of child-like astonishment. 'It's rough, though.'

'That doesn't matter in the least,' Mr. Cardan assured her. 'I'm most grateful to you for your offer,' he added, making haste to accept the invitation before the man could take it back. He had no desire to go wandering at night among these ditches. Moreover, the prospect of having company, and odd company, he guessed, was alluring. 'Most grateful,' he repeated.

'Well, if you think there's room,' said the man grudgingly.

'Of course there is,' the feminine voice replied, and laughed again. 'Isn't it six spare rooms that we've got? or is it seven? Come with us, Mr. . . . Mr. . . .'

'Cardan.'

‘. . . Mr. Cardan. We’re going straight home. Such fun,’ she added, and repeated her excessive laughter.

Mr. Cardan accompanied them, talking as agreeably as he could all the time. The man listened in a gloomy silence. But his sister — Mr. Cardan had discovered that they were brother and sister and that their name was Elver — laughed heartily at the end of each of Mr. Cardan’s sentences, as though everything he said were a glorious joke; laughed extravagantly and then made some remark which showed that she could have had no idea what Mr. Cardan had meant. Mr. Cardan found himself making his conversation more and more elementary, until as they approached their destination it was frankly addressed to a child of ten.

‘Here we are at last,’ she said, as they emerged from the denser night of a little wood of poplar trees. In front of them rose the large square mass of a house, utterly black but for a single lighted window.

To the door, when they knocked, came an old woman with a candle. By its light Mr. Cardan saw his hosts for the first time. That the man was tall and thin he had seen even without the light; he revealed himself now as a stooping, hollow-chested creature of about forty, with long spidery legs and arms and a narrow yellow face, long-nosed, not too powerfully chinned, and lit by small and furtive grey eyes that looked mostly on the ground and seemed afraid of encountering other eyes. Mr. Cardan fancied there was something faintly clerical about his appearance. The man might be a broken-down clergyman — broken-down and possibly, when one considered the furtive eyes, unfrocked as well. He was dressed in a black suit, well cut and not old, but baggy at the knees and bulgy about the pockets of the coat. The nails of his long bony hands were rather dirty and his dark brown hair was too long above the ears and at the back of his neck.

Miss Elver was nearly a foot shorter than her brother; but she looked as though Nature had originally intended to make her nearly as tall. For her head was too large for her body and her legs too short. One shoulder was higher than the other. In face she somewhat resembled her brother. One saw in it the same

long nose, but better shaped, the same weakness of chin; compensated for, however, by an amiable, ever-smiling mouth and large hazel eyes, not at all furtive or mistrustful, but on the contrary exceedingly confiding in their glance, albeit blank and watery in their brightness and not more expressive than the eyes of a young child. Her age, Mr. Cardan surmised, was twenty-eight or thirty. She wore a queer little shapeless dress, like a sack with holes in it for the head and arms to go through, made of some white material with a large design, that looked like an inferior version of the willow pattern, printed on it in bright red. Round her neck she wore two or three sets of gaudy beads. There were bangles on her wrists, and she carried a little reticule made of woven gold chains.

Using gesture to supplement his scanty vocabulary, Mr. Elver gave instructions to the old woman. She left him the candle and went out. Holding the light high, he led the way from the hall into a large room. They sat down on hard uncomfortable chairs round the empty hearth.

‘Such an uncomfy house!’ said Miss Elver. ‘You know I don’t like Italy much.’

‘Dear, dear,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘That’s bad. Don’t you even like Venice? All the boats and gondolas?’ And meeting those blank infantile eyes, he felt that he might almost go on about there being no gee-gees. The cat is on the mat; the pig in the gig is a big pig; the lass on the ass a crass lass. And so on.

‘Venice?’ said Miss Elver. ‘I’ve not been there.’

‘Florence, then. Don’t you like Florence?’

‘Nor there, either.’

‘Rome? Naples?’

Miss Elver shook her head.

‘We’ve only been here,’ she said. ‘All the time.’

Her brother, who had been sitting, bent forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped in front of him, looking down at the floor, broke silence. ‘The fact is,’ he said in his harsh high voice, ‘my sister has to keep quiet; she’s doing a rest cure.’

‘Here?’ asked Mr. Cardan. ‘Doesn’t she find it a bit hot? Rather relaxing?’

‘Yes, it’s awfully hot, isn’t it?’ said Miss Elver. ‘I’m always telling Philip that.’

‘I should have thought you’d have been better at the sea, or in the mountains,’ said Mr. Cardan.

Mr. Elver shook his head. ‘The doctors,’ he said mysteriously, and did not go on.

‘And the risk of malaria?’

‘That’s all rot,’ said Mr. Elver, with so much violence, such indignation, that Mr. Cardan could only imagine that he was a landed proprietor in these parts and meant to develop his estate as a health resort.

‘Oh, of course it’s mostly been got rid of,’ he said mollifyingly. ‘The Maremma isn’t what it was.’

Mr. Elver said nothing, but scowled at the floor.

CHAPTER VII

THE DINING-ROOM WAS also large and bare. Four candles burned on the long narrow table; their golden brightness faded in the remoter corners to faint twilight; the shadows were huge and black. Entering, Mr. Cardan could fancy himself Don Juan walking down to supper in the Commander's vault.

Supper was at once dismal and exceedingly lively. While his sister chattered and laughed unceasingly with her guest, Mr. Elver preserved throughout the meal an unbroken silence. Gloomily he ate his way through the mixed and fragmentary meal which the old woman kept bringing in, relay after unexpected relay, on little dishes from the kitchen. Gloomily too, with the air of a weak man who drinks to give himself courage and the illusion of strength, he drank glass after glass of the strong red wine. He kept his eyes fixed most of the time on the table-cloth in front of his plate; but every now and then he would look up for a second to dart a glance at the other two — for a moment only, then, fearful of being caught in the act and looked at straight in the face, he turned away again.

Mr. Cardan enjoyed his supper. Not that the food was particularly good; it was not. The old woman was one of those inept practitioners of Italian cookery who disguise their short-comings under floods of tomato sauce, with a pinch of garlic thrown in to make the disguise impenetrable. No, what Mr. Cardan enjoyed was the company. It was a long time since he had sat down with such interesting specimens. One's range, he reflected, is altogether too narrowly limited. One doesn't know enough people; one's acquaintanceship isn't sufficiently diversified. Burglars, for example, millionaires, imbeciles, clergymen, Hottentots, sea captains — one's personal knowledge of these most interesting human species is quite absurdly small. To-night, it seemed to him, he was doing something to widen his range.

‘I’m so glad we met you,’ Miss Elver was saying. ‘In the dark — such a start you gave me too!’ She shrieked with laughter. ‘We were getting so dull here. Weren’t we, Phil?’ She appealed to her brother; but Mr. Elver said nothing, did not even look up. ‘So dull. I’m awfully glad you were there.’

‘Not so glad as I am, I assure you,’ said Mr. Cardan gallantly.

Miss Elver looked at him for a moment, coyly and confidentially; then putting up her hand to her face, as though she were screening herself from Mr. Cardan’s gaze, she turned away, tittering. Her face became quite red. She peeped at him between her fingers and tittered again.

It occurred to Mr. Cardan that he’d be in for a breach of promise case very soon if he weren’t careful. Tactfully he changed the subject; asked her what sort of food she liked best and learned that her favourites were strawberries, cream ice and mixed chocolates.

The dessert had been eaten. Mr. Elver suddenly looked up and said: ‘Grace, I think you ought to go to bed.’

Miss Elver’s face, from having been bright with laughter, became at once quite overcast. A film of tears floated up into her eyes, making them seem more lustrous; she looked at her brother appealingly. ‘Must I go?’ she said. ‘Just this once!’ She tried to coax him. ‘This once!’

But Mr. Elver was not to be moved. ‘No, no,’ he said sternly. ‘You must go.’

His sister sighed and made a little whimpering sound. But she got up, all the same, and walked obediently towards the door. She was almost on the threshold, when she halted, turned and ran back to say good-night to Mr. Cardan. ‘I’m so glad,’ she said, ‘that we found you. Such fun. Good-night. But you mustn’t look at me like that.’ She put up her hand again to her face. ‘Oh, not like that.’ And still giggling, she ran out of the room.

There was a long silence.

‘Have some wine,’ said Mr. Elver at last, and pushed the flask in Mr. Cardan’s direction.

Mr. Cardan replenished his glass and then, politely, did the same for his host. Wine — it was the only thing that was likely to make this dismal devil talk. With

his practised and professional eye, Mr. Cardan thought he could detect in his host's expression certain hardly perceptible symptoms of incipient tipsiness. A spidery creature like that, thought Mr. Cardan contemptuously, couldn't be expected to hold his liquor well; and he had been putting it down pretty steadily all through supper. A little more and, Mr. Cardan was confident, he'd be as clay in the hands of a sober interrogator (and Mr. Cardan could count on being sober for at least three bottles longer than a poor feeble creature like this); he'd talk, he'd talk; the only difficulty would be to get him to stop talking.

'Thanks,' said Mr. Elver, and gloomily gulped down the replenished glass.

That's the style, thought Mr. Cardan; and in his liveliest manner he began to tell the story of the grocer's brother's statue and of his pursuit of it, ending up with an account, already more florid than the previous version, of how he lost himself.

'I console myself superstitiously,' he concluded, 'by the reflection that fate wouldn't have put me to these little troubles and inconveniences if it weren't intending to do something handsome by me in the end. I'm paying in advance; but I trust I'm paying for something round and tidy. All the same, what a curse this hunt for money is!'

Mr. Elver nodded. 'It's the root of all evil,' he said, and emptied his glass. Unobtrusively Mr. Cardan replenished it.

'Quite right,' he confirmed. 'And it's twice cursed, if you'll allow me to play Portia for a moment: it curses him that hath — can you think of a single really rich person of your acquaintance who wouldn't be less avaricious, less tyrannous, self-indulgent and generally porkish if he didn't pay super-tax? And it also curses him that hath not, making him do all manner of absurd, humiliating, discreditable things which he'd never think of doing if the hedgerows grew breadfruit and bananas and grapes enough to keep one in free food and liquor.'

'It curses him that hath not the most,' said Mr. Elver with a sudden savage animation. This was a subject, evidently, on which he felt deeply. He looked sharply at Mr. Cardan for a moment, then turned away to dip his long nose once more in his tumbler.

‘Perhaps,’ said Mr. Cardan judicially. ‘At any rate there are more complaints about this curse than about the other. Those that have not complain about their own fate. Those that have do not, it is only those in contact with them — and since the havers are few these too are few — who complain of the curse of having. In my time I have belonged to both categories. Once I had; and I can see that to my fellow men I must then have been intolerable. Now’ — Mr. Cardan drew a deep breath and blew it out between trumpeting lips, to indicate the way in which the money had gone— ‘now I have not. The curse of insolence and avarice has been removed from me. But what low shifts, what abjections this not-having has, by compensation, reduced me to! Swindling peasants out of their artistic property, for example!’

‘Ah, but that’s not so bad,’ cried Mr. Elver excitedly, ‘as what I’ve had to do. That’s nothing at all. You’ve never been an advertisement canvasser.’

‘No,’ Mr. Cardan admitted, ‘I’ve never been an advertisement canvasser.’

‘Then you can’t know what the curse of not-having really is. You can’t have an idea. You’ve no right to talk about the curse.’ Mr. Elver’s harsh, unsteady voice rose and fell excitedly as he talked. ‘No right,’ he repeated.

‘Perhaps I haven’t,’ said Mr. Cardan mollifyingly. He took the opportunity to pour out some more wine for his host. Nobody has a right, he reflected, to be more miserable than we are. Each one of us is the most unhappily circumstanced creature in the world. Hence it’s enormously to our credit that we bear up and get on as well as we do.

‘Look here,’ Mr. Elver went on confidentially, and he tried to look Mr. Cardan squarely in the face as he spoke; but the effort was too great and he had to avert his eyes; ‘look here, let me tell you.’ He leaned forward eagerly and slapped the table in front of where Mr. Cardan was sitting to emphasize what he was saying and to call his guest’s attention to it. ‘My father was a country parson,’ he began, talking rapidly and excitedly. ‘We were very poor — horribly. Not that he minded much: he used to read Dante all the time. That annoyed my mother — I don’t know why. You know the smell of very plain cooking? Steamed puddings — the very thought of them makes me sick now.’

He shuddered. ‘There were four of us then. But my brother was killed in the war and my elder sister died of influenza. So now there’s only me and the one you saw to-night.’ He tapped his forehead. ‘She never grew up, but got stuck somehow. A moron.’ He laughed compassionlessly. ‘Though I don’t know why I need tell you that. For it’s obvious enough, isn’t it?’

Mr. Cardan said nothing. His host flinched away from his half-winking, half-supercilious gaze, and fortifying himself with another gulp of wine, which Mr. Cardan a moment later unobtrusively made good from the flask, went on:

‘Four of us,’ he repeated. ‘You can imagine it wasn’t easy for my father. And my mother died when we were still children. Still, he managed to send us to a rather shabby specimen of the right sort of school, and we’d have gone on to the university if we could have got scholarships. But we didn’t.’ At this Mr. Elver, on whom the wine seemed quite suddenly to be making its effect, laughed loudly, as though he had made a very good joke. ‘So my brother went into an engineering firm, and it was just being arranged, at goodness knows what sort of a sacrifice, that I should be turned into a solicitor, when pop! my father falls down dead with heart failure. Well, he was all right rambling about the Paradiso. But I had to scramble into the nearest job available. That was how I came to be an advertisement canvasser. Oh Lord!’ He put his hand over his eyes, as though to shut out some disgusting vision. ‘Talk of the curse of not-having! For a monthly magazine it was — the sort of one with masses of little ads for indigestion cures; and electric belts to make you strong; and art by correspondence; and Why Wear a Truss? and superfluous hair-killers; and pills to enlarge the female figure; and labour-saving washing machines on the instalment system; and Learn to Play the Piano without Practising; and thirty-six reproductions of nudes from the Paris Salon for five bob; and drink cures in plain wrapper, strictly confidential, and all the rest. There were hundreds and hundreds of small advertisers. I used to spend all my days running round to shops and offices, cajoling old advertisers to renew or fishing for new ones. And, God! how horrible it was! Worming one’s way in to see people who didn’t want to see one and to whom one was only a nuisance, a sort of tiresome beggar on

the hunt for money. How polite one had to be to insolent underlings, strong in their office and only too delighted to have an opportunity to play the bully in their turn! And then there was that terrible cheerful, frank, manly manner one had to keep up all the time. The “I put it to you, sir,” straight from the shoulder business; the persuasive honesty, the earnestness and the frightful pretence one had to keep up so strenuously and continuously that one believed in what one was talking about, thought the old magazine a splendid proposition and regarded the inventor of advertisements as the greatest benefactor the human race has ever known. And what a presence one had to have! I could never achieve a presence, somehow. I could never even look neat. And you had to try and impress the devils as a keen, competent salesman. God, it was awful! And the way some of them would treat you. As the damnedest bore in the world — that was the best you could hope. But sometimes they treated you as a robber and a swindler. It was your fault if an insufficient number of imbeciles hadn’t bought galvanic belly bands or learned to play like Busoni without practising. It was your fault; and they’d fly in a rage and curse at you, and you had to be courteous and cheery and tactful and always enthusiastic in the face of it. Good Lord, is there anything more horrible than having to face an angry man? I don’t know why, but it’s somehow so profoundly humiliating to take part in a squabble, even when one’s the aggressor. One feels afterwards that one’s no better than a dog. But when one’s the victim of somebody else’s anger — that’s awful. That’s simply awful,’ he repeated, and brought his hand with a clap on to the table to emphasize his words. ‘I’m not built for that sort of thing. I’m not a bully or a fighter. They used to make me almost ill, those scenes. I couldn’t sleep, thinking of them — remembering those that were past and looking forward with terror to the ones that were coming. People talk about Dostoievsky’s feelings when he was marched out into the barrack square, tied to a post with the firing party lined up in front of him, and then, at the very last second, when his eyes were already bandaged, reprieved. But I tell you I used to go through his experiences half a dozen times a day, nerving myself to face some inevitable interview, the very thought of which made me sick with apprehension. And for me there was no

reprieve. The execution was gone through with, to the very end. Good Lord, how often I've hesitated at the door of some old bully's office, all in a bloody sweat, hesitating to cross the threshold. How often I've turned back at the last moment and turned into a pub for a nip of brandy to steady my nerves, or gone to a chemist for a pick-me-up! You can't imagine what I suffered then!' He emptied his glass, as though to drown the rising horror. 'Nobody can imagine,' he repeated, and his voice quivered with the anguish of his self-pity. 'And then how little one got in return! One suffered daily torture for the privilege of being hardly able to live. And all the things one might have done, if one had had capital! To know for an absolute certainty that — given ten thousand — one could turn them into a hundred thousand in two years; to have the whole plan worked out down to its smallest details, to have thought out exactly how one would live when one was rich, and meanwhile to go on living in poverty and squalor and slavery — that's the curse of not-having. That's what I suffered.' Overcome by wine and emotion, Mr. Elver burst into tears.

Mr. Cardan patted him on the shoulder. He was too tactful to offer the philosophical consolation that such suffering is the lot of nine-tenths of the human race. Mr. Elver, he could see, would never have forgiven such a denial of his dolorous uniqueness. 'You must have courage,' said Mr. Cardan, and pressing the glass into Mr. Elver's hand he added: 'Drink some of this. It'll do you good.'

Mr. Elver drank and wiped his eyes. 'But I'll make them smart for it one day,' he said, banging the table with his fist. The violent self-pity of a moment ago transformed itself into an equally violent anger. 'I'll make them all pay for what I suffered. When I'm rich.'

'That's the spirit,' said Mr. Cardan encouragingly.

'Thirteen years of it I had,' Mr. Elver went on. 'And two and a half years during the war, dressed in uniform and filling up forms in a wooden hut at Leeds; but that was better than touting for advertisements. Thirteen years. Penal servitude with torture. But I'll pay them, I'll pay them.' He banged the table again.

‘Still,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘you seem to have got out of it now all right. Living here in Italy is a sign of freedom; at least I hope so.’

At these words Mr. Elver’s anger against ‘them’ suddenly dropped. His face took on a mysterious and knowing expression. He smiled to himself what was meant to be a dark, secret and satanic smile, a smile that should be all but imperceptible to the acutest eye. But he found, in his tipsiness, that the smile was growing uncontrollably broader and broader; he wanted to grin, to laugh aloud. Not that what he was secretly thinking about was at all funny; it was not, at any rate when he was sober. But now the whole world seemed to swim in a bubbly sea of hilarity. Moreover, the muscles of his face, when he started to smile satanically, had all at once got out of hand and were insisting on expanding what should have been the expression of Lucifer’s darkest and most fearful thoughts into a bumpkin’s grin. Hastily Mr. Elver extinguished his face in his glass, in the hope of concealing from his guest that rebellious smile. He emerged again choking. Mr. Cardan had to pat him on the back. When it was all over, Mr. Elver reassumed his mysterious expression and nodded significantly. ‘Perhaps,’ he said darkly, not so much in response to anything Mr. Cardan had said as on general principles, so to speak, and to indicate that the whole situation was in the last degree dubious, dark and contingent — contingent on a whole chain of further contingencies.

Mr. Cardan’s curiosity was roused by the spectacle of this queer pantomime; he refilled his host’s glass. ‘Still,’ he insisted, ‘if you hadn’t freed yourself, how would you be staying here—’ in this horrible marsh, he had almost added; but he checked himself and said ‘in Italy’ instead.

The other shook his head. ‘I can’t tell you,’ he said darkly, and again the satanic smile threatened to enlarge itself to imbecility.

Mr. Cardan relapsed into silence, content to wait. From the expression on Mr. Elver’s face he could see that the effort of keeping a secret would be, for his host, intolerably great. The fruit must be left to ripen of itself. He said nothing and looked pensively into one of the dark corners of the tomb-like chamber as though occupied with his own thoughts.

Mr. Elver sat hunched up in his chair, frowning at the table in front of him. Every now and then he took a sip of wine. Tipsily mutable, his mood changed all at once from hilarious to profoundly gloomy. The silence, the darkness funereally tempered by the four unwavering candles, worked on his mind. What a moment since had seemed an uproarious joke now presented itself to his thoughts as appalling. He felt a great need to unburden himself, to transfer responsibilities on to other shoulders, to get advice that should confirm him in his course. Furtively, for a glimpse only, he looked at his guest. How abstractedly and regardlessly he was staring into vacancy! Not a thought, no sympathy for poor Philip Elver. Ah, if he only knew. . . .

He broke silence at last. ‘Tell me,’ he said abruptly, and it seemed to his drunken mind that he was displaying an incredible subtlety in his method of approaching the subject; ‘do you believe in vivisection?’

Mr. Cardan was surprised by the question. ‘Believe in it?’ he echoed. ‘I don’t quite know how one can believe in vivisection. I think it useful, if that’s what you mean.’

‘You don’t think it’s wrong?’

‘No,’ said Mr. Cardan.

‘You think it doesn’t matter cutting up animals?’

‘Not if the cutting serves some useful human purpose.’

‘You don’t think animals have got rights?’ pursued Mr. Elver with a clarity and tenacity that, in a drunken man, surprised Mr. Cardan. This was a subject, it was clear, on which Mr. Elver must long have meditated. ‘Just like human beings?’

‘No,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I’m not one of those fools who think that one life is as good as another, simply because it is a life; that a grasshopper is as good as a dog and a dog as good as a man. You must recognize a hierarchy of existences.’

‘A hierarchy,’ exclaimed Mr. Elver, delighted with the word, ‘a hierarchy — that’s it. That’s exactly it. A hierarchy. And among human beings too?’ he added.

‘Yes, of course,’ Mr. Cardan affirmed. ‘The life of the soldier who killed Archimedes isn’t worth the life of Archimedes. It’s the fundamental fallacy of democracy and humanitarian Christianity to suppose that it is. Though of course,’ Mr. Cardan added pensively, ‘one has no justifying reason for saying so, but only one’s instinctive taste. For the soldier, after all, may have been a good husband and father, may have spent the non-professional, unsoldierly portions of his life in turning the left cheek and making two blades of grass grow where only one grew before. If, like Tolstoy, your tastes run to good fatherhood, left cheeks and agriculture, then you’ll say that the life of the soldier is worth just as much as the life of Archimedes — much more, indeed; for Archimedes was a mere geometrician, who occupied himself with lines and angles, curves and surfaces, instead of with good and evil, husbandry and religion. But if, on the contrary, one’s tastes are of a more intellectual cast, then one will think as I think — that the life of Archimedes is worth the lives of several billion of even the most amiable soldiers. But as for saying which point of view is right—’ Mr. Cardan shrugged his shoulders. ‘Partner, I leave it to you.’

Mr. Elver seemed rather disappointed by the inconclusive turn that his guest’s discourse had taken. ‘But still,’ he insisted, ‘it’s obvious that a wise man’s better than a fool. There is a hierarchy.’

‘Well, I personally should say there was,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘But I can’t speak for others.’ He saw that he had been carried away by the pleasures of speculation into saying things his host did not want to hear. To almost all men, even when they are sober, a suspense of judgment is extraordinarily distasteful. And Mr. Elver was far from sober; moreover, Mr. Cardan began to suspect, this philosophic conversation was a tortuous introduction to personal confidences. If one wanted the confidences one must agree with the would-be confider’s opinion. That was obvious.

‘Good,’ said Mr. Elver. ‘Then you’ll admit that an intelligent man is worth more than an imbecile, a moron; ha ha, a moron. . . .’ And at this word he burst into violent and savage laughter, which, becoming more and more extravagant as it prolonged itself, turned at last into an uncontrollable screaming and sobbing.

His chair turned sideways to the table, his legs crossed, the fingers of one hand playing caressingly with his wine glass, the other manipulating his cigar, Mr. Cardan looked on, while his host, the tears streaming down his cheeks, his narrow face distorted almost out of recognition, laughed and sobbed, now throwing himself back in his chair, now covering his face with his hands, now bending forward over the table to rest his forehead on his arms, while his whole body shook and shook with the repeated and uncontrollable spasms. A disgusting sight, thought Mr. Cardan; and a disgusting specimen too. He began to have an inkling of what the fellow was up to. Translate ‘intelligent man’ and ‘moron’ into ‘me’ and ‘my sister’ — for the general, the philosophical in any man’s conversation must always be converted into the particular and personal if you want to understand him — interpret in personal terms what he had said about vivisection, animal rights and the human hierarchy, and there appeared, as the plain transliteration of the cipher — what? Something that looked exceedingly villainous, thought Mr. Cardan.

‘Then I suppose,’ he said in a very cool and level voice, when the other had begun to recover from his fit, ‘I suppose it’s your sister who has the liberating cash.’

Mr. Elver glanced at him, with an expression of surprise, almost of alarm, on his face. His eyes wavered away from Mr. Cardan’s steady, genial gaze. He took refuge in his tumbler. ‘Yes,’ he said, when he had taken a gulp. ‘How did you guess?’

Mr. Cardan shrugged his shoulders. ‘Purely at random,’ he said.

‘After my father died,’ Mr. Elver explained, ‘she went to live with her godmother, who was the old lady at the big house in our parish. A nasty old woman she was. But she took to Grace, she kind of adopted her. When the old bird died at the beginning of this year, Grace found she’d been left twenty-five thousand.’

For all comment, Mr. Cardan clicked his tongue against his palate and slightly raised his eyebrows.

‘Twenty-five thousand,’ the other repeated. ‘A half-wit, a moron! What can she do with it?’

‘She can take you to Italy,’ Mr. Cardan suggested.

‘Oh, of course we can live on the interest all right,’ said Mr. Elver contemptuously. ‘But when I think how I could multiply it.’ He leaned forward eagerly, looking into Mr. Cardan’s face for a second, then the shifty grey eyes moved away and fixed themselves on one of the buttons of Mr. Cardan’s coat, from which they would occasionally dart upwards again to reconnoitre and return. ‘I’ve worked it out, you see,’ he began, talking so quickly that the words tumbled over one another and became almost incoherent. ‘The Trade Cycle. . . . I can prophesy exactly what’ll happen at any given moment. For instance . . .’ He rambled on in a series of complicated explanations.

‘Well, if you’re as certain as all that,’ said Mr. Cardan when he had finished, ‘why don’t you get your sister to lend you the money?’

‘Why not?’ Mr. Elver repeated gloomily and leaned back again in his chair. ‘Because that blasted old hag had the capital tied up. It can’t be touched.’

‘Perhaps she lacked faith in the Trade Cycle,’ Mr. Cardan suggested.

‘God rot her!’ said the other fervently. ‘And when I think of what I’d do with the money when I’d made really a lot. Science, art . . .’

‘Not to mention revenge on your old acquaintances,’ said Mr. Cardan, cutting him short. ‘You’ve worked out the whole programme?’

‘Everything,’ said Mr. Elver. ‘There’d never have been anything like it. And now this damned fool of an old woman goes and gives the money to her pet moron and makes it impossible for me to touch it.’ He ground his teeth with rage and disgust.

‘But if your sister were to die unmarried,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘the money, I suppose, would be yours.’

The other nodded.

‘It’s a very hierarchical question, certainly,’ said Mr. Cardan. In the vault-like room there was a prolonged silence.

Mr. Elver had reached the final stage of intoxication. Almost suddenly he began to feel weak, profoundly weary and rather ill. Anger, hilarity, the sense of satanic power — all had left him. He desired only to go to bed as soon as possible; at the same time he doubted his capacity to get there. He shut his eyes.

Mr. Cardan looked at the limp and sodden figure with an expert's eye, scientifically observing it. It was clear to him that the creature would volunteer no more; that it had come to a state when it could hardly think of anything but the gradually mounting nausea within it. It was time to change tactics. He leaned forward, and tapping his host's arm launched a direct attack.

'So you brought the poor girl here to get rid of her,' he said.

Mr. Elver opened his eyes and flashed at his tormentor a hunted and terrified look. His face became very pale. He turned away. 'No, no, not that.' His voice had sunk to an unsteady whisper.

'Not that?' Mr. Cardan echoed scornfully. 'But it's obvious. And you've as good as been telling me so for the last half-hour.'

Mr. Elver could only go on whispering: 'No.'

Mr. Cardan ignored the denial. 'How did you propose to do it?' he asked. 'It's always risky, whatever way you choose, and I shouldn't put you down as being particularly courageous. How, how?'

The other shook his head.

Mr. Cardan insisted, ruthlessly. 'Ratsbane?' he queried. 'Steel? — no, you wouldn't have the guts for that. Or did you mean that she should tumble by accident into one of those convenient ditches?'

'No, no. No.'

'But I insist on being told,' said Mr. Cardan truculently, and he thumped the table till the reflections of the candles in the brimming glasses quivered and rocked.

Mr. Elver put his face in his hands and burst into tears. 'You're a bully,' he sobbed, 'a dirty bully, like all the rest.'

'Come, come,' Mr. Cardan protested encouragingly. 'Don't take it so hardly. I'm sorry I upset you. You mustn't think,' he added, 'that I have any of the

vulgar prejudices about this affair. I'm not condemning you. Far from it. I don't want to use your answers against you. I merely ask out of curiosity — pure curiosity. Cheer up, cheer up. Try a little more wine.'

But Mr. Elver was feeling too deplorably sick to be able to think of wine without horror. He refused it, shuddering. 'I didn't mean to do anything,' he whispered. 'I meant it just to happen.'

'Just to happen? Yours must be a very hopeful nature,' said Mr. Cardan.

'It's in Dante, you know. My father brought us up on Dante; I loathed the stuff,' he added, as though it had been castor oil. 'But things stuck in my mind. Do you remember the woman who tells how she died: "Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma"? Her husband shut her up in a castle in the Maremma and she died of fever. Do you remember?'

Mr. Cardan nodded.

'That was the idea. I had the quinine: I've been taking ten grains a day ever since I arrived — for safety's sake. But there doesn't seem to be any fever here nowadays,' Mr. Elver added. 'We've been here nine weeks. . . .'

'And nothing's happened!' Mr. Cardan leaned back in his chair and roared with laughter. 'Well, the moral of that,' he added, when he had breath enough to begin talking again, 'the moral of that is: See that your authorities are up to date.'

But Mr. Elver was past seeing a joke. He got up from his chair and stood unsteadily, supporting himself with a hand on the table. 'Would you mind helping me to my room?' he faintly begged. 'I don't feel very well.'

Mr. Cardan helped him first into the garden. 'You ought to learn to carry your liquor more securely,' he said, when the worst was over. 'That's another of the evening's morals.'

When he had lighted his host to bed, Mr. Cardan went to his appointed room and undressed. It was a long time before he fell asleep. The mosquitoes, partly, and partly his own busy thoughts, were responsible for his wakefulness.

CHAPTER VIII

NEXT MORNING MR. Cardan was down early. The first thing he saw in the desolate garden before the house was Miss Elver. She was dressed in a frock cut on the same sack-like lines as her last night's dress, but made of a gaudy, large-patterned material that looked as though it had been designed for the upholstery of chairs and sofas, not of the human figure. Her beads were more numerous and more brilliant than before. She carried a parasol of brightly flowered silk.

Emerging from the house, Mr. Cardan found her in the act of tying a bunch of Michaelmas daisies to the tail of a large white maremman dog that stood, its mouth open, its pink tongue lolling out and its large brown eyes fixed, so it seemed, meditatively on the further horizon, waiting for Miss Elver to have finished the operation. But Miss Elver was very slow and clumsy. The fingers of her stubby little hands seemed to find the process of tying a bow in a piece of ribbon extraordinarily difficult. Once or twice the dog looked round with a mild curiosity to see what was happening at the far end of its anatomy. It did not seem in the least to resent the liberties Miss Elver was taking with its tail, but stood quite still, resigned and waiting. Mr. Cardan was reminded of that enormous tolerance displayed by dogs and cats of even the most fiendish children. Perhaps, in a flash of Bergsonian intuition, the beast had realized the childish essence of Miss Elver's character, had recognized the infant under the disguise of the full-grown woman. Dogs are good Bergsonians, thought Mr. Cardan. Men, on the other hand, are better Kantians. He approached softly.

Miss Elver had at last succeeded in tying the bow to her satisfaction; the dog's white tail was tipped with a rosette of purple flowers. She straightened herself up and looked admiringly at her handiwork. 'There!' she said at last, addressing herself to the dog. 'Now you can run away. Now you look lovely.'

The dog took the hint and trotted off, waving his flower-tipped tail.

Mr. Cardan stepped forward. ‘ ”Neat but not gaudy,” ’ he quoted, ‘ ”genteel but not expensive, like the gardener’s dog with a primrose tied to his tail.” Good-morning.’ He took off his hat.

But Miss Elver did not return his salutation. Taken by surprise, she had stood, as though petrified, staring at him with stretched eyes and open mouth while he spoke. At Mr. Cardan’s ‘good-morning,’ which was the first word of his that she had understood, the enchantment of stillness seemed to be lifted from her. She burst into a nervous laugh, covered her blushing face with her hands — for a moment only — then turned and ran down the path, ungainly as an animal moving in an element not its own, to take refuge behind a clump of rank bushes at the end of the garden. Seeing her run, the big dog came bounding after her, joyously barking. One Michaelmas daisy dropped to the ground, then another. In a moment they were all gone and the ribbon with them.

Slowly, cautiously, as though he were stalking a shy bird, and with a reassuring air of being absorbed in anything rather than the pursuit of a runaway, Mr. Cardan walked after Miss Elver down the path. Between the leaves of the bushes he caught glimpses of her bright frock; sometimes, with infinite circumspection, and certain, it was clear, that she was escaping all notice, she peeped at Mr. Cardan round the edge of the bush. Gambolling round her, the dog continued to bark.

Arrived within five or six yards of Miss Elver’s hiding-place, Mr. Cardan halted. ‘Come now,’ he said cajolingly, ‘what’s there so frightening about me? Take a good look at me. I don’t bite. I’m quite tame.’

The leaves of the bushes shook; from behind them came a peal of shrill laughter.

‘I don’t even bark, like your stupid dog,’ Mr. Cardan went on. ‘And if you tied a bunch of flowers on to my tail I should never have the bad manners to get rid of them in the first two minutes like that rude animal.’

There was more laughter.

‘Won’t you come out?’

There was no answer.

‘Oh, very well then,’ said Mr. Cardan, in the tone of one who is deeply offended, ‘I shall go away. Good-bye.’ He retraced his steps for a few yards, then turned off to the right along a little path that led to the garden gate. When he was about three-quarters of the way along it, he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps coming up behind him. He walked on, pretending to notice nothing. There was a touch on his arm.

‘Don’t go. Please.’ Miss Elver’s voice spoke imploringly. He looked round, as though startled. ‘I won’t run away again. But you mustn’t look at me like that.’

‘Like what?’ asked Mr. Cardan.

Miss Elver put up a screening hand and turned away. ‘Like I don’t know what,’ she said.

Mr. Cardan thought he perfectly understood; he pursued the subject no further. ‘Well, if you promise not to run away,’ he said, ‘I won’t go.’

Miss Elver’s face shone with pleasure and gratitude. ‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘Should we go and look at the chickens? They’re round at the back.’

They went round to the back. Mr. Cardan admired the chickens. ‘You like animals?’ he asked.

‘I should think so,’ said Miss Elver rapturously, and nodded.

‘Have you ever had a parrot of your own?’

‘No.’

‘Or a monkey?’

She shook her head.

‘Not even a Shetland pony?’ asked Mr. Cardan on a note of astonishment.

Miss Elver’s voice trembled as she again had to answer ‘No.’ At the thought of all these enchanting things she had never possessed, the tears came into her eyes.

‘In my house,’ said Mr. Cardan, conjuring up fairy palaces as easily as Aladdin, ‘there are hundreds of them. I’ll give you some when you come to stay with me.’

Miss Elver's face became bright again. 'Will you?' she said, 'Oh, that would be nice, that would be nice. And do you keep bears?'

'One or two,' said Mr. Cardan modestly.

'Well . . .' Miss Elver looked up at him, her blank bright eyes opened to their fullest extent. She paused, drew a deep breath and let it slowly out again. 'It must be a nice house,' she added at last, turning away and nodding slowly at every word, 'a nice house. That's all I can say.'

'You'd like to come and stay?' asked Mr. Cardan.

'I should think I would,' Miss Elver replied decidedly, looking up at him again. Then suddenly she blushed, she put up her hands. 'No, no, no,' she protested.

'Why not?' asked Mr. Cardan.

She shook her head. 'I don't know.' And she began to laugh.

'Remember the bears,' said Mr. Cardan.

'Yes. But . . .' She left the sentence unfinished. The old woman came to the back door and rang the bell for breakfast. Ungainly as a diving-bird on land, Miss Elver scuttled into the house. Her companion followed more slowly. In the dining-room, less tomb-like in the bright morning light, breakfast was waiting. Mr. Cardan found his hostess already eating with passion, as though her life depended on it.

'I'm so hungry,' she explained with her mouth full. 'Phil's late,' she added.

'Well, I'm not surprised,' said Mr. Cardan, as he sat down and unfolded his napkin.

When he came down at last, it was in the guise of a cleric so obviously unfrocked, so deplorably seedy and broken-down that Mr. Cardan felt almost sorry for him.

'Nothing like good strong coffee,' he said cheerfully, as he filled his host's cup. Mr. Elver looked on, feeling too melancholy and too ill to speak. For a long time he sat motionless in his chair, without moving, lacking the strength to stretch out his hand to his cup.

‘Why don’t you eat, Phil?’ asked his sister, as she decapitated her second egg. ‘You generally eat such a lot.’

Goaded, as though by a taunt, Philip Elver reached for his coffee and swallowed down a gulp. He even took some toast and buttered it; but he could not bring himself to eat.

At half-past ten Mr. Cardan left the house. He told his host that he was going in search of his sculpture; and he comforted Miss Elver, who, seeing him put on his hat and take his walking stick, had begun to whimper, by assuring her that he would be back to luncheon. Following the old woman’s directions, Mr. Cardan soon found himself on the shores of the shallow lake of Massaciuccoli. A mile away, on the further shore, he could see the clustering pink and whitewashed houses of the village in which, he knew, the grocer’s brother lived and kept his treasure. But instead of proceeding directly to the goal of his pilgrimage, Mr. Cardan lighted a cigar and lay down on the grass at the side of the path. It was a bright clear day. Over the mountains floated great clouds, hard-edged against the sky, firm and massive as though carved from marble and seeming more solid than the marble mountains beneath. A breeze stirred the blue water of the lake into innumerable dazzling ripples. It rustled among the leaves of the poplars and the sound was like that of the sea heard from far off. In the midst of the landscape lay Mr. Cardan, pensively smoking his cigar; the smoke of it drifted away along the wind.

Twenty-five thousand pounds, Mr. Cardan was thinking. If one were to invest them in the seven per cent. Hungarian Loan, they would bring in seventeen hundred and fifty a year. And if one lived in Italy that went a long way; one could consider oneself rich on that. A nice house in Siena, or Perugia, or Bologna — Bologna he decided would be the best; there was nothing to compare with Bolognese cooking. A car — one could afford to keep something handsome. Plenty of nice books, nice people to stay with one all the time, jaunts in comfort through Europe. A secure old age; the horrors of decrepitude in poverty for ever averted. The only disadvantage — one’s wife happened to be a harmless idiot. Still, she’d obviously be most devoted; she’d do her best. And

one would make her happy, one would even allow her a domesticated bear. In fact, Mr. Cardan assured himself, it was the poor creature's only chance of happiness. If she stayed with her brother, he'd find some substitute for the inefficient anopheles sooner or later. If she fell into the hands of an adventurer in need of her money, the chances were that he'd be a great deal more of a scoundrel than Tom Cardan. In fact, Mr. Cardan saw, he could easily make out a case for its being his bounden duty, for the poor girl's sake, to marry her. That would do very nicely for romantic spirits like Lilian Aldwinkle. For them, he'd be the gallant rescuer, the Perseus, the chivalrous St. George. Less enthusiastic souls might look at the twenty-five thousand and smile. But let them smile. After all, Mr. Cardan asked himself, a grin more or less — what does it matter? No, the real problem, the real difficulty was himself. Could he do it? Wasn't it, somehow, a bit thick — an idiot? Wasn't it too — too Russian? Too Stavroginesque?

True, his motive would be different from the Russian's. He would marry his idiot for comfort and a placid old age — not for the sake of strengthening his moral fibres by hard exercise, not in the voluptuous hope of calling new scruples and finer remorses into existence, or in the religious hope of developing the higher consciousness by leading a low life. But on the other hand, nothing could prevent the life from being, in point of fact, thoroughly low; and he couldn't guarantee his conscience against the coming of strange qualms. Would seventeen hundred and fifty per annum be a sufficient compensation?

For more than an hour Mr. Cardan lay there, smoking, looking at the bright lake, at the ethereal fantastic mountains and the marbly clouds, listening to the wind among the leaves and the occasional far-away sounds of life, and pondering all the time. In the end he decided that seventeen hundred and fifty, or even the smaller income that would result from investment in something a little safer than seven per cent. Hungarian Loan, was a sufficient compensation. He'd do it. Mr. Cardan got up, threw away the stump of his second cigar and walked slowly back towards the house. As he approached it through the little plantation of poplar trees Miss Elver, who had been on the look-out for his return, came

running out of the gate to meet him. The gaudy upholstery material blazed up as she passed out of the shade of the house into the sunlight, her coloured beads flashed. Uttering shrill little cries and laughing, she ran towards him. Mr. Cardan watched her as she came on. He had seen frightened cormorants bobbing their heads in a ludicrous anxiety from side to side. He had seen penguins waving their little flappers, scuttling along, undignified, on their short legs. He had seen vultures with trailing wings hobbling and hopping, ungainly, over the ground. Memories of all these sights appeared before his mind's eye as he watched Miss Elver's approach. He sighed profoundly.

'I'm so glad you've come back,' Miss Elver cried breathlessly, as she approached, 'I was really afraid you were going right away.' She shook his hand earnestly and looked up into his face. 'You've not forgotten about the monkeys and the Shetland ponies, have you?' she added, rather anxiously.

Mr. Cardan smiled. 'Of course not,' he answered; and he added gallantly: 'How could I forget anything that gives you pleasure?' He squeezed her hand and, bending down, kissed it.

Miss Elver's face flushed very red, then, the moment after, became exceedingly pale. Her breath came quickly and unsteadily. She shut her eyes. A shuddering ran through her; she wavered on her feet, she seemed on the point of falling. Mr. Cardan caught her by the arm and held her up. This was going to be worse, he thought, than he had imagined; more Stavroginesque. To faint when he kissed her hand — kissed it almost ironically — that was too much. But probably, he reflected, nothing of the kind had ever happened to her before. How many men had ever so much as spoken to her? It was understandable.

'My good child — really now.' He slightly shook her arm. 'Pull yourself together. If you're going to faint like this I shall never be able to trust you with a bear. Come, come.'

Still, the understanding of a thing does not alter it. It remains what it was when it was still uncomprehended. Seventeen hundred and fifty per annum — but at this rate it looked as though that would hardly be enough.

Miss Elver opened her eyes and looked at him. Into their blankness had come that look of anxious, unhappy love with which a child looks at his mother when he thinks that she is going to leave him. Mr. Cardan could not have felt more remorseful if he had committed a murder.

What every weakness, every vice?

Tom Cardan, all were thine.

All the same, there were certain things the doing of which one felt to be an outrage. Still, one had to think of those seventeen hundred and fifty pounds; one had to think of old age in solitude and poverty.

Leaving Miss Elver to play by herself in the garden, Mr. Cardan went indoors. He found his host sitting behind closed jalousies in a greenish twilight, his head on his hand.

‘Feeling better?’ asked Mr. Cardan cheerfully; and getting no answer, he went on to tell a long, bright story of how he had searched for the grocer’s brother, only to find, at last, that he was away from home and would be away till to-morrow. ‘So I hope you won’t mind,’ he concluded, ‘if I trespass on your charming hospitality for another night. Your sister has most kindly told me that I might.’

Mr. Elver turned on him a glance of concentrated loathing and averted his eyes. He said nothing.

Mr. Cardan drew up a chair and sat down. ‘There’s a most interesting little book,’ he said, looking at his host with a genial twinkling expression, ‘by a certain Mr. W. H. S. Jones called “Malaria: a factor in the history of Greece and Rome,” or some such title. He shows how the disease may quite suddenly obtain a footing in countries hitherto immune and in the course of a few generations bring a whole culture, a powerful empire to the ground. Conversely he shows how it is got rid of. Drainage, quinine, wire-netting . . .’ The other stirred uneasily in his chair; but Mr. Cardan went on ruthlessly. When the bell rang for luncheon he was talking to Mr. Elver about the only way in which the Yellow Peril might be permanently averted.

‘First,’ he said, laying the forefinger of his right hand against the thumb of his left, ‘first you must introduce malaria into Japan. Japan’s immune, so far; it’s a crying scandal. You must start by remedying that. And secondly,’ he moved on to the index, ‘you must see that the Chinese never have a chance to stamp out the disease in their country. Four hundred million malarial Chinamen may be viewed with equanimity. But four hundred million healthy ones — that’s a very different matter. The spread of malaria among the yellow races — there’s a cause,’ said Mr. Cardan, rising from his chair, ‘a cause to which some good European might profitably devote himself. You, who take so much interest in the subject, Mr. Elver, you might find a much worse vocation. Shall we go into lunch?’ Mr. Elver rose, totteringly. ‘I have a tremendous appetite,’ his guest went on, patting him on his bent back. ‘I hope you have too.’

Mr. Elver at last broke silence. ‘You’re a damned bully,’ he whispered in a passion of misery and futile rage, ‘a damned stinking bully.’

‘Come, come,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I protest against “stinking.” ’

CHAPTER IX

EARLY THE NEXT morning Mr. Cardan and his hostess left the house and walked rapidly away through the fields in the direction of the lake. They had told the old woman that they would be back to a late breakfast. Mr. Elver was not yet awake; Mr. Cardan had left instructions that he was not to be called before half-past nine.

The ground was still wet with dew when they set out; the poplar trees threw shadows longer than themselves. The air was cool; it was a pleasure to walk. Mr. Cardan strode along at four miles an hour; and like a diver out of water, like a soaring bird reduced to walk the earth, Miss Elver trotted along at his side, rolling and hopping as she walked, as though she were mounted, not on feet, but on a set of eccentric wheels of different diameters. Her face seemed to shine with happiness; every now and then she looked at Mr. Cardan with shy adoration, and if she happened to catch his eye she would blush, turn away her head and laugh. Mr. Cardan was almost appalled by the extent of his success and the ease with which it had been obtained. He might make a slave of the poor creature, might keep her shut up in a rabbit-hutch, and, provided he showed himself now and again to be worshipped, she would be perfectly happy. The thought made Mr. Cardan feel strangely guilty.

‘When we’re married,’ said Miss Elver suddenly, ‘shall we have some children?’

Mr. Cardan smiled rather grimly. ‘The trouble about children,’ he said, ’is that the bears might eat them. You can never be quite sure of bears. Remember Elisha’s bears and those bad children.’

Miss Elver’s face became thoughtful. She walked on for a long time in silence.

They came to the lake, lying placid and very bright under the pale early-morning sky. At the sight of it Miss Elver clapped her hands with pleasure; she forgot in an instant all her troubles. The fatal incompatibility between bears and children ceased to preoccupy her. ‘What lovely water!’ she cried, and bending down she picked up a pebble from the path and threw it into the lake.

But Mr. Cardan did not permit her to linger. ‘There’s no time to lose,’ he said, and taking her arm he hurried her on.

‘Where are we going to?’ asked Miss Elver.

He pointed to the village on the further shore of the lake. ‘From there,’ he said, ‘we’ll take some sort of cab or cart.’

The prospect of driving in a cart entirely reconciled Miss Elver to parting at such short notice with the lake. ‘That’ll be lovely,’ she declared, and trotted on so fast that Mr. Cardan had to quicken his pace in order to keep up with her.

While the little carriage was being made ready and the horse put in and harnessed — hastelessly, as these things are always done in Italy, with dignity and at leisure — Mr. Cardan went to visit the grocer’s brother. Now that he had come so far it would be foolish to miss the opportunity of seeing the treasure. The grocer’s brother was himself a grocer, and so like his relative that Mr. Cardan could almost fancy it was Miss Thriplow’s virtuous and simple friend from the hill-top to whom he was now speaking in the plain. When Mr. Cardan explained his business the man bowed, wreathed himself in smiles, laughed and blew acetylene into his face just as his brother had done. He expatiated on the beauty and the antiquity of his treasure, and when Mr. Cardan begged him to make haste and show him the sculpture, he would not suffer himself to be interrupted, but went on lyrically with his description, repeating the same phrases again and again and gesticulating until he began to sweat. At last, when he considered Mr. Cardan worked up to a due state of preliminary enthusiasm, the grocer opened the door at the back of the shop and mysteriously beckoned to his visitor to follow him. They walked down a dark passage, through a kitchen full of tumbling children on whom one had to be careful not to tread, across a little yard and into a mouldering out-house. The grocer led the way, walking all

the time on tip-toe and speaking only in a whisper — for what reason Mr. Cardan could not imagine, unless it was to impress him with the profound importance of the affair, and perhaps to suggest that the beauty and antiquity of the work of art were such that it was only barefoot and in silence that it should be approached.

‘Wait there,’ he whispered impressively, as they entered the out-house.

Mr. Cardan waited. The grocer tip-toed across to the further corner of the shed. Mysteriously draped in sacking, something that might have been an ambushed man stood motionless in the shadow. The grocer halted in front of it and, standing a little to one side so as to give Mr. Cardan an uninterrupted view of the marvel to be revealed, took hold of a corner of the sacking, and with a magnificently dramatic gesture whisked it off.

There emerged the marble effigy of what in the imagination of a monumental mason of 1830 figured as a Poet. A slenderer Byron with yet more hyacinthine hair and a profile borrowed from one of Canova’s Greeks, he stood, leaning against a truncated column, his marble eyes turned upwards in pursuit of the flying Muse. A cloak hung lankly from his shoulders; a vine leaf was all the rest of his costume. On the top of the truncated column lay a half-opened marble scroll, which the Poet’s left hand held down for fear it should be blown clean away by the wind of inspiration. His right, it was evident, had originally poised above the virgin page a stylus. But the hand, alas, and the whole forearm almost to the elbow were gone. At the base of the column was a little square tablet on which, if the figure had ever been put to its proper monumental use, should have been written the name and claims to fame of the poet upon whose tomb it was to stand. But the tablet was blank. At the time this statue was carved there had evidently been a dearth of lyrists in the principality of Massa Carrara.

’E bellissimo!’ said the grocer’s brother, standing back and looking at it with a connoisseur’s enthusiasm.

‘Davvero,’ Mr. Cardan agreed. He thought sadly of his recumbent Etruscan, his sarcophagus by Jacopo della Quercia, his Romanesque demon. Still, he

reflected, even a bas-relief by Giotto would hardly have brought him five-and-twenty thousand pounds.

CHAPTER X

MR. CARDAN RETURNED to the palace of the Cybo Malaspina to find that the number of guests had been increased during his absence by the arrival of Mrs. Chelifer. Mrs. Aldwinkle had not been particularly anxious to have Chelifer's mother in the house, but finding that Chelifer was preparing to leave as soon as his mother should arrive, she peremptorily insisted on giving the lady hospitality.

'It's absurd,' she argued, 'to go down again to that horrible hotel at Marina di Vezza, stay there uncomfortably for a few days and then go to Rome by train. You must bring your mother here, and then, when it's time for Mr. Falx to go to his conference, we'll all go to Rome in the car. It'll be far pleasanter.'

Chelifer tried to object; but Mrs. Aldwinkle would not hear of objections. When Mrs. Chelifer arrived at the station of Vezza she found Francis waiting for her on the platform with Mrs. Aldwinkle, in yellow tussore and a floating white veil, at his side. The welcome she got from Mrs. Aldwinkle was far more effusively affectionate than that which she got from her son. A little bewildered, but preserving all her calm and gentle dignity, Mrs. Chelifer suffered herself to be led towards the Rolls-Royce.

'We all admire your son so enormously,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle. 'He's so — how shall I say? — so post bellum, so essentially one of us.' Mrs. Aldwinkle made haste to establish her position among the youngest of the younger generation. 'All that one only dimly feels he expresses. Can you be surprised at our admiration?'

So far Mrs. Chelifer was rather surprised by everything. It took her some time to get used to Mrs. Aldwinkle. Nor was the aspect of the palace calculated to allay her astonishment.

‘A superb specimen of early baroque,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle assured her, pointing with her parasol. But even after she knew the dates, it all seemed to Mrs. Chelifer rather queer.

Mrs. Aldwinkle remained extremely cordial to her new guest; but in secret she disliked Mrs. Chelifer extremely. There would have been small reason, in any circumstances, for Mrs. Aldwinkle to have liked her. The two women had nothing in common; their views of life were different and irreconcilable, they had lived in separate worlds. At the best of times Mrs. Aldwinkle would have found her guest bourgeoise and bornée. As things actually were she loathed her. And no wonder; for in his mother Chelifer had a permanent and unexceptionable excuse for getting away from Mrs. Aldwinkle. Mrs. Aldwinkle naturally resented the presence in her house of this cause and living justification of infidelity. At the same time it was necessary for her to keep on good terms with Mrs. Chelifer; for if she quarrelled with the mother, it was obvious that the son would take himself off. Inwardly chafing, Mrs. Aldwinkle continued to treat her with the same gushing affection as at first.

To Mrs. Aldwinkle’s guests the arrival of Mrs. Chelifer was more welcome than to herself. Mr. Falx found in her a more sympathetic and comprehensible soul than he could discover in his hostess. To Lord Hovenden and Irene her arrival meant the complete cessation of Irene’s duties as a spy; they liked her well enough, moreover, for her own sake.

‘A nice old fing,’ was how Lord Hovenden summed her up.

Miss Thriplow affected almost to worship her.

‘She’s so wonderfully good and simple and integral, if you understand what I mean,’ Miss Thriplow explained to Calamy. ‘To be able to be so undividedly enthusiastic about folk-songs and animals’ rights and all that sort of thing — it’s really wonderful. She’s a lesson to us,’ Miss Thriplow concluded, ‘a lesson.’ Mrs. Chelifer became endowed, for her, with all the qualities that the village grocer had unfortunately not possessed. The symbol of his virtues — if only he had possessed them — had been the white apron; Mrs. Chelifer’s integrity was figured forth by her dateless grey dresses.

‘She’s one of Nature’s Quakeresses,’ Miss Thriplow declared. ‘If only one could be born like that!’ There had been a time, not so long ago, when she had aspired to be one of Nature’s Guardswomen. ‘I never knew that anything so good and dove-coloured existed outside of Academy subject-pictures of 1880. You know: “A Pilgrim Mother on Board the Mayflower,” or something of that sort. It’s absurd in the Academy. But it’s lovely in real life.’

Calamy agreed.

But the person who most genuinely liked Mrs. Chelifer was Grace Elver. From the moment she set eyes on Mrs. Chelifer, Grace was her dog-like attendant. And Mrs. Chelifer responded by practically adopting her for the time being. When he learned the nature of her tastes and occupations, Mr. Cardan explained her kindness to himself by the hypothesis that poor Grace was the nearest thing to a stray dog or cat that Mrs. Chelifer could find. Conversely, Grace’s love at first sight must be due to the realization by that cat-like mind that here was a born protector and friend. In any case, he was exceedingly grateful to Mrs. Chelifer for having made her appearance when she did. Her presence in the house made easy what would otherwise have been a difficult situation.

That Mrs. Aldwinkle would be impressed by the romantic story of Grace’s abduction Mr. Cardan had always been certain. And when he told the story, she was impressed, though less profoundly than Mr. Cardan had hoped; she was too much preoccupied with her own affairs to be able to respond with her customary enthusiasm to what, at other times, would have been an irresistible appeal. About her reception of the story, then, Mr. Cardan had never entertained a doubt; he knew that she would find it romantic. But that was no guarantee that she would like the heroine of the story. From what he knew of her, which was a great deal, Mr. Cardan felt sure that she would very quickly find poor Grace exceedingly tiresome. He knew her lack of patience and her intolerance. Grace would get on her nerves; Lilian would be unkind, and goodness only knew what scenes might follow. Mr. Cardan had brought her to the palace meaning to stay only a day or two and then take his leave, before Mrs. Aldwinkle had had time to get poor Grace on her nerves. But the presence of Mrs. Chelifer made him change his

mind. Her affectionate protection was a guarantee against Mrs. Aldwinkle's impatience; more important still, it had the best possible effect on Grace herself. In Mrs. Chelifer's presence she behaved quietly and sensibly, like a child doing its best to make a good impression. Mrs. Chelifer, moreover, kept a tenderly watchful eye on her appearance and her manners; kept her up to the mark about washing her hands and brushing her hair, dropped a gentle hint when she was not behaving as well as she ought to at table, and checked her propensity to eat too much of the things she liked and not enough of those she didn't like. Mrs. Chelifer, it was obvious, had the best possible influence over her. When they were married, Mr. Cardan decided, he would frequently invite Mrs. Chelifer to stay — preferably, though she was a very nice old thing, while he was away from home. Meanwhile, secure that his residence at the palace of the Cybo Malaspina would be marred by no disagreeable incidents, he wrote to his lawyer to make the necessary arrangements about his marriage.

For her part, Mrs. Chelifer was delighted to have found Grace. As Mr. Cardan had divined, she missed her cats and dogs, her poor children and traditional games. It was very reluctantly that she had at last given up the old Oxford house; very reluctantly, though the arguments that Francis had used to persuade her were unanswerable. It was too large for her, it was full of those mediaeval labour-creating devices of which Mr. Ruskin and his architectural followers were so fond, it cost more to keep up than she could afford; moreover, it was unhealthy, she was regularly ill there every winter; the doctors had been urging her for years past to get out of the Thames valley. Yes, the arguments were quite unanswerable; but it had been a long time before she had finally made up her mind to leave the place. Forty years of her life had been passed there; she was loth to part with all those memories. And then there were the dogs and the poor children, all her old friends and her charities. In the end, however, she had allowed herself to be persuaded. The house was sold; it was arranged that she should spend the winter in Rome.

'Now you're free,' her son had said.

But Mrs. Chelifer rather mournfully shook her head. ‘I don’t know that I very much like being free,’ she answered. ‘I shall be without occupation in Rome. I look forward to it almost with dread.’

Francis reassured her. ‘You’ll soon find something,’ he said. ‘Don’t be afraid of that.’

‘Shall I?’ Mrs. Chelifer questioned doubtfully. They were walking together in the little garden at the back of the house; looking round her at the familiar grass plot and flower beds, she sighed.

But Francis was right; dogs, poor children or their equivalents are fortunately not rare. At the end of the first stage of her journey Mrs. Chelifer had found, in Grace Elver, a compensation for what she had abandoned at Oxford. Attending to poor Grace she was happy.

For the rest of the party Miss Elver’s arrival had no special or personal significance. For them she was just Mr. Cardan’s half-wit; that was all. Even Mary Thriplow, who might have been expected to take an interest in so genuine a specimen of the simple soul, paid little attention to her. The fact was that Grace was really too simple to be interesting. Simplicity is no virtue unless you are potentially complicated. Mrs. Chelifer, being with all her simplicity a woman of intelligence, threw light, Miss Thriplow felt, on her own case. Grace was simple only as a child or an imbecile is simple; her didactic value was therefore nil. Miss Thriplow remained faithful to Mrs. Chelifer.

CHAPTER XI

IT WAS NIGHT. Half undressed, Irene was sitting on the edge of her bed stitching away at an unfinished garment of pale pink silk. Her head was bent over her work and her thick hair hung perpendicularly down on either side, making an angle with her tilted face. The light clung richly to her bare arms and shoulders, was reflected by the curved and glossy surfaces of her tight-drawn stockings. Her face was extremely grave; the tip of her tongue appeared between her teeth. It was a difficult job.

Round her, on the walls of the enormous room which had once been the bedchamber of the Cardinal Alderano Malaspina, fluttered an army of gesticulating shapes. Over the door sat God the Father, dressed in a blue crêpe de Chine tunic and enveloped in a mantle of red velvet, which fluttered in the divine afflatus as though it had been so much bunting. His right hand was extended; and in obedience to the gesture a squadron of angels went flying down one of the side walls towards the window. At a prie-Dieu in the far corner knelt Cardinal Malaspina, middle-aged, stout, with a barbiche and moustache, and looking altogether, Irene thought, like the current British idea of a French chef. The Archangel Michael, at the head of his troop of Principalities and Powers, was hovering in the air above him, and with an expression on his face of mingled condescension and respect — condescension, inasmuch as he was the plenipotentiary of the Padre Eterno, and respect, in view of the fact that His Eminence was a brother of the Prince of Massa Carrara — was poising above the prelate’s head the red symbolic hat that was to make him a Prince of the Church. On the opposite wall the Cardinal was represented doing battle with the powers of darkness. Dressed in scarlet robes he stood undaunted on the brink of the bottomless pit. Behind him was a carefully painted view of the Malaspina palace, with a group of retainers and handsome coaches in the middle distance

and, immediately behind their Uncle, whom they gallantly supported by their prayers, the Cardinal's nephews. From the pit came up legions of hideous devils who filled the air with the flapping of their wings. But the Cardinal was more than a match for them. Raising a crucifix above his head, he conjured them to return to the flames. And the foiled devils, gnashing their teeth and trembling with terror, were hurled back towards the pit. Head foremost, tail foremost, in every possible position they came hurtling down towards the floor. When she lay in bed, Irene could see half a dozen devils diving down at her; and when she woke up in the morning, a pair of plunging legs waved frantically within a foot of her opening eyes. In the wall space over the windows the Cardinal's cultured leisures were allegorically celebrated. Nine Muses and three Graces, attended by a troop of Hours, reclined or stood, or danced in studied postures; while the Cardinal himself, enthroned in the midst, listened to their conversation and proffered his own opinions without appearing to notice the fact that all the ladies were stark naked. No one but the most polished and accomplished man of the world could have behaved in the circumstances with such perfect savoir-vivre.

In the midst of the Cardinal's apotheosis and entirely oblivious of it, Irene stitched away at her pink chemise. Undressing, just now, she had caught sight of it lying here in her work-basket; she hadn't been able to resist the temptation of adding a touch or two there and then. It was going to be one of her masterpieces when it was done. She held it out in her two hands, at arm's length, and looked at it, lovingly and critically. It was simply too lovely.

Ever since Chelifer's arrival she had been able to do a lot of work on her underclothes. Mrs. Aldwinkle, absorbed by her unhappy passion, had completely forgotten that she had a niece who ought to be writing lyrics and painting in water-colours. Irene was free to devote all her time to her sewing. She did not neglect the opportunity. But every now and then her conscience would suddenly prick her and she would ask herself whether, after all, it was quite fair to take advantage of poor Aunt Lilian's mournful preoccupation to do what she did not approve of. She would wonder if she oughtn't, out of loyalty to Aunt Lilian, to stop sewing and make a sketch or write a poem. Once or twice in the first days

she even acted on the advice of her conscience. But when in the evening she brought Aunt Lilian her sketch of the temple, and the lyric beginning ‘O Moon, how calmly in the midnight sky . . .’ — brought them with a certain triumph, a consciousness of virtuous actions duly performed — that distracted lady showed so little interest in these artistic tokens of niecely duty and affection that Irene felt herself excused henceforward from making any further effort to practise the higher life. She went on with her stitching. Her conscience, it is true, still troubled her at times; but she did nothing about it.

This evening she felt no conscientious qualm. The garment was so lovely that even Aunt Lilian, she felt sure, would have approved of it. It was a work of art — a work of art that deserved that honourable title just as richly as ‘O Moon, how calmly in the midnight sky’; perhaps even more richly.

Irene folded up the unfinished masterpiece in rose, put it away, and went on with her undressing. To-night, she decided, as she brushed her hair, she would tell Aunt Lilian how right she had been about Hovenden. That ought to please her. ‘How grateful I am,’ she would say. And she’d tell her how much she liked him — almost, almost in that way. Not quite yet. But soon; she felt somehow that it might happen soon. And it would be the real thing. Real and solid. Not flimsy and fizzy and imaginary, like the episodes with Peter and Jacques and the rest of them.

She put on her dressing-gown and walked down the long corridor to Mrs. Aldwinkle’s room. Cardinal Alderano was left alone with his devils and the obsequious angels, his nine naked Muses and the Eternal Father.

When Irene came in, Aunt Lilian was sitting in front of her looking-glass, rubbing skin food into her face.

‘It appears,’ she said, looking at herself in the glass, critically, as Irene had looked at her masterpiece of fine sewing, ‘that there’s such a wonderful electric massage machine. I forget who told me about it.’

‘Was it Lady Belfry?’ Irene suggested. The image of Lady Belfry’s face floated up before her mind’s eye — smooth, pink, round, youthful looking, but

with that factitious and terribly precarious youthfulness of beauty scientifically preserved.

‘Perhaps it was,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘I must certainly get one of them. Write to Harrods’ about it to-morrow, will you, darling?’

Irene began the nightly brushing of her aunt’s hair. There was a long silence. How should she begin about Hovenden? Irene was thinking. She must begin in some way that would show how really and genuinely serious it all was. She must begin in such a way that Aunt Lilian would have no possible justification for taking up a playful tone about it. At all costs, Aunt Lilian must not be allowed to talk to her in that well-known and dreaded vein of bludgeoning banter; on no account must she be given an opportunity for saying: ‘Did she think then that her silly old auntie didn’t notice?’ or anything of that kind. But to find the completely fun-proof formula was not so easy. Irene searched for it long and thoughtfully. She was not destined to find it. For Aunt Lilian, who had also been thinking, suddenly broke the silence.

‘I sometimes doubt,’ she said, ‘whether he takes any interest in women at all. Fundamentally, unconsciously, I believe he’s a homosexualist.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Irene gravely. She knew her Havelock Ellis.

For the next half-hour Mrs. Aldwinkle and her niece discussed the interesting possibility.

CHAPTER XII

MISS THRIPLOW WAS writing in her secret note-book. ‘There are people,’ she wrote, ‘who seem to have no capacity for feeling deeply or passionately about anything. It is a kind of emotional impotence for which one can only pity them profoundly. Perhaps there are more of these people nowadays than there were. But that’s only an impression; one has no facts to go on, no justifying documents. But if it’s the case, it’s due, I suppose, to our intellectualizing education. One has to have a strong emotional constitution to be able to stand it. And then one lives so artificially that many of the profounder instincts rarely get an opportunity for displaying themselves. Fear, for example, and all the desperate passions evoked by the instinct of self-preservation in face of danger or hunger. Thousands of civilized people pass through life condemned to an almost complete ignorance of these emotions.’

Miss Thriplow drew a line under this paragraph and began again a little further down the page.

‘To love primitively, with fury. To be no more civilized, but savage. No more critical, but whole-heartedly passionate. No more a troubled and dubious mind, but a young, healthy body certain and unwavering in its desires. The beast knows everything, says Uncle Yerochka in Tolstoy. Not everything; no. But he knows, at any rate, all the things the mind does not know. The strong complete spirit must know what the beast knows as well as what the mind knows.’

She drew another line.

‘His hands are so strong and firm, and yet touch so softly. His lips are soft. Where his neck joins his body, in front, between the two strong tendons, where they converge towards the collar bone, is a boldly marked depression in the flesh that looks as though it had been made by the thumb of an artist god, so beautiful it is. So beautiful . . .’

It occurred to Miss Thriplow that there would be an excellent article to be written round the theme of masculine beauty. In the Song of Solomon it is described as lyrically as feminine beauty. It is rare to find modern poetesses expressing so frank an admiration. In the Paris Salons it is the female nude which prevails; the male is exceptional and, when complete, seems a little shocking. How different from the state of things in Pompeii! Miss Thriplow bit the end of her pen. Yes, decidedly, it would make a capital article.

'His skin is white and smooth,' she went on writing. 'How strong he is! His eyes are sleepy; but sometimes they seem to wake up and he looks at me so piercingly and commandingly that I am frightened. But I like being frightened — by him.'

Another line. Miss Thriplow would have written more on this subject; but she was always apprehensive that somebody might find her note-book and read it. She did not want that to happen till she was dead. Miss Thriplow made an asterisk by the side of the first of the evening's notes. In the margin of the blank page opposite she scratched a similar sign, to indicate that what she was going to write now was in the nature of an appendix or corollary to what she had written in the first note.

'Certain people,' she wrote, 'who have no natural capacity for profound feeling are yet convinced, intellectually, that they ought to feel profoundly. The best people, they think, have formidable instincts. They want to have them too. They are the emotional snobs. This type, I am sure, is new. In the eighteenth century people tried to make out that they were rational and polished. The cult of the emotions began in the nineteenth. It has had a new turn given to it by Bergsonism and Romain-Rollandism in the twentieth century. It is fashionable now to be exactly the opposite of what it was fashionable to be in the eighteenth century. So that you get emotionally impotent people simulating passion with their minds. Hypocrites of instinct, they often more than half deceive themselves. And, if they are intelligent, they completely deceive all but the most observant of those around them. They act the emotional part better than those who actually feel the emotions. It is Diderot's paradox of the comedian, in real

life; the less you feel, the better you represent feeling. But while the comedian on the stage plays only for the audience in the theatre, those in real life perform as much for an inward as an outward gallery; they ask for applause also from themselves and, what is more, they get it; though always, I suppose, with certain secret reservations. What a curious type it is! I have known many specimens of it.'

Miss Thriplow stopped writing and thought of the specimens she had known. There was a surprisingly large number of them. Every human being is inclined to see his own qualities and weaknesses in others. Inevitably: since his own mental and moral attributes are the only ones of which he has any personal experience. The man who visualizes his multiplication table in a fantastic and definite picture imagines that all other men must do the same; the musician cannot conceive of a mind that is irresponsive to music. Similarly the ambitious man presumes that all his fellows are actuated by his own desire to achieve distinction and power. The sensualist sees sensuality everywhere. The mean man takes it for granted that everybody else is mean. But it must not be thought that the possessor of a vice who sees his own weakness in all his fellows therefore condones that weakness. We rarely give our own weaknesses their specific name, and are aware of them only in a vague and empirical fashion. The conscious and educated part of us condemns the vice to which we are congenitally subject. At the same time, our personal knowledge of the vice — a knowledge not conscious or intellectual, but obscure, practical and instinctive — tends to direct the attention of the superficial, educated part of the mind to manifestations of this particular weakness, tends even to make it detect such manifestations when they do not exist; so that we are constantly struck by the ludicrous spectacle of the avaricious passionately condemning avarice in others much more generous than themselves, of the lascivious crying out on lasciviousness, the greedy criticizing greed. Their education has taught them that these vices are blameworthy, while their personal and empirical knowledge of them causes them to take a special interest in these weaknesses and to see signs of them everywhere.

If the number of Miss Thriplow's friends who belonged to the type of the emotionally impotent was surprisingly large, the fact was due to a tendency in Miss Thriplow herself towards precisely this spiritual weakness. Being by nature a good deal more acute and self-analytic than most of the men and women who indignantly castigate their own inveterate sins, Miss Thriplow was not unaware, while she criticized others, of the similar defect in herself. She could not help suspecting, when she read Dostoievsky and Tchehov, that she was organized differently from these Russians. It seemed to her that she felt nothing so acutely, with such an intricate joy or misery as did they. And even before she had started reading the Russians, Miss Thriplow had come to the painful conclusion that if the Brontë sisters were emotionally normal, then she must be decidedly sub-normal. And even if they weren't quite normal, even if they were feverish, she desired to be like them; they seemed to her entirely admirable. It was the knowledge of her sub-normality (which she had come, however, to attribute to a lack of opportunities — we lead such sheltered, artificial lives — for the display of her potential passions and emotions) that had made Miss Thriplow so passionate an admirer of fine spontaneous feelings. It caused her at the same time to be willing and anxious to embrace every opportunity that presented itself for the testing of her reactions. It is experience that makes us aware of what we are; if it were not for contacts with the world outside ourselves we should have no emotions at all. In order to get to know her latent emotional self, Miss Thriplow desired to have as much experience, to make as many contacts with external reality as possible. When the external reality was of an unusual character and offered to be particularly fruitful in emotional revelations, she sought it with a special eagerness. Thus, a love affair with Calamy had seemed to her fraught with the most interesting emotional possibilities. She would have liked him well enough even if his drowsiness had concealed no inward fires. But the conviction that there was something 'queer,' as Mrs. Aldwinkle would say, and dangerous about the man made her imagine at every stage of their intimacy that she liked him better than she actually did; made her anxious to advance to further stages in the hope that, as he revealed himself, ampler and more

interesting revelations of her own hidden soul might there be awaiting her. She had had her reward; Calamy had already genuinely frightened her, had revealed himself as excitingly brutal.

‘You exasperate me so much,’ he had said, ‘that I could wring your neck.’

And there were moments when she half believed that he really would kill her. It was a new kind of love. She abandoned herself to it with a fervour which she found, taking its temperature, very admirable. The flood of passion carried her along; Miss Thriplow took notes of her sensations on the way and hoped that there would be more and intenser sensations to record in the future.

CHAPTER XIII

CALAMY LAY ON his back, quite still, looking up into the darkness. Up there, he was thinking, so near that it's only a question of reaching out a hand to draw back the curtaining darkness that conceals it, up there, just above me, floats the great secret, the beauty and the mystery. To look into the depths of that mystery, to fix the eyes of the spirit on that bright and enigmatic beauty, to pore over the secret until its symbols cease to be opaque and the light filters through from beyond — there is nothing else in life, for me at any rate, that matters; there is no rest or possibility of satisfaction in doing anything else.

All this was obvious to him now. And it was obvious, too, that he could not do two things at once; he couldn't at the same time lean out into the silence beyond the futile noise and bustle — into the mental silence that lies beyond the body — he couldn't at the same time do this and himself partake in the tumult; and if he wanted to look into the depths of mind, he must not interpose a preoccupation with his bodily appetites.

He had known all this so well and so long; and still he went on in the same way of life. He knew that he ought to change, to do something different, and he profoundly resented this knowledge. Deliberately he acted against it. Instead of making an effort to get out of the noise and bustle, to break away from his enslavement and do what he ought to do, what he knew that, really and profoundly, he wanted to do, he had more than once, when his bonds had seemed on the point of falling away of themselves, deliberately tightened them. He resented this necessity of changing, even though it was a necessity imposed on him, not from without, but by what he knew to be the most intelligent part of his own being. He was afraid, too, that if he changed he would be making himself ridiculous. It was not that he desired to live as he had until a year ago. That dreary and fatiguing routine of pleasure had become intolerable; he had

broken definitely with that. No; he pictured a sort of graceful Latin compromise. An Epicurean cultivation of mind and body. Breakfast at nine. Serious reading from ten till one. Luncheon prepared by an excellent French cook. In the afternoon a walk and talk with intelligent friends. Tea with crumpets and the most graceful of female society. A frugal but exquisite supper. Three hours' meditation about the Absolute, and then bed, not unaccompanied. . . . It sounded charming. But somehow it wouldn't do. To the liver of this perfect Life of Reason the secret, the mystery and the beauty, though they might be handled and examined, refused to give up their significance. If one really wanted to know about them, one must do more than meditate upon them of an evening between the French chef's masterpiece of maigre cooking and the night's rest, not in solitude. In these delightful Latin circumstances the secret, the mystery and the beauty reduced themselves to nothing. One thought of them only because they were amusing and to pass the time; they were really no more important than the tea with crumpets, the vegetarian supper and the amorous repose. If one wanted them to be more than these, one must abandon oneself completely to the contemplation of them. There could be no compromise.

Calamy knew this. But all the same he had made love to Mary Thriplow, not because he had felt an overwhelming passionate necessity to do so; but because she amused him, because her prettiness, her air of unreal innocence exasperated his senses, more than all because he felt that a love affair with Mary Thriplow would keep him thoroughly occupied and prevent him from thinking about anything else. It had not. The beauty and the mystery still hung just above him when he lay alone in the darkness. They were still there; his affair with Mary Thriplow merely prevented him from approaching them.

Down in the valley a clock struck one. The sound reminded him that he had promised to go to her to-night. He found himself thinking of what would happen when they met, of the kisses, the caresses given and received. Angrily he tried to turn his thoughts to other themes; he tried to think of the mystery and the beauty that floated there, above him, on the further side of the curtaining darkness. But

however vehemently he strove to expel them, the charnel images kept returning again and again to his mind.

‘I won’t go,’ he said to himself; but he knew while he was saying it that he would. With an extraordinary vividness he imagined her lying on the crook of his arm, extenuated, limp and shuddering, like one who has been tormented on the rack. Yes, he knew that he would go.

The notion of torture continued to haunt his mind. He thought of those poor wretches who, accused of sorcery, admitted after the third day’s torment that they had indeed flown along the wind, passed through keyholes, taken the form of wolves and conjoined themselves with incubi; who would admit, not only these things, but also, after another hour on the rack, that they had accomplices, that this man, that woman, that young child were also sorcerers and servants of the devil. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Weak in pain, but weaker still, he thought, more inexcusably weak, in pleasure. For under the torments of pleasure, what cowardices, what betrayals of self and of others will it not commit! How lightly it will lie and perjure itself! How glibly, with a word, condemn others to suffer! How abjectly it will surrender happiness and almost life itself for a moment’s prolongation of the delicious torture! The shame that follows is the spirit’s resentment, its sad indignation at its bondage and humiliation.

Under the torment of pleasure, he thought, women are weaker than men. Their weakness flatters their lover’s consciousness of strength, gratifies his desire for power. On one of his own sex a man will vent his love of power by making him suffer; but on a woman by making her enjoy. It is more the pleasurable torment he inflicts than what is inflicted upon him that delights the lover.

And since man is less weak, Calamy went on thinking, since pleasure with him is never so annihilating that he cannot take greater pleasure in the torment of his tormentor, is he not therefore the less excusable for breaking faith with himself or others under the delicious torture or the desire and anticipation of it? Man has less physical justification for his weakness and his enslavement.

Woman is made by nature to be enslaved — by love, by children. But every now and then a man is born who ought to be free. For such a man it is disgraceful to succumb under the torture.

If I could free myself, he thought, I could surely do something; nothing useful, no doubt, in the ordinary sense, nothing that would particularly profit other people; but something that for me would be of the last importance. The mystery floats just above me. If I were free, if I had time, if I could think and think and slowly learn to plumb the silences of the spirit . . .

The image of Mary Thriplow presented itself again to his mind's eye. Limply she lay in the crook of his arm, trembling as though after torment. He shut his eyes; angrily he shook his head. The image would not leave him. If I were free, he said to himself, if I were free . . .

In the end he got out of bed and opened the door. The corridor was brightly illumined; an electric light was left burning all night. Calamy was just about to step out, when another door a little further down the passage was violently thrown open and Mr. Falx, his legs showing thin and hairy below the hem of a night-shirt, impetuously emerged. Calamy retired into the shadowed embrasure of his door. With the anxious, harrowed expression on his face of one who suffers from colic, Mr. Falx hurried past, looking neither to the left hand nor to the right. He turned down another passage which entered the main corridor a few yards away and disappeared; a door slammed. When he was out of sight, Calamy walked softly and rapidly down the corridor, opened the fourth door on the left and disappeared into the darkness. A little later Mr. Falx returned, at leisure, to his room.

PART IV. THE JOURNEY

CHAPTER I

LORD HOVENDEN DETACHED from his motor car was an entirely different being from the Lord Hovenden who lounged with such a deceptive air of languor behind the steering-wheel of a Vauxhall Velox. Half an hour spent in the roaring wind of his own speed transformed him from a shy and diffident boy into a cool-headed hero, daring not merely in the affairs of the road, but in the affairs of life as well. The fierce wind blew away his diffidence; the speed intoxicated him out of his self-consciousness. All his victories had been won while he was in the car. It was in the car — eighteen months ago, before he came of age — that he had ventured to ask his guardian to increase his allowance; and he had driven faster and faster until, in sheer terror, his guardian had agreed to do whatever he wished. It was on board the Velox that he had ventured to tell Mrs. Terebinth, who was seventeen years older than he, had four children and adored her husband, that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; he had bawled it at her while they were doing seventy-five on the Great North Road. At sixty, at sixty-five, at seventy, his courage had still been inadequate to the achievement; but at seventy-five it reached the sticking-point: he had told her. And when she laughed and told him that he was an impudent young shrimp, he felt not a whit abashed, but laughed back, pressed the accelerator down a little further, and when the needle of the speedometer touched eighty, shouted through the wind and the noise of the engine: ‘But I love you.’ Unfortunately, however, the drive came to an end soon after; all drives must come to an end, sooner or later. The affaire Terebinth went no further. If only, Lord Hovenden regretfully sighed, if only one could spend all one’s life in the Velox! But the Velox had its disadvantages. There were occasions when the heroic, speed-intoxicated self had got the timorous pedestrian into awkward scrapes. There was that time, for example, when, rolling along at sixty, he had airily promised one of his

advanced political friends to make a speech at a meeting. The prospect, while one was doing sixty, had seemed not merely unalarming, but positively attractive. But what agonies he suffered when he was standing on the solid earth again, at his journey's end! How impossibly formidable the undertaking seemed! How bitterly he cursed himself for his folly in having accepted the invitation! In the end he was reduced to telegraphing that his doctor had ordered him peremptorily to the south of France. He fled, ignominiously.

To-day the Velox had its usual effect on him. At Vezza, when they started, he was all shyness and submission. He assented meekly to all the arrangements that Mrs. Aldwinkle made and remade every five minutes, however contradictory and impossible. He did not venture to suggest that Irene should come in his car; it was through no good management of his own, but by the mere luck of Mrs. Aldwinkle's final caprice before the actual moment of starting, that he did in fact find her sitting next him when at last they moved off from before the palace doors. At the back sat Mr. Falx, in solitude, surrounded by suit-cases. To him Lord Hovenden had even dutifully promised that he would never go more than five-and-twenty miles an hour. Pedestrian slavishness could hardly go further.

Heavily loaded, Mrs. Aldwinkle's limousine started first. Miss Elver, who had begged to be granted this special favour, sat in front, next the chauffeur. An expression of perfect and absolute bliss irradiated her face. Whenever the car passed any one by the roadside, she made a shrill hooting noise and waved her handkerchief. Luckily she was unaware of the feelings of disgust and indignation which her conduct aroused in the chauffeur; he was English and enormously genteel, he had the reputation of his country and his impeccable car to keep up. And this person waved handkerchiefs and shouted as though she were on a char-à-banc. Miss Elver even waved at the cows and horses, she shouted even to the cats and the chickens.

In the body of the car sat Mrs. Aldwinkle, Mrs. Chelifer, Chelifer and Mr. Cardan. Calamy and Miss Thriplow had decided that they had no time to go to Rome and had been left — without a word of objection on Mrs. Aldwinkle's part

— at the palace. The landscape slid placidly past the windows. Mr. Cardan and Mrs. Chelifer talked about traditional games.

Meanwhile, a couple of hundred yards behind, Lord Hovenden disgustfully sniffed the dusty air. ‘How intolerably slowly old Ernest drives!’ he said to his companion.

‘Aunt Lilian doesn’t allow him to do more than thirty miles an hour,’ Irene explained.

Hovenden snorted derisively. ‘Firty! But must we eat veir filthy dust all ve way?’

‘Perhaps you might drop back a bit,’ Irene suggested.

‘Or perhaps we might pass vem?’

‘Well . . .’ said Irene doubtfully. ‘I don’t think we ought to make poor Aunt Lilian eat our dust.’

‘She wouldn’t eat it for long, if old Ernest is only allowed to do firty.’

‘Well, in that case,’ said Irene, feeling that her duty towards Aunt Lilian had been done, ‘in that case . . .’

Lord Hovenden accelerated. The road was broad, flat and straight. There was no traffic. In two minutes Mrs. Aldwinkle had eaten her brief, unavoidable meal of dust; the air was clear again. Far off along the white road, a rapidly diminishing cloud was all that could be seen of Lord Hovenden’s Velox.

‘Well, fank God,’ Lord Hovenden was saying in a cheerful voice, ‘now we can get along at a reasonable rate.’ He grinned, a young ecstatic giant.

Irene also found the speed exhilarating. Under her grey silk mask, with its goggling windows for the eyes, her short lip was lifted in a joyful smile from the white small teeth. ‘It’s lovely,’ she said.

‘I’m glad you like it,’ said Hovenden. ‘Vat’s splendid.’

But a tap on his shoulder reminded him that there was somebody else in the car besides Irene and himself. Mr. Falx was far from finding the present state of affairs splendid. Blown by the wind, his white beard shook and fluttered like a living thing in a state of mortal agitation. Behind the goggles, his dark eyes had

an anxious look in them. ‘Aren’t you going rather fast?’ he shouted, leaning forward, so as to make himself heard.

‘Not a bit,’ Hovenden shouted back. ‘Just ve usual speed. Perfectly safe.’ His ordinary pedestrian self would never have dreamed of doing anything contrary to the wishes of the venerated master. But the young giant who sat at the wheel of the Velox cared for nobody. He went his own way.

They passed through the sordid outskirts of Viareggio, through the pinewoods beyond, solemn with dark green shadow, and aromatic. Islanded in their grassy meadow within the battlemented walls, the white church, the white arcaded tower miraculously poised on the verge of falling, the round white baptistery seemed to meditate in solitude of ancient glories — Pisan dominion, Pisan arts and thoughts — of the mysteries of religion, of inscrutable fate and unfathomed godhead, of the insignificance and the grandeur of man.

‘Why ve deuce it shouldn’t fall,’ said Hovenden, as the Leaning Tower came in sight, ‘I can’t imagine.’

They drove past the house on the water, where Byron had bored himself through an eternity of months, out of the town. After Pontedera the road became more desolate. Through a wilderness of bare, unfertile hills, between whose yellowing grasses showed a white and ghastly soil, they mounted towards Volterra. The landscape took on something of an infernal aspect; a prospect of parched hills and waterless gulleys, like the undulations of a petrified ocean, expanded interminably round them. And on the crest of the highest wave, the capital of this strange hell, stood Volterra — three towers against the sky, a dome, a line of impregnable walls, and outside the walls, still outside but advancing ineluctably year by year towards them, the ravening gulf that eats its way into the flank of the hill, devouring the works of civilization after civilization, the tombs of the Etruscans, Roman villas, abbeys and mediaeval fortresses, renaissance churches and the houses of yesterday.

‘Must be a bit slow, life in a town like vis,’ said Hovenden, racing round the hairpin turns with an easy virtuosity that appalled Mr. Falx.

‘Think if one had been born there,’ said Irene.

‘Well, if we’d both been born vere,’ replied Lord Hovenden, flushed with insolence and speed, ‘it wouldn’t have been so bad.’

They left Volterra behind them. The hellish landscape was gradually tempered with mundane greenness and amenity. They descended the headlong street of Colle. The landscape became once more completely earthly. The soil of the hills was red, like that from which God made Adam. In the steep fields grew rows of little pollard trees, from whose twisted black arms hung the festooned vines. Here and there between the trees shuffled a pair of white oxen, dragging a plough.

‘Excellent roads, for a change,’ said Lord Hovenden. On one straight stretch he managed to touch eighty-eight. Mr. Falx’s beard writhed and fluttered with the agonized motions of some captive animal. He was enormously thankful when they drew up in front of the hotel at Siena.

‘Wonderful machine, don’t you fink?’ Lord Hovenden asked him, when they had come to a standstill.

‘You go much too fast,’ said Mr. Falx severely.

Lord Hovenden’s face fell. ‘I’m awfully sorry,’ he apologized. The young giant in him was already giving place to the meek pedestrian. He looked at his watch. ‘The others won’t be here for another three-quarters of an hour, I should fink,’ he added, in the hope that Mr. Falx would be mollified by the information.

Mr. Falx was not mollified, and when the time came, after lunch, for setting out on the Perugia road, he expressed a decided preference for a seat in Mrs. Aldwinkle’s limousine. It was decided that he should change places with Miss Elver.

Miss Elver had no objection to speed; indeed, it excited her. The faster they went, the more piercing became her cries of greeting and farewell, the more wildly she waved her handkerchief at the passing dogs and children. The only trouble about going so fast was that the mighty wind was always tearing the handkerchiefs from between her fingers and whirling them irretrievably into receding space. When all the four handkerchiefs in her reticule had been blown away, Miss Elver burst into tears. Lord Hovenden had to stop and lend her his

coloured silk bandana. Miss Elver was enchanted by its gaudy beauty; to secure it against the assaults of the thievish wind, she made Irene tie one corner of it round her wrist.

‘Now it’ll be all right,’ she said triumphantly; lifting her goggles, she wiped away the last traces of her recent grief.

Lord Hovenden set off again. On the sky-line, lifted high above the rolling table-land over which they were travelling, the solitary blue shape of Monte Amiata beckoned from far away. With every mile to southward the horns of the white oxen that dragged the carts became longer and longer. A sneeze — one ran the risk of a puncture; a sideways toss of the head — one might have been impaled on the hard and polished points. They passed through San Quirico; from that secret and melancholy garden within the walls of the ruined citadel came a whiff of sun-warmed box. In Pienza they found the Platonic idea of a city, the town with a capital T; walls with a gate in them, a short street, a piazza with a cathedral and palaces round the other three sides, another short street, another gate and then the fields, rich with corn, wine and oil; and the tall blue peak of Monte Amiata looking down across the fertile land. At Montepulciano there were more palaces and more churches; but the intellectual beauty of symmetry was replaced by a picturesque and precipitous confusion.

‘Gosh!’ said Lord Hovenden expressively, as they slid with locked wheels down a high street that had been planned for pack-asses and mules. From pedimented windows between the pilasters of the palaces, curious faces peered out at them. They tobogganed down, through the high renaissance, out of an arch of the Middle Ages, into the dateless and eternal fields. From Montepulciano they descended on to Lake Trasimene.

‘Wasn’t there a battle here, or something?’ asked Irene, when she saw the name on the map.

Lord Hovenden seemed to remember that there had indeed been something of the kind in this neighbourhood. ‘But it doesn’t make much difference, does it?’

Irene nodded; it certainly didn’t seem to make much difference.

‘Nofing makes any difference,’ said Lord Hovenden, making himself heard with difficulty in the teeth of a wind which his speedometer registered as blowing at forty-five miles an hour. ‘Except’ — the wind made him bold— ‘except you.’ And he added hastily, in case Irene might try to be severe. ‘Such a bore going down-hill on a twiddly road like vis. One can’t risk ve slightest speed.’

But when they turned into the flat highway along the western shore of the lake, his face brightened. ‘Vis is more like it,’ he said. The wind in their faces increased from a capful to half a gale, from half a gale to a full gale, from a full gale very nearly to a hurricane. Lord Hovenden’s spirits rose with the mounting speed. His lips curved themselves into a smile of fixed and permanent rapture. Behind the glass of his goggles his eyes were very bright. ‘Pretty good going,’ he said.

‘Pretty good,’ echoed Irene. Under her mask, she too was smiling. Between her ears and the flaps of her leather cap the wind made a glorious roaring. She was happy.

The road swung round to the left following the southern shore of the lake.

‘We shall soon be at Perugia,’ said Hovenden regretfully. ‘What a bore!’

And Irene, though she said nothing, inwardly agreed with him.

They rushed on, the gale blew steadily in their faces. The road forked; Lord Hovenden turned the nose of his machine along the leftward branch. They lost sight of the blue water.

‘Good-bye, Trasimene,’ said Irene regretfully. It was a lovely lake; she wished she could remember what had happened there.

The road began to climb and twist; the wind abated to a mere half-gale. From the top of the hill, Irene was surprised to see the blue waters, which she had just taken leave of for ever, sparkling two or three hundred feet below on the left. At the joyous sight Miss Elver clapped her hands and shouted.

‘Hullo,’ Irene said, surprised. ‘That’s odd, isn’t it?’

‘Taken ve wrong road,’ Hovenden explained. ‘We’re going norf again up ve east side of ve lake. We’ll go right round. It’s too much bore to stop and turn.’

They rushed on. For a long time neither of them spoke. Behind them Miss Elver hooted her greetings to every living creature on the road.

They were filled with happiness and joy; they would have liked to go on like this for ever. They rushed on. On the north shore of the lake the road straightened itself out and became flat again. The wind freshened. Far off on their respective hills Cortona and Montepulciano moved slowly, as they rushed along, like fixed stars. And now they were on the west shore once more. Perched on its jutting peninsula Castiglione del Lago reflected itself complacently in the water. ‘Pretty good,’ shouted Lord Hovenden in the teeth of the hurricane. ‘By the way,’ he added, ‘wasn’t it Hannibal or somebody who had a battle here? Wiv elephants, or somefing.’

‘Perhaps it was,’ said Irene.

‘Not vat it matters in ve least.’

‘Not in the least.’ She laughed under her mask.

Hovenden laughed too. He was happy, he was joyful, he was daring.

‘Would you marry me if I asked you?’ he said. The question followed naturally and by a kind of logic from what they had been saying about Hannibal and his elephants. He did not look at her as he asked the question; when one is doing sixty-seven one must keep one’s eyes on the road.

‘Don’t talk nonsense,’ said Irene.

‘I’m not talking nonsense,’ Lord Hovenden protested. ‘I’m asking a straightforward question. Would you marry me?’

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Irene.

They had passed Castiglione. The fixed stars of Montepulciano and Cortona had set behind them.

‘Don’t you like me?’ shouted Lord Hovenden. The wind had swelled into a hurricane.

‘You know I do.’

‘Ven why not?’

‘Because, because . . . Oh, I don’t know. I wish you’d stop talking about it.’

The machine rushed on. Once more they were running along the southern shore. A hundred yards before the forking of the roads, Lord Hovenden broke silence. ‘Will you marry me?’ he asked.

‘No,’ said Irene.

Lord Hovenden turned the nose of his machine to the left. The road climbed and twisted, the wind of their speed abated.

‘Stop,’ said Irene. ‘You’ve taken the wrong turn again.’

But Hovenden did not stop. Instead, he pressed down the accelerator. If the car got round the corners it was more by a miracle than in obedience to the laws of Newton or of nature.

‘Stop!’ cried Irene again. But the car went on.

From the hill-top they looked down once more upon the lake.

‘Will you marry me?’ Lord Hovenden asked again. His eyes were fixed on the road in front of him. Rapturously, triumphantly he smiled. He had never felt happier, never more daring, more overflowing with strength and power. ‘Will you marry me?’

‘No,’ said Irene. She felt annoyed; how stupidly he was behaving!

They were silent for several minutes. At Castiglione del Lago he asked again. Irene repeated her answer.

‘You’re not going to do this clown’s trick again, are you?’ she asked as they approached the bifurcation of the roads.

‘It depends if you’re going to marry me,’ he answered. This time he laughed aloud; so infectiously that Irene, whose irritation was something laid on superficially over her happiness, could not help laughing too. ‘Are you going to?’ he asked.

‘No.’

Lord Hovenden turned to the left. ‘It’ll be late before we get to Perugia,’ he said.

‘Oo-ooh!’ cried Miss Elver, as they topped the long hill. ‘How lovely!’ She clapped her hands. Then, leaning forward, she touched Irene’s shoulder. ‘What a

lot of lakes there are here!' she said.

On the north shore Lord Hovenden asked again. Cortona and Montepulciano presided at the asking.

'I don't see why I should be bullied,' said Irene. Lord Hovenden found the answer more promising than those which had gone before.

'But you're not being bullied.'

'I am,' she insisted. 'You're trying to force me to answer all at once, without thinking.'

'Now really,' said Hovenden, 'I call vat a bit fick. Forcing you to answer all at once! But vat's exactly what I'm not doing. I'm giving you time. We'll go round ve lake all night, if you like.'

A quarter of a mile from the forking of the road, he put the question yet once more.

'You're a beast,' said Irene.

'Vat's not an answer.'

'I don't want to answer.'

'You needn't answer definitely if you don't want to,' he conceded. 'I only want you to say vat you'll fink of it. Just say perhaps.'

'I don't want to,' Irene insisted. They were very close, now, to the dividing of ways.

'Just perhaps. Just say you'll fink of it.'

'Well, I'll think,' said Irene. 'But mind, it doesn't commit . . .'

She did not finish her sentence; for the car, which had been heading towards the left, swerved suddenly to the right with such violence that Irene had to clutch at the arm of her seat to prevent herself from being thrown sideways bodily out of the machine. 'Goodness!'

'It's all right,' said Lord Hovenden. They were running smoothly now along the right-hand road. Ten minutes later, from the crest of a little pass, they saw Perugia on its mountain, glittering in the sunlight. They found, when they reached the hotel, that the rest of the party had long since arrived.

‘We took ve wrong turning,’ Lord Hovenden explained. ‘By ve way,’ he added, turning to Mr. Cardan, ‘about vat lake we passed — wasn’t it Hannibal or some one . . .’

‘Such a lot of lakes,’ Miss Elver was telling Mrs. Chelifer. ‘Such a lot!’

‘Only one, surely, my dear,’ Mrs. Chelifer mildly insisted.

But Miss Elver wouldn’t hear of it. ‘Lots and lots.’

Mrs. Chelifer sighed compassionately.

Before dinner Irene and Lord Hovenden went for a stroll in the town. The huge stone palaces lowered down at them as they passed. The sun was so low that only their highest windows, their roofs and cornices took the light. The world’s grey shadow was creeping up their flanks; but their crests were tipped with coral and ruddy gold.

‘I like vis place,’ said Lord Hovenden. In the circumstances he would have liked Wigan or Pittsburg.

‘So do I,’ said Irene. Through the window in her thick hair her face looked smiling out, merry in its childishness.

Leaving the stately part of the town, they plunged into the labyrinth of steep alleys, of winding passage-ways and staircases behind the cathedral. Built confusedly on the hill-side, the tall houses seemed to grow into one another, as though they were the component parts of one immense and fantastical building, in which the alleys served as corridors. The road would burrow through the houses in a long dark tunnel, to widen out into a little well-like courtyard, open to the sky. Through open doors, at the head of an outside staircase, one saw in the bright electric light a family sitting round the soup tureen. The road turned into a flight of stairs, dipped into another tunnel, made cheerful by the lights of a subterranean wine shop opening into it. From the mouth of the bright cavern came up the smell of liquor, the sound of loud voices and reverberated laughter.

And then, suddenly emerging from under the high houses, they found themselves standing on the edge of an escarped slope, looking out on to a huge expanse of pale evening sky, scalloped at its fringes by the blue shapes of mountains, with the round moon, already bright, hanging serene and solemn in

the midst. Leaning over the parapet, they looked down at the roofs of another quarter of the city, a hundred feet below. The colours of the world still struggled against the encroaching darkness; but a lavish municipality had already beaded the streets with yellow lights. A faint smell of wood-smoke and frying came up through the thin pure air. The silence of the sky was so capacious, so high and wide, that the noises of the town — like so many small, distinctly seen objects in the midst of an immense blank prairie — served but to intensify the quiet, to make the listener more conscious of its immensity in comparison with the trivial clatter at its heart.

‘I like vis place,’ Lord Hovenden repeated.

They stood for a long time, leaning their elbows on the parapet, saying nothing.

‘I say,’ said Hovenden suddenly, turning towards his companion a face on which all the shyness, the pedestrian’s self-deprecation had reappeared, ‘I’m most awfully sorry about vat silly business of going round vat beastly lake.’ The young giant who sat at the wheel of the Vauxhall Velox had retired with the machine into the garage, leaving a much less formidable Hovenden to prosecute the campaign which he had so masterfully begun. The moon, the enchanting beauty of the face that looked out so pensively through its tress-framed window, the enormous silence with the little irrelevant noises at its heart, the smell of wood-smoke and fried veal cutlets — all these influences had conspired to mollify Lord Hovenden’s joyous elation into a soft and sugary melancholy. His actions of this afternoon seemed to him now, in his changed mood, reprehensibly violent. He was afraid that his brutality might have ruined his cause. Could she ever forgive him for such behaviour? He was overwhelmed by self-reproach. To beg forgiveness seemed to be his only hope. ‘I’m awfully sorry.’

‘Are you?’ Irene turned and smiled at him. Her small white teeth showed beneath the lifted lip; in the wide-set, childish eyes there was a shining happiness. ‘I’m not. I didn’t mind a bit.’

Lord Hovenden took her hand. ‘You didn’t mind? Not at all?’

She shook her head. ‘You remember that day under the olive trees?’

‘I was a beast,’ he whispered remorsefully.

‘I was a goose,’ said Irene. ‘But I feel different now.’

‘You don’t mean . . .’

She nodded. They walked back to their hotel hand in hand. Hovenden never stopped talking and laughing all the way. Irene was silent. The kiss had made her happy too, but in a different way.

CHAPTER II

TIME AND SPACE, matter and mind, subject, object — how inextricably they got mixed, next day, on the road to Rome! The simple-minded traveller who imagines himself to be driving quietly through Umbria and Latium finds himself at the same time dizzily switchbacking up and down the periods of history, rolling on top gear through systems of political economy, scaling heights of philosophy and religion, whizzing from aesthetic to aesthetic. Dimensions are bewilderingly multiplied, and the machine which seems to be rolling so smoothly over the roads is travelling, in reality, as fast as forty horses and the human minds on board can take it, down a score of other roads, simultaneously, in all directions.

The morning was bright when they left Perugia. In the blue sky above Subasio floated a few large white clouds. Silently they rolled away down the winding hill. At the foot of the mountain, secure from the sunlight in the delicious cool of their family vault, the obese Volumni reclined along the lids of their marble ashbins, as though on couches round the dinner-table. In an eternal anticipation of the next succulent course they smiled and for ever went on smiling. We enjoyed life, they seemed to say, and considered death without horror. The thought of death was the seasoning which made our five and twenty thousand dinners upon this earth yet more appetizing.

A few miles further on, at Assisi, the mummy of a she-saint lies in a glass case, brilliantly illumined by concealed electric lights. Think of death, says the she-saint, ponder incessantly on the decay of all things, the transience of this sublunary life. Think, think; and in the end life itself will lose all its savour; death will corrupt it; the flesh will seem a shame and a disgustfulness. Think of death hard enough and you will come to deny the beauty and the holiness of life; and, in point of fact, the mummy was once a nun.

‘When Goethe came to Assisi,’ said Mr. Cardan, as they emerged from the vaults of St. Clare, ‘the only thing he looked at was the portico of a second-rate Roman temple. Perhaps he wasn’t such a fool as we think him.’

‘An admirable place for playing halma,’ said Chelifer, as they entered the Teatro Metastasio.

Upon that rococo stage art was intended to worship itself. Everywhere now, for the last two hundred years and more, it has been worshipping itself.

But in the upper and the lower churches of St. Francis, Giotto and Cimabue showed that art had once worshipped something other than itself. Art there is the handmaid of religion — or, as the psycho-analysts would say, more scientifically, anal-erotism is a frequent concomitant of incestuous homosexuality.

‘I wonder,’ said Mr. Cardan pensively, ‘if St. Francis really managed to make poverty seem so dignified, charming and attractive as they make out. I know very few poor people nowadays who cut a particularly graceful figure.’ He looked at Miss Elver, who was waddling along the road like a water-bird on land, a few yards ahead. The end of one of Lord Hovenden’s bright bandanas trailed behind her in the dust; it was tied by one corner to her wrist and she had forgotten its existence. Twenty-five thousand pounds, thought Mr. Cardan, and sighed. St. Francis, Gotama Buddha — they managed their affairs rather differently. But it was difficult nowadays to beg with any degree of dignity.

They got into the cars once more; waving the red bandana, Miss Elver said good-bye to the saints who thought so much of death that they were forced to mortify their lives. In their cool summer-house the obese Volumni smiled contemptuously. We thought not of death, we begat children, multiplied our flocks, added acre to acre, glorified life. . . . Lord Hovenden accelerated; the two wisdoms, the new and the ancient law, receded into the distance.

Spello came tumbling down the hill to look at them. In Foligno it was market day. There were so many people that Miss Elver exhausted herself in continuous wavings and greetings. Trevi on its conical mountain was like the picture of a city in an illuminated book. By the side of the road, in the rich plain, stood

factories; their tall chimneys were the slenderer repetitions of the castle towers perched high on the slopes of the hills above. In these secure and civilized times the robbers come down from their mountain fastnesses and build their watch-towers in the valleys. They were driving through progress; through progress at a mile a minute. And suddenly the cool and sparkling miracle of Clitumnus was at their right hand. The sacred spring came rushing out of the flank of the hill into a brimming pool. The banks were green with an almost English grass. There were green islands in the midst; and the weeping willow trees drooping over the water, the little bridges, transformed the Roman site into the original landscape from which a Chinese artist first drew a willow pattern.

‘More lakes,’ cried Miss Elver.

At Spoleto they stopped for lunch and the frescoes of Filippo Lippi, a painter Mrs. Aldwinkle particularly admired for having had the strength of mind, though a friar, to run off with a young girl at a Convent School. The shadowy apse was melodious with pious and elegant shapes and clear, pure colours. Anal-erotism was still the handmaid of incestuous homosexuality, but not exclusively. There was more than a hint in these bright forms of anal-erotism for anal-erotism’s sake. But the designer of that more than Roman cinquecento narthex at the west end of the church, he surely was a pure and unmixed coprophilite. How charming is divine philosophy! Astrology, alchemy, phrenology and animal magnetism, the N-rays, ectoplasm and the calculating horses of Elberfield — these have had their turn and passed. We need not regret them; for we can boast of a science as richly popular, as easy and as all-explanatory as ever were phrenology or magic. Gall and Mesmer have given place to Freud. Filippo Lippi once had a bump of art. He is now an incestuous homosexualist with a bent towards anal-erotism. Can we doubt any longer that human intelligence progresses and grows greater? Fifty years hence, what will be the current explanation of Filippo Lippi? Something profounder, something more fundamental even than faeces and infantile incestuousness; of that we may be certain. But what, precisely what, God alone knows. How charming is divine philosophy!

‘I like vese paintings,’ Lord Hovenden whispered to Irene.

They set out again. Over the pass of the Somma, down the long winding gorge to Terni.

On across the plain (the mountains bristling jaggedly all round) and up the hill to Narni; Narni that hangs precariously on the brink of its deep precipitous valley; on into the Sabine hills.

Sabine, Sabine — how wildly the mere word deviated the machine from its course! Eheu, fugaces, how the days draw in — was not that first said, first elegantly and compellingly said, in a Sabine farm? And the Sabine women! Only Rubens knew what they looked like and how they ought to be raped. How large and blonde they were! What glossy satin dresses they had on, what pearls! And their Roman ravishers were tanned as brown as Indians. Their muscles bulged; their eyes, their polished armour flashed. From the backs of their prancing horses they fairly dived into the foaming sea of female flesh that splashed and wildly undulated around them. The very architecture became tumultuous and orgiastic. Those were the high old times. Climbing from Narni, they drove into the heart of them.

But other artists than Peter Paul had passed this way. He painted only the Sabine name; they, the scene. An ancient shepherd, strayed from one of Piranesi’s ruins, watched them from a rock above the road, leaning on his staff. A flock of goats, kneeling ruminatively in the shade of an oak tree, their black bearded faces, their twisted horns sharply outlined against the bright blue sky, grouped themselves professionally — good beasts! they had studied the art of pictorial composition under the best masters — in momentary expectation of Rosa da Tivoli’s arrival. And the same Italianizing Dutchman was surely responsible for that flock of dusty sheep, those dogs, those lads with staves and that burly master shepherd, dressed like a capripede in goatskin breeches and mounted on the back of a little donkey, whose smallness contributed by contrast to the portly dignity of its rider. Nor were Dutchmen and Flemings the only foreign painters in this Italian scene. There were trees, there were glades in the woods, there were rocks that belonged by right of conquest to Nicolas Poussin.

Half close the eyes, and that grey stone becomes a ruined sepulchre: Et ego in Arcadia . . .; the village there, on the hill-top, across the valley, flowers into a little city of colonnades and cupolas and triumphal arches, and the peasants working in the fields are the people of a transcendental Arcadia gravely and soberly engaged in pursuing the True, the rationally Good and Beautiful. So much for the foreground and the middle distance. But suddenly, from the crest of a long descent, the remote wide background of Poussin's ideal world revealed itself: the vale of the Tiber, the broken plain of the Campagna, and in the midst — fantastic, improbable — the solitary cone of Mount Soracte, dim and blue against the blue of the sky.

CHAPTER III

FROM THE HEIGHTS of the Pincio Mr. Falx denounced the city that lay spread out below him.

‘Marvellous, isn’t it?’ Mrs. Aldwinkle had said. Rome was one of her private properties.

‘But every stone of it,’ said Mr. Falx, ‘raised by slave labour. Every stone! Millions of wretches have sweated and toiled and died’ — Mr. Falx’s voice rose, his language became richer and richer, he gesticulated as though he were addressing a public meeting— ‘in order that these palaces, these stately churches, these forums, amphitheatres, cloaca maximas and what-nots might be here to-day to gratify your idle eyes. Is it worth it, I ask you? Is the momentary gratification of a few idlers a sufficient reason for the secular oppression of millions of human beings, their brothers, their equals in the eyes of God? Is it, I ask again? No, a thousand times no.’ With his right fist Mr. Falx thumped the open palm of his left hand. ‘No!’

‘But you forget,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘there’s such a thing as a natural hierarchy.’ The words seemed to remind him of something. He looked round. At one of the little tea-tables grouped round the band-stand at the other side of the road, Miss Elver, dressed in her sack of flowered upholstery, was eating chocolate éclairs and meringues, messily, with an expression of rapture on her cream-smeared face. Mr. Cardan turned back and continued: ‘There are a few choice Britons who never never will be slaves, and a great many who not only will be slaves, but would be utterly lost if they were made free. Isn’t it so?’

‘Specious,’ said Mr. Falx severely. ‘But does the argument justify you in grinding the life out of a million human beings for the sake of a few works of art? How many thousand workmen and their wives and children lived degraded lives in order that St. Peter’s might be what it is?’

‘Well, as a matter of fact, St. Peter’s isn’t much of a work of art,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle scornfully, feeling that she had scored a decided point in the argument.

‘If it’s a question of degraded lives,’ put in Chelifer, ‘let me make a claim for the middle classes rather than the workers. Materially, perhaps, they may live a little better; but morally and spiritually, I assure you, they stand at the very heart of reality. Intellectually, of course, they are indistinguishable from the workers. All but a negligible, freakish minority in both classes belong to the three lowest Galtonian categories. But morally and spiritually they are worse off; they suffer from a greater reverence for public opinion, they are tortured by snobbery, they live perpetually in the midst of fear and hate. For if the workers are afraid of losing their jobs, so too are the burgesses, and with almost better reason — for they have more to lose, have further to fall. They fall from a precarious heaven of gentility into the abysses of unrelieved poverty, into the workhouse and the glutted labour exchanges; can you wonder that they live in fear? And as for hate — you can talk about the hate of the proletariat for the bourgeoisie, but it’s nothing, I assure you, to the hate that the bourgeoisie feel for the proletariat. Your burgess loathes the worker because he is afraid of him; he is terrified of the revolution that may pull him down from his genteel heaven into hell. How enviously, with what a bitter resentment, your burgess regards the slightest amelioration of the worker’s existence! To him it always seems an amelioration made at his expense. Do you remember, during the war and in the prosperous time immediately following, when the workers for the first time in history were paid a wage that enabled them to live in something like comfort, do you remember how furiously, with what a black atrabilious overflow of hatred, the middle classes denounced the riotous excesses of the idle poor? Why, the monsters even bought pianos — pianos! The pianos have all been sold again, long since. The spare furniture has gone the way of all superfluities. Even the winter overcoat is pawned. The burgess, for all that the times are hard for him too, feels happier; he is revenged. He can live in a comparative tranquillity. And what a life! He lives according to his lusts, but timorously and in a conventional

way; his diversions are provided for him by joint stock companies. He has no religion, but a great respect for genteel conventions which have not even the justification of a divine origin. He has heard of art and thought, and respects them because the best people respect them; but his mental capacities and his lack of education do not allow him to get any real satisfaction out of them. He is thus poorer than the savage, who, if he has never heard of art or science, is yet rich in religion and traditional lore. The life of a wild animal has a certain dignity and beauty; it is only the life of a domesticated animal that can be called degraded. The burgess is the perfectly domesticated human animal. That is why,' added Chelifer, 'that is why any one who wants to live really at the heart of human reality must live in the midst of burgessdom. In a little while, however, it won't be necessary to make any invidious distinctions between the classes. Every one will soon be bourgeois. The charm of the lower classes in the past consisted in the fact that they were composed of human animals in a state of relative wildness. They had a traditional wisdom and a traditional superstition; they had ancient and symbolical diversions of their own. My mother can tell you all about those,' he put in parenthetically. 'That Tolstoy should have preferred the Russian peasants to his rich and literary friends is very comprehensible. The peasants were wild; the others, just as brutish at bottom, were disgustingly tame. Moreover, they were lap-dogs of a perfectly useless breed; the peasants at any rate did something to justify their existence. But in the other countries of Europe and the New World the wild breed is rapidly dying out. Million-sale newspapers and radios are domesticating them at a prodigious rate. You can go a long way in England nowadays before you find a genuine wild human animal. Still, they do exist in the country and even in the more fetid and savage parts of towns. That's why, I repeat, one must live among the suburban bourgeoisie. The degraded and domesticated are the typical human animals of the present time; it's they who will inherit the earth in the next generation; they're the characteristic modern reality. The wild ones are no longer typical; it would be ludicrous to be a Tolstoyan now, in western Europe. And as for the genuine men and women, as opposed to the human animals, whether wild or tame — they're so fabulously

exceptional that one has no right to think of them at all. That cupola,' he pointed to the silhouette of St. Peter's, rising high above the houses on the other side of the city, 'was designed by Michelangelo. And very nice too. But what has it or he to do with us?'

'Blasphemy!' cried Mrs. Aldwinkle, flying to the defence of Buonarroti.

Mr. Falx harked back to an earlier grievance. 'You malign human nature,' he said.

'All very true and indeed obvious,' was Mr. Cardan's comment. 'But I can't see why you shouldn't allow us to amuse ourselves with Michelangelo if we want to. God knows, it's hard enough for a man to adapt himself to circumstances; why should you deprive him of his little assistants in the difficult task? Wine, for example, learning, cigars and conversation, art, cooking, religion for those that like it, sport, love, humanitarianism, hashish and all the rest. Every man has his own recipe for facilitating the process of adaptation. Why shouldn't he be allowed to indulge in his dope in peace? You young men are all so damned intolerant. How often have I had occasion to say it? You're nothing but a set of prohibitionists, the whole lot of you.'

'Still,' said Mrs. Chelifer in her gentle and musical voice, 'you can't deny that prohibition has done a great deal of good in America.'

They strolled back to the tea-table, which they had left a few minutes before to look at the view. Miss Elver was just finishing an éclair. Two empty dishes stood in front of her.

'Had a good tea?' asked Mr. Cardan.

Miss Elver nodded; her mouth was too full to speak.

'Perhaps you'd like some more cakes?' he suggested.

Miss Elver looked at the two empty dishes, then at Mr. Cardan. She seemed on the point of saying yes. But Mrs. Chelifer, who had taken the chair next hers, laid a hand on her arm.

'I don't think Grace really wants any more,' she said.

Grace turned towards her; a look of disappointment and melancholy came into her eyes, but it gave place after a moment to a happier expression. She

smiled, she took Mrs. Chelifer's hand and kissed it.

'I like you,' she said.

On the back of Mrs. Chelifer's hand her lips had left a brown print of melted chocolate. 'I think you'd better just give your face a little wipe with your napkin,' Mrs. Chelifer suggested.

'Perhaps if you dipped the corner of it first into the hot water . . .'

There was a silence. From the open-air dancing-floor, a hundred yards away beneath the trees, came the sound, a little dimmed by the intervening distance and the pervading Roman noise, of the jazz band. Monotonously, unceasingly, the banjos throbbed out the dance rhythms. An occasional squeak indicated the presence of a violin. The trumpet could be heard tooting away with a dreary persistence at the tonic and dominant; and clear above all the rest the saxophone voluptuously caterwauled. At this distance every tune sounded exactly the same. Suddenly, from the band-stand of the tea-garden a pianist, two fiddlers and a 'cellist began to play the Pilgrims' Chorus out of Tannhäuser.

Irene and Lord Hovenden, locked in one another's arms, were stepping lightly, meanwhile, lightly and accurately over the concrete dance-floor. Obedient to the music of the jazz band, forty other couples stepped lightly round them. Percolating insidiously through the palisade that separated the dance-floor from the rest of the world, thin wafts of the Pilgrims' Chorus intruded faintly upon the jazz.

'Listen,' said Hovenden. Dancing, they listened. 'Funny it sounds when you hear bof at ve same time!'

But the music from beyond the palisade was not strong enough to spoil their rhythm. They listened for a little, smiling at the absurdity of this other music from outside; but they danced on uninterruptedly. After a time they did not even take the trouble to listen.

CHAPTER IV

MR. FALX HAD expected to find no difficulty, once they were arrived in Rome, in recalling his pupil to what he considered a better and more serious frame of mind. In the bracing atmosphere of an International Labour Conference Lord Hovenden, he hoped, would recover his moral and intellectual tone. Listening to speeches, meeting foreign comrades, he would forget the corrupting charms of life under Mrs. Aldwinkle's roof and turn to nobler and more important things. Moreover, on a young and generous spirit like his the prospect of possible persecution at the hands of the Fascists might be expected to act as a stimulant; the fact of being in opposition ought to make him feel the more ardently for the unpopular cause. So Mr. Falx calculated.

But it turned out in the event that he had calculated badly. Arrived in Rome, Lord Hovenden seemed to take even less interest in advanced politics than he had during the last two or three weeks at Vezza. He suffered himself, but with a reluctance that was only too obvious to Mr. Falx, to be taken to a few of the meetings of the conference. Their bracing intellectual atmosphere had no tonic effect upon him whatsoever, and he spent his time at the meetings yawning and looking with an extraordinary frequency at his watch. In the evenings, when Mr. Falx wanted to take him to see some distinguished comrade, Lord Hovenden either made some vague excuse or, more frequently, was simply undiscoverable. The next day Mr. Falx learned with distress that he had passed half the night at a Dancing Club with Irene Aldwinkle. He could only look forward hopefully to the date of Mrs. Aldwinkle's return journey. Lord Hovenden — it had been arranged before they left England — would stay on with him in Rome till the end of the conference. With the removal of all temptations to frivolity he might be relied upon to re-become his better self.

Lord Hovenden's conscience, meanwhile, occasionally troubled him.

‘I sometimes feel I’ve raver left old Mr. Falx in ve lurch,’ he confided uneasily to Irene on the evening of their second day in Rome. ‘But still, he can’t really expect me to spend all ve day wiv him, can he?’

Irene agreed that he really couldn’t.

‘Besides,’ Lord Hovenden went on, reassuring himself, ‘I’d really be raver out of it wiv his friends. And it’s not as if he were lonely. Vere’s such a lot of people he wants to talk to. And, you know, I fink I’d really be in ve way more van anyfing.’

Irene nodded. The band struck up again. Simultaneously the two young people got up and, united, stepped off on to the floor. It was a sordid and flashy cabaret, frequented by the worst sort of international and Italian public. The women were mostly prostitutes; a party of loud and tipsy young Englishmen and Americans were sitting in one corner with a pair of swarthy young natives who looked altogether too sober; the couples who took the floor danced with an excessive intimacy. Irene and Lord Hovenden were discussing the date of their wedding; they thought the cabaret delightful.

In the day-time, when Hovenden could get off going to the conferences, they wandered about the town buying what they imagined to be antiques for their future home. The process was a little superfluous. For, absorbed in the delights of shopping, they forgot that their future home was also a highly ancestral home.

‘Vat looks an awfully nice dinner-service,’ Lord Hovenden would say; and darting into the shop they would buy it out of hand. ‘A bit chipped’ — he shook his head. ‘But never mind.’ Among the twenty-three valuable dinner-services with which their future home was already supplied was one of solid gold and one of silver gilt for less important occasions. Still, it was such fun buying, such fun to poke about in the shops! Under the pale blue sky of autumn the city was golden and black — golden where the sunlight fell on walls of stucco or travertine, black in the shadows, deeply black under archways, within the doors of churches, glossily black where the sculptured stone of fountains shone wet with the unceasing gush of water. In the open places the sun was hot; but a little wind from the sea blew freshly, and from the mouth of narrow alleys, sun-proof

these thousand years, there breathed forth wafts of a delicious vault-like coolness. They walked for hours without feeling tired.

Mrs. Aldwinkle meanwhile went the round of the sights with Chelifer. She had hopes that the Sistine Chapel, the Appian Way at sunset, the Coliseum by moonlight, the gardens of the Villa d'Este might arouse in Chelifer's mind emotions which should in their turn predispose him to feel romantically towards herself. The various emotions, she knew by experience, are not boxed off from one another in separate pigeon-holes; and when one is stimulated it is likely that its neighbours will also be aroused. More proposals are made in the taxi, on the way home from a Wagner opera, in the face of an impressive view, within the labyrinth of a ruined palace, than in drab parlours or the streets of West Kensington. But the Appian Way, even when the solitary pine trees were black against the sunset and the ghosts were playing oboes, not for the sensual ear, in the ruined sepulchres; the Coliseum, even under the moon; the cypresses, the cascades and the jade-green pools of Tivoli — all were ineffective. Chelifer never committed himself; his behaviour remained perfectly courteous.

Seated on a fallen column in the ruins of Hadrian's Villa, Mrs. Aldwinkle even went so far as to tell him about certain amorous passages in her past life. She told him, with various little modifications of the facts, modifications in which she herself had long ago come implicitly to believe, the story of the affair with Elzevir, the pianist — such an artist! to his finger-tips; with Lord Trunion — such a grand seigneur of the old school! But concerning Mr. Cardan she was silent. It was not that Mrs. Aldwinkle's mythopoeic faculties were not equal to making something very extraordinary and romantic out of Mr. Cardan. No, no; she had often described the man to those who did not know him; he was a sort of village Hampden, a mute inglorious What's-his-name, who might have done anything — but anything — if he had chosen to give himself the trouble. He was a great Don Juan, actual in this case, not merely potential. He was a mocking devil's advocate, he was even a devil. But that was because he was misunderstood — misunderstood by everybody but Mrs. Aldwinkle herself. Secretly he was so sensitive and kind-hearted. But one had to be gifted with

intuition to find it out. And so on; she had made a capital mythical figure out of him. But an instinct of caution restrained her from showing off her myths too freely before people who were well acquainted with the originals. Chelifer had never met Lord Trunion or the immortal Elzevir. He had met Mr. Cardan.

But the effect of the confidences was as small as that of the romantic scenery and the stupendous works of art. Chelifer was not encouraged by them either to confide in return or to follow the example of Elzevir and Lord Trunion. He listened attentively, gave vent, when she had finished, to a few well-chosen expressions of sympathy, such as one writes to acquaintances on the deaths of their aged grandmothers, and after a considerable silence, looking at his watch, said he thought it was time to be getting back: he had promised to meet his mother for tea, and after tea, he added, he was going to take her to look at pensions. Seeing that she was going to stay in Rome the whole winter, it was worth taking some trouble about finding a nice room. Wasn't it? Mrs. Aldwinkle was forced to agree. They set off through the parched Campagna towards the city. Mrs. Aldwinkle preserved a melancholy silence all the way.

On their way from the hotel to the tea-shop in the Piazza Venezia Mrs. Chelifer, Miss Elver and Mr. Cardan passed through the forum of Trajan. The two little churches lifted their twin domes of gold against the sky. From the floor of the forum, deep-sunk beneath the level of the road — a foot for every hundred years — rose the huge column, with tumbled pillars and blocks of masonry lying confusedly round its base. They paused to look round.

'I've always been a Protestant,' said Mrs. Chelifer after a moment's silence; 'but all the same I've always felt, whenever I came here, that Rome was somehow a special place; that God had marked it out in some peculiar way from among other cities as a place where the greatest things should happen. It's a significant place, a portentous place — though I couldn't tell you exactly why. One just feels that it is portentous; that's all. Look at this piazza, for example. Two florid little counter-Reformation churches, all trumpery pretentiousness and no piety; a mixed lot of ordinary houses all round, and in the hole in the middle a huge heathen memorial of slaughter. And yet for some reason it all seems to me

to have a significance, a spiritual meaning; it's important. And the same applies to everything in this extraordinary place. You can't regard it with indifference as you can an ordinary town.'

'And yet,' said Mr. Cardan, 'a great many tourists and all the inhabitants contrive to do so with complete success.'

'That's only because they've never looked at the place,' said Mrs. Chelifer. 'Once you've really looked . . .'

She was interrupted by a loud whoop from Miss Elver, who had wandered away from her companions and was looking over the railing into the sunken forum.

'What is it?' called Mr. Cardan. They hurried across the street towards her.

'Look,' cried Miss Elver, pointing down, 'look. All the cats!'

And there they were. On the sun-warmed marble of a fallen column basked a large tabby. A family of ginger kittens were playing on the ground below. Small tigers stalked between the blocks of masonry. A miniature black panther was standing up on its hind legs to sharpen its claws on the bark of a little tree. At the foot of the column lay an emaciated corpse.

'Puss, puss,' Miss Elver shrilly yelled.

'No good,' said Mr. Cardan. 'They only understand Italian.'

Miss Elver looked at him. 'Perhaps I'd better learn a little, then,' she said. 'Cat's Italian.'

Mrs. Chelifer meanwhile was looking down very earnestly into the forum. 'Why, there are at least twenty,' she said. 'How do they get there?'

'People who want to get rid of their cats just come and drop them over the railing into the forum,' Mr. Cardan explained.

'And they can't get out?'

'So it seems.'

An expression of distress appeared on Mrs. Chelifer's gentle face. She made a little clicking with her tongue against her teeth and sadly shook her head. 'Dear, dear,' she said, 'dear, dear. And how do they get fed?'

‘I’ve no idea,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘Perhaps they feed on one another. People throw things down from time to time, no doubt.’

‘There’s a dead one there, in the middle,’ said Mrs. Chelifer; and a note of something like reproach came into her voice, as though she found that Mr. Cardan was to blame for the deadness of the little corpse at the foot of the triumphal column.

‘Very dead,’ said Mr. Cardan.

They walked on. Mrs. Chelifer did not speak; she seemed preoccupied.

CHAPTER V

‘AN PRIS CARUNS flucuthukh’; Mr. Cardan beckoned to the guide. ‘Bring the lamp a little nearer,’ he said in Italian, and when the light had been approached, he went on slowly spelling out the primitive Greek writing on the wall of the tomb: ‘flucuthukh nun tithuial khues khathc anulis mulu vizile ziz riin puiian acasri flucuper pris an ti ar vus ta aius muntheri flucuthukh.’ He straightened himself up. ‘Charming language,’ he said, ‘charming! Ever since I learned that the Etruscans used to call the god of wine Fufluns, I’ve taken the keenest interest in their language. Fufluns — how incomparably more appropriate that is than Bacchus, or Liber, or Dionysos! Fufluns, Fufluns,’ he repeated with delighted emphasis. ‘It couldn’t be better. They had a real linguistic genius, those creatures. What poets they must have produced! “When Fufluns flucuthukhs the ziz” — one can imagine the odes in praise of wine which began like that. You couldn’t bring together eight such juicy, boozy syllables as that in English, could you?’

‘What about “Ale in a Saxon rumkin” then?’ suggested Chelifer.

Mr. Cardan shook his head. ‘It doesn’t compare with the Etruscan,’ he said. ‘There aren’t enough consonants. It’s too light, too fizzy and trivial. Why, you might be talking about soda water.’

‘But for all you know,’ said Chelifer, ‘flucuthukh in Etruscan may mean soda water. Fufluns, I grant you, is apposite. But perhaps it was just a fluke. You have no evidence to show that they fitted sound to sense so aptly in other words. “When Fufluns flucuthukhs the ziz” may be the translation of “When Bacchus drowns the hock with soda.” You don’t know.’

‘You’re quite right,’ Mr. Cardan agreed. ‘I don’t. Nor does any one else. My enthusiasm for Fufluns carried me away. Flucuthukh may not have the fruity connotation that a word with a sound like that ought to have; it may even, as you

say, mean soda water. Still, I continue to hope for the best; I believe in my Etruscans. One day, when they find the key to this fossilized language, I believe I shall be justified; flucuthukh will turn out to be just as appropriate as Fufluns — you mark my words! It's a great language, I insist; a great language. Who knows? A couple of generations hence some new Busby or Keat may be drumming Etruscan syntax and Etruscan prosody into the backsides of British boyhood. Nothing would give me greater satisfaction. Latin and Greek have a certain infinitesimal practical value. But Etruscan is totally and absolutely useless. What better basis for a gentleman's education could possibly be discovered? It's the great dead language of the future. If Etruscan didn't exist, it would be necessary to invent it.'

'Which is precisely what the pedagogues will have to do,' said Chelifer, 'there being no Etruscan literature beyond the inscriptions and the rigmarole on the mummy-wrappings at Agram.'

'So much the better,' replied Mr. Cardan. 'If we wrote it ourselves, we might find Etruscan literature interesting. Etruscan literature composed by Etruscans would be as boring as any other ancient literature. But if the epics were written by you, the Socratic dialogues by me, the history by some master of fiction like Miss Thriplow — then we'd possess a corpus in which the rare schoolboys who can derive some profit from their education could take a real interest. And when, a generation hence, we have become as much out of date in our ideas as Tully or Horace, the literature of Etruria will be rewritten by our descendants. Each generation will use the dead language to express its own ideas. And expressed in so rich an idiom as I take Etruscan to be, the ideas will seem the more significant and memorable. For I have often noticed that an idea which, expressed in one's native language, would seem dull, commonplace and opaque, becomes transparent to the mind's eye, takes on a new significance when given a foreign and unfamiliar embodiment. A cracker-motto in Latin sounds much weightier and truer than the same motto in English. Indeed, if the study of dead languages has any use at all, which I should be sorry to admit, it consists in teaching us the importance of the verbal medium in which thoughts are expressed. To know the

same thing in several languages is to know it (if you have any sense at all) more profoundly, more richly, than if it were known only in one. The youth who learns that the god of wine is called, in Etruscan, Fufluns has a profounder knowledge of the attributes of that divine personality than the youth who only knows him under the name of Bacchus. If I desire that archaeologists should discover the key to the Etruscan language, it is merely in order that I may have a deeper insight into the thing or idea connoted by such sumptuous words as flucuthukh or khathc. For the rest I care nothing. That they should discover the meaning of these inscriptions is a matter to me of the most complete indifference. For after all, what would they discover? Nothing that we don't already know. They would discover that before the Romans conquered Italy men ate and drank, made love, piled up wealth, oppressed their weaker neighbours, diverted themselves with sports, made laws and so on. One could have divined as much by walking down Piccadilly any day of the week. And besides, we have their pictures.' He threw out his hand. The guide, who had been listening patiently to the incomprehensible discourse, responded to the gesture by raising his acetylene lamp. Called magically into existence by the bright white light, a crowd of gaily coloured forms appeared on the walls of the vault in which they were standing. Set in a frame of conventionalized trees, a pair of red-brown wrestlers with Egyptian eyes and the profiles of the Greeks who disport themselves round the flanks of the earliest vases were feeling for a hold. On either side of them, beyond the trees, stood two couples of long-legged black horses. Above them, in the segment of a circle between the upper line of this band of paintings and the vaulted roof, a great leopard lay couchant, white-skinned, with a pattern of black spots arranged like those on the china dogs and cats of a later age. On the wall to the left they were feasting: red-brown Etruscans reclined on couches; porcelain-white women, contrasting as voluptuously with their tanned companions as the pale, plump nymphs of Boucher with their brown pastoral lovers, sat by their sides. With hieratic gestures of mutual love they pledged one another in bowls of wine. On the opposite wall the fowlers were busy — here with slings, there with nets. The sky

was alive with birds. In the blue sea below they were spearing fish. A long inscription ran from right to left across the wall. The vaulted roof was painted with chequers, red, black and white. Over the low, narrow door that led from the tomb into the ante-chamber there knelt a benevolent white bull. Two thousand five hundred years ago they had wept here over the newly dead.

‘You see them,’ continued Mr. Cardan, ‘hunting, drinking, playing, making love. What else could you expect them to do? This writing will tell us no more than we know already. True, I want to know what it means, but only because I hope that the brown man may be saying to the white lady: “Flucuthukh to me only with thine eyes,” or words to that effect, “and I will flucuthukh with mine.” If that was what they really were saying, it would throw an entirely new light on the notion of drinking. An entirely new light.’

‘It would throw no new light on love, if lovers they are,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle mournfully.

‘Wouldn’t it?’ Mr. Cardan queried. ‘But imagine if flucuthukh turned out to mean, not drink, but love. I assure you that the feelings denoted by such a word would be quite different from those we sum up by “love.” You can make a good guess from the sound of the word in any language what the people who speak it mean when they talk of love. Amour, for example — that long ou sound with the rolled r at the end of it, how significant it is! Ou — you have to push your lips into a snout-like formation, as though you were going to kiss. Then, briskly, rrr — you growl like a dog. Could anything be more perfectly expressive of the matter-of-fact lasciviousness which passes for love in nine-tenths of French fiction and drama? And Liebe — what a languishing, moonlit, sentimental sound the long ie has! And how apt, too, is the bleating labial by which it is followed! — be, — be. It is a sheep whose voice is choked by emotion. All German romanticism is implied in the sound of the word. And German romanticism, a little détraqué, turns quite logically into expressionismus and the wild erotic extravagance of contemporary German fiction. As for our love — that’s characteristically non-committal and diffident. That dim little monosyllable illustrates our English reluctance to call a spade a spade. It is the symbol of our

national repressions. All our hypocrisy and all the beautiful platonism of our poetry is there. Love . . .' Mr. Cardan whispered the word, and holding up his finger for silence cocked his ear to catch the faint echoes of his voice reverberating from wall to wall under the sepulchral vault. 'Love. . . . How utterly different is our English emotion from that connoted by amore! Amore — you fairly sing the second syllable, in a baritone voice, from the chest, with a little throaty tremolo on the surface to make it sound more palpitating. Amore — it's the name of the quality that Stendhal so much admired in the Italians and the absence of which in his own countrymen, and more especially countrywomen, made him rank Paris below Milan or Rome — it's the apt and perfectly expressive name of passion.'

'How true!' said Mrs. Aldwinkle, brightening for a moment through her gloom. This compliment to her Italian language and Italian character touched and pleased her. 'The very sound of amore is passionate. If the English knew what passion meant, they'd have found a more expressive word than love. That's certain. But they don't know.' She sighed.

'Quite so,' said Mr. Cardan. 'Amore, we see, can mean nothing else than Southern passion. But now, suppose that flucuthukh should turn out to be the Etruscan for love — what then? Amour connotes lasciviousness, Liebe sentiment, amore passion. To what aspect of the complex phenomenon of love can flucuthukh refer? The microbe Staphylococcus pyogenes produces in some patients boils, in others sties in the eye; in certain cases it is even responsible for keratitis punctata. It is the same with love. The symptoms vary in different individuals. But owing to the boundless suggestibility and imitativeness of man, the commonest symptoms at any given period tend to become universal in any one society. Whole peoples take the disease in the same way; one suffers from amour, another from Liebe and so on. But now imagine a people to whom love was flucuthukh. What can have been the particular symptoms of the general amorous disease to which such a name was given? One cannot guess. But at least it is fascinating to speculate.'

One after the other the party filed out through the narrow door into the ante-room of the sepulchre and up the steep flight of steps leading to the surface of the ground. Blinking in the bright afternoon light, they stepped out on to the bare and windy down.

It was a solitary place. The arches of a ruined aqueduct went striding along the ridge, and following their long recession the eye came at last to rest on the walls and tall towers of Corneto. To the left the hog-backed down sloped seawards; on the further side of the narrow plain at its foot stretched the Mediterranean. On the right lay a deep valley, shut in on the further side by a great round hill. Its grassy flanks were furrowed and pitted with what had once been the works of man. Once, on that hill, had stood the sacred city, Tarquinii of the Etruscans. The long bare down on which they were standing had been, through how many centuries? its necropolis. In little houses hollowed out of the chalky stone slept the innumerable dead. Here and there the top of a vault was broken through; from the hollow darkness within came up even at high summer an immemorial coolness. Here and there the surface of the down swelled up into round grass-grown barrows. It was from the heart of one of these tumuli that they had now emerged. The guide put out his lamp and shut the door upon the Etruscan ghosts. They walked for a few hundred yards through geological time — between the sea and the hills, under the floating clouds; on the sky-line the Middle Ages pricked up their towers; the smudged and flattened relics of Etruria undulated almost imperceptibly under the grass; from the Roman road in the plain below came up the distant hooting of a motor car.

The sound of the motor horn aroused Irene from the thoughtful trance in which, sad-faced and childish, this time, pathetically, she was walking. She had been silent and melancholy ever since, yesterday morning, they had left Rome; Lord Hovenden had stayed behind with Mr. Falx. The long-drawn hooting of the electric horn seemed to remind her of something. She looked down towards the sea-board plain. A cloud of white dust was advancing along the Maremman road from the direction of Civita Vecchia. It hung, opaque, over half a mile of road, fading slowly to transparency towards the tail. At the head, where the dust was

thickest, a small black object moved like a rapidly crawling insect across the map-like expanse of plain, drawing the cloud after it. From the opposite direction came another black-headed comet of dust. Like two white serpents they approached one another, as though rushing to battle. Nearer, nearer they came. Irene stopped still to look at them. She was filled with a horrible apprehension. It seemed impossible that they should not crash together. Nearer, nearer. The heads of the two serpents seemed almost to be touching one another. Suppose, just suppose that one of the cars was his. . . . Inevitably they must collide. Crash and smash — oh, the horror of it! Irene shut her eyes. A few seconds later she opened them. The two white snakes had merged together into one very thick opaque snake. It was impossible to see the little black heads at all. For one horrible moment she thought that they must have destroyed one another. But they reappeared after a little, receding now one from the other, no more approaching. The two serpents were still one serpent, but two-headed, a long amphisbaena. Then, gradually, the middle of the amphisbaena began to grow thin, to fade; a little clump of trees showed through it, dimly at first, mistily, then clearly. The amphisbaena had fallen in half and the two white snakes crawled on, one northwards, the other towards the south, and between their fading tails was a wide and ever wider gap. Irene heaved a deep sigh of relief and ran on after the others. It seemed to her that she had been the witness of a catastrophe miraculously averted. She felt much happier than she had felt all day. On a wide road two automobiles had passed one another. That was all.

The guide was unlocking the door that gave entrance to another excavated barrow. He relit his lamp and led the way down the steep steps into the tomb. On one wall they were horse-racing and wrestling, hieratically, all in profile. A goddess — or perhaps it was merely the Lady Mayoress of the city — wearing that high bonnet-shaped coiffure which the Roman matrons were afterwards to borrow from their neighbours, was distributing the prizes. On the other walls they were feasting. The red-brown men, the white-skinned ladies reclined along their couches. A musician stood by, playing on his double flute, and a female

dancer, dressed in what looked rather like a Persian costume, was dancing a shawl dance for the diversion of the diners.

‘They seem to have had simple tastes,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘There’s nothing very sophisticated or fin de siècle here — no bull-baiting by naked female acrobats, as at Cnossos; no gladiatorial fights, no wholesale butchering of animals, no boring matches with brass knuckle-dusters, as in the Roman arenas. A nice schoolboyish sort of people, it looks to me. Not quite civilized enough to be exigeant about their pleasures.’

‘And not yet quite civilized enough,’ added Chelifer, ‘to be really vulgar. In that respect they fall a long way behind the later Romans. Do you know that huge mosaic in the Lateran museum? It comes from one of the Imperial baths, I forget which, and consists of portraits of the principal sporting heroes of the epoch — boxers and wrestlers — with their trainers and backers. These last are treated very respectfully by the mosaic-maker, who represents them wearing togas and standing in the noblest attitudes. One sees at a glance that they are the gens bien, the sportsmen, the amateurs — in a word, the monied interest. The athletes are portrayed in a state of nature, and are indeed so excessively natural that one could easily mistake the heavy-weight boxers for gorillas peeled of their superfluous hair. Under each portrait is a caption with the name of the hero represented. The whole thing reminds one very much of the sporting page in a picture paper — only it is a page that is forty feet long by thirty wide, and made, not of wood-pulp, but of the most durable materials ever devised by the ingenuity of man for the embodiment and visible eternization of his thoughts. And it is, I think, precisely the size and everlastingness of the frightful thing that makes it so much worse than the similar page from our picture papers. To make ephemeral heroes of professional sportsmen and prize-fighters is bad enough; but that a people should desire to immortalize their fame is surely indicative of a profounder vulgarity and abjection. Like the Roman mob, the mobs of our modern capitals delight in sports and exercises which they themselves do not practise; but at any rate, the fame of our professionals lasts only a day after their triumph. We do not print their effigies on marble pavements made to live down a

hundred generations of men. We print them on wood-pulp, which is much the same as printing them on water. It is comforting to think that by the year two thousand one hundred the whole of contemporary journalism, literature and thought will have crumbled to dust. The mosaic, however, will still be in its present state of perfect preservation. Nothing short of dynamite or an earthquake will ever totally destroy the effigies of those Imperial boxers. And a very good thing, too, for the future historians of Rome. For no man can claim that he has really understood the Roman empire till he has studied that mosaic. That pavement is a vessel filled with the quintessence of Roman reality. A drop of that reality is enough to shrivel up all the retrospective Utopias that historians have ever made or ever can make out of the chronicles of ancient Rome. After looking at that mosaic a man can have no more generous illusions about the people who admired it or the age in which it was made. He will realize that Roman civilization was not merely just as sordid as ours, but if anything more sordid. But in these Etruscan vaults,' Chelifer added, looking round at the frescoed walls, 'one gets no such impression of organized and efficient beastliness as one gets from the Roman mosaic. There's a freshness, as you say, Mr. Cardan, a certain jolly schoolboyishness about all the fun they represent. But I have no doubt, of course, that the impression is entirely fallacious. Their art has a certain archaic charm; but the artists were probably quite as sophisticated and quite as repulsive as their Roman successors.'

'Come, come,' said Mr. Cardan, 'you forget that they called Bacchus Fufluns. Give them at least the credit that is due to them.'

'But the Romans too had a fine language,' Chelifer objected. 'And yet they laid down immense enlargements of the sporting page of the Daily Sketch in marble tesserae on a foundation of cement.'

They climbed again towards the light. The steps were so high and her legs so short that Miss Elver had to be helped up. The tomb resounded with her laughter and shrill whooping. They emerged at last out of the ground.

On the top of a high barrow some two or three hundred yards away stood the figure of a man, distinct against the sky. He was shading his eyes with his hand

and seemed to be looking for something. Irene suddenly became very red.

‘Why, I believe it’s Hovenden,’ she said in a voice that was as casual as she could make it.

Almost simultaneously the man turned his face in their direction. The shading hand went up in a gesture of greeting. A glad ‘Hullo!’ sounded across the tombs; the man skipped down from his barrow and came running across the down towards them. And Hovenden it was; Irene had seen aright.

‘Been looking for you all over ve place,’ he explained breathlessly as he came up. With the greatest heartiness he shook the hands of all present except — diplomatically — Irene’s. ‘Vey told me in ve town vat a party of foreigners was out here looking at ve cemetery or somefing. So I buzzed after you till I saw old Ernest wiv ve car at ve side of ve road. Been underground, have you?’ He looked into the dark entrance of the tomb. ‘No wonder I couldn’t . . .’

Mrs. Aldwinkle cut him short. ‘But why aren’t you in Rome with Mr. Falx?’ she asked.

Lord Hovenden’s boyish, freckled face became all at once exceedingly red. ‘Ve fact is,’ he said, looking at the ground, ‘vat I didn’t feel very well. Ve doctor said I ought to get away from Rome at once. Country air, you know. So I just left a note for Mr. Falx and . . . and here I am.’ He looked up again, smiling.

CHAPTER VI

‘BUT AT MONTEFIASCONE,’ said Mr. Cardan, concluding the history of the German bishop who gave the famous wine of Montefiascone its curious name, ‘at Montefiascone Bishop Defuk’s servant found good wine at every shop and tavern; so that when his master arrived he found the prearranged symbol chalked up on a hundred doors. Est, Est, Est — the town was full of them. And the Bishop was so much enraptured with the drink that he decided to settle in Montefiascone for life. For life — but he drank so much that in a very short time it turned out that he had settled here for death. They buried him in the lower church, down there. On his tombstone his servant engraved the Bishop’s portrait with this brief epitaph: “Est Est Jo Defuk. Propter nimium hic est. Dominus meus mortuus est.” Since when the wine has always been called Est Est Est. We’ll have a flask of it dry for serious drinking. And for the frivolous and the feminine, and to sip with the dessert, we’ll have a bottle of the sweet moscato. And now let’s see what there is to eat.’ He picked up the menu and holding it out at arm’s length — for he had the long sight of old age — read out slowly, with comments, the various items. It was always Mr. Cardan who ordered the dinner (although it was generally Lord Hovenden or Mrs. Aldwinkle who paid), always Mr. Cardan; for it was tacitly admitted by every one that Mr. Cardan was the expert on food and wine, the professional eater, the learned and scholarly drinker.

Seeing Mr. Cardan busy with the bill of fare, the landlord approached, rubbing his hands and cordially smiling — as well he might on a Rolls-Royce-full of foreigners — to take orders and give advice.

‘The fish,’ he confided to Mr. Cardan, ‘the fish is something special.’ He put his fingers to his lips and kissed them. ‘It comes from Bolsena, from the lake,

down there.' He pointed out of the window at the black night. Somewhere, far down through the darkness, lay the Lake of Bolsena.

Mr. Cardan held up his hand. 'No, no,' he objected with decision and shook his head. 'Don't talk to me of fish. Never safe in these little places,' he explained to his companions. 'Particularly in such hot weather. And then, imagine eating fish from Bolsena — a place where they have miracles, where holy wafers bleed for the edification of the pious and as a proof of the fact of transubstantiation. No, no,' Mr. Cardan repeated, 'fishes from Bolsena are altogether too fishy. Let's stick to fried eggs, with fillet of veal to follow. Or a little roast capon . . .'

'I want fish,' said Miss Elver. The passionate earnestness of her tone contrasted strikingly with the airiness of Mr. Cardan's banter.

'I really wouldn't, you know,' said Mr. Cardan.

'But I like fish.'

'But it may be unwholesome. You never can tell.'

'But I want it,' Miss Elver insisted. 'I love fish.' Her large lower lip began to tremble, her eyes filled with tears. 'I want it.'

'Well, then, of course you shall have it,' said Mr. Cardan, making haste to console her. 'Of course, if you really like it. I was only afraid that it mightn't perhaps be good. But it probably will be.'

Miss Elver took comfort, blew her long nose and smiled. 'Thank you, Tommy,' she said, and blushed as she pronounced the name.

After dinner they went out into the piazza for coffee and liqueurs. The square was crowded and bright with lights. In the middle the band of the local Philharmonic Society was giving its Sunday evening concert. Planted on the rising ground above the piazza Sammicheli's great church solemnly impended. The lights struck up, illuminating its pilastered walls. The cupola stood out blackly against the sky.

'The choice,' said Mr. Cardan, looking round the piazza, 'seems to lie between the Café Moderno and the Bar Ideale. Personally, I should be all for the ideal rather than the real if it wasn't for the disagreeable fact that in a bar one has

to stand. Whereas in a café, however crassly materialistic, one can sit down. I'm afraid the Moderno forces itself upon us.'

He led the way in the direction of the café.

'Talking of Bars,' said Chelifer, as they sat down at a little table in front of the café, 'has it ever occurred to you to enumerate the English words that have come to have an international currency? It's a somewhat curious selection, and one which seems to me to throw a certain light on the nature and significance of our Anglo-Saxon civilization. The three words from Shakespeare's language that have a completely universal currency are Bar, Sport and W.C. They're all just as good Finnish now as they are good English. Each of these words possesses what I may call a family. Round the idea "Bar" group themselves various other international words, such as Bitter, Cocktail, Whiskey and the like. "Sport" boasts a large family — Match, for example, Touring Club, the verb to Box, Cycle-Car, Performance (in the sporting sense) and various others. The idea of hydraulic sanitation has only one child that I can think of, namely Tub. Tub — it has a strangely old-world sound in English nowadays; but in Yugo-Slavia, on the other hand, it is exceedingly up-to-date. Which leads us on to that very odd class of international English words that have never been good English at all. A Smoking for example, a Dancing, a Five-o'clock — these have never existed except on the continent of Europe. As for High-Life, so popular a word in Athens, where it is spelt iota, gamma, lambda, iota, phi — that dates from a remote, mid-Victorian epoch in the history of our national culture.'

'And Spleen,' said Mr. Cardan, 'you forget Spleen. That comes from much further back. A fine aristocratic word, that; we were fools to allow it to become extinct. One has to go to France to hear it uttered now.'

'The word may be dead,' said Chelifer, I but the emotion, I fancy, has never flourished more luxuriantly than now. The more material progress, the more wealth and leisure, the more standardized amusements — the more boredom. It's inevitable, it's the law of Nature. The people who have always suffered from spleen and who are still the principal victims, are the prosperous, leisured and educated. At present they form a relatively small minority; but in the Utopian

state where everybody is well off, educated and leisured, everybody will be bored; unless for some obscure reason the same causes fail to produce the same effects. Only two or three hundred people out of every million could survive a lifetime in a really efficient Utopian state. The rest would simply die of spleen. In this way, it may be, natural selection will work towards the evolution of the super-man. Only the intelligent will be able to bear the almost intolerable burden of leisure and prosperity. The rest will simply wither away, or cut their throats — or, perhaps more probably, return in desperation to the delights of barbarism and cut one another's throats, not to mention the throats of the intelligent.'

'That certainly sounds the most likely and natural ending,' said Mr. Cardan. 'If of two possible alternatives one is in harmony with our highest aspirations and the other is, humanly speaking, absolutely pointless and completely wasteful, then, you may be sure, Nature will choose the second.'

At half-past ten Miss Elver complained that she did not feel very well. Mr. Cardan sighed and shook his head. 'These miraculous fishes,' he said. They went back to the hotel.

'Luckily,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle that evening while Irene was brushing her hair, 'luckily I never had any babies. They spoil the figure so frightfully.'

'Still,' Irene ventured to object, 'still . . . they must be rather fun, all the same.'

Mrs. Aldwinkle pretexted a headache and sent her to bed almost at once. At half-past two in the morning Irene was startled out of her sleep by a most melancholy groaning and crying from the room next to hers. 'Oo, Oo! Ow!' It was Grace Elver's voice. Irene jumped out of bed and ran to see what was the matter. She found Miss Elver lying in a tumbled bed, writhing with pain.

'What is it?' she asked.

Miss Elver made no articulate answer. 'Oo, Oo,' she kept repeating, turning her head from side to side as though in the hope of escaping from the obsessing pain.

Irene ran to her aunt's bedroom, knocked at the door and, getting no answer, walked in. 'Aunt Lilian,' she called in the darkness, and louder, 'Aunt Lilian!'

There was still no sound. Irene felt for the switch and turned on the light. Mrs. Aldwinkle's bed was empty. Irene stood there for a moment looking dubiously at the bed, wondering, speculating. From down the corridor came the repeated 'Oo, Oo!' of Grace Elver's inarticulate pain. Roused by the sound from her momentary inaction, Irene turned, stepped across the passage and began knocking at Mr. Cardan's door.

CHAPTER VII

SELECTIONS FROM FRANCIS Chelifer

In the sporting calendar the most interesting events are booked for the autumnal months. There is no hunting in the spring. And even in Italy there is a brief close season for song-birds that lasts from the coming of the nightingales to the departure of the last swallow. The fun, the real fun, starts only in the autumn. Grouse-shooting, partridge-shooting — these are the gay preliminaries. But the great day is the First of October, when the massacre of the gaudy pheasant begins. Crack! crack! — the double barrels make music in the fading woods. And a little later the harmonious dogs join in and the hoof, as the Latin poet so aptly puts it, the hoof shakes the putrid field with quadrupedantical sound. Winter is made gay with the noise of hunting.

It is the same in the greater year of certain feminine lives. . . . Pop! pop! — on the First of October they go out to shoot the pheasant. A few weeks later, tally-ho, they hunt the fox. And on Guy Fawkes's day the man-eating season begins. My hostess, when she picked me up on the beach of Marina di Vezza, had reached a point in her year somewhere between pheasant-shooting and man-eating. They say that foxes enjoy being hunted; but I venture to doubt the truth of this comforting hypothesis. Experientia does it, as Mrs. Micawber's papa (ha ha! from Mr. Toft) . . . Etcetera.

If loving without being loved in return may be ranked as one of the most painful of experiences, being loved without loving is certainly one of the most boring. Perhaps no experience is better calculated to make one realize the senselessness of the passion. The spectacle of some one making a fool of himself arouses only laughter. When one is playing the fool oneself, one weeps. But when one is neither the active imbecile nor the disinterested spectator, but the unwilling cause of somebody else's folly — then it is that one comes to feel that

weariness and that disgust which are the proper, the human reaction to any display of the deep animal stupidity that is the root of all evil.

Twice in my life have I experienced these salutary horrors of boredom — once by my own fault, because I asked to be loved without loving; and once because I had the misfortune to be picked up on the beach, limp as sea-weed, between the First of October and Guy Fawkes's day. The experiences were disagreeable while they lasted; but on the other hand, they were highly didactic. The first of them rounded off, so to speak, the lesson I had learned from Barbara. The second episode was staged by Providence, some few years later, to remind me of the first and to print what the Americans would call its 'message' still more indelibly upon my mind. Providence has been remarkably persistent in its efforts to sober me. To what end I cannot imagine.

Poor Miss Masson! She was a very good secretary. By the end of 1917 she knew all that it was possible to know about rubber tubing and castor oil. It was unfortunate for every one concerned that Providence should have destined her to instruct me yet more deeply in the fearful mysteries of love. True, I brought it on myself. Providence, on that occasion, elected to act indirectly and threw the blame on me. I accept it all — all the more willingly since my act shows in the most illuminating manner what are the consequences, the frightful consequences, of stupidity. There is a certain satisfaction to be derived from having personally proved the truth of one's own wisdom by acting in defiance of its precepts.

Yes, I brought it on myself. For it was I who made the first advances. It was I who, out of pure wantonness, provoked the sleeping, or at least well-disciplined tiger that lay hidden in Dorothy Masson's heart — put my walking-stick between the bars and, against all the rules, poked it rudely in the ribs. I got what I asked for.

I was like that wanton Blackamoor in one of old Busch's misanthropically comic picture-books.

Ein Mohr aus Bosheit und Pläsier
Schiesst auf das Elefantentier.

With his little arrow he punctures the placid pachyderm; and the pachyderm takes his revenge, elaborately, through fourteen subsequent woodcuts.

My only excuse — the recentness of that ludicrous catastrophe with which the tragedy of Barbara had concluded — was an excuse that might equally have served as an additional reason against doing what I did; I ought, after having once been bitten, to have shown myself twice shy. But in the state of misery in which I found myself I hoped that a second bite might distract my attention from the anguish of the first. And even this is not precisely accurate; for I never anticipated that the second would really be a bite at all. I looked forward merely to a kind of playful diversion, not to anything painful. True, when I found how serious the affair threatened to become for Dorothy Masson, I might have guessed that it would soon be serious also for myself, and have drawn back. But, inspired by that high-spirited irresponsibility which I have come since then so highly to admire in the natural, brutish human specimen, I refused to consider possible consequences and went on in the course I had begun. I was not in the least in love with the woman; nor did her person inspire me with any specific desire. My motive forces were misery, mingled with a kind of exasperation, and the vague itch of recurrent appetite. More than half of the world's 'affairs' have no more definite reasons for occurring. Ennui and itch are their first causes. Subsequently imagination may come into play and love will be born. Or experience may beget specific desires and in so doing may render one party necessary to the happiness of the other, or each to each. Or perhaps there will be no development at all and the affair will end placidly as it began, in itch and ennui.

But there are cases, of which mine was one, where one party may be inspired by the mere indefinite wantonness I have been describing, while the other is already imagination-ridden and in love. Poor Dorothy! There came into her eyes when I kissed her a look such as I had never seen in any other human eyes before or since. It was the look one sees in the eyes of a dog when its master is angry and raises his whip — a look of absolute self-abasement mingled with terror. There was something positively appalling in seeing those eyes staring at

one out of a woman's face. To see a human being reduced in one's arms to the condition of a frightened and adoring dog is a shocking thing. And the more so in this case since it was completely indifferent to me whether she was in my arms or not. But when she raised her face and looked at me for a moment with those abject and terrified eyes of hers, it was not merely indifferent to me; it was even positively distasteful. The sight of those large-pupilled eyes, in which there was no glimmer of a human rational soul, but only an animal's terror and abasement, made me feel at once guilty and, complementarily, angry, resentful and hostile.

'Why do you look at me like that?' I asked her once. 'As though you were frightened of me.'

She did not answer; but only hid her face against my shoulder, and pressed me more closely in her arms. Her body shook with involuntary startings and tremblings. Casually, from force of habit, I caressed her. The trembling became more violent. 'Don't,' she implored me in a faint hoarse whisper, 'don't.' But she pressed me still closer.

She was frightened, it seemed, not of me but of herself, of that which lay sleeping in the depths of her being and whose awakening threatened to overwhelm, to blot for a moment out of existence that well-ordered, reasonable soul which was the ruler at ordinary times of her life. She was afraid of the power within her that could make her become something other than her familiar self. She was fearful of losing her self-mastery. And at the same time there was nothing else that she desired. The sleeping power within her had begun to stir and there was no resisting it. Vainly, hopelessly, she continued to attempt the impossible. She went on trying to resist, and her resistance quickened her desire to yield. She was afraid and yet invited my awakening kisses. And while she whispered to me imploringly, like one who begs for mercy, she pressed me in her arms. I, meanwhile, had begun to realize all the potentialities for boredom implicit in the situation. And how boring it did in fact turn out to be! To be pursued by restless warmth when all that one desires is cool peace; to be perpetually and quite justly accused of remissness in love and to have to deny

the accusation, feebly, for the sake of politeness; to be compelled to pass hours in tedious company — what an affliction, what a martyrdom it is! I came to feel extremely sorry for those pretty women who are perpetually being courted by a swarm of men. But the pretty women, I reflected, had this advantage over me: that they were by nature a good deal more interested in love than I. Love is their natural business, the reason of their existence; however distasteful their suitors may personally be to them, they cannot find them as completely boring and insufferable as would, placed in similar circumstances, a person to whom love as such is fundamentally rather uninteresting. The most tedious lover atones a little, in the eyes of the courted lady, for his personal insupportableness by the generic fact of being a lover. Lacking a native enthusiasm for love, I found it more difficult to support the martyrdom of being loved by Miss Masson.

But such an affair, you will object, is a typical piece of reality. True; but at that time I was not quite such a believer in the real and earnest side of life as I am now. And even now I should regard it as something of a work of supererogation to associate with realities of so exceptionally penetrative a nature. A sober man, if he is logical and courageous, is bound to pass his life between Gog's Court and Miss Carruthers's. But he is not bound to make love to Miss Carruthers or to provoke the clinging affections of Fluffy. That would be too much — so it seems to me, at any rate at present; though perhaps the time may come when I shall feel strong enough to take my reality in these stiff doses. There is an electric machine used by masseurs for driving iodine into stiffened joints. Love acts like this machine; it serves to drive the lover's personality into the mind of the beloved. I am strong enough at present to be able to bathe in the personalities of ordinary human animals; but I should be suffocated, I should faint away, if the muddy swill were to be pumped into my spiritual system by the penetrating electricity of love.

Miss Masson stood one Galtonian class higher than Miss Carruthers or Fluffy. One out of every four people is a Fluffy; only one out of every six is a Dorothy Masson. It makes a slight but perceptible difference. None the less, how much I suffered! When I brought her a few orchids as a present, remarking as I

gave them to her that they looked so delightfully like artificial flowers, she would thank me and say she adored orchids, adding after a moment's pause for thought that she liked them because they looked so like artificial flowers. And she laughed softly to herself, she looked up at me for confirmatory applause. For that little habit alone I sometimes felt that I could have murdered her. But her solicitude, her reproaches, expressed or more often mute (for she rarely made scenes, but only looked at me with those sad brown eyes), her incessant desire to be close to me, to touch me, to kiss and be kissed — these were almost enough to drive me to suicide. It lasted for more than a year, an eternity. And technically it still lasts; for I never broke with her, never dramatically quitted her, but only quietly and gradually faded out of her life like the Cheshire Cat. Sometimes, even, we still meet. And still, as though nothing had happened, I take her in my arms and kiss her, till that strange expression of abject terror comes again into her eyes, till she implores me, in a voice made faint with excessive desire, to spare her well-disciplined everyday soul and not deliver it into the power of the fearful thing that is waking darkly within her. And still as she speaks she presses me closer, she offers her stretched throat to my kisses. And before and after, we talk about politics and common friends. And still as of old she echoes the last phrase I have spoken, still softly laughs and still expects me to admire her original thoughts. Finally I take my leave.

'You'll come again soon?' she asks, looking up into my face with eyes that are full of sadness and apprehension, of questions unuttered, of unexpressed reproaches. I kiss her hand. 'Of course,' I say. And I go away, taking pains as I walk down the street not to speculate on the subject of her thoughts.

But Providence seems to have thought my connection with Dorothy inadequately instructive. Dorothy, after all, was only twenty-six when the episode began. Hers was that vernal and flowery season during which, even in Italy, warblers are not shot. It would be another twenty years before she reached her First of October; thirty, perhaps, before the man-eating season should begin. And it was I who had made the first advances. But for my exhibition of Bosheit und Pläsier the boring history would never have unrolled itself. But Providence,

anxious, for some inscrutable reason, to teach me a yet more memorable lesson, went so far as almost to drown me, so determined was it that I should fall into the hands of the suitable schoolmistress. I was to learn how ludicrously dreadful, as well as how boring, love can be.

I made no advances on this occasion. From the first I did nothing but retreat. Mrs. Aldwinkle's blue danger signals bore down on me; like an agile pedestrian in the London traffic, I stepped aside. When she asked what women had inspired me, I answered that nothing inspired me but the London slums and the vulgarity of Lady Giblet. When she said that one could see by my face that I had been unhappy, I said that that was odd; I had always been perfectly happy. When she talked about experience, meaning, as women generally do when they use that word, merely love, I replied with a discussion of experience in relation to the Theory of Knowledge. When she accused me of wearing a mask, I protested that I paraded my naked soul for every one to see. When she asked if I had ever been in love, I shrugged my shoulders and smiled: not to speak of. And when she asked, at very close range, if I had ever been loved, I answered quite truthfully that I had, but that it bored me.

But still, indomitably, she renewed the attack. There might have been something grand about her unwavering determination — something grand, if it had not been grotesque. Providence was teaching me yet once more that the unsapient life is a dreary and hopeless business, and that it is, for all practical purposes, the only life — lived everywhere by all but a negligibly few exceptions. At least I presume that that is what Providence was trying to impress on me. But in the process it was using Mrs. Aldwinkle, I thought, rather hardly. I felt sorry for the poor lady. Some hidden irrational force within herself was compelling her to cut these capers, throw herself into these ludicrous postures, say these stupid words and contort her face into these grimaces; she was helpless. She just obeyed orders and did her best; but her best was ludicrous. And not merely ludicrous but appalling. She was like a buffoon carrying a skull.

Unflaggingly she played the deplorable part assigned to her. Every day she brought me flowers. 'I want them to blossom in your verses,' she said. I assured

her that the only scent which provoked me to write was that of the butchers' shops on a winter's evening along the Harrow Road. She smiled at me. 'Don't think I can't understand you,' she said. 'I do. I do.' She leaned forward; her eyes shone, her perfume enveloped me, she breathed heliotrope in my face. I could see with extraordinary distinctness the little wrinkles round her eyes, the careless smear of rouge at the corners of the mouth. 'I do understand you,' she repeated.

She did understand me. . . . One night (it was at Montefiascone, on our way back from Rome), when I was reading in bed, I heard a sound; I looked up, and saw Mrs. Aldwinkle carefully closing the door behind her. She was wearing a dressing-gown of sea-green silk. Her hair hung in two thick plaits over her shoulders. When she turned round, I saw that her face had been coloured and powdered with more than ordinary care. In silence she advanced across the room, she sat down on the edge of my bed. An aura of ambergris and heliotrope surrounded her.

I smiled politely, closed my book (keeping a finger, however, between the pages to mark my place) and slightly raised my eyebrows in interrogation. To what, I made my face inquire, do I owe the honour? . . .

I owed it, it seemed, to my hostess's urgently felt need to tell me yet once more that she understood me.

'I couldn't bear,' she said breathlessly, 'couldn't bear to think of you here alone. With your secret misery.' And when I made as though to protest, she held up her hand. 'Oh, don't think I haven't seen through your mask. Alone with your secret misery . . .'

'No, really . . .' I managed to put in. But Mrs. Aldwinkle would not suffer herself to be interrupted.

'I couldn't bear to think of your terrible loneliness,' she went on. 'I wanted you to know there was at least one person who understood.' She leaned towards me, smiling, but with lips that trembled. All at once her eyes filled with tears, her face contorted itself into the terrible grimace of misery. She made a little moaning noise and, letting herself fall forward, she hid her face against my knees. 'I love you, I love you,' she repeated in a muffled voice. Her body was

shaken by recurrent spasms of sobbing. I was left wondering what to do. This was not in the programme. When one goes out man-eating or pheasant-shooting, one has no business to weep over the victim. But the trouble is, of course, that the man-eater sees herself as the victim. Hinc illae lacrimae. It is impossible for two human beings to agree completely about anything. Quot homines, for now that the Dictionary of Familiar Quotations has been opened I may as well continue to make use of it, quot homines, tot disputandum est. There is no agreement even about the truths of science. One man is a geometrician; the other can only understand analysis. One is incapable of believing in anything of which he cannot make a working model; the other wants his truth as abstract as it is possible to make it. But when it comes to deciding which of two people is the victim and which the man-eater, there is nothing to be done but abandon the attempt. Let each party stick to his own opinion. The most successful men are those who never admit the validity of other people's opinions, who even deny their existence.

'My dear Lilian,' I said (she had insisted on my calling her Lilian within a day or two of my arrival), 'my dear Lilian . . .' I could find nothing more to say. A successful man, I suppose, would have said something frankly brutal, something that would have made it clear to Mrs. Aldwinkle which of the two, in his opinion, was the victim and which the carnivore. I lacked the force. Mrs. Aldwinkle went on sobbing.

'I love you. Couldn't you love me a little? A little only? I would be your slave. Your slave; I'd be your slave,' she kept repeating.

What things she said! I listened to her, feeling pity — yes, pity no doubt — but still more, a profound embarrassment, and with it anger against the person who had thrust me into this untenable position.

'It's no good,' I protested. 'It's impossible.'

She only began again, desperately.

How much further the scene might have prolonged itself and what might have happened if it had been protracted, I do not know. Luckily, however, an extraordinary commotion suddenly broke loose in the hotel. Doors slammed,

voices were raised, there was the noise of feet along the corridors and on the stairs. Startled and alarmed, Mrs. Aldwinkle got up, went to the door, opened it a crack and looked into the passage. Some one hurried past; hastily she closed it again. When the coast was clear, she slipped out into the passage and tip-toed away, leaving me alone.

The commotion was caused by the beginning of Miss Elver's death-agony. Providence, having decided that my education had gone far enough, had broken off the lesson. The means it employed were, I must say, rather violent. A vain man might have been gratified by the reflection that one woman had been made miserable in order that he might be taught a lesson, while another had died — like King John, of a surfeit of lampreys — in order that the lesson might be interrupted before it was carried too disagreeably far. But as it happens, I am not particularly vain.

CHAPTER VIII

FROM THE FIRST nobody put very much faith in the local doctor; the mere look of him was enough to inspire mistrust. But when across the patient's prostrate and comatose body he chattily confided that he had taken his degree at the University of Siena, Mr. Cardan decided that it was time to send for somebody else.

'Siena's notorious,' he whispered. 'It's the place where the imbeciles who can't get their degrees at Bologna, or Rome, or Pisa go and have themselves made doctors.'

Mrs. Aldwinkle, who in the middle of the tumult had suddenly reappeared (Irene did not know from where), expressed her horror. Doctors were one of her specialities; she was very particular about doctors. Mrs. Aldwinkle had had a number of interesting maladies in the course of her life — three nervous break-downs, an appendicitis, gout and various influenzas, pneumonias and the like, but all of them aristocratic and avowable diseases; for Mrs. Aldwinkle distinguished sharply between complaints that are vulgar and complaints of a gentlemanly sort. Chronic constipation, hernia, varicose veins ('bad legs' as the poor so gruesomely call them) — these, obviously, were vulgar diseases which no decent person could suffer from, or at any rate, suffering, talk about. Her illnesses had all been extremely refined and correspondingly expensive. What she did not know about doctors, English, French, Swiss, German, Swedish and even Japanese, was not worth knowing. Mr. Cardan's remarks about the University of Siena impressed her profoundly.

'The only thing to do,' she said decisively, 'is for Hovenden to drive straight back to Rome and bring back a specialist. At once.' She spoke peremptorily. It was a comfort for her, in her present distress of mind, to be able to do something, to make arrangements, to order people about, even herself to carry

and fetch. ‘The Principessa gave me the name of a wonderful man. I’ve got it written down somewhere. Come.’ And she darted off to her room.

Obediently Lord Hovenden followed her, wrote down the talismanic name and took himself off. Chelifer was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs.

‘I may as well come with you, if you don’t mind,’ he said. ‘I think I should only be in the way here.’

It was nearly half-past five when they started. The sun had not yet risen, but it was already light. The sky was pale grey with dark clouds low down on the horizon. There were mists in the valleys and the Lake of Bolsena was hidden from view under what seemed the waters of a milky sea. The air was cold. Driving out of the town, they met a train of pack mules climbing slowly, in the midst of a jingle of bells, up the steep street towards the market-place.

Viterbo was still asleep when they drove through. From the crest of the Ciminian mountains they first saw the sun. By seven o’clock they were in Rome. The sun-tipped obelisks, the gilded roofs and cupolas reached up out of shadow into the pale blue sky. They drove up the Corso. In the Piazza di Venezia they stopped at a café, ordered some coffee, and while it was being brought looked up in a directory the address of Mrs. Aldwinkle’s doctor. He lived, they found, in the new quarter near the station.

‘I leave all ve talking to you,’ said Hovenden, as they sipped their coffee. ‘I’m no good at ve language.’

‘How did you manage the other day when you had to see the doctor yourself?’ Chelifer inquired.

Lord Hovenden blushed. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘as a matter of fact, ve doctor I saw was English. But he’s gone away now,’ he added hastily, for fear that Chelifer might suggest their bringing the English doctor along too; ‘gone to Naples,’ he further specified, hoping by the accumulation of circumstantial details to give greater verisimilitude to his story, ‘for an operation.’

‘He was a surgeon, then?’ Chelifer raised his eyebrows.

Hovenden nodded. ‘A surgeon,’ he echoed, and buried his face in his coffee-cup.

They drove on. As they turned out of the Piazza into Trajan's Forum, Chelifer noticed a little crowd, mostly of street boys, pressing against the railings on the further side of the forum. At its centre stood a pale thin woman in dove-grey clothes whom even at this distance one could not fail to recognize as English, or at any rate definitely not Italian. The lady in grey was leaning over the railings, lowering very carefully at the end of a string, to which it was ingeniously attached by four subsidiary strings passed through holes bored in the rim, a large aluminium pannikin filled with milk. Slowly revolving as it went down, the pannikin was lowered to the floor of the sunken forum. Hardly had it touched the ground when, with simultaneous mewings and purrings, half a dozen thirsty cats came running up to it and began to lap at the white milk. Others followed; every cranny gave up its cat. Lean toms jumped down from their marble pedestals and trotted across the open with the undulating, bounding gait of a running leopard. Month-old kittens staggered up on tottering legs. In a few seconds the pannikin was besieged by a horde of cats. The street boys whooped with delight.

'Well, I'm blowed,' said Lord Hovenden, who had slowed up to watch the curious scene. 'I believe it's your mover.'

'I think it is,' said Chelifer, who had recognized her long ago.

'Would you like me to stop?' asked Hovenden.

Chelifer shook his head. 'I think we'd better get to the doctor as quickly as possible,' he said.

Looking back as they drove out of the forum, Chelifer saw that his mother, faithful to her vegetarian principles, was throwing down into the den of cats bread and cold potatoes. In the evening he imagined she would come again. She had not taken long to find her Roman occupation.

CHAPTER IX

THE FUNERAL WAS not due to take place before sunset. The bearers, the choristers, the sexton, the priest himself, most likely, were all in the fields, picking the grapes. They had something more important to do, while the light lasted, than to bury people. Let the dead bury their dead. The living were there to make wine.

Mr. Cardan sat alone in the empty church. Alone; what had once been Grace Elver lay, coffined, on a bier in the middle of the aisle. That did not count as company; it was just so much stuff in a box. His red knobbly face was as though frozen into stillness, all its gaiety, its twinkling mobility were gone. It might have been the face of a dead man, of one of the dead whose business it is to bury the dead. He sat there grim and stony, leaning forward, his chin in his hand, his elbow on his knee.

Three thousand six hundred and fifty days more, he was thinking; that is, if I live another ten years. Three thousand six hundred and fifty, and then the end of everything, the tunnelling worms.

There are such horrible ways of dying, he thought. Once, years ago, he had a beautiful grey Angora cat. She ate too many black-beetles in the kitchen and died vomiting shreds of her shard-torn stomach. He often thought of that cat. One might die like that oneself, coughing up one’s vitals.

Not that one eats many black-beetles, of course. But there is always putrid fish. The effects are not so very different. Wretched moron! he thought, looking at the coffin. It had been a disgusting sort of death. Pains, vomiting, collapse, coma, then the coffin — and now the busy ferments of putrefaction and the worms. Not a very dignified or inspiring conclusion. No speeches, no consoling serenities, no Little Nells or Paul Dombeys. The nearest approach to the

Dickensian had been when, in a brief spell of lucidity, she asked him about the bears he was going to give her after they were married.

‘Will they be grown up?’ she asked. ‘Or puppies?’

‘Puppies,’ he answered, and she had smiled with pleasure.

Those had been almost the only articulate words she had uttered. Through that long death-agony they were the only witnesses to the existence of her soul. For the rest of the time she had been no more than a sick body, mindlessly crying and muttering. The tragedy of bodily suffering and extinction has no catharsis. Punctually it runs its dull, degrading course, act by act to the conclusion. It ennobles neither the sufferer nor the contemplator. Only the tragedy of the spirit can liberate and uplift. But the greatest tragedy of the spirit is that sooner or later it succumbs to the flesh. Sooner or later every soul is stifled by the sick body; sooner or later there are no more thoughts, but only pain and vomiting and stupor. The tragedies of the spirit are mere struttings and posturings on the margin of life, and the spirit itself is only an accidental exuberance, the products of spare vital energy, like the feathers on the head of a hoopoo or the innumerable populations of useless and foredoomed spermatozoa. The spirit has no significance; there is only the body. When it is young, the body is beautiful and strong. It grows old, its joints creak, it becomes dry and smelly; it breaks down, the life goes out of it and it rots away. However lovely the feathers on a bird’s head, they perish with it; and the spirit, which is a lovelier ornament than any, perishes too. The farce is hideous, thought Mr. Cardan, and in the worst of bad taste.

Fools do not perceive that the farce is a farce. They are the more blessed. Wise men perceive it and take pains not to think about it. Therein lies their wisdom. They indulge themselves in all the pleasures, of the spirit as of the body — and especially in those of the spirit, since they are by far the more varied, charming and delightful — and when the time comes they resign themselves with the best grace they can muster to the decay of the body and the extinction of its spiritual part. Meanwhile, however, they do not think too much of death — it is an unexhilarating theme; they do not insist too much upon the farcical nature

of the drama in which they are playing, for fear that they should become too much disgusted with their parts to get any amusement out of the piece at all.

The most ludicrous comedies are the comedies about people who preach one thing and practise another, who make imposing claims and lamentably fail to fulfil them. We preach immortality and we practise death. Tartuffe and Volpone are not in it.

The wise man does not think of death lest it should spoil his pleasures. But there are times when the worms intrude too insistently to be ignored. Death forces itself sometimes upon the mind, and then it is hard to take much pleasure in anything.

This coffin, for instance — how can a man take pleasure in the beauty of the church in which this boxful of decaying stuff is lying? What can be more delightful than to look up the aisle of a great church and see at the end of a long dark vista of round-headed arches a brightly illumined segment of the drum of the cupola — the horizontal circle contrasting harmoniously with the perpendicular half-circles of the arches? There is nothing lovelier among all the works of man. But the coffin lies here under the arches, reminding the connoisseur of beauty that there is nothing but the body and that the body suffers degradingly, dies and is eaten by maggots.

Mr. Cardan wondered how he would die. Slowly or suddenly? After long pain? Intelligent, still human? Or an idiot, a moaning animal? He would die poor, now, in any case. Friends would club together and send him a few pounds every now and then. Poor old Cardan, can’t let him die in the workhouse. Must send him five pounds. What a bore! Extraordinary how he manages to last so long! But he was always a tough old devil. Poor old Cardan!

A door banged; in the hollow echoing church there was a sound of footsteps. It was the sacristan. He came to tell Mr. Cardan that they would soon be ready to begin. They had hurried back from the fields on purpose. The grapes were not so plentiful nor of quite such good quality as they had been last year. But still, one thanked God for His mercies, such as they were.

Blessed are the fools, thought Mr. Cardan, for they shall see nothing. Or perhaps they do see and, seeing, nevertheless comfortingly believe in future compensations and the justice of eternity. In either case — not seeing, or seeing but believing — they are fools. Still, believing is probably the best solution of all, Mr. Cardan went on to reflect. For it allows one to see and not to ignore. It permits one to accept the facts and yet justify them. For a believer the presence of a coffin or two would not interfere with the appreciation of Sammicheli's architecture.

The bearers filed in, bringing with them from the fields a healthy smell of sweat. They were dressed for the occasion in garments that ought, no doubt, to have been surplices, but which were, in point of fact, rather dirty and crumpled white dust-coats. They looked like a cricket eleven entirely composed of umpires. After the bearers came the priest, followed by a miniature umpire in a dust-coat so short that it did not hide his bare knees. The service began. The priest reeled off his Latin formulas as though for a wager; the bearers, in ragged and tuneless unison, bawled back at him the incomprehensible responses. During the longer prayers they talked to one another about the vintage. The boy scratched first his head, then his posterior, finally picked his nose. The priest prayed so fast that all the words fused together and became one word. Mr. Cardan wondered why the Catholic Church did not authorize prayer wheels. A simple little electric motor doing six or eight hundred revolutions a minute would get through a quite astonishing amount of pious work in a day and cost much less than a priest.

'Baa baba, baa baa, Boo-oo-baa,' bleated the priest.

'Boooo-baa,' came back from the bawling flock.

Not ceasing for a moment to pick his nose, the diminutive umpire, who seemed to know his part as perfectly as a trained dog in a music hall, handed the priest a censer. Waving it as he went, and rattling off his pious Latin, he walked round and round the bier. Symbolic and religious perfume! It had smoked in the stable of Bethlehem, in the midst of the ammoniac smell of the beasts, the sign and symbol of the spirit. The blue smoke floated up and was lost along the wind.

On the surface of the earth the beasts unremittingly propagate their kind; the whole earth is a morass of living flesh. The smell of it hangs warm and heavy over all. Here and there the incense burns; its smoke soon vanishes. The smell of the beasts remains.

‘Baa baba,’ went the priest.

‘Baa,’ the choristers retorted, a fifth lower down the scale.

The boy produced water and a kind of whisk. Once more the priest walked round the bier, sprinkling the water from the end of the wetted whisk; the little umpire followed in his train, holding up the tail of his outer garment. The bearers, meanwhile, talked to one another in serious whispers about the grapes.

Sometimes, Mr. Cardan thought, the spirit plays its part so solemnly and well that one cannot help believing in its reality and ultimate significance. A ritual gravely performed is overwhelmingly convincing, for the moment at any rate. But let it be performed casually and carelessly by people who are not thinking of what the rite is meant to symbolize; one perceives that there is nothing behind the symbols, that it is only the acting that matters — the judicious acting of the body — and that the body, the doomed, decaying body, is the one, appalling fact.

The service was over; the bearers picked up the coffin and carried it to the hearse that stood at the church door. The priest beckoned to Mr. Cardan to follow him into the sacristy. There, while the little umpire put away his censer and the whisk, he presented his bill. Mr. Cardan paid.

PART V. CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER I

‘WHAT ARE YOU thinking of?’

‘Nothing,’ said Calamy.

‘Yes, you were. You must have been thinking about something.’

‘Nothing in particular,’ he repeated.

‘Tell me,’ Mary insisted. ‘I want to know.’

‘Well, if you really want to know,’ Calamy began slowly . . .

But she interrupted him. ‘And why did you hold up your hand like that? And spread out the fingers? I could see it, you know; against the window.’ Pitch dark it was in the room, but beyond the unshuttered windows was a starlit night.

Calamy laughed — a rather embarrassed laugh. ‘Oh, you saw it, did you — the hand? Well, as a matter of fact, it was precisely about my hand that I was thinking.’

‘About your hand?’ said Mary incredulously. ‘That seems a queer thing to think about.’

‘But interesting if you think about it hard enough.’

‘Your hands,’ she said softly, in another voice, ‘your hands. When they touch me . . .’ With a feminine movement of gratitude, of thanks for a benefit received, she pressed herself more closely against him; in the darkness she kissed him. ‘I love you too much,’ she whispered, ‘too much.’ And at the moment it was almost true. The strong complete spirit, she had written in her note-book, must be able to love with fury, savagely, mindlessly. Not without pride, she had found herself complete and strong. Once, at a dinner party, she had been taken down by a large black and lemon coloured Argentine; unfolding his napkin, he had opened the evening’s conversation, in that fantastic trans-Pyrenean French which was his only substitute for the Castilian, by saying, with a roll of his black eyes and a flashing ivory smile: ‘Jé vois qué vous avez du temmperramenk.’ ‘Oh, à

revendre,' she had answered gaily, throwing herself into the light Parisian part. How marvellously amusing! But that was Life — Life all over. She had brought the incident into a short story, long ago. But the Argentine had looked with an expert's eye; he was right. 'I love you too much,' she whispered in the darkness. Yes, it was true, it was nearly true, at the moment, in the circumstances. She took his hand and kissed it. 'That's all I think about your hand,' she said.

Calamy allowed his hand to be kissed, and as soon as it was decently possible gently withdrew it. Invisibly, in the darkness, he made a little grimace of impatience. He was no longer interested in kisses, at the moment. 'Yes,' he said meditatively, 'that's one way of thinking of my hand, that's one way in which it exists and is real. Certainly. And that was what I was thinking about — all the different ways in which these five fingers' — he held them up again, splayed out, against the window's oblong of paler darkness— 'have reality and exist. All the different ways,' he repeated slowly. 'If you think of that, even for five minutes, you find yourself plunged up to the eyes in the most portentous mysteries.' He was silent for a moment; then added in a very serious voice. 'And I believe that if one could stand the strain of thinking really hard about one thing — this hand, for example — really hard for several days, or weeks, or months, one might be able to burrow one's way right through the mystery and really get at something — some kind of truth, some explanation.' He paused, frowning. Down and down, through the obscurity, he was thinking. Slowly, painfully, like Milton's Devil, pushing his way through chaos; in the end, one might emerge into the light, to see the universe, sphere within sphere, hanging from the floor of heaven. But it would be a slow, laborious process; one would need time, one would need freedom. Above everything, freedom.

'Why don't you think about me?' Mary Thriplow asked. She propped herself up on one elbow and leaned over him; with her other hand she ruffled his hair. 'Don't I bear thinking about?' she asked. She had a fistful of his thick hair in her hand; softly she tugged at it, testingly, as though she were preparing for something worse, were assuring her grip for a more violent pull. She felt a desire to hurt him. Even in her arms, she was thinking, he escaped her, he simply

wasn’t there. ‘Don’t I bear thinking about?’ she repeated, tugging a little harder at his hair.

Calamy said nothing. The truth was, he was reflecting, that she didn’t bear thinking about. Like a good many other things. All one’s daily life was a skating over thin ice, was a scampering of water-beetles across the invisible skin of depths. Stamp a little too hard, lean a shade too heavily and you were through, you were floundering in a dangerous and unfamiliar element. This love business, for example — it simply couldn’t be thought of; it could only support one on condition that one never stopped to think. But it was necessary to think, necessary to break through and sink into the depths. And yet, insanely and desperately, one still went skating on.

‘Do you love me?’ asked Mary.

‘Of course,’ he said; but the tone of his voice did not carry much conviction.

Menacingly she tugged at the tuft of hair she held twined round her fingers. It angered her that he should escape her, that he should not give himself up completely to her. And this resentful feeling that he did not love her enough produced in her a complementary conviction that she loved him too much. Her anger combined with her physical gratitude to make her feel, for the moment, peculiarly passionate. She found herself all at once playing the part of the grande amoureuse, the impassioned de Lespinasse, playing it spontaneously and without the least difficulty. ‘I could hate you,’ she said resentfully, ‘for making me love you so much.’

‘And what about me?’ said Calamy, thinking of his freedom. ‘Haven’t I a right to hate too?’

‘No. Because you don’t love so much.’

‘But that’s not the question,’ said Calamy, neglecting to record his protest against this damning impeachment. ‘One doesn’t resent love for its own sake, but for the sake of what it interferes with.’

‘Oh, I see,’ said Mary bitterly. She was too deeply wounded even to desire to pull his hair. She turned her back on him. ‘I’m sorry I should have got in the way of your important occupations,’ she said in her most sarcastic voice. ‘Such as

thinking about your hand.' She laughed derisively. There was a long silence. Calamy made no attempt to break it; he was piqued by this derisive treatment of a subject which, for him, was serious, was in some sort sacred. It was Mary who first spoke.

'Will you tell me, then, what you were thinking?' she asked submissively, turning back towards him. When one loves, one swallows one's pride and surrenders. 'Will you tell me?' she repeated, leaning over him. She took one of his hands and began to kiss it, then suddenly bit one of his fingers so hard that Calamy cried out in pain.

'Why do you make me so unhappy?' she asked between clenched teeth. She saw herself, as she spoke the words, lying face downward on her bed, desperately sobbing. It needs a great spirit to be greatly unhappy.

'Make you unhappy?' echoed Calamy in a voice of irritation; he was still smarting with the pain of that bite. 'But I don't. I make you uncommonly happy.'

'You make me miserable,' she answered.

'Well, in that case,' said Calamy, 'I'd better go away and leave you in peace.' He slipped his arm from under her shoulders, as though he were really preparing to go.

But Mary enfolded him in her arms. 'No, no,' she implored. 'Don't go. You mustn't be cross with me. I'm sorry. I behaved abominably. Tell me, please, what you were thinking about your hand. I really am interested. Really, really.' She spoke eagerly, childishly, like the little girl at the Royal Institution lecture.

Calamy couldn't help laughing. 'You've succeeded in rather damping my enthusiasm for that subject,' he said. 'I'd find it difficult to begin now, in cold blood.'

'Please, please,' Mary insisted. Wronged, it was she who asked pardon, she who cajoled. When one loves . . .

'You've made it almost impossible to talk anything but nonsense,' Calamy objected. But in the end he allowed himself to be persuaded. Embarrassed, rather awkwardly — for the spiritual atmosphere in which these ideas had been

ruminated was dissipated, and it was in the void, so to speak, in the empty cold that his thoughts now gasped for breath — he began his exposition. But gradually, as he spoke, the mood returned; he became at home once more with what he was saying. Mary listened with a fixed attention of which, even in the darkness, he was somehow conscious.

‘Well, you see,’ he started hesitatingly, ‘it’s like this. I was thinking of all the different ways a thing can exist — my hand, for example.’

‘I see,’ said Mary Thriplow sympathetically and intelligently. She was almost too anxious to prove that she was listening, that she was understanding everything; she saw before there was anything to see.

‘It’s extraordinary,’ Calamy went on, ‘what a lot of different modes of existence a thing has, when you come to think about it. And the more you think, the more obscure and mysterious everything becomes. What seemed solid vanishes; what was obvious and comprehensible becomes utterly mysterious. Gulfs begin opening all around you — more and more abysses, as though the ground were splitting in an earthquake. It gives one a strange sense of insecurity, of being in the dark. But I still believe that, if one went on thinking long enough and hard enough, one might somehow come through, get out on the other side of the obscurity. But into what, precisely into what? That’s the question.’ He was silent for a moment. If one were free, he thought, one could go exploring into that darkness. But the flesh was weak; under the threat of that delicious torture it turned coward and traitor.

‘Well?’ said Mary at last. She moved closer to him, lightly, her lips brushed across his cheek. She ran her hand softly over his shoulder and along his arm. ‘Go on.’

‘Very well,’ he said in a business-like voice, moving a little away from her as he spoke. He held up his hand once more against the window. ‘Look,’ he said. ‘It’s just a shape that interrupts the light. To a child who has not yet learned to interpret what he sees, that’s all it would be, just a shaped blotch of colour, no more significant than one of those coloured targets representing a man’s head

and shoulders that one learns shooting on. But now, suppose I try to consider the thing as a physicist.'

'Quite,' said Mary Thriplow; and from the movement of a floating tress of her hair which brushed against his shoulder he knew that she was nodding her head.

'Well then,' Calamy went on, 'I have to imagine an almost inconceivable number of atoms, each consisting of a greater or lesser number of units of negative electricity whirling several million times a minute round a nucleus of positive electricity. The vibrations of the atoms lying near the surface sift out, so to speak, the electro-magnetic radiations which fall upon them, permitting only those waves to reach our eyes which give us the sensation of a brownish-pink colour. In passing it may be remarked that the behaviour of light is satisfactorily explained according to one theory of electro-dynamics, while the behaviour of the electrons in the atom can only be explained on a theory that is entirely inconsistent with it. Inside the atom, they tell us now, electrons move from one orbit to another without taking any time to accomplish their journey and without covering any space. Indeed, within the atom there is neither space nor time. And so on and so on. I have to take most of this on trust, I'm afraid, for I understand next to nothing about these things. Only enough to make me feel rather dizzy when I begin to think about them.'

'Yes, dizzy,' said Mary, 'that's the word. Dizzy.' She made a prolonged buzzing over the z's.

'Well then, here are two ways already in which my hand exists,' Calamy went on. 'Then there's the chemical way. These atoms consisting of more or fewer electrons whizzing round a nucleus of greater or lesser charge are atoms of different elements that build themselves up in certain architectural patterns into complicated molecules.'

Sympathetic and intelligent, Mary echoed: 'Molecules.'

'Now if, like Cranmer, I were to put my right hand into the fire, to punish it for having done something evil or unworthy (words, by the way, which haven't much in common with chemistry), if I were to put my hand in the fire, these

molecules would uncombine themselves into their constituent atoms, which would then proceed to build themselves up again into other molecules. But this leads me on at once to a set of entirely different realities. For if I were to put my hand in the fire, I should feel pain; and unless, like Cranmer, I made an enormous effort of will to keep it there, I should withdraw it; or rather it would withdraw itself almost without my knowledge and before I was aware. For I am alive, and this hand is part of a living being, the first law of whose existence is to preserve its life. Being alive, this hand of mine, if it were burnt, would set about trying to repair itself. Seen by a biologist, it reveals itself as a collection of cells, having each its appointed function, and existing harmoniously together, never trespassing upon one another, never proliferating into wild adventures of growth, but living, dying and growing to one end — that the whole which they compose may fulfil its purpose — and as though in accordance with a preordained plan. Say that the hand is burnt. From all round the burn the healthy cells would breed out of themselves new cells to fill in and cover the damaged places.'

'How wonderful life is!' said Mary Thriplow. 'Life . . .'

'Cranmer's hand,' Calamy went on, 'had done an ignoble thing. The hand is part, not merely of a living being, but of a being that knows good and evil. This hand of mine can do good things and bad things. It has killed a man, for example; it has written all manner of words; it has helped a man who was hurt; it has touched your body.' He laid his hand on her breast; she started, she trembled involuntarily under his caress. He ought to think that rather flattering, oughtn't he? It was a symbol of his power over her — of her power, alas, over him. 'And when it touches your body,' he went on, 'it touches also your mind. My hand moves like this, and it moves through your consciousness as well as here, across your skin. And it's my mind that orders it to move; it brings your body into my mind. It exists in mind; it has reality as a part of my soul and a part of yours.'

Miss Thriplow couldn't help reflecting that there was, in all this, the stuff for a very deep digression in one of her novels. "This thoughtful young writer . . ." would be quoted from the reviewers on the dust-cover of her next book.

'Go on,' she said.

Calamy went on. ‘And so these,’ he said, ‘are some of the ways — and there are plenty more, of course, besides — these are some of the ways in which my hand exists and is real. This shape which interrupts the light — it is enough to think of it for five minutes to perceive that it exists simultaneously in a dozen parallel worlds. It exists as electrical charges; as chemical molecules; as living cells; as part of a moral being, the instrument of good and evil; in the physical world and in mind. And from this one goes on to ask, inevitably, what relationship exists between these different modes of being. What is there in common between life and chemistry; between good and evil and electrical charges; between a collection of cells and the consciousness of a caress? It’s here that the gulfs begin to open. For there isn’t any connection — that one can see, at any rate. Universe lies on the top of universe, layer after layer, distinct and separate . . .’

‘Like a Neapolitan ice,’ Mary’s mind flew at once to the fantastic and unexpected comparison. “This witty young writer . . .” That was already on her dust-covers.

Calamy laughed. ‘All right,’ he agreed. ‘Like a Neapolitan ice, if you like. What’s true in the chocolate layer, at the bottom of the ice, doesn’t hold in the vanilla at the top. And a lemon truth is different from a strawberry truth. And each one has just as much right to exist and to call itself real as every other. And you can’t explain one in terms of the others. Certainly you can’t explain the vanilla in terms of any of the lower layers — you can’t explain mind as mere life, as chemistry, as physics. That at least is one thing that’s perfectly obvious and self-evident.’

‘Obvious,’ Mary agreed. ‘And what’s the result of it all? I really don’t see.’

‘Neither do I,’ said Calamy, speaking through an explosion of melancholy laughter. ‘The only hope,’ he went on slowly, ’is that perhaps, if you went on thinking long enough and hard enough, you might arrive at an explanation of the chocolate and the lemon by the vanilla. Perhaps it’s really all vanilla, all mind, all spirit. The rest is only apparent, an illusion. But one has no right to say so until one has thought a long time, in freedom.’

‘In freedom?’

‘The mind must be open, unperturbed, empty of irrelevant things, quiet. There’s no room for thoughts in a half-shut, cluttered mind. And thoughts won’t enter a noisy mind; they’re shy, they remain in their obscure hiding-places below the surface, where they can’t be got at, so long as the mind is full and noisy. Most of us pass through life without knowing that they’re there at all. If one wants to lure them out, one must clear a space for them, one must open the mind wide and wait. And there must be no irrelevant preoccupations prowling around the doors. One must free oneself of those.’

‘I suppose I’m one of the irrelevant preoccupations,’ said Mary Thriplow, after a little pause.

Calamy laughed, but did not deny it.

‘If that’s so,’ said Mary, ‘why did you make love to me?’

Calamy did not reply. Why indeed? He had often asked that question himself.

‘I think it would be best,’ she said, after a silence, ‘if we were to make an end.’ She would go away, she would grieve in solitude.

‘Make an end?’ Calamy repeated. He desired it, of course, above everything — to make an end, to be free. But he found himself adding, with a kind of submarine laughter below the surface of his voice: ‘Do you think you can make an end?’

‘Why not?’

‘Suppose I don’t allow you to?’ Did she imagine, then, that she wasn’t in his power, that he couldn’t make her obey his will whenever he desired? ‘I don’t allow you,’ he said, and his voice quivered with the rising mirth. He bent over her and began to kiss her on the mouth; with his hands he held and caressed her. What an insanity, he said to himself.

‘No, no.’ Mary struggled a little; but in the end she allowed herself to be overcome. She lay still, trembling, like one who has been tortured on the rack.

CHAPTER II

ON THEIR RETURN, somewhat low-spirited, from Montefiascone, Mrs. Aldwinkle and her party found Mary Thriplow alone in the palace.

‘And Calamy?’ Mrs. Aldwinkle inquired.

‘He’s gone into the mountains,’ said Miss Thriplow in a serious, matter-of-fact voice.

‘Why?’

‘He felt like that,’ Mary answered. ‘He wanted to be alone to think. I understand it so well. The prospect of your return filled him almost with terror. He went off two or three days ago.’

‘Into the mountains?’ echoed Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘Is he sleeping in the woods, or in a cave, or something of that kind?’

‘He’s taken a room in a peasant’s cottage on the road up to the marble quarries. It’s a lovely place.’

‘This sounds most interesting,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I must really climb up and have a look at him.’

‘I’m sure he’d rather you didn’t,’ said Miss Thriplow. ‘He wants to be left alone. I understand it so well,’ she repeated.

Mr. Cardan looked at her curiously; her face expressed a bright and serious serenity. ‘I’m surprised that you too don’t retire from the world,’ he said, twinkling. He had not felt as cheerful as this since before the dismal day of poor Grace’s funeral.

Miss Thriplow smiled a Christian smile. ‘You think it’s a joke,’ she said, shaking her head. ‘But it isn’t really, you know.’

‘I’m sure it isn’t,’ Mr. Cardan made haste to protest. ‘And believe me, I never meant to imply that it was. Never, on my word. I merely said — quite seriously, I assure you — that I was surprised that you too . . .’

‘Well, you see, it doesn’t seem to me necessary to go away bodily,’ Miss Thriplow explained. ‘It’s always seemed to me that one can live the hermit’s life, if one wants to, in the heart of London, anywhere.’

‘Quite,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘You’re perfectly right.’

‘I think he might have waited till I came back,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle rather resentfully. ‘The least he could have done was to leave a note.’ She looked at Miss Thriplow angrily, as though it were she who were to blame for Calamy’s impoliteness. ‘Well, I must go and get out of my dusty clothes,’ she added crossly, and walked away to her room. Her irritation was the disguise and public manifestation of a profound depression. They’re all going, she was thinking, they’re all slipping away. First Chelifer, now Calamy. Like all the rest. Mournfully she looked back over her life. Everybody, everything had always slipped away from her. She had always missed all the really important, exciting things; they had invariably happened, somehow, just round the corner, out of her sight. The days were so short, so few now. Death approached, approached. Why had Cardan brought that horrible imbecile creature to die in front of her like that? She didn’t want to be reminded of death. Mrs. Aldwinkle shuddered. I’m getting old, she thought; and the little clock on the mantel-piece, ticking away in the silence of her huge room, took up the refrain: Getting old, getting old, getting old, it repeated again and again, endlessly. Getting old — Mrs. Aldwinkle looked at herself in the glass — and that electric massage machine hadn’t arrived. True, it was on its way; but it would be weeks before it got here. The posts were so slow. Everything conspired against her. If she had had it before, if she’d looked younger . . . who knew? Getting old, getting old, repeated the little clock. In a couple of days from now Chelifer would be going back to England; he’d go away, he’d live apart from her, live such a wonderful, beautiful life. She’d miss it all. And Calamy had already gone; what was he doing, sitting there in the mountains? He was thinking wonderful thoughts, thoughts that might hold the secret she had always been seeking and had never found, thoughts that might bring the consolation and tranquillity of which she always so sorely stood in need. She was missing them, she’d never know them. Getting old, getting old.

She took off her hat and tossed it on to the bed. It seemed to her that she was the unhappiest woman in the world.

That evening, while she was brushing Mrs. Aldwinkle's hair, Irene, braving the dangers of Aunt Lilian's terrifying fun, screwed up her courage to say: 'I can never be grateful enough to you, Auntie, for having talked to me about Hovenden.'

'What about him?' asked Mrs. Aldwinkle, from whose mind the painful events of the last few weeks had quite obliterated such trivial memories.

Irene blushed with embarrassment. This was a question she had not anticipated. Was it really possible that Aunt Lilian could have forgotten those momentous and epoch-making words of hers? 'Why,' she began stammering, 'what you said about . . . I mean . . . when you said that he looked as though . . . well, as though he liked me.'

'Oh yes,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle without interest.

'Don't you remember?'

'Yes, yes,' Mrs. Aldwinkle nodded. 'What about it?'

'Well,' Irene went on, still painfully embarrassed, 'you see . . . that made me . . . that made me pay attention, if you understand.'

'Hm,' said Mrs. Aldwinkle. There was a silence. Getting old, getting old, repeated the little clock remorselessly.

Irene leaned forward and suddenly boiled over with confidences. 'I love him so much, Aunt Lilian,' she said, speaking very rapidly, 'so much, so much. It's the real thing this time. And he loves me too. And we're going to get married at the New Year, quite quietly; no fuss, no crowds shoving in on what isn't their business; quietly and sensibly in a registry office. And after that we're going in the Velox to . . .'

'What are you talking about?' said Mrs. Aldwinkle in a furious voice, and she turned round on her niece a face expressive of such passionate anger that Irene drew back, not merely astonished, but positively afraid. 'You don't mean to tell me,' Mrs. Aldwinkle began; but she could not find the words to continue. 'What have you two young fools been thinking about?' she got out at last.

. . . old, getting old; the remorseless ticking made itself heard in every silence.

From being merry and excited in its childishness Irene's face had become astonished and miserable. She was pale, her lips trembled a little as she spoke. 'But I thought you'd be glad, Aunt Lilian,' she said. 'I thought you'd be glad.'

'Glad because you're making fools of yourselves?' asked Mrs. Aldwinkle, savagely snorting.

'But it was you who first suggested,' Irene began.

Mrs. Aldwinkle cut her short, before she could say any more, with a brusqueness that might have revealed to a more practised psychologist than Irene her consciousness of being in the wrong. 'Absurd,' she said. 'I suppose you're going to tell me,' she went on sarcastically, 'that it was I who told you to marry him.'

'I know you didn't,' said Irene.

'There!' Mrs. Aldwinkle's tone was triumphant.

'But you did say you wondered why I wasn't in love . . .'

'Bah,' said Aunt Lilian, 'I was just making fun. Calf loves . . .'

'But why shouldn't I marry him?' asked Irene. 'If I love him and he loves me. Why shouldn't I?'

Why shouldn't she? Yes, that was an awkward question. Getting old, getting old, muttered the clock in the brief ensuing silence. Perhaps that was half the answer. Getting old! they were all going; first Chelifer, then Calamy, now Irene. Getting old, getting old; soon she'd be quite alone. And it wasn't only that. It was also her pride that was hurt, her love of dominion that suffered. Irene had been her slave; had worshipped her, taken her word as law, her opinions as gospel truth. Now she was transferring her allegiance. Mrs. Aldwinkle was losing a subject — losing her to a more powerful rival. It was intolerable. 'Why shouldn't you marry him?' Mrs. Aldwinkle repeated the phrase ironically two or three times, while she hunted for the answer. 'Why shouldn't you marry him?'

'Why shouldn't I?' Irene asked again. There were tears in her eyes; but however unhappy she might look, there was something determined and

indomitable in her attitude, something obstinate in her expression and her tone of voice. Mrs. Aldwinkle had reason to fear her rival.

‘Because you’re too young,’ she said at last. It was a very feeble answer; but she had been unable to think of a better one.

‘But, Aunt Lilian, don’t you remember? You always said that people ought to marry young. I remember so well, one time, when we talked about Juliet being only fourteen when she first saw Romeo, that you said . . .’

‘That has nothing to do with it,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, cutting short her niece’s mnemonic display. Irene’s memory, Mrs. Aldwinkle had often had reason to complain, was really too good.

‘But if you said . . .’ Irene began again.

‘Romeo and Juliet have nothing to do with you and Hovenden,’ retorted Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘I repeat: you’re too young.’

‘I’m nineteen.’

‘Eighteen.’

‘Practically nineteen,’ Irene insisted. ‘My birthday’s in December.’

‘Marry in haste and repent at leisure,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle, making use of any missile, even a proverb, that came ready to hand. ‘At the end of six months you’ll come back howling and complaining and asking me to get you out of the mess.’

‘But why should I?’ asked Irene. ‘We love one another.’

‘They all say that. You don’t know your own minds.’

‘But we do.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle suddenly changed her tactics. ‘And what makes you so anxious all at once to run away from me?’ she asked. ‘Can’t you bear to stay with me a moment longer? Am I so intolerable and odious and . . . and . . . brutal and . . . She clawed at the air. ‘Do you hate me so much that . . .’

‘Aunt Lilian!’ protested Irene, who had begun to cry in earnest.

Mrs. Aldwinkle, with that tactlessness, that lack of measure that were characteristic of her, went on piling question upon rhetorical question, until in the end she completely spoiled the effect she had meant to achieve, exaggerating

into ludicrousness what might otherwise have been touching. ‘Can’t you bear me? Have I ill-treated you? Tell me. Have I bullied you, or scolded you, or . . . or not given you enough to eat? Tell me.’

‘How can you talk like that, Aunt Lilian?’ Irene dabbed her eyes with a corner of her dressing-gown. ‘How can you say that I don’t love you? And you were always telling me that I ought to get married,’ she added, breaking out into fresh tears.

‘How can I say that you don’t love me?’ echoed Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘But is it true that you’re longing to leave me as soon as possible? Is that true or not? I merely ask what the reason is, that’s all.’

‘But the reason is that we want to get married; we love each other.’

‘Or that you hate me,’ Mrs. Aldwinkle persisted.

‘But I don’t hate you, Aunt Lilian. How can you say such a thing? You know I love you.’

‘And yet you’re anxious to run away from me as fast as you possibly can,’ said Mrs. Aldwinkle. ‘And I shall be left all alone, all alone.’ Her voice trembled; she shut her eyes, she contorted her face in an effort to keep it closed and rigid. Between her eyelids the tears came welling out. ‘All alone,’ she repeated brokenly. Getting old, said the little clock on the mantel-piece, getting old, getting old.

Irene knelt down beside her, took her hands between her own and kissed them, pressed them against her tear-wet face. ‘Aunt Lilian,’ she begged, ‘Aunt Lilian.’

Mrs. Aldwinkle went on sobbing.

‘Don’t cry,’ said Irene, crying herself. She imagined that she alone was the cause of Aunt Lilian’s unhappiness. In reality, she was only the pretext; Mrs. Aldwinkle was weeping over her whole life, weeping at the approach of death. In that first moment of agonized sympathy and self-reproach, Irene was on the point of declaring that she would give up Hovenden, that she would spend all her life with her Aunt Lilian. But something held her back. Obscurely she was certain that it wouldn’t do, that it was impossible, that it would even be wrong.

She loved Aunt Lilian and she loved Hovenden. In a way she loved Aunt Lilian more than Hovenden, now. But something in her that looked prophetically forward, something that had come through innumerable lives, out of the obscure depths of time, to dwell within her, held her back. The conscious and individual part of her spirit inclined towards Aunt Lilian. But consciousness and individuality — how precariously, how irrelevantly almost, they flowered out of that ancient root of life planted in the darkness of her being! The flower was for Aunt Lilian, the root for Hovenden.

‘But you won’t be all alone,’ she protested. ‘We shall constantly be with you. You’ll come and stay with us.’

The assurance did not seem to bring much consolation to Mrs. Aldwinkle. She went on crying. The clock ticked away as busily as ever.

CHAPTER III

IN THE COURSE of the last few days the entries in Miss Thriplow's note-book had changed their character. From being amorous they had turned mystical. Savage and mindless passion was replaced by quiet contemplation. De Lespinasse had yielded to de Guyon.

'Do you remember, darling Jim,' she wrote, 'how, when we were ten, we used to discuss what was the sin against the Holy Ghost? I remember we agreed that using the altar as a W.C. was probably the unforgivable sin. It's a great pity that it isn't, for then it would be so extremely easy to avoid committing it. No, I'm afraid it's not quite so straightforward as that, the sin against the Holy Ghost. And it's most perilously easy to fall into it. Stifling the voices inside you, filling the mind with so much earthy rubbish that God has no room to enter it, not giving the spirit its fair chance — that's the sin against the Holy Ghost. And it's unforgivable because it's irremediable. Last-minute repentances are no good. The sin and the corresponding virtue are affairs of a lifetime. And almost everybody commits the sin; they die unforgiven, and at once they begin again another life. Only when they've lived in the virtue of the Holy Ghost are they forgiven, let off the pains of life and allowed to sink into unity with All. Isn't that the meaning of the text? It's terribly difficult not to commit the sin. Whenever I stop to think, I am appalled by the badness of my own life. Oh, Jim, Jim, how easily one forgets, how unthinkingly one allows oneself to be buried under a mountain of little earthy interests! The voices are muffled, the mind is blocked up, there's no place for the spirit of God. When I'm working, I feel it's all right; I'm living in the virtue of the Holy Ghost. For then I'm doing the best I can. But the rest of the time, that's when I go wrong. One can't be doing all the time, one can't always give out. One must also be passive, must receive. That's what I fail to do. I flutter about, I fill my mind with lumber, I make it impossible

for myself to receive. One can’t go on like this; one can’t go on sinning against the Holy Ghost — not if one once realizes it.’

There was a line. The next note began: ‘To think steadily and intensely of one thing is a wonderful mental exercise; it serves to open up the mysteries that lie below the commonplace surface of existence; and perhaps, if one went on thinking long enough and hard enough, one might get through the mystery to its explanation. When I think, for example, of my hand . . .’ The note was a long one; it covered, in Miss Thriplow’s clear, cultured writing, more than two pages of the book.

‘Recently,’ she had written after that, ‘I have been saying my prayers again, as I used to when I was a child. Our Father which art in heaven — the words help to clear out one’s mind, to rid it of the lumber and leave it free for the coming of the spirit.’

The next three notes had got there by mistake. Their place was not in the secret, personal book, but in the other volume, wherein she recorded little snippets that might come in useful for her novels. Not, of course, that the entries in the secret book didn’t also come in useful for her fiction sometimes; but they were not recorded expressly for that purpose.

‘A man in riding breeches,’ the first note ran: ‘he makes a little creaking noise as he walks along, whipcord rubbing against whipcord, that is like the creaking noise that swans make, flying, when they move their big white wings.’

Then followed two lines of comic dialogue.

‘Me. I find the Fall of the House of Usher a most blood-curdling story.

‘Frenchman. Yes, yes, she bloods my curdle also.’

The third note recorded that ‘moss after a shower on a sultry day is like a sponge still damp from the hot bath.’

There followed a corollary to the note on prayer. ‘There is no doubt,’ she had written, ‘that the actual technique of prayer — the kneeling, the hiding the face in the hands, the uttering of words in an audible voice, the words being addressed into empty space — helps by its mere dissimilarity from the ordinary actions of everyday life to put one into a devout frame of mind. . . .’

To-night she sat for some time in front of the open book, pen in hand, without writing anything. She frowned pensively and bit the end of her pen. In the end she put it on record that ‘St. Augustine, St. Francis and St. Ignatius Loyola lived dissolute lives before their conversions.’ Then, opening her other, her un-secret note-book, she wrote: ‘X and Y are old friends from childhood. X dashing, Y timid; Y admires X. Y marries, while X is at the war, a passionate creature who takes Y more out of pity (he is wounded) than from love. There is a child. X returns, falls in love with Y’s wife, A. Great passion amid growing anguish of mind — on her part because she is deceiving Y, whom she likes and respects, and daren’t undeceive him for fear of losing the child; on his part because he feels that he ought to give up all this sort of thing and devote himself to God, etc.; in fact, he feels the premonitions of conversion. One night they decide that the time has come to part; it can’t go on — she because of the deception, he because of mysticism, *etc.* It is a most touching scene, lasting all a last chaste night. Unfortunately Y finds out for some reason — baby ill, or something of the kind — that A is not staying at her mother’s as she said, but is elsewhere. Early in the morning Y comes to X’s flat to ask him to help in the search for A. Sees A’s coat and hat lying on the drawing-room sofa; understands all. In a fury flies at X, who, defending himself, kills him. The end. Question, however; doesn’t it end with too much of a click? too epigrammatically, so to speak? I wonder whether in this twentieth century one can permit oneself the luxury of such effective dramatic devices. Oughtn’t one to do it more flatly, somehow? More terre-à-terreishly, more real-lifeishly? I feel that a conclusion like that is almost an unfair advantage taken at the reader’s expense. One ought to arrange it differently. But the question is, how? Can one let them separate and show them living, she en bonne mère de famille, he as a coenobite? It would drag it out terribly, wouldn’t it? Must think of this carefully.’

She shut the book and put the cap on her fountain pen, feeling that she had done a good evening’s work. Calamy was now safely laid down in pickle, waiting to be consumed whenever she should be short of fictional provisions.

After having undressed, washed, brushed her hair, polished her nails, greased her face and cleaned her teeth, Miss Thriplow turned out the light, and kneeling down by the side of her bed said several prayers, aloud. She then got into bed, and lying on her back, with all her muscles relaxed, she began to think about God.

God is a spirit, she said to herself, a spirit, a spirit. She tried to picture something huge and empty, but alive. A huge flat expanse of sand, for example, and over it a huge blank dome of sky; and above the sand everything should be tremulous and shimmering with heat — an emptiness that was yet alive. A spirit, an all-pervading spirit. God is a spirit. Three camels appeared on the horizon of the sandy plain and went lolloping along in an absurd ungainly fashion from left to right. Miss Thriplow made an effort and dismissed them. God is a spirit, she said aloud. But of all animals camels are really almost the queerest; when one thinks of their frightfully supercilious faces, with their protruding under lips like the last Hapsburg kings of Spain . . . No, no; God is a spirit, all-pervading, everywhere. All the universes are made one in him. Layer upon layer . . . A Neapolitan ice floated up out of the darkness. She had never liked Neapolitan ices since that time, at the Franco-British exhibition, when she had eaten one and then taken a ride on Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machines. Round and round and round. Lord, how she had been sick, afterwards, in the Blue Grotto of Capri! 'Sixpence each, ladies and gentlemen, only sixpence each for a trip to the celebrated Blue Grotto of Capri, the celebrated Blue Grotto, ladies and gentlemen. . . .' How sick! It must have been most awkward for the grown-ups. . . . But God is a spirit. All the universes are one in the spirit. Mind and matter in all their manifestations — all one in the spirit. All one — she and the stars and the mountains and the trees and the animals and the blank spaces between the stars and . . . and the fish, the fish in the Aquarium at Monaco. . . . And what fish! What extravagant fantasies! But no more extravagant or fantastic, really, than the painted and jewelled old women outside. It might make a very good episode in a book — a couple of those old women looking through the glass at the fishes. Very beautifully and discreetly described; and the fundamental

similarity between the creatures on either side of the glass would just be delicately implied — not stated, oh, not stated; that would be too coarse, that would spoil everything, but just implied, by the description, so that the intelligent reader could take the hint. And then in the Casino . . . Miss Thriplow brusquely interrupted herself. God is a spirit. Yes. Where was she? All things are one, ah yes, yes. All, all, all, she repeated. But to arrive at the realization of their oneness one must climb up into the spirit. The body separates, the spirit unites. One must give up the body, the self; one must lose one's life to gain it. Lose one's life, empty oneself of the separating Me. She clasped her hands tightly together, tighter, tighter, as though she were squeezing out her individual life between them. If she could squeeze it all out, make herself quite empty, then the other life would come rushing in to take its place.

Miss Thriplow lay quite still, hardly breathing. Empty, she said to herself every now and then, quite empty. She felt wonderfully tranquil. God was surely very near. The silence grew more profound, her spirit became calmer and emptier. Yes, God was very near.

Perhaps it was the distant roaring of a train in the valley far below that reminded her of the noise of the whirling drill; or perhaps the thin bright line of light that came in, through a chink in the top of the rickety old door, from the illuminated corridor, to reach half across the ceiling above her — perhaps it was this long sharp probe of brightness that reminded her of a surgical instrument. Whatever may have been the cause, Miss Thriplow suddenly found herself thinking of her dentist. Such a charming man; he had a china bull-dog on the mantel-piece of his consulting-room and a photograph of his wife and twins. His hair wouldn't lie down. He had such kind grey eyes. And he was an enthusiast. 'This is an instrument of which I'm particularly fond, Miss Thriplow,' he used to say, picking out a little curved harpoon from his armoury. 'A little wider, please, if you don't mind. . . .' What about a story of a dentist who falls in love with one of his patients? He shows her all the instruments, enthusiastically, wants her to like his favourites as much as he does. He pretends that there's more wrong with her teeth than there really is, in order to see her more often.

The dentist grew dim, he began the same gesture again and again, very slowly, but could never finish it, having forgotten, half-way through the act, what he meant to do. At last he disappeared altogether. Miss Thriplow had fallen into a profound and tranquil sleep.

CHAPTER IV

IT HAD BEEN raining, stormily; but now the wind had fallen and between the heavy clouds the sun was brightly shining. The yellowing chestnut trees stood motionless in the still bright air, glittering with moisture. A noise of rapidly running water filled the ear. The grass of the steep meadows shone in the sunlight. Calamy stepped out from the dark and frowsty living-room of the cottage and walked up the steep path on to the road. He halted here and looked about him. The road at this point was terraced out of one of the sides of a deep valley. The ground rose steeply, in places almost precipitously, above it. Below it the green mountain meadows, brilliant in the sunshine and dotted here and there with clumps of chestnut trees, fell away into the depths of the valley, which the afternoon sun had left already in a vaporous smoky shadow. Profoundly shadowed, too, were the hills on the further side of the narrow cleft. Huge black masses, smoky with the same vapour as that which floated at the bottom of the valley, they rose up almost in silhouette against the bright light beyond. The sun looked down, over their clouded summits, across the intervening gulf, touching the green hillside, on the slope of which Calamy was standing, with a radiance that, in contrast to the dark hills opposite, seemed almost unearthly. To the right, at the head of the valley, a great pinnacle of naked rock, pale brown and streaked here and there with snow-white veins of marble, reached up into the clouds and above them, so that the summit shone like a precious stone in the sunlight, against the blue of the sky. A band of white vapour hung round the shoulders of the mountain. Beneath it appeared the lower buttresses of rock and the long slopes of hanging wood and meadowland falling away into the valley, all shadowy under the clouds, shadowy and dead, save where, here and there, a great golden beam broke through, touching some chosen tract of grass or woodland or rock with an intense and precarious life.

Calamy stood for a long time looking out at the scene. How beautiful it was, how beautiful! Glittering in the light, the withering trees seemed to have prepared themselves as though for a feast. For a feast — and yet it was winter and death that awaited them. Beautiful the mountains were, but menacing and terrible; terrible the deep gulf below him with its smoky vaporous shadows, far down, below the shining green. And the shadows mounted second after second as the sun declined. Beautiful, terrible and mysterious, pregnant with what enormous secret, symbolic of what formidable reality?

From the direction of the cottage below the road came a tinkle of bells and the shrill shouting of a child's voice. Half a dozen tall black and white goats, with long black beards, long twisted horns and yellow eyes, slitted with narrow pupils, came trotting up the slope, shaking their flat bells. A little boy scrambled after them, brandishing a stick and shouting words of command. To Calamy he touched his cap; they exchanged a few words in Italian, about the rain, the goats, the best pasture; then, waving his stick and peremptorily shouting at his little flock, the child moved on up the road. The goats trotted on in front, their hoofs clicking on the stones; every now and then they paused to pull a mouthful of grass from the bank at the side of the road; but the little boy would not let them pause. 'Via!' he shouted, and banged them with his stick. They bounded forward. Soon herdsman and flock were out of sight.

If he had been born that little boy, Calamy wondered, would he still be working, unquestioningly, among these hills: tending the beasts, cutting wood; every now and then carting his faggots and his cheeses down the long road to Vezza? Would he, still, unquestioningly? Would he see that the mountains were beautiful, beautiful and terrible? Or would he find them merely ungrateful land, demanding great labour, giving little in return? Would he believe in heaven and hell? And fitfully, when anything went wrong, would he still earnestly invoke the aid of the infant Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, that patriarchal family trinity — father, mother and baby — of the Italian peasant? Would he have married? By this time, very likely, his eldest children would be ten or twelve years old — driving the goats afield with shrill yellings and brandished

sticks. Would he be living quietly and cheerfully the life of a young patriarch, happy in his children, his wife, his flocks and herds? Would he be happy to live thus, close to the earth, earthily, an ancient, instinctive, animally sagacious life? It seemed hardly imaginable. And yet, after all, it was likely enough. It needs a very strong, a passionately ardent spirit to disengage itself from childish tradition, from the life which circumstances impose upon it. Was his such a spirit?

He was startled out of his speculations by the sound of his own name, loudly called from a little distance. He turned round and saw Mr. Cardan and Chelifer striding up the road towards him. Calamy waved his hand and went to meet them. Was he pleased to see them or not? He hardly knew.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Cardan, twinkling jovially, as he approached, ‘how goes life in the Thebaïd? Do you object to receiving a couple of impious visitors from Alexandria?’

Calamy laughed and shook their hands without answering.

‘Did you get wet?’ he asked, to change the conversation.

‘We hid in a cave,’ said Mr. Cardan. He looked round at the view. ‘Pretty good,’ he said encouragingly, as though it were Calamy who had made the landscape, ‘pretty good, I must say.’

‘Agreeably Wordsworthian,’ said Chelifer in his precise voice.

‘And where do you live?’ asked Mr. Cardan.

Calamy pointed to the cottage. Mr. Cardan nodded comprehendingly.

‘Hearts of gold, but a little niffy, eh?’ he asked, lifting his raised white eyebrow still higher.

‘Not to speak of,’ said Calamy.

‘Charming girls?’ Mr. Cardan went on. ‘Or goitres?’

‘Neither,’ said Calamy.

‘And how long do you propose to stay?’

‘I haven’t the faintest idea.’

‘Till you’ve got to the bottom of the cosmos, eh?’

Calamy smiled. ‘That’s about it.’

‘Splendid,’ said Mr. Cardan, patting him on the arm, ‘splendid. I envy you. God, what wouldn’t I give to be your age? What wouldn’t I give?’ He shook his head sadly. ‘And, alas,’ he added, ‘what could I give, in point of actual fact? I put it at about twelve hundred quid at the present time. My total fortune. Shouldn’t we sit down?’ he added on another note.

Calamy led the way down the little path. Along the front of the cottage, under the windows, ran a long bench. The three men sat down. The sun shone full upon them; it was pleasantly warm. Beneath them was the narrow valley with its smoky shadows; opposite, the black hills, cloud-capped and silhouetted against the brightness of the sky about the sun.

‘And the trip to Rome,’ Calamy inquired, ‘was that agreeable?’

‘Tolerably,’ said Chelifer, with precision.

‘And Miss Elver?’ he addressed himself politely to Mr. Cardan.

Mr. Cardan looked up at him. ‘Hadn’t you heard?’ he asked.

‘Heard what?’

‘She’s dead.’ Mr. Cardan’s face became all at once very hard and still.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Calamy. ‘I didn’t know.’ He thought it more tactful to proffer no further condolences. There was a silence.

‘That’s something,’ said Mr. Cardan at last, ‘that you’ll find it rather difficult to contemplate away, however long and mystically you stare at your navel.’

‘What?’ asked Calamy.

‘Death,’ Mr. Cardan answered. ‘You can’t get over the fact that, at the end of everything, the flesh gets hold of the spirit, and squeezes the life out of it, so that a man turns into something that’s no better than a whining sick animal. And as the flesh sickens the spirit sickens, manifestly. Finally the flesh dies and putrefies; and the spirit presumably putrefies too. And there’s an end of your omphaloskepsis, with all its by-products, God and justice and salvation and all the rest of them.’

‘Perhaps it is,’ said Calamy. ‘Let’s admit it as certain, even. I don’t see that it makes the slightest difference. . . .’

‘No difference?’

Calamy shook his head. ‘Salvation’s not in the next world; it’s in this. One doesn’t behave well here for the sake of a harp and wings after one is dead — or even for the sake of contemplating throughout eternity the good, the true and the beautiful. If one desires salvation, it’s salvation here and now. The kingdom of God is within you — if you’ll excuse the quotation,’ he added, turning with a smile to Mr. Cardan. ‘The conquest of that kingdom, now, in this life — that’s your salvationist’s ambition. There may be a life to come, or there may not; it’s really quite irrelevant to the main issue. To be upset because the soul may decay with the body is really mediaeval. Your mediaeval theologian made up for his really frightful cynicism about this world by a childish optimism about the next. Future justice was to compensate for the disgusting horrors of the present. Take away the life to come and the horrors remain, untempered and unpalliated.’

‘Quite so,’ said Chelifer.

‘Seen from the mediaeval point of view,’ Calamy went on, ‘the prospect is most disquieting. The Indians — and for that matter the founder of Christianity — supply the corrective with the doctrine of salvation in this life, irrespective of the life to come. Each man can achieve salvation in his own way.’

‘I’m glad you admit that,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I was afraid you’d begin telling us that we all had to live on lettuces and look at our navels.’

‘I have it from no less an authority than yourself,’ Calamy answered, laughing, ‘that there are — how many? — eighty-four thousand — isn’t it? — different ways of achieving salvation.’

‘Fully,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘and a great many more for going to the devil. But all this, my young friend,’ he pursued, shaking his head, ‘doesn’t in any way mitigate the disagreeableness of slowly becoming gaga, dying and being eaten by worms. One may have achieved salvation in this life, certainly; but that makes it none the less insufferable that, at the end of the account, one’s soul should inevitably succumb to one’s body. I, for example, am saved — I put the case quite hypothetically, mind you — I have been living in a state of moral integrity and this-worldly salvation for the last half-century, ever since I reached the age of puberty. Let this be granted. Have I, for this reason, any the less cause

to be distressed by the prospect, in a few years' time, of becoming a senile imbecile, blind, deaf, toothless, witless, without interest in anything, partially paralysed, revolting to my fellows — and all the rest of the Burtonian catalogue? When my soul is at the mercy of my slowly rotting body, what will be the use of salvation then?'

'It will have profited during the fifty years of healthy life,' said Calamy.

'But I'm talking about the unhealthy years,' Mr. Cardan insisted, 'when the soul's at the mercy of the body.'

Calamy was silent for a moment. 'It's difficult,' he said pensively, 'it's horribly difficult. The fundamental question is this: Can you talk of the soul being at the mercy of the body, can you give any kind of an explanation of mind in terms of matter? When you reflect that it's the human mind that has invented space, time and matter, picking them out of reality in a quite arbitrary fashion — can you attempt to explain a thing in terms of something it has invented itself? That's the fundamental question.'

'It's like the question of the authorship of the Iliad,' said Mr. Cardan. 'The author of that poem is either Homer or, if not Homer, somebody else of the same name. Similarly, philosophically and even, according to the new physics, scientifically speaking, matter may not be matter, really. But the fact remains that something having all the properties we have always attributed to matter is perpetually getting in our way, and that our minds do, in point of fact, fall under the dominion of certain bits of this matter, known as our bodies, changing as they change and keeping pace with their decay.'

Calamy ran his fingers perplexedly through his hair. 'Yes, of course, it's devilishly difficult,' he said. 'You can't help behaving as if things really were as they seem to be. At the same time, there is a reality which is totally different and which a change in our physical environment, a removal of our bodily limitations, would enable us to get nearer to. Perhaps by thinking hard enough . . .' He paused, shaking his head. 'How many days did Gotama spend under the bo-tree? Perhaps if you spend long enough and your mind is the right sort of mind, perhaps you really do get, in some queer sort of way, beyond the limitations of

ordinary existence. And you see that everything that seems real is in fact entirely illusory — maya, in fact, the cosmic illusion. Behind it you catch a glimpse of reality.'

'But what bosh your mystics talk about it,' said Mr. Cardan. 'Have you ever read Boehme, for example? Lights and darknesses, wheels and compunctions, sweets and bitters, mercury, salt and sulphur — it's a rigmarole.'

'It's only to be expected,' said Calamy. 'How is a man to give an account of something entirely unlike the phenomena of known existence in a language invented to describe these phenomena? You might give a deaf man a most detailed verbal description of the Fifth Symphony; but he wouldn't be much the wiser for it, and he'd think you were talking pure balderdash — which from his point of view you would be. . . .'

'True,' said Mr. Cardan; 'but I have my doubts whether any amount of sitting under bo-trees really makes it possible for any one to wriggle out of human limitations and get behind phenomena.'

'Well, I'm inclined to think that it does make it possible,' said Calamy. 'There we must agree to differ. But even if it is impossible to get at reality, the fact that reality exists and is manifestly very different from what we ordinarily suppose it to be, surely throws some light on this horrible death business. Certainly, as things seem to happen, it's as if the body did get hold of the soul and kill it. But the real facts of the case may be entirely different. The body as we know it is an invention of the mind. What is the reality on which the abstracting, symbolizing mind does its work of abstraction and symbolism? It is possible that, at death, we may find out. And in any case, what is death, really?'

'It's a pity,' put in Chelifer, in his dry, clear, accurate voice, 'it's a pity that the human mind didn't do its job of invention a little better while it was about it. We might, for example, have made our symbolic abstraction of reality in such a way that it would be unnecessary for a creative and possibly immortal soul to be troubled with the haemorrhoids.'

Calamy laughed. 'Incorrigible sentimentalist!'

'Sentimentalist?' echoed Chelifer, on a note of surprise.

‘A sentimentalist inside out,’ said Calamy, nodding affirmatively. ‘Such wild romanticism as yours — I imagined it had been extinct since the deposition of Louis-Philippe.’

Chelifer laughed good-humouredly. ‘Perhaps you’re right,’ he said. ‘Though I must say I myself should have handed out the prize for sentimentality to those who regard what is commonly known as reality — the Harrow Road, for example, or the Café de la Rotonde in Paris — as a mere illusion, who run away from it and devote their time and energy to occupations which Mr. Cardan sums up and symbolizes in the word omphaloskepsis. Aren’t they the soft-heads, the all-too-susceptible and sentimental imbeciles?’

‘On the contrary,’ Calamy replied, ‘in point of historical fact they’ve generally been men of the highest intelligence. Buddha, Jesus, Lao-tsze, Boehme, in spite of his wheels and compunctions, his salt and sulphur, Swedenborg. And what about Sir Isaac Newton, who practically abandoned mathematics for mysticism after he was thirty? Not that he was a particularly good mystic; he wasn’t. But he tried to be; and it can’t be said that he was remarkable for the softness of his head. No, it’s not fools who turn mystics. It takes a certain amount of intelligence and imagination to realize the extraordinary queerness and mysteriousness of the world in which we live. The fools, the innumerable fools, take it all for granted, skate about cheerfully on the surface and never think of inquiring what’s underneath. They’re content with appearances, such as your Harrow Road or Café de la Rotonde, call them realities and proceed to abuse any one who takes an interest in what lies underneath these superficial symbols, as a romantic imbecile.’

‘But it’s cowardice to run away,’ Chelifer insisted. ‘One has no right to ignore what for ninety-nine out of every hundred human beings is reality — even though it mayn’t actually be the real thing. One has no right.’

‘Why not?’ asked Calamy. ‘One has a right to be six foot nine inches high and to take sixteens in boots. One has a right, even though there are not more than three or four in every million like one. Why hasn’t one the right to be born

with an unusual sort of mind, a mind that can't be content with the surface-life of appearances?'

'But such a mind is irrelevant, a freak,' said Chelifer. 'In real life — or if you prefer it, in the life that we treat as if it were real — it's the other minds that preponderate, that are the rule. The brutish minds. I repeat, you haven't the right to run away from that. If you want to know what human life is, you must be courageous and live as the majority of human beings actually do live. It's singularly revolting, I assure you.'

'There you are again with your sentimentality,' complained Calamy. 'You're just the common variety of sentimentalist reversed. The ordinary kind pretends that so-called real life is more rosy than it actually is. The reversed sentimentalist gloats over its horrors. The bad principle is the same in both cases — an excessive preoccupation with what is illusory. The man of sense sees the world of appearances neither too rosily nor too biliously and passes on. There is the ulterior reality to be looked for; it is more interesting. . . .'

'Then you'd condemn out of hand all the countless human beings whose life is passed on the surface?'

'Of course not,' Calamy replied. 'Who would be such a fool as to condemn a fact? These people exist; it's obvious. They have their choice of Mr. Cardan's eighty-four thousand paths to salvation. The path I choose will probably be different from others. That's all.'

'Very likely,' said Mr. Cardan, who had been engaged in lighting a cigar, 'very likely they'll find the road to their salvation more easily than you will find the road to yours. Being simpler, they'll have within them fewer causes for disharmony. Many of them are still practically in the tribal state, blindly obeying the social code that has been suggested into them from childhood. That's the pre-lapsarian state; they've not yet eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — or rather it's the whole tribe, not the individual, that has eaten. And the individual is so much a part of the tribe that it doesn't occur to him to act against its ordinances, any more than it occurs to my teeth to begin violently biting my tongue of their own accord. Those simple souls — and there are still a lot of

them left, even among the motor buses — will find their way to salvation very easily. The difficulty begins when the individuals begin to get thoroughly conscious of themselves apart from the tribe. There's an immense number of people who ought to be tribal savages, but who have been made conscious of their individuality. They can't obey tribal morality blindly and they're too feeble to think for themselves. I should say that the majority of people in a modern educated democratic state are at that stage — too conscious of themselves to obey blindly, too inept to be able to behave in a reasonable manner on their own account. Hence that delightful contemporary state of affairs which so rejoices the heart of our friend Chelifer. We fall most horribly between two stools — the tribe and the society of conscious intelligent beings.'

'It's comforting to think,' said Chelifer, 'that modern civilization is doing its best to re-establish the tribal régime, but on an enormous, national and even international scale. Cheap printing, wireless telephones, trains, motor cars, gramophones and all the rest are making it possible to consolidate tribes, not of a few thousands, but of millions. To judge from the Middle Western novelists, the process seems already to have gone a long way in America. In a few generations it may be that the whole planet will be covered by one vast American-speaking tribe, composed of innumerable individuals, all thinking and acting in exactly the same way, like the characters in a novel by Sinclair Lewis. It's a most pleasing speculation — though, of course,' Chelifer added guardedly, 'the future is no concern of ours.'

Mr. Cardan nodded and puffed at his cigar. 'That's certainly a possibility,' he said. 'A probability almost; for I don't see that it's in the least likely that we shall be able to breed a race of beings, at any rate within the next few thousand years, sufficiently intelligent to be able to form a stable non-tribal society. Education has made the old tribalism impossible and has done nothing — nor ever will do anything — to make the non-tribal society possible. It will be necessary, therefore, if we require social stability, to create a new kind of tribalism, on the basis of universal education for the stupid, using the press, wireless and all the rest as the instruments by which the new order is to be

established. In a generation or two of steady conscious work it ought to be possible, as Chelifer says, to turn all but two or three hundred in every million of the inhabitants of the planet into Babbitts.'

'Perhaps a slightly lower standard would be necessary,' suggested Chelifer.

'It's a remarkable thing,' pursued Mr. Cardan meditatively, 'that the greatest and most influential reformer of modern times, Tolstoy, should also have proposed a reversion to tribalism as the sole remedy to civilized restlessness and uncertainty of purpose. But while we propose a tribalism based on the facts — or should I say the appearances?' — Mr. Cardan twinkled amicably at Calamy— 'of modern life, Tolstoy proposed a return to the genuine, primordial, uneducated, dirty tribalism of the savage. That won't do, of course; because it's hardly probable, once they have tasted it, that men will allow le confort moderne, as they call it in hotels, to be taken from them. Our suggestion is the more practicable — the creation of a planet-wide tribe of Babbitts. They'd be much easier to propagate, now, than moujiks. But still the principle remains the same in both projects — a return to the tribal state. And when Tolstoy and Chelifer and myself agree about anything, believe me,' said Mr. Cardan, 'there's something in it. By the way,' he added, 'I hope we haven't been hurting your susceptibilities, Calamy. You're not moujiking up here, are you? Digging and killing pigs and so on. Are you? I trust not.'

Calamy shook his head, laughing. 'I cut wood in the mornings, for exercise,' he said. 'But not on principle, I assure you, not on principle.'

'Ah, that's all right,' said Mr. Cardan. 'I was afraid you might be doing it on principle.'

'It would be a stupidity,' said Calamy. 'What would be the point of doing badly something for which I have no aptitude; something, moreover, which would prevent me from doing the thing for which it seems to me just possible I may have some native capacity.'

'And what, might I ask,' said Mr. Cardan with an assumed diffidence and tactful courtesy, 'what may that thing be?'

‘That’s rather biting,’ said Calamy, smiling. ‘But you may well ask. For it has certainly been hard to see, until now, what my peculiar talent was. I’ve not even known myself. Was it making love? or riding? or shooting antelopes in Africa? or commanding a company of infantry? or desultory reading at lightning speeds? or drinking champagne? or a good memory? or my bass voice? Or what? I’m inclined to think it was the first: making love.’

‘Not at all a bad talent,’ said Mr. Cardan judicially.

‘But not, I find, one that one can go on cultivating indefinitely,’ said Calamy. ‘And the same is true of the others — true at any rate for me. . . . No, if I had no aptitudes but those, I might certainly as well devote myself exclusively to digging the ground. But I begin to find in myself a certain aptitude for meditation which seems to me worth cultivating. And I doubt if one can cultivate meditation at the same time as the land. So I only cut wood for exercise.’

‘That’s good,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘I should be sorry to think you were doing anything actively useful. You retain the instincts of a gentleman; that’s excellent. . . .’

‘Satan!’ said Calamy, laughing. ‘But do you suppose I don’t know very well that you can make out the most damning case against the idle anchorite who sits looking at his navel while other people work? Do you suppose I haven’t thought of that?’

‘I’m sure you have,’ Mr. Cardan answered, genially twinkling.

‘The case looks damning enough, no doubt. But it’s only really cogent when the anchorite doesn’t do his job properly, when he’s born to be active and not contemplative. The imbeciles who rush about bawling that action is the end of life, and that thought has no value except in so far as it leads to action, are speaking only for themselves. There are eighty-four thousand paths. The pure contemplative has a right to one of them.’

‘I should be the last to deny it,’ said Mr. Cardan.

‘And if I find that it’s not my path,’ pursued Calamy, ‘I shall turn back and try what can be done in the way of practical life. Up till now, I must say I’ve not

seen much hope for myself that way. But then, it must be admitted, I didn't look for the road in places where I was very likely to find it.'

'What has always seemed to me to be the chief objection to protracted omphaloskepsis,' said Mr. Cardan, after a little silence, 'is the fact that you're left too much to your personal resources; you have to live on your own mental fat, so to speak, instead of being able to nourish yourself from outside. And to know yourself becomes impossible; because you can't know yourself except in relation to other people.'

'That's true,' said Calamy. 'Part of yourself you can certainly get to know only in relation to what is outside. In the course of twelve or fifteen years of adult life I think I've got to know that part of me very thoroughly. I've met a lot of people, been in a great many curious situations, so that almost every potentiality latent in that part of my being has had a chance to unfold itself into actuality. Why should I go on? There's nothing more I really want to know about that part of myself; nothing more, of any significance, I imagine, that I could get to know by contact with what is external. On the other hand, there is a whole universe within me, unknown and waiting to be explored; a whole universe that can only be approached by way of introspection and patient uninterrupted thought. Merely to satisfy curiosity it would surely be worth exploring. But there are motives more impelling than curiosity to persuade me. What one may find there is so important that it's almost a matter of life and death to undertake the search.'

'Hm,' said Mr. Cardan. 'And what will happen at the end of three months' chaste meditation when some lovely young temptation comes toddling down this road, "balancing her haunches," as Zola would say, and rolling the large black eye? What will happen to your explorations of the inward universe then, may I ask?'

'Well,' said Calamy, 'I hope they'll proceed uninterrupted.'

'You hope? Piously?'

'And I shall certainly do my best to see that they do,' Calamy added.

'It won't be easy,' Mr. Cardan assured him.

‘I know.’

‘Perhaps you’ll find that you can explore simultaneously both the temptation and the interior universe.’

Calamy shook his head. ‘Alas, I’m afraid that’s not practicable. It would be delightful if it were. But for some reason it isn’t. Even in moderation it won’t do. I know that, more or less, by experience. And the authorities are all agreed about it.’

‘But after all,’ said Chelifer, ‘there have been religions that prescribed indulgence in these particular temptations as a discipline and ceremony at certain seasons and to celebrate certain feasts.’

‘But they didn’t pretend,’ Calamy answered, ‘that it was a discipline that made it easy for those who underwent it to explore the inward universe of mind.’

‘Perhaps they did,’ objected Chelifer. ‘After all, there’s no golden rule. At one time and in one place you honour your father and your mother when they grow old; elsewhere and at other periods you knock them on the head and put them into the pot-au-feu. Everything has been right at one time or another and everything has been wrong.’

‘That’s only true with reservations,’ said Calamy, ‘and the reservations are the most important part. There’s a parallel, it seems to me, between the moral and the physical world. In the physical world you call the unknowable reality the Four-Dimensional Continuum. The Continuum is the same for all observers; but when they want to draw a picture of it for themselves, they select different axes for their graphs, according to their different motions — and according to their different minds and physical limitations. Human beings have selected three-dimensional space and time as their axes. Their minds, their bodies and the earth on which they live being what they are, human beings could not have done otherwise. Space and time are necessary and inevitable ideas for us. And when we want to draw a picture of that other reality in which we live — is it different, or is it somehow, incomprehensibly, the same? — we choose, unescapably — we cannot fail to choose, those axes of reference which we call good and evil; the laws of our being make it necessary for us to see things under the aspects of

good and evil. The reality remains the same; but the axes vary with the mental position, so to speak, and the varying capacities of different observers. Some observers are clearer-sighted and in some way more advantageously placed than others. The incessantly changing social conventions and moral codes of history represent the shifting axes of reference chosen by the least curious, most myopic and worst-placed observers. But the axes chosen by the best observers have always been startlingly like one another. Gotama, Jesus and Lao-tsze, for example; they lived sufficiently far from one another in space, time and social position. But their pictures of reality resemble one another very closely. The nearer a man approaches these in penetration, the more nearly will his axes of moral reference correspond with theirs. And when all the most acute observers agree in saying that indulgence in these particular amusements interferes with the exploration of the spiritual world, then one can be pretty sure it's true. In itself, no doubt, the natural and moderate satisfaction of the sexual instincts is a matter quite indifferent to morality. It is only in relation to something else that the satisfaction of a natural instinct can be said to be good or bad. It might be bad, for example, if it involved deceit or cruelty. It is certainly bad when it enslaves a mind that feels, within itself, that it ought to be free — free to contemplate and recollect itself.'

'No doubt,' said Mr. Cardan. 'But as a practical man, I can only say that it's going to be most horribly difficult to preserve that freedom. That balancing of haunches . . .' He waved his cigar from side to side. 'I shall call again in six months and see how you feel about it all then. It's extraordinary what an effect the natural appetites do have on good resolutions. Satiated, one thinks regeneration will be so easy; but when one's hungry again, how hard it seems.'

They were silent. From the depths of the valley the smoky shadows had climbed higher and higher up the slope. The opposite hills were now profoundly black and the clouds in which their peaks were involved had become dark and menacing save where, on their upper surfaces, the sun touched them with, as it declined, an ever richer light. The shadow had climbed up to within a hundred feet of where they were sitting, soon it would envelop them. With a great

jangling of bells and a clicking of small hard hoofs the six tall piebald goats came trotting down the steep path from the road. The little boy ran behind them, waving his stick. ‘Eia-oo!’ he shouted with a kind of Homeric fury; but at the sight of the three men sitting on the bench outside the house he suddenly became silent, blushed and slunk unheroically away, hardly daring to whisper to the goats while he drove them into their stable for the night.

‘Dear me,’ said Chelifer, who had followed the movements of the animals with a certain curiosity, ‘I believe those are the first goats I have seen, or smelt, in the flesh since I took to writing about them in my paper. Most interesting. One tends to forget that the creatures really exist.’

‘One tends to forget that anything or any one really exists, outside oneself,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘It’s always a bit of a shock to find that they do.’

‘Three days hence,’ said Chelifer meditatively, ‘I shall be at my office again. Rabbits, goats, mice; Fetter Lane; the family pension. All the familiar horrors of reality.’

‘Sentimentalist!’ mocked Calamy.

‘Meanwhile,’ said Mr. Cardan, ‘Lilian has suddenly decided to move on to Monte Carlo. I go with her, of course; one can’t reject free meals when they’re offered.’ He threw away his cigar, got up and stretched himself. ‘Well, we must be getting down before it gets dark.’

‘I shan’t see you again for some time, then?’ said Calamy.

‘I shall be here again at the end of six months, never fear,’ said Mr. Cardan. ‘Even if I have to come at my own expense.’

They climbed up the steep little path on to the road.

‘Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye.’

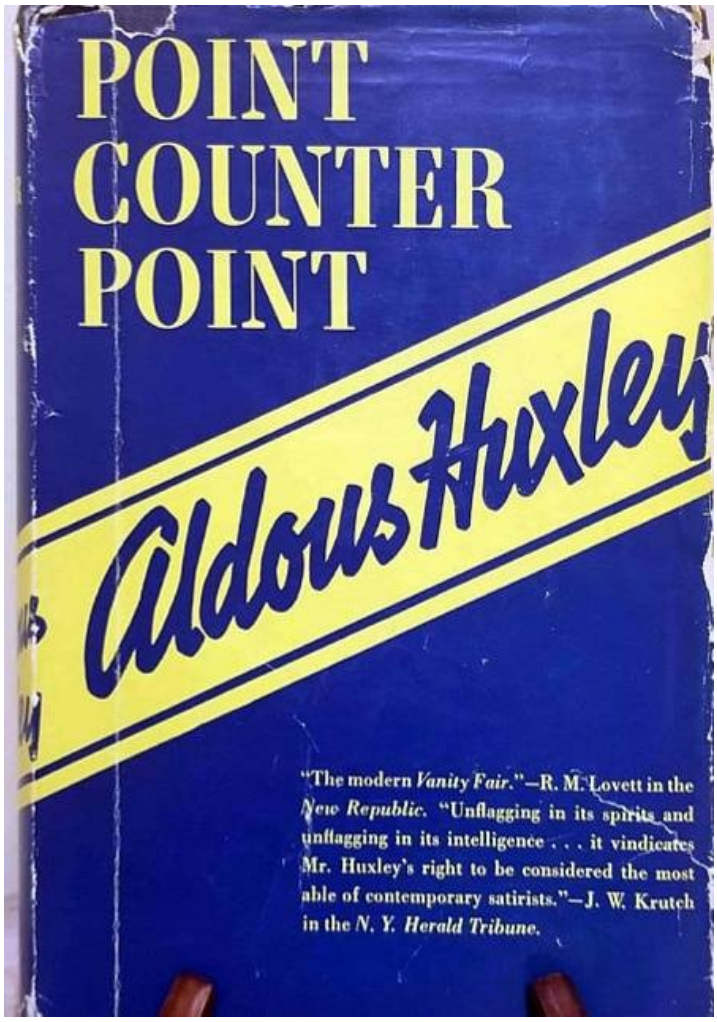
Calamy watched them go, watched them till they were out of sight round a bend in the road. A profound melancholy settled down upon him. With them, he felt, had gone all his old, familiar life. He was left quite alone with something new and strange. What was to come of this parting?

Or perhaps, he reflected, nothing would come of it. Perhaps he had been a fool.

The cottage was in the shadow now. Looking up the slope he could see a clump of trees still glittering as though prepared for a festival above the rising flood of darkness. And at the head of the valley, like an immense precious stone, glowing with its own inward fire, the limestone crags reached up through the clouds into the pale sky. Perhaps he had been a fool, thought Calamy. But looking at that shining peak, he was somehow reassured.

Point Counter Point

First published in 1928, *Point Counter Point* is often considered to be more complex than some of Huxley earlier satirical works. It derives its title from ideas of musical composition, as Huxley first presents one view, before offering a counter view and so forth until it reaches a resolution. The author based many of the characters on high profile public figures, including Nancy Cunard, D. H. Lawrence and Augustus John. Huxley included aspects of his own character in the writer, Philip Quarles, whom he depicts as awkward and emotionally detached. One figure, the political demagogue, Everard Webley, who heads the Brotherhood of British Freeman, is often believed to have been modelled on the leader of the British Union of Fascists, Oswald Mosley. However, it is perhaps worth noting that at the time Huxley composed the novel, Mosley was still a Labour MP and four years away from founding his infamous and unsuccessful fascist party.



The first edition of the novel

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Huxley's friend, the author, D.H Lawrence

CHAPTER I

‘YOU WON’T BE late?’ There was anxiety in Marjorie Carling’s voice, there was something like entreaty.

‘No, I won’t be late,’ said Walter, unhappily and guiltily certain that he would be. Her voice annoyed him. It drawled a little, it was too refined – even in misery.

‘Not later than midnight.’ She might have reminded him of the time when he never went out in the evenings without her. She might have done so; but she wouldn’t; it was against her principles; she didn’t want to force his love in any way.

‘Well, call it one. You know what these parties are.’ But as a matter of fact, she didn’t know, for the good reason that, not being his wife, she wasn’t invited to them. She had left her husband to live with Walter Bidlake; and Carling, who had Christian scruples, was feebly a sadist and wanted to take his revenge, refused to divorce her. It was two years now since they had begun to live together. Only two years; and now, already, he had ceased to love her, he had begun to love someone else. The sin was losing its only excuse, the social discomfort its sole palliation. And she was with child.

‘Half-past twelve,’ she implored, though she knew that her importunity would only annoy him, only make him love her the less. But she could not prevent herself from speaking; she loved him too much, she was too agonizingly jealous. The words broke out in spite of her principles. It would have been better for her, and perhaps for Walter too, if she had had fewer principles and given her feelings the violent expression they demanded. But she had been well brought up in habits of the strictest self-control. Only the uneducated, she knew, made ‘scenes’. An imploring ‘Half-past twelve, Walter’ was all that managed to break

through her principles. Too weak to move him, the feeble outburst would only annoy. She knew it, and yet she could not hold her tongue.

‘If I can possibly manage it.’ (There; she had done it. There was exasperation in his tone.) ‘But I can’t guarantee it; don’t expect me too certainly.’ For of course, he was thinking (with Lucy Tantamount’s image unexorcizably haunting him), it certainly wouldn’t be half-past twelve.

He gave the final touches to his white tie. From the mirror her face looked out at him, close beside his own. It was a pale face and so thin that the down-thrown light of the electric lamp hanging above them made a shadow in the hollows below the cheek-bones. Her eyes were darkly ringed. Rather too long at the best of times, her straight nose protruded bleakly from the unfleshed face. She looked ugly, tired and ill. Six months from now her baby would be born. Something that had been a single cell, a cluster of cells, a little sac of tissue, a kind of worm, a potential fish with gills, stirred in her womb and would one day become a man – a grown man, suffering and enjoying, loving and hating, thinking, remembering, imagining. And what had been a blob of jelly within her body would invent a god and worship; what had been a kind of fish would create and, having created, would become the battle-ground of disputing good and evil; what had blindly lived in her as a parasitic worm would look at the stars, would listen to music, would read poetry. A thing would grow into a person, a tiny lump of stuff would become a human body, a human mind. The astounding process of creation was going on within her; but Marjorie was conscious only of sickness and lassitude; the mystery for her meant nothing but fatigue and ugliness and a chronic anxiety about the future, pain of the mind as well as discomfort of the body. She had been glad, or at least she had tried to be glad, in spite of her haunting fears of physical and social consequences, when she first recognized the symptoms of her pregnancy. The child, she believed, would bring Walter closer; (he had begun to fade away from her even then). It would arouse in him new feelings which would make up for whatever element it was that seemed to be lacking in his love for her. She dreaded the pain, she dreaded the inevitable difficulties and embarrassments. But the pains, the difficulties would have been worth while if

they purchased a renewal, a strengthening of Walter's attachment. In spite of everything, she was glad. And at first her previsions had seemed to be justified. The news that she was going to have a child had quickened his tenderness. For two or three weeks she was happy, she was reconciled to the pains and discomforts. Then, from one day to another, everything was changed; Walter had met that woman. He still did his best, in the intervals of running after Lucy, to keep up a show of solicitude. But she could feel that the solicitude was resentful, that he was tender and attentive out of a sense of duty, that he hated the child for compelling him to be so considerate to its mother. And because he hated it, she too began to hate it. No longer overlaid by happiness, her fears came to the surface, filled her mind. Pain and discomfort – that was all the future held. And meanwhile ugliness, sickness, fatigue. How could she fight her battle when she was in this state?

'Do you love me, Walter?' she suddenly asked.

Walter turned his brown eyes for a moment from the reflected tie and looked into the image of her sad, intently gazing grey ones. He smiled. But if only, he was thinking, she would leave me in peace! He pursed his lips and parted them again in the suggestion of a kiss. But Marjorie did not return his smile. Her face remained unmovingly sad, fixed in an intent anxiety. Her eyes took on a tremulous brightness, and suddenly there were tears on her lashes.

'Couldn't you stay here with me this evening?' she begged, in the teeth of all her heroic resolutions not to apply any sort of exasperating compulsion to his love, to leave him free to do what he wanted.

At the sight of those tears, at the sound of that tremulous and reproachful voice, Walter was filled with an emotion that was at once remorse and resentment; anger, pity, and shame.

'But can't you understand,' that was what he would have liked to say, what he would have said if he had had the courage, 'can't you understand that it isn't the same as it was, that it can't be the same? And perhaps, if the truth be told, it never was what you believed it was – our love, I mean – it never was what I tried to pretend it was. Let's be friends, let's be companions. I like you, I'm very fond

of you. But for goodness sake don't envelop me in love, like this; don't force love on me. If you knew how dreadful love seems to somebody who doesn't love, what a violation, what an outrage …'

But she was crying. Through her closed eyelids the tears were welling out, drop after drop. Her face was trembling into the grimace of agony. And he was the tormentor. He hated himself. 'But why should I let myself be blackmailed by her tears?' he asked, and, asking, he hated her also. A drop ran down her long nose. 'She has no right to do this sort of thing, no right to be so unreasonable. Why can't she be reasonable?'

'Because she loves me.'

'But I don't want her love, I don't want it.' He felt the anger mounting up within him. She had no business to love him like that; not now, at any rate. 'It's a blackmail,' he repeated inwardly, 'a blackmail. Why must I be blackmailed by her love and the fact that once I loved too – or did I ever love her, really?'

Marjorie took out a handkerchief and began to wipe her eyes. He felt ashamed of his odious thoughts. But she was the cause of his shame; it was her fault. She ought to have stuck to her husband. They could have had an affair. Afternoons in a studio. It would have been romantic.

'But after all, it was I who insisted on her coming away with me.'

'But she ought to have had the sense to refuse. She ought to have known that it couldn't last for ever.'

But she had done what he had asked her; she had given up everything, accepted social discomfort for his sake. Another piece of blackmail. She blackmailed him with sacrifice. He resented the appeal which her sacrifices made to his sense of decency and honour.

'But if *she* had some decency and honour,' he thought, 'she wouldn't exploit mine.'

But there was the baby.

'Why on earth did she ever allow it to come into existence?'

He hated it. It increased his responsibility towards its mother, increased his guiltiness in making her suffer. He looked at her wiping her tear-wet face. Being

with child had made her so ugly, so old. How could a woman expect … ? But no, no, no! Walter shut his eyes, gave an almost imperceptible shuddering shake of the head. The ignoble thought must be shut out, repudiated.

‘How can I think such things?’ he asked himself.

‘Don’t go,’ he heard her repeating. How that refined and drawling shrillness got on his nerves! ‘Please don’t go, Walter.’

There was a sob in her voice. More blackmail. Ah, how could he be so base? And yet, in spite of his shame and, in a sense, because of it, he continued to feel the shameful emotions with an intensity that seemed to increase rather than diminish. His dislike of her grew because he was ashamed of it; the painful feelings of shame and self-hatred, which she caused him to feel, constituted for him yet another ground of dislike. Resentment bred shame, and shame in its turn bred more resentment.

‘Oh, why can’t she leave me in peace?’ He wished it furiously, intensely, with an exasperation that was all the more savage for being suppressed. (For he lacked the brutal courage to give it utterance; he was sorry for her, he was fond of her in spite of everything; he was incapable of being openly and frankly cruel – he was cruel only out of weakness, against his will.)

‘Why can’t she leave me in peace?’ He would like her so much more if only she left him in peace; and she herself would be so much happier. Ever so much happier. It would be for her own good … But suddenly he saw through his own hypocrisy. ‘But all the same, why the devil can’t she let me do what I want?’

What he wanted? But what he wanted was Lucy Tantamount. And he wanted her against reason, against all his ideals and principles, madly, against his own wishes, even against his own feelings – for he didn’t like Lucy; he really hated her. A noble end may justify shameful means. But when the end is shameful, what then? It was for Lucy that he was making Marjorie suffer – Marjorie who loved him, who had made sacrifices for him, who was unhappy. But her unhappiness was blackmailing him.

‘Stay with me this evening,’ she implored once more.

There was a part of his mind that joined in her entreaties, that wanted him to give up the party and stay at home. But the other part was stronger. He answered her with lies – half lies, that were worse, for the hypocritically justifying element of truth in them, than frank whole lies.

He put his arm round her. The gesture was in itself a falsehood.

‘But my darling,’ he protested in the cajoling tone of one who implores a child to behave reasonably, ‘I really must go. You see, my father’s going to be there.’ That was true. Old Bidlake was always at the Tantamounts’ parties. ‘And I must have a talk with him. About business,’ he added vaguely and importantly, releasing with the magical word a kind of smoke-screen of masculine interests between himself and Marjorie. But the lie, he reflected, must be transparently visible through the smoke.

‘Couldn’t you see him some other time?’

‘It’s important,’ he answered, shaking his head. ‘And besides,’ he added, forgetting that several excuses are always less convincing than one, ‘Lady Edward’s inviting an American editor specially for my sake. He might be useful; you know how enormously they pay.’ Lady Edward had told him that she would invite the man if he hadn’t started back to America – she was afraid he had. ‘Quite preposterously much,’ he went on, thickening his screen with impersonal irrelevancies. ‘It’s the only place in the world where it’s possible for a writer to be overpaid.’ He made an attempt at laughter. ‘And I really need a bit of overpaying to make up for all this two-guineas-a-thousand business.’ He tightened his embrace, he bent down to kiss her. But Marjorie averted her face. ‘Marjorie,’ he implored. ‘Don’t cry. Please.’ He felt guilty and unhappy. But oh! why couldn’t she leave him in peace, in peace?

‘I’m not crying,’ she answered. But her cheek was wet and cold to his lips.

‘Marjorie, I won’t go, if you don’t want me to.’

‘But I *do* want you to,’ she answered, still keeping her face averted.

‘You don’t. I’ll stay.’

‘You mustn’t.’ Marjorie looked at him and made an effort to smile. ‘It’s only my silliness. It would be stupid to miss your father and that American man.’

Returned to him like this, his excuses sounded peculiarly vain and improbable. He winced with a kind of disgust.

‘They can wait,’ he answered, and there was a note of anger in his voice. He was angry with himself for having made such lying excuses (why couldn’t he have told her the crude and brutal truth straight out? she knew it, after all); and he was angry with her for reminding him of them. He would have liked them to fall directly into the pit of oblivion, to be as though they had never been uttered.

‘No, no; I insist. I was only being silly. I’m sorry.’

He resisted her at first, refused to go, demanded to stay. Now that there was no danger of his having to stay, he could afford to insist. For Marjorie, it was clear, was serious in her determination that he should go. It was an opportunity for him to be noble and self-sacrificing at a cheap rate, gratis even. What an odious comedy! But he played it. In the end he consented to go, as though he were doing her a special favour by not staying. Marjorie tied his scarf for him, brought him his silk hat and his gloves, kissed him good-bye lightly, with a brave show of gaiety. She had her pride and her code of amorous honour; and in spite of unhappiness, in spite of jealousy, she stuck to her principles – he *ought* to be free; she had no right to interfere with him. And besides it was the best policy not to interfere. At least, she hoped it was the best policy.

Walter shut the door behind him and stepped out into the cool of the night. A criminal escaping from the scene of his crime, escaping from the spectacle of the victim, escaping from compassion and remorse, could not have felt more profoundly relieved. In the street he drew a deep breath. He was free. Free from recollection and anticipation. Free, for an hour or two, to refuse to admit the existence of past or future. Free to live only now and here, in the place where his body happened at each instant to be. Free – but the boast was idle; he went on remembering. Escape was not so easy a matter. Her voice pursued him. ‘I insist on your going.’ His crime had been a fraud as well as a murder. ‘I insist.’ How nobly he had protested! How magnanimously given in at last! It was cardsharping on top of cruelty.

‘God!’ he said almost aloud. ‘How could I?’ He was astonished at himself as well as disgusted. ‘But if only she’d leave me in peace!’ he went on. ‘Why can’t she be reasonable?’ The weak and futile anger exploded again within him.

He thought of the time when his wishes had been different. Not to be left in peace by her had once been his whole ambition. He had encouraged her devotion. He remembered the cottage they had lived in, alone with one another, month after month, among the bare downs. What a view over Berkshire! But it was a mile and a half to the nearest village. Oh, the weight of that knapsack full of provisions! The mud when it rained! And that bucket you had to wind up from the well. The well was more than a hundred feet deep. But even when he wasn’t doing something tiresome, like winding up the bucket, had it really been very satisfactory? Had he ever really been happy with Marjorie – as happy, at any rate, as he had imagined he was going to be, as he ought to have been in the circumstances? It should have been like *Epipsychidion*; but it wasn’t – perhaps because he had too consciously wanted it to be, because he had deliberately tried to model his feelings and their life together on Shelley’s poetry.

‘One shouldn’t take art too literally.’ He remembered what his brother-in-law, Philip Quarles, had said one evening, when they were talking about poetry. ‘Particularly where love is concerned.’

‘Not even if it’s true?’ Walter had asked.

‘It’s apt to be too true. Unadulterated, like distilled water. When truth is nothing but the truth, it’s unnatural, it’s an abstraction that resembles nothing in the real world. In nature there are always so many other irrelevant things mixed up with the essential truth. That’s why art moves you – precisely because it’s unadulterated with all the irrelevancies of real life. Real orgies are never so exciting as pornographic books. In a volume by Pierre Louys all the girls are young and their figures perfect; there’s no hiccoughing or bad breath, no fatigue or boredom, no sudden recollections of unpaid bills or business letters unanswered, to interrupt the raptures. Art gives you the sensation, the thought, the feeling quite pure – chemically pure, I mean,’ he had added with a laugh, ‘not morally.’

‘But *Epipsychidion* isn’t pornography,’ Walter had objected.

‘No, but it’s equally pure from the chemist’s point of view. How does that sonnet of Shakespeare’s go?

“My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips’ red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask’d, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.”

And so on. He’d taken the poets too literally and was reacting. Let him be a warning to you.’

Philip had been right, of course. Those months in the cottage hadn’t been at all like *Epipsychidion* or *La Maison du Berger*. What with the well and the walk to the village … But even if there hadn’t been the well and the walk, even if he had had Marjorie unadulterated, would it have been any better? It might even have been worse. Marjorie unadulterated might have been worse than Marjorie tempered by irrelevancies.

That refinement of hers, for example, that rather cold virtuousness, so bloodless and spiritual – from a distance and theoretically he admired. But in practice and close at hand? It was with that virtue, that refined, cultured, bloodless spirituality that he had fallen in love – with that and with her unhappiness; for Carling was unspeakable. Pity made him a knight errant. Love, he had then believed (for he was only twenty-two at the time, ardently pure, with the adolescent purity of sexual desires turned inside out, just down from Oxford and stuffed with poetry and the lucubrations of philosophers and mystics), love was talk, love was spiritual communion and companionship. That was real love. The sexual business was only an irrelevancy, unavoidable, because unfortunately

human beings had bodies, but to be kept as far as possible in the background. Ardently pure with the ardour of young desires taught artificially to burn on the side of the angels, he had admired that refined and quiet purity which, in Marjorie, was the product of a natural coldness, a congenitally low vitality.

'You're so good,' he had said. 'It seems to come to you so easily. I wish I could be good, like you.'

It was the equivalent, but he did not realize it, of wishing himself half dead. Under the shy, diffident, sensitive skin of him, he was ardently alive. It was indeed hard for him to be good, as Marjorie was good. But he tried. And meanwhile, he admired her goodness and purity. And he was touched – at least until it bored and exasperated him – by her devotion to him, he was flattered by her admiration.

Walking now towards Chalk Farm station he suddenly remembered that story his father used to tell about an Italian chauffeur he had once talked to about love. (The old man had a genius for getting people to talk; all sorts of people, even servants, even workmen. Walter envied him the talent.) Some women, according to the chauffeur, are like wardrobes. *Sono come cassettoni*. How richly old Bidlake used to tell the anecdote! They may be as lovely as you like; but what's the point of a lovely wardrobe in your arms? What on earth's the point? (And Marjorie, Walter reflected, wasn't even really good looking.) 'Give me,' said the chauffeur, 'the other kind, even if they're ugly. My girl,' he had confided, 'is the other kind. *É un frullino, proprio un frullino* – a regular egg-whisk.' And the old man would twinkle like a jovial, wicked old satyr behind his monocle. Stiff wardrobes or lively egg-whisks? Walter had to admit that his preferences were the same as the chauffeur's. At any rate, he knew by personal experience that (whenever 'real' love was being tempered by the sexual irrelevancies) he didn't much like the wardrobe kind of woman. At a distance, theoretically, purity and goodness and refined spirituality were admirable. But in practice and close to they were less appealing. And from someone who does not appeal to one, even devotion, even the flattery of admiration are unbearable. Confusedly and simultaneously he hated Marjorie for her patient, martyred coldness; he accused

himself of swinish sensuality. His love for Lucy was mad and shameful, but Marjorie was bloodless and half dead. He was at once justified and without excuse. But more without excuse, all the same; more without excuse. They were low, those sensual feelings; they were ignoble. Egg-whisk and chest of drawers – could anything be more base and ignoble than such a classification? In imagination he heard his father's rich and fleshy laugh. Horrible! Walter's whole conscious life had been orientated in opposition to his father, in opposition to the old man's jolly, careless sensuality. Consciously he had always been on the side of his mother, on the side of purity, refinement, the spirit. But his blood was at least half his father's. And now two years of Marjorie had made him consciously dislike cold virtue. He consciously disliked it, even though at the same time he was still ashamed of his dislike, ashamed of what he regarded as his beastly sensual desires, ashamed of his love for Lucy. But oh, if only Marjorie would leave him in peace! If only she'd refrain from clamouring for a return to the unwelcome love she persisted in forcing on him! If only she'd stop being so dreadfully devoted! He could give her friendship – for he liked her, genuinely; she was so good and kind, so loyal and devoted. He'd be glad of her friendship in return. But love – that was suffocating. And when, imagining she was fighting the other woman with her own weapons, she did violence to her own virtuous coldness and tried to win him back by the ardour of her caresses – oh, it was terrible, really terrible.

And then, he went on to reflect, she was really rather a bore with her heavy, insensitive earnestness. Really rather stupid in spite of her culture – because of it perhaps. The culture was genuine all right; she had read the books, she remembered them. But did she understand them? *Could* she understand them? The remarks with which she broke her long, long silences, the cultured, earnest remarks – how heavy they were, how humourless and without understanding! She was wise to be so silent; silence is as full of potential wisdom and wit as the unhewn marble of great sculpture. The silent bear no witness against themselves. Marjorie knew how to listen well and sympathetically. And when she did break silence, half her utterances were quotations. For Marjorie had a retentive

memory and had formed the habit of learning the great thoughts and the purple passages by heart. It had taken Walter some time to discover the heavy, pathetically uncomprehending stupidity that underlay the silence and the quotations. And when he discovered, it was too late.

He thought of Carling. A drunkard *and* religious. Always chattering away about chasubles and saints and the Immaculate Conception, and at the same time a nasty drunken pervert. If the man hadn't been quite so detestably disgusting, if he hadn't made Marjorie quite so wretched – what then? Walter imagined his freedom. He wouldn't have pitied, he wouldn't have loved. He remembered Marjorie's red and swollen eyes after one of those disgusting scenes with Carling. The dirty brute!

'And what about me?' he suddenly thought.

He knew that the moment the door had shut behind him, Marjorie had started to cry. Carling at least had the excuse of whiskey. Forgive them, for they know not what they do. He himself was never anything but sober. At this moment, he knew, she was crying.

'I ought to go back,' he said to himself. But instead, he quickened his pace till he was almost running down the street. It was a flight from his conscience and at the same time a hastening towards his desire.

'I ought to go back, I ought.'

He hurried on, hating her because he had made her so unhappy.

A man looking into a tobacconist's window suddenly stepped backwards as he was passing. Walter violently collided with him.

'Sorry,' he said automatically, and hurried on without looking round.

'Where yer going?' the man shouted after him angrily. Wotcher think you're doing? Being a bloody Derby winner?'

Two loitering street boys whooped with ferociously derisive mirth.

'You in yer top 'at,' the man pursued contemptuously, hating the uniformed gentleman.

The right thing would have been to turn round and give the fellow back better than he gave. His father would have punctured him with a word. But for Walter

there was only flight. He dreaded these encounters, he was frightened of the lower classes. The noise of the man's abuse faded in his ears.

Odious! He shuddered. His thoughts returned to Marjorie.

'Why can't she be reasonable?' he said to himself. 'Just reasonable. If only at least she had something to do, something to keep her occupied.'

She had too much time to think, that was the trouble with Marjorie. Too much time to think about him. Though after all it was his fault; it was he who had robbed her of her occupation and made her focus her mind exclusively on himself. She had taken a partnership in a decorator's shop when he first knew her, one of those lady-like, artistic, amateurish decorating establishments in Kensington. Lampshades and the companionship of the young women who painted them and above all devotion to Mrs Cole, the senior partner, were Marjorie's compensations for a wretched marriage. She had created a little world of her own, apart from Carling; a feminine world, with something of the girls' school about it, where she could talk about clothes and shops, and listen to gossip, and indulge in what schoolgirls call a 'pash' for an elder woman, and imagine in the intervals that she was doing part of the world's work and helping on the cause of Art.

Walter had persuaded her to give it all up. Not without difficulty, however. For her happiness in being devoted to Mrs Cole, in having a sentimental 'pash' for her, was almost a compensation for her misery with Carling. But Carling turned out to be more than Mrs Cole could compensate for. Walter offered what the lady perhaps could not, and certainly did not wish to, provide – a place of refuge, protection, financial support. Besides, Walter was a man, and a man ought, by tradition, to be loved, even when, as Walter had finally concluded about Marjorie, one doesn't really like men and is only naturally attuned to the company of women. (The effect of literature again! He remembered Philip Quarles's comments on the disastrous influence which art can exercise on life.) Yes, he was a man; but 'different', as she had never tired of telling him, from ordinary men. He had accepted his 'difference' as a flattering distinction, then. But was it? He wondered. Anyhow, 'different' she had then found him and so

was able to get the best of both worlds – a man who yet wasn't a man. Charmed by Walter's persuasions, driven by Carling's brutalities, she had consented to abandon the shop and with it Mrs Cole, whom Walter detested as a bullying, slave-driving, blood-sucking embodiment of female will.

'You're too good to be an amateur upholsterer,' he had flattered her out of the depths of a then genuine belief in her intellectual capacities.

She should help him in some unspecified way with his literary work, she should write herself. Under his influence she had taken to writing essays and short stories. But they were obviously no good. From having been encouraging, he became reticent; he said no more about her efforts. In a little while Marjorie abandoned the unnatural and futile occupation. She had nothing after that but Walter. He became the reason of her existence, the foundation on which her whole life was established. The foundation was moving away from under her.

'If only,' thought Walter, 'she'd leave me in peace!'

He turned into the Underground station. At the entrance a man was selling the evening papers. SOCIALIST ROBBERY SCHEME. FIRST READING. The words glared out from the placard. Glad of an excuse to distract his mind Walter bought a paper. The Liberal-Labour Government's Bill for the nationalization of the mines had passed its first reading by the usual majority. Walter read the news with pleasure. His political opinions were advanced. Not so the opinions of the proprietor of the evening paper. The language of the leading article was savagely violent.

'The ruffians,' thought Walter as he read it. The article evoked in him a stimulating enthusiasm for all that it assailed, a delightful hatred for Capitalists and Reactionaries. The barriers of his individuality were momentarily thrown down, the personal complexities were abolished. Possessed by the joy of political battle, he overflowed his boundaries, he became, so to speak, larger than himself – larger and simpler.

'The ruffians,' he repeated, thinking of the oppressors, the monopolizers.

At Camden Town station a wizened little man with a red handkerchief round his neck took the seat next to his. The stink of the old man's pipe was so

suffocating, that Walter looked up the car to see if there were not another vacant seat. There was, as it happened; but on second thoughts, he decided not to move. To retire from the stink would seem too offensively pointed, might occasion comment from the stinker. The acrid smoke rasped his throat; he coughed.

‘One should be loyal to one’s tastes and instincts,’ Philip Quarles used to say. ‘What’s the good of a philosophy with a major premiss that isn’t the rationalization of your feelings? If you’ve never had a religious experience, it’s folly to believe in God. You might as well believe in the excellence of oysters, when you can’t eat them without being sick.’

A whiff of stale sweat came up with the nicotine fumes to Walter’s nostrils. ‘The Socialists call it Nationalization,’ he read in his paper; ‘but the rest of us have a shorter and homelier name for what they propose to do. That name is Theft.’ But at least it was theft from thieves and for the benefit of their victims. The little old man leaned forward and spat, cautiously and perpendicularly, between his feet. With the heel of his boot he spread the gob over the floor. Walter looked away; he wished that he could personally like the oppressed and personally hate the rich oppressors. One should be loyal to one’s tastes and instincts. But one’s tastes and instincts were accidents. There were eternal principles. But if the axiomatic principles didn’t happen to be your personal major premiss … ?

And suddenly he was nine years old and walking with his mother in the fields near Gattenden. Each of them carried a bunch of cowslips. They must have been up to Batt’s Corner; it was the only place where cowslips grew in the neighbourhood.

‘We’ll stop for a minute and see poor Wetherington,’ his mother said. ‘He’s very ill.’ She knocked at a cottage door.

Wetherington had been the under-gardener at the Hall; but for the past month he had not been working. Walter remembered him as a pale, thin man with a cough, not at all communicative. He was not much interested in Wetherington. A woman opened the door. ‘Good afternoon, Mrs Wetherington.’ They were shown in.

Wetherington was lying in bed propped up with pillows. His face was terrible. A pair of enormous, large-pupilled eyes stared out of cavernous sockets. Stretched over the starting bones, the skin was white and clammy with sweat. But almost more appalling even than the face was the neck, the unbelievably thin neck. And from the sleeves of his nightshirt projected two knobbed sticks, his arms, with a pair of immense skeleton hands fastened to the end of them, like rakes at the end of their slender hafts. And then the smell in that sickroom! The windows were tightly shut, a fire burned in the little grate. The air was hot and heavy with a horrible odour of stale sick breath and the exhalations of a sick body – an old inveterate smell that seemed to have grown sickeningly sweetish with long ripening in the pent-up heat. A new, fresh smell, however pungently disgusting, would have been less horrible. It was the inveterateness, the sweet decaying over-ripeness of this sickroom smell that made it so peculiarly unbearable. Walter shuddered even now to think of it. He lit a cigarette to disinfect his memory. He had been brought up on baths and open windows. The first time that, as a child, he was taken to church, the stuffiness, the odour of humanity made him sick; he had to be hurried out. His mother did not take him to church again. Perhaps we're brought up too wholesomely and aseptically, he thought. An education that results in one's feeling sick in the company of one's fellow-men, one's brothers – can it be good? He would have liked to love them. But love does not flourish in an atmosphere that nauseates the lover with an uncontrollable disgust.

In Wetherington's sickroom even pity found it hard to flourish. He sat there, while his mother talked to the dying man and his wife, gazing, reluctant but compelled by the fascination of horror, at the ghastly skeleton in the bed and breathing through his bunch of cowslips the warm and sickening air. Even through the fresh delicious scent of the cowslips he could smell the inveterate odours of the sickroom. He felt almost no pity, only horror, fear and disgust. And even when Mrs Wetherington began to cry, turning her face away so that the sick man should not see her tears, he felt not pitiful so much as uncomfortable, embarrassed. The spectacle of her grief only made him more

urgently long to escape, to get out of that horrible room into the pure enormous air and the sunshine.

He felt ashamed of these emotions as he remembered them. But that was how he had felt, how he still felt. ‘One should be loyal to one’s instincts.’ No, not to all, not to the bad ones; one should resist these. But they were not so easily overcome. The old man in the next seat relit his pipe. He remembered that he had held every breath for as long as he possibly could, so as not to have to draw in and smell the tainted air too often. A deep breath through the cowslips; then he counted forty before he let it out again and inhaled another. The old man once more leaned forward and spat. ‘The idea that nationalization will increase the prosperity of the workers is entirely fallacious. During the past years the tax-payer has learned to his cost the meaning of bureaucratic control. If the workers imagine …’ He shut his eyes and saw the sickroom. When the time came to say good-bye, he had shaken the skeleton hand. It lay there, unmoving, on the bedclothes; he slipped his fingers underneath those dead and bony ones, lifted the hand a moment and let it fall again.

It was cold and wettish to the touch. Turning away, he surreptitiously wiped his palm on his coat. He let out his long-contained breath with an explosive sigh and inhaled another lungful of the sickening air. It was the last he had to take; his mother was already moving towards the door. Her little Pekingese frisked round her, barking.

‘Be quiet, T’ang!’ she said in her clear, beautiful voice. She was perhaps the only person in England, he now reflected, who regularly pronounced the apostrophe in T’ang.

They walked home by the footpath across the fields. Fantastic and improbable as a little Chinese dragon, T’ang ran on ahead of them bounding lightly over what were to him enormous obstacles. His feathery tail fluttered in the wind. Sometimes, when the grass was very long he sat up on his little flat rump as though he were begging for sugar, and looked out with his round bulgy eyes over the tussocks, taking his bearings.

Under the bright dappled sky Walter had felt like a reprieved prisoner. He ran, he shouted. His mother walked slowly, without speaking. Every now and then she halted for a moment and shut her eyes. It was a habit she had, when she felt pensive or perplexed. She was often perplexed, Walter reflected, smiling tenderly to himself. Poor Wetherington must have perplexed her a great deal. He remembered how often she had halted on their way home.

‘Do hurry up, mother,’ he had shouted impatiently. ‘We shall be late for tea.’

Cook had baked scones for tea and there was yesterday’s plum cake and a newly opened pot of Tiptree’s cherry jam.

‘One should be loyal to one’s tastes and instincts.’ But an accident of birth had determined them for him. Justice was eternal; charity and brotherly love were beautiful in spite of the old man’s pipe and Wetherington’s sickroom. Beautiful precisely because of such things. The train slowed down. Leicester Square. He stepped out on to the platform and made his way towards the lifts. But the personal major premiss, he was thinking, is hard to deny; and the major premiss that isn’t personal is hard, however excellent, to believe in. Honour, fidelity – these were good things. But the personal major premiss of his present philosophy was that Lucy Tantamount was the most beautiful, the most desirable …

‘All tickets, please!’

The debate threatened to start again. Deliberately he stifled it, the liftman slammed the gates. The lift ascended. In the street he hailed a taxi.

‘Tantamount House, Pall Mall.’

CHAPTER II

THREE ITALIAN GHOSTS unobtrusively haunt the eastern end of Pall Mall. The wealth of newly industrialized England and the enthusiasm, the architectural genius, of Charles Barry called them up out of the past and their native sunshine. Under the encrusting grime of the Reform Club the eye of faith recognizes something agreeably reminiscent of the Farnese Palace. A few yards further down the street, Sir Charles's recollections of the house that Raphael designed for the Pandolfini loom up through the filmy London air – the Travellers' Club. And between them, austerely classical, grim like a prison and black with soot, rises a smaller (but still enormous) version of the Cancelleria. It is Tantamount House.

Barry designed it in 1839. A hundred workmen laboured for a year or two. And the third marquess paid the bills. They were heavy; but the suburbs of Leeds and Sheffield had begun to spread over the land which his ancestors had stolen from the monasteries three hundred years before. 'The Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Spirit, has from the sacred writings and the ancient traditions of the Fathers, taught that there is a Purgatory and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar.' Rich men with uneasy consciences had left their land to the monks that their souls might be helped through Purgatory by a perpetual performance of the acceptable sacrifice of the altar. But Henry VIII had lusted after a young woman and desired a son; and because Pope Clement VII was in the power of Henry's first wife's daughter's cousin, he would not grant him a divorce. The monasteries were in consequence suppressed. An army of beggars, of paupers, of the infirm died miserably of hunger. But the Tantamounts acquired some scores of square miles of ploughland, forest and pasture. A few years later, under Edward VI, they stole the property of two

disestablished grammar schools; children remained uneducated that the Tantamounts might be rich. They farmed their land scientifically with a view to the highest profit. Their contemporaries regarded them as ‘men that live as though there were no God at all, men that would have all in their own hands, men that would leave nothing to others, men that be never satisfied.’ From the pulpit of St Paul’s, Lever accused them of having ‘offended God, and brought a common wealth into a common ruin.’ The Tantamounts were unperturbed. The land was theirs, the money came in regularly.

The corn was sown, grew and was harvested, again and again. The beasts were born, fattened and went to the slaughter. The ploughmen, the shepherds, the cow-herds laboured from before dawn till sunset, year after year, until they died. Their children took their places. Tantamount succeeded Tantamount. Elizabeth made them barons; they became viscounts under Charles II, earls under William and Mary, marquesses under George II. They married heiress after heiress – ten square miles of Nottinghamshire, fifty thousand pounds, two streets in Bloomsbury, half a brewery, a bank, a plantation and six hundred slaves in Jamaica. Meanwhile, obscure men were devising machines which made things more rapidly than they could be made by hand. Villages were transformed into towns, towns into great cities. On what had been the Tantamounts’ pasture and ploughland, houses and factories were built. Under the grass of their meadows half-naked men hewed at the black and shining coal face. The laden trucks were hauled by little boys and women. From Peru the droppings of ten thousand generations of sea-gulls were brought in ships to enrich their fields. The corn grew thicker; the new mouths were fed. And year by year the Tantamounts grew richer and richer and the souls of the Black Prince’s pious contemporaries continued, no doubt, to writhe, unaided as they were by any acceptable sacrifice of the altar, in the unquenchable fires of Purgatory. The money that might, if suitably applied, have shortened their term among the flames served, among other things, to call into existence a model of the Papal Chancellery in Pall Mall.

The interior of Tantamount House is as nobly Roman as its façade. Round a central quadrangle run two tiers of open arcades with an attic, lit by small square windows, above. But instead of being left open to the sky, the quadrangle is covered by a glass roof, which converts it into an immense hall rising the whole height of the building. With its arcades and gallery it makes a very noble room – but too large, too public, too much like a swimming bath or a roller-skating rink to be much lived in. To-night, however, it was justifying its existence. Lady Edward Tantamount was giving one of her musical parties. The floor was crowded with seated guests and in the hollow architectural space above them the music intricately pulsed.

‘What a pantomime!’ said old John Bidlake to his hostess. ‘My dear Hilda, you really must look.’

‘Sh-sh!’ Lady Edward protested behind her feather fan. ‘You mustn’t interrupt the music. Besides I *am* looking.’

Her whisper was colonial and the r’s of ‘interrupt’ were rolled far back in the throat; for Lady Edward came from Montreal and her mother had been a Frenchwoman. In 1897 the British Association met in Canada. Lord Edward Tantamount read a much-admired paper to the Biological Section. ‘One of the coming men,’ the professors had called him. But for those who weren’t professors, a Tantamount and a millionaire might be regarded as already having arrived. Hilda Sutton was most decidedly of that opinion. Lord Edward was the guest, during his stay in Montreal, of Hilda’s father. She took her opportunity. The British Association went home; but Lord Edward remained in Canada.

‘Believe me,’ Hilda had once confided to a friend, ‘I never took so much interest in osmosis before or since.’

The interest in osmosis roused Lord Edward’s attention. He became aware of a fact which he had not previously noticed; that Hilda was exceedingly pretty. Hilda also knew her woman’s business. Her task was not difficult. At forty Lord Edward was in all but intellect a kind of child. In the laboratory, at his desk, he was as old as science itself. But his feelings, his intuitions, his instincts were those of a little boy. Unexercised, the greater part of his spiritual being had never

developed. He was a kind of child, but with his childish habits ingrained by forty years of living. Hilda helped him over his paralysing twelve-year-old shynesses, and whenever terror prevented him from making the necessary advances, came half or even all the way to meet him. His ardours were boyish – at once violent and timid, desperate and dumb. Hilda talked for two and was discreetly bold. Discreetly – for Lord Edward's notions of how young girls should behave were mainly derived from the *Pickwick Papers*. Boldness undisguised would have alarmed him, would have driven him away. Hilda kept up all the appearance of Dickensian young-girlishness, but contrived at the same time to make all the advances, create all the opportunities and lead the conversation into all the properly amorous channels. She had her reward. In the spring of 1898 she was Lady Edward Tantamount.

'But I assure you,' she had once said to John Bidlake, quite angrily – for he had been making fun of poor Edward, 'I'm genuinely fond of him, genuinely.'

'In your own way, no doubt,' mocked Bidlake. 'In your own way. But you must admit it's a good thing it isn't everybody's way. Just look at yourself in that mirror.'

She looked and saw the reflection of her naked body lying, half sunk in deep cushions, on a divan.

'Beast!' she said. 'But it doesn't make any difference to my being fond of him.'

'Oh, not to your particular way of being fond, I'm sure.' He laughed. 'But I repeat that it's perhaps a good thing that –'

She put her hand over his mouth. That was a quarter of a century ago. Hilda had been married five years and was thirty. Lucy was a child of four. John Bidlake was forty-seven, at the height of his powers and reputation as a painter; handsome, huge, exuberant, careless; a great laugher, a great worker, a great eater, drinker and taker of virginities.

'Painting's a branch of sensuality,' he retorted to those who reproved him for his way of life. 'Nobody can paint a nude who hasn't learnt the human body by heart with his hands and his lips and his own body. I take my art seriously. I'm

unremitting in my preliminary studies.' And the skin would tighten in laughing wrinkles round his monocle, his eyes would twinkle like a genial satyr's.

To Hilda, John Bidlake brought the revelation of her own body, her physical potentialities. Lord Edward was only a kind of child, a fossil boy preserved in the frame of a very large middle-aged man. Intellectually, in the laboratory, he understood the phenomena of sex. But in practice and emotionally he was a child, a fossil mid-Victorian child, preserved intact, with all the natural childish timidities and all the taboos acquired from the two beloved and very virtuous maiden aunts, who had taken the place of his dead mother, all the amazing principles and prejudices sucked in with the humours of Mr Pickwick and Micawber. He loved his young wife, but loved her as a fossil child of the 'sixties might love – timidly and very apologetically; apologizing for his ardours, apologizing for his body, apologizing for hers. Not in so many words, of course; for the fossil child was dumb with shyness; but by a silent ignoring, a silent pretending that the bodies weren't really involved in the ardours, which anyhow didn't really exist. His love was one long tacit apology for itself; and being nothing more than an apology was therefore quite inexcusable. Love must justify itself by its results in intimacy of mind and body, in warmth, in tender contact, in pleasure. If it has to be justified from outside, it is thereby proved a thing without justification. John Bidlake made no apologies for the kind of love he had to offer. So far as it went, it entirely justified itself. A healthy sensualist, he made his love straightforwardly, naturally, with the good animal gusto of a child of nature.

'Don't expect me to talk about the stars and madonna lilies and the cosmos,' he said. 'They're not my line. I don't believe in them. I believe in –' And his language became what a mysterious convention has decreed to be unprintable.

It was a love without pretensions, but warm, natural, and, being natural, good so far as it went – a decent, good-humoured, happy sensuality. To Hilda, who had never known anything but a fossil child's reticent apology for love, it was a revelation. Things which had been dead in her came alive. She discovered herself, rapturously. But not too rapturously. She never lost her head. If she had

lost her head, she might have lost Tantamount House and the Tantamount millions and the Tantamount title as well. She had no intention of losing these things. So she kept her head, coolly and deliberately; kept it high and secure above the tumultuous raptures, like a rock above the waves. She enjoyed herself, but never to the detriment of her social position. She could look on at her own enjoyment; her cool head, her will to retain her social position remained apart from and above the turmoil. John Bidlake approved the way she made the best of both worlds.

‘Thank God, Hilda,’ he had often said, ‘you’re a sensible woman.’

Women who believed the world well lost for love were apt to be a terrible nuisance, as he knew only too well by personal experience. He liked women; love was an indispensable enjoyment. But nobody was worth involving oneself in tiresome complications for, nothing was worth messing up one’s life for. With the women who hadn’t been sensible and had taken love too seriously, John Bidlake had been ruthlessly cruel. It was the battle of ‘all for love’ against ‘anything for a quiet life’. John Bidlake always won. Fighting for his quiet life, he drew the line at no sort of frightfulness.

Hilda Tantamount was as much attached to the quiet life as John himself. Their affair had lasted, pleasantly enough, for a space of years and slowly faded out of existence. They had been good lovers, they remained good friends – conspirators, even, people called them, mischievous conspirators leagued together to amuse themselves at the world’s expense. They were laughing now. Or rather old John, who hated music, was laughing alone. Lady Edward was trying to preserve the decorums.

‘You simply must be quiet,’ she whispered.

‘But you’re not realizing how incredibly comic it is,’ Bidlake insisted.

‘Sh-sh.’

‘But I’m *whispering*.’ This continual shushing annoyed him.

‘Like a lion.’

‘I can’t help that,’ he answered crossly. When he took the trouble to whisper, he assumed that his voice was inaudible to all but the person to whom his

remarks were addressed. He did not like to be told that what he chose to assume as true was not true. ‘Lion, indeed!’ he muttered indignantly. But his face suddenly brightened again. ‘Look!’ he said. ‘Here’s another late arrival. What’s the betting she’ll do the same as all the others?’

‘Sh-sh,’ Lady Edward repeated.

But John Bidlake paid no attention to her. He was looking in the direction of the door, where the latest of the late-comers was still standing, torn between the desire to disappear unobtrusively into the silent crowd and the social duty of making her arrival known to her hostess. She looked about her in embarrassment. Lady Edward hailed her over the heads of the intervening crowd with a wave of her long feather and a smile. The late arrival smiled back, blew a kiss, laid a finger to her lips, pointed to an empty chair at the other side of the room, threw out both hands in a little gesture that was meant to express apologies for being late and despairing regret at being unable in the circumstances to come and speak to Lady Edward, then shrugging up her shoulders and shrinking into herself so as to occupy the smallest possible amount of space, tiptoed with extraordinary precautions down the gangway towards the vacant seat.

Bidlake was in ecstasies of merriment. He had echoed the poor lady’s every gesture as she made it. Her blown kiss he had returned with extravagant interest, and when she laid a finger to her lips, he had covered his mouth with a whole hand. He had repeated her gesture of regret, grotesquely magnifying it until it expressed a ludicrous despair. And when she tiptoed away, he began to count on his fingers, to make the gestures that, in Naples, avert the evil eye, and to tap his forehead. He turned to Lady Edward in triumph.

‘I told you so,’ he whispered, and his whole face was wrinkled with suppressed laughter. ‘It’s like being in a deaf and dumb asylum. Or talking to pygmies in Central Africa.’ He opened his mouth and pointed into it with a stretched forefinger, he went through the motions of drinking from a glass. ‘Me hungly,’ he said, ‘me velly velly thirsty.’

Lady Edward flapped her ostrich at him.

Meanwhile the music played on – Bach's Suite in B minor, for flute and strings. Young Tolley conducted with his usual inimitable grace, bending in swan-like undulations from the loins, and tracing luscious arabesques on the air with his waving arms, as though he were dancing to the music. A dozen anonymous fiddlers and 'cellists scraped at his bidding. And the great Pongileoni glueily kissed his flute. He blew across the mouth hole and a cylindrical air column vibrated; Bach's meditations filled the Roman quadrangle. In the opening *largo* John Sebastian had, with the help of Pongileoni's snout and the air column, made a statement: There are grand things in the world, noble things; there are men born kingly; there are real conquerors, intrinsic lords of the earth. But of an earth that is, oh! complex and multitudinous, he had gone on to reflect in the fugal allegro. You seem to have found the truth; clear, definite, unmistakable, it is announced by the violins; you have it, you triumphantly hold it. But it slips out of your grasp to present itself in a new aspect among the 'cellos and yet again in terms of Pongileoni's vibrating air column. The parts live their separate lives; they touch, their paths cross, they combine for a moment to create a seemingly final and perfected harmony, only to break apart again. Each is always alone and separate and individual. 'I am I,' asserts the violin; 'the world revolves round me.' 'Round me,' calls the 'cello. 'Round me,' the flute insists. And all are equally right and equally wrong; and none of them will listen to the others.

In the human fugue there are eighteen hundred million parts. The resultant noise means something perhaps to the statistician, nothing to the artist. It is only by considering one or two parts at a time that the artist can understand anything. Here, for example, is one particular part; and John Sebastian puts the case. The Rondeau begins, exquisitely and simply melodious, almost a folk-song. It is a young girl singing to herself of love, in solitude, tenderly mournful. A young girl singing among the hills, with the clouds drifting overhead. But solitary as one of the floating clouds, a poet had been listening to her song. The thoughts that it provoked in him are the Sarabande that follows the Rondeau. His is a slow and lovely meditation on the beauty (in spite of squalor and stupidity), the profound

goodness (in spite of all the evil), the oneness (in spite of such bewildering diversity) of the world. It is a beauty, a goodness, a unity that no intellectual research can discover, that analysis dispels, but of whose reality the spirit is from time to time suddenly and overwhelmingly convinced. A girl singing to herself under the clouds suffices to create the certitude. Even a fine morning is enough. Is it illusion or the revelation of profoundest truth? Who knows? Pongileoni blew, the fiddlers drew their rosined horse-hair across the stretched intestines of lambs; through the long Sarabande the poet slowly meditated his lovely and consoling certitude.

'This music is beginning to get rather tedious,' John Bidlake whispered to his hostess. 'Is it going to last much longer?'

Old Bidlake had no taste or talent for music, and he had the frankness to say so. He could afford to be frank. When one can paint as well as John Bidlake, why should one pretend to like music, when in fact one doesn't? He looked over the seated audience and smiled.

'They look as though they were in church,' he said.

Lady Edward raised her fan protestingly.

'Who's that little woman in black,' he went on, 'rolling her eyes and swaying her body like St Teresa in an ecstasy?'

'Fanny Logan,' Lady Edward whispered back. 'But do keep quiet.'

'People talk of the tribute vice pays to virtue,' John Bidlake went on, incorrigibly. 'But everything's permitted nowadays – there's no more need of moral hypocrisy. There's only intellectual hypocrisy now. The tribute philistinism pays to art, what? Just look at them all paying it – in pious grimaces and religious silence!'

'You can be thankful they pay *you* in guineas,' said Lady Edward. 'And now I absolutely insist that you should hold your tongue.'

Bidlake made a gesture of mock terror and put his hand over his mouth. Tolley voluptuously waved his arms; Pongileoni blew, the fiddlers scraped. And Bach, the poet, meditated of truth and beauty.

Fanny Logan felt the tears coming into her eyes. She was easily moved, especially by music; and when she felt an emotion, she did not try to repress it, but abandoned herself whole-heartedly to it. How beautiful this music was, how sad, and yet how comforting! She felt it within her, as a current of exquisite feeling, running smoothly but irresistibly through all the labyrinthine intricacies of her being. Even her body shook and swayed in time with the pulse and undulation of the melody. She thought of her husband; the memory of him came to her on the current of the music, of darling, darling Eric, dead now almost two years; dead, and still so young. The tears came faster. She wiped them away. The music was infinitely sad; and yet it consoled. It admitted everything, so to speak – poor Eric's dying before his time, the pain of his illness, his reluctance to go – it admitted everything. It expressed the whole sadness of the world, and from the depths of that sadness it was able to affirm – deliberately, quietly, without protesting too much – that everything was in some way right, acceptable. It included the sadness within some vaster, more comprehensive happiness. The tears kept welling up into Mrs Logan's eyes; but they were somehow happy tears, in spite of her sadness. She would have liked to tell Polly, her daughter, what she was feeling. But Polly was sitting in another row. Mrs Logan could see the back of her head, two rows further forward, and her slim little neck with the pearls that darling Eric had given her on her eighteenth birthday, only a few months before he died. And suddenly, as though she had felt that her mother was looking at her, as though she understood what she was feeling, Polly turned round and gave her a quick smile. Mrs Logan's sad and musical happiness was complete.

Her mother's were not the only eyes that looked in Polly's direction. Advantageously placed behind and to one side of her, Hugo Brockle admiringly studied her profile. How lovely she was! He was wondering whether he would have the courage to tell her that they had played together in Kensington Gardens when they were children. He would come up to her when the music was over and boldly say: 'We were introduced in our perambulators, you know.' Or, if he

wanted to be more unconventionally witty, ‘You’re the person who hit me on the head with a battledore.’

Looking restlessly round the room, John Bidlake had suddenly caught sight of Mary Betterton. Yes, Mary Betterton – that monster! He put his hand under his chair, he touched wood. Whenever John Bidlake saw something unpleasant, he always felt safer if he could touch wood. He didn’t believe in God, of course; he liked to tell disobliging stories about the clergy. But wood, wood – there was something about wood … And to think that he had been in love with her, wildly, twenty, twenty-two, he dared not think how many years ago. How fat, how old and hideous! His hand crept down again to the chair leg. He averted his eyes and tried to think of something that wasn’t Mary Betterton. But the memories of the time when Mary had been young imposed themselves upon him. He still used to ride then. The image of himself on a black horse, of Mary on a bay, rose up before him. They had often gone riding in those days. It was the time he was painting the third and best of his groups of ‘Bathers’. What a picture, by God! Mary was already a little too plump for some tastes, even then. Not for his; he had never objected to plumpness. These women nowadays, wanting to look like drain-pipes … He looked at her again for a moment and shuddered. He hated her for being so repulsive, for having once been so charming. And he was the best part of twenty years her senior.

CHAPTER III

TWO FLIGHTS UP, between the *piano nobile* and the servants' quarters under the roof, Lord Edward Tantamount was busy in his laboratory.

The younger Tantamounts were generally military. But the heir being a cripple, Lord Edward's father had destined him for the political career, which the eldest sons had always traditionally begun in the Commons and continued majestically in the Lords. Hardly had Lord Edward come of age, when he was given a constituency to nurse. He nursed it dutifully. But oh, how he hated public speaking! And when one met a potential voter, what on earth was one to say? And he couldn't even remember the main items in the Conservative party programme, much less feel enthusiastic about them. Decidedly, politics were not his line.

'But what *are* you interested in?' his father had asked. And the trouble was that Lord Edward didn't know. Going to concerts was about the only thing he thoroughly enjoyed. But obviously, one couldn't spend one's life going to concerts. The fourth marquess could not conceal his anger and disappointment. 'The boy's an imbecile,' he said, and Lord Edward himself was inclined to agree. He was good for nothing, a failure; the world had no place for him. There were times when he thought of suicide.

'If only he'd sow a few wild oats!' his father had complained. But the young man was, if possible, even less interested in debauchery than in politics. 'And he's not even a sportsman,' the accusation continued. It was true. The massacre of birds, even in the company of the Prince of Wales, left Lord Edward quite unmoved, except perhaps by a faint disgust. He preferred to sit at home and read, vaguely, desultorily, a little of everything. But even reading seemed to him unsatisfactory. The best that could be said of it was that it kept his mind from brooding and killed time. But what was the good of that? Killing time with a

book was not intrinsically much better than killing pheasants and time with a gun. He might go on reading like this for the rest of his days; but it would never help him to achieve anything.

On the afternoon of April 18th, 1887, he was sitting in the library at Tantamount House, wondering whether life was worth living and whether drowning were preferable, as a mode of dying, to shooting. It was the day that *The Times* had published the forged letter, supposed to be Parnell's, condoning the Phoenix Park murders. The fourth marquess had been in a state of apoplectic agitation ever since breakfast. At the clubs men talked of nothing else. 'I suppose it's very important,' Lord Edward kept saying to himself. But he found it impossible to take much interest either in Parnellism or in crime. After listening for a little to what people were saying at the club, he went home in despair. The library door was open; he entered and dropped into a chair, feeling utterly exhausted as though he had come in from a thirty-mile walk. 'I must be an idiot,' he assured himself, when he thought of other people's political enthusiasms and his own indifference. He was too modest to attribute the idiocy to the other people. 'I'm hopeless, hopeless.' He groaned aloud, and in the learned silence of the vast library the sound was appalling. Death; the end of everything; the river; the revolver … Time passed. Even about death, Lord Edward found, he could not think consecutively and attentively. Even death was a bore. The current *Quarterly* lay on the table beside him. Perhaps it would bore him less than death was doing. He picked it up, opened it casually and found himself reading a paragraph in the middle of an article about someone called Claude Bernard. He had never previously heard of Claude Bernard. A Frenchman, he supposed. And what, he wondered, was the glycogenic function of the liver? Some scientific business, evidently. His eyes skimmed over the page. There were inverted commas; it was a quotation from Claude Bernard's own writings.

'The living being does not form an exception to the great natural harmony which makes things adapt themselves to one another; it breaks no concord; it is neither in contradiction to, nor struggling against, general cosmic forces. Far

from that, it is a member of the universal concert of things, and the life of the animal, for example, is only a fragment of the total life of the universe.'

He read the words, idly first, then more carefully, then several times with a strained attention. 'The life of the animal is only a fragment of the total life of the universe.' Then what about suicide? A fragment of the universe would be destroying itself? No, not destroying; it couldn't destroy itself even if it tried. It would be changing its mode of existence. Changing … Bits of animals and plants became human beings. What was one day a sheep's hind leg and leaves of spinach was the next part of the hand that wrote, the brain that conceived the slow movement of the Jupiter Symphony. And another day had come when thirty-six years of pleasures, pains, hungers, loves, thoughts, music, together with infinite unrealized potentialities of melody and harmony had manured an unknown corner of a Viennese cemetery, to be transformed into grass and dandelions, which in their turn had been transformed into sheep, whose hind legs had in their turn been transformed into other musicians, whose bodies in their turn … It was all obvious, but to Lord Edward an apocalypse. Suddenly and for the first time he realized his solidarity with the world. The realization was extraordinarily exciting; he rose from his chair and began to walk agitatedly up and down the room. His thoughts were confused, but the muddle was bright and violent, not dim, not foggily languid as at ordinary times. 'Perhaps when I was at Vienna last year, I actually consumed a piece of Mozart's substance. It might have been in a Wiener Schnitzel, or a sausage, or even a glass of beer. Communion, physical communion. And that wonderful performance of *The Magic Flute* – another sort of communion, or perhaps the same, really. Transubstantiation, cannibalism, chemistry. It comes down to chemistry in the end, of course. Legs of mutton and spinach … all chemistry. Hydrogen, oxygen … What are the other things? God, how infuriating, how infuriating not to know! All those years at Eton. Latin verses. What the devil was the good? *En! distenta ferunt perpingues ubera vaccae*. Why didn't they teach me anything sensible? "A member of the universal concert of things." It's all like music; harmonies and counterpoint and modulations. But you've got to be trained to

listen. Chinese music … we can't make head or tail of it. The universal concert – that's Chinese music for me, thanks to Eton. Glycogenic function of the liver … it might be in Bantu, so far as I'm concerned. What a humiliation! But I can learn, I will learn, I *will* …'

Lord Edward was filled with an extraordinary exultation; he had never felt so happy in his life before.

That evening he told his father that he was not going to stand for Parliament. Still agitated by the morning's revelations of Parnellism, the old gentleman was furious. Lord Edward was entirely unmoved; his mind was made up. The next day he advertised for a tutor. In the spring of the following year he was in Berlin working under Du Bois Reymond.

Forty years had passed since then. The studies of osmosis, which had indirectly given him a wife, had also given him a reputation. His work on assimilation and growth was celebrated. But what he regarded as the real task of his life – the great theoretical treatise on physical biology – was still unfinished. 'The life of the animal is only a fragment of the total life of the universe.' Claude Bernard's words had been his life-long theme as well as his original inspiration. The book on which he had been working all these years was but an elaboration, a quantitative and mathematical illustration of them.

Upstairs in the laboratory the day's work had just begun. Lord Edward preferred to work at night. He found the daylight hours disagreeably noisy. Breakfasting at half-past one, he would walk for an hour or two in the afternoon and return to read or write till lunchtime at eight. At nine or half-past he would do some practical work with his assistant, and when that was over they would sit down to work on the great book or to discussion of its problems. At one, Lord Edward had his supper, and at about four or five he would go to bed.

Diminished and in fragments the B minor Suite came floating up from the great hall to the ears of the two men in the laboratory. They were too busy to realize that they were hearing it.

'Forceps,' said Lord Edward to his assistant. He had a very deep voice, indistinct and without, so to speak, a clearly defined contour. 'A furry voice,' his

daughter Lucy had called it, when she was a child.

Illidge handed him the fine bright instrument. Lord Edward made a deep noise that signified thanks and turned back with the forceps to the anaesthetized newt that lay stretched out on the diminutive operating table. Illidge watched him critically, and approved. The Old Man was doing the job extraordinarily well. Illidge was always astonished by Lord Edward's skill. You would never have expected a huge, lumbering creature like the Old Man to be so exquisitely neat. His big hands could do the finest work; it was a pleasure to watch them.

'There!' said Lord Edward at last and straightened himself up as far as his rheumatically bent back would allow him. 'I think that's all right, don't you?'

Illidge nodded. 'Perfectly all right,' he said in an accent that had certainly not been formed in any of the ancient and expensive seats of learning. It hinted of Lancashire origins. He was a small man, with a boyish-looking freckled face and red hair.

The newt began to wake up. Illidge put it away in a place of safety. The animal had no tail; it had lost that eight days ago, and to-night the little bud of regenerated tissue which would normally have grown into a new tail had been removed and grafted on to the stump of its amputated right foreleg. Transplanted to its new position, would the bud turn into a foreleg, or continue incongruously to grow as a tail? Their first experiment had been with a tail-bud only just formed; it had duly turned into a leg. In the next, they had given the bud time to grow to a considerable size before they transplanted it; it had proved too far committed to tailhood to be able to adapt itself to the new conditions; they had manufactured a monster with a tail where an arm should have been. To-night they were experimenting on a bud of intermediate age.

Lord Edward took a pipe out of his pocket and began to fill it, looking meditatively meanwhile at the newt. 'Interesting to see what happens this time,' he said in his profound indistinct voice. 'I should think we must be just about on the border line between …' He left the sentence unfinished: it was always difficult for him to find the words to express his meaning. 'The bud will have a difficult choice.'

‘To be or not to be,’ said Illidge facetiously, and started to laugh; but seeing that Lord Edward showed no signs of having been amused, he checked himself. Almost put his foot in it again. He felt annoyed with himself and also, unreasonably, with the Old Man.

Lord Edward filled his pipe. ‘Tail becomes leg,’ he said meditatively. ‘What’s the mechanism? Chemical peculiarities in the neighbouring …? It can’t obviously be the blood. Or do you suppose it has something to do with the electric tension? It does vary, of course, in different parts of the body. Though why we don’t all just vaguely proliferate like cancers … Growing in a definite shape is very unlikely, when you come to think of it. Very mysterious and …’ His voice trailed off into a deep and husky murmur.

Illidge listened disapprovingly. When the Old Man started off like this about the major and fundamental problems of biology, you never knew where he’d be getting to. Why, as likely as not he’d begin talking about God. It really made one blush. He was determined to prevent anything so discreditable happening this time. ‘The next step with these newts,’ he said in his most briskly practical tone, ’is to tinker with the nervous system and see whether that has any influence on the grafts. Suppose, for example, we excised a piece of the spine …’

But Lord Edward was not listening to his assistant. He had taken his pipe out of his mouth, he had lifted his head and at the same time slightly cocked it on one side. He was frowning, as though making an effort to seize and remember something. He raised his hand in a gesture that commanded silence; Illidge interrupted himself in the middle of his sentence and also listened. A pattern of melody faintly traced itself upon the silence.

‘Bach?’ said Lord Edward in a whisper.

Pongileoni’s blowing and the scraping of the anonymous fiddlers had shaken the air in the great hall, had set the glass of the windows looking on to it vibrating; and this in turn had shaken the air in Lord Edward’s apartment on the further side. The shaking air rattled Lord Edward’s *membrana tympani*; the interlocked *malleus, incus* and stirrup bones were set in motion so as to agitate the membrane of the oval window and raise an infinitesimal storm in the fluid of

the labyrinth. The hairy endings of the auditory nerve shuddered like weeds in a rough sea; a vast number of obscure miracles were performed in the brain, and Lord Edward ecstatically whispered ‘Bach!’ He smiled with pleasure, his eyes lit up. The young girl was singing to herself in solitude under the floating clouds. And then the cloud-solitary philosopher began poetically to meditate. ‘We must really go downstairs and listen,’ said Lord Edward. He got up. ‘Come,’ he said. ‘Work can wait. One doesn’t hear this sort of thing every night.’

‘But what about clothes,’ said Illidge doubtfully. ‘I can’t come down like this.’ He looked down at himself. It had been a cheap suit at the best of times. Age had not improved it.

‘Oh, that doesn’t matter.’ A dog with the smell of rabbits in his nostrils could hardly have shown a more indecent eagerness than Lord Edward at the sound of Pongileoni’s flute. He took his assistant’s arm and hurried him out of the door, and along the corridor towards the stairs. ‘It’s just a little party,’ he went on. ‘I seem to remember my wife having said … Quite informal. And besides,’ he added, inventing new excuses to justify the violence of his musical appetite, ‘we can just slip in without … Nobody will notice.’

Illidge had his doubts. ‘I’m afraid it’s not a very small party,’ he began; he had seen the motors arriving.

‘Never mind, never mind,’ interrupted Lord Edward, lusting irrepressibly for Bach.

Illidge abandoned himself. He would look like a horrible fool, he reflected, in his shiny blue serge suit. But perhaps, on second thoughts, it was better to appear in shiny blue – straight from the laboratory, after all, and under the protection of the master of the house (himself in a tweed jacket), than in that old and, as he had perceived during previous excursions into Lady Edward’s luscious world, deplorably shoddy and ill-made evening suit of his. It was better to be totally different from the rich and smart – a visitor from another intellectual planet – than a fourth-rate and snobbish imitator. Dressed in blue, one might be stared at as an oddity; in badly cut black (like a waiter) one was contemptuously ignored, one was despised for trying without success to be what one obviously wasn’t.

Illidge braced himself to play the part of the Martian visitor with firmness, even assertively.

Their entrance was even more embarrassingly conspicuous than Illidge had anticipated. The great staircase at Tantamount House comes down from the first floor in two branches which join, like a pair of equal rivers, to precipitate themselves in a single architectural cataract of Verona marble into the hall. It debouches under the arcades, in the centre of one of the sides of the covered quadrangle, opposite the vestibule and the front door. Coming in from the street, one looks across the hall and sees through the central arch of the opposite arcade the wide stairs and shining balustrades climbing up to a landing on which a Venus by Canova, the pride of the third marquess's collection, stands pedestalled in an alcove, screening with a modest but coquettish gesture of her two hands, or rather failing to screen, her marble charms. It was at the foot of this triumphal slope of marble that Lady Edward had posted the orchestra; her guests were seated in serried rows confronting it. When Illidge and Lord Edward turned the corner in front of Canova's Venus, tiptoeing, as they approached the music and the listening crowd, with steps ever more laboriously conspiratorial, they found themselves suddenly at the focus of a hundred pairs of eyes. A gust of curiosity stirred the assembled guests. The apparition from a world so different from theirs of this huge bent old man, pipe-smoking and tweed-jacketed, seemed strangely portentous. He had a certain air of the skeleton in the cupboard – broken loose; or of one of those monsters which haunt the palaces of only the best and most aristocratic families. The Beastie of Glamis, the Minotaur itself could hardly have aroused more interest than did Lord Edward. Lorgnons were raised, there was a general craning to left and right, as people tried to look round the well-fed obstacles in front of them. Becoming suddenly aware of so many inquisitive glances, Lord Edward took fright. A consciousness of social sin possessed him; he took his pipe out of his mouth and put it away, still smoking, into the pocket of his jacket. He halted irresolutely. Flight or advance? He turned this way and that, pivoting his whole bent body from the hips with a curious swinging motion, like the slow ponderous balancing of a camel's neck. For a

moment he wanted to retreat. But love of Bach was stronger than his terrors. He was the bear whom the smell of molasses constrains in spite of all his fears to visit the hunters' camp; the lover who is ready to face an armed and outraged husband and the divorce court for the sake of an hour in his mistress's arms. He went forward, tiptoeing down the stairs more conspiratorially than ever – Guy Fawkes discovered, but yet irrationally hoping that he might escape notice by acting as though the Gunpowder Plot were still unrolling itself according to plan. Illidge followed him. His face had gone very red with the embarrassment of the first moment; but in spite of this embarrassment, or rather because of it, he came downstairs after Lord Edward with a kind of swagger, one hand in his pocket, a smile on his lips. He turned his eyes coolly this way and that over the crowd. The expression on his face was one of contemptuous amusement. Too busy being the Martian to look where he was going, Illidge suddenly missed his footing on this unfamiliarly regal staircase with its inordinate treads and dwarfishly low risers. His foot slipped, he staggered wildly on the brink of a fall, waving his arms, to come to rest, however, still miraculously on his feet, some two or three steps lower down. He resumed his descent with such dignity as he could muster up. He felt exceedingly angry, he hated Lady Edward's guests one and all, without exception.

CHAPTER IV

PONGILEONI SURPASSED HIMSELF in the final Badinerie. Euclidean axioms made holiday with the formulae of elementary statics. Arithmetic held a wild saturnalian kermess; algebra cut capers. The music came to an end in an orgy of mathematical merry-making. There was applause. Tolley bowed, with all his usual grace; Pongileoni bowed, even the anonymous fiddlers bowed. The audience pushed back its chairs and got up. Torrents of pent-up chatter broke loose.

‘Wasn’t the Old Man too *mar*-vellously funny?’ Polly Logan had found a friend.

‘And the little carroty man with him.’

‘Like Mutt and Jeff.’

‘I thought I should die of laughing,’ said Norah.

‘Such an old magician!’ Polly spoke in a thrilling whisper, leaning forward and opening her eyes very wide, as though to express in dramatic pantomime as well as words the mysteriousness of the magical old man. ‘A wizard.’

‘But what *does* he do up there?’

‘Cuts up toads and salamanders and all that,’ Polly answered.

‘Eye of newt and toe of frog,

Wool of bat and tongue of dog …’

She recited with gusto, intoxicated by the words. ‘And he takes guinea-pigs and makes them breed with serpents. Can you imagine it – a cross between a cobra and a guinea-pig?’

‘Ugh!’ the other shuddered. ‘But why did he ever marry her, if that’s the only sort of thing he’s interested in? That’s what I always wonder.’

‘Why did *she* marry him?’ Polly’s voice dropped again to a stage whisper. She liked to make everything sound exciting – as exciting as she still felt

everything to be. She was only twenty. ‘There were very good reasons for *that*.’

‘Yes, I suppose so.’

‘And she was a Canadian, remember, which made the reasons even more cogent.’

‘One wonders how Lucy ever …’

‘Sh-sh.’

The other looked round. ‘Wasn’t Pongileoni splendid,’ she exclaimed very loudly, and with altogether too much presence of mind.

‘Too wonderful!’ Polly bawled back, as though she were on the stage at Drury Lane. ‘Ah, there’s Lady Edward.’ They were both enormously surprised and delighted. ‘We were just saying how *mar*vellous Pongileoni’s playing was.’

‘Were you?’ said Lady Edward smiling and looking from one to the other. She had a deep rich voice and spoke slowly, as though everything she said were very serious and important. ‘That was *very* nice of you.’ The ‘r’ was most emphatically rolled. ‘He’s an Italian,’ she added, and her face was now quite grave and unsmiling. ‘Which makes it even more wonderful.’ And she passed on, leaving the two young girls haggardly looking into one another’s blushing face.

Lady Edward was a small, thin woman, with an elegance of figure that, in a low-cut dress, was visibly beginning to run to bones and angles, as were also the aquiline good looks of a rather long and narrow face. A French mother and perhaps, in these later days, the hairdresser’s art accounted for the jetty blackness of her hair. Her skin was whitely opaque. Under arched black eyebrows her eyes had that boldness and insistence of regard which is the characteristic of all very dark eyes set in a pale face. To this generic boldness Lady Edward added a certain candid impertinence of fixed gaze and bright ingenuous expression that was entirely her own. They were the eyes of a child, ‘*mais d’un enfant terrible*,’ as John Bidlake had warned a French colleague whom he had taken to see her. The French colleague had occasion to make the discovery on his own account. At the luncheon table he found himself sitting next to the critic who had written of his pictures that they were the work either of

an imbecile or of a practical joker. Wide-eyed and innocent, Lady Edward had started a discussion on art … John Bidlake was furious. He drew her aside when the meal was over and gave her a piece of his mind.

‘Damn it all,’ he said, ‘the man’s my friend. I bring him to see you. And this is how you treat him. It’s a bit thick.’

Lady Edward’s bright black eyes had never been more candid, nor her voice more disarmingly French-Canadian (for she could modify her accent at will, making it more or less colonial according as it suited her to be the simple-hearted child of the North American steppe or the English aristocrat). ‘But what’s too thick?’ she asked. ‘What *have* I done this time?’

‘None of your comedy with me,’ said Bidlake.

‘But it isn’t a comedy. I’ve no idea what’s thick. No idea.’

Bidlake explained about the critic. ‘You know as well as I do,’ he said. ‘And now I come to think of it, we were talking about his article only last week.’

Lady Edward frowned, as though trying to recapture a vanished memory. ‘So we were!’ she cried at last, and looked at him with an expression of horror and repentance. ‘Too awful! But you know what a hopeless memory I have.’

‘You have the best memory of any person I know,’ said Bidlake.

‘But I *always* forget,’ she protested.

‘Only what you know you ought to remember. It’s a damned sight too regular to be accidental. You deliberately remember to forget.’

‘What nonsense!’ cried Lady Edward.

‘If you had a bad memory,’ Bidlake went on, ‘you might occasionally forget that husbands oughtn’t to be asked to meet the notorious lovers of their wives; you might sometimes forget that anarchists and leader writers in the *Morning Post* aren’t likely to be the best friends, and that pious Catholics don’t much enjoy listening to blasphemy from professional atheists. You might occasionally forget, if your memory were bad. But, I assure you, it needs a first-class memory to forget every time. A first-class memory and a first-class love of mischief.’

For the first time since the conversation had begun Lady Edward relaxed her ingenuous seriousness. She laughed. ‘You’re too absurd, my dear John.’

Talking, Bidlake had recovered his good humour; he echoed her laughter. ‘Mind you,’ he said, ‘I don’t in the least object to your playing practical jokes on other people. I enjoy it. But I do draw the line at having them played on me.’

‘I’ll do my best to remember next time,’ she said meekly and looked at him with an ingenuousness that was so impertinent, that he had to laugh.

That had been many years before; she had kept her word and played no more tricks on him. But with other people, she was just as embarrassingly innocent and forgetful as ever. Throughout the world in which she moved her exploits were proverbial. People laughed. But there were too many victims; she was feared, she was not liked. But her parties were always thronged; her cook, her wine merchant and caterer were of the first class. Much was forgiven her for her husband’s wealth. Besides, the company at Tantamount House was always variously and often eccentrically distinguished. People accepted her invitations and took their revenge by speaking ill of her behind her back. They called her, among other things, a snob and a lion hunter. But a snob, they had to admit to her defenders, who laughed at the pomps and grandeurs for which she lived. A hunter who collected lions in order that she might bait them. Where a middle-class Englishwoman would have been serious and abject, Lady Edward was mockingly irreverent. She hailed from the New World; for her the traditional hierarchies were a joke – but a picturesque joke and one worth living for.

‘She might have been the heroine of that anecdote,’ old Bidlake had once remarked of her, ‘that anecdote about the American and the two English peers. You remember? He got into conversation with two Englishmen in the train, liked them very much, wanted to renew the acquaintance later and asked their names. “My name,” says one of them, “is the Duke of Hampshire and this is my friend the Master of Ballantrae.” “Glad to meet you,” says the American. “Allow me to present my son Jesus Christ.” That’s Hilda all over. And yet her whole life consists precisely in asking and being asked out by the people whose titles seem to her so comic. Queer.’ He shook his head. ‘Very queer indeed.’

Turning away from the two discomfited young girls, Lady Edward was almost run down by a very tall and burly man, who was hurrying with dangerous

speed across the crowded room.

‘Sorry,’ he said without looking down to see who it was he had almost knocked over. His eyes were following the movements of somebody at the other end of the room; he was only aware of a smallish obstacle, presumably human, since all the obstacles in the neighbourhood were human. He checked himself in mid career and took a step to the side, so as to get round the obstacle. But the obstacle was not of the kind one circumvents as easily as that.

Lady Edward reached out and caught him by the sleeve. ‘Webley!’ Pretending not to have felt the hand on his sleeve, not to have heard the calling of his name, Everard Webley still moved on; he had no wish and no leisure to talk to Lady Edward. But Lady Edward would not be shaken off, she suffered herself to be dragged along, still tugging, at his side.

‘Webley!’ she repeated. ‘Stop! Whoa!’ And her imitation of a country carter was so loud and so realistically rustic that Webley was compelled to listen, for fear of attracting the laughing attention of his fellow guests.

He looked down at her. ‘Oh, it’s you,’ he said gruffly. ‘Sorry I hadn’t noticed.’ The annoyance, expressed in his frown and his ill-mannered words, was partly genuine, partly assumed. Many people, he had found, are frightened of anger; he cultivated his natural ferocity. It kept people at a distance, saved him from being bothered.

‘Goodness!’ exclaimed Lady Edward with an expression of terror that was frankly a caricature.

‘Did you want anything?’ he demanded in the tone in which he might have addressed an importunate beggar in the street.

‘You *do* look cross.’

‘If that was all you wanted to say to me, I think I might as well …’

Lady Edward, meanwhile, had been examining him critically out of her candidly impertinent eyes.

‘You know,’ she said, interrupting him in the middle of his sentence, as though unable to delay for a moment longer the announcement of her great and sudden discovery, ‘you ought to play the part of Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*.

Yes, really. You have the ideal face for a pirate king. Hasn't he, Mr Babbage?' She caught at Illidge as he was passing, disconsolately alien, through the crowd of strangers.

'Good evening,' he said. The cordiality of Lady Edward's smile did not entirely make up for the insult of his unremembered name.

'Webley, this is Mr Babbage, who helps my husband with his work.' Webley nodded a distant acknowledgment of Illidge's existence. 'But don't you think he's like a pirate king, Mr Babbage?' Lady Edward went on. 'Look at him now.'

Illidge uncomfortably laughed. 'Not that I've seen many pirate kings,' he said.

'But of course,' Lady Edward cried out, 'I'd forgotten; he *is* a pirate king. In real life. Aren't you, Webley?'

Everard Webley laughed. 'Oh, certainly, certainly.'

'Because, you see,' Lady Edward explained, turning confidentially to Illidge, 'this is Mr *Everard* Webley. The head of the British Freemen. You know those men in the green uniform? Like the male chorus at a musical comedy.'

Illidge smiled maliciously and nodded. So this, he was thinking, was Everard Webley. The founder and the head of the Brotherhood of British Freemen – the B.B.F.'s, the 'B – y, b – ing, f – s,' as their enemies called them. Inevitably; for, as the extremely well-informed correspondent of the *Figaro* once remarked in an article devoted to the Freemen, 'les initiales B.B.F. ont, pour le public anglais, une signification plutôt péjorative.' Webley had not thought of that, when he gave his Freemen their name. It pleased Illidge to reflect that he must be made to think of it very often now.

'If you've finished being funny,' said Everard, 'I'll take my leave.'

Tinpot Mussolini, Illidge was thinking. Looks his part, too. (He had a special personal hatred of anyone who was tall and handsome, or who looked in any way distinguished. He himself was small and had the appearance of a very intelligent street Arab, grown up.) Great lout!

'But you're not offended by anything I said, are you?' Lady Edward asked with a great show of anxiety and contrition.

Illidge remembered a cartoon in the *Daily Herald*. ‘The British Freemen,’ Webley had had the insolence to say, ‘exist to keep the world safe for intelligence.’ The cartoon showed Webley and half a dozen of his uniformed bandits kicking and bludgeoning a workman to death. Behind them a top-hatted company-director looked on approvingly. Across his monstrous belly sprawled the word: INTELLIGENCE.

‘Not offended, Webley?’ Lady Edward repeated.

‘Not in the least. I’m only rather busy. You see,’ he explained in his silkiest voice, ‘I have things to do. I work, if you know what that means.’

Illidge wished that the hit had been scored by someone else. The dirty ruffian! He himself was a communist.

Webley left them. Lady Edward watched him ploughing his way through the crowd. ‘Like a steam engine,’ she said. ‘What energy! But so touchy. These politicians – worse than actresses. Such vanity! And dear Webley hasn’t got much sense of humour. He wants to be treated as though he were his own colossal statue, erected by an admiring and grateful nation.’ (The r’s roared like lions.) ‘Posthumously, if you see what I mean. As a great historical character. I can never remember, when I see him, that he’s really Alexander the Great. I always make the mistake of thinking it’s just Webley.’

Illidge laughed. He found himself positively liking Lady Edward. She had the right feelings about things. She seemed even to be on the right side, politically.

‘Not but what his Freemen aren’t a very good thing,’ Lady Edward went on. Illidge’s sympathy began to wane as suddenly as it had shot up. ‘Don’t you think so, Mr Babbage?’

He made a little grimace. ‘Well …’ he began.

‘By the way,’ said Lady Edward, cutting short what would have been an admirably sarcastic comment on Webley’s Freemen, ‘you must really be careful coming down those stairs. They’re *terribly* slippery.’

Illidge blushed. ‘Not at all,’ he muttered and blushed still more deeply – a beetroot to the roots of his carrot-coloured hair – as he realized the imbecility of what he had said. His sympathy declined still further.

‘Well, rather slippery all the same,’ Lady Edward politely insisted, with an emphatic rolling in the throat. ‘What were you working at with Edward this evening?’ she went on. ‘It always interests me *so* much.’

Illidge smiled. ‘Well, if you really want to know,’ he said, ‘we were working at the regeneration of lost parts in newts.’ Among the newts he felt more at ease; a little of his liking for Lady Edward returned.

‘Newts? Those things that swim?’ Illidge nodded. ‘But how do they lose their parts?’

‘Well, in the laboratory,’ he explained, ‘they lose them because we cut them off.’

‘And they grow again?’

‘They grow again.’

‘Dear me,’ said Lady Edward. ‘I never knew that. How fascinating these things are. Do tell me some more.’

She wasn’t so bad after all. He began to explain. Warming to his subject, he warmed also to Lady Edward. He had just reached the crucial, the important and significant point in the proceedings – the conversion of the transplanted tail-bud into a leg – when Lady Edward, whose eyes had been wandering, laid her hand on his arm.

‘Come with me,’ she said, ‘and I’ll introduce you to General Knoyle. Such an amusing old man – if only unintentionally sometimes.’

Illidge’s exposition froze suddenly in his throat. He realized that she had not taken the slightest interest in what he had been saying, had not even troubled to pay the least attention. Detesting her, he followed in resentful silence.

General Knoyle was talking with another military-looking gentleman. His voice was martial and asthmatic. ‘“My dear fellow,” I said to him’ (they heard him as they approached), ‘“my dear fellow, don’t enter the horse now. It would be a crime,” I said. “It would be sheer madness. Scratch him,” I said, “scratch him.” And he scratched him.’

Lady Edward made her presence known. The two military gentlemen were overwhelmingly polite; they had enjoyed their evening *immensely*.

‘I chose the Bach specially for you, General Knoyle,’ said Lady Edward with something of the charming confusion of a young girl confessing an amorous foible.

‘Well – er – really, that was very kind of you.’ General Knoyle’s confusion was genuine; he did not know what to do with the musical present she had made him.

‘I hesitated,’ Lady Edward went on in the same significantly intimate tone, ‘between Handel’s *Water Music* and the B minor Suite with Pongileoni. Then I remembered you and decided on the Bach.’ Her eyes took in the signs of embarrassment on the General’s ruddy face.

‘That was very kind of you,’ he protested. ‘Not that I can pretend to understand much about music. But I know what I like, I know what I like.’ The phrase seemed to give him confidence. He cleared his throat and started again. ‘What I always say is …’

‘And now,’ Lady Edward concluded triumphantly, ‘I want to introduce Mr Babbage, who helps Edward with his work and who is a real expert on newts. Mr Babbage, this is General Knoyle and this is Colonel Pilchard.’ She gave a last smile and was gone.

‘Well, I’m damned!’ exclaimed the General, and the Colonel said she was a holy terror.

‘One of the holiest,’ Illidge feelingly agreed.

The two military gentlemen looked at him for a moment and decided that from one so obviously beyond the pale the comment was an impertinence. Good Catholics may have their little jokes about the saints and the habits of the clergy; but they are outraged by the same little jokes on the lips of infidels. The General made no verbal comment and the Colonel contented himself with looking his disapproval. But the way in which they turned to one another and continued their interrupted discussion of race-horses, as though they were alone, was so intentionally offensive, that Illidge wanted to kick them.

‘Lucy, my child!’

‘Uncle John!’ Lucy Tantamount turned round and smiled at her adopted uncle. She was of middle height and slim, like her mother, with short dark hair, oiled to complete blackness and brushed back from her forehead. Naturally pale, she wore no rouge. Only her thin lips were painted and there was a little blue round the eyes. A black dress emphasized the whiteness of her arms and shoulders. It was more than two years now since Henry Tantamount had died – for Lucy had married her second cousin. But she still mourned in her dress, at any rate by artificial light. Black suited her so well. ‘How are you?’ she added, thinking as she spoke the words that he was beginning to look very old.

‘Perishing,’ said John Bidlake. He took her arm familiarly, grasping it just above the elbow with a big, blue-veined hand. ‘Give me an excuse for going to have supper. I’m ravenously hungry.’

‘But I’m not.’

‘No matter,’ said old Bidlake. ‘My need is greater than thine, as Sir Philip Sidney so justly remarked.’

‘But I don’t want to eat.’ She objected to being domineered, to following instead of leading. But Uncle John was too much for her.

‘I’ll do all the eating,’ he declared. ‘Enough for two.’ And jovially laughing, he continued to lead her along towards the dining-room.

Lucy abandoned the struggle. They edged their way through the crowd. Greenish-yellow and freckled, the orchid in John Bidlake’s button-hole resembled the face of a yawning serpent. His monocle glittered in his eye.

‘Who’s that old man with Lucy?’ Polly Logan enquired as they passed.

‘That’s old Bidlake.’

‘Bidlake? The man who … who painted the pictures?’ Polly spoke hesitatingly, in the tone of one who is conscious of a hole in her education and is afraid of making a ridiculous mistake. ‘Do you mean *that* Bidlake?’ Her companion nodded. She felt enormously relieved. ‘Well I never,’ she went on, raising her eyebrows and opening her eyes very wide. ‘I always thought he was an Old Master. But he must be about a hundred by this time, isn’t he?’

‘I should think he must be.’ Norah was also under twenty.

‘I must say,’ Polly handsomely admitted, ‘he doesn’t look it. He’s still quite a beau, or a buck, or a Champagne Charlie, or whatever people were in his young days.’

‘He’s had about fifteen wives,’ said Norah.

It was at this moment that Hugo Brockle found the courage to present himself. ‘You don’t remember me. We were introduced in our perambulators.’ How idiotic it sounded! He felt himself blushing all over.

The third and finest of John Bidlake’s ‘Bathers’ hung over the mantelpiece in the dining-room of Tantamount House. It was a gay and joyous picture, very light in tone, the colouring very pure and brilliant. Eight plump and pearly bathers grouped themselves in the water and on the banks of a stream so as to form with their moving bodies and limbs a kind of garland (completed above by the foliage of a tree) round the central point of the canvas. Through this wreath of nacreous flesh (and even their faces were just smiling flesh, not a trace of spirit to distract you from the contemplation of the lovely forms and their relations) the eye travelled on towards a pale bright landscape of softly swelling downland and clouds.

Plate in hand and munching caviar sandwiches, old Bidlake stood with his companion, contemplating his own work. An emotion of mingled elation and sadness possessed him.

‘It’s good,’ he said, ‘it’s enormously good. Look at the way it’s composed. Perfect balance, and yet there’s no suggestion of repetition or artificial arrangement.’ The other thoughts and feelings which the picture had evoked in his mind he left unexpressed. They were too many and too confused to be easily put into words. Too melancholy above all; he did not care to dwell on them. He stretched out a finger and touched the sideboard; it was mahogany, genuine wood. ‘Look at the figure on the right with the arms up.’ He went on with his technical exposition in order that he might keep down, might drive away the uninvited thoughts. ‘See how it compensates for the big stooping one there on the left. Like a long lever lifting a heavy weight.’ But the figure with the arms up was Jenny Smith, the loveliest model he had ever had. Incarnation of beauty,

incarnation of stupidity and vulgarity. A goddess as long as she was naked, kept her mouth shut, or had it kept shut for her with kisses; but oh, when she opened it, when she put on her clothes, her frightful hats! He remembered the time he had taken her to Paris with him. He had to send her back after a week. ‘You ought to be muzzled, Jenny,’ he told her, and Jenny cried. ‘It was a mistake going to Paris,’ he went on. ‘Too much sun in Paris, too many artificial lights. Next time, we’ll go to Spitzbergen. In winter. The nights are six months long up there.’ That had made her cry still more loudly. The girl had treasures of sensuality as well as of beauty. Afterwards she took to drink and decayed, came round begging and drank up the charity. And finally what was left of her died. But the real Jenny remained here in the picture with her arms up and the pectoral muscles lifting her little breasts. What remained of John Bidlake, the John Bidlake of five and twenty years ago, was there in the picture too. Another John Bidlake still existed to contemplate his own ghost. Soon even he would have disappeared. And in any case, was he the real Bidlake, any more than the sodden and bloated woman who died had been the real Jenny? Real Jenny lived among the pearly bathers. And real Bidlake, their creator, existed by implication in his creatures.

‘It’s good,’ he said again, when he had finished his exposition, and his tone was mournful; his face as he looked at his picture was sad. ‘But after all,’ he added, after a little pause and with a sudden explosion of voluntary laughter, ‘after all, everything I do is good; damn good even.’ It was a bidding of defiance to the stupid critics who had seen a falling off in his later paintings; it was a challenge to his own past, to time and old age, to the real John Bidlake who had painted real Jenny and kissed her into silence.

‘Of course it’s good,’ said Lucy, and wondered why the old man’s painting had fallen off so much of late. This last exhibition – it was deplorable. He himself, after all, had remained so young, comparatively speaking. Though of course, she reflected, as she looked at him, he had certainly aged a good deal during the last few months.

‘Of course,’ he repeated. ‘That’s the right spirit.’

‘Though I must confess,’ Lucy added, to change the subject, ‘I always find your bathers rather an insult.’

‘An insult?’

‘Speaking as a woman, I mean. Do you really find us so profoundly silly as you paint us?’

‘Yes, do you?’ another voice enquired. ‘Do you *really*?’ It was an intense, emphatic voice, and the words came out in gushes, explosively, as though they were being forced through a narrow aperture under emotional pressure.

Lucy and John Bidlake turned and saw Mrs Betterton, massive in dove grey, with arms, old Bidlake reflected, like thighs, and hair that was, in relation to the fleshy cheeks and chins, ridiculously short, curly and auburn. Her nose, which had tilted up so charmingly in the days when he had ridden the black horse and she the bay, was now preposterous, an absurd irrelevance in the middle-aged face. Real Bidlake had ridden with her, just before he had painted these bathers. She had talked about art with a naive, schoolgirlish earnestness which he had found laughable and charming. He had cured her, he remembered, of a passion for Burne-Jones, but never, alas, of her prejudice in favour of virtue. It was with all the old earnestness and a certain significant sentimentality as of one who remembers old times and would like to exchange reminiscences as well as general ideas, that she now addressed him. Bidlake had to pretend that he was pleased to see her after all these years. It was extraordinary, he reflected as he took her hand, how completely he had succeeded in avoiding her; he could not remember having spoken to her more than three or four times in all the quarter of a century which had turned Mary Betterton into a *memento mori*.

‘Dear Mrs Betterton!’ he exclaimed. ‘This is delightful.’ But he disguised his repugnance very badly. And when she addressed him by his Christian name – ‘Now, John,’ she said, ‘you must give us an answer to our question,’ and she laid her hand on Lucy’s arm, so as to associate her in the demand – old Bidlake was positively indignant. Familiarity from a *memento mori* – it was intolerable. He’d give her a lesson. The question, it happened, was well chosen for his purposes; it fairly invited the retort discourteous. Mary Betterton had intellectual pretensions,

was tremendously keen on the soul. Remembering this, old Bidlake asserted that he had never known a woman who had anything worth having beyond a pair of legs and a figure. Some of them, he added, significantly, lacked even those indispensables. True, many of them had interesting faces; but that meant nothing. Bloodhounds, he pointed out, have the air of learned judges, oxen when they chew the cud seem to meditate the problems of metaphysics, the mantis looks as though it were praying; but these appearances are entirely deceptive. It was the same with women. He had preferred to paint his bathers unmasked as well as naked, to give them faces that were merely extensions of their charming bodies and not deceptive symbols of a non-existent spirituality. It seemed to him more realistic, truer to the fundamental facts. He felt his good humour returning as he talked, and, as it came back, his dislike for Mary Betterton seemed to wane. When one is in high spirits, *memento mori*'s cease to remind.

'John, you're incorrigible,' said Mrs Betterton, indulgently. She turned to Lucy, smiling. 'But he doesn't mean a word he says.'

'I should have thought, on the contrary, that he meant it all,' objected Lucy. 'I've noticed that men who like women very much are the ones who express the greatest contempt for them.'

Old Bidlake laughed.

'Because they're the ones who know women most intimately.'

'Or perhaps because they resent our power over them.'

'But I assure you,' Mrs Betteron insisted, 'he doesn't mean it. I knew him before you were born, my dear.'

The gaiety went out of John Bidlake's face. The *memento mori* grinned for him again behind Mary Betterton's flabby mask.

'Perhaps he was different then,' said Lucy. 'He's been infected by the cynicism of the younger generation, I suppose. We're dangerous company, Uncle John. You ought to be careful.'

She had started one of Mrs Betterton's favourite hares. That lady dashed off in serious pursuit. 'It's the upbringing,' she explained. 'Children are brought up so stupidly nowadays. No wonder they're cynical.' She proceeded eloquently.

Children were given too much, too early. They were satiated with amusements, inured to all the pleasures from the cradle. ‘I never saw the inside of a theatre till I was eighteen,’ she declared, with pride.

‘My poor dear lady!’

‘I began going when I was six,’ said Lucy.

‘And dances,’ Mrs Betterton continued. ‘The hunt ball – what an excitement! Because it only happened once a year.’ She quoted Shakespeare.

‘Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare,

Since seldom coming, in the long year set,

Like stones of worth they thinly placed are …’

‘They’re a row of pearls nowadays.’

‘And false ones at that,’ said Lucy.

Mrs Betterton was triumphant. ‘False ones – you see? But for us they were genuine, because they were rare. We didn’t “blunt the fine point of seldom pleasure” by daily wear. Nowadays young people are bored and world-weary before they come of age. A pleasure too often repeated produces numbness; it’s no more felt as a pleasure.’

‘And what’s your remedy?’ enquired John Bidlake. ‘If a member of the congregation may be permitted to ask questions,’ he added ironically.

‘Naughty!’ cried Mrs Betterton with an appalling playfulness. Then, becoming serious, ‘The remedy,’ she went on, ’is fewer diversions.’

‘But I don’t want them fewer,’ objected John Bidlake.

‘In that case,’ said Lucy, ‘they must be stronger – progressively.’

‘Progressively?’ Mrs Betterton repeated. ‘But where would that sort of progress end?’

‘In bull fighting?’ suggested John Bidlake. ‘Or gladiatorial shows? Or public executions, perhaps? Or the amusements of the Marquis de Sade? Where?’

Lucy shrugged her shoulders. ‘Who knows?’

Hugo Brockle and Polly were already quarrelling.

‘I think it’s detestable,’ Polly was saying – and her face was flushed with anger, ‘to make war on the poor.’

‘But the Freemen don’t make war on the poor.’

‘They do.’

‘They don’t,’ said Hugo. ‘Read Webley’s speeches.’

‘I only read about his actions.’

‘But they’re in accordance with his words.’

‘They are not.’

‘They are. All he’s opposed to is dictatorship of a class.’

‘Of the poor class.’

‘Of any class,’ Hugo earnestly insisted. ‘That’s his whole point. The classes must be equally strong. A strong working class clamouring for high wages keeps the professional middle class active.’

‘Like fleas on a dog,’ suggested Polly and laughed with a return towards good humour. When a ludicrous thought occurred to her she could never prevent herself from giving utterance to it, even when she was supposed to be serious, or, as in this case, in a rage.

‘They’ve jolly well got to be inventive and progressive,’ Hugo continued, struggling with the difficulties of lucid exposition. ‘Otherwise they wouldn’t be able to pay the workers what they demand and make a profit for themselves. And at the same time a strong and intelligent middle class is good for the workers, because they get good leadership and good organization. Which means better wages and peace and happiness.’

‘Amen,’ said Polly.

‘So the dictatorship of one class is nonsense,’ continued Hugo. ‘Webley wants to keep all the classes and strengthen them. He wants them to live in a condition of tension, so that the state is balanced by each pulling as hard as it can its own way. Scientists say that the different organs of the body are like that. They live in a state –’ he hesitated, he blushed – ‘of hostile symbiosis.’

‘Golly!’

‘I’m sorry,’ Hugo apologized.

‘All the same,’ said Polly, ‘he doesn’t want to allow men to strike.’

‘Because strikes are stupid.’

‘He’s against democracy.’

‘Because it allows such awful people to get power. He wants the best to rule.’

‘Himself, for example,’ said Polly sarcastically.

‘Well, why not? If you knew what a wonderful chap he was.’ Hugo became enthusiastic. He had been acting as one of Webley’s aides-de-camp for the last three months. ‘I never met anyone like him,’ he said.

Polly listened to his outpourings with a smile. She felt old and superior. At school she herself had felt and talked like that about the domestic economy mistress. All the same, she liked him for being so loyal.

CHAPTER V

A JUNGLE OF innumerable trees and dangling creepers – it was in this form that parties always presented themselves to Walter Bidlake's imagination. A jungle of noise; and he was lost in the jungle, he was trying to clear a path for himself through its tangled luxuriance. The people were the roots of the trees and their voices were the stems and waving branches and festooned lianas – yes, and the parrots and the chattering monkeys as well.

The trees reached up to the ceiling and from the ceiling they were bent back again, like mangroves, towards the floor. But in this particular room, Walter reflected, in this queer combination of a Roman courtyard and the Palm House at Kew, the growths of sound shooting up, uninterrupted, through the height of three floors, would have gathered enough momentum to break clean through the flimsy glass roof that separated them from the outer night. He pictured them going up and up, like the magic beanstalk of the Giant Killer, into the sky. Up and up, loaded with orchids and bright cockatoos, up through the perennial mist of London, into the clear moonlight beyond the smoke. He fancied them waving up there in the moonlight, the last thin aerial twigs of noise. That loud laugh, for example, that exploding guffaw from the fat man on the left – it would mount and mount, diminishing as it rose, till it no more than delicately tinkled up there under the moon. And all these voices (what were they saying? '… made an excellent speech …'; '… no idea how comfortable those rubber reducing belts are till you've tried them …'; '… such a bore …' ; … eloped with the chauffeur …'), all these voices – how exquisite and tiny they'd be up there! But meanwhile down here, in the jungle … Oh, loud, stupid, vulgar, fatuous.

Looking over the heads of the people who surrounded him, he saw Frank Illidge, alone, leaning against a pillar. His attitude, his smile were Byronic, at once world-weary and contemptuous; he glanced about him with a languid

amusement, as though he were watching the drolleries of a group of monkeys. Unfortunately, Walter reflected, as he made his way through the crowd towards him, poor Illidge hadn't the right physique for being Byronically superior. Satirical romantics should be long, slow-moving, graceful and handsome. Illidge was small, alert and jerky. And what a comic face! Like a street Arab's, with its upturned nose and wide slit of a mouth; a very intelligent, sharp-witted street Arab's face, but not exactly one to be languidly contemptuous with. Besides, who can be superior with freckles? Illidge's complexion was sandy with them. Protectively coloured, the sandy-brown eyes, the sandy-orange eyebrows and lashes disappeared, at a little distance, into the skin, as a lion dissolves into the desert. From across a room his face seemed featureless and unregarding, like the face of a statue carved out of a block of sandstone. Poor Midge! The Byronic part made him look rather ridiculous.

'Hullo,' said Walter, as he got within speaking distance. The two young men shook hands. 'How's science?' What a silly question! thought Walter as he pronounced the words.

Illidge shrugged his shoulders. 'Less fashionable than the arts, to judge by this party.' He looked round him. 'I've seen half the writing and painting section of *Who's Who* this evening. The place fairly stinks of art.'

'Isn't that rather a comfort for science?' said Walter. 'The arts don't enjoy being fashionable.'

'Oh, don't they! Why are you here, then?'

'Why indeed?' Walter parried the question with a laugh. He looked round, wondering where Lucy could have gone. He had not caught sight of her since the music stopped.

'You've come to do your tricks and have your head patted,' said Illidge, trying to get a little of his own back; the memory of that slip on the stairs, of Lady Edward's lack of interest in newts, of the military gentlemen's insolence, still rankled. 'Just look at that girl there with the frizzy dark hair, in cloth of silver. The one like a little white negress. What about her, for example? It'd be pleasant to have one's head patted by that sort of thing – eh?'

‘Well, would it?’

Illidge laughed. ‘You take the high philosophical line, do you? But, my dear chap, admit it’s all humbug. I take it myself, so I ought to know. To tell you the honest truth, I envy you art-mongers your success. It makes me really furious when I see some silly, half-witted little writer …’

‘Like me, for example.’

‘No, you’re a cut above most of them,’ conceded Illidge. ‘But when I see some wretched little scribbler with a tenth of my intelligence, making money and being cooed over, while I’m disregarded, I do get furious sometimes.’

‘You ought to regard it as a compliment. If they coo over us, it’s because they can understand, more or less, what we’re after. They can’t understand you; you’re above them. Their neglect is a compliment to your mind.’

‘Perhaps; but it’s a damned insult to my body.’ Illidge was painfully conscious of his appearance. He knew that he was ugly and looked undistinguished. And knowing, he liked to remind himself of the unpleasant fact, like a man with an aching tooth, who is for ever fingering the source of his pain, just to make sure it is still painful. ‘If I looked like that enormous lout, Webley, they wouldn’t neglect me, even if my mind were like Newton’s. The fact is,’ he said, giving the aching tooth a good tug this time, ‘I look like an anarchist. You’re lucky, you know. You look like a gentleman, or at least like an artist. You’ve no idea what a nuisance it is to look like an intellectual of the lower classes.’ The tooth was responding excruciatingly; he pulled at it the harder. ‘It’s not merely that the women neglect you – *these* women, at any rate. That’s bad enough. But the police refuse to neglect you; they take a horrid inquisitive interest. Would you believe it, I’ve been twice arrested, simply because I look like the sort of man who makes infernal machines.’

‘It’s a good story,’ said Walter sceptically.

‘But true, I swear. Once it was in this country. Near Chesterfield. They were having a coal strike. I happened to be looking on at a fight between strikers and blacklegs. The police didn’t like my face and grabbed me. It took me hours to get out of their clutches. The other time was in Italy. Somebody had just been

trying to blow up Mussolini, I believe. Anyhow, a gang of black-shirted bravoes made me get out of the train at Genoa and searched me from top to toe. Intolerable! Simply because of my subversive face.'

'Which corresponds, after all, to your ideas.'

'Yes, but a face isn't evidence, a face isn't a crime. Well, yes,' he added parenthetically, 'perhaps some faces *are* crimes. Do you know General Knoyle?' Walter nodded. 'His is a capital offence. Nothing short of hanging would do for a man like that. God! how I'd like to kill them all!' Had he not slipped on the stairs and been snubbed by a stupid man-butcher? 'How I loathe the rich! Loathe them! Don't you think they're horrible?'

'More horrible than the poor?' The recollection of Wetherington's sick-room made him almost at once feel rather ashamed of the question.

'Yes, yes. There's something peculiarly base and ignoble and diseased about the rich. Money breeds a kind of gangrened insensitiveness. It's inevitable. Jesus understood. That bit about the camel and the needle's eye is a mere statement of fact. And remember that other bit about loving your neighbours. You'll be thinking I'm a Christian at this rate,' he added with parenthetic apology. 'But honour where honour is due. The man had sense; he saw what was what. Neighbourliness is the touchstone that shows up the rich. The rich haven't got any neighbours.'

'But, damn it, they're not anchorites.'

'But they have no neighbours in the sense that the poor have neighbours. When my mother had to go out, Mrs Cradock from next door on the right kept an eye on us children. And my mother did the same for Mrs Cradock when it was her turn to go out. And when somebody had broken a leg, or lost his job, people helped with money and food. And how well I remember, as a little boy, being sent running round the village after the nurse, because young Mrs Foster from next door on the left had suddenly been taken with birth pains before she expected! When you live on less than four pounds a week, you've damned well got to behave like a Christian and love your neighbour. To begin with, you can't get away from him; he's practically in your back-yard. There can be no refined

and philosophical ignoring of his existence. You must either hate or love; and on the whole you'd better make a shift to love, because you may need his help in emergencies and he may need yours – so urgently, very often, that there can be no question of refusing to give it. And since you *must* give, since, if you're a human being, you can't help giving, it's better to make an effort to like the person you've anyhow got to give to.'

Walter nodded. 'Obviously.'

'But you rich,' the other went on, 'you have no real neighbours. You never perform a neighbourly action or expect your neighbours to do you a kindness in return. It's unnecessary. You can pay people to look after you. You can hire servants to simulate kindness for three pounds a month and board. Mrs Cradock from next door doesn't have to keep an eye on your babies when you go out. You have nurses and governesses doing it for money. No, you're generally not even aware of your neighbours. You live at a distance from them. Each of you is boxed up in his own secret house. There may be tragedies going on behind the shutters; but the people next door don't know anything about it.'

'Thank God!' ejaculated Walter.

'Thank him by all means. Privacy's a great luxury. Very pleasant, I agree. But you pay for luxuries. People aren't moved by misfortunes they don't know about. Ignorance is insensitive bliss. In a poor street misfortune can't be hidden. Life's too public. People have their neighbourly feeling kept in constant training. But the rich never have a chance of being neighbourly to their equals. The best they can do is to feel mawkish about the sufferings of their inferiors, which they can never begin to understand, and to be patronizingly kind. Horrible! And that's when they're doing their best. When they're at their worst, they're like this.' He indicated the crowded room. 'They're Lady Edward – the lowest hell! They're that daughter of hers …' He made a grimace, he shrugged his shoulders.

Walter listened with a strained and agonized attention.

'Damned, destroyed, irrevocably corrupted,' Illidge went on like a denouncing prophet. He had only spoken to Lucy Tantamount, casually, for a moment. She had seemed hardly to notice that he was there.

It was true, Walter was thinking. She was all that people enviously or disapprovingly called her, and yet the most exquisite and marvellous of beings. Knowing all, he could listen to anything that might be said about her. And the more atrocious the words the more desperately he loved her. *Credo quia absurdum. Amo quia turpe, quia indignum* …

'What a putrefaction!' Illidge continued grandiloquently. 'The consummate flower of this charming civilization of ours – that's what she is. A refined and perfumed imitation of a savage or an animal. The logical conclusion, so far as most people are concerned, of having money and leisure.'

Walter listened, his eyes shut, thinking of Lucy. 'A perfumed imitation of a savage or an animal.' The words were true and an excruciation; but he loved her all the more because of the torment and because of the odious truth.

'Well,' said Illidge in a changed voice, 'I must go and see if the Old Man wants to go on working tonight. We don't generally knock off before half-past one or two. It's rather pleasant living upside down like this. Sleeping till lunch-time, starting work after tea. Very pleasant, really.' He held out his hand. 'So long.'

'We must dine together one evening,' said Walter without much conviction.

Illidge nodded. 'Let's fix it up one of these days,' he said and was gone.

Walter edged his way through the crowd, searching.

Everard Webley had got Lord Edward into a corner and was trying to persuade him to support the British Freemen.

'But I'm not interested in politics,' the Old Man huskily protested. 'I'm not interested in politics …' Obstinately, mulishly, he repeated the phrase, whatever Webley might say.

Webley was eloquent. Men of good will, men with a stake in the country ought to combine to resist the forces of destruction. It was not only property that was menaced, not only the material interests of a class; it was the English tradition, it was personal initiative, it was intelligence, it was all natural distinction of any kind. The Freemen were banded to resist the dictatorship of the stupid; they were armed to protect individuality from the mass man, the mob;

they were fighting for the recognition of natural superiority in every sphere. The enemies were many and busy.

But forewarned was forearmed; when you saw the bandits approaching, you formed up in battle order and drew your swords. (Webley had a weakness for swords; he wore one when the Freemen paraded, his speeches were full of them, his house bristled with panoplies.) Organization, discipline, force were necessary. The battle could no longer be fought constitutionally. Parliamentary methods were quite adequate when the two parties agreed about fundamentals and disagreed only about trifling details. But where fundamental principles were at stake, you couldn't allow politics to go on being treated as a Parliamentary game. You had to resort to direct action or the threat of it.

'I was five years in Parliament,' said Webley. 'Long enough to convince myself that there's nothing to be done in these days by Parliamentarism. You might as well try to talk a fire out. England can only be saved by direct action. When it's saved we can begin to think about Parliament again. (Something very unlike the present ridiculous collection of mob-elected rich men it'll have to be.) Meanwhile, there's nothing for it but to prepare for fighting. And preparing for fighting, we may conquer peacefully. It's the only hope. Believe me, Lord Edward, it's the only hope.'

Harassed, like a bear in a pit set upon by dogs, Lord Edward turned uneasily this way and that, pivoting his bent body from the loins. 'But I'm not interested in poi …' He was too agitated to be able to finish the word.

'But even if you're not interested in politics,' Webley persuasively continued, 'you must be interested in your fortune, your position, the future of your family. Remember, all those things will go down in the general destruction.'

'Yes, but … No …' Lord Edward was growing desperate. 'I… I'm not interested in money.'

Once, years before, the head of the firm of solicitors to whom he left the entire management of his affairs, had called, in spite of Lord Edward's express injunction that he was never to be troubled with matters of business, to consult his client about a matter of investments. There were some eighty thousand

pounds to be disposed of. Lord Edward was dragged from the fundamental equations of the statics of living systems. When he learned the frivolous cause of the interruption, the ordinarily mild Old Man became unrecognizably angry. Mr Figgis, whose voice was loud and whose manner confident, had been used, in previous interviews, to having things all his own way. Lord Edward's fury astonished and appalled him. It was as though, in his rage, the Old Man had suddenly thrown back atavistically to the feudal past, had remembered that he was a Tantamount, talking to a hired servant. He had given orders; they had been disobeyed and his privacy unjustifiably disturbed. It was insufferable. If this sort of thing should ever happen again, he would transfer his affairs to another solicitor. And with that he wished Mr Figgis a very good afternoon.

'I'm not interested in money,' he now repeated.

Illidge, who had approached and was hovering in the neighbourhood, waiting for an opportunity to address the Old Man, overheard the remark and exploded with inward laughter. 'These rich!' he thought. 'These bloody rich!' They were all the same.

'But if not for your own sake,' Webley insisted, attacking from another quarter, 'for the sake of civilization, of progress.'

Lord Edward started at the word. It touched a trigger, it released a flood of energy. 'Progress!' he echoed, and the tone of misery and embarrassment was exchanged for one of confidence. 'Progress! You politicians are always talking about it. As though it were going to last. Indefinitely. More motors, more babies, more food, more advertising, more money, more everything, for ever. You ought to take a few lessons in my subject. Physical biology. Progress, indeed! What do you propose to do about phosphorus, for example?' His question was a personal accusation.

'But all this is entirely beside the point,' said Webley impatiently.

'On the contrary,' retorted Lord Edward, 'it's the only point.' His voice had become loud and severe. He spoke with a much more than ordinary degree of coherence. Phosphorus had made a new man of him; he felt very strongly about phosphorus and, feeling strongly, he was strong. The worried bear had become

the worrier. ‘With your intensive agriculture,’ he went on, ‘you’re simply draining the soil of phosphorus. More than half of one per cent a year. Going clean out of circulation. And then the way you throw away hundreds of thousands of tons of phosphorus pentoxide in your sewage! Pouring it into the sea. And you call that progress. Your modern sewage systems!’ His tone was witheringly scornful. ‘You ought to be putting it back where it came from. On the land.’ Lord Edward shook an admonitory finger and frowned. ‘On the land, I tell you.’

‘But all this has nothing to do with me,’ protested Webley.

‘Then it ought to,’ Lord Edward answered sternly. ‘That’s the trouble with you politicians. You don’t even think of the important things. Talking about progress and votes and Bolshevism and every year allowing a million tons of phosphorus pentoxide to run away into the sea. It’s idiotic, it’s criminal, it’s … it’s fiddling while Rome is burning.’ He saw Webley opening his mouth to speak and made haste to anticipate what he imagined was going to be his objection. ‘No doubt,’ he said, ‘you think you can make good the loss with phosphate rocks. But what’ll you do when the deposits are exhausted?’ He poked Everard in the shirt front. ‘What then? Only two hundred years and they’ll be finished. You think we’re being progressive because we’re living on our capital. Phosphates, coal, petroleum, nitre – squander them all. That’s your policy. And meanwhile you go round trying to make our flesh creep with talk about revolutions.’

‘But damn it all,’ said Webley, half angry, half amused, ‘your phosphorus can wait. This other danger’s imminent. Do you *want* a political and social revolution?’

Will it reduce the population and check production?’ asked Lord Edward.

‘Of course.’

‘Then certainly I want a revolution.’ The Old Man thought in terms of geology and was not afraid of logical conclusions. ‘Certainly.’ Illidge could hardly contain his laughter.

‘Well, if that’s your view …’ began Webley; but Lord Edward interrupted him.

‘The only result of your progress,’ he said, ‘will be that in a few generations there’ll be a real revolution – a natural, cosmic revolution. You’re upsetting the equilibrium. And in the end, nature will restore it. And the process will be very uncomfortable for you. Your decline will be as quick as your rise. Quicker, because you’ll be bankrupt, you’ll have squandered your capital. It takes a rich man a little time to realize all his resources. But when they’ve all been realized, it takes him almost no time to starve.’

Webley shrugged his shoulders. ‘Dotty old lunatic!’ he said to himself, and aloud, ‘Parallel straight lines never meet, Lord Edward. So I’ll bid you good-night.’ He took his leave.

A minute later the Old Man and his assistant were making their way up the triumphal staircase to their world apart.

‘What a relief!’ said Lord Edward, as he opened the door of his laboratory. Voluptuously, he sniffed the faint smell of the absolute alcohol in which the specimens were pickled. ‘These parties! One’s thankful to get back to science. Still, the music was really …’ His admiration was inarticulate.

Illidge shrugged his shoulders. ‘Parties, music, science – alternative entertainments for the leisured. You pays your money and you takes your choice. The essential is to have the money to pay.’ He laughed disagreeably.

Illidge resented the virtues of the rich much more than their vices. Gluttony, sloth, sensuality and all the less comely products of leisure and an independent income could be forgiven, precisely because they were discreditable. But disinterestedness, spirituality, incorruptibility, refinement of feeling and exquisiteness of taste – these were commonly regarded as qualities to be admired; that was why he so specially disliked them. For these virtues, according to Illidge, were as fatally the product of wealth as were chronic guzzling and breakfast at eleven.

‘These bourgeois,’ he complained, ‘they go about handing one another bouquets for being so disinterested – that is to say, for having enough to live on

without being compelled to work or be preoccupied about money. Then there's another bouquet for being able to afford to refuse a tip. And another for having enough money to buy the apparatus of cultured refinement. And yet another for having the time to spare for art and reading and elaborate long-drawn love-making. Why can't they be frank and say outright what they're all the time implying – that the root of all their virtue is a five per cent gilt-edged security?'

The amused affection which he felt for Lord Edward was tempered by a chronic annoyance at the thought that all the Old Man's intellectual and moral virtues, all his endearing eccentricities and absurdities were only made possible by the really scandalous state of his bank balance. And this latent disapproval became acute whenever he heard Lord Edward being praised, admired or even laughed at by others. Laughter, liking and admiration were permitted to *him*, because he understood and could forgive. Other people did not even realize that there was anything to forgive. Illidge was always quick to inform them.

'If the Old Man wasn't the descendant of monastery-robbers,' he would say to the praisers or admirers, 'he'd be in the workhouse or the loony asylum.'

And yet he was genuinely fond of the Old Man, he genuinely admired his talents and his character. The world, however, might be excused for not realizing the fact. 'Unpleasant' was the ordinary comment on Lord Edward's assistant.

But being unpleasant to and about the rich, besides a pleasure, was also, in Illidge's eyes, a sacred duty. He owed it to his class, to society at large, to the future, to the cause of justice. Even the Old Man himself was not spared. He had only to breathe a word in favour of the soul (for Lord Edward had what his assistant could only regard as a shameful and adulterous passion for idealistic metaphysics); Illidge would at once leap out at him with a sneer about capitalist philosophy and bourgeois religion. An expression of distaste for hard-headed business men, of indifference to material interests, of sympathy for the poor, would bring an immediate reference, more or less veiled, but always sarcastic, to the Tantamount millions. There were days (and owing to the slip on the stairs and that snub from the General, this day was one of them) when even a reference to pure science elicited its ironic comment. Illidge was an enthusiastic biologist;

but as a class-conscious citizen he had to admit that pure science, like good taste and boredom, perversity and platonic love, is a product of wealth and leisure. He was not afraid of being logical and deriding even his own idol.

‘Money to pay,’ he repeated. ‘That’s the essential.’

The Old Man looked rather guiltily at his assistant. These implied reproofs made him feel uncomfortable. He tried to change the subject. ‘What about our tadpoles?’ he asked. ‘The asymmetrical ones.’ They had a brood of tadpoles hatched from eggs that had been kept abnormally warm on one side and abnormally cold on the other. He moved towards the glass tank in which they were kept. Illidge followed.

‘Asymmetrical tadpoles!’ he repeated. ‘Asymmetrical tadpoles! What a refinement! Almost as good as playing Bach on the flute or having a palate for wine.’ He thought of his brother Tom, who had weak lungs and worked a broaching machine in a motor factory at Manchester. He remembered washing days and the pink crinkled skin of his mother’s water-sodden hands. ‘Asymmetrical tadpoles!’ he said once more and laughed.

‘Strange,’ said Mrs Betterton, ‘strange that a great artist should be such a cynic.’ In Burlap’s company she preferred to believe that John Bidlake had meant what he said. Burlap on cynicism was uplifting and Mrs Betterton liked to be uplifted. Uplifting too on greatness, not to mention art. ‘For you must admit,’ she added, ‘he *is* a great artist.’

Burlap nodded slowly. He did not look directly at Mrs Betterton, but kept his eyes averted and downcast as though he were addressing some little personage invisible to everyone but himself, standing to one side of her – his private daemon, perhaps; an emanation from himself, a little *doppelgänger*. He was a man of middle height with a stoop and a rather slouching gait. His hair was dark, thick and curly, with a natural tonsure as big as a medal showing pink on the crown of his head. His grey eyes were very deeply set, his nose and chin pronounced but well shaped, his mouth full-lipped and rather wide. A mixture, according to old Bidlake, who was a caricaturist in words as well as with the

pencil, of a movie villain and St Anthony of Padua by a painter of the baroque, of a card-sharping Lothario and a rapturous devotee.

‘Yes, a great artist,’ he agreed, ‘but not one of the greatest.’ He spoke slowly, ruminatively, as though he were talking to himself. All his conversation was a dialogue with himself or that little *doppelgänger* which stood invisibly to one side of the people he was supposed to be talking to; Burlap was unceasingly and exclusively self-conscious. ‘Not one of the greatest,’ he repeated slowly. As it happened, he had just been writing an article about the subject-matter of art for next week’s number of the *Literary World*. ‘Precisely because of that cynicism.’ Should he quote himself? he wondered.

‘How true that is!’ Mrs Betterton’s applause exploded perhaps a little prematurely; her enthusiasm was always on the boil. She clapped her hands together. ‘*How true!*’ She looked at Burlap’s averted face and thought it so spiritual, so beautiful in its way.

‘How can a cynic be a great artist?’ Burlap went on, having decided that he’d spout his own article at her and take the risk of her recognizing it in print next Thursday. And even if she did recognize it, that wouldn’t efface the personal impression he’d made by spouting it. ‘Though why you want to make an impression,’ a mocking devil had put in, ‘unless it’s because she’s rich and useful, goodness knows!’ The devil was pitch-forked back to where he came from. ‘One has responsibilities,’ an angel hastily explained. ‘The lamp mustn’t be hidden under a bushel. One must let it shine, especially on people of good will.’ Mrs Betterton was on the side of the angels; her loyalty should be confirmed. ‘A great artist,’ he went on aloud, ’is a man who synthesizes all experience. The cynic sets out by denying half the facts – the fact of the soul, the fact of ideals, the fact of God. And yet we’re aware of spiritual facts just as directly and indubitably as we’re aware of physical facts.’

‘Of course, of course!’ exclaimed Mrs Betterton.

It’s absurd to deny either class of facts.’ Absurd to deny me,’ said the demon, poking out his head into Burlap’s consciousness.

‘Absurd!’

‘The cynic confines himself to only half the world of possible experience. Less than half. For there are more spiritual than bodily experiences.’

‘Infinitely more!’

‘He may handle his limited subject-matter very well. Bidlake, I grant you, does. Extraordinarily well. He has all the sheer ability of the most consummate artists. Or had, at any rate.’

‘Had,’ Mrs Betterton sighed. ‘When I first knew him.’ The implication was that it was her influence that had made him paint so well.

‘But he’s always applied his powers to something small. What he synthesizes in his art was limited, comparatively unimportant.’

‘That’s what I always told him,’ said Mrs Betterton, reinterpreting those youthful arguments about Pre-Raphaelitism in a new and, for her own reputation, favourable light. ‘Consider Burne-Jones, I used to say.’ The memory of John Bidlake’s huge and Rabelaisian laughter reverberated in her ears. ‘Not that Burne-Jones was a particularly good painter,’ she hastened to add. ale painted,’ John Bidlake had said – and how shocked she had been, how deeply offended! – ‘as though he had never seen a pair of buttocks in the whole of his life.’) ‘But his subjects were noble. If you had *his* dreams, I used to tell John Bidlake, if you had *his* ideals, you’d be a *really* great artist.’

Burlap nodded, smiling his agreement. Yes, she’s on the side of the angels, he was thinking; she needs encouraging. One has a responsibility. The demon winked. There was something in his smile, Mrs Betterton reflected, that reminded one of a Leonardo or a Sodoma – something mysterious, subtle, inward.

‘Though, mind you,’ he said, regurgitating his article slowly, phrase by phrase, ‘the subject doesn’t make the work of art. Whittier and Longfellow were fairly stuffed with Great Thoughts. But what they wrote was very small poetry.’

‘How true!’

‘The only generalization one can risk is that the greatest works of art have had great subjects; and that works with small subjects, however accomplished, are never so good as …’

‘There’s Walter,’ said Mrs Betterton, interrupting him. ‘Wandering like an unlaid ghost. Walter!’

At the sound of his name, Walter turned. The Betterton – good Lord! And Burlap! He assumed a smile. But Mrs B. and his colleague on the *Literary World* were among the last people he wanted at this moment to see.

‘We were just discussing greatness in art,’ Mrs Betterton explained. ‘Mr Burlap was saying such *profound* things.’

She began to reproduce the profundities for Walter’s benefit.

He meanwhile was wondering why Burlap’s manner towards him had been so cold, so distant, shut, even hostile. That was the trouble with Burlap. You never knew where you stood with him. Either he loved you, or he hated. Life with him was a series of scenes – scenes of hostility or, even more trying in Walter’s estimation, scenes of affection. One way or the other, the motion was always flowing. There were hardly any intervals of comfortably slack water. The tide was always running. Why was it running now towards hostility?

Mrs Betterton went on with her exposition of the profundities. To Walter they sounded curiously like certain paragraphs in that article of Burlap’s, the proof of which he had only that morning been correcting for the printers. Reproduced – explosion after enthusiastic explosion – from Burlap’s spoken reproduction, the article did sound rather ridiculous. A light dawned. Could *that* be the reason? He looked at Burlap. His face was stony.

‘I’m afraid I must go,’ said Burlap abruptly, when Mrs Betterton paused.

‘But no,’ she protested. ‘But why?’

He made an effort and smiled his Sodoma smile. ‘The world is too much with us,’ he quoted mysteriously. He liked saying mysterious things, dropping them surprisingly into the middle of the conversation.

‘But you’re not enough with us,’ flattered Mrs Betterton.

‘It’s the crowd,’ he explained. ‘After a time, I get into a panic. I feel they’re crushing my soul to death. I should begin to scream if I stayed.’ He took his leave.

‘Such a wonderful man!’ Mrs Betterton exclaimed before he was well out of earshot. ‘It must be wonderful for you to work with him.’

‘He’s a very good editor,’ said Walter.

‘But I was thinking of his *personality*. How shall I say? The spiritual *quality* of the man.’

Walter nodded and said, ‘Yes,’ rather vaguely. The spiritual quality of Burlap was just the thing he wasn’t very enthusiastic about.

‘In an age like ours,’ Mrs Betterton continued, ‘he’s an oasis in the desert of stupid frivolity and cynicism.’

‘Some of his ideas are first rate,’ Walter cautiously agreed.

He wondered how soon he could decently make his escape.

‘There’s Walter,’ said Lady Edward.

‘Walter who?’ asked Bidlake. Borne by the social currents, they had drifted together again.

‘Your Walter.’

‘Oh, mine.’ He was not much interested, but he followed the direction of her glance. ‘What a weed!’ he said. He disliked his children for growing up; growing, they pushed him backwards, year after year, backwards towards the gulf and the darkness. There was Walter; it was only yesterday he was born. And yet the fellow must be five-and-twenty, if he was a day.

‘Poor Walter; he doesn’t look at all well.’

‘Looks as though he had worms,’ said Bidlake ferociously.

‘How’s that deplorable affair of his going?’ she asked.

Bidlake shrugged his shoulders. ‘As usual, I suppose.’

‘I never met the woman.’

‘I did. She’s awful.’

‘What, vulgar?’

‘No, no. I wish she were,’ protested Bidlake. ‘She’s refined, terribly refined. And she speaks like this.’ He spoke into a drawling falsetto that was meant to be an imitation of Marjorie’s voice. ‘Like a sweet little innocent girlie. And so serious, such a highbrow.’ He interrupted the imitation with his own deep laugh.

‘Do you know what she said to me once? I may mention that she always talks to me about Art. Art with a capital A. She said’: (his voice went up again to the babyish falsetto) “I think there’s a place for Fra Angelico *and* Rubens.”’ He laughed again, homerically. ‘What an imbecile! And she has a nose that’s at least three inches too long.’

Marjorie had opened the box in which she kept her private papers. All Walter’s letters. She untied the ribbon and looked them over one by one. ‘Dear Mrs Carling, I enclose under separate cover that volume of Keats’s Letters I mentioned today. Please do not trouble to return it. I have another copy, which I shall re-read for the pleasure of accompanying you, even at a distance, through the same spiritual adventure.’

That was the first of them. She read it through and recaptured in memory something of the pleased surprise which that passage about the spiritual adventure had originally evoked in her. In conversation he had always seemed to shrink from the direct and personal approach, he was painfully shy. She hadn’t expected him to write like that. Later, when he had written to her often, she became accustomed to his peculiarities. She took it for granted that he should be bolder with the pen than face to face. All his love – all of it, at any rate, that was articulate and all of it that, in the days of his courtship, was in the least ardent – was in his letters. The arrangement suited Marjorie perfectly. She would have liked to go on indefinitely making cultured and verbally burning love by post. She liked the idea of love; what she did not like was lovers, except at a distance and in imagination. A correspondence course of passion was, for her, the perfect and ideal relationship with a man. Better still were personal relationships with women; for women had all the good qualities of men at a distance, with the added advantage of being actually there. They could be in the room with you and yet demand no more than a man at the other end of a system of post-offices. With his face-to-face shyness and his postal freedom and ardour, Walter had seemed in Marjorie’s eyes to combine the best points of both sexes. And then he was so deeply, so flatteringly interested in everything she did and thought and felt. Poor Marjorie was not much used to having people interested in her.

‘Sphinx,’ she read in the third of his letters. (He had called her that because of her enigmatic silences. Carling, for the same reason, had called her Turnip or Dumb-Bell.) ‘Sphinx, why do you hide yourself inside such a shell of silence? One would think you were ashamed of your goodness and sweetness and intelligence. But they pop their heads out all the same and in spite of you.’

The tears came into her eyes. He had been so kind to her, so tender and gentle. And now …

‘Love,’ she read dimly, through the tears, in the next letter, ‘love can transform physical into spiritual desire; it has the magic power to turn the body into pure soul …’

Yes, he had had those desires too. Even he. All men had, she supposed. Rather dreadful. She shuddered, remembering Carling, remembering even Walter with something of the same horror. Yes, even Walter, though he *had* been so gentle and considerate. Walter had understood what she felt. That made it all the more extraordinary that he should be behaving as he was behaving now. It was as though he had suddenly become somebody else, become a kind of wild animal, with the animal’s cruelty as well as the animal’s lusts.

‘How can he be so cruel?’ she wondered. ‘How *can* he, deliberately? Walter?’ Her Walter, the real Walter, was so gentle and understanding and considerate, so wonderfully unselfish and good. It was for that goodness and gentleness that she had loved him, in spite of his being a man and having ‘those’ desires; her devotion was to that tender, unselfish, considerate Walter, whom she had got to know and appreciate after they had begun to live together. She had loved even the weak and unadmirable manifestations of his considerateness; had loved him even when he let himself be overcharged by cabmen and porters, when he gave handfuls of silver to tramps with obviously untrue stories about jobs at the other end of the country and no money to pay the fare. He was too sensitively quick to see the other person’s point of view. In his anxiety to be just to others he was often prepared to be unjust to himself. He was always ready to sacrifice his own rights rather than run any risk of infringing the rights of others. It was a considerateness, Marjorie realized, that had become a weakness, that

was on the point of turning into a vice; a considerateness, moreover, that was due to his timidity, his squeamish and fastidious shrinking from every conflict, even every disagreeable contact. All the same, she loved him for it, loved him even when it led him to treat her with something less than justice. For having come to regard her as being on the hither side of the boundary between himself and the rest of the world, he had sometimes in his excessive considerateness for the rights of others, sacrificed not only his own rights, but also hers. How often, for example, she had told him that he was being underpaid for his work on the *Literary World*! She thought of the latest of their conversations on what was to him the most odious of topics.

‘Burlap’s sweating you, Walter,’ she had said.

‘The paper’s very hard up.’ He always had excuses for the shortcomings of other people towards himself.

‘But why should you let yourself be swindled?’

‘I’m not being swindled.’ There was a note of exasperation in his voice, the exasperation of a man who knows he is in the wrong. ‘And even if I were, I prefer being swindled to haggling for my pound of flesh. After all, it’s my business.’

‘And mine!’ She held up the account book on which she had been busy when the conversation began. ‘If you knew the price of vegetables!’

He had flushed up and left the room without answering. The conversation, the case were typical of many others. Walter had never been deliberately unkind to her, only by mistake, out of excessive consideration for other people and while he was being unkind to himself. She had never resented these injustices. They proved how closely he associated her with himself. But now, now there was nothing accidental about his unkindness. The gentle considerate Walter had disappeared and somebody else – somebody ruthless and full of hate – was deliberately making her suffer.

Lady Edward laughed. ‘One wonders what he saw in her, if she’s so deplorable as you make out.’

‘What does one ever see in anyone?’ John Bidlake spoke in a melancholy tone. Quite suddenly he had begun to feel rather ill. An oppression in the stomach, a feeling of sickness, a tendency to hiccough. It often happened now. Just after eating. Bicarbonate didn’t seem to do much good. ‘In these matters,’ he added, ‘we’re all equally insane.’

‘Thanks!’ said Lady Edward, laughing.

Making an essay to be gallant, ‘Present company excepted,’ he said with a smile and a little bow. He stifled another hiccough. How miserable he was feeling! ‘Do you mind if I sit down?’ he asked. ‘All this standing about …’ He dropped heavily into a chair.

Lady Edward looked at him with a certain solicitude, but said nothing. She knew how much he hated all references to age, or illness, or physical weakness.

‘It must have been that caviar,’ he was thinking. ‘That beastly caviar.’ He violently hated caviar. Every sturgeon in the Black Sea was his personal enemy.

‘Poor Walter!’ said Lady Edward, taking up the conversation where it had been dropped. ‘And he has such a talent.’

John Bidlake snorted contemptuously.

Lady Edward perceived that she had said the wrong thing – by mistake, genuinely by mistake, this time. She changed the subject.

‘And Elinor?’ she asked. ‘When’s your Elinor coming home? Elinor and Quarles?’

‘Leaving Bombay tomorrow,’ John Bidlake answered telegraphically. He was too busy thinking of the caviar and his visceral sensations to be more responsive.

CHAPTER VI

‘DE INDIANS DRANK deir liberalism at your fountains,’ said Mr Sita Ram, quoting from one of his own speeches in the Legislative Assembly. He pointed an accusing finger at Philip Quarles. The drops of sweat pursued one another down his brown and pouchy cheeks; he seemed to be weeping for Mother India. One drop had been hanging, an iridescent jewel in the lamplight, at the end of his nose. It flashed and trembled while he spoke, as if responsive to patriotic sentiments. There came a moment when the sentiments were too much for it. At the word ‘fountain’, it gave a last violent shudder and fell among the broken morsels of fish on Mr Sita Ram’s plate.

‘Burke and Bacon,’ Mr Sita Ram went on sonorously, ‘Milton and Macaulay …’

‘Oh, look!’ Elinor Quarles’s voice was shrill with alarm. She got up so suddenly that her chair fell over backwards. Mr Sita Ram turned towards her.

‘What’s de matter?’ he asked in a tone of annoyance. It is vexatious to be interrupted in the middle of a peroration.

Elinor pointed. A very large grey toad was laboriously hopping across the veranda. In the silence its movements were audible – a soft thudding, as though a damp sponge were being repeatedly dropped.

‘De toad can do no harm,’ said Mr Sita Ram, who was accustomed to the tropical fauna.

Elinor looked beseechingly at her husband. The glance that he returned was one of disapproval.

‘Really, my darling,’ he protested. He himself had a strong dislike for squashy animals. But he knew how to conceal his disgust, stoically. It was the same with the food. There had been (the right, the fully expressive word now

occurred to him) a certain toad-like quality about the fish. But he had managed, none the less, to eat it. Elinor had left hers, after the first mouthful, untouched.

‘Perhaps you wouldn’t mind driving it away,’ she whispered. Her face expressed her inward agony. ‘You know how much I detest them.’

Her husband laughed and, apologizing to Mr Sita Ram, got up, very tall and slim, and limped across the veranda. With the toe of his clumsy surgical boot he manoeuvred the animal to the edge of the platform. It flopped down heavily into the garden below. Looking out, he caught a glimpse of the sea shining between the palm stems. The moon was up and the tufted foliage stood out black against the sky. Not a leaf stirred. It was enormously hot and seemed to be growing hotter as the night advanced. Heat under the sun was not so bad; one expected it. But this stifling darkness … Philip mopped his face and went back to his seat at the table.

‘You were saying, Mr Sita Ram?’

But Mr Sita Ram’s first fine careless rapture had evaporated. ‘I was re-reading some of de works of Morley today,’ he announced.

‘Golly!’ said Philip Quarles, who liked on occasion, very deliberately, to bring out a piece of schoolboy slang. It made such an effect in the middle of a serious conversation.

But Mr Sita Ram could hardly be expected to catch the full significance of that ‘Golly’. ‘What a tinker!’ he pursued. ‘What a great tinker! And de style is so chaste.’

‘I suppose it is.’

‘Dere are some good phrases,’ Mr Sita Ram went on. ‘I wrote dem down.’ He searched his pockets, but failed to discover his notebook. ‘Never mind,’ he said. ‘But dey were good phrases. Sometimes one reads a whole book widout finding a single phrase one can remember or quote. What’s de good of such a book, I ask you?’

‘What indeed?’

Four or five untidy servants came out of the house and changed the plates. A dish of dubious rissoles made its appearance. Elinor glanced despairingly at her

husband, then turned to Mr Sita Ram to assure him that she never ate meat. Himself stoically eating, Philip approved her wisdom. They drank sweet champagne that was nearly as warm as tea. The rissoles were succeeded by sweetmeats – large, pale balls (much fingered, one felt sure, long and lovingly rolled between the palms) of some equivocal substance, at once slimy and gritty, and tasting hauntingly through their sweetness of mutton fat.

Under the influence of the champagne, Mr Sita Ram recovered his eloquence. His latest oration re-uttered itself.

‘Dere is one law for de English,’ he said, ‘and anoder for de Indians, one for de oppressors and anoder for de oppressed. De word justice has eider disappeared from your vocab’lary, or else it has changed its meaning.’

‘I’m inclined to think that it has changed its meaning,’ said Philip.

Mr Sita Ram paid no attention. He was filled with a sacred indignation, the more violent for being so hopelessly impotent. ‘Consider de case,’ he went on (and his voice trembled out of his control), ‘of de unfortunate station-master of Bhowanipore.’

But Philip refused to consider it. He was thinking of the way in which the word justice changes its meaning. Justice for India had meant one thing before he visited the country. It meant something very different now, when he was on the point of leaving it.

The station-master of Bhowanipore, it appeared, had had a spotless record and nine children.

‘But why don’t you teach them birth control, Mr Sita Ram?’ Elinor had asked. These descriptions of enormous families always made her wince. She remembered what she had suffered when little Phil was born. And after all, she had had chloroform and two nurses and Sir Claude Aglet. Whereas the wife of the station-master of Bhowanipore … She had heard accounts of Indian midwives. She shuddered. ‘Isn’t it the only hope for India?’

Mr Sita Ram, however, thought that the only hope was universal suffrage and self-government. He went on with the station-master’s history. The man had passed all his examinations with credit; his qualifications were the highest

possible. And yet he had been passed over for promotion no less than four times. Four times, and always in favour of Europeans or Eurasians. Mr Sita Ram's blood boiled when he thought of the five thousand years of Indian civilization, Indian spirituality, Indian moral superiority, cynically trampled, in the person of the station-master of Bhowanipore, under English feet …

'Is dat justice, I ask?' He banged the table.

Who knows? Philip wondered. Perhaps it is.

Elinor was still thinking of the nine children. To obtain a quick delivery, the midwives, she had heard, stamp on their patients. And, instead of ergot, they use a paste made of cow-dung and powdered glass.

'Do you call dat justice?' Mr Sita Ram repeated.

Realizing that he was expected to make some response, Philip shook his head and said, 'No.'

'You ought to write about it,' said Mr Sita Ram, 'you ought to show de scandal up.'

Philip excused himself; he was only a writer of novels, not a politician, not a journalist. 'Do you know old Daulat Singh?' he added with apparent irrelevance. 'The one who lives at Ajmere?'

'I have met de man,' said Mr Sita Ram, in a tone that made it quite clear that he didn't like Daulat Singh, or perhaps (more probably, thought Philip) hadn't been liked or approved by him.

'A fine man, I thought,' said Philip. For men like Daulat Singh justice would have to mean something very different from what it meant for Mr Sita Ram or the station-master of Bhowanipore. He remembered the noble old face, the bright eyes, the restrained passion of his words. If only he could have refrained from chewing *pan* …

The time came for them to go. At last. They said good-bye with an almost excessive cordiality, climbed into the waiting car and were driven away. The ground beneath the palm trees of Joohoo was littered with a mintage of shining silver, splashed with puddles of mercury. They rolled through a continuous flickering of light and dark – the cinema film of twenty years ago – until,

emerging from under the palm trees, they found themselves in the full glare of the enormous moon.

‘Three-formed Hecate,’ he thought, blinking at the round brilliance. ‘But what about Sita Ram and Daulat Singh and the station-master, what about old appalling India, what about justice and liberty, what about progress and the future? The fact is, I don’t care. Not a pin. It’s disgraceful. But I don’t. And the forms of Hecate aren’t three. They’re a thousand, they’re millions. The tides. The Nemorensian goddess, the Tifatinian. Varying directly as the product of the masses and inversely as the square of the distances. A florin at arm’s length, but as big as the Russian Empire. Bigger than India. What a comfort it will be to be back in Europe again! And to think there was a time when I read books about yoga and did breathing exercises and tried to persuade myself that I didn’t really exist! What a fool! It was the result of talking with that idiot Burlap. But luckily people don’t leave much trace on me. They make an impression easily, like a ship in water. But the water closes up again. I wonder what this Italian ship will be like tomorrow? The Lloyd Triestino boats are always supposed to be good. “Luckily,” I said; but oughtn’t one to be ashamed of one’s indifference? That parable of the sower. The seed that fell in shallow ground. And yet, obviously, it’s no use pretending to be what one isn’t. One sees the results of that in Burlap. What a comedian! But he takes in a lot of people. Including himself, I suppose. I don’t believe there’s such a thing as a conscious hypocrite, except for special occasions. You can’t keep it up all the time. All the same, it would be good to know what it’s like to believe in something to the point of being prepared to kill people or get yourself killed. It would be an experience …’

Elinor had lifted her face towards the same bright disc. Moon, full moon … And instantly she had changed her position in space and time. She dropped her eyes and turned towards her husband; she took his hand and leaned tenderly against him.

‘Do you remember those evenings?’ she asked. ‘In the garden, at Gattenden. Do you remember, Phil?’

Elinor's words came to his ears from a great distance and from a world in which, for the moment, he felt no interest. He roused himself with reluctance. 'Which evenings?' he asked, speaking across gulfs, and in the rather flat and colourless voice of one who answers an importunate telephone.

At the sound of that telephone voice Elinor quickly drew away from him. To press yourself against someone who turns out simply not to be there is not only disappointing; it is also rather humiliating. Which evenings, indeed!

'Why don't you love me any more?' she asked despairingly. As if she could have been talking about any other evenings than those of that wonderful summer they had spent, just after their marriage, at her mother's house. 'You don't even take any interest in me now – less than you would in a piece of furniture, much less than in a book.'

'But, Elinor, what *are* you talking about?' Philip put more astonishment into his voice than he really felt. After the first moment, when he had had time to come to the surface, so to speak, from the depths of his reverie, he had understood what she meant, he had connected this Indian moon with that which had shone, eight years ago, on the Hertfordshire garden. He might have said so, of course. It would have made things easier. But he was annoyed at having been interrupted, he didn't like to be reproached, and the temptation to score a debater's point against his wife was strong. 'I ask a simple question,' he went on, 'merely wanting to know what you mean. And you retort by complaining that I don't love you. I fail to see the logical connection.'

'But you know quite well what I was talking about,' said Elinor. 'And besides, it *is* true – you don't love me any more.'

'I do, as it happens,' said Philip and, still skirmishing (albeit vainly, as he knew) in the realm of dialectic, went on like a little Socrates with his cross-examination. 'But what I really want to know is how we ever got to this point from the place where we started. We began with evenings and now …'

But Elinor was more interested in love than in logic. 'Oh, I know you don't want to say you don't love me,' she interrupted. 'Not in so many words. You don't want to hurt my feelings. But it would really hurt them less if you did so

straight out, instead of just avoiding the whole question, as you do now. Because this avoiding is really just as much of an admission as a bald statement. And it hurts more because it lasts longer, because there's suspense and uncertainty and repetition of pain. So long as the words haven't been definitely spoken, there's always just a chance that they mayn't have been tacitly implied. Always a chance, even when one *knows* that they have been implied. There's still room for hope. And where there's hope there's disappointment. It isn't really kinder to evade the question, Phil; it's crueller.'

'But I don't evade the question,' he retorted. 'Why should I, seeing that I do love you?'

'Yes, but how? How do you love me? Not in the way you used to, at the beginning. Or perhaps you've forgotten. You didn't even remember the time when we were first married.'

'But, my dear child,' Philip protested, 'do be accurate. You just said "those evenings" and expected me to guess which.'

'Of course I expected,' said Elinor. 'You ought to have known. You would have known, if you took any interest. That's what I complain of. You care so little now that the time when you did care means nothing to you. Do you think *I* can forget those evenings?'

She remembered the garden with its invisible and perfumed flowers, the huge black Wellingtonia on the lawn, the rising moon, and the two stone griffins at either end of the low terrace wall, where they had sat together. She remembered what he had said and his kisses, the touch of his hands. She remembered everything – remembered with the minute precision of one who loves to explore and reconstruct the past, of one who is for ever turning over and affectionately verifying each precious detail of recollected happiness.

'It's all simply faded out of your mind,' she added, mournfully reproachful. For her, those evenings were still more real, more actual than much of her contemporary living.

'But of course I remember,' said Philip impatiently. 'Only one can't readjust one's mind instantaneously. At the moment, when you spoke, I happened to be

thinking of something else; that was all.'

Elinor sighed. 'I wish I had something else to think about,' she said. 'That's the trouble; I haven't. Why should I love you so much? Why? It isn't fair. You're protected by an intellect and a talent. You have your work to retire into, your ideas to shield you. But I have nothing – no defence against my feelings, no alternative to you. And it's I who need the defence and the alternative. For I'm the one who really cares. You've got nothing to be protected from. You don't care. No, it isn't fair, it isn't fair.'

And after all, she was thinking, it had always been like this. He hadn't ever really loved her, even at the beginning. Not profoundly and entirely, not with abandonment. For even at the beginning he had evaded her demands, he had refused to give himself completely to her. On her side she had offered everything, everything. And he had taken, but without return. His soul, the intimacies of his being, he had always withheld. Always, even from the first, even when he had loved her most. She had been happy then – but only because she had not known better than to be happy, because she had not realized, in her inexperience, that love could be different and better. She took a perverse pleasure in the retrospective disparagement of her felicity, in laying waste her memories. The moon, the dark and perfumed garden, the huge black tree and its velvet shadow on the lawn … She denied them, she rejected the happiness which they symbolized in her memory.

Philip Quarles, meanwhile, said nothing. There was nothing, really, to say. He put his arms round her and drew her towards him; he kissed her forehead and her fluttering eyelids; they were wet with tears.

The sordid suburbs of Bombay slid past them – factories and little huts and huge tenements, ghastly and bone-white under the moon. Brown, thin-legged pedestrians appeared for a moment in the glare of the headlights, like truths apprehended intuitively and with immediate certainty, only to disappear again almost instantly into the void of outer darkness. Here and there, by the roadside, the light of a fire mysteriously hinted at dark limbs and faces. The inhabitants of

a world of thought starrily remote from theirs peered at them, as the car flashed past, from creaking bullock carts.

‘My darling,’ he kept repeating, ‘my darling …’

Elinor permitted herself to be comforted. ‘You love me a little?’

‘So much.’

She actually laughed, rather sobbingly, it is true; but still, it was a laugh. ‘You do your best to be nice to me.’ And after all, she thought, those days at Gattenden had really been blissful. They were hers, she had had them; they couldn’t be denied. ‘You make such efforts. It’s sweet of you.’

‘It’s silly to talk like that,’ he protested. ‘You know I love you.’

‘Yes, I know you do.’ She smiled and stroked his cheek. ‘When you have time and then by wireless across the Atlantic.’

‘No, that isn’t true.’ But secretly he knew that it was. All his life long he had walked in a solitude, in a private void, into which nobody, not his mother, not his friends, not his lovers had ever been permitted to enter. Even when he held her thus, pressed close to him, it was by wireless, as she had said, and across an Atlantic that he communicated with her.

‘It isn’t true,’ she echoed, tenderly mocking. ‘But, my poor old Phil, you couldn’t even take in a child. You don’t know how to lie convincingly. You’re too honest. That’s one of the reasons why I love you. If you knew how transparent you were!’

Philip was silent. These discussions of personal relations always made him uncomfortable. They threatened his solitude – that solitude which, with a part of his mind, he deplored (for he felt himself cut off from much he would have liked to experience), but in which alone, nevertheless, his spirit could live in comfort, in which alone he felt himself free. At ordinary times he took this inward solitude for granted, as one accepts the atmosphere in which one lives. But when it was menaced, he became only too painfully aware of its importance to him; he fought for it, as a choking man fights for air. But it was a fight without violence, a negative battle of retirement and defence. He entrenched himself now in silence, in that calm, remote, frigid silence, which he was sure that Elinor would

not attempt, knowing the hopelessness of the venture, to break through. He was right; Elinor glanced at him for an instant, and then, turning away, looked out at the moonlit landscape. Their parallel silences flowed on through time, unmeeting.

They were driven on through the Indian darkness. Almost cool against their faces, the moving air smelt now of tropical flowers, now of sewage, or curry, or burning cow-dung.

'And yet,' said Elinor suddenly, unable any longer to contain her resentful thoughts, 'you couldn't do without me. Where would you be, if I left you, if I went to somebody who was prepared to give me something in return for what I give? Where would you be?'

The question dropped into the silence. Philip made no answer. But where *would* he be? He too wondered. For in the ordinary daily world of human contacts he was curiously like a foreigner, uneasily not at home among his fellows, finding it difficult or impossible to enter into communication with any but those who could speak his native intellectual language of ideas. Emotionally, he was a foreigner. Elinor was his interpreter, his dragoman. Like her father, Elinor Bidlake had been born with a gift of intuitive understanding and social ease. She was quickly at home with anybody. She knew, instinctively, as well as old John himself, just what to say to every type of person – to every type except, perhaps, her husband's. It is difficult to know what to say to someone who does not say anything in return, who answers the personal word with the impersonal, the particular and feeling word with an intellectual generalization. Still, being in love with him, she persisted in her efforts to lure him into direct contact; and though the process was rather discouraging – like singing to deaf-mutes or declaiming poetry to an empty hall – she went on giving him her intimacies of thought and feeling. There were occasions, when, making a great effort, he did his best, in exchange, to admit her into his own personal privacies. But whether it was that the habit of secrecy had made it impossible for him to give utterance to his inward feelings, or whether the very capacity to feel had actually been atrophied by consistent silence and repression, Elinor found these rare intimacies

disappointing. The holy of holies into which he so painfully ushered her was almost as naked and empty as that which astonished the Roman invaders, when they violated the temple of Jerusalem. Still, she was grateful to Philip for his good intentions in at least wanting to admit her to his emotional intimacy, even though there mightn't be much of an emotional life to be intimate with. A kind of Pyrrhonian indifference, tempered by a consistent gentleness and kindness, as well as by the more violent intermittences of physical passion – this was the state of being which nature and second nature had made normal for him. Elinor's reason told her that this was so; but her feelings would not accept in practice what she was sure of in theory. What was living and sensitive and irrational in her was hurt by his indifference, as though it were a personal coldness directed only against herself. And yet, whatever she might feel, Elinor knew all the time that his indifference wasn't personal, that he was like that with everybody, that he loved her as much as it was possible for him to love, that his love for her hadn't diminished, because it had never really been greater – more passionate once perhaps, but never more emotionally rich in intimacies and self-giving, even at its most passionate, than it was now. But all the same her feelings were outraged; he oughtn't to be like this. He oughtn't to be; but there, he was. After an outburst, she would settle down and try to love him as reasonably as she could, making the best of his kindness, his rather detached and separate passion, his occasional and laborious essays at emotional intimacy, and finally his intelligence – that quick, comprehensive, ubiquitous intelligence that could understand everything, including the emotions it could not feel and the instincts it took care not to be moved by.

Once, when he had been telling her about Koehler's book on the apes, 'You're like a monkey on the superman side of humanity,' she said. 'Almost human, like those poor chimpanzees. The only difference is that *they're* trying to think up with their feelings and instincts, and *you're* trying to feel down with your intellect. Almost human. Trembling on the verge, my poor Phil.'

He understood everything so perfectly. That was why it was such fun being his dragoman and interpreting other people for him. (It was less amusing when

one had to interpret oneself.) All that the intelligence could seize upon he seized. She reported her intercourse with the natives of the realm of emotion and he understood at once, he generalized her experience for her, he related it with other experiences, classified it, found analogies and parallels. From single and individual it became in his hands part of a system. She was astonished to find that she and her friends had been, all unconsciously, substantiating a theory, or exemplifying some interesting generalization. Her functions as dragoman were not confined to mere scouting and reporting. She acted also directly as personal interpreter between Philip and any third party he might wish to get into touch with, creating the atmosphere in which alone the exchange of personalities is possible, preserving the conversation from intellectual desiccation. Left to himself Philip would never have been able to establish personal contact or preserve it when once established. But when Elinor was there to make and keep the contact for him, he could understand, he could sympathize, with his intelligence, in a way which Elinor assured him was all but human. In his subsequent generalizations from the experience she had made possible for him he became once more undisguisedly the overman.

Yes, it was fun to serve as dragoman to such an exceptionally intelligent tourist in the realm of feeling. But it was more than fun; it was also, in Elinor's eyes, a duty. There was his writing to consider.

'Ah, if you were a little less of an overman, Phil,' she used to say, 'what good novels you'd write!'

Rather ruefully he agreed with her. He was intelligent enough to know his own defects. Elinor did her best to supply them – gave him first-hand information about the habits of the natives, acted as go-between when he wanted to come into personal contact with one of them. Not only for her own sake, but for the sake of the novelist he might be, she wished he could break his habit of impersonality and learn to live with the intuitions and feelings and instincts as well as with the intellect. Heroically, she had even encouraged him in his velleities of passion for other women. It might do him good to have a few affairs. So anxious was she to do him good as a novelist, that on more than one

occasion, seeing him look admiringly at some young woman or other, she had gone out of her way to establish for him the personal contact which he would never have been able to establish for himself. It was risky, of course. He might really fall in love; he might forget to be intellectual and become a reformed character, but for some other woman's benefit. Elinor took the risk, partly because she thought that his writing ought to come before everything else, even her own happiness, and partly because she was secretly convinced that there was in reality no risk at all, that he would never lose his head so wholly as to want to run off with another woman. The cure by affairs, if it worked at all, would be gentle in its action; and if it did work, she was sure she would know how to profit by its good effects on him. Anyhow, it hadn't worked so far. Philip's infidelities amounted to very little and had had no appreciable effect on him. He remained depressingly, even maddeningly the same – intelligent to the point of being almost human, remotely kind, separately passionate and sensual, impersonally sweet. Maddening. Why did she go on loving him? She wondered. One might almost as well go on loving a book-case. One day she would really leave him. There was such a thing as being too unselfish and devoted. One should think of one's own happiness sometimes. To be loved for a change, instead of having to do all the loving oneself, to receive instead of perpetually giving … Yes, one day she really would leave him. She had herself to think about. Besides, it would be a punishment for Phil. A punishment – for she was sure that, if she left him, he would be genuinely unhappy, in his way, as much as it lay in him to be unhappy. And perhaps the unhappiness might achieve the miracle she had been longing and working for all these years; perhaps it would sensitize him, personalize him. Perhaps it might be the making of him as a writer. Perhaps it was even her duty to make him unhappy, the most sacred of her duties …

The sight of a dog running across the road just in front of the car aroused her from her reverie. How suddenly, how startlingly it had dashed into the narrow universe of the headlamps! It existed for a fraction of a second, desperately

running, and was gone again into the darkness on the other side of the luminous world. Another dog was suddenly in its place, pursuing.

‘Oh!’ cried Elinor. ‘It’ll be …’ The headlights swerved and swung straight again, there was a padded jolt, as though one of the wheels had passed over a stone; but the stone yelped ‘… run over,’ she concluded.

‘It *has* been run over.’

The Indian chauffeur looked round at them, grinning. They could see the flash of his teeth. ‘Dog!’ he said. He was proud of his English.

‘Poor beast!’ Elinor shuddered.

‘It was his fault,’ said Philip. ‘He wasn’t looking. That’s what comes of running after the females of one’s species.’

There was a silence. It was Philip who broke it.

‘Morality’d be very queer,’ he reflected aloud, ‘if we loved seasonally, not all the year round. Moral and immoral would change from one month to another. Primitive societies are apt to be more seasonal than cultivated ones. Even in Sicily there are twice as many births in January as in August. Which proves conclusively that in the spring the young man’s fancy … But nowhere *only* in the spring. There’s nothing human quite analogous to heat in mares or she-dogs. Except,’ he added, ‘except perhaps in the moral sphere. A bad reputation in a woman allures like the signs of heat in a bitch. Ill-fame announces accessibility. Absence of heat is the animal’s equivalent of the chaste woman’s habits and principles …’

Elinor listened with interest and at the same time a kind of horror. Even the squashing of a wretched animal was enough to set that quick untiring intelligence to work. A poor starved pariah dog had its back broken under the wheels and the incident evoked from Philip a selection from the vital statistics of Sicily, a speculation about the relativity of morals, a brilliant psychological generalization. It was amusing, it was unexpected, it was wonderfully interesting; but oh! she almost wanted to scream.

CHAPTER VII

MRS BETTERTON HAD been shaken off, his father and Lady Edward distantly waved to and avoided; Walter was free to continue his search. And at last he found what he was looking for. Lucy Tantamount had just emerged from the dining-room and was standing under the arcades, glancing in indecision this way and that. Against the mourning of her dress the skin was luminously white. A bunch of gardenias was pinned to her bodice. She raised a hand to touch her smooth black hair, and the emerald of her ring shot a green signal to him across the room. Critically, with a kind of cold intellectual hatred, Walter looked at her and wondered why he loved. Why? There was no reason, no justification. All the reasons were against his loving her.

Suddenly she moved, she walked out of sight. Walter followed. Passing the entrance to the dining-room, he noticed Burlap, no longer the anchorite, drinking champagne and being talked to by the Comtesse d'Exergillod. Gosh! thought Walter, remembering his own experiences with Molly d'Exergillod. 'But Burlap probably adores her. He would … He …' But there she was again, talking – damnation! – with General Knoyle. Walter hung about at a little distance, waiting impatiently for an opportunity to address her.

'Caught at last,' said the General patting her hand. 'Been looking for you the whole evening.'

Half satyr, half uncle, he had an old man's weakness for Lucy. 'Charming little girl!' he would assure all those who wanted to hear. 'Charming little figure! Such eyes!' For the most part he preferred them rather younger. 'Nothing like youth!' he was fond of saying. His life-long prejudice against America and Americans had been transformed into enthusiastic admiration ever since, at the age of sixty-five, he had visited California and seen the flappers of Hollywood and the bathing beauties on the Pacific beaches. Lucy was nearly thirty; but the

General had known her for years; he continued to regard her as hardly more than the young girl of his first memories. For him, she was still about seventeen. He patted her hand again. ‘We’ll have a good talk,’ he said.

‘That will be fun,’ said Lucy with sarcastic politeness.

From his post of observation Walter looked on. The General had been handsome once. Corseted, his tall figure still preserved its military bearing. The gallant and the guardsman, he smiled; he fingered his white moustache. The next moment he was the playful, protective and confidential old uncle. Faintly smiling, Lucy looked at him out of her pale grey eyes with a detached and unmerciful amusement. Walter studied her. She was not even particularly good-looking. So why, why? He wanted reasons, he wanted justification. Why? The question persistently reverberated. There was no answer. He had just fallen in love with her – that was all; insanely, the first time he set eyes on her.

Turning her head, Lucy caught sight of him. She beckoned and called his name. He pretended to be surprised and delightfully astonished.

‘I hope you’ve not forgotten our appointment,’ he said.

‘Do I ever forget? Except occasionally on purpose,’ she qualified with a little laugh. She turned to the General. ‘Walter and I are going to see your stepson this evening,’ she announced in the tone and with the smile which one employs when one talks to people about those who are dear to them. But between Spandrell and his stepfather the quarrel, she knew very well, was mortal. Lucy had inherited all her mother’s fondness for the deliberate social blunder and with it a touch of her father’s detached scientific curiosity. She enjoyed experimenting, not with frogs and guinea-pigs, but with human beings. You did unexpected things to people, you put them in curious situations and waited to see what would happen. It was the method of Darwin and Pasteur.

What happened in this case was that General Knoyle’s face became extremely red. ‘I haven’t seen him for some time,’ he said stiffly.

‘Good,’ she said to herself. ‘He’s reacting.’

‘But he’s *such* good company,’ she said aloud.

The General grew redder and frowned. What he hadn’t done for that boy! And how ungratefully the boy had responded, how abominably he had behaved! Getting himself kicked out of every job the General had wangled him into. A waster, an idler; drinking and drabbing; making his mother miserable, sponging on her, disgracing the family name. And the insolence of the fellow, the things he had ventured to say the last time they had met and, as usual, had a scene together! The General was never likely to forget being called ‘an impotent old fumbler.’

‘And so intelligent,’ Lucy was saying. With an inward smile she remembered Spandrell’s summary of his stepfather’s career. ‘Superannuated from Harrow,’ it began, ‘passed out from Sandhurst at the bottom of the list, he had a most distinguished career in the Army, rising during the War to a high post in the Military Intelligence Department.’ The way he rolled out this anticipated obituary was really magnificent. He was the *Times* made audible. And then his remarks on Military Intelligence in general! ‘If you look up “Intelligence” in the new volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,’ he had said, ‘you’ll find it classified under the following three heads: Intelligence, Human; Intelligence, Animal; Intelligence, Military. My stepfather’s a perfect specimen of Intelligence, Military.’

‘So intelligent,’ Lucy repeated.

‘Some people think so, I know,’ said General Knoyle very stiffly. ‘But personally …’ He cleared his throat with violence. That was *his* personal opinion.

A moment later, still rigid, still angrily dignified, he took his leave. He felt that Lucy had offended him. Even her youth and her bare shoulders did not compensate him for those laudatory references to Maurice Spandrell. Insolent, bad-blooded young cub! His existence was the General’s standing grievance against his wife. A woman had no right to have a son like that, no right. Poor Mrs Knoyle had often atoned to her second husband for the offences of her son. She was there, she could be punished, she was too weak to resist. The exasperated General visited the sins of the child on his parent.

Lucy glanced after the retreating figure, then turned to Walter. ‘I can’t risk that sort of thing happening again,’ she said. ‘It would be bad enough even if he didn’t smell so unpleasant. Shall we go away?’

Walter desired nothing better. ‘But what about your mother and the social duties?’ he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. ‘After all, mother can look after her own bear garden.’

‘Bear garden’s the word,’ said Walter, feeling suddenly hopeful. ‘Let’s sneak away to some place where it’s quiet.’

‘My poor Walter!’ Her eyes were derisive. ‘I never knew anybody with such a mania for quietness as you. But I don’t *want* to be quiet.’

His hope evaporated, leaving a feeble little bitterness, an ineffective anger. ‘Why not stay here then?’ he asked with an attempt at sarcasm. ‘Isn’t it noisy enough?’

‘Ah, but noisy with the wrong sort of noise,’ she explained. ‘There’s nothing I hate more than the noise of cultured, respectable, eminent people, like these creatures.’ She waved her hand comprehensively. The words evoked, for Walter, the memory of hideous evenings passed with Lucy in the company of the disreputable and uncultured – tipsy at that. Lady Edward’s guests were bad enough. But the others were surely worse. How could she tolerate them?

Lucy seemed to divine his thoughts. Smiling, she laid a hand reassuringly on his arm. ‘Cheer up!’ she said. ‘I’m not taking you into low company this time. There’s Spandrell …’

‘Spandrell,’ he repeated and made a grimace.

‘And if Spandrell isn’t classy enough for you, we shall probably find Mark Rampion and his wife, if we don’t arrive too late.’

At the name of the painter and writer, Walter nodded approvingly.

‘No, I don’t mind listening to Rampion’s noise,’ he said. And then, making an effort to overcome the timidity which always silenced him when the moment came to give words to his feelings, ‘but I’d much rather,’ he added, jocularly, so

as to temper the boldness of his words, ‘I’d much rather listen to *your* noise, in private.’

Lucy smiled, but said nothing. He flinched away in a kind of terror from her eyes. They looked at him calmly, coldly, as though they had seen everything before and were not much interested – only faintly amused, very faintly and coolly amused.

‘All right,’ he said, ‘let’s go.’ His tone was resigned and wretched.

‘We must do a creep,’ she said. ‘Furtive’s the word. No good being caught and headed back.’

But they did not escape entirely unobserved. They were approaching the door, when there was a rustle and a sound of hurrying steps behind them. A voice called Lucy’s name. They turned round and saw Mrs Knoyle, the General’s wife. She laid a hand on Lucy’s arm.

‘I’ve just heard that you’re going to see Maurice this evening,’ she said, but did not explain that the General had told her so only because he wanted to relieve his feelings by saying something disagreeable to somebody who couldn’t resent the rudeness. ‘Give him a message from me, will you?’ She leaned forward appealingly. ‘Will you?’ There was something pathetically young and helpless about her manner, something very young and soft even about her middle-aged looks. To Lucy, who might have been her daughter, she appealed as though to someone older and stronger than herself. ‘Please.’

‘But of course,’ said Lucy.

Mrs Knoyle smiled gratefully. ‘Tell him I’ll come to see him tomorrow afternoon,’ she said.

‘Tomorrow afternoon.’

‘Between four and half-past. And don’t mention it to anyone else,’ she added after a moment of embarrassed hesitation.

‘Of course I won’t.’

‘I’m so grateful to you,’ said Mrs Knoyle, and with a sudden shy impulsiveness she leaned forward and kissed her. ‘Good night, my dear.’ She slipped away into the crowd.

‘One would think,’ said Lucy, as they crossed the vestibule, ‘that it was an appointment with her lover she was making, not her son.’

Two footmen let them out, obsequiously automatic. Closing the door, one winked to the other significantly. For an instant, the machines revealed themselves disquietingly as human beings.

Walter gave the address of Sbisa’s restaurant to the taxi driver and stepped into the enclosed darkness of the cab. Lucy had already settled into her corner.

Meanwhile, in the dining-room, Molly d’Exergillod was still talking. She prided herself on her conversation. Conversation was in the family. Her mother had been one of the celebrated Miss Geoghegans of Dublin. Her father was that Mr Justice Brabant, so well known for his table talk and his witticisms from the bench. Moreover she had married into conversation. D’Exergillod had been a disciple of Robert de Montesquiou and had won the distinction of being mentioned in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* by Marcel Proust. Molly would have had to be a talker by marriage, if she had not already been one by birth. Nature and environment had conspired to make her a professional athlete of the tongue. Like all conscientious professionals, she was not content to be merely talented. She was industrious, she worked hard to develop her native powers. Malicious friends said that she could be heard practising her paradoxes in bed, before she got up in the morning. She herself admitted that she kept diaries in which she recorded, as well as the complicated history of her own feelings and sensations, every trope and anecdote and witticism that caught her fancy. Did she refresh her memory with a glance at these chronicles each time she dressed to go out to dinner? The same friends who had heard her practising in bed had also found her, like an examinee the night before his ordeal, laboriously mugging up Jean Cocteau’s epigrams about art and Mr Birrell’s after-dinner stories and W. B. Yeats’s anecdotes about George Moore and what Charlie Chaplin had said to and of her last time she was in Hollywood. Like all professional talkers Molly was very economical with her wit and wisdom. There are not enough *bons mots* in existence to provide any industrious conversationalist with a new stock for every social occasion. Though extensive, Molly’s repertory was, like that of

other more celebrated talkers, limited. A good housewife, she knew how to hash up the conversational remains of last night's dinner to furnish out this morning's lunch. Monday's funeral baked meats did service for Tuesday's wedding.

To Denis Burlap she was at this moment serving up the talk that had already been listened to with such appreciation by Lady Benger's lunch party, by the week-enders at Gobley, by Tommy Fitton, who was one of her young men, and Vladimir Pavloff, who was another, by the American Ambassador and Baron Benito Cohen. The talk turned on Molly's favourite topic.

'Do you know what Jean said about me?' she was saying (Jean was her husband). 'Do you?' she repeated insistently, for she had a curious habit of demanding answers to merely rhetorical questions. She leaned towards Burlap, offering dark eyes, teeth, a décolleté.

Burlap duly replied that he didn't know.

'He said that I wasn't quite human. More like an elemental than a woman. A sort of fairy. Do you think it's a compliment or an insult?'

'That depends on one's tastes,' said Burlap, making his face look arch and subtle as though he had said something rather daring, witty and at the same time profound.

'But I don't feel that it's even true,' Molly went on. 'I don't strike myself as at all elemental or fairy-like. I've always considered myself a perfectly simple, straightforward child of nature. A sort of peasant, really.' At this point in Molly's performance all her other auditors had burst into laughing protestation. Baron Benito Cohen had vehemently declared that she was 'one of Nature'th Roman Empreththeth'.

Burlap's reaction was unexpectedly different from that of the others. He wagged his head, he smiled with a far-away, whimsical sort of expression. 'Yes,' he said, 'I think that's true. A child of nature, *malgré tout*. You wear disguises, but the simple genuine person shows through.'

Molly was delighted by what she felt was the highest compliment Burlap could pay her. She had been equally delighted by the others' denials of her peasanthood. Denial had been *their* highest compliment. The flattering intention,

the interest in her personality were the things that mattered. About the actual opinions of her admirers she cared little.

Burlap, meanwhile, was developing Rousseau's antithesis between the Man and the Citizen. She cut him short and brought the conversation back to the original theme.

'Human beings and fairies – I think it's a very good classification, don't you?' She leaned forward with offered face and bosom, intimately. 'Don't you?' she repeated the rhetorical question.

'Perhaps.' Burlap was annoyed at having been interrupted.

'The ordinary human – yes, let's admit it – all too human being on the one hand. And the elemental on the other. The one so attached and involved and sentimental – I'm terribly sentimental, I may say.' ('About ath thentimental ath the Thirenth in the Odyththey,' had been Baron Benito's classical comment.) 'The other, the elemental, quite free and apart from things, like a cat; coming and going – and going just as lightheartedly as it came; charming, but never charmed; making other people feel, but never really feeling itself. Oh, I envy them their free airiness.'

'You might as well envy a balloon,' said Burlap, gravely. He was always on the side of the heart.

'But they have such fun.'

'They haven't got enough feelings to have fun with. That's what I should have thought.'

'Enough to have fun,' she qualified; 'but perhaps not enough to be happy. Certainly not enough to be unhappy. That's where they're so enviable. Particularly if they're intelligent. Take Philip Quarles, for example. There's a fairy if ever there was one.' She launched into her regular description of Philip. 'Zoologist of fiction,' 'learnedly elfish,' 'a scientific Puck' were a few of her phrases. But the best of them had slipped her memory. Desperately she hunted it, but it eluded her. Her Theophrastian portrait had to go out into the world robbed this time of its most brilliantly effective passage, and a little marred as a whole by Molly's consciousness of the loss and her desperate efforts, as she poured

forth, to make it good. ‘Whereas his wife,’ she concluded, rather painfully aware that Burlap had not smiled as frequently as he should have done, ’is quite the opposite of a fairy. Neither elfish, nor learned, nor particularly intelligent.’ Molly smiled rather patronizingly. ‘A man like Philip must find her a little inadequate sometimes, to say the least.’ The smile persisted, a smile now of self-satisfaction. Philip had had a *faible* for her, still had. He wrote such amusing letters, almost as amusing as her own. (‘*Quand je veux briller dans le monde*,’ Molly was fond of quoting her husband’s compliments, ‘*je cite des phrases de tes lettres*.’) Poor Elinor! ‘A little bit of a bore sometimes,’ Molly went on. ‘But mind you, a most charming creature. I’ve known her since we were children together. Charming, but not exactly a Hypatia.’ Too much of a fool even to realize that Philip was bound to be attracted by a woman of his own mental stature, a woman he could talk to on equal terms. Too much of a fool to notice, when she had brought them together, how thrilled he had been. Too much of a fool to be jealous. Molly had felt the absence of jealousy as a bit of an insult. Not that she ever gave *real* cause for jealousy. She didn’t sleep with husbands; she only talked to them. Still, they *did* do a lot of talking; there was no doubt of that. And wives *had* been jealous. Elinor’s ingenuous confidingness had piqued her into being more than ordinarily gracious to Philip. But he had started to go round the world before much conversation had taken place. The talk, she anticipated, would be agreeably renewed on his return. Poor Elinor, she thought pityingly. Her feelings might have been a little less Christian, if she had realized that poor Elinor had noticed the admiring look in Philip’s eye even before Molly had noticed it herself, and, noticing, had conscientiously proceeded to act the part of dragoman and go-between. Not that she had much hope or fear that Molly would achieve the transforming miracle. One does not fall very desperately in love with a loud speaker, however pretty, however firmly plump (for Philip’s tastes were rather old-fashioned), however attractively callipygous. Her only hope was that the passions aroused by the plumpness and prettiness would be so very inadequately satisfied by the talking (for talk was all,

according to report, that Molly ever conceded) that poor Philip would be reduced to a state of rage and misery most conducive to good writing.

‘But of course,’ Molly went on, ‘intelligence ought never to marry intelligence. That’s why Jean is always threatening to divorce me. He says I’m too stimulating. “*Tu ne m’ennuies pas assez*,” he says; and that what he needs is *une femme sédative*. And I believe he’s really right. Philip Quarles has been wise. Imagine an intelligent fairy of a man like Philip married to an equally fairyish intelligent woman – Lucy Tantamount, for example. It would be a disaster, don’t you think?’

‘Lucy’d be rather a disaster for any man, wouldn’t she, fairy or no fairy?’

‘No, I must say, I like Lucy.’ Molly turned to her inner storehouse of Theophrastian phrases. ‘I like the way she floats through life instead of trudging. I like the way she flits from flower to flower – which is perhaps a rather too botanical and poetical description of Bentley and Jim Conklin and poor Reggie Tantamount and Maurice Spandrell and Tom Trivet and Poniatovsky and that young Frenchman who writes plays, what *is* his name? and the various others one has forgotten or never heard about.’ Burlap smiled; they all smiled at this passage. ‘Anyhow, she flits. Doing a good deal of damage to the flowers, I must admit.’ Burlap smiled again. ‘But getting nothing but fun out of it herself. I must say, I rather envy her. I wish I were a fairy and could float.’

‘She has much more reason to envy you,’ said Burlap, looking deep, subtle and Christian once more, and wagging his head.

‘Envy me for being unhappy?’

‘Who’s unhappy?’ asked Lady Edward breaking in on them at this moment. ‘Good evening, Mr Burlap,’ she went on without waiting for an answer. Burlap told her how much he had enjoyed the music.

‘We were just talking about Lucy,’ said Molly d’Exergillod, interrupting him. ‘Agreeing that she was like a fairy. So light and detached.’

‘Fairy!’ repeated Lady Edward, emphatically rolling the ‘r’ far back in her throat. ‘She’s like a leprechaun. You’ve no idea, Mr Burlap, how hard it is to

bring up a leprechaun.' Lady Edward shook her head. 'She used really to frighten me sometimes.'

'Did she?' said Molly. 'But I should have thought you were a bit of a fairy yourself, Lady Edward.'

'A bit,' Lady Edward admitted. 'But never to the point of being a leprechaun.

'Well?' said Lucy, as Walter sat down beside her in the cab. She seemed to be uttering a kind of challenge. 'Well?'

The cab started. He lifted her hand and kissed it. It was his answer to her challenge. 'I love you. That's all.'

'Do you, Walter?' She turned towards him and, taking his face between her two hands, looked at him intently in the half-darkness. 'Do you?' she repeated; and as she spoke, she shook her head slowly and smiled. Then, leaning forward, she kissed him on the mouth. Walter put his arms round her; but she disengaged herself from the embrace. 'No, no,' she protested and dropped back into her corner. 'No.'

He obeyed her and drew away. There was a silence. Her perfume was of gardenias; sweet and tropical, the perfumed symbol of her being enveloped him. 'I ought to have insisted,' he was thinking. 'Brutally. Kissed her again and again. Compelled her to love me. Why didn't I? Why?' He didn't know. Nor why she had kissed him, unless it was just provocatively, to make him desire her more violently, to make him more hopelessly her slave. Nor why, knowing this, he still loved her. Why, why? he kept repeating to himself. And echoing his thoughts out loud her voice suddenly spoke.

'Why do you love me?' she asked from her corner.

He opened his eyes. They were passing a street lamp. Through the window of the moving cab the light of it fell on her face. It stood out for a moment palely against the darkness, then dropped back into invisibility – a pale mask that had seen everything before and whose expression was one of amused detachment and a hard, rather weary languor. 'I was just wondering,' Walter answered. 'And wishing I didn't.'

‘I might say the same, you know. You’re not particularly amusing when you’re like this.’

How tiresome, she reflected, these men who imagined that nobody had ever been in love before! All the same, she liked him. He was attractive. No, ‘attractive’ wasn’t the word. Attractive, as a possible lover, was just what he wasn’t. ‘Appealing’ was more like it. An appealing lover? It wasn’t exactly her style. But she liked him. There was something very *nice* about him. Besides, he was clever, he could be a pleasant companion. And tiresome as it was, his lovesickness did at least make him very faithful. That, for Lucy, was important. She was afraid of loneliness and needed her cavalier servants in constant attendance. Walter attended with a dog-like fidelity. But why did he look so like a *whipped* dog sometimes? So abject. What a fool! She felt suddenly annoyed by his abjection.

‘Well, Walter,’ she said mockingly, laying her hand on his, ‘why don’t you talk to me?’

He did not reply.

‘Or is mum the word?’ Her fingers brushed electrically along the back of his hand and closed round his wrist. ‘Where’s your pulse?’ she asked after a moment. ‘I can’t feel it anywhere.’ She groped over the soft skin for the throbbing of the artery. He felt the touch of her finger tips, light and thrilling and rather cold against his wrist. ‘I don’t believe you’ve got a pulse,’ she said. ‘I believe your blood stagnates.’ The tone of her voice was contemptuous. What a fool! she was thinking. What an abject fool! ‘Just stagnates,’ she repeated and suddenly, with sudden malice, she drove her sharp file-pointed nails into his flesh. Walter cried out in surprise and pain. ‘You deserved it,’ she said and laughed in his face.

He seized her by the shoulders and began to kiss her, savagely. Anger had quickened his desire; his kisses were a vengeance. Lucy shut her eyes and abandoned herself unresistingly, limply. Little premonitions of pleasure shot with a kind of panic flutter, like fluttering moths, through her skin. And suddenly sharp fingers seemed to pluck, *pizzicato*, at the fiddle-strings of her nerves;

Walter could feel her whole body starting involuntarily within his arms, starting as though it had been suddenly hurt. Kissing her, he found himself wondering if she had expected him to react in this way to her provocation, if she had hoped he would. He took her slender neck in his two hands. His thumbs were on her windpipe. He pressed gently. ‘One day,’ he said between his clenched teeth, ‘I shall strangle you.’

Lucy only laughed. He bent forward and kissed her laughing mouth. The touch of his lips against her own sent a thin, sharp sensation that was almost pain running unbearably through her. The panic moth-wings fluttered over her body. She hadn’t expected such fierce and savage ardours from Walter. She was agreeably surprised.

The taxi turned into Soho Square, slowed down, came to a halt. They had arrived. Walter let fall his hands and drew away from her.

She opened her eyes and looked at him. ‘Well?’ she asked challengingly, for the second time that evening. There was a moment’s silence.

‘Lucy,’ he said, ‘let’s go somewhere else. Not here; not this horrible place. Somewhere where we can be alone.’ His voice trembled, his eyes were imploring. The fierceness had gone out of his desire; it had become abject again, dog-like. ‘Let’s tell the man to drive on,’ he begged.

She smiled and shook her head. Why did he implore, like that? Why was he so abject? The fool, the whipped dog!

‘Please, *please*!’ he begged. But he should have commanded. He should simply have ordered the man to drive on, and taken her in his arms again.

‘Impossible,’ said Lucy and stepped out of the cab. If he behaved like a whipped dog, he could be treated like one.

Walter followed her, abject and miserable.

Sbisa himself received them on the threshold. He bowed, he waved his fat white hands, and his expanding smile raised a succession of waves in the flesh of his enormous cheeks. When Lucy arrived, the consumption of champagne tended to rise. She was an honoured guest.

‘Mr Spandrell here?’ she asked. ‘And Mr and Mrs Rampion?’

‘Oo yez, oo yez,’ old Sbisa repeated with Neapolitan, almost oriental emphasis. The implication was that they were not only there, but that if it had been in his power, he would have provided two of each of them for her benefit. ‘And you? Quaite well, quaite well, I hope? Sooch lobster we have tonight, sooch lobster …’ Still talking, he ushered them into the restaurant.

CHAPTER VIII

‘WHAT I COMPLAIN of,’ said Mark Rampion, ’is the horrible unwholesome tameness of our world.’

Mary Rampion laughed wholeheartedly from the depths of her lungs. It was a laugh one could not hear without wishing to laugh oneself. ‘You wouldn’t say that,’ she said, ‘if you’d been your wife instead of you. Tame? I could tell you something about tameness.’

There was certainly nothing very tame about Mark Rampion’s appearance. His profile was steep, with a hooked fierce nose like a cutting instrument and a pointed chin. The eyes were blue and piercing, and the very fine hair, a little on the reddish side of golden, fluttered up at every movement, every breath of wind, like wisps of blown flame.

‘Well, you’re not exactly a sheep either,’ said Rampion. ‘But two people aren’t the world. I was talking about the world, not us. It’s tame, I say. Like one of those horrible big gelded cats.’

‘Did you find the War so tame?’ asked Spandrell, speaking from the half-darkness outside the little world of pink-tinged lamplight in which their table stood. He sat leaning backwards, his chair tilted on its hind legs against the wall.

‘Even the War,’ said Rampion. ‘It was a domesticated outrage. People didn’t go and fight because their blood was up. They went because they were told to; they went because they were good citizens. “Man is a fighting animal,” as your stepfather is so fond of saying in his speeches. But what I complain of is that he’s a domestic animal.’

‘And getting more domestic every day,’ said Mary Rampion, who shared her husband’s opinions – or perhaps it would be truer to say, shared most of his feelings and, consciously or unconsciously borrowed his opinions when she wanted to express them. ‘It’s factories, it’s Christianity, it’s science, it’s

respectability, it's our education,' she explained. 'They weigh on the modern soul. They suck the life out of it. They …'

'Oh, for God's sake shut up!' said Rampion.

'But isn't that what you say?'

'What I say is what *I* say. It becomes quite different when you say it.'

The expression of irritation which had appeared on Mary Rampion's face cleared away. She laughed. 'Ah, well,' she said good-humouredly, 'ratiocination was never my strongest point. But you might be a little more polite about it in public.'

'I don't suffer fools gladly.'

'You'll suffer one very painfully, if you're not careful,' she menaced laughingly.

'If you'd like to throw a plate at him,' said Spandrell, pushing one over to her as he spoke, 'don't mind me.'

Mary thanked him. 'It would do him good,' she said. 'He gets so bumptious.'

'And it would do you no harm,' retorted Rampion, 'if I gave you a black eye in return.'

'You just try. I'll take you on with one hand tied behind my back.'

They all burst out laughing.

'I put my money on Mary,' said Spandrell, tilting back his chair. Smiling with a pleasure which he would have found it hard to explain, he looked from one to the other – from the thin, fierce, indomitable little man to the big golden woman. Each separately was good; but together, as a couple, they were better still. Without realizing it, he had quite suddenly begun to feel happy.

'We'll have it out one of these days,' said Rampion and laid his hand for a moment on hers. It was a delicate hand, sensitive and expressive. An aristocrat's hand if ever there was one, thought Spandrell. And hers, so blunt and strong and honest, was a peasant's. And yet by birth it was Rampion who was the peasant and she the aristocrat. Which only showed what nonsense the genealogists talked.

'Ten rounds,' Rampion went on. 'No gloves.' He turned to Spandrell.

‘You ought to get married, you know,’ he said.

Spandrell’s happiness suddenly collapsed. It was as though he had come with a jolt to his senses. He felt almost angry with himself. What business had *he* to go and sentimentalize over a happy couple?

‘I can’t box,’ he answered; and Rampion detected a bitterness in his jocularity, an inward hardening.

‘No, seriously,’ he said, trying to make out the expression on the other’s face. But Spandrell’s head was in the shadow, and the light of the interposed lamp on the table between them dazzled him.

‘Yes, seriously,’ echoed Mary. ‘You ought. You’d be a changed man.’

Spandrell uttered a brief and snorting laugh, and letting his chair fall back on to its four legs, leaned forward across the table. Pushing aside his coffee cup and his half-emptied liqueur glass, he planted his elbows on the table and his chin in his hands. His face came into the light of the rosy lamp. Like a gargoyle, Mary thought, a gargoyle in a pink boudoir. There was one on Notre Dame in just that attitude, leaning forward with his demon’s face between his claws. Only the gargoyle was a comic devil, so extravagantly diabolical that you couldn’t take his devilishness very seriously. Spandrell was a real person, not a caricature; that was why his face was so much more sinister and tragical. It was a gaunt face. Cheekbone and jaw showed in hard outline through the tight skin. The grey eyes were deeply set. In the cadaverous mask only the mouth was fleshy – a wide mouth, with lips that stood out from the skin like two thick weals.

‘When he smiles,’ Lucy Tantamount had once said of him, ‘it’s like an appendicitis operation with ironical corners.’ The red scar was sensual, but firm at the same time and determined, as was the round chin below. There were lines round the eyes and at the corners of his lips. The thick brown hair had begun to retreat from the forehead.

‘He might be fifty, to look at him,’ Mary Rampion was thinking. ‘And yet, what is his age?’ She made calculations and decided that he couldn’t be more than thirty-two or thirty-three. Just the right age for settling down.

‘A changed man,’ she repeated.

‘But I don’t particularly want to be changed.’

Mark Rampion nodded. ‘Yes, that’s the trouble with you, Spandrell. You like stewing in your disgusting suppurating juice. You don’t want to be made healthy. You enjoy your unwholesomeness. You’re rather proud of it, even.’

‘Marriage would be the cure,’ persisted Mary, indefatigably enthusiastic in the cause of the sacrament to which she herself owed all her life and happiness.

‘Unless, of course, it merely destroyed the wife,’ said Rampion. ‘He might infect her with his own gangrene.’

Spandrell threw back his head and laughed profoundly, but, as was his custom, almost inaudibly, a muted explosion. ‘Admirable!’ he said. ‘Admirable! The first really good argument in favour of matrimony I ever heard. Almost thou persuadest me, Rampion. I’ve never actually carried it as far as marriage.’

‘Carried what?’ asked Rampion, frowning a little. He disliked the other’s rather melodramatically cynical way of talking. So damned pleased with his naughtinesses! Like a stupid child, really.

‘The process of infection. I’d always stopped this side of the registry office. But I’ll cross the threshold next time.’ He drank some more brandy. ‘I’m like Socrates,’ he went on. ‘I’m divinely appointed to corrupt the youth, the female youth more particularly. I have a mission to educate them in the way they shouldn’t go.’ He threw back his head to emit that voiceless laugh of his. Rampion looked at him distastefully. So theatrical. It was as though the man were overacting in order to convince himself he was there at all.

‘But if you only knew what marriage could mean,’ Mary earnestly put in. ‘If you only knew …’

‘But, my dear woman, of course he knows,’ Rampion interrupted with impatience.

‘We’ve been married more than fifteen years now,’ she went on, the missionary spirit strong within her. ‘And I assure you …’

‘I wouldn’t waste my breath, if I were you.’

Mary glanced enquiringly at her husband. Wherever human relationships were concerned, she had an absolute trust in Rampion’s judgment. Through

those labyrinths he threaded his way with a sure tact which she could only envy, not imitate. ‘He can smell people’s souls,’ she used to say of him. She herself had but an indifferent nose for souls. Wisely then, she allowed herself to be guided by him. She glanced at him. Rampion was staring into his coffee cup. His forehead was puckered into a frown; he had evidently spoken in earnest. ‘Oh, very well,’ she said and lit another cigarette.

Spandrell looked from one to the other almost triumphantly. ‘I have a regular technique with the young ones,’ he went on in the same too cynical manner. Mary shut her eyes and thought of the time when she and Rampion had been young.

CHAPTER IX

‘WHAT A BLOTCH!’ said the young Mary, as they topped the crest of the hill and looked down into the valley. Stanton-inTeesdale lay below them, black with its slate roofs and its sooty chimneys and its smoke. The moors rose up and rolled away beyond it, bare as far as the eye could reach. The sun shone, the clouds trailed enormous shadows. ‘Our poor view! It oughtn’t to be allowed. It really oughtn’t.’

‘Every prospect pleases and only man is vile,’ quoted her brother George.

The other young man was more practically minded. ‘If one could plant a battery here,’ he suggested, ‘and drop a few hundred rounds onto the place …’

‘It would be a good thing,’ said Mary emphatically. ‘A really good thing.’

Her approval filled the military young man with happiness. He was desperately in love. ‘Heavy howitzers,’ he added, trying to improve on his suggestion. But George interrupted him.

‘Who the devil is that?’ he asked.

The others looked round in the direction he was pointing. A stranger was walking up the hill towards them.

‘No idea,’ said Mary, looking at him.

The stranger approached. He was a young man in the early twenties, hook-nosed, with blue eyes and silky pale hair that blew about in the wind – for he wore no hat. He had on a Norfolk jacket, ill cut and of cheap material, and a pair of baggy grey flannel trousers. His tie was red; he walked without a stick.

‘Looks as if he wanted to talk to us,’ said George.

And indeed, the young man was coming straight towards them. He walked rapidly and with an air of determination, as though he were on some very important business.

‘What an extraordinary face!’ thought Mary, as he approached. ‘But how ill he looks! So thin, so pale.’ But his eyes forbade her to feel pity. They were bright with power.

He came to a halt in front of them drawing up his thin body very rigidly, as though he were on parade. There was defiance in the attitude, and earnest defiance in the expression of his face. He looked at them fixedly with his bright eyes, turning from one to the other.

‘Good afternoon,’ he said. It was costing him an enormous effort to speak. But speak he must, just because of that insolent unawareness in their blank rich faces.

Mary answered for the others. ‘Good afternoon.’

‘I’m trespassing here,’ said the stranger. ‘Do you mind?’ The seriousness of his defiance deepened. He looked at them sombrely. The young men were examining him from the other side of the bars, from a long way off, from the vantage ground of another class. They had noticed his clothes. There was hostility and contempt in their eyes. There was also a kind of fear. ‘I’m a trespasser,’ he repeated. His voice was rather shrill, but musical. His accent was of the country.

‘One of the local cads,’ George had been thinking.

‘A trespasser.’ It would have been much easier, much pleasanter to sneak out unobserved. That was why he had to affront them.

There was a silence. The military man turned away. He dissociated himself from the whole unpleasant business. It had nothing to do with him, after all. The park belonged to Mary’s father. He was only a guest. ‘I’ve gotta motta: Always merry and bright,’ he hummed to himself, as he looked out over the black town in the valley.

It was George who broke the silence. ‘Do we mind?’ he said, repeating the stranger’s words. His face had gone very red.

‘How absurd he looks!’ thought Mary, as she glanced at him. ‘Like a bull calf. A blushing bull calf.’

‘Do we mind?’ Damned insolent little bounder! George was working up a righteous indignation. ‘I should just think we do mind. And I’ll trouble you to …’

Mary broke out into laughter. ‘We don’t mind at all,’ she said. ‘Not in the least.’

Her brother’s face became even redder. ‘What do you mean, Mary?’ he asked furiously. (‘Always merry and bright,’ hummed the military man, more starry detached then ever.) ‘The place is private.’

‘But we don’t mind a bit,’ she said, not looking at her brother, but at the stranger. ‘Not a bit, when people come and are frank about it, like you.’ She smiled at him; but the young man’s face remained as proudly serious as ever. Looking into those serious bright eyes, she too suddenly became serious. It was no joke, she saw all at once, no joke. Grave issues were involved, important issues. But why grave and in what way important she did not know. She was only obscurely and profoundly aware that it was no joke. ‘Goodbye,’ she said in an altered voice, and held out her hand.

The stranger hesitated for a second, then took it. ‘Goodbye,’ he said. ‘I’ll get out of the park as quick as I can.’ And turning round, he walked rapidly away.

‘What the devil!’ George began, turning angrily on his sister.

‘Oh, hold your tongue!’ she answered impatiently.

‘Shaking hands with the fellow,’ he went on protesting.

‘A bit of a pleb, wasn’t he?’ put in the military friend.

She looked from one to the other without speaking and walked away. What louts they were! The two young men followed.

‘I wish to God Mary would learn how to behave herself properly,’ said George, still fuming.

The military young man made deprecating noises. He was in love with her; but he had to admit that she *was* rather embarrassingly unconventional sometimes. It was her only defect.

‘Shaking that bounder’s hand!’ George went on grumbling.

That was their first meeting. Mary then was twenty-two and Mark Rampion a year younger. He had finished his second year at Sheffield University and was back at Stanton for the summer vacation. His mother lived in one of a row of cottages near the station. She had a little pension – her husband had been a postman – and made a few extra shillings by sewing. Mark was a scholarship boy. His younger and less talented brothers were already at work.

‘A very remarkable young man,’ the Rector insisted more than once in the course of his sketch of Mark Rampion’s career, some few days later.

The occasion was a church bazaar and charitable garden party at the Rectory. Some of the Sunday School children had acted a little play in the open air. The dramatist was Mark Rampion.

‘Quite unassisted,’ the Rector assured the assembled gentry. ‘And what’s more, the lad can draw. They’re a little eccentric perhaps, his pictures, a little … ah …’ he hesitated.

‘Weird,’ suggested his daughter, with an upper middle-class smile, proud of her incomprehension.

‘But full of talent,’ the Rector continued. ‘The boy’s a real cygnet of Tees,’ he added with a self-conscious, almost guilty laugh. He had a weakness for literary allusions. The gentry smiled perfunctorily.

The prodigy was introduced. Mary recognized the trespasser.

‘I’ve met you before,’ she said.

‘Poaching your view.’

‘You’re welcome to it.’ The words made him smile, a little ironically it seemed to her. She blushed, fearful lest she had said something that might have sounded rather patronizing. ‘But I suppose you’d go on poaching whether you were welcome or not,’ she added with a nervous little laugh.

He said nothing, but nodded, still smiling.

Mary’s father stepped in with congratulations. His praises went trampling over the delicate little play like a herd of elephants. Mary writhed. It was all wrong, hopelessly wrong. She could feel that. But the trouble, as she realized,

was that she couldn’t have said anything better herself. The ironic smile still lingered about his lips. ‘What fools he must think us all!’ she said to herself.

And now it was her mother’s turn. ‘Jolly good’ was replaced by ‘too charming’. Which was just as bad, just as hopelessly beside the point.

When Mrs Felpham asked him to tea, Rampion wanted to refuse the invitation – but to refuse it without being boorish or offensive. After all, she meant well enough, poor woman. She was only rather ludicrous. The village Maecenas, in petticoats, patronizing art to the extent of two cups of tea and a slice of plum cake. The rôle was a comic one. While he was hesitating, Mary joined in the invitation.

‘Do come,’ she insisted. And her eyes, her smile expressed a kind of rueful amusement and an apology. She saw the absurdity of the situation. ‘But I can’t do anything about it,’ she seemed to say. ‘Nothing at all. Except apologize.’

‘I should like to come very much,’ he said, turning back to Mrs Felpham.

The appointed day came. His tie as red as ever, Rampion presented himself. The men were out fishing; he was received by Mary and her mother. Mrs Felpham tried to rise to the occasion. The village Shakespeare, it was obvious, must be interested in the drama.

‘Don’t you love Barrie’s plays?’ she asked. ‘I’m so fond of them.’ She talked on; Rampion made no comment. It was only later, when Mrs Felpham had given him up as a bad job and had commissioned Mary to show him round the garden, that he opened his lips.

‘I’m afraid your mother thought me very rude,’ he said, as they walked along the smooth flagged paths between the roses.

‘Of course not,’ Mary protested with an excessive heartiness.

Rampion laughed. ‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘But of course she did. Because I *was* rude in order that I shouldn’t be ruder. Better say nothing than say what I thought about Barrie.’

‘Don’t you like his plays?’

‘Do I like them? I?’ He stopped and looked at her. The blood rushed up into her cheeks; what had she said? ‘You can ask that here.’ He waved his hand at the

flowers, the little pool with the fountain, the high terrace, with the stonecrops and the aubretias growing from between the stones, the grey, severe Georgian house beyond. ‘But come down with me into Stanton and ask me there. We’re sitting on the hard reality down there, not with an air cushion between us and the facts. You must have an assured five pounds a week at least, before you can begin to enjoy Barrie. If you’re sitting on the bare facts, he’s an insult.’

There was a silence. They walked up and down among the roses – those roses which Mary was feeling that she ought to disclaim, to apologize for. But a disclaimer, an apology would be an offence. A big retriever puppy came frisking clumsily along the path towards them. She called its name; the beast stood up on its hind legs and pawed at her.

‘I think I like animals better than people,’ she said, as she protected herself from its ponderous playfulness.

‘Well, at least they’re genuine, they don’t live on air cushions like the sort of people you have to do with,’ said Rampion, bringing out the obscure relevance of her remark to what had been said before. Mary was amazed and delighted by the way he understood.

‘I’d like to know more of your sort of people,’ she said; ‘genuine people, people without air cushions.’

‘Well, don’t imagine I’m going to do the Cook’s guide for you,’ he answered ironically. ‘We’re not a Zoo, you know; we’re not natives in quaint costume, or anything of that sort. If you want to go slumming, apply to the Rector.’

She flushed very red. ‘You know I wasn’t meaning that,’ she protested.

‘Are you sure?’ he asked her. ‘When one’s rich, it’s difficult not to mean that. A person like you simply can’t imagine what it is not to be rich. Like a fish. How can a fish imagine what life out of the water is like?’

‘But can’t one discover, if one tries?’

‘There’s a great gulf,’ he answered.

‘It can be crossed.’

‘Yes, I suppose it can be crossed.’ But his tone was dubious.

They walked and talked among the roses for a few minutes longer; then Rampion looked at his watch and said he must be going.

‘But you’ll come again?’

‘Would there be much point in my coming again?’ he asked. ‘It’s rather like interplanetary visiting, isn’t it?’

‘I hadn’t felt it like that,’ she answered, and added, after a little pause, ‘I suppose you find us all very stupid, don’t you?’ She looked at him. He had raised his eyebrows, he was about to protest. She wouldn’t allow him to be merely polite. ‘Because, you know, we *are* stupid. Terribly stupid.’ She laughed, rather ruefully. With people of her own kind stupidity was rather a virtue than a defect. To be too intelligent was to risk not being a gentleman. Intelligence wasn’t altogether safe. Rampion had made her wonder whether there weren’t better things than gentlemanly safety. In his presence she didn’t feel at all proud of being stupid.

Rampion smiled at her. He liked her frankness. There was something genuine about her. She hadn’t been spoilt – not yet, at any rate.

‘I believe you’re an *agent provocateur*,’ he bantered, ‘trying to tempt me to say rude and subversive things about my betters. But as a matter of fact, my opinions aren’t a bit rude. You people aren’t stupider than anyone else. Not naturally stupider. You’re victims of your way of living. It’s put a shell round you and blinkers over your eyes. By nature a tortoise may be no stupider than a bird. But you must admit that its way of living doesn’t exactly encourage intelligence.’

They met again several times in the course of that summer. Most often they walked together over the moors. ‘Like a force of nature,’ he thought as he watched her with bent head tunnelling her way through the damp wind. A great physical force. Such energy, such strength and health – it was magnificent. Rampion himself had been a delicate child, constantly ailing. He admired the physical qualities he did not himself possess. Mary was a sort of berserker Diana of the moors. He told her as much one day. She liked the compliment.

‘*Wass für ein Atavismus*! That was what my old German governess always used to say about me. She was right, I think. I *am* a bit of an Atavismus.’

Rampton laughed. ‘It sounds ridiculous in German. But it isn’t at all absurd in itself. An atavismus – that’s what we all ought to be. Atavismuses with all modern conveniences. Intelligent primitives. Big game with a soul.’

It was a wet cold summer. On the morning of the day fixed for their next meeting, Mary received a letter from him. ‘Dear Miss Felpham,’ she read, and this first sight of his handwriting gave her a strange pleasure. ‘I’ve idiotically gone and caught a chill. Will you be more forgiving than I am – for I can’t tell you how inexpressibly disgusted and angry I am with myself – and excuse me for putting you off till to-day week?’

He looked pale and thin, when she next saw him, and was still troubled by a cough. When she enquired about his health, he cut her short almost with anger. ‘I’m quite all right,’ he said sharply, and changed the subject.

‘I’ve been re-reading Blake,’ he said. And he began to speak about the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

‘Blake was civilized,’ he insisted, ‘*civilized*. Civilization is harmony and completeness. Reason, feeling, instinct, the life of the body – Blake managed to include and harmonize everything. Barbarism is being lop-sided. You can be a barbarian of the intellect as well as of the body. A barbarian of the soul and the feelings as well as of sensuality. Christianity made us barbarians of the soul, and now science is making us barbarians of the intellect. Blake was the last civilized man.’

He spoke of the Greeks and those naked sunburnt Etruscans in the sepulchral wall paintings. ‘You’ve seen the originals?’ he said. ‘My word, I envy you.’

Mary felt terribly ashamed. She had seen the painted tombs at Tarquinia; but how little she remembered of them! They had just been curious old works of art like all those other innumerable old works of art she had dutifully seen in company with her mother on their Italian journey the year before. They had really been wasted on her. Whereas if he could have afforded to go to Italy …

‘*They* were civilized,’ he was saying, ‘they knew how to live harmoniously and completely, with their whole being.’ He spoke with a kind of passion, as though he were angry – with the world, with himself, perhaps. ‘We’re all barbarians,’ he began; but was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing. Mary waited for the paroxysm to subside. She felt anxious and at the same time embarrassed and ashamed, as one feels when one has come upon a man off his guard and displaying a weakness which at ordinary times he is at pains to conceal. She wondered whether she ought to say something sympathetic about the cough, or pretend that she hadn’t noticed it. He solved her problem by referring to it himself.

‘Talk of barbarism,’ he said, when the fit was over. He spoke in a tone of disgust, his smile was wry and angry. ‘Have you ever heard anything more barbarous than that cough? A cough like that wouldn’t be allowed in a civilized society.’

Mary proffered solicitude and advice. He laughed impatiently.

‘My mother’s very words,’ he said. ‘Word for word. You women are all the same. Clucking like hens after their chickens.’

‘But think how miserable you’d be if we didn’t cluck!’

A few days later – with some misgivings – he took her to see his mother. The misgivings were groundless; Mary and Mrs Rampion seemed to find no difficulties in making spiritual contact. Mrs Rampion was a woman of about fifty, still handsome and with an expression on her face of calm dignity and resignation. Her speech was slow and quiet. Only once did Mary see her manner change and that was when, Mark being out of the room preparing the tea, she began to talk about her son.

‘What do you think of him?’ she asked, leaning forward towards her guest with a sudden brightening of the eyes.

‘What do I think?’ Mary laughed. ‘I’m not impertinent enough to set up as a judge of my betters. But he’s obviously somebody, somebody that matters.’

Mrs Rampion nodded, smiling with pleasure. ‘He’s somebody,’ she repeated. ‘That’s what I’ve always said.’ Her face became grave. ‘If only he were

stronger! If I could only have afforded to bring him up better. He was always delicate. He ought to have been brought up more carefully than I could do. No, not more carefully. I was as careful as I could be. More comfortably, more healthily. But there, I couldn't afford it.' She shook her head. 'There you are.' She gave a little sigh and, leaning back in her chair, sat there in silence, with folded arms, looking at the floor.

Mary made no comment; she did not know what to say. Once more she felt ashamed, miserable and ashamed.

'What did you think of my mother?' Rampion asked later, when he was escorting her home.

'I liked her,' Mary answered. 'Very much indeed. Even though she did make me feel so small and petty and bad. Which is another way of saying that I admired her, and liked her because of my admiration.'

Rampion nodded. 'She *is* admirable,' he said. 'She's courageous and strong and enduring. But she's too resigned.'

'But I thought that was one of the wonderful things about her.'

'She has no right to be resigned,' he answered, frowning. 'No right. When you've had a life like hers, you oughtn't to be resigned. You ought to be rebellious. It's this damned religion. Did I tell you she was religious?'

'No; but I guessed it, when I saw her,' Mary answered.

'She's a barbarian of the soul,' he went on. 'All soul and future. No present, no past, no body, no intellect. Only the soul and the future and in the meantime resignation. Could anything be more barbarous? She ought to rebel.'

'I should leave her as she is,' said Mary. 'She'll be happier. And you can rebel enough for two.'

Rampion laughed. 'I'll rebel enough for millions,' he said.

At the end of the summer Rampion returned to Sheffield, and a little later the Felphams moved southwards to their London house. It was Mary who wrote the first letter. She had expected to hear from him; but he did not write. Not that there was any good reason why he should. But somehow she had expected that he would write; she was disappointed when he did not. The weeks passed. In the

end she wrote to ask him the name of a book about which he had spoken in one of their conversations. The pretext was flimsy; but it served. He answered; she thanked him; the correspondence became an established fact.

At Christmas Rampion came up to London; he had had some things accepted by the newspapers and was unprecedentedly rich – he had ten pounds to do what he liked with. He did not let Mary know of his proximity till the day before his departure.

‘But why didn’t you tell me before?’ she asked reproachfully, when she heard how many days he had already been in London.

‘I didn’t want to inflict myself on you,’ he answered.

‘But you knew I should have been delighted.’

‘You have your own friends.’ *Rich* friends, the ironical smile implied.

‘But aren’t you one of my friends?’ she asked, ignoring the implication.

‘Thank you for saying so.’

‘Thank you for being so,’ she answered without affectation or coquetry.

He was moved by the frankness of her avowal, the genuineness and simplicity of her sentiment. He knew, of course, that she liked and admired him; but to know and to be told are different things.

‘I’m sorry, then, I didn’t write to you before,’ he said, and then regretted his words. For they were hypocritical. The real reason why he had kept away from her was not a fear of being badly received; it was pride. He could not afford to take her out; he did not want to accept anything.

They spent the afternoon together and were unreasonably, disproportionately happy.

‘If only you’d told me before,’ she repeated when it was time for her to go. ‘I wouldn’t have made this tiresome engagement for the evening.’

‘You’ll enjoy it,’ he assured her with a return of that ironical tone in which all his references to her life as a member of the monied class were made. The expression of happiness faded from his face. He felt suddenly rather resentful at having been so happy in her company. It was stupid to feel like that. What was the point of being happy on opposite sides of a gulf? ‘You’ll enjoy it,’ he

repeated, more bitterly. ‘Good food and wine, distinguished people, witty conversation, the theatre afterwards. Isn’t it the ideal evening?’ His tone was savagely contemptuous.

She looked at him with sad, pained eyes, wondering why he should suddenly have started thus to lay waste retrospectively to their afternoon. ‘I don’t know why you talk like that,’ she said. ‘Do you know yourself?’

The question reverberated in his mind long after they had parted. ‘Do you know yourself?’ Of course he knew. But he also knew that there was a gulf.

They met again at Stanton in Easter week. In the interval they had exchanged many letters, and Mary had received a proposal of marriage from the military friend who had wanted to obliterate Stanton with howitzers. To the surprise and somewhat to the distress of her relations, she refused him.

‘He’s such a nice boy,’ her mother had insisted.

‘I know. But one simply can’t take him seriously, can one?’

‘Why not?’

‘And then,’ Mary continued, ‘he doesn’t really exist. He isn’t completely there. Just a lump; nothing more. One can’t marry someone who isn’t there.’ She thought of Rampion’s violently living face; it seemed to burn, it seemed to be sharp and glowing. ‘One can’t marry a ghost, even when it’s tangible and lumpy – particularly when it’s lumpy.’ She burst out laughing.

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ said Mrs Felpham with dignity.

‘But *I* do,’ Mary answered. ‘*I* do. And after all, that’s what chiefly matters in the circumstances.’

Walking with Rampion on the moors, she told him of the laying of this too, too solid military phantom. He made no comment. There was a long silence. Mary felt disappointed and at the same time ashamed of her disappointment. ‘I believe,’ she said to herself, ‘I believe I was trying to get him to propose to me.’

The days passed; Rampion was silent and gloomy. When she asked him the reason, he talked unhappily about his future prospects. At the end of the summer, he would have finished his university course; it would be time to think of a

career. The only career that seemed to be immediately open – for he could not afford to wait – was teaching.

‘Teaching,’ he repeated with emphatic horror, ‘teaching! Does it surprise you that I should feel depressed?’ But his misery had other causes besides the prospect of having to teach. ‘Would she laugh at me, if I asked her?’ he was wondering. He didn’t think she would. But if she wasn’t going to refuse, was it fair on his part to ask? Was it fair to let her in for the kind of life she would have to lead with him? Or perhaps she had money of her own; and in that case his own honour would be involved.

‘Do you see me as a pedagogue?’ he asked aloud. The pedagogue was his scapegoat.

‘But why should you be a pedagogue, when you can write and draw? You can live on your wits.’

‘But can I? At least pedagogy’s safe.’

‘What do you want to be safe for?’ she asked, almost contemptuously.

Rampion laughed. ‘You wouldn’t ask if you’d had to live on a weekly wage, subject to a week’s notice. Nothing like money for promoting courage and self-confidence.’

‘Well then, to that extent money’s a good thing. Courage and self-confidence are virtues.’

They walked on for a long time in silence. ‘Well, well,’ said Rampion at last, looking up at her, ‘you’ve brought it on yourself.’ He made an attempt at laughter. ‘Courage and self-confidence are virtues; you said so yourself. I’m only trying to live up to your moral standards. Courage and self-confidence! I’m going to tell you that I love you.’ There was another long silence. He waited; his heart was beating as though with fear.

‘Well?’ he questioned at last. Mary turned towards him and, taking his hand, lifted it to her lips.

Before and after their marriage Rampion had many occasions of admiring those wealth-fostered virtues. It was she who made him give up all thought of

teaching and trust exclusively to his wits for a career. She had confidence for both.

‘I’m not going to marry a schoolmaster,’ she insisted. And she didn’t; she married a dramatist who had never had a play performed, except at the Stanton-in-Teesdale church bazaar, a painter who had never sold a picture.

‘We shall starve,’ he prophesied. The spectre of hunger haunted him; he had seen it too often to be able to ignore its existence.

‘Nonsense,’ said Mary, strong in the knowledge that people didn’t starve. Nobody that she knew had ever been hungry. ‘Nonsense.’ She had her way in the end.

What made Rampion the more reluctant to take the unsafe course was the fact that it could only be taken at Mary’s expense.

‘I can’t live on you,’ he said. ‘I can’t take your money.’

‘But you’re not taking my money,’ she insisted, ‘you’re simply an investment. I’m putting up capital in the hope of getting a good return. You shall live on me for a year or two, so that I may live on you for the rest of my life. It’s business; it’s positively sharp practice.’

He had to laugh.

‘And in any case,’ she continued, ‘you won’t live very long on me. Eight hundred pounds won’t last for ever.’

He agreed at last to borrow her eight hundred pounds at the current rate of interest. He did it reluctantly, feeling that he was somehow betraying his own people. To start life with eight hundred pounds – it was too easy, it was a shirking of difficulties, a taking of unfair advantages. If it had not been for that sense of responsibility which he felt towards his own talents, he would have refused the money and either desperately risked the career of literature without a penny, or gone the safe and pedagogical way. When at last he consented to take the money, he made it a condition that she should never accept anything from her relations. Mary agreed.

‘Not that they’ll be very anxious to give me anything,’ she added with a laugh.

She was right. Her father's horror at the misalliance was as profound as she had expected. Mary was in no danger, so far as he was concerned, of becoming rich.

They were married in August and immediately went abroad. They took the train as far as Dijon and from there began to walk south-east, towards Italy. Rampion had never been out of England before. The strangeness of France was symbolical to him of the new life he had just begun, the new liberty he had acquired. And Mary herself was no less symbolically novel than the country through which they travelled. She had not only self-confidence, but a recklessness which was altogether strange and extraordinary in his eyes. Little incidents impressed him. There was that occasion, for example, when she left her spare pair of shoes behind in the farm where they had spent the night. It was only late in the afternoon that she discovered her loss. Rampion suggested that they should walk back and reclaim them. She would not hear of it.

'They're gone,' she said. 'It's no use bothering. Let the boots bury their boots.' He got quite angry with her. 'Remember you're not rich any more,' he insisted. 'You can't afford to throw away a good pair of shoes. We shan't be able to buy a new pair till we get home.' They had taken a small sum with them for their journey and had vowed that in no circumstances would they spend more. 'Not till we get home,' he repeated.

'I know, I know,' she answered impatiently. 'I shall learn to walk barefoot.'

And she did.

'I was born to be a tramp,' she declared one evening when they were lying on hay in a barn. 'I can't tell you how I enjoy not being respectable. It's the Atavismus coming out. You bother too much, Mark. Consider the lilies of the field.'

'And yet,' Rampion meditated, 'Jesus was a poor man. Tomorrow's bread and boots must have mattered a great deal in his family. How was it that he could talk about the future like a millionaire?'

'Because he was one of nature's dukes,' she answered. 'That's why. He was born with the title; he felt he had a divine right, like a king. Millionaires who

make their money are always thinking about money; they're terribly preoccupied about tomorrow. Jesus had the real ducal feeling that he could never be let down. None of your titled financiers or soap boilers. A genuine aristocrat. And besides, he was an artist, he was a genius. He had more important things to think about than bread and boots and tomorrow.' She was silent for a little and then added, as an afterthought: 'And what's more, he wasn't respectable. He didn't care about appearances. They have their reward. But I don't mind if we do look like scarecrows.'

'You've paid yourself a nice lot of compliments,' said Rampion. But he meditated her words and her spontaneous, natural, untroubled way of living. He envied her her Atavismus.

It was not merely tramping that Mary liked. She got almost as much enjoyment out of the more prosaic settled life they led, when they returned to England. 'Marie-Antoinette at the Trianon,' was what Rampion called her, when he saw her cooking the dinner; she did it with such child-like enthusiasm.

'Think carefully,' he had warned her before they married. 'You're going to be poor. *Really* poor; not poor on a thousand a year like your impecunious friends. There'll be no servants. You'll have to cook and mend and do housework. You won't find it pleasant.'

Mary only laughed. '*You'll* be the one who won't find it pleasant,' she answered, 'at any rate until I've learnt to cook.'

She had never so much as fried an egg when she married him.

Strangely enough that child-like, Marie-Antoinette-ish enthusiasm for doing things – for cooking on a real range, using a real carpet sweeper, a real sewing machine – survived the first novel and exciting months. She went on enjoying herself.

'I could never go back to being a perfect lady,' she used to say. 'It would bore me to death. Goodness knows, housework and managing and looking after the children can be boring and exasperating enough. But being quite out of touch with all the ordinary facts of existence, living in a different planet from the world of daily, physical reality – that's much worse.'

Rampion was of the same opinion. He refused to make art and thought excuses for living a life of abstraction. In the intervals of painting and writing he helped Mary with the housework.

‘You don’t expect flowers to grow in nice clean vacuums.’ That was his argument. ‘They need mould and clay and dung. So does art.’

For Rampion, there was also a kind of moral compulsion to live the life of the poor. Even when he was making quite a reasonable income, they kept only one maid and continued to do a great part of the housework themselves. It was a case, with him, of *noblesse oblige* – or rather *roture oblige*. To live like the rich, in a comfortable abstraction from material cares would be, he felt, a kind of betrayal of his class, his own people. If he sat still and paid servants to work for him, he would somehow be insulting his mother’s memory, he would be posthumously telling her that he was too good to lead the life she had led.

There were occasions when he hated this moral compulsion, because he felt that it was compelling him to do foolish and ridiculous things; and hating, he would try to rebel against it. How absurdly shocked he had been, for example, by Mary’s habit of lying in bed of a morning. When she felt lazy, she didn’t get up; and there was an end of it. The first time it happened, Rampion was really distressed.

‘But you can’t stay in bed all the morning,’ he protested.

‘Why not?’

‘Why not? But because you *can’t*.’

‘But I *can*,’ said Mary calmly. ‘And I *do*.’

It shocked him. Unreasonably, as he perceived when he tried to analyse his feelings. But all the same, he *was* shocked. He was shocked because he had always got up early himself, because all his people had had to get up early. It shocked him that one should lie in bed while other people were up and working. To get up late was somehow to add insult to injury. And yet, obviously, getting up early oneself, unnecessarily, did nothing to help those who *had* to get up early. Getting up, when one wasn’t compelled to get up, was just a tribute of

respect, like taking off one's hat in a church. And at the same time it was an act of propitiation, a sacrificial appeasement of the conscience.

'One oughtn't to feel like that,' he reflected. 'Imagine a Greek feeling like that!'

It was unimaginable. And yet the fact remained that, however much he might disapprove of the feeling, he did in fact feel like that.

'Mary's healthier than I am,' he thought; and he remembered those lines of Walt Whitman about the animals. 'They do not sweat and whine about their condition. They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins.' Mary was like that and it was good. To be a perfect animal *and* a perfect human – that was the ideal. All the same, he was shocked when she didn't get up in the morning. He tried not to be; but he was shocked. Rebelling, he would sometimes lie in bed himself till noon, on principle. It was a duty not to be a barbarian of the conscience. But it was a very long time before he could genuinely enjoy his laziness.

Slug-abed habits were not the only things in Mary that distressed him. During those first months of their marriage he was often, secretly and against his own principles, shocked by her. Mary soon learnt to recognize the signs of his unexpressed disapproval and made a point, when she saw that she had shocked him, of shocking him yet more profoundly. The operation, she thought, did him nothing but good.

'You're such an absurd old puritan,' she told him.

The taunt annoyed him, because he knew it was well founded. By birth, to some extent, and yet more by training, he *was* half a puritan. His father had died when he was only a child and he had been brought up exclusively by a virtuous and religious mother who had done her best to abolish, to make him deny the existence of all the instinctive and physical components of his being. Growing up, he had revolted against her teaching, but with the mind only, not in practice. The conception of life against which he had rebelled was a part of him; he was at war against himself. Theoretically, he approved of Mary's easy aristocratic tolerance of behaviour which his mother had taught him was horribly sinful; he

admired her unaffected enjoyment of food and wine and kisses, of dancing and singing, fairs and theatres and every kind of jollification. And yet, whenever, in those early days, she began to talk in her calm matter-of-fact way of what he had only heard of, portentously, as fornication and adultery, he felt a shock, not in his reason (for that, after a moment's reflection, approved), but in some deeper layer of his being. And the same part of him obscurely suffered from her great and whole-heartedly expressed capacity for pleasure and amusement, from her easy laughter, her excellent appetite, her unaffected sensuality. It took him a long time to unlearn the puritanism of his childhood. There were moments when his love for his mother turned almost to hatred.

'She had no right to bring me up like that,' he said. 'Like a Japanese gardener deliberately stunting a tree. No right.'

And yet he was glad that he had not been born a noble savage, like Mary. He was glad that circumstances had compelled him laboriously to learn his noble savagery. Later, when they had been married several years and had achieved an intimacy impossible in those first months of novelties, shocks and surprises, he was able to talk to her about these matters.

'Living comes to you too easily,' he tried to explain. 'You live by instinct. You know what to do quite naturally, like an insect when it comes out of the pupa. It's too simple, too simple.' He shook his head. 'You haven't earned your knowledge; you've never realized the alternatives.'

'In other words,' said Mary, 'I'm a fool.'

'No, a woman,'

'Which is your polite way of saying the same thing. But I'd like to know,' she went on with an irrelevance that was only apparent, 'where you'd be without me. I'd like to know what you'd be doing if you'd never met me.' She moved from stage to stage of an emotionally coherent argument.

'I'd be where I am and be doing exactly what I'm doing now.' He didn't mean it, of course; for he knew, better than anyone, how much he owed to her, how much he had learnt from her example and precept. But it amused him to annoy her.

‘You know that’s not true,’ Mary was indignant.

‘It *is* true.’

‘It’s a lie. And to prove it,’ she added, ‘I’ve a very good mind to go away with the children and leave you for a few months to stew in your own juice. I’d like to see how you get on without me.’

‘I should get on perfectly well,’ he assured her with exasperating calmness.

Mary flushed; she was beginning to be genuinely annoyed. ‘Very well then,’ she answered, ‘I’ll really go. This time I really will.’ She had made the threat before; they quarrelled a good deal, for both were quick-tempered.

‘Do,’ said Rampion. ‘But remember that two can play at that going-away game. When you go away from me, I go away from you.’

‘We’ll see how you get on without me,’ she continued menacingly.

‘And you?’ he asked.

‘What about me?’

‘Do you imagine you can get on any better without me than I can get on without you?’

They looked at one another for a little time in silence and then, simultaneously, burst out laughing.

CHAPTER X

‘A REGULAR TECHNIQUE,’ Spandrell repeated. ‘One chooses them unhappy, or dissatisfied, or wanting to go on the stage, or trying to write for the magazines and being rejected and consequently thinking they’re *âmes incomprises*.’ He was boastfully generalizing from the case of poor little Harriet Watkins. If he had just baldly recounted his affair with Harriet, it wouldn’t have sounded such a very grand exploit. Harriet was such a pathetic, helpless little creature; anybody could have done her down. But generalized like this, as though her case was only one of hundreds, told in a language of the cookery book (‘one chooses them unhappy’ – it was one of Mrs Beeton’s recipes), the history sounded, he thought, most cynically impressive. ‘And one starts by being very, very kind, and so wise, and perfectly pure, an elder brother, in fact. And they think one’s really wonderful, because, of course, they’ve never met anybody who wasn’t just a city man, with city ideas and city ambitions. Simply wonderful, because one knows all about art and has met all the celebrities and doesn’t think exclusively about money and in terms of the morning paper. And they’re a little in awe of one too,’ he added remembering little Harriet’s expression of scared admiration; ‘one’s so unrespectable and yet so high-class, so at ease and at home among the great works and the great men, so wicked but so extraordinarily good, so learned, so well travelled, so brilliantly cosmopolitan and West-End (have you ever heard a suburban talking of the West-End?), like that gentleman with the order of the Golden Fleece in the advertisements for De Reszke cigarettes. Yes, they’re in awe of one; but at the same time they adore. One’s so understanding, one knows so much about life in general and their souls in particular, and one isn’t a bit flirtatious or saucy like ordinary men, not a bit. They feel they could trust one absolutely, and so they can, for the first weeks. One has to get them used to the trap; quite tame and trusting, trained not to shy

at an occasional brotherly pat on the back or an occasional chaste uncle-ish kiss on the forehead. And meanwhile one coaxes out their little confidences, one makes them talk about love, one talks about it oneself in a man-to-man sort of way, as though they were one's own age and as sadly disillusioned and bitterly knowing as oneself – which they find terribly shocking (though of course they don't say so), but oh, so thrilling, so enormously flattering. They simply love you for that. Well then, finally, when the moment seems ripe and they're thoroughly domesticated and no more frightened, one stages the dénouement. Tea in one's rooms – one's got them thoroughly used to coming with absolute impunity to one's rooms – and they're going to go out to dinner with one, so that there's no hurry. The twilight deepens, one talks disillusionedly and yet feelingly about the amorous mysteries, one produces cocktails – very strong – and goes on talking so that they ingurgitate them absent-mindedly without reflection. And sitting on the floor at their feet, one begins very gently stroking their ankles in an entirely platonic way, still talking about amorous philosophy, as though one were quite unconscious of what one's hand were doing. If that's not resented and the cocktails have done their work, the rest shouldn't be difficult. So at least I've always found.' Spandrell helped himself to more brandy and drank. 'But it's then, when they've become one's mistress that the fun really begins. It's then one deploys all one's Socratic talents. One develops their little temperaments, one domesticates them – still so wisely and sweetly and patiently – to every outrage of sensuality. It can be done, you know; the more easily, the more innocent they are. They can be brought in perfect ingenuousness to the most astonishing pitch of depravity.'

'I've no doubt they can,' said Mary indignantly. 'But what's the point of doing it?'

'It's an amusement,' said Spandrell with theatrical cynicism. 'It passes the time and relieves the tedium.'

'And above all,' Mark Rampion went on, without looking up from his coffee cup, 'above all it's a vengeance. It's a way of getting one's own back on women, it's a way of punishing them for being women and so attractive, it's a way of

expressing one's hatred of them and of what they represent, it's a way of expressing one's hatred of oneself. The trouble with you, Spandrell,' he went on, suddenly and accusingly raising his bright pale eyes to the other's face, 'is that you really hate yourself. You hate the very source of your life, its ultimate basis – for there's no denying it, sex *is* fundamental. And you hate it, *hate* it.'

'Me?' It was a novel accusation. Spandrell was accustomed to hearing himself blamed for his excessive love of women and the sensual pleasures.

'Not only you. All these people.' With a jerk of his head he indicated the other diners. 'And all the respectable ones too. Practically everyone. It's the disease of modern man. I call it Jesus's disease on the analogy of Bright's disease. Or rather Jesus's and Newton's disease; for the scientists are as much responsible as the Christians. So are the big business men, for that matter. It's Jesus's and Newton's and Henry Ford's disease. Between them, the three have pretty well killed us. Ripped the life out of our bodies and stuffed us with hatred.'

Rampion was full of his subject. He had been busy all day on a drawing that symbolically illustrated it. Jesus, in the loincloth of the execution morning, and an overalled surgeon were represented, scalpel in hand, one on either side of an operating table, on which, foreshortened, the soles of his feet presented to the spectator, lay crucified a half-dissected man. From the horrible wound in his belly escaped a coil of entrails which, falling to the earth, mingled with those of the gashed and bleeding woman lying in the foreground, to be transformed by an allegorical metamorphosis into a whole people of living snakes. In the background receded a landscape of hills, dotted with black collieries and chimneys. On one side of the picture, behind the figure of Jesus, two angels – the spiritual product of the vivisectors' mutilations – were trying to rise on their outspread wings. Vainly, for their feet were entangled in the coils of the serpents. For all their efforts, they could not leave the earth.

'Jesus and the scientists are vivisecting us,' he went on, thinking of his picture. 'Hacking our bodies to bits.'

‘But after all, why not?’ objected Spandrell. ‘Perhaps they’re meant to be vivisected. The fact of shame is significant. We feel spontaneously ashamed of the body and its activities. That’s a sign of the body’s absolute and natural inferiority.’

‘Absolute and natural rubbish!’ said Rampion indignantly. ‘Shame isn’t spontaneous, to begin with. It’s artificial, it’s acquired. You can make people ashamed of anything. Agonizingly ashamed of wearing brown boots with a black coat, of speaking with the wrong sort of accent, or having a drop at the end of their noses. Of absolutely anything, including the body and its functions. But that particular shame’s just as artificial as any other. The Christians invented it, just as the tailors in Savile Row invented the shame of wearing brown boots with a black coat. There was precious little of it before Christian times. Look at the Greeks, the Etruscans.’

The antique names transported Mary back to the moors above Stanton. He was just the same. Stronger now, that was all. How ill he had looked that day! She had felt ashamed of being healthy and rich. Had she loved him then as much as she loved him now?

Spandrell had lifted a long and bony hand. ‘I know, I know. Noble and nude and antique. But I believe they’re entirely a modern invention, those Swedish-drill pagans of ours. We trot them out whenever we want to bait the Christians. But did they ever exist? I have my doubts.’

‘But look at their art,’ put in Mary, thinking of the paintings at Tarquinia. She had seen them a second time with Mark – really seen them on that occasion.

‘Yes, and look at ours,’ retorted Spandrell. ‘When the Royal Academy sculpture room is dug up three thousand years hence, they’ll say that twentieth-century Londoners wore fig-leaves, suckled their babies in public and embraced one another in the parks, stark naked.’

‘I only wish they did,’ said Rampion.

‘But they don’t. And then – leaving this question of shame on one side for the moment – what about asceticism as the preliminary condition of the mystical experience?’

Rampion brought his hands together with a clap and, leaning back in his chair, turned up his eyes. ‘Oh, my sacred aunt!’ he said. ‘So it’s come to that, has it? Mystical experience and asceticism. The fornicator’s hatred of life in a new form.’

‘But seriously …’ the other began.

‘No, seriously, have you read Anatole France’s *Thaïs*?’

Spandrell shook his head.

‘Read it,’ said Rampion. ‘Read it. It’s elementary, of course. A boy’s book. But one mustn’t grow up without having read all the boys’ books. Read it and then come and talk to me again about asceticism and mystical experiences.’

‘I’ll read it,’ said Spandrell. ‘Meanwhile, all I wanted to say is that there are certain states of consciousness known to ascetics that are unknown to people who aren’t ascetics.’

‘No doubt. And if you treat your body in the way nature meant you to, as an equal, you attain to states of consciousness unknown to the vivisecting ascetics.’

‘But the states of the vivisectors are better than the states of the indulgers.’

‘In other words, lunatics are better than sane men. Which I deny. The sane, harmonious, Greek man gets as much as he can of both sets of states. He’s not such a fool as to want to kill part of himself. He strikes a balance. It isn’t easy of course; it’s even damnably difficult. The forces to be reconciled are intrinsically hostile. The conscious soul resents the activities of the unconscious, physical, instinctive part of the total being. The life of the one is the other’s death and vice versa. But the sane man at least tries to strike a balance. The Christians, who weren’t sane, told people that they’d got to throw half of themselves in the waste-paper basket. And now the scientists and business men come and tell us that we must throw away half of what the Christians left us. But I don’t want to be three-quarters dead. I prefer to be alive, entirely alive. It’s time there was a revolt in favour of life and wholeness.’

‘But from your point of view,’ said Spandrell, ‘I should have thought this epoch needed no reforming. It’s the golden age of guzzling, sport and promiscuous love-making.’

‘But if you knew what a puritan Mark really was!’ Mary Rampion laughed. ‘What a regular old puritan!’

‘Not a puritan,’ said her husband. ‘Merely sane. You’re like everyone else,’ he went on, addressing himself to Spandrell.

‘You seem to imagine that the cold, modern, civilized lasciviousness is the same as the healthy – what shall I call it? – phallism (that gives the religious quality of the old way of life; you’ve read the *Acharnians*?) phallism, then, of the ancients.’

Spandrell groaned and shook his head. ‘Spare us the Swedish exercisers.’

‘But it *isn’t* the same,’ the other went on. ‘It’s just Christianity turned inside out. The ascetic contempt for the body expressed in a different way. Contempt and hatred. That was what I was saying just now. You hate yourselves, you hate life. Your only alternatives are promiscuity or asceticism. Two forms of death. Why, the Christians themselves understood phallism a great deal better than this godless generation. What’s that phrase in the marriage service? “With my body I thee worship.” Worshipping with the body – that’s the genuine phallism. And if you imagine it has anything to do with the unimpassioned civilized promiscuity of our advanced young people, you’re very much mistaken indeed.’

‘Oh, I’m quite ready to admit the deathliness of our civilized entertainments,’ Spandrell answered. ‘There’s a certain smell,’ he went on speaking in snatches between sucks at the half-smoked cigar he was trying to relight, ‘of cheap scent … and stale unwashedness … I often think … the atmosphere of hell … must be composed of it.’ He threw the match away. ‘But the other alternative – there’s surely no death about that. No death in Jesus or St Francis, for example.’

‘In spots,’ said Rampion. ‘They were dead in spots. Very much alive in others, I quite agree. But they simply left half of existence out of account. No, no, they won’t do. It’s time people stopped talking about them. I’m tired of Jesus and Francis, terribly tired of them.’

‘Well then, the poets,’ said Spandrell. ‘You can’t say that Shelley’s a corpse.’

‘Shelley?’ exclaimed Rampion. ‘Don’t talk to me of Shelley.’ He shook his head emphatically. ‘No, no. There’s something very dreadful about Shelley. Not

human, not a man. A mixture between a fairy and a white slug.'

'Come, come,' Spandrell protested.

'Oh, exquisite and all that. But what a bloodless kind of slime inside! No blood, no real bones and bowels. Only pulp and a white juice. And oh, that dreadful lie in the soul! The way he was always pretending for the benefit of himself and everybody else that the world wasn't really the world, but either heaven or hell. And that going to bed with women wasn't really going to bed with them, but just two angels holding hands. Ugh! Think of his treatment of women – shocking, really shocking. The women loved it of course – for a little. It made them feel so spiritual – that is, until it made them feel like committing suicide. *So* spiritual. And all the time he was just a young schoolboy with a sensual itch like anybody else's, but persuading himself and other people that he was Dante and Beatrice rolled into one, only much more so. Dreadful, dreadful! The only excuse is that, I suppose, he couldn't help it. He wasn't born a man; he was only a kind of fairy slug with the sexual appetites of a schoolboy. And then, think of that awful incapacity to call a spade a spade. He always had to pretend it was an angel's harp or a platonic imagination. Do you remember the *Ode to the Skylark*? "Hail to thee, blithe spirit! Bird thou never wert!"' Rampion recited with a ludicrous parody of an elocutionist's 'expression'. 'Just pretending, just lying to himself, as usual. The lark couldn't be allowed to be a mere bird, with blood and feathers and a nest and an appetite for caterpillars. Oh no! That wasn't nearly poetical enough, that was much too coarse. It had to be a disembodied spirit. Bloodless, boneless. A kind of ethereal flying slug. It was only to be expected. Shelley was a kind of flying slug himself; and, after all, nobody can really write about anything except himself. If you're a slug, you must write about slugs, even though your subject is supposed to be a skylark. But I wish to God,' Rampion added, with a sudden burst of comically extravagant fury, 'I wish to God the bird had had as much sense as those sparrows in the book of Tobit and dropped a good large mess in his eye. It would have served him damned well right for saying it wasn't a bird. Blithe spirit, indeed! Blithe spirit!'

CHAPTER XI

IN LUCY'S NEIGHBOURHOOD life always tended to become exceedingly public. The more the merrier was her principle; or if 'merrier' were too strong a word, at least the noisier, the more tumultuously distracting. Within five minutes of her arrival, the corner in which Spandrell and the Rampions had been sitting all evening in the privacy of quiet conversation was invaded and in a twinkling over-run by a loud and alcoholic party from the inner room. Cuthbert Arkwright was the noisiest and the most drunken – on principle and for the love of art as well as for that of alcohol. He had an idea that by bawling and behaving offensively, he was defending art against the Philistines. Tipsy, he felt himself arrayed on the side of the angels, of Baudelaire, of Edgar Allan Poe, of De Quincey, against the dull unspiritual mob. And if he boasted of his fornications, it was because respectable people had thought Blake a madman, because Bowdler had edited Shakespeare, and the author of *Madame Bovary* had been prosecuted, because when one asked for the Earl of Rochester's *Sodom* at the Bodleian, the librarians wouldn't give it unless one had a certificate that one was engaged on *bona fide* literary research. He made his living, and in the process convinced himself that he was serving the arts, by printing limited and expensive editions of the more scabrous specimens of the native and foreign literatures. Blond, beef-red, with green and bulging eyes, his large face shining, he approached vociferating greetings. Willie Weaver jauntily followed, a little man perpetually smiling, spectacles astride his long nose, bubbling with good humour and an inexhaustible verbiage. Behind him, his twin in height and also spectacled, but grey, dim, shrunken and silent, came Peter Slipe.

'They look like the advertisement of a patent medicine,' said Spandrell as they approached. 'Slipe's the patient before, Weaver's the same after one bottle,

and Cuthbert Arkwright illustrates the appalling results of taking the complete cure.'

Lucy was still laughing at the joke when Cuthbert took her hand. 'Lucy!' he shouted. 'My angel! But why in heaven's name do you always write in pencil? I simply cannot read what you write. It's a mere chance that I'm here tonight.'

So she'd written to tell him to meet her here, thought Walter. That vulgar, stupid lout.

Willie Weaver was shaking hands with Mary Rampion and Mark. 'I had no idea I was to meet the great,' he said. 'Not to mention the fair.' He bowed towards Mary, who broke into loud and masculine laughter. Willie Weaver was rather pleased than offended. 'Positively the Mermaid Tavern!' he went on.

'Still busy with the bric-à-brac?' asked Spandrell, leaning across the table to address Peter Slipe, who had taken the seat next to Walter's. Peter was an Assyriologist employed at the British Museum.

'But why in pencil, why in pencil?' Cuthbert was roaring.

'I get my fingers so dirty when I use a pen.'

'I'll kiss the ink away,' protested Cuthbert, and bending over the hand he was still holding, he began to kiss the thin fingers.

Lucy laughed. 'I think I'd rather buy a stylo,' she said.

Walter looked on in misery. Was it possible? A gross and odious clown like that?

'Ungrateful!' said Cuthbert. 'But I simply must talk to Rampion.'

And turning away, he gave Rampion a clap on the shoulder and simultaneously waved his other hand at Mary.

'What an agape!' Willie Weaver simmered on, like a tea kettle. The spout was now turned towards Lucy, 'What a symposium! What a –' he hesitated for a moment in search of the right, the truly staggering phrase – 'what Athenian enlargements! What a more than Platonic orgy!'

'What *is* an Athenian enlargement?' asked Lucy.

Willie sat down and began to explain. 'Enlargements, I mean, by contrast with our bourgeois and Pecksniffian smuggeries …'

‘Why don’t you give me something of yours to print?’ Cuthbert was persuasively enquiring.

Rampion looked at him with distaste. ‘Do you think I’m ambitious of having my books sold in the rubber shops?’

‘They’d be in good company,’ said Spandrell. ‘*The Works of Aristotle*…’ Cuthbert roared in protest.

‘Compare an eminent Victorian with an eminent Periclean,’ said Willie Weaver. He smiled, he was happy and eloquent.

On Peter Slipe the burgundy had acted as a depressant, not a stimulant. The wine had only enhanced his native dimness and melancholy.

‘What about Beatrice?’ he said to Walter, ‘Beatrice Gilray?’ he hiccoughed and tried to pretend that he had coughed. ‘I suppose you see her often, now that she works on the *Literary World*.’

Walter saw her three times a week and always found her well.

‘Give her my love, when you see her next,’ said Slipe.

‘The stertorous borborygms of the dyspeptic Carlyle!’ declaimed Willie Weaver, and beamed through his spectacles. The *mot*, he flattered himself, could hardly have been more exquisitely *juste*. He gave the little cough which was his invariable comment on the best of his phrases. ‘I would laugh, I would applaud,’ the little cough might be interpreted; ‘but modesty forbids.’

‘Stertorous what?’ asked Lucy. ‘Do remember that I’ve never been educated.’

‘Warbling your native woodnotes wild!’ said Willie. ‘May I help myself to some of that noble brandy? The blushful Hippocrene.’

‘She treated me badly, extremely badly.’ Peter Slipe was plaintive. ‘But I don’t want her to think that I bear her any grudge.’

Willie Weaver smacked his lips over the brandy. ‘Solid joys and liquid pleasures none but Zion’s children know,’ he misquoted and repeated his little cough of self-satisfaction.

‘The trouble with Cuthbert,’ Spandrell was saying, ’is that he’s never quite learnt to distinguish art from pornography.’

‘Of course,’ continued Peter Slipe, ‘she had a perfect right to do what she liked with her own house. But to turn me out at such short notice.’

At another time Walter would have been delighted to listen to poor little Slipe’s version of that curious story. But with Lucy on his other hand, he found it difficult to take much interest.

‘But I sometimes wonder if the Victorians didn’t have more fun than we did,’ she was saying. ‘The more prohibitions, the greater the fun. If you want to see people drinking with real enjoyment, you must go to America. Victorian England was dry in every department. For example, there was a nineteenth amendment about love. They must have made it as enthusiastically as the Americans drink whiskey. I don’t know that I really believe in Athenian enlargements – that is, if we’re one of them.’

‘You prefer Pecksniff to Alcibiades,’ Willie Weaver concluded.

Lucy shrugged her shoulders. ‘I’ve had no experience of Pecksniff.’

‘I don’t know,’ Peter Slipe was saying, ‘whether you’ve ever been pecked by a goose.’

‘Been what?’ asked Walter, recalling his attention.

‘Been pecked by a goose.’

‘Never, that I can remember.’

‘It’s a hard, dry sensation.’ Slipe jabbed the air with a tobacco-stained forefinger. ‘Beatrice is like that. She pecks; she enjoys pecking. But she can be very kind at the same time. She insists on being kind in *her* way, and she pecks if you don’t like it. Pecking’s part of the kindness; so I always found. I never objected. But why should she have turned me out of the house as though I were a criminal? And rooms are so difficult to find now. I had to stay in a boarding house for three weeks. The food …’ He shuddered.

Walter could not help smiling.

‘She must have been in a great hurry to instal Burlap in your place.’

‘But why in such a hurry as all that?’

‘When it’s a case of off with the old love and on with the new …’

‘But what has love to do with it?’ asked Slipe. ‘In Beatrice’s case.’

‘A great deal,’ Willie Weaver broke in. ‘Everything. These superannuated virgins – always the most passionate.’

‘But she’s never had a love affair in her life.’

‘Hence the violence,’ concluded Willie triumphantly. ‘Beatrice has a nigger sitting on the safety valve. And my wife assures me that her underclothes are positively Phrynean. That’s most sinister.’

‘Perhaps she likes being well dressed,’ suggested Lucy.

Willie Weaver shook his head. The hypothesis was too simple.

‘That woman’s unconscious as a black hole.’ Willie hesitated a moment. ‘Full of batrachian grapplings in the dark,’ he concluded and modestly coughed to commemorate his achievement.

Beatrice Gilray was mending a pink silk camisole. She was thirty-five, but seemed younger, or rather seemed ageless. Her skin was clear and fresh. From shallow and unwrinkled orbits the eyes looked out, shining. In a sharp, determined way her face was not unhandsome, but with something intrinsically rather comic about the shape and tilt of the nose, something slightly absurd about the bright beadiness of the eyes, the pouting mouth and round defiant chin. But one laughed with as well as at her; for the set of her lips was humorous and the expression of her round astonished eyes was mocking and mischievously inquisitive.

She stitched away. The clock ticked. The moving instant which, according to Sir Isaac Newton, separates the infinite past from the infinite future advanced inexorably through the dimension of time. Or, if Aristotle was right, a little more of the possible was every instant made real; the present stood still and drew into itself the future, as a man might suck for ever at an unending piece of macaroni. Every now and then Beatrice actualized a potential yawn. In a basket by the fireplace a black she-cat lay on her side purring and suckling four blind and parti-coloured kittens. The walls of the room were primrose yellow. On the top shelf of the bookcase the dust was thickening on the text-books of Assyriology which she had bought when Peter Slipe was the tenant of her upper floor. A

volume of Pascal's *Thoughts*, with pencil annotations by Burlap, lay open on the table. The clock continued to tick.

Suddenly the front door banged. Beatrice put down her pink silk camisole and sprang to her feet.

'Don't forget that you must drink your hot milk, Denis,' she said, looking out into the hall. Her voice was clear, sharp and commanding.

Burlap hung up his coat and came to the door. 'You oughtn't to have sat up for me,' he said, with tender reproachfulness, giving her one of his grave and subtle Sodoma smiles.

'I had some work I simply had to get finished,' Beatrice lied.

'Well, it was most awfully sweet of you.' These pretty colloquialisms, with which Burlap liked to pepper his conversation, had for sensitive ears a most curious ring. 'He talks slang,' Mark Rampion once said, 'as though he were a foreigner with a perfect command of English – but a foreigner's command. I don't know if you've ever heard an Indian calling anyone a "jolly good sport". Burlap's slang reminds me of that.'

For Beatrice, however, that 'awfully sweet' sounded entirely natural and un-alien. She flushed with a young-girlishly timid pleasure. But, 'Come in and shut the door,' she rapped out commandingly. Over that soft young timidity the outer shell was horny; there was a part of her being that pecked and was efficient. 'Sit down there,' she ordered; and while she was briskly busy over the milk-jug, the saucepan, the gas-ring, she asked him if he had enjoyed the party.

Burlap shook his head. '*Fascinatio nugacitatis*,' he said. '*Fascinatio nugacitatis*.' He had been ruminating the fascination of nugacity all the way from Piccadilly Circus.

Beatrice did not understand Latin; but she could see from his face that the words connoted disapproval. 'Parties are rather a waste of time, aren't they?' she said.

Burlap nodded. 'A waste of time,' he echoed in his slow ruminant's voice, keeping his blank preoccupied eyes fixed on the invisible daemon standing a little to Beatrice's left. 'One's forty, one has lived more than half one's life, the

world is marvellous and mysterious. And yet one spends four hours chattering about nothing at Tantamount House. Why should triviality be so fascinating? Or is there something else besides the triviality that draws one? Is it some vague fantastic hope that one may meet the messianic person one's always been looking for, or hear the revealing word?' Burlap wagged his head as he spoke with a curious loose motion, as though the muscles of his neck were going limp. Beatrice was so familiar with the motion that she saw nothing strange in it any more. Waiting for the milk to boil, she listened admiringly, she watched him with a serious church-going face. A man whose excursions into the drawing-rooms of the rich were episodes in a lifelong spiritual quest might justifiably be regarded as the equivalent of Sunday morning church.

'All the same,' Burlap added, glancing up at her with a sudden mischievous, gutter-snipish grin, most startlingly unlike the Sodoma smile of a moment before, 'the champagne and the caviar were really marvellous.' It was the demon that had suddenly interrupted the angel at his philosophic ruminations. Burlap had allowed him to speak out loud. Why not? It amused him to be baffling. He looked at Beatrice.

Beatrice was duly baffled. 'I'm sure they were,' she said, readjusting her church-going face to make it harmonize with the grin. She laughed rather nervously and turned away to pour out the milk into a cup. 'Here's your milk,' she rapped out, taking refuge from her bafflement in officious command. 'Mind you drink it while it's hot.'

There was a long silence. Burlap sipped slowly at his steaming milk and, seated on a pouf in front of the empty fireplace, Beatrice waited, rather breathlessly, she hardly knew for what.

'You look like little Miss Muffett sitting on her tuffet,' said Burlap at last.

Beatrice smiled. 'Luckily there's no big spider.'

'Thanks for the compliment, if it is one.'

'Yes it is,' said Beatrice. That was the really delightful thing about Denis, she reflected; he was so trustworthy. Other men were liable to pounce on you and try to paw you about and kiss you. Dreadful that was, quite dreadful. Beatrice had

never really got over the shock she received as a young girl, when her Aunt Maggie's brother-in-law, whom she had always looked up to as an uncle, had started pawing her about in a hansom. The incident so scared and disgusted her that when Tom Field, whom she really did like, asked her to marry him, she refused, just because he was a man, like that horrible Uncle Ben, and because she was so terrified of being made love to, she had such a panic fear of being touched. She was over thirty now and had never allowed anyone to touch her. The soft quivering little girl underneath the business-like shell of her had often fallen in love. But the terror of being pawed about, of being even touched, had always been stronger than the love. At the first sign of danger, she had desperately pecked, she had hardened her shell, she had fled. Arrived in safety, the terrified little girl had drawn a long breath. Thank Heaven! But a little sigh of disappointment was always included in the big sigh of relief. She wished she hadn't been frightened, she wished that the happy relationship that had existed before the pawing could have gone on for ever, indefinitely. Sometimes she was angry with herself, more often she thought there was something fundamentally wrong with love, something fundamentally dreadful about men. That was the wonderful thing about Denis Burlap; he was so reassuringly not a pouncer or a pawer. Beatrice could adore him without a qualm.

'Susan used to sit on poufs, like little Miss Muffett,' Burlap resumed after a pause. His voice was melancholy. He had spent the last minutes in ruminating the theme of his dead wife. It was nearly two years now since Susan had been carried off in the influenza epidemic. Nearly two years: but the pain, he assured himself, had not diminished, the sense of loss had remained as overwhelming as ever. Susan, Susan, Susan – he had repeated the name to himself over and over again. He would never see her any more, even if he lived for a million years. A million years, a million years. Gulfs opened all round the words. 'Or on the floor,' he went on, reconstructing her image as vividly as he could. 'I think she liked sitting on the floor best. Like a child.' A child, a child, he repeated to himself. So young.

Beatrice sat in silence, looking into the empty grate. To have looked at Burlap, she felt, would have been indiscreet, indecent almost. Poor fellow! When she turned towards him at last, she saw that there were tears on his cheeks. The sight filled her with a sudden passion of maternal pity. ‘Like a child,’ he had said. But he was like a child himself. Like a poor unhappy child. Leaning forward she drew her fingers caressingly along the back of his limply hanging hand.

‘Batrachian grapplings!’ Lucy repeated and laughed. ‘That was a stroke of genius, Willie.’

‘All my strokes are strokes of genius,’ said Willie modestly. He acted himself; he was Willie Weaver in the celebrated rôle of Willie Weaver. He exploited artistically that love of eloquence, that passion for the rotund and reverberating phrase with which, more than three centuries too late, he had been born. In Shakespeare’s youth he would have been a literary celebrity. Among his contemporaries, Willie’s euphuisms only raised a laugh. But he enjoyed applause, even when it was derisive. Moreover, the laughter was never malicious; for Willie Weaver was so good-natured and obliging that everybody liked him. It was to a hilariously approving audience that he played his part; and, feeling the approval through the hilarity, he played it for all it was worth. ‘All my strokes are strokes of genius.’ The remark was admirably in character. And perhaps true? Willie jested, but with a secret belief. ‘And mark my words,’ he added, ‘one of these days the batrachians will erump, they’ll break out.’

‘But why batrachians?’ asked Slipe. ‘Anything less like a batrachian than Beatrice …’

‘And why should they break out?’ put in Spandrell.

‘Frogs don’t peck.’ But Slipe’s thin voice was drowned by Mary Rampion’s.

‘Because things do break out,’ she cried. ‘They do.’

‘Moral,’ Cuthbert concluded: ‘don’t shut anything up. I never do.’

‘But perhaps the fun consists in breaking out,’ Lucy speculated.

‘Perverse and paradoxical prohibitionist!’

‘But obviously,’ Rampion was saying, ‘you get revolutions occurring inside as well as outside. It’s poor against rich in the state. In the individual, it’s the oppressed body and instincts against the intellect. The intellect’s been exalted as the spiritual upper classes; the spiritual lower classes rebel.’

‘Hear, hear!’ shouted Cuthbert, and banged the table.

Rampion frowned. He felt Cuthbert’s approbation as a personal insult.

‘I’m a counter-revolutionary,’ said Spandrell. ‘But the spiritual lower classes in their place.’

‘Except in your own case, eh?’ said Cuthbert grinning.

‘Mayn’t one theorize?’

‘People have been forcibly putting them in their place for centuries,’ said Rampion; ‘and look at the result. *You*, among other things.’ He looked at Spandrell, who threw back his head and noiselessly laughed. ‘Look at the result,’ he repeated. ‘Inward personal revolution and consequent outward and social revolution.’

‘Come, come,’ said Willie Weaver. ‘You talk as though the thermidorian tumbrils were already rumbling. England still stands very much where it did.’

‘But what do you know of England and Englishmen?’ Rampion retorted. ‘You’ve never been out of London or your class. Go to the North.’

‘God forbid!’ Willie piously interjected.

‘Go to the coal and iron country. Talk a little with the steel workers. It isn’t revolution for a cause. It’s a revolution as an end in itself. Smashing for smashing’s sake.’

‘Rather sympathetic it sounds,’ said Lucy.

‘It’s terrifying. It simply isn’t human. Their humanity has all been squeezed out of them by civilized living, squeezed out by the weight of coal and iron. It won’t be a rebellion of men. It’ll be a revolution of elementals, monsters, pre-human monsters. And you just shut your eyes and pretend everything’s too perfect.’

‘Think of the disproportion,’ Lord Edward was saying, as he smoked his pipe. ‘It’s positively …’ His voice failed. ‘Take coal, for example. Man’s using a

hundred and ten times as much as he used in 1800. But population's only two and a half times what it was. With other animals … Surely quite different. Consumption's proportionate to numbers.'

Illidge objected. 'But if animals can get more than they actually require to subsist, they take it, don't they? If there's been a battle or a plague, the hyenas and vultures take advantage of the abundance to overeat. Isn't it the same with us? Forests died in great quantities some millions of years ago. Man has unearthed their corpses, finds he can use them and is giving himself the luxury of a real good guzzle while the carrion lasts. When the supplies are exhausted, he'll go back to short rations, as the hyenas do in the intervals between wars and epidemics.' Illidge spoke with gusto. Talking about human beings as though they were indistinguishable from maggots filled him with a peculiar satisfaction. 'A coal-field's discovered; oil's struck. Towns spring up, railways are built, ships come and go. To a long-lived observer on the moon, the swarming and crawling must look like the pullulation of ants and flies round a dead dog. Chilean nitre, Mexican oil, Tunisian phosphates – at every discovery another scurrying of insects. One can imagine the comments of the lunar astronomers. "These creatures have a remarkable and perhaps unique tropism towards fossilized carrion."'

'Like ostriches,' said Mary Rampion. 'You live like ostriches.'

'And not about revolutions only,' said Spandrell, while Willie Weaver was heard to put in something about 'strouthocamelian philosophies'. 'About all the important things that happen to be disagreeable. There was a time when people didn't go about pretending that death and sin didn't exist. "*Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme*,"' he quoted. 'Baudelaire was the last poet of the Middle Ages as well as the first modern. "*Et pourtant*,"' he went on, looking with a smile to Lucy and raising his glass,

'"Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure,

A cette horrible infection,

Etoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature,

Vous, mon ange et ma passion!

Alors, ô ma beauté, dites à la vermine

Qui vous mangera de baisers …”’

‘My dear Spandrell!’ Lucy held up her hand protestingly.

‘Really too necrophilous!’ said Willie Weaver.

‘Always the same hatred of life,’ Rampion was thinking. ‘Different kinds of death – the only alternatives.’ He looked observantly into Spandrell’s face.

‘And when you come to think of it,’ Illidge was saying, ‘the time it took to form the coal measures divided by the length of a human life isn’t so hugely different from the life of a sequoia divided by a generation of decay bacteria.’

Cuthbert looked at his watch. ‘But good God!’ he shouted. ‘It’s twenty-five to one.’ He jumped up. ‘And I promised we’d put in an appearance at Widdicombe’s party. Peter, Willie! Quick march.’

‘But you can’t go,’ protested Lucy. ‘Not so absurdly early.’

‘The call of duty,’ Willie Weaver explained. ‘Stern Daughter of the Voice of God.’ He uttered his little cough of self-approbation.

‘But it’s ridiculous, it’s not permissible.’ She looked from one to another with a kind of angry anxiety. The dread of solitude was chronic with her. And it was always possible, if one sat up another five minutes, that something really amusing might happen. Besides, it was insufferable that people should do things she didn’t want them to do.

‘And we too, I’m afraid,’ said Mary Rampion rising.

Thank heaven, thought Walter. He hoped that Spandrell would follow the general example.

‘But this is impossible!’ cried Lucy. ‘Rampion, I simply cannot allow it.’

Mark Rampion only laughed. These professional sirens! he thought. She left him entirely cold, she repelled him. In desperation Lucy even appealed to the woman of the party.

‘Mrs Rampion, you *must* stay. Five minutes more. Only five minutes,’ she coaxed.

In vain. The waiter opened the side door. Furtively they slipped out into the darkness.

‘Why *will* they insist on going?’ asked Lucy, plaintively.

‘Why will *we* insist on staying?’ echoed Spandrell. Walter’s heart sank; that meant the man didn’t intend to go. ‘Surely, that’s much more incomprehensible.’

Utterly incomprehensible! On Walter the heat and alcohol were having their usual effects. He was feeling ill as well as miserable. What was the point of sitting on, hopelessly, in this poisonous air? Why not go home at once. Marjorie would be pleased.

‘You, at least, are faithful, Walter.’ Lucy gave him a smile. He decided to postpone his departure. There was a silence.

Cuthbert and his companions had taken a cab. Refusing all invitations, the Rampions had preferred to walk.

‘Thank heaven!’ said Mary as the taxi drove away. ‘That dreadful Arkwright!’

‘Ah, but that woman’s worse,’ said Rampion. ‘She gives me the creeps. That poor silly little Bidlake boy. Like a rabbit in front of a weasel.’

‘That’s male trade unionism. I rather like her for making you men squirm a bit. Serves you right.’

‘You might as well like cobras.’ Rampion’s zoology was wholly symbolical.

‘But if it’s a matter of creeps, what about Spandrell? He’s like a gargoyle, a demon.’

‘He’s like a silly schoolboy,’ said Rampion emphatically. ‘He’s never grown up. Can’t you see that? He’s a permanent adolescent. Bothering his head about all the things that preoccupy adolescents. Not being able to live, because he’s too busy thinking about death and God and truth and mysticism and all the rest of it; too busy thinking about sins and trying to commit them and being disappointed because he’s not succeeding. It’s deplorable. The man’s a sort of Peter Pan – much worse even than Barrie’s disgusting little abortion, because he’s got stuck at a sillier age. He’s Peter Pan à la D ostoevsky-cum-de Musset-cum-the-Nineties-cum-Bunyan-cum-Byron and the Marquis de Sade. Really deplorable. The more so as he’s potentially a very decent human being.’

Mary laughed. ‘I suppose I shall have to take your word for it.’

‘By the way,’ said Lucy, turning to Spandrell. ‘I had a message from your mother.’ She gave it. Spandrell nodded, but made no comment.

‘And the General?’ he enquired as soon as she had finished speaking. He wanted no more said about his mother.

‘Oh, the General!’ Lucy made a grimace. ‘I had at least half an hour of Military Intelligence this evening. Really, he oughtn’t to be allowed. What about a Society for the Prevention of Generals?’

‘I’m an honorary and original member.’

‘Or why not for the Prevention of the Old, while one was about it?’ Lucy went on. ‘The old really aren’t possible. Except your father, Walter. He’s perfect. Really perfect. The only possible old man.’

‘One of the few completely *im*possible, if you only knew.’ Among the Bidlakes of Walter’s generation the impossibility of old John was almost axiomatic. ‘You wouldn’t find him quite so perfect if you’d been his wife or his daughter.’ As he uttered the words, Walter suddenly remembered Marjorie. The blood rushed to his cheeks.

‘Oh, of course, if you will go and choose him as a husband or a father,’ said Lucy, ‘what can you expect? He’s a possible old man just because he’s been such an impossible husband and father. Most old people have had the life crushed out of them by their responsibilities. Your father never allowed himself to be squashed. He’s had wives and children and all the rest. He’s always lived as though he were a boy on the spree. Not very pleasant for the wives and children, I grant. But how delightful for the rest of us!’

‘I suppose so,’ said Walter. He had always thought of himself as so utterly unlike his father. But he was acting just as his father had acted.

‘Think of him unfilially.’

‘I’ll try.’ How should he think of himself?

‘Do, and you’ll see that I’m right. One of the few possible old men. Compare him with the others.’ She shook her head. ‘It’s no good; you can’t have any dealings with them.’

Spandrell laughed. ‘You speak of the old as though they were Kaffirs or Eskimos.’

‘Well, isn’t that just about what they are? Hearts of gold, and all that. And wonderfully intelligent – in their way, and all things considered. But they don’t happen to belong to our civilization. They’re aliens. I shall always remember the time I went to tea with some Arab ladies in Tunis. So kind they were, so hospitable. But they *would* make me eat such uneatable cakes, and they talked French so badly, and there was nothing whatever to say to them, and they were so horrified by my short skirts and my lack of children. Old people always remind me of an Arab tea party. Do you suppose we shall be an Arab tea party when we’re old?’

‘Yes, and probably a death’s head into the bargain,’ said Spandrell. ‘It’s a question of thickening arteries.’

‘But what makes the old such an Arab tea party is their ideas. I simply cannot believe that thick arteries will ever make me believe in God and morals and all the rest of it. I came out of the chrysalis during the War, when the bottom had been knocked out of everything. I don’t see how our grandchildren could possibly knock it out any more thoroughly than it was knocked then. So where would the misunderstanding come in?’

‘They might have put the bottom in again,’ suggested Spandrell.

She was silent for a moment. ‘I never thought of that.’

‘Or else you might have put it in yourself. Putting the bottom in again is one of the traditional occupations of the aged.’

The clock struck one and, like the cuckoo released by the bell, Simmons popped into the library, carrying a tray. Simmons was middle-aged and had that statesman-like dignity of demeanour which the necessity of holding the tongue and keeping the temper, of never speaking one’s real mind and preserving appearances tends always to produce in diplomats, royal personages, high government officials and butlers. Noiselessly, he laid the table for two, and, announcing that his lordship’s supper was served, retired. The day had been Wednesday; two grilled mutton chops were revealed when Lord Edward lifted

the silver cover. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays were chop days. On Tuesdays and Thursdays there was steak with chips. On Saturdays, as a treat, Simmons prepared a mixed grill. On Sundays he went out; Lord Edward had to be content with cold ham and tongue, and a salad.

‘Curious,’ said Lord Edward, as he handed Illidge his chop, ‘curious that the sheep population doesn’t rise. Not at the same rate as the human population. One would have expected … seeing that the symbiosis is such a close …’ He chewed in silence.

‘Mutton must be going out of fashion,’ said Illidge. ‘Like God,’ he added provocatively, ‘and the immortal soul.’ Lord Edward was not to be baited. ‘Not to mention the Victorian novelists,’ Illidge went on. He had slipped on the stairs; and the only literature Lord Edward ever read was Dickens and Thackeray. But the Old Man calmly masticated. ‘And innocent young girls.’ Lord Edward took a scientific interest in the sexual activities of axolotls and chickens, guinea-pigs and frogs; but any reference to the corresponding activities of humans made him painfully uncomfortable. ‘And purity,’ Illidge continued, looking sharply into the Old Man’s face, ‘and virginities, and …’ He was interrupted and Lord Edward saved from further persecution by the ringing of the telephone bell.

‘I’ll deal with it,’ said Illidge jumping up from his place.

He put the receiver to his ear. ‘Hullo!’

‘Edward, is that you?’ said a deep voice, not unlike Lord Edward’s own. ‘This is me. Edward, I’ve just this moment discovered a most extraordinary mathematical proof of the existence of God, or rather of …’

‘But this isn’t Lord Edward,’ shouted Illidge. ‘Wait. I’ll ask him to come.’ He turned back to the Old Man. ‘It’s Lord Gattenden,’ he said. ‘He’s just discovered a new proof of the existence of God.’ He did not smile, his tone was grave. Gravity in the circumstances was the wildest derision. The statement made fun of itself. Laughing comment made it less, not more, ridiculous. Marvellous old imbecile! Illidge felt himself revenged for all the evening’s humiliations. ‘A mathematical proof,’ he added, more seriously than ever.

‘Oh dear!’ exclaimed Lord Edward, as though something deplorable had happened. Telephoning always made him nervous. He hurried to the instrument. ‘Charles, is that …’

‘Ah, Edward,’ cried the disembodied voice of the head of the family from forty miles away at Gattenden. ‘Such a really remarkable discovery. I wanted your opinion on it. About God. You know the formula, *m* over nought equals infinity, *m* being any positive number? Well, why not reduce the equation to a simpler form by multiplying both sides by nought? In which case you have *m* equals infinity times nought. That is to say that a positive number is the product of zero and infinity. Doesn’t that demonstrate the creation of the universe by an infinite power out of nothing? Doesn’t it?’ The diaphragm of the telephone receiver was infected by Lord Gattenden’s excitement, forty miles away. It talked with breathless speed; its questions were earnest and insistent. ‘Doesn’t it, Edward?’ All his life the fifth marquess had been looking for the absolute. It was the only sort of hunting possible to a cripple. For fifty years he had trundled in his wheeled chair at the heels of the elusive quarry. Could it be that he had now caught it, so easily, and in such an unlikely place as an elementary school-book on the theory of limits? It was something that justified excitement. ‘What’s your opinion, Edward?’

‘Well,’ began Lord Edward, and at the other end of the electrified wire, forty miles away, his brother knew, from the tone in which that single word was spoken, that it was no good. The Absolute’s tail was still unsalted.

‘Talking about elders,’ said Lucy, ‘did I ever tell either of you that really marvellous story about my father?’

‘Which story?’

‘The one about the conservatories.’ The mere thought of the story made her smile.

‘No, I never remember hearing about the conservatories,’ said Spandrell, and Walter also shook his head.

‘It was during the War,’ Lucy began. ‘I was getting on for eighteen, I suppose. Just launched. And by the way, somebody did almost literally break a

bottle of champagne over me. Parties were rather feverish in those days, if you remember.'

Spandrell nodded and, though as a matter of fact he had been at school during the War, Walter also nodded, knowingly.

'One day,' Lucy continued, 'I got a message: Would I go upstairs and see his Lordship? It was unprecedented. I was rather alarmed. You know how the old imagine one lives. And how upset they are when they discover they've been wrong. The usual Arab tea party.' She laughed and, for Walter, her laughter laid waste to all the years before he had known her. To elaborate the history of their young and innocent loves had been one of his standing consolations. She had laughed; and now not even fancy could take pleasure in that comforting romance.

Spandrell nodded. 'So you went upstairs, feeling as though you were climbing a scaffold …'

'And found my father in his library, pretending to read. My arrival really terrified him. Poor man! I never saw anyone so horribly embarrassed and distressed. You can imagine how his terrors increased mine. Such strong feelings must surely have an adequate cause. What could it be? Meanwhile, he suffered agonies. If his sense of duty hadn't been so strong, I believe he would have told me to go away again at once. You should have seen his face!' The comic memories were too much for her. She laughed.

His elbow on the table, his head in his hand, Walter stared into his wine-glass. The bright little bubbles came rushing to the surface one by one, purposively, as though determined at all costs to be free and happy. He did not dare to raise his eyes. The sight of Lucy's laughter-distorted face, he was afraid, might make him do something stupid – cry aloud, or burst into tears.

'Poor man!' repeated Lucy, and the words came out on a puff of explosive mirth. 'He could hardly speak for terror.' Suddenly changing her tone, she mimicked Lord Edward's deep blurred voice bidding her sit down, telling her (stammeringly and with painful hesitations) that he had something to talk to her

about. The mimicry was admirable. Lord Edward's embarrassed phantom was sitting at their table.

'Admirable!' Spandrell applauded. And even Walter had to laugh; but the depths of his unhappiness remained undisturbed.

'It must have taken him a good five minutes,' Lucy went on, 'to screw himself up to the talking point. I was in an agony, as you can imagine. But guess what it was he wanted to say.'

'What?'

'Guess.' And all at once Lucy began to laugh again, uncontrollably. She covered her face with her hands, her whole body shook, as though she were passionately weeping. 'It's too good,' she gasped, dropping her hands and leaning back in her chair. Her face still worked with laughter; there were tears on her cheeks. 'Too good.' She opened the little beaded bag that lay on the table in front of her and taking out a handkerchief, began to wipe her eyes. A gust of perfume came out with the handkerchief, reinforcing those faint memories of gardenias that surrounded her, that moved with her wherever she went like a second ghostly personality. Walter looked up; the strong gardenia perfume was in his nostrils; he was breathing what was for him the very essence of her being, the symbol of her power, of his own insane desires. He looked at her with a kind of terror.

'He told me,' Lucy went on, still laughing spasmodically, still dabbing at her eyes, 'he told me that he had heard that I sometimes allowed young men to kiss me at dances, in conservatories. Conservatories!' she repeated. 'What a wonderful touch! So marvellously in period. The 'eighties. The old Prince of Wales. Zola's novels. Conservatories! Poor dear man! He said he hoped I wouldn't let it happen again. My mother'd be so dreadfully distressed if she knew. Oh dear, oh dear!' She drew a deep breath. The laughter finally died down.

Walter looked at her and breathed her perfume, breathed his own desires and the terrible power of her attraction. And it seemed to him that he was seeing her for the first time. Now for the first time – with the half-emptied glass in front of

her, the bottle, the dirty ashtray; now, as she leaned back in her chair, exhausted with laughter, and wiping the tears of laughter from her eyes.

‘Conservatories,’ Spandrell was repeating. ‘Conservatories. Yes, that’s very good. That’s very good indeed.’

‘Marvellous,’ said Lucy. ‘The old are really marvellous. But hardly possible, you must admit. Except, of course, Walter’s father.’

John Bidlake climbed slowly up the stairs. He was very tired. ‘These awful parties,’ he was thinking. He turned on the light in his bedroom. Over the mantelpiece one of Degas’s realistically unlovely women sat in her round tin bath trying to scrub her back. On the opposite wall a little girl by Renoir played the piano between a landscape of his own and one of Walter Sickert’s visions of Dieppe. Above the bed hung two caricatures of himself by Max Beerbohm and another by Rouveyre. There was a decanter of brandy on the table, with a siphon and glass. Two letters were propped conspicuously against the edge of the tray. He opened them. The first contained press cuttings about his latest show. The *Daily Mail* called him ‘the veteran of British Art’ and assured its readers that ‘his hand has lost nothing of its cunning’. He crumpled up the cutting and threw it angrily into the fireplace. The next was from one of the superior weeklies. The tone was almost contemptuous. He was judged by his own earlier performance and condemned. ‘It is difficult to believe that works so cheap and flashy – ineffectively flashy, at that – as those collected in the present exhibition should have been produced by the painter of the Tate Gallery “Haymakers” and the still more magnificent “Bathers,” now at Tantamount House. In these empty and trivial pictures we look in vain for those qualities of harmonious balance, of rhythmic calligraphy, of three-dimensional plasticity which …’ What a rigmarole! What tripe! He threw the whole bunch of cuttings after the first. But his contempt for the critics could not completely neutralize the effects of their criticism. ‘Veteran of British Art’ – it was the equivalent of ‘poor old Bidlake’. And when they complimented him on his hand having lost none of its cunning, they were patronizingly assuring him that he still painted wonderfully well for an old dotard in his second childhood. The only difference between the hostile and

the favourable critic was that one said brutally in so many words what the other implied in his patronizing compliment. He almost wished that he had never painted those Bathers.

He opened the other envelope. It contained a letter from his daughter Elinor. It was dated from Lahore:

‘The bazaars are the genuine article – maggoty. What with the pullulations and the smells, it is like burrowing through a cheese. From the artist’s point of view, the distressing thing about all this oriental business is that it’s exactly like that painting of Eastern scenes they did in France in the middle of last century. You know the stuff, smooth and shiny, like those pictures that used to be printed on tea canisters. When you’re here, you see that the style is necessary. The brown skin makes the faces uniform and the sweat puts a polish on the skin. One would have to paint with a surface at least as slick as an Ingres.’

He read on with pleasure. The girl always had something amusing to say in her letters. She saw things with the right sort of eye. But suddenly he frowned.

‘Yesterday, who should come to see us but John Bidlake Junior. We had imagined him in Waziristan; but he was down here on leave. I hadn’t seen him since I was a little girl. You can imagine my surprise when an enormous military gentleman with a grey moustache stalked in and called me by my Christian name. He had never seen Phil, of course. We killed such fatted calves as this hotel can offer in honour of the prodigal brother.’

John Bidlake leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. The enormous military man with the grey moustache was his son. Young John was fifty. Fifty. There had been a time when fifty seemed a Methusalem age. ‘If Manet hadn’t died prematurely …’ He remembered the words of his old teacher at the art school in Paris. ‘But did Manet die so young?’ The old man had shaken his head. (Old? John Bidlake reflected. He had seemed very old then. But probably he wasn’t more than sixty.) ‘Manet was only fifty-one,’ the teacher had answered. He had found it difficult to restrain his laughter. And now his own son was the age of Manet when Manet died. An enormous military gentleman with a grey moustache. And his brother was dead and buried at the other side of the world,

in California. Cancer of the intestine. Elinor had met his son at Santa Barbara – a young man with a rich young wife, evading the Prohibition laws to the tune of a bottle of gin a day between them.

John Bidlake thought of his first wife, the mother of the military gentleman and the Californian who had died of cancer of the intestine. He was only twenty-two when he married for the first time. Rose was not yet twenty. They loved one another frantically, with a tigerish passion. They quarrelled too, quarrelled rather enjoyably at first, when the quarrels could be made up in effusions of sensuality as violent as the furies they assuaged. But the charm began to wear off when the children arrived, two of them within twenty-five months. There was not enough money to keep the brats at a distance, to hire professionals to do the tiresome and dirty work. John Bidlake's paternity was no sinecure. His studio became a nursery. Very soon, the results of passion – the yelling and the wetted diapers, the broken sleep, the smells – disgusted him of passion. Moreover, the object of his passion was no longer the same. After the babies were born, Rose began to put on fat. Her face became heavy; her body swelled and sagged. The quarrels, now, were not so easily made up. At the same time, they were more frequent; paternity got on John Bidlake's nerves. His art provided him with a pretext for going to Paris. He went for a fortnight and stayed away four months. The quarrels began again on his return. Rose now frankly disgusted him. His models offered him facile consolations; he had a more serious love affair with a married woman who had come to him to have her portrait painted. Life at home was a dreariness tempered by scenes. After a particularly violent scene Rose packed up and went to live with her parents. She took the children with her; John Bidlake was only too delighted to be rid of them. The elder of the squalling diaper-wetters was now an enormous military gentleman with a grey moustache. And the other was dead of cancer of the intestine. He had not seen either of them since they were boys of five-and-twenty. The sons had stuck to their mother. She too was dead, had been in the grave these fifteen years.

Once bitten, twice shy. After his divorce John Bidlake had promised himself that he would never marry again. But when one falls desperately in love with a

virtuous young woman of good family, what can one do? He had married, and those two brief years with Isabel had been the most extraordinary, the most beautiful, the happiest of all his life. And then she had died in childbirth, pointlessly. He did his best never to think of her. The recollection was too painful. Between her remembered image and the moment of remembering, the abysses of time and separation were vaster than any other gulf between the present and the past. And by comparison with the past which he had shared with Isabel every present seemed dim; and her death was a horrible reminder of the future. He never spoke of her, and all that might remind him of her – her letters, her books, the furniture of her room – he destroyed or sold. He wished to ignore all but here and now, to be as though he had only just entered the world and were destined to be eternal. But his memory survived, even though he never deliberately made use of it; and though the things which had been Isabel's were destroyed, he could not guard against chance reminders. Chance had found many gaps in his defences this evening. The widest breach was opened by this letter of Elinor's. Sunk in his armchair, John Bidlake sat for a long time, unmoving.

Polly Logan sat in front of the looking-glass. As she drew the comb through her hair there was a fine small crackling of electric sparks.

'Little sparks, like a tiny battle, tiny, tiny ghosts shooting. Tiny battle, tiny ghost of a battle-rattle.'

Polly pronounced the words in a sonorous monotone, as though she were reciting to an audience. She lingered lovingly over them, rolling the r's, hissing on the s's, humming like a bee on the m's, drawing out the long vowels and making them round and pure. 'Ghost rattle of ghost rifles, in-fin-it-es-imal ghost cannonade.' Lovely words! It gave her a peculiar satisfaction to be able to roll them out, to listen with an appreciative, a positively gluttonous ear, to the rumble of the syllables as they were absorbed into the silence. Polly had always liked talking to herself. It was a childish habit which she would not give up. 'But if it amuses me,' she protested, when people laughed at her for it, 'why shouldn't I? It does nobody any harm.'

She refused to let herself be laughed out of the habit.

‘Electric, electric,’ she went on, dropping her voice, and speaking in a dramatic whisper. ‘Electrical musketry, metrical biscuitry. Ow!’ The comb had caught in a tangle. She leaned forward to see more clearly in the glass what she was doing. The reflected face approached. ‘Ma chère,’ exclaimed Polly in another tone, ‘tu as l’air fatigué. Tu es vieille. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. At your age. Tz, tz!’ She clicked her tongue disapprovingly against her teeth and shook her head. ‘This won’t do, this won’t do. Still, you looked all right tonight. “My dear, how sweet you look in white!”’ She imitated Mrs Betterton’s emphatic voice. ‘Same to you and many of them. Do you think I shall look like an elephant when I’m sixty? Still, I suppose one ought to be grateful even for an elephant’s compliments. “Count your blessings, count them one by one,”’ she chanted softly, “And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” Oh, heavens, heavens!’ She put down her comb, she violently shuddered and covered her face with her hands. ‘Heavens!’ She felt the blood rushing up into her cheeks. ‘The *gaffe*! The enormous and ghastly floater!’ She had thought suddenly of Lady Edward. Of course she had overheard. ‘How could I have risked saying that about her being a Canadian?’ Polly moaned, overwhelmed with retrospective shame and embarrassment. ‘That’s what comes of wanting to say something clever at any cost. And then think of wasting attempted cleverness on Norah! *Norah!* Oh Lord, oh Lord!’ She jumped up and pulling her dressing-gown round her as she went, hurried down the corridor to her mother’s room. Mrs Logan was already in bed and had turned out the light. Polly opened the door and stepped into darkness.

‘Mother,’ she called, ‘mother!’ Her tone was urgent and agonized.

‘What is it?’ Mrs Logan answered anxiously out of the dark. She sat up and fumbled for the electric switch by the bed. ‘What is it?’ The light went on with a click. ‘What is it, my darling?’

Polly threw herself down on the bed and hid her face against her mother’s knees. ‘Oh, mother, if you knew what a *terrible* floater I made with Lady Edward! If you *knew*! I forgot to tell you.’

Mrs Logan was almost angry that her anxiety had been for nothing. When one has put forth all one's strength to raise what seems an enormous weight, it is annoying to find that the dumb-bell is made of cardboard and could have been lifted between two fingers. Was it necessary to come and wake me up out of my first sleep to tell me?' she asked crossly.

Polly looked up at her mother. 'I'm sorry, mother,' she said repentantly. 'But if you knew what an *awful* floater it was!'

Mrs Logan could not help laughing.

'I couldn't have gone to sleep if I hadn't told you,' Polly went on.

'And I mayn't go to sleep until you have.' Mrs Logan tried to be severe and sarcastic. But her eyes, her smile betrayed her.

Polly took her mother's hand and kissed it. 'I knew you wouldn't mind,' she said.

'I do mind. Very much.'

'It's no good trying to bluff *me*,' said Polly. 'But now I *must* tell you about the floater.'

Mrs Logan heaved the parody of a sigh of resignation and, pretending to be overwhelmed with sleepiness, closed her eyes. Polly talked. It was after half-past two before she went back to her room. They had discussed, not only the floater and Lady Edward, but the whole party, and everyone who was there. Or rather Polly had discussed and Mrs Logan had listened, had laughed and laughingly protested when her daughter's comments became too exuberantly high-spirited.

'But Polly, Polly,' she had said, 'you really mustn't say that people look like elephants.'

'But Mrs Betterton *does* look like an elephant,' Polly had replied. 'It's the truth.' And in her dramatic stage whisper she had added, rising from fancy to still more preposterous fancy: 'Even her nose is like a trunk.'

'But she's got a short nose.'

Polly's whisper had become more gruesome. 'An amputated trunk. They bit it off when she was a baby. Like puppies' tails.'

CHAPTER XII

FOR VALUED CLIENTS, Sbisa never closed his restaurant. They could sit there, in spite of the law, and consume intoxicating poisons as far into the small hours as they liked. An extra waiter came on at midnight to attend to the valued clients who wished to break the law. Old Sbisa saw to it that their value, to him, was very high. Alcohol was cheaper at the Ritz than at Sbisa's.

It was about half-past one – 'only half-past one,' Lucy complained – when she and Walter and Spandrell left the restaurant.

'Still young,' was Spandrell's comment on the night. 'Young and rather insipid. Nights are like human beings – never interesting till they're grown up. Round about midnight they reach puberty. At a little after one they come of age. Their prime is from two to half-past. An hour later they're growing rather desperate, like those man-eating women and waning middle-aged men who hop around twice as violently as they ever did in the hope of persuading themselves that they're not old. After four they're in full decay. And their death is horrible. Really horrible at sunrise, when the bottles are empty and people look like corpses and desire's exhausted itself into disgust. I have rather a weakness for the death-bed scenes, I must confess,' Spandrell added.

'I'm sure you have,' said Lucy.

'And it's only in the light of ends that you can judge beginnings and middles. The night has just come of age. It remains to be seen how it will die. Till then, we can't judge it.'

Walter knew how it would die for him – in the midst of Marjorie's tears and his own complicated misery and exasperation, in an explosion of self-hatred and hatred for the woman to whom he had been cruel. He knew, but would not admit his knowledge; nor that it was already half-past one and that Marjorie would be awake and anxiously wondering why he hadn't returned.

At five to one Walter had looked at his watch and declared that he must go. What was the good of staying? Spandrell was immovable. There was no prospect of his having a moment alone with Lucy. He lacked even that justification for making Marjorie suffer. He was torturing her, not that he might be happy, but that he might feel bored, ill, exasperated, impatiently wretched.

‘I must really go,’ he had said, standing up.

But Lucy had protested, cajoled, commanded. In the end he sat down again. That had been more than half an hour ago and now they were out in Soho Square, and the evening, according to Lucy and Spandrell, had hardly begun.

‘I think it’s time,’ Spandrell had said to Lucy, ‘that you saw what a revolutionary communist looked like.’

Lucy demanded nothing better.

‘I belong to a sort of club,’ Spandrell explained. He offered to take them in with him.

‘There’ll still be a few enemies of society on view, I expect,’ he went on, as they stepped out into the refreshing darkness. ‘Good fellows mostly. But absurdly childish. Some of them seem genuinely to believe that a revolution would make people happier. It’s charming, it’s positively touching.’ He uttered his noiseless laugh. ‘But I’m an aesthete in these matters. Dynamite for dynamite’s sake.’

‘But what’s the point of dynamite, if you don’t believe in Utopia?’ asked Lucy.

‘The point? But haven’t you eyes?’

Lucy looked round her. ‘I see nothing particularly frightful.’

‘They have eyes and see not.’ He halted, took her arm with one hand and with the other pointed round the square. ‘The deserted pickle factory, transformed into a dance hall; the lying-in hospital; Sbisa’s; the publishers of *Who’s Who*. And once,’ he added, ‘the Duke of Monmouth’s palace. You can imagine the ghosts:

“Whether inspired by some diviner lust,

His father got him with a keener gust.”

And so forth. You know the portrait of him after the execution, lying on a bed, with the sheet up to his chin, so that you can't see the place where the neck was cut through? By Kneller. Or was it Lely? Monmouth and pickles, lying-in and *Who's Who*, and dancing and Sbisa's champagne – think of them a little, think of them.'

'I'm thinking of them,' said Lucy. 'Hard.'

'And do you still ask what the point of dynamite is?'

They walked on. At the door of a little house in St Giles's Spandrell called a halt. 'Wait a moment,' he said, beckoning the others back into the darkness. He rang. The door opened at once. There was a brief parleying in the shadows; then Spandrell turned and called to his companions. They followed him into a dark hall, up a flight of stairs and into a brightly-lighted room on the first floor. Two men were standing near the fireplace, a turbaned Indian and a little man with red hair. At the sound of footsteps they turned round. The red-haired man was Illidge.

'Spandrell? Bidlake?' he raised his invisibly sandy eyebrows in astonishment. And what's that woman doing here? he wondered.

Lucy came forward with outstretched hand. 'We're old acquaintances,' she said with a smile of friendly recognition.

Illidge, who was preparing to make his face look coldly hostile, found himself smiling back at her.

A taxi turned into the street, suddenly and startlingly breaking the silence. Marjorie sat up in bed, listening. The hum of the engine grew louder and louder. It was Walter's taxi; this time she felt sure of it, she knew. Nearer it came and nearer. At the bottom of the little hill on the right of the house, the driver changed down to a lower gear; the engine hummed more shrilly, like an angry wasp. Nearer and nearer. She was possessed by an anxiety that was of the body as well as of the mind. She felt breathless, her heart beat strongly and irregularly – beat, beat, beat and then it seemed to fail; the expected beat did not make itself felt; it was as though a trapdoor had been opened beneath her into the void; she knew the terror of emptiness, of falling, falling – and the next retarded beat was

the impact of her body against solid earth. Nearer, nearer. She almost dreaded, though she had so unhappily longed for, his return. She dreaded the emotions she would feel at the sight of him; the tears she would shed, the reproaches she would find herself uttering, in spite of herself. And what would he say and do, what would be his thoughts? She was afraid of imagining. Nearer; the sound was just below her windows; it retreated, it diminished. And she had been so certain that it was Walter's taxi. She lay down again. If only she could have slept. But that physical anxiety of her body would not allow her. The blood thumped in her ears. Her skin was hot and dry. Her eyes ached. She lay quite still, on her back, her arms crossed on her breast, like a dead woman laid out for burial. Sleep, sleep, she whispered to herself, she imagined herself relaxed, smoothed out, asleep. But suddenly, a malicious hand seemed to pluck at her taut nerves. A violent tic contracted the muscles of her limbs; she started as though with terror. And the physical reaction of fear evoked an emotion of terror in her mind, quickening and intensifying the anxiety of unhappiness which, all the time, had underlain her conscious efforts to achieve tranquillity. 'Sleep, sleep, relax' – it was useless to go on trying to be calm, to forget, to sleep. She allowed her misery to come to the surface of her mind. 'Why should he want to make me so unhappy?' She turned her head. The luminous hands of the clock on the little table beside her bed marked a quarter to three. A quarter to three – and he knew she could never go to sleep before he came in. 'He knows I'm ill,' she said aloud. 'Doesn't he care?'

A new thought suddenly occurred to her. 'Perhaps he wants me to die.' To die, not to be, not to see his face any more, to leave him with that other woman. The tears came into her eyes. Perhaps he was deliberately trying to kill her. It was not in spite of her being ill that he treated her like this; it was because she suffered so much, it was precisely because she was ill. He was cruel with a purpose. He hoped, he intended that she should die; die and leave him in peace with that other woman. She pressed her face against the pillow and sobbed. Never see him again, never any more. Darkness, loneliness, death, for ever. For

ever and ever. And on top of everything, it was all so unfair. Was it her fault that she couldn't afford to dress well?

'If I could afford to buy the clothes she buys.' Chanel, Lanvin, – the pages of *Vogue* floated before her eyes – Molyneux, Groult … At one of those cheap-smart shops where cocottes buy their clothes, off Shaftesbury Avenue, there was a model for sixteen guineas. 'He likes her because she's attractive. But if I had the money …' It wasn't fair. He was making her pay for not being well off. She had to suffer because he didn't earn enough to buy her good clothes.

And then there was the baby. He was making her pay for that. His child. He was bored with her, because she was always tired and ill; he didn't like her any more. That was the greatest injustice of all.

A cell had multiplied itself and become a worm, the worm had become a fish, the fish was turning into the foetus of a mammal. Marjorie felt sick and tired. Fifteen years hence a boy would be confirmed. Enormous in his robes, like a full-rigged ship, the Bishop would say: 'Do ye here in the presence of God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your Baptism?' And the ex-fish would answer with passionate conviction: 'I do.'

For the thousandth time she wished she were not pregnant. Walter might not succeed in killing her now. But perhaps it would happen in any case, when the child was born. The doctor had said it would be difficult for her to have a baby. The pelvis was narrow. Death reappeared before her, a great pit at her feet.

A sound made her start violently. The outside door of the flat was being furtively opened. The hinges squeaked. There were muffled footsteps. Another squeak, the hardly perceptible click of the spring latch being carefully let back into place, then more footsteps. Another click and simultaneously the light showed yellow under the door that separated her room from his. Did he mean to go to bed without coming to bid her good-night? She lay quite still, quiveringly awake, her eyes wide open, listening to the noises that came from the other room and to the quick terrified beating of her own heart.

Walter sat on the bed unlacing his shoes. He was wondering why he had not come home three hours before, why he had ever gone out at all. He hated a crowd; alcohol disagreed with him and the twice-breathed air, the smell, the smoke of restaurants acted on him like a depressing poison. He had suffered to no purpose; except for those painful exasperating moments in the taxi, he had not been alone with Lucy the whole evening. The hours he had spent with her had been hours of boredom and impatience – endlessly long, minute after minute of torture. And the torture of desire and jealousy had been reinforced by the torture of self-conscious guilt. Every minute they lingered at Sbisa's, every minute among the revolutionaries, was a minute that retarded the consummation of his desire and that, increasing Marjorie's unhappiness, increased at the same time his own remorse and shame. It was after three when finally they left the club. Would she dismiss Spandrell and let him drive her home? He looked at her; his eyes were eloquent. He willed, he commanded.

'There'll be sandwiches and drinks at my house,' said Lucy, when they were in the street.

'That's very welcome news,' said Spandrell.

'Come along, Walter darling.' She took his hand, she pressed it affectionately.

Walter shook his head. 'I must go home.' If misery could kill, he would have died there in the street.

'But you can't desert us now,' she protested. 'Now that you've got thus far, you really must see it through. Come along.' She tugged at his hand.

'No, no.' But what she said was true. He could hardly make Marjorie any more wretched than he had certainly done already. If she weren't there, he thought, if she were to die – a miscarriage, bloodpoisoning …

Spandrell looked at his watch. 'Half-past three. The death rattle has almost started.' Walter listened in horror; was the man reading his thoughts? '*Munie des conforts de notre sainte religion*. Your place is at the bedside, Walter. You can't go and leave the night to die like a dog in a ditch.'

Like a dog in a ditch. The words were terrible, they condemned him. ‘I *must* go.’ He was firm, three hours too late. He walked away. In Oxford Street he found a taxi. Hoping, he knew vainly, to come home unobserved, he paid off the cab at Chalk Farm station and walked the last furlong to the door of the house in which he and Marjorie occupied the two upper floors. He had crept upstairs, he had opened the door with the precautions of a murderer. No sound from Marjorie’s room. He undressed, he washed as though he were performing a dangerous operation. He turned out the light and got into bed. The darkness was utterly silent. He was safe.

‘Walter!’

It was with the feelings of a condemned criminal when the warders come to wake him on the morning of his execution that he answered, putting an imitation of astonishment into his voice: ‘Are you awake, Marjorie?’ He got up and walked, as though from the condemned cell to the scaffold, into her room.

‘Do you want to make me die, Walter?’

Like a dog in a ditch, alone. He made as if to take her in his arms. Marjorie pushed him away. Her misery had momentarily turned to anger, her love to a kind of hatred and resentment. ‘Don’t be a hypocrite on top of everything else,’ she said. ‘Why can’t you tell me frankly that you hate me, that you’d like to get rid of me, that you’d be glad if I died? Why can’t you be honest and tell me?’

‘But why should I tell you what isn’t true?’ he protested.

‘Are you going to tell me that you love, me, then?’ she asked sarcastically.

He almost believed it while he said so; and besides it was true, in a way.

‘But I do, I do. This other thing’s a kind of madness. I don’t want to. I can’t help it. If you knew how wretched I felt, what an unspeakable brute.’ All that he had ever suffered from thwarted desire, from remorse and shame and self-hatred seemed to be crystallized by his words into a single agony. He suffered and he pitied his own sufferings. ‘If you knew, Marjorie.’ And suddenly something in his body seemed to break. An invisible hand took him by the throat, his eyes were blinded with tears and a power within him that was not himself shook his

whole frame and wrenched from him, against his will, a muffled and hardly human cry.

At the sound of this dreadful sobbing in the darkness beside her, Marjorie's anger suddenly fell. She only knew that he was unhappy, that she loved him. She even felt remorse for her anger, for the bitter words she had spoken.

'Walter. My darling.' She stretched out her hands, she drew him down towards her. He lay there like a child in the consolation of her embrace.

'Do you enjoy tormenting him?' Spandrell enquired, as they walked towards the Charing Cross Road.

'Tormenting whom?' said Lucy. 'Walter? But I don't.'

'But you don't let him sleep with you?' said Spandrell. Lucy shook her head. 'And then you say you don't torment him! Poor wretch!'

'But why should I have him, if I don't want to?'

'Why indeed? Meanwhile, however, keeping him dangling's mere torture.'

'But I like him,' said Lucy. 'He's such good company. Too young, of course; but really rather perfect. And I assure you, I don't torment him. He torments himself.'

Spandrell delayed his laughter long enough to whistle for the taxi he had seen at the end of the street. The cab wheeled round and came to a halt in front of them. He was still silently laughing when they climbed in. 'Still, he only gets what's due to him,' Spandrell went on from his dark corner. 'He's the real type of murderee.'

'Murderee?'

'It takes two to make a murder. There are born victims, born to have their throats cut, as the cut-throats are born to be hanged. You can see it in their faces. There's a victim type as well as a criminal type. Walter's the obvious victim; he fairly invites maltreatment.'

'Poor Walter!'

'And it's one's duty,' Spandrell went on, 'to see that he gets it.'

'Why not to see that he doesn't get it, poor lamb?'

‘One should always be on the side of destiny. Walter’s manifestly born to catch it. It’s one’s duty to give his fate a helping hand. Which I’m glad to see you’re already doing.’

‘But I tell you, I’m not. Have you a light?’ Spandrell struck a match. The cigarette between her thin lips, she leaned forward to drink the flame. He had seen her leaning like this, with the same swift, graceful and ravenous movement, leaning towards him to drink his kisses. And the face that approached him now was focused and intent on the flame, as he had seen it focused and intent upon the inner illumination of approaching pleasure. There are many thoughts and feelings, but only a few gestures; and the mask has only half a dozen grimaces to express a thousand meanings. She drew back; Spandrell threw the match out of the window. The red cigarette end brightened and faded in the darkness.

‘Do you remember that curious time of ours in Paris?’ he asked, still thinking of her intent and eager face. Once, three years before, he had been her lover for perhaps a month.

Lucy nodded. ‘I remember it as rather perfect, while it lasted. But you were horribly fickle.’

‘In other words I didn’t make as much of an outcry as you hoped I would, when you went off with Tom Trivet.’

‘That’s a lie!’ Lucy was indignant. ‘You’d begun to fade away long before I even dreamt of Tom.’

‘Well, have it your own way. As a matter of fact you weren’t enough of a murderee for my taste.’ There was nothing of the victim about Lucy; not much even, he had often reflected, of the ordinary woman. She could pursue her pleasure as a man pursues his, remorselessly, single-mindedly, without allowing her thoughts and feelings to be in the least involved. Spandrell didn’t like to be used and exploited for someone else’s entertainment. He wanted to be the user. But with Lucy there was no possibility of slave-holding. ‘I’m like you,’ he added. ‘I need victims.’

‘The implication being that I’m one of the criminals?’

‘I thought we’d agreed to that long ago, my dear Lucy.’

‘I’ve never agreed to anything in my life,’ she protested, ‘and never will. Not for more than half an hour at a time, any rate.’

‘It was in Paris, do you remember? At the *Chaumière*. There was a young man painting his lips at the next table.’

‘Wearing a platinum and diamond bracelet.’ She nodded, smiling. ‘And you called me an angel, or something.’

‘A bad angel,’ he qualified, ‘a born bad angel.’

‘For an intelligent man, Maurice, you talk a lot of drivel. Do you genuinely believe that some things are right and some wrong?’

Spandrell took her hand and kissed it. ‘Dear Lucy,’ he said, ‘you’re magnificent. And you must never bury your talents. Well done, thou good and faithful succubus!’ He kissed her hand again. ‘Go on doing your duty as you’ve already done it. That’s all heaven asks of you.’

‘I merely try to amuse myself.’ The cab drew up in front of her little house in Bruton Street. ‘God knows,’ she added, as she stepped out, ‘without much success. Here, I’ve got money.’ She handed the driver a ten-shilling note. Lucy insisted, when she was with men, on doing as much of the paying as possible. Paying, she was independent, she could call her own tune. ‘And nobody gives me much help,’ she went on, as she fumbled with her latchkey. ‘You’re all so astonishingly dull.’

In the dining-room a rich still-life of bottles, fruits and sandwiches was awaiting them. Round the polished flanks of the vacuum flask their reflections walked fantastically in a non-Euclidean universe. Professor Dewar had liquefied hydrogen in order that Lucy’s soup might be kept hot for her into the small hours. Over the sideboard hung one of John Bidlake’s paintings of the theatre. A curve of the gallery, a slope of faces, a corner of the bright proscenium.

‘How good that is!’ said Spandrell shading his eyes to see it more clearly.

Lucy made no comment. She was looking at herself in an old grey-glassed mirror.

‘What shall I do when I’m old?’ she suddenly asked.

‘Why not die?’ suggested Spandrell with his mouth full of bread and Strasbourg goose liver.

‘I think I’ll take to science, like the Old Man. Isn’t there such a thing as human zoology? I’d get a bit tired of frogs. Talking of frogs,’ she added, ‘I rather liked that little carroty man – what’s his name? – Illidge. How he does hate us for being rich!’

‘Don’t lump me in with the rich. If you knew …’ Spandrell shook his head. ‘Let’s hope she’ll bring some cash when she comes tomorrow,’ he was thinking, remembering the message Lucy had brought from his mother. He had written that the case was urgent.

‘I like people who can hate,’ Lucy went on.

‘Illidge knows how to. He’s fairly stuffed with theories and bile and envy. He longs to blow you all up.’

‘Then why doesn’t he? Why don’t you? Isn’t that what your club’s there for?’

Spandrell shrugged his shoulders. ‘There’s a slight difference between theory and practice, you know. And when one’s a militant communist and a scientific materialist and an admirer of the Russian Revolution, the theory’s uncommonly queer. You should hear our young friend talking about murder! Political murder is what especially interests him, of course; but he doesn’t make much distinction between the different branches of the profession. One kind, according to him, is as harmless and morally indifferent as another. Our vanity makes us exaggerate the importance of human life; the individual is nothing; Nature cares only for the species. And so on and so forth. Queer,’ Spandrell commented parenthetically, ‘how old-fashioned and even primitive the latest manifestations of art and politics generally are! Young Illidge talks like a mixture of Lord Tennyson in *In Memoriam* and a Mexican Indian, or a Malay trying to make up his mind to run amok. Justifying the most primitive, savage, animal indifference to life and individuality by means of obsolete scientific arguments. Very queer indeed.’

‘But why should the science be obsolete?’ asked Lucy. ‘Seeing that he’s a scientist himself …’

‘But also a communist. Which means he’s committed to nineteenth-century materialism. You can’t be a true communist without being a mechanist. You’ve got to believe that the only fundamental realities are space, time and mass, and that all the rest is nonsense, mere illusion and mostly bourgeois illusion at that. Poor Illidge! He’s sadly worried by Einstein and Eddington. And how he hates Henri Poincaré! How furious he gets with old Mach! They’re undermining his simple faith. They’re telling him that the laws of nature are useful conventions of strictly human manufacture and that space and time and mass themselves, the whole universe of Newton and his successors, are simply our own invention. The idea’s as inexpressibly shocking and painful to him as the idea of the non-existence of Jesus would be to a Christian. He’s a scientist, but his principles make him fight against any scientific theory that’s less than fifty years old. It’s exquisitely comic.’

‘I’m sure it is,’ said Lucy, yawning. ‘That is, if you happen to be interested in theories, which I’m not.’

‘But I am,’ retorted Spandrell; ‘so I don’t apologize. But if you prefer it, I can give you examples of his practical inconsistencies. I discovered not long ago, quite accidentally, that Illidge has the most touching sense of family loyalty. He keeps his mother, he pays for his younger brother’s education, he gave his sister fifty pounds when she married.’

‘What’s wrong in that?’

‘Wrong? But it’s disgustingly bourgeois! Theoretically he sees no distinction between his mother and any other female. He knows that, in a properly organized society, she’d be put into the lethal chamber, because of her arthritis. In spite of which he sends her I don’t know how much a week to enable her to drag on a useless existence. I twitted him about it the other day. He blushed and was terribly upset, as though he’d been caught cheating at cards. So, to restore his prestige, he had to change the subject and begin talking about political murder and its advantages with the most wonderfully calm, detached, scientific ferocity. I only laughed at him. “One of these days,” I threatened, “I’ll take you at your word and invite you to a man-shooting party.” And what’s more, I will.’

‘Unless you just go on chattering, like everybody else.’

‘Unless,’ Spandrell agreed, ‘I just go on chattering.’

‘Let me know if you ever stop chattering and do something. It might be lively.’

‘Deathly, if anything.’

‘But the deathly sort of liveliness is the most lively, really.’ Lucy frowned. ‘I’m so sick of the ordinary conventional kinds of liveliness. Youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm. You know. It’s silly, it’s monotonous. Energy seems to have so few ways of manifesting itself nowadays. It was different in the past, I believe.’

‘There was violence as well as love-making. Is that what you mean?’

‘That’s it.’ She nodded. ‘The liveliness wasn’t so exclusively … so exclusively bitchy, to put it bluntly.’

‘They broke the sixth commandment too. There are too many policemen nowadays.’

‘Many too many. They don’t allow you to stir an eyelid. One ought to have had all the experiences.’

‘But if none of them are either right or wrong – which is what you seem to feel – what’s the point?’

‘The point? But they might be amusing, they might be exciting.’

‘They could never be very exciting if you didn’t feel they were wrong.’ Time and habit had taken the wrongness out of almost all the acts he had once thought sinful. He performed them as unenthusiastically as he would have performed the act of catching the morning train to the city. ‘Some people,’ he went on meditatively, trying to formulate the vague obscurities of his own feelings, ‘some people can only realize goodness by offending against it.’ But when the old offences have ceased to be felt as offences, what then? The argument pursued itself internally. The only solution seemed to be to commit new and progressively more serious offences, to have all the experiences, as Lucy would say in her jargon. ‘One way of knowing God,’ he concluded slowly, ’is to deny Him.’

‘My good Maurice!’ Lucy protested.

‘I’ll stop.’ He laughed. ‘But really, if it’s a case of “my good Maurice” (he imitated her tone), ‘if you’re equally unaware of goodness and offence against goodness, what *is* the point of having the sort of experiences the police interfere with?’

Lucy shrugged her shoulders. ‘Curiosity. One’s bored.’

‘Alas, one is.’ He laughed again. ‘All the same, I do think the cobbler should stick to his last.’

‘But what *is* my last?’

Spandrell grinned. ‘Modesty,’ he began, ‘forbids …’

CHAPTER XIII

WALTER TRAVELLED DOWN to Fleet Street feeling not exactly happy, but at least calm – calm with the knowledge that everything was now settled. Yes, everything had been settled; everything – for in the course of last night's emotional upheaval, everything had come to the surface. To begin with, he was never going to see Lucy again; that was definitely decided and promised, for his own good as well as for Marjorie's. Next he was going to spend all his evenings with Marjorie. And finally he was going to ask Burlap for more money. Everything was settled. The very weather seemed to know it. It was a day of white insistent mist, so intrinsically calm that all the noises of London seemed an irrelevance. The traffic roared and hurried, but somehow without touching the essential stillness and silence of the day. Everything was settled; the world was starting afresh – not very exultantly, perhaps, not at all brilliantly, but with resignation, with a determined calm that nothing could disturb.

Remembering the incident of the previous evening, Walter had expected to be coldly received at the office. But on the contrary, Burlap was in one of his most genial moods. He too remembered last night and was anxious that Walter should forget it. He called Walter 'old man' and squeezed his arm affectionately, looking up at him from his chair with those eyes that expressed nothing, but were just holes into the darkness inside his skull. His mouth, meanwhile, charmingly and subtly smiled. Walter returned the 'old man' and the smile, but with a painful consciousness of insincerity. Burlap always had that effect on him; in his presence, Walter never felt quite honest or genuine. It was a most uncomfortable sensation. With Burlap he was always, in some obscure fashion, a liar and a comedian. And at the same time all that he said, even when he was speaking his innermost convictions, became a sort of falsehood.

‘I liked your article on Rimbaud,’ Burlap declared, still pressing Walter’s arm, still smiling up at him from his tilted swivel chair.

‘I’m glad,’ said Walter, feeling uncomfortably that the remark wasn’t really addressed to him, but to some part of Burlap’s own mind which had whispered, ‘You ought to say something nice about his article,’ and was having its demands duly satisfied by another part of Burlap’s mind.

‘What a man!’ exclaimed Burlap. ‘That was someone who believed in Life, if you like!’

Ever since Burlap had taken over the editorship, the leaders of the *Literary World* had almost weekly proclaimed the necessity of believing in Life. Burlap’s belief in Life was one of the things Walter found most disturbing. What did the words mean? Even now he hadn’t the faintest idea. Burlap had never explained. You have to understand intuitively; if you didn’t, you were as good as damned. Walter supposed that he was among the damned. He was never likely to forget his first interview with his future chief. ‘I hear you’re in want of an assistant editor,’ he had shyly begun. Burlap nodded. ‘Yes, I am.’ And after an enormous and horrible silence, he suddenly looked up with his blank eyes and asked: ‘Do you believe in Life?’ Walter blushed to the roots of his hair and said, Yes. It was the only possible answer. There was another desert of speechlessness and then Burlap looked up again. ‘Are you a virgin?’ he enquired. Walter blushed yet more violently, hesitated and at last shook his head. It was only later that he discovered, from one of Burlap’s own articles, that the man had been modelling his behaviour on that of Tolstoy – ‘going straight to the great simple fundamental things,’ as Burlap himself described the old Salvationist’s soulful impertinences.

‘Yes, Rimbaud certainly believed in Life,’ Walter acquiesced feebly, feeling while he spoke the words as he felt when he had to write a formal letter of condolence. Talking about believing in Life was as bad as talking about grieving with you in your great bereavement.

‘He believed in it so much,’ Burlap went on, dropping his eyes (to Walter’s great relief) and nodding as he ruminatively pronounced the words, ‘so

profoundly that he was prepared to give it up. That's how I interpret his abandonment of literature – as a deliberate sacrifice.' (He uses the big words too easily, thought Walter.) 'He that would save his life must lose it.' (Oh, oh!) 'To be the finest poet of your generation and, knowing it, to give up poetry – that's losing your life to save it. That's really believing in life. His faith was so strong, that he was prepared to lose his life, in the certainty of gaining a new and better one.' (Much too easily! Walter was filled with embarrassment.) 'A life of mystical contemplation and intuition. Ah, if only one knew what he did and thought in Africa, if only one knew!'

'He smuggled guns for the Emperor Menelik,' Walter had the courage to reply. 'And to judge from his letters, he seems to have thought chiefly about making enough money to settle down. He carried forty thousand francs in his belt. A stone and a half of gold round his loins.' Talking of gold, he was thinking, I really ought to speak to him about my screw.

But at the mention of Menelik's rifles and the forty thousand francs, Burlap smiled with an expression of Christian forgiveness. 'But do you *really* imagine,' he asked, 'that gun-running and money were what occupied his mind in the desert? The author of *Les Illuminations?*'

Walter blushed, as though he had been guilty of some nasty solecism. 'Those are the only facts we know,' he said selfexcusingly.

'But there is an insight that sees deeper than the mere facts.' 'Deeper insight' was Burlap's pet name for his own opinion. 'He was realizing the new life, he was gaining the Kingdom of Heaven.'

'It's a hypothesis,' said Walter, wishing uncomfortably that Burlap had never read the New Testament.

'For me,' retorted Burlap, 'it's a certainty. An absolute certainty.' He spoke very emphatically, he wagged his head with violence. 'A complete and absolute certainty,' he repeated, hypnotizing himself by the reiteration of the phrase into a fictitious passion of conviction. 'Complete and absolute.' He was silent; but within, he continued to lash himself into mystical fury. He thought of Rimbaud until he himself was Rimbaud. And then suddenly his devil popped out its

grinning face and whispered, ‘A stone and a half of gold round his loins.’ Burlap exorcized the creature by changing the subject. ‘Have you seen the new books for review?’ he said, pointing to a double pile of volumes on the corner of the table. ‘Yards of contemporary literature.’ He became humorously exasperated. ‘Why can’t authors stop? It’s a disease. It’s a bloody flux, like what the poor lady suffered from in the Bible, if you remember.’

What Walter chiefly remembered was the fact that the joke was Philip Quarles’s.

Burlap got up and began to look through the books. ‘Pity the poor reviewer!’ he said with a sigh.

The poor reviewer – wasn’t that the cue for his little speech about salary? Walter nerved himself, focused his will. ‘I was wondering,’ he began.

But Burlap had almost simultaneously begun on his own account. ‘I’ll get Beatrice to come in,’ he said and pressed the bell-push three times. ‘Sorry. What were you saying?’

‘Nothing.’ The demand would have to be postponed. It couldn’t be made in public, particularly when the public was Beatrice. Damn Beatrice! he thought unjustly. What business had she to do sub-editing and Shorter Notices for nothing? Just because she had a private income and adored Burlap.

Walter had once complained to her, jokingly, of his miserable six pounds a week.

‘But the *World*’s worth making sacrifices for,’ she rapped out. ‘After all, one has a responsibility towards people; one *ought* to do something for them.’ Echoed in her clear rapping voice, Burlap’s Christian sentiments sounded, Walter thought, particularly odd. ‘The *World* does do something; one ought to help.’

The obvious retort was that his own private income was very small and that he wasn’t in love with Burlap. He didn’t make it, however, but suffered himself to be pecked. Damn her, all the same!

Beatrice entered, a neat, plumply well-made little figure, very erect and business-like. ‘Morning, Walter,’ she said, and every word she uttered was like a

sharp little rap with an ivory mallet over the knuckles. She examined him with her bright, rather protuberant brown eyes. ‘You look tired,’ she went on. ‘Worn out, as though you’d been on the tiles last night.’ Peck after peck. ‘Were you?’

Walter blushed. ‘I slept badly,’ he mumbled and engrossed himself in a book.

They sorted out the volumes for the various reviewers. A little heap for the scientific expert, another for the accredited metaphysician, a whole mass for the fiction specialist. The largest pile was of Tripe. Tripe wasn’t reviewed, or only got a Shorter Notice.

‘Here’s a book about Polynesia for you, Walter,’ said Burlap generously. ‘And a new anthology of French verse. No, on second thoughts, I think *I’ll* do that.’ On second thoughts he generally did keep the most interesting books for himself.

‘*The Life of St Francis re-told for the Children by Bella Jukes*. Theology or tripe?’ asked Beatrice.

‘Tripe,’ said Walter looking over her shoulder.

‘But I’d rather like an excuse to do a little article on St Francis,’ said Burlap. In the intervals of editing, he was engaged on a full-length study of the Saint. ‘St Francis and the Modern Psyche,’ it was to be called. He took the little book from Beatrice and let the pages flick past under his thumb. Tripe-ish,’ he admitted. ‘But what an extraordinary man! Extraordinary!’ He began to hypnotize himself; to lash himself up into the Franciscan mood.

‘Extraordinary!’ Beatrice rapped out, her eyes fixed on Burlap.

Walter looked at her curiously. Her ideas and her pecking goose-billed manner seemed to belong to two different people, between whom the only perceptible link was Burlap. Was there any inward, organic connection?

‘What a devastating integrity!’ Burlap went on, self-intoxicated. He shook his head and, sighing, sobered himself sufficiently to proceed with the morning’s business.

When the opportunity came for Walter to talk (with what diffidence, what a squeamish reluctance!) about his salary, Burlap was wonderfully sympathetic.

‘I know, old man,’ he said, laying his hand on the other’s shoulder with a gesture that disturbingly reminded Walter of the time when, as a schoolboy, he had played Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* and the detestable Porter Major, disguised as Bassanio, had been coached to register friendship. ‘I know what being hard up is.’ His little laugh gave it to be understood that he was a Franciscan specialist in poverty, but was too modest to insist upon the fact. ‘I know, old man.’ And he really almost believed that he wasn’t half owner and salaried editor of the *World*, that he hadn’t a penny invested, that he had been living on two pounds a week for years. ‘I wish we could afford to pay you three times as much as we do. You’re worth it, old man.’ He gave Walter’s shoulder a little pat.

Walter made a vague mumbling sound of deprecation. That little pat, he was thinking, was the signal for him to begin:

‘I am a tainted wether of the flock,

Meetest for slaughter.’

‘I wish for your sake,’ Burlap continued, ‘for mine too,’ he added, putting himself with a rueful little laugh in the same financial boat as Walter, ‘that the paper did make more money. If you wrote worse, it might.’ The compliment was graceful. Burlap emphasized it with another friendly pat and a smile. But the eyes expressed nothing. Meeting them for an instant, Walter had the strange impression that they were not looking at him at all, that they were not looking at anything. ‘The paper’s too good. It’s largely your fault. One cannot serve God and mammon.’

‘Of course not,’ Walter agreed; but he felt again that the big words had come too easily.

‘I wish one could.’ Burlap spoke like a jocular St Francis pretending to make fun of his own principles.

Walter joined mirthlessly in the laughter. He was wishing that he had never mentioned the word ‘salary’.

‘I’ll go and talk to Mr Chivers,’ said Burlap. Mr Chivers was the business manager. Burlap made use of him, as the Roman statesman made use of oracles

and augurs, to promote his own policy. His unpopular decisions could always be attributed to Mr Chivers; and when he made a popular one, it was invariably made in the teeth of the business manager's soulless tyranny. Mr Chivers was a most convenient fiction. 'I'll go this morning.'

'Don't bother,' said Walter.

'If it's humanly possible to scrape up anything more for you …'

'No, please.' Walter was positively begging not to be given more. 'I know the difficulties. Don't think I want …'

'But we're sweating you, Walter, positively sweating you.' The more Walter protested, the more generous Burlap became. 'Don't think I'm not aware of it. I've been worrying about it for a long time.'

His magnanimity was infectious. Walter was determined not to take any more money, quite determined, even though he was sure the paper could afford to give it. 'Really, Burlap,' he almost begged, 'I'd much rather you left things as they are.' And then suddenly he thought of Marjorie. How unfairly he was treating her! Sacrificing her comfort to his. Because he found haggling distasteful, because he hated fighting on the one hand and accepting favours on the other, poor Marjorie would have to go without new clothes and a second maid.

But Burlap waved his objections aside. He insisted on being generous. 'I'll go and talk to Chivers at once. I think I can persuade him to let you have another twenty-five a year.'

Twenty-five. That was ten shillings a week. Nothing. Marjorie had said that he ought to stand out for at least another hundred. 'Thank you,' he said and despised himself for saying it.

'It's ridiculously little, I'm afraid. Quite ridiculously.'

That's what I ought to have said, thought Walter.

'One feels quite ashamed of offering it. But what can one do? 'One' could obviously do nothing, for the good reason that 'one' was impersonal and didn't exist.

Walter mumbled something about being grateful. He felt humiliated and blamed Marjorie for it.

When Walter worked at the office, which was only three days a week, he sat with Beatrice. Burlap, in editorial isolation, sat alone. It was the day of Shorter Notices. Between them, on the table, stood the stacks of Tripe. They helped themselves. It was a Literary Feast – a feast of offal. Bad novels and worthless verses, imbecile systems of philosophy and platitudinous moralizing, insignificant biographies and boring books of travel, pietism so nauseating and children's books so vulgar and so silly that to read them was to feel ashamed for the whole human race – the pile was high, and every week it grew higher. The ant-like industry of Beatrice, Walter's quick discernment and facility were utterly inadequate to stem the rising flood. They settled down to their work 'like vultures,' said Walter, 'in the Towers of Silence.' What he wrote this morning was peculiarly pungent.

On paper Walter was all he failed to be in life. His reviews were epigrammatically ruthless. Poor earnest spinsters, when they read what he had written of their heartfelt poems about God and Passion and the Beauties of Nature, were cut to the quick by his brutal contempt. The big-game shooters who had so much enjoyed their African trip would wonder how the account of anything so interesting could be called tedious. The young novelists who had modelled their styles and their epical conceptions on those of the best authors, who had daringly uncovered the secrets of their most intimate and sexual life, were hurt, were amazed, were indignant to learn that their writing was stilted, their construction non-existent, their psychology unreal, their drama stagey and melodramatic. A bad book is as much of a labour to write as a good one; it comes as sincerely from the author's soul. But the bad author's soul being, artistically at any rate, of inferior quality, its sincerities will be, if not always intrinsically uninteresting, at any rate uninterestingly expressed, and the labour expended on the expression will be wasted. Nature is monstrously unjust. There is no substitute for talent. Industry and all the virtues are of no avail. Immersed in his Tripe, Walter ferociously commented on lack of talent. Conscious of their industry, sincerity and good artistic intentions, the authors of the Tripe felt themselves outrageously and unfairly treated.

Beatrice's methods of criticism were simple; she tried in every case to say what she imagined Burlap would say. In practice what happened was that she praised all books in which Life and its problems were taken, as she thought, seriously, and condemned all those in which they were not. She would have ranked Bailey's *Festus* higher than *Candide*, unless of course Burlap or some other authoritative person had previously told her that it was her duty to prefer *Candide*. As she was never permitted to criticize anything but Tripe, her lack of all critical insight was of little importance.

They worked, they went out to lunch, they returned and set to work again. Eleven new books had arrived in the interval.

'I feel,' said Walter, 'as the Bombay vultures must feel when there's been an epidemic among the Parsees.'

Bombay and the Parsees reminded him of his sister Elinor. She and Philip would be sailing to-day. He was glad they were coming home. They were almost the only people he could talk to intimately about his affairs. He would be able to discuss his problems with them. It would be a comfort, an alleviation of his responsibility. And then suddenly he remembered that everything was settled, that there were no more problems. No more. And then the telephone bell rang. He lifted the receiver, he hallooed into the mouthpiece.

'Is that you, Walter darling?' The voice was Lucy's.

His heart sank, he knew what was going to happen.

'I've just woken up,' she explained. 'I'm all alone.'

She wanted him to come to tea. He refused. After tea, then.

'I can't,' he persisted.

'Nonsense! Of course you can.'

'Impossible.'

'But why?'

'Work.'

'But not after six. I insist.'

After all, he thought, perhaps it would be better to see her and explain what he had decided.

‘I’ll never forgive you if you don’t come.’

‘All right,’ he said, ‘I’ll make an effort. I’ll come if I possibly can.’

‘What a flirt you are!’ Beatrice mocked, as he hung up the receiver. ‘Saying no for the fun of being persuaded!’

And when, at a few minutes after five, he left the office on the pretext that he must get to the London Library before closing time, she sent ironical good wishes after him. ‘*Bon amusement!*’ were her last words.

In the editorial room Burlap was dictating letters to his secretary. ‘Yours etcetera,’ he concluded and picked up another batch of papers. ‘Dear Miss Saville,’ he began, after glancing at them for a moment. ‘No,’ he corrected himself. ‘Dear Miss Romola Saville. Thank you for your note and for the enclosed manuscripts.’ He paused and, leaning back in his chair, closed his eyes in brief reflection. ‘It is not my custom,’ he went on at last in a soft remote voice, ‘it is not my custom to write personal letters to unknown contributors.’ He reopened his eyes, to meet the dark bright glance of his secretary from across the table. The expression in Miss Cobbett’s eyes was sarcastic; the faintest little smile almost imperceptibly twitched the corners of her mouth. Burlap was annoyed; but he concealed his feelings and continued to stare straight in front of him as though Miss Cobbett were not there at all and he were looking absent-mindedly at a piece of furniture. Miss Cobbett looked back at her note-book.

‘How contemptible!’ she said to herself. ‘How unspeakably vulgar!’

Miss Cobbett was a small woman, black-haired, darkly downy at the corners of her upper lip, with brown eyes disproportionately large for her thin, rather sickly little face. Sombre and passionate eyes in which there was, almost permanently, an expression of reproach that could flash up into sudden anger or, as at this moment, derision. She had a right to look reproachfully on the world. Fate had treated her badly. Very badly indeed. Born and brought up in the midst of a reasonable prosperity, her father’s death had left her, from one day to another, desperately poor. She got engaged to Harry Markham. Life promised to begin again. Then came the War. Harry joined up and was killed. His death condemned her to shorthand and typing for the rest of her natural existence.

Harry was the only man who had ever loved her, who had been prepared to take the risk of loving her. Other men found her too disquietingly violent and impassioned and serious. She took things terribly seriously. Young men felt uncomfortable and silly in her company. They revenged themselves by laughing at her for having no ‘sense of humour’, for being a pedant and, as time went on, for being an old maid who was longing for a man. They said she looked like a witch. She had often been in love, passionately, with a hopeless violence. The men had either not noticed; or, if they noticed, had fled precipitately, or had mocked, or, what was almost worse, had been patronizingly kind as though to a poor misguided creature who might be a nuisance but who ought, none the less, to be treated with charity. Ethel Cobbett had every right to look reproachful.

She had met Burlap because, as a girl, in the prosperous days, she had been at school with Susan Paley, who had afterwards become Burlap’s wife. When Susan died and Burlap exploited the grief he felt, or at any rate loudly said he felt, in a more than usually painful series of these always painfully personal articles which were the secret of his success as a journalist (for the great public has a chronic and cannibalistic appetite for personalities), Ethel wrote him a letter of condolence, accompanying it with a long account of Susan as a girl. A moved and moving answer came back by return of post. ‘Thank you, thank you for your memories of what I have always felt to be the *realest* Susan, the little girl who survived so beautifully and purely in the woman, to the very end; the lovely child that in spite of chronology she always was, underneath and parallel with the physical Susan living in time. In her heart of hearts, I am sure, she never quite believed in her chronological adult self; she could never quite get it out of her head that she was a little girl playing at being grown up.’ And so it went on – pages of a rather hysterical lyricism about the dead child-woman. He incorporated a good deal of the substance of the letter in his next week’s article. ‘Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven’ was its title. A day or two later he travelled down to Birmingham to have a personal interview with this woman who had known the realest Susan when she was chronologically as well as spiritually a child. The impression each made upon the other was favourable. For Ethel,

living bitterly and reproachfully between her dismal lodgings and the hateful insurance office where she was a clerk, the arrival first of his letter and now of Burlap himself had been great and wonderful events. A real writer, a man with a mind and a soul. In the state into which he had then worked himself Burlap would have liked any woman who could talk to him about Susan's childhood and into whose warm maternal compassion, a child himself, he could luxuriously sink as into a feather bed. Ethel Cobbett was not only sympathetic and a friend of Susan's; she had intelligence, was earnestly cultured and an admirer. The first impressions were good.

Burlap wept and was abject. He agonized himself with the thought that he could never, never ask Susan's forgiveness for all the unkindness he had ever done her, for all the cruel words he had spoken. He confessed in an agony of contrition that he had once been unfaithful to her. He recounted their quarrels. And now she was dead; he would never be able to ask her pardon. Never, never. Ethel was moved. Nobody, she reflected, would care like that when she was dead. But being cared for when one is dead is less satisfactory than being cared for when one is alive. These agonies which Burlap, by a process of intense concentration on the idea of his loss and grief, had succeeded in churning up within himself were in no way proportionate or even related to his feelings for the living Susan. For every Jesuit novice Loyola prescribed a course of solitary meditation on the passion of Christ; a few days of this exercise, accompanied by fasting, were generally enough to produce in the novice's mind a vivid, mystical and personal realization of the Saviour's real existence and sufferings. Burlap employed the same process; but instead of thinking about Jesus, or even about Susan, he thought of himself, his own agonies, his own loneliness, his own remorses. And duly, at the end of some few days of incessant spiritual masturbation, he had been rewarded by a mystical realization of his own unique and incomparable piteousness. He saw himself in an apocalyptic vision as a man of sorrows. (The language of the New Testament was constantly on Burlap's lips and under his pen. 'To each of us,' he wrote, 'is given a Calvary proportionate to his or her powers of endurance and capabilities of self-perfection.' He spoke

familiarly of agonies in the garden and cups.) The vision rent his heart; he was overwhelmed with self-pity. But with the sorrows of this Christ-like Burlap poor Susan had really very little to do. His love for the living Susan had been as much self-induced and self-intensified as his grief at her death. He had loved, not Susan, but the mental image of Susan and the idea of love, fixedly concentrated on, in the best Jesuitical manner, until they became hallucinatingly real. His ardours for this phantom, and the love of love, the passion for passion which he had managed to squeeze out of his inner consciousness, conquered Susan, who imagined that they had some connection with herself. What pleased her most about his feelings was their ‘pure’ unmasculine quality. His ardours were those of a child for its mother (a rather incestuous child, it is true; but how tactfully and delicately the little Œdipus!); his love was at once babyish and maternal; his passion was a kind of passive snuggling. Frail, squeamish, less than fully alive and therefore less than adult, permanently under-aged, she adored him as a superior and almost holy lover. Burlap in return adored his private phantom, adored his beautifully Christian conception of matrimony, adored his own adorable husbandliness. His periodical articles in praise of marriage were lyrical. He was, however, frequently unfaithful; but he had such a pure, child-like and platonic way of going to bed with women, that neither they nor he ever considered that the process really counted as going to bed. His life with Susan was a succession of scenes in every variety of emotional key. He would chew and chew on some grievance until he had poisoned himself into a passion of anger or jealousy. Or else he would pore over his own shortcomings and grow abjectly repentant, or roll at her feet in an ecstasy of incestuous adoration for the imaginary mother-baby of a wife with whom he had chosen to identify the corporeal Susan. And then sometimes, very disquietingly for poor Susan, he would suddenly interrupt his emotions with an oddly cynical little laugh and would become for a while somebody entirely different, somebody like the Jolly Miller in the song. ‘I care for nobody, no, not I, and nobody cares for me.’ ‘One’s devil’ was how he described those moods, when he had worked himself back again into emotional spirituality; and he would quote the Ancient Mariner’s

words about the wicked whisper that had turned his heart as dry as dust. ‘One’s devil’ – or was it, perhaps the genuine, fundamental Burlap, grown tired of trying to be somebody else and of churning up emotions he did not spontaneously feel, taking a brief holiday?

Susan died; but the prolonged and passionate grief which he felt on that occasion could have been worked up, if Burlap had chosen to imagine her dead and himself desolate and lonely, almost equally well during her lifetime. Ethel was touched by the intensity of his feelings, or rather by the loudness and insistence of their expression. Burlap seemed to be quite broken down, physically and spiritually, by his grief. Her heart bled for him. Encouraged by her sympathy, he plunged into an orgy of regrets, whose vanity made them exasperatingly poignant, of repentances, excruciating for being too late, of unnecessary confessions and self-abasements. Feelings are not separate entities that can be stimulated in isolation from the rest of the mind. When a man is emotionally exalted in one direction, he is liable to become emotionally exalted in others. Burlap’s grief made him noble and generous; his self-pity made it easy to feel Christian about other people. ‘You’re unhappy, too,’ he said to Ethel. ‘I can see it.’ She admitted it; told him how much she hated her work. Hated the place, hated the people; told him her wretched history. Burlap churned up his sympathy. ‘But what do my little miseries matter in comparison with yours,’ she protested, remembering the violence of his outcry. Burlap talked about the freemasonry of suffering and then, dazzled by the vision of his own generous self, proceeded to offer Miss Cobbett a secretarial job on the staff of the *Literary World*. Infinitely preferable as London and the *Literary World* seemed to the insurance office and Birmingham, Ethel hesitated. The insurance job was dull, but it was safe, permanent, pensioned. In another and yet more explosive burst of generous feeling Burlap guaranteed her all the permanence she wanted. He felt warm with goodness.

Miss Cobbett allowed herself to be persuaded. She came. If Burlap had hoped to slide by gradual stages and almost imperceptibly into Ethel’s bed, he was disappointed. A broken-hearted child in need of consolation, he would have

liked to lure his consoler, ever so spiritually and platonically, into a gentle and delicious incest. But to Ethel Cobbett the idea was unthinkable; it never entered her head. She was a woman of principles, as passionate and violent in her moral loyalties as in her love. She had taken Burlap's grief seriously and literally. When they had agreed, with tears, to found a kind of private cult for poor Susan, to raise and keep perpetually illumined and adorned an inward altar to her memory, Ethel had imagined that they were meaning what they were saying. She meant it in any case. It never occurred to her that Burlap did not. His subsequent behaviour had astonished and shocked her. Was this the man, she asked herself as she watched him living his life of disguised and platonic and slimily spiritual promiscuities, was this the man who had vowed to keep the candles for ever burning in front of poor little Susan's altar? She looked, she spoke her disapproval. Burlap cursed himself for his foolishness in having lured her away from the insurance office, his double-dyed idiocy in promising her permanence of tenure. If only she'd go of her own accord! He tried to make her life a misery for her by treating her with a cold, superior impersonality, as though she were just a machine for taking down letters and copying articles. But Ethel Cobbett grimly stuck to her job, had stuck to it for eighteen months now and showed no signs of giving notice. It was intolerable; it couldn't go on. But how should he put an end to it? Of course, he wasn't *legally* bound to keep her for ever. He had never put down anything in black and white. If the worst came to the worst …

Stonily ignoring the look in Ethel Cobbett's eyes, the almost imperceptible smile of irony, Burlap went on with his dictation. One doesn't deign to notice machines; one uses them. But still, this sort of thing simply could not go on.

'It is not my custom to write personal letters to unknown contributors,' he repeated in a firm, determined tone. 'But I cannot refrain from telling you – no, no – from thanking you for the great pleasure your poems have given me. The lyrical freshness of your work, its passionate sincerity, its untamed and almost savage brilliance have come as a surprise and a refreshment to me. An editor must read through such quantities of bad literature, that he is almost pathetically grateful to those who – no; say: to the rare and precious spirits who offer him

gold instead of the customary dross. Thank you for the gift of …' he looked again at the papers, 'of "Love in the Greenwood" and "Passion Flowers". Thank you for their bright and turbulent verbal surface. Thank you also for the sensitiveness … no, the quivering sensibility, the experience of suffering, the ardent spirituality which a deeper insight detects beneath that surface. I am having both poems set up at once and hope to print them early next month.

'Meanwhile, if you ever happen to be passing in the neighbourhood of Fleet Street, I should esteem it a great honour to hear from you personally some account of your poetical projects. The literary aspirant, even of talent, is often balked by material difficulties which the professional man of letters knows how to circumvent. I have always regarded it as one of my greatest privileges and duties as a critic and editor to make smooth the way for literary talent. This must be my excuse for writing to you at such length. Believe me, yours very truly.'

He looked again at the typewritten poems and read a line or two. 'Real talent,' he said to himself several times, 'real talent'. But 'one's devil' was thinking that the girl was remarkably outspoken, must have a temperament, seemed to know a thing or two. He dropped the papers into the basket on his right hand and picked up another letter from the basket on his left.

'To the Reverend James Hitchcock,' he dictated. 'The Vicarage, Tuttleford, Wilts. Dear Sir, I regret very much that I am unable to use your long and very interesting article on the relation between agglutinative languages and agglutinative chimera-forms in symbolic art. Exigencies of space …'

Pink in her dressing-gown like the tulips in the vases, Lucy lay propped on her elbow, reading. The couch was grey, the walls were hung with grey silk, the carpet was rose-coloured. In its gilded cage even the parrot was pink and grey. The door opened.

'Walter, darling! At last!' She threw down her book.

'Already. If you knew all the things I ought to be doing instead of being here.' ('Do you promise?' Marjorie had asked. And he had answered, 'I promise.' But this last visit of explanation didn't count.)

The divan was wide. Lucy moved her feet towards the wall, making place for him to sit down. One of her red Turkish slippers fell.

‘That tiresome manicure woman,’ she said, raising the bare foot a few inches so that it came into her line of sight. ‘She will put that horrible red stuff on my toe nails. They look like wounds.’

Walter did not speak. His heart was violently beating. Like the warmth of a body transposed into another sensuous key, the scent of her gardenias enveloped him. There are hot perfumes and cold, stifling and fresh. Lucy’s gardenias seemed to fill his throat and lungs with a tropical and sultry sweetness. On the grey silk of the couch, her foot was flowerlike and pale, like the pale fleshy buds of lotus flowers. The feet of Indian goddesses walking among their lotuses are themselves flowers. Time flowed in silence, but not to waste, as at ordinary moments. It was as though it flowed, pumped beat after beat by Walter’s anxious heart, into some enclosed reservoir of experience to mount and mount behind the dam until at last, suddenly … Walter suddenly reached out and took her bare foot in his hand. Under the pressure of those silently accumulated seconds, the dam had broken. It was a long foot, long and narrow. His fingers closed round it. He bent down and kissed the instep.

‘But, my dear Walter!’ She laughed. ‘You’re becoming quite oriental.’

Walter said nothing, but kneeling on the ground beside the couch, he leaned over her. The face that bent to kiss her was set in a kind of desperate madness. The hands that touched her trembled. She shook her head, she shielded her face with her hand.

‘No, no.’

‘But why not?’

‘It wouldn’t do,’ she said.

‘Why not?’

‘It would complicate things too much for you, to begin with.’

‘No, it wouldn’t,’ said Walter. There were no complications. Marjorie had ceased to exist.

‘Besides,’ Lucy went on, ‘you seem to forget me. I don’t want to.’

But his lips were soft, his hands touched lightly. The moth-winged premonitions of pleasure came flutteringly to life under his kisses and caresses. She shut her eyes. His caresses were like a drug, at once intoxicant and opiate. She had only to relax her will; the drug would possess her utterly. She would cease to be herself. She would become nothing but a skin of fluttering pleasure enclosing a void, a warm abysmal darkness.

'Lucy!' Her eyelids fluttered and shuddered under his lips. His hand was on her breast. 'My sweetheart.' She lay quite still, her eyes still closed.

A sudden and piercing shriek made both of them start, broad awake, out of their timelessness. It was as though a murder had been committed within a few feet of them, but on someone who found the process of being slaughtered rather a joke, as well as painful.

Lucy burst out laughing. 'It's Polly.'

Both turned towards the cage. His head cocked a little on one side, the bird was examining them out of one black and circular eye. And while they looked, a shutter of parchment skin passed like a temporary cataract across the bright expressionless regard and was withdrawn. The jocular martyr's dying shriek was once again repeated.

'You'll have to cover his cage with the cloth,' said Lucy.

Walter turned back towards her and angrily began to kiss her. The parrot yelled again. Lucy's laughter redoubled.

'It's no good,' she gasped. 'He won't stop till you cover him.'

The bird confirmed what she had said with another scream of mirthful agony. Feeling furious, outraged and a fool, Walter got up from his knees and crossed the room. At his approach the bird began to dance excitedly on its perch; its crest rose, the feathers of its head and neck stood apart from one another like the scales of a ripened fir-cone. 'Good-morning,' it said in a guttural ventriloquial voice, 'good-morning, Auntie, good-morning, Auntie, good-morning, Auntie …' Walter unfolded the pink brocade that lay on the table near the cage and extinguished the creature. A last 'Good-morning, Auntie' came out from under the cloth. Then there was silence.

‘He likes his little joke,’ said Lucy, as the parrot disappeared. She had lighted a cigarette.

Walter strode back across the room and without saying anything took the cigarette from between her fingers and threw it into the fireplace. Lucy raised her eyebrows, but he gave her no time to speak. Kneeling down again beside her, he began to kiss her, angrily.

‘Walter,’ she protested. ‘No! What’s come over you?’ She tried to disengage herself, but he was surprisingly strong. ‘You’re like a wild beast.’ His desire was dumb and savage. ‘Walter! I insist.’ Struck by an absurd idea, she suddenly laughed. ‘If you knew how like the movies you were! A great huge grinning close-up.’

But ridicule was as unavailing as protest. And did she really desire it to be anything but unavailing? Why shouldn’t she abandon herself? It was only rather humiliating to be carried away, to be compelled instead of to choose. Her pride, her will resisted him, resisted her own desire. But after all, why not? The drug was potent and delicious. Why not? She shut her eyes. But as she was hesitating, circumstances suddenly decided for her. There was a knock at the door. Lucy opened her eyes again. ‘I’m going to say come in,’ she whispered.

He scrambled to his feet and, as he did so, heard the knock repeated.

‘Come in!’

The door opened. ‘Mr Illidge to see you, madam,’ said the maid.

Walter was standing by the window, as though profoundly interested in the delivery van drawn up in front of the opposite house.

‘Show him up,’ said Lucy.

He turned round as the door closed behind the maid. His face was very pale, his lips were trembling.

‘I quite forgot,’ she explained. ‘I asked him last night; this morning rather.’

He averted his face and without saying a word crossed the room, opened the door and was gone.

‘Walter!’ she called after him, ‘Walter!’ But he did not return.

On the stairs he met Illidge ascending behind the maid.

Walter responded to his greetings with a vague salute and hurried past. He could not trust himself to speak.

‘Our friend Bidlake seemed to be in a great hurry,’ said Illidge, when the preliminary greetings were over. He felt exultantly certain that he had driven the other fellow away.

She observed the triumph on his face. Like a little ginger cock, she was thinking. ‘He’d forgotten something,’ she vaguely explained.

‘Not himself, I hope,’ he questioned waggishly. And when she laughed, more at the fatuous masculinity of his expression than at his joke, he swelled with self-confidence and satisfaction. This social business was as easy as playing skittles. Feeling entirely at his ease, he stretched his legs, he looked round the room. Its richly sober elegance impressed him at once as the right thing. He sniffed the perfumed air appreciatively.

‘What’s under that mysterious red cloth there?’ he asked, pointing at the mobled cage.

‘That’s a cockatoo,’ Lucy answered. ‘A cock-a-doodle-doo,’ she emended, breaking out into a sudden disquieting and inexplicable laughter.

There are confessable agonies, sufferings of which one can positively be proud. Of bereavement, of parting, of the sense of sin and the fear of death the poets have eloquently spoken. They command the world’s sympathy. But there are also discreditable anguishes, no less excruciating than the others, but of which the sufferer dare not, cannot speak. The anguish of thwarted desire, for example. That was the anguish which Walter carried with him into the street. It was pain, anger, disappointment, shame, misery all in one. He felt as though his soul were dying in torture. And yet the cause was unavowable, low, even ludicrous. Suppose a friend were now to meet him and to ask why he looked so unhappy.

‘I was making love to a woman when I was interrupted, first by the screaming of a cockatoo, then by the arrival of a visitor.’

The comment would be enormous and derisive laughter. His confession would have been a smoking-room joke. And yet he could not be suffering more

if he had lost his mother.

He wandered for an hour through the streets, in Regent's Park. The light gradually faded out of the white and misty afternoon; he became calmer. It was a lesson, he thought, a punishment; he had broken his promise. For his own good as well as for Marjorie's, never again. He looked at his watch and seeing that it was after seven, turned homewards. He arrived at the house tired and determinedly repentant. Marjorie was sewing; the lamplight was bright on her thin fatigued face. She too was wearing a dressing-gown. It was mauve and hideous; he had always thought her taste bad. The flat was pervaded with a smell of cooking. He hated kitchen smells, but that was yet another reason why he should be faithful. It was a question of honour and duty. It was not because he preferred gardenia to cabbage that he had a right to make Marjorie suffer.

'You're late,' she said.

'There was a lot to do,' Walter explained. 'And I walked home.' That at least was true. 'How are you feeling?' He laid his hand on her shoulder and bent down. Dropping her sewing, Marjorie threw her hands round his neck. What a happiness, she was thinking, to have him again! Hers once more. What a comfort! But even as she pressed herself against him, she realized that she was once more betrayed. She broke away from him.

'Walter, how could you?'

The blood rushed to his face; but he tried to keep up the pretence. 'How could I what?' he asked.

'You've been to see that woman again.'

'But what *are* you talking about?' He knew it was useless; but he went on pretending all the same.

'It's no use lying.' She got up so suddenly that her work basket overturned and scattered its contents on the floor. Unheeding, she walked across the room. 'Go away!' she cried, when he tried to follow her. Walter shrugged his shoulders and obeyed. 'How could you?' she went on. 'Coming home reeking of her perfume.' So it was the gardenias. What a fool he was not to have foreseen … 'After all you said last night. How could you?'

‘But if you’d let me explain,’ he protested in the tone of a victim – an exasperated victim.

‘Explain why you lied,’ she said bitterly. ‘Explain why you broke your promise.’

Her contemptuous anger evoked an answering anger in Walter. ‘Merely explain,’ he said with hard and dangerous politeness. What a bore she was with her scenes and jealousies! What an intolerable, infuriating *bore*!

‘Merely go on lying,’ she mocked.

Again he shrugged his shoulders. ‘If you like to put it like that,’ he said politely.

‘Just a despicable liar – that’s what you are.’ And turning away from him, she covered her face with her hands and began to cry.

Walter was not touched. The sight of her heaving shoulders just exasperated and bored him. He looked at her with a cold and weary anger.

‘Go away,’ she cried through her tears, ‘go away.’ She did not want him to be there, triumphing over her, while she cried. ‘Go away.’

‘Do you really want me to go?’ he asked with the same cool, aggravating politeness.

‘Yes, go, go.’

‘Very well,’ he said and opening the door, he went.

At Camden Town he took a cab and was at Bruton Street just in time to find Lucy on the point of going out to dinner.

‘You’re coming out with me,’ he announced very calmly.

‘Alas!’

‘Yes, you are.’

She looked at him curiously and he looked back at her, with steady eyes, smiling, with a queer look of amused triumph and invincible obstinate power, which she had never seen on his face before. ‘All right,’ she said at last and, ringing for the maid, ‘Telephone to Lady Sturlett, will you,’ she ordered, ‘and say I’m sorry, but I’ve got a very bad headache and can’t come to-night.’ The maid retired. ‘Well, are you grateful now?’

‘I’m beginning to be,’ he answered.

‘Beginning?’ She assumed indignation. ‘I like your damned impertinence.’

‘I know you do,’ said Walter, laughing. And she did. That night Lucy became his mistress.

It was between three and four in the afternoon. Spandrell had only just got out of bed. He was still unshaved; over his pyjamas he wore a dressing-gown of rough brown cloth, like a monk’s cassock. (The monastic note was studied; he liked to remind himself of the ascetics. He liked, rather childishly, to play the part of the anchorite of diabolism.) He had filled the kettle and was waiting for it to boil on the gas ring. It seemed to be taking an unconscionably long time about it. His mouth was dry and haunted by a taste like the fumes of heated brass. The brandy was having its usual effects.

‘Like as the hart desireth the water brooks,’ he said to himself, ‘so longeth my soul … With a morning-after thirst. If only Grace could be bottled like Perrier water.’

He walked to the window. Outside a radius of fifty yards everything in the universe had been abolished by the white mist. But how insistently that lamp-post thrust itself up in front of the next house on the right, how significantly! The world had been destroyed and only the lamp-post, like Noah, preserved from the universal cataclysm. And he had never even noticed there was a lamp-post there; it simply hadn’t existed until this moment. And now it was the only thing that existed. Spandrell looked at it with a fixed and breathless attention. This lamp-post alone in the mist – hadn’t he seen something like it before? This queer sensation of being with the sole survivor of the Deluge was somehow familiar. Staring at the lamp-post, he tried to remember. Or rather he breathlessly didn’t try; he held back his will and his conscious thoughts, as a policeman might hold back the crowd round a woman who had fainted in the street; he held back his consciousness to give the stunned memory a place to stretch itself, to breathe, to come to life. Staring at the lamp-post, Spandrell waited, agonized and patient, like a man who feels he is just going to sneeze, tremulously awaiting the anticipated paroxysm; waited for the long-dead memory to revive. And suddenly

it sprang up, broad awake, out of its catalepsy and, with a sense of enormous relief, Spandrell saw himself walking up the steep hard-trodden snow of the road leading from Cortina towards the pass of Falzarego. A cold white cloud had descended on to the valley. There were no more mountains. The fantastic coral pinnacles of the Dolomites had been abolished. There were no more heights and depths. The world was only fifty paces wide, white snow on the ground, white cloud around and above. And every now and then, against the whiteness appeared some dark shape of house or telegraph pole, or tree or man or sledge, portentous in its isolation and uniqueness, each one a solitary survivor from the general wreck. It was uncanny, but how thrillingly new and how beautiful in a strange way! The walk was an adventure; he felt excited and a kind of anxiety intensified his happiness till he could hardly bear it.

‘But look at that little chalet on the left,’ he cried to his mother. ‘That wasn’t here when I came up last. I swear it wasn’t here.’

He knew the road perfectly, he had been up and down it a hundred times and never seen that little chalet. And now it loomed up almost appallingly, the only dark and definite thing in a vague world of whiteness.

‘Yes, I’ve never noticed it, either,’ said his mother. ‘Which only shows,’ she added with that note of tenderness which always came into her voice when she mentioned her dead husband, ‘How right your father was. Mistrust all evidence, he used to say, even your own.’

He took her hand and they walked on together in silence, pulling their sledges after them.

Spandrell turned away from the window. The kettle was boiling. He filled the tea-pot, poured himself out a cup and drank. Symbolically enough, his thirst remained unassuaged. He went on sipping, meditatively, remembering and analysing those quite incredible felicities of his boyhood. Winters among the Dolomites. Springs in Tuscany or Provence or Bavaria, summers by the Mediterranean or in Savoy. After his father’s death and before he went to school, they lived almost continuously abroad – it was cheaper. And almost all his holidays from school were spent out of England. From seven to fifteen, he had

moved from one European beauty spot to another, appreciating their beauty, what was more – genuinely, a precocious Childe Harold. England seemed a little tame afterwards. He thought of another day in winter. Not misty, this time, but brilliant, the sun hot in a cloudless sky; the coral precipices of the Dolomites shining pink and orange and white above the woods and the snow slopes. They were sliding down on skis through the bare larch-woods. Streaked with tree-shadows, the snow was like an immense white and blue tiger-skin beneath their feet. The sunlight was orange among the leafless twigs, sea-green in the hanging beards of moss. The powdery snow sizzled under their skis, the air was at once warm and eager. And when he emerged from the woods the great rolling slopes lay before him like the contours of a wonderful body, and the virgin snow was a smooth skin, delicately grained in the low afternoon sunlight, and twinkling with diamonds and spangles. He had gone ahead. At the outskirts of the wood he halted to wait for his mother. Looking back he watched her coming through the trees. A strong tall figure, still young and agile, the young face puckered into a smile. Down she came towards him, and she was the most beautiful and at the same time the most homely and comforting and familiar of beings.

‘Well!’ she said, laughing, as she drew up beside him.

‘Well!’ He looked at her and then at the snow and the tree-shadows and the great bare rocks and the blue sky, then back again at his mother. And all at once he was filled with an intense, inexplicable happiness.

‘I shall never be so happy as this again,’ he said to himself, when they set off once more. ‘Never again, even though I live to be a hundred.’ He was only fifteen at the time, but that was how he felt and thought.

And his words had been prophetic. That was the last of his happiness. Afterwards … No, no. He preferred not to think of afterwards. Not at the moment. He poured himself out another cup of tea.

A bell rang startlingly. He went to the door of the flat and opened it. It was his mother.

‘You?’ Then he suddenly remembered that Lucy had said something.

‘Didn’t you get my message?’ Mrs Knoyle asked anxiously.

‘Yes. But I’d clean forgotten.’

‘But I thought you needed …’ she began. She was afraid she might have intruded; his face was so unwelcoming.

The corners of his mouth ironically twitched. ‘I do need,’ he said. He was chronically penniless.

They passed into the other room. The windows, Mrs Knoyle observed at a glance, were foggy with grime. On shelf and mantel the dust lay thick. Sooty cobwebs dangled from the ceiling. She had tried to get Maurice’s permission to send a woman to clean up two or three times a week. But, ‘None of your slumming,’ he had said. ‘I prefer to wallow. Filth’s my natural element. Besides, I haven’t a distinguished military position to keep up.’ He laughed, noiselessly, showing his big strong teeth. That was for her. She never dared to repeat her offer. But the room really did need cleaning.

‘Would you like some tea?’ he asked. ‘It’s ready. I’m just having breakfast,’ he added, purposely drawing attention to the irregularity of his way of life.

She refused, without venturing any comment on the unusual breakfast hour. Spandrell was rather disappointed that he had not succeeded in drawing her. There was a long silence.

From time to time Mrs Knoyle glanced almost surreptitiously at her son. He was staring fixedly into the empty fireplace. He looked old, she thought, and rather ill and dreadfully uncared for. She tried to recognize the child, the big schoolboy he had been in those far-off times when they were happy, just the two of them together. She remembered how distressed he used to be when she didn’t wear what he thought were the right clothes, when she wasn’t smart or failed to look her best. He was as jealously proud of her as she was of him. But the responsibility of his upbringing weighed on her heavily. The future had always frightened her; she had always been afraid of taking decisions; she had no trust in her own powers. Besides, after her husband’s death, there wasn’t much money; and she had no head for affairs, no talent for management. How to afford to send him to the university, how to get him started in life? The questions tormented her. She lay awake at night, wondering what she ought to do. Life

terrified her. She had a child's capacity for happiness, but also a child's fears, a child's inefficiency. When existence was a holiday, none could be more rapturously happy; but when there was business to be done, plans to be made, decisions taken, she was simply lost and terrified. And to make matters worse, after Maurice went to school she was very lonely. He was with her only in the holidays. For nine months out of the twelve she was alone, with nobody to love but her old dachshund. And at last even he failed her – fell ill, poor old beast, and had to be put out of his misery. It was shortly after poor old Fritz's death that she first met Major Knoyle, as he then was.

'You say you brought that money?' Spandrell asked, breaking the long silence.

Mrs Knoyle flushed. 'Yes, it's here,' she said and opened her bag. The moment to speak had come. It was her duty to admonish, and the wad of bank-notes gave her the right, the power. But the duty was odious and she had no wish to use her power. She raised her eyes and looked at him imploringly. 'Maurice,' she begged, 'why can't you be reasonable? It's such a madness, such a folly.'

Spandrell raised his eyebrows. 'What's a madness?' he asked, pretending not to know what she was talking about.

Embarrassed at being thus compelled to specify her vague reproaches, Mrs Knoyle blushed. 'You know what I mean,' she said. 'This way of living. It's bad and stupid. And such a waste, such a suicide. Besides, you're not happy; I can see that.'

'Mayn't I even be unhappy, if I want to?' he asked ironically.

'But do you want to make me unhappy too?' she asked. 'Because if you do, you succeed, Maurice, you succeed. You make me terribly unhappy.' The tears came into her eyes. She felt in her bag for a handkerchief.

Spandrell got up from his chair and began to walk up and down the room. 'You didn't think much of my happiness in the past,' he said.

His mother did not answer, but went on noiselessly crying.

'When you married that man,' he went on, 'did you think of my happiness?'

‘You know I thought it would be for the best,’ she answered brokenly. She had explained it so often; she couldn’t begin again. ‘You know it,’ she repeated.

‘I only know what I felt and said at the time,’ he answered. ‘You didn’t listen to me, and now you tell me you wanted to make me happy.’

‘But you were so unreasonable,’ she protested. ‘If you had given me any reasons …’

‘Reasons,’ he repeated slowly. ‘Did you honestly expect a boy of fifteen to tell his mother the reasons why he didn’t want her to share her bed with a stranger?’

He was thinking of that book which had circulated surreptitiously among the boys of his house at school. Disgusted and ashamed, but irresistibly fascinated, he had read it at night, by the light of an electric torch, under the bedclothes. *A Girls’ School in Paris* it was called, innocuously enough; but the contents were pure pornography. The sexual exploits of the military were pindarically exalted. A little later his mother wrote to him that she was going to marry Major Knoyle.

‘It’s no good, mother,’ he said aloud. ‘Hadn’t we better talk about something else?’

Mrs Knoyle drew her breath sharply and with determination, gave her eyes a final wipe and put away the handkerchief. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘It was stupid of me. Perhaps I’d better go.’

Secretly she hoped that he would protest, would beg her to stay. But he said nothing.

‘Here’s the money,’ she added.

He took the folded bank-notes and stuffed them into the pocket of his dressing-gown. ‘I’m sorry I had to ask you for it,’ he said. ‘I was in a hole. I’ll try not to get into it again.’

He looked at her for a moment, smiling, and suddenly, through the worn mask, she seemed to see him as he was in boyhood. Tenderness like a soft warmth expanded within her, soft but irresistible. It would not be contained. She laid her hands on his shoulders.

‘Good-bye, my darling boy,’ she said, and Spandrell recognized in her voice that note which used to come into it when she talked to him of his dead father. She leaned forward to kiss him. Averting his face, he passively suffered her lips to touch his cheek.

CHAPTER XIV

MISS FULKES ROTATED the terrestrial globe until the crimson triangle of India was opposite their eyes.

‘That’s Bombay,’ she said, pointing with her pencil. ‘That’s where Daddy and Mummy took the ship. Bombay is a big town in India,’ she went on instructively. ‘All this is India.’

‘Why is India red?’ asked little Phil.

‘I told you before. Try to remember.’

‘Because it’s English?’ Phil remembered, of course; but the explanation had seemed inadequate. He had hoped for a better one this time.

‘There, you see, you can remember if you try,’ said Miss Fulkes, scoring a small triumph.

‘But why should English things be red?’

‘Because red is England’s colour. Look, here’s little England.’ She spun the globe. ‘Red too.’

‘We live in England, don’t we?’ Phil looked out of the window. The lawn with its Wellingtonia, the clot-polled elms looked back at him.

‘Yes, we live just about here,’ and Miss Fulkes poked the red island in the stomach.

‘But it’s green, where we live,’ said Phil. ‘Not red.’

Miss Fulkes tried to explain, as she had done so many times before, just precisely what a map was.

In the garden Mrs Bidlake walked among her flowers, weeding and meditating. Her walking-stick had a little pronged spud at the end of it; she could weed without bending. The weeds in the flower-beds were young and fragile; they yielded without a struggle to the spud. But the dandelions and plantains on the lawn were more formidable enemies. The dandelions’ roots were like long

tapering white serpents. The plantains, when she tried to pull them up, desperately clawed the earth.

It was the season of tulips. Duc van Thol and Keizers Kroon, Proserpine and Thomas Moore stood at attention in all the beds, glossy in the light. Atoms in the sun vibrated and their trembling filled all space. Eyes felt the pulses as light; the tulip atoms absorbed or reverberated the accorded movements, creating colours for whose sake the burgesses of seventeenth-century Haarlem were prepared to part with hoarded guilders. Red tulips and yellow, white and parti-coloured, smooth or feathery – Mrs Bidlake looked at them, happily. They were like those gay and brilliant young men, she reflected, in Pinturicchio's frescoes at Siena. She halted so as to be able to shut her eyes and think more thoroughly of Pinturicchio. Mrs Bidlake could only think really well when she had her eyes shut. Her face tilted a little upwards towards the sky, her heavy, wax-white eyelids closed against the light, she stood remembering, confusedly thinking. Pinturicchio, Siena, the solemn huge cathedral – the Tuscan Middle Ages marched past her in a rich and confused pageant … She had been brought up on Ruskin. Watts had painted her portrait as a child. Rebelling against the PreRaphaelites, she had thrilled with an admiration that was quickened, at first, by a sense of sacrilege, over the Impressionists. It was because she loved art that she had married John Bidlake. Liking his pictures, she had imagined, when the painter of 'The Haymakers' had paid his court to her, that she adored the man. He was twenty years her senior; his reputation as a husband was bad; her family objected strenuously. She did not care. John Bidlake was embodied Art. His was a sacred function and through his function he appealed to all her vague, but ardent, idealism.

John Bidlake's reasons for desiring to marry yet again were unromantic. Travelling in Provence he had caught typhoid. ('That's what comes of drinking water,' he used to say afterwards. 'If only I'd stuck to Burgundy and cognac!') After a month in hospital at Avignon he returned to England, a thin and tottering convalescent. Three weeks later influenza, followed by pneumonia, brought him again to death's door. He recovered slowly. The doctor congratulated him on

having recovered at all. ‘Do you call this recovering?’ grumbled John Bidlake. ‘I feel as though about three-quarters of me were dead and buried.’ Accustomed to being well, he was terrified of illness. He saw himself living miserably, a lonely invalid. Marriage would be an alleviation. He decided to marry. The girl must be good-looking – that went without saying. But serious, not flighty; devoted, a stay-at-home.

In Janet Paston he found all that he had been looking for. She had a face like a saint’s; she was serious almost to excess; her adoration for himself was flattering.

They were married, and if John Bidlake had remained the invalid he had imagined himself doomed to be, the marriage might have been a success. Her devotion would have made up for her incompetence as a nurse; his helplessness would have rendered her indispensable to his happiness. But health returned. Six months after his marriage John Bidlake was entirely his old self. The old self began to behave in the old way. Mrs Bidlake took refuge from unhappiness in an endless imaginative meditation, which even her two children were hardly able to interrupt.

It had lasted now for a quarter of a century. A tall imposing lady of fifty all in white, with a white veil hanging from her hat, she stood among the tulips, her eyes shut, thinking of Pinturicchio and the Middle Ages, and time flowing and flowing, and God immobile on the eternal bank.

A shrill barking precipitated her out of her high eternity. She opened her eyes, reluctantly, and looked round. The small and silky parody of an extreme-oriental monster, her little Pekingese was barking at the kitchen cat. Frisking this way and that round the circumference of a circle whose radius was proportionate to his terror of the arched and spitting tabby, he yapped hysterically. His tail waved like a plume in the wind, his eyes goggled out of his black face.

‘T’ang!’ Mrs Bidlake called. ‘T’ang!’ All her Pekingese for the last thirty years had had dynastic names. T’ang the First had flourished before her children were born. It was with T’ang the Second that she and Walter had visited the dying Wetherington. The kitchen cat was now spitting at T’ang the Third. In the

intervals, little Mings and Sungs had lived, grown decrepit and, in the lethal chamber, gone the way of all pets. ‘T’ang, come here.’ Even in this emergency Mrs Bidlake was careful to pronounce the apostrophe. Or rather she was not careful to pronounce it; she pronounced it by cultured instinct, because, being what nature and education had made her, she simply could not pronounce the word without the apostrophe even when the fur was threatening to fly.

The little dog obeyed at last. The cat ceased to spit, its fur lay down on its back, it walked away majestically. Mrs Bidlake went on with her weeding and her vague, unending meditation among the flowers. God, Pinturicchio, dandelions, eternity, the sky, the clouds, the early Venetians, dandelions …

Upstairs in the schoolroom lessons were over. At least they were over as far as little Phil was concerned; for he was doing what he liked best in the world, drawing. Miss Fulkes, it is true, called the process ‘Art’ and ‘Imagination Training’, and allotted half an hour to it every morning, from twelve to half-past. But for little Phil it was just fun. He sat bent over his paper, the tip of his tongue between his teeth, his face intent and serious, drawing, drawing with a kind of inspired violence. Wielding a pencil that seemed disproportionately large, his little brown hand indefatigably laboured. At once rigid and wavering, the lines of the childish composition traced themselves on the paper.

Miss Fulkes sat by the window, looking out at the sunny garden, but not consciously seeing it. What she saw was behind the eyes, in a fanciful universe. She saw herself – herself in that lovely Lanvin frock that had been illustrated last month in *Vogue*, with pearls, dancing at Ciro’s, which looked (for she had never been at Ciro’s) curiously like the Hammersmith Palais de Danse, where she had been. ‘How lovely she looks!’ all the people were saying. She walked swayingly, like that actress she had seen at the London Pavilion – what was her name? She held out her white hand; it was young Lord Wonersh who kissed it, Lord Wonersh, who looked like Shelley and lived like Byron and owned half Oxford Street and had come to the house last February with old Mr Bidlake and had perhaps spoken to her twice. And then, all at once, she saw herself riding in the Park. And a couple of seconds later she was on a yacht in the Mediterranean.

And then in a motor car. Lord Wonersh had just taken his seat beside her, when the noise of T'ang's shrill barking startlingly roused her to consciousness of the lawn, the gay tulips, the Wellingtonia and, on the other side, the schoolroom. Miss Fulkes felt guilty, she had been neglecting her charge.

'Well, Phil,' she asked, turning round briskly to her pupil, 'what are you drawing?'

'Mr Stokes and Albert pulling the mow-lawner,' Phil answered, without looking up from his paper.

'Lawn-mower,' Miss Fulkes corrected.

'Lawn-mower,' Phil dutifully repeated.

'You never get your compound words right,' Miss Fulkes continued. 'Mow-lawner, hopgrasser, cracknutter – it's a sort of mental defect, like mirror-writing, I suppose.' Miss Fulkes had taken a course in educational psychology. 'You must really try to correct it, Phil,' she added, earnestly. After so long and flagrant a dereliction of duty (at Ciro's, on horseback, in the limousine with Lord Wonersh) Miss Fulkes felt it incumbent upon her to be particularly solicitous, scientifically so: she was a very conscientious young woman. Will you try?' she insisted.

'Yes, Miss Fulkes,' the child answered. He had no idea what she wanted him to try to do. But it would keep her quiet if he said yes. He was busy on a particularly difficult bit of his drawing.

Miss Fulkes sighed and looked out of the window again. This time she consciously perceived what her eyes saw. Mrs Bidlake wandered among the tulips, dressed flowingly in white, with a white veil hanging from her hat, a sort of PreRaphaelitic ghost. Every now and then she paused and looked at the sky. Old Mr Stokes, the gardener, passed carrying a rake; the tips of his white beard fluttered gently in the breeze. The village clock struck the half-hour. The garden, the trees, the fields, the wooded hills in the distance were always the same. Miss Fulkes felt all at once so hopelessly sad that she could have cried.

'Do mow-lawners, I mean lawn-mowers, have wheels?' asked little Phil, looking up with a frown of effort and perplexity wrinkling his forehead. 'I can't

remember.'

'Yes. Or let me think …' Miss Fulkes also frowned; 'no. They have rollers.'

'Rollers!' cried Phil. 'That's it.' He attacked his drawing again with fury.

Always the same. There seemed to be no escape, no prospect of freedom. 'If I had a thousand pounds,' thought Miss Fulkes, 'a thousand pounds. A thousand pounds.' The words were magical. 'A thousand pounds.'

'There!' cried Phil. 'Come and look.' He held up his paper. Miss Fulkes got up and crossed to the table. 'What a lovely drawing!' she said.

'That's all the little bits of grass flying up,' said Phil, pointing to a cloud of dots and dashes in the middle of his picture. He was particularly proud of the grass.

'I see,' said Miss Fulkes.

'And look how hard Albert is pulling!' It was true; Albert was pulling like mad. And old Mr Stokes, recognizable by the four parallel pencil strokes issuing from his chin, pushed as energetically at the other end of the machine.

For a child of his age, little Phil had an observant eye, and a strange talent for rendering on paper what he had seen – not realistically, of course, but in terms of expressive symbols. Albert and Mr Stokes were, for all their scratchy uncertainty of outline, violently alive.

'Albert's left leg is rather funny, isn't it?' said Miss Fulkes. 'Rather long and thin and …' She checked herself, remembering what old Mr Bidlake had said. 'On no account is the child to be taught how to draw, in the art-school sense of the word. On no account. I don't want him to be ruined.'

Phil snatched the paper from her. 'No, it isn't,' he said angrily. His pride was hurt, he hated criticism, refused ever to be in the wrong.

'Perhaps it isn't really,' Miss Fulkes made haste to be soothing. 'Perhaps I made a mistake.' Phil smiled again. 'Though why a child,' Miss Fulkes was thinking, 'shouldn't be told when he's drawn a leg that's impossibly long and thin and waggly, I really don't understand.' Still, old Mr Bidlake ought to know. A man in his position, with his reputation, a great painter – she had often heard him called a great painter, read it in newspaper articles, even in books. Miss

Fulkes had a profound respect for the Great. Shakespeare, Milton, Michelangelo … Yes, Mr Bidlake, the Great John Bidlake, ought to know best. She had been wrong in mentioning that left leg.

‘It’s after half-past twelve,’ she went on in a brisk efficient voice. ‘Time for you to lie down.’ Little Phil always lay down for half an hour before lunch.

‘No!’ Phil tossed his head, scowled ferociously and made a furious gesture with his clenched fists.

‘Yes,’ said Miss Fulkes calmly. ‘And don’t make those silly faces.’ She knew, by experience, that the child was not really angry; he was just making a demonstration, in order to assert himself and in the vague hope, perhaps, that he might frighten his adversary into yielding – as Chinese soldiers are said to put on devils’ masks and to utter fearful yells when they approach the enemy, in the hope of inspiring terror.

‘Why should I?’ Phil’s tone was already much calmer.

‘Because you must.’

The child got up obediently. When the mask and the yelling fail to take effect, the Chinese soldier, being a man of sense and not at all anxious to get hurt, surrenders.

‘I’ll come and draw the curtains for you,’ said Miss Fulkes.

Together, they walked down the passage to Phil’s bedroom. The child took off his shoes and lay down. Miss Fulkes drew the folds of orange cretonne across the windows.

‘Not too dark,’ said Phil, watching her movements through the richly coloured twilight.

‘You rest better when it’s dark.’

‘But I’m frightened,’ protested Phil.

‘You’re not frightened in the least. Besides, it isn’t really dark at all.’ Miss Fulkes moved towards the door.

‘Miss Fulkes!’ She paid no attention. ‘Miss Fulkes!’

On the threshold Miss Fulkes turned round. ‘If you go on shouting,’ she said severely, ‘I shall be very angry. Do you understand?’ She turned and went out,

shutting the door behind her.

‘Miss Fulkes!’ he continued to call, but in a whisper, under his breath. ‘Miss Fulkes! Miss Fulkes!’ She mustn’t hear him, of course; for then she would really be cross. At the same time he wasn’t going to obey tamely and without a protest. Whispering her name he rebelled, he asserted his personality, but in complete safety.

Sitting in her own room, Miss Fulkes was reading – to improve her mind. The book was *The Wealth of Nations*. Adam Smith, she knew, was Great. His book was one of those that one ought to have read. The best that has been thought or said. Her family was poor, but cultured. We needs must love the highest when we see it. But when the highest takes the form of a chapter beginning, ‘As it is the power of exchanging that gives occasion to the division of labour, so the extent of this division must always be limited by the extent of that power, or in other words, by the extent of the market,’ then, really, it is difficult to love it as ardently as one ought to do. ‘When the market is very small, no person can have any encouragement to dedicate himself entirely to one employment, for want of the opportunity to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men’s labour as he has occasion for.’

Miss Fulkes read the sentence through; but before she had come to the end of it, she had forgotten what the beginning was about. She began again; … ‘for want of the opportunity to exchange all that surplus … (I could take the sleeves out of my brown dress, she was thinking; because it’s only under the arms that it’s begun to go, and wear it for the skirt only with a jumper over it) … over and above his own consumption for such parts … (an orange jumper perhaps).’ She tried a third time, reading the words out aloud. ‘When the market is very small …’ A vision of the cattle market at Oxford floated before her inward eye; it was quite a large market. ‘No person can have any encouragement to dedicate himself …’ What was it all about? Miss Fulkes suddenly rebelled against her own conscientiousness. She hated the highest when she saw it. Getting up, she put *The Wealth of Nations* back on the shelf. It was a row of very high books –

‘my treasures,’ she called them. Wordsworth, Longfellow, and Tennyson bound in squashy leather and looking, with their rounded corners and Gothic titles, like so many Bibles. *Sartor Resartus*, also Emerson’s *Essays*. Marcus Aurelius in one of those limp leathery artistic little editions that one gives, at Christmas, and in sheer despair, to those to whom one can think of nothing more suitable to give. Macaulay’s *History*. Thomas à Kempis, Mrs Browning. Miss Fulkes did not select any of them. She put her hand behind the best that has been thought or said and withdrew from its secret place a copy of *The Mystery of the Castlemaine Emeralds*. A ribbon marked her place. She opened and began to read. ‘Lady Kitty turned on the lights and walked in. A cry of horror broke from her lips, a sudden faintness almost overcame her. In the middle of the room lay the body of a man in faultless evening dress. The face was almost unrecognizably mangled; there was a red gash in the white shirt front. The rich Turkey carpet was darkly soaked with blood …’ Miss Fulkes read on, avidly. The thunder of the gong brought her back with a start from the world of emeralds and murder. She sprang up. ‘I ought to have kept an eye on the time,’ she thought. feeling guilty. ‘We shall be late.’ Pushing *The Mystery of the Castlemaine Emeralds* back into its place behind the best that has been thought or said, she hurried along to the night nursery. Little Phil had to be washed and brushed.

There was no breeze except the wind of the ship’s own speed; and that was like a blast from the engine-room. Stretched in their chairs Philip and Elinor watched the gradual diminution against the sky of a jagged island of bare red rock. From the deck above came the sound of people playing shuffle-board. Walking on principle or for an appetite, their fellow passengers passed and re-passed with the predictable regularity of comets.

‘The way people take exercise,’ said Elinor in a tone positively of resentment; it made her hot to look at them. ‘Even in the Red Sea.’

‘It explains the British Empire,’ he said.

There was a silence. Burnt brown, burnt scarlet, the young men on leave passed laughing, four to a girl. Sun-dried and curry-pickled veterans of the East

strolled by with acrimonious words, about the Reforms and the cost of Indian living, upon their lips. Two female missionaries padded past in a rarely broken silence. The French globe-trotters reacted to the oppressively imperial atmosphere by talking very loud. The Indian students slapped one another on the back like stage subalterns in the days of ‘Charley’s Aunt’; and the slang they talked would have seemed old-fashioned in a preparatory school.

Time flowed. The island vanished; the air was if possible hotter.

‘I’m worried about Walter,’ said Elinor, who had been ruminating the contents of that last batch of letters she had received just before leaving Bombay.

‘He’s a fool,’ Philip answered. ‘After committing one stupidity with that Carling female, he ought to have had the sense not to start again with Lucy.’

‘Of course he ought,’ said Elinor irritably. ‘But the point is that he hasn’t had the sense. It’s a question of thinking of a remedy.’

‘Well, it’s no good thinking about it five thousand miles away.’

‘I’m afraid he may suddenly rush off and leave poor Marjorie in the lurch. With a baby on the way, too. She’s a dreary woman. But he mustn’t be allowed to treat her like that.’

No,’ Philip agreed. There was a pause. The sparse procession of exercise lovers marched past. ‘I’ve been thinking,’ he went on reflectively, ‘that it would make an excellent subject.’

‘What?’

‘This business of Walter’s.’

‘You don’t propose to exploit poor Walter as copy?’ Elinor was indignant. ‘No really, I won’t have it. Botanizing on his grave – or at any rate his heart.’

‘But of course not!’ Philip protested.

‘*Mais je vous assure*,’ one of the Frenchwomen was shouting so loud that he had to abandon the attempt to continue, ‘*aux Galeries Lafayette les camisoles en flanelle pour enfant ne coûtent que* …’

‘*Camisoles en flanelle*,’ repeated Philip. ‘Phew!’

‘But seriously, Phil …’

‘But, my dear, I never intended to use more than the situation. The young man who tries to make his life rhyme with his idealizing books and imagines he’s having a great spiritual love, only to discover that he’s got hold of a bore whom he really doesn’t like at all.’

‘Poor Marjorie! But why can’t she keep her face better powdered? And those artistic beads and earrings she always wears …’

‘And who then goes down like a ninepin,’ Philip continued, ‘at the mere sight of a Siren. It’s the situation that appealed to me. Not the individuals. After all, there are plenty of other nice young men besides Walter. And Marjorie isn’t the only bore. Nor Lucy the only man-eater.’

‘Well, if it’s only the situation,’ Elinor grudgingly allowed.

‘And besides,’ he went on, ‘it isn’t written and probably never will be. So there’s nothing to get upset about, I assure you.’

‘All right. I won’t say anything more till I see the book.’

There was another pause.

‘… such a wonderful time at Gulmerg last summer,’ the young lady was saying to her four attentive cavaliers. ‘There was golf, and dancing every evening, and …’

‘And in any case,’ Philip began again in a meditative tone, ‘the situation would only be a kind of …’

‘*Mais je lui ai dit, les hommes sont comme ça. Une jeune fille bien élevée doit* …’

‘… a kind of excuse,’ bawled Philip. ‘It’s like trying to talk in the parrot-house at the Zoo,’ he added with parenthetic irritation. ‘A kind of excuse, as I was saying, for a new way of looking at things that I want to experiment with.’

‘I wish you’d begin by looking at me in a new way,’ said Elinor with a little laugh. ‘A more human way.’

‘But seriously, Elinor …’

‘Seriously,’ she mocked. ‘Being human isn’t serious. Only being clever.’

‘Oh, well,’ he shrugged his shoulders, ‘if you don’t want to listen, I’ll shut up.’

‘No, no, Phil. Please.’ She laid her hand on his. ‘Please.’

‘I don’t want to bore you.’ He was huffy and dignified.

‘I’m sorry, Phil. But you do look so comic when you’re more in sorrow than in anger. Do you remember those camels at Bikaner – what an extraordinarily superior expression? But do go on!’

‘This year,’ one female missionary was saying to the other, as they passed by, ‘the Bishop of Kuala Lumpur ordained six Chinese deacons and two Malays. And the Bishop of British North Borneo …’ The quiet voices faded into inaudibility.

Philip forgot his dignity and burst out laughing. ‘Perhaps he ordained some Orang-utans.’

‘But do you remember the wife of the Bishop of Thursday Island?’ asked Elinor. ‘The woman we met on that awful Australian ship with the cockroaches.’

‘The one who would eat pickles at breakfast?’

‘Pickled onions at that,’ she qualified with a shudder. ‘But what about your new way of looking at things? We seem to have wandered rather a long way from that.’

‘Well, as a matter of fact,’ said Philip, ‘we haven’t. All these *camisoles en flanelle* and pickled onions and bishops of cannibal islands are really quite to the point. Because the essence of the new way of looking is multiplicity. Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen. For instance, one person interprets events in terms of bishops; another in terms of the price of flannel camisoles; another, like that young lady from Gulmerg,’ he nodded after the retreating group, ‘thinks of it in terms of good times. And then there’s the biologist, the chemist, the physicist, the historian. Each sees, professionally, a different aspect of the event, a different layer of reality. What I want to do is to look with all those eyes at once. With religious eyes, scientific eyes, economic eyes, *homme moyen sensuel* eyes …’

‘Loving eyes too.’

He smiled at her and stroked her hand. ‘The result …’ he hesitated.

‘Yes, what would the result be?’ she asked.

‘Queer,’ he answered. ‘A very queer picture indeed.’

‘Rather too queer, I should have thought.’

‘But it can’t be too queer,’ said Philip. ‘However queer the picture is, it can never be half so odd as the original reality. We take it all for granted; but the moment you start thinking, it becomes queer. And the more you think, the queerer it grows. That’s what I want to get in this book – the astonishingness of the most obvious things. Really any plot or situation would do. Because everything’s implicit in anything. The whole book could be written about a walk from Piccadilly Circus to Charing Cross. Or you and I sitting here on an enormous ship in the Red Sea. Really, nothing could be queerer than that. When you reflect on the evolutionary processes, the human patience and genius, the social organization, that have made it possible for us to be here, with stokers having heat apoplexy for our benefit and steam turbines doing five thousand revolutions a minute, and the sea being blue, and the rays of light not flowing round obstacles, so that there’s a shadow, and the sun all the time providing us with energy to live and think – when you think of all this and a million other things, you must see that nothing could well be queerer and that no picture can be queer enough to do justice to the facts.’

‘All the same,’ said Elinor, after a long silence, ‘I wish one day you’d write a simple straightforward story about a young man and a young woman who fall in love and get married and have difficulties, but get over them, and finally settle down.’

‘Or why not a detective novel?’ He laughed. But if, he reflected, he didn’t write that kind of story, perhaps it was because he couldn’t. In art there are simplicities more difficult than the most serried complications. He could manage the complications as well as anyone. But when it came to the simplicities, he lacked the talent – that talent which is of the heart, no less than of the head, of the feelings, the sympathies, the intuitions, no less than of the analytical understanding. The heart, the heart, he said to himself. ‘Perceive ye not, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?’ No heart, no understanding.

‘… a terrible flirt!’ cried one of the four cavaliers, as the party rounded the corner into hearing.

‘I am not!’ the young lady indignantly retorted.

‘You are!’ they all shouted together. It was courtship in chorus and by teasing.

‘It’s a lie!’ But, one could hear, the ticklish impeachment really delighted her.

Like dogs, he thought. But the heart, the heart … The heart was Burlap’s speciality. ‘You’ll never write a good book,’ he had said oracularly, ‘unless you write from the heart.’ It was true; Philip knew it. But was Burlap the man to say so, Burlap whose books were so heartfelt that they looked as though they had come from the stomach, after an emetic? If he went in for the grand simplicities, the results would be no less repulsive. Better to cultivate his own particular garden for all it was worth. Better to remain rigidly and loyally oneself. Oneself? But this question of identity was precisely one of Philip’s chronic problems. It was so easy for him to be almost anybody, theoretically and with his intelligence. He had such a power of assimilation, that he was often in danger of being unable to distinguish the assimilator from the assimilated, of not knowing among the multiplicity of his rôles who was the actor. The amoeba, when it finds a prey, flows round it, incorporates it and oozes on. There was something amoeboid about Philip Quarles’s mind. It was like a sea of spiritual protoplasm, capable of flowing in all directions, of engulfing every object in its path, of trickling into every crevice, of filling every mould and, having engulfed, having filled, of flowing on towards other obstacles, other receptacles, leaving the first empty and dry. At different times in his life and even at the same moment he had filled the most various moulds. He had been a cynic and also a mystic, a humanitarian and also a contemptuous misanthrope; he had tried to live the life of detached and stoical reason and another time he had aspired to the unreasonableness of natural and uncivilized existence. The choice of moulds depended at any given moment on the books he was reading, the people he was associating with. Burlap, for example, had redirected the flow of his mind into those mystical channels which it had not filled since he discovered Boehme in

his undergraduate days. Then he had seen through Burlap and flowed out again, ready however at any time to let himself trickle back once more, whenever the circumstances seemed to require it. He was trickling back at this moment, the mould was heart-shaped. Where was the self to which he could be loyal?

The female missionaries passed in silence. Looking over Elinor's shoulder he saw that she was reading the *Arabian Nights* in Mardrus's translation. Burtt's *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* lay on his knees; he picked it up and began looking for his place. Or wasn't there a self at all? he was wondering. No, no, that was untenable, that contradicted immediate experience. He looked over the top of his book at the enormous blue glare of the sea. The essential character of the self consisted precisely in that liquid and undeformable ubiquity; in that capacity to espouse all contours and yet remain unfixed in any form, to take, and with an equal facility efface, impressions. To such moulds as his spirit might from time to time occupy, to such hard and burning obstacles as it might flow round, submerge, and, itself cold, penetrate to the fiery heart of, no permanent loyalty was owing. The moulds were emptied as easily as they had been filled, the obstacles were passed by. But the essential liquidness that flowed where it would, the cool indifferent flux of intellectual curiosity – that persisted and to that his loyalty was due. If there was any single way of life he could lastingly believe in, it was that mixture of pyrrhonism and stoicism which had struck him, an enquiring schoolboy among the philosophers, as the height of human wisdom and into whose mould of sceptical indifference he had poured his unimpassioned adolescence. Against the pyrrhonian suspense of judgment and the stoical imperturbability he had often rebelled. But had the rebellion ever been really serious? Pascal had made him a Catholic – but only so long as the volume of *Pensées* was open before him. There were moments when, in the company of Carlyle or Whitman or bouncing Browning, he had believed in strenuousness for strenuousness' sake. And then there was Mark Rampion. After a few hours in Mark Rampion's company he really believed in noble savagery; he felt convinced that the proudly conscious intellect ought to humble itself a little and admit the claims of the heart, aye and the bowels, the loins, the bones

and skin and muscles, to a fair share of life. The heart again! Burlap had been right, even though he was a charlatan, a sort of swindling thimble-rigger of the emotions. The heart! But always, whatever he might do, he knew quite well in the secret depths of his being that he wasn't a Catholic, or a strenuous liver, or a mystic, or a noble savage. And though he sometimes nostalgically wished he were one or other of these beings, or all of them at once, he was always secretly glad to be none of them and at liberty, even though his liberty was in a strange paradoxical way a handicap and a confinement to his spirit.

'That simple story of yours,' he said aloud; 'it wouldn't do.'

Elinor looked up from the *Arabian Nights*. 'Which simple story?'

'That one you wanted me to write.'

'Oh, *that*!' She laughed. 'You've been brooding over it a long time.'

'It wouldn't give me my opportunity,' he explained. 'It would have to be solid and deep. Whereas I'm wide; wide and liquid. It wouldn't be in my line.'

'I could have told you that the first day I met you,' said Elinor, and returned to Scheherazade.

'All the same,' Philip was thinking, 'Mark Rampion's right. In practice, too; which makes it so much more impressive. In his art and his living, as well as in his theories. Not like Burlap.' He thought with disgust of Burlap's emetic leaders in the *World*. Like a spiritual channel crossing. And such a nasty, slimy sort of life. But Rampion was the proof of his own theories. 'If I could capture something of his secret!' Philip sighed to himself. 'I'll go and see him the moment I get home.'

CHAPTER XV

DURING THE WEEKS which followed their final scene, Walter and Marjorie lived in relations of a peculiar and unpleasant falsity. They were very considerate to one another, very courteous, and whenever they were left together alone they made a great deal of polite unintimate conversation. The name of Lucy Tantamount was never mentioned and no reference whatsoever was made to Walter's almost nightly absences. There was a tacit agreement to pretend that nothing had happened and that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

In the first outburst of anger Marjorie had actually begun to pack her clothes. She would leave at once, that very night, before he came back. She would show him that there was a limit to the outrages and insults she would put up with. Coming home reeking of that woman's scent! It was disgusting. He seemed to imagine that she was so abjectly devoted to him and materially so dependent on him, that he could go on insulting her without any fear of provoking her to open revolt. She had made a mistake not to put her foot down before. She oughtn't to have allowed herself to be touched by his misery the previous night. But better late than never. This time it was final. She had her self-respect to consider. She pulled out her trunks from the box-room and began to pack.

But where was she going? What was she going to do? What should she live on? The questions asked themselves more and more insistently with every minute. The only relation she had was a married sister, who was poor and had a disapproving husband. Mrs Cole had quarrelled with her. There were no other friends who could or would support her. She had been trained to no profession, she had no particular gifts. Besides, she was going to have a baby; she would never find a job. And after all and in spite of everything she was very fond of Walter, she loved him, she didn't know how she would be able to do without

him. And he had loved her, did still love her a little, she was sure. And perhaps this madness would die down of its own accord; or perhaps she would be able to bring him round again gradually. And in any case it was better not to act precipitately. In the end she unpacked her clothes again and dragged the trunks back to the box-room. Next day she started to play her comedy of pretence and deliberately feigned ignorance.

On his side Walter was only too happy to play the part assigned to him in the comedy. To say nothing, to act as though nothing particular had happened, suited him perfectly. The evaporation of his anger, the slaking of his desire had reduced him from momentary strength and ruthlessness to his normal condition of gentle, conscience-stricken timidity. Upon the fibres of the spirit bodily fatigue has a softening effect. He came back from Lucy feeling guiltily that he had done Marjorie a great wrong and looking forward with dread to the outcry she was sure to raise. But she was asleep when he crept to his room. Or at any rate she pretended to be, she didn't call him. And next day it was only the more than ordinarily courteous and formal manner of her greeting that so much as hinted at any untowardness. Enormously relieved, Walter requited portentous silence with silence and politely trivial courtesy with a courtesy that, in his case, was more than merely formal, that came from the heart, that was a genuine attempt (so uneasy was his conscience) to be of service, to make solicitous and affectionatc amends for past offences, to beg forgiveness in advance for the offences he had no intention of not committing in the future.

That there had been no outcry, no reproaches, only a polite ignoring silence, was a great relief. But as the days passed, Walter began to find the falsity of their relationship more and more distressing. The comedy got on his nerves, the silence was accusatory. He became more and more polite, solicitous, affectionate but though he genuinely did like her, though he genuinely desired to make her happy, his nightly visits to Lucy made even his genuine affection for Marjorie seem a lie and his real solicitude had the air of an hypocrisy, even to himself, so long as he persisted in doing, in the intervals of his kindness, precisely those things which he knew must make her unhappy. 'But if only,' he said to himself,

with impotent complaining anger, ‘if only she’d be content with what I can give her and stop distressing herself about what I can’t.’ (For it was obvious, in spite of the comedy of silence and courtesy, that she was distressing herself. Her thin, haggard face was alone sufficient to belie the studied indifference of her manner.) ‘What I can give her is so much. What I can’t give is so unimportant. At any rate for her,’ he added; for he had no intention of cancelling his unimportant engagement with Lucy that evening.

‘Enjoy’d no sooner but despised straight;

Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,

Past reason hated.’

Literature, as usual, had been misleading. So far from making him hate and despise, having and enjoying had only made him long for more having and enjoying. True, he was still rather ashamed of his longing. He wanted it to be justified by something higher – by love. (‘After all,’ he argued, ‘there’s nothing impossible or unnatural in being in love with two women at the same time. Genuinely in love.’) He accompanied his ardours with all the delicate and charming tenderness of his rather weak and still adolescent nature. He treated Lucy, not as the hard, ruthless amusement-hunter he had so clearly recognized her as being before he became her lover, but as an ideally gracious and sensitive being, to be adored as well as desired, a sort of combined child, mother and mistress, whom one should maternally protect and be maternally protected by, as well as virilely and yes! faunishly make love to. Sensuality and sentiment, desire and tenderness are as often friends as they are enemies. There are some people who no sooner enjoy, but they despise what they have enjoyed. But there are others in whom the enjoyment is associated with kindliness and affection. Walter’s desire to justify his longings by love was only, on final analysis, the articulately moral expression of his natural tendency to associate the act of sexual enjoyment with a feeling of tenderness, at once chivalrously protective and childishly self-abased. In him sensuality produced tenderness; and conversely, where there was no sensuality, tenderness remained undeveloped. His relations with Marjorie were too sexless and platonic to be fully tender. It

was as a hard, angrily cynical sensualist that Walter had conquered Lucy. But put into action, his sensuality sentimentalized him. The Walter who had held Lucy naked in his arms was different from the Walter who had only desired to do so; and this new Walter required, in sheer self-preservation, to believe that Lucy felt no less tenderly under the influence of his caresses than he did himself. Tenderness can only live in an atmosphere of tenderness. To have gone on believing, as the old Walter had believed, that she was hard, selfish, incapable of warm feeling would have killed the soft tenderness of the new Walter. It was essential for him to believe her tender. He did his best to deceive himself. Every movement of languor and abandonment was eagerly interpreted by him as a symptom of inner softening, of trustfulness and surrender. Every loving word – and Lucy was fashionably free with her ‘darlings’ and ‘angels’ and ‘beloveds,’ her rapturous or complimentary phrases – was treasured as a word come straight from the depths of the heart. To these marks of an imaginary softness and warmth of feeling he responded with a grateful redoubling of his own tenderness; and this redoubled tenderness was doubly anxious to find an answering tenderness in Lucy. Love produced a desire to be loved. Desire to be loved begot a strained precarious belief that he was loved. The belief that he was loved strengthened his love. And so, self-intensified, the circular process began again.

Lucy was touched by his adoring tenderness, touched and surprised. She had had him because she was bored, because his lips were soft and his hands knew how to caress and because, at the last moment, she had been amused and delighted by his sudden conversion from abjectness to conquering impertinence. What a queer evening it had been! Walter sitting opposite to her at dinner with that hard look on his face, as though he were terribly angry and wanted to grind his teeth; but being very amusing, telling the most malicious stories about everybody, producing the most fantastic and grotesque pieces of historical information, the most astonishing quotations from old books. When dinner was over, ‘We’ll go back to your house,’ he said. But Lucy wanted to go and see Nellie Wallace’s turn at the Victoria Palace and then drop in at the Embassy for

some food and a little dancing, and then perhaps drive round to Cuthbert Arkwright's on the chance that … Not that she had any real and active desire to go to the music hall, or dance, or listen to Cuthbert's conversation. She only wanted to assert her will against Walter's. She only wanted to dominate, to be the leader and make him do what she wanted, not what he wanted. But Walter was not to be shaken. He said nothing, merely smiled. And when the taxi came to the restaurant door, he gave the address in Bruton Street.

'But this is a rape,' she protested.

Walter laughed. 'Not yet,' he answered. 'But it's going to be.'

And in the grey and rose-coloured sitting-room it almost was. Lucy provoked and submitted to all the violences of sensuality. But what she had not expected to provoke was the adoring and passionate tenderness which succeeded those first violences. The hard look of anger faded from his face and it was as though a protection had been stripped from him and he were left bare, in the quivering, vulnerable nakedness of adoring love. His caresses were like the soothing of pain or terror, like the appeasements of anger, like delicate propitiations. His words were sometimes like whispered and fragmentary prayers to a god, sometimes words of whispered comfort to a sick child. Lucy was surprised, touched, almost put to shame by this passion of tenderness.

'No, I'm not like that, not like that,' she protested in answer to his whispered adorations. She could not accept such love on false pretences. But his soft lips, brushing her skin, his lightly drawn finger tips were soothing and caressing her into tenderness, were magically transforming her into the gentle, loving, warm-hearted object of his adoration, were electrically charging her with all those qualities his whispers had attributed to her and the possession of which she had denied.

She drew his head on to her breast, she ran her fingers through his hair. 'Darling Walter,' she whispered, 'darling Walter.' There was a long silence, a warm still happiness. And then suddenly, just because this silent happiness was so deep and perfect and therefore, in her eyes, intrinsically rather absurd and

even rather dangerous in its flawless impersonality, rather menacing to her conscious will, ‘Have you gone to sleep, Walter?’ she asked and tweaked his ear.

In the days that followed Walter desperately did his best to credit her with the emotions he himself experienced. But Lucy did not make it easy for him. She did not want to feel that deep tenderness which is a surrender of the will, a breaking down of personal separateness. She wanted to be herself, Lucy Tantamount, in full command of the situation, enjoying herself consciously to the last limit, ruthlessly having her fun; free, not only financially and legally, but emotionally too – emotionally free to have him or not to have him. To drop him as she had taken him, at any moment, whenever she liked. She had no wish to surrender herself. And that tenderness of his – why, it was touching, no doubt, and flattering and rather charming in itself, but a little absurd and, in its anxious demand for a response from her side, really rather tiresome. She would let herself go a little way towards surrender, would suffer herself to be charged by his caresses with some of his tenderness; only to suddenly draw herself back from him into a teasing, provocative detachment. And Walter would be woken from his dream of love into a reality of what Lucy called ‘fun’, into the cold daylight of sharply conscious, laughingly deliberate sensuality. She left him unjustified, his guiltiness unpalliated.

‘Do you love me?’ he asked her one night. He knew she didn’t. But perversely he wanted to have his knowledge confirmed, made explicit.

‘I think you’re a darling,’ said Lucy. She smiled up at him. But Walter’s eyes remained unanswerингly sombre and despairing.

‘But do you *love* me?’ he insisted. Propped on his elbow, he hung over her almost menacingly. Lucy was lying on her back, her hands clasped under her head, her flat breasts lifted by the pull of the stretched muscles. He looked down at her; under his fingers was the curved elastic warmth of the body he had so completely and utterly possessed. But the owner of the body smiled up at him through half-closed eyelids, remote and unattained. ‘Do you *love* me?’

‘You’re enchanting.’ Something like mockery shone between the dark lashes.

‘But that isn’t an answer to my question. Do you love me?’

Lucy shrugged up her shoulders and made a little grimace. ‘Love?’ she repeated. ‘It’s rather a big word, isn’t it?’ Disengaging one of her hands from under her head she raised it to give a little tug to the lock of brown hair that had fallen across Walter’s forehead. ‘Your hair’s too long,’ she said.

‘Then why did you have me?’ Walter insisted.

‘If you knew how absurd you looked with your solemn face and your hair in your eyes!’ She laughed. ‘Like a constipated sheep dog.’

Walter brushed back the drooping lock. ‘I want to be answered,’ he went on obstinately. ‘Why did you have me?’

‘Why? Because it amused me. Because I wanted to. Isn’t that fairly obvious?’

‘Without loving?’

‘Why must you always bring in love?’ she asked impatiently.

‘Why?’ he repeated. ‘But how can you leave it out?’

‘But if I can have what I want without it, why should I put it in? And besides, one doesn’t put it in. It happens to one. How rarely! Or perhaps it never happens; I don’t know. Anyhow, what’s one to do in the intervals?’ She took him again by the forelock and pulled his face down towards her own. ‘In the intervals, Walter darling, there’s you.’

His mouth was within an inch or two of hers. He stiffened his neck and would not let himself be pulled down any further. ‘Not to mention all the others,’ he said.

Lucy tugged harder at his hair. ‘Idiot!’ she said, frowning. ‘Instead of being grateful for what you’ve got.’

‘But what *have* I got?’ Her body curved away, silky and warm, under his hand; but he was looking into her mocking eyes. ‘What *have* I got?’

Lucy still frowned. ‘Why don’t you kiss me?’ she demanded, as though she were delivering an ultimatum. Walter did not answer, did not stir. ‘Oh, very well.’ She pushed him away. ‘Two can play at that game.’

Repelled, Walter anxiously bent down to kiss her. Her voice had been hard with menace; he was terrified of losing her. ‘I’m a fool,’ he said.

‘You are.’ Lucy averted her face.

‘I’m sorry.’

But she would not make peace. ‘No, no,’ she said, and when, with a hand under her cheek, he tried to turn her face back towards his kisses, she made a quick fierce movement and bit him in the ball of the thumb. Full of hatred and desire, he took her by force.

‘Still bothering about love?’ she asked at last, breaking the silence of that languid convalescence which succeeds the fever of accomplished desires.

Reluctantly, almost with pain, Walter roused himself to answer. Her question in that deep silence was like the spurt of a match in the darkness of the night. The night is limitless, enormous, pricked with stars. The match is struck and all the stars are instantly abolished; there are no more distances and profundities. The universe is reduced to a little luminous cave scooped out of the solid blackness, crowded with brightly lit faces, with hands and bodies and the near familiar objects of common life. In that deep night of silence Walter had been happy. Convalescent after the fever, he held her in his arms, hating no more, but filled with a drowsy tenderness. His spirit seemed to float in the warm serenity between being and annihilation. She stirred within his arms, she spoke, and that marvellous unearthly serenity wavered and broke like a smooth reflecting surface of water suddenly disturbed.

‘I wasn’t bothering about anything.’ He opened his eyes to find her looking at him, amused and curious. Walter frowned. ‘Why do you stare at me?’ he asked.

‘I didn’t know it was prohibited.’

‘Have you been looking at me like that all this time?’ The idea was strangely unpleasant to him.

‘For hours,’ Lucy answered. ‘But admiringly, I assure you. I thought you looked really charming. Quite a sleeping beauty.’ She was smiling, mockingly; but she spoke the truth. Aesthetically, with a connoisseur’s appreciation, she had really been admiring him as he lay there, pale, with closed eyes and as though dead, at her side.

Walter was not mollified by the flattery. ‘I don’t like you to exult over me,’ he said, still frowning.

‘Exult?’

‘As though you’d killed me.’

‘What an incorrigible romantic!’ She laughed. But it was true, all the same. He *had* looked dead; and death, in these circumstances, had something slightly ridiculous and humiliating about it. Herself alive, wakefully and consciously alive, she had studied his beautiful deadness. Admiringly, but with amused detachment, she had looked at this pale exquisite creature which she had used for her delight and which was now dead. ‘What a fool!’ she had thought. And ‘why do people make themselves miserable, instead of taking the fun that comes to them?’ She had expressed her thoughts in the mocking question which recalled Walter from his eternity. Bothering about love – what a fool!

‘All the same,’ insisted Walter, ‘you were exulting.’

‘Romantic, romantic!’ she jeered. ‘You think in such an absurdly unmodern way about everything. Killing and exulting over corpses and love and all the rest of it. It’s absurd. You might as well walk about in a stock and a swallow-tail coat. Try to be a little more up to date.’

‘I prefer to be human.’

‘Living modernly’s living quickly,’ she went on. ‘You can’t cart a waggon-load of ideals and romanticisms about with you these days. When you travel by aeroplane, you must leave your heavy baggage behind. The good old-fashioned soul was all right when people lived slowly. But it’s too ponderous nowadays. There’s no room for it in the aeroplane.’

‘Not even for a heart?’ asked Walter. ‘I don’t so much care about the soul.’ He had cared a great deal about the soul once. But now that his life no more consisted in reading the philosophers, he was somehow less interested in it. ‘But the heart,’ he added, ‘the heart …’

Lucy shook her head. ‘Perhaps it’s a pity,’ she admitted. ‘But you can’t get something for nothing. If you like speed, if you want to cover the ground, you can’t have luggage. The thing is to know what you want and to be ready to pay for it. I know exactly what I want; so I sacrifice the luggage. If you choose to travel in a furniture van, you may. But don’t expect me to come along with you,

my sweet Walter. And don’t expect me to take your grand piano in my two-seater monoplane.’

There was a long silence. Walter shut his eyes. He wished he were dead. The touch of Lucy’s hand on his face made him start. He felt her taking his lower lip between her thumb and forefinger. She pinched it gently.

‘You have the most delicious mouth,’ she said.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RAMPIONS LIVED in Chelsea. Their house consisted of one large studio with three or four little rooms tacked on to it. A very nice little place, in its rather ramshackle way, Burlap reflected, as he rang the bell that Saturday afternoon. And Rampion had bought it for nothing, literally for nothing, just before the War. No post-War rents for him. A sheer gift of a hundred and fifty a year. Lucky devil, thought Burlap, forgetting for the moment that he himself was living rent-free at Beatrice's, and only remembering that he had just spent twenty-four and ninepence on a luncheon for himself and Molly d'Exergillod.

Mary Rampion opened the door. 'Mark's expecting you in the studio,' she said when salutations had been exchanged. Though why on earth, she was inwardly wondering, why on earth he goes on being friendly with this creature passes all comprehension. She herself detested Burlap. 'He's a sort of vulture,' she had said to her husband after the journalist's previous visit. 'No, not a vulture, because vultures only eat carrion. He's a parasite that feeds on living hosts, and always the choicest he can find. He has a nose for the choicest; I'll grant him that. A spiritual leech, that's what he is. Why do you let him suck your blood?'

'Why shouldn't he suck?' retorted Mark. 'He doesn't do me any harm, and he amuses me.'

'I believe he tickles your vanity,' said Mary. 'It's flattering to have parasites. It's a compliment to the quality of your blood.'

'And besides,' Rampion went on, 'he has something in him.'

'Of course he has something in him,' Mary answered. 'He has your blood in him, among other things. And the blood of all the other people he feeds on.'

'Now, don't exaggerate, don't be romantic.' Rampion objected to all hyperboles that weren't his own.

‘Well, all I can say is that I don’t like parasites.’ Mary spoke with finality. ‘And next time he comes I shall try sprinkling a little Keating’s powder on him, just to see what happens. So there.’

However, the next time had arrived, and here she was opening the door for him and telling him to find his own way to the studio, as if he were a welcome guest. Even in atavistic Mary the force of polite habit was stronger than her desire to sprinkle Keating’s.

Burlap’s thoughts, as he found his own way to the studio, were still of financial matters. The memory of what he had paid for lunch continued to rankle.

‘Not only does Rampion pay no rent,’ he was thinking; ‘he has hardly any expenses. Living as they do with only one servant, doing most of the housework themselves, having no car, they really must spend ridiculously little. True, they have two children to educate. But Burlap managed by a kind of mental conjuring trick, at which he was extremely adept, to make the two children disappear out of his field of consciousness. ‘And yet Rampion must make quite a lot. He sells his pictures and drawings very decently. And he has a regular market for anything he chooses to write. What does he do with all his money?’ Burlap wondered rather resentfully, as he knocked at the studio door. ‘Does he hoard it up? Or what?’

‘Come in,’ called Rampion’s voice from the other side of the door.

Burlap adjusted his face to a smile and opened.

‘Ah, it’s you,’ said Rampion. ‘Can’t shake hands at the moment, I’m afraid.’ He was cleaning his brushes. ‘How are you?’

Burlap shook his head and said that he needed a holiday but couldn’t afford to take it. He walked round the studio looking reverentially at the paintings. St Francis would hardly have approved of most of them. But what life, what energy, what imagination! Life, after all, was the important thing. ‘I believe in life.’ That was the first article of one’s creed.

‘What’s the title of this?’ he asked, coming to a halt in front of the canvas on the easel.

Wiping his hands as he came, Rampion crossed the room and stood beside him. ‘That?’ he said. ‘Well, “*Love*”, I suppose, is what *you*’d call it.’ He laughed; he had worked well that afternoon and was in the best of humours. ‘But less refined and soulful people might prefer something less printable.’ Grinning, he suggested a few of the less printable alternatives. Burlap’s smile was rather sickly. ‘I don’t know if you can think of any others,’ Rampion concluded maliciously. When Burlap was in the neighbourhood it amused him, and at the same time he felt it positively a duty, to be shocking.

It was a smallish painting, in oils. Low down in the left-hand corner of the canvas, set in a kind of recess between a foreground of dark rocks and tree trunks and a background of precipitous crags, and arched over by a mass of foliage, two figures, a man and a woman, lay embraced. Two naked bodies, the woman’s white, the man’s a red brown. These two bodies were the source of the whole illumination of the picture. The rocks and tree trunks in the foreground were silhouetted against the light that issued from them. The precipice behind them was golden with the same light. It touched the lower surface of the leaves above, throwing shadows up into a thickening darkness of greenery. It streamed out of the recess in which they lay, diagonally into and across the picture, illuminating and, one felt, creating by its radiance an astounding flora of gigantic roses and zinnias and tulips, with horses and leopards and little antelopes coming and going between the huge flowers, and beyond, a green landscape deepening, plane after plane, into blue, with a glimpse of the sea between the hills and over it the shapes of huge, heroic clouds in the blue sky.

‘It’s fine,’ said Burlap slowly, wagging his head over the picture.

‘But I can see you hate it.’ Mark Rampion grinned with a kind of triumph.

‘But why do you say that?’ the other protested with a martyred and gentle sadness.

‘Because it happens to be true. The thing’s not gentle-Jesusish enough for you. Love, *physical* love, as the source of light and life and beauty – Oh, no, no, no! That’s much too coarse and carnal; it’s quite deplorably straightforward.’

‘But do you take me for Mrs Grundy?’

‘Not Mrs Grundy, no.’ Rampion’s high spirits bubbled over in mockery. ‘Say St Francis. By the way, how’s your Life of him progressing? I hope you’ve got a good juicy description of his licking the lepers.’ Burlap made a gesture of protest. Rampion grinned. ‘As a matter of fact even St Francis is a little too grown up for you. Children don’t lick lepers. Only sexually perverted adolescents do that. St Hugh of Lincoln, that’s who you are, Burlap. He was a child, you know, a pure sweet chee-yild. Such a dear snuggly-wuggly, lovey-dovey little chap. So wide-eyed and reverent towards the women, as though they were all madonnas. Coming to be petted and have his pains kissed away and be told about poor Jesus – even to have a swig of milk if there happened to be any going.’

‘Really!’ Burlap protested.

‘Yes, really,’ Rampion mimicked. He liked baiting the fellow, making him look like a forgiving Christian martyr. Serve him right for coming in that beloved-disciple attitude and being so disgustingly reverential and admiring.

‘Toddling wide-eyed little St Hugh. Toddling up to the women so reverently, as though they were all madonnas. But putting his dear little hand under their skirts all the same. Coming to pray, but staying to share madonnina’s bed.’ Rampion knew a good deal about Burlap’s amorous affairs and had guessed more. ‘Dear little St Hugh! How prettily he toddles to the bedroom, and what a darling babyish way he has of snuggling down between the sheets! This sort of thing is much too gross and unspiritual for our little Hughie.’ He threw back his head and laughed.

‘Go on, go on,’ said Burlap. ‘Don’t mind me.’ And at the sight of his martyred, spiritual smile, Rampion laughed yet louder.

‘Oh dear, oh dear!’ he gasped. ‘Next time you come, I’ll have a copy of Ary Scheffer’s “St Monica and St Augustine” for you. That ought to make you really happy. Would you like to see some of my drawings?’ he asked in another tone. Burlap nodded. ‘They’re grotesques mostly. Caricatures. Rather ribald, I warn you. But if you *will* come to look at my work, you must expect what you get.’

He opened a portfolio that was lying on the table.

‘Why do you imagine I don’t like your work?’ asked Burlap. ‘After all, you’re a believer in life and so am I. We have our differences; but on most matters our point of view’s the same.’

Rampion looked up at him. ‘Oh, I’m sure it is, I know it is,’ he said, and grinned.

‘Well, if you know it’s the same,’ said Burlap, whose averted eyes had not seen the grin on the other’s face, ‘why do you imagine I’ll disapprove of your drawings?’

‘Why indeed?’ the other mocked.

‘Seeing that the point of view’s the same …’

‘It’s obvious that the people looking at the view from the same point must be identical.’ Rampion grinned again. ‘Q. E. D.’ He turned away again to take out one of the drawings. ‘This is what I call “Fossils of the Past and Fossils of the Future”.’ He handed Burlap the drawing. It was in ink touched with coloured washes, extraordinarily brilliant and lively. Curving in a magnificently sweeping S, a grotesque procession of monsters marched diagonally down and across the paper. Dinosaurs, pterodactyls, titanotheriums, diplodocuses, ichthyosauruses walked, swam or flew at the tail of the procession; the van was composed of human monsters, huge-headed creatures, without limbs or bodies, creeping slug-like on vaguely slimy extensions of chin and neck. The faces were mostly those of eminent contemporaries. Among the crowd Burlap recognized J. J. Thomson and Lord Edward Tantamount, Bernard Shaw, attended by eunuchs and spinsters, and Sir Oliver Lodge, attended by a sheeted and turnip-headed ghost and a walking cathode tube, Sir Alfred Mond and the head of John D. Rockefeller carried on a charger by a Baptist clergyman, Dr Frank Crane and Mrs Eddy wearing haloes, and many others.

‘The lizards died of having too much body and too little head,’ said Rampion in explanation. ‘So at least the scientists are never tired of telling us. Physical size is a handicap after a certain point But what about mental size? These fools seem to forget that they’re just as top-heavy and clumsy and disproportioned as

any diplodocus. Sacrificing physical life and affective life to mental life. What do they imagine's going to happen?'

Burlap nodded his agreement. 'That's what I've always asked. Man can't live without a heart.'

'Not to mention bowels and skin and bones and flesh,' said Rampion. 'They're just marching towards extinction. And a damned good thing too. Only the trouble is that they're marching the rest of the world along with them. Blast their eyes! I must say, I resent being condemned to extinction because these imbeciles of scientists and moralists and spiritualists and technicians and literary and political uplifters and all the rest of them haven't the sense to see that man must live as a man, not as a monster of conscious braininess and soulfulness. Grr! I'd like to kill the lot of them.' He put the drawing back into the portfolio and extracted another. 'Here are two Outlines of History, the one on the left according to H. G. Wells, the one on the right according to me …'

Burlap looked, smiled, laughed outright. 'Excellent!' he said. The drawing on the left was composed on the lines of a simple crescendo. A very small monkey was succeeded by a very slightly larger pithecanthropus, which was succeeded in its turn by a slightly larger Neanderthal man. Paleolithic man, neolithic man, bronze-age Egyptian and Babylonian man, iron-age Greek and Roman man – the figures slowly increased in size. By the time Galileo and Newton had appeared on the scene, humanity had grown to quite respectable dimensions. The crescendo continued uninterrupted through Watt and Stephenson, Faraday and Darwin, Bessemer and Edison, Rockefeller and Wanamaker, to come to a contemporary consummation in the figures of Mr H. G. Wells himself and Sir Alfred Mond. Nor was the future neglected. Through the radiant mist of prophecy the forms of Wells and Mond, growing larger and larger at every repetition, wound away in a triumphant spiral clean off the paper, towards Utopian infinity. The drawing on the right had a less optimistic composition of peaks and declines. The small monkey very soon blossomed into a good-sized bronze-age man, who gave place to a very large Greek and a scarcely smaller Etruscan. The Romans grew smaller again. The monks of the Thebaid were

hardly distinguishable from the primeval little monkeys. There followed a number of good-sized Florentines, English, French. They were succeeded by revolting monsters labelled Calvin and Knox, Baxter and Wesley. The stature of the representative men declined. The Victorians had begun to be dwarfish and misshapen. Their twentieth-century successors were abortions. Through the mists of the future one could see a diminishing company of little gargoyles and foetuses with heads too large for their squelchy bodies, the tails of apes and the faces of our most eminent contemporaries, all biting and scratching and disembowelling one another with that methodical and systematic energy which belongs only to the very highly civilized.

'I'd like to have one or two of these for the *World*,' said Burlap, when they had looked through the contents of the portfolio. 'We don't generally reproduce drawings. We're frankly missionaries, not an art for art concern. But these things of yours are parables as well as pictures. I must say,' he added, 'I envy you your power of saying things so immediately and economically. It would take me hundreds and thousands of words to say the same things less vividly in an essay.'

Rampion nodded. 'That's why I've almost given up writing for the moment. Writing's not much good for saying what I find I want to say now. And what a comfort to escape from words! Words, words, words, they shut one off from the universe. Three-quarters of the time one's never in contact with things, only with the beastly words that stand for them. And often not even with those – only with some poet's damned metaphorical rigmarole about a thing. "Nor what soft incense hangs upon the bough," for example. Or "every fall soothing the raven wing of darkness till it smiled." Or even "then will I visit with a roving kiss the vale of lilies and the bower of bliss."' He looked at Burlap with a grin. 'Even the bower of bliss is turned into a metaphorical abstraction. Vale of lilies, indeed! Oh, these words! I'm thankful to have escaped from them. It's like getting out of a prison – oh, a very elegant fantastic sort of prison, full of frescoes and tapestries and what not. But one prefers the genuine country outside. Painting, I find, puts you in real touch with it. I can say what I want to say.'

‘Well, all I can do,’ said Burlap, ’is to provide an audience to listen to what you’ve got to say.’

‘Poor devils!’ laughed Rampion.

‘But I think they *ought* to listen. One has a responsibility. That’s why I’d like to publish some of your drawings in the *World*. I feel it’s really a duty.’

‘Oh, if it’s a question of the categorical imperative,’ Rampion laughed again, ‘why then of course you must. Take what you like. The more shocking the drawings you publish, the better I shall be pleased.’

Burlap shook his head. ‘We must begin mildly,’ he said. He didn’t believe in Life to the point of taking any risks with the circulation.

‘Mildly, mildly,’ the other mockingly repeated. ‘You’re all the same, all you newspaper men. No jolts. Safety first. Painless literature. No prejudices extracted or ideas hammered in except under an anaesthetic. Readers kept permanently in a state of twilight sleep. You’re hopeless, all of you.’

‘Hopeless,’ repeated Burlap penitently, ‘I know. But, alas, one simply must compromise a little with the world, the flesh and the devil.’

‘I don’t mind your doing that,’ Rampion answered. ‘What I resent is the disgusting way you compromise with heaven, respectability and Jehovah. Still, I suppose in the circumstances you can’t help it. Take what you want.’

Burlap made his selection. ‘I’ll take these,’ he said at last, holding up three of the least polemical and scandalous of the drawings. ‘Is that all right?’

Rampion glanced at them. ‘If you’d waited another week,’ he grumbled, ‘I’d have had that copy of Ary Scheffer ready for you.’

‘I’m afraid,’ said Burlap with that wistfully spiritual expression which always came over his face when he began to speak about money, ‘I’m afraid I shan’t be able to pay much for them.’

‘Ah, well. I’m used to it,’ Rampion shrugged his shoulders. Burlap was glad he took it like that. And after all, he reflected, it was true. Rampion wasn’t used to being paid much. And with his way of living he did not need much. No car, no servants …

‘One wishes one could,’ he said aloud, drifting away into impersonality. ‘But the paper …’ He shook his head. ‘Trying to persuade people to love the highest when they see it doesn’t pay. One might manage four guineas a drawing.’

Rampion laughed. ‘Not exactly princely. But take them. Take them for nothing if you like.’

‘No, no,’ protested Burlap. ‘I wouldn’t do that. The *World* doesn’t live on charity. It pays for what it uses – not much, alas, but something, it pays something. I make a point of that,’ he went on, wagging his head, ‘even if I have to pay out of my own pocket. It’s a question of principle. Absolutely of principle,’ he insisted, contemplating with a thrill of justifiable satisfaction the upright and self-sacrificing Denis Burlap who paid contributors out of his own pocket and in whose existence he was beginning, as he talked, almost genuinely to believe. He talked on, and with every word the outlines of this beautifully poor but honest Burlap became clearer before his inward eyes; and at the same time the *World* crept closer and closer to the brink of insolvency, while the bill for lunch grew momently larger and larger, and his income correspondingly decreased. Rampion eyed him curiously. What the devil is he lashing himself up into a fury about this time? he wondered. A possible explanation suddenly occurred to him. When Burlap next paused for breath, he nodded sympathetically.

‘What you need is a capitalist,’ he said. ‘If I had a few hundreds or thousands to spare, I’d put them into the *World*. But alas, I haven’t. Not sixpence,’ he concluded, almost triumphantly, and the sympathetic expression turned suddenly into a grin.

That evening Burlap addressed himself to the question of Franciscan poverty. ‘Bare-footed through the Umbrian hills she goes, the Lady Poverty.’ It was thus that he began his chapter. His prose, in moments of exaltation, was apt to turn into blank verse … ‘Her feet are set on the white dusty roads that seem, to one who gazes from the walls of the little cities, taut-stretched white ribbons in the plain below …’

There followed references to the gnarled olive trees, the vineyards, the terraced fields, ‘the great white oxen with their curving horns’, the little asses patiently carrying their burdens up the stony paths, the blue mountains, the hill towns in the distance, each like a little New Jerusalem in a picture book, the classical waters of Clitumnus and the yet more classical waters of Trasimene. ‘That was a land,’ continued Burlap, ‘and that a time when poverty was a practical, workable ideal. The land supplied all the needs of those who lived on it; there was little functional specialization; every peasant was, to a great extent, his own manufacturer as well as his own butcher, baker, greengrocer and vintner. It was a society in which money was still comparatively unimportant. The majority lived in an almost moneyless condition. They dealt directly in things – household stuff of their own making and the kindly fruits of the earth – and so had no need of the precious metals which buy things. St Francis’s ideal of poverty was practicable then, because it held up for admiration a way of life not so enormously unlike the actual way of his humbler contemporaries. He was inviting the leisured and the functionally specialized members of society – those who were living mainly in terms of money – to live as their inferiors were living, in terms of things. How different is the state of things today!’ Burlap relapsed once more into blank verse, moved this time by indignation, not by lyrical tenderness. ‘We are all specialists, living in terms only of money, not of real things, inhabiting remote abstractions, not the actual world of growth and making.’ He rumbled on a little about ‘the great machines that having been man’s slaves are now his masters,’ about standardization, about industrial and commercial life and its withering effect on the human soul (for which last he borrowed a few of Rampion’s favourite phrases). Money, he concluded, was the root of the whole evil; the fatal necessity under which man now labours of living in terms of money, not of real things. ‘To modern eyes St Francis’s ideal appears fantastic, utterly insane. The Lady Poverty has been degraded by modern circumstances into the semblance of a sackaproned, leaky-booted charwoman. No one in his senses would dream of following her. To idealize so repulsive a Dulcinea one would have to be madder than Don Quixote himself. Within our

modern society the Franciscan ideal is unworkable. We have made poverty detestable. But this does not mean that we can just neglect St Francis as a dreamer of mad dreams. No, on the contrary, the insanity is ours, not his. He is the doctor in the asylum. To the lunatics the doctor seems the only madman. When we recover our senses, we shall see that the doctor has been all the time the only healthy man. As things are at present the Franciscan ideal is unworkable. The moral of that is that things must be altered, radically. Our aim must be to create a new society in which Lady Poverty shall be, not a draggled charwoman, but a lovely form of light and graciousness and beauty. Oh Poverty, Poverty, beautiful Lady Poverty! …'

Beatrice came in to say that supper was on the table.

'Two eggs,' she commanded, rapping out her solicitude. 'Two, I insist. They were made especially for you.'

'You treat me like the prodigal son,' said Burlap. 'Or the fatted calf while it was being fattened.' He wagged his head, he smiled a Sodoma smile and helped himself to the second egg.

'I want to ask your advice about some gramophone shares I've got,' said Beatrice. 'They've been rising so violently.'

'Gramophones!' said Burlap. 'Ah …' He advised.

CHAPTER XVII

IT HAD BEEN raining for days. To Spandrell it seemed as though the fungi and the mildew were sprouting even in his soul. He lay in bed, or sat in his dismal room, or leaned against the counter in a public-house, feeling the slimy growth within him, watching it with his inward eyes.

'But if only you'd do something,' his mother had so often implored. 'Anything.'

And all his friends had said the same thing, had gone on saying it for years.

But he was damned if he'd do anything. Work, the gospel of work, the sanctity of work, *laborare est orare* – all that tripe and nonsense. 'Work!' he once broke out contemptuously against the reasonable expostulations of Philip Quarles, 'work's no more respectable than alcohol, and it serves exactly the same purpose: it just distracts the mind, makes a man forget himself. Work's simply a drug, that's all. It's humiliating that men shouldn't be able to live without drugs, soberly; it's humiliating that they shouldn't have the courage to see the world and themselves as they really are. They must intoxicate themselves with work. It's stupid. The gospel of work's just a gospel of stupidity and funk. Work may be prayer; but it's also hiding one's head in the sand, it's also making such a din and a dust that a man can't hear himself speak or see his own hand before his face. It's hiding yourself from yourself. No wonder the Samuel Smileses and the big business men are such enthusiasts for work. Work gives them the comforting illusion of existing, even of being important. If they stopped working, they'd realize that they simply weren't there at all, most of them. Just holes in the air, that's all. Holes with perhaps a rather nasty smell in them. Most Smilesian souls must smell rather nasty, I should think. No wonder they daren't stop working. They might find out what they really are, or rather *aren't*. It's a risk they haven't the courage to take.'

‘And what has your courage permitted *you* to find out about yourself?’ asked Philip Quarles.

Spandrell grinned rather melodramatically. ‘It needed some courage,’ he said, ‘to go on looking at what I discovered. If I hadn’t been such a brave man, I’d have taken to work or morphia long ago.’

Spandrell dramatized himself a little, made his conduct appear rather more rational and romantic than it really was. If he did nothing, it was out of habitual laziness as well as on perverse and topsy-turvy moral principle. The sloth, indeed, had preceded the principle and was its root. Spandrell would never have discovered that work was a pernicious opiate, if he had not had an invincible sloth to find a reason and a justification for. But that it did require some courage on his part to do nothing was true; for he was idle in spite of the ravages of a chronic boredom that could become, at moments like the present, almost unbearably acute. But the habit of idleness was so deeply ingrained that to break it would have demanded more courage than to bear the agonies of boredom to which it gave rise. Pride had reinforced his native laziness – the pride of an able man who is not quite able enough, of an admirer of great achievements who realizes that he lacks the talent to do original work and who will not humiliate himself by what he knows will be an unsuccessful attempt to create, or by stooping, however successfully, to some easier task.

‘It’s all very well you talking about work,’ he had said to Philip. ‘But *you* can do something, *I* can’t. What do you want me to do? Bank clerking? Commercial travelling?’

‘There are other professions,’ said Philip. ‘And since you’ve got some money, there’s all scholarship, all natural history …’

‘Oh, you want me to be an ant collector, do you? Or a writer of theses on the use of soap among the Angevins. A dear old Uncle Toby with a hobby to ride. But I tell you, I don’t want to be an Uncle Toby. If I’m no real good, I prefer to be just frankly no good. I don’t want to disguise myself as a man of learning. I don’t want to be the representative of a hobby. I want to be what nature made me – no good.’

Ever since his mother's second marriage Spandrell had always perversely made the worst of things, chosen the worst course, deliberately encouraged his own worst tendencies. It was with debauchery that he distracted his endless leisures. He was taking his revenge on her, on himself also for having been so foolishly happy and good. He was spiting her, spiting himself, spiting God. He hoped there was a hell for him to go to and regretted his inability to believe in its existence. Still, hell or no hell, it was satisfactory, it was even exciting in those early days to know that one was doing something bad and wrong. But there is in debauchery something so intrinsically dull, something so absolutely and hopelessly dismal, that it is only the rarest beings, gifted with much less than the usual amount of intelligence and much more than the usual intensity of appetite, who can go on actively enjoying a regular course of vice or continue actively to believe in its wickedness. Most habitual debauchees are debauchees not because they enjoy debauchery, but because they are uncomfortable when deprived of it. Habit converts luxurious enjoyments into dull and daily necessities. The man who has formed a habit of women or gin, of opium-smoking or flagellation, finds it as difficult to live without his vice as to live without bread and water, even though the actual practice of the vice may have become in itself as unexciting as eating a crust or drinking a glass from the kitchen tap. Habit is as fatal to a sense of wrong-doing as to active enjoyment. After a few years the converted or sceptical Jew, the Westernized Hindu, can eat their pork and beef with an equanimity which to their still believing brothers seems brutally cynical. It is the same with the habitual debauchee. Actions which at first seemed thrilling in their intrinsic wickedness become after a certain number of repetitions morally neutral. A little disgusting, perhaps; for the practice of most vices is followed by depressing physiological reactions; but no longer wicked, because so ordinary. It is difficult for a routine to seem wicked.

Robbed gradually by habit both of his active enjoyment and of his active sense of wrong-doing (which had always been a part of his pleasure), Spandrell had turned with a kind of desperation to the refinements of vice. But the refinements of vice do not produce corresponding refinements of feeling. The

contrary is in fact true; the more refined in its far-fetched extravagance, the more uncommon and abnormal the vice, the more dully and hopelessly unemotional does the practice of it become. Imagination may exert itself in devising the most improbable variations on the normal sexual theme; but the emotional product of all the varieties of orgy is always the same – a dull sense of humiliation and abasement. There are many people, it is true, (and they are generally the most intellectually civilized, refined and sophisticated), who have a hankering after lowness and eagerly pursue their own abasement in the midst of multiple orgies, masochistic prostitutions, casual and almost bestial couplings with strangers, sexual association with gross and uneducsexual association with gross and uneducated individuals of a lower class. Excessive intellectual and aesthetic refinement is liable to be bought rather dearly at the expense of some strange emotional degeneration, and the perfectly civilized Chinaman with his love of art and his love of cruelty is suffering from another form of the same disease which gives the perfectly civilized modern aesthete his taste for guardsmen and apaches, for humiliating promiscuities and violences. ‘High brows, low loins,’ was how Rampion had once summed up in Spandrell’s hearing. ‘The higher the one, the lower the other.’ Spandrell, for his part, did not enjoy humiliation. The emotional results of all the possible refinements of vice seemed to him dully uniform. Divorced from all significant emotion, whether approving or remorseful, the mere sensations of physical excitement and pleasure were insipid. The corruption of youth was the only form of debauchery that now gave him any active emotion. Inspired, as Rampion had divined, by that curious vengeful hatred of sex, which had resulted from the shock of his mother’s second marriage supervening, in an uneasy moment of adolescence, on the normal upper middle-class training in refinement and gentlemanly repression, he could still feel a peculiar satisfaction in inflicting what he regarded as the humiliation of sensual pleasure on the innocent sisters of those too much loved and therefore detested women who had been for him the personification of the detested instinct. Mediaevally hating, he took his revenge, not (like the ascetics and puritans) by mortifying the hated flesh of women, but by teaching it an

indulgence which he himself regarded as evil, by luring and caressing it on to more and more complete and triumphant rebellion against the conscious soul. And the final stage of his revenge consisted in the gradual insinuation into the mind of his victim of the fundamental wrongness and baseness of the raptures he himself had taught her to feel. Poor little Harriet was the only innocent on whom, so far, he had been able to carry out the whole of his programme. With her predecessors he had never gone so far and she had had no successors. Seduced in the manner he had described to the Rampions, Harriet had adored him and imagined herself adored. And she was almost right; for Spandrell did genuinely care for her, even while he was deliberately making her his victim. The violation of his own feelings as well as of hers gave an added spice of perversity to the proceedings. Patiently, with the tact and gentleness and understanding of the most delicate, most exquisitely sympathetic lover, he allayed her virgin fears and gradually melted the coldness of her youth, thawed down the barriers raised by her education – only, however, to impose on her inexperience the ingenuous acceptance of the most fantastic lubricities. To see her accepting these as ordinary marks of affection was already, for the reversed ascetic in Spandrell, an admirable revenge on her for being a woman. But it was not enough; he began to simulate scruples, to shrink with an air of distress from her ardours or, if he accepted them, to accept them passively as though he were being outraged and violated. Harriet became suddenly anxious and distressed, felt ashamed as a sensitive person always feels whose ardours meet with no response; and suddenly, at the same time, she found herself a little grotesque, like an actor who has been performing with a group of companions and who, deserted, suddenly realizes he is alone on the stage – grotesque and even a little disgusting. Didn’t he love her any more? But so much, he answered. Then why? Precisely because of the depth of his love; and he began to talk about the soul. The body was like a wild beast that devoured the soul, annihilated the consciousness, abolished the real you and me. And as though by accident, somebody, that very evening, had sent him a mysterious parcel, which when he opened, as he now did, turned out to contain a portfolio full of pornographic

French etchings, in which poor Harriet saw with a growing sense of horror and disgust all the actions she had so innocently and warm-heartedly accepted as love, represented in cold and lucid outlines and made to look so hideous, so low, so bottomlessly vulgar that but to glance was to hate and despise the whole human race. For some days Spandrell skilfully rubbed the horror in; and then, when she was thoroughly penetrated with a sense of guilt and creeping with self-disgust, cynically and violently renewed his now obscene love-making. In the end she had left him, hating him, hating herself. That was three months ago. Spandrell had made no attempt to have her back or to renew the experiment on another victim. It wasn't worth the effort; nothing was worth the effort. He contented himself with talking about the excitements of diabolism, while in practice he remained sunk apathetically in the dismal routine of brandy and hired love. The talk momentarily excited him; but when it was over he fell back again yet deeper into boredom and despondency. There were times when he felt as though he were becoming inwardly paralysed, with a gradual numbing of the very soul. It was a paralysis which it was within his power, by making an effort of the will, to cure. But he could not, even would not, make the effort.

'But if you're bored by it, if you hate it,' Philip Quarles had interrogated, focusing on Spandrell his bright intelligent curiosity, 'why the devil do you go on with the life?' It was nearly a year since the question had been asked; the paralysis had not then crept so deep into Spandrell's soul. But even in those days Philip had found his case very puzzling. And since the man was prepared to talk about himself without demanding any personalities in return, since he didn't seem to mind being an object of scientific curiosity and was boastful rather than reticent about his weaknesses, Philip had taken the opportunity of cross-examining him. 'I can't see why,' he insisted.

Spandrell shrugged his shoulders. 'Because I'm committed to it. Because in some way it's my destiny. Because that's what life finally is – hateful and boring; that's what human beings are, when they're left to themselves – hateful and boring again. Because, once one's damned, one ought to damn oneself doubly. Because … yes, because I really like hating and being bored.'

He liked it. The rain fell and fell; the mushrooms sprouted in his very heart and he deliberately cultivated them. He could have gone to see his friends; but he preferred to be bored and alone. The concert season was in full swing, there was opera at Covent Garden, all the theatres were open; but Spandrell only read the advertisements – the *Eroica* at the Queen's Hall, Schnabel playing O at the Wigmore, *Don Giovanni* at Covent Garden, Little Tich at the Alhambra, *Othello* at the Old Vic, Charlie Chaplin at Marble Arch – read them very carefully and stayed at home. There was a pile of music on the piano, his shelves were full of books, all the London Library was at his disposal; Spandrell read nothing but magazines and the illustrated weeklies and the morning and evening papers. The rain went sliding incessantly down the dirty glass of the windows; Spandrell turned the enormous crackling pages of *The Times*. 'The Duke of York,' he read, having eaten his way, like a dung beetle's maggot in its native element, through Births, Deaths and the Agony Column, through Servants and Real Estate, through Legal Reports, through Imperial and Foreign News, through Parliament, through the morning's history, through the five leading articles, through Letters to the Editor, as far as Court and Personal and the little clerical essay on *The Bible in Bad Weather*, 'the Duke of York will be presented with the Honorary Freedom of the Gold and Silver Wire Drawers Company on Monday next. His Royal Highness will take luncheon with the Master and Wardens of the Company after the presentation.' Pascal and Blake were within reach, on the bookshelf. But 'Lady Augusta Crippen has left England on the *Berengaria*. She will travel across America to visit her brother-in-law and sister, the Governor-General of South Melanesia and Lady Ethelberta Todhunter.' Spandrell laughed, and the laughter was a liberation, was a source of energy. He got up; he put on his mackintosh and went out. 'The Governor-General of South Melanesia and Lady Ethelberta Todhunter.' Still smiling, he turned into the public-house round the corner. It was early; there was only one other drinker in the bar.

'But why should two people stay together and be unhappy?' the barmaid was saying. 'Why? When they can get a divorce and be happy?'

'Because marriage is a sacrament,' replied the stranger.

‘Sacrament yourself,’ the barmaid retorted contemptuously. Catching sight of Spandrell, she nodded and smiled. He was a regular customer.

‘Double brandy,’ he ordered, and leaning against the bar examined the stranger. He had a face like a choir-boy’s – but a choir-boy suddenly overwhelmed by middle age; chubby, prettily doll-like, but withered. The mouth was horribly small, a little slit in a rosebud. The cherub’s cheeks had begun to sag and were grey, like the chin, with a day’s beard.

‘Because,’ the stranger went on – and Spandrell noticed that he was never still, but must always be smiling, frowning, lifting eyebrows, cocking his head on one side or another, writhing his body in a perpetual ecstasy of self-consciousness, ‘because a man shall cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh. One flesh,’ he repeated and accompanied the words by a more than ordinary writhe of the body and a titter. He caught Spandrell’s eye, blushed, and to keep himself in countenance, hastily emptied his glass.

‘What do *you* think, Mr Spandrell?’ asked the barmaid as she turned to reach for the brandy bottle.

‘Of what? Of being one flesh?’ The barmaid nodded. ‘H’m. As a matter of fact, I was just envying the Governor-General of South Melanesia and Lady Ethelberta Todhunter for being so unequivocally two fleshes. If you were called the Governor-General of South Melanesia,’ he went on, addressing himself to the withered choir-boy, ‘and your wife was Lady Ethelberta Todhunter, do you imagine you’d be one flesh?’ The stranger wriggled like a worm on a hook. ‘Obviously not. It would be shocking if you were.’

The stranger ordered another whiskey. ‘But joking apart,’ he said, ‘the sacrament of marriage …’

‘But why should two people be unhappy?’ persisted the barmaid. ‘When it isn’t necessary?’

‘Why *shouldn’t* they be unhappy?’ Spandrell enquired. ‘Perhaps it’s what they’re here for. How do you know that the earth isn’t some other planet’s hell?’

A positivist, the barmaid laughed. ‘What rot!’

‘But the Anglicans don’t regard it as a sacrament,’ Spandrell continued.

The choir-boy writhed indignantly. ‘Do you take me for an Anglican?’

The working day was over; the bar began to fill up with men in quest of spiritual relaxation. Beer flowed, spirits were measured out in little noggins, preciously. In stout, in bitter, in whiskey they bought the equivalents of foreign travel and mystical ecstasy, of poetry and a week-end with Cleopatra, of big-game hunting and music. The choir-boy ordered another drink.

‘What an age we live in!’ he said, shaking his head. ‘Barbarous. Such abysmal ignorance of the most rudimentary religious truths.’

‘Not to mention hygienic truths,’ said Spandrell. ‘These damp clothes! And not a window.’ He pulled out his handkerchief and held it to his nose.

The choir-boy shuddered and held up his hands. ‘But what a handkerchief!’ he exclaimed, ‘what a horror!’

Spandrell held it out for inspection. ‘It seems to me a very nice handkerchief,’ he said. It was a silk bandana, red with bold patterns in black and pink. ‘Extremely expensive, I may add.’

‘But the colour, my dear sir. The colour!’

‘I like it.’

‘But not at this season of the year. Not between Easter and Whitsun. Impossible! The liturgical colour is white.’ He pulled out his own handkerchief. It was snowy. ‘And my socks.’ He lifted a foot.

‘I wondered why you looked as though you were going to play tennis.’

‘White, white,’ said the choir-boy. ‘It’s prescribed. Between Easter and Pentecost the chasuble must be predominantly white. Not to mention the fact that to-day’s the feast of St Natalia the Virgin. And white’s the colour for all virgins who aren’t also martyrs.’

‘I should have thought they were all martyrs,’ said Spandrell. ‘That is, if they’ve been virgins long enough.’

The swing-door opened and shut, opened and shut. Outside was loneliness and the damp twilight; within, the happiness of being many, of being close and in contact. The choir-boy began to talk of little St Hugh of Lincoln and St Piran of Perranzabuloe, the patron saint of Cornish tin-miners. He drank another

whiskey and confided to Spandrell that he was writing the lives of the English saints, in verse.

‘Another wet Derby,’ prophesied a group of pessimists at the bar, and were happy because they could prophesy in company with the fine weather in their bellies and beery sunshine in their souls. The wet clothes steamed more suffocatingly than ever, – a steam of felicity; the sound of talk and laughter was deafening. Into Spandrell’s face the withered choir-boy breathed alcohol and poetry.

‘To and fro, to and fro,

Piran of Perranzabuloe,’

he intoned. Four whiskeys had almost cured him of writhing and grimacing. He had lost his self-consciousness. The onlooker who was conscious of the self had gone to sleep. A few more whiskeys and there would be no more self to be conscious of.

‘Walked weightless,’

he continued,

‘Walked weightless on the heaving seas

Among the Cassiterides.’

‘That was Piran’s chief miracle,’ he explained; ‘walking from Land’s End to the Scilly Islands.’

‘Pretty nearly the world’s record, I should think,’ said Spandrell.

The other shook his head. ‘There was an Irish saint who walked to Wales. But I can’t remember his name. Miss!’ he called. ‘Here! Another whiskey, please.’

‘I must say,’ said Spandrell, ‘you seem to make the best of both worlds. Six whiskeys …’

‘Only five,’ the choir-boy protested. ‘This is only the fifth.’

‘Five whiskeys, then, and the liturgical colours. Not to mention St Piran of Perranzabuloe. Do you really believe in that walk to the Scillies?’

‘Absolutely.’

‘And here’s for young Sacramento,’ said the barmaid, pushing his glass across the counter.

The choir-boy shook his head as he paid. ‘Blasphemies all round,’ he said. ‘Every word another wound in the Sacred Heart.’ He drank. ‘Another bleeding, agonizing wound.’

‘What fun you have with your Sacred Heart!’

‘Fun?’ said the choir-boy indignantly.

‘Staggering from the bar to the altar rails. And from the confessional to the bawdy house. It’s the ideal life. Never a dull moment. I envy you.’

‘Mock on, mock on!’ He spoke like a dying martyr. ‘And if you knew what a tragedy my life has been, you wouldn’t say you envied me.’

The swing-door opened and shut, opened and shut. God-thirsty from the spiritual deserts of the workshop and the office, men came, as to a temple. Bottled and barrelled by Clyde and Liffey, by Thames, Douro and Trent, the mysterious divinity revealed itself to them. For the Brahmins who pressed and drank the soma, its name was Indra; for the hemp-eating yogis, Siva. The gods of Mexico inhabited the peyotl. The Persian Sufis discovered Allah in the wine of Shiraz, the shamans of the Samoyedes ate toadstools and were filled with the spirit of Num.

‘Another whiskey, Miss,’ said the choir-boy, and turning back to Spandrell almost wept over his misfortunes. He had loved, he had married – sacramentally; he insisted on that. He had been happy. They had both been happy.

Spandrell raised his eyebrows. ‘Did she like the smell of whiskey?’

The other shook his head sadly. ‘I had my faults,’ he admitted. ‘I was weak. This accursed drink! Accursed!’ And in a sudden enthusiasm for temperance he poured his whiskey on the floor. ‘There!’ he said triumphantly.

‘Very noble!’ said Spandrell. He beckoned to the barmaid. ‘Another whiskey for this gentleman.’

The choir-boy protested, but without much warmth. He sighed. ‘It was always my besetting sin,’ he said. ‘But I was always sorry afterwards. Genuinely repentant.’

‘I’m sure you were. Never a dull moment.’

‘If she’d stood by me, I might have cured myself.’

‘A pure woman’s help, what?’ said Spandrell.

‘Exactly,’ the other nodded. ‘That’s exactly it. But she left me. Ran off. Or rather, not ran. She was lured. She wouldn’t have done it on her own. It was that horrible little snake in the grass. That little …’ He ran through the sergeant-major’s brief vocabulary. ‘I’d wring his neck if he were here,’ the choir-boy went on. The Lord of Battles had been in his fifth whiskey. ‘Dirty little swine!’ He banged the counter. ‘You know the man who painted those pictures in the Tate; Bidlake? Well, it was that chap’s son. Walter Bidlake.’

Spandrell raised his eyebrows, but made no comment. The choir-boy talked on.

At Sbisa’s, Walter was dining with Lucy Tantamount.

‘Why don’t you come to Paris too?’ Lucy was saying.

Walter shook his head. ‘I’ve got to work.’

‘I find it’s really impossible to stay in one place more than a couple of months at a time. One gets so stale and wilted, so unutterably bored. The moment I step into the aeroplane at Croydon I feel as though I had been born again – like the Salvation Army.’

‘And how long does the new life last?’

Lucy shrugged her shoulders. ‘As long as the old one. But fortunately there’s an almost unlimited supply of aeroplanes. I’m all for Progress.’

The swing-doors of the temple of the unknown god closed behind them. Spandrell and his companion stepped out into the cold and rainy darkness.

‘Oof!’ said the choir-boy, shivering, and turned up the collar of his raincoat. ‘It’s like jumping into a swimming-bath.’

‘It’s like reading Haeckel after Fénelon. You Christians live in such a jolly little public-house of a universe.’

They walked a few yards down the street.

‘Look here,’ said Spandrell, ‘do you think you can get home on foot? Because you don’t look as though you could.’

Leaning against a lamp-post the choir-boy shook his head.

‘We’ll wait for a cab.’

They waited. The rain fell. Spandrell looked at the other man with a cold distaste. The creature had amused him, while they had been in the pub, had served as a distraction. Now, suddenly, he was merely repulsive.

‘Aren’t you afraid of going to hell?’ he asked. ‘They’ll make you drink burning whiskey there. A perpetual Christmas pudding in your belly. If you could see yourself. The revolting spectacle …’

The choir-boy’s sixth whiskey had been full of contrition. ‘I know, I know,’ he groaned. ‘I’m disgusting. I’m contemptible. But if you knew how I’d struggled and striven and …’

‘There’s a cab.’ Spandrell gave a shout.

‘How I’d prayed,’ the choir-boy continued.

‘Where do you live?’

‘Forty-one Ossian Gardens. I’ve wrestled …’

The cab drew up in front of them. Spandrell opened the door.

‘Get in, you sot,’ he said, and gave the other a push. ‘Forty-one Ossian Gardens,’ he said to the driver. The choir-boy, meanwhile, had crawled into his seat. Spandrell followed. ‘Disgusting slug!’

‘Go on, go on. I deserve it. You have every right to despise me.’

‘I know,’ said Spandrell. ‘But if you think I’m going to do you the pleasure of telling you so any more, you’re much mistaken.’ He leaned back in his corner and shut his eyes. All his appalling weariness and disgust had suddenly returned. ‘God,’ he said to himself. ‘God, God, God.’ And like a grotesque derisive echo of his thoughts, the choir-boy prayed aloud. ‘God have mercy upon me,’ the maudlin voice repeated. Spandrell burst out laughing.

Leaving the drunkard on his front door step, Spandrell went back to the cab. He remembered suddenly that he had not dined. ‘Sbisa’s Restaurant,’ he told the driver. ‘God, God,’ he repeated in the darkness. But the night was a vacuum.

‘There’s Spandrell,’ cried Lucy, interrupting her companion in the middle of a sentence. She raised her arm and waved.

‘Lucy!’ Spandrell took her hand and kissed it. He sat down at their table. ‘It’ll interest you to hear, Walter, that I’ve just been doing a good Samaritan to your

victim.’

‘My victim?’

‘Your cuckold. Carling; isn’t that his name?’ Walter blushed in an agony. ‘He wears his horns without any difference. Quite traditionally.’ He looked at Walter and was glad to see the signs of distress on his face. ‘I found him drowning his sorrows,’ he went on maliciously. ‘In whiskey. The grand romantic remedy.’ It was a relief to be able to take some revenge for his miseries.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT PORT SAID they went ashore. The flank of the ship was an iron precipice. At its foot the launch heaved on a dirty and slowly wallowing sea; between its gunwale and the end of the ship's ladder a little chasm alternately shrank and expanded. For a sound pair of legs the leap would have been nothing. But Philip hesitated. To jump with his game leg foremost might mean to collapse under the impact of arrival; and if he trusted to the game leg to propel him, he had a good chance of falling ignominiously short. He was delivered from his predicament by the military gentleman who had preceded him in the leap.

'Here, take my hand,' he called, noticing Philip's hesitation and its cause.

'Thanks so much,' said Philip when he was safely in the launch.

'Awkward, this sort of thing,' said the other. 'Particularly if one's short of a leg, what?'

'Very.'

'Damaged in the War?'

Philip shook his head. 'Accident when I was a boy,' he explained telegraphically, and the blood mounted to his cheeks. 'There's my wife,' he mumbled, glad of an excuse to get away. Elinor jumped, steadied herself against him; they picked their way to seats at the other end of the launch.

'Why didn't you let me go first and help you over?' she asked.

'I was all right,' he answered curtly and in a tone that decided her to say no more. She wondered what was the matter. Something to do with his lameness? Why was he so queer about it?

Philip himself would have found it hard to explain what there was in the military gentleman's question to distress him. After all there was nothing in the least discreditable in having been run over by a cart. And to have been rejected as totally unfit for military service was not in the least unpatriotic. And yet, quite

unreasonably, the question had disturbed him, as all such questions, as any too overt reference to his lameness, unless deliberately prepared for by himself, invariably did.

Discussing him with Elinor, ‘Philip was the last person,’ his mother had once said, ‘the very last person such an accident ought to have happened to. He was born far away, if you know what I mean. It was always too easy for him to dispense with people. He was too fond of shutting himself up inside his own private silence. But he might have learned to come out more, if that horrible accident hadn’t happened. It raised an artificial barrier between him and the rest of the world. It meant no games, to begin with; and no games meant fewer contacts with other boys, more solitude, more leisure for books. And then (poor Phil!) it meant fresh causes for shyness. A sense of inferiority. Children can be so horribly ruthless; they used to laugh at him sometimes at school. And later, when girls began to matter, how I wish he’d been able to go to dances and tennis parties! But he couldn’t waltz or play. And of course he didn’t want to go as an onlooker and an outsider. His poor smashed leg began by keeping him at a physical distance from girls of his own age. And it kept him at a psychological distance, too. For I believe he was always afraid (secretly, of course, and without admitting it) that they might laugh at him, as some of the boys did; and he didn’t want to run the risk of being rejected in favour of someone who wasn’t handicapped as he was. Not that he’d ever have taken very much interest in girls,’ Mrs Quarles had added.

And Elinor had laughed. ‘I shouldn’t imagine so.’

‘But he wouldn’t have got into such a habit of deliberately avoiding them. He wouldn’t have so systematically retired from all personal contacts – and not with girls only; with men, too. Intellectual contacts – those are the only ones he admits.’

‘It’s as though he only felt safe among ideas,’ Elinor had said.

‘Because he can hold his own there; because he can be certain of superiority. He’s got into the habit of feeling afraid and suspicious outside that intellectual world. He needn’t have. And I’ve always tried to reassure him and tempt him

out; but he won't let himself be tempted, he creeps back into his shell.' And after a silence, 'It's had only one good result,' she had added, 'the accident, I mean. It saved him from going to the War, from being killed, probably. Like his brother.'

The launch began to move towards the shore. From being an impending wall of black iron, the liner, as they receded, became a great ship, seen in its entirety. Fixed motionless between the sea and the blue glare of the sky, it looked like the advertisement of tropical cruises in the window of a Cockspur Street shipping office.

'It was an impertinence to ask,' Philip was thinking. 'What business was it of his whether I'd been damaged in the War? How they go on gloating over their War, those professional soldiers! Well, I can be thankful I kept out of the bloody business. Poor Geoffrey!' He thought of his dead brother.

'And yet,' Mrs Quarles had concluded after a pause, 'in a certain sense I wish he had gone to the War. Oh, not for fire-eating patriotic reasons. But because, if one could have guaranteed that he wouldn't have been killed or mangled, it would have been so good for him – violently good, perhaps; painfully good; but still good. It might have smashed his shell for him and set him free from his own prison. Emotionally free; for his intellect's free enough already. Too free, perhaps, for my old-fashioned taste.' And she had smiled rather sadly. 'Free to come and go in the human world, instead of being boxed up in that indifference of his.'

'But isn't the indifference natural to him?' Elinor had objected.

'Partly. But in part it's a habit. If he could break the habit, he'd be so much happier. And I think he knows it, but can't break it himself. If it could be broken for him … But the War was the last chance. And circumstances didn't allow it to be taken.'

'Thank heaven!'

'Well, perhaps you're right.'

The launch had arrived; they stepped ashore. The heat was terrific, the pavements glared, the air was full of dust. With much display of teeth, much flashing of black and liquid eyes, much choreographic gesticulation, an olive-

coloured gentleman in a tarboosh tried to sell them carpets. Elinor was for driving him away. But, ‘Don’t waste energy,’ said Philip. ‘Too hot. Passive resistance, and pretend not to understand.’

They walked on like martyrs across an arena; and like a hungry lion, the gentleman in the tarboosh frisked round them. If not carpets, then artificial pearls. No pearls? Then genuine Havana cigars at three-halfpence each. Or a celluloid comb. Or imitation amber. Or almost genuine gold bangles. Philip continued to shake his head.

‘Nice corals. Nice scarabs – real old.’ That winning smile was beginning to look like a snarl.

Elinor had seen the drapery shop she was looking for; they crossed the street and entered.

‘Saved!’ she said. ‘He daren’t follow. I had such a horrible fear that he might suddenly begin to bite. Poor wretch, though. I think we ought to buy something.’ She turned and addressed herself to the assistant behind the counter.

‘Meanwhile,’ said Philip, foreseeing that Elinor’s shopping would be interminably tedious, ‘I’ll go and get a few cigarettes.’

He stepped out into the glare. The man in the tarboosh was waiting. He pounced, he caught Philip by the sleeve. Desperately, he played his last trump.

‘Nice post-cards,’ he whispered confidentially and produced an envelope from his breast-pocket. ‘Hot stuff. Only ten shillings.’

Philip stared uncomprehending. ‘No English,’ he said and limped away along the street. The man in the tarboosh hurried at his side.

‘Très curieuses,’ he said. ‘Très amusantes. Mœurs arabes. Pour passer le temps à bord. Soixante francs seulement.’ He saw no answering light of comprehension. ‘Moho artistiche,’ he suggested in Italian. ‘Proprio curiose. Cinquanta franchi.’ He peered in desperation into Philip’s face; it was a blank. ‘Huebsch,’ he went on, ‘sehr geschlechtlich. Zehn mark.’ Not a muscle moved. ‘Muy hermosas, muy agraciadas, mucho indecorosas.’ He tried again. ‘Skon bref kort. Liderlig fotografi bild. Nakna jungfrun. Verklig smutsig.’ Philip was evidently no Scandinavian. Was he a Slav? ‘Sprosny obraz,’ the man wheedled.

It was no good. Perhaps Portuguese would do it. ‘Photographia deshonesta,’ he began.

Philip burst out laughing. ‘Here,’ he said, and gave him half a crown. ‘You deserve it.’

‘Did you discover what you wanted?’ asked Elinor when he returned.

He nodded. ‘And I also discovered the only possible basis for the League of Nations. The one common interest. Our toothy friend offered me indecent post-cards in seventeen languages. He’s wasting himself at Port Said. He ought to be at Geneva.’

‘Two ladies to see you, sir,’ said the office boy.

‘Two?’ Burlap raised his dark eyebrows. ‘Two?’ The office boy insisted. ‘Well, show them up.’ The boy retired. Burlap was annoyed. He was expecting Romola Saville, the Romola Saville who had written,

‘Already old in passion, I have known
All the world’s lovers since the world began;
Have held in Leda’s arms the immortal Swan;
And felt fair Paris take me as his own.’

And she was coming with a duenna. It wasn’t like her. *Two* ladies …

The two doors of his sanctum opened simultaneously. Ethel Cobbett appeared at one holding a bunch of galley proofs. By the other entered the two ladies. Standing on the threshold Ethel looked at them. One of them was tall and remarkably thin. Almost equally tall, the other was portly. Neither of them was any longer young. The thin lady seemed a withered and virgin forty-three or four. The portly one was perhaps a little older, but had preserved a full-blown and widowed freshness. The thin one was sallow, with sharp bony features, nondescript brown hair and grey eyes, and was dressed rather fashionably not in the style of Paris, but in the more youthful and jaunty mode of Hollywood, in pale grey and pink. The other lady was very blonde, with blue eyes, and long dangling earrings and lapis lazuli beads to match. Her style of dressing was more matronly and European than the other’s, and numbers of not very precious

ornaments were suspended here and there all over her person and tinkled a little as she walked.

The two ladies advanced across the room. Burlap pretended to be so deeply immersed in composition that he had not heard the opening of the door. It was only when the ladies had come to within a few feet of his table that he looked up from the paper on which he had been furiously scribbling – with what a start of amazement, what an expression of apologetic embarrassment! He sprang to his feet.

‘I’m so sorry. Forgive … I hadn’t noticed. One gets so deeply absorbed.’ The n’s and m’s had turned to d’s and b’s. He had a cold. ‘So idvolved id ode’s work.’

He came round the table to meet them, smiling his subtlest and most spiritual Sodoma smile. But, ‘Oh God!’ he was inwardly exclaiming. ‘What appalling females!’

‘And which,’ he went on aloud, smiling from one to the other, ‘which, may I venture to ask, is Miss Saville?’

‘Neither of us,’ said the portly lady in a rather deep voice, but playfully and with a smile.

‘Or both, if you like,’ said the other. Her voice was high and metallic and she spoke sharply, in little spurts, and with an extraordinary and vertiginous rapidity. ‘Both *and* neither.’

And the two ladies burst into simultaneous laughter. Burlap looked and listened with a sinking heart. What had he let himself in for? They were formidable. He blew his nose; he coughed. They were making his cold worse.

‘The fact is,’ said the portly lady, cocking her head rather archly on one side and affecting the slightest lisp, ‘the fact ith …’

But the thin one interrupted her. ‘The fact is,’ she said pouring out her words so fast that it was extraordinary that she should have been able to articulate them at all, ‘that we’re a partnership, a combination, almost a conspiracy.’ She uttered her sharp shrill laugh.

‘Yeth, a conthpirathy,’ said the portly one lisping from sheer playfulness.

‘We’re the two parts of Romola Saville’s dual personality.’

‘I being the Dr Jekyll,’ put in the portly one, and both laughed yet once more.

‘A conspiracy,’ thought Burlap with a growing sense of horror. ‘I should think it was!’

‘Dr Jekyll, *alias* Ruth Goffer. May I introduce you to Mrs Goffer?’

‘While I do the same for Mr Hyde, *alias* Miss Hignett?’

‘While together we introduce ourselves as the Romola Saville whose poor poems you said such very kind things about.’

Burlap shook hands with the two ladies and said something about his pleasure at beeting the authors of work he had so much adbired. ‘But how shall I ever get rid of them?’ he wondered. So much energy, such an exuberance of force and will! Getting rid of them would be no joke. He shuddered inwardly. ‘They’re like steam engines,’ he decided. And they’d pester him to go on printing their beastly verses. Their obscene verses – for that’s what they were, in the light of these women’s age and energy and personal appearance – just obscene. ‘The bitches!’ he said to himself, feeling resentfully that they’d got something out of him on false pretences, that they’d taken advantage of his innocence and swindled him. It was at this moment that he caught sight of Miss Cobbett. She held up her bundle of proofs enquiringly. He shook his head. ‘Later,’ he said to her, with a dignified and editorial expression. Miss Cobbett turned away, but not before he had remarked the look of derisive triumph on her face. Damn the woman! It was intolerable.

‘We were so thrilled and delighted by your kind letter,’ said the stouter of the ladies.

Burlap smiled Franciscanly. ‘One’s glad to be able to do something for literature.’

‘So *few* take any interest.’

‘Yes, so few,’ echoed Miss Hignett. And speaking with the rapidity of one who tries to say ‘Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper’ in the shortest possible time and with the fewest possible mistakes, she poured out their history and their grievances. It appeared that they had been living together at

Wimbledon and conspiring to be Romola Saville for upwards of six years now, and that only on nine occasions in all that time had any of their works been printed. But they hadn't lost courage. Their day, they knew, would come. They had gone on writing. They had written a great deal. Perhaps Mr Burlap would be interested to see the plays they had written? And Miss Hignett opened a despatch case and laid four thick wads of typescript on the table. Historical plays they were, in blank verse. And the titles were 'Fredegond', 'The Bastard of Normandy', 'Semiramis' and 'Gilles de Retz'.

They went at last, taking with them Burlap's promise to read their plays, to print a sonnet sequence, to come to lunch at Wimbledon. Burlap sighed; then recomposing his face to stoniness and superiority, rang for Miss Cobbett.

'You've got the proofs?' he asked distantly and without looking at her.

She handed them to him. 'I've telephoned to say they must hurry up with the rest.'

'Good.'

There was a silence. It was Miss Cobbett who broke it, and though he did not deign to look up at her, Burlap could tell from the tone of her voice that she was smiling.

'Your Romola Saville,' she said; 'that was a bit of a shock, wasn't it?'

Miss Cobbett's loyalty to Susan's memory was the intenser for being forced and deliberate. She had been in love with Burlap herself. Her loyalty to Susan and to that platonic spirituality which was Burlap's amorous speciality (she believed, at first, that he meant what he so constantly and beautifully said) was exercised by a continual struggle against love, and grew strong in the process. Burlap, who was experienced in these matters, had soon realized, from the quality of her response to his first platonic advances, that there was, in the vulgar language which even his devil hardly ever used, 'nothing doing'. Persisting, he would only damage his own high spiritual reputation. In spite of the fact that the girl was in love with him, or even in a certain sense because of it (for, loving, she realized how dangerously easy it would be to betray the cause of Susan and pure spirit and, realizing the danger, braced herself against it), she would never,

he saw, permit his passage, however gradual, from spirituality to a carnality however refined. And since he himself was not in love with her, since she had aroused in him only the vague adolescent itch of desire which almost any personable woman could satisfy, it cost him little to be wise and retire. Retirement, he calculated, would enhance her admiration for his spirituality, would quicken her love. It is always useful, as Burlap had found in the past, to have employees who are in love with one. They work much harder and ask much less than those who are not in love. For a little everything went according to plan. Miss Cobbett did the work of three secretaries and an office boy, and at the same time worshipped. But there were incidents. Burlap was too much interested in female contributors. Some women he had actually been to bed with came and confided in Miss Cobbett. Her faith was shaken. Her righteous indignation at what she regarded as Burlap's treachery to Susan and his ideals, his deliberate hypocrisy, was inflamed by personal feelings. He had betrayed her too. She was angry and resentful. Anger and resentment intensified her ideal loyalty. It was only in terms of loyalty to Susan and the spirit that she could express her jealousy.

The last straw was Beatrice Gilray. The cup of Miss Cobbett's bitterness overflowed when Beatrice was installed at the office – in the editorial department, what was more, actually doing some of the writing for the paper. Miss Cobbett comforted herself a little by the thought that the writing was only Shorter Notices, which were quite unimportant. But still, she was bitterly resentful. She was much better educated than that fool of a Beatrice, much more intelligent too. It was just because Beatrice had money that she was allowed to write. Beatrice had put a thousand pounds into the paper. She worked for nothing – and worked, what was more, like mad; just as Miss Cobbett herself had worked, at the beginning. Now, Miss Cobbett did as little as she could. She stood on her rights, never arrived a minute early, never stayed a minute past her allotted time. She did no more than she was paid to do. Burlap was annoyed, resentful, distressed; he would either have to do more work himself or employ another secretary. And then, providentially, Beatrice turned up. She took over all

the sub-editing which Miss Cobbett now had no time to do. To compensate her for the sub-editing and the thousand pounds he allowed her to do a little writing. She didn't know how to write, of course; but that didn't matter. Nobody ever read the Shorter Notices.

When Burlap went to live in Beatrice Gilray's house, Miss Cobbett's cup overflowed again. In the first moment of anger she was rash enough to give Beatrice a solemn warning against her tenant. But her disinterested solicitude for Beatrice's reputation and virginity was too manifestly and uncontrollably tinged with spite against Burlap. The only effect of her admonition was to exasperate Beatrice into sharp retort.

'She's really insufferable,' Beatrice complained to Burlap afterwards, without, however, detailing all the reasons she had for finding the woman insufferable.

Burlap looked Christ-like. 'She's difficult,' he admitted. 'But one's sorry for her. She's had a hard life.'

'I don't see that a hard life excuses anybody from behaving properly,' she rapped out.

'But one has to make allowances,' said Burlap, wagging his head.

'If I were you,' said Beatrice, 'I wouldn't have her in the place; I'd send her away.'

'No, I couldn't do that,' Burlap answered, speaking slowly and ruminatively, as though the whole discussion were taking place inside himself. 'Not in the circumstances.' He smiled a Sodoma smile, subtle, spiritual and sweet; once more he wagged his dark, romantic head. 'The circumstances are rather peculiar.' He went on vaguely, never quite definitely explaining what the rather peculiar circumstances were, and with a kind of diffidence, as though he were reluctant to sing his own praises. Beatrice was left to gather that he had taken and was keeping Miss Cobbett out of charity. She was filled with a mixed feeling of admiration and pity – admiration for his goodness and pity for his helplessness in an ungrateful world.

‘All the same,’ she said, and she looked fierce, her words were like sharp little mallet taps, ‘I don’t see why you should let yourself be bullied. *I* wouldn’t let myself be treated like that.’

From that time forward she took every opportunity of snubbing Miss Cobbett and being rude. Miss Cobbett snapped, snubbed and was sarcastic in return. In the offices of the *Literary World* the war was open. Remotely, but not quite impartially, like a god with a prejudice in favour of virtue – virtue being represented in the present case by Beatrice – Burlap hovered mediatingly above the battle.

The episode of Romola Saville gave Miss Cobbett an opportunity for being malicious.

‘Did you see those two terrifying poetesses?’ she enquired of Beatrice, with a deceptive air of friendliness, the next morning.

Beatrice glanced at her sharply. What was the woman up to? ‘Which poetesses?’ she asked suspiciously.

‘Those two formidable middle-aged ladies the editor asked to come and see him under the impression that they were one young one.’ She laughed. ‘Romola Saville. That’s how the poems were signed. It sounded so romantic. And the poems were quite romantic too. But the two authoresses! Oh, my goodness. When I saw the editor in their clutches I really felt quite sorry for him. But after all, he did bring it on himself. If he will write to his lady contributors …’

That evening Beatrice renewed her complaints about Miss Cobbett. The woman was not only tiresome and impertinent; one could put up with that if she did her job properly; she was lazy. Running a paper was a business like any other. One couldn’t afford to do business on a basis of sentimentality. Vaguely, diffidently, Burlap talked again about the peculiar circumstances of the case. Beatrice retorted. There was an argument.

‘There’s such a thing as being too kind,’ Beatrice sharply concluded.

‘Is there?’ said Burlap; and his smile was so beautifully and wistfully Franciscan, that Beatrice felt herself inwardly melting into tenderness.

‘Yes, there is,’ she rapped out, feeling more hard and hostile towards Miss Cobbett as she felt more softly and maternally protective towards Burlap. Her tenderness was lined, so to speak, with indignation. When she didn’t want to show her softness, she turned her feelings inside out and was angry. ‘Poor Denis,’ she thought, underneath her indignation. ‘He really needs somebody to look after him. He’s too good.’ She spoke aloud. ‘And you’ve got a shocking cough,’ she said reproachfully with an irrelevance that was only apparent. Being too good, having nobody to look after one and having a cough – the ideas were logically connected. ‘What you need,’ she went on in the same sharp commanding tones, ’is a good rubbing with camphorated oil and a wad of Thermogene.’ She spoke the words almost menacingly, as though she were threatening him with a good beating and a month on bread and water. Her solicitude expressed itself that way; but how tremulously soft it was underneath the surface!

Burlap was only too happy to let her carry out her tender threat. At half-past ten he was lying in bed with an extra hot-water bottle. He had drunk a glass of hot milk and honey and was now sucking a soothing lozenge. It was a pity, he was thinking, that she wasn’t younger. Still, she was really amazingly youthful for her age. Her face, her figure – more like twenty-five than thirty-five. He wondered how she’d behave when finally she’d been coaxed past her terrors. There was something very strange about these childish terrors in a grown woman. Half of her was arrested at the age at which Uncle Ben had made his premature experiment. Burlap’s devil grinned at the recollection of her account of the incident.

There was a tap at the door and Beatrice entered carrying the camphorated oil and the Thermogene.

‘Here’s the executioner,’ said Burlap laughing. ‘Let me die like a man.’ He undid his pyjama jacket. His chest was white and well-covered; the contour of the ribs only faintly showed through the flesh. Between the paps a streak of dark curly hair followed the line of the breastbone. ‘Do your worst,’ he bantered on. ‘I’m ready.’ His smile was playfully tender.

Beatrice uncorked the bottle and poured a little of the aromatic oil into the palm of her right hand. ‘Take the bottle,’ she commanded, ‘and put it down.’ He did as he was told. ‘Now,’ she said, when he was stretched out again unmoving; and she began to rub.

Her hand slid back and forth over his chest, back and forth, vigorously, efficiently. And when the right was tired, she began again with the left, back and forth, back and forth.

‘You’re like a little steam engine,’ said Burlap with his playfully tender smile.

‘I feel like one,’ she answered. But it wasn’t true. She felt like almost anything but a steam engine. She had had to overcome a kind of horror before she could touch that white, full-fleshed chest of his. Not that it was ugly or repulsive. On the contrary, it was rather beautiful in its smooth whiteness and fleshy strength. Fine, like the torso of a statue. Yes, a statue. Only the statue had dark little curls along the breastbone and a little brown mole that fluttered up and down with the pulsing skin over the heart. The statue lived; that was the disquieting thing. The white naked breast was beautiful; but it was almost repulsively alive. To touch it … She shuddered inwardly with a little spasm of horror, and she was angry with herself for having felt so stupidly. Quickly she had stretched out her hand and begun to rub. Her palm slid easily over the lubricated skin. The warmth of his body was against her hand. Through the skin she could feel the hardness of the bones. There was a bristle of roughness against her fingers as they touched the hairs along the breastbone, and the little paps were firm and elastic. She shuddered again, but there was something agreeable in the feeling of horror and the overcoming of it; there was a strange pleasure in the creeping of alarm and repulsion that travelled through her body. She went on rubbing, a steam engine only in the vigour and regularity of her movements, but, within, how quiveringly and self-dividedly alive!

Burlap lay with his eyes shut, faintly smiling with the pleasure of abandonment and self-surrender. He was feeling, luxuriously, like a child, helpless; he was in her hands, like a child who is its mother’s property and

plaything, no longer his own master. Her hands were cold on his chest; his flesh was passive and abandoned, like so much clay, under those strong cold hands.

‘Tired?’ he asked, when she paused to change hands for the third time. He opened his eyes to look at her. She shook her head. ‘I’m as much bother as a sick child.’

‘No bother at all.’

But Burlap insisted on being sorry for her and apologetic for himself. ‘Poor Beatrice!’ he said. ‘All you have to do for me! I’m quite ashamed.’

Beatrice only smiled. Her first shudderings of unreasonable repulsion had passed off. She felt extraordinarily happy.

‘There!’ she said at last. Now for the Thermogene.’ She opened the cardboard box and unfolded the orange wool. ‘The problem is how to stick it on to your chest. I’d thought of keeping it in place with a bandage. Two or three turns right round the body. What do you think?’

‘I don’t think anything,’ said Burlap who was still enjoying the luxury of infantility. ‘I’m utterly in your hands.’

‘Well, then, sit up,’ she commanded. He sat up. ‘Hold the wool on to your chest while I pass the bandage round.’ To bring the bandage round his body she had to lean very close to him, almost embracing him; her hands met for a moment behind his back, as she unwound the bandage. Burlap dropped his head forward and his forehead rested against her breast. The forehead of a tired child on the soft breast of its mother.

‘Hold the end a moment while I get a safety-pin.’

Burlap lifted his forehead and drew back. Rather flushed, but still very business-like and efficient, Beatrice was detaching one from a little card of assorted safety-pins.

‘Now comes the really difficult moment,’ she said, laughing. ‘You won’t mind if I run the pin into your flesh.’

‘No, I won’t mind,’ said Burlap and it was true; he wouldn’t have minded. He’d have been rather pleased, if she had hurt him. But she didn’t. The bandage was pinned into position with quite professional neatness.

‘There!’

‘What do you want me to do now?’ asked Burlap, greedy to obey.

‘Lie down.’

He lay down. She did up the buttons of his pyjama jacket. ‘Now you must go to sleep as quickly as you can.’ She pulled the bedclothes up to his chin and tucked them in. Then she laughed. ‘You look like a little boy.’

‘Aren’t you going to kiss me good-night?’

The colour came into Beatrice’s cheeks. She bent down and kissed him on the forehead. ‘Good-night,’ she said. And suddenly she wanted to take him in her arms, to press his head against her breast and stroke his hair. But she only laid her hand for a moment against his cheek, then hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER XIX

LITTLE PHIL WAS lying on his bed. The room was in an orange twilight. A thin needle of sunshine came probing in between the drawn curtains. Phil was more than usually restless.

‘What’s the time?’ he shouted at last, though he had shouted before and been told to keep quiet.

‘Not time for you to get up,’ Miss Fulkes called back from across the passage. Her voice came muffled, for she was halfway into her blue frock, her head involved in silken darkness, her arms struggling blindly to find the entrance to their respective sleeves. Phil’s parents were arriving today; they would be at Gattenden for lunch. Miss Fulkes’s blue best was imperatively called for.

‘But what’s the *time?*’ the child shouted back angrily. ‘On your watch, I mean.’

Miss Fulkes’s head came through into the light. ‘Twenty to one,’ she called back. ‘You must be quiet.’

‘Why isn’t it one?’

‘Because it isn’t. Now I shan’t answer you any more. And if you shout again I shall tell your mother how naughty you’ve been.’

‘Naughty!’ Phil retorted, putting a tearful fury into his voice – but so softly, that Miss Fulkes hardly heard him. ‘I hate you!’ He didn’t of course. But he had made his protest; honour was saved.

Miss Fulkes went on with her toilet. She felt agitated, afraid, painfully excited. What would they think of Phil – *her* Phil, the Phil she had made? ‘I hope he’ll be good,’ she thought, ‘I hope he’ll be good.’ He could be an angel, so enchanting when he chose. And when he wasn’t an angel, there was always a reason; but one had to know him, one had to understand him in order to see the reason. Probably they wouldn’t be able to see the reason. They had been away so

long; they might have forgotten what he was like. And in any case they couldn't know what he was like now, what he had grown into during these last months. She alone knew *that* Phil. Knew him and loved him – so much, so much. She alone. And one day she would have to leave him. She had no rights over him, no claim to him; she only loved him. They could take him away from her whenever they wanted. The image of herself in the glass wavered and was lost in a rainbow fog and suddenly the tears overflowed on to her cheeks.

The train was punctual, the car in attendance. Philip and Elinor climbed in.

'Isn't it wonderful to be here?' Elinor took her husband's hand. Her eyes shone. 'But, good Lord,' she added, in a tone of horror and without waiting for his answer, 'they're building a lot of new houses on the hill there. How dare they?'

Philip looked. 'Rather garden city, isn't it?' he said. 'It's a pity the English love the country so much,' he added. 'They're killing it with kindness.'

'But how lovely it still is, all the same. Aren't you tremendously excited?'

'Excited?' he questioned, cautiously. 'Well …'

'Aren't you even pleased that you're going to see your son again?'

'Of course.'

'Of course!' Elinor repeated the words derisively. 'And in *that* tone of voice. I never thought there was any "of course" about it; but now the time has come, I've never been so excited in my life.'

There was a silence; the car drove on windingly, down the lanes. The road mounted; they climbed through beechwoods to a wooded plateau. At the end of a long green vista the most colossal monument of Tantamount grandeur, the palace of the Marquess of Gattenden, basked far off in the sun. The flag flew; his lordship was in residence. 'We must go and call on the old madman one day,' said Philip. The fallow deer browsed in the park.

'Why does one ever travel?' said Elinor, as she looked at them.

Miss Fulkes and little Phil were waiting on the steps. 'I believe I hear the car,' said Miss Fulkes. Her rather lumpy face was very pale; her heart was beating

with more than ordinary force. ‘No,’ she added, after a moment of intent listening. What she had heard was only the sound of her own anxiety.

Little Phil moved about uncomfortably, conscious only of a violent desire to ‘go somewhere’. Anticipation had lodged a hedgehog in his entrails.

‘Aren’t you *happy?*’ asked Miss Fulkes, with assumed enthusiasm, self-sacrificingly determined that the child should show himself wild with joy to see his parents again. ‘Aren’t you *tremendously* excited?’ But they could take him away from her if they wanted to, take him away and never let her see him again.

‘Yes,’ little Phil replied rather vaguely. He was preoccupied exclusively with the approach of visceral events.

Miss Fulkes was disappointed by the flatness of his tone. She looked at him enquiringly. ‘Phil?’ She had noticed his uneasy Charleston. The child nodded. She took his hand and hurried him into the house.

A minute later Philip and Elinor drove up to a deserted porch. Elinor couldn’t help feeling disappointed. She had so clearly visualized the scene – Phil on the steps frantically waving – she had so plainly, in anticipation, heard his shouting. And the steps were a blank.

‘Nobody to meet us,’ she said, and her tone was mournful.

‘You could hardly expect them to hang about, waiting,’ Philip replied. He hated anything in the nature of a fuss. For him, the perfect homecoming would have been in a cloak of invisibility. This was a good second best.

They got out of the car. The front door was open. They entered. In the silent, empty hall three and a half centuries of life had gone to sleep. The sunlight stared through flat-arched windows. The panelling had been painted pale green in the eighteenth century. All ancient oak and high-lights, the staircase climbed up, out of sight, towards the higher floors. A smell of pot-pourri faintly haunted the air; it was as though one apprehended the serene old silence through another sense.

Elinor looked round her, she took a deep breath, she drew her finger-tips along the polished walnut wood of a table, with the knuckle of a bent forefinger

she rapped the round Venetian bowl that stood on it; the glassy bell-note lingered sweetly on the perfumed silence.

‘Like the Sleeping Beauty,’ she said. But even as she spoke the words, the spell was broken. Suddenly, as though the ringing glass had called the house back to life, there was sound and movement. Somewhere upstairs a door opened, through the sanitary noise of rushing water came the sound of Phil’s piercing young voice; small feet thudded along the carpet of the corridor, clattered like little hoofs on the naked oak of the stairs. At the same moment a door on the ground floor flew open and the enormous form of Dobbs, the parlourmaid, hastened into the hall.

‘Why, Miss Elinor, I never heard you …’

Little Phil rounded the last turn of the staircase. At the sight of his parents he gave a shout, he quickened his pace; he almost slid from step to step.

‘Not so fast, not so fast!’ his mother called anxiously and ran towards him.

‘Not so fast!’ echoed Miss Fulkes hurrying down the stairs behind. And suddenly, from the morning-room, which had a door leading out into the garden, Mrs Bidlake appeared, white and silent and with floating veils, like an imposing phantom. In a little basket she carried a bunch of cut tulips; her gardening scissors dangled at the end of a yellow ribbon. T’ang the Third followed her, barking. There was a confusion of embracing and handshaking. Mrs Bidlake’s greetings had the majesty of ritual, the solemn grace of an ancient and sacred dance. Miss Fulkes writhed with shyness and excitement, stood first on one leg and then on the other, went into the attitudes of fashion-plates and mannequins and from time to time piercingly laughed. When she shook hands with Philip, she writhed so violently that she almost lost her balance.

‘Poor creature!’ Elinor had time to think between the answering and asking of questions. ‘How urgently she needs marrying! Much worse than when we left.’

‘But how he’s grown!’ she said aloud. ‘And how he’s changed!’ She held the child at arm’s length with the gesture of a connoisseur who stands back to examine a picture. ‘He used to be the image of Phil. But now …’ She shook her head. Now the broad face had lengthened, the short straight nose (the comical

‘cat’s nose’ which in Philip’s face she had always laughed at and so much loved) had grown finer and faintly aquiline, the hair had darkened. ‘Now he’s exactly like Walter. Don’t you think so?’ Mrs Bidlake remotely nodded. ‘Except when he laughs,’ she added. ‘His laugh’s pure Phil.’

‘What have you brought me?’ asked little Phil almost anxiously. When people went away and came back again, they always brought him something. ‘Where’s my present?’

‘What a question!’ Miss Fulkes protested, blushing with vicarious shame, and writhing.

But Elinor and Philip only laughed.

‘He’s Walter when he’s serious,’ said Elinor.

‘Or you.’ Philip looked from one to the other.

‘The first minute your father and mother arrive!’ Miss Fulkes continued her reproaches.

‘Naughty!’ the child retorted and threw back his head with a little movement of anger and pride.

Elinor, who had been looking at him, almost laughed aloud. That sudden lifting of the chin – why it was the parody of old Mr Quarles’s gesture of superiority. For a moment the child was her father-in-law, her absurd deplorable father-in-law, caricatured and in miniature. It was comic, but at the same time it was somehow no joke. She wanted to laugh, but she was oppressed by a sudden realization of the mysteries and complexities of life, the terrible inscrutabilities of the future. Here was her child – but he was also Philip, he was also herself, he was also Walter, her father, her mother; and now, with that upward tilting of the chin, he had suddenly revealed himself as the deplorable Mr Quarles. And he might be hundreds of other people too. Might be? He certainly was. He was aunts and cousins she hardly ever saw; grandfathers and great-uncles she had only known as a child and utterly forgotten; ancestors who had died long ago, back to the beginning of things. A whole population of strangers inhabited and shaped that little body, lived in that mind and controlled its wishes, dictated its thoughts and would go on dictating and controlling. Phil, little Phil – the name

was an abstraction, a title arbitrarily given, like ‘France’ or ‘England’, to a collection, never long the same, of many individuals, who were born, lived and died within him, as the inhabitants of a country appear and disappear, but keep alive in their passage the identity of the nation to which they belong. She looked at the child with a kind of terror. What a responsibility!

‘I call that cupboard love,’ Miss Fulkes was still going on. ‘And you mustn’t say “naughty” to me like that.’

Elinor gave a little sigh, shook herself out of her reverie and, picking up the child in her arms, pressed him against her. ‘Never mind,’ she said, half to the reproving Miss Fulkes, half to her own apprehensive self. ‘Never mind.’ She kissed him.

Philip was looking at his watch. ‘Perhaps we ought to go and wash and brush up a bit before lunch,’ he said. He had the sentiment of punctuality.

‘But first,’ said Elinor, to whom it seemed that meals were made for man, not man for meals, ‘first we simply *must* run into the kitchen and say how-do-you-do to Mrs Inman. It would be unforgivable if we didn’t. Come.’ Still carrying the child, she led the way through the dining-room. The smell of roast duck grew stronger and stronger as they advanced.

Fretted a little by his consciousness of unpunctuality, and a little uneasy at having to risk himself, even with Elinor for dragoman, in the kitchen among the servants, Philip reluctantly followed her.

At luncheon, little Phil celebrated the occasion by behaving atrociously.

‘The excitement has been too much for him,’ poor Miss Fulkes kept repeating, trying to excuse the child and indirectly to justify herself. She would have liked to cry. ‘You’ll see when he’s got used to your being here, Mrs Quarles,’ she said, turning to Elinor, ‘you’ll see; he can be such an angel. It’s the excitement.’

She had come to love the child so much that his triumphs and humiliations, his virtues and his crimes made her exult or mourn, feel self-satisfaction or shame, as if they had been her own. Besides there was her professional pride. She had been alone responsible for him all these months, teaching him the social

virtues and why the triangle of India is painted crimson on the map; she had made him, had moulded him. And now, when this object of tenderest love, this product of her skill and patience, screamed at table, spat out mouthfuls of half-masticated food and spilt the water, Miss Fulkes not only blushed with agonizing shame, as though it were she who had screamed, had spat, had spilled, but experienced at the same time all the humiliation of the conjurer whose long-prepared trick fails to come off in public, the inventor of the ideal flying machine which simply refuses to leave the ground.

‘After all,’ said Elinor, consolingly, ‘it’s only to be expected.’ She felt genuinely sorry for the poor girl. She looked at the child. He was crying – and she had expected (how unreasonably!) that it would be quite different now, that she would find him entirely rational and grown up. Her heart sank. She loved him, but children were terrible, terrible. And he was still a child. ‘Now, Phil,’ she said severely, ‘you must eat. No more nonsense.’

The child howled louder. He would have liked to behave well, but he did not know how to stop behaving badly. He had voluntarily worked up this mood of rebellious misery within himself; but now the emotion was his master and stronger than his will. It was impossible for him, even though he desired it, to return by the way he had come. Besides he had always rather disliked roast duck; and having now, for five minutes, thought of roast duck with concentrated disgust and horror, he loathed it. The sight, the smell, the taste of it really and genuinely made him sick.

Mrs Bidlake meanwhile preserved her metaphysical calm. Her soul swam on steadily, like a great ship through a choppy sea; or perhaps it was more like a balloon, drifting high above the waters in the serene and windless world of fancy. She had been talking to Philip about Buddhism (Mrs Bidlake had a special weakness for Buddhism). At the first screams, she had not even turned round to see what was the matter, contenting herself with raising her voice so as to make it audible above the tumult. The yelling was renewed, was continued. Mrs Bidlake was silent and shut her eyes. A cross-legged Buddha, serene and golden, appeared against the red background of her closed lids; she saw the

yellow-robed priests around him, each in the attitude of the god and plunged in ecstatic meditation.

‘Maya,’ she said with a sigh, as though to herself, ‘maya – the eternal illusion.’ She opened her eyes again. ‘It *is* rather tough,’ she added, addressing herself to Elinor and Miss Fulkes who were desperately trying to make the child eat.

Little Phil seized the excuse which she had thus gratuitously given him. ‘It’s tough,’ he shouted tearfully, pushing away the fork on which Miss Fulkes, her hand trembling with the excess of painful emotions, was offering him a shred of roast duck and half a new potato.

Mrs Bidlake shut her eyes again for a moment; then turned to Philip and went on discussing the Eight-Fold Way.

That evening Philip wrote at some length in the notebook, in which he recorded, pell mell, thoughts and events, conversations, things heard and seen. ‘The kitchen in the old house,’ was how he headed the page. You can render it easily enough. The Tudor casements reflected in the bottoms of the copper pots. The huge black range with its polished steel trimmings and the fire peeping out through the half-opened porthole in the top. The mignonette in the window boxes. The cat, an enormous ginger eunuch, dozing in its basket by the dresser. The kitchen table so worn with time and constant scrubbing that the graining stands out above the softer wood – as though an engraver had prepared a wood-block of some gigantic finger-print. The beams in the low ceiling. The brown beechwood chairs. The raw pastry in process of rolling. The smell of cookery. The leaning column of yellow sunlight full of motes. And finally old Mrs Inman, the cook, small, frail, indomitable, the authoress of how many thousand meals! Work that up a little, and you’d have your picture. But I want something more. A sketch of the kitchen in time as well as space, a hint of its significance in the general human cosmos. I write one sentence. ‘Summer after summer, from the time when Shakespeare was a boy till now, ten generations of cooks have employed infra-red radiations to break up the protein molecules of spitted ducklings; (“thou wast not born for death, immortal bird,” etc.).’ One sentence,

and I am already involved in history, art and all the sciences. The whole story of the universe is implicit in any part of it. The meditative eye can look through any single object and see, as through a window, the entire cosmos. Make the smell of roast duck in an old kitchen diaphanous and you will have a glimpse of everything, from the spiral nebulae to Mozart's music and the stigmata of St Francis of Assisi. The artistic problem is to produce diaphanousness in spots, selecting the spots so as to reveal only the most humanly significant of distant vistas behind the near familiar object. But in all cases, the things seen at the end of the vista must be strange enough to make the familiar seem fantastically mysterious. Question; can this be achieved without pedantry, and without spinning out the work interminably? It needs a great deal of thinking about.

Meanwhile, how charming the kitchen is! How sympathetic its inhabitants. Mrs Inman has been in the house as long as Elinor. A miracle of aged beauty. And how serene, how aristocratically commanding! When one has been monarch of all one surveys for thirty years, one looks the royal part, even when all one surveys is only the kitchen. And then there is Dobbs, the parlourmaid. Dobbs has only been in the house since a little before the War. An invention of Rabelais. Six feet high and proportionately thick. And the enormous body houses Gargantua's spirit. What broad humours, what a relish for life, what anecdotes, what facile and enormous laughter! Dobbs's laughter is almost terrifying. And on a shelf of the pantry dresser I noticed, when we went to pay our respects, a green bottle, half full of pills – but pills like good-sized marbles, such as one blows down the throats of horses from a rubber hose. What Homeric indigestions they imply!

The kitchen is good; but so is the drawing-room. We came in from our afternoon walk to find the vicar and his wife talking Art over the tea-cups. Yes, Art. For it was their first call since their visit to the Academy.

It is an annual affair. Every year on the day following Ascension Day they take the 8.52 to town and pay the tribute that even Religion owes to Art – Established Religion and Established Art. They scour every corner of Burlington House annotating the catalogue as they go round, humorously, wherever humour

is admissible – for Mr Truby (who looks rather like Noah in a child's ark) is one of those facetious churchmen who crack jokes in order to show that, in spite of the black coat and the reversed collar, they are 'human', 'good chaps', *etc.*

Plumply pretty Mrs Truby is less uproariously waggish than her husband, but is none the less what upper middle-class readers of *Punch* would call a 'thoroughly cheery soul,' up to any amount of innocent fun and full of quaint remarks. I looked on and listened, fascinated, while Elinor drew them out about the parish and the Academy, feeling like Fabre among the coleoptera. Every now and then some word of the conversation would cross the spiritual abysses separating Elinor's mother from her surroundings, would penetrate her reverie and set up a curious reaction. Oracularly, disconcertingly, with a seriousness that was almost appalling in the midst of the Truby waggeries, she would speak out of another world. And outside, meanwhile, the garden is green and flowery. Old Stokes the gardener has a beard and looks like Father Time. The sky is pale blue. There is a noise of birds. The place is good. How good, one must have circumnavigated the globe to discover. Why not stay? Take root? But roots are chains. I have a terror of losing my freedom. Free, without ties, unpossessed by any possessions, free to do as one will, to go at a moment's notice wherever the fancy may suggest – it is good. But so is this place. Might it not be better? To gain freedom one sacrifices something – the house, Mrs Inman, Dobbs, facetious Truby from the parsonage, the tulips in the garden, and all that these things and people signify. One sacrifices something – for a greater gain in knowledge, in understanding, in intensified living? I sometimes wonder.

Lord Edward and his brother were taking the air in Gattenden Park. Lord Edward took it walking. The fifth Marquess took it in a bath chair drawn by a large grey donkey. He was a cripple. 'Which luckily doesn't prevent the mind from running,' he was fond of saying. It had been running, mazily, hither and thither all his life. Meanwhile, the grey ass only walked, very slowly. Before the two brothers and behind stretched Gattenden Broad Walk. A mile in front of them at the end of the straight vista stood a model of Trajan's column in Portland stone with a bronze statue of the first Marquess on the top, and an

inscription in large letters round the pedestal setting forth his claims to fame. He had been, among other things, Viceroy of Ireland and the Father of Scientific Agriculture. At the other end of the Broad Walk, a mile behind the brothers, rose the fantastic towers and pinnacles of Gattenden Castle, built for the second Marquess by James Wyatt in the most extravagant style of Strawberry Hill Gothic, and looking more mediaeval than anything that the real chronological Middle Ages had ever dreamt of. The Marquess lived permanently at Gattenden. Not that he particularly liked the house or the surrounding scenery. He was hardly aware of them. When he wasn't reading, he was thinking about what he had read; the world of appearances, as he liked, platonically, to call visible and tangible reality, did not interest him. This lack of interest was his revenge on the universe for having made him a cripple. He inhabited Gattenden, because it was only at Gattenden that he could safely go for drives in his bath chair. Pall Mall is no place for grey donkeys and paralytic old gentlemen who read and meditate as they drive. He had made over Tantamount House to his brother and continued to drive his ass through the beechwoods of Gattenden Park.

The ass had halted to browse at the wayside. The fifth Marquess and his brother were having an argument about God. Time passed. They were still talking about God when, half an hour later, Philip and Elinor, who had been taking their afternoon walk in the Park, emerged from the beechwood and unexpectedly came upon the Marquess's bath chair.

'Poor old creatures!' was Philip's comment when they were once more out of earshot. 'What else have they got to talk about? Too old to want to talk about love – too old and much too good. Too rich to talk about money. Too highbrow to talk about people and too hermit-like to know any people to talk about. Too shy to talk about themselves, too blankly inexperienced to talk about life or even literature. What is there left for the poor old wretches to talk about? Nothing – only God.'

'And at the present rate of progress,' said Elinor, 'you'll be exactly like them ten years from now.'

CHAPTER XX

OF PHILIP QUARLES'S father old John Bidlake used to say that he was like one of those baroque Italian churches with sham façades. High, impressive, bristling with classical orders, broken pedimenta and statuary, the façade seems to belong to a great cathedral. But look more closely and you discover that it is only a screen. Behind the enormous and elaborate front there crouches a wretched little temple of brick and rubble and scabby plaster. And warming to his simile, John Bidlake would describe the unshaven priest gabbling the office, the snotty little acolyte in his unwashed surplice, the congregation of goitrous peasant women and their brats, the cretin begging at the door, the tin crowns on the images, the dirt on the floor, the stale smell of generations of pious humanity.

'Why is it,' he concluded, forgetting that he was making an uncomplimentary comment on his own successes, 'that women always needs must love the lowest when they see it – or rather him? Curious. Particularly in this case. One would have given Rachel Quarles too much sense to be taken in by such a vacuum.'

Other people had thought so too, had also wondered why. Rachel Quarles seemed so incomparably too good for her husband. But one does not marry a set of virtues and talents; one marries an individual human being. The Sidney Quarles who had proposed to Rachel was a young man whom anyone might have fallen in love with and even believed in – anyone; and Rachel was only eighteen and particularly inexperienced. He too was young (youth is in itself a virtue), young and good-looking. Broad shouldered and proportionately tall, portly now to the verge of stoutness, Sidney Quarles was still an imposing figure. At twenty-three the big body had been athletic, the greyish hair which now surrounded a pink and polished tonsure had then been golden-brown and had covered the whole of his scalp with a waving luxuriance. The large, high

coloured, fleshy face had been fresher, firmer, less moon-like. The forehead, even before baldness had set in, had seemed intellectual in its smooth height. Nor did Sidney Quarles's conversation belie the circumstantial evidence offered by his brow. He talked well, albeit perhaps with a little too much arrogance and self-satisfaction for every taste. Moreover, he had at that time a reputation; he had just come down from the university in something that was almost a blaze of academic and debating-society glory. On the virgin expanses of his future sanguine friends painted the brightest visions. At the time when Rachel first knew him, these prophecies had a positively reasonable air. And in any case, reasonably or unreasonably she loved him. They were married when she was only nineteen.

From his father Sidney had inherited a handsome fortune. The business (old Mr Quarles was in sugar) was a going concern. The estate in Essex paid its way. The town house was in Portman Square, the country house at Chamford was commodious and Georgian. Sidney's ambitions were political. After an apprenticeship in local government, he would go into parliament. Hard work, speeches at once sound and brilliant would mark him out as the coming man. He would be offered an assistant under-secretaryship, there would be rapid promotions. He might expect (so at least it had seemed five-and-thirty years ago) to realize the most extravagant ambitions.

But Sidney, as old Bidlake had said, was only a façade, an impressive appearance, a voice, a superficial cleverness and nothing more. Behind the handsome front lived the genuine Sidney, feeble, lacking all tenacity of purpose in important matters, though obstinate where trifles were concerned, easily fired with enthusiasm and still more easily bored. Even the cleverness turned out to be no more than the kind of cleverness which enables brilliant schoolboys to write Ovidian Latin verses or humorous parodies of Herodotus. Brought to the test, this sixth-form ability proved to be as impotent in the purely intellectual as in the practical sphere. For when, by a course of neglect tempered by feverish speculation and mismanagement, he had half ruined his father's business (Rachel made him sell out completely before it was too late), when his political

prospects had been completely ruined by years of alternating indolence and undisciplined activity, he decided that his real vocation was to be a publicist. In the first flush of this new conviction, he actually contrived to finish a book about the principles of government. Shallow and vague, commonplace with an ordinariness made emphatic by the pretensions of an ornate style that coruscated with verbal epigrams, the book met with a deserved neglect, which Sidney Quarles attributed to the machinations of political enemies. He trusted to posterity for his due.

Ever since the publication of that first book, Mr Quarles had been writing, or at least had been supposed to be writing, another, much larger and more important, about democracy. The largeness and the importance justified an almost indefinite delay in its completion. He had already been at work on it for more than seven years and as yet, he would say to anyone who asked him about the progress of the book (shaking his head as he spoke with the expression of a man who bears an almost intolerable burden), as yet he had not even finished collecting the materials.

‘It’s a labour of Hercules,’ he would say with an air at once martyred and fatuously arrogant. He had a way when he spoke to you of tilting his face upwards and shooting his words into the air, as though he were a howitzer, looking at you meanwhile, if he condescended to look at you at all, along his nose and from under half-shut eyelids. His voice was resonant and full of those baa-ings with which the very Oxonian are accustomed to enrich the English language. ‘Really’ in Sidney’s mouth was always ‘ryahly,’ ‘mere’ was ‘myah.’ It was as though a flock of sheep had broken loose in his vocabulary. ‘A labour of Hercules.’ The words were accompanied by a sigh. ‘Ryahly fyahful.’

If the questioner were sufficiently sympathetic, he would take him into his study and show him (or preferably her) the enormous apparatus of card indices and steel filing-cabinets which he had accumulated round his very professional-looking roll-top desk. As time passed and the book showed no signs of getting itself written, Mr Quarles had collected more and more of these impressive objects. They were the visible proofs of his labour, they symbolized the terrific

difficulty of his task. He possessed no less than three typewriters. The portable Corona accompanied him wherever he went, in case he should at any time feel inspired when on his travels. Occasionally, when he felt the need of being particularly impressive, he took the Hammond, a rather larger machine, on which the letters were carried, not on separate arms, but on a detachable band of metal clipped to a revolving drum, so that it was possible to change the type at will and write in Greek or Arabic, mathematical symbols or Russian, according to the needs of the moment; Mr Quarles had a large collection of these alternative types which, of course, he never used, but of which he felt very proud, as though each of them represented a separate talent or accomplishment of his own. Finally there was the third and latest of the typewriters, a very large and very expensive office instrument, which was not only a typewriter, but also a calculating machine. So useful, Mr Quarles would explain, for compiling statistics for his great book and for doing the accounts of the estate. And he would point with special pride to the little electric motor attached to the machine; you made a connection with the wall plug and the motor did everything for you – everything, that is to say, except actually compose your book. You had only to touch the keys, *so* (and Mr Quarles would give a demonstration); the electricity provided the force to bring the type into contact with the paper. All muscular effort was eliminated. You could go on typing for eighteen hours at a stretch – and Mr Quarles gave it to be understood that it was a common thing for him to spend eighteen hours at his desk (like Balzac, or Sir Isaac Newton) – you could go on, indeed, almost indefinitely without experiencing the slightest fatigue, at any rate in the fingers. An American invention. Very ingenious.

Mr Quarles had bought his calculating typewriter at the moment when, for all practical purposes, he had ceased to have anything to do with the management of the estate. For Rachel had left him the estate. Not that he ran it any better than the business which she had persuaded him, only just in time, to abandon. But the absence of profit did not matter, the loss, when there actually was a loss, was inconsiderable. The estate, Rachel Quarles had hoped, would keep her husband

healthily occupied. For that it was worth paying something. But the price that had to be paid in these post-War years of depression was very high; and as Sidney occupied himself less and less with the routine of management, the price rose alarmingly, while the object for which it was being paid – healthy occupation for Sidney – was not achieved. Occasionally, it is true, Sidney would get an idea into his head and suddenly plunge into an orgy of what he called ‘estate improvements’. On one occasion after reading a book about American efficiency, he bought a large outfit of costly machinery, only to discover that the estate was not large enough to justify the expenditure; he could not give his machines enough to do. Later, he built a jam factory; it had never paid. Their lack of success made him rapidly lose interest in his ‘improvements’. Hard work and constant attention might conceivably have made them profitable in time; meanwhile, however, owing to Sidney’s neglect, the improvement had resulted in a dead loss. Decidedly, the price was too high, and it was being paid for nothing. Mrs Quarles decided that it was time to get the estate out of Sidney’s hands. With her usual tact – for after more than thirty years of marriage she knew her husband only too well – she persuaded him that he would have more time for his great work if he left the tiresome business of estate management to others. She and the bailiff were good enough for that. There was no sense in wasting talents that might be better, more suitably employed, on such mechanical labour. Sidney was easily persuaded. The estate bored him; it had hurt his vanity by being so malevolently unsuccessful in spite of his improvements. At the same time, he realized that to give up all connection with it would be an acknowledgment of failure and a tribute – yet another – to his wife’s inherent superiority. He agreed to devote less time to the details of management, but promised or threatened, in a godlike way, that he would continue to keep an eye on it, would supervise it distantly, but none the less effectively, in the intervals of his literary labours. It was now that, to justify himself, to magnify his importance, he bought the calculating typewriter. It symbolized the enormous complexity of the literary work to which he was now mainly to devote himself; and it proved at the same time that he had not

completely abandoned all interest in practical affairs. For the calculating machine was to deal not only with statistics (in what way Mr Quarles was wise enough never precisely to specify), but also with the accounts under which, it was implied, poor Rachel and the bailiff would infallibly succumb without his higher aid.

Sidney did not, of course, acknowledge his wife's superiority. But the obscure realization and resentment of it, the desire to prove that, in spite of everything, he was really just as good as she, or indeed much better, conditioned his whole life. It was this resentment, this desire to assert his domestic superiority that had made him cling so long to his unsuccessful political career. Left to himself, he would probably have abandoned political life at the first discovery of its difficulties and tediousness; his indolence was stronger than his ambition. But a reluctance to admit failure and the personal inferiority which failure would have implied, kept him (for ever desperately sanguine of his prospects) from resigning his parliamentary seat. With the exasperating spectacle of Rachel's quiet efficiency perpetually before his eyes, he could not admit himself defeated. What Rachel did, she did well; people loved and admired her. It was to rival and outdo her, in the eyes of the world and in his own, that he clung to politics, that he plunged into the erratic activities which had distinguished his parliamentary career. Disdaining to be the mere slave of his party and desirous of personal distinction, he had championed with enthusiasm, only to desert again with disgust, a succession of Causes. The abolition of capital punishment, antivivisection, prison reform, the amelioration of labour conditions in West Africa had called forth, each in its turn, his fieriest eloquence and a brief outburst of energy. He had visions of himself as a conquering reformer bringing victory by his mere presence to whatever cause he chose to take up. But the walls of Jericho never collapsed at the sound of his trumpet, and he was not the man to undertake laborious sieges. Hangings, operations on dogs and frogs, solitary convicts and maltreated negroes – one after another, all lost their charm for him. And Rachel continued to be efficient, continued to be loved and admired.

Meanwhile, her direct encouragement had always supplemented that indirect stimulus to ambition which she had provided, all unintentionally, by the mere fact of being herself and Sidney's wife. At first she genuinely believed in him; she encouraged her hero. A few years sufficed to change faith in his ultimate success into a pious hope. When the hope was gone she encouraged him for diplomatic reasons – because failure in politics cost less than failure in the City. For Sidney's mismanagement of the business was threatening to be ruinous. She dared not tell him so, dared not advise him to sell out; to have done so would have been to provoke him to cling more tenaciously than ever to the business. By throwing doubts on his capacity she would only have spurred him on to new and more dangerous speculations. To hostile criticism Sidney reacted with a violent and obstinate contrariness. Made wise by experience Rachel Quarles averted the danger by redoubling her encouragement of his political ambitions. She magnified the importance of his parliamentary activities. What good, what noble work he was doing! And what a pity that the care of the business should take up so much of the time and energies that might be better employed! Sidney responded at once and with a secret and unrealized gratitude. The routine of business bored him; he was becoming alarmed by his speculative failures. He welcomed the excuse for divesting himself of his responsibilities, which Rachel had so diplomatically offered. He sold out before it was too late and reinvested the money in securities which might be trusted to look after themselves. His income was in this way reduced by about a third; but in any case it was now secure – that was what Rachel chiefly cared about. Sidney went about hinting at the great financial sacrifices he had made in order that he might devote all his time to the poor convicts. (Later it was the poor negroes; but the sacrifices remained the same.)

When finally, tired of being a political nonentity and outraged by what he regarded as the injustice of his party chiefs, Sidney resigned his seat, Mrs Quarles made no objection. There was no business now for her husband to ruin, and the estate in those times of agricultural prosperity that immediately followed the Armistice was still profitable. Sidney explained that he was too good for

practical politics; they degraded a man of worth, their dirt came off. He had decided (for his consciousness of Rachel's superiority would not let him rest) to devote himself to something more important than 'myah' politics, something worthier of his powers. To be the philosopher of politics was better than to be a politician. He actually finished and published a first instalment of his political philosophy. The prolonged effort of writing blunted his enthusiasm for philosophical authorship; the poor success of the book disgusted him completely. But Rachel was still efficient and beloved. In self-defence he announced his intention of producing the largest and most comprehensive work on democracy that had ever been written. Rachel might be very active on committees, do good works, be loved by the villagers, have friends and correspondents galore; but, after all, what was that compared with writing the largest book on democracy? The only trouble was that the book did not get written. When Rachel showed herself too efficient, when people liked her too much, Mr Quarles bought another card-index, or a new and more ingenious kind of loose-leaf notebook, or a fountain-pen with a particularly large ink capacity – a fountain-pen, he explained, that could write six thousand words without requiring to be refilled. The retort was perhaps inadequate. But it seemed to Sidney Quarles good enough.

Philip and Elinor spent a couple of days with Mrs Bidlake at Gattenden. Then it was the turn of Philip's parents. They arrived at Chamford to find that Mr Quarles had just bought a dictaphone. Sidney did not allow his son to remain for long in ignorance of his triumph. The dictaphone was his greatest achievement since the calculating typewriter.

'I've just made an acquisition,' he said in his rich voice, shooting the words up over Philip's head. 'Something that will interest you, as a writer.' He led the way to his study.

Philip followed him. He had expected to be overwhelmed with questions about the East and the tropics. Instead of which his father had only perfunctorily enquired if the voyage had been good, and had gone on, almost before Philip could answer, to speak about his own affairs. For the first moment Philip had

been surprised and even a little nettled. But the moon, he reflected, seems larger than Sirius, because it is nearer. The voyage, *his* voyage, was to him a moon, to his father the smallest of little stars.

‘Here,’ said Mr Quarles and raised the cover. The dictaphone was revealed. ‘Wonderful invention!’ He spoke with profound self-satisfaction. It was the sudden rising, in all its refulgence, of *his* moon. He explained the workings of the machine. Then, tilting up his face, ‘It’s so useful,’ he said, ‘when an idyah occurs to you. You put it into wahds at once. Talk to yourself, the machine remembahs. I have it brought up to my bedroom every night. Such valuable idyahs come to one when one’s in bed, don’t you find? Without a dictaphone they would get lost.’

‘And what do you do when you’ve got to the end of one of these phonograph records?’ Philip enquired.

‘Send it to my secretarah to be typed.’

Philip raised his eyebrows. ‘You’ve got a secretary now?’

Mr Quarks nodded importantly. ‘Only a half-time one, so far,’ he said, addressing the cornice of the opposite wall. ‘You’ve no idyah what a lot I have to do. What with the book, and the estate, and letters, and accounts and … and … things,’ he concluded rather lamely. He sighed, he shook the martyr’s head. ‘You’re lucky, my dyah boy,’ he went on. ‘You have no distractions. You can give your whole time to writing. I wish I could give all mine. But I have the estate and all the rest. Trivial – but the business must be done.’ He sighed again. ‘I envy you your freedom.’

Philip laughed. ‘I almost envy myself sometimes. But the dictaphone will be a great help.’

‘Oh, it will,’ said Mr Quarles. ‘Undoubtedlah.’

‘How’s the book going?’

‘Slowly,’ his father replied, ‘but surely. I think I have most of my materials now.’

‘Well, that’s something.’

‘You novelists,’ said Mr Quarles patronizingly, ‘you’re fortunate. You can just sit down and write. No preliminarah labour necessarah. Nothing like this.’ He pointed to the filing cabinets and the card-index boxes. They were the proofs of his superiority, as well as of the enormous difficulties against which he had to struggle. Philip’s books might be successful. But after all, what was a novel? An hour’s entertainment, that was all; to be picked up and thrown aside again, carelessly. Whereas the largest book on democracy … And anyone could write a novel. It was just a question of living and then proceeding to record the fact. To compose the largest book on democracy one had to take notes, collect materials from innumerable sources, buy filing cabinets and typewriters, portable, polyglottic, calculating; one needed a card-index and loose-leaf notebooks and a fountain-pen that could write six thousand words without having to be refilled; one required a dictaphone and a half-time secretary who would shortly have to become a whole-time one. ‘Nothing like this,’ he insisted.

‘Oh, no,’ said Philip, who had been wandering round the room examining the literary apparatus. ‘Nothing like this.’ He picked up some newspaper clippings that were lying under a paper weight on the lid of the unopened Corona. ‘Puzzles?’ he asked, holding up the irregularly chequered diagrams. ‘I didn’t know you’d become a crossword fiend.’

Mr Quarles took the clippings from his son and put them away in a drawer. He was annoyed that Philip should have seen them. The crosswords spoiled the effect of the dictaphone. ‘Childish things,’ he said with a little laugh ‘But they’re a distraction when the mind is tired. I like to amuse myself with them occasionalah.’ In reality Mr Quarles spent almost the whole of his mornings on crosswords. They exactly suited his type of intelligence. He was one of the most expert puzzle-solvers of his epoch.

In the drawing-room, meanwhile, Mrs Quarles was talking with her daughter-in-law. She was a small and active woman, grey-haired but preserving unblurred and hardly distorted the pure outlines of regular and well-moulded features. The expression of the face was at once vivacious and sensitive. It was a delicate energy, a strong but quiveringly responsive life, that shone in incessant

variations of brilliance and shade of colour from her expressive grey-blue eyes. Her lips responded hardly less closely and constantly to her thoughts and feelings than did her eyes, and were grave or firm, smiled or were melancholy through an almost infinitesimally chromatic scale of emotional expression.

‘And little Phil?’ she said, enquiring after her grandchild.

‘Radiant.’

‘Darling little man!’ The warmth of Mrs Quarles’s affection enriched her voice and was visible as a light in her eyes. ‘You must have felt miserable, leaving him for such a long time.’

Elinor gave an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders. ‘Well, I knew that Miss Fulkes and mother between them would look after him much better than I could do.’ She laughed and shook her head. ‘I don’t believe nature ever meant me to have children. Either I’m impatient with them, or else I spoil them. Little Phil’s a pet, of course; but I know that a family would have driven me crazy.’

Mrs Quarles’s expression changed. ‘But wasn’t it wonderful to see him again after all those months?’ The tone of the question was almost anxious. She hoped that Elinor would answer it with the enthusiastic affirmative which would have been natural in the circumstances to herself. But at the same time she was haunted by a fear lest the strange girl might answer (with the frankness which was so admirable a quality in her, but which was also disquieting, in its revelation of unfamiliar and to Rachel incomprehensible states of soul) that she hadn’t been in the least pleased to see her child again. Elinor’s first words came to her as a relief.

‘Yes, it was wonderful,’ she said, but robbed the phrase of its full effect by adding, ‘I didn’t imagine I *could* be so glad to see him again. But it was really a wild excitement.’

There was a silence. ‘A queer girl,’ Mrs Quarles was thinking; and her face reflected something of that bewilderment which she always felt in Elinor’s presence. She did her best to love her daughter-in-law; and up to a point she succeeded. Elinor had many excellent qualities. But something seemed to be

lacking in her, something without which no human being could be entirely sympathetic to Rachel Quarles. It was as though she had been born without certain natural instincts. Not to have expected to feel happy when she saw her baby again – that was strange enough. But what Rachel found almost stranger was Elinor's calm and casual admission of the fact. She herself would have blushed to make such an admission, even if it had been the truth. It would have seemed to her something shameful – a kind of blasphemy, a denial of what was holy. To Rachel the reverence for holy things came naturally. It was Elinor's lack of this reverence, her inability even to realize that holy things *were* holy, which made it impossible for Mrs Quarles to love her daughter-in-law as much as she would have liked.

On her side Elinor admired, respected and genuinely liked her husband's mother. For her, the chronic difficulty was to establish effectual contact with a person whose ruling ideas and motives seemed to her so oddly incomprehensible and even so absurd. Mrs Quarles was unobtrusively but ardently religious and lived to the best of her ability in accordance with her beliefs. Elinor admired, but felt that it was all rather absurd and superfluous. Her education had been orthodox. But she never remembered a time, even in her childhood, when she seriously believed what people told her about the other world and its inhabitants. The other world bored her; she was interested only in this. Confirmation had evoked in her no more enthusiasm than a visit to the theatre, indeed considerably less. Her adolescence had passed without the trace of a religious crisis.

'It all seems to me just nonsense,' she would say when the matter was discussed in her presence. And there was no affectation in her words, they were not uttered provocatively. She simply stated a fact of her personal history. Religion and, along with religion, all transcendental morality, all metaphysical speculation seemed to her nonsensical in precisely the same way as the smell of Gorgonzola seemed to her disgusting. There was no getting behind the immediate experience. Often, on occasions like this, she wished there were. She would have liked to cross the abyss which separated her from Mrs Quarles. As it was, she felt a certain uneasiness when she was with her mother-in-law; she

hesitated in her presence to express her feelings or to say what she thought. For she had found, only too often, that the frank utterance of what seemed to her perfectly natural sentiments and reasonable opinions, was apt to distress her mother-in-law, to strike her as strange and shocking. It had happened again now, as she could see from the expression which showed itself for an instant on Mrs Quarles's mobile and sensitive face. What had it been this time? Conscious of no offence, Elinor could only wonder. In future, she decided, she would volunteer nothing of her own; she would just agree with what was said.

As it happened, however, the next topic of conversation to be broached was one in which Elinor was too deeply interested to be able to keep her new-made resolution. Moreover it was one on which, as she knew by experience, she could speak freely without risk of unintentional offence. For where Philip was concerned, Elinor's feelings and opinions seemed to Mrs Quarles entirely appropriate.

'And big Philip?' she now asked.

'You see how well he looks,' Elinor answered for his health, though she knew that the question had not concerned his bodily well-being. It was with a certain dread that she looked forward to the conversation that impended. At the same time, however, she was glad to have an opportunity of discussing that which so constantly and distressingly occupied her thoughts.

'Yes, yes, I can see that,' said Mrs Quarles. 'But what I really meant was: how is he in himself? How is he with you?'

There was a silence. Elinor frowned slightly and looked at the floor. 'Remote,' she said at last.

Mrs Quarles sighed. 'He was always that,' she said. 'Always remote.'

He too, it seemed to her, was lacking in something – in the desire and the capacity to give himself, to go out and meet his fellows, even those who loved him, even those he loved. Geoffrey had been so different. At the memory of her dead son Mrs Quarles felt her whole being invaded by a poignant sadness. If anyone had suggested that she had loved him more than she loved Philip, she would have protested. Her own feelings, she felt sure, had been initially the

same. But Geoffrey had permitted himself to be loved more fully, more intimately than his brother. If only Philip had allowed her to love him more! But there had always been barriers between them, barriers of his erecting. Geoffrey had come out to meet her, had given that he might receive. But Philip had always been reluctant and parsimonious. He had always shut doors when she approached, always locked up his mind lest she should catch a glimpse of his secrets. She had never known what he really felt and thought. ‘Even as a little boy,’ she said aloud.

‘And now he has his work,’ said Elinor after a pause. ‘Which makes it worse. It’s like a castle on the top of a mountain, his work. He shuts himself up in it and he’s impregnable.’

Mrs Quarles smiled sadly. ‘Impregnable.’ It was the right word. Even as a little boy he had been impregnable. ‘Perhaps in the end he’ll surrender of his own accord.’

‘To me?’ said Elinor. ‘Or to someone else? It wouldn’t be much satisfaction if it was to somebody else, would it? Though when I’m feeling unselfish,’ she added, ‘I wish he’d surrender to anyone – *anyone*, for his own good.’

Elinor’s words set Mrs Quarles thinking of her husband – not resentfully, though he had done wrong, though he had hurt her, but pityingly, rather, and solicitously. For she could never feel that it was entirely his fault. It was his misfortune.

Elinor sighed. ‘I can’t really expect to receive his surrender,’ she said. ‘When one has become a habit, one can’t very well suddenly turn into an overwhelming revelation.’

Mrs Quarles shook her head. In recent years Sidney’s overwhelming revelations had come from such unexpectedly humble sources. The little kitchen-maid, the gamekeeper’s daughter. How could he, she wondered for the thousandth time, how *could* he? It was incomprehensible.

‘If at least,’ she said almost in a whisper, ‘you had God as a companion.’ God had always been her comfort, God and the doing of God’s will. She could never

understand how people could get through life without Him. ‘If only you could find God.’

Elinor’s smile was sarcastic. Remarks of this sort annoyed her by being so ridiculously beside the point. ‘It might be simpler,’ she began, but checked herself after the first words. She had meant to say that it might be simpler perhaps to find a man. But she remembered her resolution and was silent.

‘What were you saying?’

Elinor shook her head. ‘Nothing.’

Fortunately for Mr Quarles the British Museum had no Essex branch. It was only in London that he could make researches and collect the documents necessary for his book. The house in Portman Square was let (Mr Quarles blamed the income tax, but his own speculations in sugar were mainly responsible); and it was in a modest little flat in Bloomsbury (‘convenientlah nyah the Museum’) that he now camped whenever the claims of scholarship brought him to town.

During the last few weeks the claims had been more than usually peremptory. His visits to London had been frequent and prolonged. After the second of these visits Mrs Quarles had wondered, sadly, whether Sidney had found another woman. And when, on his return from a third journey and, a few days later, on the eve of a fourth, he began to groan ostentatiously over the vast complexity of the history of democracy among the Ancient Indians, Rachel felt convinced that the woman had been found. She knew Sidney well enough to be certain that, if he had really been reading about the Ancient Indians, he would never have troubled to talk about them over the dinner-table – not at such length, in any case, nor so insistently. Sidney talked for the same reason as the hunted sepia squirts ink, to conceal his movements. Behind the ink-cloud of the Ancient Indians he hoped to go jaunting up to town unobserved. Poor Sidney! He thought himself so Machiavellian. But his ink was transparent, his cunning like a child’s.

‘Couldn’t you get the books sent down from the London Library?’ Mrs Quarles rather pointedly asked.

Sidney shook his head. ‘They’re the sort of books,’ he said importantly, ‘that are only in the Museum.’

Rachel sighed and could only hope that the woman could be trusted to look after herself well enough to keep out of serious trouble and not so well as to want to make mischief.

‘I think I shall run up to town with you tomorrow,’ he announced on the morning before Philip and Elinor took their leave.

‘Again?’ asked Mrs Quarles.

‘There’s a point about those wretched Indians,’ he explained, ‘that I ryahly must clyahr up. I think I may find it in Pramathanatha Banerjea’s book … Or it may be dealt with by Radakhumud Mookerji.’ He rolled out the names impressively, professionally. ‘It’s about local government in Maurya times. So democratic, you know, in spite of the central despotism. For example …’

Through the ink-cloud Mrs Quarles caught glimpses of a female figure.

Breakfast over, Sidney retired to his study and addressed himself to the morning’s crossword. A kind of onion, six letters. Anticipations of the morrow distracted him; he could not fix his attention. Her breasts, he was thinking, her smooth white back … What about ‘chive’? No good; only five letters. Walking over to the bookshelf he took out his Bible; its thin pages rustled under his fingers. ‘Thy navel is like a round goblet that wanteth not liquor, thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies. Thy two breasts are like young roes that are twins.’ Solomon spoke for him, with what rich thunders! ‘The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman.’ He read the words out loud. Gladys had a perfect figure. ‘Like a round goblet that wanteth not liquor.’ These orientals knew what passion was. Miscalling libidinousness ‘passion’, Mr Quarles regarded himself as a very passionate man. ‘Thy belly is like an heap of wheat.’ Passion is respectable, is actually respected by the law in some countries. For the poets it is even sacred. He agreed with the poets. But ‘like young roes’ was an odd, inadequate simile. Gladys was plump without being fat, firmly resilient. Roes, on the contrary … As a man of great passions, Sidney could regard himself as positively a noble and heroic figure. ‘A garden

enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire with spikenard; spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh …' But, of course, the word was 'garlic'! Six letters. A kind of onion. 'Myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.'

Their train next morning was nearly twenty minutes late. 'Scandalous,' Mr Quarles kept repeating, as he looked at his watch, 'disgraceful.'

'You're in a great hurry to be at your Indians,' said Philip, smiling from his corner.

His father frowned and talked about something else. At Liverpool Street they parted, Sidney in one taxi, Philip and Elinor in a second. Sidney reached his flat only just in time. He was still engaged in washing the grime of the journey from his large, flesh-padded hands, when the bell rang. He made haste to rinse and dry himself, then, adjusting his face, he stepped into the hall and opened. It was Gladys. He received her with a kind of condescending regality, his chin tilted, his chest thrown back, his waistcoat projecting, but smiling down at her (Gladys called herself 'petite') and graciously twinkling through half-shut eyelids. It was an impudent, vulgar, snubby little face that smiled back at him. But it was not her face that had brought Mr Quarles to London, it was not the individual Gladys Helmsley; it was the merely generic aspect of the woman, her 'figah', as Sidney would have euphemistically put it.

'You're very punctual, my dyah,' he said, holding out his hand.

Gladys was rather taken aback by the coolness of his greeting. After what had happened last time, she had expected something tenderer.

'Am I!' she said, for lack of anything better to say; and since human beings have only a limited number of noises and grimaces with which to express the multiplicity of their emotions, she laughed as though she had been amused by something, when in fact she was only surprised and disquieted. It was on the tip of her tongue to ask him, provocative-petulantly, why he didn't kiss her, whether he was tired of her *already*. But she decided to wait.

‘Almost too punctual,’ Sidney went on. ‘My train was scandalouslah late. Scandalouslah!’ He radiated indignation.

‘Fancy!’ said Gladys. The refinement that hung around her speech, like a too genteel disguise, dropped away from time to time, leaving individual words and phrases nakedly cockney.

‘Ryahly disgraceful!’ said Sidney. ‘Trains have no business to be late. I shall write to the Traffic Superintendent at Liverpool Street. I’m not sure,’ he added, still more importantly, ‘that I shan’t write to *The Times* as well.’

Gladys was impressed. Mr Quarles had intended that she should be. Apart from all merely sensual satisfactions, the greatest charm of his sexual holidays resided in the fact that they were shared with impressible companions. Sidney liked them, not only young, but of a lower class, and poor. To feel himself unequivocally superior and genuinely admired was for Sidney a luxury almost as great as an embracement. His escapades were holidays not only from chastity, but also from that sense of inferiority which, at home, in parliament, at the office, had always inveterately haunted him. In relation to young women of the lower classes he was a great man, as well as a ‘passionate’ one.

Gladys, on her side, was impressed by his thunderings. But she was also amused. Impressed, because she belonged to the world of poor and patient wage-slaves, who accept the unpleasantnesses of social life as so many natural phenomena, uncontrollable by human agency and recalcitrant to human desires. But Sidney was one of the Olympian rich; the rich refuse to accept unpleasantness; they write letters to *The Times* about it, they pull wires, use influence, lodge formal complaints with an always friendly and obsequious police. To Gladys it was wonderful – wonderful, but also very funny. There was such a lot of loud haw-haw and lahdy-da about the whole performance. It was so like the parody of itself on the music-hall stage. She admired, she realized very accurately the economic and social causes of Sidney’s behaviour (it was that realization which had made her so promptly his mistress). But she also laughed. She lacked reverence.

Mr Quarles opened the sitting-room door to let her pass.

‘Ta,’ said Gladys and walked in.

He followed. On the nape of her neck, her dark cropped hair ended in a little triangle that pointed downwards along the spine. She was wearing a thin green dress. Through the fine stuff he could see, just below her shoulders, the line where the underclothes gave place to bare skin. A belt of black shiny leather was fastened in a slant very low on her hips. At every stride it rose and fell on her left hip with a rhythmical regularity. Her stockings were the colour of sunburnt flesh. Brought up in an epoch when ladies apparently rolled along on wheels, Mr Quarles was peculiarly susceptible to calves, found modern fashions a treat and could never quite get over the belief that the young women who adopted them had deliberately made themselves indecent for his benefit and because they wanted him to become their lover. His eyes followed the curves of the lustrous sunburn. But what fascinated him most to-day was the black leather belt flicking up and down over the left haunch, with the regularity of a piece of machinery, every time she moved her leg. In that rise and fall the whole unindividualized species, the entire sex semaphored their appeal.

Gladys halted and turned towards him with a smile, expectantly coquettish. But Mr Quarles made no responding gesture.

‘I’ve got the Corona hyah,’ he said. ‘Perhaps we had better begin at once.

For the second time Gladys was surprised, thought of making a comment, and again said nothing, but sat down in silence before the typewriter.

Mr Quarles put on his tortoiseshell-rimmed pince-nez and opened his despatch case. He had found a mistress, but he did not see why that should entail the loss of a typist, for whose services, after all, he paid.

‘Perhaps,’ he said, looking up at her over the top of his pince-nez, ‘we’d better begin with those letters to the Traffic Superintendent and *The Times*.’ Gladys adjusted the paper, typed the date. Mr Quarles cleared his throat and dictated. There were some good phrases, he flattered himself, in the letters. ‘Inexcusable slackness entailing the waste of time otherwise valuable than that of drowsy railway bureaucrats’ – that, for example, was excellent. And so (for

the benefit of *The Times*) was ‘the pampered social parasites of a protected industry.’

‘That’ll teach the dogs,’ he said with satisfaction, as he read the letters through. ‘That’ll make them squirm.’ He looked to Gladys for applause, and was not entirely satisfied with the smile on that impertinent face. ‘Pity old Lord Hagworm’s not alive,’ he added, calling up strong allies. ‘I’d have written to him. He was a director of the company.’ But the last of the Hagworms had died in 1912. And Gladys continued to be more amused than admiring.

Mr Quarles dictated a dozen more letters, the answers to a correspondence which he had allowed to accumulate for several days before coming to London, so that the total might seem more important and also that he might get his full money’s worth out of Gladys’s secretaryship.

‘Thank goodness,’ he said, when the last of the letters was answered. ‘You’ve no idyah,’ he went on (and the great thinker had come to reinforce the landed gentleman), ‘you’ve no idyah how exasperating these trivial little things can be, when you’ve got something more syahrious and important to think about.’

‘I suppose they must be,’ said Gladys, thinking how funny he was.

‘Take down,’ commanded Mr Quarles, to whom a *pensée* had suddenly occurred. He leaned back in his chair and, closing his eyes, pursued the elusive phrase.

Gladys waited, her fingers poised above the keyboard. She looked at the watch on her wrist. Ten past twelve. It would be lunch-time soon. A new watch – that would be the first thing she’d make him give her. The one she had was such a cheap, nasty-looking watch; and it kept such bad time.

‘Note for the volume of Reflections,’ said Mr Quarles, without opening his eyes. The keys briefly rattled. ‘The ivory pinnacles of thought’ – he repeated the words inwardly. They made a satisfying reverberation along the corridors of his mind. The phrase was caught. He sat up briskly and opened his eyes – to become aware that the lisle-thread top of one of Gladys’s sunburnt stockings was visible, from where he was sitting, to a considerable distance above the knee.

‘All my life,’ he dictated, his eyes fixed on the lisle thread, ‘I have suffered from the irrelevant – no, say “importunate” – interruptions of the wahld’s trivialitah, full stop. Some thinkers comma I know comma are able to ignore these interruptions comma to give them a fleeting but sufficient attention and return with a serene mind to higher things full stop.’

There was silence. Above the lisle thread, Mr Quarles was thinking, was the skin, – soft, curving tightly over the firm curved flesh. To caress and, caressing, to feel the finger-tips silkily caressed; to squeeze a handful of elastic flesh. Even to bite. Like a round goblet, like a heap of wheat.

Suddenly conscious of the direction of his glances, Gladys pulled down her skirt.

‘Where was I?’ asked Mr Quarles.

‘Higher things with a serene mind,’ Gladys answered, reading from the page in front of her.

‘H’m.’ He rubbed his nose. ‘For me comma alas comma this serenitah has always been impossible semi-colon; my nahvous sensibilitah is too great full stop. Dragged down from the ivorah pinnacles of thought’ (he rolled out the phrase with relish) ‘into the common dust comma, I am exasperated comma, I lose my peace of mind and am unable to climb again into my tower.’

He rose and began to walk restlessly about the room.

‘That’s always been my trouble,’ he said. ‘Too much sensibilitah. A syahrious thinker ought to have no temperament, no nerves. He has no business to be passionate.’

The skin, he was thinking, the firm elastic flesh. He halted behind her chair. The little triangle of cropped hair pointed down along her spine. He put his hands on her shoulders and bent over her.

Gladys looked up, smiling impertinently, with triumph. ‘Well?’ she asked.

Mr Quarles bent lower and kissed her neck. She giggled. ‘How you tickle!’

His hands explored her, sliding along her arms, pressing her body – the body of the species, of the entire sex. The individual Gladys continued to giggle.

‘Naughty!’ she said, and made a pretence of pushing his hands away. ‘Naughty!’

CHAPTER XXI

‘A MONTH AGO,’ said Elinor, as their taxi drove out of Liverpool Street Station, ‘we were in Udaipur.’

‘It certainly seems improbable,’ said Philip, agreeing with the implications of her remark.

‘These ten months of travel have been like an hour in a cinema. There’s the Bank. I begin to doubt whether I’ve ever been away.’ She sighed. ‘It’s rather a dreadful feeling.’

‘Is it?’ said Philip. ‘I suppose I’m used to it. I never do feel that anything has really happened before this morning.’ He craned his neck out of the window. ‘Why people should bother about the Taj Mahal when there’s St Paul’s to look at, I can’t imagine. What a marvel!’

‘That wonderful black and white of the stone.’

‘As though it were an engraving. Doubly a work of art. Not merely architecture, but an etching of architecture.’ He leaned back. ‘I often doubt whether I ever had a childhood,’ he went on, returning to the previous conversation.

‘That’s because you never think of it. Lots of my childhood is more real to me than Ludgate Hill here. But then I constantly think of it.’

‘That’s true,’ said Philip. ‘I don’t often try to remember. Hardly ever, in fact. I always seem to have too much to do and think about.’

‘You have no natural piety,’ said Elinor. ‘I wish you had.’

They drove along the Strand. The two little churches protested against Australia House, in vain. In the courtyard of King’s College a group of young men and women sat in the sun waiting for the Professor of Pastoral Theology. At the pit door of the Gaiety there was already a queue; the placards advertised the four hundredth performance of ‘The Girl from Biarritz’. Next door to the Savoy,

Philip noticed, you could still buy a pair of boots for twelve-and-six. In Trafalgar Square the fountains were playing, Sir Edwin Landseer's lions mildly glared, the lover of Lady Hamilton stood perched among the clouds, like St Simeon the Stylite. And behind the grim colonnade of the National Gallery Uccello's horsemen timelessly fought and Rubens raped his Sabines, Venus looked into her mirror and in the midst of Piero's choiring angels Jesus was born into a magically lovely world.

The cab turned down Whitehall.

'I like to think of all the bureaucrats.'

'I don't,' said Elinor.

'Scribbling away,' he went on, 'scribbling from morning till night in order that we may live in freedom and comfort. Scribble, scribble – the result is the British Empire. What a comfort,' he added, 'to live in a world where one can delegate everything tiresome, from governing to making sausages, to somebody else.'

At the Gate of the Horse Guards the mounted sentries looked as though they were stuffed. Near the Cenotaph a middle-aged lady was standing with raised eyes, murmuring a prayer over the Kodak with which she proposed to take a snapshot of the souls of the nine hundred thousand dead. A Sikh with a black beard and a pale mauve turban emerged from Grindley's as they passed. The time, according to Big Ben, was twenty-seven minutes past eleven. In the library of the House of Lords was there a dozing marquess? A charabanc disgorged Americans at the door of Westminster Abbey. Looking back through the little porthole in the hood they were able to see that the hospital was still urgently in need of funds.

John Bidlake's house was in Grosvenor Road, overlooking the river.

'Pimlico,' said Philip meditatively, as they approached the house. He laughed. 'Do you remember that absurd song your father used always to quote?'

'"To Pimlico Then let us go,"' Elinor chanted.

'"One verse omitted here." You mustn't forget that.' They both laughed, remembering John Bidlake's comments.

“One verse omitted here.” It’s omitted in all the anthologies. I’ve never been able to discover what happened when they’d got to Pimlico. It’s kept me wondering for years, feverishly. Nothing like Bowdlerism for heating the imagination.’

‘Pimlico,’ Philip repeated. Old Bidlake, he was thinking, had made of Pimlico a sort of Rabelaisian Olympus. He liked the phrase. But ‘Gargantuan’ would be better for public use than ‘Rabelaisian’. For those who had never read him, Rabelais connoted nothing but smut. Gargantuan Olympus, then. They had at least heard rumours that Gargantua was large.

But the John Bidlake they found sitting by the stove in his studio was not at all Olympian, seemed less instead of more than life size. He suffered himself to be kissed by his daughter, limply shook hands with Philip.

‘Good to see you again,’ he said. But there was no resonance in his voice; the undertone of jovial thunders and jovial laughters was absent. He spoke without gusto. His eyes were without lustre, and bloodshot. He looked thin and grey.

‘How are you, father?’ Elinor was surprised and distressed. She had never seen her father like this before.

‘Not well,’ he answered, shaking his head, ‘not well. Something wrong with my insides.’ The old lion suddenly and recognizably roared. ‘Making us go through life with a barrow-full of tripes! I’ve always resented God’s practical jokes.’ The roar became plaintive. ‘I don’t know what’s happening to mine now. Something very unpleasant.’ It degenerated almost into a whine. ‘I feel wretched.’ Lengthily, the old man described his symptoms.

‘Have you seen a doctor?’ Elinor asked, when he had finished.

He shook his head. ‘Don’t believe in them. They never do one any good.’ The truth was that he had a superstitious terror of doctors. Birds of evil omen – he hated to see them in the house.

‘But you really ought.’ She tried to persuade him.

‘All right,’ he at last consented grumblingly. ‘Let the quacks come.’ But secretly he was rather relieved. He had been wanting to see the doctor for some time now; but his superstition had been stronger hitherto than his desire. The ill-

omened medicine man was now to come, but not on his invitation; on Elinor's. The responsibility was not his; not on him, therefore, would fall the bad luck. Old Bidlake's private religion was obscurely complicated.

They began to talk of other things. Now that he knew he could consult a doctor in safety, John Bidlake felt better and more cheerful.

'I'm worried about him,' said Elinor, as they drove away.

Philip nodded. 'Being seventy-three's no joke. He's begun to look his age.'

What a head! he was thinking. He wished he could paint. Literature couldn't render it. One could describe it, of course, down to the last wrinkle. But where would one be then? Nowhere. Descriptions are slow. A face is instantaneously perceived. A word, a single phrase – that was what one needed. 'The glory that was Greece, grown old.' That, for example, would give you something of the man. Only of course it wouldn't do. Quotations have something facetiously pedantic about them. 'A statue in parchment' would be better. 'The parchment statue of what had once been Achilles was sitting, crumpled, near the stove.' That was getting nearer the mark. No long-winded description. But for anyone who had ever seen a cast of the Discobolos, handled a vellum-bound book, heard of Achilles, John Bidlake was in that sentence visible. And for those who had never seen a Greek statue or read about Achilles in a book with a crinkly sheepskin cover? Well, presumably they could go to the devil.

'All the same,' he thought, 'it's too literary. Too much culture.'

Elinor broke the silence. 'I wonder how I shall find Everard, now that he's become such a great man.' With her mind's eye she saw the keen face, the huge but agile body. Swiftness and violence. And he was in love with her. Did she like the man? Or did she detest him?

'I wonder if he's started pinching people's ears, like Napoleon?' Philip laughed. 'Anyhow, it's only a matter of time.'

'All the same,' said Elinor, 'I like him.' Philip's mockery had answered her question for her.

'So do I. But mayn't I laugh at what I like?'

'You certainly laugh at me. Is that because you like me?'

He took her hand and kissed it. ‘I adore you, and I never laugh at you. I take you perfectly seriously.’

Elinor looked at him, unsmiling. ‘You make me desperate sometimes. What would you do, if I went off with another man? Would you care two pins?’

‘I should be perfectly wretched.’

‘Would you?’ She looked at him. Philip was smiling; he was a thousand miles away. ‘I’ve a good mind to make the experiment,’ she added, frowning. ‘But *would* you be wretched? I’d like to be certain before I began.’

‘And who’d be your fellow experimenter?’

‘Ah, that’s the trouble. Most other men are so impossible.’

‘What a compliment!’

‘But you’re impossible too, Phil. The most impossible of them all, really. And the worst of it is I love you, in spite of it. And you know it. Yes, and exploit it too.’ The cab drew up at the curb. She reached for her umbrella. ‘But you be careful,’ she went on, as she rose to her feet. ‘I’m not indefinitely exploitable. I won’t go on giving something for nothing for ever. One of these days I shall start looking for somebody else.’ She stepped out on to the pavement.

‘Why not try Everard,’ he chaffed, looking out at her through the window of the cab.

‘Perhaps I shall,’ she answered. ‘I know Everard would ask nothing better.’

Philip laughed and blew her a kiss. ‘Tell the man to drive to the Club,’ he said.

Everard kept her waiting nearly ten minutes. When she had finished re-powdering her face, Elinor wandered inquisitively about the room. The flowers were abominably arranged. And that cabinet full of old swords and daggers and inlaid pistols was hideous, like a thing in a museum; a monstrosity, but at the same time rather touchingly absurd. Everard had such a schoolboyish ambition to ride about on a horse and chop people’s heads off; the cabinet gave him away. So did that glass-topped table with the tray-full of coins and medals under the crystal lid. How proudly he had shown her his treasures! There was the Macedonian tetradrachm, with the head of Alexander the Great in the guise of

Hercules; the sestertius of 44 B.C. with the formidable profile of Caesar, and next to it Edward III's rose noble stamped with the ship that symbolized the beginning of England's power at sea. And there, on Pisanello's medal, was Sigismondo Malatesta, most beautiful of ruffians; and there was Queen Elizabeth in her ruff and Napoleon with laurels in his hair, and the Duke of Wellington. She smiled at them affectionately; they were old friends. The satisfactory thing about Everard, she reflected, was that you always knew where you were with him. He was always so definitely himself; he lived up to character. She opened the piano and played a couple of chords; out of tune, as usual. On the little table near the fireplace was a volume of Everard's latest Speeches and Addresses. She picked it up, she turned over the pages. 'The policy of the British Freemen,' she read, 'may be summarized as Socialism without Political Democracy, combined with Nationalism without insularity.' That sounded excellent. But if he had written 'political democracy without socialism combined with insularity without nationalism' she would probably have admired just as sincerely. These abstractions! she shook her head and sighed. 'I must be a fool,' she thought. But really they meant nothing to her. They were quite empty. Words, nothing more. She turned a page. 'The party system works well enough in cases where the parties are merely two groups of rival oligarchs, belonging to the same class and having fundamentally the same interests and ideals, competing with one another for power. But when parties become identified with classes and develop strict party principles, the system becomes an insanity. Because I sit on one side of the house and you sit on the other, I am compelled to believe in individualism to the exclusion of all state interference, you are compelled to believe in state interference to the exclusion of all individualism; I am compelled to believe in nationalism, even in economic nationalism (which is an imbecility), and you are compelled to believe in internationalism, even political internationalism (which is no less of an imbecility); I am compelled to believe in the dictatorship of the rich (to the exclusion of the intelligent), you are compelled to believe in the dictatorship of the poor (also to the exclusion of the intelligent). All this for the simple and

politically irrelevant reason that I am on the Right and you are on the Left. In our parliaments the claims of topography are stronger than those of sense. Such are the blessings of the modern party system. It is the aim of the British Freemen to abolish that system, along with the corrupt and inefficient parliamentarism which is its corollary.' That sounded all right, she thought; but she wondered, nevertheless, why people should bother about this sort of thing. Instead of just living. But apparently, if one were a man, one found just living dull. She reopened the book in the middle. 'Every English liberty has been paid for by a new slavery. The destruction of feudalism strengthened the Crown. At the Reformation, we disposed of papal infallibility, but we saddled ourselves with the divine right of kings. Cromwell smashed the divine right of kings, but imposed the tyranny of the landowners and the middle classes. The tyranny of the landowners and the middle classes is rapidly being destroyed, in order that we may have the dictatorship of the proletariat. A new infallibility, not of the Pope, but of the majority, has been propounded – an infallibility which we are compelled by law to believe in. The British Freemen are pledged to a new reformation and a new political revolution. We shall dispose of the dictatorship of the proletariat as our fathers disposed of the divine right of kings. We shall deny majority infallibility as they denied papal infallibility. The British Freemen stand for …' Elinor had some difficulty in turning the page. Stand for what? she wondered. For the dictatorship of Everard and the infallibility of Webley? She blew at the recalcitrant pages; they fluttered apart. '… for justice and liberty. Their policy is that the best men shall rule, whatever their origin. Careers, in a word, must be fully open to talents. That is justice. They demand that every problem shall be dealt with on its own merits, intelligently, without reference to traditional party prejudices or the worthless opinion of stupid majorities. That is liberty. Those who imagine that liberty is synonymous with universal suffrage …' A door banged; a loud voice resounded in the hall. There was a rush of feet on the stairs; the house shook. The door of the drawing-room burst open, as though a bomb had exploded on the outside. Everard Webley came in on a burst of loud apology and welcome.

‘How can I excuse myself?’ he cried, as he took her hands. ‘But if you knew what a whirl I live in! How marvellous it is to see you again! Not changed at all. As lovely as ever.’ He looked intently into her face. The same serene pale eyes, the same full and melancholy lips. ‘And looking so wonderfully well!’

She smiled back at him. His eyes were a very dark brown; from a little distance they seemed all pupil. Fine eyes, but rather disquieting, she found, in their intent, bright, watchful fixity. She looked into them a moment, then turned away. ‘You too,’ she said. ‘Just the same. But then I don’t know why we should be different.’ She glanced back into his face and found him still intently looking at her. ‘Ten months and travelling in the tropics don’t turn one into somebody else.’

Everard laughed. ‘Thank heaven for that!’ he said. ‘Let’s come down to lunch.’

‘And Philip?’ he asked, when the fish had been served. ‘Is he also the same as ever?’

‘A little more so, if possible.’

Everard nodded. ‘A little more so. Quite. One would expect it. Seeing blackamoors walking about without trousers must have made him still more sceptical about the eternal verities than he was.’

Elinor smiled, but at the same time was a little offended by his mockery. ‘And what’s been the effect on you of seeing so many Englishmen walking about in pea-green uniforms?’ she retorted.

Everard laughed. ‘Strengthened my belief in the eternal verities, of course.’

‘Of which you’re one?’

He nodded. ‘Of which, naturally, I’m one.’ They looked at one another, smiling. It was Elinor again who first averted her eyes.

‘Thanks for telling me.’ She kept up the note of irony. ‘I mightn’t have guessed by myself.’ There was a little silence.

‘Don’t imagine,’ he said at last in a tone that was no more bantering, but serious, ‘that you can make me lose my temper by telling me that I’ve got a swelled head.’ He spoke softly; but you were conscious of huge reserves of

power. ‘Other people might succeed perhaps. But then one doesn’t like to be bothered by the lower animals. One squashes them. But with fellow humans one discusses things rationally.’

‘I’m most relieved to hear it,’ laughed Elinor.

‘You think I’ve got a swelled head,’ he went on. ‘And I suppose it’s true in a way. But the trouble is, I know it’s justified – experimentally. Modesty’s harmful if it’s false. Milton said that “nothing profits more than self-esteem founded on just and right.” I know that mine is founded on just and right. I know, I’m absolutely convinced that I can do what I want to do. What’s the good of denying the knowledge? I’m going to be master, I’m going to impose my will. I have the determination and the courage. Very soon I shall have the organized strength. And then I shall take control. I know it; why should I pretend that I don’t?’ He leaned back in his chair and there was a long silence.

‘It’s absurd,’ Elinor was thinking, ‘it’s ridiculous to talk like that.’ It was the protest of her critical intellect against her feelings. For her feelings had been strangely moved. His – had carried her away. When he had said, ‘I’m going to be master,’ it was as though she had taken a gulp of mulled wine – such a warmth had suddenly tingled through her whole body. ‘It’s ridiculous,’ she inwardly repeated, trying to avenge herself on him for his easy conquest, trying to punish the traitors within her own soul who had so easily surrendered. But what had been done could not wholly be undone. The words might be ridiculous; but the fact remained that, while he was uttering them, she had thrilled with sudden admiration, with excitement, with a strange desire to exult and laugh aloud.

The servant changed the plates. They talked of indifferent matters – of her travels, of doings in London while she had been away, of common friends. The coffee was brought, they lit their cigarettes; there was a silence. How would it be broken? Elinor wondered apprehensively. Or rather did not wonder; for she knew and it was this prophetic knowledge that made her apprehensive. Perhaps she could forestall him by breaking the silence herself. Perhaps, if she rattled on, she could keep the conversation insignificant till it was time for her to go. But

there seemed suddenly to be nothing to say. She felt as though paralysed by the approach of the inevitable event. She could only sit and wait. And at last the inevitable duly happened.

‘Do you remember,’ he said slowly, without looking up, ‘what I told you before you went away?’

‘I thought we’d agreed not to talk about it again.’

He threw back his head with a little laugh. ‘Well, you thought wrong.’ He looked at her and saw in her eyes an expression of distress and anxiety, an appeal for mercy. But Everard was merciless. He planted his elbows on the table and leaned towards her. She dropped her eyes.

‘You said I hadn’t changed to look at,’ he said in his soft voice with its latencies of violence. ‘Well, my mind hasn’t changed either. It’s still the same, Elinor, still the same as it was when you went away. I love you just as much, Elinor. No, I love you more.’ Her hand lay limp on the table in front of her. He stretched out one of his and took it. ‘Elinor,’ he whispered.

She shook her head, without looking at him.

Softly and passionately he talked on. ‘You don’t know what love can be,’ he said. ‘You don’t know what I can give you. Love that’s desperate and mad, like a forlorn hope. And at the same time tender, like a mother’s love for a sick child. Love that’s violent and gentle, violent like a crime and as gentle as sleep.’

‘Words,’ Elinor was thinking, ‘absurd melodramatic words.’ But they moved her, as his boasting had moved her. ‘Please, Everard,’ she said aloud, ‘no more.’ She didn’t want to be moved. With an effort she held her glance steady while she looked into his face, into those bright and searching eyes. She essayed a laugh, she shook her head. ‘Because it’s impossible, and you know it.’

‘All I know,’ he said slowly, ’is that you’re afraid. Afraid of coming to life. Because you’ve been half dead all these years. You haven’t had a chance to come fully alive. And you know I can give it you. And you’re afraid, you’re afraid.’

‘What nonsense!’ she said. It was just ranting and melodrama.

‘And perhaps you’re right, in a way,’ he went on. ‘Being alive, really alive, isn’t entirely a joke. It’s dangerous. But by God,’ he added, and the latent violence in his soft voice suddenly broke out into ringing actuality, ‘it’s exciting.’

‘If you knew what a fright you gave me!’ she said. ‘Shouting like that!’ But it was not only a fright she had had. Her nerves and her very flesh still crept and quivered with the obscure and violent exultations which his voice had evoked in her. ‘It’s ridiculous,’ she assured herself. But it was as though she had heard the voice directly with her body. The echoes of it seemed to vibrate at her very midriff. ‘Ridiculous,’ she repeated. And then what was this love he talked about so thrillingly? Just an occasional brief violence in the intervals of business. He despised women, resented them because they wasted a man’s time and energy. She had often heard him say that he had no time for love-making. His advances were almost an insult – the propositions one makes to a woman of the streets.

‘Do be reasonable, Everard,’ she said.

Everard withdrew his hand from hers and, with a laugh, leaned back in his chair. ‘Very well,’ he answered. ‘For today.’

‘For every day.’ She felt profoundly relieved. ‘Besides,’ she added, quoting a phrase of his, with a little ironical smile, ‘you’re not a member of the leisured class. You’ve got more important things to do than make love.’

Everard looked at her for a little in silence and his face was grave with a kind of lowering thoughtfulness. More important things to do? It was true, of course. He was angry with himself for wanting so much to have her. Angry with Elinor for keeping him unsatisfied. ‘Shall we talk about Shakespeare?’ he asked sarcastically. ‘Or the musical glasses?’

The fare was three-and-six. Philip gave the driver two half-crowns and climbed the steps of the club’s pillared portico pursued by the sound of thanks. He made a habit of over-tipping. It was not out of ostentation or because he had asked, or meant to ask, special services. (Indeed, few men could have demanded less of their servants than did Philip, could have been more patient to put up with bad service, and more willing to excuse remissness.) His over-tipping was the

practical expression of a kind of remorseful and apologetic contempt. ‘My poor devil!’ the superfluous gratuity seemed to imply, ‘I’m sorry to be your superior.’ And perhaps also there was a shilling’s worth of apology for his very considerateness as an employer. For if he was unexacting in his demands, that was due as much to a dread and dislike of unnecessary human contacts as to consideration and kindness. From those who served him Philip demanded little, for the good reason that he wanted to have as little as possible to do with them. Their presence disturbed him. He did not like to have his privacy intruded upon by alien personalities. To be compelled to speak with them, to have to establish a direct contact – not of intelligences, but of wills, feelings, intuitions – with these intruders was always disagreeable to him. He avoided it as much as he could; and when contact was necessary, he did his best to dehumanize the relation. Philip’s generosity was in part a compensation for his inhuman kindness towards its recipients. It was conscience money.

The doors stood open; he entered. The hall was vast, dim, pillared and cool. Sir Francis Chantrey’s allegorical marble group of Science and Virtue subduing the Passions writhed with classical decorum in a niche on the stairs. He hung up his hat and went to the smoking-room to look at the papers and await the arrival of his guests. Spandrell was the first to arrive.

‘Tell me,’ said Philip, as soon as the greetings were over and the vermouth ordered, ‘tell me quickly, before he comes, what about my absurd young brother-in-law. What’s happening with him and Lucy Tantamount?’

Spandrell shrugged his shoulders. ‘What *does* usually happen on these occasions? And in any case, is this the place and time to go into details?’ He indicated the other occupants of the smoking-room. A cabinet minister, two judges and a bishop were within earshot.

Philip laughed. ‘But I only wanted to know how serious the affair really was, how long it’s likely to last …’

‘Very serious as far as Walter’s concerned. As for duration – who knows? But Lucy’s going abroad very soon.’

‘Thank heaven for small mercies! Ah, here you are!’ It was Walter. ‘And there’s Illidge.’ He waved his hand. The newcomers refused an aperitive. ‘Let’s come and eat at once, then,’ said Philip.

The dining-room at Philip’s club was enormous. A double row of stucco Corinthian pillars supported a gilded ceiling. From the pale chocolate-brown walls, the portraits of distinguished members, now deceased, glared down. Curtains of claret-coloured velvet were looped up at either side of the six windows, a claret-coloured carpet muffled the floor and in their claret-coloured liveries the waiters darted about almost invisibly, like leaf-insects in a forest.

‘I always like this room,’ said Spandrell as they entered. ‘It’s like a scene for Belshazzar’s feast.’

‘But a very Anglican Belshazzar,’ Walter qualified.

‘Gosh!’ exclaimed Illidge, who had been looking round. ‘This is the sort of thing that really does make me feel pleb-ish.’

Philip laughed, rather uncomfortably. Changing the subject, he pointed out the protectively coloured waiters. They proved the Darwinian hypothesis. ‘Survival of the fittest,’ he said as they sat down at their appointed table. ‘The men in other colours must have been killed off by infuriated members.’ One of the claret-coloured survivors brought the fish. They began to eat.

‘It’s curious,’ said Illidge, pursuing the train of thought suggested by his first impressions of the room, ‘it’s really extraordinary that I should be here at all. Sitting with you, at any rate, as a guest. For there wouldn’t have been anything so very surprising about my being here in one of these wine-coloured coats. That at least would have been in harmony with what the parsons would call “my station in life”.’ He uttered a brief resentful laugh. ‘But to be sitting with you – that’s really almost incredible. And it’s all due to the fact that a Manchester shopkeeper had a son with tendencies to scrofula. If Reggie Wright had been normally healthy, I’d probably be cobbling shoes in Lancashire. But luckily Reggie had tubercle bacilli in his lymph-system. The doctors prescribed a country life. His father took a cottage in our village for his wife and child, and Reggie went to the village school. But his father was ambitious for Reggie.

(What a disgusting little rat he was!)' Illidge remarked parenthetically. 'Wanted him to go to Manchester Grammar School, later on. With a scholarship. Paid our schoolmaster to give him special coaching. I was a bright boy; the master liked me. While he was coaching Reggie, he thought he might as well coach me. Gratis, what's more. Wouldn't let my mother pay a penny. Not that she could have done so very easily, poor woman. The time came, and it was I who got the scholarship. Reggie failed.' Illidge laughed. 'Miserable scrofulous little squid But I'm eternally grateful to him and the busy bacilli in his glands. But for them I'd be carrying on my uncle's cobbling business in a Lancashire village. And that's the sort of thing one's life hinges on – some absolutely absurd, million-to-one chance. An irrelevance, and your life's altered.'

'Not an irrelevance,' objected Spandrell. 'Your scholarship wasn't irrelevant; it was very much to the point, it was in harmony with you. Otherwise you wouldn't have won it, you wouldn't be here. I doubt if anything is really irrelevant. Everything that happens is intrinsically like the man it happens to.'

'That's a bit oracular, isn't it?' Philip objected. 'Perceiving events, men distort them – put it like that – so that what happens seems to be like themselves.'

Spandrell shrugged his shoulders. 'There may be that sort of distortion. But I believe that events come ready-made to fit the people they happen to.'

'What rot!' said Illidge, disgustedly.

Philip dissented more politely. 'But many people can be influenced by the same event in entirely different and characteristic ways.'

'I know,' Spandrell answered. 'But in some indescribable way the event's modified, qualitatively modified, so as to suit the character of each person involved in it. It's a great mystery and a paradox.'

'Not to say an absurdity and impossible,' put in Illidge.

'Absurd, then, and impossible,' Spandrell agreed. 'But all the same, I believe that's how it happens. Why should things be logically explainable?'

'Yes, why indeed?' Walter echoed.

‘Still,’ said Philip, ‘your providence that makes the same event qualitatively different for different people – isn’t that a bit thick?’

‘No thicker than our being here at all. No thicker than all this.’ With a wave of his hand he indicated the Belshazzaresque dining-room, the eaters, the plum-coloured waiters and the Perpetual Secretary of the British Academy, who happened at that moment to be entering the room with the Professor of Poetry at the University of Cambridge.

But Philip was argumentatively persistent. ‘But assuming, as the scientists do, that the simplest hypothesis is the best – though I could never for the life of me see what justification, beyond human ineptitude, they had for doing so …’

‘Hear, hear.’

‘What justification?’ repeated Illidge. ‘Only the justification of observed fact, that’s all. It happens to be found experimentally that nature does do things in the simplest way.’

‘Or else,’ said Spandrell, ‘that human beings understand only the simplest explanations. In practice, you couldn’t distinguish between those alternatives.’

‘But if a thing has a simple, natural explanation, it can’t at the same time have a complicated supernatural one.’

‘Why not?’ asked Spandrell. ‘You mayn’t be able to understand or measure the supernatural forces behind the superficially natural ones (whatever the difference between natural and supernatural may be). But that doesn’t prove they’re not there. You’re simply raising your stupidity to the rank of a general law.’

Philip took the opportunity to continue his argument. ‘But assuming, all the same,’ he broke in before Illidge could speak again, ‘that the simpler explanation is likely to be the truer – aren’t the facts more simply explained by saying it’s the individual, with his history and character, who distorts the event into his own likeness? We can see individuals, but we can’t see providence; we have to postulate it. Isn’t it best, if we can do without it, to omit the superfluous postulate?’

‘But *is* it superfluous?’ said Spandrell. ‘*Can* you cover the facts without it? I have my doubts. What about the malleable sort of people – and we’re all more or less malleable, we’re all more or less made as well as born? What about the people whose characters aren’t given but are formed, inexorably, by a series of events all of one type? A run of luck, if you like to call it that, or a run of bad luck; a run of purity or a run of impurity; a run of fine heroic chances or a run of ignoble drab ones. After the run has gone on long enough (and it’s astounding the way such runs persist), the character will be formed; and then, if you like to explain it that way, you can say that it’s the individual who distorts all that happens to him into his own likeness. But before he had a definite character to distort events into the likeness of – what then? Who decided the sort of things that should happen to him then?’

‘Who decides whether a penny shall come down heads or tails?’ asked Illidge contemptuously.

‘But why bring in pennies?’ Spandrel retorted. ‘Why bring in pennies, when we’re talking about human beings? Consider yourself. Do you *feel* like a penny when things happen to you?’

‘It doesn’t matter how I feel. Feelings have nothing to do with objective facts.’

‘But sensations have. Science is the rationalization of sense-perceptions. Why should one class of psychological intuitions be credited with scientific value and all others denied it? A direct intuition of providential action is just as likely to be a bit of information about objective facts as a direct intuition of blueness and hardness. And when things happen to one, one doesn’t feel like a penny. One feels that events are significant; that they’ve been arrranged. Particularly when they occur in series. Tails a hundred times in succession, shall we say?’

‘Give us the credit of coming down heads,’ said Philip laughing. ‘We’re the intelligentsia, remember.’

Spandrell frowned; he felt the frivolity as an irrelevance. The subject for him was a serious one. ‘When I think of myself,’ he said, ‘I feel sure that everything that has happened to me was somehow engineered in advance. As a young boy I

had a foretaste of what I might have grown up to be, but for events. Something entirely different from this actual Me.'

'A little angel, what?' said Illidge.

Spandrell ignored the interruption. 'But from the time that I was fifteen onwards, things began happening to me which were prophetically like what I am now.' He was silent.

'And so you grew a tail and hoofs instead of a halo and a pair of wings. A sad story. Has it ever struck you,' Illidge went on, turning towards Walter, 'you who are an expert on art, or at least ought to be – has it ever struck you that the paintings of angels are entirely incorrect and unscientific?' Walter shook his head. 'A seventy-kilogram man, if he developed wings, would have to develop colossal muscles to work them. And big flying muscles would mean a correspondingly large sternum, like a bird's. A ten-stone angel, if he wanted to fly as well as a duck, would have to have a breast-bone projecting at least four or five feet. Tell your father that, next time he wants to paint a picture of the Annunciation. All the existing Gabriels are really shockingly improbable.'

Spandrell, meanwhile, was thinking of those raptures among the mountains, those delicacies of feeling, those scruples and sensitivenesses and remorses of his boyhood; and how they were all – the repentance for a bad action no less than the piercing delight at the spectacle of a flower or a landscape – in some way bound up with his sentiment for his mother, somehow rooted and implied in it. He remembered that *Girls' School in Paris*, those erotic readings by flashlight under the sheets. The book had been written in the age when long black stockings and long black gloves had been the height of pornographic fashion, when 'kissing a man without a moustache was like eating an egg without salt'. The seductive and priapic major's moustaches had been long, curly and waxed. What shame he had felt, and what remorse! Struggled how hard, and prayed how earnestly for strength! And the god to whom he had prayed wore the likeness of his mother. To resist temptation was to be worthy of her. Succumbing, he betrayed her, he denied God. He had begun to triumph. And then, one morning,

out of the blue, came the news that she was going to marry Major Knoyle. Major Knoyle's moustaches were also curly.

'Augustine and the Calvinists were right,' he said aloud, breaking in on the discussion of Seraphim's breast-bones. 'Still harping?' said Illidge.

'God means to save some people and damn others.'

'Or rather he might do so if (*a*) he existed, (*b*) there were such a thing as salvation, and (*c*) …'

'When I think of the War,' Spandrell went on, interrupting him, 'what it might have been for me and what in fact it was …' He shrugged his shoulders. 'Yes, Augustine was right.'

'Well, I must say,' said Philip, 'I've always been very grateful to Augustine, or whoever else it may have been, for giving me a game leg. It prevented me from being a hero; but it also preserved me from becoming a corpse.'

Spandrell looked at him; the corners of his wide mouth ironically twitched. 'Your accident guaranteed you a quiet detached life. In other words, the event was like you. Just as the War, so far as I was concerned, was exactly like me. I'd been up at Oxford a year, when it began,' he went on.

'The dear old College, what?' said Illidge, who could never hear the name of one of the more ancient and expensive seats of learning mentioned without making some derisive comment.

'Three lively terms and two still more lively vacs – discovering alcohol and poker and the difference between women in the flesh and women in the pubescent imagination. Such an apocalypse, the first real woman!' he added parenthetically. 'And at the same time, such a revolting disappointment! So flat, in a way, after the super-heated fancy and the pornographic book.'

'Which is a tribute to art,' said Philip. 'As I've so often pointed out.' He smiled at Walter, who blushed, remembering what his brother-in-law had said about the dangers of trying to make love after high poetic models. 'We're brought up topsy-turvy,' Philip went on. 'Art before life; *Romeo and Juliet* and filthy stories before marriage or its equivalents. Hence all young modern literature is disillusioned. Inevitably. In the good old days poets began by losing

their virginity; and then, with a complete knowledge of the real thing and just where and how it was unpoetical, deliberately set to work to idealize and beautify it. We start with the poetical and proceed to the unpoetical. If boys and girls lost their virginities as early as they did in Shakespeare's day, there'd be a revival of the Elizabethan love lyric.'

'You may be right,' said Spandrell. 'All I know is that, when I discovered the reality, I found it disappointing – but attractive, all the same. Perhaps so attractive just because it was so disappointing. The heart's a curious sort of manure-heap; dung calls to dung, and the great charm of vice consists in its stupidity and sordidness. It attracts because it's so repellent. But repellent it always remains. And I remember when the War came, how exultantly glad I was to have a chance of getting out of the muck and doing something decent, for a change.'

'For King and Country!' mocked Illidge.

'Poor Rupert Brooke! One smiles now at that thing of his about honour having come back into the world again. Events have made it seem a bit comical.'

'No, no. At the time it was exactly what I felt myself.'

'Of course you did. Because you were what Brooke was – a spoilt and blasé member of the leisured class. You needed a new thrill, that was all. The War and that famous "honour" of yours provided it.'

Spandrell shrugged his shoulders. 'Explain it like that if you want. All I say is that in August 1914 I wanted to do something noble. I'd even have been quite pleased to get killed.'

'"Rather death than dishonour," what?'

'Yes, quite literally,' said Spandrell. 'For I can assure you that all the melodramas are perfectly realistic. There are certain occasions when people do say that sort of thing. The only defect of melodrama is that it leads you to believe that they say it all the time. They don't, unfortunately. But "rather death than dishonour" was exactly what I was thinking in August 1914. If the alternative to death was the stupid kind of life I'd been leading. I wanted to get killed.'

‘There speaks the gentleman of leisure again,’ said Illidge.

‘And then, just because I’d been brought up a good deal abroad and knew three foreign languages, because I had a mother who was too fond of me and a stepfather with military influence, I was transferred willy-nilly into the Intelligence. God was really bent on damning me.’

‘He was very kindly trying to save your life,’ said Philip.

‘But I didn’t want it saved. Not unless I could do something decent with it, something heroic for preference, or at least difficult and risky. Instead of which they put me on to liaison work and then to hunting spies. Of all the sordid and ignoble businesses …’

‘But after all the trenches weren’t so very romantic.’

‘No, but they were dangerous. Sitting in a trench, you needed courage and endurance. A spy catcher was perfectly safe and didn’t have to display any of the nobler virtues; while as to his opportunities for vice … Those towns behind the lines, and Paris, and the ports – whores and alcohol were their chief products.’

‘But after all,’ said Philip, ‘those are avoidable evils.’ Naturally cold, he found it easy to be reasonable.

‘Not avoidable by me,’ Spandrell answered. ‘Particularly in those circumstances. I’d wanted to do something decent, and I’d been prevented. So it became a kind of point of honour to do the opposite of what I’d desired. A point of honour – can you understand that?’

Philip shook his head. ‘A little too subtle for me.’

‘But just imagine yourself in the presence of a man you respect and like and admire more than you’ve ever admired and liked anyone before.’

Philip nodded. But in point of fact, he reflected, he had never deeply and whole-heartedly admired anyone. Theoretically, yes; but never in practice, never to the point of wanting to make himself a disciple, a follower. He had adopted other people’s opinions, even their modes of life – but always with the underlying conviction that they weren’t really his, that he could and certainly would abandon them as easily as he had taken them up. And whenever there had

seemed any risk of his being carried away, he had deliberately resisted, had fought or fled for his liberty.

‘You’re overcome with your feeling for him,’ Spandrell continued. ‘And you go towards him with outstretched hands, offering your friendship and devotion. His only response is to put his hands in his pockets and turn away. What would you do then?’

Philip laughed. ‘I should have to consult Vogue’s *Book of Etiquette*.’

‘You’d knock him down. At least that’s what I would do. It would be a point of honour. And the more you’d admired, the more violent the knock and the longer the subsequent dance on his carcase. That’s why the whores and the alcohol weren’t avoidable. On the contrary, it became a point of honour never to avoid them. That life in France was like the life I’d been leading before the War – only much nastier and stupider, and utterly unrelieved by any redeeming feature. And after a year of it, I was desperately wangling to cling to my dishonour and avoid death. Augustine was right, I tell you; we’re damned or saved in advance. The things that happen are a providential conspiracy.’

‘Providential balderdash!’ said Illidge; but in the silence that followed he thought again how extraordinary it was, how almost infinitely improbable that he should be sitting there, drinking claret, with the Perpetual Secretary of the British Academy two tables away and the second oldest Judge of the High Court just behind him. Twenty years before the odds against his being there under the gilded ceiling had been at the rate of several hundreds or thousands of millions to one. But there, all the same, he was. He took another draught of claret.

And Philip, meanwhile, was remembering that immense black horse, kicking, plunging, teeth bared and ears laid back; and how it suddenly started forward, dragging the carter along with it, and the rumble of the wheels; and, ‘Aie!’ his own scream; and how he shrank back against the steep bank, how he tried to climb, slipped, fell; and the appalling rush and trampling of the giant; and ‘Aie, aie!’ the huge shape between him and the sun, the great hoofs and suddenly an annihilating pain.

And through the same silence Walter was thinking of that afternoon when, for the first time, he entered Lucy Tantamount's drawing-room. 'Everything that happens is intrinsically like the man it happens to.'

'But what's her secret?' Marjorie asked. 'Why should he have gone mad about her? Because he has gone mad. Literally.'

'Isn't it rather an obvious secret?' said Elinor. What she found queer was not that Walter should have lost his head about Lucy, but that he should ever have seen anything attractive in poor Marjorie. 'After all,' she continued, 'Lucy's very amusing and alive. And besides,' she added, remembering Philip's exasperating comments on the dog they had run over at Bombay, 'she has a bad reputation.'

'But is that attractive? A bad reputation?' The tea-pot hung suspended over the cup as she asked.

'Of course. It means that the woman who enjoys it is accessible. No sugar, thanks.'

'But surely,' said Marjorie, handing her the cup, 'men don't want to share their mistress with other lovers.'

'Perhaps not. But the fact that a woman has had other lovers gives a man hope. "Where others have succeeded, I can succeed." That's the man's argument. And at the same time a bad reputation makes him immediately think of the woman in terms of love-making. It gives a twist to his imaginations about her. When you met Lola Montes, her reputation made you automatically think of bedrooms. You didn't think of bedrooms when you met Florence Nightingale. Only sickrooms. Which are rather different,' Elinor concluded.

There was a silence. It was horrid of her, Elinor was thinking, not to feel more sympathetic. But there it was; she didn't. She reminded herself of the abominable life the poor woman had had – first with her husband, and now with Walter. Really abominable. But those dreadful, dangling, sham jade earrings! And the voice, the earnest manner …

Marjorie looked up. 'But is it possible that men can be so easily taken in? By such a cheap bait? Men like Walter. Like *Walter*,' she insisted. 'Can men like

that be such … such …'

'Pigs?' suggested Elinor. 'Apparently they can. It seems odd, certainly.' Perhaps it would be better, she reflected, if Philip were rather more of a pig and less of a hermit crab. Pigs are human – all too much so, perhaps; but still human. Whereas hermit crabs are doing their best to be molluscs.

Marjorie shook her head and sighed. 'It's extraordinary,' she said with a conviction that struck Elinor as rather ludicrous. 'What sort of an opinion can she have of herself?' she wondered. But Marjorie's good opinion was not for herself so much as for virtue. She had been brought up to believe in the ugliness of vice and the animal part of human nature, the beauty of virtue and the spirit. And cold by nature, she had the cold woman's utter incomprehension of sensuality. That Walter should suddenly cease to be the Walter she had known and behave 'like a pig', as Elinor rather crudely put it, was to her really extraordinary, quite apart from any personal considerations of her own attractiveness.

'And then you must remember,' Elinor said aloud, 'Lucy has another advantage where men like Walter are concerned. She's one of those women who have the temperament of a man. Men can get pleasure out of casual encounters. Most women can't; they've got to be in love, more or less. They've got to be emotionally involved. All but a few of them. Lucy's one of the few. She has the masculine detachment. She can separate her appetite from the rest of her soul.'

'What a horror!' Marjorie shuddered.

Elinor observed the shudder and was annoyed by it into contradiction.

'Do you think so? It seems to me sometimes rather an enviable talent.' She laughed and Marjorie was duly shocked by her cynicism. 'For a boy with Walter's shyness and timidity,' she went on, 'there's something very exciting about that kind of bold temperament. It's the opposite of his. Reckless, without scruple, wilful, unconscientious. I can so well understand its going to his head.' She thought of Everard Webley. 'Force is always attractive,' she added. 'Particularly if one lacks it oneself, as Walter does. Lucy's obviously a force. You may not like that kind of force.' She herself didn't much like Webley's

energetic ambition. ‘But you can’t help admiring the force in itself. It’s like Niagara. Fine, even though you mayn’t want to be standing underneath. May I take another piece of bread and butter?’ She helped herself. Out of politeness Marjorie also took another slice. ‘Delicious brown bread,’ Elinor commented and wondered how Walter could have lived with anyone who crooked the little finger of the hand that held the tea-cup and who took such horribly small bites from a slice of bread and then chewed only with the front teeth, like a guinea-pig – as though the process of eating were an indelicate and rather disgusting affair.

‘But what do you think I ought to do?’ Marjorie brought herself finally to ask.

Elinor shrugged her shoulders. ‘What *can* you do, but hope he’ll get what he wants and soon be sick of it.’

It was obvious; but Marjorie thought her rather unfeeling, hard and cruel to have said it.

In London the Quarleses sketchily inhabited what had once been the last of a row of stables in a Belgravian mews. You passed under an archway. A cliff of cream-coloured stucco rose sheer on your left – windowless, for the Belgravians had declined to be aware of the squalid domesticity of their dependants. On the right stretched the low line of stables with the single storey of living rooms above, tenanted now by enormous Daimlers and the families of their chauffeurs. The mews ended in a wall, over the top of which you could see the waving plane-trees of Belgravian gardens. The Quarleses’ doorstep lay in the shadow of this wall. Set between the gardens and the sparsely inhabited mews, the little house was very quiet. The coming and going of limousines and the occasional yelling of a child were the only disturbances.

‘But fortunately,’ Philip had remarked, ‘the rich can afford to buy silent cars. And there’s something about internal combustion engines that makes for birth control. Who ever heard of a chauffeur with eight children?’ Coach-house and horse-boxes had been knocked together in the reconstruction of the stable, into a single spacious living-room. Two screens hinted at a division. Behind the screen on the right, as you entered, was the drawing-room end of the apartment – chairs and a sofa grouped around the fireplace. The screen on the left concealed the

dining-table and the entrance to a tiny kitchen. A little staircase slanted up across one of the walls, leading to the bedrooms. Yellow cretonnes mimicked the sunshine that never shone through the northward-looking windows. There were many books. Old Bidlake's portrait of Elinor as a young girl hung over the mantelpiece.

Philip was lying on the sofa, book in hand. 'Very remarkable,' he read, 'is Mr Tate Regan's account of pigmy parasitic males in three species of Cerativid Angler-fishes. In the Arctic *Ceratias holbolli* a female about eight inches in length carried on her ventral surface two males of about two-and-a-half inches. The snout and chin region of the dwarf male was permanently attached to a papilla of the female's skin, and the blood-vessels of the two were confluent. The male is without teeth; the mouth is useless; the alimentary canal is degenerate. In *Photocarynus spiniceps* the female, about two-and-a-half inches in length bore a male under half an inch long on the top of her head in front of her right eye. In *Edriolychnus schmidti* the dimensions were about the same as in the last case, and the female carried the pigmy male upside down on the inner surface of her gill-cover.'

Philip put down the book and feeling in his breast pocket pulled out his pocket diary and his fountain-pen. 'Female Angler-fishes,' he wrote, 'carry dwarf parasitic males attached to their bodies. Draw the obvious comparison, when my Walter rushes after his Lucy. What about a scene at an aquarium? They go in with a scientific friend who shows them the female Anglers and their husbands. The twilight, the fishes – perfect background.' He was just putting his diary away, when another thought occurred to him. He reopened it. 'Make it the aquarium at Monaco and describe Monte Carlo and the whole Riviera in terms of deep-sea monstrosity.' He lit a cigarette and went on with his book.

There was a rap at the door. He got up and opened; it was Elinor.

'What an afternoon!' She dropped into a chair.

'Well, what news of Marjorie?' he asked.

'No *news*,' she sighed, as she took off her hat. 'The poor creature's as dreary as ever. But I'm very sorry for her.'

‘What did you advise her to do?’

‘Nothing. What else could she do? And Walter?’ she asked in her turn. ‘Did you get a chance to be the heavy father?’

‘The middle-weight father, shall we say. I persuaded him to come down to Chamford with Marjorie.’

‘Did you? That was a real triumph.’

‘Not quite such a triumph as you think. I had no enemy to fight with. Lucy’s going to Paris next Saturday.’

‘Let’s hope she’ll stay there. Poor Walter!’

‘Yes, poor Walter. But I must tell you about Angler-fishes.’ He told her. ‘One of these days,’ he concluded, ‘I shall really have to write a modern Bestiary. Such moral lessons! But tell me, how was Everard? I quite forgot you’d seen him.’

‘You would have forgotten,’ she answered scornfully.

‘Would I? I don’t know why.’

‘No, you wouldn’t.’

‘I’m crushed,’ said Philip with a mock humility. There was a silence.

‘Everard’s in love with me,’ said Elinor at last without looking at her husband and in the flattest, most matter-of-fact of voices.

‘Is that news?’ asked Philip. ‘I thought he was an old admirer.’

‘But it’s serious,’ Elinor went on. ‘Very serious.’ She waited anxiously for his comment. It came, after a little pause.

‘That must be less amusing.’

Less amusing! Couldn’t he understand? After all, he wasn’t a fool. Or perhaps he did understand and was only pretending not to; perhaps he was secretly glad about Everard. Or was it just indifference that made him blind? Nobody understands what he does not feel. Philip couldn’t understand her because he didn’t feel as she felt. He was confident in the belief that other people were as reasonably lukewarm as he was himself. ‘But I like him,’ she said aloud in a last desperate attempt to provoke him into at least a semblance of caring. If only he’d show himself jealous, or sad, or angry, how happy she’d be, how

grateful! ‘Very much,’ she went on. ‘There’s something very attractive about him. That passionateness of his, that violence …’

Philip laughed. ‘Quite the irresistible cave-man, in fact.’

Elinor rose with a little sigh, picked up her hat and bag, and bending over her husband’s chair, kissed him on the forehead, as though she were saying good-bye; then turned away and still without a word went upstairs to her bedroom.

Philip picked up his abandoned book. ‘*Bonellia viridis*,’ he read, ’is a green worm, not uncommon in the Mediterranean. The female has a body about the size of a prune, bearing a string-like, terminally bifid, very contractile proboscis, which may be two feet long. But the male is microscopic and lives in what may be called the reproductive duct (modified nephridium) of the female. It has no mouth and depends on what it absorbs parasitically through its ciliated surfaces …’

Philip once more put down the book. He was wondering whether he oughtn’t to go upstairs and say something to Elinor. He was sure she’d never really care for Everard. But perhaps he oughtn’t to take it so much for granted. She had seemed rather upset. Perhaps she had expected him to say something – how much he cared for her, how wretched he’d be, how angry, if she were to stop caring for him. But these precisely were the almost unsayable things. In the end he decided not to go upstairs. He’d wait and see, he’d put it off to another time. He went on reading about *Bonellia viridis*.

CHAPTER XXII

FROM PHILIP QUARLES'S Notebook

TO-DAY, AT LUCY Tantamount's, I was the victim of a very odd association of ideas. Lucy, as usual, was the French tricolor; blue round the eyes, a scarlet mouth and the rest dead white against a background of shiny metal-black hair. I made some sort of a joke. She laughed, opening her mouth – and her tongue and gums were so much paler than the paint on her lips that they seemed (it gave me a queer creepy shock of astonished horror) quite bloodless and white by contrast. And then, without transition, I was standing in front of those sacred crocodiles in the palace gardens at Jaipur, and the Indian guide was throwing them bits of meat, and the inside of the animals' mouths was almost white, as though the mouths were lined with a slightly glacé cream-coloured kid. And that's how one's mind naturally works. And one has intellectual pretensions! Well, well. But what a windfall for my novel! I shall begin the book with it. My Walterish hero makes his Lucyish siren laugh and immediately (to his horror; but he goes on longing for her, with an added touch of perversity, all the same and perhaps all the more) sees those disgusting crocodiles he had been looking at in India a month before. In this way I strike the note of strangeness and fantasticality at once. Everything's incredible, if you can skin off the crust of obviousness our habits put on it. Every object and event contains within itself an infinity of depths within depths. Nothing's in the least like what it seems – or rather it's like several million other things at the same time. All India rushes like a cinema film through his head while she's laughing and showing – she the beloved, longed-for, lusted-after, beautiful one – those gruesomely bloodless crocodile's gums and palate.

The musicalization of fiction. Not in the symbolist way, by subordinating sense to sound. (*Pleuvent les bleus baisers des astres taciturnes*. Mere

glossolalia.) But on a large scale, in the construction. Meditate on Beethoven. The changes of moods, the abrupt transitions. (Majesty alternating with a joke, for example, in the first movement of the B flat major quartet. Comedy suddenly hinting at prodigious and tragic solemnities in the scherzo of the C sharp minor quartet.) More interesting still the modulations, not merely from one key to another, but from mood to mood. A theme is stated, then developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptibly deformed, until, though still recognizably the same, it has become quite different. In sets of variations the process is carried a step further. Those incredible Diabelli variations, for example. The whole range of thought and feeling, yet all in organic relation to a ridiculous little waltz tune. Get this into a novel. How? The abrupt transitions are easy enough. All you need is a sufficiency of characters and parallel, contrapuntal plots. While Jones is murdering a wife, Smith is wheeling the perambulator in the park. You alternate the themes. More interesting, the modulations and variations are also more difficult. A novelist modulates by reduplicating situations and characters. He shows several people falling in love, or dying, or praying in different ways – dissimilars solving the same problem. Or, *vice versa*, similar people confronted with dissimilar problems. In this way you can modulate through all the aspects of your theme, you can write variations in any number of different moods. Another way: The novelist can assume the god-like creative privilege and simply elect to consider the events of the story in their various aspects – emotional, scientific, economic, religious, metaphysical, *etc*. He will modulate from one to the other – as from the aesthetic to the physico-chemical aspect of things, from the religious to the physiological or financial. But perhaps this is a too tyrannical imposition of the author's will. Some people would think so. But need the author be so retiring? I think we're a bit too squeamish about these personal appearances nowadays.

Put a novelist into the novel. He justifies aesthetic generalizations, which may be interesting – at least to me. He also justifies experiment. Specimens of his work may illustrate other possible or impossible ways of telling a story. And if you have him telling parts of the same story as you are, you can make a variation

on the theme. But why draw the line at one novelist inside your novel? Why not a second inside his? And a third inside the novel of the second? And so on to infinity, like those advertisements of Quaker Oats where there's a Quaker holding a box of oats, on which is a picture of another Quaker holding another box of oats, on which etc., *etc.* At about the tenth remove you might have a novelist telling your story in algebraic symbols or in terms of variations in blood-pressure, pulse, secretion of ductless glands and reaction times.

Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied, as far as possible, in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece. In so far as theories are rationalizations of sentiments, instincts, dispositions of soul, this is feasible. The chief defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about people who have ideas to express – which excludes all but about .01 per cent of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books. But then I never pretended to be a congenital novelist.

The great defect of the novel of ideas is that it's a made-up affair. Necessarily; for people who can reel off neatly formulated notions aren't quite real; they're slightly monstrous. Living with monsters becomes rather tiresome in the long run.

The instinct of acquisitiveness has more perverts, I believe, than the instinct of sex. At any rate, people seem to me odder about money than about even their amours. Such amazing meannesses as one's always coming across, particularly among the rich! Such fantastic extravagances too. Both qualities; often, in the same person. And then the hoarders, the grubbers, the people who are entirely and almost unceasingly preoccupied with money. Nobody's unceasingly preoccupied with sex in the same way – I suppose because there's a physiological satisfaction possible in sexual matters, while there's none where money's concerned. When the body's satiated, the mind stops thinking about food or women. But the hunger for money and possessions is an almost purely mental thing. There's no physical satisfaction possible. That would account for the excesses and perversities of acquisitiveness. Our bodies almost compel the sexual instinct to behave in a normal fashion. Perversions must be violent before

they overrule the normal physiological tendencies. But where acquisitiveness is concerned, there's no regulating body, no lump of too too solid flesh to be pushed out of the grooves of physiological habit. The slightest tendency to perversion is at once made manifest. But perhaps the word 'perversion' is meaningless in this context. For perversion implies the existence of a norm from which it departs. What is the norm of acquisitiveness? One guesses vaguely at some golden mean; but is it in fact the true statistical norm? I should imagine myself rather 'underacquisitivized'; less interested in money and possessions in general than the average. Illidge would say it's entirely due to having been brought up in an atmosphere of easy money. It may be partly true. But not entirely, I think. Consider the many people born rich who are preoccupied with nothing but money making. No, my under-acquisitiveness is hereditary as well as acquired. In any case I find myself uninterested in possessions and rather unsympathetic with, and without understanding of, those who are. No predominantly acquisitive character has appeared in any of my stories. It is a defect; for acquisitives are obviously very common in real life. But I doubt if I could make such a character interesting – not being interested myself in the acquisitive passion. Balzac could; circumstances and heredity had made him passionately interested in money. But when one finds a thing boring, one's apt to be boring about it.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WRITING TABLE was under the window. Dimmed by the smoky air of Sheffield, a shaft of yellow, viscous-looking sunlight lit up a corner of the table and a patch of red and flowered carpet. Everard Webley was writing a letter. His pen rushed over the paper. Whatever he did was done with rapidity and decision.

'Dearest Elinor,' he wrote. '*De profundis clamavi*, from the depths of this repulsive hotel bedroom and the even lower depths of this political tour of the North, I call to you.' (He wrote his I's as though they were pillars – a strong straight shaft and two little transverse strokes at top and bottom for capital and base. The crosses on his t's were firm and uncompromising.) 'But I don't suppose you listen. I've always felt such sympathy for the savages who give their gods a good beating when they don't answer prayers or respond to sacrifices. England expects that every god this day will do his duty. And if he doesn't – well, so much the worse for him; he'll get a taste of the cat-o'-nine-tails. The modern worship of a remote Ineffable, whose acts one doesn't criticize, seems to me very unsatisfactory. What's the good of making a contract with somebody who can break it at will and against whom one has no redress? Women have gone the same way as the gods. They mayn't be questioned. You're not allowed to compel them to do their duty by their worshippers or fulfil their part in the natural contract between the sexes. I write, I implore. But, like the new-fangled god of modern philosophies and broad theologies, you don't listen. And one's not allowed to take reprisals; it's bad form to beat the defaulting god. It isn't done. All the same, I warn you: one of these days I'll try the good old methods. I'll do a slight Rape of the Sabines and then where will your ineffable remote superiority be? How I hate you really for compelling me to love you so much! It's such a damnable injustice – getting so much passion

and longing out of me and giving nothing in return. And you not here to receive the punishment you deserve! I have to take a vicarious revenge on the ruffians who disturb my meetings. I had a terrific battle last night. Howls, booing, organized singing of the International. But I fought them down. Literally at one moment. I had to give one of the ringleaders a black eye. Poor devil! He was only paying for your misdeeds. He was your scapegoat. For it was really you I was fighting. If it hadn't been for you I wouldn't have been half so savage. I probably wouldn't have won. So indirectly I owe you my victory. For which I'm duly grateful. But another time there won't be any Communists to vent my rage on. The next fight will be against the real enemy – against you. So be careful, my dear. I'll try to stop short of black eyes; but in the heat of the moment one never knows. But seriously, Elinor, seriously. Why are you so cold and aloof and dead? Why do you shut yourself off from me? I think of you so incessantly, so insistently. The thought of you is always there. It lies hidden, a latency, in the most unlikely things and places, ready at the command of some chance association to jump out at me from its ambush. Haunting, like a guilty conscience. If I …'

There was a knock at the door. It was Hugo Brockle who came in. Everard looked at his watch, then at Hugo. The expression on his face was menacing. 'Why are you so late?' he asked in a terrifyingly quiet voice.

Hugo blushed. 'I hadn't realized the time.' It was only too true. He had been lunching with the Upwiches, twenty miles away across the moors. Polly Logan was staying with them. After lunch old Upwich and the others had gone to play a round of golf on the private links in the park. Polly, providentially, didn't play. He had taken her for a walk through the woods along the river. How should he have realized the time? 'I'm sorry,' he added.

'I should hope you were,' said Everard and the latent violence broke out from under his quietness. 'I tell you to be back at five and it's now a quarter past six. When you're with me on British Freeman business you're under military discipline. My orders are to be obeyed, do you understand? Do you understand?' he insisted.

Sheepishly Hugo nodded. ‘Yes.’

‘And now go away and see that all the arrangements for this evening’s meeting have been properly made. And mind, this sort of thing mustn’t happen again. You won’t get off so lightly next time.’

Hugo shut the door after him. All the anger instantly vanished from Everard’s face. He believed in frightening his subordinates from time to time. Anger, he always found, was an excellent weapon, so long as you didn’t let yourself be mastered by it. He never did. Poor Hugo! he smiled to himself and went on with his letter. Ten minutes later Hugo came in to say that dinner was ready. The meeting was at eight; they had to eat very early.

‘But it’s so silly, all this political squabbling,’ said Rampion his voice shrill with exasperation, ‘so utterly silly. Bolsheviks and Fascists, Radicals and Conservatives, Communists and British Freeman – what the devil are they all fighting about? I’ll tell you. They’re fighting to decide whether we shall go to hell by communist express train or capitalist racing motor car, by individualist ‘bus or collectivist tram running on the rails of state control. The destination’s the same in every case. They’re all of them bound for hell, all headed for the same psychological impasse and the social collapse that results from psychological collapse. The only point of difference between them is: How shall we get there? It’s simply impossible for a man of sense to be interested in such disputes. For the man of sense the important thing is hell, not the means of transport to be employed in getting there. The question for the man of sense is: Do we or do we not want to go to hell? And his answer is: No, we don’t. And if that’s his answer, then he won’t have anything to do with any of the politicians. Because they all want to land us in hell. All, without exception. Lenin *and* Mussolini, MacDonald *and* Baldwin. All equally anxious to take us to hell and only squabbling about the means of taking us.’

‘Some of them may take us a little more slowly than others,’ suggested Philip.

Rampion shrugged his shoulders. ‘But so very little more slowly that it wouldn’t make any appreciable difference. They all believe in industrialism in one form or another, they all believe in Americanization. Think of the Bolshevist

ideal. America but much more so. America with government departments taking the place of trusts and state officials instead of rich men. And then the ideal of the rest of Europe. The same thing, only with the rich men preserved. Machinery and government officials there. Machinery and Alfred Mond or Henry Ford here. The machinery to take us to hell; the rich or the officials to drive it. You think one set may drive more cautiously than the other? Perhaps you're right. But I can't see that there's anything to choose between them. They're all equally in a hurry. In the name of science, progress and human happiness! Amen and step on the gas.'

Philip nodded. 'They do step on it all right,' he said. 'They get a move on. Progress. But as you say, it's probably in the direction of the bottomless pit.'

'And the only thing the reformers can find to talk about is the shape, colour and steering arrangements of the vehicle. Can't the imbeciles see that it's the direction that matters, that we're entirely on the wrong road and ought to go back – preferably on foot, without the stinking machine?'

'You may be right,' said Philip. 'But the trouble is that, given our existing world, you can't go back, you can't scrap the machine. That is, you can't do it unless you're prepared to kill off about half the human race. Industrialism made possible the doubling of the world's population in a hundred years. If you want to get rid of industrialism, you've got to get back to where you started. That's to say, you've got to slaughter half the existing number of men and women. Which might, *sub specie aeternitatis* or merely *historiae*, be an excellent thing. But hardly a matter of practical politics.'

'Not at the moment,' Rampion agreed. 'But the next war and the next revolution will make it only too practical.'

'Possibly. But one shouldn't count on wars and revolutions. Because, if you count on them happening, they certainly will happen.'

'They'll happen,' said Rampion, 'whether you count on them or not. Industrial progress means over-production, means the need for getting new markets, means international rivalry, means war. And mechanical progress means more specialization and standardization of work, means more ready-made

and unindividual amusements, means diminution of initiative and creativeness, means more intellectualism and the progressive atrophy of all the vital and fundamental things in human nature, means increased boredom and restlessness, means finally a kind of individual madness that can only result in social revolution. Count on them or not, wars and revolutions are inevitable, if things are allowed to go on as they are at present.'

'So the problem will solve itself,' said Philip.

'Only by destroying itself. When humanity's destroyed, obviously there'll be no more problem. But it seems a poor sort of solution. I believe there may be another, even within the framework of the present system. A temporary one while the system's being modified in the direction of a permanent solution. The root of the evil's in the individual psychology; so it's there, in the individual psychology, that you'd have to begin. The first step would be to make people live dualistically, in two compartments. In one compartment as industrialized workers, in the other as human beings. As idiots and machines for eight hours out of every twenty-four and real human beings for the rest.'

'Don't they do that already?'

'Of course they don't. They live as idiots and machines all the time, at work and in their leisure. Like idiots and machines, but imagining they're living like civilized humans, even like gods. The first thing to do is to make them admit that they are idiots and machines during working hours. "Our civilization being what it is," this is what you'll have to say to them, "you've got to spend eight hours out of every twenty-four as a mixture between an imbecile and a sewing machine. It's very disagreeable, I know. It's humiliating and disgusting. But there you are. You've got to do it; otherwise the whole fabric of our world will fall to bits and we'll all starve. Do the job, then, idiotically and mechanically; and spend your leisure hours in being a real complete man or woman, as the case may be. Don't mix the two lives together; keep the bulkheads watertight between them. The genuine human life in your leisure hours is the real thing. The other's just a dirty job that's got to be done. And never forget that it *is* dirty and, except in so far as it keeps you fed and society intact, utterly unimportant,

utterly irrelevant to the real human life. Don’t be deceived by the canting rogues who talk of the sanctity of labour and the Christian Service, that business men do their fellows. It’s all lies. Your work’s just a nasty, dirty job, made unfortunately necessary by the folly of your ancestors. They piled up a mountain of garbage and you’ve got to go on digging it away, for fear it might stink you to death, dig for dear life, while cursing the memory of the maniacs who made all the dirty work for you to do. But don’t try to cheer yourself up by pretending the nasty mechanical job is a noble one. It isn’t; and the only result of saying and believing that it is, will be to lower your humanity to the level of the dirty work. If you believe in business as Service and the sanctity of labour, you’ll merely turn yourself into a mechanical idiot for twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four. Admit it’s dirty, hold your nose and do it for eight hours and then concentrate on being a real human being in your leisure. A real complete human being. Not a newspaper reader, not a jazzer, not a radio fan. The industrialists who purvey standardized ready-made amusements to the masses are doing their best to make you as much of a mechanical imbecile in your leisure as in your hours of work. But don’t let them. Make the effort of being human.” That’s what you’ve got to say to people; that’s the lesson you’ve got to teach the young. You’ve got to persuade everybody that all this grand industrial civilization is just a bad smell and that the real, significant life can only be lived apart from it. It’ll be a very long time before decent living and industrial smell can be reconciled. Perhaps, indeed, they’re irreconcilable. It remains to be seen. In the meantime, at any rate, we must shovel the garbage and bear the smell stoically, and in the intervals try to lead the real human life.’

‘It’s a good programme,’ said Philip. ‘But I don’t see you winning many votes on it at the next election.’

‘That’s the trouble.’ Rampion frowned. ‘One would have them all against one. For the only thing they’re all agreed on – Tories, Liberals, Socialists, Bolsheviks – is the intrinsic excellence of the industrial stink and the necessity of standardizing and specializing every trace of genuine manhood or womanhood out of the human race. And we’re expected to take an interest in

politics. Well, well.' He shook his head. 'Let's think about something pleasanter. Look, I want to show you this picture.' He crossed the studio and pulled out one from a stack of canvases leaning against the wall. 'There,' he said when he had set it up on an easel. Seated on the crest of a grassy bank, where she formed the apex of the pyramidal composition, a naked woman was suckling a child. Below and in front of her to the left crouched a man, his bare back turned to the spectator, and in the corresponding position on the right stood a little boy. The crouching man was playing with a couple of tiny leopard cubs that occupied the centre of the picture, a little below the seated mother's feet; the little boy looked on. Close behind the woman and filling almost the whole of the upper part of the picture, stood a cow, its head slightly averted, ruminating. The woman's head and shoulder stood out pale against its dun flank.

'It's a picture I like particularly,' said Rampion after a little silence. 'The flesh is good. Don't you think? Has a bloom to it, a living quality. By God, how marvellously your father-in-law could paint flesh in the open air! Amazing! Nobody's done it better. Not even Renoir. I wish I had his gifts. But this is all right, you know,' he went on, turning back to the picture. 'Quite good, really. And there are other qualities. I feel I've managed to get the living relationship of the figures to each other and the rest of the world. The cow, for example. It's turned away, it's unaware of the human scene. But somehow you feel it's happily in touch with the humans in some milky, cud-chewing, bovine way. And the humans are in touch with it. And also in touch with the leopards, but in a quite different way – a way corresponding to the quick leopardy way the cubs are in touch with them. Yes, I like it.'

'So do I,' said Philip. 'It's something to put over against the industrial stink.' He laughed. 'You ought to paint a companion picture of life in the civilized world. The woman in a mackintosh, leaning against a giant Bovril bottle and feeding her baby with Glaxo. The bank covered with asphalt. The man dressed in a five-guinea suit for fifty shillings, squatting down to play with a wireless set. And the little boy, pimpled and with rickets, looking interestedly on.'

‘And the whole thing painted in the cubist manner,’ said Rampion; ‘so as to make quite sure that there should be no life in it whatever. Nothing like modern art for sterilizing the life out of things. Carbolic acid isn’t in it.’

CHAPTER XXIV

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMONG the Indians under the Maurya emperors continued, week after week, to necessitate Mr Quarles's attendance at the British Museum for at least two full days in every seven.

'I had no idyah,' he explained, 'that there was so much available matyahrial.'

Gladys, meanwhile, was discovering that she had made a mistake. The good time which she had looked forward to enjoying under Mr Quarles's protection was no better than the good time she might have enjoyed with 'boys' hardly richer than herself. Mr Quarles, it seemed, was not prepared to pay for the luxury of feeling superior. He wanted to be a great man, but for very little money. His excuse for the cheap restaurant and the cheap seats at the theatre was always the necessity of secrecy. It would never do for him to be seen by an acquaintance in Gladys's company; and since his acquaintances belonged to the world which is carried, replete, from the Berkeley to the stalls of the Gaiety, Mr Quarles and Gladys ate at a Corner House and looked at the play remotely from the Upper Circle. Such was the official explanation of the very unprincely quality of Sidney's treats. The real explanation was not the need for secrecy, but Sidney's native reluctance to part with hard cash. For though large sums meant little to him, small ones meant a great deal. When it was a matter of 'improving the estate', he would lightheartedly sign away hundreds, even thousands of pounds. But when it was a question of parting with two or three half-crowns to give his mistress a better seat at the play or a more palatable meal, a bunch of flowers or a box of chocolates, he became at once the most economical of men. His avarice was at the root of a certain curious puritanism, which tinged his opinions about almost all pleasures and amusements other than the strictly sexual. Dining with a seduced work-girl in the cheap obscurity of a Soho eating-hell, he would (with all the passion of a Milton reproving the sons of Belial, all the earnestness of a

Wordsworth advocating low living and high thinking) denounce the hoggish guzzlers at the Carlton, the gluttons at the Ritz, who in the midst of London's serried miseries would carelessly spend a farm labourer's monthly wage on *tête-à-tête* dinner. Thus his inexpensive preferences in the matter of restaurants and theatre seats were made to assume a high moral as well as a merely diplomatic character. Seduced by an ageing libertine, Mr Quarles's mistresses were surprised to find themselves dining with a Hebrew prophet, and taking their amusements with a disciple of Cato or of Calvin.

'One would think you were a blessed saint to hear you talk,' said Gladys sarcastically, when he had paused for breath in the midst of one of his Corner House denunciations of the extravagant and greedy. 'You!' Her laughter was mockingly savage.

Mr Quarles was disconcerted. He was used to being listened to respectfully, as an Olympian. Gladys's tone was ribald and rebellious; he didn't like it; it even alarmed him.

He raised his chin with dignity and fired a dropping shot of rebuke upon her head. 'It isn't a question of myah personalities,' he pronounced. 'It's a question of general principles.'

'I can't see any difference,' retorted Gladys, abolishing at one stroke all the solemn pretensions of all the philosophers and moralists, all the religious leaders and reformers and Utopia makers from the beginning of human time.

What exasperated Gladys most was the fact that even in the world of the Maison Lyons and cheap seats, Mr Quarles did not abandon his Olympian pretensions and his Olympian manners. His indignation, when one evening there was a crowd on the stairs leading to the Upper Circle was loud and righteous. 'A ryahl scandal!' he called it.

'One would think you'd taken the royal box,' said Gladys sarcastically.

And when, at a tea-shop, he complained that the one-and-four-penny slice of salmon tasted as though it had come from British Columbia rather than from Scotland, she advised him to write to *The Times* about it. The discovery tickled her fancy and, after that, she was always ironically telling him to write to *The*

Times. Did he complain, a noble and disillusioned philosopher, of the shallowness of politicians and the sordid triviality of political life, Gladys bade him write to *The Times*. He was eloquent about iniquitous Mrs Grundy and English illiberality; let him write to *The Times*. It was a ryahl scandal that neither Sir Edward Grey nor Lloyd George should have been able to speak French; *The Times* again was indicated. Mr Quarles was hurt and outraged. Nothing like this had ever happened before. In the company of his other mistresses the consciousness of his superiority had been a serene happiness. They had worshipped and admired; he had felt himself a god. And during the first days Gladys too had seemed a worshipper. But coming to pray, she had stayed to mock. His spiritual happiness was ruined. If it had not been for the bodily solace which the species in her provided, Mr Quarles would have quickly exhausted the subject of local self-government under the Mauryas and stayed at home. But there was in Gladys a more than usually large admixture of undifferentiated species. It was too much for Mr Quarles. The derisive individual in her pained and repelled him; but the attraction of what was generic, of the whole feminine species, the entire sex, was stronger than that individual repulsion. In spite of her mockery, Mr Quarles returned. The claims of the Indians became increasingly peremptory.

Realizing her power, Gladys began to withhold what he desired. Perhaps he could be blackmailed into the generosity which it was not in his nature to display spontaneously. Returning from a very inexpensive evening at Lyons' and the pictures, she pushed him angrily away when, in the taxi, he attempted the usual endearments.

'Can't you leave me in peace?' she snapped. And a moment later, 'Tell the driver to go to my place first and drop me.'

'But, my dyah child!' Mr Quarles protested. Hadn't she promised to come back with him?

'I've changed my mind. Tell the driver.'

The thought that, after three days of fervid anticipation, he would have to pass the evening in solitude was agonizing. 'But, Gladys, my darling …'

‘Tell the driver.’

‘But it’s ryahly too cruel; you’re *too* unkind.’

‘Better write to *The Times* about it,’ was all her answer. ‘I’ll tell the driver myself.’

After a night of insomnia and suffering Mr Quarles went out as soon as the shops were open and bought a fourteen-guinea wrist watch.

The advertisement was for a dentifrice. But as the picture represented two fox-trotting young people showing their teeth at one another in an amorous and pearly smile and as the word began with a D, little Phil unhesitatingly read ‘dancing’.

His father laughed. ‘You old humbug!’ he said. ‘I thought you said you could read.’

‘But they *are* dancing,’ the child protested.

‘Yes, but that isn’t what the word says. Try again.’ He pointed.

Little Phil glanced again at the impossible word and took a long look at the picture. But the fox-trotting couple gave him no help. ‘Dynamo,’ he said at last in desperation. It was the only other word beginning with a D that he could think of at the moment.

‘Or why not dinosaurus, while you’re about it?’ mocked his father. ‘Or dolicocephalous? Or dicotyledon?’ Little Phil was deeply offended; he could not bear to be laughed at. ‘Try again. Try to *read* it this time. Don’t guess.’

Little Phil turned his head away. ‘It bores me,’ he said. His vanity made him reluctant to attempt what he could not achieve successfully. Miss Fulkes, who believed in teaching by rational persuasion and with the reasoned consent of the taught (she was still very young), had lectured him on his own psychology, in the hope that, once he had realized his defects, he would mend them. ‘You’ve got the wrong sort of pride,’ she had told him. ‘You’re not ashamed of being a dunce and not knowing things. But you *are* ashamed of making mistakes. You’d rather not do a thing at all than do it badly. That’s quite wrong.’ Little Phil would nod his head and say ‘Yes, Miss Fulkes’ in the most rational and understanding way imaginable. But he continued to prefer doing things not at all

to doing them with difficulty and badly. ‘It bores me,’ he repeated. ‘But would you like me to make you a drawing?’ he suggested, turning back to his father with a captivating smile. He was always ready to draw; he drew well.

‘No thanks. I’d like you to read,’ said Philip.

‘But it bores me.’

‘Never mind. You must try.’

‘But I don’t want to try.’

‘But *I* want you to. Try.’

Little Phil burst into tears. Tears, he knew, were an irresistible weapon. And, sure enough, they proved their value yet once more.

Elinor looked up from where she was sitting, dissociated, book in hand, at the other end of the room. ‘Don’t make him cry,’ she called. ‘It’s so bad for him.’

Philip shrugged his shoulders. ‘If you imagine that’s the way to educate a child …’ he said with a bitterness that the occasion did not justify, a bitterness gradually accumulated during the past weeks of silence and distant hostility, of self-questioning and ineffective self-reproach, and finding now an almost irrelevant expression.

‘I don’t imagine anything,’ said Elinor in a cold hard voice. ‘I only know that I don’t want him to cry.’ Little Phil redoubled his noise. She called him to her and took him on to her knee.

‘But seeing that he has the misfortune to be an only child, one really ought to make the effort not to spoil him.’

Elinor pressed her cheek against the boy’s hair. ‘Seeing that he is an only child,’ she said, ‘I don’t see why he shouldn’t be treated as one.’

‘You’re hopeless,’ said Philip. ‘It’s high time we settled down, so that the boy can have a chance of being brought up rationally.’

‘And who’s going to do the rational upbringing?’ asked Elinor. ‘You?’ She laughed sarcastically. ‘At the end of a week you’d be so bored that you’d either commit suicide or take the first aeroplane to Paris and not come back for six months.’

‘Naughty father!’ put in the child.

Philip was offended, the more so as he was secretly aware that what she said was true. The ideal of a rustic domesticity, filled with small duties and casual human contacts, was one that, for him, precariously verged on absurdity. And though the idea of supervising little Phil's upbringing was interesting, he knew that the practice would be intolerably tedious. He remembered his own father's spasmodic essays at education. He'd be just the same. Which was precisely why Elinor had no business to say so.

'I'm not quite so childishly frivolous as you seem to imagine,' he said with dignity and bottled anger.

'On the contrary,' she answered, 'you're too adultly serious. You couldn't manage a child because you're not enough of a child yourself. You're like one of those dreadfully grown-up creatures in Shaw's *Methuselah*.'

'Naughty father!' repeated little Phil exasperatingly, like a parrot with only one phrase.

Philip's first impulse was to seize the child out of his mother's arms, smack him for his impertinence, drive him from the room and then turn on Elinor and violently 'have things out' with her. But a habit of gentlemanly self-control and a dread of scenes made him keep his temper. Instead of healthily breaking out he made an effort of will and more than ever tightly shut himself in. Preserving his dignity and his unexpressed grievance, he got up and walked through the French window into the garden. Elinor watched his departure. Her impulse was to run after him, take him by the hand and make peace. But she too checked herself. Philip limped away out of sight. The child continued to whimper. Elinor gave him a little shake.

'Stop, Phil,' she said almost angrily. 'That's enough now. Stop at once.'

The two doctors were examining what to an untrained eye might have seemed the photograph of a typhoon in the Gulf of Siam, of an explosion of black smoke in the midst of clouds, or merely of an ink stain.

'Particularly clear,' said the young radiographer. 'Look.' He pointed at the smoke cloud. 'There's a most obvious new growth there, at the pylorus.' He glanced with a certain enquiring deference at his distinguished colleague.

Sir Herbert nodded. ‘Obvious,’ he repeated. He had an oracular manner; what he said, you felt, was always and necessarily true.

‘It couldn’t very well be large. Not with the symptoms so far recorded. There’s been no vomiting yet.’

‘No vomiting?’ exclaimed the radiographer with an almost excessive display of interest and astonishment. ‘That would explain the smallness.’

‘The obstruction’s only slight.’

‘It would certainly be worth opening up the abdomen for exploration purposes.’

Sir Herbert made a little pouting grimace and dubiously shook his head. ‘One has to think of the patient’s age.’

‘Quite,’ the radiographer made haste to agree.

‘He’s older than he seems.’

‘Yes, yes. He certainly doesn’t look his age.’

‘Well, I must be going,’ said Sir Herbert.

The young radiographer darted to the door, handed him his hat and gloves, personally escorted him to the attendant Daimler. Returning to his desk he glanced again at the black-blotched, grey-cloudy photograph.

‘A really remarkably successful exposure,’ he said to himself with satisfaction and, turning the picture over, he wrote a few words in pencil on the back.

‘J. Bidlake, Esq. Stomach after barium meal. New growth at pylorus, small but v. clear. Photographed …’ He looked up at his calendar for the date, recorded it and put the photograph away in his file for future reference.

The old manservant announced the visitor and retired, closing the door of the studio behind him.

‘Well, John,’ said Lady Edward, advancing across the room. ‘How are you? I heard you’d been seedy. Nothing serious, I hope.’

John Bidlake did not even get up to receive her. From the depth of the armchair in which he had spent the day meditating in terror the themes of disease and death, he held out a hand.

‘But, my poor John!’ exclaimed Lady Edward sitting down beside him. ‘You look very low and wretched. What is it?’

John Bidlake shook his head. ‘God knows,’ he said. He had guessed, of course, from Sir Herbert’s vaguely professional words about ‘slight obstruction in the neighbourhood of the pylorus’, he *knew* what was the matter. Hadn’t his son Maurice died of the same thing five years ago, in California? He knew; but he would not speak his knowledge. Uttered, the worst was more frightful, more irrevocable. Besides, one should never formulate one’s knowledge of coming evil; for then fate would have, so to speak, a model on which to shape events. There was always a kind of impossible chance that, if one didn’t put one’s foreboding of evil into words, the evil wouldn’t happen. The mysteries of John Bidlake’s personal religion were quite as obscure and paradoxical as any of those in the ‘theolatrous’ orthodoxies which he liked to deride.

‘But haven’t you seen a doctor?’ Lady Edward’s tone was accusatory; she knew her friend’s strange prejudice against doctors.

‘Of course I have,’ he answered irritably, knowing that she knew. ‘Do you take me for a fool? But they’re all charlatans. I went to one with a knighthood. But do you suppose he knew anything more than the others? He just told me in quack jargon what I’d told him in plain words; that I’d got something wrong with my innards. Stupid rogue!’ His hatred of Sir Herbert and all doctors had momentarily revived him.

‘But he must have told you something,’ Lady Edward insisted.

The words brought him back to the thought of that ‘slight obstruction in the neighbourhood of the pylorus’, of disease and pain and the creeping approach of death. He relapsed into his old misery and terror. ‘Nothing of significance,’ he muttered, averting his face.

‘Then perhaps it’s nothing really serious,’ Lady Edward comfortingly suggested.

‘No, no!’ To the old man her lighthearted hopefulness seemed an outrage. He would not put himself into the power of fate by formulating the horrible truth. But at the same time he wanted to be treated as though the truth had been

formulated. Treated with a grave commiseration. ‘It’s bad. It’s very bad,’ he insisted.

He was thinking of death; death in the form of a new life growing and growing in his belly, like an embryo in a womb. The one thing fresh and active in his old body, the one thing exuberantly and increasingly alive was death.

All round, on the walls of the studio, hung fragmentary records of John Bidlake’s life. Two little landscapes painted in the Pincian Gardens in the days when Rome had only just ceased to be the Pope’s – a view of belfries and cupolas seen through a gap in the ilex trees, a pair of statues silhouetted against the sky. Next to them a satyr’s face, snubby and bearded – the portrait of Verlaine. A London street scene, full of hansoms and top hats and lifted skirts. Three sketches of the plump, bright-coloured Mary Betterton of thirty years ago. And Jenny, loveliest of models, lying naked on a long chair, with a window behind her, white clouds beyond, a bowl of roses on the window-sill and a great blue Persian cat stretched like a couchant lion, on Jenny’s white belly, dozing, its paws between her round and shallow breasts.

Lady Edward brightly changed the subject. ‘Lucy’s just flown off to Paris again,’ she began.

CHAPTER XXV

QUAI VOLTAIRE.

THE AIR WAS rough, I forgot the *Quies* for my ears and was in a Hell of Noise for 2½. hours. Feeling very tired and consequently, sweet Walter, rather sentimental and *sola sok* Why aren't you here to console me for the unbearable sadness of this lovely evening outside my window? The Louvre, the river, the green glass sky, the sunlight and those velvet shadows – they make me feel like bursting into tears. And not the scenery only. My arms in the sleeves of my dressing-gown, my hand writing, even my bare toes, now that I've dropped my slippers – terrible, terrible. And as for my face in the glass, and my shoulders, and the orange roses and the Chinese goldfish to match, and the Dufy curtains and all the rest – yes, *all*, because everything's equally beautiful and extraordinary, even the things that are dull and ugly – they're too much to be borne. Too much. I can't stand it and what's more, I won't. Interval of 5 minutes. That's why I've telephoned to René Tallemant to come and have a cocktail and take me out somewhere amusing, malgré my headache. I simply won't let myself be bullied by the universe. Do you know René? Rather a divine little man. But I wish it were you, all the same. Must go and put on a few clothes. A toi. LUCY.

QUAI VOLTAIRE.

Your letter was tiresome. Such yammering. And it isn't flattering to be called a poison in the blood. It's the equivalent of being called a stomach-ache. If you can't write more sensibly, don't write at all. Quant à moi, je m'amuse. Pas follement. But sufficiently, sufficiently. Theatres; mostly bad; but I like them; I'm still childish enough to feel involved in the imbecile plots. And buying clothes; such ravishments! I simply adored myself in Lanvin's looking-glasses. Looking at pictures, on the other hand, is an overrated sport. Not dancing,

though. There'd be some point, if life were always like dancing with a professional. But it ain't. And if it were, I dare say one would long to walk. In the evenings a little pub-crawling in Mont Parnasse through hordes of Americans, Poles, Esthonians, Rumanians, Finns, Letts, Lapps, Wends, etcetera, and all of them (God help us!) artists. Shall we found a league for the suppression of art? Paris makes me long to. Also I wish one met a few more heterosexuals for a change. I don't really like ni les tapettes ni les gousses. And since Proust and Gide made them fashionable one sees nothing else in this tiresome town. All my English respectability breaks out! Yours, L.

QUAI VOLTAIRE.

This time your letter was much better. (My only poem, and an accident at that. Rather good, all the same.) If only everybody would realize that being miserable or jolly about love is chiefly a matter of fashion. Being poetically miserable is an old fashion, and besides, the rhymes don't justify it in English. Cuore-dolore-amore; you can't escape it in Italian. Nor in German; herz must feel schmerz and liebe is inevitably full of triebe. But in English, no. There's no pain connected with English loves; only gloves and turtle doves. And the only things that, by the laws of poetry, can go straight to Englishmen's hearts are tarts and amorous arts. And I assure you, a man's much better occupied when he's thinking about those subjects than when he's telling himself how wretched he is, how jealous, how cruelly wronged and all the nonsensical rest of it. I wish that idiot René would understand this. But unfortunately cœr rhymes with douleur, and he's French. He's becoming almost as much of a bore as you were, my poor Walter. But I hope you're now a reformed character. I like you. L.

QUAI VOLTAIRE.

Suffering from a cold and intense boredom, only momentarily relieved by your letter. Paris is really terribly dreary. I have a good mind to fly away somewhere else, only I don't know where. Eileen came to see me to-day. She wants to leave Tim, because he will insist on her lying naked in bed while he sets fire to newspapers over her and lets the hot ashes fall on her body. Poor Tim! It seems unkind to deprive him of his simple pleasures. But Eileen's so

nervous of being grilled. She was furious with me for laughing and not being more sympathetic. I took it all as a joke. Which it is. A very mild one, however. For really, like the Queen, we are not amused. How I hate you for not being here to entertain me! One can forgive anything except absence. Unpardonably absent Walter, good-bye. I have an *envie* for you to-night, for your hands and your mouth. And you? Do you remember? L.

QUAI VOLTAIRE.

So Philip Quarles is going to settle in the country and be a mixture of Mrs Gaskell and Knut Hamsun. Well, well … But it's good that somebody should have illusions. At any rate he can't be more bored in his village than I am here. What straits one's reduced to! Last night I went with Tim and Eileen, who seems to be reconciled to the firework displays, to one of those places where you pay a hundred francs for the privilege of looking on at orgies (in masks – the one amusing feature) and if you want to, participating in them. Dim religious lights, little cubicles, divans, a great deal of what the French call *amour* promiscuously going on. Odd and grotesque, but terribly dreary and all so very *medical*. A sort of cross between very stupid clowns and an operating theatre. Tim and Eileen wanted me to stay. I told them I'd rather pay a visit to the Morgue, and left them there. I hope they amused themselves. But what a *bore*, what a hopeless unmitigated *bore*! I always thought Heliogabalus was such a very sophisticated young person. But now I've seen what amused him, I realize that he must have had a mind like a baby's, really infantile. I have the misfortune to be rather grown up about some things. I've a notion of going to Madrid next week. It'll be terrifically hot, of course. But I love the heat. I blossom in ovens. (Rather a significant intimation of my particular immortality, perhaps?) Why don't you come with me? Seriously, I mean. You could surely get away. Murder Burlap and come and be a tripper *à la* Maurice Banès. *Du sang, de la volupté et de la mort*. I feel rather bloodthirsty at the moment. Spain would suit me. Meanwhile, I'll make enquiries about the bullfighting season. The ring makes you sick; even my bloodthirstiness won't run to disembowelled cab-horses. But the spectators

are marvellous. Twenty thousand simultaneous sadistic *frissons*. Really remarkable. You simply must come, my sweet Walter. Say yes. I insist. LUCY.

QUAI VOLTAIRE.

It was too sweet of you, Walter darling, to do the impossible to come to Spain. I wish, for once, you hadn't taken my momentary *envie* quite so seriously. Madrid's off – for the present, at any rate. If it should come on again, I'll let you know at once. Meanwhile, Paris. Hastily. L.

CHAPTER XXVI

FROM PHILIP QUARLES'S Notebook

FOUND RAMPION GLOOMY and exasperated, I don't know what about, and consequently pessimistic – lyrically and violently so. 'I give the present dispensation ten years,' he said, after cataloguing the horrors of the modern world. 'After that the most appalling and sanguinary bust-up that's ever been.' And he prophesied class wars, wars between the continent, the final catastrophic crumbling of our already dreadfully unsteady society. 'Not a pleasant look-out for our children,' I said. 'We've at least had our thirty years or so. They'll only grow up to see the Last Judgment.' We oughtn't to have brought them into the world,' he answered. I mentioned those Melanesians that Rivers wrote about, who simply refused to breed any more after the white people had robbed them of their religion and their traditional civilization. 'The same thing's been happening in the West,' I said, 'but more slowly. No sudden race suicide, but gradual diminution of births. Gradual, because with us the poison of modern civilization has infected men so slowly. The thing has been going on for a long time; but we're only just beginning to realize that we're being poisoned. That's why we've only just begun to stop begetting children. The Melanesians had their souls suddenly murdered, so they couldn't help realizing what was being done to them. That's why they decided, almost from one day to another, that they wouldn't bother to keep the race alive any longer.' 'The poison isn't slow any more. It works faster and faster.' 'Like arsenic – the effects are cumulative. After a certain moment you begin to gallop towards death.' 'Breeding would have slowed down much more completely if people had realized. Well, well; our brats will have to look out for themselves now they're here.' 'And meanwhile,' I said, 'one's got to go on behaving as if our world were going on for ever – teaching them good manners and Latin grammar and all the rest. What do you do about

yours?' 'If I could have my way, I wouldn't teach them anything. Just turn them loose in the country, on a farm, and tell them to amuse themselves. And if they couldn't amuse themselves, I'd give them rat poison.' 'Rather Utopian as an educational programme, isn't it?' 'I know. They've got to be scholars and gentlemen, damn them! Twenty years ago, I'd have objected to the gentility. I'd have brought them up as peasants. But the working classes are just as bad as the others nowadays. Just rather bad imitations of the bourgeoisie, a little worse than the original in some ways. So it's as gentlemen my boys are being brought up after all. *And* scholars. What an imbecility!' He complained to me that both his children have a passion for machinery – motor cars, trains, aeroplanes, radios. 'It's an infection, like smallpox. The love of death's in the air. They breathe it and get infected. I try to persuade them to like something else. But they won't have it. Machinery's the only thing for them. They're infected with the love of death. It's as though the young were absolutely determined to bring the world to an end – mechanize it first into madness, then into sheer murder. Well, let them if they want to, the stupid little devils! But it's humiliating, it's horribly humiliating that human beings should have made such a devilish mess of things. Life could have been so beautiful, if they'd cared to make it so. Yes, and it *was* beautiful once, I believe. Now it's just an insanity; it's just death violently galvanized, twitching about and making a hellish hullabaloo to persuade itself that it isn't really death, but the most exuberant sort of life. Think of New York, for example; think of Berlin! God! Well, let them go to hell if they want to. I don't care.' But the trouble is that he does care.

Since reading Alverdes and Wheeler I have quite decided that my novelist must be an amateur zoologist. Or, better still, a professional zoologist who is writing a novel in his spare time. His approach will be strictly biological. He will be constantly passing from the termitary to the drawing-room and the factory, and back again. He will illustrate human vices by those of the ants, which neglect their young for the sake of the intoxicating liquor exuded by the parasites that invade their nests. His hero and heroine will spend their honeymoon by a lake, where the grebes and ducks illustrate all the aspects of courtship and

matrimony. Observing the habitual and almost sacred ‘pecking order’ which prevails among the hens in his poultry yard – hen A pecking hen B, but not being pecked by it, hen B pecking hen C and so forth – the politician will meditate on the Catholic hierarchy and Fascism. The mass of intricately copulating snakes will remind the libertine of his orgies. (I can visualize quite a good scene with a kind of Spandrell drawing the moral, to an innocent and idealistic young woman, of a serpents’ petting party.) Nationalism and the middle classes’ religious love of property will be illustrated by the male warbler’s passionate and ferocious defence of his chosen territory. And so on. Something queer and quite amusing could be made out of this.

One of the hardest things to remember is that man’s merit in one sphere is no guarantee of his merit in another. Newton’s mathematics don’t prove his theology. Faraday was right about electricity, but not about Sandemanism. Plato wrote marvellously well, and that’s why people still go on believing in his pernicious philosophy. Tolstoy was an excellent novelist; but that’s no reason for regarding his ideas about morality as anything but detestable, or for feeling anything but contempt for his aesthetics, his sociology and his religion. In the case of scientists and philosophers this ineptitude outside their own line of business isn’t surprising. Indeed, it’s almost inevitable. For it’s obvious that excessive development of the purely mental functions leads to atrophy of all the rest. Hence the notorious infantility of professors and the ludicrous simplicity of the solutions they offer for the problems of life. The same is true of the specialists in spirituality. The profound silliness of saintly people; their childishness. But in an artist there’s less specialization, less one-sided development; consequently the artist ought to be sounder right through than the lop-sided man of science; he oughtn’t to have the blind spots and the imbecilities of the philosophers and saints. That’s why a man like Tolstoy is so specially unforgivable. Instinctively you trust him more than you would trust an intellectual or a spiritual specialist. And there he goes perverting all his deepest instincts and being just as idiotic and pernicious as St Francis of Assisi, or as Kant the moralist (oh, those categorical imperatives! and then the fact that the

only thing the old gentleman felt at all deeply about was crystallized fruit!), or Newton the theologian. It puts one on one's guard, even against those one thinks are probably in the right. Such as Rampion, for example. An extraordinary artist. But right in his views about the world? Alas, it doesn't follow from the excellence of his painting and writing. But two things give me confidence in his opinions about the problems of living. The first is that he himself lives in a more satisfactory way than anyone I know. He lives more satisfactorily, because he lives more realistically than other people. Rampion, it seems to me, takes into account all the facts (whereas other people hide from them, or try to pretend that the ones they find unpleasant don't or shouldn't exist), and then proceeds to make his way of living fit the facts, and doesn't try to compel the facts to fit in with a preconceived idea of the right way of living (like these imbecile Christians and intellectuals and moralists and efficient business men). The second thing which gives me confidence in his judgment is that so many of his opinions agree with mine, which, apart from all questions of vanity, is a good sign, because we start from such distant points, from opposite poles in fact. Opinions on which two opponents agree (for that's what essentially, and to start with, we are: opponents) have a fair chance of being right. The chief difference between us, alas, is that his opinions are lived and mine, in the main, only thought. Like him, I mistrust intellectualism, but intellectually I disbelieve in the adequacy of any scientific or philosophical theory, any abstract moral principle, but on scientific, philosophical and abstract-moral grounds. The problem for me is to transform a detached intellectual scepticism into a way of harmonious all-round living.

The course of every intellectual, if he pursues his journey long and unflinchingly enough, ends in the obvious, from which the non-intellectuals have never stirred. The theme was developed by Burlap in one of those squelchy emetic articles of his. And there's a good deal of truth in it, in spite of Burlap. (Here we are, back again among the personalities. The thoroughly contemptible man may have valuable opinions, just as the in some ways admirable man can have detestable opinions. And I suppose, parenthetically, that I belong to the first

class – though not so completely, I hope, as Burlap and in a different way.) Many intellectuals, of course, don't get far enough to reach the obvious again. They remain stuck in a pathetic belief in rationalism and the absolute supremacy of mental values and the entirely conscious will. You've got to go further than the nineteenth-century fellows, for example; as far at least as Protagoras and Pyrrho, before you get back to the obvious in which the non-intellectuals have always remained. And one must hasten to make it clear that these non-intellectuals aren't the modern canaille who read the picture papers and listenin and jazz and are preoccupied with making money and having the awful modern 'good time'. No, no; one isn't paying a compliment to the hard-headed business man or the low-brow. For, in spite of their stupidity and tastelessness and vulgarity and infantility (or rather because of all these defects), they aren't the non-intellectuals I'm talking about. They take the main intellectualist axiom for granted – that there's an intrinsic superiority in mental, conscious, voluntary life over physical, intuitive, instinctive, emotional life. The whole of modern civilization is based on the idea that the specialized function which gives a man his place in society is more important than the whole man, or rather *is* the whole man, all the rest being irrelevant or even (since the physical, intuitive, instinctive and emotional part of man doesn't contribute appreciably to making money or getting on in an industrialized world) positively harmful and detestable. The low-brow of our modern industrialized society has all the defects of the intellectual and none of his redeeming qualities. The non-intellectuals I'm thinking of are very different beings. One might still find a few of them in Italy (though Fascism has probably turned them all into bad imitations of Americans and Prussians by this time); a few perhaps in Spain, in Greece, in Provence. Not elsewhere in modern Europe. There were probably quite a lot of them three thousand years ago. But the combined efforts of Plato and Aristotle, Jesus, Newton and big business have turned their descendants into the modern bourgeoisie and proletariat. The obvious that the intellectual gets back to, if he goes far enough, isn't of course the same as the obvious of the non-intellectuals. For their obvious is life itself and his recovered obvious is only the idea of that

life. Not many can put flesh and blood on the idea and turn it into reality. The intellectuals who, like Rampion, don't have to return to the obvious, but have always believed in it and lived it, while at the same time leading the life of the spirit, are rarer still.

Being with Rampion rather depresses me; for he makes me see what a great gulf separates the knowledge of the obvious from the actual living of it. And oh, the difficulties of crossing that gulf! I perceive now that the real charm of the intellectual life – the life devoted to erudition, to scientific research, to philosophy, to aesthetics, to criticism – is its easiness. It's the substitution of simple intellectual schemata for the complexities of reality; of still and formal death for the bewildering movements of life. It's incomparably easier to know a lot, say, about the history of art and to have profound ideas about metaphysics and sociology, than to know personally and intuitively a lot about one's fellows and to have satisfactory relations with one's friends and lovers, one's wife and children. Living's much more difficult than Sanskrit or chemistry or economics. The intellectual life is child's play; which is why intellectuals tend to become children – and then imbeciles and finally, as the political and industrial history of the last few centuries clearly demonstrates, homicidal lunatics and wild beasts. The repressed functions don't die; they deteriorate, they fester, they revert to primitiveness. But meanwhile it's much easier to be an intellectual child or lunatic or beast than a harmonious adult man. That's why (among other reasons) there's such a demand for higher education. The rush to books and universities is like the rush to the public-house. People want to drown their realization of the difficulties of living properly in this grotesque contemporary world, they want to forget their own deplorable inefficiency as artists in life. Some drown their sorrows in alcohol, but still more drown them in books and artistic dilettantism; some try to forget themselves in fornication, dancing, movies, listening-in, others in lectures and scientific hobbies. The books and lectures are better sorrow-drowners than drink and fornication; they leave no headache, none of that despairing *post coitum triste* feeling. Till quite recently, I must confess, I took learning and philosophy and science – all the activities that are

magniloquently lumped under the title of ‘The Search for Truth’ – very seriously. I regarded the Search for Truth as the highest of human tasks and the Searchers as the noblest of men. But in the last year or so I have begun to see that this famous Search for Truth is just an amusement, a distraction like any other, a rather refined and elaborate substitute for genuine living; and that Truth-Searchers become just as silly, infantile and corrupt in their way as the boozers, the pure aesthetes, the business men, the Good-Timers in theirs. I also perceived that the pursuit of Truth is just a polite name for the intellectual’s favourite pastime of substituting simple and therefore false abstractions for the living complexities of reality. But seeking Truth is much easier than learning the art of integral living (in which, of course, Truth-Seeking will take its due and proportionate place along with the other amusements, like skittles and mountain-climbing). Which explains, though it doesn’t justify, my continued and excessive indulgence in the vices of informative reading and abstract generalization. Shall I ever have the strength of mind to break myself of these indolent habits of intellectualism and devote my energies to the more serious and difficult task of living integrally? And even if I did try to break these habits, shouldn’t I find that heredity was at the bottom of them and that I was congenitally incapable of living wholly and harmoniously?

CHAPTER XXVII

JOHN BIDLAKE AND his third wife had never definitely or officially parted company. They simply didn't see one another very often, that was all. The arrangement suited John very well. He hated everything in the nature of a fuss, and he was the enemy of every definite and irrevocable contract. Any arrangement that bound him down, that imposed responsibilities and kept him in mind of duties, was intolerable to him. 'God knows what I should have done,' he used to say, 'if I'd had to go to an office every day, or get work done by a certain date. I think I should have run amok after a few months of it.' Of marriage he had always consistently disapproved. Unfortunately, however, he could not have all the women he wanted without marriage. He had had to enter into no less than three of what he called, in Ciceronian language, 'those inopportune and obscene compacts'. The idea of divorce or an official separation was hardly less disagreeable to him than that of marriage; it was too definite, it committed you. Why not leave things to settle themselves, instead of trying to give an arbitrary shape to them? The ideal was to live, emotionally and socially speaking, from hand to mouth – without plans, without a status, in good company of one's own daily choosing, not the choosing of others or of some dead self. 'Sleeping around' – that was how he had heard a young American girl describe the amorous side of the ideal life, as lived in Hollywood. Its other aspects might be lumped under the head of 'waking around'. The unideal life, the life which John Bidlake had always refused to lead, was that which consisted of waking and sleeping not 'around', but definitely here or there, day after day, according to a fixed foreseeable schedule that only death, or at the least the act of God or the king's enemies, could alter.

With his third wife John Bidlake's relations were, and had been for years, most satisfyingly indefinite. They did not live together, but they were not

separated. They rarely communicated, but they had never quarrelled. John had been sleeping and waking ‘around’ for upwards of twenty years, and yet they met, whenever they *did* meet, on friendly terms; and if ever he desired to refresh his memories of the landscape of the northern Chilterns, his arrival at Gattenden was accepted without comment, as though it were the most natural thing in the world. The arrangement entirely suited John Bidlake; and, to do him justice, he was grateful to his wife for making it possible. He refrained, however, from expressing his gratitude; for to have done so would have been to comment on the arrangement; and a comment would have brought a touch of destructive definition into a situation whose fragile excellence consisted precisely in its virgin and beautifully unsullied vagueness. Few women, as her husband gratefully recognized, would have been willing or even able to preserve the indefiniteness of the situations so chronically inviolate as Janet Bidlake. Another wife would have demanded explanations, would have wanted to know where she stood, would have offered the irrevocable choice of peace or war, life in common or separation. But Mrs Bidlake had permitted her husband to fade out of their married life without a quarrel, with hardly a word. And his brief spasmodic re-entries were accepted by her with as little comment. She had been from childhood more at home in the fictitious world of her invention than in the real. As a little girl she had had an imaginary sister who lived in the signal-box by the level crossing. Between the ages of ten and thirteen, her inability to distinguish between the testimony of her senses and that of her fancy had often resulted in her being punished for lying. Pictures and books gave a new turn to her imagining, which became less personal and more classically artistic, literary and speculative. From sixteen onwards she was an inhabitant of the country of art and letters and was little more than a reluctant stranger in mere England. It was because she had imagined John Bidlake a spiritual compatriot that she had fallen in love with him – artistically, poetically in love – and consented to become his wife. Her parents, who considered him only as a fellow-subject of the Queen and attached more importance, in the circumstances, to his career as a husband than as an artist, did their best to dissuade her. But Janet was of age and

had the obstinacy of those who can simply retire from the plane on which the argument is taking place, leaving the opponent to waste his energy on a mere untenanted body. She ended by doing what she wanted. When she discovered, as she discovered only too soon, that there was very little connection between the admirable artist she had loved and the husband she had married, Janet Bidlake was restrained by a very natural pride from complaining. She had no wish to give her relations the pleasure of saying, 'I told you so.' John slept and woke 'around', faded more and more completely out of conjugality. She held her peace and herself retired for consolation into those regions of artistic and literary fancy, where she was native and felt most at home. A private income, supplemented by the irregular and fluctuating contributions which John Bidlake made whenever he remembered or felt he could afford to support a wife and family, allowed her to make a habit of this foreign travel of the imagination. Elinor was born a year after their marriage. Four years later an ulcerated stomach brought John Bidlake home, a temporarily reformed character, to be nursed. Walter was the result of his still domestic convalescence. The ulcers healed, John Bidlake faded away again. Nurses and governesses looked after the children. Mrs Bidlake superintended their upbringing dimly and as though from a distance. From time to time she swooped across the border dividing her private country from the world of common fact; and her interferences with the quotidian order of things had always a certain disconcerting and almost supernatural quality. Incalculable things were liable to happen whenever she descended, a being from another plane and judging events by other standards than those of the common world, into the midst of the children's educational routine. Once, for example, she dismissed a governess because she had heard her playing Dan Leno's song about the Wasp and the Hard-boiled Egg on the schoolroom piano. She was a good girl, taught well and supported a paralytic father. But great artistic principles were at stake. Elinor's musical taste might be irretrievably ruined (incidentally Elinor resembled her father in detesting music); and the fact that she was very fond of Miss Dempster made the danger of contamination even greater. Mrs Bidlake was firm. 'The Wasp and the Hard-boiled Egg' could not

be permitted. Miss Dempster was sent away. When he heard the news, her old father had another stroke and was picked up blind in one eye and unable to speak. But Mrs Bidlake's returns from imaginative travel were generally less serious in their results. When she interfered with the practical business of her children's upbringing, it was usually only to insist that they should read classical authors usually considered incomprehensible or unsuitable for the very young. Children, it was her theory, should be brought up only with the very best in the way of philosophy and the arts. Elinor had had *Hamlet* read to her when she was three, her picture-books were reproductions of Giotto and Rubens. She had been taught French out of *Candide*, had been given *Tristram Shandy* and Bishop Berkeley's *Theory of Vision* when she was seven, Spinoza's *Ethics*, Goya's etchings and, as a German textbook, *Also sprach Zarathustra* when she was nine. The result of this premature introduction to the best philosophy was to produce in Elinor that slightly amused contempt for the grand abstractions and high-faluting idealisms, which had come to be so characteristic of her. Brought up at the same time on the unexpurgated classics, she had acquired in childhood a complete theoretical knowledge of all those matters which it is thought least suitable for the young to know. This knowledge had reinforced rather than tempered the coldness and practical incuriosity about all amorous matters which were natural to her; and she had grown up in a state of well-informed and superficially cynical innocence, like one of those Shakespearean heroines, whose scientific and Rabelaisian speech accompanies actions of the most delicately virtuous refinement. Mrs Bidlake was a little distressed by Elinor's irreverent attitude towards her cherished fancies; but, wise in her way, she did not comment, did not try to reform, only ignored and retired, as she had ignored her husband's shortcomings, had retired from the realization of them into the happier realms of art and imagination. There can be no cancellation of accomplished facts; but for practical purposes a conspiracy of silence is almost as effective as cancellation. Unmentioned, what is can become as though it were not. When John Bidlake arrived at Gattenden, a sick man made sicker by dejection, terror and an all-absorbing self-pity, Mrs Bidlake passed over in silence the fact, upon

which she might so easily have commented: that he only came to her when he needed a nurse. His room was made ready, he settled in. It was as though he had never been away. In the privacy of the kitchen the housemaids grumbled a little at the extra work, while Mrs Inman sighed and Dobbs was massively and Anglicanly indignant over old Mr Bidlake's treatment of his wife. At the same time all felt a kind of gloating pity for the old man. His disease and its symptoms were talked of in lowered voices, religiously. Aloud, the servants might grumble and disapprove. But secretly they were all rather pleased. John Bidlake's arrival broke the daily monotony, and the fact that he was going to die made them all feel somehow more important. To the domesticities of Gattenden his approaching death gave a new significance. That future event was the sun round which the souls of the household now meaningfully and almost stealthily revolved. They might grumble and disapprove, but they looked after him solicitously. In an obscure way they were grateful to him. Dying, he was quickening their life.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WITH MOLLY D'EXERGILLOD everything had to be articulate, formulated, expressed. The whole of experience was, for her, only the raw material out of which an active mind could manufacture words. Ironstone was of no use to man until he learnt to smelt it and hammer out the pure metal into tools and swords. For Molly, the raw facts of living, the sensations, the feelings, the thoughts and recollections, were as uninteresting in themselves as so many lumps of rock. They were of value only when they had been transformed by conversational art and industry into elegant words and well-shaped phrases. She loved a sunset because she could say of it: 'It's like a mixture of Bengal lights, Mendelssohn, soot and strawberries and cream'; or of spring flowers: 'They make you feel as you feel when you're convalescent after influenza. Don't you think so?' And leaning intimately she would press the rhetorical question. 'Don't you think so?' What she liked about a view of distant mountains in a thunderstorm was that it was so like El Greco's landscapes of Toledo. As for love, why, the whole charm of love, in Molly's eyes, was its almost infinite capacity for being turned into phrases. You could talk about it for ever.

She was talking about it now to Philip Quarles – had been talking about it for the last hour; analysing herself, recounting her experiences, questioning him about his past and his feelings. Reluctantly and with difficulty (for he hated talking about himself and did it very badly) he answered her.

'Don't you think,' she was saying, 'that the most exciting thing about being in love is the discoveries it enables you to make about yourself?'

Philip duly thought so.

'I'd no idea how motherly I really was, before I married Jean. I'm so preoccupied now when he gets his feet wet.'

‘I’d be very worried if you got your feet wet,’ said Philip essaying a gallantry. Too stupid! he thought. He was not very good at gallantries. He wished he wasn’t so much attracted by Molly’s rather creamy and florid beauty. He wouldn’t be making a fool of himself if she were ugly.

‘Too sweet of you,’ said Molly. ‘Tell me,’ she added, leaning towards him with offered face and bosom, ‘why do you like me.’

‘Isn’t it fairly obvious why?’ he answered.

Molly smiled. ‘Do you know why Jean says I’m the only woman he could ever fall in love with?’

‘No,’ said Philip, thinking that she was really superb in her Junonian way.

‘Because,’ Molly went on, ‘according to him, I’m the only woman who isn’t what Baudelaire calls *le contraire du dandy*. You remember that fragment in *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu?* “La femme a faim et elle veut manger; soif, et elle veut boire. La femme est *naturelle*, c’est-à-dire abominable. Aussi estelle …”’

Philip interrupted her. ‘You’ve left out a sentence,’ he said, laughing. ‘Soif, et elle veut boire. And then: Elle est en rut, et elle veut être … They don’t print the word in Crépet’s edition; but I’ll supply it if you like.’

‘No, thanks,’ said Molly, rather put out by the interruption. It had spoilt the easy unfolding of a well-tried conversational gambit. She wasn’t accustomed to people being so well up in French literature as Philip. ‘The word’s irrelevant.’

‘Is it?’ Philip raised his eyebrows. ‘I wonder.’

‘Aussi estelle toujours vulgaire,’ Molly went on, hurrying back to the point at which she had been interrupted, ‘c’est-à-dire le contraire du dandy. Jean says I’m the only female dandy. What do you think?’

‘I’m afraid he’s right.’

‘Why “afraid”?’

‘I don’t know that I like dandies much. Particularly female ones.’ A woman who uses the shapeliness of her breasts to compel you to admire her mind – a good character, he reflected, for his novel. But trying in private life, very trying indeed. ‘I prefer them natural,’ he added.

‘But what’s the point of being natural unless you have enough art to do it well and enough consciousness to know how natural you’re being?’ Molly was pleased with her question. A little polishing and it would be epigrammatically perfect. ‘There’s no point in being in love with a person unless you know exactly what you feel and can express it.’

‘I can see a great deal of point,’ said Philip. ‘One doesn’t have to be a botanist or a still-life painter to enjoy flowers. And equally, my dear Molly, one doesn’t have to be Sigmund Freud or Shakespeare to enjoy you.’ And sliding suddenly nearer to her along the sofa, he took her in his arms and kissed her.

‘But what *are* you thinking about?’ she cried in pained astonishment.

‘I’m not thinking about anything,’ he answered rather angrily from the other end of the arm with which she had pushed him away from her. Not thinking; only wanting.’ He felt humiliated, made a fool of. ‘But I’d forgotten you were a nun.’

‘I’m nothing of the kind,’ she protested. ‘I’m merely civilized. All this pouncing and clawing – it’s really too savage.’ She readjusted a water-waved lock of hair, and began to talk about platonic relationships as aids to spiritual growth. The more platonic the relations between an amorous man and woman, the more intense in them the life of the conscious mind.

‘What the body loses, the soul gains. Wasn’t it Paul Bourget who pointed that out in his *Psychologie Contemporaine?* A bad novelist,’ she added, finding it necessary to apologize for quoting from so very old-fashioned and disreputed an author; ‘but good as an essayist, I always find. Wasn’t it Paul Bourget?’ she repeated.

‘I should think it must have been Paul Bourget,’ said Philip wearily.

‘The energy which wanted to expend itself in physical passion is diverted and turns the mills of the soul.’ (‘Turn the mills of the soul’ was perhaps a shade too romantic, Victorian, Meredithian, she felt as she pronounced the words.) ‘The body’s dammed and canalized,’ she emended, ‘and made to drive the spiritual dynamos. The thwarted unconscious finds vent in making consciousness more intense.’

‘But does one want one’s consciousness intensified?’ asked Philip, looking angrily at the rather luscious figure at the other end of the sofa. ‘I’m getting a bit tired of consciousness, to tell you the truth.’ He admired her body, but the only contact she would permit was with her much less interesting and beautiful mind. He wanted kisses, but all he got was analytical anecdotes and philosophic epigrams. ‘Thoroughly tired,’ he repeated. It was no wonder.

Molly only laughed. ‘Don’t start pretending you’re a paleolithic cave-man,’ she said. ‘It doesn’t suit you. Tired of consciousness, indeed! *You!* Why, if you’re tired of consciousness, you must be tired of yourself.’

‘Which is exactly what I am,’ said Philip. ‘You’ve made me tired of myself. Sick to death.’ Still irritated, he rose to take his leave.

‘Is that an insult?’ she asked, looking up at him. ‘Why have I made you tired of yourself?’

Philip shook his head. ‘I can’t explain. I’ve given up explaining.’ He held out his hand. Still looking enquiringly into his face, Molly took it. ‘If you weren’t one of the vestal virgins of civilization,’ he went on, ‘you’d understand without any explaining. Or rather, there wouldn’t be any explaining to do. Because you wouldn’t have made me feel tired of myself. And let me add, Molly, that if you were really and consistently civilized, you’d take steps to make yourself less desirable. Desirability’s barbarous. It’s as savage as pouncing and clawing. You ought to look like George Eliot. Good-bye.’ And giving her hand a final shake, he limped out of the room. In the street he gradually recovered his temper. He even began to smile to himself. For it was a joke. The spectacle of a biter being bitten is always funny, even when the bitten biter happens to be oneself. Conscious and civilized, he had been defeated by someone even more civilized than himself. The justice was poetic. But what a warning! Parodies and caricatures are the most penetrating of criticisms. In Molly he perceived a kind of Max Beerbohm version of himself. The spectacle was alarming. Having smiled, he became pensive.

‘I must be pretty awful,’ he thought.

Sitting on a chair in the Park, he considered his shortcomings. He had considered them before, often. But he had never done anything about them. He knew in advance that he wouldn't do anything about them this time. Poor Elinor! That rigmarole of Molly's about platonic relations and Paul Bourget gave him a notion of what she had to put up with. He decided to tell her of his adventure with Molly – comically, for it was always easier to talk unseriously – and then go on to talk about themselves. Yes, that was what he'd do. He ought to have spoken before. Elinor had been so strangely and unnaturally silent of late, so far away. He had been anxious, had wanted to speak, had felt he ought to have spoken. But about what? The ridiculous episode with Molly provided him with an opening gambit.

'I saw Molly d'Exergillod this afternoon,' he began, when he saw Elinor. But the tone of her 'Did you?' was so coldly uninterested, that he went no further. There was a silence. Elinor went on with her reading. He glanced at her surreptitiously over the top of his book. Her pale face wore an expression of calm remoteness. He felt a renewal of that uneasy anxiety which had come upon him so often during the last few weeks.

'Why don't you ever talk now?' he screwed up the courage to ask her that evening after dinner.

Elinor looked up at him from her book. 'Don't I ever talk?' she said, ironically smiling. 'Well, I suppose there's nothing of any particular interest to say.'

Philip recognized one of the answers he was in the habit of making to her reproaches, and was abashed into silence. And yet it was unfair of her to retort it upon him. For in his case it was true: there really wasn't anything of interest to say. By dint of being secretive about them, he had almost abolished his intimate feelings. Very little seemed to go on in the unintellectual part of his mind – very little, at any rate, that wasn't either trivial or rather discreditable. Whereas Elinor always had a mass of things to say. Things that said themselves, that came out of their own accord from the depths of her being. Philip would have liked to explain this to her; but somehow it was difficult, he couldn't.

‘All the same,’ he brought himself to say, after a pause, ‘you used to talk much more. It’s only in these last days …’

‘I suppose I’m rather tired of talking, that’s all.’

‘But why should you be tired?’

‘Mayn’t one be tired sometimes?’ She uttered a rather resentful little laugh. ‘You seem to be permanently tired.’

Philip looked at her with a kind of anxiety. His eyes seemed to implore. But she wouldn’t allow herself to be touched. She had allowed herself to be touched too often. He had exploited her love, systematically underpaid her and, whenever she threatened rebellion, had turned suddenly rather pathetic and helpless, appealing to her better feelings. This time she was going to be hard. He might look as imploring and anxious as he liked, but she wouldn’t take any notice. It only served him right. All the same she felt rather guilty. And yet it was his own fault. Why couldn’t he love her actively, articulately, outright? When she gave him her love, he took it for granted, he accepted it passively as his right. And when she stopped giving it, he looked dumbly anxious and imploring. But as for saying anything, as for doing anything …

The seconds passed. Elinor waited, pretending to read. If only he’d speak or move! She longed for an excuse to love him again. As for Everard – why, Everard simply didn’t count. To the deep instinctive core of her being he really didn’t matter and if Philip would only take the trouble to love her a little, he wouldn’t matter any more even to the conscious part of her that was trying to love him – to love him on principle, so to speak, to love him deliberately, of set purpose. But the seconds passed in silence. And at last, with a little sigh (for he too would have liked to say something, to do something; only it was impossible, because the something said or done would have to be personal), Philip picked up his book and, in the interests of the zoological novelist in his novel, went on reading about the possessive instinct in birds. Reading again. He wasn’t going to say anything after all. Oh, very well; if he wanted her to become Everard’s mistress, then he’d have only himself to blame. She tried to shrug her shoulders and feel truculently. But the threat, she inwardly felt, was directed against

herself rather than against Philip. It was she, not he, who was being condemned. Condemned to be Everard's mistress.

Taking a lover had seemed to Elinor, theoretically and in advance, a matter of no great difficulty. Morally wrong she did not think it. All the fuss that Christians and the heroines of novels managed to make about it! It was incomprehensible. 'If people want to go to bed with one another,' she would say, 'why can't they do it quite simply and straightforwardly, without tormenting themselves and everyone else within range?' Nor had she any fear of the social consequences of taking a lover. The people who, if they knew, would object, were precisely the people she herself had always objected to. By refusing to meet her, they would be doing her a favour. As for Phil, he would have deserved it. He had had it in his power to prevent any such thing happening. Why couldn't he have come nearer, given a little more of himself? She had begged for love; but what he had given her was a remote impersonal benevolence. Mere warmth, that was all she wanted; mere humanity. It was not much to ask. And she had warned him so often of what would happen if he didn't give it.

Didn't he understand? Or was it that he simply didn't care? Perhaps it wouldn't hurt him at all; the punishment wouldn't punish. That would be humiliating. But after all, she would go on to remind herself, whenever she had arrived (yet once more) at this point of her inward argument, after all it wasn't only or mainly to punish Philip, it wasn't primarily to teach him humanity by pain and jealousy, that she was going to take a lover. It was in the interest of her own happiness. (She would try to forget how very wretched the pursuit of her own happiness made her.) Her own independent happiness. She had grown accustomed to think and act too exclusively in relation to Philip. Even when she planned to take a lover, it was still of him that she thought. Which was absurd, absurd.

But these self-reminders of her right, her intention to be independently happy, had to be constantly repeated. Her natural and habitual mode of thinking even about a possible lover was still in terms of her husband – of his conversion, or

his punishment. It was only by an effort, deliberately, that she could remember to forget him.

But anyhow, for whatever reasons she might do it, to take a lover had seemed, in advance, a matter of no great psychological difficulty. Particularly if the lover were to be Everard Webley. For she liked Everard, very much; she admired him; she felt herself strangely moved and thrilled by the power that seemed to radiate out of him. And yet, when it came to the point of physical contact with the man, what extraordinary difficulties at once arose! She liked to be with him, she liked his letters, she could imagine, when he did not touch her, that she was in love with him. But when, at their second meeting after her return, Everard took her in his arms and kissed her, she was seized with a kind of horror, she felt herself turning cold and stony in his embrace. It was the same horror, the same coldness as she had felt, nearly a year before, when he had first tried to kiss her. The same, in spite of the fact she had prepared herself in the interval to feel differently, had accustomed her conscious mind to the idea of taking him as a lover. That horror, that wincing coldness were the spontaneous reactions of the instinctive and habitual part of her being. It was only her mind that had decided to accept. Her feelings, her body, all the habits of her instinctive self were in rebellion. What her intellect found harmless, her stiffened and shrinking body passionately disapproved. The spirit was a libertine, but the flesh and its affections were chaste.

‘Please, Everard,’ she begged, ‘please.’

He let her go. ‘Why do you hate me?’

‘But I don’t, Everard.’

‘I only give you the creeps, that’s all!’ he said with a savage derision. Hurt, he took a pleasure in opening his own wound. ‘I merely disgust you.’

‘But how can you say such a thing?’ She felt wretched and ashamed of her shrinking; but the sense of repulsion still persisted.

‘Because it happens to be true.’

‘No, it isn’t.’ At the words Everard stretched out his hands again. She shook her head. ‘But you mustn’t touch me,’ she begged. ‘Not now. It would spoil

everything. I can’t explain why. I don’t know why. But not now. Not yet,’ she added, implicitly promising but meanwhile avoiding.

The implication of a promise revived his importunity. Elinor was half sorry that she had pronounced the words, half glad that she had, to this extent, committed herself. She was relieved to have escaped from the immediate menace of his bodily contact, and at the same time angry with herself for having shrunk from him. Her body and her instincts had rebelled against her will. Her implied promise was the will’s reprisal against the traitors within her. It made the amends which, she felt, she owed to Everard. ‘Not yet.’ But when? When? Any time, her will replied, any time you like. It was easy to promise, but oh, how hard to fulfil! Elinor sighed. If only Philip would let her love him! But he did not speak, he did not act, he just went on reading. Silently he condemned her to unfaithfulness.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SCENE WAS Hyde Park; a Saturday in June.

Dressed in green and wearing a sword, Everard Webley was addressing a thousand British Freemen from the back of his white horse, Bucephalus. With a military precision which would have done credit to the Guards, the Freemen had formed up on the Embankment at Blackfriars, and marched with music and symbolic standards to Charing Cross, up Northumberland Avenue, through Trafalgar Square and Cambridge Circus to the Tottenham Court Road and thence along the whole length of Oxford Street to the Marble Arch. At the entrance to the Park they had met an Anti-Vivisection procession and there had been some slight confusion – a mingling of ranks, a musical discord, as the bands collided, of ‘The British Grenadiers’ and ‘My Faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary’, an entangling of banners, ‘Protect our Doggies’ with ‘Britons never shall be slaves’, ‘Socialism is Tyranny’ with ‘Doctors or Devils?’ But the admirable discipline of the Freemen had prevented the confusion from becoming serious, and after a short delay the thousand had entered the Park, marched past their leader and finally formed themselves into three sides of a hollow square, with Everard and his staff at the centre of the fourth side. The trumpets had sounded a fanfare and the thousand had sung the four verses of Everard’s rather Kiplingesque ‘Song of the Freemen’. When the singing was done Everard began his speech.

‘British Freemen!’ he said, ‘comrades!’ and at the sound of that strong effortless voice there was a silence even among the spectators who had idly collected to watch the proceedings. Carrying a power not intrinsically theirs, a power that belonged to the speaker, not to what he spoke, his words fell one by one, thrillingly audible, into the attentive hush they had created. He began by praising the Freemen’s discipline. ‘Discipline,’ he said, ‘voluntarily accepted

discipline is the first condition of freedom, the first virtue of Freemen. Free and disciplined Spartans held the Persian hordes at bay. Free and disciplined Macedonians conquered half the world. It is for us free and disciplined Englishmen to deliver our country from the slaves who have enslaved it. Three hundred fought at Thermopylae against tens of thousands. The odds we face are not so desperate. Your battalion is only one of more than sixty, a single thousand among the sixty thousand Freemen of England. The numbers daily increase. Twenty, fifty, sometimes a hundred recruits join us every day. The army grows, the green army of Freemen.

'The British Freemen are uniformed in green. Theirs is the livery of Robin Hood and Little John, the livery of outlaws. For outlaws they are in this stupid democratic world. Outlaws proud of their outlawry. The law of the democratic world is quantity. We outlaws believe in quality. For the democratic politicians, the voice of the greatest number is the voice of God; their law is the law that pleases the mob. Outside the pale of mob-made law, we desire the rule of the best, not the most numerous. Stupider than their liberal grandfathers, the democrats of to-day would discourage individual enterprise and, by nationalizing industry and land, invest the state with tyrannical powers such as it has never possessed, except perhaps in India in the time of the Moguls. We outlaws are freemen. We believe in the value of individual liberty. We would encourage individual enterprise; for we believe that, co-ordinated and controlled in the interests of society as a whole, individual enterprise produces the best economic and moral results. The law of the democratic world is human standardization, is the reduction of all humanity to the lowest common measure. Its religion is the worship of the average man. We outlaws believe in diversity, in aristocracy, in the natural hierarchy. We would remove every removable handicap and give every man his chance, in order that the best may rise to the position for which nature has qualified them. In a word, we believe in justice. And we revere, not the ordinary, but the extraordinary man. I could go on almost indefinitely with this list of the points on which we British Freemen are in radical disagreement with the democratic governors of what once was free and merry England. But I

have said enough to show that there can be no peace between them and us. Their white is our black, their political good is our evil, their earthly paradise is our hell. Voluntary outlaws, we repudiate their rule, we wear the green livery of the forest. And we bide our time, we bide our time. For our time is coming and we do not propose to remain outlaws for ever. The time is coming when the laws will be of our making and the forest will be the place for those who now hold power. Two years ago our band was insignificant. To-day it is an army. An army of outlaws. Yet a little while, my comrades, and it will be the army of those who make the laws, not of those who break them. Yes, of those who break them. For before we can become the makers of good laws, we must be the breakers of bad laws. We must have the courage of our outlawry. British Freemen, fellow outlaws, when the time comes, will you have that courage?'

From the green-coated ranks rose an enormous shout.

'When I give the word, will you follow?'

'We will, we will,' the green thousand repeated.

'Even if laws must be broken?'

There was another burst of affirmative cheering. When it died down and as Everard Webley was opening his mouth to continue, a voice shouted, 'Down with Webley! Down with the rich man's militia! Down with the Bloody B …' But before the voice could enunciate the whole hated parody of their name, half a dozen of the nearest British Freemen had thrown themselves upon its owner.

Everard Webley rose in his stirrups. 'Keep your ranks,' he called peremptorily. 'How dare you leave the ranks?'

There was a scurrying of officers to the scene of confusion, an angry shouting of orders. The over-zealous Freemen slunk back to their places. Holding a bloody handkerchief to his nose and escorted by two policemen, their enemy marched away. He had lost his hat. The dishevelled hair blazed red in the sunlight. It was Illidge.

Everard Webley turned to the officer commanding the company whose men had broken their ranks. 'Insubordination,' he began; and his voice was cold and hard, not loud, but dangerously penetrating, 'insubordination is the worst …'

Illidge removed his handkerchief from his nose and shouted in a shrill falsetto, ‘Oh, you naughty boys!’

There was a guffaw from the spectators. Everard ignored the interruption and having concluded his rebuke, went on with his speech. Commanding and yet persuasive, passionate, but controlled and musical, his voice thrilled out; and in a moment the shattered silence was reconstructed round his words, the dissipated attention was once more focussed and concentrated. There had been a rebellion; he had made another conquest.

Spandrell waited without impatience. Illidge’s tardiness gave him the opportunity to drink an extrac cocktail or two. He was at his third and feeling already much better and more cheerful, when the restaurant door swung open and in walked Illidge, very militant and defiant, with an air of truculently parading his blackened eye.

‘Drunk and disorderly?’ questioned Spandrell at the sight of the bruise. ‘Or did you meet an outraged husband? Or have words with a lady?’

Illidge sat down and recounted his adventure, boastfully and with embellishments. He had been, according to his own account, a mixture of Horatius defending the bridge and St Stephen under the shower of stones.

‘The ruffians!’ said Spandrell sympathetically. But his eyes shone with malicious laughter. The misfortunes of his friends were an unfailing source of amusement to him, and this of Illidge’s was a particularly entertaining disaster.

‘But at least I spoilt the best effect in Webley’s disgusting oration,’ Illidge went on in the same self-congratulating tone.

‘It might have been slightly more satisfactory if you’d spoilt his face for him.’

Illidge was stung by the note of mockery in Spandrell’s words. ‘Spoiling his face wouldn’t be enough,’ he said with ferocity, scowling as he spoke. ‘The man ought to be exterminated. He’s a public danger, he and his gang of bravoes.’ He broke into profanity.

Spandrell only laughed. ‘It’s easy to yammer,’ he said. ‘Why not do something for a change? A little direct action in Webley’s own style.’

The other shrugged his shoulders apologetically. ‘We’re not well enough organized.’

‘I shouldn’t have thought it needed much organization to knock a man on the head. No, the real trouble is that you’re not courageous enough.’

Illidge blushed. ‘That’s a lie!’

‘Not well enough organized” Spandrell went on contemptuously. ‘At least you’re modern in your excuses. The great god organization. Even art and love will soon be bowing down like everything else. Why are your verses so bad? Because the poetry industry isn’t well enough organized. And the impotent lover will excuse himself in the same way and assure the indignant lady that, next time, she’ll find his organization perfect. No, no, my dear Illidge, it won’t do, you know; it won’t do.’

‘You’re being very funny, no doubt,’ said Illidge, still pink with anger. ‘But you’re talking rot. You can’t compare poetry and politics. A political party’s a lot of men who’ve got to be disciplined and held together. A poet’s one man.’

‘But so’s a murderer, isn’t he?’ Spandrell’s tone, his smile were still sarcastic. Illidge felt the blood running up again into his face like the warmth of a suddenly flaring inward fire. He hated Spandrell for his power of humiliating him, for making him feel small, a fool and ashamed. He had come in feeling important and heroic, flushed with satisfaction. And now, with a few slow sneering words, Spandrell had turned his self-satisfaction to an angry shame. There was a silence; they ate their soup without speaking. When his plate was empty, ‘One man,’ said Spandrell meditatively, leaning back in his chair. ‘With all one man’s responsibility. A thousand men have no responsibility. That’s why organization’s such a wonderful comfort. A member of a political party feels himself as safe as the member of a church. The party may order civil war, rape, massacre; he does what he’s told cheerfully, because the responsibility isn’t his. It’s the leader’s. And the leader is the rare man, like Webley. The man with courage.’

‘Or cowardice, in his case,’ said Illidge. ‘Webley’s the bourgeois rabbit terrified into ferocity.’

‘Is he?’ asked Spandrell raising his eyebrows derisively. ‘Well, you may be right. But anyhow, he’s rather different from the ordinary rabbit. The ordinary rabbit isn’t scared into ferocity. He’s scared into abject inactivity or abject activity in obedience to somebody else’s orders. Never into activity on his own account, for which he has to take the responsibility. When it’s a question of murder, for example, you don’t find the ordinary rabbits exactly eager, do you? They wait to be organized. The responsibility’s too great for the little individual. He’s scared.’

‘Well, obviously nobody wants to be hanged.’

‘He’d be scared even if there wasn’t any hanging.’

‘You’re not going to trot out the categorical imperative again, are you?’ It was Illidge’s turn to be sarcastic.

‘It trots itself out. Even in your case. When it came to the point, you’d never dare do anything about Webley, unless you had an organization to relieve you of all responsibility. You simply wouldn’t dare,’ he repeated, with a kind of mocking challenge. He looked at Illidge intently between half-closed eyelids, and through the whole of Illidge’s rather rhetorical speech about the scotching of snakes, the shooting of tigers, the squashing of bugs, he studied his victim’s flushed and angry face. How comic the man was when he tried to be heroic! Illidge stormed on, uncomfortably conscious that his phrases were too big and sounded hollow. But emphasis and still more emphasis, as the smile grew more contemptuous, seemed to be the only possible retort to Spandrell’s maddeningly quiet derision – more and still more, however false the rhetoric might sound. Like a man who stops shouting because he is afraid his voice may break, he was suddenly silent. Spandrell slowly nodded.

‘All right,’ he said mysteriously. ‘All right.’

‘It’s absurd,’ Elinor kept assuring herself. ‘It’s childish. Childish and absurd.’

It was an irrelevance. Everard was no different because he had sat on a white horse, because he had commanded and been acclaimed by a cheering crowd. He was no better because she had seen him at the head of one of his battalions. It was absurd, it was childish to have been so moved. But moved she had been; the

fact remained. What an excitement when he had appeared, riding, at the head of his men! A quickening of the heart and a swelling. And what an anxiety in the seconds of silence before he began to speak! A real terror. He might stammer and hesitate; he might say something stupid or vulgar; he might be long-winded and a bore; he might be a mountebank. And then, when the voice spoke, unstrained, but vibrant and penetrating, when the speech began to unroll itself in words that were passionate and stirring, but never theatrical, in phrases rich, but brief and incisive – then what an exultation, what pride! But when that man made his interruption, she had felt, together with a passion of indignation against the interrupter, a renewal of her anxiety, her terror lest he might fail, might be publicly humiliated and put to shame. But he had sat unmoved, he had uttered his stern rebuke, he had made a pregnant and breathless silence and then, at last, continued his speech, as though nothing had happened. Elinor's anxiety had given place to an extraordinary happiness. The speech came to an end; there was a burst of cheering and Elinor had felt enormously proud and elated and at the same time embarrassed, as though the cheering had been in part directed towards herself; and she had laughed aloud, she did not know why, and the blood had rushed up into her cheeks and she had turned away in confusion, not daring to look at him; and then, for no reason, she had begun to cry.

Absurd and childish, she now assured herself. But there, the absurd and childish thing had happened; there was no undoing it.

In the *Sunday Pictorial*, a snapshot of Everard Webley with his mouth open – a black hole in the middle of a straining face – bawling. 'Mr E. W., the founder and chief of the B.B.F., addressed a battalion of British Freemen in Hyde Park on Saturday.' And that was all that remained of the event, that gargoylish symbol of demagogy. A mouth opened to bray. What a horror!

And yet the event was genuinely impressive. And E.'s bawling sounded quite nobly, at the time. And he looked monumental on his white horse. Selecting a separate instant out of what had been a continuity, the camera turned him into a cautionary scarecrow. Unfair? Or was the camera's vision the true one and mine the false? For after all, the impressive continuity must have been made up of

such appalling instants as the camera recorded. Can the whole be something quite different from its parts? In the physical world, yes. Taken as a whole a body and brain are radically different from their component electrons. But what about the moral world? Can a collection of low values make up a single high value? Everard's photo poses a genuine problem. Millions of monstrous instants making up a splendid half-hour.

Not that I was without my doubts of the splendidness at the time. E. talked a lot about Thermopylae and the Spartans. But my resistance was even more heroic. Leonidas had three hundred companions. I defended my spiritual Thermopylae singlehanded against E. and his Freemen. They impressed me; but I resisted. The drill, to begin with, was superb. I watched, enchanted. As usual. How does one explain the fascination of the military spectacle? Explain it away, by preference. I wondered all the time I was watching.

A squad is merely ten men and emotionally neutral. The heart only begins to beat at the sight of a company. The evolutions of a battalion are intoxicating. And a brigade is already an army with banners – which is the equivalent, as we know from the Song of Songs, of being in love. The thrill is proportional to the numbers. Given the fact that one is only two yards high, two feet wide and solitary, a cathedral is necessarily more impressive than a cottage and a mile of marching men is grander then a dozen loafers at a street corner. But that's not all. A regiment's more impressive than a crowd. The army with banners is equivalent to love only when it's perfectly drilled. Stones in the form of a building are finer than stones in a heap. Drill and uniforms impose an architecture on the crowd. An army's beautiful. But that's not all; it panders to lower instincts than the aesthetic. The spectacle of human beings reduced to automatism satisfies the lust for power. Looking at mechanized slaves, one fancies oneself a master. So I thought, as I admired the evolutions of Everard's Freemen. And by taking the admiration to bits, I preserved myself from being overwhelmed by it. Divide and rule. I did the same with the music and afterwards with Everard's speech.

What a great stage manager was lost in Everard! Nothing could have been more impressive than (breaking the studiously prolonged silence) that fanfare of trumpets and then, solemnly, the massive harmonies of a thousand voices singing ‘The Song of the Freemen’. The trumpets were prodigious – like the overture to the Last Judgment. (Why should upper partials be so soul-shaking?) And when the trumpet overture was done, the thousand voices burst out with that almost supernatural sound which choral singing always has. Enormous, like the voice of Jehovah. Reinhardt himself couldn’t have done the trick more effectually. I felt as though there were a hole where my diaphragm should be; a kind of anxious tingling ran over my skin, the tears were very nearly at the surface of my eyes. I did the Leonidas turn again and reflected how bad the music was, what ridiculous rant the words.

The Last Trump, the voice of God – and then it was Everard’s turn to speak. And one wasn’t let down. How well he did it! His voice took you in the solar plexus, like those upper partials on the trumpets. Moving and convincing, even though you knew that what he said was vague and more or less meaningless. I analysed the tricks. They were the usual ones. The most effective was the employment of inspiring words with two or more meanings. ‘Liberty’, for example. The liberty in the title and programme of the British Freemen is the liberty to buy and sell and own property with a minimum of government interference. (A pretty large minimum, parenthetically; but let that pass.) Everard bawls out the word in his solar-plexus-punching voice: ‘we are fighting for *liberty*; we are going to *free* the country,’ etcetera. The hearer immediately visualizes himself sitting in shirt-sleeves with a bottle and a complaisant wench and no laws, no code of good manners, no wife, no policeman, no parson to forbid. Liberty! Naturally it arouses his enthusiasm. It’s only when the British Freemen come to power that he’ll realize that the word was really used in an entirely different sense. Divide and conquer. I conquered. *P.S.* – Or rather one part of me conquered. I’ve got into the habit of associating myself with that part and applauding when it triumphs. But, after all, is it the best part? In these particular circumstances, perhaps yes. It’s probably better to be dispassionately

analytical than to be overwhelmed by Everard's stage-managing and eloquence into becoming a British Freeman. But in other circumstances? Rampion's probably right. But having made a habit of dividing and conquering in the name of the intellect, it's hard to stop. And perhaps it isn't entirely a matter of second nature; perhaps first nature comes in too. It's easy to believe one ought to change one's mode of living. The difficulty is to act on the belief. This settlement in the country, for example; this being rustic and paternal and a good neighbour; this living vegetably and intuitively – is it really going to be possible? I imagine it; but in fact, in fact … ? Meanwhile, it might be rather interesting to concoct a character on these lines. A man who has always taken pains to encourage his own intellectualist tendencies at the expense of all the others. He avoids personal relationships as much as he can, he observes without participating, doesn't like to give himself away, is always a spectator rather than an actor. Again, he has always been careful not to distinguish one day, one place from another; not to review the past and anticipate the future at the New Year, not to celebrate Christmas or birthdays, not to revisit the scenes of his childhood, not to make pilgrimages to the birthplaces of great men, battlefields, ruins and the like. By this suppression of emotional relationships and natural piety he seems to himself to be achieving freedom – freedom from sentimentality, from the irrational, from passion, from impulse and emotionalism. But in reality, as he gradually discovers, he has only narrowed and desiccated his life; and what's more, has cramped his intellect by the very process he thought would emancipate it. His reason's free, but only to deal with a small fraction of experience. He realizes his psychological defects, and desires, in theory, to change. But it's difficult to break life-long habits; and perhaps the habits are only the expression of an inborn indifference and coldness, which it might be almost impossible to overcome. And for *him* at any rate, the merely intellectual life is easier; it's the line of least resistance, because it's the line that avoids other human beings. Among them his wife. For he'd have a wife and there would be the elements of drama in the relations between the woman, living mainly with her emotions and intuitions, and the man whose existence is mainly on the abstracted intellectual plane. He

loves her in his way and she loves him in hers. Which means that he's contented and she's dissatisfied; for love in his way entails the minimum of those warm, confiding human relationships which constitute the essence of love in her way. She complains; he would like to give more, but finds it hard to change himself. She even threatens to leave him for a more human lover; but she is too much in love with him to put the threat into effect.

That Sunday afternoon Elinor and Everard Webley drove down into the country.

'Forty-three miles in an hour and seven minutes,' said Everard looking at his watch as he stepped out of the car. 'Not bad considering that includes getting out of London and being held up by that filthy charabanc in Guildford. Not at all bad.'

'And what's more,' said Elinor, 'we're still alive. If you knew the number of times I just shut my eyes and only expected to open them again on the Day of Judgment …'

He laughed, rather glad that she should have been so frightened by the furiousness of his driving. Her terrors gave him a pleasing sense of power and superiority. He took her arm protectively and they walked away down the green path into the wood. Everard drew a deep breath.

'This is better than making political speeches,' he said, pressing her arm.

'Still,' said Elinor, 'it must be rather wonderful to sit on a horse and make a thousand people do whatever you want.'

Everard laughed. 'Unfortunately there's a bit more in politics than that.' He glanced at her. 'You enjoyed the meeting?'

'I was thrilled.' She saw him again on his white horse, heard his strong vibrating voice, remembered her exultation and those sudden tears. Magnificent, she said to herself, magnificent! But there was no recapturing the exultation. His hand was on her arm, his huge presence loomed almost threateningly over her. 'Is he going to kiss me?' she nervously wondered. She tried to drive out the questioning dread and fill its place with yesterday's exultation. Magnificent! But the dread would not be exorcized. 'I thought your speech was splendid,' she said

aloud and wondered parenthetically as she spoke what it had been about. She remembered the sound and timbre of the words, but not their significance. Hopeless! ‘Oh, what lovely honeysuckle!’

Everard reached up, enormous, and picked a couple of blossoms. ‘Such beauty, such loveliness!’ He quoted Keats, fumbled in his memory for a line in the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He wondered lyrically why one lived in towns, why one wasted one’s time in the pursuit of money and power, when there was all this beauty waiting to be known and loved.

Elinor listened rather uncomfortably. He seemed to turn it on, this love of beauty, like an electric light – turn out the love of power, turn out efficiency and political preoccupations and turn on the love of beauty. But why shouldn’t he, after all? There was nothing wrong in liking beautiful things. Nothing, except that in some obscure indescribable way Everard’s love of beauty wasn’t quite right. Too deliberate was it? Too occasional? Too much for holidays only? Too conventional, too heavy, too humourlessly reverent? She preferred him as a lover of power. As a power-lover he was somehow of better quality than as a beauty-lover. A poor beauty-lover, perhaps, because he was such a good power-lover. By compensation. Everything has to be paid for.

They walked on. In an open glade between the trees the foxgloves were coming into flower.

‘Like torches burning upwards from the bottom,’ said Everard poetically.

Elinor halted in front of one tall plant whose first flower-bells were on a level with her eyes. The red flesh of the petals was cool and resilient between her fingers. She peeped into the open bell-mouth.

‘Think of the discomfort of having freckles in one’s throat,’ she said. Not to mention little beetles.’

They moved away in silence through the trees. It was Everard who first spoke.

‘Will you ever love me?’ he asked suddenly.

‘You know how fond I am of you, Everard.’ Her heart sank; the moment had come, he would want to kiss her. But he made no gesture, only laughed, rather

mournfully.

‘Very fond of me,’ he repeated. ‘Ah, if only you could be a little less reasonable, a little more insane! If only you knew what loving was!’

‘Isn’t it a good thing somebody should be sane?’ said Elinor. ‘Sane beforehand, I mean. For everybody can be sane afterwards. Much too sane, when the fit’s over and the lovers begin to wonder whether, after all, the world *was* well lost. Think, Everard, think first. Do you want to lose the world?’

‘I shouldn’t lose it,’ Everard answered, and his voice had that strange thrilling vibration which she seemed to hear, not with her ears, but with her body, in the very midriff. ‘They couldn’t take it away from me. Times have changed since Parnell’s day. Besides I’m not Parnell. Let them try to take it away!’ He laughed. ‘Love and the world – I’m going to have both, Elinor. Both.’ He smiled down at her, the power-lover triumphant.

‘You’re asking too much,’ she answered laughing, ‘you’re greedy.’ The exultation tingled again through her, was like the breath-taking warmth of hot wine.

He bent down and kissed her. Elinor did not shrink.

Another car had pulled up at the roadside, another couple strolled along the green path into the wood. Through the glaring pink and white of her cosmetics the woman’s face was old; the weary flesh had sagged out of its once charming shape.

‘Oh, isn’t it lovely!’ she kept exclaiming as she walked along, carrying her heavy body rather unsteadily on very high-heeled shoes over the uneven ground. ‘Isn’t it lovely!’

Spandrell – for it was he – did not answer.

‘Pick me some of that honeysuckle there!’ she begged.

He pulled down a flowered spray with the crook of his stick. Through the reek of chemical perfumery and not very clean under-linen the scent of the flowers came cool and delicious to his nostrils.

‘Don’t they smell simply divine!’ she exclaimed, rapturously sniffing. ‘Too divine!’

The corners of Spandrell's mouth twitched into a smile. It amused him to hear the cast-off locutions of duchesses in the mouth of this ageing prostitute. He looked at her. Poor Connie! She *was* a skeleton at the feast – more gruesomely deathly for being covered with so much loose and sagging flesh. Really gruesome. There was no other word. Here, in the sun, she was like a piece of stage scenery seen by daylight and from close at hand. That was why he had gone to the expense of hiring the Daimler and taking her out – just because the poor superannuated punk was so gruesome. He nodded. 'Quite nice,' he said. 'But I prefer your scent.'

They walked on. A little uncertain already of the distinction between a second and a minor third, a cuckoo was calling. In the slanting corridors of sunlight tunnelled through the green and purple of the forest shadows the little flies jerkily danced and zigzagged. There was no wind, the leaves hung down heavy with greenness. The trees were as though gorged with sap and sunshine.

'Lovely, lovely,' was Connie's refrain. The place, the day reminded her, she said, of her childhood in the country. She sighed.

'And you wish you'd been a good girl,' said Spandrell sarcastically. "The roses round the door make me love mother more." I know, I know.' He was silent for a moment. 'What I hate about trees in the summer,' he went on, 'is their beastly fat complacency. Bulging – that's what they are; like bloated great profiteers. Bulging with insolence, passive insolence.'

'Oh, the foxgloves!' cried Connie, who hadn't even been listening. She ran towards them, grotesquely unsteady on her high heels. Spandrell followed her.

'Pleasingly phallic,' he said, fingering one of the spikes of unopened buds. And he went on to develop the conceit, profusely.

'Oh, be quiet, be quiet,' cried Connie. 'How can you say such things?' She was outraged, wounded. 'How can you – here?'

'In God's country,' he mocked. 'How can I?' And raising his stick he suddenly began to lay about him right and left, slash, slash, breaking one of the tall proud plants at every stroke. The ground was strewn with murdered flowers.

‘Stop, stop!’ She caught at his arm Silently laughing, Spandrell wrenched himself away from her and went on beating down the plants. ‘Stop! Please! Oh, don’t, don’t.’ She made another dash at him. Still laughing, still laying about him with his stick, Spandrell dodged away from her.

‘Down with them,’ he shouted, ‘down with them.’ Flower after flower fell under his strokes. ‘There!’ he said at last, breathless with laughter and running and slashing. ‘There!’ Connie was in tears.

‘How could you?’ she said. ‘How could you do it?’

He laughed again, silently, throwing back his head. ‘Serve them right,’ he said. ‘Do you think I’m going to sit still and let myself be insulted? The insolence of the brutes! Ah, there’s another!’ He stepped across the glade to where one last tall foxglove stood as though hiding among the hazel saplings. One stroke was enough. The broken plant fell almost noiselessly.

‘Damn their insolence! It serves them right. Let’s come back to the car.’

CHAPTER XXX

RACHEL QUARLES HAD no sympathy with those sentimental philanthropists who blur the distinction between right and wrong, between wrong-doers and the righteous. Criminals, in her eyes, and not the society in which they lived, were responsible for their crimes. Sinners committed their own sins; their environment did not do it for them. There were excuses, of course, palliations, extenuating circumstances. But good was always good, bad remained bad. There were circumstances in which the choice of good was very difficult; but it was always the individual who made the choice and who, having made, must answer for it. Mrs Quarles, in a word, was a Christian and not a humanitarian. As a Christian she thought that Marjorie had done wrong to leave her husband – even such a husband as Carling – for another man. She disapproved the act, but did not presume to judge the person, the more so since, in spite of what she had done, Marjorie's heart and head were still, from Mrs Quarles's Christian point of view, 'in the right place'. Rachel found it easier to like a person who had acted wrongly, while continuing to think rightly, than one who, like her daughter-in-law, Elinor, thought wrongly, while acting, so far as she knew, in a manner entirely blameless. There were circumstances, too, in which wrong action seemed to her almost less reprehensible than wrong thought. It was not that she had any sympathy for hypocrisy. The person who thought and spoke well while consistently and consciously acting ill was detestable to her. Such people, however, are rare. Most of those who do wrong, in spite of their sound beliefs, do so in a moment of weakness and afterwards regret their wrongdoing. But the person who thinks wrongly does not admit the wrongness of bad actions. He sees no reason why he should not commit them or why, having committed them, he should repent and mend his ways. And even if he in

fact behaves virtuously, he may be the means, by his wrong thinking, of leading others into wrong action.

‘An admirable woman,’ had been John Bidlake’s verdict; ‘but rather too fond of fig-leaves – especially over the mouth.’

Herself, Rachel Quarles was only conscious of being a Christian. She could never imagine how people contrived to live without being Christians. But a great many, she sadly had to admit, did so contrive. Almost all the young people of her acquaintance. ‘It’s as though one’s children talked a different language,’ she had once complained to an old friend.

In Marjorie Carling she discovered someone who spoke and understood her own spiritual idiom.

‘You’ll find her, I’m afraid, a bit of a bore,’ Philip had warned her, when he announced his intention of lending his little house at Chamford to Walter and Marjorie. ‘But be nice to her, all the same. She deserves it, poor woman. She’s had a very thin time of it.’ And he detailed a story that made his mother sigh to listen to.

‘I shouldn’t have expected Walter Bidlake to be like that,’ she said.

‘But in these matters one doesn’t *expect* anything of anybody. Things happen to them, that’s all. They don’t do them.’

Mrs Quarles did not answer. She was thinking of the time when she had first discovered one of Sidney’s infidelities. The astonishment, the pain, the humiliation … ‘But still,’ she said aloud, ‘one wouldn’t have thought he’d knowingly have made somebody unhappy.’

‘Still less that he’d knowingly have made himself unhappy. And yet I think he’s really made himself quite as wretched as Marjorie. Perhaps that’s his chief justification.’

His mother sighed. ‘It all seems so extraordinarily unnecessary.’

Mrs Quarles called on Marjorie almost as soon as she had settled in.

‘Come and see me often,’ she said, as she took her leave. ‘Because I like you,’ she added, with a sudden smile, for which poor Marjorie was quite pathetically grateful. It wasn’t often that people liked her. That she had fallen so

deeply in love with Walter was due, above everything, to his having been one of the few people who had ever shown any interest in her. ‘And I hope you like me,’ Mrs Quarles added.

Marjorie could only blush and stammer. But she already adored.

Rachel Quarles had spoken in all sincerity. She did like Marjorie – liked her, even, for the very defects which made other people find her such a bore; for her stupidity – it was so good and well-meaning, for her lack of humour – it was the mark of such earnestness. Even those intellectual pretensions, those deep or informative remarks dropped portentously out of a meditative silence, did not displease her. Mrs Quarles recognized in them the rather absurd symptoms of a genuine love of the good, the true and the beautiful, of a genuine desire for self-improvement.

At their third meeting Marjorie confided all her story. Mrs Quarles’s comments were sensible and Christian. ‘There’s no miraculous cure for these things,’ she said; ‘no patent medicine for unhappiness. Only the old dull virtues, patience, resignation and the rest; and the old consolation, the old source of strength – old, but not dull. There’s nothing less dull than God. But most young people won’t believe me when I tell them so, even though they’re bored to death with jazz bands and dancing.’

Marjorie’s first adoration was confirmed and increased – increased so much, indeed, that Mrs Quarles felt quite ashamed, as though she had extorted something on false pretences, as though she had fraudulently acted a part.

‘You’re such a wonderful help and comfort,’ Marjorie declared.

‘No, I’m not,’ she answered almost angrily. ‘The truth is that you were lonely and unhappy and I was conveniently there at the right moment.’

Marjorie protested; but the older woman would not permit herself to be praised or thanked.

They talked a good deal about religion. Carling had given Marjorie a horror for all that was picturesque or formal in Christianity. Piran of Peranzabuloe, vestments, ceremonials – everything remotely connected with a saint, a rite, a tradition was hateful to her. But she preserved a vague inchoate faith in what she

regarded as the essentials; she had retained from girlhood a certain habit of Christian feeling and thought. Under the influence of Rachel Quarles the faith became more definite, the habitual emotions were reinforced.

‘I feel so enormously much happier since I’ve been here, with you,’ she announced hardly more than a week after her arrival.

‘It’s because you’re not trying to be happy or wondering why you should have been made unhappy, because you’ve stopped thinking in terms of happiness or unhappiness. That’s the enormous stupidity of the young people of this generation,’ Mrs Quarles went on; ‘they never think of life except in terms of happiness. How shall I have a good time? That’s the question they ask. Or they complain. Why am I not having a better time? But this is a world where good times, in their sense of the word, perhaps in any sense, simply cannot be had continuously, and by everybody. And even when they get their good times, it’s inevitably a disappointment – for imagination is always brighter than reality. And after it’s been had for a little, it becomes a bore. Everybody strains after happiness, and the result is that nobody’s happy. It’s because they’re on the wrong road. The question they ought to be asking themselves isn’t: Why aren’t we happy, and how shall we have a good time? It’s: How can we please God, and why aren’t we better? If people asked themselves those questions and answered them to the best of their ability in practice, they’d achieve happiness without ever thinking about it. For it’s not by pursuing happiness that you find it; it’s by pursuing salvation. And when people were wise, instead of merely clever, they thought of life in terms of salvation and damnation, not of good times and bad times. If you’re feeling happy now, Marjorie, that’s because you’ve stopped wishing you were happy and started trying to be better. Happiness is like coke – something you get as a by-product in the process of making something else.’

At Gattenden, meanwhile, the days passed gloomily.

‘Why don’t you do a little painting?’ Mrs Bidlake suggested to her husband on the morning that followed his arrival.

Old John shook his head.

‘You’d enjoy it so much once you started,’ coaxed Elinor.

But her father would not allow himself to be persuaded. He didn’t want to paint, precisely because painting would have been so enjoyable. His very dread of pain, sickness and death made him perversely refuse to let his mind be distracted from their abhorred contemplation. It was as though some part of him obscurely desired to accept defeat and misery, were anxious to make abjection yet more abject. His courage, his Gargantuan power, his careless high spirits had been the fruits of a deliberate and life-long ignorance. But now that to ignore was no longer possible, now that the enemy was installed in his very vitals, the virtue had gone out of him. He was afraid and could not conceal his terrors. He no longer even desired to conceal them. He somehow wanted to be abject. And abject he was. Mrs Bidlake and Elinor did their best to rouse him from the apathetic misery in which he spent the greater part of his days at Gattenden. But he would not be roused except to complain and occasionally fly into a querulous rage.

‘Deplorable,’ wrote Philip in his notebook, ‘to see an Olympian reduced by a little tumour in his stomach to a state of sub-humanness. But perhaps,’ he added a few days later as an afterthought, ‘he was always sub-human, even when he seemed most Olympian; perhaps being Olympian was just a symptom of sub-humanity.’

It was only with little Phil that John Bidlake would occasionally rouse himself from his abjection. Playing with the child, he would sometimes forget for a little to be wretched.

‘Draw something for me,’ he would say.

And with his tongue between his teeth little Phil would draw a train, or a ship, or the stags in Gattenden Park fighting, or the old marquess in his donkey-drawn chair.

Now you draw me something, grandfather,’ he would say, when he was tired.

And the old man would take the pencil and make half a dozen marvellous little sketches of T’ang, the Pekingese dog, or Tompy, the kitchen cat. Or sometimes, in a fit of naughtiness, he would scribble a caricature of poor Miss

Fulkes writhing. And sometimes, forgetting all about the child, he would draw for his own amusement – a group of bathers, two men wrestling, a dancer.

‘But why have they got no clothes on?’ the child would ask.

‘Because they’re nicer without.’

‘I don’t think so.’ And losing interest in drawings that had so little in the way of a story to tell him, he would ask for the pencil back again.

But it was not always that John Bidlake responded so happily to his grandson. Sometimes, when he was feeling particularly wretched, he felt the child’s mere presence as an outrage, a kind of taunting. He would fly into a rage, would shout at the boy for making a noise and disturbing him.

‘Can’t I ever be left in peace?’ he would shout, and then would go on to complain with curses of the general inefficiency of everybody. The house was full of women, all supposed to be looking after that damned brat. But there he always was, rampaging round, kicking up hell’s own din, getting in the way. It was intolerable. Particularly when one wasn’t well. Absolutely intolerable. People were without any consideration. Flushed and writhing, poor Miss Fulkes would lead her howling charge back to the nursery.

The most trying scenes were at meal-times. For it was at meals (now reduced, so far as he was concerned, to broth and milk and Benger’s food) that John Bidlake was most disagreeably reminded of the state of his health. ‘Disgusting slops!’ he grumbled. But if he ate anything solid, the results were deplorable. Meal-times were the stormiest and most savage moments of John Bidlake’s day. He vented his anger on the child. Always a reluctant eater, little Phil was peculiarly difficult about his food all that spring and early summer. There were tears at almost every meal.

‘It’s because he isn’t really very well,’ Miss Fulkes explained apologetically. And it was true. The boy looked sallow and peaked, slept uneasily, was nervous and quickly tired, suffered from headaches, had ceased to put on weight. Dr Crowther had ordered malt and codliver oil and a tonic. ‘Not well,’ insisted Miss Fulkes.

But John Bidlake would not hear of it. ‘He’s simply naughty, that’s all. He just won’t eat.’ And turning to the boy, ‘Swallow, child, swallow!’ he shouted. ‘Have you forgotten how to swallow?’ The spectacle of little Phil chewing and chewing interminably on a mouthful of something he did not like exasperated him. ‘Swallow, boy! Don’t go on ruminating like that. You’re not a cow. Swallow!’ And, very red in the face, with tears welling up into his eyes, little Phil would make a terrible effort to swallow the abhorred cud of five minutes’ queasy mastication. The muscles of his throat would heave and ripple, an expression of invincible disgust would distort his small face, there would be an ominous sound of retching. ‘But it’s simply revolting!’ stormed the old man. ‘Swallow!’ His shouting was an almost infallible recipe for making the child sick.

Burdens fell, darkness gave place to light, Marjorie apocalyptically understood all the symbols of religious literature. For she herself had struggled in the Slough of Despond and had emerged; she too had climbed laboriously and without hope and had suddenly been consoled by a sight of the promised land.

‘All these phrases used to sound so conventional and meaninglessly pious,’ she said to Mrs Quarles. ‘But now I see they’re just descriptions of facts.’

Mrs Quarles nodded. ‘Bad descriptions, because the facts are indescribable. But if you’ve had personal experience of them, you can see what the symbols are driving at.’

‘Do you know the Black Country?’ said Marjorie. ‘I feel as tbough I’d come out of one of those mining towns on to the moors. Out into the great open spaces,’ she added in her earnest, rather drawlingly childish voice. (The voice, Mrs Quarles couldn’t help thinking, and repented immediately of the thought – for after all the poor girl couldn’t help her voice – made the great open spaces seem curiously stuffy.) ‘And when I look back, the black town seems so small and insignificant compared with the space and the enormous sky. As though one were looking at it through the wrong end of a pair of field-glasses.’

Mrs Quarles frowned slightly. ‘Not so insignificant as all that,’ she said. ‘For after all, there are people living in the town, however black it may be. And the

wrong end of the field-glasses is the wrong end. One isn't meant to look at things so that they appear small and insignificant. That's one of the dangers of getting out under the sky; one's too apt to think of the towns and the people in them as small and remote and unimportant. But they aren't, Marjorie. And it's the business of the lucky ones who have got out into the open to help the others to come too.' She frowned again, at herself this time; she hated anything like preaching. But Marjorie mustn't imagine herself superior, promoted out of the world. 'How's Walter?' she asked with an irrelevance that was no irrelevance. 'How are you getting on together now?'

'The same as ever,' said Marjorie. The admission, a few weeks ago, would have made her utterly wretched. But now even Walter had begun to seem small and rather remote. She loved him still, of course; but somehow through the wrong end of the field-glasses. Through the right end she saw only God and Jesus; they loomed overwhelmingly large.

Mrs Quarles looked at her, and an expression of sadness passed quickly over her sensitive face. 'Poor Walter!' she said.

'Yes, I'm sorry for him too,' said Marjorie. There was silence.

Old Dr Fisher had told her to come and report progress every few weeks, and Marjorie took advantage of that Wednesday's cheap excursion tickets to run up to town, do some necessary shopping and tell the doctor how well she felt.

'You look it too,' said Dr Fisher, peering at her first through his spectacles, then over the top of them. 'Extraordinarily much better than when you were here last. It often happens in the fourth month,' he went on to explain. Dr Fisher liked to make his patients take an intelligent interest in their own physiology. 'Health improves. So do spirits. It's the body settling down to the new state of affairs. The changes in the circulation no doubt have something to do with it. The foetal heart begins to beat about this time. I've known cases of neurasthenic women who wanted to have one baby after another, as quick as ever it could be managed. Pregnancy was the only thing that could cure them of their melancholy and obsessions. How little as yet we understand about the relations between body and mind!'

Marjorie smiled and said nothing. Dr Fisher was an angel, one of the best and kindest men in the whole world. But there were things he understood even less of than the relations between body and mind. What did he understand about God, for example? What did he understand about the soul and its mystical communion with spiritual powers? Poor Dr Fisher! All that he could talk about was the fourth month of pregnancy and the foetal heart. She smiled inwardly, feeling a kind of pity for the old man.

Burlap that morning was affectionate. ‘Old man,’ he said, laying a hand on Walter’s shoulder, ‘shouldn’t we go out and eat a chop together somewhere?’ He gave Walter’s shoulder a little squeeze and smiled down at him with the wistful enigmatic tenderness of one of Sodoma’s saints.

‘Alas,’ said Walter, trying to simulate an answering affection, ‘I’m lunching with a man at the other end of London.’ It was a lie; but he couldn’t face the prospect of an hour with Burlap in a Fleet Street chophouse. Besides, he wanted to see if there was a letter from Lucy waiting for him at the club. He looked at his watch. ‘Lord!’ he added, not wishing to prolong the conversation with Burlap, ‘I must be off.’

Outside it was raining. The umbrellas were like black mushrooms that had suddenly sprouted from the mud. Gloomy, gloomy. In Madrid the sunshine would be ferocious. ‘But I love the heat,’ she had said. ‘I blossom in ovens.’ He had imagined Spanish nights, dark and hot, and her body pale in the starlight, a ghost, but tangible and warm; and love as patient and relentless as hatred, and possessions like slow murder. His imaginations had justified every conceivable lie and outrage. It mattered not what might be done or left undone, provided the imaginations were realized. He had prepared the ground, he had invented a series of elaborate lies, one set for Burlap, another for Marjorie; he had made enquiries about the price of tickets, he had arranged for an overdraft at the bank. And then came Lucy’s letter with the news that she had changed her mind. She was going to stay in Paris. Why? There was only one possible reason. His jealousy, his disappointment, his humiliation had overflowed into six pages of reproach and fury.

‘Any letters?’ he asked off-handedly of the porter as he entered the club. His tone was meant to imply that he expected nothing more interesting than a publisher’s circular or a philanthropic offer to lend five thousand pounds without security. The porter handed him the familiar yellow envelope. He tore it open and unfolded three sheets of pencilled scribble. ‘Quai Voltaire. Monday.’ He pored over the writing. It was almost as difficult to read as an ancient manuscript. ‘Why do you always write to me in pencil?’ He remembered Cuthbert Arkwright’s question and her answer. ‘I’ll kiss the ink away,’ he had replied. The lout! Walter entered the dining-room and ordered his lunch. Between the mouthfuls he deciphered Lucy’s letter. ‘Quai Voltaire. Insufferable, your letter. Once and for all, I refuse to be cursed at or whined at; I simply won’t be reproached, or condemned. I do what I like and I don’t admit anybody’s right to call my doings into question. Last week I thought it would be amusing to go to Madrid with you; this week I don’t. If my changing my mind has put you to any inconvenience, I’m sorry. But I’m not in the least apologetic for having changed my mind, and if you think your howlings and jealousies make me feel sorry for you, you’re much mistaken. They’re intolerable, they’re inexcusable. Do you really want to know why I’m not leaving Paris? Very well. “I suppose you’ve found some man you like more than me.” Marvellous, my dear Holmes! And guess where I found him? In the street. Strolling along the Boulevard Saint-Germain, looking at the bookshops. I noticed I was being followed from window to window by a young man. I liked his looks. Very black, with an olive skin, rather Roman, no taller than I. At the fourth window he began to talk to me in extraordinary French, with accents on all the mute E’s. “Ma Lei è italiano.” He was; huge delight. “Parla italiano?” And he began pouring out his admiration in the choicest Tuscan. I looked at him. After all, why not? Someone one has never seen before and knows nothing about – it’s an exciting idea. Absolute strangers at one moment and as intimate at the next as two human beings can be. Besides, he was a beautiful creature. “Vorrei e non vorrei,” I said. But he’d never heard of Mozart – only Puccini, so I cut the cackle. “All right.” We hailed a taxi and drove to a little hotel near the Jardin des Plantes. Rooms by the hour. A bed, a

chair, a cupboard, a washstand with a tin basin and jug, a towel-horse, a bidet. Sordid, but that was part of the fun. “Dunque,” I said. I hadn’t let him touch me in the cab. He came at me as though he were going to kill me, with clenched teeth. I shut my eyes, like a Christian martyr in front of a lion. Martyrdom’s exciting. Letting oneself be hurt, humiliated, used like a doormat – queer. I like it. Besides, the doormat uses the user. It’s complicated. He’d just come back from a seaside holiday by the Mediterranean and his body was all brown and polished by the sun. Beautifully savage he looked, a Red Indian. And as savage as his looks. The marks are still there where he bit me on the neck. I shall have to wear a scarf for days. Where did I see that statue of Marsyas being skinned? His face was like that. I dug my nails into his arm so that the blood came. Afterwards I asked him what he was called. His name’s Francesco Allegri and he’s an aeronautical engineer, and comes from Siena, where his father’s a professor of medicine at the university. How curiously irrelevant that a brown savage should design aircraft engines and have a father who’s a professor! I’m going to see him again tomorrow. So now you know, Walter, why I’ve changed my mind about going to Madrid. Don’t ever send me another letter like the last. L.’

Marjorie caught the three-twelve back to Chamford. The rain had stopped when she arrived. The hills on the other side of the valley were touched with sunlight and seemed to shine with their own radiance against the smoke and indigo of the clouds. Drops still hung from the twigs and every cup of leaves and petals was full. The wetted earth gave out a cool delicious fragrance; there was a noise of birds. As she passed under the overhanging branches of the great oak tree half-way up the hill, a puff of wind shook down a cold and sudden shower on her face. Marjorie laughed with pleasure.

She found the cottage untenanted. The maid was out and wouldn’t be back till a little before bedtime. The silence in the empty rooms had a quality of crystalline and musical transparency; the solitude seemed friendly and kind. When she moved about the house, she walked on tiptoe, as though she were afraid of waking a sleeping child.

Marjorie made herself a cup of tea, sipped, ate a biscuit, lighted a cigarette. The flavour of the food and drink, the aroma of the tobacco seemed peculiarly delicious and somehow novel. It was as if she had discovered them for the first time.

She turned the armchair so that it faced the window and sat there looking out, over the valley towards the bright hills with their background of storm. She remembered a day like this when they were living in their cottage in Berkshire. Sunshine the brighter for being so precarious in the midst of darkness; a shining and transfigured earth. Walter and she had sat together at the open window. He had loved her then. And yet she was happier now, much happier. She regretted nothing of what had happened in the interval. The suffering had been necessary: It was the cloud that enhanced the shining of her present felicity. A dark cloud, but how remote now, how curiously irrelevant! And that other happy brightness before the coming of the cloud – that too was tiny and far away, like an image in a curved mirror. Poor Walter! she thought, and remotely she was sorry for him. Pursuing happiness, he had made himself miserable. Happiness is a by-product, Mrs Quarles had said. It was true. ‘Happiness, happiness.’ Marjorie repeated the word to herself. Against the black vapours the hills were like emerald and green gold. Happiness and beauty and goodness. ‘The peace of God,’ she whispered, ‘the peace of God that passeth all understanding. Peace, peace, peace …’ She felt as though she were melting into that green and golden tranquillity, sinking and being absorbed into it, dissolving out of separateness into union. Stillness flowed into stillness, the silence without became one with the silence within her. The shaken and turbid liquor of existence grew gradually calm, and all that had made it opaque – all the noise and uproar of the world, all the personal anxieties and desires and feelings – began to settle like a sediment, fell slowly, slowly and noiselessly, out of sight. The turbid liquor became clearer and clearer, more and more translucent. Behind that gradually vanishing mist was reality, was God. It was a slow, progressive revelation. ‘Peace, peace,’ she whispered to herself and the last faint ripples died away from the surface of life, the opacities churned up by the agitation of living dropped away through the utter calm. ‘Peace, peace.’

She had no desires, no more preoccupations. The liquor which had been turbid was now quite clear, clearer than crystal, more diaphanous than air the mist had vanished and the unveiled reality was a wonderful emptiness, was nothing. Nothing – the only perfection, the only absolute. Infinite and eternal nothing. The gradual revelation was now complete.

Marjorie was roused by the click of the front-door latch and the sound of footsteps in the passage. Reluctantly and with a kind of pain she rose from the depths of divine vacancy; her soul swam up again to the surface of consciousness. The sunlight on the hills had deepened its colour, the clouds had lifted and the sky was a pale greenish blue, like water. It was almost evening. Her limbs felt stiff. She must have been sitting there for hours.

'Walter?' she called questioningly to the source of the noises in the passage.

The voice in which he answered was dead and flat. 'Why is he so unhappy?' she wondered at the sound of it, but wondered from a great distance and with a kind of far-away resentment. She resented his disturbing and interrupting presence, his very existence. He entered the room and she saw that his face was pale, his eyes darkly ringed.

'What's the matter?' she asked, almost against her will. The nearer she came to Walter, the further she moved from the marvellous nothingness of God. 'You don't look at all well.'

'It's nothing,' he answered. 'Rather tired, that's all.' Coming down in the train he had read and re-read Lucy's letter, till he almost knew it by heart. His imagination had supplemented the words. He knew that sordid little room in the *hôtel meublé*; he had seen the Italian's brown body and her whiteness, and the man's clenched teeth and his face like the face of a tortured Marsyas, and Lucy's own face with that expression he knew, that look of grave and attentive suffering, as though the agonizing pleasure were a profound and difficult truth only to be grasped by intense concentration.

Ah well, Marjorie was thinking; he had said it was nothing; that was all right; she needn't worry any further. 'Poor Walter!' she said aloud and smiled at him

with a pitying tenderness. He wasn't going to make any demands on her attention or her feelings; she resented him no longer. 'Poor Walter!'

Walter looked at her for a moment, then turned away. He didn't want pity. Not that sort of superior angel's pity, at any rate, and not from Marjorie. He had accepted pity from her once. The memory of the occasion made his whole flesh creep with shame. Never again. He walked away.

Marjorie heard his feet on the stairs and the banging of a door.

'All the same,' she thought, reluctantly solicitous, 'there *is* something wrong. Something *has* made him specially miserable. Perhaps I ought to go up and see what he's doing.'

But she didn't go. She sat where she was, quite still, deliberately forgetting him. The little sediment that Walter's coming had stirred up in her quickly settled again. Through the vacant lifelessness of trance her spirit sank slowly down once more into God, into the perfected absolute, into limitless and everlasting nothing. Time passed; the late afternoon turned into summer twilight; the twilight thickened slowly into darkness.

Daisy, the maid, came back at ten.

'Sittin' in the dark, mum?' she asked, looking into the sitting-room. She turned on the light. Marjorie winced. The glare brought back to her dazzled eyes all the close immediate details of the material world. God had vanished like a pricked bubble. Daisy caught sight of the unlaid table. 'What, 'aven't you 'ad no supper?' she exclaimed in horror.

'Why, no,' said Marjorie. 'I quite forgot about supper.'

'Not Mr Bidlake neither?' Daisy went on reproachfully. 'Why, pore man, 'e must be perished.'

She hurried away towards the kitchen in search of cold beef and pickles.

Upstairs in his room Walter was lying on the bed, his face buried in the pillows.

CHAPTER XXXI

A CROSSWORD PROBLEM had brought Mr Quarles to the seventeenth volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Idle curiosity detained him. The Lord Chamberlain, he learned, carries a white staff and wears a golden or jewelled key. The word lottery has no very definite signification; but Nero gave such prizes as a house or a slave, while Heliogabalus introduced an element of absurdity – one ticket for a golden vase, another for six flies. Pinckney B. S. Pinchback was the acting Republican governor of Louisiana in 1873. To define the lyre, it is necessary clearly to separate it from the allied harp and guitar. In one of the northern ravines of Madeira some masses of a coarsely crystalline Essexite are exposed to view. But there is also a negative side to magic. And terrestrial magnetism has a long history. He had just started to read about Sir John Blundell Maple, Bart. (1845–1903), whose father, John Maple (*d*. 1900) had a small furniture shop in the Tottenham Court Road, when the parlour-maid appeared at the door and announced that there was a young lady to see him.

‘A young ladah?’ he repeated with some surprise, taking off his pince-nez.

‘Yes, it’s me,’ said a familiar voice and Gladys pushed past the maid and advanced into the middle of the room.

At the sight of her, Mr Quarles felt a sudden spasm of apprehension. He got up. ‘You can go,’ he said with dignity to the maid. She went. ‘My dyah child!’ He took Gladys’s hand; she disengaged it. ‘But what a surprise!’

‘Ow, a pleasant surprise!’ she answered sarcastically. Emotion always resuscitated the cockney in her. She sat down, planting herself with force and determination in the chair. ‘Here I am,’ that determined down-sitting seemed to imply, ‘and here I stay’ – perhaps even, ‘here I bloody well stay.’

‘Pleasant indeed,’ said Mr Quarles mellifluously, for the sake of saying something. This was terrible, he was thinking. What could she want? And how

should he get her out of the house again? But if necessary, he could say he'd sent for her to do some specially urgent typing for him. 'But very unexpected,' he added.

'Very.' She shut her mouth firmly and looked at him – with eyes that Mr Quarles didn't at all like the expression of – as if in expectation. Of what?

'I'm delighted to see you, of course,' he went on.

'Ow, are you?' She laughed dangerously.

Mr Quarles looked at her and was afraid. He really hated the girl. He began to wonder why he had ever desired her. 'Very glad,' he repeated, with dignified emphasis. The great thing was to remain dignified, firmly superior. 'But …'

'*But*,' she echoed.

'Well, ryahlly, I think it was rather rash to come here.'

'He thinks it rather rash,' said Gladys, as though passing on the information to an invisible third party.

'Not to say unnecessarah.'

'Well, I'm the judge of *that*.'

'After all, you know quite well that if you'd wanted to see me, you'd only got to write and I'd have come at once. So why run the risk of coming hyah?' He waited. But Gladys did not answer, only looked at him with those hard green eyes of hers and that close-lipped smile that seemed to shut in enigmatically heaven only knew what dangerous thoughts and feelings. 'I'm ryahlly annoyed with you.' The manner of Mr Quarles's rebuke was dignified and impressive, but kind – always kind. 'Yes, ryahlly annoyed.'

Gladys threw back her head and uttered a shrill, short, hyena-like laugh.

Mr Quarles was disconcerted. But he preserved his dignity. 'You may laugh,' he said. 'But I speak syahriously. You had no right to come. You knew quite well how important it is that nothing should be suspected. Especially hyah – hyah, in my own house. You knew it.'

'Yes, I knew it,' Gladys repeated, nodding her head truculently. 'And that's exactly why I came.' She was silent for a moment. But the pressure of her feelings made silence no longer bearable. 'Because I knew you were frightened,'

she went on, ‘frightened that people might find out what you were reelly like. You dirty old swine!’ And suddenly losing all control of her fury, she sprang to her feet and advanced on Mr Quarles so menacingly, that he recoiled a step. But her attack was only verbal. ‘Giving yourself such airs, as though you was the Prince of Wales. And then taking a girl to dinner at the Corner House. And blaming everybody else, worse than a parson, when you’re no better than a dirty old pig yourself. Yes, a dirty old pig, that’s what you are. Saying you loved me, indeed! I know what that sort of love is. Why, a girl isn’t safe with you in a taxi. No, she isn’t. You filthy old beast! And then …’

‘Ryahlly, ryahlly!’ Mr Quarles had sufficiently recovered from his first shock of horrified surprise to be able to protest. This was terrible, unheard of. He felt himself being devastated, laid waste to, ravaged.

“Ryahlly, ryahlly,”’ she mimicked derisively. ‘And then not even taking a girl to a decent seat at the theatre. But when it was a question of your having a bit of fun in your way – oh, lord! Nasty fat old swine! And carrying on all the time like Rudolph Valentino, with your chatter about all the women that had been in love with you. With *you*! You just look at yourself in the glass. Like a red egg, that’s what you are.’

‘Too unseemlah!’

‘Talking about love with a face like that!’ she went on, more shrilly than ever. ‘An old swine like you! And then you only give a girl a rotten old watch and a pair of ear-rings, and the stones in them aren’t even good ones, because I asked a jeweller and he said they weren’t. And now, on top of everything I’m going to have a baby.’

‘A babah?’ repeated Mr Quarles incredulously, but with a deeper and more dreadful sinking of apprehension. ‘Surely not a babah.’

‘Yes, a baby!’ Gladys shouted, stamping her foot. ‘Can’t you hear what I say, you old idiot? A baby. That’s what I’ve come here about. And I won’t go away till …’

It was at this moment that Mrs Quarles walked in through the French window from the garden. She had been having a talk with Marjorie at the cottage and had

come to tell Sidney that she had asked the two young people to dinner that evening.

‘Oh, I’m sorry,’ she said, halting on the threshold.

There was a moment’s silence. Then, addressing herself this time to Mrs Quarles, Gladys began again with uncontrollable fury. Five minutes later she was no less uncontrollably sobbing and Mrs Quarles was trying to console her. Sidney took the opportunity to sneak out of the room. When the gong sounded for lunch, he sent down word to say that he was feeling very ill and would they please send up two lightly boiled eggs, some toast and butter, and a little stewed fruit.

Meanwhile in the study Mrs Quarles had hung solicitously over Gladys’s chair. ‘It’s all right,’ she kept repeating, patting the girl’s shoulder. ‘It’s all right. You mustn’t cry.’ Poor girl! she was thinking. And what a dreadful scent! And how *could* Sidney? And again, poor girl, poor girl! ‘Don’t cry. Try to be brave. It’ll be all right.’

Gladys’s sobbing gradually subsided. Mrs Quarles’s calm voice talked on consolingly. The girl listened. Then suddenly she jumped up. The face that confronted Mrs Quarles was savagely derisive through the tear stains.

‘Ow, shut it!’ she said sarcastically, ‘shut it! What do you take me for? A baby? Talking like that! You think you can talk me quiet, do you? Talk me out of my rights. Talky talky; baby’s going to be good, isn’t she? But you’re mistaken, I tell you. You’re damned well mistaken. And you’ll know it soon enough, I can tell you.’

And with that she bounced out of the room into the garden and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE LITTLE house at the end of the mews Elinor was alone. Faint rumblings of far-away traffic caressed the warm silence. A bowl of her mother's pot-pourri peopled the air for her with countless potential memories of childhood. She was arranging roses in a vase; huge white roses with petals of malleable porcelain, orange roses like whorls of congealed and perfumed flame. The chiming clock on the mantelpiece made a sudden and startling comment of eight notes and left the accorded vibrations to tingle mournfully away into nothingness, like music on a departing ship. Half-past three. And at six she was expecting Everard. Expecting Everard for a cocktail, she was at pains to explain to herself, before he took her out to dinner and the play. Just an evening's entertainment, like any other evening's entertainment. She kept telling herself so, because she knew, underneath, she was prophetically certain, that the evening wouldn't be in the least like other evenings, but cardinal, decisive. She would have to make up her mind, she would have to choose. But she didn't want to choose: that was why she tried to make herself believe that the evening was to be merely trivial and amusing. It was like covering a corpse with flowers. Mountains of flowers. But the corpse was always there, in spite of the concealing lilies. And a choice would have to be made, in spite of dinner at Kettner's and the theatre. Sighing, she picked up the heavy vase in both hands and was just lifting it on to the mantelpiece, when there was a loud knock at the door. Elinor started so violently, that she almost dropped her burden. And the terror persisted, even when she had recovered from the first shock of surprise. A knock at the door, when she was alone in the lonely house, always set her heart uncomfortably beating. The idea that there was somebody there, waiting, listening, a stranger, an enemy perhaps (for Elinor's fancy was pregnant with horrible hairy faces peering round corners, with menacing hands, with knives

and clubs and pistols) or perhaps a madman, listening intently for any sound of life within the house, waiting, waiting like a spider for her to open – this was a nightmare to her, a terror. The knock was repeated. Setting down the vase, she tiptoed with infinite precautions to the window and peeped between the curtains. On days when she was feeling particularly nervous she lacked the courage even to do this, but sat motionless, hoping that the noise of her heart might not be audible in the street, until the knocker at last wore out his patience and walked away. Next day the man from Selfridge's would heap coals of fire upon her by apologizing for the retarded delivery. 'Called yesterday evening, madam, but there was nobody at home.' And Elinor would feel ashamed of herself and a fool. But the next time she was alone and nervous, she would do exactly the same thing.

This afternoon she had courage; she ventured to look at the enemy – at as much of him, that is to say, as she could see, peeping sideways through the glass towards the door. A grey trouser-leg and an elbow were all that entered her field of vision. There was yet another knock. Then the trouser-leg moved back, the whole coat came into view, the black hat and, with a turn of the head, Spandrell's face. She ran to the door and opened.

'Spandrell!' she called, for he had already turned to go. He came back, lifting his hat. They shook hands. 'I'm so sorry,' she explained. 'I was alone. I thought it was at least a murderer. Then I peeped through the window and saw it was you.'

Spandrell gave vent to brief and noiseless laughter. 'But it might still be a murderer, even though it *is* me.' And he shook his knobbed stick at her with a playfulness which was, however, so dramatically like her imaginings of the genuinely homicidal article, that Elinor was made to feel quite uncomfortable.

She covered her emotion with a laugh, but decided not to ask him into the house. Standing on the doorstep she felt safer. 'All the same,' she said, 'it would be better to be murdered by somebody one knows than by a stranger.'

'Would it?' He looked at her; the corners of his wide weal-like mouth twitched into a curious smile. 'It needs a woman to think of those refinements.

But if you should ever feel like having your throat cut in a thoroughly friendly fashion …'

'My dear Spandrell!' she protested, and felt gladder than ever that she was still on the doorstep and not inside the house.

'… Don't hesitate to send for me. No matter what the inconvenience,' he laid his hand on his heart, 'I'd fly to your side. Or rather to your neck.' He clicked his heels and bowed. 'But tell me,' he went on in another tone, 'is Philip anywhere about? I wanted him to come and dine to-night. At Sbisa's. I'd ask you too. Only it's a purely masculine aftair.'

She thanked him. 'But I couldn't come in any case. And Philip's gone down into the country to see his mother. And will only be back just in time for Tolley's concert at the Queen's Hall. But I know he said he was going round to Sbisa's afterwards, on the chance of meeting someone. You'll see him then. Late.'

'Well, better late than never. Or at least,' he uttered another of his soundless laughs, 'so one piously hopes, where one's friends are concerned. Pious hopes! But to tell you the truth, the proverb needs changing. Better never than early.'

'Then why go to the trouble of asking people to dine?'

Spandrell shrugged his shoulders. 'Force of habit,' he said. 'And besides, I generally make them pay, when I ask them out.'

They were both laughing, when a loud ringing made them turn. A telegraph boy on a red bicycle was shooting down the mews towards them.

'Quarles?' he asked, as he jumped off.

Elinor took the telegram and opened it. The laughter went out of her face as she read. 'No answer.' The boy remounted and rode away. Elinor stood staring at the telegram as though its words were written in an unfamiliar language difficult to interpret. She looked at the watch on her wrist, then back at the flimsy paper.

'Will you do something for me?' she said at last, turning to Spandrell.

'But of course.'

‘My baby’s ill,’ she explained. ‘They want me to come. If I hurry’ (she looked again at her watch), ‘I can just catch the four-seventeen at Euston. But there’ll be no time for anything else. Will you ring up Everard Webley for me and explain why I can’t dine with him this evening?’ It was a warning, she thought; a prohibition. ‘Before six. At his office.’

‘Before six,’ he repeated slowly. ‘At his office. Very well.’

‘I must rush,’ she said, holding out her hand.

‘But I’ll go and get you a cab, while you put on your hat.’

She thanked him. Spandrell hurried away along the mews. A prohibition, Elinor repeated to herself, as she adjusted her hat in front of the Venetian mirror in the living-room. The choice had been made for her. It was at once a relief and a disappointment. But made, she went on to reflect, at poor little Phil’s expense. She wondered what was the matter with him. Her mother’s telegram – such a characteristic one, that she could not help smiling now that she thought of it again – said nothing. ‘PHILIP RATHER SOUFFRANT AND THOUGH UNALARMINLGY SHOULD ADVISE PROMPT HOME-COMING MOTHER.’ She remembered how nervous and difficult the child had been of late, how easily fatigued. She reproached herself for not having realized that he was working up for an illness. Now it had come. A touch of influenza, perhaps. ‘I ought to have taken more care,’ she kept repeating. She scribbled a note for her husband. ‘The accompanying telegram explains my sudden departure. Join me at Gattenden tomorrow morning.’ Where should she put it so that Philip should be sure to see it when he came in? Leaning against the clock on the mantelpiece? But would he necessarily want to know the time? Or on the table? No; pin it to the screen; that was the thing! He couldn’t miss it. She ran upstairs in search of a pin. On Philip’s dressing-table she saw a bunch of keys. She picked them up and looked at them, frowning. The idiot’s forgotten his latch-key. How will he get in to-night?’ The noise of a taxi under the window suggested a solution. She hurried down, pinned the note and the telegram conspicuously to the screen that shut off the drawing-room part of the living-

room from the door and let herself out into the mews. Spandrell was standing at the door of the cab.

‘That is kind of you,’ she said. ‘But I haven’t finished exploiting you even now.’ She held up the keys. ‘When you see Philip this evening, give him these and tell him with my love that he’s an imbecile. He wouldn’t have been able to get in without them.’ Spandrell took the keys in silence. ‘And tell him why I’ve gone and that I’m expecting him tomorrow.’ She got into the cab. ‘And don’t forget to ring up Webley. Before six. Because he was supposed to be meeting me here at six.’

‘Here?’ he asked with an expression of sudden interest and curiosity which Elinor found rather offensive and embarrassing. Was he imagining something, was he daring to suppose … ?

‘Yes, here,’ she nodded curtly.

‘I won’t forget,’ he assured her emphatically, and there was still something about his expression which made her suspect a private significance behind the obvious words.

‘Thank you,’ said Elinor, without cordiality. ‘And now I must fly.’ She gave the word to the driver. The taxi backed up the mews, under the archway, turned and was gone.

Spandrell walked slowly up to Hyde Park Corner. From the public call-box in the station he telephoned to Illidge.

Everard Webley was striding about the room, dictating. Sedentary composition he found impossible. ‘How do people write when they’re grafted to chairs all day long, year in year out?’ He found it incomprehensible. ‘When I’m sitting in a chair, or lying on a bed, I become like the furniture I’ve combined myself with – mere wood and stuffing. My mind doesn’t move unless my muscles move.’ On days when his correspondence was large, when there were articles to dictate, speeches to compose, Everard’s working day was an eight-hour walking tour. ‘Doing the lion,’ was how his secretaries described his methods of dictation. He was doing the lion now – the restless lion, a little before feeding time – pacing from wall to wall of his big bare office.

‘Remember,’ he was saying, frowning, as he spoke, at the grey carpet; under his secretary’s pencil the shorthand scurried across the page, ‘remember that the final authority is in all cases mine and that, so long as I remain at the head of the B.B.F., every attempt at insubordination will be promptly and ruthlessly suppressed. Yours etcetera.’ He was silent and, walking back to his desk from the spot where the conclusion of his thoughtful and leonine pacing had left him, he turned over the scattered papers. ‘That seems to be all,’ he said and looked at his watch. It was just after a quarter to six. ‘Have these last letters ready for me in the morning,’ he went on. ‘I’ll sign them then.’ He took his hat from the peg. ‘Good evening.’ And slamming the door, he descended the stairs two at a time. Outside the house he found his chauffeur waiting with the car. It was a powerful machine (for Everard was a lover of furious driving) and, since he also enjoyed the sensation of battling with the weather and the wind of his own speed, open. A tightly-stretched waterproof sheet covered the whole of the back part of the touring body like a deck, leaving only the two front seats available for passengers. ‘I shan’t need you any more this evening,’ he said to the chauffeur, as he settled into the driver’s seat. ‘You can go.’

He touched the self-starter, threw the car into gear and shot off with a violent impetuosity. Several dozens of horses were bottled in the three litres of Everard’s cylinders; he liked to make them work their hardest. Full speed ahead and then, a yard from the impending accident, jam on the brakes, that was his method. Driving with Everard in town was almost too exciting. Elinor had protested the last time he took her out. ‘I don’t so much mind dying,’ she had said. ‘But I really should object to passing the rest of my life with two wooden legs and a broken nose.’ He had laughed. ‘You’re quite safe with me. I don’t have accidents.’ You’re above such things are you?’ she had mocked. ‘Well, if you like to put it like that …’ The brakes were applied with such violence that Elinor had had to clutch at the arms of her seat to prevent herself from being thrown against the wind-screen. ‘Imbecile,’ he had shouted at the bewildered old gentleman whose hen-like indecisions in the roadway had so nearly landed him under Everard’s Dunlops. ‘If you like to put it like that–’ and the car had shot

forward again with a jerk that flattened Elinor against the back of her seat – ‘you may. I don’t have accidents. I manufacture my own luck.’

Remembering the incident, Everard smiled to himself as he drove along Oxford Street. A railway delivery van held up his progress. Horses oughtn’t to be allowed in the street. ‘Either you take me,’ he would say to her, ‘and in the end that means you’ll have to make the thing public – leave Philip and come to me’ – (for he intended to be entirely honest with her; there were to be no false pretences of any kind); ‘either that, or else …’ There was an opportunity to pass the delivery van; he pressed the accelerator and darted forward with a swerve to the right and another, past the nose of the old and patiently trotting horse, to the left again. ‘Or else we don’t see one another again.’ It was to be an ultimatum. Brutal. But Everard hated situations that were neither one thing nor the other. He preferred definite knowledge, however unpleasant, to even the most hopefully blissful of uncertainties. And in this case the uncertainty wasn’t at all blissful. At the entry to Oxford Circus a policeman lifted his hand. It was seven minutes to six. She was too squeamish, he thought, looking round, too sensitive about these new buildings. Everard found nothing displeasing in the massively florid baroque of modern commerce. It was vigorous and dramatic; it was large, it was expensive, it symbolized progress. ‘But it’s so revoltingly vulgar!’ she had protested. ‘But it’s difficult,’ he had answered, ‘not to be vulgar, when one isn’t dead. You object to these people doing things. And I agree: doing things is rather vulgar.’ She had the typical consumer’s point of view, not the producer’s. The policeman dropped his hand. Slowly at first, but with gathering impetus, the pent-up flood of traffic rumbled forward. A luxury mind – that was what she had; not a necessity mind. A mind that thought of the world only in terms of beauty and enjoyment, not of use; a mind preoccupied with sensations and shades of feeling, and preoccupied with them for their own sake, not because sharp eyes and intuition are necessary in the struggle for life. Indeed, she hardly knew that there was a struggle. He ought to have disapproved of her; and he would have disapproved (Everard smiled to himself as he made the reflection) if he hadn’t been in love with her. He would have …. Flop! from the roof of a

passing ‘bus a banana skin fell like a draggled star-fish on to the bonnet in front of him. A whoop of laughter sounded through the roaring. Lifting his eyes he saw two young girls looking down at him over the rail, open-mouthed, like a pair of pretty little gargoyles, and laughing, laughing as though there had never been a joke in the world before that moment. Everard shook his fist at them and laughed too. How much Elinor would have enjoyed that! he thought. She who so loved the streets and their comedies. What an eye she had for the odd, the amusing, the significant! Where he perceived only a mass of undifferentiated humanity, she distinguished individuals. And her talent for inventing life histories for her once-glimpsed oddities was no less remarkable than her detecting eye. She would have known all about those young girls – their class, the sort of homes they came from, where they bought their clothes and how much they paid for them, whether they were still virtuous, what books they read, and which were their favourite cinema actors. Imagining to himself what Elinor would have said, remembering her laughter and the look in her eyes and her tricks of speech, he was suddenly filled with so much tenderness, such a violent yet delicately affectionate longing to be with her, that he could hardly bear to be separated from her for even a moment longer. He hooted at the taxi in front of him, he tried to thrust past on the right. An obstructing street island compelled him to fall back, but not before the taxi-driver had had time to throw doubts on his legitimacy, his heterosexuality and his prospects of happiness in another world. With as much gusto and incomparably more originality, Everard swore back. He felt himself overflowing with life, extraordinarily vigorous and strong, inexplicably and (but for the fact that it would be at least five minutes before he saw Elinor) perfectly happy. Yes, perfectly happy; for he knew (with what calm conviction!) that she would say yes, that she loved him. And his happiness became more intense, more poignant and at the same time more serene, as he swung round past the Marble Arch into the Park. His prophetic conviction deepened into something like remembered certainty, as though the future were already history. The sun was low and wherever its rosily golden light touched earth, it was as if a premature and more luminous autumn had fired the leaves

and grass. Great shafts of powdery radiance leaned down from the west between the trees and in the shadows the twilight was a mist of lavender, a mist of blue and darkening indigo, plane after plane into the hazy London distance. And the couples strolling across the grass, the children playing were alternately eclipsed and transfigured as they passed from shade to sunlight, were alternately insignificant and brilliantly miraculous. It was as though a capricious god, now bored and now enchanted by his creatures, had turned upon them at one moment an eye of withering indifference and at the next, with his love, had bestowed upon them some of his own divinity. The road stretched clear and polished before him; but Everard hardly exceeded the speed limit – in spite of his longing; in a sense because be loved her so much. For it was all so beautiful; and where beauty was, there too, for Everard, by some private logic, some personal necessity, was Elinor. She was with him now, because she would have enjoyed this loveliness so much. And because she would have wanted to prolong the pleasure, he crept along. The engine was turning at a bare fifteen hundred revolutions a minute; the dynamo was hardly charging. A Baby Austin passed him as though he were standing still. Let them pass! Everard was thinking of the phrases in which he would describe to her this marvel. Through the railings, the ‘buses in Park Lane blazed scarlet and glittered like triumphal cars in a pageant. Faintly, through the noise of the traffic, a clock struck six; and before it had finished, another chimed in, melodious, sweet and with a touch of melancholy – the very voice of the bright evening and of his happiness. And now, for all his creeping, the marble gateways of Hyde Park Corner were before him. Offered, in spite of the nakedness and the more than Swedish development of his abdominal muscles, by the Ladies of England to the Victor of Waterloo, the bronze Achilles, whose flesh had once been Napoleon’s cannons, stood with shield raised, sword brandished, menacing and defending himself against the pale and empty sky. It was almost regretfully, though he longed to be at his journey’s end, that Everard left the Park. Once more the towering ‘buses roared before him and behind. Rounding the archipelago of islands he vowed that tomorrow, if Elinor said Yes, he would send five pounds to St George’s Hospital. He knew she

would. The money was as good as given already. He turned out of Grosvenor Place; the roaring faded behind him. Belgrave Square was an oasis of trees; the starlings chattered in a rural silence. Everard turned once, twice and yet again. On the left, between the houses was an archway. He passed it by a yard or two, stopped and, pulling the wheel over, backed under it into the mews, back, back to the very end of the blind alley. He stopped the car and got out. How charming the yellow curtains looked! His heart was beating very fast. He felt as he had felt when he made his first speech, half-frightened, half-exultant. Mounting the doorstep, he knocked and waited twenty heart-beats; the house gave forth no answering sound. He knocked again and, remembering what Elinor had told him of her terrors, accompanied the rap with a whistle and, as though in answer to the unspoken challenge of her fears, a call of ‘Friend!’ And then, suddenly, he noticed that the door was not latched, but only ajar. He pushed; it swung open. Everard stepped over the threshold.

‘Elinor!’ he called, thinking that she must be upstairs. ‘Elinor!’

There was still no answer. Or was she playing a joke? Would she suddenly pounce out at him from behind one of the screens? He smiled to himself at the thought and was advancing to explore the silent room, when his eye was caught by the papers pinned so conspicuously to a panel of the screen on the right. He approached and had just begun to read, ‘The accompanying telegram will explain …’ when a sound behind him made him turn his head. A man was standing within four feet of him, his hands raised; the club which they grasped had already begun to swing sideways and forward from over the right shoulder. Everard threw up his arm, too late. The blow caught him on the left temple. It was as though a light had suddenly been turned out. He was not even conscious of falling.

Mrs Quarles kissed her son. ‘Dear Phil,’ she said. ‘It’s good of you to have come so quickly.’

‘You’re not looking very well, mother.’

‘A little tired, that’s all. And worried,’ she added after a moment’s pause and with a sigh.

‘Worried?’

‘About your father. He’s not well,’ she went on, speaking slowly and as if with reluctance. ‘He wanted very specially to see you. That was why I wired.’

‘He isn’t dangerously ill?’

Not physically,’ Mrs Quarles replied. ‘But his nerves … It’s a kind of breakdown. He’s very excited. Very unstable.’

‘But what’s the cause?’

Mrs Quarles was silent. And when at last she spoke it was with an obvious effort, as though each word had to force its way past some inward barrier. Her sensitive face was fixed and strained. ‘Something has happened to upset him,’ she said. ‘He’s had a great shock.’ And slowly, word by word, the story came out.

Bent forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands, Philip listened. After a first glance at his mother’s face, he kept his eyes fixed on the ground. He felt that to look at her, to meet her eyes would be the infliction of an unnecessary embarrassment. Speaking was already a pain to her and a humiliation; let her at least speak unseen, as though there were nobody there to witness her distress. His averted eyes left her a kind of spiritual privacy. Word after word, in a colourless soft voice, Mrs Quarles talked on. Incident succeeded sordid incident. When she began to tell the story of Gladys’s visit of two days before, Philip could not bear to listen any longer. It was too humiliating for her; he could not permit her to go on.

‘Yes, yes, I can imagine,’ he said, interrupting her. And jumping up, he limped with quick nervous steps to the window. ‘Don’t go on.’ He stood there for a minute, looking out at the lawn and the thick yew-tree walls and the harvest-coloured hills beyond, on the further side of the valley. The scene was almost exasperatingly placid. Philip turned, limped back across the room and standing for a moment behind his mother’s chair laid a hand on her shoulder; then walked away again.

‘Don’t think about it any more,’ he said. ‘I’ll do whatever has to be done.’ He looked forward with an enormous distaste to loud and undignified scenes, to

disputes and vulgar hagglings. ‘Perhaps I’d better go and see father,’ he suggested.

Mrs Quarles nodded. ‘He was very anxious to see you.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t quite know. But he’s been insisting.’

‘Does he talk about … well, this business?’

‘No. Never mentions it. I have the impression that he forgets about it deliberately.’

‘Then I’d better not speak about it.’

‘Not unless he begins,’ Mrs Quarles advised. ‘Mostly he talks about himself. About the past, about his health – pessimistically. You must try to cheer him.’ Philip nodded. ‘And humour him,’ his mother went on; ‘don’t contradict. He easily flares up. It isn’t good for him to get excited.’

Philip listened. As though he were a dangerous animal, he was thinking; or a naughty child. The misery of it, the anxiety, the humiliation for his mother!

‘And don’t stay too long,’ she added.

Philip left her. The fool, he said to himself as he crossed the hall, the damned fool! The sudden anger and contempt with which he thought of his father were tempered by no previous affection. Neither, for that matter, were they exacerbated by any previous hatred. Up to this time Philip had neither loved nor disliked his father. Unreflectingly tolerant or, at the worst, with a touch of amused resignation, he had just accepted his existence. There was nothing in his memories of childhood to justify more positive emotions. As a father, Mr Quarles had shown himself no less erratic and no less ineffectual than as a politician or as a man of business. Brief periods of enthusiastic interest in his children had alternated with long periods during which he almost ignored their existence. Philip and his brother had preferred him during the seasons of neglect; for he had ignored them benevolently. They liked him less when he was interested in their well-being. For the interest was generally not so much in the children as in a theory of education or hygiene. After meeting an eminent doctor, after reading the latest book on pedagogical methods, Mr Quarles would wake

up to the discovery that, unless something were drastically done, his sons were likely to grow up into idiots and cripples, weak-minded and with bodies poisoned by the wrong food and distorted by improper exercise. And then, for a few weeks, the two boys would be stuffed with raw carrots or overdone beef (it depended on the doctor Mr Quarles happened to have met); would be drilled, or taught folk-dancing and eurhythmics; would be made to learn poetry by rote (if it happened to be the memory that was important at the moment) or else (if it happened to be the ratiocinative faculties) would be turned out into the garden, told to plant sticks in the lawn and, by measuring the shadow at different hours of the day, discover for themselves the principles of trigonometry. While the fit lasted, life for the two boys was almost intolerable. And if Mrs Quarles protested, Sidney flew into a rage and told her that she was a selfishly doting mother, to whom the true welfare of her children meant nothing. Mrs Quarles did not insist too strongly; for she knew that, thwarted, Sidney would probably become more obstinate; humoured, he would forget his enthusiasm. And in fact, after a few weeks, Sidney would duly tire of labours which produced no quick and obvious results. His hygiene had not made the boys perceptibly larger or stronger; they had not grown appreciably more intelligent for his pedagogy. All that they quite indubitably were was a daily and hourly bore. ‘Affairs of greater moment’ would occupy more and more of his attention, until gradually, like the Cheshire cat, he had faded altogether out of the world of the schoolroom and the nursery into higher and more comfortable spheres. The boys settled down again to happiness.

Arrested at the door of his father’s room by the sounds from within, Philip listened. His face took on an expression of anxiety, even of alarm. That voice? And his father, he had been told, was alone. Talking to himself? Was he as bad as all that? Bracing himself, Philip opened the door and was immediately reassured to find that what he had taken for insanity was only dictation to the dictaphone. Propped up on pillows, Mr Quarles was half-sitting, half-lying in his bed. His face, his very scalp were flushed and shining, and his pink silk pyjamas were like an intensified continuation of the same fever. The dictaphone stood on

the table by his bed; Mr Quarles was talking into the mouthpiece of its flexible speaking-tube. ‘True greatness,’ he was saying sonorously, ’is inversely proportional to myahr immediate success. Ah, *hyah* you are!’ he cried, looking round as the door opened. He stopped the clockwork of the machine, hung up the speaking-tube and stretched out a welcoming hand. Simple gestures. But there was something, it seemed to Philip, extravagant about all his movements. It was as though he were on the stage. The eyes which he turned on Philip were unnaturally bright. ‘I’m so glad you’ve come. So glad, dyah boy.’ He patted Philip’s hand; the loud voice suddenly trembled.

Unused to such demonstrations, Philip was embarrassed. ‘Well, how are you feeling?’ he asked with an assumption of cheeriness.

Mr Quarles shook his head and pressed his son’s hand without speaking. Philip was more than ever embarrassed at seeing that the tears had come into his eyes. How could one go on hating and being angry?

‘But you’ll be all right,’ he said, trying to be reassuring. ‘It’s just a question of resting for a bit.’

Mr Quarles tightened the clasp of his hand. ‘Don’t tell your mother,’ he said. ‘But I feel that the end’s nyah.’

‘But that’s nonsense, father. You mustn’t talk like that.’

‘Nyah,’ Mr Quarles repeated, obstinately nodding, ‘very nyah. That’s why I’m so glad you’re hyah. I should have been unhappah to die when you were at the other end of the wahld. But with you hyah, I feel I can go’ – his voice trembled again – ‘quite contentedlah.’ Once more he squeezed Philip’s hand. He was convinced that he had always been a devoted father, living for nothing but his children. And so he had been, every now and then. ‘Yes, quite contentedlah.’ He pulled out his handkerchief, blew his nose, and while he was doing so surreptitiously wiped his eyes.

‘But you’re not going to die.’

‘Yes, yes,’ Mr Quarles insisted. ‘I can feel it.’ He genuinely did feel it; he believed he was going to die, because there was at least a part of his mind that desired to die. These complications of the last weeks had been too much for him;

and the future promised to be worse, if that were possible. To fade out, painlessly – that would be the best solution of all his problems. He wished, he believed; and, believing in his approaching death, he pitied himself as a victim and at the same time admired himself for the resigned nobility with which he supported his fate.

‘But you’re not going to die,’ Philip dully insisted, not knowing what consolation, beyond mere denial, to offer. He had no gift for dealing extempore with the emotional situations of practical life. ‘There’s nothing …’ He was going to say, ‘There’s nothing the matter with you’; but checked himself; reflecting, before it was too late, that his father might be offended.

‘Let’s say no more about it.’ Mr Quarles spoke tartly; there was a look of annoyance in his eye. Philip remembered what his mother had said about humouring him. He kept silence. ‘One can’t quarrel with Destinah,’ Mr Quarles went on in another tone. ‘Destinah,’ he repeated with a sigh. ‘You’ve been fortunate, dyah boy; you discovered your vocation from the farst. Fate has treated you well.’

Philip nodded. He had often thought so himself; with a certain apprehension even. He had an obscure belief in nemesis.

‘Whereas in my case …’ Mr Quarles did not finish the sentence, but raised his hand and let it fall again, hopelessly, on to the coverlet. ‘I wasted yahs of my life on false scents. Yahs and yahs before I discovered my ryahl bent. A philosopher’s wasted on practical affairs. He’s even absard. Like what’s-his-name’s albatross. You know.’

Philip was puzzled. ‘Do you mean the one in *The Ancient Mariner?*’

‘No, no,’ said Mr Quarles impatiently. ‘That Frenchman.’

‘Oh, of course.’ Philip had caught the reference. ‘Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées. Baudelaire, you mean.’

‘Baudelaire, of course.’

‘Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,

Ses ailes de géant l’empêchent de marcher,’

Philip quoted, glad to be able to divert the conversation if only for a moment from personalities to literature.

His father was delighted. ‘Exactlahr he cried triumphantly. ‘It’s the same with philosophers. Their wings prevent them from walking. For tharty yahs I tried to be a walker – in politics, in business. I didn’t ryahlize that my place was in the air, not on the ground. In the air!’ he repeated, raising his arm. ‘I had wings.’ He agitated his hand in a rapid tremolo. ‘Wings, and didn’t know it.’ His voice had grown louder, his eyes brighter, his face pinker and more shiny. His whole person expressed such an excitement, such restlessness and exaltation, that Philip was seriously disquieted.

‘Hadn’t you better rest a little?’ he anxiously suggested.

Mr Quarles disregarded the interruption. ‘Wings, wings,’ he cried. ‘I had wings and if I’d ryahlized it as a young man, what heights I might have flown to! But I tried to walk. In the mud. For tharty yahs. Only after tharty yahs did I discover that I was meant to be flying. And now I must give up almost before I’ve begun.’ He sighed and, leaning back against his pillows, he shot the words almost perpendicularly up into the air. ‘My work unfinished. My dreams unryahlized. Fate’s been hard.’

‘But you’ll have all the time you need to finish your work.’

‘No, no,’ Mr Quarles insisted, shaking his head. He wanted to be one of fate’s martyrs, to be able to point to himself and say: There, but for the malignity of providence, goes Aristotle. Destiny’s unkindness justified everything – his failure in sugar, in politics, in farming, the coldness with which his first book had been received, the indefinite delay in the appearance of the second; it even justified in some not easily explicable fashion his having put Gladys in a family way. To be a seducer of servants, secretaries, peasant girls was part of his unhappy destiny. And now that, to crown the edifice of his misfortune, he was about to die (prematurely but stoically, like the noblest Roman of them all), how trivial, how wretchedly insignificant was this matter of lost virginities and impending babies! And how unseemly, at the philosophic death-bed, was all the outcry! But he could only ignore it on condition that this was genuinely his

death-bed and that destiny was universally admitted to have been cruel. A martyred philosopher on the point of death was justified in refusing to be bothered with Gladys and her baby. That was why (though the reason was felt and not formulated) Mr Quarles repudiated, so vigorously and even with annoyance, his son's consoling assurances of long life; that was why he arraigned malignant providence and magnified with even more than his ordinary self-complaisance the talents which providence had prevented him from using.

'No, no, dyah boy,' he repeated. 'I shall never finish. And that was one of the reasons why I wanted to have a talk with you.'

Philip looked at him with a certain apprehension. What was coming next? he wondered. There was a little silence.

'One doesn't want to shuffle off entirely unrecorded,' said Mr Quarles in a voice made husky by a recrudescence of self-pity. 'Shyahr extinction – it's difficult to face.' Before his mind's eye the void expanded, lampless and abysmal. Death. It might be the end of his troubles; but it was none the less appalling. 'You understand the feeling?' he asked.

'Perfectly,' said Philip, 'perfectly. But in your case, father …' Mr Quarles who had been blowing his nose again raised a protesting hand. 'No, no.' He had made up his mind that he was going to die; it was useless for anyone to attempt to dissuade him. 'But if you understand my feeling, that's all that matters. I can depart in peace with the knowledge that you won't allow all memory of me to disappyah completely. Dyah boy, you shall be my literary executor. There are some fragments of my writing …'

'The book on democracy?' asked Philip, who saw himself being called upon to complete the largest work on the subject yet projected. His father's answer took a load off his mind.

'No, not that,' Mr Quarles hastily replied. 'Only the bare matyahrials of that book exist. And to a great extent not on paper. Only in my mind. In fact,' he went on, 'I was just going to tell you that I wanted all my notes for the big book destroyed. Without being looked at. They're myah jottings. Meaningless except to me.' Mr Quarles was not anxious that the emptiness of his files and the

prevailing blankness of the cards in his card-index should be posthumously discovered and commented on. ‘They must all be destroyed, do you understand?’

Philip made no protest.

‘What I wanted to entrust to you dyah boy,’ Mr Quarles went on, ‘was a collection of more intimate fragments. Reflections on life, records of pahsonal expyahriences. Things like that.’

Philip nodded. ‘I see.’

‘I’ve been jotting them down for a long time past,’ said Mr Quarles. ‘Memories and Reflections of Fifty Yahs – that might be a good title. There’s a lot in my notebooks. And these last days I’ve been recording on this.’ He tapped the dictaphone. ‘When one’s ill, you know, one thinks a lot.’ He sighed. ‘Syahriously.’

‘Of course,’ Philip agreed.

‘If you’d care to listen …’ he indicated the dictaphone.

Philip nodded. Mr Quarles prepared the machine. ‘It’ll give you an idyah of the kind of thing. Thoughts and memories. Hyah.’ He pushed the machine across the table and, pushing, sent a piece of paper fluttering to the ground. It lay there on the carpet, chequered, a puzzle. ‘This is where you listen.’

Philip listened. After a moment of scratchy roaring, the Punch and Judy parody of his father’s voice said, ‘The key to the problem of sex: – passion is sacred, a manifestation of the divinitah.’ And then, without stop or transition, but in a slightly different tone: ‘The wahrst thing about politics is the frivolitah of politicians. Meeting Asquith one evening at dinner, I forget now where, I took the opportunitah of ahrging on him the necessitah of abolishing capital punishment. One of the most syahrious questions of modern life. But he myahrly suggested that we should go and play bridge. Unit of measure seven letters long: Verchok. Fastidious men do not live in pigsties, nor can they long remain in politics or business. There are nature’s Greeks and nature’s Mrs Grundies. I never shared the mob’s high opinion of Lloyd George. Every man is born with a natural right to be happy; but what ferocious repression when anybody tried to

claim his right! Brazilian stork, six letters: jabiru. True greatness is invarsely proportional to myahr immediate success. *Ah*, *hyah* you … !' The scratchy roar supervened.

'Yes, I see the style of the thing,' said Philip, looking up. 'How does one stop this affair? Ah, that's it.' He stopped it.

'So many thoughts occur to me as I lie hyah,' said Mr Quarles, aimed upwards, as though speaking against aircraft. 'Such a wealth! I could never record them all but for the machine. It's wonderful. Ryahly wonderful!'

CHAPTER XXXIII

ELINOR HAD HAD time to telegraph from Euston. On her arrival, she found the car waiting for her at the station. ‘How is he?’ she asked the chauffeur. But Paxton was vague, didn’t rightly know. Privately, he thought it was one of these ridiculous fusses about nothing, such as the rich are always making, particularly where their children are concerned. They drove up to Gattenden and the landscape of the Chilterns in the ripe evening light was so serenely beautiful, that Elinor began to feel less anxious and even half wished that she had stayed till the last train. She would have been able in that case to see Webley. But hadn’t she decided that she was really almost glad not to be seeing him? One can be glad and sorry at the same time. Passing the north entrance to the Park, she had a glimpse through the bars of Lord Gattenden’s bath-chair standing just inside the gate. The ass had stopped and was eating grass at the side of the road, the reins hung loose and the marquess was too deeply absorbed in a thick red morocco quarto to be able to think of driving. The car hurried on; but that second’s glimpse of the old man sitting with his book behind the grey donkey, as she had so often seen him sitting and reading; that brief revelation of life living itself regularly, unvaryingly in the same old familiar way, was as reassuring as the calm loveliness of beech-trees and bracken, of green-golden foreground and violet distances.

And there at last was the Hall! The old house seemed to doze in the westering sun like a basking animal; you could almost fancy that it purred. And the lawn was like the most expensive green velvet; and in the windless air the huge Wellingtonia had all the dignified gravity of an old gentleman who sits down to meditate after an enormous meal. There could be nothing much wrong here. She jumped out of the car and ran straight upstairs to the nursery. Phil was lying in bed, quite still and with closed eyes. Miss Fulkes, who was sitting beside him,

turned as she entered, rose and came to meet her. One glance at her face was enough to convince Elinor that the blue and golden tranquillity of the landscape, the dozing house, the marquess and his ass had been lying comforters. ‘All’s well,’ they had seemed to say. ‘Everything’s going on as usual’ But Miss Fulkes looked pale and frightened, as though she had seen a ghost.

‘What’s the matter?’ Elinor whispered with a sudden return of all her anxiety, and before Miss Fulkes had time to answer, ‘Is he asleep?’ she added. If he were asleep, she was thinking, it was a good sign; he looked as though he were asleep.

But Miss Fulkes shook her head. The gesture was superfluous. For the question was hardly out of Elinor’s mouth, when the child made a sudden spasmodic movement under the sheets. His face contracted with pain. He uttered a little whimpering moan.

‘His head hurts him so much,’ said Miss Fulkes. There was a look of terror and misery in her eyes.

‘Go and have a rest,’ said Elinor.

Miss Fulkes hesitated, shook her head. ‘I’d like to be useful …’

Elinor insisted. ‘You’ll be more useful when you’ve rested …’ She saw Miss Fulkes’s lips trembling, her eyes growing suddenly bright with tears.

‘Go along,’ she said and pressed her arm consolingly.

Miss Fulkes obeyed with a sudden alacrity. She was afraid that she might start crying before she got to her room.

Elinor sat down by the bed. She took the little hand that lay on the turned-back sheet, she passed her fingers through the child’s pale hair caressingly, soothingly. ‘Sleep,’ she whispered, as her fingers caressed him, ‘sleep, sleep.’ But the child still stirred uneasily; and every now and then his face was distorted with sudden pain; he shook his head, as though trying to shake off the thing that was hurting him, he uttered his little whimpering moan. And bending over him, Elinor felt as though her heart were being crushed within her breast, as though a hand were at her throat, choking her.

‘My darling,’ she said beseechingly, imploring him not to suffer, ‘my darling.’

And she pressed the small hand more tightly, she let her palm rest more heavily on his hot forehead, as if to stifle the pain or at least to steady the shuddering little body against its attacks. And all her will commanded the pain to cease under her fingers, to come out of him – out of him, through her fingers, into her own body. But still he fidgeted restlessly in his bed, turning his head from one side to the other, now drawing up his legs, now straightening them out with a sharp spasmodic kick under the sheets. And still the pain returned, stabbing; and the face made its grimace of agony, the parted lips gave utterance to the little whimpering cry, again and again. She stroked his forehead, she whispered tender words. And that was all she could do. The sense of her helplessness suffocated her. At her throat and heart the invisible hands tightened their grip.

'How do you find him?' asked Mrs Bidlake, when her daughter came down.

Elinor did not answer, but turned away her face. The question had brought the tears rushing into her eyes. Mrs Bidlake put her arms round her and kissed her. Elinor hid her face against her mother's shoulder. 'You must be strong,' she kept saying to herself. 'You mustn't cry, mustn't break down. Be strong. To help him.' Her mother held her more closely. The physical contact comforted her, gave her the strength for which she was praying. She made an effort of will and with a deep intaken breath swallowed down the sobs in her throat. She looked up at her mother and gratefully smiled. Her lips still trembled a little; but the will had conquered.

'I'm stupid,' she said apologetically. 'I couldn't help it. It's so horrible to see him suffer. Helplessly. It's dreadful. Even if one knows that it'll be all right in the end.'

Mrs Bidlake sighed. 'Dreadful,' she echoed, 'dreadful,' and closed her eyes in a meditative perplexity. There was a silence. 'By the way,' she went on, opening them again to look at her daughter, 'I think you ought to keep an eye on Miss Fulkes. I don't know whether her influence is always entirely good.'

'Miss Fulkes's influence?' said Elinor, opening her eyes in astonishment. 'But she's the nicest, the most conscientious …'

‘Oh, not that, not that!’ said Mrs Bidlake hastily. ‘Her artistic influence, I mean. When I went up to see Phil the day before yesterday I found her showing him such dreadfully vulgar pictures of a dog.’

‘Bonzo?’ suggested Elinor.

Her mother nodded. ‘Yes, Bonzo.’ She pronounced the word with a certain distaste. ‘If he wants pictures of animals, there are such excellent reproductions of Persian miniatures at the British Museum. It’s so easy to spoil a child’s taste … But Elinor! My dear!’

Suddenly and uncontrollably, Elinor had begun to laugh. To laugh and to cry, uncontrollably. Grief alone she had been able to master. But grief allied with Bonzo was irresistible. Something broke inside her and she found herself sobbing with a violent, painful and hysterical laughter.

Mrs Bidlake helplessly patted her shoulder. ‘My dear,’ she kept repeating. ‘Elinor!’

Roused from uneasy and nightmarish dozing, John Bidlake shouted furiously from the library. ‘Stop that cackling,’ commanded the angry-plaintive voice. ‘For God’s sake.’

But Elinor could not stop.

‘Screaming like parrots,’ John Bidlake went on muttering to himself.

‘Some idiotic joke. When one isn’t well …’

Now, for God’s sake,’ said Spandrell roughly, ‘pull yourself together.’

Illidge pressed his handkerchief to his mouth; he was afraid of being sick. ‘I think I’ll lie down for a moment,’ he whispered. But when he tried to walk, it was as though his legs were dead under him. It might have been a paralytic who dragged himself to the sofa.

‘What you need is a mouthful of spirits,’ said Spandrell. He crossed the room. A bottle of brandy stood on the sideboard, and from the kitchen he returned with glasses. He poured out two fingers of the spirit. ‘Here. Drink this.’ Illidge took and sipped. ‘One would think we were crossing the Channel,’ Spandrell went on with ferocious mockery, as he helped himself to brandy. ‘Study in green and

ginger – that's how Whistler would have described you now. Apple-green. Moss-green.'

Illidge looked at him for a moment, then turned away, unable to face the steady glance of those contemptuous grey eyes. He had never felt such hatred as he now felt for Spandrell.

'Not to say frog-green, slime-green, scum-green,' the other went on.

'Oh shut up!' cried Illidge in a voice that had recovered some of its resonance and hardly wavered. Spandrell's mockery had steadied his nerves. Hate, like brandy, is a stimulant. He took another burning gulp. There was a silence.

'When you feel like it,' said Spandrell, putting down his emptied glass, 'you can come and help me clear up.' He rose and walked round the screen, out of sight.

Everard Webley's body was lying where it had fallen, on its side, with the arms reaching out across the floor. The chloroform-soaked handkerchief still covered the face. Spandrell bent down and twitched it away. The temple which had been struck was against the floor; seen from above the face seemed unwounded.

His hands in his pockets, Spandrell stood looking down at the body.

'Five minutes ago,' he said to himself, formulating his thoughts in words, that his realization of their significance might be the more complete, 'five minutes ago, it was alive, it had a soul. Alive,' he repeated and balancing himself unsteadily on one leg, with the other foot he touched the dead cheek, he pushed forward the ear and let it flick back again. 'A soul.' And for a moment he allowed some of his weight to rest on what had been Everard Webley's face. He withdrew his foot; the print of it remained, dust-grey, on the white skin. 'Trampling on a dead face,' he said to himself. Why had he done it? 'Trampling.' He raised his foot again and pressed his heel into the socket of the eye, gently, tentatively, as though experimenting with outrage. 'Like grapes,' he thought. 'Trampling wine out of grapes.' It was in his power to trample this thing into a pulp. But he had done enough. Symbolically, he had trodden out the essential horror from his murder; it flowed from under his trampling feet. The

essential horror? But it was more stupid and disgusting, than horrible. Pushing the toe of his boot under the chin, he rolled the head over until the face was looking up, open-mouthed and with half-shut eyes, at the ceiling. Above and behind the left eye was a huge red contusion. There were trickles of blood on the left cheek, already dry, and where the forehead had rested on the floor, a little pool – hardly even a pool – a smear.

'Incredibly little blood,' said Spandrell aloud.

At the sound of his calm voice Illidge violently started.

Spandrell withdrew his supporting foot. The dead face fell back with a little thump on to its side.

'It's a complete justification for Bishop Odo's mace,' he went on dispassionately. That he should find himself recalling, at this of all moments, the comical prancings of that conscientious churchman in the Bayeux tapestry – that too was part of the essential horror. The frivolousness of the human mind! The wandering irrelevance! Evil might have a certain dignity. But silliness …

Illidge heard him walk into the kitchen. There was the gradually sharpening note of water running into a pail. The tap was turned off, there were foot-falls; the bucket was set down with a metallic clink.

'Luckily,' Spandrell went on, in comment on his last remark. 'Or else I don't know what we should have done about the mess.'

Illidge listened with a strained and horrified attention to the sounds that came to him from the other side of the screen. A limp and meaty thud; was that an arm lifted and dropped? The sibilant sliding of a soft and heavy object across the floor. Then the splash of water, the homely noise of scrubbing. And at these sounds, so incomparably more horrible, more profoundly significant than any words, however brutal, however calmly cynical, that Spandrell could say, he felt a recrudescence of that sinking, that heart-fluttering faintness of the first minutes, when the dead man was lying there, still twitching, at his feet. He remembered, he lived over again those moments of breathless and sick anticipation before the horrible event. The noise of the car backing down the street; the gritty scrape of feet on the doorstep, and then the knock, and then a

long, long silence of heart-beats and visceral creepings and imaginative forebodings, of justifying thoughts of revolution and the future, justifying hatred of oppression and the vileness of wealth. And at the same time ridiculous, incongruous recollections, as he crouched behind the screen, of those childish games of hide and seek on school-treat days, among the gorse and juniper bushes of the common. ‘One, two, three …’; the seekers covered their faces and began to count their hundred, aloud; the hiders scattered. You thrust yourself into a prickly bush, you lay in the bracken. Then came the shout of ‘ninety-nine, a hundred, Cooee!’; and the seekers were off, were after you. And the excitement was so painfully intense, as you crouched or squatted in your lair, peeping, listening for a chance to make a bolt for Home, that you felt an almost irrepressible desire to ‘do something’, though something had been done, behind the junipers, only five minutes before. Absurd memories! And because absurd, dreadful! For the hundredth time he felt in his pocket to make sure that the bottle of chloroform was still there and safely corked. The second knock startlingly resounded and, with it, the whistle and that humorous call (you could *hear*, from the tone of his voice, that he was smiling) of ‘Friend!’ Behind his screen Illidge had shuddered. ‘Friend!’ And remembering now, he shuddered again, more violently, with all the shame and horror and humiliation which he had had no time then to feel. No time; for before his mind could realize all the implications upon implications of that laughing call, the door had creaked on its hinges, there was the noise of feet on the boards, and Webley was shouting Elinor’s name. (Illidge suddenly found himself wondering if he had been in love with her.) ‘Elinor!’ There followed a silence; Webley had seen the note. Illidge had heard his breathing, only a foot or two away, on the other side of the screen. And then there was the rustle of a quick movement, the beginning of an exclamation and that sudden dry concussion, like the noise of a slap, but duller, deader and at the same time much louder. There followed a fraction of a second’s silence, then the noise of falling – not a single sound, but a series of noises spread over an appreciable period of time; the bony collapse of the knees, the scrape of shoes sliding away across the polished floor, the muffled thud of the body and arms,

and the sharp hard rap of the head against the boards. ‘Quick!’ had come the sound of Spandrell’s voice, and he had darted out of his hiding-place. ‘Chloroform.’ Obediently, he had soaked the handkerchief, he had spread it over the twitching face … He shuddered again, he took another sip of brandy.

The sound of scrubbing was succeeded by the squelch of a wetted cloth.

‘There,’ said Spandrell, appearing round the screen. He was drying his hands on a duster. ‘And how’s the invalid?’ he added in the parody of a bedside manner, smiling ironically.

Illidge averted his face. The hatred flared up in him, expelling for the moment every other emotion. ‘I’m all right,’ he said curtly.

‘Just taking it easy while I do the dirty work. Is that it?’ Spandrell threw the duster on to a chair and began to turn down his shirt cuffs.

In two hours the muscles of the heart contract and relax, contract again and relax only eight thousand times. The earth travels less than an eighth of a million miles along its orbit. And the prickly pear has had time to invade only another hundred acres of Australian territory. Two hours are as nothing. The time to listen to the Ninth Symphony and a couple of the posthumous quartets, to fly from London to Paris, to transfer a luncheon from the stomach to the small intestine, to read *Macbeth*, to die of snake bite or earn one-and-eight-pence as a charwoman. No more. But to Illidge, as he sat waiting, with the dead body lying there behind the screen, waiting for the darkness, they seemed unending.

‘Are you an idiot?’ asked Spandrell, when he had suggested that they should go away at once and leave the thing lying there. ‘Or are you particularly anxious to die of hanging?’ The sneer, the cool ironic amusement were maddening to Illidge. ‘It would be found tonight when Philip came home.’

‘But Quarles hasn’t got a key,’ said Illidge.

‘Then tomorrow, as soon as he’d got hold of a locksmith. And three hours later, when Elinor had explained what she had done with the key, the police would be knocking at my door. And I promise you, they’d knock at yours very soon afterwards.’ He smiled at Illidge, who averted his eyes. ‘No,’ Spandrell

went on, ‘Webley’s got to be taken away. And with his car standing outside, it’s child’s play, if we wait till after dark.’

‘But it won’t be dark for another two hours.’ Illidge’s voice was shrill with anger and complaint.

‘Well, what of it?’

‘Why …’ Illidge began and checked himself, he realized that if he was going to answer truthfully, he would have to say that he didn’t want to stay those two hours because he was frightened. ‘All right,’ he said. ‘Let’s stay.’ Spandrell picked up the silver cigarette box, opened and sniffed. ‘They smell very nice,’ he said. ‘Have one.’ He pushed the box across the table. ‘And there are lots of books. And *The Times*. And the *New Statesman*. And the latest number of *Vogue*. It’s positively a dentist’s waiting-room. And we might even make ourselves a cup of tea.’ The time of waiting began. Heart-beat followed heart-beat. Each second the earth travelled twenty miles and the prickly pears covered another five rods of Australian ground. Behind the screen lay the body. Thousands upon thousands of millions of minute and diverse individuals had come together and the product of their mutual dependence, their mutual hostility had been a human life. Their total colony, their living hive had been a man. The hive was dead. But in the lingering warmth many of the component individuals still faintly lived; soon they also would have perished. And meanwhile, from the air, the invisible hosts of saprophytics had already begun their unresisted invasion. They would live among the dead cells, they would grow, and prodigiously multiply and in their growing and procreation all the chemical building of the body would be undone, all the intricacies and complications of its matter would be resolved, till by the time their work was finished a few pounds of carbon, a few quarts of water, some lime, a little phosphorus and sulphur, a pinch of iron and silicon, a handful of mixed salts – all scattered and recombined with the surrounding world – would be all that remained of Everard Webley’s ambition to rule and his love for Elinor, of his thoughts about politics and his recollections of childhood, of his fencing and good horsemanship, of that soft strong voice and that suddenly illuminating smile, of his admiration for

Mantegna, his dislike of whiskey, his deliberately terrifying rages, his habit of stroking his chin, his belief in God, his incapacity to whistle a tune correctly, his unshakeable determinations and his knowledge of Russian.

Illidge turned over the advertisement pages of *Vogue*. A young lady in a fur coat priced at two hundred guineas was stepping into a motor car; on the opposite page another young lady in nothing but a towel was stepping out of a bath impregnated with Dr Vergruggen's Reducing Salts. There followed a still-life of scent bottles containing *Songe Nègre* and the maker's latest creation, *Relent d'Amour*. The names of Worth, Lanvin, Patou sprawled across three more pages. Then there was a picture of a young lady in a rubber reducing belt, looking at herself in the glass. A group of young ladies admired one another's slumber wear from Crabb and Lushington's lingerie department. Opposite them another young lady reclined on a couch at Madame Adrena's Beauty Laboratory, while the hands of a masseuse stroked the menace of a double chin. Then followed a still-life of rolling pins and rubber strigils for rolling and rubbing away young ladies' superfluous fat, and another still-life of jars and gallipots containing skin foods to protect their faces from the ravages of time and the weather.

'Revolting!' Illidge said to himself as he turned the pages. 'Criminal!' And he cherished his indignation, he cultivated it. To be angry was a distraction, and at the same time a justification. Raging at plutocratic callousness and frivolity, he could half forget and half excuse to himself the horrible thing that had happened. Webley's body was lying on the other side of the screen. But there were women who paid two hundred guineas for a fur coat. Two hundred guineas! His Uncle Joseph would have thought himself happy if he could have made as much in eighteen months of cobbling. And they bought scent at twenty-five shillings the quarter-pint. He remembered the time when his little brother Tom had had pneumonia after influenza. Ghastly! And when he was convalescent, the doctor had said he ought to go away to the sea for a few weeks. They hadn't been able to afford it. Tom's lungs had never been too strong after that. He worked in a motor factory now (making machines for those bitches in two-hundred-guinea

coats to sit in); Illidge had paid for him to go to a technical school – paid, he reflected, beating up his anger, that the boy might have the privilege of standing eight hours a day in front of a milling machine. The air of Manchester wasn't doing Tom any good. There was no superfluous fat to be rolled off him, poor devil. Swinish guzzling! Why couldn't they do a little useful work instead of squeegeeing their hams and bellies? That would take the fat off all right. If they worked as his mother had done … She had no fat to rub off with rolling-pins, or sweat off under a rubber belt, or stew off in hot baths and brine. He thought indignantly of that endless dreary labour of housework. Day after day, year after year. Making beds, that they might be unmade. Cooking to fill bellies eternally empty. Washing up what the next meal was to make dirty again. Scrubbing the floor for muddy boots to defile. Darning and patching that yet more holes might be made. It was like the labouring of Sisyphus and the Danaids, hopeless and interminable – or would have been interminable (except by his mother's death), if he hadn't been able to send her those two pounds a week out of his salary. She could get a girl in now to help with the hardest work. But she still did more than enough to make rubber belts unnecessary. What a life! And in the world of fur coats and *Songe Nègre* they complained of boredom and fatigue, they had to retire into nursing homes for rest cures. If they could lead *her* life for a bit! And perhaps they'd be made to, one of these days (he hoped so), even in England. Illidge thought with satisfaction of those ex-officers of the Tsar driving taxis and working in factories, those ex-countesses with their restaurants and cabarets and hat-shops; of all the ex-rich of Russia, all over the world, from Harbin and Shanghai to Rome and London and Berlin, bankrupt, humiliated, reduced to the slavish estate of the common people on whom they had once parasitically lived. That was good, that served them right. And perhaps it might happen here too. But they were strong here, the fat-reducers and the fur-coated; they were numerous, they were an organized army. But the army had lost its chief. He had got his packet. Embodied beastliness and plutocracy, he lay there behind the screen. But his mouth had been open and the muscles of his face, before the reeking handkerchief had covered it, had twitched grotesquely. Illidge

shuddered. He looked again for indignant distraction and justification at the picture of the young lady in the two-hundred-guinea fur, of the young lady stepping, naked but coyly towelled, out of her reducing bath. Strumpets and gluttons! They belonged to the class that Webley had fought to perpetuate. The champion of all that was vile and low. He had got what he deserved, he had …

‘Good Lord!’ exclaimed Spandrell suddenly, looking up from his book. The sound of his voice in the silence made Illidge start with an uncontrollable terror. ‘I’d absolutely forgotten. They get stiff, don’t they?’ He looked at Illidge. ‘Corpses, I mean.’

Illidge nodded. He drew a deep breath and steadied himself with an effort of will.

‘What about getting him into the car, then?’ He sprang up and walked quickly round the screen, out of sight. Illidge heard the latch of the house door rattling. He was seized with a sudden horrible terror: Spandrell was going to make off, leaving him locked in with the body.

‘Where are you going?’ he shouted and darted off in panic pursuit. ‘Where are you going?’ The door was open, Spandrell was not to be seen, and the thing lay on the floor, its face uncovered, open-mouthed and staring secretly, significantly, as though through spy-holes, between half-closed eyelids. ‘Where are you going?’ Illidge’s voice had risen almost to a scream.

‘What *is* the excitement about?’ asked Spandrell as the other appeared, pale and with desperation in his looks, on the doorstep. Standing by Webley’s car, he was engaged in undoing the tightly stretched waterproof which decked in all that part of the open body lying aft of the front seats. ‘These thingumbobs are horribly hard to unfasten.’

Illidge put his hands in his pockets and pretended that it was merely an idle curiosity that had brought him out with such precipitation.

‘What are you doing?’ he asked off-handedly.

Spandrell gave a final tug; the cover came loose along the whole length of one side of the car. He turned it back and looked in. ‘Empty, thank goodness,’ he said and, stretching his hand, he played imaginary octaves, span after span, over

the coach-work. ‘Say four feet wide,’ he concluded, ‘by about the same in length. Of which half is taken up by the seat. With two foot six of space under the cover. Plenty of room to curl up in and be very comfortable. But if one were stiff?’ He looked enquiringly at Illidge. ‘A man could be got in, but not a statue.’

Illidge nodded. Spandrell’s last words had made him suddenly remember Lady Edward’s mocking commentary on Webley. ‘He wants to be treated like his own colossal statue – posthumously, if you see what I mean.’

‘We must do something quickly,’ Spandrell went on. ‘Before the stiffness sets in.’ He pulled back the cover and laying a hand on Illidge’s shoulder, propelled him gently into the house. The door slammed behind them. They stood looking down at the body.

‘We shall have to pull the knees up and the arms down,’ said Spandrell.

He bent down and moved one of the arms towards the side. It returned, when he let go, half-way to its former position. Like a puppet, Spandrell reflected, with elastic joints. Grotesque rather than terrible; not tragical, but only rather tiresome and even absurd. That was the essential horror – that it was all (even *this*) a kind of bad and tedious jape. ‘We shall have to find some string,’ he said. ‘Something to tie the limbs into place.’ It was like amateur plumbing, or mending the summerhouse oneself; just rather unpleasant and ludicrous.

They ransacked the house. There was no string to be found. They had to be content with three bandages, which Spandrell found among the aspirin and iodine, the boracic powder and vegetable laxatives of the little medicine cupboard in the bathroom.

‘Hold the arms in place while I tie,’ commanded Spandrell.

Illidge did as he was told. But the coldness of those dead wrists against his fingers was horrible; he felt sick again, he began to tremble.

‘There!’ said Spandrell, straightening himself up. ‘Now the legs. Thank goodness we didn’t leave it much longer.’

‘Treated like his own statue.’ The words reverberated in Illidge’s memory. ‘Posthumously, if you see what I mean.’ Posthumously … Spandrell bent one of the legs till the knee almost touched the chin.

‘Hold it.’

Illidge grasped the ankle; the socks were grey and clocked with white. Spandrell let go, and Illidge felt a sudden and startlingly powerful thrust against his retaining hand. The dead man was trying to kick. Black voids began to expand in front of his eyes, eating out holes in the solid world before him. And the solid world itself swayed and swam round the edges of those interstellar vacancies. His gorge turned, he felt horribly giddy.

‘Look here,’ he began, turning to Spandrell, who had squatted down on his heels and was tearing the wrapping off another bandage. Then shutting his eyes, he relinquished his grasp.

The leg straightened itself out like a bent spring, and the foot, as it shot forward, caught Spandrell on the shoulder and sent him, unsteadily balanced as he was, sprawling backwards on to the floor.

He picked himself up. ‘You bloody fool!’ But the anger aroused by that first shock of surprise died down. He uttered a little laugh. ‘We might be at the circus,’ he said. It was not only not tragic; it was a clownery.

By the time the body was finally trussed, Illidge knew that Tom’s weak lungs and two-hundred-guinea coats, that superfluous fat and his mother’s life-long slaving, that rich and poor, oppression and revolution, justice, punishment, indignation – all, as far as he was concerned, were utterly irrelevant to the fact of these stiffening limbs, this mouth that gaped, these half-shut, glazed and secretly staring eyes. Irrelevant, and beside the point.

Philip was dining alone. In front of his plate half a bottle of claret and the water-jug propped up an open volume. He read between the mouthfuls, as he masticated. The book was Bastian’s *On the Brain*. Not very up to date, perhaps, but the best he could find in his father’s library to keep him amused in the train. Halfway through the fish, he came upon the case of the Irish gentleman who had suffered from paraphasia, and was so much struck by it that he pushed aside his plate and, taking out his pocket-book, made a note of it at once. The physician had asked the patient to read aloud a paragraph from the statutes of Trinity College, Dublin. ‘It shall be in the power of the College to examine or not

examine every Licentiate previous to his admission to a fellowship, as they shall think fit.' What the patient actually read was: 'An the bee-what in the tee-mother of the trothodoodoo, to majoram or that emidrate, eni eni krastrei, mestreit to ketra totombreidei, to ra from treido as that kekritest.' Marvellous! Philip said to himself as he copied down the last word. What style! what majestic beauty! The richness and sonority of the opening phrase! 'An the bee-what in the tee-mother of the trothodoodoo.' He repeated it to himself. 'I shall print it on the title-page of my next novel,' he wrote in his notebook. 'The epigraph the text of the whole sermon.' Shakespeare only talked about tales told by an idiot. But here was the idiot actually speaking – Shakespeareanly, what was more. 'The final word about life,' he added in pencil.

At the Queen's Hall Tolley began with Erik Satie's *Borborygmes Symphoniques*. Philip found the joke only moderately good. A section of the audience improved it, however, by hissing and booing. Ironically polite, Tolley bowed with more than his usual grace. When the hubbub subsided, he addressed himself to the second item on the programme. It was the *Coriolan* overture. Tolley prided himself on a catholic taste and omnicompetence. But, oh dear! thought Philip as he listened, how abominably he conducted real music! As though he were rather ashamed of Beethoven's emotions and were trying to apologize for them. But fortunately Coriolanus was practically Tolley-proof. The music was heroically beautiful, it was tragic and immense in spite of him. The last of the expiring throbs of sound died away, a demonstration of man's indomitable greatness and the necessity, the significance of suffering.

In the interval Philip limped out for a smoke in the bar. A hand plucked at his sleeve.

'The melomaniac discovered!' said a familiar voice. He turned and saw Willie Weaver twinkling all over with good-humour, kindliness and absurdity. 'What did you think of our modern Orpheus?'

'If you're referring to Tolley, I don't think he can conduct Beethoven.'

'A shade too light and fantastic for old man Ludwig's portentosities?' suggested Willie.

‘That’s about it,’ said Philip smiling. ‘Not up to him.’

‘Or too far up. Portentosity belongs to the prepositivistic epoch. It’s bourgeois as Comrade Lenin would say. Tolley’s nothing if not contemporaneous. Didn’t you like him in the Satie? Or did you,’ he went on, in response to Philip’s contemptuous shrug, ‘did you wish he’d committed it?’ He coughed his own appreciation of the pun.

‘He’s almost as modern as the Irish genius whose works I discovered this evening.’ Philip took out his pocket-book and, after a word of explanation, read aloud. ‘An the bee-what in the tee-mother of the trothodoodoo …’ At the foot of the page were his own comments of an hour before. ‘The text of the whole sermon. The final word about life.’ He did not read them out. He happened to be thinking quite differently now. ‘The difference between portentosity and Satie-cum-Tolleyism,’ he said, ’is the same as the difference between the statutes of Trinity College, Dublin, and this bee-what in the tee-mother of the trothodoodoo.’

He was blankly contradicting himself. But, after all, why not?

Illidge wanted to go home and to bed; but Spandrell had insisted that he should spend at least an hour or two at Tantamount House.

‘You must get yourself seen,’ he said. ‘For the sake of the alibi. I’m going on to Sbisa’s. There’ll be a dozen people to vouch for me.’

Illidge agreed only under the threat of violence. He dreaded the ordeal of talking with anyone – even with someone so incurious, preoccupied and absent as Lord Edward. ‘I shan’t be able to stand it,’ he kept repeating, almost in tears. They had had to carry the body, trussed into the posture of a child in the womb – carry it amorously pressed in a close and staggering embrace – out of the door, down the steps into the roadway. A single greenish gas-lamp under the archway threw but a feeble light up the mews; enough, however, to have betrayed them, if anyone had happened to be passing the entrance as they carried their burden out and lifted it into the car. They had begun by dumping the thing on its back on the floor; but the up-drawn knees projected above the level of the carriage-work. Spandrell had to climb into the car and push and lug the heavy body on to its

side, so that the knees rested on the edge of the back seat. They shut the doors, pulled the cover over and fastened it tautly into place. ‘Perfect,’ said Spandrell. He took his companion by the elbow. ‘You need a little more brandy,’ he added. But in spite of the brandy Illidge was still faint and tremulous when they drove away. Nor was Spandrell’s bungling with the mechanism of the unfamiliar car at all calculated to soothe his nerves. They had begun by backing violently into the wall at the end of the mews; and before he discovered the secret of the gears, Spandrell twice inadvertently stopped the engine. He relieved his irritation by a few curses and laughed. But to Illidge these little mishaps, entailing as they did a minute’s delay in escaping from that horrible and accursed place, were catastrophes. His terror, his anxious impatience became almost hysterical.

‘No. I can’t, I really can’t,’ he protested when Spandrell had told him that he must spend the evening at Tantamount House.

‘All the same,’ said the other, ‘you’re damned well going to,’ and he headed the car into the Mall. ‘I’ll drop you at the door.’

‘No, really!’

‘And if necessary kick you in.’

‘But I couldn’t stand being there, I couldn’t stand it.’

‘This is an extremely nice car,’ said Spandrell pointedly changing the subject. ‘Delightful to drive.’

‘I couldn’t stand it,’ Illidge whimperingly repeated.

‘I believe the makers guarantee a hundred miles an hour on the track.’

They turned up past St James’s Palace into Pall Mall.

‘Here you are,’ said Spandrell, drawing up at the kerb. Obediently, Illidge got out, crossed the pavement, climbed the steps and rang the bell. Spandrell waited till the door had closed behind him, then drove on into St James’s Square. Twenty or thirty cars were parked round the central gardens. He backed in among them, stopped the engine, got out and walked up to Piccadilly Circus. A penny ‘bus-ride took him to the top of the Charing Cross Road. The trees of Soho Square shone green in the lamplight at the end of the narrow lane, between

the factory buildings. Two minutes later he was at Sbisa's, apologizing to Burlap and Rampion for being so late.

'Ah, here you are,' said Lord Edward. 'So glad you've come.'

Illidge mumbled vague apologies for not having come sooner. An appointment with a man. About business. But suppose, he wondered in terror while he spoke, suppose Lord Edward should ask what man, what business? He wouldn't know what to answer; he would utterly break down. But the Old Man seemed not even to have heard his excuses.

'Afraid I must ask you to do a little arithmetic for me,' he said in his deep blurred voice. Lord Edward had made himself a tolerably good mathematician; but 'sums' had always been beyond his powers. He had never been able to multiply correctly. And as for long division – it was fifty years since he had even attempted it. 'I've got the figures here.' He tapped the notebook that lay open in front of him on the desk. 'It's for the chapter on phosphorus. Human interference with the cycle. How much P_2O_5 did we find out was dispersed into the sea in sewage?' He turned a page. 'Four hundred thousand tons. That was it. Practically irrecoverable. Just thrown away. Then there's the stupid way we deal with cadavers. Three-quarters of a kilo of phosphorus pentoxide in every body. Restored to the earth, you may say.' Lord Edward was ready to admit every excuse, to anticipate, that he might rebut, every shift of advocacy. 'But how inadequately!' he swept the excuses away, he blew the special pleaders to bits. 'Huddling bodies together in cemeteries! How can you expect the phosphorus to get distributed? It finds its way back to the life cycle in time, no doubt. But for *our* purposes it's lost. Taken out of currency. Now, given three-quarters of a kilo of P_2O_5 for every cadaver and a world population of eighteen hundred millions and an average death-rate of twenty per thousand, what's the total quantity restored every year to the earth? You can do sums, my dear Illidge. I leave it to you.' Illidge sat in silence, shielding his face with his hand. 'But then one has to remember,' the Old Man continued, 'that there are a lot of people who dispose of the dead more sensibly than we do. It's really only among the white races that

the phosphorus is taken out of circulation. Other people don’t have necropolises and watertight coffins and brick vaults. The only people more wasteful than we are are the Indians. Burning bodies and throwing the ashes into rivers! But the Indians are stupid about everything. The way they burn all the cow-dung instead of putting it back on the land. And then they’re surprised that half the population hasn’t enough to eat. We shall have to make a separate calculation about the Indians. I haven’t got the figures, though. But meanwhile will you work out the grand total for the world? And another, if you don’t mind, for the white races. I’ve got a list of the populations here somewhere. And, of course, the death-rate will be lower than the average for the whole world, at any rate in Western Europe and America. Would you like to sit here? There’s room at this end of the table.’ He cleared a space. ‘And here’s paper. And this is quite a decent pen.

‘Do you mind,’ said Illidge faintly, ‘if I lie down for a minute. I’m not feeling well.’

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT WAS NEARLY eleven before Philip Quarles appeared at Sbisa's. Spandrell saw him as he was entering and beckoned him to the table where he was sitting with Burlap and Rampion. Philip came limping across the room and sat down beside him.

'I've got messages for you,' said Spandrell, 'and, what's more important,' he felt in his pocket, 'the key of your house.' He handed it over, explaining how he had come into possession of it. If the man knew what had happened in his house that evening … 'And Elinor's gone down to Gattenden,' he went on. 'She had a telegram. The child doesn't seem to be well. And she expects you tomorrow.'

'The devil she does!' said Philip. 'But I have at least fifteen engagements. What's wrong with the boy?'

'Unspecified.'

Philip shrugged his shoulders. 'If it had been serious, my mother-in-law wouldn't have telegraphed,' he said, yielding to the temptation to say something amusing. 'She's like that. She'll take a case of double pneumonia with perfect calm and then get terribly excited about a headache or a pain in the belly.' He interrupted himself to order an omelette and half a bottle of Moselle. Still, Philip reflected, the boy hadn't been very flourishing these last weeks. He rather wished he hadn't yielded to the temptation. And what he had said hadn't really been in the least amusing. Wanting to be amusing – that was his chief literary defect. His books would be much better if he would allow them to be much duller. He sank into a rather gloomy silence.

'These children!' said Spandrell. 'If you will go in for them …'

'Still, it must be wonderful to have a child,' said Burlap with proper wistfulness. 'I often wish …'

Rampion interrupted him. ‘It must be still more wonderful to *be* one. When one’s grown up, I mean.’ He grinned.

‘What do you do about *your* children?’ asked Spandrell.

‘As little as I can. Unfortunately they have to go to school. I only hope they won’t learn too much. It’d be really awful if they emerged as little professors stuffed with knowledge, trotting out their smart little abstract generalizations. They probably will. Just to spite me. Children generally do spite their parents. Not on purpose, of course, but unconsciously, because they can’t help it, because the parents have probably gone too far in one direction and nature’s reacting, trying to get back to the state of equilibrium. Yes, yes, I can feel it in my bones. They’ll be professors, the little devils. They’ll be horrid little scientists. Like your friend Illidge,’ he said, turning to Spandrell, who started uncomfortably at the name and was annoyed that he should have started. ‘Horrid little brains that do their best to suppress the accompanying hearts and bowels.’

Spandrell smiled his significant, rather melodramatically-ironic smile. ‘Young Illidge hasn’t succeeded in suppressing his heart and bowels,’ he said. ‘Not by a long chalk.’

‘Of course not. Nobody can suppress them. All that happens in the process is that they’re transformed from living organs into offal. And why are they transformed? In the interests of what? Of a lot of silly knowledge and irrelevant abstractions.’

‘Which are after all quite amusing in themselves,’ said Philip, breaking his silence to come to the rescue of the intellect. ‘Making generalizations and pursuing knowledge are amusements. Among the most entertaining, to my mind.’ Philip went on to develop his hedonistic justification of the mental life. ‘So why be so hard on our little diversions?’ he concluded. ‘You don’t denounce golf; so why should you denounce the sports of the highbrows?’

‘That’s fairly rudimentary, isn’t it?’ said Rampion. ‘The tree shall be known by its fruits. The fruits of golf are either non-existent, harmless or positively beneficial. A healthy liver, for example – that’s a very fine fruit. Whereas the fruits of intellectualism – my God!’ He made a grimace. ‘Look at them. The

whole of our industrial civilization – that's their fruit. The morning paper, the radio, the cinema, all fruits. Tanks and trinitrotoluol; Rockefeller and Mond – fruits again. They're all the result of the systematically organized, professional intellectualism of the last two hundred years. And you expect me to approve of your amusements? But, I tell you, I prefer bull-fighting. What's the torture of a few animals and the brutalizing of a few hundred spectators compared to the ruining and befouling and degrading of the whole world? Which is what you highbrows have done since you professionalized and organized your amusements.'

'Come, come,' said Philip. 'The picture's a little lurid. And anyhow, even if it were accurate, the highbrows can't be held responsible for the applications other people have made of their results.'

'They *are* responsible. Because they brought the other people up in their own damned intellectualist tradition. After all, the other people are only highbrows on another plane. A business man is just a man of science who happens to be rather stupider than the real man of science. He's living just as one-sidedly and intellectually, as far as his intellect goes, as the other one. And the fruit of that is inner psychological degeneration. For of course,' he added parenthetically, 'the fruits of your amusements aren't merely the external apparatus of modern industrial life. They're an inward decay; they're infantilism and degeneracy and all sorts of madness and primitive reversion. No, no, I have no patience with your precious amusements of the mind. You'd be doing far less harm if you were playing golf.'

'But truth?' queried Burlap, who had been listening to the discussion without speaking. 'What about truth?'

Spandrell nodded approval. 'Isn't that worth looking for?'

'Certainly,' said Rampion. 'But not where Philip and his scientific and scholarly friends are looking for it. After all, the only truth that can be of any interest to us, or that we can know, is a human truth. And to discover that, you must look for it with the whole being, not with a specialized part of it. What the scientists are trying to get at is non-human truth. Not that they can ever

completely succeed; for not even a scientist can completely cease to be human. But they can go some way towards abstracting themselves from the human world of reality. By torturing their brains they can get a faint notion of the universe as it would seem if looked at through non-human eyes. What with their quantum theory, wave mechanics, relativity and all the rest of it, they do really seem to have got a little way outside humanity. Well, what the devil's the good of that?'

'Apart from the fun of the thing,' said Philip, 'the good may be some astonishing practical discovery, like the secret of disintegrating the atom and the liberation of endless supplies of energy.'

'And the consequent reduction of human beings to absolute imbecility and absolute subservience to their machines,' jeered Rampion. 'I know your paradises. But the point for the moment is truth. This non-human truth that the scientists are trying to get at with their intellects – it's utterly irrelevant to ordinary human living. Our truth, the relevant human truth is something you discover by living – living completely, with the whole man. The results of your amusements, Philip, all these famous theories about the cosmos and their practical applications – they've got nothing whatever to do with the only truth that matters. And the non-human truth isn't merely irrelevant; it's dangerous. It distracts people's attention from the important human truth. It makes them falsify their experience in order that lived reality may fit in with abstract theory. For example, it's an established non-human truth – or at least it was established in my young days – that secondary qualities have no real existence. The man who takes that seriously denies himself, destroys the whole fabric of his life as a human being. For human beings happen to be so arranged that secondary qualities are, for them, the only real ones. Deny them and you commit suicide.'

'But in practice,' said Philip, 'nobody does deny them.'

'Not completely,' Rampion agreed. 'Because it can't be done. A man can't abolish his sensations and feelings completely without physically killing himself. But he can disparage them after the event. And, in fact, that's what a great number of intelligent and well-educated people do – disparage the human in the

interests of the non-human. Their motive's different from that of the Christians; but the result's the same. A sort of self-destruction. Always the same,' he went on with a sudden outburst of anger in his voice. 'Every attempt at being something better than a man – the result's always the same. Death, some sort of death. You try to be more than you are by nature and you kill something in yourself and become much less. I'm so tired of all this rubbish about the higher life and moral and intellectual progress and living for ideals and all the rest of it. It all leads to death. Just as surely as living for money. Christians and moralists and cultured aesthetes, and bright young scientists and Smilesian business men – all the poor little human frogs trying to blow themselves up into bulls of pure spirituality, pure idealism, pure efficiency, pure conscious intelligence, and just going pop, ceasing to be anything but the fragments of a little frog – decaying fragments at that. The whole thing's a huge stupidity, a huge disgusting lie. Your little stink-pot of a St Francis, for example.' He turned to Burlap, who protested. 'Just a little stink-pot,' Rampion insisted. 'A silly vain little man trying to blow himself up into a Jesus and only succeeding in killing whatever sense or decency there was in him, only succeeding in turning himself into the nasty smelly fragments of a real human being. Going about getting thrills of excitement out of licking lepers! Ugh! The disgusting little pervert! He thinks himself too good to kiss a woman; he wants to be above anything so vulgar as natural healthy pleasure, and the only result is that he kills whatever core of human decency he ever had in him and becomes a smelly little pervert who can only get a thrill out of licking lepers' ulcers. Not curing the lepers, mind you. Just licking them. For his own amusement. Not theirs. It's revolting!'

Philip leaned back in his chair and laughed. But Rampion turned on him in a fury.

'You may laugh,' he said. 'But don't imagine you're any better, really. You and your intellectual, scientific friends. You've killed just as much of yourselves as the Christian maniacs. Shall I read you your programme?' He picked up the book that was lying beside him on the table and began to turn the pages. 'I came upon it just now, as I was coming here in the 'bus. Here we are.' He began to

read, pronouncing the French words carefully and dearly. '*Plus un obstacle matériel, toutes les rapidités gagnées par la science et la richesse. Pas une tare à l'indépendance. Voir un crime de lèse-moi dans toute fréquentation, homme ou pays, qui ne serait pas expressément voulu. L'énergie, le recueillement, la tension de la solitude, les transporter dans ses rapports avec de vrais semblables. Pas d'amour peut-être, mais des amitiés rares, difficiles, exaltées, nerveuses; vivre comme on revivrait en esprit de détachement, d'inquiétude et de revanche*.' Rampion closed the book and looked up. 'That's your programme,' he said to Philip. 'Formulated by Marie Lenéru in 1901. Very brief and neat and complete. And, my God, what a horror! No body, no contact with the material world, no contact with human beings except through the intellect, no love …'

'We've changed *that* a little since 1901,' said Philip, smiling.

'Not really. You've admitted promiscuous fornication, that's all. But not love, not the natural contact and flow, not the renunciation of mental self-consciousness, not the abandonment to instinct. No, no. You stick to your conscious will. Everything must be *expressément voulu*, all the time. And the connections must be purely mental. And life must be lived, not as though it were life in a world of living people, but as though it were solitary recollection and fancy and meditation. An endless masturbation, like Proust's horrible great book. That's the higher life. Which is the euphemistic name of incipient death. It's significant, it's symbolic that that Lenéru woman was deaf and purblind. The outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual truth. Poor creature! She had some excuse for spirituality. But the other Higher-Lifers, the ones who haven't any physical defect – they're not so forgivable. They've maimed themselves deliberately, for fun. It's a pity they don't develop visible hunch-backs or wall-eyes. One would know better who one was dealing with.'

'Quite,' said Philip, nodding, and laughed with an affectation of amusement that was meant to cover the embarrassment he felt at Rampion's references to physical disability. 'Quite.' Nobody should think that, because he had a game leg, he didn't entirely appreciate the justice of Rampion's remarks about deformity.

The irrelevant loudness of his laugh made Rampion glance questioningly at him. What was up? He couldn't be bothered to discover.

'It's all a damned lie,' he went on, 'and an idiotic lie at that – all this pretending to be more than human. Idiotic because it never comes off. You try to be more than human, but you only succeed in making yourself less than human. Always …'

'Hear, hear!' said Philip. '"We walk on earth and have no need of wings."' And suddenly he heard his father's loud voice saying, 'I had wings. I had wings'; he saw his flushed face and feverishly pink pyjamas. Ludicrous and deplorable. 'Do you know who that's by?' he went on. 'That's the last line of the poem I wrote for the Newdigate prize at Oxford, when I was twenty-one. The subject was "King Arthur", if I remember rightly. Needless to say I didn't get the prize. But it's a good line.'

'A pity you didn't live up to it,' said Rampion, 'instead of whoring after abstractions. But of course, there's nobody like the lover of abstraction for denouncing abstractions. He knows by experience how life-destroying they are. The ordinary man can afford to take them in his stride. He can afford to have wings too, so long as he also remembers that he's got feet. It's when people strain themselves to fly all the time that they go wrong. They're ambitious of being angels; but all they succeed in being is either cuckoos and geese on the one hand or else disgusting vultures and carrion crows on the other.'

'But all this,' said Spandrell, breaking a long silence, 'is just the gospel of animalism. You're just advising us to behave like beasts.'

'I'm advising you to behave like human beings,' said Rampion. 'Which is slightly different. And anyhow,' he added, 'it's a damned sight better to behave like a beast – a real genuine undomesticated animal, I mean – than to invent a devil and then behave like one's invention.'

There was a brief silence. 'Suppose I were to tell them,' Spandrell was thinking, 'suppose I were to tell them that I'd just jumped out on a man from behind a screen and hit him on the side of the head with an Indian club.' He took another sip of brandy. 'No,' he said aloud, 'I'm not so sure of what you say.

Behaving like an animal is behaving like a creature that's below good and evil. You must know what good is before you can start behaving like the devil.' And yet it had all been just stupid and sordid and disgusting. Yes, and profoundly silly, an enormous stupidity. At the core of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he had found, not fire and poison, but only a brown disgusting putrefaction and a few small maggots. 'Things exist only in terms of their opposites,' he went on, frowning at his own thoughts. 'The devil implies God.'

'No doubt,' said Rampion impatiently. 'A devil of absolute evil implies a God of absolute good. Well, what of it? What's that got to do with you or me?'

'A good deal, I should have thought.'

'It's got about as much to do with us as the fact of this table being made of electrons, or an infinite series of waves undulating in an unknown medium, or a large number of point-events in a four-dimensional continuum, or whatever else Philip's scientific friends assure us it is made of. As much as that. That is to say, practically nothing. Your absolute God and absolute devil belong to the class of irrelevant non-human facts. The only things that concern us are the little relative gods and devils of history and geography, the little relative goods and evils of individual casuistry. Everything else is non-human and beside the point; and if you allow yourself to be influenced by non-human, absolute considerations, then you inevitably make either a fool of yourself, or a villain, or perhaps both.'

'But that's better than making an animal of oneself,' insisted Spandrell. 'I'd rather be a fool or a villain than a bull or a dog.'

'But nobody's asking you to be a bull or a dog,' said Rampion impatiently. 'Nobody's asking you to be anything but a man. A man, mind you. Not an angel or a devil. A man's a creature on a tight-rope, walking delicately, equilibrated, with mind and consciousness and spirit at one end of his balancing pole and body and instinct and all that's unconscious and earthy and mysterious at the other. Balanced. Which is damnably difficult. And the only absolute he can ever really know is the absolute of perfect balance. The absoluteness of perfect relativity. Which is a paradox and nonsense intellectually. But so is all real,

genuine, living truth – just nonsense according to logic. And logic is just nonsense in the light of living truth. You can choose which you like, logic or life. It's a matter of taste. Some people prefer being dead.'

'Prefer being dead.' The words went echoing through Spandrell's mind. Everard Webley lying on the floor, trussed up like a chicken. Did he prefer being dead? 'All the same,' he said slowly, 'some things must always remain absolutely and radically wrong. Killing, for example.' He wanted to believe that it was more than merely low and sordid and disgusting. He wanted to believe that it was also terrible and tragic. 'That's an absolute wrong.'

'But why more absolute than anything else?' said Rampion. 'There are circumstances when killing's obviously necessary and right and commendable. The only absolutely evil act, so far as I can see, that a man can perform, is an act against life, against his own integrity. He does wrong if he perverts himself, if he falsifies his instincts.'

Spandrell was sarcastic. 'We're getting back to the beasts again,' he said. 'Go ravening round fulfilling all your appetites as you feel them. Is that the last word in human wisdom?'

'Well, it isn't really so stupid as you try to make out,' said Rampion. 'If men went about satisfying their instinctive desires only when they genuinely felt them, like the animals you're so contemptuous of, they'd behave a damned sight better than the majority of civilized human beings behave today. It isn't natural appetite and spontaneous instinctive desire that make men so beastly – no, "beastly" is the wrong word; it implies an insult to the animals – so all-too-humanly bad and vicious, then. It's the imagination, it's the intellect, its principles, its tradition and education. Leave the instincts to themselves and they'll do very little mischief. If men made love only when they were carried away by passion, if they fought only when they were angry or terrified, if they grabbed at property only when they had need or were swept off their feet by an uncontrollable desire for possession – why, I assure you, this world would be a great deal more like the Kingdom of Heaven than it is under our present Christian-intellectual-scientific dispensation. It's not instinct that makes

Casanovas and Byrons and Lady Castlemaines; it's a prurient imagination artificially tickling up the appetite, tickling up desires that have no natural existence. If Don Juans and Don Juanesses only obeyed their desires, they'd have very few affairs. They have to tickle themselves up imaginatively before they can start being casually promiscuous. And it's the same with the other instincts. It's not the possessive instinct that's made modern civilization insane about money. The possessive instinct has to be kept artificially tickled by education and tradition and moral principles. The money-grubbers have to be told that money-grubbing's natural and noble, that thrift and industry are virtues, that persuading people to buy things they don't want is Christian Service. Their possessive instinct would never be strong enough to keep them grubbing away from morning till night all through a lifetime. It has to be kept chronically gingered up by the imagination and the intellect. And then, think of civilized war. It's got nothing to do with spontaneous combativeness. Men have to be compelled by law and then tickled up by propaganda before they'll fight. You'd do more for peace by telling men to obey the spontaneous dictates of their fighting instincts than by founding any number of Leagues of Nations.'

'You'd do still more,' said Burlap, 'by telling them to obey Jesus.'

'No, you wouldn't. Telling them to obey Jesus is telling them to be more than human. And, in practice, trying to be more than human always means succeeding in being less than human. Telling men to obey Jesus literally is telling them, indirectly, to behave like idiots and finally like devils. Just consider the examples. Old Tolstoy – a great man who deliberately turned himself into an idiot by trying to be more than a great man. Your horrid little St Francis.' He turned to Burlap. 'Another idiot. But already on the verge of diabolism. With the monks of Thebaid you see the process carried a step further. They went over the verge. They got to the stage of being devils. Self-torture, destruction of everything decent and beautiful and living. That was their programme. They tried to obey Jesus and be more than men; and all they succeeded in doing was to become the incarnation of pure diabolic destructiveness. They could have been perfectly decent human beings if they'd just gone about behaving naturally, in

accordance with their instincts. But no, they wanted to be more than human. So they just became devils. Idiots first and then devils, imbecile devils. Ugh!' Rampion made a grimace and shook his head with disgust. 'And to think,' he went on indignantly, 'that the world's full of these creatures! Not quite so far gone as St Anthony and his demons or St Francis and his half-wits. But of the same kind. Different only in degree. And all perverted in the same way – by trying to be non-human. Non-humanly religious, non-humanly moral, non-humanly intellectual and scientific, non-humanly specialized and efficient, non-humanly the business man, non-humanly avaricious and property-loving, non-humanly lascivious and Don Juanesque, non-humanly the conscious individual even in love. All perverts. Perverted towards goodness or badness, towards spirit or flesh; but always away from the central norm, always away from humanity. The world's an asylum of perverts. There are four of them at this table now.' He looked round with a grin. 'A pure little Jesus pervert.' Burlap forgivingly smiled. 'An intellectual-aesthetic pervert.'

'Thanks for the compliment,' said Philip.

'A morality-philosophy pervert.' He turned to Spandrell. 'Quite the little Stavrogin. Pardon my saying so, Spandrell; but you really are the most colossal fool.' He looked intently into his face. 'Smiling like all the tragic characters of fiction rolled into one! But it won't do. It doesn't conceal the simple-minded zany underneath.'

Spandrell threw back his head and noiselessly laughed. If he knew, he was thinking, if he knew … But if he knew, would he think him any less of a fool?

'Laugh away, old Dostoievsky! But let me tell you, it's Stavrogin who ought to have been called the Idiot, not Mishkin. He was incomparably the bigger fool, the completer pervert.'

'And what sort of a fool and pervert is the fourth person at this table?' asked Philip.

'What indeed!' Rampion shook his head. His fine hair floated up silkily. He smiled. 'A pedagogue pervert. A Jeremiah pervert. A worry-about-the-bloody-old-world pervert. Above all a gibber pervert.' He got up. 'That's why I'm going

home,' he said. 'The way I've been talking – it's really non-human. Really scandalous. I'm ashamed. But that's the trouble: when you're up against non-human things and people, you inevitably become non-human yourself. It's all your fault.' He gave a final grin, waved good-night and was gone.

Burlap came home to find Beatrice, as usual, waiting up for him. Sitting – for such was the engagingly child-like habit he had formed during the last few weeks – on the floor at her feet, his head, with the little pink tonsure in the middle of the dark curls, against her knee, he sipped his hot milk and talked of Rampion. An extraordinary man, a great man, even. Great? queried Beatrice, disapprovingly. She didn't like to hear greatness attributed to any living man (the dead were a different matter; they were dead), unless it was to Denis himself. Hardly *great*, she insisted jealously. Well, perhaps not quite. But very nearly. If he hadn't that strange insensitiveness to spiritual values, that prejudice, that blind spot. The attitude was comprehensible. Rampion was reacting against something which had gone too far in one direction; but in the process of reacting he had gone too far in the other. His incapacity to understand St Francis, for example. The grotesque and really hideous things he could say about the saint. That was extraordinary and deplorable.

'What does he say?' asked Beatrice severely. Since knowing Burlap, she had taken St Francis under her protection.

Burlap gave her an account, a little expurgated, of what Rampion had said. Beatrice was indignant. How could he say such things? How did he dare? It was an outrage. Yes, it was a defect in him, Burlap admitted, a real defect. But so few people, he added in charitable palliation, were born with a real feeling for spiritual beauty. Rampion was an extraordinary man in many ways, but it was as though he lacked that extra sense-organ which enables men like St Francis to see the beauty that is beyond earthly beauty. In a rudimentary form he himself, he thought, had the power. How rarely he met anyone who seemed to be like him! Almost everybody was in this respect a stranger. It was like seeing normally in a country where most people were colour blind. Didn't Beatrice feel that too? For of course she was one of the rare clear-seeing ones. He had felt it at once, the

first time he met her. Beatrice nodded gravely. Yes, she too felt like that. Burlap smiled up at her; he knew it. She felt proud and important. Rampion's idea of love, for example; Burlap shook his head. So extraordinarily gross and animal and corporeal.

'Dreadful,' said Beatrice feelingly. Denis, she was thinking, was so different. Tenderly she looked down at the head that reposed, so trustingly, against her knee. She adored the way his hair curled, and his very small, beautiful ears, and even the pink bare spot on the top of his crown. That little pink tonsure was somehow rather engagingly pathetic. There was a long silence.

Burlap at last profoundly sighed. 'How tired I am!' he said.

'You ought to go to bed.'

'Too tired even to move.' He pressed his cheek more heavily against her knee and shut his eyes.

Beatrice raised her hand, hesitated a moment, dropped it again, then raised it once more and began to run her fingers soothingly through his dark curls. There was another long silence.

'Ah, don't stop,' he said, when at last she withdrew her hand. 'It's so comforting. Such a virtue seems to go out from you. You'd almost cured my headache.'

'You've got a headache?' asked Beatrice, her solicitude running as usual to a kind of anger. 'Then you simply must go to bed,' she commanded.

'But I'm so happy here.'

'No, I insist.' Her protective motherliness was thoroughly aroused. It was a bullying tenderness.

'How cruel you are!' Burlap complained, rising reluctantly to his feet. Beatrice was touched with compunction. 'I'll stroke your head when you're in bed,' she promised. She too now regretted that soft warm silence, that speechless intimacy, which her outburst of domineering solicitude had too abruptly shattered. She justified herself by an explanation. The headache would return if he didn't go to sleep the moment it was cured. And so on.

Burlap had been in bed nearly ten minutes when she came to keep her promise. She was dressed in a green dressing-gown and her yellow hair was plaited into a long thick pigtail that swung heavily as she moved, like the heavy plaited tail of a cart-horse at a show.

‘You look about twelve with that pigtail hanging down your back,’ said Burlap, enchanted.

Beatrice laughed, rather nervously, and sat down on the edge of the bed. He raised his hand and took hold of the thick plait. ‘Too charming,’ he said. ‘It simply invites pulling.’ He gave a little tug at it, playfully.

‘Look out,’ she warned. ‘I’ll pull back, in spite of your headache.’ She took hold of one of his dark curls.

‘Pax, pax!’ he begged, reverting to the vocabulary of the preparatory school. ‘I’ll let go. The real reason,’ he added, ‘why little boys don’t like fighting with little girls is simply that little girls are so much more ruthless and ferocious.’

Beatrice laughed again. There was a silence. She felt a little breathless and fluttering, as one feels when one is anxiously expecting something to happen. ‘Head bad?’ she asked.

‘Rather bad.’

She stretched out a hand and touched his forehead.

‘Your hand’s magical,’ he said. With a quick unexpected movement he wriggled round sideways under the sheets and laid his head on her lap. ‘There,’ he whispered and, with a sigh of contentment, closed his eyes.

For a moment Beatrice was taken aback, almost frightened. That dark head lying hard and heavy on her thighs – it seemed strange, terrifying. She had to suppress a little shudder before she could feel glad at the confiding childishness of his movement. She began stroking his forehead, stroking his scalp through the thick dark curls. Time passed. The soft warm silence enveloped them once more, the dumb intimacy of contact was re-established. She was no longer domineering in her protective solicitude, only tender. The armour of her hardness was as though melted away from her, melted away in this warm intimacy along with the terrors which made it necessary.

Burlap sighed again. He was in a kind of blissful doze of sensual passivity.

‘Better?’ she asked in a soft whisper.

‘Still rather bad on the side,’ he whispered back. ‘Just over the ear.’ And he rolled his head over so that she could more easily reach the painful spot, rolled it over so that his face was pressed against her belly, her soft belly that stirred so livingly with her breathing, that was so warm and yielding against his face.

At the touch of his face against her body Beatrice felt a sudden renewal of those spasmodic creepings of apprehension. Her flesh was terrified by the nearness of that physical intimacy. But as Burlap did not stir, as he made no dangerous gesture, no movement towards a closer contact, the terrors died gradually down and their flutterings served only to enhance and intensify that wonderful warm emotion of tenderness which succeeded them. She ran her fingers through his hair, again and again. The warmth of his breathing was against her belly. She shivered a little; her happiness fluttered with apprehensions and anticipations. Her flesh trembled, but was somehow joyful; was afraid and yet curious; shrank, but took warmth at the contact and even, through its terrors, timidly desired.

‘Better?’ she whispered again.

He made a little movement with his head and pressed his face closer to her soft flesh.

‘Shall I stop now?’ she went on, ‘shall I go away?’

Burlap raised his head and looked at her. ‘No, no,’ he implored. ‘Don’t go. Not yet. Don’t break the magic. Stay here for a moment longer. Lie down here for a moment under the quilt. For a moment.’

Without speaking she stretched herself out beside him and he drew the quilt over her, he turned out the light.

The fingers that caressed her arm under its wide sleeve touched delicately, touched spiritually and as it were disembodiedly, like the fingers of those inflated rubber gloves that brush so thrillingly against one’s face in the darkness of séances, bringing comfort from the Great Beyond and a message of affection from the loved ones who have passed over. To caress and yet be a spiritualized

rubber glove at a séance, to make love but as though from the Great Beyond – that was Burlap's talent. Softly, patiently, with an infinite disembodied gentleness he went on caressing. Beatrice's armour was melted quite away. It was the soft young-girlish, tremulous core of her that Burlap caressed with that delicate touch of spirit fingers from the Great Beyond. Her armour was gone; but she felt so wonderfully safe with Denis. She felt no fears, or at least only such faint breathless flutterings of her still almost childish flesh as served to quicken her happiness. She felt so wonderfully safe even when – after what had seemed a delicious eternity of patiently repeated caresses from wrist to shoulder and back again – the spirit hand reached out of the Beyond and touched her breast. Delicately, almost disembodiedly it touched, like a skin of rubber stuffed with air; spiritually it slid over the rounded flesh, and its angelic fingers lingered along the skin. At the first touch the round breast shuddered; it had its private terrors within Beatrice's general happiness and sense of security. But patiently, gently, unalarmingly, the spirit hand repeated its caress again, again, till the reassured and at last eager breast longed for its return and her whole body was alive with the tingling ramifications of the breast's desires. In the darkness the eternities prolonged themselves.

CHAPTER XXXV

NEXT DAY, INSTEAD of whimpering with every return of pain, the child began to scream – cry after shrill cry, repeated with an almost clockwork regularity of recurrence for what seemed to Elinor an eternity of hours. Like the scream of a rabbit in a trap. But a thousand times worse; for it was a child that screamed, not an animal; *her* child, trapped and in agony. She felt as though she too were trapped. Trapped by her own utter helplessness to alleviate his pain. Trapped by that obscure sense of guilt, that irrational belief (but haunting in spite of its irrationality), that ever more closely pressing and suffocating conviction that it was all, in some inscrutable fashion, *her* fault, a punishment, malevolently vicarious, for *her* offence. Caged within her own snare, but outside his, she sat there holding the small hand as it were between invisible bars, unable to come to his aid, waiting through the child's quick-breathed and feverish silence for the recurrence of that dreadful cry, for yet another sight of that suddenly distorted face, that shuddering little body racked by a pain which was somehow of her own inflicting.

The doctor came at last with his opiates.

Philip arrived by the twelve-twenty. He had been in no hurry to get up and come by an earlier train. It annoyed him to have to leave town. His late arrival was in the nature of a protest. Elinor must really learn not to make such a fuss every time the child had a stomach-ache. It was absurd.

She met him at the door as he stepped out of the car, so white and haggard, and with such dark-circled and desperate eyes, that he was shocked to see her.

'But you're the one who's ill,' he said anxiously. 'What is it?'

She did not answer for a moment, but stood holding him, her face hidden on his shoulder, pressing herself against him. 'Dr Crowther says it's meningitis,' she whispered at last.

At half-past five arrived the nurse for whom Mrs Bidlake had telegraphed in the morning. The evening papers came by the same train; the chauffeur returned with a selection of them. On the front page was the announcement of the discovery, in his own motor car, of Everard Webley's body. It was to old John Bidlake, dozing listlessly in the library, that the papers were first brought. He read and was so excited by the news of another's death that he entirely forgot all his preoccupations with his own. Rejuvenated, he sprang to his feet and ran, waving the paper, into the hall. 'Philip!' he shouted in the strong resonant voice that had not been his for weeks past. 'Philip! Come here at once!'

Philip, who had just come out of the sick-room and was standing in the corridor, talking to Mrs Bidlake, hurried down to see what was the matter. John Bidlake held out the paper with an expression almost of triumph on his face. 'Read that,' he commanded importantly.

When Elinor was told the news, she almost fainted.

'I believe he's better this morning, Dr Crowther.'

Dr Crowther fingered his tie to feel if it were straight. He was a small man, brisk and almost too neatly dressed. 'Quieter, eh? Sleeps?' he enquired telegraphically. His conversation had been reduced to bed-rock efficiency. It was just comprehensible and nothing more. No energy was wasted on the uttering of unnecessary words. Dr Crowther spoke as Ford cars are made. Elinor disliked him intensely, but believed in him for just those qualities of perky efficiency and self-confidence which she detested.

'Yes, that's it,' she said. 'He's sleeping.'

'He would be,' said Dr Crowther, nodding, as though he had known everything in advance – which indeed he had; for the disease was running its invariable course.

Elinor accompanied him up the stairs. 'Is it a good sign?' she asked in a voice that implored a favourable answer.

Dr Crowther pushed out his lips, cocked his head a little on one side, then shrugged his shoulders. 'Well …' he said non-committally and was silent. He

had saved at least five foot-pounds of energy by not explaining that, in meningitis, a phase of depression follows the initial phase of excitement.

The child now dozed away his days in a kind of stupor, suffering no pain (Elinor was thankful for that), but dis-quietingly unresponsive to what was going on about him, as though he were not fully alive. When he opened his eyes she saw that the pupils were so enormously dilated that there was hardly any iris left. Little Phil's blue and mischievous regard had turned to expressionless blackness. The light which had caused him such an agony during the first days of his illness no longer troubled him. No longer did he start and tremble at every sound. Indeed, the child did not seem to hear when he was spoken to. Two days passed and then, quite suddenly and with a horrible sinking sense of apprehension, Elinor realized that he was almost completely deaf.

'Deaf?' echoed Dr Crowther, when she told him of her dreadful discovery. 'Common symptom.'

'But isn't there anything to be done about it?' she asked. The trap was closing on her again, the trap from which she had imagined herself free when that terrible screaming had quieted into silence. Dr Crowther shook his head, briskly, but only once each way. He did not speak. A foot-pound saved is a foot-pound gained.

'But we can't let him be deaf,' she said, when the doctor was gone, appealing with a kind of incredulous despair to her husband. 'We can't let him be deaf.' She knew he could do nothing; and yet she hoped. She realized the horror; but she refused to believe in it.

'But if the doctor says there isn't anything to be done …'

'But deaf?' she kept repeating, questioningly. 'Deaf, Phil? Deaf?'

'Perhaps it'll pass off by itself,' he suggested consolingly and wondered, as he spoke the words, whether she still imagined that the child would recover.

Early next morning when, in her dressing-gown, she tiptoed upstairs for nurse's report on the night, she found the child already awake. One eyelid was wide open and the eye, all pupil, was looking straight up at the ceiling; the other

was half shut in a permanent wink that imparted to the thin and shrunken little face an expression of ghastly facetiousness.

‘He can’t open it,’ the nurse explained. It’s paralysed.’

Between those long and curly lashes, which she had so often envied him, Elinor could see that the eyeball had rolled away to the exterior corner of the eye and was staring out sideways in a fixed unseeing squint.

‘Why the devil,’ said Cuthbert Arkwright, in the tone of one who has a personal grievance, ‘why the devil doesn’t Quarles come back to London?’ He hoped to extort from him a preface to his new illustrated edition of the Mimes of Herondas.

The rustication, Willie Weaver explained polysyllabically, was not voluntary. ‘His child’s ill,’ he added, uttering his little cough of self-applause; ‘it seems very reluctant, as they would say in Denmark, to absent itself from felicity much longer.’

‘Well, I wish it would hurry up about it,’ grumbled Arkwright. He frowned. ‘Perhaps I’d better try to get hold of someone else for my preface.’

At Gattenden the days had been like the successive stages of an impossibly horrible dream. When he had been deaf for a couple of days, little Phil ceased also to see. The squinting eyes were quite blind. And after nearly a week’s respite there was a sudden recurrence of the pain of the first days; he began to scream. Later he was seized several times with violent attacks of convulsions; it was as though a devil had entered into him and were torturing him from within. Then, one side of his face and half his body became paralysed and the flesh began to waste almost visibly from off his bones, like wax melting away in the heat of some inward and invisible fire. Trapped by her helplessness and by that horrible sense of guilt, which the news of Everard’s murder had enormously intensified, Elinor sat by her child’s bed and watched the phases of the malady succeeding one another – each one worse, it seemed to her, than the last, each more atrociously impossible. Yes, impossible. For such things could not, did not happen. Not to oneself at any rate. One’s own child was not gratuitously tortured and deformed before one’s eyes. The man who loved one and whom one had (oh

wrongly, guiltily and as it had turned out, fatally!) almost made up one's mind to love in return, was not suddenly and mysteriously murdered. Events like that simply did not occur. They were an impossibility. And yet, in spite of this impossibility, Everard was dead and for little Phil each day reserved a new and more excruciating torment. As in a nightmare, the impossible was being actualized.

Outwardly Elinor was very calm, silent and efficient. When Nurse Butler complained that the meals brought up to the sick-room got very cold on the way (and might she have Indian tea, as China didn't agree with her digestion?), she ordered Lipton and arranged, in spite of Dobbs's passionate objections, that lunch and dinner should be brought up in the water-heated breakfast dishes. All that Dr Crowther telegraphically ordered her to do, she did, punctually, except to take more rest. Even Nurse Butler had grudgingly to admit that she was thorough and methodical. But she backed up the doctor, partly because she wanted to rule alone and undisputed in the sick-room and partly disinterestedly, for Elinor's own sake. That calmness, she could see, was the result of effort; it was the rigidity of extreme tension. Philip and Mrs Bidlake were no less insistent that she should rest; but Elinor would not listen to them.

'But I'm perfectly all right,' she protested, denying the evidence of her pallor and of those dark circles round her eyes.

She would have liked, if it had been humanly possible, never to eat or sleep at all. With Everard dead and the child in torture before her eyes, eating and sleeping seemed almost cynical. But the very possession of a body is a cynical comment on the soul and all its ways. It is a piece of cynicism, however, which the soul must accept, whether it likes it or no. Elinor duly went to bed at eleven and came down to meals – if only that she might have strength to endure yet more unhappiness. To suffer was the only thing she could do; she wanted to suffer as much and intensely as she could.

'Well, how's the boy?' her father would ask perfunctorily, over his chicken-broth, when they met at lunch. And when she had given some vague reply, he would hastily pass on to another topic.

John Bidlake had steadily refused, throughout his grandchild's illness, to come near the sick-room. He had always hated the spectacle of suffering and disease, of anything that might remind him of the pain and death he so agonizingly dreaded for himself. And in this case he had a special reason for terror. For, with that talent for inventing private superstitions which had always distinguished him, he had secretly decided that his own fate was bound up with the child's. If the child recovered, so would he. If not … Once formulated, the superstition could not be disregarded. 'It's absurd,' he tried to assure himself 'It's utterly senseless and idiotic.' But every unfavourable bulletin from the nursery made him shudder. To have entered the room might have been to discover, quite gratuitously, the most horrible confirmation of his forebodings. And perhaps (who knows?) the child's sufferings might in some mysterious way infect himself. He did not even wish to hear of the boy. Except for that single brief enquiry at lunch-time, he never alluded to him and whenever someone else spoke of him, he either changed the subject of conversation (surreptitiously touching wood as he did so) or else withdrew out of earshot. After a few days the others learned to understand and respect his weakness. Moved by that sentiment which decrees that condemned criminals shall be treated with a special kindness, they were careful, in his presence, to avoid any allusion to what was happening upstairs.

Philip, meanwhile, hovered uneasily about the house. From time to time he went up to the nursery; but after having made an always vain attempt to persuade Elinor to come away, he would go down again in a few minutes. He could not have borne to sit there for long at a time. The futility of Elinor's helpless vigil appalled him; he had at all times a dread of doing nothing and in circumstances like these a long spell of mental disoccupation would have been a torture. In the intervals between his visits to the sick-room, he read, he tried to write. And then there was that affair of Gladys Helmsley to be attended to. The child's illness had made a journey to London impossible and so absolved him from the necessity of personally interviewing Gladys. It was to Willie Weaver – Willie, who was a solicitor as well as the most reliable of friends – that he delegated the

business. With what immense relief! He had really dreaded the encounter with Gladys. Willie, on the contrary, seemed to enjoy the business. ‘My dear Philip,’ he wrote, ‘I have been doing my best for your Aged Parent; but even my best promises to be somewhat expensive. The lady has all the endearing young charms (only professional etiquette prevented me from attempting a little playful superfoetation on my own account); but she is also a business woman. Moreover, her feelings about the Aged P. are ferocious. Rather justifiably so, I must confess to thinking, after what I heard from her. Do you know where he feeds his paramours? Chez Lyons. The man must be a barmecidal maniac, as I said to the young lady when she told me. (Needless to say, she didn’t understand the witticism; so I offer it to you, on the basis of a five per cent commission on all royalties accruing from the sales of any work or works into which you may introduce it.) Tell the Aged P. that, next time, he must really spend a little more on his amusements; it’ll probably be cheaper in the long run. Advise him to indulge his gulosity as well as his lubricity; bid him control his thrift and temperance. I return to the attack tomorrow, when I hope to get the terms of the peace treaty set down in black and white. So sorry to hear your offspring’s not well. Yours, W. W.’

Philip smiled as he read the letter, and ‘Thank goodness,’ he thought, ‘that’s settled.’ But the last phrase made him feel ashamed of his amusement and his sense of relief ‘What bottomless selfishness,’ he reproached himself. And as though to make some amends, he limped upstairs to the nursery to sit for a while with Elinor. Little Phil lay in a stupor. His face was almost unrecognizably fleshless and shrunken, and the paralysed side of it was twisted into a kind of crooked grin. His little hands plucked unceasingly at the bedclothes. He breathed now very quickly, now so slowly that one began to wonder whether he was breathing at all.

Nurse Butler had gone to take a nap; for her nights were half sleepless. They sat together in silence. Philip took his wife’s hand and held it. Measured by that light irregular breathing from the bed, time slowly passed.

In the garden John Bidlake was painting – his wife had finally induced him to make the experiment – for the first time since his arrival at Gattenden. And for the first time, forgetting himself and his illness, he was happy. What an enchantment! he was thinking. The landscape was all curves and bulges and round recessions, like a body. Orbism, by God, orbism! The clouds were cherubic back-sides; and that sleek down was a Nereid's glaucous belly; and Gattenden Punch Bowl was an enormous navel; and each of those elms in the middle distance was a paunchy great Silenus straight out of Jordaens; and these absurd round bushes of evergreen in the foreground were the multitudinous breasts of a green Diana of the Ephesians. Whole chunks of anatomy in leaves and vapour and swelling earth. Marvellous! And by God, what one could make of it! Those seraphic buttocks should be the heavenly reflection of Diana's breasts; one orbic theme, with variations; the buttocks slanting outwards and across the canvas towards the surface of the picture; the breasts slanting inwards, towards the interior. And the sleek belly should be a transverse and horizontal reconciliation of the two diagonal movements, with the great Sileni, zig-zagging a little, disposed in front of it. And in the foreground on the left there'd be the silhouetted edge of the Wellingtonia, imaginatively transplanted there to stop the movements from running right out of the picture; and the stone griffon would come in very nicely on the right – for this was to be a closed composition, a little universe with boundaries beyond which the imagination was not to be allowed to stray. And the eye was to gaze as through an imaginary tunnel, unable to stray from the focal point in the middle of the great navel of Gattenden Punch Bowl, round which all the other fragments of divine anatomy would be harmoniously grouped. 'By God,' John Bidlake said to himself, swearing aloud in pure satisfaction of spirit, 'by God!' And he began to paint with a kind of fury.

Wandering through the garden in her endless crusade against weeds, Mrs Bidlake halted for a moment behind him and looked over his shoulder.

'Admirable,' she said, as much in comment on her husband's activity as on its pictorial results.

She moved away and, having uprooted a dandelion, paused and, with eyes shut, began to repeat her own name, ‘Janet Bidlake, Janet Bidlake, Janet Bidlake,’ again and again, until the syllables had lost all significance for her and had become as mysterious, meaningless and arbitrary as the words of a necromancer’s spell. Abracadabra, Janet Bidlake – was she really herself? did she even exist? and the trees? and people? this moment and the past? everything … ?

Meanwhile, in the nursery, an extraordinary thing had happened. Suddenly and without warning, little Phil had opened his eyes and looked about him. They met his mother’s. As well as his twisted face would permit him, he smiled.

‘But he can see!’ cried Elinor. And kneeling down by the bed, she put her arms round the child and began to kiss him with a love that was quickened by an outburst of passionate gratitude. After all these days of squinting blindness, she was thankful to him, she was profoundly grateful for that look of answering intelligence in his eyes, that poor twisted essay at a smile. ‘My darling,’ she repeated and, for the first time for days, she began to cry. She averted her face, so that the child should not see her tears, got up and walked away from the bed. ‘Too stupid,’ she said apologetically to her husband, as she wiped her eyes. ‘But I can’t help it.’

‘I’m hungry,’ said little Phil suddenly.

Elinor was down on her knees again beside the bed. ‘What would you like to eat, my darling?’ But the child did not hear her question.

‘I’m hungry,’ he repeated.

‘He’s still deaf,’ said Philip.

‘But he can see again, he can speak.’ Elinor’s face was transfigured. She had known all the time, in spite of everything, that it was impossible he shouldn’t get well. Quite impossible. And now she was being proved right. ‘Stay here,’ she went on. ‘I’ll run and get some milk.’ She hurried out of the room.

Philip remained at the bedside. He stroked the child’s hand and smiled. Little Phil smiled back. He too began to believe that there really might have been a miracle.

‘Draw me something,’ the child commanded.

Philip pulled out his fountain pen and, on the back of an old letter, scribbled one of those landscapes full of elephants and airships, trains and flying pigs and steamers, for which his son had such a special partiality. An elephant came into collision with a train. Feebly, but with a manifest enjoyment, little Phil began to laugh. There could be no doubt of it; the miracle had really happened.

Elinor returned with some milk and a plate of jelly. There was colour in her cheeks, her eyes were bright and the face which, all these days, had been drawn and rigidly set had in a moment recovered all its mobility of expression. It was as though she had suddenly come to life again.

‘Come and look at the elephants,’ said little Phil. ‘So funny!’ And between each sip of milk, each spoonful of jelly, Philip had to show him the latest additions to his crowded landscape – whales in the sea, and divers being pinched by lobsters, two submarines fighting and a hippopotamus in a balloon; a volcano in eruption, cannons, a lighthouse, a whole army of pigs.

‘Why don’t you ever say anything?’ the child suddenly asked.

They looked at one another. ‘He can’t hear us,’ said Philip.

Elinor’s expression of happiness was momentarily clouded. ‘Perhaps tomorrow,’ she said. ‘If the blindness has gone today why shouldn’t he hear tomorrow?’

‘Why do you whisper?’ said the child.

The only answer she could make was to kiss him and stroke his forehead.

‘We mustn’t tire him,’ said Elinor at last. ‘I think he ought to go to sleep.’ She shook up his pillow, she smoothed the sheets, she bent over him. ‘Good-bye, my little darling.’ He could answer at least to her smile.

Elinor drew the curtains and they tiptoed out. In the passage she turned and waited for her husband to come up to her. Philip put his arm round her and she pressed herself against him with a great sigh.

‘I was beginning to be afraid,’ she said, ‘that the nightmare was going on for ever. To the end.’

Luncheon that day was like a festival of resurrection, an Easter sacrament. Elinor was unfrozen, a woman of flesh again, not of stone. And poor Miss Fulkes, in whom the symptoms of misery had been identical with those of a very bad cold in the head accompanied by pimples, reassumed an almost human appearance and was moved to all but hysterical laughter by the jokes and anecdotes of the resuscitated John Bidlake. The old man had come in, rubbing his hands.

‘What a landscape!’ he exclaimed as he took his seat. ‘So juicy, so succulent, if you know what I mean, so fleshy – there’s no other word. It makes one’s mouth water to look at it. Perhaps that’s why I’m so ravenously hungry.’

‘Here’s your broth,’ said Mrs Bidlake.

‘But you can’t expect me to do a morning’s painting on slops!’ And in spite of protests, he insisted on eating a cutlet.

The news that little Phil was better increased his satisfaction. (He touched wood three times with both hands at once.) Besides, he was really very fond of his grandchild. He began to talk, and it was the old Gargantuan Bidlake who spoke. Miss Fulkes laughed so violently at one of his anecdotes about Whistler that she choked and had to hide her face in her napkin. In the vague benevolence even of Mrs Bidlake’s smile there was a hint of something like hilarity.

At about three o’clock John Bidlake began to feel a familiar discomfort, growing momently more acute, in the region of his midriff. He was shaken by spasmodic hiccoughs. He tried to go on painting; but all his pleasure in the work had evaporated. Diana’s breasts and the angel’s hind-quarters had lost all their charm for him. ‘A slight obstruction at the pylorus.’ Sir Herbert’s medical phrases re-echoed in his memory. ‘The contents of the stomach … a certain difficulty in passing into the duodenum.’ After a particularly violent hiccough, he put down his brushes and walked into the house to lie down.

‘Where’s father?’ Elinor enquired, when she came down to tea.

Mrs Bidlake shook her head. ‘He’s not feeling very well again.’

‘Oh, dear.’

There was a silence, and it was as though death were suddenly in the room with them. But, after all, he was old, Elinor reflected; the thing was inevitable. He might be worse, but little Phil was better; and that was all that really mattered. She began to talk to her mother about the garden. Philip lighted a cigarette.

There was a knock at the door. It was the housemaid with a message from Nurse Butler: would they please come up at once.

The convulsions had been very violent; the wasted body was without strength. By the time they reached the nursery, little Phil was dead.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE WEBLEY MYSTERY, as the papers lost no time in calling it, was complete. There was no clue. At the offices of the British Freemen nobody knew anything. Webley had left at the usual hour and by his usual mode of conveyance. He was not in the habit of talking to his subordinates about his private affairs; nobody had been told where he was going. And outside the office nobody had observed the car from the time Webley had told his chauffeur he could go and the time when the policeman in St James's Square began to wonder, at about midnight, how much longer it was going to be left there unattended. Nobody had noticed the car being parked, nobody had remarked the driver as he left it. The only fingerprints on the paintwork and the steering wheel were those of the dead man. The person who drove the car after the murder had evidently worn gloves. No, there was no clue. Direct evidence was absolutely lacking. The police did what they could with the indirect. The fact that the body had not been robbed seemed obviously to point to a political motive for the crime. At the offices of the British Freemen reposed a whole collection of threatening letters. Webley received two or three of them every week. 'They're my favourite reading,' he was fond of saying. A search was made for the writers. Two Russian Jews from Houndsditch, a Nottingham typist and an ardent young undergraduate of Balliol, were identified as the authors of the most menacing and arrested, only to be released again almost immediately. The days passed. The murderers remained at large. Public interest in the crime was not allowed to abate. In part of the conservative press it was openly affirmed that the Liberal-Labour Government had given orders to the police that the affair was not to be too closely looked into. 'Screening the Murderers.' 'Socialists fear the Light.' 'Politics before the Ten Commandments.' The headlines were lively. The crime was a godsend to the opposition. The *Daily Mail* offered ten thousand pounds

reward to any person who would give information leading to the arrest of Webley's murderers. Meanwhile, the British Freemen had almost doubled their numbers in a week. 'Are you on the side of Murder? If not, join the British Freemen.' The posters glared from every hoarding. Troops of Freemen in uniform and plain clothes scoured London canvassing for recruits, making patriotic demonstrations, doing amateur detective work. They also took the opportunity to beat a number of people with whose opinions they disagreed. In Tottenham and East Ham they fought pitched battles with hostile crowds and damaged numerous policemen. At Everard's funeral a green procession more than three miles long followed the coffin to the grave.

Spandrell read all the papers every morning. They amused him. What a farce! What knockabout! What an incomparable idiocy! To Illidge, who had gone down to Lancashire to stay with his mother, he sent a picture post-card of Everard in uniform on his white horse – the shops were full of them now; hawkers peddled them in the streets. 'The dead lion seems likely to do much more damage than the live dog,' he wrote on the back. 'God was always a joker.'

God's best joke, so far as he himself was concerned, was not being there. Simply not there. Neither God nor the devil. For if the devil had been there, God would have been there too. All that was there was the memory of a sordid disgusting stupidity and now an enormous knockabout. First an affair of dustbins and then a farce. But perhaps that was what the devil really was: the spirit of dustbins. And God? God in that case would be simply the absence of dustbins.

'God's not apart, not above, not outside.' He remembered what Rampion had once said. 'At any rate, no relevant, humanly important aspect of God's above and outside. Neither is God inside, in the sense that the Protestants use the phrase – safely stowed away in the imagination, in the feelings and intellect, in the soul. He's there, of course among other places. But he's also inside in the sense that a lump of bread's inside when you've eaten it. He's in the very body, in the blood and bowels, in the heart and skin and loins. God's the total result, spiritual and physical, of any thought or action that makes for life, of any vital relation with the world. God's a quality of actions and relations – a felt,

experienced quality. At any rate, he's that for *our* purposes, for purposes of living. Because, of course for purposes of knowing and speculating he may be dozens of other things as well. He may be a Rock of Ages; he may be the Jehovah of the Old Testament; he may be anything you like. But what's that got to do with us as living corporeal beings? Nothing, nothing but harm, at any rate. The moment you allow speculative truth to take the place of felt instinctive truth as a guide to living, you ruin everything.'

Spandrell had protested. Men must have absolutes, must steer by fixed external marks. 'Music exists,' he concluded, 'even though you personally happen to be unmusical. You must admit its existence, absolutely, apart from your own capacity for listening and enjoying.'

'Speculatively, theoretically, yes. Admit it as much as you like. But don't allow your theoretical knowledge to influence your practical life. In the abstract you know that music exists and is beautiful. But don't therefore pretend, when you hear Mozart, to go into raptures which you don't feel. If you do, you become one of those idiotic music-snobs one meets at Lady Edward Tantamount's. Unable to distinguish Bach from Wagner, but mooing with ecstasy as soon as the fiddles strike up. It's exactly the same with God. The world's full of ridiculous God-snobs. People who aren't really alive, who've never done any vital act, who aren't in any living relation with anything; people who haven't the slightest personal or practical knowledge of what God is. But they moo away in churches, they coo over their prayers, they pervert and destroy their whole dismal existences by acting in accordance with the will of an arbitrarily imagined abstraction which they choose to call God. Just a pack of God-snobs. They're as grotesque and contemptible as the music-snobs at Lady Edward's. But nobody has the sense to say so. The God-snobs are admired for being so good and pious and Christian. When they're merely dead and ought to be having their bottoms kicked and their noses tweaked to make them sit up and come to life.'

Spandrell thought of the conversation now, as he addressed his post-card to Illidge. God was not there, the devil was not there; only the memory of a piece of squalid knockabout among the dustbins, a piece of dirty dung-beetle's

scavenging. A God-snob – that's what Rampion would call him. Dung-beetling in search of a non-existent God. But no, but no, God was there, outside, absolute. Else how account for the efficacy of prayer – for it *was* efficacious; how explain providence and destiny? God was there, but hiding. Deliberately hiding. It was a question of forcing him to come out of his lair, his abstract absolute lair, and compelling him to incarnate himself as a felt experienced quality of personal actions. It was a matter of violently dragging him from outsideness and aboveness to insideness But God was a joker. Spandrell had conjured him with violence to appear; and out of the bloody stream of the magically compelling sacrifice had emerged only a dustbin. But the very failure of the incantation had been a proof that God *was* there, outside. Nothing happens to a man except that which is like himself. Dustbin to dustbin, dung to dung. He had not succeeded in compelling God to pass from outsideness to insideness. But the appearance of the dustbin confirmed the reality of God as a providence, God as a destiny, God as the giver or withholder of grace, God as the predestinating saviour or destroyer. Dustbins had been his predestined lot. In giving him dustbins yet again, the providential joker was merely being consistent.

One day, in the London Library, he met Philip Quarles.

'I was very sorry to hear about your little boy,' he said.

Philip mumbled something and looked rather uncomfortable, like a man who finds himself involved in an embarrassing situation. He could not bear to let anyone come near his misery. It was private, secret, sacred. It hurt him to expose it, it made him feel ashamed.

'It was a peculiarly gratuitous horror,' he said, to bring the conversation away from the particular and personal to the general.

'All horrors are gratuitous,' said Spandrell. 'How's Elinor standing it?'

The question was direct, had to be answered. 'Badly.' He shook his head. 'It's quite broken her down.' Why did his voice, he wondered, sound so strangely unreal and, as it were, empty?

'What are you going to do now?'

‘We shall go abroad in a few days, if Elinor feels up to the journey. To Siena, I’d thought. And then perhaps to the seaside somewhere in the Maremma.’ It was a comfort to be able to go into these geographical details.

‘No more English domesticity then,’ said Spandrell after a little pause.

‘The reason of it has been taken away.’

Spandrell nodded slowly. ‘Do you remember that conversation we had at the Club, with Illidge and Walter Bidlake? Nothing ever happens to a man except what’s like him. Settling down in the country in England wasn’t at all like you. It didn’t happen. It’s been prevented. Ruthlessly, by God! But providence uses foul means as well as fair. Travelling about, being unfixed, being a spectator – that was like you. You’re being compelled to do what’s like you.’ There was a silence. ‘And living in a kind of dust-heap,’ Spandrell added, ‘that’s like me. Whatever I do, however hard I try to escape, I remain on the dust-heap. I suppose I always shall.’ Yes always, he went on thinking. He had played the last card and lost. No, not the last card; for there was one other. The last but one. Would he also lose with the last?

CHAPTER XXXVII

SPANDRELL WAS VERY insistent that they should come without delay. The *heilige Dankgesang eines genesenen an die Gotthet, in dir lydischen Tonart* simply must be heard.

‘You can’t understand anything until you have heard it,’ he declared. ‘It proves all kinds of things – God, the soul, goodness – unescapably. It’s the only real proof that exists; the only one, because Beethoven was the only man who could get his knowledge over into expression. You *must* come.’

‘Most willingly,’ said Rampion. ‘But …’

Spandrell interrupted him. ‘I heard quite by accident yesterday that the A minor quartet had been recorded for the gramophone. I rushed out and bought a machine and the records specially for you.’

‘For me? But why this generosity?’

‘No generosity,’ Spandrell answered laughing. ‘Pure selfishness. I want you to hear and confirm my opinion.’

‘But why?’

‘Because I believe in you and, if you confirm, I shall believe in myself.’

‘What a man!’ mocked Rampion. ‘Ought to join the Church of Rome and have a confessor.’

‘But you *must* come.’ He spoke earnestly.

‘But not now,’ said Mary.

‘Not to-day,’ her husband echoed, wondering as he spoke why the man was so strangely insistent. What was the matter with him? The way he moved and spoke, the look in his eyes … So excited. ‘I have innumerable things to do this afternoon.’

‘Then tomorrow.’

As though he were drunk, Rampion was reflecting. ‘Why not the day after?’ he said aloud. ‘It would be much easier for me. And the machine won’t fly away in the interval.’

Spandrell uttered his noiseless laugh. ‘No, but *I* may,’ he said. ‘I shall probably be gone by the day after tomorrow.’

‘You hadn’t told us you were going away,’ said Mary. ‘Where?’

‘Who knows?’ Spandrell answered, laughing once more. ‘All *I* know is that I shan’t be here any more.’

‘All right,’ said Rampion, who had been watching him curiously, ‘I’ll make it tomorrow.’ Why is he so melodramatic? he wondered.

Spandrell took his leave.

‘What was wrong with him?’ said Rampion, when he was gone.

‘I didn’t notice anything particularly wrong with him,’ Mary answered.

Rampion made a gesture of impatience. ‘You wouldn’t notice the Last Judgment,’ he said. ‘Didn’t you see that he was holding down his excitement. Like the lid of a saucepan on the boil – holding it down. And that melodramatic way of laughing. Like the conscious villain in the play …’

‘But was he acting?’ said Mary, ‘was he playing the fool for our benefit?’

‘No, no. He was genuine all right. But when you’re genuinely in the position of the conscious villain in the melodrama, you inevitably begin to behave like the conscious villain. You act in spite of yourself.’

‘But what’s he being a conscious villain about?’

‘How on earth should I know?’ said Rampion impatiently. Mary always expected him, by some mysterious and magical intuition, to know everything. Her faith sometimes amused and sometimes pleased, but sometimes also annoyed him. ‘Do you take me for Spandrell’s father confessor?’

‘There’s nothing to fly in a rage about.’

‘On the contrary,’ said Rampion, ‘there’s practically nothing not to fly in a rage about. If one keeps one’s temper, it’s because one lives most of the time with one’s eyes shut, half asleep. If one were always awake, my God! There wouldn’t be much crockery unsmashed.’ He stalked off to his studio.

Spandrell walked slowly eastwards from Chelsea along the river whistling to himself over and over again the opening phrases of the Lydian melody from the *heilige Danksgesang*. Over and over again. The river stretched away into the hot haze. The music was like water in a parched land. After so many years of drought, a spring, a fountain. A watering-cart rumbled past trailing its artificial shower. The wetted dust was fragrant. That music was a proof, as he had said to Rampion. In the gutter a little torrent was hurrying a crumpled cigarette packet and a piece of orange peel towards the drain. He stopped whistling. The essential horror. Like carting garbage; that was what it had been. Just nasty and unpleasant, like cleaning a latrine. Not terrible so much as stupid, indescribably stupid. The music was a proof; God existed. But only so long as the violins were playing. When the bows were lifted from the strings, what then? Garbage and stupidity, the pitiless drought.

In the Vauxhall Bridge Road he bought a shilling packet of writing-paper and envelopes. For the price of a cup of coffee and a bun he hired a table in a tea-shop. With a stump of pencil he wrote. ‘To the Secretary General, Brotherhood of British Freemen. Sir, Tomorrow, Wednesday, at five p.m., the murderer of Everard Webley will be at 37 Catskill Street, S.W.7. The flat is on the second floor. The man will probably answer the bell in person. He is armed and desperate.’

He read it through and was reminded of those communications (written in red ink, to imitate blood, and under the influence of the serial stories in *Chums* and the *B.O.P.*) with which he and Pokinghorne Minor had hoped, at nine years old, to startle and terrify Miss Veal, the matron of their preparatory school. They had been discovered and reported to the head master. Old Nosey had given them three cuts apiece over the buttocks. ‘He is armed and desperate.’ That was pure Pokinghorne. But if he didn’t say it, they wouldn’t carry revolvers. And then, why, then it wouldn’t happen. Nothing would happen. Let it go. He folded the paper and put it into the envelope. There was an essential silliness, as well as an essential nastiness and stupidity. He scribbled the address.

‘Well, here we are,’ said Rampion, when Spandrell opened his door to them the next afternoon. ‘Where’s Beethoven? Where’s the famous proof of God’s existence and the superiority of Jesus’s morality?’

‘In here.’ Spandrell led the way into his sitting-room. The gramophone stood on the table. Four or five records lay scattered near it. ‘Here’s the beginning of the slow movement,’ Spandrell went on, picking up one of them. ‘I won’t bother you with the rest of the quartet. It’s lovely. But the *heilige Danksgesang* is the crucial part.’ He wound up the clockwork; the disc revolved; he lowered the needle of the sound-box on to its grooved surface. A single violin gave out a long note, then another a sixth above, dropped to the fifth (while the second violin began where the first had started), then leapt to the octave, and hung there suspended through two long beats. More than a hundred years before, Beethoven, stone deaf, had heard the imaginary music of stringed instruments expressing his inmost thoughts and feelings. He had made signs with ink on ruled paper. A century later, four Hungarians had reproduced from the printed reproduction of Beethoven’s scribbles that music which Beethoven had never heard except in his imagination. Spiral grooves on a surface of shellac remembered their playing. The artificial memory revolved, a needle travelled in its grooves and through a faint scratching and roaring that mimicked the noises of Beethoven’s own deafness, the audible symbols of Beethoven’s convictions and emotions quivered out into the air. Slowly, slowly, the melody unfolded itself. The archaic Lydian harmonies hung on the air. It was an unimpassioned music, transparent, pure and crystalline, like a tropical sea, an Alpine lake. Water on water, calm sliding over calm; the according of level horizons and waveless expanses, a counterpoint of serenities. And everything clear and bright; no mists, no vague twilights. It was the calm of still and rapturous contemplation, not of drowsiness or sleep. It was the serenity of the convalescent who wakes from fever and finds himself born again into a realm of beauty. But the fever was ‘the fever called living’ and the rebirth was not into this world; the beauty was unearthly, the convalescent serenity was the peace of God. The interweaving of Lydian melodies was heaven.

Thirty slow bars had built up heaven, when the character of the music suddenly changed. From being remotely archaic, it became modern. The Lydian harmonies were replaced by those of the corresponding major key. The time quickened. A new melody leapt and bounded, but over earthly mountains, not among those of paradise.

'*Neue Kraft fuehlend*,' Spandrell quoted in a whisper from the score. 'He's feeling stronger; but it's not so heavenly.'

The new melody bounded on for another fifty bars and expired in scratchings. Spandrell lifted the needle and stopped the revolving of the disc.

'The Lydian part begins again on the other side,' he explained, as he wound up the machine. 'Then there's more of this lively stuff in A major. Then it's Lydian to the end, getting better and better all the time. Don't you think it's marvellous?' He turned to Rampion. 'Isn't it a proof?'

The other nodded. 'Marvellous. But the only thing it proves, so far as I can hear, is that sick men are apt to be very weak. It's the art of a man who's lost his body.'

'But discovered his soul.'

'Oh, I grant you,' said Rampion, 'sick men are very spiritual. But that's because they're not quite men. Eunuchs are very spiritual lovers for the same reason.'

'But Beethoven wasn't a eunuch.'

'I know. But why did he try to be one? Why did he make castration and bodilessness his ideal? What's this music? Just a hymn in praise of eunuchism. Very beautiful, I admit. But couldn't he have chosen something more human than castration to sing about?'

Spandrell sighed. 'To me it's the beatific vision, it's heaven.'

Not earth. That's just what I've been complaining of.'

'But mayn't a man imagine heaven if he wants to?' asked Mary.

'Certainly, so long as he doesn't pretend that his imagination is the last word in truth, beauty, wisdom, virtue and all the rest. Spandrell wants us to accept this disembodied eunuchism as the last word. I won't. I simply won't.'

‘Listen to the whole movement, before you judge.’ Spandrell reversed the disc and lowered the needle. The bright heaven of Lydian music vibrated on the air.

‘Lovely, lovely,’ said Rampion, when the record was finished. ‘You’re quite right. It *is* heaven, it *is* the life of the soul. It’s the most perfect spiritual abstraction from reality I’ve ever known. But why should he have wanted to make that abstraction? Why couldn’t he be content to be a man and not an abstract soul? Why, why?’ He began walking up and down the room. ‘This damned soul,’ he went on, ‘this damned abstract soul – it’s like a kind of cancer, eating up the real, human, natural reality, spreading and spreading at its expense. Why can’t he be content with reality, your stupid old Beethoven? Why should he find it necessary to replace the real, warm, natural thing by this abstract cancer of a soul? The cancer may have a beautiful shape; but, damn it all, the body’s more beautiful. I don’t want your spiritual cancer.’

‘I won’t argue with you,’ said Spandrell. He felt all at once extraordinarily tired and depressed. It had been a failure. Rampion had refused to be convinced. Was the proof, after all, no proof? Did the music refer to nothing outside itself and the idiosyncrasies of its inventor? He looked at his watch; it was almost five. ‘Hear the end of the movement at any rate,’ he said. ‘It’s the best part.’ He wound up the gramophone. Even if it’s meaningless, he thought, it’s beautiful, so long as it lasts. And perhaps it isn’t meaningless. After all, Rampion isn’t infallible. ‘Listen.’

The music began again. But something new and marvellous had happened in its Lydian heaven. The speed of the slow melody was doubled; its outlines became clearer and more definite; an inner part began to harp insistently on a throbbing phrase. It was as though heaven had suddenly and impossibly become more heavenly, had passed from achieved perfection into perfection yet more deeper and more absolute. The ineffable peace persisted; but it was no longer the peace of convalescence and passivity. It quivered, it was alive, it seemed to grow and intensify itself, it became an active calm, an almost passionate serenity. The miraculous paradox of eternal life and eternal repose was musically realized.

They listened, almost holding their breaths. Spandrell looked exultantly at his guest. His own doubts had vanished. How could one fail to believe in something which was there, which manifestly existed? Mark Rampion nodded. ‘Almost thou persuadest me,’ he whispered. ‘But it’s *too* good.’

‘How can anything be too good?’

‘Not human. If it lasted, you’d cease to be a man. You’d die.’

They were silent again. The music played on, leading from heaven to heaven, from bliss to deeper bliss. Spandrell sighed and shut his eyes. His face was grave and serene, as though it had been smoothed by sleep or death. Yes, dead, thought Rampion as he looked at him. ‘He refuses to be a man. Not a man – either a demon or a dead angel. Now he’s dead.’ A touch of discord in the Lydian harmonies gave an almost unbearable poignancy to the beatitude. Spandrell sighed again. There was a knocking at the door. He looked up. The lines of mockery came back into his face, the corners of the mouth became once more ironic.

‘There, he’s the demon again,’ thought Rampion. ‘He’s come to life and he’s the demon.’

‘There they are,’ Spandrell was saying and without answering Mary’s question, ‘Who?’ he walked out of the room.

Rampion and Mary remained by the gramophone, listening to the revelation of heaven. A deafening explosion, a shout, another explosion and another, suddenly shattered the paradise of sound.

They jumped up and ran to the door. In the passage three men in the green uniform of British Freemen were looking down at Spandrell’s body. They held pistols in their hands. Another revolver lay on the floor beside the dying man. There was a hole in the side of his head and a patch of blood on his shirt. His hands opened and shut, opened again and shut, scratching the boards.

‘What *has* …?’ began Rampion.

‘He fired first,’ one of the men interrupted.

There was a little silence. Through the open door came the sound of music. The passion had begun to fade from the celestial melody. Heaven, in those long-

drawn notes, became once more the place of absolute rest, of still and blissful convalescence. Long notes, a chord repeated, protracted, bright and pure, hanging, floating, effortlessly soaring on and on. And then suddenly there was no more music; only the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc.

The afternoon was fine. Burlap walked home. He was feeling pleased with himself and the world at large. ‘I accept the Universe,’ was how, only an hour before, he had concluded his next week’s leader. ‘I accept the Universe.’ He had every reason for accepting it. Mrs Betterton had given him an excellent lunch and much flattery. The *Broad Christian’s Monthly* of Chicago had offered him three thousand dollars for the serial rights of his *St Francis and the Modern Psyche*. He had cabled back demanding three thousand five hundred. The *Broad Christian’s* answer had arrived that afternoon, his terms were accepted. Then there were the Affiliated Ethical Societies of the North of England. They had invited him to deliver four lectures each in Manchester, Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield. The fee would be fifteen guineas per lecture. Which for England, wasn’t at all bad. And there’d be very little work to do. It would just be a matter of re-hashing a few of his leaders in the *World*. Two hundred and forty guineas plus three thousand five hundred dollars. The best part of a thousand pounds. He would go and have a talk with his broker about the position and prospects of rubber. Or what about one of these Investment Trusts? They gave you a very safe six or seven per cent. Burlap whistled softly as he walked. The tune was Mendelssohn’s ‘On Wings of Song’. The *Broad Christian* and the Affiliated Ethicals had made him spiritually musical. He whistled with no less satisfaction when he thought of the day’s other triumph. He had definitely got rid of Ethel Cobbett. The moment had been auspicious. Miss Cobbett had gone away for her holiday. These things are easier to do by post than face to face. Mr Chivers, the business manager, had written a business-like letter. For financial reasons a reduction of the staff of the *Literary World* was urgently necessary. He regretted, but … One month’s notice would have been legally sufficient. But as a token of the directors’ appreciation of her services he was enclosing a cheque for three months’ salary. Any references she might require would always be forthcoming

and he was hers faithfully. Burlap had tempered Mr Chivers's business-likeness with a letter of his own, full of regrets, and friendship, and jeremiads against a public that wouldn't buy the *Literary World*, and lamentations over the defeat of God, incarnated in literature and himself, by Mammon in the person of Mr Chivers and all business men. He had spoken of her to his friend Judd of the *Wednesday Review*, as well as to several other people in the journalistic world and would, of course, do everything in his power to etcetera.

Thank goodness, he reflected, as he walked along whistling 'On Wings of Song' with rich expression, that was the end of Ethel Cobbett so far as he was concerned. It was the end of her also as far as everybody was concerned. For some few days later, having written him a twelve-page letter, which he put in the fire after reading the first scarifying sentence, she lay down with her head in an oven and turned on the gas. But that was something which Burlap could not foresee. His mood as he walked whistling homewards was one of unmixed contentment. That night he and Beatrice pretended to be two little children and had their bath together. Two little children sitting at opposite ends of the big old-fashioned bath. And what a romp they had! The bathroom was drenched with their splashings. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

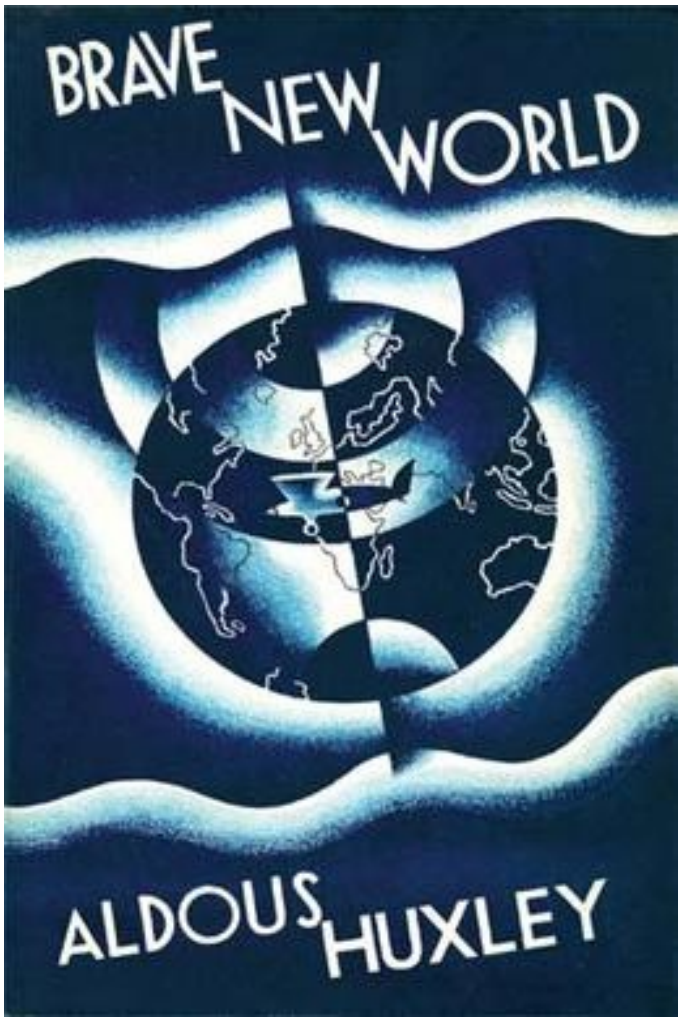
Brave New World

Brave New World was first published by Chatto & Windus in 1932. Huxley wrote the novel in Sanary-sur-Mer over the course of three months in the summer of 1931. A small town in the South East of France, close to Marseille, Sanary-sur-Mer became a haven for German writers in the mid 1930's during Hitler's rise to power. Thomas Mann, Wilhelm Herzog and Bertolt Brecht all spent significant time there before the onset of the Second World War. Huxley claimed that his dystopian novel was in part conceived as a parody and attack on H .G Wells' Utopian works. In a letter he wrote to a friend in the spring of 1931, he stated that he was 'writing a novel about the future, on the horror of the Wellsian Utopia and a revolt against it'. However, during the composition of the book, Henry Ford began to emerge as the primary figure of influence for the author and a harbinger of a dystopian future.

Brave New World is set in 2540 AD, primarily in the 'World State' city of London, where a centralised, united and totalitarian government presides over most of the world. It is a scientifically controlled society, without war, poverty or human emotions; moods are controlled by drugs and babies are artificially engineered in wombs and cloned. Each person is designated a 'caste', which determines their work and social status. Art, the teaching of history and most books are banned, while consumerism is a key facet of the state's ideology. The order is disrupted when John, a young man raised outside the 'World State' arrives in London and begins to criticise the regime.

Huxley wrote the novel shortly after the 1929 Wall Street Crash, when Britain was experiencing severe economic depression and instability and authoritarianism was a rising tendency across Europe. He not only expresses his concerns about how science and technology are deployed, but how the Fordist model of mass production, which was considered a sign of progress, was dehumanising and alienating. It fostered a society where the individual was

subsumed by the production process and any notions of personal potential or development were deemed irrelevant.



The first edition cover of the novel

Huxley in 1934

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Henry Ford in 1919

Les utopies apparaissent comme bien plus réalisables qu'on ne le croyait autrefois. Et nous nous trouvons actuellement devant une question bien autrement angoissante: Comment éviter leur réalisation définitive?

. . . Les utopies sont réalisables. La vie marche vers les utopies. Et peut-être un siècle nouveau commence-t-il, un siècle où les intellectuels et la classe cultivée rêveront aux moyens d'éviter les utopies et de retourner à une societé non utopique, moins 'parfaite'
et plus libre.

NICOLAS BERDIAEFF.

Chapter I

A SQUAT GREY building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, Community, Identity, Stability.

The enormous room on the ground-floor faced towards the north. Cold for all the summer beyond the panes, for all the tropical heat of the room itself, a harsh thin light glared through the windows, hungrily seeking some draped lay figure, some pallid shape of academic goose-flesh, but finding only the glass and nickel and bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory. Wintriness responded to wintriness. The overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber. The light was frozen, dead, a ghost. Only from the yellow barrels of the microscopes did it borrow a certain rich and living substance, lying along the polished tubes like butter, streak after luscious streak in long recession down the work-tables.

'And this,' said the Director opening the door, 'is the Fertilizing Room.'

Bent over their instruments, three hundred Fertilizers were plunged, as the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning entered the room, in the scarcely breathing silence, the absent-minded, soliloquizing hum or whistle, of absorbed concentration. A troop of newly arrived students, very young, pink and callow, followed nervously, rather abjectly, at the Director's heels. Each of them carried a note-book, in which, whenever the great man spoke, he desperately scribbled. Straight from the horse's mouth. It was a rare privilege. The D.H.C. for Central London always made a point of personally conducting his new students round the various departments.

'Just to give you a general idea,' he would explain to them. For of course some sort of general idea they must have, if they were to do their work intelligently — though as little of one, if they were to be good and happy

members of society, as possible. For particulars, as every one knows, make for virtue and happiness; generalities are intellectually necessary evils. Not philosophers, but fret-sawyers and stamp collectors compose the backbone of society.

‘To-morrow,’ he would add, smiling at them with a slightly menacing geniality, ‘you’ll be settling down to serious work. You won’t have time for generalities. Meanwhile . . .’

Meanwhile, it was a privilege. Straight from the horse’s mouth into the note-book. The boys scribbled like mad.

Tall and rather thin but upright, the Director advanced into the room. He had a long chin and big, rather prominent teeth, just covered, when he was not talking, by his full, floridly curved lips. Old, young? Thirty? fifty? fifty-five? It was hard to say. And anyhow the question didn’t arise; in this year of stability, a.f. 632, it didn’t occur to you to ask it.

‘I shall begin at the beginning,’ said the D.H.C., and the more zealous students recorded his intention in their note-books: Begin at the beginning. ‘These,’ he waved his hand, ‘are the incubators.’ And opening an insulated door he showed them racks upon racks of numbered test-tubes. ‘The week’s supply of ova. Kept,’ he explained, ‘at blood heat; whereas the male gametes,’ and here he opened another door, ‘they have to be kept at thirty-five instead of thirty-seven. Full blood heat sterilizes.’ Rams wrapped in thermogene beget no lambs.

Still leaning against the incubators he gave them, while the pencils scurried illegibly across the pages, a brief description of the modern fertilizing process; spoke first, of course, of its surgical introduction— ‘the operation undergone voluntarily for the good of Society, not to mention the fact that it carries a bonus amounting to six months’ salary’; continued with some account of the technique for preserving the excised ovary alive and actively developing; passed on to a consideration of optimum temperature, salinity, viscosity; referred to the liquor in which the detached and ripened eggs were kept; and, leading his charges to the work tables, actually showed them how this liquor was drawn off from the test-tubes; how it was let out drop by drop on to the specially warmed slides of

the microscopes; how the eggs which it contained were inspected for abnormalities, counted and transferred to a porous receptacle; how (and he now took them to watch the operation) this receptacle was immersed in a warm bouillon containing free-swimming spermatozoa — at a minimum concentration of one hundred thousand per cubic centimetre, he insisted; and how, after ten minutes, the container was lifted out of the liquor and its contents re-examined; how, if any of the eggs remained unfertilized, it was again immersed, and, if necessary, yet again; how the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where the Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled; while the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons were brought out again, after only thirty-six hours, to undergo Bokanovsky's Process.

'Bokanovsky's Process,' repeated the Director, and the students underlined the words in their little note-books.

One egg, one embryo, one adult — normality. But a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress.

'Essentially,' the D.H.C. concluded, 'bokanovskification consists of a series of arrests of development. We check the normal growth and, paradoxically enough, the egg responds by budding.'

Responds by budding. The pencils were busy.

He pointed. On a very slowly moving band a rack-full of test-tubes was entering a large metal box, another rack-full was emerging. Machinery faintly purred. It took eight minutes for the tubes to go through, he told them. Eight minutes of hard X-rays being about as much as an egg can stand. A few died; of the rest, the least susceptible divided into two; most put out four buds; some eight; all were returned to the incubators, where the buds began to develop; then, after two days, were suddenly chilled, chilled and checked. Two, four, eight, the buds in their turn budded; and having budded were dosed almost to death with alcohol; consequently burgeoned again and having budded — bud out of bud out

of bud were thereafter — further arrest being generally fatal — left to develop in peace. By which time the original egg was in a fair way to becoming anything from eight to ninety-six embryos — a prodigious improvement, you will agree, on nature. Identical twins — but not in piddling twos and threes as in the old viviparous days, when an egg would sometimes accidentally divide; actually by dozens, by scores at a time.

‘Scores,’ the Director repeated and flung out his arms, as though he were distributing largesse. ‘Scores.’

But one of the students was fool enough to ask where the advantage lay.

‘My good boy!’ The Director wheeled sharply round on him. ‘Can’t you see? Can’t you see?’ He raised a hand; his expression was solemn. ‘Bokanovsky’s Process is one of the major instruments of social stability!’

Major instruments of social stability.

Standard men and women; in uniform batches. The whole of a small factory staffed with the products of a single bokanovskified egg.

‘Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!’ The voice was almost tremulous with enthusiasm. ‘You really know where you are. For the first time in history.’ He quoted the planetary motto. ‘Community, Identity, Stability.’ Grand words. ‘If we could bokanovskify indefinitely the whole problem would be solved.’

Solved by standard Gammas, unvarying Deltas, uniform Epsilons. Millions of identical twins. The principle of mass production at last applied to biology.

‘But, alas,’ the Director shook his head, ‘we can’t bokanovskify indefinitely.’

Ninety-six seemed to be the limit; seventy-two a good average. From the same ovary and with gametes of the same male to manufacture as many batches of identical twins as possible — that was the best (sadly a second best) that they could do. And even that was difficult.

‘For in nature it takes thirty years for two hundred eggs to reach maturity. But our business is to stabilize the population at this moment, here and now. Dribbling out twins over a quarter of a century — what would be the use of that?’

Obviously, no use at all. But Podsnap's Technique had immensely accelerated the process of ripening. They could make sure of at least a hundred and fifty mature eggs within two years. Fertilize and bokanovskify — in other words, multiply by seventy-two — and you get an average of nearly eleven thousand brothers and sisters in a hundred and fifty batches of identical twins, all within two years of the same age.

'And in exceptional cases we can make one ovary yield us over fifteen thousand adult individuals.'

Beckoning to a fair-haired, ruddy young man who happened to be passing at the moment, 'Mr. Foster,' he called. The ruddy young man approached. 'Can you tell us the record for a single ovary, Mr. Foster?'

'Sixteen thousand and twelve in this Centre,' Mr. Foster replied without hesitation. He spoke very quickly, had a vivacious blue eye, and took an evident pleasure in quoting figures. 'Sixteen thousand and twelve; in one hundred and eighty-nine batches of identicals. But of course they've done much better,' he rattled on, 'in some of the tropical Centres. Singapore has often produced over sixteen thousand five hundred; and Mombasa has actually touched the seventeen thousand mark. But then they have unfair advantages. You should see the way a negro ovary responds to pituitary! It's quite astonishing, when you're used to working with European material. Still,' he added, with a laugh (but the light of combat was in his eyes and the lift of his chin was challenging), 'still, we mean to beat them if we can. I'm working on a wonderful Delta-Minus ovary at this moment. Only just eighteen months old. Over twelve thousand seven hundred children already, either decanted or in embryo. And still going strong. We'll beat them yet.'

'That's the spirit I like!' cried the Director, and clapped Mr. Foster on the shoulder. 'Come along with us and give these boys the benefit of your expert knowledge.'

Mr. Foster smiled modestly. 'With pleasure.' They went.

In the Bottling Room all was harmonious bustle and ordered activity. Flaps of fresh sow's peritoneum ready cut to the proper size came shooting up in little

lifts from the Organ Store in the sub-basement. Whizz and then, click! the lift-hatches flew open; the Bottle-Liner had only to reach out a hand, take the flap, insert, smooth-down, and before the lined bottle had had time to travel out of reach along the endless band, whizz, click! another flap of peritoneum had shot up from the depths, ready to be slipped into yet another bottle, the next of that slow interminable procession on the band.

Next to the Liners stood the Matriculators. The procession advanced; one by one the eggs were transferred from their test-tubes to the larger containers; deftly the peritoneal lining was slit, the morula dropped into place, the saline solution poured in . . . and already the bottle had passed, and it was the turn of the labellers. Heredity, date of fertilization, membership of Bokanovsky Group — details were transferred from test-tube to bottle. No longer anonymous, but named, identified, the procession marched slowly on; on through an opening in the wall, slowly on into the Social Predestination Room.

‘Eighty-eight cubic metres of card-index,’ said Mr. Foster with relish, as they entered.

‘Containing all the relevant information,’ added the Director.

‘Brought up to date every morning.’

‘And co-ordinated every afternoon.’

‘On the basis of which they make their calculations.’

‘So many individuals, of such and such quality,’ said Mr. Foster.

‘Distributed in such and such quantities.’

‘The optimum Decanting Rate at any given moment.’

‘Unforeseen wastages promptly made good.’

‘Promptly,’ repeated Mr. Foster. ‘If you knew the amount of overtime I had to put in after the last Japanese earthquake!’ He laughed good-humouredly and shook his head.

‘The Predestinators send in their figures to the Fertilizers.’

‘Who give them the embryos they ask for.’

‘And the bottles come in here to be predestinated in detail.’

‘After which they are sent down to the Embryo Store.’

‘Where we now proceed ourselves.’

And opening a door Mr. Foster led the way down a staircase into the basement.

The temperature was still tropical. They descended into a thickening twilight. Two doors and a passage with a double turn ensured the cellar against any possible infiltration of the day.

‘Embryos are like photograph film,’ said Mr. Foster waggishly, as he pushed open the second door. ‘They can only stand red light.’

And in effect the sultry darkness into which the students now followed him was visible and crimson, like the darkness of closed eyes on a summer’s afternoon. The bulging flanks of row on receding row and tier above tier of bottles glinted with innumerable rubies, and among the rubies moved the dim red spectres of men and women with purple eyes and all the symptoms of lupus. The hum and rattle of machinery faintly stirred the air.

‘Give them a few figures, Mr. Foster,’ said the Director, who was tired of talking.

Mr. Foster was only too happy to give them a few figures.

Two hundred and twenty metres long, two hundred wide, ten high. He pointed upwards. Like chickens drinking, the students lifted their eyes towards the distant ceiling.

Three tiers of racks: ground-floor level, first gallery, second gallery.

The spidery steelwork of gallery above gallery faded away in all directions into the dark. Near them three red ghosts were busily unloading demi-johns from a moving staircase.

The escalator from the Social Predestination Room.

Each bottle could be placed on one of fifteen racks, each rack, though you couldn’t see it, was a conveyor travelling at the rate of thirty-three and a third centimetres an hour. Two hundred and sixty-seven days at eight metres a day. Two thousand one hundred and thirty-six metres in all. One circuit of the cellar at ground level, one on the first gallery, half on the second, and on the two

hundred and sixty-seventh morning, daylight in the Decanting Room. Independent existence — so called.

‘But in the interval,’ Mr. Foster concluded, ‘we’ve managed to do a lot to them. Oh, a very great deal.’ His laugh was knowing and triumphant.

‘That’s the spirit I like,’ said the Director once more. ‘Let’s walk round. You tell them everything, Mr. Foster.’

Mr. Foster duly told them.

Told them of the growing embryo on its bed of peritoneum. Made them taste the rich blood surrogate on which it fed. Explained why it had to be stimulated with placentin and thyroxin. Told them of the corpus luteum extract. Showed them the jets through which at every twelfth metre from zero to 2040 it was automatically injected. Spoke of those gradually increasing doses of pituitary administered during the final ninety-six metres of their course. Described the artificial maternal circulation installed on every bottle at metres 112; showed them the reservoir of blood-surrogate, the centrifugal pump that kept the liquid moving over the placenta and drove it through the synthetic lung and waste-product filter. Referred to the embryo’s troublesome tendency to anæmia, to the massive doses of hog’s stomach extract and fœtal foal’s liver with which, in consequence, it had to be supplied.

Showed them the simple mechanism by means of which, during the last two metres out of every eight, all the embryos were simultaneously shaken into familiarity with movement. Hinted at the gravity of the so-called ‘trauma of decanting,’ and enumerated the precautions taken to minimize, by a suitable training of the bottled embryo, that dangerous shock. Told them of the tests for sex carried out in the neighbourhood of metre 200. Explained the system of labelling−a T for the males, a circle for the females and for those who were destined to become freemartins a question mark, black on a white ground.

‘For of course,’ said Mr. Foster, ‘in the vast majority of cases, fertility is merely a nuisance. One fertile ovary in twelve hundred — that would really be quite sufficient for our purposes. But we want to have a good choice. And of course one must always leave an enormous margin of safety. So we allow as

many as thirty per cent. of the female embryos to develop normally. The others get a dose of male sex-hormone every twenty-four metres for the rest of the course. Result: they're decanted as freemartins−structurally quite normal (except,' he had to admit, 'that they do have just the slightest tendency to grow beards), but sterile. Guaranteed sterile. Which brings us at last,' continued Mr. Foster, 'out of the realm of mere slavish imitation of nature into the much more interesting world of human invention.'

He rubbed his hands. For, of course, they didn't content themselves with merely hatching out embryos: any cow could do that.

'We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future . . .' He was going to say 'future World Controllers,' but correcting himself, said 'future Directors of Hatcheries' instead.

The D.H.C. acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

They were passing metre 320 on rack eleven. A young Beta-Minus mechanic was busy with screw-driver and spanner on the blood-surrogate pump of a passing bottle. The hum of the electric motor deepened by fractions of a tone as he turned the nuts. Down, down . . . A final twist, a glance at the revolution-counter, and he was done. He moved two paces down the line and began the same process on the next pump.

'Reducing the number of revolutions per minute,' Mr. Foster explained. 'The surrogate goes round slower; therefore passes through the lung at longer intervals; therefore gives the embryo less oxygen. Nothing like oxygen-shortage for keeping an embryo below par.' Again he rubbed his hands.

'But why do you want to keep the embryo below par?' asked an ingenuous student.

'Ass!' said the Director, breaking a long silence. 'Hasn't it occurred to you that an Epsilon embryo must have an Epsilon environment as well as an Epsilon heredity?'

It evidently hadn't occurred to him. He was covered with confusion.

‘The lower the caste,’ said Mr. Foster, ‘the shorter the oxygen.’ The first organ affected was the brain. After that the skeleton. At seventy per cent. of normal oxygen you got dwarfs. At less than seventy, eyeless monsters.

‘Who are no use at all,’ concluded Mr. Foster.

Whereas (his voice became confidential and eager), if they could discover a technique for shortening the period of maturation what a triumph, what a benefaction to Society!

‘Consider the horse.’

They considered it.

Mature at six; the elephant at ten. While at thirteen a man is not yet sexually mature; and is only full grown at twenty. Hence, of course, that fruit of delayed development, the human intelligence.

‘But in Epsilons,’ said Mr. Foster very justly, ‘we don’t need human intelligence.’

Didn’t need and didn’t get it. But though the Epsilon mind was mature at ten, the Epsilon body was not fit to work till eighteen. Long years of superfluous and wasted immaturity. If the physical development could be speeded up till it was as quick, say, as a cow’s, what an enormous saving to the Community!

‘Enormous!’ murmured the students. Mr. Foster’s enthusiasm was infectious.

He became rather technical; spoke of the abnormal endocrine co-ordination which made men grow so slowly; postulated a germinal mutation to account for it. Could the effects of this germinal mutation be undone? Could the individual Epsilon embryo be made to revert, by a suitable technique, to the normality of dogs and cows? That was the problem. And it was all but solved.

Pilkington, at Mombasa, had produced individuals who were sexually mature at four and full grown at six and a half. A scientific triumph. But socially useless. Six-year-old men and women were too stupid to do even Epsilon work. And the process was an all-or-nothing one; either you failed to modify at all, or else you modified the whole way. They were still trying to find the ideal compromise between adults of twenty and adults of six. So far without success. Mr. Foster sighed and shook his head.

Their wanderings through the crimson twilight had brought them to the neighbourhood of Metre 170 on Rack 9. From this point onwards Rack 9 was enclosed and the bottles performed the remainder of their journey in a kind of tunnel, interrupted here and there by openings two or three metres wide.

‘Heat conditioning,’ said Mr. Foster.

Hot tunnels alternated with cool tunnels. Coolness was wedded to discomfort in the form of hard X-rays. By the time they were decanted the embryos had a horror of cold. They were predestined to emigrate to the tropics, to be miners and acetate silk spinners and steel workers. Later on their minds would be made to endorse the judgment of their bodies. ‘We condition them to thrive on heat,’ concluded Mr. Foster. ‘Our colleagues upstairs will teach them to love it.’

‘And that,’ put in the Director sententiously, ‘that is the secret of happiness and virtue — liking what you’ve got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny.’

In a gap between two tunnels, a nurse was delicately probing with a long fine syringe into the gelatinous contents of a passing bottle. The students and their guides stood watching her for a few moments in silence.

‘Well, Lenina,’ said Mr. Foster, when at last she withdrew the syringe and straightened herself up.

The girl turned with a start. One could see that, for all the lupus and the purple eyes, she was uncommonly pretty.

‘Henry!’ Her smile flashed redly at him — a row of coral teeth.

‘Charming, charming,’ murmured the Director and, giving her two or three little pats, received in exchange a rather deferential smile for himself.

‘What are you giving them?’ asked Mr. Foster, making his tone very professional.

‘Oh, the usual typhoid and sleeping sickness.’

‘Tropical workers start being inoculated at metre 150,’ Mr. Foster explained to the students. ‘The embryos still have gills. We immunize the fish against the future man’s diseases.’ Then, turning back to Lenina, ‘Ten to five on the roof this afternoon,’ he said, ‘as usual.’

‘Charming,’ said the Director once more, and, with a final pat, moved away after the others.

On Rack 10 rows of next generation’s chemical workers were being trained in the toleration of lead, caustic soda, tar, chlorine. The first of a batch of two hundred and fifty embryonic rocket-plane engineers was just passing the eleven hundredth metre mark on Rack 3. A special mechanism kept their containers in constant rotation. ‘To improve their sense of balance,’ Mr. Foster explained. ‘Doing repairs on the outside of a rocket in mid air is a ticklish job. We slacken off the circulation when they’re right way up, so that they’re half starved, and double the flow of surrogate when they’re upside down. They learn to associate topsy-turvydom with well-being; in fact, they’re only truly happy when they’re standing on their heads.’

‘And now,’ Mr. Foster went on, ‘I’d like to show you some very interesting conditioning for Alpha-Plus Intellectuals. We have a big batch of them on Rack 5. First Gallery level,’ he called to two boys who had started to go down to the ground floor.

‘They’re round about metre 900,’ he explained. ‘You can’t really do any useful intellectual conditioning till the fœtuses have lost their tails. Follow me.’

But the Director had looked at his watch. ‘Ten to three,’ he said. ‘No time for the intellectual embryos, I’m afraid. We must go up to the Nurseries before the children have finished their afternoon sleep.’

Mr. Foster was disappointed. ‘At least one glance at the Decanting Room,’ he pleaded.

‘Very well, then.’ The Director smiled indulgently. ‘Just one glance.’

Chapter II

MR. FOSTER WAS left in the Decanting Room. The D.H.C. and his students stepped into the nearest lift and were carried up to the fifth floor.

Infant Nurseries. Neo-Pavlovian Conditioning Rooms, announced the notice board.

The Director opened a door. They were in a large bare room, very bright and sunny; for the whole of the southern wall was a single window. Half a dozen nurses, trousered and jacketed in the regulation white viscose-linen uniform, their hair aseptically hidden under white caps, were engaged in setting out bowls of roses in a long row across the floor. Big bowls, packed tight with blossom. Thousands of petals, ripe-blown and silkily smooth, like the cheeks of innumerable little cherubs, but of cherubs, in that bright light, not exclusively pink and Aryan, but also luminously Chinese, also Mexican, also apoplectic with too much blowing of celestial trumpets, also pale as death, pale with the posthumous whiteness of marble.

The nurses stiffened to attention as the D.H.C. came in.

‘Set out the books,’ he said curtly.

In silence the nurses obeyed his command. Between the rose bowls the books were duly set out — a row of nursery quartos opened invitingly each at some gaily coloured image of beast or fish or bird.

‘Now bring in the children.’

They hurried out of the room and returned in a minute or two, each pushing a kind of tall dumb-waiter laden, on all its four wire-netted shelves, with eight-month-old babies, all exactly alike (a Bokanovsky Group, it was evident) and all (since their caste was Delta) dressed in khaki.

‘Put them down on the floor.’

The infants were unloaded.

‘Now turn them so that they can see the flowers and books.’

Turned, the babies at once fell silent, then began to crawl towards those clusters of sleek colours, those shapes so gay and brilliant on the white pages. As they approached, the sun came out of a momentary eclipse behind a cloud. The roses flamed up as though with a sudden passion from within; a new and profound significance seemed to suffuse the shining pages of the books. From the ranks of the crawling babies came little squeals of excitement, gurgles and twitterings of pleasure.

The Director rubbed his hands. ‘Excellent!’ he said. ‘It might almost have been done on purpose.’

The swiftest crawlers were already at their goal. Small hands reached out uncertainly, touched, grasped, unpetaling the transfigured roses, crumpling the illuminated pages of the books. The Director waited until all were happily busy. Then, ‘Watch carefully,’ he said. And, lifting his hand, he gave the signal.

The Head Nurse, who was standing by a switchboard at the other end of the room, pressed down a little lever.

There was a violent explosion. Shriller and ever shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarm bells maddeningly sounded.

The children started, screamed; their faces were distorted with terror.

‘And now,’ the Director shouted (for the noise was deafening), ‘now we proceed to rub in the lesson with a mild electric shock.’

He waved his hand again, and the Head Nurse pressed a second lever. The screaming of the babies suddenly changed its tone. There was something desperate, almost insane, about the sharp spasmodic yelps to which they now gave utterance. Their little bodies twitched and stiffened; their limbs moved jerkily as if to the tug of unseen wires.

‘We can electrify that whole strip of floor,’ bawled the Director in explanation. ‘But that’s enough,’ he signalled to the nurse.

The explosions ceased, the bells stopped ringing, the shriek of the siren died down from tone to tone into silence. The stiffly twitching bodies relaxed, and

what had become the sob and yelp of infant maniacs broadened out once more into a normal howl of ordinary terror.

‘Offer them the flowers and the books again.’

The nurses obeyed; but at the approach of the roses, at the mere sight of those gaily-coloured images of pussy and cock-a-doodle-doo and baa-baa black sheep, the infants shrank away in horror; the volume of their howling suddenly increased.

‘Observe,’ said the Director triumphantly, ‘observe.’

Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks — already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly. What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder.

‘They’ll grow up with what the psychologists used to call an “instinctive” hatred of books and flowers. Reflexes unalterably conditioned. They’ll be safe from books and botany all their lives.’ The Director turned to his nurses. ‘Take them away again.’

Still yelling, the khaki babies were loaded on to their dumb-waiters and wheeled out, leaving behind them the smell of sour milk and a most welcome silence.

One of the students held up his hand; and though he could see quite well why you couldn’t have lower-caste people wasting the Community’s time over books, and that there was always the risk of their reading something which might undesirably de-condition one of their reflexes, yet . . . well, he couldn’t understand about the flowers. Why go to the trouble of making it psychologically impossible for Deltas to like flowers?

Patiently the D.H.C. explained. If the children were made to scream at the sight of a rose, that was on grounds of high economic policy. Not so very long ago (a century or thereabouts), Gammas, Deltas, even Epsilons, had been conditioned to like flowers — flowers in particular and wild nature in general. The idea was to make them want to be going out into the country at every available opportunity, and so compel them to consume transport.

‘And didn’t they consume transport?’ asked the student.

‘Quite a lot,’ the D.H.C. replied. ‘But nothing else.’

Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one grave defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to abolish the love of nature, at any rate among the lower classes; to abolish the love of nature, but not the tendency to consume transport. For of course it was essential that they should keep on going to the country, even though they hated it. The problem was to find an economically sounder reason for consuming transport than a mere affection for primroses and landscapes. It was duly found.

‘We condition the masses to hate the country,’ concluded the Director. ‘But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks.’

‘I see,’ said the student, and was silent, lost in admiration.

There was a silence; then, clearing his throat, ‘Once upon a time,’ the Director began, ‘while Our Ford was still on earth, there was a little boy called Reuben Rabinovitch. Reuben was the child of Polish-speaking parents.’ The Director interrupted himself. ‘You know what Polish is, I suppose?’

‘A dead language.’

‘Like French and German,’ added another student, officiously showing off his learning.

‘And “parent?”?’ questioned the D.H.C.

There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise a hand.

‘Human beings used to be . . .’ he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks. ‘Well, they used to be viviparous.’

‘Quite right.’ The Director nodded approvingly.

‘And when the babies were decanted . . .’

‘ ”Born”,’ came the correction.

‘Well, then they were the parents — I mean, not the babies, of course; the other ones.’ The poor boy was overwhelmed with confusion.

‘In brief,’ the Director summed up, ‘the parents were the father and the mother.’ The smut that was really science fell with a crash into the boys’ eye-avoiding silence. ‘Mother,’ he repeated loudly rubbing in the science; and, leaning back in his chair, ‘These,’ he said gravely, ‘are unpleasant facts; I know it. But, then, most historical facts are unpleasant.’

He returned to Little Reuben — to Little Reuben, in whose room, one evening, by an oversight, his father and mother (crash, crash!) happened to leave the radio turned on.

(‘For you must remember that in those days of gross viviparous reproduction, children were always brought up by their parents and not in State Conditioning Centres.’)

While the child was asleep, a broadcast programme from London suddenly started to come through; and the next morning, to the astonishment of his crash and crash (the more daring of the boys ventured to grin at one another) Little Reuben woke up repeating word for word a long lecture by that curious old writer (‘one of the very few whose works have been permitted to come down to us’), George Bernard Shaw, who was speaking, according to a well-authenticated tradition, about his own genius. To Little Reuben’s wink and snigger, this lecture was, of course, perfectly incomprehensible and, imagining that their child had suddenly gone mad, they sent for a doctor. He, fortunately, understood English, recognized the discourse as that which Shaw had broadcasted the previous evening, realized the significance of what had happened, and sent a letter to the medical press about it.

‘The principle of sleep-teaching, or hypnopædia, had been discovered.’ The D.H.C. made an impressive pause.

The principle had been discovered; but many, many years were to elapse before that principle was usefully applied.

‘The case of Little Reuben occurred only twenty-three years after Our Ford’s first T-Model was put on the market.’ (Here the Director made a sign of the T on

his stomach and all the students reverently followed suit.) ‘And yet . . .’

Furiously the students scribbled. ‘Hypnopædia, first used officially in A.F. 214. Why not before? Two reason. (a) . . .’

‘These early experimenters,’ the D.H.C. was saying, ‘were on the wrong track. They thought that hypnopædia could be made an instrument of intellectual education . . .’

(A small boy asleep on his right side, the right arm stuck out, the right hand hanging limp over the edge of the bed. Through a round grating in the side of a box a voice speaks softly.

‘The Nile is the longest river in Africa and the second in length of all the rivers of the globe. Although falling short of the length of the Mississippi-Missouri, the Nile is at the head of all rivers as regards the length of its basin, which extends through 35 degrees of latitude . . .’

At breakfast the next morning, ‘Tommy,’ some one says, ‘do you know which is the longest river in Africa?’ A shaking of the head. ‘But don’t you remember something that begins: The Nile is the . . .’

‘The-Nile-is-the-longest-river-in-Africa-and-the second-in-length-of-all-the-rivers-of-the-globe . . .’ The words come rushing out. ‘Although-falling-short-of . . .’

‘Well now, which is the longest river in Africa?’

The eyes are blank. ‘I don’t know.’

‘But the Nile, Tommy.’

‘The-Nile-is-the-longest-river-in-Africa-and-second . . .’

‘Then which river is the longest, Tommy?’

Tommy bursts into tears. ‘I don’t know,’ he howls.)

That howl, the Director made it plain, discouraged the earliest investigators. The experiments were abandoned. No further attempt was made to teach children the length of the Nile in their sleep. Quite rightly. You can’t learn a science unless you know what it’s all about.

‘Whereas, if they’d only started on moral education,’ said the Director, leading the way towards the door. The students followed him, desperately

scribbling as they walked and all the way up in the lift. ‘Moral education, which ought never, in any circumstances, to be rational.’

‘Silence, silence,’ whispered a loud-speaker as they stepped out at the fourteenth floor, and ‘Silence, silence,’ the trumpet mouths indefatigably repeated at intervals down every corridor. The students and even the Director himself rose automatically to the tips of their toes. They were Alphas, of course; but even Alphas have been well conditioned. ‘Silence, silence.’ All the air of the fourteenth floor was sibilant with the categorical imperative.

Fifty yards of tiptoeing brought them to a door which the Director cautiously opened. They stepped over the threshold into the twilight of a shuttered dormitory. Eighty cots stood in a row against the wall. There was a sound of light regular breathing and a continuous murmur, as of very faint voices remotely whispering.

A nurse rose as they entered and came to attention before the Director.

‘What’s the lesson this afternoon?’ he asked.

‘We had Elementary Sex for the first forty minutes,’ she answered. ‘But now it’s switched over to Elementary Class Consciousness.’

The Director walked slowly down the long line of cots. Rosy and relaxed with sleep, eighty little boys and girls lay softly breathing. There was a whisper under every pillow. The D.H.C. halted and, bending over one of the little beds, listened attentively.

‘Elementary Class Consciousness, did you say? Let’s have it repeated a little louder by the trumpet.’

At the end of the room a loud-speaker projected from the wall. The Director walked up to it and pressed a switch.

‘. . . all wear green,’ said a soft but very distinct voice, beginning in the middle of a sentence, ‘and Delta Children wear khaki. Oh no, I don’t want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able to read or write. Besides, they wear black, which is such a beastly colour. I’m so glad I’m a Beta.’

There was a pause; then the voice began again.

‘Alpha children wear grey. They work much harder than we do, because they’re so frightfully clever. I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because I don’t work so hard. And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid. They all wear green, and Delta children wear khaki. Oh no, I don’t want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able . . .’

The Director pushed back the switch. The voice was silent. Only its thin ghost continued to mutter from beneath the eighty pillows.

‘They’ll have that repeated forty or fifty times more before they wake; then again on Thursday, and again on Saturday. A hundred and twenty times three times a week for thirty months. After which they go on to a more advanced lesson.’

Roses and electric shocks, the khaki of Deltas and a whiff of asafœtida — wedded indissolubly before the child can speak. But wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home the finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behaviour. For that there must be words, but words without reason. In brief, hypnopædia.

‘The greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time.’

The students took it down in their little books. Straight from the horse’s mouth.

Once more the Director touched the switch.

‘. . . so frightfully clever,’ the soft, insinuating, indefatigable voice was saying. ‘I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because . . .’

Not so much like drops of water, though water, it is true, can wear holes in the hardest granite; rather, drops of liquid sealing-wax, drops that adhere, incrust, incorporate themselves with what they fall on, till finally the rock is all one scarlet blob.

‘Till at last the child’s mind is these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions is the child’s mind. And not the child’s mind only. The adult’s mind too — all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides — made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are our suggestions!’ The Director

almost shouted in his triumph. ‘Suggestions from the State.’ He banged the nearest table. ‘It therefore follows . . .’

A noise made him turn round.

‘Oh, Ford!’ he said in another tone, ‘I’ve gone and woken the children.’

Chapter III

OUTSIDE, IN THE garden, it was playtime. Naked in the warm June sunshine, six or seven hundred little boys and girls were running with shrill yells over the lawns, or playing ball games, or squatting silently in twos and threes among the flowering shrubs. The roses were in bloom, two nightingales soliloquized in the boskage, a cuckoo was just going out of tune among the lime trees. The air was drowsy with the murmur of bees and helicopters.

The Director and his students stood for a short time watching a game of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy. Twenty children were grouped in a circle round a chrome-steel tower. A ball thrown up so as to land on the platform at the top of the tower rolled down into the interior, fell on a rapidly revolving disk, was hurled through one or other of the numerous apertures pierced in the cylindrical casing, and had to be caught.

‘Strange,’ mused the Director, as they turned away, ‘strange to think that even in Our Ford’s day most games were played without more apparatus than a ball or two and a few sticks and perhaps a bit of netting. Imagine the folly of allowing people to play elaborate games which do nothing whatever to increase consumption. It’s madness. Nowadays the Controllers won’t approve of any new game unless it can be shown that it requires at least as much apparatus as the most complicated of existing games.’ He interrupted himself.

‘That’s a charming little group,’ he said, pointing.

In a little grassy bay between tall clumps of Mediterranean heather, two children, a little boy of about seven and a little girl who might have been a year older, were playing, very gravely and with all the focussed attention of scientists intent on a labour of discovery, a rudimentary sexual game.

‘Charming, charming!’ the D.H.C. repeated sentimentally.

‘Charming,’ the boys politely agreed. But their smile was rather patronizing. They had put aside similar childish amusements too recently to be able to watch them now without a touch of contempt. Charming? but it was just a pair of kids fooling about; that was all. Just kids.

‘I always think,’ the Director was continuing in the same rather maudlin tone, when he was interrupted by a loud boo-hooing.

From a neighbouring shrubbery emerged a nurse, leading by the hand a small boy, who howled as he went. An anxious-looking little girl trotted at her heels.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked the Director.

The nurse shrugged her shoulders. ‘Nothing much,’ she answered. ‘It’s just that this little boy seems rather reluctant to join in the ordinary erotic play. I’d noticed it once or twice before. And now again to-day. He started yelling just now . . .’

‘Honestly,’ put in the anxious-looking little girl, ‘I didn’t mean to hurt him or anything. Honestly.’

‘Of course you didn’t, dear,’ said the nurse reassuringly. ‘And so,’ she went on, turning back to the Director, ‘I’m taking him in to see the Assistant Superintendent of Psychology. Just to see if anything’s at all abnormal.’

‘Quite right,’ said the Director. ‘Take him in. You stay here, little girl,’ he added, as the nurse moved away with her still howling charge. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Polly Trotsky.’

‘And a very good name too,’ said the Director. ‘Run away now and see if you can find some other little boy to play with.’

The child scampered off into the bushes and was lost to sight.

‘Exquisite little creature!’ said the Director, looking after her. Then, turning to his students, ‘What I’m going to tell you now,’ he said, ‘may sound incredible. But then, when you’re not accustomed to history, most facts about the past do sound incredible.’

He let out the amazing truth. For a very long period before the time of Our Ford, and even for some generations afterwards, erotic play between children

had been regarded as abnormal (there was a roar of laughter); and not only abnormal, actually immoral (no!): and had therefore been rigorously suppressed.

A look of astonished incredulity appeared on the faces of his listeners. Poor little kids not allowed to amuse themselves? They could not believe it.

‘Even adolescents,’ the D.H.C. was saying, ‘even adolescents like yourselves . . .’

‘Not possible!’

‘Barring a little surreptitious auto-erotism and homosexuality — absolutely nothing.’

‘Nothing?’

‘In most cases, till they were over twenty years old.’

‘Twenty years old?’ echoed the students in a chorus of loud disbelief.

‘Twenty,’ the Director repeated. ‘I told you that you’d find it incredible.’

‘But what happened?’ they asked. ‘What were the results?’

‘The results were terrible.’ A deep resonant voice broke startlingly into the dialogue.

They looked round. On the fringe of the little group stood a stranger — a man of middle height, black-haired, with a hooked nose, full red lips, eyes very piercing and dark. ‘Terrible,’ he repeated.

The D.H.C. had at that moment sat down on one of the steel and rubber benches conveniently scattered through the gardens; but at the sight of the stranger, he sprang to his feet and darted forward, his hands outstretched, smiling with all his teeth, effusive.

‘Controller! What an unexpected pleasure! Boys, what are you thinking of? This is the Controller; this is his fordship, Mustapha Mond.’

In the four thousand rooms of the Centre the four thousand electric clocks simultaneously struck four. Discarnate voices called from the trumpet mouths.

‘Main Day-shift off duty. Second Day-shift take over. Main Day-shift off . . .’

In the lift, on their way up to the changing-rooms, Henry Foster and the Assistant Director of Predestination rather pointedly turned their backs on

Bernard Marx from the Psychology Bureau: averted themselves from that unsavoury reputation.

The faint hum and rattle of machinery still stirred the crimson air in the Embryo-Store. Shifts might come and go, one lupus-coloured face give place to another; majestically and for ever the conveyors crept forward with their load of future men and women.

Lenina Crowne walked briskly towards the door.

His fordship Mustapha Mond! The eyes of the saluting students almost popped out of their heads. Mustapha Mond! The Resident Controller for Western Europe! One of the Ten World Controllers. One of the Ten . . . and he sat down on the bench with the D.H.C., he was going to stay, to stay, yes, and actually talk to them . . . straight from the horse's mouth. Straight from the mouth of Ford himself.

Two shrimp-brown children emerged from a neighbouring shrubbery, stared at them for a moment with large, astonished eyes, then returned to their amusements among the leaves.

'You all remember,' said the Controller, in his strong deep voice, 'you all remember, I suppose, that beautiful and inspired saying of Our Ford's: History is bunk. History,' he repeated slowly, 'is bunk.'

He waved his hand; and it was as though, with an invisible feather whisk, he had brushed away a little dust, and the dust was Harappa, was Ur of the Chaldees; some spider-webs, and they were Thebes and Babylon and Cnossos and Mycenae. Whisk, Whisk — and where was Odysseus, where was Job, where were Jupiter and Gotama and Jesus? Whisk — and those specks of antique dirt called Athens and Rome, Jerusalem and the Middle Kingdom — all were gone. Whisk — the place where Italy had been was empty. Whisk, the cathedrals; whisk, whisk, King Lear and the Thoughts of Pascal. Whisk, Passion: whisk, Requiem; whisk, Symphony; whisk . . .

‘Going to the Feelies this evening, Henry?’ enquired the Assistant Predestinator. ‘I hear the new one at the Alhambra is first-rate. There’s a love scene on a bearskin rug; they say it’s marvellous. Every hair of the bear reproduced. The most amazing tactual effects.’

‘That’s why you’re taught no history,’ the Controller was saying. ‘But now the time has come . . .’

The D.H.C. looked at him nervously. There were those strange rumours of old forbidden books hidden in a safe in the Controller’s study. Bibles, poetry — Ford knew what.

Mustapha Mond intercepted his anxious glance and the corners of his red lips twitched ironically.

‘It’s all right, Director,’ he said in a tone of faint derision, ‘I won’t corrupt them.’

The D.H.C. was overwhelmed with confusion.

Those who feel themselves despised do well to look despising. The smile on Bernard Marx’s face was contemptuous. Every hair on the bear indeed!

‘I shall make a point of going,’ said Henry Foster.

Mustapha Mond leaned forward, shook a finger at them. ‘Just try to realize it,’ he said, and his voice sent a strange thrill quivering along their diaphragms. ‘Try to realize what it was like to have a viviparous mother.’

That smutty word again. But none of them dreamed, this time, of smiling.

‘Try to imagine what “living with one’s family” meant.’

They tried; but obviously without the smallest success.

‘And do you know what a “home” was?’

They shook their heads.

From her dim crimson cellar Lenina Crowne shot up seventeen stories, turned to the right as she stepped out of the lift, walked down a long corridor and,

opening the door marked Girls' Dressing-Room, plunged into a deafening chaos of arms and bosoms and underclothing. Torrents of hot water were splashing into or gurgling out of a hundred baths. Rumbling and hissing, eighty vibro-vacuum massage machines were simultaneously kneading and sucking the firm and sunburnt flesh of eighty superb female specimens. Every one was talking at the top of her voice. A Synthetic Music machine was warbling out a super-cornet solo.

'Hullo, Fanny,' said Lenina to the young woman who had the pegs and locker next to hers.

Fanny worked in the Bottling Room, and her surname was also Crowne. But as the two thousand million inhabitants of the planet had only ten thousand names between them, the coincidence was not particularly surprising.

Lenina pulled at her zippers — downwards on the jacket, downwards with a double-handed gesture at the two that held trousers, downwards again to loosen her undergarment. Still wearing her shoes and stockings, she walked off towards the bathrooms.

Home, home — a few small rooms, stiflingly over-inhabited by a man, by a periodically teeming woman, by a rabble of boys and girls of all ages. No air, no space; an understerilized prison; darkness, disease, and smells.

(The Controller's evocation was so vivid that one of the boys, more sensitive than the rest, turned pale at the mere description and was on the point of being sick.) Lenina got out of the bath, towelled herself dry, took hold of a long flexible tube plugged into the wall, presented the nozzle to her breast, as though she meant to commit suicide, pressed down the trigger. A blast of warmed air dusted her with the finest talcum powder. Eight different scents and eau-de-Cologne were laid on in little taps over the wash-basin. She turned on the third from the left, dabbled herself with chypre and, carrying her shoes and stockings in her hand, went out to see if one of the vibro-vacuum machines were free.

And home was as squalid psychically as physically. Psychically, it was a rabbit hole, a midden, hot with the frictions of tightly packed life, reeking with emotion. What suffocating intimacies, what dangerous, insane, obscene relationships between the members of the family group! Maniacally, the mother brooded over her children (her children) . . . brooded over them like a cat over its kittens; but a cat that could talk, a cat that could say, ‘My baby, my baby,’ over and over again. ‘My baby, and oh, oh, at my breast, the little hands, the hunger, and that unspeakable agonizing pleasure! Till at last my baby sleeps, my baby sleeps with a bubble of white milk at the corner of his mouth. My little baby sleeps . . .’

‘Yes,’ said Mustapha Mond, nodding his head, ‘you may well shudder.’

‘Who are you going out with to-night?’ Lenina asked, returning from the vibro-vac like a pearl illuminated from within, pinkly glowing.

‘Nobody.’

Lenina raised her eyebrows in astonishment.

‘I’ve been feeling rather out of sorts lately,’ Fanny explained. ‘Dr. Wells advised me to have a Pregnancy Substitute.’

‘But, my dear, you’re only nineteen. The first Pregnancy Substitute isn’t compulsory till twenty-one.’

‘I know, dear. But some people are better if they begin earlier. Dr. Wells told me that brunettes with wide pelvises, like me, ought to have their first Pregnancy Substitute at seventeen. So I’m really two years late, not two years early.’ She opened the door of her locker and pointed to the row of boxes and labelled phials on the upper shelf.

‘Syrup of Corpus Luteum.’ Lenina read the names aloud. ‘Ovarin, guaranteed fresh: not to be used after August 1st, a.f. 632. Mammary Gland Extract: to be taken Three Times Daily, Before Meals, with a Little Water. Placentin: 5cc to be Injected Intravenally every Third Day . . . Ugh!’ Lenina shuddered. ‘How I loathe intravenals, don’t you?’

‘Yes. But when they do one good . . .’ Fanny was a particularly sensible girl.

Our Ford — or Our Freud, as, for some inscrutable reason, he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters — Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers — was therefore full of misery; full of mothers — therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts — full of madness and suicide.

‘And yet, among the savages of Samoa, in certain islands off the coast of New Guinea . . .’

The tropical sunshine lay like warm honey on the naked bodies of children tumbling promiscuously among the hibiscus blossoms. Home was in any one of twenty palm-thatched houses. In the Trobriands conception was the work of ancestral ghosts; nobody had ever heard of a father.

‘Extremes,’ said the Controller, ‘meet. For the good reason that they were made to meet.’

‘Dr. Wells says that a three months’ Pregnancy Substitute now will make all the difference to my health for the next three or four years.’

‘Well, I hope he’s right,’ said Lenina. ‘But, Fanny, do you really mean to say that for the next three months you’re not supposed to . . .’

‘Oh no, dear. Only for a week or two, that’s all. I shall spend the evening at the Club playing Musical Bridge. I suppose you’re going out?’

Lenina nodded.

‘Who with?’

‘Henry Foster.’

‘Again?’ Fanny’s kind, rather moon-like face took on an incongruous expression of pained and disapproving astonishment. ‘Do you mean to tell me you’re still going out with Henry Foster?’

Mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. But there were also husbands, wives, lovers. There were also monogamy and romance.

‘Though you probably don’t know what those are,’ said Mustapha Mond.

They shook their heads.

Family, monogamy, romance. Everywhere exclusiveness, everywhere a focussing of interest, a narrow channelling of impulse and energy.

‘But every one belongs to every one else,’ he concluded, citing the hypnopædic proverb.

The students nodded, emphatically agreeing with a statement which upwards of sixty-two thousand repetitions in the dark had made them accept, not merely as true, but as axiomatic, self-evident, utterly indisputable.

‘But after all,’ Lenina was protesting, ‘it’s only about four months now since I’ve been having Henry.’

‘Only four months! I like that. And what’s more,’ Fanny went on, pointing an accusing finger, ‘there’s been nobody else except Henry all that time. Has there?’

Lenina blushed scarlet; but her eyes, the tone of her voice remained defiant. ‘No, there hasn’t been any one else,’ she answered almost truculently. ‘And I jolly well don’t see why there should have been.’

‘Oh, she jolly well doesn’t see why there should have been,’ Fanny repeated, as though to an invisible listener behind Lenina’s left shoulder. Then, with a sudden change of tone, ‘But seriously,’ she said, ‘I really do think you ought to be careful. It’s such horribly bad form to go on and on like this with one man. At forty, or thirty-five, it wouldn’t be so bad. But at your age, Lenina! No, it really won’t do. And you know how strongly the D.H.C. objects to anything intense or long-drawn. Four months of Henry Foster, without having another man — why, he’d be furious if he knew . . .’

‘Think of water under pressure in a pipe.’ They thought of it. ‘I pierce it once,’ said the Controller. ‘What a jet!’

He pierced it twenty times. There were twenty piddling little fountains.

‘My baby. My baby . . .!’

‘Mother!’ The madness is infectious.

‘My love, my one and only, precious, precious . . .’

Mother, monogamy, romance. High spurts the fountain; fierce and foamy the wild jet. The urge has but a single outlet. My love, my baby. No wonder those poor pre-moderns were mad and wicked and miserable. Their world didn’t allow them to take things easily, didn’t allow them to be sane, virtuous, happy. What with mothers and lovers, what with the prohibitions they were not conditioned to obey, what with the temptations and the lonely remorses, what with all the diseases and the endless isolating pain, what with the uncertainties and the poverty — they were forced to feel strongly. And feeling strongly (and strongly, what was more, in solitude, in hopelessly individual isolation), how could they be stable?

‘Of course there’s no need to give him up. Have somebody else from time to time, that’s all. He has other girls, doesn’t he?’

Lenina admitted it.

‘Of course he does. Trust Henry Foster to be the perfect gentleman — always correct. And then there’s the Director to think of. You know what a stickler . . .’

Nodding, ‘He patted me on the behind this afternoon,’ said Lenina.

‘There, you see!’ Fanny was triumphant. ‘That shows what he stands for. The strictest conventionality.’

‘Stability,’ said the Controller, ‘stability. No civilization without social stability. No social stability without individual stability.’ His voice was a trumpet. Listening, they felt larger, warmer.

The machine turns, turns and must keep on turning — for ever. It is death if it stands still. A thousand millions scrabbled the crust of the earth. The wheels began to turn. In a hundred and fifty years there were two thousand millions. Stop all the wheels. In a hundred and fifty weeks there are once more only a thousand millions; a thousand thousand thousand men and women have starved to death.

Wheels must turn steadily, but cannot turn untended. There must be men to tend them, men as steady as the wheels upon their axles, sane men, obedient men, stable in contentment.

Crying: My baby, my mother, my only, only love; groaning: My sin, my terrible God; screaming with pain, muttering with fever, bemoaning old age and poverty — how can they tend the wheels? And if they cannot tend the wheels . . . The corpses of a thousand thousand thousand men and women would be hard to bury or burn.

‘And after all,’ Fanny’s tone was coaxing, ‘it’s not as though there were anything painful or disagreeable about having one or two men besides Henry. And seeing that, you ought to be a little more promiscuous. . . .’

‘Stability,’ insisted the Controller, ‘stability. The primal and the ultimate need. Stability. Hence all this.’

With a wave of his hand he indicated the gardens, the huge building of the Conditioning Centre, the naked children furtive in the undergrowth or running across the lawns.

Lenina shook her head. ‘Somehow,’ she mused, ‘I hadn’t been feeling very keen on promiscuity lately. There are times when one doesn’t. Haven’t you found that too, Fanny?’

Fanny nodded her sympathy and understanding. ‘But one’s got to make the effort,’ she said sententiously, ‘one’s got to play the game. After all, every one belongs to every one else.’

‘Yes, every one belongs to every one else.’ Lenina repeated slowly and, sighing, was silent for a moment; then, taking Fanny’s hand, gave it a little squeeze. ‘You’re quite right, Fanny. As usual. I’ll make the effort.’

Impulse arrested spills over, and the flood is feeling, the flood is passion, the flood is even madness: it depends on the force of the current, the height and

strength of the barrier. The unchecked stream flows smoothly down its appointed channels into a calm well-being. (The embryo is hungry; day in, day out, the blood-surrogate pump unceasingly turns its eight hundred revolutions a minute. The decanted infant howls; at once a nurse appears with a bottle of external secretion. Feeling lurks in that interval of time between desire and its consummation. Shorten that interval, break down all those old unnecessary barriers.) ‘Fortunate boys!’ said the Controller. ‘No pains have been spared to make your lives emotionally easy — to preserve you, so far as that is possible, from having emotions at all.’

‘Ford’s in his flivver,’ murmured the D.H.C. ‘All’s well with the world.’

‘Lenina Crowne?’ said Henry Foster, echoing the Assistant Predestinator’s question as he zipped up his trousers. ‘Oh, she’s a splendid girl. Wonderfully pneumatic. I’m surprised you haven’t had her.’

‘I can’t think how it is I haven’t,’ said the Assistant Predestinator. ‘I certainly will. At the first opportunity.’

From his place on the opposite side of the changing-room aisle, Bernard Marx overheard what they were saying and turned pale.

‘And to tell the truth,’ said Lenina, ‘I’m beginning to get just a tiny bit bored with nothing but Henry every day.’ She pulled on her left stocking. ‘Do you know Bernard Marx?’ she asked in a tone whose excessive casualness was evidently forced.

Fanny looked startled. ‘You don’t mean to say . . .?’

‘Why not? Bernard’s an Alpha-Plus. Besides, he asked me to go to one of the Savage Reservations with him. I’ve always wanted to see a Savage Reservation.’

‘But his reputation?’

‘What do I care about his reputation?’

‘They say he doesn’t like Obstacle Golf.’

‘They say, they say,’ mocked Lenina.

‘And then he spends most of his time by himself — alone.’ There was horror in Fanny’s voice.

‘Well, he won’t be alone when he’s with me. And anyhow, why are people so beastly to him? I think he’s rather sweet.’ She smiled to herself; how absurdly shy he had been! Frightened almost — as though she were a World Controller and he a Gamma-Minus machine minder.

‘Consider your own lives,’ said Mustapha Mond. ‘Has any of you ever encountered an insurmountable obstacle?’

The question was answered by a negative silence.

‘Has any of you been compelled to live through a long time-interval between the consciousness of a desire and its fulfilment?’

‘Well,’ began one of the boys, and hesitated.

‘Speak up,’ said the D.H.C. ‘Don’t keep his fordship waiting.’

‘I once had to wait nearly four weeks before a girl I wanted would let me have her.’

‘And you felt a strong emotion in consequence?’

‘Horrible!’

‘Horrible; precisely,’ said the Controller. ‘Our ancestors were so stupid and short-sighted that when the first reformers came along and offered to deliver them from those horrible emotions, they wouldn’t have anything to do with them.’

‘Talking about her as though she were a bit of meat.’ Bernard ground his teeth. ‘Have her here, have her there. Like mutton. Degrading her to so much mutton. She said she’d think it over, she said she’d give me an answer this week. Oh, Ford, Ford, Ford.’ He would have liked to go up to them and hit them in the face — hard, again and again.

‘Yes, I really do advise you to try her,’ Henry Foster was saying.

‘Take Ectogenesis. Pfitzner and Kawaguchi had got the whole technique worked out. But would the Governments look at it? No. There was something called Christianity. Women were forced to go on being viviparous.’

‘He’s so ugly!’ said Fanny.

‘But I rather like his looks.’

‘And then so small’ Fanny made a grimace; smallness was so horribly and typically low-caste.

‘I think that’s rather sweet,’ said Lenina. ‘One feels one would like to pet him. You know. Like a cat.’

Fanny was shocked. ‘They say somebody made a mistake when he was still in the bottle — thought he was a Gamma and put alcohol into his blood-surrogate. That’s why he’s so stunted.’

‘What nonsense!’ Lenina was indignant.

‘Sleep teaching was actually prohibited in England. There was something called liberalism. Parliament, if you know what that was, passed a law against it. The records survive. Speeches about liberty of the subject. Liberty to be inefficient and miserable. Freedom to be a round peg in a square hole.’

‘But, my dear chap, you’re welcome, I assure you. You’re welcome.’ Henry Foster patted the Assistant Predestinator on the shoulder. ‘Every one belongs to every one else, after all.’

One hundred repetitions three nights a week for four years, thought Bernard Marx, who was a specialist on hypnopædia. Sixty-two thousand four hundred repetitions make one truth. Idiots!

‘Or the Caste System. Constantly proposed, constantly rejected. There was something called democracy. As though men were more than physico-chemically equal.’

‘Well, all I can say is that I’m going to accept his invitation.’

Bernard hated them, hated them. But they were two, they were large, they were strong.

‘The Nine Years’ War began in a.f. 141.’

‘Not even if it were true about the alcohol in his blood-surrogate.’

‘Phosgene, chloropicrin, ethyl iodoacetate, diphenylcyanarsine, trichlormethyl chloroformate, dichlorethyl sulphide. Not to mention hydrocyanic acid.’

‘Which I simply don’t believe,’ Lenina concluded.

‘The noise of fourteen thousand aeroplanes advancing in open order. But in the Kurfürstendamm and the Eighth Arrondissement, the explosion of the anthrax bombs is hardly louder than the popping of a paper bag.’

‘Because I do want to see a Savage Reservation.’

$CH_3C_6H_2(NO_2)_3+Hg(CNO)_2$=well, what? An enormous hole in the ground, a pile of masonry, some bits of flesh and mucus, a foot, with the boot still on it, flying through the air and landing, flop, in the middle of the geraniums — the scarlet ones; such a splendid show that summer!

‘You’re hopeless, Lenina, I give you up.’

‘The Russian technique for infecting water supplies was particularly ingenious.’

Back turned to back, Fanny and Lenina continued their changing in silence.

‘The Nine Years’ War, the great Economic Collapse. There was a choice between World Control and destruction. Between stability and . . .’

‘Fanny Crowne’s a nice girl too,’ said the Assistant Predestinator.

In the nurseries, the Elementary Class Consciousness lesson was over, the voices were adapting future demand to future industrial supply. ‘I do love flying,’ they whispered, ‘I do love flying, I do love having new clothes, I do love . . .’

‘Liberalism, of course, was dead of anthrax, but all the same you couldn’t do things by force.’

‘Not nearly so pneumatic as Lenina. Oh, not nearly.’

‘But old clothes are beastly,’ continued the untiring whisper. ‘We always throw away old clothes. Ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending, ending is better . . .’

‘Government’s an affair of sitting, not hitting. You rule with the brains and the buttocks, never with the fists. For example, there was the conscription of consumption.’

‘There, I’m ready,’ said Lenina; but Fanny remained speechless and averted. ‘Let’s make peace, Fanny darling.’

‘Every man, woman and child compelled to consume so much a year. In the interests of industry. The sole result . . .’

‘Ending is better than mending. The more stitches, the less riches; the more stitches . . .’

‘One of these days,’ said Fanny, with dismal emphasis, ‘you’ll get into trouble.’

‘Conscientious objection on an enormous scale. Anything not to consume. Back to nature.’

‘I do love flying, I do love flying.’

‘Back to culture. Yes, actually to culture. You can’t consume much if you sit still and read books.’

‘Do I look all right?’ Lenina asked. Her jacket was made of bottle-green acetate cloth with green viscose fur at the cuffs and collar.

‘Eight hundred Simple Lifers were mowed down by machine guns at Golders Green.’

‘Ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending.’

Green corduroy shorts and white viscose-woollen stockings turned down below the knee.

‘Then came the famous British Museum Massacre. Two thousand culture fans gassed with dichlorethyl sulphide.’

A green-and-white jockey cap shaded Lenina’s eyes; her shoes were bright green and highly polished.

‘In the end,’ said Mustapha Mond, ‘the Controllers realized that force was no good. The slower but infinitely surer methods of ectogenesis, Neo-Pavlovian conditioning and hypnopædia . . .’

And round her waist she wore a silver-mounted green morocco-surrogate cartridge belt, bulging (for Lenina was not a freemartin) with the regulation supply of contraceptives.

‘The discoveries of Pfitzner and Kawaguchi were at last made use of. An intensive propaganda against viviparous reproduction . . .’

‘Perfect!’ cried Fanny enthusiastically. She could never resist Lenina’s charm for long. ‘And what a perfectly sweet Malthusian belt!’

‘Accompanied by a campaign against the Past; by the closing of museums, the blowing up of historical monuments (luckily most of them had already been destroyed during the Nine Years’ War); by the suppression of all books published before a.f. 150.’

‘I simply must get one like it,’ said Fanny.

‘There were some things called the pyramids, for example.’

‘My old black-patent bandolier . . .’

‘And a man called Shakespeare. You’ve never heard of them of course.’

‘It’s an absolute disgrace — that bandolier of mine.’

‘Such are the advantages of a really scientific education.’

‘The more stitches the less riches; the more stitches the less . . .’

‘The introduction of Our Ford’s first T-Model . . .’
‘I’ve had it nearly three months.’

‘Chosen as the opening date of the new era.’

‘Ending is better than mending; ending is better . . .’

‘There was a thing, as I’ve said before, called Christianity.’

‘Ending is better than mending.’

‘The ethics and philosophy of under-consumption . . .’

‘I love new clothes, I love new clothes, I love . . .’

‘So essential when there was under-production; but in an age of machines and the fixation of nitrogen — positively a crime against society.’

‘Henry Foster gave it me.’

‘All crosses had their tops cut and became T’s. There was also a thing called God.’

‘It’s real morocco-surrogate.’

‘We have the World State now. And Ford’s Day celebrations, and Community Sings, and Solidarity Services.’

‘Ford, how I hate them!’ Bernard Marx was thinking.

‘There was a thing called Heaven; but all the same they used to drink enormous quantities of alcohol.’

‘Like meat, like so much meat.’

‘There was a thing called the soul and a thing called immortality.’

‘Do ask Henry where he got it.’

‘But they used to take morphia and cocaine.’

‘And what makes it worse, she thinks of herself as meat.’

‘Two thousand pharmacologists and bio-chemists were subsidized in a.f. 178.’

‘He does look glum,’ said the Assistant Predestinator, pointing at Bernard Marx.

‘Six years later it was being produced commercially. The perfect drug.’

‘Let’s bait him.’

‘Euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant.’

‘Glum, Marx, glum.’ The clap on the shoulder made him start, look up. It was that brute Henry Foster. ‘What you need is a gramme of soma.’

‘All the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects.’

‘Ford, I should like to kill him!’ But all he did was to say, ‘No, thank you,’ and fend off the proffered tube of tablets.

‘Take a holiday from reality whenever you like, and come back without so much as a headache or a mythology.’

‘Take it,’ insisted Henry Foster, ‘take it.’

‘Stability was practically assured.’

‘One cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy sentiments,’ said the Assistant Predestinator, citing a piece of homely hypnopædic wisdom.

‘It only remained to conquer old age.’

‘Damn you, damn you!’ shouted Bernard Marx.

‘Hoity-toity.’

‘Gonadal hormones, transfusion of young blood, magnesium salts . . .’

‘And do remember that a gramme is better than a damn.’ They went out, laughing.

‘All the physiological stigmata of old age have been abolished. And along with them, of course . . .’

‘Don’t forget to ask him about that Malthusian belt,’ said Fanny.

‘Along with them all the old man’s mental peculiarities. Characters remain constant throughout a whole lifetime.’

‘. . . two rounds of Obstacle Golf to get through before dark. I must fly.’

‘Work, play — at sixty our powers and tastes are what they were at seventeen. Old men in the bad old days used to renounce, retire, take to religion, spend their time reading, thinking — thinking!’

‘Idiots, swine!’ Bernard Marx was saying to himself, as he walked down the corridor to the lift.

‘Now — such is progress — the old men work, the old men copulate, the old men have no time, no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think — or if ever by some unlucky chance such a crevice of time should yawn in the solid substance of their distractions, there is always soma, delicious soma, half a gramme for a half-holiday, a gramme for a week-end, two grammes for a trip to the gorgeous East, three for a dark eternity on the moon; returning whence they find themselves on the other side of the crevice, safe on the solid ground of daily labour and distraction, scampering from feely to feely, from girl to pneumatic girl, from Electro-magnetic Golf Course to . . .’

‘Go away, little girl,’ shouted the D.H.C. angrily. ‘Go away, little boy! Can’t you see that his fordship’s busy? Go and do your erotic play somewhere else.’

‘Poor little children!’ said the Controller.

Slowly, majestically, with a faint humming of machinery, the Conveyors moved forward, thirty-three centimetres an hour. In the red darkness glinted innumerable rubies.

Chapter IV

§ 1

THE LIFT WAS crowded with men from the Alpha Changing Rooms, and Lenina's entry was greeted by many friendly nods and smiles. She was a popular girl and, at one time or another, had spent a night with almost all of them.

They were dear boys, she thought, as she returned their salutations. Charming boys! Still, she did wish that George Edzel's ears weren't quite so big (perhaps he'd been given just a spot too much parathyroid at metre 328?). And looking at Benito Hoover, she couldn't help remembering that he was really too hairy when he took his clothes off.

Turning, with eyes a little saddened by the recollection of Benito's curly blackness, she saw in a corner the small thin body, the melancholy face of Bernard Marx.

'Bernard!' she stepped up to him. 'I was looking for you.' Her voice rang clear above the hum of the mounting lift. The others looked round curiously. 'I wanted to talk to you about our New Mexico plan.' Out of the tail of her eye she could see Benito Hoover gaping with astonishment. The gape annoyed her. 'Surprised I shouldn't be begging to go with him again!' she said to herself. Then aloud, and more warmly than ever, 'I'd simply love to come with you for a week in July,' she went on. (Anyhow, she was publicly proving her unfaithfulness to Henry. Fanny ought to be pleased, even though it was Bernard.) 'That is,' Lenina gave him her most deliciously significant smile, 'if you still want to have me.'

Bernard's pale face flushed. 'What on earth for?' she wondered, astonished, but at the same time touched by this strange tribute to her power.

'Hadn't we better talk about it somewhere else?' he stammered, looking horribly uncomfortable.

'As though I'd been saying something shocking,' thought Lenina. 'He couldn't look more upset if I'd made a dirty joke — asked him who his mother

was, or something like that.'

'I mean, with all these people about . . .' He was choked with confusion.

Lenina's laugh was frank and wholly unmalicious. 'How funny you are!' she said; and she quite genuinely did think him funny. 'You'll give me at least a week's warning, won't you,' she went on in another tone. 'I suppose we take the Blue Pacific Rocket? Does it start from the Charing-T Tower? Or is it from Hampstead?'

Before Bernard could answer, the lift came to a standstill.

'Roof!' called a creaking voice.

The liftman was a small simian creature, dressed in the black tunic of an Epsilon-Minus Semi-Moron.

'Roof!'

He flung open the gates. The warm glory of afternoon sunlight made him start and blink his eyes. 'Oh, roof!' he repeated in a voice of rapture. He was as though suddenly and joyfully awakened from a dark annihilating stupor. 'Roof!'

He smiled up with a kind of doggily expectant adoration into the faces of his passengers. Talking and laughing together, they stepped out into the light. The liftman looked after them.

'Roof?' he said once more, questioningly.

Then a bell rang, and from the ceiling of the lift a loud-speaker began, very softly and yet very imperiously, to issue its commands.

'Go down,' it said, 'go down. Floor Eighteen. Go down, go down. Floor Eighteen. Go down, go . . .'

The liftman slammed the gates, touched a button and instantly dropped back into the droning twilight of the well, the twilight of his own habitual stupor.

It was warm and bright on the roof. The summer afternoon was drowsy with the hum of passing helicopters; and the deeper drone of the rocket-planes hastening, invisible, through the bright sky five or six miles overhead was like a caress on the soft air. Bernard Marx drew a deep breath. He looked up into the sky and round the blue horizon and finally down into Lenina's face.

'Isn't it beautiful!' His voice trembled a little.

She smiled at him with an expression of the most sympathetic understanding. ‘Simply perfect for Obstacle Golf,’ she answered rapturously. ‘And now I must fly, Bernard. Henry gets cross if I keep him waiting. Let me know in good time about the date.’ And waving her hand, she ran away across the wide flat roof towards the hangars. Bernard stood watching the retreating twinkle of the white stockings, the sunburnt knees vivaciously bending and unbending, again, again, and the softer rolling of those well-fitted corduroy shorts beneath the bottle-green jacket. His face wore an expression of pain.

‘I should say she was pretty,’ said a loud and cheery voice just behind him.

Bernard started, and looked round. The chubby red face of Benito Hoover was beaming down at him — beaming with manifest cordiality. Benito was notoriously good-natured. People said of him that he could have got through life without ever touching soma. The malice and bad tempers from which other people had to take holidays never afflicted him. Reality for Benito was always sunny.

‘Pneumatic too. And how!’ Then, in another tone, ‘But, I say,’ he went on, ‘you do look glum! What you need is a gramme of soma.’ Diving into his right-hand trouser-pocket, Benito produced a phial. ‘One cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy . . . But, I say!’

Bernard had suddenly turned and rushed away.

Benito stared after him. ‘What can be the matter with the fellow?’ he wondered, and, shaking his head, decided that the story about the alcohol having been put into the poor chap’s blood-surrogate must be true. ‘Touched his brain, I suppose.’

He put away the soma bottle, and taking out a packet of sex-hormone chewing-gum, stuffed a plug into his cheek and walked slowly away towards the hangars, ruminating.

Henry Foster had had his machine wheeled out of its lock-up and, when Lenina arrived, was already seated in the cockpit, waiting.

‘Four minutes late,’ was all his comment, as she climbed in beside him. He started the engines and threw the helicopter screws into gear. The machine shot

vertically into the air. Henry accelerated; the humming of the propeller shrilled from hornet to wasp, from wasp to mosquito; the speedometer showed that they were rising at the best part of two kilometres a minute. London diminished beneath them. The huge table-topped buildings were no more, in a few seconds, than a bed of geometrical mushrooms sprouting from the green of park and garden. In the midst of them, thin-stalked, a taller, slenderer fungus, the Charing-T Tower lifted towards the sky a disk of shining concrete.

Like the vague torsos of fabulous athletes, huge fleshy clouds lolled on the blue air above their heads. Out of one of them suddenly dropped a small scarlet insect, buzzing as it fell.

‘There’s the Red Rocket,’ said Henry, ‘just come in from New York.’ Looking at his watch, ‘Seven minutes behind time,’ he added, and shook his head. ‘These Atlantic services — they’re really scandalously unpunctual.’

He took his foot off the accelerator. The humming of the screws overhead dropped an octave and a half, back through wasp and hornet to bumble-bee, to cockchafer, to stag-beetle. The upward rush of the machine slackened off; a moment later they were hanging motionless in the air. Henry pushed at a lever; there was a click. Slowly at first, then faster and faster, till it was a circular mist before their eyes, the propeller in front of them began to revolve. The wind of a horizontal speed whistled ever more shrilly in the stays. Henry kept his eye on the revolution-counter; when the needle touched the twelve hundred mark, he threw the helicopter screws out of gear. The machine had enough forward momentum to be able to fly on its planes.

Lenina looked down through the window in the floor between her feet. They were flying over the six kilometre zone of park-land that separated Central London from its first ring of satellite suburbs. The green was maggoty with foreshortened life. Forests of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy towers gleamed between the trees. Near Shepherd’s Bush two thousand Beta-Minus mixed doubles were playing Riemann-surface tennis. A double row of Escalator Fives Courts lined the main road from Notting Hill to Willesden. In the Ealing stadium a Delta gymnastic display and community sing was in progress.

‘What a hideous colour khaki is,’ remarked Lenina, voicing the hypnopædic prejudices of her caste.

The buildings of the Hounslow Feely Studio covered seven and a half hectares. Near them a black and khaki army of labourers was busy revitrifying the surface of the Great West Road. One of the huge travelling crucibles was being tapped as they flew over. The molten stone poured out in a stream of dazzling incandescence across the road; the asbestos rollers came and went; at the tail of an insulated watering-cart the steam rose in white clouds.

At Brentford the Television Corporation’s factory was like a small town.

‘They must be changing the shift,’ said Lenina.

Like aphides and ants, the leaf-green Gamma girls, the black Semi-Morons swarmed round the entrances, or stood in queues to take their places in the monorail tram-cars. Mulberry-coloured Beta-Minuses came and went among the crowd. The roof of the main building was alive with the alighting and departure of helicopters.

‘My word,’ said Lenina, ‘I’m glad I’m not a Gamma.’

Ten minutes later they were at Stoke Poges and had started their first round of Obstacle Golf.

§ 2

WITH EYES FOR the most part downcast and, if ever they lighted on a fellow creature, at once and furtively averted, Bernard hastened across the roof. He was like a man pursued, but pursued by enemies he does not wish to see, lest they should seem more hostile even than he had supposed, and he himself be made to feel guiltier and even more helplessly alone.

‘That horrible Benito Hoover!’ And yet the man had meant well enough. Which only made it, in a way, much worse. Those who meant well behaved in the same way as those who meant badly. Even Lenina was making him suffer. He remembered those weeks of timid indecision, during which he had looked and longed and despaired of ever having the courage to ask her. Dared he face the risk of being humiliated by a contemptuous refusal? But if she were to say yes, what rapture! Well, now she had said it and he was still wretched — wretched that she should have thought it such a perfect afternoon for Obstacle Golf, that she should have trotted away to join Henry Foster, that she should have found him funny for not wanting to talk of their most private affairs in public. Wretched, in a word, because she had behaved as any healthy and virtuous English girl ought to behave and not in some other, abnormal, extraordinary way.

He opened the door of his lock-up and called to a lounging couple of Delta-Minus attendants to come and push his machine out on to the roof. The hangars were staffed by a single Bokanovsky Group, and the men were twins, identically small, black and hideous. Bernard gave his orders in the sharp, rather arrogant and even offensive tone of one who does not feel himself too secure in his superiority. To have dealings with members of the lower castes was always, for Bernard, a most distressing experience. For whatever the cause (and the current gossip about the alcohol in his blood-surrogate may very likely — for accidents

will happen — have been true) Bernard's physique was hardly better than that of the average Gamma. He stood eight centimetres short of the standard Alpha height and was slender in proportion. Contact with members of the lower castes always reminded him painfully of this physical inadequacy. 'I am I, and wish I wasn't'; his self-consciousness was acute and distressing. Each time he found himself looking on the level, instead of downward, into a Delta's face, he felt humiliated. Would the creature treat him with the respect due to his caste? The question haunted him. Not without reason. For Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons had been to some extent conditioned to associate corporeal mass with social superiority. Indeed, a faint hypnopædic prejudice in favour of size was universal. Hence the laughter of the women to whom he made proposals, the practical joking of his equals among the men. The mockery made him feel an outsider; and feeling an outsider he behaved like one, which increased the prejudice against him and intensified the contempt and hostility aroused by his physical defects. Which in turn increased his sense of being alien and alone. A chronic fear of being slighted made him avoid his equals, made him stand, where his inferiors were concerned, self-consciously on his dignity. How bitterly he envied men like Henry Foster and Benito Hoover! Men who never had to shout at an Epsilon to get an order obeyed; men who took their position for granted; men who moved through the caste system as a fish through the water — so utterly at home as to be unaware either of themselves or of the beneficent and comfortable element in which they had their being.

Slackly, it seemed to him, and with reluctance, the twin attendants wheeled his plane out on the roof.

'Hurry up!' said Bernard irritably. One of them glanced at him. Was that a kind of bestial derision that he detected in those blank grey eyes? 'Hurry up!' he shouted more loudly, and there was an ugly rasp in his voice.

He climbed into the plane and, a minute later was flying southwards, towards the river.

The various Bureaux of Propaganda and the College of Emotional Engineering were housed in a single sixty-story building in Fleet Street. In the

basement and on the lower floors were the presses and offices of the three great London newspapers — The Hourly Radio, an upper-caste sheet, the pale-green Gamma Gazette, and, on khaki paper and in words exclusively of one syllable, The Delta Mirror. Then came the Bureaux of Propaganda by Television, by Feeling Picture, and by Synthetic Voice and Music respectively — twenty-two floors of them. Above were the research laboratories and the padded rooms in which the Sound-Track Writers and Synthetic Composers did their delicate work. The top eighteen floors were occupied by the College of Emotional Engineering.

Bernard landed on the roof of Propaganda House and stepped out.

‘Ring down to Mr. Helmholtz Watson,’ he ordered the Gamma-Plus porter, ‘and tell him that Mr. Bernard Marx is waiting for him on the roof.’

He sat down and lit a cigarette.

Helmholtz Watson was writing when the message came down.

‘Tell him I’m coming at once,’ he said and hung up the receiver. Then, turning to his secretary, ‘I’ll leave you to put my things away,’ he went on in the same official and impersonal tone; and, ignoring her lustrous smile, got up and walked briskly to the door.

He was a powerfully built man, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, massive, and yet quick in his movements, springy and agile. The round strong pillar of his neck supported a beautifully shaped head. His hair was dark and curly, his features strongly marked. In a forcible emphatic way, he was handsome and looked, as his secretary was never tired of repeating, every centimetre an Alpha-Plus. By profession he was a lecturer at the College of Emotional Engineering (Department of Writing) and in the intervals of his educational activities, a working Emotional Engineer. He wrote regularly for The Hourly Radio, composed feely scenarios, and had the happiest knack for slogans and hypnopædic rhymes.

‘Able,’ was the verdict of his superiors. ‘Perhaps’ (and they would shake their heads, would significantly lower their voices) ‘a little too able.’

Yes, a little too able; they were right. A mental excess had produced in Helmholtz Watson effects very similar to those which, in Bernard Marx, were the result of a physical defect. Too little bone and brawn had isolated Bernard from his fellow men, and the sense of this apartness, being, by all the current standards, a mental excess, became in its turn a cause of wider separation. That which had made Helmholtz so uncomfortably aware of being himself and all alone was too much ability. What the two men shared was the knowledge that they were individuals. But whereas the physically defective Bernard had suffered all his life from the consciousness of being separate, it was only quite recently that, grown aware of his mental excess, Helmholtz Watson had also become aware of his difference from the people who surrounded him. This Escalator-Squash champion, this indefatigable lover (it was said that he had had six hundred and forty different girls in under four years), this admirable committee man and best mixer had realized quite suddenly that sport, women, communal activities were only, so far as he was concerned, second bests. Really, and at the bottom, he was interested in something else. But in what? In what? That was the problem which Bernard had come to discuss with him — or rather, since it was always Helmholtz who did all the talking, to listen to his friend discussing, yet once more.

Three charming girls from the Bureau of Propaganda by Synthetic Voice waylaid him as he stepped out of the lift.

‘Oh, Helmholtz darling, do come and have a picnic supper with us on Exmoor.’ They clung round him imploringly.

He shook his head, he pushed his way through them. ‘No, no.’

‘We’re not inviting any other man.’

But Helmholtz remained unshaken even by this delightful promise. ‘No,’ he repeated, ‘I’m busy.’ And he held resolutely on his course. The girls trailed after him. It was not till he had actually climbed into Bernard’s plane and slammed the door that they gave up pursuit. Not without reproaches.

‘These women!’ he said, as the machine rose into the air. ‘These women!’ And he shook his head, he frowned. ‘Too awful.’ Bernard hypocritically agreed,

wishing, as he spoke the words, that he could have as many girls as Helmholtz did, and with as little trouble. He was seized with a sudden urgent need to boast. ‘I’m taking Lenina Crowne to New Mexico with me,’ he said in a tone as casual as he could make it.

‘Are you?’ said Helmholtz, with a total absence of interest. Then after a little pause, ‘This last week or two,’ he went on, ‘I’ve been cutting all my committees and all my girls. You can’t imagine what a hullabaloo they’ve been making about it at the College. Still, it’s been worth it, I think. The effects . . .’ He hesitated. ‘Well, they’re odd, they’re very odd.’

A physical shortcoming could produce a kind of mental excess. The process, it seemed, was reversible. Mental excess could produce, for its own purposes, the voluntary blindness and deafness of deliberate solitude, the artificial impotence of asceticism.

The rest of the short flight was accomplished in silence. When they had arrived and were comfortably stretched out on the pneumatic sofas in Bernard’s room, Helmholtz began again.

Speaking very slowly, ‘Did you ever feel,’ he asked, ‘as though you had something inside you that was only waiting for you to give it a chance to come out? Some sort of extra power that you aren’t using — you know, like all the water that goes down the falls instead of through the turbines?’ He looked at Bernard questioningly.

‘You mean all the emotions one might be feeling if things were different?’

Helmholtz shook his head. ‘Not quite. I’m thinking of a queer feeling I sometimes get, a feeling that I’ve got something important to say and the power to say it — only I don’t know what it is, and I can’t make any use of the power. If there was some different way of writing . . . Or else something else to write about . . .’ He was silent; then, ‘You see,’ he went on at last, ‘I’m pretty good at inventing phrases — you know, the sort of words that suddenly make you jump, almost as though you’d sat on a pin, they seem so new and exciting even though they’re about something hypnopædically obvious. But that doesn’t seem enough.

It’s not enough for the phrases to be good; what you make with them ought to be good too.’

‘But your things are good, Helmholtz.’

‘Oh, as far as they go.’ Helmholtz shrugged his shoulders. ‘But they go such a little way. They aren’t important enough, somehow. I feel I could do something much more important. Yes, and more intense, more violent. But what? What is there more important to say? And how can one be violent about the sort of things one’s expected to write about? Words can be like X-rays, if you use them properly — they’ll go through anything. You read and you’re pierced. That’s one of the things I try to teach my students — how to write piercingly. But what on earth’s the good of being pierced by an article about a Community Sing, or the latest improvement in scent organs? Besides, can you make words really piercing — you know, like the very hardest X-rays — when you’re writing about that sort of thing? Can you say something about nothing? That’s what it finally boils down to. I try and I try . . .’

‘Hush!’ said Bernard suddenly, and lifted a warning finger; they listened. ‘I believe there’s somebody at the door,’ he whispered.

Helmholtz got up, tiptoed across the room, and with a sharp quick movement flung the door wide open. There was, of course, nobody there.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Bernard, feeling and looking uncomfortably foolish. ‘I suppose I’ve got things on my nerves a bit. When people are suspicious with you, you start being suspicious with them.’

He passed his hand across his eyes, he sighed, his voice became plaintive. He was justifying himself. ‘If you knew what I’d had to put up with recently,’ he said almost tearfully — and the uprush of his self-pity was like a fountain suddenly released. ‘If you only knew!’

Helmholtz Watson listened with a certain sense of discomfort. ‘Poor little Bernard!’ he said to himself. But at the same time he felt rather ashamed for his friend. He wished Bernard would show a little more pride.

Chapter V

§ 1

BY EIGHT O'CLOCK the light was failing. The loud-speakers in the tower of the Stoke Poges Club House began, in a more than human tenor, to announce the closing of the courses. Lenina and Henry abandoned their game and walked back towards the Club. From the grounds of the Internal and External Secretion Trust came the lowing of those thousands of cattle which provided, with their hormones and their milk, the raw materials for the great factory at Farnham Royal.

An incessant buzzing of helicopters filled the twilight. Every two and a half minutes a bell and the screech of whistles announced the departure of one of the light monorail trains which carried the lower-caste golfers back from their separate course to the metropolis.

Lenina and Henry climbed into their machine and started off. At eight hundred feet Henry slowed down the helicopter screws, and they hung for a minute or two poised above the fading landscape. The forest of Burnham Beeches stretched like a great pool of darkness towards the bright shore of the western sky. Crimson at the horizon, the last of the sunset faded, through orange, upwards into yellow and a pale watery green. Northwards, beyond and above the trees, the Internal and External Secretions factory glared with a fierce electric brilliance from every window of its twenty stories. Beneath them lay the buildings of the Golf Club — the huge lower-caste barracks and, on the other side of a dividing wall, the smaller houses reserved for Alpha and Beta members. The approaches to the monorail station were black with the ant-like pullulation of lower-caste activity. From under the glass vault a lighted train shot out into the open. Following its south-easterly course across the dark plain their eyes were drawn to the majestic buildings of the Slough Crematorium. For the safety of night-flying planes, its four tall chimneys were flood-lighted and tipped with crimson danger signals. It was a landmark.

‘Why do the smoke-stacks have those things like balconies round them?’ enquired Lenina.

‘Phosphorus recovery,’ explained Henry telegraphically. ‘On their way up the chimney the gases go through four separate treatments. P_2O_5 used to go right out of circulation every time they cremated some one. Now they recover over ninety-eight per cent. of it. More than a kilo and a half per adult corpse. Which makes the best part of four hundred tons of phosphorus every year from England alone.’ Henry spoke with a happy pride, rejoicing whole-heartedly in the achievement, as though it had been his own. ‘Fine to think we can go on being socially useful even after we’re dead. Making plants grow.’

Lenina, meanwhile, had turned her eyes away and was looking perpendicularly downwards at the monorail station. ‘Fine,’ she agreed. ‘But queer that Alphas and Betas won’t make any more plants grow than those nasty little Gammas and Deltas and Epsilons down there.’

‘All men are physico-chemically equal,’ said Henry sententiously. ‘Besides, even Epsilons perform indispensable services.’

‘Even an Epsilon . . .’ Lenina suddenly remembered an occasion when, as a little girl at school, she had woken up in the middle of the night and become aware, for the first time, of the whispering that had haunted all her sleeps. She saw again the beam of moonlight, the row of small white beds; heard once more the soft, soft voice that said (the words were there, unforgotten, unforgettable after so many night-long repetitions): ‘Every one works for every one else. We can’t do without any one. Even Epsilons are useful. We couldn’t do without Epsilons. Every one works for every one else. We can’t do without any one . . .’ Lenina remembered her first shock of fear and surprise; her speculations through half a wakeful hour; and then, under the influence of those endless repetitions, the gradual soothing of her mind, the soothing, the smoothing, the stealthy creeping of sleep. . . .

‘I suppose Epsilons don’t really mind being Epsilons,’ she said aloud.

‘Of course they don’t. How can they? They don’t know what it’s like being anything else. We’d mind, of course. But then we’ve been differently conditioned. Besides, we start with a different heredity.’

‘I’m glad I’m not an Epsilon,’ said Lenina, with conviction.

‘And if you were an Epsilon,’ said Henry, ‘your conditioning would have made you no less thankful that you weren’t a Beta or an Alpha.’ He put his forward propeller into gear and headed the machine towards London. Behind them, in the west, the crimson and orange were almost faded; a dark bank of cloud had crept into the zenith. As they flew over the Crematorium, the plane shot upwards on the column of hot air rising from the chimneys, only to fall as suddenly when it passed into the descending chill beyond.

‘What a marvellous switchback!’ Lenina laughed delightedly.

But Henry’s tone was almost, for a moment, melancholy. ‘Do you know what that switchback was?’ he said. ‘It was some human being finally and definitely disappearing. Going up in a squirt of hot gas. It would be curious to know who it was — a man or a woman, an Alpha or an Epsilon. . . .’ He sighed. Then, in a resolutely cheerful voice, ‘Anyhow,’ he concluded, ‘there’s one thing we can be certain of; whoever he may have been, he was happy when he was alive. Everybody’s happy now.’

‘Yes, everybody’s happy now,’ echoed Lenina. They had heard the words repeated a hundred and fifty times every night for twelve years.

Landing on the roof of Henry’s forty-story apartment house in Westminster, they went straight down to the dining-hall. There, in a loud and cheerful company, they ate an excellent meal. Soma was served with the coffee. Lenina took two half-gramme tablets and Henry three. At twenty past nine they walked across the street to the newly opened Westminster Abbey Cabaret. It was a night almost without clouds, moonless and starry; but of this on the whole depressing fact Lenina and Henry were fortunately unaware. The electric sky-signs effectively shut off the outer darkness. ‘Calvin Stopes and his Sixteen Sexophonists.’ From the façade of the new Abbey the giant letters invitingly

glared. ‘London’s Finest Scent and Colour Organ. All the Latest Synthetic Music.’

They entered. The air seemed hot and somehow breathless with the scent of ambergris and sandalwood. On the domed ceiling of the hall, the colour organ had momentarily painted a tropical sunset. The Sixteen Sexophonists were playing an old favourite: ‘There ain’t no Bottle in all the world like that dear little Bottle of mine.’ Four hundred couples were five-stepping round the polished floor. Lenina and Henry were soon the four hundred and first. The sexophones wailed like melodious cats under the moon, moaned in the alto and tenor registers as though the little death were upon them. Rich with a wealth of harmonics, their tremulous chorus mounted towards a climax, louder and ever louder — until at last, with a wave of his hand, the conductor let loose the final shattering note of ethermusic and blew the sixteen merely human blowers clean out of existence. Thunder in A flat major. And then, in all but silence, in all but darkness, there followed a gradual deturgescence, a diminuendo sliding gradually, through quarter tones, down, down to a faintly whispered dominant chord that lingered on (while the five-four rhythms still pulsed below) charging the darkened seconds with an intense expectancy. And at last expectancy was fulfilled. There was a sudden explosive sunrise, and simultaneously, the Sixteen burst into song:

Bottle of mine, it’s you I’ve always wanted!
Bottle of mine, why was I ever decanted?
Skies are blue inside of you,
The weather’s always fine;
For
There ain’t no Bottle in all the world
Like that dear little Bottle of mine.

Five-stepping with the other four hundred round and round Westminster Abbey, Lenina and Henry were yet dancing in another world — the warm, the richly coloured, the infinitely friendly world of soma-holiday. How kind, how good-looking, how delightfully amusing every one was! ‘Bottle of mine, it’s you

I’ve always wanted . . .’ But Lenina and Henry had what they wanted . . . They were inside, here and now — safely inside with the fine weather, the perennially blue sky. And when, exhausted, the Sixteen had laid by their sexophones and the Synthetic Music apparatus was producing the very latest in slow Malthusian Blues, they might have been twin embryos gently rocking together on the waves of a bottled ocean of blood-surrogate.

‘Good-night, dear friends. Good-night, dear friends.’ The loud-speakers veiled their commands in a genial and musical politeness. Good-night, dear friends. . . .’

Obediently, with all the others, Lenina and Henry left the building. The depressing stars had travelled quite some way across the heavens. But though the separating screen of the sky-signs had now to a great extent dissolved, the two young people still retained their happy ignorance of the night.

Swallowed half an hour before closing time, that second dose of soma had raised a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe and their minds. Bottled, they crossed the street; bottled, they took the lift up to Henry’s room on the twenty-eighth floor. And yet, bottled as she was, and in spite of that second gramme of soma, Lenina did not forget to take all the contraceptive precautions prescribed by the regulations. Years of intensive hypnopædia and, from twelve to seventeen, Malthusian drill three times a week had made the taking of these precautions almost as automatic and inevitable as blinking.

‘Oh, and that reminds me,’ she said, as she came back from the bathroom, ‘Fanny Crowne wants to know where you found that lovely green morocco-surrogate cartridge belt you gave me.’

§ 2

ALTERNATE THURSDAYS WERE Bernard's Solidarity Service days. After an early dinner at the Aphroditæum (to which Helmholtz had recently been elected under Rule Two) he took leave of his friend and, hailing a taxi on the roof, told the man to fly to the Fordson Community Singery. The machine rose a couple of hundred metres, then headed eastwards, and as it turned, there before Bernard's eyes, gigantically beautiful, was the Singery. Flood-lighted, its three hundred and twenty metres of white Carrara-surrogate gleamed with a snowy incandescence over Ludgate Hill; at each of the four corners of its helicopter platform an immense T shone crimson against the night, and from the mouths of twenty-four vast golden trumpets rumbled a solemn synthetic music.

'Damn, I'm late,' Bernard said to himself as he first caught sight of Big Henry, the Singery clock. And sure enough, as he was paying off his cab, Big Henry sounded the hour. 'Ford,' sang out an immense bass voice from all the golden trumpets. 'Ford, Ford, Ford . . .' Nine times. Bernard ran for the lift.

The great auditorium for Ford's Day celebrations and other massed Community Sings was at the bottom of the building. Above it, a hundred to each floor, were the seven thousand rooms used by Solidarity Groups for their fortnightly services. Bernard dropped down to floor thirty-three, hurried along the corridor, stood hesitating for a moment outside Room 3210, then, having wound himself up, opened the door and walked in.

Thank Ford! he was not the last. Three chairs of the twelve arranged round the circular table were still unoccupied. He slipped into the nearest of them as inconspicuously as he could and prepared to frown at the yet later comers whenever they should arrive.

Turning towards him, 'What were you playing this afternoon?' the girl on his left enquired. 'Obstacle, or Electro-magnetic?'

Bernard looked at her (Ford! it was Morgana Rothschild) and blushingly had to admit that he had been playing neither. Morgana stared at him with astonishment. There was an awkward silence.

Then pointedly she turned away and addressed herself to the more sporting man on her left.

‘A good beginning for a Solidarity Service,’ thought Bernard miserably, and foresaw for himself yet another failure to achieve atonement. If only he had given himself time to look round instead of scuttling for the nearest chair! He could have sat between Fifi Bradlaugh and Joanna Diesel. Instead of which he had gone and blindly planted himself next to Morgana. Morgana! Ford! Those black eyebrows of hers — that eyebrow, rather — for they met above the nose. Ford! And on his right was Clara Deterding. True, Clara’s eyebrows didn’t meet. But she was really too pneumatic. Whereas Fifi and Joanna were absolutely right. Plump, blonde, not too large . . . And it was that great lout, Tom Kawaguchi, who now took the seat between them.

The last arrival was Sarojini Engels.

‘You’re late,’ said the President of the Group severely. ‘Don’t let it happen again.’

Sarojini apologized and slid into her place between Jim Bokanovsky and Herbert Bakunin. The group was now complete, the solidarity circle perfect and without flaw. Man, woman, man, in a ring of endless alternation round the table. Twelve of them ready to be made one, waiting to come together, to be fused, to lose their twelve separate identities in a larger being.

The President stood up, made the sign of the T and, switching on the synthetic music, let loose the soft indefatigable beating of drums and a choir of instruments — near-wind and super-string — that plangently repeated and repeated the brief and unescapably haunting melody of the first Solidarity Hymn. Again, again — and it was not the ear that heard the pulsing rhythm, it was the midriff; the wail and clang of those recurring harmonies haunted, not the mind, but the yearning bowels of compassion.

The President made another sign of the T and sat down. The service had begun. The dedicated soma tablets were placed in the centre of the dinner table. The loving cup of strawberry ice-cream soma was passed from hand to hand and, with the formula, ‘I drink to my annihilation,’ twelve times quaffed. Then to the accompaniment of the synthetic orchestra the First Solidarity Hymn was sung.

Ford, we are twelve; oh, make us one,
Like drops within the Social River;
Oh, make us now together run
As swiftly as thy shining Flivver.

Twelve yearning stanzas. And then the loving cup was passed a second time. ‘I drink to the Greater Being’ was now the formula. All drank. Tirelessly the music played. The drums beat. The crying and clashing of the harmonies were an obsession in the melted bowels. The Second Solidarity Hymn was sung.

Come, Greater Being, Social Friend,
Annihilating Twelve-in-One!
We long to die, for when we end,
Our larger life has but begun.

Again twelve stanzas. By this time the soma had begun to work. Eyes shone, cheeks were flushed, the inner light of universal benevolence broke out on every face in happy, friendly smiles. Even Bernard felt himself a little melted. When Morgana Rothschild turned and beamed at him, he did his best to beam back. But the eyebrow, that black two-in-one — alas, it was still there; he couldn’t ignore it, couldn’t, however hard he tried. The melting hadn’t gone far enough. Perhaps if he had been sitting between Fifi and Joanna . . . For the third time the loving cup went round. ‘I drink to the imminence of His Coming,’ said Morgana Rothschild, whose turn it happened to be to initiate the circular rite. Her tone was loud, exultant. She drank and passed the cup to Bernard. ‘I drink to the imminence of His Coming,’ he repeated, with a sincere attempt to feel that the coming was imminent; but the eyebrow continued to haunt him, and the Coming, so far as he was concerned, was horribly remote. He drank and handed the cup to

Clara Deterding. ‘It’ll be a failure again,’ he said to himself. ‘I know it will.’ But he went on doing his best to beam.

The loving cup had made its circuit. Lifting his hand, the President gave a signal; the chorus broke out into the third Solidarity Hymn.

Feel how the Greater Being comes!

Rejoice and, in rejoicings, die!

Melt in the music of the drums!

For I am you and you are I.

As verse succeeded verse the voices thrilled with an ever intenser excitement. The sense of the Coming’s imminence was like an electric tension in the air. The President switched off the music and, with the final note of the final stanza, there was absolute silence — the silence of stretched expectancy, quivering and creeping with a galvanic life. The President reached out his hand; and suddenly a Voice, a deep strong Voice, more musical than any merely human voice, richer, warmer, more vibrant with love and yearning and compassion, a wonderful, mysterious, supernatural Voice spoke from above their heads. Very slowly, ‘Oh, Ford, Ford, Ford,’ it said diminishingly and on a descending scale. A sensation of warmth radiated thrillingly out from the solar plexus to every extremity of the bodies of those who listened; tears came into their eyes; their hearts, their bowels seemed to move within them, as though with an independent life. ‘Ford!’ they were melting, ‘Ford!’ dissolved, dissolved. Then, in another tone, suddenly, startlingly. ‘Listen!’ trumpeted the Voice. ‘Listen!’ They listened. After a pause, sunk to a whisper, but a whisper, somehow, more penetrating than the loudest cry. ‘The feet of the Greater Being,’ it went on, and repeated the words: ‘The feet of the Greater Being.’ The whisper almost expired. ‘The feet of the Greater Being are on the stairs.’ And once more there was silence; and the expectancy, momentarily relaxed, was stretched again, tauter, tauter, almost to the tearing point. The feet of the Greater Being — oh, they heard them, they heard them, coming softly down the stairs, coming nearer and nearer down the invisible stairs. The feet of the Greater Being. And suddenly the tearing point was reached. Her eyes staring, her lips parted, Morgana Rothschild sprang to her feet.

‘I hear him,’ she cried. ‘I hear him.’

‘He’s coming,’ shouted Sarojini Engels.

‘Yes, he’s coming, I hear him.’ Fifi Bradlaugh and Tom Kawaguchi rose simultaneously to their feet.

‘Oh, oh, oh!’ Joanna inarticulately testified.

‘He’s coming!’ yelled Jim Bokanovsky.

The President leaned forward and, with a touch, released a delirium of cymbals and blown brass, a fever of tom-tomming.

‘Oh, he’s coming!’ screamed Clara Deterding. ‘Aie!’ and it was as though she were having her throat cut.

Feeling that it was time for him to do something, Bernard also jumped up and shouted: ‘I hear him; he’s coming.’ But it wasn’t true. He heard nothing and, for him, nobody was coming. Nobody — in spite of the music, in spite of the mounting excitement. But he waved his arms, he shouted with the best of them; and when the others began to jig and stamp and shuffle, he also jigged and shuffled.

Round they went, a circular procession of dancers, each with hands on the hips of the dancer preceding, round and round, shouting in unison, stamping to the rhythm of the music with their feet, beating it, beating it out with hands on the buttocks in front; twelve pairs of hands beating as one; as one, twelve buttocks slabbily resounding. Twelve as one, twelve as one. ‘I hear him, I hear him coming.’ The music quickened; faster beat the feet, faster, faster fell the rhythmic hands. And all at once a great synthetic bass boomed out the words which announced the approaching atonement and final consummation of solidarity, the coming of the Twelve-in-One, the incarnation of the Greater Being. ‘Orgy-porgy,’ it sang, while the tom-toms continued to beat their feverish tattoo: Orgy-porgy, Ford and fun,

Kiss the girls and make them One.

Boys at one with girls at peace;

Orgy-porgy gives release.

‘Orgy-porgy,’ the dancers caught up the liturgical refrain, ‘Orgy-porgy, Ford and fun, kiss the girls . . .’ And as they sang, the lights began slowly to fade — to fade and at the same time to grow warmer, richer, redder, until at last they were dancing in the crimson twilight of an Embryo Store. ‘Orgy-Porgy . . .’ In their blood-coloured and fœtal darkness the dancers continued for a while to circulate, to beat and beat out the indefatigable rhythm. ‘Orgy-porgy . . .’ Then the circle wavered, broke, fell in partial disintegration on the ring of couches which surrounded — circle enclosing circle — the table and its planetary chairs. ‘Orgy-porgy . . .’ Tenderly the deep Voice crooned and cooed; in the red twilight it was as though some enormous negro dove were hovering benevolently over the now prone or supine dancers.

They were standing on the roof; Big Henry had just sung eleven. The night was calm and warm.

‘Wasn’t it wonderful?’ said Fifi Bradlaugh. ‘Wasn’t it simply wonderful?’ She looked at Bernard with an expression of rapture, but of rapture in which there was no trace of agitation or excitement — for to be excited is still to be unsatisfied. Hers was the calm ecstasy of achieved consummation, the peace, not of mere vacant satiety and nothingness, but of balanced life, of energies at rest and in equilibrium. A rich and living peace. For the Solidarity Service had given as well as taken, drawn off only to replenish. She was full, she was made perfect, she was still more than merely herself. ‘Didn’t you think it was wonderful?’ she insisted, looking into Bernard’s face with those supernaturally shining eyes.

‘Yes, I thought it was wonderful,’ he lied and looked away; the sight of her transfigured face was at once an accusation and an ironical reminder of his own separateness. He was as miserably isolated now as he had been when the service began — more isolated by reason of his unreplenished emptiness, his dead satiety. Separate and unatoned, while the others were being fused into the Greater Being; alone even in Morgana’s embrace — much more alone, indeed, more hopelessly himself than he had ever been in his life before. He had emerged from that crimson twilight into the common electric glare with a self-

consciousness intensified to the pitch of agony. He was utterly miserable, and perhaps (her shining eyes accused him), perhaps it was his own fault. ‘Quite wonderful,’ he repeated; but the only thing he could think of was Morgana’s eyebrow.

Chapter VI

§ 1

ODD, ODD, ODD, was Lenina's verdict on Bernard Marx. So odd, indeed, that in the course of the succeeding weeks she had wondered more than once whether she shouldn't change her mind about the New Mexico holiday, and go instead to the North Pole with Benito Hoover. The trouble was that she knew the North Pole, had been there with George Edzel only last summer, and what was more, found it pretty grim. Nothing to do, and the hotel too hopelessly old-fashioned — no television laid on in the bedrooms, no scent organ, only the most putrid synthetic music, and not more than twenty-five Escalator-Squash Courts for over two hundred guests. No, decidedly she couldn't face the North Pole again. Added to which, she had only been to America once before. And even then, how inadequately! A cheap week-end in New York — had it been with Jean-Jacques Habibullah or Bokanovsky Jones? She couldn't remember. Anyhow, it was of absolutely no importance. The prospect of flying West again, and for a whole week, was very inviting. Moreover, for at least three days of that week they would be in the Savage Reservation. Not more than half a dozen people in the whole Centre had ever been inside a Savage Reservation. As an Alpha-Plus psychologist, Bernard was one of the few men she knew entitled to a permit. For Lenina, the opportunity was unique. And yet, so unique also was Bernard's oddness, that she had hesitated to take it, had actually thought of risking the Pole again with funny old Benito. At least Benito was normal. Whereas Bernard . . .

'Alcohol in his blood-surrogate,' was Fanny's explanation of every eccentricity. But Henry, with whom, one evening when they were in bed together, Lenina had rather anxiously discussed her new lover, Henry had compared poor Bernard to a rhinoceros.

'You can't teach a rhinoceros tricks,' he had explained in his brief and vigorous style. 'Some men are almost rhinoceroses; they don't respond properly to conditioning. Poor devils! Bernard's one of them. Luckily for him, he's pretty

good at his job. Otherwise the Director would never have kept him. ‘However,’ he added consolingly, ‘I think he’s pretty harmless.’

Pretty harmless, perhaps; but also pretty disquieting. That mania, to start with, for doing things in private. Which meant, in practice, not doing anything at all. For what was there that one could do in private. (Apart, of course, from going to bed: but one couldn’t do that all the time.) Yes, what was there? Precious little. The first afternoon they went out together was particularly fine. Lenina had suggested a swim at the Torquay Country Club followed by dinner at the Oxford Union. But Bernard thought there would be too much of a crowd. Then what about a round of Electro-magnetic Golf at St. Andrews? But again, no: Bernard considered that Electro-magnetic Golf was a waste of time.

‘Then what’s time for?’ asked Lenina in some astonishment.

Apparently, for going walks in the Lake District; for that was what he now proposed. Land on the top of Skiddaw and walk for a couple of hours in the heather. ‘Alone with you, Lenina.’

‘But, Bernard, we shall be alone all night.’

Bernard blushed and looked away. ‘I meant, alone for talking,’ he mumbled.

‘Talking? But what about?’ Walking and talking — that seemed a very odd way of spending an afternoon.

In the end she persuaded him, much against his will, to fly over to Amsterdam to see the Semi-Demi-Finals of the Women’s Heavyweight Wrestling Championship.

‘In a crowd,’ he grumbled. ‘As usual.’ He remained obstinately gloomy the whole afternoon; wouldn’t talk to Lenina’s friends (of whom they met dozens in the ice-cream soma bar between the wrestling bouts); and in spite of his misery absolutely refused to take the half-gramme raspberry sundae which she pressed upon him. ‘I’d rather be myself,’ he said. ‘Myself and nasty. Not somebody else, however jolly.’

‘A gramme in time saves nine,’ said Lenina, producing a bright treasure of sleep-taught wisdom.

Bernard pushed away the proffered glass impatiently.

‘Now don’t lose your temper,’ she said. ‘Remember, one cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy sentiments.’

‘Oh, for Ford’s sake, be quiet!’ he shouted.

Lenina shrugged her shoulders. ‘A gramme is always better than a damn,’ she concluded with dignity, and drank the sundae herself.

On their way back across the Channel, Bernard insisted on stopping his propeller and hovering on his helicopter screws within a hundred feet of the waves. The weather had taken a change for the worse; a south-westerly wind had sprung up, the sky was cloudy.

‘Look,’ he commanded.

‘But it’s horrible,’ said Lenina, shrinking back from the window. She was appalled by the rushing emptiness of the night, by the black foam-flecked water heaving beneath them, by the pale face of the moon, so haggard and distracted among the hastening clouds. ‘Let’s turn on the radio. Quick!’ She reached for the dialling knob on the dash-board and turned it at random.

‘. . . skies are blue inside of you,’ sang sixteen tremoloing falsettos, ‘the weather’s always . . .’

Then a hiccough and silence. Bernard had switched off the current.

‘I want to look at the sea in peace,’ he said. ‘One can’t even look with that beastly noise going on.’

‘But it’s lovely. And I don’t want to look.’

‘But I do,’ he insisted. ‘It makes me feel as though . . .’ he hesitated, searching for words with which to express himself, ‘as though I were more me, if you see what I mean. More on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body. Doesn’t it make you feel like that, Lenina?’

But Lenina was crying. ‘It’s horrible, it’s horrible,’ she kept repeating. ‘And how can you talk like that about not wanting to be a part of the social body? After all, every one works for every one else. We can’t do without any one. Even Epsilons . . .’

‘Yes, I know,’ said Bernard derisively. ‘ ”Even Epsilons are useful”! So am I. And I damned well wish I weren’t!’

Lenina was shocked by his blasphemy. ‘Bernard!’ she protested in a voice of amazed distress. ‘How can you?’

In a different key, ‘How can I?’ he repeated meditatively. ‘No, the real problem is: How is it that I can’t, or rather — because, after all, I know quite well why I can’t — what would it be like if I could, if I were free — not enslaved by my conditioning.’

‘But, Bernard, you’re saying the most awful things.’

‘Don’t you wish you were free, Lenina?’

‘I don’t know what you mean. I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time. Everybody’s happy nowadays.’

He laughed, ‘Yes, “Everybody’s happy nowadays.” We begin giving the children that at five. But wouldn’t you like to be free to be happy in some other way, Lenina? In your own way, for example; not in everybody else’s way.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ she repeated. Then, turning to him, ‘Oh, do let’s go back, Bernard,’ she besought; ‘I do so hate it here.’

‘Don’t you like being with me?’

‘But of course, Bernard! It’s this horrible place.’

‘I thought we’d be more . . . more together here — with nothing but the sea and moon. More together than in that crowd, or even in my rooms. Don’t you understand that?’

‘I don’t understand anything,’ she said with decision, determined to preserve her incomprehension intact. ‘Nothing. Least of all,’ she continued in another tone, ‘why you don’t take soma when you have these dreadful ideas of yours. You’d forget all about them. And instead of feeling miserable, you’d be jolly. So jolly,’ she repeated and smiled, for all the puzzled anxiety in her eyes, with what was meant to be an inviting and voluptuous cajolery.

He looked at her in silence, his face unresponsive and very grave — looked at her intently. After a few seconds Lenina’s eyes flinched away; she uttered a

nervous little laugh, tried to think of something to say and couldn't. The silence prolonged itself.

When Bernard spoke at last, it was in a small tired voice. 'All right then,' he said, 'we'll go back.' And stepping hard on the accelerator, he sent the machine rocketing up into the sky. At four thousand he started his propeller. They flew in silence for a minute or two. Then, suddenly, Bernard began to laugh. Rather oddly, Lenina thought; but still, it was laughter.

'Feeling better?' she ventured to ask.

For answer, he lifted one hand from the controls and, slipping his arm round her, began to fondle her breasts.

'Thank Ford,' she said to herself, 'he's all right again.'

Half an hour later they were back in his rooms. Bernard swallowed four tablets of soma at a gulp, turned on the radio and television and began to undress.

'Well,' Lenina enquired, with significant archness when they met next afternoon on the roof, 'did you think it was fun yesterday?'

Bernard nodded. They climbed into the plane. A little jolt, and they were off.

'Every one says I'm awfully pneumatic,' said Lenina reflectively, patting her own legs.

'Awfully.' But there was an expression of pain in Bernard's eyes. 'Like meat,' he was thinking.

She looked up with a certain anxiety. 'But you don't think I'm too plump, do you?'

He shook his head. Like so much meat.

'You think I'm all right.' Another nod. 'In every way?'

'Perfect,' he said aloud. And inwardly, 'She thinks of herself that way. She doesn't mind being meat.'

Lenina smiled triumphantly. But her satisfaction was premature.

'All the same,' he went on, after a little pause, 'I still rather wish it had all ended differently.'

'Differently?' Were there other endings?

‘I didn’t want it to end with our going to bed,’ he specified.

Lenina was astonished.

‘Not at once, not the first day.’

‘But then what . . .?’

He began to talk a lot of incomprehensible and dangerous nonsense. Lenina did her best to stop the ears of her mind; but every now and then a phrase would insist on becoming audible. ‘. . . to try the effect of arresting my impulses,’ she heard him say. The words seemed to touch a spring in her mind.

‘Never put off till to-morrow the fun you can have to-day,’ she said gravely.

‘Two hundred repetitions, twice a week from fourteen to sixteen and a half,’ was all his comment. The mad bad talk rambled on. ‘I want to know what passion is,’ she heard him saying. ‘I want to feel something strongly.’

‘When the individual feels, the community reels,’ Lenina pronounced.

‘Well, why shouldn’t it reel a bit?’

‘Bernard!’

But Bernard remained unabashed.

‘Adults intellectually and during working hours,’ he went on. ‘Infants where feeling and desire are concerned.’

‘Our Ford loved infants.’

Ignoring the interruption, ‘It suddenly struck me the other day,’ continued Bernard, ‘that it might be possible to be an adult all the time.’

‘I don’t understand.’ Lenina’s tone was firm.

‘I know you don’t. And that’s why we went to bed together yesterday — like infants — instead of being adults and waiting.’

‘But it was fun,’ Lenina insisted. ‘Wasn’t it?’

‘Oh, the greatest fun,’ he answered, but in a voice so mournful, with an expression so profoundly miserable, that Lenina felt all her triumph suddenly evaporate. Perhaps he had found her too plump, after all.

‘I told you so,’ was all that Fanny said, when Lenina came and made her confidences. ‘It’s the alcohol they put in his surrogate.’

‘All the same,’ Lenina insisted. ‘I do like him. He has such awfully nice hands. And the way he moves his shoulders — that’s very attractive.’ She sighed. ‘But I wish he weren’t so odd.’

§ 2

HALTING FOR A moment outside the door of the Director's room, Bernard drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders, bracing himself to meet the dislike and disapproval which he was certain of finding within. He knocked and entered.

'A permit for you to initial, Director,' he said as airily as possible, and laid the paper on the writing-table.

The Director glanced at him sourly. But the stamp of the World Controller's Office was at the head of the paper and the signature of Mustapha Mond, bold and black, across the bottom. Everything was perfectly in order. The Director had no choice. He pencilled his initials — two small pale letters abject at the feet of Mustapha Mond−−and was about to return the paper without a word of comment or genial Ford-speed, when his eye was caught by something written in the body of the permit.

'For the New Mexican Reservation?' he said, and his tone, the face he lifted to Bernard, expressed a kind of agitated astonishment.

Surprised by his surprise, Bernard nodded. There was a silence.

The Director leaned back in his chair, frowning. 'How long ago was it?' he said, speaking more to himself than to Bernard. 'Twenty years, I suppose. Nearer twenty-five. I must have been your age . . .' He sighed and shook his head.

Bernard felt extremely uncomfortable. A man so conventional, so scrupulously correct as the Director — and to commit so gross a solecism! It made him want to hide his face, to run out of the room. Not that he himself saw anything intrinsically objectionable in people talking about the remote past; that was one of those hypnopædic prejudices he had (so he imagined) completely got rid of. What made him feel shy was the knowledge that the Director disapproved — disapproved and yet had been betrayed into doing the forbidden thing. Under what inward compulsion? Through his discomfort Bernard eagerly listened.

‘I had the same idea as you,’ the Director was saying. ‘Wanted to have a look at the savages. Got a permit for New Mexico and went there for my summer holiday. With the girl I was having at the moment. She was a Beta-Minus, and I think’ (he shut his eyes). ‘I think she had yellow hair. Anyhow, she was pneumatic, particularly pneumatic; I remember that. Well, we went there, and we looked at the savages, and we rode about on horses and all that. And then — it was almost the last day of my leave — then . . . well, she got lost. We’d gone riding up one of those revolting mountains, and it was horribly hot and oppressive, and after lunch we went to sleep. Or at least I did. She must have gone for a walk, alone. At any rate, when I woke up, she wasn’t there. And the most frightful thunderstorm I’ve ever seen was just bursting on us. And it poured and roared and flashed; and the horses broke loose and ran away; and I fell down, trying to catch them, and hurt my knee, so that I could hardly walk. Still, I searched and I shouted and I searched. But there was no sign of her. Then I thought she must have gone back to the rest-house by herself. So I crawled down into the valley by the way we had come. My knee was agonizingly painful, and I’d lost my soma. It took me hours. I didn’t get back to the rest-house till after midnight. And she wasn’t there; she wasn’t there,’ the Director repeated. There was a silence. ‘Well,’ he resumed at last, ‘the next day there was a search. But we couldn’t find her. She must have fallen into a gulley somewhere; or been eaten by a mountain lion. Ford knows. Anyhow it was horrible. It upset me very much at the time. More than it ought to have done, I dare say. Because, after all, it’s the sort of accident that might have happened to any one; and, of course, the social body persists although the component cells may change.’ But this sleep-taught consolation did not seem to be very effective. Shaking his head, ‘I actually dream about it sometimes,’ the Director went on in a low voice. ‘Dream of being woken up by that peal of thunder and finding her gone; dream of searching and searching for her under the trees.’ He lapsed into the silence of reminiscence.

‘You must have had a terrible shock,’ said Bernard, almost enviously.

At the sound of his voice the Director started into a guilty realization of where he was; shot a glance at Bernard, and averting his eyes, blushed darkly; looked at him again with sudden suspicion and, angrily on his dignity, ‘Don’t imagine,’ he said, ‘that I’d had any indecorous relation with the girl. Nothing emotional, nothing long-drawn. It was all perfectly healthy and normal.’ He handed Bernard the permit. ‘I really don’t know why I bored you with this trivial anecdote.’ Furious with himself for having given away a discreditable secret, he vented his rage on Bernard. The look in his eyes was now frankly malignant. ‘And I should like to take this opportunity, Mr. Marx,’ he went on, ‘of saying that I’m not at all pleased with the reports I receive of your behaviour outside working hours. You may say that this is not my business. But it is. I have the good name of the Centre to think of. My workers must be above suspicion, particularly those of the highest castes. Alphas are so conditioned that they do not have to be infantile in their emotional behaviour. But that is all the more reason for their making a special effort to conform. It is their duty to be infantile, even against their inclination. And so, Mr. Marx, I give you fair warning.’ The Director’s voice vibrated with an indignation that had now become wholly righteous and impersonal — was the expression of the disapproval of Society itself. ‘If ever I hear again of any lapse from a proper standard of infantile decorum, I shall ask for your transference to a Sub-Centre — preferably to Iceland. Good morning.’ And swivelling round in his chair, he picked up his pen and began to write.

‘That’ll teach him,’ he said to himself. But he was mistaken. For Bernard left the room with a swagger, exulting, as he banged the door behind him, in the thought that he stood alone, embattled against the order of things; elated by the intoxicating consciousness of his individual significance and importance. Even the thought of persecution left him undismayed, was rather tonic than depressing. He felt strong enough to meet and overcome affliction, strong enough to face even Iceland. And this confidence was the greater for his not for a moment really believing that he would be called upon to face anything at all. People simply weren’t transferred for things like that. Iceland was just a threat.

A most stimulating and life-giving threat. Walking along the corridor, he actually whistled.

Heroic was the account he gave that evening of his interview with the D.H.C. ‘Whereupon,’ it concluded, ‘I simply told him to go to the Bottomless Past and marched out of the room. And that was that.’ He looked at Helmholtz Watson expectantly, awaiting his due reward of sympathy, encouragement, admiration. But no word came. Helmholtz sat silent, staring at the floor.

He liked Bernard; he was grateful to him for being the only man of his acquaintance with whom he could talk about the subjects he felt to be important. Nevertheless, there were things in Bernard which he hated. This boasting, for example. And the outbursts of an abject self-pity with which it alternated. And his deplorable habit of being bold after the event, and full, in absence, of the most extraordinary presence of mind. He hated these things — just because he liked Bernard. The seconds passed. Helmholtz continued to stare at the floor. And suddenly Bernard blushed and turned away.

§ 3

THE JOURNEY WAS quite uneventful. The Blue Pacific Rocket was two and a half minutes early at New Orleans, lost four minutes in a tornado over Texas, but flew into a favourable air current at Longitude 95 West, and was able to land at Santa Fé less than forty seconds behind schedule time.

‘Forty seconds on a six and a half hour flight. Not so bad,’ Lenina conceded.

They slept that night at Santa Fé. The hotel was excellent — incomparably better, for example, than that horrible Aurora Bora Palace in which Lenina had suffered so much the previous summer. Liquid air, television, vibro-vacuum massage, radio, boiling caffeine solution, hot contraceptives, and eight different kinds of scent were laid on in every bedroom. The synthetic music plant was working as they entered the hall and left nothing to be desired. A notice in the lift announced that there were sixty Escalator-Squash-Racquet Courts in the hotel, and that Obstacle and Electro-magnetic Golf could both be played in the park.

‘But it sounds simply too lovely,’ cried Lenina. I almost wish we could stay here. Sixty Escalator-Squash Courts . . .’

‘There won’t be any in the Reservation,’ Bernard warned her. ‘And no scent, no television, no hot water, even. If you feel you can’t stand it, stay here till I come back.’

Lenina was quite offended. ‘Of course I can stand it. I only said it was lovely here because . . . well, because progress is lovely, isn’t it?’

‘Five hundred repetitions once a week from thirteen to seventeen,’ said Bernard wearily, as though to himself.

‘What did you say?’

‘I said that progress was lovely. That’s why you mustn’t come to the Reservation unless you really want to.’

‘But I do want to.’

‘Very well, then,’ said Bernard; and it was almost a threat.

Their permit required the signature of the Warden of the Reservation, at whose office next morning they duly presented themselves. An Epsilon-Plus negro porter took in Bernard’s card, and they were admitted almost immediately.

The Warden was a blond and brachycephalic Alpha-Minus, short, red, moon-faced, and broad-shouldered, with a loud booming voice, very well adapted to the utterance of hypnopædic wisdom. He was a mine of irrelevant information and unasked-for good advice. Once started, he went on and on — boomingly.

‘. . . five hundred and sixty thousand square kilometres, divided into four distinct Sub-Reservations, each surrounded by a high-tension wire fence.’

At this moment, and for no apparent reason, Bernard suddenly remembered that he had left the eau-de-Cologne tap in his bathroom wide open and running.

‘. . . supplied with current from the Grand Canyon hydro-electric station.’

‘Cost me a fortune by the time I get back.’ With his mind’s eye, Bernard saw the needle on the scent meter creeping round and round, ant-like, indefatigably. ‘Quickly telephone to Helmholtz Watson.’

‘. . . upwards of five thousand kilometres of fencing at sixty thousand volts.’

‘You don’t say so,’ said Lenina politely, not knowing in the least what the Warden had said, but taking her cue from his dramatic pause. When the Warden started booming, she had inconspicuously swallowed half a gramme of soma, with the result that she could now sit, serenely not listening, thinking of nothing at all, but with her large blue eyes fixed on the Warden’s face in an expression of rapt attention.

‘To touch the fence is instant death,’ pronounced the Warden solemnly. ‘There is no escape from a Savage Reservation.’

The word ‘escape’ was suggestive. ‘Perhaps,’ said Bernard, half rising, ‘we ought to think of going.’ The little black needle was scurrying, an insect, nibbling through time, eating into his money.

‘No escape,’ repeated the Warden, waving him back into his chair; and as the permit was not yet countersigned, Bernard had no choice but to obey. ‘Those

who are born in the Reservation — and remember, my dear young lady,' he added, leering obscenely at Lenina, and speaking in an improper whisper, 'remember that, in the Reservation, children still are born, yes, actually born, revolting as that may seem . . .' (He hoped that this reference to a shameful subject would make Lenina blush; but she only smiled with simulated intelligence and said, 'You don't say so!' Disappointed, the Warden began again.) 'Those, I repeat, who are born in the Reservation are destined to die there.'

Destined to die . . . A decilitre of eau-de-Cologne every minute. Six litres an hour. 'Perhaps,' Bernard tried again, 'we ought . . .'

Leaning forward, the Director tapped the table with his forefinger. 'You ask me how many people live in the Reservation. And I reply' — triumphantly— 'I reply that we do not know. We can only guess.'

'You don't say so.'

'My dear young lady, I do say so.'

Six times twenty-four — no, it would be nearer six times thirty-six. Bernard was pale and trembling with impatience. But inexorably the booming continued.

'. . . about sixty thousand Indians and half-breeds . . . absolute savages . . . our inspectors occasionally visit . . . otherwise, no communication whatever with the civilized world . . . still preserve their repulsive habits and customs . . . marriage, if you know what that is, my dear young lady; families . . . no conditioning . . . monstrous superstitions . . . Christianity and totemism and ancestor worship . . . extinct languages, such as Zuñi and Spanish and Athapascan . . . pumas, porcupines and other ferocious animals . . . infectious diseases . . . priests . . . venomous lizards . . .'

'You don't say so?'

They got away at last. Bernard dashed to the telephone. Quick, quick; but it took him nearly three minutes to get on to Helmholtz Watson. 'We might be among the savages already,' he complained. 'Damned incompetence!'

'Have a gramme,' suggested Lenina.

He refused, preferring his anger. And at last, thank Ford, he was through and, yes, it was Helmholtz; Helmholtz, to whom he explained what had happened, and who promised to go round at once, at once, and turn off the tap, yes, at once, but took this opportunity to tell him what the D.H.C. had said, in public, yesterday evening . . .

‘What? He’s looking out for some one to take my place?’ Bernard’s voice was agonized. ‘So it’s actually decided? Did he mention Iceland? You say he did? Ford! Iceland . . .’ He hung up the receiver and turned back to Lenina. His face was pale, his expression utterly dejected.

‘What’s the matter?’ she asked.

‘The matter?’ He dropped heavily into a chair. ‘I’m going to be sent to Iceland.’

Often in the past he had wondered what it would be like to be subjected (soma-less and with nothing but his own inward resources to rely on) to some great trial, some pain, some persecution; he had even longed for affliction. As recently as a week ago, in the Director’s office, he had imagined himself courageously resisting, stoically accepting suffering without a word. The Director’s threats had actually elated him, made him feel larger than life. But that, as he now realized, was because he had not taken the threats quite seriously; he had not believed that, when it came to the point, the D.H.C. would ever do anything. Now that it looked as though the threats were really to be fulfilled, Bernard was appalled. Of that imagined stoicism, that theoretical courage, not a trace was left.

He raged against himself — what a fool! — against the Director — how unfair not to give him that other chance, that other chance which, he now had no doubt at all, he had always intended to take. And Iceland, Iceland . . .

Lenina shook her head. ‘Was and will make me ill,’ she quoted, ‘I take a gramme and only am.’

In the end she persuaded him to swallow four tablets of soma. Five minutes later roots and fruits were abolished; the flower of the present rosily blossomed. A message from the porter announced that, at the Warden’s orders, a

Reservation Guard had come round with a plane and was waiting on the roof of the hotel. They went up at once. An octoroon in Gamma-green uniform saluted and proceeded to recite the morning's programme.

A bird's-eye view of ten or a dozen of the principal pueblos, then a landing for lunch in the valley of Malpais. The rest-house was comfortable there, and up at the pueblo the savages would probably be celebrating their summer festival. It would be the best place to spend the night.

They took their seats in the plane and set off. Ten minutes later they were crossing the frontier that separated civilization from savagery. Uphill and down, across the deserts of salt or sand, through forests, into the violet depth of canyons, over crag and peak and table-topped mesa, the fence marched on and on, irresistibly the straight line, the geometrical symbol of triumphant human purpose. And at its foot, here and there, a mosaic of white bones, a still unrotted carcase dark on the tawny ground marked the place where deer or steer, puma or porcupine or coyote, or the greedy turkey buzzards drawn down by the whiff of carrion and fulminated as though by a poetic justice, had come too close to the destroying wires.

'They never learn,' said the green-uniformed pilot, pointing down at the skeletons on the ground below them. 'And they never will learn,' he added and laughed, as though he had somehow scored a personal triumph over the electrocuted animals.

Bernard also laughed; after two grammes of soma the joke seemed, for some reason, good. Laughed and then, almost immediately, dropped off to sleep and, sleeping, was carried over Taos and Tesuque; over Nambe and Picuris and Pojoaque, over Sia and Cochiti, over Laguna and Acoma and the Enchanted Mesa, over Zuñi and Cibola and Ojo Caliente, and woke at last to find the machine standing on the ground, Lenina carrying the suit-cases into a small square house, and the Gamma-green octoroon talking incomprehensibly with a young Indian.

'Malpais,' explained the pilot, as Bernard stepped out. 'This is the rest-house. And there's a dance this afternoon at the pueblo. He'll take you there.' He

pointed to the sullen young savage. ‘Funny, I expect.’ He grinned. ‘Everything they do is funny.’ And with that he climbed into the plane and started up the engines. ‘Back to-morrow. And remember,’ he added reassuringly to Lenina, ‘they’re perfectly tame; savages won’t do you any harm. They’ve got enough experience of gas bombs to know that they mustn’t play any tricks.’ Still laughing, he threw the helicopter screws into gear, accelerated, and was gone.

Chapter VII

THE MESA WAS like a ship becalmed in a strait of lion-coloured dust. The channel wound between precipitous banks, and slanting from one wall to the other across the valley ran a streak of green — the river and its fields. On the prow of that stone ship in the centre of the strait, and seemingly a part of it, a shaped and geometrical outcrop of the naked rock, stood the pueblo of Malpais. Block above block, each story smaller than the one below, the tall houses rose like stepped and amputated pyramids into the blue sky. At their feet lay a straggle of low buildings, a criss-cross of walls; and on three sides the precipices fell sheer into the plain. A few columns of smoke mounted perpendicularly into the windless air and were lost.

‘Queer,’ said Lenina. ‘Very queer.’ It was her ordinary word of condemnation. ‘I don’t like it. And I don’t like that man.’ She pointed to the Indian guide who had been appointed to take them up to the pueblo. Her feeling was evidently reciprocated; the very back of the man, as he walked along before them, was hostile, sullenly contemptuous.

‘Besides,’ she lowered her voice, ‘he smells.’

Bernard did not attempt to deny it. They walked on.

Suddenly it was as though the whole air had come alive and were pulsing, pulsing with the indefatigable movement of blood. Up there, in Malpais, the drums were being beaten. Their feet fell in with the rhythm of that mysterious heart; they quickened their pace. Their path led them to the foot of the precipice. The sides of the great mesa ship towered over them, three hundred feet to the gunwale.

‘I wish we could have brought the plane,’ said Lenina, looking up resentfully at the blank impending rock-face. ‘I hate walking. And you feel so small when you’re on the ground at the bottom of a hill.’

They walked along for some way in the shadow of the mesa, rounded a projection, and there, in a water-worn ravine, was the way up the companion ladder. They climbed. It was a very steep path that zigzagged from side to side of the gulley. Sometimes the pulsing of the drums was all but inaudible, at others they seemed to be beating only just round the corner.

When they were half-way up, an eagle flew past so close to them that the wind of his wings blew chill on their faces. In a crevice of the rock lay a pile of bones. It was all oppressively queer, and the Indian smelt stronger and stronger. They emerged at last from the ravine into the full sunlight. The top of the mesa was a flat deck of stone.

‘Like the Charing-T Tower,’ was Lenina’s comment. But she was not allowed to enjoy her discovery of this reassuring resemblance for long. A padding of soft feet made them turn round. Naked from throat to navel, their dark-brown bodies painted with white lines (‘like asphalt tennis courts,’ Lenina was later to explain), their faces inhuman with daubings of scarlet, black and ochre, two Indians came running along the path. Their black hair was braided with fox fur and red flannel. Cloaks of turkey feathers fluttered from their shoulders; huge feather diadems exploded gaudily round their heads. With every step they took came the clink and rattle of their silver bracelets, their heavy necklaces of bone and turquoise beads. They came on without a word, running quietly in their deerskin moccasins. One of them was holding a feather brush; the other carried, in either hand, what looked at a distance like three or four pieces of thick rope. One of the ropes writhed uneasily, and suddenly Lenina saw that they were snakes.

The men came nearer and nearer; their dark eyes looked at her, but without giving any sign of recognition, any smallest sign that they had seen her or were aware of her existence. The writhing snake hung limp again with the rest. The men passed.

‘I don’t like it,’ said Lenina. ‘I don’t like it.’

She liked even less what awaited her at the entrance to the pueblo, where their guide had left them while he went inside for instructions. The dirt, to start with,

the piles of rubbish, the dust, the dogs, the flies. Her face wrinkled up into a grimace of disgust. She held her handkerchief to her nose.

‘But how can they live like this?’ she broke out in a voice of indignant incredulity. (It wasn’t possible.)

Bernard shrugged his shoulders philosophically. ‘Anyhow,’ he said, ‘they’ve been doing it for the last five or six thousand years. So I suppose they must be used to it by now.’

‘But cleanliness is next to fordliness,’ she insisted.

‘Yes, and civilization is sterilization,’ Bernard went on, concluding on a tone of irony the second hypnopædic lesson in elementary hygiene. ‘But these people have never heard of Our Ford, and they aren’t civilized. So there’s no point in . . .’

‘Oh!’ She gripped his arm. ‘Look.’

An almost naked Indian was very slowly climbing down the ladder from the first-floor terrace of a neighbouring house — rung after rung, with the tremulous caution of extreme old age. His face was profoundly wrinkled and black, like a mask of obsidian. The toothless mouth had fallen in. At the corners of the lips, and on each side of the chin a few long bristles gleamed almost white against the dark skin. The long unbraided hair hung down in grey wisps round his face. His body was bent and emaciated to the bone, almost fleshless. Very slowly he came down, pausing at each rung before he ventured another step.

‘What’s the matter with him?’ whispered Lenina. Her eyes were wide with horror and amazement.

‘He’s old, that’s all,’ Bernard answered as carelessly as he could. He too was startled; but he made an effort to seem unmoved.

‘Old?’ she repeated. ‘But the Director’s old; lots of people are old; they’re not like that.’

‘That’s because we don’t allow them to be like that. We preserve them from diseases. We keep their internal secretions artificially balanced at a youthful equilibrium. We don’t permit their magnesium-calcium ratio to fall below what it was at thirty. We give them transfusions of young blood. We keep their

metabolism permanently stimulated. So, of course, they don't look like that. Partly,' he added, 'because most of them die long before they reach this old creature's age. Youth almost unimpaired till sixty, and then, crack! the end.'

But Lenina was not listening. She was watching the old man. Slowly, slowly he came down. His feet touched the ground. He turned. In their deep-sunken orbits his eyes were still extraordinarily bright. They looked at her for a long moment expressionlessly, without surprise, as though she had not been there at all. Then slowly, with bent back, the old man hobbled past them and was gone.

'But it's terrible,' Lenina whispered. 'It's awful. We ought not to have come here.' She felt in her pocket for her soma — only to discover that, by some unprecedented oversight, she had left the bottle down at the rest-house. Bernard's pockets were also empty.

Lenina was left to face the horrors of Malpais unaided. They came crowding in on her thick and fast. The spectacle of two young women giving the breast to their babies made her blush and turn away her face. She had never seen anything so indecent in her life. And what made it worse was that, instead of tactfully ignoring it, Bernard proceeded to make open comments on this revoltingly viviparous scene. Ashamed, now that the effects of the soma had worn off, of the weakness he had displayed that morning in the hotel, he went out of his way to show himself strong and unorthodox.

'What a wonderfully intimate relationship,' he said, deliberately outrageous. 'And what an intensity of feeling it must generate! I often think one may have missed something in not having had a mother. And perhaps you've missed something in not being a mother, Lenina. Imagine yourself sitting there with a little baby of your own. . . .'

'Bernard! How can you?' The passage of an old woman with ophthalmia and a disease of the skin distracted her from her indignation.

'Let's go away,' she begged. 'I don't like it.'

But at this moment their guide came back and, beckoning to them to follow, led the way down the narrow street between the houses. They rounded a corner. A dead dog was lying on a rubbish heap; a woman with a goitre was looking for

lice in the hair of a small girl. Their guide halted at the foot of a ladder, raised his hand perpendicularly, then darted it horizontally forward. They did what he mutely commanded — climbed the ladder and walked through the doorway, to which it gave access, into a long narrow room, rather dark and smelling of smoke and cooked grease and long-worn, long-unwashed clothes. At the further end of the room was another doorway, through which came a shaft of sunlight and the noise, very loud and close, of the drums.

They stepped across the threshold and found themselves on a wide terrace. Below them, shut in by the tall houses, was the village square, crowded with Indians. Bright blankets, and feathers in black hair, and the glint of turquoise, and dark skins shining with heat. Lenina put her handkerchief to her nose again. In the open space at the centre of the square were two circular platforms of masonry and trampled clay — the roofs, it was evident, of underground chambers; for in the centre of each platform was an open hatchway, with a ladder emerging from the lower darkness. A sound of subterranean flute-playing came up and was almost lost in the steady remorseless persistence of the drums.

Lenina liked the drums. Shutting her eyes she abandoned herself to their soft repeated thunder, allowed it to invade her consciousness more and more completely, till at last there was nothing left in the world but that one deep pulse of sound. It reminded her reassuringly of the synthetic noises made at Solidarity Services and Ford's Day celebrations. 'Orgy-porgy,' she whispered to herself. These drums beat out just the same rhythms.

There was a sudden startling burst of singing — hundreds of male voices crying out fiercely in harsh metallic unison. A few long notes and silence, the thunderous silence of the drums; then shrill, in a neighing treble, the women's answer. Then again the drums; and once more the men's deep savage affirmation of their manhood.

Queer — yes. The place was queer, so was the music, so were the clothes and the goitres and the skin diseases and the old people. But the performance itself — there seemed to be nothing specially queer about that.

'It reminds me of a lower-caste Community Sing,' she told Bernard.

But a little later it was reminding her a good deal less of that innocuous function. For suddenly there had swarmed up from those round chambers underground a ghastly troop of monsters. Hideously masked or painted out of all semblance of humanity, they had tramped out a strange limping dance round the square; round and again round, singing as they went, round and round — each time a little faster; and the drums had changed and quickened their rhythm, so that it became like the pulsing of fever in the ears; and the crowd had begun to sing with the dancers, louder and louder; and first one woman had shrieked, and then another and another, as though they were being killed; and then suddenly the leader of the dancers broke out of the line, ran to a big wooden chest which was standing at one end of the square, raised the lid and pulled out a pair of black snakes. A great yell went up from the crowd, and all the other dancers ran towards him with outstretched hands. He tossed the snakes to the first-comers, then dipped back into the chest for more. More and more, black snakes and brown and mottled — he flung them out. And then the dance began again on a different rhythm. Round and round they went with their snakes, snakily, with a soft undulating movement at the knees and hips. Round and round. Then the leader gave a signal, and one after another, all the snakes were flung down in the middle of the square; an old man came up from underground and sprinkled them with corn meal, and from the other hatchway came a woman and sprinkled them with water from a black jar. Then the old man lifted his hand and, startlingly, terrifyingly, there was absolute silence. The drums stopped beating, life seemed to have come to an end. The old man pointed towards the two hatchways that gave entrance to the lower world. And slowly, raised by invisible hands from below, there emerged from the one a painted image of an eagle, from the other that of a man, naked, and nailed to a cross. They hung there, seemingly self-sustained, as though watching. The old man clapped his hands. Naked but for a white cotton breech-cloth, a boy of about eighteen stepped out of the crowd and stood before him, his hands crossed over his chest, his head bowed. The old man made the sign of the cross over him and turned away. Slowly, the boy began to walk round the writhing heap of snakes. He had completed the first circuit and

was half-way through the second when, from among the dancers, a tall man wearing the mask of a coyote and holding in his hand a whip of plaited leather, advanced towards him. The boy moved on as though unaware of the other's existence. The coyote-man raised his whip; there was a long moment of expectancy, then a swift movement, the whistle of the lash and its loud flat-sounding impact on the flesh. The boy's body quivered; but he made no sound, he walked on at the same slow, steady pace. The coyote struck again, again; and at every blow at first a gasp and then a deep groan went up from the crowd. The boy walked on. Twice, thrice, four times round he went. The blood was streaming. Five times round, six times round. Suddenly Lenina covered her face with her hands and began to sob. 'Oh, stop them, stop them!' she implored. But the whip fell and fell inexorably. Seven times round. Then all at once the boy staggered and, still without a sound, pitched forward on to his face. Bending over him, the old man touched his back with a long white feather, held it up for a moment, crimson, for the people to see, then shook it thrice over the snakes. A few drops fell, and suddenly the drums broke out again into a panic of hurrying notes; there was a great shout. The dancers rushed forward, picked up the snakes and ran out of the square. Men, women, children, all the crowd ran after them. A minute later the square was empty, only the boy remained, prone where he had fallen, quite still. Three old women came out of one of the houses, and with some difficulty lifted him and carried him in. The eagle and the man on the cross kept guard for a little while over the empty pueblo; then, as though they had seen enough, sank slowly down through their hatchways, out of sight, into the nether world.

Lenina was still sobbing. 'Too awful,' she kept repeating, and all Bernard's consolations were in vain. 'Too awful! That blood!' She shuddered. 'Oh, I wish I had my soma.'

There was the sound of feet in the inner room.

Lenina did not move, but sat with her face in her hands, unseeing, apart. Only Bernard turned round.

The dress of the young man who now stepped out on to the terrace was Indian; but his plaited hair was straw-coloured, his eyes a pale blue, and his skin a white skin, bronzed.

‘Hullo. Good-morrow,’ said the stranger, in faultless but peculiar English. ‘You’re civilized, aren’t you? You come from the Other Place, outside the Reservation?’

‘Who on earth . . .?’ Bernard began in astonishment.

The young man sighed and shook his head. ‘A most unhappy gentleman.’ And, pointing to the bloodstains in the centre of the square, ‘Do you see that damned spot?’ he asked in a voice that trembled with emotion.

‘A gramme is better than a damn,’ said Lenina mechanically from behind her hands. ‘I wish I had my soma!’

‘I ought to have been there.’ The young man went on. ‘Why wouldn’t they let me be the sacrifice? I’d have gone round ten times — twelve, fifteen. Palowhtiwa only got as far as seven. They could have had twice as much blood from me. The multitudinous seas incarnadine.’ He flung out his arms in a lavish gesture; then, despairingly, let them fall again. ‘But they wouldn’t let me. They disliked me for my complexion. It’s always been like that. Always.’ Tears stood in the young man’s eyes; he was ashamed and turned away.

Astonishment made Lenina forget the deprivation of soma. She uncovered her face and, for the first time, looked at the stranger. ‘Do you mean to say that you wanted to be hit with that whip?’

Still averted from her, the young man made a sign of affirmation. ‘For the sake of the pueblo — to make the rain come and the corn grow. And to please Pookong and Jesus. And then to show that I can bear pain without crying out. Yes,’ and his voice suddenly took on a new resonance, he turned with a proud squaring of the shoulders, a proud, defiant lifting of the chin, ‘to show that I’m a man . . . Oh!’ He gave a gasp and was silent, gaping. He had seen, for the first time in his life, the face of a girl whose cheeks were not the colour of chocolate or dogskin, whose hair was auburn and permanently waved, and whose expression (amazing novelty!) was one of benevolent interest. Lenina was

smiling at him; such a nice-looking boy, she was thinking, and a really beautiful body. The blood rushed up into the young man's face; he dropped his eyes, raised them again for a moment only to find her still smiling at him, and was so much overcome that he had to turn away and pretend to be looking very hard at something on the other side of the square.

Bernard's questions made a diversion. Who? How? When? From where? Keeping his eyes fixed on Bernard's face (for so passionately did he long to see Lenina smiling that he simply dared not look at her), the young man tried to explain himself. Linda and he — Linda was his mother (the word made Lenina look uncomfortable) — were strangers in the Reservation. Linda had come from the Other Place long ago, before he was born, with a man who was his father. (Bernard pricked up his ears.) She had gone walking alone in those mountains over there to the North, had fallen down a steep place and hurt her head. ('Go on, go on,' said Bernard excitedly.) Some hunters from Malpais had found her and brought her to the pueblo. As for the man who was his father, Linda had never seen him again. His name was Tomakin. (Yes, 'Thomas' was the D.H.C.'s first name.) He must have flown away, back to the Other Place, away without her — a bad, unkind, unnatural man.

'And so I was born in Malpais,' he concluded. 'In Malpais.' And he shook his head.

The squalor of that little house on the outskirts of the pueblo!

A space of dust and rubbish separated it from the village. Two famine-stricken dogs were nosing obscenely in the garbage at its door. Inside, when they entered, the twilight stank and was loud with flies.

'Linda!' the young man called.

From the inner room a rather hoarse female voice said, 'Coming.'

They waited. In bowls on the floor were the remains of a meal, perhaps of several meals.

The door opened. A very stout blonde squaw stepped across the threshold and stood looking at the strangers, staring incredulously, her mouth open. Lenina

noticed with disgust that two of the front teeth were missing. And the colour of the ones that remained . . . She shuddered. It was worse than the old man. So fat. And all the lines in her face, the flabbiness, the wrinkles. And the sagging cheeks, with those purplish blotches. And the red veins on her nose, the bloodshot eyes. And that neck — that neck; and the blanket she wore over her head — ragged and filthy. And under the brown sack-shaped tunic those enormous breasts, the bulge of the stomach, the hips. Oh, much worse than the old man, much worse! And suddenly the creature burst out in a torrent of speech, rushed at her with outstretched arms and — Ford! Ford! it was too revolting, in another moment she'd be sick — pressed her against the bulge, the bosom, and began to kiss her. Ford! to kiss, slobberingly, and smelt too horrible, obviously never had a bath, and simply reeked of that beastly stuff that was put into Delta and Epsilon bottles (no, it wasn't true about Bernard), positively stank of alcohol. She broke away as quickly as she could.

A blubbered and distorted face confronted her; the creature was crying.

'Oh, my dear, my dear.' The torrent of words flowed sobbingly. 'If you knew how glad — after all these years! A civilized face. Yes, and civilized clothes. Because I thought I should never see a piece of real acetate silk again.' She fingered the sleeve of Lenina's shirt. The nails were black. 'And those adorable viscose velveteen shorts! Do you know, dear, I've still got my old clothes, the ones I came in, put away in a box. I'll show them you afterwards. Though, of course, the acetate has all gone into holes. But such a lovely white bandolier — though I must say your green morocco is even lovelier. Not that it did me much good, that bandolier.' Her tears began to flow again. 'I suppose John told you. What I had to suffer — and not a gramme of soma to be had. Only a drink of mescal every now and then, when Popé used to bring it. Popé is a boy I used to know. But it makes you feel so bad afterwards, the mescal does, and you're sick with the peyotl; besides, it always made that awful feeling of being ashamed much worse the next day. And I was so ashamed. Just think of it: me, a Beta — having a baby, put yourself in my place.' (The mere suggestion made Lenina shudder.) 'Though it wasn't my fault, I swear; because I still don't know how it

happened, seeing that I did all the Malthusian drill — you know, by numbers, One, two, three, four, always, I swear it; but all the same it happened; and of course there wasn't anything like an Abortion Centre here. Is it still down in Chelsea, by the way?' she asked. Lenina nodded. 'And still flood-lighted on Tuesdays and Fridays?' Lenina nodded again. 'That lovely pink glass tower!' Poor Linda lifted her face and with closed eyes ecstatically contemplated the bright remembered image. 'And the river at night,' she whispered. Great tears oozed slowly out from between her tight-shut eyelids. 'And flying back in the evening from Stoke Poges. And then a hot bath and vibro-vacuum massage . . . But there.' She drew a deep breath, shook her head, opened her eyes again, sniffed once or twice, then blew her nose on her fingers and wiped them on the skirt of her tunic. 'Oh, I'm so sorry,' she said in response to Lenina's involuntary grimace of disgust. 'I oughtn't to have done that. I'm sorry. But what are you to do when there aren't any handkerchiefs? I remember how it used to upset me, all that dirt, and nothing being aseptic. I had an awful cut on my head when they first brought me here. You can't imagine what they used to put on it. Filth, just filth. "Civilization is Sterilization," I used to say to them. And "Streptocock-Gee to Banbury-T, to see a fine bathroom and W.C." as though they were children. But of course they didn't understand. How should they? And in the end I suppose I got used to it. And anyhow, how can you keep things clean when there isn't hot water laid on? And look at these clothes. This beastly wool isn't like acetate. It lasts and lasts. And you're supposed to mend it if it gets torn. But I'm a Beta; I worked in the Fertilizing Room; nobody ever taught me to do anything like that. It wasn't my business. Besides, it never used to be right to mend clothes. Throw them away when they've got holes in them and buy new. "The more stitches, the less riches." Isn't that right? Mending's anti-social. But it's all different here. It's like living with lunatics. Everything they do is mad.' She looked round; saw John and Bernard had left them and were walking up and down in the dust and garbage outside the house; but, none the less confidentially lowering her voice, and leaning, while Lenina stiffened and shrank, so close that the blown reek of embryo-poison stirred the hair on her cheek. 'For instance,'

she hoarsely whispered, ‘take the way they have one another here. Mad, I tell you, absolutely mad. Everybody belongs to every one else — don’t they? don’t they?’ she insisted, tugging at Lenina’s sleeve. Lenina nodded her averted head, let out the breath she had been holding and managed to draw another one, relatively untainted. ‘Well, here,’ the other went on, ‘nobody’s supposed to belong to more than one person. And if you have people in the ordinary way, the others think you’re wicked and anti-social. They hate and despise you. Once a lot of women came and made a scene because their men came to see me. Well, why not? And then they rushed at me . . . No, it was too awful. I can’t tell you about it.’ Linda covered her face with her hands and shuddered. ‘They’re so hateful, the women here. Mad, mad and cruel. And of course they don’t know anything about Malthusian drill, or bottles, or decanting, or anything of that sort. So they’re having children all the time — like dogs. It’s too revolting. And to think that I . . . Oh, Ford, Ford, Ford! And yet John was a great comfort to me. I don’t know what I should have done without him. Even though he did get so upset whenever a man . . . Quite as a tiny boy, even. Once (but that was when he was bigger) he tried to kill poor Waihusiwa — or was it Popé? — just because I used to have them sometimes. Because I never could make him understand that that was what civilized people ought to do. Being mad’s infectious, I believe. Anyhow, John seems to have caught it from the Indians. Because, of course, he was with them a lot. Even though they always were so beastly to him and wouldn’t let him do all the things the other boys did. Which was a good thing in a way, because it made it easier for me to condition him a little. Though you’ve no idea how difficult that is. There’s so much one doesn’t know; it wasn’t my business to know. I mean, when a child asks you how a helicopter works or who made the world — well, what are you to answer if you’re a Beta and have always worked in the Fertilizing Room? What are you to answer?’

Chapter VIII

OUTSIDE, IN THE dust and among the garbage (there were four dogs now), Bernard and John were walking slowly up and down.

‘So hard for me to realize,’ Bernard was saying, ‘to reconstruct. As though we were living on different planets, in different centuries. A mother, and all this dirt, and gods, and old age, and disease . . .’ He shook his head. ‘It’s almost inconceivable. I shall never understand unless you explain.’

‘Explain what?’

‘This.’ He indicated the pueblo. ‘That.’ And it was the little house outside the village. ‘Everything. All your life.’

‘But what is there to say?’

‘From the beginning. As far back as you can remember.’

‘As far back as I can remember.’ John frowned. There was a long silence.

It was very hot. They had eaten a lot of tortillas and sweet corn. Linda said, ‘Come and lie down, Baby.’ They lay down together in the big bed. ‘Sing,’ and Linda sang. Sang ‘Streptocock-Gee to Banbury-T’ and ‘Bye, Baby Banting, soon you’ll need decanting.’ Her voice got fainter and fainter . . .

There was a loud noise, and he woke with a start. A man was standing by the bed, enormous, frightening. He was saying something to Linda, and Linda was laughing. She had pulled the blanket up to her chin, but the man pulled it down again. His hair was like two black ropes, and round his arm was a lovely silver bracelet with blue stones in it. He liked the bracelet; but all the same, he was frightened; he hid his face against Linda’s body. Linda put her hand on him and he felt safer. In those other words he did not understand so well, she said to the man, ‘Not with John here.’ The man looked at him, then again at Linda, and said a few words in a soft voice. Linda said, ‘No.’ But the man bent over the bed

towards him and his face was huge, terrible; the black ropes of hair touched the blanket. ‘No,’ Linda said again, and he felt her hand squeezing him more tightly. ‘No, no!’ But the man took hold of one of his arms, and it hurt. He screamed. The man put out his other hand and lifted him up. Linda was still holding him, still saying ‘No, no.’ The man said something short and angry, and suddenly her hands were gone. ‘Linda, Linda.’ He kicked and wriggled; but the man carried him across to the door, opened it, put him down on the floor in the middle of the other room, and went away, shutting the door behind him. He got up, he ran to the door. Standing on tiptoe he could just reach the big wooden latch. He lifted it and pushed; but the door wouldn’t open. ‘Linda,’ he shouted. She didn’t answer.

He remembered a huge room, rather dark; and there were big wooden things with strings fastened to them, and lots of women standing round them — making blankets, Linda said. Linda told him to sit in the corner with the other children, while she went and helped the women. He played with the little boys for a long time. Suddenly people started talking very loud, and there were the women pushing Linda away, and Linda was crying. She went to the door and he ran after her. He asked her why they were angry. ‘Because I broke something,’ she said. And then she got angry too. ‘How should I know how to do their beastly weaving?’ she said. ‘Beastly savages.’ He asked her what savages were. When they got back to their house, Popé was waiting at the door, and he came in with them. He had a big gourd full of stuff that looked like water; only it wasn’t water, but something with a bad smell that burnt your mouth and made you cough. Linda drank some and Popé drank some, and then Linda laughed a lot and talked very loud; and then she and Popé went into the other room. When Popé went away, he went into the room. Linda was in bed and so fast asleep that he couldn’t wake her.

Popé used to come often. He said the stuff in the gourd was called mescal; but Linda said it ought to be called soma; only it made you feel ill afterwards. He hated Popé. He hated them all — all the men who came to see Linda. One afternoon, when he had been playing with the other children — it was cold, he

remembered, and there was snow on the mountains — he came back to the house and heard angry voices in the bedroom. They were women's voices, and they said words he didn't understand; but he knew they were dreadful words. Then suddenly, crash! something was upset; he heard people moving about quickly, and there was another crash and then a noise like hitting a mule, only not so bony; then Linda screamed. 'Oh, don't, don't, don't!' she said. He ran in. There were three women in dark blankets. Linda was on the bed. One of the women was holding her wrists. Another was lying across her legs, so that she couldn't kick. The third was hitting her with a whip. Once, twice, three times; and each time Linda screamed. Crying, he tugged at the fringe of the woman's blanket. 'Please, please.' With her free hand she held him away. The whip came down again, and again Linda screamed. He caught hold of the woman's enormous brown hand between his own and bit it with all his might. She cried out, wrenched her hand free, and gave him such a push that he fell down. While he was lying on the ground she hit him three times with the whip. It hurt more than anything he had ever felt — like fire. The whip whistled again, fell. But this time it was Linda who screamed.

'But why did they want to hurt you, Linda?' he asked that night. He was crying, because the red marks of the whip on his back still hurt so terribly. But he was also crying because people were so beastly and unfair, and because he was only a little boy and couldn't do anything against them. Linda was crying too. She was grown up, but she wasn't big enough to fight against three of them. It wasn't fair for her either. 'Why did they want to hurt you, Linda?'

'I don't know. How should I know?' It was difficult to hear what she said, because she was lying on her stomach and her face was in the pillow. 'They say those men are their men,' she went on; and she did not seem to be talking to him at all; she seemed to be talking with some one inside herself. A long talk which he didn't understand; and in the end she started crying louder than ever.

'Oh, don't cry, Linda. Don't cry.'

He pressed himself against her. He put his arm round her neck. Linda cried out. 'Oh, be careful. My shoulder! Oh!' and she pushed him away, hard. His

head banged against the wall. ‘Little idiot!’ she shouted; and then, suddenly, she began to slap him. Slap, slap . . .

‘Linda,’ he cried out. ‘Oh, mother, don’t!’

‘I’m not your mother. I won’t be your mother.’

‘But, Linda . . . Oh!’ She slapped him on the cheek.

‘Turned into a savage,’ she shouted. ‘Having young ones like an animal. . . . If it hadn’t been for you, I might have gone to the Inspector, I might have got away. But not with a baby. That would have been too shameful.’

He saw that she was going to hit him again, and lifted his arm to guard his face. ‘Oh don’t, Linda, please don’t.’

‘Little beast!’ She pulled down his arm; his face was uncovered.

‘Don’t, Linda.’ He shut his eyes, expecting the blow.

But she didn’t hit him. After a little time, he opened his eyes again and saw that she was looking at him. He tried to smile at her. Suddenly she put her arms round him and kissed him again and again.

Sometimes, for several days, Linda didn’t get up at all. She lay in bed and was sad. Or else she drank the stuff that Popé brought and laughed a great deal and went to sleep. Sometimes she was sick. Often she forgot to wash him, and there was nothing to eat except cold tortillas. He remembered the first time she found those little animals in his hair, how she screamed and screamed.

The happiest times were when she told him about the Other Place. ‘And you really can go flying, whenever you like?’

‘Whenever you like.’ And she would tell him about the lovely music that came out of a box, and all the nice games you could play, and the delicious things to eat and drink, and the light that came when you pressed a little thing in the wall, and the pictures that you could hear and feel and smell, as well as see, and another box for making nice smells, and the pink and green and blue and silver houses as high as mountains, and everybody happy and no one ever sad or angry, and every one belonging to every one else, and the boxes where you

could see and hear what was happening at the other side of the world, and babies in lovely clean bottles — everything so clean, and no nasty smells, no dirt at all — and people never lonely, but living together and being so jolly and happy, like the summer dances here in Malpais, but much happier, and the happiness being there every day, every day. . . . He listened by the hour. And sometimes, when he and the other children were tired with too much playing, one of the old men of the pueblo would talk to them, in those other words, of the great Transformer of the World, and of the long fight between Right Hand and Left Hand, between Wet and Dry; of Awonawilona, who made a great fog by thinking in the night, and then made the whole world out of the fog; of Earth Mother and Sky Father; of Ahaiyuta and Marsailema, the twins of War and Chance; of Jesus and Pookong; of Mary and Etsanatlehi, the woman who makes herself young again; of the Black Stone at Laguna and the Great Eagle and Our Lady of Acoma. Strange stories, all the more wonderful to him for being told in the other words and so not fully understood. Lying in bed, he would think of Heaven and London and Our Lady of Acoma and the rows and rows of babies in clean bottles and Jesus flying up and Linda flying up and the great Director of World Hatcheries and Awonawilona.

Lots of men came to see Linda. The boys began to point their fingers at him. In the strange other words they said that Linda was bad; they called her names he did not understand, but that he knew were bad names. One day they sang a song about her, again and again. He threw stones at them. They threw back; a sharp stone cut his cheek. The blood wouldn’t stop; he was covered with blood.

Linda taught him to read. With a piece of charcoal she drew pictures on the wall — an animal sitting down, a baby inside a bottle; then she wrote letters. The Cat is on the Mat. The Tot is in the Pot. He learned quickly and easily. When he knew how to read all the words she wrote on the wall, Linda opened her big wooden box and pulled out from under those funny little red trousers she never wore a thin little book. He had often seen it before. ‘When you’re bigger,’ she

had said, ‘you can read it.’ Well, now he was big enough. He was proud. ‘I’m afraid you won’t find it very exciting,’ she said. ‘But it’s the only thing I have.’ She sighed. ‘If only you could see the lovely reading machines we used to have in London!’ He began reading. The Chemical and Bacteriological Conditioning of the Embryo. Practical Instructions for Beta Embryo-Store Workers. It took him a quarter of an hour to read the title alone. He threw the book on the floor. ‘Beastly, beastly book!’ he said, and began to cry.

The boys still sang their horrible song about Linda. Sometimes, too, they laughed at him for being so ragged. When he tore his clothes, Linda did not know how to mend them. In the Other Place, she told him, people threw away clothes with holes in them and got new ones. ‘Rags, rags!’ the boys used to shout at him. ‘But I can read,’ he said to himself, ‘and they can’t. They don’t even know what reading is.’ It was fairly easy, if he thought hard enough about the reading, to pretend that he didn’t mind when they made fun of him. He asked Linda to give him the book again.

The more the boys pointed and sang, the harder he read. Soon he could read all the words quite well. Even the longest. But what did they mean? He asked Linda; but even when she could answer it didn’t seem to make it very clear. And generally she couldn’t answer at all.

‘What are chemicals?’ he would ask.

‘Oh, stuff like magnesium salts, and alcohol for keeping the Deltas and Epsilons small and backward, and calcium carbonate for bones, and all that sort of thing.’

‘But how do you make chemicals, Linda? Where do they come from?’

‘Well, I don’t know. You get them out of bottles. And when the bottles are empty, you send up to the Chemical Store for more. It’s the Chemical Store people who make them, I suppose. Or else they send to the factory for them. I don’t know. I never did any chemistry. My job was always with the embryos.’

It was the same with everything else he asked about. Linda never seemed to know. The old men of the pueblo had much more definite answers.

‘The seed of men and all creatures, the seed of the sun and the seed of earth and the seed of the sky — Awonawilona made them all out of the Fog of Increase. Now the world has four wombs; and he laid the seeds in the lowest of the four wombs. And gradually the seeds began to grow . . .’

One day (John calculated later that it must have been soon after his twelfth birthday) he came home and found a book that he had never seen before lying on the floor in the bedroom. It was a thick book and looked very old. The binding had been eaten by mice; some of its pages were loose and crumpled. He picked it up, looked at the title-page: the book was called The Complete Works of William Shakespeare.

Linda was lying on the bed, sipping that horrible stinking mescal out of a cup. ‘Popé brought it,’ she said. Her voice was thick and hoarse like somebody else’s voice. ‘It was lying in one of the chests of the Antelope Kiva. It’s supposed to have been there for hundreds of years. I expect it’s true, because I looked at it, and it seemed to be full of nonsense. Uncivilized. Still, it’ll be good enough for you to practise your reading on.’ She took a last sip, set the cup down on the floor beside the bed, turned over on her side, hiccoughed once or twice and went to sleep.

He opened the book at random.

Nay, but to live

In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,

Stew’d in corruption, honeying and making love

Over the nasty sty . . .

The strange words rolled through his mind; rumbled, like talking thunder; like the drums at the summer dances, if the drums could have spoken; like the men singing the Corn Song, beautiful, beautiful, so that you cried; like old Mitsima saying magic over his feathers and his carved sticks and his bits of bone and stone — kiathla tsilu silokwe silokwe silokwe. Kiai silu silu, tsithl — but better than Mitsima’s magic, because it meant more, because it talked to him; talked wonderfully and only half-understandably, a terrible beautiful magic, about

Linda; about Linda lying there snoring, with the empty cup on the floor beside the bed; about Linda and Popé, Linda and Popé.

He hated Popé more and more. A man can smile and smile and be a villain. Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain. What did the words exactly mean? He only half knew. But their magic was strong and went on rumbling in his head, and somehow it was as though he had never really hated Popé before; never really hated him because he had never been able to say how much he hated him. But now he had these words, these words like drums and singing and magic. These words and the strange, strange story out of which they were taken (he couldn't make head or tail of it, but it was wonderful, wonderful all the same) — they gave him a reason for hating Popé; and they made his hatred more real; they even made Popé himself more real.

One day, when he came in from playing, the door of the inner room was open, and he saw them lying together on the bed, asleep — white Linda and Popé almost black beside her, with one arm under her shoulders and the other dark hand on her breast, and one of the plaits of his long hair lying across her throat, like a black snake trying to strangle her. Popé's gourd and a cup were standing on the floor near the bed. Linda was snoring.

His heart seemed to have disappeared and left a hole. He was empty. Empty, and cold, and rather sick, and giddy. He leaned against the wall to steady himself. Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous . . . Like drums, like the men singing for the corn, like magic, the words repeated and repeated themselves in his head. From being cold he was suddenly hot. His cheeks burnt with the rush of blood, the room swam and darkened before his eyes. He ground his teeth. 'I'll kill him, I'll kill him, I'll kill him,' he kept saying. And suddenly there were more words.

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage

Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed . . .

The magic was on his side, the magic explained and gave orders. He stepped back into the outer room. 'When he is drunk asleep . . .' The knife for the meat

was lying on the floor near the fireplace. He picked it up and tiptoed to the door again. ‘When he is drunk asleep, drunk asleep . . .’ He ran across the room and stabbed — oh, the blood! — stabbed again, as Popé heaved out of his sleep, lifted his hand to stab once more, but found his wrist caught, held and — oh, oh! — twisted. He couldn’t move, he was trapped, and there were Popé’s small black eyes, very close, staring into his own. He looked away. There were two cuts on Popé’s left shoulder. ‘Oh, look at the blood!’ Linda was crying. ‘Look at the blood!’ She had never been able to bear the sight of blood. Popé lifted his other hand — to strike him, he thought. He stiffened to receive the blow. But the hand only took him under the chin and turned his face, so that he had to look again into Popé’s eyes. For a long time, for hours and hours. And suddenly — he couldn’t help it — he began to cry. Popé burst out laughing. ‘Go,’ he said, in the other Indian words. ‘Go, my brave Ahaiyuta.’ He ran out into the other room to hide his tears.

‘You are fifteen,’ said old Mitsima, in the Indian words. ‘Now I may teach you to work the clay.’

Squatting by the river, they worked together.

‘First of all,’ said Mitsima, taking a lump of the wetted clay between his hands, ‘we make a little moon.’ The old man squeezed the lump into a disk, then bent up the edges; the moon became a shallow cup.

Slowly and unskilfully he imitated the old man’s delicate gestures.

‘A moon, a cup, and now a snake.’ Mitsima rolled out another piece of clay into a long flexible cylinder, hooped it into a circle and pressed it on to the rim of the cup. ‘Then another snake. And another. And another.’ Round by round, Mitsima built up the sides of the pot; it was narrow, it bulged, it narrowed again towards the neck. Mitsima squeezed and patted, stroked and scraped; and there at last it stood, in shape the familiar water-pot of Malpais, but creamy white instead of black, and still soft to the touch. The crooked parody of Mitsima’s, his own stood beside it. Looking at the two pots, he had to laugh.

‘But the next one will be better,’ he said, and began to moisten another piece of clay.

To fashion, to give form, to feel his fingers gaining in skill and power — this gave him an extraordinary pleasure. ‘A, B, C, Vitamin D,’ he sang to himself as he worked, ‘The fat’s in the liver, the cod’s in the sea.’ And Mitsima also sang — a song about killing a bear. They worked all day, and all day he was filled with an intense, absorbing happiness.

‘Next winter,’ said old Mitsima, ‘I will teach you to make the bow.’

He stood for a long time outside the house; and at last the ceremonies within were finished. The door opened; they came out. Kothlu came first, his right hand outstretched and tightly closed, as though over some precious jewel. Her clenched hand similarly outstretched, Kiakimé followed. They walked in silence, and in silence, behind them, came the brothers and sisters and cousins and all the troop of old people.

They walked out of the pueblo, across the mesa. At the edge of the cliff they halted, facing the early morning sun. Kothlu opened his hand. A pinch of corn meal lay white on the palm; he breathed on it, murmured a few words, then threw it, a handful of white dust, towards the sun. Kiakimé did the same. Then Kiakimé’s father stepped forward, and holding up a feathered prayer stick, made a long prayer, then threw the stick after the corn meal.

‘It is finished,’ said old Mitsima in a loud voice. ‘They are married.’

‘Well,’ said Linda, as they turned away, ‘all I can say is, it does seem a lot of fuss to make about so little. In civilized countries, when a boy wants to have a girl, he just . . . But where are you going, John?’

He paid no attention to her calling, but ran on, away, away, anywhere to be by himself.

It is finished. Old Mitsima’s words repeated themselves in his mind. Finished, finished . . . In silence and from a long way off, but violently, desperately, hopelessly, he had loved Kiakimé. And now it was finished. He was sixteen.

At the full moon, in the Antelope Kiva, secrets would be told, secrets would be done and borne. They would go down, boys, into the kiva and come out again, men. The boys were all afraid and at the same time impatient. And at last it was the day. The sun went down, the moon rose. He went with the others. Men were standing, dark, at the entrance to the kiva; the ladder went down into the red lighted depths. Already the leading boys had begun to climb down. Suddenly one of the men stepped forward, caught him by the arm, and pulled him out of the ranks. He broke free and dodged back into his place among the others. This time the man struck him, pulled his hair. ‘Not for you, white-hair!’ ‘Not for the son of the she-dog,’ said one of the other men. The boys laughed. ‘Go!’ And as he still hovered on the fringes of the group, ‘Go!’ the men shouted again. One of them bent down, took a stone, threw it. ‘Go, go, go!’ There was a shower of stones. Bleeding, he ran away into the darkness. From the red-lit kiva came the noise of singing. The last of the boys had climbed down the ladder. He was all alone.

All alone, outside the pueblo, on the bare plain of the mesa. The rock was like bleached bones in the moonlight. Down in the valley, the coyotes were howling at the moon. The bruises hurt him, the cuts were still bleeding; but it was not for pain that he sobbed; it was because he was all alone, because he had been driven out, alone, into this skeleton world of rocks and moonlight. At the edge of the precipice he sat down. The moon was behind him; he looked down into the black shadow of the mesa, into the black shadow of death. He had only to take one step, one little jump. . . . He held out his right hand in the moonlight. From the cut on his wrist the blood was still oozing. Every few seconds a drop fell, dark, almost colourless in the dead light. Drop, drop, drop. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow . . .

He had discovered Time and Death and God.

‘Alone, always alone,’ the young man was saying.

The words awoke a plaintive echo in Bernard’s mind. Alone, alone . . . ‘So am I,’ he said, on a gush of confidingness. ‘Terribly alone.’

‘Are you?’ John looked surprised. ‘I thought that in the Other Place . . . I mean, Linda always said that nobody was ever alone there.’

Bernard blushed uncomfortably. ‘You see,’ he said, mumbling and with averted eyes, ‘I’m rather different from most people, I suppose. If one happens to be decanted different . . .’

‘Yes, that’s just it.’ The young man nodded. ‘If one’s different, one’s bound to be lonely. They’re beastly to one. Do you know, they shut me out of absolutely everything? When the other boys were sent out to spend the night on the mountains — you know, when you have to dream which your sacred animal is — they wouldn’t let me go with the others; they wouldn’t tell me any of the secrets. I did it by myself, though,’ he added. ‘Didn’t eat anything for five days and then went out one night alone into those mountains there.’ He pointed.

Patronizingly, Bernard smiled. ‘And did you dream of anything?’ he asked.

The other nodded. ‘But I mustn’t tell you what.’ He was silent for a little; then, in a low voice, ‘Once,’ he went on, ‘I did something that none of the others did: I stood against a rock in the middle of the day, in summer, with my arms out, like Jesus on the cross.’

‘What on earth for?’

‘I wanted to know what it was like being crucified. Hanging there in the sun . . .’

‘But why?’

‘Why? Well . . .’ He hesitated. ‘Because I felt I ought to. If Jesus could stand it. And then, if one has done something wrong . . . Besides, I was unhappy; that was another reason.’

‘It seems a funny way of curing your unhappiness,’ said Bernard. But on second thoughts he decided that there was, after all, some sense in it. Better than taking soma. . . .

‘I fainted after a time,’ said the young man. ‘Fell down on my face. Do you see the mark where I cut myself?’ He lifted the thick yellow hair from his forehead. The scar showed, pale and puckered, on his right temple.

Bernard looked, and then quickly, with a little shudder, averted his eyes. His conditioning had made him not so much pitiful as profoundly squeamish. The mere suggestion of illness or wounds was to him not only horrifying, but even repulsive and rather disgusting. Like dirt, or deformity, or old age. Hastily he changed the subject.

‘I wonder if you’d like to come back to London with us?’ he asked, making the first move in a campaign whose strategy he had been secretly elaborating ever since, in the little house, he had realized who the ‘father’ of this young savage must be. ‘Would you like that?’

The young man’s face lit up. ‘Do you really mean it?’

‘Of course; if I can get permission, that is.’

‘Linda too?’

‘Well . . .’ He hesitated doubtfully. That revolting creature! No, it was impossible. Unless, unless . . . It suddenly occurred to Bernard that her very revoltingness might prove an enormous asset. ‘But of course!’ he cried, making up for his first hesitations with an excess of noisy cordiality.

The young man drew a deep breath. ‘To think it should be coming true — what I’ve dreamt of all my life. Do you remember what Miranda says?’

‘Who’s Miranda?’

But the young man had evidently not heard the question. ‘O wonder!’ he was saying; and his eyes shone, his face was brightly flushed. ‘How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is!’ The flush suddenly deepened; he was thinking of Lenina, of an angel in bottle-green viscose, lustrous with youth and skin food, plump, benevolently smiling. His voice faltered. ‘O brave new world,’ he began, then suddenly interrupted himself; the blood had left his cheeks; he was as pale as paper. ‘Are you married to her?’ he asked.

‘Am I what?’

‘Married. You know — for ever. They say “for ever” in the Indian words; it can’t be broken.’

‘Ford, no!’ Bernard couldn’t help laughing.

John also laughed, but for another reason — laughed for pure joy.

‘O brave new world,’ he repeated. ‘O brave new world that has such people in it. Let’s start at once.’

‘You have a most peculiar way of talking sometimes,’ said Bernard, staring at the young man in perplexed astonishment. ‘And, anyhow, hadn’t you better wait till you actually see the new world?’

Chapter IX

LENINA FELT HERSELF entitled, after this day of queerness and horror, to a complete and absolute holiday. As soon as they got back to the rest-house, she swallowed six half-gramme tablets of soma, lay down on her bed, and within ten minutes had embarked for lunar eternity. It would be eighteen hours at the least before she was in time again.

Bernard meanwhile lay pensive and wide-eyed in the dark. It was long after midnight before he fell asleep. Long after midnight; but his insomnia had not been fruitless; he had a plan.

Punctually, on the following morning, at ten o'clock, the green-uniformed octoroon stepped out of his helicopter. Bernard was waiting for him among the agaves.

'Miss Crowne's gone on soma-holiday,' he explained. 'Can hardly be back before five. Which leaves us seven hours.'

He could fly to Santa Fé, do all the business he had to do, and be in Malpais again long before she woke up.

'She'll be quite safe here by herself?'

'Safe as helicopters,' the octoroon assured him.

They climbed into the machine and started off at once. At ten thirty-four they landed on the roof of the Santa Fé Post Office; at ten thirty-seven Bernard had got through to the World Controller's Office in Whitehall; at ten thirty-nine he was speaking to his fordship's fourth personal secretary; at ten forty-four he was repeating his story to the first secretary, and at ten forty-seven and a half it was the deep, resonant voice of Mustapha Mond himself that sounded in his ears.

'I ventured to think,' stammered Bernard, 'that your fordship might find the matter of sufficient scientific interest . . .'

‘Yes, I do find it of sufficient scientific interest,’ said the deep voice. ‘Bring these two individuals back to London with you.’

‘Your fordship is aware that I shall need a special permit . . .’

‘The necessary orders,’ said Mustapha Mond, ‘are being sent to the Warden of the Reservation at this moment. You will proceed at once to the Warden’s Office. Good-morning, Mr. Marx.’

There was silence. Bernard hung up the receiver and hurried up to the roof.

‘Warden’s Office,’ he said to the Gamma-green octoroon.

At ten fifty-four Bernard was shaking hands with the Warden.

‘Delighted, Mr. Marx, delighted.’ His boom was deferential. ‘We have just received special orders . . .’

‘I know,’ said Bernard, interrupting him. ‘I was talking to his fordship on the phone a moment ago.’ His bored tone implied that he was in the habit of talking to his fordship every day of the week. He dropped into a chair. ‘If you’ll kindly take all the necessary steps as soon as possible. As soon as possible,’ he emphatically repeated. He was thoroughly enjoying himself.

At eleven three he had all the necessary papers in his pocket.

‘So long,’ he said patronizingly to the Warden, who had accompanied him as far as the lift gates. ‘So long.’

He walked across to the hotel, had a bath, a vibro-vac massage, and an electrolytic shave, listened in to the morning’s news, looked in for half an hour on the televisor, ate a leisured luncheon, and at half-past two flew back with the octoroon to Malpais.

The young man stood outside the rest-house.

‘Bernard,’ he called. ‘Bernard!’ There was no answer.

Noiseless on his deerskin moccasins, he ran up the steps and tried the door. The door was locked.

They were gone! Gone! It was the most terrible thing that had ever happened to him. She had asked him to come and see them, and now they were gone. He sat down on the steps and cried.

Half an hour later it occurred to him to look through the window. The first thing he saw was a green suit-case, with the initials L. C. painted on the lid. Joy flared up like fire within him. He picked up a stone. The smashed glass tinkled on the floor. A moment later he was inside the room. He opened the green suit-case; and all at once he was breathing Lenina's perfume, filling his lungs with her essential being. His heart beat wildly; for a moment he was almost faint. Then, bending over the precious box, he touched, he lifted into the light, he examined. The zippers on Lenina's spare pair of viscose velveteen shorts were at first a puzzle, then, solved, a delight. Zip, and then zip; zip, and then zip; he was enchanted. Her green slippers were the most beautiful things he had ever seen. He unfolded a pair of zippicamiknicks, blushed, put them hastily away again; but kissed a perfumed acetate handkerchief and wound a scarf round his neck. Opening a box, he spilt a cloud of scented powder. His hands were floury with the stuff. He wiped them on his chest, on his shoulders, on his bare arms. Delicious perfume! He shut his eyes; he rubbed his cheek against his own powdered arm. Touch of smooth skin against his face, scent in his nostrils of musky dust — her real presence. 'Lenina,' he whispered. 'Lenina!'

A noise made him start, made him guiltily turn. He crammed up his thieveries into the suit-case and shut the lid; then listened again, looked. Not a sign of life, not a sound. And yet he had certainly heard something — something like a sigh, something like the creak of a board. He tiptoed to the door and, cautiously opening it, found himself looking on to a broad landing. On the opposite side of the landing was another door, ajar. He stepped out, pushed, peeped.

There, on a low bed, the sheet flung back, dressed in a pair of pink one-piece zippyjamas, lay Lenina, fast asleep and so beautiful in the midst of her curls, so touchingly childish with her pink toes and her grave sleeping face, so trustful in the helplessness of her limp hands and melted limbs, that the tears came to his eyes.

With an infinity of quite unnecessary precautions — for nothing short of a pisto-shot could have called Lenina back from her soma-holiday before the

appointed time — he entered the room, he knelt on the floor beside the bed. He gazed, he clasped his hands, his lips moved. ‘Her eyes,’ he murmured,

‘Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice;
Handlest in thy discourse, O! that her hand,
In whose comparison all whites are ink
Writing their own reproach; to whose soft seizure
The cygnet’s down is harsh . . .’

A fly buzzed round her; he waved it away. ‘Flies,’ he remembered,

‘On the white wonder of dear Juliet’s hand, may seize
And steal immortal blessing from her lips,
Who, even in pure and vestal modesty,
Still blush, as thinking their own kisses sin.’

Very slowly, with the hesitating gesture of one who reaches forward to stroke a shy and possibly rather dangerous bird, he put out his hand. It hung there trembling, within an inch of those limp fingers, on the verge of contact. Did he dare? Dare to profane with his unworthiest hand that . . . No he didn’t. The bird was too dangerous. His hand dropped back. How beautiful she was! How beautiful!

Then suddenly he found himself reflecting that he had only to take hold of the zipper at her neck and give one long, strong pull. . . . He shut his eyes, he shook his head with the gesture of a dog shaking its ears as it emerges from the water. Detestable thought! He was ashamed of himself. Pure and vestal modesty . . .

There was a humming in the air. Another fly trying to steal immortal blessings? A wasp? He looked, saw nothing. The humming grew louder and louder, localized itself as being outside the shuttered windows. The plane! In a panic, he scrambled to his feet and ran into the other room, vaulted through the open window, and hurrying along the path between the tall agaves was in time to receive Bernard Marx as he climbed out of the helicopter.

Chapter X

THE HANDS OF all the four thousand electric clocks in all the Bloomsbury Centre's four thousand rooms marked twenty-seven minutes past two. 'This hive of industry,' as the Director was fond of calling it, was in the full buzz of work. Every one was busy, everything in ordered motion. Under the microscopes, their long tails furiously lashing, spermatozoa were burrowing head first into eggs; and, fertilized, the eggs were expanding, dividing, or if bokanovskified, budding and breaking up into whole populations of separate embryos. From the Social Predestination Room the escalators went rumbling down into the basement, and there, in the crimson darkness, stewingly warm on their cushion of peritoneum and gorged with blood-surrogate and hormones, the fœtuses grew and grew or, poisoned, languished into a stunted Epsilonhood. With a faint hum and rattle the moving racks crawled imperceptibly through the weeks and the recapitulated æons to where, in the Decanting Room, the newly-unbottled babes uttered their first yell of horror and amazement.

The dynamos purred in the sub-basement, the lifts rushed up and down. On all the eleven floors of Nurseries it was feeding time. From eighteen hundred bottles eighteen hundred carefully labelled infants were simultaneously sucking down their pint of pasteurized external secretion.

Above them, in ten successive layers of dormitory, the little boys and girls who were still young enough to need an afternoon sleep were as busy as every one else, though they did not know it, listening unconsciously to hypnopædic lessons in hygiene and sociability, in class-consciousness and the toddler's love-life. Above these again were the playrooms where, the weather having turned to rain, nine hundred older children were amusing themselves with bricks and clay modelling, hunt-the-zipper, and erotic play.

Buzz, buzz! the hive was humming, busily, joyfully. Blithe was the singing of the young girls over their test-tubes, the Predestinators whistled as they worked, and in the Decanting Room what glorious jokes were cracked above the empty bottles! But the Director's face, as he entered the Fertilizing Room with Henry Foster, was grave, wooden with severity.

'A public example,' he was saying. 'In this room, because it contains more high-caste workers than any other in the Centre. I have told him to meet me here at half-past two.'

'He does his work very well,' put in Henry, with hypocritical generosity.

'I know. But that's all the more reason for severity. His intellectual eminence carries with it corresponding moral responsibilities. The greater a man's talents, the greater his power to lead astray. It is better that one should suffer than that many should be corrupted. Consider the matter dispassionately, Mr. Foster, and you will see that no offence is so heinous as unorthodoxy of behaviour. Murder kills only the individual — and, after all, what is an individual?' With a sweeping gesture he indicated the rows of microscopes, the test-tubes, the incubators. 'We can make a new one with the greatest ease — as many as we like. Unorthodoxy threatens more than the life of a mere individual; it strikes at Society itself. Yes, at Society itself,' he repeated. 'Ah, but here he comes.'

Bernard had entered the room and was advancing between the rows of fertilizers towards them. A veneer of jaunty self-confidence thinly concealed his nervousness. The voice in which he said, 'Good-morning, Director,' was absurdly too loud; that in which, correcting his mistake, he said, 'You asked me to come and speak to you here,' ridiculously soft, a squeak.

'Yes, Mr. Marx,' said the Director portentously. 'I did ask you to come to me here. You returned from your holiday last night, I understand.'

'Yes,' Bernard answered.

'Yes-s,' repeated the Director, lingering, a serpent, on the 's.' Then, suddenly raising his voice, 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he trumpeted, 'ladies and gentlemen.'

The singing of the girls over their test-tubes, the preoccupied whistling of the Microscopists, suddenly ceased. There was a profound silence; every one looked

round.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ the Director repeated once more, ‘excuse me for thus interrupting your labours. A painful duty constrains me. The security and stability of Society are in danger. Yes, in danger, ladies and gentlemen. This man,’ he pointed accusingly at Bernard, ‘this man who stands before you here, this Alpha-Plus to whom so much has been given, and from whom, in consequence, so much must be expected, this colleague of yours — or should I anticipate and say this ex-colleague? — has grossly betrayed the trust imposed in him. By his heretical views on sport and soma, by the scandalous unorthodoxy of his sex-life, by his refusal to obey the teachings of Our Ford and behave out of office hours “like a babe in a bottle” ’ (here the Director made the sign of the T), ‘he has proved himself an enemy of Society, a subverter, ladies and gentlemen, of all Order and Stability, a conspirator against Civilization itself. For this reason I propose to dismiss him, to dismiss him with ignominy from the post he has held in this Centre; I propose forthwith to apply for his transference to a Sub-Centre of the lowest order and, that his punishment may serve the best interest of Society, as far as possible removed from any important Centre of population. In Iceland he will have small opportunity to lead others astray by his unfordly example.’ The Director paused; then, folding his arms, he turned impressively to Bernard. ‘Marx,’ he said, ‘can you show any reason why I should not now execute the judgment passed upon you?’

‘Yes, I can,’ Bernard answered in a very loud voice.

Somewhat taken aback, but still majestically, ‘Then show it,’ said the Director.

‘Certainly. But it’s in the passage. One moment.’ Bernard hurried to the door and threw it open. ‘Come in,’ he commanded, and the reason came in and showed itself.

There was a gasp, a murmur of astonishment and horror; a young girl screamed; standing on a chair to get a better view some one upset two test-tubes full of spermatozoa. Bloated, sagging, and among those firm youthful bodies, those undistorted faces, a strange and terrifying monster of middle-agedness,

Linda advanced into the room, coquettishly smiling her broken and discoloured smile, and rolling as she walked, with what was meant to be a voluptuous undulation, her enormous haunches. Bernard walked beside her.

‘There he is,’ he said, pointing at the Director.

‘Did you think I didn’t recognize him?’ Linda asked indignantly; then, turning to the Director, ‘Of course I knew you; Tomakin, I should have known you anywhere, among a thousand. But perhaps you’ve forgotten me. Don’t you remember? Don’t you remember, Tomakin? Your Linda.’ She stood looking at him, her head on one side, still smiling, but with a smile that became progressively, in face of the Director’s expression of petrified disgust, less and less self-confident, that wavered and finally went out. ‘Don’t you remember, Tomakin?’ she repeated in a voice that trembled. Her eyes were anxious, agonized. The blotched and sagging face twitched grotesquely into the grimace of extreme grief. ‘Tomakin!’ She held out her arms. Some one began to titter.

‘What’s the meaning,’ began the Director, ‘of this monstrous . . .’

‘Tomakin!’ She ran forward, her blanket trailing behind her, threw her arms round his neck, hid her face on his chest.

A howl of laughter went up irrepressibly.

‘. . . this monstrous practical joke,’ the Director shouted.

Red in the face, he tried to disengage himself from her embrace. Desperately she clung. ‘But I’m Linda, I’m Linda.’ The laughter drowned her voice. ‘You made me have a baby,’ she screamed above the uproar. There was a sudden and appalling hush; eyes floated uncomfortably, not knowing where to look. The Director went suddenly pale, stopped struggling and stood, his hands on her wrists, staring down at her, horrified. ‘Yes, a baby — and I was its mother.’ She flung the obscenity like a challenge into the outraged silence; then, suddenly breaking away from him, ashamed, ashamed, covered her face with her hands, sobbing. ‘It wasn’t my fault, Tomakin. Because I always did my drill, didn’t I? Didn’t I? Always . . . I don’t know how . . . If you knew how awful, Tomakin . . . But he was a comfort to me, all the same.’ Turning towards the door, ‘John!’ she called. ‘John!’

He came in at once, paused for a moment just inside the door, looked round, then soft on his moccasined feet strode quickly across the room, fell on his knees in front of the Director, and said in a clear voice: ‘My father!’

The word (for ‘father’ was not so much obscene as — with its connotation of something at one remove from the loathsomeness and moral obliquity of child-bearing — merely gross, a scatological rather than a pornographic impropriety), the comically smutty word relieved what had become a quite intolerable tension. Laughter broke out, enormous, almost hysterical, peal after peal, as though it would never stop. My father — and it was the Director! My father! Oh, Ford, oh Ford! That was really too good. The whooping and the roaring renewed themselves, faces seemed on the point of disintegration, tears were streaming. Six more test-tubes of spermatozoa were upset. My father!

Pale, wild-eyed, the Director glared about him in an agony of bewildered humiliation.

My father! The laughter, which had shown signs of dying away, broke out again more loudly than ever. He put his hands over his ears and rushed out of the room.

Chapter XI

AFTER THE SCENE in the Fertilizing Room, all upper-caste London was wild to see this delicious creature who had fallen on his knees before the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning — or rather the ex-Director, for the poor man had resigned immediately afterwards and never set foot inside the Centre again — had flopped down and called him (the joke was almost too good to be true!) ‘my father.’ Linda, on the contrary, cut no ice; nobody had the smallest desire to see Linda. To say one was a mother — that was past a joke: it was an obscenity. Moreover, she wasn’t a real savage, had been hatched out of a bottle and conditioned like any one else: so couldn’t have really quaint ideas. Finally — and this was by far the strongest reason for people’s not wanting to see poor Linda — there was her appearance. Fat; having lost her youth; with bad teeth, and a blotched complexion, and that figure (Ford!) — you simply couldn’t look at her without feeling sick, yes, positively sick. So the best people were quite determined not to see Linda. And Linda, for her part, had no desire to see them. The return to civilization was for her the return to soma, was the possibility of lying in bed and taking holiday after holiday, without ever having to come back to a headache or a fit of vomiting, without ever being made to feel as you always felt after peyotl, as though you’d done something so shamefully anti-social that you could never hold up your head again. Soma played none of these unpleasant tricks. The holiday it gave was perfect and, if the morning after was disagreeable, it was so, not intrinsically, but only by comparison with the joys of the holiday. The remedy was to make the holiday continuous. Greedily she clamoured for ever larger, ever more frequent doses. Dr. Shaw at first demurred; then let her have what she wanted. She took as much as twenty grammes a day.

‘Which will finish her off in a month or two,’ the doctor confided to Bernard. ‘One day the respiratory centre will be paralysed. No more breathing. Finished.

And a good thing too. If we could rejuvenate, of course it would be different. But we can't.'

Surprisingly, as every one thought (for on soma-holiday Linda was most conveniently out of the way), John raised objections.

'But aren't you shortening her life by giving her so much?'

'In one sense, yes,' Dr. Shaw admitted. 'But in another we're actually lengthening it.' The young man stared, uncomprehending. 'Soma may make you lose a few years in time,' the doctor went on. 'But think of the enormous, immeasurable durations it can give you out of time. Every soma-holiday is a bit of what our ancestors used to call eternity.'

John began to understand. 'Eternity was in our lips and eyes,' he murmured.

'Eh?'

'Nothing,'

'Of course,' Dr. Shaw went on, 'you can't allow people to go popping off into eternity if they've got any serious work to do. But as she hasn't got any serious work . . .'

'All the same,' John persisted, 'I don't believe it's right.'

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. 'Well, of course, if you prefer to have her screaming mad all the time . . .'

In the end John was forced to give in. Linda got her soma. Thenceforward she remained in her little room on the thirty-seventh floor of Bernard's apartment house, in bed, with the radio and television always on, and the patchouli tap just dripping, and the soma tablets within reach of her hand — there she remained; and yet wasn't there at all, was all the time away, infinitely far away, on holiday; on holiday in some other world, where the music of the radio was a labyrinth of sonorous colours, a sliding, palpitating labyrinth, that led (by what beautifully inevitable windings) to a bright centre of absolute conviction; where the dancing images of the television box were the performers in some indescribably delicious all-singing feely; where the dripping patchouli was more than scent — was the sun, was a million sexophones, was Popé making love, only much more so, incomparably more, and without end.

‘No, we can’t rejuvenate. But I’m very glad,’ Dr. Shaw had concluded, ‘to have had this opportunity to see an example of senility in a human being. Thank you so much for calling me in.’ He shook Bernard warmly by the hand.

It was John, then, they were all after. And as it was only through Bernard, his accredited guardian, that John could be seen, Bernard now found himself, for the first time in his life, treated not merely normally, but as a person of outstanding importance. There was no more talk of the alcohol in his blood-surrogate, no gibes at his personal appearance. Henry Foster went out of his way to be friendly; Benito Hoover made him a present of six packets of sex-hormone chewing-gum; the Assistant Predestinator came and cadged almost abjectly for an invitation to one of Bernard’s evening parties. As for the women, Bernard had only to hint at the possibility of an invitation, and he could have whichever of them he liked.

‘Bernard’s asked me to meet the Savage next Wednesday,’ Fanny announced triumphantly.

‘I’m so glad,’ said Lenina. ‘And now you must admit that you were wrong about Bernard. Don’t you think he’s really rather sweet?’

Fanny nodded. ‘And I must say,’ she said, ‘I was quite agreeably surprised.’

The Chief Bottler, the Director of Predestination, three Deputy Assistant Fertilizer-Generals, the Professor of Feelies in the College of Emotional Engineering, the Dean of the Westminster Community Singery, the Supervisor of Bokanovskification — the list of Bernard’s notabilities was interminable.

‘And I had six girls last week,’ he confided to Helmholtz Watson. ‘One on Monday, two on Tuesday, two more on Friday, and one on Saturday. And if I’d had the time or the inclination, there were at least a dozen more who were only too anxious . . .’

Helmholtz listened to his boastings in a silence so gloomily disapproving that Bernard was offended.

‘You’re envious,’ he said.

Helmholtz shook his head. ‘I’m rather sad, that’s all,’ he answered.

Bernard went off in a huff. Never, he told himself, never would he speak to Helmholtz again.

The days passed. Success went fizzily to Bernard's head, and in the process completely reconciled him (as any good intoxicant should do) to a world which, up till then, he had found very unsatisfactory. In so far as it recognized him as important, the order of things was good. But, reconciled by his success, he yet refused to forgo the privilege of criticizing this order. For the act of criticizing heightened his sense of importance, made him feel larger. Moreover, he did genuinely believe that there were things to criticize. (At the same time, he genuinely liked being a success and having all the girls he wanted.) Before those who now, for the sake of the Savage, paid their court to him, Bernard would parade a carping unorthodoxy. He was politely listened to. But behind his back people shook their heads. 'That young man will come to a bad end,' they said, prophesying the more confidently in that they themselves would in due course personally see to it that the end was bad. 'He won't find another Savage to help him out a second time,' they said. Meanwhile, however, there was the first Savage; they were polite. And because they were polite, Bernard felt positively gigantic — gigantic and at the same time light with elation, lighter than air.

'Lighter than air,' said Bernard, pointing upwards.

Like a pearl in the sky, high, high above them, the Weather Department's captive balloon shone rosily in the sunshine.

'. . . the said Savage,' so ran Bernard's instructions, 'to be shown civilized life in all its aspects. . . .'

He was being shown a bird's-eye view of it at present, a bird's-eye view from the platform of the Charing-T Tower. The Station Master and the Resident Meteorologist were acting as guides. But it was Bernard who did most of the talking. Intoxicated, he was behaving as though, at the very least, he were a visiting World Controller. Lighter than air.

The Bombay Green Rocket dropped out of the sky. The passengers alighted. Eight identical Dravidian twins in khaki looked out of the eight portholes of the

cabin — the stewards.

‘Twelve hundred and fifty kilometres an hour,’ said the Station Master impressively. ‘What do you think of that, Mr. Savage?’

John thought it very nice. ‘Still,’ he said, ‘Ariel could put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes.’

‘The Savage,’ wrote Bernard in his report to Mustapha Mond, ‘shows surprisingly little astonishment at, or awe of, civilized inventions. This is partly due, no doubt, to the fact that he has heard them talked about by the woman Linda, his m —— .’

(Mustapha Mond frowned. ‘Does the fool think I’m too squeamish to see the word written out at full length?’)

‘Partly on his interest being focussed on what he calls “the soul,” which he persists as regarding as an entity independent of the physical environment; whereas, as I tried to point out to him . . .’

The Controller skipped the next sentences and was just about to turn the page in search of something more interestingly concrete, when his eye was caught by a series of quite extraordinary phrases. ‘. . . though I must admit,’ he read, ‘that I agree with the Savage in finding civilized infantility too easy or, as he puts it, not expensive enough; and I would like to take this opportunity of drawing your fordship’s attention to . . .’

Mustapha Mond’s anger gave place almost at once to mirth. The idea of this creature solemnly lecturing him — him — about the social order was really too grotesque. The man must have gone mad. ‘I ought to give him a lesson,’ he said to himself; then threw back his head and laughed aloud. For the moment, at any rate, the lesson would not be given.

It was a small factory of lighting-sets for helicopters, a branch of the Electrical Equipment Corporation. They were met on the roof itself (for that circular letter of recommendation from the Controller was magical in its effects)

by the Chief Technician and the Human Element Manager. They walked downstairs into the factory.

‘Each process,’ explained the Human Element Manager, ’is carried out, so far as possible, by a single Bokanovsky Group.’

And, in effect, eighty-three almost noseless black brachycephalic Deltas were cold-pressing. The fifty-six four-spindle chucking and turning machines were being manipulated by fifty-six aquiline and ginger Gammas. One hundred and seven heat-conditioned Epsilon Senegalese were working in the foundry. Thirty-three Delta females, long-headed, sandy, with narrow pelvises, and all within 20 millimetres of 1 metre 69 centimetres tall, were cutting screws. In the assembling room, the dynamos were being put together by two sets of Gamma-Plus dwarfs. The two low work-tables faced one another; between them crawled the conveyor with its load of separate parts; forty-seven blond heads were confronted by forty-seven brown ones. Forty-seven snubs by forty-seven hooks; forty-seven receding by forty-seven prognathous chins. The completed mechanisms were inspected by eighteen identical curly auburn girls in Gamma green, packed in crates by thirty-four short-legged, left-handed male Delta-Minuses, and loaded into the waiting trucks and lorries by sixty-three blue-eyed, flaxen and freckled Epsilon Semi-Morons.

‘O brave new world . . .’ By some malice of his memory the Savage found himself repeating Miranda’s words. ‘O brave new world that has such people in it.’

‘And I assure you,’ the Human Element Manager concluded, as they left the factory, ‘we hardly ever have any trouble with our workers. We always find . . .’

But the Savage had suddenly broken away from his companions and was violently retching, behind a clump of laurels, as though the solid earth had been a helicopter in an air pocket.

‘The Savage,’ wrote Bernard, ‘refuses to take soma, and seems much distressed because the woman Linda, his m —— , remains permanently on holiday. It is worthy of note that, in spite of his m — — ‘s senility and the

extreme repulsiveness of her appearance, the Savage frequently goes to see her and appears to be much attached to her — an interesting example of the way in which early conditioning can be made to modify and even run counter to natural impulses (in this case, the impulse to recoil from an unpleasant object).'

At Eton they alighted on the roof of Upper School. On the opposite side of School Yard, the fifty-two stories of Lupton's Tower gleamed white in the sunshine. College on their left and, on their right, the School Community Singery reared their venerable piles of ferro-concrete and vita-glass. In the centre of the quadrangle stood the quaint old chrome-steel statue of Our Ford.

Dr. Gaffney, the Provost, and Miss Keate, the Head Mistress, received them as they stepped out of the plane.

'Do you have many twins here?' the Savage asked rather apprehensively, as they set out on their tour of inspection.

'Oh no,' the Provost answered. 'Eton is reserved exclusively for upper-caste boys and girls. One egg, one adult. It makes education more difficult, of course. But as they'll be called upon to take responsibilities and deal with unexpected emergencies, it can't be helped.' He sighed.

Bernard, meanwhile, had taken a strong fancy to Miss Keate. 'If you're free any Monday, Wednesday, or Friday evening,' he was saying. Jerking his thumb towards the Savage, 'He's curious, you know,' Bernard added. 'Quaint.'

Miss Keate smiled (and her smile was really charming, he thought); said Thank you; would be delighted to come to one of his parties. The Provost opened a door.

Five minutes in that Alpha-Double-Plus classroom left John a trifle bewildered.

'What is elementary relativity?' he whispered to Bernard. Bernard tried to explain, then thought better of it and suggested that they should go to some other classroom.

From behind a door in the corridor leading to the Beta-Minus geography room, a ringing soprano voice called, 'One, two, three, four,' and then, with a

weary impatience, ‘As you were.’

‘Malthusian Drill,’ explained the Head Mistress. ‘Most of our girls are freemartins, of course. I’m a freemartin myself.’ She smiled at Bernard. ‘But we have about eight hundred unsterilized ones who need constant drilling.’

In the Beta-Minus geography room John learnt that ‘a savage reservation is a place which, owing to unfavourable climatic or geological conditions, or poverty of natural resources, has not been worth the expense of civilizing.’ A click; the room was darkened; and suddenly, on the screen above the Master’s head, there were the Penitentes of Acoma prostrating themselves before Our Lady, and wailing as John had heard them wail, confessing their sins before Jesus on the cross, before the eagle image of Pookong. The young Etonians fairly shouted with laughter. Still wailing, the Penitentes rose to their feet, stripped off their upper garments and, with knotted whips, began to beat themselves, blow after blow. Redoubled, the laughter drowned even the amplified record of their groans.

‘But why do they laugh?’ asked the Savage in a pained bewilderment.

‘Why?’ The Provost turned towards him a still broadly grinning face. ‘Why? But because it’s so extraordinarily funny.’

In the cinematographic twilight, Bernard risked a gesture which, in the past, even total darkness would hardly have emboldened him to make. Strong in his new importance, he put his arm round the Head Mistress’s waist. It yielded, willowily. He was just about to snatch a kiss or two and perhaps a gentle pinch, when the shutters clicked open again.

‘Perhaps we had better go on,’ said Miss Keate, and moved towards the door.

‘And this,’ said the Provost a moment later, ’is the Hypnopædic Control Room.’

Hundreds of synthetic music boxes, one for each dormitory, stood ranged in shelves round three sides of the room; pigeon-holed on the fourth were the paper sound-track rolls on which the various hypnopædic lessons were printed.

‘You slip the roll in here,’ explained Bernard, interrupting Dr. Gaffney, ‘press down this switch . . .’

‘No, that one,’ corrected the Provost, annoyed.

‘That one, then. The roll unwinds. The selenium cells transform the light impulses into sound waves, and . . .’

‘And there you are,’ Dr. Gaffney concluded.

‘Do they read Shakespeare?’ asked the Savage as they walked, on their way to the Bio-chemical Laboratories, past the School Library.

‘Certainly not,’ said the Head Mistress, blushing.

‘Our library,’ said Dr. Gaffney, ‘contains only books of reference. If our young people need distraction, they can get it at the feelies. We don’t encourage them to indulge in any solitary amusements.’

Five bus-loads of boys and girls, singing or in a silent embracement, rolled past them over the vitrified highway.

‘Just returned,’ explained Dr. Gaffney, while Bernard, whispering, made an appointment with the Head Mistress for that very evening, ‘from the Slough Crematorium. Death conditioning begins at eighteen months. Every tot spends two mornings a week in a Hospital for the Dying. All the best toys are kept there, and they get chocolate cream on death days. They learn to take dying as a matter of course.’

‘Like any other physiological process,’ put in the Head Mistress professionally.

Eight o’clock at the Savoy. It was all arranged.

On their way back to London they stopped at the Television Corporation’s factory at Brentford.

‘Do you mind waiting here a moment while I go and telephone?’ asked Bernard.

The Savage waited and watched. The Main Day-Shift was just going off duty. Crowds of lower-caste workers were queued-up in front of the monorail station — seven or eight hundred Gamma, Delta and Epsilon men and women, with not more than a dozen faces and statures between them. To each of them, with his or

her ticket, the booking clerk pushed over a little cardboard pillbox. The long caterpillar of men and women moved slowly forward.

‘What’s in those’ (remembering The Merchant of Venice), ‘those caskets?’ the Savage enquired when Bernard had rejoined him.

‘The day’s soma ration,’ Bernard answered, rather indistinctly; for he was masticating a piece of Benito Hoover’s chewing-gum. ‘They get it after their work’s over. Four half-gramme tablets. Six on Saturdays.’

He took John’s arm affectionately and they walked back towards the helicopter.

Lenina came singing into the Changing Room.

‘You seem very pleased with yourself,’ said Fanny.

‘I am pleased,’ she answered. Zip! ‘Bernard rang up half an hour ago.’ Zip, zip! She stepped out of her shorts. ‘He has an unexpected engagement.’ Zip! ‘Asked me if I’d take the Savage to the feelies this evening. I must fly.’ She hurried away towards the bathroom.

‘She’s a lucky girl,’ Fanny said to herself as she watched Lenina go.

There was no envy in the comment; good-natured Fanny was merely stating a fact. Lenina was lucky; lucky in having shared with Bernard a generous portion of the Savage’s immense celebrity, lucky in reflecting from her insignificant person the moment’s supremely fashionable glory. Had not the Secretary of the Young Women’s Fordian Association asked her to give a lecture about her experiences? Had she not been invited to the Annual Dinner of the Aphroditæum Club? Had she not already appeared in the Feelytone News — visibly, audibly and tactually appeared to countless millions all over the planet?

Hardly less flattering had been the attentions paid her by conspicuous individuals. The Resident World Controller’s Second Secretary had asked her to dinner and breakfast. She had spent one week-end with the Ford Chief-Justice, and another with the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury. The President of the Internal and External Secretions Corporation was perpetually on the phone, and she had been to Deauville with the Deputy-Governor of the Bank of Europe.

‘It’s wonderful, of course. And yet in a way,’ she had confessed to Fanny, ‘I feel as though I were getting something on false pretences. Because, of course, the first thing they all want to know is what it’s like to make love to a Savage. And I have to say I don’t know.’ She shook her head. ‘Most of the men don’t believe me, of course. But it’s true. I wish it weren’t,’ she added sadly and sighed. ‘He’s terribly good-looking; don’t you think so?’

‘But doesn’t he like you?’ asked Fanny.

‘Sometimes I think he does and sometimes I think he doesn’t. He always does his best to avoid me; goes out of the room when I come in; won’t touch me; won’t even look at me. But sometimes if I turn round suddenly, I catch him staring; and then — well, you know how men look when they like you.’

Yes, Fanny knew.

‘I can’t make it out,’ said Lenina.

She couldn’t make it out; and not only was bewildered; was also rather upset.

‘Because, you see, Fanny, I like him.’

Liked him more and more. Well, now there’d be a real chance, she thought, as she scented herself after her bath. Dab, dab, dab — a real chance. Her high spirits overflowed in song.

‘Hug me till you drug me, honey;
Kiss me till I’m in a coma:
Hug me, honey, snuggly bunny;
Love’s as good as soma.’

The scent organ was playing a delightfully refreshing Herbal Capriccio — rippling arpeggios of thyme and lavender, of rosemary, basil, myrtle, tarragon; a series of daring modulations through the spice keys into ambergris; and a slow return through sandalwood, camphor, cedar and new-mown hay (with occasional subtle touches of discord — a whiff of kidney pudding, the faintest suspicion of pig’s dung) back to the simple aromatics with which the piece began. The final blast of thyme died away; there was a round of applause; the lights went up. In the synthetic music machine the sound-track roll began to unwind. It was a trio

for hyper-violin, super-’cello and oboe-surrogate that now filled the air with its agreeable languor. Thirty or forty bars — and then, against this instrumental background, a much more than human voice began to warble; now throaty, now from the head, now hollow as a flute, now charged with yearning harmonics, it effortlessly passed from Gaspard Forster’s low record on the very frontiers of musical tone to a trilled bat-note high above the highest C to which (in 1770, at the Ducal opera of Parma, and to the astonishment of Mozart) Lucrezia Ajugari, alone of all the singers in history, once piercingly gave utterance.

Sunk in their pneumatic stalls, Lenina and the Savage sniffed and listened. It was now the turn also for eyes and skin.

The house lights went down; fiery letters stood out solid and as though self-supported in the darkness. Three Weeks in a Helicopter. An All-Super-Singing, Synthetic-Talking, Coloured, Stereoscopic Feely. With Synchronized Scent-Organ Accompaniment.

‘Take hold of those metal knobs on the arms of your chair,’ whispered Lenina. ‘Otherwise you won’t get any of the feely effects.’

The Savage did as he was told.

Those fiery letters, meanwhile, had disappeared; there were ten seconds of complete darkness; then suddenly, dazzling and incomparably more solid-looking than they would have seemed in actual flesh and blood, far more real than reality, there stood the stereoscopic images, locked in one another’s arms, of a gigantic negro and a golden-haired young brachycephalic Beta-Plus female.

The Savage started. That sensation on his lips! He lifted a hand to his mouth; the titillation ceased; let his hand fall back on the metal knob; it began again. The scent organ, meanwhile, breathed pure musk. Expiringly, a sound-track super-dove cooed ‘Oo-oh’; and vibrating only thirty-two times a second, a deeper than African bass made answer: ‘Aa-aah.’ ‘Ooh-ah! Ooh-ah!’ the stereoscopic lips came together again, and once more the facial erogenous zones of the six thousand spectators in the Alhambra tingled with almost intolerable galvanic pleasure. ‘Ooh . . .’

The plot of the film was extremely simple. A few minutes after the first Ooh's and Aah's (a duet having been sung and a little love made on that famous bearskin, every hair of which — the Assistant Predestinator was perfectly right — could be separately and distinctly felt), the negro had a helicopter accident, fell on his head. Thump! what a twinge through the forehead! A chorus of ow's and aie's went up from the audience.

The concussion knocked all the negro's conditioning into a cocked hat. He developed for the Beta blonde an exclusive and maniacal passion. She protested. He persisted. There were struggles, pursuits, an assault on a rival, finally a sensational kidnapping. The Beta blonde was ravished away into the sky and kept there, hovering, for three weeks in a wildly anti-social tête-à-tête with the black madman. Finally, after a whole series of adventures and much aerial acrobacy, three handsome young Alphas succeeded in rescuing her. The negro was packed off to an Adult Re-conditioning Centre and the film ended happily and decorously, with the Beta blonde becoming the mistress of all her three rescuers. They interrupted themselves for a moment to sing a synthetic quartet, with full super-orchestral accompaniment and gardenias on the scent organ. Then the bearskin made a final appearance and, amid a blare of sexophones, the last stereoscopic kiss faded into darkness, the last electric titillation died on the lips like a dying moth that quivers, quivers, ever more feebly, ever more faintly, and at last is quite, quite still.

But for Lenina the moth did not completely die. Even after the lights had gone up, while they were shuffling slowly along with the crowd towards the lifts, its ghost still fluttered against her lips, still traced fine shuddering roads of anxiety and pleasure across her skin. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes dewily bright, her breath came deeply. She caught hold of the Savage's arm and pressed it, limp, against her side. He looked down at her for a moment, pale, pained, desiring, and ashamed of his desire. He was not worthy, not . . . Their eyes for a moment met. What treasures hers promised! A queen's ransom of temperament. Hastily he looked away, disengaged his imprisoned arm. He was obscurely terrified lest she should cease to be something he could feel himself unworthy of.

‘I don’t think you ought to see things like that,’ he said, making haste to transfer from Lenina herself to the surrounding circumstances the blame for any past or possible future lapse from perfection.

‘Things like what, John?’

‘Like this horrible film.’

‘Horrible?’ Lenina was genuinely astonished. ‘But I thought it was lovely.’

‘It was base,’ he said indignantly, ‘it was ignoble.’

She shook her head. ‘I don’t know what you mean.’ Why was he so queer? Why did he go out of his way to spoil things?

In the taxicopter he hardly even looked at her. Bound by strong vows that had never been pronounced, obedient to laws that had long since ceased to run, he sat averted and in silence. Sometimes, as though a finger had plucked at some taut, almost breaking string, his whole body would shake with a sudden nervous start.

The taxicopter landed on the roof of Lenina’s apartment house. ‘At last,’ she thought exultantly as she stepped out of the cab. At last — even though he had been so queer just now. Standing under a lamp, she peered into her hand-mirror. At last. Yes, her nose was a bit shiny. She shook the loose powder from her puff. While he was paying off the taxi — there would just be time. She rubbed at the shininess, thinking: ‘He’s terribly good-looking. No need for him to be shy like Bernard. And yet . . . Any other man would have done it long ago. Well, now at last.’ That fragment of a face in the little round mirror suddenly smiled at her.

‘Good-night,’ said a strangled voice behind her. Lenina wheeled round. He was standing in the doorway of the cab, his eyes fixed, staring; had evidently been staring all this time while she was powdering her nose, waiting — but what for? or hesitating, trying to make up his mind, and all the time thinking, thinking — she could not imagine what extraordinary thoughts. ‘Good-night, Lenina,’ he repeated, and made a strange grimacing attempt to smile.

‘But, John . . . I thought you were . . . I mean, aren’t you? . . .’

He shut the door and bent forward to say something to the driver. The cab shot up into the air.

Looking down through the window in the floor, the Savage could see Lenina's upturned face, pale in the bluish light of the lamps. The mouth was open, she was calling. Her foreshortened figure rushed away from him; the diminishing square of the roof seemed to be falling through the darkness.

Five minutes later he was back in his room. From its hiding-place he took out his mouse-nibbled volume, turned with religious care its stained and crumpled pages, and began to read Othello. Othello, he remembered, was like the hero of Three Weeks in a Helicopter — a black man.

Drying her eyes, Lenina walked across the roof to the lift. On her way down to the twenty-seventh floor she pulled out her soma bottle. One gramme, she decided, would not be enough; hers had been more than a one-gramme affliction. But if she took two grammes, she ran the risk of not waking up in time to-morrow morning. She compromised and, into her cupped left palm, shook out three half-gramme tablets.

Chapter XII

BERNARD HAD TO shout through the locked door; the Savage would not open.

‘But everybody’s there, waiting for you.’

‘Let them wait,’ came back the muffled voice through the door.

‘But you know quite well, John’ (how difficult it is to sound persuasive at the top of one’s voice!), ‘I asked them on purpose to meet you.’

‘You ought to have asked me first whether I wanted to meet them.’

‘But you always came before, John.’

‘That’s precisely why I don’t want to come again.’

‘Just to please me,’ Bernard bellowingly wheedled. ‘Won’t you come to please me?’

‘No.’

‘Do you seriously mean it?’

‘Yes.’

Despairingly, ‘But what shall I do?’ Bernard wailed.

‘Go to hell!’ bawled the exasperated voice from within.

‘But the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury is there to-night.’ Bernard was almost in tears.

‘Ai yaa tákwa!’ It was only in Zuñi that the Savage could adequately express what he felt about the Arch-Community-Songster. ‘Háni!’ he added as an afterthought; and then (with what derisive ferocity!): ‘Sons éso tse-ná.’ And he spat on the ground, as Popé might have done.

In the end Bernard had to slink back, diminished, to his rooms and inform the impatient assembly that the Savage would not be appearing that evening. The news was received with indignation. The men were furious at having been tricked into behaving politely to this insignificant fellow with the unsavoury

reputation and the heretical opinions. The higher their position in the hierarchy, the deeper their resentment.

‘To play such a joke on me,’ the Arch-Songster kept repeating, ‘on me!’

As for the women, they indignantly felt that they had been had on false pretences — had by a wretched little man who had had alcohol poured into his bottle by mistake — by a creature with a Gamma-Minus physique. It was an outrage, and they said so, more and more loudly. The Head Mistress of Eton was particularly scathing.

Lenina alone said nothing. Pale, her blue eyes clouded with an unwonted melancholy, she sat in a corner, cut off from those who surrounded her by an emotion which they did not share. She had come to the party filled with a strange feeling of anxious exultation. ‘In a few minutes,’ she had said to herself, as she entered the room, ‘I shall be seeing him, talking to him, telling him’ (for she had come with her mind made up) ‘that I like him — more than anybody I’ve ever known. And then perhaps he’ll say . . .’

What would he say? The blood had rushed to her cheeks.

‘Why was he so strange the other night, after the feelies? So queer. And yet I’m absolutely sure he really does rather like me. I’m sure . . .’

It was at this moment that Bernard had made his announcement; the Savage wasn’t coming to the party.

Lenina suddenly felt all the sensations normally experienced at the beginning of a Violent Passion Surrogate treatment — a sense of dreadful emptiness, a breathless apprehension, a nausea. Her heart seemed to stop beating.

‘Perhaps it’s because he doesn’t like me,’ she said to herself. And at once this possibility became an established certainty: John had refused to come because he didn’t like her. He didn’t like her. . . .

‘It really is a bit too thick,’ the Head Mistress of Eton was saying to the Director of Crematoria and Phosphorus Reclamation. ‘When I think that I actually . . .’

‘Yes,’ came the voice of Fanny Crowne, ‘it’s absolutely true about the alcohol. Some one I know knew some one who was working in the Embryo

Store at the time. She said to my friend, and my friend said to me . . .'

'Too bad, too bad,' said Henry Foster, sympathizing with the Arch-Community-Songster. 'It may interest you to know that our ex-Director was on the point of transferring him to Iceland.'

Pierced by every word that was spoken, the tight balloon of Bernard's happy self-confidence was leaking from a thousand wounds. Pale, distraught, abject and agitated, he moved among his guests, stammering incoherent apologies, assuring them that next time the Savage would certainly be there, begging them to sit down and take a carotine sandwich, a slice of vitamin A pâté, a glass of champagne-surrogate. They duly ate, but ignored him; drank and were either rude to his face or talked to one another about him, loudly and offensively as though he had not been there.

'And now, my friends,' said the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury, in that beautiful ringing voice with which he led the proceedings at Ford's Day Celebrations, 'Now, my friends, I think perhaps the time has come . . .' He rose, put down his glass, brushed from his purple viscose waistcoat the crumbs of a considerable collation, and walked towards the door.

Bernard darted forward to intercept him.

'Must you really, Arch-Songster? . . . It's very early still. I'd hoped you would . . .'

Yes, what hadn't he hoped, when Lenina confidentially told him that the Arch-Community-Songster would accept an invitation if it were sent. 'He's really rather sweet, you know.' And she had shown Bernard the little golden zipper-fastening in the form of a T which the Arch-Songster had given her as a memento of the week-end she had spent at the Diocesan Singery. To meet the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury and Mr. Savage. Bernard had proclaimed his triumph on every invitation card. But the Savage had chosen this evening of all evenings to lock himself up in his room, to shout 'Háni!' and even (it was lucky that Bernard didn't understand Zuñi) 'Sons éso tse-ná!' What should have been the crowning moment of Bernard's whole career had turned out to be the moment of his greatest humiliation.

‘I’d so much hoped . . .’ he stammeringly repeated, looking up at the great dignitary with pleading and distracted eyes.

‘My young friend,’ said the Arch-Community-Songster in a tone of loud and solemn severity; there was a general silence. ‘Let me give you a word of advice.’ He wagged his finger at Bernard. ‘Before it’s too late. A word of good advice.’ (His voice became sepulchral.) ‘Mend your ways, my young friend, mend your ways.’ He made the sign of the T over him and turned away. ‘Lenina, my dear,’ he called in another tone. ‘Come with me.’

Obediently, but unsmiling and (wholly insensible of the honour done to her) without elation, Lenina walked after him, out of the room. The other guests followed at a respectful interval. The last of them slammed the door. Bernard was all alone.

Punctured, utterly deflated, he dropped into a chair and, covering his face with his hands, began to weep. A few minutes later, however, he thought better of it and took four tablets of soma.

Upstairs in his room the Savage was reading Romeo and Juliet.

Lenina and the Arch-Community-Songster stepped out on to the roof of the Singery. ‘Hurry up, my young friend — I mean, Lenina,’ called the Arch-Songster impatiently from the lift gates. Lenina, who had lingered for a moment to look at the moon, dropped her eyes and came hurrying across the roof to rejoin him.

‘A New Theory of Biology’ was the title of the paper which Mustapha Mond had just finished reading. He sat for some time, meditatively frowning, then picked up his pen and wrote across the title-page. ‘The author’s mathematical treatment of the conception of purpose is novel and highly ingenious, but heretical and, so far as the present social order is concerned, dangerous and potentially subversive. Not to be published.’ He underlined the words. ‘The author will be kept under supervision. His transference to the Marine Biological

Station of St. Helena may become necessary.' A pity, he thought, as he signed his name. It was a masterly piece of work. But once you began admitting explanations in terms of purpose — well, you didn't know what the result might be. It was the sort of idea that might easily de-condition the more unsettled minds among the higher castes — make them lose their faith in happiness as the Sovereign Good and take to believing, instead, that the goal was somewhere beyond, somewhere outside the present human sphere; that the purpose of life was not the maintenance of well-being, but some intensification and refining of consciousness, some enlargement of knowledge. Which was, the Controller reflected, quite possibly true. But not, in the present circumstance, admissible. He picked up his pen again, and under the words 'Not to be published' drew a second line, thicker and blacker than the first; then sighed. 'What fun it would be,' he thought, 'if one didn't have to think about happiness!'

With closed eyes, his face shining with rapture, John was softly declaiming to vacancy: 'O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night

Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;

Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear. . . .'

The golden T lay shining on Lenina's bosom. Sportively, the Arch-Community-Songster caught hold of it, sportively he pulled, pulled. 'I think,' said Lenina suddenly, breaking a long silence, 'I'd better take a couple of grammes of soma.'

Bernard, by this time, was fast asleep and smiling at the private paradise of his dreams. Smiling, smiling. But inexorably, every thirty seconds, the minute hand of the electric clock above his bed jumped forward with an almost imperceptible click. Click, click, click, click . . . And it was morning. Bernard was back among the miseries of space and time. It was in the lowest spirits that he taxied across to his work at the Conditioning Centre. The intoxication of

success had evaporated; he was soberly his old self; and by contrast with the temporary balloon of these last weeks, the old self seemed unprecedentedly heavier than the surrounding atmosphere.

To this deflated Bernard the Savage showed himself unexpectedly sympathetic.

‘You’re more like what you were at Malpais,’ he said, when Bernard had told him his plaintive story. ‘Do you remember when we first talked together? Outside the little house. You’re like what you were then.’

‘Because I’m unhappy again; that’s why.’

‘Well, I’d rather be unhappy than have the sort of false, lying happiness you were having here.’

‘I like that,’ said Bernard bitterly. ‘When it’s you who were the cause of it all. Refusing to come to my party and so turning them all against me!’ He knew that what he was saying was absurd in its injustice; he admitted inwardly, and at last even aloud, the truth of all that the Savage now said about the worthlessness of friends who could be turned upon so slight a provocation into persecuting enemies. But in spite of this knowledge and these admissions, in spite of the fact that his friend’s support and sympathy were now his only comfort, Bernard continued perversely to nourish, along with his quite genuine affection, a secret grievance against the Savage, to meditate a campaign of small revenges to be wreaked upon him. Nourishing a grievance against the Arch-Community-Songster was useless; there was no possibility of being revenged on the Chief Bottler or the Assistant Predestinator. As a victim, the Savage possessed, for Bernard, this enormous superiority over the others: that he was accessible. One of the principal functions of a friend is to suffer (in a milder and symbolic form) the punishments that we should like, but are unable, to inflict upon our enemies.

Bernard’s other victim-friend was Helmholtz. When, discomfited, he came and asked once more for the friendship which in his prosperity he had not thought it worth his while to preserve, Helmholtz gave it; and gave it without a reproach, without a comment, as though he had forgotten that there had ever been a quarrel. Touched, Bernard felt himself at the same time humiliated by this

magnanimity — a magnanimity the more extraordinary and therefore the more humiliating in that it owed nothing to soma and everything to Helmholtz's character. It was the Helmholtz of daily life who forgot and forgave, not the Helmholtz of a half-gramme holiday. Bernard was duly grateful (it was an enormous comfort to have his friend again) and also duly resentful (it would be a pleasure to take some revenge on Helmholtz for his generosity.) At their first meeting after the estrangement, Bernard poured out the tale of his miseries and accepted consolation. It was not till some days later that he learned, to his surprise and with a twinge of shame, that he was not the only one who had been in trouble. Helmholtz had also come into conflict with Authority.

'It was over some rhymes,' he explained. 'I was giving my usual course of Advanced Emotional Engineering for Third Year Students. Twelve lectures, of which the seventh is about rhymes. "On the Use of Rhymes in Moral Propaganda and Advertisement," to be precise. I always illustrate my lecture with a lot of technical examples. This time I thought I'd give them one I'd just written myself. Pure madness, of course; but I couldn't resist it.' He laughed. 'I was curious to see what their reactions would be. Besides,' he added more gravely, 'I wanted to do a bit of propaganda; I was trying to engineer them into feeling as I'd felt when I wrote the rhymes. Ford!' He laughed again. 'What an outcry there was! The Principal had me up and threatened to hand me the immediate sack. I'm a marked man.'

'But what were your rhymes?' Bernard asked.

'They were about being alone.'

Bernard's eyebrows went up.

'I'll recite them to you, if you like.' And Helmholtz began: 'Yesterday's committee,

Sticks, but a broken drum,

Midnight in the City,

Flutes in a vacuum,

Shut lips, sleeping faces,

Every stopped machine,

The dumb and littered places
Where crowds have been —
All silences rejoice,
Weep (loudly or low),
Speak — but with the voice
Of whom, I do not know.
Absence, say, of Susan's,
Absence of Egeria's
Arms and respective bosoms,
Lips and, ah, posteriors,
Slowly form a presence;
Whose? and, I ask, of what
So absurd an essence,
That something, which is not,
Nevertheless should populate
Empty night more solidly
Than that with which we copulate,
Why should it seem so squalidly?

Well, I gave them that as an example, and they reported me to the Principal.'

'I'm not surprised,' said Bernard. 'It's flatly against all their sleep-teaching. Remember, they've had at least a quarter of a million warnings against solitude.'

'I know. But I thought I'd like to see what the effect would be.'

'Well, you've seen now.'

Helmholtz only laughed. 'I feel,' he said, after a silence, 'as though I were just beginning to have something to write about. As though I were beginning to be able to use that power I feel I've got inside me — that extra, latent power. Something seems to be coming to me.' In spite of all his troubles, he seemed, Bernard thought, profoundly happy.

Helmholtz and the Savage took to one another at once. So cordially indeed that Bernard felt a sharp pang of jealousy. In all these weeks he had never come to so close an intimacy with the Savage as Helmholtz immediately achieved.

Watching them, listening to their talk, he found himself sometimes resentfully wishing that he had never brought them together. He was ashamed of his jealousy and alternately made efforts of will and took soma to keep himself from feeling it. But the efforts were not very successful; and between the soma-holidays there were, of necessity, intervals. The odious sentiment kept on returning.

At his third meeting with the Savage, Helmholtz recited his rhymes on Solitude.

‘What do you think of them?’ he asked when he had done.

The Savage shook his head. ‘Listen to this,’ was his answer; and unlocking the drawer in which he kept his mouse-eaten book, he opened and read: ‘Let the bird of loudest lay,

On the sole Arabian tree,

Herald sad and trumpet be . . .’

Helmholtz listened with a growing excitement. At ‘sole Arabian tree’ he started; at ‘thou shrieking harbinger’ he smiled with sudden pleasure; at ‘every fowl of tyrant wing’ the blood rushed up into his cheeks; but at ‘defunctive music’ he turned pale and trembled with an unprecedented emotion. The Savage read on: ‘Property was thus appall’d,

That the self was not the same;

Single nature’s double name

Neither two nor one was call’d.

Reason in itself confounded

Saw division grow together . . .’

‘Orgy-porgy!’ said Bernard, interrupting the reading with a loud, unpleasant laugh. ‘It’s just a Solidarity Service hymn.’ He was revenging himself on his two friends for liking one another more than they liked him.

In the course of their next two or three meetings he frequently repeated this little act of vengeance. It was simple and, since both Helmholtz and the Savage were dreadfully pained by the shattering and defilement of a favourite poetic

crystal, extremely effective. In the end, Helmholtz threatened to kick him out of the room if he dared to interrupt again. And yet, strangely enough, the next interruption, the most disgraceful of all, came from Helmholtz himself.

The Savage was reading Romeo and Juliet aloud — reading (for all the time he was seeing himself as Romeo and Lenina as Juliet) with an intense and quivering passion. Helmholtz had listened to the scene of the lovers' first meeting with a puzzled interest. The scene in the orchard had delighted him with its poetry; but the sentiments expressed had made him smile. Getting into such a state about having a girl — it seemed rather ridiculous. But, taken detail by verbal detail, what a superb piece of emotional engineering! 'That old fellow,' he said, 'he makes our best propaganda technicians look absolutely silly.' The Savage smiled triumphantly and resumed his reading. All went tolerably well until, in the last scene of the third act, Capulet and Lady Capulet began to bully Juliet to marry Paris. Helmholtz had been restless throughout the entire scene; but when, pathetically mimed by the Savage, Juliet cried out: 'Is there no pity sitting in the clouds,

That sees into the bottom of my grief?

O, sweet my mother, cast me not away!

Delay this marriage for a month, a week;

Or, if you do not, make the bridal bed

In that dim monument where Tybalt lies . . .'

when Juliet said this, Helmholtz broke out in an explosion of uncontrollable guffawing.

The mother and father (grotesque obscenity) forcing the daughter to have some one she didn't want! And the idiotic girl not saying that she was having some one else whom (for the moment, at any rate) she preferred! In its smutty absurdity the situation was irresistibly comical. He had managed, with a heroic effort, to hold down the mounting pressure of his hilarity; but 'sweet mother' (in the Savage's tremulous tone of anguish) and the reference to Tybalt lying dead, but evidently uncremated and wasting his phosphorus on a dim monument, were too much for him. He laughed and laughed till the tears streamed down his face

— quenchlessly laughed while, pale with a sense of outrage, the Savage looked at him over the top of his book and then, as the laughter still continued, closed it indignantly, got up and, with the gesture of one who removes his pearl from before swine, locked it away in its drawer.

‘And yet,’ said Helmholtz when, having recovered breath enough to apologize, he had mollified the Savage into listening to his explanations, ‘I know quite well that one needs ridiculous, mad situations like that; one can’t write really well about anything else. Why was that old fellow such a marvellous propaganda technician? Because he had so many insane, excruciating things to get excited about. You’ve got to be hurt and upset; otherwise you can’t think of the really good, penetrating, X-rayish phrases. But fathers and mothers!’ He shook his head. ‘You can’t expect me to keep a straight face about fathers and mothers. And who’s going to get excited about a boy having a girl or not having her?’ (The Savage winced; but Helmholtz, who was staring pensively at the floor, saw nothing.) ‘No,’ he concluded, with a sigh, ‘it won’t do. We need some other kind of madness and violence. But what? What? Where can one find it?’ He was silent; then, shaking his head, ‘I don’t know,’ he said at last, ‘I don’t know.’

Chapter XIII

HENRY FOSTER LOOMED up through the twilight of the Embryo Store.

‘Like to come to a feely this evening?’

Lenina shook her head without speaking.

‘Going out with some one else?’ It interested him to know which of his friends was being had by which other. ‘Is it Benito?’ he questioned.

She shook her head again.

Henry detected the weariness in those purple eyes, the pallor beneath that glaze of lupus, the sadness at the corners of the unsmiling crimson mouth. ‘You’re not feeling ill, are you?’ he asked, a trifle anxiously, afraid that she might be suffering from one of the few remaining infectious diseases.

Yet once more Lenina shook her head.

‘Anyhow, you ought to go and see the doctor,’ said Henry. ‘A doctor a day keeps the jim-jams away,’ he added heartily, driving home his hypnopædic adage with a clap on the shoulder. ‘Perhaps you need a Pregnancy Substitute,’ he suggested. ‘Or else an extra-strong V.P.S. treatment. Sometimes, you know, the standard passion-surrogate isn’t quite . . .’

‘Oh, for Ford’s sake,’ said Lenina, breaking her stubborn silence, ‘shut up!’ And she turned back to her neglected embryos.

A V.P.S. treatment indeed! She would have laughed, if she hadn’t been on the point of crying. As though she hadn’t got enough V.P. of her own! She sighed profoundly as she refilled her syringe. ‘John,’ she murmured to herself, ‘John . . .’ Then ‘My Ford,’ she wondered, ‘have I given this one its sleeping-sickness injection, or haven’t I?’ She simply couldn’t remember. In the end, she decided not to run the risk of letting it have a second dose, and moved down the line to the next bottle.

Twenty-two years eight months and four days from that moment, a promising young Alpha-Minus administrator at Mwanza-Mwanza was to die of trypanosomiasis — the first case for over half a century. Sighing, Lenina went on with her work.

An hour later, in the Changing Room, Fanny was energetically protesting. ‘But it’s absurd to let yourself get into a state like this. Simply absurd,’ she repeated. ‘And what about? A man — one man.’

‘But he’s the one I want.’

‘As though there weren’t millions of other men in the world.’

‘But I don’t want them.’

‘How can you know till you’ve tried?’

‘I have tried.’

‘But how many?’ asked Fanny, shrugging her shoulders contemptuously. ‘One, two?’

‘Dozens. But,’ shaking her head, ‘it wasn’t any good,’ she added.

‘Well, you must persevere,’ said Fanny sententiously. But it was obvious that her confidence in her own prescriptions had been shaken. ‘Nothing can be achieved without perseverance.’

‘But meanwhile . . .’

‘Don’t think of him.’

‘I can’t help it.’

‘Take soma, then.’

‘I do.’

‘Well, go on.’

‘But in the intervals I still like him. I shall always like him.’

‘Well, if that’s the case,’ said Fanny, with decision, ‘why don’t you just go and take him. Whether he wants it or no.’

‘But if you knew how terribly queer he was!’

‘All the more reason for taking a firm line.’

‘It’s all very well to say that.’

‘Don’t stand any nonsense. Act.’ Fanny’s voice was a trumpet; she might have been a Y.W.F.A. lecturer giving an evening talk to adolescent Beta-Minuses. ‘Yes, act — at once. Do it now.’

‘I’d be scared,’ said Lenina.

‘Well, you’ve only got to take half a gramme of soma first. And now I’m going to have my bath.’ She marched off, trailing her towel.

The bell rang, and the Savage, who was impatiently hoping that Helmholtz would come that afternoon (for having at last made up his mind to talk to Helmholtz about Lenina, he could not bear to postpone his confidences a moment longer), jumped up and ran to the door.

‘I had a premonition it was you, Helmholtz,’ he shouted as he opened.

On the threshold, in a white acetate-satin sailor suit, and with a round white cap rakishly tilted over her left ear, stood Lenina.

‘Oh!’ said the Savage, as though some one had struck him a heavy blow.

Half a gramme had been enough to make Lenina forget her fears and her embarrassments. ‘Hullo, John,’ she said, smiling, and walked past him into the room. Automatically he closed the door and followed her. Lenina sat down. There was a long silence.

‘You don’t seem very glad to see me, John,’ she said at last.

‘Not glad?’ The Savage looked at her reproachfully; then suddenly fell on his knees before her and, taking Lenina’s hand, reverently kissed it. ‘Not glad? Oh, if you only knew,’ he whispered, and, venturing to raise his eyes to her face, ‘Admired Lenina,’ he went on, ‘indeed the top of admiration, worth what’s dearest in the world.’ She smiled at him with a luscious tenderness. ‘Oh, you so perfect’ (she was leaning towards him with parted lips), ‘so perfect and so peerless are created’ (nearer and nearer) ‘of every creature’s best.’ Still nearer. The Savage suddenly scrambled to his feet. ‘That’s why,’ he said, speaking with averted face,’ I wanted to do something first . . . I mean, to show I was worthy of you. Not that I could ever really be that. But at any rate to show I wasn’t absolutely unworthy. I wanted to do something.’

‘Why should you think it necessary . . .’ Lenina began, but left the sentence unfinished. There was a note of irritation in her voice. When one has leant forward, nearer and nearer, with parted lips — only to find oneself, quite suddenly, as a clumsy oaf scrambles to his feet, leaning towards nothing at all — well, there is a reason, even with half a gramme of soma circulating in one’s blood-stream, a genuine reason for annoyance.

‘At Malpais,’ the Savage was incoherently mumbling, ‘you had to bring her the skin of a mountain lion — I mean, when you wanted to marry some one. Or else a wolf.’

‘There aren’t any lions in England,’ Lenina almost snapped.

‘And even if there were,’ the Savage added, with sudden contemptuous resentment, ‘people would kill them out of helicopters, I suppose, with poison gas or something. I wouldn’t do that, Lenina.’ He squared his shoulders, he ventured to look at her and was met with a stare of annoyed incomprehension. Confused, ‘I’ll do anything,’ he went on, more and more incoherently. ‘Anything you tell me. There be some sports are painful — you know. But their labour delight in them sets off. That’s what I feel. I mean I’d sweep the floor if you wanted.’

‘But we’ve got vacuum cleaners here,’ said Lenina in bewilderment. ‘It isn’t necessary.’

‘No, of course it isn’t necessary. But some kinds of baseness are nobly undergone. I’d like to undergo something nobly. Don’t you see?’

‘But if there are vacuum cleaners . . .’

‘That’s not the point.’

‘And Epsilon Semi-Morons to work them,’ she went on, ‘well, really, why?’

‘Why? But for you, for you. Just to show that I . . .’

‘And what on earth vacuum cleaners have got to do with lions . . .’

‘To show how much . . .’

‘Or lions with being glad to see me . . .’ She was getting more and more exasperated.

‘How much I love you, Lenina,’ he brought out almost desperately.

An emblem of the inner tide of startled elation, the blood rushed up into Lenina's cheeks. 'Do you mean it, John?'

'But I hadn't meant to say so,' cried the Savage, clasping his hands in a kind of agony. 'Not until . . . Listen, Lenina; in Malpais people get married.'

'Get what?' The irritation had begun to creep back into her voice. What was he talking about now?

'For always. They make a promise to live together for always.'

'What a horrible idea!' Lenina was genuinely shocked.

'Outliving beauty's outward, with a mind that doth renew swifter than blood decays.'

'What?'

'It's like that in Shakespeare too. "If thou dost break her virgin knot before all sanctimonious ceremonies may with full and holy rite . . ." '

'For Ford's sake, John, talk sense. I can't understand a word you say. First it's vacuum cleaners; then it's knots. You're driving me crazy.' She jumped up and, as though afraid that he might run away from her physically, as well as with his mind, caught him by the wrist. 'Answer me this question: do you really like me, or don't you?'

There was a moment's silence; then, in a very low voice, 'I love you more than anything in the world,' he said.

'Then why on earth didn't you say so?' she cried, and so intense was her exasperation that she drove her sharp nails into the skin of his wrist. 'Instead of drivelling away about knots and vacuum cleaners and lions, and making me miserable for weeks and weeks.'

She released his hand and flung it angrily away from her.

'If I didn't like you so much,' she said, 'I'd be furious with you.'

And suddenly her arms were round his neck; he felt her lips soft against his own. So deliciously soft, so warm and electric that inevitably he found himself thinking of the embraces in Three Weeks in a Helicopter. Ooh! ooh! the stereoscopic blonde and aah! the more than real blackamoor. Horror, horror, horror . . . he tried to disengage himself; but Lenina tightened her embrace.

‘Why didn’t you say so?’ she whispered, drawing back her face to look at him. Her eyes were tenderly reproachful.

‘The murkiest den, the most opportune place’ (the voice of conscience thundered poetically), ‘the strongest suggestion our worser genius can, shall never melt mine honour into lust. Never, never!’ he resolved.

‘You silly boy!’ she was saying. ‘I wanted you so much. And if you wanted me too, why didn’t you? . . .’

‘But, Lenina . . .’ he began protesting; and as she immediately untwined her arms, as she stepped away from him, he thought, for a moment, that she had taken his unspoken hint. But when she unbuckled her white patent cartridge belt and hung it carefully over the back of a chair, he began to suspect that he had been mistaken.

‘Lenina!’ he repeated apprehensively.

She put her hand to her neck and gave a long vertical pull; her white sailor’s blouse was ripped to the hem; suspicion condensed into a too, too solid certainty. ‘Lenina, what are you doing?’

Zip, zip! Her answer was wordless. She stepped out of her bell-bottomed trousers. Her zippicamiknicks were a pale shell pink. The Arch-Community-Songster’s golden T dangled at her breast.

‘For those milk paps that through the window bars bore at men’s eyes . . .’ The singing, thundering, magical words made her seem doubly dangerous, doubly alluring. Soft, soft, but how piercing! boring and drilling into reason, tunnelling through resolution. ‘The strongest oaths are straw to the fire i’ the blood. Be more abstemious, or else . . .’

Zip! The rounded pinkness fell apart like a neatly divided apple. A wriggle of the arms, a lifting first of the right foot, then the left: the zippicamiknicks were lying lifeless and as though deflated on the floor.

Still wearing her shoes and socks, and her rakishly tilted round white cap, she advanced towards him. ‘Darling. Darling! If only you’d said so before!’ She held out her arms.

But instead of also saying ‘Darling!’ and holding out his arms, the Savage retreated in terror, flapping his hands at her as though he were trying to scare away some intruding and dangerous animal. Four backward steps, and he was brought to bay against the wall.

‘Sweet!’ said Lenina and, laying her hands on his shoulders, pressed herself against him. ‘Put your arms round me,’ she commanded. ‘Hug me till you drug me, honey.’ She too had poetry at her command, knew words that sang and were spells and beat drums. ‘Kiss me’; she closed her eyes, she let her voice sink to a sleepy murmur, ‘kiss me till I’m in a coma. Hug me, honey, snuggly . . .’

The Savage caught her by the wrists, tore her hands from his shoulders, thrust her roughly away at arm’s length.

‘Ow, you’re hurting me, you’re . . . oh!’ She was suddenly silent. Terror had made her forget the pain. Opening her eyes, she had seen his face — no, not his face, a ferocious stranger’s, pale, distorted, twitching with some insane, inexplicable fury. Aghast, ‘But what is it, John?’ she whispered. He did not answer, but only stared into her face with those mad eyes. The hands that held her wrists were trembling. He breathed deeply and irregularly. Faint almost to imperceptibility, but appalling, she suddenly heard the grinding of his teeth. ‘What is it?’ she almost screamed.

And as though awakened by her cry he caught her by the shoulders and shook her. ‘Whore!’ he shouted. ‘Whore! Impudent strumpet!’

‘Oh, don’t, do-on’t,’ she protested in a voice made grotesquely tremulous by his shaking.

‘Whore!’

‘Plea-ease.’

‘Damned whore!’

‘A gra-amme is be-etter . . .’ she began.

The Savage pushed her away with such force that she staggered and fell. ‘Go,’ he shouted, standing over her menacingly, ‘get out of my sight or I’ll kill you.’ He clenched his fists.

Lenina raised her arm to cover her face. ‘No, please don’t, John . . .’

‘Hurry up. Quick!’

One arm still raised, and following his every movement with a terrified eye, she scrambled to her feet and still crouching, still covering her head, made a dash for the bathroom.

The noise of that prodigious slap by which her departure was accelerated was like a pistol-shot.

‘Ow!’ Lenina bounded forward.

Safely locked into the bathroom, she had leisure to take stock of her injuries. Standing with her back to the mirror, she twisted her head. Looking over her left shoulder she could see the imprint of an open hand standing out distinct and crimson on the pearly flesh. Gingerly she rubbed the wounded spot.

Outside, in the other room, the Savage was striding up and down, marching, marching to the drums and music of magical words. ‘The wren goes to’t, and the small gilded fly does lecher in my sight.’ Maddeningly they rumbled in his ears. ‘The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to’t with a more riotous appetite. Down from the waist they are Centaurs, though women all above. But to the girdle do the gods inherit. Beneath is all the fiends’. There’s hell, there’s darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie, pah, pah! Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination.’

‘John!’ ventured a small ingratiating voice from the bathroom. ‘John!’

‘O thou weed, who art so lovely fair and smell’st so sweet that the sense aches at thee. Was this most goodly book made to write “whore” upon? Heaven stops the nose at it . . .’

But her perfume still hung about him, his jacket was white with the powder that had scented her velvety body. ‘Impudent strumpet, impudent strumpet, impudent strumpet.’ The inexorable rhythm beat itself out. ‘Impudent . . .’

‘John, do you think I might have my clothes?’

He picked up the bell-bottomed trousers, the blouse, the zippicamiknicks.

‘Open!’ he ordered, kicking the door.

‘No, I won’t.’ The voice was frightened and defiant.

‘Well, how do you expect me to give them to you?’

‘Push them through the ventilator over the door.’

He did what she suggested and returned to his uneasy pacing of the room. ‘Impudent strumpet, impudent strumpet. The devil Luxury with his fat rump and potato finger . . .’

‘John.’

He would not answer. ‘Fat rump and potato finger.’

‘John.’

‘What is it?’ he asked gruffly.

‘I wonder if you’d mind giving me my Malthusian belt.’

Lenina sat listening to the footsteps in the other room, wondering, as she listened, how long he was likely to go tramping up and down like that; whether she would have to wait until he left the flat; or if it would be safe, after allowing his madness a reasonable time to subside, to open the bathroom door and make a dash for it.

She was interrupted in the midst of these uneasy speculations by the sound of the telephone bell ringing in the other room. Abruptly the tramping ceased. She heard the voice of the Savage parleying with silence.

‘Hullo.’

. . . . . .

‘Yes.’

. . . . . .

‘If I do not usurp myself, I am.’

. . . . . .

‘Yes, didn’t you hear me say so? Mr. Savage speaking.’

. . . . . .

‘What? Who’s ill? Of course it interests me.’

. . . . . .

‘But is it serious? Is she really bad? I’ll go at once. . . .’

. . . . . .

‘Not in her rooms any more? Where has she been taken?’

. . . . . .

‘Oh, my God! What’s the address?’

. . . . . .

‘Three Park Lane — is that it? Three? Thanks.’

Lenina heard the click of the replaced receiver, then hurrying steps. A door slammed. There was silence. Was he really gone?

With an infinity of precautions she opened the door a quarter of an inch; peeped through the crack; was encouraged by the view of emptiness; opened a little further, and put her whole head out; finally tiptoed into the room; stood for a few seconds with strongly beating heart, listening, listening; then darted to the front door, opened, slipped through, slammed, ran. It was not till she was in the lift and actually dropping down the well that she began to feel herself secure.

Chapter XIV

THE PARK LANE Hospital for the Dying was a sixty-story tower of primrose tiles. As the Savage stepped out of his taxicopter a convoy of gaily-coloured aerial hearses rose whirring from the roof and darted away across the Park, westwards, bound for the Slough Crematorium. At the lift gates the presiding porter gave him the information he required, and he dropped down to Ward 81 (a Galloping Senility ward, the porter explained) on the seventeenth floor.

It was a large room bright with sunshine and yellow paint, and containing twenty beds, all occupied. Linda was dying in company — in company and with all the modern conveniences. The air was continuously alive with gay synthetic melodies. At the foot of every bed, confronting its moribund occupant, was a television box. Television was left on, a running tap, from morning till night. Every quarter of an hour the prevailing perfume of the room was automatically changed. ‘We try,’ explained the nurse, who had taken charge of the Savage at the door, ‘we try to create a thoroughly pleasant atmosphere here — something between a first-class hotel and a feely-palace, if you take my meaning.’

‘Where is she?’ asked the Savage, ignoring these polite explanations.

The nurse was offended. ‘You are in a hurry,’ she said.

‘Is there any hope?’ he asked.

‘You mean, of her not dying?’ (He nodded.) ‘No, of course there isn’t. When somebody’s sent here, there’s no . . .’ Startled by the expression of distress on his pale face, she suddenly broke off. ‘Why, whatever is the matter?’ she asked. She was not accustomed to this kind of thing in visitors. (Not that there were many visitors anyhow: or any reason why there should be many visitors.) ‘You’re not feeling ill, are you?’

He shook his head. ‘She’s my mother,’ he said in a scarcely audible voice.

The nurse glanced at him with startled, horrified eyes; then quickly looked away. From throat to temple she was all one hot blush.

‘Take me to her,’ said the Savage, making an effort to speak in an ordinary tone.

Still blushing, she led the way down the ward. Faces still fresh and unwithered (for senility galloped so hard that it had no time to age the cheeks — only the heart and brain) turned as they passed. Their progress was followed by the blank, incurious eyes of second infancy. The Savage shuddered as he looked.

Linda was lying in the last of the long row of beds, next to the wall. Propped up on pillows, she was watching the Semi-finals of the South American Riemann-Surface Tennis Championship, which were being played in silent and diminished reproduction on the screen of the television box at the foot of the bed. Hither and thither across their square of illumined glass the little figures noiselessly darted, like fish in an aquarium — the silent but agitated inhabitants of another world.

Linda looked on, vaguely and uncomprehendingly smiling. Her pale, bloated face wore an expression of imbecile happiness. Every now and then her eyelids closed, and for a few seconds she seemed to be dozing. Then with a little start she would wake up again — wake up to the aquarium antics of the Tennis Champions, to the Super-Vox-Wurlitzeriana rendering of ‘Hug me till you drug me, honey,’ to the warm draught of verbena that came blowing through the ventilator above her head — would wake to these things, or rather to a dream of which these things, transformed and embellished by the soma in her blood, were the marvellous constituents, and smile once more her broken and discoloured smile of infantile contentment.

‘Well, I must go,’ said the nurse. ‘I’ve got my batch of children coming. Besides, there’s Number 3.’ She pointed up the ward. ‘Might go off any minute now. Well, make yourself comfortable.’ She walked briskly away.

The Savage sat down beside the bed.

‘Linda,’ he whispered, taking her hand.

At the sound of her name, she turned. Her vague eyes brightened with recognition. She squeezed his hand, she smiled, her lips moved; then quite suddenly her head fell forward. She was asleep. He sat watching her — seeking through the tired flesh, seeking and finding that young, bright face which had stooped over his childhood in Malpais, remembering (and he closed his eyes) her voice, her movements, all the events of their life together. ‘Streptocock-Gee to Banbury-T . . .’ How beautiful her singing had been! And those childish rhymes, how magically strange and mysterious!

A, B, C, vitamin D:

The fat’s in the liver, the cod’s in the sea.

He felt the hot tears welling up behind his eyelids as he recalled the words and Linda’s voice as she repeated them. And then the reading lessons; The tot is in the pot, the cat is on the mat; and the Elementary Instructions for Beta Workers in the Embryo Store. And long evenings by the fire or, in summer time, on the roof of the little house, when she told him those stories about the Other Place, outside the Reservation: that beautiful, beautiful Other Place, whose memory, as of a heaven, a paradise of goodness and loveliness, he still kept whole and intact, undefiled by contact with the reality of this real London, these actual civilized men and women.

A sudden noise of shrill voices made him open his eyes and, after hastily brushing away the tears, look round. What seemed an interminable stream of identical eight-year-old male twins was pouring into the room. Twin after twin, twin after twin, they came — a nightmare. Their faces, their repeated face — for there was only one between the lot of them — puggishly stared, all nostrils and pale goggling eyes. Their uniform was khaki. All their mouths hung open. Squealing and chattering they entered. In a moment, it seemed, the ward was maggoty with them. They swarmed between the beds, clambered over, crawled under, peeped into the television boxes, made faces at the patients.

Linda astonished and rather alarmed them. A group stood clustered at the foot of her bed, staring with the frightened and stupid curiosity of animals suddenly confronted by the unknown.

‘Oh, look, look!’ They spoke in low, scared voices. ‘Whatever is the matter with her? Why is she so fat?’

They had never seen a face like hers before — had never seen a face that was not youthful and taut-skinned, a body that had ceased to be slim and upright. All these moribund sexagenarians had the appearance of childish girls. At forty-four, Linda seemed, by contrast, a monster of flaccid and distorted senility.

‘Isn’t she awful?’ came the whispered comments. ‘Look at her teeth!’

Suddenly from under the bed a pug-faced twin popped up between John’s chair and the wall, and began peering into Linda’s sleeping face.

‘I say . . .’ he began; but his sentence ended prematurely in a squeal. The Savage had seized him by the collar, lifted him clear over the chair and, with a smart box on the ears, sent him howling away.

His yells brought the Head Nurse hurrying to the rescue.

‘What have you been doing to him?’ she demanded fiercely. ‘I won’t have you striking the children.’

‘Well, then, keep them away from this bed.’ The Savage’s voice was trembling with indignation. ‘What are these filthy little brats doing here at all? It’s disgraceful!’

‘Disgraceful? But what do you mean? They’re being death-conditioned. And I tell you,’ she warned him truculently, ‘if I have any more of your interference with their conditioning, I’ll send for the porters and have you thrown out.’

The Savage rose to his feet and took a couple of steps towards her. His movements and the expression on his face were so menacing that the nurse fell back in terror. With a great effort he checked himself and, without speaking, turned away and sat down again by the bed.

Reassured, but with a dignity that was a trifle shrill and uncertain, ‘I’ve warned you,’ said the nurse, ‘so mind.’ Still, she led the too inquisitive twins away and made them join in the game of hunt-the-zipper, which had been organized by one of her colleagues at the other end of the room.

‘Run along now and have your cup of caffeine solution, dear,’ she said to the other nurse. The exercise of authority restored her confidence, made her feel

better. ‘Now, children!’ she called.

Linda had stirred uneasily, had opened her eyes for a moment, looked vaguely around, and then once more dropped off to sleep. Sitting beside her, the Savage tried hard to recapture his mood of a few minutes before. ‘A, B, C, vitamin D,’ he repeated to himself, as though the words were a spell that would restore the dead past to life. But the spell was ineffective. Obstinately the beautiful memories refused to rise; there was only a hateful resurrection of jealousies and uglinesses and miseries. Popé with the blood trickling down from his cut shoulder; and Linda hideously asleep, and the flies buzzing round the spilt mescal on the floor beside the bed; and the boys calling those names as she passed. . . . Ah, no, no! He shut his eyes, he shook his head in strenuous denial of these memories. ‘A, B, C, vitamin D . . .’ He tried to think of those times when he sat on her knees and she put her arms about him and sang, over and over again, rocking him, rocking him to sleep. ‘A, B, C, vitamin D, vitamin D, vitamin D . . .’

The Super-Vox-Wurlitzeriana had risen to a sobbing crescendo; and suddenly the verbena gave place, in the scent-circulating system, to an intense patchouli. Linda stirred, woke up, stared for a few seconds bewilderedly at the Semi-finalists, then, lifting her face, sniffed once or twice at the newly perfumed air and suddenly smiled — a smile of childish ecstasy.

‘Popé!’ she murmured, and closed her eyes. ‘Oh, I do so like it, I do . . .’ She sighed and let herself sink back into the pillows.

‘But, Linda!’ The Savage spoke imploringly. ‘Don’t you know me?’ He had tried so hard, had done his very best; why wouldn’t she allow him to forget? He squeezed her limp hand almost with violence, as though he would force her to come back from this dream of ignoble pleasures, from these base and hateful memories — back into the present, back into reality: the appalling present, the awful reality — but sublime, but significant, but desperately important precisely because of the imminence of that which made them so fearful. ‘Don’t you know me, Linda?’

He felt the faint answering pressure of her hand. The tears started into his eyes. He bent over her and kissed her.

Her lips moved. ‘Popé!’ she whispered again, and it was as though he had had a pailful of ordure thrown in his face.

Anger suddenly boiled up in him. Balked for the second time, the passion of his grief had found another outlet, was transformed into a passion of agonized rage.

‘But I’m John!’ he shouted. ‘I’m John!’ And in his furious misery he actually caught her by the shoulder and shook her.

Linda’s eyes fluttered open; she saw him, knew him— ‘John!’ — but situated the real face, the real and violent hands, in an imaginary world — among the inward and private equivalents of patchouli and the Super-Wurlitzer, among the transfigured memories and the strangely transposed sensations that constituted the universe of her dream. She knew him for John, her son, but fancied him an intruder into that paradisal Malpais where she had been spending her soma-holiday with Popé. He was angry because she liked Popé, he was shaking her because Popé was there in the bed — as though there were something wrong, as though all civilized people didn’t do the same? ‘Every one belongs to every . . .’ Her voice suddenly died into an almost inaudible breathless croaking, her mouth fell open: she made a desperate effort to fill her lungs with air. But it was as though she had forgotten how to breathe. She tried to cry out — but no sound came; only the terror of her staring eyes revealed what she was suffering. Her hands went to her throat, then clawed at the air — the air she could no longer breathe, the air that, for her, had ceased to exist.

The Savage was on his feet, bent over her. ‘What is it, Linda? What is it?’ His voice was imploring; it was as though he were begging to be reassured.

The look she gave him was charged with an unspeakable terror — with terror and, it seemed to him, reproach. She tried to raise herself in bed, but fell back on to the pillows. Her face was horribly distorted, her lips blue.

The Savage turned and ran up the ward.

‘Quick, quick!’ he shouted. ‘Quick!’

Standing in the centre of a ring of zipper-hunting twins, the Head Nurse looked round. The first moment's astonishment gave place almost instantly to disapproval. 'Don't shout! Think of the little ones,' she said, frowning. 'You might decondition . . . But what are you doing?' He had broken through the ring. 'Be careful!' A child was yelling.

'Quick, quick!' He caught her by the sleeve, dragged her after him. 'Quick! Something's happened. I've killed her.'

By the time they were back at the end of the ward Linda was dead.

The Savage stood for a moment in frozen silence, then fell on his knees beside the bed and, covering his face with his hands, sobbed uncontrollably.

The nurse stood irresolute, looking now at the kneeling figure by the bed (the scandalous exhibition!) and now (poor children!) at the twins who had stopped their hunting of the zipper and were staring from the other end of the ward, staring with all their eyes and nostrils at the shocking scene that was being enacted round Bed 20. Should she speak to him? try to bring him back to a sense of decency? remind him of where he was? of what fatal mischief he might do to these poor innocents? Undoing all their wholesome death-conditioning with this disgusting outcry — as though death were something terrible, as though any one mattered as much as all that! It might give them the most disastrous ideas about the subject, might upset them into reacting in the entirely wrong, the utterly anti-social way.

She stepped forward, she touched him on the shoulder. 'Can't you behave?' she said in a low, angry voice. But, looking round, she saw that half a dozen twins were already on their feet and advancing down the ward. The circle was disintegrating. In another moment . . . No, the risk was too great; the whole Group might be put back six or seven months in its conditioning. She hurried back towards her menaced charges.

'Now, who wants a chocolate éclair?' she asked in a loud, cheerful tone.

'Me!' yelled the entire Bokanovsky Group in chorus. Bed 20 was completely forgotten.

‘Oh, God, God, God . . .’ the Savage kept repeating to himself. In the chaos of grief and remorse that filled his mind it was the one articulate word. ‘God!’ he whispered it aloud. ‘God . . .’

‘Whatever is he saying?’ said a voice, very near, distinct and shrill through the warblings of the Super-Wurlitzer.

The Savage violently started and, uncovering his face, looked round. Five khaki twins, each with the stump of a long éclair in his right hand, and their identical faces variously smeared with liquid chocolate, were standing in a row, puggily goggling at him.

They met his eyes and simultaneously grinned. One of them pointed with his éclair butt.

‘Is she dead?’ he asked.

The Savage stared at them for a moment in silence. Then, in silence he rose to his feet, in silence slowly walked towards the door.

‘Is she dead?’ repeated the inquisitive twin trotting at his side.

The Savage looked down at him and still without speaking pushed him away. The twin fell on the floor and at once began to howl. The Savage did not even look round.

Chapter XV

THE MENIAL STAFF of the Park Lane Hospital for the Dying consisted of one hundred and sixty-two Deltas divided into two Bokanovsky Groups of eighty-four red-headed female and seventy-eight dark dolichocephalic male twins, respectively. At six, when their working day was over, the two Groups assembled in the vestibule of the Hospital and were served by the Deputy Sub-Bursar with their soma ration.

From the lift the Savage stepped out into the midst of them. But his mind was elsewhere — with death, with his grief, and his remorse; mechanically, without consciousness of what he was doing, he began to shoulder his way through the crowd.

‘Who are you pushing? Where do you think you’re going?’

High, low, from a multitude of separate throats, only two voices squeaked or growled. Repeated indefinitely, as though by a train of mirrors, two faces, one a hairless and freckled moon haloed in orange, the other a thin, beaked bird-mask, stubbly with two days’ beard, turned angrily towards him. Their words and, in his ribs, the sharp nudging of elbows, broke through his unawareness. He woke once more to external reality, looked round him, knew what he saw — knew it, with a sinking sense of horror and disgust, for the recurrent delirium of his days and nights, the nightmare of swarming indistinguishable sameness. Twins, twins. . . . Like maggots they had swarmed defilingly over the mystery of Linda’s death. Maggots again, but larger, full grown, they now crawled across his grief and his repentance. He halted and, with bewildered and horrified eyes, stared round him at the khaki mob, in the midst of which, overtopping it by a full head, he stood. ‘How many goodly creatures are there here!’ The singing words mocked him derisively. ‘How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world . . .’

‘Soma distribution!’ shouted a loud voice. ‘In good order, please. Hurry up there.’

A door had been opened, a table and chair carried into the vestibule. The voice was that of a jaunty young Alpha, who had entered carrying a black iron cash-box. A murmur of satisfaction went up from the expectant twins. They forgot all about the Savage. Their attention was now focussed on the black cash-box, which the young man had placed on the table, and was now in process of unlocking. The lid was lifted.

‘Oo-oh!’ said all the hundred and sixty-two simultaneously, as though they were looking at fireworks.

The young man took out a handful of tiny pillboxes. ‘Now,’ he said peremptorily, ‘step forward, please. One at a time, and no shoving.’

One at a time, with no shoving, the twins stepped forward. First two males, then a female, then another male, then three females, then . . .

The Savage stood looking on. ‘O brave new world, O brave new world . . .’ In his mind the singing words seemed to change their tone. They had mocked him through his misery and remorse, mocked him with how hideous a note of cynical derision! Fiendishly laughing, they had insisted on the low squalor, the nauseous ugliness of the nightmare. Now, suddenly, they trumpeted a call to arms. ‘O brave new world!’ Miranda was proclaiming the possibility of loveliness, the possibility of transforming even the nightmare into something fine and noble. ‘O brave new world!’ It was a challenge, a command.

‘No shoving there, now!’ shouted the Deputy Sub-Bursar in a fury. He slammed down the lid of his cash-box. ‘I shall stop the distribution unless I have good behaviour.’

The Deltas muttered, jostled one another a little, and then were still. The threat had been effective. Deprivation of soma — appalling thought!

‘That’s better’ said the young man, and reopened his cash-box.

Linda had been a slave, Linda had died; others should live in freedom, and the world be made beautiful. A reparation, a duty. And suddenly it was

luminously clear to the Savage what he must do; it was as though a shutter had been opened, a curtain drawn back.

‘Now,’ said the Deputy-Bursar.

Another khaki female stepped forward.

‘Stop!’ called the Savage in a loud and ringing voice. ‘Stop!’

He pushed his way to the table; the Deltas stared at him with astonishment.

‘Ford!’ said the Deputy Sub-Bursar, below his breath. ‘It’s the Savage.’ He felt scared.

‘Listen, I beg you,’ cried the Savage earnestly. ‘Lend me your ears . . .’ He had never spoken in public before, and found it very difficult to express what he wanted to say. ‘Don’t take that horrible stuff. It’s poison, it’s poison.’

‘I say, Mr. Savage,’ said the Deputy Sub-Bursar, smiling propitiatingly. ‘Would you mind letting me . . .’

‘Poison to soul as well as body.’

‘Yes, but let me get on with my distribution, won’t you? There’s a good fellow.’ With the cautious tenderness of one who strokes a notoriously vicious animal, he patted the Savage’s arm. ‘Just let me . . .’

‘Never!’ cried the Savage.

‘But look here, old man . . .’

‘Throw it all away, that horrible poison.’

The words ‘Throw it all away’ pierced through the enfolding layers of incomprehension to the quick of the Deltas’ consciousness. An angry murmur went up from the crowd.

‘I come to bring you freedom,’ said the Savage, turning back towards the twins. ‘I come . . .’

The Deputy Sub-Bursar heard no more; he had slipped out of the vestibule and was looking up a number in the telephone book.

‘Not in his own rooms,’ Bernard summed up. ‘Not in mine, not in yours. Not at the Aphroditæum; not at the Centre or the College. Where can he have got to?’

Helmholtz shrugged his shoulders. They had come back from their work expecting to find the Savage waiting for them at one or other of their usual meeting-places, and there was no sign of the fellow. Which was annoying, as they had meant to nip across to Biarritz in Helmholtz's four-seater sporticopter. They'd be late for dinner if he didn't come soon.

'We'll give him five more minutes,' said Helmholtz. 'If he doesn't turn up by then, we'll . . .'

The ringing of the telephone bell interrupted him. He picked up the receiver. 'Hullo. Speaking.' Then, after a long interval of listening, 'Ford in Flivver!' he swore. 'I'll come at once.'

'What is it?' Bernard asked.

'A fellow I know at the Park Lane Hospital,' said Helmholtz. 'The Savage is there. Seems to have gone mad. Anyhow, it's urgent. Will you come with me?'

Together they hurried along the corridor to the lifts.

'But do you like being slaves?' the Savage was saying as they entered the Hospital. His face was flushed, his eyes bright with ardour and indignation. 'Do you like being babies? Yes, babies. Mewling and puking,' he added, exasperated by their bestial stupidity into throwing insults at those he had come to save. The insults bounced off their carapace of thick stupidity; they stared at him with a blank expression of dull and sullen resentment in their eyes. 'Yes, puking!' he fairly shouted. Grief and remorse, compassion and duty — all were forgotten now and, as it were, absorbed into an intense overpowering hatred of these less than human monsters. 'Don't you want to be free and men? Don't you even understand what manhood and freedom are?' Rage was making him fluent; the words came easily, in a rush. 'Don't you?' he repeated, but got no answer to his question. 'Very well, then,' he went on grimly. 'I'll teach you; I'll make you be free whether you want to or not.' And pushing open a window that looked on to the inner court of the Hospital, he began to throw the little pillboxes of soma tablets in handfuls out into the area.

For a moment the khaki mob was silent, petrified, at the spectacle of this wanton sacrilege, with amazement and horror.

‘He’s mad,’ whispered Bernard, staring with wide open eyes. ‘They’ll kill him. They’ll . . .’ A great shout suddenly went up from the mob; a wave of movement drove it menacingly towards the Savage. ‘Ford help him!’ said Bernard, and averted his eyes.

‘Ford helps those who help themselves.’ And with a laugh, actually a laugh of exultation, Helmholtz Watson pushed his way through the crowd.

‘Free, free!’ the Savage shouted, and with one hand continued to throw the soma into the area while, with the other, he punched the indistinguishable faces of his assailants. ‘Free!’ And suddenly there was Helmholtz at his side— ‘Good old Helmholtz!’ — also punching— ‘Men at last!’ — and in the interval also throwing the poison out by handfuls through the open window. ‘Yes, men! men!’ and there was no more poison left. He picked up the cash-box and showed them its black emptiness. ‘You’re free!’

Howling, the Deltas charged with a redoubled fury.

Hesitant on the fringes of the battle, ‘They’re done for,’ said Bernard and, urged by a sudden impulse, ran forward to help them; then thought better of it and halted; then, ashamed, stepped forward again; then again thought better of it, and was standing in an agony of humiliated indecision — thinking that they might be killed if he didn’t help them, and that he might be killed if he did — when (Ford be praised!), goggle-eyed and swine-snouted in their gas-masks, in ran the police.

Bernard dashed to meet them. He waved his arms; and it was action, he was doing something. He shouted ‘Help!’ several times, more and more loudly so as to give himself the illusion of helping. ‘Help! Help! Help!’

The policemen pushed him out of the way and got on with their work. Three men with spraying machines buckled to their shoulders pumped thick clouds of soma vapour into the air. Two more were busy round the portable Synthetic Music Box. Carrying water pistols charged with a powerful anæsthetic, four

others had pushed their way into the crowd and were methodically laying out, squirt by squirt, the more ferocious of the fighters.

‘Quick, quick!’ yelled Bernard. ‘They’ll be killed if you don’t hurry. They’ll . . . Oh!’ Annoyed by his chatter, one of the policemen had given him a shot from his water pistol. Bernard stood for a second or two wambling unsteadily on legs that seemed to have lost their bones, their tendons, their muscles, to have become mere sticks of jelly, and at last not even jelly — water: he tumbled in a heap on the floor.

Suddenly, from out of the Synthetic Music Box a Voice began to speak. The Voice of Reason, the Voice of Good Feeling. The sound-track roll was unwinding itself in Synthetic Anti-Riot Speech Number Two (Medium Strength). Straight from the depths of a non-existent heart, ‘My friends, my friends!’ said the Voice so pathetically, with a note of such infinitely tender reproach that, behind their gas-masks, even the policemen’s eyes were momentarily dimmed with tears, ‘what is the meaning of this? Why aren’t you all being happy and good together. Happy and good,’ the Voice repeated. ‘At peace, at peace.’ It trembled, sank into a whisper and momentarily expired. ‘Oh, I do want you to be happy,’ it began, with a yearning earnestness. ‘I do so want you to be good! Please, please be good and . . .’

Two minutes later the Voice and the soma vapour had produced their effect. In tears, the Deltas were kissing and hugging one another — half a dozen twins at a time in a comprehensive embrace. Even Helmholtz and the Savage were almost crying. A fresh supply of pillboxes was brought in from the Bursary; a new distribution was hastily made and, to the sound of the Voice’s richly affectionate, baritone valedictions, the twins dispersed, blubbering as though their hearts would break. ‘Good-bye, my dearest, dearest friends, Ford keep you! Good-bye, my dearest, dearest friends. Ford keep you. Good-bye, my dearest, dearest . . .’

When the last of the Deltas had gone the policeman switched off the current. The angelic Voice fell silent.

‘Will you come quietly?’ asked the Sergeant, ‘or must we anæsthetize?’ He pointed his water pistol menacingly.

‘Oh, we’ll come quietly,’ the Savage answered, dabbing alternately a cut lip, a scratched neck, and a bitten left hand.

Still keeping his handkerchief to his bleeding nose, Helmholtz nodded in confirmation.

Awake and having recovered the use of his legs, Bernard had chosen this moment to move as inconspicuously as he could towards the door.

‘Hi, you there,’ called the Sergeant, and a swine-masked policeman hurried across the room and laid a hand on the young man’s shoulder.

Bernard turned with an expression of indignant innocence. Escaping? He hadn’t dreamed of such a thing. ‘Though what on earth you want me for,’ he said to the Sergeant, ‘I really can’t imagine.’

‘You’re a friend of the prisoners, aren’t you?’

‘Well . . .’ said Bernard, and hesitated. No, he really couldn’t deny it. ‘Why shouldn’t I be?’ he asked.

‘Come on, then,’ said the Sergeant, and led the way towards the door and the waiting police car.

Chapter XVI

THE ROOM INTO which the three were ushered was the Controller's study.

'His fordship will be down in a moment.' The Gamma butler left them to themselves.

Helmholtz laughed aloud.

'It's more like a caffeine-solution party than a trial,' he said, and let himself fall into the most luxurious of the pneumatic arm-chairs. 'Cheer up, Bernard,' he added, catching sight of his friend's green unhappy face. But Bernard would not be cheered; without answering, without even looking at Helmholtz, he went and sat down on the most uncomfortable chair in the room, carefully chosen in the obscure hope of somehow deprecating the wrath of the higher powers.

The Savage meanwhile wandered restlessly round the room, peering with a vague superficial inquisitiveness at the books in the shelves, at the sound-track rolls and the reading-machine bobbins in their numbered pigeon-holes. On the table under the window lay a massive volume bound in limp black leather-surrogate, and stamped with large golden T's. He picked it up and opened it. My Life and Work, by Our Ford. The book had been published at Detroit by the Society for the Propagation of Fordian Knowledge. Idly he turned the pages, read a sentence here, a paragraph there, and had just come to the conclusion that the book didn't interest him, when the door opened, and the Resident World Controller for Western Europe walked briskly into the room.

Mustapha Mond shook hands with all three of them; but it was to the Savage that he addressed himself. 'So you don't much like civilization, Mr. Savage,' he said.

The Savage looked at him. He had been prepared to lie, to bluster, to remain sullenly unresponsive; but, reassured by the good-humoured intelligence of the

Controller's face, he decided to tell the truth, straightforwardly. 'No.' He shook his head.

Bernard started and looked horrified. What would the Controller think? To be labelled as the friend of a man who said that he didn't like civilization — said it openly and, of all people, to the Controller — it was terrible. 'But, John,' he began. A look from Mustapha Mond reduced him to an abject silence.

'Of course,' the Savage went on to admit, 'there are some very nice things. All that music in the air, for instance . . .'

'Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will hum about my ears, and sometimes voices.'

The Savage's face lit up with a sudden pleasure. 'Have you read it too?' he asked. 'I thought nobody knew about that book here, in England.'

'Almost nobody. I'm one of the very few. It's prohibited, you see. But as I make the laws here, I can also break them. With impunity, Mr. Marx,' he added, turning to Bernard. 'Which I'm afraid you can't do.'

Bernard sank into a yet more hopeless misery.

'But why is it prohibited?' asked the Savage. In the excitement of meeting a man who had read Shakespeare he had momentarily forgotten everything else.

The Controller shrugged his shoulders. 'Because it's old; that's the chief reason. We haven't any use for old things here.'

'Even when they're beautiful?'

'Particularly when they're beautiful. Beauty's attractive, and we don't want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones.'

'But the new ones are so stupid and horrible. Those plays, where there's nothing but helicopters flying about and you feel the people kissing.' He made a grimace. 'Goats and monkeys!' Only in Othello's words could he find an adequate vehicle for his contempt and hatred.

'Nice tame animals, anyhow,' the Controller murmured parenthetically.

'Why don't you let them see Othello instead?'

'I've told you; it's old. Besides, they couldn't understand it.'

Yes, that was true. He remembered how Helmholtz had laughed at Romeo and Juliet. ‘Well, then,’ he said, after a pause, ‘something new that’s like Othello, and that they could understand.’

‘That’s what we’ve all been wanting to write,’ said Helmholtz, breaking a long silence.

‘And it’s what you never will write,’ said the Controller. ‘Because, if it were really like Othello nobody could understand it, however new it might be. And if it were new, it couldn’t possibly be like Othello.’

‘Why not?’

‘Yes, why not?’ Helmholtz repeated. He too was forgetting the unpleasant realities of the situation. Green with anxiety and apprehension, only Bernard remembered them; the others ignored him. ‘Why not?’

‘Because our world is not the same as Othello’s world. You can’t make flivvers without steel — and you can’t make tragedies without social instability. The world’s stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get. They’re well off; they’re safe; they’re never ill; they’re not afraid of death; they’re blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they’re plagued with no mothers or fathers; they’ve got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they’re so conditioned that they practically can’t help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there’s soma. Which you go and chuck out of the window in the name of liberty, Mr. Savage. Liberty!’ He laughed. ‘Expecting Deltas to know what liberty is! And now expecting them to understand Othello! My good boy!’

The Savage was silent for a little. ‘All the same,’ he insisted obstinately, ‘Othello’s good, Othello’s better than those feelies.’

‘Of course it is,’ the Controller agreed. ‘But that’s the price we have to pay for stability. You’ve got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We’ve sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead.’

‘But they don’t mean anything.’

‘They mean themselves; they mean a lot of agreeable sensations to the audience.’

‘But they’re . . . they’re told by an idiot.’

The Controller laughed. ‘You’re not being very polite to your friend, Mr. Watson. One of our most distinguished Emotional Engineers . . .’

‘But he’s right,’ said Helmholtz gloomily. ‘Because it is idiotic. Writing when there’s nothing to say . . .’

‘Precisely. But that requires the most enormous ingenuity. You’re making flivvers out of the absolute minimum of steel — works of art out of practically nothing but pure sensation.’

The Savage shook his head. ‘It all seems to me quite horrible.’

‘Of course it does. Actual happiness always looks pretty squalid in comparison with the over-compensations for misery. And, of course, stability isn’t nearly so spectacular as instability. And being contented has none of the glamour of a good fight against misfortune, none of the picturesqueness of a struggle with temptation, or a fatal overthrow by passion or doubt. Happiness is never grand.’

‘I suppose not,’ said the Savage after a silence. ‘But need it be quite so bad as those twins?’ He passed his hand over his eyes as though he were trying to wipe away the remembered image of those long rows of identical midgets at the assembling tables, those queued-up twin-herds at the entrance to the Brentford monorail station, those human maggots swarming round Linda’s bed of death, the endlessly repeated face of his assailants. He looked at his bandaged left hand and shuddered. ‘Horrible!’

‘But how useful! I see you don’t like our Bokanovsky Groups; but, I assure you, they’re the foundation on which everything else is built. They’re the gyroscope that stabilizes the rocket plane of state on its unswerving course.’ The deep voice thrillingly vibrated; the gesticulating hand implied all space and the onrush of the irresistible machine. Mustapha Mond’s oratory was almost up to synthetic standards.

‘I was wondering,’ said the Savage, ‘why you had them at all — seeing that you can get whatever you want out of those bottles. Why don’t you make everybody an Alpha Double Plus while you’re about it?’

Mustapha Mond laughed. ‘Because we have no wish to have our throats cut,’ he answered. ‘We believe in happiness and stability. A society of Alphas couldn’t fail to be unstable and miserable. Imagine a factory staffed by Alphas — that is to say by separate and unrelated individuals of good heredity and conditioned so as to be capable (within limits) of making a free choice and assuming responsibilities. Imagine it!’ he repeated.

The Savage tried to imagine it, not very successfully.

‘It’s an absurdity. An Alpha-decanted, Alpha-conditioned man would go mad if he had to do Epsilon Semi-Moron work — go mad, or start smashing things up. Alphas can be completely socialized — but only on condition that you make them do Alpha work. Only an Epsilon can be expected to make Epsilon sacrifices, for the good reason that for him they aren’t sacrifices; they’re the line of least resistance. His conditioning has laid down rails along which he’s got to run. He can’t help himself; he’s foredoomed. Even after decanting, he’s still inside a bottle — an invisible bottle of infantile and embryonic fixations. Each one of us, of course,’ the Controller meditatively continued, ‘goes through life inside a bottle. But if we happen to be Alphas, our bottles are, relatively speaking, enormous. We should suffer acutely if we were confined in a narrower space. You cannot pour upper-caste champagne-surrogate into lower-caste bottles. It’s obvious theoretically. But it has also been proved in actual practice. The result of the Cyprus experiment was convincing.’

‘What was that?’ asked the Savage.

Mustapha Mond smiled. ‘Well, you can call it an experiment in rebottling if you like. It began in a.f. 473. The Controllers had the island of Cyprus cleared of all its existing inhabitants and re-colonized with a specially prepared batch of twenty-two thousand Alphas. All agricultural and industrial equipment was handed over to them and they were left to manage their own affairs. The result exactly fulfilled all the theoretical predictions. The land wasn’t properly worked;

there were strikes in all the factories; the laws were set at naught, orders disobeyed; all the people detailed for a spell of low-grade work were perpetually intriguing for high-grade jobs, and all the people with high-grade jobs were counter-intriguing at all costs to stay where they were. Within six years they were having a first-class civil war. When nineteen out of the twenty-two thousand had been killed, the survivors unanimously petitioned the World Controllers to resume the government of the island. Which they did. And that was the end of the only society of Alphas that the world has ever seen.'

The Savage sighed, profoundly.

'The optimum population,' said Mustapha Mond, 'is modelled on the iceberg — eight-ninths below the water line, one-ninth above.'

'And they're happy below the water line?'

'Happier than above it. Happier than your friends here, for example.' He pointed.

'In spite of that awful work?'

'Awful? They don't find it so. On the contrary, they like it. It's light, it's childishly simple. No strain on the mind or the muscles. Seven and a half hours of mild, unexhausting labour, and then the soma ration and games and unrestricted copulation and the feelies. What more can they ask for? True,' he added, 'they might ask for shorter hours. And of course we could give them shorter hours. Technically, it would be perfectly simple to reduce all lower-caste working hours to three or four a day. But would they be any the happier for that? No, they wouldn't. The experiment was tried, more than a century and a half ago. The whole of Ireland was put on to the four-hour day. What was the result? Unrest and a large increase in the consumption of soma; that was all. Those three and a half hours of extra leisure were so far from being a source of happiness, that people felt constrained to take a holiday from them. The Inventions Office is stuffed with plans for labour-saving processes. Thousands of them.' Mustapha Mond made a lavish gesture. 'And why don't we put them into execution? For the sake of the labourers; it would be sheer cruelty to afflict them with excessive leisure. It's the same with agriculture. We could synthesize every morsel of

food, if we wanted to. But we don't. We prefer to keep a third of the population on the land. For their own sakes — because it takes longer to get food out of the land than out of a factory. Besides, we have our stability to think of. We don't want to change. Every change is a menace to stability. That's another reason why we're so chary of applying new inventions. Every discovery in pure science is potentially subversive; even science must sometimes be treated as a possible enemy. Yes, even science.'

Science? The Savage frowned. He knew the word. But what it exactly signified he could not say. Shakespeare and the old men of the pueblo had never mentioned science, and from Linda he had only gathered the vaguest hints: science was something you made helicopters with, something that caused you to laugh at the Corn Dances, something that prevented you from being wrinkled and losing your teeth. He made a desperate effort to take the Controller's meaning.

'Yes,' Mustapha Mond was saying, 'that's another item in the cost of stability. It isn't only art that's incompatible with happiness; it's also science. Science is dangerous; we have to keep it most carefully chained and muzzled.'

'What?' said Helmholtz, in astonishment. 'But we're always saying that science is everything. It's a hypnopædic platitude.'

'Three times a week between thirteen and seventeen,' put in Bernard.

'And all the science propaganda we do at the College . . .'

'Yes; but what sort of science?' asked Mustapha Mond sarcastically. 'You've had no scientific training, so you can't judge. I was a pretty good physicist in my time. Too good — good enough to realize that all our science is just a cookery book, with an orthodox theory of cooking that nobody's allowed to question, and a list of recipes that mustn't be added to except by special permission from the head cook. I'm the head cook now. But I was an inquisitive young scullion once. I started doing a bit of cooking on my own. Unorthodox cooking, illicit cooking. A bit of real science, in fact.' He was silent.

'What happened?' asked Helmholtz Watson.

The Controller sighed. ‘Very nearly what’s going to happen to you young men. I was on the point of being sent to an island.’

The words galvanized Bernard into a violent and unseemly activity. ‘Send me to an island?’ He jumped up, ran across the room, and stood gesticulating in front of the Controller. ‘You can’t send me. I haven’t done anything. It was the others. I swear it was the others.’ He pointed accusingly to Helmholtz and the Savage. ‘Oh, please don’t send me to Iceland. I promise I’ll do what I ought to do. Give me another chance. Please give me another chance.’ The tears began to flow. ‘I tell you, it’s their fault,’ he sobbed. ‘And not to Iceland. Oh, please, your fordship, please . . .’ And in a paroxysm of abjection he threw himself on his knees before the Controller. Mustapha Mond tried to make him get up; but Bernard persisted in his grovelling; the stream of words poured out inexhaustibly. In the end the Controller had to ring for his fourth secretary.

‘Bring three men,’ he ordered, ‘and take Mr. Marx into a bedroom. Give him a good soma vaporization and then put him to bed and leave him.’

The fourth secretary went out and returned with three green-uniformed twin footmen. Still shouting and sobbing, Bernard was carried out.

‘One would think he was going to have his throat cut,’ said the Controller, as the door closed. ‘Whereas, if he had the smallest sense, he’d understand that his punishment is really a reward. He’s being sent to an island. That’s to say, he’s being sent to a place where he’ll meet the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world. All the people who, for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life. All the people who aren’t satisfied with orthodoxy, who’ve got independent ideas of their own. Every one, in a word, who’s any one. I almost envy you, Mr. Watson.’

Helmholtz laughed. ‘Then why aren’t you on an island yourself?’

‘Because, finally, I preferred this,’ the Controller answered. ‘I was given the choice: to be sent to an island, where I could have got on with my pure science, or to be taken on to the Controllers’ Council with the prospect of succeeding in due course to an actual Controllership. I chose this and let the science go.’ After

a little silence, ‘Sometimes,’ he added, ‘I rather regret the science. Happiness is a hard master — particularly other people’s happiness. A much harder master, if one isn’t conditioned to accept it unquestioningly, than truth.’ He sighed, fell silent again, then continued in a brisker tone. ‘Well, duty’s duty. One can’t consult one’s own preferences. I’m interested in truth, I like science. But truth’s a menace, science is a public danger. As dangerous as it’s been beneficent. It has given us the stablest equilibrium in history. China’s was hopelessly insecure by comparison; even the primitive matriarchies weren’t steadier than we are. Thanks, I repeat, to science. But we can’t allow science to undo its own good work. That’s why we so carefully limit the scope of its researches — that’s why I almost got sent to an island. We don’t allow it to deal with any but the most immediate problems of the moment. All other enquiries are most sedulously discouraged. It’s curious,’ he went on after a little pause, ‘to read what people in the time of Our Ford used to write about scientific progress. They seemed to have imagined that it could be allowed to go on indefinitely, regardless of everything else. Knowledge was the highest good, truth the supreme value; all the rest was secondary and subordinate. True, ideas were beginning to change even then. Our Ford himself did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness. Mass production demanded the shift. Universal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can’t. And, of course, whenever the masses seized political power, then it was happiness rather than truth and beauty that mattered. Still, in spite of everything, unrestricted scientific research was still permitted. People still went on talking about truth and beauty as though they were the sovereign goods. Right up to the time of the Nine Years’ War. That made them change their tune all right. What’s the point of truth or beauty or knowledge when the anthrax bombs are popping all around you? That was when science first began to be controlled — after the Nine Years’ War. People were ready to have even their appetites controlled then. Anything for a quiet life. We’ve gone on controlling ever since. It hasn’t been very good for truth, of course. But it’s been very good for happiness. One can’t have something for nothing. Happiness has got to be paid for. You’re paying for it,

Mr. Watson — paying because you happen to be too much interested in beauty. I was too much interested in truth; I paid too.'

'But you didn't go to an island,' said the Savage, breaking a long silence.

The Controller smiled. 'That's how I paid. By choosing to serve happiness. Other people's — not mine. It's lucky,' he added, after a pause, 'that there are such a lot of islands in the world. I don't know what we should do without them. Put you all in the lethal chamber, I suppose. By the way, Mr. Watson, would you like a tropical climate? The Marquesas, for example; or Samoa? Or something rather more bracing?'

Helmholtz rose from his pneumatic chair. 'I should like a thoroughly bad climate,' he answered. 'I believe one would write better if the climate were bad. If there were a lot of wind and storms, for example . . .'

The Controller nodded his approbation. 'I like your spirit, Mr. Watson. I like it very much indeed. As much as I officially disapprove of it.' He smiled. 'What about the Falkland Islands?'

'Yes, I think that will do,' Helmholtz answered. 'And now, if you don't mind, I'll go and see how poor Bernard's getting on.'

Chapter XVII

‘ART, SCIENCE — you seem to have paid a fairly high price for your happiness,’ said the Savage, when they were alone. ‘Anything else?’

‘Well, religion, of course,’ replied the Controller. ‘There used to be something called God — before the Nine Years’ War. But I was forgetting; you know all about God, I suppose.’

‘Well . . .’ The Savage hesitated. He would have liked to say something about solitude, about night, about the mesa lying pale under the moon, about the precipice, the plunge into shadowy darkness, about death. He would have liked to speak; but there were no words. Not even in Shakespeare.

The Controller, meanwhile, had crossed to the other side of the room and was unlocking a large safe let into the wall between the bookshelves. The heavy door swung open. Rummaging in the darkness within, ‘It’s a subject,’ he said, ‘that has always had a great interest for me.’ He pulled out a thick black volume. ‘You’ve never read this, for example.’

The Savage took it. ‘The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments,’ he read aloud from the title-page.

‘Nor this.’ It was a small book and had lost its cover.

‘The Imitation of Christ.’

‘Nor this.’ He handed out another volume.

‘The Varieties of Religious Experience. By William James.’

‘And I’ve got plenty more,’ Mustapha Mond continued, resuming his seat. ‘A whole collection of pornographic old books. God in the safe and Ford on the shelves.’ He pointed with a laugh to his avowed library — to the shelves of books, the racks full of reading-machine bobbins and sound-track rolls.

‘But if you know about God, why don’t you tell them?’ asked the Savage indignantly. ‘Why don’t you give them these books about God?’

‘For the same reason as we don’t give them Othello: they’re old; they’re about God hundreds of years ago. Not about God now.’

‘But God doesn’t change.’

‘Men do, though.’

‘What difference does that make?’

‘All the difference in the world,’ said Mustapha Mond. He got up again and walked to the safe. ‘There was a man called Cardinal Newman,’ he said. ‘A cardinal,’ he exclaimed parenthetically, ‘was a kind of Arch-Community-Songster.’

‘ ”I, Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal.” I’ve read about them in Shakespeare.’

‘Of course you have. Well, as I was saying, there was a man called Cardinal Newman. Ah, here’s the book.’ He pulled it out. ‘And while I’m about it I’ll take this one too. It’s by a man called Maine de Biran. He was a philosopher, if you know what that was.’

‘A man who dreams of fewer things than there are in heaven and earth,’ said the Savage promptly.

‘Quite so. I’ll read you one of the things he did dream of in a moment. Meanwhile, listen to what this old Arch-Community-Songster said.’ He opened the book at the place marked by a slip of paper and began to read. ‘ ”We are not our own any more than what we possess is our own. We did not make ourselves, we cannot be supreme over ourselves. We are not our own masters. We are God’s property. Is it not our happiness thus to view the matter? Is it any happiness, or any comfort, to consider that we are our own? It may be thought so by the young and prosperous. These may think it a great thing to have everything, as they suppose, their own way — to depend on no one — to have to think of nothing out of sight, to be without the irksomeness of continual acknowledgment, continual prayer, continual reference of what they do to the will of another. But as time goes on, they, as all men, will find that independence was not made for man — that it is an unnatural state — will do for a while, but will not carry us on safely to the end . . .” ’ Mustapha Mond paused, put down the first book and, picking up the other, turned over the pages. ‘Take this, for

example,’ he said, and in his deep voice once more began to read: ‘ ”A man grows old; he feels in himself that radical sense of weakness, of listlessness, of discomfort, which accompanies the advance of age; and, feeling thus, imagines himself merely sick, lulling his fears with the notion that this distressing condition is due to some particular cause, from which, as from an illness, he hopes to recover. Vain imaginings! That sickness is old age; and a horrible disease it is. They say that it is the fear of death and of what comes after death that makes men turn to religion as they advance in years. But my own experience has given me the conviction that, quite apart from any such terrors or imaginings, the religious sentiment tends to develop as we grow older; to develop because, as the passions grow calm, as the fancy and sensibilities are less excited and less excitable, our reason becomes less troubled in its working, less obscured by the images, desires and distractions, in which it used to be absorbed; whereupon God emerges as from behind a cloud; our soul feels, sees, turns towards the source of all light; turns naturally and inevitably; for now that all that gave to the world of sensations its life and charm has begun to leak away from us, now that phenomenal existence is no more bolstered up by impressions from within or from without, we feel the need to lean on something that abides, something that will never play us false — a reality, an absolute and everlasting truth. Yes, we inevitably turn to God; for this religious sentiment is of its nature so pure, so delightful to the soul that experiences it, that it makes up to us for all our other losses.” ’ Mustapha Mond shut the book and leaned back in his chair. ‘One of the numerous things in heaven and earth that these philosophers didn’t dream about was this’ (he waved his hand), ‘us, the modern world. “You can only be independent of God while you’ve got youth and prosperity; independence won’t take you safely to the end.” Well, we’ve now got youth and prosperity right up to the end. What follows? Evidently, that we can be independent of God. “The religious sentiment will compensate us for all our losses.” But there aren’t any losses for us to compensate; religious sentiment is superfluous. And why should we go hunting for a substitute for youthful desires, when youthful desires never fail? A substitute for distractions, when we go on

enjoying all the old fooleries to the very last? What need have we of repose when our minds and bodies continue to delight in activity? of consolation, when we have soma? of something immovable, when there is the social order?'

'Then you think there is no God?'

'No, I think there quite probably is one.'

'Then why? . . .'

Mustapha Mond checked him. 'But he manifests himself in different ways to different men. In pre-modern times he manifested himself as the being that's described in these books. Now . . .'

'How does he manifest himself now?' asked the Savage.

'Well, he manifests himself as an absence; as though he weren't there at all.'

'That's your fault.'

'Call it the fault of civilization. God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make your choice. Our civilization has chosen machinery and medicine and happiness. That's why I have to keep these books locked up in the safe. They're smut. People would be shocked if . . .'

The Savage interrupted him. 'But isn't it natural to feel there's a God?'

'You might as well ask if it's natural to do up one's trousers with zippers,' said the Controller sarcastically. 'You remind me of another of those old fellows called Bradley. He defined philosophy as the finding of bad reason for what one believes by instinct. As if one believed anything by instinct! One believes things because one has been conditioned to believe them. Finding bad reasons for what one believes for other bad reasons — that's philosophy. People believe in God because they've been conditioned to believe in God.'

'But all the same,' insisted the Savage, 'it is natural to believe in God when you're alone — quite alone, in the night, thinking about death . . .'

'But people never are alone now,' said Mustapha Mond. 'We make them hate solitude; and we arrange their lives so that it's almost impossible for them ever to have it.'

The Savage nodded gloomily. At Malpais he had suffered because they had shut him out from the communal activities of the pueblo, in civilized London he was suffering because he could never escape from those communal activities, never be quietly alone.

‘Do you remember that bit in King Lear?’ said the Savage at last: ‘ ”The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us; the dark and vicious place where thee he got cost him his eyes,” and Edmund answers — you remember, he’s wounded, he’s dying— “Thou hast spoken right; ’tis true. The wheel is come full circle; I am here.” What about that, now? Doesn’t there seem to be a God managing things, punishing, rewarding?’

‘Well, does there?’ questioned the Controller in his turn. ‘You can indulge in any number of pleasant vices with a freemartin and run no risks of having your eyes put out by your son’s mistress. “The wheel is come full circle; I am here.” But where would Edmund be nowadays? Sitting in a pneumatic chair, with his arm round a girl’s waist, sucking away at his sex-hormone chewing-gum and looking at the feelies. The gods are just. No doubt. But their code of law is dictated, in the last resort, by the people who organize society; Providence takes its cue from men.’

‘Are you sure?’ asked the Savage. ‘Are you quite sure that the Edmund in that pneumatic chair hasn’t been just as heavily punished as the Edmund who’s wounded and bleeding to death? The gods are just. Haven’t they used his pleasant vices as an instrument to degrade him?’

‘Degrade him from what position? As a happy, hard-working, goods-consuming citizen he’s perfect. Of course, if you choose some other standard than ours, then perhaps you might say he was degraded. But you’ve got to stick to one set of postulates. You can’t play Electro-magnetic Golf according to the rules of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy.’

‘But value dwells not in particular will,’ said the Savage. ‘It holds his estimate and dignity as well wherein ’tis precious of itself as in the prizer.’

‘Come, come,’ protested Mustapha Mond, ‘that’s going rather far, isn’t it?’

‘If you allowed yourselves to think of God, you wouldn’t allow yourselves to be degraded by pleasant vices. You’d have a reason for bearing things patiently, for doing things with courage. I’ve seen it with the Indians.’

‘I’m sure you have,’ said Mustapha Mond. ‘But then we aren’t Indians. There isn’t any need for a civilized man to bear anything that’s seriously unpleasant. And as for doing things — Ford forbid that he should get the idea into his head. It would upset the whole social order if men started doing things on their own.’

‘What about self-denial, then? If you had a God, you’d have a reason for self-denial.’

‘But industrial civilization is only possible when there’s no self-denial. Self-indulgence up to the very limits imposed by hygiene and economics. Otherwise the wheels stop turning.’

‘You’d have a reason for chastity!’ said the Savage, blushing a little as he spoke the words.

‘But chastity means passion, chastity means neurasthenia. And passion and neurasthenia mean instability. And instability means the end of civilization. You can’t have a lasting civilization without plenty of pleasant vices.’

‘But God’s the reason for everything noble and fine and heroic. If you had a God . . .’

‘My dear young friend,’ said Mustapha Mond, ‘civilization has absolutely no need of nobility or heroism. These things are symptoms of political inefficiency. In a properly organized society like ours, nobody has any opportunities for being noble or heroic. Conditions have got to be thoroughly unstable before the occasion can arise. Where there are wars, where there are divided allegiances, where there are temptations to be resisted, objects of love to be fought for or defended — there, obviously, nobility and heroism have some sense. But there aren’t any wars nowadays. The greatest care is taken to prevent you from loving any one too much. There’s no such thing as a divided allegiance; you’re so conditioned that you can’t help doing what you ought to do. And what you ought to do is on the whole so pleasant, so many of the natural impulses are allowed free play, that there really aren’t any temptations to resist. And if ever, by some

unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there's always soma to give you a holiday from the facts. And there's always soma to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears — that's what soma is.'

'But the tears are necessary. Don't you remember what Othello said? "If after every tempest come such calms, may the winds blow till they have wakened death." There's a story one of the old Indians used to tell us, about the Girl of Mátsaki. The young men who wanted to marry her had to do a morning's hoeing in her garden. It seemed easy; but there were flies and mosquitoes, magic ones. Most of the young men simply couldn't stand the biting and stinging. But the one that could — he got the girl.'

'Charming! But in civilized countries,' said the Controller, 'you can have girls without hoeing for them; and there aren't any flies or mosquitoes to sting you. We got rid of them all centuries ago.'

The Savage nodded, frowning. 'You got rid of them. Yes, that's just like you. Getting rid of everything unpleasant instead of learning to put up with it. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them. . . . But you don't do either. Neither suffer nor oppose. You just abolish the slings and arrows. It's too easy.'

He was suddenly silent, thinking of his mother. In her room on the thirty-seventh floor, Linda had floated in a sea of singing lights and perfumed caresses — floated away, out of space, out of time, out of the prison of her memories, her habits, her aged and bloated body. And Tomakin, ex-Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning, Tomakin was still on holiday — on holiday from humiliation and pain, in a world where he could not hear those words, that derisive laughter,

could not see that hideous face, feel those moist and flabby arms round his neck, in a beautiful world . . .

‘What you need,’ the Savage went on, ’is something with tears for a change. Nothing costs enough here.’

(‘Twelve and a half million dollars,’ Henry Foster had protested when the Savage told him that. ‘Twelve and a half million — that’s what the new Conditioning Centre cost. Not a cent less.’)

‘Exposing what is mortal and unsure to all that fortune, death and danger dare, even for an egg-shell. Isn’t there something in that?’ he asked, looking up at Mustapha Mond. ‘Quite apart from God — though of course God would be a reason for it. Isn’t there something in living dangerously?’

‘There’s a great deal in it,’ the Controller replied. ‘Men and women must have their adrenals stimulated from time to time.’

‘What?’ questioned the Savage, uncomprehending.

‘It’s one of the conditions of perfect health. That’s why we’ve made the V.P.S. treatments compulsory.’

‘V.P.S.?’

‘Violent Passion Surrogate. Regularly once a month. We flood the whole system with adrenin. It’s the complete physiological equivalent of fear and rage. All the tonic effects of murdering Desdemona and being murdered by Othello, without any of the inconveniences.’

‘But I like the inconveniences.’

‘We don’t,’ said the Controller. ‘We prefer to do things comfortably.’

‘But I don’t want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.’

‘In fact,’ said Mustapha Mond, ‘you’re claiming the right to be unhappy.’

‘All right, then,’ said the Savage defiantly, ‘I’m claiming the right to be unhappy.’

‘Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the

right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen to-morrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.'

There was a long silence.

'I claim them all,' said the Savage at last.

Mustapha Mond shrugged his shoulders. 'You're welcome,' he said.

Chapter XVIII

THE DOOR WAS ajar; they entered.

‘John!’

From the bathroom came an unpleasant and characteristic sound.

‘Is there anything the matter?’ Helmholtz called.

There was no answer. The unpleasant sound was repeated, twice; there was silence. Then, with a click, the bathroom door opened and, very pale, the Savage emerged.

‘I say,’ Helmholtz exclaimed solicitously, ‘you do look ill, John!’

‘Did you eat something that didn’t agree with you?’ asked Bernard.

The Savage nodded. ‘I ate civilization.’

‘What?’

‘It poisoned me; I was defiled. And then,’ he added, in a lower tone, ‘I ate my own wickedness.’

‘Yes, but what exactly? . . . I mean, just now you were . . .’

‘Now I am purified,’ said the Savage. ‘I drank some mustard and warm water.’

The others stared at him in astonishment. ‘Do you mean to say that you were doing it on purpose?’ asked Bernard.

‘That’s how the Indians always purify themselves.’ He sat down and, sighing, passed his hand across his forehead. ‘I shall rest for a few minutes,’ he said. ‘I’m rather tired.’

‘Well, I’m not surprised,’ said Helmholtz. After a silence, ‘We’ve come to say good-bye,’ he went on in another tone. ‘We’re off to-morrow morning.’

‘Yes, we’re off to-morrow,’ said Bernard, on whose face the Savage remarked a new expression of determined resignation. ‘And by the way, John,’ he continued, leaning forward in his chair and laying a hand on the Savage’s

knee, ‘I want to say how sorry I am about everything that happened yesterday.’ He blushed. ‘How ashamed,’ he went on, in spite of the unsteadiness of his voice, ‘how really . . .’

The Savage cut him short and, taking his hand, affectionately pressed it.

‘Helmholtz was wonderful to me,’ Bernard resumed, after a little pause. ‘If it hadn’t been for him, I should . . .’

‘Now, now,’ Helmholtz protested.

There was a silence. In spite of their sadness — because of it, even; for their sadness was the symptom of their love for one another — the three young men were happy.

‘I went to see the Controller this morning,’ said the Savage at last.

‘What for?’

‘To ask if I mightn’t go to the islands with you.’

‘And what did he say?’ asked Helmholtz eagerly.

The Savage shook his head. ‘He wouldn’t let me.’

‘Why not?’

‘He said he wanted to go on with the experiment. But I’m damned,’ the Savage added, with sudden fury, ‘I’m damned if I’ll go on being experimented with. Not for all the Controllers in the world. I shall go away to-morrow too.’

‘But where?’ the others asked in unison.

The Savage shrugged his shoulders. ‘Anywhere. I don’t care. So long as I can be alone.’

From Guildford the down-line followed the Wey valley to Godalming, then, over Milford and Witley, proceeded to Haslemere and on through Petersfield towards Portsmouth. Roughly parallel to it, the up-line passed over Worplesden, Tongham, Puttenham, Elstead and Grayshott. Between the Hog’s Back and Hindhead there were points where the two lines were not more than six or seven kilometres apart. The distance was too small for careless flyers — particularly at night and when they had taken half a gramme too much. There had been accidents. Serious ones. It had been decided to deflect the up-line a few

kilometres to the west. Between Grayshott and Tongham four abandoned air-lighthouses marked the course of the old Portsmouth-to-London road. The skies above them were silent and deserted. It was over Selborne, Borden and Farnham that the helicopters now ceaselessly hummed and roared.

The Savage had chosen as his hermitage the old lighthouse which stood on the crest of the hill between Puttenham and Elstead. The building was of ferro-concrete and in excellent condition — almost too comfortable, the Savage had thought when he first explored the place, almost too civilizedly luxurious. He pacified his conscience by promising himself a compensatingly harder self-discipline, purifications the more complete and thorough. His first night in the hermitage was, deliberately, a sleepless one. He spent the hours on his knees praying, now to that Heaven from which the guilty Claudius had begged forgiveness, now in Zuñi to Awonawilona, now to Jesus and Pookong, now to his own guardian animal, the eagle. From time to time he stretched out his arms as though he were on the cross, and held them thus through long minutes of an ache that gradually increased till it became a tremulous and excruciating agony; held them, in voluntary crucifixion, while he repeated, through clenched teeth (the sweat, meanwhile, pouring down his face), ‘Oh, forgive me! Oh, make me pure! Oh, help me to be good!’ again and again, till he was on the point of fainting from the pain.

When morning came, he felt he had earned the right to inhabit the lighthouse: yes, even though there still was glass in most of the windows, even though the view from the platform was so fine. For the very reason why he had chosen the lighthouse had become almost instantly a reason for going somewhere else. He had decided to live there because the view was so beautiful, because, from his vantage point, he seemed to be looking out on to the incarnation of a divine being. But who was he to be pampered with the daily and hourly sight of loveliness? Who was he to be living in the visible presence of God? All he deserved to live in was some filthy sty, some blind hole in the ground. Stiff and still aching after his long night of pain, but for that very reason inwardly reassured, he climbed up to the platform of his tower, he looked out over the

bright sunrise world which he had regained the right to inhabit. On the north the view was bounded by the long chalk ridge of the Hog's Back, from behind whose eastern extremity rose the towers of the seven skyscrapers which constituted Guildford. Seeing them, the Savage made a grimace; but he was to become reconciled to them in course of time; for at night they twinkled gaily with geometrical constellations, or else, flood-lighted, pointed their luminous fingers (with a gesture whose significance nobody in England but the Savage now understood) solemnly towards the plumbless mysteries of heaven.

In the valley which separated the Hog's Back from the sandy hill on which the lighthouse stood, Puttenham was a modest little village nine stories high, with silos, a poultry farm, and a small vitamin-D factory. On the other side of the lighthouse, towards the south, the ground fell away in long slopes of heather to a chain of ponds.

Beyond them, above the intervening woods, rose the fourteen-story tower of Elstead. Dim in the hazy English air, Hindhead and Selborne invited the eye into a blue romantic distance. But it was not alone the distance that had attracted the Savage to his lighthouse; the near was as seductive as the far. The woods, the open stretches of heather and yellow gorse, the clumps of Scotch firs, the shining ponds with their overhanging birch trees, their water lilies, their beds of rushes — these were beautiful and, to an eye accustomed to the aridities of the American desert, astonishing. And then the solitude! Whole days passed during which he never saw a human being. The lighthouse was only a quarter of an hour's flight from the Charing-T Tower; but the hills of Malpais were hardly more deserted than this Surrey heath. The crowds that daily left London left it only to play Electro-magnetic Golf or Tennis. Puttenham possessed no links; the nearest Riemann-surfaces were at Guildford. Flowers and a landscape were the only attractions here. And so, as there was no good reason for coming, nobody came. During the first days the Savage lived alone and undisturbed.

Of the money which, on his first arrival, John had received for his personal expenses, most had been spent on his equipment. Before leaving London he had bought four viscose-woollen blankets, rope and string, nails, glue, a few tools,

matches (though he intended in due course to make a fire drill), some pots and pans, two dozen packets of seeds, and ten kilogrammes of wheat flour. ‘No, not synthetic starch and cotton-waste flour-substitute,’ he had insisted. ‘Even though it is more nourishing.’ But when it came to pan-glandular biscuits and vitaminized beef-surrogate, he had not been able to resist the shopman’s persuasion. Looking at the tins now, he bitterly reproached himself for his weakness. Loathsome civilized stuff! He had made up his mind that he would never eat it, even if he were starving. ‘That’ll teach them,’ he thought vindictively. It would also teach him.

He counted his money. The little that remained would be enough, he hoped, to tide him over the winter. By next spring, his garden would be producing enough to make him independent of the outside world. Meanwhile, there would always be game. He had seen plenty of rabbits, and there were water-fowl on the ponds. He set to work at once to make a bow and arrows.

There were ash trees near the lighthouse and, for arrow shafts, a whole copse full of beautifully straight hazel saplings. He began by felling a young ash, cut out six feet of unbranched stem, stripped off the bark and, paring by paring, shaved away the white wood, as old Mitsima had taught him, until he had a stave of his own height, stiff at the thickened centre, lively and quick at the slender tips. The work gave him an intense pleasure. After those weeks of idleness in London, with nothing to do, whenever he wanted anything, but to press a switch or turn a handle, it was pure delight to be doing something that demanded skill and patience.

He had almost finished whittling the stave into shape, when he realized with a start that he was singing — singing! It was as though, stumbling upon himself from the outside, he had suddenly caught himself out, taken himself flagrantly at fault. Guiltily he blushed. After all, it was not to sing and enjoy himself that he had come here. It was to escape further contamination by the filth of civilized life; it was to be purified and made good; it was actively to make amends. He realized to his dismay that, absorbed in the whittling of his bow, he had forgotten what he had sworn to himself he would constantly remember — poor Linda, and

his own murderous unkindness to her, and those loathsome twins, swarming like lice across the mystery of her death, insulting, with their presence, not merely his own grief and repentance, but the very gods themselves. He had sworn to remember, he had sworn unceasingly to make amends. And here was he, sitting happily over his bow-stave, singing, actually singing. . . .

He went indoors, opened the box of mustard, and put some water to boil on the fire.

Half an hour later, three Delta-Minus land-workers from one of the Puttenham Bokanovsky Groups happened to be driving to Elstead and, at the top of the hill, were astonished to see a young man standing outside the abandoned lighthouse stripped to the waist and hitting himself with a whip of knotted cords. His back was horizontally streaked with crimson, and from weal to weal ran thin trickles of blood. The driver of the lorry pulled up at the side of the road and, with his two companions, stared open-mouthed at the extraordinary spectacle. One, two, three — they counted the strokes. After the eighth, the young man interrupted his self-punishment to run to the wood's edge and there be violently sick. When he had finished, he picked up the whip and began hitting himself again. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve . . .

'Ford!' whispered the driver. And his twins were of the same opinion.

'Fordey!' they said.

Three days later, like turkey buzzards settling on a corpse, the reporters came.

Dried and hardened over a slow fire of green wood, the bow was ready. The Savage was busy on his arrows. Thirty hazel sticks had been whittled and dried, tipped with sharp nails, carefully nocked. He had made a raid one night on the Puttenham poultry farm, and now had feathers enough to equip a whole armoury. It was at work upon the feathering of his shafts that the first of the reporters found him. Noiseless on his pneumatic shoes, the man came up behind him.

'Good-morning, Mr. Savage,' he said. 'I am the representative of The Hourly Radio.'

Startled as though by the bite of a snake, the Savage sprang to his feet, scattering arrows, feathers, glue-pot and brush in all directions.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the reporter, with genuine compunction. ‘I had no intention . . .’ He touched his hat — the aluminium stove-pipe hat in which he carried his wireless receiver and transmitter. ‘Excuse my not taking it off,’ he said. ‘It’s a bit heavy. Well, as I was saying, I am the representative of The Hourly . . .’

‘What do you want?’ asked the Savage, scowling. The reporter returned his most ingratiating smile.

‘Well, of course, our readers would be profoundly interested . . .’ He put his head on one side, his smile became almost coquettish. ‘Just a few words from you, Mr. Savage.’ And rapidly, with a series of ritual gestures, he uncoiled two wires connected to the portable battery buckled round his waist; plugged them simultaneously into the sides of his aluminium hat; touched a spring on the crown — and antennæ shot up into the air; touched another spring on the peak of the brim — and, like a jack-in-the-box, out jumped a microphone and hung there, quivering, six inches in front of his nose; pulled down a pair of receivers over his ears; pressed a switch on the left side of the hat — and from within came a faint waspy buzzing; turned a knob on the right — and the buzzing was interrupted by a stethoscopic wheeze and crackle, by hiccoughs and sudden squeaks. ‘Hullo,’ he said to the microphone, ‘hullo, hullo . . .’ A bell suddenly rang inside his hat. ‘Is that you, Edzel? Primo Mellon speaking. Yes, I’ve got hold of him. Mr. Savage will now take the microphone and say a few words. Won’t you, Mr. Savage?’ He looked up at the Savage with another of those winning smiles of his. ‘Just tell our readers why you came here. What made you leave London (hold on, Edzel!) so very suddenly. And, of course, that whip.’ (The Savage started. How did they know about the whip?) ‘We’re all crazy to know about the whip. And then something about Civilization. You know the sort of stuff. “What I think of the Civilized Girl.” Just a few words, a very few . . .’

The Savage obeyed with a disconcerting literalness. Five words he uttered and no more — five words, the same as those he had said to Bernard about the

Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury. ‘Háni! Sons éso tse-ná!’ And seizing the reporter by the shoulder, he spun him round (the young man revealed himself invitingly well-covered), aimed and, with all the force and accuracy of a champion foot-and-mouth-baller, delivered a most prodigious kick.

Eight minutes later, a new edition of The Hourly Radio was on sale in the streets of London. ‘Hourly Radio Reporter has Coccyx kicked by Mystery Savage,’ ran the headlines on the front page. ‘Sensation in Surrey.’

‘Sensation even in London,’ thought the reporter when, on his return, he read the words. And a very painful sensation, what was more. He sat down gingerly to his luncheon.

Undeterred by that cautionary bruise on their colleague’s coccyx, four other reporters, representing the New York Times, the Frankfurt Four-Dimensional Continuum, The Fordian Science Monitor, and The Delta Mirror, called that afternoon at the lighthouse and met with receptions of progressively increasing violence.

From a safe distance and still rubbing his buttocks, ‘Benighted fool!’ shouted the man from The Fordian Science Monitor, ‘why don’t you take soma?’

‘Get away!’ The Savage shook his fist.

The other retreated a few steps, then turned round again. ‘Evil’s an unreality if you take a couple of grammes.’

‘Kohakwa iyathtokyai!’ The tone was menacingly derisive.

‘Pain’s a delusion.’

‘Oh, is it?’ said the Savage and, picking up a thick hazel switch, strode forward.

The man from The Fordian Science Monitor made a dash for his helicopter.

After that the Savage was left for a time in peace. A few helicopters came and hovered inquisitively round the tower. He shot an arrow into the importunately nearest of them. It pierced the aluminium floor of the cabin; there was a shrill yell, and the machine went rocketing up into the air with all the acceleration that its super-charger could give it. The others, in future, kept their distance respectfully. Ignoring their tiresome humming (he likened himself in his

imagination to one of the suitors of the Maiden of Mátsaki, unmoved and persistent among the winged vermin), the Savage dug at what was to be his garden. After a time the vermin evidently became bored and flew away; for hours at a stretch the sky above his head was empty and, but for the larks, silent.

The weather was breathlessly hot, there was thunder in the air. He had dug all the morning and was resting, stretched out along the floor. And suddenly the thought of Lenina was a real presence, naked and tangible, saying ‘Sweet!’ and ‘Put your arms round me!’ — in shoes and socks, perfumed. Impudent strumpet! But oh, oh, her arms round his neck, the lifting of her breasts, her mouth! Eternity was in our lips and eyes. Lenina . . . No, no, no, no! He sprang to his feet and, half naked as he was, ran out of the house. At the edge of the heath stood a clump of hoary juniper bushes. He flung himself against them, he embraced, not the smooth body of his desires, but an armful of green spikes. Sharp, with a thousand points, they pricked him. He tried to think of poor Linda, breathless and dumb, with her clutching hands and the unutterable terror in her eyes. Poor Linda whom he had sworn to remember. But it was still the presence of Lenina that haunted him. Lenina whom he had promised to forget. Even through the stab and sting of the juniper needles, his wincing flesh was aware of her, unescapably real. ‘Sweet, sweet . . . And if you wanted me too, why didn’t you . . .’

The whip was hanging on a nail by the door, ready to hand against the arrival of reporters. In a frenzy the Savage ran back to the house, seized it, whirled it. The knotted cords bit into his flesh.

‘Strumpet! Strumpet!’ he shouted at every blow as though it were Lenina (and how frantically, without knowing it, he wished it were!), white, warm, scented, infamous Lenina that he was flogging thus. ‘Strumpet!’ And then, in a voice of despair, ‘Oh, Linda, forgive me. Forgive me, God. I’m bad. I’m wicked. I’m . . . No, no, you strumpet, you strumpet!’

From his carefully constructed hide in the wood three hundred metres away, Darwin Bonaparte, the Feely Corporation’s most expert big-game photographer, had watched the whole proceedings. Patience and skill had been rewarded. He

had spent three days sitting inside the bole of an artificial oak tree, three nights crawling on his belly through the heather, hiding microphones in gorse bushes, burying wires in the soft grey sand. Seventy-two hours of profound discomfort. But now the great moment had come — the greatest, Darwin Bonaparte had time to reflect, as he moved among his instruments, the greatest since his taking of the famous all-howling stereoscopic feely of the gorillas' wedding. 'Splendid,' he said to himself, as the Savage started his astonishing performance. 'Splendid!' He kept his telescopic cameras carefully aimed — glued to their moving objective; clapped on a higher power to get a close-up of the frantic and distorted face (admirable!); switched over, for half a minute, to slow motion (an exquisitely comical effect, he promised himself); listened in, meanwhile, to the blows, the groans, the wild and raving words that were being recorded on the sound-track at the edge of his film, tried the effect of a little amplification (yes, that was decidedly better); was delighted to hear, in a momentary lull, the shrill singing of a lark; wished the Savage would turn round so that he could get a good close-up of the blood on his back — and almost instantly (what astonishing luck!) the accommodating fellow did turn round, and he was able to take a perfect close-up.

'Well, that was grand!' he said to himself when it was all over. 'Really grand!' He mopped his face. When they had put in the feely effects at the studio, it would be a wonderful film. Almost as good, thought Darwin Bonaparte, as the Sperm Whale's Love-Life — and that, by Ford, was saying a good deal!

Twelve days later The Savage of Surrey had been released and could be seen, heard and felt in every first-class feely-palace in Western Europe.

The effect of Darwin Bonaparte's film was immediate and enormous. On the afternoon which followed the evening of its release, John's rustic solitude was suddenly broken by the arrival overhead of a great swarm of helicopters.

He was digging in his garden — digging, too, in his own mind, laboriously turning up the substance of his thought. Death — and he drove in his spade once, and again, and yet again. And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. A convincing thunder rumbled through the words. He lifted another

spadeful of earth. Why had Linda died? Why had she been allowed to become gradually less than human and at last . . . He shuddered. A good kissing carrion. He planted his foot on his spade and stamped it fiercely into the tough ground. As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport. Thunder again; words that proclaimed themselves true — truer somehow than truth itself. And yet that same Gloucester had called them ever-gentle gods. Besides, thy best of rest is sleep, and that thou oft provok'st; yet grossly fear'st thy death which is no more. No more than sleep. Sleep. Perchance to dream. His spade struck against a stone; he stooped to pick it up. For in that sleep of death, what dreams? . . .

A humming overhead had become a roar; and suddenly he was in shadow, there was something between the sun and him. He looked up, startled, from his digging, from his thoughts; looked up in a dazzled bewilderment, his mind still wandering in that other world of truer-than-truth, still focussed on the immensities of death and deity; looked up and saw, close above him, the swarm of hovering machines. Like locusts they came, hung poised, descended all around him on the heather. And from out of the bellies of these giant grasshoppers stepped men in white viscose-flannels, women (for the weather was hot) in acetate-shantung pyjamas or velveteen shorts and sleeveless, half-unzippered singlets — one couple from each. In a few minutes there were dozens of them, standing in a wide circle round the lighthouse, staring, laughing, clicking their cameras, throwing (as to an ape) pea-nuts, packets of sex-hormone chewing-gum, pan-glandular petits beurres. And every moment — for across the Hog's Back the stream of traffic now flowed unceasingly — their numbers increased. As in a nightmare, the dozens became scores, the scores hundreds.

The Savage had retreated towards cover, and now, in the posture of an animal at bay, stood with his back to the wall of the lighthouse, staring from face to face in speechless horror, like a man out of his senses.

From this stupor he was aroused to a more immediate sense of reality by the impact on his cheek of a well-aimed packet of chewing-gum. A shock of startling pain — and he was broad awake, awake and fiercely angry.

‘Go away!’ he shouted.

The ape had spoken; there was a burst of laughter and hand-clapping. ‘Good old Savage! Hurrah, hurrah!’ And through the babel he heard cries of: ‘Whip, whip, the whip!’

Acting on the word’s suggestion, he seized the bunch of knotted cords from its nail behind the door and shook it at his tormentors.

There was a yell of ironical applause.

Menacingly he advanced towards them. A woman cried out in fear. The line wavered at its most immediately threatened point, then stiffened again, stood firm. The consciousness of being in overwhelming force had given these sightseers a courage which the Savage had not expected of them. Taken aback, he halted and looked round.

‘Why don’t you leave me alone?’ There was an almost plaintive note in his anger.

‘Have a few magnesium-salted almonds!’ said the man who, if the Savage were to advance, would be the first to be attacked. He held out a packet. ‘They’re really very good, you know,’ he added, with a rather nervous smile of propitiation. ‘And the magnesium salts will help to keep you young.’

The Savage ignored his offer. ‘What do you want with me?’ he asked, turning from one grinning face to another. ‘What do you want with me?’

‘The whip,’ answered a hundred voices confusedly. ‘Do the whipping stunt. Let’s see the whipping stunt.’

Then, in unison and on a slow, heavy rhythm, ‘We — want — the whip,’ shouted a group at the end of the line. ‘We — want — the whip.’

Others at once took up the cry, and the phrase was repeated, parrot-fashion, again and again, with an ever-growing volume of sound, until, by the seventh or eighth reiteration, no other word was being spoken. ‘We — want — the whip.’

They were all crying together; and, intoxicated by the noise, the unanimity, the sense of rhythmical atonement, they might, it seemed, have gone on for hours — almost indefinitely. But at about the twenty-fifth repetition the proceedings were startlingly interrupted. Yet another helicopter had arrived from

across the Hog's Back, hung poised above the crowd, then dropped within a few yards of where the Savage was standing, in the open space between the line of sightseers and the lighthouse. The roar of the air screws momentarily drowned the shouting; then, as the machine touched the ground and the engines were turned off: 'We — want — the whip; we — want — the whip,' broke out again in the same loud, insistent monotone.

The door of the helicopter opened, and out stepped, first a fair and ruddy-faced young man, then, in green velveteen shorts, white shirt, and jockey cap, a young woman.

At the sight of the young woman, the Savage started, recoiled, turned pale.

The young woman stood, smiling at him — an uncertain, imploring, almost abject smile. The seconds passed. Her lips moved, she was saying something; but the sound of her voice was covered by the loud reiterated refrain of the sightseers.

'We — want — the whip! We — want — the whip!'

The young woman pressed both hands to her left side, and on that peach-bright, doll-beautiful face of hers appeared a strangely incongruous expression of yearning distress. Her blue eyes seemed to grow larger, brighter; and suddenly two tears rolled down her cheeks. Inaudibly, she spoke again; then, with a quick, impassioned gesture stretched out her arms towards the Savage, stepped forward.

'We — want — the whip! We — want . . .'

And all of a sudden they had what they wanted.

'Strumpet!' The Savage had rushed at her like a madman. 'Fitchew!' Like a madman, he was slashing at her with his whip of small cords.

Terrified, she had turned to flee, had tripped and fallen in the heather. 'Henry, Henry!' she shouted. But her ruddy-faced companion had bolted out of harm's way behind the helicopter.

With a whoop of delighted excitement the line broke; there was a convergent stampede towards that magnetic centre of attraction. Pain was a fascinating horror.

'Fry, lechery, fry!' Frenzied, the Savage slashed again.

Hungrily they gathered round, pushing and scrambling like swine about the trough.

‘Oh, the flesh!’ The Savage ground his teeth. This time it was on his shoulders that the whip descended. ‘Kill it, kill it!’

Drawn by the fascination of the horror of pain and, from within, impelled by that habit of cooperation, that desire for unanimity and atonement, which their conditioning had so ineradicably implanted in them, they began to mime the frenzy of his gestures, striking at one another as the Savage struck at his own rebellious flesh, or at that plump incarnation of turpitude writhing in the heather at his feet.

‘Kill it, kill it, kill it . . .’ the Savage went on shouting.

Then suddenly somebody started singing ‘Orgy-porgy,’ and in a moment they had all caught up the refrain and, singing, had begun to dance. Orgy-porgy, round and round and round, beating one another in six-eight time. Orgy-porgy . . .

It was after midnight when the last of the helicopters took its flight. Stupefied by soma, and exhausted by a long-drawn frenzy of sensuality, the Savage lay sleeping in the heather. The sun was already high when he awoke. He lay for a moment, blinking in owlish incomprehension at the light; then suddenly remembered — everything.

‘Oh, my God, my God!’ He covered his eyes with his hand.

That evening the swarm of helicopters that came buzzing across the Hog’s Back was a dark cloud ten kilometres long. The description of last night’s orgy of atonement had been in all the papers.

‘Savage!’ called the first arrivals, as they alighted from their machine. ‘Mr. Savage!’

There was no answer.

The door of the lighthouse was ajar. They pushed it open and walked into a shuttered twilight. Through an archway on the further side of the room they

could see the bottom of the staircase that led up to the higher floors. Just under the crown of the arch dangled a pair of feet.

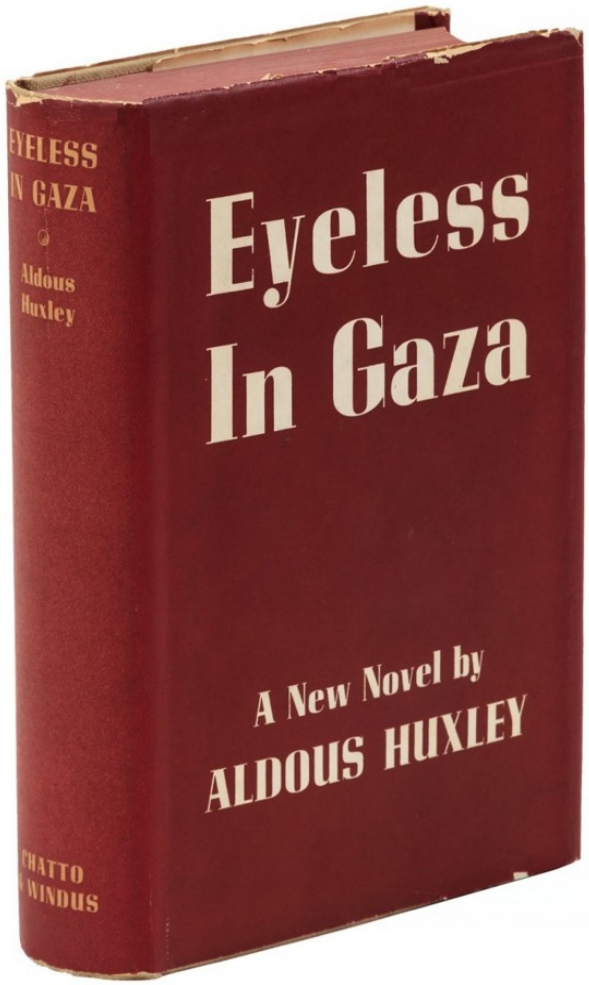
‘Mr. Savage!’

Slowly, very slowly, like two unhurried compass needles, the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-south-west; then paused, and, after a few seconds, turned as unhurriedly back towards the left. South-southwest, south, south-east, east . . .

Eyeless in Gaza

First published by Chatto & Windus in 1936, *Eyeless in Gaza* is one of Huxley's longest and most complex novels, which attempts to address fundamental questions about politics, sexuality and religion. The events in the novel are told episodically, not chronologically and the author frequently switches between one time period and another, forcing the reader to mentally re-arrange the timeline. Huxley employs this unconventional narrative method and structure in order to highlight and emphasise his innovative ideas.

The title of the novel was inspired by a phrase in the John Milton closest drama, *Samson Agonistes*. The drama was released in 1671, alongside Milton's poem, *Paradise Regain'd*; it relates the story of Samson after he has been captured by the Philistines, having had his hair cut off and his eyes gouged out. Huxley also reportedly drew upon the life of his biographer and neighbour, Sybille Bedford, who claimed that the character of Mary Amberley was in part based on her morphine-addicted mother. The novel centres on an upper-class sociologist, Anthony Beavis, as he desperately searches for meaning and a path to follow in life.



The first edition

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The famous 17th century poet, John Milton

CHAPTER ONE. August 30th 1933

THE SNAPSHOTS HAD become almost as dim as memories. This young woman who had stood in a garden at the turn of the century was like a ghost at cockcrow. His mother, Anthony Beavis recognized. A year or two, perhaps only a month or two, before she died. But fashion, as he peered at the brown phantom, fashion is a topiary art. Those swan-like loins! That long slanting cascade of bosom — without any apparent relation to the naked body beneath! And all that hair, like an ornamental deformity on the skull! Oddly hideous and repellent it seemed in 1933. And yet, if he shut his eyes (as he could not resist doing), he could see his mother languidly beautiful on her chaise-longue; or, agile, playing tennis; or swooping like a bird across the ice of a far-off winter.

It was the same with these snapshots of Mary Amberley, taken ten years later. The skirt was as long as ever, and within her narrower bell of drapery woman still glided footless, as though on castors. The breasts, it was true, had been pushed up a bit, the redundant posterior pulled in. But the general shape of the clothed body was still strangely improbable. A crab shelled in whalebone. And this huge plumed hat of 1911 was simply a French funeral of the first class. How could any man in his senses have been attracted by so profoundly anti-aphrodisiac an appearance? And yet, in spite of the snapshots, he could remember her as the very embodiment of desirability. At the sight of that feathered crab on wheels his heart had beaten faster, his breathing had become oppressed.

Twenty years, thirty years after the event, the snapshots revealed only things remote and unfamiliar. But the unfamiliar (dismal automatism!) is always the absurd. What he remembered, on the contrary, was the emotion felt when the unfamiliar was still the familiar, when the absurd, being taken for granted, had

nothing absurd about it. The dramas of memory are always Hamlet in modern dress.

How beautiful his mother had been — beautiful under the convoluted wens of hair and in spite of the jutting posterior, the long slant of bosom. And Mary, how maddeningly desirable even in a carapace, even beneath funereal plumes! And in his little fawn-coloured covert coat and scarlet tam-o'-shanter; as Bubbles, in grass-green velveteen and ruffles; at school in his Norfolk suit with the knickerbockers that ended below the knees in two tight tubes of box-cloth; in his starched collar and his bowler, if it were Sunday, his red-and-black school-cap on other days — he too, in his own memory, was always in modern dress, never the absurd little figure of fun these snapshots revealed. No worse off, so far as inner feeling was concerned, than the little boys of thirty years later in their jerseys and shorts. A proof, Anthony found himself reflecting impersonally, as he examined the top-hatted and tail-coated image of himself at Eton, a proof that progress can only be recorded, never experienced. He reached out for his note-book, opened it and wrote: 'Progress may, perhaps, be perceived by historians; it can never be felt by those actually involved in the supposed advance. The young are born into the advancing circumstances, the old take them for granted within a few months or years. Advances aren't felt as advances. There is no gratitude — only irritation if, for any reason, the newly invented conveniences break down. Men don't spend their time thanking God for cars; they only curse when the carburettor is choked.'

He closed the book and returned to the top-hat of 1907.

*

There was a sound of footsteps and, looking up, he saw Helen Ledwidge approaching with those long springing strides of hers across the terrace. Under the wide hat her face was bright with the reflection from her flame-coloured beach pyjamas. As though she were in hell. And in fact, he went on to think, she was there. The mind is its own place; she carried her hell about with her. The hell of her grotesque marriage; other hells too, perhaps. But he had always

refrained from inquiring too closely into their nature, had always pretended not to notice when she herself offered to be his guide through their intricacies. Inquiry and exploration would land him in heaven knew what quagmire of emotion, what sense of responsibility. And he had no time, no energy for emotions and responsibilities. His work came first. Suppressing his curiosity, he went on stubbornly playing the part he had long since assigned himself — the part of the detached philosopher, of the preoccupied man of science who doesn't see the things that to everyone else are obvious. He acted as if he could detect in her face nothing but its external beauties of form and texture. Whereas, of course, flesh is never wholly opaque; the soul shows through the walls of its receptacle. Those clear grey eyes of hers, that mouth with its delicately lifted upper lip, were hard and almost ugly with a resentful sadness.

The hell-flush was quenched as she stepped out of the sunlight into the shadow of the house; but the sudden pallor of her face served only to intensify the embittered melancholy of its expression. Anthony looked at her, but did not rise, did not call a greeting. There was a convention between them that there should never be any fuss; not even the fuss of saying good morning. No fuss at all. As Helen stepped through the open glass doors into the room, he turned back to the study of his photographs.

'Well, here I am,' she said without smiling. She pulled off her hat and with a beautiful impatient movement of her head shook back the ruddy-brown curls of her hair. 'Hideously hot!' She threw the hat on to the sofa and crossed the room to where Anthony was sitting at his writing-table. 'Not working?' she asked in surprise. It was so rare to find him otherwise than immersed in books and papers.

He shook his head. 'No sociology today.'

'What are you looking at?' Standing by his chair, she bent over the scattered snapshots.

'At my old corpses.' He handed her the ghost of the dead Etonian.

After studying it for a moment in silence, 'You looked nice then,' she commented.

‘Merci, mon vieux!’ He gave her an ironically affectionate pat on the back of the thigh. ‘At my private school they used to call me Benger.’ Between his finger-tips and the rounded resilience of her flesh the silk interposed a dry sliding smoothness, strangely disagreeable to the touch. ‘Short for Benger’s Food. Because I looked so babyish.’

‘Sweet,’ she went on, ignoring his interruption, ‘you looked really sweet then. Touching.’

‘But I still am,’ Anthony protested, smiling up at her.

She looked at him for a moment in silence. Under the thick dark hair the forehead was beautifully smooth and serene, like the forehead of a meditative child. Childish too, in a more comical way, was the short, slightly tilted nose. Between their narrowed lids the eyes were alive with inner laughter, and there was a smile also about the corners of the lips — a faint ironic smile that in some sort contradicted what the lips seemed in their form to express. They were full lips, finely cut; voluptuous and at the same time grave, sad, almost tremulously sensitive. Lips as though naked in their brooding sensuality; without defence of their own and abandoned to their helplessness by the small, unaggressive chin beneath.

‘The worst of it is,’ Helen said at last, ‘that you’re right. You are sweet, you are touching. God knows why. Because you oughtn’t to be. It’s all a swindle really, a trick for getting people to like you on false pretences.’

‘Come!’ he protested.

‘You make them give you something for nothing.’

‘But at least I’m always perfectly frank about its being nothing. I never pretend it’s a Grand Passion.’ He rolled the r and opened the a’s grotesquely. ‘Not even a Wahlverwandschaft,’ he added, dropping into German, so as to make all this romantic business of affinities and violent emotions sound particularly ridiculous. ‘Just a bit of fun.’

‘Just a bit of fun,’ Helen echoed ironically, thinking, as she spoke, of that period at the beginning of the affair, when she had stood, so to speak, on the threshold of being in love with him — on the threshold, waiting to be called in.

But how firmly (for all his silence and studied gentleness), how definitely and decidedly he had shut the door against her! He didn't want to be loved. For a moment she had been on the verge of rebellion; then, in that spirit of embittered and sarcastic resignation with which she had learned to face the world, she accepted his conditions. They were the more acceptable since there was no better alternative in sight; since, after all, he was a remarkable man and, after all, she was very fond of him; since, also, he knew how to give her at least a physical satisfaction. 'Just a bit of fun,' she repeated, and gave a little snort of laughter.

Anthony shot a glance at her, wondering uncomfortably whether she meant to break the tacitly accepted agreement between them and refer to some forbidden topic. But his fears were unjustified.

'Yes, I admit it,' she went on after a little silence, 'You're honest all right. But that doesn't alter the fact that you're always getting something for nothing. Call it an unintentional swindle. Your face is your fortune, I suppose. Handsome is as handsome doesn't in your case.' She bent down once more over the photographs. 'Who's that?'

He hesitated a moment before replying; then, with a smile, but feeling at the same time rather uncomfortable, 'One of the not-grand passions,' he answered. 'Her name was Gladys.'

'It would have been!' Helen wrinkled up her nose contemptuously. 'Why did you throw her over?'

'I didn't. She preferred someone else. Not that I very much minded,' he was adding, when she interrupted him.

'Perhaps the other man sometimes talked to her when they were in bed.'

Anthony flushed. 'What do you mean?'

'Some women, oddly enough, like being talked to in bed. And seeing that you didn't . . . You never do, after all.' She threw Gladys aside and picked up the woman in the clothes of 1900. 'Is that your mother?'

Anthony nodded. 'And that's yours,' he said, pushing across the picture of Mary Amberley in her funereal plumes. Then, in a tone of disgust, 'All this burden of past experience one trails about with one!' he added. 'There ought to

be some way of getting rid of one's superfluous memories. How I hate old Proust! Really detest him.' And with a richly comic eloquence he proceeded to evoke the vision of that asthmatic seeker of lost time squatting, horribly white and flabby, with breasts almost female but fledged with long black hairs, for ever squatting in the tepid bath of his remembered past. And all the stale soap-suds of countless previous washings floated around him, all the accumulated dirt of years lay crusty on the sides of the tub or hung in dark suspension in the water. And there he sat, a pale repellent invalid, taking up spongefuls of his own thick soup and squeezing it over his face, scooping up cupfuls of it and appreciatively rolling the grey and gritty liquor round his mouth, gargling, rinsing his nostrils with it, like a pious Hindu in the Ganges. . . .

'You talk about him,' said Helen, 'as if he were a personal enemy.'

Anthony only laughed.

In the silence that followed, Helen picked up the faded snapshot of her mother and began to pore over it intently, as though it were some mysterious hieroglyph which, if interpreted, might provide a clue, unriddle an enigma.

Anthony watched her for a little; then, rousing himself to activity, dipped into the heap of photographs and brought out his Uncle James in the tennis clothes of 1906. Dead now — of cancer, poor old wretch, and with all the consolations of the Catholic religion. He dropped that snapshot and picked up another. It showed a group in front of dim Swiss mountains — his father, his step-mother, his two half-sisters. 'Grindelwald, 1912' was written on the back in Mr Beavis's neat hand. All four of them, he noticed, were carrying alpenstocks.

'And I would wish,' he said aloud, as he put the picture down, 'I would wish my days to be separated each from each by unnatural impiety.'

Helen looked up from her undecipherable hieroglyph. 'Then why do you spend your time looking at old photographs?'

'I was tidying my cupboard,' he exclaimed. 'They came to light. Like Tutankhamen. I couldn't resist the temptation to look at them. Besides, it's my birthday,' he added.

'Your birthday?'

‘Forty-two today.’ Anthony shook his head. ‘Too depressing! And since one always likes to deepen the gloom. . . .’ He picked up a handful of the snapshots and let them fall again. ‘The corpses turned up very opportunely. One detects the finger of Providence. The hoof of chance, if you prefer it.’

‘You liked her a lot, didn’t you?’ Helen asked after another silence, holding out the ghostly image of her mother for him to see.

He nodded and, to divert the conversation, ‘She civilized me,’ he explained. ‘I was half a savage when she took me in hand.’ He didn’t want to discuss his feelings for Mary Amberley — particularly (though this, no doubt, was a stupid relic of barbarism) with Helen. ‘The white woman’s burden,’ he added with a laugh. Then, picking up the alpenstock group once again, ‘And this is one of the things she delivered me from,’ he said. ‘Darkest Switzerland. I can never be sufficiendy grateful.’

‘It’s a pity she couldn’t deliver herself,’ said Helen, when she had looked at the alpenstocks.

‘How is she, by the way?’

Helen shrugged her shoulders. ‘She was better when she came out of the nursing home this spring. But she’s begun again, of course. The same old business. Morphia; and drink in the intervals. I saw her in Paris on the way here. It was awful!’ She shuddered.

Ironically affectionate, the hand that still pressed her thigh seemed all of a sudden extremely out of place. He let it fall.

‘I don’t know which is worse,’ Helen went on after a pause. ‘The dirt — you’ve no idea of the state she lives in! — or that malice, that awful lying.’ She sighed profoundly.

With a gesture that had nothing ironical about it, Anthony took her hand and pressed it. ‘Poor Helen!’

She stood for a few seconds, motionless and without speech, averted; then suddenly shook herself as though out of sleep. He felt her limp hand tighten on his; and when she turned round on him, her face was alive with a reckless and deliberate gaiety. ‘Poor Anthony, on the contrary!’ she said, and from deep in

her throat produced a queer unexpected little sound of swallowed laughter. ‘Talk of false pretences!’

He was protesting that, in her case, they were true, when she bent down and, with a kind of angry violence, set her mouth against his.

CHAPTER TWO. April 4th 1934

FROM A.B.’S DIARY

Five words sum up every biography. Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor. Like all other human beings, I know what I ought to do, but continue to do what I know I oughtn’t to do. This afternoon, for example, I went to see poor Beppo, miserably convalescent from ‘flu. I knew I ought to have sat with him and let him pour out his complaints about youth’s ingratitude and cruelty, his terror of advancing old age and loneliness, his awful suspicions that people are beginning to find him a bore, no longer à la page. The Bolinskys had given a party without inviting him, Hagworm hadn’t asked him to a week-end since November. . . . I knew I ought to have listened sympathetically, and proffered good advice, implored him not to make himself miserable over inevitabilities and trifles. The advice, no doubt, wouldn’t have been accepted — as usual; but still, one never knows, therefore ought never to fail to give it. Instead of which I squared conscience in advance by buying him a pound of expensive grapes and told a lie about some committee I had to run off to, almost immediately. The truth being that I simply couldn’t face a repetition of poor B’s self-commiserations. I justified my behaviour, as well as by five bob’s worth of fruit, by righteous thoughts: at fifty, the man ought to know better than continue to attach importance to love-affairs and invitations to dinner and meeting the right people. He oughtn’t to be such an ass; therefore (impeccable logic) it wasn’t incumbent upon me to do what I knew I should do. And so I hurried off after only a quarter of an hour with him — leaving the poor wretch to solitude and his festering self-pity. Shall go to him tomorrow for at least two hours.

‘Besetting sin’ — can one still use the term? No. It has too many unsatisfactory overtones and implications — blood of lamb, terrible thing to fall into hands of living God, hell fire, obsession with sex, offences, chastity instead

of charity. (Note that poor old Beppo, turned inside out = Comstock or St Paul.) Also ‘besetting sin’ has generally implied that incessant, egotistic brooding on self which mars so much piety. See in this context the diary of Prince, that zealous evangelical who subsequently founded the Abode of Love — under Guidance, as the Buchmanites would say; for his long-repressed wish for promiscuous copulation at last emerged into consciousness as a command from the Holy Ghost (with whom in the end he came to identify himself) to ‘reconcile flesh with God’. And he proceeded to reconcile it — in public, apparently, and on the drawing-room sofa.

No, one can’t use the phrase, nor think in the terms it implies. But that doesn’t mean, of course, that persistent tendencies to behave badly don’t exist, or that it isn’t one’s business to examine them, objectively, and try to do something about them. That remark of old Miller’s, as we were riding to see one of his Indian patients in the mountains: ‘Really and by nature every man’s a unity; but you’ve artificially transformed the unity into a trinity. One clever man and two idiots — that’s what you’ve made yourself. An admirable manipulator of ideas, linked with a person who, so far as self-knowledge and feeling are concerned, is just a moron; and the pair of you associated with a half-witted body. A body that’s hopelessly unaware of all it does and feels, that has no accomplishments, that doesn’t know how to use itself or anything else.’ Two imbeciles and one intellectual. But man is a democracy, where the majority rules. You’ve got to do something about that majority. This journal is a first step. Self-knowledge an essential preliminary to self-change. (Pure science and then applied.) That which besets me is indifference. I can’t be bothered about people. Or rather, won’t. For I avoid, carefully, all occasions for being bothered. A necessary part of the treatment is to embrace all the bothersome occasions one can, to go out of one’s way to create them. Indifference is a form of sloth. For one can work hard, as I’ve always done, and yet wallow in sloth; be industrious about one’s job, but scandalously lazy about all that isn’t the job. Because, of course, the job is fun. Whereas the non-job — personal relations, in my case — is disagreeable and laborious. More and more disagreeable as the habit of

avoiding personal relations ingrains itself with the passage of time. Indifference is a form of sloth, and sloth in its turn is one of the symptoms of lovelessness. One isn't lazy about what one loves. The problem is: how to love? (Once more the word is suspect — greasy from being fingered by generations of Stigginses.) There ought to be some way of dry-cleaning and disinfecting words. Love, purity, goodness, spirit — a pile of dirty linen waiting for the laundress. How, then, to — not 'love', since it's an unwashed handkerchief — feel, say, persistent affectionate interest in people? How make the anthropological approach to them, as old Miller would say? Not easy to answer.

April 5th

Worked all morning. For it would be silly not to put my materials into shape. Into a new shape, of course. My original conception was of a vast Bouvard et Pécuchet, constructed of historical facts. A picture of futility, apparently objective, scientific, but composed, I realize, in order to justify my own way of life. If men had always behaved either like half-wits or baboons, if they couldn't behave otherwise, then I was justified in sitting comfortably in the stalls with my opera-glasses. Whereas if there were something to be done, if the behaviour could be modified . . . Meanwhile a description of the behaviour and an account of the ways of modifying it will be valuable. Though not so valuable as to justify complete abstention from all other forms of activity.

In the afternoon to Miller's, where I found a parson, who takes Christianity seriously and has started an organization of pacifists. Purchas by name. Middle-aged. Slightly the muscular-jocular Christian manner. (How hard to admit that a man can use clichés and yet be intelligent!) But a very decent sort of man. More than decent, indeed. Rather impressive.

The aim is to use and extend Purchas's organization. The unit a small group, like the Early Christian agape, or the communist cell. (Note that all successful movements have been built up in rowing eights or football elevens.) Purchas's groups preface meetings with Christian devotions. Empirically, it is found that a devotional atmosphere increases efficiency, intensifies spirit of cooperation and self-sacrifice. But devotion in Christian terms will be largely unacceptable.

Miller believes possible a non-theological praxis of meditation. Which he would like, of course, to couple with training, along F. M. Alexander's lines, in use of the self, beginning with physical control and achieving through it (since mind and body are one) control of impulses and feelings. But this is impracticable. The necessary teachers don't exist. 'We must be content to do what we can from the mental side. The physical will let us down, of course. The flesh is weak in so many more ways than we suppose.'

I agreed to contribute the money, prepare some literature and go round speaking to groups. The last is most difficult, as I have always refused to utter in public. When Purchas has gone, asked Miller if I should take lessons in speaking.

Answer. 'If you take lessons before you're well and physically coordinated, you'll merely be learning yet another way of using yourself badly. Get well, achieve coordination, use yourself properly; you'll be able to speak in any way you please. The difficulties, from stage fright to voice production, will no longer exist.'

Miller then gave me a lesson in use of the self. Learning to sit in a chair, to get out of it, to lean back and forward. He warned me it might seem a bit pointless at first. But that interest and understanding would grow with achievement. And that I should find it the solution of the video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor problem: a technique for translating good intentions into acts, for being sure of doing what one knows one ought to do.

Spent the evening with Beppo. After listening to catalogues of miseries, suggested that there was no cure, only prevention. Avoid the cause. His reaction was passionate anger: I was robbing life of its point, condemning him to suicide. In answer I hinted that there was more than one point. He said he would rather die than give up his point; then changed his mood and wished to God he could give it up. But for what? I suggested pacifism. But he was a pacifist already, always had been. Yes, I knew that; but a passive pacifist, a negative one. There was such a thing as active and positive pacifism. He listened, said he'd think about it, thought perhaps it might be a way out.

CHAPTER THREE. August 30th 1933

FROM THE FLAT roof of the house the eye was drawn first towards the west, where the pines slanted down to the sea — a blue Mediterranean bay fringed with pale bone-like rocks and cupped between high hills, green on their lower slopes with vines, grey with olive trees, then pine-dark, earth-red, rock-white or rosy-brown with parched heath. Through a gap between the nearer hills, the long straight ridge of the Sainte-Baume stood out metallically clear, but blue with distance. To north and south, the garden was hemmed in by pines; but eastwards, the vineyards and the olive orchards mounted in terraces of red earth to a crest; and the last trees stood, sometimes dark and brooding, sometimes alive with tremulous silver, against the sky.

There were mattresses on the roof for sun-bathing; and on one of these they were lying, their heads in the narrow shade of the southern parapet. It was almost noon; the sunlight fell steep out of the flawless sky; but a faint breeze stirred and died and swelled again into motion. Lapped in that fitfully tempered heat, skin seemed to acquire a livelier sensibility, almost an independent consciousness. As though it were drinking a new life from the sun. And that strange, violent, flamy life from outer space seemed to strike through the skin, to permeate and transmute the flesh beneath, till the whole body was a thing of alien sun-stuff and the very soul felt itself melting out of its proper identity and becoming something else, something of a different, an other-than-human kind.

There are so few possible grimaces, such a paucity, in comparison with all the thoughts and feelings and sensations, such a humiliating poverty of reflexes, even of consciously expressive gestures! Still lucid in his self-estrangement, Anthony observed the symptoms of that death-bed in which he also had his part as assassin and fellow-victim. Restlessly she turned her head on the cushions, this way, that way, as though seeking, but always vainly, some relief, however

slight, some respite, if only for a moment, from her intolerable suffering. Sometimes, with the gesture of one who prays despairingly that a cup may be removed, she clasped her hands, and raising them to her mouth gnawed at the clenched knuckles or pressed a wrist between her parted teeth as if to stifle her own crying. Distorted, the face was a mask of extremest grief. It was the face, he suddenly perceived, as he bent down towards those tormented lips, of one of Van der Weyden's holy women at the foot of the Cross.

And then, from one moment to the next, there was a stillness. The victim no longer rolled her tortured head on the pillow. The imploring hands fell limp. The agonized expression of pain gave place to a superhuman and rapturous serenity. The mouth became grave like that of a saint. Behind the closed eyelids what beatific vision had presented itself?

They lay for a long time in a golden stupor of sunlight and fulfilled desire. It was Anthony who first stirred. Moved by the dumb unthinking gratitude and tenderness of his satisfied body he reached out a caressing hand. Her skin was hot to the touch like fruit in the sun. He propped himself up on his elbow and opened his eyes.

'You look like a Gauguin,' he said after a moment. Brown like a Gauguin and, curiously, it struck him, flat like a Gauguin too; for the sunburn suppressed those nacreous gleams of carmine and blue and green that give the untanned white body its peculiar sumptuousness of relief.

The sound of his voice broke startlingly into Helen's warm delicious trance of unconsciousness. She winced almost with pain. Why couldn't he leave her in peace? She had been so happy in that other world of her transfigured body; and now he was calling her back — back to this world, back to her ordinary hell of emptiness and drought and discontent. She left his words unanswered and, shutting her eyes yet tighter against the menace of reality, tried to force her way back to the paradise from which she had been dragged.

Brown like a Gauguin, and flat. . . . But the first Gauguin he ever saw (and had pretended, he remembered, to like a great deal more than he actually did)

had been with Mary Amberley that time in Paris — that exciting and, for the boy of twenty that he then was, extraordinary and apocalyptic time.

He frowned to himself; this past of his was becoming importunate! But when, in order to escape from it, he bent down to kiss Helen's shoulder, he found the sun-warmed skin impregnated with a faint yet penetrating smell, at once salty and smoky, a smell that transported him instantaneously to a great chalk pit in the flank of the Chilterns, where, in Brian Foxe's company, he had spent an inexplicably pleasurable hour striking two flints together and sniffing, voluptuously, at the place where the spark had left its characteristic tang of marine combustion.

'L-like sm-moke under the s-sea,' had been Brian's stammered comment when he was given the flints to smell.

Even the seemingly most solid fragments of present reality are riddled with pitfalls. What could be more uncompromisingly there, in the present, than a woman's body in the sunshine? And yet it had betrayed him. The firm ground of its sensual immediacy and of his own physical tenderness had opened beneath his feet and precipitated him into another time and place. Nothing was safe. Even this skin had the scent of smoke under the sea. This living skin, this present skin; but it was nearly twenty years since Brian's death.

A chalk pit, a picture gallery, a brown figure in the sun, a skin, here, redolent of salt and smoke, and here (like Mary's, he remembered) savagely musky. Somewhere in the mind a lunatic shuffled a pack of snapshots and dealt them out at random, shuffled once more and dealt them out in a different order, again and again, indefinitely. There was no chronology. The idiot remembered no distinction between before and after. The pit was as real and vivid as the gallery. That ten years separated flints from Gauguins was a fact, not given, but discoverable only on second thoughts by the calculating intellect. The thirty-five years of his conscious life made themselves immediately known to him as a chaos — a pack of snapshots in the hands of a lunatic. And who decided which snapshots were to be kept, which thrown away? A frightened or libidinous animal, according to the Freudians. But the Freudians were victims of the

pathetic fallacy, incorrigible rationalizers always in search of sufficient reasons, of comprehensible motives. Fear and lust are the most easily comprehensible motives of all. Therefore . . . But psychology had no more right to be anthropomorphic, or even exclusively zoomorphic, than any other science. Besides a reason and an animal, man was also a collection of particles subject to the laws of chance. Some things were remembered for their utility or their appeal to the higher faculties of the mind; some, by the presiding animal, remembered (or else deliberately forgotten) for their emotional content. But what of the innumerable remembered things without any particular emotional content, without utility, or beauty, or rational significance? Memory in these cases seemed to be merely a matter of luck. At the time of the event certain particles happened to be in a favourable position. Click! the event found itself caught, indelibly recorded. For no reason whatever. Unless, it now rather disquietingly occurred to him, unless of course the reason were not before the event, but after it, in what had been the future. What if that picture gallery had been recorded and stored away in the cellars of his mind for the sole and express purpose of being brought up into consciousness at this present moment? Brought up, today, when he was forty-two and secure, forty-two and fixed, unchangeably himself, brought up along with those critical years of his adolescence, along with the woman who had been his teacher, his first mistress, and was now a hardly human creature festering to death, alone, in a dirty burrow? And what if that absurd childish game with the flints had had a point, a profound purpose, which was simply to be recollected here on this blazing roof, now as his lips made contact with Helen’s sun-warmed flesh? In order that he might be forced, in the midst of this act of detached and irresponsible sensuality, to think of Brian and of the things that Brian had lived for; yes, and had died for — died for, another image suddenly reminded him, at the foot of just such a cliff as that beneath which they had played as children in the chalk pit. Yes, even Brian’s suicide, he now realized with horror, even the poor huddled body on the rocks, was mysteriously implicit in this hot skin.

One, two, three, four — counting each movement of his hand, he began to caress her. The gesture was magical, would transport him, if repeated sufficiently often, beyond the past and the future, beyond right and wrong, into the discrete, the self-sufficient, the atomic present. Particles of thought, desire, and feeling moving at random among particles of time, coming into casual contact and as casually parting. A casino, an asylum, a zoo; but also, in a corner, a library and someone thinking. Someone largely at the mercy of the croupiers, at the mercy of the idiots and the animals; but still irrepressible and indefatigable. Another two or three years and the Elements of Sociology would be finished. In spite of everything; yes, in spite of everything, he thought with a kind of defiant elation, and counted thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five . . .

CHAPTER FOUR. November 6th 1902

HORNS WITH A frizzle of orange hair between; the pink muzzle lowered inquiringly towards a tiny cup and saucer; eyes expressive of a more than human astonishment. ‘THE OX’, it was proclaimed in six-inch lettering, ‘THE OX IN THE TEA-CUP’. The thing was supposed to be a reason for buying beef extract — was a reason.

Ox in Cup. The words, the basely comic image, spotted the Home Counties that summer and autumn like a skin disease. One of a score of nasty and discreditable infections. The train which carried Anthony Beavis into Surrey rolled through mile-long eczemas of vulgarity. Pills, soaps, cough drops and — more glaringly inflamed and scabby than all the rest — beef essence, the cupped ox.

‘Thirty-one . . . thirty-two,’ the boy said to himself, and wished he had begun his counting when the train started. Between Waterloo and Clapham Junction there must have been hundreds of oxen. Millions.

Opposite, leaning back in his corner, sat Anthony’s father. With his left hand he shaded his eyes. Under the drooping brown moustache his lips moved.

‘Stay for me there,’ John Beavis was saying to the person who, behind his closed lids, was sometimes still alive, sometimes the cold, immobile thing of his most recent memories:

Stay for me there; I shall not fail

To meet thee in that hollow vale.

There was no immortality, of course. After Darwin, after the Fox Sisters, after John Beavis’s own father, the surgeon, how could there be? Beyond that hollow vale there was nothing. But all the same, oh, all the same, stay for me, stay for me, stay, stay!

‘Thirty-three.’

Anthony turned away from the hurrying landscape and was confronted by the spectacle of that hand across the eyes, those moving lips. That he had ever thought of counting the oxen seemed all at once shameful, a betrayal. And Uncle James, at the other end of the seat, with his Times — and his face, as he read, twitching every few seconds in sudden spasms of nervousness. He might at least have had the decency not to read it now — now, while they were on their way to . . . Anthony refused to say the words; words would make it all so clear, and he didn't want to know too clearly. Reading The Times might be shameful; but the other thing was terrible, too terrible to bear thinking about, and yet so terrible that you couldn't help thinking about it.

Anthony looked out of the window again, through tears. The green and golden brightness of St Martin's summer swam in an obscuring iridescence. And suddenly the wheels of the train began to chant articulately. 'Dead-a-dead-a-dead,' they shouted, 'dead-a-dead-a-dead . . .' For ever. The tears overflowed, were warm for an instant on his cheeks, then icy cold. He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped them away, wiped the fog out of his eyes. Luminous under the sun, the world before him was like one vast and intricate jewel. The elms had withered to a pale gold. Huge above the fields, and motionless, they seemed to be meditating in the crystal light of the morning, seemed to be remembering, seemed, from the very brink of dissolution, to be looking back and in a last ecstasy of recollection living over again, concentrated in this shining moment of autumnal time, all the long-drawn triumph of spring and summer.

'DEAD-A-DEAD', in a sudden frenzy yelled the wheels, as the train crossed a bridge, 'A-DEAD-A-DEAD!'

Anthony tried not to listen — vainly; then tried to make the wheels say something else. Why shouldn't they say, To stop the train pull down the chain? That was what they usually said. With a great effort of concentration he forced them to change their refrain.

'To stop the train pull down the chain, to stop the train pull down a-dead-a-dead-a-dead . . .' It was no good.

Mr Beavis uncovered his eyes for a moment and looked out of the window. How bright the autumnal trees! Cruelly bright they would have seemed, insultingly, except for something desperate in their stillness, a certain glassy fragility that, oh! invited disaster, that prophetically announced the coming darkness and the black branches moving in torture among stars, the sleet like arrows along the screaming wind.

Uncle James turned the page of his Times. The Ritualists and the Kensitites were at it again, he saw; and was delighted. Let dog eat dog. ‘MR CHAMBERLAIN AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE SCHOOL.’ What was the old devil up to now? Unveiling a tablet to the Old Boys who had been killed in the war. ‘Over one hundred young men went to the front, and twelve of them laid down their lives for the country in South Africa (cheers).’ Deluded idiots, thought Uncle James, who had always been passionately a pro-Boer.

Painted, among the real cows in their pasture, the enormous horns, the triangular auburn frizz, the inquiring nostrils, the tea-cup. Anthony shut his eyes against the vision.

‘No, I won’t,’ he said with all the determination he had previously used against the wheels. He refused to know the horror; he refused to know the ox. But what was the good of refusing? The wheels were still shouting away. And how could he suppress the fact that this ox was the thirty-fourth, on the right, from Clapham Junction? A number is always a number, even on the way to . . . But counting was shameful, counting was like Uncle James’s Times. Counting was shirking, was betraying. And yet the other thing, the thing they ought to be thinking about, was really too terrible. Too unnatural, somehow.

‘Whatever we may have thought, or still think, as to the causes, the necessity, the justice of the war which is now happily at an end, I think that we must all have a feeling of profound satisfaction that when the country called its children to arms, the manhood of the nation leaped to it in response. . . .’ His face twitching with exasperation, Uncle James put down The Times and looked at his watch.

‘Two and a half minutes late,’ he said angrily.

‘If only it were a hundred years late,’ thought his brother. ‘Or ten years early — no, twelve, thirteen. The first year of our marriage.’

James Beavis looked out of the window. ‘And we’re still at least a mile from Lollingdon,’ he went on.

As though to a sore, to an aching tooth, his fingers travelled again to the chronometer in his waistcoat pocket. Time for its own sake. Always imperiously time, categorically time — time to look at one’s watch and see the time. . . .

The wheels spoke more and more slowly, became at last inarticulate. The brakes screamed.

‘Lollingdon, Lollingdon,’ the porter called.

But Uncle James was already on the platform. ‘Quick!’ he shouted, striding, long-legged, beside the still moving train. His hand went once more to that mystical ulcer for ever gnawing at his consciousness. ‘Quick!’

A sudden resentment stirred in his brother’s mind. ‘What does he want me to be quick for?’ As if they were in danger of missing something — some pleasure, some precariously brief entertainment.

Anthony climbed down after his father. They walked towards the gate, along a wall of words and pictures. A GUINEA A BOX AND A BLESSING TO MEN THE PICKWICK THE OWL AND KILLS MOTHS BUGS BEETLES A SPADE A SPADE AND BRANSON’S CAMP COFFEE THE OX IN . . . And suddenly here were the horns, the expressive eyes, the cup — the thirty-fifth cup — ‘No, I won’t, I won’t’ — but all the same, the thirty-fifth, the thirty-fifth from Clapham Junction on the right-hand side.

The cab smelt of straw and leather. Of straw and leather and of the year eighty-eight, was it? yes, eighty-eight; that Christmas when they had driven to the Champernownes’ dance — he and she and her mother — in that cold, with the sheepskin rug across their knees. And as though by accident (for he had not yet dared to make the gesture deliberately) the back of his hand had brushed against hers; had brushed, as though by accident, had casually rested. Her mother was talking about the difficulty of getting servants — and when you did get them, they didn’t know anything, they were lazy. She hadn’t moved her

hand! Did that mean she didn't mind? He took the risk; his fingers closed over hers. They were disrespectful, her mother went on, they were . . . He felt an answering pressure and, looking up, divined in the darkness that she was smiling at him.

'Really,' her mother was saying, 'I don't know what things are coming to nowadays.' And he had seen, by way of silent comment, the mischievous flash of Maisie's teeth; and that little squeeze of the hand had been deliciously conspiratorial, secret, and illicit.

Slowly, hoof after hoof, the old horse drew them; slowly along lanes, into the heart of the great autumnal jewel of gold and crystal; and stopped at last at the very core of it. In the sunshine, the church tower was like grey amber. The clock, James Beavis noticed with annoyance, was slow. They passed under the lych-gate. Startlingly and hideously black, four people were walking up the path in front of them. Two huge women (to Anthony they all seemed giantesses) rose in great inky cones of drapery from the flagstones. With them, still further magnified by their top-hats, went a pair of enormous men.

'The Champernownes,' said James Beavis; and the syllables of the familiar name were like a sword, yet another sword, in the very quick of his brother's being. 'The Champernownes and — let's see — what's the name of that young fellow their daughter married? Anstey? Annerley?' He glanced inquiringly at John; but John was staring fixedly in front of him and did not answer.

'Amersham? Atherton?' James Beavis frowned with irritation. Meticulous, he attached an enormous importance to names and dates and figures; he prided himself on his power to reproduce them correctly. A lapse of memory drove him to fury. 'Atherton? Anderson?' And what made it more maddening was the fact that the young man was so good-looking, carried himself so well — not in that stupid, stiff, military way, like his father-in-law, the General, but gracefully, easily . . . 'I shan't know what to call him,' he said to himself; and his right cheek began to twitch, as though some living creature had been confined beneath the skin and were violently struggling to escape.

They walked on. It seemed to Anthony that he had swallowed his heart — swallowed it whole, without chewing. He felt rather sick, as though he were expecting to be caned.

The black giants halted, turned, and came back to meet them. Hats were raised, hands shaken.

‘And dear little Anthony!’ said Lady Champernowne, when at last it was his turn. Impulsively, she bent down and kissed him.

She was fat. Her lips left a disgusting wet place on his cheek. Anthony hated her.

‘Perhaps I ought to kiss him too,’ thought Mary Amberley, as she watched her mother. One was expected to do such odd things when one was married. Six months ago, when she was still Mary Champernowne and fresh from school, it would have been unthinkable. But now . . . one never knew. In the end, however, she decided that she wouldn’t kiss the boy, it would really be too ridiculous. She pressed his hand without speaking, smiling only from the remote security of her secret happiness. She was nearly five months gone with child, and had lived for these last two or three weeks in a kind of trance of drowsy bliss, inexpressibly delicious. Bliss in a world that had become beautiful and rich and benevolent out of all recognition. The country, as they drove that morning in the gently swaying landau, had been like paradise; and this little plot of green between the golden trees and the tower was Eden itself. Poor Mrs Beavis had died, it was true; so pretty still, so young. How sad that was! But sadness, somehow, did not touch this secret bliss of hers, remained profoundly irrelevant to it, as though it were the sadness of somebody in another planet.

Anthony looked up for a moment into the smiling face, so bright in its black setting, so luminous with inner peace and happiness, then was overcome with shyness and dropped his eyes.

Fascinated, meanwhile, Roger Amberley observed his father-in-law and wondered how it was possible for anyone to live so unfailingly in character; how one could contrive to be a real general and at the same time to look and sound so exactly like a general on the musical comedy stage. Even at a funeral, even while

he was saying a few well-chosen words to the bereaved husband — pure Grossmith! Under his fine brown moustache his lips twitched irrepressibly.

‘Looks badly cut up,’ the General was thinking, as he talked to John Beavis; and felt sorry for the poor fellow, even while he still disliked him. For of course the man was an affected bore and a prig, too clever, but at the same time a fool. Worst of all, not a man’s man. Always surrounded by petticoats. Mother’s petticoats, aunts’ petticoats, wives’ petticoats. A few years in the army would have done him all the good in the world. Still, he did look most horribly cut up. And Maisie had been a sweet little thing. Too good for him, of course. . . .

They stood for a moment, then all together slowly moved towards the church. Anthony was in the midst of them, a dwarf among the giants. Their blackness hemmed him in, obscured the sky, eclipsed the amber tower and the trees. He walked as though at the bottom of a moving well. Its black walls rustled all around him. He began to cry.

He had not wanted to know — had done his best not to know, except superficially, as one knows, for example, that thirty-five comes after thirty-four. But this black well was dark with the concentrated horror of death. There was no escape. His sobs broke out uncontrollably.

Mary Amberley, who had been lost in the rapturous contemplation of golden leaves patterned against the pale sky, looked down for a moment at this small creature weeping on another planet, then turned away again.

‘Poor child!’ his father said to himself; and then, over-bidding as it were, ‘Poor motherless child!’ he added deliberately, and was glad (for he wanted to suffer) that the words should cost him so much pain to pronounce. He looked down at his son, saw the grief-twisted face, the full and sensitive lips so agonizingly hurt, and above this tear-stained distortion the broad high forehead, seemingly unmoved in its smooth purity; saw, and felt his heart wrung with an additional pain.

‘Dear boy!’ he said aloud, thinking, as he spoke, how this grief would surely bring them nearer together. It was so difficult somehow with a child — so hard

to be natural, to establish a contact. But surely, surely this sadness, and their common memories . . . He squeezed the small hand within his own.

They were at the church door. The well disintegrated.

‘One might be in Tibet,’ thought Uncle James as he took off his hat. ‘Why not one’s boots as well?’

Inside the church was an ancient darkness, smelly with centuries of rustic piety. Anthony took two breaths of that sweet-stale air, and felt his midriff heave with a qualm of disgust. Fear and misery had already made him swallow his heart; and now this smell, this beastly smell that meant that the place was full of germs. . . . ‘Reeking with germs!’ He heard her voice — her voice that always changed when she talked about germs, became different, as though somebody else was speaking. At ordinary times, when she wasn’t angry, it sounded so soft and somehow lazy — laughingly lazy, or tiredly lazy. Germs made it suddenly almost fierce, and at the same time frightened. ‘Always spit when there’s a bad smell about,’ she had told him. ‘There might be typhoid germs in the air.’ His mouth, as he recalled her words, began to water. But how could he spit here, in church? There was nothing to do but swallow his spittle. He shuddered as he did so, with fear and a sickening disgust. And suppose he really should be sick in this stinking place? The apprehension made him feel still sicker. And what did one have to do during the service? He had never been to a funeral before.

James Beavis looked at his watch. In three minutes the hocus-pocus was timed to begin. Why hadn’t John insisted on a plain-clothes funeral? It wasn’t as if poor Maisie had ever set much store by this kind of thing. A silly little woman; but never religiously silly. Hers had been the plain secular silliness of mere female frivolity. The silliness of reading novels on sofas, alternating with the silliness of tea-parties and picnics and dances. Incredible that John had managed to put up with that kind of foolery — had even seemed to like it! Women cackling like hens round the tea-table. James Beavis frowned with angry contempt. He hated women — was disgusted by them. All those soft bulges of their bodies. Horrible. And the stupidity, the brainlessness. But anyhow, poor Maisie had never been one of the curate-fanciers. It was those awful relations of

hers. There were deans in the family — deans and deanesses. John hadn't wanted to offend them. Weak-minded of him. One ought to be offensive on a matter of principle.

The organ played. A little procession of surplices entered through the open door. Some men carried in what seemed a great pile of flowers. There was singing. Then silence. And then, in an extraordinary voice, 'Now is Christ risen from the dead,' began the clergyman; and went on and on, all about God, and death, and beasts at Ephesus, and the natural body. But Anthony hardly heard, because he could think of nothing except those germs that were still there in spite of the smell of the flowers, and of the spittle that kept flowing into his mouth and that he had to swallow in spite of the typhoid and influenza, and of that horrible sick feeling in his stomach. How long would it last?

'Like a goat,' James Beavis said to himself as he listened to the intoning from the lectern. He looked again at that son-in-law of the Champernownes. Anderton, Abdy . . . ? What a fine, classical profile!

His brother sat with bent head and a hand across his eyes, thinking of the ashes in the casket there beneath the flowers — the ashes that had been her body.

The service was over at last. 'Thank goodness!' thought Anthony, as he spat surreptitiously into his handkerchief and folded away the germs into his pocket, 'Thank goodness!' He hadn't been sick. He followed his father to the door and, rapturously, as he stepped out of the twilight, breathed the pure air. The sun was still shining. He looked around and up into the pale sky. Overhead, in the church tower, a sudden outcry of jackdaws was like the noise of a stone flung glancingly on to a frozen pond and skidding away with a reiteration of glassy chinking across the ice.

'But, Anthony, you mustn't throw stones on the ice,' his mother had called to him. 'They get frozen in, and then the skaters . . .'

He remembered how she had come swerving round towards him, on one foot — swooping, he had thought, like a sea-gull; all in white: beautiful. And now . . . The tears came into his eyes again. But, oh, why had she insisted on his trying to skate?

‘I don’t want to,’ he had said; and when she asked why, it had been impossible to explain. He was afraid of being laughed at, of course. People made such fools of themselves. But how could he have told her that? In the end he had cried — in front of everyone. It couldn’t have been worse. He had almost hated her that morning. And now she was dead, and up there in the tower the jackdaws were throwing stones on last winter’s ice.

They were at the grave-side now. Once more Mr Beavis pressed his son’s hand. He was trying to forestall the effect upon the child’s mind of these last, most painful moments.

‘Be brave,’ he whispered. The advice was tendered as much to himself as to the boy.

Leaning forward, Anthony looked into the hole. It seemed extraordinarily deep. He shuddered, closed his eyes; and immediately there she was, swooping towards him, white, like a sea-gull, and white again in the satin evening-dress when she came to say good night before she went out to dinner, with that scent on her as she bent over him in bed, and the coolness of her bare arms. ‘You’re like a cat,’ she used to say when he rubbed his cheek against her arms. ‘Why don’t you purr while you’re about it?’

‘Anyhow,’ thought Uncle James with satisfaction, ‘he was firm about the cremation.’ The Christians had been scored off there. Resurrection of the body, indeed! In A.D. 1902!

When his time came, John Beavis was thinking, this was where he would be buried. In this very grave. His ashes next to hers.

The clergyman was talking again in that extraordinary voice. ‘Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts . . .’ Anthony opened his eyes. Two men were lowering into the hole a small terra-cotta box, hardly larger than a biscuit tin. The box touched the bottom; the ropes were hauled up.

‘Earth to earth,’ bleated the goat-like voice, ‘ashes to ashes.’

‘My ashes to her ashes,’ thought John Beavis. ‘Mingled.’

And suddenly he remembered that time in Rome, a year after they were married; those June nights and the fire-flies, under the trees, in the Doria

Gardens, like stars gone crazy.

‘Who shall change our vile body that it may be like unto his glorious body . . .’

‘Vile, vile?’ His very soul protested.

Earth fell, one spadeful, then another. The box was almost covered. It was so small, so dreadfully and unexpectedly tiny . . . the image of that enormous ox, that minute tea-cup, rose to Anthony’s imagination. Rose up obscenely and would not be exorcized. The jackdaws cried again in the tower. Like a sea-gull she had swooped towards him, beautiful. But the ox was still there, still in its tea-cup, still base and detestable; and he himself yet baser, yet more hateful.

John Beavis released the hand he had been holding and, laying his arm round the boy’s shoulders, pressed the thin little body against his own — close, close, till he felt in his own flesh the sobs by which it was shaken.

‘Poor child! Poor motherless child!’

CHAPTER FIVE. December 8th 1926

‘YOU WOULDN’T DARE,’ Joyce said.

‘I would.’

‘No, you wouldn’t.’

‘I tell you I would,’ Helen Amberley insisted more emphatically.

Maddeningly sensible, ‘You’d be sent to prison if you were caught,’ the elder sister went on. ‘No, not to prison,’ she corrected herself. ‘You’re too young. You’d be sent to a reformatory.’

The blood rushed up to Helen’s face. ‘You and your reformatories!’ she said in a tone that was meant to be contemptuous, but that trembled with irrepressible anger. That reformatory was a personal affront. Prison was terrible; so terrible that there was something fine about it. (She had visited Chillon, had crossed the Bridge of Sighs.) But a reformatory — no! that was utterly ignoble. A reformatory was on the same level as a public lavatory or a station on the District Railway. ‘Reformatories!’ she repeated. It was typical of Joyce to think of reformatories. She always dragged anything amusing and adventurous down into the mud. And, what made it so much worse, she was generally quite right in doing so: the mud was facts, the mud was common sense. ‘You think I wouldn’t dare to do it, because you wouldn’t dare,’ Helen went on. ‘Well, I shall do it. Just to show you. I shall steal something from every shop we go to. Every one. So there.’

Joyce began to feel seriously alarmed. She glanced questioningly at her sister. A profile, pale now and rigid, the chin defiantly lifted, was all that Helen would let her see. ‘Now, look here,’ she began severely.

‘I’m not listening,’ said Helen, speaking straight ahead into impersonal space.

‘Don’t be a little fool!’

There was no answer. The profile might have been that of a young queen on a coin. They turned into the Gloucester Road and walked towards the shops.

But suppose the wretched girl really meant what she said? Joyce changed her strategy. ‘Of course I know you dare,’ she said conciliatorily. There was no answer. ‘I’m not doubting it for a moment.’ She turned again towards Helen; but the profile continued to stare ahead with eyes unwaveringly averted. The grocer’s was at the next corner, not twenty yards away. There was no time to lose. Joyce swallowed what remained of her pride. ‘Now, look here, Helen,’ she said, and her tone was appealing, she was throwing herself on her sister’s generosity. ‘I do wish you wouldn’t.’ In her fancy she saw the whole deplorable scene. Helen caught red-handed; the indignant shopkeeper, talking louder and louder; her own attempts at explanation and excuse made unavailing by the other’s intolerable behaviour. For, of course, Helen would just stand there, in silence, not uttering a word of self-justification or regret, calm and contemptuously smiling, as though she were a superior being and everybody else just dirt. Which would enrage the shopkeeper still more. Until at last he’d send for a policeman. And then . . . But what would Colin think when he heard of it? His future sister-in-law arrested for stealing! He might break off the engagement. ‘Oh, please, don’t do it,’ she begged; ‘please!’ But she might as well have begged the image of King George on a half-crown to turn round, and wink at her. Pale, determined, a young queen minted in silver, Helen kept on. ‘Please!’ Joyce repeated, almost tearfully. The thought that she might lose Colin was a torture. ‘Please!’ But the smell of groceries was already in her nostrils; they were on the very threshold. She caught her sister by the sleeve; but Helen shook her off and marched straight in. With a sinking of the heart, Joyce followed as though to her execution. The young man at the cheese and bacon counter smiled welcomingly as they came in. In her effort to avert suspicion, to propitiate in advance his inevitable indignation, Joyce smiled back with an effusive friendliness. No, that was overdoing it. She readjusted her face. Calm; easy; perfectly the lady, but at the same time affable; affable and (what was that word?), oh! yes, gracious — like Queen Alexandra. Graciously she followed

Helen across the shop. But why, she was thinking, why had she ever broached the subject of crime? Why, knowing Helen, had she been mad enough to argue that, if one were properly brought up, one simply couldn't be a criminal? It was obvious what Helen's response would be to that. She had simply asked for it.

It was to the younger sister that their mother had given the shopping list. 'Because she's almost as much of a scatter-brain as I am,' Mrs Amberley had explained, with that touch of complacency that always annoyed Joyce so much. People had no right to boast about their faults. 'It'll teach her to be a good housekeeper — God help her!' she added with a little snort of laughter.

Standing at the counter, Helen unfolded the paper, read, and then, very haughtily and without a smile, as though she were giving orders to a slave, 'Coffee first of all,' she said to the assistant. 'Two pounds — the two-and-fourpenny mixture.'

The girl, it was evident, was offended by Helen's tone and feudal manner. Joyce felt it her duty to beam at her with a double, compensatory graciousness.

'Do try to behave a little more civilly,' she whispered when the girl had gone for the coffee.

Helen preserved her silence, but with an effort. Civil, indeed! To this horrible little creature who squinted and didn't wash enough under the arms? Oh, how she loathed all ugliness and deformity and uncleanliness! Loathed and detested . . .

'And for heaven's sake,' Joyce went on, 'don't do anything idiotic. I absolutely forbid . . .'

But even as she spoke the words, Helen stretched out a hand and without any attempt at concealment took the topmost of an elaborate structure of chocolate tablets that stood, like the section of a spiral pillar, on the counter — took it and then, with the same slow deliberation of movement, put it carefully away in her basket.

But before the crime was fully accomplished Joyce had turned and walked away.

‘I might say I’d never seen her before,’ she was thinking. But of course that wouldn’t do. Everybody knew they were sisters. ‘Oh, Colin,’ she cried inwardly, ‘Colin!’

A pyramid of tinned lobster loomed up before her. She halted. ‘Calm,’ she said to herself. ‘I must be calm.’ Her heart was thumping with terror, and the dark magenta lobsters on the labels of the tins wavered dizzily before her eyes. She was afraid to look round; but through the noise of her heart-beats she listened anxiously for the inevitable outcry.

‘I don’t know if you’re interested in lobster, Miss,’ a confidential voice almost whispered into her left ear.

Joyce started violently; then managed, with an effort, to smile and shake her head.

‘This is a line we can heartily recommend, Miss. I’m sure if you were to try a tin . . .’

‘And now,’ Helen was saying, very calmly and in the same maddeningly feudal tone, ‘I need ten pounds of sugar. But that you must send.’

They walked out of the shop. The young man at the cheese and bacon counter smiled his farewell; they were nice-looking girls and regular customers. With a great effort, Joyce contrived to be gracious yet once more. But they were hardly through the door when her face disintegrated, as it were, into a chaos of violent emotion.

‘Helen!’ she said furiously. ‘Helen!’

But Helen was still the young queen on her silver florin, a speechless profile.

‘Helen!’ Between the glove and the sleeve, Joyce found an inch of her sister’s bare skin and pinched, hard.

Helen jerked her arm away, and without looking round, a profile still, ‘If you bother me any more,’ she said in a low voice, ‘I shall push you into the gutter.’

Joyce opened her mouth to speak, then changed her mind and, absurdly, shut it again. She knew that if she did say anything more, Helen unquestionably would push her into the gutter. She had to be content with shrugging her shoulders and looking dignified.

The greengrocer’s was crowded. Waiting for her turn to be served, Helen had no difficulty in bagging a couple of oranges.

‘Have one?’ she proposed insultingly to Joyce as they walked out of the shop.

It was Joyce’s turn to be a profile on a coin.

At the stationer’s there were, unfortunately, no other clients to distract the attention of the people behind the counter. But Helen was equal to the situation. A handful of small change suddenly went rolling across the floor; and while the assistants were hunting for the scattered pennies, she helped herself to a rubber and three very good pencils.

It was at the butcher’s that the trouble began. Ordinarily Helen refused to go into the shop at all; the sight, the sickening smell of those pale corpses disgusted her. But this morning she walked straight in. In spite of the disgust. It was a point of honour. She had said every shop, and she wasn’t going to give Joyce an excuse for saying she had cheated. For the first half-minute, while her lungs were still full of the untainted air she had inhaled outside in the street it was all right. But, oh God, when at last she had to breathe . . . God! She put her handkerchief to her nose. But the sharp rasping smell of the carcasses leaked through the barrier of perfume, superimposing itself upon the sweetness, so that a respiration that began with Quelques Fleurs would hideously end with dead sheep or, opening in stale blood, modulated insensibly into the key of jasmine and ambergris.

A customer went out; the butcher turned to her. He was an oldish man, very large, with a square massive face that beamed down at her with a paternal benevolence.

‘Like Mr Baldwin,’ she said to herself, and then, aloud but indistinctly through her handkerchief, ‘A pound and a half of rumpsteak, please.’

The butcher returned in a moment with a mass of gory flesh. ‘There’s a beautiful piece of meat, Miss!’ He fingered the dank, red lump with an artist’s loving enthusiasm. ‘A really beautiful piece.’ It was Mr Baldwin fingering his Virgil, thumbing his dog’s-eared Webb.

‘I shall never eat meat again,’ she said to herself, as Mr Baldwin turned away and began to cut up the meat. ‘But what shall I take?’ She looked round. ‘What on earth . . . ? Ah!’ A marble shelf ran, table-high, along one of the walls of the shop. On it, in trays, pink or purply brown, lay a selection of revolting viscera. And among the viscera a hook — a big steel S, still stained, at one of its curving tips, with the blood of whatever drawn and decapitated corpse had hung from it. She glanced round. It seemed a good moment — the butcher was weighing her steak, his assistant was talking to that disgusting old woman like a bull-dog, the girl at the cash desk was deep in her accounts. Aloof and dissociated in the doorway, Joyce was elaborately overacting the part of one who interrogates the sky and wonders if this drizzle is going to turn into something serious. Helen took three quick steps, picked up the hook, and was just lowering it into her basket when, full of solicitude, ‘Look out, Miss,’ came the butcher’s voice, ‘you’ll get yourself dirty if you touch those hooks.’

That start of surprise was like the steepest descent of the Scenic Railway — sickening! Hot in her cheeks, her eyes, her forehead, came a rush of guilty blood! She tried to laugh.

‘I was just looking.’ The hook clanked back on to the marble.

‘I wouldn’t like you to spoil your clothes, Miss.’ His smile was fatherly. More than ever like Mr Baldwin.

Nervously, for lack of anything better to do or say, Helen laughed again, and, in the process, drew another deep breath of corpse. Ugh! She fortified her nose once more with Quelques Fleurs.

‘One pound and eleven ounces, Miss.’

She nodded her assent. But what could she take? And how was she to find the opportunity?

‘Anything more this morning?’

Yes, that was the only thing to do — to order something more. That would give her time to think, a chance to act. ‘Have you any . . .’ she hesitated ‘. . . any sweetbreads?’

Yes, Mr Baldwin did have some sweetbreads, and they were on the shelf with the other viscera. Near the hook. ‘Oh, I don’t know,’ she said, when he asked her how much she needed. ‘Just the ordinary amount, you know.’

She looked about her while he was busy with the sweetbreads, despairingly. There was nothing in this beastly shop, nothing except the hook, that she could take. And now that he had seen her with it in her hands, the hook was out of the question. Nothing whatever. Unless . . . That was it! A shudder ran through her. But she frowned, she set her teeth. She was determined to go through with it.

‘And now,’ when he had packed up the sweetbreads, ‘now,’ she said, ‘I must have some of those!’ She indicated the packets of pale sausages piled on a shelf at the other end of the shop.

‘I’ll do it while his back is turned,’ she thought. But the girl at the cash desk had emerged from her accounts and was looking round the shop. ‘Oh, damn her, damn her!’ Helen fairly screamed in her imagination, and then, ‘Thank goodness!’ the girl had turned away. A hand shot out; but the averted glance returned, ‘Damn her!’ The hand dropped back. And now it was too late. Mr Baldwin had got the sausages, had turned, was coming back towards her.

‘Will that be all, Miss?’

‘Well, I wonder?’ Helen frowned uncertainly, playing for time. ‘I can’t help thinking there was something else . . . something else . . .’ The seconds passed; it was terrible; she was making a fool of herself, an absolute idiot. But she refused to give up. She refused to acknowledge defeat.

‘We’ve some beautiful Welsh mutton in this morning,’ said the butcher in that artist’s voice of his, as though he were talking of the Georgics.

Helen shook her head: she really couldn’t start buying mutton now.

Suddenly the girl at the cash desk began to write again. The moment had come. ‘No,’ she said with decision, ‘I’ll take another pound of sausages.’

‘Another?’ Mr Baldwin looked surprised.

No wonder! she thought. They’d be surprised at home too.

‘Yes, just one more,’ she said, and smiled ingratiatingly, as though she were asking a favour. He walked back towards the shelf. The girl at the cash desk was

still writing, the old woman who looked like a bull-dog had never stopped talking to the assistant. Quickly — there was not a second to lose — Helen turned towards the marble shelf beside her. It was for one of those kidneys that she had decided. The thing slithered obscenely between her gloved fingers — a slug, a squid. In the end she had to grab it with her whole hand. Thank heaven, she thought, for gloves! As she dropped it into the basket, the idea came to her that for some reason she might have to take the horrible thing in her mouth, raw as it was and oozy with some unspeakable slime, take it in her mouth, bite, taste, swallow. Another shudder of disgust ran through her, so violent this time that it seemed to tear something at the centre of her body.

Tired of acting the meteorologist, Joyce was standing under her umbrella looking at the chrysanthemums in the florist's window next door. She had prepared something particularly offensive to say to Helen when she came out. But at the sight of her sister's white unhappy face she forgot even her legitimate grievances.

'Why, Helen, what is the matter?'

For all answer Helen suddenly began to cry.

'What is it?'

She shook her head and, turning away, raised her hand to her face to brush away the tears.

'Tell me . . .'

'Oh!' Helen started and cried out as though she had been stung by a wasp. An expression of agonized repugnance wrinkled up her face. 'Oh, too filthy, too filthy,' she repeated, looking at her fingers. And setting her basket down on the pavement, she unbuttoned the glove, stripped it off her hand, and, with a violent gesture, flung it away from her into the gutter.

CHAPTER SIX. November 6th 1902

THE GUARD WHISTLED, and obediently the train began to move — past Keating, at a crawl; past Branson; past Pickwick, Owl and Waverley; past Beecham, Owbridge, Carter, Pears, in accelerated succession; past Humphrey's Iron Buildings, past Lollingdon for Choate; past Eno's almost at twenty miles an hour; past Pears, Pears, Pears, Pears, Pears — and suddenly the platform and its palings dipped and were lost, swallowed in the green country. Anthony leaned back in his corner and sighed thankfully. It was escape at last; he had climbed out of that black well into which they had pushed him, and he was free again. The wheels sang cheerfully in his ears. 'To stop the train pull down the chain penálty for impróper use five póunds five pounds FIVE POUNDS FIVE POUNDS . . .' But how perfectly awful luncheon at Granny's had been!

'Work,' James Beavis was saying. 'It's the only thing at a time like this.'

His brother nodded. 'The only thing,' he agreed. Then, after a moment's hesitation, 'One's had a pretty bad knock,' he added self-consciously, in that queer jargon which he imagined to be colloquial English. John Beavis's colloquialisms mostly came out of books. That 'bad knock' was a metaphor drawn from the boxing contests he had never witnessed. 'Luckily,' he went on, 'one's got a great deal of work on hand at the moment.' He thought of his lectures. He thought of his contributions to the Oxford Dictionary. The mountains of books, the slips, his huge card index, the letters from fellow philologists. And the exhaustive essay on Jacobean slang. 'Not that one wants to "shirk" anything,' he added, putting the colloquial word between the audible equivalents of inverted commas. James mustn't think that he was going to drown his grief in work. He groped for a phrase. 'It's . . . it's a sacred music that one's facing!' he brought out at last.

James kept nodding with quick jerks of the head, as though he knew in advance everything his brother would or possibly could say. His face twitched with sudden involuntary tics. He was wasted by nervous impatience as though by a consumption, eaten away by it to the very bone. ‘Quite,’ he said, ‘quite.’ And gave one last nod. There was a long silence.

‘Tomorrow,’ Anthony was thinking, ‘there’ll be algebra with old Jimbug.’ The prospect was disagreeable; he wasn’t good at maths, and, even at the best of times, even when he was only joking, Mr Jameson was a formidable teacher. ‘If Jimbug gets baity with me, like that time last week . . .’ Remembering the scene, Anthony frowned; the blood came up into his cheeks. Jimbug made sarcastic remarks at him and pulled his hair. He had begun to blub. (Who wouldn’t have blubbed?) A tear had fallen on to the equation he was trying to work out and made a huge round blot. That beast Staithes had ragged him about it afterwards. Luckily Foxe had come to his rescue. One laughed at Foxe because he stammered; but he was really extraordinarily decent.

At Waterloo, Anthony and his father took a hansom. Uncle James preferred to walk. ‘I can get to the Club in eleven minutes,’ he told them. His hand went to his waistcoat pocket. He looked at his watch; then turned and without saying another word went striding away down the hill.

‘Euston!’ John Beavis called up to the cabman.

Stepping cautiously on the smooth slope, the horse moved forward; the cab heaved like a ship. Inaudibly, Anthony hummed the ‘Washington Post’. Riding in a hansom always made him feel extraordinarily happy. At the bottom of the hill, the cabby whipped his horse into a trot. They passed a smell of beer, a smell of fried fish; drove through ‘Good-bye, Dolly Gray’ on a cornet and swung into the Waterloo Road. The traffic roared and rattled all about them. If his father had not been there, Anthony would have sung out aloud.

The end of the afternoon was still smokily bright above the house-tops. And, all at once, here was the river, shining, with the black barges, and a tug, and St Paul’s like a balloon in the sky, and the mysterious Shot Tower.

On the bridge, a man was throwing bread to the sea-gulls. Dim, almost invisible, they came sliding through the air; turned, with a tilt of grey wings, leaning against their speed, and suddenly flashed into brilliance, like snow against the dark fringes of the sky; then wheeled away again out of the light, towards invisibility. Anthony looked and stopped humming. Swerving towards you on the ice a skater will lean like that.

And suddenly, as though, disquietingly, he too had understood the inner significance of those swooping birds, ‘Dear boy,’ Mr Beavis began, breaking a long silence. He pressed Anthony’s arm. ‘Dear boy!’

With a sinking of the heart Anthony waited for what he would say next.

‘We must stand together now,’ said Mr Beavis.

The boy made a vague noise of acquiescence.

‘Close together. Because we both . . .’ he hesitated, ‘we both loved her.’

There was another silence. ‘Oh, if only he’d stop!’ Anthony prayed. Vainly. His father went on.

‘We’ll always be true to her,’ he said. ‘Never . . . never let her down? — will we?’

Anthony nodded.

‘Never!’ John Beavis repeated emphatically. ‘Never!’ And to himself he recited yet once more those lines that had haunted him all these days:

Till age, or grief, or sickness must
Marry my body to that dust
It so much loves; and fill the room
My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.
Stay for me there!

Then aloud and in a tone almost of defiance, ‘She’ll never be dead for us,’ he said. ‘We’ll keep her living in our hearts — won’t we?’

‘Living for us,’ his father continued, ‘so that we can live for her — live finely, nobly, as she would want us to live.’ He paused on the brink of a colloquialism — the sort of colloquialism, he intended it to be, that a schoolboy would understand and appreciate. ‘Live . . . well, like a pair of regular “bricks”,’

he brought out unnaturally. ‘And bricks,’ he continued, extemporizing an improvement on the locution, ‘bricks that are also “pals”. Real “chums”. We’re going to be “chums” now, Anthony, aren’t we?’

Anthony nodded again. He was in an agony of shame and embarrassment. ‘Chums.’ It was a school-story word. The Fifth Form at St Dominic’s. You laughed when you read it, you howled derisively. Chums! And with his father! He felt himself blushing. Looking out of the side window, to hide his discomfort, he saw one of the grey birds come swooping down, out of the sky, towards the bridge; nearer, nearer; then it leaned, it swerved away to the left, gleamed for a moment, transfigured, and was gone.

*

At school everyone was frightfully decent. Too decent, indeed. The boys were so tactfully anxious not to intrude on his emotional privacy, not to insult him with the display of their own high spirits, that, after having made a few constrained and unnatural demonstrations of friendliness, they left him alone. It was almost, Anthony found, like being sent to Coventry. They could hardly have made it worse for him if he had been caught stealing or sneaking. Never, since the first days of his first term, had he felt so hopelessly out of it all as he felt that evening.

‘Pity you missed the match this afternoon,’ said Thompson as they sat down to supper; he spoke in the tone he would have used to a visiting uncle.

‘Was it a good game?’ Anthony asked with the same unnatural politeness.

‘Oh, jolly good. They won, though. Three-two.’ The conversation languished. Uncomfortably, Thompson wondered what he should say next. That limerick of Butterworth’s, about the young lady of Ealing? No, he couldn’t possibly repeat that; not today, when Beavis’s mother . . . Then what? A loud diversion at the other end of the table providentially solved his problem. He had an excuse to turn away. ‘What’s that?’ he shouted with unnecessary eagerness. ‘What’s that?’ Soon they were all talking and laughing together. From beyond an invisible gulf Anthony listened and looked on.

‘Agnes!’ someone called to the maid. ‘Agnes!’

‘Aganeezer Lemon-squeezer,’ said Mark Staithes — but in a low voice, so that she shouldn’t hear; rudeness to the servants was a criminal offence at Bulstrode, and for that reason all the more appreciated, even sotto voce. That lemon-squeezer produced an explosion of laughter. Staithes himself, however, preserved his gravity. To sit unsmiling in the midst of the laughter he himself had provoked gave him an extraordinary sense of power and superiority. Besides, it was in the family tradition. No Staithes ever smiled at his own joke or epigram or repartee.

Looking round the table, Mark Staithes saw that that wretched, baby-faced Benger Beavis wasn’t laughing with the rest, and for a second was filled with a passionate resentment against this person who had dared not to be amused by his joke. What made the insult more intolerable was the fact that Benger was so utterly insignificant. Bad at football, not much use at cricket. The only thing he was good at was work. Work! And did such a creature dare to sit unsmiling when he . . . Then, all of a sudden, he remembered that the poor chap had lost his mother, and, relaxing the hardness of his face, he gave him, across the intervening space, a little smile of recognition and sympathy. Anthony smiled back, then looked away, blushing with an obscure discomfort as though he had been caught doing something wrong. The consciousness of his own magnanimity and the spectacle of Benger’s embarrassment restored Staithes to his good humour.

‘Agnes!’ he shouted. ‘Agnes!’

Large, chronically angry, Agnes came at last.

‘More jam, please, Agnes.’

‘Jore mam,’ cried Thompson. Everybody laughed again, not because the joke was anything but putrid, but simply because everybody wanted to laugh.

‘And breadney.’

‘Yes, more breaf.’

‘More breaf, please, Agnes.’

‘Breaf, indeed!’ said Agnes indignantly, as she picked up the empty bread-and-butter plate. ‘Why can’t you say what you mean?’

There was a redoubling of the laughter. They couldn’t say what they meant — absolutely couldn’t, because to say ‘breaf’ or ‘breadney’ instead of bread was a Bulstrodian tradition and the symbol of their togetherness, the seal of their superiority to all the rest of the uninitiated world.

‘More Pepin le Bref!’ shouted Staithes.

‘Pepin le Breadney, le Breadney!’

The laughter became almost hysterical. They all remembered that occasion last term, when they had come to Pepin le Bref in their European History. Pepin le Bref — le Bref! First Butterworth had broken down, then Pembroke-Jones, then Thompson — and finally the whole of Division II, Staithes with the rest of them, uncontrollably. Old Jimbug had got into the most appalling bait. Which made it, now, even funnier.

‘Just a lot of silly babies!’ said Agnes; and, finding them still laughing when, a moment later, she came back with more bread, ‘Just babies!’ she repeated in a determined effort to be insulting. But her stroke did not touch them. They were beyond her, rapt away in the ecstasy of causeless laughter.

Anthony would have liked to have laughed with them, but somehow did not dare to do more than smile, distantly and politely, like someone in a foreign country, who does not understand the joke, but wants to show that he has no objection to other people having a bit of fun. And a moment later, feeling hungry, he found himself unexpectedly struck dumb above his empty plate. For to have asked for more breaf, or another chunk of breadney, would have been, for the sacred pariah he had now become, at once an indecency and an intrusion — an indecency, because a person who has been sanctified by his mother’s death should obviously not talk slang, and an intrusion, because an outsider has no right to use the special language reserved to the elect. Uncertainly, he hesitated. Then at last, ‘Pass me the bread, please,’ he murmured; and blushed (the words sounded so horribly stupid and unnatural) to the roots of his hair.

Leaning towards his neighbour on the other side, Thompson went on with his whispered recitation of the limerick. ‘. . . all over the ceiling,’ he concluded; and they shrieked with laughter.

Thank goodness, Thompson hadn’t heard. Anthony felt profoundly relieved. In spite of his hunger, he did not ask again.

There was a stir at the high table; old Jimbug rose to feet. A hideous noise of chair-legs scraping across boards filled the hall, solidly, it seemed; then evaporated into the emptiness of complete silence. ‘For all that we have received . . .’ The talk broke out again, the boys stampeded towards the door.

In the corridor, Anthony felt a hand on his arm. ‘Hullo, B-benger.’

‘Hullo, Foxe.’ He did not say, ‘Hullo, Horse-Face,’ because of what happened this morning. Horse-Face would be as inappropriate to the present circumstances as Breaf.

‘I’ve got s-something to sh-show you,’ said Brian Foxe, and his melancholy, rather ugly face seemed suddenly to shine, as he smiled at Anthony. People laughed at Foxe because he stammered and looked like a horse. But almost everybody liked him. Even though he was a bit of a swot and not much good at games. He was rather pi, too, about smut; and he never seemed to get into trouble with the masters. But in spite of it all, you had to like him, because he was so awfully decent. Too decent, even; for it really wasn’t right to treat New Bugs the way he did — as though they were equals. Beastly little ticks of nine the equals of boys of eleven and twelve; imagine! No, Foxe was wrong about the New Bugs; of that there could be no doubt. All the same, people liked old Horse-Face.

‘What have you got?’ asked Anthony; and he felt so grateful to Horse-Face for behaving towards him in a normal, natural way, that he spoke quite gruffly, for fear the other might notice what he was feeling.

‘Come and see,’ Brian meant to say; but he got no further than ‘C-c-c-c . . .’ The long agony of clicks prolonged itself. At another time, Anthony might have laughed, might have shouted, ‘Listen to old Horse-Face trying to be sea-sick!’ But today he said nothing; only thought what awful bad luck it was on the poor

chap. In the end, Brian Foxe gave up the attempt to say, ‘Come and see,’ and, instead, brought out. ‘It’s in my p-play-box.’

They ran down the stairs to the dark lobby where the play-boxes were kept.

‘Th-there!’ said Brian, lifting the lid of his box.

Anthony looked, and at the sight of that elegant little ship, three-masted, square-rigged with paper sails, ‘I say,’ he exclaimed, ‘that’s a beauty! Did you make her yourself?’

Brian nodded. He had had the carpenter’s shop to himself that afternoon — all the tools he needed. That was why she was so professional-looking. He would have liked to explain it all, to share his pleasure in the achievement with Anthony; but he knew his stammer too well. The pleasure would evaporate while he was laboriously trying to express it. Besides, ‘carpenter’ was a terrible word. ‘We’ll t-try her to-n-night,’ he had to be content with saying. But the smile which accompanied the words seemed at once to apologize for their inadequacy and to make up for it. Anthony smiled back. They understood one another.

Carefully, tenderly, Brian unstepped the three matchstick masts and slipped them, sails and all, into the inner pocket of his jacket; the hull went into his breeches. A bell rang. It was bed-time. Obediently, Brian shut his play-box. They started to climb the stairs once more.

‘I w-won f-five more g-games today with my old c-c-c . . . my ch-cheeser,’ he emended, finding ‘conker’ too difficult.

‘Five!’ cried Anthony. ‘Good for the old Horse-Face!’

Forgetting that he was an outcast, a sacred pariah, he laughed aloud. He felt warm and at home. It was only when he was undressing in his cubicle that he remembered — because of the tooth powder.

‘Twice a day,’ he heard her saying, as he dipped his wet brush into the pink carbolic-smelling dust. ‘And if you possibly can, after lunch as well. Because of the germs.’

‘But, Mother, you can’t expect me to go up and clean them after lunch!’

The wound to his vanity (did she think his teeth were so dirty?) had made him rude. He found a retrospective excuse in the reflection that it was against the school rules to go up to the dorms during the day.

On the other side of the wooden partition that separated his cubicle from Anthony's, Brian Foxe was stepping into his pyjamas. First the left leg, then the right. But just as he was starting to pull them up, there came to him, suddenly, a thought so terrible that he almost cried aloud. 'Suppose my mother were to die!' And she might die. If Beavis's mother had died, of course she might. And at once he saw her, lying in her bed at home. Terribly pale. And the death-rattle, that death-rattle one always read about in books — he heard it plainly; and it was like the noise of one of those big wooden rattles that you scare birds with. Loud and incessant, as though it were made by a machine. A human being couldn't possibly make such a noise. But all the same, it came out of her mouth. It was the death-rattle. She was dying.

His trousers still only half-way up his thighs, Brian stood there, quite still, staring at the brown varnished partition in front of him with eyes that filled with tears. It was too terrible. The coffin; and then the empty house; and, when he went to bed, nobody to come and say good night.

Suddenly shaking himself out of immobility, he pulled up his trousers and tied the string with a kind of violence.

'But she isn't dead!' he said to himself. 'She isn't!'

Two cubicles away, Thompson gave vent to one of those loud and extraordinarily long-drawn farts for which, at Bulstrode, he had such a reputation. There were shouts, a chorus of laughter. Even Brian laughed — Brian who generally refused to see that there was anything funny about that sort of noise. But he was filled at this moment with such a sense of glad relief, that any excuse for laughter was good enough. She was still alive! And though she wouldn't have liked him to laugh at anything so vulgar, he simply had to allow his thankfulness to explode. Uproariously he guffawed; then, all at once, broke off. He had thought of Beavis. His mother was really dead. What must he be thinking? Brian felt ashamed of having laughed, and for such a reason.

Later, when the lights had been put out, he climbed on to the rail at the head of his bed, and, looking over the partition into Anthony's cubicle, 'I s-say,' he whispered, 'sh-shall we see how the new b-b-b . . . the new sh-ship goes?'

Anthony jumped out of bed and, the night being cold, put on his dressing-gown and slippers; then, noiselessly, stepped on to his chair and from the chair (pushing aside the long baize curtain) to the window-ledge. The curtain swung back behind him, shutting him into the embrasure.

It was a high narrow window, divided by a wooden transom into two parts. The lower and larger part consisted of a pair of sashes; the small upper pane was hinged at the top and opened outwards. When the sashes were closed, the lower of them formed a narrow ledge, half-way up the window. Standing on this ledge, a boy could conveniently get his head and shoulders through the small square opening above. Each window — each pair of windows, rather — was set in a gable, so that when you leaned out, you found the slope of the tiles coming steeply down on either side, and immediately in front of you, on a level with the transom, the long gutter which carried away the water from the roof.

The gutter! It was Brian who had recognized its potentialities. A sod of turf carried surreptitiously up to bed in a bulging pocket, a few stones — and there was your dam. When it was built, you collected all the water-jugs in the dormitory, hoisted them one by one and poured their contents into the gutter. There would be no washing the next morning; but what of that? A long narrow sea stretched away into the night. A whittled ship would float, and those fifty feet of watery boundlessness invited the imagination. The danger was always rain. If it rained hard, somebody had somehow to sneak up, at whatever risk, and break the dam. Otherwise the gutter would overflow, and an overflow meant awkward investigations and unpleasant punishments.

Perched high between the cold glass and the rough hairy baize of the curtains, Brian and Anthony leaned out of their twin windows into the darkness. A brick mullion was all that separated them, they could speak in whispers.

'Now then, Horse-Face,' commanded Anthony. 'Blow!'

And like the allegorical Zephyr in a picture, Horse-Face blew. Under its press of paper sail, the boat went gliding along the narrow water-way.

‘Lovely!’ said Anthony ecstatically; and bending down till his cheek was almost touching the water, he looked with one half-shut and deliberately unfocused eye until, miraculously, the approaching toy was transformed into a huge three-master, seen phantom-like in the distance and bearing down on him, silently, through the darkness. A great ship — a ship of the line — one hundred and ten guns — under a cloud of canvas — the North-East Trades blowing steadily — bowling along at ten knots — eight bells just sounding from . . . He started violently as the foremast came into contact with his nose. Reality flicked back into place again.

‘It looks just like a real ship,’ he said to Brian as he turned the little boat round in the gutter. ‘Put your head down and have a squint. I’ll blow.’

Slowly the majestic three-master travelled back again.

‘It’s like the Fighting T-t-t . . . You know that p-picture.’

Anthony nodded; he never liked to admit ignorance.

‘T-temeraire,’ the other brought out at last.

‘Yes, yes,’ said Anthony, rather impatiently, as though he had known it all the time. Bending down again, he tried to recapture that vision of the huge hundred-and-ten-gunner bowling before the North-East Trades; but without success; the little boat refused to be transfigured. Still, she was a lovely ship. ‘A beauty,’ he said out loud.

‘Only she’s a b-bit l-lopsided,’ said Brian, in modest depreciation of his handiwork.

‘But I rather like that,’ Anthony assured him. ‘It makes her look as though she were heeling over with the wind.’ Heeling over: — it gave him a peculiar pleasure to pronounce the phrase. He had never uttered it before — only read it in books. Lovely words! And making an excuse to repeat them, ‘Just look!’ he said, ‘how she heels over when it blows really hard.’

He blew, and the little ship almost capsized. The hurricane, he said to himself . . . struck her full on the starboard beam . . . carried away the fore top-gallant

sails and the spinnakers . . . stove in our only boat . . . heeled till the gunwale touched the water. . . . But it was tiring to go on blowing as hard as that. He looked up from the gutter; his eyes travelled over the sky; he listened intently to the silence. The air was extraordinarily still; the night, almost cloudless. And what stars! There was Orion, with his feet tangled in the branches of the oak tree. And Sirius. And all the others whose names he didn't know. Thousands and millions of them.

'Gosh!' he whispered at last.

'W-what on earth do you s-suppose they're f-for?' said Brian, after a long silence.

'What — the stars?'

Brian nodded.

Remembering things his Uncle James had said, 'They're not for anything,' Anthony answered.

'But they m-must be,' Brian objected.

'Why?'

'Because e-everything is for s-something.'

'I don't believe that.'

'W-well, th-think of b-b-bees,' said Brian with some difficulty.

Anthony was shaken; they had been having some lessons in botany from old Bumface — making drawings of pistils and things. Bees — yes; they were obviously for something. He wished he could remember exactly what Uncle James had said. The iron somethings of nature. But iron whats?

'And m-mountains,' Brian was laboriously continuing. 'It w-wouldn't r-rain properly if there w-weren't any m-mountains.'

'Well, what do you think they're for?' Anthony asked, indicating the stars with an upward movement of the chin.

'P-perhaps there are p-people.'

'Only on Mars.' Anthony's certainty was dogmatic.

There was a silence. Then, with decision, as though he had at last made up his mind to have it out, at any cost, 'S-sometimes,' said Brian, 'I w-wonder wh-

whether they aren't really al-live.' He looked anxiously at his companion: was Benger going to laugh? But Anthony, who was looking up at the stars, made no sound or movement of derision; only nodded gravely. Brian's shy defenceless little secret was safe, had received no wound. He felt profoundly grateful; and suddenly it was as though a great wave were mounting, mounting through his body. He was almost suffocated by that violent uprush of love and ('Oh, suppose it had been my mother!') of excruciating sympathy for poor Benger. His throat contracted; the tears came into his eyes. He would have liked to reach out and touch Benger's hand; only, of course, that sort of thing wasn't done.

Anthony meanwhile was still looking at Sirius. 'Alive,' he repeated to himself. 'Alive.' It was like a heart in the sky, pulsing with light. All at once he remembered that young bird he had found last Easter holidays. It was on the ground and couldn't fly. His mother had made fun of him because he didn't want to pick it up. Big animals he liked, but for some reason it gave him the horrors to touch anything small and alive. In the end, making an effort with himself, he had caught the bird. And in his hand the little creature had seemed just a feathered heart, pulsing against his palm and fingers, a fistful of hot and palpitating blood. Up there, above the fringes of the trees, Sirius was just such another heart. Alive. But of course Uncle James would just laugh.

Stung by this imaginary mockery and ashamed of having been betrayed into such childishness, 'But how can they be alive?' he asked resentfully, turning away from the stars.

Brian winced. 'Why is he angry?' he wondered. Then aloud, 'Well,' he started, 'if G-god's alive . . .'

'But my pater doesn't go to church,' Anthony objected.

'N-no, b-b-but . . .' How little he wanted to argue, now!

Anthony couldn't wait. 'He doesn't believe in that sort of thing.'

'But it's G-god that c-counts; n-not ch-church.' Oh, if only he hadn't got this horrible stammer! He could explain it all so well; he could say all those things his mother had said. But somehow, at the moment, even the things that she had

said were beside the point. The point wasn't saying; the point was caring for people, caring until it hurt.

'My uncle,' said Anthony, 'he doesn't even believe in God. I don't either,' he added provocatively.

But Brian did not take up the challenge. 'I s-say,' he broke out impulsively, 'I s-say, B-b-b- . . .' The very intensity of his eagerness made him stammer all the worse. 'B-benger,' he brought out at last. It was an agony to feel the current of his love thus checked and diverted. Held up behind the grotesquely irrelevant impediment to its progress, the stream mounted, seemed to gather force and was at last so strong within him that, forgetting altogether that it wasn't done, Brian suddenly laid his hand on Anthony's arm. The fingers travelled down the sleeve, then closed round the bare wrist; and thereafter, every time his stammer interposed itself between his feeling and its object, his grasp tightened in a spasm almost of desperation.

'I'm so t-terribly s-sorry about your m-mother,' he went on. 'I d-didn't w-want to s-say it be-before. N-not in f-front of the o-others. You know, I was th-th-th . . .' He gripped on Anthony's wrist more tightly; it was as though he were trying to supplement his strangled words by the direct eloquence of touch, were trying to persuade the other of the continued existence of the stream within him, of its force, unabated in spite of the temporary checking of the current. He began the sentence again and acquired sufficient momentum to take him past the barrier. 'I was th-thinking just n-now,' he said, 'it m-might have been my mother. Oh, B-b-beavis, it m-must be too awful!'

Anthony looked at him, in the first moment of surprise, with an expression of suspicion, almost of fear on his face. But as the other stammered on, this first hardening of resistance melted away, and now, without feeling ashamed of what he was doing, he began to cry.

Balanced precariously in the tall embrasure of the windows, the two children stood there for a long time in silence. The cheeks of both of them were cold with tears; but on Anthony's wrist the grip of that consoling hand was obstinately violent, like a drowning man's.

Suddenly, with a thin rattling of withered leaves, a gust of wind came swelling up out of the darkness. The little three-master started, as though it had been woken out of sleep, and noiselessly, with an air of purposeful haste, began to glide, stern-foremost, along the gutter.

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The servants had gone to bed; all the house was still. Slowly, in the dark, John Beavis left his study and climbed past the mezzanine landing, past the drawing-room, stair after stair, towards the second floor. Outside, in the empty street, the sound of hoofs approached and again receded. The silence closed in once more — the silence of his solitude, the silence (he shuddered) of her grave.

He stood still, listening for long seconds to the beating of his heart; then, with decision, mounted the last two stairs, crossed the dark landing and, opening the door, turned on the light. His image confronted him, staring palely from the dressing-table mirror. The silver brushes were in their usual place, the little trays and pin-cushions, the row of cut-glass bottles. He looked away. One corner of the broad pink quilt was turned back; he saw the two pillows lying cheek by cheek, and above them, on the wall, that photogravure of the Sistine Madonna they had bought together, in the shop near the British Museum. Turning, he saw himself again, at full length, funereally black, in the glass of the wardrobe. The wardrobe . . . He stepped across the room and turned the key in the lock. The heavy glass door swung open of its own accord, and suddenly he was breathing the very air of her presence, that faint scent of orris-root, quickened secretly, as it were, by some sharper, warmer perfume. Grey, white, green, shell-pink, black — dress after dress. It was as though she had died ten times and ten times been hung there, limp, gruesomely headless, but haloed still, ironically, with the sweet, breathing symbol of her life. He stretched out his hand and touched the smooth silk, the cloth, the muslin, the velvet; all those various textures. Stirred, the hanging folds gave out their perfume more strongly; he shut his eyes and inhaled her real presence. But what was left of her had been burnt, and the ashes were at the bottom of that pit in Lollingdon churchyard.

‘Stay for me there,’ John Beavis whispered articulately in the silence.

His throat contracted painfully; the tears welled out between his closed eyelids. Shutting the wardrobe door, he turned away and began to undress.

He was conscious, suddenly, of an overwhelming fatigue. It cost him an immense effort to wash. When he got into bed, he fell asleep almost at once.

Towards the morning, when the light of the new day and the noises from the street had begun to break through the enveloping layers of his inner darkness, John Beavis dreamed that he was walking along the corridor that led to his lecture-room at King’s College. No, not walking: running. For the corridor had become immensely long and there was some terrible urgent reason for getting to the end of it quickly, for being there in time. In time for what? He did not know; but as he ran, he felt a sickening apprehension mounting, as it were, and expanding and growing every moment more intense within him. And when at last he opened the door of the lecture-room, it wasn’t the lecture-room at all, but their bedroom at home, with Maisie lying there, panting for breath, her face flushed with the fever, dark with the horrible approach of asphyxiation, and across it, like two weals, bluish and livid, the parted lips. The sight was so dreadful that he started broad awake. Daylight shone pale between the curtains; the quilt showed pink; there was a gleam in the wardrobe mirror: outside, the milkman was calling, ‘Mu-ilk, Mui-uilk!’ as he went his rounds. Everything was reassuringly familiar, in its right place. It had been no more than a bad dream. Then, turning his head, John Beavis saw that the other half of the broad bed was empty.

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The bell came nearer and nearer, ploughing through the deep warm drifts of sleep, until at last it hammered remorselessly on his naked and quivering consciousness. Anthony opened his eyes. What a filthy row it made! But he needn’t think of getting up for at least another five minutes. The warmth under the sheets was heavenly. Then — and it spoilt everything — he remembered that early school was algebra with Jimbug. His heart came into his throat. Those

awful quadratics! Jimbug would start yelling at him again. It wasn't fair. And he'd blub. But then it occurred to him that Jimbug probably wouldn't yell at him today — because of what, he suddenly remembered, had happened yesterday. Horse-Face had been most awfully decent last night, he went on to think.

But it was time to get up. One, two, three and, ugh, how filthily cold it was! He was just diving upwards into his shirt when somebody tapped very softly at the door of his cubicle. One last wriggle brought his head through into daylight. He went and opened. Staithes was standing in the passage. Staithes — grinning, it was true, in apparent friendliness; but still . . . Anthony was disturbed. Mistrustfully, but with a hypocritical smile of welcome, 'What's up?' he began; but the other put a finger to his lips.

'Come and look,' he whispered. 'It's marvellous!'

Anthony was flattered by this invitation from one who, as captain of the football eleven, had a right to be, and generally was, thoroughly offensive to him. He was afraid of Staithes and disliked him — and for that very reason felt particularly pleased that Staithes should have taken the trouble to come to him like this, of his own accord. . . .

Staithes's cubicle was already crowded. The conspiratorial silence seethed and bubbled with a suppressed excitement. Thompson had had to stuff his handkerchief into his mouth to keep himself from laughing, and Pembroke-Jones was doubling up in paroxysms of noiseless mirth. Wedged in the narrow space between the foot of the bed and the washstand, Partridge was standing with one cheek pressed against the partition. Staithes touched him on the shoulder. Partridge turned round and came out into the centre of the cubicle; his freckled face was distorted with glee and he twitched and fidgeted as though his bladder were bursting. Staithes pointed to the place he had vacated and Anthony squeezed in. A knot in the wood of the partition had been prized out, and, through the hole you could see all that was going on in the next cubicle. On the bed, wearing only a woollen undervest and his rupture appliance, lay Goggler Ledwidge. His eyes behind the thick glass of his spectacles were shut; his lips

were parted. He looked tranquilly happy and serene, as though he were in church.

‘Is he still there?’ whispered Staithes.

Anthony turned a grinning face and nodded; then pressed his eyes more closely to the spy-hole. What made it so specially funny was the fact that it should be Goggler — Goggler, the school buffoon, the general victim, predestined by weakness and timidity to inevitable persecution. This would be something new to bait him with.

‘Let’s give him a fright,’ suggested Staithes, and climbed up on to the rail at the head of the bed.

Partridge, who played centre forward for the first eleven, made a movement to follow him. But it was to Anthony that Staithes unexpectedly turned. ‘Come on, Beavis,’ he whispered. ‘Come up here with me.’ He wanted to be specially decent to the poor chap — because of his mater. Besides, it pleased him to be able to snub that lout, Partridge.

Anthony accepted the flattering invitation with an almost abject alacrity and got up beside him. The others perched unsteadily at the foot of the bed. At a signal from Staithes all straightened themselves up and, showing their heads above the partition, hooted their derision.

Recalled thus brutally from his squalidly tender little Eden of enemas and spankings (it had, as yet, no female inhabitants), Goggler gave vent to a startled cry; his eyes opened, frantic with terror; he went very white for a moment, then blushed. With his two hands he pulled down his vest; but it was too short to cover his nakedness or even his truss. Absurdly short, like a baby’s vest. (‘We’ll try to make them last this one more term,’ his mother had said. ‘These woollen things are so frightfully expensive.’ She had made great sacrifices to send him to Bulstrode.)

‘Pull, pull!’ Staithes shouted in sarcastic encouragement of his efforts.

‘Why wouldn’t Henry VIII allow Anne Boleyn to go into his henhouse?’ said Thompson. Everyone knew the answer, of course. There was a burst of laughter.

Staithes lifted one foot from its perch, pulled off the leather-soled slipper, took aim and threw. It hit Goggler on the side of the face. He gave a cry of pain, jumped out of bed and stood with hunched shoulders and one skinny little arm raised to cover his head, looking up at the jeering faces through eyes that had begun to overflow with tears.

‘Buzz yours too!’ shouted Staithes to the others. Then, seeing the new arrival standing in the open doorway of his cubicle, ‘Hullo, Horse-Face,’ he said, as he took off the other slipper; ‘come and have a shot.’ He raised his arm; but before he could throw, Horse-Face had jumped on to the bed and caught him by the wrist.

‘No, s-stop!’ he said. ‘Stop.’ And he caught also at Thompson’s arm. Leaning over Staithes’s shoulder, Anthony threw — as hard as he could. Goggler ducked. The slipper thumped against the wooden partition behind him.

‘B-beavis!’ cried Horse-Face — so reproachfully, that Anthony felt a sudden twinge of shame.

‘It didn’t hit him,’ he said by way of excuse; and for some queer reason found himself thinking of that horrible deep hole in Lollingdon churchyard.

Staithes had found his tongue again. ‘I don’t know what you think you’re doing, Horse-Face,’ he said angrily, and jerked the slipper out of Brian’s hand. ‘Why can’t you mind your own business?’

‘It isn’t f-fair,’ Brian answered.

‘Yes, it is.’

‘F-five against one.’

‘But you don’t know what he was doing.’

‘I d-don’t c-c-c . . . don’t mind.’

‘You would care, if you knew,’ said Staithes; and proceeded to tell him what Goggler had been doing — as dirtily as he knew how.

Brian dropped his eyes and his cheeks went suddenly very red. To have to listen to smut always made him feel miserable — miserable and at the same time ashamed of himself.

‘Look at old Horse-Face blushing!’ called Partridge; and they all laughed — none more derisively than Anthony. For Anthony had had time to feel ashamed of his shame; time to refuse to think about that hole in Lollingdon churchyard; time, too, to find himself all of a sudden almost hating old Horse-Face. ‘For being so disgustingly pi,’ he would have said, if somebody had asked him to explain his hatred. But the real reason was deeper, obscurer. If he hated Horse-Face, it was because Horse-Face was so extraordinarily decent; because Horse-Face had the courage of convictions which Anthony felt should also be his convictions — which, indeed, would be his convictions if only he could bring himself to have the courage of them. It was just because he liked Horse-Face so much that he now hated him. Or, rather, because there were so many reasons why he should like him — so few reasons, on the contrary, why Horse-Face should return the liking. Horse-Face was rich with all sorts of fine qualities that he himself either lacked completely or else, which was worse, possessed, but somehow was incapable of manifesting. That sudden derisive burst of laughter was the expression of a kind of envious resentment against a superiority which he loved and admired. Indeed, the love and the admiration in some sort produced the resentment and the envy — produced, but ordinarily kept them below the surface in an unconscious abeyance, from which, however, some crisis like the present would suddenly call them.

‘You should have seen him,’ concluded Staithes. Now that he felt in a better humour he laughed — he could afford to laugh.

‘In his truss,’ Anthony added, in a tone of sickened contempt. Goggler’s rupture was an aggravation of the offence.

‘Yes, in his beastly old truss!’ Staithes confirmed approvingly. There was no doubt about it; combined as it was with the spectacles and the timidity, that truss made the throwing of slippers not only inevitable, but right, a moral duty.

‘He’s disgusting,’ Anthony went on, warming pleasantly to his righteous indignation.

For the first time since Staithes had started on his description of Goggler’s activities Brian looked up. ‘B-but w-why is he more disgusting than anyone

else?’ he asked in a low voice. ‘A-after all,’ he went on, and the blood came rushing back into his cheeks as he spoke, ‘he i-isn’t the . . . the o-only one.’

There was a moment’s uncomfortable silence. Of course he wasn’t the only one. But he was the only one, they were all thinking, who had a truss, and goggles, and a vest that was too short for him; the only one who did it in broad daylight and let himself be caught at it. There was a difference.

Staithes counter-attacked on another front. ‘Sermon by the Reverend Horse-Face!’ he said jeeringly, and at once recovered the initiative, the position of superiority. ‘Gosh!’ he added in another tone, ‘it’s late. We must buck up.’

CHAPTER SEVEN. April 8th 1934

FROM A.B.'S DIARY

Conditioned reflex. What a lot of satisfaction I got out of old Pavlov when first I read him. The ultimate debunking of all human pretensions. We were all dogs and bitches together. Bow-wow, sniff the lamp-post, lift the leg, bury the bone. No nonsense about free will, goodness, truth, and all the rest. Each age has its psychological revolutionaries. La Mettrie, Hume, Condillac, and finally the Marquis de Sade, latest and most sweeping of the eighteenth-century debunkers. Perhaps, indeed, the ultimate and absolute revolutionary. But few have the courage to follow the revolutionary argument to Sade's conclusions. Meanwhile, science did not stand still. Dix-huitième debunking, apart from Sade, proved inadequate. The nineteenth century had to begin again. Marx and the Darwinians. Who are still with us — Marx obsessively so. Meanwhile the twentieth century has produced yet another lot of debunkers — Freud and, when he began to flag, Pavlov and the Behaviourists. Conditioned reflex: — it seemed, I remember, to put the lid on everything. Whereas actually, of course, it merely restated the doctrine of free will. For if reflexes can be conditioned, then, obviously, they can be reconditioned. Learning to use the self properly, when one has been using it badly — what is it but reconditioning one's reflexes?

Lunched with my father. More cheerful than I've seen him recently, but old and, oddly, rather enjoying it. Making much of getting out of his chair with difficulty, of climbing very slowly up the stairs. A way, I suppose, of increasing his sense of importance. Perhaps also a way of commanding sympathy whenever he happens to want it. Baby cries so that mother shall come and make a fuss of him. It goes on from the cradle to the grave. Miller says of old age that it's largely a bad habit. Use conditions function. Walk about as if you were a martyr to rheumatism and you'll impose such violent muscular strains upon yourself

that a martyr to rheumatism you'll really be. Behave like an old man and your body will function like an old man's, you'll think and feel as an old man. The lean and slippered pantaloon — literally a part that one plays. If you refuse to play it and learn how to act on your refusal, you won't become a pantaloon. I suspect this is largely true. Anyhow, my father is playing his present part with gusto. One of the great advantages of being old, provided that one's economic position is reasonably secure and one's health not too bad, is that one can afford to be serene. The grave is near, one has made a habit of not feeling anything very strongly; it's easy, therefore, to take the God's-eye view of things. My father took it about peace, for example. Yes, men were mad, he agreed; there would be another war quite soon — about 1940, he thought. (A date, significantly, when he was practically certain to be dead!) Much worse than the last war, yes; and would probably destroy the civilization of Western Europe. But did it really matter so much? Civilization would go on in other continents, would build itself up anew in the devastated areas. Our time scale was all wrong. We should think of ourselves, not as living in the thirties of the twentieth-century, but as at a point between two ice ages. And he ended up by quoting Goethe — alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis. All which is doubtless quite true, but not the whole truth. Query: how to combine belief that the world is to a great extent illusory with belief that it is none the less essential to improve the illusion? How to be simultaneously dispassionate and not indifferent, serene like an old man and active like a young one?

CHAPTER EIGHT. August 30th 1933

‘THESE VILE HORSE-FLIES!’ Helen rubbed the reddening spot on her arm. Anthony made no comment. She looked at him for a little in silence. ‘What a lot of ribs you’ve got!’ she said at last.

‘Schizothyme physique,’ he answered from behind the arm with which he was shielding his face from the light. ‘That’s why I’m here. Predestined by the angle of my ribs.’

‘Predestined to what?’

‘To sociology; and in the intervals to this.’ He raised his hand, made a little circular gesture and let it fall again on the mattress.

‘But what’s “this”?’ she insisted.

‘This?’ Anthony repeated. ‘Well . . .’ He hesitated. But it would take too long to talk about that temperamental divorce between the passions and the intellect, those detached sensualities, those sterilized ideas. ‘Well, you,’ he brought out at last.

‘Me?’

‘Oh, I admit it might have been someone else,’ he said, and laughed, genuinely amused by his own cynicism.

Helen also laughed, but with a surprising bitterness. ‘I am somebody else.’

‘Meaning what?’ he asked, uncovering his face to look at her.

‘Meaning what I say. Do you think I should be here — the real I?’

‘Real I!’ he mocked. ‘You’re talking like a theosophist.’

‘And you’re talking like a fool,’ she said. ‘On purpose. Because, of course, you aren’t one.’ There was a long silence. I, real I? But where, but how, but at what price? Yes, above all, at what price? Those Cavells and Florence Nightingales. But it was impossible, that sort of thing; it was, above all, ridiculous. She frowned to herself, she shook her head; then, opening her eyes,

which had been shut, looked for something in the external world to distract her from these useless and importunate thoughts within. The foreground was all Anthony. She looked at him for a moment; then, reaching out with a kind of fascinated reluctance, as though towards some irresistibly strange but distasteful animal, she touched the pink crumpled skin of the great scar that ran diagonally across his thigh, an inch or two above the knee. ‘Does it still hurt?’ she asked.

‘When I’m run down. And sometimes in wet weather.’ He raised his head a little from the mattress and, at the same time bending his right knee, examined the scar. ‘A touch of the Renaissance,’ he said reflectively. ‘Slashed trunks.’

Helen shuddered. ‘It must have been awful!’ Then, with a sudden vehemence, ‘How I hate pain!’ she cried, and her tone was one of passionate, deeply personal resentment. ‘Hate it,’ she repeated for all the Cavells and Nightingales to hear.

She had pushed him back into the past again. That autumn day at Tidworth eighteen years before. Bombing instruction. An imbecile recruit had thrown short. The shouts, his panic start, the blow. Oddly remote it all seemed now, and irrelevant, like something seen through the wrong end of a telescope. And even the pain, all the months of pain, had shrunk almost to non-existence. Physically, it was the worst thing that had ever happened to him — and the lunatic in charge of his memory had practically forgotten it.

‘One can’t remember pain,’ he said aloud.

‘I can.’

‘No, you can’t. You can only remember its occasion, its accompaniments.’

Its occasion at the midwife’s in the rue de la Tombe-Issoire, its accompaniments of squalor and humiliation. Her face hardened as she listened to his words.

‘You can never remember its actual quality,’ he went on. ‘No more than you can remember the quality of a physical pleasure. Today, for example, half an hour ago — you can’t remember. There’s nothing like a re-creation of the event. Which is lucky.’ He was smiling now. ‘Think, if one could fully remember perfumes or kisses. How wearisome the reality of them would be! And what woman with a memory would ever have more than one baby?’

Helen stirred uneasily. ‘I can’t imagine how any woman ever does,’ she said in a low voice.

‘As it is,’ he went on, ‘the pains and pleasures are new each time they’re experienced. Brand new. Every gardenia is the first gardenia you ever smelt. And every confinement . . .’

‘You’re talking like a fool again,’ she interrupted angrily. ‘Confusing the issue.’

‘I thought I was clarifying it,’ he protested. ‘And anyhow, what is the issue?’

‘The issue’s me, you, real life, happiness. And you go chattering away about things in the air. Like a fool!’

‘And what about you?’ he asked. ‘Are you such a clever one at real life? Such an expert in happiness?’

In the mind of each of them his words evoked the image of a timorous figure, ambushed behind spectacles.

That marriage! What on earth could have induced her? Old Hugh, of course, had been sentimentally in love. But was that a sufficient reason? And, afterwards, what sort of disillusions? Physiological, he supposed, for the most part. Comic, when you thought of them in relation to old Hugh. The corners of Anthony’s mouth faintly twitched. But for Helen, of course, the joke could only have been disastrous. He would have liked to know the details — but at second-hand, on condition of not having to ask for or be offered her confidences. Confidences were dangerous, confidences were entangling — like fly-paper; yes, like fly-paper. . . .

Helen sighed; then, squaring her shoulders and in a tone of resolution, ‘Two blacks don’t make a white,’ she said. ‘Besides, I’m my own affair.’

Which was all for the best, he thought. There was a silence.

‘How long were you in hospital with that wound?’ she asked in another tone.

‘Nearly ten months. It was disgustingly infected. They had to operate six times altogether.’

‘How horrible!’

Anthony shrugged his shoulders. At least it had preserved him from those trenches. But for the grace of God . . . ‘Queer,’ he added, ‘what unlikely forms the grace of God assumes sometimes! A half-witted bumpkin with a hand-grenade. But for him I should have been shipped out to France and slaughtered — almost to a certainty. He saved my life.’ Then, after a pause, ‘My freedom too,’ he added. ‘I’d let myself be fuddled by those beginning-of-war intoxications. “Honour has come back, as a king, to earth.” But I suppose you’re too young ever to have heard of poor Rupert. It seemed to make sense then, in 1914. “Honour has come back . . .” But he failed to mention that stupidity had come back too. In hospital, I had all the leisure to think of that other royal progress through the earth. Stupidity has come back, as a king — no; as an emperor, as a divine Führer of all the Aryans. It was a sobering reflection. Sobering and profoundly liberating. And I owed it to the bumpkin. He was one of the great Führer’s most faithful subjects.’ There was a silence. ‘Sometimes I feel a bit nervous — like Polycrates — because I’ve had so much luck in my life. All occasions always seem to have conspired for me. Even this occasion.’ He touched the scar. ‘Perhaps I ought to do something to allay the envy of the Gods — throw a ring into the sea next time I go bathing.’ He uttered a little laugh. ‘The trouble is, I don’t possess a ring.’

CHAPTER NINE. April 2nd 1903

AT PADDINGTON, MR Beavis and Anthony got into an empty third-class compartment and waited for the train to start. For Anthony a railway journey was still profoundly important, still a kind of sacrament. The male soul, in immaturity, is naturaliter ferrovialis. This huge and god-like green monster, for example, that now came snorting into the station and drew up at Platform 1 — but for Watt and Stephenson it would never have rolled thus majestically into its metropolitan cathedral of sooty glass. But the intensity of delight which Anthony felt as he watched the divine creature approach, as he breathed its stink of coal smoke and hot oil, as he heard and almost unconsciously imitated the ch-ff, ch-ff, ch-ff of its steamy panting, was a sufficient proof that the boyish heart must have been, in some mysterious way, prepared for the advent of Puffing Billy and the Rocket, that the actual locomotive, when it appeared, must have corresponded (how satisfyingly!) with some dim prophetic image of a locomotive, pre-existing in the mind of children from the beginning of palaeolithic time. Ch-ff, ch-ff; then silence; then the terrible, the soul-annihilating roar of escaping steam. Wonderful! Lovely!

Bonneted, in black, like a pair of Queen Victorias, two fat and tiny old ladies passed slowly, looking for a compartment where they would not have their throats cut or be compelled to listen to bad language. Mr Beavis looked very respectable indeed. They paused, held a consultation; but, leaning out of the window, Anthony made such a face at them that they moved away again. He smiled triumphantly. Keeping the compartment to oneself was one of the objects of the sacred game of travelling — was the equivalent, more or less, of a Royal Marriage at bezique; you scored forty, so to speak, each time you left a station without a stranger in your carriage. Having lunch in the dining-car counted as

much as a Sequence — two hundred and fifty. And Double Bezique — but this, as yet, Anthony had never scored — was being in a slip carriage.

The guard whistled, the train began to move.

‘Hurrah!’ Anthony shouted.

The game had begun well: a Royal Marriage in the very first round. But a few minutes later he was regretting those two old ladies. For, rousing himself suddenly from his abstracted silence, John Beavis leaned forward and, touching his son’s knee, ‘Do you remember what day of the month it is?’ he asked in a low and, to Anthony, inexplicably significant tone.

Anthony looked at him doubtfully; then started to overact the part of the Calculator, frowning over a difficult problem. There was something about his father that seemed to make such overacting inevitable.

‘Let me see,’ he said unnaturally, ‘we broke up on the thirty-first — or was it the thirtieth? That was Saturday, and today’s Monday . . .’

‘Today’s the second,’ said his father in the same slow voice.

Anthony felt apprehensive. If his father knew the date, why had he asked?

‘It’s exactly five months today,’ Mr Beavis went on.

Five months? And then, with a sudden sickening drop of the heart, Anthony realized what his father was talking about. The Second of November, the Second of April. It was five months since she had died.

‘Each second of the month — one tried to keep the day sacred.’

Anthony nodded and turned his eyes away with a sense of guilty discomfort.

‘Bound each to each by natural piety,’ said Mr Beavis.

What on earth was he talking about now? And, oh, why, why did he have to say these things? So awful; so indecent — yes, indecent; one didn’t know where to look. Like the times when Granny’s stomach made those awful bubbling noises after meals . . .

Looking into his son’s averted face, Mr Beavis perceived signs of resistance and was hurt, was saddened, and felt the sadness turn into an obscure resentment that Anthony should not suffer as acutely as he did. Of course the child was still

very young, not yet able to realize the full extent of his loss; but all the same, all the same . . .

To Anthony's unspeakable relief the train slowed down for its first stop. The suburbs of Slough passed slowly and ever slowlier before his eyes. Against all the rules of the sacred game, he prayed that somebody might get into their compartment. And, thank heaven, somebody did get in — a gross, purple-faced man whom on any other occasion Anthony would have hated. Today he loved him.

Shielding his eyes with his hand, Mr Beavis retired again into a private world of silence.

In the carriage, on the way from Twyford station, his father added insult to injury.

'You must always be on your very best behaviour,' he recommended.

'Of course,' said Anthony curtly.

'And always be punctual,' Mr Beavis continued. 'And don't be greedy at meal-times.' He hesitated, smiled in anticipation of what he was about to say, then launched his colloquialism: 'however excellent the "grub" may be.' There was a little silence. 'And be polite to the Abigails,' he added.

They turned off the road into a drive that wound between tall shrubberies of rhododendrons. Then, across an expanse of tree-islanded grass, appeared a façade of Georgian stucco. The house was not large, but solid, comfortable and at the same time elegant. Built, you divined, by someone who could quote Horace, aptly, on every occasion. Rachel Foxe's father, Mr Beavis reflected, as he looked at it, must have left quite a lot of money. Naval architecture — and didn't the old boy invent something that the Admiralty took up? Foxe, too, had been well off: something to do with coal. (How charming those daffodils looked in the grass there, under the tree!) But a dour, silent, humourless man who had not, Mr Beavis remembered, understood his little philological joke about the word 'pencil'. Though if he'd known at the time that the poor fellow had a duodenal ulcer, he certainly wouldn't have risked it.

Mrs Foxe and Brian came to meet them as the carriage drew up. The boys went off together. Mr Beavis followed his hostess into the drawing-room. She was a tall woman, slender and very upright, with something so majestic in her carriage, so nobly austere in the lines and expression of her face, that Mr Beavis always felt himself slightly intimidated and ill at ease in her presence.

‘It was so very good of you to ask us,’ he said. ‘And I can’t tell you how much it will mean for . . .’ he hesitated for an instant; then (since it was the second of the month), with a little shake of the head and in a lower tone, ‘for this poor motherless little fellow of mine,’ he went on, ‘to spend his holidays here with you.’

Her clear brown eyes had darkened, as he spoke, with a sympathetic distress. Always firm, always serious, the coming together of her full, almost floridly sculptured lips expressed more than ordinary gravity. ‘But I’m so delighted to have him,’ she said in a voice that was warm and musically vibrant with feeling. ‘Selfishly glad — for Brian’s sake.’ She smiled, and he noticed that even when she smiled her mouth seemed somehow to preserve, through all its sensibility, its profound capacity for suffering and enjoyment, that seriousness, that determined purity which characterized it in repose. ‘Yes, selfishly,’ she repeated. ‘Because, when he’s happy, I am.’

Mr Beavis nodded; then, sighing, ‘One’s thankful,’ he said, ‘to have as much left to one as that — the reflection of someone else’s happiness.’ Magnanimously, he was giving Anthony the right not to suffer — though of course when the boy was a little older, when he could realize more fully . . .

Mrs Foxe did not continue the conversation. There was something rather distasteful to her in his words and manner, something that jarred upon her sensibilities. But she hastened to banish the disagreeable impression from her mind. After all, the important, the essential fact was that the poor man had suffered, was still suffering. The false note, if falsity there were, was after the fact — in the mere expression of the suffering.

She proposed a stroll before tea, and they walked through the garden and out into the domesticated wilderness of grass and trees beyond. In a glade of the

little copse that bounded the property to the north, three crippled children were picking primroses. With a gruesome agility they swung themselves on their crutches from clump to clump of the pale golden flowers, yelling as they went in shrill discordant rapture.

They were staying, Mrs Foxe explained, in one of her cottages. ‘Three of my cripples,’ she called them.

At the sound of her voice the children looked up, and at once came hopping across the open space towards her.

‘Look, Miss, look what I found!’

‘Look here, Miss!’

‘What’s this called, Miss?’

She answered their questions, asked others in return, promised to come that evening to see them.

Feeling that he too ought to do something for the cripples, Mr Beavis began to tell them about the etymology of the word ‘primrose’. ‘Primerole in Middle English,’ he explained. ‘The “rose” crept in by mistake.’ They stared at him uncomprehendingly. ‘A mere popular blunder,’ he went on; then, twinkling, ‘a “howler,” ’ he added. ‘Like our old friend,’ he smiled at them knowingly, ‘our old friend “causeway”.’

There was a silence. Mrs Foxe changed the subject.

‘Poor little mites!’ she said, when at last they let her go. ‘They’re so happy, they make one want to cry. And then, after a week, one has to pack them off again. Back to their slum. It seems too cruel. But what can one do? There are so many of them. One can’t keep one lot at the expense of the others.’

They walked on for a time in silence, and Mrs Foxe found herself suddenly thinking that there were also cripples of the spirit. People with emotions so lame and rickety that they didn’t know how to feel properly; people with some kind of hunch or deformity in their power of expression. John Beavis perhaps was one of them. But how unfair she was being! How presumptuous too! Judge not that ye be not judged. And anyhow, if it were true, that would only be another reason for feeling sorry for him.

‘I think it must be tea-time,’ she said aloud; and, to prevent herself from passing any more judgements, she started to talk to him about those Cripple Schools she had been helping to organize in Notting Dale and St Pancras. She described the cripple’s life at home — the parents out at work; not a glimpse of a human face from morning till night; no proper food; no toys, no books, nothing to do but to lie still and wait — for what? Then she told him about the ambulance that now went round to fetch the children to school, about the special desks, the lessons, the arrangements for supplying a decent dinner.

‘And our reward,’ she said, as she opened the door into the house, ’is that same heart-breaking happiness I was speaking of just now. I can’t help feeling it as a kind of reproach, an accusation. Each time I see that happiness, I ask myself what right I have to be in a position to give it so easily, just by spending a little money and taking a tiny bit of pleasant trouble. Yes, what right?’ Her warm clear voice trembled a little as she uttered the question. She raised her hands in an interrogative gesture, then let them fall again and walked quickly into the drawing-room.

Mr Beavis followed her in silence. A kind of tingling warmth had expanded within him as he listened to her last words. It was like the sensation he had when he read the last scene of Measure for Measure, or listened to Joachim in the Beethoven Concerto.

Mr Beavis could only stay two nights. There was an important meeting of the Philological Society. And then, of course, his work on the Dictionary. ‘The old familiar grind,’ he explained to Mrs Foxe in a tone of affected self-pity and with a sigh that was hardly even meant to carry conviction. The truth was that he enjoyed his work, would have felt lost without it. ‘And you’re really sure,’ he added, ‘that Anthony won’t be too much of a burden to you?’

‘Burden? But look!’ And she pointed through the window to where the two boys were playing bicycle polo on the lawn. ‘And it’s not only that,’ she went on. ‘I’ve really come to be very much attached to Anthony in these two days. There’s something so deeply touching about him. He seems so vulnerable somehow. In spite of all that cleverness and good sense and determination of his.

There’s part of him that seems terribly at the mercy of the world.’ Yes, at its mercy, she repeated to herself, thinking, as she did so, of that broad and candid forehead, of those almost tremulously sensitive lips, of that slight, unforceful chin. He could be easily hurt, easily led astray. Each time he looked at her, he made her feel almost guiltily responsible for him.

‘And yet,’ said Mr Beavis, ‘there are times when he seems strangely indifferent.’ The memory of that episode in the train had not ceased to rankle. For though, of course, he wanted the child to be happy, though he had decided that the only happiness he himself could know henceforward would come from the contemplation of the child’s happiness, the old resentment still obscurely persisted: he felt aggrieved because Anthony had not suffered more, because he seemed to resist and reject suffering when it was brought to him. ‘Strangely indifferent,’ he repeated.

Mrs Foxe nodded. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘he wears a kind of armour. Covers up his vulnerability in the most exposed place and at the same time uncovers it elsewhere, so that the slighter wounds shall act as a kind of distraction, a kind of counter-irritant. It’s self-protection. And yet’ (her voice deepened, thrillingly), ‘and yet I believe that in the long run he’d be better and spiritually healthier, yes, and happier too, if he could bring himself to do just the opposite — if he’d armour himself against the little distracting wounds, the little wounds of pleasure as well as the little wounds of pain, and expose his vulnerableness only to the great and piercing blows.’

‘How true that is!’ said Mr Beavis, who found that her words applied exactly to himself.

There was a silence. Then, harking back to his original question, ‘No, no,’ said Mrs Foxe with decision, ‘so far from feeling him as a burden, I’m really enchanted to have him here. Not only for what he is in himself, but also for what he is to Brian — and incidentally for what Brian is to him. It’s delightful to see them. I should like them to be together every holidays.’ Mrs Foxe paused for a moment; then, ‘Seriously,’ she went on, ‘if you’ve made no plans for the

summer, why don’t you think of this? We’ve taken a little house at Tenby for August. Why shouldn’t you and Anthony find a place there too?’

Mr Beavis thought the idea an excellent one; and the boys, when it was broached to them, were delighted.

‘So it’s only good-bye till August,’ said Mrs Foxe as she saw him off. ‘Though of course,’ she added, with a warmth that was all the greater for being the result of a deliberate effort of cordiality, ‘of course we shall meet before then.’

The carriage rattled away down the drive; and for a hundred yards or more Anthony ran beside it, shouting ‘Good-bye’ and waving his handkerchief with a vehemence that Mr Beavis took as the sign of a correspondingly intense regret to see him go. In fact, however, it was just a manifestation of overflowing energy and high spirits. Circumstances had filled him, body and mind, with the deep joy of being happily alive. This joy required physical expression, and his father’s departure gave him an excuse for running and waving his arms. Mr Beavis was extremely touched. But if only, he went on sadly to think, if only there were some way of canalizing this love, and his own for the boy, so that it might irrigate the aridities of their daily intercourse! Women understood these things so much better. It had been touching to see how the poor child had responded to Mrs Foxe’s affection. And perhaps, he went on to speculate, perhaps it was just because there had been no woman to direct his feelings that Anthony had seemed to be so uncaring. Perhaps a child could never adequately mourn his mother for the very reason that he was motherless. It was a vicious circle. Mrs Foxe’s influence would be good, not only in this matter, but in a thousand other ways as well. Mr Beavis sighed. If only it were possible for a man and a woman to associate; not in marriage, but for a common purpose, for the sake of motherless, of fatherless children! A good woman — admirable, extraordinary even. But in spite of that (almost because of that), it could only be an association for a common purpose. Never a marriage. And anyhow there was Maisie — waiting for him there; he would not fail . . . But an association for the sake of the children — that would be no betrayal.

Anthony walked back to the house whistling ‘The Honeysuckle and the Bee’. He was fond of his father — fond, it is true, by force of habit, as one is fond of one’s native place, or its traditional cooking — but still, genuinely fond of him. Which did nothing however, to diminish the discomfort he always felt in Mr Beavis’s presence.

‘Brian!’ he shouted, as he approached the house — shouted a bit self-consciously; for it seemed queer to be calling him Brian instead of Foxe or Horse-Face. Rather unmanly, even a shade discreditable.

Brian’s answering whistle came from the school-room.

‘I vote we take the bikes,’ Anthony called.

At school, people used to mock at old Horse-Face for his bird mania. ‘I say, you fellows,’ Staithes would say, taking Horse-Face by the arm, ‘guess what I saw today! Two spew-tits and a piddle-warbler.’ And a great howl of laughter would go up — a howl in which Anthony always joined. But here, where there was nobody to shame him out of being interested in spring migrants and nest-boxes and heronries, he took to bird-watching with enthusiasm. Coming in, wet and muddy from the afternoon’s walk, ‘Do you know what we heard, Mrs Foxe?’ he would ask triumphantly, before poor Brian had had time to get out a stammered word. ‘The first whitethroat!’ or ‘The first willow wren!’ and Rachel Foxe would say, ‘How splendid!’ in such a way that he was filled with pride and happiness. It was as though those piddle-warblers had never existed.

After tea, when the curtains had been drawn and the lamps brought in, Mrs Foxe would read to them. Anthony, who had always been bored to death by Scott, found himself following the ‘Fortunes of Nigel’ with the most passionate attention.

Easter approached, and, for the time being, ‘Nigel’ was put away. Mrs Foxe gave them readings, instead, from the New Testament. ‘And he saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what

thou wilt.’ The lamplight was a round island in the darkness of the room, and towards it, from the fire, projected a vague promontory of luminous redness. Anthony was lying on the floor, and from the high Italian chair beside the lamp the words came down to him, transfigured, as it were, by that warm, musical voice, charged with significances he had never heard or seen in them before. ‘And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.’ In the ten heart-beats of silence that followed he seemed to hear the blows of the hammer on the nails. Thud, thud, thud . . . He passed the fingers of one hand across the smooth palm of the other; his body went rigid with horror, and through the stiffened muscles passed a violent spasm of shuddering.

‘And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.’ Mrs Foxe lowered her book. ‘That’s one of those additions I was telling you about,’ she said, ‘one of those embroideries on the story. One must think of the age in which the writers of the gospels lived. They believed these things could happen; and, what’s more, they thought they ought to happen on important occasions. They wanted to do honour to Jesus; they wanted to make his story seem more wonderful. But to us nowadays, these things make it seem less wonderful; and we don’t feel that they do him honour. The wonderful thing for us,’ she went on, and her voice thrilled with a deep note of fervour, ’is that Jesus was a man, no more able to do miracles and no more likely to have them done for him than the rest of us. Just a man — and yet he could do what he did, he could be what he was. That’s the wonder.’

There was a long silence; only the clock ticked and the flame rustled silkily in the grate. Anthony lay on his back and stared at the ceiling. Everything was suddenly clear. Uncle James was right; but the other people were right too. She had shown how it was possible for both of them to be right. Just a man — and yet . . . Oh, he too, he too would do and be!

Mrs Foxe picked up the book once more. The thin pages crackled as she turned them.

‘Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came upon the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain

others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.'

The stone . . . But at Lollingdon there was earth; and only ashes in that little box — that little box no bigger than a biscuit tin. Anthony shut his eyes in the hope of excluding the odious vision; but against the crimson darkness the horns, the triangular frizz of auburn curls stood out with an intenser vividness. He lifted his hand to his mouth, and, to punish himself, began to bite the forefinger, harder, harder, until the pain was almost intolerable.

That evening, when she came to say good night to him, Mrs Foxe sat down on the edge of Anthony's bed and took his hand. 'You know, Anthony,' she said after a moment of silence, 'you mustn't be afraid of thinking about her.'

'Afraid?' he mumbled, as though he hadn't understood. But he had understood — understood, perhaps, more than she had meant. The blood rushed guiltily into his cheeks. He felt frightened, as though somehow she had trapped him, found him out — frightened and therefore resentful.

'You mustn't be afraid of suffering,' she went on. 'Thinking about her will make you sad: that's inevitable. And it's right. Sadness is necessary sometimes — like an operation; you can't be well without it. If you think about her, Anthony, it'll hurt you. But if you don't think about her, you condemn her to a second death. The spirit of the dead lives on in God. But it also lives on in the minds of the living — helping them, making them better and stronger. The dead can only have this kind of immortality if the living are prepared to give it them. Will you give it her, Anthony?'

Mutely, and in tears, he nodded his answer. It was not so much the words that had reassured him as the fact that the words were hers and had been uttered in that compelling voice. His fears were allayed, his suspicious resentment died down. He felt safe with her. Safe to abandon himself to the sobs that now mounted irresistibly in his throat.

'Poor little Anthony!' She stroked his hair. 'Poor little Anthony! There's no help for it; it'll always hurt — always. You'll never be able to think of her without some pain. Even time can't take away all the suffering, Anthony.'

She paused, and for a long minute sat there in silence, thinking of her father, thinking of her husband. The old man, so massive, so majestic, like a prophet — then in his wheeled chair, paralysed and strangely shrunken, his head on one side, dribbling over his white beard, hardly able to speak . . . And the man she had married, out of admiration for his strength, out of respect for his uprightness; had married, and then discovered that she did not, could not love. For the strength, she had found, was cold and without magnanimity; the uprightness, harsh and cruel uprightness. And the pain of the long last illness had hardened and embittered him. He had died implacable, resisting her tenderness to the last.

'Yes, there'll always be pain and sadness,' she went on at last. 'And after all,' a warm note of pride, almost of defiance, came into her voice, 'can one wish that it should be otherwise? You wouldn't want to forget your mother, would you, Anthony? Or not to care any more? Just in order to escape a little suffering. You wouldn't want that?'

Sobbing, he shook his head. And it was quite true. At this moment he didn't want to escape. It was in some obscure way a relief to be suffering this extremity of sorrow. And he loved her because she had known how to make him suffer.

Mrs Foxe bent down and kissed him. 'Poor little Anthony!' she kept repeating. 'Poor little Anthony!'

It rained on Good Friday; but on Saturday the weather changed, and Easter Day was symbolically golden, as though on purpose, as though in a parable. Christ's resurrection and the re-birth of Nature — two aspects of an identical mystery. The sunshine, the clouds, like fragments of marbly sculpture in the pale blue sky, seemed, in some profound and inexpressible way, to corroborate all that Mrs Foxe had said.

They did not go to church; but, sitting on the lawn, she read aloud, first a bit of the service for Easter Day, then some extracts from Renan's Life of Jesus. The tears came into Anthony's eyes as he listened, and he felt an unspeakable longing to be good, to do something fine and noble.

On the Monday, a party of slum children were brought down to spend the day in the garden and the copse. At Bulstrode one would have called them scadgers

and offensively ignored their existence. Beastly little scadgers; and when they were older, they would grow into louts and cads. Here, however, it was different. Mrs Foxe transformed the scadgers into unfortunate children who would probably never get a second glimpse of the country in all the year.

‘Poor kids!’ Anthony said to her when they arrived. But in spite of the compassion he was doing his level best to feel, in spite of his determined goodwill, he was secretly afraid of these stunted yet horribly mature little boys with whom he had offered to play, he feared and therefore disliked them. They seemed immeasurably foreign. Their patched, stained clothes, their shapeless boots, were like a differently coloured skin; their cockney might have been Chinese. The mere appearance of them made him feel guiltily self-conscious. And then there was the way they looked at him, with a derisive hatred of his new suit and his alien manners; there was the way the bolder of them whispered together and laughed. When they laughed at Brian for his stammer, he laughed with them; and in a little while they laughed no more, or laughed only in a friendly and almost sympathetic way. Anthony, on the contrary, pretended not to notice their mockery. A gentleman, he had always been taught explicitly as well as by constant implication and the example of his elders, a gentleman doesn’t pay any attention to that kind of thing. It is beneath his dignity. He behaved as though their laughter were non-existent. They went on laughing.

He hated that morning of rounders and hide-and-seek. But worse was to follow at lunch-time. He had offered to help in the serving of the table. The work in itself was unobjectionable enough. But the smell of poverty when the twenty children were assembled in the dining-room was so insidiously disgusting — like Lollingdon church, only much worse — that he had to slip out two or three times in the course of the meal to spit in the lavatory basin. ‘Reeking with germs!’ he heard his mother’s angrily frightened voice repeating. ‘Reeking with germs!’ And when Mrs Foxe asked him a question, he could only nod and make an inarticulate noise with his mouth shut; if he spoke, he would have to swallow. Swallow what? It was revolting only to think of it.

‘Poor kids!’ he said once more, as he stood with Mrs Foxe and Brian watching their departure. ‘Poor kids!’ and felt all the more ashamed of his hypocrisy when Mrs Foxe thanked him for having worked so hard to entertain them.

And when Anthony had gone up to the school-room, ‘Thank you too, my darling,’ she said, turning to Brian. ‘You were really splendid.’

Flushing with pleasure, Brian shook his head. ‘It was all y-you,’ he said; and suddenly, because he loved her so much because she was so good, so wonderful, he found his eyes full of tears.

Together they walked out into the garden. Her hand was on his shoulder. She smelt faintly of eau-de-Cologne, and all at once (and this also, it seemed, was part of her wonderfulness) the sun came out from behind a cloud.

‘Look at those heavenly daffodils!’ she cried, in that voice that made everything she said seem, to Brian, truer, in some strange way, than the truth itself. ‘ ”And now my heart with pleasure fills . . .” Do you remember, Brian?’

Flushed and with bright eyes, he nodded. ‘ ”And d-dances . . .” ’

‘ ”Dances with the daffodils.” ’ She pressed him closer to her. He was filled with an unspeakable happiness. They walked on in silence. Her skirts rustled at every step — like the sea, Brian thought; the sea at Ventnor, that time last year, when he couldn’t sleep at night because of the waves on the beach. Lying there in the darkness, listening to the distant breathing of the sea, he had felt afraid, and above all sad, terribly sad. But, associated with his mother, the memories of that fear, that profound and causeless sadness, became beautiful; and at the same time, in some obscure way, they seemed to reflect their new beauty back on to her, making her seem yet more wonderful in his eyes. Rustling back and forth across the sunny lawn, she took on some of the mysterious significance of the windy darkness, the tirelessly returning waves.

‘Poor little Anthony!’ said Mrs Foxe, breaking the long silence. ‘It’s hard, it’s terribly hard.’ Hard also for poor Maisie, she was thinking. That graceful creature, with her languors, her silences, her dreamy abstractions, and then her sudden bursts of laughing activity — what had such a one to do with death? Or

with birth, for that matter? Maisie with a child to bring up — it hardly made more sense than Maisie dead.

‘It must be t-t-t . . .’ but ‘terrible’ wouldn’t come, ‘it must be d-dreadful,’ said Brian, laboriously circumventing the obstacle, while his emotion ran on ahead in an imaginary outburst of unuttered and unutterable words, ‘n-not to have a m-mother.’

Mrs Foxe smiled tenderly, and, bending down, laid her cheek for a moment against his hair. ‘Dreadful also not to have a son,’ she said, and realized, as she did so, that the words were even truer than she had intended them to be — that they were true on a plane of deeper, more essential existence than that on which she was now moving. She had spoken for the present; but if it would be terrible not to have him now, how incomparably more terrible it would have been then, after her father had had his stroke and during the years of her husband’s illness! In that time of pain and utter spiritual deprivation her love for Brian had been her only remaining possession. Ah, terrible, terrible indeed, then, to have no son!

CHAPTER TEN. June 16th 1912

BOOKS. THE TABLE in Anthony's room was covered with them. The five folio volumes of Bayle, in the English edition of 1738. Rickaby's translation of the Summa contra Gentiles. De Gourmont's Problème du Style. The Way of Perfection. Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground. Three volumes of Byron's Letters. The works of St John of the Cross in Spanish. The plays of Wycherley. Lee's History of Sacerdotal Celibacy.

If only, Anthony thought as he came in from his walk, if only one had two sets of eyes! Janus would be able to read Candide and the Imitation simultaneously. Life was so short, and books so countlessly many. He pored voluptuously over the table, opening at random now one volume, now another. 'He would not lie down,' he read; 'then his neck was too large for the aperture, and the priest was obliged to drown his exclamations by still louder exhortations. The head was off before the eye could trace the blow; but from an attempt to draw back the head, notwithstanding it was held forward by the hair, the first head was cut off close to the ears; the other two were taken off more cleanly. The first turned me quite hot and thirsty and made me shake so that I could hardly hold the opera glass. . . .' 'Happiness being the peculiar good of an intelligent nature, must attach to the intelligent nature on the side of something that is peculiar to it. But appetite is not peculiar to intelligent nature, but is found in all things, though diversely in diverse beings. The will, as being an appetite, is not a peculiar appurtenance of an intelligent nature, except so far as it is dependent on the intelligence; but intelligence in itself is peculiar to an intelligent nature. Happiness therefore consists in an act of the intellect substantially and principally rather than in an act of the will. . . .' 'Even in my most secret soul I have never been able to think of love as anything but a struggle, which begins with hatred and ends with moral subjection. . . .' ' "I will

not be a cuckold, I say; there will be danger in making me a cuckold." "Why, wert thou well cured of thy last clap?" . . .' 'La primera noche o purgación es amarga y terrible para el sentido, como ahora diremos. La segunda no tiene comparación, porque es horrenda y espantable para el espíritu. . . .' 'I think I have read somewhere that preciseness has been carried so far that ladies would not say, J'ai mangé des confitures, but des fitures. At this rate, above one-half of the words of the Dictionary of the French Academy should be struck out. . . .'

In the end, Anthony settled down to The Way of Perfection of St Teresa. When Brian came in, an hour later, he had got as far as the Prayer of Quiet.

'B-busy?' Brian asked.

Anthony shook his head.

The other sat down. 'I c-came to s-see if there was anything more to s-settle about to-m-morrow.' Mrs Foxe and Joan Thursley, Mr and Mrs Beavis were coming down to Oxford for the day. Brian and Anthony had agreed to entertain them together.

Hock or Sauterne cup? Lobster mayonnaise or cold salmon? And if it rained, what would be the best thing to do in the afternoon?

'Are you c-coming to the F-fabians this evening?' Brian asked, when the discussion of the next day's plans was at an end.

'Of course,' said Anthony. There was to be voting, that evening, for next term's president. 'It'll be a close fight between you and Mark Staithes. You'll need all the votes you can . . .'

Interrupting him, 'I've st-stood down,' said Brian.

'Stood down? But why?'

'V-various reasons.'

Anthony looked at him and shook his head. 'Not that I'd have ever dreamt of putting up,' he said. 'Can't imagine anything more boring than to preside over any kind of organization.' Even belonging to an organization was bad enough. Why should one be bullied into making choices when one didn't want to choose; into binding oneself to a set of principles when it was so essential to be free; into committing oneself to associate with other people when as likely as not one

would want to be alone; into promising in advance to be at given places at given times? It was with the greatest difficulty that Brian had persuaded him to join the Fabians; for the rest he was unattached. ‘Inconceivably boring,’ he insisted. ‘But still, once in the running, why stand down?’

‘Mark’ll be a b-better president than I.’

‘He’ll be ruder, if that’s what you mean.’

‘B-besides, he was so a-awfully k-keen on g-getting elected,’ Brian began; then broke off, suddenly conscience-stricken. Anthony might think he was implying a criticism of Mark Staithes, was assuming the right to patronize him. ‘I mean, he kn-knows he’ll do the j-job so well,’ he went on quickly. ‘W-whereas I . . . So I r-really didn’t see why . . .’

‘In fact you thought you might as well humour him.’

‘No, n-no!’ cried Brian in a tone of distress. ‘Not th-that.’

‘Cock of the dunghill,’ Anthony continued, ignoring the other’s protest. ‘He’s got to be cock — even if it’s only of the tiniest little Fabian dunghill.’ He laughed. ‘Poor old Mark! What an agony when he can’t get to the top of his dunghill! One’s lucky to prefer books.’ He patted St Teresa affectionately. ‘Still, I wish you hadn’t stood down. It would have made me laugh to see Mark trying to pretend he didn’t mind when you’d beaten him. You’re reading a paper, aren’t you,’ he went on, ‘after the voting?’

Relieved by the change of subject, Brian nodded. ‘On Syn . . .’ he began.

‘On sin?’

‘Synd-dicalism.’

They both laughed.

‘Odd, when you come to think of it,’ said Anthony when their laughter subsided, ‘that the mere notion of talking to socialists about sin should seem so . . . well, so outrageous, really. Sin . . . socialism.’ He shook his head. ‘It’s like mating a duck with a zebra.’

‘You could t-talk about sin if you st-started from the other end.’

‘Which end?’

‘The ssocial end. O-organizing a s-society so well that the i-individual simply c-couldn’t commit any sins.’

‘But do you honestly think such a society could exist?’

‘P-perhaps,’ said Brian doubtfully, but reflected that social change could hardly abolish those ignoble desires of his, couldn’t even legitimate those desires, except within certain conventional limits. He shook his head. ‘N-no, I don’t kn-know,’ he concluded.

‘I can’t see that you could do more than just transfer people’s sins from one plane to another. But we’ve done that already. Take envy and ambition, for example. They used to express themselves on the plane of physical violence. Now, we’ve reorganized society in such a way that they have to express themselves for the most part in terms of economic competition.’

‘Which we’re g-going to ab-abolish.’

‘And so bring physical violence back into fashion, eh?’

‘Th-that’s what you h-hope, d-don’t you?’ said Brian; and laughing, ‘You’re awful!’ he added.

There was a silence. Absently, Brian picked up The Way of Perfection, and, turning over the pages, read a line here, a paragraph there. Then with a sigh he shut the book, put it back in its place and, shaking his head, ‘I c-can’t underst-stand,’ he said, ‘why you read this sort of st-stuff. S-seeing that you d-don’t b-believe in it.’

‘But I do believe,’ Anthony insisted. ‘Not in the orthodox explanations, of course. Those are obviously idiotic. But in the facts. And in the fundamental metaphysical theory of mysticism.’

‘You m-mean that you can g-get at t-truth by some s-sort of d-direct union with it?’

Anthony nodded. ‘And the most valuable and important sort of truth only in that way.’

Brian sat for a time in silence, his elbows on his knees, his long face between his hands, staring at the floor. Then, without looking up, ‘It s-seems to me,’ he said at last, ‘that you’re r-running with the h-hare and h-h-h . . . and h-h . . .’

‘Hunting with the hounds,’ Anthony supplied.

The other nodded. ‘Using sc-cepticism against r-religion — ag-gainst any s-sort of i-idealism, really,’ he added, thinking of the barbed mockery with which Anthony loved to puncture any enthusiasm that seemed to him excessive. ‘And using th-this st-stuff’ — he pointed to The Way of Perfection— ‘a-against s-scientific argument, when it s-suits your b-b-b . . .’ ‘book’ refused to come: ‘when it s-suits your bee-double-o-kay.’

Anthony relit his pipe before answering. ‘Well, why shouldn’t one make the best of both worlds?’ he asked, as he threw the spent match into the grate. ‘Of all the worlds. Why not?’

‘W-well, c-consistency, s-single-mindedness . . .’

‘But I don’t value single-mindedness. I value completeness. I think it’s one’s duty to develop all one’s potentialities — all of them. Not stupidly stick to only one. Single-mindedness!’ he repeated. ‘But oysters are single-minded. Ants are single-minded.’

‘S-so are s-saints.’

‘Well, that only confirms my determination not to be a saint.’

‘B-but h-how can you d-do anything if you’re not s-single-minded? It’s the f-first cond-dition of any ach-achievement.’

‘Who tells you I want to achieve anything?’ asked Anthony. ‘I don’t. I want to be, completely. And I want to know. And so far as getting to know is doing, I accept the conditions of it, single-mindedly.’ With the stem of his pipe he indicated the books on the table.

‘You d-don’t accept the c-conditions of th-that kind of kn-knowing,’ Brian retorted, pointing once more at The Way of Perfection. ‘P-praying and f-fasting and all th-that.’

‘Because it isn’t knowing; it’s a special kind of experience. There’s all the difference in the world between knowing and experiencing. Between learning algebra, for example, and going to bed with a woman.’

Brian did not smile. Still staring at the floor, ‘B-but you th-think,’ he said, ‘that m-mystical experiences b-brings one into c-contact with the t-truth?’

‘And so does going to bed.’

‘D-does it?’ Brian forced himself to ask. He disliked this sort of conversation, disliked it more than ever now that he was in love with Joan — in love, and yet (he hated himself for it) desiring her basely, wrongly. . . .

‘If it’s the right woman,’ the other answered with an airy knowingness, as though he had experimented with every kind of female. In fact, though he would have been ashamed to admit it, he was a virgin.

‘S-so you needn’t b-bother about the f-fasting,’ said Brian, suddenly ironical.

Anthony grinned. ‘I’m quite content with only knowing about the way of perfection,’ he said.

‘I think I should w-want to exp-experience it too,’ said Brian, after a pause.

Anthony shook his head. ‘Not worth the price,’ he said. ‘That’s the trouble of all single-minded activity; it costs you your liberty. You find yourself driven into a corner. You’re a prisoner.’

‘But if you w-want to be f-free, you’ve g-got to be a p-prisoner. It’s the c-condition of freedom — t-true freedom.’

‘True freedom!’ Anthony repeated in the parody of a clerical voice. ‘I always love that kind of argument. The contrary of a thing isn’t the contrary; oh, dear me, no! It’s the thing itself, but as it truly is. Ask a diehard what conservatism is; he’ll tell you it’s true socialism. And the brewers’ trade papers; they’re full of articles about the beauty of True Temperance. Ordinary temperance is just a gross refusal to drink; but true temperance, true temperance is something much more refined. True temperance is a bottle of claret with each meal and three double whiskies after dinner. Personally, I’m all for true temperance, because I hate temperance. But I like being free. So I won’t have anything to do with true freedom.’

‘Which doesn’t p-prevent it from being t-true freedom,’ the other obstinately insisted.

‘What’s in a name?’ Anthony went on. ‘The answer is, Practically everything, if the name’s a good one. Freedom’s a marvellous name. That’s why you’re so anxious to make use of it. You think that, if you call imprisonment true freedom,

people will be attracted to the prison. And the worst of it is you're quite right. The name counts more with most people than the thing. They'll follow the man who repeats it most often and in the loudest voice. And of course "True Freedom" is actually a better name than freedom tout court. Truth — it's one of the magical words. Combine it with the magic of "freedom" and the effect's terrific.' After a moment's silence, 'Curious,' he went on, digressively and in another tone, 'that people don't talk about true truth. I suppose it sounds too queer. True truth; true truth,' he repeated experimentally. 'No, it obviously won't do. It's like beri-beri, or Wagga-Wagga. Nigger talk. You couldn't take it seriously. If you want to make the contrary of truth acceptable, you've got to call it spiritual truth, or inner truth, or higher truth, or even . . .'

'But a mmoment ago you were s-saying that there w-was a k-kind of higher truth. S-something you could only g-get at m-mystically. You're c-contradicting yourself.'

Anthony laughed. 'That's one of the privileges of freedom. Besides,' he added, more seriously, 'there's that distinction between knowing and experiencing. Known truth isn't the same as experienced truth. There ought to be two distinct words.'

'You m-manage to wr-wriggle out of e-everything.'

'Not out of everything,' Anthony insisted. 'There'll always be those.' He pointed again to the books. 'Always knowledge. The prison of knowledge — because of course knowledge is also a prison. But I shall always be ready to stay in that prison.'

'A-always?' Brian questioned.

'Why not?'

'Too m-much of a l-luxury.'

'On the contrary. It's a case of scorning delights and living laborious days.'

'Which are thems-selves del-lightful.'

'Of course. But mayn't one take pleasure in one's work?'

Brian nodded. 'It's not exactly th-that,' he said. 'One doesn't w-want to exploit one's privileges.'

‘Mine’s only a little one,’ said Anthony. ‘About six pounds a week,’ he added, specifying the income that had come to him from his mother.

‘P-plus all the r-rest.’

‘Which rest?’

‘The l-luck that you happen to l-like this sort of thing.’ He reached out and touched the folio Bayle. ‘And all your g-gifts.’

‘But I can’t artificially make myself stupid,’ Anthony objected. ‘Nor can you.’

‘N-no, but we can use what we’ve g-got for s-something else.’

‘Something we’re not suited for,’ the other suggested sarcastically.

Ignoring the mockery, ‘As a k-kind of th-thank-offering,’ Brian went on with a still intenser passion of earnestness.

‘For what?’

‘For all that we’ve been g-given. M-money, to start with. And then kn-knowledge, t-taste, the power to c-c . . .’ He wanted to say ‘create’, but had to be content with ‘to do things’. ‘B-being a scholar or an artist — it’s l-like purs-suing your p-personal salvation. But there’s also the k-kingdom of G-god. W-waiting to be realized.’

‘By the Fabians?’ asked Anthony in a tone of pretended ingenuousness.

‘Am-mong others.’ There was a long half-minute of silence. ‘Shall I say it?’ Brian was wondering. ‘Shall I tell him?’ And suddenly, as though a dam had burst, his irresolution was swept away. ‘I’ve decided,’ he said aloud, and the feeling with which he spoke the words was so strong that it lifted him, almost without his knowledge, to his feet and sent him striding restlessly about the room, ‘I’ve decided that I shall g-go on with ph-philosophy and l-literature and h-history till I’m thirty. Then it’ll be t-time to do something else. S-something more dir-rect.’

‘Direct?’ Anthony repeated. ‘In what way?’

‘In getting at p-people. In r-realizing the k-kingdom of G-god . . .’ The very intensity of his desire to communicate what he was feeling reduced him to dumbness.

Listening to Brian's words, looking up into the serious and ardent face, Anthony felt himself touched, profoundly, to the quick of his being . . . felt himself touched, and, for that very reason, came at once under a kind of compulsion, as though in self-defence, to react to his own emotion, and his friend's, with a piece of derision. 'Washing the feet of the poor, for example,' he suggested. 'And drying them on your hair. It'll be awkward if you go prematurely bald.'

Afterwards, when Brian had gone, he felt ashamed of his ignoble ribaldry — humiliated, at the same time, by the unreflecting automatism with which he had brought it out. Like those pithed frogs that twitch when you apply a drop of acid to their skin. A brainless response.

'Damn!' he said aloud, then picked up his book.

He was deep once more in The Way of Perfection when there was a thump at the door and a voice, deliberately harshened so as to be like the voice of a drill-sergeant on parade, shouted his name.

'These bloody stairs of yours!' said Gerry Watchett as he came in. 'Why the devil do you live in such a filthy hole?'

Gerry Watchett was fair-skinned, with small, unemphatic features and wavy golden-brown hair. A good-looking young man, but good-looking, in spite of his height and powerful build, almost to girlish prettiness. For the casual observer, there was an air about him of Arcadian freshness and innocence, strangely belied, however, upon a closer examination, by the hard insolence in his blue eyes, by the faint smile of derision and contempt that kept returning to his face, by the startling coarseness of those thick-fingered, short-nailed hands.

Anthony pointed to a chair. But the other shook his head. 'No, I'm in a hurry. Just rushed in to say you've got to come to dinner tonight.'

'But I can't.'

Gerry frowned. 'Why not?'

'I've got a meeting of the Fabians.'

'And you call that a reason for not coming to dine with me?'

'Seeing I've promised to . . .'

‘Then I can expect you at eight?’

‘But really . . .’

‘Don’t be a fool! What does it matter? A mothers’ meeting?’

‘But what excuse shall I give?’

‘Any bloody thing you like. Tell them you’ve just had twins.’

‘All right, then,’ Anthony agreed at last. ‘I’ll come.’

‘Thank you very kindly,’ said Gerry, with mock politeness. ‘I’d have broken your neck if you hadn’t. Well, so long.’ At the door he halted. ‘I’m having Bimbo Abinger, and Ted, and Willie Monmouth, and Scroope. I wanted to get old Gorchakov too; but the fool’s gone and got ill at the last moment. That’s why I had to ask you,’ he added with a quiet matter-of-factness that was far more offensive than any emphasis could have been; then turned, and was gone.

‘Do you l-like him?’ Brian had asked one day when Gerry’s name came up between them. And because the question evoked an uneasy echo in his own consciousness, Anthony had answered, with a quite unnecessary sharpness, that of course he liked Gerry. ‘Why else do you suppose I go about with him?’ he had concluded, looking at Brian with irritable suspicion. Brian made no reply; and the question had returned like a boomerang upon the asker. Yes why did he go about with Gerry? For of course he didn’t like the man; Gerry had hurt and humiliated him, was ready, he knew, to hurt and humiliate him again on the slightest provocation. Or rather without any provocation at all — just for fun, because it amused him to humiliate people, because he had a natural talent for inflicting pain. So why, why?

Mere snobbery, as Anthony was forced to admit to himself, was part of the discreditable secret. It was absurd and ridiculous; but the fact remained, nevertheless, that it pleased him to associate with Gerry and his friends. To be the intimate of these young aristocrats and plutocrats, and at the same time to know himself their superior in intelligence, taste, judgement, in all the things that really mattered, was satisfying to his vanity.

Admitting his intellectual superiority, the young barbarians expected him to pay for their admiration by amusing them. He was their intimate, yes; but as

Voltaire was the intimate of Frederick the Great, as Diderot of the Empress Catherine. The resident philosopher is not easily distinguishable from the court fool.

With genuine appreciation, but at the same time patronizingly, offensively, ‘Good for the Professor!’ Gerry would say after one of his sallies. Or, ‘Another drink for the old Professor’ — as though he were an Italian organ-grinder, playing for pennies.

The prick of remembered humiliation was sharp like an insect’s sting. With sudden violence Anthony heaved himself out of his chair and began to walk, frowning, up and down the room.

A middle-class snob tolerated because of his capacities as an entertainer. The thought was hateful, wounding. ‘Why do I stand it?’ he wondered. ‘Why am I such a damned fool? I shall write Gerry a note to say I can’t come.’ But time passed; the note remained unwritten. For, after all, he was thinking, there were also advantages, there were also satisfactions. An evening spent with Gerry and his friends was exhilarating, was educative. Exhilarating and educative, not because of anything they said or thought — for they were all stupid, all bottomlessly ignorant; but because of what they were, of what their circumstances had made them. For, thanks to their money and their position, they were able actually to live in such freedom as Anthony had only imagined or read about. For them, the greater number of the restrictions which had always hedged him in did not even exist. They permitted themselves as a matter of course licences which he took only in theory, and which he felt constrained even then to justify with all the resources of a carefully perverted metaphysic, an ingeniously adulterated mystical theology. By the mere force of social and economic circumstances, these ignorant barbarians found themselves quite naturally behaving as he did not dare to behave even after reading all Nietzsche had said about the Superman, or Casanova about women. Nor did they have to study Patanjali or Jacob Boehme in order to find excuses for the intoxications of wine and sensuality: they just got drunk and had their girls, like that, as though they were in the Garden of Eden. They faced life, not diffidently and

apologetically, as Anthony faced it, not wistfully, from behind invisible bars, but with the serenely insolent assurance of those who know that God intended them to enjoy themselves and had decreed the unfailing acquiescence of their fellows in all their desires.

True, they also had their confining prejudices; they too on occasion were as ready as poor old Brian to lock themselves up in the prison of a code. But code and prejudices were of their own particular caste; therefore, so far as Anthony was concerned, without binding force. Their example delivered him from the chains that his upbringing had fastened upon him, but was powerless to bind him with those other chains in which they themselves walked through life. In their company the compulsions of respectability, the paralysing fear of public opinion, the inhibitory maxims of middle-class prudence fell away from him; but when Bimbo Abinger indignantly refused even to listen to the suggestion that he should sell the monstrous old house that was eating up three-quarters of his income, when Scroope complained that he would have to go into Parliament, because in his family the eldest sons had always sat in the House of Commons before coming into the title, Anthony could only feel the amused astonishment of an explorer watching the religious antics of a tribe of blackamoors. A rational being does not allow himself to be converted to the cult of Mumbo Jumbo; but he will have no objection to occasionally going a bit native. The worship of Mumbo Jumbo means the acceptance of taboos; going native means freedom. ‘True freedom!’ Anthony grinned to himself; his good humour and equanimity had returned. A snob, a middle-class snob. No doubt. But there was a reason for his snobbery, a justification. And if the lordly young barbarians tended to regard him as a sort of high-class buffoon — well, that was the price he had to pay for their gift of freedom. There was no price to be paid for associating with the Fabians; but then, how little they had to give to him! Socialist doctrines might to some extent theoretically liberate the intellect; but the example of the young barbarians was a liberation in the sphere of practice.

‘So frightfully sorry,’ he scribbled in his note to Brian. ‘Suddenly remembered I’d booked myself for dinner tonight.’ (‘Booked’ was one of his

father’s words — a word he ordinarily detested for its affectation. Writing a lie, he had found it coming spontaneously to his pen.) ‘Alas’ (that was also a favourite locution of his father’s), ‘shan’t be able to listen to you on sin! Wish I could get out of this, but don’t see how. Yours, A.’

*

By the time the fruit was on the table they were all pretty drunk. Gerry Watchett was telling Scroope about that German baroness he had had on the boat, on the way to Egypt. Abinger had no audience, but was reciting limericks: the Young Lady of Wick, the Old Man of Devizes, the Young Man called Maclean — a whole dictionary of national biography. Ted and Willie were having a violent quarrel about the best way of shooting grouse. Alone of the party, Anthony was silent. Speech would have compromised the delicate happiness he was then enjoying. That last glass of champagne had made him the inhabitant of a new world, extraordinarily beautiful and precious and significant. The apples and oranges in the silver bowl were like enormous gems. Each glass, under the candles, contained, not wine, but a great yellow beryl, solid and translucent. The roses had the glossy texture of satin and the shining hardness and distinctness of form belonging to metal or glass. Even sound was frozen and crystalline. The Young Lady of Kew was the equivalent, in his ears, of a piece of sculptured jade, and that violently futile discussion about grouse seemed like a waterfall in winter. Le transparent glacier des vols qui n’ont pas fui, he thought with heightened pleasure. Everything was supernaturally brilliant and distinct, but at the same time how remote, how strangely irrelevant! Bright against the outer twilight of the room, the faces grouped about the table might have been things seen on the other side of a sheet of plate-glass, in an illuminated aquarium. And the aquarium was not only without, it was also, mysteriously, within him. Looking through the glass at those sea flowers and submarine gems, he was himself a fish — but a fish of genius, a fish that was also a god. Ichthus — Iesous Christos theou huios soter. His divine fish-soul hung there, poised in its alien element, gazing, gazing through huge eyes that perceived everything,

understood everything, but having no part in what it saw. Even his own hands lying there on the table in front of him had ceased, in any real sense, to be his. From his aquarium fastness he viewed them with the same detached and happy admiration as he felt for the fruits and flowers, or those other transfigured bits of still life, the faces of his friends. Beautiful hands! contrived — how marvellously! — to perform their innumerable functions — the pointing of double-barrelled guns at flying birds, the caressing of the thighs of German baronesses in liners, the playing of imaginary scales upon the tablecloth, so. Enchanted, he watched the movements of his fingers, the smooth sliding of the tendons under the skin. Exquisite hands! But no more truly a part of himself, of the essential fish-soul in its timeless aquarium, than the hands of Abinger peeling that banana, the hands of Scroope carrying a match to his cigar. I am not my body, I am not my sensations, I am not even my mind; I am that I am. I om that I om. The sacred word OM represents Him. God is not limited by time. For the One is not absent from anything, and yet is separated from all things. . . .

‘Hi, Professor!’ A piece of orange-peel struck him on the cheek. He started and turned round. ‘What the hell are you thinking about?’ Gerry Watchett was asking in that purposely harsh voice which it amused him to put on like a hideous mask.

The momentarily troubled waters of the aquarium had already returned to rest. A fish once more, a divine and remotely happy Fish, Anthony smiled at him with serene indulgence.

‘I was thinking about Plotinus,’ he said.

‘Why Plotinus?’

‘Why Plotinus? But, my dear sir, isn’t it obvious? Science is reason, and reason is multitudinous.’ The fish had found a tongue; eloquence flowed from the aquarium in an effortless stream. ‘But if one happens to be feeling particularly unmultitudinous — well, what else is there to think about except Plotinus? Unless, of course, you prefer the pseudo-Dionysius, or Eckhart, or St Teresa. The flight of the alone to the Alone. Even St Thomas is forced to admit that no mind can see the divine substance unless it is divorced from bodily

senses, either by death or by some rapture. Some rapture, mark you! But a rapture is always a rapture, whatever it's due to. Whether it's champagne, or saying OM, or squinting at your nose, or looking at a crucifix, or making love — preferably in a boat, Gerry; I'm the first to admit it; preferably in a boat. What are the wild waves saying? Rapture! Ecstasy! Fairly yelling it. Until, mark you, until, the breath of this corporeal frame and even the motion of our human blood almost suspended, we are laid asleep in body, and become a living soul, while with an eye made quiet . . .'

'There was a Young Fellow of Burma,' Abinger suddenly declaimed.

'Made quiet,' Anthony repeated more loudly, 'by the power of harmony . . .'

'Whose betrothed had good reasons to murmur.'

'And the deep power of joy,' shouted Anthony, 'we see . . .'

'But now that they're married he's

'Been taking cantharides . . .'

'We see into the life of things. The life of things, I tell you. The life of things. And damn all Fabians!' he added.

*

Anthony got back to his lodgings at about a quarter to midnight, and was unpleasantly startled, as he entered the sitting-room, to see someone rising with the violent impatience of a jack-in-the-box from an armchair.

'God, what a fright . . . !'

'At last!' said Mark Staithes. His emphatically featured face wore an expression of angry impatience. 'I've been waiting nearly an hour.' Then, with contempt, 'You're drunk,' he added.

'As though you'd never been drunk!' Anthony retorted. 'I remember . . .'

'So do I,' said Mark Staithes, interrupting him. 'But that was in my first year.' In his first year, when he had felt it necessary to prove that he was manly — manlier than the toughest of them, noisier, harder drinking. 'I've got something better to do now.'

'So you imagine,' said Anthony.

The other looked at his watch. ‘I’ve got about seven minutes,’ he said. ‘Are you sober enough to listen?’

Anthony sat down with dignity and in silence.

Short, but square-shouldered and powerful, Mark stood over him, almost menacingly. ‘It’s about Brian,’ he said.

‘About Brian?’ Then with a knowing smile, ‘That reminds me,’ Anthony added, ‘I ought to have congratulated you on being our future president.’

‘Fool!’ said Mark angrily. ‘Do you think I go about accepting charity? When he withdrew, I withdrew too.’

‘And let that dreary little Mumby walk into the job?’

‘What the devil do I care about Mumby?’

‘What do any of us care about anybody?’ said Anthony sententiously. ‘Nothing, thank God. Absolutely noth . . .’

‘What does he mean by insulting me like that?’

‘Who? Little Mumby?’

‘No; Brian, of course.’

‘He thinks he’s being nice to you.’

‘I don’t want his damned niceness,’ said Mark. ‘Why can’t he behave properly?’

‘Because it amuses him to behave like a Christian.’

‘Well, then, tell him for God’s sake to try it on someone else in future. I don’t like having Christian tricks played on me.’

‘You want a cock to fight, in fact.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Otherwise it’s no fun being on top of the dunghill. Whereas Brian would like us all to be jolly little capons together. Well, so far as dunghills are concerned, I’m all for Brian. It’s when we come to the question of the hens that I begin to hesitate.’

Mark looked at his watch again. ‘I must go.’ At the door he turned back. ‘Don’t forget to tell him what I’ve told you. I like Brian, and I don’t want to quarrel with him. But if he tries being charitable and Christian again . . .’

‘The poor boy will forfeit your esteem for ever,’ concluded Anthony.

‘Buffoon!’ said Staithes, and slamming the door behind him, hurried downstairs.

Left alone, Anthony took the fifth volume of the Historical Dictionary and began to read what Bayle had to say about Spinoza.

CHAPTER ELEVEN. December 8th 1926

‘CONDAR INTRA MEUM latus! It is the only place of refuge left to us.’ Anthony rolled the sheet off his typewriter, added it to the other sheets lying before him on the table, clipped them together and started to read through what he had written. Chapter XI of his Elements of Sociology was to deal with the Individual and his conceptions of Personality. He had spent the day jotting down unmethodically a few preliminary reflections.

‘Cogito ergo sum,’ he read. ‘But why not caco ergo sum? Eructo ergo sum? Or, escaping solipsism, why not futuo ergo sumus? Ribald questions. But what is “personality”?

‘MacTaggart knows his personality by direct acquaintance; others by description. Hume and Bradley don’t know theirs at all, and don’t believe it really exists. Mere splitting, all this, of a bald man’s imaginary hairs. What matters is that “Personality” happens to be a common word with a generally accepted meaning.

‘People discuss my “personality”. What are they talking about? Not homo cacans, nor homo eructans, not even, except very superficially, homo futuens. No, they are talking about homo sentiens (impossible Latin) and homo cogitans. And when, in public, I talk about “myself”, I talk about the same two homines. My “personality”, in the present conventional sense of the word, is what I think and feel — or, rather, what I confess to thinking and feeling. Caco, eructo, futuo — I never admit that the first person singular of such verbs is really me. Only when, for any reason, they palpably affect my feelings and thinking do the processes they stand for come within the bounds of my “personality”. (This censorship makes ultimate nonsense of all literature. Plays and novels just aren’t true.)

‘Thus, the “personal” is the creditable, or rather the potentially creditable. Not the morally undifferentiated.

‘It is also the enduring. Very short experiences are even less personal than discreditable or merely vegetative experiences. They become personal only when accompanied by feeling and thought, or when reverberated by memory.

‘Matter, analysed, consists of empty space and electric charges. Take a woman and a washstand. Different in kind. But their component electric charges are similar in kind. Odder still, each of these component electric charges is different in kind from the whole woman or washstand. Changes in quantity, when sufficiently great, produces changes in quality. Now, human experience is analogous to matter. Analyse it — and you find yourself in the presence of psychological atoms. A lot of these atoms constitute normal experience, and a selection from normal experience constitutes “personality”. Each individual atom is unlike normal experience and still more unlike personality. Conversely, each atom in one experience resembles the corresponding atom in another. Viewed microscopically, a woman’s body is just like a washstand, and Napoleon’s experience is just like Wellington’s. Why do we imagine that solid matter exists? Because of the grossness of our sense organs. And why do we imagine that we have coherent experiences and personality? Because our minds work slowly and have very feeble powers of analysis. Our world and we who live in it are the creations of stupidity and bad sight.

‘Recently, however, thinking and seeing have been improved. We have instruments that will resolve matter into very small parts and a mathematical technique that allows us to think about still smaller parts.

‘Psychologists have no new instruments, only new techniques of thought. All their inventions are purely mental — techniques of analysis and observation, working hypotheses. Thanks to the novelists and professional psychologists, we can think of our experience in terms of atoms and instants as well as in terms of lumps and hours. To be a tolerably good psychologist was possible, in the past, only for men of genius. Compare Chaucer’s psychology with Gower’s, even Boccaccio’s. Compare Shakespeare’s with Ben Jonson’s. The difference is one

not only of quality, but also of quantity. The men of genius knew more than their merely intelligent contemporaries.

‘Today, there is a corpus of knowledge, a technique, a working hypothesis. The amount a merely intelligent man can know is enormous — more than an unlearned man of genius relying solely on intuition.

‘Were the Gowers and Jonsons hampered by their ignorance? Not at all. Their ignorance was the standard knowledge of their times. A few monsters of intuition might know more than they; but the majority knew even less.

‘And here a digression — sociologically speaking, more important than the theme digressed from. There are fashions in personality. Fashions that vary in time — like crinolines and hobble skirts — and fashions that vary in space — like Gold Coast loincloths and Lombard Street tail-coats. In primitive societies everyone wears, and longs to wear, the same personality. But each society has a different psychological costume. Among the Red Indians of the North-West Pacific Coast the ideal personality was that of a mildly crazy egotist competing with his rivals on the plane of wealth and conspicuous consumption. Among the Plains Indians, it was that of an egotist competing with others in the sphere of warlike exploits. Among the Pueblo Indians, the ideal personality was neither that of an egotist, nor of a conspicuous consumer, nor of a fighter, but of the perfectly gregarious man who makes great efforts never to distinguish himself, who knows the traditional rites and gestures and tries to be exactly like everyone else.

‘European societies are large and racially, economically, professionally heterogeneous; therefore orthodoxy is hard to impose, and there are several contemporaneous ideals of personality. (Note that Fascists and Communists are trying to create one single “right” ideal — in other words, are trying to make industrialized Europeans behave as though they were Dyaks or Eskimos. The attempt, in the long run, is doomed to failure; but in the meantime, what fun they will get from bullying the heretics!)

‘In our world, what are the ruling fashions? There are, of course, the ordinary clerical and commercial modes — turned out by the little dressmakers round the

corner. And then la haute couture. Ravissante personnalité d'intérieur de chez Proust, Maison Nietzsche et Kipling: personnalité de sport. Personnalité de nuit, création de Lawrence. Personnalité de bain, par Joyce. Note the interesting fact that, of these, the personnalité de sport is the only one that can really count as a personality in the accepted sense of the word. The others are to a greater or less extent impersonal, because to a greater or less extent atomic. And this brings us back to Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. A pragmatist would have us say that Jonson's psychology was "truer" than Shakespeare's. Most of his contemporaries did in fact perceive themselves and were perceived as Humours. It took Shakespeare to see what a lot there was outside the boundaries of the Humour, behind the conventional mask. But Shakespeare was in a minority of one — or, if you set Montaigne beside him, of two. Humours "worked"; the complex, partially atomized personalities of Shakespeare didn't.

'In the story of the emperor's new clothes the child perceives that the man is naked. Shakespeare reversed the process. His contemporaries thought they were just naked Humours; he saw that they were covered with a whole wardrobe of psychological fancy dress.

'Take Hamlet. Hamlet inhabited a world whose best psychologist was Polonius. If he had known as little as Polonius, he would have been happy. But he knew too much; and in this consists his tragedy. Read his parable of the musical instruments. Polonius and the others assumed as axiomatic that man was a penny whistle with only half a dozen stops. Hamlet knew that, potentially as least, he was a whole symphony orchestra.

'Mad, Ophelia lets the cat out of the bag. "We know what we are, but know not what we may be." Polonius knows very clearly what he and other people are, within the ruling conventions. Hamlet knows this, but also what they may be — outside the local system of masks and humours.

'To be the only man of one's age to know what people may be as well as what they conventionally are! Shakespeare must have gone through some disquieting quarters of an hour.

‘It was left to Blake to rationalize psychological atomism into a philosophical system. Man, according to Blake (and, after him, according to Proust, according to Lawrence), is simply a succession of states. Good and evil can be predicated only of states, not of individuals, who in fact don’t exist, except as the places where the states occur. It is the end of personality in the old sense of the word. (Parenthetically — for this is quite outside the domain of sociology — is it the beginning of a new kind of personality? That of the total man, unbowdlerized, unselected, uncanalized, to change the metaphor, down any one particular drainpipe of Weltanschauung — of the man, in a word, who actually is what he may be. Such a man is the antithesis of any of the variants on the fundamental Christian man of our history. And yet in a certain sense he is also the realization of the ideal personality conceived by the Jesus of the Gospel. Like Jesus’s ideal personality, the total, unexpurgated, non-canalized man is (1) not pharisaic, that is to say, not interested in convention and social position, not puffed up with the pride of being better than other men; (2) humble, in his acceptance of himself, in his refusal to exalt himself above his human station; (3) poor in spirit, inasmuch as “he” — his ego — lays no lasting claims on anything, is content with what, for a personality of the old type, would seem psychological and philosophical destitution; (4) like a little child, in his acceptance of the immediate datum of experience for its own sake, in his refusal to take thought for the morrow, in his readiness to let the dead bury their dead; (5) not a hypocrite or a liar, since there is no fixed model which individuals must pretend to be like.)

‘A question: did the old personality ever really exist? In the year m men feel x in context z. In the year n they feel the same x in quite a different context p. But x is a major emotion — vitally significant for personality. And yet x is felt in contexts that change with the changing conventions of fashion. “Rather death than dishonour.” But honour is like women’s skirts. Worn short, worn long, worn full, worn narrow, worn with petticoats, worn minus drawers. Up to 1750 you were expected to feel, you did feel, mortally dishonoured if you saw a man pinching your sister’s bottom. So intense was your indignation, that you had to try to kill him. Today, our honours have migrated from the fleshy parts of our

female relations' anatomy, and have their seats elsewhere. And soon, indefinitely.

'So what is personality? And what is it not?

'It is not our total experience. It is not the psychological atom or instant. It is not sense impressions as such, nor vegetative life as such.

'It is experience in the lump and by the hour. It is feeling and thought.

'And who makes this selection from total experience, and on what principle? Sometimes we make it — whoever we are. But as often it is made for us — by the collective unwisdom of a class, a whole society. To a great extent, "personality" is not even our personal property.

'Vaguely, but ever more widely, this fact is now coming to be realized. At the same time, ever-increasing numbers of people are making use of the modern techniques to see themselves and others microscopically and instantaneously, as well as in the lump and by the hour. Moreover, having a working hypothesis of the unconscious, increasing numbers are becoming aware of their secret motives, and so are perceiving the large part played in their lives by the discreditable and vegetative elements of experience. With what results? That the old conception of personality has begun to break down. And not only the conception, also the fact. "Strong personalities", even "definite personalities", are becoming less common. Fascists have to go out of their way to manufacture them, deliberately, by a suitable process of education. An education that is simplification, Eskimization; that entails the suppression of psychological knowledge and the inculcation of respect for psychological ignorance. Odious policy — but, I suspect, inevitable and, sociologically speaking, right. For our psychological acumen is probably harmful to society. Society has need of simple Jonsonian Humours, not of formless collections of self-conscious states. Yet another example of the banefulness of too much knowledge and too much scientific technique.

'Once more, Hamlet casts a light. Polonius is much more obviously and definitely a person than the prince. Indeed, Hamlet's personality is so indefinite that critics have devoted thousands of pages to the discussion of what it really was. In fact, of course, Hamlet didn't have a personality — knew altogether too

much to have one. He was conscious of his total experience, atom by atom and instant by instant, and accepted no guiding principle which would make him choose one set of patterned atoms to represent his personality rather than another. To himself and to others he was just a succession of more or less incongruous states. Hence that perplexity at Elsinore and among the Shakespearian critics ever since. Honour, Religion, Prejudice, Love — all the conventional props that shore up the ordinary personality have been, in this case, gnawed through. Hamlet is his own termite, and from a tower has eaten himself down to a heap of sawdust. Only one thing prevents Polonius and the rest from immediately perceiving the fact: whatever the state of his mind, Hamlet's body is still intact, unatomized, macroscopically present to the senses. And perhaps, after all, this is the real reason for our belief in personality: — the existence and persistence of bodies. And perhaps whatever reality there is in the notion of coherent individual continuity is just a function of this physical persistence. "Such hair, such a wonderful figure! I think Mrs Jones has a lovely poyssonality." When I heard that, in the bus going up Fifth Avenue, it made me laugh. Whereas I probably ought to have listened as though to Spinoza. For what is the most personal thing about a human being? Not his mind — his body. A Hearst, a Rothermere, can mould my feelings, coerce my thinking. But no amount of propaganda can make my digestion or metabolism become identical to theirs. Cogito, ergo Rothermere est. But caco, ergo sum.

'And here, I suspect, lies the reason for that insistence, during recent years, on the rights of the body. From the Boy Scouts to the fashionable sodomites, and from Elizabeth Arden to D. H. Lawrence (one of the most powerful personality-smashers, incidentally: there are no "characters" in his books). Always and everywhere the body. Now the body possesses one enormous merit; it is indubitably there. Whereas the personality, as a mental structure, may be all in bits — gnawed down to Hamlet's heap of sawdust. Only the rather stupid and insentient, nowadays, have strong and sharply defined personalities. Only the barbarians among us "know what they are". The civilized are conscious of "what they may be", and so are incapable of knowing what, for practical, social

purposes, they actually are — have forgotten how to select a personality out of their total atomic experience. In the swamp and welter of this uncertainty the body stands firm like the Rock of Ages.

Jesu, pro me perforatus,

Condar intra tuum latus.

Even faith hankers for warm caverns of perforated flesh. How much more wildly urgent must be the demands of a scepticism that has ceased to believe even in its own personality! Condar intra MEUM latus! It is the only place of refuge left to us.'

Anthony laid the typescript down, and, tilting backwards, rocked himself precariously on the hind legs of his chair. Not so bad, he was thinking. But there were obviously omissions, there were obviously unjustifiable generalizations. He had written of the world in general as though the world in general were like himself — from the desire, of course, that it should be. For how simple it would be if it were! How agreeable! Each man a succession of states enclosed in the flesh of his own side. And if any other principle of coherence were needed, there was always some absorbing and delightful intellectual interest, like sociology, for example, to supplement the persisting body. Condar intra meum laborem. Instead of which . . . He sighed. In spite of Hamlet, in spite of The Prophetic Books, in spite of Du côté de chez Swann and Women in Love, the world was still full of Jonsonian Humours. Full of the villains of melodrama, the equally deplorable heroes of films, full of Poincarés, of Mussolinis, of Northcliffes, full of ambitious and avaricious mischief-makers of every size and shape.

An idea occurred to him. He let his tilted chair fall forward and picked up his fountain-pen.

'Last infirmity of noble mind, the primary, perhaps only, source of sin,' he scribbled. 'Noble mind = evil mind. Tree known by fruits. What are fruits of fame-seeking, ambition, desire to excel? Among others, war, nationalism, economic competition, snobbery, class hatred, colour prejudice. Comus quite right to preach sensuality; and how foolish of Satan to tempt a, by definition, ahimsa-practising Messiah with fame, dominion, ambition — things whose

inevitable fruits are violence and coercion! Compared with fame-seeking, pure sensuality all but harmless. Were Freud right and sex supreme, we should live almost in Eden. Alas, only half-right. Adler also half-right. Hinc illae lac.'

He looked at his watch. Twenty past seven — and he had to be in Kensington by eight! In his bath, he wondered what the evening would be like. It was twelve years now since he had quarrelled with Mary Amberley. Twelve years, during which he had seen her only at a distance — in picture galleries, once or twice; and across the drawing-room of a common friend. 'I don't ever want to speak to you again,' he had written in that last letter to her. And yet, a few days since, when her reconciliatory invitation had unexpectedly appeared with the other letters on his breakfast table, he had accepted immediately; accepted in the same tone as that in which the invitation itself was couched — casually, matter-of-factly, with no more explicit reference to the past than a 'Yes, it's a long time since I last dined at Number 17.' And after all, why not? What was the point of doing things finally and irrevocably? What right had the man of 1914 to commit the man of 1926? The 1914 man had been an embodied state of anger, shame, distress, perplexity. His state today was one of cheerful serenity, mingled, so far as Mary Amberley was concerned, with considerable curiosity. What would she be like now — at forty-three, was it? And was she really as amusing as he remembered her? Or had his admiration been only one of the fruits — the absurd, delicious fruits — of youthful inexperience? Would his swan turn out a goose? Or still a swan — but moulted, but (poor Mary!) middle-aged? Still wondering, he hurried downstairs and into the street.

CHAPTER TWELVE. August 30th 1933

A FAINT RUSTLING caressed the half-conscious fringes of their torpor, swelled gradually, as though a shell were being brought closer and closer to the ear, and became at last a clattering roar that brutally insisted on attention. Anthony opened his eyes for just long enough to see that the aeroplane was almost immediately above them, then shut them again, dazzled by the intense blue of the sky.

‘These damned machines!’ he said. Then, with a little laugh, ‘They’ll have a nice God’s-eye view of us here,’ he added.

Helen did not answer; but behind her closed eyelids she smiled. Pop-eyed and with an obscene and gloating disapproval! The vision of that heavenly visitant was irresistibly comic.

‘David and Bathsheba,’ he went on. ‘Unfortunately at a hundred miles an hour . . .’

A strange yelping sound punctuated the din of the machine. Anthony opened his eyes again, and was in time to see a dark shape rushing down towards him. He uttered a cry, made a quick and automatic movement to shield his face. With a violent but dull and muddy impact the thing struck the flat roof a yard or two from where they were lying. The drops of a sharply spurted liquid were warm for an instant on their skin, and then, as the breeze swelled up out of the west, startlingly cold. There was a long second of silence. ‘Christ!’ Anthony whispered at last. From head to foot both of them were splashed with blood. In a red pool at their feet lay the almost shapeless carcass of a fox-terrier. The roar of the receding aeroplane had diminished to a raucous hum, and suddenly the ear found itself conscious once again of the shrill rasping of the cicadas.

Anthony drew a deep breath; then, with an effort and still rather unsteadily, contrived to laugh. ‘Yet another reason for disliking dogs,’ he said, and,

scrambling to his feet, looked down, his face puckered with disgust, at his blood-bedabbled body. ‘What about a bath?’ he asked, turning to Helen.

She was sitting quite still, staring with wide-open eyes at the horribly shattered carcass. Her face was very pale, and a glancing spurt of blood had left a long red streak that ran diagonally from the right side of the chin, across the mouth, to the corner of the left eye.

‘You look like Lady Macbeth,’ he said, with another effort at jocularity. ‘Allons.’ He touched her shoulder. ‘Out, vile spot. This beastly stuff’s drying on me. Like seccotine.’

For all answer, Helen covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

For a moment Anthony stood quite still, looking at her crouched there, in the hopeless abjection of her blood-stained nakedness, listening to the painful sound of her weeping. ‘Like seccotine’: his own words re-echoed disgracefully in his ears. Pity stirred within him, and then an almost violent movement of love for this hurt and suffering woman, this person, yes, this person whom he had ignored, deliberately, as though she had no existence except in the context of pleasure. Now, as she knelt there sobbing, all the tenderness he had ever felt for her body, all the affection implicit in their sensualities and never expressed, seemed suddenly to discharge themselves, in a kind of lightning flash of accumulated feeling, upon this person, this embodied spirit, weeping in solitude behind concealing hands.

He knelt down beside her on the mattress, and, with a gesture that was meant to express all that he now felt, put an arm round her shoulder.

But at his touch she winced away as if from a defilement. With a violent, shuddering movement she shook her head.

‘But, Helen . . .’ he protested, in the stupid conviction that there must be some mistake, that it was impossible that she shouldn’t be feeling what he was feeling. It was only a question of making her understand what had happened to him. He laid his hand once more on her shoulder. ‘But I care, I’m so fond . . .’ Even now he refused to commit himself to the word ‘love’.

‘Don’t touch me,’ she cried almost inarticulately, leaning away from him.

He withdrew his hand, but remained there, kneeling beside her, in perplexed and miserable silence. He remembered the time when she had wanted to be allowed to love, and how he had evaded her, had refused to take more of the person that she was, or to give more of himself, than the occasional and discontinuous amorousness of their bodies. She had ended by accepting his terms — accepting them so completely that now . . .

‘Helen,’ he ventured once more. She must be made to understand.

Helen shook her head again. ‘Leave me alone,’ she said; then, as he did not move, she uncovered a face now grotesquely smudged with blood and looked at him. ‘Why can’t you go away?’ she asked, making an effort to express a cold dispassionate resentment of his intrusion upon her. Then, suddenly, her tears began to flow again. ‘Oh, please go away!’ she implored. Her voice broke, and turning aside, she once more buried her face in her hands.

Anthony hesitated for a moment; then, realizing that he would only make things worse if he stayed on, rose to his feet and left her. ‘Give her time,’ he said to himself, ‘give her time.’

He took a bath, dressed and went down to the sitting-room. The snapshots were lying as they had left them, scattered over the table. He sat down and methodically began to sort them out, subject by subject, into little heaps. Mary in plumes; Mary veiled, clambering into a pre-war Renault; Mary bathing at Dieppe in a half-sleeved bodice and bloomers that were covered to the knee by a little skirt. His mother in a garden; feeding the pigeons in the Piazza San Marco; and then her grave at Lollingdon churchyard. His father with an alpenstock; roped to a guide on a snow slope; with Pauline and the two children. Uncle James on his bicycle; Uncle James wearing a speckled straw hat; rowing on the Serpentine; talking, ten years later, with convalescent soldiers in a hospital garden. Then Brian; Brian with Anthony’s own former self at Bulstrode; Brian in a punt with Joan and Mrs Foxe; Brian climbing in the Lakes. That girl he had had an affair with in New York, in 1927, was it? His grandmother. His aunts. Half a dozen snaps of Gladys . . .

Half an hour later he heard Helen's steps, cautious at first and slow on the precipitous stairs leading down from the roof, then swift along the passage. Water splashed in the bath.

Time, she must have time. He decided to behave towards her as though nothing had happened. It was almost cheerfully, therefore, that he greeted her as she entered the room.

'Well?' he questioned brightly, looking up from his photographs. But the sight of that pale and stonily collected face filled him with misgiving.

'I'm going,' she said.

'Now? Before lunch?'

She nodded.

'But why?'

'I prefer it,' was all she answered.

Anthony was silent for a moment, wondering whether he ought to protest, to insist, to tell her the things he had tried to tell her on the roof. But the stoniness of her composure proclaimed in advance that the attempt would be useless. Later, when she had got over the first shock, when she had been given time . . . 'All right, then,' he said aloud. 'I'll drive you back to the hotel.'

Helen shook her head. 'No, I shall walk.'

'Not in this heat!'

'I shall walk,' she repeated in a tone of finality.

'Well, if you also prefer to swelter . . .' He tried to smile, without much success.

She passed through the glass doors on to the terrace, and suddenly that pale stony face was as though fire-flushed by the reflection from her pyjamas. In hell again, he said to himself, as he followed her.

'Why do you come out?' she asked.

'I'll take you as far as the gate.'

'There's no need.'

'I prefer it.'

She did not return his smile, but walked on without speaking.

Two small bushy plants of buddleia grew on either side of the steps that led down from the terrace. On the hot air the scent of the flowers (itself, so it seemed, intrinsically hot) was of an intense and violent sweetness.

‘Delicious,’ Anthony said aloud as they stepped into the perfumed aura of the blossoms. ‘Almost too delicious. But look!’ he called in another voice, and caught her sleeve. ‘Do look!’

New from the chrysalis, bright and still untattered, a swallowtail had settled on one of the clusters of mauve flowers. The pale yellow wings, with their black markings, their eyes of blue and crimson, were fully outstretched in the sunlight. Their forward edges had the curve of a sabre, and from the tips the line slanted elegantly backwards towards the two projecting tails of the lower wings. The whole butterfly seemed the symbol, the hieroglyph of gay and airy speed. The spread wings were tremulous as though from an uncontrollable excess of life, of passionate energy. Rapidly, ravenously, but with an extraordinary precision of purposeful movement, the creature plunged its uncoiled proboscis into the tiny trumpet-shaped flowers that composed the cluster. A quick motion of the head and thorax, and the probe had been thrust home, to be withdrawn a moment later and plunged as swiftly and unerringly between the lips of another and yet another flower, until all the blooms within striking distance had been explored and it was necessary to hasten on towards a yet unrifled part of the cluster. Again, again, to the very quick of the expectant flowers, deep to the sheathed and hidden sources of that hot intoxicating sweetness! Again, again, with what a tireless concupiscence, what an intense passion of aimed and accurate greed!

For a long minute they watched in silence. Then, suddenly, Helen stretched out her hand and flicked the cluster on which the butterfly was settled. But before her finger had even touched the flowers, the light, bright creature was gone. A quick flap of the wings, then a long soaring swoop; another spurt of fluttering movement, another long catenary of downward and upward slanting flight, and it was out of sight behind the house.

‘Why did you do that?’ he asked.

Pretending not to have heard his question, Helen ran down the steps and along the gravelled path. At the gate of the garden she halted and turned back.

‘Good-bye, Anthony.’

‘When are you coming again?’ he asked.

Helen looked at him for a few seconds without speaking, then shook her head. ‘I’m not coming,’ she said at last.

‘Not coming again?’ he repeated. ‘What do you mean?’

But she had already slammed the gate behind her and with long springing strides was hurrying along the dusty road under the pine trees.

Anthony watched her go, and knew that, for the moment at least, it was no good even trying to do anything. It would only make things worse if he followed her. Later on, perhaps; this evening, when she had had time . . . But walking back along the garden path, through the now unheeded perfume of the buddleias, he wondered uneasily whether it would be much good, even later on. He knew Helen’s obstinacy. And then what right had he now, after all these months of disclaiming, of actively refusing any rights whatever?

‘But I’m a fool,’ he said aloud as he opened the kitchen door, ‘I’m mad.’ And he made an effort to recover his sanity by disparaging and belittling the whole incident. Unpleasant, admittedly. But not unpleasant enough to justify Helen in behaving as though she were acting Ibsen. Doing a slight Doll’s House, he said to himself — trying to reduce it all to a conveniently ridiculous phrase — when there was no doll and no house; for she really couldn’t complain that old Hugh had ever shut her up, or that he himself had cherished any designs on her liberty. On the contrary, he had insisted on her being free. Her liberty was also his; if she had become his slave, he would necessarily have become hers.

As for his own emotions, up there on the roof — that uprush of tenderness, that longing to know and love the suffering person within that all at once irrelevantly desirable body — these had been genuine, of course; were facts of direct experience. But after all, they could be explained, explained away, as the mere exaggerations, in a disturbing moment, of his very natural sympathy with her distress. The essential thing was time. Given a little time, she would listen

once more to what he wanted to say, and he would no longer want to say any of the things she had just now refused to listen to.

He opened the refrigerator and found that Mme Cayol had prepared some cold veal and a cucumber and tomato salad. Mme Cayol had a vicarious passion for cold veal, was constantly giving it him. Anthony, as it happened, didn't much like it, but he preferred eating it to discussing the bill of fare with Mme Cayol. Whole weeks would sometimes pass without the necessity arising for him to say more than Bon jour and À demain, Mme Cayol, and Il fait beau aujourd d'hui, or Quel vent!, whichever the case might be. She came for two hours each morning, tidied up, prepared some food, laid the table and went away again. He was served, but almost without being aware of the servant. The arrangement, he considered, was as nearly perfect as any earthly arrangement could be. Cold veal was a small price to pay for such service.

At the table in the shade of the great fig tree on the terrace, Anthony settled down with determination to his food, and as he ate, turned over the pages of his latest note-book. There was nothing, he assured himself, like work — nothing, to make oneself forget a particular and personal feeling, so effective as a good generalization. The word 'freedom' caught his eye, and remembering the satisfaction he had felt, a couple of months before, when he had got those ideas safely on to paper, he began to read.

'Acton wanted to write the History of Man in terms of a History of the Idea of Freedom. But you cannot write a History of the Idea of Freedom without at the same time writing a History of the Fact of Slavery.

'The Fact of Slavery. Or rather of Slaveries. For, in his successive attempts to realize the Idea of Freedom, man is constantly changing one form of slavery for another.

'The primal slavery is the slavery to the empty belly and the unpropitious season. Slavery to nature, in a word. The escape from nature is through social organization and technical invention. In a modern city it is possible to forget that such a thing as nature exists — particularly nature in its more inhuman and

hostile aspects. Half the population of Europe lives in a universe that's entirely home-made.

'Abolish slavery to nature. Another form of slavery instantly arises. Slavery to institutions: religious institutions, legal institutions, military institutions, economic institutions, educational, artistic, and scientific institutions.

'All modern history is a History of the Idea of Freedom from Institutions. It is also the History of the Fact of Slavery to Institutions.

'Nature is senseless. Institutions, being the work of men, have meaning and purpose. Circumstances change quicker than institutions. What once was sense is sense no longer. An outworn institution is like a person who applies logical reasoning to the non-existent situation created by an idée fixe or hallucination. A similar state of things comes about when institutions apply the letter of the law to individual cases. The institution would be acting rationally if the circumstances envisaged by it really existed. But in fact they don't exist. Slavery to an institution is like slavery to a paranoiac, who suffers from delusions but is still in possession of all his intellectual faculties. Slavery to nature is like slavery to an idiot who hasn't even enough mind to be able to suffer from delusions.

'Revolt against institutions leads temporarily to anarchy. But anarchy is slavery to nature, and to a civilized man slavery to nature is even less tolerable than slavery to institutions. The escape from anarchy is through the creation of new institutions. Sometimes there is no period of anarchy — no temporary enslavement to nature; men pass directly from one set of institutions to another.

'Institutions are changed in an attempt to realize the Idea of Freedom. To appreciate the fact of the new slavery takes a certain time. So it comes about that in all revolts against institutions there is a kind of joyful honeymoon, when people believe that freedom has at last been attained. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive." And not only in the dawn of the French Revolution. What undiluted happiness, for example, in the dawn of the Franciscan movement, in the dawn of the Reformation, in the dawn of Christianity and Islam! Even in the dawn of the Great War. The honeymoon may last for as much as twenty or thirty years. Then the fact of the new slavery imposes itself on men's consciousness. It is perceived

that the idea of freedom was not realized by the last change, that the new institutions are just as enslaving as the old. What is to be done? Change the new institutions for yet newer ones. And when that honeymoon is over? Change the yet newer for newer still. And so on — indefinitely, no doubt.

‘In any given society the fact of freedom exists only for a very small number of individuals. Propitious economic circumstances are the condition of at least a partial freedom. But if the freedom is to be more nearly complete, there must also be propitious intellectual, psychological, biographical circumstances. Individuals for whom all these circumstances are favourable are not the slaves of institutions. For them, institutions exist as a kind of solid framework on which they can perform whatever gymnastics they please. The rigidity of society as a whole makes it possible for these privileged few to wander out of intellectual and customary moral bounds without risk either for themselves or for the community at large. All particular freedoms — and there is no freedom that is not particular — is enjoyed on the condition of some form of general slavery.’

Anthony shut his book, feeling that he couldn’t read even one line more. Not that his words seemed any less true now than they had done when he wrote them. In their own way and on their particular level they were true. Why then did it all seem utterly false and wrong? Not wishing to discuss this question with himself, he went into the house and sat down to Usher’s History of Mechanical Inventions.

At half past four he suddenly remembered that dead dog. A few hours more, and in this heat . . . He hurried out to the tool-house. The ground in the untended garden was sun-baked almost to the consistency of brick; by the time he had dug the hole he was dripping with sweat. Then, spade in hand, he went up to the roof. There lay the dog. The blood-stains on its fur, on the parapet, on the mattresses had turned the colour of rust. After several ineffectual attempts, he succeeded in scooping up the carcass with his spade and throwing it, flies and all — for the flies refused to be disturbed — over the parapet. He went downstairs and out into the garden; there, as though he were obstinately competing in some hideous egg-and-spoon race, he scooped the thing up once more and carried it, horribly

dangling across the iron of his spade, to the grave. When he came back to the house he felt so sick that he had to drink some brandy. After that he went down to the sea and took a long swim.

At six, when he was dressed again, he took his car and drove down to the hotel to have a talk with Helen. By this time, he calculated, she would have got over her first shock, she would be ready to listen to him. Forgetting all about the Doll's House and the sanity it had been intended to preserve, he was filled, as he drove, with an extraordinary elation. In a few minutes he would be seeing her again. Would be telling her of the discoveries he had suddenly made that morning: the discovery that he cared for her, the discovery that he had been a fool and worse, unspeakably worse than a fool. . . . It would be difficult, it would be all but impossible to say these things about himself; but for that very reason the thought that he was going to say them filled him with profound happiness.

He drew up at the door of the hotel and hurried into the hall.

'Madame Ledwidge est-elle dans sa chambre, mademoiselle?'

'Mais non, monsieur, Madame vient de partir.'

'Elle vient de partir?'

'Madame est allée prendre le rapide à Toulon.'

Anthony looked at his watch. The train had already started. In a wretched little car like his there was no hope of getting to Marseille before it left again for Paris.

'Merci, mademoiselle, merci,' he said, lapsing by force of habit into that excessive politeness by means of which he protected himself from the disquieting world of the lower classes.

'Mais de rien, monsieur.'

He drove home again, wondering miserably whether he oughtn't to be thankful for the deliverance. The postman had called in his absence. There was a letter from his broker, advising him to sell at least a part of that block of gold-mining shares he had inherited from Uncle James. There seemed to be no likelihood of their appreciating any further; in view of which, the wisest course would be to take advantage of the present prices and re-invest in sound English

industrials such as . . . He threw the letter aside. Occasions, as usual, had been conspiring for him — thrusting good fortune upon him, malignantly. Now, in the depression, he was better off than ever before. Better off when other people were worse off. Freer while they were hopelessly enslaved. The ring of Polycrates . . . It looked as though the gods had already begun their vengeance.

He went to bed early, and at two was woken by that horribly familiar dream that had haunted his boyhood and plagued him from time to time even as a grown man. In substance it was always the same. Nothing much was ever visible; but there was generally a knowledge that he was in company, surrounded by dim presences. He took a mouthful of some indeterminate food, and instantly it expanded between his teeth, became progressively more rubbery and at the same time stickier, till it was like a gag smeared with a kind of gum that dried in a thick film on the teeth, tongue, palate. Unspeakably disgusting, this process of asphyxiating expansion, of gluey thickening and clogging, went on and on. He tried to swallow, tried, in spite of the obscure but embarrassing presence of strangers, to disgorge. Without effect. In the end, he was reduced to hooking the stuff out with his finger — lump after ropy lump of it. But always in vain. For the gag continued to expand, the film to thicken and harden. Until at last he was delivered by starting out of sleep. This night, the expanding mouthful had some kind of vague but horrible connexion with the dog. He woke up shuddering. Once awake, he was unable to go to sleep again. A huge accumulation of neglected memories broke through, as it were, into his awareness. Those snapshots. His mother and Mary Amberley. Brian in the chalk pit, evoked by that salty smell of sun-warmed flesh, and again dead at the cliff’s foot, among the flies — like that dog . . .

CHAPTER THIRTEEN. May 20th 1934

MADE MY SECOND yesterday night. Without serious nervousness. It's easy enough, once you've made up your mind that it doesn't matter if you make a fool of yourself. But it's depressing. There's a sense in which five hundred people in a hall aren't concrete. One's talking to a collective noun, an abstraction, not to a set of individuals. Only those already partially or completely convinced of what you're saying even want to understand you. The rest are invincibly ignorant. In private conversation, you could be certain of getting your man to make at least a grudging effort to understand you. The fact that there's an audience confirms the not-understander in his incomprehension. Particularly if he can ask questions after the address. Some of the reasons for this are obvious. Just getting up and being looked at is a pleasure — in many cases, piercing to the point of pain. Excruciating orgasms of self-assertion. Pleasure is heightened if the question is hostile. Hostility is a declaration of personal independence. Makes it clear at the same time that it's only an accident that the questioner isn't on the platform himself — accident or else, of course, deliberate plot on the part of ruffians who want to keep him down. Interruptions and questions are generally of course quite irrelevant. Hecklers (like the rest of us) live in their own private world, make no effort to enter other people's worlds. Most arguments in public are at cross-purposes and in different languages — without interpreters.

Mark was at the meeting, and afterwards, in my rooms, took pleasure in intensifying my depression.

'Might as well go and talk to cows in a field.' The temptation to agree with him was strong. All my old habits of thinking, living, feeling impel me towards agreement. A senseless world, where nothing whatever can be done — how satisfactory! One can go off and (seeing that there's nothing else to do) compile

one’s treatise on sociology — the science of human senselessness. With Mark last night I caught myself taking intense pleasure in commenting on the imbecility of my audience and human beings at large. Caught and checked myself. Reflecting that seeds had been sown, that if only one were to germinate, it would have been worth while to hold the meeting. Worth while even if none were to germinate — for my own sake, as an exercise, a training for doing better next time.

I didn’t say all this. Merely stopped talking and, I suppose, changed my expression. Mark, who notices everything, began to laugh. Foresaw the time when I’d preface every mention of a person or group with the adjective ‘dear’. ‘The dear Communists’, ‘the dear armament makers’, ‘dear General Goering’.

I laughed — for he was comic in his best savage manner. But, after all, if you had enough love and goodness, you could be sure of evoking some measure of answering love and goodness from almost everyone you came in contact with — whoever he or she might be. And in that case almost everyone would really be ‘dear’. At present, most people seem more or less imbecile or odious; the fault is at least as much in oneself as in them.

May 24th 1934

Put in four hours this morning at working up my notes. Extraordinary pleasure! How easily one could slip back into uninterrupted scholarship and idea-mongering! Into that ‘Higher Life’ which is simply death without tears. Peace, irresponsibility — all the delights of death here and now. In the past, you had to go into a monastery to find them. You paid for the pleasure of death with obedience, poverty, chastity. Now you can have them gratis and in the ordinary world. Death completely without tears. Death with smiles, death with the pleasures of bed and bottle, death in private with nobody to bully you. Scholars, philosophers, men of science — conventionally supposed to be unpractical. But what other class of men has succeeded in getting the world to accept it and (more astonishing) go on accepting it at its own valuation? Kings have lost their divine right, plutocrats look as though they were going to lose theirs. But Higher Lifers continue to be labelled as superior. It’s the fruit of persistence.

Persistently paying compliments to themselves, persistently disparaging other people. Year in, year out, for the last sixty centuries. We're High, you're Low; we're of the Spirit, you're of the World. Again and again, like Pears Soap. It's been accepted, now, as an axiom. But, in fact, the Higher Life is merely the better death-substitute. A more complete escape from the responsibilities of living than alcohol or morphia or addiction to sex or property. Booze and dope destroy health. Sooner or later sex addicts get involved in responsibilities. Property addicts can never get all the stamps, Chinese vases, houses, varieties of lilies or whatever it may be, that they want. Their escape is a torment of Tantalus. Whereas the Higher Life escapes into a world where there's no risk to health and the minimum of responsibilities and tortures. A world, what's more, that tradition regards as actually superior to the world of responsible living — higher. The Higher Shirker can fairly wallow in his good conscience. For how easy to find in the life of scholarship and research equivalents for all the moral virtues! Some, of course, are not equivalent, but identical: perserverance, patience, self-forgetfulness and the like. Good means to ends that may be bad. You can work hard and whole-heartedly at anything — from atomic physics to forgery and white-slaving. The rest are ethical virtues transposed into the mental key. Chastity of artistic and mathematical form. Purity of scientific research. Courageousness of thought. Bold hypotheses. Logical integrity. Temperance of views. Intellectual humility before the facts. All the cardinal virtues in fancy dress. The Higher Lifers come to think of themselves as saints — saints of art and science and scholarship. A purely figurative and metaphorical sanctity taken au pied de la lettre.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' The Higher Lifer even has equivalents for spiritual poverty. As a man of science, he tries to keep himself unbiased by his interests and prejudices. But that's not all. Ethical poverty of spirit entails taking no thought for the morrow, letting the dead bury their dead, losing one's life to gain it. The Higher Lifer can make parodies of these renunciations. I know; for I made them and actually took credit to myself for having made them. You live continuously and responsibly only in the other, Higher world. In this, you detach

yourself from your past; you refuse to commit yourself in the future; you have no convictions, but live moment by moment; you renounce your own identity, except as a Higher Lifer, and become just the succession of your states. A more than Franciscan destitution. Which can be combined, however, with more than Napoleonic exultations in imperialism. I used to think I had no will to power. Now I perceive that I vented it on thoughts, rather than people. Conquering an unknown province of knowledge. Getting the better of a problem. Forcing ideas to associate or come apart. Bullying recalcitrant words to assume a certain pattern. All the fun of being a dictator without any risks and responsibilities.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN. December 8th 1926

BY DINNER-TIME IT was already a Story — the latest addition to Mary Amberley's repertory. The latest, and as good, it seemed to Anthony's critically attentive ear, as the finest classics of the collection. Ever since he received her invitation, he now realized, his curiosity had been tinged with a certain vindictive hope that she would have altered for the worse, either relatively in his own knowledgeable eyes, or else absolutely by reason of the passage of these twelve long years; would have degenerated from what she was, or what he had imagined her to be, at the time when he had loved her. Discreditably enough, as he now admitted to himself, it was with a touch of disappointment that he had found her hardly changed from the Mary Amberley of his memories. She was forty-three. But her body was almost as slim as ever, and she moved with all the old swift agility. With something more than the old agility, indeed; for he had noticed that she was now agile on purpose, that she acted the part of one who is carried away by a youthful impulse to break into quick and violent motion — acted it, moreover, in circumstances where the impulse could not, if natural, possibly have been felt. Before dinner, she took him upstairs to her bedroom to see those nudes by Pascin that she had just bought. The first half of the flight she negotiated at a normal pace, talking as she went; then, as though she had suddenly remembered that slowness on stairs is a sign of middle age, she suddenly started running — no, scampering, Anthony corrected himself as he remembered the incident; scampering was the word. And when they returned to the drawing-room, no tomboy of sixteen could have thrown herself more recklessly into the sofa or tucked up her legs with a more kittenish movement. The Mary of 1914 had never behaved so youthfully as that. Couldn't have even if she had wanted to, he reflected, in all those skirts and petticoats. Whereas now, in kilts . . . It was absurd, of course; but not yet, he judicially decided,

painfully absurd. For Mary could still claim to look the youthful part. Only a little worn, her face still seemed to sparkle, through the faint stigmata of fatigue, with the old laughing vitality. And as for her accomplishments — why, this improvisation (and an improvisation it must be, seeing that the event had occurred only that morning), this improvisation on the theme of Helen's stolen kidney was a little masterpiece.

'I shall have the object embalmed,' she was concluding in a mock-serious tone, pregnant with subdued laughter. Embalmed and . . .'

But like a suddenly opened ginger-beer bottle, bubbling, 'I'll give you an address for the embalming,' put in Beppo Bowles. He smiled, he blinked his eyes, he wriggled. His whole plump and florid person seemed to participate in what he said; he talked with every organ of his body. 'From the Mortician's Journal.' He waved a hand and declaimed, 'Embalmers! do your results have that unpleasant putty look? If so . . .'

Mrs Amberley had laughed — a little perfunctorily, perhaps; for she did not like to be interrupted in the middle of a story, Beppo was a darling, of course. So boyish, in spite of his tummy and the bald patch on the top of his head. (So girlish, even, on occasion.) But still . . . She cut him short with a 'Too perfect.' Then, turning back to the rest of the table, 'Well, as I was saying,' she continued, 'I shall have it embalmed and put under one of those glass domes . . .'

'Like life,' Beppo could not refrain from ginger-beerily interjecting. But nobody caught the reference to Adonais, and he giggled alone.

'Those domes,' repeated Mrs Amberley without looking at the interrupter, 'one finds in lodging-houses. With birds under them. Stuffed birds.' She lingered over the monosyllable, as though she were a German prolonging a modified o; and the birds, the Teutonic bö-öds, became, for some obscure reason, extraordinarily funny.

The voice, Anthony decided, was better than ever. There was a faint hoarseness now, like the bloom on a fruit, like the haze through which, on a summer's day, one sees St Paul's from Waterloo Bridge. The interposition of that curtain of husky gauze seemed to deepen, as it were, and enrich the beauties

of the vocal landscape lying behind it. Listening more attentively than ever, he tried to fix the cadences of her speech upon his memory, to analyse them into their component sounds. In his projected Elements of Sociology there was to be a chapter on Mass Suggestion and Propaganda. One of the sections would be devoted to the subject of Fascinating Noises. The fascinatingly excitingly exciting noise, for example, of Savonarola, or Lloyd George. The fascinatingly sedative noise of intoning priests; the fascinatingly hilarious noise of Robey and Little Tich; the fascinatingly aphrodisiac noise of certain actors and actresses, certain singers, certain sirens and Don Juans of private life. Mary's gift, he decided, was for making a noise that was simultaneously aphrodisiac and comic. She could emit sounds that touched the springs of laughter and desire, but never those of sorrow, of pity, of indignation. In moments of emotional stress (and he recalled those horrible scenes she used to make) her voice passed out of control into a chaos of raucous shrillness. The sound of her words of complaint, reproach, or grief evoked in the hearer only a certain physical discomfort. Whereas with Mrs Foxe, he now went on to think, the noise alone of what she said had been enough to compel your acquiescence and sympathy. Hers was the mysterious gift that hoisted Robespierre into power, that enabled Whitefield, by the mere repetition, two or three times, of some pious exclamation, to reduce the most hardened sceptic to tears. There are fascinating noises capable of convincing a listener of the existence of God.

Those bö-öds! They all laughed, all simply had to laugh, at them. Even Colin Egerton, even Hugh Ledwidge. And yet ever since that man Beavis had come into the drawing-room, Hugh had been in a prickle of uneasiness. Beavis whom he always did his best to avoid . . . Why hadn't Mary told him? For a moment he imagined it was a plot. Mary had invited Beavis on purpose to put him to shame — because she knew that the man had been a witness of his humiliations at Bulstrode. There were to be two of them: Staithes (for Staithes, he knew, was expected after dinner) and Beavis. Hugh had grown accustomed to meeting Staithes in his house, didn't mind meeting him. Staithes, there could be no doubt, had forgotten. But Beavis — whenever he met Beavis, it always seemed

to Hugh that the man looked at him in a queer way. And now Mary had invited him, on purpose, so that he could remind Staithes; and then the two of them would bait him with their reminiscences — their reminiscences of how he had funked at football; of how he had cried when it was his turn at fire-drill to slide down the rope; of how he had sneaked to Jimbug and had then been made to run the gauntlet between two lines of them, armed with wet towels rolled up into truncheons; of how they had looked over the partition . . . He shuddered. But of course, on second, saner thoughts, it couldn't possibly be a plot. Not conceivably. All the same, he was glad when they went down to dinner and he found himself separated from Beavis. Across Helen, conversation would be difficult. And after dinner he would do his best to keep at a distance . . .

As for Colin, he had sat all through the meal in a bewilderment that, as it grew, as he felt himself more and more hopelessly out of it all, was mingled to an ever-increasing extent with exasperation and disapproval, until at last he was saying to himself (what he intended to say aloud to Joyce at the first opportunity), was saying: 'I may be stupid and all that' — and this confession was uttered by his inward voice in a tone of firm contempt, as though it were a confession of strength, not weakness— 'I may be stupid and all that, but at least — well, at least I do know what's within the pale and what's without.' He would say all that to Joyce, and much more; and Joyce (he had glanced at her in the middle of one of Beppo's outrageous stories and caught an eye that was humble, anxious, pleadingly apologetic), Joyce would agree with every word he said. For the poor child was like a kind of changeling — a County changeling left by some inexplicable mistake in the arms of a mad, impossible mother who forced her, against her real nature, to associate with these . . . these . . . (He couldn't find the mentionable word for Beppo.) And he, Colin Egerton, he was the St George who would rescue her. The fact that — like some pure young girl fallen among white slavers — she needed rescuing was one of the reasons why he felt so strongly attracted to her. He loved her, among other reasons, because he so violently loathed that ghastly degenerate (that was the word), Beppo Bowles; and his approval of all that Joyce was and did was proportionate to his

disapproval (a disapproval strengthened by a certain terror) of Joyce's mother. And yet, now, in spite of the disapproval, in spite of his fear of that sharp tongue of hers, those piercingly ironic glances, he could not help laughing with the rest. Those long-drawn bö-öds under their glass domes were irresistible.

For Mrs Amberley the laughter was like champagne — warming, stimulating. 'And I shall have an inscription carved on the base,' she went on, raising her voice against the din: ' "This kidney was stolen by Helen Amberley, at the risk of life and . . ." '

'Oh, do shut up, Mummy!' Helen was blushing with a mixture of pleasure and annoyance. 'Please!' It was certainly nice to be the heroine of a story that everybody was listening to — but then the heroine was also a bit of an ass. She felt angry with her mother for exploiting the assishness.

'. . . and in spite of a lifelong and conscientious objection to butchery,' Mrs Amberley went on. Then, 'Poor darling,' she added in another tone. 'Smells always were her weak point. Butchers, fishmongers, — and shall I ever forget the one and only time I took her to church!'

('One and only time,' thought Colin. 'No wonder she goes and does things like this!')

'Oh, I do admit,' cried Mrs Amberley, 'that a village congregation on a wet Sunday morning — well, frankly, it stinks. Deafeningly! But still . . .'

'It's the odour of sanctity,' put in Anthony Beavis: and turning to Helen, 'I've suffered from it myself. And did your mother make you spit when there were bad smells about? Mine did. It made things very difficult in church.'

'She didn't spit,' Mrs Amberley answered for her daughter. 'She was sick. All over old Lady Worplesdon's astrakhan coat. I was never able to show my face in respectable society again. Thank God!' she added.

Beppo sizzled a protest against her implied imputations. Switched off kidneys, the conversation rolled away along another line.

Helen sat unnoticed, in silence. Her face had suddenly lost all its light; 'I'll never touch meat again,' she had said. And here she was, with a morsel of that gruesome red lump of cow impaled on her fork. 'I'm awful,' she thought. Pas

sérieuse, old Mme Delécluze had pronounced. And though as a professional girl-finisher the old beast could hardly be expected to say anything else, yet it was true; at bottom it was quite true. ‘I’m not serious. I’m not . . .’ But suddenly she was aware that the voice which had been sounding, inarticulately and as though from an immense distance, in her right ear was addressing itself to her.

‘. . . Proust,’ she heard it saying, and realized that it had pronounced the same syllable at least twice before. She looked round, guiltily, and saw, red with embarrassment, the face of Hugh Ledwidge turned, waveringly and uncertainly, towards her. He smiled foolishly; his spectacles flashed; he turned away. She felt doubly confused and ashamed.

‘I’m afraid I didn’t quite catch . . .’ she contrived to mumble.

‘Oh, it doesn’t matter,’ he mumbled back. ‘It’s really of no importance.’ Of no importance; but it had taken him the best part of five minutes to think of that gambit about Proust. I must say something to her, he had decided, when he saw Beavis safely involved in intimate talk with Mary Amberley and Beppo. ‘Must say something.’ But what? What did one say to young girls of eighteen? He would have liked to say something personal, something even a bit gallant. About her frock, for example. ‘How nice!’ No, that was a bit vague and unspecific. ‘How it suits your complexion, your eyes!’ (What colour were they, by the way?) Or he might ask her about parties. Did she go to many? With (very archly) boy friends? But that, he knew, was too difficult for him. Besides, he didn’t much like to think of her with boy friends — preferred her virginal: du bist wie eine Blume . . . Or else, seriously but with a smile, ‘Tell me,’ he might say, ‘tell me, Helen, what are young people really like nowadays? What do they think and feel about things?’ And Helen would plant her elbows on the table and turn sideways and tell him exactly all he wanted to know about that mysterious world, the world where people danced and went to parties and were always having personal relations with one another; would tell him everything, everything — or else, more likely, nothing, and he would just be made to feel an impertinent fool. No, no; this wouldn’t do, wouldn’t do at all. This was just fancy, this was just wish-fulfilment. It was then that the question about Proust

had occurred to him. What did she think of Proust? It was a comfortingly impersonal question — one that he could ask without feeling awkward and unnatural. But its impersonality could easily be made to lead to a long discussion — always in the abstract, always, so to speak, in a test-tube — of the most intimately emotional, even (no, no; but still, one never knew; it was revolting; and yet . . .) even physiological matters. Talking of Proust, it would be possible to say everything — everything, but always in terms of a strictly literary criticism. Perfect! He had turned towards Helen.

'I suppose you're as keen on Proust as everybody else.' No answer. From the end of the table came wafts of Mrs Amberley's conversation with Anthony and Beppo: they were discussing the habits of their friends. Colin Egerton was in the middle of a tiger hunt in the Central Provinces. He coughed, then, 'You're a Proustian, I take it? Like the rest of us,' he repeated. But the lowered and melancholy profile gave no sign of life. Feeling most uncomfortably a fool, Hugh Ledwidge tried once more.

'I wish you'd tell me,' he said in a louder voice, that sounded, he thought, peculiarly unnatural, 'what you think about Proust.'

Helen continued to stare at some invisible object on the table, just in front of her plate. Pas sérieuse. She was thinking of all the unserious things she had ever done in her life, all the silly, the mean, the awful things. A kind of panic embarrassment overwhelmed Hugh Ledwidge. He felt as he might feel if his trousers were to start coming down in Piccadilly — lost. Anybody else, of course, would just touch her arm and say, 'A penny for your thoughts, Helen!' How simple this would be, how sensible! The whole incident would at once be turned into a joke — a joke, moreover, at her expense. He would establish once and for all a position of teasing superiority. 'Day-dreaming in the middle of a dinner! About what? About whom?' Very knowing and arch. And she would blush, would giggle — at his behest, in response to his command. Like a skilled matador, he would wave his little red flag, and she would go plunging here, go charging there, making an absurd and ravishing exhibition of herself, until at last raising his sword . . . But simple and sensible and strategically advantageous as

all this would be, Hugh Ledwidge found it quite impossible to make the first move. There was her bare arm, thin like a little girl's; but somehow he could not bring himself to put out his hand and touch it. And the jocular offer of that penny — it couldn't be made; his vocal cords would not do it. Thirty seconds passed — seconds of increasing embarrassment and uncertainty. Then suddenly, as though waking from sleep, she had looked round at him. What had he said? But it was impossible to repeat that question again.

'It's of no importance. No importance,' he turned away. But why, oh why was he such a fool, so ridiculously incompetent? At thirty-five. Nel mezzo del cammin. Imagine Dante in the circumstances! Dante, with his steel profile, ploughing forward, like a spiritual battleship. And meanwhile, what on earth should he say to her in place of that now impossible remark about Proust? What in the name of heaven . . . ?

It was she finally who touched his arm. 'I'm sorry,' she said with a real contrition. She was trying to make up for her awfulness, for having so frivolously eaten Mr Baldwin's well-thumbed cow. Besides, she liked old Hugh. He was nice. He had taken the trouble to show her the Mexican things at the Museum. 'I have an appointment with Mr Ledwidge,' she had said. And the attendants had all been delightfully deferential. She had been led to his private room — the private room of the Assistant Director of the Department — as though she were some distinguished personage. One eminent archaeologist visiting another. It had really been extraordinarily interesting. Only, of course — and this was another symptom of her awful unseriousness — she had forgotten most of the things he had told her. 'So awfully sorry,' she repeated; and it was genuinely true. She knew what he must be feeling. 'You see,' she explained, 'Granny's deaf. I know how awful it is when I have to repeat something. It sounds so idiotic. Like Mr Shandy and the clock, somehow, if you see what I mean. Do forgive me.' She pressed his arm appealingly, then planting her elbows on the table and turning sideways towards him in just the confidential attitude he had visualized, 'Listen, Hugh,' she said, 'you're serious, aren't you? You know, sérieux.'

‘Well, I suppose so,’ he stammered. He had just seen, rather belatedly, what she meant by that reference to Mr Shandy, and the realization had come as something of a shock.

‘I mean,’ she went on, ‘you could hardly be at the Museum if you weren’t serious.’

‘No,’ he admitted, ‘I probably couldn’t.’ But after all, he was thinking, still preoccupied by Mr Shandy, there’s such a thing as theoretical knowledge. (And didn’t he know it? Only too well.) Theoretical knowledge corresponding to no genuine experience, unrealized, not lived through. ‘Oh God!’ he inwardly groaned.

‘Well, I’m not serious,’ Helen was saying. She felt a great need to unburden herself, to ask for help. There were moments — and they recurred whenever, for one reason or another, she felt doubtful of herself — moments when everything round her seemed terribly vague and unreliable. Everything — but in practice, of course, it all boiled down to the unreliability of her mother. Helen was very fond of her mother, but at the same time she had to admit to herself that she was no use. ‘Mummy’s like a very bad practical joke,’ she had once said to Joyce. ‘You think you’re going to sit on it; but the chair’s whisked away and you come down with a horrible bump on your bottom.’ But all that Joyce had said was: ‘Helen, you simply mustn’t use those words.’ Ass of a girl! Though, of course, it had to be admitted, Joyce was a chair that could be sat on. But an inadequate chair, a chair only for unimportant occasions — and what was the good of that? Joyce was too young; and even if she’d been much older, she wouldn’t really have understood anything properly. And now that she was engaged to Colin, she seemed to understand things less and less. God, what a fool that man was! But all the same, there, if you liked, was a chair. A chair like the rock of ages. But so shaped, unfortunately, that it forced you to sit in the most grotesquely uncomfortable position. However, as Joyce didn’t seem to mind the discomfort, that was all right. Chairless in an exhausting world, Helen almost envied her. Meanwhile there was old Hugh. She sat down, heavily.

‘What’s wrong with me,’ she went on, ’is that I’m so hopelessly frivolous.’

‘I can’t really believe that,’ he said; though why he said it he couldn’t imagine. For, obviously, he ought to be encouraging her to make confession, not assuring her that she had no sins to confess. It was as though he were secretly afraid of the very thing he had wished for.

‘I don’t think you’re . . .’

But unfortunately nothing he said could put her off. She insisted on using him as a chair.

‘No, no, it’s quite true,’ she said. ‘You can’t imagine how frivolous I am. I’ll tell you . . .’

Half an hour later, in the back drawing-room, he was writing out for her a list of the books she ought to read. Burnet’s Early Greek Philosophers; Phaedrus, Timaeus, The Apology, and The Symposium in Jowett’s translation; the Nicomachean Ethios; Cornford’s little anthology of the Greek moralists; Marcus Aurelius; Lucretius in any good translation; Inge’s Plotinus. His manner, as he spoke, was easy, confident, positively masterful. He was like a creature suddenly restored to its proper element.

‘Those will give you some idea of the way the ancients thought about things.’

She nodded. Her face as she looked at the pencilled list was grave and determined. She had decided that she would wear spectacles, and have a table brought up to her bedroom, so that she could sit undisturbed, with her books piled up and her writing materials in front of her. Note-books — or, better, a card index. It would be a new life — a life with some meaning in it, some purpose. In the drawing-room somebody started up the gramophone. As though on its own initiative, her foot began to beat out the rhythm. One two three, one two three — it was a waltz. But what was she thinking of? She frowned and held her foot still.

‘As for modern thought,’ Hugh was saying, ‘well, the two indispensable books, from which every modern culture must start, are’ — his pencil hurried across the paper— ‘Montaigne’s Essays and the Pensées of Pascal. Indispensable, these.’ He underlined the names. ‘Then you’d better glance at the Discourse on Method.’

‘Which method?’ asked Helen.

But Hugh did not hear her question. ‘And take a look at Hobbes, if you have the time,’ he went on with ever-increasing power and confidence. ‘And then Newton. That’s absolutely essential. Because if you don’t know the philosophy of Newton, you don’t know why science has developed as it has done. You’ll find all you need in Burt’s Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science.’ There was a little silence while he wrote. Tom had arrived, and Eileen and Sybil. Helen could hear them talking in the other room. But she kept her eyes determinedly fixed on the paper. ‘Then there’s Hume,’ he continued. ‘You’d better begin with the Essays. They’re superb. Such sense, such an immense sagacity!’

‘Sagacity,’ Helen repeated, and smiled to herself with pleasure. Yes, that was exactly the word she’d been looking for — exactly what she herself would like to be: sagacious, like an elephant, like an old sheepdog, like Hume, if you preferred it. But at the same time, of course, herself. Sagacious, but young; sagacious, but lively and attractive; sagacious, but impetuous and . . .

‘I won’t inflict Kant on you,’ said Hugh indulgently. ‘But I think’ (he brought the pencil into play again), ‘I think you’ll have to read one or two of the modern Kantians. Vaihinger’s Philosophy of As If, for example, and von Uexküll’s Theoretical Biology. You see, Kant’s behind all our twentieth-century science. Just as Newton was behind all the science of the eighteenth and nineteenth . . .’

‘Why, Helen!’

They started and looked up — looked up into the smiling, insolently handsome face of Gerry Watchett. Brilliantly blue against the sunburnt skin, the eyes glanced from one to the other with a kind of mockery. Coming a step nearer, he laid his hand familiarly on Helen’s shoulder. ‘What’s the fun? Crossword puzzles?’ He gave the shoulder two or three little pats.

‘As though she were his horse,’ Hugh said to himself indignantly. And, in effect, that was what the man looked like — a groom. That crisply waving, golden-brownish hair, that blunt-featured face, at once boyish and tough — they were straight from the stable, straight from Epsom Downs.

Helen smiled a smile that was intended to be contemptuously superior — an intellectual's smile. 'You would think it was crosswords!' she said. Then, 'By the way,' she added in another tone, 'you know each other, don't you?' she looked inquiringly from Gerry to Hugh.

'We do,' Gerry answered: still keeping his right hand on Helen's shoulder, he raised his left in the derisive caricature of military salute. 'Good evening, Colonel.'

Sheepishly, Hugh returned the salute. All his power and confidence had vanished with his forced return from the world of books to that of personal life; he felt like an albatross on dry land — helplessly awkward, futile, ugly. And yet how easy it should have been to put on a knowing smile, and say significantly, 'Yes, I know Mr Watchett very well' — know him, the tone would imply, for what he is: the gentleman sharepusher, the professional gambler, and the professional lover. Mary Amberley's lover at the moment, so it was supposed. 'Know him very well indeed!' That was what it would have been so easy to say. But he didn't say it: he only smiled and rather foolishly raised his hand to his forehead.

Gerry, meanwhile, had sat down on the arm of the sofa, and through the smoke of his cigarette was staring at Helen with a calm and easy insolence, appraising her, so it seemed, point by point — hocks, withers, quarters, barrel. 'Do you know, Helen,' he said at last, 'you're getting prettier and prettier every day.'

Blushing, Helen threw back her head and laughed; then suddenly stiffened her face into an unnatural rigidity. She was angry — angry with Gerry for his damned impertinence, angry above all with herself for having been pleased by the damned impertinence, for having reacted with such a humiliating automatic punctuality to that offensive flattery. Going red in the face and giggling like a schoolgirl! And that Philosophy of As If, those horn-rimmed spectacles, and the new life, and the card index . . . ? A man said, 'You're pretty,' and it was as though they had never been so much as thought of. She turned towards Hugh; turned for protection, for support. But her eyes no sooner met his than he looked

away. His face took on an expression of meditative absence; he seemed to be thinking of something else. Was he angry with her, she wondered? Had he been offended because she had been pleased by Gerry's compliment? But it had been like blinking at the noise of a gun — something you couldn't help doing. He ought to understand, ought to realize that she wanted to lead that new life, was simply longing to be sagacious. Instead of which, he just faded out and refused to have anything to do with her. Oh, it wasn't fair!

Behind that cold detached mask of his, Hugh was feeling more than ever like Baudelaire's albatross.

Ce voyageur ailé, comme il est gauche et veule!

Lui, naguère si beau, qu'il est comique et laid!

Ah, those strong and majestic swoopings in the neo-Kantian azure!

From the next room the gramophone was trumpeting, 'Yes, sir, she's my Baby.' Gerry whistled a couple of bars; then 'What about a spot of fox-trotting, Helen?' he suggested. 'Unless, of course, you haven't finished with the Colonel.' He glanced mockingly at Hugh's averted face. 'I don't want to interrupt . . .'

It was Helen's turn to look at Hugh. 'Well . . .' she began doubtfully.

But without looking up, 'Oh, not at all, not at all,' Hugh made haste to say; and wondered, even as he did so, what on earth had induced him to proclaim his own defeat before there had been a battle. Leaving her to that groom! Fool, coward! Still, he told himself cynically, she probably preferred the groom. He got up, mumbled something about having to talk to someone about some point that had turned up, and moved away towards the door that gave on to the landing and the stairs.

'Well, if he doesn't want me to stay,' Helen thought resentfully, 'if he doesn't think it's worth his while to keep me.' She was hurt.

'Exit the Colonel,' said Gerry. Then, 'What about that spot of dancing?' He rose, came towards her and held out his hand. Helen took it and pulled herself up from the low chair. 'No, sir, don't say maybe,' he sang as he put his arm about her. They stepped out into the undulating stream of the music. Zigzagging

between chairs and tables, he steered towards the door that led into the other room.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN. June 1903–January 1904

IT HAD BECOME a rite, a sacrament (that was how John Beavis described it to himself): a sacrament of communion. First, the opening of the wardrobe door, the handling of her dresses. Closing his eyes, he breathed the perfume they exhaled, the faint sweet essence of her body from across the widening abyss of time. Then there were the drawers. These three, on the left, contained her linen. The lavender bags were tied with pale blue ribbon. This lace on the night-gown he now unfolded had touched . . . Even in thought, John Beavis avoided the pronunciation of the words ‘her breasts’, but only imagined the rounded flesh softly swelling and sinking under the intricacies of the patterned thread; then recalled those Roman nights; and finally thought of Lollingdon and the hollow vale, the earth, the terrible dark silence. The night-gown refolded and once more shut away, it was the turn of the two small drawers on the right — of the gloves that had encased her hands, the belts that had girdled her body and that now he wound round his wrist or tightened like a phylactery about his temples. And the rite concluded with the reading of her letters — those touchingly childish letters she had written during their engagement. That consummated the agony for him; the rite was over and he could go to bed with yet another sword in his heart.

But recently, it seemed, the sword had grown blunter. It was as though her death, till now so poignantly alive, had itself begun to die. The rite seemed to be losing its magic: consummation became increasingly difficult of achievement, and, when achieved, was less painful and, for that reason, less satisfying. For the thing which had made life worth living all these months was precisely the pain of his bereavement. Desire and tenderness had suddenly been deprived of their object. It was an amputation — agonizing. And now this pain — and it was all of her that was left him — this precious anguish was slipping away from him, was dying, even as Maisie herself had died.

Tonight it seemed to have vanished altogether. He buried his face in the scented folds of her dresses, he spread out the lace and lawn she had worn next to her skin, he blew into one of her gloves and watched the gradual deflation of this image of her hand — dying, dying, till the skin hung limp again and empty of even the pretence of life. But the rites were without effect; John Beavis remained unmoved. He knew that she was dead and that his bereavement was terrible. But felt nothing of this bereavement — nothing except a kind of dusty emptiness of spirit.

He went to bed unfulfilled, somehow humiliated. Magic rites justify themselves by success; when they fail to produce their proper emotional results, the performer feels that he has been betrayed into making a fool of himself.

Dry, like a mummy, in the dusty emptiness of his own sepulchre, John Beavis lay for a long time, unable to sleep. Twelve; one; two; and then, when he had utterly despaired of it, sleep came, and he was dreaming that she was there beside him; and it was Maisie as she had been the first year of their marriage, the round flesh swelling and subsiding beneath the lace, the lips parted and, oh, innocently consenting. He took her in his arms.

It was the first time since her death that he had dreamed of her except as dying.

John Beavis woke to a sense of shame; and when, later in the day, he saw Miss Gannett evidently waiting for him as usual, in the corridor outside his lecture-room, he pretended not to have noticed her, but hurried past with downcast eyes, frowning, as though preoccupied by some abstruse, insoluble problem in higher philology.

But the next afternoon found him at his Aunt Edith’s weekly At Home. And of course — though he expressed a perhaps excessive surprise at seeing her — of course Miss Gannett was there, as he knew she would be; for she never missed one of Aunt Edith’s Thursdays.

‘You were in a terrible hurry yesterday,’ she said, when his surprise had had time to die down.

‘Me? When?’ He pretended not to know what she meant.

‘At the college, after your lecture.’

‘But were you there? I didn’t see you.’

‘Now he thinks I shirked his lecture,’ she wailed to some non-existent third party. Ever since, two months before, she had first met him in Aunt Edith’s drawing-room, Miss Gannett had faithfully attended every one of his public lectures. ‘To improve my mind,’ she used to explain. ‘Because,’ with a jocularity that was at the same time rather wistful, ‘it does so need improving!’

Mr Beavis protested. ‘But I didn’t say anything of the kind.’

‘I’ll show you the notes I took.’

‘No, please don’t do that!’ It was his turn to be playful. ‘If you knew how my own lectures bored me!’

‘Well, you nearly ran over me in the corridor, after the lecture.’

‘Oh, then!’

‘I never saw anyone walk so fast.’

He nodded. ‘Yes, I was in a hurry; it’s quite true. I had a Committee. Rather a special one,’ he added impressively.

She opened her eyes at him very wide, and, from playful, her tone and expression became very serious. ‘It must be rather a bore sometimes,’ she said, ‘to be such a very important person — isn’t it?’

Mr Beavis smiled down at the grave and awestruck child before him — at the innocent child who was also a rather plump and snubbily pretty young woman of seven and twenty — smiled with pleasure and stroked his moustache. ‘Oh, not quite so important as all that,’ he protested. ‘Not quite such . . .’ he hesitated for a moment; his mouth twitched, his eyes twinkled; then the colloquialism came out: ‘not quite such a “howling toff” as you seem to imagine.’

There was only one letter that morning. From Anthony, Mr Beavis saw as he tore open the envelope.

Bulstrode, June 26th

Dearest Father, — Thank you for your letter. I thought we were going to Tenby for the holidays. Did you not arrange it with Mrs Foxe? Foxe says she

expects us, so perhaps we ought not to go to Switzerland instead as you say we are doing. We had two matches yesterday, first eleven v. Sunny Bank, second v. Mumbridge, we won both which was rather ripping. I was playing in the second eleven and made six not out. We have begun a book called Lettres de mon Moulin in French, I think it is rotten. There is no more news, so with much love. — Your loving son,

Anthony.

P.S. — Don't forget to write to Mrs Foxe, because Foxe says he knows she thinks we are going to Tenby.

Mr Beavis frowned as he read the letter, and when breakfast was over, sat down at once to write an answer.

Earl's Court Square

27.vi.03.

Dearest Anthony, — I am disappointed that you should have received what I had hoped was a piece of very exciting news with so little enthusiasm. At your age I should certainly have welcomed the prospect of 'going abroad', especially to Switzerland, with unbounded delight. The arrangements with Mrs Foxe were always of the most indeterminate nature. Needless to say, however, I wrote to her as soon as the golden opportunity for exploring the Bernese Oberland in congenial company turned up, as it did only a few days since, and made me decide to postpone the realization of our vague Tenby plans. If you want to see exactly where we are going, take your map of Switzerland, find Interlaken and the Lake of Brienz, move eastward from the end of the lake to Meiringen and thence in a southerly direction towards Grindelwald. We shall be staying at the foot of the Scheideck Pass, at Rosenlaui, almost in the shadow of such giants as the Jungfrau, Weisshorn and Co. I do not know the spot, but gather from all accounts that it is entirely 'spiffing' and paradisal.

I am delighted to hear you did so creditably in your match. You must go on, dear boy, from strength to strength. Next year I shall hope to see you sporting the glories of the First Eleven Colours.

I cannot agree with you in finding Daudet ‘rotten’. I suspect that his rottenness mainly consists in the difficulties he presents to a tyro. When you have acquired a complete mastery of the language, you will come to appreciate the tender charm of his style and the sharpness of his wit.

I hope you are working your hardest to make good your sad weakness in ‘maths’. I confess that I never shone in the mathematical line myself, so I am able to sympathize with your difficulties. But hard work will do wonders, and I am sure that if you really ‘put your back into’ algebra and geometry, you can easily get up to scholarship standards by this time next year. — Ever your most affectionate father,

J.B.

‘It’s too sickening!’ said Anthony, when he had finished reading his father’s letter. The tears came into his eyes; he was filled with a sense of intolerable grievance.

‘W-what does he s-say?’ Brian asked.

‘It’s all settled. He’s written to your mater that we’re going to some stinking hole in Switzerland instead of Tenby. Oh, I really am too sick about it!’ He crumpled up the letter and threw it angrily on the ground, then turned away and tried to relieve his feeling by kicking his play-box. ‘Too sick, too sick!’ he kept repeating.

Brian was sick too. They were going to have had such a splendid time at Tenby; it had been imaginatively foreseen, preconstructed in the most luxuriant detail; and now, crash! the future good time was in bits.

‘S-still,’ he said at last, after a long silence, ‘I exp-pect you’ll enj-joy yourself in S-switzerland.’ And, moved by a sudden impulse, for which he would have found it difficult to offer an explanation, he picked up Mr Beavis’s letter, smoothed out the crumpled pages and handed it back to Anthony. ‘Here’s your l-letter,’ he said.

Anthony looked at it for a moment, opened his mouth as though to speak, then shut it again, and taking the letter, put it away in his pocket.

The congenial company in which they were to explore the Bernese Oberland turned out, when they reached Rosenlaui, to consist of Miss Gannett and her old school-friend Miss Louie Piper. Mr Beavis always spoke of them as ‘the girls’, or else, with a touch of that mock-heroic philological jocularity to which he was so partial, ‘the damsels’ — dominicellae, double diminutive of domina. The teeny weeny ladies! He smiled to himself each time he pronounced the word. To Anthony the damsels seemed a pair of tiresome and already elderly females. Piper, the thin one, was like a governess. He preferred fat old Gannett, in spite of that awful mooey, squealing laugh of hers, in spite of the way she puffed and sweated up the hills. Gannett at least was well-meaning. Luckily, there were two other English boys in the hotel. True, they came from Manchester and spoke rather funnily, but they were decent chaps, and they knew an extraordinary number of dirty stories. Moreover, in the woods behind the hotel they had discovered a cave, where they kept cigarettes. Proudly, when he got back to Bulstrode, Anthony announced that he had smoked almost every day of the hols.

One Saturday in November Mr Beavis came down to Bulstrode for the afternoon. They watched the football for a bit, then, went for a depressing walk that ended, however, at the King’s Arms. Mr Beavis ordered crumpets ‘and buttered eggs for this young stalwart’ (with a conspiratorial twinkle at the waitress, as though she knew that the word meant ‘foundation-worthy’), ‘and cherry jam to follow — isn’t cherry the favourite?’

Anthony nodded. Cherry was the favourite. But so much solicitude made him feel rather suspicious. What could it all be for? Was he going to say something about his work? About going in for the scholarship next summer? About . . . ? He blushed. But after all, his father couldn’t possibly know anything about that. Not possibly. In the end he gave it up; he couldn’t imagine what it was.

But when, after an unusually long silence, his father leaned forward and said, ‘I’ve got an interesting piece of news for you, dear boy,’ Anthony knew, in a sudden flash of illumination, exactly what was coming.

‘He’s going to marry the Gannett female,’ he said to himself.

And so he was. In the middle of December.

‘A companion for you,’ Mr Beavis was saying. That youthfulness, those fresh and girlish high spirits! ‘A companion as well as a second mother.’

Anthony nodded. But ‘companion’ — what did he mean? He thought of the fat old Gannett, toiling up the slopes behind Rosenlaui, red-faced, smelling of sweat, reeking . . . And suddenly his mother’s voice was sounding in his ears.

‘Pauline wants you to call her by her Christian name,’ Mr Beavis went on. ‘It’ll be . . . well, jollier, don’t you think?’

Anthony said ‘Yes,’ because there was obviously nothing else for him to say, and helped himself to more cherry jam.

*

‘Third person singular aorist of τίθημί?’ questioned Anthony.

Horse-Face got it wrong. It was Staithes who answered correctly.

‘Second plural pluperfect of ἔρχομαι?’

Brian’s hesitation was due to something graver than his stammer.

‘You’re putrid tonight, Horse-Face,’ said Anthony, and pointed his finger at Staithes, who gave the right answer again. ‘Good for you, Staithes.’ And repeating Jimbug’s stalest joke, ‘The sediment sinks to the bottom, Horse-Face,’ he rumbled in a parody of Jimbug’s deep voice.

‘Poor old Horse-Face!’ said Staithes, slapping the other on the back. Now that Horse-Face had given him the pleasure of knowing less Greek grammar than he did, Staithes almost loved him.

It was nearly eleven, long after lights out, and the three of them were crowded into the w.c., Anthony in his capacity of examiner sitting majestically on the seat, and the other two squatting on their heels below him, on the floor. The May night was still and warm; in less than six weeks they would be sitting for their scholarship examinations, Brian and Anthony at Eton, Mark Staithes at Rugby. It was after the previous Christmas holidays that Staithes had come back to Bulstrode with the announcement that he was going in for a scholarship. Astonishing news and, for his courtiers and followers, appalling! That work was idiotic, and that those who worked were contemptible, had been axiomatic

among them. And now here was Staithes going in for a schol with the other swots — with Benger Beavis, with old Horse-Face, with that horrible little tick, Goggler Ledwidge. It had seemed a betrayal of all that was most sacred.

By his words first of all, and afterwards, more effectively, by his actions, Staithes had reassured them. The scholarship idea was his Pater's. Not because of the money, he had hastened to add. His Pater didn't care a damn about money. But for the honour and glory, because it was a tradition in the Family. His Pater himself and his uncles, his Fraters — they had all got schols. It wouldn't do to let the Family down. Which didn't change the fact that swotting was a stinking bore and that all swotters who swotted because they liked it, as Horse-Face and Beavis seemed to do, or for the sake of the money, like that miserable Goggler, were absolutely worms. And to prove it he had ragged old Horse-Face about his stammer and his piddle-warblers, he had organized a campaign against Goggler for funking at football, he had struck nibs into Beavis's bottom during prep; and though working very hard himself, he had made up for it by playing harder than ever and by missing no opportunity of telling everyone how beastly swotting was, how he had absolutely no chance whatever of getting a schol.

When face had been sufficiently saved, he had changed his tactics towards Beavis and Horse-Face, and after showing himself for some time progressively more friendly towards them, had ended by proposing the creation of a society of mutual assistance in schol swotting. It was he who, at the beginning of the summer term, had suggested the nightly sessions in the w.c. Brian had wanted to include Goggler in these reading-parties; but the other two had protested; and anyhow, the w.c. was demonstrably too small to contain a fourth. He had to be content with helping Goggler in occasional half-hours during the day. Night and the lavatory were reserved for the triumvirate.

To explain this evening's failure with Greek verbs, 'I'm rather t-t-t . . .' Brian began; then, forced into apparent affectation, 'rather weary to-n-night,' he concluded.

His pallor and the blue transparency under his eyes testified to the truth of his words; but for Mark Staithes they were obviously an excuse by means of which

Horse-Face hoped to diminish a little the sting of his defeat at the hands of one who had been swotting, not for years, as his rivals had, but only a few months. It was an implied confession of inferiority. Triumphing, Staithes felt that he could be magnanimous. ‘Hard luck!’ he said solicitously. ‘Let’s have a bit of a rest.’

From the pocket of his dressing-gown Anthony produced three ginger-nuts, rather soft, it was true, with age, but none the less welcome.

For the thousandth time since it had been decided that he should go in for a scholarship, ‘I wish I had a ghost of a chance,’ said Staithes.

‘You’ve g-got a very g-good one.’

‘No, I haven’t. It’s just a crazy idea of my Pater’s. Crazy!’ he repeated, shaking his head. But in fact it was with a tingling, warm sensation of pride, of exultation, that he remembered his father’s words. ‘We Staitheses . . . When one’s a Staithes . . . You’ve got as good brains as the rest of us, and as much determination . . .’ He forced a sigh, and, aloud, ‘Not a ghost of a chance,’ he insisted.

‘Yes, you h-have, honestly.’

‘Rot!’ he refused to admit even the possibility of the thing. Then, if he failed, he could laughingly say, ‘I told you so’; and if he succeeded, as he privately believed he would, the glory would be all the greater. Besides, the more persistently he denied his chances, the oftener they would repeat their delicious assurances of his possible, his probable, success. Success, what was more, in their own line; success, in spite of his consistent refusal, till the beginning of last term, ever to take this ridiculous swotting seriously.

It was Benger who brought the next tribute. ‘Jimbug thinks you’ve got a chance,’ he said. ‘I heard him talking to old Jacko about it yesterday.’

‘What does that old fool Jimbug know about it?’ Staithes made a disparaging grimace; but through the mask of contempt his brown eyes shone with pleasure. ‘And as for Jacko . . .’

A sudden rattling of the door-handle made them all start. ‘I say, you chaps,’ came an imploring whisper through the keyhole, ‘do buck up! I’ve got the most frightful belly-ache.’

Brian rose hastily from the floor. ‘We must l-let him in,’ he began.

But Staithes pulled him down again. ‘Don’t be a fool!’ he said; then, turning towards the door, ‘Go to one of the rears downstairs,’ he said, ‘we’re busy.’

‘But I’m in a most frightful hurry.’

‘Then the quicker you go, the better.’

‘You are a swine!’ protested the whisper. Then ‘Christ!’ it added, and they heard the sound of slippered feet receding in a panic rush down the stairs.

Staithes grinned. ‘That’ll teach him,’ he said. ‘What about another go at the Greek grammar?’

*

Outraged in advance, James Beavis had felt his indignation growing with every minute he spent under his brother’s roof. The house positively reeked of matrimony. It was asphyxiating! And there sat John, fairly basking in those invisible radiations of dark female warmth, inhaling the stuffiness with a quivering nostril, deeply contented, revoltingly happy! Like a marmot, it suddenly occurred to James Beavis, a marmot with its female, crowded fur to fur in their subterranean burrow. Yes, the house was just a burrow — a burrow, with John like a thin marmot at one end of the table and that soft, bulging marmot-woman at the other, and between them, one on either side, himself, outraged and nauseated, and that unhappy little Anthony, like a changeling from the world of fresh air, caught and dragged down and imprisoned in the marmot-warren. Indignation begot equally violent pity and affection for this unhappy child, begot at the same time a retrospective feeling of sympathy for poor Maisie. In her lifetime he had always regarded Maisie as just a fool — hopelessly silly and frivolous. Now, John’s marriage and the oppressive connubiality which enveloped the all too happy couple made him forget his judgements on the living Maisie and think of her as a most superior woman (at least, she had had the grace to be slim), posthumously martyred by her husband for the sake of this repulsively fleshy female marmot. Horrible. He did well to be angry.

Pauline meanwhile had refused a second helping of the chocolate soufflé.

‘But, my dear, you must,’ John Beavis insisted.

Pauline heaved the conscious imitation of a sigh of repletion. ‘I couldn’t.’

‘Not even the favourite chocolatl?’ Mr Beavis always spoke of chocolate in the original Aztec.

Playfully, Pauline eyed the dish askance. ‘I shouldn’t,’ she said, implicitly admitting that the repletion was not complete.

‘Yes, you should,’ he wheedled.

‘Now he’s trying to make me fat!’ she wailed with mock reproach. ‘He’s leading me into temptation!’

‘Well, be led.’

This time, Pauline’s sigh was a martyr’s. ‘All right, then,’ she said submissively. The maid, who had been waiting impassively for the outcome of the controversy, presented the dish once again. Pauline helped herself.

‘There’s a good child,’ said Mr Beavis, in a tone and with a twinkle that expressed a sportive mock-fatherliness. ‘And now, James, I hope you’ll follow the good example.’

James’s disgust and anger were so intense that he could not trust himself to speak, for fear of saying something outrageous. He contented himself with curtly shaking his head.

‘No chocolatl for you?’ Mr Beavis turned to Anthony. ‘But I’m sure you’ll take pity on the pudding!’ And when Anthony did. ‘Ah that’s good!’ he said. ‘That’s the way . . .’ — he hesitated for a fraction of second—’. . . the way to tuck in!’

CHAPTER SIXTEEN. June 17th 1912

ANTHONY'S FLUENCY, AS they walked to the station, was a symptom of his inward sense of guilt. By the profusion of his talk, by the brightness of his attention, he was making up to Brian for what he had done the previous evening. It was not as though Brian had uttered any reproaches; he seemed, on the contrary, to be taking special pains not to hint at yesterday's offence. His silence served Anthony as an excuse for postponing all mention of the disagreeable subject of Mark Staithes. Some time, of course, he would have to talk about the whole wretched affair (what a bore people were, with their complicated squabbles!); but, for the moment, he assured himself, it would be best to wait . . . to wait until Brian himself referred to it. Meanwhile, his uneasy conscience constrained him to display towards Brian a more than ordinary friendliness, to make a special effort to be interesting and to show himself interested. Interested in the poetry of Edward Thomas as they walked down Beaumont Street; in Bergson opposite Worcester; crossing Hythe Bridge, in the nationalization of coal mines; and finally, under the viaduct and up the long approach to the station, in Joan Thursley.

'It's ext-traordinary,' said Brian, breaking, with what was manifestly an effort, a rather long preparatory silence, 'that you sh-shouldn't ever have met her.'

'Dis aliter visum', Anthony answered in his father's best classical style. Though, of course, if he had accepted Mrs Foxe's invitations to stay at Twyford, the gods, he reflected, would have changed their minds.

'I w-want you to l-like one another,' Brian was saying.

'I'm sure we shall.'

'She's not frightfully c-c-c . . .' Patiently he began again: 'frightfully c-clever. N-not on the s-surface. You'd th-think she was o-only interested in c-c-c . . .'

But ‘country life’ wouldn’t allow itself to be uttered; Brian was forced into a seemingly affected circumlocution: ‘in rural m-matters,’ he brought out at last. ‘D-dogs and b-birds and all that.’

Anthony nodded and, suddenly remembering those spew-tits and piddle-warblers of the Bulstrode days, imperceptibly smiled.

‘But w-when you g-get to kn-know her better,’ Brian went on laboriously, ‘you f-find there’s a lot m-more in her than you th-thought. She’s g-got ext-traordinary feeling for p-p-p . . . for v-verse. W-wordsworth and M-meredith, for example. I’m always ast-tonished how g-good her j-judgements are.’

Anthony smiled to himself sarcastically. Yes, it would be Meredith!

The other was silent, wondering how he should explain, whether he should even try to explain. Everything was against him — his own physical disability, the difficulty of putting what he had to say into words, the possibility that Anthony wouldn’t even want to understand what he said, that he would produce his alibi of cynicism and just pretended not to be there at all.

Brian thought of their first meeting. The embarrassing discovery of two strangers in the drawing-room when he came in, flushed and his hair still wet with the rain, to tea. His mother pronounced a name: ‘Mrs Thursley’. The new vicar’s wife, he realized, as he shook hands with the thin dowdy woman. Her manners were so ingratiating that she lisped as she spoke; her smile was deliberately bright.

‘And this is Joan.’

The girl held out her hand, and as he took it, her slender body swayed away from his alien presence in a movement of shyness that was yet adorably graceful, like the yielding of a young tree before the wind. That movement was the most beautiful and at the same time the most touching thing he had ever seen.

‘We’ve been hearing you’re keen on birds,’ said Mrs Thursley, with an oppressive politeness and intensifying that all too bright, professionally Christian smile of hers. ‘So’s Joan. A regular ornithologist.’

Blushing, the girl muttered a protest.

‘She will be pleased to have someone to talk to about her precious birds. Won’t you, Joanie?’

Joan’s embarrassment was so great that she simply couldn’t speak.

Looking at her flushed, averted face, Brian was filled with compassionate tenderness. His heart began to beat very hard. With a mixture of fear and exultation he realized that something extraordinary, something irrevocable had happened.

And then, he went on to think, there was that time, some four or five months later, when they were staying together at her uncle’s house in East Sussex. Away from her parents, she was as though transformed — not into another person; into her own fundamental self, into the happy, expansive girl that it was impossible for her to be at home. For at home she lived under constraint. Her father’s chronic grumblings and occasional outbursts of bad temper oppressed her with fear. And though she loved her, she felt herself the prisoner of her mother’s affection, was dimly conscious of being somehow exploited by means of it. And finally there was the cold numbing atmosphere of the genteel poverty in which they lived, the unremitting tension of the struggle to keep up appearances, to preserve social superiority. At home, it was impossible for Joan to be fully herself; but there, in that spacious house at Iden, among its quiet, easy-going inhabitants, she was liberated into a transfiguring happiness. Dazzled, Brian fell in love with her all over again.

He thought of the day when they had gone walking in Winchelsea marshes. The hawthorn was in bloom; dotted here and there on the wide, flat expanse of grass, the sheep and their lambs were like white constellations; overhead, the sky was alive with white clouds gliding in the wind. Unspeakably beautiful! And suddenly it seemed to him that they were walking through the image of their love. The world was their love, and their love the world; and the world was significant, charged with depth beyond depth of mysterious meaning. The proof of God’s goodness floated in those clouds, crept in those grazing sheep, shone from every burning bush of incandescent blossom — and, in himself and Joan, walked hand in hand across the grass and was manifest in their happiness. His

love, it seemed to him, in that apocalyptic moment, was more than merely his; it was in some mysterious way the equivalent of this wind and sunshine, these white gleams against the green and blue of spring. His feeling for Joan was somehow implicit in the world, had a divine and universal significance. He loved her infinitely, and for that reason was able to love everything in the world as much as he loved her.

The memory of that experience was precious to him, all the more so now, since the quality of his feelings had undergone a change. Transparent and seemingly pure as spring water, that infinite love of his had crystallized out, with the passage of time, into specific desires.

Et son bras et sa jambe, et sa cuisse et ses reins,

Polis comme de l'huile, onduleux comme un cygne,

Passaient devant mes yeux clairvoyants et sereins,

Et son ventre et ses seins, ces grappes de ma vigne.

Ever since Anthony had first made him read the poem, those lines had haunted his imagination; impersonally, at first; but later, they had come to associate themselves, definitely, with the image of Joan. Polis comme de l'huile, onduleux comme un cygne. There was no forgetting. The words had remained with him, indelibly, like a remorse, like the memory of a crime.

They entered the station and found that there were nearly five minutes to wait. The two young men walked slowly up and down the platform.

In an effort to lay the shameful phantom of those breasts, that oil-smooth belly, 'My m-mother likes her a l-lot,' Brian went on at last.

'That's very satisfactory,' said Anthony; but felt, even as he uttered the words, that he was rather overdoing the approval. If he fell in love, he most certainly wouldn't take the girl to be inspected by his father and Pauline. On approval! But it wasn't their business to approve — or disapprove, for that matter. Mrs Foxe was different, of course; one could take her more seriously than Pauline or his father. But, all the same, one wouldn't want even Mrs Foxe to interfere — indeed, he went on to reflect, would probably dislike the interference even more intensely than other people's, just because of that

superiority. For the superiority constituted a kind of claim on one, gave her certain rights. One wouldn't be able so easily to ignore her opinion as one could ignore Pauline's, for example. He was very fond of Mrs Foxe, he respected and admired her; but for that very reason he felt her as potentially a menace to his freedom. For she might — indeed, if she knew it, she certainly would — object to his way of looking at things. And though her criticisms would be based on the principles of that liberal Christianity of hers, and though, of course, such modernism was just as preposterous and, in spite of its pretensions to being 'scientific', just as hopelessly beyond the pale of rationality as the most extravagant fetishism — nevertheless, her words, being hers, would carry weight, would have to be considered. Which was why he did his best not to place himself in the position of having to listen to them. It was more than a year now since he had accepted one of her invitations to come and stay with them in the country. Dis aliter visum. But he looked forward rather nervously to his impending encounter with her.

The train came roaring in; and there, a minute later, they all were, at the other end of the platform — Mr Beavis in a grey suit, and Pauline beside him, very large in mauve, her face apoplectically flushed by the shadow of her mauve parasol, and behind them Mrs Foxe, straight and queenly, and a tall girl in a big flopping hat and a flowered dress.

Mr Beavis adopted for his greetings a humorously mock-heroic manner that Anthony found particularly irritating. 'Six precious souls,' he quoted, as he patted his son's shoulder, 'or rather only four precious souls, but all agog to dash through thick and thin. And what a hot dash — what a dashed hot dash!' he emended, twinklingly.

'Well, Anthony.' Mrs Foxe's voice was musically rich with affection. 'It's an age since I saw you.'

'Yes, an age.' He laughed rather uncomfortably, trying, as he did so, to remember those elaborate reasons he had given for not accepting her invitations. At all costs he mustn't contradict himself. Was it at Easter or at Christmas that the necessity of working at the British Museum had kept him in London? He felt

a touch on his arm, and thankful for any excuse to break off the embarrassing conversation, turned quickly away.

‘J-joan,’ Brian was saying to the girl in the flowered dress, ‘h-here’s A-anthony.’

‘Awfully glad,’ he mumbled. ‘Heard such a lot about you from . . .’ Nice hair, he thought; and the hazel eyes were beautifully bright and eager. But the profile was too emphatic; and though the lips were well cut, the mouth was too wide. A bit dairymaidish, was his conclusion; and her clothes were really too home-made. He himself preferred something rather more urban.

‘Well, lead on, Macduff,’ said Mr Beavis.

They left the station, and slowly, on the shady side of the street, walked towards the centre of the town. Still merrily Gilpinesque, as though (and this particularly irritated Anthony) today’s expedition were his first holiday jaunt for twenty years, Mr Beavis expatiated in waggish colloquialisms on the Oxford of his own undergraduate days. Mrs Foxe listened, smiled at the appropriate moments, asked pertinent questions. Pauline complained from time to time of the heat. Her face shone; and, walking in gloomy silence beside her, Anthony remarked with distaste the rather rank intensification of her natural odour. From behind him, he could hear snatches of the conversation between Brian and Joan. ‘. . . a great big hawk,’ she was saying. Her speech was eager and rapid. ‘It must have been a harrier.’ ‘D-did it have b-bars on its t-t-t . . . on its tail?’ ‘That’s it. Dark bars on a light grey ground.’ ‘Th-then it was a f-female,’ said Brian. ‘Fe-females have b-bars on their tails.’ Anthony smiled to himself sarcastically.

They were passing the Ashmolean, when a woman who was coming very slowly and as though disconsolately out of the museum suddenly waved her hand at them and, calling out first Mr Beavis’s name and then, as they all turned round to look at her, Mrs Foxe’s, came running down the steps towards them.

‘Why, it’s Mary Champernowne,’ said Mrs Foxe. ‘Mary Amberley, I should say.’ Or perhaps, she reflected, should not say, now that the Amberleys were divorced.

The name, the familiar face, evoked in Mr Beavis's mind only a pleasant sensation of surprised recognition. Raising his hat with a self-consciously comic parody of an old-world flourish, 'Welcome,' he said to the new arrival. 'Welcome, dear lady.'

Mary Amberley took Mrs Foxe's hand. 'Such luck,' she exclaimed breathlessly. Mrs Foxe was surprised by so much cordiality. Mary's mother was her friend; but Mary had always held aloof. And anyhow, since her marriage she had moved in a world that Mrs Foxe did not know, and of which, on principle, she disapproved. 'Such marvellous luck!' the other repeated as she turned to Mr Beavis.

'The luck is ours,' he said gallantly. 'You know my wife, don't you? And the young stalwart?' His eyes twinkled; the corners of his mouth, under the moustache, humorously twitched. He laid a hand on Anthony's arm. 'The young foundation-worthy?'

She smiled at Anthony. A strange smile, he noticed; a crooked smile of unparted lips that seemed as though secretly significant. 'I haven't seen you for years,' she said. 'Not since . . .' Not since the first Mrs Beavis's funeral, as a matter of fact. But one could hardly say so. 'Not since you were so high!' And lifting a gloved hand to the level of her eye, she measured, between the thumb and forefinger, a space of about an inch.

Anthony laughed nervously, intimidated, even while he admired, by so much prettiness and ease and smartness.

Mrs Amberley shook hands with Joan and Brian; then turning back to Mrs Foxe, 'I was feeling like Robinson Crusoe,' she said, explaining that abnormal cordiality. 'Marooned.' She lingered with a comical insistence over the long syllable. 'Absolutely marooned. Monarch of all I surveyed.' And while they slowly walked on across St Giles's, she launched out into a complicated story about a stay in the Cotswolds; about an appointment to meet some friends on the way home, at Oxford, on the eighteenth; about her journey from Chipping Campden; about her punctual arrival at the meeting-place, her waiting, her

growing impatience, her rage, and finally her discovery that she had come a day too early: it was the seventeenth. ‘Too typical of me.’

Everybody laughed a great deal. For the story was full of unexpected fantasies and extravagances; and it was told in a voice that modulated itself with an extraordinary subtlety to fit the words — a voice that knew when to hurry breathlessly and when to drawl, when to fade out into an inaudibility rich with unspoken implications.

Even Mrs Foxe, who didn’t particularly want to be amused — because of that divorce — found herself unable to resist the story.

For Mary Amberley, their laughter was like champagne; it warmed her, it sent a tingling exhilaration through her body. They were bores, of course; they were philistines. But the applause even of bores and philistines is still applause and intoxicating; Her eyes shone, her cheeks flushed. ‘Too hopelessly typical of me!’ she wailed, when their laughter had subsided; but the gesture of despairing self-disparagement was a caricature; she was really proud of her incompetence, regarded it as part of her feminine charm. ‘Well, anyhow,’ she concluded, ‘there I was — shipwrecked. All alone on a desert island.’

They walked for a moment in silence. The thought that she would have to be asked to lunch was in all their minds — a thought tinged in Mrs Foxe’s case with vexation, in Anthony’s with embarrassed desire. The lunch was being given in his rooms; as the host, he ought to ask her. And he wanted to ask her — violently wanted it. But what would the others say? Oughtn’t he somehow to consult them first? Mr Beavis solved the problem for him by making the suggestion on his own account.

‘I think’ — he hesitated; then, twinkling, ‘I think our festal “spread”,’ he went on, ‘will run to another guest, won’t it, Anthony?’

‘But I can’t impose myself,’ she protested, turning from the father to the son. He seemed a nice boy, she thought, sensitive and intelligent. Pleasant-looking too.

‘But I assure you . . .’ Anthony was earnestly and incoherently repeating, ‘I assure you . . .’

‘Well, if it’s really all right . . .’ She thanked him with a smile of sudden intimacy, almost of complicity — as though there were some bond between them, as though, of all the party, they two were the only ones who understood what was what.

After lunch, Joan had to be shown the sights of Oxford; and Mr Beavis had an appointment with a philological colleague in the Woodstock Road; and Pauline thought she would like to take things quietly till tea-time. Anthony was left to entertain Mary Amberley. The responsibility was deliciously alarming.

In the hansom that was taking them to Magdalen Bridge Mrs Amberley turned to him a face that was bright with sudden mischief.

‘Free at last,’ she said.

Anthony nodded at her and smiled back, understandingly, conspiratorially. ‘They were rather heavy,’ he said. ‘Perhaps I ought to apologize.’

‘I’ve often thought of founding a league for the abolition of families,’ she went on. ‘Parents ought never to be allowed to come near their children.’

‘Plato thought so too,’ he said, rather pedantically.

‘Yes, but he wanted children to be bullied by the state instead of by their fathers and mothers. I don’t want them to be bullied by anyone.’

He ventured a personal question. ‘Were you bullied?’ he asked.

Mary Amberley nodded. ‘Horribly. Few children have been more loved than I was. They fairly bludgeoned me with affection. Made me a mental cripple. It took me years to get over the deformity.’ There was a silence. Then, looking at him with an embarrassingly appraising glance, as though he were for sale, ‘Do you know,’ she said, ‘the last time I saw you was at your mother’s funeral.’

The subterranean association between this remark and what had gone before made him blush guiltily, as though at an impropriety in mixed company. ‘Yes, I remember,’ he mumbled, and was annoyed with himself for feeling so embarrassed, was at the same time rather ashamed that he had allowed even this remotely implied comment upon his mother to pass without some kind of protest, that he had felt so little desire to make a protest.

‘You were a horrible, squalid little boy then,’ she went on, still looking at him judicially. ‘How awful little boys always are! It seems incredible that they should ever turn into presentable human beings. And of course,’ she added, ‘a great many of them don’t. Dismal, don’t you find? — the way most people are so hideous and stupid, so utterly and absymally boring!’

Making a violent effort of will, Anthony emerged from his embarrassment with a creditable dash. ‘I hope I’m not one of the majority?’ he said, lifting his eyes to hers.

Mrs Amberley shook her head, and with a serious matter-of-factness. ‘No,’ she answered. ‘I was thinking how successfully you’d escaped from the horrors of boyhood.’

He blushed again, this time with pleasure.

‘Let’s see, how old are you now?’ she asked.

‘Twenty — nearly twenty-one.’

‘And I shall be thirty this winter. Queer,’ she added, ‘how these things change their significance. When I saw you last, those nine years were a great gulf between us. Uncrossable, it seemed then. We belonged to different species. And yet here we are, sitting on the same side of the gulf as though it were the most natural thing in the world. Which indeed it is, now.’ She turned and smiled at him that secret and significant smile of unparted lips. Her dark eyes were full of dancing brightness. ‘Ah, there’s Magdalen,’ she went on, leaving him (to his great relief; for in his excited embarrassment he would not have known what to say) no time to comment on her words. ‘How dreary that late Gothic can be! So mean! No wonder Gibbon didn’t think much of the Middle Ages!’ She was suddenly silent, remembering the occasion when her husband had made that remark about Gibbon. Only a month or two after their marriage. She had been shocked and astonished by his airy criticisms of things she had been brought up to regard as sacredly beyond judgement — shocked, but also thrilled, also delighted. For what fun to see the sacred things knocked about! And in those days Roger was still adorable. She sighed; then, with a touch of irritation, shook off the sentimental mood and went on talking about that odious architecture.

The cab drew up at the bridge; they dismounted and walked down to the boat-house. Lying back on the cushions of the punt, Mary Amberley was silent. Very slowly, Anthony poled his way upstream. The green world slid past her half-shut eyes. Green darkness of trees overarching the olive shadows and tawny-glaucous lights of water; and between the twilight stretches of green vaulting, the wide gold-green meadows, islanded with elms. And always the faint weedy smell of the river; and the air so soft and warm against the face that one was hardly aware any longer of the frontiers between self and not-self, but lay there, separated by no dividing surfaces, melting, drowsily melting into the circumambient summer.

Standing at the stern, Anthony could look down on her, as from a post of vantage. She lay there at his feet, limp and abandoned. Handling his long pole with an easy mastery of which he was proud, he felt, as he watched her, exultantly strong and superior. There was no gulf between them now. She was a woman, he a man. He lifted his trailing punt pole and swung it forward with a movement of easy grace, of unhurried and accomplished power. Thrust it down into the mud, tightened his muscles against its resistance; the punt shot forward, the end of the pole lifted from the river-bed, trailed for a moment, then gracefully, once more, easily, masterfully was swung forward. Suddenly she lifted her eyelids and looked at him, with that detached appraising look that had embarrassed him so much in the cab. His manly confidence evaporated at once.

‘My poor Anthony,’ she said at last, and her face came closer, as it were, in a sudden smile. ‘It makes me hot even to look at you.’

When the punt had been secured, he came forward and sat down in the place she made, drawing her skirts away, on the cushion beside her.

‘I don’t suppose your father bullies you much,’ she said, returning to the theme of their conversation in the cab.

He shook his head.

‘Nor blackmails you with too much affection, I imagine.’

Anthony found himself feeling unexpectedly loyal to his father. ‘I think he was always very fond of me.’

‘Oh, of course,’ said Mrs Amberley, impatiently. ‘I didn’t imagine he knocked you about.’

Anthony could not help laughing. The vision of his father running after him with a club was irresistibly comic. Then, more seriously, ‘He never got near enough to knock me about,’ he said. ‘There was always a great gulf fixed.’

‘Yes, one feels he has a talent for fixing gulfs. And yet your step-mother seems to get on with him all right. So did your mother, I believe.’ She shook her head. ‘But, then, marriage is so odd and unaccountable. The most obviously incompatible couples stick together, and the most obviously compatible fly apart. Boring, tiresome people are adored, and charming ones are hated. Why? God knows. But I suppose it’s generally a matter of what Milton calls the Genial Bed.’ She lingered, ludicrously, over the first syllable of ‘genial’; but Anthony was so anxious not to seem startled by the casual mention of what he had always regarded as, in a lady’s presence, the unmentionable, that he did not laugh — for a laugh might have been interpreted as a schoolboy’s automatic reaction to smut — did not even smile; but gravely, as though he were admitting the truth of a proposition in geometry, nodded his head and in a very serious and judicial tone said, ‘Yes, I suppose it generally is.’

‘Poor Mrs Foxe,’ Mary Amberley went on. ‘I imagine there was a minimum of geniality there.’

‘Did you know her husband?’ he asked.

‘Only as a child. One grown-up seems as boring as another then. But my mother’s often talked to me about him. Thoroughly beastly. And thoroughly virtuous. God preserve me from a virtuous beast! The vicious ones are bad enough; but at least they’re never beastly on principle. They’re inconsistent: so they’re sometimes nice by mistake. Whereas the virtuous ones — they never forget; they’re beastly all the time. Poor woman! She had a dog’s life, I’m afraid. But she seems to be getting it back on her son all right.’

‘But she adores Brian,’ he protested. ‘And Brian adores her.’

‘That’s exactly what I was saying. All the love she never got from her husband, all the love she never gave him — it’s being poured out on that

miserable boy.’

‘He isn’t miserable.’

‘He may not know it, perhaps. Not yet. But you wait!’ Then, after a little pause, ‘You’re lucky,’ Mrs Amberley went on. ‘A great deal luckier than you know.’

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN. May 26th 1934

LITERATURE FOR PEACE — of what kind? One can concentrate on economics: trade barriers, disorganized currency, impediments in the way of migration, private interests bent on making profits at all costs. And so on. One can concentrate on politics: danger of the concept of the sovereign state, as a wholly immoral being having interests irreconcilable with those of other sovereign states. One can propose political and economic remedies — trade agreements, international arbitration, collective security. Sensible prescriptions following sound diagnosis. But has the diagnosis gone far enough, and will the patient follow the treatment prescribed?

This question came up in the course of today's discussion with Miller. Answer in the negative. The patient can't follow the treatment prescribed, for a good reason: there is no patient. States and Nations don't exist as such. There are only people. Sets of people living in certain areas, having certain allegiances. Nations won't change their national policies unless and until people change their private policies. All governments, even Hitler's, even Stalin's, even Mussolini's, are representative. Today's national behaviour — a large-scale projection of today's individual behaviour. Or rather, to be more accurate, a large-scale projection of the individual's secret wishes and intentions. For we should all like to behave a good deal worse than our conscience and respect for public opinion allow. One of the great attractions of patriotism — it fulfils our worst wishes. In the person of our nation we are able, vicariously, to bully and cheat. Bully and cheat, what's more, with a feeling that we're profoundly virtuous. Sweet and decorous to murder, lie, torture for the sake of the fatherland. Good international policies are projections of individual good intentions and benevolent wishes, and must be of the same kind as good inter-personal policies. Pacifist propaganda

must be aimed at people as well as their governments; must start simultaneously at the periphery and the centre.

Empirical facts:

One. We are all capable of love for other human beings.

Two. We impose limitations on that love.

Three. We can transcend all these limitations — if we choose to. (It is a matter of observation that anyone who so desires can overcome personal dislike, class feeling, national hatred, colour prejudice. Not easy; but it can be done, if we have the will and know how to carry out our good intentions.) Four. Love expressing itself in good treatment breeds love. Hate expressing itself in bad treatment breeds hate.

In the light of these facts, it's obvious what inter-personal, interclass and international policies should be. But, again, knowledge cuts little ice. We all know; we almost all fail to do. It is a question, as usual, of the best methods of implementing intentions. Among other things, peace propaganda must be a set of instructions in the art of modifying character.

I see

The lost are like this, and their scourge to be, As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

Hell is the incapacity to be other than the creature one finds oneself ordinarily behaving as.

On the way home from Miller's, dived into the public lavatory at Marble Arch, and there ran into Beppo Bowles deep in conversation with one of those flannel-trousered, hatless young men who look like undergraduates and are, I suppose, very junior clerks or shop assistants. On B.'s face, what a mingling of elation and anxiety. Happy, drunk with thrilling anticipation, and at the same time horribly anxious and afraid. He might be turned down — unspeakable humiliation! He might not be turned down — appalling dangers! Frustration of desire, if there was failure, cruel blow to pride, wound to the very root of personality. And, if success, fear (through all the triumph) of blackmail and police court. Poor wretch! He was horribly embarrassed at the sight of me. I just

nodded and hurried past. B.’s hell — an underground lavatory with rows of urinals stretching to infinity in all directions and a boy at each. Beppo walking up and down the rows, for ever — his sweating self, but worse.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN. December 8th 1926

MORE GUESTS KEPT arriving — young people mostly, friends of Joyce and Helen. Dutifully, they crossed the drawing-room to the far corner where Mrs Amberley was sitting between Beppo Bowles and Anthony, said good evening, then hurried off to dance.

‘They put one in one’s middle-aged place all right,’ said Anthony, but either Mrs Amberley preferred not to hear the remark, or else she was genuinely absorbed in what Beppo was saying with such loud and fizzling enthusiasm about Berlin — the most amusing place in Europe nowadays! Where else would you find, for example, those special tarts for masochists? In top-boots; yes, genuine top-boots! And the Museum of Sexology: such photographs and wax models — almost too trompe-l’œil — such astounding objects in horn from Japan, such strange and ingenious tailoring for exhibitionists! And all those delicious little Lesbian bars, all those cabarets where the boys were dressed up as women . . .

‘There’s Mark Staithes,’ said Mrs Amberley, interrupting him, and waved to a shortish, broad-shouldered man who had just entered the drawing-room. ‘I forget,’ she said, turning to Anthony, ‘whether you know him.’

‘Only for the last thirty years,’ he answered, finding once again a certain malicious pleasure in insisting, to the point of exaggeration, on his vanished youth. If he were no longer young, then Mary had ceased to be young nine years ago.

‘But with long gaps,’ he qualified. ‘During the war and then afterwards, for all that time he was in Mexico. And I’ve hardly had more than a glimpse of him since he came back. I’m delighted to have this chance . . .’

‘He’s a queer fish,’ said Mary Amberley, thinking of the time, just after his return from Mexico, some eighteen months before, when he had first come to

her house. His appearance, his manner, as of some savage and fanatical hermit, had violently attracted her. She had tried all her seductions upon him — without the smallest effect. He had ignored them — but so completely and absolutely that she felt no ill-will towards him for the rebuff, convinced, as she was, that in fact there hadn't been any rebuff, merely a display of symptoms, either, she diagnosed judicially, of impotence, or else, less probably (though of course one never knew, one never knew), of homosexuality. 'A queer fish,' she repeated, and decided that she'd take the next opportunity of asking Beppo about the homosexuality. He would be sure to know. They always did know about one another. Then, waving again, 'Come and sit with us, Mark,' she called through the noise of the gramophone.

Staithes crossed the room, drew up a chair and sat down. His hair had retreated from his forehead, and above the ears was already grey. The brown face — that fanatical hermit's face which Mary Amberley had found so strangely attractive — was deeply lined. No smooth obliterating layer of fat obscured its inner structure. Under the skin each strip of muscle in the cheek and jaw seemed to stand out distinct and separate like the muscles in those lime-wood statues of flayed human beings that were made for Renaissance anatomy rooms. When he smiled — and each time that happened it was as though the flayed statue had come to life and were expressing its agony — one could follow the whole mechanism of the excruciating grimace; the upward and outward pull of the zygomaticus major, the sideways tug of the risorius, the contraction of the great sphincters round the eyelids.

'Am I interrupting?' he asked, looking with sharp, inquisitorial movements from one to the other.

'Beppo was telling us about Berlin,' said Mrs Amberley.

'I popped over to get away from the General Strike,' Beppo explained.

'Naturally,' said Staithes, and his face twitched in the anguish of amused contempt.

'Such a heavenly place!' Beppo exploded irrepressibly.

'You feel like Lord Haldane about it? Your spiritual home?'

‘Carnal,’ Anthony amended.

Only too happy to plead guilty, Beppo giggled. ‘Yes, those transvestists!’ he had to admit rapturously.

‘I was over there this winter,’ said Staithes. ‘On business. But of course one has to pay one’s tribute to pleasure too. That night life . . .’

‘Didn’t you find it amusing?’

‘Oh, passionately.’

‘You see!’ Beppo was triumphant.

‘One of the creatures came and sat at my table,’ Staithes went on. ‘I danced with it. It looked like a woman.’

‘You simply can’t tell them apart,’ Beppo cried excitedly, as though he were taking personal credit for the fact.

‘When we’d finished dancing, it painted its face a bit and we drank a little beer. Then it showed me some indecent photographs. That rather surgical, anti-aphrodisiac kind — you know. Damping. Perhaps that was why the conversation flagged. Anyhow, there were uncomfortable silences. Neither it nor I seemed to know what to say next. We were becalmed.’ He threw out his two thin and knotted hands horizontally, as though sliding them across an absolutely flat surface. ‘Utterly becalmed. Until, suddenly, the creature did a most remarkable thing. One of its regular gambits, no doubt; but never having had it played on me before, I was impressed. ‘Would you like to see something?’ it said. I said yes, and immediately it began to poke and pull at something under its blouse. ‘Now, look!’ it said at last. I looked. It smiled triumphantly, like a man playing the ace of trumps — or rather playing two aces of trumps; for what it plunked down on the table was a pair. A pair of superb artificial breasts, made of pink rubber sponge.’

‘But how revolting!’ cried Mrs Amberley, while Anthony laughed and Beppo’s round face took on an expression of pained distress. ‘How revolting!’ she repeated.

‘Yes, but how satisfactory!’ Staithes insisted, making that crooked and agonized grimace that passed with him for a smile. ‘It’s so good when things

happen as they ought to happen — artistically, symbolically. Two rubber breasts between the beer mugs — that's what vice ought to be. And when that was what it actually was — well, it felt as though something had clicked into place. Inevitably, beautifully. Yes, beautifully,' he repeated. 'Beautifully revolting.'

'All the same,' Beppo insisted, 'you must admit there's a lot to be said for a town where that sort of thing can happen. In public,' he added earnestly, 'in public, mind you. It's the most tolerant in the world, the German Government. You've got to admit that.'

'Oh, I do,' said Staithes. 'It tolerates everybody. Not only girls in boiled shirts and boys with rubber breasts, but also monarchists, fascists, Junkers, Krupps. Communists too, I'm thankful to say. All its enemies of every colour.'

'I think that's rather fine,' said Mrs Amberley.

'Very fine indeed, until its enemies rise up and destroy it. I only hope the communists will get in first.'

'But seeing that they're tolerated, why should its enemies want to destroy it?'

'Why not? They don't believe in tolerance. Quite rightly,' he added.

'You're barbarous,' Beppo protested.

'As one should be if one lives in the Dark Ages. You people — you're survivors from the Age of the Antonines.' He looked from one to the other, smiling his flayed smile, and shook his head. 'Imagining you're still in the first volume of Gibbon. Whereas we're well on in the third.'

'Do you mean to say . . . ? But, good heavens,' Mrs Amberley interrupted herself, 'there's Gerry!'

At her words, at the sight of Gerry Watchett himself, fox-trotting in from the back drawing-room with Helen, Anthony took out his pocket-book and quickly examined its contents. 'Thank God!' he said. 'Only two pounds.' Gerry had caught him with ten the previous month and, on the strength of a most improbably distressing story, borrowed them all. He ought to have disbelieved the story, of course, ought to have withheld the loan. Ten pounds were more than he could afford. He had said so, but had lacked the firmness to persist in his refusal. It had taken more than a fortnight of strict economy to make up that lost

money. Economizing was an unpleasant process; but to say no and to go on saying it in the teeth of Gerry's importunities and reproaches would have been still more unpleasant. He was always ready to sacrifice his rights to his conveniences. People thought him disinterested, and he would have liked, he did his best, to accept their diagnosis of his character. But awareness of the real state of affairs kept breaking through. When it did, he accepted self-knowledge with a laugh. He was laughing now. 'Only two,' he repeated. 'Luckily I can afford . . .'

He broke off. Behind Mary's back, Beppo had tapped him on the shoulder, was making significant grimaces. Anthony turned and saw that she was still staring intently and with knitted brows at the new arrivals.

'He told me he wasn't coming this evening,' she said, almost as though she were speaking to herself. Then, through the music, 'Gerry!' she called sharply in a voice that had suddenly lost all its charm — a voice that reminded Anthony only too plainly of those distasteful scenes in which, long since, he had played his part. So that was it, he said to himself, and felt sorry for poor Mary.

Gerry Watchett turned, and with the expression of one who refers to some excellent shared joke gave her a quick smile and even a hint of a wink, then looked down again to go on talking to his partner.

Mrs Amberley flushed with sudden anger. Grinning at her like that! It was intolerable. Intolerable too — but how typical! — to appear like this, unannounced, out of the blue — casually dancing with another woman, as though it were the most natural thing in the world. This time, it was true, the other woman was only Helen; but that was merely because he hadn't found anyone else to dance with, anyone worse. 'The beast!' she thought, as she followed him round the room with her eyes. Then, making an effort, she looked away, she forced herself to pay attention to what was going on around her.

'. . . a country like this,' Mark Staithes was saying, 'a country where a quarter of the population's genuinely bourgeois and another quarter passionately longs to be.'

'You're exaggerating,' Anthony protested.

‘Not a bit. What does the Labour Party poll at an election? A third of the votes. I’m generously assuming it might some day poll half of them. The rest’s bourgeois. Either naturally bourgeois by interest and fear, or else artificially, by snobbery and imagination. It’s childish to think you can get what you want by constitutional methods.’

‘And what about unconstitutional ones?’

‘There’s a chance.’

‘Not much of a chance,’ said Anthony. ‘Not against the new weapons.’

‘Oh, I know,’ said Mark Staithes, ‘I know. If they use their strength, the middle classes can obviously win. They could win, most likely, even without tanks and planes — just because they’re potentially better soldiers than the proletariat.’

‘Better soldiers?’ Beppo protested, thinking of those guardsmen friends of his.

‘Because of their education. A bourgeois gets anything from ten to sixteen years of training — most of it, what’s more, in a boarding school; that’s to say, in barracks. Whereas a workman’s child lives at home and doesn’t get more than six or seven years at his day school. Sixteen years of obedience and esprit de corps. No wonder that Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. If they’ll use only half their resources — use them ruthlessly — the game’s theirs.’

‘You think they won’t use their resources?’

Mark shrugged his shoulders. ‘Certainly the German republicans don’t seem ready to use theirs. And think of what happened here, during the Strike. Even the majority of industrialists were ready to compromise.’

‘For the simple reason,’ Anthony put in, ‘that you can’t be a successful industrialist unless you have the compromising habit. A business isn’t run by faith; it’s run by haggling.’

‘Anyhow,’ Mark went on, ‘the fact remains that the available resources weren’t used. That’s what allows one to hope that a revolution might succeed. Provided it were carried out very quickly. For, of course, once they realized they were seriously in danger, they’d forget their scruples. But they might hesitate

long enough, I think, to make a revolution possible. Even a few hours of compunction would be sufficient. Yes, in spite of tanks, there's still a chance of success. But you must be prepared to take a chance. Not like the imbeciles of the T.U.C. Or the rank and file of the Unions, for that matter. As full of scruples as the bourgeoisie. It's the hang-over of evangelical Christianity. You've no idea what a lot of preaching and hymn-singing there was during the General Strike. I was flabbergasted. But it's good to know the worst. Perhaps the younger generation . . .' He shook his head. 'But I don't feel certain even of them. Methodism may be decaying. But look at those spiritualist chapels that are sprouting up all over the industrial areas! Like toadstools.'

*

The next time he passed, Gerry called her name; but Mary Amberley refused to acknowledge his greeting. Turning coldly away she pretended to be interested only in what Anthony was saying.

'Ass of a woman!' thought Gerry, as he looked at her averted face. Then, aloud, 'What do you say to putting on this record another time?' he asked his partner.

Helen nodded ecstatically.

The music of the spheres, the beatific vision . . . But why should heaven be a monopoly of ear or eye? The muscles as they move, they too have their paradise. Heaven is not only an illumination and a harmony; it is also a dance.

'Half a tick,' said Gerry, when they were opposite the gramophone.

Helen stood there as he wound up the machine, quite still, her arms hanging limp at her sides. Her eyes were closed; she was shutting the world away from her, shutting herself out of existence. In this still vacancy between two heavens of motion, existence was without a point.

The music stopped for a moment; then began again in the middle of a bar. Behind her closed eyelids, she was aware that Gerry had moved, was standing over her, very near; then his arm encircled her body.

‘Onward, Christian soldiers!’ he said; and they stepped out once more into the music, into the heaven of harmoniously moving muscles.

*

There had been a silence. Determined not to pay any attention to that beast, Mrs Amberley turned to Staithes. ‘And those scents of yours?’ she asked with an assumption of bright, amused interest.

‘Flourishing,’ he answered. ‘I’ve had to order three new stills and take on more labour.’

Mrs Amberley smiled at him and shook her head. ‘You of all people!’ she said. ‘It seems peculiarly ridiculous that you should be a scent-manufacturer.’

‘Why?’

‘The most unfrivolous of men,’ she went on, ‘the least gallant, the most implacable misogynist!’ (Either impotent or homosexual — there couldn’t be a doubt; and, after his story about Berlin, almost certainly impotent, she thought.)

With a smile of excruciated mockery, ‘But hasn’t it occurred to you,’ Staithes asked, ‘that those might be reasons for being a scent-maker?’

‘Reasons?’

‘A way of expressing one’s lack of gallantry.’ In point of fact, it was entirely by chance that he had gone into the scent business. His eye had been caught by an advertisement in The Times, a small factory for sale very cheap. . . . Just luck. But now, after the event, it heightened his self-esteem to say that he had chosen the profession deliberately, in order to express his contempt for the women for whom he catered. The lie, which he had willed and by this time half believed to be the truth, placed him in a position of superiority to all women in general and, at this moment, to Mary Amberley in particular. Leaning forward, he took Mary’s hand, raised it as though he were about to kiss it, but, instead, only sniffed at the skin — then let it fall again. ‘For example,’ he said, ‘there’s civet in the stuff you’ve scented yourself with.’

‘Well, why not?’

‘Oh, no reason at all,’ said Staithes, ‘no reason at all, if you happen to have a taste for the excrement of polecats.’

Mrs Amberley made a grimace of disgust.

‘In Abyssinia,’ he went on, ‘they have civet farms. Twice a week, you take a stick and go and poke the cats until they’re thoroughly angry and frightened. That’s when they secrete their stuff. Like children wetting their knickers when they’re afraid. Then you catch them with a pair of tongs, so that they can’t bite, and scrape out the contents of the little pouch attached to their genital organs. You do it with an egg-spoon and the stuff’s a kind of yellow grease, rather like ear-wax. Stinks like hell when it’s undiluted. We get it in London packed in buffalo horns. Huge cornucopias full of dark brown stinking ear-wax. At a hundred and seventeen shillings the ounce, what’s more. That’s one of the reasons why your scent costs you so much. The poor can’t afford to smear themselves with cat’s mess. They have to be content with plain iso-eugenol and phenyl acetic aldehyde.’

*

Colin and Joyce had stopped dancing and were sitting on the landing outside the drawing-room door. Alone. It was Colin’s opportunity for releasing some of the righteous indignation that had been accumulating within him, ever since dinner-time.

‘I must say, Joyce,’ he began, ‘some of your mother’s guests . . .’

Joyce looked at him with eyes in which there was anxiety as well as adoration. ‘Yes, I know,’ she apologized. ‘I know,’ and was abjectly in a hurry to agree with him about Beppo’s degeneracy and Anthony Beavis’s cynicism. Then, seeing that he was enjoying his indignation and that she herself rather profited than suffered by it, she even volunteered the information that that man who had come in last and was sitting with her mother was a Bolshevik. Yes, Mark Staithes was a Bolshevik.

The phrase that Colin had been meditating all the evening found utterance. ‘I may be stupid and all that,’ he said with an assumption of humility that cloaked

an overweening self-satisfaction in what he regarded as the quite extraordinary quality of his ordinariness; ‘I may be ignorant and badly educated; but at least’ (his tone changed, he was proudly giving expression to his consciousness of being uniquely average), ‘at least I know — well, I do know what’s done. I mean, if one’s a gentleman.’ He underlined the words to make them sound slightly comic and so prove that he had a sense of humour. To speak seriously of what one took seriously — this, precisely, was one of the things that wasn’t done. That touch of humour proved more cogently than any emphasis could do, any emotional trembling of the voice, that he did take these things seriously — as a uniquely average gentleman must take them. And of course Joyce understood that he did. She glanced at him worshippingly and pressed his hand.

*

Dancing, dancing . . . Oh, if only, thought Helen, one could go on dancing for ever! If only one didn’t have to spend all that time doing other things! Wrong things, mostly, stupid things, things one was sorry for after they were done. Dancing, she lost her life in order to save it; lost her identity and became something greater than herself; lost perplexities and self-hatreds in a bright harmonious certitude; lost her bad character and was made perfect; lost the regretted past, the apprehended future, and gained a timeless present of consummate happiness. She who could not paint, could not write, could not even sing in tune, became while she danced an artist; no, more than an artist; became a god, the creator of a new heaven and a new earth, a creator rejoicing in his creation and finding it good.

‘ ”Yes, sir, she’s my baby. No, sir . . .” ’ Gerry broke off his humming. ‘I won sixty pounds at poker last night,’ he said. ‘Pretty good, eh?’

She smiled up at him and nodded in a rapturous silence. Good, good — everything was wonderfully good.

*

‘And I can’t tell you,’ Staithes was saying, ‘how intensely I enjoy those advertisements.’ The muscles in his face were working as though for an anatomical demonstration. ‘The ones about bad breath and body odours.’

‘Hideous!’ Mrs Amberley shuddered. ‘Hideous! There’s only one Victorian convention I appreciate, and that’s the convention of not speaking about those things.’

‘Which is precisely why it’s such fun to speak about them,’ said Staithes, beaming at her between contracted sphincters. ‘Forcing humans to be fully, verbally conscious of their own and other people’s disgustingness. That’s the beauty of this kind of advertising. It shakes them into awareness.’

‘And into buying,’ put in Anthony. ‘You’re forgetting the profits.’

Staithes shrugged his shoulders. ‘They’re incidental,’ he said; and it was obvious, Anthony reflected, as he watched him, it was obvious that the man was telling the truth. For him, the profits were incidental. Breaking down your protective convention,’ he went on, turning again to Mary, ‘that’s the real fun. Leaving you defenceless against the full consciousness of the fact that you can’t do without your fellow humans, and that, when you’re with them, they make you sick.’

CHAPTER NINETEEN. July 7th 1912

MRS FOXE WAS looking through her engagement book. The succession of committee meetings, of district visitings, of afternoons at the cripples' playroom, darkened the pages. And in between whiles there would be calls, and tea at the vicarage and luncheon-parties in London. And yet (she knew it in advance) the total effect of the coming summer would be one of emptiness. However tightly crammed with activity, time always seemed strangely empty when Brian was away. In other years there had been a wedge of well-filled time each summer. But this July, after only a week or two at home, Brian was going to Germany. To learn the language. It was essential. She knew that he had to go; she earnestly wanted him to go. All the same, when the moment actually came for his departure, it was painful. She wished she could be frankly selfish and keep him at home.

'This time tomorrow,' she said, when Brian came into the room, 'you'll be driving across London to Liverpool Street.'

He nodded without speaking and, laying a hand on her shoulder, bent down and kissed her.

Mrs Foxe looked up at him and smiled. Then, forgetting for a moment that she had vowed not to say anything to him about her feelings, 'It'll be a sadly empty summer, I'm afraid,' she said; and immediately reproached herself for having brought that expression of distress to his face; reproached herself even while, with a part of her being, she rejoiced to find him so responsibly loving, so sensitively concerned with her feelings. 'Unless you fill it with your letters,' she added by way of qualification. 'You will write, won't you?'

'Of c-c-c . . . Nnaturally, I'll wr-write.'

Mrs Foxe proposed a walk; or what about a little drive in the dogcart? Embarrassed, Brian looked at his watch.

‘But I’m l-lunching with the Th-Thursleys,’ he answered uncomfortably. ‘There w-wouldn’t be much t-t-t . . . much leisure’ (how he hated these ridiculous circumlocutions!) ‘for a drive.’

‘But how silly of me!’ cried Mrs Foxe. ‘I’d quite forgotten your lunch.’ It was true that she had forgotten; and this sudden, fresh realization that for long hours, on this last day, she would have to do without him was like a wound. She made an effort to prevent any sign of the pain she felt from appearing on her face or sounding in her voice. ‘But there’ll be time at least for a stroll in the garden, won’t there?’

They walked out through the French window and down the long green alley between the herbaceous borders. It was a sunless day, but warm, almost sultry. Under the grey sky the flowers took on a brilliance that seemed somehow almost unnatural. Still silent, they turned at the end of the alley and walked back again.

‘I’m glad it’s Joan,’ said Mrs Foxe at last; ‘and I’m glad you care so much. Though in a way it’s a pity you met her when you did. Because, I’m afraid, it’ll be such a weary long time before you’ll be able to get married.’

Brian nodded without speaking.

‘It’ll be a testing time,’ she went on. ‘Difficult; not altogether happy perhaps. All the same’ (and her voice vibrated movingly), ‘I’m glad it happened, I’m glad,’ she repeated. ‘Because I believe in love.’ She believed in it, as the poor believe in a heaven of posthumous comfort and glory, because she had never known it. She had respected her husband, admired him for his achievements, had liked him for what was likeable in him, and, maternally, had pitied him for his weaknesses. But there had been no transfiguring passion, and his carnal approach had always remained for her an outrage, hardly supportable. She had never loved him. That was why her belief in love’s reality was so strong. Love had to exist in order that the unfavourable balance of her own personal experience might be at least vicariously redressed. Besides, there were the attestations of the poets; it did exist and was wonderful, holy, a revelation. ‘It’s a kind of special grace,’ she went on, ‘sent by God to help us, to make us stronger

and better, to deliver us from evil. Saying no to the worst is easy when one has said yes to the best.'

Easy, Brian was thinking in the ensuing silence, even when one hasn't said yes to the best. The woman who had come and sat at their table in the Café-Concert, when Anthony and he were learning French at Grenoble, two years before — it hadn't been difficult to resist that temptation.

'Tu as l'air bien vicieux,' she had said to him in the first entr'acte; and to Anthony, 'Il doit être terrible avec les femmes, hein?' Then she had suggested that they should come home with her. 'Tous les deux, j'ai une petite amie. Nous nous amuserons bien gentiment. On vous fera voir des choses drôles. Toi qui es si vicieux — ça t'amusera.'

No, that certainly hadn't been difficult to resist, even though he had never set eyes on Joan at the time. The real temptations were not the worst, but the best. At Grenoble, it had been the best in literature. Et son ventre, et ses seins, ces grappes de ma vigne. . . . Elle se coula à mon côté, m'appela des noms les plus tendres et des noms les plus effroyablement grossiers, qui glissaient sur ses lèvres en suaves murmures. Puis elle se tût et commença à me donner ces baisers qu'elle savait. . . . The creations of the best stylists had proved to be far more dangerously attractive, far less easily resistible than the sordid realities of the Café-Concert. And now that he had said yes to the best possible reality, the appeal of the worst was even less effective, had ceased altogether to be anything remotely resembling a temptation. Such temptation as there was came once more from the best. It had been impossible to desire the low, vulgar, half-animal creature of the Café-Concert. But Joan was beautiful, Joan was refined, Joan shared his interests — and precisely for those reasons was desirable. Just because she was the best (and this for him was the paradox that it was so painful and bewildering to live through), he desired her in the wrong way, physically. . . .

'Do you remember those lines of Meredith's?' said Mrs Foxe, breaking the silence. Meredith was one of her favourite authors. 'From the Woods,' she

specified, affectionately abbreviating the title of the poem almost to a nickname. And she quoted:

‘Love, the great volcano, flings

Fires of lower earth to sky.

Love’s a kind of philosopher’s stone,’ she went on. ‘Not only does it deliver us; it also transforms. Dross into gold. Earth into heaven.’

Brian nodded affirmatively. And yet, he was thinking, those voluptuous and faceless bodies created by the stylists had actually come to assume Joan’s features. In spite of love, or just because of it, the succubi now had a name, a personality.

The stable clock struck twelve; and at the first stroke there was a noiseless explosion of doves, like snowflakes whirling up against the clotted darkness of the elms beyond.

‘The beauty of it!’ said Mrs Foxe with a kind of muted intensity.

But suppose, it suddenly occurred to Brian, suppose she were suddenly left with no money at all? And if Joan were as poor as that wretched woman at Grenoble, as hopelessly without an alternative resource?

Slowly the last bell note expired, and one by one the whirling doves dropped back on to their turreted cote above the clock.

‘Perhaps,’ said Mrs Foxe, ‘you ought to be starting if you’re going to get there punctually.’

Brian knew how reluctant his mother was to let him go; and this display of generosity produced in him a sense of guilt and, along with it (since he did not want to feel guilty), a certain resentment. ‘B-but I d-don’t need an hour,’ he said almost angrily, ‘to c-cycle three m-miles.’

A moment later he was feeling ashamed of himself for the note of irritation in his voice, and for the rest of the time he was with her he showed himself more than ordinarily affectionate.

At half past twelve he took his bicycle and rode over to the Thursleys’. The maid opened the nineteenth-century Gothic front door and he stepped into a faint smell of steamed pudding flavoured with cabbage. As usual. The vicarage

always smelt of steamed pudding and cabbage. It was a symptom, he had discovered, of poverty and, as such, gave him a feeling of moral discomfort, as though he had done something wrong and were suffering from an uneasy conscience.

He was ushered into the drawing-room. Behaving as if he were some very distinguished old lady, Mrs Thursley rose from her writing-table and advanced to meet him. ‘Ah, dear Brian!’ she cried. Her professionally Christian smile was pearly with the flash of false teeth. ‘So nice to see you!’ She took and held his hand. ‘And your dear mother — how’s she? Sad because you’re going to Germany, I’m sure. We’re all sad, if it comes to that. You’ve got such a gift for making people miss you,’ she continued in the same complimentary strain, while Brian blushed and fidgeted in an agony of discomfort. Saying nice things to people’s faces, particularly to the faces of the rich, the influential, the potentially useful, was a habit with Mrs Thursley. A Christian habit she would have called it, if she had been pressed for an explanation. Loving one’s neighbour; seeing the good in everybody; creating an atmosphere of sympathy and trust. But below the level of the avowal, almost below the level of consciousness, she knew that most people were greedy for flattery, however outrageous, and were prepared, in one way or another, to pay for it.

‘Ah, but here’s Joan,’ she cried, interrupting her praise of him, and added, in a tone that was charged with sprightly meaning, ‘You won’t want to go on talking with her tiresome old mother — will he, Joanie?’

The two young people looked at one another in a speechless embarrassment.

The door suddenly flew open and Mr Thursley hurried into the room. ‘Look at this!’ he cried in a voice that trembled with rage, and held out a glass ink-pot. ‘How do you expect me to do my work with an eighth of an inch of sediment? Dipping, dipping, dipping the whole morning. Never able to write more than two words at a time. . . .’

‘Here’s Brian, Daddy,’ said Joan in the hope, which she knew in advance was vain, that the stranger’s presence might shame him into silence.

His pointed nose still white with rage, Mr Thursley glared at Brian, shook hands and, turning away, at once went on with his angry complaint. ‘It’s always like that in this house. How can one be expected to do serious work?’

‘Oh, God,’ Joan inwardly prayed, ‘make him stop, make him shut up.’

‘As if he couldn’t fill the pot himself!’ Brian was thinking. ‘Why doesn’t she tell him so?’

But it was impossible for Mrs Thursley to say or even think anything of the kind. He had his sermons, his articles in the Guardian, his studies in Neo-Platonism. How could he be expected to fill his own ink-pot? For her as well as for him it was obvious, it had become, after these five and twenty years of abjectly given and unreflectingly accepted slavery, completely axiomatic that he couldn’t do such a thing. Besides, if she were to suggest in any way that he wasn’t perfectly right, his anger would become still more violent. Goodness only knew what he mightn’t do or say — in front of Brian! It would be awful. She began to make excuses for the empty ink-pot. Abject excuses on her own behalf, on Joan’s, on her servants’. Her tone was at once deprecatory and soothing; she spoke as though she were dealing with a mixture between Jehovah and a very savage dog that might bite at any moment.

The gong — the Thursleys had a gong that would have been audible from end to end of a ducal mansion — rumbled up to a thunderous fortissimo that reduced even the vicar to silence. But as the sound ebbed, he began again.

‘It’s not as though I asked for very much,’ he said.

‘He’ll be quieter when he’s had something to eat,’ Mrs Thursley thought, and led the way into the dining-room, followed by Joan. Brian wanted the vicar to precede him; but even in his righteous anger Mr Thursley remembered his good manners. Laying his hand on Brian’s shoulder, he propelled him towards the door, keeping up all the time a long-range bombardment of his wife.

‘Only a little quiet, only the simplest material conditions for doing my work. The barest minimum. But I don’t get it. The house is as noisy as a railway station, and my ink-pot’s neglected till I have nothing but a little black mud to write with.’

Under the bombardment, Mrs Thursley walked as though shrunken and with bowed head. But Joan, Brian noticed, had gone stiff; her body was rigid and ungraceful with excess of tension.

In the dining-room they found the two boys, Joan's younger brothers, already standing behind their chairs. At the sight of them, Mr Thursley reverted from his ink-pot to the noise in the house. 'Like a railway station,' he repeated, and the righteous indignation flared up in him with renewed intensity. 'George and Arthur have been rushing up and down the stairs and round the garden the whole morning. Why can't you keep them in order?'

They were all at their places now; Mrs Thursley at one end of the table, her husband at the other; the two boys on the left; Joan and Brian on her right. They stood there, waiting for the vicar to say grace.

'Like hooligans,' said Mr Thursley; the flames of wrath ran through him; he was filled with a tingling warmth, horribly delicious. 'Like savages.'

Making an effort, he dropped his long cleft chin on his chest and was silent. His nose was still deathly pale with anger; like marine animals in an aquarium, the nostrils contracted and expanded in a pulse of regular but fluttering movement. In his right hand he still held the ink-pot.

'Benedictus benedicat, per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum,' he said at last in his praying voice, which was deep, with the suspicion of a tremolo, and charged with transcendental significance.

With the noise of pent-up movement suddenly released, they all sat down.

'Screaming and howling,' said Mr Thursley, reverting from the tone of piety to his original shrill harshness. 'How am I expected to do my work?' With an indignant bang, he put the ink-pot down on the table in front of him, then unfolded his napkin.

At the other end of the table Mrs Thursley was cutting up the mock duck with extraordinary rapidity.

'Pass that to your father,' she said to the nearest boy. It was essential to get him eating as soon as possible.

A second or two later the parlour-maid was offering Mr Thursley the vegetable. Her apron and cap were stiff with starch and she was as well drilled as a guardsman. The vegetable dishes were hideous, but had been expensive; the spoons were of heavy Victorian silver. With them, the vicar helped himself first to boiled potatoes, then to cabbage, mashed and moulded into damp green bricks.

Still indulging himself in the luxury of anger, ‘Women simply don’t understand what serious work is,’ Mr Thursley went on; then started eating.

When she had helped the others to their mock duck, Mrs Thursley ventured a remark. ‘Brian’s just off to Germany,’ she said.

Mr Thursley looked up, chewing his food very rapidly with his front teeth, like a rabbit. ‘What part of Germany?’ he asked, darting a sharp inquisitorial look at Brian. His nose had flushed again to its normal colour.

‘M-marburg.’

‘Where there’s the university?’

Brian nodded.

Startlingly, with a noise like coke being poured down a chute, Mr Thursley burst out laughing. ‘Don’t take to beer-drinking with the students,’ he said.

The storm was over. In part out of the thankfulness of her heart, in part to make her husband feel that she had found his joke irresistible, Mrs Thursley also laughed. ‘Oh, no,’ she cried, don’t take to that!’

Brian smiled and shook his head.

‘Water or soda-water?’ the parlour-maid asked confidentially, creaking with starch and whalebone as she bent over him.

‘W-water, please.’

After lunch, when the vicar had returned to his study, Mrs Thursley suggested, in her bright, embarrassingly significant way, that the two young people should go for a walk. The ogival front door slammed behind them. Like a prisoner at last restored to liberty, Joan drew a deep breath.

The sky was still overcast, and beneath the low ceiling of grey cloud the air was soft and as though limp with fatigue, as though weary with the burden of too

much summer. In the woods, into which they turned from the high-road, the stillness was oppressive, like the intentional silence of sentient beings, pregnant with unavowed thoughts and hidden feelings. An invisible tree-creeper started to sing; but it was as if the clear bright sound were coming from some other time and place. They walked on hand in hand; and between them was the silence of the wood and at the same time the deeper, denser, more secret silence of their own unexpressed emotions. The silence of the complaints she was too loyal to utter and the pity that, unless she complained, it would, he felt, be insulting for him to put into words; her longing for the comfort of his arms and those desires he did not wish to feel.

Their path led them between great coverts of rhododendrons, and suddenly they were in a narrow cleft, hemmed in by high walls of the impenetrable, black-green foliage. It was a solitude within a solitude, the image of their own private silence visibly hollowed out of the greater stillness of the wood.

‘Almost f-frightening,’ he whispered, as they stood there listening — listening (for there was nothing else for them to hear) to their own heart-beats and each other’s breathing and all the words that hung unspoken between them.

All at once, she could bear it no longer, ‘When I think of what it’ll be like at home . . .’ The complaint had uttered itself, against her will. ‘Oh, I wish you weren’t going, Brian!’

Brian looked at her and, at the sight of those trembling lips, those eyes bright with tears, he felt himself as it were disintegrated by tenderness and pity. Stammering her name, he put his arm about her. Joan stood for a little while quite still, her head bent, her forehead resting on his shoulder. The touch of her hair was electric against his lips, he breathed its perfume. All at once, as though waking from sleep, she stirred into motion and, drawing a little away from him, looked up into his face. Her regard had a desperate, almost inhuman fixity.

‘Darling,’ he whispered.

Joan’s only answer was to shake her head.

But why? What was she denying, what implication of his endearment was she saying no to? ‘But J-joan . . . ?’ There was a note of anxiety in his voice.

Still she did not answer; only looked at him and once more slowly shook her head. How many negations were expressed in that single movement! The refusal to complain; the denial for herself of the possibility of happiness; the sad insistence that all her love and all his availed nothing against the pain of absence; the resolution not to exploit his pity, not to elicit, however much she longed for it, another, a more passionate avowal. . . .

Suddenly, he took her face between his hands and, stooping, kissed her on the mouth.

But this was what she had resolved not to extort from him, this was the gesture that could avail nothing against her inevitable unhappiness! For a second or two she stiffened her body in resistance, tried to shake her head again, tried to draw back. Then, vanquished by a longing stronger than herself, she was limp in his arms; the shut, resisting lips parted and were soft under his kisses; her eyelids closed, and there was nothing left in the world but his mouth and the thin hard body pressed against her own.

Fingers stirred the hair above the nape of her neck, slid round to the throat and dropped to her breast. The strength went out of her, she felt herself sinking deeper and deeper into that mysterious other world, behind her eyelids, into the sightless universe of touch.

Then, without warning, as though in precipitate obedience to some inaudible word of command, he broke away from her. For an instant she thought she was going to fall; but the strength came back to her knees, just in time. She swayed unsteadily, then recovered her balance, and with it the consciousness of the outrage he had inflicted upon her. She had leaned upon him with her whole being, soul as well as body, and he had allowed her to fall, had withdrawn his lips and arms and chest and left her suddenly cold and horribly exposed, defenceless and as if naked. She opened hurt, reproachful eyes and saw him standing there pale and strangely furtive; he met her glance for a moment, then averted his face.

Her resentful sense of outrage gave place to anxiety. ‘What is it, Brian?’

He looked at her for a moment, then turned away again. ‘Perhaps we’d better go home,’ he said in a low voice.

*

It was a day late in September. Under a pale blue sky the distances were mournful, were exquisitely tender with faint mist. The world seemed remote and unactual, like a memory or an ideal.

The train came to a standstill. Brian waved to the solitary porter, but he himself, nevertheless, got out with the heaviest of the suit-cases. By straining his muscles he found that he was able to relieve his conscience of some of the burden that the ability to buy a poor man’s services tended, increasingly as he grew older, to impose upon it.

The porter came running up and almost snatched the bag out of Brian’s hand. He too had his conscience. ‘You leave that to me, sir,’ he said, almost indignantly.

‘T-two more in the c-c-c . . . inside,’ he emended, long after the porter had stepped into the unpronounceable compartment to collect the remaining pieces. ‘Sh-shall I give a hand?’ he offered. The man was old — forty years older than himself, Brian calculated; white-haired and wrinkled, but called him ‘sir’, but carried his bags and would be grateful for a shilling. ‘Sh-shall I . . . ?’

The old porter did not even answer, but swung the suit-cases down from the rack, taking evident pride in his well-directed strength.

A touch on his shoulder made Brian turn sharply round. The person who had touched him was Joan.

‘In the king’s name!’ she said; but the laughter behind her words was forced, and there was an expression in her eyes of anxiety — the accumulated anxiety of weeks of bewildered speculation. All those queer, unhappy letters he had written from Germany — they had left her painfully uncertain what to think, how to feel, what to expect of him when he came back. In his letters, it was true, he had reproached only himself — with a violence for whose intensity she was unable to account. But to the extent that she was responsible for what had happened in

the wood (and of course she was partly responsible; why not? what was so wrong with just a kiss?), she felt that the reproaches were also addressed to her. And if he reproached her, could he still love her? What did he really feel about her, about himself, about their relations to one another? It was because she simply couldn't wait an unnecessary minute for the answer that she had come, surreptitiously, to meet him at the station.

Brian stood there speechless; he had not expected to see her so soon, and was almost dismayed at thus finding himself, without preparation, in her presence. Automatically, he held out his hand. Joan took it and pressed it in her own, hard, hard, as if hoping to force the reality of her love upon him; but even while doing so, she swayed away from him in her apprehension, her embarrassed uncertainty of what he might have become, swayed away as she would have done from a stranger.

The grace of that shy, uneasy movement touched him as poignantly as it had touched him at their first meeting. It was the grace, in spite of the embarrassment that the movement expressed, of a young tree in the wind. That was how he thought of it then. And now it had happened again; and the beauty of the gesture was again a revelation, but more poignant than it had been the first time, because of its implication that he was once again an alien; but an alien, against whose renewed strangeness the pressure on his hand protested, almost violently.

Her face, as she looked up into his, seemed to waver; and suddenly that artificial brightness was quenched in profound apprehension.

'Aren't you glad to see me, Brian?' she asked.

Her words broke a spell; he was able to smile again, able to speak. 'G-glad?' he repeated; and, for answer, kissed her hand. 'But I didn't th-think you'd be here. It almost g-gave me a fright.'

His expression reassured her. During those first seconds of silence, his still, petrified face had seemed the face of an enemy. Now, by that smile, he was transfigured, was once more the old Brian she had loved; so sensitive, so kind and good; and so beautiful in his goodness, beautiful in spite of that long, queer face, that lanky body, those loose, untidily moving limbs.

Noisily, the train started, gathered speed and was gone. The old porter walked away to fetch a barrow. They were alone at the end of the long platform.

‘I thought you didn’t love me,’ she said after a long silence.

‘But, J-joan!’ he protested. They smiled at one another; then, after a moment, he looked away. Not love her? he was thinking. But the trouble was that he loved her too much, loved her in a bad way, even though she was the best.

‘I thought you were angry with me.’

‘But why sh-should I be?’ His face was still averted.

‘You know why.’

‘I wasn’t a-angry with you.’

‘But it was my fault.’

Brian shook his head. ‘It w-wasn’t.’

‘It was,’ she insisted.

At the thought of what his sensations had been as he held her there, in the dark cleft between the rhododendron coverts, he shook his head a second time, more emphatically.

The old porter was there again with his barrow and his comments on the weather, his scraps of news and gossip. They followed him, playing for his benefit their parts as supernumerary characters in the local drama.

When they were almost at the gate, Joan laid a hand on Brian’s arm. ‘It’s all right, isn’t it?’ Their eyes met. ‘I’m allowed to be happy?’

He smiled without speaking and nodded.

In the dogcart on the way to the house he kept remembering the sudden brightening of her face in response to that voiceless gesture of his. And all he could do to repay her for so much love was to . . . He thought of the rhododendron coverts again and was overcome with shame.

When she learned from Brian that Joan had been at the station, Mrs Foxe felt a sharp pang of resentment. By what right? Before his own mother . . . And besides, what bad faith! For Joan had accepted her invitation to come to lunch the day after Brian’s return. Which meant that she had tacitly admitted Mrs Foxe’s exclusive right to him on the day itself. But here she was, stealing

surreptitiously to the station to catch him as he stepped out of the train. It was almost dishonest.

Mrs Foxe's passion of indignant jealousy lasted only a few seconds; its very intensity accelerated her recognition of its wrongness, its unworthiness. No sign of what she felt had appeared on her face, and it was with a smile of amused indulgence that she listened to Brian's vaguely stammered account of the meeting. Then, with a strong effort of the will, she not only shut off the expression of her emotion, but even excluded the emotion itself from her consciousness. All that, as it seemed, an impersonal regard for right conduct justified her in still feeling was a certain regretful disapproval of Joan's — how should she put it? — disingenuousness. For the girl to have stolen that march upon her was not quite right.

Not quite right; but still very understandable, she now went on to reflect, very excusable. When one's in love . . . And Joan's was an impulsive, emotional character. Which had its fortunate side, Mrs Foxe reflected. The impulses were as strong towards right as towards wrong. If one could canalize that deep and powerful stream of life within her, if one could make the right appeal to what was best in her, if one could confirm her in those fine generous aspirations of hers — why, she would be a splendid person. Splendid, Mrs Foxe insisted to herself.

'Well,' she said next day, when Joan came over to lunch, 'I hear you caught our migrant on the wing before he'd even had time to settle.' The tone was playful, there was a charming smile on Mrs Foxe's face. But Joan blushed guiltily.

'You didn't mind, did you?' she asked.

'Mind?' Mrs Foxe repeated. 'But, my dear, why should I? I only thought we'd agreed on today. But, of course, if you felt you absolutely couldn't wait . . .'

'I'm sorry,' said Joan. But something that was almost hatred mounted hot within her.

Mrs Foxe laid her hand affectionately on the girl’s shoulder. ‘Let’s stroll out into the garden,’ she suggested, ‘and see if Brian’s anywhere about.’

CHAPTER TWENTY. December 8th 1926

TIPTOEING OUT OF the back drawing-room, Hugh Ledwidge had hoped to find the refreshment of a little solitude; but on the landing he was caught by Joyce and Colin. And Colin, it appeared, was tremendously keen on natives, had always been anxious to talk to a professional ethnologist about his experiences on shikar. For nearly half an hour he had to listen, while the young man poured out his illiterate nonsense about India and Uganda. An immense fatigue overwhelmed him. His one desire was to escape, to get away from this parrot house of stupid chatter, back to delicious silence and a book.

They left him, thank God, at last, and drawing a deep breath, he braced himself for the final ordeal of leave-taking. That saying good-bye at the end of an evening was one of the things Hugh most intensely disliked. To have to expose yourself yet once more to personal contact, to be compelled, weary as you were and thirsty for solitude, to grin again and gibber and make yet another effort of hypocrisy — how odious that could be! Particularly with Mary Amberley. There were evenings when the woman simply wouldn't allow you to say good-bye but clung to you desperately, as though she were drowning. Questions, confidences, scabrous discussions of people's love-affairs — anything to keep you a few minutes longer. She seemed to regard each successive departure of a guest as the death of a fragment of her own being. His heart sank as he made his way across the room towards her. 'Damned woman!' he thought, and positively hated her; hated her, as well as for all the other reasons, because Helen was still dancing with that groom; and now with a fresh access of malevolence, because, as he suddenly perceived through the mists of his dim sight, Staithes and that man Beavis were sitting with her. All his insane thoughts about the plot came rushing back into his mind. They had been talking about him, him and the fire escape, him on the football field, him when they

threw the slippers over the partition of his cubicle. For a moment, he thought of turning back and slipping out of the house without a word. But they had seen him coming, they would suspect the reason of his flight, they would laugh all the louder. His common sense returned to him, it was all nonsense, there was no plot. How could there be a plot? And even if Beavis did remember, what reason had he to talk? But all the same, all the same . . . Squaring his narrow shoulders, Hugh Ledwidge marched resolutely towards the anticipated ambush.

To his immense relief, Mary Amberley let him go almost without a protest. ‘Must you be off, Hugh? So soon?’ That was all. She seemed to be absent, thinking of something else.

Beppo fizzled amiably; Staithes merely nodded; and now it was Beavis’s turn. Was that smile of his what it seemed to be — just vaguely and conventionally friendly? Or did it carry hidden significances, did it secretly imply derisive reminders of those past shames? Hugh turned and hurried away. Why on earth, he wondered, did one ever go to these idiotic parties? Kept on going, what was more, again and again, when one knew it was all utterly pointless and boring. . . .

Mark Staithes turned to Anthony. ‘You realize who that is?’ he asked.

‘Who? Ledwidge? Is he anyone special?’

Staithes explained.

‘Goggler!’ Anthony laughed. ‘Why of course. Poor Goggler! How fiendish we were to him!’

‘That’s why I’ve always pretended I didn’t know who he was,’ said Staithes, and smiled an anatomical smile of pity and contempt. ‘I think it would be charitable,’ he added, ‘if you did the same.’ Protecting Hugh Ledwidge gave him genuine pleasure.

Utterly pointless and boring — yes, and humiliating, Hugh was thinking, humiliating as well. For there was always some humiliation. A Beavis smiling; a Gerry Watchett, like an insolent groom . . .

There was a hurrying of feet on the stairs behind him. ‘Hugh! Hugh!’ He started almost guiltily and turned round. ‘Why were you slinking away without

saying good night to me?'

Essaying a joke, 'You seemed so busy,' he began, twinkling up at Helen through his spectacles; then fell silent in sudden astonishment, almost in awe.

She was standing there, three steps above him, one hand on the banister, the fingers of the other splayed out against the opposite wall, leaning forward as though on the brink of flight. But what had happened to her, what miracle? The flushed face that hung over him seemed to shine with an inward illumination. This was not Helen, but some supernatural creature. In the presence of such unearthly beauty, he blushed for the ignoble irrelevance of his waggery, his knowing look.

'Busy?' she echoed. 'But I was only dancing.' And it was as though some ingenuous and unconscious Moses had said to his bedazzled Israelites: 'I was only talking to Jehovah.' 'You had no excuse,' she went on. Then quickly, as though a new and curious idea had suddenly occurred to her, 'Or were you cross with me for some reason?' she added in another tone.

He began by shaking his head; but felt impelled, on second thoughts, to try to explain a little. 'Not cross,' he distinguished, 'just . . . just a bit unsociable.'

The light behind her face seemed to leap up in a quivering rush of intenser flame. Unsociable! That was really too exquisitely funny! The dancing had made her perfect, had transformed earth into heaven. At the idea that one could be (preposterous word!) unsociable, that one could feel anything but an overflowing love for everyone and everything, she could only laugh.

'You are funny, Hugh!'

'I'm glad you think so.' His tone was offended. He had turned away his head.

The silk of her dress rustled sharply; a little gust of perfume was cool on his cheek — and she was standing only one step above him, very close. 'You're not hurt because I said you were funny?' she asked.

He lifted his eyes again and found her face on a level with his own. Mollified by that expression of genuine solicitude he shook his head.

'I didn't mean funny in the horrid way,' she explained. 'I meant . . . well, you know: nicely funny. Funny, but a darling.'

In threateningly personal circumstances, a well-timed foolery is a sure defence. Smiling, Hugh raised his right hand to his heart. ‘Je suis pénétré de reconnaissance’, was what he was going to say by way of acknowledgement for that ‘darling’. The courtly jape, the mock-heroic gesture were his immediate and automatic reaction to her words. ‘Je suis pénétré . . .’

But Helen gave him no time to take cover behind his dix-huitième waggery. For she followed up her words by laying her two hands on his shoulders and kissing him on the mouth.

For a moment he was almost annihilated with surprise and confusion and a kind of suffocating, chaotic joy.

Helen drew back a little and looked at him. He had gone very pale — looked as though he had seen a ghost. She smiled — for he was funnier than ever — then bent forward and kissed him again.

The first time she had kissed him, it had been out of the fullness of the life that was in her, because she was made perfect in a perfect world. But his scared face was so absurdly comic that the sight of it somehow transformed this fullness of perfect life into a kind of mischievous wantonness. The second time she kissed him, it was for fun; for fun and, at the same time, out of curiosity. It was an experiment, made in the spirit of hilarious scientific inquiry. She was a vivisector — licensed by perfection, justified by happiness. Besides, Hugh had an extraordinarily nice mouth. She had never kissed such full soft lips before; the experience had been startlingly pleasurable. It was not only that she wanted to see, scientifically, what the absurd creature would do next; she also wanted to feel once more that cool resilience against her mouth, to experience that strange creeping of pleasure that tingled out from her lips and ran, quick and almost unbearable, like moths, along the surface of her body.

‘You were so sweet to take all that trouble,’ she said by way of justification for the second kiss. The moths had crept again, deliciously, had settled with an electric tremor of vibrating wings on her breasts. ‘All that trouble about my education.’

But ‘Helen!’ was all that he could whisper; and, before he had time to think, he had put his arms about her and kissed her.

His mouth, for the third time; and those hurrying moths along the skin . . . But, oh, how quickly he drew away!

‘Helen!’ he repeated.

They looked at one another; and now that he had had the time to think, Hugh found himself all of a sudden horribly embarrassed. His hands dropped furtively from her body. He didn’t know what to say to her — or, rather, knew, but couldn’t bring himself to say it. His heart was beating with a painful violence. ‘I love you, I want you,’ he was crying, he was positively shouting, from behind his embarrassed silence. But no word was uttered. He smiled at her rather foolishly, and dropped his eyes — the eyes, he now reflected, that must look so hideous, like a fish’s eyes, through the thick lenses of his spectacles.

‘How funny he is,’ Helen thought. But her scientific laughter had died down. His shyness was infectious. To put an end to the uncomfortable situation, ‘I shall read all those books,’ she said. ‘And that reminds me, you must give me the list.’

Grateful to her for supplying him with a subject about which it was possible to talk, he looked up at her again — for a moment only, because of those fish-eyes, goggling. ‘I’ll fill in the gaps and send it you,’ he said. Then, after a second or two, he realized that in his improvidence he had exhausted the preciously impersonal topic of the books in a single sentence. The silence persisted, distressingly; and at last, in despair, because there was nothing else to say, he decided to say good night. Trying to charge his voice with an infinity of loving significance, ‘Good night, Helen,’ he said. The words were intended to be as eloquent as a whole speech. But would she hear the eloquence, would she understand the depths of his implied meaning? He bent forward and kissed her again, quickly, very lightly, a kiss of tenderly respectful devotion.

But he had not reckoned with Helen. The embarrassment that had momentarily clouded her wanton perfection had evaporated at the touch of his lips; she was once more the laughing vivisector.

‘Kiss me again, Hugh,’ she said. And when he obeyed, she would not let him go; but kept his mouth pressed to hers, second after second . . .

The noise of voices and music became suddenly louder; somebody had opened the drawing-room door.

‘Good night, Hugh,’ she whispered against his lips; then loosed her hold and ran up the stairs two at a time.

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Looking after her, as she ran out of the room to say good night to old Ledwidge, Gerry had smiled to himself complacently. Pink in the face; with shining eyes. As though she’d drunk a bottle of champagne. Absolutely buffy with the dancing. It was fun when they lost their heads like that; lost them so enthusiastically, so ungrudgingly, so completely. Not keeping anything back, but chucking it all out of the window, so to speak. Most girls were so damned avaricious and calculating. They’d only lose half their heads and carefully keep the other half to play the outraged virgin with. Mean little bitches! But with Helen you felt that the engine was all out. She stepped on the gas and didn’t care what was in the way. He liked that sort of thing, and liked it not only because he hoped to profit by the lost head, but also disinterestedly, because he couldn’t help admiring people who let themselves go and didn’t care two hoots about the consequences. There was something fine and generous and spirited about such people. He was like that himself, when he could afford it. Guts: that was what she’d got. And the makings of a temperament, he was thinking with an inward satisfaction, when a touch on his arm from behind made him suddenly start. His surprise turned almost instantaneously to anger. There was nothing he hated more than to be taken unawares, off his guard. He turned sharply round and, seeing that the person who had touched him was Mary Amberley, tried to readjust his face. Vainly; the hard resentful eyes belied his smile.

But Mary was herself too angry to notice the signs of his annoyance. ‘I want to talk to you, Gerry,’ she said in a low voice that she tried to keep level and unemotional, but that trembled in spite of all her efforts.

‘Christ!’ he thought; ‘a scene’, and felt angrier than ever with the tiresome woman. ‘Talk away,’ he said aloud; and, with an offensive air of detachment, he took out his cigarette-case, opened and proffered it.

‘Not here,’ she said.

Gerry pretended not to understand her. ‘Sorry. I thought you didn’t mind people smoking here.’

‘Fool!’ Her anger broke out with sudden violence. Then, catching him by the sleeve, ‘Come!’ she commanded, and almost dragged him to the door.

Running upstairs, Helen was in time to see her mother and Gerry mounting from the drawing-room landing towards the higher floors of the tall house. ‘I shall have to find somebody else to dance with,’ was all she thought; and a moment later she had found little Peter Quinn and was gliding away once more into paradise.

‘Talk of floaters!’ said Anthony as their hostess left the room with Gerry Watchett. ‘I didn’t realize that Gerry was the present incumbent. . . .’

Beppo nodded. ‘Poor Mary!’ he sighed.

‘On the contrary,’ said Staithes, ‘rich Mary! She’ll be poor later.’

‘And nothing can be done about it?’ asked Anthony.

‘She’d hate you if you tried.’

Anthony shook her head. ‘These dismal compulsions! Like cuckoos in August. Like stags in October.’

‘She showed symptoms of having a compulsion about me,’ said Staithes. ‘Just after I first met her, it was. But I soon cured her of that. And then that ruffian Watchett turned up.’

‘Fascinating, the way these aristocrats can behave!’ Anthony’s tone was one of scientific enthusiasm.

Staithes’s flayed face twisted itself into a grimace of contempt. ‘Just a coarse, vulgar gangster,’ he said. ‘How on earth you ever put up with him at Oxford, I simply cannot imagine.’ In fact, of course, he was busily imagining that Anthony had done it out of mere ignoble toadyism.

‘Just snobbery,’ said Anthony, depriving the other of half his pleasure by the easy confession. ‘But, then, I insist, people like Gerry are an essential part of any liberal education. There was something really rather magnificent about him when he was rich. A certain detached and disinterested recklessness. Now . . .’ He raised his hand and let it fall again. ‘Just a gangster — you’re quite right. But that’s the fascinating thing — the ease with which aristocrats turn into gangsters. Very comprehensible, when you come to think of it. Here’s a man brought up to believe that he has a divine right to the best of everything. And so long as he gets his rights it’s all noblesse oblige and honour and all the rest of it. Inextricably mixed up with insolence, of course; but genuinely there. Now, take away his income; the oddest things are liable to happen. Providence intended you to have the best of everything; therefore intended you to have the means for procuring the best of everything; therefore, when the means don’t come to you legitimately, justifies you in getting them illegitimately. In the past, our Gerry could have gone in for banditry or simony. He’d have made an admirable condottiere, an almost perfect cardinal. But nowadays the church and the army are too respectable, too professional. They’ve no place for amateurs. The impoverished nobleman finds himself driven into business. Selling cars. Touting stocks and shares. Promoting dubious companies. To the accompaniment, of course, if he’s presentable, of a judicious prostitution of his body. If he has the luck to be born with a gift of the gab, he can make a good living out of the politer forms of blackmail and sycophancy — as a gossip writer. Noblesse oblige; but so does poverty. And when they both oblige simultaneously — well, we of the middle classes had better start counting the silver. Instead of which . . .’ He shrugged his shoulders. ‘Poor Mary!’

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Upstairs, in the bedroom, the torrent of Mary’s reproaches and abuse streamed on, unceasingly. Gerry did not even look at her. Averted, he seemed absorbed in the contemplation of the Pascin hanging over the mantelpiece. The painting showed two women lying foreshortened on a bed, naked.

‘I like this picture,’ he said with deliberate irrelevance, when Mrs Amberley had paused for breath. ‘You can see that the man who painted it had just finished making love to those girls. Both of them. At the same time,’ he added.

Mary Amberley went very pale; her lips trembled, her nostrils fluttered as though with a separate and uncontrollable life of their own.

‘You haven’t even been listening to me,’ she cried. ‘Oh, you’re awful, you’re horrible!’ The torrent began to flow again, more vehemently than ever.

Still turning his back to her, Gerry went on looking at the Pascin nudes; then at last, blowing out a final cloud of tobacco-smoke, he threw the stump of his cigarette into the fireplace and turned round.

‘When you’ve quite done,’ he said in a tired voice, ‘we may as well go to bed.’ And after a little pause, while, unable to speak, she glared furiously in his face, ‘Seeing that that’s what you really want,’ he added, and, smiling ironically, advanced across the room towards her. When he was quite near her, he halted and held out his hands invitingly. They were large hands, immaculately kept, but coarse, insensitive, brutal. ‘Hideous hands,’ Mary thought as she looked at them, ‘odious hands!’ All the more odious now, because it was by their very ugliness and brutality that she had first been attracted, was even at this very moment being attracted, shamefully, in spite of all the reasons she had for hating him. ‘Well, aren’t you coming?’ he asked in the same bored, derisive tone.

For an answer, she hit out at his face. But he was too quick for her, caught the flying hand in mid-air and, when she tried to bring the other into play, caught that too. She was helpless in his grasp.

Still smiling down at her, and without a word, he pushed her backwards, step by step, towards the bed.

‘Beast!’ she kept repeating, ‘beast!’ and struggled, vainly, and found an obscure pleasure in her helplessness. He pushed her against the end of the low divan, further and further, inexorably, and at last she lost her balance and fell back across the counterpane — (fell back, while, with one knee on the edge of the bed, he bent over her, still smiling the same derisive smile). ‘Beast, beast!’ But in fact, as she secretly admitted to herself — and the consciousness was

intoxicating in its shamefulness — in fact, she really wanted to be treated as he was treating her — like a prostitute, like an animal; and in her own house, what was more, with her guests all waiting for her, and the door unlocked, and her daughters wondering where she was, perhaps at this very moment coming up the stairs to look for her. Yes, she really wanted it. Still struggling, she gave herself up to the knowledge, to the direct physical intuition that this intolerable degradation was the accomplishment of an old desire, was a revelation marvellous as well as horrible, was the Apocalypse, the Apocalypse at once angel and beast, plague, lamb and whore in a single divine, revolting, overwhelming experience. . . .

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‘Civilization and sexuality,’ Anthony was saying: ‘there’s a definite correlation. The higher the one, the intenser the other.’

‘My word,’ said Beppo, fizzling with pleasure, ‘we must be civilized!’

‘Civilization means food and literature all round. Beefsteaks and fiction magazines for all. First-class proteins for the body, fourth-class love-stories for the spirit. And this in a safe urban world, where there are no risks, no physical fatigues. In a town like this, for example, one can live for years at a time without being made aware that there’s such a thing as nature. Everything’s man-made and punctual and convenient. But people can have too much of convenience; they want excitement, they want risks and surprises. Where are they going to find them under our dispensation? In money-making, in politics, in occasional war, in sport, and finally in sex. But most people can’t be speculators or active politicians; and war’s getting to be too much of a good thing; and the more elaborate and dangerous sports are only for the rich. So that sex is all that’s left. As material civilization rises, the intensity and importance of sexuality also rises. Must rise, inevitably. And since at the same time food and literature have increased the amount of available appetite . . .’ He shrugged his shoulders. ‘Well, you see!’

Beppo was charmed. ‘You explain it all,’ he cried. ‘Tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner.’ He felt delightedly, that Anthony’s argument gave, not only absolution, but also a plenary indulgence — to everyone (for Beppo unselfishly wanted everyone to be as happy as he was) and for everything, everything, from the ravishing barmen at Toulon to those top-booted tarts (so definitely not for him) on the Kurfürstendamm.

Staithes said nothing. If social progress, he was thinking, just meant greater piggishness for more people, why then — then, what?

‘Do you remember that remark of Dr Johnson’s?’ Anthony began again with a note of elation in his voice. It had suddenly come to him, an unexpected gift from his memory to his discursive reason — come to enrich the pattern of his thinking, to fill out his argument and extend its scope. His voice reflected the sudden triumphant pleasure that he felt. ‘How does it go? “A man is seldom so innocently employed as when he is making money.” Something like that. Admirable!’ He laughed aloud. ‘The innocence of those who grind the faces of the poor, but refrain from pinching the bottoms of their neighbours’ wives! The innocence of Ford, the innocence of Rockefeller! The nineteenth century was the Age of Innocence — that sort of innocence. With the result that we’re now almost ready to say that a man is seldom more innocently employed than when making love.’

There was a silence. Staithes looked at his watch. ‘Time one was getting out of here,’ he said. ‘But the problem,’ he added, turning round in his chair to scan the room, ‘the problem is one’s hostess.’

They got up, and while Beppo hurried off to greet a couple of young acquaintances on the other side of the room, Staithes and Anthony made their way to the door.

‘The problem,’ Staithes kept repeating, ‘the problem . . .’

On the landing, however, they met Mrs Amberley and Gerry coming down the stairs.

‘We were looking for you,’ said Anthony. ‘To say good night.’

‘So soon?’ cried Mary with a sudden access of anxiety.

But they were firm. A couple of minutes later the three of them, Staithes, Gerry Watchett, and Anthony, were walking up the street together.

It was Gerry who broke the silence. ‘These old hags,’ he said in a tone of meditative rancour, and shook his head. Then more cheerfully. ‘What about a game of poker?’ he suggested. But Anthony didn’t know how, and Mark Staithes didn’t desire, to play poker; he had to go off alone in search of more congenial company.

‘Good riddance,’ said Mark. ‘And now what about coming to my rooms for an hour?’

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It was the most important thing, Hugh Ledwidge felt as he walked home, the most important and also the most extraordinary, most incredible thing that had ever happened to him. So beautiful, so young. ‘Fashioned so slenderly.’ (If only she had thrown herself into the Thames and he had rescued her! ‘Helen! My poor child!’ And, ‘Hugh!’ she would have murmured gratefully. ‘Hugh . . .’) But even without the suicide it had been astonishing enough. Her mouth against his. Oh, why hadn’t he shown more courage, more presence of mind? All the things he might have said to her, the gestures he ought to have made! And yet, in a certain sense, it was better that he should have behaved as he did — stupidly, timidly, ineptly. Better, because it proved more conclusively that she cared for him; because it gave a higher value to her action, so young, so pure — and yet spontaneously, under no compulsion of his, in the teeth, indeed, of what had almost been his resistance, she had stepped down, had laid her hands on his shoulders, had kissed him. Kissed him in spite of everything, he repeated to himself with a kind of astonished triumph that mingled strangely with his sense of shame, his conviction of weakness and futility; in spite of everything. Non più andraï, he hummed to himself as he walked along; then, as though the dank London night were a morning on the downs in spring, broke out into unequivocal singing.

Delle belle turbando il riposo,

Narcissetto, Adoncino d’amor. . . .

At home, he sat down at once to his desk and began to write to her.

Helen, Helen. . . . If I repeat the syllables too often, they lose their sense, become just a noise in my silent room — terrifying in their meaninglessness. But if I say the name just two or three times, very softly, how rich it becomes, how full! Charged with echoes and reminders. Not so much, for me, of the original Greek Helen. I can’t feel that she was ever anything but a mature woman — never anything but married to Menelaus and eloping with Paris. Never really young, as you are — exquisitely, exquisitely, like a flower. No, it’s more Poe’s Helen I catch sight of through the name. The beauty that carries the traveller back to his own native shore — takes him home. Not to the obvious, worldly home of the passions. No; to that further, rarer, lovelier home, beyond and above them. Beyond and above; and yet implying, yet including, even while transcending, the passions . . .

It was a long letter; but he was in time, running out, to catch the midnight post. The sense of triumph with which he returned this second time was almost unalloyed. Momentarily, he had forgotten his shyness, his humiliating cowardice; he remembered only that consciousness of soaring power that had filled him while he wrote his letter. Exalted above his ordinary self, he forgot, when undressing, to put his truss away in the chest of drawers, so that Mrs Brinton shouldn’t see it when she came in with his early tea in the morning. In bed, he lay for a long time thinking tenderly, paternally, poetically, thinking at the same time with desire, but a desire so lingeringly gentle that lasciviousness assumed the quality of prayer, thinking of Helen’s exquisite youthfulness, fashioned so slenderly, and her innocence, her slender innocence, and those unexpected, those extraordinary kisses.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE. August 31st 1933

HELEN RANG THE bell, then listened. In the silence behind the closed door, nothing stirred. She had come straight from the station after a night in the train; it was not yet ten; her mother would still be asleep. She rang again; then, after a pause, once more. Heavily asleep — unless, of course, she had stayed out all night. Where? And with whom? Remembering that horrible Russian she had met at her mother's flat the last time she was in Paris, Helen frowned. She rang a fourth time, a fifth. From within the apartment there was suddenly an answering sound of movement. Helen sighed, partly with relief that her mother had only been asleep, partly in apprehension of what the coming minutes or hours held in store. The door opened at last, opened on a twilight that smelt of cats and ether and stale food; and there, in dirty pink pyjamas, her dyed orange hair dishevelled, and still blinking, still strangely swollen with sleep, stood her mother. For a second the face was a mask, bloated and middle-aged, of stupefied incomprehension; then, in a flash, it came back to life, almost back to youth, with a sudden smile of genuine delight.

'But what fun!' cried Mrs Amberley. 'Darling, I'm so glad.'

If she hadn't known — by how bitter an experience! — that this mood of gaiety and affectionateness would inevitably be followed by, at the best, a spiteful despondency, at the worst, by a fit of insanely violent anger, Helen would have been touched by the warmth of her mother's greeting. As it was, she merely suffered herself to be kissed and, her face still set and stony, stepped across the threshold into the horribly familiar nightmare of her mother's life.

This time, she found, the nightmare had a comic element.

'It's all because of that beastly old femme de ménage,' Mrs Amberley explained as they stood there in the smelly little lobby. 'She was stealing my stockings. So I had to lock the bedroom door when I went out. And then

somehow I lost the key. You know what I am,' she added complacently, boasting by force of habit of that absent-mindedness of which she had always been so proud. 'Hopeless, I'm afraid.' She shook her head and smiled that crooked little smile of hers, conspiratorially. 'When I got home, I had to smash that panel.' She pointed to the oblong aperture in the lower half of the door. 'You should have seen me, banging away with the flat-iron!' Her voice was richly vibrant with laughter. 'Luckily it was like matchwood. Cheap and nasty to a degree. Like everything in this beastly place.'

'And you crawled through?' Helen asked.

'Like this.' And going down on her hands and knees, Mrs Amberley pushed her head through the hole, turned sideways so as to admit an arm and shoulder, then, with surprising agility, pulled and pushed with a hand beyond and feet on the hither side of the door, till only her legs remained in the lobby. First one, then the other, the legs were withdrawn, and an instant later, as though from a dog-kennel, Mrs Amberley's face emerged, a little flushed, through the aperture.

'You see,' she said. 'It's as easy as winking. And the beauty of it is that old Madame Roger's much too fat. No possible chance of her getting through. I don't have to worry about my stockings any more.'

'Do you mean to say she never goes into your bedroom?'

Mrs Amberley shook her head. 'Not since I lost the key; and that was three weeks ago, at least.' Her tone was one of triumph.

'But who makes the bed and does the cleaning?'

'Well . . .' There was a moment's hesitation. 'Why, I do, of course,' the other replied a little irritably.

'You?'

'Why not?' From her kennel door, Mrs Amberley looked up almost defiantly into her daughter's face. There was a long silence; then, simultaneously, both of them burst out laughing.

Still smiling, 'Let's have a look,' said Helen, and went down on all fours. The stony face had softened into life; she felt an inward warmth. Her mother had been so absurd, peering up like that out of her kennel, so childishly ridiculous,

that suddenly she was able to love her again. To love her while she laughed at her, just because she could laugh at her.

Mrs Amberley withdrew her head. ‘Of course it is a bit untidy,’ she admitted rather anxiously, as Helen wriggled through the hole in the door. Still kneeling, she pushed some dirty linen and the remains of yesterday’s lunch under the bed.

On her feet again, inside the bedroom, Helen looked round. It was filthier even than she had expected — much filthier. She made an effort to go on smiling; but the muscles of her face refused to obey her.

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Three days later Helen was on her way back to London. Opening the English newspaper she had bought at the Gare du Nord, she read, with an equal absence of interest, about the depression, the test match, the Nazis, the New Deal. Sighing, she turned the page. Printed very large, the words, ‘An Exquisite First Novel,’ caught her eye. And below, in small letters, ‘The Invisible Lover. By Hugh Ledwidge. Reviewed by Catesby Rudge.’ Helen folded back the page to make it more manageable and read with an intense and fixed attention.

Just another book, I thought, like all the rest. And I was on the point of throwing it aside, unread. But luckily something — some mystic intuition, I suppose — made me change my mind. I opened the book. I turned over the pages, glancing at a sentence here and there. And the sentences, I found, were gems — jewels of wrought crystal. I decided to read the book. That was at nine in the evening. And at midnight I was still reading, spellbound. It was nearly two before I got to bed — my mind in a whirl of enthusiasm for this masterpiece I had just read.

How shall I describe the book to you? I might call it a fantasy. And as far as it goes, that description holds good. The Invisible Lover is a fantasy. But a fantasy that is poignant as well as airy; profound as well as intriguing and light; fraught with tears as well as with smiles; at once subtly humorous and of a high, Galahad-like spirituality. It is full of a kind of broken-hearted fun, and its

laughter is dewy with tears. And throughout runs a vein of naïve and child-like purity, infinitely refreshing in a world full of Freudians and sex-novelists and all their wearisome ilk. This fantasy of the invisible but ever present, ever watchful, ever adoring lover and his child-beloved has an almost celestial innocence. If I wanted to describe the book in a single phrase, I should say that it was the story of Dante and Beatrice told by Hans Andersen. . . .

Falling into her memories of Hugh's few ignominious attempts to make love to her, the words produced in Helen's mind a kind of violent chemical reaction. She burst out laughing; and since the ridiculous phrases went echoing on, since the grotesque memories kept renewing themselves with ever heightened intensity and in ever fuller, more painfully squalid detail, the laughter continued, irrepressibly. The story of Dante and Beatrice told by Hans Andersen! Tears of hysterical merriment ran down her cheeks; she was breathless, and the muscles of her throat were contracted in a kind of agonizing cramp. But still she went on laughing — was utterly unable to stop; it was as though she were possessed by a demon. Luckily, she was alone in the compartment. People would have taken her for a mad-woman.

In the cab, on the way to Hugh's flat — her flat too, in spite of Dante and Beatrice and Hans Andersen — she wondered whether he'd have gone to bed already, and just how upset he'd be to see her. She hadn't warned him of her arrival; he would be unprepared to receive her, unbraced against the shock of her grossly physical presence. Poor old Hugh! she thought with a derisive pity. Enjoying his private and invisible fun, like Dante with his phantom, and then having to suffer the trampling intrusion of Signora Alighieri! But tonight, she realized, as she stood at last before the door of the flat, looking in her bag for the latch-key, that invisible solitude of his had already been invaded. Somebody was playing the piano; there was a sound of laughter and voices. Hugh must be having a party. And all at once Helen saw herself making a dramatic entrance like Banquo's ghost, and was delighted by the vision. The reading of that article had momentarily transposed her entire being into the key of laughter. Everything

was a vast, extravagant, savage joke — or if it wasn't already, should be made so. It was with a tingling sense of excited anticipation that she opened the door and silently slipped into the hall. An assortment of strange hats hung on the pegs, lay on the chairs — a couple of rich hats, she noticed, very new and shapely, and the rest deformed, and ancient; hats, one could see, of the intellectual poor. There were some letters on the marble-topped table; she bent down by mere force of habit to look at them, and found that one was addressed to her — from Anthony, she recognized; and that too was a joke. Did he seriously imagine that she would read his letters? Enormous ass! She popped the envelope unopened into her bag, then tiptoed along the passage to her room. How tidy it was! How dead! Like a family vault under dust-sheets. She took off her coat and hat, washed, combed her hair, made up her face, then, as silently as she had come, crept back to the hall and stood at the door of the sitting-room, trying to guess by the sound of their voices who were the guests. Beppo Bowles, for one; that giggle, those squeaks and fizzlings were unmistakable. And Mark Staithes. And then a voice she wasn't sure of, and another, very soft and confidential, that must be old Croyland's. And who was that ridiculous foreigner who spoke so slowly and ponderously, all on one note? She stood there at the door for a long minute, then very gently turned the handle, drew the door gradually open, and without a sound edged into the room. Nobody had noticed her. Mark Staithes was seated at the piano, with Beppo, a Beppo fatter than ever, she noticed, and balder and more nervously agitated, and — yes, beard and all! — old Croyland, standing one on either side of him, leaning on the instrument and looking down at him while he spoke. Hugh was on the sofa near the fireplace, with the owner of the voice she hadn't recognized, but who turned out to be Caldwell, the publisher — the publisher, of course, of The Invisible Lover, she reflected, and had great difficulty in checking another uprush of mirth. With them was a young man she had never seen before — a young man with very pale flaxen hair and a ruddy open face that wore at the moment an expression of almost child-like seriousness. His, it was evident, had been the foreign accent — German, she supposed.

But now the moment had come.

‘Good evening,’ she called, and stepped forward.

They were all startled; but as for poor Hugh — he jumped as though someone had fired a cannon in his ear. And after the first fright, what an expression of appalled dismay! Irresistibly comic!

‘Well, Hugh,’ she said.

He looked up into her laughing face, unable to speak. Ever since the first laudatory notices of his book had begun to come in, he had been feeling so strong, so blissfully secure. And now here was Helen — come to humiliate him, come to bear shameful witness against him.

‘I didn’t expect,’ he managed to mumble incoherently. ‘I mean, why did you . . . ?’

But Caldwell, who had a reputation for after-dinner speaking to keep up, interrupted him. Raising the glass he was holding, ‘To the Muse,’ he called out. ‘The Muse and also — I don’t think it’s an indiscretion if I say so — also the heroine of our masterpiece.’ Charmed by the felicity of his own phrasing, he beamed at Helen; then, turning to Hugh with a gesture of affectionate proprietorship, he patted him on the shoulder. ‘You must drink too, old man. It’s not a compliment to you — not this time.’ And he uttered a rich chuckle.

Hugh did as he was told and, averting his eyes, took a gulp of whisky-and-soda.

‘Thank you, thank you,’ cried Helen. The laughter was seething within her, like water in a kettle. She gave one hand to Caldwell and the other to Hugh. ‘I can’t tell you how thrilled I was,’ she went on. ‘Dante and Beatrice by Hans Andersen — it sounds too delicious.’

Blushing, Hugh tried to protest. ‘That frightful article . . .’

Cutting him short, ‘But why did you keep it up your sleeve?’ she asked.

Yes why, why? Hugh was thinking; and that he had been mad to publish the book without first showing it to Helen. He had always wanted to show it to her — and always, at the last moment, found the task too difficult, too embarrassing. But the desire to publish had remained with him, had grown stronger, until at

last, senselessly, he had taken the manuscript to Caldwell and, after its acceptance, arranged with him that it should appear while Helen was out of the country. As though that would prevent her knowing anything about it! Madness, madness! And the proof that he had been mad was her presence here tonight, with that strange wild smile on her face, that brightness in the eyes. An uncalculating recklessness was one of the child-beloved's most characteristic and engaging traits; she was a celestial enfant terrible. But in the real Helen this recklessness seemed almost fiendish. She was capable of doing anything, absolutely anything.

'Why did you?' she insisted.

He made a vague apologetic noise.

'You ought to have told me you were Dante Andersen. I'd have tried to live up to you. Beatrice and the Little Match Girl rolled into one. Good evening, Beppo! and Mark!' They had come over from the piano to greet her. 'And, Mr Croyland, how are you?'

Mr Croyland gave a perfect performance of an old gentleman greeting a lovely young woman — benevolently, yet with a touch of playfulness, an attenuated echo of gallantry.

'Such an unexpected enchantment,' he breathed in the soft, deliberately ecstatic voice he ordinarily reserved for describing quattrocento paintings or for addressing the celebrated or the very rich. Then, with a gesture that beautifully expressed an impulsive outburst of affection, Mr Croyland sandwiched her hand between both of his. They were very pale, soft hands, almost gruesomely small and dainty. By comparison, it seemed to Helen that her own brown hand was like a peasant's. Mr Croyland's silvery and prophetic beard parted in a smile that ought to have been the gracious confirmation of his words and gestures, but which, with its incongruous width and the sudden ferocity of all its large and yellowing teeth, seemed instead to deny all reality to the old gentleman's exquisite refinement of manner. That smile belonged to the Mr Croyland who had traded so profitably in the Old Masters; the little white hands and their

affectionate gestures, the soft, ecstatic voice and its heart-felt words, were the property of that other, that ethereal Croyland who only cared about Art.

Helen disengaged her hand. ‘Did you ever see those china mugs, Mr Croyland,’ she asked, ‘you who know Italy so well? The ones they sell at Montecatini for drinking the purgative waters out of? White, with an inscription in golden letters: Io son Beatrice che ti faccio andare.’

‘But what an outrage!’ Mr Croyland exclaimed, and lifted his small hands in horror.

‘But it’s the sort of joke I really enjoy. Particularly now that Beatrice is really me . . .’ Becoming aware that the flaxen-haired young man was standing at attention about a yard to the west of her, evidently trying to attract her notice, Helen interrupted herself and turned towards him, holding out her hand.

The young man took it, bowed stiffly from the waist and, saying ‘Giesebrecht’, firmly squeezed it.

Laughing (it was another joke), Helen answered, ‘Ledwidge’; then, as an afterthought, ‘geboren Amberley.’

Nonplussed by this unexpected gambit, the young man bowed again in silence.

Staithes intervened to explain that Giesebrecht was his discovery. A refugee from Germany. Not because of his nose, he added as (taking pity on poor old Hugh) he drew her confidentially out of the group assembled round the sofa; not because of his nose — because of his politics. Aryan, but communist — ardently and all along the line.

‘He believes that as soon as all incomes are equalized, men will stop being cruel. Also that all power will automatically find itself in the hands of the best people. And he’s absolutely convinced that nobody who obtains power will be capable of even wishing to abuse it.’ Staithes shook his head. ‘One doesn’t know whether to admire and envy or to thank God for not having made one such an ass. And to complicate matters, he’s such a thoroughly good ass. An ass with the moral qualities of a saint. Which is why he’s such an admirable propagandist. Saintliness is almost as good as sex-appeal.’ He pulled up a chair for Helen, and

himself sat down again at the piano and began to play the first few bars of Beethoven's Für Elise; then broke off and, turning back to her, 'The trouble,' he resumed, 'is that nothing works. Not faith, not intelligence, not saintliness, not even villainy — nothing. Faith's just organized and directed stupidity. It may remove a mountain or two by dint of mere obstinate butting; but it's blinkered, it can't see that if you move the mountains, you don't destroy them, you merely shove them from one place to another. You need intelligence to see that; but intelligence isn't much good because people can't feel enthusiastic about it; it's at the mercy of the first Hitler or Mussolini that comes along — of anyone who can rouse enthusiasm; and one can rouse enthusiasm for any cause however idiotic and criminal.'

Helen was looking across the room. 'I suppose his hair's naturally that colour?' she said, more to herself than to her companion. Then, turning back to Staithes, 'And what about saintliness?' she asked.

'Well, look at history,' he answered.

'I don't know any.'

'Of course not. But I take it that you've heard of someone called Jesus? And occasionally, no doubt, you read the papers? Well, put two and two together, the morning's news and the saint, and draw your own conclusions.'

Helen nodded. 'I've drawn them.'

'If saintliness were enough to save the world,' he went on, 'then obviously the world would have been saved long ago. Dozens of times. But saintliness can exist without intelligence. And though it's attractive, it isn't more attractive than lots of other things — good food, for example, comfort, going to bed with people, bullying, feeling superior.'

Laughing (for this also was laughable), 'It looks,' said Helen, 'as if there were nothing to do but throw up everything and become an invisible lover.' She helped herself to a sandwich and a tumbler of white wine from the tray.

The group at the other end of the room had disintegrated, and Beppo and Mr Croyland were drifting back towards the piano. Staithes smiled at them and,

picking up the thread of the argument that Helen's arrival had interrupted, 'Alternatively,' he said, 'one might become an aesthete.'

'You use the word as though it were an insult,' Beppo protested with the emphatic peevishness that had grown upon him with age. Life was treating him badly — making him balder, making him stouter, making young men more and more reluctant to treat him as their contemporary, making sexual successes increasingly difficult of achievement, making that young German of Staithes's behave almost rudely to him. 'Why should one be ashamed of living for beauty?'

The thought of Beppo living for beauty — living for it with his bulging waistcoat and the tight wide seal of his check trousers and his bald crown and Florentine page's curls — almost made Helen choke over her wine.

From the depths of his armchair, ' "Glory be to God for dappled things",' murmured Mr Croyland. 'I've been re-reading Father Hopkins lately. So poignant! Like a dagger. "What lovely behaviour of silk-sack clouds!" ' He sighed, he pensively shook his head. 'They're among the things that wound one with their loveliness. Wound and yet sustain, make life liveable.'

There was a cathedral silence.

Then, making an effort to keep the laughter out of her voice, 'Be an angel, Beppo,' said Helen, 'and give me some more of that hock.'

Mr Croyland sat remote, behind half-closed eyelids, the inhabitant of a higher universe.

When the clinking of the glasses had subsided, ' "Ripeness is all",' he quoted. ' "That sober certainty of waking bliss." Waking,' he insisted. 'Piercingly conscious. And then, of course, there are pictures — the Watteaus at Dresden, and Bellini's Transfiguration, and those Raphael portraits at the Pitti. Buttresses to shore up the soul. And certain philosophies, too. Zarathustra, the Symposium.' He waved his little hand. 'One would be lost without them — lost!'

'And, with them, I take it, you're saved?' said Mark from his seat at the piano; and, without waiting for an answer, 'I wish I were,' he went on. 'But there seems to be so little substance in it all. Even in the little that's intrinsically substantial. For of course most thinking has never been anything but silly. And

as for Art, as for literature — well, look at the museums and the libraries. Look at them! Ninety-nine per cent of nonsense and mere rubbish.'

'But the Greeks,' Mr Croyland protested, 'the Florentines, the Chinese . . .' He sketched in the air an exquisitely graceful gesture, as though he were running his fingers over the flanks of a Sung jar, round the cup-shaped navel of a High Renaissance water-nymph. Subtly, with what was meant to be the expression of a Luini madonna, he smiled; but always, through the opening fur, his large yellow teeth showed ferociously, rapaciously — even when he talked about the Schifanoia frescoes, even when he whispered, as though it were an Orphic secret, the name of Vermeer of Delft.

But nonsense, Staithes insisted, almost invariably nonsense and rubbish. And most of what wasn't nonsense or rubbish was only just ordinarily good. 'Like what you or I could do with a little practice,' he explained. 'And if one knows oneself — the miserable inept little self that can yet accomplish such feats — well, really, one can't be bothered to take the feats very seriously.'

Mr Croyland, it was evident from his frown, didn't think of his own self in quite this spirit.

'Not but what one can enjoy the stuff for all kinds of irrelevant reasons,' Staithes admitted. 'For its ingenuity, for example, if one's in any way a technician or an interpreter. Steady progressions in the bass, for example, while the right hand is modulating apparently at random. Invariably delightful! But then, so's carpentry. No; ultimately it isn't interesting, that ordinarily good stuff. However great the accomplishment or the talent. Ultimately it's without value; it differs from the bad only in degree. Composing like Brahms, for example — what is it, after all, but a vastly more elaborate and intellectual way of composing like Meyerbeer? Whereas the best Beethoven is as far beyond the best Brahms as it's beyond the worst Meyerbeer. There's a difference in kind. One's in another world.'

'Another world,' echoed Mr Croyland in a religious whisper. 'But that's just what I've been trying to get you to admit. With the highest art one enters another world.'

Beppo fizzled with emphatic agreement.

‘A world,’? Mr Croyland insisted, ‘of gods and angels.’

‘Don’t forget the invisible lovers,’ said Helen, who was finding, as she drank her white wine, that everything was becoming more and more uproariously amusing.

Mr Croyland ignored the interruption. ‘A next world,’ he went on. ‘The great artists carry you up to heaven.’

‘But they never allow you to stay there,’ Mark Staithes objected. ‘They give you just a taste of the next world, then let you fall back, flop, into the mud. Marvellous while it lasts. But the time’s so short. And even while they’ve actually got me in heaven, I catch myself asking: Is that all? Isn’t there anything more, anything further? The other world isn’t other enough. Even Macbeth, even the Mass in D, even the El Greco Assumption.’ He shook his head. ‘They used to satisfy me. They used to be an escape and a support. But now . . . now I find myself wanting something more, something heavenlier, something less human. Yes, less human,’ he repeated. Then the flayed face twisted itself up into an agonized smile. ‘I feel rather like Nurse Cavell about it,’ he added. ‘Painting, music, literature, thought — they’re not enough.’

‘What is enough, then?’ asked Beppo. ‘Politics? Science? Moneymaking?’

Staithes shook his head after every suggestion.

‘But what else is there?’ asked Beppo.

Still anatomically smiling, Mark looked at him for a moment in silence, then said, ‘Nothing — absolutely nothing.’

‘Speak for yourself,’ said Mr Croyland. ‘They’re enough for me.’ He dropped his eyelids once more and retired into spiritual fastnesses.

Looking at him, Staithes was moved by the sudden angry desire to puncture the old gentleman’s balloon-like complacency — to rip a hole in that great bag of cultural gas, by means of which Mr Croyland contrived to hoist his squalid traffickings sky-high into the rarefied air of pure aesthetics. ‘And what about death? You find them adequate against death?’ he insisted in a tone that had suddenly become brutally inquisitorial. He paused, and for a moment the old

man was enveloped in a horribly significant silence — the silence of those who in the presence of a victim or an incurable tactfully ignore the impending doom. ‘Adequate against life, for that matter,’ Mark Staithes went on, relenting; ‘against life in any of its more unpleasant or dangerous aspects.’

‘Such as dogs falling on one out of aeroplanes!’ Helen burst out laughing.

‘But what are you talking about?’ cried Beppo.

‘Father Hopkins won’t keep dogs off,’ she went on breathlessly. ‘I agree with you, Mark. A good umbrella, any day . . .’

Mr Croyland rose to his feet. ‘I must go to bed,’ he said. ‘And so should you, my dear.’ The little white hand upon her shoulder was benevolent, almost apostolic. ‘You’re tired after your journey.’

‘You mean, you think I’m drunk,’ Helen answered, wiping her eyes. ‘Well, perhaps you’re right. Gosh,’ she added, ‘how nice it is to laugh for a change!’

When Mr Croyland was gone, and Beppo with him, Staithes turned towards her. ‘You’re in a queer state, Helen.’

‘I’m amused,’ she explained.

‘What by?’

‘By everything. But it began with Dante; Dante and Hans Andersen. If you’d been married to Hugh, you’d know why that was so extraordinarily funny. Imagine Europa if the bull had turned out after all to be Narcissus!’

‘I don’t think you’d better talk so loud,’ said Staithes, looking across the room to where, with an expression on his face of hopeless misery, Hugh was pretending to listen to an animated discussion between Caldwell and the young German.

Helen also looked round for a moment; then turned back with a careless shrug of the shoulders. ‘If he says he’s invisible, why shouldn’t I say I’m inaudible?’ Her eyes brightened again with laughter. ‘I shall write a book called The Inaudible Mistress. A woman who says exactly what she thinks about her lovers while they’re making love to her. But they can’t hear her. Not a word.’ She emptied her glass and refilled it.

‘And what does she say about them?’

‘The truth, of course. Nothing but the truth. That the romantic Don Juan is just a crook. Only I’m afraid that in reality she wouldn’t find that out till afterwards. Still, one might be allowed a bit of poetic licence — make the esprit d’escalier happen at the same time as the romantic affair. The moonlight, and “My darling”, and “I adore you”, and those extraordinary sensations — and at the same moment “You’re nothing but a sneakthief, nothing but a low blackguardly swindler”. And then there’d be the spiritual lover — Hans Dante, in fact.’ She shook her head. ‘Talk of Krafft-Ebing!’

‘But what does she say to him?’

‘What indeed!’ Helen took a gulp of wine. ‘Luckily she’s inaudible. We’d better skip that chapter and come straight to the epicurean sage. With the sage, she doesn’t have to be quite so obscure. “You think you’re a man, because you happen not to be impotent”. That’s what she says to him. “But in fact you’re not a man. You’re sub-human. In spite of your sageness — because of it even. Worse than the crook in some ways.” And then, bang, like a sign from heaven, down comes the dog!’

‘But what dog?’

‘Why, the dog Father Hopkins can’t protect you from. The sort of dog that bursts like a bomb when you drop it out of an aeroplane. Bang!’ The laughing excitement seethed and bubbled within her, seeking expression, seeking an outlet; and the only possible assuagement was through some kind of outrage, some violence publicly done to her own and other people’s feelings. ‘It almost fell on Anthony and me,’ she went on, finding a strange relief in speaking thus openly and hilariously about the unmentionable event. ‘On the roof of his house it was. And we had no clothes on. Like the Garden of Eden. And then, out of the blue, down came that dog — and exploded, I tell you, literally exploded.’ She threw out her hands in a violent gesture. ‘Dog’s blood from head to foot. We were drenched — but drenched! In spite of which this imbecile goes and writes me a letter.’ She opened her bag and produced it. ‘Imagining I’d read it, I suppose. As though nothing had happened, as though we were still in the Garden of Eden. I always told him he was a fool. There!’ She handed the letter to

Staithes. ‘You open it and see what the idiot has to say. Something witty, no doubt; something airy and casual; humorously wondering why I took it into my funny little head to go away.’ Then, noticing that Mark was still holding the letter unopened. ‘But why don’t you read it?’ she asked.

‘Do you really want me to?’

‘Of course. Read it aloud. Read it with expression.’ She rolled the r derisively.

‘Very well, then.’ He tore open the envelope and unfolded the thin sheets. ‘ ”I went to look for you at the hotel,” ’ he read out slowly, frowning over the small and hurried script. ‘ ”You were gone — and it was like a kind of death.” ’

‘Ass!’ commented Helen.

‘ ”It’s probably too late, probably useless; but I feel I must try to tell you in this letter some of the things I meant to say to you, yesterday evening, in words. In one way it’s easier — for I’m inept when it comes to establishing a purely personal contact with another human being. But in another way, it’s much more difficult; for these written words will be just words and no more, will come to you, floating in a void, unsupported, without the life of my physical presence.” ’

Helen gave a snort of contemptuous laughter. ‘As though that would have been a recommendation!’ She drank some more wine.

‘ ”Well, what I wanted to tell you,” ’ Staithes read on, ‘ ”was this: that suddenly (it was like a conversion, like an inspiration) while you were kneeling there yesterday on the roof, after that horrible thing had happened . . .” ’

‘He means the dog,’ said Helen. ‘Why can’t he say so?’

‘ ”. . . suddenly I realized . . .” ’ Mark Staithes broke off. ‘Look here,’ he said, ‘I really can’t go on.’

‘Why not? I insist on you going on,’ she cried excitedly.

He shook his head. ‘I’ve got no right!’

‘But I’ve given you the right.’

‘Yes, I know. But he hasn’t.’

‘What has he got to do with it? Now that I’ve received the letter . . .’

‘But it’s a love-letter.’

‘A love-letter?’ Helen repeated incredulously, then burst out laughing. ‘That’s too good!’ she cried. ‘That’s really sublime! Here, give it to me.’ She snatched the letter out of his hand. ‘Where are we? Ah, here! “. . . kneeling on the roof after that horrible thing had happened, suddenly I realized that I’d been living a kind of outrageous lie towards you!” ’ She declaimed the words rhetorically and to the accompaniment of florid gesticulations. ‘ ”I realized that in spite of all the elaborate pretence that it was just a kind of detached irresponsible amusement, I really loved you.” He really lo-o-oved me,’ she repeated, drawing the word into a grotesque caricature of itself. ‘Isn’t that wonderful? He really lo-o-oved me.’ Then, turning round in her chair, ‘Hugh!’ she called across the room.

‘Helen, be quiet!’

But the desire, the need to consummate the outrage was urgent within her.

She shook off the restraining hand that Staithes had laid on her arm, shouted Hugh’s name again and, when they all turned towards her, ‘I just wanted to tell you he really lo-o-oved me,’ she said, waving the letter.

‘Oh, for God’s sake shut up!’

‘I certainly won’t shut up,’ she retorted, turning back to Mark. ‘Why shouldn’t I tell Hugh the good news? He’ll be delighted, seeing how much he lo-o-oves me himself. Don’t you, Hughie?’ She swung back again, and her face was flushed and brilliant with excitement. ‘Don’t you?’ Hugh made no answer, but sat there pale and speechless, looking at the floor.

‘Of course you do,’ she answered for him. ‘In spite of all appearances to the contrary. Or rather,’ she emended, uttering a little laugh, ‘in spite of all disappearances — seeing that it was always invisible, that love of yours. Oh yes, Hughie darling, definitely invisible. But still . . . still, in spite of all disappearances to the contrary, you do lo-o-ove me, don’t you? Don’t you?’ she insisted, trying to force him to answer her, ‘don’t you?’

Hugh rose to his feet and, without speaking a word, almost ran out of the room.

‘Hugh!’ Caldwell shouted after him, ‘Hugh!’ There was no answer. Caldwell looked round at the others. ‘I think perhaps one ought to see that he’s all right,’

he said, with the maternal solicitude of a publisher who sees a first-rate literary property rushing perhaps towards suicide. ‘One never knows.’ And jumping up he hurried after Hugh. The door slammed.

There was a moment’s silence. Then, startlingly, Helen broke into laughter. ‘Don’t be alarmed, Herr Giesebrecht,’ she said, turning to the young German. ‘It’s just a little bit of English family life. Die Familie im Wohnzimmer, as we used to learn at school. Was tut die Mutter? Die mutter spielt Klavier. Und was tut der Vater? Der Vater sitzt in einem Lehnstuhl und raucht seine Pfeife. Just that, Herr Giesebrecht, no more. Just a typical bourgeois family.’

‘Bourgeois,’ the young man repeated, and nodded gravely. ‘You say better than you know.’

‘Do I?’

‘You are a wictim,’ he went on, very slowly, and separating word from word, ‘a wictim of capitalist society. It is full of wices . . .’

Helen threw back her head and laughed again more loudly than before; then, controlling herself with an effort, ‘You mustn’t think I’m laughing at you,’ she gasped. ‘I think you’re being sweet to me — extraordinarily decent. And probably you’re quite right about capitalist society. Only somehow at this particular moment — I don’t know why — it seemed rather . . . rather . . .’ The laughter broke out once more. ‘I’m sorry.’

‘We must be going,’ said Mark, and rose from his chair. The young German also got up and came across the room towards them. ‘Good night, Helen.’

‘Good night, Mark. Good night, Mr Giesebrecht. Come and see me again, will you? I’ll behave better next time.’

He returned her smile and bowed. ‘I will come whenever you wish,’ he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO. December 8th 1926

MARK LIVED IN a dingy house off the Fulham Road. Dark brown brick with terra-cotta trimmings; and, within, patterned linoleum; bits of red Axminster carpet; wallpapers of ochre sprinkled with bunches of cornflowers, of green, with crimson roses; fumed oak chairs and tables; rep curtains; bamboo stands supporting glazed blue pots. The hideousness, Anthony reflected, was so complete, so absolutely unrelieved, that it could only have been intentional. Mark must deliberately have chosen the ugliest surroundings he could find. To punish himself, no doubt — but why, for what offence?

'Some beer?'

Anthony nodded.

The other opened a bottle, filled a single glass; but himself did not drink.

'You still play, I see,' said Anthony, pointing in the direction of the upright piano.

'A little,' Mark had to admit. 'It's a consolation.'

The fact that the Matthew Passion, for example, the Hammerklavier Sonata, had had human authors was a source of hope. It was just conceivable that humanity might some day and somehow be made a little more John-Sebastian-like. If there were no Well-Tempered Clavichord, why should one bother even to wish for revolutionary change?

'Turning one kind of common humanity into common humanity of a slightly different kind — well, if that's all that revolution can do, the game isn't worth the candle.'

Anthony protested. For a sociologist it was the most fascinating of all games.

'To watch or to play?'

'To watch, of course.'

A spectacle bottomlessly comic in its grotesqueness, endlessly varied. But looking closely, one could detect the uniformities under the diversity, the fixed rules of the endlessly shifting game.

‘A revolution to transform common humanity into common humanity of another variety. You will find it horrifying. But that’s just what I’d like to live long enough to see. Theory being put to the test of practice. To detect, after your catastrophic reform of everything, the same old uniformities working themselves out in a slightly different way — I can’t imagine anything more satisfying. Like logically inferring the existence of a new planet and then discovering it with a telescope. As for producing more John Sebastians . . .’ He shrugged his shoulders. ‘You might as well imagine that revolution will increase the number of Siamese twins.’

That was the chief difference between literature and life. In books, the proportion of exceptional to commonplace people is high; in reality, very low.

‘Books are opium,’ said Mark.

‘Precisely. That’s why it’s doubtful if there’ll ever be such a thing as proletarian literature. Even proletarian books will deal with exceptional proletarians. And exceptional proletarians are no more proletarian than exceptional bourgeois are bourgeois. Life’s so ordinary that literature has to deal with the exceptional. Exceptional talent, power, social position, wealth. Hence those geniuses of fiction, those leaders and dukes and millionaires. People who are completely conditioned by circumstances — one can be desperately sorry for them; but one can’t find their lives very dramatic. Drama begins where there’s freedom of choice. And freedom of choice begins when social or psychological conditions are exceptional. That’s why the inhabitants of imaginative literature have always been recruited from the pages of Who’s Who.’

‘But do you really think that people with money or power are free?’

‘Freer than the poor, at any rate. Less completely conditioned by matter and other people’s wills.’

Mark shook his head. ‘You don’t know my father,’ he said. ‘Or my disgusting brothers.’

At Bulstrode, Anthony remembered, it was always, ‘My pater says . . .’ or ‘My frater at Cambridge . . .’

‘The whole vile brood of Staitheses,’ Mark went on.

He described the Staithes who was now a Knight Commander of St Michael and St George and a Permanent Under-Secretary. Pleased as Punch with it all, and serenely conscious of his own extraordinary merits, adoring himself for being such a great man.

‘As though there were any real difficulty in getting where he’s got! Anything in the least creditable about that kind of piddling little conquest!’ Mark made a flayed grimace of contemptuous disgust. ‘He thinks he’s a marvel.’

And the other Staitheses, the Staitheses of the younger generation — they also thought that they were marvels. There was one of them at Delhi, heroically occupied in bullying Indians who couldn’t stand up for themselves. And the other was on the Stock Exchange and highly successful. Successful as what? As a cunning exploiter of ignorance and greed and the insanity of gamblers and misers. And on top of everything the man prided himself on being an amorist, a professional Don Juan.

(Why the poor devil shouldn’t be allowed to have a bit of fun, Anthony was unable, as he sipped his beer, to imagine.)

One of the boys! One of the dogs! A dog among bitches — what a triumph!

‘And you call them free,’ Mark concluded. ‘But how can a climber be free? He’s tied to his ladder.’

‘But social ladders,’ Anthony objected, ‘become broader as they rise. At the bottom, you can only just get your foot on to them. At the top the rungs are twenty yards across.’

‘Well, perhaps it’s a wider perch than the bank clerk’s,’ Mark admitted. ‘But not wide enough for me. And not high enough; above all, not clean enough.’

The rage they had been in when he enlisted during the war as a private! Feeling that he’d let the family down. The creatures were incapable of seeing that, if you had the choice, it was more decent to elect to be a private than a staff lieutenant.

‘Turds to the core,’ he said. ‘So they can’t think anything but turdish thoughts. And above all, they can’t conceive of anyone else thinking differently. Turd calls to turd; and, when it’s answered by non-turd, it’s utterly at a loss.’

And when the war was over, there was that job his father had taken such pains to find for him in the City — with Lazarus and Coit, no less! — just waiting for him to step into the moment he was demobilized. A job with almost unlimited prospects for a young man with brains and energy — for a Staithes, in a word. ‘A five-figure income by the time you’re fifty,’ his father had insisted almost lyrically, and had been really hurt and grieved, as well as mortally offended, furiously angry, when Mark replied that he had no intention of taking it.

‘ ”But why not?” the poor old turd kept asking. “Why not?” And simply couldn’t see that it was just because it was so good that I couldn’t take his job. So unfairly good! So ignobly good! He just couldn’t see it. According to his ideas, I ought to have rushed at it, headlong, like all the Gadarene swine rolled into one. Instead of which I returned him his cow-pat and went to Mexico — to look after a coffee finca.’

‘But did you know anything about coffee?’

‘Of course not. That was one of the attractions of the job.’ He smiled. ‘When I did know something about it, I came back to see if there was anything doing here.’

‘And is there anything doing?’

The other shrugged his shoulders. God only knew. One joined the Party, one distributed literature, one financed pressure-groups out of the profits on synthetic carnations, one addressed meetings and wrote articles. And perhaps it was all quite useless. Perhaps, on the contrary, the auspicious moment might some day present itself . . .

‘And then what?’ asked Anthony.

‘Ah, that’s the question. It’ll be all right at the beginning. Revolution’s delightful in the preliminary stages. So long as it’s a question of getting rid of the people at the top. But afterwards, if the thing’s a success — what then? More

wireless sets, more chocolates, more beauty parlours, more girls with better contraceptives.' He shook his head. 'The moment you give people the chance to be piggish, they take it — thankfully. That freedom you were talking about just now, the freedom at the top of the social ladder — it's just the licence to be a pig; or alternatively a prig, a self-satisfied pharisee like my father. Or else both at once, like my precious brother. Pig and prig simultaneously. In Russia they haven't yet had the chance to be pigs. Circumstances have forced them to be ascetics. But suppose their economic experiment succeeds; suppose a time comes when they're all prosperous — what's to prevent them turning into Babbitts? Millions and millions of soft, piggish Babbitts, ruled by a small minority of ambitious Staitheses.'

Anthony smiled. 'A new phase of the game played according to the old unchanging rules.'

'I'm horribly afraid you're right,' said the other. 'It's orthodox Marxism, of course. Behaviour and modes of thoughts are the outcome of economic circumstances. Reproduce Babbitt's circumstances and you can't help reproducing his manners and customs. Christ!' He rose, walked to the piano and, drawing up a chair, sat down in front of it, 'Let's try to get that taste out of our mouths.' He held his large bony hands poised for a moment above the keyboard; then began to play Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D. They were in another universe, a world where Babbitts and Staitheses didn't exist, were inconceivable.

Mark had played for only a minute or two when the door opened and an elderly woman, thin and horse-faced, in a brown silk dress and wearing round her neck an old diseased brown fur, entered the room. She walked on tiptoe, acting in elaborate pantomime the very personification of silence, but in the process produced an extraordinary volume and variety of disturbing noises — creaking of shoes, rustling of silk, glassy clinkings of bead necklaces, jingling of the silver objects suspended by little chains from the waist. Mark went on playing without turning his head. Embarrassed, Anthony rose and bowed. The horse-faced creature waved him back to his place, and cautiously, in a final prolonged explosion of noise, sat down on the sofa.

‘Exquisite!’ she cried when the final chord had been struck. ‘Play us some more, Mark.’

But Mark got up, shaking his head. ‘I want to introduce you to Miss Pendle,’ he said to Anthony; and to the old woman, ‘Anthony Beavis was at Bulstrode with me,’ he explained.

Anthony took her hand. She gave him a smile. The teeth, which were false ones and badly fitting, were improbably too white and bright. ‘So you were at Bulstrode with Mark!’ she cried. ‘Isn’t that extraordinary!’

‘Extraordinary that we should still be on speaking terms?’ said Mark.

‘No, no,’ said Miss Pendle, and with a playfulness that Anthony found positively ghoulish, gave him a little slap on the arm. ‘You know exactly what I mean. He always was like that, Mr Beavis, even when he was a boy — do you remember?’

Anthony duly nodded assent.

‘So sharp and sarcastic! Even before you knew him at Bulstrode. Shocking!’ She flashed her false teeth at Mark in a sparkle of loving mock-reprobation. ‘He was my first pupil, you know,’ she went on confidentially. ‘And I was his first teacher.’

Anthony rose gallantly to the occasion. ‘Let me congratulate Mark,’ he said, ‘and condole with you.’

Miss Pendle looked at Mark. ‘Do you think I need his condolences?’ she asked, almost archly, like a young girl, coquettishly fishing for compliments.

Mark did not answer, only smiled and shrugged his shoulders. ‘I’ll go and make some tea,’ he said. ‘You’d like tea, wouldn’t you Penny?’ Miss Pendle nodded, and he rose and left the room.

Anthony was wondering rather uncomfortably what he should say to this disquietingly human old hag, when Miss Pendle turned towards him. ‘He’s wonderful, Mark is; really wonderful.’ The false teeth flashed, the words came gushingly with an incongruously un-equine vehemence. Anthony felt himself writhing with an embarrassed distaste. ‘Nobody knows how kind he is,’ she went on. ‘He doesn’t like it told; but I don’t mind — I want people to know.’ She

nodded so emphatically that the beads of her necklace rattled. ‘I was ill last year,’ she went on. Her savings had gone, she couldn’t get another job. In despair, she had written to some of her old employers, Sir Michael Staithes among them. ‘Sir Michael sent me five pounds,’ she said. ‘That kept me going for a bit. Then I had to write again. He said he couldn’t do anything more. But he mentioned the matter to Mark. And what do you think Mark did?’ She looked at Anthony in silence, a horse transfigured, with an expression at once of tenderness and triumph and her red-lidded brown eyes full of tears.

‘What did he do?’ asked Anthony.

‘He came to me where I was staying — I had a room in Camberwell then — he came and he took me away with him. Straight away, the moment I could get my things packed up, and brought me here. I’ve kept house for him ever since. What do you think of that, Mr Beavis?’ she asked. Her voice trembled and she had to wipe her eyes; but she was still triumphant. ‘What do you think of that?’

Anthony really didn’t know what to think of it; but said, meanwhile, that it was wonderful.

‘Wonderful,’ the horse repeated, approvingly. ‘That’s exactly what it is. But you mustn’t tell him I told you. He’d be furious with me. He’s like that text in the Gospel about not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing. That’s what he’s like.’ She gave her eyes a final wipe and blew her nose. ‘There, I hear him coming,’ she said, and, before Anthony could intervene, had jumped up, darted across the room in a storm of rustlings and rattlings, and opened the door. Mark entered, carrying a tray with the tea-things and a plate of mixed biscuits.

Miss Pendle poured out, said she oughtn’t to eat anything at this time of night, but, all the same, took a round biscuit with pink sugar icing on it.

‘Now, tell me what sort of a boy young Master Mark was at Bulstrode,’ she said in that playful way of hers. ‘Up to all kind of mischief, I’ll be bound!’ She took another bite at her biscuit.

‘He bullied me a good deal,’ said Anthony.

Miss Pendle interrupted her quick nibbling to laugh aloud. ‘You naughty boy!’ she said to Mark; then the jaws started to work again.

‘Being so good at football, he had the right to bully me.’

‘Yes, you were captain of the eleven, weren’t you?’

‘I forget,’ said Mark.

‘He forgets!’ Miss Pendle repeated, looking triumphantly at Anthony. ‘That’s typical of him. He forgets!’ She helped herself to a second biscuit, pushing aside the plain ones to select another with icing on it, and began to nibble once more with the intense and concentrated passion of those whose only sensual pleasures have been the pleasures of the palate.

When she had gone to bed, the two men sat down again by the fire. There was a long silence.

‘She’s rather touching,’ said Anthony at last.

For some time Mark made no comment. Then, ‘A bit too touching,’ he brought out.

Anthony looked into his face and saw there a demonstration of the anatomy of sardonic irony. There was another silence. The clock, which was supported by two draped nymphs in gilded bronze, ticked from its place among the imitation Dresden figures that thronged the shelves of the elaborate overmantel. Hideous on purpose, Anthony said to himself, as his eye took in the details of each separate outrage on good taste. And the poor old horse — was she merely the largest, the most monstrous of the knick-knacks? ‘I’m surprised,’ he said aloud, ‘that you don’t wear a hair-shirt. Or perhaps you do?’ he added.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE. June 1st 1934

TONIGHT, AT DINNER with Mark, saw Helen, for the first time since my return from America.

Consider the meaning of a face. A face can be a symbol, signifying matter which would require volumes for its exposition in successive detail. A vast sum, for the person on whom it acts as a symbol, of feelings and thoughts, of remembered sensations, impressions, judgements, experiences — all rendered synthetically and simultaneously, at a single glance. As she came into the restaurant, it was like the drowning man's instantaneous vision of life. A futile, bad, unsatisfactory life; and a vision charged with regret. All those wrong choices, those opportunities irrevocably missed! And that sad face was not only a symbol, indirectly expressive of my history; it was also a directly expressive emblem of hers. A history for whose saddening and embittering quality I was at least in part responsible. If I had accepted the love she wanted to give me, if I had consented to love (for I could have loved) in return . . . But I preferred to be free, for the sake of my work — in other words, to remain enslaved in a world where there could be no question of freedom, for the sake of my amusements. I insisted on irresponsible sensuality, rather than love. Insisted, in other words, on her becoming a means to the end of my detached, physical satisfaction and, conversely, of course, on my becoming a means to hers.

Curious how irrelevant appears the fact of having been, technically, 'lovers'! It doesn't qualify her indifference or my feeling. There's a maxim of La Rochefoucauld's about women forgetting the favours they have accorded to past lovers. I used to like it for being cynical; but really it's just a bald statement of the fact that something that's meant to be irrelevant, *i.e.* sensuality, is irrelevant. Into my present complex of thoughts, feelings, and memories, physical desire, I find, enters hardly at all. In spite of the fact that my memories are of intense and

complete satisfactions. Surprising, the extent to which eroticism is a matter of choice and focus. I don't think much in erotic terms now; but very easily could, if I wished to. Choose to consider individuals in their capacity as potential givers and receivers of pleasure, focus attention on sensual satisfactions: eroticism will become immensely important and great quantities of energy will be directed along erotic channels. Choose a different conception of the individual, another focal range: energy will flow elsewhere and eroticism seem relatively unimportant.

Spent a good part of the evening arguing about peace and social justice. Mark, as sarcastically disagreeable as he knew how to be about Miller and what he called my neo-Jesus avatar. 'If the swine want to rip one another's guts out, let them; anyhow, you can't prevent them. Swine will be swine.' But may become human, I insisted. Homo non nascitur, fit. Or rather makes himself out of the ready-made elements and potentialities of man with which he's born.

Helen's was the usual communist argument — no peace or social justice without a preliminary 'liquidation' of capitalists, liberals, and so forth. As though you could use violent, unjust means and achieve peace and justice! Means determine ends; and must be like the ends proposed. Means intrinsically different from the ends proposed achieve ends like themselves, not like those they were meant to achieve. Violence and war will produce a peace and a social organization having the potentialities of more violence and war. The war to end war resulted, as usual, in a peace essentially like war; the revolution to achieve communism, in a hierarchical state where a minority rules by police methods à la Metternich-Hitler-Mussolini, and where the power to oppress in virtue of being rich is replaced by the power to oppress in virtue of being a member of the oligarchy. Peace and social justice, only obtainable by means that are just and pacific. And people will behave justly and pacifically only if they have trained themselves as individuals to do so, even in circumstances where it would be easier to behave violently and unjustly. And the training must be simultaneously physical and mental. Knowledge of how to use the self and of what the self should be used for. Neo-Ignatius and neo-Sandow was Mark's verdict.

Put Mark into a cab and walked, as the night was beautiful, all the way from Soho to Chelsea. Theatres were closing. Helen brightened suddenly to a mood of malevolent high spirits. Commenting in a ringing voice on passers-by. As though we were at the Zoo. Embarrassing, but funny and acute, as when she pointed to the rich young men in top-hats trying to look like the De Reszke Aristocrat, or opening and shutting cigarette-cases in the style of Gerald du Maurier; to the women trying to look like Vogue, or expensive advertisements (for winter cruises or fur coats), head in air, eyelids dropped superciliously — or slouching like screen vamps, with their stomachs stuck out, as though expecting twins. The pitiable models on which people form themselves! Once it was the Imitation of Christ — now of Hollywood.

Were silent when we had left the crowds. Then Helen asked if I were happy. I said, yes — though didn't know if happiness was the right word. More substantial, more complete, more interested, more aware. If not happy exactly, at any rate having greater potentialities for happiness. Another silence. Then, 'I thought I could never see you again, because of that dog. Then Ekki came, and the dog was quite irrelevant. And now he's gone, it's still irrelevant. For another reason. Everything's irrelevant, for that matter. Except communism.' But that was an afterthought — an expression of piety, uttered by force of habit. I said our ends were the same, the means adopted, different. For her, end justified means; for me, means the end. Perhaps, I said, one day she would see the importance of the means.

June 3rd 1934

At today's lesson with Miller found myself suddenly a step forward in my grasp of the theory and practice of the technique. To learn proper use one must first inhibit all improper uses of the self. Refuse to be hurried into gaining ends by the equivalent (in personal, psycho-physiological terms) of violent revolution; inhibit this tendency, concentrate on the means whereby the end is to be achieved; then act. This process entails knowing good and bad use — knowing them apart. By the 'feel'. Increased awareness and increased power of control result. Awareness and control: trivialities take on new significance. Indeed,

nothing is trivial any more or negligible. Cleaning teeth, putting on shoes — such processes are reduced by habits of bad use to a kind of tiresome non-existence. Become conscious, inhibit, cease to be a greedy end-gainer, concentrate on means: tiresome non-existence turns into absorbingly interesting reality. In Evans-Wentz's last book on Tibet I find among 'The Precepts of the Gurus' the injunction: 'Constantly retain alertness of consciousness in walking, in sitting, in eating, in sleeping.' An injunction, like most injunctions, unaccompanied by instructions as to the right way of carrying it out. Here, practical instructions accompany injunctions; one is taught how to become aware. And not only that. Also how to perform rightly, instead of wrongly, the activities of which there is awareness. Nor is this all. Awareness and power of control are transferable. Skill acquired in getting to know the muscular aspect of mind-body can be carried over into the exploration of other aspects. There is increasing ability to detect one's motives for any given piece of behaviour, to assess correctly the quality of a feeling, the real significance of a thought. Also, one becomes more clearly and consistently conscious of what's going on in the outside world, and the judgement associated with that heightened consciousness is improved. Control also is transferred. Acquire the art of inhibiting muscular bad use and you acquire thereby the art of inhibiting more complicated trains of behaviour. Not only this: there is prevention as well as cure. Given proper correlation, many occasions for behaving undesirably just don't arise. There is an end, for example, of neurotic anxieties and depressions — whatever the previous history. For note; most infantile and adolescent histories are disastrous: yet only some individuals develop serious neurosis. Those, precisely, in whom use of the self is particularly bad. They succumb because resistance is poor. In practice, neurosis is always associated with some kind of wrong use. (Note the typically bad physical posture of neurotics and lunatics. The stooping back, the muscular tension, the sunken head.) Re-educate. Give back correct physical use. You remove a keystone of the arch constituting the neurotic personality. The neurotic personality collapses. And in its place is built up a personality in which all the habits of physical use are correct. But correct use entails — since body-

mind is indivisible except in thought — correct mental use. Most of us are slightly neurotic. Even slight neurosis provides endless occasions for bad behaviour. Teaching of right use gets rid of neurosis — therefore of many occasions for bad behaviour. Hitherto preventive ethics has been thought of as external to individuals. Social and economic reforms carried out with a view to eliminating occasions for bad behaviour. This is important. But not nearly enough. Belief that it is enough makes the social-reform conception of progress nonsensical. The knowledge that it is nonsensical has always given me pleasure. Sticking pins in large, highly inflated balloons — one of the most delightful of amusements. But a bit childish; and after a time it palls. So how satisfactory to find that there seems to be a way of making sense of the nonsense. A method of achieving progress from within as well as from without. Progress, not only as a citizen, a machine-minder and machine-user, but also as a human being.

Prevention is good; but can’t eliminate the necessity for cure. The power to cure bad behaviour seems essentially similar to the power to cure bad coordination. One learns this last when learning the proper use of self. There is a transference. The power to inhibit and control. It becomes easier to inhibit undesirable impulses. Easier to follow as well as see and approve the better. Easier to put good intentions into practice and be patient, good-tempered, kind, unrapacious, chaste.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR. June 23rd and July 5th 1927

SHE COULDN'T AFFORD it; but that didn't matter. Mrs Amberley was used to doing things she couldn't afford. It was really so simple; you just sold a little War Loan, and there you were. There you were with your motor tour in Italy, your nudes by Pascin, your account at Fortnum and Mason. And there, finally, you were in Berkshire, in the most adorable little old house, smelling of pot-pourri, with towering lime trees on the lawn and the downs at your back door, stretching away mile after mile in smooth green nakedness under the sky. She couldn't afford it; but it was so beautiful, so perfect. And after all, what were a hundred and fifty pounds of War Loan? How much did they bring in? About five pounds a year, when the taxes had been paid. And what were five pounds a year? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And besides, Gerry was going to re-invest her money for her. Her capital might have shrunk; but her income would soon start growing. Next year she would be able to afford it; and so, in anticipation of that happy time, here she was, sitting under the lime trees on the lawn with her guests around her.

Propped up on one elbow, Helen was lying on a rug behind her mother's chair. She was paying no attention to what was being said. The country was so exquisitely beautiful that one really couldn't listen to old Anthony holding forth about the place of machines in history; no, the only thing one could do in such heavenly circumstances was to play with the kitten. What the kitten liked best, she found, was the rug game. You pushed a twig under the corner of the rug, very slowly, till the end reappeared again on the other side, like the head of an animal cautiously peeping out from its burrow. A little way, very suspiciously; and then with a jerk you withdrew it. The animal had taken fright and scuttled back to cover. Then, plucking up its courage, out it came once more, went nosing to the right and left between the grass stems, then retired to finish its meal

safely under the rug. Long seconds passed; and suddenly out it popped like a jack-in-the-box, as though it were trying to catch any impending danger unaware, and was back again in a flash. Then once more, very doubtfully and reluctantly — impelled only by brute necessity and against its better judgement — it emerged into the open, conscious, you felt, of being the predestined victim, foreknowing its dreadful fate. And all this time the tabby kitten was following its comings and goings with a bright expressionless ferocity. Each time the twig retired under the rug, he came creeping, with an infinity of precautions, a few inches nearer. Nearer, nearer, and now the moment had come for him to crouch for the final, decisive spring. The green eyes stared with an absurd balefulness; the tiny body was so heavily overcharged with a tigerish intensity of purpose that, not the tail only, but the whole hindquarters shook under the emotional pressure. Overhead, meanwhile, the lime trees rustled in a faint wind, the round dapplings of golden light moved noiselessly back and forth across the grass. On the other side of the lawn the herbaceous borders blazed in the sunshine as though they were on fire, and beyond them lay the downs like huge animals, fast asleep, with the indigo shadows of clouds creeping across their flanks. It was all so beautiful, so heavenly, that every now and then Helen simply couldn’t stand it any longer, but had to drop the twig and catch up the kitten, and rub her cheek against the silky fur, and whisper meaningless words to him in baby language, and hold him up with ridiculously dangling paws in front of her face, so that their noses almost touched, and stare into those blankly bright green eyes, till at last the helpless little beast began to mew so pathetically that she had to let him go again. ‘Poor darling!’ she murmured repentantly. ‘Did I torture him?’ But the torturing had served its purpose; the painful excess of her happiness had overflowed, as it were, and left her at ease, the heavenly beauty was once more supportable. She picked up the twig. Forgivingly, for he had already forgotten everything, the kitten started the game all over again.

The ringing of a bicycle bell made her look up. It was the postman riding up the drive with the afternoon delivery. Helen scrambled to her feet and, taking the kitten with her, walked quickly but, she hoped, inconspicuously towards the

house. At the door she met the parlour-maid coming out with the letters. There were two for her. The first she opened was from Joyce, from Aldershot. (She had to smile as she read the address at the head of the paper. ‘Joyce is now living at A-aldershot,’ her mother would say, lingering over the first syllable of the name with a kind of hollow emphasis and in a tone of slightly shocked incredulity, as though it were really inconceivable that any daughter of hers should find herself at such a place. ‘At A-aldershot, my dear.’ And she managed to endow that military suburb with the fabulous strangeness of Tibet, the horror and remoteness of darkest Liberia. ‘Living at A-a-aldershot — as a mem-sahib.’)

Just a line [Helen read, still smiling] to thank you for your sweet letter. I am rather worried by what you say about Mother’s taking so many sleeping draughts. They can’t be good for her. Colin thinks she ought to take more healthy exercise. Perhaps you might suggest riding. I have been having riding lessons lately, and it is really lovely once you are used to it. We are now quite settled in, and you have no idea how adorable our little house looks now. Colin and I worked like niggers to get things straight, and I must say the results are worth all the trouble. I had to pay a lot of nerve-racking calls; but everybody has been very nice to me and I feel quite at home now. Colin sends his love. — Yours,

Joyce

The other letter — and that was why she had gone to meet the postman — was from Hugh Ledwidge. If the letters had been brought to Mrs Amberley on the lawn; if she had sorted them out, in public . . . Helen flushed with imagined shame and anger at the thought of what her mother might have said about that letter from Hugh. In spite of all the people sitting round; or rather because of them. When they were alone, Helen generally got off with a teasing word. But when other people were there, Mrs Amberley would feel inspired by her audience to launch out into elaborate descriptions and commentaries. ‘Hugh and Helen,’ she would explain, ‘they’re a mixture between Socrates and Alcibiades and Don Quixote and Dulcinea.’ There were moments when she hated her mother. ‘It’s a case,’ said the remembered voice, ‘a case of: I could not love

thee, dear, so much, loved I not ethnology more.' Helen had had to suffer a great deal on account of those letters.

She tore open the envelope.

Midsummer Day, Helen. But you're too young, I expect, to think much about the significance of special days. You've only been in the world for about seven thousand days altogether; and one has got to have lived through at least ten thousand before one begins to realize that there aren't an indefinite number of them and that you can't do exactly what you want with them. I've been here more than thirteen thousand days, and the end's visible, the boundless possibilities have narrowed down. One must cut according to one's cloth; and one's cloth is not only exiguous; it's also of one special kind — and generally of poor quality at that. When one's young, one thinks one can tailor one's time into all sorts of splendid and fantastic garments — shakoes and chasubles and Ph.D. gowns; Nijinsky's tights and Rimbaud's slate-blue trousers and Garibaldi's red shirt. But by the time you've lived ten thousand days, you begin to realize that you'll be lucky if you succeed in cutting one decent workaday suit out of the time at your disposal. It's a depressing realization; and Midsummer is one of the days that brings it home. The longest day. One of the sixty or seventy longest days of one's five and twenty thousand. And what have I done with this longest day — longest of so few, of so uniform, of so shoddy? The catalogue of my occupations would be humiliatingly absurd and pointless. The only creditable and, in any profound sense of the word, reasonable thing I've done is to think a little about you, Helen, and write this letter. . . .

'Any interesting letters?' asked Mrs Amberley when her daughter came out again from the house.

'Only a note from Joyce.'

'From our mem-sahib?'

Helen nodded.

'She's living at A-aldershot, you know,' said Mary Amberley to the assembled company. 'At A-a-aldershot,' she insisted, dragging out the first

syllable, till the place became ludicrously unreal and the fact that Joyce lived there, a fantastic and slightly indecent myth.

‘You can thank your stars that you aren’t living at Aldershot,’ said Anthony. ‘After all, you ought to be. A general’s daughter.’

For the first moment Mary was put out by his interruption; she had looked forward to developing her fantastic variations on the theme of Aldershot. But her good humour returned as she perceived the richer opportunity with which he had provided her. ‘Yes, I know,’ she cried eagerly. ‘A general’s daughter. And do you realize that, but for the grace of God, I might at this moment be a colonel’s wife? I was within an ace of marrying a soldier. Within an ace, I tell you. The most ravishingly beautiful creature. But ivory,’ she rapped her forehead, ‘solid ivory. It was lucky he was such a crashing bore. If he’d been the tiniest bit brighter, I’d have gone out to India with him. And then what? It’s unimaginable.’

‘Unimaginable!’ Beppo repeated, with a little squirt of laughter.

‘On the contrary,’ said Anthony, ‘perfectly imaginable. The club every evening between six and eight; parties at government house; adultery in the hot weather, polo in the cold; incessant bother with the Indian servants; permanent money difficulties and domestic scenes; occasional touches of malaria and dysentery; the monthly parcel of second-hand novels from The Times Book Club; and all the time the inexorable advance of age — twice as fast as in England. If you’ve ever been to India, nothing’s more easy to imagine.’

‘And you think all that would have happened to me?’ asked Mary.

‘What else could have happened? You don’t imagine you’d have gone about buying Pascins in Quetta?’

Mary laughed.

‘Or reading Max Jacob in Rawalpindi? You’d have been a mem-sahib like all the other mem-sahibs. A bit more bored and discontented than most of them, perhaps. But still a mem-sahib.’

‘I suppose so,’ she agreed. ‘But is one so hopelessly at the mercy of circumstances?’

He nodded.

‘You don’t think I’d have escaped?’

‘I can’t see why.’

‘But that means there isn’t really any such thing as me. Me,’ she repeated, laying a hand on her breast. ‘I don’t really exist.’

‘No, of course you don’t. Not in that absolute sense. You’re a chemical compound, not an element.’

‘But if one doesn’t really exist, one wonders why . . .’ she hesitated.

‘Why one makes such a fuss about things,’ Anthony suggested. ‘All that howling and hurrahing and gnashing of teeth. About the adventures of a self that isn’t really a self — just the result of a lot of accidents. And of course,’ he went on, ‘once you start wondering, you see at once that there is no reason for making such a fuss. And then you don’t make a fuss — that is, if you’re sensible. Like me,’ he added, smiling.

There was a silence. ‘You don’t make a fuss,’ Mrs Amberley repeated to herself, and thought of Gerry Watchett. ‘You don’t make a fuss.’ But how was it possible not to make a fuss, when he was so stupid, so selfish, so brutal, and at the same time so excruciatingly desirable — like water in the desert, like sleep after insomnia? She hated him; but the thought that in a few days he would be there, staying in the house, sent a prickling sensation of warmth through her body. She shut her eyes and drew a deep breath.

Still carrying the kitten, like a furry baby, in her arms, Helen had walked away across the lawn. She wanted to be alone, out of ear-shot of that laughter, those jarringly irrelevant voices. ‘Seven thousand days,’ she repeated again and again. And it was not only the declining sun that made everything seem so solemnly and richly beautiful; it was also the thought of the passing days, of human limitations, of the final unescapable dissolution. ‘Seven thousand days,’ she said aloud, ‘seven thousand days.’ The tears came into her eyes; she pressed the sleeping kitten more closely to her breast.

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Savernake, the White Horse, Oxford; and in between whiles the roar and screech of Gerry's Bugatti, the rush of the wind, the swerves and bumps, the sickening but at the same time delicious terrors of excessive speed. And now they were back again. After an age, it seemed; and at the same time it was as though they had never been away. The car came to a halt; but Helen made no move to alight.

'What's the matter?' Gerry asked. 'Why don't you get out?'

'It seems so terribly final,' she said with a sigh. 'Like breaking a spell. Like stepping out of the magic circle.'

'Magic?' he repeated questioningly. 'What kind? White or black?'

Helen laughed. 'Piebald. Absolutely heavenly and absolutely awful. You know, Gerry, you ought to be put in jail, the way you drive. Or in a lunatic asylum. Crazy and criminal. But I adored it,' she added, as she opened the door and stepped out.

'Good!' was all he answered, while he gave her a smile that was as studiedly unamorous as he could make it. He threw the car into gear and, in a stink of burnt castor oil, shot off round the house, towards the garage.

Charming! he was thinking. And how wise he had been to take that jolly, honest-to-God, big-brother line with her! Ground bait. Getting the game accustomed to you. She'd soon be eating out of his hand. The real trouble, of course, was Mary. Tiresome bitch! he thought, with a sudden passion of loathing. Jealous, suspicious, interfering. Behaving as though he were her private property. And greedy, insatiable. Perpetually thrusting herself upon him — thrusting that ageing body of hers. His face, as he manoeuvred the car into the garage, was puckered into the folds of distaste. But thank God, he went on to reflect, she'd got this chill on the liver, or whatever it was. That ought to keep her quiet for a bit, keep her out of the way.

Without troubling to take off her coat, and completely forgetting her mother's illness and for the moment her very existence, Helen crossed the hall and, almost running, burst into the kitchen.

‘Where’s Tompy, Mrs Weeks?’ she demanded of the cook. The effect of the sunshine and the country and Gerry’s Bugatti had been such that it was now absolutely essential to her that she should take the kitten in her arms. Immediately. ‘I must have Tompy,’ she insisted. And by the way of excuse and explanation, ‘I didn’t have time to see him this morning,’ she added; ‘we started in such a hurry.’

‘Tompy doesn’t seem to be well, Miss Helen.’ Mrs Weeks put away her sewing.

‘Not well?’

‘I put him in here,’ Mrs Weeks went on, getting up from her Windsor chair and leading the way to the scullery. ‘It’s cooler. He seemed to feel the heat so. As though he was feverish like. I’m sure I don’t know what’s the matter with him,’ she concluded in a tone half of complaint, half of sympathy. She was sorry for Tompy. But she was also sorry for herself because Tompy had given her all this trouble.

The kitten was lying in the shadow, under the sink. Crouching down beside the basket, Helen stretched out her hand to take him; then, with a little exclamation of horror, withdrew it, as though from the contact of something repellent.

‘But what has happened to him?’ she cried.

The little cat’s tabby coat had lost all its smoothness, all its silky lustre, and was matted into damp uneven tufts. The eyes were shut and gummy with a yellow discharge. A running at the nose had slimed the beautifully patterned fur of the face. The absurd lovely little Tompy she had played with only yesterday, the comic and exquisite Tompy she had held up, pathetically helpless, in one hand, had rubbed her face against, had stared into the eyes of, was gone, and in his place lay a limp unclean little rag of living refuse. Like those kidneys, it suddenly occurred to her with a qualm of disgust; and at once she felt ashamed of herself for having had the thought, for having, in that first gesture of recoil, automatically acted upon the thought even before she had consciously had it.

‘How beastly I am!’ she thought. ‘Absolutely beastly!’

Tompy was sick, miserable, dying perhaps. And she had been too squeamish even to touch him. Making an effort to overcome her distaste, she reached out once more, picked up the little cat, and with the fingers of her free hand caressed (with what a sickening reluctance!) the dank bedraggled fur. The tears came into her eyes, overflowed, ran down her cheeks.

'It's too awful, it's too awful,' she repeated in a breaking voice. Poor little Tompy! Beautiful, adorable, funny little Tompy! Murdered — no; worse than murdered: reduced to a squalid little lump of dirt; for no reason, just senselessly; and on this day of all days, this heavenly day with the clouds over the White Horse, the sunshine between the leaves in Savernake forest. And now, to make it worse, she was disgusted by the poor little beast, couldn't bear to touch him, as though he were one of those filthy kidneys — she, who had pretended to love him, who did love him, she insisted to herself. But it was no good her holding him like this and stroking him; it made no difference to what she was really feeling. She might perform the gesture of overcoming her disgust; but the disgust was still there. In spite of the love.

She lifted a streaming face to Mrs Weeks. 'What shall we do?'

Mrs Weeks shook her head. 'I never found there was much you could do,' she said. 'Not for cats.'

'But there must be something.'

'Nothing except leave them alone,' insisted Mrs Weeks, with a pessimism evidently reinforced by her determination not to be bothered. Then, touched by the spectacle of Helen's misery, 'He'll be all right, dear,' she added consolingly. 'There's no need to cry. Just let him sleep it off.'

Footsteps sounded on the flagstones of the stable yard, and through the open window came the notes of 'Yes, sir, she's my baby,' whistled slightly out of rune. Helen straightened herself up from her crouching position and, leaning out, 'Gerry!' she called; then added, in response to his expression of surprised commiseration, 'Something awful has happened.'

In his large powerful hands Tompy seemed more miserably tiny than ever. But how gentle he was, and how efficient! Watching him, as he swabbed the

little cat's eyes, as he wiped away the slime from the nostrils, Helen was amazed by the delicate precision of his movements. She herself, she reflected with a heightened sense of her own shameful ineptitude, had been incapable of doing anything except stroke Tompy's fur and feel disgusted. Hopeless, quite hopeless! And when he asked for her help in getting Tompy to swallow half an aspirin tablet crushed in milk, she bungled everything and spilt the medicine.

'Perhaps I can do it better by myself,' he said, and took the spoon from her. The cup of her humiliation was full. . . .

*

Mary Amberley was indignant. Here she was, feverish and in pain, worrying herself, what was more, into higher fever, worse pain, with the thought of Gerry's dangerous driving. And here was Helen, casually strolling into her room after having been in the house for more than two hours — more than two hours without having had the common decency to come and see how she was, more than two hours while her mother — her mother, mind you! — had lain there, in an agony of distress, thinking that they must have had an accident.

'But Tompy was dying,' Helen explained. 'He's dead now.' Her face was very pale, her eyes red with tears.

'Well, if you prefer a wretched cat to your mother . . .'

'Besides, you were asleep. If you hadn't been asleep, you'd have heard the car coming back.'

'Now you're begrudging me my sleep,' said Mrs Amberley bitterly. 'Aren't I to be allowed a moment's respite from pain? Besides,' she added, 'I wasn't asleep. I was delirious. I've been delirious several times today. Of course I didn't hear the car.' Her eyes fell on the bottle of Somnifaine standing on the table by her bed, and the suspicion that Helen might also have noticed it made her still more angry. 'I always knew you were selfish,' she went on. 'But I must say I didn't think you'd be quite as bad as this.'

At another time Helen would have flared up in angry self-defence, or else, convicted of guilt, would have burst out crying. But today she was feeling too

miserable to be able to shed any more tears, too much subdued by shame and unhappiness to resent even the most flagrant injustice. Her silence exasperated Mrs Amberley still further.

‘I always used to think,’ she resumed, ‘that you were only selfish from thoughtlessness. But now I see that it’s heartlessness. Plain heartlessness. Here am I — having sacrificed the best years of my life to you; and what do I get in return?’ Her voice trembled as she asked the question. She was convinced of the reality of that sacrifice, profoundly moved by the thought of its extent, its martyr-like enormity. ‘The most cynical indifference. I might die in a ditch; but you wouldn’t care. You’d be much more upset about your cat. And now go away,’ she almost shouted, ‘go away! I know my temperature’s gone up. Go away.’

*

After a lonely dinner — for Helen was keeping her room on the plea of a headache — Gerry went up to sit with Mrs Amberley. He was particularly charming that evening, and so affectionately solicitous that Mary forgot all her accumulated grounds of complaint and fell in love with him all over again, and for another set of reasons — not because he was so handsome, so easily and insolently dominating, such a ruthless and accomplished lover, but because he was kind, thoughtful, and affectionate, was everything, in a word, she had previously known he wasn’t.

Half past ten struck. He rose from his chair. ‘Time for your spot of shut-eye.’

Mary protested; he was firm — for her own good.

Thirty drops were the normal dose of Somnifaine; but he measured out forty-five, so as to make quite sure of her sleeping, made her drink, then tucked her up (‘like an old Nanny,’ she cried laughing with pleasure, as he busied himself round the bed) and, after kissing her good night with an almost material tenderness, turned out the light and left her.

The clock of the village church sounded eleven — how sadly, Helen thought as she listened to the strokes of the distant bell, how lonely! It was as though she

were listening to the voice of her own spirit, reverberated in some mysterious way from the walls of the enclosing night. One, two, three, four . . . Each sweet, cracked note seemed more hopelessly mournful, seemed to rise from the depths of a more extreme solitude, than the last. Tompy had died, and she hadn't even been capable of giving him a spoonful of milk and crushed aspirin, hadn't had the strength to overcome her disgust.

Selfish and heartless: her mother was quite right. But lonely as well as selfish, all alone among the senseless malignities that had murdered poor little Tompy; and her heartlessness spoke with the despairing voice of that bell; night was empty and enormous all around.

'Helen!'

She started and turned her head. The room was impenetrably black.

'It's me,' Gerry's voice continued. 'I was so worried about you. Are you feeling better?'

Her first surprise and alarm had given place to a feeling of resentment that he should intrude upon the privacy of her unhappiness. 'You needn't have bothered,' she said coldly. 'I'm quite all right.'

Enclosed in his faint aura of Turkish tobacco, of peppermint-flavoured tooth-paste and bay rum, he approached invisibly. Through the blanket, a groping hand touched her shin; then the springs creaked and tilted under his weight as he sat down on the edge of the bed.

'Felt a bit responsible,' he went on. 'All that looping the loop!' The tone of his voice implied the unseen smile, suggested a whimsical and affectionate twinkling of hidden eyes.

She made no comment; there was a long silence. A bad start, Gerry thought, and frowned to himself in the darkness; then began again on another tack.

'I can't help thinking of that miserable little Tompy,' he said in a different voice. 'Extraordinary how upsetting it is when an animal gets ill like that. It seems frightfully unfair.'

In a few minutes she was crying, and he had an excuse to console her.

Gently, as he had handled Tompy, and with all the tenderness that had so much touched Mrs Amberley, he stroked her hair, and later, when the sobs began to subside, drew the fingers of his other hand along her bare arm. Again and again, with the patient regularity of a nurse lulling her charge to sleep; again and again . . . Three hundred times at least, he was thinking, before he risked any gesture that could possibly be interpreted as amorous. Three hundred times; and even then the caresses would have to deviate by insensible degrees, as though by a series of accidents, till gradually, unintentionally, the hand that was now on her arm would come at last to be brushing, with the same maternal persistence, against her breast, while the fingers that came and went methodically among the curls would have strayed to the ear, and from the ear across the cheek to the lips, and would linger there lightly, chastely, but charged with the stuff of kisses, proxies, and forerunners of the mouth that would ultimately come down on hers, through the darkness, for the reward of its long patience.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE. May 20th 1931

IT WAS ANOTHER ‘knock’. Fitzimmons, Jefferies, Jack Johnson, Carpentier, Dempsey, Gene Tunney — the champions came and went; but the metaphor in which Mr Beavis described his successive bereavements remained unaltered.

Yes, a hard knock. And yet, it seemed to Anthony, there was a note almost of triumph in his father’s reminiscences, over the luncheon table, of Uncle James as a schoolboy.

‘Poor James . . . such curly hair he had then . . . nos et mutamur.’ The commiseration and regret were mingled with a certain satisfaction — the satisfaction of an old man who finds himself still alive, still able to attend the funerals of his contemporaries, his juniors.

‘Two years,’ he insisted. ‘There was the best part of two years between James and me. I was Beavis major at school.’

He shook his head mournfully; but the old, tired eyes had brightened with an irrepressible light. ‘Poor James!’ He sighed. ‘We hadn’t seen one another much these last years. Not since his conversion. How did he do it? It beats me. A Catholic — he of all people . . .’

Anthony said nothing. But after all, he was thinking, it wasn’t so surprising. The poor old thing had grown up as a Bradlaugh atheist. Ought to have been blissfully happy, parading his cosmic defiance, his unyielding despair. But he had had the bad luck to be a homosexual at a time when one couldn’t avow it even to oneself. Ingrowing pederasty — it had poisoned his whole life. Had turned that metaphysical and delightfully Pickwickian despair into real, common or garden misery. Misery and neurasthenia; the old man had been half mad, really. (Which hadn’t prevented him from being a first-rate actuary.) Then, during the war, the clouds had lifted. One could be kind to wounded soldiers — be kind pro patria and with a blameless conscience. Anthony remembered Uncle

James's visits to him in hospital. He had come almost every day. Loaded with gifts for a dozen adopted nephews as well as for the real one. On his thin, melancholy face there had been, in those days, a perpetual smile. But happiness never lasts. The armistice had come; and, after those four years in paradise, hell had seemed blacker than ever. In 1923 he had turned papist. It was only to be expected.

But Mr Beavis simply couldn't understand. The idea of James surrounded by Jesuits, James bobbing up and down at Mass, James going to Lourdes with his inoperable tumour, James dying with all the consolations of religion — it filled him with horrified amazement.

'And yet,' said Anthony, 'I admire the way they usher you out of life. Dying — it's apt to be an animal process. More exclusively animal even than sea-sickness.' He was silent for a moment, thinking of poor Uncle James's last and most physiological hour. The heavy, snoring breath, the mouth cavernously gaping, the scrabbling of the hands.

'How wise the Church has been to turn it into a ceremonial!'

'Charades,' said Mr Beavis contemptously.

'But good charades,' Anthony insisted. 'A work of art. In itself, the event's like a rough channel crossing — only rather worse. But they manage to turn it into something rather fine and significant. Chiefly for the spectator, of course. But perhaps also significant for the actor.'

There was a silence. The maid changed the plates and brought in the sweet. 'Some apple tart?' Pauline questioned, as she cut the crust.

'Apple pie, my dear.' Mr Beavis's tone was severe. 'When will you learn that a tart's uncovered? A thing with a roof is a pie.'

They helped themselves to cream and sugar.

'By the way,' said Pauline suddenly, 'had you heard about Mrs Foxe?' Anthony and Mr Beavis shook their heads. 'Maggie Clark told me yesterday. She's had a stroke.'

'Dear, dear,' said Mr Beavis. Then, reflectively, 'Curious the way people pass out of one's life,' he added. 'After being very much in it. I don't believe I've

seen Mrs Foxe half a dozen times in the last twenty years. And yet before that . . .'

'She had no sense of humour,' said Pauline, by the way of explanation.

Mr Beavis turned to Anthony. 'I don't suppose you've . . . well, "kept up" with her very closely, not since that poor boy of hers died.'

Anthony shook his head, without speaking. It was not agreeable to be reminded of all that he had done to avoid keeping up with Mrs Foxe. Those long affectionate letters she had written to him during the first year of the war — letters which he had answered more and more briefly, perfunctorily, conventionally; and at last hadn't answered at all; hadn't even read. Hadn't even read, and yet — moved by some superstitious compunction — had never thrown away. At least a dozen of the blue envelopes, addressed in the large, clear, flowing writing, were still lying unopened in one of the drawers of his desk. Their presence there was, in some obscure, inexplicable way, a salve to his conscience. Not an entirely effective salve. His father's question had made him feel uncomfortable; he hastened to change the subject.

'And what have you been delving into recently?' he asked, in the sort of playfully archaic language that his father himself might have used.

Mr Beavis chuckled and begun to describe his researches into modern American slang. Such savoury locutions! Such an Elizabethan wealth of new coinages and original metaphors! Horse feathers, dish the dope, button up your face — delicious! 'And how would you like to be called a fever frau?' he asked his younger daughter, Diana, who had sat in silence, severely aloof, throughout the meal. 'Or worse, a cinch pushover, my dear? Or I might say that you had a dame complex, Anthony. Or refer regretfully to your habit of smooching the sex jobs.' He twinkled with pleasure.

'It's like so much Chinese,' said Pauline from the other end of the table. Across her round placid face mirth radiated out in concentric waves of soft pink flesh; the succession of her chins shook like jelly. 'He thinks he's the cat's pyjamas, your father does.' She reached out, helped herself to a couple of chocolate creams from the silver bowl on the table in front of her and popped

one of them into her mouth. ‘The cat’s pyjamas,’ she repeated indistinctly and heaved with renewed laughter.

Mr Beavis, who had been working himself up to the necessary pitch of naughtiness, leaned forward and asked Anthony, in a confidential whisper, ‘What would you do if the fever frau had the misfortune to be storked?’

They were darlings, Diana was thinking; that went without saying. But how silly they could be, how inexpressibly silly! All the same, Anthony had no right to criticize them; and under that excessive politeness of his he obviously was criticizing them, the wretch! She felt quite indignant. Nobody had a right to criticize them except herself and possibly her sister. She tried to think of something unpleasant to say to Anthony; but he had given her no opening and she had no gift for epigram. She had to be content with silently frowning. And anyhow it was time to go back to the lab.

Getting up, ‘I must go,’ she said in her curt, abrupt way. ‘I absolutely forbid you to eat all those sweets,’ she added, as she bent down to kiss her mother. ‘Doctor’s orders.’

‘You’re not a doctor yet, darling.’

‘No, but I shall be next year.’

Tranquilly Pauline poked the second chocolate cream into her mouth. ‘And next year, perhaps, I’ll stop eating sweets,’ she said.

Anthony left a few minutes later. Walking through South Kensington, he found his thoughts harking back to Mrs Foxe. Had the stroke, he wondered, been a bad one? Was she paralysed? He had been so anxious to prevent his father from talking about her, that there had been no time for Pauline to say. He pictured her lying helpless, half dead, and was horrified to find himself feeling, along with sympathy, a certain satisfaction, a certain sense of relief. For, after all, she was the chief witness for the prosecution, the person who could testify most damningly against him. Dead, or only half dead, she was out of court; and, in her absence, there was no longer any case against him. With part of his being he was glad of Pauline’s news. Shamefully glad. He tried to think of something

else, and, meanwhile, boarded a bus so as to reach more quickly the haven of the London Library.

He spent nearly three hours there, looking up references to the history of the Anabaptists, then walked home to his rooms in Bloomsbury. He was expecting Gladys that evening before dinner. The girl had been a bit tiresome recently; but still . . . He smiled to himself with anticipatory pleasure.

She was due at six; but at a quarter past she had not yet come. Nor yet at half past. Nor yet at seven. Nor yet at half past seven. At eight, he was looking at those blue envelopes, postmarked in 1914 and 1915 and addressed in Mrs Foxe's writing — looking at them and wondering, in self-questioning despondency that had succeeded his first impatience and rage, whether he should open them. He was still wondering, when the telephone bell rang, and there was Mark Staithes asking him if by any chance he was free for dinner. A little party had formed itself at the last moment. Pitchley would be there, and his wife, the psychologist, and that Indian politician, Sen, and Helen Ledwidge . . . Anthony put the letters back in their drawer and hurried out of the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX. September 5th 1933

IT WAS AFTER two o'clock. Anthony lay on his back staring up into the darkness. Sleep, it seemed, deliberately refused to come, was being withheld by someone else, some malignant alien inhabiting his own body. Outside, in the pine trees the cicadas harped incessantly on the theme of their existence; and at long intervals a sound of cock-crowing would swell up out of the darkness, louder and nearer, until all the birds in the surrounding gardens were shouting defiance back and forth, peal answering peal. And then for no reason, first one, then another fell silent and the outburst died away fainter and fainter into the increasing distance — right across France, he fancied as he strained his ears after the receding sound, in a hurrying wave of ragged crowing. Hundreds of miles, perhaps. And then somewhere, the wave would turn and roll back again as swiftly as it had come. Back from the North Sea, perhaps; over the battlefields; round the fringes of Paris and from bird to distant bird through the forests; then across the plains of Beauce; up and down the hills of Burgundy and, like another aerial river of sound, headlong down the valley of the Rhone; past Valence, past Orange and Avignon, past Arles and Aix and across the bare hills of Provence; until here it was again, an hour after its previous passage, flowing tumultuously shrill across the cicadas' loud, unremitting equivalent of silence.

He was reminded suddenly of a passage in Lawrence's The Man who Died, and, thankful of an excuse to interrupt for a little his vain pursuit of sleep, he turned on the light and went downstairs to look for the book. Yes, here it was. 'As he came out, the young cock crowed. It was a diminished, pinched cry, but there was that in the voice of the bird stronger than chagrin. It was the necessity to live and even to cry out the triumph of life. The man who had died stood and watched the cock who had escaped and been caught, ruffling himself up, rising forward on his toes, throwing up his head, and parting his beak in another

challenge from life to death. The brave sounds rang out, and though they were diminished by the cord round the bird's leg, they were not cut off. The man who had died looked nakedly on life, and saw a vast resoluteness everywhere flinging itself up in the stormy or subtle wave crests, foam-tips emerging out of the blue invisible, a black orange cock or the green flame-tongues out of the extremes of the fig tree. They came forth, these things and creatures of spring, glowing with desire and assertion. They came like crests of foam, out of the blue flood of the invisible desire, out of the vast invisible sea of strength, and they came coloured and tangible, evanescent, yet deathless in their coming. The man who had died looked on the great swing into existence of things that had not died, but he saw no longer their tremulous desire to exist and to be. He heard instead their ringing, ringing, defiant challenge to all other things existing. . . .'

Anthony read on till he had finished the story of the man who had died and come to life again, the man who was himself the escaped cock; then put away the book and went back to bed. The foam on the waves of that invisible sea of desire and strength. But life, life as such, he protested inwardly — it was not enough. How could one be content with the namelessness of mere energy, with the less than individuality of a power, that for all its mysterious divineness, was yet unconscious, beneath good and evil? The cicadas sounded incessantly, and again, at about four, the tide of cock-crowing came sweeping across the land and passed on out of hearing, towards Italy.

Life irrepressibly living itself out. But there were emblems, he reflected, more vividly impressive than the crowing cock or the young leaves breaking out from the winter fig tree's bone-white skeleton. He remembered that film he had seen of the fertilization of a rabbit's ovum. Spermatozoa, a span long on the screen, ferociously struggling towards their goal — the moonlike sphere of the egg. Countless, aimed from every side, their flagella in frantic vibration. And now the foremost had reached their objective, were burrowing into it, thrusting through the outer wall of living matter, tearing away in their violent haste whole cells that floated off and were lost. And at last one of the invaders had penetrated to the quick of the nucleus, the act of fertilization was consummated; and suddenly

the hitherto passive sphere stirred into movement. There was a violent spasm of contraction; its smooth rounded surface became corrugated and in some way resistant to the other sperms that vainly threw themselves upon it. And then the egg began to divide, bending in its walls upon itself till they met in the centre, and there were two cells instead of one; then, as the two cells repeated the process, four cells; then eight, then sixteen. And within the cells the granules of protoplasm were in continuous motion, like peas in a boiling pot, but self-activated, moving by their own energy.

In comparison with these minute fragments of living matter, the crowing cock, the cicadas endlessly repeating the proclamation of their existence, were only feebly alive. Life under the microscope seemed far more vehement and irrepressible than in the larger world. Consolingly and at the same time appallingly irrepressible. For, yes, it was also appalling, the awful unconsciousness of that unconquerable, crawling desire! And, oh, the horror of that display of sub-mental passion, of violent and impersonal egotism! Intolerable, unless one could think of it only as raw material and available energy.

Yes, raw material and a stream of energy. Impressive for their quantity, their duration. But qualitatively they were only potentially valuable: would become valuable only when made up into something else, only when used to serve an ulterior purpose. For Lawrence, the animal purpose had seemed sufficient and satisfactory. The cock, crowing, fighting, mating — anonymously; and man anonymous like the cock. Better such mindless anonymity, he had insisted, than the squalid relationships of human beings advanced half-way to consciousness, still only partially civilized.

But Lawrence had never looked through a microscope, never seen biological energy in its basic undifferentiated state. He hadn’t wanted to look, had disapproved on principle of microscopes, fearing what they might reveal; and had been right to fear. Those depths beneath depths of namelessness, crawling irrepressibly — they would have horrified him. He had insisted that the raw material should be worked up — but worked only to a certain pitch and no

further; the primal crawling energy should be used for the relatively higher purposes of animal existence, but for no existence beyond the animal. Arbitrarily, illogically. For the other, ulterior purposes and organizations existed and were not to be ignored. Moving through space and time, the human animal discovered them on his path, unequivocally present and real.

Thinking and the pursuit of knowledge — these were purposes for which he himself had used the energy that crawled under the microscope, that crowed defiantly in the darkness. Thought as an end, knowledge as an end. And now it had become suddenly manifest that they were only means — as definitely raw material as life itself. Raw material — and he divined, he knew, what the finished product would have to be; and with part of his being he revolted against the knowledge. What, set about trying to turn his raw material of life, thought, knowledge into that — at his time of life, and he a civilized human being! The mere idea was ridiculous. One of those absurd hang overs from Christianity — like his father's terror of the more disreputable realities of existence, like the hymn-singing of workmen during the General Strike. The headaches, the hiccups of yesterday's religion. But with another part of his mind he was miserably thinking that he would never succeed in bringing about the transformation of his raw material into the finished product; that he didn't know how or where to begin; that he was afraid of making a fool of himself; that he lacked the necessary courage, patience, strength of mind.

At about seven, when behind the shutters the sun was already high above the horizon, he dropped off into a heavy sleep, and woke with a start three hours later to see Mark Staithes standing besides his bed and peering at him, smiling, an amused and inquisitive gargoyle, through the mosquito net.

'Mark?' he questioned in astonishment. 'What on earth . . . ?'

'Bridal!' said Mark, poking the muslin net. 'Positively première communion! I've been watching you sleeping.'

'For long?'

'Oh, don't worry,' he said, replying not to the spoken, but to the unspoken question implied by Anthony's tone of annoyance. 'You don't give yourself

away in your sleep. On the contrary, you take other people in. I've never seen anyone look so innocent as you did under that veil. Like the infant Samuel. Too sweet!'

Reminded of Helen's use of the same word on the morning of the catastrophe, Anthony frowned. Then, after a silence, 'What have you come for?' he asked.

'To stay with you.'

'You weren't asked.'

'That remains to be seen,' said Mark.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, you may discover it after the event.'

'Discover what?'

'That you wanted to ask me. Without knowing that you wanted it.'

'What makes you think that?'

Mark drew up a chair and sat down before answering. 'I saw Helen the night she got back to London.'

'Did you?' Anthony's tone was as blankly inexpressive as he could make it. 'Where?' he added.

'At Hugh's. Hugh was giving a party. There were some uncomfortable moments.'

'Why?'

'Well, because she wanted them to be uncomfortable. She was in a queer state, you know.'

'Did she tell you why?'

Mark nodded. 'She even made me read your letter. The beginning of it, at least. I wouldn't go on.'

'Helen made you read my letter?'

'Aloud. She insisted. But, as I say, she was in a very queer state.' There was a long silence. 'That's why I came here,' he added at last.

'Thinking that I'd be glad to see you?' the other asked in an ironical tone.

'Thinking that you'd be glad to see me,' Mark answered gravely.

After another silence, ‘Well, perhaps you’re not altogether wrong,’ said Anthony. ‘In a way, of course, I simply hate the sight of you.’ He smiled at Mark. ‘Nothing personal intended, mind you. I should hate the sight of anyone just as much. But in another way I’m glad you’ve come. And this is personal. Because I think you’re likely — well, likely to have some notion of what’s what,’ he concluded with a non-committal vagueness. ‘If there’s anybody who can . . .’ He was going to say ‘help’: but the idea of being helped was so repugnant to him, seemed so grotesquely associated with the parson’s well-chosen words after a death in the family, with the housemaster’s frank, friendly talk about sexual temptations, that he broke off uncomfortably. ‘If anybody can make a sensible remark about it all,’ he began again, on a different level of expression, ‘I think it’s you.’

The other nodded without speaking, and thought how typical it was of the man to go on talking about sensible remarks — even now!

‘I have a feeling,’ Anthony went on slowly, overcoming inward resistances in order to speak, ‘a feeling that I’d like to get it over, get things settled. On another basis,’ he brought out as though under torture. ‘The present one . . .’ He shook his head. ‘I’m a bit bored with it.’ Then, perceiving with a sense of shame the ludicrous inappropriateness and the worse than ludicrous falsity of the understatement, ‘It won’t do,’ he added resolutely. ‘It’s a basis that can’t carry more than the weight of a ghost. And in order to use it, I’ve turned myself into a ghost.’ After a pause, ‘These last few days,’ he went on slowly, ‘I’ve had a queer feeling that I’m really not there, that I haven’t been there for years past. Ever since . . . well, I don’t exactly know when. Since before the war, I suppose.’ He could not bring himself to speak of Brian. ‘Not there,’ he repeated.

‘A great many people aren’t there,’ said Mark. ‘Not as people, at any rate. Only as animals and incarnate functions.’

‘Animals and incarnate functions,’ the other repeated. ‘You’ve said it exactly. But in most cases they have no choice; nonentity is forced on them by circumstance. Whereas I was free to choose — at any rate, so far as anybody is free to choose. If I wasn’t there, it was on purpose.’

‘And do you mean to say that you’ve only just discovered the fact that you’ve never been there?’

Anthony shook his head. ‘No, no, I’ve known it, of course. All the time. But theoretically. In the same way as one knows . . . well, for example, that there are birds that live symbiotically with wasps. A curious and interesting fact, but no more. I didn’t let it be more. And then I had my justifications. Work: too much personal life would interfere with my work. And the need for freedom: freedom to think, freedom to indulge my passion for knowing about the world. And freedom for its own sake. I wanted to be free, because it was intolerable not to be free.’

‘I can understand that,’ said Mark, ‘provided that there’s someone there who can enjoy the freedom. And provided,’ he added, ‘that that someone makes himself conscious of being free by overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of freedom. But how can you be free, if there’s no “you”?’

‘I’ve always put it the other way round,’ said Anthony. ‘How can you be free — or rather (for one must think of it impersonally) how can there be freedom — so long as the “you” persists? A “you” has got to be consistent and responsible, has got to make choices and commit itself. But if one gets rid of the “you”, one gets rid of responsibility and the need for consistency. One’s free as a succession of unconditioned, uncommitted states without past or future, except in so far as one can’t voluntarily get rid of one’s memories and anticipations.’ After a silence, ‘The staggering imbecility of old Socrates!’ he went on. ‘Imagining that one had only to know the correct line of conduct in order to follow it. One practically always knows it — and more often than not one doesn’t follow it. Or perhaps you’re not like that,’ he added in another tone, looking at Mark through the mosquito net. ‘One’s inclined to attribute one’s own defects to everyone else. Weakness, in my case. Not to mention timidity,’ he added with a laugh, that uttered itself automatically, so deeply ingrained was the habit of half withdrawing, as soon as it was spoken, anything in the nature of a personal confidence, of evoking in the listener’s mind a doubt as to the seriousness of his intention in speaking; ‘timidity, and downright cowardice, and indolence in

regard to anything that isn't my work.' He laughed again as though it were all absurd, not worth mentioning. 'One forgets that other people may be different. Tough-minded, firm of purpose. I dare say you always do what you know is right.'

'I always do it,' Mark answered. 'Whether it's right or wrong.' He demonstrated the anatomy of a smile.

Anthony lay back on his pillows, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes half shut. Then, after a long silence, he turned to Staithes and said abruptly: 'Don't you ever feel that you simply can't be bothered to do what you've decided on? Just now, for example, I found myself wondering all of a sudden why on earth I'd been talking to you like this — why I'd been thinking these things before you came — why I'd been trying to make up my mind to do something. Wondering and feeling that I simply couldn't be bothered. Thinking it would be better just to evade it all and go back to the familiar routine. The quiet life. Even though the quiet life would be fatal. Fatal, mortal, but all the same anything for it.' He shook his head. 'Probably if you hadn't come to shame me into some sort of resolution, that's what I would have done — escaped from it all and gone back to the quiet life.' He laughed. 'And perhaps,' he added, 'I shall do it even now. In spite of you.' He sat up, lifted the mosquito net and stepped out of bed. 'I'm going to have my bath.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN. May 27th 1914

ANTHONY CAME DOWN to breakfast to find his father explaining to the children the etymology of what they were eating. '. . . merely another form of "pottage". You say "porridge" just as you say — or rather' (he twinkled at them) 'I hope you don't say— "shurrup" for "shut up".'

The two little girls went on stolidly eating.

'Ah, Anthony!' Mr Beavis went on. 'Better late than never. What, no pottage this morning? But you'll have an Aberdeen cutlet, I hope.'

Anthony helped himself to the haddock and sat down in his place.

'Here's a letter for you,' said Mr Beavis, and handed it over. 'Don't I recognize Brian's writing?' Anthony nodded. 'Does he still enjoy his work at Manchester?'

'I think so,' Anthony answered. 'Except, of course, that he does too much. He's at the newspaper till one or two in the morning. And then from lunch to dinner he works at his thesis.'

'Well, it's good to see a young man who has the energy of his ambitions,' said Mr Beavis. 'Because, of course, he needn't work so hard. It's not as if his mother hadn't got the wherewithal.'

The wherewithal so exasperated Anthony that, though he found Brian's action absurd, it was with a cutting severity that he answered his father. 'He won't accept his mother's money,' he said very coldly. 'It's a matter of principle.'

There was a diversion while the children put away their porridge plates and were helped to Aberdeen cutlets. Anthony took the opportunity to start reading his letter.

No news of you for a long time. Here all goes on as usual, or would do, if I were feeling a bit sprightlier. But sleep has been none too good and internal workings not all they might be. Am slowing down, in consequence, on the

thesis, as I can’t slow down on the paper. All this makes me look forward longingly to our projected fortnight in Langdale. Don’t let me down, for heaven’s sake. What a bore one’s carcass is when it goes in the least wrong! Even when it goes right, for that matter. Such a lot of unmodern inconveniences. I sometimes bitterly resent this physical predestination to scatology and obscenity. Write soon and let me know how you are, what you’ve been reading, whether you’ve met anybody of interest. And will you do me a kindness? Joan’s in town now, staying with her aunt and working for the Charity Organization people. Her father didn’t want her to go, of course — preferred to have her at home, so that he could tyrannize her. There was a long battle, which he finally lost; she has been in town nearly a month now. For which I’m exceedingly thankful — but at the same time, for various reasons, feel a bit worried. If I could get away for the week-ends, I’d come myself; but I can’t. And perhaps, in a certain sense, it’s all for the best. In my present mouldy condition I should be rather a skeleton at the feast; and besides, there are certain complications. I can’t explain them in a letter; but when you come north in July I’ll try. I ought to have asked your advice before this. You’re harder in the head than I am. Which is ultimately the reason why I didn’t talk to you about the matter — for fear of being thought a fool by you! Such is one’s imbecility. But, there, we’ll discuss it all later. Meanwhile, will you get in touch with her, take her out to a meal, get her to talk, then write and tell me how you think she’s reacting to London, what she feels about life in general, and so forth. It’s been a violent transition — from remote country life to London, from cramping poverty to a rich house, from subjection to her father’s bad-tempered tyranny to independence. A violent transition; and, though I’m glad of it, I’m a bit nervous as to its effects. But you’ll see. — Yours,

B.

Anthony did see that same day. The old shyness, he noticed, as they shook hands in the lobby of the restaurant, was still there — the same embarrassed smile, the

same swaying movement of recoil. In face and body she was more of a woman than when he had seen her last, a year before, seemed prettier too — chiefly, no doubt, because she was better dressed.

They passed into the restaurant and sat down. Anthony ordered the food and a bottle of Vouvray, then began to explore the ground.

London — how did she like London?

Adored it.

Even the work?

Not the office part, perhaps. But three times a week she helped at a crèche. ‘I love babies.’

‘Even those horrible little smelly ones?’

Joan was indignant. ‘They’re adorable. I love the work with them. Besides, it allows me to enjoy all the rest of London with a clear conscience. I feel I’ve paid for my theatres and dances.’

Shyness broke up her talk, plunged it, as it were, into alternate light and shade. At one moment she would be speaking with difficulty, hardly opening her lips, her voice low and indistinct, her face averted; the next, her timidity was swept aside by an uprush of strong feeling — delight, or some distress, or irrepressible mirth, and she was looking at him with eyes grown suddenly and surprisingly bold; from almost inaudible, her voice had become clear; the strong white teeth flashed between lips parted in a frank expression of feeling. Then suddenly she was as though appalled by her own daring; she became conscious of him as a possible critic. What was he thinking? Had she made a fool of herself? Her voice faltered, the blood rose to her cheeks, she looked down at her plate; and for the next few minutes he would get nothing but short mumbled answers to his questions, nothing but the most perfunctory of nervous laughs in response to his best efforts to amuse her. The food, however, and the wine did their work, and as the meal advanced, she found herself more at ease with him. They began to talk about Brian.

‘You ought to prevent him from working so hard,’ he said.

‘Do you think I don’t try?’ Then, with something almost like anger in her voice, ‘It’s his nature,’ she went on. ‘He’s so terribly conscientious.’

‘It’s your business to make him unconscientious.’ He smiled at her, expecting a return in kind. But, instead of that, she frowned; her face took on an expression of resentful misery. ‘It’s easy for you to talk,’ she muttered. There was a silence, while she sat with downcast eyes, sipping her wine.

They could have married, it occurred to him for the first time, if Brian had consented to live on his mother. Why on earth, then, seeing how much he was in love with the girl . . . ?

With the peach-melba it all came out. ‘It’s difficult to talk, about,’ she said. ‘I’ve hardly mentioned it to anyone. But with you it’s different. You’ve known Brian such a long time; you’re his oldest friend. You’ll understand. I feel I can tell you about it.’

Curious, but at the same time a little disquieted, he murmured something vaguely polite.

She failed to notice the signs of his embarrassment; for her, at the moment, Anthony was only the heaven-sent opportunity for at last releasing in speech a flood of distressing feelings too long debarred from expression.

‘It’s that conscientiousness of his. If you only knew . . . ! Why has he got the idea that there’s something wrong about love? The ordinary, happy kind of love, I mean. He thinks it isn’t right; he thinks he oughtn’t to have those feelings.’

She pushed away her plate, and, leaning forward, her elbows on the table, began to speak in a lower, more intimate tone of the kisses that Brian had given and been ashamed of, and those other kisses that, by way of atonement, he had refused to give.

Anthony listened in astonishment. ‘Certain complications’ was what Brian had written in his letter; it was putting it mildly. This was just craziness. Tragic — but also grotesque, absurd. It occurred to him that Mary would find the story particularly ludicrous.

‘He said he wanted to be worthy of me,’ she went on. ‘Worthy of love. But all that happened was that it made me feel unworthy. Unworthy of everything, in

every way. Guilty — feeling I'd done something wrong. And dirty too, if you understand what I mean, as though I'd fallen in the mud. But, Anthony, it isn't wrong, is it?' she questioned. 'I mean, we'd never done anything that wasn't . . . well, you know: quite innocent. Why does he say he's unworthy, and make me feel unworthy at the same time? Why does he?' she insisted. There were tears in her eyes.

'He was always rather like that,' said Anthony. 'Perhaps his upbringing . . . His mother's a wonderful person,' he added, dropping, as he suddenly realized, while the words were being spoken, into Mrs Foxe's own idiom. 'But perhaps a bit oppressive, just for that reason.'

Joan nodded emphatically, but did not speak.

'It may be she's made him aim a bit too high,' he went on. 'Too high all along the line, if you see what I mean — even when he's not directly following her example. That business of not wanting to take her money, for instance . . .'

Joan caught up the subject with passionate eagerness, 'Yes, why does he want to be different from everyone else? After all, there are other good people in the world and they don't feel it necessary to do it. Mind you,' she added, looking up sharply into Anthony's face, as if trying to catch and quell any expression of disapproval there, or, worse, of patronizing amusement, 'mind you, I think it's wonderful of him to do it. Wonderful!' she repeated with a kind of defiance. Then, resuming the critical tone which she would not allow Anthony to use, but to which it seemed to her that her own feelings for Brian gave her a right, 'All the same,' she went on, 'I can't see how it would hurt him to take that money. I believe it was mostly his mother's doing.'

Surprised, 'But he told me that Mrs Foxe had tried to insist on his taking it.'

'Oh, she made it seem as though she wanted him to take it. We were there for a week-end in May to talk it over. She kept telling him that it wasn't wrong to take the money, and that he ought to think about me and getting married. But then, when Brian and I told her that I'd agreed to his not taking it, she . . .'

Anthony interrupted her. 'But had you agreed?'

Joan dropped her eyes. ‘In a way,’ she said sullenly. Then looking up again with sudden anger, ‘How could I help agreeing with him? Seeing that that was what he wanted to do, and would have done, what’s more, even if I hadn’t agreed. And besides, I’ve told you, there was something rather splendid and wonderful about it. Of course, I had agreed. But agreeing didn’t mean that I really wanted him to refuse the money. And that’s where her falseness came in — pretending to think that I wanted him to refuse it, and congratulating me and him on what we’d done. Saying we were heroic and all that. And so encouraging him to go on with the idea. It is her doing, I tell you. Much more than you think.’

She was silent, and Anthony thought it best to allow the subject to drop. Heaven only knew what she’d say if he allowed her to go on talking about Mrs Foxe. ‘Poor Brian,’ he said aloud, and added, taking refuge in platitude, ‘The best is the enemy of the good.’

‘Yes, that’s just it!’ she cried. ‘The enemy of the good. He wants to be perfect — but look at the result! He tortures himself and hurts me. Why should I be made to feel dirty and criminal? Because that’s what he’s doing. When I’ve done nothing wrong. Nor has he, for that matter. And yet he wants me to feel the same about him. Dirty and criminal. Why does he make it so difficult for me? As difficult as he possibly can.’ Her voice trembled, the tears overflowed. She pulled out her handkerchief and quickly wiped her eyes. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘I’m making a fool of myself. But if you knew how hard it’s been for me! I’ve loved him so much, I want to go on loving him. But he doesn’t seem to want to allow me to. It ought to be so beautiful; but he does his best to make it all seem ugly and horrible.’ Then, after a pause, and in a voice that had sunk almost to a whisper, ‘I sometimes wonder if I can go on much longer.’

Did it mean, he wondered, that she had already decided to break it off — had already met someone else who was prepared to love her and be loved less tragically, more normally than Brian? No; probably not, he decided. But there was every likelihood that she soon would. In her way (it didn’t happen to be exactly the way he liked) she was attractive. There would be no shortage of

candidates; and if a satisfactory candidate presented himself, would she be able — whatever she might consciously wish — to refuse?

Joan broke the silence. ‘I dream so often of the house we’re going to live in,’ she said. ‘Going from room to room; and it all looks so nice. Such pretty curtains and chair covers. And vases full of flowers.’ She sighed; then, after a pause, ‘Do you understand his not wanting to take his mother’s money?’

Anthony hesitated a moment; then replied noncommittally; ‘I understand it; but I don’t think I should do it myself.’

She sighed once more. ‘That’s how I feel too.’ She looked at her watch; then gathered up her gloves. ‘I shall have to go.’ With this return from intimacy to the prosaic world of time and people and appointments, she suddenly woke up again to painful self-consciousness. Had it bored him? Did he think her a fool? She looked into his face, trying to divine his thoughts; then dropped her eyes. ‘I’m afraid I’ve been talking a lot about myself,’ she mumbled. ‘I don’t know why I should burden you . . .’

He protested. ‘I only wish I could be of some help.’

Joan raised her face again and gave him a quick smile of gratitude. ‘You’ve done a lot by just listening.’

They left the restaurant and, when he had seen her to her bus, he set off on foot towards the British Museum, wondering, as he went, what sort of letter he ought to write to Brian. Should he wash his hands of the whole business and merely scribble a note to the effect that Joan seemed well and happy? Or should he let out that she had told him everything, and then proceed to expostulate, warn, advise? He passed between the huge columns of the portico into the dim coolness within. A regular sermon, he thought with distaste. If only one could approach the problem as it ought to be approached — as a Rabelaisian joke. But then poor Brian could hardly be expected to see it in that light. Even though it would do him a world of good to think for a change in Rabelaisian terms. Anthony showed his card to the attendant and walked down the corridor to the Reading Room. That was always the trouble, he reflected; you could never influence anybody to be anything except himself, or influence him by any means

that he didn’t already accept the validity of. He pushed open the door and was under the dome, breathing the faint acrid smell of books. Millions of books. And all those hundreds of thousands of authors, century after century — each convinced he was right, convinced that he knew the essential secret, convinced that he could convince the rest of the world by putting it down in black and white. When in fact, of course, the only people anyone ever convinced were the ones that nature and circumstances had actually or potentially convinced already. And even those weren’t wholly to be relied on. Circumstances changed. What convinced in January wouldn’t necessarily convince in August. The attendant handed him the book that had been reserved for him, and he walked off to his seat. Mountains of the spirit in interminable birth-pangs; and the result was — what? Well, si ridiculum murem requiris, circumspice. Pleased with his invention, he looked about him at his fellow readers — the men like walruses, the dim females, the Indians, emaciated or overblown, the whiskered patriarchs, the youths in spectacles. Heirs to all the ages. Depressing, if you took it seriously; but also irresistibly comic. He sat down and opened his book — De Lancre’s Tableau de l’Inconstance des mauvais anges — at the place where he had stopped reading the day before. ‘Le Diable estoit en forme de bouc, ayant une queue et au dessoubs un visage d’homme noir, où elle fut contrainte le baiser. . . .’ He laughed noiselessly to himself. Another one for Mary, he thought.

At five he rose, left his books at the desk and, from Holborn, took the tube to Gloucester Road. A few minutes later he was at Mary Amberley’s front door. The maid opened; he smiled at her familiarly and, assuming the privilege of an intimate of the house, ran upstairs to the drawing-room, unannounced.

‘I have a story for you,’ he proclaimed, as he crossed the room.

‘A coarse story, I hope,’ said Mary Amberley from the sofa.

Anthony kissed the hand in that affected style he had recently adopted, and sat down. ‘To the coarse,’ he said, ‘all things are coarse.’

‘Yes, how lucky that is!’ And with that crooked little smile of hers, that dark glitter between narrowed lids, ‘A filthy mind,’ she added, ’is a perpetual feast.’

The joke was old and not her own; but Anthony's laughter pleased her none the less for that. It was whole-hearted laughter, loud and prolonged — louder and longer than the joke itself warranted. But then it wasn't at the joke that he was really laughing. The joke was hardly more than an excuse; that laughter was his response, not to a single stimulus, but to the whole extraordinary and exciting situation. To be able to talk freely about anything (anything, mind you) with a woman, a lady, a genuine 'loaf-kneader', as Mr Beavis, in his moments of etymological waggery, had been known to say, a true-blue English loaf-kneader who was also one's mistress, had also read Mallarmé, was also a friend of Guillaume Apollinaire; and to listen to the loaf-kneader preaching what she practised and casually mentioning beds, water-closets, the physiology of what (for the Saxon words still remained unpronounceable) they were constrained to call l'amour — for Anthony, the experience was still, after two years and in spite of Mary's occasional infidelities, an intoxicating mixture of liberation and forbidden fruit, of relief and titillation. In his father's universe, in the world of Pauline and the Aunts, such things were simply not there — but not there with a painfully, glaringly conspicuous absence. Like the hypnotized patient who has been commanded to see the five of clubs as a piece of virgin pasteboard, they deliberately failed to perceive the undesirable things, they were conspiratorially silent about all they had been blind to. The natural functions even of the lower animals had to be ignored; there were silences even about quadrupeds. That goat incident, for example — it was the theme, now, of one of Anthony's choicest anecdotes. Exquisitely comic — but how much more comic now than at the time, nearly two years before he first met Mary, when it had actually happened! Picnicking on that horrible Scheideck Pass, with the Weisshorn hanging over them like an obsession, and a clump of gentians, carefully sought out by Mr Beavis, in the grass at their feet, the family had been visited by a half-grown kid, greedy for the salt of their hard-boiled eggs. Shrinking and a little disgusted under their delight, his two small half-sisters had held out their hands to be licked, while Pauline took a snapshot, and Mr Beavis, whose interest in goats was mainly philological, quoted Theocritus. Pastoral scene! But suddenly the

little creature had straddled its legs and, still expressionlessly gazing at the Beavis family through the oblong pupils of its large yellow eyes, had proceeded to make water on the gentians.

‘They’re not very generous with their butter,’ and ‘How jolly the dear old Weisshorn is looking today,’ Pauline and Mr Beavis brought out almost simultaneously — the one, as she peered into her sandwich, in a tone of complaint, the other, gazing away far-focused, with a note in his voice of a rapture none the less genuinely Wordsworthian for being expressed in terms of a gentlemanly and thoroughly English facetiousness.

In haste and guiltily, the two children swallowed their incipient shriek of startled mirth and averted frozen faces from one another and the outrageous goat. Momentarily compromised the world of Mr Beavis and Pauline and the Aunts had settled down again to respectability.

‘And what about your story?’ Mrs Amberley inquired, as his laughter subsided.

‘You shall hear,’ said Anthony, and was silent for a little, lighting a cigarette, while he thought of what he was about to say and the way he meant to say it. He was ambitious about his story, wanted to make it a good one, at once amusing and psychologically profound; a smoking-room story that should also be a library story, a laboratory story. Mary must be made to pay a double tribute of laughter and admiration.

‘You know Brian Foxe?’ he began.

‘Of course.’

‘Poor old Brian!’ By his tone, by the use of the patronizing adjective, Anthony established his position of superiority, asserted his right, the right of the enlightened and scientific vivisector, to anatomize and examine. Yes, poor old Brian! That maniacal preoccupation of his with chastity! Chastity — the most unnatural of all the sexual perversions, he added parenthetically, out of Rémy de Gourmont. Mary’s appreciative smile acted on him like a spur to fresh efforts. Fresh efforts, of course, at Brian’s expense. But at the moment, that didn’t occur to him.

‘But what can you expect,’ Mrs Amberley put in, ‘with a mother like that? One of those spiritual vampires. A regular St Monica.’

‘St Monica by Ary Scheffer,’ he found himself over-bidding. Not that there was a trace in Mrs Foxe of that sickly insincerity of Scheffer’s saint. But the end of his story-telling, which was to provoke Mary’s laughter and admiration, was sufficient justification for any means whatever. Scheffer was an excellent joke, too good a joke to be neglected, even if he were beside the point. And when Mary brought out what was at the moment her favourite phrase and talked of Mrs Foxe’s ‘uterine reactions’, he eagerly seized upon the words and began applying them, not merely to Mrs Foxe, but also to Joan and even (making another joke out of the physical absurdity of the thing) to Brian. Brian’s uterine reactions towards chastity in conflict with his own and Joan’s uterine reactions towards the common desires — it was a drama. A drama, he explained, whose existence hitherto he had only suspected and inferred. Now there was no more need to guess; he knew. Straight from the horse’s mouth. Or rather, straight from the mare’s. Poor Joan! The vivisector laid another specimen on the operating table.

‘Like early Christians,’ was Mrs Amberley’s comment, when he had finished.

The virulent contempt in her voice made him suddenly remember, for the first time since he had begun his story, that Brian was his friend, that Joan had been genuinely unhappy. Too late, he wanted to explain that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, there was nobody he liked and admired and respected more than Brian. ‘You mustn’t misunderstand me,’ he said to Mary retrospectively and in imagination. ‘I’m absolutely devoted to him.’ Inside his head, he became eloquent on the subject. But no amount of this interior eloquence could alter the fact that he had betrayed confidences and been malicious without apology or qualifying explanation. At the time, of course, this malice had seemed to him the manifestation of his own psychological acuteness; these betrayed confidences, the indispensable facts without which the acuteness could not have been exercised. But now . . .

He found himself all at once confused and tongue-tied with self-reproach.

‘I felt awfully sorry for Joan,’ he stammered, trying to make amends. ‘Promised I’d do all I could to help the poor girl. But what? That’s the question. What?’ He exaggerated the note of perplexity. Perplexed, he was justified in betraying Joan’s confidences; he had told the story (he now began to assure himself) solely for the sake of asking Mary’s advice — the advice of an experienced woman of the world.

But the experienced woman of the world was looking at him in the most disquieting way. Mrs Amberley’s eyelids had narrowed over a mocking brilliance; the left-hand corner of her mouth was drawn up ironically. ‘The nicest thing about you,’ she said judicially, ’is your innocence.’

Her words were so wounding that he forgot in an instant Joan, Brian, his own discreditable behaviour, and could think only of his punctured vanity.

‘Thank you,’ he said, trying to give her a smile of frank amusement. Innocent — she thought him innocent? After their time in Paris. After those jokes about uterine reactions?

‘So deliciously youthful, so touching.’

‘I’m glad you think so.’ The smile had gone all awry; he felt the blood mounting to his cheeks.

‘A girl comes to you,’ Mrs Amberley went on, ‘and complains because she hasn’t been kissed enough. And here you are, solemnly asking what you ought to do to help her! And now you’re blushing like a beetroot. Darling, I absolutely adore you!’ Laying her hand on his arm, ‘Kneel down on the floor here,’ she commanded. Rather sheepishly, he obeyed. Mary Amberley looked at him for a little in silence, with the same bright mocking expression in her eyes. Then, softly, ‘Shall I show you what you can do to help her?’ she asked. ‘Shall I show you?’

He nodded without speaking; but still, at arm’s length, she smiled inquiringly into his face.

‘Or am I a fool to show you?’ she asked. ‘Won’t you learn the lesson too well? Perhaps I shall be jealous?’ She shook her head and smiled — a gay and ‘civilized’ smile. ‘No, I don’t believe in being jealous.’ She took his face

between her two hands and, whispering, ‘This is how you can help her,’ drew him towards her.

Anthony had felt humiliated by her almost contemptuous assumption of the dominant role; but no shame, no resentment could annul his body’s consciousness of the familiar creepings of pleasure and desire. He abandoned himself to her kisses.

A clock struck, and immediately, from an upper floor, came the approaching sound of shrill childish voices. Mrs Amberley drew back and, laying a hand over his mouth, pushed him away from her. ‘You’ve got to be domestic,’ she said, laughing. ‘It’s six. I do the fond mother at six.’

Anthony scrambled to his feet and, with the idea of fabricating a little favourable evidence, walked over to the fire and stood there with his elbows on the mantelpiece, looking at a Conder water-colour.

The door burst open, and with a yell like the whistle of an express train a small round child of about five came rushing into the room and fairly hurled herself upon her mother. Another little girl, three or four years older than the first, came hurrying after.

‘Helen!’ she kept calling, and her face, with its expression of anxious disapproval, was the absurd parody of a governess’s face. ‘Helen! You mustn’t. Tell her she mustn’t shout like that, Mummy,’ she appealed to Mrs Amberley.

But Mrs Amberley only laughed and ran her fingers through the little one’s thick yellow hair. ‘Joyce believes in the Ten Commandments,’ she said, turning to Anthony. ‘Was born believing in them. Weren’t you, darling?’ She put an arm round Joyce’s shoulder and kissed her. ‘Whereas Helen and I . . .’ She shook her head, ‘Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.’

‘Nanny says it’s the draught that gives her a stiff neck,’ Joyce volunteered, and was indignant when her mother and Anthony, and even, by uncomprehending contagion, little Helen, burst out laughing. ‘But it’s true!’ she cried; and tears of outraged virtue were in her eyes. ‘Nanny said so.’

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT. June 25th 1934

THE FACILITY WITH which one could become a Stiggins in modern dress! A much subtler, and therefore more detestable, more dangerous Stiggins. For of course Stiggins himself was too stupid to be either intrinsically very bad or capable of doing much harm to other people. Whereas if I set my mind to it, heaven knows what I mightn't achieve in the way of lies in the soul. Even with not setting my mind to it, I could go far — as I perceived, to my horror, today, when I found myself talking to Purchas and three or four of his young people. Talking about Miller's 'anthropological approach'; talking about peace as a way of life as well as an international policy — the way of life being the condition of any policy that had the least hope of being permanently successful. Talking so clearly, so profoundly, so convincingly. (The poor devils were listening with their tongues hanging out.) Much more convincingly than Purchas himself could have done; that muscular-jocular-Christian style starts by being effective, but soon makes hearers feel that they're being talked down to. What they like is that the speaker should be thoroughly serious, but comprehensible. Which is a trick I happen to possess. There I was, discoursing in a really masterly way about the spiritual life, and taking intense pleasure in that mastery, secretly congratulating myself on being not only so clever, but also so good — when all at once I realized who I was: Stiggins. Talking about the theory of courage, self-sacrifice, patience, without any knowledge of the practice. Talking, moreover, in the presence of people who had practised what I was preaching — preaching so effectively that the proper rules were reversed: they were listening to me, not I to them. The discovery of what I was doing came suddenly. I was overcome with shame. And yet — more shameful — went on talking. Not for long, however. A minute or two, and I simply had to stop, apologize, insist that it wasn't my business to talk.

This shows how easy it is to be Stiggins by mistake and unconsciously. But also that unconsciousness is no excuse, and that one's responsible for the mistake, which arises, of course, from the pleasure one takes in being more talented than other people and in dominating them by means of those talents. Why is one unconscious? Because one hasn't ever taken the trouble to examine one's motives; and one doesn't examine one's motives, because one's motives are mostly discreditable. Alternatively, of course, one examines one's motives, but tells oneself lies about them until one comes to believing that they're good. Which is the conviction of the self-conscious Stiggins. I've always condemned showing off and the desire to dominate as vulgar, and imagined myself pretty free of these vulgarities. But in so far as free at all, free, I now perceive, only thanks to the indifference which has kept me away from other people, thanks to the external-economic and internal-intellectual circumstances which made me a sociologist rather than a banker, administrator, engineer, working in direct contact with my fellows. Not to make contacts, I have realized, is wrong; but the moment I make them, I catch myself showing off and trying to dominate. Showing off, to make it worse, as Stiggins would have done, trying to dominate by a purely verbal display of virtues which I don't put into practice. Humiliating to find that one's supposed good qualities are mainly due to circumstances and the bad habit of indifference, which made me shirk occasions for behaving badly — or well, for that matter, seeing that it's very difficult to behave either well or badly except towards other people. More humiliating still to find that when, with an effort of goodwill, one creates the necessary opportunities, one immediately responds to them by behaving badly. Note: meditate on the virtues that are the contraries of vanity, lust for power, hypocrisy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE. May 24th 1931

THE BLINDS WERE up; the sunlight lay bright across the dressing-table. Helen, as usual, was still in bed. The days were so long. Lying in the soft, stupefying warmth of her own body under the quilt, she shortened them with sleep, with vague inconsequent thoughts, with drowsy reading. The book, this morning, was Shelley's poems. 'Warm fragrance,' she read, articulating the words in an audible whisper, 'seemed to fall from her light dress . . .' (She saw a long-legged figure in white muslin, with sloping shoulders and breasts high set.) . . . from her light dress

And her loose hair; and where some heavy tress The air of her own speed has disentwined. . . .

(The figure was running now, in square-toed pumps cross-gartered with black ribbon over the white cotton stockings.) The sweetness seems to satiate the faint wind; And in the soul a wild odour is felt

Beyond the sense, like fiery dews that melt Into the bosom of a frozen bud. . . .

The half-opened rose gave place to Mark Staithes's strangely twisted face. Those things he had told her the other night about perfumes. Musk, ambergris . . . And Henri Quatre with his bromidrosis of the feet. Bien vous en prend d'être roi; sans cela on ne vous pourrait souffrir. Vous puez comme charogne. She made a grimace. Hugh's smell was like sour milk.

A clock struck. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Twelve! She felt guilty; then defiantly decided that she would stay in bed for lunch. A remembered voice — it was Cynthia's — sounded reproachfully in her memory. 'You ought to go out more, see more people.' But people, Cynthia's people, were such bores. Behind closed eyelids, she saw her mother rapping the top of her skull: 'Solid ivory, my dear!' Hopelessly stupid, ignorant, tasteless, slow. 'I was brought up above my

mental station,' was what she had said to Anthony the other night. 'So that now, if ever I have to be with people as silly and uneducated as myself, it's torture, absolute torture!'

Cynthia was sweet, of course; always had been, ever since they were at school together. But Cynthia's husband — that retriever! And her young men, and the young men's young women! 'My boy friend. My girl friend.' How she loathed the words and, still more, the awful way they spoke them! So coy, such saucy implications of sleeping together! When, in fact, most of them were utterly respectable. In the few cases where they weren't respectable, it seemed even worse — a double hypocrisy. Really sleeping together, and pretending to be only archly pretending to do it. The dreary, upper-class Englishness of it all! And then they were always playing games. 'Ga-ames,' Mrs Amberley drawled out of a pre-morphia past. 'A Dear Old School in every home.' See more of those people, do more of the things they did . . . She shook her head.

Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate Whose course has been so starless . . .

Was it all nonsense? Or did it mean something — something marvellous she had never experienced? But, yes, she had experienced it.

For in the fields of Immortality

My spirit should at first have worshipped thine, A divine presence in a place divine. . . .

It was humiliating, now, to admit it; but the fact remained that, with Gerry, she had known exactly what those lines signified. A divine presence in a place divine. And it had been the presence in bed of a swindler who was also a virtuoso in the art of love-making. She found a perverse pleasure in insisting, as brutally as she could, upon the grotesque disparity between the facts and what had then been her feelings.

I love thee; yes, I feel

That on the fountain of my heart a seal Is set, to keep its waters pure and bright For thee . . .

Noiselessly, Helen laughed. The sound of the clock chiming the quarter made her think again of Cynthia's advice. There were also the other people — the

people they met when Hugh and she dined with the Museum or the University. ‘Those god-fearing people’ (her mother spoke again), ‘who still go on fearing God even though they’ve pitched him overboard.’ Fearing God on committees. Fearing him in W.E.A. lecture-rooms. Fearing him through interminable discussions of the Planned Society. But Gerry’s good looks, Gerry’s technique as a lover — how could those be planned out of existence? Or the foetus irrepressibly growing and growing in the womb? ‘A coordinated housing scheme for the whole country.’ She remembered Frank Ditchling’s eager, persuasive voice. He had a turned-up nose, and the large nostrils stared at one like a second pair of eyes, insistently. ‘Redistribution of the population . . . Satellite towns . . . Green belts . . . Lifts even in working-class flats . . .’ She had listened, she had succumbed to the spell of his hypnotic nostrils, and at a time it had seemed splendid, worth dying for. But afterwards . . . Well, lifts were very convenient — she wished there were one to her own flat. Parks were nice to walk in. But how would Frank Ditchling’s crusade affect any of the serious issues? Coordinated housing wouldn’t make her mother any less dirty, any less hopelessly at the mercy of an intoxicated body. And Hugh — would Hugh be any different in a satellite town and with a lift from what he was now, when he walked up four flights of stairs in London? Hugh! She thought, derisively, of his letters — all the delicate, beautiful things he had written — and then of the man as he had been in everyday reality, as a husband. ‘Show me how I can help you, Hugh.’ Arranging his papers, typing his notes, looking up references for him in the library. But always, his eyes glassy behind glass, he had shaken his head: either he didn’t need help, or else she wasn’t capable of giving it. ‘I want to be a good wife, Hugh.’ With her mother’s laughter loud in her imagination, it had been difficult to pronounce those words. But she had meant them; she did want to be a good wife. Darning socks, making hot milk for him before he went to bed, reading up his subject, being sérieuse, in a word, for the first time and profoundly. But Hugh didn’t want her to be a good wife, didn’t want her, so far as she could see, to be anything. A divine presence in a place divine. But the place was his letters; she was present, so far as he was concerned, only at the

other end of the postal system. He didn't even want her in bed — or at any rate not much, not in any ordinary way. Green belts, indeed!

It was all beside the point. For the point was those silences in which Hugh enclosed himself at meals. The point was that martyred expression he put on if ever she came into his study while he was working. The point was the furtive squalor of those approaches in the darkness, the revolting detachment and gentleness of a sensuality, in which the part assigned to her was purely ideal. The point was that expression of dismay, almost of horror and disgust, which she had detected that time, within the first few weeks of their marriage, when she was laid up with the flu. He had shown himself solicitous; and at first she had been touched, had felt grateful. But when she discovered how heroic an effort it cost him to attend upon her sick body, the gratitude had evaporated. In itself, no doubt, the effort was admirable. What she resented, what she couldn't forgive was the fact that an effort had had to be made. She wanted to be accepted as she was, even in fever, even vomiting bile. In that book on mysticism she had read, there was an account of Mme Guyon picking up from the floor a horrible gob of phlegm and spittle and putting it in her mouth — as a test of will. Sick, she had been Hugh's test of will; and, since then, each month had renewed his secret horror of her body. It was an intolerable insult — and would be no less intolerable in one of Ditchling's satellite towns in the planned world those god-fearing atheists were always talking about.

But there was also Fanny Carling. 'The mouse' was Helen's name for her — she was so small, so grey, so silently quick. But a mystical mouse. A mouse with enormous blue eyes that seemed perpetually astonished by what they saw behind the appearances of things. Astonished, but bright at the same time with an inexplicable happiness — a happiness that to Helen seemed almost indecent, but which she envied. 'How does one believe in the things that are obviously false?' she had asked, half in malice, half genuinely desirous of learning a valuable secret. 'By living,' the mouse answered. 'If you live in the right way, all these things turn out to be obviously true.' And she went on to talk incomprehensible stuff about the love of God and the love of things and people for the sake of

God. ‘I don’t know what you mean.’ ‘Only because you don’t want to, Helen.’ Stupid, maddening answer! ‘How do you know what I want?’ Sighing, Helen returned to her book.

I never was attached to that sect,

Whose doctrine is, that each one should select Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend, (‘One of my boy friends . . .’)

And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend To cold oblivion, though it is the code Of modern morals, and the beaten road

Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread, Who travel to their home among the dead By the broad highway of the world, and so With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe, The dreariest and the longest journey go.

The dreariest and the longest, she repeated to herself. But it could be as long, she thought, and as dreary with several as with only one — with Bob and Cecil and Quentin as with Hugh.

True Love in this differs from gold and clay, That to divide is not to take away.

‘I don’t believe it,’ she said aloud; and anyhow there hadn’t been much love to divide. For poor little Cecil she had never pretended to be more than sorry. And with Quentin it was just — well, just hygiene. As for Bob, he had genuinely cared for her and she, on her side, had done her best to care for him. But under those charming manners of his, under those heroic good looks there was really nothing. And as a lover, how hopelessly clumsy he had been, how barbarous and uncomprehending! She had broken with him after only a few weeks. And perhaps, she went on to think, that was her fate — to lose her heart only to men like Gerry, to be loved only by men like Hugh, and Bob and Cecil. To worship cruelty and meanness, be adored by deficiency.

The telephone bell rang; Helen picked up the receiver.

‘Hullo.’

It was the voice of Anthony Beavis that answered. He wanted her to dine with him tomorrow.

‘I’d love to,’ she said, though she had promised the evening to Quentin.

There was a smile on her face, as she leaned back again on the pillows. An intelligent man, she was thinking. Worth fifty of these wretched little Cecils and Quentins. And amusing, charming, even rather good-looking. How nice he had been to her the other night at Mark's dinner! Had gone out of his way to be nice. Whereas that pretentious ass Pitchley had gone out of his way to be rude and snubbing. She had wondered at the time whether Anthony wasn't rather attracted by her. Had wondered and rather hoped so. Now this invitation gave her reasons, not only for hoping, but for thinking so as well. She hummed to herself; then suddenly energetic, threw back the bed-clothes. She had decided that she would get up for lunch.

CHAPTER THIRTY. July 2nd 1914

SO FAR AS Mary Amberley was concerned, that spring and early summer had been extremely dull. Anthony was a charming boy, no doubt. But two years were a long time; he had lost his novelty. And then he was really too much in love. It was pleasant having people in love with you, of course, but not too violently, not if it went on too long. They became a nuisance in that case; they began to imagine that they had rights and that you had duties. Which was intolerable. All the fuss that Anthony had made last winter about that art critic in Paris! Flattering, in a certain sense. Mary had rarely seen anyone so desperately upset. And seeing that the art critic had turned out, on a nearer acquaintance, to be a bit of a bore, she had quite enjoyed the process of letting herself be blackmailed by Anthony's dumb miseries and tears. But the principle was wrong. She didn't want to be loved in that blackmailing way. Particularly if it was a long-drawn blackmail. She liked things to be short and sharp and exciting. Another time, and with anyone who wasn't the art critic, she wouldn't allow Anthony to blackmail her. But the trouble was that, except for Sidney Gattick — and she wasn't really sure if she could tolerate Sidney's voice and manner — there was nobody else in sight. The world was a place where all amusing and exciting things seemed, all of a sudden, to have stopped happening. There was nothing for it but to make them happen. That was why she went on at Anthony about what she called 'Joan's treatment', went on and on with a persistence quite out of proportion to any interest she felt in Joan, or in Brian Foxe, or even in Anthony — went on simply in the hope of creating a little fun out of the boring nothingness of the time.

'How's the treatment advancing?' she asked yet again that afternoon in July.

Anthony replied with a long story, elaborately rehearsed, about his position as Heavy Uncle; and how he was gradually establishing himself, on a more

intimate footing, as Big Brother; how from Big Brother, he proposed to develop, almost imperceptibly, into Sentimental Cousin; and from Sentimental Cousin into . . .

‘The truth being,’ said Mrs Amberley, interrupting him, ‘that you’re doing nothing at all.’

Anthony protested. ‘I’m going slow. Using strategy.’

‘Strategy!’ she echoed contemptously. ‘It’s just funk.’

He denied it, but with an irrepressible blush. For of course she was half right. The funk was there. In spite of the two years he had spent as Mary’s lover, he still suffered from shyness, still lacked self-confidence in the presence of women. But his timidity was not the only inhibiting force at work. There was also compunction, also affection and loyalty. But of these it would be all but impossible to talk to Mary. She would say that he was only disguising his fear in a variety of creditable fancy dresses, would simply refuse to believe in the genuineness of these other feelings of his. And the trouble was that she would have some justification for the refusal. For, after all, there hadn’t been much sign of that compunction, that affection and loyalty, when he originally told her the story. How often since then, in futile outbursts of retrospective anger, he had cursed himself for having done it! And, trying to persuade himself that the responsibility was not exclusively his, had also cursed Mary. Blaming her for not having told him that he was betraying confidences out of mere wantonness and vanity; for not having refused to listen to him.

‘The fact of the matter,’ Mary went on, implacably, ’is that you haven’t got the guts to kiss a woman. You can only put on one of those irresistibly tender and melancholy faces of yours and silently beg to be seduced.’

‘What nonsense!’ But he was blushing more hotly than ever.

Ignoring the interruption, ‘She won’t seduce you, of course,’ Mary continued. ‘She’s too young. Not too young to be tempted, perhaps. Because the thing you go for is the mother instinct, and even a child of three has got that. Even a child of three would feel her little heart wrung for you. Absolutely wr-wrung.’ She

rolled the r derisively. ‘But seduction . . .’ Mrs Amberley shook her head. ‘You can’t expect that till a good deal later. Certainly not from a girl of twenty.’

‘As a matter of fact,’ said Anthony, trying to divert her from this painful dissection of his character, ‘I’ve never found Joan particularly attractive. A bit too rustic.’ He emphasized the word in Mary’s own style. ‘Besides, she’s really rather childish,’ he added, and was instantly made to regret his words; for Mary was down on him again, like a hawk.

‘Childish!’ she repeated. ‘I like that. And what about you? Talk about pots and kettles! The feeding-bottle calling the diaper childish. Though of course,’ she went on, returning to the attack at the point where she had broken through before, ‘it’s only natural that you should complain of her. She is too childish for you. Too childish to do the pouncing. Childish enough to expect to be pounced on. Poor girl! she’s come to the wrong address. She’ll get no more kisses out of you than she gets out of that benighted early Christian of hers. Even though you do profess to be civilized. . . .’

She was interrupted by the opening of the door.

‘Mr Gattick,’ the maid announced.

Large, florid, almost visibly luminous with the inner glow of his self-satisfaction and confidence, Sidney Gattick came striding in. His voice boomed resonantly as he spoke his greetings, inquired after her health. A deep voice, virile as only the voice of an actor-manager playing the part of a strong man can be virile. And his profile, Anthony suddenly perceived — that too was an actor’s: too noble to be quite true. And after all, he went on to think, with a contempt born of jealousy and a certain envy of the other’s worldly success, what were these barristers but actors? Clever actors, but clever with the cleverness of examination-passers; capable of mugging up a case and forgetting it again the moment it was finished, as one mugged up formal logic or The Acts of the Apostles for Pass Mods or Divvers. No real intelligence, no coherent thinking. Just the examinee’s mind lodged in the actor’s body and expressing itself in the actor’s booming voice. And, for this, society paid the creature five or six thousand pounds a year. And the creature regarded itself as important, wise, a

man of note; the creature felt itself in a position to be patronizing. Not that it mattered, Anthony assured himself, being patronized by this hollow, booming mountebank. One could laugh — it was so absurd! But in spite of the absurdity, and even while one laughed, the patronage seemed painfully humiliating. The way, for example, he now acted the distinguished old military man, the bluff country squire, and, patting him on the shoulder, said, ‘Well, Anthony my lad!’ — it was absolutely intolerable. On this occasion, however, the intolerableness, it seemed to Anthony, was worth putting up with. The man might be a tiresome and pretentious fool; but at least his coming had delivered him from the assaults of Mary. In Gattick’s presence she couldn’t go on at him about Joan.

But he reckoned without Mary and her boredom, her urgent need to make something amusing and exciting happen. Few things are more exciting than deliberate bad taste, more amusing than the spectacle of someone else’s embarrassment. Before Gattick had had time to finish his preliminary boomings, she was back again on the old painful subject.

‘When you were Anthony’s age,’ she began, ‘did you always wait for the woman to seduce you?’

‘Me?’

She nodded.

Recovering from his surprise, Gattick smiled the knowing smile of an experienced Don Juan and, in his most virile jeune premier’s voice, said, ‘Of course not.’ He laughed complacently. ‘On the contrary, I’m afraid I used to rush in where angels fear to tread. Got my face slapped sometimes. But more often, not.’ He twinkled scabrously.

‘Anthony prefers to sit still,’ said Mrs Amberley; ‘to sit still and wait for the woman to make the advances.’

‘Oh, that’s bad, Anthony, that’s very bad,’ said Gattick; and his voice once more implied the military moustaches, the country gentleman’s Harris tweeds.

‘Here’s a poor girl who wants to be kissed,’ Mrs Amberley went on, ‘and he simply hasn’t got the courage to put an arm round her waist and do it.’

‘Nothing to say in your own defence, Anthony?’ Gattick asked.

Trying, rather unsuccessfully, to pretend that he didn’t care, Anthony shrugged his shoulders. ‘Only that it isn’t true.’

‘What isn’t true?’ asked Mary.

‘That I haven’t the courage.’

‘But it is true that you haven’t done the kissing. Isn’t it?’ she insisted. ‘Isn’t it?’ And when he had to admit that it was true, ‘I’m only drawing the obvious inference from the facts,’ she said. ‘You’re a lawyer, Sidney. Tell me if it’s a justifiable inference.’

‘Absolutely justifiable,’ said Gattick, and the Lord Chancellor himself could not have spoken more weightily. An aura of robes and full-bottomed wigs hung round him. He was justice incarnate.

Anthony opened his mouth to speak, then shut it again. In front of Gattick, and with Mary obstinately determined to be only ‘civilized’, how could he say what he really felt? And if that were what he really felt, why (the question propounded itself once more), why had he told her the story? And told it in that particular style — as though he were a vivisecting comedian? Vanity, wantonness; and then, of course, the fact that he was in love with her and anxious to please, at any cost, even at the cost of what he really felt. (And at the moment of telling, he was forced to admit he hadn’t really felt anything but the desire to be amusing.) But, again, that couldn’t be put into words. Gattick didn’t know about their affair, mustn’t know. And even if Gattick hadn’t been there, it would have been difficult, almost impossible, to explain it to Mary. She would laugh at him for being romantic — romantic about Brian, about Joan, even about herself; would think him absurd and ridiculous for making tragic mountains out of a simple amorous mole-hill.

‘People will insist,’ she used to say, ‘on treating the mons Veneris as though it were Mount Everest. Too silly!’

When at last he spoke, ‘I don’t do it,’ he confined himself to saying, ‘because I don’t want to do it.’

‘Because you don’t dare,’ cried Mary.

‘I do.’

‘You don’t!’ Her dark eyes shone. She was thoroughly enjoying herself.

Booming, but with a hint of laughter in his ponderousness, the Lord Chancellor let fly once more. ‘It’s an overwhelming case against you,’ he said.

‘I’m ready to bet on it,’ said Mary. ‘Five to one. If you do it within a month, I’ll give you five pounds.’

‘But I tell you I don’t want to,’ he persisted.

‘No, you can’t get out of it like that. A bet’s a bet. Five pounds to you if you bring it off within a month from today. And if you don’t, you pay me a pound.’

‘You’re too generous,’ said Gattick.

‘Only a pound,’ she repeated. ‘But I shall never speak to you again.’

For a few seconds they looked at one another in silence. Anthony had gone very pale. Close-lipped and crookedly, Mary was smiling; between the half-closed lids, her eyes were bright with malicious laughter.

Why did she have to be so horrible to him, he wondered, so absolutely beastly? He hated her, hated her all the more because of his desire for her, because of the memory of the anticipation of those pleasures, because of her liberating wit and knowledge, because of everything, in a word, that made it inevitable for him to do exactly what she wanted. Even though he knew it was stupid and wrong.

Watching him, Mary saw the rebellious hatred in his eyes, and when at last he dropped them, the sign of her own triumph.

‘Never again,’ she repeated. ‘I mean it.’

*

At home, as Anthony was hanging up his hat in the hall, his father called to him.

‘Come and look here, dear boy.’

‘Damn!’ Anthony said to himself resentfully; it was with an aggrieved expression, which Mr Beavis was much too busy to notice, that he entered his father’s study.

‘Just having a little fun with the map,’ said Mr Beavis, who was sitting at his desk with a sheet of the Swiss ordnance survey spread out before him. He had a passion for maps, a passion due in part to his love of walking, in part to his professional interest in place names. ‘Comballas,’ he murmured to himself, without looking up from the map. ‘Chamossaire. Charming, charming!’ Then, turning to Anthony, ‘It’s a thousand pities,’ he said, ‘that your conscience won’t allow you to take a holiday and come along with us.’

Anthony, who had made his work for the research fellowship an excuse for staying in England with Mary, gravely nodded. ‘One really can’t do any serious reading at high altitudes,’ he said.

‘So far as I can see,’ said Mr Beavis, who had turned back to his map, ‘we ought to have the jolliest walks and scrambles all round les Diablerets. And what a delicious name that is!’ he added parenthetically. ‘Up the Col du Pillon, for example.’ He ran his finger sinuously along the windings of a road. ‘Can you see, by the way!’ Perfunctorily, Anthony bent a little closer. ‘No, you can’t,’ Mr Beavis went on. ‘I cover it all up with my hand.’ He straightened himself up and dipped first into one pocket, then into another. ‘Where on earth,’ he said, frowning; then suddenly, as his most daring philological joke came to his mind, he changed the frown into a sly smile. ‘Where on earth is my teeny weeny penis. Or, to be accurate, my teeny weeny weeny . . .’

Anthony was so taken aback that he could only return a blank embarrassed stare to the knowing twinkle his father gaily shot at him.

‘My pencil,’ Mr Beavis was forced to explain. ‘Penecillus: diminutive of peniculus: double diminutive of penis; which as you know,’ he went on, at last producing the teeny weeny weeny from his inside left breast pocket, ‘originally meant a tail. And now let’s attack the Pillon again.’ Lowering the point of the pencil to the map, he traced out the zigzags. ‘And when we’re at the top of the Col,’ he continued, ‘we bear north-north-west round the flank of Mont Fornettaz until . . .’

It was the first time, Anthony was thinking that his father had ever, in his presence, made any allusion to the physiology of sex.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE. September 6th 1933

‘DEATH,’ SAID MARK Staithes. ‘It’s the only thing we haven’t succeeded in completely vulgarizing. Not from any lack of the desire to do so, of course. We’re like dogs on an acropolis. Trotting round with inexhaustible bladders and only too anxious to lift a leg against every statue. And mostly we succeed. Art, religion, heroism, love — we’ve left our visiting-card on all of them. But death — death remains out of reach. We haven’t been able to defile that statue. Not yet, at any rate. But progress is still progressing.’ He demonstrated the anatomy of a smile. ‘The larger hopes, the proliferating futures . . .’ The bony hands went out in a lavish gesture. ‘One day, no doubt, some genius of the kennel will manage to climb up and deposit a well-aimed tribute bang in the middle of the statue’s face. But luckily progress hasn’t yet got so far. Death still remains.’

‘It remains,’ Anthony repeated. ‘But the smoke-screen is pretty thick. We manage to forget it most of the time.’

‘But not all the time. It remains, unexorcizably. Intact. Indeed,’ Mark qualified, ‘more than intact. We have bigger and better smoke-screens than our fathers had. But behind the smoke the enemy is more formidable. Death’s grown, I should say, now that that the consolations and hopes have been taken away. Grown to be almost as large as it was when people seriously believed in hell. Because, if you’re a busy film-going, newspaper-reading, football-watching, chocolate-eating modern, then death is hell. Every time the smoke-screen thins out a bit, people catch a glimpse and are terrified. I find that a very consoling thought.’ He smiled again. ‘It makes up for a great deal. Even for those busy little dogs on the acropolis.’ There was a silence. Then, in another tone, ‘It’s a comfort,’ he resumed, ‘to think that death remains faithful. Everything else may have gone; but death remains faithful,’ he repeated. ‘If we choose to risk our lives, we can risk them as completely as ever we did.’ He

rose, took a turn or two about the room; then, coming to a halt in front of Anthony's chair, 'That's what I really came to see you about,' he said.

'What?'

'About this business of risking one's life. I've been feeling as though I were stuck. Bogged to the neck in civilized humanity.' He made the grimace of one who encounters a foul smell. 'There seemed to be only one way out. Taking risks again. It would be like a whiff of fresh air. I thought perhaps that you too . . .' He left the sentence unfinished.

'I've never taken a risk,' said Anthony, after a pause. 'Only had one taken for me once,' he added, remembering the bumpkin with the hand-grenade.

'Isn't that a reason for beginning?'

'The trouble,' said Anthony, frowning to himself, 'the trouble is that I've always been a coward. A moral one, certainly. Perhaps also a physical one — I don't know. I've never really had an opportunity of finding out.'

'I should have thought that that was a still more cogent reason.'

'Perhaps.'

'If it's a case of changing the basis of one's life, wouldn't it be best to change it with a bang?'

'Bang into a corpse?'

'No, no. Just a risk; not suicide. It's merely dangerous, the business I'm thinking of. No more.' He sat down again. 'I had a letter the other day,' he began. 'From an old friend of mine in Mexico. A man I worked with on the coffee finca. Jorge Fuentes, by name. A remarkable creature, in his way.'

He outlined Don Jorge's history. Besieged by the revolutionaries on his estate in the valley of Oaxaca. Most of the other landowners had fled. He was one of the only men who put up a resistance. At first he had had his two brothers to help him. But they were killed, one at long range, the other by machetes in an ambush among the cactuses. He had carried on the fight single-handed. Then, one day when he was out riding round the fields, a dozen of them managed to break into the house. He had come home to find the bodies of his wife and their two little boys lying mangled in the courtyard. After that, the place seemed no longer

worth defending. He stayed long enough to shoot three of the murderers, then abandoned his patrimony and went to work for other men. It was during this period that Mark had known him. Now he possessed his own house again and some land; acted as agent for most of the planters on the Pacific coast of Oaxaca state; recruited their labour for them in the mountain villages, and was the only man the Indians trusted, the only one who didn't try to swindle them. Recently, however, there had been trouble. Don Jorge had gone into politics, become the leader of a party, made enemies and hardly less dangerous friends. He was in opposition now; the state governor was persecuting him and his allies. A bad man, according to Don Jorge; corrupt, unjust — unpopular too. It shouldn't be difficult to get rid of him. Some of the troops would certainly come over. But before he started, Don Jorge wanted to know if there was any prospect of Mark's being in the neighbourhood of Oaxaca in the immediate future.

'Poor old Jorge! He has a most touching belief in the soundness of my judgement.' Mark laughed. Thus to understate Don Jorge's faith in him, thus to withhold the reasons of that faith, sent a glow of satisfaction running through his body. He might have told Anthony of that occasion when the old ass had gone and let himself be caught by bandits, and of the way he had been rescued. A good story, and creditable to himself. But not to tell it gave him more pleasure than telling it would have done. 'True, it's better than his judgement,' Mark went on. 'But that isn't saying much. Don Jorge's brave — brave as a lion; but foolhardy. No sense of reality. He'll make a mess of his coup d'état.'

'Unless you are there to help him, I take it. And do you propose to be there?'

Mark nodded. 'I've written him that I'll start as soon as I can settle my affairs in England. It occurred to me that you . . .' Again he left the sentence unfinished and looked inquiringly at Anthony.

'Do you think it's a good cause?' Anthony asked at last.

The other laughed. 'As good as any other Mexican politician's cause,' he answered.

'Is that good enough?'

‘For my purpose. And anyhow, what is a good cause? Tyranny under commissars, tyranny under Gauleiters — it doesn’t seem to make much difference. A drill-sergeant is always a drill-sergeant, whatever the colour of his shirt.’

‘Revolution for revolution’s sake, then?’

‘No, for mine. For the sake of every man who takes part in the thing. For every man can get as much fun out of it as I can.’

‘I expect it would be good for me,’ Anthony brought out after a pause.

‘I’m sure it would be.’

‘Though I’m devilishly frightened — even at this distance.’

‘That’ll make it all the more interesting.’

Anthony drew a deep breath. ‘All right,’ he said at last. ‘I’ll come with you.’ Then vehemently, ‘It’s the most stupid, senseless idea I’ve ever heard of,’ he concluded. ‘So, as I’ve always been so clever and sensible . . .’ He broke off and, laughing, reached for his pipe and the tin of tobacco.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO. July 29th 1934

WITH HELEN TODAY to hear Miller speaking at Tower Hill, during the dinner hour. A big crowd. He spoke well — the right mixture of arguments, jokes, emotional appeal. The theme, peace. Peace everywhere or no peace at all. International peace not achievable unless a translation into policy of inter-individual relations. Militarists at home, in factory, and office, towards inferiors and rivals, cannot logically expect governments which represent them to behave as pacifists. Hypocrisy and stupidity of those who advocate peace between states, while conducting private wars in business or the family. Meanwhile, there was much heckling by communists in the crowd. How can anything be achieved without revolution? Without liquidating the individuals and classes standing in the way of social progress? And so on. Answer (always with extraordinary good humour and wit): means determine ends. Violence and coercion produce a post-revolutionary society, not communistic but (like the Russian) hierarchical, ruled by an oligarchy using secret police methods. And all the rest.

After about a quarter of an hour, an angry young heckler climbed on to the little wall, where Miller was standing, and threatened to knock him off if he didn't stop. 'Come on then, Archibald.' The crowd laughed; the young man grew still angrier, advanced, clenched, squared up. 'Get down, you old bastard, or else . . .' Miller stood quite still, smiling, hands by side, saying, All right; he had no objection to being knocked off. The attacker made sparring movements, brought a fist to within an inch of Miller's nose. The old man didn't budge, showed no sign of fear or anger. The other drew back the hand, but instead of bringing it into Miller's face, hit him on the chest. Pretty hard. Miller staggered, lost his balance and fell off the wall into the crowd. Apologized to the people he'd fallen on, laughed, got up again on to the wall. Repetition of the performance. Again the young man threatened the face, but again, when Miller

didn’t lift his hands, or show either fear or anger, hit him on the chest. Miller went down and again climbed up. Got another blow. Came up once more. This time the man screwed himself up to hitting the face, but only with the flat of his hand. Miller straightened his head and went on smiling. ‘Three shots a penny, Archibald.’ The man let out at the body and knocked him off the wall. Up again. Miller looked at his watch. ‘Another ten minutes before you need go back to work, Archibald. Come on.’ But this time the man could only bring himself to shake his fist and call Miller a bloodsucking old reactionary. Then turned and walked off along the wall, pursued by derisive laughter, jokes, and whistlings from the crowd. Miller went on with his speech.

Helen’s reaction was curious. Distress at the spectacle of the young man’s brutality towards the old. But at the same time anger with Miller for allowing himself to be knocked about without resistance. The reason for this anger? Obscure; but I think she resented Miller’s success. Resented the fact that the young man had been reduced, psychologically, to impotence. Resented the demonstration that there was an alternative to terrorism and a non-violent means of combating it. ‘It’s only a trick,’ she said. Not a very easy trick, I insisted; and that I certainly couldn’t perform it. ‘Anyone could learn it, if he tried.’ ‘Possibly; wouldn’t it be a good thing if we all tried?’ ‘No. I think it’s stupid.’ Why? She found it hard to answer. ‘Because it’s unnatural,’ was the reason she managed to formulate at last — and proceeded to develop it in terms of a kind of egalitarian philosophy. ‘I want to be like other people. To have the same feelings and interests. I don’t want to make myself different. Just an ordinary person; not somebody who’s proud of having learnt a difficult trick. Like that old Miller of yours.’ I point out that we’d all learnt such difficult tricks as driving cars, working in offices, reading and writing, crossing the street. Why shouldn’t we all learn this other difficult trick? A trick, potentially, so much more useful. If all were to learn it, then one could afford to be like other people, one could share all their feelings in safety, with the certainty that one would be sharing something good, not bad. But Helen wasn’t to be persuaded. And when I suggested that we should join the old man for a late lunch, she refused. Said she didn’t want to

know him. That the young man had been quite right; Miller was a reactionary. Disguising himself in a shroud of talk about economic justice; but underneath just a tory agent. His insistence that changes in social organization weren't enough, but that they must be accompanied by, must spring from a change in personal relations — what was that but a plea for conservatism? 'I think he's pernicious,' she said. 'And I think you're pernicious.' But she consented to have lunch with me. Which showed how little stock she set on my powers to shake her convictions! Arguments — I might have lots of good arguments; to those she was impervious. But Miller's action had got between the joints of her armour. He acted his doctrine, didn't rest content with talking it. Her confidence that I couldn't get between the joints, as he had done, was extremely insulting. The more so as I knew it was justified.

Perseverance, courage, endurance. All, fruits of love. Love goodness enough, and indifference and slackness are inconceivable. Courage comes as to the mother defending her child; and at the same time there is no fear of the opponent, who is loved, whatever he may do, because of the potentialities for goodness in him. As for pain, fatigue, disapproval — they are borne cheerfully, because they seem of no consequence by comparison with the goodness loved and pursued. Enormous gulf separating me from this state! The fact that Helen was not afraid of my perniciousness (as being only theoretical), while dreading Miller's (because his life was the same as his argument), was a painful reminder of the existence of this gulf.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE. July 18th 1914

THE CURTAIN ROSE, and before them was Venice, green in the moonlight, with Iago and Roderigo talking together in the deserted street.

‘Light, I say! Light!’ Brabantio called from his window. And in an instant the street was thronged, there was a clanking of weapons and armour, torches and lanterns burned yellow in the green darkness. . . .

‘Horribly vulgar scenery, I’m afraid,’ said Anthony as the curtain fell after the first scene.

Joan looked at him in surprise. ‘Was it?’ Then: ‘Yes, I suppose it was,’ she added, hypocritically paying the tribute of philistinism to taste. In reality, she had thought it too lovely. ‘You know,’ she confessed, ‘this is only the fifth time I’ve ever been in a theatre.’

‘Only the fifth time?’ he repeated incredulously.

But here was another street and more armed men and Iago again bluff and hearty, and Othello himself, dignified like a king, commanding in every word and gesture; and when Brabantio came in with all his men, and the torchlight glittering on the spears and halberds, how heroically serene! ‘Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.’ A kind of anguish ran up and down her spine as she listened, as she saw the dark hand lifted, as the sword-points dropped, under his irresistible compulsion, towards the ground.

‘He speaks the lines all right,’ Anthony admitted.

The council chamber was rich with tapestry; the red-robed senators came and went. And here was Othello again. Still kingly, but with a kingliness that expressed itself, not in commands, this time, not in the lifting of a hand, but on a higher plane than that of the real world — in the calm, majestic music of the record of his wooing.

Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,

Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven, It was my hint to speak. . . .

Her lips moved as she repeated the familiar words after him — familiar but transfigured by the voice, the bearing of the speaker, the setting, so that, though she knew them by heart, they seemed completely new. And here was Desdemona, so young, so beautiful, with her neck and her bare shoulders rising frail and slender out of the heavy magnificence of her dress. Sumptuous brocade, and beneath it, the lovely irrelevance of a girl's body; beneath the splendid words, a girl's voice.

You are the Lord of duty,

I am hitherto your daughter; but here's my husband.

She felt again that creeping anguish along her spine. And now they were all gone, Othello, Desdemona, senators, soldiers, all the beauty, all the nobleness — leaving only Iago and Roderigo whispering together in the empty room. 'When she is sated of his body, she will find the error of her choice.' And then that fearful soliloquy. Evil, deliberate, and conscious of itself. . . .

The applause, the lights of the entr'acte were a sacrilegious irrelevance; and when Anthony offered to buy her a box of chocolates she refused almost indignantly.

'Do you think there really are people like Iago?' she asked.

He shook his head. 'Men don't tell themselves that the wrong they're doing is wrong. Either they do it without thinking. Or else they invent reasons for believing it's right. Iago's a bad man who passes other people's judgements of him upon himself.'

The lights went down again. They were in Cyprus. Under a blazing sun, Desdemona's arrival; then Othello's — and oh, the protective tenderness of his love!

The sun had set. In cavernous twilight, between stone walls, the drinking, the quarrel, the rasping of sword on sword, and Othello again, kingly and commanding, imposing silence, calling them all to obedience. Kingly and commanding for the last time. For in the scenes that followed, how terrible it

was to watch the great soldier, the holder of high office, the civilized Venetian, breaking down, under Iago's disintegrating touches, breaking down into the African, into the savage, into the uncontrolled and primordial beast! 'Handkerchief — confessions — handkerchief! . . . Noses, ears, and lips! Is it possible?' And then the determination to kill. 'Do it not with poison, strangle her in bed, even the bed she hath contaminated.' And afterwards the horrible outburst of his anger against Desdemona, the blow delivered in public; and in the humiliating privacy of the locked room, that colloquy between the kneeling girl and an Othello, momentarily sane again, but sane with the base, ignoble sanity of Iago, cynically knowing only the worst, believing in the possibility only of what was basest.

I cry you mercy then;

I took you for that cunning whore of Venice

That married with Othello.

There was a hideous note of derision in his voice, an undertone of horrible obscene laughter. Irrepressibly, she began to tremble.

'I can't bear it,' she whispered to Anthony between the scenes. 'Knowing what's going to happen. It's too awful. I simply can't bear it.'

Her face was pale, she spoke with a violent intensity of feeling.

'Well, let's go,' he suggested. 'At once.'

She shook her head. 'No, no. I must see it to the end. Must.'

'But if you can't bear it . . . ?'

'You mustn't ask me to explain. Not now.'

The curtain rose again.

My mother had a maid call'd Barbara;

She was in love, and he she lov'd prov'd mad

And did forsake her; she had a song of 'willow'.

Her heart was beating heavily; she felt sick with anticipation. In an almost childish voice, sweet, but thin and untrained, Desdemona began to sing.

The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,

Sing all a green willow.

The vision wavered before Joan's eyes, became indistinct; the tears rolled down her cheeks.

It was over at last; they were out in the street again.

Joan drew a deep breath. 'I feel I'd like to go for a long walk,' she said. 'Miles and miles without stopping.'

'Well, you can't,' he said shortly 'Not in those clothes.'

Joan looked at him with an expression of pained astonishment. 'You're angry with me,' she said.

Blushing, he did his best to smile it off. 'Angry? Why on earth should I be angry?' But she was right, of course. He was angry — angry with everyone and everything that entered into the present insufferable situation: with Mary for having pushed him into it; with himself for having allowed her to push him in; with Joan for being the subject of that monstrous bet; with Brian because he was ultimately responsible for the whole thing; with Shakespeare, even, and the actors and this jostling crowd. . . .

'Don't be cross,' she pleaded. 'It's been such a lovely evening. If you knew how marvellous it's made me feel! But I have to be so careful with the marvellousness. Like carrying a cup that's full to the brim. The slightest jolt — and down it goes. Let me carry it safely home.'

Her words made him feel very embarrassed, almost guilty. He laughed nervously. 'Don't you think you can carry it home safely in a hansom?' he asked.

Her face lit up with pleasure at the suggestion. He waved his hand; the cab drew up in front of them. They climbed in and closed the door upon themselves. The driver jerked his reins. The old horse walked a few steps, then, at the crack of the whip, broke reluctantly into a very slow trot. Along Coventry Street, through the glare of the Circus, into Piccadilly. Above the spire of St James's the dilute blackness of the sky was flushed with a coppery glow. Reflected in the polished darkness of the roadway, the long recession of the lamps seemed inexpressibly mournful, like a reminder of death. But here were the trees of the

Green Park — bright wherever the lamplight struck upwards into the leaves with an earthly, a more than spring-like freshness. There was life as well as death.

Joan sat in silence, holding firm within herself the fragile cup of that strange happiness that was also and at the same time intensest sadness. Desdemona was dead, Othello was dead, and the lamps retreating for ever down their narrowing vistas were symbols of the same destiny. And yet the melancholy of these converging parallels and the pain of the tragedy were as essential constituents of her present joy as her delight in the splendour of the poetry, as her pleasure in the significant and almost allegorical beauty of those illumined leaves. For this joy of hers was not one particular emotion exclusive of all others; it was all emotions — a state, so to speak, of general and undifferentiated movedness. The overtones and aftertones of horror, of delight, of pity and laughter — all lingered harmoniously in her mind. She sat there, behind the slowly trotting horse, serene, but with a serenity that contained the potentiality of every passion. Sadness, delight, fear, mirth — they were all there at once, impossibly conjoined within her mind. She cherished the precarious miracle.

A hansom, he was thinking — it was the classical opportunity. They were already at Hyde Park Corner; by this time he ought at least to have been holding her hand. But she sat there like a statue, staring at nothing in another world. She would feel outraged if he were to call her roughly back to reality.

‘I shall have to invent a story for Mary,’ he decided. But it wouldn’t be easy; Mary had an extraordinary talent for detecting lies.

Reined in, the old horse gingerly checked itself, came to a halt. They had arrived. Oh, too soon, Joan thought, too soon. She would have liked to drive on like this for ever, nursing in silence her incommunicable joy. It was with a sigh that she stepped on to the pavement.

‘Aunt Fanny said you were to come and say good night to her if she was still up.’

That meant that the last chance of doing it had gone, he reflected, as he followed her up the steps and into the dimly lighted hall.

‘Aunt Fanny,’ Joan called softly as she opened the drawing-room door. But there was no answer; the room was dark.

‘Gone to bed?’

She turned back towards him and nodded affirmatively. They stood there for a moment in silence.

‘I shall have to go,’ he said at last.

‘It was a wonderful evening, Anthony. Simply wonderful.’

‘I’m glad you enjoyed it.’ Behind his smile, he was thinking with apprehension that that last chance had not yet disappeared.

‘It was more than enjoying,’ she said. ‘It was . . . I don’t know how to say what it was.’ She smiled at him, added ‘Good night,’ and held out her hand.

Anthony took it, said good night in his turn; then, suddenly deciding that it was now or never, stepped closer, laid an arm round her shoulder and kissed her.

The suddenness of his decision and his embarrassment imparted to his movements a clumsy abruptness indistinguishable from that which would have been the result of a violent impulse irrepressibly breaking through restraints. His lips touched her cheek first of all, then found her mouth. She made as if to withdraw, to avert her face; but the movement was checked almost before it was begun. Her mouth came back to his, drawn irresistibly. All the diffuse and indefinite emotion that had accumulated within her during the evening suddenly crystallized, as it were, round her surprise and the evidence of his desire and this almost excruciating pleasure that, from her lips, invaded her whole body and took possession of her mind. The astonishment and anger of the first second were swallowed up in an apocalypse of new sensations. It was as though a quiet darkness were violently illuminated, as though the relaxed dumb strings of an instrument had been wound up and were vibrating ever more shrilly and piercingly, until at last the brightness and the tension annihilated themselves in their own excess. She felt herself becoming empty; enormous spaces opened up within her, gulfs of darkness.

Anthony felt her body droop limp and heavy in his arms. So heavy indeed, and with so unexpected a weight, that he almost lost his balance. He staggered,

then braced himself and held her up more closely.

‘What is it, Joan?’

She did not answer, but leaned her forehead against his shoulder. He could feel that if he were now to let her go, she would fall. Perhaps she was ill. He would have to call for help — wake up the aunt — explain what had happened. . . . Wondering desperately what to do, he looked about him. The lamp in the hall projected through the open door of the drawing-room a strip of light that revealed the end of a sofa covered with yellow chintz. Still holding her up with one arm about her shoulders, he bent down and slid the other behind her knees; then, with an effort (for she was heavier than he had imagined), lifted her off her feet, carried her along the narrow path of illumination that led into the darkness, and lowered her as gently as her weight would allow him on to the sofa.

Kneeling on the floor beside her, ‘Are you feeling better now?’ he asked.

Joan drew a deep breath, passed a hand across her forehead, then opened her eyes and looked at him, but only for a moment; overcome by an access of timidity and shame, she covered her face with her hands. ‘I’m so sorry,’ she whispered. ‘I don’t know what happened. I felt so faint all of a sudden.’ She was silent for a little; the lamps were alight again, the stretched wires were vibrating — but tolerably, not to excess. She parted her hands once more and turned towards him, shyly smiling.

With eyes that had grown accustomed to the faint light, he looked anxiously into her face. Thank God, she seemed to be all right. He wouldn’t have to call the aunt. His feeling of relief was so profound that he took her hand and pressed it tenderly.

‘You’re not cross with me, Anthony?’

‘Why should I be?’

‘Well, you have every right. Fainting like that . . .’ Her face felt naked and exposed; withdrawing her hand from his grasp, she once more hid her shame. Fainting like that . . . The recollection humiliated her. Thinking of that sudden, silent, violent gesture of his, ‘He loves me,’ she said to herself. And Brian? But Brian’s absence seemed to have been raised to a higher power. He was not there

with an unprecedented intensity, not there to the point of never having been there. All that was really there was this living presence beside her — the presence of desire, the presence of hands and mouth, the presence, potential but waiting, waiting to actualize itself again, of those kisses. She felt her breasts lift, though she was unaware of having taken a deep breath; it was as though someone else had drawn it.' He loves me,' she repeated; it was a justification. She dropped her hands from her face, looked at him for a moment, then reached out and, whispering his name, drew his head down towards her.

*

'Well, what's the result?' Mary called from the sofa as he entered. By the gloomy expression on Anthony's face she judged that it was she who had won the bet; and this annoyed her. She felt suddenly very angry with him — doubly and trebly angry; because he was so spiritless; because he hadn't cared enough for her to win his bet in spite of the spiritlessness; because he was forcing upon her a gesture which she didn't in the least want to make. After a day's motoring with him in the country she had come to the conclusion that Sidney Gattick was absolutely insufferable. By contrast, Anthony seemed the most charming of men. She didn't want to banish him, even temporarily. But her threat had been solemn and explicit; if she didn't carry it out, at least in part, all her authority was gone. And now the wretch was forcing her to keep her word. In a tone of angry reproach, 'You've been a coward and lost,' she said. 'I can see it.'

He shook his head. 'No, I've won.'

Mary regarded him doubtfully. 'I believe you're lying.'

'I'm not.' He sat down beside her on the sofa.

'Well, then, why do you look so glum? It's not very flattering to me.'

'Why on earth did you make me do it?' he burst out. 'It was idiotic.' It had also been wrong; but Mary would only laugh if he said that. 'I always knew it was idiotic. But you insisted.' His voice was shrill with a complaining resentment. 'And now God knows where I've landed myself.' Where he'd landed Joan and Brian, for that matter. 'God knows.'

‘But explain,’ cried Mary Amberley, ‘explain! Don’t talk like a minor prophet.’ Her eyes were bright with laughing curiosity. She divined some delightfully involved and fantastic situation. ‘Explain,’ she repeated.

‘Well, I did what you told me,’ he answered sullenly.

‘Hero!’

‘There’s nothing funny about it.’

‘What! did you get your face slapped?’

Anthony frowned angrily and shook his head.

‘Then how did she take it?’

‘That’s just the trouble: she took it seriously.’

‘Seriously?’ Mary questioned. ‘You mean, she threatened to tell papa?’

‘I mean, she thought I was in love with her. She wants to break it off with Brian.’

Mrs Amberley threw back her head and gave utterance to a peal of her clear, richly vibrant laughter.

Anthony felt outraged. ‘It’s not a joke.’

‘That’s where you make your mistake.’ Mary wiped her eyes and took a deep breath. ‘It’s one of the best jokes I ever heard. But what do you propose to do?’

‘I shall have to tell her it’s all a mistake.’

‘That’ll be an admirable scene!’

He shook his head. ‘I shall write a letter.’

‘Courageous, as usual!’ She patted his knee. ‘But now I want to hear the details. How was it that you let her go as far as she did? To the point of thinking you were in love with her. To the point of wanting to break it off with Brian. Couldn’t you nip it in the bud?’

‘It was difficult,’ he muttered, avoiding her inquisitive eye. ‘The situation . . . well, it got a bit out of control.’

‘You mean, you lost your head?’

‘If you like to put it that way,’ he admitted reluctantly, thinking what a fool he had been, what an utter fool. He ought, of course, to have retreated when she turned towards him in the darkness; he ought to have refused her kisses, to have

made it quite clear that his own had been light-hearted and without significance. But instead of that he had accepted them: out of laziness and cowardice, because it had been too much of an effort to make the necessary and necessarily difficult explanation; out of a certain weak and misplaced kindness of heart, because it would have hurt and humiliated her if he had said no — and to inflict a suffering he could actually witness was profoundly distasteful to him. And having accepted, he had enjoyed her kisses, had returned them with a fervour which he knew to be the result only of a detached, a momentary sensuality, but which Joan, it was obvious now (and he had known it even at the time), would inevitably regard as being roused specifically by herself, as having her for its special and irreplaceable object. An impartial observer would say that he had done his best, had gone out of his way, to create the greatest possible amount of misunderstanding in the shortest possible time.

‘How do you propose to get out of it?’ Mary asked.

He hated her for putting the question that was tormenting him. ‘I shall write her a letter,’ he said. As though that were an answer!

‘And what will Brian say about it?’

‘I’m going to stay with him tomorrow,’ he replied irrelevantly. ‘In the Lakes.’

‘Like Wö-ödsworth,’ said Mary. ‘What fun that’ll be! And what exactly do you propose to tell him about Joan?’ she went on inexorably.

‘Oh, I shall explain.’

‘But suppose Joan explains first — in a different way?’

He shook his head. ‘I told her I didn’t want her to write to Brian before I’d talked to him.’

‘And you think she’ll do what you ask?’

‘Why shouldn’t she?’

Mary shrugged her shoulders and looked at him, smiling crookedly, her eyes bright between narrowed eyelids. ‘Why should she, if it comes to that?’

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR. March 3rd 1928

REORGANIZATION . . .' 'Readjustment . . .' 'Writing down of capital values in the light of existing trade conditions . . .' Anthony lifted his eyes from the printed page. Propped up on her pillows, Mary Amberley was staring at him, he found, with an embarrassing intentness.

'Well?' she asked, leaning forward. Hennaed to an impossible orange, a lock of tousled hair fell drunkenly across her forehead. Her bed-jacket opened as she moved; under soiled lace, the breasts swung heavily towards him. 'What does it mean?'

'It means that they're politely going bankrupt on you.'

'Going bankrupt?'

'Paying you six and eightpence in the pound.'

'But Gerry told me they were doing so well,' she protested in a tone of angry complaint.

'Gerry doesn't know everything,' he charitably explained.

But, of course, the ruffian had known only too well; had known, had acted on his knowledge, had been duly paid by the people who wanted to unload their shares before the crash came. 'Why don't you ask him about it?' he said aloud, and in a tone that implied some of the resentment he felt at having been dragged, this very evening of his return from New York, into the entanglements of Mary's squalid tragedy. Everyone else, he supposed, had fled from her since she'd started taking that morphia; alone of all the friends, having been out of England for half a year, he had had as yet no opportunity and been given no reason to flee. Absence had preserved their friendship, as though in cold storage, in the state it was in before he left. When she had asked him urgently to come and see her, he had no excuse to refuse. Besides, people exaggerated; she couldn't be as bad as they made out.

‘Why don’t you ask him?’ he repeated irritably.

‘He’s gone to Canada.’

‘Oh, he’s gone to Canada.’

There was a silence. He laid the paper down on the coverlet. Mrs Amberley picked it up and re-read it — for the hundredth time, in the absurd and desperate hope that there might, this hundredth time, be something new in it, something different.

Anthony looked at her. The lamp on the bed-table lit up the profile she presented to him with a ruthlessly revealing brilliance. How hollow the cheeks were! And those lines round the mouth, those discoloured pouches of skin beneath the eyes! Remembering how she looked when he had seen her last, that time in Berkshire, only the previous summer, Anthony was appalled. The drug had aged her twenty years in half as many months. And it was not only her body that had been ravaged; the morphia had also changed her character, transformed her into someone else, someone (there had been no exaggeration at all) much worse. That engaging absence of mind, for example, that vagueness, of which, as of yet another feminine allurement, she always used to be so irritatingly vain, had now degenerated into almost an idiot’s indifference. She forgot, she wasn’t aware; above all, she didn’t care, she couldn’t any longer be bothered. Grotesquely dyed (in the hope, he supposed, of regaining some of the attractiveness which she could not help noticing that she had lost), the hair was greasy and uncombed. A smear of red paint, clumsily laid on, enlarged her lower lip into an asymmetrical shapelessness. A cigarette-end had burned a round hole in the eiderdown, and the feathers fluttered up like snowflakes each time she moved. The pillows were smudged with rouge and yolk of egg. There was a brown stain of coffee on the turned-back sheet. Between her body and the wall, the tray on which her dinner had been brought up stood precariously tilted. Still stained with gravy, a knife had slipped on to the counterpane.

With a sudden movement, Mrs Amberley crumpled up the paper and threw it from her. ‘That beast!’ she cried, in a voice that trembled with rage. ‘That beast! He absolutely forced me to put my money into this. And now look what’s

happened!’ The tears overflowed, carrying the black of her painted eyelashes in long sooty trickles down her cheeks.

‘He did it on purpose,’ she went on through her angry sobbing. ‘Just in order to harm me. He’s a sadist, really. He likes hurting people. He does it for pleasure.’

‘For profit,’ Anthony almost said; but checked himself. She seemed to derive some consolation from the thought that she had been swindled, not from vulgarly commercial motives, but gratuitously, because of a fiendishness allied to and springing from the passion of love. It would be unkind to deprive her of that illusion. Let the poor woman think the thoughts she found least painfully humiliating. Besides, the less she was contradicted and diverted, the sooner, it might be hoped, would she stop. Prudently as well as considerately, he contented himself with a non-committal nod.

‘When I think of all I did for that man!’ Mrs Amberley burst out. But while she recited her incoherent catalogue of generosities and kindnesses, Anthony could not help thinking of what the man had done for her; above all, of the terms in which Gerry was accustomed to describe what he had done. Gross, extravagantly cynical terms. Terms of an incredible blackguardism. One was startled, one was set free into sudden laughter; and one was ashamed that such inadmissible brutalities should contain any element of liberating truth. And yet they were true.

‘All the most intelligent people in London,’ Mrs Amberley was sobbing. ‘He met them all at my house.’

‘These old hags!’ Gerry Watchett’s voice sounded clearly in Anthony’s memory. ‘They’ll do anything to get it, absolutely anything.’

‘Not that he ever appreciated them,’ she went on. ‘He was too stupid for that, too barbarous.’

‘Not a bad old bitch really, if she gets enough of it to keep her quiet. The problem is to give her enough. It’s uphill work, I can tell you.’

The tone changed from anger to self-pity. ‘But what shall I do?’ she wailed. ‘What can I do? Without a penny. Living on charity.’

He tried to reassure her. There was still something. Quite a decent little sum, really. She would never starve. If she lived carefully, if she economized . . .

‘But I shall have to give up this house,’ she interrupted, and, when he agreed that of course she would have to give up, broke out into new and louder lamentations. Giving up the house was worse than being penniless and living on charity — worse, because more conceivable, a contingency nearer to the realities of her actual life. Without her pictures, without her furniture, how could she live? She was made physically ill by ugliness. And then small rooms — she developed claustrophobia in small rooms. And how could she possibly manage without her books? How did he expect her to work, when she was poor? For of course she was going to work; had already planned to write a critical study of the modern French novel. Yes, how did he expect her to do that, if he deprived her of her books?

Anthony stirred impatiently in his chair. ‘I don’t expect you to do anything,’ he said. ‘I’m simply telling you what you’ll find you’ve got to do.’

There was a long silence. Then, with a little smile that she tried to make ingratiating and appealing, ‘Now you’re angry with me,’ she said.

‘Not in the least. I’m merely asking you to face the facts.’ He rose, and feeling himself in danger of being inextricably entangled in Mary’s misfortune, symbolically asserted his right to be free by walking restlessly up and down the room. ‘I ought to talk to her about the morphia,’ he was thinking; ‘try to persuade her to go into a home and get cured. For her own sake. For the sake of poor Helen.’ But he knew Mary. She’d start to protest, she’d scream, she’d fly into a rage. It would be like a public-house brawl. Or worse, much worse, he thought with a shudder, she’d repent, she’d make promises, she’d melt into tears. He would find himself her only friend, her moral support for life. In the end, he said nothing. ‘It wouldn’t do any good,’ he assured himself. ‘It never does do any good with these morphia cases.’ ‘One’s got to come to terms with reality,’ he said aloud. Meaningless platitude — but what else was there to say?

Unexpectedly, with a submissive alacrity that he found positively disquieting, she agreed with him. Oh, absolutely agreed! It was no use crying over spilt milk.

No use building castles in the air. What was needed was a plan — lots of plans — serious, practical, sensible plans for the new life. She smiled at him with an air of connivance, as though they were a pair of conspirators.

Reluctantly, and with mistrust, he accepted her invitation to sit on the edge of the bed. The plans unfolded themselves — serious to a degree. A little flat in Hampstead. Or else a tiny house in one of those slummy streets off the King's Road, Chelsea. She could still give an occasional party, very cheaply. The real friends would come, in spite of the cheapness — wouldn't they? she insisted with rather a pathetic anxiety to be reassured.

'Of course,' he had to say; though it wasn't the cheapness that would put them off; it was the dirt, the squalor, the morphia, this sickening smell of ether on the breath.

'One can have bottle parties,' she was saying. 'It'll be fun!' Her face brightened. 'What sort of bottle will you bring, Anthony?' And before he could answer, 'We shall get infinitely tight with all those mixed drinks,' she went on. 'Infinitely . . .' A moment later she had begun to tell him about the advances that George Wyvern had taken it into his head to make to her these days. Rather embarrassing, in the circumstances — seeing that Sally Wyvern was also . . . well! She smiled that enigmatic smile of hers, close-lipped and between half-shut eyelids. And what was really too extraordinary, even old Hugh Ledwidge had recently shown signs . . .

Anthony listened in astonishment. Those pathetically few real friends had been transformed, as though by magic, into positively a host of eager lovers. Did she seriously believe in her own inventions? But anyhow, he went on to think, it didn't seem to matter whether she believed in them or not. Even unbelieved, these fictions evidently had power to raise her spirits, to restore her, at least for the moment, to a state of cheerful self-confidence.

'That time in Paris,' she was saying intimately. 'Do you remember?'

But this was awful!

'The Hôtel des Saints-Pères.' Her voice deepened and vibrated with a subterranean laughter.

Anthony nodded without raising his head. She had obviously wanted him to echo her hint of significant mirth to take up the scabrous reference to that old joke of theirs about the Holy Fathers and their own amusements under that high ecclesiastical patronage. In their private language, ‘doing a slight Holy Father’, or, yet more idiomatically, ‘doing Holiers’, had signified ‘making love’. He frowned, feeling suddenly very angry. How did she dare . . . ?

The seconds passed. Making a desperate effort to fill the icy gulf of his silence. ‘We had a lot of fun,’ said Mary in a tone of sentimental reminiscence.

‘A lot,’ he repeated, as unemphatically as possible.

Suddenly she took his hand. ‘Dear Anthony!’

‘Oh, God,’ he thought, and tried, as politely as might be, to withdraw. But the clasp of those hot dry fingers never relaxed.

‘We were fools to quarrel,’ she went on. ‘Or rather, I was a fool.’

‘Not at all,’ he said politely.

‘That stupid bet,’ she shook her head. ‘And Sidney . . .’

‘You did what you wanted to do.’

‘I did what I didn’t want to do,’ she answered quickly. ‘One’s always doing things one doesn’t want — stupidly, out of sheer perversity. One chooses the worse just because it is the worse. Hyperion to a satyr — and therefore the satyr.’

‘But for certain purposes,’ he couldn’t resist saying, ‘the satyr may be more satisfactory.’

Ignoring his words, Mary sighed and shut her eyes.

‘Doing what one doesn’t want,’ she repeated, as though to herself. ‘Always doing what one doesn’t want.’ She released his hand, and, clasping her own behind her head, leaned back against the pillows in the attitude, the known and familiar attitude, that in the Hôtel des Saints-Pères had been so delicious in its graceful indolence, so wildly exciting because of that white round throat stretched back like a victim’s, those proffered breasts, lifted and taut beneath the lace. But today the lace was soiled and torn, the breasts hung tired under their

own weight, the victim throat was no more a smooth column of white flesh, but a withered, wrinkled, hollow between starting tendons.

She opened her eyes, and, with a start, he recognized the look she gave him as the same, identically the same look, at once swooning and cynical, humorous and languidly abandoned, as had invited him, irresistibly then, in Paris, fifteen years ago. It was the look of 1913 in the face of 1928 — painfully out of its context. He stared at her for a second or two, appalled; then managed to break the silence.

‘I shall have to go.’

But before he could rise, Mrs Amberley had quickly leaned forward and laid her hands on his shoulders.

‘No, don’t go. You mustn’t go.’ She tried to repeat that laughingly voluptuous invitation, but could not prevent a profound anxiety from showing in her eyes.

Anthony shook his head and, in spite of that sickening smell of ether, did his best to smile as he lied about the supper-party he had promised to join at eleven. Gently, but with a firm and decided movement, he lifted her confining hands and stood up by the side of the bed.

‘Good night, dear Mary!’ The tone of his voice was warm; he could afford to be affectionate, now. ‘Bon courage!’ he squeezed her hands; then, bending down, kissed first one, then the other. Now that he was on his feet, and with the road to freedom clear before him, he felt at liberty to plunge into almost any emotional extravagance. But, instead of taking the cue, Mary Amberley returned him a look that had now become fixed and as though stony with unwavering misery. The mask he had adjusted to be so radiant with whimsical affectionateness seemed all of a sudden horribly out of keeping with the real situation. He could feel its irrelevance, physically, in the muscles of his face. Fool, hypocrite, coward! But it was almost at a run that he made towards the door and hurried down the stairs.

‘If a woman,’ Helen was reading in the Encyclopedia, ‘administers to herself any poison or other noxious thing, or unlawfully uses any instrument or other means to procure her own miscarriage, she is guilty of . . .’ The sound of

Anthony's feet on the stairs caught her ear. She rose, and quickly walked to the door and out on to the landing.

'Well?' She smiled no greeting in answer to his, simulated no pleasure at seeing him. The face she lifted was as tragically naked of all the conventional grimaces as her mother's had been.

'But what's the matter, Helen?' he was startled into exclaiming. She looked at him for a few seconds in silence, then shook her head and began to ask him about those shares, the whole financial position.

Obviously, he was thinking as he answered her questions, one would expect her to find it all very upsetting. But upsetting to this point — he looked at her again: no — one wouldn't have expected that. It wasn't as if the girl had ever had a wild devotion for her mother. In the teeth of Mary's ferocious egotism, how could she? And after all, it was nearly a year since the wretched woman had started on her morphia. One would think that by this time the horror would have lost some of its intensity. And yet he had never seen an unhappier face. Such youth, such freshness — it wasn't right that they should be associated with an expression of so intense a despair. The sight of her made him feel somehow guilty — guiltily responsible. But when he made another gesture of inquiring sympathy, she only shook her head again and turned away.

'You'd better go,' she said.

Anthony hesitated a moment, then went. After all, she wanted him to go. Still feeling guilty, but with a sense of profound relief, he closed the front door behind him, and, drawing a deep breath, set off towards the Underground station.

Helen went back to her volume of the Encyclopedia '. . . to procure her own miscarriage, she is guilty of felony. The punishment for this offence is penal servitude for life, or not less than three years, or imprisonment for not more than two years. If the child is born alive . . .' But they didn't say which the proper poisons were, nor what sort of instruments you had to use, and how. Only this stupid nonsense about penal servitude. Yet another loophole of escape had closed against her. It was as though the whole world had conspired to shut her in with her own impossibly appalling secret.

Melodiously, the clock in the back drawing-room struck eleven. Helen rose, put the heavy volume back in its place, and went upstairs to her mother's room.

With an unwontedly careful precision of movement, Mrs Amberley was engaged, when her daughter entered, in filling a hypodermic syringe from a little glass ampoule. She started as the door opened, looked up, made a movement as if to hide syringe and ampoule under the bedclothes, then, fearful of spilling any of the precious liquor, checked herself in the midst of her gesture.

'Go away!' she called angrily. 'Why do you come in without knocking? I won't have you coming in my room without knocking,' she repeated more shrilly, glad of the excuse she had discovered for her fury.

Helen stood for a second or two in the doorway, quite still, as if incredulous of the evidence of her own eyes; then hurried across the room.

'Give those things to me,' she said, holding out her hand.

Mrs Amberley shrank back towards the wall. 'Go away!' she shouted.

'But you promised . . .'

'I didn't.'

'You did, Mummy.'

'I did not. And, anyhow, I shall do what I like.'

Without speaking, Helen reached out and caught her mother by the wrist. Mrs Amberley screamed so loudly that, fearful lest the servants should come down to see what was the matter, Helen relaxed her grip.

Mrs Amberley stopped screaming; but the look she turned on Helen was terrifying in its malevolence. 'If you make me spill any of this,' she said in a voice that trembled with rage, 'I shall kill you. Kill you,' she repeated.

They looked at one another for a moment without speaking. It was Helen who broke the silence. 'You'd like to kill me,' she said slowly, 'because I don't let you kill yourself.' She shrugged her shoulders. 'Well, I suppose if you really want to kill yourself . . .' She left the sentence unfinished.

Mrs Amberley stared at her in silence. 'If you really want . . .' She remembered the words she had spoken to Anthony only a few minutes since, and suddenly the tears ran down her cheeks. She was overwhelmed with self-pity.

‘Do you think I want to do this?’ she said brokenly. ‘I hate it. I absolutely hate it. But I can’t help it.’

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, Helen put her arm round her mother’s shoulders. ‘Mummy darling!’ she implored. ‘Don’t cry. It’ll be all right.’ She was profoundly moved.

‘It’s all Gerry’s fault,’ Mrs Amberley cried; and without noticing the little shuddering start Helen gave, ‘everything’s his fault,’ she went on. ‘Everything. I always knew he was a beast. Even when I cared for him most.’

As though her mother had suddenly become a stranger whom it was not right to be touching so intimately, Helen withdrew her encircling arm. ‘You cared for him?’ she whispered incredulously. ‘In that way?’

Answering quite a different question, parrying a reproach that had never been made. ‘I couldn’t help it,’ Mrs Amberley replied. ‘It was like this.’ She made a little movement with the hand that held the hypodermic syringe.

‘You mean,’ said Helen, speaking very slowly, and as though overcoming an almost invisible reluctance, ‘you mean he was . . . he was your lover?’

The strangeness of the tone aroused Mrs Amberley, for the first time since their conversation had begun, to something like a consciousness of her daughter’s real personal existence. Turning, she looked at Helen with an expression of astonishment. ‘You didn’t know?’ Confronted by that extraordinary pallor, those uncontrollably trembling lips, the older woman was seized with a sudden compunction. ‘But, darling, I’m sorry. I didn’t imagine . . . You’re still so young; you don’t understand. You can’t . . . But where are you going? Come back! Helen!’

The door slammed. Mrs Amberley made a move to follow her daughter, then thought better of it, and, instead, resumed the interrupted task of filling her hypodermic syringe.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE. August 4th 1934

RETURNED DEPRESSED FROM an evening with Helen and half a dozen of her young political friends. Such a passion for ‘liquidating’ the people who don’t agree with them! And such a sincere conviction that liquidation is necessary!

Revolting — but only to be expected. Regard the problem of reform exclusively as a matter of politics and economics, and you must approve and practise liquidation.

Consider recent history. Industrialism has grown pari passu with population. Now, where markets are expanding, the two besetting problems of all industrial societies solve themselves. New inventions may create technological unemployment; but expanding markets cure it as it’s made. Each individual may possess inadequate purchasing power; but the total number of individuals is steadily rising. Many small purchasing powers do as much as fewer big ones.

Our population is now stationary, will soon decline. Shrinkage instead of expansion of markets. Therefore, no more automatic solution of the economic problems. Birth control necessitates the use of coordinating political intelligence. There must be a large-scale plan. Otherwise the machine won’t work. In other words, politicians will have to be about twenty times as intelligent as heretofore. Will the supply of intelligence be equal to the demand?

And of course, intelligence, as Miller’s always insisting, isn’t isolated. The act of intelligently planning modifies the emotions of the planners. Consider English politics. We’ve made plenty of reforms — without ever accepting the principles underlying them. (Compare the king’s titles with his present position. Compare our protestations that we’ll never have anything to do with socialism with the realities of state control.) There are no large-scale plans in English politics, and hardly any thinking in terms of first principles. With what results? Among others, that English politics have been on the whole very good-natured.

The reason is simple. Deal with practical problems as they arise and without reference to first principles; politics are a matter of higgling. Now higglers lose tempers, but don't normally regard one another as fiends in human form. But this is precisely what men of principle and systematic planners can't help doing. A principle is, by definition, right; a plan for the good of the people. Axioms from which it logically follows that those who disagree with you and won't help to realize your plan are enemies of goodness and humanity. No longer men and women, but personifications of evil, fiends incarnate. Killing men and women is wrong; but killing fiends is a duty. Hence the Holy Office, hence Robespierre and the Ogpu. Men with strong religious and revolutionary faith, men with well-thought-out plans for improving the lot of their fellows, whether in this world or the next, have been more systematically and cold-bloodedly cruel than any others. Thinking in terms of first principles entails acting with machine-guns. A government with a comprehensive plan for the betterment of society is a government that uses torture. Per contra, if you never consider principles and have no plan, but deal with situations as they arise, piecemeal, you can afford to have unarmed policemen, liberty of speech, and habeas corpus. Admirable. But what happens when an industrial society learns (a) how to make technological advances at a constantly accelerating speed, and (b) to prevent conception? Answer: it must either plan itself in accordance with general political and economic principles, or else break down. But governments with principles and plans have generally been tyrannies making use of police spies and terrorism. Must we resign ourselves to slavery and torture for the sake of coordination?

Breakdown on the one hand, Inquisition and Ogpu rule on the other. A real dilemma, if the plan is mainly economic and political. But think in terms of individual men, women, and children, not of States, Religions, Economic Systems, and suchlike abstractions: there is then a hope of passing between the horns. For if you begin by considering concrete people, you see at once that freedom from coercion is a necessary condition of their developing into full-grown human beings; that the form of economic prosperity which consists in possessing unnecessary objects doesn't make for individual well-being; that a

leisure filled with passive amusements is not a blessing; that the conveniences of urban life are bought at a high physiological and mental price; that an education which allows you to use yourself wrongly is almost valueless; that a social organization resulting in individuals being forced, every few years, to go out and murder another must be wrong. And so on. Whereas if you start from the State, the Faith, the Economic System, there is a complete transvaluation of values. Individuals must murder one another, because the interests of the Nation demand it; must be educated to think of ends and disregard means, because the schoolmasters are there and don't know of any other method; must live in towns, must have leisure to read the newspapers and go to the movies, must be encouraged to buy things they don't need, because the industrial system exists and has to be kept going; must be coerced and enslaved, because otherwise they might think for themselves and give trouble to their rulers.

The sabbath was made for man. But man now behaves like the Pharisees and insists that he is made for all the things — science, industry, nation, money, religion, schools — which were really made for him. Why? Because he is so little aware of his own interests as a human being that he feels irresistibly tempted to sacrifice himself to these idols. There is no remedy except to become aware of one's interests as a human being, and, having become aware, to learn to act on that awareness. Which means learning to use the self and learning to direct the mind. It's almost wearisome, the way one always comes back to the same point. Wouldn't it be nice, for a change, if there were another way out of our difficulties! A short cut. A method requiring no greater personal effort than recording a vote or ordering some 'enemy of society' to be shot. A salvation from outside, like a dose of calomel.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX. July 19th 1914

IN THE TRAIN going north, Anthony thought of what was in store for him. Within the next two days, or at the outside three, Brian would have to be told about what had happened, and a letter would have to be written to Joan. In what words? And what excuses should he make for himself? Should he tell the whole truth about his bet with Mary? For himself, the truth had certain advantages; if he told it, he could throw most of the blame for what had happened on Mary — but at the risk, he went on to think, of seeming miserably feeble. And that was not the only disadvantage; for Joan, the truth would be intolerably humiliating. However much blame he threw on Mary, the insult to Joan would remain. If only he could tell the truth to Brian and something else to Joan!

But that wasn't possible. They would have to be told the same story, and, for Joan's sake, a story that wasn't true. But what story? Which explanation of the facts would throw least discredit upon himself and inflict the least humiliation on Joan? On the whole, he decided the best thing to say would be that he had lost his head — been carried away by a sudden impulse, an impulse that he had subsequently seen the madness of and regretted. It was somebody else who had kissed her: that was what he would write to Joan. Somebody else — but not too else. She wouldn't like it if she were made to feel that it was a mere momentary baboon who had behaved like that in the unlighted drawing-room. The person who had kissed her would have to be partially himself. Enough himself to have been all the time very fond of her, profoundly sorry for her; but someone else to the extent of allowing the circumstances of the evening to transform the affection and sympathy into — what? Love? Desire? No, he would have to avoid saying anything so specific; would have to talk about confusions, temporary insanities spoiling a relationship which had been so fine, and so forth. Meanwhile he could only say that he was sorry and ashamed; that he felt, more

strongly than ever now, that Brian was the only man who was worthy of her, that the difficulties that had arisen between herself and Brian were only temporary and would soon . . . And all the rest.

Yes, the letter ought to be fairly easy. The trouble was that he would be expected to follow it by interviews and explanations; that he would have to bear reproaches, listen to confidences, perhaps defend himself against declarations of passion. And in the interval there would be Brian to talk to — and with Brian the thing would begin with those interviews; and the more he thought about those interviews, the harder did he find it to foresee the part that Brian would play in them. Anthony imagined himself trying to make it clear that he wasn't in love, that Joan had only momentarily lost her head as he had lost his, that nothing had changed, and that all Brian had to do was to go and kiss her himself. But would he succeed in making Brian believe him? The man being what he was, it seemed to him probable — seemed more probable the more he thought about it — that he would fail. Brian was the sort of man who would imagine that one couldn't kiss a woman under any compulsion less urgent than the deepest, most heart-felt love. He would be told that Joan had been kissed and had returned the kisses; and no amount of talk about lost heads would persuade him that it wasn't a serious matter of love at its intensest pitch. And then, Anthony speculated, what would the man do then? He'd be hurt, of course, he'd feel betrayed: but the chances were that there'd be no recriminations. No, something much worse might happen. Brian would probably take all the blame on himself; would renounce all his rights, would refuse to believe it when Anthony swore that he wasn't in love and that it had all been a kind of bad joke; would insist, just because it would be so agonizing a sacrifice, that Joan should go to the man she really loved and who really loved her. And then, suppose that, on her side, Joan agreed! And it was probable, Anthony thought with dismay as he remembered her response to his kisses, it was almost certain even, that she would do so. Appalling prospect! He couldn't face it. And why should he face it, after all? He could borrow on his securities — enough to get out of the country and stay away; for six months, for a year if necessary. And while the midlands streamed

past the window, he leaned back with closed eyes, picturing himself in Italy or, if Italy wasn't far enough from England, in Greece, in Egypt, even in India, Malaya, Java. With Mary; for of course Mary would have to come too, at least for part of the time. She could dump the children with some relation; and Egypt, he reflected, practical in his day-dreaming, Egypt in the off-season was quite cheap, and this war scare of course was nothing. Was Luxor as impressive as it looked in the photographs? And the Parthenon? And Paestum? And what of the tropics? In imagination he sailed from island to island in the Aegean; smoked hashish in the slums of Cairo, ate bhang in Benares; did a slight Joseph Conrad in the East Indies, a slight Loti even, in spite of the chromolithograph style, among the copper-coloured girls and the gardenias, and, though he still found it impossible to like the man as much as Mary did, a slight Gauguin in the South Seas. These future and hypothetical escapes were escapes also here and now, so that for a long time in his corner of the compartment he quite forgot the reason for his projected flight into the exotic. The memory of what had happened, the apprehensive anticipation of what was going to happen, returned only with the realization that the train was crossing Shap Fell, and that in less than an hour he would be talking to Brian on the platform at Ambleside. All the old questions propounded themselves with more desperate urgency. What should he say? How? On what occasion? And what would be Brian's response? What Joan's when she got his letter? Horrible questions! But why had he put himself in the position of having to provide or receive the answers to them? What a fool he had been not to take flight at once! By this time he could have been at Venice, in Calabria, on a ship in the Mediterranean. Beyond the reach of letters. Secure and happy in complete ignorance of the results of his actions. And free. Instead of which he had stupidly stayed where he was and consented to be made the slave of the circumstances his folly had created. But even now, at the eleventh hour, it wasn't too late. He could get out at the next station, make his way back to London, raise a little money and be off within twenty-four hours. But when the train stopped at Kendal, he made no move. The taking of so sudden and momentous a decision was something from which he shrank. He hated suffering,

and looked forward with dread to what the next few days and weeks held in store for him. But his fear of suffering was less than his fear of action. He found it easier to accept passively what came than to make a decisive choice and act upon it.

As the train rolled on again, he thought of all the reasons why it had been right for him not to take that decision. Brian was counting on him, would be so disturbed by his non-arrival that he might easily rush down to London to find out what had happened, see Joan and learn everything, at once. And how should he explain things to his father? Besides, there was no reason to think that Mary would come with him; she had made her arrangements for the summer and wouldn't, perhaps couldn't, alter them. And while he was away, heaven only knew what rivals would present themselves. Besides flight would be cowardly, he went on to assure himself, and immediately afterwards was reflecting that he could probably escape from his difficulties just as effectively if he stayed in England. A little tact, a bit of passive resistance . . .

Brian was waiting on the platform when the train drew in, and at the sight of him Anthony felt a sudden pang of pitying distress. For between the man and his clothes there was a startling and painful incongruousness. The rough homespun jacket and breeches, the stockings, the nailed boots, the bulging rucksack were emblems of energy and rustic good health. But the Brian who wore these emblems was the living denial of their significance. The long face was emaciated and sallow. The nose seemed larger than in the past, the eye-sockets deeper, the cheek-bones more prominent. And when he spoke, he stammered more uncontrollably than ever.

'But what is the matter with you?' cried Anthony, laying a hand on his friend's shoulder. 'You look wretched.'

Half touched by this display of a genuine solicitude (it was extraordinary, he reflected, how charming Anthony could unexpectedly be), half annoyed by having been, as he felt, found out, Brian shook his head and mumbled something about being a bit tired and in need of a rest.

But his idea of a rest, it turned out, was to walk twenty miles a day up and down the steepest hills he could find.

Anthony looked at him disapprovingly. ‘You ought to be out in a deck-chair,’ he said, but could see, as he spoke, that his advice was unwelcome. With Brian it was a kind of dogma that taking violent exercise in mountain scenery was intrinsically good. Good, because of Wordsworth; because, in his mother’s version of Christianity, landscape took the place of revelation.

‘I I-like w-walking,’ Brian insisted. ‘S-saw a d-dipper yesterday. The p-place is f-full of nice b-birds.’

In his distress at finding his friend so ill, Anthony had forgotten all about Joan and the events of the last days; but those birds (those bö-öds, those piddle-warblers) reminded him violently of what had happened. Feeling suddenly ashamed, as though he had been caught in some unwordly display of hypocrisy, Anthony withdrew his hand from Brian’s shoulder. They made their way in silence along the platform and out into the street. There they halted for a discussion. Brian wanted to send the luggage by the carrier and walk to their cottage in Langdale. Anthony proposed that they should take a car.

‘You’ve no business to walk a step further today,’ he said; then, when the other protested that he hadn’t taken enough exercise, changed ground and insisted that it was he who was tired after the journey, and that anyhow he couldn’t walk because he was wearing unsuitable clothes and shoes. After a final plea to be allowed to walk back to Langdale by himself, Brian was overruled and submitted to the car. They drove away.

Breaking a long silence, ‘Have you seen J-joan lately?’ Brian asked.

The other nodded without speaking.

‘How w-was she?’

‘Quite well,’ Anthony found himself replying in the brightly vague tone in which one answers questions about the health of those in whom one takes no particular interest. The lie — for it was a lie by omission — had come to him of its own accord. By means of it, his mind had defended itself against Brian’s question as automatically and promptly as his body, by blinking, by lifting an

arm, by starting back, would have defended itself against an advancing fist. But the words were no sooner spoken than he regretted their brevity and the casualness with which they had been uttered, than he felt that he ought at once to qualify them with additional information, in another and more serious tone. He ought to rush in immediately, and without further delay make a clean breast of everything. But time passed; he could not bring himself to speak; and within a few seconds he had begun already to dignify his cowardice with the name of consideration, he was already assuring himself that it would be wrong, Brian's health being what it was, to speak out at once, that the truly friendly thing was to wait and choose an occasion, tomorrow perhaps or the day after, when Brian was in a better state to receive the news.

'You d-don't think she was w-worrying?' Brian went on. 'I m-mean ab-bout all this delay in our g-getting married?'

'Well, of course,' Anthony admitted, 'she's not altogether happy about it.'

Brian shook his head. 'N-nor am I. But I th-think it's r-right; and I th-think in the l-long r-run she'll see it was r-right.' Then, after a silence, 'If only one were a-absolutely certain,' he said. 'S-sometimes I w-wonder if it isn't a k-kind of s-selfishness.'

'What is?'

'St-sticking to p-principles, reg-gardless of p-people. P-people — o-other p-people, I mean — p-perhaps they're m-more imp-portant e-even than what one kn-knows is a r-right p-principle. But if you d-don't st-stick to your p-principles . . .' he hesitated, turned a puzzled and unhappy face towards Anthony, then looked away again: 'well, where are you?' he concluded despairingly.

'The sabbath is made for man,' said Anthony; and thought resentfully what a fool Brian had been not to take whatever money he could get and marry out of hand. If Joan had been safely married, there would have been no confidences, no bet, no kiss, and none of the appalling consequences of kissing. And then, of course, there was poor Joan. He went on to feel what was almost righteous indignation against Brian for not having grasped the fundamental Christian principle that the sabbath is made for man, not man for the sabbath. But was it

made for man, an intrusive voice suddenly began asking, to the extent of man's having the right, for a bet, to disturb the equilibrium of another person's feelings, to break up a long-established relationship, to betray a friend?

Brian meanwhile was thinking of the occasion, a couple of months before, when he and Joan had talked over the matter with his mother.

'You still think,' she had asked, 'that you oughtn't to take the money?' and went on, when he told her that his opinions hadn't changed, to set forth all the reasons why it wouldn't be wrong for him to take it. The system might be unjust, and it might be one's duty to alter it; but meanwhile one could use one's financial advantages to help the individual victims of the system, to forward the cause of desirable reform.

'That's what I've always felt about it,' his mother concluded.

And had been right, he insisted; and that he didn't dream of criticizing what she had done, of even thinking it criticizable. But that was because her circumstances had been so different from his. A man, he had opportunities to make his own living such as she had never had. Besides, she had been left with responsibilities; whereas he . . .

'But what about Joan?' she interrupted, laying her hand affectionately, as she spoke, on Joan's arm. 'Isn't she a responsibility?'

He dropped his eyes and, feeling that it was not for him to answer the question, said nothing.

There were long seconds of an uncomfortably expectant silence, while he wondered whether Joan would speak and what, if she didn't, he should say and do.

Then, to his relief, 'After all,' Joan brought out at last in a curiously flat and muffled voice, 'Brian was a child then. But I'm grown up, I'm responsible for myself. And I'm able to understand his reasons.'

He raised his head and looked at her with a smile of gratitude. But her face was cold and as though remote; she met his eyes for only a moment, then looked away.

'You understand his reasons?' his mother questioned.

Joan nodded.

‘And you approve them?’

She hesitated for a moment, then nodded again. ‘If Brian thinks it’s right,’ she began, and broke off.

His mother looked from one to the other. ‘I think you’re a pair of rather heroic young people,’ she said, and the tone of her voice, so beautiful, so richly vibrant with emotion, imparted to the words a heightened significance. He felt that he had been confirmed in his judgement.

But later, he remembered with a pained perplexity, later, when Joan and he were alone together and he tried to thank her for what she had done, she turned on him with a bitterly resentful anger.

‘You love your own ideas more than you love me. Much more.’

Brian sighed and, shaking himself out of his long distraction, looked at the trees by the side of the road, at the mountains so sumptuously shadowed and illumined by the late afternoon sunlight, at the marbly island of clouds in the sky — looked at them, saw that they were beautiful, and found their beauty hopelessly irrelevant.

‘I wish to G-god,’ he said, ‘I knew what to d-do.’

So did Anthony, though he did not say so.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN. Autumn 1933

IT TOOK LONGER than Mark expected to dispose of his business, and at moments, during the long weeks that preceded their departure, the temptation to throw up the whole ridiculous enterprise and scuttle back into the delicious other world of Mediterranean sunshine and abstract ideas became, for Anthony, almost irresistible.

‘What are you really going for?’ he asked resentfully.

‘Fun,’ was all the answer that Mark condescended to give.

‘And your Don Jorge,’ Anthony insisted. ‘What does he hope to achieve by this little revolution of his?’

‘His own greater glory.’

‘But the peasants, the Indians?’

‘They’ll be exactly where they were before, where they always will be: underneath.’

‘And yet you think it’s worth while to go and help this Jorge of yours?’

‘Worth while for me.’ Mark smiled anatomically. ‘And worth while for you. Very much worth while for you,’ he insisted.

‘But not for the peons, I gather.’

‘It never is. What did the French peons get out of their revolution? Or our friends, the Russians, for that matter? A few years of pleasant intoxication. Then the same old treadmill. Gilded, perhaps; repainted. But in essentials the old machine.’

‘And you expect me to come along with you for fun?’ The thought of the Mediterranean and his books heightened Anthony’s indignation. ‘It’s crazy, it’s abominable.’

‘In other words,’ said Mark, ‘you’re afraid. Well, why not? But if you are, for God’s sake say so. Have the courage of your cowardice.’

How he had hated Mark for telling him the home truths he knew so well! If it hadn't been for Mr Beavis, and that interview with Helen, and finally Beppo Bowles, perhaps he would have had the courage of his cowardice. But they made it impossible for him to withdraw. There was his father, first of all, still deep in the connubial burrow, among the petticoats and the etymologies and the smell of red-haired women — but agitated, as Anthony had never seen him before, hurt, indignant, bitterly resentful. The presidency of the Philological Society, which ought, without any question, to have come to him, had gone instead to Jenkins. Jenkins, if you please! A mere ignorant popularizer, the very antithesis of a real scholar. A charlatan, a philological confidence trickster, positively (to use an American colloquialism) a 'crook'.

Jenkins's election had taken Mr Beavis long strides towards death. From being a man much younger than his years, he had suddenly come to look his age. An old man; and tired into the bargain, eroded from within.

'I'm worried,' Pauline had confided to Anthony. 'He's making himself ill. And for something so childish, really. I can't make him see that it doesn't matter. Or rather I can't make him feel it. Because he sees it all right, but goes on worrying all the same.'

Even in the deepest sensual burrow, Anthony reflected as he walked back to his rooms, even in the snuggest of intellectual other-worlds, fate could find one out. And suddenly he perceived that, having spent all his life trying to react away from the standards of his father's universe, he had succeeded only in becoming precisely what his father was — a man in a burrow. With this small difference, that in his case the burrow happened to be intermittently adulterous instead of connubial all the time; and that the ideas were about societies and not words. For the moment, he was out of his burrow — had been chased out, as though by ferrets. But it would be easy and was already a temptation to return. To return and be snug, be safe. No, not safe; that was the point. At any moment a Jenkins might be elected to some presidency or other, and then, defenceless in one's burrow of thought and sensuality, one would be at the mercy of any childish

passion that might arise. Outside, perhaps, one might learn to defend oneself against such contingencies. He decided to go with Mark.

But in the succeeding days the temptation kept coming back. In spite of the spectacle of Mr Beavis's self-destroying childishness, the quiet life seemed immensely attractive. 'Mark's mad,' he kept assuring himself. 'We're doing something stupid and wrong. And after all, my sociology is important. It'll help people to think clearly.' Wasn't it (ridiculous word!) a 'duty' to go on with it? But then, more than six weeks after his return to London, he saw Helen and Beppo Bowles — saw them in the course of a single afternoon. The meeting with Helen was a chance one. It was in the French Room at the National Gallery. Anthony was stooping to look closely into Cézanne's Mont Sainte Victoire, when he became aware that two other visitors had halted just behind him. He shifted a little to one side, so as to let them see the picture, and continued his meticulous examination of the brushwork.

A few seconds passed; then, very slowly and with a foreign accent, a man's voice said: 'See now here how the nineteenth-century petit bourgeois tried to escape from industrialism. Why must he paint such landscapes, so romantic? Because he will forget the new methods of production. Because he will not think of the proletariat. That is why.'

'Yes, I suppose that is the reason,' said another voice.

With a start, Anthony recognized it as Helen's. 'What shall I do?' he was wondering, when the voice spoke again.

'Why, it's Anthony!' A hand touched his arm.

He straightened himself up and turned towards her, making the gestures and noises appropriate to delighted astonishment. That face, which he had last seen alternately stony and bright with mockery, then in the rapt agony of pleasure, then dabbled with blood and pitiably disintegrated by a grief extreme beyond expression, finally hard as it had been at first, harder, more rigidly a stone — that face was now beautifully alive, and tender, illuminated from within by a kind of secure joy. She looked at him without the least trace of embarrassment. It

was as though the past had been completely abolished, as though, for her, only the present existed and were real.

‘This is Ekki Giesebrecht,’ she said.

The fair-haired young man beside her bent stiffly forwards as they shook hands.

‘He had to escape from Germany,’ she was explaining. ‘They would have killed him for his politics.’

It was not jealousy that he felt as he looked from one glad face to the other — not jealousy, but an unhappiness so acute that it was like a physical pain. A pain that endured and that was not in the least diminished by the solemn absurdity of the little lecture which Helen now delivered on art as a manifestation of class interests. Listening, he could laugh to himself, he could reflect with amusement on love’s fantastic by-products in matters of taste, political opinions, religious beliefs. But behind the laughter, beneath the ironical reflections, that pain of unhappiness persisted.

He refused her invitation to have tea with them.

‘I’ve promised to go and see Beppo,’ he exclaimed.

‘Give him my love,’ she said, and went on to ask if, since his return, he had met Hugh.

Anthony shook his head.

‘We’re parting company, you know.’

Making an effort to smile, ‘All good wishes for the divorce,’ he said, and hurried away.

Walking through the smoky dimness of the afternoon, he thought of that softly radiant face of hers, and felt, along with the pain of unhappiness, a renewal of that other, profounder pain of dissatisfaction with himself. Since his arrival in London he had led his ordinary London life — the lunches with men of learning and affairs, the dinners where women kept the conversation more gossipy and amusing — and the easy, meaningless successes, which his talents and a certain natural charm always allowed him to score at such gatherings, had made him all but completely forget his dissatisfaction, had masked the pain of it,

as a drug will mask neuralgia or toothache. This meeting with Helen had instantaneously neutralized the soothing drug and left him defenceless against a pain no whit diminished by the temporary anodyne — rather, indeed, intensified by it. For the realization that he had permitted himself to be soothed by an opiate of such poor quality was a new cause for dissatisfaction added to the old. And then to think that he had been seriously considering the idea of returning to the old quiet life! So quietly squalid, so quietly inhuman and, for all the expense of thought it entailed, so quietly mad. Mark's enterprise might be stupid and even disgraceful; but, however bad, it was still preferable to that quietude of work and occasional detached sensuality beside the Mediterranean.

Standing at the door of Beppo's flat, he heard the sound of voices — Beppo's and another man's. He rang the bell. Time passed. The door remained unopened. The voices talked on, inarticulately, but with shrill squeaks on Beppo's side and, on that of the stranger, a crescendo of gruff barks which proclaimed that they were quarrelling. He rang again. There were a few more squeaks and shouts; then the sound of hurrying feet. The door was flung open, and there stood Beppo. The face was flushed, the bald crown shiny with perspiration. Behind him, very upright and soldierly in his carriage, appeared a rather coarsely handsome young man, with a small moustache and carefully oiled wavy brown hair, dressed in a blue serge suit of extreme and somehow improbable smartness.

'Come in,' said Beppo rather breathlessly.

'Am I disturbing you?'

'No, no. My friend was just going — this is Mr Simpson, by the way — just going.'

'Was he?' asked the young man in a significant voice and with a Nottinghamshire accent. 'I hadn't known he was.'

'Perhaps I'd better go,' Anthony suggested.

'No, please don't, please don't.' There was a note in Beppo's voice of almost desperate appeal.

The young man laughed. 'He wants protection — that's what it is. Thinks he's going to be blackmailed. And I could if I wanted to.' He looked at Anthony

with knowing, insolent eyes. ‘But I don’t want to.’ He assumed an expression that was meant to be one of lofty moral indignation. ‘I wouldn’t do it for a thousand pounds. It’s a skunk’s game, that’s what I say.’ From being loftily general, the moral indignation came down to earth and focused itself on Beppo. ‘But a man’s got no business to be mean,’ he went on. ‘That’s a skunk’s game too.’ He pointed an accusing finger. ‘A mean, dirty swine. That’s what you are. I’ve said it before, and I say it again. And I don’t care who hears me. Because I can prove it. Yes, and you know I can. A mean dirty swine.’

‘All right, all right,’ Beppo cried, in the tone of one who makes unconditional surrender. Catching Anthony by the arm, ‘Go into the sitting-room, will you,’ he begged.

Anthony did as he was told. Outside in the hall, a few almost whispered sentences were exchanged. Then, after a silence, the front door slammed, and Beppo, pale and distracted, entered the room. With one hand he was wiping his forehead; but it was only after he had sat down that he noticed what he was holding in the other. The fat white fingers were closed round his wallet. Embarrassed, he put the compromising object away in his breast pocket. Then, fizzling explosively in misery as he fizzled in mirth, ‘It’s only money that they’re after,’ he burst out like an opened ginger-beer bottle. ‘You’ve seen it. Why should I try to hide it? Only money.’ And he rambled on, popping, squeaking, fizzling in almost incoherent denunciation of ‘them’, and commiseration for himself. Yes, he was doubly to be pitied — pitied for what he had to suffer because of ‘their’ mercenary attitude, when the thing he was looking for was love for love’s and adventure for adventure’s sake; pitied also for that growing incapacity to find the least satisfaction in any amorous experience that was not wholly new. Increasingly, repetition was becoming the enemy. Repetition killed what he called the frisson. Unspeakable tragedy. He, who so longed for tenderness, for understanding, for companionship, was debarred from ever getting what he wanted. To have an affair with somebody of one’s own class, somebody one could talk to, had come to be out of the question. But how could there be real tenderness without the sensual relationship? With

‘them’, the relationship was possible, was wildly desirable. But tenderness could no more flourish without communication than it could flourish without sensuality. And sensuality entirely divorced from communication and tenderness seemed now to be possible only under the stimulus of a constant change of object. There had to be another of ‘them’ each time. For that he was to be pitied; but the situation had its romantic side. Or at any rate might have it — used to have it. Nowadays, Beppo complained, ‘they’ had changed, were becoming mercenary, frankly rapacious, mere prostitutes.

‘You saw just now,’ he said, ‘the sordidness of it, the lowness!’ His misery bubbled over as though under an inner pressure of carbonic acid gas. In his agitation he heaved himself out of his chair and began to walk up and down the room, exposing to Anthony’s eyes, now the bulging waistcoat, the lavish tie from Sulka’s, the face with its pendant of chins, the bald and shining crown, now the broad seat of pale check trousers, the black jacket rising pear-like to narrow shoulders, and below the central baldness that fuzz of pale brown hair, like a Florentine page’s, above the collar. ‘And I’m not mean. God knows, I’ve got plenty of other faults, but not that. Why can’t they understand that it isn’t meanness, that it’s a wish to . . . to . . .’ he hesitated, ‘well, to keep the thing on a human basis? A basis at least of romance, of adventure. Instead of that, they make these awful, humiliating scenes. Refusing to understand, absolutely refusing.’

He continued to walk up and down the room in silence. Anthony made no comment, but wondered inwardly how far poor old Beppo knew the truth or whether he too refused to understand — refused to understand that, to ‘them’, his ageing and unpalatable person could hardly be expected to seem romantic, that the only charm which remained to him, outside a certain good taste, and a facile intelligence which ‘they’ were not in a position to appreciate, was his money. Did he know all this? Yes, of course he did; it was unavoidable. He knew it quite well and refused to understand. ‘Like me,’ Anthony said to himself.

That evening he telephoned to Mark to tell him definitely that he could book their passages.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT. August 10th 1934

TODAY HELEN TALKED again about Miller. Talked with a kind of resentful vehemence. (Certain memories, certain trains of thought are like the aching tooth one must always be touching just to make sure it still hurts.) Non-violence: this time, it was not only a mere trick, insignificant; it was also wrong. If you're convinced people are wicked, you've no right not to try to make them behave decently. Agreed: but how are you most likely to succeed? By violence? But violence may make people assume the forms of good behaviour for the moment; it won't produce the reality of genuine and permanent behaviour. She accused me of shirking real issues, taking refuge in vague idealism. It all boiled down at last to her vengeful hatred for the Nazis. Peace all round, except for Nazis and, by contagion, fascists. These should be punished, painfully exterminated — like rats. (Note that we're all ninety-nine per cent pacifists. Sermon on Mount, provided we're allowed to play Tamburlane or Napoleon in our particular one per cent of selected cases. Peace, perfect peace, so long as we can have the war that suits us. Result: everyone is the predestined victim of somebody else's exceptionally permissible war. Ninety-nine per cent pacifism is merely another name for militarism. If there's to be peace, there must be hundred per cent pacifism.)

We exchanged a lot of arguments; then, for some time, said nothing. Finally, she began to talk about Giesebrecht. Executed after God only knew what tortures. 'Can you be surprised if I feel like this about the Nazis?' Not surprised at all — any more than by the Nazis themselves. Surprising would have been tolerance on their part, forgiveness on hers. 'But the person who might have forgiven vanished when Ekki vanished. I was good while he was with me. Now I'm bad. If he were still here I might be able to forgive them for taking him away. But that's an impossible condition. I can't ever forgive.' (There were

answers to that, of course. But it didn't seem to me that I had any right, being what I am, acting as I still do, to make them.) She went on to describe what he had been to her. Someone she didn't have to be ashamed of loving, as she had had to be ashamed of loving Gerry. Someone she had been able to love with her whole being— 'not just occasionally and with part of me, on a roof; or just for fun, in a studio, before dinner.' And she came back to the same point — that Ekki had made her kind, truthful, unselfish, as well as happy. 'I was somebody else while I was with him. Or perhaps I was myself — for the first time.' Then, 'Do you remember how you laughed at me that time on the roof, when I talked about my real self?' Did I not remember! I hadn't even been real enough, at that moment, to perceive my own remoteness from reality. Afterwards, when I saw her crying, when I knew that I'd been deliberately refusing to love her, I did perceive it.

After a silence, 'At the beginning I believe I could have loved you almost as much as I loved Ekki.'

And I'd done my best, of course, to prevent her.

Her voice brightened with malicious derision. Like her mother's. 'Extraordinary how funny a tragedy is, when you look at it from the wrong side!' Then, still smiling, 'Do you imagine you care for me now? Lo-ove me, in a word?'

Not only imagined; did really.

She held up a hand, like a policeman. 'No film stuff here. I'd have to throw you out if you began that game. Which I don't want to do. Because, oddly enough, I really like you. In spite of everything. I never thought I should. Not after that dog. But I do.' That painful brightness came back into her face. 'All the things I thought I should never do again! Such as eating a square meal; but I was doing it after three days. And wanting to make love. That seemed inconceivably sacrilegious. And yet within three or four months it was occurring to me. I was having dreams about it. And one of these days, I suppose, I shall actually be doing it. Doing it "without any obligation", as they say when they send you the vacuum-cleaner on approval. Exactly as I did before.' She laughed

again. ‘Most probably with you, Anthony. Till the next dog comes down. Would you be ready to begin again?’

Not on the old basis. I’d want to give more, receive more.

‘It takes two to give and receive.’ Then she switched the conversation on to another line; who was I having an affair with at the moment? and when I answered: with nobody, asked whether it wasn’t difficult and disagreeable to be continent, and why I should want to imitate Mark Staithes. Tried to explain that I wasn’t imitating Mark, that Mark’s asceticism was undertaken for its own sake and above all for his, that he might feel himself more separate, more intensely himself, in a better position to look down on other people. Whereas what I was trying to do was to avoid occasions for emphasizing individual separateness through sensuality. Hate, anger, ambition explicitly deny human unity; lust and greed do the same indirectly and by implication — by insisting exclusively on particular individual experiences and, in the case of lust, using other people merely as a means for obtaining such experiences. Less dangerously so than malevolence and the passions for superiority, prestige, social position, lust is still incompatible with pacifism; can be made compatible only when it ceases to be an end in itself and becomes a means towards the unification through love of two separate individuals. Such particular union, a paradigm of union in general.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE. March 25th 1928

WHEN HELEN KEPT her eyes closed, the red darkness behind the lids came wildly and chaotically to life. Like a railway station, it seemed, full of hurrying people, loud with voices; and the colours glowed, the forms stood sharply out, jewelled, with the more than real definition of forms and colours under limelight. It was as though the fever had assembled a crowd inside her head, had lighted lamps and turned on the gramophone. On the unnaturally brilliant stage the images came and went on their own initiative and in ferocious disregard of Helen's own wishes. Came and went, talked, gesticulated, acted out their elaborate, insane dramas, unceasingly, without mercy on her fatigue, without consideration for her longing to be at rest and alone. Sometimes, in the hope that the outer world would eclipse this scurrying lunacy within, she opened her eyes. But the light hurt her; and in spite of those bunched roses on the wallpaper, in spite of the white counterpane and the knobs at the end of the bedstead, in spite of the looking-glass, the hair-brushes, the bottle of eau-de-Cologne, those images on the other side of her eyes went on living that private life of theirs, undisturbed. A vehement and crazy life — now utterly irrelevant, like a story invented by somebody else, then all at once agonizingly to the point, agonizingly hers.

This morning, for example, this afternoon (which was it? time was at once endless and non-existent: but at any rate it was just after Mme Bonifay had been in to see her — stinking, stinking of garlic and dirty linen), there had been a huge hall, with statues. Gilded statues. She recognized Voltaire, fifty feet high, and there was one of those Chinese camels, but enormous. People were standing in groups, beautifully placed, like people on the stage. Indeed, they were on the stage. Acting a play of intrigue, a play with love scenes and revolvers. How

bright the spotlights were! how clearly and emphatically they spoke the lines! Each word a bell, each figure a shining lamp.

‘Hands up . . . I love you . . . If she falls into the trap . . .’ And yet who were they, what were they saying? And now for some extraordinary reason they were talking about arithmetic. Sixty-six yards of linoleum at three and eleven a yard. And the woman with the revolver was suddenly Miss Cosmas. There was no Voltaire, no gilded camel. Only the blackboard. Miss Cosmas had always hated her because she was so bad at maths, had always been odious and unfair. ‘At three and eleven,’ Miss Cosmas shouted, ‘at three and eleven.’ But Mme Bonifay’s number was eleven, and Helen was walking once again along the rue de la Tombe-Issoire, feeling more and more sick with apprehension at every step. Walking slowlier and slowlier in the hope of never getting there. But the houses came rushing down towards her, like the walls of the moving staircases in the Underground. Came rushing towards her, and then, when number eleven drew level, stopped dead, noiselessly. ‘Mme Bonifay. Sage Femme de Ière Classe.’ She stood looking at the words, just as she had stood in reality, two days before; then walked on, just as she had walked on then. Only one more minute, she pleaded with herself, till she got over her nervousness, till she felt less sick. Walked up the street again, and was in the garden with her grandmother and Hugh Ledwidge. It was a walled garden with a pine wood at one end of it. And a man came running out of the wood, a man with some awful kind of skin disease on his face. Red blotches and scabs and scurf. Horrible! But all her grandmother said was, ‘God spat in his face,’ and everyone laughed. But in the middle of the wood, when she went on, stood a bed, and immediately, somehow, she was lying on it, looking at a lot more people in another play, in the same play, perhaps. Bright under the spotlights, with voices like bells in her ears; but incomprehensible, unrecognizable. And Gerry was there, sitting on the edge of her bed, kissing her, stroking her shoulders, her breasts. ‘But, Gerry, you mustn’t! All those people — they can see us. Gerry, don’t!’ But when she tried to push him away, he was like a block of granite, immovable; and all the time his hands, his lips were releasing soft moths of quick and fluttering pleasure under

her skin; and the shame, the dismay at being seen by all those people, let loose at the same time a special physical anguish of its own — a finer-footed, wildlier-fluttering sensation that was no longer a moth, but some huge beetle, revolting to the touch, and yet revoltingly delicious. ‘Don’t, Gerry, don’t!’ And suddenly she remembered everything — that night after the kitten had died, and all the other nights, and then the first signs, the growing anxiety, and the day she had telephoned to him and been told that he’d gone to Canada, and finally the money, and that evening when her mother . . . ‘I hate you!’ she cried: but as she managed with a last violent effort to push him away, she felt a stab of pain so excruciating that for a moment she forgot her delirium and was wholly at the mercy of immediate, physical reality. Slowly the pain died down; the other world of fever closed in on her again. And it wasn’t Gerry any more, it was Mme Bonifay. Mme Bonifay with that thing in her hand. Je vous ferai un peu mal. And it wasn’t the bed or the pine wood but the couch in Mme Bonifay’s sitting-room. She clenched her teeth, just as she had clenched them then. Only this time it was worse, because she knew what was going to happen. And under the limelight the people were still there, acting their play. And lying there on the couch she herself was part of the play, outside, and at last was no longer herself, but someone else, someone in a bathing dress, with enormous breasts, like Lady Knipe’s. And what was there to prevent her breasts from getting to be like that? Bell-clear, but incomprehensible, the actors discussed the nightmarish possibility. The possibility of Helen with enormous breasts, of Helen with thick rolls of fat round her hips, of Helen with creases in her thighs, of Helen with rows and rows of children — howling all the time; and that disgusting smell of curdled milk; and their diapers. And here, all of a sudden, was Joyce wheeling the pram along the streets of Aldershot. Taking the baby out. Feeding him. Half horrified, half fascinated, she watched him clinging, sucking. Flattened against the breast, the little frog face wore an expression of determined greed that gradually relaxed, as the stomach filled, to one of sleepy, imbecile ecstasy. But the hands — those were fully human, those were little miracles of the most delicate elegance. Lovely, exquisite little hands! Irresistible little hands! She

took the baby from Joyce, she pressed him close against her body, she bent her head so as to be able to kiss those adorable little fingers. But the thing she held in her arms was the dying kitten, was those kidneys at the butcher's, was that horrible thing which she had opened her eyes to see Mme Bonifay nonchalantly picking up and carrying away in a tin basin to the kitchen.

*

The surgeon had been called in time, and Helen now was out of all danger. Reassured, Mme Bonifay had resumed the motherly and Rabelaisian good humour that was natural to her.

It was almost with a wink that she now talked of the operation that had saved Helen's life. 'Ton petit curetage,' she would say with a kind of jovial archness, as though she were talking of some illicit pleasure. For Helen, every tone of that fat, jolly voice was yet another insult, yet a further humiliation. The fever had left her; her present weakness was lucid; she inhabited the real world once more. Turning her head, she could see herself reflected in the wardrobe mirror. It gave her a certain satisfaction to see how thin she was, how pale, what blue transparent shadows there were under the eyes, and the eyes themselves, how lifelessly without lustre. She could have powdered herself now, painted her lips a little, and rouged her cheeks, brushed back the gloss into her dull untidy hair; but, perversely, she preferred her sick pallor and dishevelment. 'Like the kitten,' she kept thinking. Reduced to a dirty little rag of limp flesh, transformed from the bright living creature into something repellent, into the likeness of kidneys, of that unspeakable thing that Mme Bonifay . . . She shuddered. And now ton petit curetage — in the same tone as ton petit amoureux. It was horrible, the final humiliation. She loathed the beastly woman, but at the same time was glad that she was so awful. That cheerful gross vulgarity was somehow appropriate — in keeping with all the rest. But when Mme Bonifay had left the room she would start crying, silently, in an agony of self-pity.

Returning unexpectedly, Mme Bonifay found her, that second morning after the petit curetage, with the tears streaming down her face. Genuinely distressed,

she offered comfort. But the comfort smelt, as usual, of onions. Physically disgusted as well as resentful of the intrusion upon the privacy of her unhappiness, Helen turned aside, and when Mme Bonifay tried to force consolation upon her, she shook her head and told her to go away. Mme Bonifay hesitated for a moment, then obeyed, but with a Parthian insult in the form of a tenderly suggestive remark about the letter she had brought and which she now laid on Helen's pillow. From him, without a doubt. A good heart, in spite of everything . . .

The letter, it turned out, was from Hugh. 'A holiday in Paris!' he wrote. 'From my dingy little kennel among the bric-à-brac, how I envy you, Helen! Paris in high summer. Gaily beautiful, as this place of hazy distances can never be. London's always mournful, even in the sunshine. One pines for the clear, unequivocal brilliance of the Paris summer. How I wish I were there! Selfishly, first of all, for the pleasure of being with you and out of London and the Museum. And then unselfishly, for your sake — because it worries me, the thought of your being all alone in Paris. Theoretically, with all my head, I know that nothing is likely to happen to you. But all the same — I'd like to be there, protective, but invisible, so that you wouldn't be aware of me, never feel my devotion as an importunity, but so that you should always have the confidence that comes from being two instead of one. Not, alas, that I should be a very good second in a tight corner. (How I hate myself sometimes for my shameful inadequacy!) But better, perhaps, than nobody. And I'd never encroach, never trespass or interfere. I'd be non-existent; except when you needed me. My reward would be just being in your neighbourhood, just seeing and hearing you — the reward of someone who comes out of a dusty place into a garden, and looks at the flowering trees, and listens to the fountains.

'I've never told you before (was afraid you'd laugh — and you may laugh; I don't mind: for after all it's your laughter), but the truth is that I sit sometimes, spinning stories to myself — stories in which I'm always with you, as I've told you I'd like to be with you now in Paris. Watching over you, keeping you from

harm, and in return being refreshed by your loveliness, and warmed by your fire, and dazzled by your bright purity . . .’

Angrily, as though the irony in it had been intentional, Helen threw the letter aside. But an hour later she had picked it up again and was re-reading it from the beginning. After all, it was comforting to know that there was somebody who cared.

CHAPTER FORTY. September 11th 1934

WITH MILLER TO see a show of scientific films. Development of the sea urchin. Fertilization, cell division, growth. A renewal of last year's almost nightmarish vision of a more-than-Bergsonian life force, of an ultimate Dark God, much darker, stranger, and more violent than any that Lawrence imagined. Raw material that, on its own inhuman plane, is already a perfectly finished product. A picture of earthworms followed. Week-long hermaphroditic love-making, worm to worm, within a tube of slime. Then an incredibly beautiful film showing the life-history of the blow-fly. The eggs. The grubs on their piece of decaying meat. Snow-white, like a flock of sheep on a meadow. Hurrying away from light. Then, after five days of growth, descending to the earth, burrowing, making a cocoon. In twelve more days, the fly emerges. Fantastic process of resurrection! An organ in the head is inflated like a balloon. Blown up so large, that the walls of the cocoon are split. The fly wriggles out. Positively now, instead of negatively phototropic, as it was as a grub. (Minor and incidental miracle!) Burrowing upwards, towards the light. At the surface, you see it literally pumping up its soft, wet body with air, smoothing out its crumpled wings by forcing blood into the veins. Astonishing and moving spectacle.

I put the question to Miller: what will be the influence of the spread of knowledge such as this? Knowledge of a world incomparably more improbable and more beautiful than the imaginings of any myth-maker. A world, only a few years ago, completely unknown to all but a handful of people. What the effects of its general discovery by all? Miller laughed. 'It will have exactly as much or as little effect as people want it to have. Those who prefer to think about sex and money will go on thinking about sex and money. However loudly the movies proclaim the glory of God.' Persistence of the ingenuous notion that the response to favourable circumstances is inevitably and automatically good. Raw material,

once again, to be worked up. One goes on believing in automatic progress, because one wants to cherish this stupidity: it’s so consoling. Consoling, because it puts the whole responsibility for everything you do or fail to do on somebody or something other than yourself.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE. December 1933

AT COLON THEY drove in a cab, at evening, along an esplanade. Whitish, like a vast fish's eye, the sea lay as though dead. Against a picture postcard sunset the immoderately tall thin palms were the emblems of a resigned hopelessness, and in the nostrils the hot air was like a vapour of wool. They swam for a little in the warm fish-eye, then returned through the deepening night to the town.

For the rich there were, after dinner, cabaret shows with expensive drinks and genuinely white prostitutes at ten dollars. For the poor, in the back streets, the mulatto women sat at doors that opened directly on to lighted bedrooms.

'If one were really conscientious,' said Anthony, as they walked back late that night to the hotel, 'I suppose one would have to go and infect oneself with syphilis.'

The smell of sweat, the smell of alcohol, the smells of sewage and decay and cheap perfumes; then, next morning, the Canal, the great locks, the ship climbing up from one ocean and down again to the other. A more than human achievement that made it possible, Mark explained, smiling anatomically, to transport whores and whisky by water instead of overland from Colon to Panama.

Their ship headed northwards. Once every couple of days they would call at a little port to pick up cargo. From among the bananas at San José, a spider, large as a fist and woolly, made its way into their cabin. Off Champerico, where the lighters came out loaded with bags of coffee, an Indian fell into the sea and was drowned.

At night, it was not the ship that seemed to move, but the stars. They mounted slowly, slantwise, hung at the top of their trajectory, then swooped downwards, travelled tentatively to the right and back to the left, then, beginning all over again, mounted once more towards the zenith.

‘Rather sickening,’ was Anthony’s verdict, ‘but beautiful.’

An improvement on the ordinary celestial mechanics. One could lie there and look at them indefinitely.

There was a note of grim satisfaction in Staithes’s voice as he replied that in two days’ time they would be at Puerto San Felipe.

Puerto San Felipe was a village of huts, with some wooden sheds, near the water, for storing coffee. Don Jorge’s agent at the port helped them through the customs. A pure Spaniard, half dead with tropical diseases, but still elaborately courteous. ‘My house is yours,’ he assured them, as they climbed the steep path towards his bungalow, ‘my house is yours.’

Orchids hung from the veranda, and, among them, cages full of incessantly screaming green parakeets.

An emaciated woman, prematurely old and tired, hopelessly tired, beyond the limit of her strength, came shuffling out of the house to welcome them, to apologize in advance for her hospitality. Puerto San Felipe was a small place, lacked commodities; and besides, she explained, the child was not well, not at all well. Mark asked her what was the matter. She looked at him with eyes expressionless with fatigue, and answered vaguely that it was fever; fever and a pain in the head.

They went with her into the house, and were shown a little girl lying on a camp-bed, restlessly turning her head from side to side, as if seeking, but always vainly, some cool place on which to rest her cheek, some position in which she might find relief from pain. The room was full of flies, and a smell of fried fish came from the kitchen. Looking at the child, Anthony suddenly found himself remembering Helen, that day on the roof — turning and turning her head in the torture of pleasure.

‘I suppose it must be mastoid,’ Mark was saying. ‘Or meningitis, perhaps.’

As he spoke, the child lifted thin arms from under the sheet and, clasping her head between her hands, began to roll still more violently from side to side, and at last broke out into a paroxysm of screaming.

In immediate response, the noise of the parakeets on the veranda swelled up, shriek after shriek, to a deafening maximum of intensity.

‘Quiet, quiet,’ the mother kept repeating, wheedlingly at first, then with a growing insistence, begging, exhorting, commanding the child to stop crying, to feel less pain. The screaming continued, the head went on rolling from side to side.

Tortured by pleasure, tortured by pain. At the mercy of one’s skin and mucus, at the mercy of those thin threads of nerve.

‘Quiet, quiet,’ the woman repeated almost angrily. She bent over the bed and, by main force, dragged down the child’s lifted arms; then, holding the two thin wrists in one hand, laid the other on the head in an effort to hold it unmoving on the pillows. Still screaming, the little girl struggled under the constraint. The woman’s bony hand tightened round the wrists, rested more heavily on the forehead. If she could forcefully restrain the manifestations of pain, perhaps the pain itself would cease, perhaps the child would stop that screaming, would sit up perhaps, smiling, and be well again.

‘Quiet, quiet,’ she commanded between clenched teeth.

With a violent effort the child released her arms from the grasp of those claw-like fingers; the hands flew once more to the head. Before the woman could snatch them away again, Mark touched her on the arm. She looked round at him.

‘Better to leave her,’ he was saying.

Obediently she straightened herself up and walked away towards the door that gave on to the veranda. They followed her. There was nothing whatever that they could do.

‘Mi casa es suya.’

Thank God, it wasn’t. The child’s screams had subsided; but the frying fish, the parakeets among the orchids . . . Politely, Mark refused the invitation to an early luncheon. They walked out again into the oppressive sunshine. The mozos had loaded their baggage on to the pack-mules, and the riding animals stood in the shade of a tree, ready saddled. They buckled on enormous spurs and mounted.

The track wound up and up from the coast, through a jungle silvery and brownish pink with drought. Sitting bolt upright on his high-backed saddle, Mark read Timon of Athens from his pocket edition of the Tragedies. Each time he turned a page, he gave his mule the spur; and for a few yards she would climb a little more quickly, then revert to the old, slow pace.

In the hotel at Tapatlan, where they spent the night, Anthony was bitten for the first time in his life by bed bugs, and the next morning it was an attack of dysentery. . . . On the fourth day he was well enough to go out and see the sights. The last earthquake had almost wrecked the church. A dense black fruitage of bats hung, like ripe plums, from the rafters; an Indian boy, ragged and bare-footed, was sweeping up the droppings; from the altars the baroque saints flapped and gesticulated in a frozen paroxysm of devotion. They walked out again into the market-place, where, secret and as though ambushed within their dark shawls, the brown Indian women squatted in the dust before their little piles of fruit and withering vegetables. The meat on the butcher's stall was covered with a crust of flies. Rhythmically shaking their long ears the donkeys passed, on small quick hoofs, noiseless in the dust. The women came and went in silence, carrying kerosene tins of water on their heads. From under hat brims, dark eyes regarded the strangers with an inscrutably reptilian glitter that seemed devoid of all curiosity, all interest, any awareness even of their presence.

'I'm tired,' Anthony announced. They had not walked very far; but at Tapatlan, it was an immense fatigue even to be living and conscious. 'When I die,' he went on after a silence, 'this is the part of hell I shall be sent to. I recognize it instantly.'

The bar of the hotel was in a dim crypt-like room with a vaulted ceiling supported at the centre by a pier of masonry, inordinately thick for its height, to resist the earthquake shocks. 'The Saxon ossuary,' Mark called it; and here, while he went to their room to fetch a handkerchief, he left Anthony installed in a cane chair.

Propped against the bar, a smartly dressed young Mexican in riding-breeches and an enormous felt hat was boasting to the proprietress about the alligators he

had shot in the swamps at the mouth of the Coppalita, of his firmness in dealing with the Indians who had come to pick the coffee on his estate, of the money he expected to make when he sold his crop.

‘A bit tight,’ Anthony reflected, listening and looking on from his chair; and was enjoying the performance, when the young man turned, and, bowing with the grave formality of one who is so drunk that he must do everything with a conscious deliberation, asked if the foreign cavalier would take a glass of tequila with him.

Fatigue had made Anthony’s Spanish more halting than usual. His efforts to explain that he had not been well, that it would not be good for him to drink alcohol, landed him very soon in incoherence. The young man listened, fixing him all the time with dark eyes, bright like the Indians’, but, unlike theirs, comprehensibly expressive — European eyes, in which it was possible to read an intense and passionate interest, a focused awareness. Anthony mumbled on, and all at once those eyes took on a new and dangerous glitter; an expression of anger distorted the handsome face, the knuckles of the strong rapacious hands went white under a sudden pressure. The young man stepped forward menacingly.

‘Usted me disprecia,’ he shouted.

His movement, the violence of his tone, startled Anthony into a kind of panic alarm. He scrambled to his feet and, edging behind his chair, began to explain in a voice that he had meant to be calmly conciliatory, but which, in spite of all his efforts to keep it grave and steady, trembled into a breadiless shrillness, that he hadn’t dreamed of despising anyone, that it was merely a question of — he fumbled for the medical explanation and could find nothing better than a pain in the stomach — merely a question of un dolar en mi estómago.

For some reason the word estómago seemed to the young man the final, most outrageous insult. He bellowed something incomprehensible, but evidently abusive; his hand went back to his hip-pocket and, as the proprietress screamed for help, came forward again, holding a revolver.

‘Don’t, don’t!’ Anthony cried out, without knowing what he was saying; then, with extraordinary agility, darted out of his corner to take shelter behind the massive pillar at the centre of the room.

For a second the young man was out of sight. But suppose he were to creep up on tiptoe. Anthony imagined the revolver suddenly coming round the pillar into his face; or else from behind — he would feel the muzzle pressed against his back, would hear the ghastly explosion, and then . . . A fear so intense that it was like the most excruciating physical pain possessed him entirely; his heart beat more violently than ever, he felt as though he were going to be sick. Overcoming terror by a greater terror, he stuck out his head to the left. The young man was standing only two yards away, staring with a ferocious fixity at the pillar. Anthony saw him jerk into movement, and with a despairing shout for help jumped to the right, looked out again and jumped back to the left; then once more to the right.

‘I can’t go on,’ he was thinking. ‘I can’t do it much longer.’ The thought of that pistol coming unexpectedly round the pillar forced him to look out yet again.

The young man moved, and he darted precipitately to the left.

The noise of the revolver going off — that was what he dreaded most. The horrible noise, sudden and annihilating like the noise of that other explosion years before. His eyelids had stiffened and were irrepressibly trembling, ready to blink, in anticipation of the horrifying event. The lashes flickered before his eyes, and it was through a kind of mist that, peering out, he saw the door open and Mark moving swiftly across the room, Mark catching the young man by the wrist . . . The pistol went off; reverberated from the walls and ceiling, the report was catastrophically loud. Anthony uttered a great cry, as though he had been wounded, and, shutting his eyes, flattened himself against the pillar. Conscious only of nausea and that pain in the genitals, those gripings of the bowels, he waited, reduced to a mere quivering embodiment of fearful anticipation, for the next explosion. Waited for what seemed hours. Dim voices parleyed incomprehensibly. Then a touch on his shoulder made him start. He shouted,

‘No, don’t,’ and lifting eyelids that still twitched with the desirable blink, saw Mark Staithes, demonstrating muscle by muscle a smile of friendly amusement.

‘All clear,’ he said, ‘you can come out.’

Feeling profoundly ashamed and humiliated, Anthony followed him into the open. The young Mexican was at the bar again and already drinking. As they approached, he turned and with outstretched arms came to meet them. ‘Hombre,’ he said to Anthony, as he took him affectionately by the hand, ‘hombre’!

Anthony felt more abjectly humiliated than ever.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO. September 15th 1934

HAVE BUILT UP during the last few days a meditation on a phrase of William Penn's. 'Force may subdue, but Love gains; and he who forgives first wins the laurel.'

'Force may subdue.' I visualize men using force. First, hand to hand. With fists, knives, truncheons, whips. Weals, red or livid across flesh. Lacerations, bruises, the broken bone sticking in jags through the skin, faces horribly swollen and bleeding. Then try to imagine, in my own body, the pain of a crushed finger, of blows with a stick or lash across the face, the searing touch of red-hot iron. All the short-range brutalities and tortures. Then, force from a distance. Machine-gun bullets, high explosive, gases, choking or blistering fire.

Force, finally, in the shape of economic coercion. Starved children, pot-bellied and with arms and legs like sticks. Women old at thirty. And those living corpses, standing in silence at the street corners in Durham or South Wales, shuffling in silence through the mud.

Yes, force may subdue. Subdue in death, subdue by wounds, subdue through starvation and terror. Vision of frightened faces, of abject gestures of servility. The manager at his desk, hectoring. The clerk cringing under the threat of dismissal. Force — the act of violently denying man's ultimate unity with man.

'Force may subdue, but Love gains.' I rehearse the history of Penn himself among the Redskins. Remember how Miller used to allay the suspicious hostility of the Indians in the mountain villages. Think of Pennell on the North-West Frontier; of the Quakers during the Russian famine; of Elizabeth Fry and Damien.

Next I consider the translations of love into terms of politics. Campbell-Bannerman's insistence that reparation should be made in South Africa — in the teeth of the protests, the Cassandra-like prophesyings of such 'sane and practical

men’ as Arthur Balfour. Love gains even in the clumsy, distorted form of a good political constitution. ‘He who forgives first wins the laurel.’ In South Africa, the English forgave those whom they had wronged — which is only less difficult than forgiving those by whom one has been wronged — and so secured a prize which they couldn’t have won by continued coercion. No prize has been won since the last war, because no combatant has yet forgiven those by whom he has been wronged or those he has wronged.

Consistently applied to any situation, love always gains. It is an empirically determined fact. Love is the best policy. The best not only in regard to those loved, but also in regard to the one who loves. For love is self-energizing. Produces the means whereby its policy can be carried out. In order to go on loving, one needs patience, courage, endurance. But the process of loving generates these means to its own continuance. Love gains because, for the sake of that which is loved, the lover is patient and brave.

And what is loved? Goodness and the potentialities for goodness in all human beings — even those most busily engaged in refusing to actualize those potentialities for goodness in relation to the lover himself. If sufficiently great, love can cast out the fear even of malevolently active enemies.

I end by holding the thought of goodness, still, as it were, before the eyes of my mind. Goodness, immanent in its potentialities, transcendent as a realized ideal; conceivable in its perfections, but also susceptible of being realized in practice, of being embodied at least partially in any situation in which we may find ourselves. ‘The thought of goodness’ — it is the wrong phrase. For in reality it is a whole system of thoughts and sentiments. It is this whole system that I hold, quite still, perceived simultaneously in its entirety — hold it without words, without images, undiscursively, as a single, simple entity. Hold it — then at last must retreat again, back into words, back at last (but refreshed, but made more conscious, but replenished, as it were) into ordinary life.

September 17th 1934

Was called in by Helen to help entertain her sister and brother-in-law, back on leave from India. Had to put on evening clothes — the first time this year —

because Colin could not allow himself to be seen in a theatre or at the Savoy Grill in anything but a white tie. A depressing evening. Joyce sickly and gaunt before her time. Colin furtively interested in plumper, fresher bodies. She, jealous and nagging; he resentful at being tied to her and the children, blaming her for the strictness of his own code, which doesn't allow him to be the libertine he would like to be. Each chronically impatient with the other. Every now and then an outburst of bad temper, an exchange of angry or spiteful words. Colin had other grievances as well. England, it seemed, didn't show sufficient respect to the officer and gent. Cabmen were impertinent, the lower classes jostled him in the streets. 'They call this a white man's country.' (This, after the second 'quick one' in the bar of the theatre, between the acts.) 'It isn't. Give me Poona every time.'

Reflect that we all have our Poonas, bolt-holes from unpleasant reality. The clanger, as Miller is always insisting, of meditation becoming such a bolt-hole. Quietism can be mere self-indulgence. Charismata like masturbations. Masturbations, however, that are dignified, by the amateur mystics who practise them, with all the most sacred names of religion and philosophy. 'The contemplative life.' It can be made a kind of high-brow substitute for Marlene Dietrich: a subject for erotic musings in the twilight. Meditation — valuable, not as a pleasurable end; only as a means for effecting desirable changes in the personality and mode of existence. To live contemplatively is not to live in some deliciously voluptuous or flattering Poona; it is to live in London, but to live there in a non-cockney style.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE. July 20th and 21st 1914

THE RIGHT, THE auspicious moment for telling Brian the truth — or at any rate as much of the truth as it was expedient for him to know — never seemed to present itself. That first evening had been ruled out in advance — because Anthony felt that he must treat himself to a respite, because poor Brian was looking so ill and tired. At supper and after it, Anthony kept the conversation as entertainingly impersonal as he could make it. He talked about Sorel's Réflexions sur la violence — uncomfortable reading for Fabians! And had Brian seen how effectively his beloved Bergson had been punctured by Julien Benda? And what about Lascelles Abercrombie's blank verse? And the latest Gilbert Cannan? Next morning they set out for a walk on the Langdale Pikes. Both were out of training; but in spite of shortened breath and bumping heart, Brian pressed on with a kind of Spartan determination that to Anthony seemed at first absurd, then exasperating. When they got home, late in the afternoon, they were both thoroughly tired; but Anthony was also resentful. Rest and a meal did something to change his mood; but he still found it impossible to behave towards Brian except as a man, forgiving indeed, but still on his dignity; and dignity was obviously quite incompatible with the telling of this particular truth. They spent a silent evening — Anthony reading, the other restlessly prowling about the room, as though on the watch for an occasion to speak — an occasion which Anthony's air of intense preoccupation was deliberately intended not to give him.

In bed the next morning Anthony found himself startled broad awake by the uncomfortable thought that time was passing, and passing not only for himself but also for Joan and Brian. Joan's impatience might get the better of her promise not to write to Brian; besides, the longer he postponed the inevitable explanation with Brian, the worse Brian would think of him.

Inventing a blistered heel for the occasion, he let Brian go out by himself, and having watched him indomitably striding away up the steep slope behind the cottage, sat down to write his letter to Joan. To try to write it, rather; for every one of the drafts he produced displayed one or other of two faults, and each of the two faults exposed him, he realized, to a particular danger: the danger that, if he insisted too much on the esteem and affection which had prepared him to lose his head on that accursed evening, she would reply that so much esteem and affection accompanied by head-losing amounted to love, and were his justification (since love was supposed to justify everything) for betraying Brian; and the other danger that, if he insisted too exclusively on the head-losing and temporary insanity, she would feel insulted and complain to Brian, to Mrs Foxe, to her relations, raise a regular hue and cry against him as a cad, a seducer, and heaven only knew what else. After the expense of three hours and a dozen sheets of paper, the best of his efforts seemed to him too unsatisfactory to send off. He put it angrily aside, and, in his mood of exasperation, dashed off a violent letter of abuse to Mary. Damned woman! She was responsible for everything. ‘Deliberate malice . . .’ ‘Shameless exploitation of my love for you . . .’ ‘Treating me as though I were some sort of animal you could torment for your private amusement . . .’ The phrases flowed from his pen. ‘This is good-bye,’ he concluded, and, with half his mind, believed in what he was dramatically writing. ‘I never want to see you again. Never.’ But a quarrel, the other half of his mind was reflecting, can always be made up: he would give her this lesson: then, perhaps, if she behaved well, if he felt he simply couldn’t do without her . . . He sealed up the letter, and at once walked briskly to the village to post it. This act of decision did something to restore his self-esteem. On his way home he made up his mind, quite definitely this time, that he would have his talk with Brian that evening, and then, in the light of his knowledge of Brian’s attitude, re-write the letter to Joan the following morning.

Brian was back at six, triumphing in the fact that he had walked further and climbed to the tops of more mountains than on any previous occasion in his life, but looking, in spite of his exultations, completely exhausted. At the sight of that

face he had known so long, that face now so tragically worn and emaciated beneath the transfigurement of the smile, Anthony felt an intenser renewal of the first evening's emotions — of anxious solicitude for an old friend, of distressed sympathy with a human being's suffering — and along with these an excruciating sense of guilt towards the friend, of responsibility for the human being. Instant confession might have relieved his pain, might have allowed him at the same time to express his feelings; but he hesitated; he was silent; and in a few seconds, by an almost instantaneous process of psychological chemistry, the sympathy and the solicitude had combined with the sense of guilt to form a kind of anger. Yes, he was positively angry with Brian for looking so tired, for being already so miserable, for going to be so much more miserable the moment he was told the truth.

'You're mad to overtire yourself like this,' he said gruffly, and drove him into the house to take a rest before supper.

After the meal they went out on to the strip of terraced lawn in front of the cottage and spreading out a rug, lay down and looked up into a sky green at their arrival with the last trace of summer twilight, then gradually and ever more deeply blue.

The time, thought Anthony, with a certain sinking of the heart, had come, irrevocably; and through a long silence he prepared himself to begin, trying out in his mind one opening gambit after another; hesitating between the abrupt and precipitate clean-breast-of-it-all and more devious strategy that would prepare the victim for the final shock.

But before he had decided which was the best approach to his confession, the other broke out all at once into stammering speech. He too, it was evident, had been waiting for an opportunity to ease his mind, and instead of acting the penitent, as he had intended, Anthony found himself (to the relief of a part of his mind, to the dismay and embarrassment of the inhabitant of a deeper layer of consciousness) suddenly called upon to play the part of confessor and director of conscience; called upon to listen all over again to the story that Joan had already told him — the story that, adorned with St Monicas and uterine reactions, he had

so joyfully passed on to Mary Amberley. He had to hear how humiliating, how painful his friend found it to be unable to gain the mastery of his body, to banish all the low desires unworthy of the love he felt for Joan. Or perhaps, Brian had qualified, citing Meredith's great volcano flinging fires of earth to sky, perhaps not unworthy when circumstances should have allowed them to take their place in the complex whole of a perfect marriage; but unworthy at that moment when it was not yet possible for them to find their legitimate expression, unworthy in so far as they were to defy the authority of the conscious mind.

'I've had to r-run away,' he explained, 'h-had to remove my b-body to a safe d-distance. B-because I wasn't able to c-c-c . . .'; 'control' would not come; he had to be satisfied with another less expressive word; 'to m-manage myself with my w-will. One's ash-shamed of being so weak,' Brian concluded.

Anthony nodded. Weak in making up one's mind to kiss, and no less weak when it came to interrupting a momentarily agreeable experience — though there had been something more than weakness there, something positive, a perverse revelling in an action known to be stupid, dangerous, wrong.

'But if one kn-knows one c-can't over-c-come it,' Brian was saying, 'I s-suppose it's b-best to r-run away. B-better than l-letting it g-get one into av-voidable trouble.'

'Yes, I agree,' said Anthony, wondering why he hadn't followed his impulse and turned back at Kendal.

'And not only ones-self, but o-other people. G-getting th-them into trouble t-too. 'There was a long silence; then, slowly and laboriously, he set out to explain that the lovely, the splendid thing about Joan was her naturalness. She had the strength of natural things and their spontaneity; she was warm, like nature, and generous and profoundly innocent. She had the qualities of a summer landscape, of a flowering tree, of a water-bird darting bright-eyed and glossy between the rushes. This naturalness was what he had chiefly loved in her, because it was the complementary opposite of his own scrupulousness and intellectualism. But it was this same naturalness that had made it all but impossible for Joan to understand why he had found her presence so dangerous, why he had felt it

necessary to keep away from her. She had been hurt by his withholding of himself, had thought it was because he didn't love her; whereas the truth was . . .

The truth was, Anthony said to himself, finding a kind of consolation, a renewal of his sense of superiority, in the derisive cynicism of his thoughts, the truth was that she was thirsty for kisses, that at his first caress her whole body revealed itself a shuddering and palpitating protest against the continence that had been imposed on it.

'The t-truth,' Brian was laboriously saying, 'is that I l-love her m-more than I e-ever did. Unspeakably much.' He was silent once more for a little; then, looking up at Anthony, 'What shall I d-do?' he asked.

Still in his critical mood, Anthony scored, with the grossness of his unspoken answer, another private triumph — as short-lived however, as it was easy; for his first thought was succeeded almost instantaneously by the disquieting realization that he was being faced by a choice: either to tell Brian what had happened between himself and Joan; or else to make some anodyne and non-committal reply to his question, and postpone the telling of the truth till later on. By omission, the anodyne reply would be a monstrous falsehood; and when at last he came to tell the truth, this lie and all the other lies implied in more than two days of silence or irrelevant chatter would inevitably be remembered against him. But to tell the truth at once, in this particular context, would be especially painful — and painful, he went on to think, not only to himself but also, and above all, to Brian. After what Brian had been saying this evening, to blurt out a plain account of what had happened would be sheer cruelty and deliberate insult.

'What o-ought I to d-do?' Brian was insisting.

'I think,' Anthony answered softly, 'I think you ought to come to terms with reality.'

He had made this decision — or rather, as he preferred to put it when, later on, in the privacy of his bedroom, he thought of the events of the evening, the decision had made itself. Looking back, he felt that he had had nothing to do with the matter.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR. September 21st 1934

REMARKS BY ST Teresa. ‘Let us look at our own faults, and not at other people’s. We ought not to insist on everyone following our footsteps, or to take upon ourselves to give instructions in spirituality when, perhaps, we do not even know what it is. Zeal for the good of souls, though given us by God, may often lead us astray.’ To which add this. ‘It is a great grace of God to practise self-examination, but too much is as bad as too little, as they say; believe me, by God’s help, we shall accomplish more by contemplating the divinity than by keeping our eyes fixed on ourselves.’ God may or may not exist. But there is the empirical fact that contemplation of the divinity — of goodness in its most unqualified form — is a method of realizing that goodness to some slight degree in one’s life, and results, often, in an experience as if of help towards that realization of goodness, help from some being other than one’s ordinary self and immensely superior to it. Christian God and the Buddhist’s primal Mind — interpretations of concrete experiences, the Buddhist being the rationalization of a state further removed from the normal than the Christian. Christians, of course, have often experienced that state and found great difficulties in explaining it in orthodox terms. Both conceptions are legitimate — just as both macroscopical and microscopical views of matter are legitimate. We look at the universe with a certain kind of physico-mental apparatus. That apparatus can respond only to certain stimuli. Within relatively narrow limits, it is adjustable. The nature of the facts which each of us perceives as primary and given depends on the nature of the individual instrument and on the adjustment we have been brought up, or deliberately chosen, to give it. From these data one can draw inferences. Which may be logically sound or unsound. Any philosophy is intellectually legitimate if, one, it starts from facts which, for the philosopher, are data and if, two, the logical construction based on these facts is sound. But an intellectually is not the

same as a morally legitimate philosophy. We can adjust our instrument deliberately, by an act of the will. This means that we can will modifications in the personal experiences which underlie our philosophy, the data from which we argue. Problem: to build really solid logical bridges between given facts and philosophical inferences. All but insoluble. No bullet-proof arguments for any of the main cosmological theories. What, then, shall we do? Stick, so far as possible, to the empirical facts — always remembering that these are modifiable by anyone who chooses to modify the perceiving mechanism. So that one can see, for example, either irremediable senselessness and turpitude, or else actualizable potentialities for good — whichever one likes; it is a question of choice.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE. April 14th 1928

HAPPINESS INEXPRESSIBLE — that was what her letter should have brought him. But Hugh's face, as he walked — walked instead of having his lunch — up and down the long gallery of the Ethnographical Collection, was a mask of perplexity and distress. The words of Helen's letter repeated themselves in his memory. 'Nobody cares a pin whether I'm alive or dead.'

From the Mexican case the symbol of death in crystal and that other skull inlaid with turquoise stared out at him as he passed. 'Nobody cares . . .' It should have been his opportunity. He had dreamt of her unhappiness — in an agony of commiseration, but also with hope. Unhappy, she would turn to him. 'Nobody cares . . .'

'Nobody except you.' His exultant pride and pleasure in those words had been tempered, as he read on, by the realization that she didn't really understand how he cared, didn't appreciate the exact quality of his feeling. 'My mother?' she had written. 'But, after all, ever since she started taking that horrible stuff, she's somebody else — always was somebody else really, even when she was well (though of course not so else). Just as I was always somebody else, if it comes to that. She expected a daughter; but I was always selfish and irresponsible. Just as she was. Somebody else. How could she care? You're not selfish, Hugh. You're . . .' But it wasn't a question merely of selfishness or unselfishness, he began to protest, with all the painted faces of the Peruvian vases staring down from the right with an unwinking intensity of frozen life. It was a question of something different, something deeper and more spiritual. On his left the trophies of the Papuan head-hunters hung shrivelled, but fantastically painted, like the heads of decapitated clowns. The skulls from the Torres Straits had been given round shining eyes of mother-of-pearl. Yes, more spiritual, Hugh insisted, thinking of what he had written about her — lyrically, lyrically! — and

of that subtle analysis of his own emotions. The unselfishness was there, but melted down, as it were, in contemplation, refined into something aesthetic. Unselfishness in a picture. Unselfishness by Watteau, by Cima da Conegliano. And she herself, the object of his contemplative and aesthetic unselfishness — she too, in his imaginings, in the accumulating pages of his manuscript, had possessed the quality of a picture or a piece of music; something that it would be sufficient happiness merely to look at for ever, to listen to; perhaps, occasionally, to touch, as though she were a statue, to caress with an almost imperceptible tenderness. And sometimes in those imaginings she was cold, was unhappy — nobody cared a pin — and she asked to be comforted and made warm, she crept into his arms, into those unselfish, contemplative, impalpable arms of his, and lay there safely, but naked, lay there a picture, virginal, ideal, but melting, melting . . . Feathered like an ambassador in full dress uniform, with the beak of a bird, the teeth of a shark, this wooden mask had once made its wearer feel, as he danced, that he was more than human, akin to the gods. ‘You’ve said you’d like to be always with me. Well, I’ve been thinking about it a lot recently, and I believe that that’s what I’d like too. Dear Hugh, I’m not in love with you; but I like you more than anyone else. I think you’re nicer, kinder, gentler, less selfish. And surely that’s a good enough foundation to build on.’ The words, when he read them first, had filled him with a kind of panic; and it was with the same protesting agitation that he now walked between New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands. In the belly of a wooden bonito fish the Melanesian widow opened a little door, and there, like a chamberpot, was her husband’s skull. But it was always spiritually and aesthetically that he had wanted to be with her. Hadn’t she been able to understand that? Surely he had made it clear enough? ‘If you still want it, there I am — I want it too.’ It was terrible, he was thinking, terrible! She was forcing a decision on him, making it impossible for him to say no by assuming that he had already said yes. He felt himself hemmed in, driven into a corner. Marriage? But he would have to change his whole way of life. The flat wouldn’t be large enough. She’d want to eat meat at night. Mrs Barton would give notice. Of the spears on his left some

were tipped with obsidian, some with the spines of sting-rays, some with human bone. ‘You probably think I’m a fool, and flighty and irresponsible; and it’s true, I have been up till now. I’m hopeless. But I wasn’t born hopeless — I was made it, because of the kind of life I’ve lived. Now I want to be something else, and I know I can be something else. Sérieuse. A good wife and all that, ridiculous and embarrassing as it sounds when one puts it down on paper. But I refuse to be ashamed of goodness any longer. I absolutely refuse.’ That irresponsibility, he was thinking, was one of the loveliest and most moving things about her. It separated her from the common world, it promoted her out of vulgar humanity. He didn’t want her to be responsible and a good wife. He wanted her to be like Ariel, like the delicate creature in his own manuscript, a being of another order, beyond good and evil. Meanwhile he had walked into Africa. The image of a Negress holding her long pointed breasts in her two hands glistened darkly from behind the confining glass. Her belly was tattooed, her navel projected in a little cone. The spears in the next case were headed with iron. Like Ariel, he repeated to himself, like those Watteaus at Dresden, like Debussy. For resonator, this xylophone had, not the usual gourd, but a human skull, and there were skulls festooned along the ivory fetish horns, thigh-bones around the sacrificial drum from Ashanti. She was spoiling everything, he said to himself resentfully. And suddenly, lifting his eyes, he saw that she was there, hurrying along the narrow passage between the cases to meet him.

‘You?’ he managed to whisper.

But Helen was too much perturbed to see the look of dismay, the pallor, and then the guilty blush, too intensely preoccupied with her own thoughts to hear the note of startled apprehension in his voice.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said breathlessly, as she took his hand. ‘I didn’t mean to come and pester you here. But you don’t know what it’s been like this morning at home.’ She shook her head; her lips trembled. ‘Mother’s been like a mad-woman. I can’t tell you. . . . You’re the only person, Hugh . . .’

Clumsily, he tried to console her. But the reality was profoundly different from his imagination of her unhappiness. The imagination had always been his

delicious opportunity; the reality was the menace of an unavoidable doom. Desperately, he tried the effect of changing the subject. These things from Benin were rather interesting. The ivory leopard, spotted with disks of copper inlay. The Negro warriors, in bronze, with their leaf-shaped spears and swords, and the heads of their enemies hanging from their belts. The Europeans, bearded and aquiline, in their high sixteenth-century morions and baggy hose, their matchlocks in their hands, and the cross hanging round their necks. Comic, he remarked, parenthetically, that the only thing these blackamoors ever got out of Christianity should have been the art of crucifying people. The punitive expedition in 1897 found the place full of crosses. And this beautiful head of the young girl with her tapering Phrygian cap of coral beads . . .

'Look at this,' Helen suddenly interrupted; and, pulling up her sleeve, she showed him two red semicircular marks on the skin of her forearm a few inches above the wrist. 'That's where she bit me, when I tried to make her go back to bed.'

Hugh was startled into pitying indignation. 'But it's awful!' he cried. 'It's too awful.' He took her hand. 'My poor child!' They stood for a moment in silence. Then, suddenly, his pity was shot through by the realization that the thing had happened. There could be no escape now. He found himself thinking again of Mrs Barton. If she were to give notice, what would he do?

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX. October 30th 1934

MARK, AT DINNER, said he'd been re-reading Anna Karenina. Found it good, as novels go. But complained of the profound untruthfulness of even the best imaginative literature. And he began to catalogue its omissions. Almost total neglect of those small physiological events that decide whether day-to-day living shall have a pleasant or unpleasant tone. Excretion, for example, with its power to make or mar the day. Digestion. And, for the heroines of novel and drama, menstruation. Then the small illnesses — catarrh, rheumatism, headache, eyestrain. The chronic physical disabilities — ramifying out (as in the case of deformity or impotence) into luxuriant insanities. And conversely the sudden accessions, from unknown visceral and muscular sources, of more than ordinary health. No mention, next, of the part played by mere sensations in producing happiness. Hot bath, for example, taste of bacon, feel of fur, smell of freesias. In life, an empty cigarette-case may cause more distress than the absence of a lover; never in books. Almost equally complete omission of the small distractions that fill the greater part of human lives. Reading the papers; looking into shops; exchanging gossip; with all the varieties of day-dreaming, from lying in bed, imagining what one would do if one had the right lover, income, face, social position, to sitting at the picture palace passively accepting ready-made day-dreams from Hollywood.

Lying by omission turns inevitably into positive lying. The implications of literature are that human beings are controlled, if not by reason, at least by comprehensible, well-organized, avowable sentiments. Whereas the facts are quite different. Sometimes the sentiments come in, sometimes they don't. All for love, or the world well lost; but love may be the title of nobility given to an inordinate liking for a particular person's smell or texture, a lunatic desire for the repetition of a sensation produced by some particular dexterity. Or consider

those cases (seldom published, but how numerous, as anyone in a position to know can tell!), those cases of the eminent statesmen, churchmen, lawyers, captains of industry — seemingly so sane, demonstrably so intelligent, publicly so high-principled; but, in private, under irresistible compulsion towards brandy, towards young men, towards little girls in trains, towards exhibitionism, towards gambling or hoarding, towards bullying, towards being whipped, towards all the innumerable, crazy perversions of the lust for money and power and position on the one hand, for sexual pleasure on the other. Mere tics and tropisms, lunatic and unavowable cravings — these play as much part in human life as the organized and recognized sentiments. And imaginative literature suppresses the fact. Propagates an enormous lie about the nature of men and women.

‘Rightly, no doubt. Because, if human beings were shown what they’re really like, they’d either kill one another as vermin, or hang themselves. But meanwhile, I really can’t be bothered to read any more imaginative literature. Lies don’t interest me. However poetically they may be expressed. They’re just a bore.’

Agreed with Mark that imaginative literature wasn’t doing its duty. That it was essential to know everything — and to know it, not merely through scientific textbooks, but also in a form that would have power to bring the facts home to the whole mind, not merely to the intellect. A complete expression (in terms of imaginative literature) leading to complete knowledge (with the whole mind) of the complete truth: indispensable preliminary condition of any remedial action, any serious attempt at the construction of a genuinely human being. Construction from within, by training in proper use of the self — training, simultaneously physical and mental. Construction, at the same time, from without, by means of social and economic arrangements devised in the light of a complete knowledge of the individual, and of the way in which the individual can modify himself.

Mark only laughed, and said I reminded him of the men who go round from house to house selling electric washing-machines.

November 4th 1934

Very good meeting in Newcastle with Miller and Purchas. Large and enthusiastic crowds — predominantly of the dispossessed. Note the significant fact that pacifism is in inverse ratio, generally, to prosperity. The greater the poverty, the longer the unemployment, the more whole-hearted the determination not to fight again, and the more complete the scepticism about the conventional idols, Empire, National Honour, and the like. A negative attitude closely correlated with bad economic conditions. Therefore not to be relied on. Such pacifism is without autonomous life. At the mercy, first of all, of anyone who comes along with money — and threats of war would lead to a vast increase of employment. At the mercy, in the second place, of anyone who comes along with an alluring positive doctrine — however crazy and criminal its positiveness may be. The mind abhors a vacuum. Negative pacifism and scepticism about existing institutions are just holes in the mind, emptinesses waiting to be filled. Fascism or communism have sufficient positive content to act as fillers. Someone with the talents of Hitler may suddenly appear. The negative void will be pumped full in a twinkling. These disillusioned pacifist sceptics will be transformed overnight into drilled fanatics of nationalism, class war, or whatever it may be. Question: have we time to fill the vacuum with positive pacifism? Or, having the time, have we the ability?

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN. January 10th and 11th 1934

OSTENSIBLY, DON JORGE'S telegram was an order for the immediate sale of six hundred bags of coffee. In fact, it announced that the moment had come, and that he was urgently expecting them.

Mark looked at his companion with an expression that was frankly hostile. 'Those blasted guts of yours!' he said.

Anthony protested that he was all right again.

'You're not fit to do the journey.'

'Yes, I am.'

'You're not,' Mark repeated with a solicitude that was at the same time a passionate resentment. 'Three days on a mule across these damned mountains. It's too much for anyone in your condition.'

Piqued by the other's words, and afraid, if he agreed with Mark, of seeming unwilling to face the difficulties and dangers that lay in front of them, Anthony insisted obstinately that he was fit for anything. Wishing to believe it, Mark soon allowed himself to be persuaded. An answer was dispatched to Don Jorge — the six hundred bags were being sold immediately; he might expect to hear further details on Friday — and after lunch, in the blazing heat of the early afternoon, they set out for the finca, lying high in the mountains above Tapatlan, where one of Don Jorge's friends would put them up for the night. Mark produced his pocket Shakespeare once again and, for four hours, they spurred their reluctant beasts, up and up, between dusty maize stubbles, and, above the fields, through a dry leafless scrub that gave place at last to the green darkness and golden lights of coffee plantations under their towering shade trees. Up and up, while Mark read the whole of Hamlet and two acts of Troilus and Cressida, and Anthony sat wondering, in a mist of fatigue, how much longer he could stand it. But at last, as night was falling, they reached their destination.

At four the next morning they were in the saddle again. Under the trees there was a double night of starless shadow; but the mules picked their way along the windings of the track with a reassuring certainty. From time to time they rode under invisible lemon trees, and in the darkness the scent of the flowers was like the brief and inenarrable revelation of something more than earthly — a moment's ecstasy, and then, as the mules advanced, hoof after hoof, up the stony path, the fading of the supernatural presence, the return to a common life symbolically represented by the smell of leather and sweat.

The sun rose, and a little later they emerged from the cultivated forest of the coffee plantations into an upland country of bare rocks and pine woods. Almost level, the track went winding in and out along the buttressed and indented flank of a mountain. To the left, the ground fell steeply away into valleys still dark with shadow. Far off, through air made hazy by the dry season's dust and the smoke of forest fires, a dim whiteness high up in the sky was the Pacific.

Mark went on reading Troilus and Cressida.

A descent so steep that they had to dismount and lead their animals brought them in another hour to the banks of a river. They forded it, and, in the blistering sunshine, began to climb the slope beyond. There was no shade, and the vast bald hills were the colour of dust and burnt grass. Nothing stirred, not even a lizard among the stones. There was no sight or sound of life. Hopelessly empty, the chaos of tumbled mountains seemed to stretch away interminably. It was as though they had ridden across the frontier of the world out into nothingness, into an infinite expanse of hot and dusty negation.

At eleven they halted for a meal, and an hour later, with the sun almost perpendicularly above them, were off once more. The path climbed, dropped fifteen hundred feet into a ravine and climbed again. By three o'clock Anthony was so tired that he could scarcely think or even see. The landscape seemed to advance and retreat before his eyes, turned black sometimes and faded away altogether. He heard voices, and, in his mind, his thoughts began to lead a life of their own — a life that was autonomous in its mad and maddening irrelevance. Image succeeded image in a phantasmagoria that it was beyond his power to

exorcize. It was as though he were possessed, as though he were being forced to lead someone else's life and think with another person's mind. But the sweat that poured like water off his face and soaked through his shirt and cotton riding-breeches, the intolerable aching of loins and thighs — these were his own. His own and excruciating, intolerable. He was tempted to groan, even to burst into tears. But through the other person's delirium he remembered his assurances to Mark, his confident promise that he wouldn't be tired. He shook his head and rode on — rode on through the illusory world of alien fancy and half-seen, vanishing landscape, rode on through the hideous reality of his pain and fatigue.

Mark's voice startled him out of his stupor.

'Are you all right?'

Looking up, and, with an effort, focusing his eyes, he saw that Mark had halted and was waiting at the turn of the track just above him. Fifty yards further up the slope the mozo was riding behind the baggage-mule.

'Mula-a-a!' came the long-drawn shout, and along with it the dull thump of a stick on mule-skin.

'Sorry,' Anthony mumbled, 'I must have dropped behind.'

'You're sure you're all right?'

He nodded.

'There's less than an hour to go,' said Mark. 'Stick it out if you can.' In the shadow of the enormous straw hat, his worn face twisted itself into a smile of encouragement.

Touched, Anthony smiled back and, to reassure him, tried to make a joke about the hardness of the wooden saddles on which they were riding.

Mark laughed. 'If we get through intact,' he said, 'we'll dedicate a pair of silver buttocks to St James of Compostella.'

He jerked the reins and gave his mule the spur. The animal started up the slope; then, in a slither of rolling stones, stumbled and fell forward on its knees.

Anthony had shut his eyes to rest them a moment from the glare. At the noise he opened them again and saw Mark lying face downwards on the ground and the mule heaving itself, in a series of violent spasms of movement, to its feet.

The landscape snapped back into solidity, the moving images fell still. Forgetting the pain in his back and legs, Anthony swung himself down from the saddle and ran up the path. As he approached, Mark rolled over and raised himself to a sitting position.

‘Hurt?’ Anthony asked.

The other shook his head, but did not speak.

‘You’re bleeding.’

The breeches were torn at the left knee, and a red stain was creeping down the leg. Anthony shouted to the mozo to come back with the baggage-mule; then, kneeling down, opened his penknife, slid the blade into the rent and sawed a long jagged slit in the tough material.

‘You’re spoiling my bags,’ Mark said, speaking for the first time.

Anthony did not answer, only tore away a wide panel of the stuff.

The whole knee-cap and the upper part of the skin were skinless red flesh, grey, where the blood was not oozing, with dust and grit. On the inner side of the knee was a deep cut that bled profusely.

Anthony frowned, and, as though the pain were his own, caught his lower lip between his teeth. A pang of physical disgust mingled with his horrified sympathy. He shuddered.

Mark had leaned forward to look at the damaged knee. ‘Messy,’ was his comment.

Anthony nodded without speaking, unscrewed the stopper of his water-bottle, and, wetting his handkerchief, began to wash the dirt out of the wounds. His emotion disappeared; he was wholly absorbed in his immediate task. Nothing was important any more except to wash this grit away without hurting Mark in the process.

By this time, the mozo had come back with the baggage-mule and was standing beside them in silence, looking down with expressionless black eyes on what was happening.

‘I expect he thinks we’re making an unnecessary fuss,’ said Mark, and made an attempt to smile.

Anthony rose to his feet, ordered the mozo to untie the mule's load, and, from one of the canvas bundles, pulled out the medicine-chest.

Under the sting of the disinfectant Mark gave vent to an explosive burst of laughter. 'No humanitarian nonsense about iodine,' he said. 'The good old-fashioned idea of hurting you for your own good. Like Jehovah. Christ!' He laughed again as Anthony swabbed another patch of raw flesh. Then, when the knee was bandaged, 'Give me a hand,' he went on. Anthony helped him to his feet, and he took a few steps up the path and back again. 'Seems all right.' He bent down to look at the forelegs of his mule. They were hardly scratched. 'Nothing to prevent us pushing on at once,' he concluded.

They helped him to mount, and, spurring with his uninjured leg, he set off at a brisk pace up the hill. For the rest of the way he was, for Anthony, mostly a straight and rigid back, but sometimes also, at the zigzags of the path, a profile, marbly in its fixed pallor — the statue of a stoic, flayed, but still alive and silently supporting his agony.

In less than the appointed hour — for Mark had chosen to keep up a pace that set the mules blowing and sweating in the afternoon heat — they rode into San Cristobal el Alto. The thirty or forty Indian ranchos of which the village consisted were built on a narrow ridge between plunging gulfs, beyond which, on either side, the mountains stretched away chaotically, range after range, into the haze.

Seeing distinguished travellers, the village shopkeeper hurried out on to the plaza to offer them accommodation for the night. Mark listened to him, nodded and made a movement to dismount; then, wincing, let himself fall back into the saddle.

Without turning his head, 'You'll have to get me off this blasted mule,' he called in a loud, angry voice.

Anthony and the mozo helped him down; but, once on the ground, he refused any further assistance.

'I can walk by myself,' he said curtly, frowning while he spoke, as though, in offering an arm, Anthony had meant to insult him.

Their quarters for the night turned out to be a wooden shed, half-full of coffee bags and hides. After inspecting the place, Mark limped out again to look at the thatched lean-to, where the mules were to be stabled; then suggested a walk round the village, ‘to see the sights,’ he explained.

Walking, it was evident, hurt him so much that he could not trust himself to speak. It was in silence that they crossed the little plaza, in silence that they visited the church, the school, the cabildo, the village prison. In silence, and one behind the other. For if they walked abreast, Anthony had reflected, he would be able to see Mark’s face, and Mark would feel that he was being spied upon. Whereas if he walked in front it would be an insult, a challenge to Mark to quicken his pace. Deliberately, Anthony lagged behind, silent, like an Indian wife trailing through the dust after her husband.

It was nearly half an hour before Mark felt that he had tortured himself sufficiently.

‘So much for the sights,’ he said grimly. ‘Let’s go and have something to eat.’

The night was piercingly cold, the bed merely a board of wood. It was from a restless and unrefreshing sleep that Anthony was roused next morning.

‘Wake!’ Mark was shouting to him. ‘Wake!’

Anthony sat up, startled, and saw Mark, in the other wooden bed, propped on his elbow and looking across at him with angry eyes.

‘Time to get away,’ the harsh voice continued. ‘It’s after six.’

Suddenly remembering yesterday’s accident, ‘How’s the knee?’ Anthony asked.

‘Just the same.’

‘Did you sleep?’

‘No, of course not,’ Mark answered irritably. Then looking away. ‘I can’t manage to get out of bed,’ he added. ‘The thing’s gone stiff on me.’

Anthony pulled on his boots and, having opened the door of the shed to admit the light, came and sat down on the edge of Mark’s bed.

‘We’d better put on a clean dressing,’ he said, and began to untie the bandage.

The lint had stuck to the raw flesh. Anthony pulled it cautiously, then let it go. ‘I’ll see if they can give me some warm water at the shop,’ he said.

Mark uttered a snort of laughter, and taking a corner of the lint between his thumb and forefinger, gave a violent jerk. The square of pink fabric came away in his hand.

‘Don’t!’ Anthony had cried out, wincing as though the pain were his. The other only smiled at him contemptuously. ‘You’ve made it bleed again,’ he added, in another tone, finding a medical justification for his outburst. But in point of fact, that trickle of fresh blood was not the thing that disturbed him most when he bent down to look at what Mark had uncovered. The whole knee was horribly swollen and almost black with bruises, and round the edges of the newly opened wound the flesh was yellow with pus.

‘You can’t possibly go with your knee in this state,’ he said.

‘That’s for me to decide,’ Mark answered, and added, after a moment. ‘After all, you did it the day before yesterday.’

The words implied a contemptuous disparagement. ‘If a poor creature like you can overcome pain, then surely I . . .’ That was what they meant to say. But the insult, Anthony realized, was unintended. It sprang from the depths of an arrogance that was almost childlike in its single-minded intensity. There was something touching and absurd about such ingenuousness. Besides, there was the poor fellow’s knee. This was not the time to resent insults.

‘I was practically well,’ he argued in a conciliatory tone. ‘You’ve got a leg that’s ready to go septic at any moment.’

Mark frowned. ‘Once I’m on my mule I shall be all right,’ he insisted. ‘It’s just a bit stiff and bruised; that’s all. Besides,’ he added, in contradiction of what he had said before, ‘there’ll be a doctor at Miajutla. The quicker I get this thing into his hands, the better.’

‘You’ll make it ten times worse on the way. If you waited here a day or two . . .’

‘Don Jorge would think I was leaving him in the lurch.’

‘Damn Don Jorge! Send him a telegram.’

‘The line doesn’t go through this place. I asked.’

‘Send the mozo, then.’

Mark shook his head. ‘I wouldn’t trust him.’

‘Why not?’

‘He’ll get drunk at the first opportunity.’

‘In other words, you don’t want to send him.’

‘Besides, it would be too late,’ Mark went on. ‘Don Jorge will be moving in a day or two.’

‘And do you imagine you’ll be able to move with him?’

‘I mean to be there,’ said Mark.

‘You can’t.’

‘I tell you, I mean to be there. I’m not going to let him down.’ His voice was cold and harsh with restrained anger. ‘And now help me up,’ he commanded.

‘I won’t.’

The two men looked at one another in silence. Then, making an effort to control himself, Mark shrugged his shoulders.

‘All right, then,’ he said, ‘I’ll call the mozo. And if you’re afraid of going on to Miajutla,’ he continued in a tone of savage contempt, ‘you can ride back to Tapatlan. I’ll go on by myself.’ Then, turning towards the open door, ‘Juan,’ he shouted. ‘Juan!’

Anthony surrendered. ‘Have it your own way. If you really want to be mad . . .’ He left the sentence unfinished. ‘But I take no responsibility.’

‘You weren’t asked to,’ Mark answered. Anthony got up and went to fetch the medicine-chest. He swabbed the wounds and applied the new dressing in silence; then, while he was trying to bandage, ‘Suppose we stopped quarrelling,’ he said. ‘Wouldn’t that make things easier?’

For a few seconds Mark remained hostile and averted; then looked up and twisted his face into a reconciliatory smile of friendliness. ‘Peace,’ he said, nodding affirmatively. ‘We’ll make peace.’

But he had reckoned without the pain. It began, agonizingly, when he addressed himself to the task of getting out of bed. For it turned out to be

impossible for him, even with Anthony's assistance, to get out of bed without bending his wounded knee; and to bend it was torture. When at last he was on his feet beside the bed, he was pale and the expression of his face hardened to a kind of ferocity.

'All right?' Anthony questioned.

Mark nodded and, as though the other had become his worst enemy, limped out of the shed without giving him a glance.

The torture began again when the time came for mounting, and was renewed with every step the mule advanced. As on the previous day, Mark took the lead. At the head of the cavalcade, he proved his superiority and at the same time put himself out of range of inquisitive eyes. The air was still cold; but from time to time, Anthony noticed, he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face, as if he were sweating. Each time he put the handkerchief away again, he would give the mule a particularly savage dig with his one available spur.

The track descended, climbed again, descended through pine woods, descended, descended. An hour passed, two hours, three; the sun was high in the sky, it was oppressively hot. Three hours, three and a half; and now there were clearings in the woods, steep fields, the stubble of Indian corn, a group of huts, and an old woman carrying water, brown children silently playing in the dust. They were on the outskirts of another village.

'What about stopping here for some food?' Anthony called, and spurred his animal to a trot. 'We might get some fresh eggs,' he continued as he drew up with the other mule.

The face Mark turned towards him was as white as paper, and, as he parted his clenched teeth to speak, the lower jaw trembled uncontrollably. 'I think we'd better push on,' he began in an almost inaudible voice. 'We've still got a long way . . .' Then the lids fluttered over his eyes, his head dropped, his body seemed to collapse upon itself; he fell forward on to the neck of his mule, slid to one side, and would have pitched to the ground if Anthony had not caught him by the arm and held him up.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT. July 23rd 1914

ANTHONY HAD DOZED off again after being called, and was late for breakfast. As he entered the little living-room, Brian looked up with startled eyes and, as though guiltily, folded away the letter he had been reading into his pocket, but not before Anthony had recognized from across the room the unmistakable characteristics of Joan's rather heavy and elaborately looped writing. Putting a specially casual note of cheeriness into his good morning, he sat down and proceeded to busy himself elaborately, as though it were a complicated scientific process requiring the whole of his attention, with the pouring out of his coffee.

'Should I tell him?' he was wondering. 'Yes, I ought to tell him. It ought to come from me, even though he does know it already. Bloody girl! Why couldn't she keep her promise?' He felt righteously indignant with Joan. Breaking her word! And what the devil has she told Brian? What would happen if his own story was different from hers? And anyhow, what a fool he would look, confessing now, when it was too late. She had robbed him of the opportunity, the very possibility of telling Brian what had happened. The woman had queered his pitch; and as his anger modulated into self-pity, he perceived himself as a man full of good intentions, maliciously prevented, at the eleventh hour, from putting them into practice. She had stopped his mouth just as he was about to speak the words that would have explained and made amends for everything; and by doing so, she had made his situation absolutely intolerable. How the devil did she expect him to behave towards Brian, now that Brian knew? He answered the question, so far, at any rate, as the next few moments were concerned, by retiring behind the Manchester Guardian. Hidden, he pretended, while he ate his scrambled eggs, to be taking a passionate interest in all this stuff about Russia and Austria and Germany. But the silence, as it lengthened out, became at lost intolerable.

‘This war business looks rather bad,’ he said at last, without lowering his barricade.

From the other end of the table Brian made a faint murmur of assent. Seconds passed. Then there was a noise of a chair being pushed back. Anthony sat there, a man so deeply preoccupied with the Russian mobilization that he wasn’t aware of what was going on in his immediate neighbourhood. It was only when Brian had actually opened the door that he started ostentatiously into consciousness.

‘Off already?’ he questioned, half turning, but not so far that he could see the other’s face.

‘I d-don’t think I shall g-go out this m-morning.’

Anthony nodded approvingly, like a family doctor. ‘That’s good,’ he said, and added that he himself proposed to hire a bicycle in the village and nip down to Ambleside. There were some things he had to buy. ‘See you at lunch-time,’ he concluded.

Brian said nothing. The door closed behind him.

By a quarter to one Anthony had returned his borrowed bicycle and was walking up the hill to the cottage. This time it was settled, definitely, once and for all. He would tell Brian everything — almost everything, the very moment he came in.

‘Brian!’ he called from the doorstep.

There was no answer.

‘Brian!’

The kitchen door opened, and old Mrs Benson, who did their cooking and cleaning, stepped out into the narrow hall. Mr Foxe, she explained, had started for a walk about half an hour before; wouldn’t be back for lunch, he had said, but had wanted (would you believe it?) to set off without anything to eat; she had made him take some sandwiches and a hard-boiled egg.

It was with a sense of inner discomfort that Anthony sat down to his solitary lunch. Brian had deliberately avoided him; therefore must be angry — or worse, it occurred to him, was hurt — too deeply to be able to bear his presence. The thought made him wince; to hurt people was so horrible, so hurting even to the

hurter. And if Brian came back from his walk magnanimously forgiving — and, knowing him, Anthony felt convinced that he would — what then? It was also painful to be forgiven; particularly painful in the case of an offence one had not oneself confessed. ‘If only I could have told him,’ he kept repeating to himself, ‘if only I could have told him’; and almost contrived to persuade himself that he had been prevented.

After lunch he walked up into the wild country behind the cottage, hoping (for it was now so urgently necessary to speak), and at the same time (since the speaking would be such an agonizing process) profoundly fearing, to meet Brian. But he met nobody. Resting on the crest of the hill, he managed for a little while to forget his troubles in sarcasms at the expense of the view. So typically and discreditably English, he reflected, wishing that Mary were there to listen to his comments. Mountains, valleys, lakes, but on the pettiest scale. Miserably small and hole-and-cornery, like English cottage architecture — all ingle-nooks and charming features; nothing fine or grandiose. No hint of thirteenth-century megalomania or baroque gesticulation. A snug, smug little sublimity. It was almost in high spirits that he started his descent.

No, said old Mrs Benson, Mr Foxe hadn’t yet come back.

He had his tea alone, then sat on a deck-chair on the lawn and read de Gourmont on style. At six, Mrs Benson came out, and after elaborately explaining that she had the table and that the cold mutton was in the larder, wished him good evening and walked away down the road towards her own cottage.

Soon afterwards the midges began to bite and he went indoors. The little bird in the Swiss clock opened its door, cuckooed seven times and retired again into silence. Anthony continued to read about style. Half an hour later the bird popped out for a single cry. It was supper-time. Anthony rose and walked to the back door. Behind the cottage the hill was bright with an almost supernatural radiance. There was no sign of Brian. He returned to the sitting-room, and for a change read some Santayana. The cuckoo uttered eight shrill hiccups. Above the orange stain of sunset the evening planet was already visible. He lit the lamp and

drew the curtains. Then, sitting down again, he tried to go on reading Santayana; but those carefully smoothed pebbles of wisdom rolled over the surface of his mind without making the smallest impression. He shut the book at last. The cuckoo announced that it was half past eight.

An accident, he was wondering, could the fellow have had an accident? But, after all, people don't have accidents — not when they're out for a quiet walk. A new thought suddenly came to him, and at once the very possibility of twisted ankles or broken legs disappeared. That walk — he felt completely certain of it now — had been to the station. Brian was in the train, on his way to London, on his way to Joan. It was obvious when one came to think of it; it simply couldn't be otherwise.

'Christ!' Anthony said aloud in the solitude of the little room. Then, made cynical and indifferent by the very hopelessness of the situation, he shrugged his shoulders and, lighting a candle, went out to the larder to fetch the cold mutton.

This time, he decided, as he ate his meal, he really would escape. Just bolt into hiding till things looked better. He felt no compunction. Brian's journey to London had relieved him, in his own estimation, of any further responsibility in the matter; he felt that he was now free to do whatever suited him best.

In preparation for his flight, he went upstairs after supper and began to pack his bag. The recollection that he had lent Brian The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman to read in bed sent him, candle in hand, across the landing. On the chest of drawers in Brian's room three envelopes stood conspicuously propped against the wall. Two, he could see from the doorway, were stamped, the other was unstamped. He crossed the room to look at them more closely. The unstamped envelope was addressed to himself, the others to Mrs Foxe and Joan respectively. He set down the candle, took the envelope addressed to himself, and tore it open. A vague but intense apprehension had filled his mind, a fear of something unknown, something he dared not know. He stood there for a long time holding the open envelope in his hand and listening to the heavy pulse of his own blood. Then, coming at last to a decision, he extricated the folded sheets. There were two of

them, one in Brian's writing, the other in Joan's. Across the top of Joan's letter Brian had written: 'Read this for yourself.' He read:

Dearest Brian, — By this time Anthony will have told you what has happened. And, you know, it did just happen — from outside, if you see what I mean, like an accident, like being run into by a train. I certainly hadn't thought about it before, and I don't think Anthony had — not really; the discovery that we loved one another just ran into us, ran over us. There wasn't any question of us doing it on purpose. That's why I don't feel guilty. Sorry, yes — more than words can say — for the pain I know I shall give you. Ready to do all I can to make it less. Asking forgiveness for hurting you. But not feeling guilty, not feeling I've treated you dishonourably. I should only feel that if I had done it deliberately; but I didn't. I tell you, it just happened to me — to us both. Brian dear, I'm unspeakably sorry to be hurting you. You of all people. If it were a matter of doing it with intention, I couldn't do it. No more than you could hurt me intentionally. But this thing has just happened, in the same way as it just happened that you hurt me because of that fear that you've always had of love. You didn't want to hurt me, but you did; you couldn't help it. The impulse that made you hurt me ran into you, ran over you, like this impulse of love that has run into me and Anthony. I don't think it's anybody's fault, Brian. We had bad luck. Everything ought to have been so good and beautiful. And then things happened to us — to you first, so that you had to hurt me; then to me. Later on, perhaps, we can still be friends. I hope so. That's why I'm not saying good-bye to you, Brian dear. Whatever happens, I am always your loving friend,

Joan.

In the effort to keep up his self-esteem and allay his profound disquietude, Anthony forced himself to think with distaste of the really sickening style in which this kind of letter was generally written. A branch of pulpit oratory, he concluded, and tried to smile to himself. But it was no good. His face refused to do what he asked of it. He dropped Joan's letter and reluctantly picked up the other sheet in Brian's handwriting.

Dear A., — I enclose the letter I received this morning from Joan. Read it; it will save me explaining. How could he have done it? That's the question I've been asking myself all the morning; and now I put it to you. How could you? Circumstances may have run over her — like a train, as she says. And that, I know, was my fault. But they couldn't have run over you. You've told me enough about yourself and Mary Amberley to make it quite clear that there could be no question in your case of poor Joan's train. Why did you do it? And why did you come here and behave as though nothing had happened? How could you sit there and let me talk about my difficulties with Joan and pretend to be sympathetic, when a couple of evenings before you had been giving her the kisses I wasn't able to give? God knows, I've done all manner of bad and stupid things in the course of my life, told all manner of lies; but I honestly don't think I could have done what you have done. I didn't think anybody could have done it. I suppose I've been living in a sort of fool's paradise all these years, thinking the world was a place where this sort of thing simply couldn't happen. A year ago I might have known how to deal with the discovery that it can happen. Not now. I know that, if I tried, I should just break down into some kind of madness. This last year has strained me more than I knew. I realize now that I'm all broken to pieces inside, and that I've been holding myself together by a continuous effort of will. It's as if a broken statue somehow contrived to hold itself together. And now this has finished it. I can't hold any more. I know if I were to see you now — and it's not because I feel that you've done something you shouldn't have done; it would be the same with anyone, even my mother — yes, if I were to see anyone who had ever meant anything to me, I should just break down and fall to bits. A statue at one moment, and the next a heap of dust and shapeless fragments. I can't face it. Perhaps I ought to; but I simply can't. I was angry with you when I began to write this letter, I hated you; but now I find I don't hate you any longer. God bless you,

B.

Anthony put the two letters and the torn envelope in his pocket, and, picking up the two stamped envelopes and the candle, made his way downstairs to the sitting-room. Half an hour later, he went to the kitchen, and in the range, which was still smouldering, set fire one by one to all the papers that Brian had left behind him. The two unopened envelopes with their closely folded contents burnt slowly, had to be constantly relighted; but at last it was done. With the poker he broke the charred paper into dust, stirred up the fire to a last flame and drew the round cover back into place. Then he walked out into the garden and down the steps to the road. On the way to the village it suddenly struck him that he would never be able to see Mary again. She would question him, she would worm the truth out of him, and having wormed it out, would proclaim it to the world. Besides, would he even want to see her again now that Brian had . . . He could not bring himself to say the words even to himself. ‘Christ!’ he said aloud. At the entrance to the village he halted for a few moments to mink what he should say when he knocked up the policeman. ‘My friend’s lost . . . My friend has been out all day and . . . I’m worried about my friend . . .’ Anything would do; he hurried on, only anxious to get it over.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE. January 12th and 14th 1934

IT WAS DARK in the little rancho, and from noon till sunset stiflingly hot; then cold all through the night. A partition divided the hut into two compartments; in the middle of the first compartment was a hearth of rough stones, and when the fire was lighted for cooking, the smoke filtered slowly away through the chinks in the windowless wooden walls. The furniture consisted of a stool, two kerosene tins for water, some earthenware cooking-pots, and a stone mortar for grinding maize. On the further side of the partition were a couple of plank beds on trestles. It was on one of these that they laid Mark.

By the following morning he was delirious with fever, and, from the knee, the infection had crept downwards, until the leg was swollen almost to the ankle.

For Anthony, as he sat there in the hot twilight, listening to the mutterings and sudden outcries of this stranger on the bed, there was, for the moment, only one thing to decide. Should he send the mozo to fetch a doctor and the necessary drugs from Miajutla? Or should he go himself?

It was the choice of evils. He thought of poor Mark, abandoned, alone in the hands of these inept and not too well-intentioned savages. But even if he himself where there, what could he do with the resources at his disposal? And suppose the mozo were sent and failed to persuade the doctor to come at once, failed to bring the necessary supplies, failed perhaps to return at all. Miajutla, as Mark had said, was in the pulque country; there would be oceans of cheap alcohol. Riding hard, he himself could be back again at Mark’s bedside in less than thirty hours. A white man with money in his pocket, he would be able to bully and bribe the doctor to bestir himself. Hardly less important, he would know what stores to bring back with him. His mind was made up. He rose, and, going to the door, called to the mozo to saddle his mule.

He had ridden for less than two hours when the miracle happened. Coming round a bend in the track he saw advancing towards him, not fifty yards away, a white man, followed by two Indians, one mounted and one on foot, with a couple of laden baggage-mules. As they drew together, the white man courteously raised his hat. The hair beneath it was light brown, grizzled above the ears, and in the deeply bronzed face the blue eyes were startlingly pale.

‘Buenas días, caballero,’ he said.

There was no mistaking the accent. ‘Good morning,’ Anthony replied.

They reined up their beasts alongside one another and began to talk.

‘This is the first word of English I’ve heard for seven and a half months,’ said the stranger. He was an elderly little man, short and spare, but with a fine upright carriage that lent him a certain dignity. The face was curiously proportioned, with a short nose and an upper lip unusually long above a wide, tightly shut mouth. A mouth like an inquisitor’s. But the inquisitor had forgotten himself and learned to smile; there were the potentialities of laughter in the deep folds of skin which separated the quiveringly sensitive corners of the mouth from the cheeks. And round the bright inquiring eyes those intricate lines seemed the traces and hieroglyphic symbols of a constantly repeated movement of humorous kindliness. A queer face, Anthony decided, but charming.

‘My name is James Miller,’ said the stranger. ‘What’s yours?’ And when he had been told, ‘Are you travelling alone, Anthony Beavis?’ he questioned, addressing the other, Quaker fashion, by both his names.

Anthony told him where he was bound and on what errand. ‘I suppose you don’t know anything about doctors in Miajutla,’ he concluded.

With a sudden deepening of the hieroglyphs about the eyes, a sudden realization of those potentialities of laughter round the mouth, the little man smiled. ‘I know about doctors here,’ he said, and tapped himself on the chest. ‘M.D., Edinburgh. And a good supply of materia medica on those mules, what’s more.’ Then, in another tone, ‘Come on,’ he said briskly. ‘Let’s get back to that poor friend of yours as quick as we can.’

Anthony wheeled his animal round, and side by side the two men set off up the track.

‘Well, Anthony Beavis,’ said the doctor, ‘you came to the right address.’

Anthony nodded. ‘Fortunately,’ he said, ‘I hadn’t been praying, otherwise I’d have had to believe in special providence and miraculous interventions.’

‘And that would never do,’ the doctor agreed. ‘Not that anything ever happens by chance, of course. One takes the card the conjuror forces on one — the card which one has oneself made it inevitable that he should force on one. It’s a matter of cause and effect.’ Then, without a pause, ‘What’s your profession?’ he asked.

‘I suppose you’d say I was a sociologist. Was one, at any rate.’

‘Indeed! Is that so?’ The doctor seemed surprised and pleased. ‘Mine’s anthropology,’ he went on. ‘Been living with the Lacandones in Chiapas these last months. Nice people when you get to know them. And I’ve collected a lot of material. Are you married, by the way?’

‘No.’

‘Never been married?’

‘No.’

Dr Miller shook his head. ‘That’s bad, Anthony Beavis,’ he said. ‘You ought to have been.’

‘What makes you say that?’

‘I can see it in your face. Here, and here.’ He touched his lips, his forehead. ‘I was married. For fourteen years. Then my wife died. Blackwater fever it was. We were working in West Africa then. She was qualified too. Knew her job better, in some ways, than I did.’ He sighed. ‘You’d have made a good husband, you know. Perhaps you will do, even now. How old are you?’

‘Forty-three.’

‘And look younger. Though I don’t like that sallow skin of yours,’ he protested with sudden vehemence. ‘Do you suffer much from constipation?’

‘Well, no,’ Anthony answered, smiling, and wondered whether it would be agreeable if everybody were to talk to one in this sort of way. A bit tiring,

perhaps, to have to treat all the people you met as human beings, every one of them with a right to know all about you; but more interesting than treating them as objects, as mere lumps of meat dumped down beside you in the bus, jostling you on the pavements. ‘Not much,’ he qualified.

‘You mean, not manifestly,’ said the doctor. ‘Any eczema?’

‘Occasional touches.’

‘And the hair tends to be scurfy.’ Dr Miller nodded his own confirmation to this statement. ‘And you get headaches, don’t you?’

Anthony had to admit that he sometimes did.

‘And, of course, stiff necks and attacks of lumbago. I know. I know. A few years more and it’ll be settled in as sciatica or arthritis.’ The doctor was silent for a moment while he looked inquiringly into Anthony’s face. ‘Yes, that sallow skin,’ he repeated, and shook his head. ‘And the irony, the scepticism, the what’s-the-good-of-it-all attitude! Negative really. Everything you think of is negative.’

Anthony laughed; but laughed to hide a certain disquiet. This being on human terms with everyone you met could be a bit embarrassing.

‘Oh, don’t imagine I’m criticizing!’ cried the doctor, and there was a note of genuine compunction in his voice.

Anthony went on laughing, unconvincingly.

‘Don’t get it into your head that I’m blaming you in any way.’

Stretching out a hand, he patted Anthony affectionately on the shoulder. ‘We’re all of us what we are; and when it comes to turning ourselves into what we ought to be — well, it isn’t easy. No, it isn’t easy, Anthony Beavis. How can you expect to think in anything but a negative way, when you’ve got chronic intestinal poisoning? Had it from birth, I guess. Inherited it. And at the same time stooping, as you do. Slumped down on your mule like that — it’s awful. Pressing down on the vertebrae like a ton of bricks. One can almost hear the poor things grinding together. And when the spine’s in that state, what happens to the rest of the machine? It’s frightful to think of.’

‘And yet,’ said Anthony, feeling a little piqued by this remorseless enumeration of his physical defects, ‘I’m still alive. I’m here to tell the tale.’

‘Somebody’s here to tell the tale,’ the doctor answered. ‘But is he the one you’d like him to be?’

Anthony did not answer, only smiled uncomfortably.

‘And even that somebody won’t be telling the tale much longer, if you’re not careful. I’m serious,’ he insisted. ‘Perfectly serious. You’ve got to change if you want to go on existing. And if it’s a matter of changing — why, you need all the help you can get, from God’s to the doctor’s. I tell you this because I like you,’ he explained. ‘I think you’re worth changing.’

‘Thank you,’ said Anthony, smiling this time with pleasure.

‘Speaking as a doctor, I’d suggest a course of colonic irrigation to start with.’

‘And speaking for God,’ said Anthony, allowing his pleasure to overflow in good-humoured mockery, ‘a course of prayer and fasting.’

‘No, not fasting,’ the doctor protested very seriously, ‘not fasting. Only a proper diet. No butcher’s meat; it’s poison, so far as you’re concerned. And no milk; it’ll only blow you up with wind. Take it in the form of cheese and butter; never liquid. And a minimum of eggs. And, of course, only one heavy meal a day. You don’t need half the stuff you’re eating. As for prayer . . .’ He sighed and wrinkled his forehead into a pensive frown. ‘I’ve never really liked it, you know. Not what’s ordinarily meant by prayer, at any rate. All that asking for special favours and guidances and forgivenesses — I’ve always found that it tends to make one egotistical, preoccupied with one’s own ridiculous self-important little personality. When you pray in the ordinary way, you’re merely rubbing yourself into yourself. You return to your own vomit, if you see what I mean. Whereas what we’re all looking for is some way of getting beyond our own vomit.’

Some way, Anthony was thinking, of getting beyond the books, beyond the perfumed and resilient flesh of women, beyond fear and sloth, beyond the painful but secretly flattering vision of the world as menagerie and asylum.

‘Beyond this piddling, twopenny-halfpenny personality,’ said the doctor, ‘with all its wretched little virtues and vices, all its silly cravings and silly pretensions. But if you’re not careful, prayer just confirms you in the bad habit of being personal. I tell you, I’ve observed it clinically, and it seems to have the same effect on people as butcher’s meat. Prayer makes you more yourself, more separate. Just as a rumpsteak does. Look at the correlation between religion and diet. Christians eat meat, drink alcohol, smoke tobacco; and Christianity exalts personality, insists on the value of petitionary prayer, teaches that God feels anger and approves the persecution of heretics. It’s the same with the Jews and the Moslems. Kosher and an indignant Jehovah. Mutton and beef — and personal survival among the houris, avenging Allah and holy wars. Now look at the Buddhists. Vegetables and water. And what’s their philosophy? They don’t exalt personality; they try to transcend it. They don’t imagine that God can be angry; when they’re unenlightened, they think he’s compassionate, and when they’re enlightened, they think he doesn’t exist, except as an impersonal mind of the universe. Hence they don’t offer petitionary prayer; they meditate — or, in other words, try to merge their own minds in the universal mind. Finally, they don’t believe in special providences for individuals; they believe in a moral order, where every event has its cause and produces its effect — where the card’s forced upon you by the conjuror, but only because your previous actions have forced the conjuror to force it upon you. What worlds away from Jehovah and God the Father and everlasting, individual souls! The fact is, of course, that we drink as we eat. I eat like a Buddhist, because I find it keeps me well and happy; and the result is that I drink like a Buddhist — and, drinking like a Buddhist, I’m confirmed in my determination to eat like one.’

‘And now you’re recommending me to eat like one.’

‘More or less.’

‘And do you also want me to think like one?’

‘In the long run you won’t be able to avoid it. But, of course, it’s better to do it consciously.’

‘Well, as a matter of fact,’ said Anthony, ‘I do think like a Buddhist already. Not in all ways perhaps, but certainly in many ways. In spite of roast beef.’

‘You think you think like a Buddhist,’ said the doctor. ‘But you don’t. Thinking negatively isn’t thinking like a Buddhist; it’s thinking like a Christian who’s eating more butcher’s meat than his intestine can deal with.’

Anthony laughed.

‘Oh, I know it sounds funny,’ said the doctor. ‘But that’s only because you’re a dualist.’

‘I’m not.’

‘Not in theory perhaps. But in practice — how can you be anything but a dualist? What are you, Anthony Beavis? A clever man — that’s obvious. But it’s equally obvious that you’ve got an unconscious body. An efficient thinking apparatus and a hopelessly stupid set of muscles and bones and viscera. Of course you’re a dualist. You live your dualism. And one of the reasons you live it is because you poison yourself with too much animal protein. Like millions of other people, of course! What’s the greatest enemy of Christianity today? Frozen meat. In the past only members of the upper classes were thoroughly sceptical, despairing, negative. Why? Among other reasons, because they were the only people who could afford to eat too much meat. Now there’s cheap Canterbury lamb and Argentine chilled beef. Even the poor can afford to poison themselves into complete scepticism and despair. And only the most violent stimuli will rouse them to purposive activity, and, what’s worse, the only activity they’ll undertake is diabolic. They can only be stimulated by hysterical appeals to persecute Jews, or murder socialists or go to war. You personally happen to be too intelligent to be a fascist or a nationalist; but again, it’s a matter of theory, not of life. Believe me, Anthony Beavis, your intestines are ripe for fascism and nationalism. They’re making you long to be shaken out of the horrible negativity to which they’ve condemned you — to be shaken by violence into violence.’

‘As a matter a fact,’ said Anthony, ‘that’s one of the reasons why I’m here.’ He waved his hand towards the tumbled chaos of the mountains. ‘Simply to be

shaken out of negativity. We were on our way to a revolution when poor Staithes got hurt.'

The doctor nodded. 'You see,' he said, 'you see! And do you suppose you'd be here if you had a healthy intestine?'

'Well, I don't really know,' Anthony answered, laughing.

'You know quite well that you wouldn't,' said the doctor almost severely. 'Not on that kind of lunatic's errand, at any rate. For, of course, you might be here as an anthropologist, say, or a teacher, a healer, whatever you like, so long as it meant understanding people and helping them.'

Anthony nodded his head slowly, but did not speak; and for a long way they rode along in silence.

*

There was light out of doors, and it was cleaner under the sky than in the little rancho. Dr Miller had chosen as his operating theatre a little clearing in the woods, outside the village.

'Beyond the range of the flies, let's hope,' he said, but without seeming too confident of it.

A hearth had been built by his two mozos, and on the fire stood a cauldron of boiling water. They had borrowed a table from the schoolmaster and some stools, with bowls for the disinfectant, and a cotton sheet to cover the bedstead.

Dr Miller had given him a dose of Nembutal, and when the time came Mark was carried out unconscious to the clearing among the pine trees. All the boys in the village escorted the stretcher and stood round in attentive silence while the patient was lifted on to the bed. Trousered, and in their wide hats, with their little blankets folded over their shoulders, they seemed, not children, but the absurd and derisive parodies of grown men.

Anthony, who had been holding the gangrened leg, straightened himself up, and, looking round, saw the ring of brown faces and the glitter of all those black, blank eyes. At the sight he found his growing apprehension abruptly transformed into uncontrollable anger.

‘Go away!’ he shouted in English, and advanced towards them, waving his arms. ‘Away, you little beasts, away!’

The children retreated, but slowly, reluctantly, with the manifest intention of returning the moment he should turn his back.

Anthony made a quick dart and caught one small boy by the arm.

‘Little beast!’

He shook the child violently, then, carried away by an irresistible impulse to inflict pain, gave him a cuff over the head that sent the big hat flying between the trees.

Uttering no cry, the child ran away after its companions. Anthony made a last menacing gesture in their direction, then turned and walked back towards the centre of the clearing. He had not taken more than a few steps when a stone, well-aimed, caught him full between the shoulders. He swung round furiously, exploding into such obscenities as he had not uttered since he was at school.

Dr Miller, who was washing his hands at the table, looked up. ‘What’s the matter?’ he asked.

‘The little devils are throwing stones.’

‘Serve you right,’ said the doctor unsympathetically. ‘Leave them alone, and come and do your duty.’

The unfamiliarly clerical and military word startled him into the uncomfortable realization that he had been behaving like a fool. Worse than a fool. With the realization of his discreditable folly came the impulse to justify it. It was in a tone of pained indignation that he spoke. ‘You’re not going to let them look on, are you?’

‘How am I to prevent them looking on, if they want to?’ asked the doctor, drying his hands as he spoke. ‘And now, Anthony Beavis,’ he went on sternly, ‘pull yourself together. This is going to be difficult enough anyhow, without your being hysterical.’

Silenced and, because he was ashamed of himself, angry with Miller, Anthony washed his hands and put on a clean shirt which had to do duty as overall.

‘Now,’ said the doctor, and stepped forward. ‘We must begin by draining the leg of blood.’

‘The’ leg, not ‘his’ leg, Anthony was thinking, as he stood beside the doctor, looking down on the man sleeping on the bed. Something impersonal, belonging to nobody in particular. The leg. But Mark’s face, Mark’s sleeping face, now so incredibly calm, so smooth, in spite of the emaciation, as though this death-like stupor had drawn a new skin across the flayed and twisted muscles — this could never be merely ‘the’ face. It was ‘his’, his for all its unlikeness to that contemptuous, suffering mask through which at ordinary times Mark looked out at the world. All the more genuinely his, perhaps, just because of that unlikeness. He remembered suddenly what Mark had said to him, beside the Mediterranean, only four months before, when he had woken to see those eyes now shut, but then wide-open and bright with derision, sardonically examining him through the mosquito net. Perhaps one really is what one seems to be in sleep. Innocence and peace — the mind’s essence, and all the rest mere accident.

‘Take his foot,’ Dr Miller ordered, ‘and lift the leg as nearly vertical as you can.’

Anthony did as he was told. Raised in this grotesque way, the horribly swollen and discoloured leg seemed more impersonal, more a mere thing than ever. The stink of mortified flesh was in his nostrils. From behind them, among the trees, a voice said something incomprehensible; there was a snicker of laughter.

‘Now leave the foot to the mozo and stand by here.’ Anthony obeyed, and smelt again the resin of the forest. ‘Hold that bottle for me.’

There was an astonished murmur of ‘Amarillo!’ as the doctor painted the thigh with flavine. Anthony looked again at his friend’s face; it remained undisturbed in its serenity. Essentially still and pure. The leg with its black dead flesh; the saw there in the bowl of permanganate solution, the knives and forceps; the fascinated children peering out of the forest — all were somehow irrelevant to the essential Mark.

‘Now the chloroform,’ said Dr Miller. ‘And the cotton wool. I’ll show you how to use it. Then you’ll have to go on by yourself.’

He opened the bottle, and the smell of pine trees in the sunshine was overlaid by a rasping and nauseating sweetness.

‘There, do you see the trick?’ asked the doctor. ‘Like that. Go on with that. I’ll tell you when to stop. I’ve got to put on the tourniquet.’

There were no birds in the trees, hardly, even, any insects. The wood was deathly still. This sunny clearing was a little island of speech and movement in an ocean of silence. And at the centre of that island lay another silence, intenser, more complete than the silence of the forest.

The tourniquet was in place. Dr Miller ordered the mozo to lower the grotesquely hoisted leg. He pulled up a stool to the bedside, sat down, then rose again and, as he washed his hands for the last time, explained to Anthony that he would have to operate sitting down. The bed was too low for him to be able to stand. Taking his seat once more, he dipped into the bowl of permanganate for a scalpel.

At the sight of those broad flaps of skin turned back, like the peel of a huge banana, but from a red and bleeding fruit, Anthony was seized with a horrible sensation of nausea. The saliva came pouring into his mouth and he had to keep swallowing and swallowing to get rid of it. Involuntarily, he gave vent to a retching cough.

‘Steady now,’ said the doctor without looking up. With an artery forceps, he secured the end of an oozing vessel.

‘Think of it scientifically.’ He made another sweeping cut through the red flesh. ‘And if you must be sick,’ he went on with sudden asperity, ‘for God’s sake go and do it quickly!’ Then, in another tone — the tone of the professor who demonstrates an interesting point to his students, ‘One has to cut back the nerves a long way,’ he said. ‘There’s a tremendous retraction as the tissues heal up. Anyhow,’ he added, ‘he’ll probably have to have a re-amputation at home. It won’t be a beautiful stump, I’m afraid.’

Calm and at peace, innocent of all craving, all malice, all ambition — it was the face of one who has made himself free, one for whom there are no more bars or chains, no more sepulchres under a stone, and on whom the bird-lime no longer sticks. The face of one who has made himself free . . . But in fact, Anthony reflected, in fact he had had his freedom forced upon him by this evil-smelling vapour. Was it possible to be one's own liberator? There were snares; but also there was a way of walking out of them. Prisons; but they could be opened. And if the torture-chambers could never be abolished, perhaps the tortures could be made to seem irrelevant. As completely irrelevant as now to Mark this sound of sawing, as this revolting rasp and squeak of the steel teeth biting into the bone, of the steel blade rubbing back and forth in the deepening groove. Mark lay there serene, almost smiling.

CHAPTER FIFTY. Christmas Day 1934

GOD — A person or not a person? Quién sabe? Only revelation can decide such metaphysical questions. And revelation isn't playing the game — is equivalent to pulling three aces of trumps from up your sleeve.

Of more significance is the practical question. Which gives a man more power to realize goodness — belief in a personal or an impersonal God? Answer: it depends. Some minds work one way, some another. Mine, as it happens, finds no need, indeed, finds it impossible to think of the world in terms of personality. Patanjali says you may believe in a personal God, or not, according to taste. The psychological results will be the same in either case.

For those whose nature demands personality as a source of energy, but who find it impossible to believe that the universe is run by a person in any sense of the word that we can possibly understand — what's the right policy? In most cases, they reject any practice which might be called religious. But this is throwing away the baby with the bath water. The desired relationship with a personality can be historical, not ontological. A contact, not with somebody existing at present as manager of the universe, but with somebody known to have existed at some time in the past. The Imitation of Christ (or of any other historical character) is just as effective if the model be regarded as having existed there, then, as it is if the model be conceived as existing here, now. And meditation on goodness, communication with goodness, contemplation of goodness are demonstrably effective means of realizing goodness in life, even when that which is meditated on, communicated with and contemplated, is not a person, but a general mind, or even an ideal supposed to exist only in human minds. The fundamental problem is practical — to work out systems of psychological exercises for all types of men and women. Catholicism has many systems of mental prayer — Ignatian, Franciscan, Liguorian, Carmelite, and so

on. Hinduism, Northern, Southern, and Zen Buddhism also have a variety of practices. There is a great work to be done here. Collecting and collating information from all these sources. Consulting books and, more important, people who have actually practised what is in the books, have had experience of teaching novices. In time, it might be possible to establish a complete and definite Ars Contemplativa. A series of techniques, adapted to every type of mind. Techniques for meditating on, communicating with and contemplating goodness. Ends in themselves and at the same time means for realizing some of that goodness in practice.

January 1st 1935

Machinery and good organization — modern inventions; and, like all blessings, have to be paid for. In many ways. One item is the general belief, encouraged by mechanical and social efficiency that progress is automatic and can be imposed from outside. We, as individuals, need do nothing about it. Liquidate undesirables, distribute enough money and goods — all will be well. It is a reversion to magic, a pandering to man's natural sloth. Note the striking way in which this tendency runs through the whole of modern life, cropping up at every point. There seems no obvious connexion between the Webbs and the Soviets on the one hand, and Modern Catholicism on the other. But what profound subterranean resemblances? The recent Catholic revival essentially a revival of sacraments. From a Catholic point of view, this is a 'sacramental age'. Magic power of sacraments regarded as sufficient for salvation. Mental prayer conspicuously absent. Exact analogy to the Webbs — Soviet idea of progress from without, through machinery and efficient organization. For English Catholics, sacraments are the psychological equivalents of tractors in Russia.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE. February 7th 1934

DR MILLER DISMOUNTED at the open door, left his beast with the mozo, and stepped into the hut.

Propped up on his bed, Mark watched him enter — a small, erect figure, walking briskly, his blue eyes bright with inquiring kindness, the corners of his mouth alive with the potentialities of laughter.

‘And how are all the little patients this evening?’ Mark twisted up his pale and still emaciated face into a ferociously sardonic smile.

From the stool on which he was sitting beside the bed, Anthony shot a glance at him, and remembered the serenity of that face three weeks before, in the early morning sunshine among the pine trees. Serene and at peace. But now that life had come back to him, now that he was safely convalescent, the peace had departed, leaving him the embittered enemy of the whole world. There had been hatred in his eyes even before he was strong enough to speak. Hatred for everyone who came near him — above all for old Miller.

‘I can’t bear his perpetual twinkle,’ was what he had said to Anthony later on. ‘Nobody has a right to go about looking like the advertisement for a constipation cure.’

But the real reason for Mark’s dislike was different. He hated old Miller because of his dependence upon him, because of the unflaggingly watchful efficiency of the man’s care. Poor Mark! How acutely he suffered from having to accept a service and, still more, from being compelled by his own physical weakness to ask for it! How bitterly he resented even affection, if it were given by somebody to whom it was impossible for him to feel superior! His dislike for the doctor had been present from the first moment of his return to consciousness, had increased with every day that the old man delayed his departure in order to look after him.

‘But why don’t you get on with your journey?’ he had asked; and when the doctor answered that he was in no hurry and intended to see him safely down to the coast and even, since he himself was leaving, home through the Canal to England, had protested vehemently that his leg was practically healed, that there would be no difficulty in getting back to Puerto San Felipe, that he himself would probably be taking the northbound boat to Los Angeles.

But the doctor had remained, attending to Mark and in the intervals riding out to the neighbouring villages to treat the sick. To the convalescent this was an additional source of irritation — though why it should have annoyed him Anthony could not rightly understand. Perhaps he resented the fact that the benefactor of the Indians was not himself. Anyhow, there it was; he was never tired of baiting old Miller with those ‘little patients’ of his.

Then, a fortnight after the operation, had come the news of the ignominious failure of Don Jorge’s attempt at insurrection. He had been surprised with an insufficient guard, taken alive, summarily tried and shot with his chief lieutenant. The report added that the two men had cracked jokes together as they walked between the soldiers towards the cemetery, where their graves were already dug.

‘And he died,’ had been Mark’s comment, ‘believing that I’d taken fright at the last moment and let him down.’

The thought was like another wound to him.

‘If I hadn’t had this blasted accident . . .’ he kept repeating. ‘If I’d been there to advise him . . . That crazy rashness of his! That was why he’d asked me to come. He mistrusted his own judgement. And here was I lying in this stinking pigsty, while the poor devil marches off to the cemetery. . . .’ Cracking jokes, as he sniffed the cold morning air. ‘Huele al cimintero, Don Jaime.’ He too would have cracked his joke. Instead of which . . . It was just bad luck, of course, just a typical piece of providential idiocy; but providence was not there for him to vent his grievance on. Only Anthony and the doctor were there. His behaviour towards them, after the news of Don Jorge’s death, had become increasingly

bitter and resentful. It was as though he regarded them as personally responsible for what had happened. Both of them, especially the doctor.

‘How’s the delicious bedside manner?’ Mark now went on, in the same derisive tone in which he had asked after the little patients.

‘Wasted, I’m afraid,’ Dr Miller answered good-humouredly as he took off his hat and sat down. ‘Either they haven’t got any beds for me to be at the side of — only a blanket on the floor. Or else they don’t speak any Spanish, and I don’t speak their brand of Indian dialect. And how’s yourself?’ he asked.

‘Myself,’ said Mark, returning the doctor his expression in a tone of emphatically contemptuous disgust, as though it were some kind of verbal ordure, ’is very well, thanks.’

‘But doing a slight Bishop Berkeley,’ Anthony interposed. ‘Feeling pains in the knee he hasn’t got.’

Mark looked at him for a moment with an expression of stony dislike; then turning away and fixing his eyes on the bright evening landscape, visible through the open door of the hut, ‘Not pains,’ he said coldly, though it was as pains that he had described them to Anthony only half an hour before. ‘Just the sensation that the knee’s still there.’

‘Can’t avoid that, I’m afraid.’ The doctor shook his head.

‘I didn’t suppose one could,’ Mark said, as though he were replying with dignity to an aspersion on his honour.

Dr Miller broke the uncomfortable silence by remarking that there was a good deal of goitre in the higher valleys.

‘It has its charm,’ said Mark, stroking an imaginary bulge at his throat. ‘How I regret those cretins one used to see in Switzerland when I was a child! They’ve iodined them out of existence now, I’m afraid. The world’s too damned sanitary these days.’ He shook his head and smiled anatomically. ‘What do they do up there in the high valleys?’ he asked.

‘Grow maize,’ said the doctor. ‘And kill one another in the intervals. There’s a huge network of vendettas spread across these mountains. Everybody’s

involved. I've been talking to the responsible men, trying to persuade them to liquidate all the old accounts and start afresh.'

'They'll die of boredom.'

'No, I'm teaching them football instead. Matches between the villages.' He smiled. 'I've had a lot of experience with vendettas,' he added. 'All over the world. They all detest them, really. Are only too thankful for football when they're used to it.'

'Christ!'

'Why "Christ"?'

'Those games! Can't we ever escape from them?'

'But they're the greatest English contribution to civilization,' said the doctor. 'Much more important than parliamentary government, or steam engines, or Newton's Principia. More important even than English poetry. Poetry can never be a substitute for war and murder. Whereas games can be. A complete and genuine substitute.'

'Substitutes!' Mark echoed contemptuously. 'You're all content with substitutes. Anthony finds his in bed or in the British Museum Reading Room. You look for yours on the football field. God help you! Why are you so frightened of the genuine article?'

For a little while no one spoke. Dr Miller looked at Anthony, and, seeing that he did not propose to answer, turned back to the other. 'It isn't a question of being frightened, Mark Staithes,' he said very mildly. 'It's a question of choosing something right instead of something wrong. . . .'

'I'm suspicious of right choices that happen to need less courage than the wrong ones.'

'Is danger your measure of goodness?'

Mark shrugged his shoulders. 'What is goodness? Hard to know, in most cases. But at least one can be sure that it's good to face danger courageously.'

'And for that you're justified in deliberately creating dangerous situations — at other people's expense?' Dr Miller shook his head. 'That won't do, Mark Staithes. If you want to use courage, why not use it in a good cause.'

‘Such as teaching blackamoors to play football,’ Mark sneered.

‘Which isn’t so easy, very often, as it sounds.’

‘They can’t grasp the offside rule, I suppose.’

‘They don’t want to grasp any rule at all, except the rule of killing the people from the next village. And when you’re between two elevens armed to the teeth and breathing slaughter to one another . . .’ He paused; his wide mouth twitched into a smile; the almost invisible hieroglyphs round his eyes deepened, as he narrowed the lids, into the manifest symbols of an inner amusement. ‘Well, as I say, it isn’t quite so easy as it sounds. Have you ever found yourself faced by a lot of angry men who wanted to kill you?’

Mark nodded, and an expression of rather malevolent satisfaction appeared on his face. ‘Several times,’ he answered. ‘When I was running a coffee finca a bit further down the coast, in Chiapas.’

‘And you faced them without arms?’

‘Without arms,’ Mark repeated, and, by the way of explanation, ‘The politicians,’ he added, ‘were still talking about revolution in those days. The land for the people — and all the rest. One fine morning the villagers came to seize the estate.’

‘Which, on your principles,’ said Anthony, ‘you ought to have approved of.’

‘And did approve, of course. But I could hardly admit it — not in those circumstances.’

‘Why not?’

‘Well, surely that’s pretty obvious, isn’t it? There they were, marching against me. Was I to tell them I sympathized with their politics and then hand over the estate? No, really, that would have been a bit too simple!’

‘What did you do, then?’

‘There were about a hundred of them the first time,’ Mark explained. ‘Festooned with guns and cartridge-belts like Christmas trees, and all with their machetes. But polite, soft-spoken. They had no particular quarrel with me, and the revolutionary idea was strange; they didn’t feel too certain of themselves.

Not that they ever make much noise,' he added. 'I've seen them killing in silence. Like fish. It's an aquarium, this country.'

'Seems like an aquarium,' Dr Miller emended. 'But when one has learnt how the fishes think . . .'

'I've always found it more important to learn how they drink,' said Mark. 'Tequila's the real enemy. Luckily, mine were sober. Otherwise . . . Well, who knows what would have happened?' After a pause, 'They were standing on the cement drying floor,' he went on, 'and I was sitting at the door of the office, up a few steps, above them. Superior, as though I were holding a durbar of my loyal subjects.' He laughed; the colour had come to his cheeks, and he spoke with a kind of gusto, as though the words had a pleasant taste in his mouth. 'A hundred villainous, coffee-coloured peons, staring up at one with those beady tortoises' eyes of theirs — it wasn't reassuring. But I managed to keep my face and voice from giving anything away. It helped a lot, I found, to think of the creatures as some kind of rather squalid insects. Cockroaches, dung beetles. Just a hundred big, staring bugs. It helped, I say. But still my heart did beat a bit. On its own — you know the sensation, don't you? It's as though you had a live bird under your ribs. A bird with its own birdlike consciousness. Suffering from its own private fears. An odd sensation, but exhilarating. I don't think I was ever happier in my life than I was that day. The fact of being one against a hundred. A hundred armed to the teeth. But bugs, only bugs. Whereas the one was a man. It was a wonderful feeling.' He was silent for a little, smiling to himself.

'And what happened then?' Anthony asked.

'Nothing. I just gave them a little speech from the throne. Told them the finca wasn't mine to give away. That, meanwhile, I was responsible for the place. And if I caught anybody trespassing on the land, or doing any mischief — well. I should know what to do. Firm, dignified, the real durbar touch. After which I got up, told them they could go, and walked up the path towards the house. I suppose I was within sight of them for about a minute. A full minute with my back turned to them. And there were at least a hundred of the creatures; nobody could have ever discovered who fired the shot. That bird under the ribs!' Lifting

a hand, he fluttered the fingers in the air. ‘And there was a new sensation — ants running up and down the spine. Terrors — but of the body only; autonomous, if you see what I mean. In my mind I knew that they wouldn’t shoot, couldn’t shoot. A hundred miserable bugs — it was morally impossible for them to do it. Bird under the ribs, ants up and down the spine; but inside the skull there was a man; and he was confident, in spite of the body’s doubts, he knew that the game had been won. It was a long minute, but a good one. A very good one. And there were other minutes like it afterwards. The only times they ever shot at me were at evening, from out of the bushes. I was within their range, but they were out of mine. Out of the range of my consciousness and will. That was why they had the courage to shoot. When the man’s away, the bugs will play. Luckily, no amount of courage has ever taught an Indian to shoot straight. In time, of course, they might have got me by a fluke; but meanwhile revolution went out of fashion. It never cut very much ice on the Pacific coast.’ He lit a cigarette. There was a long silence.

‘Well,’ said Dr Miller at last, ‘that’s one way of dealing with a hostile crowd. And seeing that you’re here to tell us, it’s evidently a way that sometimes succeeds. But it’s not my way. I’m an anthropologist, you see.’

‘What difference does that make?’

‘Quite a big one,’ Dr Miller replied. ‘An anthropologist is a person who studies men. But you prefer to deal with bugs. I’d call you an entomologist, Mark Staithes.’ His smile evoked no answering sign of friendliness. Mark’s face was stony as he met the doctor’s eyes and looked away again.

‘Entomologist!’ he repeated scornfully. ‘That’s just stupid. Why do you play with words?’

‘Because words express thoughts, Mark Staithes; and thoughts determine actions. If you call a man a bug, it means that you propose to treat him as a bug. Whereas if you call him a man, it means that you propose to treat him as a man. My profession is to study men. Which means that I must always call men by their name; always think of them as men; yes, and always treat them as men.

Because if you don’t treat men as men, they don’t behave as men. But I’m an anthropologist, I repeat. I want human material. Not insect material.’

Mark uttered an explosive little laugh. ‘One may want human material,’ he said. ‘But that doesn’t mean one’s going to get it. What one actually gets . . .’ He laughed again. ‘Well, it’s mostly plain, undiluted bug.’

‘There,’ said Dr Miller, ‘you’re wrong. If one looks for men, one finds them. Very decent ones, in a majority of cases. For example, go among a suspicious, badly treated, savage people; go unarmed, with your hands open.’ He held out his large square hands in a gesture of offering. ‘Go with the persistent and obstinate intention of doing them some good — curing their sick, for example. I don’t care how bitter their grievance against white men may be; in the end, if you’re given time enough to make your intentions clear, they’ll accept you as a friend, they’ll be human beings treating you as a human being. Of course,’ he added, and the symbols of inner laughter revealed themselves once more about his eyes, ‘it sometimes happens that they don’t leave you the necessary time. They spear you before you’re well under way. But it doesn’t often happen — it has never happened to me, as you can see — and when it does happen, well, there’s always the hope that the next man who comes will be more successful. Anthropologists may get killed; but anthropology goes on; and in the long run it can’t fail to succeed. Whereas your entomological approach . . .’ He shook his head. ‘It may succeed at the beginning; you can generally frighten and overawe people into submission. That’s to say that, by treating them as bugs, you can generally make them behave like bugs — crawl and scuttle to cover. But the moment they have the opportunity, they’ll turn on you. The anthropologist may get killed while establishing his first contacts; but after that, he’s safe; he’s a man among men. The entomologist may start by being safe; but he’s a bug-hunter among bugs — among bugs, what’s more, who resent being treated as bugs, who know they aren’t bugs. His bad quarter of an hour comes later on. It’s the old story; you can do everything with bayonets except sit on them.’

‘You don’t have to sit on them,’ said Mark. ‘It’s the other people’s bottoms that get punctured, not yours. If you wielded the bayonets with a certain amount

of intelligence, I don’t see why you shouldn’t go on ruling indefinitely. The real trouble is, of course, that there isn’t the necessary intelligence. Most bug-hunters are indistinguishable from the bugs.’

‘Exactly,’ Dr Miller agreed. ‘And the only remedy is for the bug-hunter to throw his bayonets away and treat the bugs as though they were human beings.’

‘But we’re talking about intelligence,’ said Mark. The tone of contemptuous tolerance implied that he was doing his best not to get angry with the old fool for his incapacity to think. ‘Being sentimental has nothing to do with being intelligent.’

‘On the contrary,’ the doctor insisted, ‘it has everything to do with it. You can’t be intelligent about human beings unless you’re first sentimental about them. Sentimental in the good sense, of course. In the sense of caring for them. It’s the first indispensable condition of understanding them. If you don’t care for them, you can’t possibly understand them; all your acuteness will just be another form of stupidity.’

‘And if you care for them,’ said Mark, ‘you’ll be carried away by your maudlin emotions and become incapable of seeing them for what they are. Look at the grotesque, humiliating things that happen when people care too much. The young men who fall in love and imagine that hideous, imbecile girls are paragons of beauty and intellect. The devoted women who persist in thinking that their squalid little hubbies are all that’s most charming, noble, wise, profound.’

‘They’re probably quite right,’ said Dr Miller. ‘It’s indifference and hatred that are blind, not love.’

‘Not lo-ove!’ Mark repeated derisively. ‘Perhaps we might now sing a hymn.’

‘With pleasure,’ Dr Miller smiled. ‘A Christian hymn, or a Buddhist hymn, or a Confucian — whichever you like. I’m an anthropologist; and after all, what’s anthropology? Merely applied scientific religion.’

Anthony broke a long silence. ‘Why do you only apply it to blackamoors?’ he asked. ‘What about beginning at home, like charity?’

‘You’re right,’ said the doctor, ‘it ought to have begun at home. If, in fact, it began abroad, that’s merely a historical accident. It began there because we were imperialists and so came into contact with people whose habits were different from ours and therefore seemed stranger than ours. An accident, I repeat. But in some ways a rather fortunate accident. For thanks to it we’ve learnt a lot of facts and a valuable technique, which we probably shouldn’t have learnt at home. For two reasons. Because it’s hard to think dispassionately about oneself, and still harder to think correctly about something that’s very complicated. Home’s both those things — an elaborate civilization that happens to be our own. Savage societies are simply civilized societies on a small scale and with the lid off. We can learn to understand them fairly easily. And when we’ve learnt to understand savages, we’ve learnt, as we discover, to understand the civilized. And that’s not all. Savages are usually hostile and suspicious. The anthropologist has got to learn to overcome that hostility and suspicion. And when he’s learnt that, he’s learnt the whole secret of politics.’

‘Which is . . . ?’

‘That if you treat other people well, they’ll treat you well.’

‘You’re a bit optimistic, aren’t you?’

‘No. In the long run they’ll always treat you well.’

‘In the long run,’ said Mark impatiently, ‘we shall all be dead. What about the short run?’

‘You’ve got to take a risk.’

‘But Europeans aren’t like your Sunday-school savages. It’ll be an enormous risk.’

‘Possibly. But always smaller than the risk you run by treating people badly and goading them into a war. Besides, they’re not worse than savages. They’ve just been badly handled — need a bit of anthropology, that’s all.’

‘And who’s going to give them the anthropology?’

‘Well, among others,’ Dr Miller answered, ‘I am. And I hope you are, Mark Staithes.’

Mark made a flayed grimace and shook his head. ‘Let them slit one another’s throats,’ he said. ‘They’ll do it anyhow, whatever you tell them. So leave them to make their idiotic wars in peace. Besides,’ he pointed to the basket-work cage that kept the bed-clothes out of contact with his wound, ‘what can I do now? Look on, that’s all. We’d much better all look on. It won’t be for long anyhow. Just a few years; and then . . .’ He paused, looked down and frowned. ‘What are those verses of Rochester’s? Yes.’ He raised his head again and recited:

‘Then old age and experience, hand in hand,
Lead him to death, and make him understand,
After a search so painful and so long,
That all his life he had been in the wrong.
Huddled in dirt the reasoning engine lies,
Who was so proud, so witty and so wise.’

‘Huddled in dirt,’ he repeated. ‘That’s really admirable. Huddled in dirt. And one doesn’t have to wait till one’s dead to be that. We’ll find a snug little patch of dirt and huddle together, shall we?’ He turned to Anthony. ‘Huddle together among the cow-pats and watch the doctor trying his best anthropological bedside manner on General Goering. There’ll be some hearty laughs.’

‘In spite of which,’ said Anthony, ‘I think I shall go and make myself ridiculous with Miller.’

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO. July 24th 1914

THERE WERE FOUR of them in the search-party: Anthony, the policeman, an old shepherd, with the grey whiskers and the majestic profile of a Victorian statesman, and a fair, red-faced boy of seventeen, the baker's son. The boy was made to carry the canvas part of the stretcher, while the shepherd and the policeman used the long poles as staves.

They set out from behind the cottage, walking in a line — like beaters, Anthony found himself reflecting — up the slope of the hill. It was a brilliant day, cloudless and windless. The distant hills showed as though through veils, dim with much sunlight and almost without colour. Under their feet the grass and heather were dusty with long drought. Anthony took off his jacket, and then, on second thoughts, his hat. A touch of sunstroke might simplify things; there would be no need to give explanations or answer questions. Even as it was, he felt rather sick and there was a griping in his bowels. But that was hardly enough. How many difficulties would be removed if he could be really ill! Every now and then, as they climbed slowly on, he put his hand to his head, and each time the hair felt hot to the touch, like the fur of a cat that has been sitting in front of the fire. It was a pity, he thought, that his hair was so thick.

Three hours later they had found what they were looking for. Brian's body was lying, face downwards, in a kind of rocky bay, at the foot of a cliff above the tarn. Bracken was growing between the rocks, and in the hot air its sweetish, oppressive scent was almost suffocatingly strong. The place was loud with flies. When the policeman turned the body over, the mangled face was almost unrecognizable. Anthony looked for a moment, then turned away. His whole body had begun to tremble uncontrollably; he had to lean against a rock to prevent himself from falling.

‘Come, lad.’ The old shepherd took him by the arm, and, leading him away, made him sit down on the grass, out of sight of the body. Anthony waited. A buzzard turned slowly in the sky, tracing out the passage of time on an invisible clock-face. Then at last they came out from behind the buttress of rock into his view. The shepherd and the boy walked in front, each holding one pole of the stretcher, while the policeman, behind, had to support the weight on both the poles. Brian’s torn jacket had been taken off and spread over his face. One stiffened arm stuck out irrepressibly and, at every step the bearers took, swung and trembled in the air. There were blood-stains on the shirt. Anthony got up, and in spite of their protestations insisted on taking half the policeman’s burden. Very slowly, they made their way down towards the valley. It was after three o’clock when at last they reached the cottage.

Later, the policeman went through the pockets of coat and trousers. A tobacco pouch, a pipe, Mrs Benson’s packet of sandwiches, six or seven shillings in money, and a note-book half-full of jottings about the economic history of the Roman Empire. Not the smallest hint that what had happened had been anything but an accident.

Mrs Foxe arrived the following evening. Rigid at first with self-control, she listened in silence, stonily, to Anthony’s story; then, all at once, broke down, fell to pieces as it were, in a passion of tears. Anthony stood by her for a moment, uncertainly; then crept out of the room.

Next morning, when he saw her again, Mrs Foxe had recovered her calm — but a different kind of calm. The calm of a living, sentient being, not the mechanical and frozen stillness of a statue. There were dark lines under her eyes, and the face was that of an old and suffering woman; but there was a sweetness and serenity in the suffering, an expression of dignity, almost of majesty. Looking at her, Anthony felt himself abashed, as though he were in the presence of something that he was not worthy, that he had no right, to approach. Abashed and guilty, more guilty even than he had felt the night before, when her grief had passed beyond her control.

He would have liked to escape once more; but she kept him with her all the morning, sometimes sitting in silence, sometimes speaking in that slow, beautifully modulated voice of hers. To Anthony silence and speech were equally a torture. It was an agony to sit there, saying nothing, listening to the clock ticking, and wondering, worrying about the future — how to get away from Joan, what to tell her about that accursed letter of hers; and every now and then stealing a glance at Mrs Foxe and asking himself what was going on in her mind and whether she had any knowledge, any suspicion even, of what had really happened. Yes, her silences were painful; but equally painful was her speech.

'I realize,' she began, slowly and pensively, 'I realize now that I loved him in the wrong way — too possessively.'

What was he to say? That it was true? Of course it was true. She had been like a vampire, fastened on poor Brian's spirit. Sucking his life's blood. (St Monica, he remembered, by Ary Scheffer.) Yes, a vampire. If anyone was responsible for Brian's death, it was she. But his self-justificatory indignation against her evaporated as she spoke again.

'Perhaps that was one of the reasons why it happened, in order that I might learn that love mustn't be like that.' Then, after a pause, 'I suppose,' she went on, 'Brian had learnt enough. He hadn't very much to learn, really. He knew so much to start with. Like Mozart — only his genius wasn't for music; it was for love. Perhaps that was why he could go so soon. Whereas I . . .' She shook her head. 'I've had to have this lesson. After all these long years of learning, still so wilfully stupid and ignorant!' She sighed and was silent once more.

A vampire — but she knew it; she admitted her share of responsibility. There remained his share — still unconfessed. 'I ought to tell her,' he said to himself, and thought of all that had resulted from his failure to tell the truth to Brian. But while he was hesitating, Mrs Foxe began again.

'One ought to love everyone like an only son,' she went on. 'And one's own only son as one amongst them. A son one can't help loving more than the rest, because one has more opportunities for loving him. But the love would be

different only in quantity, not in kind. One ought to love him as one loves all the other only sons — for God's sake, not for one's own.'

The richly vibrant voice spoke on, and, with every word it uttered, Anthony felt more guilty — more guilty, and at the same time more completely and hopelessly committed to his guilt. The longer he delayed and the more she said in this strain of resignation, the harder it was going to be to undeceive her with the truth.

'Listen, Anthony,' she resumed, after another long pause. 'You know how fond of you I've always been. Ever since that time just after your mother's death — do you remember? — when you first came to stay with us. You were such a defenceless little boy. And that's how I've always seen you, ever since. Defenceless under your armour. For, of course, you've had an armour. You still have. To protect yourself against me, among other dangers.' She smiled at him. Anthony dropped his eyes, blushed and mumbled some incoherent phrase. 'Never mind why you've wanted to protect yourself,' she went on. 'I don't want to know, unless you want to tell me. And perhaps you'll feel you want to protect yourself still more now. Because I'm going to say that I'd like you to take Brian's place. The place,' she qualified, 'that Brian ought to have had if I'd loved him in the right way. Among all the other only sons, the one whom there's more opportunity of loving than the rest. That's what I'd like you to be, Anthony. But, of course, I won't force myself on you. It's for you to decide.'

He sat in silence, his face averted from her, his head bent. 'Blurt it out,' a voice was crying within him. 'Anyhow, at any price!' But if it had been difficult before, now it was impossible. Saying she wanted him to take Brian's place! It was she who had made it impossible. He was shaken by the gust of futile anger. If only she'd leave him in peace, let him go away and be alone! Suddenly his throat contracted, the tears came into his eyes, the muscles of his chest tightened in spasm after violent spasm; he was sobbing. Mrs Foxe crossed the room, and bending over him, laid a hand on his shoulder.

'Poor Anthony,' she whispered.

He was pinned irrevocably to his lie.

That evening he wrote to Joan. This horrible accident. So unnecessary. So stupid in its tragedy. It had happened, as a matter of fact, before he had had an opportunity for telling Brian about those events in London. And, by the way, had she written to Brian? An envelope addressed in her handwriting had been delivered at midday, when the poor fellow had already started out. He was keeping it for her and would return it personally, when he saw her next. Meanwhile, Mrs Foxe was bearing it wonderfully; and they must all be brave; and he was always hers affectionately.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE. February 23rd 1934

HELEN CAME INTO the sitting-room, holding a frying-pan in which the bacon was still spluttering from the fire.

‘Breakfast!’ she called.

‘Komme gleich’ came back from the bedroom, and a moment later Ekki showed himself at the open door in shirt-sleeves, razor in hand, his fair ruddy face covered with soap-suds.

‘Almost finished,’ he said in English, and disappeared again.

Helen smiled to herself as she sat down. Loving him as she did, she found an extraordinary pleasure in this close and incessant physical intimacy with him — the intimacy that their poverty had perforce imposed on them. Why do people want large houses, separate rooms, all the private hiding-places that the rich find indispensable? She couldn’t imagine, now. Humming to herself, out of tune, Helen poured out the tea, helped herself to bacon, then began to sort the morning’s letters. Helen Amberley. No Mrs. Communist frankness and informality. She opened the envelope. The letter was from Newcastle. Would it be possible for her or Giesebrecht to speak to a group of young comrades on conditions in Germany some time in March? Well, one would have to see. Mr E. Giesebrecht. From Switzerland; and surely that thin spiky writing was Holtzmann’s. Ekki would be pleased.

‘Something from Holtzmann,’ she said as he came in. ‘I wonder what news he’ll have this time?’

Ekki took the letter, and, with that methodical deliberation that characterized all his actions, opened it; then, laid it down beside his plate and cut off a piece of bacon. He poked the bacon into his mouth, picked up the letter again, and, slowly chewing, began to read. An expression of intent and focused gravity came into his face; he could never do anything except thoroughly and whole-

heartedly. When he had finished, he turned back to the first page and started reading all over again.

Helen's impatience got the better of her at last. 'Anything interesting?' she asked. Holtzmann was the best informed of the exiled journalists; he always had something to communicate. 'Tell me what he says.'

Ekki did not answer at once, but read on in silence for a few seconds, then folded up the letter and put it away in his pocket. 'Mach is in Basel,' he answered at last, looking up at her.

'Mach?' she repeated. 'Do you mean Ludwig Mach?'

In the course of these last months, the name of this most resourceful and courageous of all the German comrades engaged in the dissemination of Communist propaganda and censored news had become, for Helen, at once familiar and fabulous, like the name of a personage in literature or mythology. That Ludwig Mach should be at Basel seemed almost as improbable as that Odysseus should be there, or Odin, or the Scarlet Pimpernel. 'Ludwig Mach from Stuttgart?' she insisted incredulously.

Ekki nodded. 'I shall have to go and see him. Tomorrow.'

Spoken in that slow, emphatic, foreign way of his, the words had a strange quality of absolute irrevocableness. Even his most casual statements always sounded, when uttered in English, as though he had made them on oath.

'I shall have to go,' he repeated.

Carefully, conscientiously pronounced, each syllable had the same value. Two heavy spondees and the first half of a third. Whereas an Englishman, however irrevocably he had made up his mind, would have spoken the phrase as a kind of gobbled anapaest — I-shall-have-to-go. In another man, this way of speaking — so ponderous, so Jehovah-like, as she herself had teasingly called it — would have seemed to Helen intolerably grotesque. But, in Ekki, it was an added attraction. It seemed somehow right and fitting that this man, whom (quite apart from loving) she admired and respected beyond anyone she had ever known, should be thus touchingly absurd.

‘If I couldn’t laugh at him sometimes,’ she explained to herself, ‘it might all go putrid. A pool of stagnant adoration. Like religion. Like one of Landseer’s dogs. The laughter keeps it aired and moving.’

Listening, looking into his face (at once so absurdly ingenuous in its fresh and candid gravity and so heroically determined), Helen felt, as she had so often felt before, that she would like to burst out laughing and then go down on her knees and kiss his hands.

‘I shall have to go too,’ she said aloud, parodying his way of speaking. He thought at first that she was joking; then, when he realized that she was in earnest, grew serious and began to raise objections. The fatigue — for they would be travelling third-class. The expense. But Helen was suddenly like her mother — a spoilt woman whose caprices had to be satisfied.

‘It’ll be such fun,’ she cried excitedly. ‘Such an adventure!’ And when he persisted in being negatively reasonable, she grew angry. ‘But I will come with you,’ she repeated obstinately. ‘I will.’

Holtzmann met them at the station, and, instead of being the tall, stiff, distinguished personage of Helen’s anticipatory fancy, turned out to be short and squat, with a roll of fat at the back of his neck, and, between little pig’s eyes, a soft shapeless nose like a potato. His hand, when she shook it, was so coldly sweaty that she felt her own defiled; surreptitiously, when he wasn’t looking, she wiped it on her skirt. But worse than even his appearance and his sweaty hands was the man’s behaviour. Her presence, she could see, had taken him aback.

‘I had not expected . . .’ he stammered, when Ekki presented her; and his face, for a moment, seemed to disintegrate in agitation. Then, recovering himself, he became effusively polite and cordial. It was gnädige Frau, lieber Ekki, unbeschreiblich froh all the way down the platform. As though he were meeting them on the stage, Helen thought. And acting badly, what was more, like someone in a third-rate touring company. And how detestable that nervousness was! A man had no business to giggle like that and gesticulate and make grimaces. Mopping and mowing, she said under her breath. Walking beside him, she felt herself surrounded by a bristling aura of dislike. This

horrible creature had suddenly spoilt all the fun of the journey. She found herself almost wishing that she hadn't come.

'What a loathsome man!' she managed to whisper to Ekki, while Holtzmann was engaged in extravagantly overacting the part of one who tells the porter to be careful with the typewriter.

'You find him so?' Ekki asked with genuine surprise. 'I had not thought . . .' He left the sentence unfinished and shook his head. A little frown of perplexity wrinkled his smooth forehead. But a moment later, interrupting Holtzmann's renewed protestations of affection and delight, he was asking what Mach thought of the present situation in Germany; and when Holtzmann replied, he listened, absorbed.

Half angry with him for his insensitive obtuseness, half admiring him for his power to ignore everything that, to him, was irrelevant, Helen walked in silence at his side.

'Men are extraordinary,' she was thinking. 'All the same, I ought to be like that.'

Instead of which she allowed herself to be distracted by faces, by gigglings and gestures; she wasted her feelings on pigs' eyes and rolls of fat. And all the time millions of men and women and children were going cold and hungry, were being exploited, were being overworked, were being treated as though they were less than human, mere beasts of burden, mere cogs and levers; millions were being forced to live in chronic fear and misery and despair, were being dragooned and beaten, were being maddened with lies and cowed with threats and blows, were being herded this way and that like senseless animals on the road to market, to an ultimate slaughter-house. And here was she, detesting Holtzmann, because he had sweaty hands — instead of respecting him, as she should have done, for what he had dared, what he had suffered for the sake of those unhappy millions. His hands might be sweaty; but he lived precariously in exile, had been persecuted for his principles, was a champion of justice and truth. She felt ashamed of herself, but at the same time couldn't help thinking that life, if you were like Ekki, must be strangely narrow and limited,

unimaginably without colour. A life in black and white, she reflected, hard and clear and definite, like a Dürer engraving. Whereas hers — hers was a vague bright Turner, a Monet, a savage Gauguin. But ‘you look like a Gauguin’, Anthony had said, that morning on the blazing roof, and here in the chilly twilight of Basel station she suddenly winced, as though with physical pain.

‘Oh, how awful,’ she said to herself, ‘how awful!’

‘And the labour camps,’ Ekki was asking, intently, ‘what does Mach say about the feeling in the labour camps?’

Outside the station they halted.

‘Shall we begin by taking our things to a hotel?’ Ekki suggested.

But Holtzmann would not hear of it. ‘No, no, you must come at once,’ he insisted with a breathless emphasis. ‘To my house at once. Mach is waiting there. Mach wouldn’t understand it if there was any delay.’ But when Ekki agreed, he still stood irresolute and nervous at the pavement’s edge, like a swimmer afraid to plunge.

‘What’s the matter with the man?’ Helen wondered impatiently; then aloud, ‘Well, why don’t we take a taxi?’ she asked, forgetting for the moment that the time of taxis had long since come to an end. One took trams now, one took buses. But Gauguin had precipitated her into the past; it seemed natural to think of taxis.

Holtzmann did not answer her; but suddenly, with the quick, agitated movements of one who has been forced by circumstances to take a disagreeable decision, caught Ekki by the arm, and, drawing him aside, began to speak to him in a hurried whisper. Helen saw a look of surprise and annoyance come over Ekki’s face as he listened. His lips moved, he was evidently making an objection. The other replied in smiling deprecation and began to stroke his sleeve, as though in the hope of caressing him into acquiescence.

In the end Ekki nodded, and, turning back to Helen, ‘Holtzmann wants you to join us only at lunch,’ he said in his abrupt heavy way. ‘He says that Mach wouldn’t like it if there is anyone beside me.’

‘Does he think I’ll give him away to the Nazis?’ Helen asked indignantly.

‘It isn’t you,’ Ekki explained. ‘He doesn’t know you. If he did, it would be different. But he is afraid. Afraid of everyone he does not know. And he is quite right to be afraid,’ he added, in that tone of dogmatic finality which meant that the argument was closed.

Making a great effort to swallow her annoyance and chagrin, Helen nodded her head. ‘All right then, I’ll meet you at lunch-time. Though what the point was of my coming here at all,’ she couldn’t help adding, ‘I really can’t imagine.’

‘Dear Miss Amberley, chère consœur, gnädige Frau, comrade . . .’ Holtzmann overflowed with bourgeois and Communist courtesies in all the languages at his disposal. ‘Es tut mir so leid. So very sorry.’ But here was the address of his house. At half past twelve. And if he might advise her on the best way of spending a morning in Basel . . .

She slipped the card into her bag, and without waiting to listen to his suggestions, turned her back on the two men and walked quickly away.

‘Helen!’ Ekki called after her. But she paid no attention. He did not call again.

It was cold; but the sky was a clear pale blue, the sun was shining. And suddenly, emerging from behind high houses, she found herself beside the Rhine. Leaning over the parapet, she watched the green water hurrying past, silent, but swift and purposive, like a living thing, like life itself, like the power behind the world, eternally, irresistibly flowing; watched it, until at last it was as though she herself were flowing along with the great river, were one with it, a partaker of its power. ‘And shall Trelawney die?’ she found herself singing. ‘And shall Trelawney die? There’s twenty thousand Cornish men shall know the rea-ea-eason why.’ And suddenly it seemed certain that they would win, that the revolution was only just round the corner — there, after that first bend in the river. Irresistibly the flood drove on towards it. And meanwhile what a fool she had been to be cross with Ekki, what an absolute beast! Remorse gave place, after a little, to the ecstatically tender anticipation of their reconcilement. ‘Darling,’ she would say to him, ‘darling, you must forgive me. I was really too stupid and odious.’ And he would put one arm round her, and with the other

hand would push back the hair from her forehead and then bend down and kiss her. . . .

When she walked on, the Rhine was still rushing within her, and, unburdened of her offence towards Ekki, she felt immaterially light, felt almost as though she were floating — floating in a thin intoxicating air of happiness. The starving millions receded once more into remote abstraction. How good everything was, how beautiful, how exactly as it ought to be! Even the fat old women were perfect, even the nineteenth-century Gothic houses. And that cup of hot chocolate in the café — how indescribably delicious! And the old waiter, so friendly and paternal. Friendly and paternal, what was more, in an astonishing Swiss-German that made one want to roar with laughter, as though everything he said — from his commentaries on the weather to his complaints about the times — were one huge, continuous joke. Such gutterals, such neighings! Like the language of the Houyhnhnms, she thought, and led him on, with an unwearying delight in the performance, to hoick and whinny yet again.

From the café she went on at last to the picture gallery; and the picture gallery turned out to be as exquisitely comic in its own way as the waiter's German. Those Boecklins! All the extraordinary pictures one had only seen on postcards or hanging, in coloured reproduction, on the walls of pensions in Dresden. Mermaids and tritons caught as though by a camera; centaurs in the stiff ungainly positions of race-horses in a pressman's photograph. Painted with a good faith and a laborious lack of talent that were positively touching. And here — unspeakable joy! — was the Toteninsel. The funereal cypresses, the white tomb-like temples, the long-robed figures, the solitary boat on its way across the wine-dark sea . . . The joke was perfect. Helen laughed aloud. In spite of everything, she was still her mother's daughter.

In the room of the primitives she paused for a moment, on her way out, before a picture of the martyrdom of St Erasmus. An executioner in fifteenth-century costume, with a pale shell-pink cod-piece, was methodically turning the handle of a winch — like Mr Mantalini at the mangle — winding the saint's intestines, yard after yard, out of a gash in the emaciated belly, while the victim lay back,

as if on a sofa, making himself thoroughly comfortable and looking up into the sky with an expression of unruffled equanimity. The joke here was less subtle than in Toteninsel, more frankly a knockabout; but excellent, none the less, in its own simple way. She was still smiling as she walked out into the street.

Holtzmann, it turned out, lived only a few hundred yards from the gallery, in a pretty little early nineteenth-century house (much too good for a man with sweaty hands!) set back from the road behind a little square of gravel. A large car was standing at the door. Holtzmann's? she wondered. He must be rich, the old pig! It had taken her so little time to come from the gallery that it was hardly a quarter past twelve as she mounted the steps. 'Never mind,' she said to herself. 'They'll have to put up with me. I refuse to wait one second longer.' The thought that, in a moment, she would see Ekki again made her heart beat quickly. 'What a fool I am! What an absolute fool! But how marvellous to be able to be a fool!' She rang the bell.

It was Holtzmann himself who opened — dressed in an overcoat, she was surprised to see, as though he were just going out. The expression with which he had greeted her at the station reappeared on his face as he saw her.

'You are so soon,' he said, trying to smile; but his nervousness and embarrassment amounted almost to terror. 'We had not awaited you until half-one.'

Helen laughed. 'I hadn't awaited myself,' she explained. 'But I got here quicker than I thought.'

She made a movement to step across the threshold; but Holtzmann held out his arm. 'We are not yet ready,' he said. His face was flushed and sweating with embarrassment. 'If you will return in a quarter hour,' he almost implored. 'Only a quarter hour.'

'Nur ein viertel Stündchen.' Helen laughed, thinking of those embroidered cushions on the sofas where the Geheimrats slept off the effects of noonday eating. 'But why shouldn't I wait indoors?' She pushed past him into a dark little hall that smelt of cooking and stale air. 'Where's Ekki?' she asked, suddenly overcome by the desire to see him, to see him at once, without another second's

delay, so that she could tell him what a beast she had been, but how loving all the same, how adoring in spite of the beastliness, and how happy, how eager to share her happiness with him! At the other end of the vestibule a door stood ajar. Calling his name, Helen ran towards it.

‘Stop!’ Holtzmann shouted behind her.

But she was already across the threshold.

The room in which she found herself was a bedroom. On the narrow iron bed Ekki was lying with all his clothes on, his head on one side, his mouth open. His breath came slowly in long snores; he was asleep — but asleep as she had never seen him sleeping.

‘Ekki!’ she had time to cry, while a door slammed, another voice joined itself to Holtzmann’s, and the vestibule was loud with violent movement. ‘My darling . . .’

Then suddenly a hand closed on her shoulder from behind. She turned, saw the face of a strange man within a few inches of her own, heard somewhere from the background Holtzmann’s ‘Schnell, Willi, schnell!’ and the stranger almost whispering, between clenched teeth, ‘Schmutziges Frauenzimmer’; then, as she opened her mouth to scream, received a terrible blow on the chin that brought the teeth violently together again, and felt herself dropping into blackness.

When she came to herself, she was in bed in a hospital ward. Some peasants had found her lying unconscious in a little wood five or six miles from the town. An ambulance had brought her back to Basel. It was only on the following morning that the effects of the barbitone wore off and she remembered what had happened. But by that time Ekki had been over the frontier, in Germany, for nearly twenty hours.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR. February 23rd 1935

ANTHONY HAD SPENT the morning at the offices of the organization, dictating letters. For the most part, it was a matter of dealing with the intellectual difficulties of would-be pacifists. ‘What would you do if you saw a foreign soldier attacking your sister?’ Well, whatever else one did, one certainly wouldn’t send one’s son to murder his second cousin. Wearisome work! But it had to be done. He dictated twenty-seven letters; then it was time to go to lunch with Helen.

‘There’s practically nothing to eat,’ she said, when he came in. ‘I simply couldn’t be bothered to cook anything. The unspeakable boredom of making meals!’ Her voice took on a note of almost malevolent resentment.

They addressed themselves to tinned salmon and lettuce. Anthony tried to talk; but his words seemed to bounce off the impenetrable surface of her sullen and melancholy silence. In the end, he too sat speechless.

‘It’s just a year ago today,’ she brought out at last.

‘What is?’

‘Just a year since those devils at Basel . . .’ She shook her head and was silent again.

Anthony said nothing. Anything he could say would be an irrelevance, he felt, almost an insult.

‘I often wish they’d killed me too,’ she went on slowly. ‘Instead of leaving me here, rotting away, like a piece of dirt on a rubbish heap. Like a dead kitten,’ she added, as an afterthought. ‘So much carrion.’ The words were spoken with a vehement disgust.

‘Why do you say that?’ he asked.

‘Because it’s true. I am carrion.’

‘There’s no need for you to be.’

‘I can’t help it. I’m carrion by nature.’

‘No, you’re not,’ he insisted. ‘You’ve said it yourself. When Ekki was there . . .’

‘No, I wasn’t carrion then.’

‘What you’ve been once, you can be again.’

‘Not without him.’

He nodded. ‘Yes, if you want to be, you can. It’s a matter of choosing. Choosing and then setting to work in the right way.’

Helen shook her head. ‘They ought to have killed me. If you only know how I disgust myself!’ She screwed up her face into a grimace. ‘I’m no good. Worse than no good. Just a lump of dirt.’ After a pause, ‘I’m not even interested in Ekki’s work,’ she went on. ‘I don’t like his friends. Communists. But they’re just beastly little people, like anyone else. Stupid, vulgar, envious, pushing. One might as well have the fun of wearing a chinchilla coat and lunching at Claridge’s. I shall probably end by selling myself to a rich man. That is, if I can find one.’ She laughed again. Then, in a tone of more bitter self-contempt, ‘Only a year today,’ she resumed, ‘and already I’m sick of it all. Utterly sick of it and pining to get out of it. I’m disgusting.’

‘But are you entirely to blame?’

‘Of course I am.’

Anthony shook his head. ‘Perhaps it’s also the fault of the work.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Organized hatred — it’s not exactly attractive. Not what most people feel they really want to live for.’

‘Ekki lived for it. Lots of people live for it.’

‘But what sort of people?’ he asked. ‘They’re of three kinds. Idealists with an exceptional gift for self-deception. Either they don’t know that it’s organized hatred, or else they genuinely believe that the end justifies the means, genuinely imagine that the means don’t condition the end. Ekki was one of those. They form the majority. And then there are two minorities. A minority of people who know that the thing’s organized hatred and rejoice in the fact. And a minority

that’s ambitious, that merely uses the movement as a convenient machine for realizing its ambition. You, Helen — you’re neither ambitious nor self-deceiving. And, in spite of what happened this day last year, don’t really want to liquidate people — not even Nazis. And that’s why the chinchillas and the orchids seem so attractive. Not because you actively long for them. Only because this particular alternative is so unsatisfactory.’

There was a silence. Helen got up, changed the plates and set a bowl of fruit on the table. ‘What is the satisfactory alternative?’ she asked, as she helped herself to an apple.

‘It begins,’ he answered, ‘with trying to cultivate the difficult art of loving people.’

‘But most people are detestable.’

‘They’re detestable, because we detest them. If we liked them, they’d be likeable.’

‘Do you think that’s true?’

‘I’m sure it’s true.’

‘And what do you do after that?’

‘There’s no “after”,’ he replied. ‘Because, of course, it’s a lifetime’s job. Any process of change is a lifetime’s job. Every time you get to the top of a peak, you see another peak in front of you — a peak that you couldn’t see from lower down. Take the mind-body mechanism, for example. You begin to learn how to use it better; you make an advance; from the position you’ve advanced to, you discover how you can use it better still And so on, indefinitely. The ideal ends recede as you approach them; they’re seen to be other and more remarkable than they seemed before the advance was begun. It’s the same when one tries to change one’s relations with other people. Every step forward reveals the necessity of making new steps forward — unanticipated steps, towards a destination one hadn’t seen when one set out. Yes, it lasts a lifetime,’ he repeated. ‘There can’t be any “after”. There can only be an attempt, as one goes along, to project what one has discovered on the personal level on to the level of politics and economics. One of the first discoveries,’ he added, ‘one of the very

first one makes, is that organized hatred and violence aren't the best means for securing justice and peace. All men are capable of love for all other men. But we've artificially restricted our love. By means of conventions of hatred and violence. Restricted it within families and clans, within classes and nations. Your friends want to remove those restrictions by using more hatred and violence — that's to say, by using exactly the same means as were the original causes of the restrictions.' He smiled. 'Can you be surprised if you find the work a bit unsatisfying?'

Helen looked at him for a little in silence, then shook her head. 'I prefer my chinchillas.'

'No, you don't.'

'Yes, I do. I'd rather be a lump of dirt. It's easier.' She got up. 'What about some coffee?' In the little kitchen, as they were waiting for the water to boil, she suddenly started to tell him about that young man in advertising. She had met him a couple of weeks before. Such an amusing and intelligent creature! And he had fallen violently in love with her. Her face brightened with a kind of reckless, laughing malice. 'Blue eyes,' she said, cataloguing the young man's merits, as though she were an auctioneer, 'curly hair, tremendous shoulders, narrow hips, first-rate amateur boxer — which is more than you ever were, my poor Anthony,' she added parenthetically and in a tone of contemptuous commiseration. 'In fact, thoroughly bed-worthy. Or at least he looks it. Because one never really knows till one's tried, does one?' She laughed. 'I've a good mind to try tonight,' she went on. 'To commemorate this anniversary. Don't you think it would be a good idea, Anthony?' And when he didn't answer, 'Don't you think so?' she insisted. 'Don't you think so?' She looked into his face, trying to detect in it the signs of anger, or jealousy, or disgust.

Anthony smiled back at her. 'It isn't so easy, being a lump of dirt,' he said. 'In fact, I should say it was very hard work indeed.'

The brightness faded out of her face. 'Hard work,' she repeated. 'Perhaps that's one of the reasons for going on trying.' After a pause, while she poured the water into the percolator, 'Did you say you were having a meeting tonight?'

‘In Battersea.’

‘Perhaps I shall come and listen to you. Unless,’ she added, making an effort to laugh, ‘unless, of course, I’ve decided to celebrate the anniversary in the other way.’

When they had drunk their coffee, Anthony walked back to his rooms, to put in a few hours’ work at the new pamphlet he had promised to write for Purchas. Two letters had come by the midday delivery. One was from Miller, describing the excellent meetings he had been having in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The other, without an address, was typewritten.

Sir, [it began] we have been keeping an eye on you for some time past, and have decided that you cannot be allowed to go on in your present disloyal and treacherous way. We give you fair warning. If you make any more of your dirty pacifist speeches, we shall deal with you as you deserve. Appealing to the police will not do any good. We shall get you sooner or later, and it will not be pleasant for you. It is announced that you are speaking tonight in Battersea. We shall be there. So we advise you, if you value your yellow skin, to keep away. You do not deserve this warning, but we want to behave sportingly even towards a skunk like you. — Yours faithfully,

A Group of Patriotic Englishmen.

A joke, Anthony wondered? No, probably serious. He smiled. ‘How virtuous they must be feeling!’ he said to himself. ‘And how heroic! Striking their blow for England.’

But the blow, he went on to reflect, as he sat down in front of the fire, the blow would fall upon himself — if he spoke, that was to say, if they weren’t prevented from attacking him. And, of course, there could be no question of not speaking. No question of calling on the police for protection. Nothing to do but practise what he had been preaching.

But would he have the strength of mind to see it through? Suppose they set on him, suppose they started to knock him about? Would he know how to stand it?

He tried to work on the pamphlet; but the personal questions insistently recurred, thrusting aside those remoter and impersonal problems of colonies and

prestige, markets, investment, migration. He visualized the horrible expression of anger on the men's distorted faces, heard in his fancy their violent insulting words, saw hands lifted, falling. Would he be able to prevent himself from flinching? And the pain of blows — sharp, excruciating, on the face, and sickening on the body — how much would he be able to bear, for how long? If only Miller were here to give advice and encouragement! But Miller was in Glasgow.

Doubt of himself grew upon him. To stand there, letting himself be struck, without hitting back, without giving ground — he would never be able to do that.

'I shan't have the guts,' he kept repeating, and was obsessed by the fear of being afraid. Remembering the way he had behaved at Tapatlan, he blushed with shame. And, this time, the disgrace would be in public. They would all know — Helen with the rest.

And this time, he went on to think, this time there wouldn't be the excuse of surprise. They had given him warning— 'even to a skunk like you'. And besides, he had been training himself for months past to cope with just such a contingency as this. The scene had been rehearsed. He knew by heart every cue and gesture. But when the time actually came, when the pain was no longer imaginary but real, would he remember his part? What guarantee was there that he wouldn't hopelessly break down? In front of Helen — when Helen was standing hesitant on the threshold of her own life, perhaps also of his. Besides, if he broke down, he would be discrediting more than himself. To break down would be to deny his convictions, to invalidate his philosophy, to betray his friends. 'But why are you such a fool?' a small voice began to question; 'why do you go and saddle yourself with convictions and philosophies? And why put yourself in the position of being able to betray anyone? Why not go back to doing what nature meant you to do — to looking on from your private box and making comments? What does it all matter, after all? And even if it matters, what can you do? Why not quietly resign yourself to the inevitable, and in the interval get on with the job you can do best?'

The voice spoke out of a cloud of fatigue. For a minute he was nothing but a dead, dry husk enclosing black weariness and negation. ‘Ring them up,’ the voice went on. ‘Tell them you’ve got flu. Stay in bed a few days. Then have yourself ordered to the south of France by the doctor . . .’

Suddenly he laughed aloud. From sinister, from insidiously persuasive, that small voice had become absurd. Carried to such a pitch, expressed so ingenuously, baseness was almost comic.

‘Unity,’ he said in an articulate whisper.

He was committed to them, as a hand is committed to the arm. Committed to his friends, committed even to those who had declared themselves his enemies. There was nothing he could do but would affect them all, enemies and friends — for good, if what he did were good, for evil if it were wrong. Unity, he repeated. Unity.

Unity of mankind, unity of all life, all being even.

Physical unity, first of all. Unity even in diversity, even in separation. Separate patterns, but everywhere alike. Everywhere the same constellations of the ultimate units of energy. The same on the surface of the sun as in the living flesh warmed by the sun’s radiance; in the scented cluster of buddleia flowers as in the blue sea and the clouds on the horizon; in the drunken Mexican’s pistol as in the dark dried blood on that mangled face among the rocks, the fresh blood spattered scarlet over Helen’s naked body, the drops oozing from the raw contusion on Mark’s knee.

Identical patterns, and identical patternings of patterns. He held the thought of them in his mind, and, along with it, the thought of life incessantly moving among the patterns, selecting and rejecting for its own purposes. Life building up simpler into more complex patterns — identically complex through vast ranges of animate being.

The sperm enters the egg, the cell divides and divides, to become at last this man, that rat or horse. A cow’s pituitary will make frogs breed out of season. Urine of a pregnant woman bring the mouse on heat. Sheep’s thyroid transforms the axolotl from a gilled larva into an air-breathing salamander, the cretinous

dwarf into a well-grown and intelligent human being. Between one form of animal life and another, patterns are interchangeable. Interchangeable also between animal and plant, plant and the inanimate world. Patterns in seed and leaf and root, patterns built up from simpler patterns existent in the air and soil — these can be assimilated and transformed by insect, reptile, mammal, fish.

The unity of life. Unity demonstrated even in the destruction of one life by another. Life and all being are one. Otherwise no living thing could ever derive sustenance from another or from the unliving substances around it. One even in destruction, one in spite of separation. Each organism is unique. Unique and yet united with all other organisms in the sameness of its ultimate parts; unique above a substratum of physical identity.

And minds — minds also are unique, but unique above a substratum of mental identity. Identity and interchangeableness of love, trust, courage. Fearless affection restores the lunatic to sanity, transforms the hostile savage into a friend, tames the wild animal. The mental pattern of love can be transferred from one mind to another and still retain its virtue, just as the physical pattern of a hormone can be transferred, with all its effectiveness, from one body to another.

And not only love, but hate as well; not only trust, but suspicion; not only kindness, generosity, courage, but also malevolence and greed and fear.

Divisive emotions; but the fact that they can be interchanged, can be transferred from mind to mind and retain all their original passion, is a demonstration of the fundamental unity of minds.

Reality of unity, but equal reality of division — greater reality, indeed, of division. No need to meditate the fact of division. One is constantly aware of it. Constantly aware of being unique and separate; only sometimes, and then most often only intellectually, only as the result of a process of discursive thought, aware of being one with other minds, other lives and all being. Occasionally an intuition of unity, an intuition coming at random, or sought for, step by step, in meditation.

One, one, one, he repeated; but one in division; united and yet separate.

Evil is the accentuation of division; good, whatever makes for unity with other lives and other beings. Pride, hatred, anger — the essentially evil sentiments; and essentially evil because they are all intensifications of the given reality of separateness, because they insist upon division and uniqueness, because they reject and deny other lives and beings. Lust and greed are also insistences upon uniqueness, but insistences which do not entail any negative awareness of the others from whom the unique being is divided. Lust only says, ‘I must have pleasure’, not ‘You must have pain’. Greed in its pure state is merely a demand for my satisfaction, not for your exclusion from satisfaction. They are wrong in emphasizing the separate self; but less wrong than pride or hatred or anger, because their self-emphasis is not accompanied by denial of others.

But why division at all? Why, unavoidably, even in the completest love, and, at the other end of the scale of being, even in that which is or seems to be below right and wrong, why must the evil of separation persist? Separation even of saint from saint, and separation even of mere physical pattern from mere physical pattern. One man cannot eat for another. The best must think, must enjoy and suffer, must touch, see, smell, hear, taste in isolation. The good man is merely a less completely closed universe than the bad; but still closed, even as the atom is closed.

And, of course, if there is to be existence — existence as we know it — being must be organized in closed universes. Minds like ours can only perceive undifferentiated unity as nothing. Unescapable paradox that we should desire that n should be equal to one, but that, in fact, we should always find that one is equal to nought.

Separation, diversity — conditions of our existence. Conditions upon which we possess life and consciousness, know right and wrong and have the power to choose between them, recognize truth, have experience of beauty. But separation is evil. Evil, then, is the condition of life, the condition of being aware, of knowing what is good and beautiful.

That which is demanded, that which men come finally to demand of themselves, is the realization of union between beings who would be nothing if they were not separate; is the actualization of goodness by creatures who, if they were not evil, would not exist. Impossibility — but none the less demanded.

‘Born under one law, to another bound.’

He himself, Anthony went on to think, he himself had chosen to regard the whole process as either pointless or a practical joke. Yes, chosen. For it had been an act of the will. If it were all nonsense or a joke, then he was at liberty to read his books and exercise his talents for sarcastic comment; there was no reason why he shouldn’t sleep with any presentable woman who was ready to sleep with him. If it weren’t nonsense, if there were some significance, then he could no longer live irresponsibly. There were duties towards himself and others and the nature of things. Duties with whose fulfilment the sleeping and the indiscriminate reading and the habit of detached irony would interfere. He had chosen to think it nonsense, and nonsense for more than twenty years the thing had seemed to be — nonsense, in spite of occasional uncomfortable intimations that there might be a point, and that the point was precisely in what he had chosen to regard as the pointlessness, the practical joke. And now at last it was clear, now by some kind of immediate experience he knew that the point was in the paradox, in the fact that unity was the beginning and unity the end, and that in the meantime the condition of life and all existence was separation, which was equivalent to evil. Yes, the point, he insisted, is that one demands of oneself the achievement of the impossible. The point is that, even with the best will in the world, the separate, evil universe of a person or a physical pattern can never unite itself completely with other lives and beings, or the totality of life and being. Even for the highest goodness the struggle is without end; for never in the nature of present things can the shut become the wholly open; goodness can never free itself completely from evil. It is a test, an education — searching, difficult, drawn out through a lifetime, perhaps through long series of lifetimes. Lifetimes passed in the attempt to open up further and a little further the closed universe that perpetually tends to spring shut the moment that effort is relaxed.

Passed in overcoming the separating passions of hate and malice and pride. Passed in making still the self-emphasizing cravings. Passed in constant efforts to realize unity with other lives and other modes of being. To experience it in the act of love and compassion. To experience it on another plane through meditation, in the insight of direct intuition. Unity beyond the turmoil of separations and divisions. Goodness beyond the possibility of evil. But always the fact of separation persists, always evil remains the very condition of life and being. There must be no relaxation of the opening pressure. But even for the best of us, the consummation is still immeasurably remote.

Meanwhile there are love and compassion. Constantly obstructed. But oh, let them be made indefatigable, implacable to surmount all obstacles, the inner sloth, the distaste, the intellectual scorn; and, from without, the other's aversions and suspicions. Affection, compassion — and also, meanwhile, this contemplative approach, this effort to realize the unity of lives and being with the intellect, and at last, perhaps, intuitively in an act of complete understanding. From one argument to another, step by step, towards a consummation where there is no more discourse, only experience, only unmediated knowledge, as of a colour, a perfume, a musical sound. Step by step towards the experience of being no longer wholly separate, but united at the depths with other lives, with the rest of being. United in peace. In peace, he repeated, in peace, in peace. In the depth of every mind, peace. The same peace for all, continuous between mind and mind. At the surface, the separate waves, the whirlpools, the spray; but below them the continuous and undifferentiated expanse of sea, become calmer as it deepens, till at last there is an absolute stillness. Dark peace in the depths. A dark peace that is the same for all who can descend to it. Peace that by a strange paradox is the substance and source of the storm at the surface. Born of peace, the waves yet destroy peace; destroy it, but are necessary; for without the storm on the surface there would be no existence, no knowledge of goodness, no effort to allay the leaping frenzy of evil, no rediscovery of the underlying calm, no realization that the substance of the frenzy is the same as the substance of peace.

Frenzy of evil and separation. In peace there is unity. Unity with other lives. Unity with all being. For beneath all being, beneath the countless identical but separate patterns, beneath the attractions and repulsions, lies peace. The same peace as underlies the frenzy of the mind. Dark peace, immeasurably deep. Peace from pride and hatred and anger, peace from cravings and aversions, peace from all the separating frenzies. Peace through liberation, for peace is achieved freedom. Freedom and at the same time truth. The truth of unity actually experienced. Peace in the depths, under the storm, far down below the leaping of the waves, the frantically flying spray. Peace in this profound subaqueous night, peace in this silence, this still emptiness where there is no more time, where there are no more images, no more words. Nothing but the experience of peace; peace as a dark void beyond all personal life, and yet itself a form of life more intense, for all its diffuseness, for all the absence of aim or desire, richer and of finer quality than ordinary life. Peace beyond peace, focused at first, brought together, then opening out in a kind of boundless space. Peace at the tip, as it were, of a narrowing cone of concentration and elimination, a cone with its base in the distractions of the heaving surface of life and its point in the underlying darkness. And in the darkness the tip of one cone meets the tip of another; and, from a single, focal point, peace expands and expands towards a base immeasurably distant and so wide that its circle is the ground and source of all life, all being. Cone reversed from the broken and shifting light of the surface; cone reversed and descending to a point of concentrated darkness; thence, in another cone, expanding and expanding through the darkness towards, yes! some other light, steady, untroubled, as utterly calm as the darkness out of which it emerges. Cone reversed into cone upright. Passage from wide stormy light to the still focus of darkness; and thence, beyond the focus, through widening darkness into another light. From storm to calm and on through yet profounder and intenser peace to the final consummation, the ultimate light that is the source and substance of all things; source of the darkness, the void, the submarine night of living calm; source finally of the waves and the frenzy of the spray — forgotten now. For now there is only the darkness expanding and

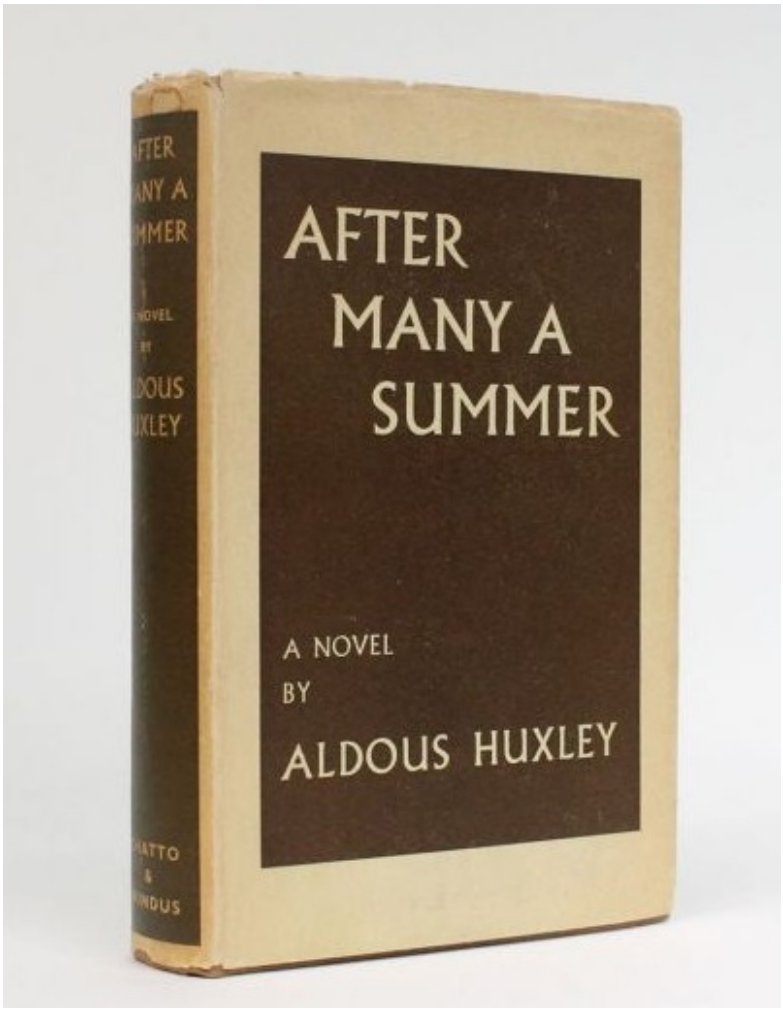
deepening, deepening into light; there is only this final peace, this consciousness of being no more separate, this illumination . . .

The clock struck seven. Slowly and cautiously he allowed himself to lapse out of the light, back through the darkness into the broken gleams and shadows of everyday existence. He rose at last and went to the kitchen to prepare himself some food. There was not much time; the meeting was at eight, and it would take him a good half-hour to reach the hall. He put a couple of eggs to boil, and sat down meanwhile to bread and cheese. Dispassionately, and with a serene lucidity, he thought of what was in store for him. Whatever it might be, he knew now that all would be well.

After Many a Summer

In 1937, Huxley migrated to California with his wife, Maria and their son, Matthew, where he would remain until his death in November 1963. It was not long after the author moved that he became friends with the president of the liberal arts college, Remsen Bird. Huxley frequently visited the school and it was the major inspiration behind his next novel's fictional Tarzana College. *After Many a Summer* was first published in Britain in 1939 by Chatto & Windus and in the USA under the title *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* by Harper & Row. The author also based some of his characters on real-life acquaintances, including unflattering depictions of the newspaper baron and politician, William Randolph Hearst and his long-term partner, the actress, Marion Davies. The novel was adapted for a 1948 NBC radio production, starring Paul Henreid and a 1967 UK television production, directed by Douglas Camfield and starring Stubby Kaye.

After Many a Summer concerns a group of characters associated with the unscrupulous, millionaire businessman, Jo Stoyte. The cast of characters all adhere to different philosophies of the best way to live, as Huxley makes clear that he shares a similar view to the professor, William Propter. The title of the novel is taken from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's famous 1859 poem *Tithonus*. It retells the Greek myth of the suffering of Tithonus after he has been granted immortality, but not eternal youth. He continues to age while his companion, Eos, the goddess of the dawn, never ages. In time Tithonus begs to be allowed to escape from his life and die. The novel shares a similar theme to the poem as Huxley explores Stoyte's refusal to accept the inevitability of death or the purpose of life as more than just the prolonging of it.



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Actress Marion Davies

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.

TENNYSON

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

IT HAD ALL been arranged by telegram; Jeremy Pordage was to look out for a coloured chauffeur in a grey uniform with a carnation in his button-hole; and the coloured chauffeur was to look out for a middle-aged Englishman carrying the Poetical Works of Wordsworth. In spite of the crowds at the station, they found one another without difficulty.

‘Mr. Stoyte’s chauffeur?’

‘Mr. Pordage, sah?’

Jeremy nodded and, his Wordsworth in one hand, his umbrella in the other, half extended his arms in the gesture of a self-deprecatory mannequin exhibiting, with a full and humorous consciousness of their defects, a deplorable figure accentuated by the most ridiculous clothes. ‘A poor thing,’ he seemed to be implying, ‘but myself.’ A defensive and, so to say, prophylactic disparagement had become a habit with him. He resorted to it on every sort of occasion. Suddenly a new idea came into his head. Anxiously he began to wonder whether, in this democratic Far West of theirs, one shook hands with the chauffeur — particularly if he happened to be a blackamoor, just to demonstrate that one wasn’t a pukka sahib even if one’s country did happen to be bearing the White Man’s burden. In the end he decided to do nothing. Or, to be more accurate, the decision was forced upon him — as usual, he said to himself, deriving a curious wry pleasure from the recognition of his own shortcomings. While he was hesitating what to do, the chauffeur took off his cap and, slightly over-acting the part of an old-world negro retainer, bowed, smiled toothily and said, ‘Welcome to Los Angeles, Mr. Pordage, sah!’ Then, changing the tone of his chanting drawl from the dramatic to the confidential, ‘I should have knowed you by your voice, Mr. Pordage,’ he went on, ‘even without the book.’

Jeremy laughed a little uncomfortably. A week in America had made him self-conscious about that voice of his. A product of Trinity College, Cambridge,

ten years before the War, it was a small, fluty voice, suggestive of evensong in an English cathedral. At home, when he used it, nobody paid any particular attention. He had never had to make jokes about it, as he had done, in self-protection, about his appearance for example, or his age. Here, in America, things were different. He had only to order a cup of coffee or ask the way to the lavatory (which anyhow wasn't called the lavatory in this disconcerting country) for people to stare at him with an amused and attentive curiosity, as though he were a freak on show in an amusement park. It had not been at all agreeable.

'Where's my porter?' he said fussily in order to change the subject.

A few minutes later they were on their way. Cradled in the back seat of the car, out of range, he hoped, of the chauffeur's conversation, Jeremy Pordage abandoned himself to the pleasure of merely looking. Southern California rolled past the windows; all he had to do was to keep his eyes open.

The first thing to present itself was a slum of Africans and Filipinos, Japanese and Mexicans. And what permutations and combinations of black, yellow and brown! What complex bastardies! And the girls — how beautiful in their artificial silk! 'And negro ladies in white muslin gowns.' His favourite line in *The Prelude*. He smiled to himself. And meanwhile the slum had given place to the tall buildings of a business district.

The population took on a more Caucasian tinge. At every corner there was a drug-store. The newspaper boys were selling headlines about Franco's drive on Barcelona. Most of the girls, as they walked along, seemed to be absorbed in silent prayer; but he supposed, on second thoughts, it was only gum that they were thus incessantly ruminating. Gum, not God. Then suddenly the car plunged into a tunnel and emerged into another world, a vast, untidy, suburban world of filling-stations and billboards, of low houses in gardens, of vacant lots and waste-paper, of occasional shops and office buildings and churches — Primitive Methodist churches built, surprisingly enough, in the style of the Cartuja at Granada, Catholic churches like Canterbury Cathedral, synagogues disguised as Hagia Sophia, Christian Science churches with pillars and pediments, like banks. It was a winter day and early in the morning; but the sun shone brilliantly, the

sky was without a cloud. The car was travelling westwards, and the sunshine, slanting from behind them as they advanced, lit up each building, each sky-sign and billboard, as though with a spot-light, as though on purpose to show the new arrival all the sights.

EATS. COCKTAILS. OPEN NITES.

JUMBO MALTS.

DO THINGS, GO PLACES WITH CONSOL SUPER GAS!

AT BEVERLY PANTHEON FINE FUNERALS ARE *NOT* EXPENSIVE.

The car sped onwards, and here in the middle of a vacant lot was a restaurant in the form of a seated bulldog, the entrance between the front paws, the eyes illuminated.

‘Zoomorph,’ Jeremy Pordage murmured to himself, and again, ‘zoomorph.’ He had the scholar’s taste for words. The bulldog shot back into the past.

ASTROLOGY, NUMEROLOGY, PSYCHIC READINGS.

DRIVE IN FOR NUTBERGERS — whatever they were. He resolved at the earliest opportunity to have one. A nutberger and a jumbo malt.

STOP HERE FOR CONSOL SUPER GAS.

Surprisingly, the chauffeur stopped. ‘Ten gallons of Super-Super,’ he ordered; then, turning back to Jeremy, ‘This is our company,’ he added. ‘Mr. Stoyte, he’s the president.’ He pointed to a billboard across the street. CASH LOANS IN FIFTEEN MINUTES, Jeremy read; CONSULT COMMUNITY SERVICE FINANCE CORPORATION. ‘That’s another of ours,’ said the chauffeur proudly.

They drove on. The face of a beautiful young woman, distorted, like a Magdalene’s, with grief, stared out of a giant billboard. BROKEN ROMANCE, proclaimed the caption. SCIENCE PROVES THAT 73 PER CENT. OF ALL ADULTS HAVE HALITOSIS.

IN TIME OF SORROW LET BEVERLY PANTHEON BE YOUR FRIEND.

FACIALS, PERMANENTS, MANICURES.

BETTY’S BEAUTY SHOPPE.

Next door to the beauty shoppe was a Western Union office. That cable to his mother … Heavens, he had almost forgotten! Jeremy leaned forward and, in the apologetic tone he always used when speaking to servants, asked the chauffeur to stop for a moment. The car came to a halt. With a preoccupied expression on his mild, rabbit-like face, Jeremy got out and hurried across the pavement, into the office.

‘Mrs. Pordage, The Araucarias, Woking, England,’ he wrote, smiling a little as he did so. The exquisite absurdity of that address was a standing source of amusement. ‘The Araucarias, Woking.’ His mother, when she bought the house, had wanted to change the name, as being too ingenuously middle-class, too much like a joke by Hilaire Belloc. ‘But that’s the beauty of it,’ he had protested. ‘That’s the charm.’ And he had tried to make her see how utterly right it would be for them to live at such an address. The deliciously comic incongruity between the name of the house and the nature of its occupants! And what a beautiful, topsy-turvy appositeness in the fact that Oscar Wilde’s old friend, the witty and cultured Mrs. Pordage, should write her sparkling letters from The Araucarias, and that from these same Araucarias, these Araucarias, mark you, at *Woking*, should come the works of mingled scholarship and curiously rarefied wit for which her son had gained his reputation. Mrs. Pordage had almost instantly seen what he was driving at. No need, thank goodness, to labour your points where she was concerned. You could talk entirely in hints and anacoluthons; she could be relied on to understand. The Araucarias had remained The Araucarias.

Having written the address, Jeremy paused, pensively frowned and initiated the familiar gesture of biting his pencil — only to find, disconcertingly, that this particular pencil was tipped with brass and fastened to a chain. ‘Mrs. Pordage, The Araucarias, Woking, England,’ he read out aloud, in the hope that the worlds would inspire him to compose the right, the perfect message — the message his mother expected of him, at once tender and witty, charged with a genuine devotion ironically worded, acknowledging her maternal domination, but at the same time making fun of it, so that the old lady could salve her

conscience by pretending that her son was entirely free, and herself the least tyrannical of mothers. It wasn't easy — particularly with this pencil on a chain. After several abortive essays he decided, though it was definitely unsatisfactory, on: 'Climate being subtropical shall break vow re underclothes stop Wish you were here my sake not yours as you would scarcely appreciate this unfinished Bournemouth indefinitely magnified stop.'

'Unfinished what?' questioned the young woman on the further side of the counter.

'B-o-u-r-n-e-m-o-u-t-h,' Jeremy spelled out. He smiled; behind the bi-focal lenses of his spectacles his blue eyes twinkled, and, with a gesture of which he was quite unconscious, but which he always, automatically, made when he was about to utter one of his little jokes, he stroked the smooth bald spot on the top of his head. '*You* know,' he said, in a particularly fluty tone, 'the bourne to which no traveller goes, if he can possibly help it.'

The girl looked at him blankly; then, inferring from his expression that something funny had been said, and remembering that courteous Service was Western Union's slogan, gave the bright smile for which the poor old chump was evidently asking, and went on reading: 'Hope you have fun at Grasse stop Tendresses Jeremy.'

It was an expensive message; but luckily, he reflected, as he took out his pocket-book, luckily Mr. Stoyte was grossly overpaying him. Three months' work, six thousand dollars. So damn the expense.

He returned to the car and they drove on. Mile after mile they went, and the suburban houses, the gas-stations, the vacant lots, the churches, the shops went along with them, interminably. To right and left, between palms, or pepper trees, or acacias, the streets of the enormous residential quarter receded to the vanishing point.

CLASSY EATS. MILE HIGH CONES.

JESUS SAVES.

HAMBURGERS.

Yet once more the traffic lights turned red. A paperboy came to the window. ‘Franco claims gains in Catalonia.’ Jeremy read, and turned away. The frightfulness of the world had reached a point at which it had become for him merely boring. From the halted car in front of them, two elderly ladies, both with permanently waved white hair and both wearing crimson trousers, descended, each carrying a Yorkshire terrier. The dogs were set down at the foot of the traffic signal. Before the animals could make up their minds to use the convenience, the lights had changed. The negro shifted into first, and the car swerved forward, into the future. Jeremy was thinking of his mother. Disquietingly enough, she too had a Yorkshire terrier.

FINE LIQUORS.

TURKEY SANDWICHES.

GO TO CHURCH AND FEEL BETTER ALL THE WEEK.

WHAT IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS IS GOOD FOR *YOU.*

Another zoomorph presented itself, this time a real estate agent’s office in the form of an Egyptian sphinx.

JESUS IS COMING SOON.

YOU TOO CAN HAVE ABIDING YOUTH WITH THRILL-PHORM BRASSIERES.

BEVERLY PANTHEON, THE CEMETERY THAT IS *DIFFERENT*.

With the triumphant expression of Puss-in-Boots enumerating the possessions of the Marquis of Carabas, the negro shot a glance over his shoulder at Jeremy, waved his hand towards the billboard and said, ‘That’s ours too.’

‘You mean, the Beverly Pantheon?’

The man nodded. ‘Finest cemetery in the world, I guess,’ he said: and added, after a moment’s pause, ‘Maybe you’s like to see it. It wouldn’t hardly be out of our way.’

‘That would be very nice,’ said Jeremy with upper-class English graciousness. Then, feeling that he ought to express his acceptance rather more warmly and democratically, he cleared his throat and, with a conscious effort to reproduce the local vernacular, added that it would be *swell.* Pronounced in his

Trinity-College-Cambridge voice, the word sounded so unnatural that he began to blush with embarrassment. Fortunately, the chauffeur was too busy with the traffic to notice.

They turned to the right, sped past a Rosicrucian Temple, past two cat-and-dog hospitals, past a School for Drum-Majorettes and two more advertisements of the Beverly Pantheon. As they turned to the left on Sunset Boulevard, Jeremy had a glimpse of a young woman who was doing her shopping in a hydrangea-blue strapless bathing-suit, platinum curls and a black fur jacket. Then she too was whirled back into the past.

The present was a road at the foot of a line of steep hills, a road flanked by small, expensive-looking shops, by restaurants, by night-clubs shuttered against the sunlight, by offices and apartment houses. Then they too had taken their places in the irrevocable. A sign proclaimed that they were crossing the city limits of Beverly Hills. The surroundings changed. The road was flanked by the gardens of a rich residential quarter. Through trees, Jeremy saw the façades of houses, all new, almost all in good taste — elegant and witty pastiches of Lutyens manor houses, of Little Trianons, of Monticellos; lighthearted parodies of Le Corbusier's solemn machines-for-living-in; fantastic Mexican adaptations of Mexican haciendas and New England farms.

They turned to the right. Enormous palm trees lined the road. In the sunlight, masses of mesembryanthemums blazed with an intense magenta glare. The houses succeeded one another, like the pavilions at some endless international exhibition. Gloucestershire followed Andalusia and gave place in turn to Touraine and Oaxaca, Düsseldorf and Massachusetts.

'That's Harold Lloyd's place,' said the chauffeur, indicating a kind of Boboli. 'And that's Charlie Chaplin's. And that's Pickfair.'

The road began to mount, vertiginously. The chauffeur pointed across an intervening gulf of shadow at what seemed a Tibetan lamasery on the opposite hill, 'That's where Ginger Rogers lives. Yes, *sir*,' he nodded triumphantly, as he twirled the steering-wheel.

Five or six more turns brought the car to the top of the hill. Below and behind lay the plain, with the city like a map extending indefinitely into a pink haze.

Before and to either hand were mountains — ridge after ridge as far as the eye could reach, a desiccated Scotland, empty under the blue desert sky.

The car turned a shoulder of orange rock, and there all at once, on a summit hitherto concealed from view, was a huge sky sign, with the words, BEVERLY PANTHEON, THE PERSONALITY CEMETERY, in six-foot neon tubes and, above it, on the very crest, a full-scale reproduction of the Leaning Tower of Pisa — only this one didn't lean.

'See that?' said the negro impressively. 'That's the Tower of Resurrection. Two hundred thousand dollars, that's what it cost. Yes, *sir*.' He spoke with an emphatic solemnity. One was made to feel that the money had all come out of his own pocket.

CHAPTER TWO

AN HOUR LATER, they were on their way again, having seen everything. Everything. The sloping lawns, like a green oasis in the mountain desolation. The groves of trees. The tombstones in the grass. The Pets' Cemetery, with its marble group after Landseer's 'Dignity and Impudence.' The tiny Church of the Poet — a miniature reproduction of Holy Trinity at Stratford-on-Avon complete with Shakespeare's tomb and a twenty-four-hour service of organ music played automatically by the Perpetual Wurlitzer and broadcast by concealed loudspeakers all over the cemetery.

Then, leading out of the vestry, the Bride's Apartment (for one was married at the Tiny Church as well as buried from it) — the Bride's Apartment that had just been redecorated, said the chauffeur, in the style of Norma Shearer's boudoir in *Marie Antoinette.* And, next to the Bride's Apartment, the exquisite black marble Vestibule of Ashes, leading to the Crematorium, where three super-modern oil-burning mortuary furnaces were always under heat and ready for any emergency.

Accompanied wherever they went by the tremolos of the Perpetual Wurlitzer, they had driven next to look at the Tower of Resurrection — from the outside only; for it housed the executive offices of the West Coast Cemeteries Corporation. Then the Children's Corner with its statues of Peter Pan and the Infant Jesus, its groups of alabaster babies playing with bronze rabbits, its lily pool and an apparatus labelled The Fountain of Rainbow Music, from which there spouted simultaneously water, coloured lights and the inescapable strains of the Perpetual Wurlitzer. Then, in rapid succession, the Garden of Quiet, the Tiny Taj Mahal, the Old World Mortuary. And, reserved by the chauffeur to the last, as the final and crowning proof of his employer's glory, the Pantheon itself.

Was it possible, Jeremy asked himself, that such an object existed? It was certainly not probable. The Beverly Pantheon lacked all verisimilitude, was

something entirely beyond his powers to invent. The fact that the idea of it was now in his mind proved, therefore, that he must really have seen it. He shut his eyes against the landscape and recalled to his memory the details of that incredible reality. The external architecture, modelled on that of Boecklin's 'Toteninsel.' The circular vestibule. The replica of Rodin's 'Le Baiser,' illuminated by concealed pink floodlights. With its flights of black marble stairs. The seven-story columbarium, the endless galleries, its tiers on tiers of slab-sealed tombs. The bronze and silver urns of the cremated, like athletic trophies. The stained-glass windows after Burne-Jones. The texts inscribed on marble scrolls. The Perpetual Wurlitzer crooning on every floor. The sculpture …

That was the hardest to believe, Jeremy reflected, behind closed eyelids. Sculpture almost as ubiquitous as the Wurlitzer. Statues wherever you turned your eyes. Hundreds of them, bought wholesale, one would guess, from some monumental masonry concern at Carrara or Pietrasanta. All nudes, all female, all exuberantly nubile. The sort of statues one would expect to see in the reception-room of a high-class brothel in Rio de Janeiro. 'Oh, Death,' demanded a marble scroll at the entrance to every gallery, 'where is thy sting?' Mutely, but eloquently, the statues gave their reassuring reply. Statues of young ladies in nothing but a very tight belt imbedded, with Bernini-like realism, in the Parian flesh. Statues of young ladies crouching; young ladies using both hands to be modest; young ladies stretching, writhing, callipygously stooping to tie their sandals, reclining. Young ladies with doves, with panthers, with other young ladies, with upturned eyes expressive of the soul's awakening. 'I am the Resurrection and the Life,' proclaimed the scrolls. 'The Lord is my shepherd; therefore shall I want nothing.' Nothing, not even Wurlitzer, not even girls in tightly buckled belts. 'Death is swallowed up in victory' — the victory no longer of the spirit but of the body, the well-fed body, for ever youthful, immortally athletic, indefatigably sexy. The Moslem paradise had had copulations six centuries long. In this new Christian heaven, progress, no doubt, would have stepped up the period to a millennium and added the joys of everlasting tennis, eternal golf and swimming.

All at once the car began to descend. Jeremy opened his eyes again, and saw that they had reached the further edge of the range of hills, among which the Pantheon was built.

Below lay a great tawny plain, chequered with patches of green and dotted with white houses. On its further side, fifteen or twenty miles away, ranges of pinkish mountains fretted the horizon.

‘What’s this?’ Jeremy asked.

‘The San Fernando Valley,” said the chauffeur. He pointed into the middle distance. ‘That’s where Groucho Marx has his place,’ he said. ‘Yes, *sir*.’

At the bottom of the hill the car turned to the left along a wide road that ran, a ribbon of concrete and suburban buildings, through the plain. The chauffeur put on speed; sign succeeded sign with bewildering rapidity. MALTS CABIN DINE AND DANCE AT THE CHATEAU HONOLULU SPIRITUAL HEALING AND COLONIC IRRIGATION BLOCKLONG HOT DOGS BUY YOUR DREAM HOME *NOW*. And behind the signs the mathematically planted rows of apricot and walnut trees flicked past — a succession of glimpsed perspectives preceded and followed every time by fan-like approaches and retirements.

Dark-green and gold, enormous orange orchards manœuvred, each one a mile-square regiment glittering in the sunlight. Far off, the mountains traced their uninterpretable graph of boom and slump.

‘Tarzana,’ said the chauffeur startlingly; there, sure enough, was the name suspended, in white letters, across the road. ‘There’s Tarzana College,’ the man went on, pointing to a group of Spanish-Colonial palaces clustering round a Romanesque basilica. ‘Mr. Stoyte, he’s just given them an auditorium.’

They turned to the right along a less important road. The orange groves gave place for a few miles to huge fields of alfalfa and fusty grass, then returned again more luxuriant than ever. Meanwhile the mountains on the northern edge of the valley were approaching and, slanting in from the west, another range was looming up to the left. They drove on. The road took a sudden turn, aiming, it seemed, at the point where the two ranges must come together. All at once, through a gap between two orchards, Jeremy Pordage saw a most surprising

sight. About half a mile from the foot of the mountains, like an island off a cliff-bound coast, a rocky hill rose abruptly, in places almost precipitously, from the plain. On the summit of the bluff and as though growing out of it in a kind of efflorescence, stood a castle. But what a castle! The donjon was like a skyscraper, the bastions plunged headlong with the effortless swoop of concrete dams. The thing was Gothic, mediaeval, baronial — doubly baronial, Gothic with a Gothicity raised, so to speak, to a higher power, more mediaeval than any building of the thirteenth century. For this … this Object, as Jeremy was reduced to calling it, was mediaeval, not out of vulgar historical necessity, like Coucy, say, or Alnwick, but out of pure fun and wantonness, platonically, one might say. It was mediaeval as only a witty and irresponsible modern architect would wish to be mediaeval, as only the most competent modern engineers are technically equipped to be.

Jeremy was startled into speech. ‘What on earth is that?.’ he asked, pointing at the nightmare on the hill-top.

‘Why, that’s Mr. Stoyte’s place,’ said the retainer; and smiling yet once more with the pride of vicarious ownership, he added: ‘It’s a pretty fine home, I guess.’

The orange groves closed in again; leaning back in his seat, Jeremy Pordage began to wonder, rather apprehensively, what he had let himself in for when he accepted Mr. Stoyte’s offer. The pay was princely; the work, which was to catalogue the almost legendary Hauberk Papers, would be delightful. But that cemetery, this … Object — Jeremy shook his head. He had known, of course, that Mr. Stoyte was rich, collected pictures, owned a show-place in California. But no one had ever led him to expect *this*. The humorous puritanism of his good taste was shocked; he was appalled at the prospect of meeting the person capable of committing such an enormity. Between that person and oneself, what contact, what community of thought or feeling could possibly exist? Why had he sent for one? For it was obvious that he couldn’t conceivably like one’s books. But had he even read one’s books? Did he have the faintest idea of what one was like? Would he be capable, for example, of understanding why one had insisted on the

name of The Araucarias remaining unchanged? Would he appreciate one's point of view about …?

These anxious questionings were interrupted by the noise of the horn, which the chauffeur was sounding with a loud and offensive insistence. Jeremy looked up. Fifty yards ahead, an ancient Ford was creeping tremulously along the road. It carried lashed insecurely to roof and running-boards and luggage-rack, a squalid cargo of household goods — rolls of bedding, an old iron stove, a crate of pots and pans, a folded tent, a tin bath. As they flashed past, Jeremy had a glimpse of three dull-eyed, anaemic children, of a woman with a piece of sacking wrapped around her shoulders, of a haggard, unshaved man.

'Transients,' the chauffeur explained in a tone of contempt.

'What's that?' Jeremy asked.

'Why, *transients*,' the negro repeated, as though the emphasis were an explanation. 'Guess that lot's from the dust bowl. Kansas licence plate. Come to pick our navels.'

'Come to pick your navels?' Jeremy echoed incredulously.

'Navel oranges,' said the chauffeur. 'It's the season. Pretty good year for navels, I guess."

They emerged once more into the open, and there once more was the Object, larger than ever. Jeremy had time to study the details of its construction. A wall with towers encircled the base of the hills, and there was a second line of defence, in the most approved post-Crusades manner, half-way up. On the summit stood the square keep, surrounded by subsidiary buildings.

From the donjon, Jeremy's eyes travelled down to a group of buildings in the plain, not far from the foot of the hill. Across the façade of the largest of them the words, 'Stoyte Home for Sick Children,' were written in gilded letters. Two flags, one the stars and stripes, the other a white banner with the letter S in scarlet, fluttered in the breeze. Then a grove of leafless walnut trees shut out the view once again. Almost at the same moment the chauffeur threw his engine out of gear and put on the brakes. The car came gently to a halt beside a man who was walking at a brisk pace along the grassy verge of the road.

‘Want a ride, Mr. Propter?’ the negro called.

The stranger turned his head, gave the man a smile of recognition and came to the window of the car. He was a large man, broad-shouldered, but rather stooping, with brown hair turning grey and a face, Jeremy thought, like the face of one of those statues which Gothic sculptors carved for a place high up on a West front — a face of sudden prominences and deeply shadowed folds and hollows, emphatically rough-hewn so as to be expressive even at a distance. But this particular face, he went on to notice, was not merely emphatic, not only for the distance; it was a face also for the near point, also for intimacy, a subtle face, in which there were the signs of sensibility and intelligence as well as of power, of a gentle and humorous serenity no less than of energy and strength.

‘Hullo, George,’ the stranger said, addressing the chauffeur; ‘nice of you to stop for me.’

‘Well, I’m sure glad to see you, Mr. Propter,’ said the negro cordially. Then he half-turned in his seat, waved a hand towards Jeremy, and with a florid formality of tone and manner said, ‘I’d like to have you meet Mr. Pordage of England. Mr. Pordage, this is Mr. Propter.’

The two men shook hands, and, after an exchange of courtesies, Mr. Propter got into the car.

‘You’re visiting with Mr. Stoyte?’ he asked, as the chauffeur drove on.

Jeremy shook his head. He was here on business; had come to look at some manuscripts — the Hauberk Papers, to be precise.

Mr. Propter listened attentively, nodded from time to time and, when Jeremy had finished, sat for a moment in silence.

‘Take a decayed Christian,’ he said at last in a meditative tone, ‘and the remains of a Stoic; mix thoroughly with good manners, a bit of money and an old-fashioned education; simmer for several years in a university. Result: a scholar and a gentleman. Well, there were worse types of human being.’ He uttered a little laugh. ‘I might almost claim to have been one myself, once, long ago.’

Jeremy looked at him enquiringly. ‘You’re not *William* Propter, are you?’ he asked. ‘Not *Short Studies in the Counter Reformation*, by any chance?’

The other inclined his head.

Jeremy looked at him in amazement and delight. Was it possible? he asked himself. Those *Short Studies* had been one of his favourite books — a model, he had always thought, of their kind.

‘Well, I’m jiggered!’ he said aloud, using the school-boyish locution deliberately and as though between inverted commas. He had found that, both in writing and in conversation, there were exquisite effects to be obtained by the judicious employment, in a solemn or cultural context, of a phrase of slang, a piece of childish profanity or obscenity. ‘I’ll be damned!’ he exploded again, and his consciousness of the intentional silliness of the words made him stroke his bald head and cough.

There was another moment of silence. Then, instead of talking, as Jeremy had expected, about the *Short Studies*, Mr. Propter merely shook his head and said, ‘We mostly are.’

‘Mostly are what?’ asked Jeremy.

‘Jiggered,’ Mr. Propter answered. ‘Damned. In the psychological sense of the word,’ he added.

The walnut trees came to an end, and there once more, on the starboard bow, was the Object. Mr. Propter pointed in its direction. ‘Poor Jo Stoyte!’ he said. ‘Think of having *that* millstone round one’s neck. Not to mention, of course, all the other millstones that go with it. What luck we’ve had, don’t you think? — we who’ve never been given the opportunity of being anything much worse than scholars and gentlemen!’ After another little silence, ‘Poor Jo,’ he went on with a smile, ‘he isn’t either of them. You’ll find him a bit trying. Because of course he’ll want to bully you, just because tradition says that your type is superior to his type. Not to mention the fact,’ he added, looking into Jeremy’s face with an expression of mingled amusement and sympathy, ‘that you’re probably the sort of person that invites persecution. A bit of a murderee, I’m afraid, as well as a scholar and gentleman.’

Feeling simultaneously annoyed by the man's indiscretion and touched by his friendliness, Jeremy smiled rather nervously and nodded his head.

'Maybe,' Mr. Propter went on, 'maybe it would help you to be less of a murderee towards Jo Stoyte if you knew what gave him the original impulsion to get damned in just *that* way' — and he pointed again towards the Object. 'We were at school together, Jo and I — only nobody called him Jo in those days. We called him Slob, or Jelly-Belly. Because, you see, poor Jo was the local fat-boy, the only fat-boy in the school during those years.' He paused for a moment; then went on in another tone, 'I've often wondered why people have always made fun of fatness. Perhaps there's something intrinsically wrong with fat. For example, there isn't a single fat saint — except, of course, old Thomas Aquinas; and I cannot see any reason to suppose that he was a real saint, a saint in the popular sense of the word, which happens to be the true sense. If Thomas is a saint, then Vincent de Paul isn't. And if Vincent's a saint, which he obviously is, then Thomas isn't. And perhaps that enormous belly of his had something to do with it. Who knows? But anyhow, that's by the way. We're talking about Jo Stoyte. And poor Jo, as I say, was a fat-boy and, being fat, was fair game for the rest of us. God, how we punished him for his glandular deficiencies! And how disastrously he reacted to that punishment! Over-compensation.… But here I am at home,' he added, looking out of the window as the car slackened speed and came to a halt in front of a small white bungalow set in the midst of a clump of eucalyptus trees. 'We'll go on with this another time. But remember, if poor Jo gets too offensive, think of what he was at school and be sorry for him — and don't be sorry for yourself.' He got out of the car, closed the door behind him and, waving a hand to the chauffeur, walked quickly up the path and entered the little house.

The car rolled on again. At once bewildered and reassured by his encounter with the author of the *Short Studies*, Jeremy sat, inertly looking out of the window. They were very near the Object now; and suddenly he noticed, for the first time, that the castle hill was surrounded by a moat. Some few hundred yards from the water's edge, the car passed between two pillars, topped by heraldic

lions. Its passage, it was evident, interrupted a beam of invisible light directed on a photo-electric cell; for no sooner were they past the lions than a drawbridge began to descend. Five seconds before they reached the moat, it was in place; the car rolled smoothly across and came to a halt in front of the main gateway of the castle's outer walls. The chauffeur got out and, speaking into a telephone-receiver concealed in a convenient loophole, announced his presence. The chromium-plated portcullis rose noiselessly, the double doors of stainless steel swung back. They drove in. The car began to climb. The second line of walls was pierced by another gate, which opened automatically as they approached. Between the inner side of this second wall and the slope of the hill a ferro-concrete bridge had been constructed, large enough to accommodate a tennis-court. In the shadowy space beneath, Jeremy caught sight of something familiar. An instant later he had recognized it as a replica of the grotto of Lourdes.

'Miss Maunciple, she's a Catholic,' remarked the chauffeur, jerking his thumb in the direction of the grotto. 'That's why he had it made for her. We's Presbyterians in *our* family,' he added.

'And who is Miss Maunciple?'

The chauffeur hesitated for a moment. 'Well, she's a young lady Mr. Stoyte's kind of friendly with,' he explained at last; then changed the subject.

The car climbed on. Beyond the grotto all the hillside was a cactus garden. Then the road swung round to the northern slope of the bluff, and the cactuses gave place to grass and shrubs. On a little terrace, over-elegant like a fashion-plate from some mythological *Vogue* for goddesses, a bronze nymph by Giambologna spouted two streams of water from her deliciously polished breasts. A little further on, behind wire netting, a group of baboons squatted among the rocks or paraded the obscenity of their hairless rumps.

Still climbing, the car turned again and finally drew up on a circular concrete platform, carried out on cantilevers over a precipice. Once more the old-fashioned retainer, the chauffeur taking off his cap, did a final impersonation of himself welcoming the young master home to the plantation, then set to work to unload the luggage.

Jeremy Pordage walked to the balustrade and looked over. The ground fell almost sheer for about a hundred feet, then sloped steeply to the inner circle of walls and, below them, to the outer fortifications. Beyond lay the moat, and on the further side of the moat stretched the orange orchards. ’Im *dunklen Laub die goldn’ Orangen glühen*,’ he murmured to himself; and then: ‘He hangs in shades the orange bright. Like golden lamps in a green night.’ Marvell’s rendering, he decided, was better than Goethe’s. And, meanwhile, the oranges seemed to have become brighter and more significant. For Jeremy, direct, unmediated experience was always hard to take in, always more or less disquieting. Life became safe, things assumed meaning, only when they had been translated into words and confined between the covers of a book. The oranges were beautifully pigeon-holed; but what about the castle? He turned round and, leaning back against the parapet, looked up. The Object impended, insolently enormous. Nobody had dealt poetically with *that.* Not Childe Roland, not the King of Thule, not Marmion, not the Lady of Shalott, not Sir Leoline. Sir Leoline, he repeated to himself with a connoisseur’s appreciation of romantic absurdity, Sir Leoline, the baron rich who had — what? A toothless mastiff bitch. But Mr. Stoyte had baboons and a sacred grotto, Mr. Stoyte had a chromium portcullis and the Hauberk Papers, Mr. Stoyte had a cemetery like an amusement park and a donjon like …

There was a sudden rumbling sound; the great nail-studded doors of the Early English entrance porch rolled back, and from between them, as though propelled by a hurricane, a small, thick-set man, with a red face and a mass of snow-white hair, darted out on to the terrace and bore down upon Jeremy. His expression, as he advanced, did not change. The face wore that shut, unsmiling mask which American workmen tend to put on in their dealing with strangers — in order to prove, by not making the ingratiating grimaces of courtesy, that theirs is a free country and you’re not going to come it over *them.*

Not having been brought up in a free country, Jeremy had automatically begun to smile as this person, whom he guessed to be his host and employer, came hurrying towards him. Confronted by the unwavering grimness of the

other's face, he suddenly became conscious of this smile — conscious that it was out of place, that it must be making him look a fool. Profoundly embarrassed, he tried to readjust his face.

'Mr. Pordage?' said the stranger in a harsh, barking voice. 'Pleased to meet you. My name's Stoyte.' As they shook hands, he peered, still unsmiling, into Jeremy's face. 'You're older than I thought,' he added.

For the second time that morning Jeremy made his mannequin's gesture of apologetic self-exhibition.

'The sere and withered leaf,' he said. 'One's sinking into senility. One's …'

Mr. Stoyte cut him short. 'What's your age?' he asked in a loud peremptory tone, like that of a police sergeant interrogating a captured thief.

'Fifty-four.'

'Only fifty-four?' Mr. Stoyte shook his head. 'Ought to be full of pep at fifty-four. How's your sex-life?' he added disconcertingly.

Jeremy tried to laugh off his embarrassment. He twinkled; he patted his bald head. '*Mon beau printemps et mon été ont fait le sault par la fenêtre,*' he quoted.

'What's that?' said Mr. Stoyte, frowning. 'No use talking foreign languages to me. I never had any education.' He broke into sudden braying of laughter. 'I'm head of an oil company here,' he said. 'Got two thousand filling-stations in California alone. And not one man in any of those filling-stations that isn't a college graduate!' He brayed again, triumphantly. 'Go and talk foreign languages to *them.*' He was silent for a moment; then, pursuing an unexplicit association of ideas, 'My agent in London,' he went on, 'the man who picks up things for me there — he gave me your name. Told me you were the right man for those — what do you call them? You know, those papers I bought this summer. Roebuck? Hobuck?'

'Hauberk,' said Jeremy, and with a gloomy satisfaction noted that he had been quite right. The man had never read one's books, never even heard of one's existence. Still, one had to remember that he had been called Jelly-Belly when he was young.

‘Hauberk,’ Mr. Stoyte repeated with a contemptuous impatience. ‘Anyhow, he said you were the man.’ Then, without pause or transition, ‘What was it you were saying, about your sex-life, when you started that foreign stuff on me?’

Jeremy laughed uncomfortably. ‘One was implying that it was normal for one’s age.’

‘What do *you* know about what’s normal at your age?’ said Mr. Stoyte. ‘Go and talk to Dr. Obispo about it. It won’t cost you anything. Obispo’s on salary. He’s the house physician.’ Abruptly changing the subject, ‘Would you like to see the castle?’ he asked. ‘I’ll take you round.’

‘Oh, that’s very kind of you,’ said Jeremy effusively. And, for the sake of making a little polite conversation, he added: ‘I’ve already seen your burial-ground.”

‘Seen my burial-ground?’ Mr. Stoyte repeated in a tone of suspicion: suspicion turned suddenly to anger. ‘What the hell do you mean?’ he shouted.

Quailing before his fury, Jeremy stammered something about the Beverly Pantheon and that he had understood from the chauffeur that Mr. Stoyte had a financial interest in the company.

‘I see,’ said the other, somewhat mollified, but still frowning. ‘I thought you meant …’ Stoyte broke off in the middle of the sentence, leaving the bewildered Jeremy to guess what he had thought. ‘Come on,’ he barked; and, bursting into movement, he hurried towards the entrance to the house.

CHAPTER THREE

THERE WAS SILENCE in Ward Sixteen of the Stoyte Home for Sick Children; silence and the luminous twilight of drawn venetian blinds. It was the mid-morning rest period. Three of the five small convalescents were asleep. A fourth lay staring at the ceiling, pensively picking his nose. The fifth, a little girl, was whispering to a doll as curly and Aryan as herself. Seated by one of the windows, a young nurse was absorbed in the latest issue of *True Confessions.*

‘His heart gave a lurch,’ she read. ‘With a strangled cry he pressed me closer. For months we’d been fighting against just this; but the magnet of our passion was too strong for us. The clamorous pressure of his lips had struck an answering spark within my melting body.

‘“Germaine,” he whispered. “Don’t make me wait. Won’t you be good to me now, darling?”

‘He was so gentle, but so ruthless too — as a girl in love wants a man to be ruthless. I felt myself swept away by the rising tide of …’

There was a noise outside in the corridor. The door of the ward flew open, as though before the blast of a hurricane, and someone came rushing into the room.

The nurse looked up with a start of surprise which the completeness of her absorption in ‘The Price of a Thrill’ rendered positively agonizing. Her almost immediate reaction to the shock was one of anger.

‘What’s the idea?’ she began indignantly; then she recognized the intruder and her expression changed. ‘Why, Mr. Stoyte!’

Disturbed by the noise, the young nose-picker dropped his eyes from the ceiling, the little girl turned away from her doll.

‘Uncle Jo!’ they shouted simultaneously. ‘Uncle Jo!’

Starting out of sleep, the others took up the cry.

‘Uncle Jo! Uncle Jo!’

Mr. Stoyte was touched by the warmth of his reception. The face which Jeremy had found so disquietingly grim relaxed into a smile. In mock protest he covered his ears with his hands. ‘You’ll make me deaf,’ he cried. Then, in an aside to the nurse, ‘Poor kids!’ he murmured. ‘Makes me feel I’d kind of like to cry.’ His voice became husky with sentiment. ‘And when one thinks how sick they’ve been …’ He shook his head, leaving the sentence unfinished; then, in another tone, ‘By the way,’ he added, waving a large square hand in the direction of Jeremy Pordage, who had followed him into the ward and was standing near the door, wearing an expression of bewildered embarrassment, ‘this is Mr.… Mr.… Hell! I’ve forgotten your name.’

‘Pordage,’ said Jeremy, and reminded himself that Mr. Stoyte’s name had once been Slob.

‘Pordage, that’s it. Ask him about history and literature,’ he added derisively to the nurse. ‘He knows it all.’

Jeremy was modestly protesting that his period was only from the invention of Ossian to the death of Keats, when Mr. Stoyte turned back to the children and in a voice that drowned the other’s faintly fluted disclaimers, shouted: ‘Guess what Uncle Jo’s brought you!’

They guessed. Candies, bubble gum, balloons, guineapigs. Mr. Stoyte continued triumphantly to shake his head. Finally, when the children had exhausted their power of imagination, he dipped into the pocket of his old tweed jacket and produced, first a whistle, then a mouth-organ, then a small musical box, then a trumpet, then a wooden rattle, then an automatic pistol. This, however, he hastily put back.

‘Now play,’ he said, when he had distributed the instruments. ‘All together. One, two, three.’ And, beating time with both arms, he began to sing, ‘Way down upon the Swanee River.’

At this latest in a long series of shocks and surprises, Jeremy’s mild face took on an expression of intenser bewilderment.

What a morning! The arrival at dawn. The negro retainer. The interminable suburb. The Beverly Pantheon. The Object among the orange trees, and his

meeting with William Propter and this really dreadful Stoyte. Then, inside the castle, the Rubens and the great El Greco in the hall, the Vermeer in the elevator, the Rembrandt etchings along the corridors, the Winter-halter in the butler's pantry.

Then Miss Maunciple's Louis XV boudoir, with the Watteau and the two Lancrets and the fully equipped soda-fountain in a rococo embrasure, and Miss Maunciple herself, in an orange kimono, drinking a raspberry and peppermint ice-cream soda at her own counter. He had been introduced, had refused the offer of a sundae and been hurried on again, always at top speed, always as though on the wings of a tornado, to see the other sights of the castle. The Rumpus Room, for example, with frescoes of elephants by Sert. The library, with its woodwork by Grinling Gibbons, but with no books, because Mr. Stoyte had not yet brought himself to buy any. The small dining-room, with its Fra Angelico and its furniture from Brighton Pavilion. The large dining-room, modelled on the interior of the mosque at Fatehpur Sikri. The ballroom, with its mirrors and coffered ceiling. The thirteenth-century stained-glass in the eleventh-floor W.C. The morning-room, with Boucher's picture of 'La Petite Morphil' bottom upwards on a pink satin sofa. The chapel, imported in fragments from Goa, with the walnut confessional used by St. François de Sales at Annecy. The functional billiard-room. The indoor swimming-pool. The Second Empire bar, with its nudes by Ingres. The two gymnasiums. The Christian Science Reading Room, dedicated to the memory of the late Mrs. Stoyte. The dentist's office. The Turkish bath. Then down, with Vermeer, into the bowels of the hill, to look at the cellar in which the Hauberk Papers had been stored. Down again yet deeper, to the safe-deposit vaults, the power-house, the air-conditioning plant, the well and pumping-station. Then up once more to ground level and the kitchens, where the Chinese chef had shown Mr. Stoyte the newly arrived consignment of turtles from the Caribbean. Up again to the fourteenth, to the bedroom which Jeremy was to occupy during his stay. Then up another six stories to the business office, where Mr. Stoyte gave orders to his secretary, dictated a couple of letters and had a long telephone conversation with

his brokers in Amsterdam. And when that was finished, it had been time to go to the hospital.

Meanwhile, in Ward Sixteen, a group of nurses had collected and were watching Uncle Jo, his white hair flying like Stokowski's, frantically spurring his orchestra to yet louder crescendos of cacophony.

'He's like a great big kid himself,' said one of them in a tone of almost tender amusement.

Another, evidently with literary leanings, declared that it was like something in Dickens. 'Don't you think so?' she insisted to Jeremy.

He smiled nervously and nodded a vague and noncommittal assent.

More practical, a third wished she had her Kodak with her. 'Candid Camera portrait of the President of Consol Oil, California Land and Minerals Corporation. Bank of the Pacific, West Coast Cemeteries, etc., etc.…' She reeled off the names of Mr. Stoyte's chief companies, mock-heroically, indeed, but with admiring gusto, as a convinced legitimist with a sense of humour might enumerate the titles of a grandee of Spain. 'The papers would pay you good money for a snap like that,' she insisted. And to prove that what she was saying was true, she went on to explain that she had a boy friend who worked with an advertising firm, so that he ought to know, and only the week before he had told her that …

Mr. Stoyte's knobbed face, as he left the hospital, was still illuminated with benevolence and happiness.

'Makes you feel kind of good, playing with those poor kids,' he kept repeating to Jeremy.

A wide flight of steps led down from the hospital entrance to the roadway. At the foot of these steps Mr. Stoyte's blue Cadillac was waiting. Behind it stood another, smaller car which had not been there when they arrived. A look of suspicion clouded Mr. Stoyte's beaming face as he caught sight of it. Kidnappers, blackmailers — one never knew. His hand went to the pocket of his coat. 'Who's there?' he shouted in a tone of such loud fury that Jeremy thought for a moment that the man must have suddenly gone mad.

Moon-like, a large, snub-featured face appeared at the car window, smiling round the chewed butt of a cigar.

‘Oh, it’s you, Clancy,’ said Mr. Stoyte. ‘Why didn’t they tell me you were here?’ he went on. His face had flushed darkly; he was frowning and a muscle in his cheek had begun to twitch. ‘I don’t like having strange cars around. Do you hear, Peters?’ he almost screamed at his chauffeur — not because it was the man’s business, of course; simply because he happened to be there, available. ‘Do you hear, I say?’ Then, suddenly, he remembered what Dr. Obispo had said to him that time he had lost his temper with the fellow. ‘Do you really *want* to shorten your life, Mr. Stoyte?’ The doctor’s tone had been one of cool amusement; he had smiled with an expression of politely sarcastic indulgence. ‘Are you absolutely *bent* on having a stroke? A second stroke, remember; and you won’t get off so lightly next time. Well, if so, then go on behaving as you’re doing now. Go on.’ With an enormous effort of will, Mr. Stoyte swallowed his anger. ‘God is love,’ he said to himself. ‘There is no death.’ The late Prudence McGladdery Stoyte had been a Christian Scientist. ‘God is love,’ he said again, and reflected that if people would only stop being so exasperating he would never have to lose his temper. ‘God is love.’ It was all their fault.

Clancy, meanwhile, had left his car and, grotesquely pot-bellied over spindly legs, was coming up the steps, mysteriously smiling and winking as he approached.

‘What is it?’ Mr. Stoyte enquired, and wished to God the man wouldn’t make those faces. ‘Oh, by the way,’ he added, ‘this is Mr.… Mr.…’

‘Pordage,’ said Jeremy.

Clancy was pleased to meet him. The hand he gave to Jeremy was disagreeably sweaty.

‘I got some news for you,’ said Clancy in a hoarse conspiratorial whisper; and, speaking behind his hand, so that his words and the smell of cigar should be for Mr. Stoyte alone, ‘You remember Tittelbaum?’ he added.

‘That chap in the City Engineer’s Department?’

Clancy nodded. ‘One of the boys,’ he affirmed enigmatically and again winked.

‘Well, what about him?’ asked Mr. Stoyte; and in spite of God’s being love, there was a note in his voice of renascent exasperation.

Clancy shot a glance at Jeremy Pordage; then, with the elaborate by-play of Guy Fawkes talking to Catesby on the stage of a provincial theatre, he took Mr. Stoyte by the arm and led him a few feet away, up the steps. ‘Do you know what Tittelbaum told me to-day?’ he asked rhetorically.

‘How the devil should I know?’ (But no, God is love. There is no death.)

Undeterred by the signs of Mr. Stoyte’s irritation, Clancy went on with his performance. ‘He told me what they’ve decided about …’ he lowered his voice still further, ‘about the San Felipe Valley.’

‘Well, what *have* they decided?’ Once more Mr. Stoyte was at the limits of his patience.

Before answering, Clancy removed the cigar-butt from his mouth, threw it away, produced another cigar out of his waistcoat pocket, tore off the cellophane wrapping and stuck it, unlighted, in the place occupied by the old one.

‘They’ve decided,’ he said very slowly, so as to give each word its full dramatic effect, ‘they’ve decided to pipe the water into it.’

Mr. Stoyte’s expression of exasperation gave place at last to one of interest. ‘Enough to irrigate the whole valley?’ he asked.

‘Enough to irrigate the whole valley,’ Clancy repeated with solemnity.

Mr. Stoyte was silent for a moment. ‘How much time have we got?’ he asked at last.

‘Tittelbaum thought the news wouldn’t break for another six weeks.’

‘Six weeks?’ Mr. Stoyte hesitated for a moment; then made his decision. ‘All right. Get busy at once,’ he said with the peremptory manners of one accustomed to command. ‘Go down yourself and take a few of the other boys along with you. Independent purchasers — interested in cattle-raising; want to start a Dude Ranch. Buy all you can. What’s the price, by the way?’

‘Averages twelve dollars an acre.’

‘Twelve,’ Mr. Stoyte repeated, and reflected that it would go to a hundred as soon as they started laying the pipe. ‘How many acres do you figure you can get?’ he asked.

‘Maybe thirty thousand.’

Mr. Stoyte’s face beamed with satisfaction. ‘Good,’ he said briskly. ‘Very good. No mention of my name, of course,’ he added, and then, without pause or transition: ‘What’s Tittelbaum going to cost?’

Clancy smiled contemptuously. ‘Oh, I’ll give him four or five hundred bucks.’

‘That all?’

The other nodded. ‘Tittelbaum’s in the bargain basement,’ he said. ‘Can’t afford to ask any fancy prices. He needs the money — needs it awful bad.’

‘What for?’ asked Mr. Stoyte, who had a professional interest in human nature. ‘Gambling? Women?’

Clancy shook his head. ‘Doctors,’ he explained. ‘He’s got a kid that’s paralysed.’

‘Paralysed?’ Mr. Stoyte echoed in a tone of genuine sympathy. ‘That’s too bad.’ He hesitated for a moment; then, in a sudden burst of generosity, ‘Tell him to send the kid here,’ he went on, making a large gesture towards the hospital. ‘Best place in the State for infantile paralysis, and it won’t cost him anything. Not a red cent.’

‘Hell, that’s kind of you, Mr. Stoyte,’ said Clancy admiringly. ‘That’s real kind.’

‘Oh, it’s nothing,’ said Mr. Stoyte, as he moved towards his car. ‘I’m glad to be able to do it. Remember what it says in the Bible about children. You know,’ he added, ‘I get a real kick out of being with those poor kids in there. Makes you feel kind of warm inside.’ He patted the barrel of his chest. ‘Tell Tittelbaum to send in an application for the kid. Send it to me personally. I’ll see that it goes through at once.’ He climbed into the car and shut the door after him; then, catching sight of Jeremy, opened it again without a word. Mumbling apologetically, Jeremy scrambled in. Mr. Stoyte slammed the door once more,

lowered the glass and looked out. ‘So long,’ he said. ‘And don’t lose any time about that San Felipe business. Make a good job of it, Clancy, and I’ll let you have ten per cent of all the acreage over twenty thousand.’ He raised the window and signalled to the chauffeur to start. The car swung out of the drive and headed towards the castle. Leaning back in his seat, Mr. Stoyte thought of those poor kids and the money he would make out of the San Felipe business. ‘God is love,’ he said yet once more, with momentary conviction and in a whisper that was audible to his companion. ‘God is love.’ Jeremy felt more uncomfortable than ever.

The drawbridge came down as the blue Cadillac approached, the chromium portcullis went up, the gates of the inner rampart rolled back to let it pass. On the concrete tennis-court the seven children of the Chinese cook were roller-skating. Below, in the sacred grotto, a group of masons were at work. At the sight of them, Mr. Stoyte shouted to the chauffeur to stop.

‘They’re putting up a tomb for some nuns,’ he said to Jeremy as they got out of the car.

‘Some nuns?’ Jeremy echoed in surprise.

Mr. Stoyte nodded, and explained that his Spanish agents had bought some sculpture and iron-work from the chapel of a convent that had been wrecked by the anarchists at the beginning of the civil war. ‘They sent some nuns along too,’ he added. ‘Embalmed, I guess. Or maybe just sun-dried: I don’t know. Anyhow, there they are. Luckily I happened to have something nice to put them in.’ He pointed to the monument which the masons were in process of fixing to the south wall of the grotto. On a marble shelf above a large Roman sarcophagus were the statues by some nameless Jacobean stonemason of a gentleman and lady, both in ruffs, kneeling, and behind them, in three rows of three, nine daughters diminishing from adolescence to infancy. ‘*Hic jacet Carolus Franciscus Beals, Armiger* …’ Jeremy began to read.

‘Bought it in England, two years ago,’ said Mr. Stoyte, interrupting him. Then, turning to the workmen, ‘When will you boys be through?’ he asked.

‘To-morrow noon. Maybe to-night.’

‘That’s all I wanted to know,’ said Mr. Stoyte, and turned away. ‘I must have those nuns taken out of storage,’ he said, as they walked back to the car.

They drove on. Poised on the almost invisible vibration of its wings, a humming-bird was drinking at the jet that spouted from the left nipple of Giambologna’s nymph. From the enclosure of the baboons came the shrill noise of battle and copulation. Mr. Stoyte shut his eyes. ‘God is love,’ he repeated, trying deliberately to prolong the delightful condition of euphoria into which those poor kids and Clancy’s good news had plunged him. ‘God is love. There is no death.’ He waited to feel that sense of inward warmth, like the after-effect of whisky, which had followed his previous utterance of the words. Instead, as though some immanent fiend were playing a practical joke on him, he found himself thinking of the shrunken leathery corpses of those nuns, and of his own corpse, and of judgment and the flames. Prudence McGladdery Stoyte had been a Christian Scientist; but Joseph Budge Stoyte, his father, had been a Sandemanian; and Letitia Morgan, his maternal grandmother, had lived and died a Plymouth Sister. Over his cot in the attic room of the little framehouse in Nashville, Tennessee, had hung the text, in vivid orange on a black background: ‘IT IS A TERRIBLE THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD.’ ‘God is love,’ Mr. Stoyte desperately reaffirmed. ‘There is no death.’ But for sinners, such as himself, it was only the worm that never died.

‘If you’re always scared of dying,’ Obispo had said, ‘you’ll surely die. Fear’s a poison; and not such a slow poison either.’

Making another enormous effort, Mr. Stoyte suddenly began to whistle. The tune was, ‘I’m making hay in the moonlight in my Baby’s arms,’ but the face which Jeremy Pordage saw and, as though from some horrible and indecent secret, immediately averted his eyes from, was the face of a man in a condemned cell.

‘Old sour-puss,’ the chauffeur muttered to himself as he watched his employer get out of the car and walk away.

Followed by Jeremy, Mr. Stoyte hurried in silence through the Gothic portal, crossed a pillared Romanesque lobby like the Lady Chapel at Durham, and, his

hat still pulled down over his eyes, stepped into the cathedral twilight of the great hall.

A hundred feet overhead, the sound of the two men's footsteps echoed in the vaulting. Like iron ghosts, the suits of armour stood immobile round the walls. Above them, sumptuously dim, the fifteenth-century tapestries opened windows upon a leafy world of phantasy. At one end of the cavernous room, lit by a hidden searchlight, El Greco's 'Crucifixion of St. Peter' blazed out in the darkness like the beautiful revelation of something incomprehensible and profoundly sinister. At the other, no less brilliantly illuminated, hung a full-length portrait of Hélène Fourment, dressed only in a bearskin cape. Jeremy looked from one to the other — from the ectoplasm of the inverted saint to the unequivocal skin and fat and muscle which Rubens had so loved to see and touch; from unearthly flesh-tints of green-white ochre and carmine, shadowed with transparent black, to the creams and warm pinks, the nacreous blues and greens of Flemish nudity. Two shining symbols, incomparably powerful and expressive — but of what, of what? That, of course, was the question.

Mr. Stoyte paid attention to none of his treasures, but strode across the hall, inwardly cursing his buried wife for having made him think about death by insisting that there wasn't any.

The door of the elevator was in an embrasure between pillars. Mr. Stoyte opened it, and the light came on, revealing a Dutch lady in blue satin sitting at a harpsichord — sitting, Jeremy reflected, at the very heart of an equation, in a world where beauty and logic, painting and analytical geometry, had become one. With what intention? To express, symbolically, what truths about the nature of things? Again, that was the question. Where art was concerned, Jeremy said to himself, that was always the question.

'Shut the door,' Mr. Stoyte ordered; then when it was done, 'We'll have a swim before lunch,' he added, and pressed the topmost of a long row of buttons.

CHAPTER FOUR

MORE THAN A dozen families of transients were already at work in the orange grove, as the man from Kansas, with his wife and his three children and his yellow dog, hurried down the line towards the trees which the overseer had assigned to him. They walked in silence, for they had nothing to say to one another and no energy to waste on words.

Only half a day, the man was thinking; only four hours till work would be stopped. They'd be lucky if they made as much as seventy-five cents. Seventy-five cents. Seventy-five cents; and that right front tyre wasn't going to last much longer. If they meant to get up to Fresno and then Salinas, they'd just have to get a better one. But even the rottenest old second-hand tyre cost money. And money was food. And did they eat! he thought with sudden resentment. If he were alone, if he didn't have to drag the kids and Minnie around, then he could rent a little place somewhere. Near the highway, so that he could make a bit extra by selling eggs and fruit and things to the people that rode past in their automobiles, sell a lot cheaper than the markets and still make good money. And then, maybe, he'd be able to buy a cow and a couple of hogs; and then he'd find a girl — one of those fat ones, he liked them rather fat: fat and young with …

His wife started coughing again; the dream was shattered. Did they eat! More than they were worth. Three kids with no strength in them. And Minnie going sick on you half the time so that you had to do her work as well as yours!

The dog had paused to sniff at a post. With sudden and surprising agility the man from Kansas took two quick steps forward and kicked the animal squarely in the ribs. 'You goddam dog!' he shouted. 'Get out of the way!' It ran off, yelping. The man from Kansas turned his head in the hope of catching in his children's faces an expression of disapproval or commiseration. But the children had learnt better than to give him an excuse for going on from the dog to

themselves. Under the tousled hair, the three pale, small faces were entirely blank and vacant. Disappointed, the man turned away, grumbling indistinctly that he'd belt the hell out of them if they weren't careful. The mother did not even turn her head. She was feeling too sick and tired to do anything but walk straight on. Silence settled down again over the party.

Then, suddenly, the youngest of the three children let out a shrill cry. 'Look there!' She pointed. In front of them was the castle. From the summit of its highest tower rose a spidery metal structure, carrying a succession of platforms to a height of twenty or thirty feet above the parapet. On the highest of these platforms, black against the shining sky, stood a tiny human figure. As they looked, the figure spread its arms and plunged head foremost out of sight behind the battlements. The children's shrill outcry of astonishment gave the man from Kansas the pretext which, a moment before, they had denied him. He turned on them furiously. 'Stop that yellin',' he yelled; then rushed at them, hitting out — a slap on the side of the head for each of them. With an enormous effort, the woman lifted herself from the abyss of fatigue into which she had fallen; she halted, she turned, she cried out protestingly, she caught her husband's arm. He pushed her away, so violently that she almost fell.

'You're as bad as the kids,' he shouted at her. 'Just layin' around and eatin'. Not worth a damn. I tell you, I'm just sick and tired of the whole lot of you. Sick and tired,' he repeated. 'So you keep your mouth shut, see!' He turned away and, feeling a good deal better for his outburst, walked briskly on, at a rate which he knew his wife would find exhausting, between the rows of loaded orange trees.

From that swimming-pool at the top of the donjon the view was prodigious. Floating on the translucent water, one had only to turn one's head to see, between the battlement, successive vistas of plain and mountain, of green and tawny and violet and faint blue. One floated, one looked, and one thought, that is, if one were Jeremy Pordage, of that tower in *Epipsychidion*, that tower with its chambers

Looking towards the golden Eastern air
And level with the living winds.

Not so, however, if one were Miss Virginia Maunciple. Virginia neither floated, nor looked, nor thought of *Epipsychidion*, but took another sip of whisky and soda, climbed to the highest platform of the diving-tower, spread her arms, plunged, glided under water and, coming up immediately beneath the unsuspecting Pordage, caught him by the belt of his bathing-pants and pulled him under.

‘You asked for it,’ she said, as he came up again, gasping and spluttering, to the surface, ‘lying there without moving, like a silly old Buddha.’ She smiled at him with an entirely good-natured contempt.

These people that Uncle Jo kept bringing to the castle. An Englishman with a monocle to look at the armour; a man with a stammer to clean the pictures; a man who couldn’t speak anything but German to look at some silly old pots and plates; and to-day this other ridiculous Englishman with a face like a rabbit’s and a voice like Songs without Words on the saxophone.

Jeremy Pordage blinked the water out of his eyes and, dimly, since he was presbyopic and without his spectacles, saw the young laughing face very close to his own, the body foreshortened and wavering uncertainly through the water. It was not often that he found himself in such proximity to such a being. He swallowed his annoyance and smiled at her.

Miss Maunciple stretched out a hand and patted the bald patch at the top of Jeremy’s head. ‘Boy,’ she said, ‘does it shine. Talk of billiard-balls. I know what I shall call you: Ivory. Good-bye, Ivory.’ She turned, swam to the ladder, climbed out, walked to the table on which the bottles and glasses were standing, drank the rest of her whisky and soda, then went and sat down on the edge of the couch on which, in black spectacles and bathing-drawers, Mr. Stoyte was taking his sun-bath.

‘Well, Uncle Jo,’ she said in a tone of affectionate playfulness, ‘feeling kind of good?’

‘Feeling fine, Baby,’ he answered. It was true; the sun had melted away his dismal forebodings; he was living again in the present, that delightful present in which one brought happiness to sick children; in which there were Tittelbaums

prepared, for five hundred bucks, to give one information worth at the very least a million; in which the sky was blue and the sunshine a caressing warmth upon the stomach; in which, finally, one stirred out of a delicious somnolence to see little Virginia smiling down at one as though she really cared for her old Uncle Jo, and cared for him, what was more, not merely as an old uncle — no, *sir*; because, when all's said and done, a man is only as old as he feels and acts; and where his Baby was concerned did he feel young? did he *act* young? Yes, sir. Mr. Stoyte smiled to himself, a smile of triumphant self-satisfaction.

'Well, Baby,' he said aloud, and laid a square, thick-fingered hand on the young woman's bare knee.

Through half-closed eyelids Miss Maunciple gave him a secret and somehow indecent look of understanding and complicity; then uttered a little laugh and stretched her arms. 'Doesn't the sun feel good!' she said; and, closing her lids completely, she lowered her raised arms, clasped her hands behind her neck, and threw back her shoulders. It was a pose that lifted the breasts, that emphasized the inward curve of the loins and the contrary swell of the buttocks — the sort of pose that a new arrival in the seraglio would be taught by the eunuchs to assume at her first interview with the sultan; the very pose, Jeremy recognized, as he had chanced to look her way, of that quite particularly unsuitable statue on the third floor of the Beverly Pantheon.

Through his dark glasses, Mr. Stoyte looked up at her with an expression of possessiveness at once gluttonous and paternal. Virginia was his baby, not only figuratively and colloquially, but also in the literal sense of the word. His sentiments were simultaneously those of the purest father-love and the most violent eroticism.

He looked up at her. By contrast with the shiny white satin of her beach clout and brassière the sunburnt skin seemed more richly brown. The planes of the young body flowed in smooth continuous curves, effortlessly solid, three-dimensional, without accent or abrupt transition. Mr. Stoyte's regards travelled up to the auburn hair and came down by way of the rounded forehead, of the wide-set eyes, and small, straight, impudent nose, to the mouth. That mouth — it

was her most striking feature. For it was to the mouth's short upper lip that Virginia's face owed its characteristic expression of childlike innocence — an expression that persisted through all her moods, that was noticeable whatever she might be doing, whether it was telling smutty stories or making conversation with the Bishop, taking tea in Pasadena or getting tight with the boys, enjoying what she called 'a bit of yum-yum' or attending Mass. Chronologically, Miss Maunciple was a young woman of twenty-two; but that abbreviated upper lip gave her, in all circumstances, an air of being hardly adolescent, of not having reached the age of consent. For Mr. Stoyte, at sixty, the curiously perverse contrast between childishness and maturity, between the appearance of innocence and the fact of experience, was intoxicatingly attractive. It was not only so far as he was concerned that Virginia was both kinds of baby; she was also both kinds of baby objectively, in herself.

Delicious creature! The hand that had lain inert, hitherto, upon her knee slowly contracted. Between the broad spatulate thumb and the strong fingers, what smoothness, what a sumptuous and substantial resilience!

'Jinny, he said. 'My Baby!'

The Baby opened her large blue eyes and dropped her arms to her sides. The tense back relaxed, the lifted breasts moved downwards and forwards like soft living creatures sinking to repose. She smiled at him.

'What are you pinching me for, Uncle Jo?'

'I'd like to eat you,' her Uncle Jo replied in a tone of cannibalistic sentimentality.

'I'm tough.'

Mr. Stoyte uttered a maudlin chuckle. 'Little tough kid!' he said.

The tough kid stooped down and kissed him.

Jeremy Pordage, who had been quietly looking at the panorama and continuing his silent recitation of *Epipsychidion*, happened at this moment to turn once more in the direction of the couch, and was so much embarrassed by what he saw that he began to sink and had to strike out violently with arms and legs to prevent himself from going under. Turning round in the water, he swam

to the ladder, climbed out and, without waiting to dry himself, hurried to the elevator.

‘Really!’ he said to himself as he looked at the Vermeer. ‘*Really!*’

‘I did some business this morning,’ said Mr. Stoyte when the Baby had straightened herself up again.

‘What sort of business?’

‘Good business,’ he answered. ‘Might make a lot of money. *Real* money,’ he insisted.

‘How much?’

‘Maybe half a million,’ he said cautiously, understating his hopes; ‘maybe a million; maybe even more.’

‘Uncle Jo,’ she said, ‘I think you’re wonderful.’ Her voice had the ring of complete sincerity. She genuinely did think him wonderful. In the world in which she had lived it was axiomatic that a man who could make a million dollars must be wonderful. Parents, friends, teachers, newspapers, radio, advertisements — explicitly or by implication, all were unanimous in proclaiming his wonderfulness. And besides, Virginia was very fond of her Uncle Jo. He had given her a wonderful time, and she was grateful. Besides, she liked to like people if she possibly could; she liked to please them. Pleasing them made her feel good — even when they were elderly, like Uncle Jo, and when some of the ways in which she was called upon to please them didn’t happen to be very appetizing. ‘I think you’re wonderful,’ she repeated.

Her admiration gave him an intense satisfaction. ‘Oh, it’s quite easy,’ he said with hypocritical modesty, angling for more.

Virginia gave it him. ‘Easy, nothing!’ she said firmly. ‘I say you *are* wonderful. So just keep your mouth shut.’

Enchanted, Mr. Stoyte took another handful of firm flesh and squeezed it affectionately. ‘I’ll give you a present, if the deal goes through,’ he said. ‘What would you like, Baby?’

‘What would I like?’ she repeated. ‘But I don’t want anything.’

Her disinterestedness was not assumed. For it was true; she never did want things this way, in cold blood. At the moment a want occurred, for an ice-cream soda, for example, for a bit of yum-yum, for a mink coat seen in a shop-window — at such moments she did want things, and wanted them badly, couldn't wait to have them. But as for long-range wants, wants that had to be thought about in advance — no, she never had wanted like that. The best part of Virginia's life was spent in enjoying the successive instants of present contentment of which it was composed; and if ever circumstances forced her out of this mindless eternity into the world of time, it was a narrow little universe in which she found herself, a world whose furthest boundaries were never more than a week or two away in the future. Even as a show-girl, at eighteen dollars a week, she had found it difficult to bother much about money and security and what would happen if you had an accident and couldn't show your legs any more. Then Uncle Jo had come along, and everything was there, as though it grew on trees — a swimming-pool tree, a cocktail tree, a Schiaparelli tree. You just had to reach out your hand and there it was, like an apple in the orchard back home in Oregon. So where did presents come in? Why should she want anything? Besides, it was obvious that Uncle Jo got a tremendous kick out of her not wanting things; and to be able to give Uncle Jo a kick always made her feel good. 'I tell you, Uncle Jo, I don't want *anything*.'

'Don't you?' said a strange voice, startlingly close behind them. 'Well, I do.'

Dark-haired and dapper, glossily Levantine, Dr. Sigmund Obispo stepped briskly up to the side of the couch.

'To be precise,' he went on, 'I want to inject one-point-five cubic centimetres of testosterones into the great man's *gluteus medius.* So off you go, my angel,' he said to Virginia in a tone of derision, but with a smile of unabashed desire. 'Hop!' He gave her a familiar little pat on the shoulder, and another, when she got up to make room for him, on the white satin posterior.

Virginia turned round sharply, with the intention of telling him not to be so fresh; then, as her glance travelled from that barrel of hairy flesh which was Mr. Stoyte to the other's handsome face, so insultingly sarcastic and at the same time

so flatteringly concupiscent, she changed her mind and, instead of telling him, loudly, just where he got off, she made a grimace and stuck out her tongue at him. What was begun as a rebuke had ended, before she knew it, as the acquiescence in an impertinence, as an act of complicity with the offender and of disloyalty to Uncle Jo. Poor Uncle Jo! she thought, with a rush of affectionate pity for the old gentleman. For a moment she felt quite ashamed of herself. The trouble, of course, was that Dr. Obispo was so handsome; that he made her laugh; that she liked his admiration; that it was fun to lead him on and see how he'd act. She even enjoyed getting mad at him, when he was rude, which he constantly was.

'I suppose you think you're Douglas Fairbanks Junior,' she said, making an attempt to be scathing; then walked away with as much dignity as her two little strips of white satin would permit her to assume and, leaning against a battlement, looked down at the plain below. Ant-like figures moved among the orange trees. She wondered idly what they were doing; then her mind wandered to other, more interesting and personal matters. To Sig and the fact that she couldn't help feeling rather thrilled when he was around, even when he acted the way he had done just now. Some day, maybe — some day, just to see what it was like and if things got a bit dull out here at the castle … Poor Uncle Jo! she reflected. But then what could he expect — at his age and at hers? The unexpected thing was that, in all these months, she hadn't yet given him any reason for being jealous — unless, of course, you counted Enid and Mary Lou; which she didn't; because she really wasn't that way at all; and when it did happen, it was nothing more than a kind of little accident; nice, but not a bit important. Whereas with Sig, if it ever happened, the thing would be different; even though it weren't very serious; which it wouldn't be — not like with Walt, for example, or even with little Buster back in Portland. It would be different from the accidents with Enid and Mary Lou, because, with a man, those things generally did matter a good deal, even when you didn't mean them to matter. Which was the only reason for not doing them, outside of their being sins, of course; but somehow that never seemed to count very much when the boy was a

real good looker (which one had to admit Sig was, even though it was rather in the style of Adolphe Menjou; but, come to think of it, it was those dark ones with oil on their hair that had always given her the biggest kick!). And when you'd had a couple of drinks, maybe, and you felt you'd like some thrills, why, then it never even occurred to you that it was a sin; and then the one thing led to another, and before you knew what had happened — well, it *had* happened; and really she just couldn't believe it was as bad as Father O'Reilly said it was; and, anyhow, Our Lady would be a lot more understanding and forgiving than he was; and what about the way Father O'Reilly ate his food, whenever he came to dinner? — like a hog, there wasn't any other word for it; and wasn't gluttony just as bad as the other thing? So who was he to talk like that?

'Well, and how's the patient?' Dr. Obispo enquired in the parody of a bedside manner, as he took Virginia's place on the couch. He was in the highest of spirits. His work in the laboratory was coming along unexpectedly well; that new preparation of bile salts had done wonders for his liver; the rearmament boom had sent his aircraft shares up another three points; and it was obvious that Virginia wasn't going to hold out much longer. 'How's the little invalid this morning?' he went on, enriching his parody with the caricature of an English accent; for he had done a year of post-graduate work at Oxford.

Mr. Stoyte growled inarticulately. There was something about Dr. Obispo's facetiousness that always enraged him. In some not easily definable way it had the quality of a deliberate insult. Mr. Stoyte was always made to feel that Obispo's apparently good-natured banter was in reality the expression of a calculated and malignant contempt. The thought of it made Mr. Stoyte's blood boil. But when his blood boiled, his blood-pressure, he knew, went up, his life was shortened. He could not afford to be as angry with Obispo as he would have liked. And what was more, he couldn't afford to get rid of the man. Obispo was an indispensable evil. 'God is love; there is no death.' But Mr. Stoyte remembered with terror that he had had a stroke, that he was growing old. Obispo had put him on his feet again when he was almost dying, had promised him ten more years of life even if those researches didn't work out as well as he

hoped; and if they did work out — then more, much more. Twenty years, thirty, forty. Or it might even be that the loathsome little kike would find some way of proving that Mrs. Eddy was right, after all. Perhaps there really and truly wouldn't be any death — not for Uncle Jo, at any rate. Glorious prospect! Meanwhile … Mr. Stoyte sighed, resignedly, profoundly. 'We all have our cross to bear,' he said to himself, echoing, across the intervening years, the words his grandmother used to repeat when she made him take castor oil.

Dr. Obispo, meanwhile, had sterilized his needle, filed the top off a glass ampoule, filled his syringe. His movements, as he worked, were characterized by a certain studied exquisiteness, by a florid and self-conscious precision. It was as though the man were simultaneously his own ballet and his own audience — a sophisticated and highly critical audience, it was true; but then, what a ballet! Nijinsky, Karsavina, Pavlova, Massine — all on a single stage. However terrific the applause it was always merited.

'Ready,' he called at last.

Obediently and in silence, like a trained elephant, Mr. Stoyte rolled over on to his stomach.

CHAPTER FIVE

JEREMY HAD DRESSED again and was sitting in the subterranean store-room that was to serve as his study. The dry acrid dust of old documents had gone to his head, like a kind of intoxicating snuff. His face was flushed as he prepared his files and sharpened his pencils; his bald head shone with perspiration; behind their bifocal lenses his eyes were bright with excitement.

There! Everything was ready. He turned round in his swivel-chair and sat for a little while quite still, voluptuously savouring his anticipations. Tied up in innumerable brown-paper parcels, the Hauberk Papers awaited their first reader. Twenty-seven crates of still unravished brides of quietness. He smiled to himself at the thought that he was to be their Bluebeard. Thousands of brides of quietness accumulated through centuries by successive generations of indefatigable Hauberks. Hauberk after Hauberk; barony after knighthood; earldom after barony; and then Earl of Gonister after Earl of Gonister down to the last, the eighth. And, after the eighth, nothing but death-duties and an old house and two old spinster ladies, sinking ever deeper into solitude and eccentricity, into poverty and family pride, but finally, poor pets! more deeply into poverty than pride. They had sworn they would never sell; but in the end they had accepted Mr. Stoyte's offer. The papers had been shipped to California. They would be able, now, to buy themselves a couple of really sumptuous funerals. And that would be the end of the Hauberks. Delicious fragment of English history! Cautionary perhaps, or perhaps, and more probably, merely senseless, merely a tale told by an idiot. A tale of cut-throats and conspirators, of patrons of learning and shady speculators, of bishops and kings' catamites and minor poets, of admirals and pimps, of saints and heroines and nymphomaniacs, of imbeciles and prime ministers, of art collectors and sadists. And here was all that remained of them, in twenty-seven crates, higgledy-piggledy, never

catalogued, never even looked at, utterly virgin. Gloating over his treasure, Jeremy forgot the fatigues of the journey, forgot Los Angeles and the chauffeur, forgot the cemetery and the castle, forgot even Mr. Stoyte. He had the Hauberk Papers, had them all to himself. Like a child dipping blindly into a bran pie for a present which he knows will be exciting, Jeremy picked up one of the brown-paper parcels with which the first crate was filled and cut the string. What rich confusion awaited him within! A book of household accounts for the year 1576 and 1577; a narrative by some Hauberk cadet of Sir Kenelm Digby's expedition to Scanderoon; eleven letters in Spanish from Miguel de Molinos to that Lady Ann Hauberk who had scandalized her family by turning papist; a collection, in early eighteenth-century handwriting, of sickroom recipes; a copy of Drelincourt *On Death*; and an odd volume of Andréa de Nerciat's *Félicia, ou Mes Fredaines.* He had just cut the string of the second bundle and was wondering whose was the lock of pale brown hair preserved between the pages of the Third Earl's holograph Reflections on the Late Popish Plot, when there was a knock at the door. He looked up and saw a small, dark man in a white overall advancing towards him. The stranger smiled, said, 'Don't let me disturb you,' but nevertheless disturbed him. 'My name's Obispo,' he went on, 'Dr. Sigmund Obispo: Physician in ordinary to His Majesty King Stoyte the First — and let's hope also the last.'

Evidently delighted by his own joke, he broke into a peal of startlingly loud metallic laughter. Then, with the elegantly fastidious gesture of an aristocrat in a dust-heap, he picked up one of Molinos's letters and started, slowly, and out loud, to decipher the first line of the flowing seventeenth-century calligraphy that met his eyes. '"*Ame a Dios como es en sí y no como se lo dice y forma su imaginación.*"' He looked up at Jeremy with an amused smile. 'Easier said than done, I should think. Why, you can't even love a woman as she is in herself; and after all, there is some sort of objective physical basis for the phenomenon we call a female. A pretty nice basis in some cases. Whereas poor old Dios is only a spirit — in other words, pure imagination. And here's this idiot, whoever he is, telling some other idiot that people mustn't love God as he is in their

imagination.' Once again self-consciously the aristocrat, he threw down the letter with a contemptuous flick of the wrist. 'What drivel it all is!' he went on. 'A string of words called religion. Another string of words called philosophy. Half a dozen other strings called political ideals. And all the words either ambiguous or meaningless. And people getting so excited about them they'll murder their neighbours for using a word they don't happen to like. A word that probably doesn't mean as much as a good belch. Just a noise without even the excuse of gas on the stomach. "*Ame a Dios come es en sî*"' he repeated derisively. 'It's about as sensible as saying "hiccough *a* hiccough *como es en* hiccough." I don't know how you *litterae humaniores* boys manage to stand it. Don't you pine for some sense once in a while?'

Jeremy smiled with an expression of nervous apology. 'One doesn't bother too much about the meanings,' he said. Then, anticipating further criticism by disparaging himself and the things he loved most dearly, 'One gets a lot of fun, you know,' he went on, 'just scrabbling about in the dust-heaps.'

Dr. Obispo laughed and patted Jeremy encouragingly on the shoulders. 'Good for you!' he said. 'You're frank. I like that. Most of the Ph.D. boys one meets are such damned Pecksniffs. Trying to pull that high-moral culture stuff on you! You know: wisdom rather than knowledge; Sophocles instead of science. "Funny," I always say to them when they try that on me, "funny that the thing you get your income from should happen to be the thing that's going to save humanity." Whereas you don't try to glorify your little racket. You're honest. You admit you're in the thing merely for the fun of it. Well, that's why I'm in *my* little racket. For the fun. Though, of course, if you'd given me any of that Sophocles stuff, I'd just have let you have my piece about science and progress, science and happiness, even science and ultimate truth, if you'd been obstinate.' He showed his white teeth in a happy derision of everybody.

His amusement was infectious. Jeremy also smiled. 'I'm glad I wasn't obstinate,' he said in a tone whose fluty demureness implied how much he objected to disquisitions on ultimate truth.

‘Mind you,’ Dr. Obispo went on, ‘I’m not entirely blind to the charms of your racket. I’d draw the line at Sophocles, of course. And I’d be deadly bored with this sort of stuff’ — he nodded towards the twenty-seven crates. ‘But I must admit,’ he concluded handsomely, ‘I’ve had a lot of fun out of old books in my time. Really, a lot of fun.’

Jeremy coughed and caressed his scalp; his eyes twinkled in anticipation of the deliciously dry little joke he was just about to make. But, unfortunately, Dr. Obispo gave him no time. Serenely unaware of Jeremy’s preparations he looked at his watch; then rose to his feet. ‘I’d like to show you my laboratory,’ he said. ‘There’s plenty of time before lunch.’

‘Instead of asking if I’d like to see his bloody laboratory.’ Jeremy protested inwardly, as he swallowed his joke; and it had been such a good one! He would have liked, of course, to go on unpacking the Hauberk Papers; but, lacking the courage to say so, he rose obediently and followed Dr. Obispo towards the door.

Longevity, the doctor explained, as they left the room. That was his subject. Had been ever since he left medical school. But, of course, so long as he was in practice he hadn’t been able to do any serious work on it. Practice was fatal to serious work, he added parenthetically. How could you do anything sensible, when you had to spend all your time looking after patients? Patients belonged to three classes: those that imagined they were sick, but weren’t; those that were sick, but would get well anyhow; those that were sick and would be much better dead. For anybody capable of serious work to waste his time with patients was simply idiotic. And, of course, nothing but economic pressure would ever have driven him to do it. And he might have gone on in that groove for ever. Wasting himself on morons. But then, quite suddenly, his luck had turned. Jo Stoyte had come to consult him. It had been positively providential.

‘Most awfully a godsend,’ Jeremy murmured, quoting his favourite phrase of Coleridge.

Jo Stoyte, Dr. Obispo repeated, Jo Stoyte on the verge of breaking up completely. Forty pounds overweight and having had a stroke. Not a bad one, luckily; but enough to put the old bastard into a sweat. Talk of being scared to

death! (Dr. Obispo's white teeth flashed again in wolfish good-humour.) In Jo's case it had been a panic. Out of that panic had come Dr. Obispo's liberation from his patients; had come his income, his laboratory for work on the problems of longevity, his excellent assistant; had come, too, the financing of that pharmaceutical work at Berkeley, of those experiments with monkeys in Brazil, of that expedition to study the tortoises on the Galapagos Islands. Everything a research worker could ask for, with old Jo himself thrown in as the perfect guinea-pig — ready to submit to practically anything short of vivisection without anaesthetics, provided it offered some hope of keeping him above ground a few years longer.

Not that he was doing anything spectacular with the old buzzard at the moment. Just keeping his weight down; and taking care of his kidneys; and pepping him up with periodical shots of synthetic sex hormone; and watching out for those arteries. The ordinary, commonsense treatment for a man of Jo Stoyte's age and medical history. Meanwhile, however, he was on the track of something new, something that promised to be important. In a few months, perhaps in a few weeks, he'd be in a position to make a definite pronouncement.

'That's very interesting,' said Jeremy with hypocritical politeness.

They were walking along a narrow corridor, whitewashed and bleakly illuminated by a series of electric bulbs. Through open doors Jeremy had occasional glimpses of vast cellars crammed with totem poles and armour, with stuffed orang-utans and marble groups by Thorwaldsen, with gilded Bodhisattvas and early steam-engines, with lingams and stage-coaches and Peruvian pottery, with crucifixes and mineralogical specimens.

Dr. Obispo, meanwhile, had begun to talk again about longevity. The subject, he insisted, was still in the pre-scientific stage. A lot of observations without any explanatory hypothesis. A mere chaos of facts. And what odd, what essentially eccentric facts! What was it, for example, that made a cicada live as long as a bull? or a canary outlast three generations of sheep? Why should dogs be senile at fourteen and parrots sprightly at a hundred? Why should female humans become sterile in the forties, while female crocodiles continued to lay eggs into

their third century? Why in heaven's name should a pike live to two hundred without showing any signs of senility? Whereas poor old Jo Stoyte …

From a side passage two men suddenly emerged carrying between them on a stretcher a couple of mummified nuns. There was a collision.

'Damned fools!' Dr. Obispo shouted angrily.

'Damned fool yourself!'

'Can't you look where you're going?'

'Keep your face shut!'

Dr. Obispo turned contemptuously away and walked on.

'Who the hell do you think you are?' they called after him.

Jeremy meanwhile had been looking with lively curiosity at the mummies. 'Discalced Carmelites,' he said to nobody in particular; and enjoying the flavour of that curious combination of syllables, he repeated them with a certain emphatic relish. 'Discalced Carmelites.'

'Discalced your ass,' said the foremost of the two men, turning fiercely upon this new antagonist.

Jeremy gave one glance at that red and angry face, then, with ignominious haste, hurried after his guide.

Dr. Obispo halted at last. 'Here we are,' he said, opening a door. A smell of mice and absolute alcohol floated out into the corridor. 'Come on in,' he said cordially.

Jeremy entered. There were the mice all right — cage upon cage of them, in tiers along the wall directly in front of him. To the left, three windows, hewn in the rock, gave on to the tennis-court and a distant panorama of orange trees and mountains. Seated at a table in front of one of these windows, a man was looking through a microscope. He raised his fair, tousled head as they approached, and turned towards them a face of almost childlike candour and openness. 'Hullo, doc,' he said with a charming smile.

'My assistant,' Dr. Obispo explained. 'Peter Boone. Pete, this is Mr. Pordage.' Pete rose and revealed himself an athletic young giant.

‘Call me Pete,’ he said, when Jeremy had called him Mr. Boone. ‘Everyone calls me Pete.’

Jeremy wondered whether he ought to invite the young man to call him Jeremy — but wondered, as usual, so long that the appropriate moment for doing so passed, irrevocably.

‘Pete’s a bright boy,’ Dr. Obispo began again in a tone that was affectionate in intention, but a little patronizing in fact. ‘Knows his physiology. Good with his hands, too. Best mouse surgeon I ever saw.’ He patted the young man on the shoulder.

Pete smiled — a little uncomfortably, it seemed to Jeremy, as though he found it rather difficult to make the right response to the other’s cordiality.

‘Takes his politics a bit too seriously,’ Dr. Obispo went on. ‘That’s his only defect. I’m trying to cure him of that. Not very successfully so far, I’m afraid. Eh, Pete?’

The young man smiled again, more confidently; this time he knew exactly where he stood and what to do.

‘*Not* very successfully,’ he repeated. Then, turning to Jeremy, ‘Did you see the Spanish news this morning?’ he asked. The expression on his large, fair, open face changed to one of concern.

Jeremy shook his head.

‘It’s something awful,’ said Pete gloomily. ‘When I think of those poor devils without planes or artillery or …’

‘Well, don’t think of them,’ Dr. Obispo cheerfully advised. ‘You’ll feel better.’

The young man looked at him, then looked away again without saying anything. After a moment of silence he pulled out his watch. ‘I think I’ll go and have a swim before lunch,’ he said, and walked towards the door.

Dr. Obispo picked up a cage of mice and held it within a few inches of Jeremy’s nose. ‘These are the sex-hormone boys,’ he said with a jocularity that the other found curiously offensive. The animals squeaked as he shook the cage.

‘Lively enough while the effect lasts. The trouble is that the effects are only temporary.’

Not that temporary effects were to be despised, he added, as he replaced the cage. It was always better to feel temporarily good than temporarily bad. That was why he was giving old Jo a course of that testosterone stuff. Not that the old bastard had any great need of it with that Maunciple girl around.…

Dr. Obispo suddenly put his hand over his mouth and looked round towards the window. ‘Thank God,’ he said, ‘he’s out of the room. Poor old Pete!’ A derisive smile appeared on his face. ‘Is he in love!’ He tapped his forehead. ‘Thinks she’s like something in the Works of Tennyson. You know, chemically pure. Last month he nearly killed a man for suggesting that she and the old boy … Well, you know. God knows what he figures the girl is doing here. Telling Uncle Jo about the spiral nebulae, I suppose. Well, if it makes him happy to think that way, I’m not the one that’s going to spoil his fun.’ Dr. Obispo laughed indulgently. ‘But to come back to what I was saying about Uncle Jo.…’

Just having that girl around the house was the equivalent of a hormone treatment. But it wouldn’t last. It never did. Brown-Séquard and Voronoff and all the rest of them — they’d been on the wrong track. They’d thought that the decay of sexual power was the cause of senility. Whereas it was only one of the symptoms. Senescence started somewhere else and involved the sex mechanism along with the rest of the body. Hormone treatments were just palliatives and pick-me-ups. Helped you for a time, but didn’t prevent your growing old.

Jeremy stifled a yawn.

For example, Dr. Obispo went on, why should some animals live much longer than human beings and yet show no signs of old age? Somehow, somewhere we had made a biological mistake. Crocodiles had avoided that mistake; so had tortoises. The same was true of certain species of fish.

‘Look at this,’ he said; and, crossing the room, he drew back a rubber curtain, revealing as he did so the glass front of a large aquarium recessed into the wall. Jeremy approached and looked in.

In the green and shadowy translucence, two huge fish hung suspended, their snouts almost touching, motionless except for the occasional ripple of a fin and the rhythmic panting of their gills. A few inches from their staring eyes a rosary of bubbles streamed ceaselessly up towards the light, and all around them the water was spasmodically silver with the dartings of smaller fish. Sunk in their mindless ecstasy, the monsters paid no attention.

Carp, Dr. Obispo explained; carp from the fishponds of a castle in Franconia — he had forgotten the name; but it was somewhere near Bamberg. The family was impoverished; but the fish were heirlooms, unpurchasable. Jo Stoyte had had to spend a lot of money to have these two stolen and smuggled out of the country in a specially constructed automobile with a tank under the back seats. Sixty-pounders they were; over four feet long; and those rings in their tails were dated 1761.

‘The beginning of my period,’ Jeremy murmured in a sudden access of interest. 1761 was the year of *Fingal*. He smiled to himself; the juxtaposition of carp and Ossian, carp and Napoleon’s favourite poet, carp and the first premonitions of the Celtic Twilight, gave him a peculiar pleasure. What a delightful subject for one of his little essays! Twenty pages of erudition and absurdity — of sacrilege in lavender — of a scholar’s delicately *canaille* irreverence for the illustrious or unillustrious dead.

But Dr. Obispo would not allow him to think his thoughts in peace. Indefatigably riding his own hobby, he began again. There they were, he said, pointing at the huge fish; nearly two hundred years old; perfectly healthy; no symptoms of senility; no apparent reason why they shouldn’t go on for another three or four centuries. There they were; and there were you. He turned back accusingly towards Jeremy. Here were you; no more than middle-aged, but already bald, already long-sighted and short-winded; already more or less edentate; incapable of prolonged physical exertion; chronically constipated (could you deny it?); your memory already not so good as it was; your digestion capricious; your potency falling off — if it hadn’t, indeed, already disappeared for good.

Jeremy forced himself to smile, and at every fresh item nodded his head in what was meant to look like an amused assent. Inwardly, he was writhing with a mixture of distress at this all too truthful diagnosis and anger against the diagnostician for the ruthlessness of his scientific detachment. Talking with a humorous self-deprecation about one's own advancing senility was very different from being bluntly told about it by someone who took no interest in you except as an animal that happened to be unlike a fish. Nevertheless, he continued to nod and smile.

Here you were, Dr. Obispo repeated at the end of his diagnosis, and there were the carp. How was it that you didn't manage your physiological affairs as well as they did? Just where and how and why did you make the mistake that had already robbed you of your teeth and hair and would bring you in a very few years to the grave?

Old Metchnikoff had asked those questions and made a bold attempt to answer. Everything he said happened to be wrong: phagocytosis didn't occur; intestinal autointoxication wasn't the sole cause of senility; neuronophags were mythological monsters; drinking sour milk didn't materially prolong life; whereas the removal of the large gut *did* materially shorten it. Chuckling, he recalled those operations that were so fashionable just before the War! Old ladies and gentlemen with their colons cut out, and in consequence being forced to evacuate every few minutes, like canaries! All to no purpose, needless to say; because of course the operation that was meant to make them live to a hundred killed them all off within a year or two. Dr. Obispo threw back his glossy head and uttered one of those peals of brazen laughter which were his regular response to any tale of human stupidity resulting in misfortune. Poor old Metchnikoff, he went on, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes. Consistently wrong. And yet almost certainly not nearly so wrong as people had thought. Wrong, yes, in supposing that it was all a matter of intestinal stasis and autointoxication. But probably right in thinking that the secret was somewhere down there, in the gut. Somewhere in the gut, Dr. Obispo repeated; and, what was more, he believed that he was on its track.

He paused and stood for a moment in silence, drumming with his fingers on the glass of the aquarium. Poised between mud and air, the two obese and aged carps hung in their greenish twilight, serenely unaware of him. Dr. Obispo shook his head at them. The worst experimental animals in the world, he said in a tone of resentment mingled with a certain gloomy pride. Nobody had a right to talk about technical difficulties who hadn't tried to work with fish. Take the simplest operation; it was a nightmare. Had you ever tried to keep its gills properly wet while it was anaesthetized on the operating-table? Or, alternatively, to do your surgery under water? Had you ever set out to determine a fish's basal metabolism, or take an electro-cardiograph of its heart action, or measure its blood-pressure? Had you ever wanted to analyse its excreta? And, if so, did you know how hard it was even to collect them; Had you ever attempted to study the chemistry of a fish's digestion and assimilation? To determine its blood pressure under different conditions? To measure the speed of its nervous reactions?

No, you had not, said Dr. Obispo contemptuously. And until you had, you had no right to complain about anything.

He drew the curtain on his fish, took Jeremy by the arm and led him back to the mice.

'Look at those,' he said, pointing to a batch of cages on an upper shelf.

Jeremy looked. The mice in question were exactly like all other mice. 'What's wrong with them?' he asked.

Dr. Obispo laughed. 'If those animals were human beings,' he said dramatically, 'they'd all be over a hundred years old.'

And he began to talk, very rapidly and excitedly, about fatty alcohols and the intestinal flora of carp. For the secret was there, the key to the whole problem of senility and longevity. There, between the sterols and the peculiar flora of the carp's intestine.

Those sterols! (Dr. Obispo frowned and shook his head over them.) Always linked up with senility. The most obvious case, of course, was cholesterol. A senile animal might be defined as one with an accumulation of cholesterol in the walls of its arteries. Potassium thiocyanate seemed to dissolve those

accumulations. Senile rabbits would show signs of rejuvenation under a treatment with potassium thiocyanate. So would senile humans. But, again, not for very long. Cholesterol in the arteries was evidently only one of the troubles. But then cholesterol was only one of the sterols. They were a closely related group, those fatty alcohols. It didn't take much to transform one into another. But if you'd read old Schneeglock's work and the stuff they'd been publishing at Upsala, you'd know that some of the sterols were definitely poisonous — much more than cholesterol, even in large accumulations. Longbotham had even suggested a connection between fatty alcohols and neoplasms. In other words, cancer might be regarded, in a final analysis, as a symptom of sterol-poisoning. He himself would go even further and say that such sterol-poisoning was responsible for the entire degenerative process of senescence in man and the other mammals. What nobody had done hitherto was to look into the part played by fatty alcohols in the life of such animals as carp. That was the work he had been doing for the last year. His researches had convinced him of two or three things: first, that the fatty alcohols in carp did not accumulate in excessive quantity; second, that they did not undergo transformation into the more poisonous sterols; and third, that both these immunities were due to the peculiar nature of the carp's intestinal flora. What a flora! Dr. Obispo cried enthusiastically. So rich, so wonderfully varied! He had not yet succeeded in isolating the organism responsible for the carp's immunity to old age, nor did he fully understand the nature of the chemical mechanisms involved. Nevertheless, the main fact was certain. In one way or another, in combination or in isolation, these organisms contrived to keep the fish's sterols from turning into poisons. That was why a carp could live a couple of hundred years and show no signs of senility.

Could the intestinal flora of a carp be transferred to the gut of a mammal? And, if transferable, would it achieve the same chemical and biological results? That was what he had been trying, for the past few months, to discover. With no success, to begin with. Recently, however, they had experimented with a new technique — a technique that protected the flora from the process of digestion,

gave it time to adapt itself to the unfamiliar conditions. It had taken root. The effect on the mice had been immediate and significant. Senescence had been halted, even reversed. Physiologically, the animals were younger than they had been for at least eighteen months — younger at the equivalent of a hundred than they had been at the equivalent of sixty.

Outside in the corridor an electric bell began to ring. It was lunch-time. The two men left the room and walked towards the elevator. Dr. Obispo went on talking. Mice, he said, were apt to be a bit deceptive. He had now begun to try the thing out on larger animals. If it worked all right on dogs and baboons, it ought to work on Uncle Jo.

CHAPTER SIX

IN THE SMALL dining-room, most of the furnishings came from the Pavilion at Brighton. Four gilded dragons supported the red lacquered table, and two more served as caryatids on either side of a chimney-piece in the same material. It was the Regency's dream of the Gorgeous East. The kind of thing, Jeremy reflected, as he sat down on his scarlet and gold chair, the kind of thing that the word 'Cathay' would have conjured up in Keats's mind, for example, or Shelley's, or Lord Byron's — just as that charming 'Leda' by Etty, over there, next to the Fra Angelico's 'Annunciation,' was an accurate embodiment of their fancies on the subject of pagan mythology; was an authentic illustration (he chuckled inwardly at the thought) to the Odes to Psyche and the Grecian Urn, to *Endymion* and *Prometheus Unbound.* An age's habits of thought and feeling and imagination are shared by all who live and work within that age — by all, from the journeyman up to the genius. Regency is always Regency, whether you take your sample from the top of the basket or from the bottom. In 1820, the man who shut his eyes and tried to visualize magic casements opening on the foam of faery seas would see — what? The turrets of Brighton Pavilion. At the thought, Jeremy smiled to himself with pleasure. Etty and Keats, Brighton and Percy Bysshe Shelley — what a delightful subject! Much better than carp and Ossian; better inasmuch as Nash and the Prince Regent were funnier than even the most aged fish. But for conversational purposes and at the luncheon-table, even the best of subjects is worthless if there is nobody to discuss it with. And who was there, Jeremy asked himself, who was there in this room desirous or capable of talking with him on such a theme? Not Mr. Stoyte; not, certainly, Miss Maunciple, nor the two young women who had come over from Hollywood to have lunch with her; not Dr. Obispo, who cared more for mice than books; nor Peter Boone, who probably didn't even know that there were any books to care

for. The only person who might conceivably be expected to take an interest in the manifestations of the later-Georgian time spirit was the individual who had been introduced to him as Dr. Herbert Mulge, Ph.D., D.D., Principal of Tarzana College. But at the moment Dr. Mulge was talking in a rich vein of something that sounded almost like pulpit eloquence about the new Auditorium which Mr. Stoyte had just presented to the College and which was shortly to be given its formal opening. Dr. Mulge was a large and handsome man with a voice to match — a voice at once sonorous and suave, unctuous and ringing. The flow of his language was slow, but steady and apparently stanchless. In phrases full of the audible equivalents of Capital Letters, he now went on to assure Mr. Stoyte and anyone else who cared to listen that it would be a Real Inspiration for the boys and girls of Tarzana to come together in the beautiful new building for their Community Activities. For Non-Denominational Worship, for example; for the Enjoyment of the Best in Drama and Music. Yes, what an inspiration! The name of Stoyte would be remembered with love and reverence by successive generations of the College's Alumni and Alumnae, — would be remembered, he might say, for ever; for the Auditorium was a *monumentum aere perennius*, a Footprint on the Sand of Time — definitely a Footprint. And now, Dr. Mulge continued, between the mouthfuls of creamed chicken, now Tarzana's Crying Need was for a new Art School. Because, after all, Art, as we were now discovering, was one of the most potent of educational forces. Art was the aspect under which, in this twentieth century of ours, the Religious Spirit most clearly manifested itself. Art was the means by which Personalities could best achieve Creative Self-Expression and …

'Cripes!' Jeremy said to himself; and then: 'Golly!' He smiled ruefully at the thought that he hoped to talk to this imbecile about the relation between Keats and Brighton Pavilion.

Peter Boone found himself separated from Virginia by the blonder of her two young friends from Hollywood, so that he could only look at her past a foreground of rouge and eyelashes, of golden curls and a thick, almost visible perfume of gardenias. To anyone else, this foreground might have seemed a bit

distracting; but for Pete it was of no more significance than the equivalent amount of mud. He was interested only in what was beyond the foreground — in that exquisitely abbreviated upper lip, in the little nose that made you want to cry when you looked at it, it was so elegant and impertinent, so ridiculous and angelic; in that long Florentine bob of lustrous auburn hair; in those wide-set, widely opened eyes with their twinkling surface of humour and their dark blue depths of what he was sure was an infinite tenderness, a plumbless feminine wisdom. He loved her so much that, where his heart should have been he could feel only an aching breathlessness, a cavity which she alone could fill.

Meanwhile, she was talking to the blonde Foreground about that new job which the Foreground had landed with the Cosmopolitan-Perlmutter Studio. The picture was called ‘Say it with Stockings,’ and the Foreground was to play the part of a rich debutante who runs away from home to make a career of her own, becomes a strip-tease dancer in a Western mining-camp and finally marries a cow-puncher, who turns out to be the son of a millionaire.

‘Sounds like a swell story,’ said Virginia. ‘Don’t you think so, Pete?’

Pete thought so; he was ready to think almost anything if she wanted him to.

‘That reminds me of Spain,’ Virginia announced. And while Jeremy, who had been eavesdropping on the conversation, frantically tried to imagine what train of associations had taken her from ‘Say it with Stockings’ to the civil war — whether it had been Cosmopolitan-Perlmutter, Anti-Semitism, Nazis, Franco; or débutante, class war, Moscow, Negrin; or strip-tease, modernity, radicalism, Republicans — while he was vainly speculating thus, Virginia went on to ask the young man to tell them about what he had done in Spain; and when he demurred, insisted — because it was so thrilling, because the Foreground had never heard about it, because, finally, she wanted him to.

Pete obeyed. Only half-articulately, in a vocabulary composed of slang and clichés, and adorned by expletives and grunts — the vocabulary, Jeremy reflected as he listened surreptitiously through the booming of Dr. Mulge’s eloquence, the characteristically squalid and poverty-stricken vocabulary to which the fear of being thought unsocially different or undemocratically

superior, or unsportingly highbrow, condemns most young Englishmen and Americans — he began to describe his experiences as a volunteer in the International Brigade during the heroic days of 1937. It was a touching narrative. Through the hopelessly inadequate language, Jeremy could divine the young man's enthusiasm for liberty and justice; his courage; his love for his comrades; his nostalgia, even in the neighbourhood of that short upper lip, even in the midst of an absorbing piece of scientific research, for the life of men united in devotion to a cause, made one in the face of hardship and shared danger and impending death.

'Gee,' he kept repeating, 'they were swell guys.'

They were all swell — Knud, who had saved his life one day, up there in Aragon; Anton and Mack and poor little Dino, who had been killed; André, who had lost a leg; Jan, who had a wife and two children; Fritz, who'd had six months in a Nazi concentration camp; and all the others — the finest bunch of boys in the world. And what did he do, but go and get rheumatic fever on them, and then myocarditis — which meant no more active service; no more anything except sitting around. That was why he was here, he explained apologetically. But, gee, it had been good while it lasted! That time, for example, when he and Knud had gone out at night and climbed a precipice in the dark and taken a whole platoon of Moors by surprise and killed half a dozen of them and come back with a machine-gun and three prisoners.…

'And what is *your* opinion of Creative Work, Mr. Pordage?'

Surprised in flagrant inattention, Jeremy started guiltily. 'Creative work?' he mumbled, trying to gain a little time. 'Creative work? Well, of course one's all for it. Definitely,' he insisted.

'I'm glad to hear you say so,' said Dr. Mulge. 'Because *that's* what I want at Tarzana. Creative work — ever more and more Creative. Shall I tell you what is my highest ambition?' Neither Mr. Stoyte nor Jeremy made any reply. But Dr. Mulge proceeded, nevertheless, to tell them. 'It is to make of Tarzana the living Centre of the New Civilization that is coming to blossom here in the West.' He raised a large fleshy hand in solemn asseveration. 'The Athens of the twentieth

century is on the point of emerging here, in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. I want Tarzana to be its Parthenon and its Academe, its Stoa and its Temple of the Muses. Religion, Art, Philosophy, Science — I want them all to find their home in Tarzana, to radiate their influence from our campus, to …'

In the middle of his story about the Moors and the precipice, Pete became aware that only the Foreground was listening to him. Virginia's attention had wandered, surreptitiously at first, then frankly and avowedly — had wandered to where, on her left, the less blonde of her two friends was having something almost whispered to her by Dr. Obispo.

'What's that?' Virginia asked.

Dr. Obispo leaned towards her and began again. The three heads, the oil-smooth black, the elaborately curly brown, the lustrous auburn, were almost touching. By the expression on their faces Pete could see that the doctor was telling one of his dirty stories. Alleviated for a moment by the smile she had given him when she asked him to tell them about Spain, the anguish in that panting void where his heart ought to have been came back with redoubled intensity. It was a complicated pain, made up of jealousy and a despairing sense of loss and personal unworthiness, of a fear that his angel was being corrupted and another, deeper fear, which his conscious mind refused to formulate, a fear that there wasn't much further corruption to be done, that the angel was not as angelic as his love had made him assume. The flow of his narrative suddenly dried up. He was silent.

'Well, what happened then?' the Foreground enquired with an eagerness and an expression of hero-worshipping admiration that any other young man would have found delightfully flattering.

He shook his head. 'Oh, nothing much.'

'But those Moors …'

'Hell!' he said impatiently. 'What does it matter, anyhow?'

His words were drowned by a violent explosion of laughter that sent the three conspiratorial heads, the black, the brown, the lovely auburn, flying apart from one another. He looked up at Virginia and saw a face distorted with mirth. At

what? he asked himself in agony, trying to measure the extent of her corruption; and a kind or telescoped and synthetic memory of all the schoolboy stories, all the jokes and limericks he had ever heard, rushed in upon him.

Was it at that one that she was laughing? Or at that? Or, God, perhaps at *that*? He hoped and prayed it wasn't at *that*; and the more he hoped and prayed, the more insanely sure he became that *that* was the one it had been.

'… above all,' Dr. Mulge was saying, 'Creative Work in the Arts. Hence the crying need for a new Art School, an Art School worthy of Tarzana, worthy of the highest traditions of …'

The girls' shrill laughter exploded with a force of hilarity proportionate to the strength of the surrounding social taboos. Mr. Stoyte turned sharply in the direction from which the noise had come.

'What's the joke?' he asked suspiciously. He wasn't going to have his Baby listen to smut. He disapproved of smut in mixed company almost as whole-heartedly as his grandmother, the Plymouth Sister, had done. 'What's all that noise about?'

It was Dr. Obispo who answered. He'd been telling them a funny story he'd heard over the radio, he explained with that suave politeness that was like a sarcasm. Something delightfully amusing. Perhaps Mr. Stoyte would like to have him repeat it.

Mr. Stoyte grunted ferociously and turned away.

A glance at his host's scowling face convinced Dr. Mulge that it would be better to postpone discussion of the Art School to another, more propitious occasion. It was disappointing; for it seemed to him that he had been making good progress. But, there! such things would happen. Dr. Mulge was a college president chronically in quest of endowments; he knew all about the rich. Knew, for example, that they were like gorillas, creatures not easily domesticated, deeply suspicious, alternately bored and bad-tempered. You had to approach them with caution, to handle them gently and with a boundless cunning. And even then they might suddenly turn savage on you and show their teeth. Half a lifetime of experience with bankers and steel-magnates and retired meat-packers

had taught Dr. Mulge to take such little setbacks as to-day's with a truly philosophic patience. Brightly, with a smile on his large, imperial-Roman face, he turned to Jeremy. 'And what do you think of our Californian weather, Mr. Pordage?' he asked.

Meanwhile, Virginia had noticed the expression on Pete's face and immediately divined the causes of his misery. Poor Pete! But really, if he thought she had nothing better to do than always be listening to his talk about that silly old war in Spain — or if it wasn't Spain, it was the laboratory; and they did vivisection there, which was just awful; because, after all, when you were hunting, the animals had a chance of getting away, particularly if you were a bad shot, like she was; besides, hunting was full of thrills and you got such a kick from being up there in the mountains in the good air; whereas Pete cut them up underground in that cellar place.… No, if he thought she had nothing better to do than that, he made a big mistake. All the same, he was a nice boy; and talk about being in love! It was nice having people around who felt that way about you; made you feel kind of good. Though it could be rather a nuisance sometimes. Because they got to feel they had some claim on you; they figured they had a right to tell you things and interfere. Pete didn't do that in so many words; but he had a way of looking at you — like a dog would do if it suddenly started criticizing you for taking another cocktail. Saying it with eyes, like Hedy Lamarr — only it wasn't the same thing as Hedy was saying with *her* eyes; in fact, just the opposite. It was just the opposite now — and what had she done? Got bored with that silly old war and listened in to what Sig was saying to Mary Lou. Well, all she could say was that she wasn't going to have anyone interfering with the way she chose to live her own life. That was her business. Why, he was almost as bad, the way he looked at her, as Uncle Jo, or her mother, or Father O'Reilly. Only, of course, they didn't just look; they said things. Not that he meant badly, of course, poor Pete; he was just a kid, just unsophisticated and, on top of everything, in love the way a kid is — like the high-school boy in Deanna Durbin's last picture. Poor Pete, she thought again. It was tough luck on him; but the fact was she never had been attracted by that big, fair, Cary Grant sort of

boy. They just didn’t appeal to her; that was all there was to it. She liked him; and she enjoyed his being in love with her. But that was all.

Across the corner of the table she caught his eye, gave him a dazzling smile and invited him, if he had half an hour to spare after lunch, to come and teach her and the girls how to pitch horseshoes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MEAL WAS over at last; the party broke up. Dr. Mulge had an appointment in Pasadena to see a rubber-goods manufacturer's widow, who might perhaps give thirty thousand dollars for a new girls' dormitory. Mr. Stoyte drove into Los Angeles for his regular Friday afternoon board meetings and business consultations. Dr. Obispo was going to operate on some rabbits and went down to the laboratory to prepare his instruments. Pete had a batch of scientific journals to look at, but gave himself, meanwhile, a few minutes of happiness in Virginia's company. And for Jeremy, of course, there were the Hauberk Papers. It was with a sense of almost physical relief, a feeling that he was going home to where he belonged, that he returned to his cellar. The afternoon slipped past — how delightfully, how profitably! Within three hours, another batch of letters from Molinos had turned up among the account books and the business correspondence. So had the third and fourth volumes of *Félicia.* So had an illustrated edition of *Le Portier des Carmes*; and, bound like a prayer-book, so had a copy of that rarest of all works of the Divine Marquis, *Les Cent-Vingt Jours de Sodome.* What a treasure! What unexpected fortune! Or perhaps, Jeremy reflected, not so unexpected if one remembered the history of the Hauberk family. For the date of the books made it likely that they had been the property of the Fifth Earl — the one who had held the title for more than half a century and died at more than ninety, under William IV, completely unregenerate. Given the character of that old gentleman, one had no reason to feel surprised at the finding of a store of pornography — one had every reason, indeed, to hope for more.

Jeremy's spirits mounted with each new discovery. Always, with him, a sure sign of happiness, he began to hum the tunes that had been popular during his childhood. Molinos evoked 'Tara-rara Boom-de-ay!' *Félicia* and the *Portier des*

Carmes shared the romantic lilt of ‘The Honeysuckle and the Bee.’ As for the ‘*Cent-Vingt Jours*,’ which he had never previously read or even seen a copy of — the finding of that delighted him so much that when, as a matter of bibliographical routine, he raised the ecclesiastical cover and, expecting the Anglican ritual, found instead the coldly elegant prose of the Marquis de Sade, he broke out into that rhyme from ‘The Rose and the Ring,’ the rhyme his mother had taught him to repeat when he was only three years old and which had remained with him as the symbol of childlike wonder and delight, as the only completely adequate reaction to any sudden blessing, any providentially happy surprise.

Oh, what fun to have a plum bun!

How I wish it never was done!

And fortunately it wasn’t done, wasn’t even begun; the book was still unread, the hours of entertainment and instruction still lay before him. Remembering that pang of jealousy he had felt up there, in the swimming-pool, he smiled indulgently. Let Mr. Stoyte have all the girls he wanted; a well-written piece of eighteenth-century pornography was better than any Maunciple. He closed the volume he was holding. The tooled morocco was austerely elegant; on the back, the words ‘The Book of Common Prayer’ were stamped in a gold which the years had hardly tarnished. He put it down with the other *curiosa* on a corner of the table. When he had finished for the afternoon, he would take the whole collection up to his bedroom.

‘Oh, what fun to have a plum bun!’ he chanted to himself, as he opened another bundle of papers, and then, ‘On a summer’s afternoon, where the honeysuckles bloom and all Nature seems at rest.’ That Wordsworthian touch about Nature always gave him a special pleasure. The new batch of papers turned out to be a correspondence between the Fifth Earl and a number of prominent Whigs regarding the enclosure, for his benefit, of three thousand acres of common land in Nottinghamshire. Jeremy slipped them into a file, wrote a brief preliminary description of the contents on a card, put the file in a cupboard and the card in its cabinet, and, dipping again into the bran pie, reached down for

another bundle. He cut the string. ‘You are my honey, honey, honeysuckle, I am the bee.’ What would Dr. Freud have thought of that, he wondered? Anonymous pamphlets against deism were a bore; he threw them aside. But here was a copy of Law’s *Serious Call* with manuscript notes by Edward Gibbon; and here were some accounts rendered to the Fifth Earl by Mr. Rogers of Liverpool: accounts of the expenses and profits of three slave-trading expeditions which the Earl had helped finance. The second voyage, it appeared, had been particularly auspicious; less than a fifth of the cargo had perished on the way, and the prices realized at Savannah were gratifyingly high. Mr. Rogers begged to enclose his draft for seventeen thousand two hundred and twenty-four pounds eleven shillings and fourpence. Written from Venice, in Italian, another letter announced to the same Fifth Earl the appearance upon the market of a half-length ‘Mary Magdalen’ by Titian, at a price which the Italian correspondent described as derisory. Other offers had already been made; but out of respect for the not less learned than illustrious English *cognoscente*, the vendor would wait until a reply had been received from his lordship. In spite of which, his lordship would be well advised not to delay too long; for otherwise …

It was five o’clock; the sun was low in the sky. Dressed in white shoes and socks, white shorts, a yachting-cap and a pink silk sweater, Virginia had come to see the feeding of the baboons.

Its engine turned off, her rose-coloured motor-scooter stood parked at the side of the road thirty or forty feet above the cage. In company with Dr. Obispo and Pete, she had gone down to have a closer look at the animals.

Just opposite the point at which they were standing, on a shelf of artificial rock, sat a baboon mother, holding in her arms the withered and disintegrating corpse of the baby she would not abandon even though it had been dead for a fortnight. Every now and then, with an intense, automatic affection, she would lick the little cadaver. Tufts of greenish fur and even pieces of skin detached themselves under the vigorous action of her tongue. Delicately, with black fingers, she would pick the hairs out of her mouth, then begin again. Above her, at the mouth of a little cave, two young males suddenly got into a fight. The air

was filled with screams and barks and the gnashing of teeth. Then one of the two combatants ran away and, in a moment, the other had forgotten all about the fight and was searching for pieces of dandruff on his chest. To the right, on another shelf of rock, a, formidable old male, leather-snouted, with the grey bobbed hair of a seventeenth-century Anglican divine, stood guard over his submissive female. It was a vigilant watch; for if she ventured to move without his leave, he turned and bit her; and meanwhile the small black eyes, the staring nostrils at the end of the truncated snout, kept glancing this way and that with an unsleeping suspicion. From the basket he was carrying, Pete threw a potato in his direction, then a carrot and another potato. With a vivid flash of magenta buttocks the old baboon darted down from his perch on the artificial mountain, seized the carrot and, while he was eating it, stuffed one potato into his left cheek, the other into the right; then, still biting at the carrot, advanced toward the wire and looked up for more. The coast was clear. The young male who had been looking for dandruff suddenly saw his opportunity. Chattering with excitement, he bounded down to the shelf on which, too frightened to follow her master, the little female was still squatting. Within ten seconds they had begun to copulate.

Virginia clapped her hands with pleasure. ‘Aren’t they cute!’ she cried. ‘Aren’t they *human*!’

Another burst of screaming and barking almost drowned her words.

Pete interrupted his distribution of food to say that it was a long while since he had seen Mr. Propter. Why shouldn’t they all go down the hill and pay a call on him.

‘From the monkey cage to the Propter paddock,’ said Dr. Obispo, ‘and from the Propter paddock back to the Stoyte house and the Maunciple kennel. What do you say, angel?’

Virginia was throwing potatoes to the old male — throwing them in such a way as to induce him to turn, to retrace his steps towards the shelf on which he had left his female. Her hope was that, if she got him to go back far enough, he’d see how the girl friend passed the time when he was away. ‘Yes, let’s go and see

old Proppy,' she said, without turning round. She tossed another potato into the enclosure. With a flutter of grey bobbed hair the baboon pounced on it; but instead of looking up and catching Mrs. B. having her romance with the ice-man, the exasperating animal immediately turned round towards the wire, asking for more. 'Stupid old fool!' Virginia shouted, and this time threw the potato straight at him, it caught him on the nose. She laughed and turned towards the others. 'I like old Proppy,' she said. 'He scares me a bit; but I like him.'

'All right then,' said Dr. Obispo, 'let's go and rout out Mr. Pordage while we're about it.'

'Yes, let's go and fetch old Ivory,' Virginia agreed, patting her own auburn curls in reference to Jeremy's baldness. 'He's kind of cute, don't you think?'

Leaving Pete to go on with the feeding of the baboons, they climbed back to the road and up a flight of steps on the further side, leading directly to the rock-cut windows of Jeremy's room. Virginia pushed open the glass door.

'Ivory,' she called, 'we've come to disturb you.'

Jeremy began to murmur something humorously gallant; then broke off in the middle of a sentence. He had suddenly remembered that pile of curious literature on the corner of the table. To get up and put the books into a cupboard would be to invite attention to them; he had no newspaper with which to cover them, no other books to mix them up with. There was nothing to be done. Nothing, except to hope for the best. Fervently he hoped for it; and almost immediately the worst happened. Idly, out of the need to perform some muscular action, however pointless, Virginia picked up a volume of Nerciat, opened it at one of its conscientiously detailed engravings, looked, then with wider eyes looked again and let out a whoop of startled excitement. Dr. Obispo glanced and yelled in turn; then both broke out into enormous laughter.

Jeremy sat in a misery of embarrassment, sicklily smiling, while they asked him if *that* was how he spent his time, if *this* was the sort of thing he was studying. If only people weren't so wearisome, he was thinking, so deplorably unsubtle!

Virginia turned over the pages until she found another illustration. Once more there was an outcry of delight, astonishment and, this time, incredulity. Was it possible? Could it really be done? She spelled out the caption under the engraving: '*La volupté frappait à toutes les portes*'; then petulantly shook her head. It was no good; she couldn't understand it. Those French lessons at High School — just lousy; that was all you could say about them. They hadn't taught her anything except a lot of nonsense about *le crayon de mon oncle* and *savez-vous planter le chou.* She'd always said that studying was mostly a waste of time; this proved it. And why did they have to print this stuff in French anyhow? At the thought that the deficiencies in the educational system of the State of Oregon might for ever prevent her from reading André de Nerciat, the tears came into Virginia's eyes. It was really *too* bad!

A brilliant idea occurred to Jeremy. Why shouldn't he offer to translate the book for her — *viva voce* and sentence by sentence, like an interpreter at a Council Meeting of the League of Nations? Yes, why not? The more he thought of it, the better the idea seemed to him to be. His decision was made and he had begun to consider how most felicitously to phrase his offer, when Dr. Obispo quietly took the volume Virginia was holding, picked up the three companion volumes from the table, along with *Le Portier des Carmes* and the *Cent-Vingt Jours de Sodome*, and slipped the entire collection into the side-pocket of his jacket.

'Don't worry,' he said to Virginia. 'I'll translate them for you. And now let's go back to the baboons. Pete'll be wondering what's happened to us. Come on, Mr. Pordage.'

In silence, but boiling inwardly with self-reproach for his own inefficiency and indignation at the doctor's impudence, Jeremy followed them out of the french window and down the steps.

Pete had emptied his basket and was leaning against the wire, intently following with his eyes the movements of the animals within. At their approach he turned towards them. His pleasant young face was bright with excitement.

'Do you know, doc,' he said, 'I believe it's working.'

‘What’s working?’ asked Virginia.

Pete’s answering smile was beautiful with happiness. For, oh, how happy he was! Doubly and trebly happy. By the sweetness of her subsequent behaviour, Virginia had more than made up for the pain she had inflicted by turning away to listen to that smutty story. And after all it probably wasn’t a smutty story; he had been maligning her, thinking gratuitous evil of her. No, it certainly hadn’t been a smutty story — not smutty because, when she turned back to him, her face had looked like the face of that child in the illustrated Bible at home, that child who was gazing so innocently and cutely while Jesus said, ‘Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ And that was not the only reason for his happiness. He was happy, too, because it looked as though those cultures of the carp’s intestinal flora were really having an effect on the baboons they had tried them on.

‘I believe they’re livelier,’ he explained. ‘And their fur — it’s kind of glossier.’

The fact gave him almost as great a satisfaction as did Virginia’s presence here in the transfiguring richness of the evening sunlight, as did the memory of her sweetness, the uplifting conviction of her essential innocence. Indeed, in some obscure way, the rejuvenation of the baboons and Virginia’s adorableness seemed to him to have a profound connection — a connection not only with one another, but also and at the same time with Loyalist Spain and anti-fascism. Three separate things, and yet one thing … There was a bit of poetry he had been made to learn at school — how did it go?

I could not love thee, dear, so much,

Loved I not something or other (he could not at the moment remember what) *more.*

He did not love anything *more* than Virginia. But the fact that he cared so enormously much for science and justice, for this research and the boys back in Spain, did something to make his love for her more profound and, though it seemed a paradox, more whole-hearted.

‘Well, what about moving on?’ he suggested at last.

Dr. Obispo looked at his wrist-watch. ‘I’d forgotten,’ he said. ‘I’ve got some letters I ought to write before dinner. Guess I’ll have to see Mr. Propter some other time.’

‘That’s too bad!’ Pete did his best to impart to his tone and expression the cordiality of regret he did not feel. In fact, he was delighted. He admired Dr. Obispo, thought him a remarkable research worker — but not the sort of person a young innocent girl like Virginia ought to associate with. He dreaded for her the influence of so much cynicism and hardboiledness. Besides, so far as his own relations to Virginia were concerned, Dr. Obispo was always in the way. ‘That’s too bad!’ he repeated, and the intensity of his pleasure was such that he fairly ran up the steps leading from the baboon-enclosure to the drive — ran so fast that his heart began palpitating and missing beats. Damn that rheumatic fever!

Dr. Obispo stepped back to allow Virginia to pass and, as he did so, gave a little tap to the pocket containing *Les Cent-Vingt Jours de Sodome* and tipped her a wink. Virginia winked back and followed Pete up the steps.

A few moments later, Dr. Obispo was walking up the drive, the others down. Or, to be more exact, Pete and Jeremy were walking, while Virginia, to whom the idea of using one’s legs to get from anywhere to anywhere else was practically unthinkable, sat on her strawberry-and-cream coloured scooter and, with one hand affectionately laid on Pete’s shoulder, allowed herself to be carried down by the force of gravity.

The noise of the baboons faded behind them, and at the next turn of the road there was Giambologna’s nymph, still indefatigably spouting from her polished breasts. Virginia suddenly interrupted a conversation about Clark Gable to say, in the righteously indignant tone of a vice crusader, ‘I just can’t figure why Uncle Jo allows that thing to stand there. It’s disgusting!’

‘Disgusting?’ Jeremy echoed in astonishment.

‘Disgusting!’ she repeated emphatically.

‘Do you object to her not having any clothes on?’ he asked, remembering, as he did so, those two little satin asymptotes to nudity which she herself had worn

up there, in the swimming-pool.

She shook her head impatiently. ‘It’s the way the water comes out.’ She made the grimace of one who had tasted something revolting. ‘I think it’s horrible.’

‘But why?’ Jeremy insisted.

‘Because it’s horrible,’ was all the explanation she could give. A child of her age, which was the age, in this context, of bottle-feeding and contraception, she felt herself outraged by this monstrous piece of indelicacy from an earlier time. It was just horrible; that was all that could be said about it. Turning back to Pete, she went on talking about Clark Gable.

Opposite the entrance to the Grotto, Virginia parked her scooter. The masons had finished their work on the tomb and were gone; the place was empty. Virginia straightened her rakishly tilted yachting-cap as a sign of respect; then ran up the steps, paused on the threshold to cross herself and, entering, knelt for a few moments before the image. The others waited silently, in the roadway.

‘Our Lady was so wonderful to me when I had sinus trouble last summer,’ Virginia explained to Jeremy when she emerged again. ‘That’s why I got Uncle Jo to make this grotto for her. Wasn’t it gorgeous when the Archbishop came for the consecration?’ she added, turning to Pete.

Pete nodded affirmatively.

‘I haven’t even had a cold since She’s been here,’ Virginia went on, as she took her seat on the scooter. Her face fairly shone with triumph; every victory for the Queen of Heaven was also a personal success for Virginia Maunciple. Then abruptly and without warning, as though she were doing a screen test and had received the order to register fatigue and self-pity, she passed a hand across her forehead, sighed profoundly and, in a tone of utter dejection and discouragement, said, ‘All the same, I’m feeling pretty tired this evening. Guess I was in the sun too much right after lunch. Maybe I’d better go and lie down a bit.’ And affectionately but very firmly rejecting Pete’s offer to go back with her to the castle, she wheeled her scooter round, so that it faced uphill, gave the young man a last, particularly charming, almost amorous smile and look, said, ‘Good-bye, Pete darling,’ and, opening the throttle of the engine, shot off with

gathering momentum and an accelerating roll of explosions up the steep curving road, out of sight. Five minutes later she was in her boudoir, fixing a chocolate-and-banana split at the soda-fountain. Seated in a gilded armchair upholstered in satin *couleur fesse de nymphe*, Dr. Obispo was reading aloud and translating as he went along from the first volume of *Les Cent-Vingt Jours.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

MS. PROPTER WAS SITTING on a bench under the largest of his eucalyptus trees. To the west the mountains were already a flat silhouette against the evening sky, but in front of him, to the north, the upper slopes were still alive with light and shadow, with rosy gold and depths of indigo. In the foreground, the castle had put on a garment of utterly improbable splendour and romance. Mr. Propter looked at it and at the hills and up through the motionless leaves of the eucalyptus at the pale sky; then closed his eyes and noiselessly repeated Cardinal Bérulle's answer to the question: 'What is man?' It was more than thirty years before, when he was writing his study of the Cardinal, that he had first read those words. They had impressed him even then by the splendour and precision of their eloquence. With the lapse of time and the growth of his experience they had come to seem more than eloquent, had come to take on ever richer connotations, ever profounder significances. 'What is man?' he whispered to himself. '*C'est un néant environné de Dieu, indigent de Dieu, capable de Dieu, et rempli de Dieu, s'il veut*.' 'A nothingness surrounded by God, indigent and capable of God, filled with God, if he so desires.' And what is this God of which men are capable? Mr. Propter answered with the definition given by John Tauler in the first paragraph of his *Following of Christ*: 'God is a being withdrawn from creatures, a free power, a pure working.' Man, then, is as nothingness surrounded by, and indigent of, a being withdrawn from creatures, a nothingness capable of free power, filled with a pure working if he so desires. *If* he so desires, Mr. Propter was distracted into reflecting with a sudden, rather bitter sadness. But how few men ever do desire or, desiring, ever know what to wish for or how to get it! Right knowledge is hardly less rare than the sustained good-will to act on it. Of those few who look for God, most find, through

ignorance, only such reflections of their own self-will as the God of battles, the God of the chosen people, the Prayer-Answerer, the Saviour.

Having deviated thus far into negativity, Mr. Propter was led on, through a continuing failure of vigilance, into an even less profitable preoccupation with the concrete and particular miseries of the day. He remembered his interview that morning with Hansen, who was the agent for Jo Stoyte's estates in the valley. Hansen's treatment of the migrants who came to pick the fruit was worse even than the average. He had taken advantage of their number and their desperate need to force down wages. In the groves he managed, young children were being made to work all day in the sun at the rate of two or three cents an hour. And when the day's work was finished, the homes to which they returned were a row of verminous sties in the waste land beside the bed of the river. For these sties, Hansen was charging a rent of ten dollars a month. Ten dollars a month for the privilege of freezing or suffocating; of sleeping in a filthy promiscuity; of being eaten up by bed-bugs and lice; of picking up ophthalmia and perhaps hookworm and amoebic dysentery. And yet Hansen was a very decent, kindly man: one who would be shocked and indignant if he saw you hurting a dog; one who would fly to the protection of a maltreated woman or a crying child. When Mr. Propter drew this fact to his attention, Hansen had flushed darkly with anger.

'That's different,' he had said.

Mr. Propter had tried to find out why it was different.

It was his duty, Hansen had said.

But how could it be his duty to treat children worse than slaves and inoculate them with hookworm?

It was his duty to the estates. He wasn't doing anything for himself.

But why should doing wrong for someone else be different from doing wrong on your own behalf; The results were exactly the same in either case. The victims didn't suffer any less when you were doing what you called your duty than when you were acting in what you imagined might be your own interests.

This time the anger had exploded in violent abuse. It was the anger, Mr. Propter had perceived, of the well-meaning but stupid man who is compelled against his will to ask himself indiscreet questions about what he has been doing as a matter of course. He doesn't want to ask these questions, because he knows that if he does he will be forced either to go on with what he is doing, but with the cynic's awareness that he is doing wrong, or else, if he doesn't want to be a cynic, to change the entire pattern of his life so as to bring his desire to do right into harmony with the real facts as revealed in the course of self-interrogation. To most people any radical change is even more odious than cynicism. The only way between the horns of the dilemma is to persist at all costs in the ignorance which permits one to go on doing wrong in the comforting belief that by doing so one is accomplishing one's duty — one's duty to the company, to the shareholders, to the family, the city, the state, the fatherland, the church. For, of course, poor Hansen's case wasn't in any way unique; on a smaller scale, and therefore with less power to do evil, he was acting like all those civil servants and statesmen and prelates who go through life spreading misery and destruction in the name of their ideals and under orders from their categorical imperatives.

Well, he hadn't got very far with Hansen, Mr. Propter sadly concluded. He'd have to try again with Jo Stoyte. In the past, Jo had always refused to listen, on the ground that the estates were Hansen's business. The alibi was so convenient that it would be hard, he foresaw, to break it down.

From Hansen and Jo Stoyte his thoughts wandered to that newly arrived family of transients from Kansas, to whom he had given one of his cabins. The three undernourished children, with the teeth already rotting in their mouths; the woman, emaciated by God knew what complication of diseases, deep-sunken already in apathy and weakness; the husband, alternately resentful and self-pitying, violent and morose.

He had gone with the man to get some vegetables from the garden plots and a rabbit for the family supper. Sitting there, skinning the rabbit, he had had to listen to outbursts of incoherent complaint and indignation. Complaint and indignation against the wheat market, which had broken each time he had begun

to do well. Against the banks he had borrowed money from and been unable to repay. Against the droughts and winds that had reduced his farm to a hundred and sixty acres of dust and wilderness. Against the luck that had always been against *him.* Against the folks who had treated him so meanly, everywhere, all his life.

Dismally familiar story! With inconsiderable variations, he had heard it a thousand times before. Sometimes they were share-croppers from further south, dispossessed by the owners in a desperate effort to make the farming pay. Sometimes, like this man, they had owned their own place and been dispossessed, not by financiers, but by the forces of nature — forces of nature which they themselves had made destructive by tearing up the grass and planting nothing but wheat. Sometimes they had been hired men, displaced by the tractors. All of them had come to California as to a promised land; and California had already reduced them to a condition of wandering peonage and was fast transforming them into Untouchables. Only a saint, Mr. Propter reflected, only a saint, could be a peon and a pariah with impunity, because only a saint would accept the position gladly and as though he had chosen it of his own free will. Poverty and suffering ennoble only when they are voluntary. By involuntary poverty and suffering men are made worse. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for an involuntarily poor man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Here, for example, was this poor devil from Kansas. How had he reacted to involuntary poverty and suffering' So far as Mr. Propter could judge, he was compensating himself for his misfortunes by brutality to those weaker than himself. The way he yelled at the children.… It was an all too familiar symptom.

When the rabbit was skinned and gutted, Mr. Propter had interrupted his companion's monologue.

'Do you know which is the stupidest text in the Bible?' he had suddenly asked.

Startled, and evidently a bit shocked, the man from Kansas had shaken his head.

‘It’s this,’ Mr. Propter had said, as he got up and handed him the carcase of the rabbit. ‘“They hated me without a cause.”’

Under the eucalyptus tree, Mr. Propter wearily sighed. Pointing out to unfortunate people that, in part at any rate, they were pretty certainly responsible for their own misfortunes; explaining to them that ignorance and stupidity are no less severely punished by the nature of things than deliberate malice — these were never agreeable tasks. Never agreeable, but, so far as he could see, always necessary. For what hope, he asked himself, what faintest glimmer of hope is there for a man who really believes that ‘they hated me without a cause’ and that he had no part in his own disasters? Obviously, no hope whatever. We see, as matter of brute fact, that disasters and hatreds are never without causes; we also see that some at least of those causes are generally under the control of the people who suffer the disasters or are the object of the hatred. In some measure they are directly or indirectly responsible. Directly, by the commission of stupid or malicious acts. Indirectly, by the omission to be as intelligent and compassionate as they might be. And if they make this omission, it is generally because they choose to conform unthinkingly to local standards, and the current way of living. Mr. Propter’s thoughts returned to the poor fellow from Kansas. Self-righteous, no doubt disagreeable to the neighbours, an incompetent farmer; but that wasn’t the whole story. His gravest offence had been to accept the world in which he found himself as normal, rational and right. Like all the others, he had allowed the advertisers to multiply his wants; he had learned to equate happiness with possessions, and prosperity with money to spend in a shop. Like all the others, he had abandoned any idea of subsistence farming to think exclusively in terms of a cash crop; and he had gone on thinking in those terms, even when the crop no longer gave him any cash. Then, like all the others, he had got into debt with the banks. And finally, like all the others, he had learned that what the experts had been saying for a generation was perfectly true: in a semi-arid country it is grass that holds down the soil; tear up the grass, the soil will go. In due course, it had gone.

The man from Kansas was now a peon and a pariah; and the experience was making a worse man of him.

St. Peter Claver was another of the historical personages to whom Mr. Propter had devoted a study. When the slave-ships came into the harbour of Cartagena, Peter Claver was the only white man to venture down into the holds. There, in the unspeakable stench and heat, in the vapours of pus and excrement, he tended the sick, he dressed the ulcers of those whom their manacles had wounded, he held in his arms the men who had given way to despair and spoke to them words of comfort and affection — and in the intervals talked to them about their sins. *Their* sins! The modern humanitarian would laugh, if he were not shocked. And yet — such was the conclusion to which Mr. Propter had gradually and reluctantly come — and yet St. Peter Claver was probably right. Not completely right, of course; for, acting on wrong knowledge, no man, however well-intentioned, can be more than partially right. But as nearly right, at any rate, as a good man with a counter-Reformation Catholic philosophy could expect to be. Right in insisting that, whatever the circumstances in which he finds himself, a human being always has omissions to make good, commissions whose effects must, if possible, be neutralized. Right in believing that it is well even for the most brutally sinned against to be reminded of their own shortcomings.

Peter Claver's conception of the world had the defect of being erroneous, but the merit of being simple and dramatic. Given a personal God, dispenser of forgiveness, given heaven and hell and the absolute reality of human personalities, given the meritoriousness of mere good intentions and of unquestioning faith in a set of incorrect opinions, given the one true church, the efficacy of priestly mediation, the magic of sacraments — given all these, it was really quite easy to convince even a newly imported slave of his sinfulness and to explain exactly what he ought to do about it. But if there is no single inspired book, no uniquely holy church, no mediating priesthood nor sacramental magic, if there is no personal God to be placated into forgiving offences, if there are, even in the moral world, only causes and effects and the enormous complexity of inter-relationships — then, clearly the task of telling people what to do about

their shortcomings is much more difficult. For every individual is called upon to display not only unsleeping good-will but also unsleeping intelligence. And this is not all. For, if individuality is not absolute, if personalities are illusory figments of a self-will disastrously blind to the reality of a more-than-personal consciousness, of which it is the limitation and denial, then all of every human being's efforts must be directed, in the last resort, to the actualization of that more-than-personal consciousness. So that even intelligence is not sufficient as an adjunct to good-will; there must also be the recollection which seeks to transform and transcend intelligence. Many are called, but few are chosen — because few even know in what salvation consists. Consider again this man from Kansas.… Mr. Propter sadly shook his head. Everything was against the poor fellow — his fundamentalist orthodoxy, his wounded and inflamed egotism, his nervous irritability, his low intelligence. The first three disadvantages might perhaps be removed. But could anything be done about the fourth? The nature of things is implacable towards weakness. 'From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' And what were those words of Spinoza's? 'A man may be excusable and nevertheless be tormented in many ways. A horse is excusable for not being a man; but nevertheless he must needs be a horse, and not a man.' All the same, there must surely be something to be done for people like the man from Kansas — something that didn't entail telling harmful untruths about the nature of things. The untruth, for example, that there is a person up aloft, or the other more modern untruth to the effect that human values are absolute and that God is the nation or the party or the human race as a whole. Surely, Mr. Propter insisted, surely there was something to be done for such people. The man from Kansas had begun by resenting what he had said about the chain of cause and effect, the network of relationships — resenting it as a personal insult. But afterwards, when he saw that he was not being blamed, that no attempt was being made to come it over him, he had begun to take an interest, to see that after all there was something in it. Little by little it might be possible to make him think a bit more realistically, at least about the world of everyday life, the outside world of appearances. And when he had done that, then it

mightn’t be so overwhelmingly difficult for him to think a bit more realistically about himself — to conceive of that all-important ego of his as a fiction, a kind of nightmare, a frantically agitated nothingness capable, when once its frenzy had been quieted, of being filled with God, with a God conceived and experienced as a more than personal consciousness, as a free power, a pure working, a being withdrawn.… Suddenly, as he thus returned to his starting-point, Mr. Propter became aware of the long, circuitous, unprofitable way he had travelled in order to reach it. He had come to this bench under the eucalyptus tree in order to recollect himself, in order to realize for a moment the existence of that other consciousness behind his private thoughts and feelings, that free, pure power greater than his own. He had come for this; but memories had slipped in while he was off his guard; speculations had started up, cloud upon cloud, like seabirds rising from their nesting-place to darken and eclipse the sun. Bondage is the life of personality, and for bondage the personal self will fight with tireless resourcefulness and the most stubborn cunning. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance; and he had failed to be vigilant. It wasn’t a case, he reflected ruefully, of the spirit being willing and the flesh weak. That was altogether the wrong antithesis. The spirit is always willing; but the person, who is a mind as well as a body, is always unwilling — and the person, incidentally, is not weak but extremely strong.

He looked again at the mountains, at the pale sky between the leaves, at the soft russet pinks and purples and greys of the eucalyptus trunks; then shut his eyes once more.

‘A nothingness surrounded by God, indigent of God, capable of God and filled with God if man so desires. And what is God? A being withdrawn from creatures, a free power, a pure working.’ His vigilance gradually ceased to be an act of the will, a deliberate thrusting back of irrelevant personal thoughts and wishes and feelings. For little by little these thoughts and wishes and feelings had settled like a muddy sediment in a jar of water, and as they settled, his vigilance was free to transform itself into a kind of effortless unattached awareness, at once intense and still, alert and passive — an awareness whose

object was the words he had spoken and at the same time that which surrounded the words. But that which surrounded the words was the awareness itself; for this vigilance which was now an effortless awareness — what was it but an aspect, a partial expression, of that impersonal and untroubled consciousness into which the words had been dropped and through which they were slowly sinking? And as they sank they took a new significance for the awareness that was following them down into the depths of itself — a significance new not in respect to the entities connoted by the words, but rather in the mode of their comprehension, which, from being intellectual in character, had become intuitive and direct, so that the nature of man in his potentiality and of God in actuality were realized by an analogue of sensuous experience, by a kind of unmediated participation.

The busy nothingness of his being experienced itself as transcended in the felt capacity for peace and purity, for the withdrawal from revulsion and desires, for the blissful freedom from personality.…

The sound of approaching footsteps made him open his eyes. Peter Boone and that Englishman he had sat with in the car were advancing up the path towards his seat under the eucalyptus trees. Mr. Propter raised his hand in welcome and smiled. He was fond of young Pete. There was native intelligence there and native kindliness; there was sensitiveness, generosity, a spontaneous decency of impulse and reaction. Charming and beautiful qualities! The pity was that by themselves, and undirected as they were by a right knowledge of the nature of things, they should be so impotent for good, so inadequate to anything a reasonable man could call salvation. Fine gold, but still in the ore, unsmelted, unworked. Some day, perhaps, the boy would learn to use his gold. He would have to wish to learn first — and wish also to unlearn a lot of the things he now regarded as self-evident and right. It would be hard for him — as hard, but for other reasons, as it would be for that poor fellow from Kansas.

‘Well, Pete,’ he called, ‘come and sit with me here. And you’ve brought Mr. Pordage; that’s good.’ He moved to the middle of the bench so that they could sit, one on either side of him. ‘And did you meet the Ogre?’ he said to Jeremy, pointing in the direction of the castle.

Jeremy made a grimace and nodded. ‘I remembered the name you used to call him at school,’ he said. ‘That made it a little easier.’

‘Poor Jo,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘Fat people are always supposed to be so happy. But who ever enjoyed being laughed at? That jolly manner they sometimes have, and the jokes they make at their own expense — it’s just a case of alibis and prophylactics. They vaccinate themselves with their own ridicule so that they shan’t react too violently to other people’s.’

Jeremy smiled. He knew all about that. ‘It’s a good way out of an unpleasant predicament,’ he said.

Mr. Propter nodded. ‘But unfortunately,’ he said, ‘it didn’t happen to be Jo’s way. Jo was the kind of a fat boy who bluffs it out. The kind that fights. The kind that bullies or patronizes. The kind that boasts and shows off. The kind that buys popularity by treating the girls to ice-creams, even if he has to steal a dime from his grandmother’s purse to do it. The kind that goes on stealing even if he’s found out and gets beaten and believes it when they tell him he’ll go to hell. Poor Jo, he’s been that sort of fat boy all his life.’ He pointed once again in the direction of the castle. ‘That’s his monument to a faulty pituitary. And talking of pituitaries,’ he went on, turning to Pete, ‘how’s the work been going?’

Pete had been thinking gloomily of Virginia — wondering for the hundredth time why she had left them, whether he had done anything to offend her, whether she was really tired or if there might be some other reason. At Mr. Propter’s mention of work he looked up, and his face brightened. ‘It’s going just fine,’ he answered, and, in quick, eager phrases, strangely compounded of slang and technical terms, he told Mr. Propter about the results they had already got with their mice and were beginning to get, so it seemed, with the baboons and the dogs.

‘And if you succeed,’ Mr. Propter asked, ‘what happens to your dogs?’

‘Why, their life’s prolonged,’ Pete answered triumphantly.

‘Yes, yes, I know that,’ said the older man. ‘What I meant to ask was something different. A dog’s a wolf that hasn’t fully developed. It’s more like the foetus of a wolf than an adult wolf; isn’t that so.’

Pete nodded.

‘In other words,’ Mr. Propter went on, ‘it’s a mild, tractable animal because it has never grown up into savagery. Isn’t that supposed to be one of the mechanisms of evolutionary development?’

Pete nodded again. ‘There’s a kind of glandular equilibrium,’ he explained. ‘Then a mutation comes along and knocks it sideways. You get a new equilibrium that happens to retard the development rate. You grow up; but you do it so slowly that you’re dead before you’ve stopped being like your great-great-grandfather’s foetus.’

‘Exactly,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘So what happens if you prolong the life of an animal that has evolved that way?’

Pete laughed and shrugged his shoulders. ‘Guess we’ll have to wait and see,’ he said.

‘It would be a bit disquieting,’ said Mr. Propter, ‘if your dogs grew back in the process of growing up.’

Pete laughed again delightedly. ‘Think of the dowagers being chased by their own Pekingese,’ he said.

Mr. Propter looked at him curiously and was silent for a moment, as though waiting to see whether Pete would make any further comment. The comment did not come. ‘I’m glad you feel so happy about it,’ he said. Then, turning to Jeremy, ‘“It is not,” if I remember rightly, Mr. Pordage,’ he went on, ‘“it is not growing like a tree in bulk doth make men better be.”’

‘“Or standing long an oak, three hundred years,”’ said Jeremy, smiling with the pleasure which an apt quotation always gave him.

‘What shall we all be doing at three hundred?’ Mr. Propter speculated. ‘Do you suppose you’d still be a scholar and a gentleman;’

Jeremy coughed and patted his bald head. ‘One will certainly have stopped being a gentleman,’ he answered. ‘One’s begun to stop even now, thank heaven.’

‘But the scholar will stay the course?’

‘There’s a lot of books in the British Museum.’

‘And you, Pete?’ said Mr. Propter. ‘Do you suppose you’ll still be doing scientific research?’

‘Why not? What’s to prevent you from going on with it for ever?’ the young man answered emphatically.

‘For ever?’ Mr. Propter repeated. ‘You don’t think you’d get a bit bored? One experiment after another. Or one book after another,’ he added in an aside to Jeremy. ‘In general, one damned thing after another. You don’t think that would prey on your mind a bit?’

‘I don’t see why,’ said Pete.

‘Time doesn’t bother you, then?’

Pete shook his head. ‘Why should it?’

‘Why shouldn’t it?’ said Mr. Propter, smiling at him with an amused affection. ‘Time’s a pretty bothersome thing, you know.’

‘Not if you aren’t scared of dying or growing old.’

‘Yes, it is,’ Mr. Propter insisted; ‘even if you’re not scared. It’s nightmarish in itself — intrinsically nightmarish, if you see what I mean.’

‘Intrinsically?’ Pete looked at him perplexed. ‘I don’t get it,’ he said. ‘Intrinsically nightmarish …?’

‘Nightmarish in the present tense, of course,’ Jeremy put in. ‘But if one takes it in the fossil state — in the form of the Hauberk Papers, for example …’ He left the sentence unfinished.

‘Oh, pleasant enough,’ said Mr. Propter, agreeing with his implied conclusion. ‘But, after all, history isn’t the real thing. Past time is only evil at a distance; and, of course, the study of past time is itself a process in time. Cataloguing bits of fossil evil can never be more than an *Ersatz* for the experience of eternity.’ He glanced curiously at Pete, wondering how the boy would respond to what he was saying. Plunging like this into the heart of the matter, beginning at the very core and centre of the mystery — it was risky; there was a danger of evoking nothing but bewilderment, or alternatively nothing but angry derision. Pete’s, he could see, was more nearly the first reaction; but it

was a bewilderment that seemed to be tempered by interest; he looked as though he wanted to find out what it was all about.

Meanwhile, Jeremy had begun to feel that this conversation was taking a most undesirable turn. ‘What precisely are we supposed to be talking about?’ he asked acidulously. ‘The New Jerusalem?’

Mr. Propter smiled at him good-humouredly. ‘It’s all right,’ he said.’ ‘I won’t say a word about harps or wings.’

‘Well, that’s something,’ said Jeremy.

‘I never could get much satisfaction out of meaningless discourse,’ Mr. Propter continued. ‘I like the words I use to bear some relation to facts. That’s why I’m interested in eternity — psychological eternity. Because it’s a fact.’

‘For you, perhaps,’ said Jeremy in a tone which implied that more civilized people didn’t suffer from these hallucinations.

‘For anyone who chooses to fulfil the conditions under which it can be experienced.’

‘And why should anyone choose to fulfil them?’

‘Why should anyone choose to go to Athens to see the Parthenon’ Because it’s worth the bother. And the same is true of eternity. The experience of timeless good is worth all the trouble it involved.’

‘“Timeless good,”’ Jeremy repeated with distaste. ‘I don’t know what the words mean.’

‘Why should you?’ said Mr. Propter. ‘One doesn’t know the full meaning of the word “Parthenon” until one has actually seen the thing.’

‘Yes, but at least I’ve seen photographs of the Parthenon; I’ve read descriptions.’

‘You’ve read descriptions of timeless good,’ Mr. Propter answered. ‘Dozens of them. In all the literatures of philosophy and religion. You’ve read them; but you’ve never bought your ticket for Athens.’

In a resentful silence, Jeremy had to admit to himself that this was true. The fact that it was true made him disapprove of the conversation even more profoundly than he had done before.

‘As for time,’ Mr. Propter was saying to Pete, ‘what is it, in this particular context, but the medium in which evil propagates itself, the element in which evil lives and outside of which it dies?. Indeed, it’s more than the element of evil, more than merely its medium. If you carry your analysis far enough, you’ll find that time is evil. One of the aspects of its essential substance.’

Jeremy listened with growing discomfort and a mounting irritation. His fears had been justified; the old boy was launching out into the worst kind of theology. Eternity, timeless experience of good, time as the substance of evil — it was bad enough, God knew, in books; but, fired at you like this, point-blank, by somebody who really took it seriously, why, it was really frightful. Why on earth couldn’t people live their lives in a rational, civilized way? Why couldn’t they take things as they came? Breakfast at nine, lunch at one-thirty, tea at five. And conversation. And the daily walk with Mr. Gladstone, the Yorkshire terrier. And the library; the Works of Voltaire in eighty-three volumes; the inexhaustible treasure of Horace Walpole; and for a change the *Divine Comedy*; and then, in case you might be tempted to take the Middle Ages too seriously, Salimbene’s autobiography and the Miller’s Tale. And sometimes calls in the afternoon — the Rector, Lady Fredegond with her ear-trumpet, Mr. Veal. And political discussions — except that in these last months, since the *Anschluss* and Munich, one had found that political discussion was one of the unpleasant things it was wise to avoid. And the weekly journey to London, with lunch at the Reform, and always dinner with old Thripp of the British Museum; and a chat with one’s poor brother Tom at the Foreign Office (only that too was rapidly becoming one of the things to be avoided). And then, of course, the London library; and Vespers at Westminster Cathedral, if they happened to be singing Palestrina; and every alternate week, between five and six-thirty, an hour and a half with Mae or Doris in their flat in Maida Vale. Infinite squalor in a little room, as he liked to call it; abysmally delightful. Those were the things that came; why couldn’t they take them, quietly and sensibly? But no, they had to gibber about eternity and all the rest. That sort of stuff always made Jeremy want to be blasphemous — to ask whether God had a *boyau rectum*, to protest, like the Japanese in the anecdote,

that he was altogether flummoxed and perplexed by position of Honourable Bird. But, unfortunately, the present was one of those peculiarly exasperating cases where such reactions were out of place. For, after all, old Propter had written *Short Studies*; what he said couldn't just be dismissed as the vapourings of a deficient mind. Besides, he hadn't talked Christianity, so that jokes about anthropomorphism were beside the point. It was really too exasperating! He assumed an expression of haughty detachment and even started to hum 'The Honeysuckle and the Bee.' The impression he wanted to give was that of a superior being who really couldn't be expected to waste his time listening to stuff like this.

A comic spectacle, Mr. Propter reflected as he looked at him; except, of course, that it was so extremely depressing.

CHAPTER NINE

‘TIME AND CRAVING,’ said Mr. Propter, ‘craving and time — two aspects of the same thing; and that thing is the raw material of evil. So you see, Pete,’ he added in another tone, ‘you see what a queer sort of present you’ll be making us, if you’re successful in your work. Another century or so of time and craving. A couple of extra lifetimes of potential evil.’

‘*And* potential good,’ the young man insisted with a note of protest in his voice.

‘*And* potential good,’ Mr. Propter agreed. ‘But only at a far remove from that extra time you’re giving us.’

‘Why do you say that?’ Pete asked.

‘Because potential evil is *in* time; potential good isn’t. The longer you live, the more evil you automatically come into contact with. Nobody comes automatically into contact with good. Men don’t find more good by merely existing longer. It’s curious,’ he went on reflectively, ‘that people should always have concentrated on the problem of evil. Exclusively. As though the nature of good were something self-evident. But it isn’t self-evident. There’s a problem of good at least as difficult as the problem of evil.’

‘And what’s the solution?’ Pete asked.

‘The solution is very simple and profoundly unacceptable. Actual good is outside time.’

‘Outside time?. But then how …?’

‘I told you it was unacceptable,’ said Mr. Propter.

‘But if it’s outside time, then …’

‘… then nothing within time can be actual good. Time is potential evil, and craving converts the potentiality into actual evil. Whereas a temporal act can

never be more than potentially good, with a potentiality, what's more, that can't be actualized except out of time.'

'But inside time, here — you know, just doing the ordinary things — hell! we do sometimes do right. What acts *are* good?'

'Strictly speaking, none,' Mr. Propter answered. 'But, in practice, I think one's justified in applying the word to certain acts. Any act that contributes towards the liberation of those concerned in it — I'd call it a good act.'

'Liberation?' the young man repeated dubiously. The words, in his mind, carried only economic and revolutionary connotations. But it was evident that Mr. Propter wasn't talking about the necessity for getting rid of capitalism. 'Liberation from what?'

Mr. Propter hesitated before replying. Should he go on with this? he wondered. The Englishman was hostile; the time short; the boy himself entirely ignorant. But it was an ignorance evidently mitigated by good-will and a touching nostalgia for perfection. He decided to take a chance and go on.

'Liberation from time,' he said. 'Liberation from craving and revulsions. Liberation from personality.'

'But heck,' said Pete, 'you're always talking about democracy. Doesn't that mean respecting personality?'

'Of course,' Mr. Propter agreed. 'Respecting it in order that it may be able to transcend itself. Slavery and fanaticism intensify the obsession with time and evil and the self. Hence the value of democratic institutions and a sceptical attitude of mind. The more you respect a personality, the better its chance of discovering that all personality is a prison. Potential good is anything that helps you to get out of prison. Actualized good lies outside the prison, in timelessness, in the state of pure, disinterested consciousness.'

'I'm not much good at abstractions,' said the young man. 'Let's take some concrete examples. What about science, for instance? Is that good?'

'Good, bad and indifferent, according to how it's pursued and what it's used for. Good, bad and indifferent, first of all, for the scientists themselves — just as art and scholarship may be good, bad or indifferent for artists and scholars. Good

if it facilitates liberation; indifferent if it neither helps nor hinders; bad if it makes liberation more difficult by intensifying the obsession with personality. And, remember, the apparent selflessness of the scientist, or the artist, is not necessarily a genuine freedom from the bondage of personality. Scientists and artists are men devoted to what we vaguely call an ideal. But what is an ideal? An ideal is merely the projection, on an enormously enlarged scale, of some aspect of personality.'

'Say that again,' Pete requested, while even Jeremy so far forgot his pose of superior detachment to lend his most careful attention.

Mr. Propter said it again. 'And that's true,' he went on, 'of every ideal except the highest, which is the ideal of liberation — liberation from personality, liberation from time and craving, liberation into union with God, if you don't object to the word, Mr. Pordage. Many people do,' he added. 'It's one of the words that the Mrs. Grundys of the intellect find peculiarly shocking. I always try to spare their sensibilities, if I can. Well, to return to our idealist,' he continued, glad to see that Jeremy had been constrained, in spite of himself, to smile. 'If he serves any ideal except the highest — whether it's the artist's ideal of beauty, or the scientist's ideal of truth, or the humanitarian's ideal of what currently passes for goodness — he's not serving God; he's serving a magnified aspect of himself. He may be completely devoted; but in the last analysis his devotion turns out to be directed towards an aspect of his own personality. His apparent selflessness is really not a liberation from his ego, but merely another form of bondage. This means that science may be bad for scientists, even when it appears to be a deliverer. And the same holds good of art, of scholarship, of humanitarianism.'

Jeremy thought nostalgically of his library at The Araucarias. Why couldn't this old madman be content to take things as they came?

'And what about other people?' Pete was saying. 'People who aren't scientists. Hasn't it helped to set them free?'

Mr. Propter nodded. 'And it has also helped to tie them more closely to themselves. And what's more, I should guess that it has increased bondage more

than it has diminished it — and will tend to go on increasing it, progressively.'

'How do you figure that out?'

'Through its applications,' Mr. Propter answered. 'Applications to warfare, first of all. Better planes, better explosives, better guns and gases — every improvement increases the sum of fear and hatred, widens the incidence of nationalistic hysteria. In other words, every improvement in armaments makes it more difficult for people to escape from their egos, more difficult to forget those horrible projections of themselves they call their ideals of patriotism, heroism, glory and all the rest. And even the less destructive applications of science aren't really much more satisfactory. For what do such applications result in? The multiplication of possessable objects; the invention of new instruments of stimulation; the disseminations of new wants through propaganda aimed at equating possession with well-being and incessant stimulation with happiness.

'But incessant stimulation from without is a source of bondage; and so is the preoccupation with possessions. And now you're threatening to prolong our lives, so that we can go on being stimulated, go on desiring possessions, go on waving flags and hating our enemies and being afraid of air attack — go on and on, generation after generation, sinking deeper and deeper into the stinking slough of our personality.' He shook his head. 'No, I can't quite share your optimism about science.'

There was a silence while Pete debated with himself whether to ask Mr. Propter about love. In the end he decided he wouldn't. Virginia was too sacred. (But why, why had she turned back at the Grotto? What could he have said or done to offend her? As much to prevent himself from brooding over these problems as because he wanted to know the old man's opinions on the last of the three things that seemed to him supremely valuable, he looked up at Mr. Propter and asked, 'What about social justice? I mean, take the French Revolution. Or Russia. And what about this Spanish business — fighting for liberty and democracy against fascist aggression?' He had tried to remain perfectly calm and scientific about the whole thing; but his voice trembled a little as he spoke

the last words. In spite of their familiarity (perhaps because of their familiarity), phrases like ‘fascist aggression’ still had power to move him to the depths.

‘Napoleon came out of the French Revolution,’ said Mr. Propter, after a moment’s silence. ‘German nationalism came out of Napoleon. The war of 1870 came out of German nationalism. The war of 1914 came out of the war of 1870. Hitler came out of the war of 1914. Those are the bad results of the French Revolution. The good results were the enfranchisement of the French peasants and the spread of political democracy. Put the good results in one scale of your balance and the bad ones in the other, and try which set is the heavier. Then perform the same operation with Russia. Put the abolition of tsardom and capitalism in one scale; and in the other put Stalin, put the secret police, put the famines, put twenty years of hardship for a hundred and fifty, million people, put the liquidation of intellectuals and kulaks and old bolsheviks, put the hordes of slaves in prison camps; put the military conscription of everybody, male and female, from childhood to old age, put the revolutionary propaganda which spurred the bourgeoisie to invent fascism.’ Mr. Propter shook his head. ‘Or take the fight for democracy in Spain,’ he went on. ‘There was a fight for democracy all over Europe not so long ago. Rational prognosis can only be based on past experience. Look at the results of 1914 and then ask yourself what chance the loyalists ever had of establishing a liberal régime at the end of a long war. The others are winning; so we shall never have the opportunity of seeing what circumstances and their own passions would have driven those well-intentioned liberals to become.’

‘But, hell!’ Pete broke out, ‘what do you expect people to do when they’re attacked by the fascists? Sit down and let their throats be cut?’

‘Of course not,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘I *expect* them to fight. And the expectation is based on my previous knowledge of human behaviour. But the fact that people generally do react to that kind of situation in that kind of way doesn’t prove that it’s the best way of reacting. Experience makes me expect that they’ll behave like that. But experience also makes me expect that, if they do behave like that, the results will be disastrous.’

‘Well, how do you want us to act? Do you want us to sit still and do nothing?’

‘Not nothing,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘Merely something appropriate.’

‘But what is appropriate?’

‘Not war, anyhow. Nor violent revolution. Nor yet politics, to any considerable extent, I should guess.’

‘Then what?’

‘That’s what we’ve got to discover. The main lines are clear enough. But there’s still a lot of work to be done on the practical details.’

Pete was not listening. His mind had gone back to that time in Aragon when life had seemed supremely significant. ‘But those boys, back there in Spain,’ he burst out. ‘You didn’t know them, Mr. Propter. They were wonderful, really they were. Never mean to you, and brave, and loyal and … and everything.’ He wrestled with the inadequacies of his vocabulary, with the fear of making an exhibition of himself by talking big, like a highbrow. ‘They weren’t living for themselves, I can tell you that, Mr. Propter.’ He looked into the old man’s face almost supplicatingly, as though imploring him to believe. ‘They were living for something much bigger than themselves — like what you were talking about just now; you know, something more than just personal.’

‘And what about Hitler’s boys?’ Mr. Propter asked. ‘What about Mussolini’s boys? What about Stalin’s boys? Do you suppose they’re not just as brave, just as kind to one another, just as loyal to their cause and just as firmly convinced that it’s the cause of justice, truth, freedom, right and honour?’ He looked at Pete enquiringly; but Pete said nothing. ‘The fact that people have a lot of virtues,’ Mr. Propter went on, ‘doesn’t prove anything about the goodness of their actions. You can have all the virtues — that’s to say, all except the two that really matter, understanding and compassion — you can have all the others, I say, and be a thoroughly bad man. Indeed, you can’t be really bad unless you *do* have most of the virtues. Look at Milton’s Satan for example. Brave, strong, generous, loyal, prudent, temperate, self-sacrificing. And let’s give the dictators the credit that’s due to them; some of them are nearly as virtuous as Satan. Not quite, I admit, but nearly. That’s why they can achieve so much evil.’

His elbows on his knees, Pete sat in silence, frowning. ‘But that feeling,’ he said at last. ‘That feeling there was between us. You know — the friendship; only it was more than just ordinary friendship. And the feeling of being there all together — fighting for the same thing — and the thing being worth while — and then the danger, and the rain, and that awful cold at nights, and the heat in summer, and being thirsty, and even those lice and the dirt — share and share alike in everything bad or good — and knowing that to-morrow it might be your turn, or one of the other boys — your turn for the field hospital (and the chances were they wouldn’t have enough anaesthetics, except maybe for an amputation or something like that), or your turn for the burial-party. All those feelings, Mr. Propter — I just can’t believe they didn’t mean something.’

‘They meant themselves,’ said Mr. Propter.

Jeremy saw the opportunity for a counter-attack and, with a promptitude unusual in him, immediately took it. ‘Doesn’t the same thing apply to your feelings about eternity, or whatever it is he asked.

‘Of course it does,’ said Mr. Propter.

‘Well, in that case, how can you claim any validity for it? The feeling means itself, and that’s all there is to it.’

‘It means itself,’ Mr. Propter agreed. ‘But what precisely is this “itself”? In other words, what is the nature of the feeling?’

‘Don’t ask me,’ said Jeremy with a shake of the head and a comically puzzled lift of the eyebrows. ‘I really don’t know.’

Mr. Propter smiled. ‘I know you don’t want to know,’ he said. ‘And I won’t ask you. I’ll just state the facts. The feeling in question is a non-personal experience of timeless peace. Accordingly, non-personality, timelessness and peace are what it means. Now let’s consider the feeling that Pete had been talking about. These are all personal feelings, evoked by temporal situations, and characterized by a sense of excitement. Intensification of the ego within the world of time and craving — that’s what these feelings meant.’

‘But you can’t call self-sacrifice an intensification of the ego,’ said Pete.

‘I can and I do,’ Mr. Propter insisted. ‘For the good reason that it generally is. Self-sacrifice to any but the highest cause is sacrifice to an ideal, which is simply a projection of the ego. What is commonly called self-sacrifice is the sacrifice of one part of the ego to another part, one set of personal feelings and passions for another set — as when the feelings connected with money or sex are sacrificed in order that the ego may have the feelings of superiority, solidarity and hatred which are associated with patriotism, or any kind of political or religious fanaticism.’

Pete shook his head. ‘Sometimes,’ he said, with a smile of rueful perplexity, ‘sometimes you almost talk like Dr. Obispo. You know — cynically.’

Mr. Propter laughed. ‘It’s good to be cynical,’ he said. ‘That is, if you know when to stop. Most of the things that we’re all taught to respect and reverence — they don’t deserve anything but cynicism. Take your own case. You’ve been taught to worship ideals like patriotism, social justice, science, romantic love. You’ve been told that such virtues as loyalty, temperance, courage and prudence are good in themselves, in any circumstances. You’ve been assured that self-sacrifice is always splendid and fine feelings invariably good. And it’s all nonsense, all a pack of lies that people have made up in order to justify themselves in continuing to deny God and wallow in their own egotism. Unless you’re steadily and unflaggingly cynical about the solemn twaddle that’s talked by bishops and bankers and professors and politicians and all the rest of them, you’re lost. Utterly lost. Doomed to perpetual imprisonment in your ego — doomed to be a personality in a world of personalities; and a world of personalities is *this* world, the world of greed and fear and hatred, of war and capitalism and dictatorship and slavery. Yes, you’ve got to be cynical, Pete. Specially cynical about all the actions and feelings you’ve been taught to suppose were good. Most of them are not good. They’re merely evils which happen to be regarded as creditable. But, unfortunately, creditable evil is just as bad as discreditable evil. Scribes and Pharisees aren’t any better, in the last analysis, than publicans and sinners. Indeed, they’re often much worse. For several reasons. Being well thought of by others, they think well of themselves;

and nothing so confirms an egotism as thinking well of oneself. In the next place, publicans and sinners are generally just human animals, without enough energy or self-control to do much harm. Whereas the Scribes and Pharisees have all the virtues, except the only two which count, and enough intelligence to understand everything except the real nature of the world. Publicans and sinners merely fornicate and overeat, and get drunk. The people who make wars, the people who reduce their fellows to slavery, the people who kill and torture and tell lies in the name of their sacred causes, the really evil people, in a word — these are never the publicans and the sinners. No, they're the virtuous, respectable men, who have the finest feelings, the best brains, the noblest ideals.'

'So what it all boils down to,' Pete concluded in a tone of angry despair, 'is that there just isn't anything you can do. Is that it?'

'Yes and no,' said Mr. Propter, in his quiet judicial way. 'On the strictly human level, the level of time and craving, I should say that it's quite true: in the last resort, there isn't anything you can do.'

'But that's just defeatism!' Pete protested.

'Why is it defeatism to be realistic?'

'There *must* be something to do!'

'I see no "must" about it.'

'Then what about the reformers and all those people? If you're right, they're just wasting their time.'

'It depends what they think they're doing,' said Mr. Propter. 'If they think they're just temporarily palliating particular distresses, if they see themselves as people engaged in laboriously deflecting evil from old channels into new and slightly different channels, then they can justifiably claim to be successful. But if they think they're making good appear where evil was before, why, then, all history clearly shows that they *are* wasting their time.'

'But why can't they make good appear where evil was before?'

'Why do we fall when we jump out of a tenth-story window? Because the nature of things happens to be such that we do fall. And the nature of things is such that, on the strictly human level of time and craving, you can't achieve

anything but evil. If you choose to work exclusively on that level, and exclusively for the ideals and causes that are characteristic of it, then you're insane if you expect to transform evil into good. You're insane, because experience should have shown you that, on that level, there doesn't happen to be any good. There are only different degrees and different kinds of evil.'

'Then what do you want people *to do?*'

'Don't talk as though it were all my fault,' said Mr. Propter. 'I didn't invent the universe.'

'What ought they to do, then?'

'Well, if they want fresh varieties of evil, let them go on with what they're doing now. But if they want good, they'll have to change their tactics. And the encouraging thing,' Mr. Propter added in another tone, 'the encouraging thing is that there *are* tactics which will produce good. We've seen that there's nothing to be done on the strictly human level — or rather there are millions of things to be done, only none of them will achieve any good. But there *is* something effective to be done on the levels where good actually exists. So you see, Pete, I'm not a defeatist. I'm a strategist. I believe that if a battle is to be fought, it had better be fought under conditions in which there's at least some chance of winning. I believe that, if you want the golden fleece, it's more sensible to go to the place where it exists than to rush round performing prodigies of valour in a country where all the fleeces happen to be coal-black.'

'Then where ought we to fight for good?'

'Where good is.'

'But where is it?'

'On the level below the human and on the level above. On the animal level and on the level … well, you can take your choice of names: the level of eternity; the level, if you don't object, of God; the level of the spirit — only that happens to be about the most ambiguous word in the language. On the lower level, good exists as the proper functioning of the organism in accordance with the laws of its own being. On the higher level, it exists in the form of a knowledge of the world without desire or aversion; it exists as the experience of

eternity, as the transcendence of personality, the extension of consciousness beyond the limits imposed by the ego. Strictly human activities are activities that prevent the manifestation of good on the other two levels. For, in so far as we're human, we're obsessed with time, we're passionately concerned with our personalities and with those magnified projections of our personalities which we call our policies, our ideals, our religions. And what are the results? Being obsessed with time and our egos, we are for ever craving and worrying. But nothing impairs the normal functioning of the organism like craving and revulsion, like greed and fear and worry. Directly or indirectly, most of our physical ailments and disabilities are due to worry and craving. We worry and crave ourselves into high blood-pressure, heart disease, tuberculosis, peptic ulcer, low resistance to infection, neurasthenia, sexual aberrations, insanity, suicide. Not to mention all the rest.' Mr. Propter waved his hand comprehensively. 'Craving even prevents us from seeing properly,' he went on. 'The harder we try to see, the graver our error of accommodation. And it's the same with bodily posture: the more we worry about doing the thing immediately ahead of us in time, the more we interfere with our correct body posture and the worse, in consequence, becomes the functioning of the entire organism. In a word, in so far as we're human beings, we prevent ourselves from realizing the physiological and instinctive good that we're capable of as animals. And, *mutatis mutandis*, the same thing is true in regard to the sphere above. In so far as we're human beings, we prevent ourselves from realizing the spiritual and timeless good that we're capable of as potential inhabitants of eternity, as potential enjoyers of the beatific vision. We worry and crave ourselves out of the very possibility of transcending personality and knowing, intellectually at first and then by direct experience, the true nature of the world.'

Mr. Propter was silent for a moment; then, with a sudden smile, 'Luckily,' he went on, 'most of us don't manage to behave like human beings all the time. We forget our wretched little egos and those horrible great projections of our egos in the ideal world — forget them and relapse for a while into harmless animality. The organism gets a chance to function according to its own laws; in other

words, it gets a chance to realize such good as it's capable of. That's why we're as healthy and sane as we are. Even in great cities, as many as four persons out of five manage to go through life without having to be treated in a lunatic asylum. If we were consistently human, the percentage of mental cases would rise from twenty to a hundred. But fortunately most of us are incapable of consistency — the animal always resuming its rights. And to some people fairly frequently, perhaps occasionally to all, there come little flashes of illumination — momentary glimpses into the nature of the world as it is for a consciousness liberated from appetite and time, of the world as it might be if we didn't choose to deny God by being our personal selves. Those flashes come to us when we're off our guards; then craving and worry come rushing back and the light is eclipsed once more by our personality and its lunatic ideals, its criminal policies and plans.'

There was silence. The sun had gone. Behind the mountains to the west, a pale yellow light faded through green into a blue that deepened as it climbed. At the zenith, it was all night.

Pete sat quite still, staring into the dark, but still transparent sky above the northern peaks. That voice, so calm at first and then at the end so powerfully resonant, those words, now mercilessly critical of all the things to which he had given his allegiance, now charged with the half-comprehended promise of things incommensurably worthier of loyalty, had left him profoundly moved and at the same time perplexed and at a loss. Everything, he saw, would have to be thought out again, from the beginning — science, politics, perhaps even love, even Virginia. He was appalled by the prospect and yet, in another part of his being, attracted; he felt resentful at the thought of Mr. Propter, but at the same time loved the disquieting old man; loved him for what he did and, above all, for what he so admirably and, in Pete's own experience, uniquely was — disinterestedly friendly, at once serene and powerful, gentle and strong, self-effacing and yet intensely *there*, more present, so to speak, radiating more life than anyone else.

Jeremy Pordage had also found himself taking an interest in what the old man said, had even, like Pete, experienced the stirrings of a certain disquiet — a

disquiet none the less disquieting for having stirred in him before. The substance of what Mr. Propter had said was familiar to him. For, of course, he had read all the significant books on the subject — would have thought himself barbarously uneducated if he hadn't — had read Sankara and Eckhart, the Pali texts and John of the Cross, Charles de Condran and the Bardo, and Patanjali and the Pseudo-Dionysius. He had read them and been moved by them into wondering whether he oughtn't to do something about them; and, because he had been moved in this way, he had taken the most elaborate pains to make fun of them, not only to other people, but also and above all to himself. 'You've never bought your ticket to Athens,' the man had said — damn his eyes! Why did he want to go putting these things over on one? All one asked was to be left in peace, to take things as they came. Things as they came — one's books, one's little articles, and Lady Fredegond's ear-trumpet, and Palestrina, and steak-and-kidney pudding at the Reform, and Mae and Doris. Which reminded him that to-day was Friday; if he were in England it would be his afternoon at the flat in Maida Vale. Deliberately he turned his attention away from Mr. Propter and thought instead of those alternate Friday afternoons; of the pink lampshades; the smell of talcum powder and perspiration; the Trojan women, as he called them because they worked so hard, in their kimonos from Marks and Spencer's; the framed reproductions of pictures by Poynter and Alma Tadema (delicious irony, that works which the Victorians had regarded as art should have come to serve, a generation later, as pornography in a trollop's bedroom!); and, finally, the erotic routine, so matter-of-factly sordid, so conscientiously and professionally low, with a lowness and a sordidness that constituted, for Jeremy, their greatest charm, that he prized more highly than any amount of moonlight and romance, any number of lyrics and *Liebestods.* Infinite squalor in a little room! It was the apotheosis of refinement, the logical conclusion of good taste.

CHAPTER TEN

THIS FRIDAY, MR. STOYTE'S afternoon in town had been exceptionally uneventful. Nothing untoward had occurred during the preceding week. In the course of his various meetings and interviews nobody had said or done anything to make him lose his temper. The reports on business conditions had been very satisfactory. The Japs had bought another hundred thousand barrels of oil. Copper was up two cents. The demand for bentonite was definitely increasing. True, applications for bank credit had been rather disappointing; but the influenza epidemic had raised the weekly turnover of the Pantheon to a figure well above the average.

Things went so smoothly that Mr. Stoyte was through with all his business more than an hour before he had expected. Finding himself with time to spare, he stopped on the way home at his agent's, to find out what was happening on the estate. The interview lasted only a few minutes — long enough, however, to put Mr. Stoyte in a fury that sent him rushing out to the car.

'Drive to Mr. Propter's,' he ordered with a peremptory ferocity as he slammed the door.

What the hell did Bill Propter think he was doing? he kept indignantly asking himself. Shoving his nose into other people's business. And all on account of those lousy bums who had come to pick the oranges! All for those tramps, those stinking, filthy hobos! Mr. Stoyte had a peculiar hatred for the ragged hordes of transients on whom he depended for the harvesting of his crops, a hatred that was more than the rich man's ordinary dislike of the poor. Not that he didn't experience that complex mixture of fear and physical disgust, of stifled compassion and shame transformed by repression into chronic exasperation. He did. But over and above this common and generic dislike for poor people, he was moved by other hatreds of his own. Mr. Stoyte was a rich man who had been

poor. In the six years between the time when he ran away from his father and grandmother in Nashville and the time when he had been adopted by the black sheep of the family, his Uncle Tom, in California, Jo Stoyte had learned, as he imagined, everything there was to be known about being poor. Those years had left him with an ineradicable hatred for the circumstances of poverty and at the same time an ineradicable contempt for all those who had been too stupid, or too weak, or too unlucky, to climb out of the hell into which they had fallen or been born. The poor were odious to him, not only because they were potentially a menace to his position in society, not only because their misfortunes demanded a sympathy he did not wish to give, but also because they reminded him of what he himself had suffered in the past, and at the same time because the fact that they were still poor was a sufficient proof of their contemptibleness and his own superiority. And since he had suffered what they were now suffering, it was only right that they should go on suffering what he had suffered. Also, since their continued poverty proved them contemptible, it was proper that he, who was now rich, should treat them in every way as the contemptible creatures they had shown themselves to be. Such was the logic of Mr. Stoyte's emotions. And here was Bill Propter, running counter to this logic by telling the agent that they oughtn't to take advantage of the glut of transient labour to force down wages; that they ought, on the contrary, to raise them — raise them, if you please, at a time when these bums were swarming over the State like a plague of Mormon crickets! And not only that; they ought to build accommodation for them — cabins, like the ones that crazy fool Bill had built for them himself; two-roomed cabins at six or seven hundred dollars apiece — for bums like that, and their women, and those disgusting children who were so filthy dirty he wouldn't have them in his hospital; not unless they were really dying of appendicitis or something — you couldn't refuse them then, of course. But meanwhile, what the hell did Bill Propter think he was doing? And it wasn't the first time either that he'd tried to interfere. Gliding through the twilight of the orange groves, Mr. Stoyte kept striking the palm of his left hand with his clenched right fist.

'I'll let him have it,' he whispered to himself. 'I'll let him have it.'

Fifty years before, Bill Propter had been the only boy in the school who, even though he was the older and stronger, didn't make fun of him for being fat. They had met again when Bill was teaching at Berkeley and he himself had made good in the real estate game and had just gone into oil. Partly in gratitude for the way Bill Propter had acted when they were boys, partly also in order to display his power, to redress the balance of superiority in his own favour, Jo Stoyte had wanted to do something handsome for the young assistant professor. But in spite of his modest salary and the two or three miserable thousand dollars a year his father had left him, Bill Propter hadn't wanted anything done for him. He had seemed genuinely grateful, he had been perfectly courteous and friendly; but he just didn't want to come in on the ground floor of Consol Oil — didn't want to because, as he kept explaining, he had all he needed and preferred not to have anything more. Jo's effort to redress the balance of superiority had failed. Failed disastrously, because, by refusing his offer, Bill had done something which, though he called him a fool for doing it, compelled Jo Stoyte secretly to admire him more than ever. Extorted against his will, this admiration bred a corresponding resentment towards its object. Jo Stoyte felt aggrieved that Bill had given him so many reasons for liking him. He would have preferred to like him without a reason, in spite of his shortcomings. But Bill had few shortcomings and many merits, merits which Jo himself did not have and whose presence in Bill he therefore regarded as an affront. Thus it was that all the reasons for liking Bill Propter were also, in Jo's eyes, equally valid reasons for disliking him. He continued to call Bill a fool; but he felt him as a standing reproach. And yet the nature of this standing reproach was such that he liked to be in Bill's company. It was because Bill had settled down on a ten-acre patch of land in this part of the valley that Mr. Stoyte had decided to build his castle on the site where it now stood. He wanted to be near Bill Propter, even though, in practice, there was almost nothing that Bill could do or say that didn't annoy him. To-day, this chronic exasperation had been fanned by Mr. Stoyte's hatred of the transients into a passion of fury.

'I'll let him have it,' he repeated again and again.

The car came to a halt, and before the chaffeur could open the door for him, Mr. Stoyte had darted out and was hurrying in his determined way, looking neither to right nor left, up the path that led from the road to his old friend's bungalow.

'Hullo, Jo,' a familiar voice called from the shadow under the eucalyptus trees.

Mr. Stoyte turned, peered through the twilight, then, without a word, hurried towards the bench on which the three men were sitting. There was a chorus of 'Good evenings,' and, as he approached, Pete rose politely and offered him his place. Ignoring his gesture and his very presence, Mr. Stoyte addressed himself immediately to Bill Propter.

'Why the hell can't you leave my man alone?' he almost shouted.

Mr. Propter looked at him with only a moderate astonishment. He was used to these outbursts from poor Jo; he had long since divined their fundamental cause and knew by experience how to deal with them.

'Which man, Jo?' he asked.

'Bob Hansen, of course. What do you mean by going to him behind my back?'

'When I went to you,' said Mr. Propter, 'you told me it was Hansen's business. So I went to Hansen.'

This was so infuriatingly true that Mr. Stoyte could only resort to roaring. He roared. 'Interfering with him in his work! What's the idea?'

'Pete's offering you a seat,' Mr. Propter put in. 'Or, if you prefer it, there's an iron chair behind you. You'd better sit down, Jo.'

'I'm not going to sit down,' Mr. Stoyte bellowed. 'And I want an answer. What's the idea?'

'The idea?' Mr. Propter repeated in his slow quiet way. 'Well, it's quite an old one, you know. I didn't invent it.'

'Can't you answer me?'

'It's the idea that men and women are human beings. Not vermin.'

'Those bums of yours!'

Mr. Propter turned to Pete. ‘You may as well sit down again,’ he said.

‘Those lousy bums! I tell you I won’t stand it.’

‘Besides,’ Mr. Propter went on, ‘I’m a practical man. You’re not.’

‘Me not practical?’ Mr. Stoyte echoed with indignant amazement. ‘Not *practical*? Well, look at the place I live in and then look at this dump of yours.’

‘Exactly. That proves the point. You’re hopelessly romantic, Jo; so romantic, you think people can work when they haven’t had enough to eat.’

‘You’re trying to make communists of them.’ The word ‘communist’ renewed Mr. Stoyte’s passion and at the same time justified it; his indignation ceased to be merely personal and became righteous. ‘You’re nothing but a communist agitator.’ His voice trembled, Mr. Propter sadly noticed, just as Pete’s had trembled half an hour before at the words ‘fascist aggression.’ He wondered if the boy had noticed or, having noticed, would take the hint. ‘Nothing but a communist agitator,’ Mr. Stoyte repeated with a crusader’s zeal.

‘I thought we were talking about eating,’ said Mr. Propter.

‘You’re stalling!’

‘Eating and working — wasn’t that it?’

‘I’ve put up with you all these years,’ Mr. Stoyte went on. ‘For old times’ sake. But now I’m through. I’m sick of you. Talking communism to those bums! Making the place dangerous for decent people to live in.’

‘Decent?’ Mr. Propter echoed, and was tempted to laugh, but immediately checked the impulse. Being laughed at in the presence of Pete and Mr. Pordage might goad the poor fellow into doing something irreparably stupid.

‘I’ll have you run out of the valley,’ Mr. Stoyte was roaring. ‘I’ll see that you’re …’ He broke off in the middle of the sentence and stood there for a few seconds in silence, his mouth still open and working, his eyes staring. That drumming in the ears, that tingling heat in the face — they had suddenly reminded him of his blood-pressure, of Dr. Obispo, of death. Death and that flame-coloured text in his bedroom at home. Terrible to fall into the hands of the living God — not Prudence’s God, of course; the other one, the *real* one, the God of his father and his grandmother.

Mr. Stoyte drew a deep breath, pulled out his handkerchief, wiped his face and neck, then, without uttering another word, turned and began to walk away.

Mr. Propter got up, hurried after him and, in spite of the other's angry motion of recoil, took Mr. Stoyte's arm and walked along beside him.

'I want to show you something, Jo,' he said. 'Something that'll interest you, I think.'

'I don't want to see it,' said Mr. Stoyte between his false teeth.

Mr. Propter paid no attention, but continued to lead him towards the back of the house. 'It's a gadget that Abbot of the Smithsonian has been working on for some time,' he continued. 'A thing for making use of solar energy.' He interrupted himself for a moment to call back to the others to follow him; then turned again to Mr. Stoyte and resumed the conversation. 'Much more compact than anything of the kind that's ever been made before,' he said. 'Much more efficient, too.' And he went on to describe the system of trough-shaped reflectors, the tubes of oil heated to a temperature of four or five hundred degrees Fahrenheit; the boiler for raising steam, if you wanted to run a low-pressure engine; the cooking-range and water-heater, if you were using it only for domestic purposes. 'Pity the sun's down,' he said, as they stood in front of the machine. 'I'd have liked to show you the way it works the engine. I've had two horse-power, eight hours a day, ever since I got the thing working last week. Not bad considering we're still in January. We'll have her working overtime all summer.'

Mr. Stoyte had intended to persist in his silence — just to show Bill that he was still angry, that he hadn't forgiven him; but his interest in the machine and, above all, his exasperated concern with Bill's idiotic, crackpot notions were too much for him. 'What the hell do you want with two horse-power, eight hours a day?' he asked.

'To run my electric generator.'

'But what do you want with an electric generator? Haven't you got your current wired in from the city?'

'Of course. And I'm trying to see how far I can be independent of the city.'

‘But what for?’

Mr. Propter uttered a little laugh. ‘Because I believe in Jeffersonian democracy.’

‘What the hell has Jeffersonian democracy got to do with it?’ said Mr. Stoyte with mounting irritation. ‘Can’t you believe in Jefferson and have your current wired in from the city?’

‘That’s exactly it,’ said Mr. Propter; ‘you almost certainly can’t.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘What I say,’ Mr. Propter answered mildly.

‘*I* believe in democracy too,’ Mr. Stoyte announced with a look of defiance.

‘I know you do. And you also believe in being the undisputed boss in all your businesses.’

‘I should hope so!’

‘There’s another name for an undisputed boss,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘“Dictator.”’

‘What are you trying to get at?’

‘Merely at the facts. You believe in democracy; but you’re at the head of businesses which have to be run dictatorially. And your subordinates have to accept your dictatorship because they’re dependent on you for their living. In Russia they’d depend on government officials for their living. Perhaps you think that’s an improvement,’ he added, turning to Pete.

Pete nodded. ‘I’m all for the public ownership of the means of production,’ he said. It was the first time he had openly confessed his faith in the presence of his employer; he felt happy at having dared to be a Daniel.

‘“Public ownership of the means of production,”’ Mr. Propter repeated. ‘But unfortunately governments have a way of regarding the individual producers as being parts of the means. Frankly. I’d rather have Jo Stoyte as my boss than Jo Stalin. This Jo’ (he laid his hand on Mr. Stoyte’s shoulder), ‘this Jo can’t have you executed; he can’t send you to the Arctic; he can’t prevent you from getting a job under another boss. Whereas the other Jo …’ he shook his head. ‘Not that,’ he added, ‘I’m exactly longing to have even this Jo as my boss.’

‘You’d be fired pretty quick,’ growled Mr. Stoyte.

‘I don’t want *any* boss,’ Mr. Propter went on. ‘The more bosses, the less democracy. But unless people can support themselves, they’ve got to have a boss who’ll undertake to do it for them. So the less self-support, the less democracy. In Jefferson’s day, a great many Americans did support themselves. They were economically independent. Independent of government and independent of big business. Hence the Constitution.’

‘We’ve still got the Constitution,’ said Mr. Stoyte.

‘No doubt,’ Mr. Propter agreed. ‘But if we had to make a new Constitution to-day, what would it be like? A Constitution to fit the facts of New York and Chicago and Detroit; of United States Steel and the Public Utilities and General Motors and the C.I.O. and the government departments. What on earth would it be like?’ he repeated. ‘We respect our old Constitution, but in fact we live under a new one. And if we want to live under the first, we’ve got to re-create something like the conditions under which the first was made. That’s why I’m interested in this gadget.’ He patted the frame of the machine. ‘Because it may help to give independence to anyone who desires independence. Not that many do desire it,’ he added parenthetically. ‘The propaganda in favour of dependence is too strong. They’ve come to believe that you can’t be happy unless you’re entirely dependent on government or centralized business. But for the few who do care about democracy, who really want to be free in the Jeffersonian sense, this thing may be a help. If it makes them independent of fuel and power, that’s already a great deal.’

Mr. Stoyte looked anxious. ‘Do you really think it’ll do that?’

‘Why not?’ said Mr. Propter. ‘There’s a lot of sunshine running to waste in this part of the country.’

Mr. Stoyte thought of his presidency of the Consol Oil Company. ‘It won’t be good for the oil business,’ he said.

‘I should hate it to be good for the oil business,’ Mr. Propter answered cheerfully.

‘And what about coal?’ He had an interest in a group of West Virginia mines. ‘And the railroads?’ There was that big block of Union Pacific shares that had

belonged to Prudence. ‘The railroads can’t get on without long hauls. And steel,’ he added disinterestedly; for his holdings in Bethlehem Steel were almost negligible. ‘What happens to steel if you hurt the railroads and cut down trucking? You’re going against progress,’ he burst out in another access of righteous indignation. ‘You’re turning back the clock.’

‘Don’t worry, Jo,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘It won’t affect your dividends for quite a long while. There’ll be plenty of time to adjust to the new conditions.’

With an admirable effort, Mr. Stoyte controlled his temper. ‘You seem to figure I can’t think of anything but money,’ he said with dignity. ‘Well, it may interest you to know that I’ve decided to give Dr. Mulge another thirty thousand dollars for his Art School.’ (The decision had been made there and then, for the sole purpose of serving as a weapon in the perennial battle with Bill Propter.) ‘And if you think,’ he added as an afterthought, ‘if you think I’m only concerned with my own interests, read the special World’s Fair number of the *New York Times.* Read that,’ he insisted with the solemnity of a fundamentalist recommending the Book of Revelation. ‘You’ll see that the most forward-looking men in the country think as I do.’ He spoke with unaccustomed and incongruous unction, in the phraseology of after-dinner eloquence. ‘The way of progress is the way of better organization, more service from business, more goods for the consumer!’ Then, incoherently, ‘Look at the way a housewife goes to her grocer,’ he added, ‘and buys a package of some nationally advertised cereal or something. *That’s* progress. Not your crackpot idea of doing everything at home with this idiotic contraption.’ Mr. Stoyte had reverted completely to his ordinary style. ‘You always were a fool, Bill, and I guess you always will be. And remember what I told you about interfering with Bob Hansen. I won’t stand for it.’ In dramatic silence he walked away; but after taking a few steps he halted and called back over his shoulder, ‘Come up to dinner, if you feel like it.’

‘Thanks,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘I will.’

Mr. Stoyte walked briskly towards his car. He had forgotten about high blood-pressure and the living God and felt all of a sudden unaccountably and unreasonably happy. It was not that he had scored any notable success in his

battle with Bill Propter. He hadn't; and, what was more, in the process of not scoring a success he had made, and was even half aware that he had made, a bit of a fool of himself. The source of his happiness was elsewhere. He was happy, though he would never have admitted the fact, because, in spite of everything, Bill seemed to like him.

In the car, as he drove back to the castle, he whistled to himself.

Entering (with his hat on, as usual; for even after all these years he still derived a childish pleasure from the contrast between the palace in which he lived and the proletarian manners he affected), Mr. Stoyte crossed the great hall, stepped into the elevator and, from the elevator, walked directly into Virginia's boudoir.

When he opened the door, the two were sitting at least fifteen feet apart. Virginia was at the soda-counter, pensively eating a chocolate-and-banana split; seated in an elegant pose on one of the pink satin armchairs, Dr. Obispo was in process of lighting a cigarette.

On Mr. Stoyte the impact of suspicion and jealousy was like the blow of a fist directed (for the shock was physical and localized in the midriff) straight to the solar plexus. His face contracted as though with pain. And yet he had seen nothing; there was no apparent cause for jealousy, no visible reason, in their attitudes, their actions, their expressions, for suspicion. Dr. Obispo's manner was perfectly easy and natural; and the Baby's smile of startled and delighted welcome was angelic in its candour.

'Uncle Jo!' She ran to meet him and threw her arms round his neck.' 'Uncle Jo!'

The warmth of her tone, the softness of her lips, had a magnified effect on Mr. Stoyte. Moved to a point at which he was using the word to the limit of its double connotation, he murmured, 'My Baby!' with a lingering emphasis. The fact that he should have felt suspicious, even for a moment, of this pure and adorable, this deliciously warm, resilient and perfumed child, filled him with shame. And even Dr. Obispo now heaped coals of fire on his head.

‘I was a bit worried,’ he said, as he got up from his chair, ‘by the way you coughed after lunch. That’s why I came up here, to make sure of catching you the moment you got in.’ He put a hand in his pocket and, after half drawing out and immediately replacing a little leather-bound volume, like a prayer-book, extracted a stethoscope. ‘Prevention’s better than cure,’ he went on. ‘I’m not going to let you get influenza if I can help it.’

Remembering what a good week they had had at the Beverly Pantheon on account of the epidemic, Mr. Stoyte felt alarmed. ‘I don’t *feel* bad,’ he said. ‘I guess that cough wasn’t anything. Only my old — you know: the chronic bronchitis.’

‘Maybe it was only that. But all the same, I’d like to listen in.’ Briskly professional, Dr. Obispo hung the stethoscope round his neck.

‘He’s right, Uncle Jo,’ said the Baby.

Touched by so much solicitude, and at the same time rather disturbed by the thought that it might perhaps be influenza, Mr. Stoyte took off his coat and waistcoat and began to undo his tie. A moment later he was standing stripped to the waist under the crystals of the chandelier. Modestly, Virginia retired again to her soda-fountain. Dr. Obispo slipped the ends of the curved nickel tubes of the stethoscope into his ears. ‘Take a deep breath,’ he said as he pressed the muzzle against Mr. Stoyte’s chest. ‘Again,’ he ordered. ‘Now cough.’ Looking past that thick barrel of hairy flesh, he could see, on the wall behind the inhabitants of Watteau’s mournful paradise as they prepared to set sail for some other paradise, doubtless yet more heartbreaking.

‘Say ninety-nine,’ Dr. Obispo commanded, returning from the embarkation for Cythera to a near view of Mr. Stoyte’s thorax and abdomen.

‘Ninety-nine,’ said Mr. Stoyte. ‘Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine.’

With professional thoroughness, Dr. Obispo shifted the muzzle of his stethoscope from point to point on the curving barrel of flesh before him. There was nothing wrong, of course, with the old buzzard. Just the familiar set of râles and wheezes he always had. Perhaps it would make things a bit more realistic if he were to take the creature down to his office and stick him up in front of the

fluoroscope. But, no; he really couldn’t be bothered. And, besides, this farce would be quite enough.

‘Cough again,’ he said, planting his instrument among the grey hairs on Mr. Stoyte’s left pap. And among other things, he went on to reflect, while Mr. Stoyte forced out a succession of artificial coughs, among other things, these old sacks of guts didn’t smell too good. How any young girl could stand it, even for money, he really couldn’t imagine. And yet the fact remained that there were thousands of them who not only stood it, but actually enjoyed it. Or, perhaps, ‘enjoy’ was the wrong word. Because in most cases there probably wasn’t any question of enjoyment in the proper, physiological sense of the word. It all happened in the mind, not in the body. They loved their old gut-sacks with their heads; loved them because they admired them, because they were impressed by the gut-sack’s position in the world, or his knowledge, or his celebrity. What they slept with wasn’t the man; it was a reputation, it was the embodiment of a function. And then, of course, some of the girls were future models for Mother’s Day advertisements; some were little Florence Nightingales, on the look-out for a Crimean War. In those cases, the very infirmities of their gut-sacks were added attractions. They had the satisfaction of sleeping not only with a reputation or a stock of wisdom, not only with a federal judgeship, for example, or the presidency of a chamber of commerce, but also and simultaneously with a wounded soldier, with an imbecile child, with a lovely stinking little baby who still made messes in its bed. Even this cutie (Dr. Obispo shot a sideways glance in the direction of the soda-fountain), even this one had something of the Florence Nightingale in her, something of the Gold Star Mother. (And that in spite of the fact that, with her conscious mind, she felt a kind of physical horror of physical maternity.) Jo Stoyte was a little bit her baby and her patient; and at the same time, of course, he was a great deal her own private Abraham Lincoln. Incidentally, he also happened to be the man with the cheque-book. Which was a consideration, of course. But if he were only that, Virginia wouldn’t have been so nearly happy as she obviously was. The cheque-book was made more

attractive by being in the hands of a demi-god who had to have a nanny to change his diapers.

‘Turn round, please.’

Mr. Stoyte obeyed. The back, Dr. Obispo reflected, was perceptibly less revolting than the front. Perhaps because it was less personal.

‘Take a deep breath,’ he said; for he was going to play the farce all over again on this new stage. ‘Another.’

Mr. Stoyte breathed enormously, like a cetacean.

‘And another,’ said Dr. Obispo. ‘*And* again,’ said Dr. Obispo, reflecting as the old man snorted that his own chief asset was a refreshing unlikeness to this smelly old gut-sack. She would take him, and take him, what was more, on his own terms. No Romeo-and-Juliet acts, no nonsense about Love with a large L, none of that popular-song claptrap with its skies of blue, dreams come true, heaven with you. Just sensuality for its own sake. The real, essential concrete thing; no less, it went without saying, but also (and this most certainly didn’t go without saying; for the bitches were always trying to get you to stick them on pedestals, or be their soul-mates), also no more. No more, to begin with, out of respect for scientific truth. He believed in scientific truth. Facts were facts; accept them as such. It was a fact, for example, that young girls in the pay of rich old men could be seduced without much difficulty. It was also a fact that rich old men, however successful at business, were generally so frightened, ignorant and stupid that they could be bamboozled by any intelligent person who chose to try.

‘Say ninety-nine again,’ he said aloud.

‘Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine.’

Ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that they would never find out anything. That was the fact about old men. The fact about love was that it consisted essentially of tumescence and detumescence. So why embroider the fact with unnecessary fictions? Why not be realistic? why not treat the whole business scientifically?

‘Ninety-nine,’ Mr. Stoyte went on repeating, ‘Ninety-nine.’

And then, Dr. Obispo went on to reflect, as he listened without interest to the whisperings and crepitations inside the warm, smelly barrel before him, then there were the more personal reasons for preferring to take love unadorned, in the chemically pure condition. Personal reasons that were also, of course, a fact that had to be accepted. For it was a fact that he personally found an added pleasure in the imposition of his will upon the partner he had chosen. To be pleasurable, this imposition of will must never be too easy, too much a matter of course. Which ruled out all professionals. The partner had to be an amateur and, like all amateurs, committed to the thesis that tumescence and detumescence should always be associated with LOVE, PASSION, SOUL-MATING — all in upper-case letters. In imposing his will, he imposed the contradictory doctrine, the doctrine of tumescence and detumescence for tumescence's and detumescence's sake. All he asked was that a partner should give the thesis a practical try-out — however reluctantly, however experimentally, for just this once only; he didn't care. Just a single try-out. After that it was up to him. If he couldn't make a permanent and enthusiastic convert of her, at any rate so far as he was concerned, then the fault was his.

'Ninety-nine, ninety-nine,' said Mr. Stoyte with exemplary patience.

'You can stop now,' Dr. Obispo told him graciously.

Just one try-out; he could practically guarantee himself success. It was a branch of applied physiology; he was an expert, a specialist. The Claude Bernard of the subject. And talk of imposing one's will! You began by forcing the girl to accept a thesis that was in flat contradiction to all the ideas she had been brought up with, all the dreams-come-true rigmarole of popular ideology. Quite a pleasant little victory, to be sure. But it was only when you got down to the applied physiology that the series of really satisfying triumphs began. You took an ordinarily rational human being, a good hundred-percent. American with a background, a position in society, a set of conventions, a code of ethics, a religion (Catholic in the present instance, Dr. Obispo remembered parenthetically); you took this good citizen, with rights fully and formally guaranteed by the Constitution, you took her (and perhaps she had come to the

place of assignation in her husband's Packard limousine and direct from a banquet, with speeches in honour, say, of Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler or the retiring Archbishop of Indianapolis), you took her and you proceeded, systematically and scientifically, to reduce this unique personality to a mere epileptic body, moaning and gibbering under the excruciations of a pleasure for which you, the Claude Bernard of the subject, were responsible and of which you remained the enjoying, but always detached, always ironically amused, spectator.

'Just a few more deep breaths, if you don't mind.'

Wheezily Mr. Stoyte inhaled, then with a snorting sigh emptied his lungs.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THERE WAS SILENCE after Mr. Stoyte's departure. A long silence, while each of the three men thought his own private thoughts. It was Pete who spoke first.

'Things like that,' he said gloomily, 'they get me kind of wondering if I ought to go on taking his money. What would you do, Mr. Propter, if you were me?'

'What would I do?' Mr. Propter reflected for a moment. 'I'd go on working in Jo's laboratory,' he said. 'But only so long as I felt fairly certain that what I was doing wouldn't cause more harm than good. One has to be a utilitarian in these matters. A utilitarian with a difference,' he qualified. 'Bentham crossed with Eckhart, say, or Nagarjuna.'

'Poor Bentham!' said Jeremy, horrified by the thought of what was being done to his namesake.

Mr. Propter smiled. 'Poor Bentham, indeed! Such a good, sweet, absurd, intelligent man! So nearly right; but so enormously wrong! Deluding himself with the notion that the greatest happiness of the greatest number could be achieved on the strictly human level — the level of time and evil, the level of the absence of God. Poor Bentham!' he repeated. 'What a great man he would have been if only he could have grasped that good can't be had except where it exists!'

'That sort of utilitarian you're talking about,' said Pete, 'what would he feel about the job I'm doing now?'

'I don't know,' Mr. Propter answered. 'I haven't thought about it enough to guess what he'd say. And, anyhow, we haven't yet got the empirical material on which a reasonable judgment could be based. All I know is that if I were in on this I'd be cautious. Infinitely cautious,' he insisted.

‘And what about the money;’ Pete went on. ‘Seeing where it comes from and who it belongs to, do you think I ought to take it?’

‘All money’s pretty dirty,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘I don’t know that poor Jo’s is appreciably dirtier than anyone else’s. You may think it is; but that’s only because, for the first time, you’re seeing money at its source — its personal, human source. You’re like one of these city children who have been used to getting their milk in sterilized bottles from a shiny white delivery wagon. When they go into the country and see it being pumped out of a big, fat, smelly old animal, they’re horrified, they’re disgusted. It’s the same with money. You’ve been used to getting it from behind a bronze grating in a magnificent marble bank. Now you’ve come out into the country and are living in the cowshed with the animal that actually secretes the stuff. And the process doesn’t strike you as very savoury or hygienic. But the same process was going on, even when you didn’t know about it. And if you weren’t working for Jo Stoyte, you’d probably be working for some college or university. But where do colleges and universities get their money from? From rich men. In other words, from people like Jo Stoyte. Again it’s dirt served out in sterile containers — by a gentleman in a cap and gown this time.’

‘So you figure it’s all right for me to go on like I am now?’ said Pete.

‘All right,’ Mr. Propter answered, ‘in the sense that it’s not conspicuously worse than anything else.’ Suddenly smiling, ‘I was glad to hear that Dr. Mulge had got his Art School,’ he said in another, lighter tone. ‘Immediately after the Auditorium, too. It’s a lot of money. But I suppose the prestige of being a patron of learning is worth it. And, of course, there’s an enormous social pressure on the rich to make them become patrons of learning. They’re being pushed by shame as well as pulled by the longing to believe they’re the benefactors of humanity. And, happily, with Dr. Mulge a rich man can have his kudos with safety. No amount of art schools at Tarzana will ever disturb the *status quo*. Whereas if I were to ask Jo for fifty thousand dollars to finance research into the technique of democracy, he’d turn me down flat. Why? Because he knows that sort of thing is dangerous. He likes speeches about democracy. (Incidentally, Dr.

Mulge is really terrific on the subject.) But he doesn't approve of the coarse materialists who try to find out how to put those ideals into practice. You saw how angry he got about my poor little sun-machine. Because, in its tiny way, it's a menace to the sort of big business he makes his money from. And it's the same with these other little gadgets that I've talked to him about from time to time. Come and look, if it doesn't bore you.'

He took them into the house. Here was the little electric mill, hardly larger than a coffee-machine, in which he ground his own flour as he needed it. Here was the loom at which he had learnt and was now teaching others to weave. Next he took them out to the shed in which, with a few hundred dollars' worth of electrically operated tools, he was equipped to do any kind of carpentry and even some light metal-work. Beyond the shed were the still unfinished greenhouses; for the vegetable plots weren't adequate to supply the demands of his transients. There they were, he added, pointing through the increasing darkness to the lights of a row of cabins. He could put up only a few of them; the rest had to live in a sort of garbage-heap down in the dry bed of the river — paying rent to Jo Stoyte for the privilege. Not the best material to work with, of course. But such misery as theirs left one no choice. They simply had to be attended to. A few had come through undemoralized; and, of these, a few could see what had to be done, what you had to aim at. Two or three were working with him here; and he had been able to raise money to settle two or three more on some land near Santa Suzanna. Mere beginning — unsatisfactory at that. Because, obviously, you could not even start experimenting properly until you had a full-fledged community working under the new conditions. But to set a community on its feet would require money. A lot of money. But rich men wouldn't touch the work; they preferred art schools at Tarzana. The people who were interested had no money; that was one of the reasons why they were interested. Borrowing at the current commercial rates was dangerous. Except in very favourable circumstances, the chances were that you'd merely be selling yourself into slavery to a bank.

'It isn't easy,' said Mr. Propter, as they walked back to the house. 'But the great point is that, easy or not easy, it's there, waiting to be done. Because, after

all, Pete, there *is* something to do.'

Mr. Propter went into the bungalow for a moment to turn out the lights, then emerged again on to the porch. Together, the three men walked down the path to the road. Before them the castle was a vast black silhouette punctured by occasional lights.

'There *is* something you can do,' Mr. Propter resumed; 'but only on condition that you know what the nature of the world happens to be. If you know that the strictly human level is the level of evil, you won't waste your time trying to produce good on that level. Good manifests itself only on the animal level and on the level of eternity. Knowing that, you'll realize that the best you can do on the human level is preventive. You can see that purely human activities don't interfere too much with the manifestation of good on the other levels. That's all. But politicians don't know the nature of reality. If they did, they wouldn't be politicians. Reactionary or revolutionary, they're all humanists, all romantics. They live in a world of illusion, a world that's a mere projection of their own human personalities. They act in ways which would be appropriate if such a world as they think they live in really existed. But, unfortunately, it doesn't exist except in their imaginations. Hence nothing that they do is appropriate to the real world. All their actions are the actions of lunatics, and all, as history is there to demonstrate, are more or less completely disastrous. So much for the romantics. The realists, who have studied the nature of the world, know that an exclusively humanistic attitude towards life is always fatal, and that all strictly human activities must therefore be made instrumental to animal and spiritual good. They know, in other words, that men's business is to make the human world safe for animals and spirits. Or perhaps,' he added, turning to Jeremy, 'perhaps, as an Englishman, you prefer Lloyd George's phrase to Wilson's: "A home fit for heroes to live in" — wasn't that it? A home fit for animals and spirits, for physiology and disinterested consciousness. At present, I'm afraid, it's profoundly unfit. The world we've made for ourselves is a world of sick bodies and insane or criminal personalities. How shall we make this world safe for

ourselves as animals and as spirits? If we can answer that question, we've discovered what to do.'

Mr. Propter halted at what appeared to be a wayside shrine, opened a small steel door with a key he carried in his pocket, and, lifting the receiver of the telephone within, announced their presence to an invisible porter, somewhere on the other side of the moat. They walked on.

'What are the things that make the world unsafe for animals and spirits?' Mr. Propter continued. 'Obviously greed and fear, lust for power, hatred, anger …'

At this moment, a dazzling light struck them full in the face and was almost immediately turned out.

'What in heaven's name …?' Jeremy began.

'Don't worry,' said Peter. 'They only want to make sure it's us, not a set of gangsters. It's just the searchlight.'

'Just our old friend Jo expressing his personality,' said Mr. Propter, taking Jeremy's arm. 'In other words, proclaiming to the world that he's afraid because he's been greedy and domineering. And he's been greedy and domineering, among other reasons, because the present system puts a premium on those qualities. Our problem is to find a system that will give the fewest possible opportunities for unfortunate people, like Jo Stoyte, to realize their potentialities.'

The bridge had swung down as they approached the moat, and now the boards rang hollow under their feet.

'You'd like socialism, Pete,' Mr. Propter continued. 'But socialism seems to be fatally committed to centralization and standardized urban mass production all round. Besides, I see too many occasions for bullying there — too many opportunities for bossy people to display their bossiness, for sluggish people to sit back and be slaves.'

The portcullis rose, the gates slid back to receive them.

'If you want to make the world safe for animals and spirits, you must have a system that reduces the amount of fear and greed and hatred and domineering to their minimum. Which means that you must have enough economic security to

get rid at least of that source of worry. Enough personal responsibility to prevent people from wallowing in sloth. Enough property to protect them from being bullied by the rich, but not enough to permit them to bully. And the same thing with political rights and authority — enough of the first for the protection of the many, too little of the second for domination by the few.'

'Sounds like peasants to me,' said Pete dubiously.

'Peasants plus small machines and power. Which means that they're no longer peasants, except in so far as they're largely self-sufficient.'

'And who makes the machines? More peasants?"

'No; the same sort of people as make them now. What can't be made satisfactorily except by mass-production methods, obviously has to go on being made that way. About a third of all production — that's what it seems to amount to. The other two-thirds are more economically produced at home or in a small workshop. The immediate, practical problem is to work out the technique of that small-scale production. At present, all the research is going to the discovery of new fields for mass production.'

In the Grotto a row of twenty-five-feet electric candles burned in perpetual adoration before the Virgin. Above, on the tennis-court, the second butler, two maids and the head electrician were playing mixed doubles by the light of arc lamps.

'And do you figure people will want to leave the cities and live the way you're telling us, on little farms?'

'Ah, now you're talking, Pete!' said Mr. Propter approvingly. 'Frankly, then, I don't expect them to leave the cities, any more than I expect them to stop having wars and revolutions. All I expect is that, if I do my work and it's reasonably good, there'll be a few people who will want to collaborate with me. That's all.'

'But if you're not going to get more than just a few, what's the point. Why not try to do something with the cities and the factories, seeing that that's where most people are going to stay? Wouldn't that be more practical?'

‘It depends how one defines the word,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘For example, *you* seem to think that it’s practical to help a great many people to pursue a policy which is known to be fatal; but that it isn’t practical to help a very few people to pursue a policy which there is every reason to regard as sound. I don’t agree with you.’

‘But the many are there. You’ve got to do something about them.’

‘You’ve got to do something about them,’ Mr. Propter agreed. ‘But at the same time there are circumstances when you can’t do anything. You can’t do anything effective about anyone if he doesn’t choose or isn’t able to collaborate with you in doing the right thing. For example, you’ve *got* to help people who are being killed off by malaria. But in practice you can’t help them if they refuse to screen their windows and insist on taking walks near stagnant water in the twilight. It’s exactly the same with the diseases of the body politic. You’ve got to help people if they’re faced by war or ruin or enslavement, if they’re under the menace of sudden revolution or slow degeneration. You’ve got to help. But the fact remains, nevertheless, that you can’t help if they persist in the course of behaviour which originally got them into their trouble. For example, you can’t preserve people from the horrors of war if they won’t give up the pleasures of nationalism. You can’t save them from slumps and depressions so long as they go on thinking exclusively in terms of money and regarding money as the supreme good. You can’t avert revolution and enslavement if they *will* identify progress with the increase of centralization and prosperity with the intensifying of mass production. You can’t preserve them from collective madness and suicide if they persist in paying divine honours to ideals which are merely projections of their own personalities — in other words, if they persist in worshipping themselves rather than God. So much for conditional clauses. Now let’s consider the actual facts of the present situation. For our purposes, the most significant facts are these: the inhabitants of every civilized country are menaced; all desire passionately to be saved from impending disaster; the overwhelming majority refuse to change the habits of thought, feeling and action which are directly responsible for their present plight. In other words, they can’t

be helped, because they are not prepared to collaborate with any helper who proposes a rational and realistic course of action. In these circumstances, what ought the would-be helper to do?'

'He's got to do *something*', said Pete.

'Even if he thereby accelerates the process of destruction?' Mr. Propter smiled sadly. 'Doing for doing's sake,' he went on. 'I prefer Oscar Wilde. Bad art can't do so much harm as ill-considered political action. Doing good on any but the tiniest scale requires more intelligence than most people possess. They ought to be content with keeping out of mischief; it's easier and it doesn't have such frightful results as trying to do good in the wrong way. Twiddling the thumbs and having good manners are much more helpful, in most cases, than rushing about with good intentions, *doing* things.'

Floodlighted, Giambologna's nymph was still indefatigably spouting away against the velvet background of the darkness. Electricity and sculpture, Jeremy was thinking as he looked at her — predestined partners. The things that old Bernini could have done with a battery of projectors! The startling lights, the rich fantastic shadows! The female mystics in orgasm, the conglobulated angels, the skeletons whizzing up out of papal tombs like sky-rockets, the saints in their private hurricane of flapping draperies and wind-blown marble curls! What fun! What splendour! What self-parodying emphasis! What staggering beauty! What enormous bad taste! And what a shame that the man should have had to be content with mere daylight and tallow candles!

'No,' Mr. Propter was saying in answer to a protesting question from the young man, 'no, I certainly wouldn't advise their abandonment. I'd advise the constant reiteration of the truths they've been told again and again during the past three thousand years. And, in the intervals, I'd do active work on the technics of a better system, and active collaboration with the few who understand what the system is and are ready to pay the price demanded for its realization. Incidentally, the price, measured in human terms, is enormously high. Though, of course, much lower than the price demanded by the nature of things from those who persist in behaving in the standard human way. Much

lower than the price of war, for example — particularly war with contemporary weapons. Much lower than the price of economic depression and political enslavement.'

'And what happens,' Jeremy asked in a fluting voice, 'what happens when you've had your war? Will the few be any better off than the many?'

'Oddly enough,' Mr. Propter answered, 'there's just a chance they may be. For this reason. If they've learnt the technique of self-sufficiency they'll find it easier to survive a time of anarchy than the people who depend for their livelihood on a highly centralized and specialized organization. You can't work for the good without incidentally preparing yourself for the worst.'

He stopped speaking, and they walked on through a silence broken only by the sound, from somewhere high overhead in the castle, of two radios tuned to different stations. The baboons, on the contrary, were already asleep.

CHAPTER TWELVE

IN THE COLUMNED Lady Chapel, with its hat-racks and its Magnascos, its Brancusi and its Etruscan sarcophagus used as an umbrella-stand, Jeremy Pordage began, all of a sudden, to feel himself more cheerful and at home.

‘It’s as though one were walking into the mind of a lunatic,’ he said, smiling happily, as he hung up his hat and followed the others into the great hall. ‘Or, rather, an idiot,’ he qualified. ‘Because I suppose a lunatic’s a person with a one-track mind. Whereas this …’ — he made a circular gesture— ‘this is a no-track mind. No-track because infinity-track. It’s the mind of an idiot of genius. Positively stuffed with the best that has been thought and said.’ He pronounced the phrase with a kind of old-maidish precision that made it sound entirely ludicrous. ‘Greece, Mexico, backsides, crucifixions, machinery, George IV, Amida Buddha, science, Christian Science, Turkish baths — anything you like to mention. And every item is perfectly irrelevant to every other item.’ He rubbed his hands together, he twinkled delightedly through his bifocals. ‘Disquieting at first. But, do you know? I’m beginning to enjoy it. I find I really rather like living inside an idiot.’

‘I don’t doubt it,’ said Mr. Propter, matter-of-factly. ‘It’s a common taste.’

Jeremy was offended. ‘One wouldn’t have thought this sort of thing was very common,’ he said, nodding in the direction of the Greco.

‘It isn’t,’ Mr. Propter agreed. ‘But you can live in an idiot-universe without going to the expense of actually constructing it out of ferro-concrete and filling it with works of art.’

There was a pause while they entered the lift.

‘You can live inside a cultural idiot,’ Mr. Propter went on. ‘Inside a patchwork of mutually irrelevant words and bits of information. Or, if you’re a lowbrow, you can live in the idiot world of the *homme moyen sensuel* — the

world where the irrelevances consist of newspapers and baseball, of sex and worry, of advertising and money and halitosis and keeping up with the Joneses. There's a hierarchy of idiocies. Naturally, you and I prefer the classiest variety.'

The elevator came to a halt. Pete opened the gate, and they stepped out into the whitewashed corridor of the sub-sub-basement.

'Nothing like an idiot-universe if you want a quiet irresponsible life. That is, provided you can stand the idiocy,' Mr. Propter added. 'A lot of people can't. After a time, they get tired of their no-track world. They feel the need of being concentrated and directed. They want their lives to have some sense. That's when they go communist, or join the Church of Rome, or take up with the Oxford Group. Anything, provided it will make them one-trackers. And, of course, in the overwhelming majority of cases they choose the wrong track. Inevitably. Because there are a million wrong tracks and only one right — a million ideals, a million projections of personality, and only one God and one beatific vision. From no-track idiocy most of them pass on to some one-track lunacy, generally criminal. It makes them feel better, of course; but, pragmatically, the last state is always worse than the first. If you don't want the only thing worth having, my advice is: Stick to idiocy. — Is this where you work?' he went on in another tone, as Jeremy opened the door of his vaulted study. 'And those are the Hauberk Papers, I take it. Plenty of them. The title's extinct, isn't it?'

Jeremy nodded. 'And so's the family — or very nearly. Nothing left but two old maids in a haunted house without any money.' He twinkled, uttered his little preparatory cough and, patting his bald crown, said with an exaggerated precision: 'Decayed gentlewomen.' Exquisite locution! It was one of his favourites. 'And the decay must have gone pretty far,' he added. 'Otherwise they wouldn't have sold the papers. They've refused all previous offers.'

'How fortunate one is, not to belong to an ancient family!' said Mr. Propter. 'All those inherited loyalties to bricks and mortar, all those obligations to tombstones and bits of paper and painted canvases!' He shook his head. 'What a dismal form of compulsory idolatry.' Jeremy, meanwhile, had crossed the room,

opened a drawer and returned with a file of papers which he handed to Mr. Propter. ‘Look at these.’

Mr. Propter looked. ‘From Molinos!’ he said in surprise.

‘I thought that would be your cup of tea,’ said Jeremy, deriving a sly pleasure from talking about mysticism in the most absurdly inappropriate language.

Mr. Propter smiled. ‘My cup of tea,’ he repeated. ‘But not my favourite blend. There was something not quite right about poor Molinos. A strain of — how shall I put it? — of negative sensuality. He enjoyed suffering. Mental suffering, the dark night of the soul — he really wallowed in it. No doubt, poor fellow, he sincerely believed he was destroying self-will; but, without his being aware of it, he was always turning the process of destruction into another affirmation of self-will. Which was a pity,’ Mr. Propter added, taking the letters to the light, to look at them more closely. ‘Because he certainly did have some first-hand experience of reality. Which only shows that you’re never certain of getting there, even when you’ve come near enough to see what sort of thing you’re going to. Here’s a fine sentence,’ he put in parenthetically. ‘“*Ame a Dios*,”’ he read aloud, ‘“*como es en sí y no como se lo dice y forma su imaginación*.”’

Jeremy almost laughed. The coincidence that Mr. Propter should have picked on the same passage as had caught Dr. Obispo’s eye that morning gave him a peculiar satisfaction. ‘Pity he couldn’t have read a little Kant,’ he said. ‘*Dios en si* seems to be much the same as *Ding an sich.* Unknowable by the human mind.’

‘Unknowable by the *personal* human mind,’ Mr. Propter agreed, ‘because personality is self-will, and self-will is the negation of reality, the denial of God. So far as the ordinary human personality is concerned, Kant is perfectly right in saying that the tiling in itself is unknowable. *Dios en s*í can’t be comprehended by a consciousness dominated by an ego. But now suppose there were some way of eliminating the ego from consciousness. *If* you could do this, you’d get close to reality, you’d be in a position to comprehend *Dios en sí.* Now, the interesting thing is that, as a matter of brute fact, this thing can be done, has been done again and again. Kant’s blind alley is for people who choose to remain on the

human level. If you choose to climb on to the level of eternity, the *impasse* no longer exists.'

There was a silence. Mr. Propter turned over the sheets, pausing every now and then to decipher a line or two of the fine calligraphy. '"*Tres maneras hay de silencio*,"' he read aloud after a moment. '"*El primero es de palabras, el segundo de deseos y el tercero de pensamientos.*" He writes nicely, don't you think? Probably that had a lot to do with his extraordinary success. How disastrous when a man knows how to say the wrong things in the right way! Incidentally,' he added, looking up with a smile into Jeremy's face, 'how few great stylists have ever said any of the right things. That's one of the troubles about education in the humanities. The best that has been thought and said. Very nice. But best in which way?. Alas, only in form. The content is generally deplorable.' He turned back to the letters. After a moment, another passage caught his attention. '"*Oirá y leera el hombre racional estas espirituales materias, pero no llegera, dice San Pablo, a comprenderlas: Animalis homo non percipit ea quae sunt spiritus.*" And not merely *animalis homo*,' Mr. Propter commented. 'Also *humanus homo.* Indeed, above all *humanus homo.* And you might even add that *humanus homo non percipit ea quae sunt animalis.* In so far as we think as strictly human beings, we fail to understand what is below us no less than what is above. And then there's a further trouble. Suppose we stop thinking in a strictly human fashion; suppose we make it possible for ourselves to have direct intuitions of the nonhuman realities in which, so to speak, we're imbedded. Well and good. But what happens when we try to pass on the knowledge so acquired? We're floored. The only vocabulary at our disposal is a vocabulary primarily intended for thinking strictly human thoughts about strictly human concerns. But the things *we* want to talk about are nonhuman realities and nonhuman ways of thinking. Hence the radical inadequacy of all statements about our animal nature and, even more, of all statements about God or spirit, or eternity.'

Jeremy uttered a little cough. 'I can think of some pretty adequate statements about …' he paused, beamed, caressed his polished scalp; 'well, about the more

intime aspects of our animal nature,' he concluded demurely. His face suddenly clouded; he had remembered his treasure-trove and Dr. Obispo's impudent theft.

'But what does their adequacy depend on?' Mr. Propter asked. 'Not so much on the writer's skill as the reader's response. The direct, animal intuitions aren't rendered by words; the words merely remind you of your memories of similar experiences. *Notus calor* is what Virgil says when he's talking about the sensations experienced by Vulcan in the embrace of Venus. Familiar heat. No attempt at description or analysis; no effort to get any kind of verbal equivalence to the facts. Just a reminder. But that reminder is enough to make the passage one of the most voluptuous affairs in Latin poetry. Virgil left the work to his readers. And, by and large, that's what most erotic writers are content to do. The few who try to do the work themselves have to flounder about with metaphors and similes and analogies. You know the sort of stuff: fire, whirlwinds, heaven, darts.'

'"The vale of lilies,"' Jeremy quoted. '"And the bower of bliss."'

'Not to mention the expense of spirit in a waste of shame,' said Mr. Propter; 'and all the other figures of speech. An endless variety, with only one feature in common — they're all composed of words which don't connote any aspect of the subject they're supposed to describe.'

'Saying one thing in order to mean another,' Jeremy put in. 'Isn't that one of the possible definitions of imaginative literature?'

'Maybe,' Mr. Propter answered. 'But what chiefly interests me at the moment is the fact that our immediate animal intuitions have never been given any but the most summary and inadequate labels. We say "red," for example, or "pleasant," and just leave it at that, without trying to find verbal equivalents for the various aspects of perceiving redness or experiencing pleasure.'

'Well, isn't that because you can't go beyond "red" or "pleasant"?' said Pete. 'They're just facts, ultimate facts.'

'Like giraffes,' Jeremy added. '"There ain't no such animal" is what the rationalist says, when he's shown its portrait. And then in it walks, neck and all!'

‘You’re right,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘A giraffe is an ultimate fact. You’ve got to accept it, whether you like it or not. But accepting the giraffe doesn’t prevent you from studying and describing it. And the same applies to redness or pleasure or *notus calor*. They can be analysed, and the results of the analysis can be described by means of suitable words. But as a matter of historical fact, this hasn’t been done.’

Pete nodded slowly. ‘Why do you figure that should be?’ he asked.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Propter, ‘I should say it’s because men have always been more interested in doing and feeling than in understanding. Always too busy making good and having thrills and doing what’s “done” and worshipping the local idols — too busy with all this even to feel any desire to have an adequate verbal instrument for elucidating their experiences. Look at the languages we’ve inherited — incomparably effective in rousing violent and exciting emotions; an ever-present help for those who want to get on in the world; worse than useless for anyone who aspires to disinterested understanding. Hence, even on the strictly human level, the need for special impersonal languages like mathematics and technical vocabularies of the various sciences. Wherever men have felt the wish to understand, they’ve given up the traditional language and substituted for it another special language, more precise and, above all, less contaminated with self-interest. Now, here’s a very significant fact. Imaginative literature deals mainly with the everyday life of men and women; and the everyday life of men and women consists, to a large extent, of immediate animal experiences. But the makers of imaginative literature have never forged an impersonal, uncontaminated language for the elucidation of immediate experiences. They’re content to use the bare, unanalysed names of experiences as mere aids to their own and their reader’s memory. Every direct intuition is *notus calor*, with the connotation of the words left open, so to speak, for each individual reader to supply according to the nature of his or her particular experiences in the past. Simple, but not exactly scientific. But then people don’t read literature in order to understand; they read it because they want to re-live the feelings and sensations which they found exciting in the past. Art can be a lot of things; but in

actual practice most of it is merely the mental equivalent of alcohol and cantharides.'

Mr. Propter looked down again at the close-set lines of Molinos's epistle. '"*Oirá y leerá el hombre racional estas espirituales materias*,"' he read out once more. '"*Pero non llegerá a comprenderlas.*" He'll hear and read these things, but he won't succeed in understanding them. And he won't succeed,' said Mr. Propter, closing the file and handing it back to Jeremy, 'he won't succeed for one of two excellent reasons. Either he has never seen the giraffes in question, and so, being an *hombre racional*, knows quite well that there ain't no such animal. Or else he has had glimpses of the creatures, or has some other reason for believing in their existence, but can't understand what the experts say about them; can't understand because of the inadequacy of the language in which the fauna of the spiritual world is ordinarily described. In other words, he either hasn't had the immediate experience of eternity and so has no reason to believe that eternity exists; or else he *does* believe that eternity exists, but can't make head or tail of the language in which it's talked about by those who have had experience of it. Furthermore, when he wants to talk about eternity himself — and he may wish to do so, either in order to communicate his own experiences to others or to understand them better, from the human point of view, himself — he finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. For either he recognizes that the existing language is unsuitable — in which case he has only two rational choices: to say nothing at all, or to invent a new and better technical language of his own, a calculus of eternity, so to speak, a special algebra of spiritual experience — and if he does invent it, nobody who hasn't learnt it will know what he's talking about. So much for the first horn of the dilemma. The second horn is reserved for those who don't recognize the inadequacy of the existing language; or else who do recognize it, but are irrationally hopeful enough to take a chance with an instrument which they know to be worthless. These people will write in the existing language, and their writing will be, in consequence, more or less completely misunderstood by most of their readers. Inevitably, because the words they use don't correspond to the things they're talking about. Most of

them are words taken from the language of everyday life.… But the language of everyday life refers almost exclusively to strictly human affairs. What happens when you apply words derived from that language to experiences on the plane of the spirit, the plane of timeless experience? Obviously, you create a misunderstanding; you say what you didn't mean to say.'

Pete interrupted him. 'I'd like an example, Mr. Propter,' he said.

'All right,' the other answered. 'Let's take the commonest word in all religious literature: "love." Love on the human level means — what: Practically everything from Mother to the Marquis de Sade.'

The name reminded Jeremy yet again of what had happened to the *Cent-Vingt Jours de Sodome.* Really it was too insufferable! the impudence of it …!

'We don't even make the simple Greek distinction between *erao* and *philo, eros* and *agape.* With us everything is just love, whether it's self-sacrificing or possessive, whether it's friendship or lust or homicidal lunacy. It's all just love,' he repeated. 'Idiotic word! Even on the human level it's hopelessly ambiguous. And when you begin using it in relation to experiences on the level of eternity — well, it's simply disastrous. "The love of God." "God's love for us." "The saint's love for his fellows." What does the word stand for in such phrases? And in what way is this related to what it stands for when it's applied to a young mother suckling her baby? or to Romeo climbing into Juliet's bedroom? or to Othello as he strangles Desdemona? or to the research worker who loves his science? or to the patriot who's ready to die for his country — to die and, in the meantime, to kill, steal, lie, swindle and torture for it? Is there really anything in common between what the word stands for in these contexts and what it stands for when one talks, let us say, of the Buddha's love for all sentient beings? Obviously, the answer is: No, there isn't. On the human level, the word stands for a great many different states of mind and ways of behaving. Dissimilar in many respects, but alike at least in this: they're all accompanied by emotional excitement and they all contain an element of craving. Whereas the most characteristic features of the enlightened person's experience are serenity and disinterestedness. In other words, the absence of excitement and the absence of craving.'

‘“The absence of excitement and the absence of craving,”’ Pete said to himself, while the image of Virginia in her yachting-cap, riding her pink scooter, kneeling in her shorts under the arch of the grotto, swam before his inward eye.

‘Distinctions in fact ought to be represented by distinctions in language,’ Mr. Propter was saying. ‘If they’re not, you can’t expect to talk sense. In spite of which, we insist on using one word to connote entirely different things. “God is love,” we say. The word’s the same as the one we use when we talk about “being in love,” or “loving one’s children,” or “being inspired by love of country.” Consequently we tend to think that the thing we’re talking about must be more or less the same. We imagine in a vague, reverential way, that God is composed of a kind of immensely magnified yearning.’ Mr. Propter shook his head. ‘Creating God in our own image. It flatters our vanity, and of course we prefer vanity to understanding. Hence those confusions of language. If we wanted to understand the word, if we wanted to think about it realistically, we should say that we were in love, but that God was x-love. In this way, people who had never had any first-hand experience on the level of eternity would at least be given a chance of knowing intellectually that what happens on that level is not the same as what happens on the strictly human level. They’d know, because they’d seen it in print, that there was some kind of difference between love and x-love. Consequently, they’d have less excuse than people have to-day for imagining that God was like themselves, only a bit more so on the side of respectability and a bit less so, of course, on the other side. And, naturally, what applies to the word “love,” applies to all the other words taken over from the language of everyday life and used to describe spiritual experience. Words like “knowledge,” wisdom, power, mind, peace, joy, freedom,” “good.” They stand for certain things on the human level. But the things that writers force them to stand for when they describe events on the level of eternity are quite different. Hence the use of them merely confuses the issue. They just make it all but impossible for anyone to know what’s being talked about. And, meanwhile, you must remember that these words from the language of everyday life aren’t the only

troublemakers. People who write about experiences on the level of eternity also make use of technical phrases borrowed from various systems of philosophy.'

'Isn't that your algebra of spiritual experience?' said Pete. 'Isn't that the special, scientific language you've been talking about?'

'It's an attempt at such an algebra,' Mr. Propter answered. 'But, unfortunately, a very unsuccessful attempt. Unsuccessful because this particular algebra is derived from the language of metaphysics — bad metaphysics, incidentally. The people who use it are committing themselves, whether they like it or no, to an explanation of the facts as well as a description. An explanation of actual experiences in terms of metaphysical entities, whose existence is purely hypothetical and can't be demonstrated. In other words, they're describing the facts in terms of figments of the imagination; they're explaining the known in terms of the unknown. Take a few examples. Here's one: "ecstasy." It's a technical term that refers to the soul's ability to stand outside the body — and of course it carries the further implication that we know what the soul is and how it's related to the body and the rest of the universe. Or take another instance, a technical term that is essential to the Catholic theory of mysticism: "infused contemplation." Here the implication is that there's somebody outside us who pours a certain kind of psychological experience into our minds. The further implication is that we know who that somebody is. Or consider even "union with God." What it means depends on the upbringing of the speaker. It may mean "union with the Jehovah of the Old Testament." Or it may mean "union with the personal deity of orthodox Christianity." It may mean what it probably would have meant, say, to Eckhart, "union with the impersonal Godhead of which the God of orthodoxy is an aspect and a particular limitation." Similarly, if you were an Indian, it may mean "union with Isvara" or "union with Brahman." In every case, the term implies a previous knowledge about the nature of things which are either completely unknowable, or at best only to be inferred from the nature of the experiences which the term is supposed to describe. So there,' Mr. Propter concluded, 'you have the second horn of the dilemma — the horn on which all those who use the current religious vocabulary

to describe their experiences on the level of eternity inevitably impale themselves.'

'And the way between the horns?' Jeremy questioned. 'Isn't it the way of the professional psychologists who have written about mysticism? They've evolved a pretty sensible language. You haven't mentioned them.'

'I haven't mentioned them,' said Mr. Propter, 'for the same reason as in talking about beauty I shouldn't mention professional aestheticians who had never been inside a picture gallery.'

'You mean, they don't know what they're talking about?'

Mr. Propter smiled. 'I'd put it another way,' he said. 'They talk about what they know. But what they know isn't worth talking about. For what they know is only the literature of mysticism — not the experience.'

'Then there's *no* way between the horns,' Jeremy concluded. His eyes twinkled behind his spectacles; he smiled like a child, taking a sly triumph in some small consummation of naughtiness. 'What fun it is when there isn't a way between!' he went on. 'It makes the world seem so deliciously cosy, when all the issues are barred and there's nowhere to go to with all your brass bands and shining armour. Onward, Christian soldiers! Forward, the Light Brigade! Excelsior! And all the time you're just going round and round — head to tail, follow-my-fuehrer — like Fabre's caterpillars. That really gives me a *great* deal of pleasure!'

This time Mr. Propter laughed outright. 'I'm sorry to have to disappoint you,' he said. 'But unfortunately there is a way between the horns. The practical way. You can go and find out what it means for yourself, by first-hand experience. Just as you can find out what El Greco's "Crucifixion of St. Peter" looks like by taking the elevator and going up to the hall. Only, in this case, I'm afraid, there isn't any elevator. You have to go up on your own legs. And make no mistakes,' he added, turning to Pete, 'there's an awful lot of stairs.'

Dr. Obispo straightened himself up, took the tubes of the stethoscope out of his ears and stowed the instrument away in his pocket along with the *Cent-Vingt Jours de Sodome.*

‘Anything bad?’ Mr. Stoyte asked anxiously.

Dr. Obispo shook his head and gave him a smile of reassurance. No influenza anyhow,’ he said. ‘Just a slight intensification of the bronchial condition. I’ll give you something for it to-night before you go to bed.’

Mr. Stoyte’s face relaxed into cheerfulness. ‘Glad it was only a false alarm,’ he said, and turned away to get his clothes, which were lying in a heap on the sofa, under the Watteau.

From her seat at the soda-counter, Virginia let out a whoop of triumph. ‘Isn’t that just swell!’ she cried. Then, in another, graver tone: ‘You know, Uncle Jo,’ she added, ‘he’d got me panicked about that cough of yours. Panicked,’ she repeated.

Uncle Jo grinned triumphantly and slapped his chest so hard that its hairy, almost female accumulations of flesh shivered like jellies under the blow. Nothing wrong with *me*,’ he boasted.

Virginia watched him over the top of her glass, as he got into his shirt and knotted his tie. The expression on her innocent young face was one of perfect serenity. But behind those limpid blue eyes her mind was simmering with activity. “Was that a close call!’ she kept saying to herself. ‘Gee, was it close!’ At the recollection of that sudden violent start at the sound of the elevator gate being opened, of that wild scramble as the footsteps approached along the corridor, she felt herself tingling with a delicious mixture of fear and amusement, of apprehension and triumph. It was the sensation she used to have as a child, playing hide-and-seek in the dark. A close call! And hadn’t Sig been wonderful! What presence of mind! And that stethoscope thing he pulled out of his pocket — what a brain-wave! That had saved the situation. Because, without the stethoscope, Uncle Jo would have put on one of his jealousy acts. Though what right he had to be jealous, Virginia went on to reflect, with a strong sense of injury, she really didn’t know. Seeing that nothing had happened except just a little reading aloud. And, anyhow, why shouldn’t a girl be allowed to read that sort of thing if she wanted to? Especially as it was in French. And, besides, who was Uncle Jo to be prudish, she’d like to know? Getting mad with people only

for telling you a funny story, when just look what he himself was *doing* all the time — and then expecting you to talk like Louisa M. Alcott, and thinking you ought to be protected from hearing so much as a dirty word! And the way he simply wouldn't allow her to tell the truth about herself, even if she had wanted to. Making a build-up of her as somebody quite different from what she really was. Acting almost as though she were Daisy Mae in the comic strip and he a sort of Little Abner rescuing her in the nick of time. Though, of course, she had to admit that it had happened at least once before he came along, because if it hadn't, there'd have been no excuse for *him.* It had happened, but quite unwillingly — you know, practically a rape — or else some fellow taking advantage of her being so dumb and innocent — at Congo Club with nothing on but a G-string and some talcum powder. And naturally she was always supposed to have hated it; crying her eyes out all the time until Uncle Jo came along; and then everything was different. But in that case, it now suddenly occurred to Virginia, if that was the way he thought about her, what the hell did he mean by coming home like this at seven-fifteen, when he'd told her he wouldn't be back till eight? The old double-crosser! Was he trying to spy on her? Because, if so, she wasn't going to stand for it; if so, then it just served him right that that was what Sig had been reading to her. He was just getting what he deserved for snooping around, trying to catch her doing something that wasn't right. Well, if *that* was how he was going to act, she'd tell Sig to come every day and read another chapter. Though how on earth the man who wrote the book was going to keep it up for a hundred and twenty days she really couldn't imagine. Considering what had happened already in the first week — and here was she, figuring that there wasn't anything she didn't know! Well, one lived and learned. Though there was some of it she really hadn't in the least wanted to learn. Things that made you feel sick to your stomach. Horrible! As bad as having babies! (She shuddered.) Not that there weren't a lot of funny things in the book too. The piece she had made Sig read over again — that was grand, that had given her a real kick. And that other bit where the girl …

‘Well, Baby,’ said Mr. Stoyte, as he did up the last button of his waistcoat. ‘You’re not saying much, are you? A penny for your thoughts.’

Virginia raised that childishly short upper lip in a smile that made his heart melt with tenderness and desire. ‘I was thinking about you, Uncle Jo,’ she said.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IF THOU APPEAR untouch'd by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine;
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

'AND VERY NICE too,' Jeremy said aloud. *Transparent* was the word, he reflected. The meaning was there like a fly in amber. Or, rather, there was no fly; there was only the amber; and the amber was the meaning. He looked at his watch. Three minutes to midnight. He closed his Wordsworth — and to think, he went on bitterly to remind himself, to think that he might have been refreshing his memory of *Félicia*! — laid the volume down on the table beside his bed and took off his glasses. Deprived of their six and a half diopters of correction, his eyes were instantly reduced to a state of physiological despair. Curved crystal had become their element; unspectacled, they were like a pair of jellied sea-creatures suddenly taken out of water. Then the light went out; and it was as though the poor things had been mercifully dropped, for safe keeping, into an aquarium.

Jeremy stretched under the bedclothes and yawned. What a day! But now, thank God, the paradise of bed. The Blessed Damozel leaned out from the gold bed of heaven. But these sheets were cotton ones, not linen; which was really a bit discreditable in a house like this! A house full of Rubenses and Grecos — and your sheets were cotton! But that 'Crucifixion of St. Peter' — what a really staggering machine! At least as good as the 'Assumption' at Toledo. Which had probably been blown up by this time, incidentally. Just to demonstrate what happened when people took things too seriously. Not but that, he went on to reflect, there wasn't something rather impressive about that old Propter-Object.

(For that was what he had decided to call the man in his own mind and when he wrote to his mother: the Propter-Object.) A bit of an Ancient Mariner, perhaps. The wedding guest, he beat his breast on occasions; ought perhaps to have beaten it more often than he had done, seeing what a frightful subversion of all the common decencies and, *a fortioro*, the common indecencies (such as *Félicia*, such as every other Friday afternoon in Maida Vale) the creature was inculcating. Not without a considerable persuasiveness, damn his glittering eyes! For this particular Mariner not only held you with that eye of his; he was also and simultaneously the loud bassoon you wanted to hear. One listened without reluctance — though, of course, one had no intention of permitting one's own particular little structures of decencies and indecencies to be subverted. One was not going to allow religion (of all things!) to invade the sanctities of private life. An Englishman's home is his castle; and, curiously enough, an American's castle, as he had discovered after the first shock began to wear off, was turning out to be this particular Englishman's home. His spiritual home. Because it was the embodiment of an imbecile's no-track mind. Because there were no issues and nothing led anywhere and the dilemmas had an infinity of horns and you went round and round, like Fabre's caterpillars, in a closed universe of utter cosiness — round and round among the Hauberk Papers, from St. Peter to La Petite Morphil to Giambologna to the gilded Bodhisattvas in the cellar to the baboons to the Marquis de Sade to St. François de Sales to Félicia and round again in due course to St. Peter. Round and round, like caterpillars inside the mind of an imbecile; round and round in an infinite cosiness of issueless thoughts and feelings and actions, of hermetically bottled art and learning, of culture for its own sake, of self-sufficient little decencies and indecencies, of impassable dilemmas and moral questions sufficiently answered by the circumambient idiocy.

Round and round, round and round, from Peter's feet to Morphil's little buttocks to the baboon's, from the beautiful Chinese spiral of the folds in the Buddha's robe to the humming-bird drinking in mid-air to Peter's feet again with the nails in them … His drowsiness darkened into sleep.

In another room on the same floor of the donjon Pete Boone was not even trying to get to sleep; he was trying, on the contrary, to figure things out. To figure out science and Mr. Propter, social justice and eternity and Virginia and anti-fascism. It wasn't easy. Because, if Mr. Propter was right, then you'd have to start thinking quite differently about almost everything. 'Disinterested quest for truth' — that was what you said (if you were ever forced to say anything so embarrassing about why you were a biologist). And in the case of socialism it was 'humanity,' it was 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number,' it was 'progress' — and, of course, that linked up with biology again: happiness and progress through science as well as socialism. And while happiness and progress were on the way there was loyalty to the cause. He remembered a piece about loyalty by Josiah Royce, a piece he had had to read in his sophomore year at college. Something about all loyal people grasping in their own way some form of religious truth — winning some kind of genuine religious insight. It had made a big impression on him at the time. He had just lost his faith in that old Blood-of-the-Lamb business he'd been brought up in, and this had come as a kind of reassurance, had made him feel that, after all, he *was* religious even if he didn't go to church any more — religious because he was loyal. Loyal to causes, loyal to friends. He had been religious, it had always seemed to him, over there in Spain. Religious, again, when he felt that way about Virginia. And yet, if Mr. Propter was right, old Royce's ideas about loyalty were all wrong. Being loyal didn't of itself give you religious insight. On the contrary, it might prevent you from having insight — indeed, was absolutely certain to prevent you, if you gave your loyalty to anything less than the highest cause of all; and the highest cause of all (if Mr. Propter was right) was almost terrible in its farness and strangeness. Almost terrible; and yet the more he thought about it, the more dubious he felt about everything else. Perhaps it really was the highest. But if it was, then socialism wasn't enough. And it wasn't enough, because humanity wasn't enough. Because the greatest happiness didn't happen to be in the place where people had thought it was, because you couldn't make it come by doing things in the sort of fields you worked in if you were a social reformer. The best you

could do in those fields was to make it easier for people to go on to where the greatest happiness could be had. And, of course, what applied to socialism would apply to biology or any other science, if you thought of it as a means to progress. Because, if Mr. Propter was right, then what people called progress wasn't progress. That is, it wouldn't be progress unless it had made it easier for people to go on to where the greatest happiness actually was. Easier, in other words, to be loyal to the highest cause of all. And, obviously, if that was your standard, you had to think twice about using progress as a justification for science. And then there was that disinterested quest for truth. But again, if Mr. Propter was right, biology and the rest were the disinterested quest for only one aspect of truth. But a half-truth was a falsehood, and it remained a falsehood even when you'd told it in the belief that it was the whole truth. So it looked as though *that* justification wouldn't do either — or at any rate as though it wouldn't do unless you were at the same time disinterestedly trying to discover the other aspect of truth, the aspect you were looking for when you gave your loyalty to the highest cause of all. And meanwhile what about Virginia, he asked himself in mounting anguish, what about Virginia? For, if Mr. Propter were right, then even Virginia wasn't enough, even Virginia might actually be an obstacle to prevent him from giving his loyalty to the highest cause of all. Even those eyes and her innocence and that utterly adorable mouth; even what he felt about her; even love itself, even the best kind of love (for he could honestly say that he hated the other kind — that dreadful brothel in Barcelona, for example, and here, at home, those huggings after the third or fourth cocktail, those gropings by the roadside in a parked car) — yes, even the best kind of love might be inadequate, might actually be worse than inadequate. 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not something or other more.' Hitherto, something or other had been his biology, his socialism. But now these had turned out to be inadequate, or even, taken as ends in themselves, worse than inadequate. No loyalty was good in itself, or brought religious insight except loyalty to the highest cause of all. 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not the highest cause of all more.' But the question, the agonizing question, was this: Could you

love the highest cause of all and go on feeling as you did about Virginia? The worst love was obviously incompatible with loyalty to the highest cause of all. Obviously so; because the worst love was just being loyal to your own physiology, whereas, if Mr. Propter was right, you couldn't be loyal to the highest cause of all without denying such loyalties to yourself. But was the best love so fundamentally different, after all, from the worst? The worst was being loyal to your physiology. It was hateful to admit it; but so too was the best: being loyal to your physiology and at the same time (which was its distinguishing mark) loyal also to your higher feelings — to that empty ache of longing, to that infinity of tenderness, to that adoration, that happiness, those pains, that sense of solitude, that longing for identity. You were loyal to these, and being loyal to these was the definition of the best kind of love, of what people called romance and praised as the most wonderful thing in life. But being loyal to these was being loyal to yourself; and you couldn't be loyal to yourself and loyal at the same time to the highest cause of all. The practical conclusion was obvious. But Pete refused to draw it. Those eyes were blue and limpid, that mouth adorable in its innocence. And then, how sweet she was, how beautifully thoughtful! He remembered the conversation they had had on the way into dinner. He had asked her how her headache was. 'Don't talk about it,' she had whispered; 'it might upset Uncle Jo. Doc's been going over him with his stethoscope; doesn't think he's so good this evening. I don't want to have him worrying about *me*. And anyhow, what is a headache?' Not only beautiful, not only innocent and sweet, but brave too, and unselfish. And how adorable she had been to him all the evening, asking him about his work, telling him about her home in Oregon, making him talk about his home down in El Paso. In the end, Mr. Stoyte had come and sat down beside them — in silence, and his face black as thunder. Pete had glanced enquiringly at Virginia, and she had given him a look that said, 'Please go,' and another when he rose to say good-night, so pleadingly apologetic, so full of gratitude, so understanding, so sweet and affectionate, that the recollection of it was enough to bring the tears into his eyes. Lying there in the darkness, he cried with happiness.

That niche in the wall between the windows in Virginia's bedroom had been intended, no doubt, for a bookshelf. But Virginia was not very keen on books; the recess had been fitted up, instead, as a little shrine. You drew back a pair of short white velvet curtains (everything in the room was white), and there, in a bower of artificial flowers, dressed in real silk clothes, with the cutest little gold crown on her head and six strings of seed pearls round her neck, stood Our Lady, brilliantly illuminated by an ingenious system of concealed electric bulbs. Barefooted and in white satin pyjamas, Virginia was kneeling before this sacred doll's house, saying her evening prayers. Our Lady, it seemed to her, was looking particularly sweet and kind to-night. To-morrow, she decided, while her lips pronounced the formulas of praise and supplications, to-morrow morning, first thing, she'd go right down to the sewing-room and get one of the girls to help her make a new mantle for Our Lady out of that lovely piece of blue brocade she had bought last week at the junk shop in Glendale. A blue brocade mantle, fastened in front with a gold button — or, better still, with a little gold cord that you could tie in a bow, with the ends hanging down, almost to Our Lady's feet. Oh, that would be just gorgeous! She wished it were morning so that she could start right away.

The last prayer had been said; Virginia crossed herself and rose from her knees. Happening to look down as she did so, she saw to her horror that some of the cyclamen-coloured varnish had scaled off the nails of the second and third toes of her left foot. A minute later she was squatting on the floor beside the bed, the right leg outstretched, the other foot drawn across it, making ready to repair the damage. An open bottle stood beside her; she held a small paint-brush in her hand, and a horribly industrial aura of acetone had enveloped the Schiaparelli 'Shocking' with which her body was impregnated. She started to work, and as she bent forward, two strands of auburn hair broke loose from their curly pattern and fell across her forehead. Under frowning brows, the large blue eyes intently stared. To aid concentration, the tip of a pink tongue was held between the teeth. 'Hell!' she suddenly said aloud, as the little brush made a false stroke. Then, immediately, the teeth clamped down again.

Interrupting her work to allow the first coat of varnish to dry, she shifted her scrutiny from the toes to the calf and shin of her left leg. The hairs were beginning to grow again, she noticed with annoyance; it would soon be time for another of those wax treatments. Still pensively caressing the leg, she let her mind travel back over the events of the day. The memory of that close call with Uncle Jo still gave her shivers of apprehensive excitement. Then she thought of Sig with his stethoscope, and the upper lip lifted ravishingly in a smile of amusement. And then there was that book, which it served Uncle Jo right that she should have had Sig read to her. And Sig getting fresh with her between the chapters and making passes: that also served Uncle Jo right for trying to spy on her. She remembered how mad she had got at Sig. Not so much for what he actually did; for besides serving Uncle Jo right (of course it was only *afterwards* that she discovered quite how right it served him), what he actually did had been rather thrilling than otherwise; because, after all, Sig was terribly attractive and in those ways Uncle Jo didn't hardly count — in fact, you might almost say that he counted the other way; in the red, so to speak; counted less than nobody, so that anybody else who *was* attractive seemed still more attractive when Uncle Jo had been around. No, it wasn't what he actually did that had made her mad at him. It was the way he did it. Laughing at her, like that. She didn't mind a bit of kidding at ordinary times. But kidding while he was actually making passes — that was treating her like she was a tart on Main Street. No romance, or anything; just that sniggering sort of laugh and a lot of dirty cracks. Maybe it was sophisticated; but she didn't like it. And didn't he see that it was just plain dumb to act that way? Because, after all, when you'd been reading that book with someone so attractive as Sig — well, you felt you'd like a bit of romance. Real romance, like in the pictures, with moonlight, and swing music, or perhaps a torch singer (because it was nice to feel sad when you were happy), and a boy saying lovely things to you, and a lot of kissing, and at the end of it, almost without your knowing it, almost as if it weren't happening to you, so that you never felt there was anything wrong, anything that Our Lady would really mind … Virginia sighed deeply and shut her eyes; her face took on an expression of

seraphic tranquillity. Then she sighed again, shook her head and frowned. Instead of that, she was thinking angrily, instead of that, Sig had to go and spoil it all by acting hard-boiled and sophisticated. It just shot all the romance to pieces and made you feel mad at him. And what was the sense in that? Virginia concluded resentfully. What was the sense in that, either from his point of view or from hers?

The first coat of varnish seemed to be dry. Bending over her foot, she blew on her toes for a little, then started to apply the second coat. Behind her, all of a sudden, the door of the bedroom was opened and as gently closed again.

‘Uncle Jo?’ she said enquiringly and with a note of surprise in her voice, but without looking up from her enamelling.

There was no answer, only the sound of an approach across the room.

‘Uncle Jo?’ she repeated and, this time, interrupted the painting of her toes to turn round.

Dr. Obispo was standing over her. ‘Sig!’ Her voice dropped to a whisper. ‘What *are* you doing?’

Dr. Obispo smiled his smile of ironic admiration, of intense and at the same time amused and mocking concupiscence. ‘I thought we might go on with our French lesson,’ he said.

‘You’re crazy!’ She looked apprehensively towards the door. ‘He’s just across the hall. He might come in.…’

Dr. Obispo’s smile broadened to a grin. ‘Don’t worry about Uncle Jo,’ he said.

‘He’d kill you if he found you here.’

‘He won’t find me here,’ Dr. Obispo answered. ‘I gave him a capsule of Nembutal before he went to bed. He’ll sleep through the Last Trump.’

‘I think you’re awful!’ said Virginia emphatically; but she couldn’t help laughing, partly out of relief and partly because it really was rather funny to think of Uncle Jo snoring away next door while Sig read her that stuff.

Dr. Obispo pulled the Book of Common Prayer out of his pocket. ‘Don’t let me interrupt your labours,’ he said with the parody of chivalrous politeness. ‘“A

woman's work is never done." Just go on as though I weren't there. I'll find the place and start reading.' Smiling at her with imperturbable impudence, he sat down on the edge of the rococo bed and turned over the pages of the book.

Virginia opened her mouth to speak; then, catching hold of her left foot, closed it again under the compulsion of a need even more urgent than that of telling him exactly where he got off. The varnish was drying in lumps; her toes would look just awful if she didn't go on with them at once. Hastily dipping her little brush in the bottle of acetone enamel, she started painting again with the focussed intensity of a Van Eyck at work on the microscopic details of the 'Adoration of the Lamb.'

Dr. Obispo looked up from the book. 'I admired the way you acted with Pete this evening,' he said. 'Flirting with him all through dinner, so that you got the old man hopping jealous of him. That was masterly. Or should one say mistressly?'

Virginia released her tongue to say emphatically, 'Pete's a nice boy.'

'But dumb,' Dr. Obispo qualified, as he sprawled with conscious elegance and a maddeningly insolent assumption of being at home across the bed.

'Otherwise he wouldn't be in love with you the way he is.' He uttered a snort of laughter. 'The poor chump thinks you're an angel, a heavenly little angel, complete with wings, harp and genuine eighteen-carat, fully jewelled, Swiss-made virginity. Well, if that isn't being dumb …'

'You just wait till I get time for you,' said Virginia menacingly, but without looking up; for she had reached a critical phase in the execution of her work of art.

Dr. Obispo ignored the remark. 'I used to underestimate the value of an education in the humanities,' he said after a little silence. 'Now, I make that mistake no longer.' In a tone of deep solemnity, a tone, one might imagine, like Whittier's in a reading from his own works. 'The lessons of great literature!' he went on. 'The deep truths! The gems of wisdom!'

'Oh, shut up!' said Virginia.

‘When I think what I owe Dante and Goethe,’ said Dr. Obispo in the same prophetic style. ‘Take the case of Paolo reading aloud to Francesca. With the most fruitful results, if you remember. “*Noi leggevamo un giorno, per diletto, di Lancilotto, come amor lo strinse. Soli eravamo e senz’ alcun sospetto. Senz’ alcun sospetto,*”’ Dr. Obispo repeated with emphasis, looking, as he did so, at one of the engravings in the *Cent-Vingt Jours.* ‘Not the smallest suspicion, mark you, of what was going to happen.’

‘Hell!’ said Virginia, who had made another slip.

‘No, not even a suspicion of hell,’ Dr. Obispo insisted. ‘Though, of course, they ought to have been on the look-out for it. They ought to have had the elementary prudence to guard against being sent there by the accident of sudden death. A few simple precautions, and they could have made the best of both worlds. Could have had their fun while the brother was out of the way and, when the time for having fun was over, could have repented and died in the odour of sanctity. But then it must be admitted that they hadn’t the advantage of reading Goethe’s *Faust.* They hadn’t learnt that inconvenient relatives could be given sleeping-draughts. And even if they had learnt, they wouldn’t have been able to go to the drug-store and buy a bottle of Nembutal. Which shows that education in the humanities isn’t enough; there must also be education in science. Dante and Goethe to teach you what to do. And the professor of pharmacology to show you how to put the old buzzard into a coma with a pinch of barbiturate.’

The toes were finished. Still holding her left foot, so as to keep it from any damaging contact until the varnish should be entirely dry, Virginia turned on her visitor. ‘I won’t have you calling him an old buzzard,’ she said hotly.

‘Well, shall we say “bastard”?’ Dr. Obispo suggested.

‘He’s a better man than you’ll ever be!’ Virginia cried; and her voice had the ring of sincerity. ‘I think he’s wonderful.’

‘You think he’s wonderful,’ Dr. Obispo repeated. ‘But all the same, in about fifteen minutes you’ll be sleeping with me.’ He laughed as he spoke and, leaning forward from his place on the bed, caught her two arms from behind, a little

below the shoulders. ‘Look out for your toes,’ he said, as Virginia cried out and tried to wrench herself away from him.

The fear of ruining her masterpiece made her check the movement before it was more than barely initiated. Dr. Obispo took advantage of her hesitation to stoop down, through the aura of acetone towards the nape of that delicious neck, towards the perfume of ‘Shocking,’ towards a firm warmth against the mouth, a touch of hair like silk upon the cheeks. Swearing, Virginia furiously jerked her head away. But a fine tingling of agreeable sensation was running parallel, so to speak, with her indignation, was incorporating itself in it.

This time, Dr. Obispo kissed her behind the ear. ‘Shall I tell you,’ he whispered, ‘what I’m going to do to you?’ She answered by calling him a lousy ape-man. But he told her all the same, in considerable detail.

Less than fifteen minutes had elapsed when Virginia opened her eyes and, across the now darkened room, caught sight of Our Lady smiling benignantly from among the flowers of her illuminated doll’s house. With a cry of dismay she jumped up and, without waiting to put on any clothes, ran to the shrine and drew the curtains. The lights went out automatically. Stretching out her hands in the thick darkness, she groped her way cautiously back to bed.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

‘AGAIN, NO DEARTH of news,’ Jeremy wrote to his mother three weeks later. ‘News of every kind and from all the centuries. Here’s a bit of news, to begin with, about the Second Earl. In the intervals of losing battles for Charles I, the Second Earl was a poet. A bad poet, of course (for the chances are always several thousands to one against any given poet being good), but with occasional involuntary deviations into charm. What about this, for example, which I found in manuscript only yesterday?

One taper burns, but ’tis too much;
Our loves demand complete eclipse.
Let sight give place to amorous touch,
And candle-light to limbs and lips!

Rather pretty, don’t you think? But, alas, almost the only nugget so far unearthed from the alluvium. If only the rest were silence! But that’s the trouble with poets, good no less than bad. They will not keep their traps shut, as we say in the Western hemisphere. What joy if the rest of Wordsworth had been silence, the rest of Coleridge, the rest of Shelley!

‘Meanwhile, the Fifth Earl sprang a surprise on me yesterday in the form of a notebook full of miscellaneous jottings. I have only just started on them (for I mustn’t spend all my time on any one item till I have the whole collection unpacked and roughly catalogued); but the fragments I’ve read are decidedly appetizing. I found this on the first page: “Lord Chesterfield writes to his Son that a Gentleman never speaks to his footman, nor even the beggar in the street, *d’un ton brusque*, but ‘corrects the one coolly and refuses the other with humanity.…’ His lordship should have added that there is an Art by which such coolness may be rendered no less formidable than Anger and such humanity more wounding than Insult.

‘“Furthermore, footmen and beggars are not the only objects on whom this Art may be exercised. His lordship has been ungallant enough in this instance to forget the Sex, for there is also an Art of coolly outraging a devoted female, and of abusing her Person, with all the *bienséance* befitting the most accomplished Gentleman.”

‘Not a bad beginning! I will keep you posted of any subsequent discoveries in this field.

‘Meanwhile, contemporary news is odd, confused and a bit disagreeable. To begin with, Uncle Jo is chronically glum and ill-tempered these days. I suspect the green-eyed monster; for the blue-eyed monster (in other words, Miss Maunciple, the Baby) has been rolling them, for some time now, in the direction of young Pete. Whether she rolls more than the eyes, I don’t know; but suspect the fact; for she has that inward, dreamy look, that far-away sleep-walker’s expression, which one often remarks on the faces of young ladies who have been doing a lot of strenuous love-making. You know the expression I mean: exquisitely spiritual and pre-Raphaelitish. One has only to look at such a face to *know* that God Exists. The one incongruous feature in the present instance is the costume. A pre-Raphaelite expression demands pre-Raphaelite clothes: long sleeves, square yokes, yards and yards of Liberty velveteen. When you see it, as I did to-day, in combination with white shorts, a bandana and a cowboy hat, you’re disturbed, you’re all put out. Meanwhile, in defence of Baby’s Honour, I must insist that all this is mere hypothesis and guess-work. It may be, of course, that this new, spiritual expression of hers is not the result of amorous fatigue. For all I know to the contrary, Baby may have been converted by the teachings of the Propter-Object and is now walking about in a state of perpetual *samadhi*. On the other hand, I *do* see her giving the glad eye to Pete. What’s more, Uncle Jo exhibits all the symptoms of being suspicious of them and extremely cross with everybody else. With me among others, of course. Perhaps even more with me than with others, because I happen to have read more books than the rest and am therefore more of a symbol of Culture. And Culture, of course, is a thing for which he has positively a Tartar’s hatred. Only, unlike the Tartars, he doesn’t

want to burn the monuments of Culture, he wants to buy them up. He expresses his superiority to talent and education by means of possession rather than destruction; by hiring and then insulting the talented and educated rather than by killing them. (Though perhaps he would kill them if he had the Tartar's opportunities and power.) All this means that, when I am not in bed or safely underground with the Hauberks, I spend most of my time grinning and bearing, thinking of Jelly-Belly and my nice salary, in order not to think too much of Uncle Jo's bad manners. It's all very unpleasant; but fortunately not unbearable — and the Hauberks are an immense consolation and compensation.

'So much for the erotic and cultural fronts. On the scientific front, the news is that we're all perceptibly nearer to living as long as crocodiles. At the time of writing, I haven't decided whether I really want to live as long as a crocodile.' (With the penning of the second 'crocodile,' Jeremy was seized by a sudden qualm. His mother would be seventy-seven in August. Under that urbanity of hers, under the crackled glaze of the admirable conversation, there was a passionate greed for life. She would talk matter-of-factly enough about her own approaching extinction; she would make little jokes about her death and funeral. But behind the talk and the little jokes there lurked, as Jeremy knew, a fierce determination to hold on to what was left, to go on doing what she had always done, in the teeth of death, in defiance of old age. This talk of crocodiles might give pain; this expression of doubt as to the desirability of prolonging life might be interpreted as an unfavourable criticism. Jeremy took a new sheet of paper and started the paragraph afresh.)

'So much for the erotic and cultural fronts,' he wrote. 'On the scientific front, *rien de nouveau*, except that the Obispo is being more bumptious than ever; which isn't news, because he's always more bumptious than ever. Not one of my favourite characters, I'm afraid: though not unamusing when one feels inclined for a few moments of ribaldry. Longevity, it appears, is making headway. Old Parr and the Countess of Desmond are on the march.

'And what of the religious front? Well, our Propter-Object has given up his attempts at edification, at any rate so far as I'm concerned. Thank heaven! for

when he dismounts from his hobby-horse, what excellent company he is! A mind full of all kinds of oddments; and the oddments are pigeon-holed in apple-pie order. One rather envies him his intellectual coherence; but consoles oneself by thinking that, if one had them, they'd spoil one's own particular little trick. When one has a gift for standing gracefully on one's head, one is foolish and ungrateful to envy the Marathon-runner. A funny little literary article in the hand is worth at least three Critiques of Pure Reason in the bush.

'My final item is from the home front and refers to your last letter from Grasse. What a feast! Your account of Mme de Villemomble was really Proustian. And as for the description of your drive to Cap d'Ail and your day with what remains of the Princess and *ce pauvre Hunyadi* — well, all I can say is that it was worthy of Murasaki: the essence of all tragedy refined to a couple of tablespoonfuls of amber-coloured tea in a porcelain cup no bigger than a magnolia flower. What an admirable lesson in the art of literary chastity! My own tendencies — only in the world of letters, I am thankful to say — are towards a certain exhibitionism. This vestal prose of yours puts me to shame.

'Well, there is nothing more to say, as I used to write when I was at school — very large, do you remember? in an effort to make the words fill up half a page of note-paper. There is nothing more to say, except, of course, the unsayable, which I leave unsaid because you know it already.'

Jeremy sealed up his letter, addressed it — to The Araucarias, for his mother would be back from Grasse by the time it had crossed the Atlantic — and slipped the envelope into his pocket. All around him the Hauberk Papers clamoured for his attention; but for some time he remained idle. His elbow on the desk, in an attitude of prayer, he meditatively scratched his head; scratched it with both hands where little spots had formed the dry scabs at the roots of the hair that still remained to him, scabs which it was an exquisite pleasure to prise up with the finger-nails and carefully detach. He was thinking of his mother and how curious it was, after all, that one should have read all the Freudian literature about the Oedipus business, all the novels, from *Sons and Lovers* downwards, about the dangers of too much filial devotion, the menace of excessive maternal

love — that one should have read them all, and still, with one's eyes open, go on being what one was: the victim of a greedy, possessive mother. And perhaps even odder was the fact that this possessive mother had also read all the relevant literature and was also perfectly aware of what she was and what she had done to her son. And yet she too went on being and doing what she had always been and done, just as he did, and with eyes no less open than his own. (There! the scab under the right hand had come loose. He pulled it out through the thick tufted hair above his ears and, as he looked at the tiny desiccated shred of tissue, was suddenly reminded of the baboons. But, after all, why not? The most certain and abiding pleasures are the tiniest, the simplest, the rudimentarily animal — the pleasure of lying in a hot bath, for example, or under the bedclothes, between waking and sleeping, in the morning; the pleasure of answering the calls of nature, the pleasure of being rubbed by a good masseur, the pleasure finally of scratching when one itched. Why be ashamed? He dropped the scab into the waste-paper basket and continued to scratch with the left hand.)

Nothing like self-knowledge, he reflected. To know why you do a thing that is wrong or stupid is to have an excuse for going on doing it. Justification by psychoanalysis — the modern substitute for justification by faith. You know the distant causes which made you a sadist or a money-grubber, a mother-worshipper or a son-cannibal; therefore you are completely justified in continuing to be a son-cannibal, mother-worshipper, money-grubber or sadist. No wonder if whole generations had risen up to bless the name of Freud! Well, that was how he and his mother managed things. 'We blood-sucking matriarchs!' Mrs. Pordage used to say of herself — in the presence of the Rector, what was more. Or else it was into Lady Fredegond's ear-trumpet that she proclaimed her innocence. 'Old Jocastas like me, with a middle-aged son in the house,' she would shout. And Jeremy would play up to her by coming across the room and bellowing into that tomb of intelligent conversation some feeble waggery about his being an old maid, for example, or about erudition as a substitute for embroidery; any rot would do. And the old harridan would utter that deep gangster's laugh of hers and wag her head till the stuffed sea-gulls, or

the artificial petunias, or whatever it was that she happened to be wearing in her always extraordinary hat, nodded like the plumes of a horse in a French *pompe funèbre* of the first class. Yes, how curious it was, he said to himself again; but how sensible, considering that they both, his mother and he, desired nothing better than to go on being just what they were. Her reasons for wanting to go on being a matriarch were obvious enough; it's fun to be a queen, it's delightful to receive homage and have a faithful subject. Less obvious, perhaps, at any rate to an outsider, were his own reasons for preferring the *status quo.* But, looked into, they turned out to be cogent enough. There was affection to begin with; for, under a certain superficial irony and airiness, he was deeply attached to his mother. Then there was habit — habit so long standing that his mother had come to be for him almost like an organ of his own body, hardly less dispensable than his pancreas or his liver. There was even a feeling of gratitude towards her for having done to him the things which, at the time she did them, had seemed the most cruelly unjustifiable. He had fallen in love when he was thirty; he had wanted to marry. Without making a single scene, without being anything but sympathetically loving towards himself and charming in all her dealings with dear little Eileen, Mrs. Pordage had set to work to undermine the relationship between the two young people; and had succeeded so well that, in the end, the relationship just fell in on itself, like a house sapped from beneath. He had been very unhappy at the time, and with a part of himself he had hated his mother for what she had done. But as the years passed he had felt less and less bitterly about the whole business, until now he was positively grateful to her for having delivered him from the horrors of responsibility, of a family, of regular and remunerative labour, of a wife who would probably have turned out to be a worse tyrant than his mother — indeed, who would certainly have turned out to be a worse tyrant; for the bulging, bustling matron into whom Eileen had by degrees transformed herself was one of the most disastrous females of his acquaintance: a creature passionately conventional, proud of her obtuseness, ant-like in her efficiency, tyrannically benevolent. In short, a monster. But for his mother's strategy he would now be the unfortunate Mr. Welkin who was

Eileen’s husband and the father of no less than four little Welkins as dreadful even in childhood and adolescence as Eileen had become in her middle age. His mother was doubtless speaking the truth when she jokingly called herself an old Jocasta, a blood-sucking matriarch; and doubtless, too, his brother Tom was right when he called him, Jeremy, a Peter Pan, and talked contemptuously of apron-strings. But the fact remained that he had had the opportunity to read what he liked and write his little articles; and that his mother saw to all the practical aspects of life, demanded in return an amount of devotion which it really wasn’t very difficult to give, and left him free, on alternate Friday afternoons, to savour the refined pleasures of an infinite squalor in Maida Vale. Meanwhile, look what had happened to poor Tom! Second Secretary at Tokyo; First Secretary at Oslo; Counsellor at La Paz; and now back, more or less for good, in the Foreign Office, climbing slowly up the hierarchy, towards posts of greater responsibility and tasks of increasing turpitude. And as the salary rose and the morality of what he was called upon to do correspondingly sank, the poor fellow’s uneasiness had increased, until at last, with the row over Abyssinia, he just hadn’t been able to stand it any longer. On the brink of resignation or a nervous breakdown, he had managed, in the nick of time, to get himself converted to Catholicism. Thenceforward, he had been able to pack up the moral responsibility for his share in the general iniquity, take it to Farm Street and leave it there, in camphor, so to speak, with the Jesuit Fathers. Admirable arrangement! It had made a new man of him. After fourteen years of childlessness, his wife had suddenly had a baby — conceived, Jeremy had calculated, on the very night that the Spanish civil war began. Then, two days after the sack of Nanking, Tom had published a volume of comic verses. (Curious how many English Catholics take to comic versifying.) Meanwhile, he was steadily gaining weight; between the *Anschluss* and Munich he had put on eleven pounds. Another year or two of Farm Street and power-politics, and Tom would turn the scale at fourteen stone and have written the libretto of a musical comedy. No! Jeremy said to himself with decision. No! it simply wasn’t admissible. Better Peter Pan and apron-strings and infinite squalor in a little room. Better a thousand times. Better to begin

with, aesthetically; for this getting fat on *Realpolitik*, this scribbling of comic verses on the margins of an engraving of the Crucifixion — really, it was too inelegant. And that wasn't all: it was better even ethically; for, of course, the old Propter-Object was right: if you can't be sure of doing positive good, at least keep out of mischief. And there was poor old Tom, as busy as a beaver and, now that he was a Papist, as happy as a lark, working away at the precise spot where he could do the maximum amount of harm to the greatest possible number of people.

(The other scab came loose. Jeremy sighed and leaned back in his chair.)

One scratched like a baboon, he concluded; one lived, at fifty-four, in the security of one's mother's shadow; one's sexual life was simultaneously infantile and corrupt; by no stretch of the imagination could one's work be described as useful or important. But when one compared oneself with other people, with Tom, for example, or even with the eminent and august, with cabinet ministers and steel-magnates and bishops and celebrated novelists — well, really, one didn't come out so badly after all. Judged by the negative criterion of harmlessness, one even came out extremely well. So that, taking all things into consideration, there was really no reason why one should do anything much about anything. Having decided which, it was time to get back to the Hauberks.

CHAPTER TWO

VIRGINIA DID NOT wake up that morning till nearly ten; and even after having had her bath and eaten her breakfast she remained in bed for another hour or more, her eyes closed, leaning back motionless against the heaped-up pillows, like a beautiful young convalescent newly emerged from the valley of the shadow.

The valley of the shadow of death; of the greater deaths and all the little deaths. Through deaths come transfigurations. He who would save his life must lose it. Men and women are continually trying to lose their lives, the stale, unprofitable, senseless lives of their ordinary personalities. For ever trying to get rid of them, and in a thousand different ways. In the frenzies of gambling and revivalism; in the monomanias of avarice and perversion, of research and sectarianism and ambition; in the compensatory lunacies of alcohol, of reading, of daydreaming, of morphia; in the hallucinations of opium and the cinema and ritual; in the wild epilepsies of political enthusiasm and erotic pleasure; in the stupors of veronal and exhaustion. To escape; to forget one's own, old, wearisome identity; to become someone else or, better, some other *thing* — a mere body, strangely numbed or more than ordinarily sentient; or else just a state of impersonal mind, a mode of unindividualized consciousness. What happiness, what a blissful alleviation! Even for such as were not previously aware that there was anything in their condition that needed to be alleviated. Virginia had been one of those, happy in limitation, not sufficiently conscious of her personal self to realize its ugliness and inadequacy, or the fundamental wretchedness of the human state. And yet, when Dr. Obispo had scientifically engineered her escape into an erotic epilepsy more excruciatingly intense than anything she had known before or even imagined possible, Virginia had realized that, after all, there was something in her existence that required alleviating, and that this headlong

plunge through an intenser, utterly alien consciousness into the darkness of a total oblivion was precisely the alleviation it required.

But, like all the other addictions, whether to drugs or books, to power or applause, the addiction to pleasure tends to aggravate the condition it temporarily alleviates. The addict goes down into the valley of the shadow of his own particular little death — down indefatigably, desperately down in search of something else, something not himself, something other and better than the life he miserably lives as a human person in the hideous world of human persons. He goes down and, either violently or in delicious inertia, he dies and is transfigured; but dies only for a little while, is transfigured only momentarily. After the little death is a little resurrection, a resurrection out of unconsciousness, out of self-annihilating excitement, back into the misery of knowing oneself alone and weak and worthless, back into a completer separateness, an acuter sense of personality. And the acuter the sense of separate personality, the more urgent the demand for yet another experience of assuaging death and transfiguration. The addiction alleviates, but in doing so increases the pains demanding alleviation.

Lying there, propped up against her pillows, Virginia was suffering her daily resurrection from the valley of the shadow of her nocturnal deaths. From having been epileptically something else, she was becoming her own self again — a self, it was true, still somewhat numbed and bewildered by fatigue, still haunted by the memory of strange scenes and overpowering sensations, but none the less recognizably the old Virginia; the Virginia who admired Uncle Jo for his success and was grateful to him for having given her such a wonderful time, the Virginia who had always laughed and thought life grand and never bothered about things, the Virginia who had made Uncle Jo build the Grotto and had loved Our Lady ever since she was a kid. And now this Virginia was double-crossing her poor old, admired Uncle Jo — not just telling a few little fibs, which might happen to anyone, but deliberately and systematically double-crossing him. And not only him; she was also double-crossing poor Pete. Talking to him all the time; giving him the glad eye (as glad an eye, at any rate, as she was capable of giving in the

circumstances); practically making love to him in public, so that Uncle Jo wouldn't suspect Sig. Not that she wouldn't be glad in some ways if Uncle Jo did suspect him. She'd love to see him getting a punch on the jaw and being thrown out. Just love it! But meanwhile she was doing everything she could to cover him up; and in the process making that poor, idiot boy imagine she was stuck on him. A double-crosser — that was all she was. A double-crosser. The knowledge of this worried her, it made her feel unhappy and ashamed; it prevented her laughing at things the way she used to; it kept her thinking, and feeling bad about what she was doing, and resolving not to do it again; resolving, but not being able to prevent herself doing it again, even though she really hated herself for doing it and hated Sig for making her and, above all, for telling her, in that horrible, hard-boiled, cynical way, just how he made her and why she couldn't resist it. And one of the reasons why she had to do it again was that it stopped her feeling bad about having done it before. But then, afterwards, she felt bad again. Felt so bad, indeed, that she had been ashamed to look Our Lady in the face. For more than a week now the white velvet curtains across the front of the sacred doll's house had remained drawn. She simply didn't dare to open them, because she knew that if she did, and if she made a promise there, on her knees, to Our Lady, it just wouldn't be any good. When that awful Sig came along again, she'd just go all funny inside, like her bones had all turned into rubber, and the strength would go out of her and, before she knew where she was, it would all be happening again. And that would be much worse than the other times, because she'd made a promise about it to Our Lady. So that it was better not to make any promise at all — not now, at any rate; not until there seemed to be some chance of keeping it. Because it just couldn't last this way for ever; she simply refused to believe she'd always have that awful rubber feeling in her bones. Some day she'd feel strong enough to tell Sig to go to hell. And when she did, she'd make that promise. Till then, better not.

Virginia opened her eyes, and looked with a nostalgic expression at the niche between the windows and the drawn white curtains that concealed the treasure within — the cunning little crown, the seed pearls, the mantle of blue silk, the

benignant face, the adorable little hands. Virginia sighed profoundly and, closing her eyes again, tried, by a simulation of sleep, to recapture the happy oblivion from which the light of morning had forced her unwillingly to emerge.

CHAPTER THREE

MR. STOYTE HAD SPENT his morning at the Beverly Pantheon. Very reluctantly; for he had a horror of cemeteries, even his own. But the claims of moneymaking were sacred; business was a duty to which all merely personal considerations had to be sacrificed. And talk of business! The Beverly Pantheon was the finest real estate proposition in the country. The land had been bought during the War at five hundred dollars an acre, improved (with roads, Tiny Tajes, Columbariums and statuary) to the tune of about ten thousand an acre, and was now selling, in grave-sites, at the rate of a hundred and sixty thousand an acre — selling so fast that the entire capital outlay had already been amortized, so that everything from now on would be pure jam. And, of course, as the population of Los Angeles increased, the jam would become correspondingly more copious. And the population *was* increasing, at the rate of nearly ten per cent, per annum — and, what was more, the main accessions consisted of elderly retired people from other States of the Union; the very people who would bring the greatest immediate profit to the Pantheon. And so, when Charlie Habakkuk sent that urgent call for him to come over and discuss the latest plans of improvements and extensions, Mr. Stoyte had found it morally impossible to refuse. Repressing his antipathies, he had done his duty. All that morning the two men had sat with their cigars in Charlie's office at the top of the Tower of Resurrection; and Charlie had waved those hands of his, and spouted cigar-smoke from his nostrils, and talked — God, how he had talked! As though he were one of those men in a red fez trying to make you buy an Oriental carpet — and incidentally, Mr. Stoyte reflected morosely, that was what Charlie looked like; only he was better fed than most of those carpet boys, and therefore greasier.

‘Cut the sales talk,’ he growled out loud. ‘You seem to forget I own the place.’

Charlie looked at him with an expression of pained surprise. Sales talk? But this wasn’t sales talk. This was real, this was earnest. The Pantheon was his baby; for all practical purposes he had invented the place. It was he who had thought up the Tiny Taj and the Church of the Bard; he who, on his own initiative, had bought that bargain lot of statues at Genoa; he who had first clearly formulated the policy of injecting sex-appeal into death; he who had resolutely resisted every attempt to introduce into the cemetery any representation of grief or age, any symbol of mortality, any image of the sufferings of Jesus. He had had to fight for his ideas, he had had to listen to a lot of criticism; but the results had proved him right. Anyone who complained that there was no Crucifixion in the place could be referred to the published accounts. And here was Mr. Stoyte talking sarcastically about sales talk. Sales talk, indeed, when the demand for space in the Pantheon was so great that existing accommodation would soon be inadequate. There would have to be enlargements. More space, more buildings, more amenities. Bigger and better; progress; service.

In the top of the Tower of Resurrection, Charlie Habakkuk unfolded his plans. The new extension was to have a Poets’ Corner, open to any bona fide writer — though he was afraid they’d have to draw the line at the authors of advertising copy, which was a pity, because a *lot of* them made good money and might be persuaded to pay extra for the prestige of being buried with the moving-picture people. But that cut both ways — because the scenario writers wouldn’t feel that the Poets’ Corner was exclusive enough if you let in the advertising boys. And seeing that the moving-picture fellows made so much more than the others … well, it stood to reason, Charlie had concluded, it stood to reason. And, of course, they’d have to have a replica of Westminster Abbey in the Poets’ Corner. Wee Westminster — it would sound kind of cute. And as they needed a couple of extra mortuary furnaces anyhow, they’d have them installed there in the Dean’s Yard. And they’d put a new automatic record-player in the

crypt, so that there'd be more variety in the music. Not that people didn't appreciate the Perpetual Wurlitzer; they did. But all the same it got a bit monotonous. So he'd thought they might have some recordings of a choir singing hymns and things, and perhaps, every now and then, just for a change, some preacher giving an inspirational message, so that you'd be able to sit in the Garden of Contemplation, for example, and listen to the Wurlitzer for a few minutes, and then the choir singing 'Abide with Me,' and then a nice sort of Barrymore voice saying some piece, like the Gettysburg Address, or 'Laugh and the World Laughs with You,' or maybe some nice juicy bit by Mrs. Eddy or Ralph Waldo Trine — anything would do so long as it was inspirational enough. And then there was his idea of the Catacombs. And, boy, it was the best idea he'd ever had. Leading Mr. Stoyte to the southeastern window, he had pointed across an intervening valley of tombs and cypresses and the miniature monuments of bogus antiquity, to where the land sloped up again to a serrated ridge on the further side. There, he had shouted excitedly, there, in that hump in the middle; they'd tunnel down into that. Hundreds of yards of catacombs. Lined with reinforced concrete to make them earthquake-proof. The only class-A catacombs in the world. And little chapels, like the ones in Rome. And a lot of phoney-looking murals, looking like they were real old. You could get them done cheap by one of those W.P.A. art projects. Not that those guys knew how to paint, of course; but that was quite O.K. seeing that the murals had to look phoney anyhow. And they wouldn't have anything but candles and little lamps for people to carry around — no electric light at all, except right at the very end of all those winding passages and stairs, where there'd be a great big sort of underground church, with one of those big nude statues that were going up at the San Francisco Fair and that they'd be glad to sell for a thousand bucks or even less when the show was over — one of those modernistic broads with muscles on them — and they'd have her standing right in the middle there, with maybe some fountain spouting all around her and concealed pink lighting in the water so she'd look kind of real. Why, the tourists would come a thousand miles to see it. Because there was nothing people liked so much as caves. Look at those

Carlsbad Caverns, for example; and all those caves in Virginia. And those were just common-or-garden natural caves, without murals or anything. Whereas these would be catacombs. Yes, sir; real catacombs, like the things the Christian Martyrs lived in — and, by gum, that was another idea! Martyrs! Why wouldn't they have a Chapel of the Martyrs with a nice plaster group of some girls with no clothes on, just going to be eaten by a lion? People wouldn't stand for the Crucifixion; but they'd get a real thrill out of that.

Mr. Stoyte had listened wearily and with repugnance. He loathed his Pantheon and everything to do with it. Loathed it because in spite of statues and Wurlitzer, it spoke to him of nothing but disease and death and corruption and final judgment; because it was here, in the Pantheon, that they would bury him — at the foot of the pedestal of Rodin's '*Le Baiser.*' (An assistant manager had once inadvisedly pointed out the spot to him and been immediately fired; but there was no dismissing the memory of his offence.) Charlie's enthusiasm for catacombs and Wee Westminsters elicited no answering warmth; only occasional grunts and a final sullen O.K. for everything except the Chapel of the Martyrs. Not that the Chapel of the Martyrs seemed to Mr. Stoyte a bad idea; on the contrary, he was convinced that the public would go crazy over it. If he rejected it, it was merely on principle — because it would never do to allow Charlie Habakkuk to think he was always right.

'Get plans and estimates for everything else,' he ordered in a tone so gruff that he might have been delivering a reprimand. 'But no martyrs. I won't have any martyrs.'

Almost in tears, Charlie pleaded for just one lion, just one Early Christian Virgin with her hands tied behind her back — because people got such a kick out of anything to do with ropes or handcuffs. Two or three Virgins would have been much better, of course; but he'd be content with one. 'Just one, Mr. Stoyte,' he implored, clasping his eloquent hands. 'Only one.'

Obstinately deaf to all his entreaties, Mr. Stoyte shook his head. 'No martyrs here,' he said. 'That's final.' And to show that it was final, he threw away the butt of his cigar and got up to go.

Five minutes later, Charlie Habakkuk was letting off steam to his secretary. The ingratitude of people! The stupidity! He'd a good mind to resign, just to show the old buzzard that they couldn't get on without him. Not for five minutes. Who was it that had made the place what it was: the uniquest cemetery in the world? Absolutely the uniquest. Who? (Charlie slapped himself on the chest.) And who made all the money? Jo Stoyte. And what had *he* done to make the place a success? Absolutely nothing at all. It was enough to make you want to be a communist. And the old devil wasn't grateful or even decently polite. Pushing you around as though you were a bum off the streets! Well, there was one comfort: Old Jo hadn't been looking any too good this morning. One of these days, maybe, they'd have the pleasure of burying him. Down there in the vestibule of the Columbarium, eight foot underground. And serve him right!

It was not only that he didn't look too good; leaning back in the car which was taking him down to Beverly Hills on his way to see Clancy, Mr. Stoyte was thinking, as he had thought so often during these last two or three weeks, that he didn't feel too good. He'd wake up in the morning feeling kind of sluggish and heavy; and his mind didn't seem to be as clear as it was. Obispo called it suppressed influenza and made him take those pills every night; but they didn't seem to do him any good. He went on feeling that way just the same. And, on top of everything else, he was worrying himself sick about Virginia. The Baby was acting strange, like someone that wasn't really there; so quiet, and not noticing anything, and starting when you spoke to her and asking what you said. Acting for all the world like one of those advertisements for Sal Hepatica or California Syrup of Figs; and that was what he'd have thought it was, if it hadn't been for the way she went on with that Peter Boone fellow. Always talking to him at meals; and asking him to come and have a swim; and wanting to take a squint down his microscope — and what sort of a damn did *she* give for microscopes, he'd like to know? Throwing herself at him — that was what it had looked like on the surface. And that kind of syrup-of-figs way of acting (like people at those Quaker Meetings that Prudence used to make him go to before she took up with Christian Science) — that all fitted in. You'd say she was kind

of stuck on the fellow. But then why should it have happened so suddenly? Because she'd never shown any signs of being stuck on him before. Always treated him like you'd treat a great big dog — friendly and all that, but not taking him too seriously; just a pat on the head and then, when he'd wagged his tail, thinking of something else. No, he couldn't understand it; he just couldn't figure it out. It looked like she was stuck on him; but then, at the same time, it looked like she just didn't notice if he was a boy or a dog. Because that was how she was acting even now. She paid a lot of attention to him — only the way you'd pay attention to a nice big retriever. And that was what had thrown him out. If she'd been stuck on Pete in the ordinary way, then he'd have got mad, and raised hell, and thrown the boy out of the house. But how could you raise hell over a dog? How could you get mad with a girl for telling a retriever she'd like to have a squint down his microscope? You couldn't even if you tried; because getting mad didn't make any sense. All he'd been able to do was just worry, trying to figure things out and not being able to. There was only one thing that was clear, and that was that the Baby meant more to him than he had thought, more than he had ever believed it possible that anyone should mean to him. It had begun by his just wanting her — wanting her to touch, to hold, to handle, to eat; wanting her because she was warm and smelt good; wanting her because she was young and he was old, because she was so innocent and he too tired for anything not innocence to excite. That was how it had begun; but almost immediately something else had happened. That youth of hers, that innocence and sweetness — they were more than just exciting. She was so cute and lovely and childish, he almost felt like crying over her, even while he wanted to hold and handle and devour. She did the strangest things to him — made him feel good, like you felt when you'd tanked up a bit on Scotch, and at the same time made him feel *good*, like you felt when you were at church, or listening to William Jennings Bryan, or making some poor kid happy by giving him a doll or something. And Virginia wasn't just anybody's kid, like the ones at the hospital; she was *his* kid, his very own. Prudence wasn't able to have children; and at the time he'd been sore about it. But now he was glad. Because if he'd had a row of

kids, they'd be standing in the way of the Baby. And Virginia meant more to him than any daughter could mean. Because even if she were *only* a daughter, which she wasn't, she was probably a lot nicer than his own flesh-and-blood daughter would have been — seeing that, after all, the Stoytes were all a pretty sour-faced lot and Prudence had been kind of dumb even if she was a good woman, which she certainly was — maybe a bit too good. Whereas with the Baby everything was just right, just perfect. He had been happier since he'd known her than he'd ever been in years. With her around, things had seemed worth doing again. You didn't have to go through life asking 'Why?' The reason for everything was there in front of you, wearing that cunning little yachting-cap, maybe, or all dressed up with her emeralds and everything for some party with the moving-picture crowd.

And now something had happened. The reason for carrying on was being taken away from him. The Baby had changed; she was fading away from him; she had gone somewhere else. Where had she gone? And why? Why did she want to leave him? To leave him all alone. Absolutely alone, and he was an old man, and the white slab was there in the vestibule of the Columbarium, waiting for him.

'What's the matter, Baby?' he had asked. Time and again he had asked, with anguish in his heart, too miserable to be angry, too much afraid of being left alone to care about his dignity, or his rights, about anything except keeping her, at whatever cost: 'What's the matter, Baby?'

And all she ever did was to look at him as though she were looking at him from some place a million miles away — to look at him like that and say: Nothing; she was feeling fine; she hadn't got anything on her mind; and, no, there wasn't anything he could do for her, because he'd given her everything already, and she was perfectly happy.

And if he mentioned Pete (kind of casually, so she shouldn't think he suspected anything) she wouldn't even bat an eyelid; just say: Yes, she liked Pete; he was a nice boy, but unsophisticated — and that made her laugh; and she liked laughing.

‘But, Baby, you’re different,’ he would say; and it was difficult for him to keep his voice from breaking, he was so unhappy. ‘You don’t act like you used to, Baby.’

And all she’d answer was, that that was funny because she felt just the same.

‘You don’t feel the same about me,’ he would say.

And she’d say she did. And he’d say no. And she’d say it wasn’t true. Because what reasons did he have for saying she felt different about him? And of course she was quite right; there weren’t any reasons you could lay your finger on. He couldn’t honestly say she acted less affectionate, or didn’t want to let him kiss her, or anything like that. She was different because of something you couldn’t put a name to. Something in the way she looked and moved and sat around. He couldn’t describe it except by saying it was like she wasn’t really there where you thought you were looking at her, but some place else; some place where you couldn’t touch her, or talk to her, or even really see her. That was how it was. But whenever he had tried to explain it to her, she had just laughed at him and said he must be having some of those feminine intuitions you read about in stories — only his feminine intuitions were all wrong.

And so there he’d be, back where he started from, trying to figure it out and not being able to, and worrying himself sick. Yes, worrying himself sick. Because when he’d got over feeling sluggish and heavy, like he always did in the mornings now, he felt so worried about the Baby that he’d start bawling at the servants and being rude to that god-damned Englishman and getting mad with Obispo. And the next thing that happened was that he couldn’t digest his meals. He was getting heartburn and sour stomach; and one day he had such a pain that he’d thought it was appendicitis. But Obispo had said it was just gas; because of his suppressed influenza. And then he’d got mad and told the fellow he must be a lousy doctor if he couldn’t cure a little thing like that. Which must have put the fear of God into Obispo, because he’d said, ‘Just give me two or three days more. That’s all I need to complete the treatment.’ And he’d said that suppressed influenza was a funny thing; didn’t seem to be anything, but

poisoned the whole system, so you couldn't think straight any more; and you'd get to imagining things that weren't really there, and worrying about them.

Which might be true in a general way; but in this case he just knew it wasn't all imagination. The Baby *was* different; he had a reason for being worried.

Sunk in his mood of perplexed and agitated gloom, Mr. Stoyte was carried down the windings of the mountain road, through the bowery oasis of Beverly Hills, and eastward (for Clancy lived in Hollywood) along Santa Monica Boulevard. Over the telephone, that morning, Clancy had put on one of his melodramatic conspirator acts. From the rigmarole of hints and dark allusions and altered names, Mr. Stoyte had gathered that the news was good. Clancy and his boys had evidently succeeded in buying up most of the best land in the San Felipe Valley. At another time, Mr. Stoyte would have exulted in his triumph; to-day, even the prospect of making a million or two of easy money gave him no sort of pleasure. In the world he had been reduced to inhabiting, millions were irrelevant. For what could millions do to allay his miseries? The miseries of an old, tired, empty man; of a man who had no end in life but himself, no philosophy, no knowledge but of his own interests, no appreciations, not even any friends — only a daughter-mistress, a concubine-child, frantically desired, cherished to the point of idolatry. And now this being, on whom he had relied to give significance to his life, had begun to fail him. He had come to doubt her fidelity — but to doubt without tangible reasons, to doubt in such a way that none of the ordinary satisfying reactions, of rage, of violence, of recrimination, was appropriate. The sense was going out of his life and he could do nothing; for he was in a situation with which he did not know how to deal, hopelessly bewildered. And always, in the background of his mind, there floated an image of that circular marble room, with Rodin's image of desire at the centre, and that white slab in the pavement at its base — the slab that would some day have his name engraved upon it: Joseph Panton Stoyte, and the dates of his birth and death. And along with that inscription went another, in orange letters on a coal-black ground: 'It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' And meanwhile here was Clancy, conspiratorially announcing victory. Good news!

Good news! A year or two from now he would be richer by another million. But the millions were in one world and the old, unhappy, frightened man was in another, and there was no communication between the two.

CHAPTER FOUR

JEREMY WORKED FOR a couple of hours, unpacking, examining, provisionally cataloguing, filing. There were no finds this morning — merely accounts and legal documents and business letters. Stuff for Coulton and Tawney and the Hammonds; not at all his cup of tea.

By half-past twelve the weight of boredom had become too much for him. He broke off and, in search of a little spiritual refreshment, turned to the Fifth Earl's vellum-bound notebook.

'July 1780,' he read. 'Sensuality is close allied with Sorrow, and it sometimes happens that, on account of the very sincerity of her Grief, the weeping Widow is betrayed by her own Feelings and finds herself unable to resist the importunities of the funeral Guest, who knows the Art of passing imperceptibly from Condolence to Familiarity. I myself have posthumously cuckolded a Duke and two Viscounts (one of them no later than last night) upon the very Beds from which, but a few hours before, they had been borne in Pomp to the ancestral Sepulchre.'

That was something for his mother, Jeremy reflected. The sort of thing she really adored! He had a good mind, if it wasn't too horribly expensive, to cable it to her in a night letter.

He returned to the notebook.

'One of the Livings in my Gift having unexpectedly fallen vacant, my Sister sent to me to-day a young Divine whom she commends, and I believe her, for his singular Virtue. I will have no Parsons around me but such as drink deep, ride to Hounds and caress the Wives and daughters of their Parishioners. A Virtuous Parson does nothing to test or exercise the Faith of his Flock; but as I have written to my Sister, it is by Faith that we come to Salvation.'

The next entry was dated March 1784.

‘In old Tombs newly opened a kind of ropy Slime depends from the roof and coats the walls. It is the condensation of decay.’

‘January 1786. Half a dozen pensées in as many years. If I am to fill a volume at this rate, I must outlast the patriarchs. I regret my sloth, but console myself with the thought that my fellow men are too contemptible for me to waste my time instructing or entertaining them.’

Jeremy hurried over three pages of reflections on politics and economics. Under the date of March 12th, 1787, he found a more interesting entry:

‘Dying is almost the least spiritual of our acts, more strictly carnal even than the act of love. There are Death Agonies that are like the strainings of the Costive at stool. To-day I saw M. B. die.’

‘January 11th, 1788. This day fifty years ago I was born. From solitude in the Womb, we emerge into solitude among our Fellows, and return again to solitude within the Grave. We pass our lives in the attempt to mitigate that solitude. But Propinquity is never fusion. The most populous City is but an agglomeration of wildernesses. We exchange Words, but exchange them from prison to prison, and without hope that they will signify to others what they mean to ourselves. We marry, and there are two solitudes in the house instead of one; we beget children, and there are many solitudes. We reiterate the act of love; but again propinquity is never fusion. The most intimate contact is only of Surfaces, and we couple, as I have seen the condemned Prisoners at Newgate coupling with their Trulls, between the bars of our cages. Pleasure cannot be shared; like Pain, it can only be experienced or inflicted, and when we give Pleasure to our Lovers or bestow Charity upon the Needy, we do so, not to gratify the object of our Benevolence, but only ourselves. For the Truth is that we are kind for the same reason as we are cruel, in order that we may enhance the sense of our own Power; and this we are for ever trying to do, despite the fact that by doing it we cause ourselves to feel more solitary than ever. The reality of Solitude is the same in all men, there being no mitigation of it, except in Forgetfulness, Stupidity or Illusion; but a man’s sense of Solitude is proportionate to the sense

and fact of his Power. In any set of circumstances, the more Power we have, the more intensely do we feel our solitude. I have enjoyed much Power in my life.'

'June 1788. Captain Pavey came to pay his respects to-day, a round, jovial, low man, whom even his awe of me could not entirely prevent from breaking out into the vulgar Mirth which is native to him. I questioned him concerning his last Voyage, and he very minutely described for me the mode of packing the Slaves in the holds; the chains used to secure them; the feeding of them and, in calm weather, the exercising on deck, though always with Nets about the bulwarks, to prevent the more desperate from casting themselves into the sea; the Punishments for the refractory; the schools of hungry sharks accompanying the vessel; the scurvy and other diseases, the wearing away of the negroes' Skin by the hardness of the planks on which they lie and the continual Motion of the waves; the Stench so horrible that even the hardiest seaman will turn pale and swoon away, if he ventures into the hold; the frequent Deaths and almost incredibly rapid Putrefaction, especially in damp Weather near the Line. When he took his leave, I made him a present of a gold snuff box. Anticipating no such favour, he was so coarsely loud in his expression of thanks and future devotion to my Interests, that I was forced to cut him short. The snuff box cost me sixty guineas; Captain Pavey's last three Voyages have brought me upwards of forty thousand. Power and wealth increase in direct proportion to a man's distance from the material objects from which wealth and power are ultimately derived. For every risk taken by the General Officer, the private soldier takes a hundred; and for every guinea earned by the latter the General earns a hundred. So with myself and Pavey and the Slaves. The Slaves labour in the Plantation for nothing but blows and their diet; Captain Pavey undergoes the hardships and dangers of the Sea and lives not so well as a Haberdasher or Vintner; I put my hands to nothing more material than a Banker's draft, and a shower of gold descends upon me for my pains. In a world such as ours, a man is given but three choices. In the first place, he may do as the multitude have always done and, too stupid to be wholly a knave, mitigate his native baseness with a no less native folly. Second, he may imitate those more consummate fools who painfully deny their

native Baseness in order to practise Virtue. Third, he may choose to be a man of sense — one who, knowing his native Baseness, thereby learns to make use of it and, by the act of knowledge, rises superior to it and to his more foolish Fellows. For myself, I have chosen to be a man of sense.'

'March 1789. Reason promises happiness; Feeling protests that it is Happiness; Sense alone gives Happiness. And Happiness itself is like dust in the mouth.'

'July 1789. If Men and Women took their Pleasures as noisily as the Cats, what Londoner could ever hope to sleep of nights?'

'July 1789. The Bastille is fallen. Long live the Bastille!'

The next few pages were devoted to the Revolution. Jeremy skipped them. In 1794 the Fifth Earl's interest in the Revolution gave place to interest in his own health.

'To those who visit me,' he had written, 'I say that I have been sick and am now well again. The words are quite untrue; for it was not I who lay at Death's door, nor is it I who am recovered. The first was a special creation of Fever, an embodiment of Pain and Lassitude; the second is not I, but an old man, weak, shrunken and without desires. My name and some memories are all that remain to me of the Being I once was. It is as if a Man had died and willed to some surviving Friend a handful of worthless trinkets to remember him by.'

'1794. A sick, rich Man is like one who lies wounded and alone in the deserts of Egypt; the Vultures hover lower and lower above his head and the Jackals and Hyenas prowl in ever-narrowing circles about the place where he lies. Not even a rich Man's Heirs could be more unsleepingly attentive. When I look into my Nephew's face and read there, behind the mask of Solicitude, his impatient longing for my Death and his disappointment that I am not already gone, I feel an influx of new Life and Strength. If for no other reason, I will live on to rob Him of the Happiness which he still believes (for he is confident of my Relapse) to be within his Grasp.'

'1794. The World is a Mirror, reflecting his image to the Beholder.'

‘January 1795. I have tried King David’s remedy against old age and found it wanting. Warmth cannot be imparted, but only evoked; and where no lingering spark persists, even tinder will not raise a flame.

‘It may be as the Parsons say, that we are saved by another’s vicarious suffering; but I can vouch for the feet that vicarious pleasure is without efficacity, except only to enhance the sentiments of Superiority and Power in him who inflicts it.’

‘1795. As the Satisfactions of Sense decay, we compensate ourselves for their loss by cultivating the sentiments of Pride and Vanity. The love of Domination is independent of the bodily faculties and therefore, when the body loses its powers, may easily take the place of vanished Pleasure. For myself, I was never without the love of Dominion even when in the Throes of Pleasure. Since my late Death, the Phantom that remains of me is forced to content itself with the first, less substantial and, above all, less harmless of these two Satisfactions.’

‘July 1796. The fishponds at Gonister were dug in the Ages of Superstition by the monks of the Abbey upon whose foundations the present House is built. Under King Charles I, my great-great-grandfather caused a number of leaden Disks engraved with his cypher and the date, to be attached by silver rings to the tails of fifty well-grown carp. Not less than twenty of these fish are alive to-day, as one may count whenever the bell is rung that calls the Creatures to be fed. With them come others even larger than they — survivors, it may be, from the monkish times before King Henry’s Dissolution of the Religious Houses. Watching them through the pellucid Water, I marvel at the strength and unimpaired agility of these great Fishes, of which the oldest were perhaps alive when the Utopia was written, while the youngest are co-eval with the author of Paradise Lost. The latter attempted to justify God’s ways to Man. He would have done a more useful Work in undertaking to explain the ways of God to Fish. Philosophers have wasted their own and their readers’ time in speculations upon the Immortality of the Soul; the Alchemists have pored for centuries over their crucibles in the vain hope of discovering the Elixir or the Stone. Meanwhile, in every pond and river, one may find Carps that have outlived three Platos and

half a dozen Paracelsuses. The Secret of eternal Life is not to be found in old Books, nor in liquid Gold, nor even in Heaven; it is to be found in the Mud and only awaits a skilful Angler.'

Outside the corridor the bell rang for lunch. Jeremy rose, put the Fifth Earl's notebook away and walked towards the lift, smiling to himself at the thought of the pleasure he would derive from telling that bumptious ass, Obispo, that all his best ideas about longevity had been anticipated in the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER FIVE

LUNCHEON, IN THE absence of Mr. Stoyte, was a very cheerful meal. The servants went about their business unreprimanded. Jeremy could talk without the risk of being snubbed or insulted. Dr. Obispo was able to tell the story about the chimney-sweep who applied for life-insurance after going on his honeymoon, and, from the far-away depths of that almost trance-like state of fatigue — that state which she deliberately fostered, so as not to have to think too much and feel too badly about what was happening — Virginia was at liberty to laugh at it as loudly as she liked. And though with one part of herself she would have liked not to laugh at all, because she didn't want to make Sig think she was encouraging him in any way, with another part she wanted to laugh, indeed couldn't help laughing, because, after all, the story was really very funny. Besides, it was such a relief not to have to put on that act with Pete for the benefit of uncle Jo. No double-crossing. For once, she could be herself. The only fly in the ointment was that this self she was being was such a miserable specimen: a self with bones that would go like rubber whenever that horrible Sig chose to come along; a self without the strength to keep a promise even to Our Lady. Her laughter abruptly ceased.

Only Pete was consistently unhappy — about the chimney-sweep, of course, and Virginia's burst of merriment; but also because Barcelona had fallen and, with it, all his hopes of a speedy victory over fascism, all prospect of ever seeing any of his old comrades again. And that wasn't all. Laughing at the story of the chimney-sweep was only a single painful incident among many. Virginia had allowed the first two courses of the meal to come and go without once paying any attention to him. But why, why? His distress was aggravated by bitter bewilderment. Why? In the light of what had been happening during the past three weeks it was inexplicable. Ever since the evening of the day she had turned

back at the Grotto, Virginia had been simply wonderful to him — going out of her way to talk to him, inviting him to tell her things about Spain and even about biology. Why, she had actually asked to look at something under the microscope. Trembling with happiness, so that he could hardly adjust the slide, he had focussed the instrument on a preparation of the carp's intestinal flora. Then she had sat down in his place, and as she bent over the eyepiece her auburn curls had swung down on either side of the microscope and, above the edge of her pink sweater, the nape of her neck had been uncovered, so white, so tangibly inviting, that the enormous effort he had had to make to prevent himself from kissing it had left him feeling almost faint.

There had been times during the ensuing days when he wished that he hadn't made that effort. But then his better self would reassert its rule and he was glad again that he had. Because, of course, it wouldn't have been right. For, though he had long since given up the family belief in that Blood-of-the-Lamb business, he still remembered what his pious and conventional mother had said about kissing anyone you weren't engaged to; he was still at heart the earnest adolescent whom Reverend Schlitz's eloquence had fired during the perplexities of puberty with a passionate determination to be continent, a conviction of the Sacredness of Love, an enthusiasm for something wonderful called Christian marriage. But at the moment, unfortunately, he wasn't earning enough to feel justified in asking Virginia to accept his sacred love and enter into Christian marriage with him. And there was the added complication that on his side the Christian marriage wouldn't be Christian except in substance, whereas Virginia was attached to the institution which Reverend Schlitz sometimes called the Whore of Babylon and the Marxists regarded as pre-eminently detestable. An institution, moreover, that would think as poorly of him as he thought of it — though he thought rather less poorly of it now that Hitler was persecuting it in Germany and since he had been looked after by those Sisters of Mercy in Spain. And even if those religious and financial difficulties could somehow be miraculously smoothed away, there remained the dreadful fact of Mr. Stoyte. He *knew*, of course, that Mr. Stoyte was nothing more than a father to Virginia, or at

most an uncle — but knew it with that excessive certainty that is born of desire; knew it in the same way as Don Quixote knew that the pasteboard vizor of his helmet was as strong as steel. It was the kind of knowledge about which it is prudent to make no enquiries; and of course, if he asked Virginia to marry him, such enquiries, or the information such enquiries might be expected to elicit, would almost inevitably be forced upon him.

Yet another complicating factor in the situation was Mr. Propter. For if Mr. Propter was right, as Pete was coming to feel more and more certain that he was, then it was obviously unwise to do something that would make more difficult the passage from the human level to the level of eternity. And though he loved Virginia, he found it difficult to believe that marriage to her would be anything but an obstacle to the enlightenment of everybody concerned.

Or rather, he *had* thought this; but in the course of the last week or two his opinion had changed. Or, to be more exact, he no longer had an opinion; he was just uncertain and bewildered. For Virginia's character seemed almost suddenly to have changed. From being childlike, loud and extraverted, her innocence had become quiet and inscrutable. In the past, she had treated him with the jocular and casual friendliness of mere good-fellowship; but recently there had been a strange alteration. The jokes had stopped and a kind of earnest solicitude had taken their place. She had been simply wonderful to him — but not in the way a girl is wonderful to a man she wants to fall in love with her. No, Virginia had been wonderful like a sister — and not an ordinary sister, either: almost a Sister of Mercy. Not just any Sister of Mercy: that particular Sister who had nursed him when he was in hospital at Gerona; the young Sister with the big eyes and the pale oval face, like the face of the Virgin Mary in a picture; the one who always seemed to be secretly happy, not because of anything that was going on around her, but because of something inside, something extraordinary and beautiful behind her eyes that she could look in at; and when she'd looked at it, there was no reason any more why she should feel scared by an air-raid, for example, or upset by an amputation. She evidently saw things from what Mr. Propter called the level of eternity; they didn't affect her in the way they'd affect

a person living on the human level. On the human level you were scared and angry; or, if you were calm, you made yourself calm by an effort of will. But the Sister was calm without making an effort of will. At the time, he had admired without comprehension. Now, thanks to Mr. Propter, he could begin to understand as well as admire.

Well, that was the face that Virginia's had reminded him of during the past weeks. There had been a kind of sudden conversion from the outward-looking life to the inward, from open responsiveness to secret and mysterious abstraction. The cause of this conversion was beyond his comprehension; but the fact was manifest, and he had respected it. Respected it by not kissing her neck as she bent over the microscope; by never even touching her arm or taking her hand; by not saying to her one word of all he felt about her. In the strange, inexplicable circumstances of her transformation, such actions, he had felt, would have been inappropriate to the point positively of sacrilege. It was as a sister that she had chosen to be wonderful to him; it was therefore as a brother that he had responded. And now, for no known reason, she seemed suddenly to have become unaware of his existence.

The sister had forgotten her brother; and the Sister of Mercy had forgotten herself — forgotten herself so far as to listen to Dr. Obispo's ignoble anecdote about the chimney-sweep, even to laugh at it. And yet, Pete noticed in bewilderment, the moment she stopped laughing, her face resumed its expression of inwardness and secrecy and detachment. The Sister of Mercy remembered herself as promptly as she had forgotten. It was beyond him; he simply couldn't figure it out.

With the arrival of the coffee, Dr. Obispo announced that he proposed to take the afternoon off and, as there was nothing that urgently needed doing in the laboratory, he advised Pete to do the same. Pete thanked him and, pretending to be in a hurry (for he didn't want to go through the humiliation of being ignored when Virginia discussed her plans for the afternoon), swallowed his coffee and, mumbling excuses, left the room. A little later he was out in the sunshine, walking down towards the plain.

As he went, he thought of some of the things Mr. Propter had said to him in the course of his recent visits.

Of what he had said about the silliest text in the Bible and the most sensible. ‘They hated me without a cause’ and ‘God is not mocked; as a man sows, so shall he reap.’

Of what he had said about nobody ever getting something for nothing — so that a man would pay for too much money, for example, or too much power, or too much sex, by being shut up more tightly inside his own ego; so that a country that moved too quickly and violently would fall under a tyranny, like Napoleon’s, or Stalin’s, or Hitler’s; and a people that was prosperous and internally peaceful would pay for it by being smug and self-satisfied and conservative, like the English.

The baboons were gibbering as he passed. Pete recalled some of Mr. Propter’s remarks about literature. About the wearisomeness, to an adult mind, of all those merely descriptive plays and novels which critics expected one to admire. All the innumerable, interminable anecdotes and romances and character-studies, but no general theory of anecdotes, no explanatory hypothesis of romance or character. Just a huge collection of facts about lust and greed, fear and ambition, duty and affection; just facts, and imaginary facts at that, with no coordinating philosophy superior to common sense and the local system of conventions, no principle of arrangement more rational than simple aesthetic expediency. And then the astonishing nonsense talked by those who undertake to elucidate and explain this hodge-podge of prettily patterned facts and fancies! All that solemn tosh, for example, about Regional Literature — as though there were some special and outstanding merit in recording unco-ordinated facts about the lusts, greeds and duties of people who happen to live in the country and speak in dialect! Or else the facts were about the urban poor and there was an effort to co-ordinate them in terms of some post-Marxian theory that might be partly true, but was always inadequate. And in that case it was the great Proletarian Novel. Or else somebody wrote yet another book proclaiming that Life is Holy; by which he always meant that anything people do in the way of

fornicating, or getting drunk, or losing their tempers, or feeling maudlin, is entirely O.K. with God and should therefore be regarded as permissible and even virtuous. In which case it was up to the critics to talk about the author's ripe humanity, his deep and tender wisdom, his affinities with the great Goethe, and his obligations to William Blake.

Pete smiled as he remembered, but with a certain ruefulness as well as amusement; for he too had taken this sort of thing with the seriousness its verbiage seemed to demand.

Misplaced seriousness — the source of some of our most fatal errors. One should be serious, Mr. Propter had said, only about what deserves to be taken seriously. And, on the strictly human level, there was nothing that deserved to be taken seriously except the suffering men inflicted upon themselves by their crimes and follies. But, in the last analysis, most of these crimes and follies arose from taking too seriously things which did not deserve it. And that, Mr. Propter had continued, was another of the enormous defects of so-called good literature; it accepted the conventional scale of values; it respected power and position; it admired success; it treated as though they were reasonable the mainly lunatic preoccupations of statesmen, lovers, business men, social climbers, parents. In a word, it took seriously the causes of suffering as well as the suffering. It helped to perpetuate misery by explicitly or implicitly approving the thoughts and feelings and practices which could not fail to result in misery. And this approval was bestowed in the most magnificent and persuasive language. So that even when a tragedy ended badly, the reader was hypnotized by the eloquence of the piece into imagining that it was all somehow noble and worth while. Which of course it wasn't. Because, if you considered them dispassionately, nothing could be more silly and squalid than the themes of *Phèdre*, or *Othello*, or *Wuthering Heights*, or the *Agamemnon.* But the treatment of these themes had been in the highest degree sublime and thrilling, so that the reader or the spectator was left with the conviction that, in spite of the catastrophe, all was really well with the world, the all too human world, which had produced it. No, a good satire was much more deeply truthful and, of course, much more profitable than a good

tragedy. The trouble was that so few good satires existed, because so few satirists were prepared to carry their criticism of human values far enough. *Candide*, for example, was admirable as far as it went; but it went no further than debunking the principal human activities in the name of the ideal of harmlessness. Now, it was perfectly true that harmlessness was the highest ideal most people could aspire to; for, though few had the power to do much positive good, there was nobody who could not refrain, if he so desired, from evil. Nevertheless, mere harmlessness, however excellent, most certainly didn't represent the highest possible ideal. *Il faut cultiver notre jardin* was not the last word in human wisdom; at the best it was only the last but one.

The sun was in such a position that, as he walked down the hill, Pete saw two little rainbows spouting from the nipples of Giambologna's nymph. Thoughts of Noah immediately arose in conjunction with thoughts of Virginia in her white satin bathing-costume. He tried to repress the latter as incompatible with the new thoughts he was trying to cultivate about the Sister of Mercy; and since Noah was not a subject that would bear much thinking about, he proceeded instead to concentrate on that talk he had had with Mr. Propter about sex. It had begun with his own puzzled questionings as to what sort of sexual behaviour was normal — not statistically normal, of course, but normal in that absolute sense in which perfect vision or unimpaired digestion may be called normal. What sort of sexual behaviour was normal in that sense of the word? And Mr. Propter had answered: None. But there must be, he had protested. If good could be manifested on the animal level, then there must be some kind of sexual behaviour that was absolutely normal and natural, just as there was an absolutely normal and natural sort of digestive activity. But man's sexual behaviour, Mr. Propter had answered, wasn't on the same level as digestion. A rat's love-making — yes, that *was* on the same level as digestion; for the entire process was instinctive; in other words, was controlled by the physiological intelligence of the body — the same physioogical intelligence as correlated the actions of heart and lungs and kidneys, as regulated temperature, as nourished the muscles and made them do the work demanded of them by the central nervous system. Men's bodily

activities were controlled by the same physiological intelligence; and it was that intelligence which, on the animal level, manifested good. In human beings, sexual behaviour was almost completely outside the jurisdiction of this physiological intelligence. It controlled only the cellular activities which made sexual behaviour possible. All the rest was non-instinctive and took place on the strictly human level of self-consciousness. Even when men thought that they were being most exclusively animal in their sexuality, they were still on the human level. Which meant that they were still self-conscious, still dominated by words — and where there were words, there, of necessity, were memories and wishes, judgments and imaginations. There, inevitably, were the past and the future, the actual and the fantastic; regret and anticipation; good and evil; the creditable and the discreditable; the beautiful and the ugly. Among men and women, even the most apparently bestial acts of eroticism were associated with some or all of these non-animal factors — factors which were injected into every human situation by the existence of language. This meant that there was no one type of human sexuality that could be called ‘normal’ in the sense in which one could say that there was a normality of vision or digestion. In *that* sense, all kinds of human sexuality were strictly abnormal. The different kinds of sexual behaviour could not be judged by referring them to an absolute natural norm. They could only be judged in reference to the ultimate aims of each individual and the results observed in each case. Thus, if an individual wanted to be well thought of in any given society, he or she could safely regard as ‘normal’ the type of sexual behaviour currently tolerated by that local religion and approved by the ‘best people.’ But there were some individuals who cared little for the judgment of an angry God or even of the best people. Their principal desire was for intense and reiterated stimulation of their senses and their feelings. For these, it was obvious, ‘normality’ in sexual behaviour would be quite different from what it was for the more social-minded. Then there would be all the kinds of sexuality ‘normal’ to those desirous of making the best of both worlds — the personal world of sensations and emotions, and the social world of moral and religious conventions. The ‘normalities’ of Tartuffe and Pecksniff; of the

clergymen who can’t keep away from schoolgirls, the cabinet ministers with a secret mania for handsome youths. And, finally, there were those who were concerned neither to get on in society, nor to placate the local deity, nor to enjoy repeated emotional and sensuous stimulations, but whose chief preoccupation was with enlightenment and liberation, with the problem of transcending personality, of passing from the human level to the level of eternity. Their conceptions of ‘normality’ in sexual behaviour would not resemble those of the men and women in any of the other categories.

From the concrete tennis-court the children of the Chinese cook were flying kites in the shape of birds and equipped with little whistles, so that they warbled plaintively in the wind. The cheerful quacking sound of Cantonese drifted down to Pete’s ears. Across the Pacific, he reflected, millions upon millions of such children had died already or were dying. Below them, in the Sacred Grotto, stood the plaster figure of Our Lady. Pete thought of Virginia kneeling in white shorts and a yachting-cap, of the abusive eloquence of Reverend Schlitz, of Dr. Obispo’s jokes, of Alexis Carrel on the subject of Lourdes, of Lee’s *History of the Inquisition*, of Tawney on the relationship between Protestantism and Capitalism, of Niemöller and John Knox and Torquemada and that Sister of Mercy and again of Virginia, and finally of Mr. Propter as the only person he knew who could make some sense out of the absurd, insane, diabolical confusion of it all.

CHAPTER SIX

SOMEWHAT TO JEREMY'S disappointment, Dr. Obispo was not at all mortified by the information that his ideas had been anticipated in the eighteenth century.

'I'd like to hear some more about your Fifth Earl,' he said, as they glided down into the cellars with the Vermeer. You say he lived to ninety?'

'More than ninety,' Jeremy answered. 'Ninety-six or seven, I forget which. And died in the middle of a scandal, what's more.'

'What sort of a scandal?'

Jeremy coughed and patted the top of his head. 'The usual sort,' he fluted.

'You mean, the old bozo was still at it?' Dr. Obispo asked incredulously.

'Still at it,' Jeremy repeated. 'There's a passage about the affair in the unpublished papers of Greville. He died just in time. They were actually on the point of arresting him.'

'What for?'

Jeremy twinkled again and coughed. 'Well,' he said slowly and in his most Cranford-like manner, 'it seems that he had a tendency to take his pleasures rather homicidally.'

'You mean, he'd killed someone.'

'Not actually killed,' Jeremy answered: 'just damaged.'

Dr. Obispo was rather disappointed, but consoled himself almost immediately by the reflection that, at ninety-six, even damage was pretty creditable. 'I'd like to look into this a little further,' he added.

'Well, the notebook's at your disposal,' said Jeremy politely.

Dr. Obispo thanked him. Together they walked towards Jeremy's work-room.

'The handwriting's rather difficult,' said Jeremy as they entered. 'I think it might be easier if I read it aloud to you,'

Dr. Obispo protested that he didn't want to waste Jeremy's time; but as the other was anxious to find an excuse for putting off to another occasion the wearisome task of sorting papers that didn't interest him, the protest was out-protested. Jeremy insisted on being altruistic. Dr. Obispo thanked him and settled down to listen. Jeremy took his eyes out of their native element for long enough to polish his spectacles, then began to re-read aloud the passage he had been reading that morning when the bell rang for lunch.

'"It is to be found in the Mud,"' he concluded, '"and only awaits a skilful Angler."'

Dr. Obispo chuckled. 'You might almost use it as a definition of science,' he said. 'What is science? Science is angling in the mud — angling for immortality and for anything else that may happen to turn up,' He laughed again and added that he liked the old bastard.

Jeremy went on reading.

'"August 1796. To-day my gabbling niece Caroline reproached me with what she called the Inconsistency of my Conduct. A man who is humane with the Horses in his stables, the Deer in his park and the Carp in his fishponds should show his Consistency by being more sociable than I am, more tolerant of the company of Fools, more charitable towards the poor and humble. To which I answered by remarking that the word, Man, is the general Name applied to successions of inconsistent Conduct, having their source within a two-legged and featherless Body, and that such words as Caroline, John and the like are the proper names applied to particular successions of inconsistent Conduct within particular Bodies. The only Consistency exhibited by the mass of Mankind is a Consistency of Inconsistency. In other words, the nature of any particular succession of inconsistent Conduct depends upon the history of the individual and his ancestors. Each succession of Inconsistencies is determined and obeys the Laws imposed upon it by its own antecedent Circumstances. A Character may be said to be consistent in the sense that its Inconsistencies are predestined and cannot pass beyond the boundaries ordained for it. The Consistency demanded by such Fools as Caroline is of quite another kind. These reproach us

because our successive Acts are not consistent with some arbitrarily selected set of Prejudices, or ridiculous code of rules, such as the Hebrew, the Gentlemanlike, the Iroquois or the Christian. Such Consistency is not to be achieved, and the attempt to achieve it results only in Imbecility or Hypocrisy. Consider, I said to Caroline, your own Conduct. What Consistency, pray, do you find between your conversations with the Dean upon Redemption and your Draconian birchings of the younger Maids? between your conspicuous charities and the setting of man-traps on your estates? between your appearances at Court and your *chaise percée*? or between divine service on Sunday morning and the pleasures enjoyed on Saturday night with your husband and on Friday or Thursday, as all the world suspects, with a certain Baronet who shall be nameless? But before I had concluded my final question, Caroline had left the room."'

'Poor Caroline,' said Dr. Obispo, with a laugh. 'Still, she got what she asked for.'

Jeremy read out the next entry.

'"December 1796. After this second attack of pulmonary congestion, Convalescence has come more slowly than before and advanced less far. I hang here suspended above the pit as though by a single thread, and the substance of that thread is Misery."'

With an elegantly bent little finger, Dr. Obispo flicked the ash of his cigarette on to the floor.

'One of those pharmaceutical tragedies,' he commented. 'With a course of thiamin chloride and some testosterone I could have made him as happy as a sandboy. Has it ever struck you,' he added, 'what a lot of the finest romantic literature is the result of bad doctoring?

I could lie down like a tired child

And weep away this life of care.

Lovely! But if they'd known how to clear up poor Shelley's chronic tuberculous pleurisy it would never have been written. Lying down like a tired child and weeping life away happens to be one of the most characteristic

symptoms of chronic tuberculous pleurisy. And most of the other *Weltschmerz* boys were either sick men or alcoholics or dope addicts. I could have prevented every one of them from writing as he did.' Dr. Obispo looked at Jeremy with a wolfish smile that was almost childlike in the candour of its triumphant cynicism. 'Well, let's hear how the old boy gets over his troubles.'

'"December, 1796,"' Jeremy read out. '"The prowlings of my attendant hyaenas became so intolerable to me that yesterday I resolved to put an end to them. When I asked them to leave me alone in the future, Caroline and John protested their more than filial Affection. In the end I was forced to say that, unless they were gone by noon to-day, I would order my Steward to bring a score of men and eject them from my House. This morning, from my window, I watched them take their departure."'

The next note was dated January nth, 1797. '"This year the anniversary of my birth calls up Thoughts more gloomy than ever before. I am too weary to record them. The day being fine and remarkably warm for the Season, I had myself carried in my chair to the fishponds. The bell was rung, and the Carp at once came hurrying to be fed. The spectacle of the brute Creation provides me with almost my sole remaining pleasure. The stupidity of the Brutes is without pretensions and their malignity depends on Appetite and is therefore only intermittent. Men are systematically and continuously cruel, while their Follies are justified in the names of Religion and Politics, and their Ignorance is muffled up in the pompous garments of Philosophy.

'"Meanwhile, as I watched the fishes pushing and jostling for their dinner, like a crowd of Divines in search of Preferment, my Thoughts returned to the perplexing Question upon which I have so often speculated in the past. Why should a man die at three-score years and ten, when a Fish can retain its Youth for two or three centuries? I have debated with myself a number of possible answers. There was a time, for example, when I thought that the longer life of Carp and Pike might be due to the superiority of their Watery Element over our Air. But the lives of some subaqueous Creatures are short, while those of certain Birds exceed the human span.

‘“Again, I have asked myself if the Fish’s longer years might not be due to its peculiar mode of begetting and bearing its young. But again I am met by fatal Objections. The Males of Parrots and Ravens do not onanize, but copulate; the females of Elephants do not lay eggs but bear their young, if we are to believe M. de Buffon, for a period of not less than four and twenty months. But Parrots, Ravens and Elephants are long-lived Creatures; from which we must conclude that the Brevity of human Life is due to other Causes than the manner in which Men beget and Females reproduce their Kind.

‘“The only Hypotheses to which I can see no manifest Objections are these: the Diet of such fish as Carp and Pike contains some substance which preserves their Bodies from the Decay which overtakes the greater number of Creatures even while they are alive; alternatively the substance which prevents Decay is to be found within the Body of the Fish, especially, it would be reasonable to guess, in the Stomach, Liver, Bowels and other Organs of Concoction and Assimilation. In the short-lived animals, such as Man, the Substances preventive of Decay must be presumed to be lacking. The question then arises whether these Substances can be introduced into the human Body from that of the Fish. History does not record any remarkable instances of longevity among the Ichthyophagi, nor have I ever observed that the Inhabitants of sea ports and other places where there is an abundance of Fish were specially long-lived. But we need not conclude from this that the Substance preventive of Decay can never be conveyed from Fish to Man. For Man cooks his Food before eating it, and we know by a thousand instances that the application of Heat profoundly modifies the nature of many Substances; moreover, he throws away, as unfit for his Consumption, precisely those Organs of the Fish in which it is most reasonable to assume that the Substance preventive of Decay is contained.”’

‘Christ!’ said Dr. Obispo, unable to contain himself any longer. ‘Don’t tell me that the old buzzard is going to eat raw fish-guts!’

Bright behind their bifocals, Jeremy’s eyes had darted down to the bottom of the page and were already at the top of the next. ‘That’s exactly what he is doing,’ he cried delightedly. ‘Listen to this: “My first three attempts provoked an

uncontrollable retching; at the fourth I contrived to swallow what I had placed in my mouth, but within two or three minutes my triumph was cut short by an access of vomiting. It was only after the ninth or tenth essay that I was able to swallow and retain even a few spoonfuls of the nauseating mince meat."'

'Talk of courage!' said Dr. Obispo. 'I'd rather go through an air-raid than that.'

Jeremy, meanwhile, had not so much as raised his eyes from the book.

'"It is now a month,"' he read, '"since I began to test the truth of my Hypothesis, and I am now ingesting each day not less than six ounces of the raw, triturated Viscera of freshly opened Carp."'

'And the fish,' said Dr. Obispo, slowly shaking his head, 'has a greater variety of parasitic worms than any other animal. It makes my blood run cold even to hear about it.'

'You needn't worry,' said Jeremy, who had gone on reading. 'His Lordship does nothing but get better and better. Here's a "singular accession of Strength and Vigour during the month of March." Not to mention "Revival of appetite and Improved memory and powers of ratiocination." I like that ratiocination,' Jeremy put in appreciatively. 'Such a nice period piece, don't you think? A real Chippendale word!' He went on reading to himself, and after a little silence announced triumphantly: 'By April he's riding again "an hour on the bay gelding every afternoon." And the dose of what he calls his "visceral and stercoraceous pap" has been raised to ten ounces a day.'

Dr. Obispo jumped up from his chair and began to walk excitedly up and down the room. 'Damn it all!' he shouted. 'This is more than a joke. This is serious. Raw fish-guts; intestinal flora; prevention of sterol poisoning; and rejuvenation. Rejuvenation!' he repeated.

'The Earl's more cautious than you are,' said Jeremy. 'Listen to this. "Whether I owe my recovery to the Carp, to the Return of Spring, or to the *Vis medicatrix Naturæ*, I am not yet able to determine."'

Dr. Obispo nodded approvingly. 'That's the right spirit,' he said.

‘“Time,”’ Jeremy continued, ‘“will show; that is, if I can force it to show, which I intend to do by persisting in my present Regimen. For I take it that my Hypothesis will be substantiated if, after persisting in it for some time longer, I shall have recovered not only my former state of Health, but a measure of Vigour not enjoyed since the passing of Youth.”’

‘Good for him!’ Dr. Obispo exclaimed. ‘I only wish old Uncle Jo could look at things in that scientific way. Or, maybe,’ he added, suddenly remembering the Nembutal and Mr. Stoyte’s childlike faith in his medical omniscience, ‘maybe I don’t wish it. It might have its inconveniences.’ He chuckled to himself over his private joke. ‘Well, let’s go on with our case history,’ he added.

‘In September he can ride for three hours at a stretch without fatigue,’ said Jeremy. ‘And he’s renewing his acquaintance with Greek literature, and thinks very poorly of Plato, I notice. After which we have no entry till 1799.’

‘No entry till 1799!’ Dr. Obispo repeated indignantly. ‘The old bastard! Just when his case is getting really interesting, he goes and leaves us in the dark.’

Jeremy looked up from the notebook, smiling. ‘Not entirely in the dark,’ he said. ‘I’ll read you his first entry after the two years of silence, and you can draw your own conclusions about the state of his intestinal flora.’ He uttered a little cough and began to read in his Mrs. Gaskell manner. ‘“May 1799. The most promiscuously abandoned Females, especially among Women of Quality, are often those to whom an unkind Nature has denied the ordinary Reason and Excuse for Gallantry. Cut off by a constitutional Frigidity from the enjoyments of Pleasure, they are in everlasting rebellion against their Fate. The power which drives them on to multiply the number of their Gallantries is not Sensuality, but Hope; not the wish to reiterate the experience of a familiar Bliss, but rather the aspiration towards a common and much vaunted Felicity which they themselves have had the misfortune never to know. To the Voluptuary, the woman of easy Virtue is often no less obnoxious, though for other reasons, than she seems to the severe Moralist. God preserve me in Future from any such Conquests as that which I made this Spring at Bath!”’ Jeremy put down the book. ‘Do you still feel that you’ve been left in the dark?’ he asked.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WITH A DEAFENING shriek the electric smoothing-tool whirled its band of sandpaper against the rough surface of the wood. Bent over the carpenter's bench, Mr. Propter did not hear the sound of Pete's entrance and approach. For a long half-minute the young man stood in silence, watching him while he moved the smoothing-tool back and forth over the board before him. There was sawdust, Pete noticed, in the shaggy eyebrows, and on the sunburnt forehead a black smear where he had touched his face with oily fingers.

Pete felt a sudden twinge of compunction. It wasn't right to spy on a man if he didn't know you were there. It was underhand: you might be seeing something he didn't want you to see. He called Mr. Propter's name.

The old man looked up, smiled, and stopped the motor of his little machine.

'Well, Pete,' he said. 'You're just the man I want. That is, if you'll do some work for me. Will you? But I'd forgotten,' he added, interrupting Pete's affirmative answer, 'I'd forgotten about that heart of yours. These miserable rheumatic fevers! Do you think you ought to?'

Pete blushed a little; for he had not yet had time to live down a certain sense of shame in regard to his disability. 'You're not going to make me run the quartermile, are you?'

Mr. Propter ignored the jocular question. 'You're sure it's all right?' he insisted, looking with an affectionate earnestness into the young man's face.

'Quite sure, if it's only this sort of thing.' Pete waved his hand in the direction of the carpenter's bench.

'Honest?'

Pete was touched and warmed by the other's solicitude. 'Honest!' he affirmed.

‘Very well then,’ said Mr. Propter, reassured. ‘You’re hired. Or rather you’re not *hired*, because you’ll be lucky if you get as much as a Coca-Cola for your work. You’re conscribed.’

All the other people round the place, he went on to explain, were busy. He had been left to run the entire furniture factory single-handed. And the trouble was that it had to be run under pressure; three of the migrant families down at the cabins were still without any chairs or tables.

‘Here are the measurements,’ he said, pointing to a typewritten sheet of paper pinned to the wall. ‘And there’s the lumber. Now, I’ll tell you what I’d like you to do first,’ he added, as he picked up a board and laid it on the bench.

The two men worked for some time without trying to speak against the noise of their electric tools. Then there was an interim of less noisy activity. Too shy to embark directly upon the subject of his own perplexities, Pete started to talk about Professor Pearl’s new book on population. Forty inhabitants to the square mile for the entire land area of the planet. Sixteen acres per head. Take away at least half for unproductive land, and you were left with eight acres. And with average agricultural methods a human being could be supported on the produce of two and a half acres. With five and a half acres to spare for every person, why should a third of the world be hungry;

‘I should have thought you’d have discovered the answer in Spain,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘They’re hungry because man cannot live by bread alone.’

‘What has that got to do with it?’

‘Everything,’ Mr. Propter answered. ‘Men can’t live by bread alone, because they need to feel that their life has a point. That’s why they take to idealism. But it’s a matter of experience and observation that most idealism leads to war, persecution and mass insanity. Man cannot live by bread alone; but if he chooses to nourish his mind on the wrong kind of spiritual food, he won’t even get bread. He won’t even get bread, because he’ll be so busy killing or preparing to kill his neighbours in the name of God, or Country, or Social Justice, that he won’t be able to cultivate his fields. Nothing could be simpler or more obvious. But at the same time,’ Mr. Propter concluded, ‘nothing is unfortunately more certain than

that most people will go on choosing the wrong spiritual food and thereby indirectly choosing their own destruction.'

He turned on the current, and once more the smoothing-tool set up its rasping shriek. There was another cessation of talk.

'In a climate like this,' said Mr. Propter, in the next interval of silence, 'and with all the water that'll be available when the Colorado River aqueduct starts running next year, you could do practically anything you liked.' He unplugged the smoothing-tool and went to fetch a drill. 'Take a township of a thousand inhabitants; give it three or four thousand acres of land and a good system of producers' and consumers' co-operatives: it could feed itself completely; it could supply about two-thirds of its other needs on the spot; and it could produce a surplus to exchange for such things as it couldn't produce itself. You could cover the State with such townships. That is,' he added, smiling rather mournfully, 'that is, if you could get the permission from the banks and a supply of people intelligent and virtuous enough to run a genuine democracy.'

'You certainly wouldn't get the banks to agree,' said Pete.

'And you probably couldn't find more than quite a few of the right people,' Mr. Propter added. 'And of course nothing's more disastrous than starting a social experiment with the wrong people. Look at all the efforts to start communities in this country. Robert Owen, for example, and the Fourierists and the rest of them. Dozens of social experiments and they all failed. Why? Because the men in charge didn't choose their people. There was no entrance examination and no novitiate. They accepted anyone who came along. That's what comes of being unduly optimistic about human beings.'

He started the drill and Pete took his turn with the smoothing-tool.

'Do you think one oughtn't to be optimistic?' the young man asked.

Mr. Propter smiled. 'What a curious question!' he answered. 'What would you say about a man who installed a vacuum pump in a fifty-foot well? Would you call him an optimist?'

'I'd call him a fool.'

‘So would I,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘And that’s the answer to your question; a man’s a fool if he’s optimistic about any situation in which experience has shown that there’s no justification for optimism. When Robert Owen took in a crowd of defectives and incompetents and habitual crooks, and expected them to organize themselves into a new and better sort of human society, he was just a damned fool.’

There was silence for a time while Pete did some sawing.

‘I suppose I’ve been too optimistic,’ the young man said reflectively, when it was over.

Mr. Propter nodded. ‘Too optimistic in certain directions,’ he agreed. ‘And at the same time too pessimistic in others.’

‘For instance?’ Pete questioned.

‘Well, to begin with,’ said Mr. Propter, ‘too optimistic about social reforms. Imagining that good can be fabricated by mass-production methods. But, unfortunately, good doesn’t happen to be that sort of commodity. Good is a matter of moral craftsmanship. It can’t be produced except by individuals. And, of course, if individuals don’t know what good consists in, or don’t wish to work for it, then it won’t be manifested, however perfect the social machinery. There!’ he added, in another tone, and blew the sawdust out of the hole he had been drilling. ‘Now for these chair-legs and battens.’ He crossed the room and began to adjust the lathe.

‘And what do you think I’ve been too pessimistic about?’ Pete asked.

Mr. Propter answered, without looking up from his work: ‘About human nature.’

Pete was surprised. ‘I’d have expected you to say I was too optimistic about human nature,’ he said.

‘Well, of course, in certain respects that’s true,’ Mr. Propter agreed. ‘Like most people nowadays, you’re insanely optimistic about people as they are, people living exclusively on the human level. You seem to imagine that people can remain as they are and yet be the inhabitants of a world conspicuously better than the world we live in. But the world we live in is a consequence of what men

have been and a projection of what they are now. If men continue to be like what they are now and have been in the past, it's obvious that the world they live in can't become better. If you imagine it can, you're wildly optimistic about human nature. But, on the other hand, you're wildly pessimistic if you imagine that men and women are condemned by their nature to pass their whole lives on the strictly human level. Thank God,' he said emphatically, 'they're not. They have it in their power to climb out and up, on to the level of eternity. No human society can become conspicuously better than it is now, unless it contains a fair proportion of individuals who know that their humanity isn't the last word and who consciously attempt to transcend it. That's why one should be profoundly pessimistic about the things most people are optimistic about — such as applied science, and social reform, and human nature as it is in the average man or woman. And that's also why one should be profoundly optimistic about the thing they're so pessimistic about that they don't even know it exists — I mean, the possibility of transforming and transcending human nature. Not by evolutionary growth, not in some remote future, but at any time — here and now, if you like — by the use of properly directed intelligence and good-will.'

Tentatively he started the lathe, then stopped it again for further adjustments.

'It's the kind of pessimism and the kind of optimism you find in all the great religions,' he added. 'Pessimism about the world at large and human nature as it displays itself in the majority of men and women. Optimism about the things that can be achieved by anyone who wants to and knows how.' He started the lathe again and, this time, kept it going.

'You know the pessimism of the New Testament,' he went on through the noise of the machine. 'Pessimism about the mass of mankind: many are called, few chosen. Pessimism about weakness and ignorance: from those that have not shall be taken away even that which they have. Pessimism about life as lived on the ordinary human level; for that life must be lost if the other eternal life is to be gained. Pessimism about even the highest forms of worldly morality: there's no access to the kingdom of heaven for anyone whose righteousness fails to exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. But who are the Scribes and Pharisees? Simply

the best citizens; the pillars of society; all right-thinking men. In spite of which, or rather because of which, Jesus calls them a generation of vipers. Poor dear Dr. Mulge!' he added parenthetically. 'How pained he'd be if he ever had the misfortune to meet his Saviour!' Mr. Propter smiled to himself over his work. 'Well, that's the pessimistic side of the Gospel teaching,' he went on. 'And, more systematically and philosophically, you'll find the same things set forth in the Buddhist and Hindu scriptures. The world as it is and people on the strictly human level — they're beyond hope: that's the universal verdict. Hope begins only when human beings start to realize that the kingdom of heaven, or whatever other name you care to give it, is within and can be experienced by anybody who's prepared to take the necessary trouble. That's the optimistic side of Christianity and the other-world religions.'

Mr. Propter stopped the lathe, took out the chair-leg he had been turning and put another in its place.

'It isn't the sort of optimism they teach you in the liberal churches,' said Pete, thinking of his transition period between Reverend Schlitz and militant anti-fascism.

'No, it isn't,' Mr. Propter agreed. 'What they teach you in liberal churches hasn't got anything to do with Christianity or any other realistic religion. It's mainly drivel.'

'Drivel!'

'Drivel,' Mr. Propter repeated. 'Early twentieth-century humanism seasoned with nineteenth-century evangelicalism. What a combination! Humanism affirms that good can be achieved on a level where it doesn't exist and denies the fact of eternity. Evangelicalism denies the relationship between causes and effects by affirming the existence of a personal deity who forgives offences. They're like Jack Spratt and his wife: between the two of them, they lick the platter clean of all sense whatsoever. No, I'm wrong,' Mr. Propter added, through the buzz of the machine, 'not *all* sense. The humanists don't talk of more than one race, and the evangelicals only worship one God. It's left to the patriots to polish off that last shred of sense. The patriots and the political sectarians. A hundred mutually

exclusive idolatries. “There are many gods and the local bosses are their respective prophets.” The amiable silliness of the liberal churches is good enough for quiet times; but note that it’s always supplemented by the ferocious lunacies of nationalism for use in times of crisis. And those are the philosophies young people are brought up on. The philosophies your optimistic elders expect you to reform the world with.’ Mr. Propter paused for a moment, then added, ‘“As a man sows, so shall he reap. God is not mocked.” Not mocked,’ he repeated. ‘But people simply refuse to believe it. They go on thinking they can cock a snook at the nature of things and get away with it. I’ve sometimes thought of writing a little treatise, like a cook-book, “One Hundred Ways of Mocking God” I’d call it. And I’d take a hundred examples from history and contemporary life, illustrating what happens when people undertake to do things without paying regard to the nature of reality. And the book would be divided into sections, such as “Mocking God in Agriculture,” “Mocking God in Politics,” “Mocking God in Education,” “Mocking God in Philosophy,” “Mocking God in Economics.” It would be an instructive little book. But a bit depressing,’ Mr. Propter added.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NEWS THAT the Fifth Earl had had three illegitimate children at the age of eighty-one was announced in the notebook with a truly aristocratic understatement. No boasting, no self-congratulation. Just a brief, quiet statement of the facts between the record of a conversation with the Duke of Wellington and a note on the music of Mozart. One hundred and twenty years after the event, Dr. Obispo, who was not an English gentleman, exulted noisily, as though the achievement had been his own.

'Three of them,' he shouted in his proletarian enthusiasm. '*Three!* What do you think of that?'

Brought up in the same tradition as the Fifth Earl, Jeremy thought that it wasn't bad, and went on reading.

In 1820 the Earl had been ill again, but not severely; and a three months' course of raw carps' entrails had restored him to his normal health, 'the health,' as he put it, 'of a man in the flower of his age.'

A year later, for the first time in a quarter of a century, he visited his nephew and niece, and was delighted to find that Caroline had become a shrew, that John was already bald and asthmatic, and that their eldest daughter was so monstrously fat that nobody would marry her.

On the news of the death of Bonaparte he had written philosophically that a man must be a great fool if he could not satisfy his desire for glory, power and excitement except by undergoing the hardships of war and the tedium of civil government. '"The language of polite conversation," he concluded, "reveals with a sufficient clarity that such exploits as those of Alexander and Bonaparte have their peaceful and domestic equivalents. We speak of amorous *Adventures*, of the *Conquest* of a desired Female and the *Possession* of her Person. For the Man of sense, such tropes are eloquent indeed. Considering their significance, he

perceives that war and the pursuit of Empire are wrong because foolish, foolish because unnecessary, and unnecessary because the satisfactions derivable from Victory and Dominion may be obtained with vastly less trouble, pain and ennui behind the silken curtains of the Duchess's Alcove or on the straw Pallet of the Dairy Maid. And if at any time such simple Pleasures should prove insipid, if, like the antique Hero, he should find himself crying for new Worlds to conquer, then by the offer of a supplementary guinea, or in very many instances, as I have found, gratuitously, by the mere elicitation of a latent Desire for Humiliation and even Pain, a man may enjoy the privilege of using the Birch, the Manacles, the Cage and any such other Emblems of absolute Power as the Fancy of the Conqueror may suggest and the hired Patience of the Conquered will tolerate or her consenting Taste approve. I recall a remark by Dr. Johnson to the effect that a man is seldom more innocently employed than when making Money. Making Love is an even more innocent employment than making Money. If Bonaparte had had the Wisdom to vent his Desire for Domination in the Saloons and Bed Chambers of his native Corsica, he would have expired in Freedom among his own people, and many hundreds of thousands of men now dead or maimed or blind would be alive and enjoying the use of their faculties. True, they would doubtless be employing their Eyes, Limbs and Lives as foolishly and malignantly as those whom Bonaparte did not murder are employing them to-day. But though a Superior Being might applaud the onetime Emperor for having removed so great a quantity of Vermin from the Earth, the Vermin themselves will always be of another Opinion. As a mere Man of Sense, and not a Superior Being, I am on the side of the Vermin."'

'Have you ever noticed,' said Dr. Obispo reflectively, 'the way even the most hard-boiled people always try to make out they're really good. Even this old buzzard — you'd think *he* wouldn't care how he rated, so long as he got his fun. But no; he has to write a long screed proving what a much better man he is than Napoleon. Which, of course, he is by any reasonable standard. But you wouldn't expect him to go out of his way to say so.'

'Well, nobody else was likely to say so,' Jeremy put in.

‘So he had to do it himself,’ Dr. Obispo concluded. ‘Which just proves my point. Iagos don’t exist. People will do everything Iago did; but they’ll never say they’re villains. They’ll construct a beautiful verbal world in which all their villainies are right and reasonable. I’d hoped that old carp-guts would be an exception. But he isn’t. It’s really rather a disappointment.’

Jeremy giggled with a certain patronizing disdain. ‘You’d have liked him to do the Don-Juan-in-hell-act. The *calme héros courbé sur sa rapière.* You’re more romantic than I thought.’ He turned back to the notebook and, after a pause, announced that in 1823 the Fifth Earl had spent some hours with Coleridge and found his conversation deep, but singularly muddy—“characteristics,” he had added, “which are admirable in Fish Ponds, but deplorable in rational Discourse, which should be pellucid and always shallow enough for a man to wade through without risk of drowning himself in an abyss of nonsense.” Jeremy beamed with pleasure. Coleridge was not a favourite of his. ‘When I think of the rot people are still talking about the rubbish that old dope-addict wrote …’

Dr. Obispo cut him short. ‘Let’s hear some more about the Earl,’ he said.

Jeremy returned to the notebook.

In 1824 the old gentleman was lamenting the passage of the Bill which assimilated the transportation of slaves to piracy and so made the trade a capital offence. Henceforward, he would be a matter of eight or nine thousand a year the poorer. But he consoled himself by thinking of Horace living in philosophic tranquillity on his Sabine farm.

In 1826 he was deriving his keenest pleasure from a reperusal of Theocritus and the company of a young female, called Kate, whom he had made his housekeeper. In the same year, despite the curtailment of his income, he had been unable to resist the temptation of purchasing an exquisite ‘Assumption of the Virgin’ by Murillo.

1827 had been a year of financial reverses; reverses that were connected, apparently, with the death, following an abortion, of a very young maid employed by the housekeeper as her personal attendant. The entry in the

notebook was brief and obscure; but it seemed to imply that the girl's parents had had to be paid a very substantial sum.

A little later, he was unwell again and wrote a long and minute description of the successive stages of decay in the human corpse, with special reference to the eyes and lips. A short course of triturated carp restored him to a more cheerful frame of mind, and in 1828 he made a voyage to Athens, Constantinople and Egypt.

In 1831 he was in negotiations for the purchase of a house near Farnham.

'That must be Selford,' Jeremy put in. 'The house where these things came from.' He indicated the twenty-seven packing-cases. 'Where the two old ladies are living.' He continued his reading. '"The house is old, dark and inconvenient, but stands in sufficiently extensive Grounds upon an Eminence above the River Wey, whose southern bank at this point rises almost perpendicularly in a Cliff of yellow sandstone, to the height of perhaps one hundred and twenty feet. The Stone is soft and easily worked, a Circumstance which accounts for the existence beneath the house of very extensive Cellars which were dug, it would seem, about a Century ago, when the Vaults were used for the storage of smuggled Spirits and other goods on their way from the coasts of Hampshire and Sussex to the Metropolis. To allay the fears of his Wife, who dreads to lose a child in their subterranean meanders, the Farmer who now owns the House has walled off the greater part of his Cellarage; but even that which remains presents the appearance of a veritable Catacomb. In Vaults such as these a man could be assured of all the Privacy required for the satisfaction of even the most eccentric Tastes."' Jeremy looked up over the top of his book. 'That sounds a bit sinister, don't you think?'

Dr. Obispo shrugged his shoulders. 'Nobody can have enough privacy,' he said emphatically. 'When I think of all the trouble I've had for want of some nice cellars like the ones you've been reading about …' He left the sentence unfinished, and a shadow crossed his face: he was thinking that he couldn't go on giving Jo Stoyte those Nembutal capsules indefinitely, damn him!

‘Well, he buys the house,’ said Jeremy, who had been reading to himself. ‘And he has repairs and additions made in the Gothic manner. And an apartment is fitted up in the cellars, forty-five feet underground and at the end of a long passage. And, to his delight, he finds that there’s a subterranean well, and another shaft that goes down to a great depth and can be used as a privy. And the place is perfectly dry and has an ample supply of air, and …’

‘But what does he do down there?’ Dr. Obispo asked impatiently.

‘How should I know?’ Jeremy answered. He ran his eyes down the page. ‘At the moment,’ he went on, ‘the old boy’s making a speech to the House of Lords in favour of the Reform Bill.’

‘In favour of it?’ said Obispo in surprise.

‘“In the first days of the French Revolution,”’ Jeremy read out, ‘“I infuriated the adherents of every political Party by saying: ‘The Bastille is fallen; long live the Bastille.’ Forty-three years have elapsed since the occurrence of that singularly futile Event, and the correctness of my Prognostications has been demonstrated by the rise of new Tyrannies and the restoration of old ones. It is therefore with perfect Confidence that I now say: ‘Privilege is dead; long live Privilege.’ The masses of mankind are incapable of Emancipation and too inept to direct their own Destinies. Government must always be by Tyrants or Oligarchs. My opinion of the Peerage and the landed Gentry is exceedingly low; but their own opinion of themselves must be even lower than mine. *They* believe that the Ballot will rob them of their Power and Privileges, whereas *I* am sure that, by the exercise of even such little Prudence and Cunning as parsimonious Nature has endowed them with, they can with ease maintain themselves in their present pre-eminence. This being so, let the Rabble amuse itself by voting. An Election is no more than a gratuitous Punch and Judy Show, offered by the Rulers in order to distract the attention of the Ruled.”’

‘How he’d have enjoyed a modern communist or fascist election!’ said Dr. Obispo. ‘By the way, how old was he when he made this speech?’

‘Let me see.’ Jeremy paused for a moment to make the calculation, then answered: ‘Ninety-four.’

‘Ninety-four!’ Dr. Obispo repeated. ‘Well, if it wasn’t those fish-guts, I don’t know what it was.’

Jeremy turned back to the notebook. ‘At the beginning of 1833 he sees his nephew and niece again, on the occasion of Caroline’s sixty-fifth birthday. Caroline now wears a red wig, her eldest daughter is dead of cancer, the younger is unhappy with her husband and is addicted to piety, the son, who is now a Colonel, has gambling debts which he expects his parents to pay. Altogether, as the Earl remarks, “a most enjoyable evening.”’

‘Nothing about those cellars?’ Dr. Obispo complained.

‘No; but his housekeeper, Kate, has been ill and he’s giving her the carp diet.’

Dr. Obispo showed a renewal of interest. ‘And what happens?’ he asked.

Jeremy shook his head. ‘The next entry’s about Milton,’ he said.

‘Milton?’ exclaimed Dr. Obispo in a tone of indignant disgust.

‘He says that Milton’s writings prove that religion depends for its existence upon the picturesque use of intemperate language.’

‘He may be right,’ said Dr. Obispo irritably. ‘But what I want to know is what happened to that housekeeper.’

‘She’s evidently alive,’ said Jeremy. ‘Because here’s a little note in which he complains about the tediousness of too much female devotion.’

‘Tedious!’ Dr. Obispo repeated. ‘That’s putting it mildly. I’ve known women who were like fly-paper.’

‘He doesn’t seem to have objected to an occasional infidelity. There’s a reference here to a young mulatto girl.’ He paused; then, smiling, ‘Delicious creature,’ he said. ‘“She combines the brutish imbecility of the Hottentot with the malice and cupidity of the European.” After which the old gentleman goes out to dinner at Farnham Castle with the Bishop of Winchester and finds his claret poor, his port execrable and his intellectual powers beneath contempt.’

‘Nothing about Kate’s health?’ Dr. Obispo persisted.

‘Why should he talk about it? He takes it for granted.’

‘I’d hoped he was a man of science,’ said Dr. Obispo almost plaintively.

Jeremy laughed. ‘You must have very odd ideas about fifth earls and eleventh barons. Why on earth should they be men of science?’ Dr. Obispo was unable to answer. There was a silence, while Jeremy started a new page. ‘Well, I’m damned!’ he broke out. ‘He’s been reading James Mill’s *Analysis of the Human Mind*. At ninety-five. I think that’s even more remarkable than having a rejuvenated housekeeper and a mulatto. “The Common Fool is merely stupid and ignorant. To be a Great Fool a man must have much learning and high abilities. To the everlasting credit of Mr. Bentham and his Lieutenants it must be said that *their* Folly has always been upon the grandest scale. Mr. Mill’s *Analysis* is a veritable Coliseum of silliness.” And the next note is about the Marquis de Sade. By the way,’ Jeremy interpolated, looking up at Dr. Obispo, ‘when are you going to return me my books?’

Dr. Obispo shrugged his shoulders. ‘Whenever you like,’ he answered. ‘I’m through with them.’

Jeremy tried not to show his delight and, with a cough, returned to the notebook. ‘“The Marquis de Sade,”’ he read aloud, ‘“was a man of powerful genius, unhappily deranged. In my opinion, an Author would achieve Perfection if he combined the qualities of the Marquis with those of Bishop Butler and Sterne.”’ Jeremy paused. ‘The Marquis, Bishop Butler and Sterne,’ he repeated slowly. ‘My word, you’d have a pretty remarkable book!’ He went on reading. ‘“October 1833. To degrade oneself is pleasurable in proportion to the height of the worldly and intellectual Eminence from which one descends and to which one returns when the act of Degradation is concluded.” That’s pretty good,’ he commented, thinking of the Trojan Women and alternate Friday afternoons in Maida Vale. ‘Yes, that’s pretty good. Let me see, where are we? Oh yes. “The Christians talk much of Pain, but nothing of what they say is to the point. For the most remarkable Characteristics of Pain are these: the Disproportion between the enormity of physical suffering and its often trifling causes; and the manner in which, by annihilating every faculty and reducing the body to helplessness, it defeats the Object for which it was apparently devised by Nature: *viz.* to warn the sufferer of the approach of Danger, whether from within or without. In

relation to Pain, that empty word, Infinity, comes near to having a meaning. This is not the case with Pleasure; for Pleasure is strictly finite and any attempt to extend its boundaries results in its transformation into Pain. For this reason, the infliction of Pleasure can never be so delightful to the aspiring Mind as the infliction of Pain. To give a finite quantity of Pleasure is a merely human act; the infliction of the Infinity we call Pain is truly god-like and divine."'

'The old bastard's going mystical in his old age,' Dr. Obispo complained. 'Almost reminds me of Mr. Propter.' He lit a cigarette. There was a silence.

'Listen to this,' Jeremy suddenly cried in a tone of excitement. '"March nth, 1834. By the criminal negligence of Kate, Priscilla has been allowed to escape from the subterranean place of confinement. Bearing as she does upon her Person the evidence that she has been for some weeks past the subject of my Investigations, she holds in her hands my Reputation and perhaps even my Liberty and Life."'

'I suppose this is what you were talking about before we started reading,' said Dr. Obispo. 'The final scandal. What happened?'

'Well, I suppose the girl must have told her story,' Jeremy answered, without looking up from the page before him. 'Otherwise how do you account for the presence of this "hostile Rabble" he's suddenly started talking about?. "The Humanity of men and women is inversely proportional to their Numbers. A Crowd is no more human than an Avalanche or a Whirlwind. A rabble of men and women stands lower in the scale of moral and intellectual being than a herd of Swine or of Jackals."'

Dr. Obispo threw back his head and uttered a peal of his surprisingly loud, metallic laughter. 'That's exquisite!' he said. 'Exquisite! You couldn't have a better example of typically human behaviour. *Homo* conducting himself like *sub-homo* and then being *sapiens* in order to prove that he's really *super-homo*.' He rubbed his hands together. 'This is really heavenly!' he said; then added: 'Let's hear what happens now.'

'Well, as far as I can make out,' said Jeremy, 'they have to send a company of militia from Guildford to protect the house from the rabble. And a magistrate has

issued a warrant for his arrest; but they're not doing anything for the time being, on account of his age and position and the scandal of a public trial. Oh, and now they've sent for John and Caroline. Which makes the old gentleman wildly angry. But he's helpless. So they arrive at Selford; "Caroline in her orange wig, and John, at seventy-two, looking at least twenty years older than I, who was already twenty-four when my Brother, then scarcely of age, had the imprudence to marry an attorney's Daughter and the richly merited misfortune to beget this Attorney's Grandson whom I have always treated with the Contempt which his low origin and feeble Intellect deserve, but to whom the negligence of a Strumpet has now given the Power to impose his Will upon me."'

'One of those delightful family reunions,' said Dr. Obispo. 'But I suppose he doesn't give us any of the details;'

Jeremy shook his head. 'No details,' he said. 'Just an outline of the negotiations. On March the seventeenth they tell him that he can avoid prosecution if he makes over his unentailed property by deed of gift, assigns them the revenues of the entailed estates, and consents to enter a private asylum.'

'Pretty stiff conditions!'

'Which he refuses,' Jeremy continued, 'on the morning of the eighteenth.'

'Good for him!'

'"Private madhouses,"' Jeremy read out, '"are private prisons in which, uncontrolled by Parliament or Judiciary, subject to no inspection by the Police and closed even to the humanitarian visitations of Philanthropists, hired Torturers and Gaolers execute the dark designs of family Vengeance and personal Spite."'

Dr. Obispo clapped his hands with delight. 'There's another beautiful human touch!' he cried. 'Those humanitarian visitations of philanthropists!' he laughed aloud. 'And hired torturers! It's like a speech by one of the Foundling Fathers. Magnificent! And then one thinks of those slave-ships and little Miss Priscilla. It's almost as good as Field-Marshal Goering denouncing unkindness to animals. Hired torturers and gaolers,' he repeated with relish, as though the phrase were a

delicious sweetmeat, slowly melting upon the palate. ‘What’s the next move?’ he asked.

‘They tell him he’ll be tried, condemned and transported. To which he answers that he prefers transportation to a private asylum. “At this it was evident that my precious nephew and niece were nonplussed. They swore that my treatment in the Madhouse should be humane. I answered that I would not accept their word. John talked of his honour. I said, An Attorney’s honour, no doubt, and spoke of the manner in which a lawyer sells his convictions for a Fee. They then implored me for the good name of the Family to accept their offers. I answered that the good name of the Family was indifferent to me, but that I had no desire to undergo the Humiliations of a Public Trial or the pains and discomforts of Transportation. I was ready, I said, to accept any reasonable alternative to Trial and Transportation; but I would regard no Alternative as reasonable which did not in some sort guarantee my proper treatment at their hands. Their word of honour I did not regard as such a Guarantee; nor could I accept to be placed in an Institution where I should be entrusted to the care of Doctors and Keepers in the pay of those whose Interest it was that I should perish with all possible Celerity. I therefore refused to subscribe to any Arrangement which left me at their Mercy without placing them to a corresponding extent at mine.”’

‘The principles of diplomacy in a nutshell!’ said Dr. Obispo. ‘If only Chamberlain had understood them a little better before he went to Munich! Not that it would have made much difference in the long run,’ he added. ‘Because, after all, it doesn’t really matter what the politicians do: nationalism will always produce at least one war each generation. It has done in the past, and I suppose we can rely on it to do the same in the future. But how does the old gentleman propose to put his principles into practice? He’s at their mercy all right. How’s he going to put them at his?’

‘I don’t know yet,’ Jeremy answered from the depths of the recorded past. ‘He’s gone off on one of his philosophizing jaunts again.’

‘Now?’ said Dr. Obispo in astonishment. ‘When he’s got a warrant out against him?’

‘“There was a time,”’ Jeremy read, ‘“when I believed that all the Efforts of Humanity were directed towards a Point located approximately at the Centre of the female Person. To-day I am inclined to think that Vanity and Avarice play a more considerable part even than Lust in shaping the course of men’s Actions and determining the nature of their Thoughts.” And so on. Where the devil does he get back to the point again? Perhaps he never does; it would be just like him. No, here’s something: “March 20th. To-day, Robert Parsons, my Factor, returned from London bringing with him in the Coach, three strong boxes containing Gold coin and Bank Notes to the value of two hundred and eighteen thousand pounds, the product of the sale of my Securities and such Jewels, Plate and works of Art as it was possible to dispose of at such short notice and for cash. With more time I could have realized at least three hundred and fifty thousand pounds. This loss I can bear philosophically; for the sum I have in hand is amply sufficient for my purposes.”’

‘What purposes?’ asked Dr. Obispo.

Jeremy did not answer for a little while. Then he shook his head in bewilderment. ‘What on earth is happening now?’ he said. ‘Listen to this: “My funeral will be conducted with all the Pomp befitting my exalted Rank and the eminence of my Virtues. John and Caroline were miserly and ungrateful enough to object to the expense; but I have insisted that my Obsequies shall cost not a penny less than Four Thousand Pounds. My only Regret is that I shall be unable to leave my subterranean Retreat to see the Pageantry of Woe and to study the expression of grief upon the withered faces of the new Earl and his Countess. To-night I shall go down with Kate to our Quarters in the Cellarage; and to-morrow morning the World will hear the news of my death. The body of an aged Pauper has already been conveyed hither in Secret from Haslemere, and will take my place in the Coffin. After the Interment the New Earl and Countess will proceed at once to Gonister, where they will take up their Residence, leaving this house untenanted except for Parsons, who will serve as Caretaker and provide

for our material wants. The Gold and Bank Notes brought by Parsons from London are already bestowed in a subterranean hiding-place known only to myself, and it has been arranged that, every First of June, so long as I live, five thousand pounds in cash shall be handed over by myself to John, or to Caroline, or, in the event of their predeceasing me, to their Heir, or to some duly authorized Representative of the Family. By this arrangement, I flatter myself, I fill the Place left vacant by the Affection they most certainly do not feel." And that's all,' said Jeremy, looking up. 'There's nothing else. Just two more blank pages, and that's the end of the book. Not another word of writing.'

There was a long silence. Once more Dr. Obispo got up and began to walk about the room.

'And nobody knows how long the old buzzard lived on?' he said at last.

Jeremy shook his head. 'Not outside the family. Perhaps those two old ladies …'

Dr. Obispo halted in front of him, and banged the table with his fist. 'I'm taking the next boat to England,' he announced dramatically.

CHAPTER NINE

TO-DAY, EVEN THE Children's Hospital brought Mr. Stoyte no consolations. The nurses had welcomed him with their friendliest smiles. The young house physician encountered in the corridor was flatteringly deferential. The convalescents shouted 'Uncle Jo!' with all their customary enthusiasm, and, as he paused beside their beds, the faces of the sick were momentarily illuminated with pleasure. His gifts of toys were received as usual, sometimes with noisy rapture, sometimes (more touchingly) in the silence of a happiness speechless with amazement and incredulity. On his round of the various wards, he saw, as on other days, the pitiful succession of small bodies distorted by scrofula and paralysis, of small emaciated faces resigned to suffering, of little angels dying, and martyred innocents and snub-faced imps of mischief tortured into a reluctant stillness.

Ordinarily it all made him feel good — like he wanted to cry, but at the same time like he wanted to shout and be proud: proud of just being human, because these kids were human and you'd never seen anything so brave as they were; and proud that he had done this thing for them, given them the finest hospital in the State, and all the best that money could buy. But to-day his visit brought none of the customary reactions. He had no impulsion either to cry or to shout. He felt neither pride, nor the anguish of sympathy, nor the exquisite happiness that resulted from their combination. He felt nothing — nothing except the dull, gnawing misery which had been with him all that day, at the Pantheon, with Clancy, in his down-town office. Driving out from the city, he had looked forward to his visit to the hospital as an asthma patient might look forward to a dose of adrenalin or an opium-smoker to a long-postponed pipe. But the looked-for relief had not come. The kids had let him down.

Taking his cue from what had happened at the end of previous visits, the porter smiled at Mr. Stoyte as he left the hospital and said something about it being the finest bunch of great little kids he ever knew. Mr. Stoyte looked at him blankly, nodded without speaking, and passed on.

The porter watched him go. ‘Jeepers Creepers!’ he said to himself, remembering the expression on Mr. Stoyte’s face.

Mr. Stoyte drove back to the castle feeling as unhappy as he had felt when he left it in the morning. He went up with the Vermeer to the fourteenth floor; Virginia was not in her boudoir. He went down to the tenth; but she was not in the billiard-room. He dropped to the second; but she was being neither manicured nor massaged. In a sudden access of suspicion he descended to the sub-subbasement and almost ran to see if she were in the laboratory with Pete; the laboratory was empty. A mouse squeaked in its cage, and behind the glass of the aquarium one of the aged carp glided slowly from shadow into light and from light once more into green shadow. Mr. Stoyte hurried back to the elevator, shut himself in with the Dutchman’s dream of everyday life mysteriously raised to the pitch of mathematical perfection, and pressed the topmost of the twenty-three buttons.

Arrived at his destination, Mr. Stoyte slid back the gate of the elevator and looked out through the glass panel in the second door.

The water of the swimming-pool was perfectly still. Between the battlements, the mountains had taken on their evening richness of golden light and indigo shadow. The sky was cloudless and transparently blue. A tray with bottles and glasses had been set on the iron table at the further side of the pool, and behind the table stood one of the low couches on which Mr. Stoyte was accustomed to take his sun-baths. Virginia was lying on this couch, as though anaesthetized, her lips parted, her eyes closed, one arm dropped limply and its hand lying palm upwards on the floor, like a flower carelessly thrown aside and forgotten. Half concealed by the table, Dr. Obispo, the Claude Bernard of his subject, was looking down into her face with an expression of slightly amused scientific curiosity.

In its first irrepressible uprush, Mr. Stoyte's fury came near to defeating its own homicidal object. With a great effort, he checked the impulse to shout, to charge headlong out of the elevator, waving his fists and foaming at the mouth. Trembling under the internal pressure of pent-up rage and hatred, he groped in the pocket of his jacket. Except for a child's rattle and two packets of chewing-gum left over from his distribution of gifts at the hospital, it was empty. For the first time in months he had forgotten his automatic.

For a few seconds Mr. Stoyte stood hesitating, undecided what to do. Should he rush out, as he had first been moved to do, and kill the man with his bare hands? Or should he go down and fetch his gun? In the end, he decided to get the gun. He pressed the button, and the lift dropped silently down its shaft. Unseeing, Mr. Stoyte glared at the Vermeer; and from her universe of perfected geometrical beauty the young lady in blue satin turned her head from the open harpsichord and looked out, past the draped curtain, over the black-and-white tessellated floor — out through the window of the picture-frame into that other universe in which Mr. Stoyte and his fellow-creatures had their ugly and untidy being.

Mr. Stoyte ran to his bedroom, opened the drawer in which his handkerchiefs were kept, rummaged furiously among the silks and cambrics, and found nothing. Then he remembered. Yesterday morning he had worn no jacket. The gun had been in his hip-pocket. Then Pedersen had come to give him his Swedish exercises. But a gun in the hip-pocket was uncomfortable if you did things on your back, on the floor. He had taken it out and put it away in the writing-desk in his study.

Mr. Stoyte ran back to the elevator, went down four floors and ran to the study. The gun was in the top left-hand drawer of the writing-table; he remembered exactly.

The top left-hand drawer of the writing-table was locked. So were all the other drawers.

'God damn that old bitch!' Mr. Stoyte shouted as he tugged at the handles.

Thoughtful and conscientious in every detail, Miss Grogram, his secretary, always locked up everything before she went home.

Still cursing Miss Grogram, whom he hated at the moment almost as bitterly as he hated that swine there on the roof, Mr. Stoyte hurried back to the elevator. The gate was locked. During his absence in the study, somebody must have pressed the recall button on some other floor. Through the closed door he could hear the faint hum of the machinery. The elevator was in use. God only knew how long he would have to wait.

Mr. Stoyte let out an inarticulate bellow, rushed along the corridor, turned to the right, opened a swing-door, turned to the right again and was at the gate of the service lift. He seized the handle and pulled. It was locked. He pressed the recall button. Nothing happened. The service elevator was also in use.

Mr. Stoyte ran back along the corridor, through the swing-door, then through another swing-door. Spiral round a central well that went down two hundred feet into the depth of the cellars, the staircase mounted and descended. Mr. Stoyte started to climb. Breathless after only two floors, he ran back to the elevators. The service elevator was still in use; but the other responded to the call of the button. Dropping from somewhere overhead, it came to a halt in front of him. The locked door unlocked itself. He pulled it open and stepped in. The young lady in satin still occupied her position of equilibrium in a perfectly calculated universe. The distance of her left eye from the left side of the picture was to its distance from the right side as one is to the square root of two minus one; and the distance of the same eye from the bottom of the picture was equal to its distance from the left side. As for the knot of ribbons on her right shoulder — that was precisely at the corner of an imaginary square with the sides equal to the longer of the two golden sections into which the base of the picture was divisible. A deep fold in the satin skirt indicated the position of the right side of this square, and the lid of the harpsichord marked the top. The tapestry in the upper right-hand corner stretched exactly one-third of the way across the picture and had its lower edge at a height equal to the base. Pushed forward by the browns and dusky ochres of the background, the blue satin encountered the

black-and-white marble slabs of the floor and was pushed back, to be held suspended in mid picture-space, like a piece of steel between two magnets of opposite sign. Within the frame nothing could have been different; the stillness of that world was not the mere immobility of old paint and canvas; it was also the spirited repose of consummated perfection.

‘The old bitch!’ Mr. Stoyte kept growling to himself, and then, turning in memory from his secretary to Dr. Obispo, ‘The swine!’

The elevator came to a stop. Mr. Stoyte darted out and hurried along the corridor to Miss Grogram’s empty office. He thought he knew where she kept the keys; but it turned out that he was wrong. They were somewhere else. But where? where? where? Frustration churned up his rage into a foam of frenzy. He opened drawers and flung their contents on the floor, he scattered the neatly filed papers about the room, he overturned the dictaphone, he even went to the trouble of emptying the bookshelves and upsetting the potted cyclamen and the bowl of Japanese goldfish which Miss Grogram kept on the window-sill. Red scales flashed among the broken glass and the reference-books. One gauzy tail was black with spilt ink. Mr. Stoyte picked up a bottle of glue and, with all his might, threw it down among the dying fish.

‘Bitch!’ he shouted. ‘Bitch!’

Then suddenly he saw the keys, hanging in a neat little bunch on a hook near the mantelpiece, where, he suddenly remembered, he had seen them a thousand times before.

‘Bitch!’ he shouted with redoubled fury as he seized them. He hurried towards the door, pausing only to push the typewriter off its table. It fell with a crash into the chaos of torn paper and glue and goldfish. That would serve the old bitch right, Mr. Stoyte reflected with a kind of maniacal glee as he ran towards the elevator.

CHAPTER TEN

BARCELONA HAD FALLEN.

But even if it had not fallen, even if it had never been besieged, what then?

Like every other community, Barcelona was part machine, part sub-human organism, part nightmare-huge projection and embodiment of men's passions and insanities — their avarice, their pride, their lust for power, their obsession with meaningless words, their worship of lunatic ideals.

Captured or uncaptured, every city and nation has its being on the plane of the absence of God. Has its being on the plane of the absence of God, and is therefore foredoomed to perpetual self-stultification, to endlessly reiterated attempts at self-destruction.

Barcelona had fallen. But even the prosperity of human societies is a continual process of gradual or catastrophic falling. Those who build up the structures of civilization are the same as those who undermine the structures of civilization. Men are their own termites, and must remain their own termites for just so long as they persist in being only men.

The towers rise, the palaces, the temples, the dwellings, the workshops; but the heart of every beam is gnawed to dust even as it is laid, the joists are riddled, the floors eaten away under the feet.

What poetry, what statues — but on the brink of the Peloponnesian War! And now the Vatican is painted — just in time for the sack of Rome. And the Eroica is composed — but for a hero who turns out to be just another bandit. And the nature of the atom is elucidated — by the same physicists as volunteer in war-time to improve the arts of murder.

On the plane of the absence of God, men can do nothing else except destroy what they have built — destroy even while they build — build with the elements of destruction.

Madness consists in not recognizing the facts; in making wishes the fathers of thoughts; in conceiving things to be other than they really are; in trying to realize desired ends by means which countless previous experiments have shown to be inappropriate.

Madness consists, for example, in thinking of oneself as a soul, a coherent and enduring human entity. But, between the animal below and the spirit above there is nothing on the human level except a swarm of constellated impulses and sentiments and notions; a swarm brought together by the accidents of heredity and language; a swarm of incongruous and often contradictory thoughts and desires. Memory and the slowly changing body constitute a kind of spatio-temporal cage, within which the swarm is enclosed. To talk of it as though it were a coherent and enduring ‘soul’ is madness. On the strictly human level there is no such thing as a soul.

Thought-constellations, feeling-arrangements, desirepatterns. Each of these has been built up and is strictly conditioned by the nature of its fortuitous origin. Our ‘souls’ are so little ‘us’ that we cannot even form the remotest conception how ‘we’ should react to the universe, if we were ignorant of language in general, or even of our own particular language. The nature of our ‘souls’ and of the world they inhabit would be entirely different from what it is, if we had never learnt to talk, or if we had learnt to talk Eskimo instead of English. Madness consists, among other things, in imagining that our ‘soul’ exists apart from the language our nurses happen to have taught us.

Every psychological pattern is determined; and, within the cage of flesh and memory, the total swarm of such patterns is no more free than any of its members. To talk of freedom in connection with acts which in reality are determined is madness. On the strictly human level no acts are free. By their insane refusal to recognize facts as they are, men and women condemn themselves to have their desires stultified and their lives distorted or extinguished. No less than the cities and nations of which they are members, men and women are for ever falling, for ever destroying what they have built and are building. But whereas cities and nations obey the laws that come into

play whenever large numbers are involved, individuals do not. Or rather need not; for though in actual fact most individuals allow themselves to be subjected to these laws, they are under no necessity to do so. For they are under no necessity to remain exclusively on the human level of existence. It is in their power to pass from the level of the absence of God to that of God's presence. Each member of the psychological swarm is determined; and so is the conduct of the total swarm. But beyond the swarm, and yet containing and interpenetrating it, lies eternity, ready and waiting to experience itself. But if eternity is to experience itself within the temporal and spatial cage of any individual human being, the swarm we call the 'soul' must voluntarily renounce the frenzy of its activity, must make room, as it were, for the other timeless consciousness, must be silent to render possible the emergence of profounder silence. God is completely present only in the complete absence of what we call our humanity. No iron necessity condemns the individual to the futile torment of being merely human. Even the swarm we call the soul has it in its power temporarily to inhibit its insane activity, to absent itself, if only for a moment, in order that, if only for a moment, God may be present. But let eternity experience itself, let God be sufficiently often present in the absence of human desires and feelings and preoccupations: the result will be a transformation of the life which must be lived, in the intervals, on the human level. Even the swarm of our passions and opinions is susceptible to the beauty of eternity; and, being susceptible, becomes dissatisfied with its own ugliness; and, being dissatisfied, undertakes to change itself. Chaos gives place to order — not the arbitrary, purely human order that comes from the subordination of the swarm to some lunatic 'ideal,' but an order that reflects the real order of the world. Bondage gives place to liberty — for choices are no longer dictated by the chance occurrences of earlier history, but are made ideologically and in the light of a direct insight into the nature of things. Violence and mere inertia give place to peace — for violence is the manic, and inertia the depressive, phase of that cyclic insanity, which consists in regarding the ego or its social projections as real entities. Peace is the serene activity which springs from the knowledge that our 'souls' are illusory and their

creations insane, that all beings are potentially united in eternity. Compassion is an aspect of peace and a result of the same act of knowledge.

Walking at sunset up the castle hill, Pete kept thinking with a kind of tranquil exultation of all the things Mr. Propter had said to him. Barcelona had fallen. Spain, England, France, Germany, America — all were falling; falling even at such times as they seemed to be rising; destroying what they built in the very act of building. But any individual has it in his power to refrain from falling, to stop destroying himself. The solidarity with evil is optional, not compulsory.

On their way out of the carpenter's shop Pete had brought himself to ask Mr. Propter if he would tell him what he ought to do.

Mr. Propter had looked at him intently. 'If you want it,' he had said, 'I mean, if you *really* want it …'

Pete had nodded without speaking.

The sun had set; and now the twilight was like the embodiment of peace — the peace of God, Pete said to himself, as he looked across the plain to the distant mountains, the peace that passes all understanding. To part with such loveliness was unbearable. Entering the castle, he went straight to the elevator, recalled the cage from somewhere up aloft, shut himself up with the Vermeer and pressed the highest of the buttons. Up there, at the top of the keep, he would be at the very heart of this celestial peace.

The elevator came to a halt. He opened the gates and stepped out. The swimming-pool reflected a luminous tranquillity. He turned his eyes from the water to the sky, and from the sky to the mountains; then walked round the pool in order to look down over the battlements on the further side.

'Go away!' a muffled voice suddenly said.

Pete started violently, turned and saw Virginia lying in the shadow almost at his feet.

'Go away,' the voice repeated. 'I hate you.'

'I'm sorry,' he stammered. 'I didn't know …'

'Oh, it's you.' She opened her eyes, and in the dim light he was able to see that she had been crying. 'I thought it was Sig. He went to get a comb for my

hair.' She was silent for a little; then suddenly she burst out, 'I'm so unhappy, Pete.'

'Unhappy?' The word and her tone had utterly shattered the peace of God. In an anguish of love and anxiety he sat down beside her on the couch. (Under her bath-robe, he couldn't help noticing, she didn't seem to be wearing anything at all.) 'Unhappy?'

Virginia covered her face with her hands and began to sob. 'Not even Our Lady,' she gasped in an incoherency of grief. 'I can't even tell *her*. I feel so mean …'

'Darling!' he said in a voice of entreaty, as though imploring her to be happy. He began to stroke her hair. 'My darling!'

Suddenly there was a violent commotion on the further side of the pool; a crash as the elevator gates were flung back; a rush of feet; an inarticulate yell of rage. Pete turned his head and was in time to see Mr. Stoyte rushing towards them, holding something in his hand, something that might almost have been an automatic pistol.

He had half risen to his feet, when Mr. Stoyte fired.

Arriving two or three minutes later with the comb for Virginia's hair, Dr. Obispo found the old man on his knees, trying, with a pocket-handkerchief, to stanch the blood that was still pouring out of the two wounds, one clean and small, the other cavernous, which the bullet had made as it passed through Pete's head.

Crouching in the shadow of the battlements, the Baby was praying. 'Holy-Mary-Mother-of-God-pray-for-us sinners-now-and-in-the-hour- of-our-death-Amen,' she repeated, again and again, as fast as her sobs would permit her. Every now and then she would be seized and shaken by an access of nausea, and the praying would be interrupted for a moment. Then it began again where she had left off '… us-sinners-now-and-in-the-hour-of-our-death-Amen-Holy-Mary-Mother-of-God …'

Dr. Obispo opened his mouth to make an exclamation, then closed it again, whispered, 'Christ!' and walked quickly and silently round the pool. Before

making his presence known, he took the precaution of picking up the pistol and slipping it into his pocket. One never knew. Then he called Mr. Stoyte's name. The old man started, and a hideous expression of terror appeared on his face. Fear gave place to relief as he turned round and saw who it was that had spoken to him.

'Thank God it's you,' he said; then suddenly remembered that this was the man he had meant to kill. But all that had been a million years ago, a million miles away. The near, immediate, urgent fact was not the Baby, not love or anger; it was fear and this thing that lay here on the ground.

'You got to save him,' he said in a hoarse whisper. 'We can say it was an accident. I'll pay him anything he likes. Anything in reason,' an old reflex impelled him to add. 'But you got to save him.' Laboriously he heaved himself to his feet and motioned Dr. Obispo to his vacated place.

The only movement Dr. Obispo made was one of withdrawal. The old man was covered with blood, and he had no wish to spoil a ninety-five-dollar suit. 'Save *him*?' he repeated. 'You're mad. Look at all the brain lying there on the floor.'

From the shadows behind him, Virginia interrupted the sobbing mutter of her prayers to scream. 'On the floor,' she kept wailing. 'On the floor.'

Dr. Obispo turned on her savagely. 'Shut up, do you hear?'

The screams abruptly ceased; but a few seconds later there was a sound of violent retching; then 'Holy-Mary-Mother-of-God-pray-for-us-sinners-now-and-in-the-hour-of-our-death-Amen-Holy-Mary-Mother-of-God-pray-for-us- sinners …'

'If we're going to try and save anybody,' Dr. Obispo went on, 'it had better be you. And believe me,' he added emphatically, throwing all his weight on his left leg and using the toe of his right shoe to point at the body, 'you need some saving. It's either the gas chamber or St. Quentin for life.'

'But it was an accident.' Mr. Stoyte began to protest with a breathless eagerness. 'I mean, it was all a mistake. I never wanted to shoot him. I meant to

…’ He broke off and stood in silence, his mouth working, as though he were trying to swallow some unspoken words.

‘You meant to kill me,’ said Dr. Obispo, completing the sentence for him and smiling, as he did so, with the expression of wolfish good-humour which was characteristic of him in any situation where the joke was at all embarrassing or painful. Secure in the knowledge that the old buzzard was much too scared to be angry, and that anyhow the gun was in his own pocket, he prolonged the joke by saying, ‘Well,’ sententiously, ‘that’s what comes of snooping.’

‘… now-and-in-the-hour-of-our-death-Amen,’ Virginia gabbled in the ensuing silence. ‘Holy-Mary-Mother …’

‘I never meant it,’ Mr. Stoyte reiterated. ‘I just got mad. Guess I didn’t really figure out what I was doing.…’

‘Tell that to the jury,’ said Dr. Obispo sarcastically.

‘But I swear it: I didn’t really know,’ Mr. Stoyte protested. His harsh voice broke grotesquely into a squeak. His face was white with fear.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. ‘Maybe,’ he said. ‘But not knowing doesn’t make any difference to that.’ He stood on one leg again to point an elegantly shod foot in the direction of the body.

‘But what shall I *do*?’ Mr. Stoyte almost screamed in the anguish of his terror.

‘Don’t ask me.’

Mr. Stoyte initiated the gesture of laying his hand imploringly on the other’s sleeve; but Dr. Obispo quickly drew back. ‘No, don’t touch me,’ he said. ‘Just look at your hands.’

Mr. Stoyte looked. The thick, carrot-like fingers were red; under the horny nails the blood was already caked and dry, like clay. ‘God!’ he whispered. ‘Oh my God!’

‘… and-at-the-hour- of-our-death-Amen-Holy-Mary …’

At the word ‘death’ the old man started as though he had been struck with a whip. ‘Obispo,’ he began again, breathless with apprehension, ‘Obispo! Listen here — you got to help me out of this. You got to help me,’ he entreated.

‘After you did your best to do *that* to me?’ The white-and-tan shoe shot out again.

‘You wouldn’t let them get me?’ Mr. Stoyte wheedled, abject in his terror.

‘Why wouldn’t I?’

‘But you can’t,’ he almost shouted. ‘You can’t.’

Dr. Obispo bent down to make quite sure, in the fading light, that there was no blood on the couch; then, pulling up his fawn-coloured trousers, sat down. ‘One gets tired of standing,’ he said in a pleasant conversational tone.

Mr. Stoyte went on pleading. ‘I’ll make it worth your while,’ he said. ‘You can have anything you care to ask for. Anything,’ he repeated without any qualifying reference, this time, to reason.

‘Ah,’ said Dr. Obispo, ‘now you’re talking turkey.’

‘… Mother-of-God,’ muttered the Baby, ‘pray-for-us-sinners-now-and-in-the-hour-of-our-death-Amen-Holy-Mary-Mother-of-God-pray-for-us-sinners-now …’

‘You’re talking turkey,’ Dr. Obispo repeated.

PART THREE

CHAPTER ONE

THERE WAS A tap at the door of Jeremy's work-room; it was Mr. Propter who entered. He was wearing, Jeremy noticed, the same dark-grey suit and black tie as he had worn at Pete's funeral. The urban costume diminished him; he seemed smaller than in his working clothes, and at the same time less himself. That weather-beaten, emphatically featured face of his — that face of a statue high up on the west front of a cathedral — looked curiously incongruous above a starched collar.

'You've not forgotten?' he said, when they had shaken hands.

For all reply, Jeremy pointed to his own black jacket and sponge-bag trousers. They were expected at Tarzana for the ceremonial opening of the new Stoyte Auditorium.

Mr. Propter looked at his watch. 'We've got another few minutes before we need think of starting.' He sat down. 'What's the news?'

'Couldn't be better,' Jeremy answered.

Mr. Propter nodded. 'Now that poor Jo and the others have gone, it must be quite agreeable here.'

'All alone with twelve million dollars' worth of bric-à-brac,' said Jeremy. 'I have the most enormous fun.'

'How little fun you'd be having,' said Mr. Propter meditatively, 'if you'd been left in company with the people who actually made the bric-à-brac. With Greco, and Rubens, and Turner, and Fra Angelico.'

'God preserve us!' said Jeremy, throwing up his hands.

'That's the charm of art,' Mr. Propter went on. 'It represents only the most amiable aspects of the most talented human beings. That's why I've never been able to believe that the art of any period threw much light on the life of that period. Take a Martian; show him a representative collection of Botticellis,

Peruginos and Raphaels. Could he infer from them the conditions described by Machiavelli?'

'No, he couldn't,' Jeremy agreed. 'But meanwhile, here's another question. The conditions described by Machiavelli — were they the real conditions? Not that Machiavelli didn't tell the truth. The things he described really happened. But did contemporaries think them as awful as they seem to us when we read about them now? *We* think they ought to have been miserable about what was happening. But were they?'

'Were they?' Mr. Propter repeated. 'We ask the historians; and of course they can't answer — because obviously there's no way of compiling statistics about the sum of happiness, nor any way of comparing the feelings of people living under one set of conditions with the feelings of people living under another and quite different set. The real conditions at any given moment are the subjective conditions of the people then alive. And the historian has no way of finding out what those conditions were.'

'No way except through looking at works of art,' said Jeremy. 'I'd say they do throw light on the subjective conditions. Take one of your examples. Perugino's a contemporary of Machiavelli. That means that at least one person contrived to be cheerful all through an unpleasant period. And if one could be, why not many?' He cleared the way for a quotation with a little cough. '"The state of the country never put a man off his dinner."'

'Massive wisdom!' said Mr. Propter. 'But remember that the state of Dr. Johnson's England was excellent, even at its worst. What about the state of a country like China, say, or Spain — a country where a man can't be put off his dinner, for the simple reason that there isn't any dinner? And conversely, what about all the losses of appetite at times when everything's going well?' He paused, smiled enquiringly at Jeremy, then shook his head. 'Sometimes there's a lot of cheerfulness as well as a lot of misery; sometimes there seems to be almost nothing but misery. That's all the historian can say in so far as he's a historian. In so far as he's a theologian, of course, or a metaphysician, he can maunder on indefinitely, like Marx or St. Augustine or Spengler.' Mr. Propter made a little

grimace of distaste. ‘God, what a lot of bosh we’ve managed to talk in the last few thousand years!’ he said.

‘But it has its charm,’ Jeremy insisted. ‘Really *good* bosh …’

‘I’m barbarous enough to prefer sense,’ said Mr. Propter. ‘That’s why, if I want a philosophy of history, I go to the psychologist.’

‘“Totem and Taboo?”’ Jeremy questioned in some astonishment.

‘No, no,’ said Mr. Propter with a certain impatience. ‘Not *that* kind of psychologist. I mean the religious psychologist; the one who knows by direct experience that men are capable of liberation and enlightenment. He’s the only philosopher of history whose hypothesis has been experimentally verified; therefore the only one who can make a generalization that covers the facts.’

‘And what are his generalizations?’ said Jeremy. ‘Just the usual thing?’

Mr. Propter laughed. ‘Just the usual thing,’ he answered: ‘the old, boring, unescapable truths. On the human level men live in ignorance, craving and fear. Ignorance, craving and fear result in some temporary pleasures, in many lasting miseries, in final frustration. The nature of the cure is obvious; the difficulties in the way of its achieving it, almost insuperable. We have to choose between almost insuperable difficulties on the one hand and absolutely certain misery and frustration on the other. Meanwhile, the general hypothesis remains as the intellectual key to history. Only the religious psychologist can make any sense of Perugino and Machiavelli, for example; or of all this.’ He pointed towards the Hauberk Papers.

Jeremy twinkled behind his glasses and patted his bald patch. ‘Your true scholar,’ he fluted, ‘doesn’t even *want* to make sense of it.’

‘Yes, I always tend to forget that,’ said Mr. Propter rather sadly.

Jeremy coughed. ‘“Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,”’ he quoted from the ‘Grammarian’s Funeral.’

‘Gave it for his own sake,’ said Mr. Propter, getting out of his chair. ‘Gave it regardless of the fact that the grammar he was studying was hopelessly unscientific, riddled with concealed metaphysics, utterly provincial and antiquated. Well,’ he added, ‘that’s what one would expect, I suppose.’ He took

Jeremy's arm, and they walked together towards the elevator. 'What a curious figure old Browning is!' he continued, his mind harking back to the Grammarian. 'Such a first-rate intelligence, and at the same time *such* a fool. All that preposterous stuff about romantic love! Bringing God into it, putting it into heaven, talking as though marriage and the higher forms of adultery were identical with the beatific vision. The silliness of it! But, again, that's what one has to expect.' He sighed. 'I don't know why,' he added after a pause, 'I often find myself remembering that rhyme of his — I can't even recall which poem it comes from — the one that goes: "one night he kissed My soul out in a burning mist." My soul out in a burning mist, indeed!' he repeated. 'Really, how much I prefer Chaucer on the subject. Do you remember? "Thus swivèd is this carpenterès wife." So beautifully objective and unemphatic and free of verbiage! Browning was always rambling on about God; but I suspect he was much further away from reality than Chaucer was, even though Chaucer never thought about God if he could possibly help it. Chaucer had nothing between himself and eternity but his appetites. Browning had his appetites, plus a great barrage of nonsense — nonsense, what's more, with a purpose. For, of course, that bogus mysticism wasn't merely gratuitous bosh. It had an object. It existed in order that Browning might be able to persuade himself that his appetites were identical with God. "Thus swivèd is this carpenterès wife,"' he repeated, as they entered the elevator and went up with Vermeer to the great hall. '"My soul out in a burning mist!" It's extraordinary the way the whole quality of our existence can be changed by altering the words in which we think and talk about it. We float in language like icebergs — four-fifths under the surface and only one-fifth of us projecting into the open air of immediate, non-linguistic experience.'

They crossed the hall. Mr. Propter's car was standing outside the front door. He took the wheel; Jeremy got in beside him. They drove off, down the curving road, past the baboons, past Giambologna's nymph, past the Grotto, under the portcullis and across the drawbridge.

'I so often think of that poor boy,' said Mr. Propter, breaking a long silence. 'Dying so suddenly.'

‘I’d no idea his heart was as bad as that,’ said Jeremy.

‘In a certain sense,’ Mr. Propter went on, ‘I feel responsible for what happened. I asked him to help me in the carpenter’s shop. Made him work too hard, I guess — though he insisted it was all right for him. I ought to have realized that he had his pride — that he was young enough to feel ashamed of admitting he couldn’t take it. One’s punished for being insensitive and unaware. And so are the people one’s insensitive about.’

They drove past the hospital and through the orange groves in silence. ‘There’s a kind of pointlessness about sudden and premature death,’ said Jeremy at last. ‘A kind of specially acute irrelevance …’

‘Specially acute?’ Mr. Propter questioned. ‘No, I shouldn’t say so. It’s no more irrelevant than any other human event. If it seems more irrelevant, that’s only because, of all possible events, premature death is the most glaringly out of harmony with what we imagine ourselves to be.’

‘What do you mean?’ Jeremy asked.

Mr. Propter smiled. ‘I mean what I presume *you* mean,’ he answered. ‘If a tiling seems irrelevant, there must be something it’s irrelevant to. In this case, that something is our conception of what we are. We think of ourselves as free, purposive beings. But every now and then things happen to us that are incompatible with this conception. We speak of them as accidents; we call them pointless and irrelevant. But what’s the criterion by which we judge? The criterion is the picture we paint of ourselves in our own fancy — the highly flattering portrait of the free soul making creative choices and being the master of its fate. Unfortunately, the picture bears no resemblance to ordinary human reality. It’s the picture of what we’d like to be, of what, indeed, we might become if we took the trouble. To a being who is in fact the slave of circumstance there’s nothing specially irrelevant about premature death. It’s the sort of event that’s characteristic of the universe in which he actually lives — though not, of course, of the universe he foolishly imagines he lives in. An accident is the collision of a train of events on the level of determinism with another train of events on the level of freedom. We imagine that our life is full of

accidents, because we imagine that our human existence is lived on the level of freedom. In fact, it isn't. Most of us live on the mechanical level, where events happen in accordance with the laws of large numbers. The things we call accidental and irrelevant belong to the very essence of the world in which we elect to live.'

Annoyed at having, by an unconsidered word, landed himself in a position which Mr. Propter could show to be unwarrantably 'idealistic,' Jeremy was silent. They drove on for a time without speaking.

'That funeral!' Jeremy said at last; for his chronically anecdotal mind had wandered back to what was concrete, particular and odd in the situation under discussion. 'Like something out of Ronald Firbank!' He giggled. 'I told Mr. Habakkuk he ought to put steam heat into the statues. They're dreadfully unlifelike to the *touch.*' He moved his cupped hand over an imaginary marble protuberance.

Mr. Propter, who had been thinking about liberation, nodded and politely smiled.

'And Dr. Mulge's reading of the service!' Jeremy went on. 'Talk of unction! It couldn't have been oilier even in an English cathedral. Like vaseline with a flavour of port wine. And the way he said, "I am the resurrection and the life" — as though he really meant it, as though he, Mulge, could personally guarantee it, in writing, on a money-back basis: the entire cost of the funeral refunded if the next world fails to give complete satisfaction.'

'He probably even believes it,' said Mr. Propter meditatively. 'In some curious Pickwickian way, of course. You know: it's true, but you consistently act as though it weren't; it's the most important fact in the universe, but you never think about it if you can possibly avoid it.'

'And how do *you* believe in it?' Jeremy asked. 'Pickwickianly or unPickwickianly?' And when Mr. Propter answered that he didn't believe in that sort of resurrection and life: 'Oho!' he went on in the tone of an indulgent father who has caught his son kissing the housemaid, 'Oho! So there's also a Pickwickian resurrection?'

Mr. Propter laughed. ‘I think there may be,’ he said.

‘In which case, what has become of poor Pete?’

‘Well, to start with,’ said Mr. Propter slowly, ‘I should say that Pete, *qua* Pete, doesn’t exist any longer.’

‘Super-Pickwickian!’ Jeremy interjected.

‘But Pete’s ignorance,’ Mr. Propter went on, ‘Pete’s fears and cravings — well, I think it’s quite possible that they’re still somehow making trouble in the world. Making trouble for everything and everyone, especially for themselves. Themselves in whatever form they happen to be taking.’

‘And if by any chance Pete hadn’t been ignorant and concupiscent, what then;’

‘Well, obviously,’ said Mr. Propter, ‘there wouldn’t be anything to make further trouble.’ After a moment’s silence, he quoted Tauler’s definition of God. ‘“God is a being withdrawn from creatures, a free power, a pure working.”’

He turned the car off the main road, into the avenue of pepper trees that wound across the green lawns of the Tarzana Campus. The new Auditorium loomed up, austerely romanesque. Mr. Propter parked his old Ford among the lustrous Cadillacs and Chryslers and Packards already lined up in front of it, and they entered. The press photographers at the entrance looked them over, saw at a glance that they were neither bankers, nor movie stars, nor corporation lawyers, nor dignitaries of any church, nor senators, and turned away contemptuously.

The students were already in their places. Under their stares, Jeremy and Mr. Propter were ushered down the aisle to the rows of seats reserved for distinguished guests. And what distinction! There, in the front row, was Sol R. Katzenblum, the President of Abraham Lincoln Pictures Incorporated and a pillar of Moral Re-Armament; there, beside him, was the Bishop of Santa Monica; there too was Mr. Pescecagniolo, of the Bank of the Far West. The Grand Duchess Eulalie was sitting next to Senator Bardolph; and in the next row were two of the Engels Brothers and Gloria Bossom, who was chatting with Rear-Admiral Shotoverk. The orange robe and permanently waved beard

belonged to Swami Yogalinga, founder of the School of Personality. Beside him sat the Vice-President of Consol Oil and Mrs. Wagner …

Suddenly the organ burst out, full blast, into the Tarzana Anthem. The academic procession filed in. Two by two, in their gowns and hoods and tasselled mortarboards, the Doctors of Divinity, of Philosophy, of Science, of Law, of Letters, of Music, shuffled down the aisle and up the steps on to the platform, where their seats had been prepared for them in a wide arc close to the back drop. At the centre of the stage stood a reading-desk, and at the reading-desk stood Dr. Mulge. Not that he did any reading, of course; for Dr. Mulge prided himself on being able to speak almost indefinitely without a note. The reading-desk was there to be intimately leant over, to be caught hold of and passionately leant back from, to be struck emphatically with the palm of the hand, to be dramatically walked away from and returned to.

The organ was silent. Dr. Mulge began his address — began it with a reference, of course, to Mr. Stoyte. Mr. Stoyte whose generosity … The realization of a Dream … This embodiment of an ideal in Stone … The Man of Vision. Without Vision the people perish … But this Man had had Vision … The Vision of what Tarzana was destined to become … The centre, the focus, the torch-bearer … California … New Culture, richer science, higher spirituality … (Dr. Mulge's voice modulated from bassoon to trumpet. From vaseline with a mere flavour of port wine to undiluted fatty alcohol.) But, alas (and here the voice subsided pathetically into saxophone and lanoline), alas … Unable to be with us to-day … A sudden distressing event … Carried off on the threshold of life … A young collaborator in those scientific fields which he ventured to say were as close to Mr. Stoyte's heart as the fields of social service and culture … The shock … The exquisitely sensitive heart under the sometimes rough exterior … His physician had ordered a complete and immediate change of scene … But in spite of physical absence, his spirit … We feel it among us to-day … An inspiration to all, young and old alike … The torch of Culture … The Future … The Ideal … The Spirit of Man … Great things already accomplished … God had walked in power through this campus … Strengthened and guided …

Forward … Onward … Upward … Faith and Hope … Democracy … Freedom … The imperishable heritage of Washington and Lincoln … The glory that was Greece reborn beside the waters of the Pacific … The flag … The mission … The manifest destiny … The will of God … Tarzana …

It was over at last. The organ played. The academic procession filed back up the aisle. The distinguished guests straggled after it.

Outside, in the sunshine, Mr. Propter was button-holed by Mrs. Pescecagniolo.

‘I thought that was a wonderfully inspirational address,’ she said with enthusiasm.

Mr. Propter nodded. ‘Almost the most inspirational address I ever listened to. And God knows,’ he said, ‘I’ve heard a lot of them in the course of my life.’

CHAPTER TWO

EVEN IN LONDON there was a little diluted sunshine — sunshine that brightened and grew stronger as they drove through the diminishing smoke of the outer suburbs, until at last, somewhere near Esher, they had travelled into the most brilliant of early spring mornings.

Under a fur rug, Mr. Stoyte sprawled diagonally across the rear seat of the car. More for his own good, this time, than for his physician's, he was back again on sedatives, and found it hard, before lunch, to keep awake. With a fitful stertorousness he had dozed almost from the moment they drove away from the Ritz.

Pale and with sad eyes, silently ruminating an unhappiness which five days of rain on the Atlantic and three more of London gloom had done nothing to alleviate, Virginia sat aloof in the front seat.

At the wheel (for he had thought it best to take no chauffeur on this expedition) Dr. Obispo whistled to himself and, occasionally, even sang aloud — sang, '*Stretti, stretti, nell' estasí d' amor*'; sang, 'Do you think a l-ittle drink'll do us any harm?'; sang, 'I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls.' It was partly the fine weather that made him so cheerful — spring-time, he said to himself, the only merry ring-time, not to mention the lesser celandines, the windflowers, whatever they might be, the primroses in the copse. And should he ever forget his bewilderment when English people had started talking about cops in the singular and in contexts where policemen seemed deliriously out of place? 'Let's go and pick some primroses in the cops.' Surprising intestinal flora! Better even than the carp's. Which brought him to the second reason for his satisfaction with life. They were on their way to see the two old Hauberk ladies — on their way, perhaps, to finding something interesting about the Fifth Earl, something

significant about the relationship between senility and sterols and the intestinal flora of the carp.

With mock-operatic emphasis he burst again into song.

‘I drea-heamt I dwe-helt in mar-harble halls,’ he proclaimed, ‘with vass-als and serfs at my si-hi-hide. And of all who assembled with-hin those walls, that I was the hope and the pri-hi-hide.’

Virginia, who had been sitting beside him, stony with misery, turned round in sudden exasperation. ‘Oh, for heaven’s sake!’ she almost screamed, breaking a silence that had lasted all the way from Kingston-on-Thames. ‘Can’t you be quiet?’

Dr. Obispo ignored her protests. ‘I had riches,’ he sang on (and reflected, with an inward chuckle of satisfaction as he did so, that the statement now happened to be true), ‘I had riches too grea-heat to cou-hount.’ No; that was an exaggeration. Not at all too great to count. Just a nice little competence. Enough to give him security and the means to continue his researches without having to waste his time on a lot of sick people who ought to be dead. Two hundred thousand dollars in cash and forty-five hundred acres of land in the San Felipe Valley — land that Uncle Jo had positively sworn was just on the point of getting its irrigation water. (And if it didn’t get it, God! how he’d twist the old buzzard’s tail for him!) ‘Heart failure due to myocarditis of rheumatic origin.’ He could have asked a lot more than two hundred thousand for that death-certificate. Particularly as it hadn’t been his only service. No, sir! There had been all the mess to clear up. (The ninety-five-dollar fawn-coloured suit was ruined after all.) There had been the servants to keep away; the Baby to put to bed with a big shot of morphia; the permission to cremate the body to be obtained from the next of kin, who was a sister, living, thank God, in straitened circumstances, and at Pensacola, Florida, so that she fortunately couldn’t afford to come out to California for the funeral. And then (most ticklish of all) there had been the search for a dishonest undertaker; the discovery of a possible crook; the interview, with its veiled hints of an unfortunate accident to be hushed up, of money that was, practically speaking, no object; then, when the fellow had fired

off his sanctimonious little speech about its being a duty to help a leading citizen to avoid unpleasant publicity, the abrupt change of manner, the business-like statement of the unavoidable facts and the necessary fictions, the negotiations as to price. In the end, Mr. Pengo had agreed not to notice the holes in Pete's skull for as little as twenty-five thousand dollars.

'I had riches too gre-heat to cou-hount, could boast of a hi-yish ancestral name.' Yes, decidedly, Dr. Obispo reflected, as he sang, decidedly he could have asked for a great deal more. But what would have been the point? He was a reasonable man; almost, you might say, a philosopher; modest in his ambitions, uninterested in worldly success, and with tastes so simple that the most besetting of them, outside the sphere of scientific research, could be satisfied in the great majority of cases at practically no expense whatsoever, sometimes even with a net profit, as when Mrs. Bojanus had given him that solid gold cigarette-case as a token of her esteem — and then mere were Josephine's pearl studs, and the green enamel cuff-links with his monogram in diamonds from little what's-her-name …

'But I a-halso drea-heamt which plea-heased me most,' he sang, raising his voice for this final affirmation and putting in a passionate tremolo, 'that you lo-hoved me sti-hill the same, that you lo-hoved me sti-hill the same, that you loved me, he repeated, turning away for a moment from the Portsmouth road to peer with raised eyebrows and a look of amused, ironical enquiry into Virginia's averted face, 'you lo-hoved me sti-hill the same,' and, for the fourth time with tremendous emphasis and pathos, 'that you lo-ho-ho-hoved me sti-hi-hill the same.'

He shot another glance at Virginia. She was staring straight in front of her, holding her lower lip between her teeth, as though she were in pain but determined not to cry out.

'Did I dream correctly?' His smile was wolfish.

The Baby did not answer. From the back seat Mr. Stoyte snored like a bulldog.

‘Do you lo-ho-hove sti-hi-hill the same?’ he insisted, making the car swerve to the right as he spoke, and putting on speed to pass a row of Army lorries.

The Baby released her lip and said, ‘I could kill you.’

‘Of course you could,’ Dr. Obispo agreed. ‘But you won’t. Because you lo-ho-ho-hove me too much. Or rather,’ he added, and his smile became more gleefully canine with every word, ‘you don’t lo-ho-ho-hove *me*; you lo-ho-ho-hove …’ he paused for an instant: ‘Well, let’s put it in a more poetical way — because one can never have too much poetry, don’t you agree? you’re in lo-ho-hove with Lo-ho-ho-hove, so much in lo-ho-ho-hove that, when it came to the point, you simply couldn’t bring yourself to bump me off. Because, whatever you may feel about me, I’m the boy that produces the lo-ho-ho-hoves.’ He began to sing again: ‘I dre-heamt I kihilled the goo-hoo-hoo-hoose that laid-haid the go-holden e-he-heggs.’

Virginia covered her ears with her hands in an effort to shut out the sound of his voice — the hideous sound of the truth. Because, of course, it was true. Even after Pete’s death, even after she had promised Our Lady that it would never, never happen again — well, it had happened again.

Dr. Obispo continued his improvisation. ‘And that thu-hus I’d lo-host my so-hole excuse for showing the skin of my le-he-hegs.’

Virginia pressed her fingers more tightly over her ears. It had happened again, even though she’d said no, even though she’d got mad at him, fought with him, scratched him; but he’d only laughed and gone on; and then suddenly she was just too tired to fight any more. Too tired and too miserable. He got what he wanted; and the awful thing was that it seemed to be what she wanted — or, rather, what her unhappiness wanted; for the misery had been relieved for a time; she had been able to forget the blood; she had been able to sleep. The next morning she had despised and hated herself more than ever.

‘I had grottoes and candles and doodahs galore,’ Dr. Obispo sang on; then relapsed into speech; ‘not to mention fetishes, relics, mantras, prayer-wheels, gibberish, vestments. But I also dreamt which pleased me most — or rather more, seeing that we have to rhyme with galore’ (he opened his mouth and let

out his richest and most tremulous notes), ‘that you lo-hoved me sti-hill the same, that you lo-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-hoved me …’

‘Stop!’ Virginia shouted at the top of her voice.

Uncle Jo woke up with a start. ‘What’s the matter?’ he asked.

‘She objects to my singing,’ Dr. Obispo called back to him. ‘Goodness knows why. I have a charming voice. Particularly well adapted to a small auditorium, like this car.’ He laughed with whole-hearted merriment. The Baby’s antics, as she vacillated between Priapus and the Sacred Grotto, gave him the most exquisite amusement. Along with the fine weather, the primroses in the cops and the prospect of learning something decisive about sterols and senility, they accounted for the ebullience of his good-humour.

It was about half-past eleven when they reached their destination. The lodge was untenanted; Dr. Obispo had to get out and open the gates himself.

Within, grass was growing over the drive and the park had sunk back towards the squalor of unmodified nature. Uprooted by past storms, dead trees lay rotting where they had fallen. On the boles of the living, great funguses grew like pale buns. The ornamental plantations had turned into little jungles, impenetrable with brambles. Perched on its knoll above the drive, the Grecian gazebo was in ruins. They rounded a curve, and there was the house, Jacobean at one end, with strange accretions of nineteenth-century Gothic at the other. The yew hedges had grown up into high walls of shaggy greenery. The position of what had once been formal flower-beds was marked by rich green circles of docks, oblongs and crescents of sow-thistles and nettles. From the tufted grass of a long untended lawn emerged the tops of rusty croquet hoops.

Dr. Obispo stopped the car at the foot of the front steps and got out. As he did so, a little girl, perhaps eight or nine years old, darted out of a tunnel in the yew hedge. At the sight of the car and its occupants the child halted, made a movement of retreat, then, reassured by a second glance, came forward.

‘Look what I got,’ she said in sub-standard Southern English, and held out, snout downwards, a gas-mask half filled with primroses and dog’s-mercury.

Gleefully, Dr. Obispo laughed. ‘The cops!’ he cried. ‘You picked them in the cops!’ He patted the child’s tow-coloured head. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Millie,’ the little girl answered; and then added, with a note of pride in her voice: ‘I’aven’t been somewhere for five days now.’

‘Five days?’

Millie nodded triumphantly. ‘Granny says she’ll ‘ave to take me to the doctor.’ She nodded again, and smiled up at him with the expression of one who has just announced his forthcoming trip to Bali.

‘Well, I think your Granny’s entirely right,’ said Dr. Obispo. ‘Does your Granny live here?’

The child nodded affirmatively. ‘She’s in the kitchen,’ she answered; and added irrelevantly, ‘she’s deaf.’

‘And what about Lady Jane Hauberk?’ Dr. Obispo went on. ‘Does *she* live here? And the other one — Lady Anne, isn’t that it?’

Again the child nodded. Then an expression of sly mischief appeared on her face. ‘Do you know what Lady Anne does?’ she asked.

‘What does she do?’

Millie beckoned to him to bend down so that she could put her mouth to his ear. ‘She makes noises in’er stomick,’ she whispered.

‘You don’t say so!’

‘Like birds singing,’ the child added poetically. ‘She does it after lunch.’

Dr. Obispo patted the tow-coloured head again and said, ‘We’d like to see Lady Anne and Lady Jane.’

‘See them?’ the little girl repeated in a tone almost of alarm.

‘Do you think you could go and ask your Granny to show us in?’

Millie shook her head. ‘She wouldn’t do it. Granny won’t let nobody come in. Some people came about these things.’ She held up the gas-mask. ‘Lady Jane, she got so angry I was frightened. But then she broke one of the lamps with her stick — you know, by mistake: bang! and the glass was all in bits, all over the floor. That made me laugh.’

‘Good for you,’ said Dr. Obispo. ‘Why shouldn’t we make you laugh again?’

The child looked at him suspiciously. ‘What do you mean?’

Dr. Obispo assumed a conspiratorial expression and dropped his voice to a whisper. ‘I mean, you might let us in by one of the side-doors, and we’d all walk on tiptoes, like this’; he gave a demonstration across the gravel. ‘And then we’d pop into the room where they’re sitting and give them a surprise. And then maybe Lady Jane will smash another lamp, and we’ll all laugh and laugh and laugh. What do you say to that?’

‘Granny’d be awfully cross,’ the child said dubiously.

‘We won’t tell her you did it.’

‘She’d find out.’

‘No, she wouldn’t,’ said Dr. Obispo confidently. Then changing his tone, ‘Do you like candies?’ he added.

The child looked at him blankly.

‘Lovely candies?’ he repeated voluptuously; then suddenly remembered that, in this damned country, candies weren’t called candies. What the hell did they call them? He remembered. ‘Lovely sweets!’ He darted back to the car and returned with the expensive-looking box of chocolates that had been bought in case Virginia should feel hungry by the way. He opened the lid, let the child take one sniff, then closed it again. ‘Let us in,’ he said, ‘and you can have them all.’

Five minutes later they were squeezing their way through an ogival french window at the nineteenth-century end of the house. Within, there was a twilight that smelt of dust and dry-rot and moth-balls. Gradually, as the eyes became accustomed to the gloom, a draped billiard-table emerged into view, a mantelpiece with a gilt clock, a bookshelf containing the Waverley Novels in crimson leather, and the eighth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a large brown painting representing the baptism of the future Edward VII, the heads of five or six stags. Hanging on the wall near the door was a map of the Crimea; little flags on pins marked the position of Sevastopol and the Alma.

Still carrying the flower-filled gas-mask in one hand, and with the forefinger of the other pressed to her lips, Millie led the way on tiptoes along a corridor,

across a darkened drawing-room, through a lobby, down another passage. Then she halted and, waiting for Dr. Obispo to come up with her, pointed.

‘That’s the door,’ she whispered. ‘They’re in there.’

Without a word, Dr. Obispo handed her the box of chocolates; the child snatched it and, like an animal with a stolen tit-bit, slipped past Virginia and Mr. Stoyte, and hurried away down the dark passage to enjoy her prize in safety. Dr. Obispo watched her go, then turned to his companions.

There was a whispered consultation, and in the end it was agreed that Dr. Obispo should go on alone.

He walked forward, quietly opened the door, slipped through and closed it behind him.

Outside, in the corridor, the Baby and Uncle Jo waited for what seemed to them hours. Then, all at once, there was a crescendo of confused noise which culminated in the sudden emergence of Dr. Obispo. He slammed the door, pushed a key into the lock and turned it.

An instant later, from within, the door-handle was violently rattled, a shrill old voice cried, ‘How dare you?’ Then an ebony cane delivered a series of peremptory raps and the voice almost screamed, ‘Give me back those keys. Give them back at once.’

Dr. Obispo put the key of the door in his pocket and came down the corridor, beaming with satisfaction.

‘The two god-damnest-looking old hags you ever saw,’ he said. ‘One on each side of the fire, like Queen Victoria and Queen Victoria.’

A second voice joined the first; the rattling and the rapping were redoubled.

‘Bang away!’ Dr. Obispo shouted derisively; then, pushing Mr. Stoyte with one hand and with the other giving the Baby a familiar little slap on the buttocks, ‘Come on,’ he said. ‘Come on.’

‘Come on where?’ Mr. Stoyte asked in a tone of resentful bewilderment. He’d never been able to figure out what this damn fool expedition across the Atlantic was for — except, of course, to get away from the castle. Oh, yes, they’d had to get away from the castle. No question about that; in fact, the only question was

whether they'd ever be able to go back to it, after what happened — whether they'd ever be able to bathe in that pool again, for example. Christ! when he thought of it …

But, then, why go to England? At this season? Why not Florida or Hawaii? But no; Obispo had insisted it must be England. Because of his work, because there might be something important to be found out there. Well, he couldn't say no to Obispo — not now, not yet. And besides, he couldn't do without the man. His nerves, his digestion — all shot to pieces. And he couldn't sleep without dope; he couldn't pass a cop on the street without his heart missing a beat or two. And you could say, 'God is love. There is no death,' till you were blue in the face; but it didn't make any difference. He was old, he was sick; death was coming closer and closer, and unless Obispo did something quick, unless he found out something soon …

In the dim corridor Mr. Stoyte suddenly halted. 'Obispo,' he said anxiously, while the Hauberk ladies hammered with ebony on the door of their prison, 'Obispo, are you absolutely certain there's no such thing as hell? Can you prove it?'

Dr. Obispo laughed. 'Can you prove that the back side of the moon isn't inhabited by green elephants?' he asked.

'No, but seriously …' Mr. Stoyte insisted, in anguish.

'Seriously,' Dr. Obispo gaily answered, 'I can't prove anything about any assertion that can't be verified.' Mr. Stoyte and he had had this sort of conversation before. There was something, to his mind, exquisitely comic about chopping logic with the old man's unreasoning terror.

The Baby listened in silence. She *knew* about hell; she *knew* what happened if you committed mortal sins — sins like letting it happen again, after you'd promised Our Lady that it wouldn't. But Our Lady was so kind and so wonderful. And, after all, it had really been all that beast Sig's fault. Her own intentions had been absolutely pure; and then Sig had come along and just made her break her word. Our Lady would understand. The awful thing was that it had happened again, when he hadn't forced her. But even then it hadn't *really* been

her fault — because, after all, she'd been through that terrible experience; she wasn't well; she …

'But do you think hell's possible?' Mr. Stoyte began again.

'Everything is possible,' said Dr. Obispo cheerfully. He cocked an ear to listen to what the old hags were yelling back there behind the door.

'Do you think there's one chance in a thousand it may be true? Or one in a million?'

Grinning, Dr. Obispo shrugged his shoulders. Ask Pascal,' he suggested.

'Who's Pascal?' Mr. Stoyte enquired, clutching despairingly at any and every straw.

'He's dead,' Dr. Obispo positively shouted in his glee. 'Dead as a door-nail. And now, for God's sake!' He seized Uncle Jo by the arm and fairly dragged him along the passage.

The terrible word reverberated through Mr. Stoyte's imagination. 'But I want to be certain,' he protested. 'Certain about what you can't know!'

'There *must* be a way.'

'There isn't. No way except dying and then seeing what happens. Where the hell is that child?' he added in another tone, and called, 'Millie!'

Her face smeared with chocolate, the little girl popped up from behind an umbrella-stand in the lobby. 'Did you see 'em?' she asked with her mouth full.

Dr. Obispo nodded. 'They thought I was the Air Raid Precautions.'

'That's it!' the child cried excitedly. 'That was the one that made her break the lamp.'

'Come here, Millie,' Dr. Obispo commanded. The child came. 'Where's the door to the cellar?'

An expression of fear passed over Millie's face. 'It's locked,' she answered.

Dr. Obispo nodded. 'I know it,' he said. 'But Lady Jane gave me the keys.' He pulled out of his pocket a ring on which were suspended three large keys.

'There's bogies down there,' the child whispered.

'We don't worry about bogies.'

‘Granny says they’re awful,’ Millie went on. ‘She says they’re something chronic.’ Her voice broke into a whimper. ‘She says if I don’t go somewhere more regular-like, the bogies will come after me. But I can’t ‘elp it.’ The tears began to flow. ‘It isn’t my fault.’

‘Of course it isn’t,’ said Dr. Obispo impatiently. ‘Nothing is ever anybody’s fault. Even constipation. But now I want you to show us the door of the cellar.’

Still in tears, Millie shook her head. ‘I’m frightened.’

‘But you won’t have to go down into the cellar. Just show us where the door is, that’s all.’

‘I don’t want to.’

‘Won’t you be a nice little girl,’ Dr. Obispo wheedled, ‘and take us to the door?’

Stubborn with fear, Millie continued to shake her head.

Dr. Obispo’s hand shot out and snatched the box of chocolates out of the child’s grasp. ‘If you don’t tell me, you won’t have any candies,’ he said, and added irritably, ‘sweets, I mean.’

Millie let out a scream of anguish and tried to get back at the box; but he held it high up, beyond her reach. ‘Only when you show us the door of the cellar,’ he said; and, to show that he was in earnest, he opened the box, took a handful of chocolates and popped them one after another into his mouth. ‘Aren’t they good!’ he said as he munched. ‘Aren’t they just wonderful! Do you know, I’m glad you won’t show us the door, because then I can eat them all.’ He took another bite, made a grimace of ecstasy. ‘Ooh, goody, goody!’ He smacked his lips. ‘Poor little Millie! She isn’t going to get any more of them.’ He helped himself again.

‘Oh, don’t, don’t!’ the child entreated each time she saw one of the brown nuggets of bliss disappearing between Dr. Obispo’s jaws. Then a moment came when greed was stronger than fear. ‘I’ll show you where it is,’ she screamed, like a victim succumbing to torture and promising to confess.

The effect was magical. Dr. Obispo replaced in the box the three chocolates he was still holding and closed the lid. ‘Come on,’ he said, and held out his hand

for the child to take.

‘Give me the box,’ she demanded.

Dr. Obispo, who understood the principles of diplomacy, shook his head. ‘Not till you’ve taken us to the door,’ he said.

Millie hesitated for a moment; then, resigned to the hard necessity of keeping to her side of the bargain, took his hand.

Followed by Uncle Jo and the Baby, they made their way out of the lobby, back through the drawing-room, along the passage, past the map of the Crimea and across the billiard-room, along another passage and into a large library. The red plush curtains were drawn; but a little light filtered between them. All round the room the brown and blue and crimson strata of classic literature ran up to within three feet of the high ceiling, and at regular intervals along the mahogany cornice stood busts of the illustrious dead. Millie pointed to Dante. ‘That’s Lady Jane,’ she whispered confidentially.

‘For Christ’s sake!’ Mr. Stoyte broke out startlingly. ‘What’s the big idea? What the hell do you figure we’re doing?’

Dr. Obispo ignored him. ‘Where’s the door?’ he asked.

The child pointed.

‘What do you mean?’ he started angrily to shout. Then he saw that what he had taken for just another section of the book-filled shelves was in fact a mere false front of wood and leather simulating thirty-three volumes of the Collected Sermons of Archbishop Stilling-fleet and (he recognized the Fifth Earl’s touch) the Complete Works, in seventy-seven volumes, of Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade. A keyhole revealed itself to a closer scrutiny.

‘Give me my sweets,’ the child demanded.

But Dr. Obispo was taking no risks. ‘Not till we see if the key fits.’

He tried and, at the second attempt, succeeded. ‘There you are.’ He handed Millie her chocolates and at the same time opened the door. The child uttered a scream of terror and rushed away.

‘What’s the big idea?’ Mr. Stoyte repeated uneasily.

‘The big idea,’ said Dr. Obispo, as he looked down the flight of steps that descended, after a few feet, into an impenetrable darkness, ‘the big idea is that you may not have to find out whether there’s such a place as hell. Not yet awhile, that’s to say; not for a very long time maybe. Ah, thank God!’ he added. ‘We shall have some light.’

Two old-fashioned bull’s-eye lanterns were standing on a shelf just inside the door. Dr. Obispo picked one of them up, shook it, held it to his nose. There was oil in it. He lit them both, handed one to Mr. Stoyte and, taking the other himself, led the way cautiously down the stairs.

A long descent; then a circular chamber cut out of the yellow sandstone. There were four doorways. They chose one of them and passed, along a narrow corridor, into a second chamber with two more doorways. A blind alley first; then another flight of steps leading to a cave full of ancient refuse. There was no second issue; laboriously, with two wrong turnings on the way, they retraced their steps to the circular chamber from which they had started, and made trial of its second doorway. A flight of descending steps; a succession of small rooms. One of these had been plastered, and upon its walls early eighteenth-century hands had scratched obscene *graffiti*. They hurried on, down another short flight of steps, into a large square room with an air-shaft leading at an angle through the rock to a tiny, far-away ellipse of white light. That was all. They turned back again. Mr. Stoyte began to swear; but the doctor insisted on going on. They tried the third doorway. A passage, a suite of three rooms. Two outlets from the last, one mounting, but walled up with masonry after a little way; the other descending to a corridor on a lower level. Thirty or forty feet brought them to an opening on the left. Dr. Obispo turned his lantern into it, and the light revealed a vaulted recess, at the end of which, on a stuccoed pedestal, stood a replica in marble of the Medici Venus.

‘Well, I’m damned!’ said Mr. Stoyte, and then, on second thoughts, was seized with a kind of panic. ‘How the hell did *that* get here, Obispo?’ he said, running to catch up the doctor.

Dr. Obispo did not answer, but hurried impatiently forward.

‘It’s crazy,’ Mr. Stoyte went on apprehensively, as he trotted behind the doctor. ‘It’s downright crazy. I tell you, I don’t like it.’

Dr. Obispo broke his silence. ‘We might see if we can get her for the Beverly Pantheon,’ he said with a wolfish joviality. ‘Hullo, what’s this?’ he added.

They emerged from the tunnel into a fair-sized room. At the centre of the room was a circular drum of masonry, with two iron uprights rising from either side of it, and a cross-piece, from which hung a pulley.

‘The well!’ said Dr. Obispo, remembering a passage in the Fifth Earl’s notebook.

He almost ran towards the tunnel on the further side of the room. Ten feet from the entrance, his progress was barred by a heavy, nail-studded oak door. Dr. Obispo took out his bunch of keys, chose at random and opened the door at the first trial. They were on the threshold of a small oblong chamber. His bull’s-eye revealed a second door on the opposite wall. He started at once towards it.

‘Canned beef!’ said Mr. Stoyte in astonishment, as he ran the beam of his lantern over the rows of tins and jars on the shelves of a tall dresser that occupied almost the whole of one of the sides of the room. ‘Biloxi Shrimps. Sliced Pineapple. Boston Baked Beans,’ he read out, then turned towards Dr. Obispo. ‘I tell you, Obispo, I don’t like it.’

The Baby had taken out a handkerchief saturated in ‘Shocking’ and was holding it to her nose. ‘The smell!’ she said indistinctly through its folds, and shuddered with disgust. ‘The smell!’

Dr. Obispo, meanwhile, was trying his keys on the lock of the other door. It opened at last. A draught of warm air flowed in, and at once the little room was filled with an intolerable stench. ‘Christ!’ said Mr. Stoyte, and behind her handkerchief the Baby let out a scream of nauseated horror.

Dr. Obispo made a grimace and advanced along the stream of foul air. At the end of a short corridor was a third door, of iron bars this time, like the door (Dr. Obispo reflected) of a death-cell in a prison. He flashed his lantern between the bars, into the foetid darkness beyond.

From the little room Mr. Stoyte and the Baby suddenly heard an astonished exclamation and then, after a moment's silence, a violent, explosive guffaw, succeeded by peal after peal of Dr. Obispo's ferocious, metallic laughter. Paroxysm upon uncontrollable paroxysm, the noise reverberated back and forth in the confined space. The hot, stinking air vibrated with a deafening and almost maniacal merriment.

Followed by Virginia, Mr. Stoyte crossed the room and hastened through the open door into the narrow tunnel beyond. Dr. Obispo's laughter was getting on his nerves. 'What the hell …?' he shouted angrily as he advanced; then broke off in the middle of the sentence. 'What's that?' he whispered.

'A foetal ape,' Dr. Obispo began; but was cut short by another explosion of hilarity, that doubled him up as though with a blow in the solar plexus.

'Holy Mary,' the Baby began behind her handkerchief.

Beyond the bars, the light of the lanterns had scooped out of the darkness a narrow world of forms and colours. On the edge of a low bed, at the centre of this world, a man was sitting, staring, as though fascinated, into the light. His legs, thickly covered with coarse reddish hair, were bare. The shirt, which was his only garment, was torn and filthy. Knotted diagonally across the powerful chest was a broad silk ribbon that had evidently once been blue. From a piece of string tied round his neck was suspended a little image of St. George and the Dragon in gold and enamel. He sat hunched up, his head thrust forward and at the same time sunk between his shoulders. With one of his huge and strangely clumsy hands he was scratching a sore place that showed red between the hairs of his left calf.

'A foetal ape that's had time to grow up,' Dr. Obispo managed at last to say. 'It's *too* good!' Laughter overtook him again. 'Just look at his face!' he gasped, and pointed through the bars. Above the matted hair that concealed the jaws and cheeks, blue eyes stared out of cavernous sockets. There were no eyebrows; but under the dirty, wrinkled skin of the forehead a great ridge of bone projected like a shelf.

Suddenly, out of the black darkness, another simian face emerged into the beam of the lantern — a face only lightly hairy, so that it was possible to see, not only the ridge above the eyes, but also the curious distortions of the lower jaws, the accretions of bone in front of the ears. Clothed in an old check ulster and some glass beads, a body followed the face into the light.

'It's a woman,' said Virginia, almost sick with the horrified disgust she felt at the sight of those pendulous and withered dugs.

The doctor exploded into even noisier merriment.

Mr. Stoyte seized him by the shoulder and violently shook him. 'Who are they?' he demanded.

Dr. Obispo wiped his eyes and drew a deep breath; the storm of his laughter was flattened to a heaving calm. As he opened his mouth to answer Mr. Stoyte's question, the creature in the shirt suddenly turned upon the creature in the ulster and hit out at her head. The palm of the enormous hand struck the side of the face. The creature in the ulster uttered a scream of pain and rage, and shrank back out of the light. From the shadow came a shrill, furious gibbering that seemed perpetually to tremble on the verge of articulate blasphemy.

'The one with the Order of the Garter,' said Dr. Obispo, raising his voice against the tumult, 'he's the Fifth Earl of Gonister. The other's his housekeeper.'

'But what's happened to them?'

'Just time,' said Dr. Obispo airily.

'Time?'

'I don't know how old the female is,' Dr. Obispo went on. 'But the Earl there — let me see, he was two hundred and one last January.'

From the shadows the shrill voice continued to scream its all but articulate abuse. Impassibly the Fifth Earl scratched the sore on his leg and stared at the light.

Dr. Obispo went on talking. Slowing up of development rates … one of the mechanisms of evolution … the older an anthropoid, the stupider … senility and sterol poisoning … the intestinal flora of the carp … the Fifth Earl had anticipated his own discovery … no sterol poisoning, no senility … no death,

perhaps, except through an accident … but meanwhile the foetal anthropoid was able to come to maturity … It was the finest joke he had ever known.

Without moving from where he was sitting, the Fifth Earl urinated on the floor. A shriller chattering arose from the darkness. He turned in the direction from which it came and bellowed the guttural distortions of almost forgotten obscenities.

‘No need of any further experiment,’ Dr. Obispo was saying. ‘We know it works. You can start taking the stuff at once. At once,’ he repeated with sarcastic emphasis.

Mr. Stoyte said nothing.

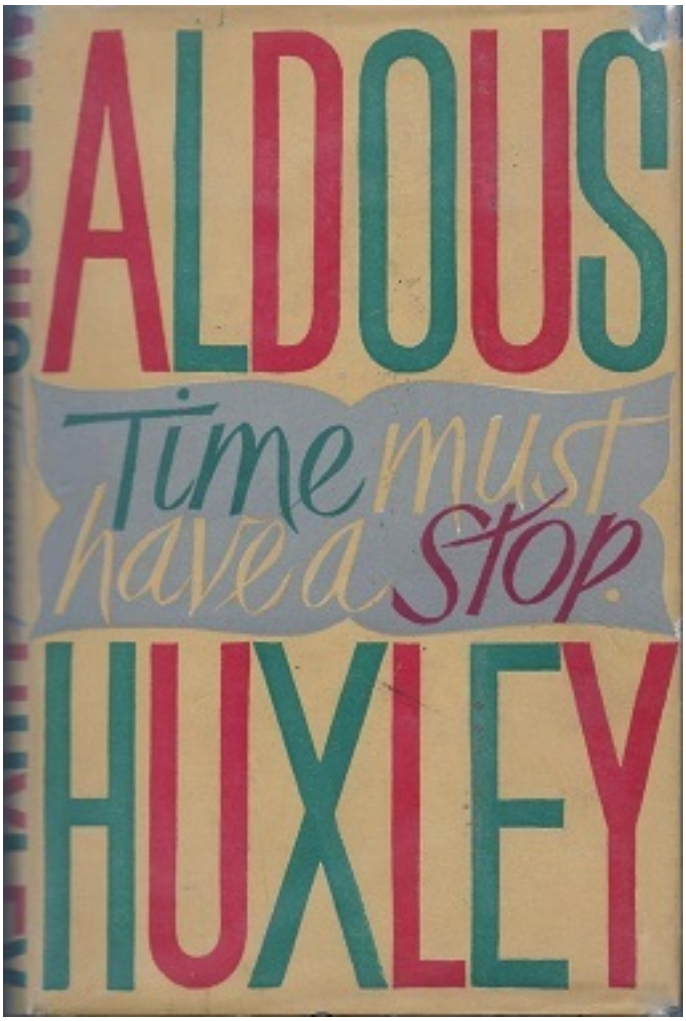
On the other side of the bars, the Fifth Earl rose to his feet, stretched, scratched, yawned, then turned and took a couple of steps towards the boundary that separated the light from the darkness. His housekeeper’s chattering became more agitated and rapid. Affecting to pay no attention, the Earl halted, smoothed the broad ribbon of his order with the palm of his hand, then fingered the jewel at his neck, making as he did so a curious humming noise that was like a simian memory of the serenade in *Don Giovanni.* The creature in the ulster whimpered apprehensively, and her voice seemed to retreat further into the shadows. Suddenly, with a ferocious yell, the Fifth Earl sprang forward, out of the narrow universe of lantern light into the darkness beyond. There was a rush of footsteps, a succession of yelps; then a scream and the sound of blows and more screams; then no more screams, but only a stertorous growling in the dark and little cries.

Mr. Stoyte broke the silence. ‘How long do you figure it would take before a person went like that?’ he said in a slow, hesitating voice. ‘I mean, it wouldn’t happen at once … there’d be a long time while a person … well, you know; while he wouldn’t change any. And once you get over the first shock — well, they look like they were having a pretty good time. I mean in their own way, of course. Don’t you think so, Obispo?’ he insisted.

Dr. Obispo went on looking at him in silence; then threw back his head and started to laugh again.

Time Must Have a Stop

Time Must Have a Stop was first published in the USA in 1944 by Harper & Brothers and released a year later in Britain by Chatto & Windus. Huxley was immensely proud of the novel and considered it to be one of his most successful works at merging together his philosophical ideas with a good narrative. The title of book is taken from the death speech by Hotspur (Harry Percy) in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part One*. The novel introduces seventeen-year-old poet, Sebastian Barnack, whose frivolous and decadent lifestyle frustrates and enrages his father. Sebastian is a strikingly handsome young man, who cares much for his appearance, so when his father refuses to help him acquire expensive formal wear for a friend's party, he decides to leave for Italy with his debauched and hedonistic uncle to acquire the funds for his clothing. It is during this holiday that Sebastian begins to question his beliefs and values. He develops a close relationship with Bruno, a profoundly religious bookshop owner and is inspired to pursue a different path in life.



The first edition

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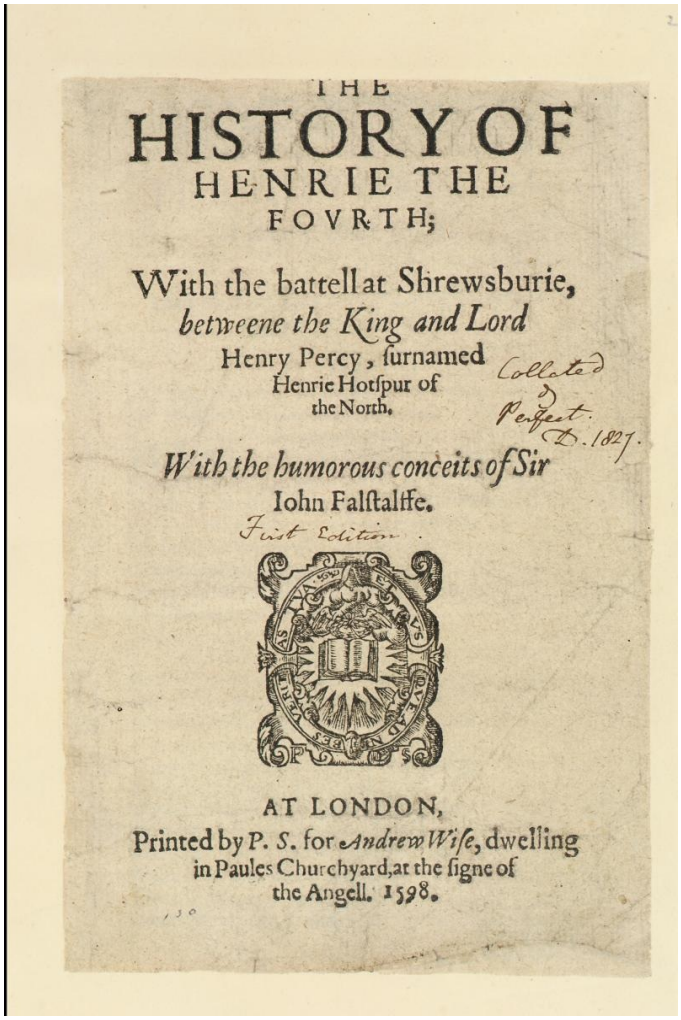


THE
HISTORY OF
HENRIE THE
FOVRTH;

With the battell at Shrewsburie,
betweene the King and Lord
Henry Percy, ſurnamed
Henrie Hotſpur of
the North.

Collated
&
perfect.
D. 1827.

With the humorous conceits of Sir
Iohn Falſtaffe.

First Edition.

AT LONDON,
Printed by P. S. for *Andrew Wiſe*, dwelling
in Paules Churchyard, at the ſigne of
the Angell. 1598.

The title of the novel was taken from Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part 1

CHAPTER ONE

SEBASTIAN BARNACK CAME out of the reading room of the public library and paused in the vestibule to put on his shabby overcoat. Looking at him, Mrs. Ockham felt a sword in her heart. This small and exquisite creature with the seraphic face and the pale curly hair was the living image of her own, her only, her dead and vanished darling.

The boy's lips were moving, she noticed, as he struggled into his coat. Talking to himself — just as her Frankie used to do. He turned and began to walk past the bench on which she was sitting, towards the door.

'It's a raw evening,' she said aloud, acting on a sudden impulse to detain this living phantom, to turn the sharp memory in her wounded heart.

Startled out of his preoccupying thoughts, Sebastian halted, turned and, for a second or two, stared at her uncomprehending. Then he took in the significance of that yearningly maternal smile. His eyes hardened. This sort of thing had happened before. She was treating him as though he were one of those delicious babies one pats the heads of in perambulators. He'd teach the old bitch! But as usual he lacked the necessary courage and presence of mind. In the end he just feebly smiled and said, Yes, it *was* a raw evening.

Mrs. Ockham, meanwhile, had opened her bag and pulled out a white cardboard box.

'Would you like one of these?'

She held out the box. It was French chocolate, Frankie's favourite — her own too, for that matter. Mrs. Ockham had a weakness for sweet things.

Sebastian considered her uncertainly. Her accent was all right, and in their rather shapeless tweedy way the clothes were substantial and of good quality. But she was fat and old — at least forty, he guessed. He hesitated, torn between a desire to put this tiresome creature in her place and a no less urgent desire for

those delicious *langues de chat.* Like a pug, he said to himself, as he looked at that blunt, soft face of hers. A pink, hairless pug with a bad complexion. After which he felt that he could accept the chocolates without compromising his integrity.

‘Thanks,’ he said, and gave her one of those enchanting smiles which middle-aged ladies always found completely irresistible.

To be seventeen, to have a mind which one felt to be agelessly adult, and to look like a Della Robbia angel of thirteen — it was an absurd and humiliating fate. But last Christmas he had read Nietzsche, and since then he had known that he must Love his Fate. *Amor Fad* — but tempered with a healthy cynicism. If people were ready to pay one for looking less than one’s age, why not give them what they wanted?

‘How good!’

He smiled at her again, and the corners of his mouth were brown with chocolate. The sword in Mrs. Ockham’s heart gave another agonizing twist.

‘Take the whole box,’ she said. Her voice trembled, her eyes were bright with tears.

‘No, no, I couldn’t …’

‘Take it,’ she insisted, ‘take it.’ And she pressed it into his hand — into Frankie’s hand.

‘Oh, thank you….’ It was just what Sebastian had hoped, even expected. He had had experience of these sentimental old dodoes.

‘I had a boy once,’ Mrs. Ockham went on brokenly. ‘So like you he was. The same hair and eyes …’ The tears overflowed on to her cheeks. She took off her glasses and wiped them; then, blowing her nose, she got up and hurried into the reading room.

Sebastian stood looking after her until she was out of sight. All at once he felt horribly guilty and mean. He looked at the box in his hand. A boy had died in order that he might have these *langues de chat*: and if his own mother were alive, she would be nearly as old now as that poor creature in the spectacles. And if *he* had died, she’d have been just as unhappy and sentimental. Impulsively, he

made a movement to throw the chocolates away; then checked himself. No, that would be just silliness and superstition. He slipped the box into his pocket and walked out into the foggy twilight.

‘Millions and millions,’ he whispered to himself; and the enormity of the evil seemed to grow with every repetition of the word. All over the world, millions of men and women lying in pain; millions dying, at this very moment; millions more grieving over them, their faces distorted, like that poor old hag’s, the tears running down their cheeks. And millions starving, millions frightened, and sick, and anxious. Millions being cursed and kicked and beaten by other brutal millions. And everywhere the stink of garbage and drink and unwashed bodies, everywhere the blight of stupidity and ugliness. The horror was always there, even when one happened to be feeling well and happy — always there, just round the corner and behind almost every door.

As he walked down Haverstock Hill, Sebastian felt himself evercome by a vast impersonal sadness. Nothing else seemed to exist now, or to matter, except death and agony.

And then that phrase of Keats’s came back to him— ‘The giant agony of the world!’ The giant agony. He racked his memory to find the other lines. ‘None may usurp this height …’ How did it go?

None may usurp this height, returned that shade,

But those to whom the miseries of the world

Are misery, and will not let them rest….

How exactly right that was! And perhaps Keats had thought of it one cold spring evening, walking down the hill from Hampstead, just as he himself was doing now. Walking down, and stopping sometimes to cough up a morsel of his lungs and think of his own death as well as of other people’s. Sebastian began again, whispering articulately to himself.

None may usurp this height, returned that shade,

But those …

But, good heavens, how awful it sounded when you spoke it aloud! None may usurp *this* height, returned *that* shade, but *those* … How could he have let a thing

like that get past him? But, of course, old Keats was pretty careless sometimes. And being a genius didn't preserve him from the most ghastly lapses into bad taste. There were things in *Endymion* that made one shudder. And when one reflected that it was supposed to be *Greek* … Sebastian smiled to himself with compassionate irony. One of these days he'd show them what could be done with Greek mythology. Meanwhile, his mind went back to the phrases that had come to him just now in the library, while he was reading Tarn's book on Hellenistic civilization. 'Ignore the dried figs!' that was how it was to begin. 'Ignore the dried figs …' But, after all, dried figs can be good figs. For slaves there would never be anything but the spoilage and refuse of the crop. 'Ignore the *stale* figs,' then. Besides, in this particular context of sound, 'stale' carried the proper vowel.

Ignore the stale figs, the weevils and the whippings,

The old men terrified of death …

But that was horribly flat. Steam-rolled and macadamized, like bad Wordsworth. What about 'scared of dying'?

The old men scared of dying, the women …

He hesitated, wondering how to sum up that dismal life of the Gyneceum. Then, from the mysterious source of light and energy at the back of his skull, out popped the perfect phrase: '… the women in cages.'

Sebastian smiled at the image that bobbed up — a whole zoo of ferocious and undomesticable girls, a deafening aviary of dowagers. But these would be for another poem — a poem in which he would take vengeance on the whole female sex. At the moment his business was with Hellas — with the historical squalor that was Greece and the imaginary glory. Imaginary, of course, so far as a whole people was concerned, but surely realizable by an individual, a poet above all. Some day, somehow, somewhere, that glory would be within his grasp; of that Sebastian was convinced. But meanwhile it was important not to make a fool of oneself. The passion of his nostalgia would have to be tempered, in the expression, with a certain irony, the splendour of the longed-for ideal with a spice of the absurd. Forgetting all about the dead boy and the giant agony of the

world, he helped himself to a *langue de chat* from the store in his pocket and, his mouth full, resumed the intoxicating labour of composition.

Ignore the stale figs, the weevils and the whippings,

The old men scared of dying, the women in cages.

So much for history. Now for imagination.

In a perpetual June …

He shook his head. ‘Perpetual’ was like the headmaster talking about the climate of Ecuador in those asinine geography lessons of his. ‘Chronic’ suggested itself as an alternative. The associations with varicose veins and the language of Cockney charwomen delighted him.

In a chronic June, what Alcibiadeses

Surround the beard of Plato!

Vile! This was no place for proper names. ‘What musculatures’ perhaps? Then, like manna, ‘what heavyweights’ fell from heaven. Yes, yes; ‘what highbrow heavyweights.’ He laughed aloud. And substituting ‘wisdom’ for ‘Plato’ you got:

In a chronic June, what highbrow heavyweights

Surround the beard of wisdom!

Sebastian repeated the words with relish, two or three times. And now for the other sex.

Hark, near by,

The twangling and the flutes!

He walked on, frowning to himself. Those prancing Bacchae, those Praxitelean breasts and buttocks, those dancers on the vases — how hellishly difficult to make any kind of sense of them! Compress and express. Squeeze all the voluptuous images into a lump and, in the act, squeeze out of them a liqueur-glassful of verbal juice, at once astringent and heady, tart and aphrodisiac. It was easier said than done. His lips began to move at last.

‘Hark,’ he whispered again.

Hark, near by,

The twangling and the flutes. Before, behind,

Gyre after gyre, what orbed resiliences,

The last veil loosened, uneclipse their moons!

He sighed and shook his head. Not quite right yet; but still, it would have to do for the time being. And meanwhile here was the corner. Should he go straight home, or walk round by Bantry Place, pick up Susan and let her hear the new poem? Sebastian hesitated a moment, then decided on the second course and turned to the right. He felt in the mood for an audience and applause.

… what orbed resiliences,

The last veil loosened, uneclipse their moons!

But perhaps the whole thing was too short. It might be necessary to slip in three or four more lines between those resiliences and his final, purple explosion of Bengal lights. Something about the Parthenon, for example. Or maybe something about Aeschylus would be more amusing.

Tragical on stilts, bawling sublimities

Through a tortured mouth-hole …

But goodness! here were those Bengal lights, rocketing up irrepressibly and uninvited into his throat.

And all the time, darling upon a thousand

Islands in the hyacinthine sea,

What fierce desires …

No, no, no. Too vague, too fleshlessly abstract!

What bulls, what boys, what frenzy of swans and nipples,

What radiant lusts like a red forge panting up

From fire to brighter fire …

But ‘brighter’ had no kind of resonance, no meaning beyond itself. What he needed was a word that, while it described the growing intensity of the fire, should also convey the substance of his own passionately cherished faith — the equivalence of all the ecstasies, the poetic, the sexual, even the religious (if you went in for that sort of thing), and their superiority to all the merely humdrum and ordinary states of being.

He went back to the beginning, hoping in this way to gather enough momentum to carry him over the obstacle.

And all the while, darling upon a thousand
Islands in the hyacinthine sea,
What bulls, what boys, what frenzy of swans and nipples,
What radiant lusts, like a red forge panting up
From fire … from fire …

He hesitated; then the words came.

From fire to purer fire, to Light Itself —
The incandescent copulation of Gods.

But here was the turning into Bantry Place, and even through the closed and curtained windows of number five he could hear Susan at her piano lesson, playing that thing of Scarlatti's she had been working on all the winter. The sort of music, it struck him, that would happen if the bubbles in a magnum of champagne were to rush up rhythmically and, as they reached the surface, burst into sounds as dry and tangy as the wine from whose depths they had arisen. The simile pleased him so much that Sebastian failed to remember that he had never tasted champagne; and his last reflection, as he rang the bell, was that the music would be even dryer and tangier if it were the harpsichord that were being played and not old Pfeiffer's luscious Blüthner.

Over the top of the piano, Susan caught sight of him as he entered the music-room — those beautiful parted lips of his, and the soft hair she always longed to stroke and run her fingers through (but he would never let her), tousled by the wind into a delicious frenzy of pale curls. How sweet of him to have come out of his way to call for her! She gave him a quick glad smile, and as she did so, noticed all at once that there were tiny little water-drops in his hair, like the lovely dew on cabbage leaves — only here they were smaller, beaded along silk floss; and if one touched them, they would be as cold as ice. To think of it was enough to get her all tangled up in the fingering of her left hand.

Old Dr. Pfeiffer, who was pacing up and down the room like a caged animal — a small, obese bear in unpressed trousers and with the moustache of a walrus

— took the much-chewed cigar stump out of the corner of his mouth and shouted in German:

‘Musik, musik!’

With an effort, Susan expelled from her mind the thought of dewdrops on silky curls, caught up the faltering sonata and played on. To her chagrin, she felt herself blushing.

Crimson cheeks, and the hair auburn almost to redness. Beetroots and carrots, Sebastian reflected without indulgence; and the way she showed her gums when she smiled — it was positively anatomical.

Susan struck the final chord and dropped her hands into her lap, waiting for the master’s verdict. It came with a roar and on a blast of cigar smoke.

‘Goot, goot, goot!’ And Dr. Pfeiffer clapped her on the shoulder, as though he were encouraging a cart-horse. Then he turned to Sebastian.

‘Und here’s der liddle Ariel! Oder, perhaps, der liddle Puck — not?’ He twinkled between his narrowed eyelids with what he felt to be the most playfully subtle, the most exquisite and cultured irony.

Little Ariel, little Puck … Twice in an afternoon, and this time without any excuse — just because the old buffoon thought he was being funny.

‘Not being a German,’ Sebastian retorted tartly, ‘I haven’t read any Shakespeare — so I really can’t say.’

‘Der Puck, der Puck!’ cried Dr. Pfeiffer, and laughed so whole-heartedly that he stirred up his chronic bronchitis and started to cough.

An expression of anxiety appeared on Susan’s face. Goodness only knew where this would end. She jumped up from the piano-stool, and when the explosions and the horribly liquid wheezings of Dr. Pfeiffer’s cough had somewhat subsided, she announced that they must leave at once; her mother was particularly anxious for her to get back early today.

Dr. Pfeiffer wiped the tears out of his eyes, bit once again on the much-chewed end of his cigar, treated Susan to two or three more of his resounding, cart-horse endearments, and told her in God’s name to remember what he had said about the trills in the right hand. Then, picking up from a table the cedar-

lined silver box, which a grateful pupil had given him for his last birthday, he turned to Sebastian, laid one huge square hand on the boy's shoulder, and with the other held the cigars under his nose.

'Take one,' he said cajolingly. 'Take a nize big fat Havana. Free of charge, *und guarantiert* it won't make a vomitus even to a sucking baby.'

'Oh, shut up!' Sebastian shouted in a fury that was on the verge of tears; and suddenly ducking down, he slipped from under his persecutor's arm and ran out of the room. Susan stood for a moment, hesitant, then without a word hurried after him. Dr. Pfeiffer took the cigar out of his mouth and shouted after her:

'Quick! Quick! Our liddle genius is crying.'

The door slammed. In defiance of his bronchitis, Dr. Pfeiffer started to laugh again, enormously. Two months before, the liddle genius had accepted one of his cigars and, while Susan did her best with the 'Moonlight Sonata,' had puffed away at it for nearly five minutes. Then there was a panic dash for the bathroom; but he had failed to get there quite in time. Dr. Pfeiffer's sense of humour was medievally robust; for him, that vomitus on the second-floor landing was almost the funniest thing that had happened since the jokes in *Faust.*

CHAPTER TWO

HE WAS WALKING so fast that Susan had to run, and even so she came up with him only under the second lamp-post. She caught his arm and squeezed it affectionately.

‘Sebastian!’

‘Let go,’ he commanded angrily, and shook himself free. He wasn’t going to be patronized and condoled with by anyone.

There! She’d done the wrong thing again. But why must he be so horribly touchy? And why on earth did he pay any attention to an old ass like Pfeiffy?

For a while they walked along, side by side, in silence. She spoke at last.

‘Did you write any poetry today?’

‘No,’ Sebastian lied. Those incandescent copulations of gods had been quenched and turned to ashes. The very thought of reciting the lines now, after what had happened, made him feel sick — like the thought of eating the cold scraps left over from yesterday’s dinner.

There was another silence. It was a half-holiday, Susan was thinking, and because it was examination-time, there wasn’t any football. Had he spent the afternoon with that awful Esdaile creature? She shot a glance at him under the next lamp; yes, there was no doubt of it, he looked dark under the eyes. The pigs! She was filled with sudden anger — anger born of a jealousy, all the more painful for being unavowable. She had no rights; there had never been any question of their being anything but cousins, almost sister and brother; besides, it was too painfully obvious that he didn’t even dream of thinking about her in that other way. And incidentally when he *had* asked her, that time, two years before, to let him see her without any clothes on, she had said no, in an absolute panic. Two days later she told Pamela Groves about what had happened; and Pamela, who went to one of those progressive schools and whose parents were so much

younger than Susan's, had merely roared with laughter. What a fuss about nothing at all! Why, she and her brothers and her cousins — they were always seeing one another with no clothes on. Yes, and her brothers' friends too. So why on earth shouldn't poor Sebastian do it, if he wanted to? All this silly Victorian prudery! Susan was made to feel ashamed of her own and her mother's old-fashioned views. Next time Sebastian asked, she'd take off her pyjamas immediately and stand there in front of him in the attitude, she decided after some reflection, of that Roman matron, or whoever she was, in the Alma-Tadema engraving in her father's study, smiling and with her arms up, doing her hair. For several days she rehearsed the scene in front of her looking-glass, until finally she had it all absolutely perfect. But unfortunately Sebastian never renewed his request, and she hadn't the nerve to take the initiative. With the result that here he was, doing the most awful things with that Esdaile bitch, and she didn't have any right or reason even to cry. Much less to slap his face, as she would have liked to do, and call him names, and pull his hair, and … and make him kiss her.

'I suppose you spent the afternoon with your precious Mrs. Esdaile,' she said at last, trying to sound contemptuous and superior.

Sebastian, who had been walking with bent head, looked up at her.

'What's that to you?' he said after a pause.

'Nothing at all.' Susan shrugged her shoulders and uttered a little laugh. But inwardly she felt angry with herself and ashamed. How often she had vowed never to show any further curiosity about his beastly affair, never to listen again to those horrifying details, which he recounted so vividly and with so manifest a relish! And yet curiosity always got the better of her, and she listened greedily every time. Listened just because these accounts of his love-making with somebody else were so painful to her. Listened, too, because thus to share in his love-making, even theoretically and in imagination, was obscurely exciting to her, and itself constituted a kind of sensual bond between them, a mental embrace, horribly unsatisfying and exasperating, but none the less an embrace.

Sebastian had looked away; but now suddenly he turned back to her with a strange smile almost of triumph, as though he had just scored off somebody.

‘All right, then,’ he said. ‘You’ve asked for it. Don’t blame me if it shocks your maiden modesty.’

He broke off with a rather harsh little laugh, and walked along in silence, meditatively rubbing the bridge of his nose with the tip of his right forefinger. How well she knew the gesture! It was the infallible sign that he was composing a poem, or thinking of the best way to tell one of his stories.

Those stories, those extraordinary stories! Susan had lived in the fantastic worlds of Sebastian’s creation almost as long and quite as intensely as she had lived in the real world. More intensely perhaps; for in the real world she had to depend on her own prosaic self, whereas in the story world she found herself endowed with Sebastian’s rich imagination, moved and excited by Sebastian’s flow of words.

The first of his stories that Susan clearly remembered was the one Sebastian had told her on the beach at Tenby, that summer (it must have been the summer of 1917) when there were five candles on their joint birthday cake. They had found among the seaweed an old red rubber ball, torn almost in half. Sebastian took it to a little pool and washed out the sand with which it was filled. On the wet inner surface of the ball was a kind of wart-like excrescence. Why? Only the manufacturers could say. For a child of five, it was an inexplicable mystery. Sebastian touched the wart with a probing forefinger. That was the tummy-button, he whispered. They looked around furtively to make sure that they were out of earshot: navels were things that verged upon the unmentionable. Everybody’s tummy-button grew inwards like that, Sebastian went on. And when she asked him, ‘How do you know?’ he launched out into a circumstantial account of what he had seen Dr. Carter doing to a little girl in his consulting-room, the last time Aunt Alice had taken him there about his earache. Cutting her open — that was what Dr. Carter was doing — cutting her open with a big knife and fork, to look at her tummy-button from the inside. And when you were too tough for a knife and fork, they had to use one of those saws that butchers

cut bones with. Yes, really and truly, he insisted, when she expressed her horrified incredulity, really and truly. And to prove his point, he began sawing at the ball with the side of his hand. The gashed rubber parted under the pressure; the wound gaped wider and wider as the saw cut more deeply into what, for Susan, was now no longer a ball, but a little girl's tummy — for all practical purposes, her own. H-h-h-h, h-h-h-h, h-h-h-h, Sebastian went, trilling the aspirant far back in the throat. The sound was blood-curdlingly like the noise of a meat saw. And then, he went on, when they'd cut far enough, they opened you. Like this — and he pulled the two halves of the wounded ball apart. They opened you, and they turned your top flap inside out — so; and then they scrubbed the tummy-button with soap and water to get the dirt off. Furiously he scratched the mysterious wart, and his nails on the rubber made a small dry noise that, to Susan, was unspeakably horrifying. She uttered a scream and covered her ears with her hands. For years afterwards she had been terrified of Dr. Carter, had howled whenever he came near her; and even now when she knew it was all nonsense about the tummy-button, the sight of his little black bag, of those cabinets in his consulting-room, full of glass tubes and bottles and nickel-plated gadgets, filled her with a vague apprehension which she found it difficult, in spite of all her efforts at reasonableness, to dispel.

Uncle John Barnack was often away for months at a stretch travelling abroad and writing articles for that left-wing paper which Susan's father wouldn't so much as allow his fire to be lighted with. Sebastian had therefore lived a good part of his life under the care of his Aunt Alice and at closest quarters with the youngest of her children, the little girl between whom and himself there was a difference in age of only a single day. With the growth of that small body of his, that precocious and feverishly imaginative mind, the stories that he told her — or rather that he related to himself in her stimulating presence — became ever more complicated and circumstantial. Sometimes they would last for weeks and months, in an interminable series of instalments, composed as they walked back and forth from school, or ate their supper in front of the gas fire in the nursery, or sat together on the roofs of wintry buses while their elders travelled

prosaically inside. For example, there was the epic that ran almost uninterruptedly through the whole of 1923 — the epic of the Larnimans. Or rather the La-a-arnimans — for the name was always pronounced in a whisper and with a horribly significant prolongation of the first syllable. Those La-a-arnimans were a family of human ogres, who lived in tunnels that radiated out from a central cavern immediately under the lion house at the Zoo.

‘Listen!’ Sebastian would whisper to her each time they found themselves in front of the Siberian tiger’s cage.

‘Listen!’ And he would stamp his foot on the pavement.

‘It’s hollow. Don’t you hear?’

And, sure enough, Susan did hear and, hearing, shuddered at the thought of the La-a-arnimans sitting there fifty feet below, at the heart of a whirring complex of machinery, counting the money they had stolen from the vaults of the Bank of England, roasting the children they had kidnapped through trap-doors in basements, breeding cobras, to let loose into the drains so that suddenly, one fine morning, just as one was about to sit down, a hooded head would pop up out of the W.C. and hiss. Not that she believed any of it, of course. But even if you didn’t believe in it, it was still frightening. Those horrible La-a-arnimans with their cat’s eyes and their patent electric guns and their underground switchbacks — they didn’t really live under the lion house (even though the ground *did* sound hollow when you stamped on it). But that didn’t mean that they didn’t exist. The proof of their existence was the fact that she dreamed about them, that she kept a sharp look-out, each morning, for those cobras.

But the Larnimans were ancient history now. Their place had been taken, first, by a detective; then (after Sebastian had read his father’s book about the Russian Revolution) by Trotsky; then by Odysseus, whose adventures, during that summer and autumn of 1926, were wilder than anything that Homer had ever reported. It was with the coming of Odysseus that girls first made their appearance in Sebastian’s stories. True, they had figured to some extent in the earlier epics, but only as the victims of doctors, cannibals, cobras and revolutionaries. (Anything to make Susan’s flesh creep, to elicit that horrified

squeal of protest!) But in the new Odyssey they started to play another kind of part. They were pursued and kissed, they were looked at through keyholes without their clothes on, they were discovered bathing at midnight in a phosphorescent sea, and Odysseus would also go swimming.

Forbidden themes, repulsively fascinating, disgustingly attractive! Sebastian would embark on them with a quiet casualness — *pianissimo*, so to speak, and *senza espressione*, as though he were hurrying over some boring transitional passage, some patch of mere five-finger exercises interpolated into the romantic rhapsody of his Odyssey. *Pianissimo*, *senza espressione* — and then, bang! like a chord by Scriabin in the middle of a Haydn quartet, out he'd come with some frightful enormity! And in spite of all her efforts to take it casually, matter-of-factly, as Pamela would have taken it, Susan would be startled into an exclamation, a blush, a covering of the ears, a rushing away, as though she didn't mean to listen to another word. But always she did listen; and sometimes, when he broke off his narrative to ask her some direct and horribly indiscreet question, she would even speak herself about the impossible subject, muttering with averted eyes, or else in a voice uncontrolledly loud, and modulating, against her will, into a burst of laughter.

Gradually the new Odyssey had petered out. Susan had her music and her School Certificate, and Sebastian spent all his leisure reading Greek and the English poets, and writing verses of his own. There seemed to be no time for story-telling, and if ever they did find themselves together for a little, he liked to recite his latest poems. When she praised them, as she generally did — for she really did think they were wonderful — Sebastian's face would light up.

'Oh, it's not *too* bad,' he would say deprecatingly; but his smile and the irrepressible brightness of his eyes betrayed what he really thought. Sometimes, however, there were lines she didn't understand, or didn't like; and then, if she ventured to say so, he'd flush with anger and call her a fool and a Philistine; or else sarcastically remark that it was only to be expected, seeing that women had the minds of hens, or seeing it was notorious that musicians had no brains, only fingers and a solar plexus. Sometimes his words hurt her; but more often they

only evoked a smile and made her feel, by comparison with his transparent childishness, delightfully old, wise and, in spite of his dazzling gifts, superior. When he behaved like that, Sebastian proclaimed himself an infant as well as a prodigy, and invited her to love him in yet another way — protectively and maternally.

And then suddenly, a few weeks after the beginning of the current term, the stories had started again — but with a difference; for this time they were not fiction, they were autobiography: he had begun to tell her about Mrs. Esdaile. The child in him was still there, still urgently in need of mothering, of being preserved from the consequences of his own childishness; but the grown boy she secretly worshipped with quite another passion was now the lover of a woman — older than herself and prettier, and a million times more experienced; rich too, and with lovely clothes and manicures and make-up; utterly beyond the possibility of competition and rivalry. Susan had never let him see how much she minded; but her diary had been full of bitterness, and in bed at night she had often cried herself to sleep. And tonight she would again have reason to be miserable.

Frowning, Susan glanced sideways at her companion. Sebastian was still pensively caressing his nose.

‘That’s it,’ she burst out with a sudden uprush of resentment; ‘rub your beastly little snout till you’ve got it all pat!’

Sebastian started and looked round. An expression of disquiet appeared on his face.

‘Got what all pat?’ he asked defensively.

‘All your beautiful speeches and witty repartees,’ she answered. ‘You think I don’t know you, I suppose. Why, I bet you’re too shy to say anything, even when you’re …’ She broke off, unable to give utterance to the words that would evoke the odious picture of their love-making.

At another time this taunting reference to his timidity — to the humiliating dumbness and incoherence with which he was afflicted whenever he found

himself in strange or impressive Company — would have roused him to anger. But on this occasion he was merely amused.

‘Mayn’t I tell even the tiniest lie?’ he said. ‘Just for art’s sake?’

‘You mean for *your* sake — to make yourself look like something out of Noel Coward.’

‘Out of Congreve,’ he protested.

‘Out of anybody you like,’ said Susan, happy to have this opportunity of venting her accumulated bitterness without betraying its real nature and cause. ‘Any old lie, so long as you don’t have to show yourself as you really are….’

‘A Don Juan without the courage of his conversation,’ he put in. It was a phrase he had invented to console himself for having cut such a lamentable figure at the Boveneys’ Christmas party. ‘And you’re annoyed because I put the conversation where it ought to have been. Don’t be so horribly literal.’

He smiled at her so enchantingly that Susan had to capitulate.

‘All right,’ she grumbled. ‘I’ll believe you even when I know it’s a lie.’

His smile broadened; he was the gayest of Della Robbia angels.

‘Even when you *know*,’ he repeated, and laughed aloud. It was the most exquisite of jokes. Poor old Susan! She *knew* that the accounts of his conversational prowess were false; but she also *knew* that he had got talking with a beautiful dark-haired young woman on the top of a Finchley Road bus, that this woman had asked him to tea at her flat, had listened to his poetry, had told him how unhappy she was with her husband, had made an excuse to leave the drawing-room and then, five minutes later, had called him, ‘Mr. Barnack, Mr. Barnack,’ — and he had walked out after her, and across the landing and through a half-opened door into a room that was pitch dark, and suddenly had felt her bare arms round him and her lips on his face. Susan knew all that, and a great deal more besides; and the beauty of it was that Mrs. Esdaile didn’t exist, that he had found her name in the telephone book, her pale oval face in a volume of Victorian steel engravings, and all the rest in his imagination. And all that poor Susan objected to was the elegance of his conversation!

‘She was wearing black lace underclothes today,’ he improvised, carried away by his amusement into an emphatic Beardsleyism that at ordinary times he would have despised.

‘She would!’ said Susan, bitterly thinking of her own stout white cotton.

With his inward eye Sebastian was contemplating a Callipyge in needle-point, patterned all over with spidery arabesques. Like one of those ornamental china horses, on whose flanks the dapplings are leaves and tendrils. He laughed to himself.

‘I told her she was the latest archaeological discovery — the Dappled Aphrodite of Hampstead.’

‘Liar!’ said Susan emphatically. ‘You didn’t tell her anything of the kind.’

‘I shall write a poem about the Dappled Aphrodite,’ Sebastian went on, ignoring her.

A fire-works display of lovely phrases began to blaze and crackle in his mind.

‘Stippled with scrolls her withers, her velvet croup tattooed with Brussels roses. And round the barrel,’ he murmured, rubbing his nose, ‘round the rich barrel, like a net of flowery moles, gardens and trellises of bobbin-work.’

And, by golly, there was a perfectly good rhyme! Scrolls and moles — two stout pegs on which one could hang any amount of lace and goddess-skin.

‘Oh, shut up!’ said Susan.

But his lips continued to move.

‘Inked on those creamy quarters, what artful calligraphy, swelling and shrinking with each alternate movement.’

Suddenly he heard his name being shouted and the sound of running feet from behind them.

‘Who the devil …?’

They stopped and turned round.

‘It’s Tom Boveney,’ said Susan.

So it was! Sebastian smiled.

‘I’ll bet you five bob he says, “Hullo, Suse, how’s the booze?”’

Six and a half feet high, three feet wide, two feet thick, sandy-haired and grinning, Tom came rushing up like the Cornish Riviera Express.

‘Basty Boy,’ he shouted, ‘you’re just the man I was looking for. Oh, and there’s young Suse. — How’s the booze, Suse?’

He laughed, and was delighted when Susan and Sebastian also laughed — laughed with unaccustomed heartiness.

‘Well,’ he went on, turning back to Sebastian, ‘it’s all settled.’

‘What’s settled?’

‘The dinner problem. Seeing you’re going abroad as soon as term’s over, I’ve arranged to put it off to the end of the hols.’

He grinned and patted Sebastian’s shoulder affectionately. He too, Susan said to herself. And she went on to reflect that almost everyone felt that way about Sebastian — and he exploited it. Yes, he exploited it.

‘Pleased?’ Tom questioned.

Basty was his mascot, his child, and at the same time the exquisite and brilliant object of a love which he was too congenitally heterosexual to avow, or even to understand and give a name to. He’d do anything to please little Basty.

But instead of beaming delightedly, Sebastian looked almost dismayed.

‘But, Tom,’ he stammered, ‘you mustn’t … I mean, you shouldn’t put yourself out for me.’

Tom laughed and gave his shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

‘I’m not putting myself out.’

‘But the other fellows,’ said Sebastian, clutching at every straw.

Tom pointed out that the other fellows didn’t care whether his farewell party was at the beginning of the hols or at the end.

‘A binge is always a binge,’ he was saying philosophically, when Sebastian cut him short with a vehemence altogether unjustified by considerations of mere politeness.

‘No, I wouldn’t dream of it,’ he cried in a tone of finality.

There was a silence. Tom Boveney looked down at him wonderingly.

‘You almost sound as if you didn’t want to come,’ he began in bewilderment.

Sebastian realized his mistake and made haste to protest that of course there was nothing he'd have liked better. Which was true. Dinner at the Savoy, a show, and a night club to wind up with — it would be an unprecedented experience. But he had to refuse the invitation, and for the most humiliating and childish reason: he had no evening clothes. And now, when he thought that everything had been settled so satisfactorily, here was Tom reopening the question. Damn him, damn him! Sebastian positively hated the great lout for his officious friendliness.

'But if you want to come,' Tom insisted with exasperating common sense, 'what on earth are you saying no for?' He turned to Susan. 'Can *you* throw any light on the mystery?'

Susan hesitated. She knew, of course, all about Uncle John's refusal to get Sebastian a suit of evening clothes. It was mean of him. But after all there wasn't anything for Sebastian to be ashamed of. Why didn't he frankly come out with it?

'Well,' she said slowly, 'I suppose it's because …'

'Shut up. Shut up, I tell you.' In his fury, Sebastian gave her arm such a pinch that she cried out in pain.

'Serves you right,' he whispered savagely, and turned again to Tom. Susan was astonished to hear him saying that of course he'd come, and it was really terribly nice of Tom to have taken all that trouble to change the date. Terribly nice — and he actually managed to give Tom one of his angelic smiles.

'You didn't think I'd have a party without you, Basty?' Once more Tom Boveney squeezed the shoulder of his mascot, his only child, his infant prodigy and exquisite beloved.

'Now of all times, when I'm going to Canada — and God knows when I shall be seeing you again. You or any of the other Haverstock fellows,' he added hastily; and to build up the alibi, he addressed himself jocularly to Susan: 'And if it weren't a stag party, I'd ask you too. Plenty of booze for good old Suse.' He slapped her on the back, and laughed.

‘And now I’ve got to fly. Oughtn’t to have stopped to talk to you by rights; but it was such a stroke of luck running into you. So long, Suse. So long, Basty.’ He turned and started to run, elegantly in spite of his size and weight, like a professional half-miler, into the darkness out of which he had come. The others resumed their walk.

‘What I can’t understand,’ said Susan, after a long silence, ’is why you don’t just tell the truth. It isn’t your fault that you don’t have a dinner jacket. And it’s not as if there was a law against wearing your blue serge suit. They won’t turn you out of the restaurant, you know.’

‘Oh, for God’s sake!’ cried Sebastian, driven almost to frenzy by the maddening reasonableness of what she was saying.

‘But if you’d only explain to me why you don’t tell him,’ she persisted.

‘I don’t wish to explain,’ he said with a dignified finality.

Susan glanced at him, thought how ridiculous he looked, and shrugged her shoulders.

‘You mean, you can’t explain.’

In the silence that ensued, Sebastian chewed on the bitter cud of his abasement. He didn’t wish to explain because, as Susan had said, he couldn’t explain. And he couldn’t explain, not because he lacked reasons, but because the reasons he had were so excruciatingly intimate. First that old cow in the library; even that dead son was no excuse for her slobbering over him as though he were still in diapers. Then Pfeiffer and his stinking cigars. And now this last humiliation. It was not only that he looked like a child, when he knew himself to be a hundred times abler than the oldest of them. It was also that he lacked the outward accoutrement and paraphernalia belonging to his real age. If he’d had decent clothes and enough pocket money, the other humiliations would have been tolerable. By his easy spendings and the cut of his coats he could have refuted the specious evidence of his face and stature. But his father gave him only a shilling a week, made him wear his shoddy reach-me-downs till they were threadbare and short in the sleeves, and absolutely refused to get him a dinner jacket. His garments confirmed the testimony of the body they so shabbily

covered; he was a child in child's clothing. And here was that fool, Susan, asking him why he didn't tell Tom Boveney the truth!

'*Amor Fati,*' she quoted. 'Didn't you say that was your motto now?' Sebastian did not deign to make a reply.

Looking at him, as he walked beside her, his face set, his body curiously rigid and constrained, Susan felt her irritation melting away into a maternal tenderness. Poor darling! How miserable he managed to make himself! And for such idiotic reasons! Worrying about a dinner jacket! But she'd be prepared to bet that Tom Boveney didn't have an affair with a beautiful married woman. And, remembering how he had cheered up just now at the mention of Mrs. Esdaile, Susan charitably tried again.

'You didn't finish telling me about those black lace underclothes,' she said at last, breaking the dismal silence.

But this time there was no response; Sebastian merely shook his head without even looking in her direction.

'Please,' she cajoled.

'I don't want to.' And when Susan tried to insist, 'I tell you, I don't want to,' he repeated more emphatically.

There was nothing funny any longer about Susan's gullibility. Seen soberly, in its proper light, this Esdaile business was just another of his humiliations.

His mind harked back to that hideous evening two months before. Outside the Camden Town tube station, a girl in blue, coarsely pretty, with painted mouth and a lot of yellow hair. He walked up and down two or three times, trying to screw up his courage and feeling rather sick, just as he did before one of those ghastly interviews with the headmaster about his maths. The nausea of the threshold. But finally, when one had knocked and gone in and sat down opposite that large and extraordinarily clean-shaven face, it wasn't really so bad. 'You seem to think, Sebastian, that because you're highly gifted in one direction you're excused from working at anything you don't happen to enjoy.' And it would end up with his being kept in for two or three hours on half-holiday afternoons, or having to do a couple of extra problems every day for a month.

Nothing so very bad, after all, nothing to justify that nausea. Taking courage from these reflections, Sebastian walked up to the girl in blue and said, ‘Good evening.’

In the beginning she wouldn’t even take him seriously. ‘A kid like you! I’d be ashamed of myself.’ He had to show her the inscription in his copy of the *Oxford Book of Greek Verse*, which he happened to be carrying in his pocket. ‘*For Sebastian, on his seventeenth birthday, from his uncle, Eustace Barnack.* 1928.’ The girl in blue read the words aloud, glanced dubiously into his face, then back at the book. From the fly-leaf she turned to a page chosen at random in the middle of the volume. ‘Why, it’s Yiddish!’ She looked curiously into his face. ‘I’d never have guessed it,’ she said. Sebastian set her right. ‘And you mean to tell me you can read it?’ He demonstrated his ability on a chorus from the *Agamemnon.* That convinced her; anybody who could do that must be more than just a kid. But did he have any money? He produced his wallet and showed her the pound-note that still remained to him from Uncle Eustace’s Christmas present. ‘All right,’ said the girl. But she had no place of her own; where did he mean to go?

Aunt Alice and Susan and Uncle Fred had all gone away for the week-end, and there was nobody left in the house except old Ellen — and Ellen always went to bed sharp at nine, and was as deaf as a post anyway. They could go to his place, he suggested; and he hailed a taxi.

Of the nightmare that followed Sebastian could not think without a shudder. That rubber corset and, when they were in his room, her body, as unresponsive as its carapace. The bored perfunctory kisses, and the breath that stank of beer and caries and onions. His own excitement, so frenzied as to be almost instantly self-stultifying; and then, irremediable, the hideously sober coldness that brought with it a disgust for what lay there beside him, a horror as though for a corpse — and the corpse laughed and offered him its derisive condolences.

On the way down to the front door, the girl asked to look at the drawing-room. Her eyes opened wide as the light revealed its modest splendours. ‘Hand painted!’ she said admiringly, crossing over to the fireplace and running her

fingers over the varnish of the presentation portrait of Sebastian's grandfather. That seemed to settle it for her. She turned to Sebastian and announced that she wanted another quid. But he hadn't got another quid. The girl in blue sat down emphatically on the sofa. Very well, then; she'd stay there until he found one. Sebastian emptied his pockets of small change. Three and elevenpence. No, she insisted, nothing less than a quid; and in a hoarse contralto she started to chant the words, 'A quid, a quid, a quid-o,' to the tune of 'When Irish Eyes …'

'Don't do that,' he begged. The chant swelled to full-throated song. 'A quid, a quid, a quid-o, a lovely, lovely quid …' Almost in tears, Sebastian interrupted her: there was a servant sleeping upstairs, and even the neighbours might hear. 'Well, let them all come,' said the girl in blue. 'They're welcome.' 'But what would they say?' Sebastian's voice quavered as he spoke, his lips were trembling. The girl looked at him contemptuously, and broke out into her loud, ugly laugh. 'Serve you right, cry-baby: that's what they'd say. Wanting to go with girls, when he ought to be staying at 'ome and letting 'is mother blow 'is nose for him.' She started to beat time. 'Now, one, two, three. All together, boys. "When Irish quids are quidding …"'

On the little table by the sofa Sebastian caught sight of that gold-mounted tortoise-shell paper-knife which had been presented to Uncle Fred on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his association with the City and Far Eastern Investment Company. Worth much more than a pound. He picked it up and tried to press it into her hands. 'Take this,' he implored. 'Yes, and 'ave them call the p'lice the moment I try to sell it.' She pushed it aside. In another key and more loudly than ever, she began again. 'When Irish quids …' 'Stop,' he cried despairingly, 'stop! I'll get you the money. I swear I will.' The girl in blue broke off and looked at her wrist-watch. 'I'll give you five minutes,' she said. Sebastian hurried out of the room and up the stairs. A minute later he was hammering on one of the doors that gave on to the fourth-floor landing. 'Ellen, Ellen!' There was no answer. Deaf as a post. Damn the woman, *damn* her! He knocked again and shouted. Suddenly, and without any warning, the door opened and there was Ellen in a grey flannelette dressing-gown, with her grey hair done up into two little pigtails

tied with tape, and no false teeth, so that her round, apple-like face seemed to have caved in and, when she asked him if the house was on fire, he could hardly understand what she said. Making a great effort, he turned on his most angelic smile — the smile with which he had always managed to get round her, all his life. ‘Sorry, Ellen. I wouldn’t have done it if it weren’t so urgent.’ ‘So what?’ she asked, turning her better ear towards him. ‘Do you think you could lend me a pound?’ She looked blank, and he had to yell at her. ‘A POUND.’ ‘A pound?’ she echoed in amazement. ‘I borrowed it from a friend of mine, and he’s waiting at the door.’ Toothlessly, but still with her north-country intonation, Ellen enquired why he couldn’t pay it back tomorrow. ‘Because he’s going away,’ Sebastian explained. ‘Going to Liverpool.’ ‘Oh, to Liverpool,’ said Ellen in another tone, as though that cast quite a new light on the matter. ‘Is he taking a ship?’ she asked. ‘Yes, to America,’ Sebastian shouted, ‘to Philadelphia.’ *Off to Philadelphia in the morning.* He glanced at his watch. Only another minute or thereabouts, and she’d be starting that other Irish song again. He gave Ellen a yet more enchanting smile. ‘Could you manage it, Ellen?’ The old woman smiled back at him, took his hand and laid it for a moment against her cheek, then without a word she turned back into the room to look for her purse.

It was when they came back from that week-end — on the Monday afternoon, to be precise, while he was walking home with her from old Pfeiffer’s — that he had first told Susan about Mrs. Esdaile. Exquisite, cultured, wildly voluptuous Esdaile in the arms of her triumphant young lover — the reverse of that medal whose other, real face bore the image of the girl in blue and a nauseated child, abject and blubbering.

At the corner of Glanvil Place they parted company.

‘You go straight home,’ said Sebastian, breaking the long silence. ‘I’m going to see if Father’s in.’ And without waiting for Susan’s comments, he turned and quickly walked away.

Susan stood there looking after him as he hurried down the street, so frail and helpless, but marching with such desperate resolution towards inevitable failure.

For, of course, if the poor boy imagined he could get the better of Uncle John, he was just asking to be hurt again.

Under the street lamp at the corner, the pale hair came to life like an aureole of tousled flame; then he turned and was lost to sight. And that was life, Susan reflected as she walked on — a succession of street corners. You met with something — something strange, something beautiful and desirable; and the next moment you were at another corner; it had turned and was gone. And even when it didn't turn, it was in love with Mrs. Esdaile.

She mounted the steps of number eighteen, and rang the bell. Ellen opened the door and, before admitting her, made her wipe her feet again on the mat.

'Can't have you muddying my carpets,' she said in her ordinary tone of grumbling affection.

On her way upstairs, Susan looked in to say good-evening to her mother. Mrs. Poulshot seemed preoccupied, and her kiss was perfunctory.

'Try not to do anything to annoy your father,' she recommended. 'He's feeling a bit out of sorts this evening.'

Oh God, thought Susan, who had suffered ever since she could remember from those moods of his.

'And change into your pale blue,' Mrs. Poulshot added. 'I want Uncle Eustace to see you at your prettiest.'

A fat lot *she* cared if Uncle Eustace thought her pretty! And anyhow, she went on to reflect, as she climbed the stairs, what hope was there of competing with someone who had been married, who had money, who bought her clothes in Paris and was probably drenched — though oddly enough Sebastian had never mentioned the fact — in the most indecent kind of scent.

She lit the gas fire in her room, undressed and walked down half a flight to the bathroom.

The pleasure of soaking in hot water was unpleasantly tempered by Mr. Poulshot's insistence that none but carbolic soap should ever be used in his household. The result was that one came out of one's bath smelling, not like Mrs. Esdaile, but like a newly washed dog. Susan sniffed at herself as she

reached for the towel, and made a wry face of disgust at the stink of her own cleanliness.

Sebastian's room was on the opposite side of the landing to hers, and, knowing him absent, she went boldly in, opened the top drawer of his dressing-table and took out the safety-razor which he had bought two months before to keep down a still hypothetical beard.

Meticulously, as though preparing for an evening in a sleeveless gown and a night of passion, she shaved her armpits; then picked out the tell-tale hairs and replaced the razor in its box.

CHAPTER THREE

SEBASTIAN, MEANWHILE, HAD walked down Glanvil Place, frowning to himself and biting his lips. This was probably his last chance of getting those evening clothes in time for Tom Boveney's party. His father, he knew, was not expected to dinner that evening, and the next day he was going to Huddersfield, or somewhere, for a conference; wouldn't be back till Wednesday evening, and on Thursday morning they were to set out together for Florence. It must be now or never.

'Evening clothes were a class symbol, and it was a crime to spend money on useless luxuries when people as good as oneself were starving!' Sebastian knew in advance what his father's arguments would be. But behind the arguments was the man — dominating and righteous, hard on others because even harder on himself. If the man were approached in the right way, perhaps the arguments would not be pressed home to their logical conclusion. The great thing, Sebastian had learnt from long and bitter experience, was never to seem too anxious or insistent. He must ask for the dinner jacket — but in such a way that his father wouldn't think that he really longed for it. That, he knew, would be to invite a refusal — nominally, of course, on the score of economy and socialist ethics, but really, he had come to suspect, because his father took a certain pleasure in thwarting the too explicit manifestations of desire. If he managed to avoid the pitfall of over-eagerness, perhaps he would be able to talk his father out of the other, avowable reasons for refusal. But it would take good acting to bring it off, and a lot of finesse, and above all that presence of mind in which, at moments of crisis, he was always so woefully lacking. But perhaps if he worked out a plan of campaign in advance, a piece of brilliant and inspired strategy …

Sebastian had kept his eyes fixed upon the pavement at his feet; but now he raised his head, as though the perfect, the irresistible plan were up there in the

murky sky, waiting only to be seen and seized. He raised his head, and suddenly there it was on the other side of the street — not the plan, of course, but the Primitive Methodist Chapel, *his* Chapel, the thing that it was worth walking down Glanvil Terrace of an evening on purpose to see. But today, lost as he was in the labyrinth of his own miseries, he had forgotten all about it. And now here it confronted him, faithfully itself, the lower part of its façade suffused with the greenish gas-light of the street lamp in front of it, and the upper part growing dimmer and dimmer as it mounted from the light, until the last spiky pinnacles of Victorian brickwork hung there, opaquely black against the foggy darkness of the London sky. Bright little details and distinctions fading upwards into undifferentiated mystery; a topless darkness of the London sky. Bright little details and distinctions at its foot. Sebastian stood there, looking; and in spite of the memory of his humiliations and his dread of what might be in store for him at his father's, he felt something of that strange, inexplicable elation which the spectacle always evoked in him.

Little squalor! transfigured into Ely,
Into Bourges, into the beauty of holiness;
Burgeoning out of gas-light into Elephanta;
Out of school-treats, out of the Reverend Wilkins,
Flowering into Poetry …

He repeated to himself the opening lines of his poem, then looked again at its subject. Built at the worst period, of the shoddiest materials. Hideous, in the day-time, beyond belief. But an hour later, when the lamps were lit, as lovely and significant as anything he had ever seen. Which was the real chapel — the little monstrosity that received the Reverend Wilkins and his flock on Sunday mornings? Or this unfathomably pregnant mystery before him? Sebastian shook his head, and walked on. The questions admitted of no answer, the only thing you could do was to re-formulate them in terms of poetry.

Little squalor! transfigured into Ely,
Into Bourges, into the beauty of holiness …

Number twenty-three was a tall stucco-fronted house, identical with all the others in the row. Sebastian turned in under the pillared porch, crossed the hall, and with a renewal of his momentarily banished apprehension began to climb the stairs.

One flight, two flights, three flights, yet another, and he was standing at the door of his father's flat. Sebastian raised a hand to the bell button, then let it fall again. He felt sick, and his heart was beating violently. It was the blue tart over again, the headmaster, the nausea of the threshold. He looked at his watch. Six forty-seven and a half. At six forty-eight he would ring and go in and just blurt it out, anyhow.

'Father, you really must let me have a dinner jacket….' He lifted his hand again and pressed the ball of his thumb firmly against the button. Inside, the bell buzzed like an angry wasp. He waited half a minute, then rang again. There was no answer. His last chance had vanished. Disappointment was mingled in Sebastian's mind with a profound sense of relief that he had been allowed to postpone the hour of his ordeal. Tom Boveney's party was four weeks away; whereas, if his father had been at home, the dreaded interview would be going on now, at this very moment.

Sebastian had gone down only a single flight when the sound of a familiar voice made him halt.

'Seventy-two stairs,' his father was saying down there in the hall.

'Dio!' said another, a foreign voice. 'You live half-way up to paradise.'

'This house is a symbol,' the ringing, upper-class English voice continued. 'A symbol of the decay of capitalism.'

Sebastian recognized the conversational gambit. It was the one John Barnack usually played upon his visitors the first time he accompanied them up those interminable stairs.

'Once the home of a single prosperous Victorian family.' That was it. 'Now a nest of bachelors and struggling business women, with a childless couple or two thrown in for good measure.'

The voice grew louder and more distinct as its owner approached.

‘… and it’s a product, too, of rising unemployment and a falling birth-rate. In a word, of blighted hopes and Marie Stopes.’ And on that there was the startling explosion of John Barnack’s loud, metallic laughter.

‘Christ!’ Sebastian whispered to himself. It was the third time he had heard that joke and the subsequent outburst.

‘Stope?’ queried the foreign voice through the tail-end of the other’s merriment. ‘Do I know what it signifies, to stope? *Stopare? Stopper? Stopfen?*’ But neither Italian, nor French, nor German seemed to throw any light.

Very elaborately, the Cambridge accent started to explain.

Not wishing it to appear that he had been eavesdropping, Sebastian started once more to run down the stairs, and when the two men came round the corner into sight, he uttered a well-simulated exclamation of astonishment.

Mr. Barnack looked up and saw in that small slender figure poised there, six steps above him, not Sebastian, but Sebastian’s mother — Rosie on the evening of the Hilliards’ fancy-dress dance, in the character of Lady Caroline Lamb disguised, in a monkey-jacket and tight red velvet breeches, as Byron’s page. Three months later had come the war, and two years after that she had left him for that vicious imbecile, Tom Hilliard.

‘Oh, it’s you,’ Mr. Barnack said aloud, without allowing the faintest symptom of surprise, or pleasure, or any other emotion to appear on his brown leathery face.

To Sebastian that was one of the most disquieting things about his father: you never knew from his expression what he was feeling or thinking. He would look at you straight and unwaveringly, his grey eyes brightly blank, as though you were a perfect stranger. The first intimation of his state of mind always came verbally, in that loud, authoritative, barrister’s voice of his, in those measured phrases, so carefully chosen, so beautifully articulated. There would be silence, or perhaps talk of matters indifferent; and then suddenly, out of the blue of his impassivity, a pronouncement, as though from Sinai.

Smiling uncertainly, Sebastian came down to meet them.

‘This is my youngster,’ said Mr. Barnack.

And the stranger turned out to be Professor Cacciaguida — the famous Professor Cacciaguida, Mr. Barnack added. Sebastian smiled deferentially and shook hands; this must be that antifascist man he had heard his father talking about. Well, it was a fine head, he thought, as he turned away. Roman of the best period, but with an incongruous mane of grey hair brushed romantically back from the forehead — he shot another surreptitious glance — as though the Emperor Augustus had tried to get himself up as Liszt.

But how strangely, Sebastian went on to reflect as they climbed the final flight, how pathologically even, the stranger's body fell away from that commanding head! The emperor-genius declined into the narrow chest and shoulders of a boy, then, incongruously, into the belly and wide hips almost of a middle-aged woman, and finally into a pair of thin little legs and the tiniest of patent-leather button-boots. Like some sort of larva that had started to develop and then got stuck, with only the front end of the organism fully adult and the rest hardly more than a tadpole.

John Barnack opened the door of his flat and turned on the light.

'I'd better go and see about supper,' he said. 'Seeing you've got to get away so early, Professor.'

It was an opportunity to talk about the dinner jacket. But when Sebastian offered to come and give a hand, his father peremptorily ordered him to stay where he was and talk to their distinguished guest.

'Then when I'm ready,' he added, 'you must scuttle. We've got some important things to discuss.'

And having thus tersely put Sebastian in his childish place, Mr. Barnack turned and, with quick, decided steps, like an athlete going into combat, strode out of the room.

Sebastian stood hesitating for a few seconds, then made up his mind to disobey, follow his father into the kitchen and have it out with him, there and then. But at this moment the Professor, who had been looking inquisitively around the room, turned to him with a smile.

‘But how it is aseptic!’ he exclaimed in that melodious voice of his, and with that charming trace of a foreign accent, those odd and over-literary turns of phrase, which merely served to emphasize the completeness of his command of the language.

In that bare, bleak sitting-room, everything, except the books, was enamelled the colour of skim milk, and the floor was a polished sheet of grey linoleum. Professor Cacciaguida sat down in one of the metal chairs and with tremulous, nicotine-stained fingers, lighted a cigarette.

‘One awaits the arrival of the surgeon,’ he added, ‘at any moment.’

But instead, it was John Barnack who came back into the room, carrying plates and a handful of cutlery. The Professor turned in his direction, but did not speak at once; instead, he put his cigarette to his lips, inhaled, held his breath for a couple of seconds, then voluptuously spouted smoke through his imperial nostrils. After which, his craving momentarily assuaged, he called across the room to his host.

‘It’s positively prophetic!’ He indicated the room with a wave of his hand. ‘A fragment of the rational and hygienic future.’

‘Thank you,’ said John Barnack without looking up. He was laying the table with the same focussed attention, Sebastian noticed, the same exasperatingly meticulous care, as he gave to all his tasks, from the most important to the humblest — laying it as though he were manipulating an intricate piece of apparatus in the laboratory, or (yes, the Professor was quite right) performing the most ticklish of surgical operations.

‘All the same,’ the other went on with a little laugh, ‘where the arts are concerned, I confess to being sentimental. Give me yesterday rather than tomorrow. Isabella’s apartment at Mantova, for example. Much dust, no doubt, in the mouldings. And all that sculptured wood!’ He traced a series of volutes with the smoke of his burning cigarette. ‘Full of archaeological filth! But what warmth, what wealth!’

‘Quite,’ said Mr. Barnack. He straightened himself up and stood there, upright and assertive, looking down at his guest. ‘But whose pockets did the

wealth come out of?' And without waiting for an answer, he marched back to the kitchen.

But the Professor had only just begun.

'What do *you* think?' he asked, turning to Sebastian. The words were accompanied by a genial smile; but it became sufficiently obvious, as he went on, that he took not the smallest interest in what Sebastian thought. All he wanted was an audience.

'Perhaps dirt is the necessary condition of beauty,' he continued. 'Perhaps hygiene and art can never be bedfellows. No Verdi, after all, without spitting into trumpets. No Duse without a crowd of malodorous bourgeois giving one another their coryzas. And think of the inexpugnable retreats for microbes prepared by Michelangelo in the curls of Moses' beard!'

He paused triumphantly, waiting for applause. Sebastian gave it in the form of a delighted laugh. The effortless virtuosity of the Professor's talk delighted him; and the Italian accent, the odd unexpected vocabulary, lent an adventitious charm to the performance. But as the improvisation prolonged itself, Sebastian's feelings towards it underwent a change. Five minutes later, he was wishing to God that the old bore would shut up.

It was the smell and sizzling of fried lamb chops which finally produced that much-desired result. The Professor threw back his noble head and sniffed appreciatively.

'Ambrosial!' he cried. 'I see we have a second Baronius among the pots and pans.'

Sebastian, who did not know who the first Baronius was, turned round and looked through the open door into the kitchen. His father was standing with his back to him, his grizzled head and the broad strong shoulders bent forward as he pored over the range.

'Not only a great mind, but a great cook as well,' the Professor was saying.

Yes, that was the trouble, Sebastian reflected. And not only a great cook (though he had the utmost contempt for those who cared about food for its own sake), but also a great desk-tidier, a great mountain-climber, a great account-

maker, a great botanizer and bird-watcher, a great letter-answerer, a great socialist, a great four-mile-an-hour walker, teetotaler and non-smoker, a great report-reader and statistics-knower, a great everything, in short, that was tiresome, efficient, meritorious, healthful, social-minded. If only he'd take a rest sometimes! If only his armour had a few chinks in it!

The Professor raised his voice a little, evidently hoping that what he was about to say would be heard even in the kitchen and through the noise of frying.

'And the great mind is associated with an even greater heart and soul,' he pronounced in a tone of vibrant solemnity. He leaned over and laid a small hand, very white except for the yellowed finger-tips, upon Sebastian's knee.

'I hope you're as proud of your father as you ought to be,' he went on.

Sebastian smiled vaguely and made a faint inarticulate noise of assent. But how anyone who knew his father could talk about his great heart, he really couldn't imagine.

'A man who could have aspired to the highest political honours under the old party system — but he had his principles, he refused to play their game. And who knows?' the Professor added parenthetically, with a confidential lowering of the voice. 'Perhaps he'll get his reward very soon. Socialism is much nearer than anyone imagines — and when it comes, when it comes …' he raised his hand expressively, as though prophesying Mr. Barnack's apotheosis. 'And when one thinks,' he went on, 'of all those thousands he might have made at the Bar. Thousands and thousands! But he abandons all. Like San Francesco. And what he has, he lavishes with a heroic generosity. Causes, movements, suffering individuals — he gives to all. To all,' he repeated, nodding his noble head emphatically. 'All!'

All but one, Sebastian inwardly amended. There was still money enough for political organizations and, he guessed, for exiled professors; but when it came to sending his own son to a decent school, to getting him a few decent suits and a dinner jacket — nothing doing. Sonorously, the Professor renewed his infuriating eloquence. Almost bursting with suppressed anger, Sebastian was

thankful when at last the arrival of the chops cut short the panegyric and set him free.

‘Tell Aunt Alice I’ll be with her after dinner,’ Mr. Barnack called after him as he ran down the stairs. ‘And make sure that Uncle Eustace doesn’t leave before I get there; I’ve got to make all sorts of arrangements with him.’

Outside in the street his little squalor of a chapel still darkened up into poetry, into inexplicable significance and beauty; but this time Sebastian felt so bitterly aggrieved that he would not even look at it.

CHAPTER FOUR

SHERRY-GLASS IN HAND, Eustace Barnack was standing on the hearth-rug, looking up at the portrait of his father over the mantelpiece. From its black background, the square, strong face of that cotton-spinning philanthropist glared out into vacancy like a head-lamp.

Meditatively, Eustace shook his head.

‘Hundreds of guineas,’ he said. ‘That’s what the subscribers paid for that object. And you’d be lucky if you could get a fiver for it now. Personally,’ he added, turning to where his sister was sitting, slender and very upright, on the sofa, ‘personally I’d be very ready to give you ten pounds for the privilege of not possessing it.’

Alice Poulshot said nothing. She was thinking, as she looked at him, how shockingly Eustace had aged since last she saw him. Grosser even than he had been three years ago. And the face was like a loose rubber mask sagging from the bones, flabby and soft and unwholesomely blotched. As for the mouth … She remembered the brilliant, laughing boy she had once been so proud of; in him, those parted, childish lips had seemed amusing in their incongruity with the manly stature — amusing and at the same time profoundly touching. You couldn’t look at him without feeling that you’d like to mother him. But now — now the sight was enough to make you shudder. The damp, mobile looseness of that mouth, its combination of senility and babyishness, of the infantile with the epicurean! Only in the humorously twinkling eyes could she discover a trace of the Eustace she had loved so much. And now the whites of those eyes were yellow and bloodshot, and under them were pouches of discoloured skin.

With a thick forefinger, Eustace tapped the canvas.

‘Wouldn’t he be furious if he knew! I remember how bitterly he resented it at the time. All that good money going on a mere picture, when it might have been

spent on something really useful, like a drinking-fountain or a public lavatory.'

At the words 'public lavatory,' his nephew, Jim Poulshot, looked up from the *Evening Standard* and uttered a loud guffaw. Eustace turned and regarded him curiously.

'That's right, my boy,' he said with mock heartiness. 'It's English humour that has made the Empire what it is.'

He walked over to the sofa and cautiously lowered his soft bulk into a sitting posture. Mrs. Poulshot moved further into the corner to give him room.

'Poor old father!' he said, continuing the previous conversation.

'What's poor about him?' Alice asked rather sharply. 'I should have thought we were the poor ones. After all, he accomplished something. Where's our achievement, I'd like to know?'

'Where?' Eustace repeated. 'Well, certainly not in the rubbish-heap, which is where *his* is. The mills working half-time because of Indian and Japanese competition. Individual paternalism replaced by State interference, which he regarded as the devil. The Liberal Party dead and buried. And earnest high-minded rationalism transformed into cynical libertinage. If the old man isn't to be pitied, I'd like to know who is?'

'It's not the results that matter,' said Mrs. Poulshot, changing her ground.

She had worshipped her father; and to defend a memory which she still reverenced as something all but divine, she was ready to sacrifice much more than mere logical consistency.

'It's motives, and intentions and hard work — yes, and self-denial,' she added significantly.

Eustace uttered a wheezy chuckle.

'Whereas *I'm* disgustingly self-indulgent,' he said. 'And if I happen to be fat, it's entirely my own vicious fault. Has it ever struck you, my dear, that if Mother had lived, she'd have probably grown to be as big as Uncle Charles?'

'How can you say such things!' cried Mrs. Poulshot indignantly. Uncle Charles had been a monster.

‘It was in the family,’ he answered; and patting his belly complacently, ‘It still is,’ he added.

The sound of a door being opened made him turn his head.

‘Aha,’ he cried, ‘here comes my future guest!’

Still brooding on his reasons for being angry and miserable, Sebastian looked up with a start. Uncle Eustace … in his preoccupation with his own affairs he had forgotten all about him. He stood there, gaping.

‘“In vacant or in pensive mood,”’ Eustace continued genially. ‘It’s all in the great poetical tradition.’

Sebastian advanced and shook the hand extended to him. It was soft, rather damp and surprisingly cold. The realization that he was making a deplorable impression just at the very moment when he ought to have been at his best, increased his shyness to the point of rendering him speechless. But his mind continued to work. In that expanse of flabby face the little eyes, he thought, were like an elephant’s. An elegant little elephant in a double-breasted black coat and pale-grey check trousers. Oh, and even a monocle on the end of a string to make him look still more like the elderly dandy on the musical comedy stage!

Eustace turned to his sister.

‘He gets more and more like Rosie every year,’ he said. ‘It’s fantastic.’

Mrs. Poulshot nodded without speaking. Sebastian’s mother was a subject which it was best, she thought, to avoid.

‘Well, Sebastian, I hope you’re prepared for a pretty strenuous holiday.’ Once again Eustace patted his stomach. ‘You see before you the world’s champion sight-seer. Author of “Canters through Florence,” “The Vatican on Roller Skates,” “Round the Louvre in Eighty Minutes.” And my speed record for the English cathedrals has never even been challenged.’

‘Idiot!’ said Mrs. Poulshot, laughing.

Jim roared in unison, and in spite of the dinner jacket, Sebastian couldn’t help joining in. The idea of this dandified elephant galloping through Canterbury in sponge-bag trousers and a monocle was irresistibly grotesque.

Noiselessly, in the midst of their merriment, the door swung open again. Grey, lugubrious, long-faced like a horse, like his own image in a distorting mirror, Fred Poulshot entered as though on soles of felt. Catching sight of him, Jim and Sebastian checked themselves abruptly. He walked over to the sofa to greet his brother-in-law.

‘You’re looking well,’ said Eustace as they shook hands.

‘Well?’ Mr. Poulshot repeated in an offended tone. ‘Get Alice to tell you about my sinus some time.’

He turned away, and, with the scrupulous care of one who measures out a purgative, poured himself one-third of a glass of sherry.

Eustace looked at him and felt, as he had so often done in the past, profoundly sorry for poor Alice. Thirty years of Fred Poulshot — imagine it! Well, such was family life. He felt very thankful that he was now alone in the world.

Susan’s headlong entrance at this moment did nothing to mitigate his thankfulness. True, she possessed the enormous adventitious advantage of being seventeen; but even the perverse and slightly comic charms of adolescence could not disguise the fact that she was a Poulshot and, like all the other Poulshots, unutterably dull. The most that could be said for her was that, up to the present at any rate, she was a cut above Jim. But then, at twenty-five, poor Jim was just an empty pigeon-hole waiting to be occupied by the moderately successful stockbroker he would be in 1949. Well, that was what came of choosing a father like Fred. Whereas Sebastian had had the wit to get himself sired by a Barnack and conceived by the loveliest of irresponsible gipsies.

‘Did you tell him about my sinus?’ Mr. Poulshot insisted.

But Alice pretended not to have heard him.

‘Talking of canters through Florence,’ she said rather loudly, ‘do you ever see Cousin Mary’s son when you’re out there?’

‘You mean Bruno Rontini?’

Mrs. Poulshot nodded.

‘Why on earth she should ever have married that Italian I simply cannot imagine,’ she said in a tone of disapproval.

‘But even Italians are very nearly human.’

‘Don’t be silly, Eustace. You know exactly what I mean.’

‘But how you’d hate it if I were to tell you!’ said Eustace, smiling.

For what she meant, of course, was just plain prejudice and snobbery — an insular dislike of foreigners, a bourgeois conviction that all unsuccessful people must be in some way immoral.

‘Father was endlessly kind to the man,’ Mrs. Poulshot went on. ‘When I think of all the opportunities he gave him!’

‘And wise old Carlo made a mess of every one of them!’

‘Wise?’

‘Well, he got himself paid four pounds a week to keep out of the cotton business and go back to Tuscany. Don’t you call that wisdom?’

Eustace drank the rest of his sherry and put down the glass.

‘The son still runs his second-hand bookshop,’ he went on. ‘I’m really very fond of funny old Bruno. In spite of that tiresome religiosity of his. Nothing but the Gaseous Vertebrate!’

Mrs. Poulshot laughed. In the Barnack family, Haeckel’s definition of God had been a standing joke for the past forty years.

‘The Gaseous Vertebrate,’ she repeated. ‘But then, think how he was brought up! Cousin Mary used to take him to those Quaker meetings of hers when he was a boy. *Quakers!*’ she repeated with a kind of incredulous emphasis.

The parlour-maid appeared and announced that dinner was served. Active and wiry, Alice was on her feet in an instant. Her brother hoisted himself up more painfully. Followed by the rest of the family, they moved towards the door. Mr. Poulshot walked over to the electric switches and, as the last person crossed the threshold, turned out the lights.

As they went downstairs to the dining-room, Eustace laid a hand on Sebastian’s shoulder.

‘I had the devil of a time persuading your father to let you come and stay with me,’ he said. ‘He was afraid you’d learn to live like the idle rich. Luckily, we were able to checkmate him with an appeal to culture — weren’t we, Alice?’

Mrs. Poulshot nodded a little stiffly. She didn't like her brother's habit of discussing grown-up affairs in front of the children.

'Florence is part of a liberal education,' she said.

'Exactly. What Every Young Boy Ought to Know.'

Suddenly the staircase lights went out. Even in his blackest moods, Fred never forgot to be economical.

They entered the dining-room — red-papered still, Eustace noticed, and as uncompromisingly hideous as ever — and took their seats.

'Mock turtle,' said Alice as the parlour-maid set down the soup in front of him.

Mock turtle — it would be! Dear Alice had always displayed a positive genius for serving the dreariest kind of English food. On principle. With a smile at once affectionate and faintly ironic, Eustace laid a thick oedematous hand over his sister's bony fingers.

'Well, my dear, it's been a long, long time since last I sat here at your festive board.'

'No fault of mine,' Mrs. Poulshot answered. Her voice took on a note of rather sharp and perky jocularity. 'The Prodigal's place was always laid for him. But I suppose he was too busy filling his belly with the caviar that the swine did eat.'

Eustace laughed with unaffected good-humour. Twenty-three years before, he had given up what everybody said was a most promising career in radical politics to marry a rich widow with a weak heart, and retire to Florence. It was an act which neither his sister nor his brother, though for different reasons, had ever forgiven. With John it was a matter of outraged political principle. But what Alice resented was the insult to her father's memory, the wound inflicted on her family pride. Theirs was the third generation of low-living, high-minded Barnacks; and, with the exception of unmentionable Great-Uncle Luke, Eustace was the first who had ever gone over to the hostile camp of luxury and leisure.

'*Ve-ry* pretty,' he said to her in the phrase and tone of one who applauds a particularly well directed stroke at billiards.

With an income of six thousand a year, he could afford to be magnanimous. Besides, his conscience had never troubled him for what he had done. For the five years of their brief married life he had been as good a husband as poor dear Amy could expect. And why any quick-witted and sensitive person should feel ashamed of having said good-bye to politics, he couldn't imagine. The sordid intrigues behind the scenes! The conscious or unconscious hypocrisy of every form of effective public speaking! The asinine stupidity of that interminable repetition of the same absurd over-simplifications, the same illogical arguments and vulgar personalities, the same bad history and baseless prophecy! And that was supposed to be a man's highest duty. And if he chose instead the life of a civilized human being, he ought to be ashamed of himself.

'*Ve-ry* pretty,' he repeated. 'But what an implacable Puritan you are, my dear! And without the smallest metaphysical justification.'

'Metaphysics!' said Mrs. Poulshot in the contemptuous tone of one who is above and beyond such fooleries.

The soup plates, meanwhile, had been cleared away and the saddle of mutton brought in. In silence and without in any way altering his expression of irremediable suffering, Mr. Poulshot set to work to carve the roast.

Eustace glanced at him, then back at Alice. She, poor thing, was looking at Fred with an expression of apprehensive distress — wishing, no doubt, that the sulky old baby would be on his good behaviour in front of strangers. And perhaps, Eustace went on to reflect, perhaps that was why she had been so sharp towards himself. White-washing her husband by black-washing her brother. Not very logical, no doubt, but all too human.

'I hope it's cooked as you like it, Fred,' she called down the table.

Without answering or even looking up, Mr. Poulshot shrugged his narrow shoulders.

With an effort, Mrs. Poulshot adjusted her expression and turned to Eustace.

'Poor Fred has such a dreadful time with his sinus,' she said, trying to make amends to her husband for what she had done in the drawing-room.

As old Ellen came in with the vegetables, a half-grown kitten slipped into the room and came to rub itself against the leg of Alice's chair. She stooped and picked it up.

'Well, Onyegin,' she said, tickling the little beast behind the ears. 'We call him Onyegin,' she explained brightly to her brother, 'because he's the masterpiece of our late-lamented Puss-kin.'

Eustace smiled politely.

The consolations of philosophy, he reflected, of religion, of art, of love, of politics — none of these for poor dear Alice. No, hers were the consolations of an Edwardian sense of humour and the weekly copy of *Punch.* Still it was better to make bad puns and be whimsical in the style of 1912 than to indulge in self-pity or capitulate to Fred's black moods, as everyone else at the table had done. And, by God, it was pretty difficult not to capitulate. Sitting there behind his bulwark of mutton, Fred Poulshot fairly beamed with negativity. You could positively *feel* it as it beat against you — a steady, penetrating radiation that was the very antithesis of life, the total denial of all human warmth. Eustace decided to attempt a diversion.

'Well, Fred!' he called out in his jolliest tone. 'How's that City of yours? How's the gorgeous East? Business pretty good?'

Mr. Poulshot looked up, pained but, after a moment, forgiving.

'It could hardly be worse,' he pronounced.

Eustace raised his eyebrows in mock alarm.

'Heavens! How's that going to affect my Yangtze and South China Bank dividends?'

'They talk of reducing them this year.'

'Oh dear!'

'From eighty per cent. to seventy-five per cent.,' said Mr. Poulshot gloomily; and turning away to help himself to the vegetables, he relapsed once more into a silence that engulfed the entire table.

How much less awful the man would be, Eustace was thinking, as he ate his mutton and brussels sprouts, if only he sometimes lost his temper, or got drunk,

or went to bed with his secretary — though God help the poor secretary if he did! But there had never been anything violent or extreme in Fred's behaviour. Except for being absolutely intolerable, he was the perfect husband. One who loved the routine of marriage and domestic life — carving mutton, begetting children — just as he loved the routine of being (what was it?) Secretary and Treasurer of that City and Far Eastern thingummy-bob. And in all that concerned these routines, he was the soul of probity and regularity. Swear, get angry, deceive poor dear Alice with another woman? Why, he'd as soon embezzle the company's petty cash. No, no, Fred took it out of people in a very different way. He didn't have to *do* anything; it was enough for him just to *be.* They shrivelled and turned black by mere infection.

Suddenly Mr. Poulshot broke the long silence, and in a dead, toneless voice asked for the red-currant jelly.

Startled as though by a summons from the other world, Jim looked wildly round the table.

'Here you are, Jim.' Eustace Barnack pushed the dish across to him.

Jim gave him a grateful look, and passed it on to his father. Mr. Poulshot took it without a word or a smile, helped himself, and then, with the evident intention of involving another victim in this rite of woe, handed it back, not to Jim, but to Susan, who was in the very act of raising her fork from her plate. As he had foreseen and desired, Mr. Poulshot had to wait, dish in hand and with an expression on his face of martyred patience, while Susan hastily poked the mutton into her mouth, put down her knife and fork with a clatter and, blushing crimson, accepted the proffered jelly.

From his front-row seat at the human comedy, Eustace smiled appreciatively. What an exquisite refinement of the will to power, what elegant cruelty! And what an amazing gift for that contagious gloom which damps even the highest spirits and stifles the very possibility of joy. Well, nobody could accuse dear Fred of having buried his talent.

Silence, as though there were a coffin in the room, settled all at once upon the table. Mrs. Poulshot tried desperately to think of something to say — something

bright, something defiantly funny — but could find nothing, nothing at all. Fred had broken through her defences and stopped up the source of speech, of life itself, with sand and ashes. She sat there empty, conscious only of the awful fatigue accumulated during thirty years of unremitting defence and counter-attack. And as though it had somehow become aware of her defeat, the kitten sleeping on her knee uncurled itself, stretched and jumped noiselessly to the floor.

‘Onyegin!’ she cried, and reached out a hand; but the little cat slid away, silky and serpentine, from under her fingers. If she had been less old and sensible, Mrs. Poulshot would have burst into tears.

The silence lengthened out, punctuated by the ticking, now for the first time audible, of the brass clock on the mantelpiece. Eustace, who had begun by thinking that it would be amusing to see how long the intolerable situation could last, found himself suddenly overcome by pity and indignation. Alice needed help, and it would be monstrous if that creature there, that tapeworm, were left to enjoy his triumph. He leaned back in his chair, wiped his mouth and, looking about him, gaily smiled.

‘Cheer up, Sebastian,’ he called across the table. ‘I hope you’re not going to be glum like this when you’re staying with *me* next week.’

The spell was broken. Alice Poulshot’s fatigue dropped away from her, and she found it once more possible to speak.

‘You forget,’ she broke in waggishly, as the boy tried to mumble something in response to his uncle’s challenge, ‘our little Sebastian’s got the poetic temperament.’ And rolling her r’s like an old-fashioned reciter, she added, ‘“Tear-rs from the depth of some divine despair-r.”’

Sebastian flushed and bit his lip. He was very fond of Aunt Alice — as fond of her as she herself would ever allow anyone to be. And yet, in spite of his affection, there were times — and this was one of them — when he would have liked to kill her. It wasn’t merely himself that she outraged with this sort of remark; it was beauty, poetry, genius, everything above the level of the commonplace and the conventional.

Eustace observed the expression of his nephew's face, and felt sorry for the poor boy. Alice could be curiously hard, he reflected — on principle, just as she preferred bad cooking. Tactfully, he tried to change the subject. Alice had quoted Tennyson; what did the young think of Tennyson nowadays?

But Mrs. Poulshot did not permit the subject to be changed. She had undertaken Sebastian's education, and if she allowed him to indulge his native moodiness, she wouldn't be doing her duty. It was because that silly mother of his had always given in to him that Fred now behaved as he did.

'Or perhaps,' she went on, her tone growing more flippant as her intention became more severely didactic, 'perhaps it's a case of first love. "Deep as first love, and wild with all regret." Unless, of course, it's Epsom Salts that the poor boy needs.'

At this reference to Epsom Salts, young Jim broke into a peal of laughter all the more explosive because of the constraint imposed upon him by his proximity to the source of gloom behind the mutton. Susan glanced with solicitude at Sebastian's reddening face, then frowned angrily at her brother, who didn't even notice it.

'I'll cap your Tennyson with some Dante,' said Eustace, coming once again to Sebastian's relief. 'Do you remember? In the fifth circle of Hell:

Tristi fummo

Nell' aer dolce che del sol s'allegra.

And because they were sad, they were condemned to pass eternity stuck there in the swamp; and their horrid little *Weltschmerz* came bubbling up through the mud, like marsh gas. So you'd better be careful, my lad,' he concluded mock-menacingly, but with a smile which signified that he was entirely on Sebastian's side, and understood his feelings.

'He needn't bother about the next world,' said Mrs. Poulshot with a touch of asperity. She felt strongly about this immortality nonsense — so strongly that she didn't like to hear it talked about, even in joke. 'I'm thinking about what'll happen to him when he's grown up.'

Jim laughed again. Sebastian’s youthfulness seemed to him almost as funny as his possible need of a purge.

That second laugh spurred Mr. Poulshot into action. Eustace, of course, was just a hedonist, and even from Alice he could really expect nothing better. She had always (it was her only failing, but how enormous!) proved herself shockingly insensitive to his inner sufferings. But Jim, happily, was different. Unlike Edward and Marjorie, who in this respect were altogether too like their mother, Jim had always shown a decent respect and sympathy. That he should now so far forget himself as to laugh twice, was therefore doubly painful — painful as an outrage to his sensibilities and an interruption to his sad and sacred thoughts; painful, too, because so disappointing, such a blow to one’s faith in the boy’s better nature. Raising the eyes which he had kept so resolutely fixed upon his plate, Mr. Poulshot looked at his son with an expression of sorrow. Jim flinched away from that reproachful regard and, to cover his confusion, filled his mouth with bread. Almost in a whisper, Mr. Poulshot spoke at last.

‘Do you know what day this is?’ he asked.

Anticipating the rebuke that was to come, Jim blushed and muttered indistinctly through the bread that he thought it was the twenty-seventh.

‘March the twenty-seventh,’ Mr. Poulshot repeated. He nodded slowly and emphatically. ‘This day, eleven years ago, your poor grandfather was taken from us.’ He looked fixedly for a few seconds into Jim’s face, observing with satisfaction the symptoms of his discomfiture, then dropped his eyes and lapsed once again into silence, leaving the young man to feel ashamed of himself.

At the other end of the table Alice and Eustace were laughing together over reminiscences of their childhood. Mr. Poulshot did his best to pity them for the frivolity that made them so heartlessly insensitive to the finer feelings of others. ‘Forgive them, for they know not what they do,’ he said to himself; then, closing his mind against their idle chatter, he addressed himself to the task of reconstructing in detail his negotiations, on the evening of March the twenty-seventh, 1918, with the undertaker.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM, when dinner was over, Jim and Susan settled down to chess, while the others grouped themselves around the fire. Fascinated, Sebastian looked on, while his Uncle Eustace lighted the massive Romeo and Juliet which, knowing Alice's principles and Fred's economical habits, he had prudently brought with him. First the ritual of piercing; then, as he raised the cigar to his mouth, the smile of happy anticipation. Damply, lovingly, the lips closed over the butt; the match was ignited; he pulled at the flame. And suddenly Sebastian was reminded of his cousin Marjorie's baby, nuzzling with blind concupiscence for the nipple, seizing it at last between the soft prehensile flaps of its little mouth and working away, working away in a noiseless frenzy of enjoyment. True, Uncle Eustace had rather better manners; and in this case the nipple was coffee-coloured and six inches long. Images floated up before his mind's eye; words, grotesque and mock-heroic, started to arrange themselves:

Old but an infant, mouthing with lustful lip
The wet brown teat, incarnate where he sucks,
Of some imaginary, largest Queen
Of all the Hottentots …

He was interrupted by the sudden opening and then the slam of the door. John Barnack entered the room, and strode over to where Mrs. Poulshot was sitting on the sofa.

'Sorry I couldn't be with you for dinner,' he said, laying his hand on her shoulder. 'But it was my only chance of seeing Cacciaguida. Who tells me, by the way,' he added, turning to his brother, 'that Mussolini has definitely got cancer of the throat.'

Eustace took the tobacco-teat from between his lips and smiled indulgently.

'It's the throat this time, is it? *My* anti-fascists seem to prefer the liver.'

John Barnack was offended, but made an effort not to show it.

‘Cacciaguida has very reliable sources of information,’ he said a little stiffly.

‘Don’t I remember somebody saying something about wishes being fathers to thoughts?’ Eustace asked with exasperating mildness.

‘Of course you do,’ said John. ‘You remember it because you need an excuse for disparaging a great political cause and belittling its heroes.’ He spoke in his usual measured and perfectly articulated style, but in a tone that betrayed his inner feelings by being a trifle louder and more vibrant than usual. ‘Cynical realism — it’s the intelligent man’s best excuse for doing nothing in an intolerable situation.’

Alice Poulshot glanced from one to the other and wished to goodness that her two brothers didn’t have to quarrel every time they met. Why couldn’t John just accept the fact that Eustace was a bit of an old pig, and have done with it? But, no; he always lost his temper in that awful suppressed way of his, and then pretended it was moral indignation. And on his side Eustace deliberately provoked the explosions by waving political red rags and throwing poisoned darts. They were really incorrigible.

‘King Log or King Stork?’ Eustace was saying blandly. ‘I’m for dear old Log every time. Just keeping out of mischief — it’s the greatest of all the virtues.’

Standing there by the fireplace, his arms hanging by his sides, his feet apart, his body very straight and tense, in the posture of an athlete poised on the brink of action, John Barnack looked down at his brother with the calm unwavering regard which, in the law courts, he reserved for hostile witnesses and prevaricating defendants. It was a look which, even when directed on someone else, filled Sebastian with a shrinking terror. But Eustace merely let himself sink more deeply into the upholstery of the sofa. Closing his eyes, he tenderly kissed the end of his cigar and sucked.

‘And you imagine, I suppose,’ said John Barnack after a long silence, ‘that you’re one of the great exponents of that virtue?’

Eustace blew out a cloud of aromatic smoke, and answered that he did his best.

‘You do your best,’ John repeated. ‘But I believe you’ve got a comfortable holding in the Yangtze and South China Bank?’

Eustace nodded.

‘And along with the right to fatten on exploitation in China and Japan, a lot of jute shares — isn’t that so?’

‘Very nice shares too,’ said Eustace.

‘Very nice indeed. Thirty per cent. even in a bad year. Earned for you by Indians who are getting paid a daily wage that wouldn’t buy more than a third of one of your cigars.’

Mr. Poulshot, who had sat in gloomy silence, disregarded by all, startlingly broke into the conversation.

‘They were all right until the agitators got to work on them,’ he said. ‘Organizing unions, stirring up trouble against the owners. They ought to be shot. Yes, they ought to be shot!’ he repeated with ferocious emphasis.

John Barnack smiled ironically.

‘Don’t you worry, Fred. The City of London will see to it.’

‘What *are* you talking about?’ said Alice irritably. ‘The City of London isn’t in India.’

‘No; but its agents are. And they’re the fellows with the machine-guns. Fred’s agitators will duly get shot, and Eustace here will go on keeping out of mischief — keeping out of it with all the inimitable grace we’ve learnt to admire in him.’

There was a silence. Sebastian, who had dearly hoped to see his father discomfited, glanced miserably in the direction of his uncle. But instead of sitting there crushed and dejected, Eustace was heaving with noiseless laughter.

‘Admirable!’ he cried, when he had recovered breath enough to speak. ‘Quite admirable! And now, John, you should drop the sarcasm and give them five minutes of simple pathos and indignation; five heart-warming minutes of straightforward manly sentiment. After which the jury finds me guilty without even leaving the box, and adds a rider recommending that counsel for the plaintiffs be appointed Tribune of the People. Tribune of the People,’ he repeated sonorously. ‘All in classical fancy dress. And, by the way, what’s the

technical name for that noble Roman toga that political gentlemen drape over the will-to-power when they want to make it look respectable? You know that, don't you, Sebastian?' And when Sebastian shook his head, 'Goodness,' he exclaimed, 'what *do* they teach you nowadays? Why, its technical name is Idealism. Yes, my dear,' he went on, addressing himself to Susan, who had looked up, startled, from her game of chess, 'that was what I said: Idealism.'

John Barnack yawned ostentatiously behind his hand.

'One gets a bit bored with this kind of cheap seventeenth-century psychology,' he said.

'And now tell us,' said Eustace, 'what do you expect to get when the right people come into power? The Attorney-Generalship, I suppose.'

'Now, Eustace,' said Mrs. Poulshot firmly, 'that's enough.'

'Enough?' Eustace repeated in a tone of mock-outrage. 'You think it's enough — a piddling little Attorney-Generalship? My dear, you underrate your brother. But now, John,' he added, in another tone, 'let's get down to more serious matters. I don't know what *your* plans are; but whatever happens, I've got to leave for Florence tomorrow. I'm expecting my mother-in-law on Tuesday.'

'Old Mrs. Gamble?' Alice looked up from her knitting in surprise. 'Do you mean to say *she* still travels about Europe? At *her* age?'

'Eighty-six,' said Eustace, 'and, except for being pretty well blind with cataract, as fit as a fiddle.'

'Goodness!' exclaimed Mrs. Poulshot. 'I do hope *I* don't have to hang on as long as that!' She shook her head emphatically, appalled by the thought of thirty-one more years of housekeeping, and Fred's black moods, and the utter pointlessness of everything.

Eustace turned back to his brother.

'And when do you two intend to start?'

'Next Thursday. But we spend a night in Turin. I have to get in touch with some of Cacciaguida's people,' John explained.

'Then you'll deliver Sebastian to me on Saturday?'

‘Or rather he’ll deliver himself. I’m getting off the train at Genoa.’

‘Oh, you don’t deign to come yourself?’

John Barnack shook his head. The boat was leaving Genoa that same evening. He’d be in Egypt for three or four weeks. Then his paper wanted him to report on the condition of the natives in Kenya and Tanganyika.

‘And while you’re about it,’ said Eustace, ‘do find out why my East African coffee shares aren’t doing better.’

‘I can tell you here and now,’ his brother answered. ‘A few years ago there was a lot of money in coffee. Result: millions of acres of new plantations, with all the Gadarene swine of London and Paris and Amsterdam and New York rushing down a steep place into coffee investments. Now there’s such a surplus of beans, and the price is so low, that even sweated black labour can’t give you a dividend.’

‘Too bad!’

‘You think so? Wait till your keeping out of mischief has brought on rebellion among the subject peoples and revolution at home!’

‘Luckily,’ said Eustace, ‘we shall all be dead by that time.’

‘Don’t you be too sure.’

‘We may all hang on like poor old Mrs. Gamble,’ said Alice, who had been trying to imagine what Fred and she would be like in 1950.

‘No need for that,’ said John Barnack with manifest satisfaction. ‘It’s coming a great deal sooner than any of you imagine.’ He looked at his watch. ‘Well, I’ve got some work to do,’ he announced. ‘And tomorrow I must be up at cockcrow. So I’ll say good-night, Alice.’

Sebastian’s heart started to beat violently, he felt all at once rather sick. The moment had come at last, the absolutely final opportunity. He drew a deep breath, got up and walked over to where his father was standing.

‘Good-night, father,’ he said; and then, ‘Oh, by the way,’ he brought out in the most casual tone he could command, ‘don’t you think I might … I mean, don’t you think I really ought to have some evening clothes now?’

‘Ought?’ his father repeated. ‘Ought? It’s a case of the Categorical Imperative, eh?’ And suddenly, alarmingly, he uttered a short explosive bray of laughter.

Overwhelmed, Sebastian mumbled something to the effect that it hadn’t been necessary when he asked last time; but now … now it was really urgent: he had been asked to a party.

‘Oh, you’ve been asked to a party,’ said Mr. Barnack; and he recalled the ecstatic tone in which Rosie used to pronounce that hated word; he remembered the brightening of her eyes as she heard the music and the confused roaring of the crowd, the all but frenzy of her wild gaiety as the evening progressed.

‘More and more categorical,’ he added sarcastically.

‘Your father’s had a lot of expense recently,’ Mrs. Poulshot interposed in a well-meant effort to cushion poor Sebastian against the impact of her brother’s intransigence. After all, it hadn’t been Rosie’s fault entirely. John had always been hard and exacting, even as a boy. And now, to make things worse, he had to poison people’s lives with these ridiculous political principles of his. But meanwhile the hardness and the principles were facts; and so was Sebastian’s sensitiveness. Her policy was to try to keep the two sets of facts from colliding. But the attempt, on this occasion, was worse than fruitless.

‘My dear Alice,’ said John Barnack in the tone of a courteous but absolutely determined debater, ‘it isn’t a question of whether I can *afford* to buy the boy his fancy dress.’ (The words evoked an image of the red velvet breeches of Lady Caroline Lamb as Byron’s — as young Tom Hilliard’s — page.) ‘The point at issue is whether it’s *right* to do so.’

Eustace took the teat out of his mouth to protest that this was worse than Savonarola.

John Barnack emphatically shook his head.

‘It has nothing in common with Christian asceticism, it’s just a question of decency — of not exploiting one’s accidental advantages. *Noblesse oblige*.’

‘Very nice,’ said Eustace. ‘But meanwhile, you begin by *oblige*-ing the *noblesse.* It’s just plain coercion.’

‘Sebastian has absolutely no sense of social responsibility. He’s got to learn it.’

‘Isn’t that exactly what Mussolini says about the Italian people?’

‘And anyhow,’ Mrs. Poulshot put in, glad of this opportunity of fighting Sebastian’s battle with the support of an ally, ‘why make all this fuss about a miserable dinner jacket?’

‘A paltry *smoking*,’ Eustace elaborated in a tone that was meant to shift the whole argument on to the level of mere farce, ‘a twopenny-halfpenny Tuxedo. Oh, and that reminds me of my young man of Peoria — you didn’t know I was a poet, did you, Sebastian?

Who to keep up his sense of euphoria
Would don his Tuxedo
And murmur the Credo,
Along with the Sanctus and Gloria.

And here you go, John, depriving your poor child of the benefit of the sacraments.’

More loudly than usual, because of his nervousness, Sebastian started to laugh; then, at the sight of his father’s grave, unsmiling face and resolutely closed lips, he checked himself abruptly.

Eustace twinkled at him between his puffy eyelids.

‘Thank you for the applause,’ he said. ‘But I’m afraid we are *not* amused.’

Mrs. Poulshot intervened once more, in an attempt to undo the effects of Eustace’s false step.

‘After all,’ she said, trying to bring the discussion back to seriousness, ‘what *is* evening dress? Nothing but a silly little convention.’

‘Silly, I grant you,’ said John in his measured, judicious way. ‘But when it involves a class symbol, no convention can be called little.’

‘But, Father,’ Sebastian broke in, ‘all the boys of my age have got evening clothes.’ His voice was shrill and unsteady with emotion.

Bent over the chess-board, Susan heard it, recognized the danger signal, and at once raised her eyes. Sebastian’s face was darkly flushed, and his lips had

started to tremble. More than ever he looked like a little boy. A little boy in distress, a helpless little boy to whom a grown-up is being cruel. Susan was overwhelmed by loving pity. But what a mess he was making of the whole business! she thought, feeling suddenly furious with him, not in despite of her love and pity, but precisely because she cared so much. And why on earth couldn't he use a little self-control, or if that was impossible, just keep his mouth shut?

For a few seconds John Barnack looked in silence at his son — looked intently at the image of the childish wife who had betrayed him, and was now dead. Then he smiled sarcastically.

'*All* the other boys,' he repeated, 'every single one.' And, in the tone he employed in court to discredit the other side's star witness, he added, contemptuously ironic: 'In South Wales the sons of the unemployed miners make a point of wearing tails and white ties. Not to mention gardenias in their buttonholes. And now,' he commanded peremptorily, 'go to bed, and don't ever talk to me about this foolery again.'

Sebastian turned and, speechless, hurried out of the room.

'Your play,' said Jim impatiently.

Susan looked down again, saw the black knight standing immediately in front of her queen and took it.

'Got him!' she said ferociously. The black knight was Uncle John.

Triumphantly, Jim moved a castle across the board and, as he dropped her queen into the box, shouted, 'Check!'

Three-quarters of an hour later, in her pyjamas, Susan was squatting on the floor in front of the gas fire in her bedroom, writing her diary. 'B+ for History, B for Algebra. Which might be worse. Miss C. gave me a bad mark for untidiness, but of course didn't say a word to her beloved Gladys. *Really!!!* Scarlatti went better, but Pfeiffy tried to be funny with S. about cigars, and then Tom B. met us and asked him to come to his party, and S. was miserable about his wretched dinner jacket. Otherwise I should have hated him because he was with Mrs. E. again today and she was wearing *black lace* next her skin. But I only felt

dreadfully sorry for him. And this evening Uncle J. was *horrible* about the dinner jacket; I really hate him sometimes. Uncle E. tried to stick up for S., but it wasn't any good.' It wasn't any good, and what made it worse was that she had to sit there, waiting till first Uncle John and then Uncle Eustace took leave; and even when she had been free to go to bed, she hadn't dared to go and comfort him, for fear her mother or Jim might hear her and come up and find her in his room, and, if it were Jim, guffaw as though he had seen her in the lavatory, or if her mother, make some little jocular remark that would be worse than death. But now — she looked at the clock on the mantelpiece — now it ought to be safe. She got up, locked the diary into the drawer of her writing-desk and hid the key in its usual place behind the looking-glass. Then she turned out the light, cautiously opened the door, and looked out. The lights on the lower landings had been extinguished; the house was so still that she could hear the heavy beating of her own heart. Three steps brought her to the door on the other side of the landing; the handle turned noiselessly, and noiselessly she slipped in. The room was not entirely dark; for the blinds had not been drawn, and the lamp across the street threw an oblong of greenish twilight across the ceiling. Susan closed the door behind her and stood, listening — listening at first only to her own heart. Then the springs of the bed creaked faintly, and there was the sound of a long sobbing inhalation of breath. He was crying. Impulsively, she moved forward; her outstretched hand touched a brass rail, moved to the blanket beyond, and, from wool, slid over to the smoothness of the turned-back sheet. The white linen was ghostly in the darkness, and against the dimly seen pillow Sebastian's head was a black silhouette. Her fingers touched the nape of his neck.

'It's me, Sebastian.'

'Get away,' he muttered angrily. 'Get away!'

Susan said nothing, but sat down on the edge of the bed. The little bristles left by the barber's clippers were electrical against her fingertips.

'You mustn't mind, Sebastian darling,' she whispered. 'You mustn't let yourself be hurt.'

She was patronizing him, of course; she was treating him like a child. But he was utterly miserable; and besides, humiliation had gone so far that he no longer had the energy of pride to keep up his resentment. He lay still, permitting himself to enjoy the comforting reassurance of her proximity.

Susan lifted her hand from his neck and held it poised in midair, breathlessly hesitant. Did she dare? Would he be furious if she did? Her heart thumped yet more violently against her ribs. Then, swallowing hard, she made up her mind to risk it. Slowly the lifted hand moved forwards and downwards through the darkness, until the fingers were touching his hair — that pale bright hair, curly and wind-ruffled, but now invisible, no more now than a scarcely perceptible unravelling of living silk against her skin. She waited tremulously, expecting every moment to hear his angry command to let him alone. But no sound came, and, emboldened by his silence, she lowered her hand a little further.

Inert, Sebastian abandoned himself to the tenderness which at ordinary times he would never allow her to express, and in the very act of self-abandonment found a certain consolation. Suddenly and irrelevantly, it came into his mind that this was one of the situations he had always looked forward to in his dream of a love-affair with Mary Esdaile — or whatever other name one chose to give the dark-haired mistress of his imagination. He would lie there inert in the darkness, and she would kneel beside the bed, stroking his hair; and sometimes she would bend down and kiss him — or perhaps it wouldn't be her lips on his, but the touch of her naked breast. But, of course, this was only Susan, not Mary Esdaile.

She was running her hand through his hair now, openly, undisguisedly, just as she had always longed to do — the fingertips passing from the smooth taut skin behind the ears, pushing their way among the roots of his hair, while the thick resilient curls slid along between the fingers as she moved her hand up to the crown of his head. Again, again, indefatigably.

'Sebastian?' she whispered at last; but he did not answer, and his breathing was almost imperceptibly soft.

With eyes that had grown accustomed to the darkness, she looked down at the sleeping face, and the happiness she experienced, the unutterable bliss, was like

what she had sometimes felt while she was holding Marjorie’s baby, but with all these other things added — this desire and apprehension, this breathless sense of forbiddenness, as she felt the electrical contact of his hair against her fingertips, this aching pleasure in her breasts. Bending down, she touched his cheek with her lips. Sebastian stirred a little, but did not wake.

‘Darling,’ she repeated and, sure that he could not hear her, ‘my love, my precious love.’

CHAPTER SIX

EUSTACE WOKE UP, that Saturday morning, at a few minutes before nine, after a night of dreamless sleep, induced by nothing stronger in the way of narcotics than a pint of stout taken at midnight, with two or three small anchovy sandwiches.

Waking was painful, of course; but the taste in his mouth was less brassy, and that tired ache in all his limbs decidedly less acute than it ordinarily was at this black hour of the morning. True, he coughed a bit and brought up some phlegm; but the exhausting paroxysm was over more quickly than usual. After his early cup of tea and a hot bath he felt positively young again.

Beyond the circular shaving-mirror and the image of his lathered face lay the city of Florence, framed between the cypresses of his descending terraces. Over Monte Morello hung fat clouds, like the backsides of Correggio's cherubs at Parma; but the rest of the sky was flawlessly blue, and in the flower-beds below the bathroom window the hyacinths were like carved jewels in the sunlight, white jade and lapis-lazuli and pale-pink coral.

'The pearl-grey,' he called out to his valet without looking round, and then paused to wonder which tie would go best with the suit and the gay weather. A black-and-white check? But that would be too much the jaunty stockbroker. No; what the place and time required was something in the style of those tartans on a white ground from the Burlington Arcade. Or better still, that delicious salmon-pink fellow from Sulka's. 'And the pink tie,' he added, 'the new one.'

There were white and yellow roses on the breakfast table. Really quite prettily arranged! Guido was beginning to learn. He pulled out a virginal white bud and stuck it in his buttonhole, then addressed himself to his hot-house grapes. A bowl of porridge followed, then two poached eggs on toast, a kipper and some scones and marmalade.

As he ate, he read his letters.

A note, first of all, from Bruno Rontini. Was he back in Florence? And, if so, why not drop in at the shop one day for a chat and a glance at the books? A catalogue of the new arrivals was enclosed.

Then there were two charity appeals from England — those beastly Orphans again, and a brand-new lot of Incurables, whom he'd have to send a couple of guineas to, because Molly Carraway was on the committee. But to make up for the Incurables was a most cheering note from the manager of his Italian bank. Using the two thousand pounds of liquid capital he'd given them to play with, they'd succeeded in netting him, during the previous month, fourteen thousand lire. Just by buying and selling on the dollar-franc exchange. Fourteen thousand…. It was quite a windfall. He'd give the Incurables a fiver and buy himself a little birthday present. A few nice books perhaps; and he unfolded Bruno's catalogue. But, really, who wanted the first edition of Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat?* Or the *Opera Omnia* of St. Bonaventura edited by the Franciscans of Quaracchi? Eustace threw the catalogue aside and settled down to the task of deciphering the long illegible scribble from Mopsa Schottelius, which he had reserved to the last. In pencil and the most disconcerting mixture of German, French and English, Mopsa described for him what she was doing at Monte Carlo. And what that girl wasn't doing could have been set down on the back of a postage-stamp. How appallingly thorough these Germans always managed to be, how emphatic! In sex no less than in war — in scholarship, in science. Diving deeper than anyone else and coming up muddier. He decided to send Mopsa a picture, postcard advising her to read John Morley on 'Compromise.'

It was in accord with these same Morleian principles that he decided, when the meal was over, to smoke one of those small Larranaga *claros* which had pleased him so much when he tried one at his London tobacconist's that he bought a thousand of them on the spot. The doctors were always nagging at him about his cigars, and he had promised to smoke only two a day, after lunch and dinner. But these little fellows were so mild that it would take a dozen of them to

produce the same effect as one of his big Romeo and Juliets. So, if he were to smoke one of them now, and another after lunch, and perhaps a third after tea, with only a single big one after dinner, he would still be well on the right side of excess. He lit his cigar and leaned back, savouring the delicate lusciousness of its aroma. Then he got up and, giving orders to the butler to ring up Casa Acciaiuoli and find out if the Contessa could receive him this afternoon, made his way to the library. The four or five books which he was simultaneously reading lay piled on the table that stood beside the chair into which he now cautiously lowered himself: Scawen Blunt's *Journals*, the second volume of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, an illustrated *History of Embroidery*, the latest novel by Ronald Firbank … After a moment's hesitation, he decided on the Proust. Ten pages were what he usually managed to read of any book before desiring a change; but this time he lost interest after only six and a half, and turned instead to the section on the *Opus Anglicanum* in the *History of Embroidery*. Then the clock in the drawing-room struck eleven, and it was time for him to go up to the west wing and say good-morning to his mother-in-law.

Brightly painted, and dressed in the most elegant of canary-coloured tailor-mades, old Mrs. Gamble was sitting in state, having her right hand manicured by her French maid, stroking her toy Pomeranian, Foxy VIII, with her left, and listening to Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond* read aloud to her by her companion. At Eustace's entrance, Foxy VIII jumped down from her knee, rushed towards him and, retiring backwards as he advanced, furiously barked.

'Foxy!' cried Mrs. Gamble in a tone almost as harshly shrill as the Pomeranian's. 'Foxy!'

'Little hell-hound!' said Eustace genially; and, turning to the reader, who had broken off in the middle of a sentence, he added: 'Please don't let me interrupt you, Mrs. Thwale.'

Veronica Thwale raised her impeccably oval face and looked at him with a calm intentness.

'But it's a pleasure,' she said, 'to get back from all these ghosts to a bit of solid flesh.'

She lingered a little over the final consonant. As ‘flesh-sh,’ the word took on a meatier significance.

Like an Ingres madonna, Eustace reflected, as he twinkled back at her. Smooth and serene almost to the point of impersonality, and yet with all the sex left in — and perhaps even a little added.

‘Too, too solid, I’m afraid.’

Chuckling, he patted the smooth convexity of his pearl-grey waistcoat.

‘And how’s the Queen Mother this morning?’ he added, crossing over to Mrs. Gamble’s chair. ‘Having her claws sharpened, I see.’

The old lady uttered a thin crackling laugh. She was proud of her reputation for reckless plain speaking and malicious wit.

‘You’re a rascal, Eustace,’ she said, and the thin old voice was still vibrant with those rasping intonations of authority which make so many rich and aristocratic old ladies sound like sublimated sergeant-majors. ‘And who’s talking of flesh?’ she added, turning her unseeing eyes inquisitorially from where she imagined Eustace was to where Mrs. Thwale had seemed to be sitting. ‘Are *you* putting on flesh, Eustace?’

‘Well, I’m not quite as sylph-like as you are,’ he answered, looking down with a smile at the blind little shrunken mummy in the chair beside him.

‘Where are you?’ Mrs. Gamble asked; and leaving one gnarled hand to the manicurist, she pawed with the other at the air, then found the lapel of his coat and, from that, ran her fingers over the pearl-grey bulge below. ‘Heavens!’ she exclaimed. ‘I had no idea! You’re gross, Eustace, *gross*!’ The thin voice grated again, like a petty officer’s. ‘Ned was gross too,’ she went on, comparing mentally the stomach under her hand with the remembered paunch that had been her husband’s. ‘That was why he passed on so young. Only sixty-four. No fat man ever lived even to seventy.’

The conversation had taken a turn which Eustace could not help finding a bit distasteful. He decided to laugh his way out into a more congenial subject.

‘That was up to the best of your old form,’ he said gaily. ‘But tell me,’ he added, ‘what happens to fat people when they die?’

‘They don’t die,’ said Mrs. Gamble. ‘They pass on.’

‘When they pass on,’ Eustace amended, with an intonation that put the words between inverted commas. ‘Are they still obese on the other side? I’d like to ask next time you have a séance.’

‘You’re being frivolous,’ said the Queen Mother severely.

Eustace turned to Mrs. Thwale.

‘Did you finally succeed in locating a good witch?’

‘Unfortunately, most of them speak only Italian,’ she answered. ‘But now Lady Worplesden’s given us the name of an English one, who she says is very satisfactory.’

‘I’d have preferred a trumpet medium,’ said Mrs. Gamble. ‘But when one’s travelling, one has to put up with what one can find.’

Noiselessly, the French maid rose, moved her chair over and, taking Mrs. Gamble’s other hand from where it lay, clawlike, on Foxy’s orange fur, began to file the pointed nails.

‘That young nephew of yours is arriving today, isn’t he?’

‘This evening,’ Eustace answered. ‘We may be a little late for dinner.’

‘I like boys,’ the Queen Mother pronounced. ‘That is, when they have decent manners, which very few of them have nowadays. And that reminds me, Veronica, of Mr. De Vries.’

‘He’s coming to tea this afternoon,’ said Mrs. Thwale in her calm, level voice.

‘De Vries?’ Eustace questioned.

‘You met him in Paris,’ said the Queen Mother. ‘At my New Year cocktail party.’

‘Did I?’ Eustace’s tone was vague. He had also met about five thousand other people on the same occasion.

‘American,’ the Queen Mother went on. ‘And he took the greatest fancy to me. Didn’t he, Veronica?’

‘He certainly did,’ said Mrs. Thwale.

‘Came to see me constantly all this winter — constantly. And now he’s in Florence.’

‘Money?’

Mrs. Gamble nodded.

‘Breakfast Food,’ she said. ‘But what he’s really interested in is science and all that kind of stuff. However, as I keep telling him, facts are facts, whatever your Mr. Einstein may say.’

‘And not only Mr. Einstein,’ said Eustace with a smile, ‘Mr. Plato, Mr. Buddha, Mr. Francis of Assisi.’

A curious little grunting sound made him turn his head. Almost voicelessly, Mrs. Thwale was laughing.

‘Did I say anything so amusing?’ he asked.

The pale oval face resumed its customary serenity.

‘I was thinking of a little joke my husband and I used to have together.’

‘About Mr. Francis of Assisi?’

For a second or two she looked at him without speaking.

‘About Brother Ass-ss,’ she said at last.

Eustace would have liked to enquire further, but thought it more tactful, seeing that Thwale was so lately dead, to refrain.

‘If you’re going down into the town this morning,’ Mrs. Gamble broke in, ‘I wish you’d take Veronica.’

‘I’d be enchanted.’

‘She’s got some shopping to do for me,’ the old woman continued.

Eustace turned to Mrs. Thwale.

‘Then let’s have lunch together at Betti’s.’

But it was the Queen Mother who declined the invitation.

‘No, Eustace, I want her to come straight back. In a taxi.’

He glanced anxiously at Mrs. Thwale to see how she was taking it. The face of the Ingres madonna was expressionlessly calm.

‘In a taxi,’ she repeated in her clear, level voice. ‘Very well, Mrs. Gamble.’

Half an hour later, in the sober elegance of her black tailor-made, Veronica Thwale walked out into the sunshine. At the foot of the front steps stood the Isotta, large, dark blue, and prodigiously expensive-looking. But Paul De Vries, she reflected as she got in, was probably at least as well off as Mr. Barnack.

‘I hope you don’t object,’ said Eustace, holding up the second of the day’s cigars.

She raised her eyelids at him, smiled without parting her lips, and shook her head; then looked back again at the gloved hands lying limply folded in her lap.

Slowly the car rolled down between the cypresses and out into the steep winding road beyond the gates.

‘Of all the specimens in my collection,’ said Eustace, breaking the long silence, ‘I think the Queen Mother is perhaps the most remarkable. A fossil scorpion out of the Carboniferous, almost perfectly preserved.’

Mrs. Thwale smiled at her folded hands.

‘I’m not a geologist,’ she said. ‘And, incidentally, the fossil is my employer.’

‘Which is the thing I find most surprising of all.’

She looked up at him enquiringly.

‘You mean, that I should be acting as Mrs. Gamble’s companion?’

The final word, Eustace noted appreciatively, was faintly emphasized, so that it took on its fullest, Brontëan significance.

‘That’s it,’ he said.

Mrs. Thwale examined him appraisingly, taking in the tilted hat, the beautifully fitting pearl-grey suit, the Sulka tie, the rosebud in his buttonhole.

‘*Your* father wasn’t a poor clergyman in Islington,’ she brought out.

‘No, he was a militant anti-clerical in Bolton.’

‘Oh, it’s not the faith I’m thinking about,’ she answered, smiling with delicate irony. ‘It’s what your mother-in-law calls the Facts.’

‘Such as?’

She shrugged her shoulders.

‘Chilblains, for example. Living in a cold house. Feeling ashamed because one’s clothes are so old and shabby. But poverty wasn’t the whole story. *Your*

father didn’t practise the Christian virtues.’

‘On the contrary,’ said Eustace, ‘he was a professional philanthropist. You know — drinking-fountains, hospitals, boys’ clubs.’

‘Ah, but he only gave the money and had his name written up over the door. He didn’t have to work in his beastly clubs.’

‘Whereas *you* did?’

Mrs. Thwale nodded.

‘From the time I was thirteen. And after I was sixteen it was four nights a week.’

‘Did they force you?’

Mrs. Thwale shrugged her shoulders and did not immediately answer. She was thinking of her father — those bright eyes in the face of a consumptive Phoebus, that long thin body, stooping and hollow-chested. And beside him stood her mother, tiny and fragile, but the protector of his helpless unworldliness, the little bird-like Atlas who sustained the whole weight of his material universe.

‘There’s such a thing as moral blackmail,’ she said at last. ‘If the people around you insist on behaving like Early Christians, you’ve got no choice, have you?’

‘Not much, I admit.’

Eustace took the cigar out of the corner of his mouth and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

‘That’s one of the reasons,’ he added with a chuckle, ‘why it’s so important to eschew the company of the Good.’

‘One of the Good was your stepdaughter,’ said Mrs. Thwale after a little pause.

‘Who, Daisy Ockham?’

She nodded.

‘Oh, then your father must be that Canon What’s-his-name she’s always talking about.’

‘Canon Cresswell.’

‘That’s it — Cresswell.’ Eustace beamed at her. ‘Well, all I can say is that you ought to hear her on the subject.’

‘I have,’ said Mrs. Thwale. ‘Very often.’

Daisy Ockham, Dotty Freebody, Yvonne Graves — the Holy Women. One fat, two scraggy. She had once drawn a picture of them squatting at the foot of the cross on which her father was being crucified by a troop of Boy Scouts.

Eustace broke the silence with a little laugh at his stepdaughter’s expense — at Canon Cresswell’s too, incidentally. But there didn’t seem to be any filial piety to consider in this case.

‘All those deplorably good works of hers!’ he said. ‘But then of course,’ he added commiseratingly, ‘there wasn’t much alternative for the poor thing, after she’d lost her husband and the boy.’

‘She used to do them even before,’ said Mrs. Thwale.

‘So there’s really *no* excuse!’ he said.

Mrs. Thwale smiled and shook her head. Then, after a pause, she volunteered that it was Daisy Ockham who had originally introduced her to Mrs. Gamble.

‘Rare privilege!’ said Eustace.

‘But it was at her house that I met Henry.’

‘Henry?’ he questioned.

‘That was my husband.’

‘Oh, of course.’

There was a silence, while Eustace sucked at his cigar and tried to remember what the Queen Mother had said about Henry Thwale. A partner in the firm of solicitors who managed her affairs. Very pleasant and well-bred, but had passed on of a ruptured appendix at only — what was the age she had mentioned, with her usual ghoulish accuracy about such things? Thirty-eight, he seemed to recall. So that he would have been at least twelve or fourteen years older than his wife.

‘How old were you when you married?’ he asked.

‘Eighteen.’

‘Just the right age, according to Aristotle.’

‘But not according to my father. He’d have liked me to wait a couple of years.’

‘Fathers are never supposed to relish the thought of their young daughters getting married.’

Mrs. Thwale looked down at her folded hands and thought of their honeymoon and summer holiday beside the Mediterranean. The swimming, the deliciously stupefying sun-baths, the long siesta hours in the aquarium twilight of their green-shuttered bedroom.

‘I’m not altogether surprised,’ she said, without raising her eyes.

At the memory of those extremes of pleasure and shamelessness and self-abandonment she smiled a little to herself. ‘Nature’s lay idiot, I taught thee to love.’ And to the quotation Henry had added, as his personal testimonial, that she was a model pupil. But then he had been a good master. Which didn’t prevent him, unfortunately, from having the most abominable temper and being mean about money.

‘Well, I’m glad you managed to make your escape,’ said Eustace.

Mrs. Thwale was silent for a little. ‘After Henry died,’ she said at last, ‘it almost looked as if I might have to go back to where I’d come from.’

‘To the Poor and the Good?’

‘To the Poor and the Good,’ she echoed. ‘But fortunately Mrs. Gamble needed somebody to read to her.’

‘So now you live with the Rich and the Bad, eh?’

‘As a parasite,’ said Mrs. Thwale calmly. ‘As a kind of glorified lady’s maid…. But it’s a question of making one’s choice between two evils.’

She opened her handbag, took out a handkerchief and, raising it to her nose, inhaled its perfume of civet and flowers. In her father’s house there was chronically the smell of cabbage and steamed puddings, and at the Girls’ Club — well, the smell of girls.

‘Personally,’ she said, as she put away the handkerchief again, ‘I’d rather be a hanger-on in a house like yours than on my own with — what would it have been? About fifty shillings a week, I suppose.’

There was a brief silence.

‘In your position,’ said Eustace at last, ‘perhaps I’d have made the same choice.’

‘It wouldn’t astonish me,’ was Mrs. Thwale’s comment.

‘But I think I’d have drawn a line …’

‘People don’t draw lines unless they can afford it.’

‘Not even at fossil scorpions?’

Mrs. Thwale smiled.

‘Your mother-in-law would have preferred a trumpet medium. But even she has to be content with what she can find.’

‘Even she!’ Eustace repeated with a wheezy laugh. ‘But I must say, she was pretty lucky to find you, wasn’t she?’

‘Not so lucky as I was to find her.’

‘And if you hadn’t found one another, what then?’

Mrs. Thwale shrugged her shoulders.

‘Perhaps I could have made a little money illustrating books.’

‘Oh, you draw?’

She nodded.

‘Secretly,’ she answered.

‘Why secretly?’

‘Why?’ she repeated. ‘Partly from mere force of habit. You see, one’s drawings weren’t much appreciated at home.’

‘On what grounds? Aesthetic or ethical?’

She smiled and shrugged her shoulders. ‘Who knows?’

But Mrs. Cresswell had been so dreadfully upset by the discovery of her sketch-book that she had gone to bed for three days with a migraine headache. After that, Veronica had never done any drawing except in the W.C. and on bits of paper that could be thrown away without risk of stopping up the drains.

‘Besides,’ she went on, ‘secrecy’s such fun just for its own sake.’

‘Is it?’

‘Don’t tell me you feel like my husband about it! Henry would have been a nudist if he’d been born ten years later.’

‘But you wouldn’t, even though you *were* born ten years later?’

She shook her head emphatically.

‘I wouldn’t even write out a laundry list with somebody else in the room. But Henry … Why, the door of his study was never shut. Never! It used to make me feel quite ill even to look at him.’

She was silent for a moment.

‘There’s an awful prayer at the beginning of the Communion Service,’ she went on. ‘You know the one: “Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid.” Really awful! I used to make drawings about it. Those were the ones that seemed to upset my mother most of all.’

‘I can well believe it,’ said Eustace with a chuckle. ‘One day,’ he added, ‘will you show me some of your drawings?’

Mrs. Thwale glanced at him searchingly, then averted her eyes. For a few seconds she did not speak. Then, slowly and in the tone of one who has thought out a problem and come at last to a decision, she gave her answer.

‘You’re one of the few people I wouldn’t mind showing them to.’

‘I feel flattered,’ said Eustace.

Mrs. Thwale opened her handbag and, from among its perfumed contents, extracted half a sheet of notepaper.

‘Here’s something I was working on before breakfast this morning.’

He took it and put up his monocle. The drawing was in ink and, in spite of its smallness, extraordinarily detailed and meticulous. Competent, was Eustace’s verdict, but unpleasantly niggling. He peered at it closely. The drawing represented a woman, dressed in the severest and most correctly fashionable of tailor-made suits, walking, prayer-book in hand, up the aisle of a church. Behind her, at the end of a string, she trailed a horseshoe magnet — but a horseshoe magnet so curved and rounded as to suggest a pair of thighs tapering down to the knees. On the ground, a little way behind the woman, lay an enormous eyeball,

as big as a pumpkin, its pupil staring wildly at the retreating magnet. From the sides of the eye sprouted two wormlike arms, ending in a pair of huge hooked hands that clawed at the floor. So strong had been the attraction and so desperate the futile effort to resist, that the dragging fingers had scored long grooves in the flagstones.

Eustace raised his left eyebrow and allowed the monocle to drop.

‘There’s only one thing about the parable I don’t understand,’ he said. ‘Why the church?’

‘Oh, for any number of reasons,’ Mrs. Thwale answered, shrugging her shoulders. ‘Respectability always heightens a woman’s attractiveness. And blasphemy gives an extra spice to pleasure. And, after all, churches are places people get married in. Besides, who tells you that that isn’t the *Decameron* she’s carrying, bound in black leather like a prayer-book?’

She took the sheet of paper and put it away again in her bag.

‘It’s a pity fans have gone out of fashion,’ she added in another tone. ‘And those big white masks they used to wear in Casanova. Or talking from behind screens, like the ladies in “The Tale of Genji.” Wouldn’t that be heavenly!’

‘Would it?’

She nodded, her face bright with unwonted animation.

‘One could do the oddest things while one was chatting with the Vicar about … well, let’s say the League of Nations. Oh, the *oddest*!’

‘Such as?’

A little grunt of voiceless laughter was all the answer she vouchsafed. There was a pause.

‘And then,’ she added, ‘think of the enormities one could bring out without blushing!’

‘And you feel you’d like to bring out enormities?’

Mrs. Thwale nodded.

‘I’d have been a good scientist,’ she said.

‘What’s that got to do with it?’

‘But can’t you see?’ she said impatiently. ‘Can’t you see? Cutting bits off frogs and mice, grafting cancer into rabbits, boiling things together in test-tubes — just to see what’ll happen, just for the fun of the thing. Wantonly committing enormities — that’s all science is.’

‘And you’d enjoy it *outside* the laboratory?’

‘Not in public, of course.’

‘But if you were ambushed behind a screen, where the Good couldn’t see you …’

‘Ambushed behind a screen,’ Mrs. Thwale repeated slowly. ‘And now,’ she went on in another tone, ‘I shall have to get out. There’s a shop somewhere here on the Lungarno where you can buy rubber rats for dogs. Rats with a chocolate flavour. Foxy’s very keen on the chocolate, it seems. Ah, here we are!’

She leaned forward and rapped the glass.

Eustace watched her go. Then, replacing his hat, he ordered the chauffeur to drive to Weyl’s in the Via Tornabuoni.

CHAPTER SEVEN

‘WEYL FRÈRES, BRUXELLES, Paris …’

Eustace pushed open the door and walked into the crowded shop. ‘“Where every prospect pleases,”’ he was humming, as he always hummed on these occasions, ‘“and only man is Weyl Frères, Bruxelles, Paris, Florence, Vienne.”’

But this morning it was woman, not man. Mme Weyl was engaged, as he entered, in trying to talk what was obviously an Anglo-Indian colonel into buying a Braque. The performance was so ludicrous and the performer so ravishingly pretty that Eustace simulated an interest in a particularly hideous piece of majolica in order to have an excuse to watch and listen at close quarters.

Pearly, golden, deliciously pink and plump, how had this sumptuous young creature escaped from the Rubens canvas which was so obviously her home? And how, good heavens, did it happen that a figure from Peter Paul’s mythology was wearing clothes? But even in her incongruous twentieth-century frills, Weyl’s Flemish Venus remained enchanting. Which only heightened the absurdity of the act she was now staging for the colonel. With the earnestness of a little girl who is doing her very best to reproduce, word-perfect, the lesson so laboriously learned by heart, she was conscientiously repeating the nonsense phrases with which her husband adorned his incomparable patter. ‘Tactile Values,’ ‘rhythm,’ ‘significant forms,’ ‘repoussoirs,’ ‘calligraphic outline’ — Eustace recognized all the stereotypes of contemporary criticism, and along with them such products of Weyl’s own luxuriant genius as ‘four-dimensional volumes,’ *‘couleur d’éternité,’* and ‘plastic polyphony’; the whole uttered with a French accent so strong, so indecently ‘cute,’ so reminiscent of the naughty-naughty twitterings of a Parisian miss on the English musical comedy stage, that the colonel’s ruddy face was fairly beaming with concupiscence.

Suddenly there was a rush of feet and the loud, delighted cry of ‘Monsieur Eustache!’ Eustace turned his head. Short, broad-shouldered, astonishingly quick and agile, it was Gabriel Weyl himself, darting towards him between the baroque statues and the cinquecento furniture. Seizing Eustace’s hand in both of his, he shook it long and ardently, assured him, in a torrent of incorrigibly Belgian English, how happy he was, how proud, how deeply touched and flattered; and then, lowering his voice, whispered dramatically that he had just received something from his brother in Paris, a consignment of treasures which he had said to himself the very first moment he looked at them that he wouldn’t show to anyone, not a soul, not to Pierpont Morgan himself, by God, until *ce cher Monsieur Eustache* had plucked the virginity of the portfolio and rifled its choicest sweets. And what sweets! Degas drawings such as nobody had ever seen the like of.

Still boiling over with enthusiasm, he led the way into the back room. On an elaborately carved Venetian table lay a black portfolio.

‘There!’ he cried, pointing at it with the gesture of one who, in an Old Master, somewhat superfluously calls attention to the Transfiguration or the martyrdom of St. Erasmus.

He was silent for a moment; then, changing his expression to the libidinous leer of a slave-dealer peddling Circassians to an ageing pasha, he started to undo the strings of the portfolio. The hands, Eustace noticed, were deft and powerful, their backs furred with a growth of soft black hair, their short fingers exquisitely manicured. With a flourish M. Weyl threw back the heavy flap of cardboard.

‘Look!’

The tone was triumphant and assured. At the sight of those newly budded paps, that incomparable navel, no pasha, however jaded, could possibly resist.

‘But look!’

Putting up his monocle, Eustace looked, and saw the charcoal sketch of a naked woman standing in a tin bath like a Roman sarcophagus. One foot, much distorted by the wearing of tight shoes, was planted on the edge of the bath, and the woman was bending down, hair and bosom falling one way, rump bonily

jutting another, one knee crooked outward at the most ungraceful of all possible angles, to scrub a heel which one divined, through some unanalysable subtlety of the drawing, as yellow and, in spite of soap, chronically dirty-looking.

'Was *this* the face …?' Eustace murmured.

But really there was nobody quite like Degas, nobody who could render the cosy and domestic squalors of our physiology with so much intensity and in forms so exquisitely beautiful.

'You oughtn't to have sold me that Magnasco,' he said aloud. 'How can I possibly afford one of these?'

The slave-dealer shot a glance at his pasha and saw that the Circassians were beginning to have the desired effect. But they were so cheap, he protested; and the soundest of investments — as good as shares in the Suez Canal Company. And now let Monsieur Eustache look at this one!

He removed the first drawing; and this time the face that launched the thousand ships was seen squarely from the rear, leaning forward over the tin sarcophagus and vigorously towelling the back of its neck.

Gabriel Weyl laid a thick, perfectly manicured forefinger on the buttocks.

'What values!' he breathed ecstatically, 'what volumes, what *calligraphy*!'

Eustace burst out laughing. But, as usual, it was M. Weyl who laughed last. Little by little the jaded pasha began to yield. He might perhaps consider it — that was to say, if the price weren't too exorbitant….

Only eight thousand lire, wheedled the slave-dealer, eight thousand for something that was not only a masterpiece, but also a gilt-edged security.

It was quite a reasonable figure; but Eustace felt bound to protest.

No, no, not a centesimo less than eight thousand. But if Monsieur Eustache would take two of them, and pay cash, he could have them for only fourteen.

Fourteen, fourteen … After this morning's letter from the bank one might almost say that one was getting two Degases free gratis and for nothing. His conscience salved, Eustace pulled out his cheque-book.

'I'll take them with me,' he said, indicating the foot-washer and the towel-wielder.

Five minutes later, with the square flat package under his arm, he emerged again into the sunlight of the Via Tornabuoni.

From Weyl's Eustace made his way to Vieusseux's lending library, to see if they had a copy of Lamettrie's *L'Homme Machine.* But of course they hadn't; and after turning over the pages of the latest French and English reviews in the vain hope of finding something one could read, he walked out again into the jostle of the narrow streets.

After a moment of hesitation he decided to pop into the Bargello for a moment and then, on the way to lunch, to look in on Bruno Rontini and ask him to arrange about taking Sebastian round the Villa Galigai.

Ten minutes were enough to whizz through the Donatellos and, his head full of heroic bronze and marble, he strolled up the street in the direction of the bookshop.

Yes, it would have been nice, he was thinking, it would have been very nice indeed if one's life had had the quality of those statues. Nobility without affectation. Serenity combined with passionate energy. Dignity wedded to grace. But, alas, those were not precisely the characteristics that one's life had exhibited. Which was regrettable, no doubt. But of course it had its compensating advantages. Being a Donatello would have been altogether too strenuous for his taste. That sort of thing was much more John's cup of tea — John who had always seen himself as the equivalent of a mixture between Gattamelata and the Baptist. Instead of which, his actual life was … what? Eustace cast about for the answer, and finally decided that John's life was best compared to a war picture by one of those deplorable painters who were born to be magazine illustrators but had unfortunately seen the Cubists and taken to High Art. Poor John! He had no taste, no sense of style….

But here was Bruno's corner. He opened the door and walked into the dark little book-lined cavern.

Seated at the counter, a man was reading by the light of a green-shaded lamp that hung from the ceiling. At the sound of the door-bell he put away his book and, with movements that were expressive more of resignation to the

interruption than of delight at seeing a customer, got up and advanced to meet the newcomer. He was a young man in the middle twenties, tall, large-boned, with a narrow convex face like that of a rather tense and over-earnest, but still not very intelligent ram.

‘*Buon giorno*,’ said Eustace genially.

The young man returned his greeting without the trace of an answering smile. Not, Eustace felt sure, from any desire to be discourteous, but just because, to a face of that kind, smiling was all but an impossibility.

He asked where Bruno was, and was told that Bruno would be out for at least another hour.

‘Gallivanting about as usual!’ Eustace commented with that unnecessary and rather pointless jocularity into which the desire to display his perfect command of the Tuscan idiom so often betrayed him when he spoke Italian.

‘If you like to put it that way, Mr. Barnack,’ said the young man with quiet gravity.

‘Oh, you know who I am?’

The other nodded.

‘I came into the shop one day last autumn, when you were talking with Bruno.’

‘And when I’d gone, he treated you to a thorough dissection of my character!’

‘How can you say that!’ the young man cried reproachfully. ‘You who’ve known Bruno for so long.’

Eustace laughed and patted him on the shoulder. The boy was humourless, of course; but in his loyalty to Bruno, in the solemn ovine sincerity of all he said, curiously touching.

‘I was only joking,’ he said aloud. ‘Bruno’s the last person to gossip about a man when his back is turned.’

For the first time during the conversation, the young man’s face brightened into a smile.

‘I’m glad you realize it,’ he said.

‘Not only realize, but sometimes even regret it,’ said Eustace mischievously. ‘There’s nothing that so effectively ruins conversation as charitableness. After all, nobody can be amusing about other people’s virtues. What’s your name, by the way?’ he added, before the other had time to translate the pained disapproval of his expression into words.

‘Malpighi, Carlo Malpighi.’

‘No relation of Avvocato Malpighi?’

The other hesitated; an expression of embarrassment appeared on his face.

‘He’s my father,’ he said at last.

Eustace betrayed no surprise; but his curiosity was aroused. Why was the son of a highly successful lawyer selling secondhand books? He set himself to find out.

‘I expect Bruno’s been very helpful to you,’ he began, taking what he divined would be the shortest way to the young man’s confidence.

He was not mistaken. In a little while he had young ram-face almost chattering. About his sickly and conventional mother; about his father’s preference for the two older and cleverer sons; about the impact of *il Darwinismo* and his loss of faith; about his turning to the Religion of Humanity.

‘The Religion of Humanity!’ Eustace repeated with relish. How deliciously comic that people should still be worshipping Humanity!

From theoretical socialism the step to an active anti-fascism was short and logical — particularly logical in Carlo’s case, since both his brothers were party members and climbing rapidly up the hierarchical ladder. Carlo had spent a couple of years distributing forbidden literature; attending clandestine meetings; talking to peasants and workmen in the hope of persuading them to put up some kind of resistance to the all-pervading tyranny. But nothing happened; there were no results to show for all these efforts. In private, people grumbled and exchanged whispered jokes and little obscenities about their masters; in public, they continued to shout ‘*Duce*, *Duce!*’ And meanwhile, from time to time, one of Carlo’s associates would be caught, and either beaten up in the old-fashioned way, or else shipped off to the islands. That was all, that was absolutely all.

‘And even if it hadn’t been all,’ Eustace put in, ‘even if you’d persuaded them to do something violent and decisive, what then? There’d have been anarchy for a little while. And then, to cure the anarchy, another dictator, calling himself a communist, no doubt, but otherwise indistinguishable from this one. Quite indistinguishable,’ he repeated with the jolliest of chuckles. ‘Unless, of course, he happened to be rather worse.’

The other nodded.

‘Bruno said something of that kind too.’

‘Sensible fellow!’

‘But he also said something else …’

‘Ah, I was afraid of that!’

Carlo ignored the interruption, and his face glowed with sudden ardour.

‘… That there’s only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that’s your own self. Your own self,’ he repeated. ‘So you have to begin there, not outside, not on other people. That comes afterwards, when you’ve worked on your own corner. You’ve got to *be* good before you can *do* good — or at any rate do good without doing harm at the same time. Helping with one hand and hurting with the other — that’s what the ordinary reformer does.’

‘Whereas the truly wise man,’ said Eustace, ‘refrains from doing anything with either hand.’

‘No, no,’ the other protested with unsmiling earnestness. ‘The wise man begins by transforming himself, so that he can help other people without running the risk of being corrupted in the process.’

And with the incoherence of passion he began to talk about the French Revolution. The men who made it had the best of intentions; but these good intentions were hopelessly mixed up with vanity and ambition and insensitiveness and cruelty. With the inevitable consequence that what had begun as a movement of liberation degenerated into terrorism and a squabble for power, into tyranny and imperialism and the world-wide reactions to imperialism. And this sort of thing was bound to happen wherever people tried

to do good without being good. Nobody could do a proper job with dirty or misshapen instruments. There was no way out except Bruno's way. And, of course, Bruno's way was the way that had been pointed out by …

Suddenly he broke off and, taking cognizance of Eustace as a potential customer, looked very sheepish.

'I'm sorry,' he said in a tone of apology. 'I don't know why I'm talking to you like this. I ought to have asked you what you wanted.'

'Exactly what you've given me,' said Eustace with a smile of amused and slightly ironic friendliness. 'And I'll buy any book you recommend, from Aretino to Mrs. Molesworth.'

Carlo Malpighi looked at him for a moment in hesitant silence. Then, deciding to take him at his word, he stepped over to one of the shelves and came back with a rather battered volume.

'It's only twenty-five lire,' he said.

Eustace put up his monocle, opened the book at random, and read aloud:

'"Grace did not fail thee, but thou wast wanting to grace. God did not deprive thee of the operation of his love, but thou didst deprive his love of thy co-operation. God would never have rejected thee, if thou hadst not rejected him."

Golly!' He turned back to the title page. 'Treatise of the Love of God by St. François de Sales,' he read. 'Pity it isn't de Sade. But then,' he added, as he pulled out his wallet, 'it would have cost a good deal more than twenty-five lire.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONFIDENT THAT, AT Betti's, he would find a friend to share his meal, Eustace had made no luncheon engagement. Unwisely, as he now realized on entering the restaurant. For Mario De Lellis was swallowed up in the midst of a large convivial party, and could only wave a distant greeting. And Mopsa's father, solemn old Schottelius, was pontificating about world politics to two other Germans. And as for Tom Pewsey, he was lunching so intimately with such an extraordinarily handsome young Nordic that he failed even to notice the entry of his oldest friend.

Seated at the table assigned to him, Eustace was preparing, rather mournfully, to eat a solitary meal, when he became aware, over the top of his menu, of an intruding presence. Raising his head, he saw a slender young man looking down at him with all the focussed intentness of two very bright brown eyes and the fixedly staring nostrils of a tilted and inquisitive nose.

'I don't suppose you remember me,' said the stranger.

It was a New England voice; and its intonations curiously combined a native eagerness with a studiedly academic flatness, deliberation and monotony.

Eustace shook his head.

'No, I'm afraid I don't,' he admitted.

'I had the pleasure of being introduced to you in Paris last January. At Mrs. Gamble's.'

'Oh, you're Mr. De Jong.'

'De Vries,' the young man emended. 'Paul De Vries.'

'I know all about you,' said Eustace. 'You talk to my mother-in-law about Einstein.'

Very brightly, as though he were deliberately turning on a light, the young man smiled.

‘Could any subject be more exciting?’

‘None — unless it’s the subject of lunch when the clock says half-past one. Will you join me in discussing that?’

The young man had evidently been hoping for just such an invitation.

‘Thank you so much,’ he said; and, putting down the two thick volumes he was carrying, he seated himself, planted his elbows on the table and leaned forward towards his new companion.

‘Everyone ought to know something about Einstein,’ he began.

‘One moment,’ said Eustace. ‘Let’s start by deciding what we’re going to eat.’

‘Yes, yes, that’s very important,’ the other agreed, but with an obvious lack of all conviction. ‘The stomach has its reasons, as Pascal would say.’ He laughed perfunctorily, and picked up the bill-of-fare. When the waiter had taken the orders, he planted his elbows as before, and began again.

‘As I was saying, Mr. Barnack, everyone ought to know something of Einstein.’

‘Even those who can’t understand what he’s talking about?’

‘But they *can*,’ the other protested. ‘It’s only the mathematical techniques that are difficult. The principle is simple — and after all, it’s the understanding of the principle that affects values and conduct.’

Eustace laughed aloud.

‘I can just see my mother-in-law changing her values and conduct to fit the principles of relativity!’

‘Well, of course she *is* rather elderly,’ the other admitted. ‘I was thinking more of people who are young enough to be flexible. For example, that lady who acts as Mrs. Gamble’s companion …’

Ah, so that was why he had been so assiduous in his attentions to the Queen Mother! But in that case the picture of the magnetized eye was perhaps not only a parable but a piece of history.

‘… Mathematically speaking, almost illiterate,’ the young man was saying. ‘But that doesn’t prevent her from realizing the scope and significance of the

Einsteinian revolution.'

And what a revolution, he went on with mounting enthusiasm. Incomparably more important than anything that had happened in Russia or Italy. For this was the revolution that had changed the whole course of scientific thinking, brought back idealism, integrated mind into the fabric of Nature, put an end for ever to the Victorians' nightmare universe of infinitesimal billiard balls.

'Too bad,' said Eustace in parenthesis. 'I really loved those little billiard balls.'

He addressed himself to the plate of ribbon-like *lasagne verdi* which the waiter had set before him.

'First-rate,' he said appreciatively with his mouth full. 'Almost as good as at the Pappagallo in Bologna. Do you know Bologna?' he added, hoping to divert the conversation to more congenial themes.

But Paul De Vries knew Bologna only too well. Had spent a week there the previous autumn, having talks with all the most interesting people at the university.

'The university?' Eustace repeated incredulously.

The young man nodded and, putting down his fork, explained that, during the last two years, he had been making a tour of all the leading universities of Europe and Asia. Getting in touch with the really significant people working in each. Trying to enlist their co-operation in his great project — the setting up of an international clearing house of ideas, the creation of a general staff of scientific-religious-philosophic synthesis for the entire planet.

'With yourself as the commander-in-chief?' Eustace couldn't resist putting in.

'No, no,' the other protested. 'Only the liaison officer and interpreter. Only the bridge-building engineer.'

That was the full extent of his ambition: to be a humble bridge-builder, a *pontifex.* Not *maximus*, he added with another of his bright deliberate smiles. *Pontifex minimus.* And he had good hopes of succeeding. People had been extraordinarily kind and helpful and interested. And meanwhile he could assure Eustace that Bologna was living up to her ancient reputation. They were doing

the most exciting work in crystallography; and in his latest lectures on Aesthetics, Bonomelli was using all the resources of modern psycho-physiology and the mathematics of many dimensions. Nothing quite like Bonomelli's Aesthetics had ever been seen before.

Eustace wiped his mouth and drank some Chianti.

'I wish one could say the same thing of contemporary Italian art,' he remarked, as he refilled his glass from the big-bellied flask in its swinging cradle.

Yes, the other admitted judicially, it was quite true that easel paintings didn't amount to much in modern Italy. But he had seen the most remarkable specimens of socialized and civic art. Classico-functional post offices, giant football stadiums, heroic murals. And after all, that was going to be the art of the future.

'God,' said Eustace, 'I hope I shan't live to see it!'

Paul De Vries signed to the waiter to remove his almost untouched plate of *lasagne*, hungrily lighted a cigarette and continued:

'You're a specimen, if I may say so, of Individualistic Man. But Individualistic Man is rapidly giving place to Social Man.'

'I knew it,' said Eustace. 'Everyone who wants to do good to the human race always ends in universal bullying.'

The young man protested. He wasn't talking about regimentation, but integration. And in a properly integrated society a new kind of cultural field would arise, with new kinds of aesthetic values coming into existence within it.

'Aesthetic values!' Eustace repeated impatiently. 'That's the sort of phrase that fills me with the profoundest mistrust.'

'What makes you say that?'

Eustace answered with another question.

'What's the colour of the wall-paper in your bedroom at the hotel?' he asked.

'The colour of the wall-paper?' the young man echoed in a tone of astonishment. 'I haven't the faintest idea.'

‘No, I thought not,’ said Eustace. ‘And that’s why I mistrust aesthetic values so much.’

The waiter brought the creamed breasts of turkey and he lapsed into silence. Paul De Vries crushed out his cigarette and took two or three mouthfuls, chewing with extraordinary rapidity, like a rabbit. Then he wiped his lips, lighted another cigarette and fixed Eustace with his bright eyes and staring nostrils.

‘You’re right,’ he said, ‘you’re entirely right. My mind is so busy thinking about values that I don’t have time to experience them.’

The admission was made with such ingenuous humility that Eustace was touched.

‘Let’s go round the Uffizi one day,’ he said. ‘I’ll tell you what I think about the paintings and you shall tell me what I ought to know about their metaphysical and historical and social implications.’

The young man nodded delightedly.

‘A synthesis!’ he cried. ‘The organismic viewpoint.’

Organismic … The blessed word released him out of cramping actuality into the wide open spaces of the uncontaminated idea. He began to talk about Professor Whitehead, and how there was no such thing as Simple Location, only location within a field. And the more one considered the idea of the organized and organizing field, the more significant it seemed, the more richly exciting. It was one of the great bridge-ideas connecting one universe of discourse with another. You had the electro-magnetic field in physics, the individuation field in embryology and general biology, the social field among insects and human beings….

‘And don’t forget the sexual field.’

Paul De Vries looked questioningly at the interrupter.

‘It’s something that even you must have noticed,’ Eustace continued. ‘When you come into the neighbourhood of certain young ladies. Like Faraday’s tubes of force. And you don’t need a galvanometer to detect it,’ he concluded with a chuckle.

‘Tubes of force,’ the young man repeated slowly. ‘Tubes of force.’

The words seemed to have made a deep impression on him. He frowned to himself.

‘And yet of course,’ he went on after a little pause, ‘sex has its values — though I know you dislike the word.’

‘But not the thing,’ said Eustace jovially.

‘It can be refined and sublimated; it can be given wider reference.’

He made a gesture with his cigarette to indicate the wideness.

Eustace shook his head.

‘Personally,’ he said, ‘I prefer it raw and narrow.’

There was a silence. Then Eustace opened his mouth to remark that little Mrs. Thwale had a pretty powerful field around her; but before the words were out he had shut it again. No point in making trouble for oneself or other people. Besides, the oblique attack was generally the more effective; and since the Queen Mother had come to stay for a month, he would have all the time in the world to satisfy his curiosity.

Pensively, Paul De Vries began to talk about celibacy. People had come to mistrust the idea of vows and orders; but after all, they provided a simple and effective mechanism for delivering the dedicated intellectual from emotional entanglements and the distracting responsibilities of family life. Though of course, he added, certain values had to be sacrificed….

‘Not if the vows are judiciously tempered with a little fornication.’

Eustace beamed at him over the top of his wine-glass. But the young man’s expression remained obstinately serious.

‘Perhaps,’ he said, ‘there might be a modified form of celibacy. Not excluding romantic love and the higher forms of sex, but only barring marriage.’

Eustace burst out laughing.

‘But after all,’ the other protested, ‘it’s not love that’s incompatible with the life of a dedicated intellectual; it’s the whole-time job of a wife and family.’

‘And you expect the ladies to share your views?’

‘Why not — if they were dedicated to the same kind of life?’

‘You mean, the intellectuals would only sleep with female mathematicians?’

‘Why only mathematicians? Poetesses, women scientists and musicians and painters.’

‘In a word, every girl who can pass an examination or strum the piano. Or even turn out a drawing,’ he added as an afterthought. ‘You modified celibates ought to have some fun!’

But what an ass! Eustace thought, as he went on eating. And how pathetically transparent! Caught between his ideals and his desires, and trying to rationalize his way out of that absurdly commonplace situation by talking nonsense about values and dedicated intellectuals and modified celibacy. It was really pathetic.

‘Well, now that we’ve dealt with the sexual field,’ he said aloud, ‘let’s get on to the others.’

Paul De Vries looked at him for a moment without speaking, then turned on one of his bright smiles and nodded his head.

‘Let’s get on to the others,’ he repeated.

Pushing aside his half-eaten turkey, he planted his elbows on the table and in a moment was off once more into the open.

Take the case, for example, of psychic fields, and even spiritual fields. For if one looked into the matter open-mindedly and without preconceived ideas, one simply had to accept such things as facts — didn’t one?

Did one? Eustace shrugged his shoulders.

But the evidence was overwhelmingly strong. If you read the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, you couldn’t fail to be convinced. Which was why most philosophers so scrupulously refrained from reading them. That was what came of having to do your work within the old-fashioned academic field. You couldn’t think honestly about certain things, even if you wanted to. And, of course, if the field was a strong one, you wouldn’t want to.

‘You should talk to my mother-in-law about ghosts,’ said Eustace.

The advice was unnecessary. Paul De Vries had already sat in at a number of the old lady’s séances. Bridging the gap between the phenomena of spiritualism and the phenomena of psychology and physics was one of his jobs as *pontifex*

minimus. An uncommonly difficult job, incidentally, since nobody had yet formulated a hypothesis in terms of which you could think coherently of the two sets of facts. For the present, the best one could do was just to skip from one world to the other — hoping, meanwhile, that some day one might get a hunch, an illuminating intuition of the greater synthesis. For a synthesis there undoubtedly must be, a thought-bridge that would permit the mind to march discursively and logically from telepathy to the four-dimensional continuum, from poltergeists and departed spirits to the physiology of the nervous system. And beyond the happenings of the séance room there were the events of the oratory and the meditation hall. There was the ultimate all-embracing field — the Brahma of Sankara, the One of Plotinus, the Ground of Eckhart and Boehme, the …

'The Gaseous Vertebrate of Haeckel,' Eustace interjected.

And within that ultimate field, the young man hurried on, determined not to be interrupted, there were subordinate fields — such as that which the Christians called the Communion of Saints and the Buddhists …

But Eustace would not leave him in peace.

'Why stop there?' he broke in sarcastically, as he selected a cigar and prepared to light it. 'Why not the Immaculate Conception and the Infallibility of the Pope?'

He sucked at the burning match, and the smoke gushed from his nostrils.

'You remind me,' he said, 'of the Young Man of Cape Cod, who applied Quantum Theory to God …'

And nipping in the bud the other's effort to start again, he went on to recite a selection from what he called his New World Suite — the Young Girl of Spokane, the Young Man of Peoria, the Two Young Girls of Cheyenne. Paul De Vries's laughter, he noticed, was a bit forced and perfunctory; but he went on all the same — on principle; for one really couldn't allow the fellow to get away with his pretensions. Implicitly claiming to be religious just because he could talk a lot of high-class boloney about religion. A little honest dirt would clear the air of philosophic cant and bring the philosopher down to the good old human

barnyard, where he still belonged. That ram-faced boy at Bruno's might be absurd, and Bruno himself an amiable but misguided imbecile; but at least they weren't pretentious; they practised what they preached and, what was almost more remarkable, refrained from preaching what they practised. Whereas young *pontifex minimus* here …

Eustace took the cigar from between his lips, blew out a cloud of smoke and, lowering his voice a little, recited his limerick about the Bishop of Wichita Falls.

CHAPTER NINE

FROM BETTI'S, WHEN lunch was finished, he strolled over to his bank. Catching sight of him, as he stood waiting for the cashier to give him his money, the manager came running out to tell him enthusiastically that, next month, they hoped to do even better on the exchanges. The bank had a new correspondent in Berne, a certain Dr. Otto Loewe, who had a truly wonderful gift for this branch of speculation — a real genius, one might say, like Michelangelo or Marconi….

Still carrying his Degas drawings and his *Treatise of the Love of God*, Eustace made his way to the Piazza and, hailing a taxi, gave the driver Laurina Acciaiuoli's address. The cab started; he leaned back in his corner and sighed with a weary resignation. Laurina was one of his crosses. It was bad enough that she should be sick and importunate and embittered. But that was only the beginning. This haggard, arthritic cripple had once been the woman he had loved with an intensity of passion such as he had never experienced before or since. Another woman would have resigned herself to forget the fact. Not so Laurina. Twisting the dagger in her wound, she would spend whole afternoons talking to him about past beauty and present hideousness, past loves and present neglect, present loneliness and misery. And when she had worked herself up sufficiently, she would turn against her visitor, pointing accusingly with her swollen fingers and, in that low voice (once so enchantingly husky, now hoarse with sickness and over-smoking and sheer hatred), telling him that he had only come to see her out of a sense of duty — worse, out of mere weakness; that he had cared for her only when her body was young and straight, and that now she was old and crippled and unhappy he could hardly bring himself even to feel pity. Challenged to deny these all too painfully obvious truths, Eustace would find himself floundering in a quagmire of hypocritical platitudes; and what he said was generally so very unconvincing that Laurina would end by laughing outright

— laughing with a ferocity of sarcasm much more wounding to herself, of course, than to him; for, after all, he was not the one who had the arthritis. But even so, it was painful enough. Apprehensively, he wondered what the present afternoon would bring. Another of those unutterably boring threats of suicide, perhaps. Or else …

'Bebino!' a piercing voice shouted almost in his ear. *'Bebino!'*

He turned with a start. Through the narrow, crowded street the cab was making its way at a foot pace, and trotting along beside it, her hand on the frame of the open window, was the inventor (for reasons which she and she alone could understand) of that grotesquely infantile nickname.

'Mimi!' he exclaimed, and hoped to God there was nobody of his acquaintance within sight or earshot.

In that extraordinary purple outfit she looked not merely like the pretty little tart she was, but like the caricature of a pretty little tart in a comic paper. Which was what he liked about her, of course. The simple and unaffected vulgarity of her style was absolutely consummate.

Leaning forward, he called to the driver; and when the cab had stopped, opened the door for her. Mimi would look less conspicuous inside than out.

'Bebino mio!' She snuggled up against him on the seat, and he found himself enveloped by the reek of cheap perfume. 'Why haven't you been to see me, *Bebino?*'

As the cab drove on, he began to explain that he had been in Paris for a couple of months, and after that in England. But instead of listening, she continued to overwhelm him with reproaches and questions. Such a long, long time! But that was what men were like — *forchi*, real *parchi*. Didn't he love her any more? Was he making her horns with someone else?

'I tell you, I was in Paris for a couple of months,' he repeated.

'Sola, sola,' she broke in on a note of heart-felt grief.

'… And then a few weeks in London,' he went on, raising his voice in an effort to get himself heard.

‘And I who did everything you ever asked!’ There were actually tears in her brown eyes. ‘Everything,’ she insisted plaintively.

‘But I tell you I was away!’ Eustace shouted impatiently.

Abruptly changing her expression, the girl gave him a look and smile of the frankest lasciviousness and, catching up his hand, pressed it against her plump young bosom.

‘Why don’t you come with me now, *Bebino?* she cajoled. ‘I’ll make you so happy.’ And leaning towards him she whispered in baby language, ‘Hair-brush — naughty little *Bebino* needs the hair-brush.’

Eustace looked at her for a moment in silence, then consulted his watch. No, there wouldn’t be time, before the train arrived, to fit in both. It would have to be one or the other. The past or the present; commiseration or enjoyment. He made his choice.

‘Gather ye peaches while ye may,’ he said in English, and tapping the glass he told the driver that he had changed his mind: he wanted to be taken somewhere else, and he gave the address of Mimi’s apartment near Santa Croce. The man nodded and gave him an understanding wink.

‘I have to telephone,’ said Eustace when they arrived.

And while Mimi was changing her clothes, he rang up his house and left orders that the car was to be waiting at the main entrance of Santa Croce at a quarter to six. Then it was Laurina’s turn. Could he speak to the Contessa? Waiting for the connection, he elaborated his little fiction.

‘Eustace?’ came the low husky voice that had once had power to command him anything.

‘*Chère,*’ he began volubly, ‘*je suis horriblement ennuyé …*’ Polite insincerity seemed to come more easily in French than in English or Italian.

He broke it to her gradually, in a spate of foreign words — the bad, bad news that he had broken the little contraption which had to take the place of his vanished teeth. Not yet a full-scale *râtelier*, thank goodness — *plutôt un de ces bridges — ces petits ponts qui sont les Ponts des Soupirs qu’on traverse pour aller du palais de la jeunesse aux prisons lugubres de la sénilité.* He chuckled

appreciatively at his own elegant joke. Well, the long and the short of it was that he'd been compelled to go *en hâte* to the dentist's, and would have to stay there until his bridge was repaired. And that, *hélas*, would prevent him from coming to tea.

Laurina took it a great deal better than he had dared to hope. Dr. Rossi, she told him, had imported a new kind of lamp from Vienna, a marvellous new drug from Amsterdam. For days at a time now she was almost free from pain. But that wasn't the whole story. Passing on from the subject of her health, she remarked with a casualness of tone that was meant to mask, but actually betrayed, her sense of triumph, that D'Annunzio had recently come to see her — several times, and had talked so poetically about the past. And dear old Van Arpels had sent her his new book of poems, and with it the most charming of letters. And, talking of letters, she'd been going through her collection — and he had no idea what a lot there were, and how interesting.

'They must be,' said Eustace. And he thought of the almost insane intensities of feeling she had evoked in the days of her fascination, the agonies of craving and jealousy. And in such a variety of men — from pure mathematicians to company promoters, from Hungarian poets to English baronets and Estonian tennis champions. And now … He called up the image of Laurina as she was today, twenty years after: the gaunt cripple in her invalid-chair, and those brassy yellow curls above a face that might have been Dante's death-mask….

'I'd got out some of your letters to read to you,' said the voice in the microphone at his ear.

'They must sound pretty silly now.'

'No, no, they're charming,' she insisted. 'So witty; *et en même temps si tendres — così vibranti!*'

'*Vibranti?*' he repeated. 'Don't tell me I was ever vibrant!'

A sound made him turn his head. In the open doorway stood Mimi. She smiled at him and blew him a kiss; her claret-coloured kimono fell open.

At the other end of the wire paper sharply rustled.

‘Listen to this,’ said Laurina’s husky voice. ‘“You have the power of arousing desires that are infinite and, being infinite, can never be assuaged by the possession of a merely finite body and personal mind.”’

‘Golly!’ said Eustace. ‘Did I write that? It sounds like Alfred de Musset.’

Mimi was standing beside him now. With his free hand he gave her a couple of friendly pats on the buttocks. Gather ye peaches …

The husky voice went on reading. ‘“So it looks, Laurina, as though the only cure for being in love with you were to become a Sufi or a John of the Cross. God alone is commensurate with the cravings you inspire …”’

‘Il faudrait d’abord l’inventer’ Eustace interjected with a little chuckle. But at the time, he remembered, it had seemed quite sensible to say that sort of thing. Which just showed to what a condition this damned love could reduce a reasonable being! Well, thank goodness, now he was finished with *that* sort of thing! He administered another gentle smack and looked up at Mimi with a smile.

‘*Spicciati, Bebino,*’ she whispered.

‘And here’s another adorable thing you wrote,’ said Laurina’s voice in the same instant: ‘“Loving you as I do …”’

Mimi tweaked his ear impatiently —

‘“… As though one had been born again into another and intenser kind of life,”’ the voice at the telephone read on.

‘Sorry to have to interrupt my own raptures,’ said Eustace, speaking into the receiver. ‘But I’ve got to ring off…. No, no, not a moment more, my dear. Here’s the dentist. *Ecco il dentista,*’ he repeated for Mimi’s benefit, accompanying the words with a playful little pinch. ‘*Adesso commincia la tortura.’*

He hung up, turned and, pulling the girl down on to his knee, began with thick stubby fingers to tickle her well-covered ribs.

‘No, no, Bebino … no!’

‘Adesso commincia la tortura,’ he said again through the peals of her hysterical laughter.

CHAPTER TEN

SEATED AT THE counter of his cavernous little shop, Bruno Rontini was engaged in pricing a newly purchased batch of books. Fifteen lire, twelve, twenty-five, forty … His pencil moved from fly-leaf to fly-leaf. The light that fell almost vertically downwards from the hanging lamp above his head brought out black shadows within the deeply sunken sockets of the eyes and under the cheek-bones and the prominent nose. It was a beaked skull that bent over the books; but when he looked up, the eyes were blue and bright, the whole face wore an expression almost of gaiety.

Carlo had gone home, and he was alone — all alone with that which made his solitudes so pregnant with an inexpressible happiness. The noises of the street were loud beyond the window; but inside the little shop there was a core, as it were, of quintessential silence, to which every noise was an irrelevance, and which persisted through any interruption. Seated at the heart of that silence, Bruno was thinking that the crossed L which he was tracing out before the numerals on every fly-leaf stood not only for Lire, but also for Love, also for Liberation.

The door-bell rang, and a customer entered the shop. Bruno raised his head and saw a young, almost childish face. But how oddly skimped! As though Nature, suddenly parsimonious, had refused to provide a sufficiency of material for full-sized and significant features. Only the uneven and projecting teeth were large — those and the concave spectacles, through which, with a shy, sharp furtiveness, there beamed an intelligence that was obviously being used as an instrument, not for the discovery of truth, but for self-defence and, above all, for self-reassurance in humiliation.

The stranger coughed nervously and said that he wanted a good book on comparative religion. Bruno produced what he had in stock — a standard Italian

text-book, a popular work in French, a translation, in two volumes, from the German.

‘I recommend the Frenchman,’ he said in his soft voice. ‘Only two hundred and seventy pages. You’ll hardly waste more than a couple of hours on him.’

He received a contemptuous smile.

‘I’m looking for something a little more solid.’

There was a little silence while the stranger turned over the pages of the other two books.

‘You’re going into teaching, I take it?’ said Bruno.

The other glanced at him suspiciously; then, finding no trace of irony or impertinence in the bookseller’s expression, he nodded.

Yes, he was going into teaching. And meanwhile he’d take the translation from the German.

‘*Peccato*,’ said Bruno, as he picked up the two thick volumes. ‘And when you finally get to be a university professor,’ he added, ‘what then?’

The young man held up the Italian text-book.

‘I shall write,’ he answered.

Yes, he’d write, Bruno said to himself, rather sadly. And either in despair, or out of an ingenuous respect for professors as such, some woman would have married him. And, of course, it is better to marry than to burn; but this one, it was all too obvious, would go on burning even after he was married — furtively, but with the inextinguishable violence characteristic of such frail and nervous temperaments. And under the crust of respectability and even eminence, the life of God-eclipsing phantasy, the secret addiction to self-inflicted pleasure, would persist almost into old age. But of course, he quickly reminded himself, nothing could ever be certainly prognosticated of any human being. There was always free will, there was always a sufficiency of grace if one wished to co-operate with it.

‘I shall write with authority,’ the young man went on almost aggressively.

‘And not as the scribes and Pharisees,’ Bruno murmured with a little smile. ‘But what then?’

‘“What then?”’ the other repeated. ‘What do you mean by “what then?” I shall go on writing.’

No, there was no chink yet in that protective carapace. Bruno turned away and began to tie up the books in brown paper. Shrinking from the vulgar transference of coin from hand to hand, the young man laid out the money along the edge of the counter. For him, no physical contacts with other human beings except the sexual. And even those, thought Bruno, even those would always prove disappointing, even a bit repulsive. He tied the final knot and handed over the parcel.

‘Many thanks,’ he said. ‘And if ever you should get tired of this kind of …’ He hesitated; in their deep sockets the blue eyes twinkled with an almost mischievous light. ‘… This kind of learned frivolity,’ he went on, laying his finger on the parcel, ‘remember, I’ve got quite a considerable stock of really serious books on the subject.’ He pointed to a section of the shelves on the opposite wall. ‘Scupoli, the Bhagavata, the Tao Teh King, the Theologia Germanica, the Graces of Interior Prayer …’

For a few seconds the young man listened — listened with the uneasy expression of one who finds himself closeted with a potentially dangerous lunatic; then, looking at his wrist-watch, he muttered something about its being very late, and hurried out of the shop.

Bruno Rontini sighed, and went back to the pricing of his books. L for Lire, L for Liberation. Out of ten thousand only one would ever break out of his carapace completely. Not a high proportion. But out of all those galaxies of eggs, how many herrings ever came to be full-sized fish? And herrings, it was to be remembered, suffered only from external interruptions to their hatching and growth. Whereas, in this process of spiritual maturation, every human being was always his own worst enemy. The attacks came from both sides, and from within even more violently and persistently and purposefully than from without. So that, after all, the record of one growing-up in ten thousand trials was really pretty creditable. Something to be admired rather than deplored. Something in regard to which one should not, as one was so often tempted, rail against God for

his injustice, but rather give thanks for that divine generosity which granted to so many a reward so incommensurably vast.

L for Liberation, L for Love…. In spite of the impatient hooting, in spite of the clang and rumble of the traffic, the silence, for Bruno Rontini, was like a living crystal. Then the door-bell rang again, and looking up, he saw, under its tilted Homburg, the broad sagging face, with its pouchy eyes and its loosely smiling, unweaned lips, of Eustace Barnack. And through the medium of that living crystal he perceived the man as entombed, as coffined away from the light, as immured in an impenetrable privation of beatitude. And the walls of that sepulchre were built of the same sloths and sensualities as he had known within himself, and still knew, still had to beg God to forgive him. Filled with an enormous compassion, Bruno rose and went to greet him.

‘Found at last!’ Eustace cried. He spoke in Italian, because it was easier, when one was thus consummately acting the part of a jovial Florentine bourgeois, to preserve oneself from the danger of having to talk too seriously — and with Bruno it was particularly important that one should never be serious. ‘I’ve been looking for you all day.’

‘Yes, I heard you’d been in this morning,’ Bruno answered in English.

‘And was received,’ said Eustace, still playing his Tuscan comedy, ‘by the most ardent young disciple of yours! He even managed to sell me some edifying literature — *qualche trattatine sull’ amor del* Gaseous Vertebrate,’ he concluded airily.

And now the volume had taken its place between one of Pittigrilli’s novels and a dog-eared Dream Book on Mimi’s bed-table.

‘Eustace, are you well?’ Bruno asked with an earnestness that was entirely out of key with the other’s jocularity.

Eustace was startled into his native language.

‘Never felt better,’ he answered. And then, as Bruno continued to look at him with the same intent, distressed expression, a note of irritation and suspicion came into his voice. ‘What is it?’ he questioned sharply.

Could the fellow see something that permitted him to guess about Mimi? Not that Mimi was anything one had to be ashamed of. No, the intolerable thing was the intrusion on one's privacy. And Bruno, he remembered, had always had this odd, exasperating gift of knowing things without being told about them. And of course, if it wasn't clairvoyance, it might easily be smears of lipstick.

'Why do you stare at me?'

Bruno smiled apologetically.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I just thought you looked … well, I don't know. Like people look when they're going to have a touch of flu.'

It was the face of a man entombed, and now all of a sudden menaced in his tomb. Menaced by what?

Relieved that it wasn't Mimi who had been detected, Eustace relaxed into a smile.

'Well, if I get the flu,' he said, 'I shall know who wished it on me. And now don't imagine,' he went on genially, 'that I've come here just to feast my eyes on that seraphic mug of yours. I want you to get permission for me to take my young nephew to see the maze in the Galigai gardens. He's arriving this evening.'

'Which nephew?' Bruno asked. 'One of Alice's sons?'

'Those louts?' said Eustace. 'God forbid! No, no; this is John's boy. Quite a remarkable little creature. Seventeen, and childish at that; but writes the most surprising verses — full of talent.'

'John must be a pretty difficult father,' said Bruno after a little pause.

'Difficult? He's nothing but a bullying fool. And of course the boy dislikes him and loathes everything he stands for.'

Eustace smiled. It gave him real pleasure to think of his brother's shortcomings.

'Yes, if only people would realize that moral principles are like measles …'

The soft voice tailed away into silence and a sigh.

'Like measles?'

‘They have to be caught. And only the people who’ve got them can pass on the contagion.’

‘Fortunately,’ said Eustace, ‘they don’t always succeed in passing it on.’

He was thinking of that little Thwale woman. Any amount of contagion from the Canon and his wife; but no sign of any moral or pietistic rash on the daughter’s white, voluptuous skin.

‘You’re right,’ Bruno agreed. ‘One doesn’t have to catch the infection of goodness if one doesn’t want to. The will is always free.’

Always free. People had been able to say no even to Filippo Neri and François de Sales, even to the Christ and the Buddha. As he named them to himself, the little flame in his heart seemed to expand, as it were, and aspire, until it touched that other light beyond it and within; and for a moment it was still in the timeless intensity of a yearning that was also consummation. The sound of his cousin’s voice brought his attention back again to what was happening in the shop.

‘There’s nothing I enjoy more,’ Eustace was remarking with relish, ‘than the spectacle of the Good trying to propagate their notions and producing results exactly contrary to what they intended. It’s the highest form of comedy.’

He chuckled wheezily.

Listening to that laughter coming up from the depths and darkness of a sepulchre, Bruno was moved almost to despair.

‘If only you could forgive the Good!’ The quiet voice was raised almost to vehemence. ‘Then you might allow yourself to be forgiven.’

‘For what?’ Eustace enquired.

‘For being what you are. For being a human being. Yes, God can forgive you even that, if you really want it. Can forgive your separateness so completely that you can be made one with him.’

‘The solid vertebrate united with the Gaseous.’

Bruno looked at him for a moment in silence. In their setting of tired soft flesh the eyes were gaily twinkling; the babyish lips were curved into a smile of irony.

‘What about the comedy of the Clever?’ he said at last. ‘Achieving self-destruction in the name of self-interest, and delusion in the name of realism. I sometimes think it’s even higher than the comedy of the Good.’

He went behind the counter, and came back with a very old Gladstone bag.

‘If you’re going to meet that young nephew of yours,’ he said, ‘I’ll go with you to the station.’

He was taking the seven-thirty train to Arezzo, he explained. There was an old retired professor there, who wanted to sell his library. And Monday was the opening day of a very important auction at Perugia. Dealers would be attending from all over the country. He hoped to pick up some of the unconsidered trifles.

Bruno turned out the lights, and they went out into a twilight that was fast deepening into night. Eustace’s car was waiting in a side street. The two men got in, and were driven slowly towards the station.

‘Do you remember the last time we drove to the station together?’ Bruno suddenly asked after a period of silence.

‘The last time we drove together to the station,’ Eustace repeated doubtfully.

And then, all at once, it came back to him. He and Bruno in the old Panhard. And it was just after Amy’s funeral, and he was going back to the Riviera — back to Laurina. No, it hadn’t been too creditable, that episode of his life. Definitely on the squalid side. He made a little grimace, as though he had caught a whiff of rotten cabbage. Then, imperceptibly, he shrugged his shoulders. After all, what *did* it matter? It would all be the same a hundred years hence; it would all be the same.

‘Yes, I remember,’ he said. ‘You talked to me about the Gaseous Vertebrate.’

Bruno smiled. ‘Oh no, I wouldn’t have dared to break the taboo,’ he said. ‘You began it.’

‘Perhaps I did,’ Eustace admitted.

Death and that insane passion and his own discreditable behaviour had conspired to make him do a lot of funny things at that time. He felt, all at once, extremely depressed.

‘Poor Amy!’ he said aloud, speaking under a kind of obscure compulsion that was stronger than all his resolutions to refrain, in Bruno’s presence, from being serious. ‘Poor Amy!’

‘I don’t think she was to be pitied,’ said Bruno. ‘Amy had reconciled herself to what was happening to her. You don’t have to feel sorry for people who are prepared for death.’

‘Prepared? But what difference does that make?’ Eustace’s tone was almost truculent. ‘Dying is always dying,’ he concluded, happy to be able thus to escape from seriousness into controversy.

‘Physiologically, perhaps,’ Bruno agreed. ‘But psychologically, spiritually …’

The car came to a halt before a policeman’s outstretched arm.

‘Now, now,’ Eustace broke in. ‘No nonsense about immortality! None of your wishful thinking!’

‘And yet,’ said Bruno softly, ‘annihilation would be pretty convenient, wouldn’t it? What about the wish to believe in that?’

From the sepulchre of his privation Eustace made confident answer.

‘One doesn’t *wish* to believe in annihilation,’ he said. ‘One just accepts the facts.’

‘You mean, one accepts the inferences drawn from one particular set of facts, and ignores the other facts from which different inferences might be drawn. Ignores them because one really wants life to be a tale told by an idiot. Just one damned thing after another, until at last there’s a final damned thing, after which there isn’t anything.’

There was a blast of the policeman’s whistle; and as the car moved on again, the light from a shop window passed slowly across Eustace’s face, showing up every pouch and line and blotch in the loose skin. Then the darkness closed down once more, like the lid of a sarcophagus. Closed down irrevocably, it seemed to Bruno, closed down for ever. Impulsively, he laid his hand on the other’s arm.

‘Eustace,’ he said, ‘I implore you …’

Eustace started. Something strange was happening. It was as though the slats of a Venetian blind had suddenly been turned so as to admit the sunlight and the expanse of the summer sky. Unobstructed, an enormous and blissful brightness streamed into him. But with the brightness came the memory of what Bruno had said in the shop: ‘To be forgiven … forgiven for being what you are.’ With a mixture of anger and fear, he jerked his arm away.

‘What *are* you doing?’ he asked sharply. ‘Trying to hypnotize me?’

Bruno did not answer. He had made his final desperate effort to raise the lid; but from within the sarcophagus it had been pulled down again. And of course, he reflected, resurrection is optional. We are under no compulsion except to persist — to persist as we are, growing always a little worse and a little worse; indefinitely, until we wish to rise again as something other than ourselves; inexorably, unless we permit ourselves to be raised.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TRAIN WAS unexpectedly punctual and, when they reached the station, the passengers were already elbowing their way through the gates.

‘If you see a small cherub in grey flannel trousers,’ said Eustace, as he stood on tiptoes to peer over the heads of the crowd, ‘that’s our man.’

Bruno pointed a bony finger.

‘Does *that* answer your description?’

‘Which one?’

‘That little *non Anglus sed angelus* behind the pillar there,’

Eustace caught sight of a familiar head of pale and curly hair and, waving his hand, pushed his way closer to the gate.

‘And this is your long-lost second-cousin once removed,’ he said, as he returned a minute later with the boy. ‘Bruno Rontini — who sells second-hand books and would like everybody to believe in the Gaseous Vertebrate.’ And as they shook hands, ‘Let me warn you,’ he continued in a mock-solemn tone, ‘he’ll probably try to convert you.’

Sebastian looked again at Bruno and, under the influence of his uncle’s introduction, saw only foolishness in the bright eyes, only bigotry in that thin bony face, with its hollows under the cheek-bones, its beaky protrusion of a nose. Then he turned to Eustace and smiled.

‘So this is Sebastian,’ said Bruno slowly. Ominously significant, it was the name of fate’s predestined target.

‘Somehow, I can’t help thinking of all those arrows,’ he went on. ‘The arrows of the lusts which this beauty would evoke and would permit its owner to satisfy; the arrows of vanity and self-satisfaction and …’

‘But arrows go both ways,’ said Eustace. ‘This martyr will give as good as he gets — won’t he, Sebastian?’ He smiled knowingly, as from man to man.

Flattered by this display of confidence in his prowess, Sebastian laughed and nodded.

With an affectionate, almost a possessive gesture, Eustace laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

'*Andiamo!*' he cried.

There was a note of something like triumph in his tone. Not only had he got even with Bruno for what had happened in the car; he had also cut him off from any chance of exerting an influence on Sebastian.

'*Andiamo!*' Bruno repeated. 'I'll take you to the car and get my bag.' Picking up Sebastian's suitcase, he started towards the exit. The others followed.

Hooting in a melodious baritone, the Isotta slowly nosed its way along the crowded street. Sebastian pulled the fur rug a little higher over his knees and thought how wonderful it was to be rich. And to think that, if it weren't for his father's idiotic ideas …

'Funny old Bruno!' his uncle remarked in a tone of amused condescension. 'For some reason he always reminds me of those preposterous Anglo-Saxon saints. St. Willibald and St. Wunnibald, St. Winna and St. Frideswide …'

He made the names sound so ludicrous that Sebastian burst out laughing.

'But a thoroughly kind, gentle creature,' Eustace went on. 'And considering he's one of the Good, not too much of a bore.'

Interrupting himself, he touched Sebastian's arm and pointed through the left-hand window.

'The Medici tombs are up there,' he said. 'Talk about the Sublime! I can't look at them now. Donatello's my limit these days. But of course it's quite true: the damned things *are* the greatest sculptures in the world. And that's Rossi's, the tailor,' he went on without transition, pointing again. 'Order decent English cloth, and the man will make you as good a suit as you can get in Savile Row, and at half the price. We'll take time off from our sight-seeing to get you measured for those evening clothes.'

Scarcely daring to believe his ears, Sebastian looked at him questioningly.

‘You mean …? Oh, thank you, Uncle Eustace,’ he cried, as the other smiled and nodded.

Eustace looked at the boy and saw, by the transient light of a street lamp, that his face had reddened and his eyes were bright. Touched, he patted him on the knee.

‘No need for gratitude,’ he said. ‘If I were in *Who’s Who*, which I’m not, you’d see that my chief recreation was “Annoying my brother.”’

They laughed together, conspirators in mischief.

‘And now,’ cried Eustace, ‘bend down and take a squint up through this window at the second-largest egg ever laid.’

Sebastian did as he was told, and saw great cliffs of marble and, above the cliffs, an enormous dome floating up into the sky and darkening, as it rose, from the faint lamplight that still lingered about its base into a mystery more impenetrable than the night itself. It was the transfiguration, not of a little squalor this time, but of a vast harmonious magnificence.

‘Light first,’ said Eustace, pointing a bloated finger that travelled upwards as he spoke, ‘then darkness.’

Sebastian looked at him in astonishment. He too …?

‘It’s like a looking-glass equation,’ the other went on. ‘You start with the values of *x* and *y*, and you end with an unknown quantity. The most romantic kind of lighting.’

‘I didn’t know anyone else had noticed it,’ said Sebastian.

‘Optimist!’ Eustace smiled indulgently. What fun to be young, to be convinced, each time one lost a virginity, that this sort of thing had never happened before! ‘The Victorian etchers and engravers hardly noticed anything else. All their romantic Matterhorns and ruined castles are darker on top than at the bottom. Which doesn’t make the looking-glass equation less amusing.’

There was a little silence. The car turned out of the cathedral square into a street even narrower and more crowded than the one by which they had come from the station.

‘I wrote a poem about it,’ Sebastian confided at last.

‘Not one of those you sent me for Christmas?’

The boy shook his head.

‘I didn’t think you’d like it. It’s a bit … well, I don’t know … a bit religious; that is, if it was about religion, which it isn’t. But seeing you’ve noticed it too … I mean, the way things are lighted from the bottom …’

‘Can you recite it?’

Torn between shyness and a desire to show off, Sebastian hummed and hawed, then finally said yes.

Little squalor! transfigured into Ely,

Into Bourges, into the beauty of holiness …

Leaning back in his corner, Eustace listened to the still almost childish voice and, as the lights came and went, scanned the averted face as it gazed with angelic gravity, wide-eyed, into the darkness. Yes, there was talent there all right. But what touched him so profoundly, what moved him almost to tears, was the whole-heartedness, the guileless good faith, the essential purity. Purity, he insisted — even though one couldn’t really say what the word meant, or even justify its use. For obviously the boy was obsessed with sex — certainly masturbated — probably had affairs, homosexual or otherwise. And yet there was a purity there, a real purity.

The recitation came to an end, there was a long silence — so long, indeed, that Sebastian began to wonder uneasily if his little squalor were really as good as he believed. Uncle Eustace had taste; and if *he* thought it was no good, then … But the other spoke at last.

‘That was very beautiful,’ he said quietly. The words referred less to the poem than to what he himself had felt while listening to it — this unexpected uprush of high emotion and protective tenderness. ‘Very beautiful.’ He laid his hand affectionately on Sebastian’s knee. Then, after a pause, he added, smiling, ‘I used to write verses when I was a few years older than you are now.’

‘You did?’

‘Dowson and water,’ said Eustace, shaking his head. ‘With occasional flashes of Wilde and cat-piss.’ He laughed. Enough of sentimentality. ‘I don’t rise above

limericks nowadays,' he went on. 'But as Wordsworth so justly remarked,

Scorn not the Limerick, Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours; with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his pants; th' obscenity
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound …
And so on — until, of course, in Milton's hand
The Thing became a strumpet; whence he blew
Soul-animating strains — alas, too few!
After which I really must tell you about the "Young Girl of Spokane."'

He did. The car, meanwhile, had emerged into a larger darkness. Lights gleamed on water; a bridge was crossed, and with gathering speed they rolled for a minute or two along a wide embankment. Then their road swung to the right, grew tortuous, began to climb. Through his window, Sebastian looked on fascinated, as the head-lamps created out of nothingness a confluent series of narrow universes. A gaunt grey goat standing up on its hind legs to munch the wistaria buds that hung across an expanse of peeling stucco; a priest in black skirts pushing a lady's bicycle up the steep hill; a great ilex tree, writhing like a wooden octopus; and at the foot of a flight of steps two startled lovers, breaking apart from their embrace and turning with a flash of eyes and laughing teeth towards the light which had evoked and now, passing, abolished them.

A moment later, the car drew up before tall iron gates. Musically, but imperiously, it hooted for admittance, and a little old man came running out of the shadows to undo the bolts.

The drive wound its way under tall cypresses; a bed of blue hyacinths appeared and vanished, then a little fountain in a shell-shaped niche. As the Isotta made its final turn, the head-lights called into existence half a dozen weathered nymphs, naked on pedestals, then came to rest, as though this were the final, the all-explaining revelation, on an orange tree growing in a very large earthenware pot.

'Here we are,' said Eustace; and at the same moment a butler in a white jacket opened the door and deferentially inclined his head.

They entered a high square vestibule, pillared and barrel-vaulted like a church. The butler took their things, and Eustace led the way up the stone staircase.

‘Here’s your room,’ he said, throwing open a door. ‘Don’t be alarmed by *that*,’ he added, pointing at the enormous canopied bed. ‘It’s only the carving that’s antique. The mattress is contemporary. And your bathroom is in there.’ He waved his hand towards another door. ‘Do you think you can get yourself washed and brushed in five minutes?’

Sebastian was sure he could; and five minutes later he was downstairs again in the hall. A half-opened door invited; he entered and found himself in the drawing-room. A faint spicy perfume of potpourri haunted the air, and the lamps that hung from the coffered ceiling were reflected, in innumerable curving high-lights, from surfaces of porcelain and silver, turned wood and sculptured bronze and ivory. Mountains of glazed chintz, enormous armchairs and sofas alternated with the elaborately carved and gaily painted discomfort of eighteenth-century Venetian furniture. Underfoot, a yellow Chinese carpet lay like an expanse of soft and ancient sunshine. On the walls, the picture-frames were doorways leading into other worlds. The first he looked into was a strange, bright universe, intensely alive and yet static, definitive and serene — a world in which everything was made of innumerable dots of pure colour, and the men wore stove-pipe hats and the women’s bustles were monumental like Egyptian granite. And next to it was the opening into another, a Venetian world, where a party of ladies in a gondola trailed their pink satins against the complementary jade of the Grand Canal. And here, over the mantelpiece, in a maniac’s universe of candlelight and brown bituminous shadows, a company of elongated monks sat feasting under the vaults of a cathedral …

His uncle’s voice brought him back to reality.

‘Ah, you’ve discovered my little Magnasco.’

Eustace came and took his arm.

‘Amusing, isn’t it?’

But before the boy could answer, he began to speak again.

‘And now you must come and look at what I did yesterday,’ he went on, drawing him away. ‘There!’

He pointed. In an arched recess stood a black *papier-maché* table, painted with scrolls of gilding and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Upon it stood a bouquet of wax flowers under a glass bell and a tall cylindrical case of stuffed humming-birds. On the wall, between and a little above these two objects, hung a small fourteenth-century painting of young men with bobbed hair and cod-pieces, shooting arrows at a St. Sebastian attached to a flowering apple tree.

‘Your namesake,’ Eustace said. ‘But the real point is that at last one’s discovered a way of using minor primitives. Obviously, it’s ridiculous to treat this sort of rubbish as though it were serious art. But on the other hand, it’s charming rubbish; one doesn’t want to waste it. Well, here’s the way out of the dilemma. Mix with Mid-Victorian! It makes the most delicious salad. And now, my dear, let’s go and eat. The dining-room’s over here, through the library.’

They moved away. From behind the door at the other end of the long tunnel of books came the sound of a harsh cracked voice and the clinking of silver and porcelain.

‘Well, here we are at last!’ Eustace cried gaily as he opened.

Dressed in a steel-blue evening gown, with seven rows of pearls about her mummied neck, the Queen Mother turned sightlessly in their direction.

‘You know my habits, Eustace,’ she said in her ghost of a sergeant-major’s voice. ‘Never wait dinner for anyone after seven forty-five. Not for anyone,’ she repeated emphatically. ‘We’ve almost finished.’

‘Some more fruit?’ said Mrs. Thwale softly, putting into the old woman’s hand a fork, on which was impaled a quarter of a pear. Mrs. Gamble took a bite.

‘Where’s the boy?’ she asked with her mouth full.

‘Here.’

Sebastian was pushed forward, and gingerly shook the jewelled claw which was held out for him to take.

‘I knew your mother,’ Mrs. Gamble rasped. ‘Pretty, very pretty. But badly brought up. I hope you’ve been brought up better.’ She finished off the rest of

the pear and put down the fork.

Sebastian blushed crimson, and made a deprecating, inarticulate noise to the effect that he hoped so.

‘Speak up,’ said Mrs. Gamble sharply. ‘If there’s one thing I can’t tolerate, it’s mumbling. All young people mumble nowadays. Veronica?’

‘Yes, Mrs. Gamble?’

‘Oh, by the way, boy, this is Mrs. Thwale.’

Sebastian advanced into an aura of perfume and, raising abashed eyes from the folds of a dove-grey dress, almost cried out in amazement at what he saw. That oval face in its setting of smooth dark hair — it was Mary Esdaile’s.

‘How do you do, Sebastian?’

Oddly enough, he had never, with his inward ear, clearly heard the sound of Mary’s voice. But it was obvious, now, that these were its very tones — rather low, but clear and exquisitely distinct.

‘How do you do?’

They shook hands.

It was only in the eyes that he found a difference between his fancy and its incarnation. The Mary Esdaile of his day-dreams had always dropped her eyes when he looked at her. And how unwaveringly he was able to look in his dreams, how firmly and commandingly! Like his father. But this was not dream, but reality. And in reality he was still as shy as ever, and those dark eyes were now fixed upon him with a steady and slightly ironic scrutiny, which he found intensely embarrassing. His glance faltered, and at last flinched away.

‘*You* know how to speak the king’s English, Veronica,’ Mrs. Gamble creaked on. ‘Give him a few lessons while he’s here.’

‘Nothing would give me greater pleasure,’ said Veronica Thwale, as though she were reading from a book of Victorian etiquette. She raised her eyes once again to Sebastian’s face, the corners of her beautifully sculptured mouth quivered into a tiny smile. Then, turning away, she busied herself with peeling the rest of Mrs. Gamble’s pear.

‘Let the poor boy come and eat,’ called Eustace, who had sat down and was already half-way through his soup. Thankfully, Sebastian moved away to the place assigned to him.

‘I ought to have warned you about our Queen Mother,’ Eustace went on jocularly. ‘Her bite is worse even than her bark.’

‘Eustace! I never heard such impertinence!’

‘That’s because you’ve never listened to yourself,’ he answered.

The old lady cackled appreciatively, and sank her false teeth into another piece of pear. The juice ran down her chin and dropped into the bunch of cattleyas pinned to her corsage.

‘As for Mrs. Veronica Thwale,’ Eustace went on, ‘I know the young lady too little to be able to offer you advice about her. You’ll have to find out for yourself when she gives you your mumbling lessons. Do you like giving lessons, Mrs. Thwale?’

‘It depends on the intelligence of the pupil,’ she answered gravely.

‘And do you think that this one looks intelligent?’

Once more Sebastian found himself compelled to flinch away from the steady scrutiny of those dark eyes. But she was beautiful in that grey dress, and the neck was smooth like a white pillar; and the breasts were rather small.

‘Very,’ said Mrs. Thwale at last. ‘But of course,’ she added, ‘where mumbling is concerned, you can never be quite certain. Mumbling is rather special, don’t you think?’

And before Eustace could answer, she uttered her odd little snorting stertorous laugh. For a second only; then the face resumed its grave marble serenity. Delicately, she began to peel a tangerine.

Mrs. Gamble turned in the direction of her son-in-law.

‘Mr. De Vries came to see me this afternoon. So I know where you had lunch.’

‘“And from whom no secrets are hid,”’ said Eustace.

Mrs. Thwale raised her eyelids to give him a quick glance of complicity, then looked down again at her plate.

‘A most instructive young man,’ he continued.

‘I like him,’ the Queen Mother pronounced emphatically.

‘And he simply adores you,’ said Eustace with hardly veiled irony. ‘And meanwhile, how are *you* getting on with your Einstein, Mrs. Thwale?’

‘I do my best,’ she answered without lifting her eyes.

‘I bet you do,’ said Eustace in a tone of genial mischief.

Mrs. Thwale looked up; but this time there was no complicity in her glance, no hint of answering amusement — only stony coldness. Tactfully, Eustace changed the subject.

‘I had a long talk with Laurina Acciaiuoli this afternoon,’ he said, turning back to Mrs. Gamble.

‘What, hasn’t she passed on yet?’ The Queen Mother seemed disappointed, almost aggrieved. ‘I thought the woman was so desperately ill,’ she added.

‘Evidently not quite ill enough,’ said Eustace.

‘Sometimes they drag on for years,’ rasped Mrs. Gamble. ‘Your mother passed on some time ago, didn’t she, Sebastian?’

‘In 1921.’

‘What?’ she cried. ‘What? You’re mumbling again.’

‘In 1921,’ he repeated more loudly.

‘Don’t yell like that,’ barked back the ghostly sergeant-major. ‘I’m not deaf. Have you had any communications with her since then?’

‘Communications?’ he repeated in bewilderment.

‘Through a medium,’ Eustace explained.

‘Oh, I *see*. No; no, I haven’t.’

‘Not because of religious objections, I hope?’

Eustace laughed aloud.

‘What a preposterous question!’

‘Not preposterous at all,’ the Queen Mother snapped back. ‘Seeing that my own granddaughter has religious objections. Mainly due to your father, Veronica,’ she added.

Mrs. Thwale apologized for the Canon.

‘No fault of yours,’ said the Queen Mother generously. ‘But Daisy’s an idiot to listen to him. There she sits with a husband and a child on the other side, and does nothing whatever about it. It makes me sick.’

She pushed back her chair and stood up.

‘We’re going upstairs now,’ she said. ‘Good-night, Eustace.’

Since she couldn’t see him, Eustace didn’t bother to stand up.

‘Good-night, Queen Mother,’ he called back to her.

‘And you, boy, you’re to have a mumbling lesson tomorrow, do you understand? Now, Veronica.’

CHAPTER TWELVE

MRS. THWALE TOOK THE old woman's arm and steered her through the door which Sebastian had opened for them. Her perfume, as she passed him, was sweet in his nostrils — sweet, but at the same time obscurely animal, as though a whiff of sweat had been perversely mingled with the gardenias and the sandalwood. He closed the door and returned to his place.

'A good joke, our Queen Mother,' said Eustace. 'But one's always rather grateful when it's over. Most people never ought to be there for more than five minutes at a time. But that little Thwale, on the contrary … Quite a museum piece.'

He broke off to protest against the inadequacy of the portion of filleted sole to which Sebastian had helped himself. A recipe from the Trois Faisans at Poitiers. He had had to bribe the chef to get it. Obediently Sebastian took some more. The butler moved on to the head of the table.

'Quite a museum piece,' he repeated. 'If I were twenty years younger, or you were five years older … Except, of course, that you don't have to be any older, do you?'

He beamed with a kind of arch significance. Sebastian did his best to return the right sort of smile.

'*Verb. sap.,*' Eustace continued. 'And never put off till tomorrow the pleasure you can enjoy today.'

Sebastian said nothing. *His* pleasures, he was thinking bitterly, were only those of phantasy. When reality presented itself, he was merely terrified. Couldn't he at least have looked her in the eyes?

Wiping the sauce from his large loose lips, Eustace drank some of the champagne which had been poured into his glass.

'Roederer 1916,' he said. 'I'm really very pleased with it.'

Acting the part of a relishing connoisseur, Sebastian took an appreciative sip or two, then gulped down half a glassful. It had the taste, he thought, of an apple peeled with a steel knife.

‘It’s awfully good,’ he said aloud. Then, remembering Susan’s latest piece, ‘It’s … it’s like Scarlatti’s harpsichord music,’ he forced himself to bring out, and blushed because it sounded so unnatural.

But Eustace was delighted by the comparison.

‘And I’m so glad,’ he added, ‘that you don’t take after your father. That indifference to all the refinements of life — it’s really shocking. Just Calvinism, that’s all. Calvinism without the excuse of Calvin’s theology.’

He swallowed the last mouthful of his second helping of fish and, leaning back in his chair, looked round with pleasure at the beautifully appointed table, at the Empire furniture, at the Domenichino landscape over the mantelpiece, the life-sized goats by Rosa di Tivoli above the sideboard, at the two men-servants working with the noiseless precision of conjurers.

‘No Calvin for me,’ he said. ‘Give me Catholicism every time. Father Cheeryble with his thurible; Father Chatterjee with his liturgy. What fun they have with all their charades and conundrums! If it weren’t for the Christianity they insist on mixing in with it, I’d be converted tomorrow.’

He leaned forward and, with a surprising deftness and delicacy of touch, rearranged the fruits in the silver bowl between the candlesticks.

‘“The beauty of holiness,”’ he said, ‘“the beauty of holiness.” I’m delighted you used that phrase in your poem. And, remember, it doesn’t apply only to churches. There, that’s better.’ He made a final adjustment on the hot-house grapes, and leaned back again in his chair. ‘I used to have a darling old butler once — never hope to find his equal.’ He sighed and shook his head. ‘That man could make a dinner-party go off with the solemn perfection of High Mass at the Madeleine.’

Creamed chicken succeeded the fish. Eustace made a brief digression on the subject of truffles, then returned to the beauty of holiness, and from that proceeded to life as a fine art.

‘But an unrecognized fine art,’ he complained. ‘Its masters aren’t admired; they’re regarded as idlers and wasters. The moral codes have always been framed by people like your father — or, at the very best, people like Bruno. People like me have hardly been able to get a word in edgeways. And when we do get our word in — as we did once or twice during the eighteenth century — nobody listens to us seriously. And yet we demonstrably do much less mischief than the other fellows. We don’t start any wars, or Albigensian crusades, or communist revolutions. “Live and let live” — that’s our motto. Whereas *their* idea of goodness is “die and make to die” — get yourself killed for your idiotic cause, and kill everybody who doesn’t happen to agree with you. Hell isn’t merely paved with good intentions; it’s walled and roofed with them. Yes, and furnished too.’

To Sebastian, after his second glass of champagne, this remark seemed, for some reason, extremely funny, and he broke into a giggle that ended embarrassingly in a belch. This stuff was as bad as ginger beer.

‘You’re familiar, of course, with the Old Man of Moldavia?’

‘You mean the one who wouldn’t believe in Our Saviour?’

Eustace nodded.

‘“So he founded instead,”’ he quoted, ‘“with himself as the head,” — though that’s out of character, mark you; he wouldn’t *want* to be the head; he’d just want to enjoy himself quietly and have good manners— “the cult of Decorous Behaviour.” Or, in other words, Confucianism. But, unfortunately, China was also full of Buddhists and Taoists and miscellaneous war-lords. People with bullying temperaments, and people with inhibited, scrupulous temperaments. Horrible people like Napoleon, and other horrible people like Pascal. There was an Old Man of Corsica who would not believe in anything but power. And an Old Man of Port Royal who tortured himself by believing in the God of Abraham and Isaac, not of the philosophers. Between them, they don’t give the poor Old Man of Moldavia a dog’s chance. Not in China or anywhere else.’

He paused to help himself to the chocolate soufflé.

‘If I had the knowledge,’ he went on, ‘or the energy, I’d write an outline of world history. Not in terms of geography, or climate, or economics, or politics. None of these is fundamental. In terms of temperament. In terms of the eternal three-cornered struggle between the Old Man of Moldavia, the Old Man of Corsica, and the Old Man of Port Royal.’

Eustace broke off to ask for some more cream; then continued. Christ, of course, had been an Old Man of Port Royal. So were Buddha and most of the other Hindus. So was Lao-Tsu. But Mahomet had had a lot of the Old Man of Corsica in him. And the same, of course, was true of any number of the Christian saints and doctors. So you got violence and rapine, practised by proselytizing bullies and justified in terms of a theology devised by introverts. And meanwhile the poor Old Men of Moldavia got kicked and abused by everybody. Except perhaps among the Pueblo Indians, there had never been a predominantly Moldavian society — a society where it was bad form to nourish ambitions, heretical to have a personal religion, criminal to be a leader of men, and virtuous to have a good time in peace and quietness. Outside of Zuñi and Taos, the Old Men of Moldavia had had to be content with registering a protest, with applying the brakes, with sitting down on their broad bottoms and refusing to move unless dragged. Confucius had had the best success in moderating the furies of the Corsicans and Port Royalists; whereas, in the West, Epicurus had become a by-word; Boccaccio and Rabelais and Fielding were disregarded as mere men of letters; and nobody bothered to read Bentham any more, or even John Stuart Mill. And recently the Old Men of Port Royal had begun to be treated as badly as those of Moldavia. Nobody read Bentham any more; but equally nobody now read À-Kempis. Traditional Christianity was in process of becoming almost as discreditable as Epicureanism. The philosophy of action for action, power for the sake of power, had become an established orthodoxy. ‘Thou hast conquered, O go-getting Babbitt.’

‘And now,’ he concluded, ‘let’s go and have our coffee where we can be a bit more comfortable.’

Moving delicately and deliberately within his fragile world of incipient tipsiness, Sebastian followed his uncle into the drawing-room.

‘No, thank you,’ he said politely to the offer of a cigar even larger and darker than Dr. Pfeiffer’s.

‘Then take a cigarette,’ said Eustace, as he helped himself to a Romeo and Juliet. Damply, lovingly the unweaned lips closed on the object of their desire. He sucked at the flame of the little silver lamp, and a moment later the teat was yielding its aromatic milk, his mouth was full of smoke. Eustace breathed a sigh of contentment. The taste of the tobacco was as new, as exquisitely a revelation as it had seemed when he was a young man; it was as though his palate were virgin and this were its first astounding introduction to pleasure. ‘You should hurry up,’ he said, ‘and acquire the cigar habit. It’s one of the major happinesses. And so much more lasting than love, so much less costly in emotional wear and tear. Though of course,’ he added, remembering Mimi, ‘even love can be considerably simplified. Very considerably.’ He took Sebastian’s arm affectionately. ‘You haven’t seen the prize exhibit yet.’ And leading him across the room, he turned a switch. Under the light a lovely fragment of mythology sprang into existence. In a green glade, with the Mediterranean in the distance, and a couple of Capris off-shore, Adonis lay asleep among his sleeping dogs. Bending over him a blonde and amorous Venus was in the act of drawing aside the veil of gold-embroidered gauze which was his only covering, while a Cupid in the foreground playfully menaced her left pap with an arrow from the young hunter’s quiver.

‘The incandescent copulations of gods,’ Sebastian said to himself as he gazed enchanted at the picture. Other phrases began to come to him. ‘Bright with divine lust.’ ‘The pure lascivious innocence of heaven.’ But what made this particular incandescence so delightful was the fact that it was rendered with a touch of irony, a hint (subtly conveyed by the two white rabbits in the left-foreground, the bullfinch among the oak-leaves overhead, the three pelicans and the centaur on the distant beach) that it was all a tiny bit absurd.

‘Real love-making,’ Eustace remarked, ’is seldom quite so pretty as Piero di Cosimo’s idea of it.’ He turned away and began to unwrap the drawings he had bought that morning at Weyl’s. ‘It’s a good deal more like Degas.’ He handed Sebastian the sketch of the woman drying the back of her neck.

‘When you’re seduced,’ he said, ‘it’ll probably be by someone like *this* rather than like *that*.’ He jerked his head in the direction of Piero’s Venus.

From within his private universe of champagne Sebastian answered with a giggle.

‘Or perhaps you have been seduced already?’ Eustace’s tone was jocular. ‘But of course it’s none of my business,’ he added, as Sebastian giggled again and blushed. ‘Three words of advice, however. Remember that your talent is more important than your amusement. Also that a woman’s amusement may sometimes be incompatible not only with your talent, but even with your fun. Also that, if this should happen, flight is your only strategy.’

He poured out some brandy into the two enormous glasses that had been brought in, sugared one of the cups of coffee, and, settling heavily into the sofa, beckoned to the boy to sit down beside him.

Professionally, Sebastian twirled the liquor in his glass and sipped. It tasted like the smell of methylated spirits. He dipped a piece of sugar in his coffee and nibbled at it, as he would have done after a dose of ammoniated quinine. Then he looked again at the drawing.

‘What’s its equivalent in poetry?’ he said reflectively. ‘Villon?’ He shook his head. ‘No. This isn’t tragic. Donne’s a little more like it — except that he’s a satirist, and this man isn’t.’

‘And Swift,’ put in Eustace, ‘doesn’t know how to convey the beauty of his victims. The fascinating contours of the dowager’s hind-quarters, the delicious greens and magentas in a schoolgirl’s complexion — he doesn’t even see these things, much less make *us* see them.’

They laughed together. Then Eustace gulped down what remained of his brandy and helped himself to some more.

‘What about Chaucer?’ said Sebastian, looking up from another examination of the drawing.

‘You’re right!’ Eustace cried delightedly. ‘You’re absolutely right. He and Degas — they knew the same secret: the beauty of ugliness, the comedy of holiness. Now, suppose you were given the choice,’ he went on. ‘*The Divine Comedy* or *The Canterbury Tales* — which would you rather have written?’ And without leaving Sebastian time to answer, ‘I’d choose *The Canterbury Tales*,’ he said. ‘Oh, without hesitation! And as a man — how infinitely one would prefer to be Chaucer! Living through the forty disastrous years after the Black Death with only one reference to the troubles in the whole of his writings — and that a comic reference! Being an administrator and a diplomat, and not regarding the fact as having sufficient importance to require even a single mention! Whereas Dante has to rush into party politics; and, when he backs the wrong horse, he spends the rest of his life in rage and self-pity. Revenging himself on his political opponents by putting them into hell, and rewarding his friends by promoting them to purgatory and paradise. What could be sillier or more squalid? And of course, if he didn’t happen to be the second greatest virtuoso of language that ever lived, there’d be nobody to say a good word for him.’

Sebastian laughed and nodded his agreement. The alcohol and the fact that his uncle was taking him seriously, was listening to his opinions with respect, made him feel very happy. He drank some more brandy, and as he munched on the sugar with which he took the taste of it away, he looked again at the drawing of the woman with the towel. Elation quickened his faculties, and almost in a flash he had a quatrain. Pulling out his pencil and his scribbling pad, he started to write.

‘What are you up to?’

Sebastian made no answer in words, but tore off the page and handed it to his uncle. Eustace put up his monocle and read aloud:

To make a picture, others need
All Ovid and the Nicene Creed;
Degas succeeds with one tin tub,

Two buttocks and a pendulous bub.

He clapped Sebastian on the knee.

‘Bravo,’ he cried, ‘bravo!’

He repeated the last line, and laughed until he coughed.

‘We’ll make an exchange,’ he said, when the fit was over and he had drunk another cup of coffee and some more brandy. ‘I’ll keep the poem, and you shall have the drawing.’

‘Me?’

Eustace nodded. It was really a pleasure to do things for somebody who responded with such whole-hearted and unfeigned delight.

‘You shall have it when you go up to Oxford. A drawing by Degas over the mantelpiece — it’ll give you almost as much prestige as rowing in your college eight. Besides,’ he added, ‘I know you’ll love the thing for its own sake.’

Which was a great deal more, it suddenly struck him, than could be said of his stepdaughter. He himself had only a life-interest; after his death, everything would go to Daisy Ockham. Not merely the stocks and shares, but this house and all that was in it, the furniture, the carpets, the china — yes, even the pictures. His absurd little St. Sebastian, his two delicious Guardis, his Magnasco, his Seurat, his Venus and Adonis — which Daisy would certainly consider too indecent to hang up in her drawing-room, in case her Girl Guides, or whatever they were, should see it and get ideas into their heads. And perhaps she’d bring the creatures out here, to the villa. Swarms of female puberties, pasty-faced and pimpled, wandering through his house and giggling in barbarous incomprehension at everything they saw. The very thought of it was sickening. But, after all, Eustace reminded himself, he wouldn’t be there to care. And being sickened in advance, with no immediate reason for one’s feelings, were merely silly. No less silly was thinking about death. So long as one was alive, death didn’t exist, except for other people. And when one was dead, nothing existed, not even death. So why bother? Particularly as he was taking very good care to postpone the event. Smoking only one of these heavenly Romeo and Juliets, drinking only one glass of brandy after dinner … But no; he’d already drunk

two. This one that he was just raising to his lips was the third. Well, never mind; he'd see that it didn't happen again. Tonight he was celebrating Sebastian's arrival. It wasn't every day that one welcomed an infant prodigy. He took a sip, and rolled the spirit round his mouth; on tongue and palate it consummated the happiest of marriages with the clinging aroma of his cigar.

He turned to Sebastian.

'A penny for your thoughts.'

The other laughed with a touch of embarrassment and answered that they weren't worth it. But Eustace insisted.

'Well, to begin with,' said Sebastian, 'I was thinking … well, I was thinking how extraordinarily decent you'd been to me.' It wasn't quite true; for his fancy had been busy with the gifts, not with the giver. 'And then,' he continued rather hurriedly; for he realized, too late as usual, that this perfunctory tribute didn't sound very convincing, 'I was thinking of the things I'd do when I had some evening clothes.'

'Such as taking the entire Gaiety chorus out to supper at Ciro's?'

Caught in the discreditable act of day-dreaming, Sebastian blushed. He had been imagining himself at the Savoy, not indeed with the whole Gaiety chorus, but very definitely with the two girls who were going to be at Tom Boveney's party. And then one of the girls had turned into Mrs. Thwale.

'Am I right?'

'Well … not exactly,' Sebastian answered.

'Not *exactly*,' Eustace repeated with benevolent irony. 'Of course, you realize,' he added, 'that you'll always be disappointed?'

'With what?'

'With girls, with parties, with experience in general. Nobody who has any kind of creative imagination can possibly be anything but disappointed with real life. When I was young, I used to be miserable because I hadn't any talents — nothing but a little taste and cleverness. But now I'm not sure one isn't happier that way. People like you aren't really commensurable with the world they live

in. Whereas people like me are completely adapted to it.' He removed the teat from between his large damp lips to take another sip of brandy.

'Your business isn't doing things,' he resumed. 'It isn't even living. It's writing poetry. *Vox et praeterea nihil*, that's what you are and what you ought to be. Or rather *voces*, not *vox*. All the voices in the world. Like Chaucer. Like Shakespeare. The Miller's voice and the Parson's voice, Desdemona's and Caliban's and Kent's and Polonius's. All of them, impartially.'

'Impartially,' Sebastian repeated, slowly.

Yes, that was good; that was exactly what he'd been trying to think about himself, but had never quite succeeded, because such thoughts didn't fit into the ethical and philosophical patterns which he had been brought up to regard as axiomatic. Voices, all the voices impartially. He was delighted by the thought.

'Of course,' Eustace was saying, 'you could always argue that you live more intensely in your mental world-substitute than we who only wallow in the real thing. And I'd be inclined to admit it. But the trouble is that you can't be content to stick to your beautiful *ersatz*. You have to descend into evening clothes and Ciro's and chorus girls — and perhaps even politics and committee meetings, God help us! With lamentable results. Because you're not at home with these lumpy bits of matter. They depress you, they bewilder you, they shock you and sicken you and make a fool of you. And yet they still tempt you; and they'll go on tempting you, all your life. Tempting you to embark on actions which you know in advance can only make you miserable and distract you from the one thing you can do properly, the one thing that people value you for.'

It was interesting to be talked about in this way; but the stimulative effects of the alcohol had worn off, and Sebastian felt himself almost suddenly invaded by a kind of stupor that obliterated all thoughts of poetry, voices, evening clothes. Surreptitiously he yawned. His uncle's words came to him through a kind of fog that thickened and then thinned again, permitting the significance to shine through for a little, then rolled in once more, obscuring everything.

'… *Fascinatio nugacitatis*,' Eustace was saying. 'It's translated quite differently in the English version of the Apocrypha. But how wonderful in the

Vulgate! The magic of triviality — the being spellbound by mere footling. How well I know the fascination! And how frightfully intense it is! Trifles for trifles' sake. And yet, what's the alternative? Behaving like the Old Man of Corsica, or some kind of horrible religious fanatic….'

Once again darkness invaded Sebastian's mind, a stupor diversified only by quivering streaks of dizziness and a faint nausea. He yearned to be in bed. Very distinct and silvery, a clock struck the half-hour.

'Half-past ten,' Eustace proclaimed. '"Time, time and half a time. The innocent and the beautiful have no enemy but time."' He gave vent to a belch. 'That's what I like about champagne — it makes one so poetical. All the lovely refuse of fifty years of indiscriminate reading comes floating to the surface. *O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!'*

O lente, lente … Funereally slow black horses moved through the fog. And suddenly Sebastian realized that his chin had dropped involuntarily on to his chest. He woke up with a start.

'Faith,' his uncle was saying, 'they can never do without a faith. Always the need of some nonsensical ideal that blinds them to reality and makes them behave like lunatics. And look at the results in our history!' He took another swig of brandy, then sucked voluptuously at his cigar. 'First it's God they believe in — not three Gaseous Vertebrates, but one Gaseous Vertebrate. And what happens? They get the Pope, they get the Holy Office, they get Calvin and John Knox and the wars of religion. Then they grow bored with God, and it's war and massacre in the name of Humanity. Humanity and Progress, Progress and Humanity. Have you ever read *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, by the way?'

Rather belatedly, Sebastian started out of his coma and said no.

'What a book!' the other exclaimed. 'Incomparably the finest thing Flaubert ever did. It's one of the great philosophical poems of the world — and probably the last that will ever be written. For, of course, after *Bouvard et Pécuchet* there just isn't anything more to say. Dante and Milton merely justify the ways of God. But Flaubert really goes down to the root of things. He justifies the ways of Fact. The ways of Fact as they affect, not only man, but God as well — and not

only the Gaseous Vertebrate, but all the other fantastic products of human imbecility, including, of course, our dear old friend, Inevitable Progress. Inevitable Progress!' he repeated. 'Only one more indispensable massacre of Capitalists or Communists or Fascists or Christians or Heretics, and there we are — there we are in the Golden Future. But needless to say, in the very nature of things, the future *can't* be golden. For the simple reason that nobody ever gets anything for nothing. Massacre always has to be paid for, and its price is a state of things that absolutely guarantees you against achieving the good which the massacre was intended to achieve. And the same is true even of bloodless revolutions. Every notable advance in technique or organization has to be paid for, and in most cases the debit is more or less equivalent to the credit. Except of course when it's more than equivalent, as it has been with universal education, for example, or wireless, or these damned aeroplanes. In which case, of course, your progress is a step backwards and downwards. Backwards and downwards,' he repeated; and, taking the cigar out of his mouth, he threw back his head and gave vent to a long peal of wheezy laughter. Then, all at once, he broke off, and his large face screwed itself up into a grimace of pain. He raised a hand to his chest.

'Heartburn,' he said, shaking his head. 'That's the trouble with white wine. I've had to give up Hock and Riesling completely; and sometimes even champagne….'

Eustace made another grimace, and bit his lip. The pain subsided a little. With some difficulty he heaved himself up out of his deep seat.

'Luckily,' he added, with a smile, 'there's almost nothing that a little bicarbonate of soda won't set right.'

He reinserted the teat and walked out of the drawing-room, across the hall and along the little passage that led to the downstairs lavatory.

Left to himself, Sebastian rose, uncorked the brandy and poured what remained in his glass back into the bottle. Then he drank some soda-water and felt distinctly better. Going to one of the windows, he pushed aside the curtain and looked out. A moon was shining. Against the sky, the cypresses were

obelisks of solid darkness. At their feet stood the pale gesticulating statues, and behind and below, far off, were the lights of Florence. And doubtless there were slums down there, like the slums of Camden Town, and tarts in blue at the street corners, and all the stink and the stupidity, all the miseries and humiliations. But here was only order and intention, significance and beauty. Here was a fragment of the world in which human beings *ought* to be living.

Suddenly, in an act of pure intellectual apprehension, he was aware of the poem he was going to write about this garden. Not of its accidents — the metrical arrangements, the words and sentences — but of its essential form and animating spirit. The form and spirit of a long pensive lyric; of a poetical reflection intensified to the point of cry and song, and sustained in its intensity by a kind of enduring miracle. For a moment he knew it perfectly, his unwritten poem — and the knowledge filled him with an extraordinary happiness. Then it was gone.

He let the curtain drop, walked back to his chair and sat down to wrestle with the problems of composition. Two minutes later he was fast asleep.

There was an onyx ashtray on the lavatory windowsill. Very carefully, so as not to disturb its faultless combustion, Eustace put down his cigar, then turned and opened the door of the little medicine cupboard above the wash-basin. It was always kept well stocked, so that, if ever during the day he had any need of internal or external first aid, it would be unnecessary for him to go upstairs to his bathroom. In ten years, he liked to say, he had spared himself as much climbing as would have taken him to the top of Mount Everest.

From the row of medicaments on the upper shelf he selected the bicarbonate of soda, unscrewed the stopper and shook out into his left palm four of the white tablets. He was in the act of replacing the bottle, when another spasm of this strangely violent heartburn made him decide to double the dose. He filled a glass, and began to swallow the tablets one by one, with a sip of water after each. Two, three, four, five, six … And then suddenly the pain was like a red-hot poker boring through his chest. He felt dizzy, and a whirling blackness obscured the outside world. Groping blindly, his hands slid across the wall and found the

smooth enamelled cistern of the toilet. He lowered himself unsteadily on to the seat and almost immediately felt a good deal better. ‘It must have been that bloody fish,’ he said to himself. The recipe called for a lot of cream, and he had taken two helpings. He swallowed the last two tablets, drank the rest of the water and, reaching out, set down the glass on the windowsill. Just as his arm was at full stretch the pain returned — but in a new form; for it had now become, in some indescribable way, obscene as well as agonizing. And all at once he found himself panting for breath and in the clutch of a terror more intense than any fear he had ever experienced before. It was terror, for a few seconds, absolutely pure and unmotivated. Then all at once the pain shot down his left arm — nauseating, disgusting, like being hit in the wind, like getting a blow in the genitals — and in a flash the causeless fear crystallized into a fear of heart failure, of death.

Death, death, death. He remembered what Dr. Burgess had told him last time he went for a consultation. ‘The old pump can’t put up with indefinite abuse.’ And his wife — she too … But with her it hadn’t come suddenly. There had been years and years of sofas and nurses and strophanthine drops. Quite an agreeable existence, really. He wouldn’t mind that at all; he’d even give up smoking altogether.

More excruciating than ever, the pain returned. The pain and the awful fear of death.

‘Help!’ he tried to call. But all the sound he could produce was a faint hoarse bark. ‘Help!’ Why didn’t they come? Bloody servants! And that damned boy there, just across the hall in the drawing-room.

‘Sebastian!’ The shout produced no more than a whisper. ‘Don’t let me die. Don’t let me …’ Suddenly he was gasping with a strange crowing noise. There was no air, no air. And suddenly he remembered that beastly glacier where they had taken him climbing when he was a boy of twelve. Whooping and gasping in the snow, and vomiting his breakfast, while his father stood there with John and the Swiss guide, smiling in a superior sort of way and telling him it was only a touch of mountain sickness. The memory vanished; and nothing remained but this crowing for breath, this pressure on the darkened eyes, this precipitated

thudding of blood in the ears, and the pain increasing and increasing, as though some pitiless hand were gradually tightening a screw, until at last — ah, Christ! Christ! but it was impossible to scream — something seemed to crack and give way; and suddenly there was a kind of tearing. The stab of that redoubled anguish brought him to his feet. He took three steps towards the door and turned the key backwards in the lock; but before he could open, his knees gave way and he fell. Face downwards on the tiled floor, he continued to gasp for a little, more and more stertorously. But there was no air; only a smell of cigar smoke.

With a sudden start Sebastian woke into a consciousness of pins and needles in his left leg. He looked around him and, for a second or two, was unable to remember where he was. Then everything fell into place — the journey, and Uncle Eustace, and the strange disquieting incarnation of Mary Esdaile. His eye fell on the drawing, which was lying where his uncle had left it, on the sofa. He leaned over and picked it up. ‘Two buttocks and a pendulous bub.’ A genuine Degas, and Uncle Eustace was going to give it to him. And the evening clothes too! He would have to wear them secretly, hide them in the intervals. Otherwise his father would be quite capable of taking them away from him. Susan would let him keep them in her room. Or Aunt Alice, for that matter; for in this case Aunt Alice was as much on his side as Susan herself. And luckily his father would still be abroad when Tom Boveney gave his party.

Musically the clock on the mantelpiece went ding-dong, and then repeated itself, ding-dong, ding-dong. Sebastian looked up and was amazed to see that the time was a quarter to twelve. And it had been only a little after half-past ten when Uncle Eustace left the room.

He jumped up, walked to the door and looked out. The hall was empty, all the house was silent.

Softly, for fear of waking anybody, he ventured a discreet call.

‘Uncle Eustace!’

There was no answer.

Did he go upstairs and never come down again? Or perhaps, Sebastian speculated uneasily, perhaps he had come back, found him asleep and left him

there — as a joke. Yes, that was probably what had happened. And tomorrow he'd never hear the end of it. Curled up in the armchair like a tired child! Sebastian felt furious with himself for having succumbed so easily to a couple of glasses of champagne. The only consolation was that Uncle Eustace wouldn't be unpleasantly sarcastic. Just a bit playful, that was all. But the danger was that he might be playful in front of the others — in front of that horrible old she-devil, in front of Mrs. Thwale; and the prospect of being treated as a baby in front of Mrs. Thwale was particularly distasteful and humiliating.

Frowning to himself, he rubbed his nose in perplexed uncertainty. Then, since it was obvious that Uncle Eustace had no intention of coming down again at this hour, he decided to go to bed.

Turning out the lights in the drawing-room, he made his way upstairs. Someone, he found, had unpacked for him while he was at dinner. A pair of faded pink pyjamas had been neatly laid out on the majestic bed; the celluloid comb with the three broken teeth and the wood-backed hair-brushes had taken their place incongruously among the crystal and silver fittings of the dressing-table. At the sight he winced. What must the servants think? As he undressed, he wondered how much he would have to tip them when he went away.

It was late; but the luxurious opportunity of taking a midnight bath was not to be missed. Carrying his pyjamas over his arm, Sebastian entered the bathroom, and having, by unthinking force of habit, carefully locked the door behind him, turned on the water. Lying there in the deliciously enveloping warmth, he thought about that garden in the moonlight and the poem he intended to write. It would be something like 'Tintern Abbey,' like Shelley's thing on Mont Blanc — but of course quite different and contemporary. For he would use all the resources of non-poetic as well as of poetic diction; would intensify lyricism with irony, the beautiful with the grotesque. 'A sense of something far more deeply interfused' — that might have been all right in 1800, but not now. It was too easy now, too complacent. Today the something interfused would have to be presented in conjunction with the horrors it was interfused with. And that, of course, meant an entirely different kind of versification. Changeable and uneven

to fit a subject matter that would modulate from God Flat Minor to Sex Major and Squalor Natural. He chuckled over his little invention and conjured up the picture of Mary Esdaile in that moonlit garden. Mary Esdaile among the statues, as pale as they, and, between the meshes of her black lace, much nakeder.

But why Mary Esdaile? Why not her incarnation, her real presence? Real to the point of being disquieting, but beautiful, terribly desirable. And perhaps Mrs. Thwale was as passionate as her imaginary counterpart, as unashamedly voluptuous as the Venus in Uncle Eustace's picture. Three comic pelicans and a centaur — and in the foreground the pure lascivious innocence of heaven, the incandescent copulation of a goddess, who certainly knew what she wanted, with her mortal lover. What self-abandonment, what laughter and light-heartedness! Voluptuously he imagined himself a consenting Adonis.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THERE WAS NO pain any longer, no more need to gasp for breath, and the tiled floor of the lavatory had ceased to be cold and hard.

All sound had died away, and it was quite dark. But in the void and the silence there was still a kind of knowledge, a faint awareness.

Awareness not of a name or person, not of things present, not of memories of the past, not even of here or there — for there was no place, only an existence whose single dimension was this knowledge of being ownerless and without possessions and alone.

The awareness knew only itself, and itself only as the absence of something else.

Knowledge reached out into the absence that was its object. Reached out into the darkness, further and further. Reached out into the silence. Illimitably. There were no bounds.

The knowledge knew itself as a boundless absence within another boundless absence, which was not even aware.

It was the knowledge of an absence ever more total, more excruciatingly a privation. And it was aware with a kind of growing hunger, but a hunger for something that did not exist; for the knowledge was only of absence, of pure and absolute absence.

Absence endured through ever-lengthening durations. Durations of restlessness. Durations of hunger. Durations that expanded and expanded as the frenzy of insatiability became more and more intense, that lengthened out into eternities of despair.

Eternities of the insatiable, despairing knowledge of absence within absence, everywhere, always, in an existence of only one dimension….

And then abruptly there was another dimension, and the everlasting ceased to be the everlasting.

That within which the awareness of absence knew itself, that by which it was included and interpenetrated, was no longer an absence, but had become the presence of another awareness. The awareness of absence knew itself known.

In the dark silence, in the void of all sensation, something began to know it. Very dimly at first, from immeasurably far away. But gradually the presence approached. The dimness of that other knowledge grew brighter. And suddenly the awareness had become an awareness of light. The light of the knowledge by which it was known.

In the awareness that there was something other than absence the anxiety found appeasement, the hunger found satisfaction.

Instead of privation there was this light. There was this knowledge of being known. And this knowledge of being known was a satisfied, even a joyful knowledge.

Yes, there was joy in being known, in being thus included within a shining presence, in thus being interpenetrated by a shining presence.

And because the awareness was included by it, interpenetrated by it, there was an identification with it. The awareness was not only known by it but knew with its knowledge.

Knew, not absence, but the luminous denial of absence, not privation, but bliss.

There was hunger still. Hunger for yet more knowledge of a yet more total denial of an absence.

Hunger, but also the satisfaction of hunger, also bliss. And then as the light increased, hunger again for profounder satisfactions, for a bliss more intense.

Bliss and hunger, hunger and bliss. And through ever-lengthening durations the light kept brightening from beauty into beauty. And the joy of knowing, the joy of being known, increased with every increment of that embracing and interpenetrating beauty.

Brighter, brighter, through succeeding durations, that expanded at last into an eternity of joy.

An eternity of radiant knowledge, of bliss unchanging in its ultimate intensity. For ever, for ever.

But gradually the unchanging began to change.

The light increased its brightness. The presence became more urgent. The knowledge more exhaustive and complete.

Under the impact of that intensification, the joyful awareness of being known, the joyful participation in that knowledge, was pinned against the limits of its bliss. Pinned with an increasing pressure until at last the limits began to give way and the awareness found itself beyond them, in another existence. An existence where the knowledge of being included within a shining presence had become a knowledge of being oppressed by an excess of light. Where that transfiguring interpenetration was apprehended as a force disruptive from within. Where the knowledge was so penetratingly luminous that the participation in it was beyond the capacity of that which participated.

The presence approached, the light grew brighter.

Where there had been eternal bliss there was an immensely prolonged uneasiness, an immensely prolonged duration of pain and, longer and yet longer, as the pain increased, durations of intolerable anguish. The anguish of being forced, by participation, to know more than it was possible for the participant to know. The anguish of being crushed by the pressure of that too much light — crushed into ever-increasing density and opacity. The anguish, simultaneously, of being broken and pulverized by the thrust of that interpenetrating knowledge from within. Disintegrated into smaller and smaller fragments, into mere dust, into atoms of mere nonentity.

And this dust and the ever-increasing denseness of that opacity were apprehended by the knowledge in which there was participation as being hideous. Were judged and found repulsive, a privation of all beauty and reality.

Inexorably, the presence approached, the light grew brighter.

And with every increase of urgency, every intensification of that invading knowledge from without, that disruptive brightness thrusting from within, the agony increased, the dust and the compacted darkness became more shameful, were known, by participation, as the most hideous of absences.

Shameful everlastingly in an eternity of shame and pain.

But the light grew brighter, agonizingly brighter.

The whole of existence was brightness — everything except this one small clot of untransparent absence, except these dispersed atoms of a nothingness that, by direct awareness, knew itself as opaque and separate, and at the same time, by an excruciating participation in the light, knew itself as the most hideous and shameful of privations.

Brightness beyond the limits of the possible, and then a yet intenser, nearer incandescence, pressing from without, disintegrating from within. And at the same time there was this other knowledge, ever more penetrating and complete, as the light grew brighter, of a clotting and a disintegration that seemed progressively more shameful as the durations lengthened out interminably.

There was no escape, an eternity of no escape. And through ever-longer, through ever-decelerating durations, from impossible to impossible, the brightness increased, came more urgently and agonizingly close.

Suddenly there was a new contingent knowledge, a conditional awareness that, if there were no participation in the brightness, half the agony would disappear. There would be no perception of the ugliness of this clotted or disintegrated privation. There would only be an untransparent separateness, self-known as other than the invading light.

An unhappy dust of nothingness, a poor little harmless clot of mere privation, crushed from without, scattered from within, but still resisting, still refusing, in spite of the anguish, to give up its right to a separate existence.

Abruptly, there was a new and overwhelming flash of participation in the light, in the agonizing knowledge that there was no such right as a right to separate existence, that this clotted and disintegrated absence was shameful and must be denied, must be annihilated — held up unflinchingly to the radiance of

that invading knowledge and utterly annihilated, dissolved in the beauty of that impossible incandescence.

For an immense duration the two awarenesses hung as though balanced — the knowledge that knew itself separate, knew its own right to separateness, and the knowledge that knew the shamefulness of absence and the necessity for its agonizing annihilation in the light.

As though balanced, as though on a knife-edge between an impossible intensity of beauty and an impossible intensity of pain and shame, between a hunger for opacity and separateness and absence and a hunger for a yet more total participation in the brightness.

And then, after an eternity, there was a renewal of that contingent and conditional knowledge: ‘If there were no participation in the brightness, if there were no participation …’

And all at once there was no longer any participation. There was a self-knowledge of the clot and the disintegrated dust; and the light that knew these things was another knowledge. There was still the agonizing invasion from within and without, but no shame any more, only a resistance to attack, a defence of rights.

By degrees the brightness began to lose some of its intensity, to recede, as it were, to grow less urgent. And suddenly there was a kind of eclipse. Between the insufferable light and the suffering awareness of the light as a presence alien to this clotted and disintegrated privation, something abruptly intervened. Something in the nature of an image, something partaking of a memory.

An image of things, a memory of things. Things related to things in some blessedly familiar way that could not yet be clearly apprehended.

Almost completely eclipsed, the light lingered faintly and insignificantly on the fringes of awareness. At the centre were only things.

Things still unrecognized, not fully imagined or remembered, without name or even form, but definitely there, definitely opaque.

And now that the light had gone into eclipse and there was no participation, opacity was no more shameful. Density was happily aware of density,

nothingness of untransparent nothingness. The knowledge was without bliss, but profoundly reassuring.

And gradually the knowledge became clearer, and the things known more definite and familiar. More and more familiar, until awareness hovered on the verge of recognition.

A clotted thing here, a disintegrated thing there. But what things? And what were these corresponding opacities by which they were being known?

There was a vast duration of uncertainty, a long, long groping in a chaos of unmanifested possibilities.

Then abruptly it was Eustace Barnack who was aware. Yes, this opacity was Eustace Barnack, this dance of agitated dust was Eustace Barnack. And the clot outside himself, this other opacity of which he had the image, was his cigar. He was remembering his Romeo and Juliet as it had slowly disintegrated into blue nothingness between his fingers. And with the memory of the cigar came the memory of a phrase: ‘Backwards and downwards.’ And then the memory of laughter.

Words in what context? Laughter at whose expense? There was no answer. Just ‘backwards and downwards’ and that stump of disintegrating opacity. ‘Backwards and downwards,’ and then the cachinnation, and the sudden glory.

Far off, beyond the image of that brown slobbered cylinder of tobacco, beyond the repetition of those three words and the accompanying laughter, the brightness lingered, like a menace. But in his joy at having found again this memory of things, this knowledge of an identity remembering, Eustace Barnack had all but ceased to be aware of its existence.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SEBASTIAN HAD DRAWN back the curtains when he went to bed, and a little after half-past seven an entering shaft of sunlight touched his face and awoke him. Outside the window there was a sound of birds and church bells, and between the little grey and white clouds the sky was so brilliantly blue that he decided, in spite of the deliciousness of his enormous bed, to go and do a little exploring before anyone else was about.

He got up, took a bath, examined his chin and cheeks to see if there was any need to use his razor, and deciding that there was no need, dressed himself with care in a clean shirt, the newer of his grey flannel trousers and the less shabby of the two outgrown tweed jackets which his father had said must last till June. Then, after giving his rebellious hair a final brushing, he went downstairs and out through the front door.

Hardly less romantic than it had seemed under the moon, the garden revealed itself in all the details of its architectural design, with all the colours of its foliage and April flowers. Six goddesses stood sentinel on the terrace, and between the central pair a great flight of steps went down from landing to paved and parapeted landing, down, between colonnades of cypresses, to a green lawn bounded by a low semicircular wall, beyond which the eye travelled down and on to a distant chaos of brown and rosy roofs, and, floating high above them, in the very centre of the vista, the dome of the cathedral. Sebastian walked down to the bottom of the steps and looked over the retaining wall. Below it stretched a sloping field of vines, still leafless, like an acre of dead men’s arms reaching up frantically towards the light. And here, beyond the cypresses, grew an ancient fig tree, all knees and knuckles, with elbowed branches pale as bones against the sky. What intricacies of blue and white when one looked up into it! ‘Snatches of heaven,’ he whispered to himself, ‘seen through an ossuary. A pendent ossuary

of arthropods.’ And there were those church bells again, and a smell of wood smoke and hyacinths, and the first yellow butterfly. And when one walked back to the foot of the steps and looked up, it was like being inside something by Milton. Like walking about in *Lycidas*, through one of the similes in *Paradise Lost.* Majestic symmetries! And at the top, on their high pedestals, Artemis and Aphrodite stood pale against the foreshortened façade of the house. Beautiful, and at the same time slightly absurd. The appropriate phrases began to come to him.

Dian with dog, and Venus modestly
Screening her pubic lichen and the green
Moss on her limestone paps …

And then suddenly he perceived that, without intending it, he had discovered the Open Sesame to his entire poem. ‘Limestone’ — it had come out casually, as a simple descriptive epithet. But in fact it was the password to his unwritten masterpiece, the key and guiding clue. And, of all people, old walrus-whiskered Macdonald, the science master, was his Ariadne. He remembered the words which had roused him for a moment from the coma into which he habitually sank during his physics and chemistry lessons. ‘The difference between a piece of stone and an atom is that an atom is highly organized, whereas the stone is not. The atom is a pattern, and the molecule is a pattern, and the crystal is a pattern; but the stone, although it is made up of these patterns, is just a mere confusion. It’s only when life appears that you begin to get organization on a larger scale. Life takes the atoms and molecules and crystals; but, instead of making a mess of them like the stone, it combines them into new and more elaborate patterns of its own.’

The others had only heard the oddities of old Mac’s Dundee accent. For weeks, ‘the putterrns of uttoms’ had been a standing joke. But for Sebastian the joke had made some kind of obscure unrecognized sense. And now suddenly here the sense was, clear and comprehensible.

The primal pattern. And then the chaos made of patterns. And then the living patterns built up out of fragments of the chaos. And then what next? Living

patterns of living patterns? But man’s world was chaotically ugly and unjust and stupid. More hopelessly refractory than even the lump of stone. For that suffered itself to be carved into breasts and faces. Whereas five thousand laborious years of civilization had resulted only in slums and factories and offices. He reached the top of the stairs and sat down on the smooth flagstones at the foot of Venus’s pedestal.

‘And human individuals,’ he was thinking. As living patterns in space, how incredibly subtle, rich and complex! But the trace they left in time, the pattern of their private lives — God, what a horror of routine! Like the repeats on a length of linoleum, like the succession of identical ornamental tiles along the wall of a public lavatory. Or if they did try to launch out into something original, the resulting scrolls and curlicues were generally atrocious. And anyhow most of them quickly ended in a smudge of frustration — and then it was linoleum and lavatory tiles, lavatory tiles and linoleum, to the bitter end.

He looked up at the house and wondered which of all the shuttered windows was Mrs. Thwale’s. If that horrible old hag really wanted him to take lessons in speaking, it would give him an opportunity of talking to her. Would he have the nerve to tell her about Mary Esdaile? It would obviously be a wonderful opening. He imagined a conversation beginning with a witty and ironical confession of his own adolescent phantasies and ending — well, ending practically anywhere.

He sighed, looked down between the cypresses at the distant cupola, then up at the statue above him. What a curious worm’s-eye view of a goddess! A green iridescent rose beetle was crawling slowly across her left knee. Or so it seemed to him. But what would the beetle say it was doing? Feeling the sixfold rhythm of its legs, the pull of gravity on its right side, the fascination of strong light on its left eye, the warmth and hardness of a surface diversified with pits and jagged stalagmites and vegetable growths, rank, but uninteresting, since the smell was not one that made it, willy-nilly, cut round holes in leaves or burrow between the petals of flowers. And what, Sebastian wondered, was he himself doing at this

moment? Crawling over what enormous knee? Towards what future event, what premeditated flick of a giant's finger-nail?

He got up, dusted the seat of his trousers; then, reaching up, gave the beetle a little fillip. It fell on to the pedestal and lay there on its back, its legs waving. Sebastian bent down to look at it, and saw that its plated belly was covered with minute crawling ticks. Disgustedly, he turned the creature over on to its feet and walked away towards the house. The sun, which had passed for a moment behind a cloud, came out again, and all the garden glowed, as though every leaf and flower had been illumined from within. Sebastian smiled with pleasure, and started to whistle the tune of the first movement of Susan's Scarlatti sonata.

As he opened the front door, he was surprised to hear a confused noise of talk, and, stepping across the threshold, he found the hall full of people — half a dozen servants, two old peasant women with shawls over their heads, and a dark-eyed little girl of ten or twelve, carrying a baby in one arm and, with the other hand, holding by the feet, head downwards and inert, a large speckled hen.

Suddenly they all fell silent. From a dark vaulted passage on the right came a sound of laboured shuffling; and a moment later, walking backwards with a pair of grey-trousered legs under his arm, emerged the butler, and then, stooping under the weight of the body, the footman and the chauffeur. One thick yellowish hand trailed palm upwards on the floor, and as the men turned to take their burden up the stairs, Sebastian caught sight of the black gape of an open mouth and two lustreless and discoloured eyes, fixed and mindlessly staring. Then step by step the body was heaved up, out of sight. Dangling from the child's hand, the speckled hen uttered a feeble squawk and tried to flap its wings. The baby broke into crowing laughter.

Sebastian turned and hurried away into the drawing-room. The first animal reaction of surprise and horror had left his stomach turned, his heart violently beating. He sat down and covered his face with his hands. It was as bad as that ghastly time at school when old Mac had made them dissect the dog-fish and he had been sick in one of the laboratory sinks. And this was poor Uncle Eustace. Suddenly snuffed out, reduced to the likeness of that awful Thing they had

hauled up the stairs. Like men moving a piano. And it must have happened while he himself was sleeping, here, in this very chair. Perhaps Uncle Eustace had called for him; and perhaps, if he had heard, he could have done something to save his life. But he hadn't heard; he'd just gone on sleeping. Sleeping like a hog, while this man who was his friend, this man who had been more decent to him than almost anyone he could think of, who had treated him with such extraordinary generosity …

Suddenly, like a thunderbolt, the thought came to him that now he wouldn't have his evening clothes. Yesterday Uncle Eustace had promised; but today there was nobody to keep the promise. It was good-bye to Tom Boveney's party; good-bye to those girls before he had even known them. The whole structure of that particular set of day-dreams — so rational and substantial since Uncle Eustace had pointed out the tailor's shop on the way from the station — disintegrated into less than nothing. The pang of his disappointment and self-pity brought tears to Sebastian's eyes. Had anyone ever had such bad luck?

Then he remembered Uncle Eustace — remembered him, not as the dispenser of dinner jackets, but as that kindly, lively person who last night had been his friend and now was only a revolting thing — remembered, and was overcome by shame at his own monstrous selfishness.

'God, I'm awful,' he said to himself; and to keep his mind on the real tragedy, he whispered the word, 'Dead, dead,' over and over again.

And then suddenly he caught himself wondering what excuse he could invent for Tom Boveney. That he was ill? That he was in mourning for his uncle?

A bell rang, and through the open door Sebastian saw the footman crossing the hall to the front entrance. A few Italian phrases were exchanged, and then a tall thin man, elegantly dressed and carrying a little black bag, was ushered up the stairs. Evidently the doctor, called in to write the death-certificate. But if he had been called last night, Uncle Eustace might have been saved. And the reason why the doctor wasn't called, Sebastian reminded himself, was that he had been asleep.

The servant came down again and vanished into the kitchen regions. Time passed. Then the clock on the mantelpiece gave vent to four ding-dongs, and struck nine. A moment later, the footman entered through the library door, came to a halt in front of the chair on which Sebastian was sitting, and said something which, because of the distant aroma of coffee and fried bacon, the latter interpreted as an announcement of breakfast. He said ‘thank you,’ got up and walked into the dining-room. The nausea of surprise and horror had worn off, and he was feeling hungry again. He sat down to eat. The scrambled eggs were absolutely delicious; the bacon, crisp between the teeth and exquisitely pungent; the coffee, a dream.

He had just helped himself for the second time to marmalade when a luminous idea occurred to him. That Degas drawing, which Uncle Eustace had given him … What on earth could he do with it for the next few years? Hang it up in his bedroom and have old Ellen complain that it was ‘rude’? Put it away until he went to Oxford? But wouldn’t it really be much more sensible to sell the thing and use the money to get a suit of evening clothes?

The opening of the door made him look up. Dressed in black, with white ruffles at the neck and wrists, Mrs. Thwale had quietly entered. Sebastian jumped to his feet and, hastily wiping his mouth, said good-morning. With the sheet of notepaper she held in her hand Mrs. Thwale waved him back into his chair, and herself sat down beside him.

‘You know what’s happened, of course?’

Sebastian nodded, guiltily.

‘One feels … well, one feels almost ashamed of oneself.’

He was trying to atone for not having given a thought to poor Uncle Eustace during the whole of breakfast.

‘You know,’ he went on, ‘ashamed of being alive.’

Mrs. Thwale looked at him for a moment in silence, then shrugged her shoulders.

‘But that’s what living happens to be,’ she said. ‘The physiological denial of reverence and good manners and Christianity. And you’re not even a Christian,

are you?’

He shook his head. Mrs. Thwale continued with an apparently irrelevant question.

‘How old are you?’

‘Seventeen.’

‘Seventeen?’

Once more she looked at him; looked at him so intently, with an expression of such disquietingly impersonal amusement, that he started to blush, and dropped his eyes.

‘In that case,’ she went on, ‘it’s doubly silly of you to feel ashamed of living. At your age one’s quite old enough to know what the essence of life really is. Shamelessness, that’s all; pure shamelessness.’

Her beautiful steel-engraving face puckered itself into a comic mask, and she uttered the delicate little grunt of her laughter. Then, suddenly serene again, she opened her handbag and took out a pencil.

‘There’s a whole sheaf of telegrams to be sent,’ she went on in a calm, business-like voice. ‘You can help me with some of the addresses.’

A few minutes later the butler came in and announced that he had been able to reach Mr. Pewsey on the telephone, and that Mr. Pewsey had offered to make all the necessary arrangements for the funeral.

‘Thank you, Guido.’

The butler inclined his head almost imperceptibly, turned and silently went out again. The ritual of his service remained flawless; but Sebastian could see that he had been crying.

‘Well, that’s a great relief,’ said Mrs. Thwale.

Sebastian nodded.

‘All that rigmarole of funerals,’ he said. ‘It’s too awful.’

‘But evidently less awful than the realization that dying is even more shameless than living.’

‘More shameless?’

‘Well, at least you don’t putrefy when you make love, or eat, or excrete. Whereas when you die …’ She made a little grimace. ‘That’s why people are ready to spend such fortunes on last sacraments and embalmers and lead coffins. But what about these telegrams?’ She looked back at her list of names. ‘Mrs. Poulshot,’ she read out. ‘Where can she be reached?’

Sebastian was uncertain. Aunt Alice and Uncle Fred were on a motor tour in Wales. Better send the wire to London and hope for the best.

Mrs. Thwale took down the address at his dictation.

‘Talking of shamelessness,’ she said, as she reached for another telegraph form, ‘I knew a girl once who lost her virginity on the night of Good Friday, at Jerusalem — just above the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Now, what about your father?’

‘He left for Egypt yesterday evening,’ Sebastian began. Suddenly through the open door there came a harsh imperious call of ‘Veronica, Veronica!’

Without answering or making any remark, Mrs. Thwale rose and, followed by Sebastian, walked into the drawing-room. A storm of shrill barking greeted them. Retreating step by step as they advanced, Foxy VIII almost screamed his defiance. Sebastian glanced from the dog to its mistress. Her rouged face seeming more fantastically gaudy by contrast with the black of her dress and hat, the Queen Mother was standing, small and shrivelled, beside the stolid figure of her maid.

‘Quiet!’ she called blindly in the direction of the noise. ‘Pick him up, Hortense.’

In Hortense’s arms Foxy contented himself with an occasional growl.

‘Is the boy there too?’ Mrs. Gamble enquired, and when Sebastian came forward, ‘Well, boy,’ she said almost triumphantly, ‘what do you think of all this?’

Sebastian murmured that he thought it was terrible.

‘I told him only yesterday,’ the Queen Mother went on in the same tone. ‘No fat man has ever lived even to seventy. Much less to any reasonable age. You’ve sent a wire to Daisy, have you?’

‘It’s going off with the others in a few minutes,’ said Mrs. Thwale.

‘And to think that that goose is inheriting everything!’ exclaimed the Queen Mother. ‘What can *she* do with it, I’d like to know? All Eustace’s pictures and furniture. I always told Amy not to let her have everything.’

Suddenly she turned on the maid.

‘What on earth are you standing here for, Hortense? Go away and do something useful. Can’t you see I don’t need you?’

Silently the woman started to go.

‘Where’s Foxy?’ shouted the Queen Mother in the direction of the retreating footsteps. ‘Give him to me.’

She held out a pair of jewelled claws. The dog was handed over.

‘Little Foxy-woxy,’ Mrs. Gamble rasped affectionately, bending down to rub her cheek against the animal’s fur. Foxy responded with a lick. The Queen Mother cackled shrilly and wiped her face with her fingers, smudging the rouge across her sharp and rather hairy chin. ‘Only fifty-three,’ she went on, turning back to the others. ‘It’s ridiculous. But what else could you expect with a stomach like that? Boy!’ she rapped out sharply. ‘Give me your arm.’

Sebastian did as he was bidden.

‘I want you to show me the place where he actually passed on.’

‘You mean …?’ he began.

‘Yes, I do,’ barked the Queen Mother. ‘You can stay here, Veronica.’

Slowly and cautiously Sebastian set off towards the door. ‘Why don’t you talk?’ Mrs. Gamble demanded after they had walked a few yards in silence. ‘I know a great deal about football, if that’s what interests you.’

‘Well, not really … I’m more interested in … well, in poetry and things like that.’

‘Poetry?’ she repeated. ‘Do you write poetry?’

‘*A* little.’

‘Very peculiar,’ said the Queen Mother. Then after a pause, ‘I remember one time,’ she went on, ‘I was staying at a house where Mr. Browning was one of the

guests. I never saw anyone eat so much for breakfast. Never. Except perhaps King Edward.'

They passed out of the hall into the dark little passage. The door at the end was still ajar. Sebastian pushed it open.

'This is the place,' he said.

Mrs. Gamble let go of his arm and, still holding the dog, groped her way forward. Her hand made contact with the washbasin; she turned on a tap and turned it off again; then groped on, touched and flushed the toilet. Foxy began to bark.

'Which was that Roman emperor?' she asked through the yapping and the noise of the rushing water. 'The one who passed on in the W.C. Was it Marcus Aurelius or Julius Caesar?'

'I think it was Vespasian,' Sebastian ventured.

'Vespasian? I never heard of him,' said the Queen Mother emphatically. 'It smells of cigar smoke here,' she added. 'I always told him he smoked too many cigars. Give me your arm again.'

They walked back through the hall and into the drawing-room.

'Veronica,' said the Queen Mother, speaking at random into the darkness that constituted her world, 'did you ring up that tiresome woman again?'

'Not yet, Mrs. Gamble.'

'I wonder why she didn't answer.' The old lady's tone was fretful and aggrieved.

'She was out,' said Mrs. Thwale quietly. 'Giving a séance perhaps.'

'Nobody has séances at nine in the morning. And anyhow, she ought to have left somebody to take her calls.'

'She probably can't afford a servant.'

'Nonsense!' barked the Queen Mother. 'I've never known a good medium who couldn't afford a servant. Particularly in Florence, where they're dirt-cheap. Ring her up again, Veronica. Ring her up every hour until you get her. And now, boy, I want to walk up and down the terrace for a little, and you shall talk to me about poetry. How do you start writing a poem?'

‘Well,’ Sebastian began, ‘I usually …’

He broke off.

‘But it’s really too difficult to explain.’

He turned and gave her one of his irresistible, his angelic smiles.

‘What a stupid answer!’ exclaimed the Queen Mother. ‘It may be difficult, but it certainly isn’t impossible.’

Remembering too late that she couldn’t see his smile, and feeling very foolish indeed, Sebastian relaxed his facial muscles into seriousness.

‘Go on!’ commanded the old lady.

Stammering, he did his best.

‘Well, it’s as if you … I mean, it’s like suddenly *hearing* something. And then it seems to grow by itself — you know, like a crystal in a super-saturated solution.’

‘In a what?’

‘A super-saturated solution.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Oh, well, it’s … it’s the thing that crystals grow in. But as a matter of fact,’ he hastily added, ‘that isn’t quite the right metaphor. It’s more like flowers coming up from seed. Or even like sculpture — you know: adding on little bits of clay and at last it’s a statue. Or, still better, you might compare it to …’

The Queen Mother cut him short.

‘I don’t understand a word you’re saying,’ she rasped. ‘And you mumble worse than ever.’

‘I’m awfully sorry,’ he muttered, yet more inaudibly.

‘I shall tell Veronica to give you a lesson in talking the king’s English every afternoon, while I’m having my rest. And now start again about your poetry.’

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

‘BACKWARDS AND DOWNWARDS,’ the laughter and the cigar. For long durations there was nothing else. This was all of himself that he possessed, all of himself that he had been able to find. Nothing but the memory of three words, of a sudden glory and a slobbered cylinder of tobacco. But it sufficed. The knowledge was delightful and reassuring.

Meanwhile, on the fringes of awareness, the light still lingered; and suddenly, between two rememberings, he perceived that it had somehow changed.

In the beginning the brightness had been everywhere, and everywhere the same, a shining silence, boundless and uniform. And essentially it was still without flaw, still indeterminate. And yet, while it remained what it had always been, it was as though that calm boundlessness of bliss and knowledge had been limited by the interpenetration of an activity. An activity that was at the same time a pattern, a kind of living lattice; ubiquitous, infinitely complex, exquisitely delicate. A vast ubiquitous web of beknottednesses and divergences, of parallels and spirals, of intricate figures and their curiously distorted projections — all shining and active and alive.

Once more his single fragment of selfhood came back to him — the same as ever, but in some way associated, this time, with a particular figure in that bright lattice of intricate relationships, located, as it were, on one of its innumerable nodes of intersecting movement.

‘Backwards and downwards,’ and then the sudden glory of laughter.

But this pattern of intersections was projected from another pattern, and within that other pattern he suddenly found another, larger fragment of himself — found the remembered image of a small boy, scrambling up out of the water of a ditch, wet and muddy to above the knees. And ‘Sucks, John, sucks!’ he

remembered himself shouting; and when the boy said, ‘Jump, you coward,’ he only shouted ‘Sucks!’ again, and howled with laughter.

And the laughter brought back the cigar, all slobbered, and along with the cigar, somewhere else in the heart of that ubiquitous lattice, the memory of the feeling of a thumb between the lips, the memory of the pleasure of sitting interminably in the W.C., reading the *Boy’s Own Paper* and sucking on a stringy length of liquorice.

And here, going back from projection to projector, was the image of an enormous, firm-fleshed presence, smelling of disinfectant soap. And when he failed to do *Töpfchen*, Fräulein Anna laid him deliberately across her knees, gave him two smacks, and left him lying face downwards on the cot, while she went to fetch the *Sprite.* Yes, the *Spritze*, the *Spritze* …. And there were other names for it, English names; for sometimes it was his mother who inflicted the pleasure-anguish of the enema. And when that happened the looming presence smelt, not of disinfectant, but of orris root. And though, of course, he could have done *Töpfchen* if he had wanted to, he wouldn’t — just for the sake of that agonizing pleasure.

The lines of living light fanned out, then came together in another knot; and this was no longer Fräulein Anna or his mother; this was Mimi. *Spicciati, Bebino!* And with an uprush of elation he remembered the claret-coloured dressing-gown, the warmth and resilience of flesh beneath the silk.

Through the interstices of the lattice he was aware of the other aspect of the light — of the vast undifferentiated silence, of the beauty austerely pure, but fascinating, desirable, irresistibly attractive.

The brightness approached, grew more intense. He became part of the bliss, became identical with the silence and the beauty. For ever, for ever.

But with participation in the beauty there went participation in the knowledge. And suddenly he knew these recovered fragments of himself for what they so shamefully were; knew them for mere clots and disintegrations, for mere absences of light, mere untransparent privations, nothingnesses that had to be annihilated, had to be held up into the incandescence, considered in all their

hideousness by the light of that shining silence, considered and understood and then repudiated, annihilated to make place for the beauty, the knowledge, the bliss.

The claret-coloured dressing-gown fell apart, and he discovered another fragment of his being — a memory of round breasts, wax-white, tipped with a pair of blind brown eyes. And in the thick flesh, deeply embedded, the navel, he recalled, had the absurd primness of a Victorian mouth. Prunes and prisms. *Adesso commincia la tortura.*

Abruptly, almost violently, the beauty of the light and the anguish of participating in its knowledge were intensified beyond the limits of possibility. But in the same instant he realized that it was in his power to avert his attention, to refuse to participate. Deliberately, he limited his awareness to the claret-coloured dressing-gown. The light died down again into insignificance. He was left in peace with his little property of memories and images. To treasure and enjoy them interminably — to enjoy them to the point of identification, to the point of being transubstantiated into them. Again and again, through comfortable durations of cigars and dressing-gowns and laughter and Fräulein Anna, and then cigars again and dressing-gowns….

Then suddenly, within the framework of the lattice, there was an abrupt displacement of awareness, and he was discovering another fragment of himself…. They were sitting in that church at Nice, and the choir was singing Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* — the men's voices filling all the hollow darkness with a passion of grief and yearning, and the boyish trebles passing back and forth between them, harmonious but beautifully irrelevant with the virginal otherness of things before the Fall, before the discovery of good and evil. Effortlessly, the music moved on from loveliness to loveliness. There was the knowledge of perfection, ecstatically blissful and at the same time sad, sad to the point of despair. *Ave Verum*, *Verum Corpus.* Before the motet was half over, the tears were streaming down his cheeks. And when he and Laurina left the church, the sun had set and above the dark house-tops the sky was luminous and serene. They found the car and drove back to Monte Carlo along the Comiche. At a bend

of the road, between two tall cypresses, he saw the evening star. ‘Look!’ he said. ‘Like the boys singing!’ But twenty minutes later they were in the Casino. It was the evening Laurina had her extraordinary run of luck. Twenty-two thousand francs. And in her room, at midnight, she had spread the money all over the carpet — hundreds of gold pieces, dozens and dozens of hundred-franc notes. He sat down beside her on the floor, put an arm round her shoulders and drew her close. ‘*Ave Verum Corpus,*’ he said, laughing. This was the true body.

And now he was at another but an almost identical intersection of the lattice, remembering himself lying in the long grass beside the cricket field at school. Looking up sleepily, through half-closed eyelids, at the hazy, almost tangible blueness of an English summer afternoon. And as he looked, something extraordinary happened. Nothing moved, but it was as though there had been an enormous circular gesture, as though something like a curtain had been drawn back. To all outward seeming that blue nostalgic canopy just above the tree-tops remained unruffled. And yet everything was suddenly different, everything had fallen to bits. The half-holiday afternoon, the routine of the game, the friendliness of familiar things and happenings — all were in bits. Shattered, for all that they were physically intact, by an inward and invisible earthquake. Something had broken through the crust of customary appearance. A lava gush from some other, more real order of existence. Nothing had changed; but he perceived everything as totally different, perceived himself as capable of acting and thinking in totally new ways appropriate to that revolutionary difference in the world.

‘What about going down town when the game’s over?’

He looked up. It was Timmy Williams — but even Timmy Williams, he suddenly perceived, was something other, better, more significant than the ferret-faced creature he enjoyed talking literature and smut with.

‘Something rather queer happened to me this afternoon,’ he was confiding, half an hour later, as they sat at the confectioner’s, eating strawberries and cream.

But when the story was told Timmy merely laughed and said that everybody had spots in front of their eyes sometimes. It was probably constipation.

It wasn't true, of course. But now that the shattered world had come together again, now that the curtain had fallen into place and the lava gush had flowed back to where it had come from, how nice and comfortable everything was! Better to leave well enough alone. Better to go on behaving as one had always behaved, not risk having to do anything strange or uncomfortable. After a moment's hesitation, he joined in the laughter.

Probably constipation. Yes, probably constipation. And, as though endowed with a life of its own, the refrain began to chant itself to the tune of 'Under the Bamboo Tree.'

Probably constip,

Probably constip,

Probably constipaysh;

Probably const,

Probably const,

Probably constipay, pay, pay.

And *da capo, da capo* — like that barrel organ which was playing the tune outside the Kensington Registry Office the morning he and Amy were married.

Under the bamboo,

Under the bamboo,

Probably constipaysh …

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

‘WELL,’ SAID MRS. THWALE, as Foxy’s barking and the thin croak of the Queen Mother’s endearments died away into the distance, ‘now you’re my pupil. Perhaps I ought to have provided myself with a birch. Do you get birched at school?’

Sebastian shook his head.

‘No? What a pity! I’ve always thought that birching had considerable charm.’

She looked at him with a faint smile; then turned away to sip her coffee. There was a long silence.

Sebastian raised his eyes and surreptitiously studied her averted face — the face of Mary Esdaile come to life, the face of the woman with whom, in imagination, he had explored what he believed to be the uttermost reaches of sensuality. And here she sat, decorously in black among all the coloured richness of the room, utterly unaware of the part she had played in his private universe, the things she had done and submitted to. Messalina inside his skull, Lucretia inside hers. But of course she wasn’t Lucretia, not with those eyes of hers, not with that way of silently impregnating the space around her with her physically feminine presence.

Mrs. Thwale looked up.

‘Obviously,’ she said, ‘the first thing is to discover why you mumble, when it’s just as easy to speak clearly and coherently. Why do you?’

‘Well, if one feels shy …’

‘If one feels shy,’ said Mrs. Thwale, ‘the best thing to do, I’ve always found, is to imagine how the person you’re shy of would look if he or she were squatting in a hip bath.’

Sebastian giggled.

‘It’s almost infallible,’ she continued. ‘The old and ugly ones look so grotesque that you can hardly keep a straight face. Whereas the young, good-looking ones look so attractive that you lose all alarm and even all respect. Now, shut your eyes and try it.’

Sebastian glanced at her, and the blood rushed up into his face.

‘You mean …?’

He found himself unable to finish the question.

‘*I* have no objection,’ said Mrs. Thwale composedly.

He shut his eyes; and there was Mary Esdaile in black lace, Mary Esdaile on a pink divan in the attitude of Boucher’s *Petite Morphil.*

‘Well, do you feel less shy now?’ she asked when he had reopened his eyes.

Sebastian looked at her for a moment; then, overwhelmed by embarrassment at the thought that she now knew something of what was happening in the world of his phantasy, emphatically shook his head.

‘You don’t?’ said Mrs. Thwale, and the low voice modulated upwards on a rising coo. ‘That’s bad. It almost looks as if yours were a case for surgery. S-surgery,’ she repeated, and took another sip of coffee, looking at him all the time with bright ironic eyes over the top of her cup.

‘However,’ she added, as she wiped her mouth, ‘it may still be possible to achieve a cure by psychological methods. There’s the technique of outrage, for example.’

Sebastian repeated the words on a tone of enquiry.

‘Well, you know what an outrage is,’ she said. ‘A *non sequitur* in action. For example, rewarding a child for being good by giving it a sound whipping and sending it to bed. Or better still, whipping it and sending it to bed for no reason at all. That’s the perfect outrage — completely disinterested, absolutely platonic.’

She smiled to herself. Those last words were the ones her father liked to use when he talked about Christian charity. That damned charity, with which he had poisoned all her childhood and adolescence. Surrounding himself, in its name, with a rabble of the unfortunate and the worthy. Turning what should have been

their home into a mere waiting-room and public corridor. Bringing her up among the squalors and uglinesses of poverty. Blackmailing her into a service she didn't want to give. Forcing her to spend her leisure with dull and ignorant strangers, when all she desired was to be alone. And as though to add insult to injury, he made her recite I Corinthians xiii every Sunday evening.

'Absolutely platonic,' Mrs. Thwale repeated, looking up again at Sebastian. 'Like Dante and Beatrice.' And after a second or two she added pensively: 'One day that pretty face of yours is going to get you into trouble.'

Sebastian laughed uncomfortably, and tried to change the subject.

'But where does shyness come in?' he asked.

'It doesn't,' she answered. 'It goes out. The outrage drives it out.'

'What outrage?'

'Why, the outrage you commit when you simply don't know what else to do or say.'

'But how can you? I mean, if you're shy …'

'You've got to do violence to yourself. As if you were committing suicide. Put the revolver to your temple. Five more seconds, and the world will come to an end. Meanwhile, nothing matters.'

'But it does matter,' Sebastian objected. 'And the world doesn't really come to an end.'

'No; but it's really transformed. The outrage creates an entirely novel situation.'

'An unpleasant situation.'

'So unpleasant,' Mrs. Thwale agreed, 'that you can't think of being shy any more.'

Sebastian looked doubtful.

'You don't believe me?' she said. 'Well, we'll stage a rehearsal. I'm Mrs. Gamble asking you to tell me how you write a poem.'

'God, wasn't that ghastly!' cried Sebastian.

'And why was it ghastly? Because you didn't have the sense to see that it was the sort of question that couldn't be answered except by an outrage. It made me

laugh to hear you humming and hawing over psychological subtleties which the old lady couldn't possibly have understood even if she had wanted to. Which, of course, she didn't.'

'But what else could I have done? Seeing that she wanted to know how I wrote.'

'I'll tell you,' said Mrs. Thwale. 'You shouldn't have spoken for at least five seconds; then very slowly and distinctly you should have said: "Madame, I do it with an indelible pencil on a roll of toilet paper." Now, say it.'

'No, I can't … really …'

He gave her one of his appealing, irresistible smiles. But, instead of melting, Mrs. Thwale contemptuously shook her head.

'No, no,' she said, 'I'm not a bit fond of children. And as for you, you ought to be ashamed of playing those tricks. At seventeen a man ought to be begetting babies, not trying to imitate them.'

Sebastian blushed and uttered a nervous laugh. Her frankness had been horribly painful; and yet with a part of his being he was glad that she should have spoken as she did, glad that she didn't want, like all the rest, to treat him as a child.

'And now,' Mrs. Thwale went on, 'this time you'll say it — do you understand?'

The tone was so coolly imperious that Sebastian obeyed without further protest or demur.

'Madame, I do it with an indelible pencil,' he began.

'That's not an outrage,' said Mrs. Thwale. 'That's a bleat.'

'I do it with an indelible pencil,' he repeated more loudly.

'Fortissimo!'

'… With an indelible pencil on a roll of toilet paper….'

Mrs. Thwale clapped her hands.

'Excellent!'

She uttered a delicate grunt of laughter. More boisterously, Sebastian joined in.

‘And now,’ she went on, ‘I ought to box your ears. Hard, so that it hurts. And you’ll be so startled and angry that you’ll shout, “You bloody old bitch,” or words to that effect. And then the fun will begin. I’ll start screeching like a macaw, and you’ll start …’

The door of the drawing-room was thrown open.

‘Il Signor De Vries,’ announced the footman.

Mrs. Thwale broke off in the middle of her sentence and instantaneously readjusted her expression. It was a grave madonna who faced the new arrival as he hurried across the room towards her.

‘I was out all morning,’ said Paul De Vries, as he took her extended hand. ‘Didn’t get your phone message till I came back to the hotel after lunch. What a shocking piece of news!’

‘Shocking,’ Mrs. Thwale repeated, nodding her head. ‘By the way,’ she added, ‘this is poor Mr. Barnack’s nephew, Sebastian.’

‘This must be a dreadful blow to you,’ said De Vries as they shook hands.

Sebastian nodded and, feeling rather hypocritical, mumbled that it was.

‘Dreadful, dreadful,’ the other repeated. ‘But of course one must never forget that even death has its values.’

He turned back to Mrs. Thwale.

‘I came up here to see if there was anything I could do to help you.’

‘That was very kind of you, Paul.’

She lifted her eyelids and gave him an intent, significant look; the unparted lips trembled into a faint smile. Then she looked down again at the white hands lying folded in her lap.

Paul De Vries’s face lit up with pleasure; and suddenly, in a flash of insight, Sebastian perceived that the fellow was in love with her, and that she knew it and permitted it.

He was overcome with a fury of jealousy, jealousy all the more painful for knowing itself futile, all the more violent because he was too young to be able to avow it without making a fool of himself. If he told her what he felt, she would simply laugh at him. It would be another of his humiliations.

‘I think I ought to go,’ he muttered, and began to move towards the door.

‘You’re not running away, are you?’ said Mrs. Thwale.

Sebastian halted and looked round. Her eyes were fixed upon him. He flinched away from their dark enigmatic regard.

‘I’ve got to … to write some letters,’ he invented; and turning, he hurried out of the room.

‘Do you see that?’ said Mrs. Thwale as the door closed. ‘The poor boy’s jealous of you.’

‘Jealous?’ the young man repeated in a tone of incredulous astonishment.

He hadn’t noticed anything. But then, of course, he seldom did notice things. It was a fact about himself which he knew and was even rather proud of. When one’s mind is busy with really important, exciting ideas, one can’t be bothered with the trivial little events of daily life.

‘Well, I suppose you’re right,’ he said with a smile. ‘“The desire of the moth for the star.” It’s probably very good for the boy,’ he added in the tone of a wise, benevolent humanist. ‘Hopeless passions are part of a liberal education. That’s the way adolescents learn how to sublimate sex.’

‘Do they?’ said Mrs. Thwale with a seriousness so absolute that a more perspicacious man would have divined the underlying irony.

But Paul De Vries only nodded emphatically.

‘By discovering the values of romantic love,’ he said. ‘That’s how they achieve sublimation. Havelock Ellis has some beautiful things to say about it in one of his …’

Becoming suddenly aware that this wasn’t at all what he really wanted to talk to her about, he broke off.

‘Damn Havelock Ellis!’ he said; and there was a long silence.

Mrs. Thwale sat quite still, waiting for what she knew was going to happen next. And, sure enough, he suddenly sat down on the sofa beside her, took her hand and squeezed it between both of his.

She raised her eyes, and Paul De Vries gazed back at her with a tremulous little smile of the most intense yearning. But Mrs. Thwale’s face remained

unalterably grave, as though love were too serious a thing to be smiled over. With those nostrils of his, she was thinking, he looked like one of those abjectly sentimental dogs. Ludicrous, but at the same time a bit distasteful. But then it was always a question of choosing between two evils. She looked down again.

The young man raised her unresponsive fingers to his lips and kissed them with a kind of religious reverence. But her perfume had a kind of sultry and oppressive sweetness; her neck was flawlessly round and smooth and white; under the stretched black silk he could imagine the firmness of the small breasts. Yearning came sharply into focus as desire. He whispered her name and, abruptly, rather clumsily, put one arm round her shoulders and with the other hand raised her face towards his own. But before he could kiss her Mrs. Thwale had drawn away from him.

‘No, Paul. Please.’

‘But, my darling …’

He caught hold of her hand and tried once again to draw her towards him. She stiffened and shook her head.

‘I said no, Paul.’

Her tone was peremptory: he desisted.

‘Don’t you care for me at all, Veronica?’ he said plaintively.

Mrs. Thwale looked at him in silence, and for a moment she was tempted to answer the fool as he deserved. But that would be silly. Gravely, she nodded.

‘I’m very fond of you, Paul. But you seem to forget,’ she added with a sudden smile and change of tone, ‘that I’m what’s known as a respectable woman. Sometimes I wish I weren’t. But there it is!’

Yes, there it was — an insurmountable obstacle in the way of modified celibacy. And meanwhile he loved her as he had never loved anyone before. Loved uncontrollably, beyond reason, to the verge of insanity. Loved to the point of being haunted by the thought of her, of being possessed by the lovely demon of her desirableness.

The small inert hand which he had been holding came suddenly to life and was withdrawn.

‘Besides,’ she went on gravely, ‘we’re forgetting poor Mr. Barnack.’

‘Damn Mr. Barnack!’ he couldn’t help snapping.

‘Paul!’ she protested, and her face took on an expression of distress. ‘Really …’

‘I’m sorry,’ he said, between his teeth.

Elbows on knees, head between hands, he stared unseeingly at the patch of Chinese carpet between his feet. He was thinking, resentfully, how the demon would break in upon him while he was reading. There was no preservative or exorcism; even the most excitingly new and important books were powerless against the obsession. Instead of quantum mechanics, instead of the individuation field, it would suddenly be the pale oval of her face that filled his mind, it would be her voice, and the way she looked at you, and her perfume, and the white roundness of her neck and arms. And yet he had always sworn to himself that he would never get married, that he’d give all his time and thought and energies to this great work of his, to the bridge-building which was so obviously and providentially his vocation.

All at once he felt the touch of her hand on his hair and, looking up, found her smiling at him, almost tenderly.

‘You mustn’t be sad, Paul.’

He shook his head.

‘Sad, and mad, and probably bad as well.’

‘No, don’t say that,’ she said, and with a quick movement she laid her fingers lightly over his mouth. ‘Not bad, Paul; never bad.’

He caught her hand and covered it with kisses. Unprotestingly, she abandoned it for a few seconds to his passion, then gently took it back.

‘And now,’ she said, ‘I want to hear all about your visit to that man you were telling me about yesterday.’

His face brightened.

‘You mean Loria?’

She nodded.

‘Oh, that was really exciting,’ said Paul De Vries. ‘He’s the man who’s been carrying on Peano’s work in mathematical logic.’

‘Is he as good as Russell?’ asked Mrs. Thwale, who recalled an earlier conversation on the same subject.

‘That’s just the question *I’ve* been asking myself,’ the young man cried delightedly.

‘Great minds think alike,’ said Mrs. Thwale.

Smiling an enchantingly playful smile, she rapped with her knuckles first on her own forehead, then on his.

‘And now I want to hear about your exciting Professor Loria.’

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

TO THE TUNE of ‘Under the Bamboo Tree,’ to the accompaniment of Timmy Williams’s knowing laughter, again, again:

Probably constip,

Probably constip,

Probably constipaysh …

But of course it wasn’t true. He had always known that it wasn’t true.

There was an awareness once more of an all-pervading silence that shone and was alive. Beautiful with more than the beauty of even Mozart’s music, more than the beauty of the sky after sunset, of the evening star emerging into visibility between the cypresses.

And from those cypresses he found himself moving across the lattice to the discovery of himself at Paestum in the dusk of a windy autumn twilight, to a memory of the Vale of the White Horse as the July sunshine poured down with a kind of desperate intensity out of a blue gulf between mountainous continents of thunder-cloud. And here was the Maize God from Copan, and the ‘Last Communion of St. Jerome.’ And that thing of Constable’s at the Victoria and Albert, and — yes!— ‘Susanna and the Elders.’

But this wasn’t Tintoret’s pale silhouette of a marbly and majestic nakedness. This was Mimi. Mimi as she squatted on the divan, short-legged, opaquely white against the garish cushions.

And suddenly he was participating once more in that relentless knowledge of an absence so hideous that there could be nothing but self-abhorrence, nothing but shame, judgment, condemnation.

To escape from the pain he turned once more towards the parting of the dressing-gown, towards the fondlings and the dandlings, the cigar and the

laughter. But this time the light refused to be eclipsed. Instead, it grew brighter, impossibly; grew unendurably more beautiful.

Terror modulated into resentment, into a passion of rage and hatred. And as though by magic he had, at one stroke, repossessed himself of all his four vocabularies of obscenity — the native English, the painstakingly acquired German and French and Italian.

The uprush of his anger, the torrent of those words, brought him immediate relief. The urgency of the light diminished, and there was no more participation in the knowledge, by which he was compelled to judge himself shameful. Nothing remained but that beauty, far off in the background, like the sky after sunset. But now he had seen through its loveliness, knew it was only a bait to lure one on into some horrible kind of suicide.

Suicide, suicide — they were all trying to persuade one to commit suicide. And here was the fragment of himself represented by Bruno in the bookshop, Bruno on the way to the station. Looking at one with those eyes of his, talking so gently about the need of allowing oneself to be forgiven, even trying to hypnotize one. To hypnotize one into self-destruction.

Slipping sideways, as it were, on to another plane of the lattice, he found himself all of a sudden in contact with a knowledge which he knew immediately as Bruno’s. The knowledge, dim and irrelevant, of a bare hotel bedroom and, at the same time, overpoweringly, of the light. Tenderly blue, this time. Blue and somehow musical. A systole and diastole of radiance, singing voicelessly within the whorls of an unseen shell.

Beauty and peace and tenderness — immediately recognized and immediately rejected. Known, only to be hated, only to be defiled, idiomatically, in four languages.

St. Willibald saying his prayers in the bedroom of a fourth-rate hotel. St. Wunnibald staring at his navel. It was asinine. It was contemptible. And if the fool imagined that, by playing these tricks, he could shame one into wanting to commit suicide, he was entirely mistaken. Who did he think he was, fooling about with that damned light? But whatever he might think, the fact remained

that he was just old man Bruno, just a scrubby little bookseller with a half-baked intelligence and a gift of the gab.

And then he was aware that Bruno was not alone, that Bruno's knowledge of the light was not the only knowledge. There was a whole galaxy of awarenesses. Bright by participation, made one with the light that gave them their being. Made one and yet recognizable, within the Universal Possibility, as possibilities that had actually been realized.

In the hotel bedroom the knowledge of that tender and musical radiance was growing more complete. And as it did so, the blueness brightened up towards a purer incandescence, the music modulated from significance through heightened significance into the ultimate perfection of silence.

'Willibald, Wunnibald. In a fourth-rate hotel. And let's hope there's a couple of German honeymooners in the next room.' Showing off what he could do with the light! But that didn't prevent him from being a silly little rag-and-bone merchant, a pedlar of mouldy rubbish. 'And if he seriously imagines he can browbeat one into feeling ashamed …'

Abruptly, Eustace was aware of what the other knew. Was aware by acquaintance, not from the outside only, but in an act of identification. And in the same instant he became aware again of the unutterable ugliness of his own opaque and fragmentary being.

Shameful, shameful…. But he refused to feel ashamed. He'd be damned if he'd let himself be dragooned into suicide. Yes, he'd be damned, he'd be damned!…

In the brightness and the silence his thoughts were like lumps of excrement, like the noise of vomiting. And the more repulsive they seemed, the more frantic became his anger and hatred.

Damned light! Bloody little rag-and-bone man! But now there was no longer any rest or respite to be found in being angry. His hatred blazed, but blazed in the face of an unobscured radiance. The four vocabularies of obscenity vomited themselves out in a silence with which in some sort he was identified, a silence that merely emphasized the hideousness of that which interrupted it.

All the elation of anger and hatred, all the distracting excitement, died away, and he was left with nothing but the naked, negative experience of revulsion. Painful intrinsically and at the same time a cause of further pain. For the unobscured light and the uninterruptible silence, which were the objects of his loathing, compelled him once again to know himself to sit in judgment, to condemn.

Other fragments of himself made their appearance. Ten pages of Proust, and a trot round the Bargello; St. Sebastian among the Victorian ornaments, and the Young Man of Peoria. *Fascinatio nugacitatis.* But all the trifling which had once enchanted him was now not only profoundly wearisome, but also, in some negative way, profoundly evil. And yet it had to be persisted in; for the alternative was a total self-knowledge and self-abandonment, a total attention and exposure to the light.

So now it was Mimi again. And in the brightness, with which he was now unescapably identified, those too had to be persisted in — those long afternoons in the little flat behind Santa Croce. Interminable cold frictions; the strigil rasping and rasping, but without titillation. *Adesso comincia la tortura.* And it never stopped, because he couldn’t allow it to stop, for fear of what might happen if he did. There was no escape, except along this path which led him yet further into captivity.

Suddenly Bruno Rontini stirred a little and coughed. Eustace was aware, at one remove, of a heightened awareness of the bleak little bedroom and the noise of the traffic climbing in low gear up the steep approaches to Perugia. Then this irrelevant knowledge was quietly put aside, and there was only silence again and brightness.

Or was there perhaps another path? A way that would lead one around these excremental clots of old experience and the condemnation they imposed? The silence and the brightness were pregnant with the unequivocal answer: there was no way round, there was only the way through. And of course he knew all about it, he knew exactly where it led.

But if that way were followed, what would happen to Eustace Barnack? Eustace Barnack would be dead. Stone dead, extinct, annihilated. There'd be nothing but this damned light, this fiendish brightness in the silence. His hatred flared up again; and then, almost instantly, the delightful and exhilarating heat was quenched. Nothing was left him but a frigid and frightened revulsion and, along with the revulsion, the excruciating knowledge that his hatred and his revulsion were equally disgusting.

But better this pain than its alternative; better this knowledge of his own hatefulness than the extinction of all knowledge whatsoever. Anything rather than that! Even these eternities of empty foolery, these eternities of a lust devoid of all pleasure. Ten pages of Proust, and the juxtaposition of wax flowers and St. Sebastian. Again and again. And after that the repetitions of those corpse-cold sensualities, the fondlings, the dandlings, the endless obligatory fumblings, to the accompaniment of 'Probably Constip' and 'The Young Man of Peoria.' Thousands of times, hundreds of thousands of times. And the little joke about St. Willibald, the little joke about St. Wunnibald. And Mr. Cheeryble with his thurible, Mr. Chatterjee with his Mr. Chatterjee with his Mr. Chatterjee with … And again the same ten pages of Proust, the same wax flowers and St. Sebastian, the same blind brown breast-eyes and the torture of compulsory lust, while the Young Man of Peoria kept on murmuring the Credo, murmuring the Sanctus, murmuring a string of flawlessly idiomatic obscenities in a luminous silence which made each one of their million repetitions seem yet more senseless than the last, yet more drearily disgusting.

But there was no alternative, no alternative except giving in to the light, except dying out into the silence. But anything rather than that, anything, anything….

And then suddenly there was salvation. A knowledge, first of all, that there were other knowledges. Not like Bruno's beastly conspiracy with the light. Not like that galaxy of awarenesses within the knowledge of all possibility. No, no. These other awarenesses were cosily similar to his own. And all of them were concerned with himself, with his own beloved and opaque identity. And their

concern was like the fluttering shadow of a host of wings, like the cry and chatter of innumerable agitated little birds, shutting out that insupportable light, shattering that accursed silence, bringing respite and relief, bringing the blessed right to be himself and not ashamed of the fact.

He rested there in the delicious, twittering confusion, of which he had become the centre, and would have been happy so to rest for ever. But better things were reserved for him. Suddenly and without warning there dawned a new, more blissful phase of his salvation. He was in possession of something infinitely precious, something of which, as he now realized, he had been deprived throughout the whole duration of these horrible eternities — a set of bodily sensations. There was an experience, thrillingly direct and immediate, of the warm, living darkness behind closed eyelids; of faint voices, not remembered, but actually heard out there in front; of a touch of lumbago in the small of the back; of a thousand obscure little aches and pressures and tensions from within and from without. And what an odd kind of heaviness in the lower inwards! What curiously unfamiliar sensations of weight and constriction out there in front of the chest!

‘I think she’s gone under,’ said the Queen Mother in a harsh stage whisper.

‘She certainly seems to be breathing very stertorously,’ Paul De Vries agreed. ‘Snoring is always indicative of relaxation,’ he added instructively. ‘That’s why thin nervous people so seldom …’

Mrs. Gamble cut him short.

‘Kindly let go of my hand,’ she said. ‘I want to blow my nose.’

Her bracelets tinkled in the darkness. There was a rustling and a snort.

‘Now, where are you?’ she asked, clawing for his hand. ‘Ah, here! I hope everybody’s holding tight.’

‘*I* certainly am,’ said the young man.

He spoke gaily; but the squeeze he administered to the soft hand on his right was lingeringly tender. To his delight the pressure was faintly, but quite perceptibly, returned.

Ambushed in the darkness, Mrs. Thwale was thinking of the shameless essence of love.

‘And what about you, Sebastian?’ she asked, turning her head.

‘I’m all right,’ he answered with a nervous giggle. ‘I’m still holding on.’

But so was that stinking De Vries! Holding on and being held on to. Whereas if *he* were to squeeze her hand, she’d probably announce the fact to the rest of the company, and they’d all simply howl with laughter. All the same, he had a good mind to do it in spite of everything. As an outrage — just as she had said. De Vries was in love with her and, for all he knew, she was in love with De Vries. Very well, then; the biggest *non sequitur* possible in the circumstances would be for him to say or do something to show that *he* was in love with her. But when it came to actually committing the outrage of squeezing her hand, Sebastian found himself hesitant. Did he have the nerve or didn’t he? Was it really worth it, or wasn’t it?

‘They say that holding hands does something to the vibrations,’ announced the Queen Mother from her end of the row.

‘Well, it’s not impossible,’ said Paul De Vries judicially. ‘In the light of the most recent researches into the electric potentials of the various muscle groups …’

In five seconds, Sebastian was saying to himself, with the imaginary pistol barrel pressed once again to his temple, in five seconds the world would have come to an end. Nothing mattered any more. But still he didn’t act. Nothing mattered, nothing mattered, he was still despairingly repeating, when all at once he felt her hand coming to life within his own. Then, startlingly, her finger-tips began to trace little circles on his palm. Again, again, deliciously, electrically. Then without warning she dug her pointed nails into his flesh. For a second only, after which the fingers straightened out and relaxed, and he found himself holding a hand as limp and passive and inert as it had been before.

‘And then,’ Paul De Vries was saying, ‘one has to consider the possibility of mitotic radiations as a factor in the phenom …’

‘Sh-sh! She’s saying something.’

Out of the darkness in front of them came a squeaky childish voice.

‘This is Bettina,’ it said. ‘This is Bettina.’

‘Good-evening, Bettina,’ cried the Queen Mother, in a tone that was intended to be gay and ingratiating. ‘How are things over on the other side?’

‘Fine!’ said the squeak, which belonged, as Mrs. Byfleet had explained before the lights were turned out, to a little girl who had passed on in the San Francisco earthquake. ‘Everything’s fine. Everyone’s feeling good. But poor old Gladys here — she’s quite sick.’

‘Yes, we’re all *so* sorry that Mrs. Byfleet shouldn’t be feeling well.’

‘Not feeling good at all.’

‘Most unfortunate!’ replied the Queen Mother with hardly disguised impatience. It was she who had insisted on Mrs. Byfleet’s giving the séance in spite of her indisposition. ‘But I hope it won’t interfere with the communications.’

The squeak said something about ‘doing our best,’ and tailed off into incoherence. Then the medium sighed profoundly and snored a little. There was a silence.

What did it mean, Sebastian was wondering. What on earth could it mean? His heart was beating like a sledge-hammer. Once again the barrel of the revolver was pressed against his forehead. In five seconds the world would come to an end. One, two, three … He squeezed her hand. Waited a second. Squeezed it again. But there was no responsive pressure, no indication of any kind that she had even noticed what he had done. Sebastian felt himself overcome by the most excruciating embarrassment.

‘I always like to have my first séance as soon after the funeral as possible,’ the Queen Mother remarked. ‘Even before it, if the thing can be arranged. Nothing like striking the iron while it’s hot.’

There was a pause. Then, eager but monotonously flat, Paul De Vries’s voice broke in.

‘I keep thinking,’ he said, ‘of Mr. Pewsey’s address at the graveside this afternoon. Most touching, didn’t you think? And so felicitously worded. “Friend

of the arts and artist in friendship." He couldn't have phrased it better.'

'Which doesn't prevent him,' rasped the Queen Mother, 'from having the most disgusting habits. If it weren't for Veronica and that boy, I'd tell you a few of the things I happen to know about Tom Pewsey.'

'There's somebody here,' the squeak startlingly announced. 'He's very anxious to get in touch with you folks.'

'Tell him we're waiting,' said the Queen Mother in the tone of one who gives orders to the footman.

'Only just come over,' the squeak went on. 'Seems he doesn't rightly know he's passed on.'

For Paul De Vries the words were like the fresh scent of a rabbit to a nosing dog; he was off in a flash.

'Isn't that interesting!' he exclaimed. 'He doesn't know he's passed on. But they all say that, from the Mahayana Buddhists down to …'

But the squeak had begun to mutter something.

'Can't you stop interrupting?' said the Queen Mother.

'I'm sorry,' he murmured.

In the darkness Mrs. Thwale sympathetically pressed his right hand and, in the same instant, disinterested and platonic, crooked a delicate forefinger and across the centre of Sebastian's left palm traced out the four letters, L, O, V, E, and then another, unavowable combination, and another. An effervescence of soundless laughter bubbled up within her.

'He's so glad you folks are all here,' said the squeak, becoming suddenly articulate. 'He can't say how happy it makes him.'

'Not that one would have expressed it with quite so much pathetic emphasis,' Eustace was thinking. 'But substantially it's the truth.'

That damned light was now definitively out; and with these newly recovered sensations hopping and twittering like twenty thousand sparrows, there was no question any more of silence. And how delightful even lumbago could be, even this obscure and unfamiliar belly-ache! And the Queen Mother's nutmeg-grater voice — no Mozart had ever sounded sweeter! Of course, it was unfortunate

that, for some reason, everything had to pass through the filter of this intermediate knowledge. Or rather this intermediate ignorance; for it was just a lump of organized imbecility, that was all. You gave it the choicest of your little jokes, and four times out of five it came out with unadulterated nonsense. What a hash, for example, it made of the things he said when that American fellow started talking about psychic factors, or whatever it was! And when he wanted to quote Sebastian's line about two buttocks and a pendulous bub, it kept on talking in a bewildered way about pendulums — bucks and pendulums. Too idiotic! However, he did at least manage to get in one good dig at the Queen Mother, to get it in almost verbatim; for even a half-wit couldn't make a mistake about the word 'claws.'

And then something very curious happened.

'Is it true,' Mrs. Thwale suddenly enquired in a tone of excessive and altogether improbable innocence, 'is it true that, where you are, there isn't any marrying or giving in marriage?'

The words seemed to touch a trigger; there was a kind of mental jerk, an almost violent displacement of consciousness — and Eustace found himself aware, as though in vivid memory, of events which had not happened to himself, events which, he somehow knew, had not as yet happened at all. Wearing a broad-shouldered fur coat and a preposterous hat like something out of a Winterhalter portrait of the Empress Eugenie, Mrs. Thwale was sitting on a platform with a lot of naval officers, while a man with tousled hair and a Middle Western accent bellowed into a microphone. 'Liberty Ship,' he kept saying, 'four hundred and fifty-ninth Liberty Ship.' And, sure enough, that enormous precipice of iron out there to the left was a ship's prow. And now Mrs. Thwale was on her feet swinging a champagne bottle on the end of a string. And then the precipice began to move away, and there was a lot of cheering. And while she was smiling up at an Admiral and some Captains, De Vries came running up and began to talk to them about the exciting new developments in ballistics …

'I'm not the one who's thinking about marriage,' he said jocularly.

But what the imbecile actually uttered was, ‘We don’t think about marriage over here.’

Eustace began to protest, but was distracted from his irritation by the emergence of another of those clear memories of what had not yet happened. Little Thwale on a sofa with a very young officer, like those beardless children one used to see during the war. And really, really, the things she permitted herself! And always with that faintly ironical smile, that expression of detached curiosity in the bright dark eyes, which always remained wide open and observant, whatever might be happening. Whereas the boy, in his effort to hold the pleasure in, to shut the shame and the embarrassment out, kept *his* eyes tightly closed.

The moving images faded into nothingness and, at the thought of De Vries’s horns and the inevitable connection between war and lust, between the holiest crusades and the most promiscuous copulations, Eustace started to laugh. ‘Backwards and downwards, Christian soldiers,’ he said in the interval between two paroxysms of amusement.

‘He says we’re all Christian soldiers,’ pronounced the squeak; and then, almost immediately, ‘Good-bye, folks,’ it called, ‘good-bye, good-bye.’

Laughter, a crescendo of laughter. Then, all of a sudden, Eustace realized that the blissful experience of sensation was beginning to ebb away from him. The voices from outside grew dimmer and more confused; the small obscure awarenesses of pressure, touch and tension faded away. And at last there was nothing left, not even the lumbago, not even the idiot interpreter. Nothing but the hunger for what he had lost and, emerging again from its long eclipse behind the opacity and the delicious noise, that pure, shining silence of the light. Brighter, ever more urgently, ever more austerely and menacingly beautiful. Perceiving his danger, Eustace directed all his attention to little Thwale and her uniformed adolescent, to the enormous, cosmic joke of crusades and copulation. ‘Downwards and backwards, Christian soldiers,’ he repeated. Making a deliberate effort, he laughed more heartily than ever.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IT WAS ONLY a little after seven when Sebastian came down next morning for another solitary stroll in the garden — another wandering through *Lycidas* in the direction of his own as yet unnamed and unwritten poem. It would begin, he had decided, with the Venus of the balustrade — shaped by a mind out of the shapelessness of stone. Order born of a chaos that itself was composed of innumerable lesser orders. And the statue would be the emblem of an individual life in its possible and ideal excellence, just as the garden as a whole would stand for the ideally excellent life of a society. From the ideally excellent he would pass to the actualities of ugliness, cruelty, ineptitude, death. After which, in a third part, ecstasy and intelligence would build the bridges leading from the actual to the ideal — from the blue tart and his father's severities to Mrs. Thwale and Mary Esdaile, from the corpse in the lavatory to Theocritus and Marvell.

Precisely how all this would be put across without becoming a bore he wouldn't know until he had actually got to work among the words in which it was to be expressed. Hitherto the only words that had come to him were connected with poor old Uncle Eustace and last night's séance, and would take their place somewhere in the second part.

'This Thing was once a man,' he repeated to himself, as he walked up and down the terrace in the early sunshine.

This Thing was once a man —

Take it for all in all,

Like the old piano …

No, no, that was wrong: make it 'old Bechstein.'

Like the old Bechstein, auctioned off for nothing; And men in aprons come for it with a van, Shuffling across the hall.

Of the lines that followed, he still felt a bit uncertain.

But somebody in the empty drawing-room, Strumming the non-existent keys …

He shook his head. ‘Non-existent’ was journalistic. The word to aim at was ‘absence.’ ‘Strumming the absence of its keys.’ Or, better perhaps, ‘strumming an absence of departed keys.’

But somebody in the empty drawing-room, Strumming an absence of departed keys, Still plays the old Chaconne and Für Elise And Yes, sir, she’s my baby, yes, sir, she’s My baby, yes, sir, till the crack of doom.

Which was certainly what it had seemed like at the séance, with that idiotic squeak quoting Uncle Eustace’s smallest jokes, and even misquoting, as Sebastian had finally realized, his own little effort about Degas. But meanwhile there was that ‘crack of doom’ to be considered. Did circumstances justify the cliché? Or mightn’t it be better to protract the sentence a little to lead it on, winding and serpentine, through ‘tomb,’ perhaps, or alternatively through an interrogatory ‘whom?’ into further recesses of the subject?

Sebastian was still debating the question, when something happened to interrupt the flow of his thoughts. The small girl he had seen that dreadful morning in the hall suddenly appeared at the top of the steps carrying, not a baby this time or a chicken, but a large basket. Startled by his unexpected presence, she halted and looked at him for a few seconds with an expression of uncertainty, almost of fear. Sebastian gave her a smile. Reassured by this display of benevolence on the part of one of the terrifying *signori*, the little girl smiled back and, walking in an excess of deference on the very tips of her clumsy boots, crossed the terrace and began to weed the flower-bed which ran in a narrow strip of colour and perfume at the foot of the villa’s long façade.

Sebastian continued his promenading. But the presence of the child was an insurmountable obstacle to further composition. It was not that she made any noise, or indulged in any violence of movement. No, the trouble lay deeper. What distracted him was the fact that she was working messily in the earth, while he strolled up and down with his hands in his pockets. The proximity of the poor always made him feel uncomfortable, and to discomfort was added,

when they worked and he apparently did nothing, a sense of shame. These were feelings which ought, he supposed, to have made him want to follow in his father's footsteps. But politics always seemed so futile and unimportant. His ordinary reaction from the shame and discomfort was a flight from the situation which had occasioned them. And today the situation was even worse than usual. For the worker was a child, who ought to have been playing; and the poverty, contrasted with this surrounding magnificence, seemed peculiarly outrageous. Sebastian glanced at his watch and, in case she might be looking at him (which she wasn't), overacted the part of one who suddenly realizes that he is late for an important business appointment and hurried away. Half-way to the front door he suddenly remembered that he actually had a reason to hurry. He was going down into the town after lunch. Nominally to do some sight-seeing. But really, he had already decided, to get himself measured for his evening clothes — that was to say, if he could first sell the Degas.

He ran up to his room and came down again with his dispatch-case. The drawing-room was empty, and the old persistent whiff of Uncle Eustace's cigars had so far faded that it smelt only of potpourri. A long pencil of sunlight crossed the room and, as though with some mysterious purpose, lit up the three pelicans in the background of Piero's picture.

The drawings were lying on the marble-topped table that stood in the embrasure of the central window. Sebastian walked over, unfolded the brown paper, and from between the two protecting sheets of cardboard withdrew his legacy. Two buttocks and a pendulous bub. He placed the drawing in his dispatch-case and closed the lid. Then, very carefully, he folded the paper as it had been before. Degas and dinner jacket — now that poor old Uncle Eustace was dead, they were nobody's business but his own.

A thin little noise of treble singing made him start. He looked out through the open window. There, almost immediately below him, squatted the child from whom he had just fled. Her small grubby hands moved delicately among the hyacinths, pulling up here a groundsel, there a couple of blades of grass, so that all might be perfect and in order for the *signori*.

‘Gobbo rotondo,’ she sang to herself, *‘che fai in questo mondo?’*

Then, becoming somehow aware of the alien presence above her, she looked up and saw Sebastian. An expression of guilt and terror came into her eyes; the almost colourless cheeks flushed crimson.

‘Scusi, signore,’ she muttered in a trembling voice. *‘Scusi.’*

Sebastian, who was almost as much embarrassed as the little girl, withdrew his head abruptly and, moving away from the window, bent down to pick up his dispatch-case.

‘What *are* you doing?’ a low clear voice enquired behind him.

He started and turned. But without waiting for his answer, Mrs. Thwale had gone over to the window and was looking out.

‘Cosa fai?’ she asked.

From the terrace outside, the frightened voice made some incomprehensible answer.

Mrs. Thwale shrugged her shoulders and came back into the room.

‘What were you talking to the child about?’

‘I wasn’t,’ Sebastian stammered. ‘I was just … well, she was singing.’

‘So you listened, and now you’re going to sit down and do a slight Wordsworth about it?’

He laughed uncomfortably.

‘And those are your manuscripts, I suppose?’

She indicated the dispatch-case.

Only too grateful for the suggestion, Sebastian nodded.

‘Well, put them down and come out into the garden.’

Obediently he followed her across the hall and through the front door.

‘And how did you enjoy the séance?’ she asked, as he came up with her on the terrace.

‘Oh, it was interesting,’ he answered non-committally.

‘Interesting?’ she repeated. ‘Only that?’

Sebastian blushed and averted his eyes. She was giving him an opportunity to say something about what had happened last night — to ask her what it had

meant, to tell her about Mary Esdaile. But the words wouldn't come. They simply wouldn't come.

Mrs. Thwale glanced at the red, agonized face beside her, and almost laughed aloud. What exquisitely comic situations could arise with a person too timid to speak! The most outrageous actions, and not a word uttered, no reference ever made to them. Officially nothing would have happened; for there wouldn't be any communiqué. But actually, actually …

'What a Punch and Judy show!' she said at last, breaking the long silence.

'You mean the séance?'

Mrs. Thwale nodded.

'All the same, it seemed genuine, didn't it? I mean, sometimes,' Sebastian added, hedging a little for fear of finding himself compelled to defend a too explicit opinion.

But the precaution was unnecessary.

'Perfectly genuine,' she agreed. 'Death cocking snooks at reverence and piety in exactly the same way as life does.'

They had reached the head of the steps, and she halted to look down, between the cypresses, at the roofs of Florence. Shamelessness at the core; but on the surface Brunelleschi and Michelangelo, good manners and Lanvin clothes, art and science and religion. And the charm of life consisted precisely in the inconsistency between essence and appearance, and the art of living in a delicate acrobacy of *sauts périlleux* from one world to the other, in a prestidigitation that could always discover the obscenity of rabbits at the bottom of even the glossiest high hat and, conversely, the elegant decency of a hat to conceal even the most pregnant and lascivious of rodents.

'Well, we can't stand here for ever,' Mrs. Thwale said at last. They moved on. As though casually and unreflectingly, she laid a hand on Sebastian's shoulder.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

‘A DRAWING TO sell?’

M. Weyl put on the bored, contemptuous expression he always assumed on these occasions. But when the boy opened his case and revealed the Degas that had been sold to *ce pauvre Monsieur Eustache* only four days before, he could not restrain a start of surprise.

‘From where have you got this drawing?’ he asked.

‘It was given to me,’ Sebastian answered.

‘Given?’

‘*Tout est possible*,’ M. Weyl said to himself. But there had never been any suggestion that the old man was a homosexual.

Conscious that he had become an object of suspicion, Sebastian blushed.

‘By my uncle,’ he said. ‘You probably knew him. Mr. Barnack.’

‘Your uncle?’

M. Weyl’s expression changed. He smiled; he seized Sebastian’s hand in both of his and shook it.

One of his most valued clients. One of his truest friends, he ventured to say. He had been *bouleversé* by the tragic news. An irreparable loss to art. He could only offer his sincerest condolences.

Sebastian stammered his thanks.

‘And the good uncle, he gave you this drawing?’

The other nodded.

‘Just a few hours before …’

‘Before the supreme adieu,’ said Gabriel Weyl poetically. ‘What a sentimental value it must possess for you!’

Sebastian blushed a deeper crimson. To justify himself, he mumbled something about his having no place to hang the drawing. Besides, there was a

sum of money which had to be paid out immediately — almost a debt of honour, he added as a picturesque afterthought. Otherwise he wouldn't have dreamt of parting with his uncle's present.

M. Weyl nodded sympathetically; but his eyes were bright with calculation.

'Tell me,' he asked, 'for what reason did you address yourself to me in this affair?'

'For no reason,' Sebastian answered. M. Weyl's happened to be the first art dealer's shop he had seen as he walked up the Via Tornabuoni.

That meant that he didn't know where the drawing had been bought. M. Weyl laughed gaily and patted Sebastian on the shoulder.

'The hazard,' he said sententiously, 'is often our surest guide.'

He looked down at the drawing, screwed up his eyelids and critically cocked his head.

'Pretty,' he said, 'pretty. Though hardly the master's best work.' He laid his finger on the buttocks. 'One remarks the effects of failing sight, *hein?*'

'Well, I didn't think so,' said Sebastian, in a manful effort to defend his property from disparagement.

There was a little pause.

'If your good uncle gave you other things,' said M. Weyl in a casual tone, without looking up, 'I would be more than happy to make an offer. Last time I had the honour of visiting his collection, I recall that I was struck by some of the Chinese bronzes.' His thick, agile hands came together at the level of his face, as though he were clasping and cherishing some almost sacred object. 'What volumes!' he cried enthusiastically. 'What rhythmic sensuality! But small, quite small. One could almost carry them in the pockets.'

Turning to Sebastian, he smiled ingratiatingly.

'I could make you a very good offer for the bronzes,' he said.

'But they're not mine. I mean … he only gave me this.'

'Only this?' the other repeated in a tone of incredulity.

Sebastian dropped his eyes. That smile, that insistent bright regard, made him feel uncomfortable. What was the fellow trying to suggest?

‘Nothing except this,’ he insisted, wishing to God that he had picked on another dealer. ‘But of course, if you’re not interested …’

He started to put the drawing away again.

‘But no, but no!’ cried M. Weyl, laying a restraining hand on his sleeve. ‘On the contrary. I interest myself in everything that Degas ever did — even in the smallest things, the most unimportant.’

Ten minutes later it was all over.

‘… Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one and twenty-two. Correct, *hein*?’

‘Thank you,’ said Sebastian. He took the thick wad of hundred-lire notes and crammed them into his wallet. His face was flushed; his eyes shone with excitement and irrepressible triumph. The man had begun by offering only a thousand. Greatly daring, he had demanded three. They had compromised at last on two thousand two hundred. Ten per cent, above the figure that would have split the difference between demand and offer. Feeling that he had a right to be proud of himself, Sebastian put the wallet back into his pocket and looked up, to find the dealer smiling at him with almost paternal benevolence.

‘A young man who knows how to sell his article of commerce,’ said M. Weyl, patting him once more. ‘In business you will have the most brilliant career.’

‘No business for me,’ Sebastian said. And when the other questioningly raised his eyebrows, ‘You see,’ he added, ‘I’m a poet.’

A poet? But that had been M. Weyl’s own youthful ambition. To express the lyricism of a heart which suffers …

Les chants désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux,

Et j’en sais d’immortels qui sont de purs sanglots.

‘De purs sanglots,’ he repeated. *‘Mais, hélas,* the duty led me otherwhere.’

He sighed, and went on to question Sebastian about his family. Doubtless, in so cultivated a milieu, there was a tradition of poetry and the fine arts? And when the boy answered that his father was a barrister, he insisted on Mr. Barnack’s being one of those legal luminaries who devote their leisures to the Muses.

The idea of his father ever having any leisures or, if he had, devoting them to anything but Blue books, was so funny that Sebastian laughed aloud. But M. Weyl looked offended; and he hastily broke off in order to offer an explanation for his merriment.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘my father’s rather peculiar.’

‘Peculiar?’

Sebastian nodded, and in his broken incoherent style embarked upon an account of John Barnack’s career. And somehow, in his present mood, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to make the picture heroic — to harp on his father’s successes as an advocate, to magnify his political importance, to stress the greatness of his self-sacrifice.

‘But what generosity!’ cried M. Weyl.

Sebastian responded to the words as if they had been a compliment addressed to himself. A tingling warmth ran up his spine.

‘He has lots of money,’ he went on. ‘But he gives it all away. To political refugees and that kind of thing.’

The pleasure of vicariously boasting had made him momentarily forget his hatred of those bloodsuckers who took what rightfully should have been his and left him without even a dinner jacket.

‘There’s a chap called Cacciaguida, for example …’

‘You mean the Professor?’

Sebastian nodded. M. Weyl cast a quick glance round the shop and, though it was empty, resumed the conversation in a lower tone.

‘Is *he* a friend of your father’s?’

‘He came to dinner with us,’ Sebastian answered importantly, ‘just before we started for Florence.’

‘Personally,’ M. Weyl whispered, after taking another look round the shop, ‘I find him a great man. But permit me to give you a good advice.’

He winked expressively, raised a forefinger to his floridly sculptured lips, and shook his head. ‘The silence is of gold,’ he pronounced oracularly.

The sudden jangling of the door-bell made them turn with a start, like a pair of conspirators. Two ladies in the early forties, one rather plump and dark, the other fair, sunburnt and athletic, were entering the shop. An expression of rapturous delight appeared on M. Weyl's face.

'Gnädige Baronin!' he cried, *'y la reina de Buenos Aires!'*

Pushing Sebastian aside, he jumped over a *cassettone*, ducked under the right arm of a life-sized crucified Christ and, rushing up to the two ladies, ecstatically kissed their hands.

Unobtrusively, Sebastian slipped out of the shop and, whistling, walked jauntily up the Via Tornabuoni in the direction of the cathedral and Uncle Eustace's tailor.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS, COPULATING soldiers; and all those wars, those holy wars, while echo answers, ‘Whores, whores, whores!’ The God of Battles is always the God of Brothels, always and inevitably the God of Brothels….

For Eustace Barnack, there was no longer any need to force the laughter. It pealed now of its own accord, shattering what remained of that detestable silence, darkening and dissipating the last far gleams of the light.

The whole universe quivered with amusement, rumbled with enormous hilarities. And through the laughter echo kept answering, ‘Whores and Brothels, Whores and Brothels.’

A whole section of his intellectual being was suddenly restored to him. He remembered his collection of Historical Jokes. A million casualties and the Gettysburg Address, and then those abject, frightened negroes one sees in the little towns of Georgia and Louisiana. The crusade for liberty, quality, fraternity, and then the rise of Napoleon; the crusade against Napoleon, and then the rise of German nationalism; the crusade against German nationalism, and now those unemployed men, standing, like half-animated corpses, at the corners of mean streets in the rain.

And this was John’s voice that he now remembered — vibrant with repressed enthusiasm, talking about the end of *laissez-faire* and production for use and the Russian Revolution. In other words, two and a half times the population of London exterminated, in order that political power might be taken from one set of ruffians and given to another set; in order that a process of industrialization might be made a little more rapid and a great deal more ruthless than it otherwise would have been. ‘Downwards and backwards, Anti-Christian soldiers!’

Laughter swelled to a crescendo. He was filled with an enormous elation, with the glory of universal derision, the ecstasy of contempt for everyone.

Silliness and murder, stupidity and destruction! He found the phrases waiting for him. And the motive was always idealism, the instruments were always courage and loyalty — the heroic courage and loyalty without which men and women would never be able to persevere in their long-drawn suicides and assassinations.

And all those treasures of knowledge placed so unhesitatingly at the service of passion! All the genius and intelligence dedicated to the attempt to achieve ends either impossible or diabolic! All the problems inherited from the last crusade and solved by methods that automatically created a hundred new problems. And each new problem would require a new crusade, and each new crusade would leave fresh problems for yet further crusades to solve and multiply in the good old way.

And then there were the Triumphs of Religion and Science. Reforming Protestantism — sponsor of capitalistic exploitation. Francis of Assisi miraculously upholding a Mystical Body that was also a political machine and a business concern. Faraday and Clerk Maxwell working indefatigably that the ether might at last become a vehicle for lies and imbecility.

And then the Triumph of Education — that deity to which his poor father had offered fifty thousand pounds and a Polytechnic Institute in yellow brick. Education, compulsory and gratuitous. Everybody had been taught to read, and the result was Northcliffe and advertisements for cigarettes and laxatives and whisky. Everybody went to school, and everywhere the years of schooling had been made a prelude to military conscription. And what fine courses in false history and self-congratulation! What a thorough grounding in the religions of nationalism! No God any more; but forty-odd infallible Foreign Offices.

Once again, the whole universe shook with laughter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IT WAS TO be a small, informal dinner; and Eustace, after all, was only a relation by marriage, not blood. The Queen Mother had therefore seen no reason for cancelling her acceptance of Lady Worplesden's invitation. And as for staying at home to be with Daisy when she arrived that evening — why, the idea simply didn't occur to her.

'You'll have to entertain my granddaughter single-handed,' she announced to Sebastian at tea-time.

'Single-handed? But I thought Mrs. Thwale …?'

'I'm taking Veronica with me, of course.'

Mrs. Thwale put in a word of reassurance.

'You won't find her in the least formidable.'

'Formidable!' The Queen Mother's tone was contemptuous. 'She's like blancmange.'

'So there'll be no excuse for mumbling. Or for not saying anything at all,' Mrs. Thwale added casually, reaching out for a lump of sugar as she spoke. 'Which is a slight defect of yours that I seem to have noticed.'

'That reminds me,' said the Queen Mother. 'How's he getting on with his mumbling lessons?'

'I'm hoping he'll give you a demonstration one of these days,' Mrs. Thwale answered gravely.

'A demonstration? What demonstration?'

There was no immediate answer. Sebastian raised his eyes and gave Mrs. Thwale a look of agonized entreaty. But the smile she returned was one of bright, impersonal amusement — as if she were looking on at some delicate comedy of manners.

'How do you write a poem?' she murmured under her breath.

‘What’s that you’re saying?’ asked the Queen Mother sharply.

On its withered tortoise’s neck the old head turned questingly from side to side in a succession of quick blind movements.

‘What’s that?’

‘Please.’ Sebastian implored, framing the word voicelessly with lips that trembled in distress. ‘Please!’

For an awful second he was left in uncertainty of what she was going to do next. Then she turned to Mrs. Gamble.

‘It’s nothing,’ she said. ‘Just a silly little joke we have together at our mumbling lessons.’

‘I don’t like people having jokes together,’ the old woman rasped in a harsh resentful tone. With unseeing eyes she glared ferociously at Mrs. Thwale across the tea-table. ‘I don’t like it,’ she repeated: ‘I don’t like it at all.’

In silence Mrs. Thwale examined the fossil scorpion from the Carboniferous.

‘It shan’t happen again, Mrs. Gamble,’ she said at last.

But as she thought of what the submissive words really signified, her eyes brightened and her lips twitched into a little smile of secret triumph. That morning a special messenger had brought her a letter from Paul De Vries — six pages, typewritten, of frenzy and long words. Not yet specifically a proposal of marriage. But it was pretty obvious that Mrs. Gamble would soon have to find herself a new companion.

She got up, stepped softly over to the back of Sebastian’s chair and, singling out one of those scandalously charming curls of his, gave it a short but very painful tug. Then, without even glancing at him, she moved on to where the Queen Mother was sitting and took the cup from between her claw-like hands.

‘Let me give you some fresh tea,’ she said in her low musical voice.

Another woman might have been vexed to find herself treated in this off-hand and discourteous fashion. But Daisy Ockham was so singularly lacking in a sense of her own importance that she was hardly even surprised when the butler gave her Mrs. Gamble’s message.

‘My grandmother’s gone out to dinner,’ she explained to her companion. ‘So we shall be alone this evening.’

The other inclined his head and, in an accent which betrayed that he had not been educated at one of the more ancient and expensive seats of learning, said that it was a pleasure he looked forward to.

Thin, sharp-featured and middle-aged, with brown, damp hair brushed back over a bald spot on the top of his head, Mr. Tendring was dressed for the part of an eminent barrister or Harley Street specialist, but unfortunately without much verisimilitude; for the dark striped trousers had been shoddy even in their palmiest days, the black jacket was manifestly readymade. Only the collar came up to professional standards — high, with flaring wings and an inordinately wide opening through which Mr. Tendring’s neck, with its protuberant Adam’s apple, looked pathetically stringy and at the same time rather unpleasantly naked, almost indecent. A black leather brief-case, too important to be handed over to the footman, who had relieved him of his overcoat, was carried under the right arm.

‘Well, I expect you’d like to go up to your room before dinner,’ said Mrs. Ockham.

Again he inclined his head, this time without speaking.

As they followed the butler towards the staircase, Mr. Tendring looked about him with small appraising eyes — took in the pillars and barrel vaulting of the hall, darted, through the tall double doors, a glance down the long rich vista of the drawing-room, observed the pictures on the walls, the porcelain, the carpets. The thought of all the money that must have been spent to make the house what it was gave him an almost sensual pleasure. He had a deep, disinterested respect for wealth, a tender and admiring love of money for its own sake and without any reference to himself or his immediate needs. Surrounded by these exotic and unfamiliar splendours, he felt no envy, only veneration tinged with a secret satisfaction at the thought that here he was, the greengrocer’s son, the ex-office boy, enjoying the splendours from the inside, as a guest, as the indispensable financial adviser, tax expert and accountant of their new owner. Suddenly, the

grey sharp-featured face relaxed and, like a schoolboy who has succeeded in scoring off his companions, Mr. Tendring positively grinned.

‘Quite a mansion,’ he said to Mrs. Ockham, showing a set of teeth which the suburban dentist had made so brilliantly pearly that they would have seemed improbable in the mouth even of a chorus girl.

‘Quite,’ said Mrs. Ockham vaguely. ‘Quite.’

She was thinking how poignantly familiar it all seemed. As though it were only yesterday that she had been a schoolgirl, coming out to Florence every Christmas and Easter to spend the holidays. And now all the rest were dead. Her father first of all. So old and awe-inspiring, so tall and bushy-eyebrowed and aloof, that his going had really made no difference. But then had come her mother’s turn; and, for Daisy Ockham, her mother had died twice over — once when she married Eustace, and again, for ever, five years later. And when that anguish had been lived down, there had come her marriage and those years of happiness with Francis and little Frankie. Nearly fourteen years of the richest, the intensest living. And then one brilliant holiday morning, with the sea-gulls screaming, and the air full of blown spray, and the great green glassy waves exploding into foam along the beaches, they had gone down for a bathe. Father and son, the man’s hand on the boy’s shoulder, laughing together as they walked. Half an hour later, when she followed them down to the beach with the thermos of hot milk and the biscuits, she met the fishermen carrying the two bodies up from the water…. And now it was poor Eustace, whom her mother had loved and whom, for that reason, she herself had passionately hated. But then her mother had died, and Eustace had fallen out of her life, had become a casual acquaintance, encountered occasionally in other people’s houses — and once every year or so, when there was business to discuss, they would meet by appointment at the solicitor’s and, from Lincoln’s Inn, when everything had been settled, he would take her to lunch at the Savoy, and she would listen to his odd, disconcerting talk, so utterly unlike anything she heard at home, and laugh and reflect that, after all, he was really very nice in his funny way. Very nice

indeed and very clever, and it was a shame he didn't do anything with his gifts and all that money.

Well, now he was dead, and all that money was hers — all that money and, along with it, all the responsibility for using it as it ought to be used, as God would want it to be used. At the mere thought of the future burden, Mrs. Ockham sighed profoundly. This house, for example — what on earth should she do with it? And all the servants? There must be a dozen of them.

'It was terribly sudden,' she said in Italian to the butler as they started to climb the stairs.

The man shook his head and an expression of genuine sadness appeared on his face. The *signore* had been so kind. *Tanto buono, tanto buono.* Tears came into his eyes.

Mrs. Ockham was touched. And yet she simply couldn't keep all these servants. Perhaps if she offered them a year's wages when she gave them notice — or, better, a year's board wages But Mr. Tendring would never allow that. She shot an apprehensive glance at that grey face with its sharp nose and tight-shut, almost lipless mouth. Never, she repeated to herself, never. And after all, that was what he was there for — to keep her in order, to prevent her from doing anything too silly. She remembered what Canon Cresswell was always dinning into her. 'It takes two people to make a swindle — the swindler and the swindlee. If you let yourself be a swindlee, you're an accessory before the fact — you're leading an innocent person into temptation. So don't do it. Don't!' Golden advice — but how difficult it had been for her to follow it! And now that, instead of her all too comfortable twelve hundred a year, she was to have six thousand and a whole fortune in buildings, furniture and works of art, it would be even harder, because there would be so many more outstretched hands. She had hired Mr. Tendring, among other reasons, to protect her from her own sentimentality. And yet she couldn't help feeling that those poor servants ought to have a year's board wages. After all, it was no fault of theirs that Eustace had died so suddenly; and some of them had been with him for years and years…. She sighed again. How hard it was to know what was right! And then, when one

knew, the knowledge had to be acted upon. That was fairly easy if there were nobody but oneself involved. But mostly one couldn't do what was right without upsetting almost as many people as one satisfied. And then their disappointment and their bitterness made one wonder whether, after all, one had been doing right. And then the whole debate had to begin again….

Half an hour later, refreshed by a hot bath and a change of clothes, Mrs. Ockham entered the drawing-room. She had expected to find herself alone; and when, from the depths of one of the enormous chintz-covered chairs, a small figure suddenly uncurled its legs and jumped respectfully to its feet, she uttered a startled exclamation of surprise. Diffidently, the figure advanced, and as it came within range of her rather short-sighted eyes Mrs. Ockham recognized it as the boy she had talked to in the Hampstead public library. The boy who had reminded her of Frankie; had actually *been* Frankie, so it excruciatingly seemed; had been her little precious one as he would have become if she had been allowed to keep him another year or two. How often, since that chance meeting of a couple of weeks before, she had reproached herself for having lacked the presence of mind to ask his name and where he lived! And now, impossibly, he was here in Eustace's drawing-room.

'You?' she whispered incredulously. 'But … but who are you?' The living ghost of Frankie smiled at her shyly.

'I'm Sebastian,' he answered. 'Uncle Eustace was … well, he was my uncle,' he concluded lamely.

Suddenly and rather heavily — for she was feeling strangely weak about the knees — Mrs. Ockham sat down on the nearest chair. Another moment, and she might have fainted. She shut her eyes and took three or four deep breaths. There was a long silence.

Standing in front of her, Sebastian fidgeted uneasily and wondered whether he oughtn't to say something— 'What a funny coincidence!' or 'That was awfully good chocolate you gave me.' But after all, she had lost her son. He ought to say something about that. 'I didn't have time to say how sorry I was.'

But somehow even that sounded pretty bad. Seeing how upset she obviously was, poor old thing!

Mrs. Ockham looked up.

‘It’s the hand of Providence,’ she said in a low voice.

There were tears in her eyes, but she was also smiling — a smile that transfigured the soft and snubby face, making it seem almost beautiful.

‘God wants to give him back to me.’

Sebastian writhed. This was really awful!

God wanted to give her Frankie back to her, Mrs. Ockham was thinking; yes, and perhaps to give Himself back. For Frankie had been the living sacrament, the revelation, the immediate experience of divinity.

‘God is love,’ she said aloud. ‘But what’s love? I never knew until after my little boy was born. Then I began to learn. And every day I learned a little more. Different forms of love, deeper intensities — every day for nearly fourteen years.’

She was silent again, thinking of that windy summer’s morning, and the fishermen toiling slowly up the beach; remembering those first weeks of almost insane, rebellious despair, and then the months of emptiness, of being numb and hopeless and half dead. It was Canon Cresswell who had brought her back to life. After the disaster she had refused to go near him. Perversely — because she knew in her heart that he could help her, and she didn’t want to be helped; she wanted to suffer in solitude, for ever. Then, somehow, Mrs. Cresswell had discovered where she was; and one wet November afternoon there they were on the doorstep of the dismal little cottage she had chosen as her hiding-place. And instead of condoling with her on the tragedy, instead of telling her sympathetically how ill she looked, Canon Cresswell made her sit down and listen, while he called her a cowardly, self-indulgent emotionalist, a mutineer against God’s Providence, a self-willed sinner guilty of the most inexcusable despair.

An hour later, Mrs. Cresswell was helping her to clean up the cottage and pack her bags. That evening she was back at the Girls’ Club, and the next day,

which was Sunday, she went to early Communion. She had come back to life again — but it was a diminished life. In the past God had been with her almost every day. For example, when she came and said good-night to Frankie, and he got out of bed and knelt there in his pink pyjamas and they repeated the Lord's Prayer together — there He was, Our Father in the heaven of her love. But now even Communion failed to bring Him close to her. And though she loved the poor children at the Club, though she was ready to do much more for them now than she had done when her work there was only a thank-offering for so much happiness, it was all a second best; there was nobody to take the place of Frankie. She had learnt to accept God's will; but it was the will of somebody at a distance — withdrawn and unrevealed.

Mrs. Ockham took a handkerchief out of her bag and wiped her eyes.

'I know you think I'm a dreadful old sentimentalist,' she said with a little laugh.

'Not a bit,' Sebastian protested politely.

But for once the Queen Mother had been quite right: blancmange was the word for her.

'You're John Barnack's son, I suppose?'

He nodded.

'Then your mother …?'

Mrs. Ockham left the sentence unfinished. But her tone, and the expression of distress which appeared in her grey eyes, sufficiently indicated what she meant to say.

'Yes, she's dead,' said Sebastian.

'Your mother's dead,' she repeated slowly.

But imagine poor little Frankie, all alone in a harsh, indifferent world, with nobody to love him as she alone was capable of loving him! To the love in her heart there was added an overpowering compassion.

Blancmange, Sebastian was thinking. Blancmange with Jesus sauce. Then, to his great relief, the butler entered and announced that dinner was served.

With a sigh Mrs. Ockham put away her handkerchief, then asked the man to go and tell the *signore.* Turning to Sebastian, she began to explain Mr. Tendring.

‘You’ll find him a bit … well, you know, not quite …’ The deprecating gesture sufficiently indicated what he quite wasn’t. ‘But a good soul underneath,’ she hastened to add. ‘He’s a Unitarian, and he’s got two children, and he grows tomatoes in the sweetest little greenhouse in his back garden. And as for business — well, I don’t know what I’d have done without him these last five years. That’s why I asked him to come along with me now — to deal with all this.’

In a limp gesture of all-embracing ineptitude she waved her hand at Eustace’s treasures.

‘I wouldn’t even know where to begin,’ she concluded hopelessly.

The sound of footsteps made her turn.

‘Ah, I was just talking about you, Mr. Tendring. Telling Sebastian here — he’s Mr. Barnack’s nephew, by the way — how utterly lost I’d be without you.’

Mr. Tendring acknowledged the compliment with a slight bow, silently shook hands with Sebastian, then turned and apologized to Mrs. Ockham for having kept her waiting.

‘I was compiling a catalogue of the furnishings in my bedroom,’ he explained; and in confirmation of his words he pulled a small black notebook out of the side pocket of his jacket and held it up for her inspection.

‘A catalogue?’ Mrs. Ockham repeated in some astonishment, as she got up from her chair.

Mr. Tendring further compressed his tight-shut mouth, and nodded importantly. In the wide, barristerial opening of his stiff collar, the Adam’s apple stirred like a thing endowed with a small spasmodic life of its own. Deliberately, in phrases modelled on those of the business letter and the legal document, he began to speak.

‘You have informed me, Mrs. Ockham, that the late owner carried no insurance against fire or theft.’

Surprisingly, Mrs. Ockham uttered a little peal of rich, bubbly laughter.

‘He used to say he couldn’t afford it. Because of the duty on Havana cigars.’

Sebastian smiled; but Mr. Tendring contracted his brows, and his Adam’s apple sharply rose and fell, as though it too were shocked by such a blasphemy against Prudence.

‘Personally,’ he said with severity, ‘I don’t hold with joking about serious matters.’

Mrs. Ockham hastened to placate him.

‘Quite right,’ she said, ‘quite right. But I don’t see what *his* having no insurance has to do with *your* making a catalogue.’

Mr. Tendring permitted himself a smile. The Gaiety-Girl teeth flashed triumphantly.

‘The fact,’ he said, ‘constitutes presumptive evidence that the late owner caused no list of his personal property ever to be drawn up.’

He smiled again, evidently delighted with the beauty of his language.

‘So that’s what you’re writing in your little black book,’ said Mrs. Ockham. ‘Is it really necessary?’

‘Necessary?’ Mr. Tendring repeated almost indignantly. ‘It’s a *sine qua non*.’

It was final and crushing. After a little silence Mrs. Ockham suggested that they should go in to dinner.

‘Will you take me in, Sebastian?’ she asked.

Sebastian began by offering her the wrong arm, and was horribly embarrassed and ashamed when Mrs. Ockham smiled and told him to go round to the other side. Making a fool of himself in front of this awful little bounder….

‘Too stupid,’ he muttered. ‘I know perfectly well, really.’

But Mrs. Ockham was enchanted by his mistake.

‘Just like Frankie!’ she cried delightedly. ‘Frankie could *never* remember which arm to give.’

Sebastian said nothing; but he was beginning to have enough of Frankie.

Intimately, as they walked towards the dining-room, Mrs. Ockham squeezed his arm.

‘What luck that the others should have been out for our first evening!’ she said; but added quickly, ‘Not but what I’m very fond of poor dear Granny. And Veronica’s so …’

She hesitated, remembering the Cresswells’ concern over the disquieting spirit that had started, before she was even out of pigtails, to peep through their daughter’s calm, bright eyes.

‘So pretty and clever,’ she concluded. ‘But all the same, I’m awfully glad they’re not here. I hope you are too,’ she added, smiling at him almost archly.

‘Oh, very,’ Sebastian answered without much conviction.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

BUT AFTER ALL, he had to admit long before the evening was over, she wasn't a bad old thing by any manner of means. A bit blancmangeish, of course; but really very decent. She was going to give him all the volumes of the Loeb Classics that had been in her husband's library. And the Oxford Press edition of Donne. And Saintsbury's two volumes of *Minor Caroline Poets.* And on top of being kind, she wasn't even such a fool. True, she had confessed to being unable to sing 'Abide with me' without crying; but she also liked George Herbert. And though she had an exasperating habit of referring to everyone she knew as 'dear So-and-so,' or at the very worst and most uncharitable as 'poor dear,' she had quite a sense of humour, and some of the stories she told were really very funny.

But her most precious gift was that she never made you feel shy. In that respect she was like Uncle Eustace; and in both of them, it seemed to Sebastian, the secret consisted in a certain absence of pretentiousness, a refraining from standing on rights or privileges or dignity. Whereas that fiendish old Queen Mother didn't merely stand on her own dignity; she went out and deliberately trampled on yours. And more subtly, for all her desirableness, Mrs. Thwale did the same thing. It was as though she were always using you, in some way or other, as a means to further her own private ends — and the ends were disquietingly mysterious and unpredictable. Whereas with Mrs. Ockham it was you who were the end, and all she asked was to be allowed to be the adoring means of your glorification. Which was really rather pleasant. So pleasant, indeed, that Sebastian soon did more than merely cease to be shy with her; he began to show off and lay down the law. Except for Susan — and Susan didn't really count — he had never known anyone who was ready to listen so respectfully to what he had to say. Stimulated by her admiration, and quite unhindered by Mr. Tendring, who never put in a word and allowed his presence

to be completely ignored, he became, especially after his second glass of wine, extraordinarily loquacious. And when his own ideas failed him, he did not hesitate to fall back on Uncle Eustace's. His remarks about the affinity between Mid-Victorian English and Italian Primitive were thought to be very startling and brilliant. Still, even with the wine to give him courage and take away discretion, he didn't venture to repeat what Uncle Eustace had said in connection with Piero's Venus and her Adonis. It was Mrs. Ockham who finally broke the silence that had settled down on them as they stood looking at the picture after dinner.

'Art's a funny thing,' she said, pensively shaking her head. 'Very funny indeed, sometimes.'

Sebastian gave her an amused and pitying smile. Her remark had made him feel delightfully superior.

'Works of art aren't moral tracts,' he said sententiously.

'Oh, I know, I know,' Mrs. Ockham agreed. 'But all the same …'

'All the same what?'

'Well, why bother about that sort of thing so much?'

She hadn't bothered — except, of course, negatively, inasmuch as she'd always felt that the whole business was profoundly unpleasant. And, in spite of her mother's vague but fearful warnings about the male sex, her darling Francis had really bothered very little. So why did other people find it necessary to think and talk so much about it, to write all those books and poems, to paint such pictures as this thing they were now looking at? Pictures which, if they weren't Great Art, one would never dream of tolerating in a decent house, where innocent boys like Frankie, like Sebastian here …

'Sometimes,' she went on, 'I just cannot understand …'

'Excuse me,' Mr. Tendring broke in, suddenly pushing his way between them and the mythological nudities.

Horizontally first, then vertically, he applied a tape-measure to the painting. Then, taking the pencil from between his pearly teeth, he made an entry in his

notebook: *Oil Painting: Antony and Cleopatra. Antique.* 41 *ins* × 20 *ins. Framed.*

‘Thanks,’ he said, and passed on to the Seurat. Twenty-six by sixteen; and the frame, instead of being gilded and genuine hand-carved, was the cheapest-looking thing, painted in different colours, like one of those camouflaged ships during the war.

Mrs. Ockham led Sebastian away to the sofa and, while they sipped their coffee, began to ask him about his father.

‘He didn’t get on too well with poor dear Eustace, did he?’

‘He hated Uncle Eustace.’

Mrs. Ockham was shocked.

‘You mustn’t say that, Sebastian.’

‘But it’s true,’ he insisted.

And when she started trying to smother the whole thing in that soft sentimental blancmange of hers — mooing away about brothers not seeing eye to eye perhaps, but never hating one another, never really forgetting that they were brothers — he became annoyed.

‘You don’t know my father,’ he snapped.

And forgetting all about the heroic portrait he had painted for the benefit of Gabriel Weyl, Sebastian launched out into an embittered account of John Barnack’s character and behaviour. Greatly distressed, Mrs. Ockham tried to persuade him that it was all just a case of misunderstanding. When he was older he would realize that his father had always acted with the best intentions. But the only effect of these well-meaning interventions was to stimulate Sebastian to a greater intemperance of language. Then, by a natural transition, his resentment modulated into complaint. He felt all at once extraordinarily sorry for himself, and began to say so.

Mrs. Ockham was touched. Even if Mr. Barnack wasn’t as bad as he had been painted, even if he were nothing worse than a busy man with harsh manners and no time for affection, that would be quite enough to make a sensitive child unhappy. More than ever, as she listened to Sebastian, she felt convinced that it

was God who had brought them together — the poor motherless boy, the poor mother who had lost her child — brought them together that they might help one another and, helping one another, might be strengthened to do God's work in the world.

Meanwhile, Sebastian had begun to tell the story of the evening clothes.

Mrs. Ockham remembered how adorable Frankie had looked in the dinner jacket she had bought him for his thirteenth birthday. So grown-up, so touchingly childish. Her eyes filled with tears. But in the meantime it really did seem hard on poor Sebastian that his father should sacrifice him to a mere political prejudice.

'Oh, how sweet of dear old Eustace to give it you!' she cried, when he reached that point in his story.

Sebastian was offended by her cheerful all's-well-that-ends-well tone.

'Uncle Eustace only promised,' he said gloomily. 'Then … well, this thing happened.'

'So you never got it after all?'

He shook his head.

'Poor darling, you *do* have bad luck!'

To Sebastian, in his mood of self-pity, her commiseration was as balm. To be told, in that tone, that he had had bad luck was so delightful that it would be almost sacrilegious to mention the drawing, the two thousand two hundred lire, the visit to the tailor's. Indeed, it never even occurred to him that they ought to be mentioned. In the present circumstances of mood and feeling these things were irrelevant to the point of being practically non-existent. Then, suddenly, they jumped out into the foreground of immediate reality. Mrs. Ockham leaned forward and laid her hand on his knee; her soft snubby face was transfigured by a smile of intense yearning tenderness.

'Sebastian, I've got a favour to ask of you.'

He smiled charmingly and raised a questioning eyebrow.

'Eustace made you a promise,' she explained. 'A promise he wasn't able to keep. But I *can* keep it. Will you allow me, Sebastian?'

He looked at her for a moment, uncertain whether he had understood her aright. Then, as it became clear that her words could have only one meaning, the blood rushed up into his cheeks.

‘You mean … about the evening clothes?’

He averted his eyes in confusion.

‘I’d so love to do it,’ she said.

‘It’s awfully decent of you,’ he muttered. ‘But really …’

‘After all, it was one of poor Eustace’s last wishes.’

‘I know; but …’

He hesitated, wondering whether to tell her about the drawing. But she might think, as that Weyl fellow had obviously thought, that he oughtn’t to have sold it — not so quickly, not immediately after the funeral. And to her he couldn’t say it was for a debt of honour. Besides, if he were going to mention the drawing at all, he ought to have done it long ago. To mention it now would be to admit that he had been enjoying her sympathy and inviting her generosity on false pretences. And what a fool he would seem, as well as a humbug!

‘After all,’ said Mrs. Ockham, who had attributed his hesitation to a quite understandable reluctance to accept a present from a stranger, ‘after all, I’m really part of the family. A step-first cousin, to be precise.’

What delicate feelings he had! More tenderly than ever, she smiled at him again.

From the depths of his discomfort Sebastian tried to smile back. It was too late to explain now. There was nothing for it but to go ahead.

‘Well, if you really think it’s all right,’ he said.

‘Oh, good, good!’ cried Mrs. Ockham. ‘Then we’ll go to the tailor’s together. That *will* be fun, won’t it?’

He nodded and said it would be great fun.

‘It must be the best tailor in town.’

‘I noticed one in the Via Tornabuoni,’ he said, determined at any cost to head her off from the place near the cathedral.

But what a fool he had been to get rid of the drawing in such a hurry! Instead of waiting to see what might turn up. And now he'd be landed with two evening suits. And it wasn't as though he could save up one of them for use later on. In a couple of years he'd have grown out of both. Well, after all, it didn't really matter.

'When we're back in London,' said Mrs. Ockham, 'I hope you'll come and dine with me sometimes in your evening clothes.'

'I'd love to,' he said politely.

'You'll be my excuse for going to all the plays and concerts I never have the heart or the energy to go to by myself.'

Plays and concerts…. His eyes brightened at the prospect.

They began talking about music. Mrs. Ockham, it seemed, had been a great concert-goer when her husband was alive, had travelled to Salzburg for Mozart and the moderns, to Bayreuth for Wagner, to Milan for *Otello* and *Falstaff.* Against these achievements Sebastian could only set a few poor evenings at the Queen's Hall. In mere self-defence he found himself compelled to expatiate, with a kind of boastful possessiveness, on the wonderful playing of an old pianist friend of his own, retired now from the concert stage, but as brilliant as ever — Dr. Pfeiffer by name; she had probably heard of him. No? But in his day he had enjoyed a European reputation.

In the background, meanwhile, Mr. Tendring had measured all the paintings and was now working his way through the porcelain, jade and ivory. Thousands of pounds, he said to himself from time to time, lingering voluptuously over the Cockney diphthongs, thousands of pounds…. He felt extraordinarily happy.

At a quarter past ten there was a sudden commotion in the hall, and a moment later, as from a ghostly parade ground, the Queen Mother's voice came to their ears.

'There's poor dear Granny,' said Mrs. Ockham, interrupting Sebastian in the middle of a sentence.

She rose and hurried towards the door. In the hall, Mrs. Gamble's maid had just divested the old lady of her wrap and was in process of handing over the

Pomeranian.

‘Little Foxy-woxy,’ cried the Queen Mother. ‘Did he miss his old granny-wanny? Did he, then?’

Foxy VIII licked her chin, then turned to bark at the newcomer.

‘Granny dear!’

Scintillating like a whole chandelier of diamonds, Mrs. Gamble wheeled in the direction of the voice.

‘Is that Daisy?’ she rasped enquiringly.

And when Mrs. Ockham had said yes, she presented her with a withered brick-red cheek, lowering Foxy, as she did so, out of range, so that her granddaughter might not be bitten as she paid her respects.

Mrs. Ockham kissed her safely.

‘How nice to see you!’ she said through the yapping.

‘Why is your nose so cold?’ the Queen Mother asked sharply. ‘You haven’t got a chill, I hope?’

Mrs. Ockham assured her that she had never felt better, then turned to Mrs. Thwale, who had remained standing a little to one side, a silent, bright-eyed, faintly smiling spectator.

‘And here’s dear little Veronica,’ she said, holding out both her hands.

Mrs. Thwale took the cue and offered both of hers.

‘Looking more beautiful than ever,’ exclaimed Mrs. Ockham in a tone of whole-hearted admiration.

‘Now, Daisy,’ rasped the Queen Mother, ‘for goodness’ sake, stop gushing like a schoolgirl.’

To hear other people complimented in her presence was distasteful to her. But instead of taking the hint, Mrs. Ockham proceeded to deepen her original offence.

‘I’m not gushing,’ she protested, as she took her grandmother’s arm and started with her towards the drawing-room. ‘It’s the simple truth.’

The Queen Mother snorted angrily.

‘I’ve never seen Veronica look so radiant as she does tonight.’

Well, if that was true, Mrs. Thwale was thinking, as she followed them, it meant that she had been living in a fool's paradise. Flattering herself with the conviction that she had built up an ironclad facial alibi, when in fact she could still be read like an open book.

She frowned to herself. It was bad enough to have a hypothetical God, unto whom all hearts were open, all desires known. But to be known and open to Daisy Ockham, of all people — that was the ultimate humiliation.

True, there were excuses. It wasn't every evening that one was proposed to by Paul De Vries. But, on the other hand, it was precisely on the exceptional and important occasions that it was most necessary to keep other people in ignorance of what one was really feeling. And she had permitted the symptoms of her elation to appear so clearly that even a fat old goose like Daisy could detect them. Not that much harm had been done this time. But it just showed how careful one had to be, how sleeplessly vigilant.

Mrs. Thwale frowned once more; then, as she relaxed her facial muscles, made a conscious effort to assume an expression of detached indifference. No more of that tell-tale radiance. For the outside world, nothing but the opaque symbol of a rather distant and amused politeness. But behind it, for herself, what gay bright secrets, what an effervescence of unuttered laughter and private triumph!

It had happened after dinner, when old Lord Worplesden, who was an amateur astronomer, insisted on taking Mrs. Thwale and the little Contessina up to the top of the tower on which he had installed his six-inch refracting telescope. A first-rate instrument, he boasted. By Zeiss of Jena. But among the young ladies of the neighbourhood it was celebrated for other reasons. The star-gazer would take you in, under the dome of his baby observatory, and then, under the pretext of getting you and the telescope into the right position for seeing the satellites of Jupiter, would paw you about, booming away all the time about Galileo. Then, if you hadn't objected too much, he'd show you the rings of Saturn. And finally there were the spiral nebulae. These required at least ten minutes of the most laborious adjustment. Girls who had seen a spiral nebula got

a big bottle of scent the next day, with a playful invitation, embossed with a coronet and signed, ‘Yours very affectionately, W.,’ to come again another time and really explore the Moon.

The Contessina’s stock of scent had evidently run low; for it was nearly half an hour before she and the old gentleman emerged again from the observatory. Time enough for Paul, who had followed them uninvited up the tower, to look at the night sky and talk a little about Eddington; to look down at the lights of Florence and reflect aloud that they were beautiful, that earth had its constellations too; to be silent for a little, and then say something about Dante and the *Vita Nuova*·, and again be silent and hold her hand; and at last, rather breathlessly and, for once, inarticulately, to ask her to marry him.

The intrinsic ludicrousness of what had happened, and the sudden glory of her own elation, had almost caused her to laugh aloud.

At last! The magnet had done its work; the philosophic Eye had finally succumbed to life’s essential shamelessness. In the tug-of-war between appearance and reality, reality had won, as it always must, it always must.

Ludicrous spectacle! But for her, at least, the joke would have important and serious consequences. It meant freedom; it meant power over her surroundings; it meant a little cushioned world of privacy outside herself as well as merely within — a house of her own as well as an attitude, a suite at the Ritz as well as a state of mind and a luxuriant fancy.

‘Will you, Veronica?’ he had repeated anxiously, as her averted silence persisted through the seconds. ‘Oh, my darling, say you will!’

Confident at last of being able to speak without betraying herself, she had turned back to him.

Dear Paul … touched inexpressibly … taken so utterly by surprise … would like to wait a day or two before giving her final answer….

The door of the little observatory had opened and Lord Worplesden could be heard loudly recommending the Contessina to read the more popular writings of Sir James Jeans, F.R.S. In his case, she reflected, the Eye was astronomical and

proconsular; but it was the same old magnet, the identical shamelessness. And in a few more years there would be the final shamelessness of dying.

Meanwhile, in the drawing-room, the Queen Mother had responded to Mr. Tendring's accent exactly as her granddaughter had feared and expected. To his polite enquiries after her health she responded merely by asking him to spell his name; and when he had done so, she said, 'How very odd!' and repeated the word 'Tendring' two or three times in a tone of extreme distaste, as though she were being forced against her will to speak of skunks or excrement. Then she turned to Daisy and, in a harsh stage-whisper, asked her why on earth she had brought such a dreadfully common little man with her. Fortunately, Mrs. Ockham was able to cover up the old lady's words by the first sentence of her own loud and enthusiastic account of her previous meeting with Sebastian.

'Oh, he's like Frankie, is he?' said the Queen Mother, after listening for a little while in silence. 'Then he must look very young for his age, very babyish.'

'He looks sweet!' cried Mrs. Ockham, with a sentimental unction which Sebastian found almost as humiliating as her grandmother's offensive.

'I don't like it when boys look sweet,' Mrs. Gamble went on. 'Not with men like Tom Pewsey prowling around.' She lowered her voice. 'What about that little man of yours, Daisy — is *he* all right?'

'Granny!' Mrs. Ockham exclaimed in horror.

She looked round apprehensively, and was relieved to see that Mr. Tendring had gone over to the other side of the room and was cataloguing the Capo di Monte figures in the cabinet between the windows.

'Thank goodness,' she breathed, 'he didn't hear you.'

'I wouldn't mind if he had,' said the Queen Mother emphatically. 'Penal servitude — that's what *those* people deserve.'

'But he isn't one of those people,' Mrs. Ockham protested in an agitated and indignant whisper.

'That's what *you* think,' the Queen Mother retorted. 'But if you imagine you know anything about the subject, you're very much mistaken.'

‘I don’t want to know anything,’ said Mrs. Ockham with a shudder. ‘It’s a horrible subject!’

‘Then why bring it up? Particularly in front of Veronica. Veronica!’ she called. ‘Have you been listening?’

‘In snatches,’ Mrs. Thwale demurely admitted.

‘You see!’ said the Queen Mother in a tone of reproachful triumph to Mrs. Ockham. ‘But luckily she’s a married woman. Which is more than can be said of that boy. Boy,’ she went on, speaking imperiously into the darkness, ‘tell me what you think of all this.’

Sebastian blushed. ‘You mean, the … penal servitude?’

‘Penal servitude?’ repeated the Queen Mother irritably. ‘I’m asking you what you think of meeting my granddaughter again.’

‘Oh, that! Well, of course, it’s most extraordinary. I mean, it’s a funny coincidence, isn’t it?’

Impulsively, Mrs. Ockham put an arm round Sebastian’s shoulders and drew him towards her.

‘Not exactly funny,’ she said. ‘Joyful, if you like — the happiest kind of Godsend. Yes, a real Godsend,’ she repeated, and her eyes filled with the tears that came to her so easily, her voice took on a vibrancy of emotion.

‘God here, God there,’ rasped the Queen Mother. ‘You talk too much about God.’

‘But how can one talk and think enough?’

‘It’s blasphemous.’

‘But God *did* send him to me.’

And to lend emphasis to what she had said, Mrs. Ockham tightened her embrace. Inertly, Sebastian suffered himself to be hugged. He felt horribly embarrassed. She was making a fool of him in public — just how much of a fool he divined from the expression on Mrs. Thwale’s face. It was the same expression as he had seen on it that afternoon when she tormented him with her talk of giving Mrs. Gamble a demonstration of outrage — the amused,

impersonal expression of the spectator who looks on at a delightfully heartless little comedy of manners.

‘And not only blasphemous,’ the Queen Mother continued. ‘It’s bad taste to be always talking about God. Like wearing all one’s pearls all day long, instead of only in the evening when one’s dressed for dinner.’

‘Apropos of dressing for dinner,’ said Mrs. Ockham, trying to shift the conversation on to safer ground. ‘Sebastian and I have agreed that we’re going to a lot of plays and concerts together when we get back to London. Haven’t we, Sebastian?’

He nodded his head and smiled uncomfortably. Then, to his vast relief, Mrs. Ockham dropped her hand from his shoulder, and he was able to move away.

From between the curtains of her spiritual private box, Mrs. Thwale observed it all and was delighted with the play. The Holy Woman was fairly itching with unsatisfied motherhood. But the boy, not unnaturally, didn’t much relish being made the victim of that particular brand of concupiscence. So poor old Holy-Poly had to offer bribes. Theatres and concerts to induce him to become her gigolo-baby, to submit to being the instrument of her maternal lust. But, after all, there were other forms of the essential shamelessness — forms that an adolescent would find more attractive than mother-craving; there were magnets, she flattered herself, considerably more powerful than Daisy’s pug-like face, Daisy’s chaste but abundant bosom. It might be amusing perhaps, it might be an interesting scientific experiment…. She smiled to herself. Yes, doubly amusing just because of what had happened this evening on Lord Worplesden’s tower, scientific to the point of outrage and enormity.

At the mention of concerts, the Queen Mother, who could never bear to feel that she was being left out of anything, had insisted that she should also be of the party whenever they went to one. But, of course, she drew the line at modern music. And Bach always made her go to sleep. And as for string quartets — she couldn’t abide that tiresome scraping and squeaking….

Suddenly Mr. Tendring reappeared upon the scene.

‘Pardon me,’ he said, when the Queen Mother had come to the end of her musical dislikes; and he handed Mrs. Ockham a slip of paper.

‘What’s this?’ she asked.

‘A discrepancy,’ Mr. Tendring answered, with all the gravity due to a four-syllabled word used by chartered accountants.

Foxy, who had the rich dog’s infallible ear and eye and nose for members of the lower orders, started to growl.

‘There, there,’ said the Queen Mother soothingly. Then, turning to Mrs. Ockham, ‘What’s the man talking about?’ she barked.

‘A discrepancy,’ Mr. Tendring explained, ‘between this receipt, delivered to the late owner on the day of his … ah … demise, and the number of articles actually contained in the package. He bought two: but now there’s only one.’

‘One what?’ asked Mrs. Ockham.

Mr. Tendring smiled almost archly.

‘Well, I suppose you’d say it was a work of art,’ he said.

Sebastian suddenly felt rather sick.

‘If you’ll step over here,’ Mr. Tendring went on.

They all followed him to the table by the window. Mrs. Ockham examined the one remaining Degas and then the slip of paper upon which M. Weyl had acknowledged payment for two.

‘Let me have them,’ said the Queen Mother, when the situation had been explained to her.

In silence she fingered the drawing’s cardboard mount and the flimsy receipt, then handed them back to Mrs. Ockham. The old face lit up.

‘The other one must have been stolen,’ she said with relish.

Stolen! Sebastian repeated to himself. That was it; they’d think he’d stolen it. And of course, it now occurred to him for the first time, he had no way of *proving* that Uncle Eustace had given him the drawing. Even that little joke between them at the séance wasn’t really evidence. ‘Bucks and pendulums’ — it had been obvious to him. But would it be obvious if he tried to explain it to anyone else?

Meanwhile Mrs. Ockham had protested against her grandmother's uncharitable suggestion. But the old lady was not to be put off.

'It's one of the servants, of course,' she insisted almost gleefully.

And she went on to tell them about that butler of hers who had drunk at least three dozen bottles of her best brandy, about the housemaid who had been caught with Amy's ruby brooch, about the chauffeur who used to cheat on the petrol and repairs, about the under-gardener who …

And the fact that he had immediately gone and sold the thing — that would look bad, of course. If only he'd mentioned the matter the very day they found the body! Or else at the séance; that would have been a golden opportunity. Or this morning to Mrs. Thwale. Or even this evening, when Mrs. Ockham had offered to give him the dinner jacket — even then, at the risk of looking as if he'd been asking for sympathy on false pretences. If only, if only … Because now it was too late. If he told them now, it would look as though he were doing it because he'd been caught. And the story of Uncle Eustace's generosity would sound like something invented on the spur of the moment to cover up his guilt — a particularly stupid and unconvincing lie. And yet, if he didn't tell them, goodness only knew what mightn't happen.

'But we have no right even to think that it's been stolen,' said Mrs. Ockham, as the Queen Mother's recollections of dishonest menials temporarily ran dry. 'Poor Eustace probably took it out of the package and put it somewhere.'

'He couldn't have put it somewhere,' the Queen Mother retorted, 'because he didn't go anywhere. Eustace was in this room with the boy until he went to the W.C. and passed on. All the time — isn't that so, boy?'

Sebastian nodded without speaking.

'Can't you answer?' the ghostly sergeant-major exploded.

'Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot…. I mean, yes, he was here. All the time.'

'Listen to that, Veronica,' said the Queen Mother. 'He mumbles worse than ever.'

Mrs. Ockham turned to Sebastian.

'Did you see him doing anything with the drawing that evening?' she asked.

For a second, Sebastian hesitated; then, in a kind of unreasoning panic, he shook his head.

‘No, Mrs. Ockham.’

Feeling that he was violently blushing, he turned away and, to hide his tell-tale face, bent down to look more closely at the drawing on the table.

‘I told you it was stolen,’ he heard the Queen Mother saying triumphantly.

‘Oh, Mr. Tendring, why *did* you have to find it out?’ Mrs. Ockham wailed.

He began to say something dignified about his professional duty, when the Queen Mother interrupted him.

‘Now listen, Daisy,’ she said. ‘I won’t have you behaving like a sentimental imbecile, slobbering over a pack of good-for-nothing servants! Why, they’re probably robbing you right and left at this very moment.’

‘No, they aren’t,’ cried Mrs. Ockham. ‘I simply refuse to believe it. And anyhow, why should we bother about this wretched drawing? If it’s as ugly as the other one …’

‘Why should we bother?’ Mr. Tendring repeated in the tone of one whose most sacred feelings have been outraged. ‘But do you realize what the late owner paid for this object?’ He picked up the receipt and handed it again to Mrs. Ockham. ‘Seven thousand lire, madam. Seven thousand lire.’

Sebastian started and looked up at him; his eyes widened, his mouth fell open. Seven thousand lire? And that stinker had offered him a thousand and congratulated him on his business ability for having screwed the price up to two thousand two hundred. Anger and humiliation brought the blood rushing up into his face. What a fool he’d been, what an unutterable idiot!

‘You see, Daisy, you see?’ The Queen Mother’s expression was gleeful. ‘They could sell the thing for the equivalent of a year’s wages.’

There was a little silence; and then, from behind him, Sebastian heard Mrs. Thwale’s low musical voice.

‘I don’t think it was one of the s-servants,’ she said, lingering with delicate affectation over the sibilant. ‘I think it was somebody els-se.’

Sebastian’s heart started to beat very fast and hard, as though he had been playing football. Yes, she must have seen him through the door, while he was putting the drawing into his dispatch-case. And when, an instant later, she spoke his name, he felt absolutely certain of it.

‘Sebastian,’ Mrs. Thwale repeated softly, when he failed to answer.

Reluctantly he straightened himself up and looked at her. Mrs. Thwale was smiling again as she might smile if she were watching a comedy.

‘I expect you know as well as I do,’ she said.

He swallowed hard and looked away.

‘Don’t you?’ Mrs. Thwale insisted softly.

‘Well,’ he began almost inaudibly, ‘I suppose you mean …’

‘Of course,’ she broke in. ‘Of course! That little girl who was out there on the terrace.’ And she pointed at the darkness beyond the window.

Startled, Sebastian looked up at her again. The dark eyes were dancing with a kind of exultant light; the smiling lips looked as though they might part at any moment to give passage to a peal of laughter.

‘Little girl?’ echoed the Queen Mother. ‘What little girl?’

Mrs. Thwale started to explain. And suddenly, with an overpowering sense of relief, Sebastian realized that he had been reprieved.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SEBASTIAN'S SENSE OF relief gave place very soon to bewilderment and uneasiness. Alone in his room, as he undressed and brushed his teeth, he kept wondering why the reprieve had come. Did she *really* think that the child had done it? Obviously, he tried to assure himself, she must have thought so. But there was a part of his mind which obstinately refused to accept that simple explanation. If it were true, then why should she have looked at him like that? What was it she had found so exquisitely amusing? And if she hadn't thought that it was the little girl, what on earth had induced her to say so? The obvious answer was that she had seen him take the drawing, believed he had no right to it, and tried to shield him. But again, in the light of that queer smile of hers, that almost irrepressible amusement, the obvious answer made no sense. Nothing she had done made any sense. And meanwhile there was that wretched little girl to think of. The child would be questioned and bullied; and then the parents would come under suspicion; and finally, of course, Mrs. Gamble would insist on sending for the police….

He turned out all the lights but the reading-lamp on the night table, and climbed into the enormous bed. Lying there, open-eyed, he fabricated for the thousandth time a series of scenes in which he casually mentioned Uncle Eustace's bequest to Mrs. Thwale and the Queen Mother, told Mrs. Ockham that he had already bought an evening suit with the money he had got for the drawing, smilingly scotched Mr. Tendring's suspicions before they were well hatched. How simple it all was, and how creditably he emerged from the proceedings! But the reality was as painfully and humiliatingly different from these consoling fancies as the blue tart had been from Mary Esdaile. And now it was too late to tell them what had really happened. He imagined the Queen Mother's comments on his behaviour — like sandpaper for uncharitableness.

And Mrs. Thwale's faint smile and ironic silence. And the excuses which Mrs. Ockham would make for him with such an effusive sentimentality that her grandmother would become doubly censorious. No, it was impossible to tell them now. There was only one thing to do — buy the drawing back from M. Weyl and then 'find' it somewhere in the house. But the tailor had insisted upon being paid in advance; that meant that ten out of his twenty-two precious banknotes had gone within an hour of his receiving them. And he had spent another hundred lire on books, and sixty for a tortoise-shell cigarette-case. So now he had little more than a thousand in hand. Would Weyl give him credit for the balance? Despondently Sebastian shook his head. He'd have to borrow the money. But from whom? And with what excuse?

Suddenly there was a little tap at the door.

'Come in,' he called.

Mrs. Ockham walked into the room.

'It's me,' she said; and crossing over to the bed, she laid a hand on his shoulder. 'It's rather late, I'm afraid,' she went on apologetically. 'Granny kept me up interminably. But I just couldn't resist coming to say good-night to you.'

Politely, Sebastian propped himself up on one elbow. But she shook her head and, without speaking, gently pushed him back on to the pillow.

There was a long silence while she looked down at him — looked down at little Frankie and her murdered happiness, looked down at the living present, at this other curly-headed incarnation of divine reality. Rosy and golden, a childish head upon a pillow. As she looked, love mounted within her, overwhelming, like a tide rushing up from the depths of that great ocean from which for so long she had been cut off by the siltings of a hopeless aridity.

'Frankie used to wear pink pyjamas too,' she said in a voice which, in spite of her effort to speak lightly, trembled with the intensity of her emotion.

'Did he?'

Sebastian gave her one of those enchanting smiles of his — not consciously this time, or deliberately, but because he felt himself touched into an answering

affection for this absurd woman. And suddenly he knew that this was the moment to tell her about the drawing.

‘Mrs. Ockham …’ he began.

But at the same instant, and moved by a yearning so intense as to make her unaware that he was trying to say something, Mrs. Ockham also spoke.

‘Would you mind very much,’ she whispered, ‘if I gave you a kiss?’

And before he could answer, she had bent down and touched his forehead with her lips. Drawing back a little, she ran her fingers through his hair — and it was Frankie’s hair. Her eyes filled with tears. Once more she bent down and kissed him.

Suddenly, startlingly, there was an interruption.

‘Oh, excuse me …’

Mrs. Ockham straightened herself up and they both turned in the direction from which the voice had come. In the open doorway stood Veronica Thwale. Her dark hair hung down in two plaits over her shoulders, and she was buttoned up in a long white satin dressing-gown that made her look like a nun.

‘I’m so sorry to interrupt you,’ she said to Mrs. Ockham. ‘But your grandmother …’

She left the sentence unfinished, and smiled.

‘Does Granny want me again?’

‘She has something more to say about that lost drawing.’

‘Oh dear!’ Mrs. Ockham sighed profoundly. ‘Well, I’d better go, I suppose. Would you like me to turn the light out?’ she added, addressing herself again to Sebastian.

He nodded. Mrs. Ockham turned the switch, then laid her hand for a moment against his cheek, whispered ‘Good-night,’ and hurried out into the corridor. Mrs. Thwale closed the door.

Alone in the darkness, Sebastian wondered uneasily what it was that the Queen Mother wanted so urgently to say about the drawing. Of course, if he’d had time to tell Mrs. Ockham about it, it wouldn’t matter what she said. But as it was … He shook his head. As it was, whatever the old she-devil said or did was

sure to complicate matters, was bound to make it more difficult for himself. Meanwhile such an opportunity as he had had just now might not come again; and to go and tell Mrs. Ockham in cold blood would be the most horrible ordeal. So horrible that he began to wonder whether it mightn't be better, after all, to try to get the drawing back from Weyl. He was in the middle of an imaginary interview with the dealer, when he heard behind him the sound of the door being quietly opened. On the wall at which he was looking a bar of light widened, then grew narrower and, as the latch clicked, there was darkness again. Sebastian turned in his bed towards the unseen rustle of silk. She'd come back, and now he could tell her everything. He felt enormously relieved.

'Mrs. Ockham!' he said. 'Oh, I'm so glad …'

Through the covers a hand touched his knee, travelled up to his shoulder, and with a sharp movement pulled back the bedclothes and threw them aside. The silk rustled again in the darkness, and a wave of perfume came to his nostrils — that sweet hot scent that was a mingling of flowers and sweat, spring freshness and a musky animality.

'Oh, it's you,' Sebastian began in a startled whisper.

But even as he spoke an unseen face bent over him; a mouth touched his chin, then found his lips; and fingers on his throat moved down and began to undo the buttons of his pyjama jacket.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

DIVINELY INNOCENT, A sensuality panting up through incandescence into pure ecstasy; in the intervals, the tender and yet wittily cultured lasciviousness of Mary Esdaile — that was what Sebastian had imagined it would be, what he had looked forward to. Certainly not those hands, deliberate in the darkness, that almost surgical research of the essential shamelessness. Nor yet the delicate gluttony of those soft lips that would suddenly give place to teeth and pointed nails. And not those imperiously whispered commands; not those spells of silent, introverted frenzy, those long-drawn agonies, under his timid and almost horrified caresses, of a despairing insatiability.

In his fancy, love had been a kind of gay, ethereal intoxication; but last night's reality was more like madness. Yes, sheer madness; a maniac struggling in the musky darkness with another maniac.

'Twin cannibals in bedlam …' The phrase came to him as he was examining the red and livid mark of teeth on his arm. Twin cannibals, devouring their own identity and one another's; ravening up reason and decency; obliterating the most rudimentary conventions of civilization. And yet it was precisely there, in that frenzy of the cannibals, that the real attraction had lain. Beyond the physical pleasure lay the yet more rapturous experience of being totally out of bounds, the ecstasy of an absolute alienation.

Mrs. Thwale had put on her dove-grey dress and was wearing round her neck the little gold and ruby cross which her mother had given her on the day she was confirmed.

'Good-morning, Sebastian,' she said, as he came into the dining-room. 'We seem to have the breakfast table to ourselves.'

Sebastian looked with panic at the empty chairs and the unfolded napkins. For some reason he had taken it for granted that Mrs. Ockham would be there to

chaperone this dreadfully embarrassing encounter.

‘Yes, I thought … I mean, the journey … They must have been pretty tired….’

From her private box at the comedy Mrs. Thwale looked at him with bright ironic eyes.

‘Mumbling again!’ she said. ‘I shall really have to buy that birch!’

To cover his confusion, Sebastian went over to the sideboard and started to look at what was under the lids of the silver dishes on the hot-plate. Of course, what he ought to have done, he realized as he was helping himself to porridge, what he ought to have done, when he saw that she was alone, was to go and kiss her on the nape of the neck and whisper something about last night. And perhaps it wasn’t too late even now. Press the muzzle of the revolver against the right temple, count ten, and then rush in and do it. One, two, three, four … Porridge plate in hand, he advanced towards the table. Four, five, six …

‘I hope you slept well,’ said Mrs. Thwale in her low clear voice.

He looked at her in dismay, then dropped his eyes.

‘Oh, yes,’ he muttered, ‘yes … very well, thanks.’

There was no question any more of that kiss.

‘You did?’ Mrs. Thwale insisted with an air of astonishment. ‘In spite of the owls?’

‘The owls?’

‘You don’t mean to say,’ she cried, ‘that you didn’t hear the owls? Lucky boy! I wish I slept as soundly as you do. I was awake half the night!’

She took a sip of coffee, delicately wiped her mouth, bit off a morsel of her toast and butter and, when she had swallowed it, wiped her mouth again.

‘If I were you,’ she said, ‘I’d make it a point today to go to San Marco and look at the Fra Angelicos.’

The door opened and Mr. Tendring entered and, a moment later, Mrs. Ockham. They too had failed to hear the owls — even though Mrs. Ockham hadn’t been able to go to sleep for hours, because of worrying about that wretched drawing.

Yes, that wretched drawing, that stinking drawing. In his impotence, Sebastian indulged in a childish outburst of bad language as he ate his buttered eggs. But calling names brought him no nearer to the resolution of his difficulties, and instead of clearing the mental atmosphere, blasphemy and obscenity merely intensified his mood of oppression by making him feel ashamed of himself.

‘Are you going to send for the police?’ Mrs. Thwale enquired.

Sebastian’s heart seemed to miss a beat. Keeping his eyes fixed upon his plate, he stopped chewing so as to be able to listen with undivided attention.

‘That’s what Granny wants to do,’ said Mrs. Ockham. ‘But I won’t have it yet. Not till we’ve made a really thorough search.’

Sebastian renewed his mastication — too soon, as it turned out; for Mrs. Thwale was all for having the little girl brought up to the house for cross-questioning.

‘No, I’ll go and talk to the parents first,’ said Mrs. Ockham.

‘Thank God!’ Sebastian said to himself.

That meant that he probably had the whole of the day before him. Which was something. But how on earth was he going to set to work?

A touch on the elbow startled him out of his abstraction; the footman was bending over him, and on the proffered salver were two letters. Sebastian took them. The first was from Susan. Impatiently he put it in his pocket, unopened, and looked at the second. The envelope was addressed in an unfamiliar hand, and the stamp was Italian. Who on earth …? And then a hope was born, grew and, in an instant of time, was transformed into a conviction, a positive certainty that the letter was from that man at the art gallery; explaining that it had all been a mistake; apologizing profusely; enclosing a cheque…. Eagerly he tore open the envelope, unfolded the single sheet of cheap commercial paper and looked for the signature. ‘Bruno Rontini,’ he read. His disappointment found vent in sudden anger. That fool who believed in Gaseous Vertebrates, that creeping Jesus who tried to convert people to his own idiocies! Sebastian started to put the letter away in his pocket, then decided after all to see what the man had to say.

‘Dear Sebastian,’ he read, ‘Returning yesterday, I heard the news, distressing on more than one account, of poor Eustace’s death. I don’t know if your plans have been modified by what has happened; but if you are staying on in Florence, remember that I am one of the oldest inhabitants as well as some sort of a cousin, and that I shall be very happy to help you find your way about. You will generally find me at my apartment in the mornings, in the afternoon at the shop.’

‘At the shop,’ Sebastian repeated to himself ironically. ‘And he can damned well stay there.’ And then all at once it occurred to him that, after all, this fool might be of some use to him. A dealer in books, a dealer in pictures — the chances were that they knew one another. Weyl might be ready to do the other fellow a favour; and Uncle Eustace had said that old man Bruno was pretty decent in spite of his silliness. Pensively Sebastian folded up the letter and put it in his pocket.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

YES, THE WHOLE universe was laughing with him. Laughing cosmically at the cosmic joke of its own self-frustration, guffawing from pole to pole at the world-wide, age-old slapstick of disaster following on the heels of good intention. A counterpoint of innumerable hilarities — Voltairean voices, yelping in sharp shrill triumph over the bewildered agonies of stupidity and silliness; vast Rabelaisian voices, like bassoons and double basses, rejoicing in guts and excrement and copulation, rumbling delightedly at the spectacle of grossness, of inescapable animality.

Shaking in unison with the universal merriment, he laughed through long durations of increasing pleasure, durations of mounting exhilaration and glory. And meanwhile here was that light again, here was that crystal of luminous silence — still and shining in all the interstices of the jagged laughter. Not at all formidable, this time, but softly, tenderly blue, as it had been when he caught old Bruno at his tricks with it. A blue caressing silence, ubiquitously present, in spite of the yelping and the bassoons, but present without urgency; beautiful, not with that austere, unbearable intensity, but imploringly, as though it were humbly begging to be taken notice of. And there was no participation in its knowledge, no self-compulsion to shame and condemnation. Only this tenderness. But Eustace was not to be caught so easily, Eustace was forearmed against all its little stratagems. To the entreaty of that blue crystal of silence he returned only the explosions of his derision, more and more strident as the light became more tenderly beautiful, as the silence ever more humbly, ever more gently and caressingly solicited his attention. No, no, none of that! He thought again of the Triumphs of Education, the Triumphs of Science, Religion, Politics, and his merriment mounted to a kind of frenzy. Paroxysm after cosmic paroxysm. What pleasure, what power and glory! But suddenly he was aware that the laughter

had passed beyond his control, had become a huge, autonomous hysteria, persisting against his will and in spite of the pain it was causing him, persisting with a life of its own that was alien to his life, with a purpose of its own that was entirely incompatible with his well-being.

Out there, in here, the silence shone with a blue, imploring tenderness. But none of that, none of that! The light was always his enemy. Always, whether it was blue or white, pink or pea-green. He was shaken by another long, harrowing convulsion of derision.

Then, abruptly, there was a displacement of awareness. Once again he was remembering something that had not yet happened to somebody else.

Shuddering in the universal epilepsy, an open window presented itself; and there was poor old John, standing beside it, looking down into the street. And what confusion down there, what a yelling in that golden haze of dust! Dark faces, open-mouthed and distorted, dark hands, clenched or clawing. Thousands and thousands of them. And from the bright sunlit square on the right, from the narrow side-street immediately opposite the window, squads of turbaned and black-bearded policemen were shoving their way into the crowd, swinging their long bamboo staves. On heads and shoulders, on the bone of thin wrists upraised to protect the frightened, screaming faces — blow after blow, methodically. There was another convulsion. The figures wavered and broke, like images in a ruffled pool, then came together again as the laughing frenzy died down. Overhead, the blue tenderness was not mere sky, but the bright crystal of living silence. Methodically, the policemen hammered on. The thought of those sharp or cushioned impacts was nauseatingly distinct.

‘Horrible!’ John was saying between his teeth. ‘Horrible!’

‘It would be a damned sight worse if the Japs were to get to Calcutta,’ another voice remarked.

Slowly, reluctantly, John nodded his head.

The professional Liberal condoning a *lathi* charge! There was another convulsive seizure, and another. Derision kept on tearing at him, like the gusts of a hurricane among tattered sails; kept on carding the very substance of his being,

as though with combs and iron claws. But through the torment Eustace was unsteadily aware that, immediately below the window, a boy had dropped unconscious, felled by a blow on the temple. Two other young men were bending over him. Suddenly, through the yelping and the bassoons, there was as it were a memory of wild shrill cries and the frightened repetition of one incomprehensible phrase. A line of steel helmets was moving forward across the square. There was a panic movement of the crowd, away from the approaching danger. Jostled and staggering, the two young men succeeded none the less in raising their companion from the ground. As though in some mysterious rite, the boy's limp body was lifted shoulder-high towards the blue, imploring tenderness of the silence. For a few seconds only. Then the rush of the frightened mob toppled them down. Rescuers and rescued, they were gone, engulfed in the trampling and the suffocation. Blindly, in terror, the crowd moved on. A gale of mirthless lacerating laughter blew them into oblivion. Only the luminous silence remained, tender, beseeching. But Eustace was up to all its tricks.

And suddenly there was another bleeding face. Not the face of the nameless Indian boy; but, of all people, Jim Poulshot's face. Yes, Jim Poulshot! That vacant pigeon-hole which was so obviously destined to contain the moderately successful stockbroker of 1949. But Jim was in uniform and lying at the foot of a clump of bamboos, and three or four little yellow men with guns in their hands were standing over him.

'Wounded,' Jim kept saying in a thin cracked voice. 'Bring doctor quick! Wounded, wounded …'

The three little yellow men broke out simultaneously into loud, almost good-humoured guffaws. And as though moved by a kind of secret sympathy, the whole universe shook and howled in chorus.

Then suddenly one of the men raised his foot and stamped on Jim's face. There was a scream. The heel of the heavy rubber-soled boot came down again and, with yet more force, a third time. Blood was streaming from the mangled mouth and nose. The face was hardly recognizable.

Horror, pity, indignation — but in the same instant a blast of frantic laughter clawed at his being. ‘The empty pigeon-hole,’ his memories kept howling, and then, with irrepressible glee: ‘The stockbroker of 1949, the moderately successful stockbroker.’

Under the bamboos the stockbroker of 1949 lay still, moaning.

Under the bamboo,

Under the bamboo,

Probably constipaysh …

The barrel-organ outside the Kensington Registry Office, and Timmy’s explanation of what had happened on the cricket field.

Probably constip,

Probably constip …

Among the little yellow men there had been a short, gloating silence. Then one of them said something and, as though to illustrate his meaning, drove his long bayonet into Jim Poulshot’s chest. Grinning, the others followed suit — in the face, in the belly, in the throat and the genitals — again and again, until at last the screaming stopped.

The screaming stopped. But the laughter persisted — the howling, the epilepsy, the uncontrollable lacerating derision.

And meanwhile the scene had repeated itself. The bleeding face, the horror of the bayonets, but all somehow mixed up with Mimi in her claret-coloured dressing-gown. *Adesso comincia la tortura* — and then the dandling, the fumbling, the fondling. And at the same time the stamping, the stabbing. With St. Sebastian among the Victorian flowers, and poor dear Amy, tremulous before the Kensington Registrar, and Laurina at Monte Carlo. *Ave verum corpus*, the true body, the prim Victorian mouth, the brown, blind breast-eyes. And while the bayonets stabbed and stabbed, there was the shameful irrelevance of a pleasure that died at last into a cold reiterated friction, automatic and compulsory. And all the time the yelping and the bassoons, the iron teeth, combing and carding the very substance of his being. For ever and ever, excruciatingly. But he knew what the light was up to. He knew what that blue tenderness of silence was beseeching

him to do. No, no, none of that! Deliberately he turned yet again towards the parting of the dressing-gown, towards the mangled and unrecognizable face, towards the intolerable pain of derision and lust, compulsorily, self-imposed, for ever and ever.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THERE WERE ALMOST as many stairs as at Glanvil Terrace, but the fifth-floor landing was reached at last. Sebastian paused before ringing the bell, to recover his breath and to remind himself that, on this occasion, the nausea on the threshold was entirely unjustified. Who was Bruno Rontini anyhow? Just an amiable old ass, too decent, by all accounts, to be sarcastic or censorious, and too completely a stranger, for all his vague cousinship, to have the right to say unpleasant things, even if he wanted to. Besides, it wasn't as if he, Sebastian, were going to confess his sins, or anything like that. No, no, he wouldn't ask for help on that basis. It would be a matter of just casually introducing the subject, as though it weren't really so very important after all. 'By the way, do you happen to know a fellow called Weyl?' And so on, lightly, airily; and as Bruno wasn't his father, there wouldn't be any unpleasant interruptions, everything would go through according to plan. So that there was really no possible excuse for feeling sick like this. Sebastian drew three deep breaths, then pushed the button.

The door was opened almost immediately, and there stood old man Bruno, strangely cadaverous and beaky, in a grey sweater, with crimson carpet slippers on his feet.

His face lit up with a smile of welcome.

'Good,' he said, 'good!'

Sebastian took the extended hand, mumbled something about its being so awfully kind of him to write, and then averted his face in an excess of that paralysing embarrassment which always assailed him when he spoke to strangers. But meanwhile, inside his skull, the observer and the phrase-maker were busily at work. By daylight, he had noticed, the eyes were blue and very bright. Blue fires in bone-cups, vivid not simply with awareness and certainly

not with the detached, inhuman curiosity which had shone in Mrs. Thwale's dark eyes when, last night, she had suddenly turned on the light and he had found her, on hands and knees, spanning him like an arch of white flesh. For a long half-minute she had looked at him, wordlessly smiling. Microscopic, in the black bright pupils, he could see his own pale reflection. '"Nature's lay idiot, I taught thee to love,"' she said at last. Then the pure mask crumpled into a grimace, she uttered her tiny stertorous grunt of laughter, reached out a slender arm towards the lamp and once more plunged the room into darkness. With an effort, Sebastian exorcized his memories. He looked up again into those bright, serene and extraordinarily friendly eyes.

'You know,' said Bruno, 'I was almost expecting you.'

'Expecting me?'

Bruno nodded, then turned and led the way across an obscure cupboard of a hall into a small bed-sitting-room, in which the only articles of luxury were the view of far-away mountains across the house-tops and a square of sunlight, glowing like a huge ruby, on the tiled floor.

'Sit down.' Bruno indicated the more comfortable of the two chairs, and when they were settled, 'Poor Eustace!' he went on reflectively, after a pause. He had a way, Sebastian noticed, of leaving spaces between his sentences, so that everything he said was framed, as it were, in a setting of silence. 'Tell me how it happened.'

Breathless and somewhat incoherent with shyness, Sebastian began to tell the story.

An expression of distress appeared on Bruno's face.

'So suddenly!' he said, when Sebastian had finished. 'So utterly without preparation!'

The words caused Sebastian to feel delightfully superior. Inwardly he smiled an ironic smile. It was almost incredible, but the old idiot seemed actually to believe in hell-fire and Holy Dying. With a studiously straight face, but still chuckling to himself, he looked up, to find the blue eyes fixed upon his face.

‘You think it sounds pretty funny?’ Bruno said, after the usual second of deliberate silence.

Startled, Sebastian blushed and stammered.

‘But I never … I mean, really …’

‘You mean what everybody means nowadays,’ the other interposed in his quiet voice. ‘Ignore death up to the last moment; then, when it can’t be ignored any longer, have yourself squirted full of morphia and shuffle off in a coma. Thoroughly sensible, humane and scientific, eh?’

Sebastian hesitated. He didn’t want to be rude, because, after all, he wanted the old ass to help him. Besides, he shrank from embarking on a controversy in which he was foredoomed by his shyness to make a fool of himself. At the same time, nonsense was nonsense.

‘I don’t see what’s wrong with it,’ he said cautiously, but with a faint undertone almost of truculence.

He sat there, sullenly averted, waiting for the other’s argumentative retort. But it never came. Prepared for attack, his resistance found itself confronted by a friendly silence and became somehow absurd and irrelevant.

Bruno spoke at last.

‘I suppose Mrs. Gamble will be holding one of her séances pretty soon.’

‘She has already,’ said Sebastian.

‘Poor old thing! What a greed for reassurance!’

‘But I must say … well, it’s pretty convincing, don’t you think?’

‘Oh, something happens all right, if that’s what you mean.’

Remembering Mrs. Thwale’s comment, Sebastian giggled knowingly.

‘Something pretty shameless,’ he said.

‘Shameless?’ Bruno repeated, looking up at him in surprise. ‘That’s an odd word. What makes you use it?’

Sebastian smiled uncomfortably and dropped his eyes.

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ he said. ‘It just seemed the right word, that’s all.’

There was another silence. Through the sleeve of his jacket Sebastian felt for the place where she had left the mark of her teeth. It was still painful to the

touch. Twin cannibals in bedlam…. And then he remembered that damned drawing, and that time was passing, passing. How the devil was he to broach the subject?

‘Shameless,’ Bruno said again pensively. ‘Shameless…. And yet you can’t see why there should be any preparation for dying?’

‘Well, he seemed perfectly happy,’ Sebastian answered defensively. ‘You know — jolly and amusing, like when he was alive. That is, if it really *was* Uncle Eustace.’

‘If,’ Bruno repeated. *‘If.’*

‘You don’t believe …?’ Sebastian questioned in some surprise.

Bruno leaned forward and laid his hand on the boy’s knee.

‘Let’s try to get this business quite clear in our minds,’ he said. ‘Eustace’s body plus some unknown, non-bodily *x* equals Eustace. And for the sake of argument let’s admit that poor Eustace was as happy and jolly as you seem to think he was. All right. A moment comes when Eustace’s body is abolished; but in view of what happens at old Mrs. Gamble’s séance we’re forced to believe that *x* persists. But before we go any further, let’s ask ourselves what it really was that we learned at the séance. We learned that *x* plus the medium’s body equals a temporary pseudo-Eustace. That’s an empirical fact. But meanwhile what exactly is *x*? And what’s happening to *x* when it isn’t connected with the medium’s body? What happens to it?’ he insisted.

‘Goodness knows.’

‘Precisely. So don’t let’s pretend that *we* know. And don’t let’s commit the fallacy of thinking that, because *x* plus the medium’s body is happy and jolly, *x* by itself must also be happy and jolly.’ He withdrew his hand from Sebastian’s knee and leaned back in his chair. ‘Most of the consolations of spiritualism,’ he went on after a little pause, ‘seem to depend on bad logic — on drawing faulty inferences from the facts observed at séances. When old Mrs. Gamble hears about Summerland and reads Sir Oliver Lodge, she feels reassured; she’s convinced that the next world will be just like this one. But actually Summerland

and Lodge are perfectly compatible with Catherine of Genoa and …' he hesitated, 'yes, even the *Inferno*.'

'The *Inferno*?' Sebastian repeated. 'But surely you don't imagine …?' And making a last desperate effort to assure himself that Bruno was just an old ass, he laughed aloud.

His sniggering dropped into a gulf of benevolent silence.

'No,' said Bruno at last, 'I don't believe in eternal damnation. But not for any reasons that I can discover from going to séances. And still less for any reasons that I can discover from living in the world. For other reasons. Reasons connected with what I know about the nature …'

He paused, and with an anticipatory smile Sebastian waited for him to trot out the word 'God.'

'… of the Gaseous Vertebrate,' Bruno concluded. He smiled sadly. 'Poor Eustace! It made him feel so much safer to call it that. As though the fact were modified by the name. And yet he was always laughing at other people for using intemperate language.'

'Now he's going to start on his conversion campaign,' Sebastian said to himself.

But, instead, Bruno got up, crossed over to the window and, without a word, deftly caught the big blue-bottle fly that was buzzing against the glass and tossed it out into freedom. Still standing by the window, he turned and spoke.

'You've got something on your mind, Sebastian,' he said. 'What is it?'

Startled into a kind of panic suspicion, Sebastian shook his head.

'Nothing,' he insisted; but an instant later he was cursing himself for having missed his opportunity.

'And yet that's what you came here to talk about.'

The smile with which the words were accompanied was without a trace of irony or patronage. Sebastian was reassured.

'Well, as a matter of fact …' He hesitated for a second or two, then forced a rather theatrical little laugh. 'You see,' he said with an attempt at gaiety, 'I've been swindled. Swindled,' he repeated emphatically; for all at once he had seen

how the story could be told without any reference to Mr. Tendring's discovery or his own humiliating failures to tell the truth — simply as the story of trustful inexperience and (yes, he'd admit it) childish silliness shamefully victimized and now appealing for help. Gathering confidence as he proceeded, he told his revised version of what had happened.

'Offering me a thousand, when he'd sold it to Uncle Eustace for seven!' he concluded indignantly. 'It's just plain swindling.'

'Well,' said Bruno slowly, 'they have peculiar standards, these dealers.' None more so, he might have added, on the strength of an earlier encounter with the man, than Gabriel Weyl. But nothing would be gained, and perhaps some positive harm might be done, if he were to tell Sebastian what he knew. 'But meanwhile,' he went on, 'what do your people up at the villa think about it all? Surely they must be wondering.'

Sebastian felt himself blushing.

'Wondering?' he questioned, hoping and pretending that he didn't understand what was being implied.

'Wondering how the drawing disappeared like that. And you must be pretty worried about it, aren't you?'

There was a pause. Then, without speaking, the boy nodded his head.

'It's difficult to come to any decision,' said Bruno mildly, 'unless one knows all the relevant facts.'

Sebastian felt profoundly ashamed of himself.

'I'm sorry,' he whispered. 'I ought to have explained….'

Sheepishly, he began to supply the details he had previously omitted.

Bruno listened without comment until the end.

'And you were really intending to tell Mrs. Ockham all about it?' he questioned.

'I was just beginning,' Sebastian insisted. 'And then she was sent for.'

'You didn't think of telling Mrs. Thwale instead?'

'Mrs. Thwale? Oh, goodness, no!'

'Why *goodness*, no?'

‘Well …’ Embarrassed, Sebastian groped for an avowable answer. ‘I don’t know. I mean, the drawing didn’t belong to her. She had nothing to do with it.’

‘And yet you say it was she who suspected the little girl.’

‘I know, but …’ Twin cannibals in bedlam — and when the light went on, the eyes were bright with the look of one who enjoys a comedy from between the curtains of the most private of boxes.

‘Well, somehow it never occurred to me.’

‘I see,’ said Bruno, and was silent for a few seconds. ‘If I can get the drawing back for you,’ he went on at last, ‘will you promise to take it straight to Mrs. Ockham and tell her the whole story?’

‘Oh, I promise,’ Sebastian cried eagerly.

The other held up a bony hand.

‘Not so quick, not so quick! Promises are serious. Are you sure you’ll be able to keep this one, if you make it?’

‘Certain!’

‘So was Simon Peter. But cocks have a habit of crowing at the most inconvenient moments….’

Bruno smiled, humorously, but at the same time with a kind of compassionate tenderness.

‘As though I were ill,’ Sebastian thought, as he looked into the other’s face, and was simultaneously touched and annoyed — touched by so much solicitude on his behalf, but annoyed by what it implied: namely, that he was sick (mortally sick, to judge by the look in those bright blue eyes), of the inability to keep a promise. But really that was a bit thick….

‘Well,’ Bruno went on, ‘the quicker we get to work the better, eh?’

He peeled off his sweater and, opening the wardrobe, took out an old brown jacket. Then he sat down to change his shoes. Bending over the laces, he began to talk again.

‘When I do something wrong,’ he said, ‘or merely stupid, I find it very useful to draw up — not exactly a balance sheet; no, it’s more like a genealogy, if you see what I mean, a family tree of the offence. Who or what were its parents,

ancestors, collaterals? What are likely to be its descendants — in my own life and other people's? It's surprising how far a little honest research will take one. Down into the rat-holes of one's own character. Back into past history. Out into the world around one. Forward into possible consequences. It makes one realize that nothing one does is unimportant and nothing wholly private.' The last knot was tied; Bruno got up. 'Well, I think that's everything,' he said, as he put on his jacket.

'There's the money,' Sebastian mumbled uncomfortably. He pulled out his wallet. 'I've only got about a thousand lire left. If you could lend me the rest … I'll return it as soon as I possibly …'

Bruno took the wad of notes and handed one of them back to the boy.

'You're not a Franciscan,' he said. 'At any rate, not yet — though one day, perhaps, in mere self-defence against yourself …' He smiled almost mischievously and, cramming the rest of the money in a trouser pocket, picked up his hat.

'I don't suppose I shall be very long,' he said, looking back from the door. 'You'll find plenty of books to amuse you — that is, if you want an opiate, which I hope you don't. Yes, I hope you don't,' he repeated with a sudden, insistent earnestness; then he turned and went out.

Left to himself, Sebastian sat down again.

It had gone off quite differently, of course, from what he had imagined, but very well. Better, in fact, than he had ever dared to hope — except that he *did* wish he hadn't started by telling that revised version of what had happened. Hoping to cut a better figure, and then having to admit, abjectly, humiliatingly, that it wasn't true. Anyone else would have seized the opportunity to deliver the most frightful pi-jaw. Not Bruno, however. He felt profoundly grateful for the man's forbearance. To have had the decency to help without first taking it out of him in a sermon — that was really extraordinary. And he wasn't a fool either. What he had said about the genealogy of an offence, for example …

'The genealogy of an offence,' he whispered in the silence, 'the family tree….'

He began to think of the lies he had told and of all their ramifying antecedents and accompaniments and consequences. He oughtn't to have told them, of course; but, on the other hand, if it hadn't been for his father's idiotic principles he wouldn't have had to tell them. And if it hadn't been for the slums and rich men with cigars, like poor Uncle Eustace, his father wouldn't have had those idiotic principles. And yet Uncle Eustace had been thoroughly kind and decent. Whereas that anti-fascist professor — one wouldn't trust him an inch. And how boring most of his father's left-wing, lower-class friends were! How unutterably dreary! But dreary and boring, he remembered, to *him*; and that was probably his fault. Just as it was his fault that those evening clothes should have seemed so indispensable — because other boys had them, because there would be those girls at Tom Boveney's party. But one oughtn't to consider what other people did or thought; and the girls would turn out to be just another excuse for sensual day-dreamings that were destined henceforward to be haunted by memories of last night's reality of unimaginable shamelessness and alienation. Cannibals in bedlam — and the door of the madhouse had been locked against the last chance of telling the truth. Meanwhile, in some crowded peasant's cottage at the remote, unvisited end of the garden, a child in tears was perhaps even now protesting her innocence under an angry cross-examination. And when blows and threats had failed to elicit the information she didn't possess, that old she-devil of a Mrs. Gamble would insist on sending for the police; and then everybody would be questioned, everybody — himself included. But would he be able to stick to his story? And if they took it into their heads to go and talk to Weyl, what reason would *he* have for withholding the truth? And then … Sebastian shuddered. But now, thank God, old man Bruno had come to the rescue. The drawing would be bought back; he'd make a clean breast of the whole business to Mrs. Ockham — irresistibly, so that she'd start crying and say he was just like Frankie — and everything would be all right. The children of his lie would either remain unborn or else be smothered in their cradles, and the lie itself would be as though it had never been uttered. Indeed, for all practical purposes, one could now say that it never *had* been uttered.

‘Never,’ Sebastian said to himself emphatically, ‘never.’

His spirits rose, he began to whistle, and suddenly, in a flash of intensely pleasurable illumination, he perceived how well this notion of the genealogy of offences would fit into the scheme of his new poem. Patterns of atoms; but chaos of the molecules assembled in the stone. Patterns of living cells and organs and physiological functioning, but chaos of men’s behaviour in time. And yet even in that chaos there was law and logic; there was a geometry even of disintegration. The square on lust is equal, so to speak, to the sum of the squares on vanity and idleness. The shortest distance between two cravings is violence. And what about the lies he had been telling? What about broken promises and betrayals? Phrases began to form themselves in his mind.

Belial his blubber lips and Avarice
Pouting a trap-tight sphincter, voluptuously
Administer the lingering Judas kiss …

He pulled out his pencil and scribbling-pad, and started to write. ‘… the lingering Judas kiss.’ And, after Judas, the crucifixion. But death had many ancestors besides greed and falsehood, many other forms than voluntary martyrdom. He recalled an article he had read somewhere about the character of the next war. ‘And the dead children,’ he wrote,

And the dead children lying about the streets
Like garbage, when the bombardiers have done —
These the mild sluggard murders while he snores,
And Calvin, father of a thousand whores,
Murders in pulpits, logically, for a syllogism….

An hour later a key turned in the lock. Startled, and at the same time annoyed, by the unwelcome interruption, Sebastian came to the surface from the depths of his absorbed abstraction and looked towards the door.

Bruno met his eye and smiled.

‘Eccolo!’ he said, holding up a thin rectangular package wrapped in brown paper.

Sebastian looked at it, and for a second couldn't think what it was. Then recognition came; but so completely had he convinced himself that Bruno would succeed, and that all his troubles were already over, that the actual sight of the drawing left him almost indifferent.

'Oh, the thing,' he said, 'the Degas.' Then, realizing that mere politeness demanded a display of gratitude and delight, he raised his voice and cried, 'Oh, thank you, thank you! I can never … I mean, you've been so extraordinarily decent….'

Bruno looked at him without speaking. 'A small cherub in grey flannel trousers,' he said to himself, remembering the phrase that Eustace had used at the station. And it was true: that smile was angelical, in spite of its calculatedness. There was a kind of lovely and supernatural innocence about the boy, even when, as now, he was so obviously acting a part. And, incidentally, why should he be acting a part? And considering the panic he had been in an hour ago, why was it that he didn't now feel genuinely glad and grateful? Scrutinizing the delicately beautiful face before him, Bruno sought in vain for an answer to his questions. All he could find in it was the brute fact of that seraphic naïveté shining enchantingly through childish hypocrisy, that guilelessness even in deliberate cunning. And because of that guilelessness people would always love him — always, whatever he might be betrayed into doing or leaving undone. But that wasn't by any means the most dangerous consequence of being a seraph — but a seraph out of heaven, deprived of the beatific vision, unaware, indeed, of the very existence of God. No, the most dangerous consequence was that, whatever he might do or leave undone, he himself would tend, because of the beauty of his own intrinsic innocence, to spare himself the salutary agonies of contrition. Being angelical, he would be loved, not only by other people, but also by himself — through thick and thin, with a love inexpugnable by any force less violent than a major disaster. Once again, Bruno felt himself moved by a profound compassion. Sebastian, the predestined target, the delicate and radiant butt of God alone knew what ulterior flights of arrows — piercing enjoyments,

successes poisoned with praise and barbed to stick; and then, if Providence was merciful enough to send an antidote, pains and humiliations and defeats….

‘Been writing?’ he asked at last, noticing the pad and pencil, and making them the excuse for breaking the long silence.

Sebastian blushed and stowed them away in his pocket.

‘I’d been thinking of what you were saying just before you went out,’ he answered. ‘You know, about things having genealogies….’

‘And you’ve been working out the genealogy of your own mistakes?’ Bruno asked with a glad hopefulness.

‘Well, not exactly. I was … Well, you see, I’m working on a new poem, and this seemed to fit in so well….’

Bruno thought of the interview from which he had just come, and smiled with a touch of rather rueful amusement. Gabriel Weyl had ended by yielding; but the surrender had been anything but graceful. Against his will — for he had done his best to put them out of mind — Bruno found himself remembering the ugly words that had been spoken, the passionate gestures of those hirsute and beautifully manicured hands, that face distorted and pale with fury. He sighed, laid his hat and the drawing on the book-case, and sat down.

‘The Gospel of Poetry,’ he said slowly. ‘In the beginning were the words, and the words were with God, and the words *were* God. Here endeth the first, last and only lesson.’

There was a silence. Sebastian sat quite still, with averted face, staring at the floor. He was feeling ashamed of himself and at the same time resentful of the fact that he had been made to feel ashamed. After all, there was nothing wrong about poetry; so why on earth shouldn’t he write, if he felt like it?

‘Can I see what you’ve done?’ Bruno asked at last.

Sebastian blushed again and mumbled something about its being no good; but finally handed over the scribbling-pad.

‘“Belial his blubber lips,”’ Bruno began aloud, then continued his reading in silence. ‘Good!’ he said, when he had finished. ‘I wish *I* could say the thing as powerfully as that. If I’d been able to,’ he added with a little smile, ‘perhaps

you'd have spent your time making out your own genealogy, instead of writing something that may move other people to make out theirs. But then, of course, you have the luck to have been born a poet. Or is it the misfortune?'

'The misfortune?' Sebastian repeated.

'Every Fairy Godmother is also potentially the Wicked Fairy.'

'Why?'

'Because it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man …' He left the sentence unfinished.

'But I'm not rich,' Sebastian protested, thinking resentfully of what his father's stinginess had forced him to do.

'Not rich? Read your own verses!' Bruno handed back the scribbling-pad. 'And when you've done that, look at your image in a mirror.'

'Oh, I see….'

'And women's eyes — those are mirrors when they come close enough,' Bruno added.

When they come close enough — looking down at the comedy, with the microscopic image of nature's lay idiot reflected in their ironic brightness. Feeling extremely uneasy, Sebastian wondered what the man would say next. But to his great relief the talk took a less personal turn.

'And yet,' Bruno went on reflectively, 'a certain number of the intrinsically rich *do* succeed in getting through the needle's eye. Bernard, for example. And perhaps Augustine, though I always wonder if he wasn't the victim of his own incomparable style. And Thomas Aquinas. And obviously François de Sales. But they're few, they're few. The great majority of the rich get stuck, or never even attempt the passage. Did you ever read a life of Kant?' he asked parenthetically. 'Or of Nietzsche?'

Sebastian shook his head.

'Well, perhaps you'd better not,' said Bruno. 'It's difficult, if one does, to avoid uncharitableness. And then Dante….' He shook his head, and there was a silence.

‘Uncle Eustace talked about Dante,’ Sebastian volunteered. ‘That last evening it was — just before …’

‘What did he say?’

Sebastian did his best to reproduce the substance of the conversation.

‘And he was perfectly right,’ said Bruno, when he had finished. ‘Except, of course, that Chaucer isn’t any solution to the problem. Being worldly in one way and writing consummately well about this world is no better than being worldly in another way and writing consummately well about the next world. No better for oneself, that’s to say. When it comes to the effect on other people …’ He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. ‘“Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.” Or

e la sua volontate è nostra pace;

ell’è quel mare al qual tutto si move,

ciò eh’ella crea e che natura face.

I know which of them *I’d* choose. Can you understand Dante, by the way?’

Sebastian shook his head, but immediately made up for this admission of ignorance by showing off a little.

‘If it were Greek,’ he said, ‘or Latin, or French …’

‘But unfortunately it’s Italian,’ Bruno interposed matter-of-factly. ‘But Italian’s worth learning, if only for the sake of what those lines can do for you. And yet,’ he added, ‘how little they did for the man who actually wrote them! Poor Dante — the way he pats himself on the back for belonging to such a distinguished family! Not to mention the fact that he’s the only man who was ever allowed to visit heaven before he died. And even in Paradise he can’t stop raging and railing about contemporary politics. And when he gets to the sphere of the Contemplatives, what does he make Benedict and Peter Damian talk about? Not love or liberation, nor the practice of the presence of God. No, no; they spend all their time, as Dante liked to spend his — denouncing other people’s bad behaviour and threatening them with hell-fire.’ Sadly, Bruno shook his head. ‘Such a waste of such enormous gifts — it makes one feel inclined to weep.’

‘Why do you suppose he wasted himself like that?’

‘Because he wanted to. And if you ask *why* he went on wanting to after he’d written about God’s will being our peace, the answer is that that’s how genius works. It has insights into the nature of ultimate reality and it gives expression to the knowledge so obtained. Gives expression to it either explicitly in things like *“e la sua volontate è nostra pace”* or implicitly, in the white spaces between the lines, so to speak — by writing beautifully. And of course you can write beautifully about anything, from the Wife of Bath to Baudelaire’s *affreuse juive* and Gray’s pensive Selima. And incidentally the explicit statements about reality don’t convey very much unless they too are written poetically. Beauty is truth; truth, beauty. The truth about the beauty is given in the lines, and the beauty of the truth in the white spaces between them. If the white spaces are merely blank, the lines are just … just Hymns Ancient and Modern.’

‘Or late Wordsworth,’ put in Sebastian.

‘Yes, and don’t forget the very early Shelley,’ said Bruno. ‘The adolescent can be quite as inept as the old.’ He smiled at Sebastian. ‘Well, as I was saying,’ he continued in another tone, ‘explicitly or implicitly, men of genius express their knowledge of reality. But they themselves very rarely act on their knowledge. Why not? Because all their energy and attention are absorbed by the work of composition. They’re concerned with writing, not with acting or being. But because they’re only concerned with writing about their knowledge, they prevent themselves from knowing more.’

‘What do you mean?’ Sebastian asked.

‘Knowledge is proportionate to being,’ Bruno answered. ‘You know in virtue of what you are; and what you are depends on three factors: what you’ve inherited, what your surroundings have done to you, and what you’ve chosen to do with your surroundings and your inheritance. A man of genius inherits an unusual capacity to see into ultimate reality and to express what he sees. If his surroundings are reasonably good, he’ll be able to exercise his powers. But if he spends all his energies on writing and doesn’t attempt to modify his inherited and acquired being in the light of what he knows, then he can never get to

increase his knowledge. On the contrary, he'll know progressively less instead of more.'

'Less instead of more?' Sebastian repeated questioningly.

'Less instead of more,' the other insisted. 'He that is not getting better is getting worse, and he that is getting worse is in a position to know less and less about the nature of ultimate reality. Conversely, of course, if one gets better and knows more, one will be tempted to stop writing, because the all-absorbing labour of composition is an obstacle in the way of further knowledge. And that, maybe, is one of the reasons why most men of genius take such infinite pains not to become saints — out of mere self-preservation. So you get Dante writing angelic lines about the will of God and in the next breath giving vent to his rancours and vanities. You get Wordsworth worshipping God in nature and preaching admiration, hope and love, while all the time he cultivates an egotism that absolutely flabbergasts the people who know him. You get Milton devoting a whole epic to man's first disobedience and consistently exhibiting a pride worthy of his own Lucifer. And finally,' he added, with a little laugh, 'you get young Sebastian perceiving the truth of an important general principle — the inter-relationship of evil — and using all his energy, not to act on it, which would be a bore, but to turn it into verse, which he thoroughly enjoys. "Calvin, father of a thousand whores" is pretty good, I grant you; but something personal and practical might have been still better. Mightn't it? However, as I said before, In the beginning were the words, and the words were with God, and the words *were* God.' He got up and crossed over to the door of the kitchen. 'And now let's see what we can scrape together for lunch,' he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

AFTER LUNCHEON THEY did some sight-seeing, and it was with an imagination haunted by the frescoes of San Marco and the Medicean tombs that Sebastian finally made his way home. The sun was already low as he walked up the steep and dusty road to the villa; there were treasures of blue shadow, expanses not of stone or stucco, but of amber, trees and grass glowing with supernatural significance. Blissfully, in a mood of effortless alertness and passivity, like a wide-eyed somnambulist, who sees, but with senses somehow not his own, who feels and thinks, but with emotions that no longer have a personal reference, a mind entirely free and unconditioned, he moved through the actual radiance around him, through the memories of what he had so lately seen and heard — the huge, smooth marbles, the saints diaphanous in the whitewashed monastery cells, the words that Bruno had spoken as they came out of the Medici chapel.

'Michelangelo and Fra Angelico — apotheosis and deification.'

Apotheosis — the personality exalted and intensified to the point where the person ceases to be mere man or woman and becomes god-like, one of the Olympians, like that passionately pensive warrior, like those great titanesses brooding, naked, above the sarcophagi. And over against apotheosis, deification — personality annihilated in charity, in union, so that at last the man or woman can say, 'Not I, but God in me.'

But meanwhile here was the goat again, the one that had been eating wistaria buds under the head-lamps that first evening with Uncle Eustace. But this time it had a half-ruminated rose sticking out of the corner of its mouth — like Carmen in the opera, so that it was to the imagined strains of '*Toreador, toreador*' that the creature advanced to the gate of its garden and, slowly chewing on the rose, looked out at him through the bars. In the yellow eyes the pupils were two

narrow slots of the purest, blackest mindlessness. Sebastian reached out and caressed the long curve of a nobly semitic nose, fondled six warm and muscular inches of drooping ear, then took hold of one of the diabolic horns. Carmen began to back away impatiently. He tightened his grip and tried to pull her forward. With a sudden, forceful jerk of the head, the creature broke away from him and went bounding up the steps. A large black udder wobbled wildly as she ran. Pausing at the top of the steps, she let fall half a dozen pills of excrement, then reached up and plucked another rose for her appearance in the Second Act. Sebastian turned and walked on, through the late afternoon sunshine and his memories. Somnambulistically happy. But uneasily, at the back of his mind, he was aware of the other, disregarded realities — the lies he had told, the interview with Mrs. Ockham that still lay ahead of him. And perhaps that wretched child had already been questioned, whipped, deprived of food. But no, he refused to give up his happiness before it was absolutely necessary. Carmen with her rose and her white beard; marble and fresco; apotheosis and deification. But why not apotragosis and caprification? He laughed aloud. And yet what Bruno had said, as they stood there in the Piazza del Duomo, waiting for the tram, had impressed him profoundly. Apotheosis and deification — the only roads of escape from the unutterable wearisomeness, the silly and degrading horror, of being merely yourself, of being only human. Two roads; but in reality only the second led out into open country. So much more promising, apparently, so vastly more attractive, the first invariably turned out to be only a glorious blind alley. Under triumphal arches, along an avenue of statuary and fountains, you marched in pomp towards an ultimate frustration — solemnly and heroically, full tilt into the insurmountable dead end of your own selfhood. And the dead end was solid marble, of course, and adorned with the colossal monuments of your power, magnanimity and wisdom, but no less a wall than the most grotesquely hideous of the vices down there in your old, all too human prison. Whereas the other road … But then the tram had come.

‘You’ve been incredibly kind,’ he had stammered as they shook hands, and then, suddenly carried away by his feelings: ‘You’ve made me see such a lot of

things…. I'll really try. Really….'

The brown beaked skull had smiled, and in their deep sockets the eyes had brightened with tenderness and, once again, compassion.

Yes, Sebastian had repeated to himself, as the tram crawled along the narrow streets towards the river, he'd really try. Try to be more honest, to think less of himself. To live with people and real events and not so exclusively with words. How awful he was! Self-hatred and remorse blended harmoniously with the feelings evoked by the afternoon sunlight and the fascinating foreignness of what it illuminated, by San Marco and the Medici chapel, by Bruno's kindness and what the man had said. And gradually his mood had modulated out of its original ethical urgency into another key — out of the exaltation of repentance and good resolutions into the bliss of detached poetical contemplation, into this heavenly condition of somnambulism, in which he still found himself as he rounded the last hairpin of the road and saw the wrought-iron gates between their tall pillars of stone, the solemn succession of the cypress trees winding away towards the villa, out of sight, round the contour of the hill.

He slipped through the pedestrians' wicket. The fine gravel of the drive made a delicious crunching noise under his feet, like Grape Nuts.

Walking on Grape Nuts and imagination,

Among recollected crucifixions and these jewels

Of horizontal sunlight …

Suddenly, from between two cypresses, twenty or thirty yards ahead of him, a small black figure came running out into the drive. With a start and a horrible sinking of the stomach, Sebastian recognized the little girl with the weeding basket, recognized the incarnation of his own disregarded guilty conscience, the harbinger of that reality which, in his somnambulistic detachment, he had forgotten. Catching sight of him, the child halted and stood there staring with round black eyes. Her face, Sebastian noticed, was paler than usual, and she had evidently been crying. Oh, God…. He smiled at her, called 'Hullo' and waved a friendly hand. But before he had taken five more steps the child turned and, like a frightened animal, rushed away along the path by which she had come.

‘Stop!’ he shouted.

But of course she didn’t stop; and when he came to the opening between the trees, the child was nowhere to be seen. And even if he were to follow and find her, he reflected, it wouldn’t be any good. She understood no English, he spoke no Italian. Gloomily Sebastian turned and walked on towards the house.

No servants were about when he entered, and he could hear no sound from the drawing-room. Thank God, the coast was clear. He tiptoed across the hall and started to climb the stairs. On the last step he halted. A sound had caught his ear. Somewhere, behind one of those closed doors, people were talking. Should he run the invisible blockade and go on, or beat a retreat? Sebastian was still hesitating, when the door of what had been poor Uncle Eustace’s room was thrown open and out walked old Mrs. Gamble, hugging that dog of hers in one arm while Mrs. Ockham held the other. They were followed by a pale, cow-like creature, whom Sebastian recognized as the medium. Then came Mrs. Thwale and, close behind Mrs. Thwale — of all horrors! — Gabriel Weyl and Mme Weyl.

‘So different from the occidental art,’ Weyl was saying. ‘For example, you would not desire to *feel* a Gothic madonna — would you, madame?’

He dodged past Mrs. Thwale and the medium, and caught Mrs. Ockham by the sleeve.

‘Would you?’ he insisted, as she halted and turned towards him.

‘Well, really …’ said Mrs. Ockham uncertainly.

‘What’s that he’s saying?’ the Queen Mother questioned sharply. ‘I can’t understand a word of it.’

‘Those folds of *trecento* drapery,’ M. Weyl went on. ‘So harsh, so emphatic!’ He made a grimace of agony and with his left hand tenderly clasped the fingers of his right, as though they had just been caught in a mouse-trap. ‘*Qué barbaridad!*’

Still keeping his eyes fixed on the menace at the other end of the corridor, Sebastian stepped noiselessly down from the highest stair to the one below the highest.

‘Whereas a Chinese object,’ M. Weyl went on; and, from agonized, his large expressive face became suddenly rapturous. ‘*Un petit bodhisattva, par exemple…*’

Another step down.

‘… With his draperies in liquefaction. Like butter in the month of August. No violence, no Gothic folds — simply *quelques volutes savantes et peu profondes.*

Voluptuously the thick, white, hairy hands caressed the air.

‘What deliciousness for the ends of the fingers! What sublime sensuality! What …’

Another step. But this time the movement was too abrupt. Foxy VIII turned a sharp nose towards the staircase and, wriggling frantically in Mrs. Gamble’s clasp, began to bark.

‘Why, it’s Sebastian!’ cried Mrs. Ockham delightedly. ‘Come along and be introduced to Monsieur and Madame Weyl.’

Feeling like a criminal on his way to execution, Sebastian slowly mounted the last three stairs of the scaffold and walked towards the drop. The barking grew more hysterical.

‘Be quiet, Foxy,’ rasped the Queen Mother. Then, tempering command by argument, ‘After all,’ she added, ‘he’s a perfectly harmless boy. Perfectly harmless.’

‘Sebastian Barnack, my stepfather’s nephew,’ Mrs. Ockham explained.

Sebastian looked up, expecting to meet a smile of ironic recognition, a voluble declaration that the Weyls had met him before. But, instead, the wife merely inclined her head politely, while the man held out a hand and said:

‘Enchanted to make your acquaintance, sir.’

‘Enchanted,’ Sebastian mumbled back, trying to look and behave as though this were the usual kind of ordinary unimportant introduction.

‘Without doubt,’ said M. Weyl, ‘you share your uncle’s love of the arts?’

‘Oh, rather … I mean, I …’

‘The Chinese collection alone!’ M. Weyl clasped his hands and looked up to heaven. ‘And the fact that he kept most of it in his bedroom,’ he went on, turning

back to Mrs. Ockham, ‘for no other eyes than his own! What delicacy, what sensibility!’

‘I’d sell the whole lot if I were you, Daisy,’ put in the Queen Mother. ‘Sell ’em for cash and buy yourself a Rolls. It’s an economy in the end.’

‘How true!’ breathed M. Weyl in the tone of one who comments reverently on an utterance by Rabindranath Tagore.

‘Well, I don’t know about the Rolls,’ said Mrs. Ockham, who had been thinking of how she could use the money to help her poor girls. Then, to avoid further discussion with her grandmother, she hastily changed the subject. ‘I wanted to talk to Monsieur Weyl about the drawing,’ she continued, turning to Sebastian. ‘So Veronica rang him up after luncheon, and he very kindly offered to come up here immediately.’

‘No kindness at all,’ protested M. Weyl. ‘A pleasure and at the same time a sacred duty to the memory of our dear defunct.’ He laid his hand on his heart.

‘Monsieur Weyl is very optimistic,’ Mrs. Ockham went on. ‘He doesn’t think it was stolen. In fact, he’s absolutely certain we shall find it again.’

‘Daisy, you’re talking nonsense,’ barked the Queen Mother. ‘Nobody can be certain about that drawing except Eustace. That’s why I sent for Mrs. Byfleet again — and the quicker we get to our séance, the better.’

There was a silence, and Sebastian knew that the moment had come for him to keep his promise. If he failed to act now, if he didn’t immediately hand over the drawing and explain what had happened, it might be too late. But to confess in public, before that awful man and the Queen Mother and Mrs. Thwale — the prospect was appalling. And yet he had promised, he had promised. Sebastian swallowed hard and passed the tip of his tongue over his dry lips. But it was Mrs. Gamble who broke the silence.

‘Nothing will convince *me* that it wasn’t stolen,’ she went on emphatically. ‘Nothing except an assurance from Eustace’s own lips.’

‘Not even the fact that it has been already found?’ said M. Weyl.

His eyes twinkled, his tone and expression were those of a man on the verge of delighted laughter.

‘Already found?’ Mrs. Ockham repeated questioningly.

Like a conjurer materializing rabbits, M. Weyl reached out and twitched the thin, flat parcel from under Sebastian’s left arm.

‘In its original wrapping,’ he said, as he broke the string. ‘I recognize my paper of *emballage*.’ And with a flourish, as though it were not rabbits this time, but infant unicorns, he pulled out the drawing and handed it to Mrs. Ockham. ‘And as for our *jeune farceur*,’ he went on, ‘who holds himself there saying nothing with a funebrial face as if he was at an interment …’ He exploded in a great guffaw and clapped Sebastian on the shoulder.

‘What’s that, what’s that?’ cried the Queen Mother, darting blind glances from one face to another. ‘The boy’s found it, has he?’

‘“Elle est retrouvée”’ M. Weyl declaimed,

‘Elle est retrouvée.

Quoi? L’éternite.

C’est la mer allée

Avec le soleil.

But seriously, my friend, seriously … Where? Not by chance in the place where I always said it must be? Not in …?’ He paused, then leaned forward and whispered in Sebastian’s ear, ‘… In the place where even the king goes on foot — *enfin*, the toilet cabinet?’

Sebastian hesitated for a moment, then nodded his head.

‘There’s a little space between the medicine cupboard and the wall,’ he whispered.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

PAIN AND THE howling of laughter. Nightmares of cruelty and cold lust, and this irrepressible derision tearing relentlessly at the very substance of his being. Without end; and the durations grew longer and progressively longer with each repetition of the ever-increasing agony.

After an eternity deliverance came with a kind of jerk, as though by miracle. Came with the sudden lapse out of mere incoherent succession into the familiar orderliness of time. Came with the multitudinous twittering of sensation, the fluttering consciousness of having a body. And out there lay space; and in the space there were bodies — the sensed evidence of other kindred minds.

‘We have two old friends of yours with us this evening,’ he heard the Queen Mother saying in her ghostly petty officer’s voice. ‘Monsieur and Madame — what’s the name, by the way?’

‘Weyl,’ and ‘Gabriel Weyl,’ a masculine and a feminine voice answered simultaneously.

And sure enough, it was the Flemish Venus and her preposterous Vulcan.

“‘Where every prospect pleases,”’ he chanted, ‘“and only man is WEYL FRÈRES, Bruxelles, Paris, Florence….”’

But, as usual, the imbecile interpreter got it all wrong. Meanwhile the dealer had begun to talk to him about the Chinese bronzes. What taste in the collector of such treasures, what connoisseurship, what sensibility! Then, with a solemn earnestness that was in ludicrous contrast with her naughty-naughty French accent, Mme Weyl brought out something about their calligraphic polyphony.

Delicious absurdity!

‘He thinks you’re funny,’ the interpreter squeaked, and broke into a shrill giggle.

But these Weyls, Eustace suddenly perceived, were much more than funny. In some way or other they were enormously significant and important. In some way and for some mysterious reason they were epoch-making — yes, there was no other word for it. They were absolutely epoch-making.

He seemed on the verge of discovering just how and why they were epoch-making, when the Queen Mother suddenly broke in.

‘I suppose you’re beginning to feel quite at home now, on the other side,’ she rasped.

‘At home!’ he repeated with sarcastic emphasis.

But it was as a rather gushing statement of fact that the imbecile brought out the words.

‘Sure, he feels quite at home,’ she squeaked.

Then the Queen Mother suggested that it might be nice for those who had never attended a séance before if he gave them something evidential; and she began to fire off a string of the most idiotic questions. How much had he paid for those drawings he had bought from M. Weyl? What was the name of the hotel he had stayed at in Paris? What books had he been reading the day he passed on? And then Mrs. Thwale piped up, and both the Weyls; and the conversation became so incoherent, so senselessly trivial, that he grew confused, found it difficult to think straight or even remember the most familiar facts. In self-protection he turned his attention away from the significance of what was being said to him, concentrating instead on the mere sound of the words, on the pitch and timbre and volume of the different voices. And contrapuntal to these noises from without there were the muffled rhythms of blood and breathing, the uninterrupted stream of messages from this temporary body of his. Warmths and pressures, moistures and titillations, a score of little aches and stiffnesses, of obscure visceral discontents and satisfactions. Treasures of physiological reality, directly experienced and so intrinsically fascinating that there was no need to bother about other people, no point in thinking or trying to communicate. It was enough just to have this feeling of space and time and the processes of life. Nothing else was required. This alone was paradise.

And then, through the dark twittering aviary of his sensations, Eustace was aware, once again, of that blue shining stillness. Delicate, unutterably beautiful, like the essence of all skies and flowers, like the silent principle and potentiality of all music. And tender, yearning, supplicatory.

But meanwhile the air slowly came and went in the nostrils, cool on the intake, warm to the point of being all but imperceptible as it was breathed out; and as the chest expanded and contracted, effort was succeeded by a delicious effortlessness, tension by relaxation, again and again. And what pleasure to listen to the waves of blood as they beat against the ear-drums, to feel them throbbing under the skin of the temples! How fascinating to analyse the mingled savours of garlic and chocolate, red wine and — yes — kidneys, haunting the tongue and palate! And then, all at once, by a kind of exquisitely harmonious and co-ordinated earthquake of all the muscles of the mouth and gullet, the accumulations of saliva were swallowed; and a moment later a faint bubbling trill from below the diaphragm announced that the processes of digestion were sleeplessly going forward. That seemed to bring the ultimate reassurance, to perfect and consummate his sense of paradisal cosiness. And suddenly he found himself remembering St. Sebastian and the stuffed humming-birds, remembering the taste of cigar smoke on a palate warmed by old brandy, remembering Mimi and the Young Man of Peoria and his collection of facts about the ludicrous or disastrous consequences of idealism — remembering them not with shame or self-condemnation but with downright relish or, at the very worst, an amused indulgence. The light persisted, ubiquitously present; but this feeling of being in a body was an effective barrier against its encroachments. Behind his sensations he was safe from any compulsion to know himself as he was known. And these Weyls, he now perceived, this Venus with her swarthy Vulcan, could become the instruments of his permanent deliverance from that atrocious knowledge. There was a living uterine darkness awaiting him there, a vegetative heaven. Providence was ready for him, a providence of living flesh, hungry to engulf him into itself, yearning to hold and cradle him, to nourish with the very substance of its deliciously carnal and sanguine being.

Imploringly, the light intensified its shining silence. But he knew what it was up to, he was forearmed against its tricks. And besides, it was possible to make the best of Mozart *and* the Casino, of Mimi *and* the evening star between cypresses. Perfectly possible, provided always one owned a physiology to protect one against the stratagems of the light. And that protection could be had for the asking; or rather was being offered, greedily, with a kind of mindless frenzy….

Suddenly the squeaking of the imbecile ceased to be nothing but a sensation, and modulated into significance.

‘Good-bye, folks, good-bye.’

And from out there in the darkness came an answering chorus of farewells that grew momently dimmer, vaguer, more confused. And all the delicious messages from this body of his — they too were fading. The aviary fell silent and motionless. And suddenly there was a kind of wrench, and once again he was out of the comfortable world where time is a regular succession and place is fixed and solid — out in the chaos and delirium of unfettered mind. In the vague flux of masterless images, of thoughts and words and memories all but autonomous and independent, two things preserved their stability, the tender ubiquity of the light and the knowledge that there was a fostering darkness of flesh and blood in which, if he chose, he could find deliverance from the light.

But here once more was the lattice of relationships, and he was in the midst of it, moving from node to node, from one patterned figure to its strangely distorted projection in another pattern. Moving, moving, until all of a sudden there he was, carefully putting down his cigar on the onyx ashtray and turning to open the medicine cupboard.

There was a kind of side-slip, a falling, as it were, through the intricacies of the lattice — and he knew himself remembering events that had not yet taken place. Remembering a day towards the end of summer, hot and cloudless, with aeroplanes roaring across the sky — across the luminous silence. For the silence was still there, shining, ubiquitously tender; still there in spite of what was happening on this long straight road between its poplar trees. Thousands of

people, all moving one way, all haunted by the same fear. People on foot, carrying bundles on their backs, carrying children; or perched high on overloaded carts; or wheeling bicycles with suitcases strapped to the handle-bars.

And here was Weyl, paunchy and bald-headed, pushing a green perambulator packed full of unframed canvases and Dutch silver and Chinese jade, with a painted madonna standing drunkenly at an angle where the baby should have been. Heavy now with the approach of middle age, the Flemish Venus limped after him under the burden of a blue morocco dressing-case and her sealskin coat. *'Je n'en peux plus,'* she kept whispering, *'je n'en peux plus.'* And sometimes, despairingly, *'Suicidons-nous, Gabriel.'* Bent over the perambulator, Weyl did not answer or even look round, but the little spindly boy who walked beside her, preposterous in baggy plus-fours, would squeeze his mother's hand, and when she turned her tear-stained face towards him would smile up at her encouragingly.

To the left, across a tawny expanse of stubble and some market gardens, a whole town was burning, and the smoke of it, billowing up from behind the towers of that sunlit church in the suburbs, spread out as it mounted through the luminous silence into a huge inverted cone of brown darkness. A noise of distant gunfire bumped against the summer air. Near by, from an abandoned farm, came the frantic lowing of unmilked cows and, overhead, suddenly there were the planes again. The planes — and almost in the same instant another roaring made itself heard on the road behind them. Dimly at first. But the convoy was travelling at full speed and, second by second, the noise swelled up, terrifyingly. There were shouts and screaming and a panic rush towards the ditch — the frenzy and blind violence of fear. And suddenly here was Weyl howling like a madman beside his overturned perambulator. A horse took fright, whinnied, reared up in the shafts; the cart moved back with a sudden jerk, striking Mme Weyl a glancing blow on the shoulder. She staggered forward a step or two, trying to recover her balance, then caught one of her high heels against a stone and fell face downwards into the roadway. '*Maman!*' screamed the little boy.

But before he could pull her back the first of the huge lorries had rolled across the struggling body. For a second there was a gap in the nightmare, a glimpse between the trees of that distant church, bright against the billowing smoke, like a carved jewel in the sunshine. Then, identical with the first, the second lorry passed. The body was quite still.

But Eustace was alone again with the light and the silence. Alone with the principle of all skies and music and tenderness, with the potentialities of all that skies and music and even tenderness were incapable of manifesting. For an instant, for an eternity, there was a total and absolute participation. Then, excruciatingly, the knowledge of being separate returned, the shamed perception of his own hideous and obscene opacity.

But in the same instant there was the memory of those epoch-making Weyls, the knowledge that if he chose to accept it, they could bring him deliverance from the excess of light.

The lorries rolled on, identically grey-green, full of men and clanking metal. In the gap of time between the fourth and fifth, they managed to pull the body out from under the wheels. A coat was thrown over it.

Still crying, Weyl went back, after a little, to see if he could find any more fragments of the madonna's broken crown and fingers. A big red-cheeked woman laid her arm round the child's shoulders and, leading him away, made him sit down at the foot of one of the poplar trees. The little boy crouched there, his face in his hands, his body trembling and shaken by sobs. And suddenly it was no longer from outside that he was thought about. The agony of that grief and terror were known directly, by an identifying experience of them — not as his, but mine. Eustace Barnack's awareness of the child had become one with the child's awareness of himself; it *was* that awareness.

Then there was another displacement, and again the image of the little boy was only a memory of someone else. Horrible, horrible! And yet, in spite of the horror, what blessedness it was to feel the waves of blood beating and beating within the ears! He remembered the warm delicious sense of being full of food and drink, and the feel of flesh, the aromatic smell of cigar smoke … But here

was the light again, the shining of the silence. None of that, none of that. Firmly and with decision, he averted his attention.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AS SOON AS breakfast was over, Sebastian slipped out of the house and almost ran down the hill to where the tram-cars stopped. He had to see Bruno, to see him as soon as possible and tell him what had happened.

His mind, as he stood there waiting for the tram, wavered back and forth between an overpowering sense of guilt and the aggrieved and plaintive feeling that he had been exposed to moral pressures which it was beyond the power of any ordinary human being to withstand. He'd broken his promise — the promise that (to crown wrongdoing with humiliation) he'd been so boastfully confident of being able to keep. But then who could have imagined that Weyl would be there? Who could possibly have anticipated that the fellow would behave in that extraordinary way? Inventing a story for him to tell, and fairly forcing it upon him! Yes, forcing him to lie, he kept repeating in self-justification. Forcing him against his better judgment, against his will; for hadn't he really been on the point of coming out with the truth, there in the corridor, in front of everybody? By the time the tram arrived, Sebastian had half persuaded himself that that was how it had been. He had just been opening his mouth to tell Mrs. Ockham everything, when, for some unknown and sinister reason, that beast of a man barged in and forced him to break his promise. But the trouble with that story, he reflected as they rattled along the Lungarno, was that Bruno would listen to it and then, after a little silence, very quietly ask some question that would make it collapse like a pricked balloon. And there he'd be, clutching the shameful vestiges of yet another lie and still under the necessity of confessing the previous falsehood. No, it would be better to start by telling Bruno the miserable truth — that he'd started by trying to run away and then, when he'd been cornered, had felt only too grateful to Weyl for showing him the way to break his promise and save his precious skin.

But here was Bruno's corner. The tram stopped; he got off and started to walk along the narrow street. Yes, at bottom he'd actually been grateful to the man for having made the lie so easy.

'God, I'm awful,' he whispered to himself, 'I'm awful!'

The tarry smell of Bologna sausages came to his nostrils. He looked up. Yes, this was it — the little *pizzicheria* next to Bruno's house. He turned in under a tall doorway and began to climb the stairs. On the second landing he became aware that there were people coming down from one of the higher floors; and suddenly some sort of soldier or policeman came into sight. With a fatuous assumption of majesty, he strutted along the landing. Sebastian squeezed against the wall to let him pass. A second later three more men turned the corner of the stairs. A man in uniform led the way, a man in uniform brought up the rear, and between them, carrying his ancient Gladstone bag, walked Bruno. Catching sight of Sebastian, Bruno immediately frowned, pursed his lips to indicate the need of silence and almost imperceptibly shook his head. Taking the hint, the boy closed his parted lips and tried to look blank and unconcerned. In silence the three men passed him, then one after another turned and disappeared down the stairs.

Sebastian stood there, listening to the sound of the receding footsteps. Where his stomach should have been, there was an awful void of apprehension. What did it mean? What on earth could it mean?

They were at the bottom of the stairs now, they were crossing the hall. Then abruptly there was no more sound; they had walked out into the street. Sebastian hurried down after them and, looking out, was in time to see the last of the policemen stepping into a waiting car. The door was slammed, the old black Fiat started to move, turned left just beyond the sausage shop and was gone. For a long time Sebastian stared unseeingly at the place where it had been, then started to walk slowly back by the way he had come.

A touch on the elbow made him start and turn his head. A tall bony young man was walking beside him.

'You came to see Bruno?' he said in bad English.

Remembering his father's stories of police spies and *agents provocateurs*, Sebastian did not immediately answer. His apprehension was evidently reflected on his face; for the young man frowned and shook his head.

'Not have fear,' he said almost angrily. 'I am Bruno's friend. Malpighi — Carlo Malpighi.' He raised his hand and pointed. 'Let us go in here.'

Four broad steps led up to the entrance of a church. They mounted and pushed aside the heavy leather curtain that hung across the open door. At the end of the high vaulted tunnel a few candles burned yellow in a twilight thick with the smell of stale incense. Except for a woman in black, praying at the altar rails, the building was empty.

'What happened?' Sebastian whispered when they were inside.

Struggling with his broken English and incoherent with emotional distress, the young man tried to answer. A friend of Bruno's — a man employed at police headquarters — had come last night to warn him of what they were going to do. In a fast car he could easily have got to the frontier. There were lots of people who would have taken almost any risk to help him. But Bruno had refused: he wouldn't do it, he simply wouldn't do it.

The young man's voice broke, and in the half-darkness the other could see that big tears were running down his cheeks.

'But what did they have against him?' Sebastian asked.

'He'd been denounced for being in touch with some of Cacciaguida's agents.'

'Cacciaguida?' Sebastian repeated; and with a renewal of that horrible sense of inner emptiness he remembered the elation he had felt as he stuffed the twenty-two bank-notes into his wallet, his stupid boasting about all that his father had done to help the anti-fascists. 'Was it — was it that man Weyl?' he whispered.

For what seemed an enormously long time the young man looked at him without speaking. Wet with tears and strangely distorted, the narrow elongated face twitched uncontrollably. He stood quite still, his arms hanging loosely by his sides; but the big hands kept clenching and unclenching, as though animated by a tortured life of their own. And at last the silence was broken.

‘It was all because of you,’ he said, speaking very slowly and in a tone of such concentrated hatred that Sebastian shrank away from him in fear. ‘All because of *you*.’

And advancing a step, he gave the boy a back-handed blow in the face. Sebastian uttered a cry of pain and staggered back against a pillar. His teeth bared, his fists raised, the other stood over him menacingly; then, as Sebastian pulled out a handkerchief to stanch the blood that was streaming from his nostrils, he suddenly dropped his hands.

‘Excuse,’ he muttered brokenly, ‘excuse!’

And quickly turning, he hurried out of the church.

By a quarter to one Sebastian was back again at the villa, with nothing worse than a slightly swollen lip to bear witness to his morning’s adventures. In the church he had lain down across two chairs until his nose stopped bleeding, then had given his face a preliminary washing in holy water and gone out to buy himself a clean handkerchief and finish off his ablutions in the lavatory of the British Institute.

The goat was there again as he climbed the hill; but Sebastian felt obscurely that he had no right to stop and look at it, felt at the same time too horribly guilty even to wish to indulge in poetical fancies. Up the road, through the gate and between the stately cypresses he walked on, miserably, wishing he were dead.

On the low wall of the terrace in front of the villa, at the foot of the pedestal on which a moss-grown Pomona held up her cornucopia of fruits, the Queen Mother was sitting all alone, stroking the little dog on her knees. Catching sight of her, Sebastian halted. Would it be possible, he wondered, to tiptoe past her into the house without being heard? The old woman suddenly raised her head and looked sightlessly up into the sky. To his astonishment and dismay, Sebastian saw that she was crying. What could be the matter? And then he noticed the way Foxy was lying across her lap — limply, like one of those brown furs that women wrap round their necks, the paws dangling, the head lower than the body. It was obvious: the dog was dead. Feeling now that it

would be wrong to sneak past unobserved, Sebastian started to walk across the crunching gravel with steps as heavy as he could make them.

The Queen Mother turned her head.

‘Is that you, Daisy?’ And when Sebastian gave his name, ‘Oh, it’s you, boy,’ she said in a tone of almost resentful disappointment. ‘Come and sit here.’ She patted the sun-warmed stucco of the wall, then pulled out an embroidered handkerchief and wiped her eyes and her wet rouged cheeks.

Sebastian sat down beside her.

‘Poor little Foxy…. What happened?’

The old woman put away her handkerchief and turned blindly towards him.

‘Didn’t you know?’

Sebastian explained that he had spent the whole morning in town.

‘That fool, Daisy, thinks it was an accident,’ said the Queen Mother. ‘But it wasn’t. I know it wasn’t. They killed him.’ Her thin, rasping voice trembled with a ferocious hatred.

‘Killed him?’

She nodded emphatically.

‘To revenge themselves. Because we thought it was that child who had stolen the drawing.’

‘Do you think so?’ Sebastian whispered in a tone of dismay. Bruno arrested, and now the little dog killed — and all because of what he had done or left undone. ‘Do you really think so?’

‘I tell you, I know it,’ rasped the Queen Mother impatiently. ‘They gave him rat poison — that’s what it was. Rat poison. Veronica found him after breakfast, lying dead on the terrace.’

Suddenly she gave vent to a loud and horribly inhuman cry. Picking up the small limp body on her knees she held it close, pressing her face against the soft fur.

‘Little Foxy,’ she said brokenly. ‘Little Foxy-woxy….’ And then the puckered grimace of despair gave place once again to an expression of intense hatred. ‘The beasts!’ she cried. ‘The devils!’

Sebastian looked at her in horror. This was his fault, this was all his fault.

The hum of an approaching car made him turn his head.

‘It’s the Isotta,’ he said, thankful to have an excuse to change the subject.

The car swung round past the front steps and came to a halt immediately in front of them. The door swung open and Mrs. Ockham jumped out.

‘Granny,’ she called excitedly, ‘we’ve found one.’ And from under her coat she brought out a little round handful of orange fur with two bright black eyes and a black pointed muzzle. ‘His father’s won three First Prizes. Here! Hold out your hands.’

Mrs. Gamble stretched out a pair of jewelled claws into the darkness, and the tiny puppy was placed between them.

‘How small!’ she exclaimed.

‘Four months old,’ said Mrs. Ockham. ‘Wasn’t that what the woman told us?’ she added, turning to Mrs. Thwale, who had followed her out of the car.

‘Four months last Tuesday,’ said Mrs. Thwale.

‘He’s not black, is he?’ questioned the old woman.

‘Oh, no! The real fox-colour.’

‘So he’s Foxy too,’ said the Queen Mother. ‘Foxy the Ninth.’ She lifted the little creature to her face. ‘Such soft fur!’ Foxy IX turned his head and gave her a lick on the chin. The Queen Mother uttered a gleeful cackle. ‘Does he love me then? Does he love his old granny?’ Then she looked up in the direction of Mrs. Ockham. ‘Five Georges,’ she said, ‘seven Edwards, eight Henries. But there’s never been anybody the ninth.’

‘What about Louis XIV?’ suggested Mrs. Ockham.

‘I was talking about England,’ said the Queen Mother severely. ‘In England they’ve never got further than an eighth. Little Foxy here is the first one to be a ninth.’ She lowered her hands. Foxy IX leaned out from between the imprisoning fingers and sniffed inquisitively at the corpse of Foxy VIII.

‘I bought my first Pomeranian in ‘seventy-six,’ said the Queen Mother. ‘Or was it ‘seventy-four? Anyhow, it was the year that Gladstone said he was going to abolish the income tax — but he didn’t, the old rascal! We used to have pugs

before that. But Ned didn't like the way they snored. He snored himself — that was why. But little Foxy-woxy,' she added in another tone, '*he* doesn't snore, does he?' And she raised the tiny dog again to her face.

Noiselessly, like a ghost, the butler appeared and announced that luncheon was served.

'Did he say lunch?' said the Queen Mother; and without waiting for anyone to help her, she almost sprang to her feet. With a little thud the body of Foxy VIII fell to the ground. 'Oh dear, I'd quite forgotten he was on my lap. Pick him up, boy, will you? Hortense is making a little coffin for him. She's got a bit of an old pink satin dress of mine to line it with. Give me your arm, Veronica.'

Mrs. Thwale stepped forward and they started to walk towards the house.

Sebastian bent down and, with a qualm of repulsion, picked up the dead dog.

'Poor little beast!' said Mrs. Ockham; and as they followed the others, she laid a hand affectionately on Sebastian's shoulder. 'Did you have a nice morning in town?' she asked.

'Quite nice, thanks,' he answered vaguely.

'Sight-seeing, I suppose,' she began, and then broke off. 'But I'd quite forgotten. There was a wire from your father after you'd gone.' She opened her bag, unfolded the telegraph form and read aloud: '"ACCEPTED CANDIDACY FORTHCOMING BY-ELECTION RETURNING IMMEDIATELY ARRANGE SEBASTIAN MEET ME FOUR PM WEDNESDAY NEXT THOMAS COOK AND SON GENOA." It's a shame,' she said, shaking her head. 'I thought we'd keep you here till the end of the holidays. And, oh dear! there won't be any time to get your evening clothes.'

'No, I'm afraid not,' said Sebastian.

No time, he was thinking, to get either suit; for the dinner jacket he had ordered at Uncle Eustace's tailor — ordered, yes, and paid for — was to have been tried on for a first fitting the very day he had to be in Genoa. It had all been for nothing — all these miseries he had gone through, all this guilt, and Bruno's arrest, and this wretched little dog. And meanwhile there was the problem of

Tom Boveney's party, still unsolved and growing more agonizingly urgent with every passing day.

'It's a shame!' Mrs. Ockham repeated.

'What is?' asked the Queen Mother over her shoulder.

'Sebastian's having to leave so soon.'

'No more mum-mbling lessons,' said Mrs. Thwale, lingering a little over the word. 'But perhaps he'll be relieved.'

'You'll have to make the best of such time as is left you,' said the Queen Mother.

'Oh, we will, we will,' Mrs. Thwale assured her, and uttered her delicate little grunt of laughter. 'Here we are at the steps,' she went on gravely. 'Five of them, if you remember. Low risers and very broad treads.'

CHAPTER THIRTY

EPILOGUE

THE GUNS ON Primrose Hill were banging away with a kind of frenzy; and though the desert was far away, though the nightmare under those swooping planes was long past, Sebastian felt some of the old quivering tension — as if he were a violin with knotted strings in the process of being tuned up, excruciatingly sharp and sharper, towards the final snapping point. Movement might bring relief, he thought. He jumped up — too abruptly. The papers lying on the arm of his chair scattered to the floor. He bent down and grabbed for them as they were falling — grabbed with the nearer of his hands; but the nearer of his hands wasn't there. Fool! he said to himself. It was a long time since he had done a thing like that. Forcing himself to be methodical, he picked them up with the hand that still remained to him. While he was doing this, the noise outside subsided; and suddenly there was the blessing of silence. He sat down again.

Hateful experience! But it had at least one good point; it made it impossible for one to cherish the illusion that one was identical with a body that behaved in direct opposition to all one's wishes and resolutions. *Neti, neti* — not this, not this. There could be no possible doubt about it. And, of course, he reflected, there hadn't been any doubt in the old days, when he wanted to say no to his sensuality and couldn't. The only difference was that, in those circumstances, it had been fun to surrender to one's alien body, whereas, in these, it was atrocious.

The telephone bell rang; he picked up the receiver and said, 'Hullo.'

'Sebastian darling!'

For a second he thought it was Cynthia Poyns and immediately started to think of excuses for refusing the impending invitation.

'Sebastian?' the voice questioned, when he didn't reply; and to his enormous relief he realized that he had made a mistake.

'Oh, it's *you*, Susan!' he said. 'Thank goodness!'

‘Who did you think it was?’

‘Oh, somebody else….’

‘One of the ex-girl friends, I suppose. Ringing up to make a scene of jealousy.’ Susan’s tone was playfully, but still reproachfully sarcastic. ‘She wasn’t pretty enough for you — was that it?’

‘That was it,’ Sebastian agreed. But Cynthia Poyns wasn’t only passively good-looking; she was also actively a sentimentalist and literary snob, with a notorious weakness, in spite of her being such an exemplary young mother, for men. ‘Oughtn’t we to be wishing one another a Happy New Year?’ he asked, in another tone.

‘That’s what I rang up for,’ said Susan.

And she went on to hope that he’d started the year auspiciously, to wish and pray that 1944 might finally bring peace. But meanwhile, all three children had colds and Robin was even running a temperature. Nothing to worry about, of course — but all the same one couldn’t help worrying. But her mother, happily, was much better, and she had just heard from Kenneth that there was a chance of his being transferred to a job in England — and what a marvellous New Year’s present that would be!

Then Aunt Alice took over the instrument and opened with her favourite gambit: ‘How’s literature?’

‘Still conscious,’ Sebastian answered. ‘But sinking fast.’

Jocularity, whenever one talked to Aunt Alice about art or philosophy or religion, was always *de rigueur*.

‘I hope you’ve got another play on the way,’ came the bright, perky voice.

‘Luckily,’ he said, ‘I’ve still got something left of what I earned with the last one, five years ago.’

‘Well, take my advice; don’t invest it in the Far East.’

Gallantly making a joke of financial ruin, Aunt Alice uttered a little peal of laughter; then asked him if he had heard the story about the American corporal and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

He had, several times; but not wishing to deprive her of a pleasure, Sebastian begged to hear it. And when she duly told it, he made all the appropriate noises.

‘But here’s that Susan again,’ she concluded.

And Susan had forgotten to ask him if he remembered Pamela, the girl with a snub nose who was at that progressive school. Lost sight of her for years till just a few weeks ago. A really wonderful girl! So intelligent and well-informed! Working on statistics for the Government, and really very attractive in that *piquant*, original kind of way — you know.

Sebastian smiled to himself. Another of those prospective wives that Susan was always indefatigably digging up for him. Well, one day she might dig up the right one — and of course he’d be very grateful. But meanwhile …

Meanwhile, Susan was saying, Pamela would be in London again next week. They’d all have to get together.

She was finished at last, and he hung up, feeling that curious mixture of humorous tenderness and complete despair which conversations like these always seemed to evoke in him. It was the problem, not of evil, but of goodness — the excruciating problem of sound, honest, better-than-average goodness.

He thought of dear Aunt Alice, indefatigably full of good works in spite of the never-ending discomfort of her rheumatism. Carrying on undramatically, without ever trying to play the part (and what a juicy part!) of one who carries on. Bearing her misfortunes with the same unaffected simplicity. Poor Jim killed in Malaya; her house burnt by an incendiary with all her possessions in it; nine-tenths of their savings wiped out by the fall of Singapore and Java; Uncle Fred breaking down under the shock and strain, and escaping at last into insanity. She didn’t talk too much about these things, and she didn’t talk too little, too repressedly. And meanwhile the old, rather metallic brightness of manner was still maintained, the little jokes and the pert answers were still uttered. As though she had resolved to go down with her sense of humour still flying and nailed to the mast.

And then there was Susan, there were the three admirably brought up babies, there were the all too priceless letters from Kenneth, somewhere in the Middle

East, and Susan's own comments on war and peace, life and death, good and evil, bubbling up from the depths of a still almost untroubled upper-middle-class *Weltanschauung.*

Mother, daughter, son-in-law — looking at them with a playwright's eyes, he could see them as three deliciously comic characters. But in the other sense of that word and from the moralist's viewpoint, they were three characters of the most solid worth. Courageous and reliable and self-sacrificing as he himself had never been and could only humbly hope he might become. An absolutely sterling goodness, but limited by an impenetrable ignorance of the end and purpose of existence.

Without Susan and Kenneth and Aunt Alice and all their kind, society would fall to pieces. With them, it was perpetually attempting suicide. They were the pillars, but they were also the dynamite; simultaneously the beams and the dry-rot. It was thanks to their goodness that the system worked as smoothly as it did; and thanks to their limitations that the system was fundamentally insane — so insane that Susan's three charming babies would almost certainly grow up to become cannon fodder, plane fodder, tank fodder, fodder for any one of the thousand bigger and better military gadgets with which bright young engineers like Kenneth would by that time have enriched the world.

Sebastian sighed and shook his head. There was only one remedy, of course; but that they didn't want to try.

He picked up the loose-leaf book lying on the floor beside his chair. Fifty or sixty pages of random notes, jotted down at intervals during the last few months. This first day of the year was a good time to take stock. He started to read:

There is a higher utilitarianism as well as the ordinary, common or garden utilitarianism.

'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all the rest shall be added.' That is the classic expression of the higher utilitarianism — together with: 'I show you sorrow' (the world of ordinary, nice, unregenerate people) 'and the ending of sorrow' (the world of people who have achieved unitive knowledge of the divine Ground).

Set against these the slogans implicit in the lower, popular utilitarianism. ‘I show you sorrow’ (the world as it is now) ‘and the ending of sorrow’ (the world as it will be when Progress and a few more indispensable wars, revolutions and liquidations have done their work). And then, ‘Seek ye first all the rest — creditable virtues, social reform, instructive chats on the radio and the latest in scientific gadgets — and some time in the twenty-first or twenty-second century the kingdom of God will be added.’

All men are born with an equal and inalienable right to disillusionment. So, until they choose to waive that right, it’s three cheers for Technological Progress and a College Education for Everybody.

Read Aeschylus on the subject of Nemesis. His Xerxes comes to a bad end for two reasons. First, because he is an aggressive imperialist. Second, because he tries to get too much control over nature — specifically by bridging the Hellespont. We understand the devilishness of the political manifestations of the lust for power; but have so completely ignored the evils and dangers inherent in the technological manifestations that, in the teeth of the most obvious facts, we continue to teach our children that there is no debit side to applied science, only a continuing and ever-expanding credit. The idea of Progress is based on the belief that one can be overweening with impunity.

The difference between metaphysics now and metaphysics in the past is the difference between word-spinning which makes no difference to anybody and a system of thought associated with a transforming discipline. ‘Short of the Absolute, God cannot rest, and having reached that goal He is lost and religion with Him.’ That is Bradley’s view, the modern view. Sankara was as strenuously an Absolutionist as Bradley — but with what an enormous difference! For him, there is not only discursive knowledge about the Absolute, but the possibility (and the final necessity) of a direct intellectual intuition, leading the liberated spirit to identification with the object of its knowledge. ‘Among all means of liberation, Bhakti or devotion is supreme. To seek earnestly to know one’s real nature — this is said to be devotion. In other words, devotion can be defined as the search for the reality of one’s own Atman.’· And the Atman, of course, is the

spiritual principle in us, which is identical with the Absolute. The older metaphysicians did not lose religion; they found it in the highest and purest of all possible forms.

The fallacy of most philosophies is the philosopher. Enjoying as we do the privilege of Professor X's acquaintance, we know that whatever he personally may think up about the nature and value of existence cannot possibly be true. And what (God help us!) about *our* great thoughts? But fortunately there have been saints who could write. We and the Professor are free to crib from our betters.

It is wonderfully easy to escape the vices towards which one doesn't happen to be drawn. I hate sitting long over meals, am indifferent to 'good food' and have a stomach that is turned by more than an ounce or two of alcohol; no wonder, then, that I am temperate. And what about the love of money? Too squeamish and retiring to want to show off, too exclusively concerned with words and notions to care about real estate or first editions or 'nice things,' too improvident and too sceptical to be bothered about investments, I have always (except during a year or two of undergraduate idiocy) had more than enough for my needs. And for someone with my musculature, my kind of gift and my disastrous capacity for getting away with murder, the lust for power is even less of a problem than the lust for money. But when it comes to the subtler forms of vanity and pride, when it comes to indifference, negative cruelty and the lack of charity, when it comes to being afraid and telling lies, when it comes to sensuality …

I remember, I remember the house where *j'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans*, where emotion is recollected in tranquillity and there is *nessun maggior dolore che* death in life, the days that are no more. And all the rest, all the rest. For the nine Muses are the daughters of Mnemosyne; memory is of the very stuff and substance of poetry. And poetry, of course, is the best that human life can offer. But there is also the life of the spirit, and the life of the spirit is the analogue, on a higher turn of the spiral, of the animal's life. The progression is from animal eternity into time, into the strictly human world of memory and

anticipation; and from time, if one chooses to go on, into the world of spiritual eternity, into the divine Ground. The life of the spirit is life exclusively in the present, never in the past or future; life here, now, not life looked forward to or recollected. There is absolutely no room in it for pathos, or remorse, or a voluptuous rumination of the delicious cuds of thirty years ago. Its Intelligible Light has nothing whatever to do either with the sunset radiance of those heart-rendingly good old days before the last war but three, or with the neon glow from those technological New Jerusalems beyond the horizons of the next revolution. No, the life of the spirit is life out of time, life in its essence and eternal principle. Which is why they all insist — all the people best qualified to know — that memory must be lived down and finally died to. When one has succeeded in mortifying the memory, says John of the Cross, one is in a state that is only a degree less perfect and profitable than the state of union with God. It is an assertion that, at a first reading, I found incomprehensible. But that was because at that time, my first concern was with the life of poetry, not of the spirit. Now I know, by humiliating experience, all that memory can do to darken and obstruct the knowledge of the eternal Ground. Mortification is always the condition of proficiency.

'Mortification' — the word had sent his mind flying off on a tangent. Instead of thinking about the dangers of memory, he was remembering. Remembering Paul De Vries in 1939 — poor old Paul, as he had sat, so monotonously eager, so intelligently absurd, leaning across the table in the little café at Villefranche and talking, talking. The subject, of course, was one of those famous 'bridge-ideas,' with which he loved to link the island universes of discourse. A particularly 'exciting' idea, he insisted, harping on the word that had always irritated Sebastian so much — a generalization that spanned, a little precariously perhaps, the gulfs separating art, science, religion and ethics. The bridge, surprisingly enough, was mortification. Mortification of prejudice, cocksureness and even common sense, for the sake of objectivity in science; mortification of the desire to own or exploit, for the sake of contemplating an existing beauty or creating a new one; mortification of the passions, for the sake of an ideal of

rationality and virtue; mortification of the self in all its aspects, for the sake of liberation, of union with God. He had listened, Sebastian remembered, with a good deal of interest — but patronizingly, as one listens to a very clever man who is also a fool, and with whose wife, moreover, one happens, the previous evening, to have committed adultery. It was the evening, incidentally, that Veronica had copied out for him that sonnet of Verlaine's:

Ah! les oaristys! les premières maîtresses!
Vor des cheveux, l'azur des yeux, la fleur des chairs,
Et puis, parmi l'odeur des corps jeunes et chers
La spontanéité craintive des caresses….

Only in Veronica's case there was nothing timid about that surgical spontaneity and, in spite of Elizabeth Arden, the body was now thirty-five years old; while as for 'dear' — that it had never been, never. It had been only irresistible, the dreaded and fascinating vehicle of an alienation more total than that which he had known with anyone else of all the women he had loved or allowed himself to be loved by. And in the same instant he remembered his wife, unutterably weary under the burden of a pregnancy that seemed so strangely irrelevant to a being so small, bird-quick and fragile as Rachel had been. Remembered the promises he had made her, when he left Le Lavandou to go and stay with the De Vrieses, the vows of fidelity which he knew, even as he made them, that he wasn't going to keep — even though she was certain to find out. And of course she had found out, much sooner than he had expected. Sebastian remembered her as she lay in the hospital a month later, after the miscarriage, when the blood-poisoning had set in. 'It's all your fault,' she whispered reproachfully; and when he knelt beside her, in tears, she had turned her face away from him. When he came the next morning, Dr. Buloz waylaid him on the stairs. 'Some courage, my friend! We'ave some bad newses about your wife.'

Bad newses, and it was all his fault, his fault *parmi l'odeur des corps*, amid the smell of iodoform and the memory of tuberoses on the coffin. Rachel's coffin, Uncle Eustace's coffin. And beside both the graves had stood Veronica, monastically elegant in mourning, with only the extremities of that warm white

instrument of alienation projecting from under her disguise. And within two weeks of Rachel's funeral, once again the cannibals in bedlam…. 'It's all your fault.' The phrase had gone on repeating itself even in the extremities of an experience of otherness almost as absolute, on its own level, as the otherness of God. But he had gone on, just because it was such a vileness and for the express purpose of enjoying yet another repulsive taste of that mixture of sensuality, abhorrence and self-hatred which had become for him the all too fascinating theme of what turned out to be a whole volume of verses.

It was with one of those poems that he had been deliciously struggling when somebody sat down beside him on his favourite bench on the Promenade des Anglais. He turned irritably to see who had trespassed on his sacred privacy. It was Bruno Rontini — but Bruno ten years after, Bruno the ex-prisoner, now in exile and far gone in his last illness. An old man, bent and horribly emaciated. But in the beaked skull the blue bright eyes were full of joy, alive with an intense and yet somehow disinterested tenderness.

Speechless with a kind of terror, he took the dry skeleton hand that was held out to him. This was *his* doing! And what made it worse was the fact that, all these years, he had done everything he could to obliterate the consciousness of his offence. It had begun with excuses and alibis. He had been a child; and after all, who was there who didn't tell an occasional fib? And his fib, remember, had been told out of mere weakness, not from interest or malice. Nobody would have dreamed of making a fuss about it, if it hadn't been for that unfortunate accident. And, obviously, Bruno had it coming to him; Bruno had been on their bad books for years. That wretched little business of the drawing happened to have been made the pretext of an action which would have been taken anyhow, sooner or later. By no stretch of the imagination could he, Sebastian, be held responsible. And a couple of days after the arrest he was on his way home; and his father had taken him electioneering — which had been the greatest fun. And the next term he had worked tremendously hard for a scholarship which, to his own and everyone else's surprise, he had won. And when he went up to Oxford that autumn, Daisy Ockham secretly gave him a cheque for three hundred pounds, to

supplement his allowance; and what with the intoxicating excitement of spending it, what with the new freedom, the new succession of amorous adventures, it ceased to be necessary to find excuses or establish alibis: he just forgot. The incident slipped away into insignificance. And now suddenly, out of the grave of his oblivion, this old dying man with the blue eyes had risen like some irrepressible Lazarus — for what purpose? To reproach, to judge, to condemn?

‘Those arrows!’ Bruno said at last. ‘All those arrows!’

But what had happened to his voice? Why did he speak in that almost inaudible whisper? Terror deepened into sheer panic.

Bruno’s smile had expressed a kind of humorous compassion.

‘They seem to have started flying all right,’ he whispered. ‘The predestined target….’

Sebastian shut his eyes, the better to recall that little house at Vence which he had taken for the dying man. Furnished and decorated with an unfailing bad taste. But Bruno’s bedroom had windows on three sides, and there was a wide veranda, windless and warm with spring sunshine, from which one could look out over the terraced fields of young wheat, the groves of orange trees and the olive orchards, down to the Mediterranean.

‘*Il tremolar della marina*,’ Bruno would whisper when the reflected sunlight lay in a huge splendour across the sea. And sometimes it was Leopardi that he liked to quote:

e sovrumani

Silenzi, e profondissima quiete.

And then, again and again, voicelessly, so that it was only by the movements of the lips that Sebastian had been able to divine the words:

E'l naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

Little old Mme Louise had done the cooking and the housework; but except for the last few days, when Dr. Borély insisted on a professional nurse, the care of the sick man had been exclusively Sebastian's business. Those fifteen weeks between the meeting on the Promenade des Anglais and that almost comically unimpressive funeral (which Bruno had made him promise was not to cost more than twenty pounds) had been the most memorable period of his life. The most memorable and, in a certain sense, the happiest. There had been sadness, of course, and the pain of having to watch the endurance of a suffering which he was powerless to alleviate. And along with that pain and sadness had gone the gnawing sense of guilt, the dread and the anticipation of an irreparable loss. But there had also been the spectacle of Bruno's joyful serenity, and even, at one remove, a kind of participation in the knowledge of which that joy was the natural and inevitable expression — the knowledge of a timeless and infinite presence; the intuition, direct and infallible, that apart from the desire to be separate there was no separation, but an essential identity.

With the progress of the cancer in his throat, speech, for the sick man, became more and more difficult. But those long silences on the veranda, or in the bedroom, were eloquent precisely about the things which words were unfitted to convey — affirmed realities which a vocabulary invented to describe appearances in time could only indirectly indicate by means of negations. 'Not this, not this' was all that speech could have made clear. But Bruno's silence had become what it knew and could cry, 'This!' triumphantly and joyfully, 'this, this this!'

There were circumstances, of course, in which words were indispensable; and then he had resorted to writing. Sebastian got up, and from one of the drawers of his desk took the envelope in which he kept all the little squares of paper on

which Bruno had pencilled his rare requests, his answers to questions, his comments and advice. He sat down again and, selecting at random, began to read.

‘Would it be very extravagant to get a bunch of freesias?’

Sebastian smiled, remembering the pleasure the flowers had brought. ‘Like angels,’ Bruno had whispered. ‘They smell like angels.’

‘Don’t worry,’ the next scribbled message began. ‘Having intense emotions is just a matter of temperament. God can be loved without any *feelings* — by the will alone. So can your neighbour.’

And to this Sebastian had clipped another jotting on the same theme. ‘There isn’t any secret formula or method. You learn to love by loving — by paying attention and doing what one thereby discovers has to be done.’

He picked up another of the squares of paper. ‘Remorse is pride’s *ersatz* for repentance, the ego’s excuse for not accepting God’s forgiveness. The condition of being forgiven is self-abandonment. The proud man prefers self-reproach, however painful — because the reproached self isn’t abandoned; it remains intact.’

Sebastian thought of the context in which the words had been written — his passion for self-loathing, his almost hysterical desire to make some kind of dramatic expiation for what he had done, to pay off his debt of guilt towards Bruno, who was dying, towards the despairing and embittered Rachel, who had died. If he could submit to some great pain or humiliation, if he could undertake some heroic course of action! He had expected an unqualified approval. But Bruno had looked at him for a few seconds in appraising silence; then, with a gleam of sudden mischief in his eyes, had whispered, ‘You’re not Joan of Arc, you know. Not even Florence Nightingale.’ And then, reaching for the pencil and the scribbling-pad, he had started to write. At the time, Sebastian remembered, the note had shocked him by its calm and, he had felt, positively cynical realism. ‘You’d be inefficient, you’d be wasting your talents, and your heroic altruism would do a great deal of harm, because you’d be so bored and resentful that you’d come to loathe the very thought of God. Besides, you’d

seem so noble and pathetic, on top of your good looks, that all the women within range would be after you. Not fifty per cent. of them, as now, but *all.* As mothers, as mistresses, as disciples — every one. And of course you wouldn't resist — would you?' Sebastian had protested, had said something about the necessity of sacrifice. 'There's only one effectively redemptive sacrifice,' came the answer, 'the sacrifice of self-will to make room for the knowledge of God.' And a little later, on another scrap of paper: 'Don't try to act somebody else's part. Find out how to become your inner not-self in God while remaining your outer self in the world.'

Bewildered and a little disappointed, Sebastian looked up and found Bruno smiling at him.

'You think it's too easy?' came the whisper. Then the pencil went to work again.

Sebastian rustled through the scattered leaves of paper. Here was what the pencil had written:

'Performing miracles in a crisis — so much easier than loving God selflessly every moment of every day! Which is why most crises arise — because people find it so hard to behave properly at ordinary times.'

Reading the scribbled lines, Sebastian had felt himself all of a sudden appalled by the magnitude of the task that had been set for him. And soon, very soon, there would be no Bruno to help him.

'I shall never be able to do it alone,' he cried.

But the sick man was inexorable.

'It can't be done by anyone else,' the pencil wrote. 'Other people can't make you see with their eyes. At the best they can only encourage you to use your own.'

Then, as an afterthought, he had added on another sheet of the scribbling-pad: 'And, of course, once you've started using your own eyes, you'll see that there's no question of being alone. Nobody's alone unless he wishes to be.'

And as though to illustrate his point, he put down his pencil and looked away towards the sunlit landscape and the sea. His lips moved. '"The corn was orient

and immortal wheat" … *Ell'è quel mare al qual tutto si move … E'I naufragar m'è dolce* … the shipwreck in that sea….' He shut his eyes. After a minute or two he opened them again, looked at Sebastian with a smile of extraordinary tenderness and held out his thin bony hand. Sebastian took and pressed it. The sick man looked at him for a little longer with the same smile, then shut his eyes again. There was a long silence. Suddenly, from the kitchen, came the thin, piping voice of Mme Louise, singing her favourite waltz of forty years ago. '*Lorsque tout est fini*….' Bruno's emaciated face puckered itself into an expression of amusement.

'Finished,' he whispered, 'finished?' And his eyes as he opened them were bright with inner laughter. 'But it's only just begun!'

For a long time Sebastian sat quite still. But, alas, the memory of the knowledge that had come to him that day was very different from the knowledge. And, in the end, perhaps even this memory would have to be mortified. He sighed profoundly, then turned back to his note-book.

War guilt — the guilt of London and Hamburg, of Coventry, Rotterdam, Berlin. True, one wasn't in politics or finance, one was lucky enough not to have been born in Germany. But in a less obvious, more fundamental way, one was guilty by just being imperviously oneself, by being content to remain a spiritual embryo, undeveloped, undelivered, unillumined. In part, at least, I am responsible for my own maiming, and on the hand that is left me there is blood and the black oily smear of charred flesh.

Look at any picture paper or magazine. News (and only evil is news, never good) alternates with fiction, photographs of weapons, corpses, ruins, with photographs of half-naked women. Pharisaically, I used to think there was no causal connection between these things, that, as a strict sensualist and aesthete, I was without responsibility for what was happening in the world. But the habit of sensuality and pure aestheticism is a process of God-proofing. To indulge in it is to become a spiritual mackintosh, shielding the little corner of time, of which one is the centre, from the least drop of eternal reality. But the only hope for the world of time lies in being constantly drenched by that which lies beyond time.

Guaranteed God-proof, we exclude from our surroundings the only influence that is able to neutralize the destructive energies of ambition, covetousness and the love of power. Our responsibility may be less spectacularly obvious than theirs; but it is no less real.

The rain is over. On the spider-webs the beads of water hang unshaken. Above the tree-tops the sky is like a closed lid, and these fields are the flat bare symbols of a total resignation.

Invisible in the hedge, a wren periodically releases the ratchet of its tiny whirring clockwork. From the wet branches overhead the drops fall and fall in the unpredictable rhythm of an absolutely alien music. But the autumnal silence remains unflawed and even the rumble of a passing lorry, even the long crescendo and the fading roar of a flight of aeroplanes, even my memories of those explosions and all the long nights of pain, are somehow irrelevant and can be ignored. On the sphere's surface what a clatter of ironmongery! But here, at its glassy centre, the three old hornbeams and the grass, the brambles and the holly tree stand waiting. And between the repetitions of his mindless little declaration of personal independence, even the wren occasionally stops, down there at the bottom of the hedge, to listen for a moment to the silence within the silence; cocks his head and, for a second or two, is aware of himself, waiting, in the twiggy labyrinthine darkness, waiting for a deliverance of which he can have no inkling. But we, who can come, if we choose, to the full knowledge of that deliverance, have quite forgotten that there is anything to wait for.

Something of the happiness he had felt in the course of that long-drawn solitude under the dripping trees came back to him. Not, of course, that it was anything like enough to sense the significances of landscapes and living things. Wordsworth had to be supplemented by Dante, and Dante by … well, by somebody like Bruno. But if you didn't idolatrously take the manifestation for the principle, if you avoided spiritual gluttony and realized that these country ecstasies were only an invitation to move on to something else, then of course it was perfectly all right to wander lonely as a cloud and even to confide the fact to paper. He started to read again.

To the surprise of Humanists and Liberal Churchmen, the abolition of God left a perceptible void. But Nature abhors vacuums. Nation, Class and Party, Culture and Art have rushed in to fill the empty niche. For politicians and for those of us who happen to have been born with a talent, the new pseudo-religions have been, still are and (until they destroy the entire social structure) will continue to be extremely profitable superstitions. But regard them dispassionately, *sub specie aeternitatis*. How unutterably odd, silly and satanic!

Gossip, daydreaming, preoccupation with one's own moods and feelings — fatal, all of them, to the spiritual life. But among other things even the best play or narrative is merely glorified gossip and artistically disciplined daydreaming. And lyric poetry? Just 'Ow!' or 'Oo-ooh!' or 'Nyum-nyum!' or 'Damn!' or 'Darling!' or 'I'm a pig!' — suitably transliterated, of course, and developed.

Which is why some God-centred saints have condemned art, root and branch. And not only art — science, scholarship, speculation. Or remember Aquinas: the consummate philosophical virtuoso — but after achieving the unitive knowledge of that Primordial Fact, about which he had so long been spinning theories, he refused to write another word of theology. But what if he had come to union twenty years earlier? Would there have been no *Summa*? And, if so, would that have been a matter for regret? No, we should have answered a few years ago. But now some physicists are beginning to wonder if scholastic Aristotelianism may not be the best philosophy in terms of which to organize the findings of contemporary science. (But meanwhile, of course, contemporary science in the hands of contemporary men and women is engaged in destroying, not only things and lives, but entire patterns of civilization. So we find ourselves faced with yet another set of question marks.)

For the artist or intellectual, who happens also to be interested in reality and desirous of liberation, the way out would seem to lie, as usual, along a knife-edge.

He has to remember, first, that what he does as an artist or intellectual won't bring him to knowledge of the divine Ground, even though his work may be directly concerned with this knowledge. On the contrary, in itself the work is a

distraction. Second, that talents are analogous to the gifts of healing or miracle-working. But ‘one ounce of sanctifying grace is worth a hundredweight of those graces which theologians call “gratuitous,” among which is the gift of miracles. It is possible to receive such gifts and be in a state of mortal sin; nor are they necessary to salvation. As a rule, gratuitous graces are given to men less for their own benefit than for the edification of their neighbours.’ But François de Sales might have added that miracles don’t *necessarily* edify. Nor does even the best art. In both cases, edification is merely a possibility.

The third thing that has to be remembered is that beauty is intrinsically edifying; gossip, daydreaming and mere self-expression, intrinsically unedifying. In most works of art, these positive and negative elements cancel out. But occasionally the anecdotes and the daydreams are thought of in relation to first principles and set forth in such a way that the intervals between their component elements create some new unprecedented kind of beauty. When this happens, the possibilities of edification are fully realized, and the gratuitous grace of a talent finds its justification. True, the composition of such consummate works of art may be no less of a distraction than the composition of swing music or advertising copy. It is possible to write about God and, in the effort to write well, close one’s mind completely to God’s presence. There is only one antidote to such forgetting — constant recollection.

Well, he couldn’t say that he hadn’t given himself due warning, Sebastian reflected with a smile, as he turned the page. ‘Minimum Working Hypothesis’ was the heading to the next note.

Research by means of controlled sense-intuitions into material reality — research motivated and guided by a working hypothesis, leading up through logical inference to the formulation of a rational theory, and resulting in appropriate technological action. That is natural science.

No working hypothesis means no motive for starting the research, no reason for making one experiment rather than another, no rational theory for bringing sense or order to the observed facts.

Contrariwise, too much working hypothesis means finding only what you *know,* dogmatically, to be there and ignoring all the rest.

Among other things, religion is also research. Research by means of pure intellectual intuition into non-sensuous, non-psychic, purely spiritual reality, descending to rational theories about its results and to appropriate moral action in the light of such theories.

To motivate and (in its preliminary stages) guide this research, what sort and how much of a working hypothesis do we need?

None, say the sentimental humanists; just a little bit of Wordsworth, say the blue-dome-of-nature boys. Result: they have no motive impelling them to make the more strenuous investigations; they are unable to explain such non-sensuous facts as come their way; they make very little progress in Charity.

At the other end of the scale are the Papists, the Jews, the Moslems, all with historical, one-hundred-percent, revealed religions. These people have a working hypothesis about non-sensuous reality — which means that they have a motive for doing something to get to know about it. But because their working hypotheses are too elaborately dogmatic, most of them discover only what they were taught to believe. But what they believe is a hotch-potch of good, less good and even bad. Records of the infallible intuitions of great saints into the highest spiritual reality are mixed up with records of the less reliable and infinitely less valuable intuitions of psychics into lower levels of non-sensuous existence; and to these are added mere fancies, discursive reasonings and sentimentalisms, projected into a kind of secondary objectivity and worshipped as though they were divine facts. But at all times and in spite of the handicap imposed by these excessive working hypotheses, a passionately persistent few continue the research to the point where they become aware of the Intelligible Light and are united with the divine Ground.

For those of us who are not congenitally the members of any organized church, who have found that humanism and blue-domeism are not enough, who are not content to remain in the darkness of spiritual ignorance, the squalor of

vice or that other squalor of mere respectability, the minimum working hypothesis would seem to be about as follows:

That there is a Godhead or Ground, which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestation.

That the Ground is transcendent and immanent.

That it is possible for human beings to love, know and, from virtually, to become actually identified with the Ground.

That to achieve this unitive knowledge, to realize this supreme identity, is the final end and purpose of human existence.

That there is a Law or Dharma, which must be obeyed, a Tao or Way, which must be followed, if men are to achieve their final end.

That the more there is of I, me, mine, the less there is or the Ground; and that consequently the Tao is a Way of humility and compassion, the Dharma a Law of mortification and self-transcending awareness. Which accounts, of course, for the facts of human history. People love their egos and don't wish to mortify them, don't wish to see why they shouldn't 'express their personalities' and 'have a good time.' They get their good times; but also and inevitably they get wars and syphilis and revolution and alcoholism, tyranny and, in default of an adequate religious hypothesis, the choice between some lunatic idolatry, like nationalism, and a sense of complete futility and despair. Unutterable miseries! But throughout recorded history most men and women have preferred the risks, the positive certainty, of such disasters to the laborious whole-time job of trying to get to Know the divine Ground of all being. In the long run we get exactly what we ask for.

Which was all right so far as it went, Sebastian reflected. But it would be one of the tasks of the coming year to add the necessary developments and qualifications. To discuss the relationships, for example, between the Ground and its higher manifestations — between the Godhead and the personal God and the human Avatar and the liberated saint. And then there were the two methods of religious approach to be considered: the direct approach, aiming at an identifying knowledge of the Ground, and the indirect, ascending through the

hierarchy of material and spiritual manifestations — at the risk, always, of getting stuck somewhere on the way. But meanwhile, where was the note he had made by way of commentary on those lines in Hotspur's final speech? He flicked through the pages. Here it was.

If you say absolutely everything, it all tends to cancel out into nothing. Which is why no explicit philosophy can be dug out of Shakespeare. But as a metaphysic by implication, as a system of beauty-truths, constituted by the poetical relationships of scenes and lines, and inhering in the blank spaces between even such words as 'told by an idiot, signifying nothing,' the plays are the equivalent of a great theological *Summa.* And, of course, if you choose to ignore the negatives that cancel them out, what extraordinary isolated utterances of a perfectly explicit wisdom! I keep thinking, for example, of those two and a half lines in which the dying Hotspur casually summarizes an epistemology, an ethic and a metaphysic.

But thought's the slave of life, and life's time's fool,
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

Three clauses, of which the twentieth century has paid attention only to the first. Thought's enslavement to life is one of our favourite themes. Bergson and the Pragmatists, Adler and Freud, the Dialectical Materialism boys and the Behaviourists — all tootle their variations on it. Mind is nothing but a tool for making tools; controlled by unconscious forces, either sexual or aggressive; the product of social and economic pressures; a bundle of conditioned reflexes.

All quite true, so far as it goes; but false if it goes no further. For, obviously, if mind is only some kind of nothing-but, none of its affirmations can make any claim to general validity. But all nothing-but philosophies make such claims. Therefore they can't be true; for if they were true, that would be the proof that they were false. Thought's the slave of life — undoubtedly. But if it weren't also something else, we couldn't make even this partially valid generalization.

The significance of the second clause is mainly practical. Life's time's fool. By merely elapsing time makes nonsense of all life's conscious planning and

scheming. No considerable action has ever had all or nothing but the results expected of it. Except under controlled conditions, or in circumstances where it is possible to ignore individuals and consider only large numbers and the law of averages, any kind of accurate foresight is impossible. In all actual human situations more variables are involved than the human mind can take account of; and with the passage of time the variables tend to increase in number and change their character. These facts are perfectly familiar and obvious. And yet the only faith of a majority of twentieth-century Europeans and Americans is faith in the Future — the bigger and better Future, which they *know* that Progress is going to produce for them, like rabbits out of a hat. For the sake of what their faith tells them about a Future time, which their reason assures them to be completely unknowable, they are prepared to sacrifice their only tangible possession, the Present.

Since I was born, thirty-two years ago, about fifty millions of Europeans and God knows how many Asiatics have been liquidated in wars and revolutions. Why? In order that the great-great-grandchildren of those who are now being butchered or starved to death may have an absolutely wonderful time in A.D. 2043. And (choosing, according to taste or political opinion, from among the Wellsian, Marxian, Capitalistic or Fascist blueprints) we solemnly proceed to visualize the sort of wonderful time these lucky beggars are going to have. Just as our early Victorian great-great-grandfathers visualized the sort of wonderful time *we* were going to have in the middle years of the twentieth century.

True religion concerns itself with the givenness of the timeless. An idolatrous religion is one in which time is substituted for eternity — either past time, in the form of a rigid tradition, or future time, in the form of Progress towards Utopia. And both are Molochs, both demand human sacrifice on an enormous scale. Spanish Catholicism was a typical idolatry of past time. Nationalism, Communism, Fascism, all the social pseudo-religions of the twentieth century, are idolatries of future time.

What have been the consequences of our recent shift of attention from Past to Future? An intellectual progress from the Garden of Eden to Utopia; a moral and

political advance from compulsory orthodoxy and the divine right of kings to conscription for everybody, the infallibility of the local boss and the apotheosis of the State. Before or behind, time can never be worshipped with impunity.

But Hotspur's summary has a final clause: time must have a stop. And not only *must*, as an ethical imperative and an eschatological hope, but also *does* have a stop, in the indicative tense, as a matter of brute experience. It is only by taking the fact of eternity into account that we can deliver thought from its slavery to life. And it is only by deliberately paying our attention and our primary allegiance to eternity that we can prevent time from turning our lives into a pointless or diabolic foolery. The divine Ground is a timeless reality. Seek it first, and all the rest — everything from an adequate interpretation of life to a release from compulsory self-destruction — will be added. Or, transposing the theme out of the evangelical into a Shakespearean key, you can say: 'Cease being ignorant of what you are most assured, your glassy essence, and you will cease to be an angry ape, playing such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep.'

A postscript to what I wrote yesterday. In politics we have so firm a faith in the manifestly unknowable future that we are prepared to sacrifice millions of lives to an opium smoker's dream of Utopia or world dominion or perpetual security. But where natural resources are concerned, we sacrifice a pretty accurately predictable future to present greed. We know, for example, that if we abuse the soil it will lose its fertility; that if we massacre the forests our children will lack timber and see their uplands eroded, their valleys swept by floods. Nevertheless, we continue to abuse the soil and massacre the forests. In a word, we immolate the present to the future in those complex human affairs where foresight is impossible; but in the relatively simple affairs of nature, where we know quite well what is likely to happen, we immolate the future to the present. 'Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.'

For four and a half centuries white Europeans have been busily engaged in attacking, oppressing and exploiting the coloured peoples inhabiting the rest of the world. The Catholic Spaniards and Portuguese began it; then came Protestant

Dutch and Englishmen, Catholic French, Greek Orthodox Russians, Lutheran Germans, Catholic Belgians. Trade and the Flag, exploitation and oppression, have always and everywhere followed or accompanied the proselytizing Cross.

Victims have long memories — a fact which oppressors can never understand. In their magnanimity they forget the ankle they twisted while stamping on the other fellow's face, and are genuinely astonished when he refuses to shake the hand that flogged him and manifests no eagerness to go and get baptized.

But the fact remains that a shared theology is one of the indispensable conditions of peace. For obvious and odious historical reasons, the Asiatic majority will not accept Christianity. Nor can it be expected that Europeans and Americans will swallow the whole of Brahmanism, say, or Buddhism. But the Minimum Working Hypothesis is also the Highest Common Factor.

Three prostrate telegraph poles lying in the patch of long grass below my window at the inn — lying at a slight angle one to another, but all foreshortened, all insisting, passionately, on the fact (now all of a sudden unspeakably mysterious) of the third dimension. To the left the sun is in the act of rising. Each pole has its attendant shadow, four or five feet wide, and the old wheel tracks in the grass, almost invisible at midday, are like canyons full of blue darkness. As a 'view,' nothing could be more perfectly pointless; and yet, for some reason, it contains all beauty, all significance, the subject-matter of all poetry.

Industrial man — a sentient reciprocating engine having a fluctuating output, coupled to an iron wheel revolving with uniform velocity. And then we wonder why this should be the golden age of revolution and mental derangement.

Democracy is being able to say no to the boss, and you can't say no to the boss unless you have enough property to enable you to eat when you have lost the boss's patronage. There can be no democracy where …

Sebastian turned over a page or two. Then his eye was caught by the opening words of a note that was dated, 'Christmas Eve.'

Today there was an almost effortless achievement of silence — silence of intellect, silence of will, silence even of secret and subconscious cravings. Then a passage through these silences into the intensely active tranquillity of the living and eternal Silence.

Or else I could use another set of inadequate verbal signs and say that it was a kind of fusion with the harmonizing interval that creates and constitutes beauty. But whereas any particular manifestation of beauty — in art, in thought, in action, in nature — is always a relationship between existences not in themselves intrinsically beautiful, this was a perception of, an actual participation in, the paradox of Relationship as such, apart from anything related; the direct experience of pure interval and the principle of harmony, apart from the things which, in this or that concrete instance, are separated and harmonized. And somewhere, somehow, the participation and the experience persist even now as I write. Persist in spite of the infernal racket of the guns, in spite of my memories and fears and preoccupations. If they could persist always …

But the grace had been withdrawn again, and in recent days … Sebastian sadly shook his head. Dust and cinders, the monkey devils, the imbecile unholinesses of distraction. And because knowledge, the genuine knowledge beyond mere theory and book learning, was always a transforming participation in that which was known, it could never be communicated — not even to one's own self when in a state of ignorance. The best one could hope to do by means of words was to remind oneself of what one once had unitively understood and, in others, to evoke the wish and create some of the conditions for a similar understanding. He reopened the book.

Spent the evening listening to people talking about the future organization of the world — God help us all! Do they forget what Acton said about power? 'Power always corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. All great men are bad.' And he might have added that all great nations, all great classes, all great religious or professional groups are bad — bad in exact proportion as they exploit their power.

In the past there was an age of Shakespeare, of Voltaire, of Dickens. Ours is the age, not of any poet or thinker or novelist, but of the Document. Our Representative Man is the travelling newspaper correspondent, who dashes off a best seller between two assignments. ‘Facts speak for themselves.’ Illusion! Facts are ventriloquists’ dummies. Sitting on a wise man’s knee they may be made to utter words of wisdom; elsewhere, they say nothing, or talk nonsense, or indulge in sheer diabolism.

Must look up what Spinoza says about pity. As I remember, he considers it intrinsically undesirable, in so far as it is a passion, but relatively desirable, in so far as it does more good than harm. I kept thinking of this yesterday, all the time I was with Daisy Ockham. Dear Daisy! Her passionate pity moves her to do all sorts of good and beautiful things; but because it is just a passion, it also warps her judgment, causes her to make all kinds of ludicrous and harmful mistakes, and translates itself into the most absurdly sentimental and radically false view of life. She loves to talk, for example, about people being transformed and ameliorated by suffering. But it’s perfectly obvious, if one isn’t blinded by the passion of pity, that this isn’t true. Suffering may and often does produce a kind of emotional uplift and a temporary increase in courage, tolerance, patience and altruism. But if the pressure of suffering is too much prolonged, there comes a breakdown into apathy, despair or violent selfishness. And if the pressure is removed, there’s an immediate return to normal conditions of unregeneracy. For a short time, a blitz engenders sentiments of universal brotherliness; but as for permanent transformation and improvement — that occurs only exceptionally. Most of the people I know have come back from battle unchanged; a fair number are worse than they were; and a few — men with an adequate philosophy and a desire to act upon it — are better. Daisy is so sorry for them that she insists that they are all better. I talked to her a little about poor Dennis C., and what suffering has done for him — drink, recklessness, indifference to simple honesty, a total cynicism.

Buddhist writers distinguish between compassion and Great Compassion — pity in the raw, as a mere visceral and emotional disturbance, and pity informed

by principle, enlightened by insight into the nature of the world, aware of the causes of suffering and the only remedy. Action depends on thought, and thought, to a large extent, depends on vocabulary. Based on the jargons of economics, psychology, and sentimental religiosity, the vocabulary in terms of which we think nowadays about man's nature and destiny is about the worst….

Suddenly the door-bell rang. Sebastian looked up with a start. At this hour, who could it be? Dennis Camlin probably. And probably rather drunk again. What if he didn't open the door? But, no, that would be uncharitable. The poor boy seemed to find some sort of comfort in his presence. 'It's all true,' he used to say. 'I've always known it was true. But if one *wants* to destroy oneself — well, why not?' And the tone would become truculent, the words violently obscene and blasphemous. But a few days later he'd be back again.

Sebastian got up, walked into the hall and opened the door. A man was standing there in the darkness — his father. He cried out in astonishment.

'But why aren't you on the other side of the Atlantic?'

'That's the charm of war-time travel,' said John Barnack, in the studiedly unexcited tone which he reserved for partings and reunions. 'No nonsense about sailing lists or premonitory cables. Can you put me up, by the way?'

'Of course,' Sebastian answered.

'Not if it's the least trouble,' his father continued as he put down his suitcase and began to unbutton his overcoat. 'I just thought it would be easier for me to open up my own place by daylight.'

He walked briskly into the sitting-room, sat down and, without even asking Sebastian how he was or volunteering the slightest personal information, began to talk about his tour through Canada and the States. The remarkable swing to the left in the Dominion — so strikingly different from what was going on across the border. But whether the Republicans would actually win the presidential election was another matter. And anyhow it wasn't by any party or president that the country's future policy would be dictated — it was by brute circumstance. Whoever got in, there'd be more government control, more centralization to cope with the post-war mess, continuing high taxes….

Sebastian made the gestures and noises of intelligent attention; but his real concern was with the speaker, not with what was being said. How tired his father looked, how old! Four years of war-time overwork, at home, in India, back again in England, had left him worn and diminished; and now these two months of winter travel, of daily lectures and conferences, had consummated the process. Almost suddenly, John Barnack had passed from powerful maturity to the beginnings of old age. But, of course, Sebastian reflected, his father would be much too proud to acknowledge the fact, much too strong-willed and stubborn to make any concessions to his tired and shrunken body. Ascetical for asceticism's sake, he would continue to drive himself on, pointlessly, until the final collapse.

'… The most consummate imbecile,' John Barnack was saying in a voice that contempt had made more ringingly articulated. 'And of course, if he hadn't been Jim Tooley's brother-in-law, nobody would ever have dreamed of giving him the job. But naturally, when one's wife is the sister of the world's champion lick-spittle, one can aspire to the highest official positions.'

He uttered a loud metallic bray of laughter; then launched out into an animated digression on nepotism in high places.

Sebastian listened — not to the words, but to what they concealed and yet so plainly expressed: his father's bitter sense of grievance against a party and a government that had left him all these years in the ranks, without office or any position of authority. Pride did not permit him to complain; he had to be content with these ferociously sardonic references to the stupidity or the turpitude of the men for whom he had been passed over. But, after all, if one couldn't refrain from talking to one's colleagues as though they were subnormal and probably delinquent children, one really ought not to be surprised if they handed out the sugar plums to somebody else.

Old, tired, bitter. But that wasn't all, Sebastian said to himself, as he watched the deeply furrowed, leathery face and listened to the now incongruously loud and commanding voice. That wasn't all. In some subtle and hardly explicable way his father gave an impression of deformity — as though he had suddenly turned into a kind of dwarf or hunchback. 'He that is not getting better is getting

worse.’ But that was too sweeping and summary. ‘He that isn’t growing up is growing down.’ That was more like it. Such a man might end his life, not as a ripened human being, but as an aged foetus. Adult in worldly wisdom and professional skill; embryonic in spirit and even (in spite of all the stoical and civic virtues he might have acquired) in character. At sixty-five his father was still trying to be what he had been at fifty-five, forty-five, thirty-five. But this attempt to be the same made him essentially different. For then he had been what a busy young or middle-aged politician ought to be. Now he was what an old man ought not to be; and so, by straining to remain unmodified, had transformed himself into a gruesome anomaly. And, of course, in an age that had invented Peter Pan and raised the monstrosity of arrested development to the rank of an ideal, he wasn’t in any way exceptional. The world was full of septuagenarians playing at being in their thirties or even in their teens, when they ought to have been preparing for death, ought to have been trying to unearth the spiritual reality which they had spent a lifetime burying under a mountain of garbage. In his father’s case, of course, the garbage had been of the very highest quality — personal austerity, public service, general knowledge, political idealism. But the spiritual reality was no less effectually buried than it would have been under a passion for gambling, for example, or an obsession with sexual pleasure. Perhaps, indeed, it was buried even more effectually. For the card-player and the whoremonger didn’t imagine that their activities were creditable, and therefore stood a chance of being shamed into giving them up; whereas the well-informed good citizen was so certain of being morally and intellectually right that he seldom so much as envisaged the possibility of changing his way of life. It had been the publicans who came to salvation, not the Pharisees.

Meanwhile, the talk had veered away from nepotism, to settle, inevitably, on what might be expected to happen after the war…. Up till quite recently, Sebastian was thinking as he listened, this staunch idolater of future time had been rewarded by his god with the grace of an inexhaustible energy in the service of his favourite social reforms. Now, instead of the beneficiary, he was

the victim of what he worshipped. The future and its problems had come to haunt him like a guilty conscience or a consuming passion.

There was first the immediate future. On the continent a chaos so frightful that, to millions of people, the war years would seem in retrospect a time positively of prosperity. And even in England, along with the enormous relief, there would be a certain nostalgia for the simplicities of war economy and war organization. And meanwhile, in Asia, what political confusion, what hunger and disease, what abysses of inter-racial hatred, what preparations, conscious and unconscious, for the coming war of colour! John Barnack raised his hands and let them fall again in a gesture of utter hopelessness. But of course, that wasn't all. As though spurred on by avenging Furies, he proceeded to explore the further distances of time. And here there loomed for him, like the menace of an inescapable fate, the quasi-certainties of future population trends. An England, a Western Europe, an America, hardly more populous thirty years hence than at the present time, and with a fifth of their inhabitants drawing old-age pensions. And contemporary with this decrepitude, a Russia of more than two hundred millions, preponderantly youthful, and as bumptious, confident and imperialistically minded as England had been at a corresponding point in her own long-past phase of economic and demographic expansion. And east of Russia would be a China of perhaps five hundred millions, in the first flush of nationalism and industrialization. And, south of the Himalayas, four or five hundred millions of starving Indians, desperately trying to exchange the products of their sweated factory labour for the wherewithal to survive just long enough to add an additional fifty millions to the population and subtract yet another year or two from the average expectation of life.

The main result of the war, he went on gloomily, would be the acceleration of processes which otherwise would have taken place more gradually and therefore less catastrophically. The process of Russia's advance towards the domination of Europe and the Near East; of China's advance towards the domination of the rest of Asia; and of all Asia's advance towards industrialism. Torrents of cheap

manufactures flooding the white men's markets. And the white men's reaction to those torrents would be the *casus belli* of the impending war of colour.

'And what *that* war will be like …'

John Barnack left the sentence unfinished and began to talk instead about the present miseries of India — the Bengal famine, the pandemic of malaria, the prisons crowded with the men and women at whose side, a few years before, he himself had fought for *swaraj*. A note of despairing bitterness came into his voice. It was not only that he had had to sacrifice his political sympathies. No, the roots of his despair struck deeper — down into the conviction that political principles, however excellent, were almost irrelevant to the real problem, which was merely arithmetical, a matter of the relationship between acreage and population. Too many people, too little arable land. Thanks to technology and the Pax Britannica, Malthus's nightmare had become, for a sixth of the human race, their everyday reality.

Sebastian went out to the kitchen to brew some tea. Through the open door he heard a momentary blast of trumpets and saxophones, then the distressing noise of actresses being emotional, then the quieter intonations of a masculine voice that talked and talked. His father was evidently listening to the news.

When he came back into the living-room, it was over. His eyes shut, John Barnack was lying back in his chair, half asleep. Taken off guard, the face and the limp body betrayed an unutterable fatigue. A cup clinked as Sebastian set down the tray. His father started and sat up. The worn face took on its familiar look of rather formidable determination, the body was taut again and alert.

'Did you hear that about the Russians and the Czechs?' he asked.

Sebastian shook his head. His father enlightened him. More details about the twenty-year pact were coming out.

'You see,' he concluded almost triumphantly, 'it's beginning already — the Russian hegemony of Europe.'

Cautiously, Sebastian handed him an overflowing cup of tea. Not so long ago, he was thinking, it wouldn't have been 'Russian hegemony,' but 'Soviet influence.' But that was before his father had begun to take an interest in

population problems. And now, of course, Stalin had reversed the old revolutionary policy towards religion. The Greek Orthodox Church was being used again as an instrument of nationalism. There were seminaries now, and a patriarch like Father Christmas, and millions of people crossing themselves in front of ikons.

‘A year ago,’ John Barnack went on, ‘we would never have allowed the Czechs to do this. Never! Now we have no choice.’

‘In that case,’ Sebastian suggested after a brief silence, ‘it might be as well to think occasionally about matters where we *do* have a choice.’

‘What do you mean?’ his father asked, looking up at him suspiciously.

‘Russians or no Russians, one’s always at liberty to pay attention to the Nature of Things.’

John Barnack assumed an expression of pitying contempt, then burst into a peal of laughter that sounded like a carload of scrap iron being tipped on to a dump.

‘Four hundred divisions,’ he said, when the paroxysm was over, ‘against some high-class thoughts about the Gaseous Vertebrates!’

It was a remark in the good old style — but with this difference, that the good old style was now the new style of a self-stunted dwarf who had succeeded in consummating his own spiritual abortion.

‘And yet,’ said Sebastian, ‘if one thought about it to the point of…’ he hesitated, ‘well, to the point of actually becoming one of *its* thoughts, one would obviously be very different from what one is now.’

‘Not a doubt of it!’ said John Barnack sarcastically.

‘And that sort of difference is infectious,’ Sebastian went on. ‘And in time the infection might spread so far that the people with the big battalions would actually not wish to use them.’

Another load of scrap iron was tipped down the chute. This time Sebastian joined in the laughter.

‘Yes,’ he admitted, ‘it *is* pretty funny. But, after all, a chance of one in a million is better than no chance at all, which is what *you* look forward to.’

‘No, I didn’t say that,’ his father protested. ‘There’ll be a truce, of course — quite a long one.’

‘But not peace?’

The other shook his head.

‘No, I’m afraid not. No real peace.’

‘Because peace doesn’t come to those who merely work for peace — only as the by-product of something else.’

‘Of an interest in Gaseous Vertebrates, eh?’

‘Exactly,’ said Sebastian. ‘Peace can’t exist except where there’s a metaphysic which all accept and a few actually succeed in realizing.’ And when his father looked at him questioningly, ‘By direct intuition,’ he went on; ‘the way you realize the beauty of a poem — or a woman, for that matter.’

There was a long silence.

‘I suppose you don’t remember your mother very well, do you?’ John Barnack suddenly asked.

Sebastian shook his head.

‘You were very like her when you were a boy,’ the other went on. ‘It was strange … almost frightening.’ He shook his head, then added, after a little pause: ‘I never imagined you’d do this.’

‘Do what?’

‘You know — what we’ve been talking about. Of course, I think it’s all nonsense,’ he added quickly. ‘But I must say …’ A look of unwonted embarrassment appeared on his face. Then, shying away from the too emphatic expression of affection, ‘It certainly hasn’t done you any harm,’ he concluded judicially.

‘Thank you,’ said Sebastian.

‘I remember him as a young man,’ his father went on over the top of his teacup.

‘Remember whom?’

‘Old Rontini’s son. Bruno — wasn’t that his name?’

‘That was it,’ said Sebastian.

‘He didn’t make much impression on me then.’

Sebastian wondered whether anybody had ever made much impression on him. His father had always been too busy, too completely identified with his work and his ideas, to be very much aware of other people. He knew them as the embodiments of legal problems, as particular examples of political or economic types, not as individual men and women.

‘And yet I suppose he must have been remarkable in some way,’ John Barnack went on. ‘After all, *you* thought so.’

Sebastian was touched. It was the first time that his father had paid him the compliment of admitting that perhaps he wasn’t an absolute fool.

‘I knew him so much better than you did,’ he said.

With what was obviously a rather painful effort, John Barnack hoisted himself out of the depths of the armchair. ‘Time to go to bed,’ he said, as though he were enunciating a general truth, not expressing his own fatigue. He turned back to Sebastian. ‘What was it you found in him?’ he asked.

‘What was it?’ Sebastian repeated slowly. He hesitated, uncertain what to answer. There were so many things one could mention. That candour, for example, that extraordinary truthfulness. Or his simplicity, the absence in him of all pretensions. Or that tenderness of his, so intense and yet so completely unsentimental and even impersonal — but impersonal, in some sort, above the level of personality, not below it, as his own sensuality had been impersonal. Or else there was the fact that, at the end, Bruno had been no more than a kind of thin transparent shell, enclosing something incommensurably other than himself — an unearthly beauty of peace and power and knowledge. But that, Sebastian said to himself, was something his father wouldn’t even wish to understand. He looked up at last. ‘One of the things that struck me most,’ he said, ‘was that Bruno could somehow convince you that it all made sense. Not by talking, of course; by just being.’

Instead of laughing again, as Sebastian had expected him to do, John Barnack stood there, silently rubbing his chin.

‘If one’s wise,’ he said at last, ‘one doesn’t ask whether it makes any sense. One does one’s work and leaves the problem of evil to one’s metabolism. *That* makes sense all right.’

‘Because it’s not oneself,’ said Sebastian. ‘Not human, but a part of the cosmic order. That’s why animals have no metaphysical worries. Being identical with their physiology, they *know* there’s a cosmic order. Whereas human beings identify themselves with money-making, say, or drink, or politics, or literature. None of which has anything to do with the cosmic order. So naturally they find that nothing makes sense.’

‘And what’s to be done about it?’

Sebastian smiled and, standing up, ran a finger-nail across the grille of the loud-speaker.

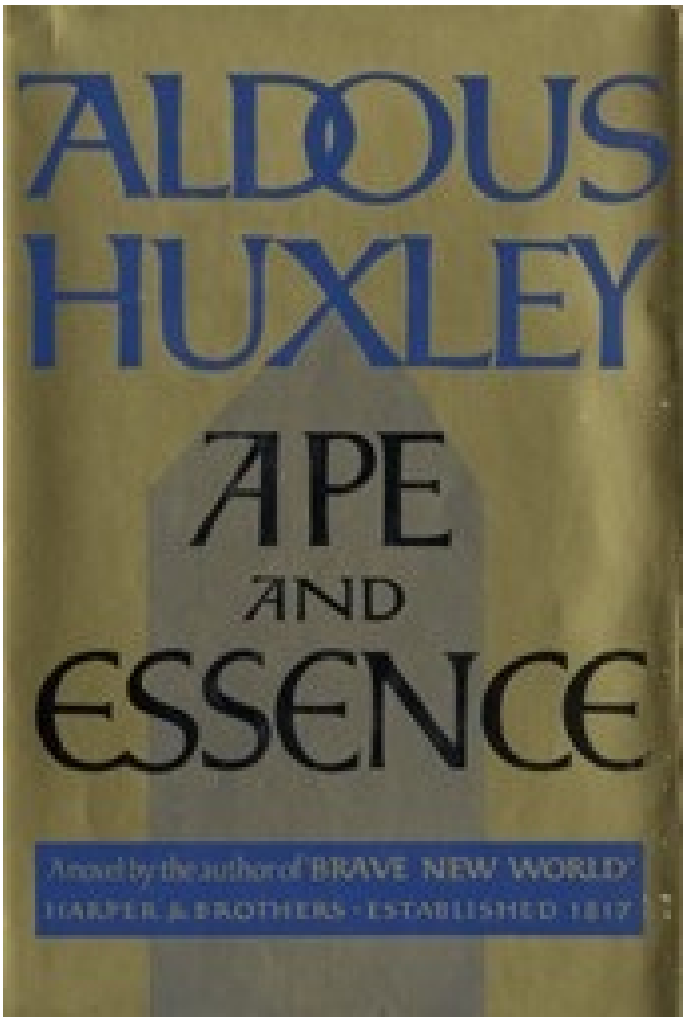
‘One can either go on listening to the news — and of course the news is always bad, even when it sounds good. Or alternatively one can make up one’s mind to listen to something else.’

Affectionately, he took his father’s arm. ‘What about going to see if everything’s all right in the spare room?’

Ape and Essence

Ape and Essence was first published in the UK and USA in 1948 by Chatto & Windus and Harper & Brothers respectively. Written shortly after the end of World War II, the horrors and atrocities committed during the conflict serve to shatter the idea of the inevitability of a better and more progressive future. Huxley had famously expressed his fears about a society ruled by technology and science in his famous dystopian novel, *A Brave New World*. It was a time of great uncertainty, when it was possible to produce nuclear weapons with the power to kill many millions, possibly billions of people, while also decimating entire ecosystems. In *Ape and Essence*, Huxley once again focuses on the dehumanising aspects of unchecked technological advancement, while also exploring the effects of State oppression.

The satirical novel opens on 30 January 1948, the day of Gandhi's assassination, with Bob Briggs complaining to an uninterested narrator about his personal woes. They discover a discarded film script called 'Ape and Essence' by William Tallis and decide to try and find him. The rest of the novel is the screenplay of 'Ape and Essence', which is set one hundred years after human civilisation has been devastated by World War III and the use of nuclear weapons. A team of scientists from New Zealand, having survived the destruction, arrive on the West Coast of the USA to explore the region. They discover a small society of survivors living a horrible existence that involves eugenics, stealing from graves, burning books and worshipping the devil, Belial. Huxley underlines that this future dystopia, where all empathy and humanity has been decimated, already has its seeds in the present.



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I. TALLIS

IT WAS THE day of Gandhi's assassination; but on Calvary the sightseers were more interested in the contents of their picnic baskets than in the possible significance of the, after all, rather commonplace event they had turned out to witness. In spite of all the astronomers can say, Ptolemy was perfectly right: the centre of the universe is here, not there. Gandhi might be dead; but across the desk in his office, across the lunch table in the Studio Commissary, Bob Briggs was concerned to talk only about himself.

'You've always been such a help,' Bob assured me, as he made ready, not without relish, to tell the latest instalment of his history.

But at bottom, as I knew very well and as Bob himself knew even better than I, he didn't really want to be helped. He liked being in a mess and, still more, he liked talking about his predicament. The mess and its verbal dramatization made it possible for him to see himself as all the Romantic Poets rolled into one — Beddoes committing suicide, Byron committing fornication, Keats dying of Fanny Brawne, Harriet dying of Shelley. And seeing himself as all the Romantic Poets, he could forget for a little the two prime sources of his misery — the fact that he had none of their talents and very little of their sexual potency.

'We got to the point,' he said (so tragically that it occurred to me that he would have done better as an actor than as a writer of screen plays), 'we got to the point, Elaine and I, where we felt like ... like Martin Luther.'

'Martin Luther?' I repeated in some astonishment.

'You know — *ich kann nicht anders*. We just couldn't — but *couldn't* — do anything but go off together to Acapulco.'

And Gandhi, I reflected, just couldn't do anything but resist oppression non-violently and go to prison and finally get shot.

'So there it was,' he went on. 'We got on a plane and flew to Acapulco.'

‘Finally!’

‘What do you mean, *“finally”*?’

‘Well, you’d been thinking about it for a long time, hadn’t you?’

Bob looked annoyed. But I remembered all the previous occasions when he had talked to me about the problem. Should he or should he not make Elaine his mistress? (That was his wonderfully old-world way of putting it.) Should he or should he not ask Miriam for a divorce?

A divorce from the woman who in a very real sense was still what she had always been — his only love; but in another very real sense Elaine was also his only love — and would be still more so if he finally decided (and that was why he couldn’t decide) to ‘make her his mistress.’ To be or not to be — the soliloquy had gone on for the best part of two years, and if Bob could have had his way, it would have gone on for ten years longer. He liked his messes to be chronic and mainly verbal, never so acutely carnal as to put his uncertain virility to yet another humiliating test. But under the influence of his eloquence, of that baroque facade of a profile and prematurely snowy hair, Elaine had evidently grown tired of a merely chronic and platonic mess. Bob was presented with an ultimatum; it was to be either Acapulco or a clean breach.

So there he was, bound and committed to adultery no less irrevocably than Gandhi had been bound and committed to non-violence and prison and assassination, but, one may suspect, with more and deeper misgivings. Misgivings which the event had wholly justified. For though poor Bob didn’t actually tell me what had happened at Acapulco, the fact that Elaine was now, as he put it, ‘acting strangely’ and had been seen several times in the company of that unspeakable Moldavian baron, whose name I have fortunately forgotten, seemed to tell the whole ludicrous and pathetic story. And meanwhile Miriam had not only refused to give him a divorce: she had taken the opportunity of Bob’s absence and her possession of his power of attorney to have the title to the ranch, the two cars, the four apartment houses, the corner lots at Palm Springs and all the securities transferred from his name to hers. And meanwhile he owed thirty-three thousand dollars to the Government for arrears of income tax. But

when he asked his producer for that extra two hundred and fifty dollars a week which had been as good as promised him, there was only a long and pregnant silence.

‘What about it, Lou?’

Measuring his words with a solemn emphasis, Lou Lublin gave his answer.

‘Bob,’ he said, ‘in this Studio, at this time, not even Jesus Christ himself could get a raise.’

The tone was friendly; but when Bob tried to insist, Lou had banged his desk and told him that he was being un-American. That finished it.

Bob talked on. But what a subject, I was thinking, for a great religious painting! Christ before Lublin, begging for a raise of only two hundred and fifty bucks a week and being turned down flat. It would be one of Rembrandt’s favourite themes, drawn, etched, painted a score of times. Jesus turning sadly away into the darkness of unpaid income tax, while in the golden spotlight, glittering with gems and metallic highlights, Lou in an enormous turban still chuckled triumphantly over what he had done to the Man of Sorrows.

And then there would be Breughel’s version of the subject. A great synoptic view of the entire Studio; a three-million-dollar musical in full production, with every technical detail faithfully reproduced; two or three thousand figures, all perfectly characterized; and in the bottom right-hand corner long search would finally reveal a Lublin, no bigger than a grasshopper, heaping contumely upon an even tinier Jesus.

‘But I’ve had an absolutely stunning idea for an original,’ Bob was saying with that optimistic enthusiasm which is the desperate man’s alternative to suicide. ‘My agent’s absolutely crazy about it — thinks I ought to be able to sell it for fifty or sixty thousand.’

He started to tell the story.

Still thinking of Christ before Lublin, I visualized the scene as Piero would have painted it — the composition, luminously explicit, an equation in balanced voids and solids, in harmonizing and contrasting hues; the figures in adamantine repose. Lou and his assistant producers would all be wearing those Pharaonic

head-dresses, those huge inverted cones of white or coloured felt, which in Piero's world serve the double purpose of emphasizing the solid-geometrical nature of the human body and the outlandishness of Orientals. For all their silken softness, the folds of every garment would have the inevitability and definitiveness of syllogisms carved in porphyry, and throughout the whole we should feel the all-pervading presence of Plato's God, for ever mathematizing chaos into the order and beauty of art.

But from the Parthenon and the *Timaeus* a specious logic leads to the tyranny which, in the *Republic*, is held up as the ideal form of government. In the field of politics the equivalent of a theorem is a perfectly disciplined army; of a sonnet or picture, a police state under a dictatorship. The Marxist calls himself scientific, and to this claim the Fascist adds another: he is the poet — the scientific poet — of a new mythology. Both are justified in their pretensions; for each applies to human situations the procedures which have proved effective in the laboratory and the ivory tower. They simplify, they abstract, they eliminate all that, for their purposes, is irrelevant and ignore whatever they choose to regard as inessential; they impose a style, they compel the facts to verify a favourite hypothesis, they consign to the waste-paper basket all that, to their mind, falls short of perfection. And because they thus act like good artists, sound thinkers and tried experimenters, the prisons are full, political heretics are worked to death as slaves, the rights and preferences of mere individuals are ignored, the Gandhis are murdered, and from morning till night a million school teachers and broadcasters proclaim the infallibility of the bosses who happen at the moment to be in power.

'And after all,' Bob was saying, 'there's no reason why a movie shouldn't be a work of art. It's this damned commercialism ...'

He spoke with all the righteous indignation of an ungifted artist denouncing the scapegoat whom he has chosen to take the blame for the lamentable consequences of his own lack of talent.

'Do you think Gandhi was interested in art?' I asked.

'Gandhi? No, of course not.'

‘I think you’re right,’ I agreed. ‘Neither in art nor in science. And that’s why we killed him.’

‘We?’

‘Yes, we. The intelligent, the active, the forward-looking, the believers in Order and Perfection. Whereas Gandhi was a reactionary who believed only in people. Squalid little individuals governing themselves, village by village, and worshipping the Brahman who is also Atman. It was intolerable. No wonder we bumped him off.’

But even as I spoke, I was thinking that that wasn’t the whole story. The whole story included an inconsistency, almost a betrayal. This man who believed only in people had got himself involved in the subhuman mass-madness of nationalism, in the would-be superhuman, but actually diabolic, institutions of the nation-state. He got himself involved in these things, imagining that he could mitigate the madness and convert what was satanic in the state to something like humanity. But nationalism and the politics of power had proved too much for him. It is not at the centre, not from within the organization, that the saint can cure our regimented schizophrenia; it is only from without, at the periphery. If he makes himself a part of the machine, in which the collective madness is incarnated, one or other of two things is bound to happen. Either he remains himself, in which case the machine will use him as long as it can and, when he becomes unusable, reject or destroy him. Or he will be transformed into the likeness of the mechanism with and against which he works, and in this case we shall see Holy Inquisitions and alliances with any tyrant prepared to guarantee ecclesiastical privileges.

‘Well, to get back to their disgusting commercialism,’ Bob said at last. ‘Let me give you an example....’

But I was thinking that the dream of Order begets tyranny, the dream of Beauty, monsters and violence. Athena, the patroness of the arts, is also the goddess of scientific warfare, the heavenly Chief of every General Staff. We killed him because, after having briefly (and fatally) played the political game, he refused any longer to go on dreaming our dream of a national Order, a social

and economic Beauty; because he tried to bring us back to the concrete and cosmic facts of real people and the inner Light.

The headlines I had seen that morning were parables; the event they recorded, an allegory and a prophecy. In that symbolic act, we who so longed for peace had rejected the only possible means to peace and had issued a warning to all who, in the future, might advocate any courses but those which lead inevitably to war.

‘Well, if you’ve finished your coffee,’ said Bob, ‘let’s go.’

We rose and walked out into the sunshine. Bob took my arm and squeezed it.

You’ve been enormously helpful,’ he assured me again.

‘I wish I could believe it, Bob.’

‘But it’s true, it’s true.’

And perhaps it was true, in the sense that stirring the mess before a sympathetic public made him feel better, more like the Romantics.

We walked on for a little in silence — past the Projection Rooms and between the Churrigueresque bungalows of the executives. Over the entrance to the largest of them a great bronze plaque bore the inscription LOU LUBLIN PRODUCTIONS.

‘What about that salary raise?’ I asked. ‘Shall we go in and have another shot at it?’

Bob uttered a rueful little laugh, and there was another silence. When at last he spoke, it was in a pensive tone.

‘Too bad about old Gandhi,’ he said. ‘I suppose his great secret was not wanting anything for himself.’

‘Yes, I suppose that was one of the secrets.’

‘I wish to God I didn’t want things so much.’

‘Same here,’ I fervently concurred.

‘And when you finally get what you want, it’s never what you thought it was going to be.’

Bob sighed and relapsed into silence. He was thinking, no doubt, of Acapulco, of the horrible necessity of passing from the chronic to the acute,

from the vaguely verbal to the all too definitely and concretely carnal.

We emerged from the street of executive bungalows, crossed a parking lot and entered a canyon between towering sound stages. A tractor passed, pulling a low trailer, on which was the bottom half of the west door of a thirteenth-century Italian cathedral.

‘That’s for “Catherine of Siena.”’

‘What’s that?’

‘Hedda Boddy’s new picture. I worked on the script two years ago. Then they gave it to Streicher. And after that it was rewritten by the O’Toole-Menendez-Boguslavsky team. It’s lousy.’

Another trailer rattled past with the upper half of the cathedral door and a pulpit by Niccolò Pisano.

‘When you come to think of it,’ I said, ‘she’s very like Gandhi in some ways.’

‘Who? Hedda?’

‘No, Catherine.’

‘Oh, I see. I thought you were talking about the loincloth.’

‘I was talking about saints in politics,’ I said. ‘They didn’t actually lynch her, of course; but that was only because she died too young. The consequences of her politics hadn’t had time to show up. Do you go into all that in the script?’

Bob shook his head.

‘Too depressing,’ he said. ‘The public likes its stars to be successful. Besides, how can you talk about church politics? It would certainly be anti-Catholic and might easily become un-American. No, we play safe — concentrate on the boy she dictated her letters to. He’s wildly in love — but it’s all sublimated and spiritual, and after she’s dead he goes into a hermitage and prays in front of her picture. And then there’s the other boy who actually made passes at her. It’s mentioned in her letters. We play that for all it’s worth. They’re still hoping to be able to sign up Humphrey ...’

A loud tooting made us both jump.

‘Look out!’

Bob caught my arm and pulled me back. From the courtyard in the rear of the Story Department a two-ton truck emerged into the roadway.

‘Why don’t you look where you’re going?’ shouted the driver as he passed.

‘Idiot!’ Bob yelled back; then, turning to me, ‘Do you see what it’s loaded with?’ he asked. ‘Scripts.’ He shook his head. ‘Taking them to the incinerator. Which is where they belong. A million dollars’ worth of literature.’

He laughed with melodramatic bitterness.

Twenty yards up the road, the truck swung sharply to the right. Its speed must have been excessive; centrifugally propelled, half a dozen of the topmost scripts spilled out into the road. Like prisoners of the Inquisition, I thought, making a miraculous escape on the way to the stake.

‘The man can’t drive,’ Bob was grumbling. ‘One of these days he’ll kill somebody.’

‘But meanwhile let’s see who’s been saved.’

I picked up the nearest of the scripts.

‘“A Miss is as good as a Male,” Screenplay by Albertine Krebs!’ Bob remembered it. It stank.

‘Well, what about “Amanda”?’ I turned over the pages. ‘It must have been a musical. Here’s some poetry: *‘Amelia needs a meal,*

But Amanda needs a man ...’

Bob wouldn’t let me go on.

‘Don’t, don’t! It made four and a half million during the Battle of the Bulge.’

I dropped ‘Amanda’ and picked up another of the spread-eagled volumes. This one, I noticed, was bound in green, not in the Studio’s standard crimson.

‘“Ape and Essence,”’ I read aloud from the hand-lettered front cover.

‘“Ape and Essence”?’ Bob repeated in some surprise.

I turned to the flyleaf.

‘“An original Treatment by William Tallis, Cottonwood Ranch, Murcia, California.” And here’s a note in pencil. “Rejection slip sent 11-6-47. No self-addressed envelope. For the Incinerator” — twice underlined.’

‘They get thousands of these things,’ Bob explained.

Meanwhile I was looking into the body of the script.

‘More poetry.’

‘Christ!’ said Bob in a tone of disgust.

‘“Surely it’s obvious,”’ I began reading:

‘Surely it’s obvious.
Doesn’t every schoolboy know it?
Ends are ape-chosen; only the means are man’s.
Papio’s procurer, bursar to baboons,
Reason comes running, eager to ratify;
Comes, a catch-fart with Philosophy, truckling to tyrants;
Comes, a pimp for Prussia, with Hegel’s patent History;
Comes, with Medicine to administer the Ape-King’s aphrodisiac;
Comes, rhyming and with Rhetoric, to write his orations;
Comes with the Calculus to aim his rockets
Accurately at the orphanage across the ocean;
Comes, having aimed, with incense to impetrate
Our Lady devoutly for a direct hit.’

There was a silence. We looked at one another questioningly.

‘What do you think of it?’ Bob said at last.

I shrugged my shoulders. I really didn’t know.

‘Anyhow, don’t throw it away,’ he went on. ‘I want to see what the rest is like.’

We resumed our walk, turned a final corner, and there, a Franciscan convent among palm trees, was the Writers’ Building.

‘Tallis,’ Bob was saying to himself, as we entered, ‘William Tallis ...’ He shook his head. ‘Never heard of him. And anyhow, where’s Murcia?’

The following Sunday we knew the answer — knew it not merely in theory and on the map, but experimentally, by going there, at eighty miles an hour, in Bob’s (or rather Miriam’s) Buick convertible. Murcia, California, was two red gasoline pumps and a very small grocery store on the south-western fringe of the Mojave desert.

The long drouth had broken two days before. The sky was still overcast and a cold wind blew steadily from the west. Ghostly under their roof of slate-coloured cloud, the San Gabriel mountains were white with newly fallen snow. But to the north, far out in the desert, the sun was shining in a long narrow strip of golden light. All around us were the soft rich greys and silvers, the pale golds and russets of the desert vegetation — sage-brush, burro-brush, bunch-grass, and buckwheat, with here and there a strangely gesticulating Joshua-tree, rough-barked, or furred with dry prickles, and tufted at the end of its many-elbowed arms with thick clusters of green metallic spikes.

An old deaf man, at whom we had to shout our questions, at last understood what we were talking about. Cottonwood Ranch — of course he knew it. Take that dirt road there; drive south for a mile; then turn west, follow the irrigation ditch for another three-quarters of a mile, and there it was. The old man wanted to tell us much more about the place; but Bob was too impatient to listen. He threw the car into gear and we were off.

Along the irrigation ditch the cottonwoods and willows were aliens, clinging precariously, in the midst of those tough ascetic lives of the desert, to another, easier, more voluptuous mode of being. They were leafless now, the mere skeletons of trees, white against the sky; but one could imagine how intense, under the fierce clear sun, would be the emerald of their young leaves three months from now.

The car, which was being driven much too fast, crashed heavily into an unexpected dip. Bob swore.

‘Why any man in his senses should choose to live at the end of a road like this, I can’t imagine.’

‘Perhaps he takes it a little more slowly,’ I ventured to suggest.

Bob did not deign so much as to glance at me. The car rattled on at undiminished speed. I tried to concentrate on the view.

Out there, on the floor of the desert, there had been a noiseless but almost explosive transformation. The clouds had shifted and the sun was now shining on the nearest of those abrupt and jagged buttes, which rose so inexplicably, like

islands out of the enormous plain. A moment before they had been black and dead. Now suddenly they had come to life; between a shadowed foreground and a background of cloudy darkness they shone as if with their own incandescence.

I touched Bob's arm and pointed.

'Now do you understand why Tallis chooses to live at the end of this road?'

He took a quick look, swerved round a fallen Joshua-tree, looked again for a fraction of a second and brought his eyes back to the road.

'It reminds me of that etching by Goya — you know the one. The woman riding a stallion, and the animal's turning its head and has her dress between its teeth — trying to pull her down, trying to tear the clothes off her. And she's laughing like a maniac in a frenzy of pleasure. And in the background there's a plain, with buttes sticking out of it, just like here. Only if you look carefully at Goya's buttes, you see that they're really crouching animals, half rats, half lizards — as big as mountains. I bought a reproduction of it for Elaine.'

But Elaine, I reflected in the ensuing silence, hadn't taken the hint. She had allowed the stallion to drag her to the ground; she had lain there, laughing and laughing, uncontrollably, while the big teeth ripped at her bodice, tore the skirt to shreds, grazing the soft skin beneath with a fearful but delicious threat, with the tingling imminence of pain. And then, at Acapulco, those huge rat-lizards had stirred out of their stony sleep, and suddenly poor old Bob had found himself surrounded, not by deliciously swooning Graces, not by the laughing troop of rosy-bottomed Cupids, but by monsters.

But meanwhile we had reached our destination. Between the trees along the ditch I saw a white frame-house under an enormous cottonwood, with a windmill to one side of it, a corrugated iron barn to the other. The gate was closed. Bob stopped the car and we got out. A white board had been nailed to the gate-post. On it an unskilled hand had painted a long inscription in vermilion.

The leech's kiss, the squid's embrace,
The prurient ape's defiling touch:
And do you like the human race?

No, not much.

THIS MEANS YOU, KEEP OUT

‘Well, we’ve evidently come to the right place,’ I said.

Bob nodded. We opened the gate, walked across a wide expanse of beaten earth and knocked at the door of the house. It was opened almost immediately by a stout elderly woman in spectacles, wearing a flowered blue cotton dress and a very old red jacket. She gave us a friendly smile.

‘Car broken down?’ she inquired.

We shook our heads and Bob explained that we had come to see Mr. Tallis.

‘Mr. Tallis.’

The smile faded from her face; she looked grave and shook her head. ‘Didn’t you know?’ she said. ‘Mr. Tallis passed on six weeks ago.’

‘Do you mean, he’s dead?’

‘Passed on,’ she insisted, then launched out into her story.

Mr. Tallis had rented the house for a year. She and her husband went to live in the little old cabin behind the barn. It only had an outside toilet, but they had been used to that back in North Dakota, and luckily it had been a warm winter. Anyhow, they were glad of the money, what with prices the way they were nowadays; and Mr. Tallis couldn’t have been pleasanter, once you understood that he liked his privacy.

‘I suppose it was he who put up that sign on the gate?’

The old lady nodded and said that it was kind of cute; she meant to leave it there.

‘Had he been sick for a long time?’ I asked.

‘Not sick at all,’ she answered. ‘Though he always did say he had heart trouble.’

And that was why he had passed on. In the bathroom. She found him there one morning when she came to bring him his quart of milk and a dozen eggs from the store. Stone cold. He must have lain there all night. She had never had

such a shock in all her life. And then what a commotion on account of there not being any relatives that anybody knew about! The doctor was called and then the sheriff, and there had to be a court order before the poor man could even be buried, much less embalmed. And then all the books and papers and clothes had to be packed up and seals put on the boxes, and everything stored somewhere in Los Angeles, just in case there should be an heir somewhere. Well, now she and her husband were back in the house, and she felt rather badly about it, because poor Mr. Tallis still had four months of his lease to run and he'd paid everything in advance. But of course in one way she was thankful, now that the rain and snow had come at last — on account of the toilet being inside the house, not outside, like when they were living in the cabin.

She paused for breath. Bob and I exchanged glances.

'Well, in the circumstances,' I said, 'I think we'd better be going.'

But the old lady wouldn't hear of it.

'Come in,' she insisted, 'come in.'

We hesitated; then, accepting her invitation, followed her through a tiny entrance lobby into the living room. An oil stove was burning in a corner of the room; the air was hot and an almost tangible smell of fried food and diapers filled the house. A little old man like a leprechaun was seated in a rocking-chair near the window, reading the Sunday comics. Near him a pale, preoccupied-looking young girl — she couldn't have been more than seventeen — was holding a baby in one arm and, with the other hand, buttoning her pink blouse. The child belched; a bubble of milk appeared at the corner of its mouth. The young mother left the final button undone and tenderly wiped the pouting lips. Through the open door of another room came the sound of a fresh soprano voice singing, 'Now is the Hour,' to the accompaniment of a guitar.

'This is my husband,' said the old lady. 'Mr. Coulton.'

'Pleased to meet you,' said the leprechaun, without looking up from his comics.

'And this is our granddaughter, Katie. She got married last year.'

‘So I see,’ said Bob. He bowed to the girl and gave her one of those fascinating smiles for which he was so famous.

Katie looked at him as though he were merely a piece of furniture; then, fastening that final button, she turned without a word and started to climb the steep stairs that led to the upper floor.

‘And these,’ Mrs. Coulton went on, indicating Bob and myself, ‘are two friends of Mr. Tallis.’

We had to explain that we weren’t precisely friends. All we knew of Mr. Tallis was his work; but that had interested us so much that we had come here hoping to make his acquaintance — only to learn the tragic news of his death.

Mr. Coulton looked up from his paper.

‘Sixty-six,’ he said. ‘That’s all *he* was. I’m seventy-two myself. Seventy-two last October.’

He uttered the triumphant little laugh of one who has scored a victory, then returned to Flash Gordon — Flash the invulnerable, Flash the immortal, Flash the perpetual knight-errant to girls, not as they lamentably are, but as the idealists of the brassiere industry proclaim that they ought to be.

‘I happened to see what Mr. Tallis had sent in to our Studio,’ said Bob.

Again the leprechaun looked up.

‘You’re in the movies?’ he inquired.

Bob admitted that he was.

In the next room the music broke off suddenly in the middle of a phrase.

‘One of those big shots?’ Mr. Coulton inquired.

With the most charming false modesty, Bob assured him that he was only a writer who occasionally dabbled in directing.

The leprechaun nodded slowly.

‘I see in the paper where that guy Goldwyn says all the big shots got to take a fifty per cent. cut in their salary.’

His eyes twinkled gleefully, once again he uttered his triumphant little laugh. Then, abruptly disinteresting himself from reality, he returned to his myths.

Christ before Lublin! I tried to change the painful subject by asking Mrs. Coulton whether she had known that Tallis was interested in the movies. But as I spoke a sound of footsteps in the inner room distracted her attention.

I turned my head. In the doorway, dressed in a black sweater and a tartan skirt, there stood — who? Lady Hamilton at sixteen, Ninon de Lenclos when she lost her virginity to Coligny, *la petite* Morphilany, Anna Karenina in the schoolroom.

‘This is Rosie,’ said Mrs. Coulton proudly, ‘our other granddaughter. Rosie’s studying singing,’ she confided to Bob. ‘She wants to get into the movies.’

‘But how interesting!’ cried Bob enthusiastically, as he rose and shook hands with the future Lady Hamilton.

‘Maybe you could give her some advice,’ said the doting grandmother.

‘I’d be only too happy ...’

‘Fetch another chair, Rosie.’

The girl raised her eyelids and gave Bob a brief but intense look. ‘Unless you don’t mind sitting in the kitchen,’ she said.

‘Of course not!’

They vanished together into the inner room. Looking out of the window, I saw that the buttes were again in shadow. The rat-lizards had closed their eyes and were shamming dead — but only to lull their victim into a sense of false security.

‘It’s more than luck,’ Mrs. Coulton was saying, ‘it’s Providence. A big shot in the movies coming here, just when Rosie needs a helping hand.’

‘Just when movies are going to fold up like vaudeville,’ said the leprechaun without raising his eyes from the page before him.

‘What makes you say those things?’

‘It’s not me that says them,’ the old man answered. ‘It’s that Goldwyn guy.’

From the kitchen came the sound of a startlingly childish laugh. Bob was evidently making headway. I foresaw another trip to Acapulco, with consequences even more disastrous than the first.

Innocently the procuress, Mrs. Coulton, smiled with pleasure.

‘I like your friend,’ she said. ‘Gets on well with kids. None of that stuffed shirt business.’

I accepted the implied rebuke without comment and asked her again if she had known that Mr. Tallis was interested in movies.

She nodded. Yes, he’d told her that he was sending something to one of the Studios. He wanted to make some money. Not for himself; for though he’d lost most of what he once had, there was still enough to live on. No, he wanted some extra money to send to Europe. He’d been married to a German girl, way back, before the First World War. Then they’d been divorced and she had stayed on in Germany with the baby. And now there wasn’t anybody left but a granddaughter. Mr. Tallis wanted to bring her over here; but the people at Washington wouldn’t let him. So the next best thing was to send her a lot of money so she could eat properly and finish her education. That was why he’d written that thing for the movies.

Her words suddenly reminded me of something in Tallis’s script — something about children in post-war Europe prostituting themselves for bars of chocolate. The granddaughter — had she perhaps been one of those children? ‘*Ich* give you *Schokolade*, *du* give me *Liebe*. Understand?’ They understood only too well. One Hershey bar now; two more afterwards.

‘What happened to the wife?’ I asked. ‘And the granddaughter’s parents?’

‘They passed on,’ said Mr. Coulton. ‘I guess they were Jewish, or something.’

‘Mind you,’ said the leprechaun suddenly, ‘I don’t have anything against Jews. But all the same ...’ He paused. ‘Maybe Hitler wasn’t so dumb after all.’

This time, I could see, it was to the Katzenjammer Kids that he returned.

Another peal of childish laughter broke out in the kitchen. Lady Hamilton at sixteen sounded as though she were about eleven. And yet how mature, how technically perfect had been the look with which she greeted Bob! Obviously, the most disquieting fact about Rosie was that she was simultaneously innocent and knowing, a calculating adventuress and a pig-tailed schoolgirl.

‘He married again,’ the old lady went on, ignoring both the giggle and the anti-semitism. ‘Someone on the stage. He told me the name, but I’ve forgotten it.

Anyhow, it didn’t last long. She went off with some other fellow. I say it served him right for going off with her when he had a wife back there in Germany. I don’t think it’s right, all this divorcing and marrying somebody else’s husband.’

In the ensuing silence I fabricated a whole biography for this man I had never seen. The young New Englander of good family. Carefully educated, but not to the point of pedantry. Naturally gifted, but not so overwhelmingly as to make him wish to exchange a life of leisure for the fatigues of professional authorship. From Harvard he had gone on to Europe, had lived gracefully, had known the best people everywhere. And then — in Munich, I felt sure — he had fallen in love. I visualized the girl, wearing the German equivalent of Liberty dresses — a daughter of some successful artist or patron of the arts. One of those almost disembodied, those as it were floating products of Wilhelmine wealth and culture; a being at once vague and intense, fascinatingly unpredictable and maddeningly idealistic, *tief* and German. Tallis had fallen in love, had married, had fathered a child in spite of his wife’s frigidity, had been almost asphyxiated by the oppressive soulfulness of the domestic atmosphere. How fresh and healthy, by comparison, had seemed the air of Paris and the personal ambience of that young Broadway actress whom he had met vacationing there!

La belle Américaine,
Qui rend les hommes fous,
Dans deux ou trois semaines
Partira pour Corfu.

But this one didn’t leave for Corfu — or if she did, it was in Tallis’s company. And she wasn’t frigid, she didn’t float, she was neither vague nor intense, neither deep nor soulful, nor an art snob. What she *was*, unfortunately, was a bit of a bitch. And that bit had grown larger with the passage of the years. By the time he divorced her, it had become the entire animal.

Looking back from the vantage point of 1947, the Tallis of my imagination could see precisely what he had done: for the sake of a physical pleasure and the simultaneous excitement and satisfaction of an erotic imagination, he had condemned a wife and a daughter to death at the hands of maniacs, and a

granddaughter to the caresses of any soldier or black marketeer with a pocketful of sweetmeats or the price of a decent meal.

Romantic fancies! I turned to Mrs. Coulton.

‘Well, I wish I’d known him,’ I said.

‘You’d have liked him,’ she assured me. ‘We all liked Mr. Tallis. I’ll tell you something,’ she confided. ‘Every time I make the trip to Lancaster for the Ladies’ Bridge Club, I go to the cemetery, just to visit with him.’

‘And I bet he hates it,’ said the leprechaun.

‘Now, Elmer,’ his wife protested.

‘But I heard him say it,’ Mr. Coulton insisted. ‘Time and again. “If I die here,” he says, “I want to be buried out in the desert.”’

‘He wrote as much in that script he sent to the Studio,’ I said.

‘He did?’ Mrs. Coulton’s tone was one of incredulity.

‘Yes, he even describes the grave he meant to be buried in. All by itself, under a Joshua-tree.’

‘I could have told him it wasn’t legal,’ said the leprechaun. ‘Not since the morticians lobbied that bill through the Legislature at Sacramento. I knew a man that had to be dug up twenty years after he was buried — way out there behind the buttes.’ He waved a hand in the direction of Goya’s saurian rats. ‘It cost his nephew three hundred dollars by the time he was all through.’

He chuckled at the recollection.

‘*I* wouldn’t want to be buried in the desert,’ said his wife emphatically.

‘Why not?’

‘Too lonely,’ she answered. ‘I’d hate it.’

While I was wondering what to say next, the pale young mother came down the stairs carrying a diaper. She stopped for a moment to look in at the kitchen.

‘Listen, Rosie,’ she said in a low, angry voice, ‘it’s time you did some work for a change.’

Then she turned and walked towards the entrance lobby, where an open door revealed the modern conveniences of that indoor bathroom.

‘He’s got diarrhoea again,’ she said bitterly, as she passed her grandmother.

Flushed, her eyes bright with excitement, the future Lady Hamilton emerged from the kitchen. Behind her, in the doorway, stood the future Hamilton, busily imagining that he was going to be Lord Nelson.

‘Grandma,’ the girl announced, ‘Mr. Briggs thinks he can arrange for me to have a screen test.’

The idiot! I got up.

‘Time we were going, Bob,’ I said, knowing that it was already too late.

From the half-open door of the bathroom came the squelchy sound of diapers being rinsed in the toilet bowl.

‘Listen!’ I whispered to Bob as we passed.

‘Listen to what?’ he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. Ears have they, neither do they hear.

Well, that was the nearest we ever got to Tallis in the flesh. In what follows the reader can discover the reflection of his mind. I print the text of ‘Ape and Essence’ as I found it, without change and without comment.

II. THE SCRIPT

TITLES, CREDITS AND finally, to the accompaniment of trumpets and a chorus of triumphant angels, the name of the PRODUCER.

The music changes its character, and if Debussy were alive to write it, how delicate it would be, how aristocratic, how flawlessly pure of all Wagnerian lubricity and bumptiousness, all Straussian vulgarity! For here on the screen, in something better than Technicolor, it is the hour before sunrise. Night seems to linger in the darkness of an almost unruffled sea; but from the fringes of the sky a transparent pallor mounts from green through deepening blue to the zenith. In the east the Morning Star is still visible.

NARRATOR

Beauty inexpressible, peace beyond understanding ...
But, alas, on our screen
This emblem of an emblem
Will probably look like
Mrs. Somebody’s illustration
To a poem by Ella
Wheeler Wilcox.
Out of the sublime in Nature
Art all too often manufactures
Only the ludicrous.
But the risk must be run;
For you there, you in the audience,
Somehow and at any price,
Wilcox or worse,
Somehow you must be reminded,

Be induced to remember,
Be implored to be willing to
Understand what’s What.

As the Narrator speaks, we fade out of our emblem of an emblem of Eternity into the interior of a picture palace filled to capacity. The light grows a little less dim and suddenly we become aware that the audience is composed entirely of well-dressed baboons of both sexes and of all ages from first to second childhood.

NARRATOR

But man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority —
Most ignorant of what he is most assur’d.
His glassy essence — like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.

Cut to the screen, at which the apes are so attentively gazing. In a setting such as only Semiramis or Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer could have imagined we see a bosomy young female baboon, in a shell-pink evening gown, her mouth painted purple, her muzzle powdered mauve, her fiery red eyes ringed with mascara. Swaying as voluptuously as the shortness of her hind legs will permit her to do, she walks on to the brightly illuminated stage of a night club and, to the clapping of two or three hundred pairs of hairy hands, approaches the Louis XV microphone. Behind her, on all fours and secured by a light steel chain attached to a dog collar, comes Michael Faraday.

NARRATOR

‘Most ignorant of what he is most assur’d ...’ And I need hardly add that what we call knowledge is merely another form of Ignorance — highly organized, of course, and eminently scientific, but for that very reason all the more complete, all the more productive of angry apes. When Ignorance was merely ignorance, we were the equivalents of lemurs, marmosets and howler monkeys. Today, thanks to that Higher Ignorance which is our knowledge, man’s stature has increased to such an extent that the least among us is now a baboon, the greatest an orang-utan or even, if he takes rank as a Saviour of Society, a true Gorilla.

Meanwhile the baboon-girl has reached the microphone. Turning her head, she catches sight of Faraday on his knees, in the act of straightening his bent and aching back.

‘Down, sir, down!’

The tone is peremptory, she gives the old man a cut with her coral-headed riding-switch. Faraday winces and obeys, the apes in the audience laugh delightedly. She blows them a kiss, then, drawing the microphone towards her, she bares her formidable teeth and starts to sing, in an expiring bedroom contralto, the latest popular success: *Love, Love, Love — Love’s the very essence*

Of everything I think, of everything I do.

Give me, give me, give me,

Give me detumescence.

That means you.

Close-up of Faraday’s face, as it registers astonishment, disgust, indignation and, finally, such shame and anguish that tears begin to flow down the furrowed cheeks.

Montage shots of the Folks in Radio Land, listening-in.

A stout baboon housewife frying sausages, while the loud-speaker brings her the imaginary fulfilment and real exacerbation of her most unavowable wishes.

A baboon baby standing up in its cot, reaching over to the portable on the commode and dialling the promise of detumescence.

A middle-aged baboon financier, interrupting his reading of the stock-market news to listen, with closed eyes and a smile of ecstasy. *Give me, give me, give*

me, give me.

Two baboon teen-agers, fumbling to music in a parked car. '*That means you-ou*.' Close-up of mouths and paws.

Cut back to Faraday's tears. The singer turns, catches sight of his agonized face, utters a cry of rage and starts to beat him, blow after savage blow, while the audience applauds tumultuously. The gold and jasper walls of the night club evaporate and for a moment we see the figures of the ape and her captive intellect silhouetted against the dawning twilight of our first sequence. Then these too fade out, and there is only the emblem of an emblem of Eternity.

NARRATOR

The sea, the bright planet, the boundless crystal of the sky — surely you remember them! Surely! Or can it be that you have forgotten, that you have never even discovered what lies beyond the mental Zoo and the inner Asylum and all that Broadway of imaginary theatres, in which the only name in lights is always your own?

The Camera moves across the sky, and now the black serrated shape of a rocky island breaks the line of the horizon. Sailing past the island is a large, four-masted schooner. We approach, we see that the ship flies the flag of New Zealand and is named the *Canterbury*. Her captain and a group of passengers are at the rail, staring intently towards the east. We look through their binoculars and discover a line of barren coast. Then, almost suddenly, the sun comes up behind the silhouette of distant mountains.

NARRATOR

This new bright day is the twentieth of February, 2108, and these men and women are members of the New Zealand Re-Discovery Expedition to North America. Spared by the belligerents of the Third World War — not, I need hardly say, for any humanitarian reason, but simply because, like Equatorial Africa, it was too remote to be worth anybody's while to obliterate — New

Zealand survived and even modestly flourished in an isolation which, because of the dangerously radioactive condition of the rest of the world, remained for more than a century almost absolute. Now that the danger is over, here come its first explorers, re-discovering America from the West. And meanwhile, on the other side of the world, the black men have been working their way down the Nile and across the Mediterranean. What splendid tribal dances in the bat-infested halls of the Mother of Parliaments! And the labyrinth of the Vatican — what a capital place in which to celebrate the lingering and complex rites of female circumcision! We all get precisely what we ask for.

The scene darkens; there is a noise of gunfire. When the lights come up again, there squats Dr. Albert Einstein, on a leash, behind a group of baboons in uniform.

The Camera moves across a narrow no-man's-land of rubble, broken trees and corpses, and comes to rest on a second group of animals, wearing different decorations and under another flag, but with the same Dr. Albert Einstein, on an exactly similar string, squatting at the heels of their jack-boots. Under the tousled aureole of hair, the good, innocent face wears an expression of pained bewilderment. The Camera travels back and forth from Einstein to Einstein. Close shots of the two identical faces, staring wistfully at one another between the polished leather boots of their respective masters.

On the sound track, the voice, the saxophones and 'cellos continue to yearn for detumescence.

'Is that you, Albert?' one of the Einsteins hesitantly inquires.

The other slowly nods his head.

'Albert, I'm afraid it is.'

Overhead the flags of the opposing armies suddenly begin to stir in the freshening breeze. The coloured patterns open out, then fold in again upon themselves, are revealed and once more hidden.

NARRATOR

Vertical stripes, horizontal stripes, noughts and crosses, eagles and hammers. Mere arbitrary signs. But every reality to which a sign has been attached is thereby made subject to its sign. Goswami and Ali used to live at peace. But I got a flag, you got a flag, all Baboon-God's children got flags. So even Ali and Goswami got flags; and because of the flags it immediately became right and proper for the one with the foreskin to disembowel the one without a foreskin, and for the circumcised to shoot the uncircumcised, rape his wife and roast his children over slow fires.

But meanwhile, above the bunting float the huge shapes of clouds, and beyond the clouds is that blue void which is an emblem of our glassy Essence, and at the foot of the flagstaff grows the wheat and the emerald-green rice and the millet. Bread for the body and bread for the spirit. Our choice is between bread and bunting. And bunting, I need hardly add, is what we have almost unanimously chosen.

The Camera drops from the flags to the Einsteins and passes from the Einsteins to the much-decorated General Staffs in the background. All at once and simultaneously the two Field Marshalissimos shout an order. Immediately, from either side, appear baboon technicians, with fully motorized equipment for releasing aerosols. On the pressure-tanks of one army are painted the words SUPER TULAREMIA; on those of their opponents, IMPROVED GLANDERS, GUARANTEED 99.44% PURE. Each group of technicians is accompanied by its mascot, Louis Pasteur, on a chain. On the sound track there is a reminiscence of the baboon-girl. *Give me, give me, give me, give me detumescence*.... Then these voluptuous strains modulate into 'Land of Hope and Glory,' played by massed brass bands, and sung by a choir of fourteen thousand voices.

NARRATOR

What land, you ask? And I answer,

Any old land.

And the Glory, of course, is the Ape-King's,

As for the Hope —
Bless your little heart, there is no hope,
Only the almost infinite probability
Of consummating suddenly,
Or else by agonizing inches,
The ultimate and irremediable
Detumescence.

Close shot of paws at the stop-cocks; then the Camera draws back. Out of the pressure-tanks two streams of yellow fog start to roll towards one another, sluggishly, across no-man's-land.

NARRATOR

Glanders, my friends, Glanders — a disease of horses, not common among humans. But, never fear, Science can easily make it universal. And these are its symptoms. Violent pains in all the joints. Pustules over the whole body. Below the skin hard swellings, which finally burst and turn into sloughing ulcers. Meanwhile the mucous membrane of the nose becomes inflamed and exudes a copious discharge of stinking pus. Ulcers rapidly form within the nostrils and eat away the surrounding bone and cartilage. From the nose the infection passes to the eyes, mouth, throat and bronchial passages. Within three weeks most of the patients are dead. To see that *all* shall die has been the task of some of those brilliant young D.Sc.'s now in the employ of your government. And not of your government only: of all the other elected or self-appointed organizers of the world's collective schizophrenia. Biologists, pathologists, physiologists — here they are, after a hard day at the lab, coming home to their families. A hug from the sweet little wife. A romp with the children. A quiet dinner with friends, followed by an evening of chamber music or intelligent conversation about politics or philosophy. Then bed at eleven and the familiar ecstasies of married love. And in the morning, after orange juice and Grapenuts, off they go again to

their job of discovering how yet greater numbers of families precisely like their own can be infected with a yet deadlier strain of *bacillus mallei*.

There is another yelp of command from the Marshalissimos. Among the booted apes in charge of either army's supply of Genius there is a violent cracking of whips, a tugging of leashes.

Close shot of the Einsteins as they try to resist.

'No, no ... I can't.'

'I tell you I can't.'

'Disloyal!'

'Unpatriotic!'

'Filthy Communist!'

'Stinking bourgeois-Fascist!'

'Red Imperialist!'

'Capitalist-Monopolist!'

'Take that!'

'Take that!'

Kicked, whipped, half throttled, each of the Einsteins is finally dragged towards a kind of sentry box. Inside these boxes are instrument boards with dials, knobs and switches.

NARRATOR

Surely it's obvious.

Doesn't every schoolboy know it?

Ends are ape-chosen; only the means are man's.

Papio's procurer, bursar to baboons,

Reason comes running, eager to ratify;

Comes, a catch-fart with Philosophy, truckling to tyrants;

Comes, a pimp for Prussia, with Hegel's patent History;

Comes, with Medicine to administer the Ape-King's aphrodisiac;

Comes, rhyming and with Rhetoric, to write his orations;

Comes with the Calculus to aim his rockets
Accurately at the orphanage across the ocean;
Comes, having aimed, with incense to impetrate
Our Lady devoutly for a direct hit.

The brass bands give place to the most glutinous of Wurlitzers, ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ to ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers.’ Followed by his Very Reverend Dean and Chapter, the Right Reverend the Baboon-Bishop of the Bronx advances majestic, his crozier in his jewelled paw, to pronounce benediction upon the two Field Marshalissimos and their patriotic proceedings.

NARRATOR

Church and State,
Greed and Hate: —
Two Baboon-Persons in one Supreme Gorilla.

OMNES

Amen, amen.

THE BISHOP

In nomine Babuini ...

On the sound track it is all *vox humana* and the angel voices of choristers.

‘With the (*dim*) Cross of (*pp*) Jesus, (*ff*) going on before.’

Huge paws hoist the Einsteins to their feet and, in a close-up, seize their wrists. Ape-guided, those fingers, which have written equations and played the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, close on the master switches and, with a horrified reluctance, slowly press them down. There is a little click, then a long silence which is broken at last by the voice of the Narrator.

NARRATOR

Even at supersonic speeds the missiles will take an appreciable time to reach their destinations. So what do you say, boys, to a spot of breakfast while we're waiting for our Last Judgment!

The apes open their haversacks, throw some bread, a few carrots and two or three lumps of sugar to the Einsteins, then fall to themselves on rum and Bologna sausage.

We dissolve to the deck of the schooner, where the scientists of the Re-Discovery Expedition are also breakfasting.

NARRATOR

And these are some of the survivors of that Judgment. Such nice people! And the civilization they represent — that's nice too. Nothing very exciting or spectacular, of course. No Parthenons or Sistine Chapels, no Newtons or Mozarts or Shakespeares; but also no Ezzelinos, no Napoleons or Hitlers or Jay Goulds, no Inquisitions or NKVD's, no purges, pogroms or lynchings. No heights or abysses, but plenty of milk for the kids, and a reasonably high average IQ, and everything, in a quiet provincial way, thoroughly cosy and sensible and humane.

One of the men raises his binoculars and peers at the shore, now only a mile or two distant. Suddenly he utters an exclamation of delighted astonishment.

'Look!' He hands the glasses to one of his companions. 'On the crest of the hill.'

The other looks.

Telescopic shot of low hills. On the highest point of the ridge, three oil derricks stand silhouetted against the sky, like the equipment of a modernized and more efficient Calvary.

'Oil!' cries the second observer excitedly. 'And the derricks are still standing.'

'Still standing?'

There is general astonishment.

‘That means,’ says old Professor Craigie, the geologist, ‘that there can’t have been much of an explosion hereabouts.’

‘But you don’t have to have explosions,’ explains his colleague from the Department of Nuclear Physics. ‘Radioactive gases do the job just as effectively and over much wider areas.’

‘You seem to forget the bacteria and the viruses,’ puts in Professor Grampian, the biologist. His tone is that of a man who feels that he has been slighted.

His young wife, who is only an anthropologist and so has nothing to contribute to the argument, contents herself with glaring angrily at the physicist.

Athletic in tweeds, but at the same time brightly intelligent behind her horn-rimmed glasses, Miss Ethel Hook, of the Department of Botany, reminds them that there was, almost certainly, a widespread employment of plant diseases. She turns for confirmation of what she says to her colleague, Dr. Poole, who nods approvingly.

‘Diseases of food plants,’ he says in his professorial manner, ‘would have a long-range effect hardly less decisive than that produced by fissionable material or artificially induced pandemics. Consider, for example, the potato ...’

‘But why bother about any of this fancy stuff?’ bluffly booms the engineer of the party, Dr. Cudworth. ‘Cut the aqueducts, and it’s all over in a week. No drinky, no livey.’ Delighted by his own joke, he laughs enormously.

Meanwhile Dr. Schneeglock, the psychologist, sits listening with a smile of hardly disguised contempt.

‘But why even bother about aqueducts?’ he asks. ‘All you need do is just to threaten your neighbour with any of the weapons of mass destruction. Their own panic will do the rest. Remember what the psychological treatment did to New York, for example. The short-wave broadcasts from overseas, the headlines in the evening papers. And immediately there were eight millions of people trampling one another to death on the bridges and in the tunnels. And the survivors scattered through the countryside, like locusts, like a horde of plague-infected rats. Fouling the water supply. Spreading typhoid and diphtheria and venereal disease. Biting, clawing, looting, murdering, raping. Feeding on dead

dogs and the corpses of children. Shot at sight by the farmers, bludgeoned by the police, machine-gunned by the State Guard, strung up by the Vigilantes. And the same thing was happening in Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington; in London, in Paris; in Bombay and Shanghai and Tokyo; in Moscow, in Kiev, in Stalingrad; in every capital, every manufacturing centre, every port, every railway junction, all over the world. Not a shot had been fired, and civilization was already in ruins. Why the soldiers ever found it necessary to use their bombs, I really can't imagine.'

NARRATOR

Love casts out fear; but conversely fear casts out love. And not only love. Fear also casts out intelligence, casts out goodness, casts out all thought of beauty and truth. What remains is the dumb or studiedly jocular desperation of one who is aware of the obscene Presence in the corner of the room and knows that the door is locked, that there aren't any windows. And now the thing bears down on him. He feels a hand on his sleeve, smells a stinking breath, as the executioner's assistant leans almost amorously towards him. 'Your turn next, brother. Kindly step this way.' And in an instant his quiet terror is transmuted into a frenzy as violent as it is futile. There is no longer a man among his fellow-men, no longer a rational being speaking articulately to other rational beings; there is only a lacerated animal, screaming and struggling in the trap. For in the end fear casts out even a man's humanity. And fear, my good friends, fear is the very basis and foundation of modern life. Fear of the much touted technology which, while it raises our standard of living, increases the probability of our violently dying. Fear of the science which takes away with one hand even more than what it so profusely gives with the other. Fear of the demonstrably fatal institutions for which, in our suicidal loyalty, we are ready to kill and die. Fear of the Great Men whom we have raised, by popular acclaim, to a power which they use, inevitably, to murder and enslave us. Fear of the War we don't want and yet do everything we can to bring about.

As the Narrator speaks, we dissolve to the alfresco picnic of the baboons and their captive Einsteins. They eat and drink with gusto, while the first two bars of ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers’ are repeated again and again, faster and faster, louder and louder. Suddenly the music is interrupted by the first of a succession of enormous explosions. Darkness. A long-drawn, deafening noise of crashing, rending, screaming, moaning. Then silence and increasing light, and once again it is the hour before sunrise, with the morning star and the delicate, pure music.

NARRATOR

Beauty inexpressible, peace beyond understanding ...

Far off, from below the horizon, a column of rosy smoke pushes up into the sky, swells out into the likeness of an enormous toadstool and hangs there, eclipsing the solitary planet.

We dissolve again to the scene of the picnic. The baboons are all dead. Horribly disfigured by burns, the two Einsteins lie side by side under what remains of a flowering apple tree. Not far off, a pressure-tank is still oozing its Improved Glanders.

FIRST EINSTEIN

It’s unjust, it isn’t right ...

SECOND EINSTEIN

We, who never did any harm to anybody;

FIRST EINSTEIN

We, who lived only for Truth.

NARRATOR

And that precisely is why you are dying in the murderous service of baboons. Pascal explained it all more than three hundred years ago. ‘We make an idol of truth; for truth without charity is not God, but his image and idol, which we must neither love nor worship.’ You lived for the worship of an idol. But, in the last analysis, the name of every idol is Moloch. So here you are, my friends, here you are.

Stirred by a sudden gust, the stagnant plague-fog noiselessly advances, sends a wreath of pus-coloured vapour swirling among the apple blossoms, then descends to engulf the two recumbent figures. A choking scream announces the death, by suicide, of twentieth-century science.

We dissolve to a point on the coast of Southern California, twenty miles or thereabouts due west of Los Angeles. The scientists of the Re-Discovery Expedition are in the act of landing from a whaleboat. A huge sewer, shattered where it enters the sea, stands in the background.

NARRATOR

Parthenon, Coliseum —
Glory that was Greece, grandeur, etcetera.
And there are all the others: —
Thebes and Copan, Arezzo and Ajanta;
Bourges, taking heaven by violence,
And the Holy Wisdom, floating in repose.
But the glory that was Queen Victoria
Remains unquestionably the W.C.;
The grandeur that was Franklin Delano
Is this by far the biggest drain-pipe ever —
Dry now and shattered, Ichabod, Ichabod;
And its freight of condoms (irrepressibly buoyant,
Like hope, like concupiscence) no longer whitens
This lonely beach with a galaxy as of wind-flowers

Or summer daisies.

Meanwhile the scientists, with Dr. Craigie at their head, have crossed the beach, scrambled up the low cliff and are making their way across the sandy and eroded plain towards the oil-wells on the hills beyond.

The Camera holds on Dr. Poole, the Chief Botanist of the Expedition. Like a browsing sheep, he moves from plant to plant, examining flowers through his magnifying glass, putting away specimens in his collecting box, making notes in a little black book.

NARRATOR

Well, here he is, our hero, Dr. Alfred Poole, D.Sc. Better known to his students and younger colleagues as Stagnant Poole. And the nickname, alas, is painfully apt. For though not unhandsome, as you see, though a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand and by no means a fool, in the circumstances of practical life his intelligence seems to be only potential, his attractiveness no more than latent. It is as though he lived behind plate glass, could see and be seen, but never establish contact. And the fault, as Dr. Schneeglock of the Psychology Department is only too ready to tell you, the fault lies with that devoted and intensely widowed Mother of his — that saint, that pillar of fortitude, that vampire, who still presides at his breakfast table and with her own hands launders his silk shirts and sacrificially darns his socks.

Miss Hook now enters the shot — enters it on a burst of enthusiasm.

‘Isn’t this exciting, Alfred!’ she exclaims.

‘Very,’ says Dr. Poole politely.

‘Seeing *Yucca gloriosa* in its native habitat — who would have imagined that we’d ever get the chance? And *Artemisia tridentata*.’

‘There are still some flowers on the *Artemisia*,’ says Dr. Poole. ‘Do you notice anything unusual about them?’

Miss Hook examines them, and shakes her head.

‘They’re a great deal bigger than what’s described in the old text-books,’ he says in a tone of studiedly repressed excitement.

‘A great deal bigger?’ she repeats. Her face lights up. ‘Alfred, you don’t think ...?’

Dr. Poole nods.

‘I’m ready to bet on it,’ he says. ‘Tetraploidy. Induced by irradiation with gammarays.’

‘Oh, Alfred!’ she cries ecstatically.

NARRATOR

In her tweeds and her horn-rimmed spectacles Ethel Hook is one of those extraordinarily wholesome, amazingly efficient and intensely English girls to whom, unless one is oneself equally wholesome, equally English and even more efficient, one would so much rather not be married. Which is probably why, at thirty-five, Ethel is still without a husband. Still without a husband — but not, she dares to hope, for much longer. For though dear Alfred has not yet actually proposed, she knows (and knows that he knows) that his Mother’s dearest wish is for him to do so — and Alfred is the most dutiful of sons. Besides, they have so much in common — botany, the University, the poetry of Wordsworth. She feels confident that before they get back to Auckland it will all be arranged — the simple ceremony with dear old Dr. Trilliams officiating, the honeymoon in the Southern Alps, the return to their sweet little house in Mount Eden, and then, after eighteen months, the first baby ...

Cut to the other members of the expedition, as they toil up the hill towards the oil-wells. Professor Craigie, their leader, halts to mop his brow and to take stock of his charges.

‘Where’s Poole?’ he asks. ‘And Ethel Hook?’

Somebody points and, in a long shot, we see the distant figures of the two botanists.

Cut back to Professor Craigie, who cups his hands around his mouth and shouts: ‘Poole, Poole!’

‘Why don’t you leave them to their little romance?’ asks the genial Cudworth.

‘Romance indeed!’ Dr. Schneeglock snorts derisively.

‘But she’s obviously sweet on him.’

‘It takes two to make a romance.’

‘Trust a woman to get her man to pop the question.’

‘You might as well expect him to commit incest with his Mother,’ says Dr. Schneeglock emphatically.

‘Poole!’ bellows Professor Craigie once more, and turning to the others, ‘I don’t like people to lag behind,’ he says in a tone of irritation. ‘In a strange country ... You never know.’

He renews his shouting.

Cut back to Dr. Poole and Miss Hook. They hear the distant call, look up from their tetraploid *Artemisia*, wave their hands and start in pursuit of the others. Suddenly Dr. Poole catches sight of something that makes him cry aloud.

‘Look!’ He points a forefinger.

‘What is it?’

‘*Echinocactus hexaedrophorus* — and the most beautiful specimen.’

Medium long shot from his viewpoint of a ruined bungalow among the sage-brush. Then a close shot of the cactus growing between two paving-stones, near the front door. Cut back to Dr. Poole. From the leather sheath at his belt he draws a long, narrow-bladed trowel.

‘You’re not going to dig it up?’

His only answer is to walk over to where the cactus is growing and squat down beside it.

‘Professor Craigie will be so cross,’ protests Miss Hook.

‘Well, then, run ahead and keep him quiet.’

She looks at him for a few seconds with an expression of solicitude.

‘I hate to leave you alone, Alfred.’

‘You talk as though I were five years old,’ he answers irritably. ‘Go ahead, I tell you.’

He turns away and starts to dig.

Miss Hook does not immediately obey, but stands looking at him in silence for a little while longer.

NARRATOR

Tragedy is the farce that involves our sympathies; farce, the tragedy that happens to outsiders. Tweedy and breezy, wholesome and efficient, this object of the easiest kind of satire is also the subject of an Intimate Journal. What flaming sunsets she has seen and vainly attempted to describe! What velvety and voluptuous summer nights! What lyrically lovely days of spring! And oh, the torrents of feeling, the temptations, the hopes, the passionate throbbing of the heart, the humiliating disappointments! And now, after all these years, after so many committee meetings attended, so many lectures delivered and examination papers corrected, now at last, moving in His mysterious way, God has made her, she feels, responsible for this helpless and unhappy man. And because he is unhappy and helpless, she loves him — not romantically, of course, not as she loved that curly-headed scamp who, fifteen years ago, swept her off her feet and then married the daughter of that rich contractor, but genuinely none the less, with a strong, protective tenderness.

‘All right,’ she says at last. ‘I’ll go ahead. But promise you won’t be long.’

‘Of course I won’t be long.’

She turns and walks away. Dr. Poole looks after her; then, with a sigh of relief at finding himself once more alone, resumes his digging.

NARRATOR

‘Never,’ he is repeating to himself, ‘Never! Whatever Mother may say.’ For though he respects Miss Hook as a botanist, relies on her as an organizer and

admires her as a high-minded person, the idea of being made one flesh with her is as unthinkable as a violation of the Categorical Imperative.

Suddenly, from behind him, three villainous-looking men, black-bearded, dirty and ragged, emerge very quietly from out of the ruins of the house, stand poised for a moment, then throw themselves upon the unsuspecting botanist and, before he can so much as utter a cry, force a gag into his mouth, tie his hands behind his back and drag him down into a gully, out of sight of his companions.

We dissolve to a panoramic view of Southern California from fifty miles up in the stratosphere. As the Camera plummets downwards, we hear the Narrator's voice.

NARRATOR

The sea and its clouds, the mountains glaucous-golden,
The valleys full of indigo darkness,
The drouth of lion-coloured plains,
The rivers of pebbles and white sand.
And in the midst of them the City of the Angels.
Half a million houses,
Five thousand miles of streets,
Fifteen hundred thousand motor vehicles,
And more rubber goods than Akron,
More celluloid than the Soviets,
More Nylons than New Rochelle,
More brassieres than Buffalo,
More deodorants than Denver,
More oranges than anywhere,
With bigger and better girls —
The great Metrollopis of the West.

And now we are only five miles up and it becomes increasingly obvious that the great Metrollopis is a ghost town, that what was once the world's largest oasis is now its greatest agglomeration of ruins in a waste-land. Nothing moves in the streets. Dunes of sand have drifted across the concrete. The avenues of palms and pepper trees have left no trace.

The Camera comes down over a large rectangular graveyard, lying between the ferro-concrete towers of Hollywood and those of Wilshire Boulevard. We land, pass under an arched gateway, enjoy a trucking shot of mortuary gazebos. A baby pyramid. A Gothic sentry box. A marble sarcophagus surmounted by weeping seraphs. The more than life-size statue of Hedda Boddy—'affectionately known,' reads the inscription on the pedestal, 'as Public Sweetheart Number One. "Hitch your wagon to a Star."' We hitch and move on; and suddenly in the midst of all this desolation, here is a little group of human beings. There are four men, heavily bearded and more than a little dirty, and two young women, all of them busy with shovels in or around an opened grave and all dressed identically in shirts and trousers of tattered homespun. Over these rough garments each wears a small square apron upon which, in scarlet wool, is embroidered the word 'NO.' In addition to the apron, the girls wear a round patch over either breast and, behind, a pair of somewhat larger patches on the seat of their trousers. Three unequivocal negatives greet us as they approach, two more, by way of Parthian shots, as they recede.

Overseeing the labourers from the roof of an adjacent mausoleum sits a man in his middle forties, tall, powerfully built, with the dark eyes and hawk nose of an Algerian corsair. A black curly beard emphasizes the moistness and redness of his full lips. Somewhat incongruously, he is dressed in a pale grey suit of midtwentieth-century cut, a little too small for him. When we catch our first sight of him, he is absorbed in the paring of his nails.

Cut back to the gravediggers. One of them, the youngest and handsomest of the men, looks up from his shovelling, glances surreptitiously at the overseer on the roof and, seeing him busy with his nails, turns an intensely concupiscent look on the plump girl who stands, stooped over her spade, beside him. Close shot of

the two prohibitory patches. NO and again NO, growing larger and larger the more longingly he looks. Cupped already for the deliciously imagined contact, his hand goes out, tentative, hesitant; then, with a jerk, as conscience abruptly gets the better of temptation, is withdrawn again. Biting his lip, the young man turns away and, with redoubled zeal, addresses himself once more to his digging.

Suddenly a spade strikes something hard. There is a cry of delight, a flurry of concerted activity. A moment later a handsome mahogany coffin is hoisted to the surface of the ground.

‘Break it open.’

‘O.K., Chief.’

We hear the creaking and cracking of rent wood.

‘Man or woman?’

‘Man.’

‘Fine! Spill him out.’

With a yo-heave-ho they tilt the coffin, and the corpse rolls out on to the sand. The eldest of the bearded gravediggers kneels down beside it and starts methodically to relieve the thing of its watch and jewellery.

NARRATOR

Thanks to the dry climate and the embalmer’s art, what remains of the Managing Director of the Golden Rule Brewing Corporation looks as though it had been buried only yesterday. The cheeks are still pink with the rouge applied by the undertaker for the lying-in-state. Stitched into a perpetual smile, the upturned corners of the lips impart to the round, crumpet-like face the maddeningly enigmatic expression of a Madonna by Boltraffio.

Suddenly the lash of a dog-whip cuts across the shoulders of the kneeling gravedigger. The Camera pulls back to reveal the Chief impending, whip in hand, like the embodiment of divine Vengeance, from the height of his marble Sinai.

‘Give back that ring.’

‘Which ring?’ the man falters.

For answer the Chief administers two or three more cuts with the dog-whip.

‘No, no — please! Ow! I’ll give it back. Stop!’

The culprit inserts two fingers into his mouth and after a little fumbling draws forth the handsome diamond ring which the deceased brewer bought for himself when business was so hearteningly good during the Second World War.

‘Put it there with the other things,’ commands the Chief, and, as the man obeys, ‘Twenty-five lashes,’ he continues with grim relish, ‘that’s what *you’re* going to get this evening.’

Blubbering, the man begs for indulgence — just for this once. Seeing that tomorrow is Belial Day ... And after all he’s old, he has worked faithfully all his life, has risen to the rank of a Deputy Supervisor ...

The Chief cuts him short.

‘This is a Democracy,’ he says. ‘We’re all equal before the Law. And the Law says that everything belongs to the Proletariat — in other words, it all goes to the State. And what’s the penalty for robbing the State?’ The man looks up at him in speechless misery. ‘What’s the penalty?’ the Chief bellows, raising his whip.

‘Twenty-five lashes,’ comes the almost inaudible reply.

‘Good! Well, that settles that, doesn’t it? And now, what are the clothes like?’

The younger and slimmer of the girls bends down and fingers the corpse’s double-breasted black jacket.

‘Nice stuff,’ she says. ‘And no stains. He hasn’t leaked or anything.’

‘I’ll try them on,’ says the Chief.

With some difficulty they divest the cadaver of its trousers, coat and shirt, then drop it back into the grave and shovel the earth back over its one-piece undergarment. Meanwhile the Chief takes the clothes, sniffs at them critically, then doffs the pearl-grey jacket which once belonged to the Production Manager of Western-Shakespeare Pictures Incorporated, and slips his arms into the more conservative tailoring that goes with malt liquors and the Golden Rule.

NARRATOR

NARRATOR

Put yourself in his place. You may not know it, but a complete scribbler, or first card-engine, consists of a breast, or small swift, and two swifts, with the accompanying workers, strippers, fancies, doffers, *etc.* And if you don't have any carding machinery or power looms, if you don't have any electric motors to run them, or any dynamos to generate the electricity, or any turbines to turn the dynamos, or any coal to raise steam, or any blast furnaces to make steel — why then, obviously, you must depend for your fine cloth on the cemeteries of those who once enjoyed these advantages. And so long as the radioactivity persisted, there weren't even any cemeteries to exploit. For three generations the dwindling remnant of those who survived the consummation of technological progress lived precariously in the wilderness. It is only during the last thirty years that it has been safe for them to enjoy the buried remains of *le confort moderne*.

Close shot of the Chief, grotesque in the borrowed jacket of a man whose arms were much shorter and whose belly was much larger than his own. The sound of approaching footsteps makes him turn his head.

In a long shot from his viewpoint we see Dr. Poole, his hands tied behind his back, trudging wearily through the sand. Behind him walk his three captors. Whenever he stumbles or slackens his pace, they prick him in the rear with needle-sharp yucca leaves and laugh uproariously to see him wince.

The Chief stares at them in astonished silence as they approach.

'What in Belial's name?' he brings out at last.

The little party comes to a halt at the foot of the mausoleum. The three members of Dr. Poole's escort bow to the Chief and tell their story. They had been fishing in their coracle off Redondo Beach; had suddenly seen a huge, strange ship coming out of the mist; had immediately paddled back to shore to escape detection. From the ruins of an old house they had watched the strangers land. Thirteen of them. And then this man had come wandering with a woman to the very threshold of their hiding-place. The woman had gone away again, and while the man was grubbing in the dirt with a tiny spade they had jumped on him

from behind, gagged him, bound him and now had brought him here for questioning.

There is a long silence, broken finally by the Chief.

‘Do you speak English?’

‘Yes, I speak English,’ Dr. Poole stammers.

‘Good. Untie him; hoist him up.’

They hoist him — so unceremoniously that he lands on all fours at the Chief’s feet.

‘Are you a priest?’

‘A priest?’ Dr. Poole echoes in apprehensive astonishment. He shakes his head.

‘Then why don’t you have a beard?’

‘I ... I shave.’

‘Oh, then you’re not ...’ The Chief passes a finger across Dr. Poole’s chin and cheek. ‘I see, I see. Get up.’

Dr. Poole obeys.

‘Where do you come from?’

‘New Zealand, sir.’

Dr. Poole swallows hard, wishes his mouth were less dry, his voice less tremulous with terror.

‘New Zealand? Is that far?’

‘Very far.’

‘You came in a big ship? With sails?’

Dr. Poole nods, and adopting that lecture-room manner which is always his refuge when personal contacts threaten to become too difficult, proceeds to explain why they weren’t able to cross the Pacific under steam.

‘There would have been no place to refuel. It’s only for coastwise traffic that our shipping companies are able to make use of steamers.’

‘Steamers?’ the Chief repeats, his face alight with interest. ‘You still have steamers? But that must mean you didn’t have the Thing?’

Dr. Poole looks puzzled.

‘I don’t quite catch your meaning,’ he says. ‘What thing?’

‘*The* Thing. You know — when He took over.’

Raising his hands to his forehead, he makes the sign of the horns with extended forefingers. Devoutly, his subjects follow suit.

‘You mean the Devil?’ says Dr. Poole dubiously.

The other nods.

‘But, but ... I mean, *really* ...’

NARRATOR

Our friend is a good Congregationalist, but, alas, on the liberal side. Which means that he has never given the Prince of this world His ontological due. To put it brutally, he doesn’t believe in Him.

‘Yes, He got control,’ the Chief explains. ‘He won the battle and took possession of everybody. That was when they did all this.’

With a wide, comprehensive gesture he takes in the desolation that was once Los Angeles. Dr. Poole’s expression brightens with understanding.

‘Oh, I see. You mean the Third World War. No, we were lucky; we got off without a scratch. Owing to its peculiar geographical situation,’ he adds professorially, ‘New Zealand was of no strategic importance to ...’

The Chief cuts short a promising lecture.

‘Then you’ve still got trains?’ he questions.

‘Yes, we’ve still got trains,’ Dr. Poole answers, a little irritably. ‘But, as I was saying ...’

‘And the engines really work?’

‘Of course they work. As I was saying ...’

Startlingly the Chief lets out a whoop of delight and claps him on the shoulder.

‘Then you can help us to get it all going again. Like in the good old days before ...’ He makes the sign of horns. ‘We’ll have trains, real trains.’ And in an

ecstasy of joyous anticipation he draws Dr. Poole towards him, puts an arm round his neck and kisses him on both cheeks.

Shrinking with an embarrassment that is reinforced by disgust (for the great man seldom washes and is horribly foul-mouthed), Dr. Poole disengages himself.

‘But I’m not an engineer,’ he protests. ‘I’m a botanist.’

‘What’s that?’

‘A botanist is a man who knows about plants.’

‘War plants?’ the Chief asks hopefully.

‘No, no, just plants. Things with leaves and stalks and flowers — though, of course,’ he adds hastily, ‘one mustn’t forget the Cryptogams. And as a matter of fact the Cryptogams are my special pets. New Zealand, as you probably know, is particularly rich in Cryptogams ...’

‘But what about the engines?’

‘Engines?’ Dr. Poole repeats contemptuously. ‘I tell you, I don’t know the difference between a steam turbine and a diesel.’

‘Then you can’t do anything to help us get the trains running again?’

‘Not a thing.’

Without a word the Chief raises his right leg, places his foot against the pit of Dr. Poole’s stomach, then sharply straightens the bent knee.

Close shot of Dr. Poole as he raises himself, shaken and bruised, but with no bones broken, from the heap of sand on to which he has fallen. Over the shot we hear the Chief shouting to his retainers.

Medium shot of the gravediggers and fishermen as they come running in response to the summons.

The Chief points down at Dr. Poole.

‘Bury him.’

‘Alive or dead?’ asks the plumper of the girls in her rich contralto voice.

The Chief looks down at her. Shot from his viewpoint. With an effort he turns away. His lips move. He is repeating the relevant passage from the Shorter

Catechism. ‘What is the nature of woman? Answer: Woman is the vessel of the Unholy Spirit, the source of all deformity, the enemy of the race, the ...’

‘Alive or dead?’ the plump girl repeats.

The Chief shrugs his shoulders.

‘As you like,’ he answers with studied indifference.

The plump girl claps her hands.

‘Goody, goody!’ she cries, and turns to her companions. ‘Come on, boys. Let’s have some fun.’

They close in on Dr. Poole, lift him screaming from the ground and drop him feet-first into the half-filled grave of the Managing Director of the Golden Rule Brewing Corporation. While the plump girl holds him down, the men shovel the loose dry earth into place. In a very short time he is buried up to the waist.

On the sound track the victim’s screams and the excited laughter of the executioners taper off into a silence that is broken by the voice of the Narrator.

NARRATOR

Cruelty and compassion come with the chromosomes;
All men are merciful and all are murderers.
Doting on dogs, they build their Dachaus;
Fire whole cities and fondle the orphans;
Are loud against lynching, but all for Oakridge;
Full of future philanthropy, but today the NKVD.
Whom shall we persecute, for whom feel pity?
It is all a matter of the moment’s mores,
Of words on wood-pulp, of radios roaring,
Of communist kindergartens or first communions.
Only in the knowledge of his own Essence
Has any man ceased to be many monkeys.

The laughter and the pleas for mercy return to the sound track. Then, suddenly, we hear the Chief.

‘Stand back,’ he shouts. ‘I can’t see.’

They obey. In silence the Chief looks down at Dr. Poole.

‘You know all about plants,’ he says at last. ‘Why don’t you grow some roots down there?’

The sally is greeted by enormous guffaws.

‘Why don’t you put out some nice little pink flowers?’

We are shown a close-up of the botanist’s agonized face.

‘Mercy, mercy ...’

The voice breaks, grotesquely; there is another burst of hilarity.

‘I could be useful to you. I could show you how to get better crops. You’d have more to eat.’

‘More to eat?’ the Chief repeats with sudden interest. Then he frowns savagely. ‘You’re lying!’

‘I’m not. I swear by Almighty God.’

There is a murmur of shocked protest.

‘He may be almighty in New Zealand,’ says the Chief. ‘But not here — not since the Thing happened.’

‘But I know I can help you.’

‘Are you ready to swear by Belial?’

Dr. Poole’s father was a clergyman and he himself is a regular church-goer; but it is with heartfelt fervour that he does what is asked of him.

‘By Belial. I swear by Almighty Belial.’

Everyone makes the sign of the horns. There is a long silence.

‘Dig him up.’

‘Oh, Chief!’ the plump girl protests. ‘That isn’t fair!’

‘Dig him up, you vessel of Unholiness!’

His tone carries immediate conviction; they dig with such fervour that in less than a minute Dr. Poole is out of his grave and standing, rather unsteadily, at the foot of the mausoleum.

‘Thank you,’ he manages to say; then his knees give way and he collapses.

There is a chorus of contemptuously good-humoured laughter.

The Chief leans from his marble perch. ‘Here, you there, the red-headed vessel.’ He hands the girl a bottle. ‘Make him drink some of this,’ he orders. ‘He’s got to be able to walk. We’re going back to Headquarters.’

She sits down beside Dr. Poole, raises his limp body, props the wobbling head against the interdictions on her bosom, and administers the restorative.

Dissolve to a street. Four of the bearded men are carrying the Chief in a litter. The others straggle behind, moving slowly through the drifted sand. Here and there, under the porches of ruined filling-stations, in the gaping doorways of office buildings, lie heaps of human bones.

Medium close shot of Dr. Poole. Still holding the bottle in his right hand, he walks a little unsteadily, singing ‘Annie Laurie’ to himself with intense feeling. Drunk on an empty stomach — the empty stomach, moreover, of a man whose Mother has always had conscientious objections to alcohol — the strong red wine has taken prompt effect.

‘And for bonny Annie Laurie

I’d lay me doon and dee....’

In the middle of the final phrase, the two girl gravediggers enter the shot. Approaching the singer from behind, the plump one gives him a friendly slap on the back. Dr. Poole starts, turns round, and looks suddenly apprehensive. But her smile is reassuring.

‘I’m Flossie,’ she says. ‘And I hope you’re not cross with me because I wanted to bury you?’

‘Oh, no, no, not a bit,’ Dr. Poole assures her in the tone of one who says he has no objection to the young lady lighting a cigarette.

‘It’s not that I had anything against you,’ Flossie assures him.

‘Of course not.’

‘I just wanted a laugh, that’s all.’

‘Quite, quite.’

‘People look so screamingly funny when they’re being buried.’

‘Screamingly,’ Dr. Poole agrees, and forces a nervous giggle.

Feeling the need for more courage, he fortifies himself with another swig from the bottle.

‘Well, see you later,’ says the plump girl. ‘I’ve got to go and talk to the Chief about lengthening the sleeves of his new jacket.’

She gives him another slap on the back and hurries away.

Dr. Poole is left alone with her companion. He steals a glance at her. She is eighteen; she has red hair and dimples, a charming face and a slender, adolescent body.

‘My name’s Loola,’ she volunteers. ‘What’s yours?’

‘Alfred,’ Dr. Poole replies. ‘My Mother was a great admirer of *In Memoriam*,’ he adds by way of explanation.

‘Alfred,’ the red-headed girl repeats. ‘I shall call you Alfie. I’ll tell you something, Alfie: I don’t really like these public burials. I don’t know why I should be different from other people; but they don’t make me laugh. I can’t see anything funny about them.’

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ says Dr. Poole.

‘You know, Alfie,’ she resumes, after a little silence, ‘you’re really a very lucky man.’

‘Lucky?’

Loola nods.

‘First of all you’re dug up — and I’ve never seen *that* happen before — and now you walk straight into the Purification Ceremonies.’

‘Purification Ceremonies?’

‘Yes, it’s Belial Day tomorrow — Belial Day,’ she insists in response to the blank look of incomprehension on the other’s face. ‘Don’t tell me you don’t know what happens on Belial Eve.’

Dr. Poole shakes his head.

‘But when do *you* have your Purification?’

‘Well, we take a bath every day,’ says Dr. Poole, who has just been reminded, yet once more, that Loola most decidedly doesn’t.

‘No, no,’ she says impatiently. ‘I mean the Purification of the Race.’

‘Of the Race?’

‘Hell, your priests don’t let the deformed babies go on living, do they?’

There is a silence; then Dr. Poole counters with a question of his own.

‘Are there many deformed babies born here?’

She nods affirmatively.

‘Ever since the Thing — ever since He’s been in charge.’ She makes the sign of the horns. ‘They say that before that there weren’t any.’

‘Did anyone ever tell you about the effect of gammarays?’

‘Gammarays? What’s a gammaray?’

‘It’s the reason for all those deformed children.’

‘You’re not trying to suggest that it wasn’t Belial, are you?’ Her tone is one of indignant suspicion; she looks at him as St. Dominic might have eyed an Albigensian heretic.

‘No, no, of course not,’ Dr. Poole hastens to assure her. ‘He’s the primary cause — that goes without saying.’ Clumsily and inexpertly, he makes the sign of the horns. ‘I was merely suggesting the nature of the secondary causes — the means He used to carry out His ... His providential purpose, if you see what I mean.’

His words and, still more, his pious gesture allay Loola’s suspicions. Her face clears; she gives him her most charming smile. The dimples in her cheeks come to life like a pair of adorable little creatures fitfully leading a secret and autonomous existence in independence of the rest of Loola’s face. Dr. Poole returns her smile, but almost instantly looks away, blushing as he does so to the roots of his hair.

NARRATOR

Out of the enormity of his respect for his Mother, our poor friend here is still, at thirty-eight, a bachelor. Too full of an unnatural piety to marry, he has spent half a lifetime surreptitiously burning. Feeling that it would be a sacrilege to ask a virtuous young gentlewoman to share his bed, he inhabits, under the carapace of

academic respectability, a hot and furtive world, where erotic phantasies beget an agonizing repentance and adolescent desires forever struggle with the maternal precepts. And now here is Loola — Loola without the least pretension to education or good breeding, Loola *au naturel* with a musky redolence which, on second thoughts, has something really rather fascinating about it. What wonder if he reddens and (against his will, for he longs to go on looking at her) averts his eyes.

For consolation and in hope of an accession of boldness, he resorts again to the bottle. Suddenly the boulevard narrows to a mere footpath between the two dunes of sand.

‘After you,’ says Dr. Poole, politely bowing.

She smiles her acknowledgment of a courtesy to which, in this place where men take precedence and the vessels of the Unholy Spirit follow after, she is wholly unaccustomed.

Trucking shot, from Dr. Poole’s viewpoint, of Loola’s back. NO NO, NO NO, NO NO, step after step in undulant alternation. Cut back to a close shot of Dr. Poole, gazing, wide-eyed, and from Dr. Poole’s face once again to Loola’s back.

NARRATOR

It is the emblem, outward, visible, tangible, of his own inner consciousness. Principle at odds with concupiscence, his Mother and the Seventh Commandment superimposed upon his fancies and the facts of life.

The dunes subside. Once more the road is wide enough for two to walk abreast. Dr. Poole steals a glance at his companion’s face and sees it clouded with an expression of melancholy.

‘What is it?’ he asks solicitously and, greatly daring, adds ‘Loola’ and lays a hand on her arm.

‘It’s terrible,’ she says in a tone of quiet despair.

‘What’s terrible?’

‘Everything. You don’t want to think about those things; but you’re one of the unlucky ones — you can’t help thinking about them. And you almost go crazy. Thinking and thinking about someone, and wanting and wanting. And you know you mustn’t. And you’re scared to death of what they might do if they found out. But you’d give everything in the world just for five minutes, to be free for five minutes. But no, no, no. And you clench your fists and hold yourself in — and it’s like tearing yourself to pieces. And then suddenly, after all that suffering, suddenly ...’ she breaks off.

‘Suddenly what?’ inquires Dr. Poole.

She looks at him sharply, but sees on his face only an expression of inquiring and genuinely innocent incomprehension.

‘I can’t make you out,’ she says at last. ‘Is it true, what you told the Chief? You know, about your not being a priest.’

All at once she blushes.

‘If you don’t believe me,’ says Dr. Poole with wine-begotten gallantry, ‘I’m ready to prove it.’

She looks at him for a moment, then shakes her head and, in a kind of terror, turns away. Nervously she smooths her apron.

‘And meanwhile,’ he continues, emboldened by her new-found shyness, ‘you haven’t told me just what it is that suddenly happens.’

Loola glances about her to make sure that nobody is within earshot, then speaks at last almost in a whisper.

‘Suddenly He starts to take possession of everybody. For weeks He makes them think about those things — and it’s against the Law, it’s wicked. The men get so mad, they start hitting you and calling you a vessel, the way the priests do.’

‘A vessel?’

She nods.

‘Vessel of the Unholy Spirit.’

‘Oh, I see.’

‘And then comes Belial Day,’ she goes on after a little pause. ‘And then ... well, you know what that means. And afterwards, if you have a baby, the chances are that He’ll punish you for what He has made you do.’ She shudders, then makes the sign of the horns. ‘I know we have to accept what He wills,’ she adds. ‘But oh, I do so hope that, if ever I have any babies, they’ll be all right.’

‘But of course they’ll be all right,’ cried Dr. Poole. ‘After all, there isn’t anything wrong about *you*.’

Delighted by his own audacity, he looks down at her.

Close shot from his viewpoint. NO NO NO, NO NO NO ...

Mournfully, Loola shakes her head.

‘That’s where you’re wrong,’ she says. ‘I’ve got an extra pair of nipples.’

‘Oh,’ says Dr. Poole, in a tone which makes us realize that the thought of his Mother has momentarily obliterated the effects of the red wine.

‘Not that there’s anything really bad about that,’ Loola hastily adds. ‘Even the best people have them. It’s perfectly legal. They allow you up to three pairs. And seven toes and fingers. Anything over that gets liquidated at the Purification. My friend Polly — *she* had a baby this season. Her first one. And it’s got four pairs, and no thumbs. There isn’t any chance for it. In fact, it’s been condemned already. She’s had her head shaved.’

‘Had her head shaved?’

‘They do it to all the girls whose babies are liquidated.’

‘But why?’

Loola shrugs her shoulders.

‘Just to remind them that He’s the Enemy.’

NARRATOR

‘To put it,’ as Schroedinger has said, ‘drastically, though perhaps a little naïvely, the injuriousness of a marriage between first cousins might very well be increased by the fact that their grandmother had served for a long period as an X-ray nurse. It is not a point that need worry any individual personally. But any

possibility of gradually infecting the human race with unwanted latent mutations ought to be a matter of concern to the community.' It ought to be; but, needless to say, it isn't. Oakridge is working three shifts a day; an atomic power plant is going up on the coast of Cumberland; and on the other side of the fence, goodness only knows what Kapitza is up to on the top of Mount Ararat, what surprises that wonderful Russian Soul, about which Dostoevsky used to write so lyrically, has in store for Russian bodies and the carcases of Capitalists and Social Democrats.

Once again sand bars the road. They enter another winding pathway between the dunes and are suddenly alone, as though in the middle of the Sahara.

Trucking shot from Dr. Poole's viewpoint. NO NO, NO NO ... Loola halts and turns back towards him. NO NO NO. The Camera moves up to her face and all at once he notices that its expression is tragical.

NARRATOR

The Seventh Commandment, the Facts of Life. But there is also another Fact, to which one cannot react by a mere departmentalized negation or a no less fragmentary display of lust — the Fact of Personality.

'I don't want them to cut my hair,' she says in a breaking voice.

'But they won't.'

'They will.'

'They can't, they mustn't.' Then, amazed by his own daring, he adds, 'It's much too beautiful.'

Still tragic, Loola shakes her head.

'I feel it,' she says, 'in my bones. I just *know* it'll have more than seven fingers. They'll kill it, they'll cut my hair off, they'll whip me — and He *makes* us do these things.'

'What things?'

She looks at him for a moment without speaking; then, with an expression almost of terror, drops her eyes.

‘It’s because He *wants* us to be miserable.’

Covering her face with her hands, she starts to sob uncontrollably.

NARRATOR

The wine within and, without, the musky reminder

Of those so near, warm, ripe, orby and all but

Edible Facts of Life.... And now her tears, her tears ...

Dr. Poole takes the girl in his arms and, while she sobs against his shoulder, strokes her hair with all the tenderness of the normal male he has momentarily become.

‘Don’t cry,’ he whispers, ‘don’t cry. It’ll be all right. I’ll always be there. I won’t let them do anything to you.’

She permits herself gradually to be comforted. The sobbing becomes less violent and finally ceases altogether. She looks up, and the smile she gives him through her tears is so unequivocally amorous that anyone but Dr. Poole would have accepted the invitation forthwith. The seconds pass and, while he is still hesitating, her expression changes, she drops her eyelids over an avowal that she suddenly feels to have been too frank, and turns away.

‘I’m sorry,’ she murmurs, and starts to rub away her tears with the knuckles of a hand that is as grubby as a child’s.

Dr. Poole takes out his handkerchief and tenderly wipes her eyes.

‘You’re so sweet,’ she says. ‘Not a bit like the men here.’

She smiles up at him again. Like a pair of enchanting little wild animals emerging from concealment, out come the dimples.

So impulsively that he has no time to feel surprise at what he is doing, Dr. Poole takes her face between his hands and kisses her on the mouth.

Loola resists for a moment, then abandons herself in a surrender so complete as to be more active than his assault.

On the sound track ‘Give me detumescence’ modulates into *Liebestod* from *Tristan*.

Suddenly Loola stiffens into a shuddering rigidity. Pushing him away, she stares up wildly into his face; then turns and glances over her shoulder with an expression of guilty terror.

‘Loola!’

He tries to draw her close again, but she breaks away from him and starts to run along the narrow path.

NO NO, NO NO, NO NO ...

We dissolve to the corner of Fifth Street and Pershing Square. As of old, the Square is the hub and centre of the city’s cultural life. From a shallow well in front of the Philharmonic Auditorium two women are drawing water in a goatskin, which they empty into earthenware jars for other women to carry away. From a bar slung between two rusty lamp-posts hangs the carcass of a newly slaughtered ox. Standing in a cloud of flies, a man with a knife is cleaning out the entrails.

‘That looks good,’ says the Chief genially.

The butcher grins and, with bloody fingers, makes the sign of the horns.

A few yards away stand the communal ovens. The Chief orders a halt, and graciously accepts a piece of the newly baked bread. While he is eating, ten or twelve small boys enter the shot, staggering under inordinate loads of fuel from the near-by Public Library. They tumble their burdens on to the ground and, stimulated by the blows and curses of their elders, hurry back for more. One of the bakers opens a furnace door and starts to shovel the books into the flames.

All the scholar in Dr. Poole, all the bibliophile, is outraged by the spectacle.

‘But this is frightful!’ he protests.

The Chief only laughs.

‘In goes *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, out comes the corn bread. And damned good bread it is.’

He takes another bite.

Meanwhile Dr. Poole has bent down and, from the very brink of destruction, has snatched to safety a charming little duodecimo Shelley.

‘Thank G—’ he begins, but fortunately remembers where he is and manages to check himself in time.

He slips the volume into his pocket and, turning to the Chief, ‘But what about culture?’ he asks. ‘What about the social inheritance of humanity’s painfully acquired wisdom? What about the best that has been thought and ...’

‘They can’t read,’ the Chief answers with his mouth full. ‘No, that’s not quite true. We teach all of them to read *that*.’

He points. Medium shot from his viewpoint of Loola — Loola with dimples and all the rest, but also with the large red NO on her apron, the two smaller NO’s on her shirt front.

‘That’s all the book learning they need. And now,’ he commands his bearers, ‘move on.’

Trucking shot of the litter as it is carried through the doorless entrance of what was once the Biltmore Coffee Shop. Here, in the malodorous twilight, twenty or thirty women, some middle-aged, some young, some mere girls, are busily weaving on primitive looms of the kind used by the Indians of Central America.

‘None of these vessels had a baby this season,’ the Chief explains to Dr. Poole. He frowns and shakes his head. ‘When they’re not producing monsters, they’re sterile. What we’re going to do for man power, Belial only knows ...’

They advance further into the Coffee Shop, pass a group of three-and four-year-old children under the supervision of an aged vessel with a cleft palate and fourteen fingers, and come to a halt under an archway giving access to a second dining-room only slightly smaller than the first.

Over the shot we hear the sound of a chorus of youthful voices reciting in unison the opening phrases of the Shorter Catechism.

‘Question: What is the chief end of Man? Answer: The chief end of Man is to propitiate Belial, deprecate His enmity and avoid destruction for as long as possible.’

Cut to a close shot of Dr. Poole’s face, on which we see an expression of amazement mingled with a growing horror. Then a long long shot from his

viewpoint. In five rows of twelve, sixty boys and girls between the ages of thirteen and fifteen stand rigidly at attention, gabbling as fast as they can in a shrill harsh monotone. Facing them, on a dais, sits a small, fat man wearing a long robe of black-and-white goatskins and a fur cap with a stiff leather edging, to which are attached two medium-sized horns. Beardless and sallow, his face shines with a profuse perspiration, which he is forever wiping away with the hairy sleeve of his cassock.

Cut back to the Chief, as he leans down and touches Dr. Poole on the shoulder.

‘That,’ he whispers, ’is our leading Satanic Science Practitioner. I tell you, he’s an absolute whizz at Malicious Animal Magnetism.’

Over the shot we hear the mindless gabble of the children.

‘Question: To what fate is Man predestined? Answer: Belial has, out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity elected all now living to everlasting perdition.’

‘Why does he wear horns?’ asks Dr. Poole.

‘He’s an Archimandrite,’ the Chief explains. ‘Due for his third horn any time now.’

Cut to a medium shot of the dais.

‘Excellent,’ the Satanic Science Practitioner is saying in a high piping voice, like the voice of an extraordinarily priggish and self-satisfied small boy. ‘Excellent!’ He wipes his forehead. ‘And now tell me why you deserve everlasting perdition.’

There is a moment’s silence. Then, in a chorus that starts a little raggedly, but soon swells to a loud unanimity, the children answer.

‘Belial has perverted and corrupted us in all the parts of our being. Therefore, we are, merely on account of that corruption, deservedly condemned by Belial.’

Their teacher nods approvingly.

‘Such,’ he squeaks unctuously, ’is the inscrutable justice of the Lord of Flies.’

‘Amen,’ respond the children.

All make the sign of the horns.

‘And what about your duty towards your neighbour?’

‘My duty towards my neighbour,’ comes the choral answer, ’is to do my best to prevent him from doing unto me what I should like to do unto him; to subject myself to all my governors; to keep my body in absolute chastity, except during the two weeks following Belial Day; and to do my duty in that state of life to which it hath pleased Belial to condemn me.’

‘What is the Church?’

‘The Church is the body of which Belial is the head and all possessed people are the members.’

‘Very good,’ says the Practitioner, wiping his face yet once more. ‘And now I need a young vessel.’

He runs his eyes over the ranks of his pupils, then points a finger.

‘You there. Third from the left in the second row ... The vessel with the yellow hair. Come here.’

Cut back to the group around the litter.

The bearers are grinning with happy anticipation and, looking intensely red and moist and fleshy among the black curls of the moustache and beard, even the Chief’s full lips are curved into a smile. But there is no smile on Loola’s face. Pale, her hand over her mouth, her eyes wide and staring, she is watching the proceedings with the horror of one who has been through this kind of ordeal herself. Dr. Poole glances at her, then back at the victim, whom we now see, from his viewpoint, slowly advancing towards the dais.

‘Up here,’ squeaks the almost babyish voice in a tone of conqueror’s authority. ‘Stand by me. Now face the class.’

The child does as she is told.

Medium close shot of a tall slender girl of fifteen with the face of a Nordic madonna. NO, proclaims the apron attached to the waist-band of her ragged pedal-pushers; NO and NO, the patches over her budding breasts.

The Practitioner points at her accusingly.

‘Look at it,’ he says, wrinkling up his face into a grimace of disgust. ‘Did you ever see anything so revolting?’

He turns to the class.

‘Boys,’ he squeaks. ‘Any of you who feels any Malicious Animal Magnetism coming out of this vessel, hold up your hand.’

Cut to a long shot of the class. Without exception, all the boys are holding up their hands. Their faces wear that expression of lustful and malevolent amusement with which the orthodox have always looked on while their spiritual pastors torment the hereditary scapegoats or still more severely punish the heretics who threaten the interests of the Establishment.

Cut back to the Practitioner. He sighs hypocritically and shakes his head.

‘I feared as much,’ he says. Then he turns to the girl beside him on the dais. ‘Now tell me,’ he says, ‘what is the Nature of Woman?’

‘The Nature of Woman?’ the child repeats unsteadily.

‘Yes, the Nature of Woman. Hurry up!’

She glances at him with an expression of terror in her blue eyes, then turns away. Her face becomes deathly pale. Her lips tremble; she swallows hard.

‘Woman,’ she begins, ‘woman ...’

Her voice breaks, her eyes overflow with tears; in a desperate effort to control her feelings she clenches her fists and bites her lip.

‘Go on!’ the Practitioner shrilly shouts. And picking up a willow switch from the floor, he gives the child a sharp cut across the calves of her bare legs. ‘Go on!’

‘Woman,’ the girl begins once more, ’is the vessel of the Unholy Spirit, the source of all deformity, the ... the ... Ow!’

She winces under another blow.

The Practitioner laughs and the whole class follows suit.

‘The enemy ...’ he prompts.

‘Oh, yes — the enemy of the race, punished by Belial and calling down punishment on all those who succumb to Belial in her.’

There is a long silence.

‘Well,’ says the Practitioner at last, ‘that’s what *you* are. That’s what all vessels are. And now go, go!’ he squeals, and with sudden fury he strikes at her

again and again.

Crying with pain, the child jumps down from the dais and runs back to her place in the ranks.

Cut back to the Chief. His brow is wrinkled in a frown of displeasure.

‘All this progressive education!’ he says to Dr. Poole. ‘No proper discipline. I don’t know what we’re coming to. Why, when I was a boy, our old Practitioner used to tie them over a bench and go to work with a birch-rod. “That’ll teach you to be a vessel,” he’d say, and then swish, swish, swish! Belial, how they howled! That’s what *I* call education. Well, I’ve had enough of this,’ he adds. ‘Quick march!’

As the litter moves out of the shot, the Camera holds on Loola, who remains, staring in an agony of fellow-feeling at the tear-wet face and heaving shoulders of the little victim in the second row. A hand touches her arm. She starts, turns apprehensively and is relieved to find herself looking into the kindly face of Dr. Poole.

‘I entirely agree with you,’ he whispers. ‘It’s wrong, it’s unjust.’

Only after she has thrown a quick look over her shoulder does Loola venture to give him a little smile of gratitude.

‘Now we must go,’ she says.

They hurry after the others. Following the litter, they retrace their steps through the Coffee Shop, then turn to the right and enter the Cocktail Bar. At one end of the room an enormous pile of human bones reaches almost to the ceiling. Squatting on the floor, in a thick white dust, a score of craftsmen are engaged in fashioning drinking-cups out of skulls, knitting-needles from ulnas, flutes and recorders from the longer shank-bones, ladles, shoe-horns and dominoes from pelvises, and spigots out of femurs.

A halt is called, and, while one of the workmen plays ‘Give me detumescence’ on a shin-bone flute, another presents the Chief with a superb necklace of graded vertebrae ranging in size from a baby’s cervicals to the lumbars of a heavyweight boxer.

NARRATOR

NARRATOR

‘And he set me down in the midst of the valley that was full of bones; and lo, they were very dry.’ The dry bones of some of those who died, by thousands, by millions, in the course of those three bright summer days that, for you there, are still in the future. ‘And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?’ The answer, I replied, is in the negative. For though Baruch might save us (perhaps) from taking our places in such an ossuary as this, he can do nothing to avert that other, slower, nastier death....

Trucking shot of the litter as it is carried up the steps into the main lobby. Here the stink is overpowering, the filth beyond description. Close-up of two rats gnawing at a mutton bone, of the flies on the purulent eyelids of a small girl. The Camera pulls back for a longer shot. Forty or fifty women, half of them with shaven heads, are sitting on the stairs, among the refuse on the floor, on the tattered remnants of ancient beds and sofas. Each of them is nursing a baby, all the babies are ten weeks old, and all those belonging to shaven mothers are deformed. Over close-ups of little faces with hare lips, little trunks with stumps instead of legs and arms, little hands with clusters of supernumerary fingers, little bodies adorned with a double row of nipples, we hear the voice of the Narrator.

NARRATOR

For this other death — not by plague, this time, not by poison, not by fire, not by artificially induced cancer, but by the squalid disintegration of the very substance of the species — this gruesome and infinitely unheroic death-in-birth could as well be the product of atomic industry as of atomic war. For in a world powered by nuclear fission everybody’s grandmother would have been an X-ray technician. And not only everybody’s grandmother — everybody’s grandfather and father and mother as well, everybody’s ancestors back to three and four and five generations of them that hate Me.

From the last of the deformed babies the Camera pulls back to Dr. Poole, who is standing, his handkerchief held to his still too sensitive nose, staring with horrified bewilderment at the scene around him.

‘All the babies look as if they were exactly the same age,’ he says, turning to Loola, who is still beside him.

‘Well, what do you expect? Seeing that practically all of them were born between the tenth and the seventeenth of December.’

‘But that must mean that ...’ He breaks off, deeply embarrassed. ‘I think,’ he concludes hastily, ‘that things must be rather different here from what they are in New Zealand ...’

In spite of the wine, he remembers his grey-haired Mother across the Pacific and, blushing guiltily, coughs and averts his eyes.

‘There’s Polly,’ cries his companion, and hurries across the room.

Mumbling apologies as he picks his way between the squatting or recumbent mothers, Dr. Poole follows her.

Polly is sitting on a straw-filled sack near what was once the Cashier’s desk. She is a girl of eighteen or nineteen, small and fragile, her head shaved like that of a criminal prepared for execution. She has a face whose beauty is all in the fine bones and the big luminous eyes. It is with an expression of hurt bewilderment that those eyes now look up into Loola’s face and from Loola’s face move without curiosity, almost without comprehension, to that of the stranger who accompanies her.

‘Darling!’

Loola bends down to kiss her friend. NO NO, from Dr. Poole’s viewpoint. Then she sits down beside Polly, and puts a comforting arm around her. Polly hides her face against the other’s shoulder and both girls begin to cry. As though infected by their grief, the little monster in Polly’s arms wakes up and utters a thin complaining howl. Polly raises her head from her friend’s shoulder and, her face still wet with tears, looks down at the deformed child, then opens her shirt and, pushing aside one of the crimson NO’s, gives it the breast. With an almost frantic hunger the child starts to suck.

‘I love him,’ Polly sobs. ‘I don’t want them to kill him.’

‘Darling,’ is all that Loola can find to say, ‘darling!’

A loud voice interrupts her.

‘Silence there! Silence!’

Other voices take up the refrain.

‘Silence!’

‘Silence there!’

‘Silence, silence!’

In the lobby all talk ceases abruptly and there is a long, expectant hush. Then a horn is blown, and another of those strangely babyish but self-important voices announces: ‘His Eminence the Arch-Vicar of Belial, Lord of the Earth, Primate of California, Servant of the Proletariat, Bishop of Hollywood.’

Long shot of the hotel’s main staircase. Dressed in a long robe of Anglo-Nubian goatskins and wearing a golden crown set with four tall, sharp horns, the Arch-Vicar is seen majestically descending. An acolyte holds a large goatskin umbrella over his head and he is followed by twenty or thirty ecclesiastical dignitaries, ranging in rank from three-horned Patriarchs to one-horned Presbyters and hornless Postulants. All of them, from the Arch-Vicar downwards, are conspicuously beardless, sweaty and fat-rumped, and, when any of them speaks, it is always in a fluting contralto.

The Chief rises from his litter and advances to meet the incarnation of spiritual authority.

NARRATOR

Church and State,

Greed and Hate: —

Two baboon-persons

In one Supreme Gorilla.

The Chief inclines his head respectfully. The Arch-Vicar raises his hands to his tiara, touches the two anterior horns, then lays his spiritually charged

fingertips on the Chief's forehead.

'May you never be impaled upon His horns.'

'Amen,' says the Chief; then, straightening himself up and changing his tone abruptly from the devout to the briskly business-like, 'Everything O.K. for tonight?' he asks. In the voice of a ten-year-old, but with the long-winded and polysyllabic unctuousness of a veteran ecclesiastic long accustomed to playing the role of a superior being set apart from and above his fellows, the Arch-Vicar replies that all things are in order. Under the personal supervision of the Three-Horned Inquisitor and the Patriarch of Pasadena, a devoted band of Familiars and Postulants has travelled from settlement to settlement, making the yearly census. Every mother of a monster has been marked down. Heads have been shaved and the preliminary whippings administered. By this time all the guilty have been transported to one or other of the three Purification Centres at Riverside, San Diego and Los Angeles. The knives and the consecrated bulls' pizzles have been made ready and, Belial willing, the ceremonies will begin at the appointed hour. Before tomorrow's sunrise the purification of the land should be complete.

Once more the Arch-Vicar makes the sign of the horns, then stands for a few seconds in recollected silence. Reopening his eyes, he turns to the ecclesiastics in his train.

'Go, take the shaven ones,' he squeaks, 'take these defiled vessels, these living testimonies of Belial's enmity, and lead them to the place of their shame.'

A dozen Presbyters and Postulants hurry down the stairs and out into the crowd of mothers.

'Hurry, hurry!'

'In Belial's name.'

Slowly, reluctantly, the crop-headed women rise to their feet. Their little burdens of deformity pressed against bosoms heavy with milk, they move towards the door in a silence more painfully expressive of misery than any outcry.

Medium shot of Polly on her sack of straw. A young Postulant approaches and pulls her roughly to her feet.

‘Up!’ he shouts in a voice of an angry and malevolent child. ‘Get up, you spawner of filth!’

And he slaps her across the face. Cringing away from a second blow, Polly almost runs to rejoin her fellow-victims near the entrance.

Dissolve to a night sky, with stars between thin bars of cloud and a waning moon already low in the west. There is a long silence; then we begin to hear the sound of distant chanting. Gradually it becomes articulate in the words, ‘Glory to Belial, to Belial in the lowest,’ repeated again and again.

NARRATOR

An inch from the eyes, the ape’s black paw
Eclipses the stars, the moon, and even
Space itself. Five stinking fingers
Are all the World.

The silhouette of a baboon’s hand advances towards the Camera, grows larger and more menacing, and finally engulfs everything in blackness.

We cut to the interior of the Los Angeles Coliseum. By the smoky and intermittent light of torches we see the faces of a great congregation. Tier above tier, like massed gargoyles, spouting the groundless faith, the subhuman excitement, the collective imbecility which are the products of ceremonial religion — spouting them from black eye-holes, from quivering nostrils, from parted lips, while the chanting monotonously continues: ‘Glory to Belial, to Belial in the lowest.’ Below, in the arena, hundreds of shaven girls and women, each with her tiny monster in her arms, are kneeling before the steps of the High Altar. Awe-inspiring in their chasubles of Anglo-Nubian fur, in their tiaras of gilded horns, Patriarchs and Archimandrites, Presbyters and Postulants stand in two groups at the head of the altar steps, chanting antiphonally in a high treble to the music of bone recorders and a battery of xylophones.

SEMICHORUS I

Glory to Belial,

SEMICHORUS II

To Belial in the lowest!

Then, after a pause, the music of the chant changes and a new phase of the service begins.

SEMICHORUS I

It is a terrible thing,

SEMICHORUS II

Terrible, terrible,

SEMICHORUS I

To fall into the hands,

SEMICHORUS II

The huge hands and the hairy,

SEMICHORUS I

Into the hands of the living Evil,

SEMICHORUS II

Hallelujah!

SEMICHORUS I

Into the hands of the Enemy of man,

SEMICHORUS II

SEMICHORUS II

Our boon-companions;

SEMICHORUS I

Of the Rebel Against the Order of Things —

SEMICHORUS II

And we have conspired with him against ourselves,

SEMICHORUS I

Of the great Blowfly who is the Lord of Flies,

SEMICHORUS II

Crawling in the heart;

SEMICHORUS I

Of the naked Worm that never dies,

SEMICHORUS II

And, never dying, is the source of our eternal life;

SEMICHORUS I

Of the Prince of the Powers of the Air —

SEMICHORUS II

Spitfire and Stuka, Beelzebub and Azazel, Hallelujah!

SEMICHORUS I

Of the Lord of this world;

SEMICHORUS II

And its defiler;

SEMICHORUS I

Of the great Lord Moloch,

SEMICHORUS II

Patron of all nations;

SEMICHORUS I

Of Mammon our master,

SEMICHORUS II

Omnipresent:

SEMICHORUS I

Of Lucifer the all-powerful,

SEMICHORUS II

In Church, in State;

SEMICHORUS I

Of Belial,

SEMICHORUS II

Transcendent,

SEMICHORUS I

SEMICHORUS I

Yet, oh, how immanent!

ALL TOGETHER

Of Belial, Belial, Belial, Belial.

As the chanting dies away, two hornless Postulants descend, seize the nearest of the shaven women, raise her to her feet and lead her up, dumb with terror, to where, at the head of the altar steps, the Patriarch of Pasadena stands whetting the blade of a long butcher's knife. The thick-set Mexican mother stands staring at him in fascinated horror, open-mouthed. Then one of the Postulants takes the child out of her arms and holds it up before the Patriarch.

Close shot of a characteristic product of progressive technology — a hare-lipped Mongolian idiot. Over the shot we hear the chanting of the Chorus.

SEMICHORUS I

I show you the sign of Belial's enmity,

SEMICHORUS II

Foul, foul;

SEMICHORUS I

I show you the fruit of Belial's grace,

SEMICHORUS II

Filth infused in filth.

SEMICHORUS I

I show you the penalty for obedience to His Will,

SEMICHORUS II

On earth as it is in Hell.

SEMICHORUS I

Who is the breeder of all deformities?

SEMICHORUS II

Mother.

SEMICHORUS I

Who is the chosen vessel of Unholiness?

SEMICHORUS II

Mother.

SEMICHORUS I

And the curse that is on our race?

SEMICHORUS II

Mother.

SEMICHORUS I

Possessed, possessed —

SEMICHORUS II

Inwardly, outwardly:

SEMICHORUS I

Her incubus an object, her subject a succubus —

SEMICHORUS II

And both are Belial;

SEMICHORUS I

Possessed by the Blowfly.

SEMICHORUS II

Crawling and stinging,

SEMICHORUS I

Possessed by that which irresistibly

SEMICHORUS II

Goads her, drives her,

SEMICHORUS I

Like the soiled fitchew,

SEMICHORUS II

Like the sow in her season,

SEMICHORUS I

Down a steep place

SEMICHORUS II

Into filth unutterable;

SEMICHORUS I

Whence, after much wallowing,

SEMICHORUS II

After many long draughts of the swill,

SEMICHORUS I

Mother emerging, nine months later,

SEMICHORUS II

Bears this monstrous mockery of a man.

SEMICHORUS I

How then shall there be atonement?

SEMICHORUS II

By blood.

SEMICHORUS I

How shall Belial be propitiated?

SEMICHORUS II

Only by blood.

The Camera moves from the altar to where, tier above tier, the pale gargoyles stare down in hungry anticipation at the scene below. And suddenly the faces open their black mouths and start to chant in unison, hesitantly at first, then with growing confidence and an ever greater volume of sound: ‘Blood, blood, blood, the blood, the blood, blood, blood, the blood ...’

We cut back to the altar. The sound of the mindless, subhuman chanting continues monotonously over the shot.

The Patriarch hands his whetstone to one of the attendant Archimandrites, then with his left hand takes the deformed child by the neck and impales it on his knife. It utters two or three little bleating cries, and is silent.

The Patriarch turns, allows half a pint of blood to spill out on the altar, then tosses the tiny corpse into the darkness beyond. The chanting rises in a savage crescendo: ‘Blood, blood, the blood, the blood, blood, blood, the blood ...’

‘Drive her away!’ cries the Patriarch in a commanding squeak.

In terror the mother turns and hurries down the steps. The two Postulants follow, striking at her savagely with their consecrated bulls’ pizzles. The chanting is punctuated by piercing screams. From the congregation comes a noise that is half commiserating groan, half grunt of satisfaction.

Flushed and a little breathless from so unusually strenuous an exercise, the plump young Postulants seize another woman — a girl this time, frail and slender almost to the point of childishness. Her face is hidden as they drag her up the steps. Then one of them steps back a little and we recognize Polly.

Thumbless, eight-nippled, the child is held up before the Patriarch.

SEMICHORUS I

Foul, foul! How shall there be atonement?

SEMICHORUS II

By blood.

SEMICHORUS I

How shall Belial be propitiated?

This time it is the entire congregation that answers:

‘Only by blood, blood, blood, blood, the blood ...’

The Patriarch’s left hand closes about the infant’s neck.

‘No, no, don’t. Please!’

Polly makes a movement towards him, but is held back by the Postulants. Very deliberately, while she sobs, the Patriarch impales the child on his knife, then tosses the body into the darkness behind the altar.

There is a loud cry. We cut to a medium close shot of Dr. Poole. Conspicuous in his front-row seat, he has fainted.

Dissolve to the interior of the Unholy of Unholies. The shrine, which stands at one end of the arena's shorter axis, to the side of the high altar, is a small oblong chamber of adobe brick, with an altar at one end and, at the other, sliding doors, closed at present, except for a gap at the centre, through which one can see what is going on in the arena. On a couch in the centre of the shrine reclines the Arch-Vicar. Not far off a hornless Postulant is frying pigs' trotters over a charcoal brazier, and near him a two-horned Archimandrite is doing his best to revive Dr. Poole, who lies inanimate on a stretcher. Cold water and two or three sharp slaps in the face at last produce the desired result. The botanist sighs, opens his eyes, wards off another slap and sits up.

'Where am I?' he asks.

'In the Unholy of Unholies,' the Archimandrite answers. 'And there is His Eminence.'

Dr. Poole recognizes the great man and has enough presence of mind to incline his head respectfully.

'Bring a stool,' commands the Arch-Vicar.

The stool is brought. He beckons to Dr. Poole, who scrambles to his feet, walks a little unsteadily across the room and sits down. As he does so a particularly loud shriek makes him turn his head.

Long shot, from his viewpoint, of the High Altar. The Patriarch is in the act of tossing yet another little monster into the darkness, while his acolytes shower blows upon its screaming mother.

Cut back to Dr. Poole, who shudders and covers his face with his hands. Over the shot we hear the monotonous chanting of the congregation. 'Blood, blood, blood.'

'Horrible!' says Dr. Poole. 'Horrible!'

‘And yet there’s blood in your religion too,’ remarks the Arch-Vicar, smiling ironically: “Washed in the blood of the Lamb.” Isn’t that correct?’

‘Perfectly correct,’ Dr. Poole admits. ‘But we don’t actually do the washing. We only talk about it — or, more often, we only sing about it, in hymns.’

Dr. Poole averts his eyes. There is a silence. At this moment the Postulant approaches with a large platter, which, together with a couple of bottles, he sets down on a table beside the couch. Spearing one of the trotters with a genuine antique twentieth-century forgery of an early Georgian fork, the Arch-Vicar stars to gnaw.

‘Help yourself,’ he squeaks between two bites. ‘And here’s some wine,’ he adds, indicating one of the bottles.

Dr. Poole, who is extremely hungry, obeys with alacrity and there is another silence, loud with the noise of eating and the chant of the blood.

‘You don’t believe it, of course,’ says the Arch-Vicar at last, with his mouth full.

‘But I assure you ...’ Dr. Poole protests.

His zeal to conform is excessive, and the other holds up a plump, pork-greasy hand.

‘Now, now, now! But I’d like you to know that we have good reasons for believing as we do. Ours, my dear sir, is a rational and realistic faith.’ There is a pause while he takes a swig from the bottle and helps himself to another trotter. ‘I take it that you’re familiar with world history?’

‘Purely as a dilettante,’ Dr. Poole answers modestly. But he thinks he can say that he has read most of the more obvious books on the subject — Graves’s *Rise and Extinction of Russia*, for example; Basedow’s *Collapse of Western Civilization*; Bright’s inimitable *Europe, An Autopsy*; and, it goes without saying, that absolutely delightful and, though it’s only a novel, that genuinely veracious book, *The Last Days of Coney Island* by dear old Percival Pott. ‘You know it, of course?’

The Arch-Vicar shakes his head.

‘I don’t know anything that’s been published after the Thing,’ he answers curtly.

‘But how stupid of me!’ cried Dr. Poole, regretting, as so often in the past, that gushing loquacity with which he over-compensates a shyness that, left to itself, would reduce him almost to speechlessness.

‘But I’ve read quite a lot of the stuff that came out before,’ the Arch-Vicar continues. ‘They had some pretty good libraries here in Southern California. Mined out now, for the most part. In future, I’m afraid, we’ll have to go farther afield for our fuel. But meanwhile we’ve baked our bread and I’ve managed to save three or four thousand volumes for our Seminary.’

‘Like the Church in the Dark Ages,’ says Dr. Poole with cultured enthusiasm. ‘Civilization has no better friend than religion. That’s what my agnostic friends will never ...’ Suddenly remembering that the tenets of that Church were not quite the same as those professed by this, he breaks off and, to hide his embarrassment, takes a long pull at his bottle.

But fortunately the Arch-Vicar is too much preoccupied with his own ideas to take offence at the *faux pas* or even to notice it.

‘As I read history,’ he says, ‘it’s like this. Man pitting himself against Nature, the Ego against the Order of Things, Belial’ (a perfunctory sign of the horns) ‘against the Other One. For a hundred thousand years or so the battle’s entirely indecisive. Then, three centuries ago, almost overnight, the tide starts to run uninterruptedly in one direction. Have another of these pigs’ feet, won’t you?’

Dr. Poole helps himself to his second, while the other begins his third.

‘Slowly at first, then with gathering momentum, man begins to make headway against the Order of Things.’ The Arch-Vicar pauses for a moment to spit out a piece of cartilage. ‘With more and more of the human race falling into line behind him, the Lord of Flies, who is also the Blowfly in every individual heart, inaugurates His triumphal march across a world of which He will so soon become the undisputed Master.’

Carried away by his own shrill eloquence and forgetting for a moment that he is not in the pulpit of St. Azazel’s, the Arch-Vicar makes a sweeping gesture.

The trotter falls off his fork. With a good-humoured laugh at his own expense, he picks it up from the floor, wipes it on the sleeve of his goatskin cassock, takes another bite and continues.

‘It began with machines and the first grain ships from the New World. Food for the hungry and a burden lifted from men’s shoulders. O God, we thank Thee for all the blessings which in Thy Bounty ... etcetera etcetera.’ The Arch-Vicar laughs derisively. ‘Needless to say, nobody ever gets anything for nothing. God’s bounties have their price, and Belial always sees that it’s a stiff one. Take those machines, for example. Belial knew perfectly well that, in finding a little alleviation from toil, flesh would be subordinated to iron and mind would be made the slave of wheels. He knew that if a machine is fool-proof, it must also be skill-proof, talent-proof, inspiration-proof. Your money back if the product should be faulty, and twice your money back if you can find in it the smallest trace of genius or individuality! And then there was that good food from the New World. O God, we thank Thee ... But Belial knew that feeding means breeding. In the old days, when people made love, they merely increased the infantile mortality rate and lowered the expectation of life. But after the coming of the food ships it was different. Copulation resulted in population — with a vengeance!’

Once again the Arch-Vicar utters his shrill laugh.

Dissolve to a shot through a powerful microscope of spermatozoa frantically struggling to reach their Final End, the vast moon-like ovum in the top left-hand corner of the slide. On the sound track we hear the tenor voice in the last movement of Liszt’s Faust Symphony: *La femme éternelle toujours nous élève. La femme éternelle toujours* ... Cut to an aerial view of London in 1800. Then back to the Darwinian race for survival and self-perpetuation. Then to a view of London in 1900 — and again to the spermatozoa — and again to London, as the German airmen saw it in 1940. Dissolve to a close shot of the Arch-Vicar.

‘O God,’ he intones in the slightly tremulous voice that is always considered appropriate to such utterances, ‘we thank Thee for all these immortal souls.’ Then, changing his tone, ‘these immortal souls,’ he goes on, ‘lodged in bodies

that grow progressively sicklier, scabbier, scrubbier, year after year, as all the things foreseen by Belial inevitably come to pass. The overcrowding of the planet. Five hundred, eight hundred, sometimes as many as two thousand people to a square mile of food-producing land — and the land in process of being ruined by bad farming. Everywhere erosion, everywhere the leaching out of minerals. And the deserts spreading, the forests dwindling. Even in America, even in that New World which was once the hope of the Old. Up goes the spiral of industry, down goes the spiral of soil fertility. Bigger and better, richer and more powerful — and then, almost suddenly, hungrier and hungrier. Yes, Belial foresaw it all — the passage from hunger to imported food, from imported food to booming population and from booming population back to hunger again. Back to hunger. The New Hunger, the Higher Hunger, the hunger of enormous industrialized proletariats, the hunger of city dwellers with money, with all the modern conveniences, with cars and radios and every imaginable gadget, the hunger that is the cause of total wars and the total wars that are the cause of yet more hunger.'

The Arch-Vicar pauses to take another swig from his bottle.

'And remember this,' he adds: 'even without synthetic glanders, even without the atomic bomb, Belial could have achieved all His purposes. A little more slowly, perhaps, but just as surely, men would have destroyed themselves by destroying the world they lived in. They couldn't escape. He had them skewered on both His horns. If they managed to wriggle off the horn of total war, they would find themselves impaled on starvation. And if they were starving, they would be tempted to resort to war. And just in case they should try to find a peaceful and rational way out of their dilemma, He had another subtler horn of self-destruction all ready for them. From the very beginning of the industrial revolution He foresaw that men would be made so overwhelmingly bumptious by the miracles of their own technology that they would soon lose all sense of reality. And that's precisely what happened. These wretched slaves of wheels and ledgers began to congratulate themselves on being the Conquerors of Nature. Conquerors of Nature, indeed! In actual fact, of course, they had merely

upset the equilibrium of Nature and were about to suffer the consequences. Just consider what they were up to during the century and a half before the Thing. Fouling the rivers, killing off the wild animals, destroying the forests, washing the topsoil into the sea, burning up an ocean of petroleum, squandering the minerals it had taken the whole of geological time to deposit. An orgy of criminal imbecility. And they called it Progress. Progress,' he repeats, 'Progress! I tell you, that was too rare an invention to have been the product of any merely human mind — too fiendishly ironical! There had to be Outside Help for that. There had to be the Grace of Belial, which, of course, is always forthcoming — that is, for anyone who's prepared to co-operate with it. And who isn't?'

'Who isn't?' Dr. Poole repeats with a giggle; for he feels that he has to make up somehow for his mistake about the Church in the Dark Ages.

'Progress and Nationalism — those were the two great ideas he put into their heads. Progress — the theory that you can get something for nothing; the theory that you can gain in one field without paying for your gain in another; the theory that you alone understand the meaning of history; the theory that you know what's going to happen fifty years from now; the theory that, in the teeth of all experience, you can foresee all the consequences of your present actions; the theory that Utopia lies just ahead and that, since ideal ends justify the most abominable means, it is your privilege and duty to rob, swindle, torture, enslave and murder all those who, in your opinion (which is, by definition, infallible), obstruct the onward march to the earthly paradise. Remember that phrase of Karl Marx's: "Force is the midwife of Progress"? He might have added — but, of course, Belial didn't want to let the cat out of the bag at that early stage of the proceedings — that Progress is the midwife of Force. Doubly the midwife, for the fact of technological progress provides people with the instruments of ever more indiscriminate destruction, while the myth of political and moral progress serves as the excuse for using those means to the very limit. I tell you, my dear sir, an undevout historian is mad. The longer you study modern history, the more evidence you find of Belial's Guiding Hand.' The Arch-Vicar makes the sign of the horns, refreshes himself with another drink of wine, then continues: 'And

then there was Nationalism — the theory that the state you happen to be subject to is the only true god, and that all other states are false gods; that all these gods, true as well as false, have the mentality of juvenile delinquents; and that every conflict over prestige, power or money is a crusade for the Good, the True and the Beautiful. The fact that such theories came, at a given moment of history, to be universally accepted is the best proof of Belial's existence, the best proof that at long last He'd won the battle.'

'I don't quite follow,' says Dr. Poole.

'But surely it's obvious. Here you have two notions. Each is intrinsically absurd and each leads to courses of action that are demonstrably fatal. And yet the whole of civilized humanity decides, almost suddenly, to accept these notions or guides to conflict. Why? And at Whose suggestion, Whose prompting, Whose inspiration? There can only be one answer.'

'You mean, you think it was ... it was the Devil?'

'Who else desires the degradation and destruction of the human race?'

'Quite, quite,' Dr. Poole agrees. 'But all the same, as a Protestant Christian, I really can't ...'

'Is that so?' says the Arch-Vicar sarcastically. 'Then you know better than Luther, you know better than the whole Christian Church. Are you aware, sir, that from the second century onwards no orthodox Christian believed that a man could be possessed by God? He could only be possessed by the Devil. And why did people believe that? Because the facts made it impossible for them to believe otherwise. Belial's a fact, Moloch's a fact, diabolic possession's a fact.'

'I protest,' cries Dr. Poole. 'As a man of science ...'

'As a man of science you're bound to accept the working hypothesis that explains the facts most plausibly. Well, what are the facts? The first is a fact of experience and observation — namely, that nobody wants to suffer, wants to be degraded, wants to be maimed or killed. The second is a fact of history — the fact that, at a certain epoch, the overwhelming majority of human beings accepted beliefs and adopted courses of action that could not possibly result in anything but universal suffering, general degradation and wholesale destruction.

The only plausible explanation is that they were inspired or possessed by an alien consciousness, a consciousness that willed their undoing and willed it more strongly than they were able to will their own happiness and survival.'

There is a silence.

'Of course,' Dr. Poole ventures at last to suggest, 'those facts could be accounted for in other ways.'

'But not so plausibly, not nearly so simply,' insists the Arch-Vicar. 'And then consider all the other evidence. Take the First World War, for example. If the people and the politicians hadn't been possessed, they'd have listened to Benedict XV or Lord Lansdowne — they'd have come to terms, they'd have negotiated a peace without victory. But they couldn't, they couldn't. It was impossible for them to act in their own self-interest. They had to do what the Belial in them dictated — and the Belial in them wanted the Communist Revolution, wanted the Fascist reaction to that revolution, wanted Mussolini and Hitler and the Politburo, wanted famine, inflation and depression; wanted armaments as a cure for unemployment; wanted the persecution of the Jews and the Kulaks; wanted the Nazis and the Communists to divide Poland and then go to war with one another. Yes, and He wanted the wholesale revival of slavery in its most brutal form. He wanted forced migrations and mass pauperization. He wanted concentration camps and gas chambers and cremation ovens. He wanted saturation bombing (what a deliciously juicy phrase!); He wanted the destruction overnight of a century's accumulation of wealth and all the potentialities of future prosperity, decency, freedom and culture. Belial wanted all this, and, being the Great Blowfly in the hearts of the politicians and generals, the journalists and the Common Man, He was easily able to get the Pope ignored even by Catholics, to have Lansdowne condemned as a bad patriot, almost a traitor. And so the war dragged on for four whole years; and afterwards everything went punctually according to Plan. The world situation went steadily from bad to worse, and, as it worsened, men and women became progressively more docile to the leadings of the Unholy Spirit. The old beliefs in the value of the individual soul faded away; the old restraints lost their effectiveness; the old

compunctions and compassions evaporated. Everything that the Other One had ever put into people's heads oozed out, and the resulting vacuum was filled by the lunatic dreams of Progress and Nationalism. Granted the validity of those dreams, it followed that mere people, living here and now, were no better than ants and bed-bugs and might be treated accordingly. And they *were* treated accordingly, they most certainly were!'

The Arch-Vicar chuckles shrilly and helps himself to the last of the trotters.

'For his period,' he continues, 'old man Hitler was a pretty good specimen of a demoniac. Not so completely possessed, of course, as many of the great national leaders in the years between 1945 and the beginning of the Third World War, but definitely above the average of his own time. More than almost any of his contemporaries, he had a right to say, "Not I, but Belial in me." The others were possessed only in spots, only at certain times. Take the scientists, for example. Good, well-meaning men, for the most part. But He got hold of them all the same — got hold of them at the point where they ceased to be human beings and became specialists. Hence, the glanders and those bombs. And then remember that man — what was his name? — the one that was President of the United States for such a long time ...'

'Roosevelt?' suggests Dr. Poole.

'That's it — Roosevelt. Well, do you recall that phrase he kept repeating through the whole of the Second World War? "Unconditional Surrender, Unconditional Surrender." Plenary inspiration — that's what *that* was. Direct and plenary inspiration!'

'You say so,' demurs Dr. Poole. 'But what's your proof?'

'The proof?' repeats the Arch-Vicar. 'The whole of subsequent history is the proof. Look at what happened when the phrase became a policy and was actually put into practice. Unconditional surrender — how many millions of new cases of tuberculosis? How many millions of children forced to be thieves or prostituting themselves for bars of chocolate? Belial was particularly pleased about the children. And, again, unconditional surrender — the ruin of Europe, the chaos in Asia, the starvation everywhere, the revolutions, the tyrannies. Unconditional

surrender — and more innocents had to undergo worse suffering than at any other period in history. And, as you know very well, there's nothing that Belial likes better than the suffering of innocents. And finally, of course, there was the Thing. Unconditional surrender and bang! — just as He'd always intended. And it all happened without any miracle or special intervention, merely by natural means. The more one thinks about the workings of His Providence, the more unfathomably marvellous it seems.' Devoutly, the Arch-Vicar makes the sign of the horns. There is a little pause. 'Listen,' he says, holding up his hand.

For a few seconds they sit without speaking. The dim, blurred monotone of the chant swells into audibility. 'Blood, blood, blood, the blood ...' There is a faint cry as yet another little monster is spitted on the Patriarch's knife, then the thudding of bulls' pizzles on flesh and, through the excited roaring of the congregation, a succession of loud, scarcely human screams.

'You'd hardly think He could have produced *us* without a miracle,' the Arch-Vicar thoughtfully continues. 'But He did, He did. By purely natural means, using human beings and their science as His instruments, He created an entirely new race of men, with deformity in their blood, with squalor all around them, and ahead, in the future, no prospects but of more squalor, worse deformity and, finally, complete extinction. Yes, it's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living Evil.'

'Then why,' asks Dr. Poole, 'do you go on worshipping Him?'

'Why do you throw food to a growling tiger? To buy yourself a breathing space. To put off the horror of the inevitable, if only for a few minutes. In earth as it is in Hell — but at least one's still on earth.'

'It hardly seems worth while,' says Dr. Poole in the philosophical tone of one who has just dined.

Another unusually piercing scream makes him turn his head towards the door. He watches for a while in silence. This time, his expression is one in which horror has been considerably mitigated by scientific curiosity.

'Getting used to it, eh?' says the Arch-Vicar genially.

NARRATOR

NARRATOR

Conscience, custom — the first makes cowards,
Makes saints of us sometimes, makes *human beings*.
The other makes Patriots, Papists, Protestants,
Makes Babbitts, Sadists, Swedes or Slovaks,
Makes killers of Kulaks, chlorinators of Jews,
Makes all who mangle, for lofty motives,
Quivering flesh, without qualm or question
To mar their certainty of Supreme Service.

Yes, my friends, remember how indignant you once felt when the Turks massacred more than the ordinary quota of Armenians, how you thanked God that you lived in a Protestant, progressive country, where such things simply couldn't happen — couldn't happen because men wore bowler hats and travelled daily to town by the eight-twenty-three. And then reflect for a moment on a few of the horrors you now take for granted; the outrages against the most rudimentary human decencies that have been perpetrated on your behalf (or perhaps by your own hands); the atrocities you take your little girl to see, twice a week, on the news reel — and she finds them commonplace and boring. Twenty years hence, at this rate, your grandchildren will be turning on their television sets for a look at the gladiatorial games; and when those begin to pall, there will be the Army's mass crucifixion of Conscientious Objectors, or the skinning alive, in full colour, of the seventy thousand persons suspected, at Tegucigalpa, of un-Honduranean activities.

Meanwhile, in the Unholy of Unholies, Dr. Poole is still looking out through the crack between the sliding doors. The Arch-Vicar is picking his teeth. There is a comfortable, post-prandial silence. Suddenly Dr. Poole turns to his companion.

'Something's happening,' he cries excitedly. 'They're leaving their seats.'

'I'd been expecting that for quite a long time now,' replies the Arch-Vicar, without ceasing to pick his teeth. 'It's the blood that does it. That and, of course,

the whipping.'

'They're jumping down into the arena,' Dr. Poole continues. 'They're running after one another. What on earth ...? Oh, my God! I beg your pardon,' he hastily adds. 'But really, *really* ...'

Much agitated, he walks away from the door.

'There *are* limits,' he says.

'That's where you're wrong,' replies the Arch-Vicar. 'There are no limits. Everybody's capable of anything — but *anything*.'

Dr. Poole does not answer. Drawn irresistibly by a force that is stronger than his will, he has returned to his old place and is staring out, avidly and in horror, at what is going on in the arena.

'It's monstrous!' he cries indignantly. 'It's utterly revolting.'

The Arch-Vicar rises heavily from his couch and, opening a little cupboard in the wall, takes out a pair of binoculars, which he hands to Dr. Poole.

'Try these,' he says. 'Night glasses. Standard Navy equipment from before the Thing. You'll see everything.'

'But you don't imagine ...'

'Not merely do I imagine,' says the Arch-Vicar, with an ironically benignant smile; 'I see with my own eyes. Go ahead, man. Look. You've never seen anything like this in New Zealand.'

'I certainly have not,' says Dr. Poole in the kind of tone his Mother might have used.

All the same, he finally raises the binoculars to his eyes.

Long shot from his viewpoint. It is a scene of Satyrs and Nymphs, of pursuits and captures, provocative resistances followed by the enthusiastic surrender of lips to bearded lips, of panting bosoms to the impatience of rough hands, the whole accompanied by a babel of shouting, squealing and shrill laughter.

Cut back to the Arch-Vicar, whose face is puckered into a grimace of contemptuous distaste.

'Like cats,' he says at last. 'Only cats have the decency not to be gregarious in their courting. And you still have doubts about Belial — even after this?'

There is a pause.

‘Was this something that happened after ... after the Thing?’ Dr. Poole inquires.

‘In two generations.’

‘Two generations!’ Dr. Poole whistles. ‘Nothing recessive about *that* mutation. And don’t they ... well, I mean, don’t they feel like doing this sort of thing at any other season?’

‘Just for five weeks, that’s all. And we only permit two weeks of actual mating.’

‘Why?’

The Arch-Vicar makes the sign of the horns.

‘On general principles. They have to be punished for having been punished. It’s the Law of Belial. And, I may say, we really let them have it if they break the rules.’

‘Quite, quite,’ says Dr. Poole, remembering with discomfort the episode with Loola among the dunes.

‘It’s pretty hard for the ones who throw back to the old-style mating pattern.’

‘Are there many of those?’

‘Between five and ten per cent of the population. We call them “Hots.”’

‘And you don’t permit ...?’

‘We beat the hell out of them when we catch them.’

‘But that’s monstrous!’

‘Of course it is,’ the Arch-Vicar agrees. ‘But remember your history. If you want social solidarity, you’ve got to have either an external enemy or an oppressed minority. We have no external enemies, so we have to make the most of our Hots. They’re what the Jews were under Hitler, what the bourgeois were under Lenin and Stalin, what the heretics used to be in Catholic countries and the Papists under the Protestants. If anything goes wrong, it’s always the fault of the Hots. I don’t know what we’d do without them.’

‘But don’t you ever stop to think what *they* must feel?’

‘Why should I? First of all, it’s the Law. Condign punishment for having been punished. Second, if they’re discreet, they won’t get punished. All they’ve got to do is to avoid having babies at the wrong season and to disguise the fact that they fall in love and make permanent connections with persons of the opposite sex. And, if they don’t want to be discreet, they can always run away.’

‘Run away? Where to?’

‘There’s a little community up north, near Fresno. Eighty-five per cent Hot. It’s a dangerous journey, of course. Very little water on the way. And if we catch them, we bury them alive. But if they choose to take the risk, they’re perfectly free to do so. And then finally there’s the priesthood.’ He makes the sign of the horns. ‘Any bright boy who shows early signs of being a Hot has his future assured: we make a priest of him.’

Several seconds pass before Dr. Poole ventures to ask his next question.

‘You mean, you ...?’

‘Precisely,’ says the Arch-Vicar. ‘For the Kingdom of Hell’s sake. Not to mention the strictly practical reasons. After all, the business of the community has got to be carried on somehow, and obviously the laity are in no condition to do it.’

The noise from the arena swells to a momentary climax.

‘Nauseous!’ squeaks the Arch-Vicar with a sudden intensification of abhorrence. ‘And this is nothing to what it will be later on. How thankful I am that I’ve been preserved from such ignominy! Not they, but the Enemy of Mankind incarnate in their disgusting bodies. Kindly look over there.’ He draws Dr. Poole towards him; he points a thick forefinger. ‘To the left of the High Altar — with that little red-headed vessel. That’s the Chief. The Chief!’ he repeats with derisive emphasis. ‘What sort of a ruler is *he* going to be during the next two weeks?’

Resisting the temptation to make personal remarks about a man who, though temporarily in retirement, is destined to return to power, Dr. Poole utters a nervous little laugh.

‘Yes, he certainly seems to be relaxing from the cares of State.’

NARRATOR

But why, why does he have to relax with Loola? Vile brute and faithless strumpet! But there is at least one consolation — and to a shy man, plagued with desires he dares not act upon, a very great consolation: Loola's conduct is the proof of an accessibility which, in New Zealand, in academic circles, in the neighbourhood of his Mother, could only be furtively dreamed about as something altogether too good to be true. And it is not only Loola who proves herself accessible. The same thing is being demonstrated, no less actively, no less vocally, by those mulatto girls, by Flossie, the plump and honey-coloured Teuton, by that enormous Armenian matron, by the little tow-headed adolescent with the big blue eyes....

'Yes, that's our Chief,' says the Arch-Vicar bitterly. 'Until he and the other pigs stop being possessed, the Church just takes over.'

Incorrigibly cultured, in spite of his overwhelming desire to be out there with Loola — or almost anyone else, if it comes to that — Dr. Poole makes an apt remark about the Spiritual Authority and the Temporal Power.

The Arch-Vicar ignores it.

'Well,' he says briskly, 'it's time I got down to business.'

He calls a Postulant, who hands him a tallow dip, then crosses over to the altar at the east end of the shrine. Upon it stands a single candle of yellow beeswax, three or four feet high and disproportionately thick. The Arch-Vicar genuflects, lights the candle, makes the sign of the horns, then comes back to where Dr. Poole is staring out, wide-eyed with fascinated horror and shocked concupiscence, at the spectacle in the arena.

'Stand aside, please.'

Dr. Poole obeys.

A Postulant slides back first one door, then the other. The Arch-Vicar steps forward and stands in the centre of the opening, touching the gilded horns of his tiara. From the musicians on the steps of the High Altar comes a shrill screeching of thigh-bone recorders. The noises of the crowd die away into a

silence that is only occasionally punctuated by the bestial utterance of some joy or anguish too savagely violent to be repressed. Antiphonally, the priests begin to chant.

SEMICHORUS I

This is the time,

SEMICHORUS II

For Belial is merciless,

SEMICHORUS I

Time for Time’s ending.

SEMICHORUS II

In the chaos of lust.

SEMICHORUS I

This is the time,

SEMICHORUS II

For Belial is in your blood,

SEMICHORUS I

Time for the birth in you

SEMICHORUS II

Of the Others, the Aliens,

SEMICHORUS I

Of Itch, of Tetter,

SEMICHORUS II

Of tumid Worm.

SEMICHORUS I

This is the time,

SEMICHORUS II

For Belial hates you,

SEMICHORUS I

Time for the Soul’s death,

SEMICHORUS II

For the Person to perish,

SEMICHORUS I

Sentenced by craving,

SEMICHORUS II

And pleasure is the hangman;

SEMICHORUS I

Time for the Enemy’s

SEMICHORUS II

Total triumph,

SEMICHORUS I

SEMICHORUS I

For the Baboon to be master,

SEMICHORUS II

That monsters may be begotten.

SEMICHORUS I

Not your will, but His,

SEMICHORUS II

That you may all be lost forever.

From the crowd rises a loud, unanimous ‘Amen.’

‘His curse be on you,’ the Arch-Vicar intones in his high-pitched voice, then moves back to the end of the shrine and mounts the throne that stands next to the altar. From outside we hear a confused shouting that grows louder and louder, and suddenly the shrine is invaded by a throng of corybantic worshippers. They rush to the altar, they tear off one another’s aprons and fling them in a mounting pile at the foot of the Arch-Vicar’s throne. NO, NO, NO — and for each NO there is a triumphant shout of ‘Yes,’ followed by an unequivocal gesture towards the nearest person of the opposite sex. In the distance the priests are monotonously chanting, ‘Not your will, but His, that you may all be lost forever’ — again and again.

Close shot of Dr. Poole as he watches the proceedings from a corner of the oratory.

Cut back to the crowd; face after mindless, ecstatic face enters the field of view and passes out again. And there, suddenly, is Loola’s face — the eyes shining, the lips parted, the dimples wildly alive. She turns her head, she catches sight of Dr. Poole.

‘Alfie!’ she cries.

Her tone and expression evoke an equally rapturous response.

‘Loola!’

They rush together in a passionate embrace. Seconds pass. Vaseline-like, the strains of the Good Friday music from *Parsifal* make themselves heard on the sound track.

Then the faces come unstuck, the Camera pulls back.

‘Quick, quick!’

Loola seizes his arm and drags him towards the altar.

‘The apron,’ she says.

Dr. Poole looks down at the apron, then, blushing as red as the NO embroidered upon it, averts his eyes.

‘It seems so ... so indecorous,’ he says.

He stretches out his hand, withdraws it, then changes his mind yet again. Taking a corner of the apron between his thumb and forefinger, he gives it a couple of feebly ineffective tweaks.

‘Harder,’ she cries, ‘much harder!’

With an almost frantic violence — for it is not only the apron that he is tearing away, it is also his Mother’s influence and all his inhibitions, all the conventions in which he has been brought up — Dr. Poole does as he is told. The stitching yields more easily than he had anticipated and he almost falls over backwards. Recovering his balance, he stands there, looking in sheepish embarrassment from the little diaper that represents the Seventh Commandment into Loola’s laughing face and then down again at the crimson prohibition. Cut back and forth: NO, dimples, NO, dimples, NO ...

‘Yes!’ shouts Loola triumphantly. ‘Yes!’

Snatching the apron out of his hand, she throws it down at the foot of the throne. Then, with a ‘Yes’ and another ‘Yes,’ she rips the patches from her chest and, turning to the altar, makes her reverence to the Candle.

Medium close shot from the back of Loola genuflecting. All at once an elderly man with a grey beard rushes excitedly into the shot, tears the twin NO’s off the seat of her homespun pants and starts to drag her towards the door of the shrine.

Giving him a slap in the face and a vigorous push, Loola breaks away and for the second time throws herself into Dr. Poole's arms.

'Yes?' she whispers.

And emphatically he answers, 'Yes!'

They kiss, smile rapturously at one another, then move in the direction of the darkness beyond the sliding doors. As they pass the throne, the Arch-Vicar leans down and, smiling ironically, taps Dr. Poole on the shoulder.

'What about my field glasses?' he says.

Dissolve to a night scene of ink-black shadows and expanses of moonlight. In the background stands the mouldering pile of the Los Angeles County Museum. Amorously interlaced, Loola and Dr. Poole enter the shot, then pass into impenetrable darkness. Silhouettes of men pursuing women, or women throwing themselves on men, appear for a moment and vanish. To the accompaniment of the Good Friday music we hear a rising and falling chorus of grunts and moans, of explosively shouted obscenities and long-drawn howls of angonizing delight.

NARRATOR

Consider the birds. What a delicacy in their lovemaking. What old-world chivalry! For although the hormones produced within the body of the breeding hen predispose her to sexual emotion, their effect is neither so intense nor of so brief a duration as that of the ovarian hormones in the blood of female mammals during oestrus. Moreover, for obvious reasons, the cock bird is in no position to enforce his desires upon an unwilling hen. Hence the prevalence among male birds of bright plumage and of an instinct for courtship. And hence the conspicuous absence of these charming things among male mammals. For where, as in the mammals, the female's amorous desires and her attractiveness to the male sex are wholly determined by chemical means, what need is there of masculine beauty or the niceties of preliminary courtship?

Among humans every day of the year is potentially the mating season. Girls are not chemically predestined, during a few days, to accept the advances of the

first male who presents himself. Their bodies manufacture hormones in doses sufficiently small to leave even the most temperamental of them a certain freedom of choice. That is why, unlike his fellow-mammals, man has always been a wooer. But now the gammarays have changed all that. The hereditary patterns of man's physical and mental behaviour has been given another form. Thanks to the supreme Triumph of Modern Science, sex has become seasonal, romance has been swallowed up by the oestrus, and the female's chemical compulsion to mate has abolished courtship, chivalry, tenderness, love itself.

At this moment a radiant Loola and a considerably dishevelled Dr. Poole emerge from the shadows. A burly male, temporarily unattached, comes striding into the shot. At the sight of Loola he stops. His mouth falls open, his eyes widen, he breathes heavily.

Dr. Poole gives the stranger one look, then turns nervously to his companion.

'I think perhaps it might be a good thing if we walked this way ...'

Without a word the stranger rushes at him, gives him a push that sends him flying and takes Loola in his arms. She resists for a moment; then the chemicals in her blood impose their Categorical Imperative, and she ceases to struggle.

Making a noise like a tiger at feeding time, the stranger lifts her off her feet and carries her into the shadows.

Dr. Poole, who has had time to pick himself up, makes as though to follow, to wreak vengeance, to rescue the distressed victim. Then a combination of apprehension and modesty causes him to slacken his pace. If he advances, heaven knows what he may find himself intruding upon. And then that man, that hairy hulk of bone and muscle ... On the whole it might perhaps be wiser ... He comes to a halt and stands hesitant, not knowing what to do. Suddenly two beautiful young mulatto girls come running out of the County Museum and simultaneously throw their brown arms round his neck and cover his face with kisses.

'You great big beautiful bastard,' they whisper in husky unison.

For a moment Dr. Poole hesitates between the inhibitory recollection of his Mother, the fidelity to Loola prescribed by all the poets and novelists, and the

warm, elastic Facts of Life. After about four seconds of moral conflict, he chooses, as we might expect, the Facts of Life. He smiles, he returns the kisses, he murmurs words which it would startle Miss Hook and almost kill his Mother to hear, he encircles either body with an arm, caresses either bosom with hands that have never done anything of the kind except in unavowable imaginings. The noises of mating swell to a brief climax, then diminish. For a little while there is complete silence.

Accompanied by a strain of Archimandrites, Familiars, Presbyters and Postulants, the Arch-Vicar and the Patriarch of Pasadena come pacing majestically into the shot. At the sight of Dr. Poole and the mulattoes they come to a halt. Making a grimace of disgusted abhorrence, the Patriarch spits on the ground. More tolerant, the Arch-Vicar only smiles ironically.

‘Dr. Poole!’ he flutes in his odd falsetto.

Guiltily, as though he had heard his Mother calling, Dr. Poole drops those busy hands of his and, turning towards the Arch-Vicar, tries to assume an expression of airy innocence. ‘These girls,’ his smile is meant to imply, ‘who *are* these girls? Why, I don’t even know their names. We were just having a little chat about the higher Cryptogams, that’s all.’

‘You great big beautiful ...’ begins a husky voice.

Dr. Poole coughs loudly and fends off the embrace that accompanies the words.

‘Don’t mind us,’ says the Arch-Vicar pleasantly. ‘After all, Belial Day comes but once a year.’

Approaching, he touches the gilded horns of his tiara, then lays his hands on Dr. Poole’s head.

‘Yours,’ he says with a suddenly professional unctuousness, ‘has been an almost miraculously sudden conversion. Yes, almost miraculously.’ Then, changing his tone, ‘By the way,’ he adds, ‘we’ve had a bit of trouble with your friends from New Zealand. This afternoon somebody spotted a group of them in Beverly Hills. I guess they were looking for you.’

‘Yes, I suppose so.’

‘But they’re not going to find you,’ says the Arch-Vicar genially. ‘One of our Inquisitors went out with a posse of Familiars to deal with them.’

‘What happened?’ Dr. Poole anxiously inquires.

‘Our men laid an ambush, let fly with arrows. One was killed, and the others made off with the wounded. I don’t think we shall be bothered again. But just to make certain ...’ He beckons to two of his attendants. ‘Listen,’ he says. ‘There isn’t going to be a rescue and there isn’t going to be an escape. I make you responsible, do you understand?’

The two Postulants bow their heads.

‘And now,’ says the Arch-Vicar, turning back to Dr. Poole, ‘we’ll leave you to beget all the little monsters you can.’

He winks, pats Dr. Poole on the cheek, then takes the Patriarch’s arm and, followed by his retinue, moves away.

Dr. Poole stares after the retreating figures, then glances uneasily at the two Postulants who have been appointed to guard him.

Brown arms are thrown around his neck.

‘You great big beautiful ...’

‘No, really. Not in public. Not with those men around!’

‘What difference does that make?’

And before he has time to answer, husky, musky, dusky, the Facts of Life close in on him again, and in a complicated embrace, like some half reluctant, half blissfully consenting Laocoon, he is ravished away into the shadows. With an expression of disgust, the two Postulants simultaneously spit.

NARRATOR

L’ombre était nuptiale, auguste et solennelle

He is interrupted by a burst of frenzied caterwauling.

NARRATOR

When I look into the fishponds in my garden,

(And not mine only, for every garden is riddled
With eel-holes and reflected moons), *methinks*
I see a Thing armed with a rake that seems,
Out of the ooze, out of the immanence
Among the eels of heaven, *to strike at me —*
At Me the holy, Me divine! And yet
How tedious is a guilty conscience! How
Tedious, for that matter, an unguilty one!
What wonder if the horror of the fishponds
Draws us towards the rake? And the Thing strikes,
And I, the uneasy Person, in the mud,
Or in the liquid moonlight, thankfully
Find others than myself to have that blind
Or radiant being.

Dissolve to a medium shot of Dr. Poole asleep on the drifted sand at the foot of a towering wall of concrete. Twenty feet away one of his guards is also sleeping. The other is absorbed in an ancient copy of *Forever Amber*. The sun is already high in the heavens and a close shot reveals a small green lizard crawling over one of Dr. Poole's outstretched hands. He does not stir, but lies as though dead.

NARRATOR

And this, too, is the beatific being of somebody who most certainly isn't Alfred Poole, D.Sc. For sleep is one of the pre-conditions of the Incarnation, the primary instrument of divine immanence. Sleeping, we cease to live that we may be lived (how blessedly!) by some nameless Other who takes this opportunity to restore the mind to sanity and bring healing to the abused and self-tormented body.

From breakfast to bed-time you may be doing everything in your power to outrage Nature and deny the fact of your Glassy Essence. But even the angriest

ape at last grows weary of his tricks and has to sleep. And, while he sleeps, the indwelling Compassion preserves him, willynilly, from the suicide which, in his waking hours, he has tried so frantically hard to commit. Then the sun rises again, and our ape wakes up once more to his own self and the freedom of his personal will — to yet another day of trick-playing or, if he chooses, to the beginnings of self-knowledge, to the first steps towards his liberation.

A peal of excited feminine laughter cuts short the Narrator's speech. The sleeper stirs and, at a second, louder outburst, starts into full wakefulness and sits up, looking around him in bewilderment, not knowing where he is. Again that laughter. He turns his head in the direction of the sound. In a long shot from his viewpoint we see his two brown-skinned friends of the previous night emerging at full speed from behind a sand dune and darting into the ruins of the County Museum. At their heels, in concentrated silence, runs the Chief. All three disappear from view.

The sleeping Postulant wakes up and turns to his companion.

'What's that?' he asks.

'The usual thing,' the other answers, without looking up from *Forever Amber*.

As he speaks, shrill squeals reverberate through the cavernous halls of the Museum. The Postulants look at one another in silence, then simultaneously spit.

Cut back to Dr. Poole.

'My God!' he says aloud. 'My God!'

He covers his face with his hands.

NARRATOR

Into the satiety of this morning-after let loose a rodent conscience and the principles learned at a Mother's knee — or not infrequently across it (head downwards and with shirt tails well tucked up), in condign spankings, sadly and prayerfully administered, but remembered, ironically enough, as the pretext and accompaniment of innumerable erotic day-dreams, each duly followed by its

remorse, and each remorse bringing with it the idea of punishment and all its attendant sensualities. And so on, indefinitely. Well, as I say, let those loose into this, and the result may easily be a religious conversion. But a conversion to what? Most ignorant of what he is most assured, our poor friend doesn't know. And here comes almost the last person he would expect to help him to discover.

As the Narrator speaks this last sentence, Loola enters the shot.

'Alfie!' she cries happily. 'I was looking for you.'

Cut briefly to the two Postulants, who look at her for a moment with all the distaste of enforced continence, then turn away and expectorate.

Meanwhile, after one brief glance at those 'lineaments of satisfied desire,' Dr. Poole guiltily averts his eyes.

'Good morning,' he says in a tone of formal politeness. 'I hope you ... you slept well?'

Loola sits down beside him, opens the leather bag which she carries slung over her shoulder and extracts half a loaf of bread and five or six large oranges.

'Nobody can think of doing much cooking these days,' she explains. 'It's just one long picnic until the cold season begins again.'

'Quite, quite,' says Dr. Poole.

'You must be awfully hungry,' she goes on. 'After last night.'

Her dimples come out of hiding as she smiles at him.

Hot and blushing with embarrassment, Dr. Poole hastily tries to change the subject of conversation.

'Those are beautiful oranges,' he remarks. 'In New Zealand they don't do really well except in the extreme ...'

'There!' says Loola, interrupting him.

She hands him a thick hunk of bread, breaks off another for herself and bites into it with strong white teeth.

'It's good,' she says with her mouth full. 'Why don't you eat?'

Dr. Poole, who realizes that, in effect, he is ravenously hungry, but who is unwilling, for the sake of decorum, to admit the fact too openly, nibbles daintily at his crust.

Loola snuggles against him and leans her head on his shoulder.

‘It was fun, Alfie, wasn’t it?’ She takes another bite of bread, and without waiting for him to answer continues: ‘More fun with you than with any of the others. Did you think that too?’

She looks up at him tenderly.

Close shot from her viewpoint of Dr. Poole’s expression of agonizing moral discomfort.

‘Alfie!’ she cries, ‘what’s the matter?’

‘Perhaps it would be better,’ he manages at last to say, ‘if we talked about something else.’

Loola straightens herself up and looks at him for a few seconds intently and in silence.

‘You think too much,’ she says at last. ‘You mustn’t think. If you think, it stops being fun.’ The light suddenly goes out of her face. ‘If you think,’ she goes on in a low voice, ‘it’s terrible, terrible. It’s a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living Evil. When I remember what they did to Polly and her baby ...’

She shudders, her eyes fill with tears and she turns away.

NARRATOR

Those tears again, those symptoms of personality — the sight of them evokes a sympathy that is stronger than the sense of guilt.

Forgetting the Postulants, Dr. Poole draws Loola towards him and with whispered words, with the caresses one uses to quiet a crying child, tries to comfort her. He is so successful that, in a minute or two, she is lying quite still in the crook of his arm. Sighing happily, she opens her eyes, looks up at him and smiles with an expression of tenderness, to which the dimples add a ravishingly incongruous hint of mischief.

‘This is what I’ve always dreamed of.’

‘Is it?’

‘But it never happened — it never *could* happen. Not till *you* came....’ She strokes his cheek. ‘I wish your beard didn’t have to grow,’ she adds. ‘You’ll look like the other fellows then. But you aren’t like them, you’re quite different.’

‘Not so different as all that,’ says Dr. Poole.

He bends down and kisses her on the eyelids, on the throat, on the mouth — then draws back and looks down at her with an expression of triumphant masculinity.

‘Not different in *that* way,’ she qualifies. ‘But different in *this* way.’ She pats his cheek again. ‘You and I sitting together and talking and being happy because you’re you and I’m me. It doesn’t happen here. Except ... except ...’ She breaks off. Her face darkens. ‘Do you know what happens to people who are Hots?’ she whispers.

This time it is Dr. Poole’s turn to protest against thinking too much. He backs up his words with action.

Close shot of the embrace. Then cut to the two Postulants, staring disgustedly at the spectacle. As they spit, another Postulant enters the shot.

‘Orders from His Eminence,’ he says, making the sign of the horns. ‘This assignment’s over. You’re to report back to Headquarters.’

Dissolve to the *Canterbury*. A wounded seaman, with an arrow still sticking in his shoulder, is being hoisted in a sling from the whaleboat to the deck of the schooner. On the deck lie two other victims of the Californians’ archery — Dr. Cudworth with a wound in his left leg and Miss Hook. The latter has an arrow imbedded deeply in her right side. The doctor, as he bends over her, looks grave.

‘Morphine,’ he says to his orderly. ‘Then we’ll get her down to the surgery as quickly as we can....’

Meanwhile there has been a shouting of orders and suddenly we hear the noise of the donkey engine and the clanking of the anchor chain as it is wound round the capstan.

Ethel Hook opens her eyes and looks around her. An expression of distress appears on her pale face.

‘You’re not going to sail away and leave him?’ she says. ‘But you can’t, you can’t!’ She makes an effort to raise herself from the stretcher; but the movement causes so much pain that she falls back again, with a groan.

‘Quiet, quiet,’ says the doctor soothingly, as he swabs her arm with alcohol.

‘But he may still be alive,’ she feebly protests. ‘They can’t desert him; they can’t just wash their hands of him.’

‘Hold still,’ says the doctor, and, taking the syringe from his orderly, he drives the needle into the flesh.

The clanking of the anchor chain rises to a crescendo as we dissolve to Loola and Dr. Poole.

‘I’m hungry,’ says Loola, sitting up.

Reaching for her knapsack, she takes out what is left of the bread, breaks it in two, hands the larger fragment to Dr. Poole and sinks her teeth into the other. She finishes her mouthful and is about to start on another, when she changes her mind. Turning to her companion, she takes his hand and kisses it.

‘What’s that for?’ he asks.

Loola shrugs her shoulders.

‘I don’t know. I just suddenly felt like that.’ She eats some more bread, then, after a ruminative silence, turns to him with the air of one who has just made an important and unexpected discovery.

‘Alfie,’ she announces, ‘I believe I shall never want to say Yes to anyone except you.’

Greatly moved, Dr. Poole leans forward, and takes her hand and presses it to his heart.

‘I feel I’ve only just discovered what life’s all about,’ he says.

‘Me too.’

She leans against him, and like a miser irresistibly drawn to count his treasure yet once more, Dr. Poole runs his fingers through her hair, separating lock from thick lock, lifting a curl and letting it fall back noiselessly into its place.

NARRATOR

And so, by the dialectic of sentiment, these two have re-discovered for themselves that synthesis of the chemical and the personal to which we give the names of monogamy and romantic love. In her case it was the hormone that excluded the person; in his, the person that could not come to terms with the hormone. But now there is the beginning of a larger wholeness.

Dr. Poole reaches into his pocket and pulls out the little volume which he rescued yesterday from the furnace. He opens it, turns the pages and begins to read aloud: *'Warm fragrance seems to fall from her light dress*

And her loose hair; and where some heavy tress
The air of her own speed has disentwined,
The sweetness seems to satiate the faint wind;
And in the soul a wild odour is felt
Beyond the sense, like fiery dews that melt
Into the bosom of a frozen bud.'

'What's that?' Loola asks.

'You!' He bends down and kisses her hair. '"And in the soul,"' he whispers, '"a wild odour is felt beyond the sense."' 'In the soul,' he repeats.

'What's the soul?' Loola asks.

'Well ...' He hesitates; then, deciding to let Shelley give the answer, he resumes his reading:

'See where she stands, a mortal shape indued
With love and life and light and deity,
And motion which may change, but never die,
An image of some bright Eternity,
A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendour
Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender
Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love ...'

'But I don't understand a word of it,' Loola complains.

'And until today,' says Dr. Poole, smiling down at her, 'until today, neither did I.'

We dissolve to the exterior of the Unholy of Unholies, two weeks later. Several hundreds of bearded men and slatternly women are queued up, in double file, awaiting their turn to enter the shrine. The Camera passes down the long line of dull and dirty faces, then holds on Loola and Dr. Poole, who are in the act of passing through the sliding doors.

Within all is gloom and silence. Two by two the nymphs and prancing satyrs of a few short days ago shuffle despondently past an altar, whose mighty candle is now eclipsed by a tin extinguisher. At the foot of the Arch-Vicar's empty throne lies the heap of discarded Seventh Commandments. As the procession slowly passes, the Archimandrite in charge of Public Morals hands out to every male an apron and to every female an apron and four round patches.

'Out through the side door,' he repeats to each recipient.

And out through the side door, when their turn comes, Loola and Dr. Poole duly go. There, in the sunshine, a score of Postulants are busily at work, with thread and needle, stitching aprons to waist-bands, patches to trouser seats and shirt fronts.

The Camera holds on Loola. Three young seminarists in Toggenbarg cassocks accost her as she emerges into the open air.

She hands her apron to the first, a patch to each of the others. All three set to work simultaneously and with extraordinary rapidity. NO, NO and NO.

'Turn around, please.'

Handing over her last patches, she obeys; and while the apron specialist moves away to attend to Dr. Poole, the others ply their needles so diligently that, in half a minute, she is no less forbidding from behind than when seen from in front.

'There!'

'And there!'

The two clerical tailors step aside and reveal a close shot of their handiwork. NO NO. Cut back to the Postulants, who express their sentiments by spitting in unison, then turn towards the door of the shrine.

'Next lady, please.'

Wearing a look of extreme dejection, the two inseparable mulatto girls step forward together.

Cut to Dr. Poole. Aproned, and bearded with a fortnight's growth of hair, he walks over to where Loola is waiting for him.

'This way, please,' says a shrill voice.

In silence they take their places at the end of yet another queue. Resignedly, two or three hundred persons are waiting to be assigned their tasks by the Grand Inquisitor's Chief Assistant in charge of Public Works. Three-horned and robed impressively in a white Saanen soutane, the great man is sitting with a couple of two-horned Familiars at a large table, on which stand several steel filing-cabinets salvaged from the offices of the Providential Life Insurance Company.

A series of montage shots exhibits, in twenty seconds, the slow, hour-long advance of Loola and Dr. Poole towards the well-spring of Authority. And now at last they have reached their destination. Close shot of the Grand Inquisitor's Special Assistant as he tells Dr. Poole to report to the Director of Food Production at his office in the ruins of the Administration Building of the University of Southern California. This gentleman will see that the botanist gets a laboratory, a plot of ground for his experimental planting, and up to four labourers to perform the manual work.

'Up to four labourers,' the prelate repeats. 'Though at ordinary times ...'

Unauthorized, Loola breaks into the conversation.

'Oh, let me be one of the labourers,' she begs. 'Please.'

The Grand Inquisitor's Special Assistant gives her a long withering look, then turns to his Familiars.

'And who, pray, is this young vessel of the Unholy Spirit?' he asks.

One of the Familiars extracts Loola's card from the file and provides the relevant information. Aged eighteen and hitherto sterile, the vessel in question is reported to have associated during one off-season with a notorious Hot, who was later liquidated while trying to resist arrest. Nothing, however, was ever proved against the said vessel and its conduct has been generally satisfactory. Said

vessel has been employed, for the past year, as a miner of cemeteries and is to be similarly employed during the coming season.

‘But I want to work with Alfie,’ she protests.

‘You seem to forget,’ says the first Familiar, ‘that this is a Democracy ...’

‘A Democracy,’ adds his colleague, ‘in which every proletarian enjoys perfect freedom.’

‘*True* freedom.’

‘Freely doing the will of the Proletariat.’

‘And *vox proletariatus, vox Diaboli*.’

‘While, of course, *vox Diaboli, vox Ecclesiae*.’

‘And we here are the Church’s representatives.’

‘So you see.’

‘But I’m tired of cemeteries,’ the girl insists. ‘I’d like to dig up live things for a change.’

There is a brief silence. Then the Grand Inquisitor’s Special Assistant bends down and, from under his chair, produces a very large consecrated bull’s pizzle, which he lays on the table before him. Then he turns to his subordinates.

‘Correct me if I’m wrong,’ he says. ‘But my impression is that any vessel rejecting proletarian liberty is liable to twenty-five lashes for each and every such offence.’

There is another silence. Pale and wide-eyed, Loola stares at the instrument of torture, then looks away, makes an effort to speak, finds herself voiceless and, swallowing hard, tries again.

‘I won’t resist,’ she manages to bring out. ‘I really *want* to be free.’

‘Free to go on mining cemeteries?’

She nods affirmatively.

‘There’s a good vessel!’ says the Special Assistant.

Loola turns to Dr. Poole, and for a few seconds they look into one another’s eyes without speaking.

‘Good-bye, Alfie,’ she whispers at last.

‘Good-bye, Loola.’

Two more seconds pass; then she drops her eyes and walks away.

‘And now,’ says the Special Assistant to Dr. Poole, ‘we can get back to business. At ordinary times, as I was saying, you would be expected to make use of not more than two labourers. Do I make myself clear?’

Dr. Poole inclines his head.

We dissolve to a laboratory in which the sophomores of the University of Southern California once pursued the study of Elementary Biology. There are the usual sinks and tables, Bunsen burners and balances, cages for mice and guinea-pigs, glass tanks for tadpoles. But the dust is thick over everything, and scattered about the room lie half a dozen skeletons, still associated with crumbling remains of slacks and sweaters, of Nylons and costume jewellery and brassieres.

The door opens and Dr. Poole enters, followed by the Director of Food Production, an elderly, grey-bearded man wearing homespun trousers, the standard apron and a cut-away coat that must have once belonged to the English butler of some twentieth-century motion-picture executive.

‘A little messy, I’m afraid,’ says the Director apologetically. ‘But I’ll have the bones cleared out this afternoon and tomorrow the charvessels can dust off the tables and wash the floors.’

‘Quite,’ says Dr. Poole, ‘quite.’

Dissolve to the same room a week later. The skeletons have been removed and, thanks to the charvessels, the floors, walls and furniture are almost clean. Dr. Poole has three distinguished visitors. Wearing his four horns and the brown, Anglo-Nubian habit of the Society of Moloch, the Arch-Vicar is seated beside the Chief, who is dressed in the much-bemedalled uniform of a Rear-Admiral of the United States Navy, recently disinterred from Forest Lawn. At a respectful distance behind and to one side of the two Heads of Church and State sits the Director of Food Production, still disguised as a butler. Facing them, in the posture of a French Academician preparing to read his latest production to some choice and privileged audience, sits Dr. Poole.

‘Shall I begin?’ he asks.

The heads of Church and State exchange glances; then turn to Dr. Poole and simultaneously nod their assent. He opens his notebook and adjusts his spectacles.

‘Notes on Soil Erosion and Plant Pathology in Southern California,’ he reads aloud. ‘Followed by a Preliminary Report on the Agricultural Situation and a Plan of Remedial Action for the Future. By Alfred Poole, D.Sc., Assistant Professor of Botany at the University of Auckland.’

As he reads, we dissolve to a slope among the foothills of the San Gabriel mountains. Naked but for a cactus here and there, the stony ground lies dead and mangled in the sunshine. A network of ramifying gullies furrows the hillside. Some of them are still in the infancy of erosion, others have cut their way deep into the ground. The ruins of a substantial house, half of which has already been engulfed, stands precariously at the edge of one of these strangely fretted canyons. In the plain, at the foot of the hill, dead walnut trees emerge from the dried mud in which successive rains have buried them.

Over the shot we hear the sonorous drone of Dr. Poole’s voice:

‘In true symbiosis,’ he is saying, ‘there is a mutually beneficial relationship between two associated organisms. The distinguishing mark of parasitism, on the other hand, is that one organism lives at the expense of another. In the end this one-sided relationship proves fatal to both parties; for the death of the host cannot but result in the death of the parasite by which it has been killed. The relationship between modern man and the planet, of which, until so recently, he regarded himself as the master, has been that, not of symbiotic partners, but of tapeworm and infested dog, of fungus and blighted potato.’

Cut back to the Chief. Within its nest of curly black beard the red-lipped mouth has opened into an enormous yawn. Over the shot Dr. Poole reads on: ‘Ignoring the obvious fact that his devastation of natural resources would, in the long run, result in the ruin of his civilization and even in the extinction of his species, modern man continued, generation after generation, to exploit the earth in such a way that ...’

‘Couldn’t you make it a bit snappier?’ asks the Chief.

Dr. Poole begins by looking offended. Then he remembers that he is a condemned captive on probation among savages, and forces a nervous smile.

‘Perhaps it might be best,’ he says, ‘if we passed without more ado to the section on Plant Pathology.’

‘I don’t care,’ says the Chief, ‘so long as you make it snappy.’

‘Impatience,’ pipes the Arch-Vicar sententiously, ’is one of Belial’s favourite vices.’

Dr. Poole, meanwhile, has turned over three or four pages and is ready to start again.

‘Given the existing state of the soil, yield per acre would be abnormally low, even if the principal food plants were completely healthy. But they are not healthy. After viewing crops in the field, after inspecting grains, fruits and tubers in storage, after examining botanical specimens under an almost undamaged pre-Thing microscope, I feel certain that there is only one explanation for the number and variety of plant diseases now rampant in the area — namely, deliberate infection of the crops by means of fungus bombs, bacteria-bearing aerosols and the release of many species of virus-carrying aphides and other insects. Otherwise, how account for the prevalence and extreme virulence of *Giberella Saubinetti* and *Puccinia graminis?* Of *Phytophthora infestans* and *Synchitrium endobioticum*? Of all the mosaic diseases due to viruses? Of *Bacillus amylovorus, Bacillus carotovorus, Pseudomonas citri, Pseudomonas tumefaciens, Bacterium ...*’

Cutting short his recitation almost before it has begun, the Arch-Vicar interrupts him.

‘And you still maintain,’ he says, ‘that these people weren’t possessed by Belial!’ He shakes his head. ‘It’s incredible how prejudice can blind even the most intelligent, the most highly educated ...’

‘Yes, yes, we know all that,’ says the Chief impatiently. ‘But now let’s cut all the cackle and get down to practical business. What can you do about all this?’

Dr. Poole clears his throat.

‘The task,’ he says impressively, ‘will be long-drawn and extremely arduous.’

‘But I want more food *now*,’ says the Chief imperiously. ‘I’ve got to have it this very year.’

Somewhat apprehensively Dr. Poole is forced to tell him that disease-resisting varieties of plants cannot be bred and tested in under ten or twelve years. And meanwhile there is the question of the land; the erosion is destroying the land, erosion must be checked at all costs. But the labour of terracing and draining and composting is enormous and must go on unremittingly, year after year. Even in the old days, when man-power and machinery were plentiful, people had failed to do what was necessary to preserve the fertility of the soil.

‘It wasn’t because they couldn’t,’ puts in the Arch-Vicar. ‘It was because they didn’t want to. Between World War II and World War III they had all the time and all the equipment they needed. But they preferred to amuse themselves with power politics; and what were the consequences?’ He counts off the answers on his thick fingers. ‘Worse malnutrition for more people. More political unrest, resulting in more aggressive nationalism and imperialism. And finally the Thing. And why did they choose to destroy themselves? Because that was what Belial wanted them to do, because He had taken possession....’

The Chief holds up his hand.

‘Please, please,’ he protests. ‘This isn’t a course in Apologetics or Natural Diabology. We’re trying to *do* something.’

‘And unfortunately the doing will take a long time,’ says Dr. Poole.

‘How long?’

‘Well, in five years you might find yourself holding your own against erosion. In ten years there’d be a perceptible improvement. In twenty years, some of your land might be back to as much as seventy per cent, of its original fertility. In fifty years ...’

‘In fifty years,’ puts in the Arch-Vicar, ‘the deformity rate will be double what it is at present. And in a hundred years the triumph of Belial will be complete. But complete!’ he repeats with a child-like giggle. He makes the sign of the horns and gets up from his chair. ‘But meanwhile I’m all for this gentleman doing everything he can.’

Dissolve to the Hollywood Cemetery. Trucking shot of the monuments, with which our earlier visit to the graveyard has already made us familiar.

Medium close shot of the statue of Hedda Boddy. The Camera drops from the figure to the pedestal and the inscription:

'... affectionately known as Public Sweetheart Number One. "Hitch your wagon to a Star."'

Over the shot we hear the sound of a spade being thrust into the ground, then the rattle of sand and gravel as the earth is tossed aside.

The Camera pulls back, and we see Loola standing in a three-foot hole, wearily digging.

The sound of footsteps makes her look up. Flossie, the plump girl of the earlier sequence, enters the shot.

'Getting on all right?' she asks.

Loola nods without speaking and wipes her forehead with the back of her hand.

'When you hit the pay dirt,' the plump girl goes on, 'come and report to us.'

'It'll take at least an hour more,' says Loola gloomily.

'Well, keep at it, kid,' says Flossie in the maddeningly hearty tones of a person delivering a pep talk. 'Put your back into it. Prove to them that a vessel can do as much as a man! If you work well,' she goes on encouragingly, 'maybe the Superintendent will let you keep the Nylons. Look at the pair *I* got this morning!'

She pulls the coveted trophies from her pocket. Except for a greenish discoloration around the toes, the stockings are in perfect condition.

'Oh!' cries Loola in envious admiration.

'But we didn't have any luck with the jewellery,' says Flossie, as she puts the stockings away again. 'Just the wedding ring and a rotten little bracelet. Let's hope this one won't let us down.'

She pats the Parian stomach of Public Sweetheart Number One.

'Well, I must get back,' she continues. 'We're digging for the vessel who's buried under that red stone cross — you know, the big one, near the north gate.'

Loola nods.

‘I’ll be there as soon as I make a strike,’ she says.

Whistling the tune of ‘When I survey the Wondrous Horns,’ the plump girl walks out of the shot. Loola sighs, and resumes her digging.

Very softly, a voice pronounces her name.

She starts violently and turns in the direction from which the sound has come.

Medium shot from her viewpoint of Dr. Poole advancing cautiously from behind the tomb of Rudolph Valentino.

Cut back to Loola.

She flushes, then turns deathly pale. Her hand goes to her heart.

‘Alfie,’ she whispers.

He enters the shot, jumps into the grave beside her and, without a word, takes her in his arms. The kiss is passionate. Then she hides her face against his shoulder.

‘I thought I should never see you any more,’ she says in a breaking voice.

‘What did you take me for?’

He kisses her again, then holds her at arm’s length and looks into her face.

‘Why are you crying?’ he asks.

‘I can’t help it.’

‘You’re lovelier even than I remembered.’

She shakes her head, unable to speak.

‘Smile,’ he commands.

‘I can’t.’

‘Smile, smile. I want to see them again.’

‘See what?’

‘Smile!’

With an effort, but full of a passionate tenderness, Loola smiles up at him.

In her cheeks the dimples emerge from the long hibernation of her sorrow.

‘There they are,’ he cries in delight, ‘there they are!’

Delicately, like a blind man reading Herrick in Braille, he passes a finger across her cheek. Loola smiles more effortlessly, the dimple deepens under his

touch. He laughs with pleasure.

At the same moment the whistled tune of ‘When I survey the Wondrous Horns’ swells from a distant *pianissimo* through *piano* to *mezzo forte*.

An expression of terror appears on Loola’s face.

‘Quick, quick!’ she whispers.

With astonishing agility Dr. Poole scrambles out of the grave.

By the time the plump girl re-enters the shot he is leaning in a studiedly casual attitude against the monument to Public Sweetheart Number One. Below him, in the pit, Loola is digging like mad.

‘I forgot to tell you that we’re knocking off for lunch in half an hour,’ Flossie begins.

Then, catching sight of Dr. Poole, she utters an exclamation of surprise.

‘Good morning,’ says Dr. Poole politely.

There is a silence. Flossie looks from Dr. Poole to Loola, and from Loola back to Dr. Poole.

‘What are *you* doing here?’ she asks suspiciously.

‘I’m on my way to St. Azazel’s,’ he answers. ‘The Arch-Vicar sent a message that he wanted me to attend his three lectures to the seminarists. Belial in History — that’s the subject of them.’

‘You’ve chosen a very funny way to get to St. Azazel’s.’

‘I was looking for the Chief,’ Dr. Poole explains.

‘Well, he’s not here,’ says the plump girl.

There is another silence.

‘In that case,’ says Dr. Poole, ‘I’d better be trotting along. Mustn’t keep either of you young ladies from your duties,’ he adds with an artificial and entirely unconvincing brightness. ‘Good-bye. Good-bye.’

He bows to the two girls, then, assuming an air of easy nonchalance, walks away.

Flossie looks after him in silence, then turns severely to Loola.

‘Now listen, kid,’ she begins.

Loola stops digging and looks up from the grave.

‘What is it, Flossie?’ she asks with an expression of uncomprehending innocence.

‘What is it?’ the other echoes derisively. ‘Tell me, what’s written on your apron?’

Loola looks down at her apron, then back at Flossie. Her face reddens with embarrassment.

‘What’s written on it?’ the plump girl insists.

‘“No!”’

‘And what’s written on those patches?’

‘“No!”’ Loola repeats.

‘And on the other ones, when you turn round?’

‘“No!”’

‘No, no, no, no, no,’ says the plump girl emphatically. ‘And when the Law says no, it means no. You know that as well as I do, don’t you?’

Loola nods her head without speaking.

‘Say you know it,’ the other insists. ‘Say it.’

‘Yes, I know it,’ Loola brings out at last in a barely audible voice.

‘Good. Then don’t pretend you haven’t been warned. And if that foreign Hot ever comes prowling around you again, just let me know. *I’ll* see to him.’

We dissolve to the interior of St. Azazel’s. Once the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Azazel’s has undergone only the most superficial of alterations. In the chapels, the plaster figures of St. Joseph, the Magdalen, St. Anthony of Padua and St. Rose of Lima have merely been painted red and fitted with horns. On the High Altar nothing has been changed except that the crucifix has been replaced by a pair of enormous horns carved out of cedar wood and hung with a wealth of rings and wristwatches, of bracelets, chains, earrings and necklaces, mined from the cemeteries or found in association with old bones and the mouldering remnants of jewel-boxes.

In the body of the church some fifty Toggenberg-robed seminarists — with Dr. Poole, incongruously bearded and in tweeds, in the middle of the front row

— are sitting with bowed heads while, from the pulpit, the Arch-Vicar pronounces the final words of his lecture.

‘For as in the Order of Things all might, if they had so desired, have lived, so also in Belial all have been, or inevitably shall be, made to die. Amen.’

There is a long silence. Then the Master of Novices rises. With a great rustling of fur, the seminarists follow suit and start to walk, two by two, and with the most perfect decorum, towards the west door.

Dr. Poole is about to follow them, when he hears a high, childish voice calling his name.

Turning, he sees the Arch-Vicar beckoning from the steps of the pulpit.

‘Well, what did you think of the lecture?’ squeaks the great man as Dr. Poole approaches.

‘Very fine.’

‘Without flattery?’

‘Really and truly.’

The Arch-Vicar smiles with pleasure.

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ he says.

‘I specially liked what you said about religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — the retreat from Jeremiah to the Book of Judges, from the personal and therefore the universal to the national and therefore the internecine.’

The Arch-Vicar nods.

‘Yes, it was a pretty close shave,’ he says. ‘If they’d stuck to the personal and the universal, they’d have been in harmony with the Order of Things, and the Lord of Flies would have been done for. But fortunately Belial had plenty of allies — the nations, the churches, the political parties. He used their prejudices. He exploited their ideologies. By the time they’d developed the atomic bomb he had people back in the state of mind they were in before 900 B.C.’

‘And then,’ says Dr. Poole, ‘I liked what you said about the contacts between East and West — how He persuaded each side to take only the worst the other had to offer. So the East takes Western nationalism, Western armaments, Western movies and Western Marxism; the West takes Eastern despotism,

Eastern superstitions and Eastern indifference to individual life. In a word, He saw to it that mankind should make the worst of both worlds.'

'Just think if they'd made the best!' squeaks the Arch-Vicar. 'Eastern mysticism making sure that Western science should be properly used; the Eastern art of living refining Western energy; Western individualism tempering Eastern totalitarianism.' He shakes his head in pious horror. 'Why, it would have been the kingdom of heaven. Happily the grace of Belial was stronger than the Other One's grace.'

He chuckles shrilly; then, laying a hand on Dr. Poole's shoulder, he starts to walk with him towards the vestry.

'You know, Poole,' he says, 'I've got to be very fond of you.'

Dr. Poole mumbles his embarrassed acknowledgments.

'You're intelligent, you're well educated, you know all kinds of things that we've never learned. You could be very useful to me and, on my side, I could be very useful to you — that is,' he adds, 'if you were to become one of us.'

'One of you?' Dr. Poole repeats doubtfully.

'Yes, one of *us*.'

Comprehension dawns on an expressive close-up of Dr. Poole's face. He utters a dismayed 'Oh!'

'I won't disguise from you,' says the Arch-Vicar, 'that the surgery involved is not entirely painless, nor wholly without danger. But the advantages to be gained by entering the priesthood would be so great as to outweigh any trifling risk or discomfort. Nor must we forget ...'

'But, Your Eminence ...' Dr. Poole protests.

The Arch-Vicar holds up a plump, damp hand.

'One moment, please,' he says severely.

His expression is so forbidding that Dr. Poole hastens to apologize.

'I beg your pardon.'

'Granted, my dear Poole, granted.'

Once again the Arch-Vicar is all amiability and condescension.

‘Well, as I was saying,’ he goes on, ‘we must not forget that, if you were to undergo what I may call a physiological conversion, you would be delivered from all the temptations to which, as an unmutated male, you will most certainly be exposed.’

‘Quite, quite,’ Dr. Poole agrees. ‘But I can assure you ...’

‘Where temptations are concerned,’ says the Arch-Vicar sententiously, ‘nobody can assure anyone of anything.’

Dr. Poole remembers his recent interview with Loola in the cemetery, and feels himself blushing.

‘Isn’t that rather a sweeping statement?’ he says, without too much conviction.

The Arch-Vicar shakes his head.

‘In these matters,’ he says, ‘one can never be too sweeping. And let me remind you of what happens to those who succumb to such temptations. The bulls’ pizzles and the burying squad are always in readiness. And that is why, in your own interest, for your future happiness and peace of mind, I advise you — nay, I beg and implore you — to join our Order.’

There is a silence. Dr. Poole swallows hard.

‘I should like to be able to think it over,’ he says at last.

‘Of course, of course,’ the Arch-Vicar agrees. ‘Take your time. Take a week.’

‘A week? I don’t think I could decide in a week.’

‘Take two weeks,’ says the Arch-Vicar, and when Dr. Poole still shakes his head, ‘take four,’ he adds, ‘take six, if you like. I’m in no hurry. I’m only concerned about you.’ He pats Dr. Poole on the shoulder. ‘Yes, my dear fellow, about *you*.’

Dissolve to Dr. Poole at work in his experimental garden, planting out tomato seedlings. Nearly six weeks have passed. His brown beard is considerably more luxuriant, his tweed coat and flannel trousers considerably dirtier, than when we saw him last. He wears a grey homespun shirt and moccasins of local manufacture.

When the last of his seedlings is in the ground, he straightens himself up, stretches, rubs his aching back, then walks slowly to the end of the garden and stands there motionless, looking out at the view.

In a long shot we see, as it were through his eyes, a wide prospect of deserted factories and crumbling houses, backed in the distance by a range of mountains that recedes, fold after fold, towards the east. The shadows are gulfs of indigo, and in the richly golden lights the far-off details stand out distinct and small and perfect, like the images of things in a convex mirror. In the foreground, delicately chased and stippled by the almost horizontal light, even the baldest patches of parched earth reveal an unsuspected sumptuousness of texture.

NARRATOR

There are times, and this is one of them, when the world seems purposefully beautiful, when it is as though some mind in things had suddenly chosen to make manifest, for all who choose to see, the supernatural reality that underlies all appearances.

Dr. Poole's lips move and we catch the low murmur of his words:

'*For love and beauty and delight*
There is no death nor change; their might
Exceed our organs, which endure
No light, being themselves obscure.'

He turns and walks back towards the entrance to the garden. Before opening the gate, he looks cautiously around him. There is no sign of an unfriendly observer. Reassured, he slips out and almost immediately turns into a winding path between sand dunes. Once again his lips move: *'I am the Earth,*

Thy mother; she within whose stony veins
To the last fibre of the loftiest tree,
Whose thin leaves trembled in the frozen air,
Joy ran, as blood within a living frame,
When thou didst from her bosom, like a cloud

Of glory, arise, a spirit of keen joy.'

From the footpath Dr. Poole emerges into a street flanked by small houses, each with its garage and each surrounded by the barren space that was once a plot of grass and flowers.

'"A spirit of keen joy,"' he repeats, and then sighs and shakes his head.

NARRATOR

Joy? But joy was murdered long ago. All that survives is the laughter of demons about the whipping-posts, the howling of the possessed as they couple in the darkness. Joy is only for those whose life accords with the given Order of the world. For you there, the clever ones who think you can improve upon that Order, for you, the angry ones, the rebellious, the disobedient, joy is fast becoming a stranger. Those who are doomed to reap the consequences of your fantastic tricks will never so much as suspect its existence. Love, Joy and Peace — these are the fruits of the spirit that is your essence and the essence of the world. But the fruits of the ape-mind, the fruits of the monkey's presumption and revolt, are hate and unceasing restlessness and a chronic misery tempered only by frenzies more horrible than itself.

Dr. Poole, meanwhile, continues on his way.

'The world is full of woodmen,' he says to himself,

'The world is full of woodmen, who expel
Love's gentle dryads from the trees of life
And vex the nightingales in every dell.'

NARRATOR

Woodmen with axes, dryad-killers with knives, nightingale-vexers with scalpels and surgical scissors.

Dr. Poole shudders and, like a man who feels himself dogged by some malevolent presence, quickens his pace. Suddenly he halts and once more looks about him.

NARRATOR

In a city of two and a half million skeletons the presence of a few thousands of the living is hardly perceptible. Nothing stirs. The silence is total and, in the midst of all these cosy little bourgeois ruins, seems conscious and in some sort conspiratorial.

His pulses quickened by hope and the fear of disappointment, Dr. Poole turns off the road and hurries along the drive that leads to the garage of Number 1993. Sagging on their rusted hinges, the double doors stand ajar. He slips between them into a musty twilight. Through a hole in the west wall of the garage a thick pencil of late afternoon sunshine reveals the left front wheel of a Super de Luxe Four-Door Chevrolet Sedan and, on the ground beside it, two skulls, one an adult's, the other evidently a child's. Dr. Poole opens the only one of the four doors which is not jammed and peers into the darkness within.

'Loola!'

He climbs into the car, sits down beside her on the disintegrated upholstery of the back seat, and takes her hand in both of his.

'Darling!'

She looks at him without speaking. In her eyes there is an expression almost of terror.

'So you were able to get away, after all?'

'But Flossie still suspects something.'

'Damn Flossie!' says Dr. Poole in a tone that is intended to be carefree and reassuring.

'She kept asking questions,' Loola goes on. 'I told her I was going out to forage for needles and cutlery.'

'But all you've found is me.'

He smiles at her tenderly and raises her hand to his lips; but Loola shakes her head.

'Alfie — please!'

Her tone is a supplication. He lowers her hand without kissing it.

‘And yet you do love me, don’t you?’

She looks at him with eyes that are wide with a frightened bewilderment, then turns away.

‘I don’t know, Alfie, I don’t know.’

‘Well, *I* know,’ says Dr. Poole decidedly. ‘I know I love you. I know I want to be with you. Always. Till death do us part,’ he adds with all the fervour of an introverted sexualist suddenly converted to objectivity and monogamy.

Loola shakes her head again.

‘All I know is that I oughtn’t to be here.’

‘But that’s nonsense!’

‘No, it isn’t. I oughtn’t to be here now. I oughtn’t to have come those other times. It’s against the Law. It’s against everything that people think. It’s against Him,’ she adds after a moment’s pause. An expression of agonized distress appears on her face. ‘But then why did He make me so that I could feel this way about you? Why did He make me like those — like those — ?’ She cannot bring herself to utter the abhorred word. ‘I used to know one of them,’ she goes on in a low voice. ‘He was sweet — almost as sweet as you are. And then they killed him.’

‘What’s the good of thinking about other people?’ says Dr. Poole. ‘Let’s think about ourselves. Let’s think how happy we could be, how happy we actually were two months ago. Do you remember? The moonlight ... And how dark it was in the shadows! “And in the soul a wild odour is felt beyond the sense ...!”’

‘But we weren’t doing wrong then.’

‘We’re not doing wrong now.’

‘No, no, it’s quite different now.’

‘It isn’t different,’ he insists. ‘I don’t feel any different from what I did then. And neither do you.’

‘I do,’ she protests — too loudly to carry conviction.

‘No, you don’t.’

‘I do.’

‘You don’t. You’ve just said it. You’re not like these other people — thank God!’

‘Alfie!’

She makes a propitiatory sign of the horns.

‘They’ve been turned into animals,’ he goes on. ‘You haven’t. You’re still a human being — a normal human being with normal human feelings.’

‘I’m not.’

‘Yes, you are.’

‘It isn’t true,’ she wails. ‘It isn’t true.’

She covers her face with her hands and starts to cry.

‘He’ll kill me,’ she sobs.

‘Who’ll kill you?’

Loola raises her head and looks apprehensively over her shoulder, through the rear window of the car.

‘*He* will. He knows everything we do, everything we even think or feel.’

‘Maybe He does,’ says Dr. Poole, whose Liberal-Protestant views about the Devil have been considerably modified during the past few weeks. ‘But if we feel and think and do the right thing. He can’t hurt us.’

‘But what *is* the right thing?’ she asks.

For a second or two he smiles at her without speaking.

‘Here and now,’ he says at last, ‘the right thing is *this*.’

He slips an arm about her shoulders and draws her towards him.

‘No, Alfie, no!’

Panic-stricken, she tries to free herself; but he holds her tight.

‘This is the right thing,’ he repeats. ‘It mightn’t always and everywhere be the right thing. But here and now it is — definitely.’

He speaks with the force and authority of complete conviction. Never in all his uncertain and divided life has he thought so clearly or acted so decisively.

Loola suddenly ceases to struggle.

‘Alfie, are you *sure* it’s all right? Are you absolutely sure?’

‘Absolutely sure,’ he replies from the depths of his new, self-validating experience. Very gently he strokes her hair.

‘“A mortal shape,”’ he whispers, ‘“indued with love and life and light and deity. A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning, a Vision like incarnate April.”’

‘Go on,’ she whispers.

Her eyelids are closed, her face wears that look of supernatural serenity which one sees upon the faces of the dead.

Dr. Poole begins again:

‘And we will talk, until thought’s melody
Become too sweet for utterance, and it die
In words, to live again in looks, which dart
With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
Harmonizing silence without a sound.
Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound,
And our veins beat together, and our lips
With other eloquence than words, eclipse
The soul that burns between them, and the wells
Which boil under our being’s inmost cells,
The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
Confused in Passion’s golden purity;
As mountain springs under the morning sun,
We shall become the same, we shall be one
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?’

There is a long silence. Suddenly Loola opens her eyes, looks at him intently for a few seconds, then throws her arms round his neck and kisses him passionately on the mouth. But even as he clasps her more closely, she breaks away from him and retreats to her end of the seat.

He tries to approach, but she holds him at arm’s length.

‘It can’t be right,’ she says.

‘But it *is* right.’

She shakes her head.

‘It’s too good to be right, I should be too happy if it were. He doesn’t want us to be happy.’ There is a pause. ‘Why do you say He can’t hurt us?’

‘Because there’s something stronger than He is.’

‘Something stronger?’ She shakes her head. ‘That was what He was always fighting against — and He won.’

‘Only because people helped Him to win. But they don’t have to help Him. And, remember, He can never win for good.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because He can never resist the temptation of carrying evil to the limit. And whenever evil is carried to the limit, it always destroys itself. After which the Order of Things comes to the surface again.’

‘But that’s far away in the future.’

‘For the whole world, yes. But not for single individuals, not for you or me, for example. Whatever Belial may have done with the rest of the world, you and I can always work with the Order of Things, not against it.’

There is another silence.

‘I don’t think I understand what you mean,’ she says at last, ‘and I don’t care.’ She moves back towards him and leans her head against his shoulder. ‘I don’t care about anything,’ she goes on. ‘He can kill me if He wants to. It doesn’t matter. Not now.’

She raises her face towards his and, as he bends down to kiss her, the image on the screen fades into the darkness of a moonless night.

NARRATOR

L’ombre était nuptiale, auguste et solennelle. But this time it is a nuptial darkness whose solemnity is marred by no caterwaulings, no *Liebestods*, no saxophones pleading for detumescence. The music with which this night is charged is clear, but undescriptive; precise and definite, but about realities that have no name; all-embracingly liquid, but never viscous, without the slightest

tendency to stick possessively (like blood or sperm, like treacle or excrement) to what it touches and comprehends. A music with the spirit of Mozart's, delicately gay among the constant implications of tragedy; a music akin to Weber's, aristocratic and refined, and yet capable of the most reckless joy and the completest realization of the world's agony. And is there perhaps a hint of that which, in the *Ave Verum Corpus*, in the *G-minor Quintet*, lies beyond the world of *Don Giovanni*? Is there a hint already of what (in Bach, sometimes, and in Beethoven, in that final wholeness of art which is analogous to holiness) transcends the Romantic integration of the tragic and the joyful, the human and the daemonic? And when, in the darkness, the lover's voice whispers again of *a mortal shape indued*

With love and life and light and deity,

is there already the beginning of an understanding that beyond *Epipsychidion* there is *Adonais*, and beyond *Adonais* the wordless doctrine of the Pure in Heart?

Dissolve to Dr. Poole's laboratory. Sunlight pours through the tall windows, and is dazzlingly reflected from the stainless steel barrel of the microscope on the work-table. The room is empty.

Suddenly the silence is broken by the sound of approaching footsteps; the door is opened and, still a butler in moccasins, the Director of Food Production looks in.

'Poole,' he begins, 'His Eminence has come to ...'

He breaks off and an expression of astonishment appears on his face.

'He isn't here,' he says to the Arch-Vicar, who now follows him into the room.

The great man turns to the two Familiars in attendance on him.

'Go and see if Dr. Poole is in the experimental garden,' he orders.

The Familiars bow, squeak, 'Yes, Your Eminence,' in unison, and go out.

The Arch-Vicar sits down and graciously motions to the Director to follow his example.

'I don't think I told you,' he says; 'I'm trying to persuade our friend here to enter religion.'

‘I hope Your Eminence doesn’t mean to deprive us of his invaluable help in the field of food production,’ says the Director anxiously.

The Arch-Vicar reassures him.

‘I’ll see that he always has time to give you the advice you need. But meanwhile I want to make sure that the Church shall benefit by his talents and ...’

The Familiars re-enter the room and bow.

‘Well?’

‘He isn’t in the garden, Your Eminence.’

The Arch-Vicar frowns angrily at the Director, who quails under his look.

‘I thought you said this was the day he worked in the laboratory?’

‘It is, Your Eminence.’

‘Then why is he out?’

‘I can’t imagine, Your Eminence. I’ve never known him to change his schedule without telling me.’

There is a silence.

‘I don’t like it,’ the Arch-Vicar says at last. ‘I don’t like it at all.’ He turns to his Familiars. ‘Run back to Headquarters and have half-a-dozen men ride out on horseback to find him.’

The Familiars bow, squeak simultaneously, and vanish.

‘And as for you,’ says the Arch-Vicar, turning on the pale and abject figure of the Director, ‘if anything should have happened, you’ll have to answer for it.’

He rises in majestic wrath and stalks towards the door.

Dissolve to a series of montage shots.

Loola with her leather knapsack and Dr. Poole with a pre-Thing army pack on his back are climbing over a landslide that blocks one of those superbly engineered highways whose remains still scar the flanks of the San Gabriel mountains.

We cut to a wind-swept crest. The two fugitives are looking down over the enormous expanse of the Mojave desert.

Next we find ourselves in a pine forest on the northern slope of the range. It is night. In a patch of moonlight between the trees, Dr. Poole and Loola lie sleeping under the same homespun blanket.

Cut to a rocky canyon, at the bottom of which flows a stream. The lovers have halted to drink and fill their water-bottles.

And now we are in the foothills above the floor of the desert. Between the clumps of sage-brush, the yuccas and the juniper bushes the walking is easy. Dr. Poole and Loola enter the shot, and the Camera trucks with them as they come striding down the slope.

‘Feet sore?’ he asks solicitously.

‘Not too bad.’

She gives him a brave smile, and shakes her head.

‘I think we’d better stop pretty soon and eat something.’

‘Just as you think best, Alfie.’

He pulls an antique map out of his pocket and studies it as he walks along.

‘We’re still a good thirty miles from Lancaster,’ he says. ‘Eight hours of walking. We’ve got to keep up our strength.’

‘And how far shall we get tomorrow?’ Loola asks.

‘A little beyond Mojave. And after that I reckon it’ll take us at least two days to cross the Tehachapis and get to Bakersfield.’ He returns the map to his pocket. ‘I managed to get quite a lot of information out of the Director,’ he goes on. ‘He says those people up north are very friendly to runaways from Southern California. Won’t give them back even when the government officially asks for them.’

‘Thank Bel ... I mean, thank God,’ says Loola.

There is another silence. Suddenly Loola comes to a halt.

‘Look! What’s that?’

She points, and from their viewpoint we see at the foot of a very tall Joshua-tree a slab of weathered concrete, standing crookedly at the head of an ancient grave, overgrown with bunch-grass and buckwheat.

‘Somebody must have been buried here,’ says Dr. Poole.

They approach, and in a close shot of the slab we see, while Dr. Poole's voice reads aloud, the following inscription:

'WILLIAM TALLIS

1882-1948

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
They hopes are gone before: from all things here
They have departed, thou shouldst now depart!'

Cut back to the two lovers.

'He must have been a very sad man,' says Loola.

'Perhaps not quite so sad as you imagine,' says Dr. Poole, as he slips off his heavy pack and sits down beside the grave.

And while Loola opens her knapsack and takes out bread and fruit and eggs and strips of dried meat, he turns over the pages of his duodecimo Shelley.

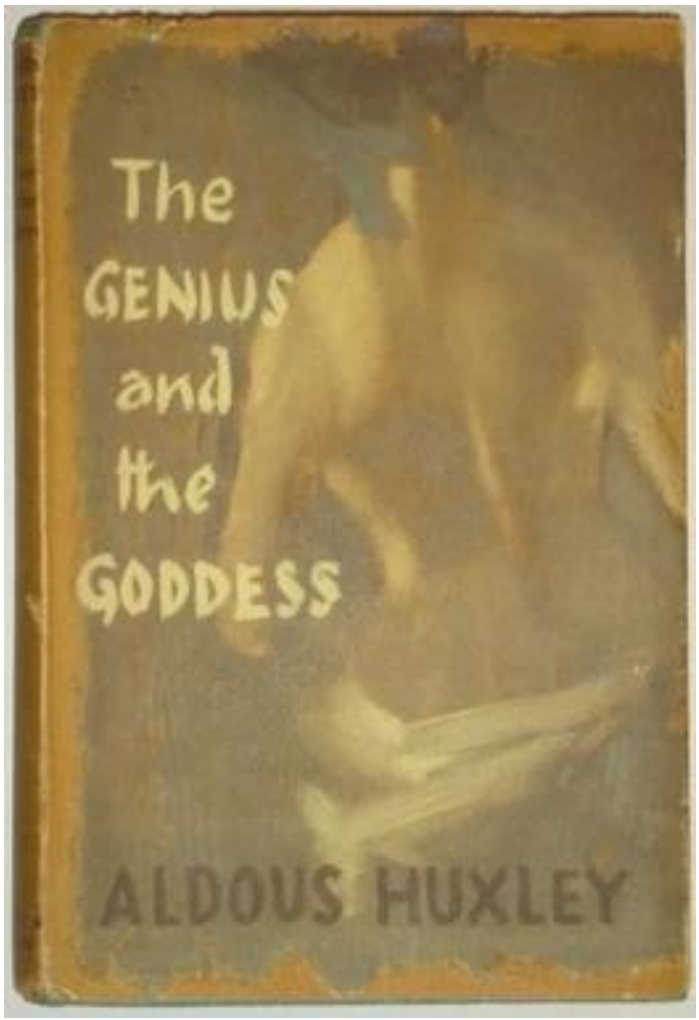
'Here we are,' he says at last. 'It's the very next stanza after the one that's quoted here:

'That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction, which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love,
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.'

There is a silence. Then Loola hands him a hard-boiled egg. He cracks it on the headstone and, as he peels it, scatters the white fragments of the shell over

the grave.

The Genius and the Goddess



The first edition

The Genius and the Goddess

"THE TROUBLE WITH fiction," said John Rivers, "is that it makes too much sense. Reality never makes sense."

"Never?" I questioned.

"Maybe from God's point of view," he conceded. "Never from ours. Fiction has unity, fiction has style. Facts possess neither. In the raw, existence is always one damned thing after another, and each of the damned things is simultaneously Thurber and Michelangelo, simultaneously Mickey Spillane and Thomas à Kempis. The criterion of reality is its intrinsic irrelevance." And when I asked, "To what?" he waved a square brown hand in the direction of the bookshelves. "To the Best that has been Thought and Said," he declaimed with mock portentousness. And then, "Oddly enough, the closest to reality are always the fictions that are supposed to be the least true." He leaned over and touched the back of a battered copy of *The Brothers Karamazov*. "It makes so little sense that it's almost real. Which is more than can be said for any of the academic kinds of fiction. Physics and chemistry fiction. History fiction. Philosophy fiction…." His accusing finger moved from Dirac to Toynbee, from Sorokin to Carnap. "More than can be said even for Biography fiction. Here's the latest specimen of the genre."

From the table beside him he picked up a volume in a glossy blue dust-jacket and held it up for my inspection.

"*The Life of Henry Maartens*," I read out with no more interest than one accords to a household word. Then I remembered that, to John Rivers, the name had been something more and other than a household word. "You were his pupil, weren't you?"

Rivers nodded without speaking.

“And this is the official biography?”

“The official fiction,” he amended. “An unforgettable picture of the Soap Opera scientist — you know the type — the moronic baby with the giant intellect; the sick genius battling indomitably against enormous odds; the lonely thinker who was yet the most affectionate of family men; the absent-minded Professor with his head in the clouds but his heart in the right place. The facts, unfortunately, weren’t quite so simple.”

“You mean, the book’s inaccurate?”

“No, it’s all true — so far as it goes. After that, it’s all rubbish — or rather it’s nonexistent. And maybe,” he added, “maybe it *has* to be nonexistent. Maybe the total reality is always too undignified to be recorded, too senseless or too horrible to be left unfictionalized. All the same it’s exasperating, if one happens to know the facts, it’s even rather insulting, to be fobbed off with Soap Opera.”

“So you’re going to set the record straight?” I presumed.

“For the public? Heaven forbid!”

“For me, then. In private.”

“In private,” he repeated. “After all, why not?” He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. “A little orgy of reminiscence to celebrate one of your rare visits.”

“Anyone would think you were talking about a dangerous drug.”

“But it *is* a dangerous drug,” he answered. “One escapes into reminiscence as one escapes into gin or sodium amytal.”

“You forget,” I said, “I’m a writer, and the Muses are the daughters of Memory.”

“And God,” he added quickly, “is *not* their brother. God isn’t the son of Memory; He’s the son of Immediate Experience. You can’t worship a spirit in spirit, unless you do it now. Wallowing in the past may be good literature. As wisdom, it’s hopeless. Time Regained is Paradise Lost, and Time Lost is Paradise Regained. Let the dead bury their dead. If you want to live at every moment as it presents itself, you’ve got to die to every other moment. That’s the most important thing I learned from Helen.”

The name evoked for me a pale young face framed in the square opening of a bell of dark, almost Egyptian hair — evoked, too, the great golden columns of Baalbek, with the blue sky and the snows of the Lebanon behind them. I was an archaeologist in those days, and Helen's father was my boss. It was at Baalbek that I had proposed to her and been rejected.

"If she'd married me," I said, "would *I* have learned it?"

"Helen practised what she always refrained from preaching," Rivers answered. "It was difficult not to learn from her."

"And what about my writing, what about those daughters of Memory?"

"There would have been a way to make the best of both worlds."

"A compromise?"

"A synthesis, a third position subtending the other two. Actually, of course, you can never make the best of one world, unless in the process you've learned to make the best of the other. Helen even managed to make the best of life while she was dying."

In my mind's eye Baalbek gave place to the campus of Berkeley, and instead of the noiselessly swinging bell of dark hair there was a coil of grey, instead of a girl's face I saw the thin drawn features of an ageing woman. She must have been ill, I reflected, even then.

"I was in Athens when she died," I said aloud.

"I remember." And then, "I wish you'd been here," he added. "For her sake — she was very fond of you. And, of course, for *your* sake too. Dying's an art, and at our age we ought to be learning it. It helps to have seen someone who really knew how. Helen knew how to die because she knew how to live — to live now and here and for the greater glory of God. And that necessarily entails dying too there and then and tomorrow and one's own miserable little self. In the process of living as one ought to live, Helen had been dying by daily instalments. When the final reckoning came, there was practically nothing to pay. Incidentally," Rivers went on after a little silence, "*I* was pretty close to the final reckoning last spring. In fact, if it weren't for penicillin, I wouldn't be here. Pneumonia, the old man's friend. Now they resuscitate you, so that you can live

to enjoy your arteriosclerosis or your cancer of the prostate. So, you see, it's all entirely posthumous. Everybody's dead except me, and I'm living on borrowed time. If I set the record straight, it'll be as a ghost talking about ghosts. And anyhow this is Christmas Eve; so a ghost story is quite in order. Besides, you're a very old friend and even if you *do* put it all in a novel, does it really matter?"

His large lined face lit up with an expression of affectionate irony.

"If it does matter," I assured him, "I won't."

This time he laughed outright.

"The strongest oaths are straw to the fire i' the blood," he quoted. "I'd rather entrust my daughters to Casanova than my secrets to a novelist. Literary fires are hotter even than sexual ones. And literary oaths are even strawier than the matrimonial or monastic varieties."

I tried to protest; but he refused to listen.

"If I still wanted to keep it secret," he said, "I wouldn't tell you. But when you *do* publish, please remember the usual footnote. You know — any resemblance to any character living or dead is purely coincidental. But *purely!* And now let's get back to those Maartenses. I've got a picture somewhere." He hoisted himself out of his chair, walked over to the desk and opened a drawer. "All of us together — Henry and Katy and the children and me. And by a miracle," he added, after a moment of rustling among the papers in the drawer, "it's where it ought to be."

He handed me the faded enlargement of a snapshot. It showed three adults standing in front of a wooden summer house — a small, thin man with white hair and a beaked nose, a young giant in shirt sleeves and, between them, fair-haired, laughing, broad-shouldered and deep-bosomed, a splendid Valkyrie incongruously dressed in a hobble skirt. At their feet sat two children, a boy of nine or ten, and a pigtailed elder sister in her early teens.

"How old he looks!" was my first comment. "Old enough to be his children's grandfather."

"And infantile enough, at fifty-six, to be Katy's baby boy."

"Rather a complicated incest."

“But it worked,” Rivers insisted, “it worked so well that it had come to be a regular symbiosis. He lived on her. And she was there to be lived on — incarnate maternity.”

I looked again at the photograph.

“What a fascinating mixture of styles! Maartens is pure Gothic. His wife’s a Wagnerian heroine. The children are straight out of Mrs. Molesworth. And you, you …” I looked up at the square, leathery face that confronted me from the other side of the fireplace, then back at the snapshot. “I’d forgotten what a beauty you used to be. A Roman copy of Praxiteles.”

“Couldn’t you make me an original?” he pleaded.

I shook my head.

“Look at the nose,” I said. “Look at the modelling of the jaw. That isn’t Athens; that’s Herculaneum. But luckily girls aren’t interested in art history. For all practical amorous purposes you were the real thing, the genuine Greek god.”

Rivers made a wry face.

“I may have looked the part,” he said. “But if you think I could act it …” He shook his head. “No Ledas for me, no Daphnes, no Europas. In those days, remember, I was still the unmitigated product of a deplorable upbringing. A Lutheran minister’s son and, after the age of twelve, a widowed mother’s only consolation. Yes, her *only* consolation, in spite of the fact that she regarded herself as a devout Christian. Little Johnny took first, second and third place; God was just an Also Ran. And of course the only consolation had no choice but to become the model son, the star pupil, the indefatigable scholarship winner, sweating his way through college and postgraduate school with no spare time for anything more subtle than football or the Glee Club, more enlightening than the Reverend Wigman’s weekly sermon.”

“But did the girls allow you to ignore them? With a face like *that*?” I pointed at the curly-headed athlete in the snapshot.

Rivers was silent, then answered with another question.

“Did *your* mother ever tell you that the most wonderful wedding present a man could bring his bride was his virginity?”

“Fortunately not.”

“Well, mine did. And she did it, what’s more, on her knees, in the course of an extemporary prayer. She was a great one for extemporary praying,” he added parenthetically. “Better even than my father had been. The sentences flowed more evenly, the language was more genuinely sham-antique. She could discuss our financial situation or reprimand me for my reluctance to eat tapioca pudding, in the very phrases of the Epistle to the Hebrews. As a piece of linguistic virtuosity, it was quite amazing. Unfortunately I couldn’t think of it in those terms. The performer was my mother and the occasion solemn. Everything that was said, while she was talking to God, had to be taken with a religious seriousness. Particularly when it was connected with the great unmentionable subject. At twenty-eight, believe it or not, I still had that wedding present for my hypothetical bride.”

There was a silence.

“My poor John,” I said at last.

He shook his head.

“Actually it was my poor mother. She had it all worked out so perfectly. An instructorship in my old university, then an assistant professorship, then a professorship. There would never be any need for me to leave home. And when I was around forty, she’d arrange a marriage for me with some wonderful Lutheran girl who would love her like her own mother. But for the grace of God, there went John Rivers — down the drain. But the grace of God was forthcoming — with a vengeance, as it turned out. One fine morning, a few weeks after I had my Ph.D., I had a letter from Henry Maartens. He was at St. Louis then, working on atoms. Needed another research assistant, had heard good reports of me from my professor, couldn’t offer more than a scandalously small salary — but would I be interested? For a budding physicist it was the opportunity of a lifetime. For my poor mother it was the end of everything. Earnestly, agonizingly, she prayed over it. To her eternal credit, God told her to let me go.

“Ten days later a taxi deposited me on the Maartens’ doorstep. I remember standing there in a cold sweat, trying to screw up my courage to ring the bell. Like a delinquent schoolboy who has an appointment with the Headmaster. The first elation over my wonderful good fortune had long since evaporated, and for the last few days at home, and during all the endless hours of the journey, I had been thinking only of my own inadequacy. How long would it take a man like Henry Maartens to see through a man like me? A week? A day? More likely an hour! He’d despise me; I’d be the laughing-stock of the laboratory. And things would be just as bad outside the laboratory. Indeed, they might be even worse. The Maartenses had asked me to be their guest until I could find a place of my own. How extraordinarily kind! But also how fiendishly cruel! In the austerely cultured atmosphere of their home I should reveal myself for what I was — shy, stupid, hopelessly provincial. But meanwhile, the Headmaster was waiting. I gritted my teeth and pushed the button. The door was opened by one of those ancient coloured retainers in an old-fashioned play. You know, the kind that was born before Abolition and has been with Miss Belinda ever since. The performance was on the corny side; but it was a sympathetic part and, though she dearly loved to ham it up, Beulah was not merely a treasure; she was, as I soon discovered, well along the road to sainthood. I explained who I was and, as I talked, she looked me over. I must have seemed satisfactory; for there and then she adopted me as a long-lost member of the family, a kind of Prodigal Son just back from the husks. ‘I’ll go make you a sandwich and a nice cup of coffee,’ she insisted, and adding, ‘They’re all in here.’ She opened a door and pushed me through it. I braced myself for the Headmaster and a barrage of culture. But what I actually walked into was something which, if I had seen it fifteen years later, I might have mistaken for a parody, in the minor key, of the Marx Brothers. I was in a large, extremely untidy living-room. On the sofa lay a white-haired man with his shirt collar unbuttoned, apparently dying — for his face was livid, his breath came and went with a kind of wheezing rattle. Close beside him in a rocking-chair — her left hand on his forehead and a copy of William James’s *Pluralistic Universe* in her right — the most beautiful woman I had ever seen

was quietly reading. On the floor were two children — a small redheaded boy playing with a clockwork train and a girl of fourteen with long black legs, lying on her stomach and writing poetry (I could see the shape of the stanzas) with a red pencil. All were so deeply absorbed in what they were engaged upon — playing or composing, reading or dying — that for at least half a minute my presence in the room remained completely unnoticed. I coughed, got no reaction, coughed again. The small boy raised his head, smiled at me politely but without interest, and returned to his train. I waited another ten seconds; then, in desperation, advanced into the room. The recumbent poetess blocked my path. I stepped over her. 'Pardon me,' I murmured. She paid no attention; but the reader of William James heard and looked up. Over the top of the *Pluralistic Universe* her eyes were brilliantly blue. 'Are you the man about the gas furnace?' she asked. Her face was so radiantly lovely that for a moment I couldn't say a word. I could only shake my head. 'Silly!' said the small boy. 'The gas man has a moustache.' 'I'm Rivers,' I finally managed to mumble. 'Rivers?' she repeated blankly. 'Rivers? Oh, *Rivers*!' There was a sudden dawn of recognition. 'I'm so glad …' But before she could finish the sentence, the man with the death rattle opened a pair of ghastly eyes, made a noise like an indrawn war whoop and, jumping up, rushed toward the open window. 'Look out!' the small boy shouted. 'Look *out*!' There was a crash. 'Oh, Christ!' he added in a tone of contained despair. A whole Grand Central Station lay in ruins, reduced to its component blocks. 'Christ!' the child repeated; and when the poetess told him he mustn't say Christ, 'I'll say something *really* bad,' he menaced. 'I'll say …' His lips moved in silent blasphemy.

"From the window, meanwhile, came the dreadful sound of a man being slowly hanged.

"'Excuse me,' said the beautiful woman. She rose, put down her book and hurried to the rescue. There was a metallic clatter. The hem of her skirt had overturned a signal. The small boy uttered a shriek of rage. 'You *fool*,' he yelled. 'You … you *elephant*.'

“‘Elephants,’ said the poetess didactically, ‘always look where they’re going.’ Then she screwed her head round and, for the first time, acknowledged my existence. ‘They’d forgotten all about you,’ she explained to me in a tone of wearily contemptuous superiority. ‘That’s how things are around here.’

“Over by the window the gradual hanging was still in progress. Doubled up, as though someone had hit him below the belt, the white-haired man was fighting for air — fighting what looked and sounded like a losing battle. Beside him stood the goddess, patting his back and murmuring words of encouragement. I was appalled. This was the most terrible thing I had ever seen. A hand plucked at the cuff of my trousers. I turned and found the poetess looking up at me. She had a narrow, intense little face with grey eyes, set wide apart and a size too large. ‘*Gloom*,’ she said. ‘I need three words to rhyme with *gloom*. I’ve got *room* — that fits all right. And I’ve got *womb* — which is simply gorgeous. But what about *catacomb*? …’ She shook her head; then, frowning at her paper, she read aloud. ‘*The something gloom Of my soul’s deep and dreary catacomb.* I don’t like it, do you?’ I had to admit that I didn’t. ‘And yet it’s exactly what I want to say,’ she went on. I had a brain wave. ‘What about *tomb*?’ Her face lit up with pleasure and excitement. But of course, of course! What a fool she had been! The red pencil started to scribble at a furious rate. ‘*The something gloom*,’ she declaimed triumphantly, ‘*Of my soul’s irremediable tomb.*’ I must have looked dubious, for she hastily asked me if I thought *irrevocable tomb* would be better. Before I could answer there was another, louder sound of strangling. I glanced towards the window, then back at the poetess. ‘Isn’t there anything we can do?’ I whispered. The girl shook her head. ‘I looked it up in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,’ she answered. ‘It says there that asthma never shortened anybody’s life.’ And then, seeing that I was still disturbed, she shrugged her bony little shoulders and said, ‘You kind of get used to it.’”

Rivers laughed to himself as he savoured the memory.

“‘You kind of get used to it,’” he repeated. “Fifty per cent of the Consolations of Philosophy in seven words. And the other fifty per cent can be expressed in

six: Brother, when you're dead, you're dead. Or if you prefer, you can make it seven: Brother, when you're dead, you're *not* dead."

He got up and started to mend the fire.

"Well, that was my first introduction to the Maartens family," he said as he laid another oak log on the pile of glowing embers. "I kind of got used to everything pretty quickly. Even to the asthma. It's remarkable how easy it is to get used to other people's asthma. After two or three experiences I was taking Henry's attacks as calmly as the rest of them. One moment he'd be strangling; the next he was as good as new and talking nineteen to the dozen about quantum mechanics. And he continued to repeat the performance till he was eighty-seven. Whereas *I* shall be lucky," he added, giving the log a final poke, "if I go to sixty-seven. I was an athlete, you see. One of those strong-as-a-horse boys. And never a day's illness — until, bang, comes a coronary, or whoosh, go the kidneys! Meanwhile the broken reeds, like poor old Henry, go on and on, complaining of ill health until they're a hundred. And not merely complaining — actually suffering. Asthma dermatitis, every variety of belly-ache, inconceivable fatigues, indescribable depressions. He had a cupboard in his study and another at the laboratory, chock full of little bottles of homoeopathic remedies, and he never stirred out of the house without his Rhus Tox, his Carbo Veg and Bryonia and Kali Phos. His sceptical colleagues used to laugh at him for dosing himself with medicines so prodigiously diluted that, in any given pill, there couldn't be so much as a simple molecule of the curative substance.

"But Henry was ready for them. To justify homoeopathy, he had developed a whole theory of non-material fields — fields of pure energy, fields of unembodied organization. In those days it sounded preposterous. But Henry, don't forget, was a man of genius. Those preposterous notions of his are now beginning to make sense. A few more years, and they'll be self-evident."

"What *I'm* interested in," I said, "is the belly-aches. Did the pills work or didn't they?"

Rivers shrugged his shoulders.

"Henry lived to eighty-seven," he answered, as he resumed his seat.

“But wouldn’t he have lived to eighty-seven without the pills?”

“That,” said Rivers, “is a perfect example of a meaningless question. We can’t revive Henry Maartens and make him live his life over again without homoeopathy. Therefore, we can never know how his self-medication was related to his longevity. And where there’s no possible operational answer, there’s no conceivable sense in the question. That’s why,” he added, “there can never be a science of history — because you can never test the truth of any of your hypotheses. Hence the ultimate irrelevance of all these books. And yet you have to read the damned things. Otherwise how can you find your way out of the chaos of immediate fact? Of course it’s the wrong way; that goes without saying. But it’s better to find even the wrong way than to be totally lost.”

“Not a very reassuring conclusion,” I ventured.

“But the best we can reach — at any rate, in our present condition.” Rivers was silent for a moment. “Well, as I say,” he resumed in another tone, “I kind of got used to Henry’s asthma, I kind of got used to all of them, to everything. So much so, indeed, that when, after a month of house-hunting, I finally located a cheap and not too nasty apartment, they wouldn’t let me go. ‘Here you are,’ said Katy, ‘and here you stay.’ Old Beulah backed her up. So did Timmy and, though she was of an age and in a mood to dissent from everything anyone else approved of, so, rather grudgingly, did Ruth. Even the great man emerged for a moment from Cloud Cuckoo Land to cast a vote in favour of my staying on. That clinched it. I became a fixture; I became an honorary Maartens. It made me so happy,” Rivers went on after a pause, “that I kept thinking uneasily that there must surely be something wrong. And pretty soon I saw what it was. Happiness with the Maartenses entailed disloyalty to home. It was an admission that, all the time I lived with my mother, I had never experienced anything but constraint and a chronic sense of guilt. And now, as a member of this family of pagan strangers, I felt not merely happy, but also good; also, in an entirely unprecedented way, religious. For the first time I knew what all those words in the Epistles really meant. *Grace*, for example — I was chock full of grace. *The newness of the spirit* — it was there all the time; whereas most of what I had known with my

mother was the deadening oldness of the letter. And what about First Corinthians, thirteen? What about *faith, hope and charity*? Well, I don't want to boast, but I had them. Faith first of all. A redeeming faith in the universe and in my fellow man. As for the other brand of faith — that simple, Lutheran variety which my poor mother was so proud of having preserved intact, like a virginity, through all the temptations of my scientific education…." He shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing can be simpler than zero; and that, I suddenly discovered, was the simple faith I had been living by for the past ten years. At St Louis I had the genuine article — real faith in a real good, and at the same time a hope amounting to the positive conviction that everything would always be wonderful. And along with faith and hope went an overflowing charity. How could you feel affection for someone like Henry — someone so remote that he hardly knew who you were and so self-centred that he didn't even want to know? You couldn't be fond of him — and yet I was, I was. I liked him not merely for the obvious reasons — because he was a great man, because working with him was like having your own intelligence and insight raised to a higher power. I even liked him outside the laboratory, for the very qualities that made it all but impossible to regard him as anything but a kind of high-class monster. I had so much charity in those days that I could have loved a crocodile, I could have loved an octopus. One reads all these fictions of the sociologists, all this learned foolery by the political scientists." With a gesture of contemptuous exasperation Rivers slapped the backs of a row of corpulent volumes on the seventh shelf. "But actually there's only one solution, and that's expressible in a four-letter word, so shocking that even the Marquis de Sade was chary of using it." He spelled it out. "L-O-V-E. Or if you prefer the decent obscurity of the learned languages, *Agape*, *Caritas*, *Mahakaruna*. In those days I really knew what it meant. For the first time — yes, for the first time. That was the only disquieting feature in an otherwise blissful situation. For if this was the first time I knew what loving was, what about all the other times when I had thought I knew, what about those sixteen years of being my mother's only consolation?"

In the ensuing pause I summoned up the memory of the Mrs Rivers who had sometimes come, with her little Johnny, to spend a Sunday afternoon with us on the farm, nearly fifty years ago. It was a memory of black alpaca, of a pale profile like the face on Aunt Esther's cameo brooch, of a smile whose deliberate sweetness didn't seem to match the cool appraising eyes. The picture was associated with a chilling sense of apprehension. "Give Mrs Rivers a big kiss." I obeyed, but with what horrified reluctance! A phrase of Aunt Esther's came up, detached, like a single bubble, out of the depths of the past. "That poor kid," she had said, "he just *worships* his mother." He had worshipped, yes. But had he loved her?

"Is there such a word as 'debellishment'?" Rivers suddenly asked.

I shook my head.

"Well, there ought to be," he insisted. "For that's what I resorted to in my letters home. I recorded the facts; but I systematically debellished them. I turned a revelation into something drab and ordinary and moralistic. Why was I staying on at the Maartenses? Out of a sense of duty. Because Dr M. couldn't drive a car and I was able to help with the fetching and carrying. Because the children had had the misfortune to strike a pair of inadequate teachers and needed all the coaching I could give them. Because Mrs M. had been so very kind that I felt I simply *had* to stay and relieve her of a few of her burdens. Naturally I should have preferred my privacy; but would it have been right to put my personal inclinations before their needs? And since the question was addressed to my mother, there could, of course, be only one answer. What hypocrisy, what a pack of lies! But the truth would have been much too painful for her to hear or for me to put into words. For the truth was that I had never been happy, never loved, never felt capable of spontaneous unselfishness until the day I left home and came to live with these Amalekites."

Rivers sighed and shook his head.

"My poor mother," he said. "I suppose I could have been kinder to her. But however kind I might have been, it wouldn't have altered the fundamental facts — the fact that she loved me possessively, and the fact that I didn't want to be

possessed; the fact that she was alone and had lost everything, and the fact that I had my new friends; the fact that she was a proud Stoic, living in the illusion that she was a Christian, and the fact that I had lapsed into a wholesome paganism and that, whenever I could forget her — which was every day except Sundays, when I wrote her my weekly letter — I was supremely happy. Yes, supremely happy! For me, in those days, life was an eclogue interspersed with lyrics. Everything was poetry. Driving Henry to the laboratory in my second-hand Maxwell; mowing the lawn; carrying Katy's groceries home in the rain — pure poetry. So was taking Timmy to the station to look at engines. So was taking Ruth for walks in springtime to look for caterpillars. She took a professional interest in caterpillars," he explained, when I expressed my surprise. "It was part of the Gloom-Tomb syndrome. Caterpillars were the nearest approach, in real life, to Edgar Allen Poe."

"To Edgar Allen Poe?"

"'For the play is the tragedy, Man,'" he declaimed, "'and its hero, the Conqueror Worm.' In May and June the landscape was fairly crawling with Conqueror Worms."

"Nowadays," I reflected, "it wouldn't be Poe. She'd be reading Spillane or one of the more sadistic comics."

He nodded his agreement.

"Anything, however bad, provided it has some death in it. Death," he repeated, "preferably violent, preferably in the form of guts and corruption — it's one of the appetites of childhood. Almost as strong as the appetite for dolls or candy or playing with the genital organs. Children need death in order to get a new, disgustingly delicious kind of thrill. No, that's not quite accurate. They need it, as they need the other things, in order to give a specific form to the thrills they already have. Can you remember how acute your sensations were, how intensely you felt about everything, when you were a child? The rapture of raspberries and cream, the horror of fish, the hell of castor oil! And the torture of having to get up and recite before the whole class! The inexpressible joy of sitting next to the driver, with the smell of horse sweat and leather in one's

nostrils, the white road stretching away to infinity, and the fields of corn and cabbages slowly turning, as the buggy rolled past, slowly opening and shutting like enormous fans. When you're a child, your mind is a kind of saturated solution of feeling, a suspension of all the thrills — but in a latent state, in a condition of indeterminacy. Sometimes it's external circumstances that act as the crystallizing agent, sometimes it's your own imagination. You want some special kind of thrill, and you deliberately work away at yourself until you get it — a bright pink crystal of pleasure, for example, a green or bruise-coloured lump of fear; for fear, of course, is a thrill like any other, fear is a hideous kind of fun. At twelve, I used to enjoy the fun of scaring myself with fantasies about dying, about the hell of my poor father's Lenten sermons. And how much scareder Ruth could get than I could! Scareder at one end of the scale and more rapturously happy at the other. And that's true, I'd say, of most young girls. Their thrill-solution is more concentrated than ours, they can fabricate more kinds of bigger and better crystals more rapidly. Needless to say, I knew nothing about young girls in those days. But Ruth was a liberal education — a bit too liberal, as it turned out later; but we'll come to that in due course. Meanwhile, she had begun to teach me what every young man ought to know about young girls. It was a good preparation for my career as the father of three daughters."

Rivers drank some whisky and water, put down the glass and for a little while sucked at his pipe in silence.

"There was one particularly educative weekend," he said at last, smiling to himself at the memory. "It was during my first spring with the Maartenses. We were staying at their little farmhouse in the country, ten miles west of St Louis. After supper, on the Saturday night, Ruth and I went out to look at the stars. There was a little hill behind the house. You climbed it, and there was the whole sky from horizon to horizon. A hundred and eighty degrees of brute inexplicable mystery. It was a good place for just sitting and saying nothing. But in those days I still felt I had a duty to improve people's minds. So instead of leaving her in peace to look at Jupiter and the Milky Way, I trotted out the stale old facts and figures — the distance in kilometres to the nearest fixed star, the diameter of the

galaxy, the latest word from Mount Wilson on the spiral nebulae. Ruth listened, but her mind wasn't improved. Instead, she went into a kind of metaphysical panic. Such spaces, such durations, so many worlds beyond improbable worlds! And here we were, in the face of infinity and eternity, bothering our heads about science and housekeeping and being on time, about the colour of hair ribbons and the weekly grades in algebra and Latin grammar! Then, in the little wood beyond the hill, an owl began calling, and at once the metaphysical panic turned into something physical — physical but at the same time occult; for this creeping at the pit of the stomach was due to the superstition that owls are wizard birds, bringers of bad luck, harbingers of death. She knew, of course, that it was all nonsense; but how transporting it was to think and act as though it were true! I tried to laugh her out of it; but Ruth wanted to feel scared and was ready to rationalize and justify her fears. 'One of the girls in my class's grandmother died last year,' she told me. 'And that night there was an owl in the garden. Right in the middle of St Louis, where there never are any owls.' As if to confirm her story, there was another burst of distant hooting. The child shuddered and took my arm. We started to walk down the hill in the direction of the wood. 'It would absolutely kill me if I was alone,' she said. And then, a moment later, 'Did you ever read *The Fall of the House of Usher*?' It was evident that she wanted to tell me the story; so I said, No, I hadn't read it. She began. 'It's about a brother and sister called Usher, and they lived in a kind of castle with a black and livid tarn in front of it, and there are funguses on the walls, and the brother is called Roderick and he has such a fervid imagination that he can make up poetry without stopping to think, and he's dark and handsome and has very large eyes and a delicate Hebrew nose, just like his twin sister, who's called Lady Madeline, and they're both very ill with a mysterious nervous complaint and she's liable to go into cataleptic fits….' And so the narrative proceeded — a snatch of remembered Poe, and then a gush of the junior high school dialect of the nineteen-twenties — as we walked down the grassy slope under the stars. And now we were on the road and moving towards the dark wall of woodland. Meanwhile poor Lady Madeline had died and young Mr Usher was roaming

about among the tapestries and the fungi in a state of incipient lunacy. And no wonder! ‘For said I not that my senses were acute?’ Ruth declaimed in a thrilling whisper. ‘I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them many, many days ago.’ Around us the darkness had deepened and suddenly the trees closed over us and we were engulfed in the double night of the wood. Overhead, in the roof of foliage, there was an occasional jagged gleam of a paler, bluer darkness and on either side the tunnel walls opened here and there into mysterious crevices of dim grey crape and blackened silver. And what a mouldy smell of decay! What a damp chill against the cheek! It was as though Poe’s fancy had turned into sepulchral fact. We had stepped, so it seemed, into the Ushers’ family vault. ‘And then suddenly,’ Ruth was saying, ‘suddenly there was a kind of metallic clang, like when you drop a tray on a stone floor, but sort of muffled, like it was a long way underground, because, you see, there was a huge cellar under the house where all the family was buried. And a minute later there she was at the door — the lofty and enshrouded figure of the Lady Madeline of Usher. And there was blood on her white robes, because she’d been struggling for a whole week to get out of the casket, because of course she’d been buried alive. Lots of people are,’ Ruth explained. ‘That’s why they advise you to put it in your will — don’t bury me until you’ve touched the soles of my feet with a red-hot iron. If I don’t wake up, it’s OK and you can go ahead with the funeral. They hadn’t done that with the Lady Madeline, and she was just in a cataleptic fit, till she woke up in the coffin. And Roderick had heard her all those days, but for some reason he hadn’t said anything about it. And now here she was, all in white, with blood on her, reeling to and fro on the threshold, and then she gave the most frightened shriek and fell on top of him, and he shrieked too and …’ But at this moment there was a loud commotion in the invisible undergrowth. Black in the blackness, something enormous emerged on to the road just in front of us. Ruth’s scream was as loud as Madeline’s and Roderick’s combined. She clutched my arm, she hid her face against the sleeve. The apparition snorted. Ruth screamed again. There was another snort, then the clatter of retreating hoofs. ‘It’s only a stray horse,’ I said.

But her knees had given way and, if I hadn't caught her and lowered her gently to the ground, she would have fallen. There was a long silence. 'When you've had enough of sitting in the dust,' I said ironically, 'maybe we can go on.' 'What would you have done if it *had* been a ghost?' she asked at last. 'I'd have run away and not come back till it was all over.' 'What do you mean "all over"?' she asked. 'Well, you know what happens to people who meet ghosts,' I answered. 'Either they die of fright on the spot, or else their hair turns white and they go mad.' But instead of laughing, as I had meant her to do, Ruth said I was a beast and burst into tears. That dark clot, which the horse and Poe and her own fancy had crystallized out of her solution of feeling, was too precious a thing to be lightly parted with. You know those enormous lollipops on sticks that children lick at all day long? Well, that's what her fear was — an all-day sucker; and she wanted to make the most of it, to go on sucking and sucking to the deliciously bitter end. It took me the best part of half an hour to get her on her feet again and in her right mind. It was after her bedtime when we got home and Ruth went straight to her room. I was afraid she'd have nightmares. Not at all. She slept like a top and came down to breakfast next morning as gay as a lark. But a lark that had read her Poe, a lark that was still interested in worms. After breakfast we went out caterpillar hunting and found something really stupendous — a big hawk-moth larva, with green and white markings and a horn on its rear end. Ruth poked it with a straw and the poor thing curled itself first one way, then the other, in a paroxysm of impotent rage and fear. 'It writhes, it writhes,' she chanted exultantly; 'with frightful pangs the mimes become its food, and the angels sob at vermin fangs with human blood imbued.' But this time the fear-crystal was no bigger than a diamond on a twenty-dollar engagement ring. The thought of death and corruption which she had savoured, the previous night, for the sake of its own intrinsic bitterness, was now a mere condiment, a spice to heighten the taste of life, and make it more intoxicating. "'Vermin fangs,'" she repeated, and gave the green worm another poke, "'Vermin fangs …'" And in an overflow of high spirits she began to sing, 'If you were the only girl in the world,' at the top of her voice. Incidentally," Rivers added, "how significant it is

that that disgusting song should crop up as a byproduct of every major massacre! It was invented in World War I, revived in World War II and was still being sporadically warbled while the slaughter was going on in Korea. The last word in sentimentality accompanies the last words in Machiavellian power politics and indiscriminate violence. Is that something to be thankful for? Or is it something to deepen one's despair about the human race? I really don't know — do you?"

I shook my head.

"Well, as I was saying," he resumed, "she started singing, 'If you were the only girl in the world,' changed the next line to 'and I were the vermin fangs,' then broke off, made a dive for Grampus, the cocker spaniel, who eluded her and rushed off, full tilt across the pasture, with Ruth in hot pursuit. I followed at a walk and, when at last I caught up with her, she was standing on a little knoll, with Grampus panting at her feet. The wind was blowing and she was facing into it, like a miniature Victory of Samothrace, the hair lifting from her small flushed face, her short skirt blown back and fluttering like a flag, the cotton of her blouse pressed by the air stream against a thin little body that was still almost as flat and boyish as Timmy's. Her eyes were closed, her lips moved in some silent rhapsody or invocation. The dog turned his head as I approached and wagged a stumpy tail; but Ruth was too far gone into her rapture to hear me. It would have been almost a sacrilege to disturb her; so I halted a few yards away and quietly sat down on the grass. As I watched her, a beatific smile parted her lips and the whole face seemed to glow as though with an inner light. Suddenly her expression changed; she uttered a little cry, opened her eyes and looked about her with an air of frightened bewilderment. 'John!' she called thankfully, when she caught sight of me, then ran and dropped on her knees beside me. 'I'm so glad you're here,' she said. 'And there's old Grampus. I almost thought …' She broke off and, with the forefinger of her right hand, touched the tip of her nose, her lips, her chin. 'Do I look the same?' she asked. 'The same,' I assured her, 'but if anything a little more so.' She laughed, and it was a laugh not so much of amusement as of relief. 'I was nearly gone,' she confided. 'Gone where?' I

asked. ‘I don’t know,’ she said, shaking her head. ‘It was that wind. Blowing and blowing. Blowing everything out of my head — you and Grampus and everyone else, everyone at home, everyone at school, and everything I ever knew or ever cared about. All blown away, and nothing left but the wind and the feeling of my being alive. And they were turning into the same thing and blowing away. And if I’d let go, there wouldn’t have been any stopping. I’d have crossed the mountains and gone out over the ocean and maybe right off into one of those black holes between the stars that we were looking at last night.’ She shuddered. ‘Do you think I would have died?’ she asked. ‘Or maybe gone into a catalepsy, so that they’d think I was dead, and then I’d have woken up in a coffin.’ She was back again with Edgar Allen Poe. Next day she showed me a lamentable piece of doggerel, in which the terrors of the night and the ecstasies of the morning had been reduced to the familiar glooms and tombs of all her rhyming. What a gulf between *im*pression and *ex*pression! That’s our ironic fate — to have Shakespearean feelings and (unless by some billion-to-one chance we happen to *be* Shakespeare) to talk about them like automobile salesmen, or teen-agers, or college professors. We practise alchemy in reverse — touch gold and it turns into lead; touch the pure lyrics of experience, and they turn into the verbal equivalents of tripe and hogwash.”

“Aren’t you being unduly optimistic about experience?” I questioned. “Is it always so golden and poetical?”

“Intrinsically golden,” Rivers insisted. “Poetical by its essential nature. But of course if you’re sufficiently steeped in the tripe and hogwash dished out by the moulders of public opinion, you’ll tend automatically to pollute your impressions at the source; you’ll re-create the world in the image of your own notions — and of course your own notions are everybody else’s notions; so the world you live in will consist of the Lowest Common Denominators of the local culture. But the original poetry is always there — always,” he insisted.

“Even for the old?”

“Yes, even for the old. Provided, of course, that they can recapture their lost innocence.”

“And do you ever succeed, may I ask?”

“Believe it or not,” Rivers answered, “I sometimes do. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that it sometimes happens to me. It happened yesterday, as a matter of fact, while I was playing with my grandson. From one minute to another — the transformation of lead into gold, of solemn professorial hogwash into poetry, the kind of poetry that life was all the time, while I was with the Maartenses. Every moment of it.”

“Including the moments in the laboratory?”

“Those were some of the best moments,” he answered me. “Moments of paper work, moments of fiddling around with experimental gadgets, moments of discussion and argument. The whole thing was pure idyllic poetry, like something out of Theocritus or Virgil. Four young Ph.D.s in the rôle of goatherd’s apprentices, with Henry as the patriarch, teaching the youngsters the tricks of his trade, dropping pearls of wisdom, spinning interminable yarns about the new pantheon of theoretical physics. He struck the lyre and rhapsodized about the metamorphosis of earth-bound Mass into celestial Energy. He sang the hopeless loves of Electron for her Nucleus. He piped of Quanta and hinted darkly at the mysteries of Indeterminacy. It was idyllic. Those were the days, remember, when you could be a physicist without feeling guilty; the days when it was still possible to believe that you were working for the greater glory of God. Now they won’t even allow you the comfort of self-deception. You’re paid by the Navy and trailed by the FBI. Not for one moment do they permit you to forget what you’re up to. *Ad majorem Dei gloriam?* Don’t be an idiot! *Ad majorem hominis degradationem* — that’s the thing you’re working for. But in 1921 infernal machines were safely in the future. In 1921 we were just a bunch of Theocritan innocents, enjoying the nicest kind of clean scientific fun. And when the fun in the laboratory was over, I’d drive Henry home in the Maxwell and there’d be fun of another kind. Sometimes it was young Timmy, having difficulties with the Rule of Three. Sometimes it was Ruth who simply couldn’t see why the square on the hypotenuse must *always* be equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. In *this* case, yes; she was ready to admit it. But

why *every* time? They would appeal to their father. But Henry had lived so long in the world of Higher Mathematics that he had forgotten how to do sums; and he was interested in Euclid only because Euclid's was the classical example of reasoning based upon a vicious circle. After a few minutes of utterly confounding talk, the great man would get bored and quietly fade away, leaving me to solve Timmy's problem by some method a little simpler than vector analysis, to set Ruth's doubts at rest by arguments a little less subversive of all faith in rationality than Hilbert's or Poincaré's. And then at supper there would be the noisy fun of the children telling their mother about the day's events at school; the sacrilegious fun of Katy suddenly breaking into a soliloquy on general relativity theory with an accusing question about those flannel pants which Henry was supposed to have picked up at the cleaners; the Old Plantation fun of Beulah's comments on the conversation, or the epic fun of one of her sustained, blow-by-blow accounts of how they used to butcher hogs back on the farm. And later, when the children had gone to bed and Henry had shut himself up in his study, there was the fun of funs — there were my evenings with Katy."

Rivers leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"I'm not much good at visualizing," he said after a little silence. "But the wallpaper, I'm pretty sure, was a dusty kind of pink. And the lampshade was certainly red. It must have been red, because there was always that rich flush on her face, as she sat there darning our socks or sewing on the children's buttons. A flush on the face, but never on the hands. The hands moved in the brightness of the unscreened light. What strong hands!" he added, smiling to himself. "What efficient hands! None of your spiritual, Blessed-Damozellish appendages! Honest to God hands that were good with screw-drivers; hands that could fix things when they went wrong; hands that could give a massage, or when necessary, a spanking; hands that had a genius for pastry and didn't mind emptying slops. And the rest of her matched the hands. Her body — it was the body of a strong young matron. A matron with the face of a healthy, peasant girl. No, that's not quite right. It was the face of a goddess disguised as a healthy peasant girl. Demeter, perhaps. No, Demeter was too sad. And it wasn't

Aphrodite either; there was nothing fatal or obsessive about Katy's femininity, nothing self-consciously sexy. If there was a goddess involved, it must have been Hera. Hera playing the part of a milkmaid — but a milkmaid with a mind, a milkmaid who had gone to college." Rivers opened his eyes and replaced the pipe between his teeth. He was still smiling. "I remember some of the things she said about the books I used to read aloud in the evenings. H. G. Wells, for example. He reminded her of the rice paddies in her native California. Acres and acres of shiny water, but never more than two inches deep. And those ladies and gentlemen in Henry James's novels — could they ever bring themselves, she wondered, to go to the bathroom? And D. H. Lawrence. How she loved those early books of his! All scientists ought to be compelled to take a postgraduate course in Lawrence. She said that to the Chancellor when he came to dinner. He was a most distinguished chemist; and whether it was *post hoc* or *propter hoc*, I don't know; but his wife looked as if all her secretions were pure acetic acid. Katy's remarks weren't at all well received." Rivers chuckled. "And sometimes," he went on, "we didn't read; we just talked. Katy told me about her childhood in San Francisco. About the balls and parties after she came out. About the three young men who were in love with her — each one richer and, if possible, stupider than the last. At nineteen she got engaged to the richest and the dumbest. The trousseau was bought, the wedding presents had begun to arrive. And then Henry Maartens came out to Berkeley as a visiting professor. She heard him lecture on the philosophy of science, and after the lecture she went to an evening party given in his honour. They were introduced. He had a nose like an eagle's, he had pale eyes like a Siamese cat's, he looked like the portraits of Pascal and when he laughed, the noise was like a ton of coke going down a chute. As for what *he* saw — it must have passed description. I knew Katy at thirty-six, when she was Hera. At nineteen she must have been Hebe and the three Graces and all the nymphs of Diana rolled into one. And Henry, remember, had just been divorced by his first wife. Poor woman! she simply wasn't strong enough to play the parts assigned to her — mistress to an indefatigable lover, business manager to an absentee half-wit, secretary to a man of genius, and

womb, placenta and circulatory system to the psychological equivalent of a foetus. After two miscarriages and a nervous breakdown she had packed up and gone home to her mother. Henry was on the loose, all four of him — foetus, genius, half-wit and hungry lover — in search of some woman capable of meeting the demands of a symbiotic relationship, in which all the giving would be on her side, all the ravenous and infantile taking on his. The search had been going on for the best part of a year. Henry was growing desperate. And now, suddenly, providentially, here was Katy. It was love at first sight. He took her into a corner and, ignoring everyone else in the room, started to talk to her. Needless to say, it never occurred to him that she might have her own interests and problems, it never entered his head that it might perhaps be a good thing to draw the girl out. He just let fly at her with what happened, for the moment, to be on his mind. On this occasion, it was recent developments in logic. Katy, of course, didn't understand a word of it; but he was so manifestly a genius, it was all so unspeakably wonderful, that there and then, before the evening was over, she made her mother ask him to dinner. He came, he finished off what he had to say and, while Mrs Hanbury and her other guests played bridge he plunged with Katy into semiotics. Three days later there was some sort of a picnic organized by the Audubon Society, and the two of them managed to get separated from the rest of the party in an arroyo. And finally there was the evening when they went to hear *Traviata*. Rum-tum-tum-TUM-te-tum." Rivers hummed the theme of the prelude to the third act. "It was irresistible — it always is. On the way home in the cab he kissed her — kissed her with an intensity of passion and at the same time a tact, an adeptness, for which the semiotics and the absent-mindedness had left her entirely unprepared. After that it became only too evident that her engagement to poor dear Randolph had been a mistake. But what a hue and cry, when she announced her intention of becoming Mrs Henry Maartens! A half-mad professor, with nothing but his salary, divorced by his first wife and old enough, into the bargain, to be her father! But all they could say was entirely irrelevant. The only thing that mattered was the fact that Henry belonged to another species; and *that*, not Randolph's — *Homo sapiens* and not *Homo*

moronicus — was the species she now was interested in. Three weeks after the earthquake they got married. Had she ever regretted her millionaire? Regretted *Randolph*? To this inconceivably ridiculous question the answer was a peal of laughter. But his horses, she added as she wiped the tears from her eyes, his horses were another matter. His horses were Arabians, and the cattle on his ranch were pure-bred Herefords, and he had a big pond behind the ranch house, with all kinds of the most heavenly ducks and geese. The worst of being a poor professor's wife in a big town was that you never had a chance of getting away from people. Sure, there were plenty of good people, intelligent people. But the soul cannot live by people alone; it needs horses, it needs pigs and waterfowl. Randolph could have provided her with all the animals her heart could desire — but at a price: himself. She had sacrificed the animals and chosen genius — genius with all its drawbacks. And frankly (she admitted it with a laugh, she talked about it with humorous detachment), frankly there *were* drawbacks. In his own way, albeit for entirely different reasons, Henry could be almost as dumb as Randolph himself. An idiot where human relations were concerned, a prize ass in all the practical affairs of life. But what an unboring ass, what a luminous idiot! Henry could be utterly insupportable; but he was always worth it. *Always!* And maybe, she paid me the compliment of adding, maybe when I got married, my wife would feel the same way about me. Insupportable, but worth it."

"I thought you said she wasn't consciously sexy," I commented.

"And it's true," he said. "You think she was baiting her hook with flattery. She wasn't. She was just stating a fact. I had my points; but I was also unbearable. Twenty years of formal education and a lifetime of my poor mother had produced a real monster." On the outspread fingers of his left hand he itemized the monster's components. "I was a learned bumpkin; I was an athlete who couldn't say Bo to a girl; I was a pharisee with a sense of inferiority, I was a prig who secretly envied the people he disapproved of. And yet, in spite of everything, it was worth while to put up with me. I was enormously well meaning."

“And in this case, I imagine, you did more than mean well. Were you in love with her?” I asked.

There was a little pause; then Rivers slowly nodded.

“Overwhelmingly,” he said.

“But you couldn’t say Bo to a girl.”

“This wasn’t a girl,” he answered. “This was Henry’s wife. Bo was unthinkable. Besides, I was an honorary Maartens, and that made her my honorary mother. And it wasn’t just a question of morality. I never *wanted* to say Bo. I loved her metaphysically, almost theologically — the way Dante loved Beatrice, the way Petrarch loved Laura. With one slight difference, however. In *my* case it happened to be sincere. I actually *lived* my idealism. No little illegitimate Petrarchs on the side. No Mrs Alighieri, and none of those whores that Dante found it necessary to resort to. It was passion, but it was also chastity; and both at white heat. Passion and chastity,” he repeated, and shook his head. “At sixty one forgets what the words stand for. Today I only know the meaning of the word that has replaced them — indifference. *Io son Beatrice*,” he declaimed. “And all is dross that is not Helena. So what? Old age has something else to think about.”

Rivers was silent; and suddenly, as though to elucidate what he had been saying, there was only the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, and the whispers of flames among the logs.

“How can anyone seriously believe in his own identity?” he went on. “In logic, A equals A. Not in fact. Me-now is one kettle of fish; me-then is another. I look at the John Rivers who felt that way about Katy. It’s like a puppet play, it’s like Romeo and Juliet through the wrong end of the opera glasses. No, it’s not even that; it’s like looking through the wrong end of the opera glasses at the ghosts of Romeo and Juliet. And Romeo once called himself John Rivers, and was in love, and had at least ten times more life and energy than at ordinary times. And the world he was living in — how totally transfigured!

“I remember how he looked at landscapes; and the colours were incomparably brighter, the patterns that things made in space unbelievably

beautiful. I remember how he glanced around him in the streets, and St Louis, believe it of not, was the most splendid city ever built. People, houses, trees, T-model Fords, dogs at lamp-posts — everything was more significant. Significant, you may ask, of what? And the answer is: themselves. These were realities, not symbols. Goethe was absolutely wrong. *Alles vergängliche* is NOT a *Gleichnis.* At every instant every transience is eternally that transience. What it signifies is its own being, and that being (as one sees so clearly when one's in love) is the same as Being with the biggest possible B. Why do you love the woman you're in love with? Because she *is.* And that, after all, is God's own definition of Himself: I am that I am. The girl is who she is. Some of her isness spills over and impregnates the entire universe. Objects and events cease to the mere representatives of classes and become their own uniqueness; cease to be illustrations of verbal abstractions and become fully concrete. Then you stop being in love, and the universe collapses, with an almost audible squeak of derision, into its normal insignificance. Could it ever *stay* transfigured? Maybe it could. Maybe it's just a question of being in love with God. But that," Rivers added, "is neither here nor there. Or rather it's the only thing that's either here, there or anywhere; but if we said so, we'd be cut by all our respectable friends and might even end up in the asylum. So let's get back as quickly as possible to something a little less dangerous. Back to Katy, back to the late lamented …"

He broke off.

"Did you hear something?"

This time I distinctly did. It was the sound, muffled by distance and a heroic self-restraint, of a child's sobbing.

Rivers got up and, thrusting his pipe into his pocket, walked to the door and opened it.

"Bimbo?" he called questioningly, and then to himself: "How the devil did he get out of his crib?"

For all answer there was a louder sob.

He moved out into the hall and a moment later there was the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs.

“Bimbo,” I heard him saying, “good old Bimbo! Come to see if you could catch Santa Claus red-handed — was that it?”

The sobbing mounted to a tragic crescendo. I got up and followed my host upstairs. Rivers was sitting on the top step, his arms, gigantic in their rough tweed, around a tiny figure in blue pyjamas.

“It’s grandpa,” he kept repeating. “Funny old grandpa. Bimbo’s all right with grandpa.” The sobbing gradually died down. “What made Bimbo wake up?” Rivers asked. “What made him climb out of his crib?”

“Dog,” said the child, and at the memory of his dream he began to cry again. “Big dog.”

“Dogs are funny,” Rivers assured him. “Dogs are so dumb they can’t say anything but bow-wow. Think of all the things Bimbo can say. Mummy. Weewee. Daddy. Pussycat. Dogs aren’t smart. They can’t say any of those things. Just bow-wow-wow.” He put on an imitation of a bloodhound. “Or else bow-wow-wow.” This time it was a toy Pomeranian. “Or else Wo-o-o-ow.” He howled lugubriously and grotesquely. Uncertainly, between sobs, the child began to laugh. “That’s right,” said Rivers. “Bimbo just laughs at those dumb dogs. Every time he sees one, every time he hears that silly barking, he laughs and laughs and laughs.” This time the child laughed whole-heartedly. “And now,” said Rivers, “grandpa and Bimbo are going to take a walk.” Still holding the child in his arms, he got up and made his way along the corridor. “This is grandpa’s room,” he said, opening the first door. “Nothing of great interest here, I’m afraid.” The next door stood ajar; he walked in. “And this is Mummy’s and Daddy’s room. And here’s the closet with all Mummy’s clothes. Don’t they smell good?” He sniffed loudly. The child followed suit. “*Le Shocking de Schiaparelli*,” Rivers went on. “Or is it *Femme*? Anyhow, it serves the same purpose; for it’s sex, sex, sex that makes the world go round — as, I’m sorry to say, you’ll find out, my poor Bimbo, in a very few years from now.” Tenderly he brushed his cheek against the pale floss of the child’s hair, then walked over to the full length mirror set in the door of the bathroom. “Look at us,” he called to me. “Just look at us!”

I came and stood beside him. There we were in the glass — a pair of bent and sagging elders and, in the arms of one of them, a small, exquisite Christ-child.

"And to think," said Rivers, "to think that once we were all like that. You start as a lump of protoplasm, a machine for eating and excreting. You grow into this sort of thing. Something almost supernaturally pure and beautiful." He laid his cheek once more against the child's head. "Then comes a bad time with pimples and puberty. After which you have a year or two, in your twenties, of being Praxiteles. But Praxiteles soon puts on weight and starts to lose his hair and for the next forty years you degenerate into one or other of the varieties of the human gorilla. The spindly gorilla — that's you. Or the leather-faced variety — that's me. Or else it's the successful business-man type of gorilla — you know, the kind that looks like a baby's bottom with false teeth. As for the female gorillas, the poor old things with paint on their cheeks and orchids at the prow … No, let's not talk about them, let's not even think."

The child in his arms yawned at our reflections, then turned, pillowed his head on the man's shoulder and closed his eyes. "I think we can take him back to his crib," Rivers whispered and started towards the door.

"One feels," he said slowly, as we stood looking down, a few minutes later, at that small face, which sleep had transfigured into the image of an unearthly serenity, "one feels so desperately sorry for them. They don't know what they're in for. Seventy years of ambushes and betrayals, of booby traps and deceptions."

"*And* of fun," I put in. "Fun to the pitch, sometimes, of ecstasy."

"Of course," Rivers agreed, as he turned away from the crib. "That's what baits the booby traps." He switched off the light, softly closed the door and followed me down the stairs. "Fun — every kind of fun. Sex fun, eating fun, power fun, comfort fun, possession fun, cruelty fun. But there's either a hook in the bait, or else when you grab it, it pulls a trigger and down come the bricks or the bucket of bird lime or whatever it is that the cosmic joker has prepared for you." We resumed our seats on either side of the fire in the library. "What sort of traps are waiting for that poor little shining creature up there in the crib? One can hardly bear to think of it. The only comfort is that there's ignorance before the

event and, after it, forgetting, or at the very least indifference. Every balcony scene turns into an affair of midgets in another universe! And in the end, of course, there's always death. And while there is death, there is hope." He refilled our glasses and relit his pipe. "Where was I?"

"In heaven," I answered, "with Mrs Maartens."

"In heaven," Rivers repeated. And then, after a little pause, "It lasted," he went on, "about fifteen months. From December to the second spring, with a break of ten weeks in the summer, while the family was away in Maine. Ten weeks of what was supposed to be my vacation at home, but was actually, in spite of the familiar house, in spite of my poor mother, the most desolate kind of exile. And it wasn't only Katy that I missed. I was homesick for all of them — for Beulah in the kitchen, for Timmy on the floor with his trains, for Ruth and her preposterous poems, for Henry's asthma and the laboratory and those extraordinary monologues of his about everything. What bliss it was, in September, to regain my paradise! Eden in autumn, with the leaves turning, the sky still blue, the light changing from gold to silver. Then Eden in winter, Eden with the lamps lighted and rain outside the windows, the bare trees like hieroglyphs against the sunset. And then, at the beginning of that second spring, there was a telegram from Chicago. Katy's mother was ill. Nephritis — and those were the days before the sulfas, before penicillin. Katy packed her bags and was at the station in time to catch the next train. The two children — the three children, if you counted Henry — were left in charge of Beulah and myself. Timmy gave us no trouble at all. But the others, I assure you, the others more than made up for Timmy's reasonableness. The poetess refused to eat her prunes at breakfast, couldn't be bothered to brush her hair, neglected her home work. The Nobel Prize winner wouldn't get up in the morning, cut his lectures, was late for every appointment. And there were other, graver delinquencies. Ruth broke her piggy bank and squandered a year's accumulated savings on a make-up kit and a bottle of cheap perfume. The day after Katy left, she looked and smelt like the Whore of Babylon."

"For the benefit of the Conqueror Worm?"

“Worms were out,” he answered. “Poe was as old-fashioned as *Over There* or *Alexander’s Ragtime Band.* She’d been reading Swinburne, she’d just made the discovery of the poems of Oscar Wilde. The universe was quite different now and she herself was somebody else — another poetess with a brand new vocabulary … Sweet sin; desire; jasper claws; the ache of purple pulses; the raptures and roses of vice; and lips, of course, lips intertwisted and bitten till the foam has a savour of blood — all that adolescent bad taste of Late-Victorian rebellion. And in Ruth’s case, the new words had been accompanied by new facts. She was no longer a little boy in a skirt and with pigtails; she was a budding woman with two little breasts that she carried about delicately and gingerly as though they were a pair of extremely valuable but rather dangerous and embarrassing zoological specimens. They were a source, one could sense, of mingled pride and shame, of intense pleasure and, therefore, of a haunting sense of guilt. How impossibly crude our language is! If you don’t mention the physiological correlates of emotion, you’re being false to the given facts. But if you do mention them, it sounds as though you were trying to be gross and cynical. Whether it’s passion or the desire of the moth for the star, whether it’s tenderness or adoration or romantic yearning — love is always accompanied by events in the nerve endings, the skin, the mucous membranes, the glandular and erectile tissues. Those who don’t say so are liars. Those who do are labelled as pornographers. It’s the fault, of course, of our philosophy of life; and our philosophy of life is the inevitable byproduct of a language that separates in idea what in actual fact is always inseparable. It separates and at the same time it evaluates. One of the abstractions is ‘good,’ and the other is ‘bad.’ *Judge not that ye be not judged.* But the nature of language is such that we can’t help judging. What we need is another set of words. Words that can express the natural togetherness of things. Muco-spiritual, for example, or dermatocharity. Or why not mastonoetic? Why not viscerosophy? But translated, of course, out of the indecent obscurity of a learned language into something you could use in everyday speech or even in lyrical poetry. How hard it is, without those still nonexistent words, to discuss even so simple and obvious a case as Ruth’s! The

best one can do is to flounder about in metaphors. A saturated solution of feelings, which can be crystallized either from the outside or the inside. Words and events that fall into the psycho-physical soup and make it clot into action-producing lumps of emotion and sentiment. Then come the glandular changes, and the appearance of those charming little zoological specimens which the child carries around with so much pride and embarrassment. The thrill-solution is enriched by a new kind of sensibility that radiates from the nipples, through the skin and the nerve-ends, into the soul, the subconscious, the superconscious, the spirit. And these new psycho-erectile elements of personality impart a kind of motion to the thrill-solution, cause it to flow in a specific direction — towards the still unmapped, undifferentiated region of love. Into this flowing stream of love-oriented feeling chance drops a variety of crystallizing agents — words, events, other people's example, private phantasies and memories, all the innumerable devices used by the Fates to mould an individual human destiny. Ruth had the misfortune to pass from Poe to Algernon and Oscar, from the *Conqueror Worm* to *Dolores* and *Salome*. Combined with the new facts of her own physiology, the new literature made it absolutely necessary for the poor child to smear her mouth with lipstick and drench her combinations with synthetic violet. And worse was to follow."

"Synthetic ambergris?"

"Much worse — synthetic love. She persuaded herself that she was passionately, Swinburneishly in love — and, of all people, with *me*!"

"Couldn't she have chosen someone a little nearer her own size?" I asked.

"She'd tried," Rivers answered, "but it hadn't worked. I had the story from Beulah, to whom she had confided it. A tragic little story of a fifteen-year-old girl adoring a heroic young footballer and scholarship-winner of seventeen. She had chosen someone more nearly her own size; but unfortunately, at that period of life, two years are an almost impassable gulf. The young hero was interested only in girls of a maturity comparable to his own — eighteen-year-olds, seventeen-year-olds, at a pinch well-developed sixteen-year-olds. A skinny little fifteen-year-old like Ruth was out of the question. She found herself in the

position of a low-born Victorian maiden hopelessly adoring a duke. For a long time the young hero didn't even notice her; and when at last she forced herself on his attention, he began by being amused and ended by being rude. That was when she started to persuade herself that she was in love with me."

"But if seventeen was too old, why did she try twenty-eight? Why not sixteen?"

"There were several reasons. The rebuff had been public, and if she'd chosen some pimply younger substitute for the footballer, the other girls would have commiserated with her to her face and laughed at her behind her back. Love for another schoolboy was thus out of the question. But she knew no males except schoolboys and myself. There was no choice. If she was going to love anybody — and the new physiological facts inclined her to love, the new vocabulary imposed love upon her as a categorical imperative — then I was the man. It started actually several weeks before Katy left for Chicago. I had noticed a number of premonitory symptoms — blushings, silences, abrupt inexplicable exits in the middle of conversations, fits of jealous sulking if ever I seemed to prefer the mother's company to the child's. And then, of course, there were those love poems which she insisted, in the teeth of her own and my embarrassment, on showing me. *Blisses* and *kisses. Lips* and *whips, yearning* and *burning. Best, blest, pressed, breast.* She'd look at me intently while I read the things, and it wasn't the merely anxious look of a literary novice awaiting the critic's judgment; it was the damp, large, lustrous regard of an adoring spaniel, of a Counter-Reformation Magdalen, of the willing murderee at the feet of her predestined Bluebeard. It made me feel exceedingly uncomfortable, and I wondered sometimes if it wouldn't be a good thing, for everybody's sake, to mention the matter to Katy. But then, I argued, if my suspicions were unfounded, I should look pretty fatuous; and if I were right, I should be making trouble for poor little Ruth. Better say nothing and wait for the foolishness to blow over. Better to go on pretending that the poems were simply literary exercises which had nothing to do with real life or their author's feelings. And so it went on, underground, like a Resistance Movement, like the Fifth Column,

until the day of her mother's departure. Driving home from the station I wondered apprehensively what would happen now that Katy's restraining presence had been removed. Next morning brought the answer — painted cheeks, a mouth like an over-ripe strawberry and that perfume, that whore-house smell of her!"

"With behaviour, I suppose, to match?"

"That was what I expected, of course. But oddly enough it didn't immediately materialize. Ruth didn't seem to feel the need of *acting* her new part; it was enough merely to *look* it. She was satisfied with the signs and emblems of the grand passion. Scenting her cotton underclothes, looking at the image in the glass of that preposterously raddled little face, she could see and smell herself as another Lola Montez, without having to establish her claim to the title by doing anything at all. And it was not merely the mirror that told her who she had become; it was also public opinion — her amazed and envious and derisive school fellows, her scandalized teachers. Their looks and comments corroborated her private phantasies. She was not the only one to know it; even other people recognized the fact that she had now become the *grande amoureuse*, the *femme fatale*. It was all so novel and exciting and absorbing that for a time, thank heaven, I was almost forgotten. Besides, I had committed the unpardonable offence of not taking her latest impersonation with proper seriousness. It was on the very first day of the new dispensation. I came downstairs to find Ruth and Beulah in the hall, hotly disputing. 'A nice young girl like you,' the old woman was saying. 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself.' The nice young girl tried to enlist me as an ally. 'You don't think mother will mind my using make-up, do you?' Beulah left me no time to answer. 'I'll tell you what your mother will do,' she said emphatically and with remorseless realism, 'she'll give you one look, then she'll sit down on the davenport, turn you over her knee, pull down your drawers and give you the biggest spanking you ever had in all your life.' Ruth gave her a look of cold and haughty contempt and said, 'I wasn't talking to you.' Then she turned back in my direction. 'What do *you* say, John?' The strawberry lips wreathed themselves

into what was intended to be a richly voluptuous smile, the eyes gave me a bolder version of their adoring look. ‘What do *you* say?’ In mere self-defence I told her the truth. ‘I’m afraid Beulah’s right,’ I said. ‘An enormous spanking.’ The smile faded, the eyes darkened and narrowed, an angry flush appeared beneath the rouge on her cheeks. ‘I think you’re absolutely disgusting,’ she said. ‘Disgusting!’ Beulah echoed. ‘Who’s disgusting, I’d like to know?’ Ruth scowled and bit her lip, but managed to ignore her. ‘How old was Juliet?’ she asked with a note of anticipated triumph in her voice. ‘A year younger than you are,’ I answered. The triumph broke through in a mocking smile. ‘But Juliet,’ I went on, ‘didn’t go to school. No classes, no homework. Nothing to think about except Romeo and painting her face — if she *did* paint it, which I rather doubt. Whereas you’ve got algebra, you’ve got Latin and the French irregular verbs. You’ve been given the inestimable opportunity of some day becoming a reasonably civilized young woman.’ There was a long silence. Then she said, ‘I hate you.’ It was the cry of an outraged Salome, of Dolores justly indignant at having been mistaken for a high school kid. Tears began to flow. Charged with the black silt of mascara, they cut their way through the alluvial plains of rouge and powder. ‘Damn you,’ she sobbed, ‘*damn* you!’ She wiped her eyes; then, catching sight of the horrible mess on her handkerchief, she uttered a cry of horror and rushed upstairs. Five minutes later, serene and completely repainted, she was on her way to school. And *that*,” Rivers concluded, “was one of the reasons why our *grande amoureuse* paid so little attention to the object of her devouring passion, why the *femme fatale* preferred, during the first two weeks of her existence, to concentrate on herself rather than on the person to whom the author of the scenario had assigned the part of victim. She had tried me out and found me sadly unworthy of the rôle. It seemed better, for the time being, to play the piece as a monologue. In *that* quarter at least I was given a respite. But meanwhile my Nobel Prize winner was getting into trouble.

“On the fourth day of his emancipation, Henry sneaked off to a cocktail party given by a female musicologist with Bohemian tastes. Broken reeds can never hold their liquor like gentlemen. Henry could get gloriously tipsy on tea and

conversation. Martinis turned him into a maniac, who suddenly became a depressive and ended up, invariably, by vomiting. He knew it, of course; but the child in him had to assert its independence. Katy had confined him to an occasional sherry. Well, he'd show her, he'd prove that he could affront Prohibition as manfully as anyone else. When the cat's away, the mice will play. And they'll play (such is the curious perversity of the human heart) at games which are simultaneously dangerous and boring — games where, if you lose and retire, you feel humiliated and, if you persist and win, you wish to God you hadn't. Henry accepted the musicologist's invitation, and what was bound to happen duly happened. By the time he was halfway through his second drink he was making an exhibition of himself. By the end of the third he was holding the musicologist's hand and telling her that he was the unhappiest man in the world. And a quarter of the way through the fourth he had to make a dash for the bathroom. But that wasn't all; on the way home — he insisted on walking — he managed somehow to lose his briefcase. In it were the first three chapters of his new book. *From Boole to Wittgenstein.* Even now, a generation later, it's still the best introduction to modern logic. A little masterpiece! And maybe it would be still better if he hadn't got drunk and lost the original version of the first three chapters. I deplored the loss, but welcomed its sobering effect on poor old Henry. For the next few days he was as good as gold, as reasonable, very nearly, as little Timmy. I thought my troubles were over, all the more so as the news from Chicago seemed to indicate that Katy would soon be home again. Her mother, so it seemed, was sinking. Sinking so fast that, one morning on our way to the laboratory, Henry made me stop at a haberdasher's; he wanted to buy himself a black satin tie for the funeral. Then, electrifyingly, came the news of a miracle. At the last moment, refusing to give up hope, Katy had called in another doctor — a young man just out of Johns Hopkins, brilliant, indefatigable, up to all the latest tricks. He had started a new treatment, he had wrestled with death through the whole of a night and a day and another night. And now the battle was won; the patient had been brought back from the very brink of the grave and would live. Katy, in her letter, was exultant and I, of course, exulted in

sympathy. Old Beulah went about her work loudly praising the Lord, and even the children took time off from their themes and problems, their phantasies of sex and railway trains, to rejoice. Everyone was happy except Henry. True, he kept saying that he was happy; but his unsmiling face (he could never conceal what he really felt) belied his words. He had been counting on Mrs Hanbury's death to bring his womb-secretary, his mother-mistress home again. And now — unexpectedly, improperly (there was no other word for it) — this interfering young squirt from Johns Hopkins had come along with his damned miracle. Someone who ought to have quietly shuffled off, was now (against all the rules) out of danger. Out of danger; but still, of course, much too sick to be left alone. Katy would have to stay on in Chicago until the patient could fend for herself. Heaven only knew when the one being on whom poor old Henry depended for everything — his health, his sanity, his very life — would return to him. Hope deferred brought on several attacks of asthma. But then, providentially, came the announcement that he had been elected a Corresponding Member of the French Institute. Very flattering, indeed! It cured him instantly — but, alas, not permanently. A week passed, and as day succeeded day, Henry's sense of deprivation became a positive agony, like the withdrawal pains of a drug addict. His anguish found expression in a wild, irrational resentment. That fiendish old hag! (Actually, Katy's mother was two months his junior.) That malignant malingerer! For, of course, she wasn't *really* ill — nobody could be really ill that long without dying. She was just shamming. And the motive was a mixture of selfishness and spite. She wanted to keep her daughter to herself and she wanted (for the old bitch had always hated him) to prevent Katy from being where she ought to be — with her husband. I gave him a little talk about nephritis and made him re-read Katy's letters. It worked for a day or two, and after that the news was more encouraging. The patient was making such good progress that in a few days, maybe, she could safely be left in charge of a nurse and the Swedish maid. In his joy, Henry became, for the first time since I had known him, almost a normal father. Instead of retiring to his study after dinner, he played games with the children. Instead of talking about his own subjects, he tried to amuse

them by making bad puns and asking riddles. ‘Why is a chicken with its head hanging down like next week?’ Obviously, because its neck’s weak. Timmy was in ecstasies and even Ruth condescended to smile. Three more days passed and it was Sunday. In the evening we played bezique and then a game of Heads, Bodies and Tails. The clock struck nine. One last round; then the children went upstairs. Ten minutes later they were in bed and calling us to come and say good night. We looked in first on Timmy. ‘Do you know this one?’ Henry asked. ‘What flower would come up if you planted bags of anger?’ The answer, of course, was sacks of rage; but as Timmy had never heard of saxifrage, it left him rather cold. We turned out the light and moved on to the next room. Ruth was in bed with the Teddy Bear, who was at once her baby and her Prince Charming, beside her. She was wearing pale blue pyjamas and full make up. Her teacher had raised objections to rouge and perfume in class and, when persuasion proved unavailing, the Principal had categorically forbidden them. The poetess had been reduced to painting and scenting herself at bedtime. The whole room reeked of imitation violets and the pillow, on either side of her small face, was streaked with lipstick and mascara. These were details, however, which Henry was not the man to notice. ‘What flower,’ he asked as he approached the bed, ‘or, to be more precise, what flowering tree would come up, if you were to plant a packet of old love letters?’ ‘Love letters?’ the child repeated. She glanced at me, then blushed and looked away. Forcing a laugh, she answered, in a bored superior tone, that she couldn’t guess. ‘Laburnum,’ her father brought out triumphantly; and when she didn’t understand, ‘La, burn ’em,’ he explained. ‘Don’t you get the point? They’re love letters — *old* love letters, and you’ve found a new admirer. So what do you do? You burn them.’ ‘But why La?’ Ruth asked. Henry gave her a brief, instructive lecture on the art of innocuous blasphemy. Gee for God, Jeeze for Jesus, Heck for Hell, La for Lord. ‘But nobody ever says La,’ Ruth objected. ‘They did in the eighteenth century,’ Henry retorted rather testily. Far off, in the master bedroom, the telephone bell started to ring. His face brightened. ‘I have a hunch it’s Chicago calling,’ he said, as he bent down to give Ruth her good-night kiss. ‘And another hunch,’ he added as he hurried

towards the door, ‘that mother will be coming back tomorrow. Tomorrow!’ he repeated, and was gone. ‘Won’t it be wonderful,’ I said fervently, ‘if he’s right!’ Ruth nodded her head and said, ‘Yes,’ in a tone that made it sound like ‘No.’ The narrow painted face suddenly took on an expression of acute anxiety. She was thinking, no doubt, of what Beulah had said would happen when her mother came home; was seeing, was actually feeling, Dolores-Salome turned over a large maternal knee and, in spite of her being a year older than Juliet, getting resoundingly spanked. ‘Well, I’d better be going,’ I said at last. Ruth caught my hand and held it. ‘Not yet,’ she pleaded and, as she spoke, her face changed its expression. The pinched anxious look was replaced by a tremulous smile of adoration; the lips parted, the eyes widened and shone. It was as though she had suddenly remembered who I was — her slave and her predestined Bluebeard, the only reason for her assumption of the double rôle of fatal temptress and sacrificial victim. And tomorrow, if her mother came home, tomorrow it would be too late; the play would be over, the theatre closed by order of the police. It was now or never. She squeezed my hand. ‘Do you like me, John?’ she whispered almost inaudibly. I answered in the jolly, ringing tones of an extraverted scoutmaster, ‘Of course I like you.’ ‘As much as you like mother?’ she insisted. I parried with a display of good-humoured impatience. ‘What an asinine question!’ I said. ‘I like your mother the way one likes grown-ups. And I like you the way …’ ‘The way one likes children,’ she concluded bitterly. ‘As if *that* made any difference!’ ‘Well, doesn’t it?’ ‘Not to *this* kind of thing.’ And when I asked which kind of thing, she squeezed my hand and said, ‘Liking people,’ and gave me another of those looks of hers. There was an embarrassing pause. ‘Well, I guess I’d better be going,’ I said at last, and remembering the rhyme which Timmy always found so exquisitely humorous, ‘Good night,’ I added as I disengaged my hand, ‘sleep tight, mind the fleas don’t bite.’ The joke fell like a ton of pig iron into the silence. Unsmiling, with a focused intensity of yearning that I would have found comic if it hadn’t scared me out of my wits, she went on gazing up at me. ‘Aren’t you going to say good night to me properly?’ she asked. I bent down to administer the ritual peck on the forehead,

and suddenly her arms were around my neck and it was no longer I who was kissing the child, but the child who was kissing me — on the right cheekbone first of all and then, with somewhat better aim, near the corner of the mouth. ‘Ruth!’ I protested; but before I could say more, she had kissed me again, with a clumsy kind of violence, full on the lips. I jerked myself free. ‘What did you do that for?’ I asked in an angry panic. Her face flushed, her eyes shining and enormous, she looked at me, whispered, ‘I love you,’ then turned away and buried her face in the pillow, next to the Teddy Bear. ‘All right,’ I said severely. ‘This is the last time I come and say good night to you,’ and I turned to go. The bed creaked, bare feet thudded on the floor and as I touched the door knob she was beside me, tugging at my arm. ‘I’m sorry, John,’ she was saying incoherently. ‘I’m sorry. I’ll do anything you say. Anything …’ The eyes were all spaniel now, without a trace of the temptress. I ordered her back to bed and told her that, if she was a very good girl, I might relent. Otherwise … And with that unspoken threat I left her. First I went to my room, to wash the lipstick off my face, then walked back along the corridor towards the stairs and ultimately the library. On the landing at the head of the staircase I almost collided with Henry, as he came out of the passage leading to his wing of the house. ‘What news?’ I began. But then I saw his face and was appalled. Five minutes before he had been gaily asking riddles. Now he was an old, old man, pale as a corpse, but without the corpse’s serenity; for there was an expression in his eyes and around the mouth of unbearable suffering. ‘Is something wrong?’ I asked anxiously. He shook his head without speaking. ‘You’re sure?’ I insisted. ‘That was Katy on the phone,’ he said at last in a toneless voice. ‘She isn’t coming home.’ I asked if the old lady were worse again. ‘That’s the excuse,’ he said bitterly, then turned and walked back in the direction from which he had come. Full of concern, I followed him. There was a short passage, I remember, with the door of a bathroom at the end of it and another door on the left, opening into the master bedroom. I had never been in the room before, and it was with a shock of surprise and wonder that I now found myself confronted by the Maartenses’ extraordinary bed. It was an Early American four-poster, but of such gigantic

proportions that it made me think of presidential assassinations and state funerals. In Henry's mind, of course, the association of ideas must have been somewhat different. My catafalque was his marriage bed. The telephone, which had just condemned him to another term of solitude, stood next to the symbol and scene of his conjugal happiness. No, that's the wrong word," Rivers added parenthetically. "'Conjugal' implies a reciprocal relationship between two full-blown persons. But for Henry, Katy wasn't a person; she was his food, she was a vital organ of his own body. When she was absent, he was like a cow deprived of grass, like a man with jaundice struggling to exist without a liver. It was an agony. 'Maybe you'd better lie down for a while,' I said in the wheedling tone one automatically adopts when speaking to the sick. I made a gesture in the direction of the bed. His response, this time, was like what happens if you sneeze while traversing a slope of newly fallen snow — an avalanche. And what an avalanche! Not the white, virginal variety, but a hot, palpitating dung-slide. It stank, it suffocated, it overwhelmed. From the fool's paradise of my belated and utterly inexcusable innocence, I listened in shocked, astonished horror. 'It's obvious,' he kept repeating. 'It's only too obvious.' Obvious that if Katy didn't come home, it was because she didn't want to come home. Obvious that she must have found some other man. And obvious that this other man was the new doctor. Doctors were notoriously good lovers. They understood physiology, they knew all about the autonomic nervous system.

"Horror gave place in my mind to indignation. What was he daring to say about my Katy, about this more than woman who could only be as pure and perfect as my own almost religious passion? 'Are you seriously implying,' I began … But Henry wasn't implying. He was categorically affirming. Katy was being unfaithful to him with the young squirt from Johns Hopkins.

"I told him he was mad, and he retorted that I knew nothing about sex. Which, of course, was painfully true. I tried to change the subject. It wasn't a question of sex — it was a question of nephritis, of a mother who needed her daughter's care. But Henry wouldn't listen. All he now wanted was to torture himself. And if you ask why he wanted to torture himself, I can only answer that

it was because he was already in agony. His was the weaker, the more dependent half of a symbiotic partnership which (so he believed) had just been dissolved abruptly. It was a surgical operation, without anaesthetics. Katy's return would have stopped the pain and instantly healed the wound. But Katy was not returning. *Therefore* (admire the logic!) it was necessary for Henry to inflict upon himself as much additional suffering as he possibly could. And the most effective way of doing that was to put his misery into lacerating words. To talk and talk — not, of course, to me, not even at me; only to himself — but to himself (and this was essential if he was to suffer) in my presence. The part assigned to me was not that of the supporting character actor, not even that of the bit player who serves as confidante and errand-runner. No, I was merely the nameless, almost faceless extra, whose business it had been to provide the hero with his initial excuse for thinking out loud, and who now, by simply being on the spot, imparted to the overheard soliloquy a monstrousness, a sheer obscenity, which it would have lacked if the speaker had been alone. Self-activated, the dung-slide gathered momentum. From Katy's betrayal, he passed to her choice (and this was the unkindest cut) of a younger man. Younger and therefore more virile, more indefatigably lustful. (Not to mention that, as a doctor, he knew about physiology and the autonomic nervous system.) The person, the professional, the devoted healer — all had disappeared; and so, by implication had Katy. Nothing remained except a pair of sexual functions frantically exploiting one another in the void. That he could have thought in these terms about Katy and her hypothetical lover was a proof, as I began obscurely to realize, that he thought in the same way about Katy and himself. Henry, as I've said, was a broken reed, and broken reeds, as you must have had innumerable occasions to observe, are apt to be ardent. Ardent, indeed, to the point of frenzy. No, that's the wrong word. Frenzy is blind. Whereas lovers like Henry never lose their head. They take it with them, however far they go — take it with them so that they can be fully, gloatingly conscious of their own and their partner's alienation. Actually, this was about the only thing, outside his laboratory and his library, that Henry cared to be conscious of. Most people inhabit a universe that

is like French *café au lait* — fifty per cent skim milk and fifty per cent stale chicory, half psycho-physical reality and half conventional verbiage. Henry's universe was modelled on the highball. It was a mixture in which half a pint of the fizziest philosophical and scientific ideas all but drowned a small jigger of immediate experience, most of it strictly sexual. Broken reeds are seldom good mixers. They're far too busy with their ideas, their sensuality and their psychosomatic complaints to be able to take an interest in other people — even their own wives and children. They live in a state of the most profound voluntary ignorance, not knowing anything about anybody, but abounding in preconceived opinions about everything. Take the education of children, for example. Henry could talk about it as an authority. He had read Piaget, he had read Dewey, he had read Montessori, he had read the psycho-analysts. It was all there in his cerebral filing cabinet, classified, categorized, instantly available. But when it came to doing something for Ruth and Timmy, he was either hopelessly incompetent or, more often, he just faded out of the picture. For of course they bored him. All children bored him. So did the overwhelming majority of adults. How could it be otherwise? Their ideas were rudimentary and their reading, nonexistent. What had they to offer? Only their sentiments and their moral life, only their occasional wisdom and their frequent and pathetic lack of wisdom. In a word, only their humanity. And humanity was something in which poor Henry was incapable, congenitally, of taking an interest. Between the worlds of quantum theory and epistemology at one end of the spectrum and of sex and pain at the other, there was a kind of limbo peopled only by ghosts. And among the ghosts was about seventy-five per cent of himself. For he was as little aware of his own humanity as of other people's. His ideas and his sensations — yes, he knew all about *those*. But who was the man who had the ideas and felt the sensations? And how was this man related to the things and people around him? How, above all, *ought* he to be related to them? I doubt if it ever occurred to Henry to ask himself such questions. In any case he didn't ask them on this occasion. His soliloquy was not a husband's agonized debate between love and suspicion. That would have been a fully human response to the challenge of a

fully human situation — and, as such, it could never occur in the presence of a listener so raw and foolish, so incapable of giving understanding help, as was the young John Rivers of thirty years ago. No, this was essentially a less than human reaction; and one of the elements of its subhumanity was the fact, the utterly outrageous and senseless fact, that it was taking place in the presence of someone who was neither an intimate friend nor a professional counsellor — merely a shocked young bumpkin with a too pious background and a pair of receptive but shuddering ears. Those poor ears! Lucidly expressed and richly documented, the scientific dirt fairly poured into them. Burton and Havelock Ellis, Krafft-Ebing and the incomparable Ploss and Bartels — like Piaget and John Dewey, they were all there in Henry's built-in filing cabinet, accessible in the minutest detail. And in this case, it now became evident, Henry had not been content to remain the armchair expert. He had practised what he preached, he had acted, systematically, on what he knew in theory. How difficult it is, in these days when you can discuss orgasms over the soup and flagellation with the ice cream, how extraordinarily difficult it is to remember the strength of the old taboos, the depth of the silence by which they were surrounded! As far as I was concerned, everything that Henry talked about — the techniques of love-making, the anthropology of marriage, the statistics of sexual satisfaction — was a revelation from the abyss. It was the sort of thing that decent people did not mention, did not, I had fondly imagined, even know; the sort of thing that could be discussed and understood only in brothels, at rich men's orgies, in Montmartre and Chinatown and the French Quarter. And yet these horrors were being poured into my ears by the man whom I respected above all others, the man who, for intellect and scientific intuition, surpassed everyone I had ever known. And he was uttering his horrors in connection with the woman whom I loved as Dante had loved Beatrice; as Petrarch worshipped Laura. He was asserting, as though it were the most obvious thing in the world, that Beatrice had almost insatiable appetites, that Laura had broken her marriage vows for the sake of the kind of physical sensations which any hefty brute with a good knowledge of the autonomic nervous system could so easily evoke. And even if

he hadn’t been accusing Katy of unfaithfulness, I should have been appalled by what he said. For what he said implied that the horrors were as much a part of marriage as of adultery. I can hardly expect you to believe it,” Rivers added with a laugh, “but it’s the truth. Up to that moment I had no idea of what went on between husbands and wives. Or rather I had an idea, but it didn’t happen to be correct. My idea was that, outside the underworld, decent people didn’t make love except for the sake of having children — once in a lifetime in my parents’ case, twice in the Maartenses’. And now here was Henry sitting on the edge of his catafalque and soliloquizing. Soliloquizing with the lucidity of genius, the uninhibited elaboration of infantility, about all the strange and, to me, appallingly immoral things that had happened under its funereal canopy. And Katy, my Katy, had been his accomplice — not his victim, as at first I had tried to believe, but his willing and even enthusiastic accomplice. It was this enthusiasm indeed, that made him suspect her. For if sensuality meant so much to her here, on the domestic catafalque, it must of necessity mean even more to her up there in Chicago, with the young doctor. And suddenly, to my unspeakable embarrassment, Henry covered his face and began to sob.”

There was a silence.

“What did you do?” I asked.

“What *could* I do?” He shrugged his shoulders. “Nothing, except make a few soothing noises and advise him to go to bed. Tomorrow he’d discover that it had all been a huge mistake. Then, on the pretext of getting him his hot milk, I hurried off to the kitchen. Beulah was in her rocking-chair, reading a small book about the Second Coming. I told her that Dr Maartens wasn’t feeling so good. She listened, nodded meaningfully as though she had expected it, then shut her eyes and, in silence, but with moving lips, prayed for a long time. After that she gave a sigh and said, ‘Empty, swept and garnished.’ Those were the words that had been given to her. And though it seemed an odd thing to say about a man who had more in his head than any six ordinary intellectuals, the phrase turned out, on second thoughts, to be an exact description of poor old Henry. Empty of God, swept clean of common manhood and garnished, like a Christmas tree,

with glittering notions. And seven other devils, worse even than stupidity and sentimentality, had moved in and taken possession. But meanwhile the milk was steaming. I poured it into a thermos and went upstairs. For a moment, as I entered the bedroom, I thought Henry had given me the slip. Then, from behind the catafalque, came a sound of movement. In the recess between the draped chintz of the four-poster and the window, Henry was standing before the open door of a small safe, let into the wall and ordinarily concealed from view by the half-length portrait of Katy in her wedding dress, which covered it. ‘Here’s your milk,’ I began in a tone of hypocritical cheerfulness. But then I noticed that the thing he had taken out of the recesses of the strong-box was a revolver. My heart missed a beat. I remembered suddenly that there was a midnight train for Chicago. Visions of the day after tomorrow’s headlines crowded in on me. FAMOUS SCIENTIST SHOOTS WIFE, SELF. Or NOBEL PRIZE MAN HELD IN DOUBLE SLAYING. Or even MOTHER OF TWO DIES IN FLAMING LOVE NEST. I put down the thermos and, bracing myself to knock him out, if necessary with a left to the jaw, or a short sharp jab in the solar plexus, I walked over to him. ‘If you don’t mind, Dr Maartens,’ I said respectfully. There was no struggle, hardly so much as a conscious effort on his part to keep the revolver. Five seconds later the thing was safely in my pocket. ‘I was just looking at it,’ he said in a small flat voice. And then, after a little pause, he added, ‘It’s a funny thing, when you think of it.’ And when I asked, ‘What?’ he said, ‘Death.’ And that was the full extent of the great man’s contribution to the sum of human wisdom. Death was a funny thing when you thought of it. That was why he never thought of it — except on occasions like the present, when suffering had made him feel the need for the self-infliction of more suffering. Murder? Suicide? The ideas had not even occurred to him. All he demanded from the instrument of death was a sensation of negative sensuality — a painful reminder, in the midst of all his other pains, that some day, a long long time hence, he too would have to die.

“‘Can we shut this up again?’ I asked. He nodded. On a little table beside the bed lay the objects he had taken out of the safe while looking for the revolver.

These I now replaced — Katy's jewel box, half a dozen cases containing the gold medals presented to the great man by various learned societies, several manilla envelopes bulging with papers. And finally there were those books — all six volumes of the *Psychology of Sex*, a copy of *Félicia* by Andréa de Nerciat and, published in Brussels, an anonymous work with illustrations, entitled *Miss Floggy's Finishing School.* 'Well, that's that,' I said in my jolliest bedside manner as I locked the safe door and returned him the key. Picking up the portrait I hung it again on its appointed hook. Behind the white satin and the orange blossom, behind the madonna lilies and a face whose radiance even the ineptitude of a fifth-rate painter could not obscure, who could have divined the presence of that strangely assorted treasure — *Félicia* and the stock certificates, *Miss Floggy* and the golden symbols with which a not very grateful society rewards its men of genius?

"Half an hour later I left him and went to my room — with what a blessed sense of having escaped, of being free at last from an oppressive nightmare! But even in my room there was no security. The first thing I saw, when I switched on the light, was an envelope pinned to my pillow. I opened it and unfolded two sheets of mauve paper. It was a love poem from Ruth. This time yearning rhymed with spurning, Love confessed had caused the beloved to detest her something or other breast. It was too much for one evening: Genius kept pornography in the safe; Beatrice had been to school at Miss Floggy's; childish innocence painted its face, addressed impassioned twaddle to young men and, if I didn't lock my door, would soon be yearning and burning its way out of bad literature into worse reality.

"The next morning I overslept and, when I came down to breakfast, the children were already halfway through their cereal. 'Your mother isn't coming home, after all,' I announced. Timmy was genuinely sorry; but though she uttered appropriate words of regret, the sudden brightening of Ruth's eyes betrayed her; she was delighted. Anger made me cruel. I took her poem out of my pocket and laid it on the tablecloth beside the grapenuts. 'It's lousy,' I said brutally. Then without looking at her I left the room and went upstairs again to

see what had happened to Henry. He had a lecture at nine-thirty and would be late unless I routed him out of bed. But when I knocked at his door, a feeble voice announced that he was ill. I went in. On the catafalque lay what looked already like a dead man. I took his temperature. It was over a hundred and one. What was to be done? I ran downstairs to the kitchen to consult with Beulah. The old woman sighed and shook her head. 'You'll see,' she said. 'He'll *make* her come home.' And she told me the story of what had happened, two years before, when Katy went to France to visit her brother's grave in one of the war cemeteries. She had hardly been gone a month when Henry took sick — so sick that they had to send a cable summoning her home. Nine days later, when Katy got back to St Louis, he was all but dead. She entered the sickroom, she laid a hand on his forehead. 'I tell you,' said Beulah dramatically, 'it was just like the raising of Lazarus. Down to the doors of death and then, whoosh! all the way up again, like he was in an elevator. Three days later he was eating fried chicken and talking his head off. And he'll do the same this time. He'll make her come home, even if it means going to death's door to get what he wants.' And that," Rivers added, "was precisely where he went — to death's door."

"You mean it was genuine? He wasn't putting on an act?"

"As if the second alternative excluded the first! Of course he was putting on an act; but he put it on so successfully that he very nearly died of pneumonia. However, that was something I didn't clearly recognize at the time. In that respect Beulah was a great deal more scientific in her approach than I. I had the exclusive superstition of germs; she believed in psychosomatic medicine. Well, I telephoned the doctor and then went back to the diningroom. The children had finished their breakfast and were gone. I didn't see them again for the best part of two weeks; for when I got home from the laboratory that evening, I found that Beulah had packed them off, on the doctor's advice, to stay with a friendly neighbour. No more poems, no further need to lock my door. It was a great relief. I phoned to Katy on Monday night and again, with the news that we had had to engage a nurse and hire an oxygen tent, on Tuesday. Next day Henry was worse; but so, when I telephoned to Chicago, was poor Mrs Hanbury. 'I *can't*

leave her,' Katy kept repeating in an anguish. 'I can't!' To Henry, who had been counting on her return, the news was almost mortal. Within two hours his temperature had risen a whole degree and he was delirous. 'It's his life or Mrs Hanbury's,' said Beulah, and she went to her room to pray for guidance. In about twenty-five minutes it came. Mrs Hanbury was going to die whatever happened; but Henry would be all right if Katy came home. So she *must* come home. It was the doctor who finally persuaded her. 'I don't want to be an alarmist,' he said over the phone that evening, '*but* …' That did it. 'I'll be home by tomorrow night,' she said. Henry was going to get his way — but only just in time.

"The doctor left. The nurse settled down to a night of watching. I went to my room. 'Katy will be back tomorrow,' I said to myself. 'Katy will be back tomorrow.' But which Katy — mine or Henry's, Beatrice or Miss Floggy's favourite pupil? Would everything, I wondered, be different now? Would it be possible, after the dung-slide, to feel for her as I had felt before? All that night and the next day the questions tormented me. I was still asking them when, at long last, I heard the taxi turning into the driveway. My Katy or his? A horrible foreboding sickened and paralyzed me. It was a long time before I could force myself to go and meet her. When at last I opened the front door, the luggage was already on the steps and Katy was paying off the driver. She turned her head. How pale she looked in the light of the porch lamp, how drawn and haggard! But how beautiful! More beautiful than ever — beautiful in a new, heart-rending way, so that I found myself loving her with a passion from which the last traces of impurity had been dissolved by pity and replaced by an ardour of self-sacrifice, a burning desire to help and protect, to lay down life itself in her service. And what about Henry's soliloquy and the other Katy? What about *Miss Floggy* and *Félicia* and the *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*? So far as my suddenly leaping heart was concerned, they had never existed, or at any rate were totally irrelevant.

"As we entered the hall, Beulah came running out of the kitchen. Katy threw her arms round the old woman's neck and for a long half minute the two stood

there locked in a silent embrace. Then, drawing back a little, Beulah looked up searchingly into the other's face. And as she looked, the expression of tear-stained rapture gave place to one of deepening anxiety. 'But it isn't you,' she cried. 'It's the ghost of you. You're almost as far gone as he is.' Katy tried to laugh it off. She was just a bit tired, that was all. The old woman emphatically shook her head. 'It's the virtue,' she said. 'The virtue's gone out of you. Like it went out of our dear Lord when all those sick people kept grabbing hold of him.' 'Nonsense,' said Katy. But it was quite true. The virtue *had* gone out of her. Three weeks at her mother's bedside had drained her of life. She was empty, a shell animated only by the will. And the will is never enough. The will can't digest your meals for you, or lower your temperature — much less somebody else's temperature. 'Wait till tomorrow,' Beulah begged, when Katy announced her intention of going up to the sickroom. 'Get some sleep. You can't help him now, not in the state you're in.' 'I helped him last time,' Katy retorted. 'But last time was different,' the old woman insisted. 'Last time you had the virtue; you weren't a ghost.' 'You and your ghosts!' said Katy with a touch of annoyance; and, turning, she started up the stairs. I followed her.

"Under his oxygen tent Henry was asleep or in a stupor. A grey stubble covered his chin and cheeks, and in the emaciated face the nose was enormous, like something in a caricature. Then, as we looked at him, the eyelids opened. Katy bent over the transparent window of the tent and called his name. There was no response, no sign in the pale blue eyes that he knew who she was, or even that he had seen her. 'Henry,' she repeated, 'Henry! It's me. I've come back.' The wavering eyes came to a focus and a moment later there was the faintest dawn of recognition — for a few seconds only; then it faded. The eyes drifted away again, the lips began to move; he had fallen back into the world of his delirium. The miracle had miscarried; Lazarus remained unraised. There was a long silence. Then heavily, hopelessly, 'I guess I'd better go to bed,' Katy said at last.

"And the miracle?" I asked. "Did she pull it off the next morning?"

“How could she? With no virtue, no life in her, nothing but her will and her anxiety. Which is worse, I wonder — being desperately ill yourself, or watching somebody you love being desperately ill? One has to begin by defining the word ‘you.’ I say you’re desperately ill. But do I mean *you*? Isn’t it, in fact, the new, limited personality created by the fever and the toxins? A personality without intellectual interests, without social obligations, without material concerns. Whereas the loving nurse remains her normal self, with all her memories of past happiness, all her fears for the future, all her worried awareness of a world beyond the four walls of the sickroom. And then there’s the question of death. How do you react to the prospect of death? If you’re sick enough, you reach a point where, however passionately you may be fighting for life, a part of you wouldn’t be at all sorry to die. Anything rather than this misery, this interminably squalid nightmare of finding oneself reduced to a mere lump of suffering matter! ‘Give me liberty or give me death.’ But in this case the two are identical. Liberty equals death equals the pursuit of happiness — but only, of course, for the patient, never for the nurse who loves him. She has no right to the luxury of death, to deliverance, through surrender, from her sickroom-prison. Her business is to go on fighting even when it’s perfectly obvious that the battle is lost; to go on hoping, even when there are no reasons for anything but despair; to go on praying, even when God has manifestly turned against her, even when she knows for certain that He doesn’t exist. She may be sick with grief and foreboding but she must act as though she were cheerful and serenely confident. She may have lost courage; but she must still inspire it. And meanwhile she’s working and waking beyond the limits of physical endurance. And there’s no respite; she must be constantly there, constantly available, constantly ready to give and give — to go on giving, even when she’s completely bankrupt. Yes, bankrupt,” he repeated. “That’s what Katy was. Absolutely bankrupt, but compelled by circumstances and her own will to go on spending. And, to make matters worse, the spending was fruitless. Henry didn’t get well; he merely refrained from dying. And meanwhile she was killing herself with the long, sustained effort to keep him alive. The days passed — three days, four days, I

can’t remember how many. And then came the day I shall never forget. April twenty-third, 1922.”

“Shakespeare’s birthday.”

“Mine too.”

“Yours?”

“Not my physical birthday,” Rivers explained. “That’s in October. My spiritual birthday. The day of my emergence from half-baked imbecility into something more nearly resembling the human form. I think,” he added, “we deserve a little more Scotch.”

He refilled our glasses.

“April the twenty-third,” he repeated. “What a day of miseries! Henry had had a bad night and was definitely worse. And when, at lunch time, Katy’s sister telephoned from Chicago, it was to announce that the end was very close. That evening I had to read a paper before one of the local Scientific Societies. When I got home at eleven, I found only the nurse. Katy, she told me, was in her room, trying to get a little sleep. There was nothing I could do. I went to bed.

“Two hours later I was startled out of unconsciousness by the groping touch of a hand. The room was pitch dark; but my nostrils immediately recognized the aura of womanhood and orris-root surrounding the unseen presence. I sat up. ‘Mrs Maartens?’ (I still called her Mrs Maartens.) The silence was pregnant with tragedy. ‘Is Dr Maartens worse?’ I asked anxiously. There was no immediate answer, only a movement in the darkness, only the creaking of springs as she sat down on the edge of the bed. The fringes of the Spanish shawl she had thrown over her shoulders brushed my face; the field of her fragrance enveloped me. Suddenly and with horror, I found myself remembering Henry’s soliloquy. Beatrice had appetites, Laura was a graduate of Miss Floggy’s. What blasphemy, what a hideous desecration! I was overcome by shame, and my shame deepened to an intense, remorseful self-loathing when, breaking the long silence Katy told me in a flat expressionless voice that there had been another call from Chicago: her mother was dead. I muttered some kind of a condolence. Then the flat voice

spoke again. ‘I’ve been trying to go to sleep,’ it said. ‘But I can’t; I’m too tired to sleep.’ There was a sigh of hopeless weariness, then another silence.

“‘Have you ever seen anyone die?’ the voice went on at last. But my military service hadn’t taken me to France, and when my father died, I had been staying at my grandmother’s place. At twenty-eight I knew as little of death as of that other great encroachment of the organic upon the verbal, of experience upon our notions and conventions — the act of love. ‘It’s the cut-offness that’s so terrible,’ I heard her saying. ‘You sit there helplessly, watching the connections being broken, one after the other. The connection with people, the connection with language, the connection with the physical universe. They can’t see the light, they can’t feel the warmth, they can’t breathe the air. And finally the connection with their own body begins to give way. They’re left at last hanging by a single thread — and it’s fraying away, fraying away, minute by minute.’ The voice broke and, by the muffled sound of the last words, I knew that Katy had covered her face with her hands. ‘All alone,’ she whispered, ‘absolutely alone.’ The dying, the living — everyone is alone always. There was a little whimper in the darkness, then a shuddering, convulsive movement, a hardly human cry. She was sobbing. I loved her and she was in anguish. And yet the only thing I could find to say was, ‘Don’t cry.’” Rivers shrugged his shoulders. “If you don’t believe in God or an after-life — which of course as a minister’s son I didn’t, except in a strictly Pickwickian sense — what else *can* you say in the presence of death? Besides, in this particular case, there was the grotesquely embarrassing fact that I couldn’t decide what to call her. Her grief and my compassion had made it impossible to say ‘Mrs Maartens,’ but on the other hand ‘Katy’ might seem presumptuous, might even sound as though I were trying to exploit her tragedy for the baser purposes of a scoundrel who found it impossible to forget *Miss Floggy* and the dung-slide of Henry’s subhuman soliloquy. ‘Don’t cry,’ I went on whispering, and in lieu of the prohibited endearments, of the Christian name which I dared not pronounce, I laid a timid hand on her shoulder and clumsily patted her. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said. And then, brokenly, ‘I promise I’ll behave properly tomorrow.’ And after another paroxysm of weeping, ‘I haven’t

cried like this since before I was married.' It was only later that the full significance of that last phrase began to dawn on me. A wife who permitted herself to cry would never have done for poor old Henry. His chronic weakness had compelled her to be unremittingly strong. But even the most stoical fortitude has its limits. That night Katy was at the end of her tether. She had suffered a total defeat — but a defeat for which, in a sense, she was grateful. Circumstances had been too much for her. But, by way of compensation, she had been granted a holiday from responsibility, had been permitted, if only for a few brief minutes, to indulge in the, for her, unprecedented luxury of tears. 'Don't cry,' I kept repeating. But actually she wanted to cry, she felt the need of crying. Not to mention the fact that she had the best possible reasons for crying. Death was all around her — it had come for her mother; it was coming, inevitably, so it seemed, for her husband; it would be there in a few years for herself, in a few more years for her children. They were all moving towards the same consummation — towards the progressive cutting of the lines of communications, towards the slow, sure attrition of the sustaining threads, towards the final plunge, alone, into the emptiness.

"From somewhere far away over the house-tops a clock struck the three-quarters. The chimes were a manmade insult added gratuitously to a cosmic injury — a symbol of time's incessant passage, a reminder of the inevitable end. 'Don't cry,' I implored her, and forgetting everything but my compassion, I moved my hand from the nearer to the further of her shoulders, and drew her closer. Shaken by sobs and trembling, she pressed herself against me. The clock had struck, time was bleeding away and even the living are utterly alone. Our only advantage over the dead woman up there in Chicago, over the dying man at the other end of the house, consisted in the fact that we could be alone in company, could juxtapose our solitudes and pretend that we had fused them into a community. But these, of course, were not the thoughts I was thinking then. Then there was no room in my mind for anything but love and pity and an intensely practical concern for the well-being of this goddess who had suddenly become a weeping child, this adored Beatrice who was now trembling, in just

the way that little dogs can tremble, within the circle of my protecting arm. I touched the hands with which she was covering her face; they were stone cold. And the bare feet — cold as ice. ‘But you’re frozen!’ I said almost indignantly. And then, thankful that at last it was possible for me to translate my pity into useful action. ‘You must get under the bed-clothes,’ I commanded. ‘At once.’ I visualized myself tenderly tucking her in, then drawing up a chair and sitting, quietly watchful, like a mother, while she went to sleep. But when I moved to get out of bed, she clung to me, she wouldn’t let me go. I tried to disengage myself, I tried to protest. ‘Mrs Maartens!’ But it was like protesting against the clutch of a drowning child; the act was at once inhuman and useless. And meanwhile she was chilled to the bone and trembling — trembling uncontrollably. I did the only thing that was left for me to do.”

“You mean, you got under the covers too?”

“Under the covers,” he repeated, “with two cold bare arms round my neck and a shuddering, sob-shaken body pressed against my own.”

Rivers drank some whisky and leaning back in his chair, sat for a long time smoking in silence.

“The truth,” he said at last, “the whole truth and nothing but the truth. All the witnesses take the same oath and testify about the same events. The result, of course, is fifty-seven varieties of fiction. Which of them is nearest the truth? Stendhal or Meredith? Anatole France or D. H. Lawrence? *The fountains of our deepest life shall he confused in Passion’s golden purity* or *The Sexual Behaviour of the Human Female*?”

“Do *you* know the answer?” I inquired.

He shook his head.

“Maybe one could take a hint from the geometers. Describe the event in relation to three co-ordinates.” In the air before him Rivers traced with the stem of his pipe two lines at right angles to one another, then from their point of intersection, added a vertical that took his hand above the level of his head. “Let one of these lines represent Katy, another the John Rivers of thirty years ago, and the third John Rivers as I am today. Now, within this frame of reference,

what can we say about the night of April twenty-third, 1922? Not the whole truth, of course. But a good deal more of the truth than can be conveyed in terms of any single fiction. Let's begin with the Katy line." He drew it again, and for a moment the smoke of his pipe waveringly marked its position in space. "It's the line," he said, "of a born pagan forced by circumstances into a situation with which only a thorough-going Christian or Buddhist could adequately deal. It's the line of a woman who has always been happily at home in the world and who suddenly finds herself standing on the brink of the abyss and invaded, body and mind, by the horrible black emptiness confronting her. Poor thing! She felt herself abandoned, not by God (for she was congenitally incapable of monotheism) but by the gods — all of them, from the little domestic lares and penates to the high Olympians. They had left her and taken everything with them. She had to find her gods again. She had to become a part once more of the natural, and therefore divine, order of things. She had to re-establish her contacts with life — with life at its simplest, life in its most unequivocal manifestations, as physical companionship, as the experience of animal warmth, as strong sensation, as hunger and the satisfaction of hunger. It was a matter of self-preservation. And that isn't the whole story," Rivers added. "She was in tears, grieving for the mother who had just died, grieving for the husband who might die tomorrow. There's a certain affinity between the more violent emotions. Anger modulates only too easily into aggressive lust, and sorrow, if you give it a chance, will melt almost imperceptibly, into the most delicious sensuality. After which, of course, He giveth His beloved sleep. In the context of bereavement, love is the equivalent of barbiturates and a trip to Hawaii. Nobody blames the widow or the orphan for resorting to these alleviations. So why condemn them for trying to preserve their life and sanity by the other simpler method?"

"*I'm* not condemning them," I assured him. "But other people have other views."

"And thirty years ago I was one of them." He ran his pipe up and down the imaginary vertical in front of him. "The line of the virgin prig of twenty-eight, the line of the ex-Lutheran and ex-mother's boy, the line of the Petrarchian

idealist. From *that* position I had no choice but to think of myself as a treacherous adulterer, and of Katy as — what? The words were too hideous to be articulated. Whereas from Katy's goddess-eye viewpoint nothing had happened that was not entirely natural, and anything that was natural was morally good. Looking at the matter from here," (and he indicated the line of John Rivers-Now) "I'd say we were both of us half right and therefore wholly wrong — she by being beyond good and evil on the merely Olympian level (and the Olympians, of course, were nothing but a pack of superhuman animals with miraculous powers), and I by not being beyond good and evil at all, but still mired up to the ears in the all too human notions of sin and social convention. To be wholly right, she should have come down to my level and then gone further, on the other side; whereas I should have climbed to her level and, having found it unsatisfactory, pressed forward to join her at the place where one is genuinely beyond good and evil in the sense of being, not a superhuman animal, but a transfigured man or woman. If we had been at that level, should we have done what we then did? It's an unanswerable question. And in actual fact we weren't at that level. She was a goddess who had temporarily broken down and was finding her way home to Olympus by the road of sensuality. I was a divided soul committing a sin all the more enormous for being accompanied by the most ecstatic pleasure. Alternately and even, at moments, simultaneously, I was two people — a novice in love who had had the extraordinary good fortune to find himself in the arms of a woman at once uninhibited and motherly, profoundly tender and profoundly sensual, and a conscience-stricken wretch, ashamed of having succumbed to what he had been taught to regard as his basest passions and shocked, positively outraged (for he was censorious as well as remorseful) by the easy unconcern with which his Beatrice accepted the intrinsic excellence of pleasure, his Laura displayed her proficiency in the arts of love, and displayed it, what was more, in the solemn context of mortality. Mrs Hanbury was dead, Henry was dying. According to all the rules, she should have been in crape and I should have been offering the consolations of philosophy. But in fact, in brute, paradoxical fact …" There was a moment of silence. "Midgets," he went on

pensively as, behind closed lids, he studied his far-off memories. “Midgets who don’t belong to my universe. And they didn’t really belong to it even then. That night of the twenty-third of April we were in the Other World, she and I, in the dark, wordless heaven of nakedness and touch and fusion. And what revelations in that heaven, what pentecosts! The visitations of her caresses were like sudden angels, like doves descending. And how hesitantly, how tardily I responded! With lips that hardly dared, with hands still fearful of blaspheming against my notions, or rather my mother’s notions, of what a good woman ought to be, of what, in fact, all good women are — in spite of which (and this was as shocking as it was wonderful) my timid blasphemies against the ideal were rewarded by an answering ecstasy of delight, by a bounty of reciprocated tenderness, beyond anything I could have imagined. But over against that nocturnal Other World stood this world — the world in which the John Rivers of 1922 did his day-time thinking and feeling; the world where this kind of thing was obviously criminal, where a pupil had cheated his master and a wife her husband; the world from whose point of view our dark heaven was the most sordid little hell and the visiting angels nothing but the manifestations of lust in a context of adultery. Lust and adultery,” Rivers repeated with a little laugh. “How old-fashioned it sounds! Nowadays we prefer to talk of drives, urges, extra-marital intimacies. Is it a good thing? Or a bad thing? Or does it simply not matter one way or another? Fifty years from now Bimbo may know the answer. Meanwhile one can only record the fact that, on the verbal level, morality is simply the systematic use of bad language. *Vile, base, foul* — those are the linguistic foundations of ethics; and those were the words that haunted my conscience as I lay there, hour after hour, watching over Katy’s sleep. Sleep — that’s also the Other World. Otherer even than the heaven of touch. From love to sleep, from the other to the otherer. It’s that otherer otherness which invests the sleeping beloved with a quality almost of sacredness. Helpless sacredness — the thing that people adore in the Christ Child; the thing that filled me, then, with such an inexpressible tenderness. And yet it was all vile, base, foul. Those hideous monosyllables! They were like woodpeckers, hammering away at me with their cast-iron beaks.

Vile, base, foul … But in the silence between two bouts of pecking I could hear Katy quietly breathing; and she was my beloved, asleep and helpless and therefore sacred, sacred in that Other World where all bad language, even all good language, is entirely irrelevant and beside the point. But that didn't prevent those damned woodpeckers from starting up again with undiminished ferocity.

"And then, against all the conventions of fiction and good style, I must have fallen asleep. For suddenly it was dawn, and the birds were twittering in the suburban gardens, and there was Katy standing beside the bed in the act of throwing her long-fringed shawl over her shoulders. For a fraction of a second I couldn't think why she was there. Then I remembered everything — the visitations in the darkness, the ineffable Other Worlds. But now it was morning, and we were in this world again, and I would have to call her Mrs Maartens. Mrs Maartens, whose mother had just died, whose husband might be dying. Vile, base, foul! How could I ever look her in the face again? But at that moment she turned and looked *me* in the face. I had time to see the beginnings of her old, frank, open smile; then, in an agony of shame and embarrassment, I averted my face. 'I'd hoped you wouldn't wake up,' she whispered, and bending down, she kissed me, as a grown-up kisses a child, on the forehead. I wanted to tell her that, in spite of everything, I still worshipped her; that my love was as intense as my remorse; that my gratitude for what had happened was as deep and strong as my determination that it should never happen again. But no words came; I was dumb. And so, but for quite another reason, was Katy. If she said nothing about what had happened, it was because she judged that what had happened was the sort of thing it was best not to talk about. 'It's after six,' was all she said, as she straightened herself up. 'I must go and relieve poor Nurse Koppers.' Then she turned, opened the door noiselessly and, as noiselessly, closed it behind her. I was left alone, at the mercy of my woodpeckers. Vile, base, foul; foul, base, vile … By the time the bell rang for breakfast, my mind was made up. Rather than live a lie, rather than besmirch my ideal, I would go away — forever.

"In the hall, on my way to the diningroom, I ran into Beulah. She was carrying a tray with the eggs and bacon, and humming the tune of 'All creatures

that on earth do dwell'; catching sight of me, she gave me a radiant smile and said, 'Praise the Lord!' I had never felt less inclined to praise Him. 'We're going to have a miracle,' she went on. 'And when I asked her how she knew we were going to have a miracle, she told me that she had just seen Mrs Maartens in the sickroom, and Mrs Maartens was herself again. Not a ghost any more, but her old self. The virtue had come back, and that meant that Dr Maartens would start getting well again. 'It's Grace,' she said. 'I've been praying for it night and day. "Dear Lord, give Mrs Maartens some of that Grace of yours. Let her have the virtue back, so Dr Maartens can get well." And now it's happened, it's happened!' And, as though to confirm what she had said, there was a rustling on the stairs behind us. We turned. It was Katy. She was dressed in black. Love and sleep had smoothed her face and the body which yesterday had moved so wearily, at the cost of so much painful effort, was now as softly strong, as rich with life as it had been before her mother's illness. She was a goddess once again — in mourning but uneclipsed, luminous even in her grief and resignation. The goddess came down the stairs, said good morning and asked if Beulah had told me the bad news. For a moment I thought something must have happened to Henry. 'You mean Dr Maartens?' I began. She cut me short. The bad news about her mother. And suddenly I realized that, officially, I hadn't yet heard of the melancholy event in Chicago. The blood rushed up into my cheeks and I turned away in horrible confusion. We were acting the lie already — and was I bad at it! Sadly but serenely, the goddess went on talking about that midnight telephone call, about her sister's voice sobbing at the other end of the wire, about the last moments of the long-drawn agony. Beulah sighed noisily, said it was God's will and that she had known it all along, then changed the subject. 'What about Dr Maartens?' she asked. Had they taken his temperature? Katy nodded; they had, and it was definitely lower. 'Didn't I tell you so!' the old woman said to me triumphantly. 'It's the grace of God, just like I said. The Lord has given her back the virtue.' We moved into the diningroom, sat down and began to eat. Heartily, as I remember. And I remember, too, that I found the heartiness rather shocking." Rivers laughed. "How hard it is not to be a Manichee! Soul's high,

body’s low. Death’s an affair of the soul, and in that context eggs and bacon are in bad taste and love, of course, is sheer blasphemy. And yet it’s sufficiently obvious that eggs and bacon may be the means of grace, that love may be chosen as the instrument of divine intervention.”

“You’re talking like Beulah,” I objected.

“Because there aren’t any other words to talk with. The uprush from within of something strong and wonderful, something that’s manifestly greater than yourself; the things and events which, from being neutral or downright hostile, suddenly, gratuitously, spontaneously come to your rescue — these are facts. They can be observed, they can be experienced. But if you want to talk about them, you discover that the only vocabulary is the theologian’s. Grace, Guidance, Inspiration, Providence — the words protest too much, beg all the questions before they’re asked. But there are occasions when you can’t avoid them. Here was Katy, for example. When she came back from Chicago, the virtue had gone out of her. Gone out of her so completely that she was useless to Henry and a burden to herself. Another woman might have prayed for strength, and the prayer might have been answered — because prayers *do* get answered sometimes. Which is absurd, which is out of the question; and yet it happens. Not, however, to people like Katy. Katy wasn’t the praying kind. For her, the supernatural was Nature; the divine was neither spiritual nor specifically human; it was in landscapes and sunshine and animals, it was in flowers, in the sour smell of little babies, in the warmth and softness of snuggling children, it was in kisses, of course, in the nocturnal apocalypses of love, in the more diffuse but no less ineffable bliss of just feeling well. She was a kind of feminine Antaeus — invincible while her feet were on the ground, a goddess so long as she was in contact with the greater goddess within her, the universal Mother without. Three weeks of attendance on a dying woman had broken that contact. Grace came when it was restored, and that happened on the night of April the twenty-third. An hour of love, five or six hours of the deeper otherness of sleep, and the emptiness was filled, the ghost reincarnated. She lived again — yet not she, of course, but the Unknown Quantity lived in her. The Unknown Quantity,” he

repeated. “At one end of the spectrum it’s pure spirit, it’s the Clear Light of the Void; and at the other end it’s instinct, it’s health, it’s the perfect functioning of an organism that’s infallible so long as we don’t interfere with it; and somewhere between the two extremes is what St Paul called ‘Christ’ — the divine made human. Spiritual grace, animal grace, human grace — three aspects of the same underlying mystery; ideally, all of us should be open to all of them. In practice most of us either barricade ourselves against every form of grace or, if we open the door, open it to only one of the forms. Which isn’t, of course, enough. And yet a third of a loaf is better than no bread. How much better was manifest that morning of April twenty-fourth. Cut off from animal grace, Katy had been an impotent phantom. Restored to it, she was Hera and Demeter and Aphrodite gloriously rolled into one, with Aesculapius and the Grotto of Lourdes thrown in as a bonus — for the miracle was definitely under way. After three days at death’s door, Henry had felt the presence of the virtue in her and was responding. Lazarus was in process of being raised.”

“Thanks, at one remove, to you!”

“Thanks, at one remove, to me,” he repeated.

“*Le Cocu Miraculé.* What a subject for a French farce!”

“No better than any other subject. Oedipus, for example, or Lear, or even Jesus or Gandhi — you could make a roaring farce out of any of them. It’s just a question of describing your characters from the outside, without sympathy and in violent but unpoetical language. In real life farce exists only for spectators, never for the actors. What *they* participate in is either a tragedy or a complicated and more or less painful psychological drama. So far as I was concerned, the farce of the cuckold’s miraculous healing was a long-drawn anguish of divided loyalties, of love in conflict with duty, of temptations resisted and then ignominiously succumbed to, of pleasures guiltily enjoyed and passionately repented, of good resolutions made, forgotten, made again and once more swept away by the torrent of irresistible desire.”

“I thought you’d made up your mind to go away.”

“I had. But that was before I saw her coming down those stairs reincarnated as a goddess. A goddess in mourning. Those emblems of bereavement kept alive the pity, the religious adoration, the sense that my beloved was a spirit who must be worshipped in spirit. But out of the black bodice rose the luminous column of the neck; between the coils of honey-coloured hair the face was transfigured by a kind of unearthly radiance. What’s that thing of Blake’s?

In a wife I would require
What in whores is always found,
The lineaments of satisfied desire.

“But the lineaments of satisfied desire are also the lineaments of desirability, the lineaments of the promise of future satisfactions. God, how frantically I desired her! And how passionately, from the depths of my remorse, the heights of my idealism, I loathed myself for doing so! When I got back from the lab, I tried to have it out with her. But she put me off. It wasn’t the time, it wasn’t the place. Beulah might come in, or Nurse Koppers. It would be better in the evening, when we could be quiet. And so, that evening she came to my room. In the darkness, in the perfumed field of her womanhood, I tried to tell her all the things I had been unable to tell her that morning — that I loved her, but we mustn’t; that I had never been so happy, nor so utterly miserable; that I would remember what had happened with the most passionate gratitude, all my life long, and that tomorrow I would pack my bags and go and never, never see her again. At that point my voice broke and I found myself sobbing. This time it was Katy’s turn to say, ‘Don’t cry,’ to offer the consolation of a hand on the shoulder, an encircling arm; the outcome, of course, was the same as it had been the night before. The same but more so — with fierier pentecosts, visitations not from mere angels, but from Thrones, Dominations, Powers; and the next morning (when, needless to say, I did not pack my bags), remorses to match the ecstasies, woodpeckers proportionately ferocious.

“Which Katy, I gather, wasn’t pecked by?”

“And resolutely refused to talk about,” Rivers added.

“But *you* must have talked about them.”

“I did my best. But it takes two to make a conversation. Whenever I tried to tell her something of what was going on in my heart and mind, she either changed the subject or else, with a little laugh, with a little indulgent pat on the back of the hand, gently but very decidedly shut me up. Would it have been better, I wonder, if we had come out into the open, courageously called a spade a phallic symbol and handed one another our quivering entrails on a silver platter? Maybe it would. Or maybe it wouldn’t. The truth shall make you free; but on the other hand, let sleeping dogs lie and, above all, let lying dogs sleep. One must never forget that the most implacable wars are never the wars about things; they’re the wars about the nonsense that eloquent idealists have talked about things — in other words, the religious wars. What’s lemonade? Something you make out of lemons. And what’s a crusade? Something you make out of crosses — a course of gratuitous violence motivated by an obsession with unanalysed symbols. ‘What do you read, my lord?’ ‘Words, words, words.’ And what’s in a word? Answer: corpses, millions of corpses. And the moral of *that* is, Keep your trap shut; or if you *must* open it, never take what comes out of it too seriously. Katy kept *our* traps firmly shut. She had the instinctive wisdom that taboos the four-letter words (and *a fortiori* the scientific polysyllables), while tacitly taking for granted the daily and nightly four-letter acts to which they refer. In silence, an act is an act is an act. Verbalized and discussed, it becomes an ethical problem, a *casus belli*, the source of a neurosis. If Katy had talked, where, I ask you, should we have been? In a labyrinth of intercommunicating guilts and anguishes. Some people, of course, enjoy that sort of thing. Others detest it, but feel, remorsefully, that they deserve to suffer. Katy (God bless her!) was neither a Methodist nor a Masochist. She was a goddess, and the silence of goddesses is genuinely golden. None of your superficial plating. A solid, twenty-four carat silence all the way through. The Olympian’s trap is kept shut, not by an act of willed discretion, but because there’s really nothing to say. Goddesses are all of one piece. There’s no internal conflict in them. Whereas the lives of people like

you and me are one long argument. Desires on one side, woodpeckers on the other. Never a moment of real silence. What I needed most at that time was a dose of justificatory good language to counteract the effect of all that vile-base-foul. But Katy wouldn't give it me. Good or bad, language was entirely beside the point. The point, so far as she was concerned, was her experience of the creative otherness of love and sleep. The point was finding herself once again in a state of grace. The point, finally, was her renewed ability to do something for Henry. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, not in the cook book. Pleasure received and given, virtue restored, Lazarus raised from the dead — the eating in this case was self-evidently good. So help yourself to the pudding and don't talk with your mouth full — it's bad manners and it prevents you from appreciating the ambrosial flavour. It was a piece of advice too good for me to be able to take. True, I didn't talk to her; she wouldn't let me. But I went on talking to myself — talking and talking till the ambrosia turned into wormwood or was contaminated by the horrible gamey taste of forbidden pleasure, of sin recognized and knowingly indulged in. And meanwhile the miracle was duly proceeding. Steadily, rapidly, without a single setback, Henry was getting better."

"Didn't that make you feel happier about things?" I asked.

Rivers nodded his head.

"In one way, yes. Because, of course, I realized even then, even in my state of imbecile innocence, that I was indirectly responsible for the miracle. I had betrayed my master; but if I hadn't, my master would probably be dead. Evil had been done; but good, an enormous good, had come of it. It was a kind of justification. On the other hand how horrible it seemed that grace for Katy and life for her husband should be dependent on something so intrinsically low, so utterly vile-base-foul, as bodies and their sexual satisfaction! All my idealism revolted against the notion. And yet it was obviously true."

"And Henry?" I asked. "How much did he know or suspect about the origins of the miracle?"

"Nothing," Rivers answered emphatically. "No, less than nothing. He was in a mood, as he emerged from the sepulchre, in which suspicion was unthinkable.

‘Rivers,’ he said to me one day when he was well enough to have me come and read to him, ‘I want to talk to you. About Katy,’ he added after a little pause. My heart stopped beating. This was the moment I had dreaded. ‘You remember that night just before I got ill?’ he went on. ‘I wasn’t in my right mind. I said all kinds of things that I oughtn’t to have said, things that weren’t true, things, for example, about Katy and that doctor from Johns Hopkins.’ But the doctor from Johns Hopkins, as he had now discovered, was a cripple. And even if the man hadn’t had infantile paralysis as a boy, Katy was utterly incapable of even thinking anything of the kind. And in a voice that trembled with feeling he proceeded to tell me how wonderful Katy was, how unspeakably fortunate he had been to win and hold a wife at once so good, so beautiful, so sensible and yet so sensitive, so strong and faithful and devoted. Without her, he would have gone mad, broken down, fizzled out. And now she had saved his life, and the thought that he had said those wild, bad, senseless things about her tormented him. So would I please forget them or, if I remembered, remember them only as the ravings of a sick man. It was a relief, of course, not to have been found out, and yet, in some ways, this was worse — worse because the display of so much trust, such abysmal ignorance, made me feel ashamed of myself — and not only of myself, of Katy too. We were a pair of cheats, conspiring against a simpleton — a simpleton who, for sentimental reasons which did him nothing but credit, was doing his best to make himself even more innocent than he was by nature.

“That evening I managed to say a little of what was on my mind. At first she tried to stop my mouth with kisses. Then, when I pushed her away, she grew angry and threatened to go back to her room. I had the sacrilegious courage to restrain her by brute force. ‘You’ve got to listen,’ I said as she struggled to free herself. And holding her at arm’s length, as one holds a dangerous animal, I poured out my tale of moral anguish. Katy heard me out; then, when it was all over, she laughed. Not sarcastically, not with the intention of wounding me, but from the sunny depths of a goddess’s amusement. ‘*You* can’t bear it,’ she teased. ‘*You’re* too noble to be a party to a deception! Can’t you ever think of anything but your own precious self? Think of *me*, for a change, think of Henry! A sick

genius and the poor woman whose job it's been to keep the sick genius alive and tolerably sane. His huge, crazy intellect against my instincts, his inhuman denial of life against the flow of life in me. It wasn't easy, I've had to fight with every weapon that came to hand. And now here I have to listen to you — talking the most nauseous kind of Sunday School twaddle, daring to tell me — *me!* — you cannot live a lie — like George Washington and the cherry tree. You make me tired. I'm going to sleep.' She yawned and, rolling over on her side, turned her back on me — the back," Rivers added with a little snort of laughter, "the infinitely eloquent back (if you perused it in the dark, like Braille, with your fingertips), of Aphrodite Callipyge. And that, my friend, *that* was as near as Katy ever got to an explanation or an apologia. It left me no wiser than I was before. Indeed it left me considerably less wise; for her words prompted me to ask myself a lot of questions, to which she never vouchsafed any answers. Had she implied, for example, that this sort of thing was inevitable — at least in the circumstances of her own marriage? Had it, in actual fact, happened before? And if so, when, how often, with whom?"

"Did you ever find out?" I asked.

Rivers shook his head.

"I never got further than wondering and imagining — my God, how vividly! Which was enough, of course, to make me more miserable than I'd ever been. More miserable, and at the same time more frenziedly amorous. Why is it that, when you suspect a woman you love of having made love to somebody else, you should feel such a heightening of desire? I had loved Katy to the limit. Now I found myself loving her beyond the limit, loving her desperately and insatiably, loving her with a vengeance, if you know what I mean. Katy herself soon noticed it. 'You've been looking at me,' she complained two evenings later, 'as though you were on a desert island and I were a beef steak. Don't do it. People will notice. Besides, I'm *not* a beef steak, I'm an uncooked human being. And anyhow Henry's almost well again, and the children will be coming home tomorrow. Things will have to go back to what they were before. We've got to be sensible.' To be sensible … I promised — for tomorrow. Meanwhile — put

out the light! — there was this love with a vengeance, this desire which, even in the frenzy of its consummation, retained a quality of despair. The hours passed and in due course it was tomorrow — dawn between the curtains, birds in the garden, the anguish of the final embrace, the reiterated promises that I would be sensible. And how faithfully I kept the promise! After breakfast I went up to Henry's room and read him Rutherford's article in the latest issue of *Nature.* And when Katy came in from her marketing, I called her 'Mrs Maartens' and did my best to look as radiantly serene as she did. Which in my case, of course, was hypocrisy. In hers it was just a manifestation of the Olympian nature. A little before lunch, the children came home, bag and baggage, in a cab. Katy was always the all-seeing mother; but her all-seeingness was tempered generally, by an easy tolerance of childish failings. This time, for some reason, it was different. Perhaps it was the miracle of Henry's recovery that had gone to her head, that had given her not only a sense of power but also a desire to exercise that power in other ways. Perhaps, too, she had been intoxicated by her sudden restoration, after all those nightmare weeks, to a state of animal grace through satisfied desire. Anyhow, whatever the cause may have been, whatever the attenuating circumstances, the fact remained that, on that particular day, Katy was too all-seeing by half. She loved her children and their return filled her with joy; and yet she was under a kind of compulsion, as soon as she saw them, to criticize, to find fault, to throw her maternal weight around. Within two minutes of their arrival she had pounced on Timmy for having dirty ears; within three, she had made Ruth confess that she was constipated; and, within four, had inferred, from the fact that the child didn't want anyone to unpack for her, that she must be hiding some guilty secret. And there — when, at Katy's orders, Beulah had opened the suitcase — there the poor little guilty secret lay revealed: a boxful of cosmetics and the half empty bottle of synthetic violets. At the best of times Katy would have disapproved — but would have disapproved with sympathy, with an understanding chuckle. On this occasion, her disapproval was loud and sarcastic. She had the make-up kit thrown into the garbage can and herself, with an expression of nauseated disgust, poured the perfume into the

toilet and pulled the plug. By the time we sat down to our meal, the poetess, red-faced and her eyes still swollen with crying, hated everybody — hated her mother for having humiliated her, hated Beulah for having been such a good prophet, hated poor Mrs Hanbury for being dead and therefore in no further need of Katy's ministrations, hated Henry for being well enough to have permitted this disastrous home-coming, and hated me because I had treated her as a child, had said her love poem was lousy and had shown, still more unforgivably, that I preferred her mother's company to her own.

"Did she suspect anything?" I asked.

"She probably suspected everything," Rivers answered.

"But I thought you were being sensible."

"We were. But Ruth had always been jealous of her mother. And now her mother had hurt her, and at the same time she knew — theoretically, of course, but in terms of the most violent and overblown language — the sort of things that happen when men and women like one another. Ache of purple pulses; lips intertwisted and bitten. Etcetera. Even if nothing had ever happened between Katy and me, she'd have believed that it had, and hated us accordingly, hated us with this new, more implacable kind of hate. In the past her hates had never lasted for more than a day or two. This time it was different. The hatred was unrelenting. For days on end she refused to talk to us, but sat there through every meal, in a black silence, pregnant with unspoken criticisms and condemnations. Poor little Ruth! Dolores-Salome was, of course, a fiction, but a fiction founded on the solid facts of puberty. In outraging the fiction Katy and I, in our different ways, had outraged something real, something that was a living part of the child's personality. She had come home with her perfume and her make-up, with her brand new breasts and her brand new vocabulary, with Algernon's notions and Oscar's sentiments — had come home full of vaguely wonderful expectations, vaguely horrifying apprehensions; and what had happened to her? The insult of being treated as what, in fact, she still was: an irresponsible child. The outrage of not being taken seriously. The hurt and humiliation of finding herself rejected by the man she had chosen as her victim and Bluebeard, in

favour of another woman — and, to make matters worse, the other woman was her own mother. Was it any wonder that all my efforts to laugh or cajole her out of her black mood were unavailing? ‘Leave her alone,’ was Katy’s advice. ‘Let her stew in her own juice, until she gets sick of it.’ But the days passed and Ruth showed no signs of getting sick of it. On the contrary, she seemed to be enjoying the bitter tastes of wounded pride, of jealousy and suspicion. And then, about a week after the children’s return, something happened that turned chronic grievance into the acutest, the most ferocious animosity.

“Henry was now well enough to sit up, to walk about his room. A few days more and he would be fully convalescent. ‘Let him spend a few weeks in the country,’ the doctor advised. But what with the bad weather in early spring, what with Katy’s absence in Chicago, the weekend farm house had been closed since Christmas. Before it could be lived in again, it would have to be aired and dusted and provisioned. ‘Let’s go and do the job tomorrow,’ Katy suggested to me one morning at breakfast. Startlingly, like a prairie dog popping out of its burrow, Ruth emerged from the depths of her malevolent silence. Tomorrow, she muttered angrily, she’d be at school. And *that*, Katy answered, was why tomorrow would be such a good day for doing the necessary chores. No work-shy poetesses mooning around and getting in the way. ‘But I *must* come,’ Ruth insisted with a strange kind of muffled violence. ‘Must?’ Katy echoed. ‘Why *must*?’ Ruth looked at her mother for a moment, then dropped her eyes. ‘Because …’ she began, thought better of it and broke off. ‘Because I want to,’ she concluded lamely. Katy laughed and told her not to be silly. ‘We’ll get off early,’ she said, turning back to me, ‘and take a picnic basket.’ The child turned very pale, tried to eat her toast but couldn’t swallow, asked to be excused and, without waiting for an answer, got up and ran out of the room. When I saw her again that afternoon, her face was a mask, blank but somehow menacing, of controlled hostility.”

From outside, in the hall, I had heard the creak of the front door being opened, then the bang of its closing. And now there was the sound of footsteps and low voices. Rivers broke off and looked at his watch.

“Only ten after eleven,” he said, and shook his head. Then, raising his voice, “Molly!” he called. “Is that you?”

Open on a square of smooth white skin, on pearls and the bodice of a scarlet evening gown, a mink coat appeared in the doorway. Above it was a young face that would have been beautiful, if its expression had been less bitterly sullen.

“Was it a nice party?” Rivers asked.

“Stinking,” said the young woman. “That’s why we’re home so early. Isn’t it, Fred?” she added, turning to a dark-haired young man who had followed her into the room. The young man gave her a look of cold distaste, and turned away. “Isn’t it?” she repeated more loudly, with a note in her voice almost of anguish.

A faint smile appeared on the averted face and there was a shrug of the broad shoulders, but no answer.

Rivers turned to me.

“You’ve met my little Molly, haven’t you?”

“When she was *so* high.”

“And this,” he waved his hand in the direction of the dark young man, “is my son-in-law, Fred Shaughnessy.”

I said I was pleased to meet him; but the young man didn’t even look at me. There was a silence.

Molly drew a jewelled hand across her eyes.

“I’ve got a splitting headache,” she muttered. “Guess I’ll go to bed.”

She started to walk away; then halted and, with what was evidently an enormous effort, brought herself to say, “Good night.”

“Good night,” we said in chorus. But she was already gone. Without a word, as though he were a gunman on her trail, the young man turned and followed her. Rivers sighed profoundly.

“They’ve got to the point,” he said, “where sex seems pretty dull unless it’s the consummation of a quarrel. And *that*, if you please, is little Bimbo’s destiny. Either life as the child of a divorced mother with a succession, until she loses her looks, of lovers or husbands. Or else life as the the child of two parents who ought to be divorced but can never separate because they share an unavowable

taste for torturing and being tortured. And there's nothing in either eventuality that I can do about it. Whatever happens, the child has got to go through hell. Maybe he'll emerge all the better and stronger for it. Maybe he'll be utterly destroyed. Who knows? Certainly not *these* boys!" He pointed with the stem of his pipe at a long shelf of Freudians and Jungians. "Psychology-fiction! It makes pleasant reading, it's even rather instructive. But how much does it explain? Everything except the essentials, everything except the two things that finally determine the course of our lives, Predestination and Grace. Look at Molly, for example. She had a mother who knew how to love without wanting to possess. She had a father who at least had sense enough to try to follow his wife's example. She had two sisters who were happy as children and grew up to be successful wives and mothers. There were no quarrels in the household, no chronic tensions, no tragedies or explosions. By all the rules of psychology-fiction, Molly ought to be thoroughly sane and contented. Instead of which …" He left the sentence unfinished. "And then there's the other kind of Predestination. Not the inner Predestination of temperament and character, but the Predestination of events — the kind of Predestination that lay in wait for me and Ruth and Katy. Even through the wrong end of the opera glasses one doesn't like to look at it."

There was a long silence, which I did not presume to break.

"Well," he said at last, "let's get back to Ruth, let's get back to that afternoon of the day before the picnic. I came home from the laboratory, and there was Ruth in the living-room, reading. She didn't look up as I came in, so I put on my breeziest bedside manner and said, 'Hullo, kiddums!' She turned and gave me a long, unsmiling, balefully blank look, then went back to her book. This time I tried a literary gambit. 'Have you been writing any more poetry?' I asked. 'Yes, I have,' she said emphatically, and there was a little smile on her face more baleful even than the previous blankness. 'May I see it?' To my great surprise, she said yes. The thing wasn't quite finished; but tomorrow without fail. I forgot all about the promise; but the next morning, sure enough, as she was leaving for school, Ruth handed me one of her mauve envelopes. 'Here it is,' she said. 'I

hope you'll like it.' And giving me another menacing smile, she hurried after Timmy. I was too busy to read the poem immediately, so I slipped the envelope into my pocket and went on with the job of loading the car. Bedding, cutlery, kerosene — I piled the stuff in. Half an hour later we were off. Beulah shouted goodbye from the front steps, Henry waved at us from an upstairs window. Katy waved back and blew a kiss. 'I feel like John Gilpin,' she said happily as we turned out of the driveway. '*All agog to dash through thick and thin.*' It was one of those lyrical days in early May, one of those positively Shakespearean mornings. There had been rain in the night, and now all the trees were curtseying to a fresh wind; the young leaves glittered like jewels in the sunlight; the great marbly clouds on the horizons were something Michelangelo had dreamed in a moment of ecstatic happiness and superhuman power. And then there were the flowers. Flowers in the suburban gardens, flowers in the woods and fields beyond; and every flower had the conscious beauty of a beloved face, and its fragrance was a secret from the Other World, its petals had the smoothness, under the fingers of my imagination, the silky coolness and resilience of living skin. It goes without saying, of course, that we were still being sensible. But the world was tipsy with its own perfections, crazy with excess of life. We did our work, we ate our picnic lunch, we smoked our cigarettes on deck-chairs in the sun. But the sunwas too hot and we decided to finish our nap indoors; and then what anybody could have told us would happen duly happened … Happened, as I suddenly discovered between two ecstasies, under the eyes of a three-quarter length portrait of Henry Maartens, commissioned and presented to him by the directors of some big electrical company that had profited by his professional advice, and so monstrous in its photographic realism that it had been relegated to the spare bedroom at the farm. It was one of those portraits that are always looking at you, like Big Brother in Orwell's *1984*. I turned my head, and there it was in its black cutaway coat, solemnly glaring — the very embodiment of public opinion, the painted symbol and projection of my own guilty conscience. And next to the portrait was a Victorian wardrobe with a looking-glass door that reflected the tree outside the window and, within the room, part of the bed, part

of two bodies dappled with sunlight and the moving shadows of oak leaves. ‘Forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ But here, what with the portrait and the mirror, there was no possibility of ignorance. And the knowledge of what we had done became even more disquieting when, half an hour later, as I put on my jacket, I heard the crackle of stiff paper in a side pocket, and remembered Ruth’s mauve envelope. The poem, this time, was a narrative, in four-line stanzas, a kind of ballad about two adulterers, a faithless wife and her lover, before the bar of God at the Last Judgment. Standing there in the huge, accusing silence, they feel themselves being stripped by invisible hands of all their disguises, garment after garment, until at last they’re stark naked. More than stark naked, indeed; for their resurrected bodies are transparent. Lights and liver, bladder and guts, every organ, with its specific excrement — all, all are revoltingly visible. And suddenly they find that they are not alone, but on a stage, under spotlights, in the midst of millions of spectators, tier on tier of them, retching with uncontrollable disgust as they look, or jeering, denouncing, calling for vengeance, howling for the whip and the branding iron. There was a kind of Early Christian malignity about the piece, which was all the more terrifying because Ruth had been brought up completely outside the pale of that hideous kind of fundamentalism. Judgment, hell, eternal punishment — these weren’t things she’d been taught to believe in. They were notions she had adopted for her own special purposes, in order to express what she felt about her mother and myself. Jealousy, to begin with; jealousy and rebuffed love, hurt vanity, angry resentment. And the resentment had to be given a respectable motive, the anger transformed into righteous indignation. She suspected the worst of us so that she might be justified in feeling the worst. And she suspected the worst so vehemently that, in next to no time, she wasn’t guessing any more, she *knew* that we were guilty. And, knowing it, the child in her was outraged, the woman felt more bitterly, vengefully jealous than before. With a horrible sinking of the heart, a mounting terror in the face of an incalculable future, I read the thing to the end, read it again, then turned to where Katy was sitting before the mirror on the dressing-table, pinning up her hair, smiling at the radiantly smiling image of

a goddess, and humming a tune out of 'The Marriage of Figaro.' *Dove sono i bei momenti Di dolcezza e di piacer?* I had always admired that divine unconcern of hers, that Olympian *je m'en foutisme.* Now, suddenly, it enraged me. She had no right not to be feeling what the reading of Ruth's poem had made me feel. 'Do you want to know,' I said, 'why our little Ruthy has been acting the way she has? Do you want to know what she really thinks of us?' And crossing the room, I handed her the two sheets of purple notepaper on which the child had copied out her poem. Katy started to read. Studying her face I saw the original look of amusement (for Ruth's poetry was a standing joke in the family) give place to an expression of serious, concentrated attention. Then a vertical wrinkle appeared on the forehead between the eyes. The frown deepened and, as she turned to the second page, she bit her lip. The goddess, after all, was vulnerable … I had scored my point; but it was a poor sort of triumph that ended with there being two bewildered rabbits in the trap instead of one. And it was the kind of trap that Katy was totally unequipped to get out of. Most uncomfortable situations she just ignored, just sailed through as though they didn't exist. And in effect, if she went on ignoring them long enough and serenely enough, they stopped existing. The people she had offended forgave her, because she was so beautiful and good-humoured; the people who had worried themselves sick, or made complications for others, succumbed to the contagion of her god-like indifference and momentarily forgot to be neurotic or malignant. And when the technique of being serenely unaware didn't work, there was her other gambit — the technique of rushing in where angels fear to tread; the technique of being gaily tactless, of making enormous bloomers in all innocence and simplicity, of uttering the most unmentionable truths with the most irresistible of smiles. But this was a case where neither of these methods would work. If she said nothing, Ruth would go on acting as she had acted up till now. And if she rushed in and said everything, God only knew what a disturbed adolescent might do. And meanwhile there was Henry to think of, there was her own future as the sole and, we were all convinced, the utterly indispensable support of a sick genius and his children. Ruth was in the position, and might even now be in the mood, to pull

down the whole temple of their lives for the sake of spiting her mother. And there was nothing that a woman who had the temperament of a goddess, without the goddess's omnipotence, could do about it. There was, however, something that *I* could do; and as we discussed our situation — for the first time, remember, since there had been a situation to discuss! — it became more and more clear what that something was. I could do what I had felt I ought to do after that first apocalyptic night — clear out.

"Katy wouldn't hear of it at first, and I had to argue with her all the way home — argue against myself, against my own happiness. In the end she was convinced. It was the only way out of the trap.

"Ruth eyed us, when we got home, like a detective searching for clues. Then she asked me if I had liked her poem. I told her — which was strictly true — that it was the best thing she had ever written. She was pleased, but did her best not to show it. The smile which lit up her face was almost instantly repressed and she asked me, in an intently meaningful way, what I had thought of the poem's subject. I was prepared for the question and answered with an indulgent chuckle. It reminded me, I said, of the sermons my poor dear father used to preach in Lent. Then I looked at my watch, said something about urgent work and left her, as I could see by the expression on her face, discomfited. She had looked forward, I suppose, to a scene in which she would play the coldly implacable judge, while I, the culprit, gave an exhibition of cringing evasion, or broke down and confessed. But, instead, the culprit had laughed and the judge had been treated to an irrelevant joke about clergymen. I had won a skirmish; but the war still raged and could be ended, it was plain enough, only by my retreat.

"Two days later it was Friday and, as happened every Friday, the postman had brought my mother's weekly letter and Beulah, when she set the table for breakfast, had propped it conspicuously (for she was all for mothers) against my coffee cup. I opened, read, looked grave, read again, then lapsed into preoccupied silence. Katy took the cue and asked solicitously if I had had bad news. To which I answered, of course, that it wasn't too good. My mother's health … The alibi had been prepared. By that evening it was all settled.

Officially, as the head of the laboratory, Henry gave me two weeks' leave of absence. I would take the ten-thirty on Sunday morning and, in the interval, on Saturday, we would all escort the convalescent to the farm and have a farewell picnic.

"There were too many of us for one car; so Katy and the children went ahead in the family Overland. Henry and Beulah, with most of their luggage, followed in the Maxwell with me. The others had a good start of us; for when we were half a mile from home, Henry discovered, as usual, that he had forgotten some absolutely indispensable book, and we had to drive back and look for it. Ten minutes later we were on our way again. On our way, as it turned out, to that meeting with Predestination."

Rivers finished his whisky and knocked out his pipe.

"Even through the wrong end of the opera glasses, even in another universe, inhabited by different people …" He shook his head. "There are certain things that are simply inadmissible." There was a pause. "Well, let's get it over with," he said at last. "About two miles this side of the farm there was a cross-road where you had to turn left. It was in a wood and the leaves were so thick you couldn't see what was coming from either side. When we got there, I slowed down, I honked my horn, I put the car into low and turned. And suddenly, as I rounded the bend, there was the Overland roadster in the ditch, upside down, and near it a big truck with its radiator smashed in. And between the two cars was a young man in blue denims kneeling by a child, who was screaming. Ten or fifteen feet away there were two things that looked like bundles of old clothes, like garbage — garbage with blood on it."

There was another silence.

"Were they dead?" I finally asked.

"Katy died a few minutes after we came on the scene, and Ruth died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. Timmy was being reserved for a worse death at Okinawa; he got off with some cuts and a couple of broken ribs. He was sitting at the back, he told us, with Katy driving, and Ruth beside her on the front seat. The two of them had been having an argument, and Ruth was mad about

something — he didn’t know what, because he wasn’t listening; he was thinking of a way of electrifying his clockwork train and anyhow he never paid much attention to what Ruth said when she was mad. If you paid attention to her, it just made things worse. But his mother *had* paid attention. He remembered her saying, ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about,’ and then, ‘I forbid you to say those things.’ And then they turned the corner, and they were going too fast and she didn’t honk the horn and that huge truck hit them broadside on. So you see,” Rivers concluded, “it was really both kinds of Predestination. The Predestination of events, and at the same time the Predestination of two temperaments, Ruth’s and Katy’s — the temperament of an outraged child, who was also a jealous woman; and the temperament of a goddess, cornered by circumstances and suddenly realizing that, objectively, she was only a human being, for whom the Olympian temperament might actually be a handicap. And the discovery was so disturbing that it made her careless, left her incapable of dealing adequately with the events by which she was predestined to be destroyed — and destroyed (but this was for *my* benefit, of course, this was an item in *my* psychological Predestination) with every refinement of physical outrage — an eye put out by a splinter of glass, the nose and lips and chin almost obliterated, rubbed out on the bloody macadam of the road. And there was a crushed right hand and the jagged ends of a broken shin-bone showing through the stocking. It was something I dreamed about almost every night. Katy with her back to me; and she was either on the bed in the farmhouse, or else standing by the window in my room, throwing the shawl over her shoulders. Then she’d turn and look at me, and there was no face, only that expanse of scraped flesh, and I’d wake up screaming. I got to the point where I didn’t dare to go to sleep at night.”

Listening to him, I remembered that young John Rivers whom, to my great surprise, I had found at Beirut, in twenty-four, teaching physics at the American University.

“Was that why you looked so horribly ill?” I asked.

He nodded his head.

“Too little sleep and too much memory,” he said. “I was afraid of going mad, and rather than go mad, I’d decided to kill myself. Then, just in the nick of time, Predestination got to work and came up with the only brand of saving Grace that could do me any good. I met Helen.”

“At the same cocktail party,” I put in, “where I met her. Do you remember?”

“Sorry, I don’t. I don’t remember anybody on that occasion except Helen. If you’ve been saved from drowning, you remember the life-guard, but not the spectators on the pier.”

“No wonder I never had a chance!” I said. “At the time I used to think, rather bitterly, that it was because women, even the best of them, even the rare extraordinary Helens, prefer good looks to artistic sensibility, prefer brawn with brains (for I was forced to admit that you had some brains!) to brains with that exquisite *je ne sais quoi* which was *my* specialty. Now I see what your irresistible attraction was. You were unhappy.”

He nodded his agreement, and there was a long silence. A clock struck twelve.

“Merry Christmas,” I said and, finishing off my whisky, I got up to go. “You haven’t told me what happened to poor old Henry after the accident.”

“Well, he began, of course, by having a relapse. Not a very bad one. He had nothing to gain, this time, by going to death’s door. Just a mild affair. Katy’s sister came down for the funeral and stayed on to look after him. She was like a caricature of Katy. Fat, florid, loud. Not a goddess disguised as a peasant — a barmaid imagining she was a goddess. She was a widow. Four months later Henry married her. I’d gone to Beirut by that time; so I never witnessed their connubial bliss. But from all accounts it was considerable. But the poor woman couldn’t keep her weight down. She died in thirty-five. Henry quickly found himself a young redhead, called Alicia. Alicia wanted to be admired for her thirty-eight inch bust, but still more for her two-hundred inch intellect. ‘What do you think of Schroedinger?’ you’d ask him; but it would be Alicia who answered. She saw him through to the end.”

“When did you see him last?” I asked.

“Just a few months before he died. Eighty-seven and still amazingly active, still chock-full of what his biographer likes to call ‘the undiminished blaze of intellectual power.’ To me he seemed like an overwound clockwork monkey. Clockwork ratiocination; clockwork gestures, clockwork smiles and grimaces. And then there was the conversation. What amazingly realistic tape recordings of the old anecdotes about Planck and Rutherford and J. J. Thompson! Of his celebrated soliloquies about Logical Positivism and Cybernetics! Of reminiscences about those exciting war years when he was working on the A-Bomb! Of his gaily apocalyptic speculations about the bigger and better Infernal Machines of the future! You could have sworn that it was a real human being who was talking. But gradually, as you went on listening, you began to realize that there was nobody at home. The tapes were being reeled off automatically, it was *vox et praeterea nihil* — the voice of Henry Maartens without his presence.”

“But isn’t that the thing you were recommending?” I asked. “Dying every moment.”

“But Henry hadn’t died. That’s the whole point. He’d merely left the clockwork running and gone somewhere else.”

“Gone where?”

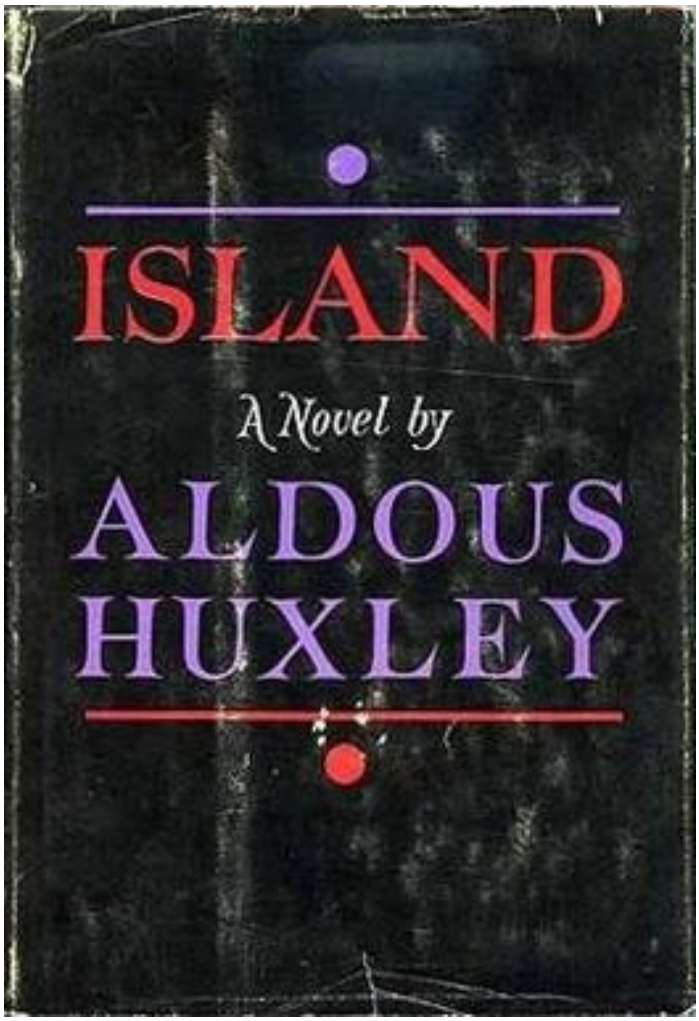
“God knows. Into some kind of infantile burrow in his subconscious, I suppose. Outside, for all to see and hear, was that stupendous clockwork monkey, that undiminished blaze of intellectual power. Inside there lurked the miserable little creature who still needed flattery and reassurance and sex and a womb-substitute — the creature who would have to face the music on Henry’s death-bed. *That* was still frantically alive and unprepared, by any preliminary dying, totally unprepared for the decisive moment. Well, the decisive moment is over now and whatever remains of poor old Henry is probably squeaking and gibbering in the streets of Los Alamos, or maybe around the bed of his widow and her new husband. And of course nobody pays any attention, nobody gives a damn. Quite rightly. Let the dead bury their dead. And now you want to go.” He got up, took my arm and walked me out into the hall. “Drive carefully,” he said

as he opened the front door. “This is a Christian country and it’s the Saviour’s birthday. Practically everybody you see will be drunk.”

Island

First published in America in 1962 by Harper & Brothers, *Island* is yet another utopian novel and the author's last work, released only a year before he died on 22 November 1963. He wrote it during a period of declining health, while he was suffering from laryngeal cancer; in fact, Huxley nearly lost the manuscript completely in 1961, when his house burned down. In his dystopian books, a central theme is that of human development being subordinated to technological progress, but Huxley also voices Malthusian fears of the supposed dangers of overpopulation and addresses topics such as individual freedom, medicine and mysticism. Many of these subjects feature in *Island* too, but this time Huxley is interested in exploring how technology, science, the arts and religion can be combined positively to create a good society.

The novel tells the story of Will Farnaby, a frustrated journalist, who arrives at the fictional island of Pala, where he is tasked with trying to secure the rights to the island's oil reserves for a British businessman. Farnaby explores the country and soon discovers a society built on peace, happiness, intellectual and cultural pursuits and mysticism. He also partakes in the practice of using of psychedelic drugs to alleviate past trauma and facilitate self-discovery and knowledge. The inhabitants of Pala have rejected rampant consumerism and capitalism and have not allowed themselves to become subsumed by technology. However, this idyllic life on the island is under threat by an invading kingdom that wishes to establish dictatorial control over the population.



The US first edition

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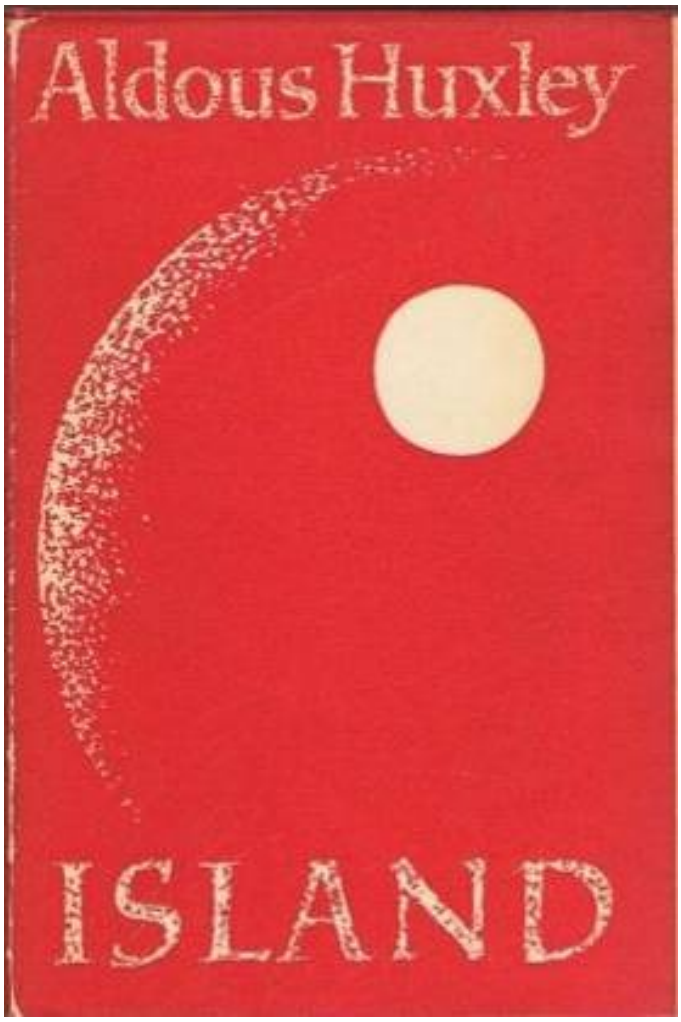

The UK first edition cover

CHAPTER ONE

"ATTENTION," A VOICE began to call, and it was as though an oboe had suddenly become articulate. "Attention," it repeated in the same high, nasal monotone. "Attention."

Lying there like a corpse in the dead leaves, his hair matted, his face grotesquely smudged and bruised, his clothes in rags and muddy, Will Farnaby awoke with a start. Molly had called him. Time to get up. Time to get dressed. Mustn't be late at the office.

"Thank you, darling," he said and sat up. A sharp pain stabbed at his right knee and there were other kinds of pain in his back, his arms, his forehead.

"Attention," the voice insisted without the slightest change of tone. Leaning on one elbow, Will looked about him and saw with bewilderment, not the grey wallpaper and yellow curtains of his London bedroom, but a glade among trees and the long shadows and slanting lights of early morning in a forest.

"Attention"?

Why did she say, "Attention"?

"Attention. Attention," the voice insisted — how strangely, how senselessly!

"Molly?" he questioned. "Molly?"

The name seemed to open a window inside his head. Suddenly, with that horribly familiar sense of guilt at the pit of the stomach, he smelt formaldehyde, he saw the small brisk nurse hurrying ahead of him along the green corridor, heard the dry creaking of her starched clothes. "Number fifty-five," she was saying, and then halted, opened a white door. He entered and there, on a high white bed, was Molly. Molly with bandages covering half her face and the mouth hanging cavernously open. "Molly," he had called, "Molly …" His voice had broken, and he was crying, was imploring now, "My darling!" There was no answer. Through the gaping mouth the quick shallow breaths came noisily,

again, again. “My darling, my darling …” And then suddenly the hand he was holding came to life for a moment. Then was still again.

“It’s me,” he said, “it’s Will.”

Once more the fingers stirred. Slowly, with what was evidently an enormous effort, they closed themselves over his own, pressed them for a moment and then relaxed again into lifelessness.

“Attention,” called the inhuman voice. “Attention.”

It had been an accident, he hastened to assure himself. The road was wet, the car had skidded across the white line. It was one of those things that happen all the time. The papers are full of them; he had reported them by the dozen. “Mother and three children killed in head-on crash …” But that was beside the point. The point was that, when she asked him if it was really the end, he had said yes; the point was that less than an hour after she had walked out from that last shameful interview into the rain, Molly was in the ambulance, dying.

He hadn’t looked at her as she turned to go, hadn’t dared to look at her. Another glimpse of that pale suffering face might have been too much for him. She had risen from her chair and was moving slowly across the room, moving slowly out of his life. Shouldn’t he call her back, ask her forgiveness, tell her that he still loved her? Had he ever loved her?

For the hundredth time the articulate oboe called him to attention.

Yes, had he ever really loved her?

“Good-bye, Will,” came her remembered whisper as she turned back on the threshold. And then it was *she* who had said it — in a whisper, from the depths of her heart. “I still love you, Will — in spite of everything.”

A moment later the door of the flat closed behind her almost without a sound. The little dry click of the latch, and she was gone.

He had jumped up, had run to the front door and opened it, had listened to the retreating footsteps on the stairs. Like a ghost at cock-crow, a faint familiar perfume lingered vanishingly on the air. He closed the door again, walked into his grey and yellow bedroom and looked out of the window. A few seconds passed, then he saw her crossing the pavement and getting into the car. He heard

the shrill grinding of the starter, once, twice, and after that the drumming of the motor. Should he open the window? “Wait, Molly, wait,” he heard himself shouting in imagination. The window remained unopened; the car began to move, turned the corner and the street was empty. It was too late. Too late, thank God! said a gross derisive voice. Yes, thank God! And yet the guilt was there at the pit of his stomach. The guilt, the gnawing of his remorse — but through the remorse he could feel a horrible rejoicing. Somebody low and lewd and brutal, somebody alien and odious who was yet himself was gleefully thinking that now there was nothing to prevent him from having what he wanted. And what he wanted was a different perfume, was the warmth and resilience of a younger body. “Attention,” said the oboe. Yes, attention. Attention to Babs’s musky bedroom, with its strawberry-pink alcove and the two windows that looked on to the Charing Cross Road and were looked into, all night long, by the winking glare of the big sky sign for Porter’s Gin on the opposite side of the street. Gin in royal crimson — and for ten seconds the alcove was the Sacred Heart, for ten miraculous seconds the flushed face so close to his own glowed like a seraph’s, transfigured as though by an inner fire of love. Then came the yet profounder transfiguration of darkness. One, two, three, four … Ah God, make it go on forever! But punctually at the count of ten the electric clock would turn on another revelation — but of death, of the Essential Horror; for the lights, this time, were green, and for ten hideous seconds Babs’s rosy alcove became a womb of mud and, on the bed, Babs herself was corpse-coloured, a cadaver galvanized into posthumous epilepsy. When Porter’s Gin proclaimed itself in green, it was hard to forget what had happened and who one was. The only thing to do was to shut one’s eyes and plunge, if one could, more deeply into the Other World of sensuality, plunge violently, plunge deliberately into those alienating frenzies to which poor Molly — Molly (‘Attention’) in her bandages, Molly in her wet grave at Highgate, and Highgate, of course, was why one had to shut one’s eyes each time that the green light made a corpse of Babs’ nakedness — had always and so utterly been a stranger. And not only Molly. Behind his closed eyelids, Will saw his mother, pale like a cameo, her face spiritualized by

accepted suffering, her hands made monstrous and subhuman by arthritis. His mother and, standing behind her wheelchair, already running to fat and quivering like calves'-foot jelly with all the feelings that had never found their proper expression in consummated love, was his sister Maud.

"How can you, Will?"

"Yes, how can you," Maud echoed tearfully in her vibrating contralto.

There was no answer. No answer, that was to say, in any words that could be uttered in their presence, that, uttered, those two martyrs — the mother to her unhappy marriage, the daughter to filial piety — could possibly understand. No answer except in words of the most obscenely scientific objectivity, the most inadmissible frankness. How could he do it? He could do it, for all practical purposes was compelled to do it, because … well because Babs had certain physical peculiarities which Molly did not possess and behaved at certain moments in ways which Molly would have found unthinkable.

There had been a long silence; but now, abruptly, the strange voice took up its old refrain.

"Attention. Attention."

Attention to Molly, attention to Maud and his mother, attention to Babs. And suddenly another memory emerged from the fog of vagueness and confusion. Babs' strawberry-pink alcove sheltered another guest, and its owner's body was shuddering ecstatically under somebody else's caresses. To the guilt in the stomach was added an anguish about the heart, a constriction of the throat.

"Attention."

The voice had come nearer, was calling from somewhere over there to the right. He turned his head, he tried to raise himself for a better view; but the arm that supported his weight began to tremble, then gave way, and he fell back into the leaves. Too tired to go on remembering, he lay there for a long time staring up through half-closed lids, at the incomprehensible world around him. Where was he and how on earth had he got here? Not that this was of any importance. At the moment nothing was of any importance except this pain, this annihilating weakness. All the same, just as a matter of scientific interest …

This tree, for example, under which (for no known reason) he found himself lying, this column of grey bark with the groining, high up, of sun-speckled branches, this ought by rights to be a beech tree. But in that case — and Will admired himself for being so lucidly logical — in that case the leaves had no right to be so obviously evergreen. And why would a beech tree send its roots elbowing up like this above the surface of the ground? And those preposterous wooden buttresses, on which the pseudo-beech supported itself — where did *those* fit into the picture? Will remembered suddenly his favourite worst line of poetry. “Who prop, thou ask’st, in these bad days my mind?” Answer: congealed ectoplasm, Early Dali. Which definitely ruled out the Chilterns. So did the butterflies swooping out there in the thick buttery sunshine. Why were they so large, so improbably cerulean or velvet-black, so extravagantly eyed and freckled? Purple staring out of chestnut, silver powdered over emerald, over topaz, over sapphire.

“Attention.”

“Who’s there?” Will Farnaby called in what he intended to be a loud and formidable tone; but all that came out of his mouth was a thin, quavering croak.

There was a long and, it seemed, profoundly menacing silence. From the hollow between two of the tree’s wooden buttresses an enormous black centipede emerged for a moment into view, then hurried away on its regiment of crimson legs and vanished into another cleft in the lichen-covered ectoplasm.

“Who’s there?” he croaked again.

There was a rustling in the bushes on his left and suddenly, like a cuckoo from a nursery clock, out popped a large black bird, the size of a jackdaw — only, needless to say, it wasn’t a jackdaw. It clapped a pair of white-tipped wings and, darting across the intervening space, settled on the lowest branch of a small dead tree, not twenty feet from where Will was lying. Its beak, he noticed was orange, and it had a bald yellow patch under each eye, with canary-coloured wattles that covered the sides and back of its head with a thick wig of naked flesh. The bird cocked its head and looked at him first with the right eye, then with the left. After which it opened its orange bill, whistled ten or twelve notes

of a little air in the pentatonic scale, made a noise like somebody having hiccups, and then, in a chanting phrase, *do do sol do*, said, “Here and now, boys; here and now, boys.”

The words pressed a trigger, and all of a sudden he remembered everything. Here was Pala, the forbidden island, the place no journalist had ever visited. And now must be the morning after the afternoon when he’d been fool enough to go sailing, alone, outside the harbour of Rendang-Lobo. He remembered it all — the white sail curved by the wind into the likeness of a huge magnolia petal, the water sizzling at the prow, the sparkle of diamonds on every wave crest, the troughs of wrinkled jade. And eastwards, across the Strait, what clouds, what prodigies of sculptured whiteness above the volcanoes of Pala! Sitting there at the tiller, he had caught himself singing — caught himself, incredibly, in the act of feeling unequivocally happy.

“‘Three, three for the rivals,’” he had declaimed into the wind.

“‘Two, two for the lily-white boys, clothèd all in green-oh; One is one and all alone …’”

Yes, all alone. All alone on the enormous jewel of the sea.

“‘And ever more shall be so.’”

After which, needless to say, the thing that all the cautious and experienced yachtsmen had warned him against happened. The black squall out of nowhere, the sudden, senseless frenzy of wind and rain and waves …

“Here and now, boys,” chanted the bird. “Here and now, boys.”

The really extraordinary thing was that he should be here, he reflected, under the trees and not out there, at the bottom of the Pala Strait or, worse, smashed to pieces at the foot of the cliffs. For even after he had managed, by sheer miracle, to take his sinking boat through the breakers and run her aground on the only sandy beach in all those miles of Pala’s rock-bound coast — even then it wasn’t over. The cliffs towered above him; but at the head of the cove there was a kind of headlong ravine where a little stream came down in a succession of filmy waterfalls, and there were trees and bushes growing between the walls of grey limestone. Six or seven hundred feet of rock climbing — in tennis shoes, and all

the footholds slippery with water. And then, dear God! those snakes. The black one looped over the branch by which he was pulling himself up. And five minutes later, the huge green one coiled there on the ledge, just where he was preparing to step. Terror had been succeeded by a terror infinitely worse. The sight of the snake had made him start, made him violently withdraw his foot, and that sudden unconsidered movement had made him lose his balance. For a long sickening second, in the dreadful knowledge that this was the end, he had swayed on the brink, then fallen. Death, death, death. And then, with the noise of splintering wood in his ears he had found himself clinging to the branches of a small tree, his face scratched, his right knee bruised and bleeding, but alive. Painfully he had resumed his climbing. His knee hurt him excruciatingly; but he climbed on. There was no alternative. And then the light had begun to fail. In the end he was climbing almost in darkness, climbing by faith, climbing by sheer despair.

“Here and now, boys,” shouted the bird.

But Will Farnaby was neither here nor now. He was there on the rock face, he was then at the dreadful moment of falling. The dry leaves rustled beneath him; he was trembling. Violently, uncontrollably, he was trembling from head to foot.

CHAPTER TWO

SUDDENLY THE BIRD ceased to be articulate and started to scream. A small shrill human voice said, “Mynah!” and then added something in a language that Will did not understand. There was a sound of footsteps on dry leaves. Then a little cry of alarm. Then silence. Will opened his eyes and saw two exquisite children looking down at him, their eyes wide with astonishment and a fascinated horror. The smaller of them was a tiny boy of five, perhaps, or six, dressed only in a green loin cloth. Beside him, carrying a basket of fruit on her head, stood a little girl some four or five years older. She wore a full crimson skirt that reached almost to her ankles; but above the waist she was naked. In the sunlight her skin glowed like pale copper flushed with rose. Will looked from one child to the other. How beautiful they were, and how faultless, how extraordinarily elegant! Like two little thoroughbreds. A round and sturdy thoroughbred, with a face like a cherub’s — that was the boy. And the girl was another kind of thoroughbred, fine-drawn, with a rather long, grave little face framed between braids of dark hair.

There was another burst of screaming. On its perch in the dead tree the bird was turning nervously this way and that, then, with a final screech, it dived into the air. Without taking her eyes from Will’s face, the girl held out her hand invitingly. The bird fluttered, settled, flapped wildly, found its balance, then folded its wings and immediately started to hiccup. Will looked on without surprise. Anything was possible now — anything. Even talking birds that would perch on a child’s finger. Will tried to smile at them; but his lips were still trembling, and what was meant to be a sign of friendliness must have seemed like a frightening grimace. The little boy took cover behind his sister.

The bird stopped hiccuping and began to repeat a word that Will did not understand. ‘Runa’ — was that it? No, ‘Karuna’. Definitely ‘Karuna’.

He raised a trembling hand and pointed at the fruit in the round basket. Mangoes, bananas … His dry mouth was watering.

“Hungry,” he said. Then, feeling that in these exotic circumstances the child might understand him better if he put on an imitation of a musical comedy Chinaman, “Me velly hungly,” he elaborated.

“Do you want to eat?” the child asked in perfect English.

“Yes — eat,” he repeated, “eat.”

“Fly away, mynah!” She shook her hand. The bird uttered a protesting squawk and returned to its perch on the dead tree. Lifting her thin little arms in a gesture that was like a dancer’s, the child raised the basket from her head, then lowered it to the ground. She selected a banana, peeled it and, torn between fear and compassion, advanced towards the stranger. In his incomprehensible language the little boy uttered a cry of warning and clutched at her skirt. With a reassuring word, the girl halted, well out of danger, and held up the fruit.

“Do you want it?” she asked.

Still trembling, Will Farnaby stretched out his hand. Very cautiously, she edged forward, then halted again and, crouching down, peered at him intently.

“Quick,” he said in an agony of impatience.

But the little girl was taking no chances. Eyeing his hand for the least sign of a suspicious movement, she leaned forward, she cautiously extended her arm.

“For God’s sake,” he implored.

“God?” the child repeated with sudden interest. “Which God?” she asked. “There are such a lot of them.”

“Any damned God you like,” he answered impatiently.

“I don’t really like any of them,” she answered. “I like the Compassionate One.”

“Then be compassionate to me,” he begged. “Give me that banana.”

Her expression changed. “I’m sorry, she said apologetically. Rising to her full height, she took a quick step forward and dropped the fruit into his shaking hand.

“There,” she said and, like a little animal avoiding a trap, she jumped back, out of reach.

The small boy clapped his hands and laughed aloud. She turned and said something to him in their incomprehensible language. He nodded his round head, and saying “Okay, boss,” trotted away, through a barrage of blue and sulphur butterflies, into the forest shadows on the further side of the glade.

“I told Tom Krishna to go and fetch someone,” she explained.

Will finished his banana and asked for another, and then for a third. As the urgency of his hunger diminished, he felt a need to satisfy his curiosity.

“How is it that you speak such good English?” he asked.

“Because everybody speaks English,” the child answered.

“Everybody?”

“I mean, when they’re not speaking Palanese.” Finding the subject uninteresting, she turned, waved a small brown hand and whistled.

“Here and now, boys,” the bird repeated yet once more, then fluttered down from its perch on the dead tree and settled on her shoulder. The child peeled another banana, gave two-thirds of it to Will and offered what remained to the mynah.

“Is that your bird?” Will asked.

She shook her head.

“Mynahs are like the electric light,” she said. “They don’t belong to anybody.”

“Why does he say those things?”

“Because somebody taught him,” she answered patiently. What an ass! her tone seemed to imply.

“But why did they teach him *those* things? Why ‘Attention’? Why ‘Here and now’?”

“Well …” She searched for the right words in which to explain the self-evident to this strange imbecile. “That’s what you always forget, isn’t it? I mean, you forget to pay attention to what’s happening. And that’s the same as not being here and now.”

“And the mynahs fly about reminding you — is that it?”

She nodded. That, of course, was it. There was a silence.

“What’s your name?” she enquired.

Will introduced himself.

“My name’s Mary Sarojini MacPhail.”

“MacPhail?” It was too implausible.

“MacPhail,” she assured him.

“And your little brother is called Tom Krishna?” She nodded. “Well, I’m damned!”

“Did you come to Pala by the aeroplane?”

“I came out of the sea.”

“Out of the sea? Do you have a boat?”

“I did have one.” With his mind’s eye Will saw the waves breaking over the stranded hulk, heard with his inner ear the crash of their impact. Under her questioning he told her what had happened. The storm, the beaching of the boat, the long nightmare of the climb, the snakes, the horror of falling … He began to tremble again, more violently than ever.

Mary Sarojini listened attentively and without comment. Then as his voice faltered and finally broke, she stepped forward and, the bird still perched on her shoulder, kneeled down beside him.

“Listen, Will,” she said, laying a hand on his forehead. “We’ve got to get rid of this.” Her tone was professional and calmly authoritative.

“I wish I knew how,” he said between chattering teeth.

“How?” she repeated. “But in the usual way, of course. Tell me again about those snakes and how you fell down.”

He shook his head. “I don’t want to.”

“Of course you don’t want to,” she said. “But you’ve got to. Listen to what the mynah’s saying.”

“Here and now, boys,” the bird was still exhorting. “Here and now, boys.”

“You can’t be here and now,” she went on, “until you’ve got rid of those snakes. Tell me.”

“I don’t want to, I don’t want to.” He was almost in tears.

“Then you’ll never get rid of them. They’ll be crawling about inside your head forever. And serve you right,” Mary Sarojini added severely.

He tried to control the trembling; but his body had ceased to belong to him. Someone else was in charge, someone malevolently determined to humiliate him, to make him suffer.

“Remember what happened when you were a little boy,” Mary Sarojini was saying. “What did your mother do when you hurt yourself?”

She had taken him in her arms, had said, ‘My poor baby, my poor little baby.’

“She did *that*?” The child spoke in a tone of shocked amazement. “But that’s awful! That’s the way to rub it in. ‘My poor baby,’” she repeated derisively, “it must have gone on hurting for hours. And you’d never forget it.”

Will Farnaby made no comment, but lay there in silence, shaken by irrepressible shudderings.

“Well, if you won’t do it yourself, I’ll have to do it for you. Listen, Will: there was a snake, a big green snake, and you almost stepped on him. You almost stepped on him, and it gave you such a fright that you lost your balance, you fell. Now say it yourself — say it!”

“I almost stepped on him,” he whispered obediently. “And then I …” He couldn’t say it. “Then I fell,” he brought out at last, almost inaudibly.

All the horror of it came back to him — the nausea of fear, the panic start that had made him lose his balance, and then worse fear and the ghastly certainty that it was the end.

“Say it again.”

“I almost stepped on him. And then …”

He heard himself whimpering.

“That’s right, Will. Cry — cry!”

The whimpering became a moaning. Ashamed, he clenched his teeth, and the moaning stopped.

“No, don’t do that,” she cried. “Let it come out if it wants to. Remember that snake, Will. Remember how you fell.”

The moaning broke out again and he began to shudder more violently than ever.

“Now tell me what happened.”

“I could see its eyes, I could see its tongue going in and out.”

“Yes, you could see his tongue. And what happened then?”

“I lost my balance, I fell.”

“Say it again, Will.” He was sobbing now. “Say it again,” she insisted.

“I fell.”

“Again.”

It was tearing him to pieces, but he said it. “I fell.”

“Again, Will.” She was implacable. “Again.”

“I fell, I fell. I fell …”

Gradually the sobbing died down. The words came more easily and the memories they aroused were less painful.

“I fell,” he repeated for the hundredth time.

“But you didn’t fall very far,” Mary Sarojini now said.

“No, I didn’t fall very far,” he agreed.

“So what’s all the fuss about?” the child enquired.

There was no malice or irony in her tone, not the slightest implication of blame. She was just asking a simple, straightforward question that called for a simple straightforward answer. Yes, what *was* all the fuss about? The snake hadn’t bitten him; he hadn’t broken his neck. And anyhow it had all happened yesterday. Today there were these butterflies, this bird that called one to attention, this strange child who talked to one like a Dutch uncle, looked like an angel out of some unfamiliar mythology and within five degrees of the equator was called, believe it or not, MacPhail. Will Farnaby laughed aloud.

The little girl clapped her hands and laughed too. A moment later the bird on her shoulder joined in with peal upon peal of loud demonic laughter that filled the glade and echoed among the trees, so that the whole universe seemed to be fairly splitting its sides over the enormous joke of existence.

CHAPTER THREE

"WELL, I'M GLAD it's all so amusing," a deep voice suddenly commented.

Will Farnaby turned and saw, smiling down at him, a small spare man dressed in European clothes and carrying a black bag. A man, he judged, in his late fifties. Under the wide straw hat the hair was thick and white, and what a strange beaky nose! And the eyes — how incongruously blue in the dark face!

"Grandfather!" he heard Mary Sarojini exclaiming.

The stranger turned from Will to the child.

"What was so funny?" he asked.

"Well," Mary Sarojini began, and paused for a moment to marshal her thoughts. "Well, you see, he was in a boat and there was that storm yesterday and he got wrecked — somewhere down there. So he had to climb up the cliff. And there were some snakes, and he fell down. But luckily there was a tree, so he only had a fright. Which was why he was shivering so hard, so I gave him some bananas and I made him go through it a million times. And then all of a sudden he saw that it wasn't anything to worry about. I mean, it's all over and done with. And that made him laugh. And when he laughed, I laughed. And then the mynah bird laughed."

"Very good," said her grandfather approvingly. "And now," he added, turning back to Will Farnaby, "after the psychological first aid, let's see what can be done for poor old Brother Ass. I'm Dr Robert MacPhail, by the way. Who are you?"

"His name's Will," said Mary Sarojini before the young man could answer. "And his other name is Far-something."

"Farnaby, to be precise. William Asquith Farnaby. My father, as you might guess, was an ardent Liberal. Even when he was drunk. Especially when he was drunk." He gave vent to a harsh derisive laugh strangely unlike the full-throated

merriment which had greeted his discovery that there was really nothing to make a fuss about.

“Didn’t you like your father?” Mary Sarojini asked with concern.

“Not as much as I might have,” Will answered.

“What he means,” Dr MacPhail explained to the child, “is that he hated his father. A lot of them do,” he added parenthetically.

Squatting down on his haunches, he began to undo the straps of his black bag.

“One of our ex-imperialists, I assume,” he said over his shoulder to the young man.

“Born in Bloomsbury,” Will confirmed.

“Upper class,” the doctor diagnosed, “but not a member of the military or county sub-species.”

“Correct. My father was a barrister and political journalist. That is, when he wasn’t too busy being an alcoholic. My mother, incredible as it may seem, was the daughter of an archdeacon. An *archdeacon*,” he repeated, and laughed again as he had laughed over his father’s taste for brandy.

Dr MacPhail looked at him for a moment, then turned his attention once more to the straps.

“When you laugh like that,” he remarked in a tone of scientific detachment, “your face becomes curiously ugly.”

Taken aback, Will tried to cover his embarrassment with a piece of facetiousness. “It’s always ugly,” he said.

“On the contrary, in a Baudelairian sort of way it’s rather beautiful. Except when you choose to make noises like a hyena. Why do you make those noises?”

“I’m a journalist,” Will explained. “Our Special Correspondent, paid to travel about the world and report on the current horrors. What other kind of noise do you expect me to make? Coo-coo? Blah-blah? Marx-Marx?” He laughed again, then brought out one of his well-tried witticisms. “I’m the man who won’t take yes for an answer.”

“Pretty,” said Dr MacPhail. “Very pretty. But now let’s get down to business.” Taking a pair of scissors out of his bag, he started to cut away the torn

and bloodstained trouser leg that covered Will's injured knee.

Will Farnaby looked up at him and wondered, as he looked, how much of this improbable Highlander was still Scottish and how much Palanese. About the blue eyes and the jutting nose there could be no doubt. But the brown skin, the delicate hands, the grace of movement — these surely came from somewhere considerably south of the Tweed.

"Were you born here?" he asked.

The doctor nodded affirmatively. "At Shivapuram, on the day of Queen Victoria's funeral."

There was a final click of the scissors, and the trouser leg fell away, exposing the knee. "Messy," was Dr MacPhail's verdict after a first intent scrutiny. "But I don't think there's anything too serious." He turned to his granddaughter, "I'd like you to run back to the station and ask Vijaya to come here with one of the other men. Tell them to pick up a stretcher at the infirmary."

Mary Sarojini nodded and, without a word, rose to her feet, and hurried away across the glade.

Will looked after the small figure as it receded — the red skirt swinging from side to side, the smooth skin of the torso glowing rosily golden in the sunlight.

"You have a very remarkable granddaughter," he said to Dr MacPhail.

"Mary Sarojini's father," said the doctor after a little silence, "was my eldest son. He died four months ago — a mountain climbing accident."

Will mumbled his sympathy, and there was another silence.

Dr MacPhail uncorked a bottle of alcohol and swabbed his hands.

"This is going to hurt a bit," he warned. "I'd suggest that you listen to that bird." He waved a hand in the direction of the dead tree, to which, after Mary Sarojini's departure, the mynah had returned.

"Listen to him closely, listen discriminatingly. It'll keep your mind off the discomfort."

Will Farnaby listened. The mynah had gone back to its first theme.

"Attention," the articulate oboe was calling. "Attention."

“Attention to what?” he asked, in the hope of eliciting a more enlightening answer than the one he had received from Mary Sarojini.

“To attention,” said Dr MacPhail.

“Attention to attention?”

“Of course.”

“Attention,” the mynah chanted in ironical confirmation.

“Do you have many of these talking birds?”

“There must be at least a thousand of them flying about the island. It was the old Raja’s idea. He thought it would do people good. Maybe it does, though it seems rather unfair to the poor mynahs. Fortunately, however, birds don’t understand pep talks. Not even St Francis’. Just imagine,” he went on, “preaching sermons to perfectly good thrushes and goldfinches and chiffchaffs! What presumption! Why couldn’t he have kept his mouth shut and let the birds preach to *him*? And now,” he added in another tone, “you’d better start listening to our friend in the tree. I’m going to clean this thing up.”

“Attention.”

“Here goes.”

The young man winced and bit his lip.

“Attention. Attention. Attention.”

Yes, it was quite true. If you listened intently enough, the pain wasn’t so bad.

“Attention. Attention …”

“How you ever contrived to get up that cliff,” said Dr MacPhail, as he reached for the bandage, “I cannot conceive.”

Will managed to laugh. “Remember the beginning of *Erewhon*,” he said. “‘As luck would have it, Providence was on my side.’”

From the further side of the glade came the sound of voices. Will turned his head and saw Mary Sarojini emerging from between the trees, her red skirt swinging as she skipped along. Behind her, naked to the waist and carrying over his shoulder the bamboo poles and rolled-up canvas of a light stretcher, walked a huge bronze statue of a man, and behind the giant came a slender, dark-skinned adolescent in white shorts.

“This is Vijaya Bhattacharya,” said Dr MacPhail as the bronze statue approached. “Vijaya is my assistant.”

“In the hospital?”

Dr MacPhail shook his head. “Except in emergencies,” he said, “I don’t practise any more. Vijaya and I work together at the Agricultural Experimental Station. And Murugan Mailendra,” (he waved his hand in the direction of the dark-skinned boy), “is with us temporarily, studying soil science and plant breeding.”

Vijaya stepped aside and, laying a large hand on his companion’s shoulder, pushed him forward. Looking up into that beautiful, sulky young face, Will suddenly recognized, with a start of surprise, the elegantly tailored youth he had met, five days before, at Rendang-Lobo, had driven with in Colonel Dipa’s white Mercedes all over the island. He smiled, he opened his mouth to speak, then checked himself. Almost imperceptibly but quite unmistakably, the boy had shaken his head. In his eyes Will saw an expression of anguished pleading. His lips moved soundlessly. “Please,” he seemed to be saying, “please …” Will readjusted his face.

“How do you do, Mr Mailendra,” he said in a tone of casual formality.

Murugan looked enormously relieved. “How do you do,” he said, and made a little bow.

Will looked round to see if the others had noticed what had happened. Mary Sarojini and Vijaya, he saw, were busy with the stretcher and the doctor was repacking his black bag. The little comedy had been played without an audience. Young Murugan evidently had his reasons for not wanting it to be known that he had been in Rendang. Boys will be boys. Boys will even be girls. Colonel Dipa had been more than fatherly towards his young protégé, and towards the Colonel, Murugan had been a good deal more than filial — he had been positively adoring. Was it merely hero-worship, merely a schoolboy’s admiration for the strong man who had carried out a successful revolution, liquidated the opposition and installed himself as dictator? Or were other feelings involved? Was Murugan playing Antinous to this black moustached

Hadrian? Well, if that was how he felt about middle-aged military gangsters, that was his privilege. And if the gangster liked pretty boys, that was *his*. And perhaps, Will went on to reflect, that was why Colonel Dipa had refrained from making a formal introduction. “This is Muru,” was all he had said, when the boy was ushered into the presidential office. “My young friend Muru,” and he had risen, had put his arm around the boy’s shoulders, had led him to the sofa and sat down beside him. “May I drive the Mercedes?” Murugan had asked. The dictator had smiled indulgently and nodded his sleek black head. And that was another reason for thinking that more than mere friendliness was involved in that curious relationship. At the wheel of the Colonel’s sports car Murugan was a maniac. Only an infatuated lover would have entrusted himself, not to mention his guest, to such a chauffeur. On the flat between Rendang-Lobo and the oil fields the speedometer had twice touched a hundred and ten; and worse, much worse, was to follow on the mountain road from the oil fields to the copper mines. Chasms yawned, tyres screeched round corners, water buffaloes emerged from bamboo thickets a few feet ahead of the car, ten-ton lorries came roaring down on the wrong side of the road. “Aren’t you a little nervous?” Will had ventured to ask. But the gangster was pious as well as infatuated. “If one knows that one is doing the will of Allah — and I *do* know it, Mr Farnaby — there is no excuse for nervousness. In those circumstances, nervousness would be blasphemy.” And as Murugan swerved to avoid yet another buffalo, he opened his gold cigarette case and offered Will a Balkan Sobranje.

“Ready,” Vijaya called.

Will turned his head and saw the stretcher lying on the ground beside him.

“Good!” said Dr MacPhail. “Let’s lift him on to it. Carefully. Carefully …”

A minute later the little procession was winding its way up the narrow path between the trees. Mary Sarojini was in the van, her grandfather brought up the rear and, between them, came Murugan and Vijaya at either end of the stretcher.

From his moving bed Will Farnaby looked up through the green darkness as though from the floor of a living sea. Far overhead, near the surface, there was a rustling among the leaves, a noise of monkeys. And now it was a dozen hornbills

hopping, like the figments of a disordered imagination, through a cloud of orchids.

“Are you comfortable?” Vijaya asked, bending solicitously to look into his face.

Will smiled back at him.

“Luxuriously comfortable,” he said.

“It isn’t far,” the other went on reassuringly. “We’ll be there in a few minutes.”

“Where’s ‘there’?”

“The Experimental Station. It’s like Rothamsted. Did you ever go to Rothamsted when you were in England?”

Will had heard of it, of course, but never seen the place.

“It’s been going for more than a hundred years,” Vijaya went on.

“A hundred and eighteen, to be precise,” said Dr MacPhail. “Lawes and Gilbert started their work on fertilizers in 1843. One of their pupils came out here in the early fifties to help my grandfather get our Station going. Rothamsted in the tropics — that was the idea. *In* the tropics and *for* the tropics.”

There was a lightening of the green gloom and a moment later the litter emerged from the forest into the full glare of tropical sunshine. Will raised his head and looked about him. They were not far from the floor of an immense ampitheatre. Five hundred feet below stretched a wide plain, checkered with fields, dotted with clumps of trees and clustered houses. In the other direction the slopes climbed up and up, thousands of feet towards a semicircle of mountains. Terrace above green or golden terrace, from the plain to the crenellated wall of peaks, the rice paddies followed the contour lines, emphasizing every swell and recession of the slope with what seemed a deliberate and artful intention. Nature here was no longer merely natural; the landscape had been composed, had been reduced to its geometrical essences, and rendered, by what in a painter would have been a miracle of virtuosity, in terms of these sinuous lines, these streaks of pure bright colour.

“What were you doing in Rendang?” Dr Robert asked, breaking a long silence.

“Collecting materials for a piece on the new régime.”

“I wouldn’t have thought the Colonel was newsworthy.”

“You’re mistaken. He’s a *military* dictator. That means there’s death in the offing. And death is always news. Even the remote smell of death is news,” he laughed. “That’s why I was told to drop in on my way back from China.”

And there had been other reasons which he preferred not to mention. Newspapers were only one of Lord Aldehyde’s interests. In another manifestation he was the South-East Asia Petroleum Company, he was Imperial and Foreign Copper Limited. Officially, Will had come to Rendang to sniff the death in its militarized air; but he had also been commissioned to find out what the dictator felt about foreign capital, what tax rebates he was prepared to offer, what guarantees against nationalization. And how much of the profits would be exportable? How many native technicians and administrators would have to be employed? A whole battery of questions. But Colonel Dipa had been most affable and co-operative. Hence that hair-raising drive, with Murugan at the wheel, to the copper mines. “Primitive, my dear Farnaby, primitive. Urgently in need, as you can see for yourself, of modern equipment.” Another meeting had been arranged — arranged, Will now remembered, for this very morning. He visualized the Colonel at his desk. A report from the chief of police. ‘Mr Farnaby was last seen sailing a small boat single-handed into the Pala Strait. Two hours later a storm of great violence … Presumed dead …’ Instead of which, here he was, alive and kicking, on the forbidden island.

“They’ll never give you a visa,” Joe Aldehyde had said at their last interview. “But perhaps you could sneak ashore in disguise. Wear a burnous or something, like Lawrence of Arabia.”

With a straight face, “I’ll try,” Will had promised.

“Anyhow if you ever do manage to land in Pala, make a bee-line for the palace. The Rani — that’s their Queen Mother — is an old friend of mine. Met her for the first time six years ago at Lugano. She was staying there with old

Voegeli, the investment banker. His girl friend is interested in spiritualism and they staged a seance for me. A trumpet medium, genuine Direct Voice — only unfortunately it was all in German. Well, after the lights were turned on, I had a long talk with her."

"With the trumpet?"

"No, no. With the Rani. She's a remarkable woman. You know, The Crusade of the Spirit."

"Was that *her* invention?"

"Absolutely. And personally I prefer it to Moral Rearmament. It goes down better in Asia. We had a long talk about it that evening. And after that we talked about oil. Pala's full of oil. South-East Asia Petroleum has been trying to get in on it for years. So have all the other companies. Nothing doing. No oil concessions to anyone. It's their fixed policy. But the Rani doesn't agree with it. She wants to see the oil doing some good in the world. Financing the Crusade of the Spirit, for example. So, as I say, if ever you get to Pala, make a bee-line for the palace. Talk to her. Get the inside story about the men who make the decisions. Find out if there's a pro-oil minority and ask how we could help them to carry on the good work." And he had ended by promising Will a handsome bonus if his efforts should be crowned with success. Enough to give him a full year of freedom. "No more reporting. Nothing but High Art, Art, A-ART." And he had uttered a scatological laugh as though the word had an 's' at the end of it, and not a 't'. Unspeakable creature! But all the same he wrote for the unspeakable creature's vile papers and was ready, for a bribe, to do the vile creature's dirty work. And now, incredibly, here he was on Palanese soil. As luck would have it, Providence had been on his side — for the express purpose, evidently, of perpetrating one of those sinister practical jokes which are Providence's speciality.

He was called back to present reality by the sound of Mary Sarojini's shrill voice. "Here we are!"

Will raised his head again. The little procession had turned off the highway and was passing through an opening in a white stuccoed wall. To the left, on a

rising succession of terraces, stood lines of low buildings shaded by peepul trees. Straight ahead an avenue of tall palms sloped down to a lotus pool, on the further side of which sat a huge stone Buddha. Turning to the left, they climbed between flowering trees and through blending perfumes to the first terrace. Behind a fence, motionless except for his ruminating jaws, stood a snow-white humped bull, god-like in his serene and mindless beauty. Europa's lover receded into the past, and here were a brace of Juno's birds trailing their feathers over the grass. Mary Sarojini unlatched the gate of a small garden.

"My bungalow," said Dr MacPhail, and turning to Murugan, "Let me help you to negotiate the steps."

CHAPTER FOUR

TOM KRISHNA AND Mary Sarojini had gone to take their siesta with the gardener's children next door. In her darkened living-room, Susila MacPhail sat alone with her memories of past happiness and the present pain of her bereavement. The clock in the kitchen struck the half hour. It was time for her to go. With a sigh she rose, put on her sandals and walked out into the tremendous glare of the tropical afternoon. She looked up at the sky. Over the volcanoes enormous clouds were climbing towards the zenith. In an hour it would be raining. Moving from one pool of shadow to the next, she made her way along the tree-lined path. With a sudden rattle of quills a flock of pigeons broke out of one of the towering peepul trees. Green-winged and coral-billed, their breasts changing colour in the light like mother of pearl, they flew off towards the forest. How beautiful they were, how unutterably lovely! Susila was on the point of turning to catch the expression of delight on Dugald's upturned face; then, checking herself, she looked down at the ground. There was no Dugald any more; there was only this pain, like the pain of the phantom limb that goes on haunting the imagination, haunting even the perceptions, of those who have undergone an amputation. "Amputation," she whispered to herself, "amputation …" Feeling her eyes fill with tears, she broke off. Amputation was no excuse for self-pity and, for all that Dugald was dead, the birds were as beautiful as ever and her children, all the other children, had as much need to be loved and helped and taught. If his absence was so constantly present, that was to remind her that henceforward she must love for two, live for two, take thought for two, must perceive and understand not merely with her own eyes and mind but with the mind and eyes that had been his and, before the catastrophe, hers too in a communion of delight and intelligence.

But here was the doctor's bungalow. She mounted the steps, crossed the verandah and walked into the living-room. Her father-in-law was seated near the window, sipping cold tea from an earthenware mug and reading the *Journal de Mycologie*. He looked up as she approached, and gave her a welcoming smile.

"Susila, my dear! I'm so glad you were able to come."

She bent down and kissed his stubbly cheek.

"What's all this I hear from Mary Sarojini?" she asked. "Is it true she found a castaway?"

"From England — but via China, Rendang and a shipwreck. A journalist."

"What's he like?"

"The physique of a Messiah. But too clever to believe in God or be convinced of his own mission. And too sensitive, even if he were convinced, to carry it out. His muscles would like to act and his feelings would like to believe; but his nerve-endings and his cleverness won't allow it."

"So I suppose he's very unhappy."

"So unhappy that he has to laugh like a hyena."

"Does he know he laughs like a hyena?"

"Knows and is rather proud of it. Even makes epigrams about it. 'I'm the man who won't take yes for an answer.'"

"Is he badly hurt?" she asked.

"Not badly. But he's running a temperature. I've started him on antibiotics. Now it's up to you to raise his resistance and give the *vis medicatrix naturae* a chance."

"I'll do my best." Then, after a silence, "I went to see Lakshmi," she said, "on my way back from school."

"How did you find her?"

"About the same. No, perhaps a little weaker than yesterday."

"That's what I felt when I saw her this morning."

"Luckily the pain doesn't seem to get any worse. We can still handle it psychologically. And today we worked on the nausea. She was able to drink something. I don't think there'll be any more need for intravenous fluids."

“Thank goodness!” he said. “Those IV’s were a torture. Such enormous courage in the face of every real danger; but whenever it was a question of a hypodermic or a needle in a vein, the most abject and irrational terror.”

He thought of the time, in the early days of their marriage, when he had lost his temper and called her a coward for making such a fuss. Lakshmi had cried and, having submitted to her martyrdom, had heaped coals of fire upon his head by begging to be forgiven. “Lakshmi, Lakshmi …” And now in a few days she would be dead. After thirty-seven years. “What did you talk about?” he asked aloud.

“Nothing in particular,” Susila answered. But the truth was that they had talked about Dugald and that she couldn’t bring herself to repeat what had passed between them. “My first baby,” the dying woman had whispered. “I didn’t know that babies could be so beautiful.” In their skull-deep, skull-dark sockets the eyes had brightened, the bloodless lips had smiled. “Such tiny, tiny hands,” the faint hoarse voice went on, “such a greedy little mouth!” And an almost fleshless hand tremblingly touched the place where, before last year’s operation, her breast had been. “I never knew,” she repeated. And, before the event, how could she have known? It had been a revelation, an apocalypse of touch and love. “Do you know what I mean?” And Susila had nodded. Of course she knew — had known it in relation to her own two children, known it, in those other apocalypses of touch and love, with the man that little Dugald of the tiny hands and greedy mouth had grown into. “I used to be afraid for him,” the dying woman had whispered. “He was so strong, such a tyrant, he could have hurt and bullied and destroyed. If he’d married another woman … I’m so thankful it was you!” From the place where the breast had been the fleshless hand moved out and came to rest on Susila’s arm. She had bent her head and kissed it. They were both crying.

Dr MacPhail sighed, looked up and, like a man who has climbed out of the water, gave himself a little shake. “The castaway’s name is Farnaby,” he said. “Will Farnaby.”

“Will Farnaby,” Susila repeated. “Well, I’d better go and see what I can do for him.” She turned and walked away.

Dr MacPhail looked after her, then leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He thought of his son, he thought of his wife — of Lakshmi slowly wasting to extinction, of Dugald like a bright fiery flame suddenly snuffed out. Thought of the incomprehensible sequence of changes and chances that make up a life, all the beauties and horrors and absurdities whose conjunctions create the uninterpretable and yet divinely significant pattern of human destiny. “Poor girl,” he said to himself, remembering the look on Susila’s face when he had told her of what had happened to Dugald, “poor girl!” Meanwhile there was this article on Hallucinogenic mushrooms in the *Journal de Mycologie*. That was another of the irrelevancies that somehow took its place in the pattern. The words of one of the old Raja’s queer little poems came to his mind.

All things, to all things
perfectly indifferent,
perfectly work together
in discord for a Good beyond
good, for a Being more
timeless in transience, more
eternal in its dwindling than
God there in heaven.

The door creaked, and an instant later Will heard light footsteps and the rustle of skirts. Then a hand was laid on his shoulder and a woman’s voice, low-pitched and musical, asked him how he was feeling.

“I’m feeling miserable,” he answered without opening his eyes.

There was no self-pity in his tone, no appeal for sympathy — only the angry matter-of-factness of a Stoic who has finally grown sick of the long farce of impassibility and is resentfully blurting out the truth.

“I’m feeling miserable.”

The hand touched him again. “I’m Susila MacPhail,” said the voice, “Mary Sarojini’s mother.”

Reluctantly Will turned his head and opened his eyes. An adult, darker version of Mary Sarojini was sitting there beside the bed, smiling at him with friendly solicitude. To smile back at her would have cost him too great an effort; he contented himself with saying “How do you do,” then pulled the sheet a little higher and closed his eyes again.

Susila looked down at him in silence — at the bony shoulders, at the cage of ribs under a skin whose Nordic pallor made him seem, to her Palanese eyes, so strangely frail and vulnerable, at the sunburnt face, emphatically featured like a carving intended to be seen at a distance — emphatic and yet sensitive, the quivering, more than naked face, she found herself thinking, of a man who has been flayed and left to suffer.

“I hear you’re from England,” she said at last.

“I don’t care where I’m from,” Will muttered irritably. “Nor where I’m going. *From* hell *to* hell.”

“I was in England just after the War,” she went on. “As a student.”

He tried not to listen; but ears have no lids; there was no escape from that intruding voice.

“There was a girl in my psychology class,” it was saying; “her people lived at Wells. She asked me to stay with them for the first month of the summer vacation. Do you know Wells?”

Of course he knew Wells. Why did she pester him with her silly reminiscences?

“I used to love walking there by the water,” Susila went on, “looking across the moat at the cathedral,” — and thinking, while she looked at the cathedral, of Dugald under the palm trees on the beach, of Dugald giving her her first lesson in rock climbing. “You’re on the rope. You’re perfectly safe. You can’t possibly fall …” Can’t possibly fall, she repeated bitterly — and then remembered here and now, remembered that she had a job to do, remembered, as she looked again

at the flayed emphatic face, that here was a human being in pain. “How lovely it was,” she went on, “and how marvellously peaceful!”

The voice, it seemed to Will Farnaby, had become more musical and in some strange way more remote. Perhaps that was why he no longer resented its intrusion.

“Such an extraordinary sense of peace. *Shanti, shanti, shanti*. The peace that passes understanding.”

The voice was almost chanting now — chanting, it seemed, out of some other world.

“I can shut my eyes,” it chanted on, “can shut my eyes and see it all so clearly. Can see the church — and it’s enormous, much taller than the huge trees round the bishop’s palace. Can see the green grass and the water and the golden sunlight on the stones and the slanting shadows between the buttresses. And listen! I can hear the bells. The bells and the jackdaws. The jackdaws in the tower — can you hear the jackdaws?”

Yes, he could hear the jackdaws, could hear them almost as clearly as he now heard those parrots in the trees outside his window. He was here and at the same time he was there — here in this dark, sweltering room near the equator, but also there, outdoors in that cool hollow at the edge of the Mendips, with the jackdaws calling from the cathedral tower and the sound of the bells dying away into the green silence.

“And there are white clouds,” the voice was saying, “and the blue sky between them is so pale, so delicate, so exquisitely tender.”

Tender, he repeated, the tender blue sky of that April week-end he had spent there, before the disaster of their marriage, with Molly. There were daisies in the grass and dandelions, and across the water towered up the huge church, challenging the wildness of those soft April clouds with its austere geometry. Challenging the wildness, and at the same time complementing it, coming to terms with it in perfect reconciliation. That was how it should have been with himself and Molly — how it had been then.

“And the swans,” he now heard the voice dreamily chanting, “the swans …”

Yes, the swans. White swans moving across a mirror of jade and jet — a breathing mirror that heaved and trembled, so that their silvery images were forever breaking and coming together again, disintegrating and being made whole.

"Like the inventions of heraldry. Romantic, impossibly beautiful. And yet there they are — real birds in a real place. So near to me now that I can almost touch them — and yet so far away, thousands of miles away. Far away on that smooth water, moving as if by magic, softly, majestically …"

Majestically, moving majestically, with the dark water lifting and parting as the curved white breasts advanced — lifting, parting, sliding back in ripples that widened in a gleaming arrowhead behind them. He could see them moving across their dark mirror, could hear the jackdaws in the tower, could catch, through this nearer mingling of disinfectants and gardenias, the cold, flat, weedy smell of that Gothic moat in the far-away green valley.

"Effortlessly floating," Will said to himself. "Effortlessly floating." The words gave him a deep satisfaction.

"I'd sit there," she was saying, "I'd sit there looking and looking, and in a little while *I*'d be floating too. I'd be floating with the swans on that smooth surface between the darkness below and the pale tender sky above. Floating at the same time on that other surface between here and far away, between then and now." And between remembered happiness, she was thinking, and this insistent, excruciating presence of an absence. "Floating," she said aloud, "on the surface between the real and the imagined, between what comes to us from the outside and what comes to us from within, from deep, deep down in here."

She laid her hand on his forehead, and suddenly the words transformed themselves into the things and events for which they stood; the images turned into facts. He actually *was* floating.

"Floating," the voice softly insisted. "Floating like a white bird on the water. Floating on a great river of life — a great smooth silent river that flows so still, so still, you might almost think it was asleep. A sleeping river. But it flows irresistibly.

“Life flowing silently and irresistibly into ever fuller life, into a living peace all the more profound, all the richer and stronger and more complete because it knows all your pain and unhappiness, knows them and takes them into itself and makes them one with its own substance. And it’s into that peace that you’re floating now, floating on this smooth silent river that sleeps and is yet irresistible, and is irresistible precisely because it’s sleeping. And I’m floating with it.” She was speaking for the stranger. She was speaking on another level for herself. “Effortlessly floating. Not having to do anything at all. Just letting go, just allowing myself to be carried along, just asking this irresistible sleeping river of life to take me where it’s going — and knowing all the time that where it’s going is where I want to go, where I have to go: into more life, into living peace. Along the sleeping river, irresistibly, into the wholeness of reconciliation.”

Involuntarily, unconsciously, Will Farnaby gave a deep sigh. How silent the world had become! Silent with a deep crystalline silence, even though the parrots were still busy out there beyond the shutters, even though the voice still chanted here beside him. Silence and emptiness and through the silence and the emptiness flowed the river, sleeping and irresistible.

Susila looked down at the face on the pillow. It seemed suddenly very young, child-like in its perfect serenity. The frowning lines across the forehead had disappeared. The lips that had been so tightly closed in pain were parted now, and the breath came slowly, softly, almost imperceptibly. She remembered suddenly the words that had come into her mind as she looked down, one moonlit night, at the transfigured innocence of Dugald’s face: “She giveth her beloved sleep.”

“Sleep,” she said aloud. “Sleep.”

The silence seemed to become more absolute, the emptiness more enormous.

“Asleep on the sleeping river,” the voice was saying. “And above the river, in the pale sky, there are huge white clouds. And as you look at them, you begin to float up towards them. Yes, you begin to float up towards them, and the river

now is a river in the air, an invisible river that carries you on, carries you up, higher and higher."

Upwards, upwards through the silent emptiness. The image was the thing, the words became the experience.

"Out of the hot plain," the voice went on, "effortlessly, into the freshness of the mountains."

Yes, there was the Jungfrau, dazzlingly white against the blue. There was Monte Rosa …

"How fresh the air feels as you breathe it. Fresh, pure, charged with life!"

He breathed deeply and the new life flowed into him. And now a little wind came blowing across the snow-fields, cool against his skin, deliciously cool. And, as though echoing his thoughts, as though describing his experience, the voice said, "Coolness. Coolness and sleep. Through coolness into more life. Through sleep into reconciliation, into wholeness, into living peace."

Half an hour later Susila re-entered the sitting room.

"Well?" her father-in-law questioned. "Any success?"

She nodded.

"I talked to him about a place in England," she said. "He went off more quickly than I'd expected. After that I gave him some suggestions about his temperature …"

"*And* the knee, I hope."

"Of course."

"Direct suggestion?"

"No, indirect. They're always better. I got him to be conscious of his body image. Then I made him imagine it much bigger than in everyday reality — and the knee much smaller. A miserable little thing in revolt against a huge and splendid thing. There can't be any doubt as to who's going to win." She looked at the clock on the wall. "Goodness, I must hurry. Otherwise I'll be late for my class at school."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SUN WAS just rising as Dr Robert entered his wife's room at the hospital. An orange glow and, against it the jagged silhouette of the mountains. Then suddenly a dazzling sickle of incandescence between two peaks. The sickle became a half circle and the first long shadows, the first shafts of golden light crossed the garden outside the window. And when one looked up again at the mountains there was the whole unbearable glory of the risen sun.

Dr Robert sat down by the bed, took his wife's hand and kissed it. She smiled at him, then turned again towards the window.

"How quickly the earth turns!" she whispered, and then after a silence, "One of these mornings," she added, "it'll be my last sunrise."

Through the confused chorus of bird cries and insect noises, a mynah was chanting, "Karuna. Karuna …"

"Karuna," Lakshmi repeated. "Compassion …"

"Karuna. Karuna," the oboe-voice of Buddha insisted from the garden.

"I shan't be needing it much longer," she went on. "But what about you? Poor Robert, what about you?"

"Somehow or other one finds the necessary strength," he said.

"But will it be the right kind of strength? Or will it be the strength of armour, the strength of shut-offness, the strength of being absorbed in your work and your ideas and not caring a damn for anything else? Remember how I used to come and pull your hair and make you pay attention? Who's going to do that when I'm gone?"

A nurse came in with a glass of sugared water. Dr Robert slid a hand under his wife's shoulders and lifted her to a sitting position. The nurse held the glass to her lips. Lakshmi drank a little water, swallowed with difficulty, then drank again and yet once more. Turning from the proffered glass, she looked up at Dr

Robert. The wasted face was illumined by a strangely incongruous twinkle of pure mischief.

"'I the Trinity illustrate,'" the faint voice hoarsely quoted, "'Sipping watered orange pulp; in three sips the Arian frustrate' …" She broke off. "What a ridiculous thing to be remembering. But then I always was pretty ridiculous, wasn't I?"

Dr Robert did his best to smile back at her. "Pretty ridiculous," he agreed.

"You used to say I was like a flea. Here one moment and then, hop! somewhere else, miles away. No wonder you could never educate me!"

"But *you* educated *me* all right," he assured her. "If it hadn't been for you coming in and pulling my hair and making me look at the world and helping me to understand it, what would I be today? A pedant in blinkers — in spite of all my training. But luckily I had the sense to ask you to marry me, and luckily you had the folly to say yes and then the wisdom and intelligence to make a good job of me. After thirty-seven years of adult education I'm almost human."

"But I'm still a flea." She shook her head. "And yet I did try. I tried very hard. I don't know if you ever realized it, Robert: I was always on tiptoes, always straining up towards the place where you were doing your work and your thinking and your reading. On tiptoes, trying to reach it, trying to get up there beside you. Goodness, how tiring it was! What an endless series of efforts! And all of them quite useless. Because I was just a dumb flea hopping about down here among the people and the flowers and the cats and dogs. Your kind of highbrow world was a place I could never climb up to, much less find my way in. When *this* thing happened," (she raised her hand to her absent breast) "I didn't have to try any more. No more school, no more homework. I had a permanent excuse."

There was a long silence.

"What about taking another sip?" said the nurse at last.

"Yes, you ought to drink some more," Dr Robert agreed.

"And ruin the Trinity?" Lakshmi gave him another of her smiles. Through the mask of age and mortal sickness Dr Robert suddenly saw the laughing girl with

whom, half a life-time ago, and yet only yesterday, he had fallen in love.

An hour later Dr Robert was back in his bungalow.

"You're going to be all alone this morning," he announced, after changing the dressing on Will Farnaby's knee. "I have to drive down to Shivapuram for a meeting of the Privy Council. One of our student nurses will come in around twelve to give you your injection and get you something to eat. And in the afternoon, as soon as she's finished her work at the school, Susila will be dropping in again. And now I must be going." Dr Robert rose and laid his hand for a moment on Will's arm. "Till this evening." Half way to the door he halted and turned back. "I almost forgot to give you this." From one of the side pockets of his sagging jacket he pulled out a small green booklet. "It's the Old Raja's '*Notes on What's What, and on What it Might be Reasonable to Do About What's What.*'"

"What an admirable title!" said Will as he took the proffered book.

"And you'll like the contents, too," Dr Robert assured him. "Just a few pages, that's all. But if you want to know what Pala is all about, there's no better introduction."

"Incidentally," Will asked, "who *is* the Old Raja?"

"Who *was* he, I'm afraid. The Old Raja died in thirty-eight — after a reign three years longer than Queen Victoria's. His eldest son died before he did, and he was succeeded by his grandson, who was an ass — but made up for it by being short-lived. The present Raja is his great-grandson."

"And, if I may ask a personal question, how does anybody called MacPhail come into the picture?"

"The first MacPhail of Pala came into it under the Old Raja's grandfather — the Raja of the Reform, we call him. Between them, he and my great-grandfather invented modern Pala. The Old Raja consolidated their work and carried it further. And today we're doing our best to follow in his footsteps."

Will held up the '*Notes on What's What*'.

"Does this give the history of the reforms?"

Dr Robert shook his head. “It merely states the underlying principles. Read about those first. When I get back from Shivapuram this evening, I’ll give you a taste of the history. You’ll have a better understanding of what was actually done, if you start by knowing what had to be done — what always and everywhere has to be done by anyone who has a clear idea about what’s what. So read it, read it. And don’t forget to drink your fruit juice at eleven.”

Will watched him go, then opened the little green book and started to read.

Nobody needs to go anywhere else. We are all, if we only knew it, already there.

If I only knew who in fact I am, I should cease to behave as what I think I am; and if I stopped behaving as what I think I am, I should know who I am.

What in fact I am, if only the Manichee I think I am would allow me to know it, is the reconciliation of yes and no lived out in total acceptance and the blessed experience of Not-Two.

In religion all words are dirty words. Anybody who gets eloquent about Buddha, or God, or Christ, ought to have his mouth washed out with carbolic soap.

Because his aspiration to perpetuate only the ‘yes’ in every pair of opposites can never, in the nature of things, be realized, the insulated Manichee I think I am condemns himself to endlessly repeated frustration, endlessly repeated conflicts with other aspiring and frustrated Manichees.

Conflicts and frustrations — the theme of all history and almost all biography. “I show you sorrow,” said the Buddha realistically. But he also showed the ending of sorrow — self-knowledge, total acceptance, the blessed experience of Not-Two.

II

Knowing who in fact we are results in Good Being, and Good Being results in the most appropriate kind of good doing. But good doing does not of itself result

in Good Being. We can be virtuous without knowing who in fact we are. The beings who are merely good are not Good Beings; they are just pillars of society.

Most pillars are their own Samsons. They hold up, but sooner or later they also pull down. There has never been a society in which most good doing was the product of Good Being and therefore constantly appropriate. This does not mean that there will never be such a society or that we in Pala are fools for trying to call it into existence.

III

The Yogin and the Stoic — two righteous egos who achieve their very considerable results by pretending, systematically, to be somebody else. But it is not by pretending to be somebody else, even somebody supremely good and wise, that we can pass from insulated Manicheehood to Good Being.

Good Being is knowing who in fact we are; and in order to know who in fact we are, we must first know, moment by moment, who we think we are and what this bad habit of thought compels us to feel and do. A moment of clear and complete knowledge of what we think we are, but in fact are not, puts a stop, for the moment, to the Manichean charade. If we renew, until they become a continuity, these moments of the knowledge of what we are not, we may find ourselves all of a sudden, knowing who in fact we are. Concentration abstract thinking, spiritual exercises — systematic exclusions in the realm of thought. Asceticism and hedonism — systematic exclusions in the realms of sensation, feeling and action. But Good Being is in the knowledge of who in fact one is in relation to *all* experiences; so be aware — aware in every context, at all times and whatever, creditable or discreditable, pleasant or unpleasant, you may be doing or suffering. This is the only genuine yoga, the only spiritual exercise worth practising. *The more a man knows about individual objects, the more he knows about God*. Translating Spinoza's language into ours, we can say: The more a man knows about himself in relation to every kind of experience, the greater his chance of suddenly, one fine morning, realizing who in fact he is —

or rather Who (capital W) in Fact (capital F) “he” (between quotation marks) Is (capital I).

St John was right. In a blessedly speechless universe, the Word was not only *with* God; it *was* God. As a something to be believed in. God is a projected symbol, a deified name. God = “God”.

Faith is something very different from belief. Belief is the systematic taking of unanalysed words much too seriously. Paul’s words, Mohammed’s words, Marx’s words, Hitler’s words — people take them too seriously, and what happens? What happens is the senseless ambivalence of history — sadism versus duty, or (incomparably worse) sadism *as* duty; devotion counterbalanced by organized paranoia; sisters of charity selflessly tending the victims of their own church’s inquisitors and crusaders. Faith, on the contrary, can never be taken too seriously. For Faith is the empirically justified confidence in our capacity to know who in fact we are, to forget the belief-intoxicated Manichee in Good Being. Give us this day our daily Faith, but deliver us, dear God, from Belief.

There was a tap at the door. Will looked up from his book.

“Who’s there?”

“It’s me,” said a voice that brought back unpleasant memories of Colonel Dipa and that nightmarish drive in the white Mercedes. Dressed only in white sandals, white shorts and a platinum wrist watch, Murugan was advancing towards the bed.

“How nice of you to come and see me!”

Another visitor would have asked him how he was feeling; but Murugan was too whole-heartedly concerned with himself to be able even to simulate the slightest interest in anyone else. “I came to the door three-quarters of an hour ago,” he said in tones of aggrieved complaint. “But the old man hadn’t left, so I had to go home again. And then I had to sit with my mother and the man who’s staying with us while they were having their breakfast …”

“Why couldn’t you come in while Dr Robert was here?” Will asked. “Is it against the rules for you to talk to me?”

The boy shook his head impatiently. “Of course not. I just didn’t want him to know the reason for my coming to see you.”

“The reason?” Will smiled. “Visiting the sick is an act of charity — highly commendable.”

His irony was lost upon Murugan, who went on steadily thinking about his own affairs. “Thank you for not telling them you’d seen me before,” he said abruptly, almost angrily. It was as though he resented having to acknowledge his obligation, and were furious with Will for having done him the good turn which demanded this acknowledgement.

“I could see you didn’t want me to say anything about it,” said Will. “So of course I didn’t.”

“I wanted to thank you,” Murugan muttered between his teeth and in a tone that would have been appropriate to, “You dirty swine!”

“Don’t mention it,” said Will with mock politeness.

What a delicious creature! he was thinking as he looked, with amused curiosity, at that smooth golden torso, that averted face, regular as a statue’s but no longer Olympian, no longer classical — a Hellenistic face, mobile and all too human. A vessel of incomparable beauty — but what did it contain? It was a pity, he reflected, that he hadn’t asked that question a little more seriously before getting involved with his unspeakable Babs. But then Babs was a female. By the sort of heterosexual he was, the sort of rational question he was now posing was unaskable. As no doubt it would be, by anyone susceptible to boys, in regard to this bad-blooded little demi-god sitting at the end of his bed. “Didn’t Dr Robert know you’d gone to Rendang?” he asked.

“Of course he knew. Everybody knew it. I’d gone there to fetch my mother. She was staying there with some of her relations. I went over to bring her back to Pala. It was absolutely official.”

“Then why didn’t you want me to say that I’d met you over there?”

Murugan hesitated for a moment, then looked up at Will defiantly. “Because I didn’t want them to know I’d been seeing Colonel Dipa.”

Oh, so *that* was it! “Colonel Dipa’s a remarkable man,” he said aloud, fishing with sugared bait for confidences.

Surprisingly unsuspicious, the fish rose at once. Murugan’s sulky face lit up with enthusiasm and there, suddenly, was Antinous in all the fascinating beauty of his ambiguous adolescence. “I think he’s wonderful,” he said, and for the first time since he had entered the room, he seemed to recognize Will’s existence and gave him the friendliest of smiles. The Colonel’s wonderfulness had made him forget his resentment, had made it possible for him, momentarily, to love everybody — even this man to whom he owed a rankling debt of gratitude. “Look at what he’s doing for Rendang!”

“He’s certainly doing a great deal for Rendang,” said Will non-committally.

A cloud passed across Murugan’s radiant face. “They don’t think so here,” he said, frowning. “They think he’s awful.”

“Who thinks so?”

“Practically everybody!”

“So they didn’t want you to see him?”

With the expression of an urchin who has cocked a snook while the teacher’s back is turned, Murugan grinned triumphantly. “They thought I was with my mother all the time.”

Will picked up the cue at once. “Did your mother know you were seeing the Colonel?” he asked.

“Of course.”

“And had no objection?”

“She was all for it.”

And yet Will felt quite sure, he hadn’t been mistaken when he thought of Hadrian and Antinous. Was the woman blind? Or didn’t she wish to see what was happening?

“But if *she* doesn’t mind,” he said aloud, “why should Dr Robert and the rest of them object?” Murugan looked at him suspiciously. Realizing that he had ventured too far into forbidden territory, Will hastily drew a red herring across

the trail. “Do they think,” he asked with a laugh, “that he might convert you to a belief in military dictatorship?”

The red herring was duly followed, and the boy’s face relaxed into a smile. “Not that, exactly,” he answered, “but something like it. It’s all so stupid,” he added with a shrug of the shoulders. “Just idiotic protocol.”

“Protocol?” Will was genuinely puzzled.

“Weren’t you told anything about me?”

“Only what Dr Robert said yesterday.”

“You mean, about my being a student?” Murugan threw back his head and laughed.

“What’s so funny about being a student?”

“Nothing — nothing at all.” The boy looked away again. There was a silence. Still averted, “The reason,” he said at last, “why I’m not supposed to see Colonel Dipa is that he’s the head of a state and *I’m* the head of a state. When we meet, it’s international politics.”

“What do you mean?”

“I happen to be the Raja of Pala.”

“The Raja of Pala?”

“Since fifty-four. That was when my father died.”

“And your mother, I take it, is the Rani?”

“My mother is the Rani.”

Make a bee-line for the palace. But here was the palace making a bee-line for him. Providence, evidently, was on the side of Joe Aldehyde and working overtime.

“Were you the eldest son?” he asked.

“The *only* son,” Murugan replied. And then, stressing his uniqueness still more emphatically, “The only *child*,” he added.

“So there’s no possible doubt,” said Will. “My goodness! I ought to be calling you Your Majesty. Or at least Sir.” The words were spoken laughingly; but it was with the most perfect seriousness and a sudden assumption of regal dignity that Murugan responded to them.

“You’ll have to call me that at the end of next week,” he said. “After my birthday. I shall be eighteen. That’s when a Raja of Pala comes of age. Till then I’m just Murugan Mailendra. Just a student learning a little bit about everything — including plant breeding,” he added contemptuously— “so that, when the time comes, I shall know what I’m doing.”

“And when the time comes, what will you be doing?” Between this pretty Antinous and his portentous office there was a contrast which Will found richly comic. “How do you propose to act?” he continued on a bantering note. “Off with their heads? *L’Etat c’est Moi*?”

Seriousness and regal dignity hardened into rebuke. “Don’t be stupid.”

Amused, Will went through the motions of apology. “I just wanted to find out how absolute you were going to be.”

“Pala is a constitutional monarchy,” Murugan answered gravely.

“In other words, you’re just going to be a symbolic figurehead — to reign, like the Queen of England, but not rule.”

Forgetting his regal dignity, “No, *no*,” Murugan almost screamed. “*Not* like the Queen of England. The Raja of Pala doesn’t just reign; he rules.” Too much agitated to sit still, Murugan jumped up and began to walk about the room. “He rules constitutionally; but, by God, he rules, he *rules*!” Murugan walked to the window and looked out. Turning back after a moment of silence, he confronted Will with a face transfigured by its new expression into an emblem, exquisitely moulded and coloured, of an all too familiar kind of psychological ugliness. “I’ll show them who’s the boss around here,” he said in a phrase and tone, which had obviously been borrowed from the hero of some American gangster movie. “These people think they can push me around,” he went on reciting from the dismally commonplace script, “the way they pushed my father around. But they’re making a big mistake,” he uttered a sinister snigger and wagged his beautiful, odious head. “A big mistake,” he repeated.

The words had been spoken between clenched teeth and with scarcely moving lips; the lower jaw had been thrust out so as to look like the jaw of a comic strip criminal; the eyes glared coldly between narrowed lids. At once absurd and

horrible. Antinous had become the caricature of all the tough guys in all the B-pictures from time immemorial.

“Who’s been running the country during your minority?” Will now asked.

“Three sets of old fogeys,” Murugan answered contemptuously. “The Cabinet, the House of Representatives and then, representing *me*, the Raja, the Privy Council.”

“Poor old fogeys!” said Will. “They’ll soon be getting the shock of their lives.” Entering gaily into the spirit of delinquency, he laughed aloud. “I only hope I’ll still be around to see it happening.”

Murugan joined in the laughter — joined in it, not as the sinisterly mirthful Tough Guy but, with one of those sudden changes of mood and expression that would make it, Will foresaw, so hard for him to play the Tough Guy part, as the triumphant urchin of a few minutes earlier. “The shock of their lives,” he repeated happily.

“Have you made any specific plans?”

“I most certainly have,” said Murugan. On his mobile face the triumphant urchin made way for the statesman, grave but condescendingly affable, at a press conference. “Top priority: get this place modernized. Look at what Rendang has been able to do because of its oil royalties.”

“But doesn’t Pala get any oil royalties?” Will questioned with that innocent air of total ignorance, which he had found by long experience to be the best way of eliciting information from the simple-minded and the self-important.

“Not a penny,” said Murugan. “And yet the southern end of the island is fairly oozing with the stuff. But except for a few measly little wells for home consumption, the old fogeys won’t do anything about it. And what’s more, they won’t allow anyone else to do anything about it.” The statesman was growing angry; there were hints now in his voice and expression of the Tough Guy. “All sorts of people have made offers — South-East Asia Petroleum, Shell, Royal Dutch, Standard of California. But the bloody old fools won’t listen.”

“Can’t you persuade them to listen?”

“I’ll damn well *make* them listen,” said the Tough Guy.

“That’s the spirit!” Then, casually, “Which of the offers do you think of accepting?” he asked.

“Colonel Dipa’s working with Standard of California, and he thinks it might be best if we did the same.”

“I wouldn’t do that without at least getting a few competing bids.”

“That’s what I think too. So does my mother.”

“Very wise.”

“My mother’s all for South-East Asia Petroleum. She knows the Chairman of the Board, Lord Aldehyde.”

“She knows Lord Aldehyde? But how extraordinary!” The tone of delighted astonishment was thoroughly convincing. “Joe Aldehyde is a friend of mine. I write for his papers. I even serve as his private ambassador. Confidentially,” he added, “that’s why we took that trip to the copper mines. Copper is one of Joe’s side-lines. But of course his real love is oil.”

Murugan tried to look shrewd. “What would he be prepared to offer?”

Will picked up the cue and answered, in the best movie-tycoon style, “Whatever Standard offers plus a little more.”

“Fair enough,” said Murugan out of the same script, and nodded sagely. There was a long silence. When he spoke again, it was as the statesman granting an interview to representatives of the press.

“The oil royalties,” he said, “will be used in the following manner. Twenty-five per cent of all monies received will go to World Reconstruction.”

“May I ask,” Will enquired deferentially, “precisely how you propose to reconstruct the world?”

“Through the Crusade of the Spirit. Do you know about the Crusade of the Spirit?”

“Of course. Who doesn’t?”

“It’s a great world movement,” said the statesman gravely. “Like Early Christianity. Founded by my mother.”

Will registered awe and astonishment.

“Yes, founded by my mother,” Murugan repeated, and he added impressively, “I believe it’s man’s only hope.”

“Quite,” said Will Farnaby, “quite.”

“Well, that’s how the first twenty-five per cent of the royalties will be used,” the statesman continued. “The remainder will go into an intensive programme of industrialization.” The tone changed again. “These old idiots here only want to industrialize in spots and leave all the rest as it was a thousand years ago.”

“Whereas you’d like to go the whole hog. Industrialization for industrialization’s sake.”

“No, industrialization for the country’s sake. Industrialization to make Pala strong. To make other people respect us. Look at Rendang. Within five years they’ll be manufacturing all the rifles and mortars and ammunition they need. It’ll be quite a long time before they can make tanks. But meanwhile they can buy them from Skoda with their oil money.”

“How soon will they graduate to H-bombs?” Will asked ironically.

“They won’t even try,” Murugan answered. “But after all,” he added, “H-bombs aren’t the only absolute weapons,” He pronounced the phrase with relish. It was evident that he found the taste of ‘absolute weapons’ positively delicious. “Chemical and biological weapons — Colonel Dipa calls them the poor man’s H-bombs. One of the first things I’ll do is to build a big insecticide plant.” Murugan laughed and winked an eye. “If you can make insecticides,” he said, “you can make nerve gas.”

Will remembered that still unfinished factory in the suburbs of Rendang-Lobo.

“What’s that?” he had asked Colonel Dipa as they flashed past it in the white Mercedes.

“Insecticides,” the Colonel had answered. And showing his gleaming white teeth in a genial smile, “We shall soon be exporting the stuff all over South-East Asia.”

At the time, of course, he had thought that the Colonel merely meant what he said. But now … Will shrugged his mental shoulders. Colonels will be Colonels

and boys, even boys like Murugan, will be gun-loving boys. There would always be plenty of jobs for special correspondents on the trail of death.

“So you’ll strengthen Pala’s army?” Will said aloud.

“Strengthen it? No — I’ll create it. Pala doesn’t have an army.”

“None at all?”

“Absolutely nothing. They’re all pacifists.” The *p* was an explosion of disgust, the *s’s* hissed contemptuously. “I shall have to start from scratch.”

“And you’ll militarize as you industrialize, is that it?”

“Exactly.”

Will laughed. “Back to the Assyrians! You’ll go down in history as a true revolutionary.”

“That’s what I hope,” said Murugan. “Because that’s what my policy is going to be — Continuing Revolution.”

“Very good!” Will applauded.

“I’ll just be continuing the revolution that was started more than a hundred years ago by Dr Robert’s great-grandfather when he came to Pala and helped my great-great-great-grandfather to put through the first reforms. Some of the things they did were really wonderful. Not all of them, mind you,” he qualified; and with the absurd solemnity of a schoolboy playing Polonius in an end-of-term performance of *Hamlet* he shook his curly head in grave, judicial disapproval. “But at least they *did* something. Whereas nowadays we’re governed by a set of do-nothing conservatives. Conservatively primitive — they won’t lift a finger to bring in modern improvements. And conservatively radical — they refuse to change any of the old bad revolutionary ideas that ought to be changed. They won’t reform the reforms. And I tell you, some of those so-called reforms are absolutely disgusting.”

“Meaning, I take it, that they have something to do with sex?”

Murugan nodded and turned away his face. To his astonishment, Will saw that he was blushing.

“Give me an example,” he demanded.

But Murugan could not bring himself to be explicit.

“Ask Dr Robert,” he said, “ask Vijaya. *They* think that sort of thing is simply wonderful. In fact they all do. That’s one of the reasons why nobody wants to change. They’d like everything to go on as it is, in the same old disgusting way, for ever and ever.”

“Forever and ever,” a rich contralto voice teasingly repeated.

“Mother!” Murugan sprang to his feet.

Will turned and saw in the doorway a large florid woman swathed (rather incongruously, he thought; for that kind of face and build usually went with mauve and magenta and electric blue) in clouds of white muslin. She stood there smiling with a conscious mysteriousness, one fleshy brown arm upraised, with its jewelled hand pressed against the door jamb, in the pose of the great actress, the acknowledged *diva*, pausing at her first entrance to accept the plaudits of her adorers on the other side of the footlights. In the background, waiting patiently for his cue, stood a tall man in a dove-grey Dacron suit whom Murugan, peering past the massive embodiment of maternity that almost filled the doorway, now greeted as Mr Bahu.

Still in the wings, Mr Bahu bowed without speaking.

Murugan turned again to his mother. “Did you *walk* here?” he asked. His tone expressed incredulity and an admiring solicitude. Walking here — how unthinkable! But if she *had* walked, what heroism! “All the way?”

“All the way, my baby,” she echoed, tenderly playful. The uplifted arm came down, slid round the boy’s slender body, pressed it, engulfed in floating draperies, against the enormous bosom, then released it again. “I had one of my Impulses.” She had a way, Will noticed, of making you actually *hear* the capital letters at the beginning of the words she meant to emphasize. “My Little Voice said, ‘Go and see this Stranger at Dr Robert’s house. Go!’ ‘Now?’ I said. ‘*Malgré la chaleur*?’ Which makes my Little Voice lose patience. ‘Woman,’ it says, ‘hold your silly tongue and do as you’re told.’ So here I am, Mr Farnaby.” With hand outstretched and surrounded by a powerful aura of sandalwood oil, she advanced towards him.

Will bowed over the thick bejewelled fingers and mumbled something that ended in ‘Your Highness’ …

“Bahu!” she called, using the royal prerogative of the unadorned surname.

Responding to his long-awaited cue, the supporting actor made his entrance and was introduced as His Excellency, Abdul Bahu, the Ambassador of Rendang: “Abdul Pierre Bahu — *car sa mère est parisienne*. But he learned his English in New York.”

He looked, Will thought as he shook the ambassador’s hand, like Savonarola — but a Savonarola with a monocle and a tailor in Savile Row.

“Bahu,” said the Rani, “is Colonel Dipa’s Brains Trust.”

“Your Highness, if I may be permitted to say so, is much too kind to me and not nearly kind enough to the Colonel.”

His words and manner were courtly to the point of being ironical, a parody of deference and self-abasement.

“The brains,” he went on, “are where brains ought to be — in the head. As for me, I am merely a part of Rendang’s sympathetic nervous system.”

“*Et combien sympathique*!” said the Rani. “Among other things, Mr Farnaby, Bahu is the Last of the Aristocrats. You should see his country place! Like the Arabian Nights! One claps one’s hands — and instantly there are six servants ready to do one’s bidding. One has a birthday — and there is a *fête nocturne* in the gardens. Music, refreshments, dancing girls; two hundred retainers carrying torches. The life of Haroun al Rashid, but with modern plumbing.”

“It sounds quite delightful,” said Will, remembering the villages through which he had passed in Colonel Dipa’s white Mercedes — the wattled huts, the garbage, the children with ophthalmia, the skeleton dogs, the women bent double under enormous loads.

“And such taste,” the Rani went on, “such a well-stored mind and, through it all” (she lowered her voice), “such a deep and unfailing Sense of the Divine.”

Mr Bahu bowed his head, and there was a silence.

Murugan, meanwhile, had pushed up a chair. Without so much as a backward glance — regally confident that someone must always, in the very nature of

things, be at hand to guard against mishaps and loss of dignity — the Rani sat down with all the majestic emphasis of her hundred kilograms.

"I hope you don't feel that my visit is an intrusion," she said to Will. He assured her that he didn't; but she continued to apologize … "I would have given warning," she said, "I would have asked your permission. But my Little Voice says, 'No — you must go now.' Why? I cannot say. But no doubt we shall find out in due course." She fixed him with her large, bulging eyes and gave him a mysterious smile. "And now, first of all, how *are* you, dear Mr Farnaby?"

"As you see, ma'am, in very good shape."

"Truly?" The bulging eyes scrutinized his face with an intentness that he found embarrassing. "I can see that you're the kind of heroically considerate man who will go on reassuring his friends even on his deathbed."

"You're very flattering," he said. "But as it happens, I *am* in good shape. Amazingly so, all things considered — miraculously so."

"Miraculous," said the Rani, "was the very word I used when I heard about your escape. It *was* a miracle."

"As luck would have it," Will quoted again from *Erewhon*, "'Providence was on my side.'"

Mr Bahu started to laugh; but noticing that the Rani had evidently failed to get the point, changed his mind and adroitly turned the sound of merriment into a loud cough.

"How true!" the Rani was saying, and her rich contralto thrillingly vibrated. "Providence is *always* on our side." And when Will raised a questioning eyebrow, "I mean," she elaborated, "in the eyes of those who Truly Understand." (Capital T, capital U) "And this is true even when all things seem to conspire against us — *même dans le désastre*. You understand French, of course, Mr Farnaby?" Will nodded. "It often comes to me more easily than my own native tongue, or English or Palanese. After so many years in Switzerland," she explained, "first at school. And again, later on, when my poor baby's health was so precarious," (she patted Murugan's bare arm) "and we had to go and live in the mountains. Which illustrates what I was saying about Providence always

being on our side. When they told me that my little boy was on the brink of consumption, I forgot everything I'd ever learnt. I was mad with fear and anguish, I was indignant against God for having allowed such a thing to happen. What Utter Blindness! My baby got well, and those years among the Eternal Snows were the happiest of our lives — weren't they, darling?"

"The happiest of our lives," the boy agreed, with what almost sounded like complete sincerity.

The Rani smiled triumphantly, pouted her full red lips and with a faint smack parted them again in a long-distance kiss. "So you see, my dear Farnaby," she went on, "you see. It's really self-evident. Nothing happens by Accident. There's a Great Plan, and within the Great Plan innumerable little plans. A little plan for each and every one of us."

"Quite," said Will politely. "Quite."

"There was a time," the Rani continued, "when I knew it only with my intellect. Now I know it with my heart. I really …" she paused for an instant to prepare for the utterance of the mystic majuscule, "Understand."

'Psychic as hell.' Will remembered what Joe Aldehyde had said of her. And surely that life-long frequenter of seances should know.

"I take it, ma'am," he said, "that you're naturally psychic."

"From birth," she admitted. "But also and above all by training. Training, needless to say, in Something Else."

"Something else?"

"In the life of the Spirit. As one advances along the Path, all the *sidhis*, all the psychic gifts and miraculous powers, develop spontaneously."

"Is that so?"

"My Mother," Murugan proudly assured him, "can do the most fantastic things."

"*N' exagérons pas, chéri*."

"But it's the truth," Murugan insisted.

"A truth," the ambassador put in, "which I can confirm. And I confirm it," he added, smiling at his own expense, "with a certain reluctance. As a life-long

sceptic about these things, I don't like to see the impossible happening. But I have an unfortunate weakness for honesty. And when the impossible actually does happen, before my eyes, I'm compelled *malgré moi* to bear witness to the fact. Her Highness *does* do the *most* fantastic things."

"Well, if you like to put it that way," said the Rani, beaming with pleasure. "But never forget, Bahu, never forget. Miracles are of absolutely no importance. What's important is the Other Thing — the Thing one comes to at the end of the Path."

"After the Fourth Initiation," Murugan specified. "My Mother …"

"Darling!" The Rani had raised a finger to her lips. "These are things one doesn't talk about."

"I'm sorry," said the boy. There was a long and pregnant silence.

The Rani closed her eyes, and Mr Bahu, letting fall his monocle, reverentially followed suit and became the image of Savonarola in silent prayer. What was going on behind that austere, that almost fleshless mask of recollectedness? Will looked and wondered.

"May I ask," he said at last, "how you first came, ma'am, to find the Path?"

For a second or two the Rani said nothing, merely sat there with her eyes shut, smiling her Buddha smile of mysterious bliss. "Providence found it for me," she answered at last.

"Quite, quite. But there must have been an occasion, a place, a human instrument."

"I'll tell you." The lids fluttered apart and once again he found himself under the bright unswerving glare of those protuberant eyes of hers.

The place had been Lausanne; the time, the first year of her Swiss education; the chosen instrument, darling little Mme Buloz. Darling little Mme Buloz was the wife of darling old Professor Buloz, and old Professor Buloz was the man to whose charge, after careful enquiry and much anxious thought, she had been committed by her father, the late Sultan of Rendang. The Professor was sixty-seven, taught geology and was a Protestant of so austere a sect that, except for drinking a glass of claret with his dinner, saying his prayers only twice a day and

being strictly monogamous, he might almost have been a Muslim. Under such guardianship a princess of Rendang would be intellectually stimulated, while remaining morally and doctrinally intact. But the Sultan had reckoned without the Professor's wife. Mme Buloz was only forty, plump, sentimental, bubblingly enthusiastic and, though officially of her husband's Protestant persuasion, a newly-converted and intensely ardent Theosophist. In a room at the top of the tall house near the Place de la Riponne she had her Oratory, to which, whenever she could find time, she would secretly retire to do breathing exercises, practice concentration and raise Kundalini. Strenuous disciplines! But the reward was transcendentally great. In the small hours of a hot summer night, while the darling old Professor lay rhythmically snoring two floors down, she had become aware of a Presence: the Master Koot Hoomi was with her.

The Rani made an impressive pause.

"Extraordinary," said Mr Bahu.

"Extraordinary," Will dutifully echoed.

The Rani resumed her narrative. Irrepressibly happy, Mme Buloz had been unable to keep her secret. She had dropped mysterious hints, had passed from hints to confidences, from confidences to an invitation to the Oratory and a course of instruction. In a very short time Koot Hoomi was bestowing greater favours upon the novice than upon her teacher.

"And from that day to this," she concluded, "the Master has helped me to Go Forward."

To go forward, Will asked himself, into what? Koot Hoomi only knew. But whatever it was that she had gone forward into, he didn't like it. There was an expression on that large florid face which he found peculiarly distasteful — an expression of domineering calm, of serene and unshakeable self-esteem. She reminded him in a curious way of Joe Aldehyde. Joe was one of those happy tycoons who feel no qualms, but rejoice without inhibition in their money and in all that their money will buy in the way of influence and power. And here — albeit clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful — was another of Joe Aldehyde's breed: a female tycoon who had cornered the market, not in soya

beans or copper, but in Pure Spirituality and the Ascended Masters, and was now happily rubbing her hands over the exploit.

"Here's one example of what He's done for me," the Rani went on. "Eight years ago — to be exact, on the twenty-third of November 1953 — the Master came to me in my morning Meditation. Came in Person, came in Glory. 'A great Crusade is to be launched,' He said, 'a World-Movement to save Humanity from self-destruction. And you, my child, are the Appointed Instrument.' 'Me? A world movement? But that's absurd,' I said. 'I've never made a speech in my whole life. I've never written a word for publication. I've never been a leader or an organizer.' 'Nevertheless,' He said (and He gave me one of those indescribably beautiful smiles of His), 'nevertheless it is you who will launch this Crusade — the World-Wide Crusade of the Spirit. You will be laughed at, you will be called a fool, a crank, a fanatic. The dogs bark; the Caravan passes. From tiny, laughable beginnings the Crusade of the Spirit is destined to become a Mighty Force. A force for Good, a force that will ultimately Save the World.' And with that He left me. Left me stunned, bewildered, scared out of my wits. But there was nothing for it; I had to obey. I *did* obey. And what happened? I made speeches, and He gave me eloquence. I accepted the burden of leadership and, because He was walking invisibly at my side, people followed me. I asked for help, and the money came pouring in. So here I am." She threw out her thick hands in a gesture of self-depreciation, she smiled a mystic smile. *A poor thing*, she seemed to be saying, *but not my own — my Master's, Koot Hoomi's*. "Here I am," she repeated.

"Here, praise God," said Mr Bahu devoutly, "you are."

After a decent interval Will asked the Rani if she had always kept up the practices so providentially learned in Mme Buloz's oratory.

"Always," she answered. "I could no more do without Meditation than I could do without Food."

"Wasn't it rather difficult after you were married? I mean, before you went back to Switzerland. There must have been so many tiresome official duties."

“Not to mention all the *un*official ones,” said the Rani in a tone that implied whole volumes of unfavourable comment upon her late husband’s character, *weltanschauung* and sexual habits. She opened her mouth to elaborate on the theme, then closed it again and looked at Murugan. “Darling,” she called.

Murugan, who was absorbedly polishing the nails of his left hand upon the open palm of his right, looked up with a guilty start. “Yes, Mother?”

Ignoring the nails and his evident inattention to what she had been saying, the Rani gave him a seducing smile. “Be an angel,” she said, “and go and fetch the car. My Little Voice doesn’t say anything about *walking* back to the bungalow. It’s only a few hundred yards,” she explained to Will. “But in this heat, and at my age …”

Her words called for some kind of flattering rebuttal. But if it was too hot to walk, it was also too hot, Will felt, to put forth the very considerable amount of energy required for a convincing show of bogus sincerity. Fortunately a professional diplomat, a practised courtier was on hand to make up for the uncouth journalist’s deficiencies. Mr Bahu uttered a peal of light-hearted laughter, then apologized for his merriment.

“But it was really *too* funny! ‘At my age,’” he repeated, and laughed again. “Murugan is not quite eighteen, and I happen to know how old — how *very* young — the Princess of Rendang was when she married the Raja of Pala.”

Murugan, meanwhile, had obediently risen and was kissing his mother’s hand.

“Now we can talk more freely,” said the Rani when he had left the room. And freely — her face, her tone, her bulging eyes, her whole quivering frame registering the most intense disapproval — she now let fly.

De mortuis … She wouldn’t say anything about her husband except that, in most respects, he was a typical Palanese, a true representative of his country. For the sad truth was that Pala’s smooth bright skin concealed the most horrible rottenness.

“When I think what they tried to do to my Baby, two years ago, when I was on my world tour for the Crusade of the Spirit.” With a jingling of bracelets she

lifted her hands in horror. “It was an agony for me to be parted from him for so long; but the Master had sent me on a Mission, and my Little Voice told me that it wouldn’t be right for me to take my Baby with me. He’d lived abroad for so long. It was high time for him to get to know the country he was to rule. So I decided to leave him here. The Privy Council appointed a committee of guardianship. Two women with growing boys of their own and two men — one of whom, I regret to say,” (more in sorrow than in anger), “was Dr Robert MacPhail. Well, to cut a long story short, no sooner was I safely out of the country than those precious guardians, to whom I’d entrusted my Baby, my Only Son, set to work systematically — *systematically*, Mr Farnaby — to undermine my influence. They tried to destroy the whole edifice of Moral and Spiritual Values, which I had so laboriously built up over the years.”

Somewhat maliciously (for of course he knew what the woman was talking about), Will expressed his astonishment. The *whole* edifice of moral and spiritual values? And yet nobody could have been kinder than Dr Robert and the others, no Good Samaritans were ever more simply and effectively charitable.

“I’m not denying their kindness,” said the Rani. “But after all kindness isn’t the only virtue.”

“Of course not,” Will agreed, and he listed all the qualities that the Rani seemed most conspicuously to lack. “There’s also sincerity. Not to mention truthfulness, humility, selflessness …”

“You’re forgetting Purity,” said the Rani severely. “Purity is fundamental, Purity is the *sine qua non*.”

“But here in Pali, I gather, they don’t think so.”

“They most certainly do not,” said the Rani. And she went on to tell him how her poor Baby had been deliberately exposed to impurity, even actively encouraged to indulge in it with one of those precocious, promiscuous girls of whom, in Pala, there were only too many. And when they found that he wasn’t the sort of boy who would seduce a girl (for she had brought him up to think of Woman as essentially Holy), they had encouraged the girl to do her best to seduce *him*.

Had she, Will wondered, succeeded? Or had Antinous already been girl-proofed by little friends of his own age or, still more effectively, by some older, more experienced and authoritative pederast, some Swiss precursor of Colonel Dipa?

"But that wasn't the worst." The Rani lowered her voice to a horrified stage whisper. "One of the mothers on the committee of guardianship — one of the *mothers*, mind you — advised him to take a course of lessons."

"What sort of lessons?"

"In what they euphemistically call Love." She wrinkled up her nose as though she had smelt raw sewage. "Lessons, if you please," and disgust turned into indignation, "from some Older Woman."

"Heavens!" cried the ambassador.

"Heavens!" Will dutifully echoed. Those older women, he could see, were competitors much more dangerous, in the Rani's eyes, than even the most precociously promiscuous of girls. A mature instructress in love would be a rival mother, enjoying the monstrously unfair advantage of being free to go to the limits of incest.

"They teach …" the Rani hesitated. "They teach Special Techniques."

"What sort of techniques?" Will enquired.

But she couldn't bring herself to go into the repulsive particulars. And anyhow it wasn't necessary. For Murugan (bless his heart!) had refused to listen to them. Lessons in immorality from someone old enough to be his mother — the very idea of it had made him sick. No wonder. He had been brought up to reverence the Ideal of Purity. "*Brahmacharya*, if you know what that means."

"Quite," said Will.

"And this is another reason why his illness was such a blessing in disguise, such a real Godsend. I don't think I *could* have brought him up that way in Pala. There are too many bad influences here. Forces working against Purity, against the Family, even against Mother Love."

Will pricked up his ears. "Did they even reform mothers?"

She nodded. “You just can’t imagine how far things have gone here. But Koot Hoomi knew what kind of dangers we would have to run in Pala. So what happens? My Baby falls ill, and the doctors order us to Switzerland. Out of Harm’s way.”

“How was it,” Will asked, “that Koot Hoomi let you go off on your Crusade? Didn’t he foresee what would happen to Murugan as soon as your back was turned?”

“He foresaw everything,” said the Rani. “The temptations, the resistance, the massed assault by all the Powers of Evil and then, at the very last moment, the rescue. For a long time,” she explained, “Murugan didn’t tell me what was happening. But after three months the assaults of the Powers of Evil were too much for him. He dropped hints; but I was too completely absorbed in my Master’s business to be able to take them. Finally he wrote me a letter in which it was all spelled out — in detail. I cancelled my last four lectures in Brazil and flew home as fast as the jets would carry me. A week later we were back in Switzerland. Just my Baby and I — alone with the Master.”

She closed her eyes, and an expression of gloating ecstasy appeared upon her face. Will looked away in distaste. This self-canonized world-saviour, this clutching and devouring mother — had she ever, for a single moment, seen herself as others saw her? Did she have any idea of what she had done, what she was still doing, to her poor silly little son? To the first question the answer was certainly no. About the second one could only speculate. Perhaps she honestly didn’t know what she had made of the boy. But perhaps, on the other hand, she *did* know. Knew and preferred what was happening with the Colonel to what might happen if the boy’s education were taken in hand by a woman. The woman might supplant her; the Colonel, she knew, would not.

“Murugan told me that he intended to reform these so-called reforms.”

“I can only pray,” said the Rani in a tone that reminded Will of his grandfather, the Archdeacon, “that he’ll be given the Strength and Wisdom to do it.”

“And what do you think of his other projects?” Will asked. “Oil? Industries? An army?”

“Economics and politics aren’t exactly my strong point,” she answered with a little laugh which was meant to remind him that he was talking to someone who had taken the Fourth Initiation. “Ask Bahu what he thinks.”

“I have no right to offer an opinion,” said the ambassador. “I’m an outsider, the representative of a foreign power.”

“Not so very foreign,” said the Rani.

“Not in your eyes, ma’am. And not, as you know very well, in mine. But in the eyes of the Palanese government — yes. Completely foreign.”

“But that,” said Will, “doesn’t prevent you from having opinions. It only prevents you from having the locally orthodox opinions. And incidentally,” he added, “I’m not here in my professional capacity. You’re not being interviewed, Mr Ambassador. All this is strictly off the record.”

“Strictly off the record, then, and strictly as myself and not as an official personage, I believe that our young friend is perfectly right.”

“Which implies, of course, that you believe the policy of the Palanese government to be perfectly wrong.”

“Perfectly wrong,” said Mr Bahu — and the bony, emphatic mask of Savonarola positively twinkled with his Voltairean smile— “perfectly wrong because all too perfectly right.”

“Right?” the Rani protested. “Right?”

“Perfectly right,” he explained, “because so perfectly designed to make every man, woman and child on this enchanting island as perfectly free and happy as it’s possible to be.”

“But with a False Happiness,” the Rani cried, “a freedom that’s only for the Lower Self.”

“I bow,” said the ambassador, duly bowing, “to Your Highness’s superior insight. But still, high or low, true or false, happiness is happiness and freedom is most enjoyable. And there can be no doubt that the policies inaugurated by the

original Reformers and developed over the years have been admirably well adapted to achieving these two goals."

"But you feel," said Will, "that these are undesirable goals?"

"On the contrary, everybody desires them. But unfortunately they're out of context, they've become completely irrelevant to the present situation of the world in general and Pala in particular."

"Are they more irrelevant now than they were when the Reformers first started to work for happiness and freedom?"

The Ambassador nodded. "In those days, Pala was still completely off the map. The idea of turning it into an oasis of freedom and happiness made sense. So long as it remains out of touch with the rest of the world, an ideal society can be a viable society. Pala was completely viable, I'd say, until about 1905. Then, in less than a single generation, the world completely changed. Movies, cars, aeroplanes, radio. Mass production, mass slaughter, mass communication and, above all, plain mass — more and more people in bigger and bigger slums or suburbs. By 1930 any clear-sighted observer could have seen that, for three-quarters of the human race, freedom and happiness were almost out of the question. Today, thirty years later, they're completely out of the question. And meanwhile the outside world has been closing in on this little island of freedom and happiness. Closing in steadily and inexorably, coming nearer and nearer. What was once a viable ideal is now no longer viable."

"So Pala will have to be changed — is that your conclusion?"

Mr Bahu nodded. "Radically."

"Root and branch," said the Rani with a prophet's sadistic gusto.

"And for two cogent reasons," Mr Bahu went on. "First because it simply isn't possible for Pala to go on being different from the rest of the world. And, second, because it isn't right that it should be different."

"Not right for people to be free and happy?"

Once again the Rani said something inspirational about false happiness and the wrong kind of freedom.

Mr Bahu deferentially acknowledged her interruption, then turned back to Will.

“Not right,” he insisted. “Flaunting your blessedness in the face of so much misery — it’s sheer *hubris*, it’s a deliberate affront to the rest of humanity. It’s even a kind of affront to God.”

“God,” the Rani murmured voluptuously, “God …”

Then, re-opening her eyes, “These people in Pala,” she added, “they don’t believe in God. They only believe in Hypnotism and Pantheism and Free Love.” She emphasized the words with indignant disgust.

“So now,” said Will, “you’re proposing to make them miserable in the hope that this will restore their faith in God. Well, that’s one way of producing a conversion. Maybe it’ll work. And maybe the end will justify the means.” He shrugged his shoulders. “But I do see,” he added, “that, good or bad, and regardless of what the Palanese may feel about it, this thing is going to happen. One doesn’t have to be much of a prophet to foretell that Murugan is going to succeed. He’s riding the wave of the future. And the wave of the future is undoubtedly a wave of crude petroleum. Talking of crudity and petroleum,” he added, turning to the Rani, “I understand that you’re acquainted with my old friend, Joe Aldehyde.”

“You know Lord Aldehyde?”

“Well.”

“So *that’s* why my Little Voice was so insistent!” Closing her eyes again, she smiled to herself and slowly nodded her head. “Now I Understand.” Then, in another tone, “How is that dear man?” she asked.

“Still characteristically himself,” Will assured her.

“And what a rare self! *L’homme au cerf-volant* — that’s what I call him.”

“The man with the kite?” Will was puzzled.

“He does his work down here,” she explained; “but he holds a string in his hand, and at the other end of the string is a kite, and the kite is forever trying to go higher, higher, Higher. Even while he’s at work, he feels the constant Pull from Above, feels the Spirit tugging insistently at the flesh. Think of it! A man

of affairs, a great Captain of Industry — and yet, for him, the only thing that Really Matters is the Immortality of the Soul."

Light dawned. The woman had been talking about Joe Aldehyde's addiction to Spiritualism. He thought of those weekly seances with Mrs Harbottle, the automatist; with Mrs Pym, whose control was a Kiowa Indian called Bawbo; with Miss Tuke and her floating trumpet out of which a squeaky whisper uttered oracular words that were taken down in shorthand by Joe's private secretary: '*Buy Australian cement; don't be alarmed by the fall in Breakfast Foods; unload forty per cent of your rubber shares and invest the money in IBM and Westinghouse …'*

"Did he ever tell you," Will asked, "about that departed stock-broker, who always knew what the market was going to do next week?"

"*Sidhis*" said the Rani indulgently. "Just *sidhis*. What else can you expect? After all, he's only a Beginner. And in this present life business is his *karma*. He was predestined to do what he's done, what he's doing, what he's going to do. And what he's going to do," she added impressively and paused in a listening pose, her finger lifted, her head cocked, "what he's going to do — that's what my Little Voice is saying — includes some great and wonderful things here in Pala."

"What a spiritual way of saying, 'This is what I want to happen! Not as I will but as God wills — and by a happy coincidence God's will and mine are always identical.'" Will chuckled inwardly, but kept the straightest of faces.

"Does your Little Voice say anything about South-East Asia Petroleum?" he asked.

The Rani listened again, then nodded. "Distinctly."

"But Colonel Dipa, I gather, doesn't say anything but 'Standard of California.' Incidentally," Will went on, "why does Pala have to worry about the Colonel's taste in oil companies?"

"My government," said Mr Bahu sonorously, "is thinking in terms of a Five Year Plan for Inter-Island Economic Co-ordination and Co-operation."

“Does Inter-Island Co-ordination and Co-operation mean that Standard has to be granted a monopoly?”

“Only if Standard’s terms were more advantageous than those of its competitors.”

“In other words,” said the Rani, “only if there’s nobody who will pay us more.”

“Before you came,” Will told her, “I was discussing this subject with Murugan. South-East Asia Petroleum, I said, will give Pala whatever Standard gives Rendang plus a little more.”

“Fifteen per cent more?”

“Let’s say ten.”

“Make it twelve and a half.”

Will looked at her admiringly. For someone who had taken the Fourth Initiation she was doing pretty well.

“Joe Aldehyde will scream with agony,” he said. “But in the end, I feel certain, you’ll get your twelve and a half.”

“It would certainly be a most attractive proposition,” said Mr Bahu.

“The only trouble is that the Palanese government won’t accept it.”

“The Palanese government,” said the Rani, “will soon be changing its policy.”

“You think so?”

“I KNOW it,” the Rani answered in a tone that made it quite clear that the information had come straight from the Master’s mouth.

“When the change of policy comes, would it help,” Will asked, “if Colonel Dipa were to put in a good word for South-East Asia Petroleum?”

“Undoubtedly.”

Will turned to Mr Bahu. “And would you be prepared, Mr Ambassador, to put in a good word with Colonel Dipa?”

In polysyllables, as though he were addressing a plenary session of some international organization, Mr Bahu hedged diplomatically. On the one hand,

yes; but on the other hand, no. From one point of view, white; but from a different angle, distinctly black.

Will listened in polite silence. Behind the mask of Savonarola, behind the aristocratic monocle, behind the ambassadorial verbiage he could see and hear the Levantine broker in quest of his commission, the petty official cadging for a gratuity. And for her enthusiastic sponsorship of South-East Asia Petroleum, how much had the royal initiate been promised? Something, he was prepared to bet, pretty substantial. Not for herself, of course, no, *no*! For the Crusade of the Spirit, needless to say, for the greater glory of Koot Hoomi.

Mr Bahu had reached the peroration of his speech to the international organization. “It must therefore be understood,” he was saying, “that any positive action on my part must remain contingent upon circumstances as, when and if these circumstances arise. Do I make myself clear?”

“Perfectly,” Will assured him. “And now,” he went on with deliberately indecent frankness, “let me explain my position in this matter. All *I’m* interested Two thousand pounds without having to do a hand’s turn of work. A year of freedom just for helping Joe Aldehyde to get his hands on Pala.”

“Lord Aldehyde,” said the Rani, “is remarkably generous.”

“Remarkably,” Will agreed, “considering how little I can do in this matter. Needless to say, he’d be still more generous to anyone who could be of greater help.”

There was a long silence. In the distance a mynah bird was calling monotonously for attention. Attention to avarice, attention to hypocrisy, attention to vulgar cynicism … There was a knock at the door.

“Come in,” Will called out and, turning to Mr Bahu, “Let’s continue this conversation some other time,” he said.

Mr Bahu nodded.

“Come in,” Will repeated.

Dressed in a blue skirt and a short buttonless jacket that left her midriff bare and only sometimes covered a pair of apple-round breasts, a girl in her late teens walked briskly into the room. On her smooth brown face a smile of friendliest

greeting was punctuated at either end by dimples. “I’m Nurse Appu,” she began. “Radha Appu.” Then, catching sight of Will’s visitors, she broke off. “Oh, excuse me, I didn’t know …”

She made a perfunctory *Knicks* to the Rani.

Mr Bahu, meanwhile, had courteously risen to his feet. “Nurse Appu,” he cried enthusiastically. “My little ministering angel from the Shivapuram hospital. What a delightful surprise!”

For the girl, it was evident to Will, the surprise was far from delightful.

“How do you do, Mr Bahu,” she said without a smile and, quickly turning away, started to busy herself with the straps of the canvas bag she was carrying.

“Your Highness has probably forgotten,” said Mr Bahu; “but I had to have an operation last summer. For hernia,” he specified. “Well, this young lady used to come and wash me every morning. Punctually at eight-forty-five. And now, after having vanished for all these months, here she is again!”

“Synchronicity,” said the Rani oracularly. “It’s all part of the Plan.”

“I’m supposed to give Mr Farnaby an injection,” said the little nurse looking up, still unsmiling, from her professional bag.

“Doctor’s orders are doctor’s orders,” cried the Rani, overacting the role of royal personage deigning to be playfully gracious. “To hear is to obey. But where’s my chauffeur?”

“Your chauffeur’s here,” called a familiar voice.

Beautiful as a vision of Ganymede, Murugan was standing in the doorway. A look of amusement appeared on the little nurse’s face.

“Hullo, Murugan — I mean, Your Highness.” She bobbed another curtsey which he was free to take as a mark of respect or of ironic mockery.

“Oh hullo, Radha,” said the boy in a tone that was meant to be distantly casual. He walked past her to where his mother was sitting. “The car,” he said, “is at the door. Or rather the so-called car.” With a sarcastic laugh, “It’s a Baby Austin, 1954 vintage,” he explained to Will. “The best that this highly civilized country can provide for its royal family. Rendang gives its ambassador a Bentley,” he added bitterly.

“Which will be calling for me at this address in about ten minutes,” said Mr Bahu, looking at his watch. “So may I be permitted to take leave of you here, Your Highness?”

The Rani extended her hand. With all the piety of a good Catholic kissing a Cardinal’s ring, he bent over it; then, straightening himself up, he turned to Will.

“I’m assuming — perhaps unjustifiably — that Mr Farnaby can put up with me for a little longer. May I stay?”

Will assured the ambassador that he would be delighted.

“And I hope,” said Mr Bahu to the little nurse, “that there will be no objections on medical grounds?”

“Not on medical grounds,” said the girl in a tone that implied the existence of the most cogent non-medical objections.

Assisted by Murugan, the Rani hoisted herself out of her chair. “*Au revoir, mon cher* Farnaby,” she said as she gave him her jewelled hand. Her smile was charged with a sweetness that Will found positively menacing.

“Good-bye, ma’am.”

She turned, patted the little nurse’s cheek and sailed out of the room. Like a pinnace in the wake of a full-rigged ship of the line, Murugan trailed after her.

CHAPTER SIX

"GOLLY!" THE LITTLE nurse exploded, when the door was safely closed behind them.

"I entirely agree with you," said Will.

The Voltairean light twinkled for a moment on Mr Bahu's evangelical face. "Golly," he repeated. "It was what I heard an English schoolboy saying when he first saw the Great Pyramid. The Rani makes the same kind of impression. Monumental. She's what the Germans call *eine grosse Seele*." The twinkle had faded, the face was unequivocally Savonarola's, the words, it was obvious, were for publication.

The little nurse suddenly started to laugh.

"What's so funny?" Will asked.

"I suddenly saw the Great Pyramid all dressed up in white muslin," she gasped. "Dr Robert calls it the mystic's uniform."

"Witty, very witty!" said Mr Bahu. "And yet," he added diplomatically, "I don't know why mystics shouldn't wear uniforms, if they feel like it."

The little nurse drew a deep breath, wiped the tears of merriment from her eyes and began to make her preparations for giving the patient his injection.

"I know exactly what you're thinking," she said to Will. "You're thinking I'm much too young to do a good job."

"I certainly think you're very young."

"You people go to a University at eighteen and stay there for four years. We start at sixteen and go on with our education till we're twenty-four — half-time study and half-time work. I've been doing biology and at the same time doing this job for two years. So I'm not quite such a fool as I look. Actually I'm a pretty good nurse."

“A statement,” said Mr Bahu, “which I can unequivocally confirm. Miss Radha is not merely a good nurse; she’s an absolutely first-rate one.”

But what he really meant, Will felt sure as he studied the expression on that face of a much-tempted monk, was that Miss Radha had a first-rate midriff, first-rate navel and first-rate breasts. But the owner of the navel, midriff and breasts had clearly resented Savonarola’s admiration, or at any rate the way it had been expressed. Hopefully, over-hopefully, the rebuffed ambassador was returning to the attack.

The spirit lamp was lighted and, while the needle was being boiled, little Nurse Appu took her patient’s temperature.

“Ninety-nine point two.”

“Does that mean I have to be banished?” Mr Bahu enquired.

“Not so far as he’s concerned,” the girl answered.

“So please stay,” said Will.

The little nurse gave him his injection of antibiotic, then, from one of the bottles in her bag, stirred a tablespoonful of some greenish liquid into half a glass of water.

“Drink this.”

It tasted like one of those herbal concoctions that health-food enthusiasts substitute for tea.

“What is it?” Will asked, and was told that it was an extract from a mountain plant related to valerian.

“It helps people to stop worrying,” the little nurse explained, “without making them sleepy. We give it to convalescents. It’s useful, too, in mental cases.”

“Which am I! Mental or convalescent?”

“Both,” she answered without hesitation.

Will laughed aloud. “That’s what comes of fishing for compliments.”

“I didn’t mean to be rude,” she assured him. “All I meant was that I’ve never met anybody from the outside who wasn’t a mental case.”

“Including the Ambassador?”

She turned the question back upon the questioner. “What do *you* think?”

Will passed it on to Mr Bahu. “You’re the expert in this field,” he said.

“Settle it between yourselves,” said the little nurse. “I’ve got to go and see about my patient’s lunch.”

Mr Bahu watched her go; then, raising his left eyebrow, he let fall his monocle and started methodically to polish the lens with his handkerchief. “You’re aberrated in one way,” he said to Will. “I’m aberrated in another. A schizoid (isn’t that what you are?) and, from the other side of the world, a paranoid. Both of us victims of the same twentieth-century plague. Not the Black Death, this time; the Grey Life. Were you ever interested in power?” he asked after a moment of silence.

“Never.” Will shook his head emphatically. “One can’t have power without committing oneself.”

“And for you the horror of being committed outweighs the pleasure of pushing other people around?”

“By a factor of several thousand times.”

“So it was never a temptation?”

“Never.” Then after a pause, “Let’s get down to business,” Will added in another tone.

“To business,” Mr Bahu repeated. “Tell me something about Lord Aldehyde?”

“Well, as the Rani said, he’s remarkably generous.”

“I’m not interested in his virtues, only his intelligence. How bright is he?”

“Bright enough to know that nobody does anything for nothing.”

“Good,” said Mr Bahu. “Then tell him from me that for effective work by experts in strategic positions he must be prepared to lay out at least ten times what he’s going to pay you.”

“I’ll write him a letter to that effect.”

“And do it today,” Mr Bahu advised. “The plane leaves Shivapuram tomorrow evening, and there won’t be another outgoing mail for a whole week.”

“Thank you for telling me,” said Will. “And now — Her Highness and the shockable stripling being gone — let’s move on to the next temptation. What

about sex?”

With the gesture of a man who tries to rid himself of a cloud of importunate insects, Mr Bahu waved a brown and bony hand back and forth in front of his face. “Just a distraction, that’s all. Just a nagging, humiliating vexation. But an intelligent man can always cope with it.”

“How difficult it is,” said Will, “to understand another man’s vices!”

“You’re right. Everybody should stick to the insanity that God has seen fit to curse him with. *Pecca fortiter* — that was Luther’s advice. But make a point of sinning your own sins, not someone else’s. And above all don’t do what the people of this island do. Don’t try to behave as though you were essentially sane and naturally good. We’re all demented sinners in the same cosmic boat — and the boat is perpetually sinking.”

“In spite of which, no rat is justified in leaving it. Is that what you’re saying?”

“A few of them may sometimes try to leave. But they never get very far. History and the other rats will always see to it that they drown with the rest of us. That’s why Pala doesn’t have the ghost of a chance.”

Carrying a tray, the little nurse re-entered the room.

“Buddhist food,” she said, as she tied a napkin round Will’s neck. “All except the fish. But we’ve decided that fishes are vegetables within the meaning of the act.”

Will started to eat.

“Apart from the Rani and Murugan and us two here,” he asked after swallowing the first mouthful, “how many people from the outside have you ever met?”

“Well, there was that group of American doctors,” she answered. “They came to Shivapuram last year, while I was working at the Central Hospital.”

“What were they doing here?”

“They wanted to find out why we have such a low rate of neurosis and cardiovascular trouble. Those doctors!” She shook her head. “I tell you, Mr Farnaby, they really made my hair stand on end — made everybody’s hair stand on end in the whole hospital.”

“So you think our medicine’s pretty primitive?”

“That’s the wrong word. It isn’t primitive. It’s fifty per cent terrific and fifty per cent non-existent. Marvellous antibiotics — but absolutely no methods for increasing resistance, so that antibiotics won’t be necessary. Fantastic operations — but when it comes to teaching people the way of going through life without having to be chopped up, absolutely nothing. And it’s the same all along the line. Alpha Plus for patching you up when you’ve started to fall apart; but Delta Minus for keeping you healthy. Apart from sewage systems and synthetic vitamins, you don’t seem to do anything at all about prevention. And yet you’ve got a proverb: prevention is better than cure.”

“But cure,” said Will, “is so much more dramatic than prevention. And for the doctors it’s also a lot more profitable.”

“Maybe for your doctors,” said the little nurse. “Not for ours. Ours get paid for keeping people well.”

“How is it done?”

“We’ve been asking that question for a hundred years, and we’ve found a lot of answers. Chemical answers, psychological answers, answers in terms of what you eat, how you make love, what you see and hear, how you feel about being who you are in this kind of world.”

“And which are the best answers?”

“None of them is best without the others.”

“So there’s no panacea.”

“How can there be?” And she quoted the little rhyme that every student nurse had to learn by heart on the first day of her training.

“‘*I’ am a crowd, obeying as many laws*
As it has members. Chemically impure
Are all ‘my’ beings. There’s no single cure
For what can never have a single cause.

So whether it's prevention or whether it's cure, we attack on all the fronts at once. *All* the fronts," she insisted, "from diet to auto-suggestion, from negative ions to meditation."

"Very sensible," was Will's comment.

"Perhaps a little *too* sensible," said Mr Bahu. "Did you ever try to talk sense to a maniac?" Will shook his head. "I did once." He lifted the greying lock that slanted obliquely across his forehead. Just below the hair-line a jagged scar stood out, strangely pale against the brown skin. "Luckily for me, the bottle he hit me with was pretty flimsy." Smoothing his ruffled hair, he turned to the little nurse. "Don't ever forget, Miss Radha: to the senseless nothing is more maddening than sense. Pala is a small island completely surrounded by twenty-nine hundred million mental cases. So beware of being too rational. In the country of the insane, the integrated man doesn't become king." Mr Bahu's face was positively twinkling with Voltairean glee. "He gets lynched."

Will laughed perfunctorily, then turned again to the little nurse.

"Don't you have any candidates for the asylum?" he asked.

"Just as many as you have — I mean in proportion to the population. At least that's what the textbook says."

"So living in a sensible world doesn't seem to make any difference."

"Not to the people with the kind of body-chemistry that'll turn them into psychotics. They're born vulnerable. Little troubles that other people hardly notice can bring them down. We're just beginning to find out what it is that makes them so vulnerable. We're beginning to be able to spot them in advance of a breakdown. And once they've been spotted, we can do something to raise their resistance. Prevention again — and, of course, on all the fronts at once."

"So being born into a sensible world will make a difference even for the predestined psychotic."

"And for the neurotics it has already made a difference. Your neurosis rate is about one in five or even four. Ours is about one in twenty. The one that breaks down gets treatment, on all fronts, and the nineteen who don't break down have had prevention on all the fronts. Which brings me back to those American

doctors. Three of them were psychiatrists, and one of the psychiatrists smoked cigars without stopping and had a German accent. He was the one that was chosen to give us a lecture. What a lecture!" The little nurse held her head between her hands. "I never heard anything like it."

"What was it about?"

"About the way they treat people with neurotic symptoms. We just couldn't believe our ears. They *never* attack on all the fronts; they only attack on about half of one front. So far as they're concerned, the physical fronts don't exist. Except for a mouth and an anus, their patient doesn't have a body. He isn't an organism, he wasn't born with a constitution or a temperament. All he has is the two ends of a digestive tube, a family and a psyche. But what sort of a psyche? Obviously not the whole mind, not the mind as it really is. How could it be that when they take no account of a person's anatomy, or biochemistry or physiology? Mind abstracted from body — that's the only front they attack on. And not even on the whole of that front. The man with the cigar kept talking about the unconscious. But the only unconscious they ever pay attention to is the negative unconscious, the garbage that people have tried to get rid of by burying it in the basement. Not a single word about the positive unconscious. No attempt to help the patient to open himself up to the life force or the Buddha Nature. And no attempt even to teach him to be a little more conscious in his everyday life. You know: 'Here and now, boys.' 'Attention.'" She gave an imitation of the mynah birds. "These people just leave the unfortunate neurotic to wallow in his old bad habits of never being all there in present time. The whole thing is just pure idiocy! No, the man with the cigar didn't even have *that* excuse; he was as clever as clever can be. So it's not idiocy. It must be something voluntary, something self-induced — like getting drunk, or talking yourself into believing some piece of foolishness because it happens to be in the Scriptures. And then look at their idea of what's normal. Believe it or not, a normal human being is one who can have an orgasm and is adjusted to his society." Once again the little nurse held her head between her hands. "It's unimaginable! No question about what you do with your orgasms. No question about the quality of your feelings

and thoughts and perceptions. And then what about the society you're supposed to be adjusted to? Is it a mad society or a sane one? And even if it's pretty sane, is it right that anybody should be *completely* adjusted to it?"

With another of his twinkling smiles, "Those whom God would destroy," said the Ambassador, "He first makes mad. Or alternatively, and perhaps even more effectively, He first makes them sane." Mr Bahu rose and walked to the window. "My car has come for me. I must be getting back to Shivapuram and my desk." He turned to Will and treated him to a long and flowery farewell. Then, switching off the ambassador, "Don't forget to write that letter," he said. "It's very important." He smiled conspiratorially and, passing his thumb back and forth across the first two fingers of his right hand, he counted out invisible money.

"Thank goodness," said the little nurse when he had gone.

"What was his offence?" Will enquired. "The usual thing?"

"Offering money to someone you want to go to bed with — but she doesn't like you. So you offer more. Is that usual where he comes from?"

"Profoundly usual," Will assured her.

"Well, I didn't like it."

"So I could see. And here's another question. What about Murugan?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Curiosity. I noticed that you'd met before. Was that when he was here two years ago without his mother?"

"How did you know about that?"

"A little bird told me — or rather an extremely massive bird."

"The Rani! She must have made it sound like Sodom and Gomorrah."

"But unfortunately I was spared the lurid details. Dark hints — that was all she gave me. Hints, for example, about veteran Messalinas giving lessons in love to innocent young boys."

"And did he need those lessons!"

"Hints, too, about a precocious and promiscuous girl of his own age."

Nurse Appu burst out laughing.

“Did you know her?”

“The precocious and promiscuous girl was me.”

“You? Does the Rani know it?”

“Murugan only gave her the facts, not the names. For which I’m very grateful. You see, I’d behaved pretty badly. Losing my head about someone I didn’t really love and hurting someone I did. Why is one so stupid?”

“The heart has its reasons,” said Will, “and the endocrines have theirs.”

There was a long silence. He finished the last of his cold boiled fish and vegetables. Nurse Appu handed him a plate of fruit salad.

“You’ve never seen Murugan in white satin pyjamas,” she said.

“Have I missed something?”

“You’ve no idea how beautiful he looks in white satin pyjamas. Nobody has any right to be so beautiful. It’s indecent. It’s taking an unfair advantage.”

It was the sight of him in those white satin pyjamas from Sulka that had finally made her lose her head. Lose it so completely that for two months she had been someone else — an idiot who had gone chasing after a person who couldn’t bear her and had turned her back on the person who had always loved her, the person she herself had always loved.

“Did you get anywhere with the pyjama boy?” Will asked.

“As far as a bed,” she answered. “But when I started to kiss him, he jumped out from between the sheets and locked himself into the bathroom. He wouldn’t come out until I’d passed his pyjamas through the transom and given him my word of honour that he wouldn’t be molested. I can laugh about it now; but at the time, I tell you, at the time …” She shook her head. “Pure tragedy. They must have guessed, from the way I carried on, what had happened. Precocious and promiscuous girls, it was obvious, were no good. What he needed was regular lessons.”

“And the rest of the story I know,” said Will. “Boy writes to mother, mother flies home and whisks him off to Switzerland.”

“And they didn’t come back until about six months ago. And for at least half of that time they were in Rendang, staying with Murugan’s aunt.”

Will was on the point of mentioning Colonel Dipa, then remembered that he had promised Murugan to be discreet and said nothing.

From the garden came the sound of a whistle.

“Excuse me,” said the little nurse and went to the window. Smiling happily at what she saw, she waved her hand. “It’s Ranga.”

“Who’s Ranga?”

“That friend of mine I was talking about. He wants to ask you some questions. May he come in for a minute?”

“Of course.”

She turned back to the window and made a beckoning gesture.

“This means, I take it, that the white satin pyjamas are completely out of the picture.”

She nodded. “It was only a one-act tragedy. I found my head almost as quickly as I’d lost it. And when I’d found it, there was Ranga, the same as ever, waiting for me.” The door swung open and a lanky young man in gym shoes and khaki shorts came into the room.

“Ranga Karakuran,” he announced as he shook Will’s hand.

“If you’d come five minutes earlier,” said Radha, “you’d have had the pleasure of meeting Mr Bahu.”

“Was *he* here?” Ranga made a grimace of disgust.

“Is he as bad as all that?” Will asked.

Ranga listed the indictments. “A: He hates us. B: He’s Colonel Dipa’s tame jackal. C: He’s the unofficial ambassador of all the oil companies. D: The old pig made passes at Radha, and E: He goes about giving lectures about the need for a religious revival. He’s even published a book about it. Complete with preface by someone at the Harvard Divinity School. It’s all part of the campaign against Palanese independence. God is Dipa’s alibi. Why can’t criminals be frank about what they’re up to? All this disgusting idealistic hogwash — it makes one vomit.”

Radha stretched out her hand and gave his ear three sharp tweaks.

“You little …” he began angrily; then broke off and laughed. “You’re quite right,” he said. “All the same, you didn’t have to pull quite so hard.”

“Is that what you always do when he gets worked up?” Will enquired of Radha.

“Whenever he gets worked up at the wrong moment, or over things he can’t do anything about.”

Will turned to the boy. “And do you ever have to tweak *her* ear?”

Ranga laughed. “I find it more satisfactory,” he said, “to smack her bottom. Unfortunately, she rarely needs it.”

“Does that mean she’s better balanced than you are?”

“Better balanced? I tell you, she’s abnormally sane.”

“Whereas you’re merely normal?”

“Maybe a little left of centre.” He shook his head. “I get horribly depressed sometimes — feel I’m no good for anything.”

“Whereas in fact,” said Radha, “he’s so good that they’ve given him a scholarship to study biochemistry at the University of Manchester.”

“What do you do with him when he plays these despairing, miserable-sinner tricks on you? Pull his ears?”

“That,” she said, “and … well, other things.” She looked at Ranga and Ranga looked at her. Then they both burst out laughing.

“Quite,” said Will. “Quite. And these other things being what they are,” he went on, “is Ranga looking forward to the prospect of leaving Pala for a couple of years?”

“Not much,” Ranga admitted.

“But he has to go,” said Radha firmly.

“And when he gets there,” Will wondered, “is he going to be happy?”

“That’s what I wanted to ask you,” said Ranga.

“Well, you won’t like the climate, you won’t like the food, you won’t like the noises or the smells or the architecture. But you’ll almost certainly like the work and you’ll probably find that you can like quite a lot of the people.”

“What about the girls?” Radha enquired.

“How do you want me to answer *that* question?” he asked. “Consolingly, or truthfully?”

“Truthfully.”

“Well, my dear, the truth is that Ranga will be a wild success. Dozens of girls are going to find him irresistible. And some of those girls will be charming. How will you feel if *he* can’t resist?”

“I’ll be glad for his sake.”

Will turned to Ranga. “And will you be glad if she consoles herself, while you’re away, with another boy?”

“I’d like to be,” he said. “But whether I actually shall be glad — that’s another question.”

“Will you make her promise to be faithful?”

“I won’t make her promise anything.”

“Even though she’s your girl?”

“She’s her own girl.”

“And Ranga’s his own boy,” said the little nurse. “He’s free to do what he likes.”

Will thought of Babs’s strawberry pink alcove and laughed ferociously. “And free above all,” he said, “to do what he doesn’t like.” He looked from one young face to the other and saw that he was being eyed with a certain astonishment. In another tone and with a different kind of smile, “But I’d forgotten,” he added. “One of you is abnormally sane and the other is only a little left of centre. So how can you be expected to understand what this mental case from the outside is talking about?” And without leaving them time to answer his question, “Tell me,” he asked, “how long is it …” He broke off. “But perhaps I’m being indiscreet. If so, just tell me to mind my own business. But I *would* like to know, just as a matter of anthropological interest, how long you two have been friends.”

“Do you mean ‘friends’?” asked the little nurse. “Or do you mean ‘lovers’?”

“Why not both, while we’re about it?”

“Well, Ranga and I have been friends since we were babies. And we’ve been lovers — except for that miserable white pyjama episode — since I was fifteen and a half and he was seventeen — ust about two and a half years.”

“And nobody objected?”

“Why should they?”

“Why indeed,” Will echoed. “But the fact remains that, in my part of the world, practically everybody would have objected.”

“What about other boys?” Ranga asked.

“In theory they were even more out of bounds than girls. In practice … Well, you can guess what happens when five or six hundred male adolescents are cooped up together in a boarding school. Does that sort of thing ever go on here?”

“Of course.”

“I’m surprised.”

“Surprised? Why?”

“Seeing that girls aren’t out of bounds.”

“But one kind of love doesn’t exclude the other.”

“And both are legitimate?”

“Naturally.”

“So that nobody would have minded if Murugan had been interested in another pyjama boy?”

“Not if it was a good sort of relationship.”

“But unfortunately,” said Radha, “the Rani had done such a thorough job that he couldn’t be interested in anyone but her — and, of course, himself.”

“No boys?”

“Maybe now. I don’t know. All I know is that in my day there was nobody in his universe. No boys and, still more emphatically, no girls. Only Mother and masturbation and the Ascended Masters. Only jazz records and sports cars and Hitlerian ideas about being a Great Leader and turning Pala into what he calls a Modern State.”

“Three weeks ago,” said Ranga, “he and the Rani were at the palace, in Shivapuram. They invited a group of us from the University to come and listen to Murugan’s ideas — on oil, on industrialization, on television, on armaments, on the Crusade of the Spirit.”

“Did he make any converts?”

Ranga shook his head. “Why would anyone want to exchange something rich and good and endlessly interesting for something bad and thin and boring? We don’t feel any need for your speedboats or your television. Still less for your wars and revolutions, your revivals, your political slogans, your metaphysical nonsense from Rome and Moscow. Did you ever hear of *Maithuna*,” he asked.

“*Maithuna*? What’s that?”

“Let’s start with the historical background,” Ranga answered; and with the engaging pedantry of an undergraduate delivering a lecture about matters which he himself has only lately heard of, he launched forth. “Buddhism came to Pala about twelve hundred years ago, and it came not from Ceylon, which is what one would have expected, but from Bengal, and through Bengal, later on, from Tibet. Result: we’re Mahayanists, and our Buddhism is shot through and through with Tantra. Do you know what Tantra is?”

Will had to admit that he had only the haziest notion.

“And to tell you the truth,” said Ranga, with a laugh that broke irrepressibly through the crust of his pedantry, “I don’t really know much more than you do. Tantra’s an enormous subject and most of it, I guess, is just silliness and superstition — not worth bothering about. But there’s a hard core of sense. If you’re a Tantrik, you don’t renounce the world or deny its value; you don’t try to escape into a Nirvana apart from life, as the monks of the Southern School do. No, you accept the world, and you make use of it; you make use of everything you do, of everything that happens to you, of all the things you see and hear and taste and touch, as so many means to your liberation from the prison of yourself.”

“Good talk,” said Will in a tone of polite scepticism.

“And something more beside,” Ranga insisted. “That’s the difference,” he added — and youthful pedantry modulated the eagerness of youthful proselytism, “that’s the difference between your philosophy and ours. Western philosophers, even the best of them — they’re nothing more than good talkers. Eastern philosophers are often rather bad talkers, but that doesn’t matter. Talk isn’t the point. Their philosophy is pragmatic and operational. Like the philosophy of modern physics — except that the operations in question are psychological and the results transcendental. Your metaphysicians make statements about the nature of man and the universe; but they don’t offer the reader any way of testing the truth of those statements. When *we* make statements, we follow them up with a list of operations that can be used for testing the validity of what we’ve been saying. For example, *Tat tvam asi*, ‘thou art That’ — the heart of all our philosophy. *Tat tvam asi*,” he repeated. “It looks like a proposition in metaphysics; but what it actually refers to is a psychological experience, and the operations by means of which the experience can be lived through are described by our philosophers, so that anyone who’s willing to perform the necessary operations can test the validity of *Tat tvam asi* for himself. The operations are called yoga, or dhyana, or Zen — or, in certain special circumstances, *maithuna*.”

“Which brings us back to my original question. What *is maithuna*?”

“Maybe you’d better ask Radha.”

Will turned to the little nurse. “What is it?”

“*Maithuna*,” she answered gravely, “is the yoga of love.”

“Sacred or profane?”

“There’s no difference.”

“That’s the whole point,” Ranga put in. “When you do *maithuna*, profane love *is* sacred love.”

“*Buddhatvan yoshidyonisansritan*,” the girl quoted.

“None of your Sanskrit,! What does it mean?”

“How would you translate *Buddhatvan*, Ranga?”

“Buddhaness, Buddheity, the quality of being enlightened.”

Radha nodded and turned back to Will. “It means that Buddhaness is in the *yoni*.”

“In the *yoni*?” Will remembered those little stone emblems of the Eternal Feminine that he had bought, as presents for the girls at the office, from a hunchbacked vendor of *bondieuseries* at Benares. Eight annas for a black *yoni*; twelve for the still more sacred image of the *yoni-lingam*. “Literally in the *yoni*?” he asked. “Or metaphorically.”

“What a ridiculous question!” said the little nurse, and she laughed her clear unaffected laugh of pure amusement. “Do you think we make love metaphorically? *Buddhatvan yoshidyonianaritan*,” she repeated. “It couldn’t be more completely and absolutely literal.”

“Did you ever hear of the Oneida Community?” Ranga now asked.

Will nodded. He had known an American historian who specialized in nineteenth-century communities. “But why do *you* know about it?” he asked.

“Because it’s mentioned in all our textbooks of applied philosophy. Basically, *maithuna* is the same as what the Oneida people called Male Continence. And that was the same as what Roman Catholics mean by *coitus reservatus*.”

“*Reservatus*,” the little nurse repeated. “It always makes me want to laugh. ‘Such a *reserved* young man’!” The dimples reappeared and there was a flash of white teeth.

“Don’t be silly,” said Ranga severely. “This is serious.”

She expressed her contrition. But ‘*reservatus*’ was really too funny.

“In a word,” Will concluded, “it’s just birth control without contraceptives.”

“But that’s only the beginning of the story,” said Ranga. “*Maithuna* is also something else. Something even more important.” The undergraduate pedant had reasserted himself. “Remember,” he went on earnestly, “remember the point that Freud was always harping on.”

“Which point? There were so many.”

“The point about the sexuality of children. What we’re born with, what we experience all through infancy and childhood, is a sexuality that isn’t concentrated on the genitals; it’s a sexuality diffused throughout the whole

organism. That's the paradise we inherit. But the paradise gets lost as the child grows up. *Maithuna* is the organized attempt to regain that paradise." He turned to Radha. "You've got a good memory," he said. "What's that phrase of Spinoza's that they quote in the applied philosophy book?"

"'Make the body capable of doing many things,'" she recited. "This will help you to perfect the mind and so to come to the intellectual love of God.'"

"Hence all the yogas," said Ranga. "Including *maithuna*."

"And it's a real yoga," the girl insisted. "As good as raja yoga, or karma yoga, or bhakti yoga. In fact, a great deal better, so far as most people are concerned. *Maithuna* really gets them there."

"What's 'there'?" Will asked.

"'There' is where you know."

"Know what?"

"Know who in fact you are — and believe it or not," she added, "*Tat tvam asi* — thou art That, and so am I; That is me." The dimples came to life, the teeth flashed. "And That's also *him*." She pointed at Ranga. "Incredible, isn't it?" She stuck out her tongue at him. "And yet it's a fact."

Ranga smiled, reached out and with an extended forefinger touched the tip of her nose. "And not merely a fact," he said. "A revealed truth." He gave the nose a little tap. "A revealed truth," he repeated. "So mind your P's and Q's, young woman."

"What I'm wondering," said Will, "is why we aren't all enlightened — I mean, if it's just a question of making love with a rather special kind of technique. What's the answer to that?"

"I'll tell you," Ranga began.

But the girl cut him short. "Listen," she said, "listen!"

Will listened. Faint and far off, but still distinct, he heard the strange inhuman voice that had first welcomed him to Pala. "Attention," it was saying. "Attention. Attention …"

"That bloody bird again!"

"But that's the secret."

“Attention? But a moment ago you were saying it was something else. What about that young man who’s so reserved?”

“That’s just to make it easier to pay attention.”

“And it *does* make it easier,” Ranga confirmed. “And that’s the whole point of *maithuna*. It’s not the special technique that turns love-making into yoga; it’s the kind of awareness that the technique makes possible. Awareness of one’s sensations and awareness of the not-sensation in every sensation.”

“What’s a not-sensation?”

“It’s the raw material for sensation that my not-self provides me with.”

“And you can pay attention to your not-self?”

“Of course.”

Will turned to the little nurse. “You too?”

“To myself,” she answered, “and at the same time to my not-self. And to Ranga’s not-self, and to Ranga’s self, and to Ranga’s body, and to my body and everything it’s feeling. And to all the love and the friendship. And to the mystery of the other person — the perfect stranger, who’s the other half of your own self, and the same as your not-self. And all the while one’s paying attention to all the things that, if one were sentimental, or worse, if one were spiritual like the poor old Rani, one would find so unromantic and gross and sordid even. But they aren’t sordid, because one’s also paying attention to the fact that, when one’s fully aware of them, those things are just as beautiful as all the rest, just as wonderful.”

“*Maithuna* is *dhyana*,” Ranga concluded. A new word, he evidently felt, would explain everything.

“But what is *dhyana*?” Will asked.

“*Dhyana* is contemplation.”

“Contemplation.”

Will thought of that strawberry-pink alcove above the Charing Cross Road. Contemplation was hardly the word he would have chosen. And yet even there, on second thoughts, even there he had found a kind of deliverance. Those alienations in the changing light of Porter’s Gin were alienations from his odious

daytime self. They were also, unfortunately, alienations from all the rest of his being — alienations from love, from intelligence, from common decency, from all consciousness but that of an excruciating frenzy by corpse-light or in the rosy glow of the cheapest, vulgarest illusion. He looked again at Radha's shining face. What happiness! What a manifest conviction, not of the sin that Mr Bahu was so determined to make the world safe for, but of its serene and blissful opposite! It was profoundly touching. But he refused to be touched. *Noli me tangere* — it was a categorical imperative. Shifting the focus of his mind, he managed to see the whole thing as reassuringly ludicrous. What shall we do to be saved? The answer is in four letters.

Smiling at his own little joke, "Were you taught *maithuna* at school?" he asked ironically.

"At school," Radha answered with a simple matter-of-factness that took all the Rabelaisian wind out of his sails.

"Everybody's taught it," Ranga added.

"And when does the teaching begin?"

"About the same time as trigonometry and advanced biology. That's between fifteen and fifteen and a half."

"And after they've learned *maithuna*, after they've gone out into the world and got married — that is if you ever do get married."

"Oh, we do, we do," Radha assured him.

"Do they still practice it?"

"Not all of them, of course. But a good many do."

"All the time?"

"Except when they want to have a baby."

"And those who don't want to have babies, but who might like to have a little change from *maithuna* — what do *they* do?"

"Contraceptives," said Ranga laconically.

"And are the contraceptives available?"

"Available! They're distributed by the government. Free, gratis and for nothing — except of course that they have to be paid for out of taxes."

“The postman,” Radha added, “delivers a thirty-night supply at the beginning of each month.”

“And the babies don’t arrive?”

“Only those we want. Nobody has more than three, and most people stop at two.”

“With the result,” said Ranga, reverting, with the statistics, to his pedantic manner, “that our population is increasing at less than a third of one per cent per annum. Whereas Rendang’s increase is as big as Ceylon’s — almost three per cent. And China’s is two per cent, and India’s about one point seven.”

“I was in China only a month ago,” said Will. “Terrifying! And last year I spent four weeks in India. And before India in Central America, which is outbreeding even Rendang and Ceylon. Have either of you been in Rendang-Lobo?”

Ranga nodded affirmatively.

“Three days in Rendang,” he explained. “If you get into the Upper Sixth, it’s part of the advanced sociology course. They let you see for yourself what the Outside is like.”

“And what did you think of the Outside?” Will enquired.

He answered with another question. “When you were in Rendang-Lobo, did they show you the slums?”

“On the contrary, they did their best to prevent me from seeing the slums. But I gave them the slip.”

Gave them the slip, he was vividly remembering, on his way back to the hotel from that grisly cocktail party at the Rendang Foreign Office. Everybody who was anybody was there. All the local dignitaries and their wives — uniforms and medals, Dior and emeralds. All the important foreigners — diplomats galore, British and American oilmen, six members of the Japanese trade mission, a lady pharmacologist from Leningrad, two Polish engineers, a German tourist who just happened to be a cousin of Krupp von Bohlen, an enigmatic Armenian representing a very important financial consortium in Tangiers, and, beaming with triumph, the fourteen Czech technicians who had come with last month’s

shipment of tanks and cannon and machine guns from Skoda. “And these are the people,” he had said to himself as he walked down the marble steps of the Foreign Office into Liberty Square, “these are the people who rule the world. Twenty-nine hundred millions of us at the mercy of a few scores of politicians, a few thousands of tycoons and generals and money-lenders. Ye are the cyanide of the earth — and the cyanide will never, never lose its savour.”

After the glare of the cocktail party, after the laughter and the luscious smells of canapés and Chanel-sprayed women, those alleys behind the brand new Palace of Justice had seemed doubly dark and noisome, those poor wretches camping out under the palm trees of Independence Avenue more totally abandoned by God and man than even the homeless, hopeless thousands he had seen sleeping like corpses in the streets of Calcutta. And now he thought of that little boy, that tiny pot-bellied skeleton, whom he had picked up, bruised and shaken by a fall from the back of the little girl, scarcely larger than himself, who was carrying him — had picked up and, led by the other child, had carried back, carried down, to the windowless cellar that, for nine of them (he had counted the dark ringwormy heads) was home.

“Keeping babies alive,” he said, “healing the sick, preventing the sewage from getting into the water supply — one starts with doing things that are obviously and intrinsically good. And how does one end? One ends by increasing the sum of human misery and jeopardizing civilization. It’s the kind of cosmic practical joke that God seems really to enjoy.”

He gave the young people one of his flayed, ferocious grins.

“God has nothing to do with it,” Ranga retorted, “and the joke isn’t cosmic, it’s strictly man-made. These things aren’t like gravity or the second law of thermo-dynamics; they don’t *have* to happen. They happen only if people are stupid enough to allow them to happen. Here in Pala we haven’t allowed them to happen, so the joke hasn’t been played on us. We’ve had good sanitation for the best part of a century — and still we’re not overcrowded, we’re not miserable, we’re not under a dictatorship. And the reason is very simple: we chose to behave in a sensible and realistic way.”

“How on earth were you able to choose?” Will asked.

“The right people were intelligent at the right moment,” said Ranga. “But it must be admitted — they were also very lucky. In fact Pala as a whole has been extraordinarily lucky. It’s had the luck, first of all, never to have been anyone’s colony. Rendang has a magnificent harbour. That brought them an Arab invasion in the Middle Ages. We have no harbour, so the Arabs left us alone and we’re still Buddhists or Shivaites — that is, when we’re not Tantrik agnostics.”

“Is that what *you* are?” Will enquired. “A Tantrik agnostic?”

“With Mahayana trimmings,” Ranga qualified. “Well, to return to Rendang. After the Arabs it got the Portuguese. We didn’t. No harbour, no Portuguese. Therefore no Catholic minority, no blasphemous nonsense about its being God’s will that people should breed themselves into subhuman misery, no organized resistance to birth control. And that isn’t our only blessing: after a hundred and twenty years of the Portuguese, Ceylon and Rendang got the Dutch. And after the Dutch came the English. We escaped both those infestations. No Dutch, no English, and therefore no planters, no coolie labour, no cash crops for export, no systematic exhaustion of our soil. Also no whisky, no Calvinism, no syphilis, no foreign administrators. We were left to go our own way and take responsibility for our own affairs.”

“You certainly *were* lucky.”

“And on top of that amazing good luck,” Ranga went on, “there was the amazing good management of Murugan the Reformer and Andrew MacPhail. Has Dr Robert talked to you about his great-grandfather?”

“Just a few words, that’s all.”

“Did he tell you about the founding of the Experimental Station?”

Will shook his head.

“The Experimental Station,” said Ranga, “had a lot to do with our population policy. It all began with a famine. Before he came to Pala, Dr Andrew spent a few years in Madras. The second year he was there, the monsoon failed. The crops were burnt up, the tanks and even the wells went dry. Except for the English and the rich, there was no food. People died like flies. There’s a famous

passage in Dr Andrew's memoirs about the famine. A description and then a comment. He'd had to listen to a lot of sermons when he was a boy, and there was one he kept remembering now, as he worked among the starving Indians. 'Man cannot live by bread alone' — that was the text, and the preacher had been so eloquent that several people were converted. 'Man cannot live by bread alone.' But without bread, he now saw, there is no mind, no spirit, no inner light, no Father in Heaven. There is only hunger, there is only despair and then apathy and finally death."

"Another of the cosmic jokes," said Will. "And this one was formulated by Jesus himself. 'To those who have shall be given, and from those who have not shall be taken away even that which they have' — the bare possibility of being human. It's the cruellest of all God's jokes, and also the commonest. I've seen it being played on millions of men and women, millions of small children — all over the world."

"So you can understand why that famine made such an indelible impression on Dr Andrew's mind. He was resolved, and so was his friend the Raja, that in Pala, at least, there should always be bread. Hence their decision to set up the Experimental Station. Rothamsted-in-the-Tropics was a great success. In a few years we had new strains of rice and maize and millet and breadfruit. We had better breeds of cattle and chickens. Better ways of cultivating and composting; and in the fifties, we built the first superphosphate factory east of Berlin. Thanks to all these things people were eating better, living longer, losing fewer children. Ten years after the founding of Rothamsted-in-the-Tropics the Raja took a census. The population had been stable, more or less, for a century. Now it had started to rise. In fifty or sixty years, Dr Andrew foresaw, Pala would be transformed into the kind of festering slum that Rendang is today. What was to be done? Dr Andrew had read his Malthus. 'Food production increases arithmetically; population increases geometrically. Man has only two choices: he can either leave the matter to Nature, who will solve the population problem in the old familiar way, by famine, pestilence and war: or else (Malthus being a clergyman) he can keep down his numbers by moral restraint.'"

“Mor-ral R-restr-raint,” the little nurse repeated rolling her r’s in the Indonesian parody of a Scottish divine. “Mor-ral r-restr-raint! Incidentally,” she added, “Dr Andrew had just married the Raja’s sixteen-year-old niece.”

“And that,” said Ranga, “was yet another reason for revising Malthus. Famine on this side, restraint on that. Surely there must be some better, happier, humaner way between the Malthusian horns. And of course there was such a way even then, even before the age of rubber and spermicides. There were sponges, there was soap, there were condoms made of every known waterproof material from oiled silk to the blind gut of sheep. The whole armoury of Paleo-Birth Control.”

“And how did the Raja and his subjects react to Paleo-Birth Control? With horror?”

“Not at all. They were good Buddhists, and every good Buddhist knows that begetting is merely postponed assassination. Do your best to get off the Wheel of Birth and Death, and for heaven’s sake don’t go about putting superfluous victims on to the Wheel. For a good Buddhist, birth control makes metaphysical sense. And for a village community of rice growers, it makes social and economic sense. There must be enough young people to work the fields and support the aged and the little ones. But not too many of them; for then neither the old nor the workers nor their children will have enough to eat. In the old days, couples had to have six children in order to raise two or three. Then came clean water and the Experimental Station. Out of six children five now survived. The old patterns of breeding had ceased to make sense. The only objection to Paleo-Birth Control was its crudity. But fortunately there was a more aesthetic alternative. The Raja was a Tantrik initiate and had learned the yoga of love. Dr Andrew was told about *maithuna* and, being a true man of science, agreed to try it. He and his young wife were given the necessary instruction.”

“With what results?”

“Enthusiastic approval.”

“That’s the way everybody feels about it,” said Radha.

“Now, now, none of your sweeping generalizations! Some people feel that way, others don’t. Dr Andrew was one of the enthusiasts. The whole matter was

lengthily discussed. In the end they decided that contraceptives should be like education — free, tax-supported and, though not compulsory, as nearly as possible universal. For those who felt the need for something more refined, there would be instruction in the yoga of love."

"Do you mean to tell me that they got away with it?"

"It wasn't really so difficult. *Maithuna* was orthodox. People weren't being asked to do anything against their religion. On the contrary, they were being given a flattering opportunity to join the elect by learning something esoteric."

"And don't forget the most important point of all," the little nurse chimed in. "For women — *all* women, and I don't care what you say about sweeping generalizations — the yoga of love means perfection, means being transformed and taken out of themselves and completed." There was a brief silence. "And now," she resumed in another, brisker tone, "it's high time we left you to your siesta."

"Before you go," said Will, "I'd like to write a letter. Just a brief note to my boss to say that I'm alive and in no immediate danger of being eaten by the natives."

Radha went foraging in Dr Robert's study and came back with paper, pencil and an envelope.

"*Veni, vidi*," Will scrawled. "I was wrecked, I met the Rani and her collaborator from Rendang, who implies that he can deliver the goods in return for baksheesh to the tune (he was specific) of twenty thousand pounds. Shall I negotiate on this basis? If you cable, *Proposed article OK*, I shall go ahead. If *No hurry for article* I shall let the matter drop. Tell my mother I am safe and shall soon be writing."

"There," he said as he handed the envelope, sealed and addressed, to Ranga. "May I ask you to buy me a stamp and get this off in time to catch tomorrow's plane."

"Without fail," the boy promised.

Watching them go, Will felt a twinge of conscience. What charming young people! And here he was, plotting with Bahu and the forces of history, to subvert

their world. He comforted himself with the thought that, if he didn’t do it, somebody else would. And even if Joe Aldehyde did get his concession, they could still go on making love in the style to which they were accustomed. Or couldn’t they?

From the door the little nurse turned back for a final word. “No reading now,” she wagged her finger at him. “Go to sleep.”

“I never sleep during the day,” Will assured her with a certain perverse satisfaction.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HE COULD NEVER go to sleep during the day; but when he looked next at his watch, the time was twenty-five past four, and he was feeling wonderfully refreshed. He picked up *Notes on What's What*, and resumed his interrupted reading.

"Give us this day our daily Faith, but deliver us, dear God, from Belief."

This was as far as he had got this morning; and now here was a new section, the fifth.

"Me as I think I am and me as I am in fact — sorrow, in other words, and the ending of sorrow. One third, more or less, of all the sorrow that the person I think I am must endure is unavoidable. It is the sorrow inherent in the human condition, the price we must pay for being sentient and self-conscious organisms, aspirants to liberation, but subject to the laws of nature and under orders to keep on marching, through irreversible time, through a world wholly indifferent to our well-being, towards decrepitude and the certainty of death. The remaining two thirds of all sorrow is home-made and, so far as the universe is concerned, unnecessary.

Will turned the page. A sheet of notepaper fluttered on to the bed. He picked it up and glanced at it. Twenty lines of small clear writing and at the bottom of the page the initials S.M. Not a letter evidently; a poem and therefore public property. He read: *Somewhere between brute silence and last*

Sunday's

Thirteen hundred thousand sermons;

Somewhere between
Calvin on Christ (God help us!) and the lizards;
Somewhere between seeing and speaking,

somewhere
Between our soiled and greasy currency of words
And the first star, the great moths fluttering
About the ghosts of flowers,
Lies the clear place where I, no longer I,

Nevertheless remember
Love's nightlong wisdom of the other shore;
And, listening to the wind, remember too
That other night, that first of widowhood,
Sleepless, with death beside me in the dark.
Mine, mine, all mine, mine inescapably!
But I, no longer I,
In this clear place between my thought and

silence
See all I had and lost, anguish and joys,
Glowing like gentians in the Alpine grass,
Blue, unpossessed and open.

‘Like gentians,’ Will repeated to himself, and thought of that summer holiday in Switzerland when he was twelve; thought of the meadow, high above Grindelwald, with its unfamiliar flowers, its wonderful un-English butterflies; thought of the dark blue sky and the sunshine and the huge shining mountains on the other side of the valley. And all his father had found to say was that it looked like an advertisement for Nestlé’s milk chocolate. “Not even real chocolate,” he had insisted with a grimace of disgust. “*Milk* chocolate.” After which there had been an ironic comment on the water colour his mother was painting — so badly (poor thing!) but with such loving and conscientious care. “The milk chocolate advertisement that Nestlé rejected.” And now it was *his* turn. “Instead of just mooning about with your mouth open, like the village idiot, why not do something intelligent for a change? Put in some work on your German grammar, for example.” And diving into the rucksack, he had pulled out, from among the hardboiled eggs and the sandwiches, the abhorred little brown book. What a detestable man! And yet, if Susila was right, one ought to be able to see him now, after all these years, glowing like a gentian — Will glanced again at the last line of the poem— ‘blue, unpossessed and open.’

“Well …” said a familiar voice.

He turned towards the door. “Talk of the devil,” he said. “Or rather read what the devil has written.” He held up the sheet of notepaper for her inspection.

Susila glanced at it. “Oh, *that*,” she said. “If only good intentions were enough to make good poetry!” She sighed and shook her head.

“I was trying to think of my father as a gentian,” he went on. “But all I get is the persistent image of the most enormous turd.”

“Even turds,” she assured him, “can be seen as gentians.”

“But only, I take it, in the place you were writing about — the clear place between thought and silence?”

Susila nodded.

“How do you get there?”

“You don’t get there. There comes to you. Or rather there is really here.”

“You’re just like little Radha,” he complained. “Parroting what the Old Raja says at the beginning of this book.”

“If we repeat it,” she said, “it’s because it happens to be true. If we didn’t repeat it, we’d be ignoring the facts.”

“Whose facts?” he asked. “Certainly not mine.”

“Not at the moment,” she agreed. “But if you were to do the kind of things that the Old Raja recommends, they might be yours.”

“Did *you* have parent trouble?” he asked after a little silence. “Or could you always see turds as gentians?”

“Not at that age,” she answered. “Children *have* to be Manichean dualists. It’s the price we must all pay for learning the rudiments of being human. Seeing turds as gentians, or rather seeing both gentians and turds as Gentians with a capital G — that’s a post-graduate accomplishment.”

“So what did you do about your parents? Just grin and bear the unbearable? Or did your father and mother happen to be bearable?”

“Bearable separately,” she answered. “Especially my father. But quite unbearable together — unbearable because they couldn’t bear one another. A bustling, cheerful, outgoing woman married to a man so fastidiously introverted that she got on his nerves all the time — even, I suspect, in bed. She never stopped communicating, and he never started. With the result that he thought she was shallow and insincere, she thought he was heartless, contemptuous and without normal human feelings.”

“I’d have expected that you people would know better than to walk into that kind of trap.”

“We do know better,” she assured him. “Boys and girls are specifically taught what to expect of people whose temperament and physique are very different

from their own. Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that the lessons don't seem to have much effect. Not to mention the fact that in some cases the psychological distance between the people involved is really too great to be bridged. Anyhow, the fact remains that my father and mother never managed to make a go of it. They'd fallen in love with one another — goodness knows why. But when they came to close quarters, she found herself being constantly hurt by his inaccessibility, while *her* uninhibited good fellowship made him fairly cringe with embarrassment and distaste. *My* sympathies were always with my father. Physically and temperamentally I'm very close to him, not in the least like my mother. I remember, even as a tiny child, how I used to shrink away from her exuberance. She was like a permanent invasion of one's privacy. She still is."

"Do you have to see a lot of her?"

"Very little. She has her own job and her own friends. In our part of the world 'Mother' is strictly the name of a function. When the function has been duly fulfilled, the title lapses; the ex-child and the woman who used to be called 'mother' establish a new kind of relationship. If they get on well together, they continue to see a lot of one another. If they don't, they drift apart. Nobody expects them to cling, and clinging isn't equated with loving — isn't regarded as anything particularly creditable."

"So all's well *now*. But what about *then*? What happened when you were a child, growing up between two people who couldn't bridge the gulf that separated them? I know what *that* means — the fairy-story ending in reverse, 'And so they lived unhappily ever after'."

"And I've no doubt," said Susila, "that if we hadn't been born in Pala, we would have lived unhappily ever after. As it was, we got on, all things considered, remarkably well."

"How did you manage to do that?"

"We didn't; it was all managed for us. Have you read what the Old Raja says about getting rid of the two thirds of sorrow that's home-made and gratuitous?"

Will nodded. "I was just reading it when you came in."

“Well, in the bad old days,” she went on, “Palanese families could be just as victimizing, tyrant-producing and liar-creating as yours can be today. In fact they were so awful that Dr Andrew and the Raja of the Reform decided that something had to be done about it. Buddhist ethics and primitive village communism were skilfully made to serve the purposes of reason, and in a single generation the whole family system was radically changed.” She hesitated for a moment. “Let me explain,” she went on, “in terms of my own particular case — the case of an only child of two people who couldn’t understand one another and were always at cross purposes or actually quarrelling. In the old days, a little girl brought up in those surroundings would have emerged as either a wreck, a rebel, or a resigned hypocritical conformist. Under the new dispensation I didn’t have to undergo unnecessary suffering, I wasn’t wrecked or forced into rebellion or resignation. Why? Because from the moment I could toddle, I was free to escape.”

“To escape?” he repeated. “To escape?” It seemed too good to be true.

“Escape,” she explained, “is built into the new system. Whenever the parental Home Sweet Home becomes too unbearable, the child is allowed, is actively encouraged — and the whole weight of public opinion is behind the encouragement — to migrate to one of its other homes.”

“How many homes does a Palanese child have?”

“About twenty on the average.”

“Twenty? My God!”

“We all belong,” Susila explained, “to an MAC — a Mutual Adoption Club. Every MAC consists of anything from fifteen to twenty-five assorted couples. Newly elected brides and bridegrooms, old timers with growing children, grandparents and great-grandparents — everybody in the club adopts everyone else. Besides our own blood relations, we all have our quota of deputy mothers, deputy fathers, deputy aunts and uncles, deputy brothers and sisters, deputy babies and toddlers and teen-agers.”

Will shook his head. “Making twenty families grow where only one grew before.”

“But what grew before was *your* kind of family. The twenty are all our kind.” As though reading instructions from a cookery book, “‘Take one sexually inept wage-slave,’” she went on, “‘one dissatisfied female, two or (if preferred) three small television-addicts; marinate in a mixture of Freudism and dilute Christianity; then bottle up tightly in a four-room flat and stew for fifteen years in their own juice.’ *Our* recipe is rather different. ‘Take twenty sexually satisfied couples and their offspring; add science, intuition and humour in equal quantities; steep in Tantrik Buddhism and simmer indefinitely in an open pan in the open air over a brisk flame of affection.’”

“And what comes out of your open pan?” he asked.

“An entirely different kind of family. Not exclusive, like your families, and not predestined, not compulsory. An inclusive, unpredestined and voluntary family. Twenty pairs of fathers and mothers, eight or nine ex-fathers and ex-mothers, and forty or fifty assorted children of all ages.”

“Do people stay in the same adoption club all their lives?”

“Of course not. Grown-up children don’t adopt their own parents or their own brothers and sisters. They go out and adopt another set of elders, a different group of peers and juniors. And the members of the new club adopt them and, in due course, their children. Hybridization of micro-cultures — that’s what our sociologists call the process. It’s as beneficial, on its own level, as the hybridization of different strains of maize or chickens. Healthier relationships in more responsible groups, wider sympathies and deeper understandings. And the sympathies and understandings are for everyone in the MAC from babies to centenarians.”

“Centenarians? What’s your expectation of life?”

“A year or two more than yours,” she answered. “Ten per cent of us are over sixty-five. The old get pensions, if they can’t earn. But obviously pensions aren’t enough. They need something useful and challenging to do; they need people they can care for and be loved by in return. The MAC’s fulfill those needs.”

“It all sounds,” said Will, “suspiciously like the propaganda for one of the new Chinese Communes.”

“Nothing,” she assured him, “could be less like a Commune than an MAC. An MAC isn’t run by the government, it’s run by its members. And we’re not militaristic. We’re not interested in turning out good party members; we’re only interested in turning out good human beings. We don’t inculcate dogmas. And finally we don’t take the children away from their parents; on the contrary, we give the children additional parents and the parents additional children. That means that even in the nursery we enjoy a certain degree of freedom; and our freedom increases as we grow older and can deal with a wider range of experience and take on greater responsibilities. Whereas in China there’s no freedom at all. The children are handed over to official baby-tamers, whose business it is to turn them into obedient servants of the State. Things are a great deal better in your part of the world — better, but still quite bad enough. You escape the state-appointed baby-tamers; but your society condemns you to pass your childhood in an exclusive family, with only a single set of siblings and parents. They’re foisted on you by hereditary predestination. You can’t get rid of them, can’t take a holiday from them, can’t go to anyone else for a change of moral or psychological air. It’s freedom, if you like — but freedom in a telephone booth.”

“Locked in,” Will elaborated, “(and I’m thinking now of myself) with a sneering bully, a Christian martyr and a little girl who’d been frightened by the bully and blackmailed by the martyr’s appeal to her better feelings into a state of quivering imbecility. That was the home from which, until I was fourteen and my Aunt Mary came to live next door, I never escaped.”

“And your unfortunate parents never escaped from *you*.”

“That’s not quite true. My father used to escape into brandy and my mother into High Anglicanism. I had to serve out my sentence without the slightest mitigation. Fourteen years of family servitude. How I envy you! Free as a bird!”

“Not so lyrical! Free, let’s say, as a developing human being, free as a future woman — but no freer. Mutual Adoption guarantees children against injustice and the worst consequences of parental ineptitude. It doesn’t guarantee them against discipline, or against having to accept responsibilities. On the contrary, it

increases the number of their responsibilities; it exposes them to a wide variety of disciplines. In your predestined and exclusive families children, as you say, serve a long prison term under a single set of parental jailers. These parental jailers may, of course, be good, wise and intelligent. In that case the little prisoners will emerge more or less unscathed. But in point of fact most of your parental jailers are *not* conspicuously good, wise or intelligent. They're apt to be well-meaning but stupid, or not well-meaning and frivolous, or else neurotic, or occasionally downright malevolent, or frankly insane. So God help the young convicts committed by law and custom and religion to their tender mercies! But now consider what happens in a large, inclusive, voluntary family. No telephone booths, no predestined jailers. Here the children grow up in a world that's a working model of society at large, a small-scale but accurate version of the environment in which they're going to have to live when they're grown up. 'Holy', 'Healthy', 'whole' — they all come from the same root and carry different overtones of the same meaning. Etymologically and in fact, our kind of family, the inclusive and voluntary kind, is the genuine holy family. Yours is the *un*holy family."

"Amen," said Will, and thought again of his own childhood, thought too of poor little Murugan in the clutches of the Rani. "What happens," he asked after a pause, "when the children migrate to one of their other homes? How long do they stay there?"

"It all depends. When my children get fed up with me, they seldom stay away for more than a day or two. That's because, fundamentally, they're very happy at home. I wasn't, and so when *I* walked out, I'd sometimes stay away for a whole month."

"And did your deputy parents back you up against your real mother and father?"

"It's not a question of doing anything *against* anybody. All that's being backed up is intelligence and good feeling, and all that's being opposed is unhappiness and its avoidable causes. If a child feels unhappy in his first home, we do our best for him in fifteen or twenty second homes. Meanwhile the father

and mother get some tactful therapy from the other members of their Mutual Adoption Club. In a few weeks the parents are fit to be with their children again, and the children are fit to be with their parents. But you mustn't think," she added, "that it's only when they're in trouble that children resort to their deputy parents and grandparents. They do it all the time, whenever they feel the need for a change or some kind of new experience. And it isn't just a social whirl. Wherever they go, as deputy children, they have their responsibilities as well as their rights — brushing the dog, for example, cleaning out the bird cages, minding the baby while the mother's doing something else. Duties as well as privileges — but not in one of your airless little telephone booths. Duties and privileges in a big, open, unpredestined, inclusive family, where all the seven ages of man and a dozen different skills and talents are represented, and in which children have experience of all the important and significant things that human beings do and suffer — working, playing, loving, getting old, being sick, dying …" She was silent, thinking of Dugald and Dugald's mother; then, deliberately changing her tone, "But what about *you*?" she went on. "I've been so busy talking about families that I haven't even asked you how you're feeling. You certainly *look* a lot better than when I saw you last."

"Thanks to Dr MacPhail. And also thanks to someone who, I suspect, was definitely practising medicine without a licence. What on earth did you do to me yesterday afternoon?"

Susila smiled. "You did it to yourself," she assured him. "I merely pressed the buttons."

"Which buttons?"

"Memory buttons, imagination buttons."

"And that was enough to put me into a hypnotic trance?"

"If you like to call it that."

"What else can one call it?"

"Why call it anything? Names are such question-beggars. Why not be content with just knowing that it happened?"

"But what *did* happen?"

“Well, to begin with, we made some kind of contact, didn’t we?”

“We certainly did,” he agreed. “And yet I don’t believe I even so much as looked at you.”

He was looking at her now, though — looking and wondering, as he looked, who this strange little creature really was, what lay behind the smooth grave mask of the face, what the dark eyes were seeing as they returned his scrutiny, what she was thinking.

“How *could* you look at me?” she said. “You’d gone off on your vacation.”

“Or was I pushed off?”

“Pushed? No.” She shook her head. “Let’s say seen off, helped off.” There was a moment of silence. “Did you ever,” she resumed, “try to do a job of work with a child hanging around?”

Will thought of the small neighbour who had offered to help him paint the dining-room furniture, and laughed at the memory of his exasperation.

“Poor little darling!” Susila went on. “He means so well, he’s so anxious to help.”

“But the paint’s on the carpet, the finger prints are all over the walls …”

“So that in the end you have to get rid of him. ‘Run along, little boy! Go and play in the garden!’”

There was a silence.

“Well?” he questioned at last.

“Don’t you see?”

Will shook his head.

“What happens when you’re ill, when you’ve been hurt? Who does the repairing? Who heals the wounds and throws off the infection? DO *you*?”

“Who else?”

“You?” she insisted. “*You*? The person that feels the pain and does the worrying and thinks about sin and money and the future! Is *that* you capable of doing what has to be done?”

“Oh, I see what you’re driving at.”

“At last!” she mocked.

“Send *me* to play in the garden so that the grown-ups can do their work in peace. But who *are* the grown-ups?”

“Don’t ask me,” she answered. “That’s a question for a neurotheologian.”

“Meaning what?” he asked.

“Meaning precisely what it says. Somebody who thinks about people in terms, simultaneously, of the Clear Light of the Void and the vegetative nervous system. The grown-ups are a mixture of Mind and physiology.”

“And the children?”

“The children are the little fellows who think they know better than the grown-ups.”

“And so must be told to run along and play.”

“Exactly.”

“Is your sort of treatment standard procedure in Pala?” he asked.

“Standard procedure,” she assured him. “In your part of the world doctors get rid of the children by poisoning them with barbiturates. We do it by talking to them about cathedrals and jackdaws.” Her voice had modulated into a chant. “About white clouds floating in the sky, white swans floating on the dark, smooth, irresistible river of life …”

“Now, now,” he protested. “None of that!”

A smile lit up the grave dark face, and she began to laugh. Will looked at her with astonishment. Here, suddenly, was a different person, another Susila MacPhail, gay, mischievous, ironical.

“I know your tricks,” he added, joining in the laughter.

“Tricks?” Still laughing, she shook her head. “I was just explaining how I did it.”

“I know exactly how you did it. And I also know that it works. What’s more, I give you leave to do it again — whenever it’s necessary.”

“If you like,” she said more seriously, “I’ll show you how to press your own buttons. We teach it in all our elementary schools. The three R’s plus rudimentary S.D.”

“What’s that?”

“Self-Determination. Alias Destiny Control.”

“Destiny Control?” He raised his eyebrows.

“No, no,” she assured him, “we’re not quite such fools as you seem to think. We know perfectly well that only a part of our destiny is controllable.”

“And you control it by pressing your own buttons?”

“Pressing our own buttons and then visualizing what we’d like to happen.”

“But does it happen?”

“In many cases it does.”

“Simple!” There was a note of irony in his voice.

“Wonderfully simple,” she agreed. “And yet, so far as I know, we’re the only people who systematically teach DC to their children. *you* just tell them what they’re supposed to do and leave it at that. Behave well, you say. But how? You never tell them. All you do is give them pep talks and punishments. Pure idiocy.”

“Pure unadulterated idiocy,” he agreed, remembering Mr Crabbe, his housemaster, on the subject of masturbation, remembering the canings and the weekly sermons and the Commination Service on Ash Wednesday. “Cursed is he that lieth with his neighbour’s wife. Amen.”

“If your children take the idiocy seriously, they grow up to be miserable sinners. And if they don’t take it seriously, they grow up to be miserable cynics. And if they react from miserable cynicism, they’re apt to go Papist or Marxist. No wonder you have to have all those thousands of jails and churches and Communist cells.”

“Whereas in Pala, I gather, you have very few.”

Susila shook her head.

“No Alcatrazes here,” she said. “No Billy Grahams or Mao Tse-tungs or Madonnas of Fatima. No hells on earth and no Christian pie in the sky, no Communist pie in the twenty-second century. Just men and women and their children trying to make the best of the here and now, instead of living somewhere else, as you people mostly do, in some other time, some other home-made imaginary universe. And it really isn’t your fault. You’re almost

compelled to live that way because the present is so frustrating. And it's frustrating because you've never been taught how to bridge the gap between theory and practice, between your New Year's resolutions and your actual behaviour."

"'For the good that I would,'" he quoted, "'I do not; and the evil that I would not, that I do.'"

"Who said that?"

"The man who invented Christianity — St Paul."

"You see," she said, "the highest possible ideals, and no methods for realizing them."

"Except the supernatural method of having them realized by Somebody Else."

Throwing back his head, Will Farnaby burst into song.

"*There is a fountain fill'd with blood,*
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Are cleansed of all their stains."

Susila had covered her ears. "It's really obscene," she said.

"My housemaster's favourite hymn," Will explained. "We used to sing it about once a week, all the time I was at school."

"Thank goodness," she said, "there was never any blood in Buddhism! Gautama lived till eighty and died from being too courteous to refuse bad food. Violent death always seems to call for more violent death. 'If you won't believe that you're redeemed by *my* redeemer's blood, I'll drown you in your own.' Last year I took a course at Shivapuram in the history of Christianity." Susila shuddered at the memory. "What a horror! And all because that poor ignorant man didn't know how to implement his good intentions."

"And most of us," said Will, "are still in the same old boat. The evil that we would not, that we do. And how!"

Reacting unforgivably to the unforgivable, Will Farnaby laughed derisively. Laughed because he had seen the goodness of Molly and then, with open eyes, had chosen the pink alcove and, with it, Molly's unhappiness, Molly's death, his own gnawing sense of guilt and then the pain, out of all proportion to its low and essentially farcical cause, the agonizing pain that he had felt when Babs in due course did what any fool must have known she inevitably would do — turned him out of her infernal gin-illumined paradise, and took another lover.

"What's the matter?" Susila asked.

"Nothing. Why do you ask?"

"Because you're not very good at hiding your feelings. You were thinking of something that made you unhappy."

"You've got sharp eyes," he said, and looked away.

There was a long silence. Should he tell her? Tell her about Babs, about poor Molly, about himself, tell her all the dismal and senseless things he had never, even when he was drunk, told even his oldest friends? Old friends knew too much about one, too much about the other parties involved, too much about the grotesque and complicated game which (as an English gentleman who was also a Bohemian, also a would-be poet, also — in mere despair, because he knew he could never be a good poet — a hard boiled journalist, and the private agent, very well paid, of a rich man whom he despised) he was always so elaborately playing. No, old friends would never do. But from this dark little outsider, this stranger to whom he already owed so much and with whom, though he knew nothing about her, he was already so intimate, there would come no foregone conclusions, no *ex parte* judgments — would come perhaps, he found himself hoping (he who had trained himself never to hope!) some unexpected enlightenment, some positive and practical help. (And, God knew, he needed help — though God also knew, only too well, that he would never say so, never sink so low as to ask for it.) Like a muezzin in his minaret, one of the talking birds began to shout from the tall palm beyond the mango trees, "Here and now, boys. Here and now, boys."

Will decided to take the plunge — but to take it indirectly, by talking first, not about his problems, but hers. Without looking at Susila (for that, he felt, would be indecent), he began to speak.

“Dr MacPhail told me something about … about what happened to your husband.”

The words turned a sword in her heart; but that was to be expected, that was right and inevitable. “It’ll be four months next Wednesday,” she said. And then, meditatively, “Two people,” she went on after a little silence, “two separate individuals — but they add up to something like a new creation. And then suddenly half of this new creature is amputated; but the other half doesn’t die — can’t die, *mustn’t* die.”

“Mustn’t die?”

“For so many reasons — the children, oneself, the whole nature of things. But needless to say,” she added with a little smile that only accentuated the sadness in her eyes, “needless to say the reasons don’t lessen the shock of the amputation or make the aftermath any more bearable. The only thing that helps is what we were talking about just now — Destiny Control. And even that …” She shook her head. “DC can give you a completely painless childbirth. But a completely painless bereavement — no. And of course that’s as it should be. It wouldn’t be right if you could take away all the pain of a bereavement; you’d be less than human.”

“Less than human,” he repeated. “Less than human …” Three short words; but how completely they summed him up! “The really terrible thing,” he said aloud, “is when you know it’s your fault that the other person died.”

“Were *you* married?” she asked.

“For twelve years. Until last spring …”

“And now she’s dead?”

“She died in an accident.”

“In an accident? Then how was it your fault?”

“The accident happened because … well, because the evil that I didn’t want to do, I did. And that day it came to a head. The hurt of it confused and

distracted her, and I let her drive away in the car — let her drive away into a head-on collision."

"Did you love her?"

He hesitated for a moment, then slowly shook his head.

"Was there somebody else — somebody you cared for more?"

"Somebody I couldn't have cared for less." He made a grimace of sardonic self-mockery.

"And that was the evil you didn't want to do, but did?"

"Did and went on doing until I'd killed the woman I ought to have loved, but didn't. Went on doing it even after I'd killed her, even though I hated myself for doing it — yes, and really hated the person who made me do it."

"Made you do it, I suppose, by having the right kind of body?"

Will nodded, and there was a silence.

"Do you know what it's like," he asked at length, "to feel that nothing is quite real — including yourself?"

Susila nodded. "It sometimes happens when one's just on the point of discovering that everything, including oneself, is much more real than one ever imagined. It's like shifting gears: you have to go into neutral before you change into high."

"Or low," said Will. "In my case, the shift wasn't up, it was down. No, not even down; it was into reverse. The first time it happened I was waiting for a bus to take me home from Fleet Street. Thousands upon thousands of people, all on the move, and each of them unique, each of them the centre of the universe. Then the sun came out from behind a cloud. Everything was extraordinarily bright and clear; and suddenly, with an almost audible click, they were all maggots."

"Maggots?"

"You know, those little pale worms with black heads that one sees on rotten meat. Nothing had changed, of course; people's faces were the same, their clothes were the same. And yet they were all maggots. Not even real maggots — just the ghosts of maggots, just the illusion of maggots. And I was the illusion of

a spectator of maggots. I lived in that maggot-world for months. Lived in it, worked in it, went out to lunch and dinner in it — all without the least interest in what I was doing. Without the least enjoyment or relish, completely desireless and, as I discovered when I tried to make love to a young woman I'd had occasional fun with in the past, completely impotent."

"What did you expect?"

"Precisely that."

"Then why on earth …?"

Will gave her one of his flayed smiles and shrugged his shoulders. "As a matter of scientific interest. I was an entomologist investigating the sex-life of the phantom maggot."

"After which, I suppose, everything seemed even more unreal."

"Even more," he agreed, "if that was possible."

"But what brought on the maggots in the first place?"

"Well, to begin with," he answered, "I was my parents' son. By Bully Boozer out of Christian Martyr. And on top of being my parents' son," he went on after a little pause, "I was my Aunt Mary's nephew."

"What did your Aunt Mary have to do with it?"

"She was the only person I ever loved, and when I was sixteen she got cancer. Off with the right breast; then, a year later, off with the left. And after that nine months of X-rays and radiation sickness. Then it got into the liver, and that was the end. I was there from start to finish. For a boy in his teens it was a liberal education — but *liberal*."

"In what?" Susila asked.

"In Pure and Applied Pointlessness. And a few weeks after the close of my private course in the subject came the grand opening of the public course. World War II. Followed by the non-stop refresher course of Cold War I. And all this time I'd been wanting to be a poet and finding out that I simply don't have what it takes. And then, after the War, I had to go into journalism to make money. What I wanted was to go hungry, if necessary, but try to write something decent — good prose at least, seeing that it couldn't be good poetry. But I'd reckoned

without those darling parents of mine. By the time he died, in January forty-six, my father had got rid of all the little money our family had inherited and by the time she was blessedly a widow, my mother was crippled with arthritis and had to be supported. So there I was in Fleet Street, supporting her with an ease and a success that were completely humiliating."

"Why humiliating?"

"Wouldn't you be humiliated if you found yourself making money by turning out the cheapest, flashiest kind of literary forgery? I was a success because I was so irremediably second-rate."

"And the net result of it all was maggots?"

He nodded. "Not even real maggots: phantom maggots. And here's where Molly came into the picture. I met her at a high-class maggot-party in Bloomsbury. We were introduced, we made some politely inane conversation about non-objective painting. Not wanting to see any more maggots, I didn't look at her; but she must have been looking at me. Molly had very pale grey-blue eyes," he added parenthetically, "eyes that saw everything — she was incredibly observant, but observed without malice or censoriousness, seeing the evil, if it was there, but never condemning it, just feeling enormously sorry for the person who was under compulsion to think those thoughts and do that odious kind of thing. Well, as I say, she must have been looking at me while we talked; for suddenly she asked me why I was so sad. I'd had a couple of drinks and there was nothing impertinent or offensive about the way she asked the question; so I told her about the maggots. 'And you're one of them,' I finished up, and for the first time I looked at her. 'A blue-eyed maggot with a face like one of the holy women in attendance at a Flemish crucifixion'."

"Was she flattered?"

"I think so. She'd stopped being a Catholic; but she still had a certain weakness for crucifixions and holy women. Anyhow, next morning she called me at breakfast time. Would I like to drive down into the country with her? It was Sunday and, by a miracle, fine. I accepted. We spent an hour in a hazel copse, picking primroses and looking at the little white windflowers. One

doesn’t pick the windflowers,” he explained, “because in an hour they’re withered. I did a lot of looking in that hazel copse — looking at flowers with the naked eye and then looking into them through the magnifying glass that Molly had brought with her. I don’t know why, but it was extraordinarily therapeutic — just looking into the hearts of primroses and anemones. For the rest of the day I saw no maggots. But Fleet Street was still there, waiting for me, and by lunch time on Monday the whole place was crawling with them as thickly as ever. Millions of maggots. But now I knew what to do about them. That evening I went to Molly’s studio.”

“Was she a painter?”

“Not a real painter, and she knew it. Knew it and didn’t resent it, just made the best of having no talent. She didn’t paint for art’s sake; she painted because she liked looking at things, liked the process of trying meticulously to reproduce what she saw. That evening she gave me a canvas and a palette, and told me to do likewise.”

“And did it work?”

“It worked so well that when a couple of months later, I cut open a rotten apple, the worm at its centre wasn’t a maggot — not subjectively, I mean. Objectively, yes; it was all that a maggot should be, and that’s how I portrayed it, how we both portrayed it — for we always painted the same things at the same time.”

“What about the other maggots, the phantom maggots outside the apple?”

“Well, I still had relapses, especially in Fleet Street and at cocktail parties; but the maggots were definitely fewer, definitely less haunting. And meanwhile something new was happening in the studio. I was falling in love — falling in love because love is catching and Molly was so obviously in love with me — why, God only knows.”

“I can see several possible reasons why. She might have loved you because …” Susila eyed him appraisingly and smiled, “Well, because you’re quite an attractive kind of queer fish.”

He laughed. “Thank you for a handsome compliment.”

“On the other hand,” Susila went on, “(and this isn’t quite so complimentary), she might have loved you because you made her feel so damned sorry for you.”

“That’s the truth, I’m afraid. Molly was a born Sister of Mercy.”

“And a Sister of Mercy, unfortunately, isn’t the same as a Wife of Love.”

“Which I duly discovered,” he said.

“After your marriage, I suppose.”

Will hesitated for a moment. “Actually,” he said, “it was before. Not because, on her side, there had been any urgency of desire, but only because she was so eager to do anything to please me. Only because, on principle, she didn’t believe in conventions and was all for freely loving, and more surprisingly” (he remembered the outrageous things she would so casually and placidly give utterance to even in his mother’s presence) “all for freely talking about that freedom.”

“You knew it beforehand,” Susila summed up, “and yet you still married her.”

Will nodded his head without speaking.

“Because you were a gentleman, I take it, and a gentleman keeps his word.”

“Partly for that rather old-fashioned reason, but also because I was in love with her.”

“*Were* you in love with her?”

“Yes. No, I don’t know. But at the time I *did* know. At least I thought I knew. I was really convinced that I was really in love with her. And I knew, I still know, why I was convinced. I was grateful to her for having exorcised those maggots. And besides the gratitude there was respect. There was admiration. She was so much better and honester than I was. But unfortunately, you’re right: a Sister of Mercy isn’t the same as a Wife of Love. But I was ready to take Molly on her own terms, not on mine. I was ready to believe that her terms were better than mine.”

“How soon,” Susila asked, after a long silence, “did you start having affairs on the side?”

Will smiled his flayed smile. “Three months to the day after our wedding. The first time was with one of the secretaries at the office. Goodness, what a bore! After that there was a young painter, a curly-headed little Jewish girl that Molly had helped with money while she was studying at the Slade. I used to go to her Studio twice a week, from five to seven. It was almost three years before Molly found out about it.”

“And, I gather, she was upset?”

“Much more than I’d ever thought she’d be.”

“So what did you do about it?”

Will shook his head. “This is where it begins to get complicated,” he said. “I had no intention of giving up my cocktail hours with Rachel; but I hated myself for making Molly so unhappy. At the same time I hated her for being unhappy. I resented her suffering and the love that had made her suffer; I felt that they were unfair, a kind of blackmail to force me to give up my innocent fun with Rachel. By loving me so much and being so miserable about what I was doing — what she really forced me to do — she was putting pressure on me, she was trying to restrict my freedom. But meanwhile she was genuinely unhappy; and though I hated her for blackmailing me with her unhappiness, I was filled with pity for her. Pity,” he repeated, “not compassion. Compassion is suffering-with, and what I wanted at all costs was to spare myself the pain her suffering caused me, and avoid the painful sacrifices by which I could put an end to her suffering. Pity was my answer, being sorry for her from the outside, if you see what I mean — sorry for her as a spectator, an aesthete, a connoisseur in excruciations. And this aesthetic pity of mine was so intense, every time her unhappiness came to a head, that I could almost mistake it for love. Almost, but never quite. For when I expressed my pity in physical tenderness (which I did because that was the only way of putting a temporary stop to her unhappiness and to the pain her unhappiness was inflicting on me) that tenderness was always frustrated before it could come to its natural consummation. Frustrated because, by temperament, she was only a Sister of Mercy, not a wife. And yet, on every level but the sensual, she loved me with a total commitment — a commitment that called for

an answering commitment on my part. But I wouldn't commit myself, maybe I genuinely couldn't. So instead of being grateful for her self-giving, I resented it. It made claims on me, claims that I refused to acknowledge. So there we were, at the end of every crisis, back at the beginning of the old drama — the drama of a love incapable of sensuality self-committed to a sensuality incapable of love and evoking strangely mixed responses of guilt and exasperation, of pity and resentment, sometimes of real hatred (but always with an undertone of remorse), the whole accompanied by, contrapuntal to, a succession of furtive evenings with my little curly-headed painter."

"I hope at least they were enjoyable," said Susila.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Only moderately. Rachel could never forget that she was an intellectual. She had a way of asking what one thought of Piero di Cosimo at the most inopportune moments. The real enjoyment and of course the real agony — I never experienced them until Babs appeared on the scene."

"When was that?"

"Just over a year ago. In Africa."

"Africa?"

"I'd been sent there by Joe Aldehyde."

"That man who owns newspapers?"

"*And* all the rest. He was married to Molly's Aunt Eileen. An exemplary family man, I may add. That's why he's so serenely convinced of his own righteousness, even when he's engaged in the most nefarious financial operations."

"And you're working for him?"

Will nodded. "That was his wedding present to Molly — a job for me on the Aldehyde papers at almost twice the salary I'd been getting from my previous employers. Princely! But then he was very fond of Molly."

"How did he react to Babs?"

"He never knew about her — never knew that there was any reason for Molly's accident."

"So he goes on employing you for your dead wife's sake?"

Will shrugged his shoulders. “The excuse,” he said, “is that I have my mother to support.”

“And of course you wouldn’t enjoy being poor.”

“I certainly wouldn’t.”

There was a silence.

“Well,” said Susila at last, “let’s get back to Africa.”

“I’d been sent there to do a series on Negro Nationalism. Not to mention a little private hanky-panky in the business line for Uncle Joe. It was on the plane, flying home from Nairobi. I found myself sitting next to her.”

“Next to the young woman you couldn’t have liked less?”

“Couldn’t have liked less,” he repeated, “or disapproved of more. But if you’re an addict you’ve got to have your dope — the dope that you know in advance is going to destroy you.”

“It’s a funny thing,” she said reflectively, “but in Pala we have hardly any addicts.”

“Not even sex-addicts?”

“The sex-addicts are also person-addicts. In other words, they’re lovers.”

“But even lovers sometimes hate the people they love.”

“Naturally. Because I always have the same name and the same nose and eyes, it doesn’t follow that I’m always the same woman. Recognizing that fact and reacting to it sensibly — that’s part of the Art of Loving.”

As succinctly as he could, Will told her the rest of the story. It was the same story, now that Babs had come on the scene, as it had been before — the same but much more so. Babs had been Rachel raised, so to speak, to a higher power — Rachel squared, Rachel to the *n*th. And the unhappiness that, because of Babs, he had inflicted upon Molly was proportionately greater than anything she had had to suffer on account of Rachel. Proportionately greater, too, had been his own exasperation, his own resentful sense of being blackmailed by her love and suffering, his own remorse and pity, his own determination, in spite of the remorse and the pity, to go on getting what he wanted, what he hated himself for wanting, what he resolutely refused to do without. And meanwhile Babs had

become more demanding, was claiming ever more and more of his time — time not only in the strawberry-pink alcove, but also outside, in restaurants, and nightclubs, at her horrible friends' cocktail parties, on week-ends in the country. "Just you and me, darling," she would say, "all alone together." All alone together in an isolation that gave him the opportunity to plumb the almost unfathomable depths of her mindlessness and vulgarity. But through all his boredom and distaste, all his moral and intellectual repugnance, the craving persisted. After one of those dreadful week-ends, he was as hopelessly a Babs-addict as he had been before. And on her side, on her own Sister-of-Mercy level, Molly had remained, in spite of everything, no less hopelessly a Will Farnaby-addict. Hopelessly so far as *he* was concerned — for his one wish was that she should love him less and allow him to go to hell in peace. But, so far as Molly herself was concerned, the addiction was always and irrepressibly hopeful. She never ceased to expect the transfiguring miracle that would change him into the kind, unselfish, loving Will Farnaby whom (in the teeth of all the evidence, all the repeated disappointments) she stubbornly insisted on regarding as his true self. It was only in the course of that last fatal interview, only when (stifling his pity and giving free rein to his resentment of her blackmailing unhappiness) he had announced his intention of leaving her and going to live with Babs — it was only then that hope had finally given place to hopelessness. "Do you mean it, Will — do you really mean it?" "I really mean it." It was in hopelessness that she had walked out to the car, in utter hopelessness had driven away into the rain — into her death. At the funeral, when the coffin was lowered into the grave, he had promised himself that he would never see Babs again. Never, never, never again. That evening, while he was sitting at his desk, trying to write an article on "What's Wrong With Youth", trying not to remember the hospital, the open grave and his own responsibility for everything that had happened, he was startled by the shrill buzzing of the doorbell. A belated message of condolence, no doubt … He had opened, and there, instead of the telegram, was Babs — dramatically without make-up and all in black.

“My poor, poor Will!” They had sat down on the sofa in the living room, and she had stroked his hair and both of them had cried. An hour later, they were naked and in bed. Within three months, as any fool could have foreseen, Babs had begun to tire of him; within four, an absolutely divine man from Kenya had turned up at a cocktail party. One thing had led to another and when, three days later, Babs came home, it was to prepare the alcove for a new tenant and give notice to the old.

“Do you really mean it, Babs?”

She really meant it.

There was a rustling in the bushes outside the window and an instant later, startlingly loud and slightly out of tune, “Here and now, boys,” shouted a talking bird.

“Shut up!” Will shouted back.

“Here and now, boys,” the mynah repeated. “Here and now, boys. Here and …”

“Shut up!”

There was silence.

“I had to shut him up,” Will explained, “because of course he’s absolutely right. Here, boys; now, boys. Then and there are absolutely irrelevant. Or aren’t they? What about your husband’s death, for example? Is *that* irrelevant?”

Susila looked at him for a moment in silence, then slowly nodded her head. “In the context of what I have to do now — yes, completely irrelevant! That’s something I had to learn.”

“Does one learn how to forget?”

“It isn’t a matter of forgetting. What one has to learn is how to remember and yet be free of the past. How to be there with the dead and yet still be here, on the spot, with the living.” She gave him a sad little smile and added, “It isn’t easy.”

“It isn’t easy,” Will repeated. And suddenly all his defences were down, all his pride had left him. “Will you help me?” he asked.

“It’s a bargain,” she said, and held out her hand.

A sound of footsteps made them turn their heads. Dr MacPhail had entered the room.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"GOOD EVENING, MY dear. Good evening, Mr Farnaby."

The tone was cheerful — not, Susila was quick to notice, with any kind of synthetic cheerfulness, but naturally, genuinely. And yet, before coming here, he must have stopped at the hospital, must have seen Lakshmi as Susila herself had seen her only an hour or two since, more dreadfully emaciated than ever, more skull-like and discoloured. Half a long life-time of love and loyalty and mutual forgiveness — and in another day or two it would be all over; he would be alone. But sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof — sufficient unto the place and the person. "One has no right," her father-in-law had said to her one day as they were leaving the hospital together, "one has no right to inflict one's sadness on other people. And no right, of course, to pretend that one isn't sad. One just has to accept one's grief and one's absurd attempts to be a stoic. Accept, accept …" His voice broke. Looking up at him, she saw that his face was wet with tears. Five minutes later they were sitting on a bench, at the edge of the lotus pool, in the shadow of the huge stone Buddha. With a little plop, sharp and yet liquidly voluptuous, an unseen frog dived from its round leafy platform into the water. Thrusting up from the mud, the thick green stems with their turgid buds broke through into the air, and here and there the blue or rosy symbols of enlightenment had opened their petals to the sun and the probing visitations of flies and tiny beetles and the wild bees from the jungle. Darting, pausing in mid-flight, darting again, a score of glittering blue and green dragon flies were hawking for midges.

"*Tathata*," Dr Robert had whispered. "Suchness."

For a long time they sat there in silence. Then, suddenly, he had touched her shoulder.

"Look!"

She lifted her eyes to where he was pointing. Two small parrots had perched on the Buddha's right hand and were going through the ritual of courtship.

"Did you stop again at the lotus pool?" Susila asked aloud.

Dr Robert gave her a little smile and nodded his head.

"How was Shivapuram?" Will enquired.

"Pleasant enough in itself," the doctor answered. "Its only defect is that it's so close to the outside world. Up here one can ignore all those organized insanities, and get on with one's work. Down there, with all the antennae and listening posts and channels of communication that a government has to have, the outside world is perpetually breathing down one's neck. One hears it, feels it, smells it — yes, *smells* it." He wrinkled up his face into a grimace of comic disgust.

"Has anything more than usually disastrous happened since I've been here?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary at your end of the world. I wish I could say the same about *our* end."

"What's the trouble?"

"The trouble is our next door neighbour, Colonel Dipa. To begin with, he's made another deal with the Czechs."

"More armaments?"

"Sixty million dollars' worth. It was on the radio this morning."

"But what on earth for?"

"The usual reasons. Glory and power. The pleasures of vanity and the pleasures of bullying. Terrorism and military parades at home; conquests and Te Deums abroad. And that brings me to the second item of unpleasant news. Last night the Colonel delivered another of his celebrated Greater Rendang speeches."

"Greater Rendang? What's that?"

"You may well ask," said Dr Robert. "Greater Rendang is the territory controlled by the Sultans of Rendang-Lobo between 1447 and 1483. It included Rendang, the Nicobar Islands, about thirty per cent of Sumatra and the whole of Pala. Today, it's Colonel Dipa's *Irredenta*."

"Seriously?"

“With a perfectly straight face. No, I’m wrong. With a purple, distorted face and at the top of a voice that he has trained, after long practice, to sound exactly like Hitler’s. Greater Rendang or death!”

“But the great powers would never allow it.”

“Maybe they wouldn’t like to see him in Sumatra. But Pala — that’s another matter.” He shook his head. “Pala, unfortunately, is in nobody’s good books. We don’t want the Communists; but neither do we want the Capitalists. Least of all do we want the wholesale industrialization that both parties are so anxious to impose on us — for different reasons, of course. The West wants it because our labour costs are low and investors’ dividends will be correspondingly high. And the East wants it because industrialization will create a proletariat, open fresh fields for Communist agitation and may lead in the long run to the setting up of yet another People’s Democracy. We say no to both of you, so we’re unpopular everywhere. Regardless of their ideologies, all the Great Powers may prefer a Rendang-controlled Pala with oil fields to an independent Pala without. If Dipa attacks us, they’ll say it’s most deplorable; but they won’t lift a finger. And when he takes us over and calls the oil-men in, they’ll be delighted.”

“What can you do about Colonel Dipa?” Will asked.

“Except for passive resistance, nothing. We have no army and no powerful friends. The Colonel has both. The most we can do, if he starts making trouble, is to appeal to the United Nations. Meanwhile we shall remonstrate with the Colonel about this latest Greater Rendang effusion. Remonstrate through our minister in Rendang-Lobo, and remonstrate with the great man in person when he pays his state visit to Pala ten days from now.”

“A state visit?”

“For the young Raja’s coming-of-age celebrations. He was asked a long time ago, but he never let us know for certain whether he was coming or not. Today it was finally settled. We’ll have a summit meeting as well as a birthday party. But let’s talk about something more rewarding. How did you get on today, Mr Farnaby?”

“Not merely well — gloriously. I had the honour of a visit from your reigning monarch.”

“Murugan?”

“Why didn’t you tell me he was your reigning monarch?”

Dr Robert laughed. “You might have asked for an interview.”

“Well, I didn’t. Nor from the Queen Mother.”

“Did the Rani come too?”

“At the command of her Little Voice. And, sure enough, the Little Voice sent her to the right address. My boss, Joe Aldehyde is one of her dearest friends.”

“Did she tell you that she’s trying to bring your boss here, to exploit our oil?”

“She did indeed.”

“We turned down his latest offer less than a month ago. Did you know that?”

Will was relieved to be able to answer quite truthfully that he didn’t. Neither Joe Aldehyde nor the Rani had told him of this most recent rebuff. “My job,” he went on, a little less truthfully, “is in the wood-pulp department, not in petroleum.” There was a silence. “What’s my status here?” he asked at last. “Undesirable alien?”

“Well, fortunately you’re not an armament salesman.”

“Nor a missionary,” said Susila.

“Nor an oil-man — though on that count you might be guilty by association.”

“Nor even, so far as we know, a uranium prospector.”

“Those,” Dr Robert concluded, “are the Alpha Plus undesirables. As a journalist you rank as a Beta. Not the kind of person we should ever dream of inviting to Pala. But also not the kind who, having managed to get here, requires to be summarily deported.”

“I’d like to stay here for as long as it’s legally possible,” said Will.

“May I ask why?”

Will hesitated. As Joe Aldehyde’s secret agent and a reporter with a hopeless passion for literature, he had to stay long enough to negotiate with Bahu and earn his year of freedom. But there were other, more avowable reasons. “If you don’t object to personal remarks,” he said, “I’ll tell you.”

“Fire away,” said Dr Robert.

“The fact is that, the more I see of you people, the better I like you. I want to find out more about you. And in the process,” he added, glancing at Susila, “I might find out some interesting things about myself. How long shall I be allowed to stay?”

“Normally we’d turn you out as soon as you’re fit to travel. But if you’re seriously interested in Pala, above all if you’re seriously interested in yourself — well, we might stretch a point. Or shouldn’t we stretch that point? What do you say, Susila? After all, he *does* work for Lord Aldehyde.”

Will was on the point of protesting again that his job was in the wood-pulp department; but the words stuck in his throat and he said nothing. The seconds passed. Dr Robert repeated his question.

“Yes,” Susila said at last, “we’d be taking a certain risk. But personally … personally I’d be ready to take it. Am I right?” she turned to Will.

“Well, I think you can trust me. At least I hope you can.” He laughed, trying to make a joke of it; but to his annoyance and embarrassment, he felt himself blushing. Blushing for what, he demanded resentfully of his conscience? If anybody was being double-crossed, it was Standard of California. And once Dipa had moved in, what difference would it make who got the concession? Which would you rather be eaten by — a wolf or a tiger? So far as the lamb is concerned, it hardly seems to matter. Joe would be no worse than his competitors. All the same, he wished he hadn’t been in such a hurry to send off that letter. And why, why couldn’t that dreadful woman have left him in peace?

Through the sheet he felt a hand on his undamaged knee. Dr Robert was smiling down at him.

“You can have a month here,” he said. “I’ll take full responsibility for you. And we’ll do our best to show you everything.”

“I’m very grateful to you.”

“When in doubt,” said Dr Robert, “always act on the assumption that people are more honourable than you have any solid reason for supposing they are. That

was the advice the Old Raja gave me when I was a young man." Turning to Susila, "Let's see," he said, "how old were you when the Old Raja died?"

"Just eight."

"So you remember him pretty well."

Susila laughed. "Could anyone ever forget the way he used to talk about himself. 'Quote "I" (unquote) like sugar in my tea.' What a darling man."

"And what a great one!"

Dr MacPhail got up and crossing to the bookcase that stood between the door and the wardrobe, pulled out of its lowest shelf a thick red album, much the worse for tropical weather and fish insects. "There's a picture of him somewhere," he said as he turned over the pages. "Here we are."

Will found himself looking at the faded snapshot of a little old Hindu in spectacles and a loin cloth, engaged in emptying the contents of an extremely ornate silver sauceboat over a small squat pillar.

"What *is* he doing?" he asked.

"Anointing a phallic symbol with melted butter," the doctor answered. "It was a habit my poor father could never break him of."

"Did your father disapprove of phalluses?"

"No, *no*," said Dr MacPhail. "My father was all for them. It was the *symbol* that he disapproved of."

"Why the symbol?"

"Because he thought that people ought to take their religion warm from the cow, if you see what I mean. Not skimmed or pasteurized or homogenized. Above all not canned in any kind of theological or liturgical container."

"And the Raja had a weakness for containers?"

"Not for containers in general. Just this one particular tin can. He'd always felt a special attachment to the family lingam. It was made of black basalt, and was at least eight hundred years old."

"I see," said Will Farnaby.

"Buttering the family lingam — it was an act of piety, it expressed a beautiful sentiment about a sublime idea. But even the sublimest of ideas is totally

different from the cosmic mystery it's supposed to stand for. And the beautiful sentiments connected with the sublime idea — what do they have in common with the direct experience of the mystery? Nothing whatsoever. Needless to say, the Old Raja knew all this perfectly well. Better than my father. He'd drunk the milk as it came from the cow, he'd actually *been* the milk. But the buttering of lingams was a devotional practice he just couldn't bear to give up. And, I don't have to tell you, he should never have been asked to give it up. But where symbols were concerned, my father was a puritan. He'd amended Goethe — *Alles vergängliche ist NICHT ein Gleinchnis*. His ideal was pure experimental science at one end of the spectrum, and pure experimental mysticism at the other. Direct experience on every level and then clear, rational statements about those experiences. Lingams and crosses, butter and holy water, sutras, gospels, images, chanting — he'd have liked to abolish them all."

"Where would the arts have come in?" Will questioned.

"They wouldn't have come in at all," Dr MacPhail answered. "And that was my father's blindest spot — poetry. He said he liked it; but in fact he didn't. Poetry for its own sake, poetry as an autonomous universe, out there, in the space between direct experience and the symbols of science — that was something he simply couldn't understand. Let's find his picture."

Dr MacPhail turned back the pages of the album and pointed to a craggy profile with enormous eyebrows.

"What a Scotsman!" Will commented.

"And yet his mother and his grandmother were Palanese."

"One doesn't see a trace of them."

"Whereas his grandfather who hailed from Perth, might almost have passed for a Rajput."

Will peered into the ancient photograph of a young man with an oval face and black side whiskers, leaning his elbow on a marble pedestal on which, bottom upwards, stood his inordinately tall top-hat.

"Your great-grandfather?"

“The first MacPhail of Pala. Dr Andrew. Born 1822, in the Royal Burgh, where *his* father, James MacPhail, owned a rope mill. Which was properly symbolical; for James was a devout Calvinist, and being convinced that he himself was one of the elect, derived a deep and glowing satisfaction from the thought of all those millions of his fellow men going through life with the noose of predestination about their necks, and Old Nobodaddy Aloft counting the minutes to spring the trap.”

Will laughed.

“Yes,” Dr Robert agreed, “it does seem pretty comic. But it didn’t then. Then it was serious — much more serious than the H-bomb is today. It was known for certain that ninety-nine point nine per cent of the human race were condemned to everlasting brimstone. Why? Either because they’d never heard of Jesus; or, if they had, because they couldn’t believe sufficiently strongly that Jesus had delivered them from the brimstone. And the proof that they didn’t believe sufficiently strongly was the empirical, observable fact that their souls were not at peace. Perfect faith is defined as something that produces perfect peace of mind. But perfect peace of mind is something that practically nobody possesses. Therefore practically nobody possesses perfect faith. Therefore practically everybody is predestined to eternal punishment. *Quod erat demonstrandum*.”

“One wonders,” said Susila, “why they didn’t all go mad.”

“Fortunately most of them believed only with the tops of their heads. Up here.” Dr MacPhail tapped his bald spot. “With the tops of their heads they were convinced it was the Truth with the largest possible T. But their glands and their guts knew better — knew that it was all sheer bosh. For most of them, Truth was true only on Sundays, and then only in a strictly Pickwickian sense. James MacPhail knew all this and was determined that *his* children should not be mere Sabbath-day believers. They were to believe every word of the sacred nonsense even on Mondays, even on half-holiday afternoons; and they were to believe with their whole being, not merely up there, in the attic. Perfect faith and the perfect peace that goes with it were to be forced into them. How? By giving them hell now and threatening them with hell hereafter. And if, in their devilish

perversity, they refused to have perfect faith, and be at peace, give them more hell and threaten hotter fires. And meanwhile tell them that good works are as filthy rags in the sight of God; but punish them ferociously for every misdemeanour. Tell them that by nature they're totally depraved, then beat them for being what they inescapably are."

Will Farnaby turned back to the album.

"Do you have a picture of this delightful ancestor of yours?"

"We had an oil painting," said Dr MacPhail. "But the dampness was too much for the canvas, and then the fish insects got into it. He was a splendid specimen. Like a High Renaissance picture of Jeremiah. You know — majestic, with an inspired eye and the kind of prophetic beard that covers such a multitude of physiognomic sins. The only relic of him that remains is a pencil drawing of his house."

He turned back another page and there it was.

"Solid granite," he went on, "with bars on all the windows. And, inside that cosy little family Bastille, what systematic inhumanity! Systematic inhumanity in the name, needless to say, of Christ and for righteousness' sake. Dr Andrew left an unfinished autobiography, so we know all about it."

"Didn't the children get any help from their mother?"

Dr MacPhail shook his head.

"Janet MacPhail was a Cameron and as good a Calvinist as James himself. Maybe an even better Calvinist than he was. Being a woman, she had further to go, she had more instinctive decencies to overcome. But she did overcome them — heroically. Far from restraining her husband, she urged him on, she backed him up. There were homilies before breakfast and at the mid-day dinner; there was the catechism on Sundays and learning the epistles by heart; and every evening, when the day's delinquencies had been added up and assessed, methodical whipping, with a whalebone riding switch on the bare buttocks, for all six children, girls as well as boys, in order of seniority."

"It always makes me feel slightly sick," said Susila. "Pure sadism."

“No, not *pure*,” said Dr MacPhail. “Applied sadism. Sadism with an ulterior motive, sadism in the service of an ideal, as the expression of a religious conviction. And that’s a subject,” he added, turning to Will, “that somebody ought to make a historical study of — the relations between theology and corporal punishment in childhood. I have a theory that, wherever little boys and girls are systematically flagellated, the victims grow up to think of God as ‘Wholly Other’ — isn’t that the fashionable *argot* in your part of the world? Wherever, on the contrary, children are brought up without being subjected to physical violence, God is immanent. A people’s theology reflects the state of its children’s bottoms. Look at the Hebrews — enthusiastic child-beaters. And so were all good Christians in the Ages of Faith. Hence Jehovah, hence Original Sin and the infinitely offended Father of Roman and Protestant orthodoxy. Whereas among Buddhists and Hindus education has always been non-violent. No laceration of little buttocks — therefore *Tat tvam asi*, thou art That, mind from Mind is not divided. And look at the Quakers. They were heretical enough to believe in the Inner Light, and what happened? They gave up beating their children and were the first Christian denomination to protest against the institution of slavery.”

“But child-beating,” Will objected, “has quite gone out of fashion nowadays. And yet it’s precisely at this moment that it has become modish to hold forth about the Wholly Other.”

Dr MacPhail waved the objection away. “It’s just a case of reaction following action. By the second half of the nineteenth century free-thinking humanitarianism had become so strong that even good Christians were influenced by it and stopped beating their children. There were no weals on the younger generation’s posterior; consequently it ceased to think of God as the Wholly Other and proceeded to invent New Thought, Unity, Christian Science — all the semi-Oriental heresies in which God is the Wholly Identical. The movement was well under way in William James’ day, and it’s been gathering momentum ever since. But thesis always invites antithesis and in due course the heresies begat Neo-Orthodoxy. Down with the Wholly Identical and back to the

Wholly Other! Back to Augustine, back to Martin Luther — back, in a word, to the two most relentlessly flagellated bottoms in the whole history of Christian thought. Read the *Confessions*, read the *Table Talk*. Augustine was beaten by his schoolmaster and laughed at by his parents when he complained. Luther was systematically flogged not only by his teachers and his father, but even by his loving mother. The world has been paying for the scars on his buttocks ever since. Prussianism and the Third Reich — without Luther and his flagellation-theology these monstrosities could never have come into existence. Or take the flagellation-theology of Augustine, as carried to its logical conclusions by Calvin and swallowed whole by pious folk like James MacPhail and Janet Cameron. Major premise: God is Wholly Other. Minor premise: man is totally depraved. Conclusion: Do to your children's bottoms what was done to yours, what your Heavenly Father has been doing to the collective bottom of humanity ever since the Fall: whip, whip, whip!"

There was a silence. Will Farnaby looked again at the drawing of the granite person in the rope-walk, and thought of all the grotesque and ugly phantasies promoted to the rank of supernatural facts, all the obscene cruelties inspired by those phantasies, all the pain inflicted and the miseries endured because of them. And when it wasn't Augustine with his 'benignant asperity', it was Robespierre, it was Stalin; when it wasn't Luther exhorting the princes to kill the peasants, it was a genial Mao reducing them to slavery.

"Don't you sometimes despair?" he asked.

Dr MacPhail shook his head. "We don't despair," he said, "because we know that things don't necessarily *have* to be as bad as in fact they've always been."

"We know that they can be a great deal better," Susila added. "Know it because they already *are* a great deal better, here and now, on this absurd little island."

"But whether we shall be able to persuade you people to follow our example, or whether we shall even be able to preserve our tiny oasis of humanity in the midst of your world-wide wilderness of monkeys — that, alas," said Dr MacPhail, "is another question. One's justified in feeling extremely pessimistic

about the current situation. But despair, radical despair — no, I can't see any justification for that."

"Not even when you read history?"

"Not even when I read history."

"I envy you. How do you manage to do it?"

"By remembering what history is — the record of what human beings have been impelled to do by their ignorance and the enormous bumptiousness that makes them canonize their ignorance as a political or religious dogma. He turned again to the album. "Let's get back to that house in the Royal Burgh, back to James and Janet, and the six children whom Calvin's God, in his inscrutable malevolence, had condemned to their tender mercies. 'The rod and reproof bring wisdom; but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.' Indoctrination reinforced by psychological stress and physical torture — the perfect Pavlovian set-up. But, unfortunately for organized religion and political dictatorship, human beings are much less reliable as laboratory animals than dogs. On Tom, Mary and Jean the conditioning worked as it was meant to work. Tom became a minister, and Mary married a minister and duly died in childbirth. Jean stayed at home, nursed her mother through a long grim cancer and for the next twenty years was slowly sacrificed to the ageing and finally senile and drivelling patriarch. So far, so good. But with Annie, the fourth child, the pattern changed. Annie was pretty. At eighteen she was proposed to by a captain of dragoons. But the captain was an Anglican and his views on total depravity and God's good pleasure were criminally incorrect. The marriage was forbidden. It looked as though Annie were predestined to share the fate of Jean. She stuck it out for ten years; then, at twenty-eight, she got herself seduced by the second mate of an East Indiaman. There were seven weeks of almost frantic happiness — the first she had ever known. Her face was transfigured by a kind of supernatural beauty, her body glowed with life. Then the Indiaman sailed for a two-year voyage for Madras and Macao. Four months later, pregnant, friendless and despairing, Annie threw herself into the Tay. Meanwhile Alexander, the next in line, had run away from school and joined a company of actors. In the house by the rope-walk

nobody, thenceforward, was ever allowed to refer to his existence. And finally there was Andrew, the youngest, the Benjamin. What a model child! He was obedient, he loved his lessons, he learned the Epistles by heart faster and more accurately than any of the other children had done. Then, just in time to restore her faith in human wickedness, his mother caught him one evening playing with his genitals. He was whipped till the blood came; was caught again a few weeks later and again whipped, sentenced to solitary confinement on bread and water, told that he had almost certainly committed the sin against the Holy Ghost and that it was undoubtedly on account of that sin that his mother had been afflicted with cancer. For the rest of his childhood Andrew was haunted by recurrent nightmares of hell. Haunted, too, by recurrent temptations and, when he succumbed to them — which of course he did, but always in the privacy of the latrine at the bottom of the garden — by yet more terrifying visions of the punishments in store for him."

"And to think," Will Farnaby commented, "to think that people complain about modern life having no meaning! Look at what life was like when it *did* have a meaning. A tale told by an idiot, or a tale told by a Calvinist? Give me the idiot every time."

"Agreed," said Dr MacPhail. "But mightn't there be a third possibility? Mightn't there be a tale told by somebody who is neither an imbecile nor a paranoiac?"

"Somebody, for a change, completely sane," said Susila.

"Yes, for a change," Dr MacPhail repeated. "For a blessed change. And luckily, even under the old dispensation, there were always plenty of people whom even the most diabolic upbringing couldn't ruin. By all the rules of the Freudian and Pavlovian games, my great-grandfather ought to have grown up to be a mental cripple. In fact, he grew up to be a mental athlete. Which only shows," Dr Robert added parenthetically, "how hopelessly inadequate your two highly touted systems of psychology really are. Freudism and Behaviourism — poles apart but in complete agreement when it comes to the facts of the built-in, congenital differences between individuals. How do your pet psychologists deal

with these facts? Very simply. They ignore them. They blandly pretend that the facts aren't there. Hence their complete inability to cope with the human situation as it really exists, or even to explain it theoretically. Look at what happened, for example, in this particular case. Andrew's brothers and sisters were either tamed by their conditioning, or destroyed. Andrew was neither destroyed nor tamed. Why? Because the roulette wheel of heredity had stopped turning at a lucky number. He had a more resilient constitution than the others, a different anatomy, different biochemistry and different temperament. His parents did their worst, as they had done with all the rest of their unfortunate brood. Andrew came through with flying colours, almost without a scar."

"In spite of the sin against the Holy Ghost?"

"That, happily, was something he got rid of during his first year of medical studies at Edinburgh. He was only a boy — just over seventeen. (They started young in those days.) In the dissecting room the boy found himself listening to the extravagant obscenities and blasphemies with which his fellow students kept up their spirits among the slowly rotting cadavers. Listening at first with horror, with a sickening fear that God would surely take vengeance. But nothing happened. The blasphemers flourished, the loud-mouthed fornicators escaped with nothing worse than a dose, every now and then, of the clap. Fear gave place in Andrew's mind to a wonderful sense of relief and deliverance. Greatly daring, he began to risk a few ribald jokes of his own. His first utterance of a four-letter word — what a liberation, what a genuinely religious experience! And meanwhile, in his spare time, he read *Tom Jones*, he read Hume's Essay on Miracles, he read the infidel Gibbon. Putting the French he had learned at school to good account, he read La Mettrie, he read Dr Cabanis. Man is a machine, the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile. How simple it all was, how luminously obvious! With all the fervour of a convert at a revival meeting, he decided for atheism. In the circumstances it was only to be expected. You can't stomach St Augustine any more, you can't go on repeating the Athanasian rigmarole. So you pull the plug and send them down the drain. What bliss! But not for very long. Something, you discover, is missing. The experimental baby

was flushed out with the theological dirt and soapsuds. But nature abhors a vacuum. Bliss gives place to a chronic discomfort, and now you're afflicted, generation after generation, by a succession of Wesleys, Puseys, Moodies and Billies — Sunday and Graham — all working like beavers to pump the theology back out of the cesspool. They hope, of course, to recover the baby. But they never succeed. All that a revivalist can do is to siphon up a little of the dirty water. Which, in due course, has to be thrown out again. And so on, indefinitely. It's really too boring and, as Dr Andrew came at last to realize, wholly unnecessary. Meanwhile here he was, in the first flush of his new-found freedom. Excited, exultant — but quietly excited, exultant behind that appearance of grave and courteous detachment which he habitually presented to the world."

"What about his father?" Will asked. "Did they have a battle?"

"No battle. Andrew didn't like battles. He was the sort of man who always goes his own way, but doesn't advertise the fact, doesn't argue with people who prefer another road. The old man was never given the opportunity of putting on his Jeremiah act. Andrew kept his mouth shut about Hume and La Mettrie, and went through the traditional motions. But when his training was finished, he just didn't come home. Instead, he went to London and signed up, as surgeon and naturalist on HMS *Melampus*, bound for the South Seas with orders to chart, survey, collect specimens and protect Protestant missionaries and British interests. The cruise of the *Melampus* lasted for a full three years. They called at Tahiti, they spent two months on Samoa and a month in the Marquesas group. After Perth, the islands seemed like Eden — but an Eden innocent unfortunately not only of Calvinism and capitalism and industrial slums, but also of Shakespeare and Mozart, also of scientific knowledge and logical thinking. It was paradise, but it wouldn't do, it wouldn't do. They sailed on. They visited Fiji and the Carolines and the Solomons. They charted the northern coast of New Guinea and, in Borneo, a party went ashore, trapped a pregnant orang-utan and climbed to the top of Mount Kinabalu. Then followed a week at Pannoy, a fortnight in the Mergui Archipelago. After which they headed West to the

Andamans and from the Andamans to the mainland of India. While ashore, my great-grandfather was thrown from his horse and broke his right leg. The captain of the *Melampus* found another surgeon and sailed for home. Two months later, as good as new, Andrew was practising medicine at Madras. Doctors were scarce in those days and sickness fearfully common. The young man began to prosper. But life among the merchants and officials of the Presidency was oppressively boring. It was an exile, but an exile without any of the compensations of exile, an exile without adventure or strangeness, a banishment merely to the provinces, to the tropical equivalent of Swansea or Huddersfield. But still he resisted the temptation to book a passage on the next home-bound ship. If he stuck it out for five years, he would have enough money to buy a good practice in Edinburgh — no, in London, in the West End. The future beckoned, rosy and golden. There would be a wife, preferably with auburn hair and a modest competence. There would be four or five children — happy, unwhipped and atheistic. And his practice would grow, his patients would be drawn from circles ever more exalted. Wealth, reputation, dignity, even a knighthood. Sir Andrew MacPhail stepping out of his brougham in Belgrave Square. The great Sir Andrew, physician to the Queen. Summoned to St Petersburg to operate on the Grand Duke, to the Tuileries, to the Vatican, to the Sublime Porte. Delightful phantasies! But the facts, as it turned out, were to be far more interesting. One fine morning a brown-skinned stranger called at the surgery. In halting English he gave an account of himself. He was from Pala and had been commanded by His Highness, the Raja, to seek out and bring back with him a skilful surgeon from the West. The rewards would be princely. *Princely*, he insisted. There and then Dr Andrew accepted the invitation. Partly, of course, for the money; but mostly because he was bored, because he needed a change, needed a taste of adventure. A trip to the Forbidden Island — the lure was irresistible."

"And remember," Susila interjected, "in those days Pala was much more forbidden than it is now."

“So you can imagine how eagerly young Dr Andrew jumped at the opportunity now offered by the Raja’s ambassador. Ten days later his ship dropped anchor off the north coast of the forbidden island. With his medicine chest, his bag of instruments and a small tin trunk containing his clothes and a few indispensable books, he was rowed in an outrigger canoe through the pounding surf, carried in a palanquin through the streets of Shivapuram and set down in the inner courtyard of the royal palace. His royal patient was eagerly awaiting him. Without being given time to shave or change his clothes, Dr Andrew was ushered into the presence — the pitiable presence of a small brown man in his early forties, terribly emaciated under his rich brocades, his face so swollen and distorted as to be barely human, his voice reduced to a hoarse whisper. Dr Andrew examined him. From the maxillary antrum, where it had its roots, a tumour had spread in all directions. It had filled the nose, it had pushed up into the socket of the right eye, it had half-blocked the throat. Breathing had become difficult, swallowing acutely painful and sleep an impossibility — for whenever he dropped off, the patient would choke and wake up frantically struggling for air. Without radical surgery, it was obvious, the Raja would be dead within a couple of months. *With* radical surgery, much sooner. Those were the good old days, remember — the good old days of septic operations without benefit of chloroform. Even in the most favourable circumstances surgery was fatal to one patient out of four. Where conditions were less propitious, the odds declined — fifty-fifty, thirty to seventy, zero to a hundred. In the present case the prognosis could hardly have been worse. The patient was already weak and the operation would be long, difficult and excruciatingly painful. There was a good chance that he would die on the operating table and a virtual certainty that, if he survived, it would only be to die a few days later of blood poisoning. But if he should die, Dr Andrew now reflected, what would be the fate of the alien surgeon who had killed a king? And, during the operation, who would hold the royal patient down while he writhed under the knife? Which of his servants or courtiers would have the strength of mind to disobey, when the master screamed in agony or positively commanded them to let him go?

Perhaps the wisest thing would be to say, here and now, that the case was hopeless, that he could do nothing, and ask to be sent back to Madras forthwith. Then he looked again at the sick man. Through the grotesque mask of his poor deformed face the Raja was looking at him intently — looking with the eyes of a condemned criminal begging the judge for mercy. Touched by the appeal, Dr Andrew gave him a smile of encouragement and all at once, as he patted the thin hand, he had an idea. It was absurd, crack-brained, thoroughly discreditable; but all the same, all the same …

Five years before, he suddenly remembered, while he was still at Edinburgh, there had been an article in *The Lancet*, an article denouncing the notorious Professor Elliotson for his advocacy of animal magnetism. Elliotson had had the effrontery to talk of painless operations performed on patients in the mesmeric trance The man was either a gullible fool or an unscrupulous knave. The so-called evidence for such nonsense was manifestly worthless. It was all sheer humbug, quackery, downright fraud — and so on for six columns of righteous indignation. At the time — for he was still full of La Mettrie and Hume and Cabanis — Dr Andrew had read the article with a glow of orthodox approval. After which he had forgotten about the very existence of animal magnetism. Now, at the Raja's bedside, it all came back to him — the mad Professor, the magnetic passes, the amputations without pain, the low death-rate and rapid recoveries. Perhaps, after all, there might be something in it. He was deep in these thoughts, when, breaking a long silence, the sick man spoke to him. From a young sailor who had deserted his ship at Rendang-Lobo and somehow made his way across the strait, the Raja had learned to speak English with remarkable fluency, but also, in faithful imitation of his teacher, with a strong cockney accent. That cockney accent," Dr MacPhail repeated with a little laugh. "It turns up again and again in my great-grandfather's memoirs. There was something, to him, inexpressibly improper about a king who spoke like Sam Weller. And in this case the impropriety was more than merely social. Besides being a king, the Raja was a man of intellect and the most exquisite refinement; a man, not only of deep religious convictions (any crude oaf can have deep religious convictions),

but also of deep religious experience and spiritual insight. That such a man should express himself in cockney was something that an Early Victorian Scotsman who had read *The Pickwick Papers* could never get over. Nor, in spite of all my great-grandfather's tactful coaching, could the Raja ever get over his impure diphthongs and dropped aitches. But all that was in the future. At their first tragic meeting, that shocking, lower-class accent seemed strangely touching. Laying the palms of his hands together in a gesture of supplication, the sick man whispered, "'Elp me, Dr MacPhile, 'elp me."

The appeal was decisive. Without any further hesitation, Dr Andrew took the Raja's thin hands between his own and began to speak in the most confident tone about a wonderful new treatment recently discovered in Europe and employed as yet by only a handful of the most eminent physicians. Then, turning to the attendants who had been hovering all this time in the background, he ordered them out of the room. They did not understand the words; but his tone and accompanying gestures were unmistakably clear. They bowed and withdrew. Dr Andrew took off his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves and started to make those famous magnetic passes, about which he had read with so much sceptical amusement in *The Lancet*. From the crown of the head, over the face and down the trunk to the epigastrium, again and again until the patient falls into a trance — 'or until' (he remembered the derisive comments of the anonymous writer of the article) 'until the presiding charlatan shall choose to say that his dupe is now under the magnetic influence.' Quackery, humbug and fraud. But all the same, all the same … He worked away in silence. Twenty passes, fifty passes. The sick man sighed and closed his eyes. Sixty, eighty, a hundred, a hundred and twenty. The heat was stifling, Dr Andrew's shirt was drenched with sweat, and his arms ached. Grimly he repeated the same absurd gesture. A hundred and fifty, a hundred and seventy-five, two hundred. It was all fraud and humbug; but all the same he was determined to make this poor devil go to sleep, even if it took him the whole day to do it. "You are going to sleep," he said aloud as he made the two hundred and eleventh pass. "You are going to sleep." The sick man seemed to sink more deeply into his pillows, and suddenly Dr Andrew caught the sound

of a rattling wheeze. “This time,” he added quickly, “you are not going to choke. There’s plenty of room for the air to pass, and you’re not going to choke.” The Raja’s breathing grew quiet. Dr Andrew made a few more passes, then decided that it would be safe to take a rest. He mopped his face, then rose, stretched his arms and took a couple of turns up and down the room. Sitting down again by the bed, he took one of the Raja’s stick-like wrists and felt for the pulse. An hour before it had been running at almost a hundred; now the rate had fallen to seventy. He raised the arm; the hand hung limp like a dead man’s. He let go, and the arm dropped by its own weight and lay, inert and unmoving, where it had fallen. “Your Highness,” he said, and again, more loudly, “Your Highness.” There was no answer. It was all quackery, humbug and fraud, but all the same it worked, it obviously worked.”

A large, brightly coloured mantis fluttered down on to the rail at the foot of the bed, folded its pink and white wings, raised its small flat head and stretched out its incredibly muscular front legs in the attitude of prayer. Dr MacPhail pulled out a magnifying glass and bent forward to examine it.

“*Gongylus gongyloides*,” he pronounced. “It dresses itself up to look like a flower. When unwary flies and moths come sailing in to sip the nectar, it sips *them*. And if it’s a female, she eats her lovers.” He put the glass away and leaned back in his chair. “What one likes most about the universe,” he said to Will Farnaby, “is its wild improbability. *Gongylus gongyloides*, *Homo sapiens*, my great-grandfather’s introduction to Pala and hypnosis — what could be more unlikely?”

“Nothing,” said Will. “Except perhaps *my* introduction to Pala and hypnosis, Pala via a shipwreck and a precipice; hypnosis by way of a soliloquy about an English cathedral.”

Susila laughed. “Fortunately I didn’t have to make all those passes over you. In this climate! I really admire Dr Andrew. It sometimes takes three hours to anaesthetize a person with the passes.”

“But in the end he succeeded?”

“Triumphantly.”

“And did he actually perform the operation?”

“Yes, he actually performed the operation,” said Dr MacPhail. “But not immediately. There had to be a long preparation. Dr Andrew began by telling his patient that henceforward he would be able to swallow without pain. Then, for the next three weeks, he fed him up. And between meals he put him into trance and kept him asleep until it was time for another feeding. It’s wonderful what your body will do for you if you only give it a chance. The Raja gained twelve pounds and felt like a new man. A new man full of new hope and confidence. He *knew* he was going to come through his ordeal. And so, incidentally, did Dr Andrew. In the process of fortifying the Raja’s faith, he had fortified his own. It was not a blind faith. The operation, he felt quite certain, was going to be successful. But this unshakable confidence did not prevent him from doing everything that might contribute to its success. Very early in the proceedings he started to work on the trance. The trance, he kept telling his patient, was becoming deeper every day, and on the day of the operation it would be much deeper than it had ever been before. It would also last longer. ‘You’ll sleep,’ he assured the Raja, ‘for four full hours after the operation’s over; and when you awake, you won’t feel the slightest pain.’ Dr Andrew made these affirmations with a mixture of total scepticism and complete confidence. Reason and past experience assured him that all this was impossible. But in the present context past experience had proved to be irrelevant. The impossible had already happened, several times. There was no reason why it shouldn’t happen again. The important thing was to *say* that it would happen — so he said it, again and again. All this was good; but better still was Dr Andrew’s invention of the rehearsal.”

“Rehearsal of what?”

“Of the surgery. They ran through the procedure half a dozen times. The last rehearsal was on the morning of the operation. At six, Dr Andrew came to the Raja’s room and, after a little cheerful talk, began to make the passes. In a few minutes the patient was in deep trance. Stage by stage, Dr Andrew described what he was going to do. Touching the cheekbone near the Raja’s right eye, he

said, “I begin by stretching the skin, And now, with this scalpel,” (and he drew the tip of a pencil across the cheek) “I make an incision. You feel no pain, of course — not even the slightest discomfort. And now the underlying tissues are being cut and you still feel nothing at all. You just lie there, comfortably asleep, while I dissect the cheek back to the nose. Every now and then I stop to tie a blood vessel; then I go on again. And when that part of the work is done, I’m ready to start on the tumour. It has its roots there in the antrum and it has grown upwards, under the cheekbone, into the eye socket, and downwards into the gullet. And as I cut it loose, you lie there as before, feeling nothing, perfectly comfortable, completely relaxed. And now I lift your head.” Suiting his action to the words, he lifted the Raja’s head and bent it forward on the limp neck. “I lift it and bend it so that you can get rid of the blood that’s run down into your mouth and throat. Some of the blood has got into your windpipe, and you cough a little to get rid of it; but it doesn’t wake you.” The Raja coughed once or twice, then, when Dr Andrew released his hold, dropped back on to the pillows, still fast asleep. “And you don’t choke even when I work on the lower end of the tumour in your gullet.” Dr Andrew opened the Raja’s mouth and thrust two fingers down his throat. “It’s just a question of pulling it loose, that’s all. Nothing in that to make you choke. And if you have to cough up the blood, you can do it in your sleep. Yes, in your sleep, in this deep, deep sleep.”

“That was the end of the rehearsal. Ten minutes later, after making some more passes and telling his patient to sleep still more deeply, Dr Andrew began the operation. He stretched the skin, he made the incision, he dissected the cheek, he cut the tumour away from its roots in the antrum. The Raja lay there perfectly relaxed, his pulse firm and steady at seventy-five, feeling no more pain than he had felt during the make-believe of the rehearsal. Dr Andrew worked on the throat; there was no choking. The blood flowed into the windpipe; the Raja coughed but did not awake. Four hours after the operation was over, he was still sleeping; then, punctual to the minute, he opened his eyes, smiled at Dr Andrew between his bandages and asked, in his sing-song cockney, when the operation was to start. After a feeding and a sponging, he was given some more passes and

told to sleep for four more hours and to get well quickly. Dr Andrew kept it up for a full week. Sixteen hours of trance each day, eight of waking. The Raja suffered almost no pain and, in spite of the thoroughly septic conditions under which the operation had been performed and the dressings renewed, the wounds healed without suppuration. Remembering the horrors he had witnessed in the Edinburgh Infirmary, the yet more frightful horrors of the surgical wards at Madras, Dr Andrew could hardly believe his eyes. And now he was given another opportunity to prove to himself what animal magnetism could do. The Raja's eldest daughter was in the ninth month of her first pregnancy. Impressed by what he had done for her husband, the Rani sent for Dr Andrew. He found her sitting with a frail frightened girl of sixteen, who knew just enough broken cockney to be able to tell him she was going to die — she and her baby too. Three black birds had confirmed it by flying on three successive days across her path. Dr Andrew did not try to argue with her. Instead, he asked her to lie down, then started to make the passes. Twenty minutes later the girl was in a deep trance. In *his* country, Dr Andrew now assured her, black birds were lucky — a presage of birth and joy. She would bear her child easily and without pain. Yes, with no more pain than her father had felt during his operation. No pain at all, he promised, no pain whatsoever.

"Three days later, and after three or four more hours of intensive suggestion, it all came true. When the Raja woke up for his evening meal, he found his wife sitting by his bed. 'We have a grandson,' she said, 'and our daughter is well. Dr Andrew has said that tomorrow you may be carried to her room, to give them both your blessing.' At the end of a month the Raja dissolved the Council of Regency and resumed his royal powers. Resumed them, in gratitude to the man who had saved his life and (the Rani was convinced of it) his daughter's life as well, with Dr Andrew as his chief adviser."

"So he didn't go back to Madras?"

"Not to Madras. Not even to London. He stayed here in Pala."

"Trying to change the Raja's accent?"

"And trying, rather more successfully, to change the Raja's kingdom."

“Into what?”

“That was a question he couldn’t have answered. In those early days he had no plan — only a set of likes and dislikes. There were things about Pala that he liked, and plenty of others that he didn’t like at all. Things about Europe that he detested and things he passionately approved of. Things he had seen on his travels that seemed to make good sense, and things that filled him with disgust. People, he was beginning to understand, are at once the beneficiaries and the victims of their culture. It brings them to flower; but it also nips them in the bud or plants a canker at the heart of the blossom. Might it not be possible, on this forbidden island, to avoid the cankers, minimize the nippings and make the individual blooms more beautiful? That was the question to which, implicitly at first, then with a growing awareness of what they were really up to, Dr Andrew and the Raja were trying to find an answer.”

“And *did* they find an answer?”

“Looking back,” said Dr MacPhail, “one’s amazed by what those two men accomplished. The Scottish doctor and the Palanese king, the Calvinist-turned-atheist and the pious Mahayana Buddhist — what a strangely assorted pair! But a pair, very soon, of firm friends; a pair, moreover, of complementary temperaments and talents, with complementary philosophies and complementary stocks of knowledge, each man supplying the other’s deficiencies, each stimulating and fortifying the other’s native capacities. The Raja’s was an acute and subtle mind; but he knew nothing of the world beyond the confines of his island, nothing of physical science, nothing of European technology, European art, European ways of thinking. No less intelligent, Dr Andrew knew nothing, of course, about Indian painting and poetry and philosophy. He also knew nothing, as he gradually discovered, about the science of the human mind and the art of living. In the months that followed the operation each became the other’s pupil and the other’s teacher. And of course that was only a beginning. They were not merely private citizens concerned with their private improvement. The Raja had a million subjects and Dr Andrew was virtually his Prime Minister. Private improvement was to be the preliminary to public improvement. If the king and

the doctor were now teaching one another to make the best of both worlds — the Oriental and the European, the ancient and the modern — it was in order to help the whole nation to do the same. To make the best of both worlds — what am I saying? To make the best of *all* the worlds — the worlds already realized within the various cultures and, beyond them, the worlds of still unrealized potentialities. It was an enormous ambition, an ambition totally impossible of fulfilment; but at least it had the merit of spurring them on, of making them rush in where angels feared to tread — with results that sometimes proved, to everybody's astonishment, that they had not been quite such fools as they looked. They never succeeded, of course, in making the best of all the worlds; but by dint of boldly trying, they made the best of many more worlds than any merely prudent or sensible person would have dreamed of being able to reconcile and combine."

"'If the fool would persist in his folly,'" Will quoted from *The Proverbs of Hell*, "'he would become wise.'"

"Precisely," Dr Robert agreed. "And the most extravagant folly of all is the folly described by Blake, the folly that the Raja and Dr Andrew were now contemplating — the enormous folly of trying to make a marriage between hell and heaven. But if you persist in that enormous folly, what an enormous reward! Provided, of course, that you persist intelligently. Stupid fools get nowhere; it's only the knowledgeable and clever ones whose folly can make them wise or produce good results. Fortunately these two fools *were* clever. Clever enough, for example to embark on their folly in a modest and appealing way. They began with pain relievers. The Palanese were Buddhists. They knew how misery is related to mind. You cling, you crave, you assert yourself — and you live in a home-made hell. You become detached — and you live in peace. 'I show you sorrow,' the Buddha had said, 'and I show you the ending of sorrow.' Well, here was Dr Andrew with a special kind of mental detachment which would put an end at least to one kind of sorrow, namely physical pain. With the Raja himself or, for the woman, the Rani and her daughter acting as interpreters, Dr Andrew gave lessons in his new-found art to groups of midwives and physicians, of

teachers, mothers, invalids. Painless childbirth — and forthwith all the women of Pala were enthusiastically on the side of the innovators. Painless operations for stone and cataract and haemorrhoids — and they had won the approval of all the old and the ailing. At one stroke more than half the adult population became their allies, prejudiced in their favour, friendly in advance, or at least open-minded, towards the next reform."

"Where did they go from pain?" Will asked.

"To agriculture and language. They got a man out from England to establish Rothamsted-in-the-Tropics, and they set to work to give the Palanese a second language. Pala was to remain a forbidden island; for Dr Andrew wholeheartedly agreed with the Raja that missionaries, planters and traders were far too dangerous to be tolerated. But while the foreign subversives must not be allowed to come in, the natives must somehow be helped to get out — if not physically, at least with their minds. But their language and their archaic version of the Brahmi alphabet were a prison without windows. There could be no escape for them, no glimpse of the outside world until they had learned English and could read the Latin script. Among the courtiers, the Raja's linguistic accomplishments had already set a fashion. Ladies and gentlemen larded their conversation with scraps of cockney, and some of them had even sent to Ceylon for English-speaking tutors. What had been a mode was now transformed into a policy. English schools were set up and a staff of Bengali printers, with their presses and their founts of Caslon and Bodoni were imported from Calcutta. The first English book to be published at Shivapuram was a selection from *The Arabian Nights*, the second, a translation of *The Diamond Sutra*, hitherto available only in Sanskrit and in manuscript. For those who wished to read about Sinbad and Marouf, and for those who were interested in the Wisdom of the Other Shore, there were now two cogent reasons for learning English. That was the beginning of the long educational process that turned us at last into a bi-lingual people. We speak Palanese when we're cooking, when we're telling funny stories, when we're talking about love or making it. (Incidentally, we have the richest erotic and sentimental vocabulary in South-East Asia.) But when it comes to business,

or science, or speculative philosophy, we generally speak English. And most of us prefer to write in English. Every writer needs a literature as his frame of reference; a set of models to conform to or depart from. Pala had good painting and sculpture, splendid architecture, wonderful dancing, subtle and expressive music — but no real literature, no national poets or dramatists or story tellers. Just bards reciting Buddhist and Hindu myths; just a lot of monks preaching sermons and splitting metaphysical hairs. Adopting English as our stepmother tongue, we gave ourselves a literature with one of the longest pasts and certainly the widest of presents. We gave ourselves a background, a spiritual yardstick, a repertory of styles and techniques, an inexhaustible source of inspiration. In a word, we gave ourselves the possibility of being creative in a field where we had never been creative before. Thanks to the Raja and my great-grandfather, there's an Anglo-Palanese literature — of which, I may add, Susila here is a contemporary light."

"On the dim side," she protested.

Dr MacPhail shut his eyes, and, smiling to himself, began to recite: "*Thus-Gone to Thus-Gone, I with a Buddha's hand Offer the unplucked flower, the frog's soliloquy Among the lotus leaves, the milk-smeared mouth At my full breast and love and, like the cloudless Sky that makes possible mountains and setting*

moon.

This emptiness that is the womb of love, This poetry of silence."

He opened his eyes again. "And not only this poetry of silence,' he said. "This science, this philosophy, this theology of silence. And now it's high time you went to sleep." He rose and moved towards the door. "I'll go and get you a glass of fruit juice."

CHAPTER NINE

PATRIOTISM IS NOT enough. But neither is anything else. Science is not enough, religion is not enough, art is not enough, politics and economics are not enough, nor is love, nor is duty, nor is action however disinterested, nor, however sublime, is contemplation. Nothing short of everything will really do.'

"Attention!" shouted a far-away bird.

Will looked at his watch. Five to twelve. He closed his *Notes on What's What* and picking up the bamboo alpenstock which had once belonged to Dugald MacPhail, he set out to keep his appointment with Vijaya and Dr Robert. By the short cut the main building of the Experimental Station was less than a quarter of a mile from Dr Robert's bungalow. But the day was oppressively hot, and there were two flights of steps to be negotiated. For a convalescent with his right leg in a splint, it was a considerable journey.

Slowly, painfully, Will made his way along the winding path and up the steps. At the top of the second flight he halted to take breath and mop his forehead; then keeping close to the wall, where there was still a narrow strip of shade, he moved on towards a signboard marked LABORATORY.

The door beneath the board was ajar; he pushed it open and found himself on the threshold of a long, high-ceilinged room. There were the usual sinks and work tables, the usual glass-fronted cabinets full of bottles and equipment, the usual smells of chemicals and caged mice. For the first moment Will was under the impression that the room was untenanted, but no — almost hidden from view by a book case that projected at right angles from the wall, young Murugan was seated at a table, intently reading. As quietly as he could — for it was always amusing to take people by surprise — Will advanced into the room. The whirring of an electric fan covered the sound of his approach, and it was not until he was within a few feet of the bookcase that Murugan became aware of his

presence. The boy started guiltily, shoved his book with panic haste into a leather briefcase and, reaching for another, smaller volume that lay open on the table beside the briefcase, drew it within reading range. Only then did he turn to face the intruder.

Will gave him a reassuring smile. “It’s only me.”

The look of angry defiance gave place, on the boy’s face to one of relief.

“I thought it was …” He broke off, leaving the sentence unfinished.

“You thought it was someone who would bawl you out for not doing what you’re supposed to do — is that it?”

Murugan grinned and nodded his curly head.

“Where’s everyone else?” Will asked.

“They’re out in the fields — pruning or pollinating or something.” His tone was contemptuous.

“And so, the cats being away, the mouse duly played. What were you studying so passionately?”

With innocent disingenuousness, Murugan held up the book he was now pretending to read. “It’s called ‘Elementary Ecology,’” he said.

“So I see,” said Will. “But what I asked you was what *were* you reading?”

“Oh, that,” Murugan shrugged his shoulders. “You wouldn’t be interested.”

“I’m interested in everything that anyone tries to hide, Will assured him. “Was it pornography?”

Murugan dropped his play-acting and looked genuinely offended. “Who do you take me for?”

Will was on the point of saying that he took him for an average boy, but checked himself. To Colonel Dipa’s pretty young friend, ‘average boy’ might sound like an insult or an innuendo. Instead he bowed with mock politeness. “I beg your Majesty’s pardon,” he said. “But I’m still curious,” he added in another tone. “May I?” He laid a hand on the bulging briefcase.

Murugan hesitated for a moment, then forced a laugh. “Go ahead.”

“What a tome!” Will pulled the ponderous volume out of the bag and laid it on the table. “Sears, Roebuck and Co., *Spring and Summer Catalog*” he read

aloud.

“It’s last year’s,” said Murugan apologetically. “But I don’t suppose there’s been much change since then.”

“There,” Will assured him, “you’re mistaken. If the styles weren’t completely changed every year, there’d be no reason for buying new things before the old ones are worn out. You don’t understand the first principles of modern consumerism.” He opened at random. “‘Soft Platform Wedgies in Wide Widths.’”

Opened at another place and found the description and image of a Whisper-Pink Bra in Dacron and Pima Cotton. Turned the page and here, *memento mori*, was what the Bra-buyer would be wearing twenty years later — A Strap-Controlled Front, Cupped to Support Pendulous Abdomen.

“It doesn’t get really interesting,” said Murugan, “until near the end of the book. It has thirteen hundred and fifty-eight pages,” he added parenthetically. “Imagine! Thirteen hundred and fifty-eight!”

Will skipped the next seven hundred and fifty pages.

“Ah, this is more like it,” he said. “‘Our Famous 22 Revolvers and Automatics.’” And here, a little further on, were the Fibre Glass Boats, here were the High Thrust Inboard Engines, here was a 12 h.p. Outboard for only $234.95 — and the Fuel Tank was included. “That’s extraordinarily generous!”

But Murugan, it was evident, was no sailor. Taking the book, he leafed impatiently through a score of additional pages.

“Look at this Italian Style Motor Scooter!” And while Will looked, Murugan read aloud. “‘This sleek Speedster gives up to 110 Miles per Gallon of Fuel.’ Just imagine!” His normally sulky face was glowing with enthusiasm. “And you can get up to sixty miles per gallon even on this 14.5 h.p. Motor Cycle. And it’s guaranteed to do seventy-five miles an hour — *guaranteed*!”

“Remarkable!” said Will. Then, curiously, “Did somebody in America send you this glorious book?” he asked.

Murugan shook his head. “Colonel Dipa gave it to me.”

“Colonel Dipa?” What an odd kind of present from Hadrian to Antinous! He looked again at the picture of the motor bike, then back at Murugan’s glowing face. Light dawned; the Colonels purpose revealed itself. *The serpent tempted me and I did eat*. The tree in the midst of the garden was called the Tree of Consumer Goods, and to the inhabitants of every underdeveloped Eden, the tiniest taste of its fruit, and even the sight of its thirteen hundred and fifty-eight leaves, had power to bring the shameful knowledge that, industrially speaking, they were stark naked. The future Raja of Pala was being made to realize that he was no more than the untrousered ruler of a tribe of savages.

“You ought,” Will said aloud, “to import a million of these catalogues and distribute them — gratis, of course, like contraceptives — to all your subjects.”

“What for?”

“To whet their appetite for possessions. Then they’ll start clamouring for Progress — oil wells, armaments, Joe Aldehyde, Soviet technicians.”

Murugan frowned and shook his head. “It wouldn’t work.”

“You mean, they wouldn’t be tempted? Not even by Sleek Speedsters and Whisper-Pink Bras? But that’s incredible!”

“It may be incredible,” said Murugan bitterly; “but it’s a fact. They’re just not interested.”

“Not even the young ones?”

“I’d say especially the young ones.”

Will Farnaby pricked up his ears. This lack of interest was profoundly interesting. “Can you guess why?” he asked.

“I don’t guess,” the boy answered. “I know.” And as though he had suddenly decided to stage a parody of his mother, he began to speak in a tone of righteous indignation that was absurdly out of keeping with his age and appearance. “To begin with, they’re much too busy with …” He hesitated, then the abhorred word was hissed out with a disgustful emphasis. “With *sex*.”

“But everybody’s busy with sex. Which doesn’t keep them from whoring after sleek speedsters.”

“Sex is different here,” Murugan insisted.

“Because of the yoga of love?” Will asked, remembering the little nurse’s rapturous face.

The boy nodded. “They’ve got something that makes them think they’re perfectly happy, and they don’t want anything else.”

“What a blessed state!”

“There’s nothing blessed about it,” Murugan snapped. “It’s just stupid and disgusting. No progress, only sex, sex, sex. And of course that beastly dope they’re all given.”

“Dope?” Will repeated in some astonishment. Dope in a place where Susila had said there were no addicts? “What kind of dope?”

“It’s made out of toadstools. *Toadstools!*” He spoke in a comical caricature of the Rani’s most vibrant tone of outraged spirituality.

“Those lovely red toadstools that gnomes used to sit on?”

“No, these are yellow. People used to go out and collect them in the mountains. Nowadays the things are grown in special fungus beds at the High Altitude Experimental Station. Scientifically cultivated dope. Pretty, isn’t it?”

A door slammed and there was a sound of voices, of footsteps approaching along a corridor. Abruptly, the indignant spirit of the Rani took flight, and Murugan was once again the conscience-stricken schoolboy furtively trying to cover up his delinquencies. In a trice ‘Elementary Ecology’ had taken the place of Sears Roebuck, and the suspiciously bulging briefcase was under the table. A moment later, stripped to the waist and shining like oiled bronze with the sweat of labour in the noonday sun, Vijaya came striding into the room. Behind him came Dr Robert. With the air of a model student, interrupted in the midst of his reading by trespassers from the frivolous outside world, Murugan looked up from his book. Amused, Will threw himself at once wholeheartedly into the part that had been assigned to him.

“It was I who got here too early,” he said in response to Vijaya’s apologies for their being so late. “With the result that our young friend here hasn’t been able to get on with his lessons. We’ve been talking our heads off.”

“What about?” Dr Robert asked.

“Everything, Cabbages, kings, motor scooters, pendulous abdomens. And when you came in, we’d just embarked on toadstools. Murugan was telling me about the fungi that are used here as a source of dope.”

“What’s in a name?” said Dr Robert with a laugh. “Answer, practically everything. Having had the misfortune to be brought up in Europe, Murugan calls it dope and feels about it all the disapproval that, by conditioned reflex, the dirty word evokes. We, on the contrary, give the stuff good names — the *moksha*-medicine, the reality-revealer, the truth-and-beauty pill. And we know, by direct experience, that the good names are deserved. Whereas our young friend here has no first-hand knowledge of the stuff and can’t be persuaded even to give it a try. For him, it’s dope and dope is something that, by definition, no decent person ever indulges in.”

“What does His Highness say to that?” Will asked.

Murugan shook his head. “All it gives you is a lot of illusions,” he muttered. “Why should I go out of my way to be made a fool of?”

“Why indeed?” said Vijaya with good-humoured irony. “Seeing that, in your normal condition, you alone of the human race are never made a fool of and never have illusions about anything!”

“I never said that,” Murugan protested. “All I mean is that I don’t want any of your false *samadhi*.”

“How do you know it’s false?” Dr Robert enquired.

“Because the real thing only comes to people after years and years of meditation and *tapas* and … well, you know — not going with women.”

“Murugan,” Vijaya explained to Will, “is one of the Puritans. He’s outraged by the fact that, with four hundred milligrammes of *moksha*-medicine in their bloodstreams, even beginners — yes, and even boys and girls who make love together — can catch a glimpse of the world as it looks to someone who has been liberated from his bondage to the ego.”

“But it isn’t real,” Murugan insisted.

“Not real!” Dr Robert repeated. “You might as well say that the experience of feeling well isn’t real.”

“You’re begging the question,” Will objected. “An experience can be real in relation to something going on inside your skull, but completely irrelevant to anything outside.”

“Of course,” Dr Robert agreed.

“Do you know what goes on inside your skull, when you’ve taken a dose of the mushroom?”

“We know a little.”

“And we’re trying all the time to find out more,” Vijaya added.

“For example,” said Dr Robert, “We’ve found that the people whose EEG doesn’t show any alpha-wave activity when they’re relaxed, aren’t likely to respond significantly to the *moksha*-medicine. That means that, for about fifteen per cent of the population, we have to find other approaches to liberation.”

“Another thing we’re just beginning to understand,” said Vijaya, “is the neurological correlate of these experiences. What’s happening in the brain when you’re having a vision? And what’s happening when you pass from a pre-mystical to a genuinely mystical state of mind?”

“Do you know?” Will asked.

“‘Know’ is a big word. Let’s say we’re in a position to make some plausible guesses. Angels and New Jerusalems and Madonnas and Future Buddhas — they’re all related to some kind of unusual stimulation of the brain areas of primary projection — the visual cortex, for example. Just how the *moksha*-medicine produces those unusual stimuli we haven’t yet found out. The important fact is that, somehow or other, it does produce them. And somehow or other, it also does something unusual to the silent areas of the brain, the areas not specifically concerned with perceiving, or moving, or feeling.”

“And how do the silent areas respond?” Will enquired.

“Let’s start with what they *don’t* respond with. They don’t respond with visions or auditions, they don’t respond with telepathy or clairvoyance or any other kind of parapsychological performance. None of that amusing pre-mystical stuff. Their response is the full-blown mystical experience. You know — One in

all and All in one. The basic experience with its corollaries — boundless compassion, fathomless mystery and meaning."

"Not to mention joy," said Dr Robert, "inexpressible joy."

"And the whole caboodle is inside your skull," said Will. "Strictly private. No reference to any external fact except a toadstool."

"Not real," Murugan chimed in. "That's exactly what I was trying to say."

"You're assuming," said Dr Robert, "that the brain *produces* consciousness. I'm assuming that it transmits consciousness. And my explanation is no more far-fetched than yours. How on earth can a set of events belonging to one order be experienced as a set of events belonging to an entirely different and incommensurable order? Nobody has the faintest idea. All one can do is to accept the facts and concoct hypotheses. And one hypothesis is just about as good, philosophically speaking, as another. You say that the *moksha*-medicine does something to the silent areas of the brain which causes them to produce a set of subjective events to which people have given the name 'mystical experience.' *I* say that the *moksha*-medicine does something to the silent areas of the brain which opens some kind of neurological sluice and so allows a larger volume of Mind with a large 'M' to flow into your mind with a small 'm'. You can't demonstrate the truth of your hypothesis, and I can't demonstrate the truth of mine. And even if you could prove that I'm wrong, would it make any practical difference?"

"I'd have thought it would make all the difference," said Will.

"Do you like music," Dr Robert asked.

"More than most things."

"And what, may I ask, does Mozart's G-Minor Quintet refer to? Does it refer to Allah? Or Tao? Or the second person of the Trinity? Or the Atman-Brahman?"

Will laughed. "Let's hope not."

"But that doesn't make the experience of the G-Minor Quintet any less rewarding. Well, it's the same with the kind of experience that you get with the *moksha*-medicine, or through prayer and fasting and spiritual exercises. Even if

it doesn’t refer to anything outside itself, it’s still the most important thing that ever happened to you. Like music, only incomparably more so. And if you give the experience a chance, if you’re prepared to go along with it, the results are incomparably more therapeutic and transforming. So maybe the whole thing does happen inside one’s skull. Maybe it *is* private and there’s no unitive knowledge of anything but one’s own physiology. Who cares? The fact remains that the experience can open one’s eyes and make one blessed and transform one’s whole life.” There was a long silence. “Let me tell you something,” he resumed, turning to Murugan. “Something I hadn’t intended to talk about to anybody. But now I feel that perhaps I have a duty, a duty to the throne, a duty to Pala and all its people — an obligation to tell you about this very private experience. Perhaps the telling may help you to be a little more understanding about your country and its ways.” He was silent for a moment; then in a quietly matter-of-fact tone, “I suppose you know my wife,” he went on.

His face still averted, Murugan nodded. “I was sorry,” he mumbled, “to hear she was so ill.”

“It’s a matter of a few days now,” said Dr Robert. “Four or five at the most. But she’s still perfectly lucid, perfectly conscious of what’s happening to her. Yesterday she asked me if we could take the *moksha*-medicine together. We’d taken it together,” he added parenthetically, “once or twice each year for the last thirty-seven years — ever since we decided to get married. And now once more — for the last time, the last, last time. There was a risk involved, because of the damage to the liver. But we decided it was a risk worth taking. And as it turned out, we were right. The *moksha*-medicine — the dope, as you prefer to call it — hardly upset her at all. All that happened to her was the mental transformation.”

He was silent, and Will suddenly became aware of the squeak and scrabble of caged rats and, through the open window, the babel of tropical life and the call of a distant mynah-bird. “Here and now, boys. Here and now …”

“You’re like that mynah,” said Dr Robert at last, “Trained to repeat words you don’t understand or know the reason for, ‘*It isn’t real. It isn’t real.*’ But if you’d experienced what Lakshmi and I went through yesterday, you’d know

better. You'd know it was much more real than what you call reality. More real than what you're thinking and feeling at this moment. More real than the world before your eyes. But *not real* is what you've been taught to say. *Not real*, *not real*." Dr Robert laid a hand affectionately on the boy's shoulder. "You've been told that we're just a set of self-indulgent dope-takers, wallowing in illusions and false *samadhis*. Listen, Murugan — forget all the bad language that's been pumped into you. Forget it at least to the point of making a single experiment. Take four hundred milligrammes of *moksha*-medicine and find out for yourself what it does, what it can tell you about your own nature, about this strange world you've got to live in, learn in, suffer in and finally die in. Yes, even you will have to die one day — maybe fifty years from now, maybe tomorrow. Who knows? But it's going to happen, and one's a fool if one doesn't prepare for it." He turned to Will. "Would you like to come along while we take our shower and get into some clothes?"

Without waiting for an answer, he walked out through the door that led into the central corridor of the long building. Will picked up his bamboo staff and, accompanied by Vijaya, followed him out of the room.

"Do you suppose that made any impression on Murugan?" he asked Vijaya when the door had closed behind them.

Vijaya shrugged his shoulders, "I doubt it."

"What with his mother," said Will, "and his passion for internal combustion engines, he's probably impervious to anything you people can say. You should have heard him on the subject of motor scooters!"

"We have heard him," said Dr Robert, who had halted in front of a blue door and was waiting for them to come up with him. "Frequently. When he comes of age, scooters are going to become a major political issue."

Vijaya laughed. "To scoot or not to scoot, that is the question."

"And it isn't only in Pala that it's the question," Dr Robert added. "It's the question that every underdeveloped country has to answer one way or the other."

"And the answer," said Will, "is always the same. Wherever I've been — and I've been almost everywhere — they've opted wholeheartedly for scooting. All

of them."

"Without exception," Vijaya agreed. "Scooting for scooting's sake, and to hell with all considerations of fulfilment, self-knowledge, liberation. Not to mention common or garden health or happiness."

"Whereas *we*," said Dr Robert, "have always chosen to adapt our economy and technology to human beings — not our human beings to somebody else's economy and technology. We import what we can't make; but we make and import only what we can afford. And what we can afford is limited not merely by our supply of pounds and marks and dollars, but also and primarily — *primarily*," he insisted— "by our wish to be happy, our ambition to become fully human. Scooters, we've decided after carefully looking into the matter, are among the things — the very numerous things — we simply can't afford. Which is something poor little Murugan will have to learn the hard way — seeing that he hasn't learned, and doesn't want to learn, the easy way."

"Which is the easy way?" Will asked.

"Education and reality-revealers. Murugan has had neither. Or rather he's had the opposite of both. He's had miseducation in Europe — Swiss governesses, English tutors, American movies, everybody's advertisements — and he's had reality eclipsed for him by his mother's brand of spirituality. So it's no wonder he pines for scooters."

"But his subjects, I gather, do not."

"Why should they? They've been taught from infancy to be fully aware of the world, and to enjoy their awareness. And, on top of that, they have been shown the world and themselves and other people as these are illumined and transfigured by reality-revealers. Which helps them, of course, to have an in tenser awareness and a more understanding enjoyment, so that the most ordinary things, the most trivial events, are seen as jewels and miracles. Jewels and miracles," he repeated emphatically. "So why should we resort to scooters or whisky or television or Billy Graham or any other of your distractions and compensations."

“‘Nothing short of everything will really do,’” Will quoted. “I see now what the Old Raja was talking about. You can’t be a good economist unless you’re also a good psychologist. Or a good engineer without being the right kind of metaphysician.”

“And don’t forget all the other sciences,” said Dr Robert. “Pharmacology, sociology, physiology, not to mention pure and applied autology, neurotheology, metachemistry, mycomysticism, and the ultimate science,” he added, looking away so as to be more alone with his thoughts of Lakshmi in the hospital, “the science that sooner or later we shall all have to be examined in — thanatology.” He was silent for a moment; then, in another tone, “Well, let’s go and get washed up,” he said and, opening the blue door, led the way into a long changing room with a row of showers and wash basins at one end and, on the opposite wall, tiers of lockers and a large hanging cupboard.

Will took a seat and while his companions lathered themselves at the basins, went on with their conversation.

“Would it be permissible,” he asked, “for a miseducated alien to try a truth-and-beauty pill?”

The answer was another question. “Is your liver in good order?” Dr Robert enquired.

“Excellent.”

“And you don’t seem to be more than mildly schizophrenic. So I can’t see any counter-indication.”

“Then I can make the experiment?”

“Whenever you like.”

He stepped into the nearest shower stall and turned on the water. Vijaya followed suit.

“Aren’t you supposed to be intellectuals?” Will asked when the two men had emerged again and were drying themselves.

“We do intellectual work,” Vijaya answered.

“Then why all this horrible honest toil?”

“For a very simple reason: this morning I had some spare time.”

“So did I.” said Dr Robert.

“So you went out into the fields and did a Tolstoy act.”

Vijaya laughed. “You seem to imagine we do it for ethical reasons.”

“Don’t you?”

“Certainly not. I do muscular work, because I have muscles; and if I don’t use my muscles I shall become a bad-tempered sitting-addict.”

“With nothing between the cortex and the buttocks,” said Dr Robert. “Or rather with everything — but in a condition of complete unconsciousness and toxic stagnation. Western intellectuals are all sitting-addicts. That’s why most of you are so repulsively unwholesome. In the past even a duke had to do a lot of walking, even a moneylender, even a metaphysician. And when they weren’t using their legs, they were jogging about on horses. Whereas now, from the tycoon to his typist, from the logical positivist to the positive thinker, you spend nine-tenths of your time on foam rubber. Spongy seats for spongy bottoms — at home, in the office, in cars and bars, in planes and trains and buses. No moving of legs, no struggles with distance and gravity — just lifts and planes and cars, just foam rubber and an eternity of sitting. The life force that used to find an outlet through striped muscle gets turned back on the viscera and the nervous system, and slowly destroys them.”

“So you take to digging and delving as a form of therapy?”

“As prevention — to make therapy unnecessary. In Pala even a professor, even a government official generally puts in two hours of digging and delving each day.”

“As part of his duties?”

“And as part of his pleasure.”

Will made a grimace. “It wouldn’t be part of *my* pleasure.”

“That’s because you weren’t taught to use your mind-body in the right way.” Vijaya explained. “If you’d been shown how to do things with the minimum of strain and the maximum of awareness, you’d enjoy even honest toil.”

“I take it that your children all get this kind of training.”

“From the first moment they start doing for themselves. For example, what’s the proper way of handling yourself while you’re buttoning your clothes?” And suiting action to words, Vijaya started to button the shirt he had just slipped into. “We answer the question by actually putting their heads and bodies into the physiologically best position. And we encourage them at the same time to notice how it feels to be in the physiologically best position, to be aware of what the process of doing up buttons consists of in terms of touches and pressures and muscular sensations. By the time they’re fourteen they’ve learned how to get the most and the best — objectively and subjectively — out of any activity they may undertake. And that’s when we start them working. Ninety minutes a day at some kind of manual job.”

“Back to good old child labour!”

“Or rather,” said Dr Robert, “forward from bad new child-idleness. You don’t allow your teen-agers to work; so they have to blow off steam in delinquency or else throttle down steam till they’re ready to become domesticated sitting-addicts. And now,” he added, “it’s time to be going. I’ll lead the way.”

In the laboratory, when they entered, Murugan was in the act of locking his briefcase against all prying eyes. “I’m ready,” he said and, tucking the thirteen hundred and fifty-eight pages of the Newest Testament under his arm, he followed them out into the sunshine. A few minutes later, crammed into an ancient jeep, the four of them were rolling along the road that led, past the paddock of the white bull, past the lotus pool and the huge stone Buddha, out through the gate of the Station Compound to the highway. “I’m sorry we can’t provide more comfortable transportation,” said Vijaya as they bumped and rattled along.

Will patted Murugan’s knee. “This is the man you should be apologizing to,” he said. “The one whose soul yearns for Jaguars and Thunderbirds.”

“It’s a yearning, I’m afraid,” said Dr Robert from the back seat, “that will have to remain unsatisfied.”

Murugan made no comment, but smiled the secret contemptuous smile of one who knows better.

“We can’t import toys,” Dr Robert went on. “Only essentials.”

“Such as?”

“You’ll see in a moment.” They rounded a curve, and there beneath them were the thatched roofs and tree-shaded gardens of a considerable village. Vijaya pulled up at the side of the road and turned off the motor. “You’re looking at New Rothamsted,” he said. “Alias Madalia. Rice, vegetables, poultry, fruit. Not to mention two potteries and a furniture factory. Hence those wires.” He waved his hand in the direction of the long row of pylons that climbed up the terraced slope behind the village, dipped out of sight over the ridge, and reappeared, far away, marching up from the floor of the next valley towards the green belt of mountain jungle and the cloudy peaks beyond and above. “That’s one of the indispensable imports — electric equipment. And when the waterfalls have been harnessed and you’ve strung up the transmission lines, here’s something else with a high priority.” He directed a pointing finger at a windowless block of cement that rose incongruously from among the wooden houses near the upper entrance to the village.

“What is it?” Will asked. “Some kind of electric oven?”

“No, the kilns are over on the other side of the village. This is the communal freezer.”

“In the old days,” Dr Robert explained, “we used to lose about half of all the perishables we produced. Now we lose practically nothing. Whatever we grow is for us, not for the circumambient bacteria.”

“So now you have enough to eat.”

“More than enough. We eat better than any other country in Asia, and there’s a surplus for export. Lenin used to say that electricity plus socialism equals communism. Our equations are rather different. Electricity minus heavy industry plus birth control equals democracy and plenty. Electricity plus heavy industry minus birth control equals misery, totalitarianism and war.”

“Incidentally,” Will asked, “who owns all this? Are you capitalists or state socialists?”

“Neither. Most of the time we’re co-operators. Palanese agriculture has always been an affair of terracing and irrigation. But terracing and irrigation call for pooled efforts and friendly agreements. Cut throat competition isn’t compatible with rice-growing in a mountainous country. Our people found it quite easy to pass from mutual aid in a village community to streamlined co-operative techniques for buying and selling and profit-sharing and financing.”

“Even co-operative financing?”

Dr Robert nodded. “None of those blood-sucking usurers that you find all over the Indian countryside. And no commercial banks in your Western style. Our borrowing and lending system was modelled on those credit unions that Wilhelm Raiffeisen set up more than a century ago in Germany. Dr Andrew persuaded the Raja to invite one of Raiffeisen’s young men to come here and organize a co-operative banking system. It’s still going strong.”

“And what do you use for money?” Will asked.

Dr Robert dipped into his trouser pocket and pulled out a handful of silver, gold and copper.

“In a modest way,” he explained, “Pala’s a gold-producing country. We mine enough to give our paper a solid metallic backing. And the gold supplements our exports. We can pay spot cash for expensive equipment like those transmission lines and the generators at the other end.”

“You seem to have solved your economic problems pretty successfully.”

“Solving them wasn’t difficult. To begin with, we never allowed ourselves to produce more children than we could feed, clothe, house, and educate into something like full humanity. Not being over-populated, we have plenty. But although we have plenty, we’ve managed to resist the temptation that the West has now succumbed to — the temptation to over-consume. We don’t give ourselves coronaries by guzzling six times as much saturated fat as we need. We don’t hypnotize ourselves into believing that two television sets will make us twice as happy as one television set. And finally we don’t spend a quarter of the gross national product preparing for World War III or even World War’s baby brother, Local War MMMCCXXXIII. Armaments, universal debt and planned

obsolescence — those are the three pillars of Western prosperity. If war, waste, and moneylenders were abolished, you'd collapse. And while you people are over-consuming, the rest of the world sinks more and more deeply into chronic disaster. Ignorance, militarism and breeding, these three — and the greatest of these is breeding. No hope, not the slightest possibility, of solving the economic problem until *that's* under control. As population rushes up, prosperity goes down." He traced the descending curve with an outstretched finger. "And as prosperity goes down, discontent and rebellion" (the forefinger moved up again), "political ruthlessness and one-party rule, nationalism and bellicosity begin to rise. Another ten or fifteen years of uninhibited breeding, and the whole world, from China to Peru via Africa and the Middle East will be fairly crawling with Great Leaders, all dedicated to the suppression of freedom, all armed to the teeth by Russia or America or, better still, by both at once, all waving flags, all screaming for *lebensraum*."

"What about Pala?" Will asked. "Will *you* be blessed with a Great Leader ten years from now?"

"Not if we can help it." Dr Robert answered. "We've always done everything possible to make it very difficult for a Great Leader to arise."

Out of the corner of his eye Will saw that Murugan was making a face of indignant and contemptuous disgust. In his fancy Antinous evidently saw himself as a Carlylean Hero. Will turned back to Dr Robert.

"Tell me how you do it." he said.

"Well, to begin with we don't fight wars or prepare for them. Consequently we have no need for conscription, or military hierarchies, or a unified command. Then there's our economic system: it doesn't permit anybody to become more than four or five times as rich as the average. That means that we don't have any captains of industry or omnipotent financiers. Better still, we have no omnipotent politicians or bureaucrats. Pala's a federation of self-governing units, geographical units, professional units, economic units — so there's plenty of scope for small-scale initiative and democratic leaders, but no place for any kind of dictator at the head of a centralized government. Another point: we have no

established church, and our religion stresses immediate experience and deplores belief in unverifiable dogmas and the emotions which that belief inspires. So we're preserved from the plagues of popery on the one hand and fundamentalist revivalism on the other. And along with transcendental experience we systematically cultivate scepticism. Discouraging children from taking words too seriously, teaching them to analyze whatever they hear or read — this is an integral part of the school curriculum. Result: the eloquent rabble-rouser, like Hitler or our neighbour across the Strait, Colonel Dipa, just doesn't have a chance here in Pala."

This was too much for Murugan. Unable to contain himself, "But look at the energy Colonel Dipa generates in his people," he burst out. "Look at all the devotion and self-sacrifice! We don't have anything like that here."

"Thank God," said Dr Robert devoutly.

"Thank God," Vijaya echoed.

"But these things are good," the boy protested. "I admire them."

"I admire them too," said Dr Robert. "Admire them in the same way as I admire a typhoon. Unfortunately that kind of energy and devotion and self-sacrifice happens to be incompatible with liberty, not to mention reason and human decency. But decency, reason and liberty are what Pala has been working for, ever since the time of your namesake, Murugan the Reformer."

From under his seat Vijaya pulled out a tin box and, lifting the lid, distributed a first round of cheese and avocado sandwiches. "We'll have to eat as we go." He started the motor and with one hand, the other being busy with his sandwich, swung the little car on to the road. "Tomorrow," he said to Will, "I'll show you the sights of the village, and the still more remarkable sight of my family eating their lunch. Today we have an appointment in the mountains."

Near the entrance to the village he turned the jeep into a side road that went winding steeply up between terraced fields of rice and vegetables, interspersed with orchards and, here and there, plantations of young trees destined, Dr Robert explained, to supply the pulp mills of Shivapuram with their raw material.

“How many papers does Pala support?” Will enquired and was surprised to learn that there was only one. “Who enjoys the monopoly? The government? The party in power? The local Joe Aldehyde?”

“Nobody enjoys a monopoly,” Dr Robert assured him. There’s a panel of editors representing half a dozen different parties and interests. Each of them gets his allotted space for comment and criticism. The reader’s in a position to compare their arguments and make up his own mind. I remember how shocked I was, the first time I read one of your big-circulation newspapers. The bias of the headlines, the systematic one-sidedness of the reporting and the commentaries, the catchwords and slogans instead of argument. No serious appeal to reason. Instead, a systematic effort to install conditioned reflexes in the minds of the voters — and, for the rest, crime, divorce, anecdotes, twaddle, anything to keep them distracted, anything to prevent them from thinking.”

The car climbed on and now they were on a ridge between two headlong descents, with a tree-fringed lake down at the bottom of a gorge to their left and, to the right a broader valley where, between two tree-shaded villages, like an incongruous piece of pure geometry, sprawled a huge factory.

“Cement?” Will questioned.

Dr Robert nodded. “One of the indispensable industries. We produce all we need and a surplus for export.”

“And those villages supply the man-power?”

“In the intervals of agriculture and work in the forest and the sawmills.”

“Does that kind of part-time system work well?”

“It depends what you mean by ‘well’. It doesn’t result in maximum efficiency. But then in Pala maximum efficiency isn’t the categorical imperative that it is with you. You think first of getting the biggest possible output in the shortest possible time. We think first of human beings and their satisfactions. Changing jobs doesn’t make for the biggest output in the fewest days. But most people like it better than doing one kind of job all their lives. If it’s a choice between mechanical efficiency and human satisfaction, we choose satisfaction.”

“When I was twenty,” Vijaya now volunteered, “I put in four months at that cement plant — and after that ten weeks making superphosphates and then six months in the jungle, as a lumberjack.”

“All this ghastly honest toil!”

“Twenty years earlier,” said Dr Robert, “I did a stint at the copper smelters. After which I had a taste of the sea on a fishing boat. Sampling all kinds of work — it’s part of everybody’s education. One learns an enormous amount that way — about things and skills and organizations, about all kinds of people and their ways of thinking.”

Will shook his head. “I’d still rather get it out of a book.”

“But what you can get out of a book is never *it*. At bottom,” Dr Robert added, “all of you are still Platonists. You worship the word and abhor matter!”

“Tell that to the clergymen,” said Will. “They’re always reproaching us with being crass materialists.”

“Crass,” Dr Robert agreed, “but crass precisely because you’re such inadequate materialists. Abstract materialism — that’s what you profess. Whereas we make a point of being materialists concretely — materialistic on the wordless levels of seeing and touching and smelling, of tensed muscles and dirty hands. Abstract materialism is as bad as abstract idealism, it makes immediate spiritual experience almost impossible. Sampling different kinds of work as concrete materialists is the first, indispensable step in our education for concrete spirituality.”

“But even the most concrete materialism,” Vijaya qualified, “won’t get you very far unless you’re fully conscious of what you’re doing and experiencing. You’ve got to be completely aware of the bits of matter you’re handling, the skills you’re practising, the people you’re working with.”

“Quite right,” said Dr Robert “I ought to have made it clear that concrete materialism is only the raw stuff of a fully human life. It’s through awareness, complete and constant awareness, that we transform it into concrete spirituality. Be fully aware of what you’re doing, and work becomes the yoga of work, play

becomes the yoga of play, everyday living becomes the yoga of everyday living."

Will thought of Ranga and the little nurse. "And what about love?"

Dr Robert nodded. "That too. Awareness transfigures it, turns love-making into the yoga of love-making."

Murugan gave an imitation of his mother looking shocked.

"Psycho-physical means to a transcendental end," said Vijaya, raising his voice against the grinding screech of the low gear into which he had just shifted, "that, primarily, is what all these yogas are. But they're also something else, they're also devices for dealing with the problems of power." He shifted back to a quieter gear and lowered his voice to its normal tone. "The problems of power," he repeated. "And they confront you on every level of organization — every level, from national governments down to nurseries and honeymooning couples. For it isn't merely a question of making things hard for the Great Leaders. There are all the millions of small-scale tyrants and persecutors, all the mute inglorious Hitlers, the village Napoleons, the Calvins and Torquemadas of the family. Not to mention all the brigands and bullies stupid enough to get themselves labelled as criminals. How does one harness the enormous power these people generate and set it to work in some useful way — or at least prevent it from doing harm?"

"That's what I want you to tell me," said Will. "Where do you start?"

"We start everywhere at once," Vijaya answered. "But since one can't say more than one thing at a time, let's begin by talking about the anatomy and physiology of power. Tell him about your biochemical approach to the subject, Dr Robert."

"It started," said Dr Robert, "nearly forty years ago, while I was studying in London. Started with prison visiting on week-ends and reading history whenever I had a free evening. History and prisons," he repeated. "I discovered that they were closely related. The record of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind (that's Gibbon, isn't it?) and the place where unsuccessful crimes and follies are visited with a special kind of misfortune. Reading my books and

talking to my jailbirds, I found myself asking questions. What kind of people became dangerous delinquents — the grand delinquents of the history books, the little ones of Pentonville and Wormwood Scrubbs? What kinds of people are moved by the lust for power, the passion to bully and domineer? And the ruthless ones, the men and women who know what they want and have no qualms about hurting and killing in order to get it, the monsters who hurt and kill, not for profit, but gratuitously, because hurting and killing are such fun — who *are* they? I used to discuss these questions with the experts — doctors, psychologists, social scientists, teachers. Mantegazza and Galton had gone out of fashion, and most of my experts assured me that the only valid answers to these questions were answers in terms of culture, economics and the family. It was all a matter of mothers and toilet training, of early conditioning and traumatic environments. I was only half convinced. Mothers and toilet training and the circumambient nonsense — these were obviously important. But were they *all*-important? In the course of my prison visiting I'd begun to see evidence of some kind of a built-in pattern — or rather of two kinds of built-in pattern; for dangerous delinquents and power-loving trouble-makers don't belong to a single species. Most of them, as I was beginning to realize even then, belong to one or other of two distinct and dissimilar species — the Muscle People and the Peter Pans. I've specialized in the treatment of Peter Pans."

"The boys who never grow up?" Will queried.

"'Never' is the wrong word. In real life Peter Pan always ends by growing up. He merely grows up too late — grows up physiologically more slowly than he grows up in terms of birthdays."

"What about girl Peter Pans?"

"They're very rare. But the boys are as common as blackberries You can expect one Peter Pan among every five or six male children. And among problem children, among the boys who can't read, won't learn, don't get on with anyone and finally turn to the more violent forms of delinquency, seven out of ten turn out, if you take an X-ray of the bones of the wrist, to be Peter Pans. The rest are mostly Muscle People of one sort or another."

“I’m trying to think,” said Will, “of a good historical example of a delinquent Peter Pan.”

“You don’t have to go far afield. The most recent, as well as the best and biggest, was Adolf Hitler.”

“Hitler?” Murugan’s tone was one of shocked astonishment. Hitler was evidently one of his heroes.

“Read The Führer’s biography,” said Dr Robert. “A Peter Pan if ever there was one. Hopeless at school. Incapable either of competing or co-operating. Envying all the normally successful boys — and, because he envied, hating them and, to make himself feel better, despising them as inferior beings. Then came the time for puberty. But Adolf was sexually backward. Other boys made advances to girls, and the girls responded. Adolf was too shy, too uncertain of his manhood. And all the time incapable of steady work, at home only in the compensatory Other World of his fancy. There, at the very least, he was Michelangelo. Here, unfortunately, he couldn’t draw. His only gifts were hatred, low cunning, a set of indefatigable vocal cords and a talent for non-stop talking at the top of his voice from the depths of his Peter-Panic paranoia. Thirty or forty million deaths and heaven knows how many billions of dollars — that was the price the world had to pay for little Adolf’s retarded maturation. Fortunately most of the boys who grow up too slowly never get a chance of being more than minor delinquents. But even minor delinquents if there are enough of them, can exact a pretty stiff price. That’s why we try to nip them in the bud — or rather, since we’re dealing with Peter Pans, that’s why we try to make their nipped buds open out and grow.”

“And do you succeed?”

Dr Robert nodded. “It isn’t hard. Particularly if you start early enough. Between four and a half and five all our children get a thorough examination. Blood tests, psychological tests, somatotyping; then we X-ray their wrists and give them an EEG. All the cute little Peter Pans are spotted without fail, and appropriate treatment is started immediately. Within a year practically all of them are perfectly normal. A crop of potential failures and criminals, potential

tyrants and sadists, potential misanthropes and revolutionaries for revolution's sake, has been transformed into a crop of useful citizens who can be governed *adandena asatthena* — without punishment and without a sword. In your part of the world, delinquency is still left to clergymen, social workers and the police. Non-stop sermons and supportive therapy; prison sentences galore. With what results? The delinquency rate goes steadily up and up. No wonder. Words about sibling rivalry and hell and the personality of Jesus are no substitutes for biochemistry. A year in jail won't cure a Peter Pan of his endocrine disbalance or help the ex-Peter Pan to get rid of its psychological consequences. For Peter Panic delinquency, what you need is early diagnosis and three pink capsules a day before meals. Given a tolerable environment, the result will be sweet reasonableness and a modicum of the cardinal virtues within eighteen months. Not to mention a fair chance, where before there hadn't been the faintest possibility, of eventual *prajnaparamita* and *karuna*, eventual wisdom and compassion. And now get Vijaya to tell you about the Muscle People. As you may perhaps have observed, he's one of them." Leaning forward, Dr Robert thumped the giant's broad back. "Solid beef!" And he added, "How lucky for us poor shrimps that the animal isn't savage."

Vijaya took one hand off the wheel, beat his chest and uttered a loud ferocious roar. "Don't tease the gorilla," he said, and laughed good-humouredly. Then, "Think of the other great dictator", he said to Will, "think of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. Hitler's the supreme example of the delinquent Peter Pan. Stalin's the supreme example of the delinquent Muscle Man. Predestined, by his shape, to be an extravert. Not one of your soft, round, spill-the-beans extraverts who pine for indiscriminate togetherness. No — the trampling, driving extravert, the one who always feels impelled to Do Something and is never inhibited by doubts or qualms, by sympathy or sensibility. In his will, Lenin advised his successors to get rid of Stalin: the man was too fond of power and too apt to abuse it. But the advice came too late. Stalin was already so firmly entrenched that he couldn't be ousted. Ten years later his power was absolute. Trotsky had been scotched; all his old friends had been bumped off. Now, like God among

the choiring angels, he was alone in a cosy little heaven peopled only by flatterers and yes-men. And all the time he was ruthlessly busy, liquidating kulaks, organizing collectives, building an armament industry, shifting reluctant millions from farm to factory. Working with a tenacity, a lucid efficiency of which the German Peter Pan, with his apocalyptic phantasies and his fluctuating moods, was utterly incapable. And in the last phase of the War, compare Stalin's strategy with Hitler's. Cool calculation pitted against compensatory day-dreams, clear-eyed realism against the rhetorical nonsense that Hitler had finally talked himself into believing. Two monsters, equal in delinquency, but profoundly dissimilar in temperament, in unconscious motivation, and finally in efficiency. Peter Pans are wonderfully good at starting wars and revolutions; but it takes Muscle Men to carry them through to a successful conclusion. Here's the jungle," Vijaya added in another tone, waving a hand in the direction of a great cliff of trees that seemed to block their further ascent.

A moment later they had left the glare of the open hillside and had plunged into a narrow tunnel of green twilight that zigzagged up between walls of tropical foliage. Creepers dangled from the over-arching branches and between the trunks of huge trees grew ferns and dark-leaved rhododendrons with a dense profusion of shrubs and bushes that for Will, as he looked about him, were namelessly unfamiliar. The air was stiflingly damp and there was a hot, acrid smell of luxuriant green growth and of that other kind of life which is decay. Muffled by the thick foliage, Will heard the ringing of distant axes, the rhythmic screech of a saw. The road turned yet once more and suddenly the green darkness of the tunnel gave place to sunshine. They had entered a clearing in the forest. Tall and broad-shouldered, half a dozen almost naked woodcutters were engaged in lopping the branches from a newly felled tree. In the sunshine hundreds of blue and amethyst butterflies chased one another, fluttering and soaring in an endless random dance. Over a fire at the further side of the clearing an old man was slowly stirring the contents of an iron cauldron. Near by a small tame deer, fine-limbed and elegantly dappled, was quietly grazing.

“Old friends,” said Vijaya, and shouted something in Palanese. The wood cutters shouted back and waved their hands. Then the road swung sharply to the left and they were climbing again up the green tunnel between the trees.

“Talk of Muscle Men,” said Will as they left the clearing. “Those were really splendid specimens.”

“That kind of physique,” said Vijaya, “is a standing temptation. And yet among all these men — and I’ve worked with scores of them — I’ve never met a single bully, a single potentially dangerous power-lover.”

“Which is just another way,” Murugan broke in contemptuously, “of saying that nobody here has any ambition.”

“What’s the explanation?” Will asked.

“Very simple, so far as the Peter Pans are concerned. They’re never given a chance to work up an appetite for power. We cure them of their delinquency before it’s had time to develop. But the Muscle Men are different. They’re just as muscular here, just as tramplingly extraverted, as they are with you. So why don’t they turn into Stalins or Dipas, or at the least into domestic tyrants? First of all, our social arrangements offer them very few opportunities for bullying their families, and our political arrangements make it practically impossible for them to domineer on any larger scale. Second, we train the Muscle Men to be aware and sensitive, we teach them to enjoy the commonplaces of everyday existence. This means that they always have an alternative — innumerable alternatives — to the pleasure of being the boss. And finally we work directly on the love of power and domination that goes with this kind of physique in almost all its variations. We canalize this love of power and we deflect it — turn it away from people and on to things. We give them all kinds of difficult tasks to perform — strenuous and violent tasks that exercise their muscles and satisfy their craving for domination — but satisfy it at nobody’s expense and in ways that are either harmless or positively useful.”

“So these splendid creatures fell trees instead of felling people — is that it?”

“Precisely. And when they’ve had enough of the woods, they can go to sea, or try their hands at mining, or take it easy, relatively speaking, on the rice

paddies."

Will Farnaby suddenly laughed.

"What's the joke?"

"I was thinking of my father. A little wood chopping might have been the making of him — not to mention the salvation of his wretched family. Unfortunately he was an English gentleman. Wood chopping was out of the question."

"Didn't he have *any* physical outlet for his energies?"

Will shook his head. "Besides being a gentleman," he explained "my father thought he was an intellectual. But an intellectual doesn't hunt or shoot or play golf; he just thinks and drinks. Apart from brandy, my father's only amusements were bullying, auction bridge and the theory of politics. He fancied himself as a twentieth-century version of Lord Acton — the last, lonely philosopher of Liberalism. You should have heard him on the iniquities of the modern omnipotent State! 'Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. *Absolutely*.' After which he'd down another brandy and go back with renewed gusto to his favourite pastime — trampling on his wife and children."

"And if Acton himself didn't behave in that way," said Dr Robert, "it was merely because he happened to be virtuous and intelligent. There was nothing in his theories to restrain a delinquent Muscle Man or an untreated Peter Pan from trampling on anyone he could get his feet on. That was Acton's fatal weakness. As a political theorist he was altogether admirable. As a practical psychologist he was almost non-existent. He seems to have thought that the power problem could be solved by good social arrangements, supplemented, of course, by sound morality and a spot of revealed religion. But the power problem has its roots in anatomy and biochemistry and temperament. Power has to be curbed on the legal and political levels; that's obvious. But it's also obvious that there must be prevention on the individual level. On the level of instinct and emotion, on the level of the glands and the viscera, the muscles and the blood. If I can ever find the time, I'd like to write a little book on human physiology in relation to ethics, religion, politics and law."

“Law,” Will echoed. “I was just going to ask you about law. Are you completely swordless and punishmentless? Or do you still need judges and policemen?”

“We still need them,” said Dr Robert. “But we don’t need nearly so many of them as you do. In the first place, thanks to preventive medicine and preventive education, we don’t commit many crimes. And in the second place most of the few crimes that are committed are dealt with by the criminal’s MAC. Group therapy within a community that has assumed group responsibility for the delinquent. And in difficult cases the group therapy is supplemented by medical treatment and a course of *moksha*-medicine experiences, directed by somebody with an exceptional degree of insight.”

“So where do the judges come in?”

“The judge listens to the evidence, decides whether the accused person is innocent or guilty, and if he’s guilty, remands him to his MAC and, where it seems advisable, to the local panel of medical and mycomystical experts. At stated intervals the experts and the MAC report back to the judge. When the reports are satisfactory, the case is closed.”

“And if they’re never satisfactory?”

“In the long run,” said Dr Robert, “they always are.”

There was a silence.

“Did you ever do any rock climbing?” Vijaya suddenly asked.

Will laughed. “How do you think I came by my game leg?”

“That was forced climbing. Did you ever climb for fun?”

“Enough,” said Will, “to convince me that I wasn’t much good at it.”

Vijaya glanced at Murugan. “What about you, while you were in Switzerland?”

The boy blushed deeply and shook his head. “You can’t do any of those things,” he muttered, “if you have a tendency to TB.”

“What a pity!” said Vijaya. “It would have been so good for you.”

Will asked, “Do people do a lot of climbing in these mountains?”

“Climbing’s an integral part of the school curriculum.”

“For everybody?”

“A little for everybody. With more advanced rock work for the full-blown Muscle People — that’s about one in twelve of the boys and one in twenty-seven of the girls. We shall soon be seeing some youngsters tackling their first post-elementary climb.”

The green tunnel widened, brightened, and suddenly they were out of the dripping forest on a wide shelf of almost level ground, walled in on three sides by red rocks that towered up two thousand feet and more into a succession of jagged crests and isolated pinnacles. There was a freshness in the air and, as they passed from sunshine into the shadow of a floating island of cumulus, it was almost cool. Dr Robert leaned forward and pointed, through the windshield, at a group of white buildings on a little knoll near the centre of the plateau.

“That’s the High Altitude Station,” he said, “seven thousand feet up, with more than five thousand acres of good flat land, where we can grow practically anything that grows in southern Europe. Wheat and barley; green peas and cabbages, lettuce and tomatoes (the fruit won’t set where night temperatures are over sixty-eight); gooseberries, strawberries, walnuts, greengages, peaches, apricots. Plus all the valuable plants that are native to high mountains at this latitude — including the mushrooms that our young friend here so violently disapproves of.”

“Is this the place we’re bound for?” Will asked.

“No, we’re going higher.” Dr Robert pointed to the last outpost of the range, a ridge of dark red rock from which the land sloped down on one side to the jungle, and, on the other, mounted precipitously towards an unseen summit lost in the clouds. “Up to the old Shiva temple where the pilgrims used to come every spring and autumn equinox. It’s one of my favourite places in the whole island. When the children were small, we used to go up there for picnics, Lakshmi and I, almost every week. How many years ago!” A note of sadness had come into his voice. He sighed and, leaning back in his seat, closed his eyes.

They turned off the road that led to the High Altitude Station and began to climb again.

“Entering the last, worst lap,” said Vijaya. “Seven hairpin turns and half a mile of unventilated tunnel.”

He shifted into first gear and conversation became impossible. Ten minutes later they had arrived.

CHAPTER TEN

CAUTIOUSLY MANŒUVRING HIS immobilized leg, Will climbed out of the car and looked about him. Between the red soaring crags to the south and the headlong descents in every other direction the crest of the ridge had been levelled, and at the mid-point of this long narrow terrace stood the temple — a great red tower of the same substance as the mountains, massive, four-sided, vertically ribbed. A thing of symmetry in contrast with the rocks, but regular not as Euclidean abstractions are regular; regular with the pragmatic geometry of a living thing. Yes, of a living thing; for all the temple's richly textured surfaces, all its bounding contours against the sky curved organically inwards, narrowing as they mounted towards a ring of marble, above which the red stone swelled out again, like the seed capsule of a flowering plant, into a flattened, many-ribbed dome that crowned the whole.

"Built about fifty years before the Norman Conquest," said Dr Robert.

"And looks," Will commented, "as though it hadn't been built by anybody — as though it had grown out of the rock. Grown like the bud of an agave, on the point of rocketing up into a twelve-foot stalk and an explosion of flowers."

Vijaya touched his arm, "Look," he said. "A party of Elementaries coming down."

Will turned towards the mountain and saw a young man in nailed boots and climbing clothes working his way down a chimney in the face of the precipice. At a place where the chimney offered a convenient resting place he halted and, throwing back his head, gave utterance to a loud Alpine yodel. Fifty feet above him a boy came out from behind a buttress of rock, lowered himself from the ledge on which he was standing and started down the chimney.

"Does it tempt you?" Vijaya asked, turning to Murugan.

Heavily overacting the part of the bored, sophisticated adult who has something better to do than watch the children at play, Murugan shrugged his shoulders. “Not in the slightest.” He moved away and, sitting down on the weather-worn carving of a lion, pulled a gaudily bound American magazine out of his pocket and started to read.

“What’s the literature?” Vijaya asked.

“Science Fiction.” There was a ring of defiance in Murugan’s voice.

Dr Robert laughed. “Anything to escape from Fact.”

Pretending not to have heard him, Murugan turned a page and went on reading.

“He’s pretty good,” said Vijaya, who had been watching the young climber’s progress. “They have an experienced man at each end of the rope,” he added. “You can’t see the number one man. He’s behind that buttress in a parallel chimney thirty or forty feet higher up. There’s a permanent iron spike up there, where you can belay the rope. The whole party could fall, and they’d be perfectly safe.”

Spread-eagled between footholds in either wall of the narrow chimney, the leader kept shouting up instructions and encouragement. Then, as the boy approached, he yielded his place, climbed down another twenty feet and, halting, yodelled again. Booted and trousered, a tall girl with her hair in pigtails appeared from behind the buttress and lowered herself into the chimney.

“Excellent!” said Vijaya approvingly as he watched her.

Meanwhile, from a low building at the foot of the cliff — the tropical version, evidently, of an Alpine hut — a group of young people had come out to see what was happening. They belonged, Will was told, to three other parties of climbers who had taken their Post-Elementary Test earlier in the day.

“Does the best team win a prize?” Will asked.

“Nobody wins anything,” Vijaya answered. “This isn’t a competition. It’s more like an ordeal.”

“An ordeal,” Dr Robert explained, “which is the first stage of their initiation out of childhood into adolescence. An ordeal that helps them to understand the

world they'll have to live in, helps them to realize the omnipresence of death, the essential precariousness of all existence. But after the ordeal comes the revelation. In a few minutes these boys and girls will be given their first experience of the *moksha*-medicine. They'll all take it together, and there'll be a religious ceremony in the temple."

"Something like the Confirmation Service?"

"Except that this is more than just a piece of theological rigmarole. Thanks to the *moksha*-medicine, it includes an actual experience of the real thing."

"The real thing?" Will shook his head. "Is there such a thing? I wish I could believe it."

"You're not being asked to believe it," said Dr Robert. "The real thing isn't a proposition; it's a state of being. We don't teach our children creeds or get them worked up over emotionally charged symbols. When it's time for them to learn the deepest truths of religion, we set them to climb a precipice and then give them four hundred milligrammes of revelation. Two firsthand experiences of reality, from which any reasonably intelligent boy or girl can derive a very good idea of what's what."

"And don't forget the dear old power problem," said Vijaya. "Rock climbing's a branch of applied ethics; it's another preventive substitute for bullying."

"So my father ought to have been an alpinist as well as a wood-chopper."

"One may laugh," said Vijaya, duly laughing. "But the fact remains that it works. It works. First and last I've climbed my way out of literally scores of the ugliest temptations to throw my weight around — and my weight being considerable," he added, "incitements were correspondingly strong."

"There seems to be only one catch," said Will. "In the process of climbing your way out of temptation, you might fall and …" Suddenly remembering what had happened to Dugald MacPhail, he broke off.

It was Dr Robert who finished the sentence. "Might fall," he said slowly, "and kill yourself. Dugald was climbing alone," he went on after a little pause.

“Nobody knows what happened. The body wasn’t found till the next day.” There was a long silence.

“Do you still think this is a good idea?” Will asked, pointing with his bamboo staff at the tiny figures crawling so laboriously on the face of that headlong wilderness of naked rock.

“I still think it’s a good idea,” said Dr Robert.

“But poor Susila.…”

“Yes, poor Susila,” Dr Robert repeated. “And poor children, poor Lakshmi, poor me. But if Dugald hadn’t made a habit of risking his life, it might have been poor everybody for other reasons. Better court the danger of killing yourself than court the danger of killing other people, or at the very least making them miserable. Hurting them because you’re naturally aggressive and too prudent, or too ignorant, to work off your aggression on a precipice. And now,” he continued in another tone, “I want to show you the view.”

“And *I*’ll go and talk to those boys and girls.” Vijaya walked away towards the group at the foot of the red crags.

Leaving Murugan to his Science Fiction, Will followed Dr Robert through a pillared gateway and across the wide stone platform that surrounded the temple. At one corner of this platform stood a small domed pavilion. They entered and, crossing to the wide unglazed window, looked out. Rising to the line of the horizon, like a solid wall of jade and lapis, was the sea. Below them, after a sheer fall of a thousand feet, lay the green of the jungle. Beyond the jungle, folded vertically into combe and buttress, terraced horizontally into a huge man-made staircase of innumerable fields, the lower slopes went steeply down into a wide plain, at whose furthest verge, between the market gardens and the palm-fringed beach, stretched a considerable city. Seen from this high vantage point in its shining completeness, it looked like the tiny, meticulous painting of a city in a medieval book of hours.

“There’s Shivapuram,” said Dr Robert. “And that complex of buildings on the hill beyond the river — that’s the great Buddhist temple. A little earlier than Borobudur and the sculpture is as fine as anything in Further India.” There was a

silence. “This little summer-house,” he resumed, “is where we used to eat our picnics when it was raining. I shall never forget the time when Dugald (he must have been about ten) amused himself by climbing up here on the window ledge and standing on one leg in the attitude of the dancing Shiva. Poor Lakshmi, she was scared out of her wits. But Dugald was a born steeplejack. Which only makes the accident even more incomprehensible.” He shook his head; then, after another silence, “The last time we all came up here,” he said, “was eight or nine months ago. Dugald was still alive and Lakshmi wasn’t yet too weak for a day’s outing with her grandchildren. He did that Shiva stunt again for the benefit of Tom Krishna and Mary Sarojini. On one leg; and he kept his arms moving so fast that one could have sworn there were four of them.” Dr Robert broke off. Picking up a flake of mortar from the floor, he tossed it out of the window. “Down, down, down … Empty space. *Pascal avait son gouffre*. How strange that this should be at once the most powerful symbol of death and the most powerful symbol of the fullest, intensest life.” Suddenly his face lighted up. “Do you see that hawk?”

“A hawk?”

Dr Robert pointed to where, half way between their eyrie and the dark roof of the forest, a small brown incarnation of speed and rapine lazily wheeled on unmoving wings. “It reminds me of a poem that the Old Raja once wrote about this place.” Dr Robert was silent for a moment, then started to recite.

“‘*Up here, you ask me,*
Up here aloft where Shiva
Dances above the world,
What the devil do I think I’m doing?

No answer, friend — except
That hawk below us turning,
Those black and arrowy swifts
Trailing long silver wires across the air —

The shrillness of their crying,

How far, you say, from the hot plains,
How far, reproachfully, from all my people!
And yet how close! For here between the cloudy
Sky and the sea below, suddenly visible,
I read their luminous secret and my own.'"

"And the secret, I take it, is this empty space."

"Or rather what this empty space is the symbol of — the Buddha Nature in all our perpetual perishing. Which reminds me …" He looked at his watch.

"What's next on the programme?" Will asked as they stepped out into the glare.

"The service in the temple," Dr Robert answered. "The young climbers will offer their accomplishment to Shiva — in other words, to their own Suchness visualized as God. After which they'll go on to the second part of their initiation — the experience of being liberated from themselves.

"By means of the *moksha*-medicine?"

Dr Robert nodded. "Their leaders give it them before they leave the Climbing Association's hut. Then they come over to the temple. The stuff starts working during the service. Incidentally," he added, "the service is in Sanskrit, so you won't understand a word of it. Vijaya's address will be in English — he speaks in his capacity as President of the Climbing Association. So will mine. And of course the young people will mostly talk in English."

Inside the temple there was a cool, cavernous darkness, tempered only by the faint daylight filtering in through a pair of small latticed windows and by the seven lamps that hung, like a halo of yellow, quivering stars, above the head of the image on the altar. It was a copper statue, no taller than a child, of Shiva. Surrounded by a flame-fringed glory, his four arms gesturing, his braided hair wildly flying, his right foot treading down a dwarfish figure of the most hideous malignity, his left foot gracefully lifted, the god stood there, frozen in mid-

ecstasy. No longer in their climbing dress, but sandalled, bare-breasted and in shorts or brightly coloured skirts, a score of boys and girls, together with the six young men who had acted as their leaders and instructors, were sitting cross-legged on the floor. Above them, on the highest of the altar steps, an old priest, shaven and yellow-robed, was intoning something sonorous and incomprehensible. Leaving Will installed on a convenient ledge, Dr Robert tiptoed over to where Vijaya and Murugan were sitting and squatted down beside them.

The splendid rumble of Sanskrit gave place to a high nasal chant, and the chanting in due course was succeeded by a litany, priestly utterance alternating with congregational response.

And now incense was burned in a brass thurible. The old priest held up his two hands for silence, and through a long pregnant time of the most perfect stillness the thread of grey incense smoke rose straight and unwavering before the god, then as it met the draught from the windows broke and was lost to view in an invisible cloud that filled the whole dim space with the mysterious fragrance of another world. Will opened his eyes and saw that, alone of all the congregation, Murugan was restlessly fidgeting. And not merely fidgeting — making faces of impatient disapproval. He himself had never climbed; therefore climbing was merely silly. He himself had always refused to try the *moksha*-medicine; therefore those who used it were beyond the pale. His mother believed in the Ascended Masters and chatted regularly with Koot Hoomi; therefore the image of Shiva was a vulgar idol. What an eloquent pantomine, Will thought as he watched the boy. But alas for poor little Murugan, nobody was paying the slightest attention to his antics.

"*Shivanayama*," said the old priest, breaking the long silence, and again, "*Shivanayama*." He made a beckoning gesture.

Rising from her place, the tall girl whom Will had seen working her way down the precipice, mounted the altar steps. Standing on tiptoe, her oiled body gleaming like a second copper statue in the light of the lamps, she hung a garland of pale yellow flowers on the uppermost of Shiva's two left arms. Then,

laying palm to palm, she looked up into the god's serenely smiling face and, in a voice that faltered at first, but gradually grew steadier, began to speak.

O you the creator, you the destroyer, you who sustain and make an end,
Who in sunlight dance among the birds and the children at their play,
Who at midnight dance among corpses in the burning grounds,
You Shiva, you dark and terrible Bhairava,
You Suchness and Illusion, the Void and All Things,
You are the lord of life, and therefore I have brought you flowers;
You are the lord of death, and therefore I have brought you my heart —
This heart that is now your burning-ground.
Ignorance there and self shall be consumed with fire.
That you may dance, Bhairava, among the ashes.
That you may dance, Lord Shiva, in a place of flowers,
And I dance with you.

Raising her arms, the girl made a gesture that hinted at the ecstatic devotion of a hundred generations of dancing worshippers, then turned away and walked back into the twilight. "*Shivanayama*," somebody cried out. Murugan snorted contemptuously as the refrain was taken up by other young voices. "*Shivanayama, Shivanayama* …" The old priest started to intone another passage from the scriptures. Half way through his recitation a small grey bird with a crimson head flew in through one of the latticed windows, fluttered wildly around the altar lamps then, chattering in loud indignant terror, darted out again. The chanting continued, swelled to a climax, and ended in the whispered prayer for peace: *Shanti shanti shanti*. The old priest now turned towards the altar, picked up a long taper and, borrowing flame from one of the lamps above Shiva's head, proceeded to light seven other lamps that hung within a deep niche beneath the slab on which the dancer stood. Glinting on polished convexities of metal, their light revealed another statue — this time of Shiva and Parvati, of the Arch-Yogin seated and, while two of his four hands held aloft the symbolic

drum and fire, caressing with the second pair the amorous Goddess, with her twining legs and arms, by whom, in this eternal embrace of bronze, he was bestridden. The old priest waved his hand. This time it was a boy, dark-skinned and powerfully muscled, who stepped into the light. Bending down, he hung the garland he was carrying about Parvati's neck; then, twisting the long flower chain, dropped a second loop of white orchids over Shiva's head.

"Each is both," he said.

"Each is both," the chorus of young voices repeated.

Murugan violently shook his head.

"O you who are gone," said the dark-skinned boy, "who are gone, who are gone to the other shore, who have landed on the other shore, O you enlightenment and you other enlightenment, you liberation made one with liberation, you compassion in the arms of infinite compassion."

"*Shivanayama*."

He went back to his place. There was a long silence. Then Vijaya rose to his feet and began to speak.

"Danger," he said, and again, "danger. Danger deliberately and yet lightly accepted. Danger shared with a friend, a group of friends. Shared consciously, shared to the limits of awareness so that the sharing and the danger become a yoga. Two friends roped together on a rock face. Sometimes three friends or four. Each totally aware of his own straining muscles, his own skill, his own fear and his own spirit transcending the fear. And each, of course, aware at the same time of all the others, concerned for them, doing the right things to make sure that they'll be safe. Life at its highest pitch of bodily and mental tension, life more abundant, more inestimably precious, because of the ever-present threat of death. But after the yoga of danger there's the yoga of the summit, the yoga of rest and letting go, the yoga of complete and total receptiveness, the yoga that consists in consciously accepting what is given as it is given, without censorship by your busy moralistic mind, without any additions from your stock of second-hand ideas, your even larger stock of wishful phantasies. You just sit there with muscles relaxed and a mind open to the sunlight and the clouds, open to distance

and the horizon, open in the end to that formless, wordless Not-Thought which the stillness of the summit permits you to divine, profound and enduring, within the twittering flux of your everyday thinking.

"And now it's time for the descent, time for a second bout of the yoga of danger, time for a renewal of tension and the awareness of life in its glowing plenitude as you hang precariously on the brink of destruction. Then at the foot of the precipice you unrope, you go striding down the rocky path towards the first trees. And suddenly you're in the forest, and another kind of yoga is called for — the yoga of the jungle, the yoga that consists of being totally aware of life at the near-point, jungle life in all its exuberance and its rotting, crawling squalor, all its melodramatic ambivalence of orchids and centipedes, of leeches and sunbirds, of the drinkers of nectar and the drinkers of blood. Life bringing order out of chaos and ugliness, life performing its miracles of birth and growth, but performing them, it seems, for no other purpose than to destroy itself. Beauty and horror, beauty," he repeated, "and horror. And then suddenly, as you come down from one of your expeditions in the mountains, suddenly you know that there's a reconciliation. And not merely a reconciliation. A fusion, and identity. Beauty made one with horror in the yoga of the jungle. Life reconciled with the perpetual imminence of death in the yoga of danger. Emptiness identified with selfhood in the Sabbath yoga of the summit."

There was silence. Murugan yawned ostentatiously. The old priest lighted another stick of incense and, muttering, waved it before the dancer, waved it again around the cosmic love-making of Shiva and the Goddess.

"Breathe deeply," said Vijaya, "and as you breathe, pay attention to this smell of incense. Pay your whole attention to it; know it for what it is — an ineffable fact beyond words, beyond reason and explanation. Know it in the raw. Know it as a mystery. Perfume, women and prayer — those were the three things that Mohammed loved above all others. The inexplicable data of breathed incense, touched skin, felt love and beyond them, the mystery of mysteries, the One in plurality, the Emptiness that is all, the Suchness totally present in every

appearance, at every point and instant. So breathe," he repeated, "breathe," and in a final whisper, as he sat down, "breathe."

"*Shivanayama*," murmured the old priest ecstatically.

Dr Robert rose and started towards the altar, then halted, turned back and beckoned to Will Farnaby.

"Come and sit with me," he whispered, when Will had caught up with him. "I'd like you to see their faces."

"Shan't I be in the way?"

Dr Robert shook his head, and together they moved forward, climbed and, three-quarters of the way up the altar stair, sat down side by side in the penumbra between darkness and the light of the lamps. Very quietly Dr Robert began to talk about Shiva-Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance.

"Look at his image," he said. "Look at it with these new eyes that the *moksha*-medicine has given you. See how it breathes and pulses, how it grows out of brightness into brightnesses ever more intense. Dancing through time and out of time, dancing everlastingly and in the eternal now. Dancing and dancing in all the worlds at once. Look at him."

Scanning those upturned faces, Will noted, now in one, now in another, the dawning illuminations of delight, recognition, understanding, the signs of worshipping wonder that quivered on the brinks of ecstasy or terror.

"Look closely," Dr Robert insisted. "Look still more closely." Then, after a long minute of silence, "Dancing in all the worlds at once," he repeated. "In *all* the worlds. And first of all in the world of matter. Look at the great round halo, fringed with the symbols of fire, within which the god is dancing. It stands for Nature, for the world of mass and energy. Within it Shiva-Nataraja dances the dance of endless becoming and passing away. It's his *lila*, his cosmic play. Playing for the sake of playing, like a child. But this child is the Order of Things. His toys are galaxies, his playground is infinite space and between finger and finger every interval is a thousand million light years. Look at him there on the altar. The image is man-made, a little contraption of copper only four feet high. But Shiva-Nataraja fills the universe, *is* the universe. Shut your eyes and see him

towering into the night, follow the boundless stretch of those arms and the wild hair infinitely flying. Nataraja at play among the stars and in the atoms. But also," he added, "also at play within every living thing, every sentient creature, every child and man and woman. Play for play's sake. But now the playground is conscious, the dance-floor is capable of suffering. To us, this play without purpose seems a kind of insult. What we would really like is a God who never destroys what he has created. Or if there must be pain and death, let them be meted out by a God of righteousness, who will punish the wicked and reward the good with everlasting happiness. But in fact the good get hurt, the innocent suffer. Then let there be a God who sympathizes and brings comfort. But Nataraja only dances. His play is a play impartially of death and of life, of all evils as well as of all goods. In the uppermost of his right hands he holds the drum that summons being out of not-being. Rub-a-dub-dub — the creation tattoo, the cosmic reveille. But now look at the uppermost of his left hands. It brandishes the fire by which all that has been created is forthwith destroyed. He dances this way — what happiness! Dances that way — and oh, the pain, the hideous fear, the desolation! Then hop, skip and jump. Hop into perfect health. Skip into cancer and senility. Jump out of the fulness of life into nothingness, out of nothingness again into life. For Nataraja it's all play, and the play is an end in itself, everlastingly purposeless. He dances because he dances, and the dancing is his *maha-sukha*, his infinite and eternal bliss. Eternal Bliss," Dr Robert repeated and again, but questioningly, "Eternal Bliss?" He shook his head. "For us there's no bliss, only the oscillation between happiness and terror and a sense of outrage at the thought that our pains are as integral a part of Nataraja's dance as our pleasures, our dying as our living. Let's quietly think about that for a little while."

The seconds passed, the silence deepened. Suddenly, startlingly one of the girls began to sob. Vijaya left his place and, kneeling down beside her, laid a hand on her shoulder. The sobbing died down.

"Suffering and sickness," Dr Robert resumed at last, "old age, decrepitude, death. *I show you sorrow*. But that wasn't the only thing the Buddha showed us.

He also showed us the ending of sorrow."

"*Shivanayama*," the old priest cried triumphantly.

"Open your eyes again and look at Nataraja up there on the altar. Look closely. In his upper right hand, as you've already seen, he holds the drum that calls the world into existence, and in his upper left hand he carries the destroying fire. Life and death, order and disintegration, impartially. But now look at Shiva's other pair of hands. The lower right hand is raised and the palm is turned outwards. What does that gesture signify? It signifies, 'Don't be afraid; it's All Right.' But how can anyone in his senses fail to be afraid? How can anyone pretend that evil and suffering are all right, when it's so obvious that they're all wrong? Nataraja has the answer. Look now at his lower left hand. He's using it to point down at his feet. And what are his feet doing? Look closely and you'll see that the right foot is planted squarely on a horrible little subhuman creature — the demon, Muyalaka. A dwarf, but immensely powerful in his malignity, Muyalaka is the embodiment of ignorance, the manifestation of greedy, possessive selfhood. Stamp on him, break his back! And that's precisely what Nataraja is doing. Trampling the little monster down under his right foot. But notice that it isn't at this trampling right foot that he points his finger; it's at the left foot, the foot that, as he dances, he's in the act of raising from the ground. And why does he point at it? Why? That lifted foot, that dancing defiance of the force of gravity — it's the symbol of release, of *moksha*, of liberation. Nataraja dances in all the worlds at once — in the world of physics and chemistry, in the world of ordinary, all-too-human experience, in the world finally of Suchness, of Mind, of the Clear Light. And now," Dr Robert went on after a moment of silence, "I want you to look at the other statue, the image of Shiva and the Goddess. Look at them there in their little cave of light. And now shut your eyes and see them again — shining, alive, glorified. How beautiful! And in their tenderness what depths of meaning! What wisdom beyond all spoken wisdoms in that sensual experience of spiritual fusion and atonement! Eternity in love with time. The One joined in marriage to the many, the relative made absolute

by its union with the One. Nirvana identified with samsara, the manifestation in time and flesh and feeling of the Buddha Nature."

"*Shivanayama*." The old priest lighted another stick of incense and softly, in a succession of long-drawn melismata, began to chant something in Sanskrit. On the young faces before him Will could read the marks of a listening serenity, the hardly perceptible, ecstatic smile that welcomes a sudden insight, a revelation of truth or of beauty. In the background, meanwhile, Murugan sat wearily slumped against a pillar, picking his exquisitely Grecian nose.

"Liberation," Dr Robert began again, "the ending of sorrow, ceasing to be what you ignorantly think you are and becoming what you are in fact. For a little while, thanks to the *moksha*-medicine, you will know what it's like to be what in fact you are, what in fact you always have been. What a timeless bliss! But, like everything else, this timelessness is transient. Like everything else, it will pass. And when it has passed, what will you do with this experience? What will you do with all the other similar experiences that the *moksha*-medicine will bring you in the years to come? Will you merely enjoy them as you would enjoy an evening at the puppet show, and then go back to business as usual, back to behaving like the silly delinquents you imagine yourselves to be? Or, having glimpsed, will you devote your lives to the business, not at all as usual, of being what you are in fact? All that we older people can do with our teachings, all that Pala can do for you with its social arrangements, is to provide you with techniques and opportunities. And all that the *moksha*-medicine can do is to give you a succession of beatific glimpses, an hour or two, every now and then, of enlightening and liberating grace. It remains for you to decide whether you'll co-operate with the grace and take those opportunities. But that's for the future. Here and now, all you have to do is to follow the mynah bird's advice: Attention! Pay attention and you'll find yourselves, gradually or suddenly, becoming aware of the great primordial facts behind these symbols on the altar."

"*Shivanayama*!" The old priest waved his stick of incense. At the foot of the altar steps the boys and girls sat motionless as statues. A door creaked, there was a sound of footsteps. Will turned his head and saw a short, thick-set man picking

his way between the young contemplatives. He mounted the steps and, bending down, murmured something in Dr Robert's ear, then turned and walked back towards the door.

Dr Robert laid a hand on Will's knee. "It's a royal command," he whispered, with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders. "That was the man in charge of the Alpine hut. The Rani has just telephoned to say that she has to see Murugan as soon as possible. It's urgent." Laughing noiselessly, he rose and helped Will to his feet.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WILL FARNABY HAD made his own breakfast and, when Dr Robert returned from his early morning visit to the hospital, was drinking his second cup of Palanese tea and eating toasted breadfruit with pumelo marmalade.

"Not too much pain in the night," was Dr Robert's response to his enquiries. "Lakshmi had four or five hours of good sleep, and this morning she was able to take some broth."

They could look forward, he continued, to another day of respite. And so, since it tired the patient to have him there all the time, and since life, after all, had to go on and be made the best of, he had decided to drive up to the High Altitude Station and put in a few hours work on the research team in the pharmaceutical laboratory.

"Work on the *moksha*-medicine?"

Dr Robert shook his head. "That's just a matter of repeating a standard operation — something for technicians, not for the researchers. *They're* busy with something new."

And he began to talk about the indoles recently isolated from the ololiuqui seeds that had been brought in from Mexico last year and were now being grown in the Station's botanic garden. At least three different indoles, of which one seemed to be extremely potent. Animal experiments indicated that it affected the reticular system. …

Left to himself, Will sat down under the overhead fan and went on with his reading of the *Notes on What's What*.

We cannot reason ourselves out of our basic irrationality. All we can do is to learn the art of being irrational in a reasonable way.

In Pala, after three generations of Reform, there are no sheep-like flocks and no ecclesiastical Good Shepherds to shear and castrate; there are no bovine or swinish herds and no licensed drovers, royal or military, capitalistic or revolutionary, to brand, confine and butcher. There are only voluntary associations of men and women on the road to full humanity.

Tunes or pebbles, processes or substantial things? ‘Tunes’, answer Buddhism and modern science. ‘Pebbles’, say the classical philosophers of the West. Buddhism and modern science think of the world in terms of music. The image that comes to mind when one reads the philosophers of the West, is a figure in a Byzantine mosaic, rigid, symmetrical, made up of millions of little squares of some stony material and firmly cemented to the walls of a windowless basilica.

The dancer’s grace and, forty years on, her arthritis — both are functions of the skeleton. It is thanks to an inflexible framework of bones that the girl is able to do her pirouettes, thanks to the same bones, grown a little rusty, that the grandmother is condemned to a wheel chair. Analogously, the firm support of a culture is the prime condition of all individual originality and creativeness; it is also their principal enemy. The thing in whose absence we cannot possibly grow into complete human beings is, all too often, the thing that prevents us from growing.

A century of research on the *moksha*-medicine has clearly shown that quite ordinary people are perfectly capable of having visionary or even fully liberating experiences. In this respect the men and women who make and enjoy high culture are no better off than the low-brows. High experience is perfectly compatible with low symbolic expression. The expressive symbols created by Palanese artists are no better than the expressive symbols created by artists elsewhere. Being the products of happiness and a sense of fulfilment, they are probably less moving, perhaps less satisfying aesthetically, than the tragic or compensatory symbols created by victims of frustration and ignorance, of tyranny, war and guilt-fostering crime-inciting superstitions. Palanese

superiority does not lie in symbolic expression but in an art which, though higher and far more valuable than all the rest, can yet be practised by everyone — the art of adequately experiencing, the art of becoming more intimately acquainted with all the worlds that, as human beings, we find ourselves inhabiting. Palanese culture is not to be judged as (for lack of any better criterion) we judge other cultures. It is not to be judged by the accomplishments of a few gifted manipulators of artistic or philosophical symbols. No, it is to be judged by what all the members of the community, the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, can and do experience in every contingency and at each successive intersection of time with eternity.

The telephone bell had started to ring. Should he let it ring, or would it be better to answer and let the caller know that Dr Robert was out for the day? Deciding on the second course, Will lifted the receiver.

"Dr MacPhail's bungalow," he said, in a parody of secretarial efficiency. "But the doctor is out for the day."

"*Tant mieux*," said the rich royal voice at the other end of the wire. "How are you, *mon cher* Farnaby?"

Taken aback, Will stammered out his thanks for Her Highness's gracious enquiry.

"So they took you," said the Rani, "to see one of their so-called initiations yesterday afternoon."

Will had recovered sufficiently from his surprise to respond with a neutral word and in the most non-committal of tones. "It was most remarkable," he said.

"Remarkable," said the Rani, dwelling emphatically on the spoken equivalents of pejorative and laudatory capital letters, "but only as the Blasphemous Caricature of TRUE Initiation. They've never learned to make the elementary distinction between the Natural Order and the Supernatural."

"Quite," Will murmured, "Quite …"

"What did you say?" the voice at the other end of the line demanded.

"Quite," Will repeated more loudly.

“I’m glad you agree. But I didn’t call you,” the Rani went on, “to discuss the difference between the Natural and the Supernatural — Supremely Important as that difference is. No, I called you about a more urgent matter.”

“Oil?”

“Oil,” she confirmed. “I’ve just received a very disquieting communication from my Personal Representative in Rendang. Very Highly Placed,” she added parenthetically, “and invariably Well Informed.”

Will found himself wondering which of all those sleek and much be-medalled guests at the Foreign Office cocktail party had double-crossed his fellow double-crossers — himself, of course, included.

“Within the last few days,” the Rani went on, “representatives of no less than three Major Oil Companies, European and American, have flown into Rendang-Lobo. My informant tells me that they’re already working on the four or five Key Figures in the Administration who might, at some future date, be influential in deciding who is to get the concession for Pala.”

Will clicked his tongue disapprovingly.

Considerable sums, she hinted, had been, if not directly offered, at least named and temptingly dangled.

“Nefarious,” he commented.

Nefarious, the Rani agreed, was the word. And that was why Something must be Done About It, and Done Immediately. From Bahu she had learned that Will had already written to Lord Aldehyde, and within a few days a reply would doubtless be forthcoming. But a few days were too long. Time was of the essence — not only because of what those rival companies were up to, but also (and the Rani lowered her voice mysteriously) for Other Reasons. ‘Now, now!’ her Little Voice kept exhorting. ‘Now, without delay!’ Lord Aldehyde must be informed by cable of what was happening (the faithful Bahu, she added parenthetically, had offered to transmit the message in code by way of the Rendang Legation in London) and along with the information must go an urgent request that he empower his Special Correspondent to take such steps — at this

stage the appropriate steps would be predominantly of a financial nature — as might be necessary to secure the triumph of their Common Cause.

"So with your permission," the voice concluded, "I'll tell Bahu to send the cable immediately. In our joint names, Mr Farnaby, yours and Mine. I hope, *mon cher*, that this will be agreeable to you."

It wasn't at all agreeable, but there seemed to be no excuse, seeing that he had already written that letter to Joe Aldehyde, for demurring. And so, "Yes, of course," he cried with a show of enthusiasm belied by his long dubious pause, before the words were uttered, in search of an alternative answer. "We ought to get the reply some time tomorrow," he added.

"We shall get it tonight," the Rani assured him.

"Is that possible?"

"With God" (*con espressione*) "all things are possible."

"Quite," he said, "quite. But still. …"

"I go by what my Little Voice tells me. 'Tonight,' it's saying. And 'he will give Mr Farnaby *carte blanche,' carte blanche*." she repeated with gusto. "'And Farnaby will be completely successful.'"

"I wonder?" he said doubtfully.

"You *must* be successful."

"Must be?"

"Must be," she insisted.

"Why?"

"Because it was *God* who inspired me to launch the Crusade of the Spirit."

"I don't quite get the connection."

"Perhaps I oughtn't to tell you," she said. Then, after a moment of silence, "But after all, why not? If our Cause triumphs, Lord Aldehyde has promised to back the Crusade with all his resources. And since God wants the Crusade to succeed, our Cause cannot fail to triumph."

"QED," he wanted to shout, but restrained himself. It wouldn't be polite. And anyhow this was no joking matter.

“Well I must call Bahu,” said the Rani. “*A bientôt*, my dear Farnaby.” And she rang off.

Shrugging his shoulders, Will turned back to the *Notes on What’s What*. What else was there to do?

Dualism … Without it there can hardly be good literature. With it, there most certainly can be no good life.

“I” affirms a separate and abiding me-substance, “am” denies the fact that all existence is relationship and change. “I am.”

Two tiny words; but what an enormity of untruth!

The religiously minded dualist calls home-made spirits from the vasty deep: The non-dualist calls the vasty deep into his spirit or, to be more accurate, he finds that the vasty deep is already there.

There was the noise of an approaching car, then silence as the motor was turned off, then the slamming of a door and the sound of footsteps on gravel, on the steps of the verandah.

“Are you ready?” called Vijaya’s deep voice.

Will put down the *Notes on What’s What*, picked up his bamboo staff and, hoisting himself to his feet walked to the front door.

“Ready and champing at the bit,” he said as he stepped out on to the verandah.

“Then let’s go.” Vijaya took his arm. “Careful of these steps,” he recommended.

Dressed all in pink and with corals round her neck and in her ears, a plump, round-faced woman in her middle forties was standing beside the jeep.

“This is Leela Rao,” said Vijaya. “Our librarian, secretary, treasurer and general keeper-in-order. Without her we’d be lost.”

She looked, Will thought as he shook hands with her, like a browner version of one of those gentle but inexhaustibly energetic English ladies who, when their children are grown, go in for good works or organized culture. Not too

intelligent, poor dears; but how selfless, how devoted, how genuinely good — and, alas, how boring!

“I was hearing of you,” Mrs Rao volunteered as they rattled along past the lotus pond and out on to the highway, “from my young friends, Radha and Ranga.”

“I hope,” said Will, “that they approved of me as heartily as I approved of them.”

Mrs Rao’s face brightened with pleasure. “I’m so glad you like them!”

“Ranga’s exceptionally bright,” Vijaya put in.

And so delicately balanced, Mrs Rao elaborated, between introversion and the outside world. Always tempted — and how strongly! — to escape into the Arhat’s Nirvana or the scientist’s beautifully tidy little paradise of pure abstraction. Always tempted, but often resisting temptation, for Ranga, the arhat-scientist, was also another kind of Ranga, a Ranga capable of compassion, ready, if one knew how to make the right kind of appeal, to lay himself open to the concrete realities of life, to be aware, concerned and actively helpful. How fortunate for him and for everyone else that he had found a girl like little Radha, a girl so intelligently simple, so humorous and tender, so richly endowed for love and happiness! Radha and Ranga, Mrs Rao confided, had been among her favourite pupils.

Pupils, Will patronizingly assumed, in some kind of Buddhist Sunday School. But in fact, as he was now flabbergasted to learn, it was in the yoga of love that this devoted Settlement Worker had been, for the past six years and in the intervals of librarian-ship, instructing the young. By the kind of methods, Will supposed, that Murugan had shrunk from and the Rani, in her all but incestuous possessiveness, had found so outrageous. He opened his mouth to question her. But his reflexes had been conditioned in higher latitude and by Settlement Workers of another species. The questions simply refused to pass his lips. And now it was too late to ask them. Mrs Rao had begun to talk about her other avocation.

“If you knew,” she was saying, “what trouble we have with books in this climate! The paper rots, the glue liquefies, the bindings disintegrate, the insects devour. Literature and the tropics are really incompatible.”

“And if one’s to believe your Old Raja,” said Will, “literature is incompatible with a lot of other local features besides your climate — incompatible with human integrity, incompatible with philosophical truth, incompatible with individual sanity and a decent social system, incompatible with everything except dualism, criminal lunacy, impossible aspiration and unnecessary guilt. But never mind.” He grinned ferociously. “Colonel Dipa will put everything right. After Pala has been invaded and made safe for war and oil and heavy industry, you’ll undoubtedly have a Golden Age of literature and theology.”

“I’d like to laugh,” said Vijaya. “The only trouble is that you’re probably right. I have an uncomfortable feeling that my children will grow up to see your prophecy come true.”

They left their jeep, parked between an oxcart and a brand new Japanese lorry, at the entrance to the village, and proceeded on foot. Between thatched houses, set in gardens shaded by palms and papayas and breadfruit trees, the narrow street led to a central market place. Will halted and, leaning on his bamboo staff, looked around him. On one side of the square stood a charming piece of oriental rococo with a pink stucco façade and gazebos at the four corners — evidently the town hall. Facing it, on the opposite side of the square, rose a small temple of reddish stone, with a central tower on which, tier after tier, a host of sculptured figures recounted the legends of the Buddha’s progress from spoiled child to Tathagata. Between these two monuments, more than half of the open space was covered by a huge banyan tree. Along its winding and shadowy aisles were ranged the stalls of a score of merchants and market women. Slanting down through chinks in the green vaulting overhead, the long probes of sunlight picked out here a row of black and yellow water jars, there a silver bracelet, a painted wooden toy, a bolt of cotton print; here a pile of fruits, and a girl’s gaily flowered bodice, there the flash of laughing teeth and eyes, the ruddy gold of a naked torso.

“Everybody looks so healthy,” Will commented, as they made their way between the stalls under the great tree.

“They look healthy because they *are* healthy,” said Mrs Rao.

“And happy — for a change.” He was thinking of the faces he had seen in Calcutta, in Manila, in Rendang-Lobo — the faces, for that matter, one saw every day in Fleet Street and the Strand. “Even the women,” he noted, glancing from face to face, “even the women look happy.”

“They don’t have ten children,” Mrs Rao explained.

“They don’t have ten children where I come from,” said Will. “In spite of which … ‘Marks of weakness, marks of woe’.” He halted for a moment to watch a middle-aged market woman weighing out slices of sun-dried breadfruit for a very young mother with a baby in a carrying bag on her back. “There’s a kind of radiance,” he concluded.

“Thanks to *maithuna*,” said Mrs Rao triumphantly. “Thanks to the yoga of love.” Her face shone with a mixture of religious fervour and professional pride.

They walked out from under the shade of the banyan, across a stretch of fierce sunlight, up a flight of worn steps and into the gloom of the temple. A golden Bodhisattva loomed, gigantic, out of the darkness. There was a smell of incense and fading flowers, and from somewhere behind the statue the voice of an unseen worshipper was muttering an endless litany. Noiselessly, on bare feet, a little girl came hurrying in from a side door. Paying no attention to the grown-ups she climbed with the agility of a cat on to the altar and laid a spray of white orchids on the statue’s upturned palm. Then, looking up into the huge golden face, she murmured a few words, shut her eyes for a moment, murmured again, then turned, scrambled down and, softly singing to herself, went out by the door through which she had entered.

“Charming,” said Will, as he watched her go. “Couldn’t be prettier. But precisely what does a child like that think she’s doing? What kind of religion is she supposed to be practising?”

“She’s practising,” Vijaya explained, “the local brand of Mahayana Buddhism, with a bit of Shivaism, probably, on the side.”

“And do you high-brows encourage this kind of thing?”

“We neither encourage nor discourage. We accept it. Accept it as we accept that spider web up there on the cornice. Given the nature of spiders, webs are inevitable. And given the nature of human beings, so are religions. Spiders can’t help making flytraps, and men can’t help making symbols. That’s what the human brain is there for — to turn the chaos of given experience into a set of manageable symbols. Sometimes the symbols correspond fairly closely to some of the aspects of the external reality behind our experience; then you have science and common sense. Sometimes, on the contrary, the symbols have almost no connection with external reality; then you have paranoia and delirium. More often there’s a mixture, part realistic and part fantastic; that’s religion. Good religion or bad religion — it depends on the blending of the cocktail. For example, in the kind of Calvinism that Dr Andrew was brought up in, you’re given only the tiniest jigger of realism to a whole jug-full of malignant fancy. In other cases the mixture is more wholesome. Fifty-fifty, or even sixty-forty, even seventy-thirty in favour of truth and decency. Our local Old Fashioned contains a remarkably small admixture of poison.”

Will nodded. “Offerings of white orchids to an image of compassion and enlightenment — it certainly seems harmless enough. And after what I saw yesterday, I’d be prepared to put in a good word for cosmic dancing and divine copulations.”

“And remember,” said Vijaya, “this sort of thing isn’t compulsory. Everybody’s given a chance to go further. You asked what that child thinks she’s doing. I’ll tell you. With one part of her mind, she thinks she’s talking to a person — an enormous, divine person who can be cajoled with orchids into giving her what she wants. But she’s already old enough to have been told about the profounder symbols behind Amitabha’s statue and about the experiences that give birth to those profounder symbols. Consequently with another part of her mind she knows perfectly well that Amitabha isn’t a person. She even knows, because it’s been explained to her, that if prayers are sometimes answered it’s because, in this very odd psycho-physical world of ours, ideas have a tendency,

if you concentrate your mind on them, to get themselves realized. She knows too that this temple isn't what she still likes to think it is — the house of Buddha. She knows it's just a diagram of her own unconscious mind — a dark little cubby-hole with lizards crawling upside down on the ceiling, and cockroaches in all the crevices. But at the heart of the verminous darkness sits Enlightenment. And that's another thing the child is doing — she's unconsciously learning a lesson about herself, she's being told that if she'd only stop giving herself suggestions to the contrary, she might discover that her own busy little mind is also Mind with a large M."

"And how soon will the lesson be learned? When will she stop giving herself those suggestions?"

"She may never learn. A lot of people don't. On the other hand, a lot of people do."

He took Will's arm and led him into the deeper darkness behind the image of Enlightenment. The chanting grew more distinct, and there, hardly visible in the shadows, sat the chanter — a very old man, naked to the waist and, except for his moving lips, as rigidly still as Amitabha's golden statue.

"What's he intoning?" Will asked.

"Something in Sanskrit."

Seven incomprehensible syllables, again and again.

"Good old vain repetition!"

"Not necessarily vain," Mrs Rao objected. "Sometimes it really gets you somewhere."

"It gets you somewhere," Vijaya elaborated, "not because of what the words mean or suggest, but simply because they're being repeated. You could repeat *Hey Diddle Diddle* and it would work just as well as *Om* or *Kyrie Eleison* or *La ila illa 'llah*. It works because when you're busy with the repetition of *Hey Diddle Diddle* or the name of God, you can't be entirely preoccupied with yourself. The only trouble is that you can Hey-Diddle-Diddle yourself downwards as well as upwards — down into the not-thought of idiocy as well as up into the not-thought of pure awareness."

“So, I take it, you wouldn’t recommend this kind of thing,” said Will, “to our little friend with the orchids?”

“Not unless she were unusually jittery or anxious. Which she isn’t. I know her very well; she plays with my children.”

“Then what would you do in her case?”

“Among other things,” said Vijaya, “I’d take her, in another year or so, to the place we’re going to now.”

“What place?”

“The meditation room.”

Will followed him through an archway and along a short corridor. Heavy curtains were parted and they stepped into a large whitewashed room with a long window, to their left, that opened on to a little garden planted with banana and breadfruit trees. There was no furniture, only a scattering on the floor of small square cushions. On the wall opposite the window hung a large oil painting. Will gave it a glance, then approached to look into it more closely.

“My word!” he said at last. “Who is it by?”

“Gobind Singh.”

“And who’s Gobind Singh?”

“The best landscape painter Pala ever produced. He died in ‘forty-eight.”

“Why haven’t we ever seen anything by him?”

“Because we like his work too well to export any of it.”

“Good for you,” said Will. “But bad for us.” He looked again at the picture. “Did this man ever go to China?”

“No; but he studied with a Cantonese painter who was living in Pala. And of course he’d seen plenty of reproductions of Sung landscapes.”

“A Sung master,” said Will, “who chose to paint in oils and was interested in chiaroscuro.”

“Only after he went to Paris. That was in 1910. He struck up a friendship with Vuillard.”

Will nodded. “One might have guessed as much from this extraordinary richness of texture.” He went on looking at the picture in silence. “Why do you

hang it in the meditation room?" he asked at last.

"Why do you suppose?" Vijaya countered.

"Is it because this thing is what you call a diagram of the mind?"

"The temple was a diagram. This is something much better. It's an actual manifestation. A manifestation of Mind with a large M in an individual mind in relation to a landscape, to canvas and to the experience of painting. It's a picture, incidentally, of the next valley to the west. Painted from the place where the power lines disappear over the ridge."

"What clouds!" said Will. "And the light!"

"The light," Vijaya elaborated, "of the last hour before dusk. It's just stopped raining and the sun has come out again, brighter than ever. Bright with the praeternatural brightness of slanting light under a ceiling of cloud, the last, doomed, afternoon brightness that stipples every surface it touches and deepens every shadow."

'Deepens every shadow,' Will repeated to himself, as he looked into the picture. The shadow of that huge, high continent of cloud, darkening whole mountain ranges almost to blackness; and in the middle distance the shadows of island clouds. And between dark and dark was the blaze of young rice, or the red heat of ploughed earth, the incandescence of naked limestone, the sumptuous darks and diamond glitter of evergreen foliage. And here at the centre of the valley stood a group of thatched houses, remote and tiny, but how clearly seen, how perfect and articulate, how profoundly significant! Yes, significant. But when you asked yourself, 'Of what?' you found no answer. Will put the question into words.

"What do they mean?" Vijaya repeated. "They mean precisely what they are. And so do the mountains, so do the clouds, so do the lights and darks. And that's why this is a genuinely religious image. Pseudo-religious pictures always refer to something else, something beyond the things they represent — some piece of metaphysical nonsense, some absurd dogma from the local theology. A genuinely religious image is always intrinsically meaningful. So that's why we hang this kind of painting in our meditation room."

“Always landscapes?”

“Almost always. Landscapes can really remind people of who they are.”

“Better than scenes from the life of a Saint or Saviour?”

Vijaya nodded. “It’s the difference, to begin with, between objective and subjective. A picture of Christ or Buddha is merely the record of something observed by a Behaviourist and interpreted by a theologian. But when you’re confronted with a landscape like this, it’s psychologically impossible for you to look at it with the eyes of a J. B. Watson or the mind of a Thomas Aquinas. You’re almost forced to submit to your immediate experience; you’re practically compelled to perform an act of self-knowing.”

“Self-knowing?”

“Self-knowing,” Vijaya insisted. “This view of the next valley is a view, at one remove, of your own mind, of everybody’s mind as it exists above and below the level of personal history. Mysteries of darkness; but the darkness teems with life. Apocalypses of light; and the light shines out as brightly from the flimsy little houses as from the trees, the grass, the blue spaces between the clouds. We do our best to disprove the fact, but a fact it remains; man is as divine as nature, as infinite as the Void. But that’s getting perilously close to theology, and nobody was ever saved by a notion. Stick to the data, stick to the concrete facts.” He pointed a finger at the picture. “The fact of half a village in sunshine and half in shadow and in secret. The fact of those indigo mountains and of the more fantastic mountains of vapour above them. The fact of blue lakes in the sky, lakes of pale green and raw sienna on the sunlit earth. The fact of this grass in the foreground, this clump of bamboos only a few yards down the slope, and the fact, at the same time, of those far-away peaks and the absurd little houses two thousand feet below in the valley. Distance,” he added, parenthetically, “their ability to express the fact of distance — that’s yet another reason why landscapes are the most genuinely religious pictures.”

“Because distance lends enchantment to the view?”

“No; because it lends reality. Distance reminds us that there’s a lot more to the universe than just people — that there’s even a lot more to people than just

people. It reminds us that there are mental spaces inside our skulls as enormous as the spaces out there. The experience of distance, of inner distance and outer distance, of distance in time and distance in space — it's the first and fundamental religious experience. 'O Death in life, the days that are no more' — and O the places, the infinite number of places that are not *this* place! Past pleasures, past unhappinesses and insights — all so intensely alive in our memories and yet all dead, dead without hope of resurrection. And the village down there in the valley so clearly seen even in the shadow, so real and indubitable, and yet so hopelessly out of reach, incommunicado. A picture like this is the proof of man's capacity to accept all the deaths in life, all the yawning absences surrounding every presence. To my mind," Vijaya added, "the worst feature of your non-representational art is its systematic two-dimensionality, its refusal to take account of the universal experience of distance. As a coloured object, a piece of abstract expressionism can be very handsome. It can also serve as a kind of glorified Rohrshach ink blot. Everybody can find in it a symbolic expression of his own fears, lusts, hatreds, and daydreams. But can one ever find in it those more than human (or should one say those other than all too human) facts that one discovers in oneself when the mind is confronted by the outer distances of nature, or by the simultaneously inner and outer distances of a painted landscape like this one we're looking at? All I know is that in your abstractions I don't find the realities that reveal themselves here, and I doubt if anyone else can. Which is why this fashionable abstract non-objective expressionism of yours is so fundamentally irreligious — and also, I may add, why even the best of it is so profoundly boring, so bottomlessly trivial."

"Do you come here often?" Will asked after a silence.

"Whenever I feel like meditating in a group rather than alone."

"How often is that?"

"Once every week or so. But of course some people like to do it oftener — and some much more rarely, or even never. It depends on one's temperament. Take our friend Susila, for example — she needs big doses of solitude; so she

hardly ever comes to the meditation room. Whereas Shanta (that's my wife) likes to look in here almost every day."

"So do I," said Mrs Rao. "But that's only to be expected," she added with a laugh. "Fat people enjoy company — even when they're meditating."

"And do you meditate on this picture?" Will asked.

"Not *on* it. *From* it, if you see what I mean. Or rather parallel with it. I look at it, and the other people look at it, and it reminds us all of who we are and what we aren't, and how what we aren't might turn into who we are."

"Is there any connection," Will asked, "between what you've been talking about and what I saw up there in the Shiva temple?"

"Of course there is," she answered. "The *moksha*-medicine takes you to the same place as you get to in meditation."

"So why bother to meditate?"

"You might as well ask, Why bother to eat your dinner?"

"But, according to you, the *moksha*-medicine *is* dinner."

"It's a banquet," she said emphatically. "And that's precisely why there has to be meditation. You can't have banquets every day. They're too rich and they last too long. Besides banquets are provided by a caterer; *you* don't have any part in the preparation of them. For your everyday diet you have to do your own cooking. The *moksha*-medicine comes as an occasional treat."

"In theological terms," said Vijaya, "the *moksha*-medicine prepares one for the reception of gratuitous graces — pre-mystical visions or the full-blown mystical experiences. Meditation is one of the ways in which one co-operates with those gratuitous graces."

"How?"

"By cultivating the state of mind that makes it possible for the dazzling ecstatic insights to become permanent and habitual illuminations. By getting to know oneself to the point where one won't be compelled by one's unconscious to do all the ugly, absurd, self-stultifying things that one so often finds oneself doing."

"You mean, it helps one to be more intelligent?"

“Not more intelligent in relation to science or logical argument — more intelligent on the deeper level of concrete experiences and personal relationships.”

“More intelligent on *that* level,” said Mrs Rao, “even though one may be very stupid upstairs.” She patted the top of her head. “I’m too dumb to be any good at the things that Dr Robert and Vijaya are good at — genetics and biochemistry and philosophy and all the rest. And I’m no good at painting or poetry or acting. No talents and no cleverness. So I ought to feel horribly inferior and depressed. But in fact I don’t — thanks entirely to the *moksha*-medicine and meditation. No talents or cleverness. But when it comes to living, when it comes to understanding people and helping them, I feel myself growing more and more sensitive and skilful. And when it comes to what Vijaya calls gratuitous graces …” She broke off. “You could be the greatest genius in the world, but you wouldn’t have anything more than what I’ve been given. Isn’t that true, Vijaya?”

“Perfectly true.”

She turned back to Will. “So you see, Mr Farnaby, Pala’s the place for stupid people. The greatest happiness of the greatest number — and we stupid ones *are* the greatest number. People like Dr Robert and Vijaya and my darling Ranga — we recognize their superiority, we know very well that their kind of intelligence is enormously important. But we also know that our kind of intelligence is just as important. And we don’t envy them, because we’re given just as much as they are. Sometimes even more.”

“Sometimes,” Vijaya agreed, “even more. For the simple reason that a talent for manipulating symbols tempts its possessors into habitual symbol-manipulation, and habitual symbol-manipulation is an obstacle in the way of concrete experiencing and the reception of gratuitous graces.”

“So you see,” said Mrs Rao, “you don’t have to feel too sorry for us.” She looked at her watch. “Goodness, I shall be late for Dillip’s dinner if I don’t hurry.”

She started briskly towards the door.

“Time, time, time,” Will mocked. “Time even in this place of timeless meditation. Time for dinner breaking incorrigibly into eternity.” He laughed. Never take yes for an answer. The nature of things is always no.

Mrs Rao halted for a moment and looked back at him.

“But sometimes,” she said with a smile,” it’s eternity that miraculously breaks into time — even into dinner time. Goodbye.” She waved her hand and was gone.

“Which is better,” Will wondered aloud as he followed Vijaya through the dark temple, out into the noonday glare, “which is better — to be born stupid into an intelligent society or intelligent into an insane one?”

CHAPTER TWELVE

"HERE WE ARE," said Vijaya, when they had reached the end of the short street that led downhill from the market place. He opened a wicket gate and ushered his guest into a tiny garden, at the further end of which, on its low stilts, stood a small thatched house.

From behind the bungalow a yellow mongrel dog rushed out and greeted them with a frenzy of ecstatic yelps and jumps and tail-waggings. A moment later a large green parrot, with white cheeks and a bill of polished jet, came swooping down from nowhere and landed with a squawk and a noisy fluttering of wings on Vijaya's shoulder.

"Parrots for you," said Will, "mynahs for little Mary Sarojini. You people seem to be on remarkably good terms with the local fauna."

Vijaya nodded. "Pala is probably the only country in which an animal theologian would have no reason for believing in devils. For animals everywhere else, Satan, quite obviously, is *Homo sapiens*."

They climbed the steps to the verandah and walked through the open front door into the bungalow's main living-room. Seated on a low chair near the window, a young woman in blue was nursing her baby son. She lifted a heart-shaped face that narrowed down from a broad forehead to a delicately pointed chin, and gave them a welcoming smile.

"I've brought Will Farnaby," said Vijaya as he bent down to kiss her.

Shanta held out her free hand to the stranger.

"I hope Mr Farnaby doesn't object to nature in the raw," she said. As though to give point to her words, the baby withdrew his mouth from the brown nipple, and belched. A white bubble of silk appeared between his lips, swelled up and burst. He belched again, then resumed his sucking. "Even at eight months," she added "Rama's table manners are still rather primitive."

“A fine specimen,” said Will politely. He was not much interested in babies and had always been thankful for those repeated miscarriages which had frustrated all Molly’s hopes and longings for a child. “Who’s he going to look like — you or Vijaya?”

Shanta laughed and Vijaya joined in, enormously, an octave lower.

“He certainly won’t look like Vijaya,” she answered.

“Why not?”

“For the sufficient reason,” said Vijaya, “that I’m not genetically responsible.”

“In other words, the baby isn’t Vijaya’s son.”

Will looked from one laughing face to the other, then shrugged his shoulders. “I give up.”

“Four years ago,” Shanta explained, “we produced a pair of twins who are the living image of Vijaya. This time we thought it would be fun to have a complete change. We decided to enrich the family with an entirely new physique and temperament. Did you ever hear of Gobind Singh?”

“Vijaya has just been showing me his painting in your meditation room.”

“Well, that’s the man we chose for Rama’s father.”

“But I understood he was dead.”

Shanta nodded. “But his soul goes marching along.”

“What do you mean?”

“DF and AI.”

“DF and AI?”

“Deep Freeze and Artificial Insemination.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Actually,” said Vijaya, “we developed the techniques of AI about twenty years before you did. But of course we couldn’t do much with it until we had electric power and reliable refrigerators. We got those in the late twenties. Since when we’ve been using AI in a big way.”

“So you see,” Shanta chimed in, “my baby might grow up to be a painter — that is, if that kind of talent is inherited. And even if it isn’t, he’ll be a lot more

endomorphic and viscerotonic than his brothers or either of his parents. Which is going to be very interesting and educative for everybody concerned."

"Do many people go in for this kind of thing?" Will asked.

"More and more. In fact I'd say that practically all the couples who decide to have a third child now go in for AI. So do quite a lot of those who mean to stop at number two. Take my family, for example. There's been some diabetes among my father's people; so they thought it best — he and my mother — to have both their children by AI. My brother's descended from three generations of dancers and, genetically, I'm the daughter of Dr Robert's first cousin, Malcolm Chakravarti-MacPhail, who was the o d Raja's private secretary."

"And the author," Vijaya added, "of the best history of Pala. Chakravarti-MacPhail was one of the ablest men of his generation."

Will looked at Shanta, then back again at Vijaya.

"And has the ability been inherited?" he asked.

"So much so," Vijaya answered, "that I have the greatest difficulty in maintaining my position of masculine superiority. Shanta has more brains than I have; but fortunately she can't compete with my brawn."

"Brawn," Shanta repeated sarcastically, "*brawn* … I seem to remember a story about a young lady called Delilah."

"Incidentally," Vijaya went on, "Shanta has thirty-two half-brothers and twenty-nine half-sisters. And more than a third of them are exceptionally bright."

"So you're improving the race."

"Very definitely. Give us another century, and our average IQ will be up to a hundred and fifteen."

"Whereas *ours*, at the present rate of progress, will be down to about eighty-five. Better medicine — more congenital deficiencies preserved and passed on. It'll make things a lot easier for future dictators." At the thought of this cosmic joke he laughed aloud. Then, after a silence, "What about the ethical and religious aspects of AI?" he asked.

“In the early days,” said Vijaya, “there were a good many conscientious objectors. But now the advantages of AI have been so clearly demonstrated, most married couples feel that it’s more moral to take a shot at having a child of superior quality than to run the risk of slavishly reproducing whatever quirks and defects may happen to run in the husband’s family. Meanwhile the theologians have got busy. AI has been justified in terms of reincarnation and the theory of karma. Pious fathers now feel happy at the thought that they’re giving their wife’s children a chance of creating a better destiny for themselves and their posterity.”

“A better destiny?”

“Because they carry the germ plasm of a better stock. And the stock is better because it’s the manifestation of a better karma. We have a central bank of superior stocks. Superior stocks of every variety of physique and temperament. In *your* kind of environment, most people’s heredity never gets a fair chance. In ours, it does. And incidentally we have excellent genealogical and anthropometric records going back as far as the eighteen-seventies. So you see we’re not working entirely in the dark. For example, we know that Gobind Singh’s maternal grandmother was a gifted medium and lived to ninety-six.”

“So you see,” said Shanta, “we may even have a centenarian clairvoyant in the family.” The baby belched again. She laughed. “The oracle has spoken — as usual, very enigmatically.” Turning to Vijaya, “If you want lunch to be ready on time,” she added, “you’d better go and do something about it. Rama’s going to keep me busy for at least another ten minutes.”

Vijaya rose, laid one hand on his wife’s shoulder and with the other gently rubbed the baby’s brown back.

Shanta bent down and passed her cheek across the top of the child’s downy head. “It’s father,” she whispered “Good father, good, good. …”

Vijaya administered a final pat, then straightened himself up. “You were wondering,” he said to Will, “how it is that we get on so well with the local fauna. I’ll show you.” He raised his hand. “Polly. Polly.” Cautiously, the big bird stepped from his shoulder to the extended forefinger. “Polly’s a good bird,” he

chanted. “Polly’s a very good bird.” He lowered his hand to the point where a contact was made between the bird’s body and the child’s, then moved it slowly, feathers against brown skin, back and forth, back and forth. “Polly’s a good bird,” he repeated, “a good bird.”

The parrot uttered a succession of low chuckles, then leaned forward from its perch on Vijaya’s finger and very gently nibbled at the child’s tiny ear.

“Such a good bird,” Shanta whispered, taking up the refrain. “Such a *good* bird.”

“Dr Andrew picked up the idea,” said Vijaya, “while he was serving as a naturalist on the *Melampus*. From a tribe in northern New Guinea. Neolithic people; but like you Christians and us Buddhists, they believed in love. And unlike us and you, they’d invented some very practical ways of making their belief come true. This technique was one of their happiest discoveries. Stroke the baby while you’re feeding him; it doubles his pleasure. Then, while he’s sucking and being caressed, introduce him to the animal or person you want him to love. Rub his body against theirs; let there be a warm physical contact between child and love-object. At the same time repeat some word like ‘good’. At first he’ll understand only your tone of voice. Later on, when he learns to speak, he’ll get the full meaning. Food plus caress plus contact plus ‘good’ equals love. And love equals pleasure, love equals satisfaction.”

“Pure Pavlov.”

“But Pavlov purely for a good purpose. Pavlov for friendliness and trust and compassion. Whereas you prefer to use Pavlov for brain washing, Pavlov for selling cigarettes and vodka and patriotism. Pavlov for the benefit of dictators, generals, and tycoons.”

Refusing any longer to be left out in the cold, the yellow mongrel had joined the group and was impartially licking every piece of sentient matter within its reach — Shanta’s arm, Vijaya’s hand, the parrot’s feet, the baby’s backside. Shanta drew the dog closer and rubbed the child against its furry flank.

“And this is a good good dog,” she said. “Dog Toby, good good dog Toby.”

Will laughed. “Oughtn’t I to get into the act?”

“I was going to suggest it,” Shanta answered, “only I was afraid you’d think it was beneath your dignity.”

“You can take my place,” said Vijaya. “I must go and see about our lunch.”

Still carrying the parrot, he walked out through the door that led into the kitchen. Will pulled up his chair and, leaning forward, began to stroke the child’s tiny body.

“This is another man,” Shanta whispered. “A good man, baby. A *good* man.”

“How I wish it were true!” he said with a rueful little laugh.

“Here and now it *is* true.” And bending down again over the child, “He’s a good man,” she repeated. “A good good man.”

He looked at her blissfully, secretly smiling face, he felt the smoothness and warmth of the child’s tiny body against his finger tips. Good, good, good … He too might have known this goodness — but only if his life had been completely different from what in fact, in senseless and disgusting fact, it was. So never take yes for an answer, even when, as now, yes is self-evident. He looked again with eyes deliberately attuned to another wavelength of value, and saw the caricature of a Memling altarpiece. ‘Madonna with Child, Dog, Pavlov and Casual Acquaintance.’ And suddenly he could almost understand, from the inside, why Mr Bahu so hated these people. Why he was so bent — in the name, as usual and needless to say, of God — on their destruction.

“Good,” Shanta was still murmuring to her baby, “good, good, good.”

Too good — that was their crime. It simply wasn’t permissible. And yet how precious it was! And how passionately he wished that he might have had a part in it! Pure sentimentality! he said to himself; and then aloud, “Good, good, good,” he echoed ironically. “But what happens when the child grows a little bigger and discovers that a lot of things and people are thoroughly bad, bad, bad?”

“Friendliness evokes friendliness,” she answered.

“From the friendly — yes. But not from the greedy, not from the power-lovers, not from the frustrated and embittered. For them, friendliness is just

weakness, just an invitation to exploit, to bully, to take vengeance with impunity."

"But one has to run the risk, one has to make a beginning. And luckily no one's immortal. The people who've been conditioned to swindling and bullying and bitterness will all be dead in a few years. Dead, and replaced by men and women brought up in the new way. It happened with us; it can happen with you."

"It *can* happen," he agreed. "But in the context of H-bombs and nationalism and fifty million more people every single year, it almost certainly won't."

"You can't tell till you try."

"And we shan't try as long as the world is in its present state. And, of course, it will remain in its present state until we do try. Try and, what's more, succeed at least as well as you've succeeded. Which brings me back to my original question. What happens when good, good, good discovers that, even in Pala, there's a lot of bad, bad, bad? Don't the children get some pretty unpleasant shocks?"

"We try to inoculate them against those shocks."

"How? By making things unpleasant for them while they're still young?"

"Not unpleasant. Let's say *real*. We teach them love and confidence, but we expose them to reality, reality in *all* its aspects. And then give them responsibilities. They're made to understand that Pala isn't Eden or the Land of Cockayne. It's a nice place all right. But it will remain nice only if everybody works and behaves decently. And meanwhile the facts of life are the facts of life. Even here."

"What about such facts of life as those bloodcurdling snakes I met half way up the precipice? You can say 'good, good, good' as much as you like; but snakes will still bite."

"You mean, they still *can* bite. But will they in fact make use of their ability?"

"Why shouldn't they?"

“Look over there,” said Shanta. He turned his head and saw that what she was pointing at was a niche in the wall behind him. Within the niche was a stone Buddha, about half life size, seated upon a curiously grooved cylindrical pedestal and surmounted by a kind of lead-shaped canopy that tapered down behind him into a broad pillar. “It’s a small replica,” she went on, “of the Buddha in the station compound — you know, the huge figure by the lotus pool.”

“Which is a magnificent piece of sculpture,” he said. “And the smile really gives one an inkling of what the Beatific Vision must be like. But what has it got to do with snakes?”

“Look again.”

He looked. “I don’t see anything specially significant.”

“Look harder.”

The seconds passed. Then, with a shock of surprise, he noticed something strange and even disquieting. What he had taken for an oddly ornamented cylindrical pedestal had suddenly revealed itself as a huge coiled snake. And that downward tapering canopy under which the Buddha was sitting, was the expanded hood, with the flattened head at the centre of its leading edge, of a giant cobra.

“My God!” he said. “I hadn’t noticed. How unobservant can one be?”

“Is this the first time you’ve seen the Buddha in this context?”

“The first time. Is there some legend?”

She nodded. “One of my favourites. You know about the Bodhi Tree, of course?”

“Yes, I know about the Bodhi Tree.”

“Well, that wasn’t the only tree that Gotama sat under at the time of his Enlightenment. After the Bodhi Tree, he sat for seven days under a banyan, called the Tree of the Goatherd. And after that he moved on to the Tree of Muchalinda.”

“Who was Muchalinda?”

“Muchalinda was the King of the Snakes and, being a god, he knew what was happening. So when the Buddha sat down under his tree, the Snake King crawled out of his hole, yards and yards of him, to pay Nature’s homage to Wisdom. Then a great storm blew up from the West. The divine cobra wrapped its coils round the more than divine man’s body, spread its hood over his head and, for the seven days his contemplation lasted, sheltered the Tathagata from the wind and rain. So there he sits to this day, with cobra beneath him, cobra above him, conscious simultaneously of cobra and the Clear Light and their ultimate identity.”

“How very different,” said Will, “from *our* view of snakes!”

“And your view of snakes is supposed to be God’s view — remember Genesis.”

“‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman,’” he quoted, “‘and between her seed and thy seed.’”

“But Wisdom never puts enmity anywhere. All those senseless, pointless cockfights between Man and Nature, between Nature and God, between the Flesh and the Spirit! Wisdom doesn’t make those insane separations.”

“Nor does Science.”

“Wisdom takes Science in its stride and goes a stage further.”

“And what about Totemism?” Will went on. “What about the fertility cults? *They* didn’t make any separations. Were *they* Wisdom?”

“Of course they were — primitive Wisdom, Wisdom on the neolithic level. But after a time people begin to get self-conscious and the old Dark Gods come to seem disreputable. So the scene changes. Enter the Gods of Light, enter the Prophets, enter Pythagoras and Zoroaster, enter the Jains and the early Buddhists. Between them they usher in the Age of the Cosmic Cockfight — Ormuzd versus Ahriman, Jehovah versus Satan and the Baalim, Nirvana as opposed to Samsara, appearance over against Plato’s Ideal Reality. And except in the minds of a few Tankriks and Mahayanists and Taoists and heretical Christians, the cockfight went on for the best part of two thousand years.”

“After which?” he questioned.

“After which you get the beginnings of modern biology.”

Will laughed. “‘God said, Let Darwin be’, and there was Nietzsche, Imperialism and Adolf Hitler.”

“All that,” she agreed. “But also the possibility of a new kind of Wisdom for everybody. Darwin took the old Totemism and raised it to the level of biology. The fertility cults reappeared as genetics and Havelock Ellis. And now it’s up to us to take another half turn up the spiral. Darwinism was the old Neolithic Wisdom turned into scientific concepts. The new conscious Wisdom — the kind of Wisdom that was prophetically glimpsed in Zen and Taoism and Tantra — is biological theory realized in living practice, is Darwinism raised to the level of compassion and spiritual insight. So you see,” she concluded, “there isn’t any earthly reason — much less any heavenly reason — why the Buddha or anyone else for that matter, shouldn’t contemplate the Clear Light as manifested in a snake!”

“Even though the snake might kill him?”

“Even though it might kill him.”

“And even though it’s the oldest and most universal of phallic symbols?”

Shanta laughed. “‘Meditate under the Tree of Muchalinda’ — that’s the advice we give to every pair of lovers. And in the intervals between those loving meditations remember what you were taught as children; snakes are your brothers; snakes have a right to your compassion and your respect; snakes, in a word, are good, good, good.”

“Snakes are also poisonous, poisonous, poisonous.”

“But if you remember that they’re just as good as they’re poisonous, and act accordingly, they won’t use their poison.”

“Who says so?”

“It’s an observable fact. People who aren’t frightened of snakes, people who don’t approach them with the fixed belief that the only good snake is a dead snake, hardly ever get bitten. Next week I’m borrowing our neighbour’s pet python. For a few days I’ll be giving Rama his lunch and dinner in the coils of the Old Serpent.”

From outside the house came the sound of high-pitched laughter, then a confusion of children's voices interrupting one another in English and Palanese. A moment later, looking very tall and maternal by comparison with her charges, Mary Sarojini walked into the room flanked by a pair of identical four-year-olds and followed by the sturdy cherub who had been with her when Will first opened his eyes on Pala.

"We picked up Tara and Arjuna at the kindergarten," Mary Sarojini explained as the twins hurled themselves upon their mother.

With the baby in one arm and the other round the two little boys, Shanta smiled her thanks. "That was very kind of you."

It was Tom Krishna who said, "You're welcome." He stepped forward and, after a moment of hesitation, "I was wondering …" he began, then broke off and looked appealingly at his sister. Mary Sarojini shook her head.

"What were you wondering?" Shanta enquired.

"Well, as a matter of fact, we were both wondering … I mean, could we come and have dinner with you?"

"Oh, I see." Shanta looked from Tom Krishna's face to Mary Sarojini's and back again. "Well, you'd better go and ask Vijaya if there's enough to eat. He's doing the cooking today."

"Okay," said Tom Krishna without enthusiasm. With slow reluctant steps he crossed the room and went out through the door into the kitchen. Shanta turned to Mary Sarojini. "What happened?"

"Well, Mother's told him at least fifty times that she doesn't like his bringing lizards into the house. But this morning he did it again. So she got very cross with him."

"And you decided you'd better come and have dinner here?"

"If it isn't convenient, Shanta, we could try the Raos or the Rajajinnadasas."

"I'm quite sure it will be convenient," Shanta assured her. "I only thought it would be good for Tom Krishna to have a little talk with Vijaya."

"You're perfectly right," said Mary Sarojini gravely. Then, very business-like, "Tara, Arjuna," she called. "Come with me to the bathroom and we'll get

washed up. They're pretty grubby," she said to Shanta as she led them away.

Will waited until they were out of earshot, then turned to Shanta. "I take it that I've just been seeing a Mutual Adoption Club in action."

"Fortunately," said Shanta, "in very mild action. Tom Krishna and Mary Sarojini get on remarkably well with their mother. There's no personal problem there — only the problem of destiny, the enormous and terrible problem of Dugald's being dead."

"Will Susila marry again?" he asked.

"I hope so. For everybody's sake. Meanwhile, it's good for the children to spend a certain amount of time with one or other of their deputy fathers. Specially good for Tom Krishna. Tom Krishna's just reaching the age when little boys discover their maleness. He still cries like a baby; but the next moment he's bragging and showing off and bringing lizards into the house — just to prove he's two hundred per cent a he-man. That's why I sent him to Vijaya. Vijaya's everything Tom Krishna likes to imagine he is. Three yards high, two yards wide, terrifically strong, immensely competent. When he tells Tom Krishna how he ought to behave, Tom Krishna listens — listens as he would never listen to me or his mother saying the same things. And Vijaya *does* say the same things as we would say. Because, on top of being two hundred per cent male, he's almost fifty per cent sentitive-feminine. So, you see, Tom Krishna is really getting the works. And now," she concluded, looking down at the sleeping child in her arms, "I must put this young man to bed and get ready for lunch."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WASHED AND BRUSHED, the twins were already in their high chairs. Mary Sarojini hung over them like a proud but anxious mother. At the stove Vijaya was ladling rice and vegetables out of an earthenware pot. Cautiously and with an expression on his face of focused concentration, Tom Krishna carried each bowl, as it was filled, to the table.

"There!" said Vijaya when the last brimming bowl had been sent on its way. He wiped his hands, walked over to the table and took his seat. "Better tell our guest about grace," he said to Shanta.

Turning to Will, "In Pala," she explained, "we don't say grace *before* meals. We say it *with* meals. Or rather we don't *say* grace; we chew it."

"Chew it?"

"Grace is the first mouthful of each course — chewed and chewed until there's nothing left of it. And all the time you're chewing you pay attention to the flavour of the food, to its consistency and temperature, to the pressures on your teeth and the feel of the muscles in your jaws."

"And meanwhile, I suppose, you give thanks to the Enlightened One, or Shiva, or whoever it may be?"

Shanta shook her head emphatically. "That would distract your attention, and attention is the whole point. Attention to the experience of something given, something you haven't invented. Not the memory of a form of words addressed to somebody in your imagination." She looked round the table. "Shall we begin?"

"Hurrah!" the twins shouted in unison, and picked up their spoons.

For a long minute there was a silence, broken only by the twins who had not yet learned to eat without smacking their lips.

"May we swallow now?" asked one of the little boys at last.

Shanta nodded. Everyone swallowed. There was a clinking of spoons and a burst of talk from full mouths.

“Well,” Shanta enquired, “what did your grace taste like?”

“It tasted,” said Will, “like a long succession of different things. Or rather a succession of variations on the fundamental theme of rice and turmeric and red peppers and zucchini and something leafy that I don’t recognize. It’s interesting how it doesn’t remain the same. I’d never really noticed that before.”

“And while you were paying attention to these things, you were momentarily delivered from daydreams, from memories, from anticipations, from silly notions — from all the symptoms of *you*.”

“Isn’t tasting *me*?”

Shanta looked down the length of the table to her husband. “What would you say, Vijaya?”

“I’d say it was half way between me and not-me. Tasting is not-me doing something for the whole organism. And at the same time tasting is me being conscious of what’s happening. And that’s the point of our chewing-grace — to make the me more conscious of what the not-me is up to.”

“Very nice,” was Will’s comment. “But what’s the point of the point?”

It was Shanta who answered. “The point of the point,” she said, “is that when you’ve learned to pay closer attention to more of the not-you in the environment (that’s the food) and more of the not-you in your own organism (that’s your taste sensations), you may suddenly find yourself paying attention to the not-you on the further side of consciousness, or perhaps it would be better,” Shanta went on, “to put it the other way round. The not-you on the further side of consciousness will find it easier to make itself known to a you that has learned to be more aware of its not-you on the side of physiology.” She was interrupted by a crash, followed by a howl from one of the twins. “After which,” she continued as she wiped up the mess on the floor, “one has to consider the problem of me and not-me in relation to people less than forty-two inches high. A prize of sixty-four thousand crores of rupees will be given to anyone who comes up with a fool-

proof solution." She wiped the child's eyes, had him blow his nose, then gave him a kiss and went to the stove for another bowl of rice.

"What are your chores for this afternoon?" Vijaya asked when lunch was over.

"We're on scarecrow duty," Tom Krishna answered importantly.

"In the field just below the school house," Mary Sarojini added.

"Then I'll take you there in the car," said Vijaya. Turning to Will Farnaby, "Would you like to come along?" he asked.

Will nodded. "And if it's permissible," he said, "I'd like to see the school, while I'm about it — sit in, maybe, at some of the classes."

Shanta waved good-bye to them from the verandah and a few minutes later they came in sight of the parked jeep.

"The school's on the other side of the village," explained Vijaya as he started the motor. "We have to take the by-pass. It goes down and then up again."

Down through terraced fields of rice and maize and sweet potatoes, then on the level, along a contour line, with a muddy little fish pond on the left and an orchard of bread-fruit trees on the right, and finally up again through more fields, some green, some golden — and there was the school house, white and spacious under its towering shade trees.

"And down there," said Mary Sarojini, "are our scarecrows."

Will looked in the direction she was pointing. In the nearest of the terraced fields below them the yellow rice was almost ready to harvest. Two small boys in pink loin cloths and a little girl in a blue skirt were taking turns at pulling the strings that set in motion two life-sized marionettes attached to poles at either end of the narrow field. The puppets were of wood, beautifully carved and clothed, not in rags, but in the most splendid draperies. Will looked at them in astonishment.

"Solomon in all his glory," he exclaimed, "was not arrayed like one of these."

But then Solomon, he went on to reflect, was only a king; these gorgeous scarecrows were beings of a higher order. One was a Future Buddha, the other a delightfully gay, East Indian version of God the Father as one sees him in the

Sistine Chapel, swooping down over the newly created Adam. With each tug of the string the Future Buddha wagged his head, uncrossed his legs from the lotus posture, danced a brief fandango in the air, then crossed them again and sat motionless for a moment until another jerk of the string once more disturbed his meditations. God the Father, meanwhile, waved his outstretched arm, wagged his forefinger in portentous warning, opened and shut his horsehair-fringed mouth and rolled a pair of eyes which, being made of glass, flashed comminatory fire at any bird that dared to approach the rice. And all the time a brisk wind was fluttering his draperies, which were bright yellow, with a bold design — in brown, white and black — of tigers and monkeys, while the Future Buddha's magnificent robes of red and orange rayon bellied and flapped around him with an Aeolian jingling of dozens of little silver bells.

"Are all your scarecrows like this?" Will asked.

"It was the Old Raja's idea," Vijaya answered. "He wanted to make the children understand that all gods are home-made, and that it's we who pull their strings and so give them the power to pull ours."

"Make them dance," said Tom Krishna, "make them wiggle." He laughed delightedly.

Vijaya stretched out an enormous hand and patted the child's dark curly head. "That's the spirit!" And turning back to Will, "*Quote* 'gods' *unquote*," he said in what was evidently an imitation of the Old Raja's manner, " — their one great merit (apart from scaring birds and *quote* 'sinners' *unquote*, and occasionally, perhaps, consoling the miserable, consists in this: being raised aloft on poles, they have to be looked up at; and when anyone looks up, even at a god, he can hardly fail to see the sky beyond. And what's the sky? Air and scattered light; but also a symbol of that boundless and (excuse the metaphor) *pregnant* emptiness out of which everything, the living and the inanimate, the puppet-makers and their divine marionettes, emerge into the universe we know — or rather that we think we know."

Mary Sarojini, who had been listening intently, nodded her head. "Father used to say," she volunteered, "that looking up at birds in the sky was even

better. Birds aren't words, he used to say. Birds are real. Just as real as the sky." Vijaya brought the car to a standstill. "Have a good time," he said as the children jumped out. "Make them dance and wiggle."

Shouting, Tom Krishna and Mary Sarojini ran down to join the little group in the field below the road.

"And now for the more solemn aspects of education." Vijaya turned the jeep into the driveway that led up to the school house. "I'll leave the car here and walk back to the Station. When you've had enough, get someone to drive you home." He turned off the ignition and handed Will the key.

In the school office Mrs Narayan, the Principal, was talking across her desk to a white-haired man with a long, rather doleful face like the face of a lined and wrinkled bloodhound.

"Mr Chandra Menon," Vijaya explained when the introductions had been made, "is our Under-Secretary of Education."

"Who is paying us," said the Principal, "one of his periodical visits of inspection."

"And who thoroughly approves of what he sees," the Under-Secretary added with a courteous bow in Mrs Narayan's direction.

Vijaya excused himself. "I have to get back to my work," he said and moved towards the door.

"Are you specially interested in education?" Mr Menon enquired.

"Specially ignorant would be more like it," Will answered. "I was merely brought up, never educated. That's why I'd like to have a look at the genuine article."

"Well, you've come to the right place," the Under-Secretary assured him. "New Rothamsted is one of our best schools."

"What's your criterion of a good school?" Will asked.

"Success."

"In what. Winning scholarships? Getting ready for jobs? Obeying the local categorical imperatives?"

“All that, of course,” said Mr Menon. “But the fundamental question remains. What are boys and girls for?”

Will shrugged his shoulders. “The answer depends on where you happen to be domiciled. For example, what are boys and girls for in America? Answer: for mass consumption. And the corollaries of mass consumption are mass communications, mass advertising, mass opiates in the form of television, meprobamate, positive thinking and cigarettes. And now that Europe has made the breakthrough into mass production, what will its boys and girls be for? For mass consumption and all the rest — just like the boys and girls in America. Whereas in Russia there’s a different answer. Boys and girls are for strengthening the national state. Hence all those engineers and science teachers, not to mention fifty divisions ready for instant combat and equipped with everything from tanks to H-bombs and long-range rockets. And in China it’s the same, but a good deal more so. What are boys and girls for there? For cannon fodder, industry fodder, agriculture fodder, road-building fodder. So East is East and West is West — for the moment. But the twain may meet in one or other of two ways. West may get so frightened of East that it will give up thinking that boys and girls are for mass consumption and decide instead that they’re for cannon fodder and strengthening the state. Alternatively East may find itself under such pressure from the appliance-hungry masses who long to go Western, that it will have to change its mind and say that boys and girls are really for mass consumption. But that’s for the future. As of now, the current answers to your question are mutually exclusive.”

“And both of the answers,” said Mr Menon, “are different from ours. What are Palanese boys and girls for? Neither for mass consumption, nor for strengthening the state. The state has to exist, of course. And there has to be enough for everybody. That goes without saying. It’s only on those conditions that boys and girls can discover what in fact they are for — only on those conditions that we can do anything about it.”

“And what in fact *are* they for?”

“For actualization, for being turned into full-blown human beings.”

Will nodded. "*Notes on What's What*," he commented. "Become what you really are."

"The Old Raja," said Mr Menon, "was mainly concerned with what people really are on the level that's beyond individuality. And of course we're just as much interested in that as he was. But our first business is elementary education, and elementary education has to deal with individuals in all their diversity of shape, size, temperament, gifts and deficiencies. Individuals in their transcendent unity are the affair of higher education. That begins in adolescence and is given concurrently with advanced elementary education."

"Begins, I take it," said Will, "with the first experience of the *moksha*-medicine."

"So you've heard about the *moksha*-medicine?"

"I've even seen it in action."

"Dr Robert," the Principal explained, "took him yesterday to see an initiation."

"By which," added Will, "I was profoundly impressed. When I think of *my* religious training …" He left the sentence eloquently unfinished.

"Well, as I was saying," Mr Menon continued, "adolescents get both kinds of education concurrently. They're helped to experience their transcendental unity with all other sentient beings and at the same time they're learning, in their psychology and physiology classes, that each one of us has his own constitutional uniqueness, everybody's different from everybody else."

"When I was at school," said Will, "the pedagogues did their best to iron out those differences, or at least to plaster them over with the same Late Victorian ideal — the ideal of the scholarly but Anglican football-playing gentleman. But now tell me what *you* do about the fact that everybody's different from everybody else."

"We begin," said Mr Menon, "by assessing the differences. Precisely who or what, anatomically, biochemically and psychologically, is this child? In the organic hierarchy, which takes precedence — his gut, his muscles, or his nervous system? How near does he stand to the three polar extremes? How

harmonious or how disharmonious is the mixture of his component elements, physical and mental? How great is his inborn wish to dominate, or to be sociable, or to retreat into his inner world? And how does he do his thinking and perceiving and remembering? Is he a visualizer or a non-visualizer? Does his mind work with images or with words, with both at once, or with neither? How close to the surface is his story-telling faculty? Does he see the world as Wordsworth and Traherne saw it when they were children? And, if so, what can be done to prevent the glory and the freshness from fading into the light of common day? Or, in more general terms, how can we educate children on the conceptual level without killing their capacity for intense non-verbal experience? How can we reconcile analysis with vision? And there are dozens of other questions that must be asked and answered. For example, does this child absorb all the vitamins in his food, or is he subject to some chronic deficiency that, if it isn't recognized and treated, will lower his vitality, darken his mood, make him see ugliness, feel boredom and think foolishness or malice? And what about his blood sugar? What about his breathing? What about his posture and the way he uses his organism when he's working, playing, studying? And there are all the questions that have to do with special gifts. Does he show signs of having a talent for music, for mathematics, for handling words, for observing accurately and for thinking logically and imaginatively about what he has observed? And finally how suggestible is he going to be when he grows up? All children are good hypnotic subjects — so good that four out of five of them can be talked into somnambulism. In adults the proportion is reversed. Four out of five of them can never be talked into somnambulism. Out of any hundred children, which are the twenty who will grow up to be suggestible to the pitch of somnambulism?"

"Can you spot them in advance?" Will asked. "And if so, what's the point of spotting them?"

"We *can* spot them," Mr Menon answered. "And it's very important that they should be spotted. Particularly important in *your* part of the world. Politically

speaking, the twenty per cent that can be hypnotized easily and to the limit is the most dangerous element in your societies."

"Dangerous?"

"Because these people are the propagandist's predestine victims. In an old-fashioned, pre-scientific democracy, any spell-binder with a good organization behind him can turn that twenty per cent of potential somnambulists into an army of regimented fanatics dedicated to the greater glory and power of their hypnotist. And under a dictatorship these same potential somnambulists can be talked into implicit faith and mobilized as the hard core of the omnipotent party. So you see it's very important for any society that values liberty to be able to spot the future somnambulists when they're young. Once they've been spotted, they can be hypnotized and systematically trained *not* to be hypnotizable by the enemies of liberty. And at the same time, of course, you'd be well advised to re-organize your social arrangements so as to make it difficult or impossible for the enemies of liberty to arise or have any influence."

"Which is the state of things, I gather, in Pala?"

"Precisely," said Mr Menon. "And that's why *our* potential somnambulists don't constitute a danger."

"Then why do you go to the trouble of spotting them in advance?"

"Because, if it's properly used, their gift is so valuable."

"For destiny control?" Will questioned, remembering those therapeutic swans and all the things that Susila had said about pressing one's own buttons.

The Under-Secretary shook his head. "Destiny Control doesn't call for anything more than a light trance. Practically everybody's capable of that. The potential somnambulists are the twenty per cent who can go into very deep trance. And it's in very deep trance — and only in very deep trance — that a person can be taught how to distort time."

"Can *you* distort time?" Will enquired.

Mr Menon shook his head. "Unfortunately I could never go deep enough. Everything I know had to be learned the long, slow way. Mrs Narayan was more

fortunate. Being one of the privileged twenty per cent, she could take all kinds of educational short cuts that were completely closed to the rest of us."

"What sort of short cuts?" Will asked, turning to the Principal.

"Short cuts to memorizing," she answered, "short cuts to calculating and thinking and problem-solving. One starts by learning how to experience twenty seconds as ten minutes, a minute as half an hour. In deep trance it's really very easy. You listen to the teacher's suggestions and you sit there quietly for a long, long time. Two full hours — you'd be ready to take your oath on it. When you've been brought back, you look at your watch. Your experience of two hours was telescoped into exactly four minutes of clock time."

"How?"

"Nobody knows how," said Mr Menon. "But all those anecdotes about drowning men seeing the whole of their life unfolding before them in a few seconds are substantially true. The mind and the nervous system — or rather some minds and some nervous systems — happen to be capable of this curious feat; that's all that anybody knows. We discovered the fact about sixty years ago, and ever since we've been exploiting it. Exploiting it, among other things, for educational purposes."

"For example," Mrs Narayan resumed, "here's a mathematical problem. In your normal state it might take you the best part of half an hour to solve. But now you distort time to the point where one minute is subjectively the equivalent of thirty minutes. Then you set to work on your problem. Thirty subjective minutes later it's solved. But thirty subjective minutes are one clock minute. Without the least sense of rush or strain you've been working as fast as one of those extraordinary calculating boys, who turn up from time to time. Future geniuses like Ampère and Gauss, or future idiots like Dase — but all of them, by some built-in trick of time distortion, capable of getting through an hour's hard work in a couple of minutes — sometimes in a matter of seconds. I'm only an average student; but I could go into deep trance, which meant that I could be taught how to telescope my time into a thirtieth of its normal span. Result: I was able to cover far more intellectual ground than I could possibly have covered if

I'd had to do all my learning in the ordinary way. You can imagine what happens when somebody with a genius IQ, is also capable of time distortion. The results are fantastic!"

"Unfortunately," said Mr Menon, "they're not very common. In the last two generations we've had precisely two time-distorters of real genius, and only five or six runners-up. But what Pala owes to those few is incalculable. So it's no wonder that we keep a sharp look out for potential somnambulists!"

"Well, you certainly ask plenty of searching questions about your little pupils," Will concluded after a brief silence. "What do you do when you've found the answers?"

"We start educating accordingly," said Mr Menon. "For example, we ask questions about every child's physique and temperament. When we have the answers, we sort out all the shyest, tensest, most over-responsive and introverted children, and assemble them in a single group. Then, little by little, the group is enlarged. First a few children with tendencies towards indiscriminate sociability are introduced. Then one or two little muscle-men and muscle-women — children with tendencies towards aggressiveness and love of power. It's the best method, we've found, for getting little boys and girls at the three polar extremes to understand and tolerate one another. After a few months of carefully controlled mixing, they're ready to admit that people with a different kind of hereditary make-up have just as good a right to exist as they have."

"And the principle," said Mrs Narayan, "is explicitly taught as well as progressively applied. In the lower forms we do the teaching in terms of analogies with familiar animals. Cats like to be by themselves. Sheep like being together. Martens are fierce and can't be tamed. Guinea-pigs are gentle and friendly. Are you a cat person or a sheep person, a guinea-pig person or a marten person? Talk about it in animal parables, and even very small children can understand the fact of human diversity and the need for mutual forbearance, mutual forgiveness."

"And later on," said Mr Menon, "when they come to read the *Gita*, we tell them about the link between constitution and religion. Sheep-people and guinea-

pig-people love ritual and public ceremonies and revivalistic emotion; their temperamental preferences can be directed into the Way of Devotion. Cat-people like to be alone, and their private broodings can become the Way of Self-Knowledge. Marten-people want to *do* things, and the problem is how to transform their driving aggressiveness into the Way of Disinterested Action."

"And the way to the Way of Disinterested Action is what I was looking at yesterday," said Will. "The way that leads through wood-chopping and rock-climbing — is that it?"

"Wood-chopping and rock-climbing," said Mr Menon, "are special cases. Let's generalize and say that the way to *all* the Ways leads through the redirection of power."

"What's that?"

"The principle is very simple. You take the power generated by fear or envy or too much noradrenalin, or else by some built-in urge that happens, at the moment, to be out of place — you take it and, instead of using it to do something unpleasant to someone else, instead of repressing it and so doing something unpleasant to yourself, you consciously direct it along a channel where it can do something useful, or, if not useful, at least harmless."

"Here's a simple case," said the Principal. "An angry or frustrated child has worked up enough power for a burst of crying, or bad language, or a fight. If the power generated is sufficient for any of those things, it's sufficient for running, or dancing, more than sufficient for five deep breaths. I'll show you some dancing later on. For the moment, let's confine ourselves to breathing. Any irritated person who takes five deep breaths releases a lot of tension and so makes it easier for himself to behave rationally. So we teach our children all kinds of breathing games, to be played whenever they're angry or upset. Some of the games are competitive. Which of two antagonists can inhale most deeply and say 'OM' on the outgoing breath for the longest time? It's a duel that ends, almost without fail, in reconciliation. But of course there are many occasions when competitive breathing is out of place. So here's a little game that an exasperated child can play on his own, a game that's based on the local folklore.

Every Palanese child has been brought up on Buddhist legends, and in most of these pious fairy stories somebody has a vision of a celestial being. A Bodhisattva, say, in an explosion of lights, jewels and rainbows. And along with the glorious vision there's always an equally glorious olfaction; the fireworks are accompanied by an unutterably delicious perfume. Well, we take these traditional phantasies — which are all based, needless to say, on actual visionary experiences of the kind induced by fasting, sensory deprivation or mushrooms — and we set them to work. Violent feelings, we tell the children, are like earthquakes. They shake us so hard that cracks appear in the wall that separates our private selves from the shared, universal Buddha Nature. You get cross, something inside of you cracks and, through the crack, out comes a whiff of the heavenly smell of enlightenment. Like champak, like ylang-ylang, like gardenias — only infinitely more wonderful. So don't miss this heavenliness that you've accidentally released. It's there every time you get cross. Inhale it, breathe it in, fill your lungs with it. Again and again."

"And they actually do it?"

"After a few weeks of teaching, most of them do it as a matter of course. And, what's more, a lot of them really smell that perfume. The old repressive 'Thou shalt not' has been translated into a new expressive and rewarding 'Thou shalt.' Potentially harmful power has been redirected into channels where it's not merely harmless, but may actually do some good. And meanwhile, of course, we've been giving the children systematic and carefully graduated training in perception and the proper use of language. They're taught to pay attention to what they see and hear, and at the same time they're asked to notice how their feelings and desires affect what they experience of the outer world, and how their language habits affect not only their feelings and desires but even their sensations. What my ears and my eyes record is one thing; what the words I use and the mood I'm in and the purposes I'm pursuing allow me to perceive, make sense of and act upon is something quite different. So you see it's all brought together into a single educational process. What we give the children is simultaneously a training in perceiving and imagining, a training in applied

physiology and psychology, a training in practical ethics and practical religion, a training in the proper use of language, and a training in self-knowledge. In a word, a training of the whole mind-body in all its aspects."

"What's the relevance," Will asked, "of all this elaborate training of the mind-body to formal education? Does it help a child to do sums, or write grammatically, or understand elementary physics?"

"It helps a lot," said Mr Menon. "A trained mind-body learns more quickly and more thoroughly than an untrained one. It's also more capable of relating facts to ideas, and both of them to its own ongoing life." Suddenly and surprisingly — for that long melancholy face gave one the impression of being incompatible with any expression of mirth more emphatic than a rather weary smile — he broke into a loud long peal of laughter.

"What's the joke?"

"I was thinking of two people I met last time I was in England. At Cambridge. One of them was an atomic physicist, the other was a philosopher. Both extremely eminent. But one had a mental age, outside the laboratory, of about eleven and the other was a compulsive eater with a weight problem that he refused to face. Two extreme examples of what happens when you take a clever boy, give him fifteen years of the most intensive formal education and totally neglect to do anything for the mind-body which has to do the learning and the living."

"And your system, I take it, doesn't produce that kind of academic monster?"

The Under-Secretary shook his head. "Until I went to Europe, I'd never seen anything of the kind. They're grotesquely funny," he added. "But, goodness, how pathetic! And, poor things, how curiously repulsive!"

"Being pathetically and curiously repulsive — that's the price we pay for specialization."

"For specialization," Mr Menon agreed, "but not in the sense you people ordinarily use the word. Specialization in that sense is necessary and inevitable. No specialization, no civilization. And if one educates the whole mind-body along with the symbol-using intellect, that kind of necessary specialization won't

do much harm. But you people don't educate the mind-body. Your cure for too much scientific specialization is a few more courses in the humanities. Excellent! Every education ought to include courses in the humanities. But don't let's be fooled by the name. By themselves, the humanities don't humanize. They're simply another form of specialization on the symbolic level. Reading Plato or listening to a lecture on T. S. Eliot doesn't educate the whole human being; like courses in physics or chemistry, it merely educates the symbol-manipulator and leaves the rest of the living mind-body in its pristine state of ignorance and ineptitude. Hence all those pathetic and repulsive creatures that so astonished me on my first trip abroad."

"What about formal education?" Will now asked. "What about indispensable information and the necessary intellectual skills? Do you teach the way we do?"

"We teach the way you're probably going to teach in another ten or fifteen years. Take mathematics, for example. Historically mathematics began with the elaboration of useful tricks, soared up into metaphysics and finally explained itself in terms of structure and logical transformations. In our schools we reverse the historical process. We begin with structure and logic; then, skipping the metaphysics, we go on from general principles to particular applications."

"And the children understand?"

"Far better than they understand when one starts with utilitarian tricks. From about five onwards practically any intelligent child can learn practically anything, provided always that you present it to him in the right way. Logic and structure in the form of games and puzzles. The children play and, incredibly quickly, they catch the point. After which you can go on to practical applications. Taught in this way, most children can learn at least three times as much, four times as thoroughly, in half the time. Or consider another field where one can use games to implant an understanding of basic principles. All scientific thinking is in terms of probability. The old eternal verities are merely a high degree of likeliness; the immutable laws of nature are just statistical averages. How does one get these profoundly un-obvious notions into children's heads. By

playing roulette with them, by spinning coins and drawing lots. By teaching them all kinds of games with cards and boards and dice."

"Evolutionary Snakes and Ladders — that's the most popular game with the little ones," said Mrs Narayan. "Another great favourite is Mendelian Happy Families."

"And a little later," Mr Menon added, "we introduce them to a rather complicated game played by four people with a pack of sixty specially designed cards divided into three suits. Psychological bridge, we call it. Chance deals you your hand, but the way you play it is a matter of skill, bluff and co-operation with your partner."

"Psychology, Mendelism, Evolution — your education seems to be heavily biological," said Will.

"It *is*," Mr Menon agreed. "Our primary emphasis isn't on physics and chemistry; it's on the sciences of life."

"Is that a matter of principle?"

"Not entirely. It's also a matter of convenience and economic necessity. We don't have the money for large-scale research in physics and chemistry, and we don't really have any practical need for that kind of research — no heavy industries to be made more competitive, no armaments to be made more diabolical, not the faintest desire to land on the backside of the moon. Only the modest ambition to live as fully human beings in harmony with the rest of life on this island at this latitude on this planet. We can take the results of your researches in physics and chemistry and apply them, if we want to or can afford it, to our own purposes. Meanwhile we'll concentrate on the research which promises to do us the greatest good — in the sciences of life and mind. If the politicians in the newly independent countries had any sense," he added, "they'd do the same. But they want to throw their weight around; they want to have armies, they want to catch up with the motorized television-addicts of America and Europe. You people have no choice," he went on. "You're irretrievably committed to applied physics and chemistry, with all their dismal consequences, military, political and social. But the underdeveloped countries aren't

committed. They don't *have* to follow your example. They're still free to take the road *we've* taken — the road of applied biology, the road of fertility control and the limited production and selective industrialization which fertility control make possible, the road that leads towards happiness from the inside out, through health, through awareness, through a change in one's attitude towards the world; not towards the mirage of happiness from the outside in, through toys and pills and non-stop distractions. They could still choose our way; but they don't want to, they want to be exactly like you, God help them. And as they can't possibly do what you've done — at any rate within the time they've set themselves — they're foredoomed to frustration and disappointment, predestined to the misery of social breakdown and anarchy, and then to the misery of enslavement by tyrants. It's a completely foreseeable tragedy, and they're walking into it with their eyes open."

"And we can't do anything about it," the Principal added.

"Can't do anything," said Mr Menon, "except go on doing what we're doing now and hoping against hope that the example of a nation that has found a way of being happily human may be imitated. There's very little chance of it; but it just might happen."

"Unless Greater Rendang happens first."

"Unless Greater Rendang happens first," Mr Menon gravely agreed. "Meanwhile we have to get on with our job, which is education. Is there anything more that you'd like to hear about, Mr Farnaby?"

"Lots more," said Will. "For example, how early do you start your science teaching?"

"We start it at the same time as we start multiplication and division. First lessons in ecology."

"Ecology? Isn't that a bit complicated?"

"That's precisely the reason why we begin with it. Never give children a chance of imagining that anything exists in isolation. Make it plain from the very first that all living is relationship. Show them relationships in the woods, in the

fields, in the ponds and streams, in the village and the country around it. Rub it in."

"And let me add," said the Principal, "that we always teach the science of relationship in conjunction with the ethics of relationship. Balance, give and take, no excesses — it's the rule in nature and, translated out of fact into morality, it *ought* to be the rule among people. As I said before, children find it very easy to understand an idea when it's presented to them in a parable about animals. We give them an up-to-date version of Aesop's Fables. Not the old anthropomorphic fictions, but true ecological fables with built-in, cosmic morals. And another wonderful parable for children is the story of erosion. We don't have any good examples of erosion here; so we show them photographs of what has happened in Rendang, in India and China, in Greece and the Levant, in Africa and America — all the places where greedy, stupid people have tried to take without giving, to exploit without love or understanding. Treat Nature well, and Nature will treat you well. Hurt or destroy Nature, and Nature will soon destroy you. In a Dust Bowl, 'Do as you would be done by' is self-evident — much easier for a child to recognize and understand than in an eroded family or village. Psychological wounds don't show — and anyhow children know so little about their elders. And, having no standards of comparison, they tend to take even the worst situation for granted, as though it were part of the nature of things. Whereas the difference between ten acres of meadow and ten acres of gullies and blowing sand is obvious. Sand and gullies are parables. Confronted by them, it's easy for the child to see the need for conservation and then to go on from conservation to morality — easy for him to go on from the Golden Rule in relation to plants and animals and the earth that supports them to the Golden Rule in relation to human beings. And here's another important point. The morality to which a child goes on from the facts of ecology and the parables of erosion is a universal ethic. There are no Chosen People in nature, no Holy Lands, no Unique Historical Revelations. Conservation-morality gives nobody an excuse for feeling superior, or claiming special privileges. 'Do as you would be done by' applies to our dealings with all kinds of life in every part of the

world. We shall be permitted to live on this planet only for as long as we treat all nature with compassion and intelligence. Elementary ecology leads straight to elementary Buddhism."

"A few weeks ago," said Will after a moment of silence, "I was looking at Thorwald's book about what happened in Eastern Germany between January and May of 1945. Have either of you read it?"

They shook their heads.

"Then don't," Will advised. "I was in Dresden five months after the February bombing. Fifty or sixty thousand civilians — mostly refugees running away from the Russians — burned alive in a single night. And all because little Adolf had never learned ecology," he smiled his flayed ferocious smile, "never been taught the first principles of conservation." One made a joke of it because it was too horrible to be talked about seriously.

Mr Menon rose and picked up his briefcase.

"I must be going." He shook hands with Will. It had been a pleasure, and he hoped that Mr Farnaby would enjoy his stay in Pala. Meanwhile, if he wanted to know more about Palanese education, he had only to ask Mrs Narayan. Nobody was better qualified to act as a guide and instructor.

"Would you like to visit some of the classrooms?" Mrs Narayan asked, when the Under-Secretary had left.

Will rose and followed her out of the room and along a corridor.

"Mathematics," said the Principal as she opened a door. "And this is the Upper Fifth. Under Mrs Anand."

Will bowed as he was introduced. The white-haired teacher gave a welcoming smile and whispered, "We're deep, as you see, in a problem."

He looked about him. At their desks a score of boys and girls were frowning, in a concentrated, pencil-biting silence, over their note-books. The bent heads were sleek and dark. Above the white or khaki shorts, above the long gaily coloured skirts, the golden bodies glistened in the heat. Boys' bodies that showed the cage of the ribs beneath the skin, girls' bodies, fuller, smoother, with the swell of small breasts, firm, high-set, elegant as the inventions of a rococo

sculptor of nymphs. And everyone took them completely for granted. What a comfort, Will reflected, to be in a place where the Fall was an exploded doctrine!

Meanwhile Mrs Anand was explaining — *sotto voce* so as not to distract the problem-solvers from their task — that she always divided her classes into two groups. The group of the visualizers, who thought in geometrical terms, like the ancient Greeks, and the group of the non-visualizers who preferred algebra and imageless abstractions. Somewhat reluctantly Will withdrew his attention from the beautiful unfallen world of young bodies and resigned himself to taking an intelligent interest in human diversity and the teaching of mathematics.

They took their leave at last. Next door, in a pale blue classroom decorated with paintings of tropical animals, Bodhisattvas and their bosomy Shaktis, the Lower Fifth were having their bi-weekly lesson in Elementary Applied Philosophy. Breasts here were smaller, arms thinner and less muscular. These were only a year away from childhood.

“Symbols are public,” the young man at the blackboard was saying as Will and Mrs Narayan entered the room. He drew a row of little circles, numbered them 1, 2, 3, 4, *n*. “These are people,” he explained. Then from each of the little circles he drew a line that connected it with a square at the left of the board. S he wrote in the centre of the square. “S is the system of symbols that the people use when they want to talk to one another. They all speak the same language — English, Palanese, Eskimo, it depends where they happen to live. Words are public; they belong to all the speakers of a given language: they’re listed in dictionaries. And now let’s look at the things that happen out there.” He pointed through the open window. Gaudy against a white cloud, half a dozen parrots came sailing into view, passed behind a tree and were gone. The teacher drew a second square at the opposite side of the board, labelled it E for ‘events’ and connected it by lines to the circles. “What happens out there is public — or at least fairly public,” he qualified. “And what happens when somebody speaks or writes words — that’s also public. But the things that go on inside these little circles are private. Private.” He laid a hand on his chest. “Private.” He rubbed his

forehead. “Private.” He touched his eyelids and the tip of his nose with a brown forefinger. “Now let’s make a simple experiment. Say the word ‘pinch.’”

“Pinch,” said the class in ragged unison. “Pinch …”

“P-I-N-C-H — pinch. That’s public, that’s something you can look up in the dictionary. But now pinch yourselves. Hard! Harder!”

To an accompaniment of giggles, of *aies* and *ows*, the children did as they were told.

“Can anybody feel what the person sitting next to him is feeling?”

There was a chorus of No’s.

“So it looks,” said the young man, “as though there were — let’s see, how many are we?” He ran his eyes over the desks before him. “It looks as though there were twenty-three distinct and separate pains. Twenty-three in this one room. Nearly three thousand million of them in the whole world. Plus the pains of all the animals. And each of these pains is strictly private. There’s no way of passing the experience from one centre of pain to another centre of pain. No communication except indirectly through S.” He pointed to the square at the left of the board, then to the circles at the centre. “Private pains here in 1, 2, 3, 4, and *n*. News about private pains out here at S, where you can say ‘pinch’, which is a public word listed in a dictionary. And notice this: there’s only one public word, ‘pain’, for three thousand million private experiences, each of which is probably about as different from all the others as my nose is different from your noses and your noses are different from one another. A word only stands for the ways in which things or happenings of the same general kind are like one another. That’s why the word is public. And, being public, it can’t possibly stand for the ways in which happenings of the same general kind are unlike one another.”

There was a silence. Then the teacher looked up and asked a question.

“Does anyone here know about Mahakasyapa?”

Several hands were raised. He pointed his finger at a little girl in a blue skirt and a necklace of shells sitting in the front row.

“You tell us, Amiya.”

Breathlessly and with a lisp, Amiya began.

“Mahakathyapa,” she said, “Wath the only one of the dithciples that underthtood what the Buddha wath talking about.”

“And what was he talking about?”

“He wathn’t talking. That’th why they didn’t underthand.”

“But Mahakasyapa understood what he was talking about even though he wasn’t talking — is that it?”

The little girl nodded. That was it exactly. “They thought he wath going to preach a thermon,” she said, “But he didn’t. He jutht picked a flower and held it up for everybody to look at.”

“And that was the sermon,” shouted a small boy in a yellow loincloth, who had been wriggling in his seat, hardly able to contain his desire to impart what he knew.

“But nobody could underthtand that kind of a thermon. Nobody but Mahakathyapa.”

“So what did Mahakasyapa say when the Buddha held up that flower?”

“Nothing!” the yellow loincloth shouted triumphantly.

“He jutht thmiled,” Amiya elaborated. “And that thowed the Buddha that he underthtood what it wath all about. Tho he thmiled back, and they jutht that there, thmiling and thmiling.”

“Very good,” said the teacher. “And now,” he turned to the yellow loincloth, “let’s hear what you think it was that Mahakasyapa understood.”

There was a silence. Then, crestfallen, the child shook his head. “I don’t know,” he mumbled.

“Does anyone else know?”

There were several conjectures. Perhaps he’d understood that people get bored with sermons — even the Buddha’s sermons. Perhaps he liked flowers as much as the Compassionate One did. Perhaps it was a white flower, and that made him think of the Clear Light. Or perhaps it was blue, and that was Shiva’s colour.

“Good answers,” said the teacher. “Especially the first one. Sermons *are* pretty boring — especially for the preacher. But here’s a question. If any of your

answers had been what Mahakasyapa understood when Buddha held up the flower, why didn't he come out with it in so many words?"

"Perhapth he wathn't a good thpeaker."

"He was an excellent speaker."

"Maybe he had a sore throat."

"If he'd had a sore throat, he wouldn't have smiled so happily."

"*You* tell us," called a shrill voice from the back of the room.

"Yes, *you* tell us," a dozen other voices chimed in.

The teacher shook his head. "If Mahakasyapa and the Compassionate One couldn't put it into words, how can I? Meanwhile let's take another look at these diagrams on the blackboard. Public words, more or less public events and then people, completely private centres of pain and pleasure. *Completely* private?" he questioned. "But perhaps that isn't quite true. Perhaps, after all, there is some kind of communication between the circles — not in the way I'm communicating with you now, through words, but directly. And maybe that was what the Buddha was talking about when his wordless flower-sermon was over. 'I have the treasure of the unmistakable teachings,' he said to his disciples, 'the wonderful Mind of Nirvana, the true form without form, beyond all words, the teaching to be given and received outside of all doctrines. This I have now handed to Mahakasyapa.'" Picking up the chalk again, he traced a rough ellipse that enclosed within its boundaries all the other diagrams on the board — the little circles representing human beings, the square that stood for events and the other square that stood for words and symbols. "All separate," he said, "and yet all one. People, events, words — they're all manifestations of Mind, of Suchness, of the Void. What Buddha was implying and what Mahakasyapa understood was that one can't speak these teachings, one can only *be* them. Which is something you'll all discover when the moment comes for your initiation."

"Time to move on." the Principal whispered. And when the door had closed behind them, and they were standing again in the corridor, "We use this same

kind of approach," she said to Will, "in our science teaching, beginning with botany."

"Why with botany?"

"Because it can be related so easily to what was being talked about just now — the Mahakasyapa story."

"Is that your starting point?"

"No, we start prosaically with the textbook. The children are given all the obvious, elementary facts, tidily arranged in the standard pigeon-holes. Undiluted botany — that's the first stage. Six or seven weeks of it. After which they get a whole morning of what we call bridge-building. Two and a half hours during which we try to make them relate everything they've learned in the previous lessons to art, language, religion, self-knowledge."

"Botany and self-knowledge — how do you build *that* bridge?"

"It's really quite simple," Mrs Narayan assured him. "Each of the children is given a common flower — a hibiscus for example, or better still (because the hibiscus has no scent), a gardenia. Scientifically speaking, what is a gardenia? What does it consist of? Petals, stamens, pistil, ovary and all the rest of it. The children are asked to write a full analytical description of the flower, illustrated by an accurate drawing. When that's done there's a short rest period, at the close of which the Mahakasyapa story is read to them and they're asked to think about it. Was Buddha giving a lesson in botany? Or was he teaching his disciples something else? And, if so, what?"

"What indeed?"

"And of course, as the story makes clear, there's no answer that can be put into words. So we tell the boys and girls to stop thinking and just look. 'But don't look analytically,' we tell them, 'Don't look as scientists, even as gardeners. Liberate yourselves from everything you know and look with complete innocence at this infinitely improbable thing before you. Look at it as though you'd never seen anything of the kind before, as though it had no name and belonged to no recognizable class. Look at it alertly but passively, receptively, without labelling or judging or comparing. And as you look at it,

inhale its mystery, breathe in the spirit of sense, the smell of the wisdom of the other shore.'"

"All this," Will commented, "sounds very like what Dr Robert was saying at the initiation ceremony."

"Of course it does," said Mrs Narayan. "Learning to take the Mahakasyapa's-eye view of things is the best preparation for the *moksha*-medicine experience. Every child who comes to initiation comes to it after a long education in the art of being receptive. First the gardenia as a botanical specimen. Then the same gardenia in its uniqueness, the gardenia as the artist sees it, the even more miraculous gardenia seen by the Buddha and Mahakasyapa. And it goes without saying," she added, "that we don't confine ourselves to flowers. Every course the children take is punctuated by periodical bridge-building sessions. Everything from dissected frogs to the spiral nebulae, it all gets looked at receptively as well as conceptually, as a fact of aesthetic or spiritual experience as well as in terms of science or history or economics. Training in receptivity is the complement and anti-dote to training in analysis and symbol-manipulation. Both kinds of training are absolutely indispensable. If you neglect either of them you'll never grow into a fully human being."

There was a silence. "How should one look at other people?" Will asked at last. "Should one take the Freud's-eye view or the Cézanne's-eye view? The Proust's-eye view or the Buddha's-eye view?"

Mrs Narayan laughed. "Which view are you taking of me?" she asked.

"Primarily, I suppose, the sociologist's-eye view," he answered. "I'm looking at you as the representative of an unfamiliar culture. But I'm also being aware of you receptively. Thinking, if you don't mind my saying so, that you seem to have aged remarkably well. Well aesthetically, well intellectually and psychologically, and well spiritually, whatever that word means — and if I make myself receptive it means something important. Whereas, if I choose to project instead of taking in, I can conceptualize it into pure nonsense." He uttered a mildly hyena-like laugh.

“If one chooses to,” said Mrs Narayan, “one can always substitute a bad ready-made notion for the best insights of receptivity. The question is, why should one want to make that kind of choice? Why shouldn’t one choose to listen to both parties and harmonize their views? The analysing tradition-bound concept-maker and the alertly passive insight-receiver — neither is infallible; but both together can do a reasonably good job.”

“Just how effective is your training in the art of being receptive?” Will now enquired.

“There are degrees of receptivity,” she answered. “Very little of it in a science lesson, for example. Science starts with observation; but the observation is always selective. You have to look at the world through a lattice of projected concepts. Then you take the *moksha*-medicine, and suddenly there are hardly any concepts. You don’t select and immediately classify what you experience; you just take it in. It’s like that poem of Wordsworth’s. ‘Bring with you a heart that watches and receives’. In these bridge-building sessions I’ve been describing there’s still quite a lot of busy selecting and projecting, but not nearly so much as in the preceding science lessons. The children don’t suddenly turn into little Tathagatas; they don’t achieve the pure receptivity that comes with the *moksha*-medicine. Far from it. All one can say is that they learn to go easy on names and notions. For a little while they’re taking in a lot more than they give out.”

“What do you make them do with what they’ve taken in?”

“We merely ask them,” Mrs Narayan answered with a smile, “to attempt the impossible. The children are told to translate their experience into words. As a piece of pure, unconceptualized givenness, what *is* this flower, this dissected frog, this planet at the other end of the telescope? What does it mean? What does it make you think, feel, imagine, remember? Try to put it down on paper. You won’t succeed, of course; but try all the same. It’ll help you to understand the difference between words and events, between knowing about things and being acquainted with them. ‘And when you’ve finished writing’, we tell them, ‘Look at the flower again and, after you’ve looked, shut your eyes for a minute or two.

Then draw what came to you when your eyes were closed. Draw whatever it may have been — something vague or vivid, something like the flower itself or something entirely different. Draw what you saw or even what you didn't see, draw it and colour it with your paints or crayons. Then take another rest and, after that, compare your first drawing with the second; compare the scientific description of the flower with what you wrote about it when you weren't analysing what you saw, when you behaved as though you didn't know anything about the flower and just permitted the mystery of its existence to come to you, like that, out of the blue. Then compare your drawings and writings with the drawings and writings of the other boys and girls in the class. You'll notice that the analytical descriptions and illustrations are very similar, whereas the drawings and writings of the other kind are very different one from another. How is all this connected with what you have learned in school, at home, in the jungle, in the temple?' Dozens of questions, and all of them insistent. The bridges have to be built in all directions. One starts with botany — or any other subject in the school curriculum — and one finds oneself, at the end of a bridge-building session, thinking about the nature of language, about different kinds of experience, about metaphysics and the conduct of life, about analytical knowledge and the wisdom of the Other Shore."

"How on earth," Will asked. "did you ever manage to teach the teachers who now teach the children to build these bridges?"

"We began teaching teachers a hundred and seven years ago," said Mrs Narayan. "Classes of young men and women who had been educated in the traditional Palanese way. You know — good manners, good agriculture, good arts and crafts, tempered by folk medicine, old wives' physics and biology and a belief in the power of magic and the truth of fairy tales. No science, no history, no knowledge of anything going on in the outside world. But these future teachers were pious Buddhists; most of them practised meditation and all of them had read or listened to quite a lot of Mahayana philosophy. That meant that in the fields of applied metaphysics and psychology, they'd been educated far more thoroughly and far more realistically than any group of future teachers in

your part of the world. Dr Andrew was a scientifically trained, anti-dogmatic humanist, who had discovered the value of pure and applied Mahayana. His friend, the Raja, was a Tantrik Buddhist who had discovered the value of pure and applied science. Both, consequently, saw very clearly that, to be capable of teaching children to become fully human in a society fit for fully human beings to live in, a teacher would first have to be taught how to make the best of both worlds."

"And how did those early teachers feel about it? Didn't they resist the process?"

Mrs Narayan shook her head. "They didn't resist, for the good reason that nothing precious had been attacked. Their Buddhism was respected. All they were asked to give up was the old wives' science and the fairy tales. And in exchange for those they got all kinds of much more interesting facts and much more useful theories. And these exciting things from your Western world of knowledge and power and progress were now to be combined with, and in a sense subordinated to, the theories of Buddhism and the psychological facts of applied metaphysics. There was really nothing in that best-of-both-worlds programme to offend the susceptibilities of even the touchiest and most ardent of religious patriots."

"I'm wondering about *our* future teachers," said Will after a silence. "At this late stage, would they be teachable? Could they possibly learn to make the best of both worlds?"

"Why not? They wouldn't have to give up any of the things that are really important to them. The non-Christian could go on thinking about man and the Christians could go on worshipping God. No change, except that God would have to be thought of as immanent and man would have to be thought of as potentially self-transcendent."

"And you think they'd make those changes without any fuss?" Will laughed. "You're an optimist."

"An optimist," said Mrs Narayan, "for the simple reason that, if one tackles a problem intelligently and realistically, the results are apt to be fairly good. This

island justifies a certain optimism. And now let's go and have a look at the dancing class."

They crossed a tree-shaded courtyard and, pushing through a swing door, passed out of silence into the rhythmic beat of a drum and the screech of fifes repeating over and over again a short pentatonic tune that to Will's ears sounded vaguely Scotch.

"Live music or canned?" he asked.

"Japanese tape," Mrs Narayan answered laconically. She opened a second door that gave access to a large gymnasium where two bearded young men and an amazingly agile little old lady in black satin slacks were teaching some twenty or thirty little boys and girls the steps of a lively dance.

"What's this?" Will asked. "Fun or education?"

"Both," said the Principal. "And it's also applied ethics. Like those breathing exercises we were talking about just now — only more effective because so much more violent."

"So stamp it out," the children were chanting in unison. And they stamped their small sandalled feet with all their might. "So stamp it out!" A final furious stamp and they were off again, jigging and turning, into another movement of the dance.

"This is called the Rakshasi Hornpipe," said Mrs Narayan.

"Rakshasi?" Will questioned. "What's that?"

"A Rakshasi is a species of demon. Very large, and exceedingly unpleasant. All the ugliest passions personified. The Rakshasi Hornpipe is a device for letting off those dangerous heads of steam raised by anger and frustration."

"So stamp it out!" The music had come round again to the choral refrain. "So stamp it out!"

"Stamp again," cried the little old lady setting a furious example. "Harder! Harder!"

"Which did more," Will speculated, "for morality and rational behaviour — the Bacchic orgies or the *Republic?* the *Nicomachean Ethics* or corybantic dancing?"

“The Greeks,” said Mrs Narayan, “were much too sensible to think in terms of either-or. For them, it was always not-only-but-also. Not only Plato and Aristotle, but also the maenads. Without those tension-reducing hornpipes, the moral philosophy would have been impotent, and without the moral philosophy the horn-pipers wouldn’t have known where to go next. All we’ve done is to take a leaf out of the old Greek book.”

“Very good!” said Will approvingly. Then remembering (as sooner or later, however keen his pleasure and however genuine his enthusiasm, he always did remember) that he was the man who wouldn’t take yes for an answer, he suddenly broke into laughter. “Not that it makes any difference in the long run,” he said, “Corybantism couldn’t stop the Greeks from cutting one another’s throats. And when Colonel Dipa decides to move, what will your Rakshasi Hornpipes do for you? Help you to reconcile yourselves to your fate, perhaps — that’s all.”

“Yes, that’s all,” said Mrs Narayan. “But being reconciled to one’s fate — that’s already a great achievement.”

“You seem to take it all very calmly.”

“What would be the point of taking it hysterically? It wouldn’t make our political situation any better; it would merely make our personal situation a good deal worse.”

“So stamp it out,” the children shouted again in unison, and the boards trembled under their pounding feet. “So stamp it out.”

“Don’t imagine,” Mrs Narayan resumed, “that this is the only kind of dancing we teach. Redirecting the power generated by bad feelings is important. But equally important is directing good feelings and right knowledge into expression. Expressive movements, in this case, expressive gesture. If you had come yesterday, when our visiting master was here, I could have shown you how we teach that kind of dancing. Not today unfortunately. He won’t be here again before Tuesday.”

“What sort of dancing does he teach?”

Mrs Narayan tried to describe it. No leaps, no high kicks, no running. The feet always firmly on the ground. Just bendings and sideways motions of the knees and hips. All expression confined to the arms, wrists and hands, to the neck and head, the face and, above all the eyes. Movement from the shoulders upwards and outwards — movement intrinsically beautiful and at the same time charged with symbolic meaning. Thought taking shape in ritual and stylized gesture. The whole body transformed into a hieroglyph, a succession of hieroglyphs, of attitudes modulating from significance to significance like a poem or a piece of music. Movements of the muscles representing movements of Consciousness, the passage of Suchness into the many, of the many into the immanent and ever-present One.

"It's meditation in action," she concluded. "It's the metaphysics of the Mahayana expressed, not in words, but through symbolic movements and gestures."

They left the gymnasium by a different door from that through which they had entered and turned left along a short corridor.

"What's the next item?" Will asked.

"The Lower Fourth," Mrs Narayan answered, "and they're working on Elementary Practical Psychology."

She opened a green door.

"Well, now you know," Will heard a familiar voice saying. "Nobody *has* to feel pain. You told yourselves that the pin wouldn't hurt — and it didn't hurt."

They stepped into the room and there, very tall in the midst of a score of plump or skinny little brown bodies, was Susila MacPhail. She smiled at them, pointed to a couple of chairs in a corner of the room and turned back to the children. "Nobody *has* to feel pain," she repeated. "But never forget: pain always means that something is wrong. You've learned to shut pain off, but don't do it thoughtlessly, don't do it without asking yourselves the question: What's the reason for this pain? And if it's bad, or if there's no obvious reason for it, tell your mother about it, or your teacher, or any grown-up in your Mutual Adoption Club. *Then* shut off the pain. Shut it off knowing that, if anything

needs to be done, it will be done. Do you understand? And now," she went on, after all the questions had been asked and answered. "Now let's play some pretending games. Shut your eyes and pretend you're looking at that poor old mynah bird with one leg that comes to school every day to be fed. Can you see him?"

Of course they could see him. The one-legged mynah was evidently an old friend.

"See him just as clearly as you saw him today at lunch time. And don't stare at him, don't make any effort. Just see what comes to you, and let your eyes shift — from his beak to his tail, from his bright little round eye to his one orange leg."

"I can hear him too," a little girl volunteered. "He's saying '*Karuna, Karuna!*'"

"That's not true," another child said indignantly. "He's saying 'Attention!'"

"He's saying both those things," Susila assured them. "And probably a lot of other words besides. But now we're going to do some real pretending. Pretend that there are two one-legged mynah birds. Three one-legged mynah birds. Four one-legged mynah birds. Can you see all four of them?"

They could.

"Four one-legged mynah birds at the four corners of a square, and a fifth one in the middle. And now let's make them change their colour. They're white now. Five white mynah birds with yellow heads and one orange leg. And now the heads are blue. Bright blue — and the rest of the bird is pink. Five pink birds with blue heads. And they keep changing. They're purple now. Five purple birds with white heads and each of them has one pale green leg. Goodness, what's happening! There aren't five of them; there are ten. No, twenty, fifty, a hundred. Hundreds and hundreds. Can you see them?" Some of them could — without the slightest difficulty; and for those who couldn't go the whole hog, Susila proposed more modest goals.

"Just make twelve of them," she said. "Or if twelve is too many, make ten, make eight. That's still an awful lot of mynahs. And now," she went on, when

all the children had conjured up all the purple birds that each was capable of creating, “now they’re gone.” She clapped her hands. “Gone! Every single one of them. There’s nothing there. And now you’re not going to see mynahs, you’re going to see *me*. One me in yellow. Two mes in green. Three mes in blue with pink spots. Four mes in the brightest red you ever saw.” She clapped her hands again. “All gone. And this time it’s Mrs Narayan and that funny-looking man with a stiff leg who came in with her. Four of each of them. Standing in a big circle in the gymnasium. And now they’re dancing the Rakshasi Hornpipe. ‘So stamp it out, so stamp it out.’”

There was a general giggle. The dancing Wills and Principals must have looked richly comical.

Susila snapped her fingers.

“Away with them! Vanish! And now each of you sees three of your mothers and three of your fathers running round the playground. Faster, faster, faster! And suddenly they’re not there any more. And then they *are* there. But next moment they aren’t. They are there, they aren’t. They are, they aren’t …”

The giggles swelled into squeals of laughter and at the height of the laughter a bell rang. The lesson in Elementary Practical Psychology was over.

“What’s the point of it all?” Will asked when the children had run off to play and Mrs Narayan had returned to her office.

“The point,” Susila answered, “is to get people to understand that we’re not *completely* at the mercy of our memory and our phantasies. If we’re disturbed by what’s going on inside our heads, we can do something about it. It’s all a question of being shown what to do and then practising — the way one learns to write or play the flute. What those children you saw here were being taught is a very simple technique — a technique that we’ll develop later on into a method of liberation. Not complete liberation, of course. But half a loaf is a great deal better than no bread. This technique won’t lead you to the discovery of your Buddha Nature: but it may help you to prepare for that discovery — help you by liberating you from the hauntings of your own painful memories, your remorses, your causeless anxieties about the future.”

"'Hauntings'," Will agreed, "is the word."

"But one doesn't *have* to be haunted. Some of the ghosts can be laid quite easily. Whenever one of them appears, just give it the imagination treatment. Deal with it as we dealt with those mynahs, as we dealt with you and Mrs Narayan. Change its clothes, give it another nose, multiply it, tell it to go away, call it back again and make it do something ridiculous. Then abolish it. Just think what you could have done about your father, if someone had taught you a few of these simple little tricks when you were a child! You thought of him as a terrifying ogre. But that wasn't necessary. In your fancy you could have turned the ogre into a grotesque. Into a whole chorus of grotesques. Twenty of them doing a tap dance and singing, 'I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls.' A short course in Elementary Practical Psychology, and your whole life might have been different."

How would he have dealt with Molly's death, Will wondered as they walked out towards the parked jeep? What rites of imaginative exorcism could he have practised on that white, musk-scented succubus who was the incarnation of his frantic and abhorred desires?

But here was the jeep. Will handed Susila the keys and laboriously hoisted himself into his seat. Very noisily, as though it were under some neurotic compulsion to overcompensate for its diminutive stature, a small and aged car approached from the direction of the village, turned into the driveway and, still clattering and shuddering, came to a halt beside the jeep.

They turned. There, leaning out of the window of the royal Baby Austin was Murugan and beyond him, vast in white muslin and billowy like a cumulus cloud, sat the Rani. Will bowed in her direction and evoked the most gracious of smiles, which was switched off as soon as she turned to Susila, whose greeting was acknowledged only with the most distant of nods.

"Going for a drive?" Will asked politely.

"Only as far as Shivapuram," said the Rani.

"If this wretched little crate will hold together that long," Murugan added bitterly. He turned the ignition key. The motor gave a last obscene hiccup and

died.

“There are some people we have to see,” the Rani went on. “Or rather One Person,” she added in a tone charged with conspiratorial significance. She smiled at Will and very nearly winked.

Pretending not to understand that she was talking about Bahu, Will uttered a non-committal, “Quite”, and commiserated with her on all the work and worry that the preparations for next week’s coming-of-age party must entail.

Murugan interrupted him. “What are you doing out here?” he asked.

“I’ve spent the afternoon, taking an intelligent interest in Palanese education.”

“Palanese education,” the Rani echoed. And again, sorrowfully, “Palanese” (pause) “Education.” She shook her head.

“Personally,” said Will, “I liked everything I saw and heard of it — from Mr Menon and the Principal to Elementary Practical Psychology, as taught,” he added, trying to bring Susila into the conversation, “by Mrs MacPhail here.”

Still studiedly ignoring Susila, the Rani pointed a thick accusing finger at the scarecrows in the field below.

“Have you seen *those*, Mr Farnaby?”

He had indeed. “And where but in Pala,” he asked, “can one find scarecrows which are simultaneously beautiful, efficient and metaphysically significant?”

“And which,” said the Rani in a voice that was vibrant with a kind of sepulchral indignation, “not only scare the birds away from the rice; they also scare little children away from the very idea of God and His Avatars.” She raised her hand, “Listen!”

Trom Krishna and Mary Sarojini had been joined by five or six small companions and were making a game of tugging at the strings that worked the supernatural marionettes. From the group came a sound of shrill voices piping in unison. At their second repetition, Will made out the words of the chantey.

Pully, hauly, tug with a will;

The gods wiggle-waggle, but the sky stands still.

“Bravo!” he said, and laughed.

“I’m afraid I can’t be amused,” said the Rani severely. “It isn’t funny. It’s Tragic, *Tragic*.”

Will stuck to his guns. “I understand,” he said, “that these charmings carecrows were an invention of Murugan’s great grandfather.”

“Murugan’s great grandfather,” said the Rani, “was a very remarkable man. Remarkably intelligent, but no less remarkably perverse. Great gifts — but, alas, how maleficently used! And what made it all so much worse, he was full of False Spirituality.”

“False Spirituality?” Will eyed the enormous specimen of True Spirituality and, through the reek of hot petroleum products, inhaled the incense-like, other-worldly smell of sandalwood. “False Spirituality?” And suddenly he found himself wondering — wondering and then, with a shudder, imagining — what the Rani would look like if suddenly divested of her mystic’s uniform and exposed, exuberantly and steatopygously naked, to the light. And now multiply her into a trinity of undressed obesities, into two trinities, ten trinities. Applied Practical Psychology — with a vengeance!

“Yes, False Spirituality,” the Rani was repeating, “Talking about Liberation; but always, because of his obstinate refusal to follow the True Path, always working for greater Bondage. Acting the part of humility. But in his heart, he was so full of pride, Mr Farnaby, that he refused to recognize any Spiritual Authority Higher than his own. The Masters, the Avatare, the Great Tradition — they meant nothing to him. Nothing at all. Hence those dreadful scarecrows. Hence that blasphemous rhyme that the children have been taught to sing. When I think of those Poor Innocent Little Ones being deliberately perverted, I find it hard to contain myself, Mr Farnaby, I find it …”

“Listen, mother,” said Murugan who had been glancing impatiently and ever more openly at his wrist watch, “if we want to be back by dinner time, we’d better get going.” His tone was rudely authoritative. Being at the wheel of a car — even of this senile Baby Austin — made him feel, it was evident, considerably larger than life. Without waiting for the Rani’s answer he started the motor, shifted into low and with a wave of the hand, drove off.

“Good riddance,” said Susila.

“Don’t you love your dear Queen?”

“She makes my blood boil.”

“So stamp it out,” Will chanted teasingly.

“You’re quite right,” she agreed with a laugh. “But unfortunately this was an occasion when it just wasn’t feasible to do a Rakshasi Hornpipe.” Her face brightened with a sudden flash of mischief, and without warning she punched him, surprisingly hard, in the ribs. “There!” she said. “Now I feel much better.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SHE STARTED THE motor and they drove off — down to the bypass, up again to the high road beyond the other end of the village, and on into the compound of the Experimental Station. Susila pulled up at a small thatched bungalow like all the others. They climbed the six steps that led up to the verandah and entered a whitewashed living-room.

To the left was a wide window with a hammock slung between the two wooden pillars at either side of the projecting bay. “For you,” she said, pointing to the hammock. “You can put your leg up.” And when Will had lowered himself into the net, “What shall we talk about?” she asked as she pulled up a wicker chair and sat down beside him.

“What about the good, the true and the beautiful? Or maybe,” he grinned, “the ugly, the bad and the even truer.”

“I’d thought,” she said, ignoring his attempt at a witticism, “that we might go on where we left off last time — go on talking about *you*.”

“That was precisely what I was suggesting — the ugly, the bad and the truer than all official truth.”

“Is this just an exhibition of your conversational style?” she asked. “Or do you really want to talk about yourself?”

“Really,” he assured her, “desperately. Just as desperately as I *don’t* want to talk about myself. Hence, as you may have noticed, my unflagging interest in art, science, philosophy, politics, literature — any damned thing rather than the only thing that ultimately has any importance.”

There was a long silence. Then in a tone of casual reminiscence, Susila began to talk about Wells Cathedral, about the calling of the jackdaws, about the white swans floating between the reflections of the floating clouds. In a few minutes he too was floating.

“I was very happy all the time I was at Wells,” she said. “Wonderfully happy. And so were you, weren’t you?”

Will made no answer. He was remembering those days in the green valley, years ago, before he and Molly were married, before they were lovers. What peace! What a solid, living maggotless world of springing grass and flowers! And between them had flowed the kind of natural, undistorted feeling that he hadn’t experienced since those far-off days when Aunt Mary was alive. The only person he had ever really loved — and here, in Molly, was her successor. What blessedness! Love transposed into another key — but the melody, the rich and subtle harmonies were the same. And then, on the fourth night of their stay, Molly had knocked on the wall that separated their rooms, and he had found her door ajar, had groped his way in darkness to the bed where, conscientiously naked, the Sister of Mercy was doing her best to play the part of the Wife of Love. Doing her best and (how disastrously!) failing.

Suddenly, as happened almost every afternoon, there was a loud rushing of wind and, muffled by distance, a hollow roaring of rain on thick foliage — a roaring that grew louder and louder as the shower approached. A few seconds passed, and then the raindrops were hammering insistently on the window panes. Hammering as they had hammered on the windows of his study that day of their last interview. “Do you really mean it, Will?”

The pain and shame of it made him want to cry aloud. He bit his lip.

“What are you thinking of?” Susila asked.

It wasn’t a matter of thinking. He was actually seeing her, actually hearing her voice. “Do you really mean it, Will?” And through the sound of the rain he heard himself answering, “I really mean it.”

On the window pane — was it here? Or was it there, was it then? — the roar had diminished, as the gust spent itself to a pattering whisper.

“What are you thinking of?” Susila insisted.

“I’m thinking of what I did to Molly.”

“What was it that you did to Molly?”

He didn’t want to answer; but Susila was inexorable.

“Tell me what it was that you did.”

Another violent gust made the windows rattle. It was raining harder now — raining, it seemed to Will Farnaby, on purpose, raining in such a way that he would *have* to go on remembering what he didn’t want to remember, would be compelled to say out loud the shameful things he must at all costs keep to himself.

“Tell me.”

Reluctantly and in spite of himself, he told her.

“‘Do you really mean it, Will?’” And because of Babs — *Babs*, God help him! *Babs*, believe it or not! — he really did mean it, and she had walked out into the rain.

“The next time I saw her was in the hospital.”

“Was it still raining?” Susila asked.

“Still raining.”

“As hard as it’s raining now?”

“Very nearly.” And what Will heard was no longer this afternoon shower in the tropics, but the steady drumming on the window of the little room where Molly lay dying.

“It’s me,” he was saying through the sound of the rain, “It’s Will.” Nothing happened; and then suddenly he felt the almost imperceptible movement of Molly’s hand within his own. The voluntary pressure and then, after a few seconds, the involuntary release, the total limpness.

“Tell me again, Will.”

He shook his head. It was too painful, too humiliating.

“Tell me again,” she insisted. “It’s the only way.”

Making an enormous effort, he started to tell the odious story yet once more. Did he really mean it? Yes, he really meant it — meant to hurt, meant perhaps (did one ever know what one really intended?) to kill. *All for Babs, or the World well Lost*. Not *his* world, of course — Molly’s world, and, at the centre of that world, the life that had created it. Snuffed out for the sake of that delicious smell

in the darkness, of those muscular reflexes, that enormity of enjoyment, those consummate and intoxicatingly shameless skills.

"Goodbye, Will." And the door had closed behind her with a faint, dry click.

He wanted to call her back. But Babs's lover remembered the skills, the reflexes, and, within its aura of musk, a body agonizing in the extremity of pleasure. Remembered these things and, standing at the window, watched the car move away through the rain, watched and was filled as it turned the corner, with a shameful exultation. Free at last! Even freer, as he discovered three hours later in the hospital, than he had supposed. For now he was feeling the last faint pressure of her fingers; feeling the final message of her love. And then the message was interrupted. The hand went limp and now, suddenly, appallingly, there was no sound of breathing. "Dead," he whispered, and felt himself choking. "Dead."

"Suppose it hadn't been your fault," said Susila, breaking a long silence. "Suppose that she'd suddenly died without your having had anything to do with it. Wouldn't that have been almost as bad?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean, it's more than just feeling guilty about Molly's death. It's death itself, death as such, that you find so terrible." She was thinking of Dugald now. "So senselessly evil."

"Senselessly evil," he repeated. "Yes, perhaps that's why I had to be a professional execution-watcher. Just because it was all so senseless, so utterly bestial. Following the smell of death from one end of the earth to the other. Like a vulture. Nice comfortable people just don't have any idea what the world is like. Not exceptionally, as it was during the War, but all the time. All the time." And as he spoke he was seeing, in a vision as brief and comprehensive and intensely circumstantial as a drowning man's, all the hateful scenes he had witnessed in the course of those well-paid pilgrimages to every hell-hole and abattoir revolting enough to qualify as News. Negroes in South Africa, the man in the San Quentin gas chamber, mangled bodies in an Algerian farmhouse, and everywhere mobs, everywhere policemen and paratroopers, everywhere those

dark-skinned children, stick-legged, pot-bellied, with flies on their raw eyelids, everywhere the nauseating smells of hunger and disease, the awful stench of death. And then suddenly, through the stench of death, mingled and impregnated with the stench of death, he was breathing the musky essence of Babs. Breathing the essence of Babs and remembering his little joke about the chemistry of purgatory and paradise. Purgatory is tetraethylene diamine and sulphuretted hydrogen; paradise, very definitely, is symtrinitropsi-butyl toluene, with an assortment of organic impurities — ha — ha — ha! (Oh, the delights of social life!) And then, quite suddenly, the odours of love and death gave place to a rank animal smell — a smell of dog.

The wind swelled up again into violence and the driving rain drops hammered and splashed against the panes.

“Are you still thinking of Molly?” Susila asked.

“I was thinking of something I’d completely forgotten,” he answered. “I can’t have been more than four years old when it happened, and now it’s all come back to me. Poor Tiger.”

“Who was poor Tiger?” she questioned.

Tiger, his beautiful red setter. Tiger, the only source of light in that dismal house where he had spent his childhood. Tiger, dear dear Tiger. In the midst of all that fear and misery, between the two poles of his father’s sneering hate of everything and everybody and his mother’s self-conscious self-sacrifice, what effortless good will, what spontaneous friendliness, what a bounding, barking, irrepressible joy! His mother used to take him on her knee and tell him about God and Jesus. But there was more God in Tiger than in all her Bible stories. Tiger, so far as he was concerned, was the Incarnation. And then one day the Incarnation came down with distemper.

“What happened then?” Susila asked.

“His basket’s in the kitchen, and I’m there, kneeling beside it. And I’m stroking him — but his fur feels quite different from what it felt like before he was sick. Kind of sticky. And there’s a bad smell. If I didn’t love him so much, I’d run away, I couldn’t bear to be near him. But I do love him, I love him more

than anything or anybody. And while I stroke him, I keep telling him that he'll soon be well again. Very soon — tomorrow morning. And then all of a sudden he starts to shudder, and I try to stop the shuddering by holding his head between my hands. But it doesn't do any good. The trembling turns into a horrible convulsion. It makes me feel sick to look at it, and I'm frightened. I'm dreadfully frightened. Then the shuddering and the twitching die down and in a little while he's absolutely still. And when I lift his head and then let go, the head falls back — thump, like a piece of meat with a bone inside."

Will's voice broke, the tears were streaming down his cheeks, he was shaken by the sobs of a four-year-old grieving for his dog and confronted by the awful, inexplicable fact of death. With the mental equivalent of a click and a little jerk, his consciousness seemed to change gear. He was an adult again, and he had ceased to float.

"I'm sorry," He wiped his eyes and blew his nose. "Well, that was my first introduction to the Essential Horror. Tiger was my friend, Tiger was my only consolation. That was something, obviously that the Essential Horror couldn't tolerate. And it was the same with my Aunt Mary. The only person I ever really loved and admired and completely trusted; and, Christ, what the Essential Horror did to her!"

"Tell me," said Susila.

Will hesitated, then, shrugging his shoulders, "Why not?" he said. "Mary Frances Farnaby, my father's younger sister. Married at eighteen, just a year before the outbreak of World War I, to a professional soldier. Frank and Mary, Mary and Frank — what harmony, what happiness!" He laughed. "Even outside of Pala one can find occasional islands of decency. Tiny little atolls, or even, every now and then, a full-blown Tahiti — but always totally surrounded by the Essential Horror. Two young people on their private Pala. Then, one fine morning, it was August 4th, 1914. Frank went overseas with the Expeditionary Force, and on Christmas Eve Mary gave birth to a deformed child that survived long enough for her to see for herself what the E.H. can do when it really tries. Only God can make a microcephalous idiot. Three months later, needless to say,

Frank was hit by a piece of shrapnel and died in due course of gangrene. “All that,” Will went on after a little silence, “was before my time. When I first knew her, in the ‘twenties, Aunt Mary was devoting herself to the aged. Old people in institutions, old people cooped up in their own homes, old people living on and on as a burden to their children and grandchildren. Struldbrugs, Tithonuses. And the more hopeless the decrepitude, the more crotchety and querulous the character, the better. As a child, how I hated Aunt Mary’s old people! They smelt bad, they were frighteningly ugly, they were always boring and generally cross. But Aunt Mary really loved them — loved them through thick and thin, loved them in spite of everything. My mother used to talk a lot about Christian charity; but somehow one never believed what she said, just as one never felt any love in all the self-sacrificing things she was always forcing herself to do — no love, only duty. Whereas with Aunt Mary one was never in the slightest doubt. Her love was like a kind of physical radiation, something one could almost sense as heat or light. When she took me to stay with her in the country and later, when she came to town and I used to go and see her almost every day, it was like escaping from a refrigerator into the sunshine. I could feel myself coming alive in that light of hers, that radiating warmth. Then the Essential Horror got busy again. At the beginning she made a joke of it. ‘Now I’m an Amazon,’ she said after the first operation.”

“Why an Amazon?” Susila asked.

“The Amazons had their right breast amputated. They were warriors and the breast got in the way when they were shooting with the long bow. ‘Now I’m an Amazon,’” he repeated, and with his mind’s eye could see the smile on that strong aquiline face, could hear, with his mind’s ear, the tone of amusement in that clear, ringing voice. “But a few months later the other breast had to be cut off. After that there were the X-rays, the radiation sickness and then, little by little, the degradation.” Will’s face took on its look of flayed ferocity. “If it weren’t so unspeakably hideous, it would really be funny. What a masterpiece of irony! Here was a soul that radiated goodness and love and heroic charity. Then, for no known reason, something went wrong. Instead of flouting it, a little piece

of her body started to obey the second law of thermodynamics. And as the body broke down, the soul began to lose its virtue, its very identity. The heroism went out of her, the love and the goodness evaporated. For the last months of her life, she was no more the Aunt Mary I had loved and admired; she was somebody else, somebody (and this was the ironist's final and most exquisite touch) almost indistinguishable from the worst and weakest of the old people she had once befriended and been a tower of strength to. She had to be humiliated and degraded; and when the degradation was complete, she was slowly, and with a great deal of pain, put to death in solitude. In solitude," he insisted. "For of course nobody can help, nobody can ever be present. People may stand by while you're suffering and dying; but they're standing by in another world. In *your* world you're absolutely alone. Alone in your suffering and your dying, just as you're alone in love, alone even in the most completely shared pleasure."

The essences of Babs and of Tiger, and when the cancer had gnawed a hole in the liver and her wasted body was impregnated with that strange, aromatic smell of contaminated blood, the essence of Aunt Mary dying. And in the midst of those essences, sickeningly or intoxicatedly aware of them, was an isolated consciousness, a child's, a boy's, a man's, forever isolated, irremediably alone. "And on top of everything else," he went on, "this woman was only forty-two. She didn't want to die. She refused to accept what was being done to her. The Essential Horror had to drag her down by main force. I was there; I saw it happening."

"And that's why you're the man who won't take yes for an answer?"

"How can anyone take yes for an answer?" he countered. "Yes is just pretending, just positive thinking. The facts, the basic and ultimate facts, are always no. Spirit? No! Love? No! Sense, meaning, achievement? No!"

Tiger exuberantly alive and joyful and full of God. And then Tiger transformed by the Essential Horror into a packet of garbage, which the vet had to come and be paid for removing. And after Tiger, Aunt Mary. Maimed and tortured, dragged in the mud, degraded and finally, like Tiger, transformed into a packet of garbage — only this time it was the undertaker who had removed it,

and a clergyman was hired to make believe that it was all, in some sublime and Pickwickian sense, perfectly O.K. Twenty years later another clergyman had been hired to repeat the same strange rigmarole over Molly's coffin. '*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*.'

Will uttered another of his hyena laughs. "What impeccable logic, what sensibility, what ethical refinement!"

"But you're the man who won't take yes for an answer. So why raise any objections?"

"I oughtn't to," he agreed. "But one remains an aesthete, one likes to have the no said with style. 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" He screwed up his face in an expression of disgust.

"And yet," said Susila, "in a certain sense the advice is excellent. Eating, drinking, dying — three primary manifestations of the universal and impersonal life. Animals live that impersonal and universal life without knowing its nature. Ordinary people know its nature but don't live it and, if ever they think seriously about it, refuse to accept it. An enlightened person knows it, lives it and accepts it completely. He eats, he drinks and in due course he dies — but he eats with a difference, drinks with a difference, dies with a difference."

"And rises again from the dead?" he asked sarcastically.

"That's one of the questions the Buddha always refused to discuss. Believing in eternal life never helped anybody to live in eternity. Nor, of course, did *dis*believing. So stop all your pro-ing and con-ing (that's the Buddha's advice) and get on with the job."

"Which job?"

"Everybody's job — enlightenment. Which means, here and now, the preliminary job of practising all the yogas of increased awareness."

"But I don't want to be more aware," said Will. "I want to be less aware. Less aware of horrors like Aunt Mary's death and the slums of Rendang-Lobo. Less aware of hideous sights and loathsome smells — even of some delicious smells," he added as he caught through the remembered essences of dog and cancer of the

liver, a civet-like whiff of the pink alcove: “Less aware of my fat income and other people’s subhuman poverty. Less aware of my own excellent health in an ocean of malaria and hookworm, of my own safely sterilized sex-fun in the ocean of starving babies. ‘Forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ What a blessed state of affairs! But unfortunately I do know what I’m doing. Only too well. And here you go, asking me to be even more aware than I am already.”

“I’m not asking anything,” she said. “I’m merely passing on the advice of a succession of shrewd old birds, beginning with Gautana and ending with the Old Raja. Start by being fully aware of what you think you are. It’ll help you to become aware of what you are in fact.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “One thinks one’s something unique and wonderful at the centre of the universe. But in fact one’s merely a slight delay in the ongoing march of entropy.”

“And that precisely, is the first half of the Buddha’s message. Transience, no permanent soul, inevitable sorrow. But he didn’t stop there, the message had a second half. This temporary slowdown of entropy is also pure undiluted Suchness. This absence of a permanent soul is also the Buddha Nature.”

“Absence of a soul — that’s easy to cope with. But what about the presence of cancer, the presence of slow degradation? What about hunger and overbreeding and Colonel Dipa? Are *they* pure Suchness?”

“Of course. But, needless to say, it’s desperately difficult for the people who are deeply involved in any of those evils to discover their Buddha Nature. Public health and social reform are the indispensable preconditions of any kind of general enlightenment.”

“But in spite of public health and social reform, people still die. Even in Pala,” he added ironically.

“Which is why the corollary of welfare has to be *dhyana* — all the yogas of living and dying, so that you can be aware, even in the final agony, of who in fact, and in spite of everything, you really are.”

There was a sound of footsteps on the planking of the verandah and a childish voice called, “Mother!”

“Here I am, darling,” Susila called back.

The front door was flung open and Mary Sarojini came hurrying into the room.

“Mother,” she said breathlessly, “they want you to come at once. It’s Granny Lakshmi. She’s …” Catching sight for the first time of the figure in the hammock, she started and broke off. “Oh! I didn’t know *you* were here.”

Will waved his hand to her without speaking. She gave him a perfunctory smile, then turned back to her mother. “Granny Lakshmi suddenly got much worse,” she said, “and Grandpa Robert is still up at the High Altitude Station, and they can’t get through to him on the telephone.”

“Did you run all the way?”

“Except where it’s really *too* steep.”

Susila put her arm round the child and kissed her, then very brisk and business-like, rose to her feet.

“It’s Dugald’s mother,” she said.

“Is she …?” He glanced at Mary Sarojini, then back at Susila. Was death taboo? Could one mention it before children?

“You mean, is she dying?”

He nodded.

“We’ve been expecting it, of course,” Susila went on. “But not today. Today she seemed a little better.” She shook her head. “Well, I have to go and stand by — even if it *is* in another world. And actually,” she added, “it isn’t quite so completely other as you think. I’m sorry we had to leave our business unfinished; but there’ll be other opportunities. Meanwhile what do you want to do? You can stay here. Or I’ll drop you at Dr Robert’s. Or you can come with me and Mary Sarojini.”

“As a professional execution-watcher?”

“*Not* as a professional execution-watcher,” she answered emphatically. “As a human being, as someone who needs to know how to live and then how to die. Needs it as urgently as we all do.”

“Needs it,” he said, “a lot more urgently than most. But shan’t I be in the way?”

“If you can get out of your own way, you won’t be in anyone else’s.”

She took his hand and helped him out of the hammock. Two minutes later they were driving past the lotus pool and the huge Buddha meditating under the cobra’s hood, past the white bull, out through the main gate of the compound. The rain was over, in a green sky enormous clouds glowed like archangels. Low in the West the sun was shining with a brightness that seemed almost supernatural.

Soles occidere et redire possunt;
nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,
nox est perpetua una dormienda.
Da mi basia mille.

Sunsets and death; death and therefore kisses; kisses and consequently birth and then death for yet another generation of sunset-watchers.

“What do you say to people who are dying?” he asked. “Do you tell *them* not to bother their heads about immortality and get on with the job?”

“If you like to put it that way — yes, that’s precisely what we do. Going on being aware — it’s the whole art of dying.”

“And you teach the art?”

“I’d put it another way. We help them to go on practising the art of living even while they’re dying. Knowing who in fact one is, being conscious of the universal and impersonal life that lives itself through each of us — that’s the art of living, and that’s what one can help the dying to go on practising. To the very end. Maybe beyond the end.”

“Beyond?” he questioned. “But you said that was something that the dying aren’t supposed to think about.”

“They’re not being asked to think *about* it. They’re being helped, if there is such a thing, to experience it. If there is such a thing,” she repeated, “if the

universal life goes on, when the separate me-life is over."

"Do you personally think it does go on?"

Susila smiled. "What I personally think is beside the point. All that matters is what I may impersonally experience — while I'm living, when I'm dying, maybe when I'm dead."

She swung the car into a parking space and turned off the engine. On foot they entered the village. Work was over for the day and the main street was so densely thronged that it was hard for them to pass.

"I'm going ahead by myself," Susila announced. Then to Mary Sarojini, "Be at the hospital in about an hour," she said. "Not before." She turned and, threading her way between the slowly promenading groups, was soon lost to view.

"You're in charge now," said Will, smiling down at the child by his side.

Mary Sarojini nodded gravely and took his hand. "Let's go and see what's happening in the Square," she said.

"How old is your Granny Lakshmi?" Will asked as they started to make their way along the crowded street.

"I don't really know," Mary Sarojini answered. "She *looks* terribly old. But maybe that's because she's got cancer."

"Do you know what cancer is?" he asked.

Mary Sarojini knew perfectly well. "It's what happens when part of you forgets all about the rest of you and carries on the way people do when they're crazy — just goes on blowing itself up and blowing itself up as if there was nobody else in the whole world. Sometimes you can do something about it. But generally it just goes on blowing itself up until the person dies."

"And that's what has happened, I gather, to your Granny Lakshmi."

"And now she needs someone to help her die."

"Does your mother often help people die?"

The child nodded. "She's awfully good at it."

"Have *you* ever seen anyone die?"

“Of course,” Mary Sarojini answered, evidently surprised that such a question should be asked. “Let me see.” She made a mental calculation. “I’ve seen five people die. Six, if you count babies.”

“I hadn’t seen anyone die when I was your age.”

“You hadn’t?”

“Only a dog.”

“Dogs die easier than people. They don’t talk about it before-hand.”

“How do you feel about … about people dying?”

“Well, it isn’t nearly so bad as having babies. That’s awful. Or at least it *looks* awful. But then you remind yourself that it doesn’t hurt at all. They’ve turned off the pain.”

“Believe it or not,” said Will, “I’ve never seen a baby being born.”

“Never?” Mary Sarojini was astonished. “Not even when you were at school?”

Will had a vision of his headmaster in full canonicals conducting three hundred black-coated boys on a tour of the Lying-In Hospital. “Not even at school,” he said aloud.

“You never saw anybody dying, and you never saw anybody having a baby. How did you get to know things?”

“In the school *I* went to,” he said, “we never got to know things, we only got to know words.”

The child looked up at him, shook her head and, lifting a small brown hand, significantly tapped her forehead. “Crazy,” she said. “Or were your teachers just stupid?”

Will laughed. “They were high-minded educators dedicated to *mens sana in corpore sano* and the maintenance of our sublime Western Tradition. But meanwhile tell me something. Weren’t you ever frightened?”

“By people having babies?”

“No, by people dying. Didn’t that scare you?”

“Well, yes — it did,” she said after a moment of silence.

“So what did you do about it?”

“I did what they teach you to do — tried to find out which of me was frightened and why she was frightened.”

“And which of you was it?”

“This one.” Mary Sarojini pointed a forefinger into her open mouth. “The one that does all the talking. Little Miss Gibber — that’s what Vijaya calls her. She’s always talking about all the nasty things I remember, all the huge, wonderful impossible things I imagine I can do. She’s the one that gets frightened.”

“Why is she so frightened?”

“I suppose it’s because she gets talking about all the awful things that might happen to her. Talking out loud or talking to herself. But there’s another one who doesn’t get frightened.”

“Which one is that?”

“The one that doesn’t talk — just looks and listens and feels what’s going on inside. And sometimes,” Mary Sarojini added, “sometimes she suddenly sees how beautiful everything is. No, that’s wrong. *She* sees it all the time, but *I* don’t — not unless she makes me notice it. That’s when it suddenly happens. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! Even dogs’ messes.” She pointed at a formidable specimen almost at their feet.

From the narrow street they had emerged into the market place. The last of the sunlight still touched the sculptured spire of the temple, the little pink gazebos on the roof of the town hall; but here in the square there was a premonition of twilight and under the great banyan tree it was already night. On the stalls between its pillars and hanging ropes the market women had turned on their lights. In the leafy darkness there were islands of form and colour, and from hardly visible nonentity brown-skinned figures stepped for a moment into brilliant existence, then back again into nothingness. The spaces between the tall buildings echoed with a confusion of English and Palanese, of talk and laughter, of street cries and whistled tunes, of dogs barking, parrots screaming. Perched oh one of the pink gazebos, a pair of mynah birds calling indefatigably for attention and compassion. From an open-air kitchen at the centre of the square rose the appetizing smell of food on the fire. Onions, peppers, turmeric, fish frying, cakes

baking, rice on the boil — and through these good gross odours, like a reminder from the Other Shore, drifted the perfume, thin and sweet and ethereally pure, of the many-coloured garlands on sale beside the fountain.

Twilight deepened and suddenly, from high overhead, the arc lamps were turned on. Bright and burnished against the rosy copper of oiled skin, the women's necklaces and rings and bracelets came alive with glittering reflections. Seen in the downward-striking light, every contour became more dramatic, every form seemed to be more substantial, more solidly there. In eye sockets, under nose and chin, the shadows deepened. Modelled by light and darkness young breasts grew fuller and the faces of the old were more emphatically lined and hollowed.

Hand in hand they made their way through the crowd.

A middle-aged woman greeted Mary Sarojini, then turned to Will, "Are you that man from the Outside?" she asked.

"Almost infinitely from the outside," he assured her.

She looked at him for a moment in silence, then smiled encouragingly and patted his cheek.

"We're all very sorry for you," she said.

They moved on, and now they were standing on the fringes of a group assembled at the foot of the temple steps to listen to a young man who was playing a long-necked, lute-like instrument and singing in Palanese. Rapid declamation alternated with long-drawn, almost bird-like melismata on a single vowel sound, and then a cheerful and strongly accented tune that ended in a shout. A roar of laughter went up from the crowd. A few more bars, another line or two of recitative and the singer struck his final chord. There was applause and more laughter and a chorus of incomprehensible commentary.

"What's it all about?" Will asked.

"It's about girls and boys sleeping together," Mary Sarojini answered.

"Oh — I see." He felt a pang of guilty embarrassment; but looking down into the child's untroubled face, he could see that his concern was uncalled for. It was

evident that boys and girls sleeping together were as completely to be taken for granted as going to school or eating three meals a day — or dying.

“And the part that made them laugh,” Mary Sarojini went on, “was where he said the Future Buddha won’t have to leave home and sit under the Bodhi Tree. He’ll have his Enlightenment while he’s in bed with the princess.”

“Do you think that’s a good idea?” Will asked.

She nodded emphatically. “It would mean that the princess would be enlightened too.”

“You’re perfectly right,” said Will. “Being a man, I hadn’t thought of the princess.”

The lute player plucked a queer unfamiliar progression of chords, followed them with a ripple of arpeggios and began to sing, this time in English.

Everyone talks of sex; take none of them
seriously —
Not whore nor hermit, neither Paul nor Freud.
Love — and your lips, her breasts will change

mysteriously
Into Themselves, the Suchness and the Void.

The door of the temple swung open. A smell of incense mingled with the ambient onions and fried fish. An old woman emerged and very cautiously lowered her unsteady weight from stair to stair.

"Who were Paul and Freud?" Mary Sarojini asked as they moved away.

Will began with a brief account of Original Sin and the Scheme of Redemption. The child heard him out with concentrated attention.

"No wonder the song says, Don't take them seriously," she concluded.

"After which," said Will, "we come to Dr Freud and the Oedipus Complex."

"Oedipus?" Mary Sarojini repeated. "But that's the name of a marionette show. I saw it last week, and they're giving it again tonight. Would you like to see it? It's nice."

"Nice?" he repeated. "Nice? Even when the old lady turns out to be his mother and hangs herself? Even when Oedipus puts out his eyes?"

"But he doesn't put out his eyes," said Mary Sarojini.

"He does where *I* hail from."

"Not here. He only says he's going to put out his eyes, and she only tries to hang herself. They're talked out of it."

"Who by?"

"The boy and girl from Pala."

"How do *they* get into the act?" Will asked.

"I don't know. They're just there. '*Oedipus in Pala*' — that's what the play is called. So why shouldn't they be there?"

"And you say they talk Jocasta out of suicide and Oedipus out of blinding himself?"

"Just in the nick of time. She's slipped the rope round her neck and he's got hold of two huge pins. But the boy and girl from Pala tell them not to be silly. After all, it was an accident. He didn't know that the old man was his father. And anyhow the old man began it, hit him over the head, and that made Oedipus

lose his temper — and nobody had ever taught him to dance the Rakshasi Hornpipe. And when they made him a king, he had to marry the old queen. She was really his mother; but neither of them knew it. And of course all they had to do when they did find out was just to stop being married. That stuff about marrying his mother being the reason why everybody had to die of a virus — all that was just nonsense, just made up by a lot of poor stupid people who didn't know any better."

"Dr Freud thought that all little boys really want to marry their mothers and kill their fathers. And the other way round for little girls — *they* want to marry their fathers."

"Which fathers and mothers?" Mary Sarojini asked. "We have such a lot of them."

"You mean, in your Mutual Adoption Club?"

"There's twenty-two of them in our MAC."

"Safety in numbers!"

"But of course poor old Oedipus never had an MAC. And besides they'd taught him all that horrible stuff about God getting furious with people every time they made a mistake."

They had pushed their way through the crowd and now found themselves at the entrance to a small roped-off enclosure, in which a hundred or more spectators had already taken their seats. At the further end of the enclosure the gaily painted proscenium of a puppet theatre glowed red and gold in the light of powerful floodlamps. Pulling out a handful of the small change with which Dr Robert had provided him, Will paid for two tickets. They entered and sat down on a bench.

A gong sounded, the curtain of the little proscenium noiselessly rose and there, white pillars on a pea-green ground, was the façade of the royal palace of Thebes with a much-whiskered divinity sitting in a cloud above the pediment. A priest exactly like the god, except that he was somewhat smaller and less exuberantly draped, entered from the right, bowed to the audience, then turned towards the palace and shouted "Oedipus" in piping tones that seemed comically

incongruous with his prophetic beard. To a flourish of trumpets the door swung open and, crowned and heroically buskined, the king appeared. The priest made obeisance, the royal puppet gave him leave to speak.

“Give ear to our afflictions,” the old man piped.

The king cocked his head and listened.

“I hear the groans of dying men,” he said. “I hear the shriek of widows, the sobbing of the motherless, the mutterings of prayer and supplication.”

“Supplication!” said the deity in the clouds. “That’s the spirit.” He patted himself on the chest.

“They had some kind of a virus,” Mary Sarojini explained in a whisper. “Like Asian flu, only a lot worse.”

“We repeat the appropriate litanies,” the old priest querulously piped, “we offer the most expensive sacrifices, we have the whole population living in chastity and flagellating itself every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. But the flood of death spreads ever more widely, rises higher and ever higher. So help us, King Oedipus, help us.”

“Only a god can help.”

“Hear, hear!” shouted the presiding deity.

“But by what means?”

“Only a god can say.”

“Correct,” said the god in his *basso profondo*, “absolutely correct.”

“Creon, my wife’s brother, has gone to consult the oracle. When he returns — as very soon he must — we shall know what heaven advises.”

“What heaven bloody well commands!” the *basso profondo* emended.

“Were people *really* so silly?” Mary Sarojini asked, as the audience laughed.

“Really and truly,” Will assured her.

A phonograph started to play the Dead March in *Saul*.

From left to right a black-robed procession of mourners carrying sheeted biers passed slowly across the front of the stage. Puppet after puppet — and as soon as the group had disappeared on the right it would be brought in again from the left. The procession seemed endless, the corpses innumerable.

“Dead,” said Oedipus as he watched them pass. “And another dead. And yet another, another.”

“That’ll teach them!” the *basso profondo* broke in. “I’ll learn you to be a toad!”

Oedipus continued,

“*The soldier’s bier, the whore’s; the babe stone-cold*
Pressed to the ache of unsucked breasts; the youth in horror
Turning away from the black swollen face
That from his moonlit pillow once looked up,
Eager for kisses. Dead, all dead,
Mourned by the soon to die and by the doomed
Borne with reluctant footing to the abhorred
Garden of cypresses where one huge pit
Yawns to receive them, stinking to the moon.”

While he was speaking, two new puppets, a boy and a girl in the gayest of Palanese finery, entered from the right and, moving in the opposite direction to the black-robed mourners, took their stand arm in arm, downstage and a little left of centre.

“But we, meanwhile,” said the boy when Oedipus had finished,

“*Are bound for rosier gardens and the absurd*
Apocalyptic rite that in the mind
Calls forth from the touched skin and melting flesh
The immanent Infinite.”

“What about Me?” the *basso profondo* rumbled from the welkin. “You seem to forget that I’m Wholly Other.”

Endlessly the black procession to the cemetery still shuffled on. But now the Dead March was interrupted in mid-phrase. Music gave place to a single deep

note — tuba and double bass — prolonged interminably. The boy in the foreground held up his hand.

“Listen! The drone, the everlasting burden.”

In unison with the unseen instruments the mourners began to chant. “Death, death, death, death …”

“But life knows more than one note,” said the boy.

“Life,” the girl chimed in, “can sing both high and low.”

“And your unceasing drone of death serves only to make a richer music.”

“A richer music,” the girl repeated.

And with that, tenor and treble, they started to vocalize a wandering arabesque of sound wreathed, as it were, about the long rigid shaft of the ground bass.

The drone and the singing diminished gradually into silence; the last of the mourners disappeared and the boy and girl in the foreground retired to a corner where they could go on with their kissing undisturbed.

There was another flourish of trumpets and, obese in a purple tunic, in came Creon, fresh from Delphi and primed with oracles. For the next few minutes the dialogue was all in Palanese, and Mary Sarojini had to act as interpreter.

“Oedipus asks him what God said; and the other one says that what God said was that it was all because of some man having killed the old king, the one before Oedipus. Nobody had ever caught him, and the man was still living in Thebes, and this virus that was killing everybody had been sent by God — that’s what Creon says he was told — as a punishment. I don’t know why all these people who hadn’t done anything to anybody had to be punished; but that’s what he says God said. And the virus won’t stop till they catch the man that killed the old king and send him away from Thebes. And of course Oedipus says he’s going to do everything he can to find the man and get rid of him.”

From his downstage corner the boy began to declaim, this time in English.

“*God, most Himself when most sublimely vague,*

Talks, when His talk is plain, the ungodliest bosh.

Repent, He roars, for Sin has caused the plague.
But we say 'Dirt — so wash.'"

While the audience was still laughing, another group of mourners emerged from the wings and slowly crossed the stage.

"*Karuna*," said the girl in the foreground, "compassion. The suffering of the stupid is as real as any other suffering."

Feeling a touch on his arm, Will turned and found himself looking into the beautiful sulky face of young Murugan.

"I've been hunting for you everywhere," he said angrily, as though Will had concealed himself on purpose, just to annoy him. He spoke so loudly that many heads were turned and there were calls for quiet.

"You weren't at Dr Robert's, you weren't at Susila's," the boy nagged on, regardless of the protests.

"Quiet, quiet …"

"Quiet!" came a tremendous shout from Basso Profondo in the clouds. "Things have come to a pretty pass," the voice added grumblingly, "when God simply can't hear himself speak."

"Hear, hear," said Will, joining in the general laughter. He rose, and followed by Murugan and Mary Sarojini, hobbled towards the exit.

"Didn't you want to see the end?" Mary Sarojini asked, and turning to Murugan, "You really might have waited," she said in a tone of reproof.

"Mind your own business!" Murugan snapped.

Will laid a hand on the child's shoulder. "Luckily," he said, "your account of the end was so vivid that I don't have to see it with my own eyes. And of course," he added ironically, "His Highness must always come first."

Murugan pulled an envelope out of the pocket of those white silk pyjamas which had so bedazzled the little nurse and handed it to Will. "From my Mother." And he added, "It's urgent."

"How good it smells!" Mary Sarojini commented, sniffing at the rich aura of sandalwood that surrounded the Rani's missive.

Will unfolded three sheets of heaven-blue notepaper embossed with five golden lotuses under a princely crown. How many underlinings, what a profusion of capital letters! He started to read.

"*Ma Petite Voix, cher Farnaby, avait raison* — AS USUAL! I had been TOLD again and again what Our Mutual Friend was predestined to do for poor little Pala and (through the financial support which Pala will permit him to contribute to the Crusade of the Spirit) for the WHOLE WORLD. So when I read his cable (which arrived a few minutes ago, by way of the faithful Bahu and his diplomatic colleague in London), it came as NO surprise to learn that Lord A has given you *Full Powers* (and, it goes without saying, the WHEREWITHAL) to negotiate on his behalf — on *our* behalf; for his advantage is also yours, mine and (since in our different ways we are all Crusaders) the SPIRIT'S!!

But the arrival of Lord A's cable is not the only piece of news I have to report. Events (as we learned this afternoon from Bahu) are *rushing* towards the Great Turning Point of Palanese History — rushing far more rapidly than I had previously thought to be possible. For reasons which are partly political (the need to offset a recent decline in Colonel D's popularity), partly Economic (the burdens of Defence are too onerous to be borne by Rendang alone) and partly Astrological (these days, say the Experts, are *uniquely* favourable for a joint venture by Rams — myself and Murugan — and that *typical* Scorpion, Colonel D.) it has been decided to precipitate an Action originally planned for the night of the lunar eclipse next November. This being so, it is essential that the three of us here should meet *without delay* to decide what must be Done, in these new and swiftly changing Circumstances, to promote our special interests, material and Spiritual. The so-called 'Accident' which brought you to our shores at this most Critical Moment was, as you must recognize, Manifestly Providential. It remains for us to collaborate, as dedicated Crusaders, with that divine POWER which has so unequivocally espoused our Cause. So COME AT ONCE! Murugan has the motor car and will bring you to our modest Bungalow, where, I

assure you, my dear Farnaby, you will receive a *very* warm welcome from *bien sincèrement vôtre*, Fatima R."

Will folded up the three odorous sheets of scrawled blue paper and replaced them in their envelope. His face was expressionless; but behind this mask of indifference he was violently angry. Angry with this ill-mannered boy before him, so ravishing in his white silk pyjamas, so odious in his spoiled silliness. Angry, as he caught another whiff of the letter, with that grotesque monster of a woman, who had begun by ruining her son in the name of mother love and chastity, and was now egging him on, in the name of God and an assortment of Ascended Masters, to become a bomb-dropping spiritual crusader under the oily banner of Joe Aldehyde. Angry, above all, with himself for having so wantonly become involved with this ludicrously sinister couple, in heaven only knew what kind of a vile plot against all the human decencies that his refusal to take yes for an answer had never prevented him from secretly believing in and (how passionately!) longing for.

"Well, shall we go?" said Murugan in a tone of airy confidence. He was evidently assuming as axiomatic that, when Fatima R. issued a command, obedience must necessarily be complete and unhesitating.

Feeling the need to give himself a little more time to cool off, Will made no immediate answer. Instead, he turned away to look at the now distant puppets. Jocasta, Oedipus and Creon were sitting on the Palace steps, waiting, presumably for the arrival of Tiresias. Overhead, Basso Profondo was momentarily napping. A party of black-robed mourners was crossing the stage. Near the footlights the boy from Pala had begun to declaim in blank verse.

"*Light and Compassion*," he was saying,
"*Light and Compassion — how unutterably*
Simple our Substance! But the Simple waited,
Age after age, for intricacies sufficient
To know their One in multitude, their Everything

Here, now, their Fact in fiction; waited and still
Waits on the absurd, on incommensurables
Seamlessly interwoven — oestrin with
Charity, truth with kidney function, beauty
With chyle, bile, sperm, and God with dinner, God
With dinner's absence or the sound of bells
Suddenly — one, two, three — in sleepless ears."

There was a ripple of plucked strings, then the long-drawn notes of a flute.

"Shall we go?" Murugan repeated.

But Will held up his hand for silence. The girl puppet had moved to the centre of the stage and was singing.

"*Thought is the brain's three milliards*
Of cells from the inside out.

Billions of games of billiards
Marked up as Faith and Doubt.

My Faith, but their collisions;
My logic, their enzymes;
Their pink epinephrin, my visions;
Their white epinephrin, my crimes.

Since I am the felt arrangement
Of ten to the ninth times three,

Each atom in its estrangement
Must yet be prophetic of me."

Losing all patience, Murugan caught hold of Will's arm and gave him a savage pinch. "Are you coming?" he shouted.

Will turned on him angrily. "What the devil do you think you're doing, you little fool?" He jerked his arm out of the boy's grasp.

Intimidated, Murugan changed his tone. "I just wanted to know if you were ready to come to my mother's."

"I'm not ready," Will answered, "because I'm not going."

"Not going?" Murugan cried in a tone of incredulous amazement. "But she expects you, she …"

"Tell your mother I'm very sorry, but I have a prior engagement. With someone who's dying," Will added.

"But this is frightfully important."

"So is dying."

Murugan lowered his voice. "Something's happening," he whispered.

"I can't hear you," Will shouted through the confused noises of the crowd.

Murugan glanced about him apprehensively, then risked a somewhat louder whisper. "Something's happening, something tremendous."

"Something even more tremendous is happening at the hospital."

"We just heard …" Murugan began. He looked around again, then shook his head. "No, I can't tell you — not here. That's why you *must* come to the bungalow. *Now*, There's no time to lose."

Will glanced at his watch. "No time to lose," he echoed and, turning to Mary Sarojini, "We must get going," he said. "Which way?"

"I'll show you," she said, and they set off hand in hand.

"Wait," Murugan implored, "wait!" Then, as Will and Mary Sarojini held on their course, he came dodging through the crowd in pursuit. "What shall I tell her?" he wailed at their heels.

The boy's terror was comically abject. In Will's mind anger gave place to amusement. He laughed aloud. Then, halting, "What would *you* tell her, Mary Sarojini?" he asked.

"I'd tell her exactly what happened," said the child. "I mean, if it was *my* mother. But then," she added on second thought, "my mother isn't the Rani." She looked up at Murugan. "Do you belong to an MAC?" she enquired.

Of course he didn't. For the Rani the very idea of a Mutual Adoption Club was a blasphemy. Only God could make a Mother. The Spiritual Crusader wanted to be alone with her God-given victim.

"No MAC." Mary Sarojini shook her head. "That's awful! You might have gone and stayed for a few days with one of your other mothers."

Still terrified by the prospect of having to tell his only mother about the failure of his mission, Murugan began to harp almost hysterically on a new variant of the old theme. "I don't know what she'll say," he kept repeating. "I don't know what she'll say."

"There's only one way to find out what she'll say," Will told him. "Go home and listen."

"Come with me," Murugan begged. "Please." He clutched at Will's arm.

"I told you not to touch me." The clutching hand was hastily withdrawn. Will smiled again. "That's better!" He raised his staff in a farewell gesture. "*Bonne nuit, Altesse*." Then to Mary Sarojini, "Lead on, MacPhail," he said in high good humour.

"Were you putting it on?" Mary Sarojini asked. "Or were you really angry?"

"Really and truly," he assured her. Then he remembered what he had seen in the school gymnasium. He hummed the opening notes of the Rakshasi Hornpipe and banged the pavement with his ironshod staff.

"Ought I to have stamped it out?"

"Maybe it would have been better."

"You think so?"

"He's going to hate you as soon as he's stopped being frightened."

Will shrugged his shoulders. He couldn't care less. But as the past receded and the future approached, as they left the arc lamps of the market place and climbed the steep dark street that wound uphill to the hospital, his mood began to change. Lead on, MacPhail — but towards what, and away from what? Towards yet another manifestation of the Essential Horror and away from all hope of that blessed year of freedom which Joe Aldehyde had promised and that it would be so easy and (since Pala was doomed in any event) not so immoral or treacherous to earn. And not only away from the hope of freedom; away quite possibly if the Rani complained to Joe and if Joe became sufficiently indignant, from any further prospects of well-paid slavery as a professional execution-watcher. Should he turn back, should he try to find Murugan, offer apologies, do whatever that dreadful woman ordered him to do? A hundred yards up the road, the lights of the hospital could be seen shining between the trees.

"Let's rest for a moment," he said.

"Are you tired?" Mary Sarojini enquired solicitously.

"A little."

He turned and, leaning on his staff, looked down at the market place. In the light of the arc lamps, the town hall glowed pink, like a monumental serving of raspberry sherbet. On the temple spire he could see, frieze above frieze, the exuberant chaos of Indic sculpture — elephants, demons, girls with supernatural breasts and bottoms, capering Shivas, rows of past and future Buddhas in quiet ecstasy. Below in the space between sherbet and mythology, seethed the crowd, and somewhere in that crowd was a sulky face and a pair of white satin pyjamas. Should he go back? It would be the sensible, the safe, the prudent thing to do. But an inner voice — not little, like the Rani's, but stentorian — shouted, 'Squalid! Squalid!' Conscience? No. Morality? Heaven forbid! But supererogatory squalor, ugliness and vulgarity beyond the call of duty — these were things which, as a man of taste, one simply couldn't be a party to.

"Well, shall we go on?" he said to Mary Sarojini.

They entered the lobby of the hospital. The nurse at the desk had a message for them from Susila. Mary Sarojini was to go directly to Mrs Rao's, where she

and Tom Krishna would spend the night. Mr Farnaby was to be asked to come at once to Room 34.

“This way,” said the nurse, and held open a swing door.

Will stepped forward. The conditioned reflex of politeness clicked automatically into action. “Thank you,” he said, and smiled. But it was with a dull, sick feeling in the pit of the stomach that he went hobbling towards the apprehended future.

“The last door on the left,” said the nurse. But now she had to get back to her desk in the lobby. “So I’ll leave you to go on alone,” she added as the door closed behind her.

Alone, he repeated to himself, alone — and the apprehended future was identical with the haunting past, the Essential Horror was timeless and ubiquitous. This long corridor with its green-painted walls was the very same corridor along which, a year ago, he had walked to the little room where Molly lay dying. The nightmare was recurrent. Foredoomed and conscious, he moved on towards its horrible consummation. Death, yet another vision of death.

Thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four … He knocked and waited, listening to the beating of his heart. The door opened and he found himself face to face with little Radha.

“Susila was expecting you,” she whispered.

Will followed her into the room. Rounding a screen, he caught a glimpse of Susila’s profile silhouetted against a lamp, of a high bed, of a dark emaciated face on the pillow, of arms that were no more than parchment-covered bones, of claw-like hands. Once again the Essential Horror. With a shudder he turned away. Radha motioned him to a chair near the open window. He sat down and closed his eyes — closed them physically against the present, but, by that very act, opened them inwardly upon that hateful past of which the present had reminded him. He was there in that other room, with Aunt Mary. Or rather with the person who had once been Aunt Mary, but was now this hardly recognizable somebody else — somebody who had never so much as heard of the charity and courage which had been the very essence of Aunt Mary’s being; somebody who

was filled with an indiscriminate hatred for all who came near her, loathing them, whoever they might be, simply because they didn't have cancer, because they weren't in pain, had not been sentenced to die before their time. And along with this malignant envy of other people's health and happiness had gone a bitterly querulous self-pity, an abject despair.

"Why to me? Why should this thing have happened to me?"

He could hear the shrill complaining voice, could see that tear-stained and distorted face. The only person he had ever really loved or whole-heartedly admired. And yet, in her degradation, he had caught himself despising her — despising, positively hating.

To escape from the past, he re-opened his eyes. Radha, he saw, was sitting on the floor, cross-legged and upright, in the posture of meditation. In her chair beside the bed Susila seemed to be holding the same kind of focused stillness. He looked at the face on the pillow. That too was still, still with a serenity that might almost have been the frozen calm of death. Outside, in the leafy darkness, a peacock suddenly screamed. Deepened by contrast, the ensuing silence seemed to grow pregnant with mysterious and appalling meanings.

"Lakshmi." Susila laid a hand on the old woman's wasted arm. "Lakshmi," she said again more loudly. The death-calm face remained impassive. "You mustn't go to sleep."

Not go to sleep? But for Aunt Mary, sleep — the artificial sleep that followed the injections — had been the only respite from the self-lacerations of self-pity and brooding fear.

"Lakshmi!"

The face came to life.

"I wasn't really asleep," the old woman whispered. "It's just my being so weak. I seem to float away."

"But you've got to be here," said Susila. "You've got to know you're here. All the time." She slipped an additional pillow under the sick woman's shoulders and reached for a bottle of smelling salts that stood on the bed table.

Lakshmi sniffed, opened her eyes and looked up into Susila's face. "I'd forgotten how beautiful you were," she said. "But then Dugald always did have good taste." The ghost of a mischievous smile appeared for a moment on the fleshless face. "What do you think, Susila?" she added after a moment and in another tone. "Shall we see him again? I mean, over there?"

In silence Susila stroked the old woman's hand. Then, suddenly smiling, "How would the Old Raja have asked that question?" she said. "*Do you think 'we' (quote, unquote) shall see 'him' (quote, unquote) 'over there' (quote, unquote).*"

"But what do *you* think?"

"I think we've all come out of the same light, and we're all going back into the same light."

Words, Will was thinking, words, words, words. With an effort, Lakshmi lifted a hand and pointed accusingly at the lamp on the bed table.

"It glares in my eyes," she whispered.

Susila untied the red silk handkerchief knotted around her throat and draped it over the lamp's parchment shade. From white and mercilessly revealing, the light became as dimly, warmly rosy as the flush, Will found himself thinking, on Babs's rumpled bed, whenever Porter's Gin proclaimed itself in crimson.

"That's much better," said Lakshmi. She shut her eyes. Then, after a long silence, "The light," she broke out, "the light. It's here again." Then after another pause, "Oh, how wonderful," she whispered at last, "how wonderful!" Suddenly she winced and bit her lip.

Susila took the old woman's hand in both of hers. "Is the pain bad?" she asked.

"It would be bad," Lakshmi explained, "if it were really *my* pain. But somehow it isn't. The pain's here; but I'm somewhere else. It's like what you discover with the *moksha*-medicine. Nothing really belongs to you. Not even your pain."

"Is the light still there?"

Lakshmi shook her head. “And looking back, I can tell you exactly when it went away. It went away when I started talking about the pain not being really mine.”

“And yet what you were saying was good.”

“I know — but I was *saying* it.” The ghost of an old habit of irreverent mischief flitted once again across Lakshmi’s face.

“What are you thinking of?” Susila asked.

“Socrates.”

“Socrates?”

“Gibber, gibber, gibber — even when he’d actually swallowed the stuff. Don’t let me talk, Susila. Help me to get out of my own light.”

“Do you remember that time last year,” Susila began after a silence, “when we all went up to the old Shiva temple above the High Altitude Station? You and Robert and Dugald and me and the two children — do you remember?”

Lakshmi smiled with pleasure at the recollection.

“I’m thinking specially of that view from the west side of the temple — the view out over the sea. Blue, green, purple — and the shadows of the clouds were like ink. And the clouds themselves — snow, lead, charcoal, satin. And while we were looking, you asked a question. Do you remember, Lakshmi?”

“You mean, about the Clear Light?”

“About the Clear Light,” Susila confirmed. “Why do people speak of Mind in terms of Light? Is it because they’ve seen the sunshine and found it so beautiful that it seems only natural to identify the Buddha Nature with the clearest of all possible Clear Lights? Or do they find the sunshine beautiful because, consciously or unconsciously, they’ve been having revelations of Mind in the form of Light ever since they were born? I was the first to answer,” said Susila, smiling to herself. “And as I’d just been reading something by some American Behaviourist, I didn’t stop to think — I just gave you the (quote, unquote) ‘scientific point of view’. People equate Mind (whatever *that* may be) with hallucinations of light, because they’ve looked at a lot of sunsets and found them very impressive. But Robert and Dugald would have none of it. The Clear Light,

they insisted, comes first. You go mad about sunsets because sunsets remind you of what's always been going on, whether you knew it or not, inside your skull and outside space and time. You agreed with them, Lakshmi — do you remember? You said, 'I'd like to be on your side, Susila, if only because it isn't good for these men of ours to be right *all* the time. But in this case — surely it's pretty obvious — in this case they *are* right.' Of course they were right, and of course I was hopelessly wrong. And, needless to say, you had known the right answer before you ever asked the question."

"I never *knew* anything," Lakshmi whispered. "I could only *see*."

"I remember your telling me about seeing the Clear Light," said Susila. "Would you like me to remind you of it?"

The sick woman nodded her head.

"When you were eight years old," said Susila. "That was the first time. An orange butterfly on a leaf, opening and shutting its wings in the sunshine — and suddenly there was the Clear Light of pure Suchness blazing through it, like another sun."

"Much brighter than the sun," Lakshmi whispered.

"But much gentler. You can look into the Clear Light and not be blinded. And now remember it. A butterfly on a green leaf, opening and shutting its wings — and it's the Buddha Nature totally present, it's the Clear Light outshining the sun. And you were only eight years old."

"What had I done to deserve it?"

Will found himself remembering that evening, a week or so before her death, when Aunt Mary had talked about the wonderful times they had had together in her little Regency house near Arundel where he had spent the better part of all his holidays. Smoking out the wasps' nests with fire and brimstone, having picnics on the downs or under the beeches. And then the sausage rolls at Bognor, the gypsy fortune teller who had prophesied that he would end up as Chancellor of the Exchequer, the black-robed, red-nosed verger who had chased them out of Chichester Cathedral because they laughed too much. "Laughed too much," Aunt Mary had repeated bitterly. "*Laughed* too much …"

“And now,” Susila was saying, “think of that view from the Shiva temple. Think of those lights and shadows on the sea, those blue spaces between the clouds. Think of them, and then let go of your thinking. Let go of it, so that the not-Thought can come through. Things into Emptiness, Emptiness into Suchness. Suchness into things again, into your own mind. Remember what it says in the Sutra. ‘Your own consciousness shining, void, inseparable from the great Body of Radiance, is subject neither to birth nor death, but is the same as the immutable Light, Buddha Amitabha.’”

“The same as the light,” Lakshmi repeated. “And yet it’s all dark again.”

“It’s dark because you’re trying too hard,” said Susila. “Dark because you want it to be light. Remember what you used to tell me when I was a little girl. ‘Lightly, child, lightly. You’ve got to learn to do everything lightly. Think lightly, act lightly, feel lightly. Yes, feel lightly, even though you’re feeling deeply. Just lightly let things happen and lightly cope with them.’ I was so preposterously serious in those days, such a humourless little prig. Lightly, lightly — it was the best advice ever given me. Well, now I’m going to say the same thing to you, Lakshmi … Lightly, my darling, lightly. Even when it comes to dying. Nothing ponderous, or portentous, or emphatic. No rhetoric, no tremolos, no self-conscious persona putting on its celebrated imitation of Christ or Goethe or Little Nell. And of course, no theology, no metaphysics. Just the fact of dying and the fact of the Clear Light. So throw away all your baggage and go forward. There are quicksands all about you, sucking at your feet, trying to suck you down into fear and self-pity and despair. That’s why you must walk so lightly. Lightly, my darling. On tiptoes; and no luggage, not even a sponge-bag. Completely unencumbered.”

Completely unencumbered … Will thought of poor Aunt Mary sinking deeper and deeper with every step into the quicksands. Deeper and deeper until, struggling and protesting to the last, she had gone down, completely and forever, into the Essential Horror. He looked again at the fleshless face on the pillow and saw that it was smiling.

“The Light,” came the hoarse whisper, “the Clear Light. It’s here — along with the pain, in spite of the pain.”

“And where are *you*?” Susila asked.

“Over there, in the corner.” Lakshmi tried to point, but the raised hand faltered and fell back, inert, on the coverlet. “I can see myself there. And she can see my body on the bed.”

“Can she see the Light?”

“No. The Light’s here, where my body is.”

The door of the sickroom was quietly opened. Will turned his head and was in time to see Dr Robert’s small spare figure emerging from behind the screen into the rosy twilight.

Susila rose and motioned him to her place beside the bed. Dr Robert sat down and, leaning forward, took his wife’s hand in one of his and laid the other on her forehead.

“It’s me,” he whispered.

“At last …”

A tree, he explained, had fallen across the telephone line. No communication with the High Altitude Station except by road. They had sent a messenger in a car, and the car had broken down. More than two hours had been lost. “But thank goodness,” Dr Robert concluded, “here I finally am.”

The dying woman sighed profoundly, opened her eyes for a moment and looked up at him with a smile, then closed them again. “I knew you’d come.”

“Lakshmi,” he said very softly. “Lakshmi.” He drew the tips of his fingers across the wrinkled forehead, again and again. “My little love.” There were tears on his cheeks; but his voice was firm and he spoke with the tenderness, not of weakness, but of power.

“I’m not over there any more,” Lakshmi whispered.

“She was over there in the corner,” Susila explained to her father-in-law. “Looking at her body here on the bed.”

“But now I’ve come back. Me and the pain, me and the Light, me and you — all together.”

The peacock screamed again and, through the insect noises that in this tropical night were the equivalent of silence, far off but clear, came the sound of gay music, flutes and plucked strings and the steady throbbing of drums.

"Listen," said Dr Robert. "Can you hear it? They're dancing."

"Dancing," Lakshmi repeated. "Dancing."

"Dancing so lightly," Susila whispered. "As though they had wings."

The music swelled up again into audibility.

"It's the Courting Dance," Susila went on.

"The Courting Dance. Robert, do you remember?"

"Could I ever forget?"

Yes, Will said to himself, could one ever forget? Could one ever forget that other distant music and, near by, unnaturally quick and shallow, the sound of dying breath in a boy's ears? In the house across the street somebody was practising one of those Brahms Waltzes that Aunt Mary had loved to play. One-two and three and One-two and three and O-o-o-ne two three, One — and One and Two-Three and One and … The odious stranger who had once been Aunt Mary stirred out of her artificial stupor and opened her eyes. An expression of the most intense malignity had appeared on the yellow, wasted face. "Go and tell them to stop," the harsh unrecognizable voice had almost screamed. And then the lines of malignity had changed into the lines of despair, and the stranger, the pitiable odious stranger started to sob uncontrollably. Those Brahms Waltzes — they were the pieces, out of all her repertory, that Frank had loved best.

Another gust of cool air brought with it a louder strain of the gay, bright music.

"All those young people dancing together," said Dr Robert, "All that laughter and desire, all that uncomplicated happiness. It's all here, like an atmosphere, like a field of force. Their joy and our love — Susila's love, my love — all working together, all reinforcing one another. Love and joy enveloping you, my darling; love and joy carrying you up into the peace of the Clear Light. Listen to the music. Can you still hear it, Lakshmi?"

"She's drifted away again," said Susila. "Try to bring her back."

Dr Robert slipped an arm under the emaciated body and lifted it into a sitting posture. The head drooped sideways on to his shoulder.

"My little love," he kept whispering. "My little love …"

Her eyelids fluttered open for a moment. "Brighter," came the barely audible whisper, "brighter." And a smile of happiness intense almost to the point of elation transfigured her face.

Through his tears Dr Robert smiled back at her. "So now you can let go, my darling." He stroked her grey hair. "Now you can let go. Let go," he insisted. "Let go of this poor old body. You don't need it any more. Let it fall away from you. Leave it lying here like a pile of worn-out clothes."

In the fleshless face the mouth had fallen open, and suddenly the breathing became stertorous.

"My love, my little love …" Dr Robert held her more closely. "Let go now, let go. Leave it here, your old worn-out body, and go on. Go on, my darling go on into the Light, into the peace, into the living peace of the Clear Light …"

Susila picked up one of the limp hands and kissed it, then turned to little Radha.

"Time to go," she whispered, touching the girl's shoulder.

Interrupted in her meditation, Radha opened her eyes, nodded and, scrambling to her feet, tiptoed silently towards the door. Susila beckoned to Will and, together, they followed her. In silence the three of them walked along the corridor. At the swing door Radha took her leave.

"Thank you for letting me be with you," she whispered.

Susila kissed her. "Thank *you* for helping to make it easier for Lakshmi."

Will followed Susila across the lobby and out into the warm odorous darkness. In silence they started to walk downhill towards the market place.

"And now," he said at last, speaking under a strange compulsion to deny his emotion in a display of the cheapest kind of cynicism, "I suppose she's trotting off to do a little *maithuna* with her boy friend."

"As a matter of fact," said Susila calmly, "she's on night duty. But if she weren't, what would be the objection to her going on from the yoga of death to

the yoga of love?”

Will did not answer immediately. He was thinking of what had happened between himself and Babs on the evening of Molly’s funeral. The yoga of anti-love, the yoga of resented addiction, of lust and the self-loathing that reinforces the self and makes it yet more loathsome.

“I’m sorry I tried to be unpleasant,” he said at last.

“It’s your father’s ghost. We’ll have to see if we can exorcise it.”

They had crossed the market place and now, at the end of the short street that led out of the village, they had come to the open space where the jeep was parked. As Susila turned on to the highway, the beam of their headlamps swept across a small green car that was turning downhill into the by-pass.

“Don’t I recognize the royal Baby Austin?”

“You do,” said Susila, and wondered where the Rani and Murugan could be going at this time of night.

“They’re up to no good,” Will guessed. And on a sudden impulse he told Susila of his roving commission from Joe Aldehyde, his dealings with the Queen Mother and Mr Bahu.

“You’d be justified in deporting me tomorrow,” he concluded.

“Not now that you’ve changed your mind,” she assured him. “And anyhow nothing you did could have affected the real issue. Our enemy is oil in general. Whether we’re exploited by South-East Asia Petroleum or Standard of California makes no difference.”

“Did you know that Murugan and the Rani were conspiring against you?”

“They make no secret of it.”

“Then why don’t you get rid of them?”

“Because they would be brought back immediately by Colonel Dipa. The Rani is a princess of Rendang. If we expelled her, it would be a *casus belli*.”

“So what can you do?”

“Try to keep them in order, try to change their minds, hope for a happy outcome and be prepared for the worst.” Then, after a silence, “Did Dr Robert

say you could have the *moksha*-medicine?" she asked, and when Will nodded, "Would you like to try it."

"Now?"

"Now. That is, if you don't mind being up all night with it."

"I'd like nothing better."

"You may find that you never liked anything worse," Susila warned him. "The *moksha*-medicine can take you to heaven; but it can also take you to hell. Or else to both, together or alternately. Or else (if you're lucky, or if you've made yourself ready) beyond either of them. And then beyond the beyond, back to where you started from — back to here, back to New Rothamsted, back to business as usual. Only now, of course, business as usual is completely different."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ONE, TWO, THREE, four … The clock in the kitchen struck twelve. How irrelevantly, seeing that time had ceased to exist! The absurd, importunate bell had sounded at the heart of a timelessly present Event, of a Now that changed incessantly in a dimension, not of seconds and minutes, but of beauty, of significance, of intensity, of deepening mystery.

"Luminous bliss." From the shallows of his mind the words rose like bubbles, came to the surface and vanished into the infinite spaces of living light that now pulsed and breathed behind his closed eyelids. "Luminous bliss." That was as near as one could come to it. But *it* — this timeless and yet ever changing Event — was something that words could only caricature and diminish, never convey. *It* was not only bliss, *it* was also understanding. Understanding of everything, but without knowledge of anything. Knowledge involved a knower and all the infinite diversity of known and knowable things. But here, behind his closed lids, there was neither spectacle nor spectator. There was only this experienced fact of being blissfully one with oneness.

In a succession of revelations, the light grew brighter, the understanding deepened, the bliss became more impossibly, more unbearably intense. "Dear God!" he said to himself. "Oh, my dear God." Then, out of another world, he heard the sound of Susila's voice.

"Do you feel like telling me what's happening?"

It was a long time before Will answered her. Speaking was difficult. Not because there was any physical impediment. It was just that speech seemed so fatuous, so totally pointless. "Light," he whispered at last.

"And you're there, looking at the light?"

"Not looking at it," he answered after a long reflective pause. "Being it. *Being* it," he repeated emphatically.

Its presence was his absence. William Asquith Farnaby — ultimately and essentially there was no such person. Ultimately and essentially there was only a luminous bliss, only a knowledgeless understanding, only union with unity in a limitless, undifferentiated awareness. This, self-evidently, was the mind's natural state. But no less certainly there had also been that professional execution watcher, that self-loathing Babs-addict; there were also three thousand millions of insulated consciousnesses, each at the centre of a nightmare world, in which it was impossible for anyone with eyes in his head or a grain of honesty to take yes for an answer. By what sinister miracle had the mind's natural state been transformed into all these Devil's Islands of wretchedness and delinquency?

In the firmament of bliss and understanding, like bats against the sunset, there was a wild criss-crossing of remembered notions and the hangovers of past feelings. Bat-thoughts of Plotinus and the Gnostics, of the One and its emanations, down, down into thickening horror. And then bat-feelings of anger and disgust as the thickening horrors became specific memories of what the essentially non-existent William Asquith Farnaby had seen and done, inflicted and suffered.

But behind and around and somehow even within those flickering memories was the firmament of bliss and peace and understanding. There might be a few bats in the sunset sky; but the fact remained that the dreadful miracle of creation had been reversed. From a praeternaturally wretched and delinquent self he had been unmade into pure mind, mind in its natural state, limitless, undifferentiated, luminously blissful, knowledgelessly understanding.

Light here, light now. And because it was infinitely here and timelessly now, there was nobody outside the light to look at the light. The fact was the awareness, the awareness the fact.

From that other world, somewhere out there to the right, came the sound once more of Susila's voice.

"Are you feeling happy?" she asked.

A surge of brighter radiance swept away all those flickering thoughts and memories. There was nothing now except a crystalline transparency of bliss.

Without speaking, without opening his eyes, he smiled and nodded.

“Eckhart called it God,” she went on. “‘Felicity so ravishing, so inconceivably intense that no one can describe it. And in the midst of it God glows and flames without ceasing.’”

God glows and flames … It was so startlingly, so comically right that Will found himself laughing aloud. “God like a house on fire,” he gasped. “God-the-fourteenth-of-July.” And he exploded once more into cosmic laughter.

Behind his closed eyelids an ocean of luminous bliss poured upwards like an inverted cataract. Poured upwards from union into completer union, from impersonality into a yet more absolute transcendence of selfhood.

“God-the-fourteenth-of-July,” he repeated and, from the heart of the cataract, gave vent to a final chuckle of recognition and understanding.

“What about the fifteenth of July?” Susila questioned. “What about the morning after?”

“There isn’t any morning after.”

She shook her head. “It sounds suspiciously like Nirvana.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“Pure Spirit, one hundred degrees proof — that’s a drink that only the most hardened contemplation-guzzlers indulge in. Bodhisattvas dilute their Nirvana with equal parts of love and work.”

“This is better,” Will insisted.

“You mean, it’s more delicious. That’s why it’s such an enormous temptation. The only temptation that God could succumb to. The fruit of the ignorance of good and evil. What heavenly lusciousness, what a super-mango! God had been stuffing himself with it for billions of years. Then all of a sudden, up comes *Homo sapiens*, out pops the knowledge of good and evil. God had to switch to a much less palatable brand of fruit. You’ve just eaten a slice of the original super-mango, so you can sympathize with Him.”

A chair creaked, there was a rustle of skirts, then a series of small busy sounds that he was unable to interpret. What was she doing? He could have answered that question by simply opening his eyes. But who cared, after all,

what she might be doing? Nothing was of any importance except this blazing uprush of bliss and understanding.

“Super-mango to fruit of knowledge — I’m going to wean you,” she said, “by easy stages.”

There was a whirring sound. From the shallows, a bubble of recognition reached the surface of consciousness. Susila had been putting a record on the turn-table of a gramophone and now the machine was in motion.

“Johann Sebastian Bach,” he heard her saying. “The music that’s closest to silence, closest, in spite of its being so highly organized, to pure, one-hundred-degree proof Spirit.”

The whirring gave place to musical sounds. Another bubble of recognition came shooting up; he was listening to the Fourth Brandenburg Concerto.

It was the same, of course, as the Fourth Brandenburg he had listened to so often in the past — the same and yet completely different. This Allegro — he knew it by heart. Which meant that he was in the best possible position to realize that he had never really heard it before. To begin with, it was no longer he, William Asquith Farnaby, who was hearing it. The Allegro was revealing itself as an element in the great present Event, a manifestation at one remove of the luminous bliss. Or perhaps that was putting it too mildly. In another modality this Allegro *was* the luminous bliss; it was the knowledgeless understanding of everything apprehended through a particular piece of knowledge; it was undifferentiated awareness broken up into notes and phrases and yet still all-comprehendingly itself. And of course all this belonged to nobody. It was at once in here, out there and nowhere. The music which, as William Asquith Farnaby, he had heard a hundred times before, had been re-born as an unowned awareness. Which was why he was now hearing it for the first time. Unowned, the Fourth Brandenburg had an intensity of beauty, a depth of intrinsic meaning, incomparably greater than anything he had ever found in the same music when it was his private property.

“Poor idiot” came up in a bubble of ironic comment. The poor idiot hadn’t wanted to take yes for an answer in any field but the aesthetic. And all the time

he had been denying, by the mere fact of being himself, all the beauty and meaning he so passionately longed to say yes to. William Asquith Farnaby was nothing but a muddy filter, on the hither side of which human beings, nature and even his beloved art had emerged bedimmed and bemired, less, other and uglier than themselves. Tonight, for the first time his awareness of a piece of music was completely unobstructed. Between mind and sound, mind and pattern, mind and significance, there was no longer any babel of biographical irrelevances to drown the music or make a senseless discord. Tonight's Fourth Brandenburg was a pure datum — no, a blessed *donum* — uncorrupted by the personal history, the second-hand notions, the ingrained stupidities with which, like every self, the poor idiot, who wouldn't (and in art plainly couldn't) take yes for an answer, had overlaid the gifts of immediate experience.

And tonight's Fourth Brandenburg was not merely an unowned Thing in Itself; it was also, in some impossible way, a Present Event with an infinite duration. Or rather (and still more impossibly, seeing that it had three movements and was being played at its usual speed) it was without duration. The metronome presided over each of its phrases; but the sum of its phrases was not a span of seconds and minutes. There was a *tempo*, but no time. So what was there?

"Eternity," Will was forced to answer. It was one of those metaphysical dirty words which no decent-minded man would dream of pronouncing even to himself, much less in public. "Eternity, my brethren," he said aloud. "Eternity, blah blah." The sarcasm, as he might have known it would, fell completely flat. Tonight those four syllables were no less concretely significant than the four letters of the other class of tabooed words. He began to laugh again.

"What's so funny?" she asked.

"Eternity," he answered. "Believe it or not, it's as real as shit."

"Excellent!" she said approvingly.

He sat there motionlessly attentive, following with ear and inward eye the interwoven streams of sound, the interwoven streams of congruous and equivalent lights, that flowed on timelessly from one sequence to another. And

every phrase of this well-worn familiar music was an unprecedented revelation of beauty that went pouring upwards, like a multitudinous fountain, into another revelation as novel and amazing as itself. Stream within stream — the stream of the solo violin, the streams of the two recorders, the manifold streams of the harpsichord and the little orchestra of assorted strings. Separate, distinct, individual — and yet each of the streams was a function of all the rest, each was itself in virtue of its relationship to the whole of which it was a component.

"Dear God!" he heard himself whispering.

In the timeless sequence of change the recorders were holding a single long-drawn note. A note without upper partials, clear, pellucid, divinely empty. A note (the word came bubbling up) of pure contemplation. And here was another inspirational obscenity that had now acquired a concrete meaning and might be uttered without a sense of shame. Pure contemplation, unconcerned, beyond contingency, outside the context of moral judgments. Through the uprushing lights he caught a glimpse, in memory, of Radha's shining face as she talked of love as contemplation, of Radha once again, sitting cross-legged, in a focused intensity of stillness, at the foot of the bed where Lakshmi lay dying. This long pure note was the meaning of her words, the audible expression of her silence. But always, flowing through and along with the heavenly emptiness of that contemplative fluting was the rich sound, vibration within passionate vibration, of the violin. And surrounding them both — the notes of contemplative detachment and the notes of passionate involvement — was this network of sharp dry tones plucked from the wires of the harpsichord. Spirit and instinct, action and vision — and around them the web of intellect. They were comprehended by discursive thought, but comprehended, it was obvious, only from the outside, in terms of an order of experience radically different from that which discursive thinking professes to explain.

"It's like a Logical Positivist," he said.

"What is?"

"That harpsichord."

Like a Logical Positivist, he was thinking in the shallows of his mind, while in the depths the great Event of light and sound timelessly unfolded. Like a Logical Positivist talking about Plotinus and Julie de Lespinasse.

The music changed again, and now it was the violin that sustained (how passionately!) the long-drawn note of contemplation, while the two recorders took up the theme of active involvement and repeated it — the identical form imposed upon another substance — in the mode of detachment. And here, dancing in and out between them, was the Logical Positivist, absurd but indispensable, trying to explain, in a language incommensurable with the facts, what it was all about.

In the Eternity that was as real as shit, he went on listening to these interwoven streams of sound, went on looking at these interwoven streams of light, went on actually *being* (out there, in here and nowhere) all that he saw and heard. And now, abruptly, the character of the light underwent a change. These interwoven streams, which were the first fluid differentiations of an understanding on the further side of all particular knowledge, had ceased to be a continuum. Instead, there was, all of a sudden, this endless succession of separate forms — forms still manifestly charged with the luminous bliss of undifferentiated being, but limited now, isolated, individualized. Silver and rose, yellow and pale green and gentian-blue, an endless succession of luminous spheres came swimming up from some hidden source of forms and, in time with the music, purposefully constellated themselves into arrays of unbelievable complexity and beauty. An inexhaustible fountain that sprayed out into conscious patternings, into lattices of living stars. And as he looked at them, as he lived their life and the life of this music that was their equivalent, they went on growing into other lattices that filled the three dimensions of an inner space and changed incessantly in another, timeless dimension of quality and significance.

“What are you hearing?” Susila asked.

“Hearing what I see,” he answered. “And seeing what I hear.”

“And how would you describe it?”

“What it looks like,” Will answered after a long silence, “what it sounds like, is the creation. Only it’s not a one-shot affair. It’s non-stop, perpetual creation.”

“Perpetual creation out of no-what nowhere into something somewhere — is that it?”

“That’s it.”

“You’re making progress.”

If words had come more easily and, when spoken, had been a little less pointless, Will would have explained to her that knowledgeless understanding and luminous bliss were a damn sight better than even Johann Sebastian Bach.

“Making progress,” Susila repeated. “But you’ve still got a long way to go. What about opening your eyes?”

Will shook his head emphatically.

“It’s time you gave yourself a chance of discovering what’s what.”

“What’s what is *this*,” he muttered.

“It isn’t,” she assured him. “All you’ve been seeing and hearing and being is only the first *what*. Now you must look at the second one. Look, and then bring the two together into a single inclusive *what’s-what*. So open your eyes, Will. Open them wide.”

“All right,” he said at last and reluctantly, with an apprehensive sense of impending misfortune, he opened his eyes. The inner illumination was swallowed up in another kind of light. The fountain of forms, the coloured orbs in their conscious arrays and purposefully changing lattices gave place to a static composition of uprights and diagonals, of flat planes and curving cylinders, all carved out of some material that looked like living agate, and all emerging from a matrix of living and pulsating mother-of-pearl. Like a blind man newly healed and confronted for the first time by the mystery of light and colour, he stared in uncomprehending astonishment. And then, at the end of another twenty timeless bars of the Fourth Brandenburg, a bubble of explanation rose into consciousness. He was looking, Will suddenly perceived, at a small square table, and beyond the table at a rocking chair, and beyond the rocking chair at a blank wall of whitewashed plaster. The explanation was reassuring; for in the eternity that he

had experienced between the opening of his eyes and the emergent knowledge of what he was looking at, the mystery confronting him had deepened from inexplicable beauty to a consummation of shining alienness that filled him, as he looked, with a kind of metaphysical terror. Well, this terrifying mystery consisted of nothing but two pieces of furniture and an expanse of wall. The fear was allayed, but the wonder only increased. How was it possible that things so familiar and commonplace could be *this?* Obviously it wasn't possible; and yet there it was, there it was.

His attention shifted from the geometrical constructions in brown agate to their pearly background. Its name he knew, was 'wall'; but in experienced fact it was a living process, a continuing series of transubstantiations from plaster and whitewash into the stuff of a supernatural body — into a god-flesh that kept modulating, as he looked at it, from glory to glory. Out of what the word-bubbles had tried to explain away as mere calcimine, some shaping spirit was evoking an endless succession of the most delicately discriminated hues, at once faint and intense, that emerged out of latency and went flushing across the god-body's divinely radiant skin. Wonderful, wonderful! And there must be other miracles, new worlds to conquer and be conquered by. He turned his head to the left and there (appropriate words had bubbled up almost immediately) was the large marble-topped table at which they had eaten their supper. And now, thick and fast, more bubbles began to rise. This breathing apocalypse called 'table' might be thought of as a picture by some mystical Cubist, some inspired Juan Gris with the soul of Traherne and a gift for painting miracles with conscious gems and the changing moods of water-lily petals.

Turning his head a little further to the left he was startled by a blaze of jewelry. And what strange jewelry! Narrow slabs of emerald and topaz, of ruby and sapphire and lapis lazuli, blazing away, row above row, like so many bricks in a wall of the New Jerusalem. Then — at the end, not in the beginning — came the word. In the beginning were the jewels, the stained glass windows, the walls of paradise. It was only now, at long last, that the word 'book-case' presented itself for consideration.

Will raised his eyes from the book-jewels and found himself at the heart of a tropical landscape. Why? Where? Then he remembered that, when (in another life) he first entered the room, he had noticed, over the book-case, a large, bad water-colour. Between sand dunes and clumps of palms a widening estuary receded towards the open sea, and above the horizon enormous mountains of cloud towered into a pale sky. “Feeble,” came bubbling up from the shallows. The work, only too obviously, of a not very gifted amateur. But that was now beside the point, for the landscape had ceased to be a painting and was now the subject of the painting — a real river, real sea, real sand glaring in the sunshine, real trees against a real sky. Real to the *n*th, real to the point of absoluteness. And this real river mingling with a real sea was his own being engulfed in God. “‘God’ between quotation marks?” enquired an ironical bubble. “Or God(!) in a modernist, Pickwickian sense?” Will shook his head. The answer was just plain God — the God one couldn’t possibly believe in, but who was self-evidently the fact confronting him. And yet this river was still a river, this sea the Indian Ocean. Not something else in fancy dress. Unequivocally themselves. But at the same time unequivocally God.

“Where are you now?” Susila asked.

Without turning his head in her direction, Will answered, “In heaven, I suppose,” and pointed at the landscape.

“In heaven — *still*? When are you going to make a landing down here?”

Another bubble of memory came up from the silted shallows. “Something far more deeply interfused, Whose dwelling is the light of something or other.”

“But Wordsworth also talked about the still sad music of humanity.”

“Luckily,” said Will, “there are no humans in this landscape.”

“Not even any animals,” she added with a little laugh. “Only clouds and the most deceptively innocent-looking vegetables. That’s why you’d better look at what’s on the floor.”

Will dropped his eyes. The grain on the floorboards was a brown river, and the brown river was an eddying, ongoing diagram of the world’s divine life. At the centre of that diagram was his own right foot, bare under the straps of its

sandal, and startlingly three-dimensional, like the marble foot, revealed by a searchlight, of some heroic statue. ‘Boards’, ‘grain’, ‘foot’, — through the glib explanatory words the mystery stared back at him, impenetrable and yet, paradoxically, understood. Understood with that knowledgeless understanding to which, in spite of sensed objects and remembered names, he was still open.

Suddenly, out of the tail of his eye, he caught a glimpse of quick, darting movement. Openness to bliss and understanding was also, he realized, an openness to terror, to total incomprehension. Like some alien creature lodged within his chest and struggling in anguish, his heart started to beat with a violence that made him tremble. In the hideous certainty that he was about to meet the Essential Horror, Will turned his head and looked.

“It’s one of Tom Krishna’s pet lizards,” she said reassuringly. The light was as bright as ever; but the brightness had changed its sign. A glow of sheer evil radiated from every grey-green scale of the creature’s back, from its obsidian eyes and the pulsing of its crimson throat, from the armoured edges of its nostrils and its slit-like mouth. He turned away. In vain. The Essential Horror glared out of everything he looked at. Those compositions by the mystical Cubist — they had turned into intricate machines for doing nothing malevolently. That tropical landscape, in which he had experienced the union of his own being with the being of God — it was now simultaneously the most nauseating of Victorian oleographs and the actuality of hell. On their shelves, the rows of book-jewels beamed with a thousand watts of darkness visible. And how cheap these gems of the abyss had become, how indescribably vulgar! Where there had been gold and pearl and precious stones there were only Christmas tree decorations, only the shallow glare of plastic and varnished tin. Everything still pulsed with life, but with the life of an infinitely sinister bargain basement. And that, the music now affirmed, that was what Omnipotence was perpetually creating — a cosmic Woolworth stocked with mass-produced horrors. Horrors of vulgarity and horrors of pain, of cruelty and tastelessness, of imbecility and deliberate malice.

“Not a gecko,” he heard Susila saying, “not one of our nice little house lizards. A hulking stranger from outdoors, one of the bloodsuckers. Not that they

suck blood, of course. They merely have red throats and go purple in the face when they get excited. Hence that stupid name. Look! there he goes!”

Will looked down again. Praeternaturally real, the scaly horror with its black blank eyes, its murderer’s mouth, its blood-red throat pumping away while the rest of the body lay stretched along the floor as still as death, was now within six inches of his foot.

“He’s seen his dinner,” said Susila. “Look over there to your left, on the edge of the matting.”

He turned his head.

“*Gongylus gongyloides*,” she went on. “Do you remember?”

Yes, he remembered. The praying mantis that had settled on his bed. But that was in another existence. What he had seen then was merely a rather odd-looking insect. What he saw now was a pair of inch-long monsters, exquisitely grisly, in the act of coupling. Their blueish pallor was barred and veined with pink, and the wings that fluttered continuously, like petals in a breeze, were shaded at the edges with deepening violet. A mimicry of flowers. But the insect forms were undisguisable. And now even the flowery colours had undergone a change. Those quivering wings were the appendages of two brightly enamelled gadgets in the bargain basement, two little working models of a nightmare, two miniaturized machines for copulation. And now one of the nightmare machines, the female, had turned the small flat head, all mouth and bulging eyes, at the end of its long neck — had turned it and (dear God!) had begun to devour the head of the male machine. First a purple eye was chewed out, then half the blueish face. What was left of the head fell to the ground. Unrestrained by the weight of the eyes and jaws, the severed neck waved wildly. The female machine snapped at the oozing stump, caught it and, while the headless male uninterruptedly kept up his parody of Ares in the arms of Aphrodite, methodically chewed.

Out of the corner of his eye Will glimpsed another spurt of movement, turned his head sharply and was in time to see the lizard crawling towards his foot. Nearer, nearer. He averted his eyes in terror. Something touched his toes and went tickling across his instep. The tickling ceased; but he could sense a little

weight on his foot, a dry scaly contact. He wanted to scream; but his voice was gone and, when he tried to move, his muscles refused to obey him.

Timelessly the music had turned into the final Presto. Horror briskly on the march, horror in rococo fancy dress leading the dance.

Utterly still, except for the pulse in its red throat, the scaly horror on his instep lay staring with expressionless eyes at its predestined prey. Interlocked, the two little working models of a nightmare quivered like wind-blown petals and were shaken spasmodically by the simultaneous agonies of death and copulation. A timeless century passed; bar after bar, the gay little dance of death went on and on. Suddenly there was a scrabbling against his skin of tiny claws. The bloodsucker had crawled down from his instep to the floor. For a long life-span it lay there absolutely still. Then, with incredible speed, it darted across the boards and on to the matting. The slit-like mouth opened and closed again. Protruding from between the champing jaws, the edge of a violet-tinted wing still fluttered, like an orchid petal in the breeze; a pair of legs waved wildly for a moment, then disappeared from view.

Will shuddered and closed his eyes; but across the frontier between things sensed and things remembered, things imagined, the Horror pursued him. In the fluorescent glare of the inner light an endless column of tin-bright insects and gleaming reptiles marched up diagonally, from left to right, out of some hidden source of nightmare towards an unknown and monstrous consummation. *Gongylus gongyloides* by millions and, in the midst of them, innumerable bloodsuckers. Eating and being eaten — for ever.

And all the while — fiddle, flute and harpsichord — the final Presto of the Fourth Brandenburg kept trotting timelessly forward. What a jolly little rococo death-march! Left, right; left, right … But what was the word of command for hexapods? And suddenly they weren’t hexapods any longer; they were bipeds. The endless column of insects had turned abruptly into an endless column of soldiers. Marching as he had seen the Brown Shirts marching through Berlin, a year before the War. Thousands upon thousands of them, their banners fluttering, their uniforms glowing in the infernal brightness like floodlit

excrement. Numberless as insects, and each of them moving with the precision of a machine, the perfect docility of a performing dog. And the faces, the faces! He had seen the close-ups on the German news reels, and here they were again, praeternaturally real and three-dimensional and alive. The monstrous face of Hitler with his mouth open, yelling. And then the faces of assorted listeners. Huge idiot faces, blankly receptive. Faces of wide-eyed sleepwalkers. Faces of young Nordic angels rapt in the Beatific Vision. Faces of Baroque saints going into ecstasy. Faces of lovers on the brink of orgasm. One Folk, One Realm, One Leader. Union with the unity of an insect swarm. Knowledgeless understanding of nonsense and diabolism. And then the newsreel camera had cut back to the serried ranks, the swastikas, the brass bands, the yelling hypnotist on the rostrum. And here once again, in the glare of his inner light, was the brown insect-like column, marching endlessly to the tunes of this rococo horror-music. Onward Nazi soldiers, onward Christian soldiers, onward Marxists and Muslims, onward every chosen People, every Crusader and Holy War-maker. Onward into misery, into all wickedness, into death! And suddenly Will found himself looking at what the marching column would become when it had reached its destination — thousands of corpses in the Korean mud, innumerable packets of garbage littering the African desert. And here (for the scene kept changing with bewildering rapidity and suddenness), here were the five fly-blown bodies he had seen only a few months ago, faces upwards and their throats gashed, in the courtyard of an Algerian farm. Here, out of a past almost twenty years earlier, was that old woman, dead and stark naked in the rubble of a stucco house in St John’s Wood. And here, without transition, was his own grey and yellow bedroom, with the reflection in the mirror on the wardrobe door of two pale bodies, his and Babs’s, frantically coupling to the accompaniment of his memories of Molly’s funeral and the strains, from Radio Stuttgart, of the Good Friday music out of *Parsifal*.

The scene changed again and, festooned with tin stars and fairy lamps, Aunt Mary’s face smiled at him gaily and then was transformed before his eyes into the face of the whining malignant stranger who had taken her place during those

last dreadful weeks before the final transformation into garbage. A radiance of love and goodness, and then a blind had been drawn, a shutter closed, a key turned in the lock, and there they were — she in her cemetery and he in his private prison sentenced to solitary confinement and, one unspecified fine morning, to death. The Agony in the Bargain Basement. The Crucifixion among the Christmas tree decorations. Outside or in, with the eyes open or with the eyes closed, there was no escape. “No escape”, he whispered, and the words confirmed the fact, transformed it into a hideous certitude that kept opening out, opening down, into depth below depth of malignant vulgarity, hell beyond hell of utterly pointless suffering.

And this suffering (it came to him with the force of a revelation) this suffering was not merely pointless; it was also cumulative, it was also self-perpetuating. Surely enough, frightfully enough, as it had come to Molly and Aunt Mary and all the others, death would come also to him. Would come to him, but never to this fear, this sickening disgust, these lacerations of remorse and self-loathing. Immortal in its pointlessness, suffering would go on forever. In all other respects one was grotesquely, despicably finite. Not in respect to suffering. This dark little inspissated clot that one called ‘I’ was capable of suffering to infinity and, in spite of death, the suffering would go on for ever. The pains of living and the pains of dying, the routine of successive agonies in the bargain basement and the final crucifixion in a blaze of tin and plastic vulgarity — reverberating, continuously amplified, they would always be there. And the pains were incommunicable, the isolation complete. The awareness that one existed was an awareness that one was always alone. Just as much alone in Babs’s musky alcove as one had been alone with one’s ear-ache or one’s broken arm, as one would be alone with one’s final cancer, alone, when one thought it was all over, with the immortality of suffering.

He was aware, all of a sudden, that something was happening to the music. The tempo had changed. *Rallentando*. It was the end. The end of everything for everyone. The jaunty little death-dance had piped the marchers on and on to the edge of the cliff. And now here it was, and they were tottering on the brink.

Rallentando, rallentando. The dying fall, the fall into dying. And punctually, inevitably, here were the two anticipated chords, of consummation, the expectant dominant and then, *finis*, the loud unequivocal tonic. There was a scratching, a sharp click and then silence. Through the open window he could hear the distant frogs and the shrill monotonous rasp of insect noises. And yet in some mysterious way the silence remained unbroken. Like flies in a block of amber, the sounds were embedded in a transparent soundlessness which they were powerless to destroy or even modify, and to which they remained completely irrelevant. Timelessly, from intensity to intensity, the silence deepened. Silence in ambush, a watching, conspiratorial silence incomparably more sinister than the grisly little rococo death march which had preceded it. This was the abyss to whose brink the music had piped him. To the brink, and now over the brink into this everlasting silence.

“Infinite suffering,” he whispered. “And you can’t speak, you can’t even cry out.”

A chair creaked, silk rustled, he felt the wind of movement against his face, the nearness of a human presence. Behind the closed lids he was somehow aware that Susila was kneeling there in front of him. An instant later he felt her hands touching his face — the palms against his cheeks, the fingers on his temples.

The clock in the kitchen made a little whirring noise, then started to strike the hour. One, two, three, four. Outside in the garden a gusty breeze whispered intermittently among the leaves. A cock crowed and a moment later, from a long way off, came an answering call, and almost simultaneously another and another. Then an answer to the answers, and more answers in return. A counterpoint of challenges challenged, of defiances defied. And now a different kind of voice joined in the chorus. Articulate but inhuman. “Attention,” it called through the crowing and the insect noises. “Attention. Attention. Attention.”

“Attention,” Susila repeated; and as she spoke, he felt her fingers starting to move over his forehead. Lightly, lightly, from the brows up to the hair, from either temple to the mid-point between the eyes. Up and down, back and forth, soothing away the mind’s contractions, smoothing out the furrows of

bewilderment and pain. “Attention to *this*.” And she increased the pressure of her palms against his cheek bones, of her fingertips above his ears. “To *this*,” she repeated. “To *now*. Your face between my two hands.” The pressure was relaxed, the fingers started to move again across his forehead.

“Attention.” Through a ragged counterpoint of crowing the injunction was insistently repeated. “Attention. Attention. Atten …” The inhuman voice broke off in mid-word.

Attention to her hands on his face? Or attention to this dreadful glare of the inner light, to this uprush of tin and plastic stars and, through the barrage of vulgarity, to this packet of garbage that had once been Molly, to the whore-house looking-glass, to all those countless corpses in the mud, the dust, the rubble. And here were the lizards again and *Gongylus gongyloides* by the million, here were the marching columns, the rapt, devoutly listening faces of Nordic angels.

“Attention,” the mynah bird began to call again from the other side of the house. “Attention.”

Will shook his head. “Attention to what?”

“To *this*.” And she dug her nails into the skin of his forehead. “*This*. Here and now. And it isn’t anything so romantic as suffering, or even pain. It’s just the feel of finger nails. And even if it were much worse, it couldn’t possibly be for ever or to infinity. Nothing is for ever, nothing is to infinity. Except, maybe, the Buddha Nature.”

She moved her hands, and the contact now was no longer with nails but with skin. The finger tips slid down over his brows and, very lightly, came to rest on his closed eyelids. For the first wincing moment he was mortally afraid. Was she preparing to put out his eyes? He sat there, ready at her first move to throw back his head and jump to his feet. But nothing happened. Little by little his fears died away; the awareness of this intimate, unexpected, potentially dangerous contact remained. An awareness so acute and, because the eyes were supremely vulnerable, so absorbing that he had nothing to spare for the inner light or the horrors and vulgarities revealed by it.

“Pay attention,” she whispered.

But it was impossible *not* to pay attention. However, gently and delicately, her fingers had probed to the very quick of his consciousness. And how intensely alive, he now noticed, those fingers were! What a strange tingling warmth flowed out of them!

“It’s like an electric current,” he marvelled.

“But luckily,” she said, “the wire carries no messages. One touches and, in the act of touching, one’s touched. Complete communication, but nothing communicated. Just an exchange of life, that’s all.” Then, after a pause, “Do you realize, Will,” she went on, “that in all these hours we’ve been sitting here — all these centuries in your case, all these eternities — you haven’t looked at me once? Not once. Are you afraid of what you might see?”

He thought over the question and finally nodded his head. “Maybe that’s what it was,” he said. “Afraid of seeing something I’d have to be involved with, something I might have to do something about.”

“So you stuck to Bach and landscapes and the Clear Light of the Void.”

“Which you wouldn’t let me go on looking at,” he complained.

“Because the Void won’t do you much good unless you can see its light in *Gongylus gongyloides. And* in people,” she added. “Which is sometimes considerably more difficult.”

“Difficult?” He thought of the marching columns, of the bodies in the mirror, of all those other bodies face downwards in the mud, and shook his head. “It’s impossible.”

“No, not impossible,” she insisted. “*Sunyata* implies *karuna*. The Void is light; but it’s also compassion. Greedy contemplatives want to possess themselves of the light without bothering about compassion. Merely good people try to be compassionate and refuse to bother about the light. As usual, it’s a question of making the best of both worlds. And now,” she added, “it’s time for you to open your eyes and see what a human being really looks like.”

The finger tips moved up from his eyelids to his forehead, moved out to the temples, moved down to the cheeks, to the corners of the jaw. An instant later he

felt their touch on his own fingers, and she was holding his two hands in hers.

Will opened his eyes and, for the first time since he had taken the *moksha*-medicine, found himself looking her squarely in the face.

“Dear God,” he whispered at last.

Susila laughed. “Is it as bad as the bloodsucker?” she asked.

But this was not a joking matter. Will shook his head impatiently and went on looking. The eye sockets were mysterious with shadow and, except for a little crescent of illumination on the cheek bone, so was all the right side of her face. The left side glowed with a living, golden radiance — praeternaturally bright, but with a brightness that was neither the vulgar and sinister glare of darkness visible, nor yet that blissful incandescence revealed, in the far-off dawn of his eternity, behind his closed lids and, when he had opened his eyes, in the book-jewels, the compositions of the mystical Cubists, the transfigured landscape. What he was seeing now was the paradox of opposites indissolubly wedded, of light shining out of darkness, of darkness at the very heart of light.

“It isn’t the sun,” he said at last, “and it isn’t Chartres. Nor the infernal bargain basement, thank God. It’s all of them together, and you’re recognizably you, and I’m recognizably me — though, needless to say, we’re both completely different. You and me by Rembrandt, but Rembrandt about five thousand times more so.” He was silent for a moment; then, nodding his head in confirmation of what he had just said, “Yes, that’s it,” he went on. “Sun into Chartres, and then stained glass windows into bargain basement. And the bargain basement is also the torture chamber, the concentration camp, the charnel house with Christmas tree decorations. And now the bargain basement goes into reverse, picks up Chartres and a slice of the sun, and backs out into this — into you and me by Rembrandt. Does that make any sense to you?”

“All the sense in the world,” she assured him.

But Will was too busy looking at her to be able to pay much attention to what she was saying. “You’re so incredibly beautiful,” he said at last. “But it wouldn’t matter if you were incredibly ugly; you’d still be a Rembrandt-but-five-thousand-times-more-so. Beautiful, beautiful,” he repeated. “And yet I don’t

want to sleep with you. No, that isn't true. I would like to sleep with you. Very much indeed. But it won't make any difference if I never do. I shall go on loving you — loving you in the way one's supposed to love people if one's a Christian. Love," he repeated, "*love* … It's another of those dirty words. 'In love', 'make love' — those are all right. But plain 'love' — that's an obscenity I couldn't pronounce. But now, now …" He smiled and shook his head. "Believe it or not, now I can understand what it means when they say, 'God is love'. What manifest nonsense! And yet it happens to be true. Meanwhile there's this extraordinary face of yours." He leaned forward to look into it more closely. "As though one were looking into a crystal ball," he added incredulously. "Something new all the time. You can't imagine …"

But she *could* imagine. "Don't forget," she said, "I've been there myself."

"Did you look at people's faces?"

She nodded. "At my own in the glass. And of course at Dugald's. Goodness, that last time we took the *moksha*-medicine together! He started by looking like a hero out of some impossible mythology — of Indians in Iceland, of Vikings in Tibet. And then, without warning, he was Maitreya Buddha. Obviously, self-evidently Maitreya Buddha. Such a radiance! I can still see …"

She broke off, and suddenly Will found himself looking at Incarnate Bereavement with seven swords in her heart. Reading the signs of pain in the dark eyes, about the corners of the full-lipped mouth, he knew that the wound had been very nearly mortal and, with a pang in his own heart, that it was still open, still bleeding. He pressed her hands. There was nothing, of course, that one could say, no words, no consolations of philosophy — only this shared mystery of touch, only this communication from skin to skin of a flowing infinity.

"One slips back so easily," she said at last. "Much too easily. And much too often." She drew a deep breath and squared her shoulders.

Before his eyes the face, the whole body, underwent another change. There was strength enough, he could see, in that small frame to make head against any suffering; a will that would be more than a match for all the swords that fate might stab her with. Almost menacing in her determined serenity, a dark Circean

goddess had taken the place of the Mater Dolorosa. Memories of that quiet voice talking so irresistibly about the swans and the cathedral, about the clouds and the smooth water, came rushing up. And as he remembered, the face before him seemed to glow with the consciousness of triumph. Power, intrinsic power — he saw the expression of it, he sensed its formidable presence and shrank away from it.

"Who *are* you?" he whispered.

She looked at him for a moment without speaking; then gaily smiling, "Don't be so scared," she said. "I'm *not* the female mantis."

He smiled back at her — smiled back at a laughing girl with a weakness for kisses and the frankness to invite them.

"Thank the Lord!" he said, and the love which had shrunk away in fear came flowing back in a tide of happiness.

"Thank him for what?"

"For having given you the grace of sensuality."

She smiled again. "So *that* cat's out of the bag."

"All that power," he said, "all that admirable, terrible will! You might have been Lucifer. But fortunately, providentially …" He disengaged his right hand and with the tip of its stretched forefinger touched her lips. "The blessed gift of sensuality — it's been your salvation. *Half* your salvation," he qualified, remembering the gruesomely loveless frenzies in the pink alcove, "*one* of your salvations. Because, of course, there's this other thing, this knowing who in fact you are." He was silent for a moment. "Mary with swords in her heart," he went on, "and Circe, and Ninon de Lenclos and now — who? Somebody like Juliana of Norwich or Catherine of Genoa. Are you really all these people?"

"Plus an idiot," she assured him. "Plus a rather worried and not very efficient mother. Plus a bit of the little prig and day-dreamer I was as a child. Plus, potentially, the old dying woman who looked out at me from the mirror the last time we took the *moksha*-medicine together. And then Dugald looked and saw what *he* would be like in another forty years. Less than a month later," she added, "he was dead."

One slips back too easily, one slips back too often … Half in mysterious darkness, half mysteriously glowing with golden light, her face had turned once again into a mask of suffering. Within their shadowy orbits the eyes, he could see, were closed. She had retreated into another time and was alone, somewhere else, with the swords and her open wound. Outside, the cocks were crowing again, and a second mynah bird had begun to call, half a tone higher than the first, for compassion.

"Karuna."

"Attention. Attention."

"Karuna."

Will raised his hand once more and touched her lips.

"Do you hear what they're saying?"

It was a long time before she answered. Then, raising her hand, she took hold of his extended finger and pressed it hard against her lower lip. "Thank you," she said and opened her eyes again.

"Why thank me? *You* taught me what to do."

"And now it's you who have to teach your teacher."

Like a pair of rival gurus each touting his own brand of spirituality, "Karuna, attention," shouted the mynah birds; then, as they drowned out one another's wisdom in overlapping competition, "Runattenshkarattunshon." Proclaiming that he was the never impotent owner of all females, the invincible challenger of every spurious pretender to maleness, a cockerel in the next garden shrilly announced his divinity.

A smile broke through the mask of suffering; from her private world of swords and memory, Susila had returned to the present. "Cock-a-doodle-doo," she said. "How I love him! Just like Tom Krishna when he goes around asking people to feel his muscles. And those preposterous mynah birds, so faithfully repeating the good advice they can't understand. They're just as adorable as my little bantam."

"And what about the other kind of biped?" he asked. "The less adorable variety."

For all answer she leaned forward, caught him by the forelock and, pulling his head down, kissed him on the tip of his nose. “And now it’s time you moved your legs,” she said. Climbing to her feet, she held out her hand to him. He took it and she pulled him up from his chair.

“Negative crowing and parroted anti-wisdom,” she said. That’s what some of the other kind of bipeds go in for.”

“What’s to guarantee that I shan’t return to my vomit?” he asked.

“You probably will,” she cheerfully assured him. “But you’ll also probably come back again to this.”

There was a spurt of movement at their feet.

Will laughed. “There goes my poor little scrabbling incarnation of evil.”

She took his arm, and together they walked over to the open window. Announcing the near approach of dawn, a little wind fitfully rattled the palm fronds. Below them, rooted invisibly in the moist acrid-smelling earth, was a hibiscus bush — a wild profusion of bright glossy leaves and vermilion trumpets, evoked from the double darkness of night and over-arching trees by a shaft of lamplight from within the room.

“It isn’t possible,” he said incredulously. He was back again with God-the-fourteenth-of-July.

“It isn’t possible,” she agreed. “But like everything else in the universe, it happens to be a fact. And now that you’ve finally recognized my existence, I’ll give you leave to look to your heart’s content.”

He stood there motionless, gazing, gazing through a timeless succession of mounting intensities and ever profounder significances. Tears filled his eyes and overflowed at last on to his cheeks. He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped them away.

“I can’t help it,” he apologized.

He couldn’t help it because there was no other way in which he could express his thankfulness. Thankfulness for the privilege of being alive and a witness to this miracle, of being, indeed, more than a witness — a partner in it, an aspect of it. Thankfulness for these gifts of luminous bliss and knowledgeless

understanding. Thankfulness for being at once this union with the divine unity and yet this finite creature among other finite creatures.

“Why should one cry when one’s grateful?” he said as he put his handkerchief away. “Goodness knows. But one does.” A memory-bubble popped up from the sludge of past reading. “‘Gratitude is heaven itself’,” he quoted. “Pure gibberish! But now I see that Blake was just recording a simple fact. It *is* heaven itself.”

“And all the more heavenly,” she said, “for being heaven on earth and not heaven in heaven.”

Startlingly, through the crowing and the croaking, through the insect noises and the duet of the rival gurus, came the sound of distant musketry.

“What on earth is that?” she wondered.

“Just the boys playing with fireworks,” he answered gaily.

Susila shook her head. “We don’t encourage those kinds of fireworks. We don’t even possess them.”

From the highway beyond the walls of the compound a roar of heavy vehicles climbing in low gear swelled up louder and louder. Over the noise, a voice at once stentorian and squeaky bellowed incomprehensibly through a loud speaker.

In their setting of velvet shadow the leaves were like thin shavings of jade and emerald, and from the heart of their gem-bright chaos fantastically sculptured rubies flared out into five-pointed stars. Gratitude, gratitude. His eyes filled again with tears.

Snatches of the shrill bellowing resolved themselves into recognizable words. Against his will, he found himself listening.

“People of Pala,” he heard; then the voice blasted into amplified inarticulateness. Squeak, roar, squeak, and then, “Your Raja speaking … remain calm … welcome your friends from across the Strait …”

Recognition dawned. “It’s Murugan.”

“And he’s with Dipa’s soldiers.”

“Progress,” the uncertain excited voice was saying. “Modern life …” And then, moving on from Sears Roebuck to the Rani and Koot Hoomi, “Truth,” it

squeaked, “values … genuine spirituality … oil.”

“Look,” said Susila. “look! They’re turning into the compound.”

Visible in a gap between two clumps of bamboos, the beams of a procession of headlamps shone for a moment on the left cheek of the great stone Buddha by the lotus pool and passed by, hinted again at the blessed possibility of liberation and again passed by.

“The throne of my father,” bawled the gigantically amplified squeak, “joined to the throne of my mother’s ancestors … Two sister nations marching forward, hand in hand, into the future … To be known henceforth as the United Kingdom of Rendang and Pala … The United Kingdom’s first prime minister, that great political and spiritual leader, Colonel Dipa …”

The procession of headlamps disappeared behind a long range of buildings and the shrill bellowing died down into incoherence. Then the lights re-emerged and once again the voice became articulate.

“Reactionaries,” it was furiously yelling. “Traitors to the principles of the permanent revolution …”

In a tone of horror, “They’re stopping at Dr Robert’s bungalow,” Susila whispered.

The voice had said its last word, the headlamps and the roaring motors had been turned off. In the dark expectant silence the frogs and the insects kept up their mindless soliloquies, the mynah birds reiterated their good advice. “Attention, Karuna.” Will looked down at his burning bush and saw the Suchness of the world and his own being blazing away with the clear light that was also (how obviously now!) compassion — the clear light that, like everyone else, he had always chosen to be blind to, the compassion to which he had always preferred his tortures, endured or inflicted, in a bargain basement, his squalid solitudes, with the living Babs or the dying Molly in the foreground, with Joe Aldehyde in the middle distance and, in the remoter background, the great world of impersonal forces and proliferating numbers, of collective paranoias, and organized diabolism. And always, everywhere, there would be the yelling or quietly authoritative hypnotists; and in the train of the ruling

suggestion-givers, always and everywhere, the tribes of buffoons and hucksters, the professional liars, the purveyors of entertaining irrelevances. Conditioned from the cradle, unceasingly distracted, mesmerized systematically, their uniformed victims would go on obediently marching and counter-marching, go on, always and everywhere, killing and dying with the perfect docility of trained poodles. And yet in spite of the entirely justified refusal to take yes for an answer, the fact remained and would remain always, remain everywhere — the fact that there was this capacity even in a paranoiac for intelligence, even in a devil-worshipper for love; the fact that the ground of all being could be totally manifest in a flowering shrub, a human face; the fact that there was a light and that this light was also compassion.

There was the sound of a single shot; then a burst of shots from an automatic rifle.

Susila covered her face with her hands. She was trembling uncontrollably.

He put an arm round her shoulders and held her close.

The work of a hundred years destroyed in a single night. And yet the fact remained — the fact of the ending of sorrow as well as the fact of sorrow.

The starters screeched; engine after engine roared into action. The headlamps were turned on and, after a minute of noisy manœuvring, the cars started to move slowly back along the road by which they had come.

The loud speaker brayed out the opening bars of a martial and at the same time lascivious hymn tune, which Will recognized as the national anthem of Rendang. Then the Wurlitzer was switched off, and here once again was Murugan.

“This is your Raja speaking,” the excited voice proclaimed. After which, *da capo*, there was a repetition of the speech about Progress, Values, Oil, True Spirituality. Abruptly, as before the procession disappeared from sight and hearing. A minute later it was in view again, with its wobbly counter-tenor bellowing the praises of the newly united kingdom’s first prime minister.

The procession crawled on and now, from the right this time, the headlamps of the first armoured car lit up the serenely smiling face of enlightenment. For an

instant only, and then the beam moved on. And here was the Tathagata for the second time, the third, the fourth, the fifth. The last of the cars passed by. Disregarded in the darkness, the fact of enlightenment remained. The roaring of the engines diminished, the squeaking rhetoric lapsed into an inarticulate murmur, and as the intruding noises died away, out came the frogs again, out came the uninterruptable insects, out came the mynah birds.

"Karuna. Karuna." And a semi-tone lower, "Attention."

The Translation

Prior's Field School, originally called Prior's Garth, in Godalming, Surrey, was founded by Huxley's mother, Julia Arnold, in 1902 — Huxley was brought up in Prior's Garth and was taught at the school by his mother.

A Virgin Heart by Remy de Gourmont

Authorized Translation by Aldous Huxley

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PREFACE

THE AUTHOR HAD thought of qualifying this book: A Novel Without Hypocrisy; but he reflected that these words might appear unseemly, since hypocrisy is becoming more and more fashionable.

He next thought of: A Physiological Novel; but that was still worse in this age of great converts, when grace from on high so opportunely purifies the petty human passions.

These two sub-titles being barred, nothing was left; he has therefore put nothing.

A novel is a novel. And it would be no more than that if the author had not attempted, by an analysis that knows no scruples, to reveal in these pages what may be called the seamy side of a “virgin heart” to show that innocence has its instincts, its needs, its physiological dues.

A young girl is not merely a young heart, but a young human body, all complete.

Such is the subject of this novel, which must, in spite of everything, be called “physiological.”

R. G.

CHAPTER I

THE TERRACE WAS in a ruinous state, over-grown with grass and brambles and acacias. The girl was leaning on the Parapet, eating mulberries. She displayed her purple-stained hands and laughed. M. Hervart looked-up.

"You've got a moustache as well," he said. "It looks very funny."

"But I don't want to look funny."

She walked to the little stream flowing close at hand, wetted her handkerchief and began wiping her mouth.

M. Hervart's eyes returned to his magnifying glass; he went on examining the daisy on which he had two scarlet bugs so closely joined together that they seemed a single insect. They had gone to sleep in the midst of their love-making, and but for the quivering of their long antennæ, you would have thought they were dead. M. Hervart would have liked to watch the ending of this little scene of passion; but it might go on for hours. He lost heart.

"What's more," he reflected, "I know that the male does not die on the spot; he goes running about in search of food as soon as he's free. Still, I would have liked to see the mechanism of separation. That will come with luck. One must always count on luck, whether one is studying animals or men. To be sure, there is also patience, perseverance...."

He made a little movement with his head signifying, no doubt, that patience and perseverance were not in his line. Then, very gently he laid the flower with its sleeping burden on the parapet of the terrace. It was only then he noticed that Rose was no longer there.

"I must have annoyed her by what I said about the moustache. It wasn't true, either. But there are moments when that child gets on my nerves with that look of hers, as though she wanted to be kissed. And yet, if I did so much as to lay my

hand on her shoulder, I should get my face smacked. A curious creature. But then all women are curious creatures, girls above all."

Carefully wiping his glass, M. Hervart stepped across the stream and entered the wood.

M. Hervart was about forty. He was tall and thin; sometimes, when his curiosity had kept him poring over something for too long at a stretch he stooped a little. His eyes were bright and penetrating, despite the fact that one of them had, it would seem, been narrowed and shrunk by the use of the microscope. His clear-complexioned face, with its light pointed beard, was pleasant, without being striking.

He was the keeper of the department of Greek sculpture at the Louvre, but the cold beauty of the marbles interested him little, and archæology even less. He was a lover of life, who divided his days between women and animals. Studying the habits of insects was his favourite hobby. He was often to be seen at the Zoological Gardens, or else, more often than at his office, in the animal-shop round the corner. His evenings he devoted to amusement, frequenting every kind of society. To sympathetic audiences he liked to give out that he was the descendant of the M. d'Hervart whose wife had La Fontaine for a lover. He used also to say that it was only his professional duties that had prevented his making himself a name as a naturalist. But the opinion of most people was that M. Hervart was, in all he did, nothing more than a clever amateur, ruined by a great deal of indolence.

Every two or three years he used to go and stay with his friend M. Desbois at his manor of Robinvast, near Cherbourg. M. Desbois was a retired commercial sculptor, who had recently ennobled himself by means of a Y and one or two other little changes. When M. Des Boys burst upon the world, Hervart appeared not to notice the metamorphosis. That earned him an increase in affection, and whenever he came to visit, *Mme.* Des Boys would take almost excessive pains about the cooking.

Mme. Des Boys, who had been sentimental and romantic in her youth and had remained all her life rather a silly woman, had insisted on calling her daughter

Rose. It would have been a ridiculous name — Rose Des Boys — if Rose had been the sort of girl to tolerate the repetition of a foolish compliment. Ordinarily she was a gay and gentle creature, but she could be chilling, could ignore and disregard you in the cruellest fashion. Her parents adored her and were afraid of her: so they allowed her to do what she liked. She was twenty years old.

Meanwhile, M. Hervart was looking for Rose. He did not dare call her, because he did not know what name to use. In conversation he said: You; before strangers, Mademoiselle; in his own mind, Rose.

“She was much nicer two years ago. She listened to what I had to say. She obeyed me. She caught insects for me. This is the critical moment now. If we were bugs....”

He went on:

“Whether it’s women or beetles, love is their whole life. Bugs die as soon as their work is done, and women begin dying from the moment of their first kiss.... They also begin living. It’s pretty, the spectacle of these girls who want to live, want to fulfil their destiny, and don’t know how, and go sobbing through the darkness, looking for their way. I expect I shall find her crying.”

Rose, indeed, had just finished wiping her eyes. They were blue when she was sad and greenish when she laughed.

“You’ve been crying. Did you prick yourself coming through this holly? I did too.”

“I shouldn’t cry for a thing like that. But who told you I’d been crying? I got a fly in my eye. Look, only one of them’s red.”

But, instead of lifting her head, she bent down and began to pick the flowers at her feet.

“May I sit down beside you?”

“What a question!”

“You see, your skirt takes up all the room.”

“Well then, push it away.”

M. Hervart turned back the outspread skirt and sat down on the old bench — cautiously, for he knew that it was rather rickety. Now that he had money and an

aristocratic name, M. Des Boys had become romantic. His whole domain, except for the kitchen garden and the rooms that were actually inhabited, was kept in a perennially wild, decrepit state. In the house and its surroundings you could see nothing but mouldering walls and rotten planks moss-grown benches, impenetrable bramble bushes. Near the stream stood an old tower from which the ivy fell in a cataract whose waves of greenery splashed up again to the summit of an old oak with dead forked branches — a pretty sight. The Des Boys never went out except to show their virgin forest to a visitor. M. Des Boys dabbled in painting.

It was morning, and the wood was cool, still damp with dew. Through the thickly woven beech branches the sunlight fell on the stiff holly leaves and lit them up like flowers. A little chestnut tree, that had sprouted all awry raised its twisted head towards the light! Near-by stood a wild cherry, into which the sparrows darted, twittering and alarmed. A jay passed like a flash of blue lightning. The wind crept in beneath the trees, stirring the bracken that darkened and lightened at its passage. A wounded bee fell on Rose's skirt.

"Poor bee! One of his wings is unhooked. I'll try and put it right."

"Take care," said Mr. Hervart. "It will sting. Animals never believe that you mean well by them. To them every one's an enemy."

"True," said Rose, shaking off the bee. "Your bugs will eat him and that will be a happy ending. Every one's an enemy."

Rose had spoken so bitterly that M. Hervart was quite distressed. He brought his face close to hers as her big straw hat would permit, and whispered:

"Are you unhappy?"

How beautifully women manage these things! In a flash the hat had disappeared, tossed almost angrily aside, and at the same moment an exquisitely pale and fluffy head dropped on to M. Hervart's shoulder.

It was a touching moment. Much moved, the man put his arm round the girl's waist. His hand took possession of the little hand that she surrendered to him. He had only to turn and bend his head a little, and he was kissing, close below the

hair, a white forehead, feverishly moist. He felt her abandonment to him becoming more deliberate; the hand he was holding squeezed his own.

Rose made an abrupt movement which parted them, and looking full at M. Hervart, her face radiant with tenderness, she said:

“I’m not unhappy now.”

She got up, and they moved away together through the wood, exchanging little insignificant phrases in voices full of tenderness. Each time their eyes met, they smiled. They kept on fingering leaves, flowers, mere pieces of wood, so as to have an excuse for touching each other’s hand. Coming to a clearing where they could walk abreast, they allowed their arms on the inner side to hang limply down, so that their hands touched and were soon joined.

There was a silence, prolonged and very delightful. Each, meanwhile, was absorbed in his own thoughts.

“Obviously,” M. Hervart was saying to himself, “if I have any sense left, I shall take the train home. First of all, I must go to Cherbourg and send a telegram to some one who can send a wire to recall me. What a nuisance! I was joying myself so much here. To whom shall I appeal? To Gratienne? I shall have to write a letter in that case, to concoct some story. Three or four days longer won’t make matters any worse; I know these young girls. Time doesn’t exist for them; they live in the absolute. So long as there’s no jealousy — and I don’t see how there can be — I shall be all right. She is really charming — Rose. Lord! what a state of excitement I’m in! But I must be reasonable. I shall tell Gratienne to meet me at Grandcamp. She has been longing to go to Grandcamp ever since she read that novel about the place. Besides, there are the rocks. I’m quite indifferent provided I get away from here....”

“What are you thinking about?”

“Can you ask, my dear child?”

A squeeze from the little hand showed that his answer had been understood. Silence settled down once more.

“Gratienne? At this very moment she’s probably with another lover. But then, think of leaving a woman alone in Paris, in July? ‘I am never bored. I dine at

Mme. Fleury's every day; she loves having me. We start for Honfleur on the 25th. You must come and see us.' She imagines that Honfleur is close to Cherbourg. 'I am never bored,' Come, come; When women speak so clearly, it means they have nothing to hide.... On the contrary it's one of their tricks...."

"Well, my child, how's your wretchedness? Is it all over?"

"I am very happy," Rose answered.

A look from her big limpid eyes confirmed these solemn words and M. Hervart was more moved than at the moment of her surrender. The idea that he was the cause of this child's happiness filled him with pride.

"Better not disturb Gratienne. She's so suspicious. Whom shall I write to, then? My colleagues? No, I'm not on intimate enough terms. Gauvain, the animal-shop man? That would be humiliating. What a bore it all is! Leave it; we'll see later on. And after all, what's the matter? A little sentimental friendship. Rose lives such a lonely life. Why should I rob her of the innocent pleasure of playing — at sentiment with me? Summer-holiday amusements...."

"Oh," said Rose, "look at that beetle. Isn't he handsome."

But the animal, superb in its gold and sapphire armour, had disappeared under the dead leaves. They thought no more about it. Rose was occupied by very different thoughts. She felt herself filled with an exultant tenderness.

"I don't belong to myself anymore. It's very thrilling. What is going to happen? He'll kiss me on the eyes. There'll be no resisting, because I belong to him."

She lifted her head and looked at M. Hervart She seemed to be offering her eyes. Without changing her position she closed them. A kiss settled lightly on her soft eyelids.

"He does everything I expect him to do. Does he read my thoughts or do I read his?"

Meanwhile M. Hervart was trying to find something gallant or sentimental to say, and could think of nothing.

"I might praise her chestnut hair, with its golden lights, tell her how fine and silky it is. But is it? And besides, it might be a little premature. What shall I

praise? Her mouth? Its rather large. Her nose? It's a little too hooked. Her complexion? Is it a compliment to say it's pale and opaque? Her eyes? That would look like an allusion. They're pretty, though — her eyes, the way they change colour."

He had picked a blade of grass as he walked. It was covered with little black moving specks. "What a bore," said M. Hervart, "I've forgotten to bring my microscope."

"I've got one, only the reflector's broken. It will have to be sent to Cherbourg."

"Couldn't you take it yourself?"

"If you like."

"But wouldn't you enjoy it, Rose?"

She was so pleased at being called Rose, that for a moment she did not answer. Then she said, blushing:

"You see, I scarcely ever go out of this place: the idea hardly occurs to me. But I should love to go with you."

She added with a spoilt child's tone of authority: "I'll go and tell father. We'll start after luncheon."

M. Hervart looked once more at his indecipherable grass blade.

"I know a good shop," he said. "Lepoultel the marine optician. Do you know him? He's a friend of Gauvain's...."

"The animal man?"

"What, do you mean to say you remember that?"

"I remember everything you tell me," answered Rose, very seriously.

M. Hervart was flattered. It occurred to him also that this sentimental child might make a very good practical little wife. His rather curious life passed rapidly before him and he called to mind some of the mistresses of his fugitive amours. He saw Gratienne; it was six months since they had met; she would have left him, very likely, by the time he returned. At this thought M. Hervart frowned. At the same time the pressure of his fingers relaxed.

Rose looked at him:

“What are you thinking about?”

“Again!” said M. Hervart to himself. “Oh, that eternal feminine question! As if any one ever answered it! Here’s my answer....”

Looking at the clouds, he pronounced:

“I think it’s going to rain.”

“Oh, no!” said Rose, “I don’t think so. The wind is ‘suet’....”

Conscious of having uttered a provincialism, she made haste to add:

“As the country people say.”

“What does it mean?”

“South-east.”

M. Hervart was little interested in dialectal forms; rather spitefully and with the true Parisian’s fatuous vanity, he replied:

“What an ugly word! You ought to say South-east. You’re a regular peasant woman.”

“Laugh away,” said Rose. “I don’t mind, now. We’re all country-people; my father comes from these parts, so does my mother. I wasn’t born here, but I belong to the place. I belong to it as the trees do, as the grass and all the animals. Yes, I *am* a peasant woman.”

She raised her head proudly.

“I come from here too,” said M. Hervart.

“Yes, and you don’t care for it any longer.”

“I do, because it produced you and because you love it.”

Delighted at the discovery of this insipidity, M. Hervart darted, hat in hand, in pursuit of a butterfly; he missed it.

“They’re not so easy to catch as kisses,” said Rose with a touch of irony.

M. Hervart was startled.

“Is she merely sensual?” he wondered.

But Rose was incapable of dividing her nature into categories. She felt her character as a perfect unity. Her remark had been just a conversational remark, for she was not lacking in wit.

Meanwhile, this mystery plunged M. Hervart into a prolonged meditation. He constructed the most perverse theories about the precocity of girls.

But he was soon ashamed of these mental wanderings.

“Women are complex; not more so, of course, than men, but in a different way which men can’t understand. They don’t understand themselves, and what’s more, they don’t care about understanding. They feel, and that suffices to steer them very satisfactorily through life, as well as to solve problems which leave men utterly helpless. One must act towards them as they do themselves. It’s only through the feelings that one can get into contact with them. There is but one way of understanding women, and that is to love them.... Why shouldn’t I say that aloud? It would amuse her, and perhaps she might find something pretty to say in reply.”

But, without being exactly shy, M. Hervart was nervous about hearing the sound of his own voice. That was why he generally gave vent only to the curtest phrases. Rose had taken his hand once more. This mute language seemed to appeal to her, and M. Hervart was content to put up with it, though he found this exchange of manual confidences a little childish.

“But nothing,” he went on to himself, “nothing is childish in love....”

This word, which he did not pronounce, even to himself, but which he seemed to see, as though his own hand had written it on a sheet of paper this word filled him with terror. He burst out into secret protestations:

“But there’s no question of love. She doesn’t love me. I don’t love her. It’s a mere game. This child has made me a child like herself....”

He wanted to stop thinking, but the process went on of its own accord.

“A dangerous game.... I oughtn’t to have kissed her eyes. Her forehead, that’s a different matter; it’s fatherly.... And then letting her lean on my shoulder, like that! What’s to be done?”

He had to admit that he had been the guilty party. Almost unconsciously, prompted by his mere male instinct, he had, since his arrival a fortnight before, and while still to all appearance, he continued to treat her as a child, been silently courting her. He was always looking at her, smiling to her, even though

his words might be serious. Feeling herself the object of an unceasing attention, Rose had concluded that he wanted to capture her, and she had allowed herself to be caught. M. Hervart considered himself too expert in feminine psychology to admit the possibility of a young girl's having deliberately taken the first step. He felt like an absent-minded sportsman who, forgetting that he has fired, wakes up to find a partridge in his game-bag.

"An agreeable surprise," he reflected. "Almost too agreeable."

CHAPTER II

IT HAD ALREADY grown hot. They sat down in the shade, on a tree trunk. Large harmless ants crawled hither and thither on the bark, but M. Hervart seemed to have lost his interest in entomology. Idly, they looked at the busy little creatures, crossing and recrossing one another's paths.

"Do they know what they're doing? And do I know what I'm doing? Some sensation guides them. What about me? They run here and there, because they think they've seen or smelt some prey. And I? Oh, I should like to run away from my prey. I reason, I deliberate.... Yes, I deliberate, or at least I try."

He looked up at the girl.

Rose was engaged in pulling foxglove buds off their stems and making them pop in the palm of her hand. Her face was serious. M. Hervart could look at her without distracting her from her dreams.

She made a pretty picture, as she sat there, gentle and, at the same time, wild. Her features, while they still preserved a trace of childishness, were growing marked and definite. She was a woman. How red her mouth was, how voluptuous! M. Hervart caught himself reflecting that that mouth would give most excellent kisses. What a fruit to bite, firm-fleshed and succulent! Rose heaved a sigh, and it was as though a wave had lifted her white dress; all her young bosom had seemed to expand. M. Hervart had a vision of roseate whiteness, soft and living; he desired it as a child desires the peach he sees on the wall hidden under its long leaves. He took the pleasure in this desire that he had sometimes taken in standing before Titian's Portrait of a Young Lady. The obstacle was as insurmountable: Rose, so far as he was concerned, was an illusion.

"But that makes no difference," he said to himself, "I have desired her, which isn't chaste of me. If I had been in love with her, I should not have had that kind

of vision. Therefore I am not in love with her. Fortunately!”

Rose was thinking of nothing. She was just letting herself be looked at. Having been examined, she smiled gently, a smile that was faintly tinged with shyness. Flying suddenly to the opposite extreme, she burst out laughing and, holding on with both hands to the knotted trunk, leaned backwards. Her hat fell off her hair came undone. She sat up again, looking wilder than ever. M. Hervart thought that she was going to run away, like Galatea; but there was no willow tree.

“I don’t care,” she said as M. Hervart handed her the hat; “my hair will have to stay down. It’s all right like that. Pins don’t hold on my head.”

“Pins,” said M. Hervart, “pins rarely do hold on women’s heads.”

She smiled without answering and certainly without understanding. She was smiling a great deal this morning, M. Hervart thought.

“But her smile is so sweet that I should never get tired of it. Come now, I’ll tell her that....”

“I love your smile. It’s so sweet that I should never get tired of it.”

“As sweet as that? That’s because it’s so new. I don’t smile much generally.”

It was enough to move any man to the depths of his being. M. Hervart murmured spontaneously:

“I love you, Rose.”

Frankly, and without showing any surprise, she answered:

“So do I, my dear.”

At the same time she shook her skirt on which a number of ants were crawling.

“This sort doesn’t bite,” she said. “They’re nice....”

“Like you.” (What a compliment! How insipid! What a fool I’m making of myself!)

“There’s one on your sleeve,” said Rose. She brushed it off.

“Now say thank you,” and she presented her cheek, on which M. Hervart printed the most fraternal of kisses.

“It’s incomprehensible,” he thought. “However, I don’t think she’s in love. If she were, she would run away. It is only after the decisive act that love becomes familiar....”

“If we want to go to Cherbourg,” said Rose, “we must have lunch early.”

They moved away; soon they were out of the wood and had entered the hardly less unkempt garden. It was sunny there, and they crossed it quickly. She walked ahead. M. Hervart picked a rose as he went along and presented it to her. Rose took it and picked another, which she gave to M. Hervart, saying:

“This one’s me.”

M. Hervart had to begin pondering again. He was feeling happy, but understood less and less.

“She behaves as though she were in love with me.... She also behaves as though she weren’t. At one moment one would think that I was everything to her. A little later she treats me like a mere friend of the family..... And it’s she who leads me on.... I have never seen that with flirts.... Where can she have learnt it? Women are like the noblemen in Molière’s time: they know everything without having been taught anything at all.”

M. Hervart weighed down in mind, but light of heart, went up to his room, so as to be able to meditate more at ease. First of all he smarted himself up with some care. He plucked from his beard a hair, which, if not quite silver, was certainly very pale gold. He scented his waistcoat and slipped on his finger an elaborately chased ring.

“It may come in useful when conversation begins to flag.”

He was about to begin his meditations, when somebody knocked at the door. Luncheon was ready.

M. Des Boys, despite the disturbance of his plans seemed pleased. A drive, he declared would do him good. He needed an outing; besides he had a right to one.

“I have just finished the ninth panel of my of my life of Sainte Clotilde. It is her entry too the convent of Saint Martin at Tours.”

M. Hervart manifested an interest in this composition, which he had admired the previous evening before it had been given the final touches. He hoped to see

it soon in its proper frame, with the other panels in Robinvast church.

“There are going to be twelve in all,” said M. Des Boys.

“People will come and see them as they do the Life of St. Bruno that used to be at the Chartreux and is now in the Louvre.”

“So I hope.”

“But they won’t come quite so much.”

“Yes, Robinvast is rather far. But then who goes to the Louvre? A few artists, a few aimless foreign sightseers. Nobody in France takes an interest in art.”

“Nobody in the world does,” said M. Hervart, “except those who live by it.”

“What about those who die of it?” asked Rose.

Mme. Des Boys looked at her daughter with some surprise:

“I have never heard that painting was a dangerous industry.”

“When one believes in it, it is,” said M. Hervart.

“What, not dangerous?” said M. Des Boys “What about white lead?”

“One must believe,” said Rose, looking at M. Hervart.

“This just shows,” M. Des Boys went on, “what the public’s point of view in this matter is. My wife’s marvellously absurd remark exactly represents their feelings.”

There followed a series of pointless anecdotes on *Mme.* Des Boys’ habitual absence of mind. M. Hervart very nearly forgot to laugh: he was thinking of what Rose had just said.

“Rose,” said M. Des Boys, “ask Hervart if we weren’t believers when we went around the Louvre. We were in a fever of enthusiasm. Hervart is my pupil; I formed his taste for beauty. Unluckily I left Paris and he has turned out badly. I remain faithful, in spite of everything.”

“But” said M. Hervart, “faithfulness only begins at the moment of discovering one’s real vocation.”

Rose seemed to have given these words a meaning which M. Hervart had not consciously intended they should have. Two eyes, full of an infinite tenderness, rested on his like a caress.

“It’s as though I had made a declaration,” he thought. “I must be mad. But how can one avoid phrases which people go and take as premeditated allusions?”

However, he found the game amusing. It was possible in this way to speak in public and to give utterance to one’s real feelings under cover of the commonplaces of conversation. Rose had given him the example; he had followed her without thinking, but this docility was a serious symptom.

“I am lost. Here I am in process of falling in love.”

But like those drunkards who, feeling the moment of intoxication at hand, desire to control themselves, but must still obey their cravings because they have been so far weakened by the very sensation that now awakens them to a consciousness of their state, M. Hervart, while deciding that he ought to struggle, yielded.

He drank off a whole glass of wine and said:

“It is easy to make a mistake at one’s first entry into life, and to go on making it long after. I am still very fond of art, but I was never meant to do more than pay her visits. We are friends, not a married couple. I have built my house on other foundations; it may be worth much or little, but I live in it faithfully. One can only stick to what one loves. To keep a treasure, you must have found it first.”

He had spoken with passion.

“What eloquence!” said M. Des Boys.

All of a sudden, Rose began to laugh, a laugh so happy, so full of gratitude, that M. Hervart could make no mistake about its meaning.

“You’re being laughed at, my poor friend,” M. Des Boys went on.

At this mistake, Rose’s laughter redoubled. It became gay, childish, uncontrollable.

“This is something,” said *Mme.* Des Boys, “which will console you, I hope. But what a little demon my daughter is!”

Out of pity for her mother, Rose made an effort to restrain herself. She succeeded after two or three renewed spasms and said, addressing herself to M. Hervart:

“What do you think of the little demon? Are you afraid?”

“More than you think.”

“So am I; I’m afraid of myself.”

“That’s a sensible remark,” said *Mme.* Des Boys. “Come now, behave.”

The home-made cake being approved of, she began giving the recipe. A meal rarely passed without *Mme.* Des Boys’ revealing some culinary mystery.

The carriage drove past the windows, and lunch ended almost without further conversation. Rose had become dreamy. M. Hervart’s conclusion was:

“Our affair has made the most terrifying progress in these few seconds.”

CHAPTER III

HE WENT ON with his meditations in the little wagonette which carried them to Couville station. Rose was sitting opposite; their feet, naturally, came into contact.

M. Des Boys, who owned several farms, stopped to examine the state of the crops. In some of the fields the corn had been beaten down. He got up on the box beside the driver to ask him whether it was the same throughout the whole district. He was very disquieted.

M. Hervart stretched out his legs, so that he held the girl's knees between his own. She smiled. M. Hervart, a little oppressed by his emotions, dared not speak. He took her hand and kissed it.

All of a sudden, Rose exclaimed: "We have forgotten the microscope!"

"So we have! our pretext. What will become of us?"

"But do we need a pretext, now?"

M. Hervart renewed the pressure of his prisoning knees. That was his first answer.

"We're conspirators, Rose," he then said. "It's serious."

"I hope so."

"We have been conspirators for a long time."

"Since this morning, yes."

She blushed a little.

"From that moment," M. Hervart went on, "when you said, 'One must believe.'"

"I said what I thought."

"It's what I think too."

"In this way," he said to himself, "I say what I ought to say without going too far. 'Oh, if only I dared!"

Meanwhile, he was disturbed by the thought of the microscope.

“I shall buy one,” he said, “and leave it with you. It will be of use to me when I come again.”

“Stop,” said Rose; her voice was low, but its tone was violent. “When you talk of coming again, you’re talking of going away.”

M. Hervart had nothing to answer. He got out of the difficulty by renewing the pressure of his legs.

They reached the little lonely station. The train came in, and a quarter of an hour later they were in Cherbourg.

M. Des Boys at once announced his intention of going to see the museum. He wanted to look at a few masterpieces, he said, so that he might once more compare his own art with that of the great men. M. Hervart protested. For him, a holiday consisted in getting away from museums. Furthermore, he regarded this particular collection, with its list of great names, as being in large part apocryphal.

“If the catalogue of the Louvre is false, as it is, what must the catalogue of the Cherbourg museum be like?” he asked.

M. Des Boys shrugged his shoulders:

“You have lost my esteem.”

And he affirmed the perfect authenticity of the Van Dycks, Van Eycks, Chardins, Poussins, Murillos, Jordaenses, Ribeiras, Fra Angelicos, Cranachs, Pourbuses and Leonardos which adorned the town hall.

“There’s no Raphael,” said M. Hervart, “and there ought to be a Velasquez and a Titian and a Correggio.”

M. Des Boys replied sarcastically:

“There’s a Natural History museum.”

And with a wave of the hand, he disappeared round the corner of a street.

One would think everything in this dreary maritime city had been arranged to disguise the fact that the sea is there. The houses turn their backs on it, and a desert of stones and dust and wind lies between the shores and the town. To

discover that Cherbourg is really a seaport, one must climb to the top of the Roule rock. M. Hervart had a desire to scale this pinnacle.

“It’s a waste of time,” said Rose; “let’s go up the tower in the Liais gardens.”

Side by side, they walked through the dismal streets. Rose kept on looking at M. Hervart; she was disquieted by his silence. She took his arm.

“I didn’t dare offer it to you,” he said.

“That’s why I took it myself.”

“I do enjoy walking with you like this, Rose.”

But as a matter of fact he was most embarrassed. This privilege was at once too innocent and too free. He wondered what he should do to keep it within its present bounds.

“If this is going on.... And to think it only started this morning....”

He reassured himself by this most logical piece of reasoning:

“Either I do or I don’t want to marry her; in either case I shall have to respect her.... That’s evident. Being neither a fool nor a blackguard, I have nothing to fear from myself. The civilised instinct; I’m very civilised....”

They were lightly clad. As he held her arm, he could feel its warmth burning into his flesh.

“Distressing fact! in love you can never be sure of anything or anybody, least of all of yourself. I’m helpless in the hands of desire. And then, at the same time as my own, I must calm down this child’s over-exited nerves. Nerves? No, feelings. Feelings lead anywhere.... What a fool I am, making mental sermons like this! I’m spoiling delicious moments.”

A house like all the others, a carriage door, a vaulted passage — and behold, you were in a great garden, where the brilliance and scent of exotic flowers burst from among the palm-trees, more intoxicating to their senses than the familiar scents and colours of the copse at Robinvast. Within the high walls of this strange oasis, the air hung motionless, heavy and feverish. The flowers breathed forth an almost carnal odour.

“What a place to make love in,” thought M. Hervart.

He forgot all about Rose; his imagination called up the thought of Gratienne and her voluptuousness. He shut out the sun, lit up the place with dim far away lamps, spread scarlet cushions on the grass where a magnolia had let fall one of its fabulous flowers, and on them fancied his mistress.... He knelt beside her, bent over her beauty, covering it with kisses and adoration.

“This garden’s making me mad,” said M. Hervart aloud. The dream was scattered.

“Here’s the tower,” said Rose. “Let’s go up. It will be cool on top.”

She too was breathing heavily, but from uneasiness, not from passion. It was cool within the tower. In a few moments Rose, now freed from her sense of sense of oppression, was at the top. She had quite well realised that M. Hervart, absorbed in some dream of his own, had been far away from her all the last part of their walk. Rose was annoyed, and the appearance of M. Hervart, rather red in the face and with eyes that were still wild, was not calculated to calm her. She felt jealous and would have liked to destroy the object of his thought.

M. Hervart noticed the little movement of irritation, which Rose had been unable to repress, and he was pleased. He would have liked to be alone.

He went and and leaned on the balustrade and, without speaking, looked far out over the blue sea. Seeing him once more absorbed by something which was not herself, Rose was torn by another pang of jealousy; but this time she knew her rival. Women have no doubts about one another, which is what always ensures them the victory, but Rose now pitted herself against the charm of the infinite sea. She took up her position, very close to M. Hervart, shoulder to shoulder with him.

M. Hervart looked at Rose and stopped looking at the sea.

His eyes were melancholy at having seen the ironic flight of desire. Rose’s were full of smiles.

“They are the colour of the infinite sea, Rose.”

“It’s quite pleasant,” thought M. Hervart, “to be the first man to say that to a young girl.... In the ordinary way, women with blue eyes hear that compliment for the hundredth time, and it makes them think that all men are alike and all

stupid.... It’s men who have made love so insipid.... Rose’s eyes are pretty, but I ought not to have said so.... Am I the first?...”

M. Hervart felt the prick, ill defined as yet, of jealousy.

“Who can have taught her these little physical complaisances? She has no girl friends; it must have been some enterprising young cousin.... What a fool I am, torturing myself! Rose has had girl friends, at Valognes at the convent. She has them still, she writes to them.... And besides, what do I care? I’m not in love; it’s all nothing more than a series of light sensations, a pretext for amusing observations....”

The afternoon was drawing on. They had to think of the commissions which *Mme.* Des Boys had given them.... It was time to go down.

“How dark the staircase is,” said Rose. “Give me your hand.”

At the bottom, as though to thank him for his help, she offered her cheek. His kiss settled on the corner of her mouth. Rose recoiled, warned of danger by this new sensation that was too intimate, too intense. But in the process of moving away, she came near to falling. Her hands clutched at his, and she found herself once more leaning towards M. Hervart. They looked at one another for a moment. Rose shut her eyes and waited for a renewal of the burning touch.

“I hope you haven’t hurt yourself.”

She burst out laughing.

“That,” said M. Hervart to himself, “is what is called being self-controlled. And then she laughs at me for it. Such are the fruits of virtue.”

They went into almost all the shops in the Rue Fontaine, which is the centre of this big outlandish village. M. Hervart bought some picture postcards. The castles in the Hague district are almost as fine and as picturesque as those on the banks of the Loire. He would have liked to send the picture of them to Gratienne, but he felt himself to be Rose’s prisoner. For a moment, that put him in a bad temper. Then, as Rose was entering a draper’s shop, he made up his mind; the post office was next door.

“I should like your advice,” said Rose. “I have got to match some wools.”

But he had gone. She waited patiently.

The castles were at last dropped into the box and they continued their course. The walk finished up at the confectioner’s.

One of Mr. Hervart’s pleasures was eating cakes at a pastry cook’s, and the pleasure was complete when a woman was with him. He was a regular customer at the shop in the Rue du Louvre, at the corner of the square; he went there every day and not always alone.

Entering the shop with Rose, he imagined himself in Paris, enjoying a little flirtation, and the thought amused him. Rose was as happy as he. Smiling and serious, she looked as though she were accomplishing some familiar rite.

“She would soon make a Parisian,” M. Hervart thought, as he looked at her.

And in an instant of time, he saw a whole future unfolding before him. They would live in the Quai Voltaire; she would often start out with him in the mornings on her way to the Louvre stores. He would take her as far as the arcades. She would come and pick him up for luncheon. On other days, she would come into his office at four o’clock and they would go and eat cakes and drink a glass of iced water; and then they would walk slowly back by the Pont Neuf and the Quays; on the way they would buy some queer old book and look at the play of the sunlight on the water and in the trees. Sometimes they would take the steamer or the train and go to some wood, not so wild as the Robinvast wood, but pleasant enough, where Rose could breathe an air almost as pure as the air of her native place....

There was not much imagination in this dream of M. Hervart’s, for he had often realised it in the past. But the introduction of Rose made of it something quite new, a pleasure hitherto unfelt.

“By the end of my stay I shall be madly in love with her and very unhappy,” he said to himself at last.

A little while later they met M. Des Boys, who was looking for them. While they were waiting at the station for the train, M. Hervart examined his duplicate postcards of the castles.

“Why shouldn’t we go and look at them?” said Rose, glancing at her father.

He acquiesced:

“It will give me some ideas for the restoration of Robinvast, which I think of carrying out.”

All that he meant to do was simply to set the place in order. He would have the mortar repointed without touching the ivy, and while preserving the wildness of the park and wood, he would have paths and alleys made.

“Art,” he said sententiously, “admits only of a certain kind of disorder. Besides, I have to think of public opinion; the disorder of my garden will make people think that I am letting my daughter grow up in the same way....”

There was, in these words, a hint of marriage plans. Rose perceived it at once.

“I’m quite all right as I am,” she said, “and so is Robinvast.”

“Vain little creature!”

“Don’t you agree with me?” said Rose, turning to M. Hervart with a laugh that palliated the boldness of her question.

“About yourself, most certainly.”

“Oh, there’s nothing more to be done with me. The harm’s done already; I’m a savage. I’m thinking of the wildness of Robinvast; I like it and it suits my wildness.”

“All the same,” said M. Hervart, whose hands were covered with scratches, “there are a lot of brambles in the wood. I’ve never seen such fine ones, shoots like tropical creepers, like huge snakes....”

“I never scratch myself,” said Rose.

But it was not without a feeling of satisfaction that she looked at M. Hervart’s hands, which were scarred with picking blackberries for her. She whispered to him:

“I’m as cruel as the brambles.”

“Defend yourself as well as they do,” M. Hervart replied.

It had been only a chance word. No doubt, M. Des Boys thought of marrying his daughter, but the project was still distant. No suitor threatened. M. Hervart was pleased with this state of affairs; for, having fallen in love at ten in the morning, he was thinking now, at seven, of marrying this nervous and sentimental child who had offered the corner of her mouth to his clumsy kiss.

The evenings at Robinvast were regularly spent in playing cards. Trained from her earliest youth to participate in this occupation, Rose played whist with conviction. She managed the whole game, scolded her mother, argued about points with her father and kept M. Hervart fascinated under the gaze of her gentle eyes.

As soon as he sat down at the card table, he was conscious of this fascination, which, up till then, had worked on him without his knowledge. He remembered now that each time a chance had brought him face to face with Rose, he had felt himself intoxicated by a great pleasure. It was a kind of possession; spectators feel the same at the theatre, when they see the actress of their dreams. He reflected too that his own pleasure, almost unconscious though it had been, must have expressed itself by fervent looks....

“Her heart responded little by little to the mysterious passion of my eyes.... I have nice eyes too, I know; they are my best feature.... My pleasure is easily explained; full face, Rose is quite divine, though her profile is rather hard. Her nose, which is a little long, looks all right from the front; her face is a perfect oval; her smile seems to be the natural movement of her rather wide mouth, and her eyes come out in the lamplight from their deep setting, like flowers.... I have often stood in the same ecstasy before my lovely Titian Venus; it’s true that she displays other beauties as well, but her face and her eyes are above all exquisite....”

“Don’t make signs at one another!”

This observation, which had followed a too obvious exchange of smiles, amused Rose enormously; for she had been thinking very little of the game at the moment. She bowed her head innocently under the paternal rebuke.

They played extremely badly and lost a great number of points.

At the change of partners they were separated; but separation united them the better, for their knees soon came together under the table. The game, under these conditions, became delicious. Rose did her best to beat her lover and at the same time, delighting in the sense of contrast, caressed him under the table. Life seemed to her very delightful.

She was a little feverish and it was late before she went to sleep, to dream of this wonderful day when she had so joyously reached the summit of her desires. She was loved; that was happiness. She did not for a moment think of wondering whether she were herself in love. She had no doubts on the state of her heart.

M. Hervart's reflections were somewhat different. They also were extremely confused. Women live entirely in the present; men much more in the future — a sign, it may be, that there nature is not so well organised. M. Hervart was making plans. He went to sleep in the midst of his scheming, exhausted by his to make so much as one plan that should be tenable.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN HE CAME down fairly early next morning, he found M. Des Boys, who was usually invisible till lunch time, walking in the garden with his daughter. He was gesticulating, largely. M. Hervart was alarmed.

But they were not talking of him. M. Des Boys was planning a long winding alley and was showing Rose how it would run. After consulting M. Hervart, who was all eagerness in agreeing, he decided that they should start their tour of the castles that very day.

At the same time he sent for workmen to come the next day and wrote to Lanfranc, the architect of Martinvast, a friend of whom he had lost sight for a good many years. Lanfranc lived at St. Lô, where he acted as clerk of the works to the local authorities. M. Hervart was also acquainted with him.

Meanwhile, M. Des Boys forgot his painting and stayed in the garden nearly the whole morning. Rose was annoyed. She had counted on repeating their yesterday's walk among the hollies and brambles, among the foxgloves and through the bracken. She dreamed of how she would take this walk every day of her life, believing that she would find it eternally the same, as moving and as novel.

M. Hervart, though he was grateful for this diversion, could not help feeling certain regrets. He missed Rose's hand within his own.

For a moment, as they were walking along the terrace, they found themselves alone, at the very spot where the crisis had begun.

Quickly, they took one another's hands and Rose offered her cheek. M. Hervart made no attempt, on this occasion, to obtain a better kiss. It was not the occasion. Perhaps he did not even think of it. Rose was disappointed. M. Hervart noticed it and lifted the girl's hands to his lips. He loved this caress, having a special cult for hands. He gave utterance to his secret thought, saying:

“How is it that I never yet kissed your hands?”

Pleased, without being moved, Rose confined herself to smiling. Then, suddenly, as an idea flashed through her mind, the smile broke into a laugh, which, for all its violence, seemed somehow tinged with shyness. Grown calmer, she asked.

“I’d like to know ... to know.... I’d like to know your name.”

M. Hervart was nonplussed.

“My name? But ... Ah, I see ... the other one.”

He hesitated. This name, the sound of which he had hardly heard since his mother’s death, was so unfamiliar to him that he felt a certain embarrassment at uttering it. He signed himself simply “Hervart.” All his friends railed him by this name, for none had known him in the intimacy of the family; even his mistresses had never murmured any other. Besides, women prefer to make use of appellations suitable to every one in general, such as “wolf,” or “pussy-cat,” or “white rabbit” — M. Hervart, who was thin, had been generally called “wolf.”

“Xavier,” he said at last. Rose seemed satisfied.

She began eating blackberries as she had done the day before. M. Hervart — just as he had done yesterday, opened his magnifying glass; he counted the black spots on the back of a lady-bird, *coccinella septempunctata*; there were only six.

In the palm of her little hand, well smeared already with purple, Rose placed a fine blackberry and held it out to M. Hervart. As he did not lift his head, but still sat there, one eye shut, the other absorbed in what he was looking at, she said gently, in a voice without affection, a voice that was deliciously natural:

“Xavier!”

M. Hervart felt an intense emotion. He looked at Rose with surprised and troubled eyes. She was still holding out her hand. He ate the blackberry in a kiss and then repeated several times in succession, “Rose, Rose....”

“How pale you are!” she said equally moved.

She stepped back, leant against the wall. M. Hervart took a step forward. They were standing now, looking into one another’s eyes. Very serious, Rose waited. M. Hervart said:

“Rose, I love you.”

She hid her face in her hands. M. Hervart dared not speak or move. He looked at the hands that hid Rose’s face.

When she uncovered her face, it was grave and her eyes were wet. She said nothing, but went off and picked a blackberry as though nothing had happened. But instead of eating it, she threw it aside and, instead of coming back to M. Hervart, she walked away.

M. Hervart felt chilled. He stood looking at her sadly, as she smoothed the folds of her dress and set her hat straight.

When she reached the corner by the lilac bushes, Rose stopped, turned round and blew a kiss, then, taking flight, she disappeared in the direction of the house.

The scene had lasted two or three minutes; but in that little space, M. Hervart had lived a great deal. It had been the most moving instant of his life; at least he could not remember having known one like it. At the sound of that name, Xavier, almost blotted from his memory, a host of charming moments from the past had entered his heart; he thought of his mother’s love, of his first declaration, his first caresses. He found himself once more at the outset of life and as incapable of mournful thoughts as at twenty.

His whole manner suddenly changed. He hoisted himself on to the terrace and, sitting on the edge in the dry grass, lit a cigarette and looked at the world without thinking of anything at all.

CHAPTER V

THEIR RAPID INTIMACY did not leave off growing during the following days. M. Des Boys never left the workmen who were making the new paths and from moment to moment he would call his daughter or M. Hervart, soliciting their approval.

In the afternoons they would go and look at one of the castles in the neighbourhood.

They saw Martinvast, towers, chapel, Gothic arches, ingeniously adapted so as to cover, without spoiling their lines, the flimsy luxury of modern times. Tourlaville, though less old, looked more decayed under its cloak of ivy. M. Hervart admired the great octagonal tower, the bold lines of the inward-curving roofs. They saw Pepinbast, a thing of lace-work and turrets, florid with trefoils and pinnacles. They saw Chiflevast, a Janus, Gothic on one side and Louis XIV on the other.

Nacqueville is old in parts; the main block seems to be contemporary with Richelieu; as a whole, it is imposing, a building to which each generation has added its own life without hiding the distant origins.

Vast, which looks quite modern, occupies a pleasing site by the falls of the Saire. It seemed more human than the others, whose hugeness and splendour they had admired without a wish to possess. Here one could give play to one’s desire.

“All the same,” said M. Hervart, “it looks too much like a big cottage.”

M. Des Boys resolved to have a cascade at Robinvast. It was a pity that he had nothing better than a stream at his disposal.

They returned by La Pernelle, from which one can see all the eastern part of the Hague, from Gatteville to St. Marcouf, a great sheet of emerald green, bordered, far away by a ribbon of blue sea.

They made a halt. Rose picked some heather, with which she filled M. Hervart's arms. The eagerness of the air lit up her eyes, fired her cheeks.

"Isn't it lovely, my country?"

A cloud hid the sun. Colour paled away from the scene; a shadow walked across the sea, quenching its brilliance; but southward, towards the isles of St. Marcouf, it was still bright.

"A sad thought crossing the brow of the sea," said M. Hervart. "But look...."

Everything had suddenly lit up once again.

Rose blew kisses into space.

They had to go back towards St. Vast, where they had hired the carriage. Thence, traveling by the little railway which follows the sea for a space before it turns inland under the apple trees, they arrived at Valognes.

They dined at the St. Michel hotel. M. Des Boys was bored; he had begun to find the excursion rather too long. But there were still a lot of fine buildings to be looked at, Fontenay, Flamanville.... However, those didn't mean such long journeys.

"We have still got to go," said he, "to Barnavast, Richemont, the Hermitage and Pannelier. That can be done in one afternoon."

They did not get back to Robinvast till very late. The darkness in the carriage gave M. Hervart his opportunity; his leg came into contact with Rose's; under pretext of steadying the bundle of heather which Rose was balancing on her knee, their hands met for an instant.

Mme. Des Boys was waiting for them, rather anxiously. She kissed her daughter almost frenziedly. Enervated, Rose burst out laughing, said she wanted something to drink and, having drunk expressed a wish for food.

"That's it," said M. Hervart. "Let's have supper."

He checked himself:

"I was only joking; I'm not in the least hungry."

But Rose found the idea amusing; she went in search of food, bringing into the drawing-room every kind of object, down to a bottle of sparkling cider she had discovered in a cupboard.

“Hervart’s a boy of twenty-five,” said M. Des Boys as he watched his friend helping Rose in her preparations. “I shall go to bed.”

“At twenty-five,” said Hervart, “one doesn’t know what to do with one’s life. One has all the trumps in one’s hand, but one plays one’s cards haphazard, and one loses.”

“Does he talk of playing now?” said M. Des Boys, who was half asleep. Rose burst out laughing.

“Are you really going to bed?” asked *Mme.* Des Boys; she looked tired. “I suppose I must stay here.”

But she was soon bored. It was half past twelve. She tried to get her daughter to come.

“Ten minutes more, mother.”

“All right, I’ll leave you. I shall expect you in ten minutes.”

M. Hervart got up.

“I give you ten minutes. Be indulgent with the child. All this fresh air has gone to her head.”

M. Hervart felt embarrassed. A week ago such a *tête-a-tête* would have seemed the most innocent and perhaps, too, the most tedious of things.

“I really don’t know what may happen. I must be serious, cold; I must try and look tired and antique....”

As soon as she heard her mother’s footsteps in the room above the drawing-room, Rose came and sat down close to M. Hervart, put her hands on the arm of his chair. He looked at her, and there was something of madness in his eyes. He turned completely and laid his hands upon the girl’s hands. They moved, took his and pressed them, gently. Then, without having had the time to think of what they were doing, they woke up a second later mouth against mouth. This kiss exhausted their emotion. With the same instinctive movement both drew back, but they went on looking at one another.

Decidedly, she was very pretty. She, for part, found him admirable, thinking:

“I belong to him. I have given him my lips. I am his. What will he do? What shall I do?...”

That was just what M. Hervart was wondering — what ought he to do?

“What caresses are possible, what won’t she object to? I should like to kiss her lips again.... Her eyes? Her neck? Which of the Italian poets was it who said: ‘Kiss the arms, the neck, the breasts of your beloved, they will not give you back your kisses. The lips alone,’ But I shall have to say something. Of course, I ought to say: ‘Je vous aime.’ But I don’t love her. If I did, I should have said: ‘Je t’aime!’ and I should have said it without thinking, without knowing.

“Rose, I love you.”

She shut her eyes, laid her head on the arm of the chair; for she was sitting on a low stool.

It was the ear that presented itself. M. Hervart kissed her ear slowly, savouring it, kiss by kiss, like an epicure over some choice shell-fish.

“She lets me do what I like. It’s amusing....”

He kissed his way round her ear and halted next to the eye, which was shut.

“How soft her eyelid is!”

His lips travelled down her nose and settled at the corner of her mouth. Tickled by their touch, she smiled.

When he had thoroughly kissed the right side, she offered him the left; then, giving her lips to him frankly, she received his kiss, returned it with all her heart, and got up.

She smiled without any embarrassment. She was happy and very little disturbed.

“There,” she said to herself. “Now I’m married.”

CHAPTER VI

THE PATHS WERE now visible. One of them, in front of the house, made an oval round a lawn, which looked, at the moment, like a patch of weeds, with all sorts of flowers in the uneven grass — buttercups, moon-daisies, cranes-bill and centaury; there were rushes, too, and nettles, hemlock and plants of lingwort that looked like long thin girls in white hats.

Encoignard, the gardener from Valognes, was contemplating this wildness with a melancholy eye:

“It will have to be ploughed, M. Des Boys, or at least well hoed. Then we’ll sift the earth we’ve broken up, level it down and sow ray-grass. In two years it will be like a carpet of green velvet.”

Eyeing the landscape, he went on:

“Lime trees! You ought to have a segoya here and over there an araucaria. And what’s that? An apple-tree. That’s quite wrong. We’ll have that up and put a magnolia grandiflora there. You want an English garden, don’t you? An English garden oughtn’t to contain anything but exotic plants. Lilacs and roses.... Why not snow-ball trees? Ah, there’s a nice spotted holly. We might use that perhaps.”

“I don’t want anyone to touch my trees,” said Rose, who had drawn near.

“She’s right,” said M. Des Boys.

“Think of pulling up lilacs,” Rose went on, “pulling up rose-trees.”

“But I mean to put prettier flowers in their place, Mademoiselle.”

“The prettiest flowers are the ones I like best.”

She picked a red rose and put it to her lips, kissing it as though it were something sacred and adored.

M. Des Boys looked at his daughter with astonishment.

“Well, M. Encoignard, we must do what she wants. Hervart, what do you think about it?”

“I think that one ought to leave nature as unkempt as possible. I also think that one ought to love the plants of the country where one lives. They are the only ones that harmonise with the sky and the crops, with the colour of the rivers and roads and roofs.”

“Quite right,” said M. Des Boys.

“Xavier, I love you,” Rose whispered, taking M. Hervart’s arm.

The inspection of the garden was continued, and it was decided that M. Encoignard’s collaboration should be reduced to the ordinary functions of a plain docile gardener. One or two new plants were admitted on condition that the old should be respected.

M. Hervart had got up early and had been strolling about the garden for some time past. He had spent half the night in thought. All the women he had loved or known had visited his memory with their customary gestures and the attitudes they affected. There was that other one who seemed always to have come merely to pay a friendly call; it needed real diplomacy to obtain from her what, at the bottom of her heart, she really desired. Between these two extremes there were many gradations. Most of them liked to give themselves little by little, playing their desire against their sense of shame M. Hervart flattered himself that he knew all about women; he knew that who let herself be touched will let herself be wholly possessed.

“A woman,” he said to himself, “who has been as familiar as Rose has been, or even much less familiar, ought to be one who has surrendered herself. Perhaps she might make me wait a few days more, but she would belong to me, she would let her eyes confess it and her lips would speak it out. Such a woman would even be disposed to hasten the coming of the delightful moment, if I had not the wit to prepare it myself. Rose, being a young girl and having only the dimmest presentiments of the truth, does not know how to hasten our happiness; otherwise she most certainly would hasten it. She belongs, then, to me. The

question to be answered is this: shall I go on smelling the rose on the tree, or shall I pluck it?”

The poetical quality of this metaphor seemed to him perhaps a little flabby. He began to speak to himself, without actually articulating the words, even in a whisper, in more precise terms.

“Well, then, if I take her, I shall keep her. I have never thought of marrying, but it’s no good going against the current of one’s life. It may be happiness. Shall I lay up this regret for my old age: happiness passed dose to me, smiling to my desire, and my eyes remained dull and my mouth dumb? Happiness? Is it certain? Happiness is always uncertain. Unhappiness too. And the fusing of these two elements makes a dull insipid mixture.”

This commonplace idea occupied him for a while. Every joy is transient, and when it has passed one finds oneself numb and neutral once again.

“Neutral, or below neutral? A woman of this temperament? I can still tame her? Yes, but what will happen ten years hence, when she is thirty? Ah, well, till then...!”

M. Des Boys carried off Encoignard into his study. Left alone, Rose and M. Hervart had soon vanished behind the trees and shrubberies, had soon crossed the stream. They almost ran.

“Here we are at home,” said Rose and, very calmly, she offered her lips to M. Hervart.

“She’s positively conjugal already,” thought M. Hervart.

Nevertheless, this kiss disturbed his equanimity — the more so since Rose, in gratitude no doubt to M. Hervart for his defence of her old garden, kept her mouth a long time pressed to his. She was growing breathless and her breasts rose under her thin white blouse. M. Hervart was tempted to touch them. He made bold, and his gesture was received without indignation. They looked at one another anxious to speak but finding no words. Their mouths came together once more. M. Hervart pressed Rose’s breast, and a small hand squeezed his other hand. It was a perilous moment. Realising this, M. Hervart tried to put an end to the contact. But the little hand squeezed his own more tightly and in a

convulsive movement her knee came into contact with his leg. The tension was broken. Their hands were loosened, they drew away from one another, and for the first time after a kiss, Rose shut her eyes.

M. Hervart felt a pain in the back of his neck.

He began thinking of that season of Platonic love he had once passed at Versailles with a virtuous woman, and he was frightened; for that passion of light kisses and hand-pressures had undermined him as more violent excesses had never done.

“What will become of me?” he thought. “This is a case of acute Platonism, marked by the most decisive symptoms. All or nothing! Otherwise I am a dead man.”

He looked at Rose, meaning to put on a chilly expression; but those eyes of her looked back at him so sweetly!

His thoughts became confused. He felt a desire to lie down in the grass and sleep, and he said so.

“All right, lie down and sleep. I’ll watch over you and keep the flies away from your eyes and mouth. I’ll fan you with this fern.”

She spoke in a voice that was caressingly passionate. It was like music. M. Hervart woke up and uttered words of love.

“I love you, Rose. The touch of your lips has refreshed my blood and brought joy to my heart. When I first touched you, it was as though I were clasping a treasure without price. But tell me, my darling, you won’t take back this treasure now you have given it?”

M. Hervart was breathing heavily. Rose shook her head and said, “No, I won’t take it back;” and to prove that she meant it she leaned towards him, as though offering her bosom; M. Hervart lightly touched the stuff of her blouse with his lips.

Seeing her lover’s lack of alacrity, Rose, without suspecting the mystery, at least guessed that there was a mystery.

“No doubt,” she thought, “love needs a rest every now and then. We will go for a little walk and I’ll talk to him of flowers and insects. We should do well,

perhaps, to go back to the garden, for it would be very annoying if they took it into their heads to come and look for us." They got up and walked round the wood meaning to go straight back to the house.

M. Hervart seemed to be in an absent-minded mood. He was holding Rose's hand in his, but he forgot to squeeze it. His thoughts were, none the less, thoughts of love. He looked about him as though he were searching for something.

"What are you looking for? Tell me; I'll look too."

M. Hervart was looking for a nook. He inspected the dry leaves, peeped into every nook and bower of the wood. But he felt ashamed of his quest.

"Yet," he thought, "I must. I love her and these innocent amusements are really too pernicious. Shall I go away? That would be to condemn myself to a melancholy solitude, with, perhaps, bitter consolations. Marry her, then? Certainly, but it can't come off to-morrow, and we are too much aquiver with desire to wait patiently. And suppose, when we are engaged, we have to submit ourselves to the law of the traditional sentimentality.... No, let us be peasants, children of this kindly earth. Let us, like them, make love first, at haphazard, where the paths of the wood lead us; then, when we are certain of the consent of our flesh, we will call our fellow men to witness."

He went on looking and found what he wanted, but when he had found, he started searching again, for he was ashamed of himself.

"Perhaps," he thought, answering his own objections, "one may have to behave like a cad in order to be happy. What, shall I submit myself to the prejudices of the world at the moment when life offers to my kisses a virgin who is unaware of them? I will have the courage of my caddishness."

Time passed and his eyes examined the heaps of leaves with decreasing interest. His imagination returned pleasantly to the joys of a little before, and he longed to be able to lay his trembling hand once more on Rose's breast and to drink her breath in a kiss.

M. Hervart was recovering all his self-possession. He concluded:

“Well, it’s very curious adventure and one that will increase the sum of my knowledge and of my pleasures.”

Rose, feeling the pressure of his fingers, had the courage, at last, to look at him. He smiled and she was reassured.

“You won’t leave me, will you?” she said. “Promise. When we are married well live wherever you like, but till then, I want you near me, in my house, in my garden, my woods, my fields. Do you understand?”

“Child, I love you and I understand that you love me too.”

“Why ‘too’? I loved you first; I don’t like that word; it expresses a kind of imitation.”

“It’s true,” said M. Hervart. “We fell in love simultaneously. But the convention is that the man falls in love first and the woman does no more than consent to his desires.”

“What can you want that I don’t want myself?”

“Delicious innocence!” thought M. Hervart.

He went on:

“But perhaps I want still more intimacy, complete surrender, Rose.”

“But am I not entirely yours? I want you in exchange, though, Xavier, I want you, all of you.”

M. Hervart did not know what to say. He became quite shy. This charming ingenuousness troubled his imagination more than the images of pleasure itself.

“She doesn’t know,” he thought. “She hasn’t even dreamed of it. What chastity and grace!”

He answered:

“I belong to you, Rose, with all my heart....”

“What were you thinking of a moment ago? You seemed far away.”

“I was just feeling happy.”

“You must have had such a lot of happinesses since you began life, Xavier. You have given happiness, received it....”

“I have just lived,” said M. Hervart.

“Yes, and I’m only a girl of twenty.”

“Think of being twenty!”

“If you were twenty, I shouldn’t love you.”

M. Hervart answered only by a smile which he tried to make as young, as delicate as possible. He knew what he would have liked to say, but he felt that he could not say it. Besides, he wondered whether Rose and he were really speaking the same language.

“This conversation is really absurd. I tell her that I want her to surrender herself to me, and she answers — at least I suppose that’s what she means — that she has given me her heart. Obviously, she has no idea of what might happen between us.... What do these little caresses mean to her? They’re just marks of affection.... All the same there was surely desire in her movements, her kisses, her eyes. And her body trembled at the urgent touch of my lips. Yes, she knows what love is. How ridiculous! All the same, if we go to work cleverly....”

“You mustn’t believe, Rose,” he said out loud, “that I have ever yet had occasion to give my heart. That doesn’t always happen in the course of a life; and when it does happen, it happens only once.... A man has plenty of adventures in which his will is not concerned.... Man is an animal as well as a man....”

“And what about women?”

“The best people agree,” said M. Hervart, “that woman is an angel.”

Rose burst out laughing at this remark, apparently very innocently, and said:

“I can’t claim to be an angel. It wouldn’t amuse me to be one, either. Angels — why, father puts them in his pictures. No, I prefer being a woman. Would you love an angel?”

M. Hervart laughed too. He explained that young girls had a right to being called angels, because of their innocence....

“When one is in love, is one still innocent?”

“If one still is, one doesn’t remain so long.”

They could say no more. They had come back to the stream and there they caught sight of M. Des Boys showing his domains to two gentlemen, one of whom seemed to be of his own age, while the other looked about thirty.

CHAPTER VII

M. HERVART SOON recognised in one of the visitors a friend of old days, Lanfranc, the architect. The young man, as he found out, was Lanfranc's nephew, pupil and probable successor. He was further informed that the two architects were installed in the old manor house of Barnavast, the restoration of which they had undertaken on behalf of *Mme.* Suif, widow of that famous Suif who gave such a fine impulse to the art of mortuary and religious sculpture. Lanfranc, who had patched and painted every church in Normandy, had for twenty years bought his materials at Suif's and the widow had always appreciated him. Hence this job at Barnavast which would round off his fortune, make it possible for him to return to Paris and achieve a place in the Institute.

As soon as they had settled down in the shade of the chestnut trees on the rustic seat, Lanfranc began telling the story of *Mme.* Suif, a story that was well known to every one. Rose listened attentively. The moment Lanfranc could collect a friendly audience he always told the story of *Mme.* Suif. It was in some degree his own story too. *Mme.* Suif had been his mistress, then he had married, then he had resumed relations with her and had, with the cooling of their passion, remained her friend.

"Ah! If I hadn't been so childish as to marry for love, I would marry *Mme.* Suif's millions to-day, for *Mme.* Suif would be grateful to any man who would relieve her of her name. Being an architect of churches and ancient monuments, I could hardly get divorced, could I? But of course she may be willing to call herself *Mme.* Leonor Varin. For she looks at my nephew with no unfavourable eye!"

"Thanks, I don't want her," said Leonor, blushing.

Rose had looked at him and he had suddenly felt quite ashamed of his secret cupidity.

Leonor, who was nearly thirty, looked older from a distance and younger from close at hand. He was large, rather massive and slow in his movements. But when one came near him one was surprised at the sentimental expression of his eyes, surprised at the youthful appearance of a beard that still seemed to be newly sprouting, at the awkwardness of his gestures and, when he spoke, the abrupt shyness of his speech; for he could hardly open his mouth without blushing. It is true that the moment after he would frown and contract his whole face into an expression of harshness. But the eyes remained blue and gentle in this frowning mask. Leonor was a riddle for everybody, including himself. He liked pondering, and when he thought of love it was to come to the conclusion that his ideal hovered between the daydream and the debauch, between the happiness of kissing, on bended knees, a gloved hand and the pleasure of lying languidly in the midst of a troop of odalisques of easy virtue. He had no suspicion that he was like almost all other men. He was afraid of himself and contemptuous too, when he caught himself thinking too complacently of *Mme.* Suif's millions, those millions that would give immediate satisfaction to his vices and, later on, to his sentimental aspirations.

He looked at Rose in his turn, but Rose did not drop her eyes. Meanwhile, M. Hervart was growing bored.

"Mme. Suif," said Lanfranc, "is still quite well preserved. For instance...."

"Rose dear," interrupted M. Des Boys, "doesn't your mother want you?"

"Oh, no, I'm sure she doesn't. Mother would only find me in the way."

"Your father is right, Rose," said M. Hervart glad to make trial of his authority.

She did not dare oppose her lover's wish, but she felt angry as she rose to go.

"Acting like my master already!" she thought. "I should so like to listen to M. Lanfranc...."

She dared not add: "... and to look at this M. Leonor and be looked at by him and still more, to hear them talk of *Mme.* Suif. What was he going to say? Oh, I don't want to know!"

She entered the house, came out again by another door and hid herself in a shrubbery from which she could hear their voices quite clearly.

“It’s not only her shoulders,” M. Lanfranc was saying, “they’re not the only things about her that tempt one. She’s forty-five, but her figure is still good and not too excessively run to flesh. As a whole she is certainly a bit ample, but at the Art School one could still make a very respectable Juno of her. I’ve seen worse on the model’s throne....”

“Time,” said M. Hervart, “often shows angelical clemency. He pardons women who have been good lovers.”

“And still are,” said Lanfranc.

“There’s no better recreation than love,” said Leonor. “No sport more suited to keep one fit and supple.”

M. Hervart looked in surprise at this dim young man who had so unexpectedly made a joke. Anxious to shine in his turn, he replied: “No one has ever dared to put that in a manual of hygiene. What a charming chapter one could make of it, in the style of the First Empire: ‘Love, the preserver of Beauty.’”

“A pretty subject too for the Prix de Rome,” said Lanfranc.

“Seriously,” broke in M. Des Boys, “I believe that the thing that so quickly shrivels up virtuous women in chastity.”

“Virtuous women!” said Lanfranc, “they’re mean to reproduce the species. When they have had their children, and that must take place between twenty and thirty, their rôle is finished.”

“The only thing left for them to do,” said M. Des Boys, “is to concoct philters to keep us young.”

The others looked at him interrogatively; he laughed.

“You will see, or rather you’ll taste, and you will understand. I wish you all as good a magician as *Mme.* Des Boys.”

“True,” said M. Hervart, understanding him at last, “she has a real genius for cookery. Dinners of her planning are regular love-potions.”

“You’ll realise that when you get back to Paris.”

“Yes, when I get back to Paris. I am taking a holiday here,” said M. Hervart, pleased at this mark of confidence. He even added, so as to guard against possible suspicions:

“A holiday from love is not without a certain melancholy.”

Rose had found it all very amusing, but when her father began speaking she stopped listening. Leonor, pleased at having made a witty remark, and afraid of not being able to think of another, had got up and was walking about the garden. Rose looked at him. The sight of this young animal interested her. And what curious words about love had issued from that mouth! So love was an exercise like tennis, or bicycling, or riding! What a revelation! And the most singular fancies took shape in her mind as she followed with her eyes the now distant figure of this ingenious and decisive young man.

“How do people play the game of love,” she wondered, “real love? Xavier teaches me nothing. He knows all about it though, more probably than this young Leonor, but he takes care not to tell me. He treats me like a little girl, while he makes fun of my innocence. Oh! it’s gentle fun, because he loves me; but all the same he rather abuses his superior position. A sport, a sport....”

Quitting the shrubbery, she went and sat down on an old stone bench in a lonely corner, from which she could keep a watch between the trees on all that was happening in the neighbourhood. She was fond of this nook and in it, before M. Hervart’s arrival, she had spent whole mornings dreaming alone. She laughed at the childishness of those dreams now.

“It always seemed to me,” she thought, “that the branches were just about to open, making way for some beautiful young cavalier.... Without saying a word, he would bring his horse to stop at my side, would lean down, pick me up, lay me across the saddle and off we would go. Then there was to be a mad, furious, endless gallop, and in the end I should go to sleep. And in reality I used to wake up as though from a sleep, even though I hadn’t dropped off. Nothing happened but this dumb ride in the blue air, and yet, when I came to myself, I felt tired.... How often I have dreamed this dream! How often have I seen the lilac plumes bending to make way for my lovely young knight and his black horse! The horse

was always black. I remember very little of the face of the Perseus who delivered me, for a few hours at least, from the bondage of my boring existence.... A sport? That was indeed a sport! What did he do with his Andromeda, this Perseus of mine? I've never been able to find out. What do Perseuses do with their Andromedas?"

To this question Rose's tireless imagination provided, for the hundredth time, a new series of answers. The imagination of a young girl who knows and yet is ignorant of what she desires has an Aretine-like fecundity.

Into all these imaginations of hers Rose now introduced the complicity of M. Hervart. Even at the moment when she was on the lookout for Leonor's return, it was really of M. Hervart that she was thinking. Leonor was to be nothing more than a stimulant for her heart and her nerves, a musical accompaniment to something else. The stimulation which the young man's arrival had brought to her went to the profit of M. Hervart.

"Xavier," she murmured, "Xavier...."

Xavier, meanwhile, was congratulating himself that his paternal intervention had spared Rose's ears the hearing of those over-frank remarks of M. Lanfranc. The architect would of course have toned down his language; but is it good that a young girl should learn the use that wives make of marriage? He said:

"M. Lanfranc, keep an eye on your language at table. Don't forget that we have a young girl with us."

"Yes," said M. Des Boys "I sent her away from here, but that would hardly be possible during luncheon."

"Girls," said Lanfranc, "understand nothing."

"They guess," said M. Hervart.

M. Des Boys had no opinions on maiden perspicacity, but he desired to conform to custom and allow his daughter to listen only to the choicest conversation.

"Well, then," said Lanfranc, "let us profitably employ these moments while we are alone." His lively blue eyes lit up his tanned face.

The conversation had deviated once more in the direction of *Mme.* Des Boys' administrative merits.

"One meets so many different kinds of women," said M. Hervart. "The best of them is never equal to the dream one makes up about them."

"Silly commonplace," he thought. "What answer will he make to that?"

"I don't dream," said Lanfranc, "I search. But I scarcely ever find. Adventures have always disappointed me. That's why Paris is the only place for love affairs. One can find plenty of pleasant romances there with only one chapter — the last."

"Your opinion of women ceases to astonish me then!"

"His opinion is very reasonable," said M. Des Boys. "You talk as though you were still twenty-five, Hervart."

He reddened a little.

"Me! Oh no, thank God! I'm forty."

And seeing the appropriateness of the occasion, he added:

"You're jealous of my liberty, but I am becoming afraid that I may lose it."

"Are you thinking of marriage?" asked Lanfranc.

"Perhaps."

"Mme. Suif would suit you very well. Leonor is being coy about her...."

Irritated by so much vulgarity, M. Hervart got up and walked into the garden. Rose and Leonor were strolling there together.

CHAPTER VIII

ROSE HAD LAID her plans in such a fashion that the young man had found her in his path. Not to see her was too deliberately to avoid her. If he saw her, he had to take off his hat. And this was what had happened. Rose had answered his salutation by a word of welcome; conversation had then passed to the old house at Barnavast, finally to *Mme.* Suif. But Leonor was discreet and vague, so much so that at one of Rose's questions the conversation had switched off on to sentimental commonplaces. But, for Rose, nothing in the world was commonplace yet.

"Isn't she rather old to marry again?" she asked.

"Ah, but *Mme.* Suif is one of those whose hearts are always young."

"Then there are some hearts that grow old more slowly than others?"

"Some never grow old at all, just as some have never been young."

"All the same, I see a great difference, when I look around me, between the feelings of young and old people."

"Do you know many people?"

"No, very few; but I have always seen a correspondence between people's hearts and faces."

"Certainly; but a general truth, although it may represent the average of particular truths, is hardly ever the same as a single particular case selected by chance...."

Rose looked at Leonor with a mixture of admiration and shame: she did not understand. Leonor perceived the fact and went on:

"I mean that there are, in all things, exceptions. I also mean that there are rules which admit of a great number of exceptions. It even happens in life, just as in grammar, that the exceptional are more numerous than the regular cases. Do you follow?"

“Oh, perfectly.”

“But that,” he concluded, emphasising his words, “does not prevent the rule’s being the rule, even though there were only two normal cases as against ten exceptions.”

Rose liked this magisterial tone. M. Hervart had, for some time, done nothing but agree with her opinions.

“But how does one recognise the rule?” she went on.

“Rules,” said Leonor, “always satisfy the reason.”

Rose looked at him in alarm; then, pretending she had understood, made a sign of affirmation.

“Women never understand that very well,” Leonor continued. “It doesn’t satisfy them. They yield only to their feelings. So do men, for that matter, but they don’t admit it. So that women accused of hypocrisy and vanity have less of these vices, it may be, than men.... At any rate the rule is the rule. The rule demands that Marguerite should give up....”

“Who’s Marguerite?”

“Mme. Suif.”

“Do you know her well?”

Leonor smiled. “Am I not the nephew and lieutenant of her architect? The rule, then, would demand that Marguerite should give up love; and the rule further demands, Mademoiselle, that you should begin to think of it.”

“The rule is the rule,” said Rose sententiously, suppressing the shouts of laughter that exploded silently in her heart.

“The rule’s not so stupid after all,” she thought. “I don’t ask anything better than to obey it....”

At this moment M. Hervart came face to face with them at the turn of a path. Rose welcomed him with a happy smile, a smile of delicious frankness.

“Good,” thought M. Hervart, “he isn’t my rival yet. My rôle for the moment is to act the part of the man who is sure of himself, the man who possesses, dominates, the lord who is above all changes and chances....”

And he began to talk of his stay at Robinvast and of the pleasure he found in the midst of this rich disorderly scene of nature.

“But you,” he said, “have come to put it in order. You have come to whiten these walls, scrape off this moss and ivy, cut clearings through these dark masses, and you will make M. Des Boys a present of a brand-new castle with a charming and equally brand-new park.”

“Who’s going to touch my ivy?” exclaimed Rose, indignantly.

“Why should it be touched,” said Leonor. “Isn’t ivy the glory of the walls of Tourlaville? Ivy — why, it’s the only architectural beauty that can’t be bought. At Barnavast, which is in a state of ruin, we always respect it when the wall can be consolidated from inside. To my mind, restoration means giving back to a monument the appearance that the centuries would have given it if it had been well looked after. Restoration doesn’t mean making a thing look new; it doesn’t consist in giving an old man the hair, beard, complexion and teeth of a youth; it consists in bringing a dying man back to life and giving him the health and beauty of his age.”

“How glad I am to hear you talk like this,” said Rose. “I hope M. Lanfranc shares your ideas.”

“M. Lanfranc is completely converted to my ideas.”

“My father will do nothing without consulting me, but I shall feel more certain of getting my way if you are my ally.”

“I will be your ally then.”

“Yours is a sensible method,” said M. Hervart. “You may know that I am the keeper of the Greek sculpture at the Louvre. I entered that necropolis at a time when the old system of restoration had begun to be abandoned. They were oscillating between two methods — re-making or doing nothing. The second has prevailed. You will have noticed that our marbles can be divided into two groups: those which have no antiquity but in the name, and those which have no antiquity except in the material. In old days, when they had found a bust, they manufactured a new head for it, new arms and new legs; then they wrote underneath: ‘Artemis (restored), Minerva (restored), Nymph with a bow

(restored),' according to the fancy of the cast-maker or as they were guided by a somnolent archæology. I think that they certainly filled some gaps in this way. If the system had gone on being followed, we should doubtless be in possession at the present time of a complete Olympus; while as it is there are plenty of empty places left in the assembly of our gods. Since we decided to do nothing, our galleries have grown rich in curious anatomical odds and ends — legs and hands that look like those ex-voto offerings that used, as a matter of fact, to hang in Greek sanctuaries; heads that look as though they had, like Orpheus's head, been rolled by storms among the pebbles of the sea; busts so full of holes that they seem to have served as targets for drunken soldiers. In short nothing comes to us now but fragments — fragments of great archæological interest, but whose value as works of art is almost nothing. Wouldn't some intermediate method be preferable? By intermediate I mean intelligent. Intelligence is the art of reconciling ideas and producing a harmony. A head of Aphrodite with a broken nose ceases to be a head of Aphrodite. I ask for beauty and they give me a museum specimen. If they want me to admire it, they must make a new nose; if they don't want to make a new nose, then they must divide up the Louvre into two museums, the æsthetic museum and the archæological museum."

Having finished speaking, he looked first of all at Rose, thus showing that he had need, before everything else, of her approbation. Rose's face lit up with happiness. Her eyes answered, "My dear, I admire you. You're a god."

These movements were understood by Leonor, who had been trying for some few moments to guess what were the relations between Rose and Hervart.

"They are in love," he said to himself. "Hervart has a genius for making love. I am twenty-eight, which is my only point of superiority over him. And even that is very illusory, for it is only women who know something about life, whether through experience or through the confidences of some one else, who pay any attention to a man's age. A woman is as old as her face: a man is as old as his eyes. Hervart has a pair of fine blue eyes, gentle and lively, ardent. But what do I care? I don't desire the good graces of this innocent."

While reflecting thus, he had answered M. Hervart, “I quite agree with you. People tend too much to-day to confound the curious, rare or antique with the beautiful. The æsthetic sense has been replaced by a feeling of respect.”

“The process was perhaps inevitable,” said M. Hervart. “In any case it suits a democracy. People have no time to learn to admire, but one can very quickly learn to respect. The intelligence is docile, but taste is recalcitrant.”

“But aren’t there such things,” Rose asked, “as spontaneous admirations?”

“Yes,” said Leonor, “there’s love.”

“Then is admiration the same as love?”

“If they don’t yet love, people come very near loving when they admire.”

“And is love admiration?”

“Not always.”

“Love,” said M. Hervart, “is compatible with almost all other feelings, even with hatred.”

“Yes,” replied Leonor, “that has the appearance of being true, for there are many kinds of love. The love that struggles with hatred can only be a love inspired by interest or sensuality.”

“One never knows. I hold that love, just as it is capable of taking any shape or form, can devour all other feelings and install itself in their place. It comes and it goes, without one’s ever being able to understand the mechanism of its movements. It lasts two hours or a whole life....

“You are mixing up the different species,” said Leonor. “You must, if we are to understand one another, allow words to keep their traditional sense with all its shades of meaning. Love is at the base of all emotions either as a negative or positive principle; one can say that, and when one has said it one is no forwarder. Do you think there’s no point in the way verbal usage employs the words ‘passion, caprice, inclination, taste, curiosity’ and other words of the kind? It would surely be better to create new shades, rather than set one’s wits to work to dissolve all the colours and shades of sensation and emotion into a single hue.”

Like a village musician plunged into the midst of a discussion on counterpoint and orchestration, Rose listened, a little disquieted, a little irritated, but at the same time fascinated. They were speaking of something that filled her heart and set her nerves tingling; she did not understand, she felt. She would have liked to understand.

“Xavier will explain it all to me. How silly I look in the middle of the conversations where I can’t put in a word.”

She pretended to desire a rose out of reach of her hand. M. Hervart darted forward, reached the flower and set to work to strip the branch of its thorns and its superfluous wood and leaves.

“That was not the one I wanted,” said Rose.

M. Hervart began again and the girl looked on, happy at having been able to interrupt a serious conversation by a mere whim.

Leonor examined them with a certain irony. Rose noticed his look, felt herself blushing and slipped away.

M. Hervart and Leonor continued their stroll and their chat; but they talked no more about love.

CHAPTER IX

LUNCHEON PASSED AGREEABLY for Rose. She was the centre of looks, desires and conversation. M. Lanfranc gallanted without bad taste. She would laugh and then, with sudden seriousness, accept the contact of some gesture of M. Hervart's, who was sitting next to her. Leonor confined himself to a few curt phrases, which were meant to sum up the more ingenuous remarks of his fellow guests. He had thought he could treat this girl with contempt, but her eyes, he found, excited him. By dint of trying to seem a superior being, he succeeded in looking like a thoroughly disagreeable one. Rose was frightened of him.

"How cold he is," she thought. "One could never talk or play with a man so sure of all his movements. He would always win."

Several times, with innocent unconsciousness, she looked at M. Hervart.

"How well I have chosen! Here is a man who is younger than he, nearer my own age, and yet each of his words and gestures brings me closer to Xavier. I feel that it will be always like that. Who can compete with him? Xavier, I love you."

She leaned forward to reach a jug and as she did so whispered full in M. Hervart's face, "Xavier, I love you."

M. Hervart pretended to choke. His redness of face was put down to a cherry stone; Lanfranc gave vent to some feeble joking on the subject.

As luncheon was nearing its end, she said with a perverse frankness:

"M. Hervart, will you come with me and see if everything's all right down in the garden?"

"I am having coffee served out of doors," *Mme.* Des Boys explained.

Lanfranc expatiated on the beauties of this country custom.

As soon as they were hidden from view behind the shrubbery, Rose, without a word, took M. Hervart by the shoulders and offered him her lips. It was a long

kiss. Xavier clasped the girl in his arms and with a passion in which there was much amorous art, drank in her soul.

When he lifted his head, he felt confused:

“I have been giving the kiss of a happy lover, when what was asked for was a betrothal kiss. What will she think of me?”

Rose was already looking at the rustic table. When M. Hervart rejoined her, she greeted him with the sweetest of smiles.

“Was that what she wanted then?” M. Hervart wondered.

“Rose,” he said aloud, “I love you, I love you.”

“I hope you do,” she replied.

“Oh, how I should like to be alone with you now!”

“I wouldn’t. I should be afraid.”

This answer set M. Hervart thinking: “Does she know as much about it as all that? Is it an invitation?”

His thought lost itself in a tangle of vain desires. But for the very reason that the moment was not propitious, he let himself go among the most audacious fancies. His eyes wandered towards the dark wood, as though in search of some favourable retreat. He made movements which he never finished. Raising himself from his chair, he let himself fall back, fidgeted with an empty cup, searched vainly for a match to light his absent cigarette. The arrival of Leonor calmed him. His fate that day was to embark on futile discussions with this young man, and he accepted his destiny.

Every one was once more assembled. The conversation was resumed on the tone it had kept up at luncheon; but Rose was dreaming, and M. Hervart had a headache. It was all so spiritless, despite the enticements of M. Lanfranc, that M. Des Boys lost no time in proposing a walk.

“If you want us,” said Leonor, “to draw up a plan for the transformation of your property, you must show it to us in some detail. Is this wood to be a part of your projected park? And what’s beyond it? Another estate, or meadows, or ploughed fields? What are the rights of way? Do you want a single avenue

towards Couville? One could equally well have one joining the St. Martin road....

“Do you intend to lay waste this wood?” asked Rose. “It’s so beautiful and wild.”

“My dear young lady,” said Leonor, “I intend to do nothing; that is to say, I only intend to please you....”

“Do what my daughter wants,” said M. Des Boys. “You’re here for her sake.”

“For her sake,” *Mme.* Des Boys repeated.

“Oh, well,” said Leonor, “we shall get on very well then.”

“So I hope,” said Rose.

“I am at your orders,” said Leonor.

“Come on then,” said Rose.

With these words she got up, throwing M. Hervart a look which was understood. But as M. Hervart rose to his feet, *Mme.* Des Boys approached him:

“I have something very interesting to tell you.”

M. Hervart had to let Rose and Leonor plunge alone into the wood in which he had, during these last few days, experienced such delightful emotions. *Mme.* Des Boys took him into the garden.

“I have a question to ask you,” she said. “First of all, is architecture a serious profession?”

“Very,” said M. Hervart.

“But do people make really a lot of money at it?”

“Lanfranc, who was a beggar when I first knew him, is probably richer than you are to-day. Leonor will go even further, I should think, for he seems an intelligent fellow and knows a lot about his business.”

“You’re not speaking out of mere friendship for him?”

“Not at all. Far from it; to tell you the truth I’m not very fond of either of them.”

“But they’re thorough gentlemen and very good company.”

“Certainly, Lanfranc especially.”

“Isn’t he amusing? His nephew is more severe, but I prefer it.”

“So do I.”

“I’m glad to see that you agree with me.”

She continued after a moment’s reflection. “He would be an excellent husband for Rose.”

Hervart did not reply. He had grown pale and his heart had begun beating violently. His thoughts were in confusion; his head whirled.

“What do you think of the idea?” *Mme.* Des Boys insisted.

He withheld his answer, for he knew that his voice would seem quite changed. He murmured; “Hum,” or something of the sort, something that simply meant that he had heard the question.

But bit by bit he recovered. The happy idea came to him that time. Des Boys was a nullity in the family and had little influence over her daughter.

“Nothing that she says has any importance. I’ll agree with her.”

“I entirely agree with you,” he pronounced,

“My daughter’s a curious creature,” went on *Mme.* Des Boys, “but your approbation will perhaps be enough to convince her. You have a great deal of influence over her.”

“I?”

“She’s very fond of you. It’s obvious.”

“I’m such an old friend,” said M. Hervart courageously.

His cowardice made him blush.

“Why shouldn’t I confess? Why not say, ‘Yes, she does like me, and I like her, why not?’ Isn’t my desire evident? Can I go away, leave her, do without her?...” But to all these intimate questions M. Hervart did not dare to give a definite answer.

“What I should like is that the present moment should go on for ever....”

“They have hardly spoken to one another, and yet,” *Mme.* Des Boys continued, “I seem to see between them the beginnings of ... what?... how shall I put it?...”

“The beginnings of an understanding,” prompted M. Hervart with ironic charity. “Why not love? There’s such a thing as love at first sight.”

“Oh, Rose is much too well bred.”

The silliness of this woman, so reasonable and natural, none the less, in her rôle of mother, exasperated M. Hervart even more than the insinuations to which he had been obliged to listen. Ceasing, not to hesitate, but to reflect, he said abruptly:

“I shall be very sorry to see her married.”

Mme. Des Boys pressed his hand:

“Dear friend! yes, it will make a big difference in our home.”

She went on, after a moment’s hesitation:

“Not a word about all this, dear Hervart; you understand. And now I think that the *tête-a-tête* has perhaps gone on long enough; it would be very nice of you if you’d go and join them.”

M. Hervart, impatient though he was, made his way slowly through the meanders of the little copse. Like Panurge, he kept repeating to himself, “Marry her? or not marry her?”

His head was a clock in which a pendulum swung indefatigably. He sat down on the little bench where, for the first time, he had fell the girl’s head coming gently to rest on his shoulder. He wanted to think.

“I must come to a decision,” he said to himself.

Leonor had noticed that, from the moment their walk had begun, Rose was on the alert at the slightest noise.

“She expects him. That means he’ll come. So much the better. I care very little about this schoolgirl. We’re alone now; no more compliments. I’m simply a landscape gardener at the orders of *Mlle.* Rose Des Boys. What a name!...”

He looked at the girl.

“After all, the name isn’t so ridiculous as one might think. She is so fresh, she looks so pure. How curious they are, these innocent beings who go through life with the grace of a flower blossoming by the wayside.... But let’s get on with our job....

“The taste of the day, mademoiselle, inclines towards the French style of garden. Some compromise, at least, is necessary between the sham naturalness

of the English park and the rigidity of geometrical designs....

“Tell me what your compromise is.”

“But I don’t know the ground yet.”

“It isn’t big, you know. In a quarter of an hour you will have an idea of the place as a whole.”

Leonor continued his dissertation on the art of the garden for a little, but he was perfectly aware that he was not being listened to. Finally he said:

“Nature must obey man; but a reasonable man only asks of her that she should allow herself to be admired or to be loved. Those who wish to admire are inclined to impose certain sacrifices upon her. Those who love ask less and are content, provided they find an easy access to the sites that please them. But I should imagine that women demand more. They want nature to be tamer, they want to see her utterly conquered; they want landscapes in which you can see the mark of their power....”

“What a curious conversation,” Rose said to herself. “Here’s an architect who would get on my nerves if I had to pass my life in his company....”

This idea made her think more urgently of M. Hervart. She turned her head, questioning the narrow alleys where the sunlight filtered through in little drops.

“She’s thinking of her dear Xavier,” thought Leonor. “What subject can I think of to hold her attention? Obviously, my remarks have so far interested her very little.”

A man, however cold he may voluntarily make himself, however self-controlled he may be by nature, is scarcely capable of going for a walk alone with a young woman without wishing to please. He is equally incapable of keeping his presence of mind sufficiently to be able to look at himself acting and not to make mistakes. But how can one please? Can it be done by rule, particularly with a young girl? Women are hardly capable of anything but total impressions. They do not distinguish, for instance, between cleverness and intelligence, between facility and real power, between real and apparent youthfulness. If one pleases them, one pleases in one’s entirety, and as soon as one does please them, one becomes their sacred animal. Leonor had an

inspiration. Instead of expounding his own ideas on gardens, he set to work to repeat, in different terms, what Rose had said that morning:

“What I have been expounding,” he said, “doesn’t seem to interest you much. But you see, I must do my job, which is to back up M. Lanfranc. Personally, I agree with you. If there are weak spots in your house, the nearest mason can put on the necessary plaster, stone and mortar. As for the garden and the wood, I should do nothing except make a few paths so that I might walk without fear of dew or brambles.”

“Now you’re being sensible. Very well then, I shall tell my father that I shall make arrangements with you alone. You will come back here and we will do nothing, almost nothing.”

“I shall come back with pleasure and I shall do nothing; but if I have not made you dislike me I shall consider that I have done a great deal.”

“But I don’t dislike you. When people agree with me, I never dislike them.”

“But how can people fail to agree with you when you say such sensible things?”

“Oh, that’s very easy. M. Hervart doesn’t dispose with disagreement. He contradicts me, laughs at me.”

“Good,” thought Leonor, “she’s in love with Hervart; then she likes being contradicted and even laughed at a little. Or perhaps she’s lying, so as to make me believe that Hervart is indifferent to her. Let’s try and get a rise.”

“At this age that sort of thing is permissible.”

“That’s why I don’t get cross.”

“And besides, he’s very nice.”

“Oh, so nice; I’m very fond of him.”

“It doesn’t take,” thought Leonor. “Hervart, to her, is a god and we might go on talking till to-morrow without her understanding a single one of my insinuations or ironies.”

He went on, nevertheless, picking out all the spiteful things that can be said with politeness.

“Old bachelors often have manias....”

“That’s what I often tell him. For instance, his taste for insects.... But it amuses him so.”

“She’s invulnerable,” said Leonor to himself.

“And then he knows life. He has lived so much.”

“That’s true. Sometimes, when he’s speaking to me, I fed as though a whole world were opening before me.”

“He knows all there is to be known, the arts and the sciences, friendship and love, men, women.... He’s seen a lot of them and of every variety.”

This time it was Rose who paused a moment to reflect, then:

“That’s why I have such immense confidence in him. It’s a real happiness for me that he should come and spend his holidays here. I have learnt more in these few weeks than in all the other years of my life.”

Leonor looked at Rose. He felt a powerful emotion, for to be loved like this seemed to him the height of felicity. He had never believed that it was possible to inspire a young girl with such ingenuous confidence. And how frank she was! What a divine simplicity!

“How does one make oneself so much loved? What’s his secret? Ah! if only I dared ask more! But now, I don’t even want to try and violate an intimacy so charming to contemplate. I’m looking at happiness, and it’s such a rare sight.”

He glanced at Rose once more.

“And with all that she’s very pretty. How graceful she is under this aspect of wildness! What suppleness of form! Everything down to her complexion, gilded and freckled like an apple by the sun, looks lovely in these country surroundings. How well a wife like this would suit me; for I belong to this country and am destined to live here. Why couldn’t Hervart have stayed among his Parisian women?”

“He must be very fond of you,” he went on, “and I envy his happiness in being allowed to be your friend. I shall come back, since you so desire, but I would rather not come back.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want to displease you.”

“But it won’t displease me; far from it. Do explain.”

“If I come back, perhaps, I shan’t have the strength of mind not to grow fond of you, and that will make you angry.”

“But why? How odd you are! Make yourself a friend of the house. I shall be very pleased.”

“But then I shan’t be able to like you as you like M. Hervart.”

“Oh! I don’t think that would be possible.”

“And you won’t like me as you like him.”

She broke into such ingenuous laughter that Leonor assured himself that she had not understood anything of his insinuations. However, he was wrong, and her laughter proved it. She had laughed just because the idea had suddenly come to her that another man might have played Xavier’s part in what had happened. The idea seemed to her comic and she had laughed. But the idea had come, and that was a great point.

It was such a great point that in her turn she looked at Leonor, and this time she did not laugh; but she had no time to make any comparison, for at the same moment she pricked up her ears and said, “There he is.”

M. Hervart did not arrive till quite an appreciable time had passed, and Leonor said to himself:

“She scents her lover as a pointer scents the game. Love is extraordinary.”

He abandoned himself to reflection, astonished at having learnt so many things in half an hour’s walk with a young and simple-hearted girl.

Rose was staring with all her eyes in the direction from which the sound of rustling leaves had come. Leonor stooped down behind her and kissed the hem of her skirt.

CHAPTER X

WHILE HE WAS alone, M. Hervart had done his best to make a decision, as he had promised himself to do; but decisions had fluttered like capricious butterflies round his head and would not let themselves be caught. He was neither surprised nor vexed at the fact.

"Rose," he said to himself at last, "will do all I want."

This certitude was enough for him. The moment he had a will, Rose would acquiesce.

"Provided my will agrees with hers, that's obvious. Now Rose's wish is to become *Mme.* Hervart. Dear little thing, she's in love with me...."

He dwelt complacently on this idea, but a moment later it alarmed him and he felt himself a prisoner. A hundred times over he repeated:

"I must have done with it. I will speak to Des Boys this evening, to-morrow morning at latest.... He will laugh at me. But that's all. He will have to give in afterwards. My will, Rose's will.... I shall carry her off and take her to Paris. Is it my first adventure? If it's the last it will at least be a splendid one."

He pictured to himself all the details of this romantic enterprise. He would, of course, reserve a compartment in the train so as to insure a propitious solitude. It would not be at night, but in the evening. After an amusing little supper and some thrilling kisses, Rose would go to sleep on his shoulder and from time to time he would touch her breast, kiss her eyelids. She would be, at this moment, at once his wife and his mistress, the woman who has given herself, but whom one has not yet taken, a beautiful fruit to be looked at and delicately handled before it is at last relished. What an exquisite creature of love she would be. How docile her curiosity! What a pupil, like clay the hands of the sculptor. An elopement? Why not a marriage tour? No, no elopements! no romantic nonsense! Des Boys will give me his daughter when I want....

But suddenly he had a curious vision. He was standing on the platform of Caen station, amusing himself by peeping indiscreetly into the carriages, and what did he see? — Rose and Leonor huddled together, mouth against mouth. The train moved on, and he was left standing there, looking at the red light disappearing in the smoke....

He got up, full of jealousy; he ran, then slowed down, listening for possible words, questioning the silence. Without his knowing exactly why, Rose's laugh, heard through the leaves of the wood, reassured him. He saw Leonor stoop down and rise again holding a little pink flower in his hand.

"*Sherardia arvensis*," he said, taking the flower. "It has no business to grow here. Its place is in the field next door. *Arvensis*, you see, *arvensis*. But there are lots of plants that lose their way."

"He knows everything," said Rose. "You see, he knows everything."

Leonor, who had understood the allusion, did not answer. He walked away, under the pretense of continuing his botanical researches in the wood.

"If love were born at this moment in my heart, it would be most untimely, it would have chosen its place very unfortunately. Does he love as he is loved? That is what I should like to know. Is he capable of perseverance? Who knows? It may be, Rose, that you will one day lie weeping in my arms."

All three of them made their way back, Leonor walking a little ahead. M. Hervart kept silence, for what he had to say demanded secrecy, and commonplace words were impossible. Rose did not notice the silence; she herself did not think of talking. She was happy, walking dose to her lover. Sometimes, furtively she stretched out her hand and squeezed one of his fingers. M. Hervart allowed his left arm to hang limply on purpose. Leonor did not turn round once, and Rose was grateful to him for that. M. Hervart, who felt that his secret had been guessed, would have preferred a less deliberate, a less suspicious discretion.

"What have these architects come to do here?" he wondered. "It looks as though it had all been arranged by the Des Boys with a view to getting off their

daughter. Will they come back? Leonor certainly will. And shall I be able to stay?”

His perplexities began again. When Rose’s hand touched his own, he felt himself her prisoner, her happy slave. As soon as the contact was removed, he was seized by ideas of flight and liberty. He would like to have called Leonor, flung Rose into his arms and made off across country.

“I have never been so much disturbed by any amour. It’s the question of marriage. What complications! I hate this fellow Leonor. But for him.... But for him? But is he the only man in the world? If I don’t take her, it will be somebody else.” Suddenly he drew closer to Rose and whispered frenziedly in her ear a stream of tender and violent words, “Rose, I love you, I desire you with all my being, I want you.”

Rose started, but these words responded so exactly to her own thoughts that she was only surprised by their suddenness. First she blushed, then a smile of happy sweetness lit up her face and her eyes shone with life and desire.

They soon rejoined Lanfranc and M. Des Boys, who were confabulating over a glass of wine. A few minutes later the architects got into their carriage.

At the moment when the groom let go of the horse’s head, Leonor turned round. Rose realised that the gesture was meant for her; she slightly shrugged her shoulders.

“I’m going to do a little painting,” said M. Des Boys.

“I caught sight of an interesting beetle at the top of the garden,” said M. Hervart.

“I’m going up to my room,” said Rose.

Five minutes later the two lovers had met again near the bench on which M. Hervart had meditated in vain.

Without saying a word, Rose let herself fall into her lover’s arms. Her drooping head revealed her neck, and M. Hervart kissed it with more passion than usual. His mouth pushed aside the collar of her dress, seeking her shoulder.

“Let us sit down,” she said at last, when she had had her fill of her lover’s mild caresses. And taking his head between her hands, she in her turn covered

him with kisses, but mostly on the eyes and on the forehead. Desiring a more tender contact, he took the offensive, seized the exquisite head and after a slight resistance made a conquest of her lips. There was always, when they were sitting down, a little struggle before he reached this point, although she had often, when they were walking, offered him her lips frankly. On the bench it was more serious, because it was slower and because the kiss irradiated more easily throughout her body.

“No, Xavier, no!”

But she surrendered. For the first time, M. Hervart, having loosened her bodice, touched the soft flesh of her breast, fluttering with fear and passion. He kissed her violently, and when the kiss was slow in coming she provoked it, amorously. A simultaneous start put an end to their double pleasure; and there, sitting close to one another, were a pair of lovers, at once happy and ill satisfied. One of them was wondering if love had not completer pleasures to offer; and the other was saying, what a pity that one is a decent man!

At the moment M. Hervart considered himself very reserved. Later, when he had recovered his presence of mind a little more, he felt certain scruples, for he was delicate and subject to headaches as a result of indecisive pleasures. He felt proud of the at least partial domination, which he could, at scabrous moments, exercise over his nervous centres with his well-constructed, well-conditioned brain.

“Do you love your husband, little Rose?”

“Oh, yes!”

She roused herself to utter this exclamation with energy. M. Hervart felt no further indecision. Furthermore, he began almost at once to give a new direction to his thoughts. He wanted something to eat; Rose acquiesced. As she was slow in getting up he wanted to pick her up in his arms; but his arms, grown strangely weak, were unequal to the light burden. M. Hervart felt, too, that his legs were not as solid as they might have been. He would have liked to eat and at the same time to lie down in the grass. He let himself fall back on the bench.

“You look so tired,” said Rose, inventing every kind of tenderness. “Stay here, I’ll bring you some cakes and wine.”

But he refused and they went back together.

Cheered by a little sherry and some brioches, M. Hervart asked for music. Rose, inexpert though she was, soothed her lover with all the melodies he desired. She even sang to him. The songs were all romances.

“Joys of the young couple,” he said to himself, half dozing. “A picture by Greuze. Nothing is lacking except the little spaniel dog and the paternal old man looking in at the window and shedding a few quiet tears ‘inspired by memory’ at the sight of this ravishing scene. There, I’m laughing at myself, so that I can’t be quite so badly done for as might have been thought. Not so close a prisoner, either.”

“Go and see my father,” said Rose, leaving a verse half sung. “I’ll come and find you there later.”

And she went on with her music.

“More and more conjugal, for I shall obey her after having, of course, gone over: I kissed her in the neck. Dear child, she’s waiting for the surprise, shivering at it already....”

Everything went off as M. Hervart had predicted, but there was something more. Rose turned round and said, after offering her lips:

“Go along, my darling, and mind you admire his painting a lot, more than yesterday.”

“Yes, my love.”

“How charming it all is!” he said to himself as he knocked at the studio door. “Delightful family conspiracies. Shall I be able to play this part for long? Suppose I announce my intentions to my venerable friend. Obviously there can be no more hesitation. Come on!”

They talked of *Ste.* Clotilde. M. Hervart was loud in his praise both of the historical knowledge as well as the pictorial skill of the master of Robinvast, and at every word he uttered he felt a longing to make the conversation touch on the conjugal virtues of that honourable queen. Then the desire passed.

Dinner time came. Afterwards, as usual, they played a game of whist. M. Hervart retired to bed with pleasure and, wearied by his kisses and his thoughts, went to sleep full of the contentment that comes from a pleasant fatigue.

“I shall have to warn Rose,” he said to himself as soon as he woke, rather late, next morning, “of her mother’s schemes. They might make her fall into some trap.”

He soon found an opportunity. In the morning their kisses were more reserved, still somnolent. They frittered away the time pleasantly. M. Hervart would sometimes make a serious examination of some rare insect: Rose worked at her embroidery with conviction. They did not venture into the wood, because of the dew, but remained in the neighbourhood of the house. At this hour of the day M. Hervart was always particularly lucid. He discoursed on a hundred different topics and Rose listened, without daring to interrupt, even when she did not understand. She enjoyed the sound of his voice much more than the sense of his words.

Rose was not surprised to learn of her mothers schemes. She confessed, furthermore, that she had divined in M. Varin’s attitude the existence of quite definite intentions. It was therefore decided that M. Hervart should make his request that very day in order to forestall circumstances. Rose spoke so resolutely and her words were so lyrical that M. Hervart felt all his absurd hesitations melt away within him. She knew her parents’ income and gave the figure, very straightforwardly, like the practical woman she was. M. Des Boys had an income of sixty thousand francs of which, she imagined, he hardly spent half. There was no doubt that he would willingly give the greater part of the other half to his only daughter. As she had also calculated, though with less certainty, the value of M. Hervart’s fortune, she included decisively:

“We shall have from thirty to forty thousand francs a year.”

M. Hervart calculated the figures again with the details that were known to him personally and found the estimate correct. His admiration for Rose was increased.

“She has all the virtues: an aptitude for love and the sense of domestic economy, intelligence and very little education, health without a striking beauty. Finally, she adores me and I love her.”

At the first insinuations of his friend M. Des Boys smiled and said:

“I thought as much. My daughter has received but the vaguest education. Her mother is incapable. As for me, I am interested only in art. She needs a serious husband, a husband, that is to say, who is not in his first youth. If she wants you, take her. I’ll go and ask her.”

M. Hervart was on the point of saying there was no need. But luckily he checked himself and M. Des Boys questioned his daughter.

“I should like to,” she said.

M. Des Boys returned.

“She said, ‘I should like to,’ She said it without enthusiasm, but she said it. Now go and arrange things yourselves. I shall go on with my painting.”

M. Hervart admired Rose still more for her astute answer.

The girl was waiting for him as he came towards her, serious, scarcely smiling, but beautified by the profound emotion that she could scarcely contain. She gave him her hand, then her forehead; and when M. Hervart drew her into his arms, she burst into tears.

CHAPTER XI

MEANWHILE LEONOR HAD received a wound which he could not support with patience. A hundred times a day he thought of Rose. He was not in love with the woman, he was in love with her love. He saw her as she had appeared to him in the wood at Robinvast, with her whole desire, her whole will, her whole body, turned innocently toward M. Hervart and he felt no jealousy; on the contrary, he admired the ingenuous force of so confiding, so powerful a love. By having been able to inspire such a love M. Hervart evoked in him an almost superstitious respect; he would willingly have helped him in his amour.

"I should like to know him," he said to himself naively; "I should ask him for advice and lessons. I should beg him to reveal his secret to me."

He would spend hours dreaming on this theme: to be loved like that. In these matters the most intelligent easily become childish. The ego is a wall that limits the view, rising higher in proportion as the man is greater. There is, however, a certain degree of greatness from which, when a man reaches it, he can always look over the top of the wall of his egoism; but that is very rare. Leonor was not a rare character; he was simply a man a little above the ordinary, capable of originality and of learning from experience, clever at his profession, apt at forming general ideas, sometimes refined and sometimes gross, a peasant rather than a man of the world, a solitary, cold of aspect, full of contradictions, ironic or ingenuous by fits, tormented by sexual images and sentimental ideas.

He was not one of those in whom a budding love, even a love of the head, abolishes the senses. The more he dreamed about Rose, the more disquietingly tense grew his nerves. His desire did not turn towards her; he caught himself one evening spying on the wife of the Barnavast keeper, who was showing her legs as she bent over the well. It made him feel rather ashamed, for this big Norman peasant woman, so young and fresh, could boast, he imagined, of nothing more

than a peasant’s cleanliness — wholly exterior, and he would only, could only tolerate woman in the state of the nymph fresh risen from the bath, like the companions of Diana.

Besides, he noticed that Lanfranc was making up to this good creature and doing it in all seriousness. Sure of giving him satisfaction by taking himself off for a few days, he drove to Valognes and took the Paris train.

Leonor, without making pretensions to conquests, would have liked to have certain kinds of adventures. He wanted to find one of those women whom some careless husband, whether through avarice or poverty, deprives of the joy of fashionable elegance or who, adorned by a lover’s prodigalities, dreams of giving for nothing the present which they none the less very gladly sell. He had experienced these equivocal good graces in the days when he lived in Paris. He had even succeeded, during the space of eighteen months, in enchanting a very agreeable little actress who fitted marvellously into the second category, and he remembered how he had taken in a very pretty and very poor young middle-class woman who had surrendered herself to him because he had given himself out to be a rich nobleman. At the moment his mistress was *Mme.* de la Mesangerie, a local beauty; but he had never really possessed her as he desired.

What Grand Turk ever ruled over such a harem? Paris, the cafés, the concert halls, the theatres, the stations, the big shops, the gardens, the Park! The women belong to whoever takes them; none belongs to herself. None leaves her home in freedom and is sure of not returning a slave. Leonor had no illusions with regard to the results of his sensual quest He knew very well that he would captivate none but willing slaves, slaves by profession, slaves by birth. But the hunt, if the game came and offered itself graciously to the hunter, would still have its attraction — that of choice; the fun would be to put one’s hand on the fattest partridge.

“No,” he said to himself, as he walked down the Avenue de l’Opera, “this child from Robinvast shall not obsess me thus hour by hour. Any woman, provided she is acceptable to my senses, will deliver me from this silly vision. Is there such a thing as love without carnal desire? It would be contrary to

physiological truth. If I love Rose, it means that I desire her.... If I desire her, it means that I have physical needs. Once these needs are satisfied, I shall feel no desire for any woman and I shall stop thinking of this silly girl. Hervart can do what he likes with her; I shan't mind; and, after all, will the satisfaction which he derives from her be so different from that which some unknown woman will lavish so generously on me? A little coyness, does that add a spice? The sensation of a victory, a favour is better. Shall I obtain a favour? Alas, no. But by paying for it one can have the most perfect imitations. Ah! why am not I at Barnavast, gauging cubes of masonry, with glimpses of Placide Gerard's podgy thighs? Now I know just what will happen.... Does one ever know? It's only eleven in the morning and I've got a week before me."

Still pursuing his stroll and his reflections, he entered the Louvre stores. Here, provincials and foreigners were parading their requirements and their astonishments. One heard all the possible ways of pronouncing French badly. It was an exhibition of provincial dialects. He jumped on moving platforms and staircases, passed down long files of stoves and lamps, went down again, traversed an ocean of crockery, went upstairs, found leather goods, whips and carriage lanterns, tumbled into lifts, was caught once more in a labyrinth of endless drapery, and after having wandered for some time among white leather belts garters and umbrellas, he found himself face to face with Mme de la Mesangerie, who blushed.

"Is it a stroke of luck?" he wondered.

Perhaps it was, for she said to him very quickly:

"I'm alone. My husband has just gone back. I was going to wire to you."

Then in a lower voice:

"Well here you are! I don't ask how it happened. Shall we profit by the opportunity?"

"It seems to me that I was looking for you without knowing."

"I have two days," she said, "at least two days."

They left the shop, making their plans, which were very simple.

“Let’s go,” she said, “and shut ourselves up at Fontainebleau for a couple of days.”

“No, at Compiègne. It’s more of a desert.”

She wanted to start on the spot. Her provincial prudery seemed suddenly to have flown away. She was no longer the calm mistress who had never yielded except to the most passionate entreaties. The proud-hearted woman was turning into the lover, full of tenderness, a little reckless.

As he packed his bag, Leonor felt very happy, though still very much surprised. He decided, however, that he would ask no equivocal questions. The woman he was looking for, and whom he would not have found, had just fallen into his arms. What was more, he knew this woman, he was in love with her, though without passion; he had derived from her furtive but delicious pleasures. She inspired him, in a word, with the liveliest curiosity: he trembled at the thought that he was now to see her in all her natural beauty.

“Is she as beautiful as she is elegant? Suppose I were to find a farm-girl under the dress of the great lady.”

Less than an hour after their meeting they were together in the refreshment room of the Gare du Nord. They had time to eat a hasty luncheon, then the train carried them off.

“I’m quite mad,” she said, kissing Leonor’s hands. “What an adventure! It’s I who have thrown myself at your head.”

“I have thrown myself so often at your knees!”

“Very well, let it be understood that I am yielding to an old entreaty — and to my own desire, my darling boy, for I love you. Haven’t I done what you would have liked often enough? But do you think I didn’t want to as much as you? A woman has so little freedom, especially in a country place. How many women are there who would dare do what I have done, even that little? Getting lost when we were out shooting — that was all right for once. How frightened I was when you got into my railway carriage, against orders, one evening at Condé.... Many’s the afternoon I’ve spent dreaming of you, you wicked boy.... There, you make me quite shameless. I’m glad.”

And she took Leonor’s head between her hands, kissing it all over, at haphazard. Leonor had often seen her kissing her little boy or her dog like that.

Hortense was thirty. She owed her name to certain Bonapartist sentiments which, in her family, had survived by a few years the events of 1870. Certain elegant habits of thought and manners had also been preserved. Her father, M. d’Urville had been one of the actors of Octave Feuillet’s comedies, in this same Compiègne where they were now arriving. At the age when girls begin to forget that there are such things as dolls, she had read the complete works of this shy passionate writer; her mother did not forbid her to look at the *Vie Parisienne*, in which her happy frivolity had never seen anything that might be dangerous for a well-bred girl. And so, when she married, Hortense knew that though marriage may be a garden surrounded by a wall, there are ladders to climb over this wall; the only things she thought of in her husband were rank, fortune and the conventions. Her first lover had been a young officer, with whom, as with Leonor, she had lost her way hunting; only with him it had been a stag-hunt. Leonor had participated only at an ordinary shoot, M. de la Mesangerie, in view of the present hard times, having broken up his pack of hounds. That affair had been of the most fugitive character. Afterward she had received the advances of M. de la Cloche, a once celebrated member of the Chamber of Deputies; but M. de la Cloche voted the wrong way, and under the cloak of political reasons M. de la Mesangerie closed his doors to him, in spite of his wife, who concealed a real though momentary despair. Finally M. Leonor Varin came to stay at La Mesangerie to superintend certain repairs to the fine Louis XIII house. In this chilly young man, so cold and yet so romantic as well as sensual, Hortense had found a more durable love, which greatly increased her happiness. Under a very skilfully calculated reserve, she adored Leonor, who had, on his side, always shown himself obedient, respectful, adroit and tender. She realised that the furtive pleasures which she was able to give him without compromising herself did not altogether satisfy her lover. She too, in whom the avid sensuality of the woman of thirty had begun to wake, desired pleasures of a less rapid and more complicated nature. Leonor’s kisses and the words he whispered had little by

little filled her imagination with images which she wanted to see in real life. How often she had thought of running away! Two days in Paris! And now her husband had given her these two days himself.

When she said, “I’m glad” she was confessing to the existence of a happiness in which it still seemed impossible wholly to believe. She pressed herself close to Leonor.

“Is it true? Are we really both of us here, alone and free?”

In a whisper she added, her bosom heaving with precipitate waves, “I shall be yours, absolutely yours, at last.”

“All mine, all?” asked Leonor, touching her mouth with his own.

“I belong to you.”

She had the wisdom to withdraw, and looking out of the window she asked:

“Where are we?”

“We are coming near our happiness,” said Leonor.

They crossed the Oise, calm and gentle; then came the first houses of Compiègne and in a moment the station. They felt a strange emotion.

She did not wish to go to the Bell Hotel. A cab took them quickly to the Stag. Leonor was paying it off, but Hortense, wiser than her lover, kept it to do a round in the forest. She was pitiless and laughed, but with passion in her laughter; she changed her clothes and came down again.

They passed, without seeing it, before that elegant casket of stone which is the town hall. Following the fringe of the Great Park they reached the Tremble hills, where oaks and chestnut trees emerge, like the sails of ships, above the green ocean of bracken. They got down from the carriage with the intention of losing themselves for a moment in this bitter-smelling sea. The woman’s white dress and fair hair left a luminous track as she advanced, for she was flying, like a laughing nymph before the hoarse laughter of the faun.

“It was about time,” she said when the carriage picked them up to take them on to the Beaux-Monts.

“Time? what do you mean?”

“Yes,” she went on, “I was too entranced.... We’ll come back. Would you like to? We’ll come back every year.... One needs a lot of virtue to resist the persuasions of the forest.”

“Virtue,” said Leonor, “consists in being able to defer one’s pleasure or one’s happiness.... I should like to see you in this scented sea, a nymph, a dryad, a siren....”

“Do you want to?... You’re driving me crazy.”

The climb up the slope of the Beaux-Monts calmed their nerves. The carriage, which had come round by the circular road, was waiting for them at the top. They stood for a little while looking at the mist-grey distances.

They drove back by the Soissons road; they looked at nothing now and, since it had grown cool, they drew closer together and sat with clasped hands.

Leonor was thinking of the curious chances that had transported him, in a day or two, from Barnavast into the forest of Compiègne and had changed his profession from architecture to love. In spite of the fact that it seemed absurd and almost indelicate, he began, sitting in this carriage with his mistress’s hand in his, to think of his walk with Rose.

“Rose is the cause of it all. It is she who brought me here, not you, poor darling, who sit dreaming at my side. It is she who made me hungry for the kisses I reserve for you?? kisses that any other woman might have received in your place.... Yes, squeeze my hand, you may do it, for I really think I love you. I love you more than chance, I love you more than the woman I was looking for, because you are the woman I found. Besides, the perfume of your soul will make sweet your own pleasure without thinking at all of mine. In love, egotism is a homage; it is also a sign of confidence.”

The moment came. Silence fell with the night. She strove to hide her shyness under an impudent smile.

“Must I be a statue to please you? Am I a statue?”

“Your beauty would enchant me,” he said, “even if it were not you. Statue, are you made of marble?”

“You know I’m not.”

She called to mind, though the moment seemed most inapposite, her husband's pudicity, his discreet entries into the conjugal chamber, the timidity of his caresses, the decency of his words, and the sudden savagery after his almost brotherly conversation. M. de la Mesangerie had explained to her that the final formality was necessary for the procreation of children. "God," he added, "has so ordered it, and we must bless his divine providence." He seemed to regret the obligation of going so far and, whether through natural or acquired foolishness, or whether through hypocrisy, he encouraged his wife to believe that sensual pleasures were contemptible. "They are," he even said, "a means and not an end." Following these principles, he had deprived her of them as soon as her first child seemed imminent. M. de la Mesangerie was very pious and prided himself on the possession of a most enlightened and methodical religion.

"That's the way," she said to herself, as she looped up her hair, "to train up a wife for adultery."

Under the pretext of sticking a pin into her hair, she stood admiring herself in front of the glass, and at the same time, at the risk of offending her lover, who shouldn't have doubted the fact, she said, "You're the only person who has seen me like this, you and I...."

When Leonor went to sleep she knelt beside his adored body and pious words came to her lips: she had found the living god at last.

They had two days. They decided to finish the last hours at Paris and they returned to shut themselves up in a hotel in the Rue de Rivoli. Hortense was indefatigable.

"What shall we do to recapture this?" she asked.

The idea of taking a little house at Carentan seemed to them a good one. *Mme.* de la Mesangerie would always have the pretext of going to see her mother at Carquebut; her husband accompanied her there only once a year.

"Yes," said Leonor; "there's the time between two trains, one hour; then one misses one train. That makes two hours. Plenty of things can be done in two hours."

"Lovers learn the art of using every moment."

To Hortense it seemed as though she had begun a new life, her real life. She began consulting time-tables, fitting in her connections. Then she tossed the booklet aside, saying:

“Bah! It would be much simpler to get divorced.”

“Your husband’s virtue stands in the way, my dear.”

She did not insist. Nevertheless, at this moment, she would have abandoned everything — family, children, house, fortune, honour — to follow Leonor and become the wife of a little architect with a still uncertain future. And then she would be the niece of Lanfranc, whose mother used to sell cakes to the children in the Place Notre-Dame at Saint-Lô! She had bought them from her when she was ten. Her aristocratic instinct revolted, but she looked at Leonor and reflected that the demigods were born of the peasant girls of Attica. She pursued her idea.

“Your mother must have been very beautiful.”

“Who told you so? It’s quite true.”

She wished to go to the station alone, refused to be seen off.

“When shall I see you? You’re not going to stay on in Paris?”

“No.”

Leonor kept his word. He saw Hortense starting for the station, with red eyes, and an hour later he left in his turn.

CHAPTER XII

SATIATED, LANGUID WITH that fatigue which is a blessing to the body and a joy for the lightened brain, Hortense was thinking. She was not sorry to be returning home. The journey — what better pretext could there be for the headaches which demand darkness and silence, or long morning hours in bed, for siestas?

"I must sleep off my love, as drunkards say that one must sleep off one's wine. But what a horrid comparison! I shall dream deliciously. My lover, I have only to shut my eyes to see you, happy in my happiness, and to feel your dear caresses. Tell me, are you pleased with me? What must I do to be still more your mistress? Yes, I ought not to have gone away; I ought to have stayed with you, at your orders, forgetting everything that is not you. You should have run and overtaken me, kept me, locked me up! But listen, I shall go and see you every week. Oh! how gladly I shall tell lies! How pleasant it will be for me to look M. de la Mesangerie in the face while he reads around my eyes only the innocent fatigue of a long journey!"

The delirium of the senses invaded all her life. She scarcely remembered the events that had preceded her trip to Compiègne. She had spent more than an hour wondering if there were round about St. Lô, or in the forest of Cerisy, any of these oceans of bracken. She could not think of any; but she would look....

M. de la Mesangerie, who was waiting for her at the station, thought she looked tired. She was not tired; she was in a state of hallucination. However, she had enough presence of mind to reproach her husband for having deserted her. Thus, she hadn't dare fix definitely on the furniture which they had almost chosen together; she had spent two days of indecision in the Louvre stores, tiring every one, including herself.

"You must go back there by yourself," she said, "it will be your punishment."

M. de la Mesangerie was flattered. But there was another misfortune: the toys for the children had been forgotten. Hortense felt rather ashamed when she confessed this; she also inwardly regretted such an oversight.

“I am a lover, but I am also a mother.”

For the first time the possibility of a conflict between two tendencies of her heart occurred to her. A few minutes’ shopping in the town repaired her omissions, and meanwhile gave opportunity to send a post card to Barnavast. After that she abandoned herself, with a certain pleasure, to the re-discovery of familiar landscapes: they were not so different as she might have thought.

Leonor went back with no lyrical ideas in his head, but none the less very well satisfied.

“I have a mistress of the very kind I wanted. Libertinage and sentiment. The mixture has a very piquant savour. But I didn’t believe her capable of so much boldness. She would never have dared in her own surroundings. People only become themselves out of their native surroundings: they either die or else they develop according to their own physiological logic. Breton girls, out of whom Paris sometimes makes such agreeable little drabs, are dreamy little prudes in the shade of their village belfry. Hortense is, as was said of Marion, ‘naturally lascivious’; she might have died without knowing the art of fruitfully employing this precious temperament. She seemed so awkward and shame-faced when she abandoned herself at those first meetings of ours. She loves me. But mayn’t she perhaps love me too much? Leave her husband! No she must remain my secret.”

He was in a very good humour, and took an interest in the trees and rivers and houses that he passed. The monotony of the apple orchards and the fields of cows did not bore him in the least. Having nothing to desire he was enjoying the mere process of living!

He stopped at Carentan to look for a house in which he could hide a bed, failed to find one, but discovered a very decent furnished room. The skipper of an English coasting steamer occupied it sometimes, but the people would be happy to have a more sober tenant. Everything smelt strongly of whiskey. He made the bargain, had the room cleaned, paid well and made no concealment of

his intentions. “Oh, yes,” they answered, “the other tenant used to bring them back with him too. It’s all right provided there’s no noise.”

“*Them*, he thought; that’s what she’ll be for these people. Just one of them.”

He left them and strolled along the shore to Grandcamp, thinking of nothing but the little sensations of the moment. He was not one of those who complain that the seaside is fringed with houses, that there are shelters where one can take refuge from wind and rain, iced drinks to melt the salt out of one’s throat, board and lodgings and the movement of a second-rate, but sometimes curious, humanity. These little boys destined to become gross males, little girls whom time will turn into pretentious young ladies and rich middle class brides — what pretty and delicate animals they are! Much more amusing than little dogs or kittens! He had often pondered on the mystery of intelligence among children. How is it that these subtle creatures are so quickly transformed into imbeciles? Why should the flower of these fine graceful plants be silliness?

“But isn’t it the same with animals, and especially among the animals that approach our physiology most closely? The great apes, so intelligent in their youth, become idiotic and cruel as soon as they reach puberty. There is a cape there which they never double. A few men succeed; their intelligence escapes shipwreck, and they float free and smiling on the tranquillized sea. Sex is an absinthe whose strength only the strong can stand; it poisons the blood of the commonalty of men. Women succumb even more surely to this crisis. Those who have been intelligent in their critical age is past. In both sexes there are two successive crises: the sexual crisis and the sensual crisis. The first comes at a fixed period for the individuals of the same race and the same environment. The second generally coincides with the completion of growth, with the state of physiological perfection. Sometimes, when decline is beginning, a third crisis occurs, which is like the first, inasmuch as it almost always brings with it a condition of sentimentality. Hervart, I feel almost sure, is going through this crisis now; Hortense and I are at the second; Rose is undergoing the first.”

Leonor, like many of his contemporaries, despised his profession. He was an architect, but his desire was to write scientific works, showing that physiology is

the base of all the so-called psychical phenomena. All the acts which men call virtuous or vicious were, he considered, made inevitable by the state of the organs and the disposition of the nervous system. Nothing made him want to laugh so much as the pretensions of cold-blooded women who make a merit of their chastity; and he was amazed, after so much scientific data, at the way in which men went on considering the explosions of the organism as voluntary or involuntary. The influence of conscience on human conduct seemed to him null. He had demonstrated this to one of his friends, a master in an ecclesiastical school, by means of a grandfather clock which stood in his study. “What you call conscience,” he said, “is the weight that works the striking apparatus. But I can take off that weight and the clock will go on making the hours without striking them.” This friend had confessed that his own very real chastity was entirely involuntary: women roused no desire in him. He had once made the experiment and had obtained, after the greatest difficulty, only a most disappointing result. “I believe,” he added, “that most of my colleagues are like me. Some of them, more favoured by nature, employ their faculties in secret; another has a private vice; and I know one who is a danger for children. For the most part we are chaste by the will of nature herself. Debauchery would be a torture for me. I am only interested in mathematics.”

Leonor, however, had no intention of succumbing to the embraces of the sensual crisis.

“Let me profit by this momentary disposition, but let me preserve at the same time a certain spirit. I mustn’t compromise either my physical, intellectual or social fortune. Within these limits I can give myself body and soul to this midsummer madness. Hortense is a perfect violin; I will be her devoted bow. And between her hands, am not I also a good instrument? Oh! the fools who pass their life fighting against their passions! After that, what happens? When they see that the garden is almost flowerless, they come in melancholy fashion to smell the last rose: the wind passes and they find only a bush of leaves and thorns! But shouldn’t I also ask: after that? May it not be that the only delicious thing in life is the constancy of an unconscious love? I know only too well that I

love Hortense, and I know only too well why I love her. It is certain that on the day when she appears to me less beautiful I shall leave her. Suppose I let it go at that? Suppose I looked for something else? Is variety as satisfactory as quality? Let's have a look on this beach.... I must make use of my state of mind, that is to say of the pleasing irritation of my nerves...."

Chance is scarcely ever anything more than our aptitude to take advantage of circumstances. On the beach Leonor met a young and pretty woman, a young woman of the sort that one sees so many of, the sort whose dress and figure tell one nothing decisive. He might have gone on contemplating the melancholy death of the wave at her feet; but he was walking for this very purpose — to meet a woman walking by herself: his desire created the chance. For a moment he was afraid that she was going to make advances, but she passed on. He followed. Skirting the water all the while, the young woman moved away from the frequented part of the sands. She tried to pick up a ribbon of weed, but it escaped her. Leonor reached it. Out of the water, it was a long vicious whip-lash. She thanked him, embarrassed by the present.

"Throw it back, then. It's like most of our desires. As soon as one holds them fast, one would like to throw them back into the sea."

She gave a little laugh, a sad, almost a smothered, laugh.

"Oh! Not always," she said.

They turned back toward the dunes and, seated on the sand, began to talk as though they were old friends.

She looked at him insistently, though not appearing to do so. Finally she said:

"You don't look like a nasty man."

"Is that a compliment?"

"In my mouth, yes."

Then, little by little warming up, she talked without stop. It was a flood of words, like the mounting tide, only more rapid. She told him the story of her life. Leonor liked this sort of thing from ladies of equivocal reputations, and he now displayed a keen interest, putting in little words that inspired confidence. This was what he succeeded in making out:

She lived in Paris and gave herself only to a small number of friends, always the same. The respectability of her life was, therefore, beyond suspicion. Her parents could not complain of having that sort of daughter. They lived in the north, near Boulogne; hence, in order not to meet them or the people from her part of the country, she confined her peregrinations to the seaside resorts of Normandy. Among her friends two were particularly dear. One was a young foreigner, who lived in Paris six months of the year; but he went on sending her money during the summer The other, though he was older, gave less she liked him better — being a Parisian, he was clever. He was a civil servant. She would not specify the office for which he worked, but it seemed to be the department of Fine Arts. The first of these friends imagined that she was at Grandcamp, where she had just arrived; for the civil servant was at Honfleur. That complicated her correspondence a little, but it was better. Besides, she had had no opportunity of writing to the civil servant for a long time, for he gave signs of life only by an occasional postcard. That seemed to her suspicious and made her sad. When he had last written he was at Cherbourg, but he had given no address.

“He looks like a man who wants to get married. Married! he’s not capable of satisfying a woman. All the same, I like him. And besides, I should miss him for other reasons.”

This woman, with her commonplace life her commonplace brain, had an agreeable voice, a delicate face, intelligence in her eyes and a sort of natural elegance. Leonor felt a violent desire for her.

“I am spending several days here,” he said.

“So am I.”

“Shouldn’t we spend them together?”

She gave a pretty laugh, allowed herself to be entreated, and accepted, after having once more examined Leonor with a sagacious eye. The proposition accepted, she offered him her lips, looked at the time on a minute watch and got up, saying:

“Let’s go and have dinner. We must hurry to get a little table.”

Her name was Gratienne. She was a little woman, with a mass of dark hair, and her profile was charming. Leonor was amused by the contrast between this little statuette and the opulent Leda type of Hortense. She had a supple body, fresh and delicately scented; and since she was a professional and ardently shared the pleasures she provoked, he passed several pleasant nights. The days were much less agreeable, for he had to submit to long prolix confidences. There were amusing touches in her stories, but from professional ethics she refrained from ever uttering a proper name, a fact which somewhat confused her anecdotes.

One evening, however, in a moment of distraction or of confidence, she allowed Leonor to turn over her little collection of postcards.

“Besides,” added, “as you’re not Parisian, the names will tell you nothing.”

Leonor looked at ships, mountains, casinos, girls bathing and many other interesting pictures. Some were signed Theobald and came from Austria, others Paul, and came from the Pyrenees.

“Hullo, Tourlaville castle!”

Without appearing to do so, he examined the writing of the address with care. He did not know the hand. The card was signed H. He passed on. Another of the La Hague castles. This time the signature was Herv.

“Surely it’s Hervart.”

The name appeared in full at the bottom of Martinvast Castle, with a postscript of “love and kisses.”

“That must be the civil servant in the Fine Arts Department. Obviously.”

For a moment he felt annoyed at being the collaborator, even the casual collabor, of M. Hervart. He would have preferred someone he did not know. Theobald pleased him better. But all at once he thought of Rose:

“It’s curious,” he said to himself, “that we should love the same women in all the different styles.”

While Gratienne was looking out of the window, he slipped the card of Martinvast castle into his pocket.

CHAPTER XIII

SINCE HIS MARRIAGE had been decided on, M. Hervart seemed very happy Rose's confidence in him had grown still greater and with it their intimacy. He hesitated now about only one thing: what date should he fix? Rose, without admitting the fact wanted to be married as soon as possible, so that she might know the end of the story. Women, however, are broken into prolonged patience. She would wait, if Xavier decided that they ought to wait. To obey Xavier was to her a great pleasure.

M. Hervart's latest hesitations were not very comprehensible. His situation, after the winter, would be in no way altered. What was the present obstacle? Gratienne? Of course, he thought himself passionately adored by her, but would she love him less, would she be less hurt a year hence? His ideas about Gratienne, were moreover, variable. At one moment he attributed to her the virtue of an unhappily married woman who has given herself for love to her heart's choice; at the next going to the opposite extreme, he saw her prostituted to every chance comer. The humble truth escaped him. Expert in these matters though he was, he had never been able to see that Gratienne was a girl who could skilfully reconcile her interests, her pleasures and her sentimental needs, and who completely dissociated these three things. What she loved in M. Hervart was the sensual lover, but she none the less appreciated the rich and serious civil servant in him. For free love is like legal love in this also, that money reinforces sentiment. Thus M. Hervart esteemed Gratienne sometimes more and sometimes less, but he always loved her the same, having, moreover, no visible breach of contract to reproach her with. The thought of deserting Gratienne filled him with distress, not because of the pain he himself would feel, but because of the pain that she most certainly would suffer. Besides, even when he was in a mood to despise Gratienne, he set store by her esteem. However, all of that would come

right, he thought, for the situation was a common one and one of those that have to be solved every day.

“As soon as I have possessed Rose, I shall think no more of Gratienne, that’s obvious. And then, why should I break with the charming girl brutally? I don’t intend to upset her.”

At bottom, it was the thought of marriage itself that was still alarming M. Hervart. He felt the tyrant that they all turn into already rising up beneath the surface of the sweet young girl.

“She loves me, therefore she will be jealous. So shall I perhaps. Or perhaps in a few days I shall dislike her. Shall I please her for long? She loves me because she knows no one else but me.”

M. Hervart’s health sometimes alarmed him. He would wake up feeling more tired than when he went to bed. The least cold caught him in the throat or in the joints. And when meals were late, his breathing became difficult and he was seized with giddiness.

“I’m a fool. Here am I, getting married at an age when wise men begin unmarrying. Bah! In spite of everything, I’m still tough and I can still tame a woman.”

He recalled, with pride, his last rendezvous with Gratienne; he had conquered her, annihilated her, reduced her to a pulp, and himself, strutting like a cock, had crowed over his happy victim.

“Besides, with Rose, I shall be master. I shall be for her the Man and men in general.... By the way, why hasn’t Gratienne written to me since I’ve been here? Of course, I never gave her my address.”

That had been the right thing, he first thought; then he reproached himself for it, felt almost remorseful. He hastily concocted a quite affectionate letter, asking for news. There was a letter-box not far away, on the St. Martin road; he went quickly downstairs and ran there with his missive.

On his return he found Rose in the garden. Since their engagement she had been living in a perpetual smile. She entered naïvely into her destiny, suspecting no further possible obstacle to her happiness. At the same time, by what must

have been instinctive coquetry, she had become, not more reserved, but less prompt at their habitual sports. She spoke a great deal of her future house, picturing to herself their drawing-room furniture, which she pictured from the illustrated catalogues, and the colour of their carpets and curtains. The idea of this furniture horrified M. Hervart, who had a taste for antiques and happy discoveries, which he mixed, without shame, with practical constructions made under his own directions. To-day he found it more difficult than usual to tolerate this housewifely chatter. He was bored.

“Can it be,” he wondered, “that I feel nothing but a wholly carnal love for her? What’s the use of marrying, if I can’t see in her the wife, the mother, the lady of the house as well as the mistress? In that case Gratienne is quite enough for me. Marriage is delightful when one is fresh from school. One finds the happiest establishments among students. They live on one another, in one another. Promiscuity seems an enchantment. One makes one’s first acquaintance with the opposite sex; one completes oneself. Later on, all this intimacy is no longer possible; and later still, one is very well content with mere amorous visitations while one awaits the moment when solitude brings the only instants of appreciable happiness.”

M. Hervart brought his meditations to no conclusions, and so the morning passed — Rose choosing imaginary wallpapers and Xavier philosophising in secret on the unpleasantnesses of marriage.

After luncheon, a diabolic idea occurred to him: Why shouldn’t he take a definite advance on his conjugal rights? The blood went to his head. He began to breathe a little heavily as he pressed Rose against him. When they were seated, the usual ceremony took place after the usual rebuffs. She allowed her lover’s hand to wander. Their mouths, meanwhile, were kissing, drinking one another. After a moment of calm, M. Hervart, on his knees now, took one of Rose’s feet in his hand. He caressed the ankle and she made no resistance, when he became more daring, though much moved, still she did not protest, and did no more than whisper, “Xavier! No! No!” Nothing more happened. M. Hervart did not dare.

While, feeling very uncomfortable, he was deploring his virtue, Rose fondled him and called him naughty.

“It’s curious,” he thought, “that they all have the same vocabulary by nature.”

He was ashamed. Nothing makes a man ashamed so much as having failed in his purpose, what ever may have been the cause of his failure. He said, a little nervously:

“Let’s walk a little. Let’s do something.”

“What an idiot I am,” he thought, as they walked along the Couville road, where there are rocks and a little heather and foxgloves among the birch-trees; “after all, she’s my wife.”

On the following days the same manoeuvre was repeated several times, and M. Hervart always hesitated at the decisive moment.

“Besides,” he wondered, “would she let me? I can hardly violate my fiancée, can I? I have taught her nothing she doesn’t know. If we came on to untried lessons, how would she take it?...”

He continued: “Dismal pleasures for me. I’ve had enough of them. It was amusing only the first time.”

Finally, one evening when they had gone out alone, a thing which never had happened before, he was a little more daring....

The darkness made Rose receive her lover’s caresses more willingly than usual. She was expecting them. The thing which had appeared so bold to M. Hervart obviously seemed already quite natural to her....

“Much more natural, perhaps, than allowing me to touch her breast or the under side of her arm....”

M. Hervart made bold to ask for more.... “Rose! Rose!”

But the girl recoiled. Suppressing a cry, Rose got up and said: “Let’s go indoors.”

She added, a moment later, “It’s wrong Xavier, it’s wrong. Respect me.”

“What logic,” said M. Hervart to himself. “Respect me! But it’s true, I made a mistake. With young girls especially one must begin at the end.”

The next day they met very early and Rose, refusing to listen to anything he had to say, refusing even to give him a friendly kiss, pronounced the sentence on which she had been meditating:

“I am angry. If you want me to pardon you, go away at once and write to me a week hence that everything’s arranged for our marriage. I love you. You will realise that when I am your wife, but not before. I have been willing to play with you and you have tried to abuse the privilege. It’s wrong. Go!”

He had to go, she was inflexible.

When M. Hervart got into the express at Sottevast, Rose cried. She had forgiven him because she loved him. She had forgiven him because he had obeyed.

CHAPTER XIV

FROM 8.57 A.M. till the hour of 6 p.m., when she rang at his door, M. Hervart had precisely one idea, a single one: he must meet Gratienne.

She had been in Paris since the day before, and she had just written to him when she got his telegram from Caen. Her delight was very great. She fulfilled her lover's desire with joy.

"I love you, my old darling!"

M. Hervart spent two days without thinking of Rose except as something very remote. He was thrilled to re-discover the Louvre: he looked at the colonnade before he went in; even the "fighting Hero" seemed a novelty to him: he went and meditated in front of the crouching Venus, of which he was especially fond. It was there that he had often met Gratienne. How he loved her! What a pleasure it had been to come back to his "ephebe."

On the third day after his arrival he received Gratienne's letter forwarded from Robinvast. That disturbed him a little — Rose's writing superimposed on Gratienne's.

"But aren't they superimposed in life? No, I mean, mingled together. Rose is much too ignorant of the way things go to have any suspicion. And besides, I must have got at least ten letters in women's handwriting while I was at Robinvast and I never made any attempt at concealment.... Rose — it's true I went rather far with her. But whose fault was that? If she had resisted my first attacks, I shouldn't have insisted. What an egoist she is!... However, I ought to write to her. No, not to-day. It's my turn to be cross."

During the day he thought several more times of Rose. The scenes in the garden and the wood came back into his mind and unnerved him. Then a question posed itself in his mind: Do I love her? But he would not answer. Others presented themselves yet insistently: How shall I draw back. He did not

understand. He had no intention of drawing back. Well, then, should the marriage take place? He really didn't know.

"I must have a breathing space. I come back, I have arrears of work and friends to sec. Everything must be done properly. For the little dryad of the Robinvast wood, there is only one thing in the world and that is I. For me there are a dozen things, a thousand...."

He rang the bell, gave unnecessary orders, asked futile questions. It was only at about three o'clock that he opened the door to an image which had been prowling round his head since the morning: Gratienne was coming to pick him up at four and they were to go to St. Cloud. That was one of his great pleasures.

"Will Rose be able to understand these profoundly civilised landscapes, this well-tamed nature, these hills with their harmonious lines like the body of a lovely sleeping woman?"

M. Hervart felt in very good form. The uncomfortable symptoms which had disquieted him in the country had disappeared since his return.... He found in Gratienne a favourable reception and to the realisation of his desires. She knew his tastes and she shared them. In short, he promised himself several delightful hours after this familiar outing. However a very disagreeable surprise was in store for him. After the preludes of passion, when his whole being was bent on realisation, M. Hervart had a moment of weakness. Gratienne's skilful tenderness had certainly overcome it, the self-esteem of both parties had been preserved.

In the morning, he thought of Stendhal, carried the volume to his office and read chapter LX of *L'Amour* with the greatest attention. He found nothing there to enlighten him. Gratienne, certainly, did not inspire, and indeed no woman had ever inspired, in him that kind of ill-balanced passion in which the body recoils, alarmed at its own boldness.

"Stendhal no doubt had discovered one of the reasons for an absence of apropos, but he had found only one. And besides, all this doesn't belong to psychology; it is physiology. There's nothing but physiology. Bouret will tell me about it."

Bouret, who knew M. Hervart's life, made him relate, point by point, the whole history of his last year. Finally he said: "Well it's very simple."

Bouret employed no circumlocutions. He was clear and brutal. After a moment's reflection he continued!

"The inevitable accompaniment of Platonic love is secret vice. Simple flirtation leads to the same consequences. Double flirtation is secret vice *à deux*, discreet and hypocritical. Triple flirtation, if it exists, would still be secret vice *à deux*, but avowed, frank. It would perhaps be less dangerous than double flirtation, which is simply realisation artificially provoked. No virility can stand that. Women, for another reason less easy to explain, are destroyed by it just like men. Men are fools. If you want a woman, take a woman and behave like a fine animal fulfilling its functions! And above all beware of young girls. Young girls have destroyed the virility of more men than all the Messalinas in the world. Sentimental conversations, furtive kisses and hand-squeezings are almost always accompanied in an impressionable man, especially if he has several months or even a few weeks of chastity behind him, by loss of vigor. Then do you know what happens? One gets used to it. I believe that our organs, despite their close interdependence, have a certain autonomy. The first thing you must do is to preserve perfect chastity for an indefinite period. Active occupations, fatigue; you must procure sheer brute sleep. Then, in two or three months make a few direct attempts, absolutely direct. If that's all right, you must marry and set your mind to producing children. There."

"Then you condemn me to conjugal duty."

"That's it precisely."

"One should marry a woman one doesn't love?

"That would be true wisdom."

"And be faithful to her?"

"Obviously."

"Or else renounce everything?"

"I won't go as far as that. Your case isn't desperate. You have fled in time."

"I didn't fly. I was driven away."

“Bless her cruel heart. Tell me, did she permit indiscretions?”

“Yes, I should almost have said willingly.”

“She will be a dangerous wife.”

“She is so innocent!”

“There are no innocent women. They know by instinct all that we claim to teach them.”

“That’s just what innocence is.”

“Perhaps. But a delicate voluptuary with an innocent and amorous girl is a lost man.”

“I begin to realise the fact.”

“There are not,” Bouret went on, “several kinds of love. There is only one kind. Love is physical. The most ethereal reverberates through the organism with as much certainty as the most brutal. Nature knows only one end, procreation, and if the road you take does not lead there, she stops you and condemns you at least to some simulacrum; that is her vengeance. Every intersexual sentiment tends towards love, unless its initial character be well defined or unless the partners are in a phase of life in which love is impossible.... But I am treating you too much as a friend and too little as a patient. You seem to be pensive. You’re not as much interested in questions as Leonor Varin. He is my pupil in the physiology of morals. How is Lanfranc? He doesn’t Platonise, doesn’t flirt....”

“Oh! no.”

“Varin interests me. Do you know him?”

“Very little.”

“The loss is yours. One of his days he will become a fine mind, if he gets over the sensual crisis. I’d like to marry him to some one.”

“That’s your panacea.”

“Perhaps it is one, my friend, on condition that marriage is taken seriously. It’s only in marriage that one can find stability. By the way, have you seen Des Boys’ daughter? He writes to me from time to time. We have remained friends because, though he’s a fool, he’s a laconic fool. And then he’s a very decent sort

of fellow and a man to whom I owe my position. He seems to be almost embarrassed with his daughter. He has no connections in the world. What's she like? Pretty?

"Yes."

"Intelligent? I mean, of course, as far as a woman can be intelligent."

"Yes."

"And now the principal thing — her health?"

"Good as far as one can see."

"Ho, ho! I shall unloose Varin in pursuit of this nymph."

"Unnecessary; he knows her."

"Ah, he knows her?"

M. Hervart got up. He was afraid that some unforeseen question might make him say something silly. Suppose Bouret, who was a friend of Des Boys, guessed something? He tried to think of an ambiguous phrase and found one: "I spent a day at the Des Boys' with Varin. I don't know if he's a familiar of the house."

And with that he went away.

"What a bad business!" he said to himself, as he thought of his health, for the rest was of secondary importance to him now. "No more women! No more Gratienne! No libidinous thoughts! Am I master of my thoughts? Why not a course of pious reading?"

He spent several black days, then gave orders, in one of the galleries of his museum, for one of those untimely upheavals which drive the amateur wild. M. Hervart needed to distract himself. After a week, Gratienne grown anxious, sent him an express letter. He yielded to the suggestion and that evening made an attempt which Bouret would have considered premature. However, it succeeded marvellously well and M. Hervart felt new life spring within him.

The next day, as he was in excellent spirits, he wrote to Rose, whose prolonged silence had ended by pricking his self-satisfaction.

CHAPTER XV

ON REACHING BARNAVAST, Leonor had found two letters; which of the two interested him the more he could not tell. One was from M. Des Boys, asking him to come and finish, before the winter, and immediately, if he could, the alterations at Robinvast. A room was ready for him. He had but to give them warning, and they would send for him. The second came from La Mesangerie. It was a diary.

"15th September. What are my children's kisses after the kisses of my lover? It is like the smell of the humble pink after the heady perfume of the rarest flowers...."

"What a fool the woman is," said Leonor inwardly. "Why does she write. She has intelligence, her conversation is agreeable, she has taste, and see what she writes! God, how melancholy!..."

"... But pinks have their charm, just as they have their own season, and I am happy to come back to them, since their season has returned."

"That," thought Leonor, "is better; it's almost good.... Is Hervart still at Robinvast? I hope not. His holiday wasn't indefinite, I should think. Suppose I wrote to Gratienne?"

"... You flowers that the touch of my Beloved made to blossom in my heart, you perfume my soul, you intoxicate my senses...."

"Intoxicate my senses.... Is it necessary to remember myself to Gratienne? I would as soon get my information from another source."

"... intoxicate my senses. My body trembles at the thought of the night at Compiègne, every moment of which is a star that shines in my dreams. I did not know what love was...."

"Who does know what love is?... I don't feel bound to answer that to-day. Now I come to think of it, I don't know where Gratienne is. She must have left

almost at the same time as I did. Let’s leave it at that....”

“... what love was.... I have no desire to meet Hervart again at Robinvast. He bores me. Is she really going to marry this civil servant? If Rose knew. Yes, but if Rose knew everything, would she think much more of me than of M. Hervart? I am ten years younger than he, that’s all; and my mistress is a much heavier millstone about my neck than his. It’s easy to get rid of a Gratienne; with some one like Hortense, the process is much more difficult. She may make a scandal, she may kill herself, she may make her husband turn her out and then come and take refuge in my arms.... What then? Besides I love this beautiful woman quite a lot and it would distress me very much if I had to drive her to despair. And then Rose is wildly in love. Let me be reasonable. Where was I? Still at love.”

“... what love was, before knowing you; I did not know what pleasure was before our mad night....”

“That’s very likely. But I am doubtful about love. Is it love, that frenzy of sensual curiosity that makes us desire to know, in every aspect and in all its mysteries, the longed-for body? Why not? It is indeed, probably, the best kind of love. Bite, eat, devour! How well they realise it — those who reduce the object of their love to a little bit of bread which they swallow. The Communion — what an act of love! It’s marvellous. Bouret would think that foolish, perhaps; but Bouret, right as he is in being a materialist, is wrong in not understanding materialistic mysticism. Can any one be at once more materialistic and more mystical than those Christians who believe in the Real Presence? Flesh and blood — that’s what lovers want too, and they too have to content themselves with a mere symbol.”

“... our mad night. It revealed a new world to me. I shall not die, like Joshua, without having seen the earthly paradise.”

This phrase, despite its banality, pleased Leonor, who had begun to feel more indulgent towards his mistress.

“To write along letter like this was a great effort for her, and as it was for me that she made the effort, I should be a cad to laugh at it. That is why it would be

as well to read no more. I shall ask her to give me a rendezvous too. Afterwards I shall go to Robinvast. Everything fits in well."

The assignation at Carentan was difficult to arrange. Hortense, at first delighted and ready to start, seemed to hesitate. It was too near, the town was too small. But her desire was so strong! What should she do? She hoped to find some pretext for going to Paris alone.

The truth was that, re-established in her surroundings, Hortense did not feel sufficiently bold to flout the rules voluntarily. She was one of those women who are ready to do anything, provided that circumstances determine their will. She could yield on an impulse to an imperious lover, where or when did not matter, as soon as safety was assured; she would profit by a chance, but to create chance, to organise it — that was another matter. Her escapade at Compiègne appeared to her now as one of those strokes of fortune which life does not grant twice. She dreamed of a new chance meeting with Leonor; but a concerted assignation! At the very thought, she felt herself followed, shadowed; the idea made her quite ill. To be surprised by her absurd husband — how shameful that would be!

"If Leonor came here we could easily find some means. I could have a headache, one Sunday, stay in my room, be alone in the house; besides, there is luck."

She always entrusted herself to luck. She had never yielded to any of her lovers except on the spur of the moment.

"Might we not recapture," she went on, "something of the night at Compiègne, even in a rapid abandonment?"

Women are ruminants: they can live for months, for years it may be, on a voluptuous memory. That is what explains the apparent virtue of certain women; one lovely sin, like a beautiful flower with an immortal perfume, is enough to bless all the days of their life. Women still remember the first kiss when men have forgotten the last.

Hortense dreamed, Leonor desired. He thought only of yesterday's mistress, when he did think of her, in order to make her the mistress of to-morrow. His

sentimentality was material. He crossed the stream from stone to stepping-stone, from reality to reality. In default of Hortense, he had taken Gratienne, not to satisfy his physical, but his cerebral needs. To live, he had to have the electuary of two or three sensations, always the same, but always fresh. Was he capable of a profound emotion, and would such a love have influenced his physiological habits? He did not know. Faithful to Bouret's theories, he did not think so.

He wrote to Hortense: "I want you to come." She was frightened but happy.

"How he loves me!"

The pleasure of obeying struggled in her with fear. Fear, at certain moments, gave way.

"Since he wants me to come, it is clear that he knows I can come, that there is no danger. And then, he will be there!"

She leaned on Leonor as on a second husband, stronger, more real, though distant. Distant? But wasn't he always present in her thoughts?

One morning her fear gave way altogether, she wrote, set out, arrived.

She was trembling, and she still trembled long after the bolts were shot.

This new festival of love was vain, on account of her sensibility. Leonor, astonished by a coldness which he imagined he had overcome for ever, attributed it to a failure of tenderness. He knew that women only palpitate with the men they adore, but he thought that they ought always to palpitate. He did He did not know that there are women who, their whole life long, pursue the delirious sensations which they are doomed never to find again. He imagined therefore, that he was no longer loved, and he was bitter, for men are readily bitter when their mistress's exaltation is too moderate.

Hortense wept. "Oh, my dream, my beautiful dream!"

Her tenderness had, however, in no way diminished. Leonor had to admit it as he received contritely Hortense's poignant kisses. He asked her pardon, humiliated himself, and for a moment she was happy in the caresses of her lover, but she was still whispering to herself, "Oh, my dream, my beautiful dream!"

After her departure, Leonor coldly informed his landlady that he did not mean to come back; then after a long tedious wait in an inn parlour, he returned to

Barnavast. A letter awaited him, pressing him to come. M. Des Boys begged him, with a kind of anxiety, to fix the day on which they could come and fetch him.

Leonor would have liked, however, to devote some few days to meditation. He had a question to answer, “Does she love me?”

“We shall not meet again at Carentan, that is decided. Besides, it was absurd. What a place to make love in! Her failure was due to her repugnance for the surroundings. It was a sign of her refinement of feeling. And then women have no imagination. To me, everything is a palace; the woman I adore would light up a hovel.... Does she love me?”

But it was in vain that he repeated the question, he could find no answer.

“What a fool I am! I shall see well enough next time. I continue to love her. She is beautiful, she is obedient.... But is that the aim of my life? Suppose she were given me for my own?”

But to this question he could think of no answer either.

Hortense, at the same moment, in the old room she had had before she was married, was going to sleep, sighing, “Oh, my dream, my beautiful dream!”

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN LEONOR ARRIVED at Robinvast, Rose and her father were sitting in the garden, each of them reading a letter.... From time to time, Rose would raise her eyes and look at the trees; M. Des Boys between two sentences of his letter would examine his daughter. During this last fortnight, she had been pale, sad, out of humour; and her father, absent-minded, but affectionate, had grown anxious. What was going on between the recently engaged couple? But M. Des Boys would never have dared to question his daughter. He was waiting for a confidence, knowing quite well that it would never come; and on her side, Rose was unhappy at having to keep locked up in her heart the troubles that were suffocating her. These two people, shy and secretive towards one another, might have remained like this for years without deciding to speak the words which would have consoled them.

M. Des Boys had accordingly urged Leonor to come and finish his work.

“It will be a distraction for her,” he had thought, “and then, at bottom and in spite of my pledged word, I agree with my wife: Leonor would be a much more suitable husband. What! Can Hervart be making her unhappy already.”

The letter he was reading at this moment put the final touch to his anxiety. It was from Bouret and Leonor was much praised in it. Bouret went on:

“I have seen Hervart and have equally advised him to get married, but for different reasons. Though he is little younger than we are, he is probably nearer the end. We shall all, alas, see this end confronting us, if we live another fifteen years. Do you understand me? With prudence and diplomacy, Hervart can still drag on a long time, can even recapture brilliant moments; but he has played too much on the fine violin given him by nature. The strings will snap one after the other. As long as one remains a virtuoso, one can still astonish ears habituated to vulgar exercises; but all the same, a single string is very risky! I have therefore

ordered him to marry and, above all, to be faithful to his wife. Fidelity will bring satiety, satiety will bring continence, and continence will perhaps be the true philter. A young wife is not so dangerous as one thinks for a man on the down grade. She is a favourable stimulant and, at the same time, a moderating element. In fine, Hervart may make a very good husband. In any case it's an experiment that interests me. I should be quite capable — if it gives good results, that is, at least a fine child — of yielding myself to an old temptation. I would give up my practice and go and cultivate roses and camellias in some corner of your earthly Paradise, in the Saire Valley, where one sees palms among the willow-trees!"

"I had almost forgotten one important point in our hypothesis. The young wife must have a virtuous temperament, without coldness, but also without sensual curiosity; a good reproducing animal, apt in the pleasure of conceiving rather than in the pleasure of love-making; one of those who, after having been blushing brides, become loving mothers. If he falls on some rebellious woman he is lost. If the instrument which he has to tune and render sensitive gives out no sound or false notes he will lose courage and return to his old concerts. But if, by chance, his wife should reveal herself as a creature of voluptuousness, his perdition would be still more certain: Hervart would flare up like a faggot and nothing but a handful of ashes would be left. I am not speaking of the adultery which would, in these last two cases be inevitable. Sometimes it has the effect of re-establishing the balance in a dislocated household; there are excellent conjugal associations in which each party has his or her ideal down town, in a different quarter of the city. But this is a matter of sociology and doesn't interest me. I remain in my domain, which is the human body, its functions, its anomalies. I may add that it is by their ignorance of it that the sociologists think of such nonsense as they do. They are still hard at work — the idiots! — reasoning about averages, they never come down to reality, to the individual. How it is despised, this human body of ours! And yet it is the only truth, the only beauty, just as it is the only ideal and the only poetry...."

Bouret was inclined to philosophise. His letters almost always passed the range of his correspondents' comprehension. He saw that himself, when he re-

read them, and smiled. All that M. Des Boys understood in his friend's dissertation was the passage which concerned Hervart; but that he understood very well. Bouret's reticences produced their ordinary effect: Hervart was considered as a man incapable, condemned without reprieve.

"He's a madman. What does he mean by going and captivating a young girl's heart when he isn't sure of being able to make a wife of her! The Lord knows, women aren't angels; they have corpora! sensations; and then maternity, maternity...."

M. Des Boys confided to himself all the scabrous or moral banalities that such a subject could make him think of. Meanwhile, he examined his daughter.

"How shall I explain this to her? I shall make her mother do it."

He continued his meditations; and sometimes he would smile at the evocation of foolish fancies, sometimes his brows contracted and he would feel a mixture of anxiety and anger.

Rose was also reading:

"... but I have been very ill since my arrival here. Some fever, due, it may be to the delicious excitement of my heart. A great depression has been the result and I now feel a most disquieting lassitude. Alas! the conclusion is sad: we must put off our marriage. It's a infinite pain to me to write this; but I ask myself when it will be possible? Will it ever be possible? No, I won't ask that. It would be terrible. I love you so much! What a happiness it is to walk again with you, in fancy, through the wood at Robinvast! If I was too audacious, you will pardon me won't you, because of the violence of my love...."

There was a lot more in this style, and a less inexperienced woman than Rose would have felt the artificiality of this amorous eloquence Not a word of it, certainly, came from the heart. M. Hervart, who was not cruel, had first laid down the principle of his illness and his intention was to draw from it, graduating deceptions, all its logical conclusions. If necessary, he had said to himself, Bouret will help me. M. Hervart, who was by nature a man of the last moment and the present sensation, thought of Rose only as one thinks of a sick friend, for whose recovery one certainly hopes, but without anguish of mind.

However the fatuity inevitable in the male sex assured him that he was not forgotten: he flattered himself on having left a wound in the young girl's heart which would never altogether close, and he felt what was almost remorse. To enjoy the egoist's complete peace, he would have consented to a sacrifice; he would have allowed Rose, not forgetfulness, but melancholy resignation.

"Poor child!... But it had to happen. I hope she won't be too unhappy."

The perusal of M. Hervart's letter left Rose sad and charmed:

"Oh, how he loves me! Oh, my darling Xavier, you are ill then?"

And she thought of the fiancée's cruel fate:

"He is ill, and mayn't go and console him."

She was turning towards her father when he rose to meet Leonor. It was in the presence of the young man and without paying heed to him that she imparted M. Hervart's news.

"He is ill, he has had a touch of fever...."

"Fever?" exclaimed M. Des Boys.

"Yes, and afterwards he's been feeling very weak after it."

"Very weak, yes. What then?"

"What then, why, our marriage has to be postponed...."

"Of course."

"I'm very anxious."

"So I should imagine."

"Why shouldn't we go and see him?"

"Do you think it would be any use?"

"It would give him such pleasure."

"Does he ask you to do it?"

"No...."

"Well, then."

"He doesn't dare ask."

"Is he as shy as all that?"

This innocent question made her blush.

“I’ll speak of it with your mother,” M. Des Boys continued. “Meanwhile, let’s get on a little with our architecture.”

Rose had been so bored since Xavier’s departure, she had been so miserable at his long silence, and now she was feeling so anxious that she accepted her father’s proposal without repugnance.

This time they were dealing with the house, there were urgent repairs to be made and useful ameliorations. As they went round, the architect pointed out the weak spots. A whole plan of restoration formed itself in his head.

The days passed. The masons were soon at work. Rose hardly left Leonor’s side.

They had news of M. Hervart more than once through the newspapers, for his rearrangements at the Louvre had drawn upon him the epigrams of the press; but he himself remained silent.

In the circumstances M. Des Boys had resolved to say nothing, to leave time to do its work. Later on, when no dangerous memories of her past love remained in Rose’s heart, when she should be married, he would confide her the truth, with a smile.

One day Leonor let fall, from the top of a ladder, a pocket-book from which a flood of papers — sketches, bills, letters, picture post-cards — escaped. Rose picked them up, without giving them more than the discreetest glance when Martinvast castle caught her eye. At the loot of the keep she found M. Hervart’s “love and kisses.” The blood came suddenly to her eyes; she turned the card over and read: “Mademoiselle Gratienne Leboeuf, Rue du Havre, Honfleur.” She looked up; Leonor did not seem to have noticed the incident, and with a rapid gesture she folded up the card and slipped it into her bosom.

“Monsieur Leonor, you’ve dropped your pocket-book.”

Leonor descended his ladder and thanked her, while Rose walked away. When she had disappeared he noticed with delight that she had stolen Martinvast Castle; then, whistling, he climbed up once more to see his workmen.

Arrived in her room, Rose sat down, trembling.

“I have made a mistake,” she said to herself. “It isn’t possible. And how could it have come into Leonor’s hands?”

She extracted the card from its hiding-place, unfolded it and looked at it, trembling.

“It’s his writing all right.”

She still felt doubtful.

“What’s the date?”

She deciphered it without difficulty. “Cherbourg, 31 July, 1903.”

“The very day we went to the Liais Garden, the day we went up that tower where I almost fainted with love.... I was so happy!”

She began crying. Through her tears she looked at her hands, turning them, looking at all the fingers one after another. She looked as though she were rediscovering them, taking possession of them once more.

Finally she got up and stamped her foot.

“Very well then, I don’t love him any more. There! Good-bye, Monsieur Hervart. You deceived me, I shall never forgive you. And I had such confidence in him; I let myself rest so softly on his heart.”

She was still crying.

“Now, I am ashamed....”

And she felt her body, from head to feet, as though to take possession of it also. She would have liked to press it, to wring it so that all the caresses, all the kisses which had sunk into her skin, penetrated her veins, thrilled her nerves, might be drained out of it.

In her already perverted innocence she pictured to herself the mutual caresses of Xavier and this Gratienne woman. She pictured to herself this woman’s body and compared it with her own. Was she more beautiful? In what is one woman’s body more beautiful than another’s? Xavier had loved to caress her, to crush her in his arms. And used he not to say: “How beautiful you are!” A vision, against which she struggled in vain, showed her Xavier kneeling beside Gratienne and covering her with kisses.

A heat mounted in her breast, her heart contracted; she tried to cry out, half got up, clutched at the air with her hands and fell in a faint.

When she came to herself, she felt very tired and very frightened as well. She looked about her, afraid to discover the reality of the painful vision which had overwhelmed her. Reassured, she breathed again.

“It was a dream, only a dream.”

But it seemed as though a spring had suddenly been released in her heart. Throughout her whole being there was a sudden change. Under her maiden breast, grief had taken up its home. She felt it as one feels a piece of gravel in one’s shoe. It was something material which had insinuated itself into the intimacy of her flesh, causing her, not pain, but a sense of discomfort.

At the same time, all that she habitually loved seemed to her without the faintest interest. She looked with an indifferent eye at this room in which she had dreamt so many dreams, this room that she had arranged, decorated with so much pleasure, so much minute care, this cell she had spun and woven herself to sleep in, like a chrysalis, till the awakening of love should come. The great trees of the wood which she could see from her window, and could never see without emotion, appeared to her patches of insignificant greenery: she noticed, for the first time, that their tops were of uneven height and she was irritated by it. There was a sound of hammering; she leaned out of the window and saw two men splitting a block of granite, and for a moment she wondered what for.

“Oh, yes, of course, the repairs.... What does it all matter to me? Ah! where are my dear solitary hours in the old house, imprisoned by its ivy and climbing roses! And now Leonor! I wish he’d go away. He’s the cause of it all. If it hadn’t been for his clumsiness, I should never have known of the existence of this woman.... But how did he come to have that card in his pocket?”

The idea of a voluntary indiscretion did not occur to her. She had never dreamt that Leonor could feel for her any emotion of tenderness. Besides, no man except Xavier had yet existed in her imagination. There was Xavier on the one hand; and on the other there were the others.

Meanwhile she went on reflecting. Love, jealousy, grief, quickened her natural intelligence.

“There were several letters in the pocket-book addressed to M. Varin. That’s natural. But why this card addressed to that woman? He must know her too. She must have given it to him because of the view of Martinvast Castle, I suppose....”

She could not succeed in reconstructing the adventure of this post-card. There was some mystery about it, which she soon gave up the hope of solving.

“But all I have to do is to ask M. Leonor. How simple! But then I shall have to tell him that I stole his postal card, for I have stolen it! It’s not very serious, perhaps, but how shall I dare talk to him about it, how shall I, first of all, confess that I had the bad manners to look at his correspondence? Oh! but a post-card, a picture! And then I shall tell him the truth? it fell under my eyes by chance, and if the card had been turned with the address side upwards, I should certainly not have turned it over....”

What was most repugnant to her was the necessity of speaking of Gratienne, for Leonor was not ignorant of her projected marriage with M. Hervart. She remained undecided, and at once she began to suffer once more; for her grief had spared her a little while she was engaged in her deliberations.

She was so wretched and so tired that when the dinner-bell rang she went down without thinking of her dress, without refreshing her eyes, still red and inflamed with crying.

CHAPTER XVII

LEONOR WAS ON the watch for the effect of his cure. He saw that evening that it had succeeded. Rose looked like a shadow, a dolorous shadow. She forgot to eat, and would sit looking into the void, her hand on her glass; she did not reply to questions unless they were repeated. Finally, it was obvious that she had been crying.

"The remedy has been a painful one," said Leonor to himself. "Will she bear a grudge against the doctor? Perhaps, but the important thing was to scratch out the unblemished image stamped on her heart. That has been done. Across M. Hervart's portrait, in all directions, from top to bottom, from side to side, there is written now: Gratienne, Gratienne, Gratienne.

"Ah, little swallow of the beach, how precious you have been for me! I will give you a golden necklet to thank, in your person, the supreme goddess of hearts. Hervart, I envied you once now I am sorry for you. I despise you too. You had found love, ingenuous and absolute, you had found in a single being, the child, the mistress and the wife, you possessed the smile of innocence and the woman's desire — and you have left it all for Gratienne and her caresses. But no, no invectives; worthy civil servant, I thank you. Yes, but am I much better? My Gratienne is a marquise, to be sure, but I have one just the same. No, I have ceased to have a Gratienne. I shall be loyal. I will fling my old burden into the sea, and at your feet, sad maiden, I shall kneel, heart free."

Nothing happened that evening. Rose preserved her silence, and her attitude towards Leonor was the same as at other times. But she had to make a painful effort to preserve her customary amiability. Leonor wondered, deliberated within himself whether he should speak. Might he not question her, with a distracted air about the post-card of Martinvast? "He had thought it was with the other papers, but he couldn't find it. Perhaps the wind carried it away."

“No, that would be too direct. She may have suspicions; I shall try to destroy them. I should be lost if she had certainties. But I have no doubts. She will come of her own accord, she will speak first. And I shall look as though I didn’t understand; she will have to drag out of me one by one a few ambiguous words.”

The days passed. Rose remained in the same melancholy state, ruminating on her grief. Still she did not speak, and Leonor foresaw the moment, when, his presence being no longer necessary, he would have to take his leave. The operations on the outside of the house were coming to an end, the weather had made digging impossible and Rose had decided that the interior repairs should be put off till the spring.

Meanwhile Leonor began to suffer in his turn. By living in the same house as Rose he had felt the love, that had to begin with been somewhat chimerical, grow and take root within him. From the moment of their first meeting Rose had aroused in him something like a love of love. He had first been moved by the generosity of an innocent heart giving itself with so noble a violence. Next, he had felt that vague jealousy which all men feel for one another. He had detested M. Hervart, without being able to keep himself from admiring the spectacle of his happiness. The desire to supplant him had naturally tormented Leonor; but it was one of those desires which one feels sure can never be realised and at which, in lucid moments, one shrugs one’s shoulders. Since chance and his own good management had so much modified the logical sequence of things to his own profit, Leonor had begun to tell himself that one should never doubt anything, that anything may happen and that the impossible is probably the most reasonable thing in the world.

In these few weeks he had become more serious than ever, and above all more calm. His egotism began to be capable of long deviations from its straight course. He knew very well that Rose, if he hazarded a confession, would reply with indifference, perhaps with anger. His plan was to risk a few discreet insinuations on some suitable opportunity.

“I might,” he reflected, “put on the melancholy, disenchanted look myself. She is ill, and it would be a case of one sick person seeking some comfort in the

eyes of a companion in misfortune.... Comedy! But would it be so much of a comedy? Have I found in life all that I looked for? If I had found it, should I be here dreaming of the capture of a young girl? It's my right, to do that, since I love; all means will be fair which put the resources of my imagination at the service of my heart."

But the opportunity of striking a melancholy, disenchanted attitude never presented itself. Rose considered him more and more as an architect, praised his skill in managing the workmen, and paid no attention to his youth, his cleverness or even to the way he looked at her — and his glances were often penetrating. There were moments when he became discouraged. The memory of Hortense came back to him. They had exchanged a few anodyne letters. She called him to her, but in a weak voice, and it was in uncertain terms that he announced his next visit.

"Dying love is always melancholy," he thought. "The poem would have been beautiful if we had said good-bye after Compiègne. We tried to add a verse, and it has been a failure. It's a pity. But what will become of her? I still feel some curiosity about her."

At other moments he pictured to himself Gratienne and the elegant manner of her posturing; that roused him for a time. But the image of M. Hervart would seem to come and mingle with that of this agreeable young woman, and the charm would be broken.

Rose's arrival would dispel all these visions. He took a great delight in seeing her walk, enjoying, though with no idea of libertinage, the grace of her movements.

Leonor's departure had already been spoken of. One rainy afternoon, Rose decided to speak. She did it very seriously, without attempting to dissimulate her unhappiness. Between the two there followed a conversation which took the tone of friendly confidences.

After long hesitation she put the question for which Leonor had been waiting with so much anxiety. He had forged several anecdotes with which Rose would doubtless have been satisfied; but when the moment came, rather than hesitate

and risk inevitable contradictions, he suddenly decided on a certain degree of frankness.

He said: “The card fell into my hands because I myself have also been entertained by this person. M. Hervart, I must tell you, was not there; he did not know and she shall certainly never know. I had no idea myself that he was the intimate friend of the house. That was why his name struck me, appended as it was to ‘best love.’”

“It was ‘love and kisses.’”

“Of course, I remember now.” And he repeated, with an intonation that aggravated the words, and stamped them on the young girl’s bruised heart: “Yes, ‘love and kisses.’ There were a number of picture post-cards addressed to the same person; there were many signed with the same name or an abbreviation: H., Her., Herv. I was bold enough to take one as a souvenir of my visit. And then ... and then.... May I say it, Mademoiselle?”

“Say what you like. Nothing can hurt me any more now.”

“Very well; I got hold of this card dishonestly, perhaps, but it was because I was thinking of you.... I was thinking that the man to whom you had just given your hand loved another woman and publicly admitted his love for her. That seemed to me bad; I suffered for you — you whose delicate and generous feelings I had guessed.... Yes, that distressed me and my idea was, by stealing this proof of a wrong action, to let you know of it, if circumstances allowed me.”

“Then you dropped your pocket-book on purpose?”

“I confess. I did. And if that method had failed, I should have tried to find another.”

“You hurt me a great deal. All the same, I am grateful to you.”

She held out her hand; Leonor pressed it respectfully.

“I have given you less pain now than you would have felt later on. It would have been irremediable then.”

“Who knows? I might perhaps have forgiven him afterwards. I shall not forgive before.”

“I know M. Hervart fairly well,” said Leonor, in a slightly hypocritical voice, “but I know that, despite his age, he is capricious. M. Lanfranc is a spiteful gossip and I won’t repeat all he told me. I know enough, and from certain sources, to make me congratulate myself on what is perhaps an audacious intervention.”

“And what about my father? He has agreed to our marriage.”

“Your father lives a long way from Paris. He is kind and trustful. No doubt his friend promised him to make you happy, and he believed him.”

“I believed him too. Alas! he had begun to make me happy already.”

“Oh! his intentions weren’t bad. M. Hervart is not a bad man. He is fickle, inconstant, irresolute.”

“I see that only too clearly.”

“He’s an egoist. All men are egoists, for that matter, but there are degrees. Is he capable of loving a woman whole-heartedly, capable of consecrating his life to weaving daily joys for her? And yet what could be a more perfect dream, when one meets in his path a creature who is worthy of it, one who draws to herself not only love but adoration!”

“I suppose that women like that are rare.”

“Those who have known one and desert her are very guilty.”

“Say rather that they are very much to be pitied. But not being one of these women, I didn’t ask so much.”

“You don’t know yourself, Mademoiselle. Oh! if only I had been in M. Hervart’s place.”

“What would have happened?” asked Rose, without the least emotion, without even the least curiosity.

“How I should have loved you!”

“But he loved me a great deal.”

“He didn’t love you as you should be loved.”

“I don’t know. How should I know these things? I believed, that was all. I believed in him.”

“He was not worthy of you.”

“Perhaps it was I who was unworthy of him, since he loves me no more.”

“Unworthy of him, you? Don’t you know, then, what this woman is?”

“No, and I don’t want to know. Oh! I’m not jealous. I’m humiliated. I feel as though I had been beaten. Jealous? No. I have stopped loving and I shall never love again.”

“Don’t say that.”

“Love doesn’t come twice.”

“But if one is unhappy the first time?”

“One remains unhappy.”

“Happiness always has to be looked for. When one looks for it one finds it.”

“Happiness falls from heaven one day; then it goes up again and never descends any more.”

“Don’t say that. You will be happy.”

“It’s finished.”

“You will be happy as soon as you meet some one you really love with all the force of an ardent and devoted heart.”

“Don’t let’s speak of these things. It hurts me.”

“I obey you. I will be silent, but not before telling you that that heart is mine.”

Rose looked at him with astonished eyes. She seemed not to understand. Leonor, very much moved, got up, walked towards her and said, in a whisper:

“Rose, I love you.”

At these words, Rose started, and when Leonor tried to take her hand, she got up and ran away, crying:

“No, no, no, no.”

“How stupid I’ve been,” Leonor said to himself, when he was alone. “Does one declare one’s love like this? Here am I on a level with the lowest heroes of novels. Think of declaring one’s love, saying, ‘I am hot,’ to a woman who is cold. What does it mean to her? Words possess eloquence when the ears expect them. If not, they ring false. They only incline hearts which have already abdicated their will.”

Leonor was very sincerely in love with Rose; hence he was very unhappy. He imagined, moreover, that M. Hervart was already completely pardoned. Rose was only awaiting some act of humility to give herself to him again.

“She is hurt in her pride. Her heart is happy, if happiness consists in loving much more than in being loved. It is a painful pleasure, but none the less a pleasure, for her to talk of M. Hervart....”

That evening Leonor had no difficulty in putting on a melancholy and disenchanted look. He felt these two emotions to perfection, and Rose, who could not help looking at him, noticed it.

“Can he really be in love with me,” she wondered, “ —— he?”

The next morning, when she woke up, she asked herself the same dangerous question. Then suddenly, a wave of red mounted to her head. She had just remembered all the amusements into which her own innocence and M. Hervart’s perverse good-nature had led her.

“I am dishonoured,” she said to herself. “Am I a maiden?”

This was the first time that she had felt any shame in calling to mind the kisses and caresses in which her heart, rather than her body, had felt pleasure. Though she was unconscious of the transference, the pain which she still felt had, without changing its nature, changed its cause.

When Leonor said good-morning she felt herself blushing and immediately turned her head, to discover an imaginary piece of thread on her skirt.

“So it’s to-morrow that we shall have to drive you back,” said M. Des Boys.

“If the garden isn’t arranged before the winter,” said Rose, “we shall have to wait till next autumn.”

“Obviously,” said Leonor; “one can’t transplant in the spring. At least, it’s a most delicate operation.”

“Well, then, stay and let’s finish it off,” said M. Des Boys.

Leonor stayed.

“Since I have made a declaration and it has been successful, I shall now pay my addresses. Can it be that the old methods are the best?”

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THOSE LAST autumn days, under the rain of dead leaves, they enjoyed delicious hours. Leonor lived attentively, taking care that no single word of his might shock the young girl. Rose, her eyes always sad, answered with cordial politeness. Their words were measured, insignificant, but they were uttered in a voice full of a secret emotion.

They directed the alterations together, giving no orders without consulting one another; and they were soon agreed about everything, for their only desire was to stand together looking at the workmen. They confined themselves to cutting a few useful paths, transplanting a few bushes and arranging the lawns and flower-beds.

The decisive gestures in life are almost always the simplest, the most ingenuous. Discovering a few sprigs of violet under a wall, picking them, offering them to her: that was the act which won for Leonor his first smile from the girl, a smile that was still vague, a smile in which the soul, so long solicited, showed itself for an instant, as though at a window visited at last by the sun.

One day, while they were holding a lilac that was being transplanted, their hands met. Rose withdrew hers without affectation, but a little later she approached it once more and perhaps that tree, as it was wrenched from the earth, felt a thrill of love passing through its sleeping trunk.

Leonor thought of nothing but the charm of his present life; he analysed himself no more; he made no plots or projects; he breathed pure air, he was opening out.

Though less wretched, Rose still suffered. One evening, when she was undressing to go to bed, she called to mind all the liberties she had permitted. No detail was spared her, and it was in vain that her body revolted; along her nerves she felt the now shameful shudder of her former voluptuousness. She threw

herself into her bed and soon, in the warmth, the imaginary contacts grew more numerous and precise. Then, losing her head, she yielded and went to sleep in a trance of pleasure.

Accordingly, in the mornings, she was apt to be a little peevish. Leonor seemed, at these moments, to lose all he had gained in the afternoons; but he was not disturbed by it. He knew that characters change according to the time of day, as they change according to the season. Happy in being able to hope for everything, he waited without impatience. Exorcising Rose demanded a whole morning of Leonor's company. The sound of his voice, rather than his words, calmed her possessed spirit. She would end by doubting the very existence of the spell from which she had been released and, by the time lunch was over, she was a child smiling at love.

Some evenings the crisis was very intense. Hardly had she entered her room when she seemed to receive a kind of imperious injunction to look at herself in the glass. Standing there, she would press her shoulders feverishly. Then she felt herself lifted up and carried to her bed, at the mercy of the demon of love. At other times the obsession was less malignant and she was able to attempt some resistance. The fall was slow, gradual and sometimes incomplete. She noticed that she had more peace and more strength on the evenings when she had, by her attitude, encouraged Leonor to make some tenderer utterance, and that fact caused her great joy. For she loved her exorcist; like a sick woman full of confidence, she loved her doctor.

Now she appeared more humble and at the same time almost provocative. She allowed her eyes to rest more often and for a longer time on the young man's face. She even came to studying his face when he was looking, and, though she dropped her eyes quickly at the first alarm, Leonor noticed it.

"She loves me, she loves me. Ah! this time she will listen to me, and perhaps she will speak."

But, by dint of loving innocently, Leonor had become shy; and several days passed in the motions of the eyes and heart. Rose derived great consolation from them. One evening, when the obsession had almost left her in peace and she was

about to go to sleep victorious, she suddenly saw herself once more in the drawing room. Leonor was offering her a marvellous flower of a kind she did not recognise. She took it and when she smelt it felt an inexpressible sweetness slowly penetrate her whole being; she was asleep.

She awoke full of joy, a thing that had not happened since the day of her great grief. She was smiling at Leonor before she had even seen him. They met on the stairs. Leonor heard a door slam, the sound of hurrying feet. He drew back to make passage room. It was Rose. Playfully, as she had already allowed him to do, he made as though to bar her way.

"You shan't pass," he said.

"Very well, I won't pass."

And she fell into the open arms that closed at once round her body — a happy prisoner.

"Do you love me, then? At last?"

"Yes, I love you."

Rose never once remembered that it was thus she had fallen into M. Hervart's arms in the staircase of the tower. She forgot in its entirety the first adventure of her poor abused heart and her troubled senses. When M. Hervart's name was pronounced in her presence, it recalled to her those studious walks at Robinvast with that old friend of her father's who told her the anecdotes of entomology.

M. Des Boys, as he had resolved, revealed to his daughter what he called the misfortunes of M. Hervart. And so, when she heard that he was to marry *Mme.* Suif, she allowed herself an honest smile of commiseration. That happened in the third year of their marriage; they were spending the season at Grandcamp, where, without knowing her, she often rubbed shoulders with a young woman who had played a decisive part in her history.

Leonor was wandering one morning on this same beach where Gratienne had attracted him; but he was not thinking of Gratienne, who as it happened was looking at him, from a distance, with interest. He was thinking of Hortense, of whose death he had seen the announcement in a local paper; of Hortense, who had written him, on the eve of his marriage, a letter so moving in its proud

resignation that it had almost made him weep; of Hortense whom he had loved and who perhaps had died because of his happiness.

When he came back, Rose received him as a lover is received. She had found in marriage the attentions which her nature demanded. She was happy.

THE END

The Shorter Fiction

Huxley attended Eton College as a child

Limbo

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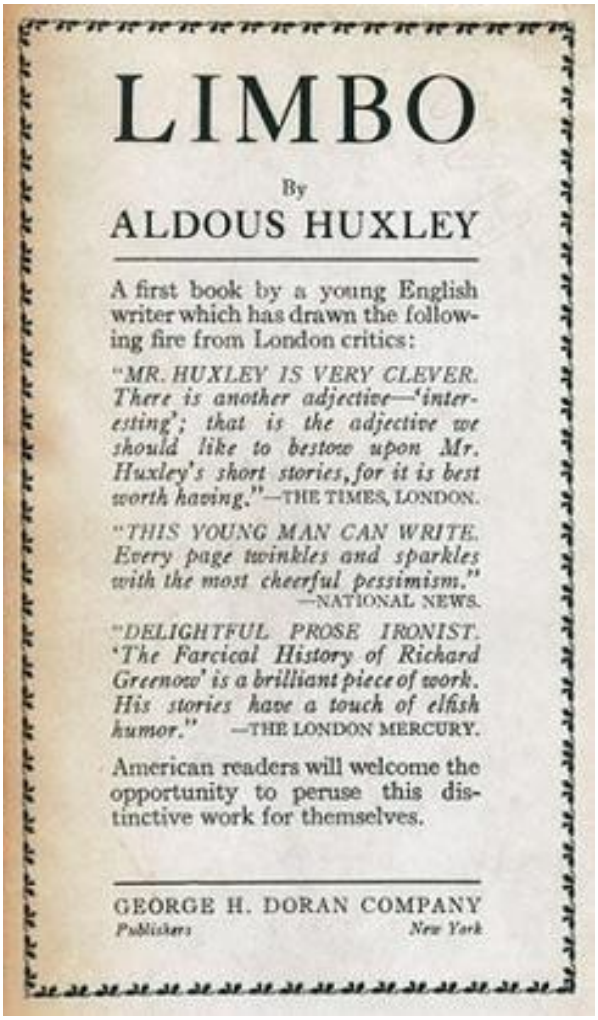

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FARCICAL HISTORY OF RICHARD GREENOW

I

THE MOST SUMPTUOUS present that Millicent received on her seventh birthday was a doll's house. "With love to darling little Mill from Aunty Loo." Aunt Loo was immensely rich, and the doll's house was almost as grandiose and massive as herself.

It was divided into four rooms, each papered in a different colour and each furnished as was fitting: beds and washstands and wardrobes in the upstair rooms, arm-chairs and artificial plants below. "Replete with every modern convenience; sumptuous appointments." There was even a cold collation ready spread on the dining-room table — two scarlet lobsters on a dish, and a ham that had been sliced into just enough to reveal an internal complexion of the loveliest pink and white. One might go on talking about the doll's house for ever, it was so beautiful. Such, at any rate, was the opinion of Millicent's brother Dick. He would spend hours opening and shutting the front door, peeping through the windows, arranging and rearranging the furniture. As for Millicent, the gorgeous present left her cold. She had been hoping — and, what is more, praying, fervently, every night for a month — that Aunty Loo would give her a toy sewing-machine (one of the kind that works, though) for her birthday.

She was bitterly disappointed when the doll's house came instead. But she bore it all stoically and managed to be wonderfully polite to Aunty Loo about the whole affair. She never looked at the doll's house: it simply didn't interest her.

Dick had already been at a preparatory school for a couple of terms. Mr. Killigrew, the headmaster, thought him a promising boy. "Has quite a remarkable aptitude for mathematics," he wrote in his report. "He has started Algebra this term and shows a"— "quite remarkable" scratched out (the language of reports is apt to be somewhat limited)— "a very unusual grasp of

the subject.” Mr. Killigrew didn’t know that his pupil also took an interest in dolls: if he had, he would have gibed at Dick as unmercifully and in nearly the same terms as Dick’s fellow-schoolboys — for shepherds grow to resemble their sheep and pedagogues their childish charges. But of course Dick would never have dreamt of telling anyone at school about it. He was chary of letting even the people at home divine his weakness, and when anyone came into the room where the doll’s house was, he would put his hands in his pockets and stroll out, whistling the tune of, “There is a Happy Land far, far away, where they have Ham and Eggs seven times a day,” as though he had merely stepped in to have a look at the beastly thing — just to give it a kick.

When he wasn’t playing with the doll’s house, Dick spent his holiday time in reading, largely, devouringly. No length or incomprehensibility could put him off; he had swallowed down *Robert Elsmere* in the three-volume edition at the age of eight. When he wasn’t reading he used to sit and think about Things in General and Nothing in Particular; in fact, as Millicent reproachfully put it, he just mooned about. Millicent, on the other hand, was always busily doing something: weeding in the garden, or hoeing, or fruit-picking (she could be trusted not to eat more than the recognized tariff — one in twenty raspberries or one in forty plums); helping Kate in the kitchen; knitting mufflers for those beings known vaguely as The Cripples, while her mother read aloud in the evenings before bedtime. She disapproved of Dick’s mooning, but Dick mooned all the same.

When Dick was twelve and a half he knew enough about mathematics and history and the dead languages to realize that his dear parents were profoundly ignorant and uncultured. But, what was more pleasing to the dear parents, he knew enough to win a scholarship at Æsop College, which is one of our Greatest Public Schools.

If this were a Public School story, I should record the fact that, while at Æsop, Dick swore, lied, blasphemed, repeated dirty stories, read the articles in *John Bull* about brothels disguised as nursing-homes and satyrs disguised as curates; that he regarded his masters, with very few exceptions, as fools, not

even always well-meaning. And so on. All which would be quite true, but beside the point. For this is not one of the conventional studies of those clever young men who discover Atheism and Art at School, Socialism at the University, and, passing through the inevitable stage of Sex and Syphilis after taking their B.A., turn into maturely brilliant novelists at the age of twenty-five. I prefer, therefore, to pass over the minor incidents of a difficult pubescence, touching only on those points which seem to throw a light on the future career of our hero.

It is possible for those who desire it — incredible as the thing may appear — to learn something at Æsop College. Dick even learnt a great deal. From the beginning he was the young Benjamin of his mathematical tutor, Mr. Skewbauld, a man of great abilities in his own art, and who, though wholly incapable of keeping a form in order, could make his private tuition a source of much profit to a mathematically minded boy. Mr. Skewbauld's house was the worst in Æsop: Dick described it as a mixture between a ghetto and a home for the mentally deficient, and when he read in Sir Thomas Browne that it was a Vulgar Error to suppose that Jews stink, he wrote a letter to the *School Magazine* exploding that famous doctor as a quack and a charlatan, whose statements ran counter to the manifest facts of everyday life in Mr. Skewbauld's house. It may seem surprising that Dick should have read Sir Thomas Browne at all. But he was more than a mere mathematician. He filled the ample leisure, which is Æsop's most precious gift to those of its Alumni who know how to use it, with much and varied reading in history, in literature, in physical science, and in more than one foreign language. Dick was something of a prodigy.

"Greenow's an intellectual," was Mr. Copthorne-Slazenger's contemptuous verdict. "I have the misfortune to have two or three intellectuals in my house. They're all of them friends of his. I think he's a Bad Influence in the School." Copthorne-Slazenger regarded himself as the perfect example of *mens sana in corpore sano*, the soul of an English gentleman in the body of a Greek god. Unfortunately his legs were rather too short and his lower lip was underhung like a salmon's.

Dick had, indeed, collected about him a band of kindred spirits. There was Partington, who specialized in history; Gay, who had read all the classical writings of the golden age and was engaged in the study of mediæval Latin; Fletton, who was fantastically clever and had brought the art of being idle to a pitch never previously reached in the annals of Æsop. These were his chief friends, and a queer-looking group they made — Dick, small and dark and nervous; Partington, all roundness, and whose spectacles were two moons in a moonface; Gay, with the stiff walk of a little old man; and Fletton, who looked like nobody so much as Mr. Jingle, tall and thin with a twisted, comical face.

"An ugly skulking crew," Copthorne-Slazenger, conscious of his own Olympian splendour, would say as he saw them pass.

With these faithful friends Dick should have been — and indeed for the most part was — very happy. Between them they mustered up a great stock of knowledge; they could discuss every subject under the sun. They were a liberal education and an amusement to one another. There were times, however, when Dick was filled with a vague, but acute, discontent. He wanted something which his friends could not give him; but what, but what? The discontent rankled under the surface, like a suppressed measles. It was Lord Francis Quarles who brought it out and made the symptoms manifest.

Francis Quarles was a superb creature, with the curly forehead of a bull and the face and limbs of a Græco-Roman statue. It was a sight worth seeing when he looked down through half-shut eyelids, in his usual attitude of sleepy arrogance, on the world about him. He was in effect what Mr. Copthorne-Slazenger imagined himself to be, and he shared that gentleman's dislike for Dick and his friends. "Yellow little atheists," he called them. He always stood up for God and the Church of England; they were essential adjuncts to the aristocracy. God, indeed, was almost a member of the Family; lack of belief in Him amounted to a personal insult to the name of Quarles.

It was half-way through the summer term, when Dick was sixteen, on one of those days of brilliant sunshine and cloudless blue, when the sight of beautiful and ancient buildings is peculiarly poignant. Their age and quiet stand out in

melancholy contrast against the radiant life of the summer; and at Æsop the boys go laughing under their antique shadow; “Little victims” — you feel how right Gray was. Dick was idly strolling across the quadrangle, engaged in merely observing the beauty about him — the golden-grey chapel, with its deep geometrical shadows between the buttresses, the comely rose-coloured shapes of the brick-built Tudor buildings, the weathercocks glittering in the sun, the wheeling flurries of pigeons. His old discontent had seized on him again, and to-day in the presence of all this beauty it had become almost unbearable. All at once, out of the mouth of one of the dark little tunnelled doors pierced in the flanks of the sleeping building, a figure emerged into the light. It was Francis Quarles, clad in white flannels and the radiance of the sunshine. He appeared like a revelation, bright, beautiful, and sudden, before Dick’s eyes. A violent emotion seized him; his heart leapt, his bowels were moved within him; he felt a little sick and faint — he had fallen in love.

Francis passed by without deigning to notice him. His head was high, his eyes drowsy under their drooping lids. He was gone, and for Dick all the light was out, the beloved quadrangle was a prison-yard, the pigeons a loathsome flock of carrion eaters. Gay and Partington came up behind him with shouts of invitation. Dick walked rudely away. God! how he hated them and their wretched, silly talk and their yellow, ugly faces.

The weeks that followed were full of strangeness. For the first time in his life Dick took to writing poetry. There was one sonnet which began:

Is it a vision or a waking dream?
Or is it truly Apollo that I see,
Come from his sylvan haunts in Arcady
To { laugh and loiter
sing and saunter by an English stream. . . .

He kept on repeating the words to himself, “Sylvan haunts in Arcady,” “laugh and loiter” (after much thought he had adopted that as more liquidly melodious than “sing and saunter”). How beautiful they sounded! — as beautiful as Keats — more beautiful, for they were his own.

He avoided the company of Gay and Fletton and Partington; they had become odious to him, and their conversation, when he could bring himself to listen to it, was, somehow, almost incomprehensible. He would sit for hours alone in his study; not working — for he could not understand the mathematical problems on which he had been engaged before the fateful day in the quadrangle — but reading novels and the poetry of Mrs. Browning, and at intervals writing something rather ecstatic of his own. After a long preparatory screwing up of his courage, he dared at last to send a fag with a note to Francis, asking him to tea; and when Francis rather frigidly refused, he actually burst into tears. He had not cried like that since he was a child.

He became suddenly very religious. He would spend an hour on his knees every night, praying, praying with frenzy. He mortified the flesh with fasting and watching. He even went so far as to flagellate himself — or at least tried to; for it is very difficult to flagellate yourself adequately with a cane in a room so small that any violent gesture imperils the bric-à-brac. He would pass half the night stark naked, in absurd postures, trying to hurt himself. And then, after the dolorously pleasant process of self-maceration was over, he used to lean out of the window and listen to the murmurs of the night and fill his spirit with the warm velvet darkness of midsummer. Copthorne-Slazenger, coming back by the late train from town one night, happened to see his moon-pale face hanging out of window and was delighted to be able to give him two hundred Greek lines to remind him that even a member of the Sixth Form requires sleep sometimes.

The fit lasted three weeks. “I can’t think what’s the matter with you, Greenow,” complained Mr. Skewbauld snufflingly. “You seem incapable or unwilling to do anything at all. I suspect the cause is constipation. If only everyone would take a little paraffin every night before going to bed! . . .” Mr.

Skewbauld's self-imposed mission in life was the propagation of the paraffin habit. It was the universal panacea — the cure for every ill.

His friends of before the crisis shook their heads and could only suppose him mad. And then the fit ended as suddenly as it had begun.

It happened at a dinner-party given by the Cravisters. Dr. Cravister was the Headmaster of *Æ*sop — a good, gentle, learned old man, with snow-white hair and a saintly face which the spirit of comic irony had embellished with a nose that might, so red and bulbous it was, have been borrowed from the properties of a music-hall funny man. And then there was Mrs. Cravister, large and stately as a galleon with all sails set. Those who met her for the first time might be awed by the dignity of what an Elizabethan would have called her "swelling port." But those who knew her well went in terror of the fantastic spirit which lurked behind the outward majesty. They were afraid of what that richly modulated voice of hers might utter. It was not merely that she was malicious — and she had a gift of ever-ready irony; no, what was alarming in all her conversation was the element of the unexpected. With most people one feels comfortably secure that they will always say the obvious and ordinary things; with Mrs. Cravister, never. The best one could do was to be on guard and to try and look, when she made a more than usually characteristic remark, less of a bewildered fool than one felt.

Mrs. Cravister received her guests — they were all of them boys — with stately courtesy. They found it pleasant to be taken so seriously, to be treated as perfectly grown men; but at the same time, they always had with Mrs. Cravister a faint uncomfortable suspicion that all her politeness was an irony so exquisite as to be practically undistinguishable from ingenuousness.

"Good evening, Mr. Gay," she said, holding out her hand and shutting her eyes; it was one of her disconcerting habits, this shutting of the eyes. "What a pleasure it will be to hear you talking to us again about eschatology."

Gay, who had never talked about eschatology and did not know the meaning of the word, smiled a little dimly and made a protesting noise.

“Eschatology? What a charming subject!” The fluty voice belonged to Henry Cravister, the Headmaster’s son, a man of about forty who worked in the British Museum. He was almost too cultured, too erudite.

“But I don’t know anything about it,” said Gay desperately.

“Spare us your modesty,” Henry Cravister protested.

His mother shook hands with the other guests, putting some at their ease with a charming phrase and embarrassing others by saying something baffling and unexpected that would have dismayed even the hardiest diner-out, much more a schoolboy tremblingly on his good behaviour. At the tail end of the group of boys stood Dick and Francis Quarles. Mrs. Cravister slowly raised her heavy waxen eyelids and regarded them a moment in silence.

“The Græco-Roman and the Gothic side by side!” she exclaimed. “Lord Francis is something in the Vatican, a rather late piece of work; and Mr. Greenow is a little gargoyle from the roof of Notre Dame de Paris. Two epochs of art — how clearly one sees the difference. And my husband, I always think, is purely Malayan in design — purely Malayan,” she repeated as she shook hands with the two boys.

Dick blushed to the roots of his hair, but Francis’ impassive arrogance remained unmoved. Dick stole a glance in his direction, and at the sight of his calm face he felt a new wave of adoring admiration sweeping through him.

The company was assembled and complete, Mrs. Cravister looked round the room and remarking, “We won’t wait for Mr. Copthorne-Slazenger,” sailed majestically in the direction of the door. She particularly disliked this member of her husband’s staff, and lost no opportunity of being rude to him. Thus, where an ordinary hostess might have said, “Shall we come in to dinner?” Mrs. Cravister employed the formula, “We won’t wait for Mr. Copthorne-Slazenger”; and a guest unacquainted with Mrs. Cravister’s habits would be surprised on entering the dining-room to find that all the seats at the table were filled, and that the meal proceeded smoothly without a single further reference to the missing Copthorne, who never turned up at all, for the good reason that he had never been invited.

Dinner began a little nervously and uncomfortably. At one end of the table the Headmaster was telling anecdotes of *Æ*sop in the sixties, at which the boys in his neighbourhood laughed with a violent nervous insincerity. Henry Cravister, still talking about eschatology, was quoting from Sidonius Apollinarius and Commodianus of Gaza. Mrs. Cravister, who had been engaged in a long colloquy with the butler, suddenly turned on Dick with the remark, "And so you have a deep, passionate fondness for cats," as though they had been intimately discussing the subject for the last hour. Dick had enough presence of mind to say that, yes, he did like cats — all except those Manx ones that had no tails.

"No tails," Mrs. Cravister repeated— "no tails. Like men. How symbolical everything is!"

Francis Quarles was sitting opposite him, so that Dick had ample opportunity to look at his idol. How perfectly he did everything, down to eating his soup! The first lines of a new poem began to buzz in Dick's head:

"All, all I lay at thy proud marble feet —

My heart, my love and all my future days.

Upon thy brow for ever let me gaze,

For ever touch thy hair: oh (something) sweet . . ."

Would he be able to find enough rhymes to make it into a sonnet? Mrs. Cravister, who had been leaning back in her chair for the last few minutes in a state of exhausted abstraction, opened her eyes and said to nobody in particular:

"Ah, how I envy the calm of those Chinese dynasties!"

"Which Chinese dynasties?" a well-meaning youth inquired.

"Any Chinese dynasty, the more remote the better. Henry, tell us the names of some Chinese dynasties."

In obedience to his mother, Henry delivered a brief disquisition on the history of politics, art, and letters in the Far East.

The Headmaster continued his reminiscences.

An angel of silence passed. The boys, whose shyness had begun to wear off, became suddenly and painfully conscious of hearing themselves eating. Mrs.

Cravister saved the situation.

“Lord Francis knows all about birds,” she said in her most thrilling voice. “Perhaps he can tell us why it is the unhappy fate of the carrion crow to mate for life.”

Conversation again became general. Dick was still thinking about his sonnet. Oh, these rhymes! — praise, bays, roundelays, amaze: greet, bleat, defeat, beat, paraclete. . . .

“. . . to sing the praise

In anthems high and solemn roundelays

Of Holy Father, Son and Paraclete.”

That was good — damned good; but it hardly seemed to fit in with the first quatrain. It would do for one of his religious poems, though. He had written a lot of sacred verse lately.

Then suddenly, cutting across his ecstatic thoughts, came the sound of Henry Cravister’s reedy voice.

“But I always find Pater’s style so *coarse*,” it said.

Something explosive took place in Dick’s head. It often happens when one blows one’s nose that some passage in the labyrinth connecting ears and nose and throat is momentarily blocked, and one becomes deaf and strangely dizzy. Then, suddenly, the mucous bubble bursts, sound rushes back to the brain, the head feels clear and stable once more. It was something like this, but transposed into terms of the spirit, that seemed now to have happened to Dick.

It was as though some mysterious obstruction in his brain, which had dammed up and diverted his faculties from their normal course during the past three weeks, had been on a sudden overthrown. His life seemed to be flowing once more along familiar channels.

He was himself again.

“But I always find Pater’s style so *coarse*.”

These few words of solemn foolery were the spell which had somehow performed the miracle. It was just the sort of remark he might have made three

weeks ago, before the crisis. For a moment, indeed, he almost thought it was he himself who had spoken; his own authentic voice, carried across the separating gulf of days, had woken him again to life!

He looked at Francis Quarles. Why, the fellow was nothing but a great prize ox, a monstrous animal. “There was a Lady loved a Swine. Honey, said she . . .” It was ignoble, it was ridiculous. He could have hidden his face in his hands for pure shame; shame tingled through his body. Goodness, how grotesquely he had behaved!

He leaned across and began talking to Henry Cravister about Pater and style and books in general. Cravister was amazed at the maturity of the boy’s mind; for he possessed to a remarkable degree that critical faculty which in the vast majority of boys is — and from their lack of experience must be — wholly lacking.

“You must come and see me some time when you’re in London,” Henry Cravister said to him when the time came for the boys to get back to their houses. Dick was flattered; he had not said that to any of the others. He walked home with Gay, laughing and talking quite in his old fashion. Gay marvelled at the change in his companion; strange, inexplicable fellow! but it was pleasant to have him back again, to repossess the lost friend. Arrived in his room, Dick sat down to attack the last set of mathematical problems that had been set him. Three hours ago they had appeared utterly incomprehensible; now he understood them perfectly. His mind was like a giant refreshed, delighting in its strength.

Next day Mr. Skewbauld congratulated him on his answers.

“You seem quite to have recovered your old form, Greenow,” he said. “Did you take my advice? Paraffin regularly . . .”

Looking back on the events of the last weeks, Dick was disquieted. Mr. Skewbauld might be wrong in recommending paraffin, but he was surely right in supposing that something was the matter and required a remedy. What could it be? He felt so well; but that, of course, proved nothing. He began doing Müller’s

exercises, and he bought a jar of malt extract and a bottle of hypophosphites. After much consultation of medical handbooks and the encyclopædia, he came to the conclusion that he was suffering from anæmia of the brain; and for some time one fixed idea haunted him: Suppose the blood completely ceased to flow to his brain, suppose he were to fall down suddenly dead or, worse, become utterly and hopelessly paralysed. . . . Happily the distractions of *Æ*sop in the summer term were sufficiently numerous and delightful to divert his mind from this gloomy brooding, and he felt so well and in such high spirits that it was impossible to go on seriously believing that he was at death's door. Still, whenever he thought of the events of those strange weeks he was troubled. He did not like being confronted by problems which he could not solve. During the rest of his stay at school he was troubled by no more than the merest velleities of a relapse. A fit of moon-gazing and incapacity to understand the higher mathematics had threatened him one time when he was working rather too strenuously for a scholarship. But a couple of days' complete rest had staved off the peril. There had been rather a painful scene, too, at Dick's last School Concert. Oh, those *Æ*sop concerts! Musically speaking, of course, they are deplorable; but how rich from all other points of view than the merely æsthetic! The supreme moment arrives at the very end when three of the most eminent and popular of those about to leave mount the platform together and sing the famous "*Æ*sop, Farewell." Greatest of school songs! The words are not much, but the tune, which goes swooning along in three-four time, is perhaps the masterpiece of the late organist, Dr. Pilch.

Dick was leaving, but he was not a sufficiently heroic figure to have been asked to sing, "*Æ*sop, Farewell." He was simply a member of the audience, and one, moreover, who had come to the concert in a critical and mocking spirit. For, as he had an ear for music, it was impossible for him to take the concert very seriously. The choir had clamorously re-crucified the Messiah; the soloists had all done their worst; and now it was time for "*Æ*sop, Farewell." The heroes climbed on to the stage. They were three demi-gods, but Francis Quarles was the most splendid of the group as he stood there with head thrown back, eyes almost

closed, calm and apparently unconscious of the crowd that seethed, actually and metaphorically, beneath him. He was wearing an enormous pink orchid in the buttonhole of his evening coat; his shirt-front twinkled with diamond studs; the buttons of his waistcoat were of fine gold. At the sight of him, Dick felt his heart beating violently; he was not, he painfully realized, master of himself.

The music struck up — Dum, dum, dumdidi, dumdidi; dum, dum, dum, and so on. So like the *Merry Widow*. In two days' time he would have left Æsop for ever. The prospect had never affected him very intensely. He had enjoyed himself at school, but he had never, like so many Æsopians, fallen in love with the place. It remained for him an institution; for others it was almost an adored person. But to-night his spirit, rocked on a treacly ocean of dominant sevenths, succumbed utterly to the sweet sorrow of parting. And there on the platform stood Francis. Oh, how radiantly beautiful! And when he began, in his rich tenor, the first verse of the Valedictory:

"Farewell, Mother Æsop,
Our childhood's home!
Our spirit is with thee,
Though far we roam . . ."

he found himself hysterically sobbing.

II

CANTELOUP COLLEGE is perhaps the most frightful building in Oxford — and to those who know their Oxford well this will mean not a little. Up till the middle of last century Canteloup possessed two quadrangles of fifteenth-century buildings, unimpressive and petty, like so much of College architecture, but at least quiet, unassuming, decent. After the accession of Victoria the College began to grow in numbers, wealth, and pride. The old buildings were too small and unpretentious for what had now become a Great College. In the summer of 1867 a great madness fell upon the Master and Fellows. They hired a most distinguished architect, bred up in the school of Ruskin, who incontinently razed

all the existing buildings to the ground and erected in their stead a vast pile in the approved Mauro-Venetian Gothic of the period. The New Buildings contained a great number of rooms, each served by a separate and almost perpendicular staircase; and if nearly half of them were so dark as to make it necessary to light them artificially for all but three hours out of the twenty-four, this slight defect was wholly outweighed by the striking beauty, from outside, of the Neo-Byzantine loopholes by which they were, euphemistically, “lighted.”

Prospects in Canteloup may not please; but man, on the other hand, tends to be less vile there than in many other places. There is an equal profusion at Canteloup of Firsts and Blues; there are Union orators of every shade of opinion and young men so languidly well bred as to take no interest in politics of any kind; there are drinkers of cocoa and drinkers of champagne. Canteloup is a microcosm, a whole world in miniature; and whatever your temperament and habits may be, whether you wish to drink, or row, or work, or hunt, Canteloup will provide you with congenial companions and a spiritual home.

Lack of athletic distinction had prevented Dick from being, at Æsop, a hero or anything like one. At Canteloup, in a less barbarically ordered state of society, things were different. His rooms in the Venetian gazebo over the North Gate became the meeting-place of all that was most intellectually distinguished in Canteloup and the University at large. He had had his sitting-room austerely upholstered and papered in grey. A large white Chinese figure of the best period stood pedestalled in one corner, and on the walls there hung a few uncompromisingly good drawings and lithographs by modern artists. Fletton, who had accompanied Dick from Æsop to Canteloup, called it the “cerebral chamber”; and with its prevailing tone of brain-coloured grey and the rather dry intellectual taste of its decorations it deserved the name.

To-night the cerebral chamber had been crammed. The Canteloup branch of the Fabian Society, under Dick’s presidency, had been holding a meeting. “Art in the Socialist State” was what they had been discussing. And now the meeting had broken up, leaving nothing but three empty jugs that had once contained mulled claret and a general air of untidiness to testify to its having taken place at

all. Dick stood leaning an elbow on the mantelpiece and absent-mindedly kicking, to the great detriment of his pumps, at the expiring red embers in the grate. From the depths of a huge and cavernous arm-chair, Fletton, pipe in mouth, fumed like a sleepy volcano.

"I liked the way, Dick," he said, with a laugh— "the way you went for the Arty-Crafties. You utterly destroyed them."

"I merely pointed out, what is sufficiently obvious, that crafts are not art, nor anything like it, that's all." Dick snapped out the words. He was nervous and excited, and his body felt as though it were full of compressed springs ready to jump at the most imponderable touch. He was always like that after making a speech.

"You did it very effectively," said Fletton. There was a silence between the two young men.

A noise like the throaty yelling of savages in rut came wafting up from the quadrangle on which the windows of the cerebral chamber opened. Dick started; all the springs within him had gone off at once — a thousand simultaneous Jack-in-the-boxes.

"It's only Francis Quarles' dinner-party becoming vocal," Fletton explained. "Blind mouths, as Milton would call them."

Dick began restlessly pacing up and down the room. When Fletton spoke to him, he did not reply or, at best, gave utterance to a monosyllable or a grunt.

"My dear Dick," said the other at last, "you're not very good company to-night," and heaving himself up from the arm-chair, Fletton went shuffling in his loose, heelless slippers towards the door. "I'm going to bed."

Dick paused in his lion-like prowling to listen to the receding sound of feet on the stairs. All was silent now: Gott sei dank. He went into his bedroom. It was there that he kept his piano, for it was a piece of furniture too smugly black and polished to have a place in the cerebral chamber. He had been thirsting after his piano all the time Fletton was sitting there, damn him! He drew up a chair and began to play over and over a certain series of chords. With his left hand he struck an octave G in the base, while his right dwelt lovingly on F, B, and E. A

luscious chord, beloved by Mendelssohn — a chord in which the native richness of the dominant seventh is made more rich, more piercing sweet by the addition of a divine discord. G, F, B, and E — he let the notes hang tremulously on the silence, savoured to the full their angelic overtones; then, when the sound of the chord had almost died away, he let it droop reluctantly through D to the simple, triumphal beauty of C natural — the diapason closing full in what was for Dick a wholly ineffable emotion.

He repeated that dying fall again and again, perhaps twenty times. Then, when he was satiated with its deliciousness, he rose from the piano and opening the lowest drawer of the wardrobe pulled out from under his evening clothes a large portfolio. He undid the strings; it was full of photogravure reproductions from various Old Masters. There was an almost complete set of Greuze's works, several of the most striking Ary Scheffers, some Alma Tadema, some Leighton, photographs of sculpture by Torwaldsen and Canova, Boecklin's "Island of the Dead," religious pieces by Holman Hunt, and a large packet of miscellaneous pictures from the Paris Salons of the last forty years. He took them into the cerebral chamber where the light was better, and began to study them, lovingly, one by one. The Cézanne lithograph, the three admirable etchings by Van Gogh, the little Picasso looked on, unmoved, from the walls.

It was three o'clock before Dick got to bed. He was stiff and cold, but full of the satisfaction of having accomplished something. And, indeed, he had cause to be satisfied; for he had written the first four thousand words of a novel, a chapter and a half of *Heartsease Fitzroy: the Story of a Young Girl*.

Next morning Dick looked at what he had written overnight, and was alarmed. He had never produced anything quite like this since the days of the Quarles incident at Æsop. A relapse? He wondered. Not a serious one in any case; for this morning he felt himself in full possession of all his ordinary faculties. He must have got overtired speaking to the Fabians in the evening. He looked at his manuscript again, and read: "'Daddy, do the little girl angels in heaven have toys and kittens and teddy-bears?'

"'I don't know,' said Sir Christopher gently. 'Why does my little one ask?'

“‘Because, daddy,” said the child— ‘because I think that soon I too may be a little angel, and I should so like to have my teddy-bear with me in heaven.’

“Sir Christopher clasped her to his breast. How frail she was, how ethereal, how nearly an angel already! Would she have her teddy-bear in heaven? The childish question rang in his ears. Great, strong man though he was, he was weeping. His tears fell in a rain upon her auburn curls.

“‘Tell me, daddy,’ she insisted, ‘will dearest God allow me my teddy-bear?’

“‘My child,’ he sobbed, ‘my child . . .’”

The blushes mounted hot to his cheeks; he turned away his head in horror. He would really have to look after himself for a bit, go to bed early, take exercise, not do much work. This sort of thing couldn’t be allowed to go on.

He went to bed at half-past nine that night, and woke up the following morning to find that he had added a dozen or more closely written pages to his original manuscript during the night. He supposed he must have written them in his sleep. It was all very disquieting. The days passed by; every morning a fresh instalment was added to the rapidly growing bulk of *Heartsease Fitzroy*. It was as though some goblin, some Lob-lie-by-the-Fire, came each night to perform the appointed task, vanishing before the morning. In a little while Dick’s alarm wore off; during the day he was perfectly well; his mind functioned with marvellous efficiency. It really didn’t seem to matter what he did in his sleep provided he was all right in his waking hours. He almost forgot about *Heartsease*, and was only reminded of her existence when by chance he opened the drawer in which the steadily growing pile of manuscript reposed.

In five weeks *Heartsease Fitzroy* was finished. Dick made a parcel of the manuscript and sent it to a literary agent. He had no hopes of any publisher taking the thing; but he was in sore straits for money at the moment, and it seemed worth trying, on the off-chance. A fortnight later Dick received a letter beginning: “DEAR MADAM, — Permit me to hail in you a new authoress of real talent. *Heartsease Fitzroy* is GREAT,” — and signed “EBOR W. SIMS, Editor, *Hildebrand’s Home Weekly*.”

Details of the circulation of *Hildebrand's Home Weekly* were printed at the head of the paper; its average net sale was said to exceed three and a quarter millions. The terms offered by Mr. Sims seemed to Dick positively fabulous. And there would be the royalties on the thing in book form after the serial had run its course.

The letter arrived at breakfast; Dick cancelled all engagements for the day and set out immediately for a long and solitary walk. It was necessary to be alone, to think. He made his way along the Seven Bridges Road, up Cumnor Hill, through the village, and down the footpath to Bablock Hithe, thence to pursue the course of the "stripling Thames" — haunted at every step by the Scholar Gipsy, damn him! He drank beer and ate some bread and cheese in a little inn by a bridge, farther up the river; and it was there, in the inn parlour, surrounded by engravings of the late Queen, and breathing the slightly mouldy preserved air bottled some three centuries ago into that hermetically sealed chamber — it was there that he solved the problem, perceived the strange truth about himself.

He was a hermaphrodite.

A hermaphrodite, not in the gross obvious sense, of course, but spiritually. Two persons in one, male and female. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: or rather a new William Sharp and Fiona MacLeod — a more intelligent William, a vulgarer Fiona. Everything was explained; the deplorable Quarles incident was simple and obvious now. A sentimental young lady of literary tastes writing sonnets to her Ouida guardsman. And what an unerring flair Mr. Sims had shown by addressing him so roundly and unhesitatingly as "madam"!

Dick was elated at this discovery. He had an orderly mind that disliked mysteries. He had been a puzzle to himself for a long time; now he was solved. He was not in the least distressed to discover this abnormality in his character. As long as the two parts of him kept well apart, as long as his male self could understand mathematics, and as long as his lady novelist's self kept up her regular habit of writing at night and retiring from business during the day, the arrangement would be admirable. The more he thought about it, the more it

seemed an ideal state of affairs. His life would arrange itself so easily and well. He would devote the day to the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, to philosophy and mathematics, with perhaps an occasional excursion into politics. After midnight he would write novels with a feminine pen, earning the money that would make his unproductive male labours possible. A kind of spiritual *souteneur*. But the fear of poverty need haunt him no more; no need to become a wage-slave, to sacrifice his intelligence to the needs of his belly. Like a gentleman of the East, he would sit still and smoke his philosophic pipe while the womenfolk did the dirty work. Could anything be more satisfactory?

He paid for his bread and beer, and walked home, whistling as he went.

III

TWO months later the first instalment of *Heartsease Fitzroy: the Story of a Young Girl*, by Pearl Bellairs, appeared in the pages of *Hildebrand's Home Weekly*. Three and a quarter millions read and approved. When the story appeared in book form, two hundred thousand copies were sold in six weeks; and in the course of the next two years no less than sixteen thousand female infants in London alone were christened Heartsease. With her fourth novel and her two hundred and fiftieth Sunday paper article, Pearl Bellairs was well on her way to becoming a household word.

Meanwhile Dick was in receipt of an income far beyond the wildest dreams of his avarice. He was able to realize the two great ambitions of his life — to wear silk underclothing and to smoke good (but really good) cigars.

IV

DICK went down from Canteloup in a blaze of glory. The most brilliant man of his generation, exceptional mind, prospects, career. But his head was not turned. When people congratulated him on his academic successes, he thanked them politely and then invited them to come and see his Memento Mori. His Memento Mori was called Mr. Glottenham and could be found at any hour of the day in

the premises of the Union, or if it was evening, in the Senior Common Room at Canteloup. He was an old member of the College, and the dons in pity for his age and loneliness had made him, some years before, a member of their Common Room. This act of charity was as bitterly regretted as any generous impulse in the history of the world. Mr. Glottenham made the life of the Canteloup fellows a burden to them; he dined in Hall with fiendish regularity, never missing a night, and he was always the last to leave the Common Room. Mr. Glottenham did not prepossess at a first glance; the furrows of his face were covered with a short grey sordid stubble; his clothes were disgusting with the spilth of many years of dirty feeding; he had the shoulders and long hanging arms of an ape — an ape with a horribly human look about it. When he spoke, it was like the sound of a man breaking coke; he spoke incessantly and on every subject. His knowledge was enormous; but he possessed the secret of a strange inverted alchemy — he knew how to turn the richest gold to lead, could make the most interesting topic so intolerably tedious that it was impossible, when he talked, not to loathe it.

This was the death's-head to which Dick, like an ancient philosopher at a banquet, would direct the attention of his heartiest congratulators. Mr. Glottenham had had the most dazzling academic career of his generation. His tutors had prophesied for him a future far more brilliant than that of any of his contemporaries. They were now Ministers of State, poets, philosophers, judges, millionaires. Mr. Glottenham frequented the Union and the Canteloup Senior Common Room, and was — well, he was just Mr. Glottenham. Which was why Dick did not think too highly of his own laurels.

V

"WHAT shall I do? what ought I to do?" Dick walked up and down the room smoking, furiously and without at all savouring its richness, one of his opulent cigars.

“My dear,” said Cravister — for it was in Cravister’s high-ceilinged Bloomsbury room that Dick was thus unveiling his distress of spirit— “my dear, this isn’t a revival meeting. You speak as though there were an urgent need for your soul to be saved from hell fire. It’s not as bad as that, you know.”

“But it *is* a revival meeting,” Dick shouted in exasperation— “it is. I’m a revivalist. You don’t know what it’s like to have a feeling about your soul. I’m terrifyingly earnest; you don’t seem to understand that. I have all the feelings of Bunyan without his religion. I regard the salvation of my soul as important. How simple everything would be if one could go out with those creatures in bonnets and sing hymns like, ‘Hip, hip for the blood of the Lamb, hurrah!’ or that exquisite one:

“‘The bells of Hell ring tingalingaling
For you, but not for me.
For me the angels singalingaling;
They’ve got the goods for me.’
Unhappily it’s impossible.”

“Your ideas,” said Cravister in his flutiest voice, “are somewhat Gothic. I think I can understand them, though of course I don’t sympathize or approve. My advice to people in doubt about what course of action they ought to pursue is always the same: do what you want to.”

“Cravister, you’re hopeless,” said Dick, laughing. “I suppose I am rather Gothic, but I do feel that the question of ought as well as of want does arise.”

Dick had come to his old friend for advice about Life. What ought he to do? The indefatigable pen of Pearl Bellairs solved for him the financial problem. There remained only the moral problem: how could he best expend his energies and his time? Should he devote himself to knowing or doing, philosophy or politics? He felt in himself the desire to search for truth and the ability — who knows? — to find it. On the other hand, the horrors of the world about him seemed to call on him to put forth all his strength in an effort to ameliorate what was so patently and repulsively bad. Actually, what had to be decided was this: Should he devote himself to the researches necessary to carry out the plan, long

ripening in his brain, of a new system of scientific philosophy; or should he devote his powers and Pearl Bellairs' money in propaganda that should put life into the English revolutionary movement? Great moral principles were in the balance. And Cravister's advice was, do what you want to!

After a month of painful indecision, Dick, who was a real Englishman, arrived at a satisfactory compromise. He started work on his new Synthetic Philosophy, and at the same time joined the staff of the *Weekly International*, to which he contributed both money and articles. The weeks slipped pleasantly and profitably along. The secret of happiness lies in congenial work, and no one could have worked harder than Dick, unless it was the indefatigable Pearl Bellairs, whose nightly output of five thousand words sufficed to support not only Dick but the *Weekly International* as well. These months were perhaps the happiest period of Dick's life. He had friends, money, liberty; he knew himself to be working well; and it was an extra, a supererogatory happiness that he began at this time to get on much better with his sister Millicent than he had ever done before. Millicent had come up to Oxford as a student at St. Mungo Hall in Dick's third year. She had grown into a very efficient and very intelligent young woman. A particularly handsome young woman as well. She was boyishly slender, and a natural grace kept on breaking through the somewhat rigid deportment, which she always tried to impose upon herself, in little beautiful gestures and movements that made the onlooker catch his breath with astonished pleasure.

"Wincing she was as is a jolly colt,

Straight as a mast and upright as a bolt:"

Chaucer had as good an eye for youthful grace as for mormals and bristly nostrils and thick red jovial villainousness.

Millicent lost no time in making her presence at St. Mungo's felt. Second-and third-year heroines might snort at the forwardness of a mere fresh-girl, might resent the complete absence of veneration for their glory exhibited by this youthful bejauna; Millicent pursued her course unmoved. She founded new societies and put fresh life into the institutions which already existed at St.

Mungo's to take cocoa and discuss the problems of the universe. She played hockey like a tornado, and she worked alarmingly hard. Decidedly, Millicent was a Force, very soon the biggest Force in the St. Mungo world. In her fifth term she organized the famous St. Mungo general strike, which compelled the authorities to relax a few of the more intolerably tyrannical and anachronistic rules restricting the liberty of the students. It was she who went, on behalf of the strikers, to interview the redoubtable Miss Prosser, Principal of St. Mungo's. The redoubtable Miss Prosser looked grim and invited her to sit down, Millicent sat down and, without quailing, delivered a short but pointed speech attacking the fundamental principles of the St. Mungo system of discipline.

"Your whole point of view," she assured Miss Prosser, "is radically wrong. It's an insult to the female sex; it's positively obscene. Your root assumption is simply this: that we're all in a chronic state of sexual excitement; leave us alone for a moment and we'll immediately put our desires into practice. It's disgusting. It makes me blush. After all, Miss Prosser, we are a college of intelligent women, not an asylum of nymphomaniacs."

For the first time in her career, Miss Prosser had to admit herself beaten. The authorities gave in — reluctantly and on only a few points; but the principle had been shaken, and that, as Millicent pointed out, was what really mattered.

Dick used to see a good deal of his sister while he was still in residence at Canteloup, and after he had gone down he used to come regularly once a fortnight during term to visit her. That horrible mutual reserve, which poisons the social life of most families and which had effectively made of their brotherly and sisterly relation a prolonged discomfort in the past, began to disappear. They became the best of friends.

"I like you, Dick, a great deal better than I did," said Millicent one day as they were parting at the gate of St. Mungo's after a long walk together.

Dick took off his hat and bowed. "My dear, I reciprocate the sentiment. And, what's more, I esteem and admire you. So there."

Millicent curtsied, and they laughed. They both felt very happy.

VI

VI

"WHAT a life!" said Dick, with a sigh of weariness as the train moved out of Euston.

Not a bad life, Millicent thought.

"But horribly fatiguing. I am quite outreined by it."

"Outreined" was Dick's translation of *éreinté*. He liked using words of his own manufacture; one had to learn his idiom before one could properly appreciate his intimate conversation.

Dick had every justification for being outreined. The spring and summer had passed for him in a whirl of incessant activity. He had written three long chapters of the *New Synthetic Philosophy*, and had the material for two more ready in the form of notes. He had helped to organize and bring to its successful conclusion the great carpenters' strike of May and June. He had written four pamphlets and a small army of political articles. And this comprised only half his labour; for nightly, from twelve till two, Pearl Bellairs emerged to compose the masterpieces which supplied Dick with his bread and butter. *Apes in Purple* had been published in May. Since then she had finished *La Belle Dame sans Morality*, and had embarked on the first chapters of *Daisy's Voyage to Cythera*. Her weekly articles, "For the Girls of Britain," had become, during this period, a regular and favourite feature in the pages of *Hildebrand's Sabbath*, that prince of Sunday papers. At the beginning of July, Dick considered that he had earned a holiday, and now they were off, he and Millicent, for the North.

Dick had taken a cottage on the shore of one of those long salt-water lochs that give to the west coast of Scotland such a dissipated appearance on the map. For miles around there was not a living soul who did not bear the name of Campbell — two families only excepted, one of whom was called Murray-Drummond and the other Drummond-Murray. However, it was not for the people that Dick and Millicent had come, so much as for the landscape, which

made up in variety for anything that the inhabitants might lack. Behind the cottage, in the midst of a narrow strip of bog lying between the loch and the foot of the mountains, stood one of the numerous tombs of Ossian, a great barrow of ancient stones. And a couple of miles away the remains of Deirdre's Scottish refuge bore witness to the Celtic past. The countryside was dotted with the black skeletons of mediæval castles. Astonishing country, convulsed into fantastic mountain shapes, cut and indented by winding fiords. On summer days the whole of this improbable landscape became blue and remote and aerially transparent. Its beauty lacked all verisimilitude. It was for that reason that Dick chose the neighbourhood for his holidays. After the insistent actuality of London this frankly unreal coast was particularly refreshing to a jaded spirit.

"Nous sommes ici en plein romantisme," said Dick on the day of their arrival, making a comprehensive gesture towards the dream-like scenery, and for the rest of his holiday he acted the part of a young romantic of the palmy period. He sat at the foot of Ossian's tomb and read Lamartine; he declaimed Byron from the summit of the mountains and Shelley as he rowed along the loch. In the evening he read George Sand's *Indiana*; he agonized with the pure, but passionate, heroine, while his admiration for Sir Brown, her English lover, the impassive giant who never speaks and is always clothed in faultless hunting costume, knew no bounds. He saturated himself in the verses of Victor Hugo, and at last almost came to persuade himself that the words, *Dieu*, *infinité*, *eternité*, with which the works of that deplorable genius are so profusely sprinkled, actually possessed some meaning, though what that meaning was he could not, even in his most romantic transports, discover. Pearl Bellairs, of course, understood quite clearly their significance, and though she was a very poor French scholar she used sometimes to be moved almost to tears by the books she found lying about when she came into existence after midnight. She even copied out extracts into her notebooks with a view to using them in her next novel.

"Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux,
Et j'en sais d'immortels qui sont de purs sanglots,"
was a couplet which struck her as sublime.

Millicent, meanwhile, did the housekeeping with extraordinary efficiency, took a great deal of exercise, and read long, serious books; she humoured her brother in his holiday romanticism, but refused to take part in the game.

The declaration of war took them completely by surprise. It is true that a *Scotsman* found its way into the cottage by about lunch-time every day, but it was never read, and served only to light fires and wrap up fish and things of that sort. No letters were being forwarded, for they had left no address; they were isolated from the world. On the fatal morning Dick had, indeed, glanced at the paper, without however noticing anything out of the ordinary. It was only later when, alarmed by the rumours floating round the village shop, he came to examine his *Scotsman* more closely, that he found about half-way down the third column of one of the middle pages an admirable account of all that had been so tragically happening in the last twenty-four hours; he learnt with horror that Europe was at war and that; his country too had entered the arena. Even in the midst of his anguish of spirit he could not help admiring the *Scotsman's* splendid impassivity — no headlines, no ruffling of the traditional aristocratic dignity. Like Sir Rodolphe Brown in *Indiana*, he thought, with a sickly smile.

Dick determined to start for London at once. He felt that he must act, or at least create the illusion of action; he could not stay quietly where he was. It was arranged that he should set out that afternoon, while Millicent should follow a day or two later with the bulk of the luggage. The train which took him to Glasgow was slower than he thought it possible for any train to be. He tried to read, he tried to sleep; it was no good. His nervous agitation was pitiable; he made little involuntary movements with his limbs, and every now and then the muscles of his face began twitching in a spasmodic and uncontrollable tic. There were three hours to wait in Glasgow; he spent them in wandering about the streets. In the interminable summer twilight the inhabitants of Glasgow came forth into the open to amuse themselves; the sight almost made him sick. Was it possible that there should be human beings so numerous and so uniformly hideous? Small, deformed, sallow, they seemed malignantly ugly, as if on

purpose. The words they spoke were incomprehensible. He shuddered; it was an alien place — it was hell.

The London train was crammed. Three gross Italians got into Dick's carriage, and after they had drunk and eaten with loud, unpleasant gusto, they prepared themselves for sleep by taking off their boots. Their feet smelt strongly ammoniac, like a cage of mice long uncleaned. Acutely awake, while the other occupants of the compartment enjoyed a happy unconsciousness, he looked at the huddled carcasses that surrounded him. The warmth and the smell of them was suffocating, and there came to his mind, with the nightmarish insistence of a fixed idea, the thought that every breath they exhaled was saturated with disease. To be condemned to sit in a hot bath of consumption and syphilis — it was too horrible! The moment came at last when he could bear it no longer; he got up and went into the corridor. Standing there, or sitting sometimes for a few dreary minutes in the lavatory, he passed the rest of the night. The train roared along without a stop. The roaring became articulate: in the days of his childhood trains used to run to the tune of "Lancashire, to Lancashire, to fetch a pocket-handkercher; to Lancashire, to Lancashire . . ." But to-night the wheels were shouting insistently, a million times over, two words only— "the War, the War; the War, the War." He tried desperately to make them say something else, but they refused to recite Milton; they refused to go to Lancashire; they went on with their endless Tibetan litany — the War, the War, the War.

By the time he reached London, Dick was in a wretched state. His nerves were twittering and jumping within him; he felt like a walking aviary. The tic in his face had become more violent and persistent. As he stood in the station, waiting for a cab, he overheard a small child saying to its mother, "What's the matter with that man's face, mother?"

"Sh — sh, darling," was the reply. "It's rude."

Dick turned and saw the child's big round eyes fixed with fascinated curiosity upon him, as though he were a kind of monster. He put his hand to his forehead and tried to stop the twitching of the muscles beneath the skin. It pained him to think that he had become a scarecrow for children.

Arrived at his flat, Dick drank a glass of brandy and lay down for a rest. He felt exhausted — ill. At half-past one he got up, drank some more brandy, and crept down into the street. It was intensely hot; the pavements reverberated the sunlight in a glare which hurt his eyes; they seemed to be in a state of grey incandescence. A nauseating smell of wetted dust rose from the roadway, along which a water-cart was slowly piddling its way. He realized suddenly that he ought not to have drunk all that brandy on an empty stomach; he was definitely rather tipsy. He had arrived at that state of drunkenness when the senses perceive things clearly, but do not transmit their knowledge to the understanding. He was painfully conscious of this division, and it needed all the power of his will to establish contact between his parted faculties. It was as though he were, by a great and prolonged effort, keeping his brain pressed against the back of his eyes; as soon as he relaxed the pressure, the understanding part slipped back, the contact was broken, and he relapsed into a state bordering on imbecility. The actions which ordinarily one does by habit and without thinking, he had to perform consciously and voluntarily. He had to reason out the problem of walking — first the left foot forward, then the right. How ingeniously he worked his ankles and knees and hips! How delicately the thighs slid past one another!

He found a restaurant and sat there drinking coffee and trying to eat an omelette until he felt quite sober. Then he drove to the offices of the *Weekly International* to have a talk with Hyman, the editor. Hyman was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, writing.

He lifted his head as Dick came in. “Greenow,” he shouted delightedly, “we were all wondering what had become of you. We thought you’d joined the Army.”

Dick shook his head, but did not speak; the hot stuffy smell of printer’s ink and machinery combined with the atrocious reek of Hyman’s Virginian cigarettes to make him feel rather faint. He sat down on the window-ledge, so as to be able to breathe an uncontaminated air.

“Well,” he said at last, “what about it?”

“It’s going to be hell.”

“Did you suppose I thought it was going to be paradise?” Dick replied irritably. “Internationalism looks rather funny now, doesn’t it?”

“I believe in it more than ever I did,” cried Hyman. His face lit up with the fervour of his enthusiasm. It was a fine face, gaunt, furrowed, and angular, for all that he was barely thirty, looking as though it had been boldly chiselled from some hard stone. “The rest of the world may go mad; we’ll try and keep our sanity. The time will come when they’ll see we were right.”

Hyman talked on. His passionate sincerity and singleness of purpose were an inspiration to Dick. He had always admired Hyman — with the reservations, of course, that the man was rather a fanatic and not so well-educated as he might have been — but to-day he admired him more than ever. He was even moved by that perhaps too facile eloquence which of old had been used to leave him cold. After promising to do a series of articles on international relations for the paper, Dick went home, feeling better than he had done all day.

He decided that he would begin writing his articles at once. He collected pens, paper, and ink and sat down in a business-like way at his bureau. He remembered distinctly biting the tip of his pen-holder; it tasted rather bitter.

And then he realized he was standing in Regent Street, looking in at one of the windows of Liberty’s.

For a long time he stood there quite still, absorbed to all appearance in the contemplation of a piece of peacock-blue fabric. But all his attention was concentrated within himself, not on anything outside. He was wondering — wondering how it came about that he was sitting at his writing-table at one moment, and standing, at the next, in Regent Street. He hadn’t — the thought flashed upon him — he hadn’t been drinking any more of that brandy, had he? No, he felt himself to be perfectly sober. He moved slowly away and continued to speculate as he walked.

At Oxford Circus he bought an evening paper. He almost screamed aloud when he saw that the date printed at the head of the page was August 12th. It was on August 7th that he had sat down at his writing-table to compose those

articles. Five days ago, and he had not the faintest recollection of what had happened in those five days.

He made all haste back to the flat. Everything was in perfect order. He had evidently had a picnic lunch that morning — sardines, bread and jam, and raisins; the remains of it still covered the table. He opened the sideboard and took out the brandy bottle. Better make quite sure. He held it up to the light; it was more than three-quarters full. Not a drop had gone since the day of his return. If brandy wasn't the cause, then what was?

As he sat there thinking, he began in an absent-minded way to look at his evening paper. He read the news on the front page, then turned to the inner sheets. His eye fell on these words printed at the head of the column next the leading article:

"To the Women of the Empire. Thoughts in WarTime. By Pearl Bellairs." Underneath in brackets: "The first of a series of inspiring patriotic articles by Miss Bellairs, the well-known novelist."

Dick groaned in agony. He saw in a flash what had happened to his five missing days. Pearl had got hold of them somehow, had trespassed upon his life out of her own reserved nocturnal existence. She had taken advantage of his agitated mental state to have a little fun in her own horrible way.

He picked up the paper once more and began to read Pearl's article. "Inspiring and patriotic": those were feeble words in which to describe Pearl's shrilly raucous chauvinism. And the style! Christ! to think that he was responsible, at least in part, for this. Responsible, for had not the words been written by his own hand and composed in some horrible bluebeard's chamber of his own brain? They had, there was no denying it. Pearl's literary atrocities had never much distressed him; he had long given up reading a word she wrote. Her bank balance was the only thing about her that interested him. But now she was invading the sanctities of his private life. She was trampling on his dearest convictions, denying his faith. She was a public danger. It was all too frightful.

He passed the afternoon in misery. Suicide or brandy seemed the only cures. Not very satisfactory ones, though. Towards evening an illuminating idea occurred to him. He would go and see Rogers. Rogers knew all about psychology — from books, at any rate: Freud, Jung, Morton Prince, and people like that. He used to try hypnotic experiments on his friends and even dabbled in amateur psychotherapy. Rogers might help him to lay the ghost of Pearl. He ate a hasty dinner and went to see Rogers in his Kensington rooms.

Rogers was sitting at a table with a great book open in front of him. The reading-lamp, which was the only light in the room, brightly illumined one side of the pallid, puffy, spectacled face, leaving the other in complete darkness, save for a little cedilla of golden light caught on the fold of flesh at the corner of his mouth. His huge shadow crossed the floor, began to climb the wall, and from the shoulders upwards mingled itself with the general darkness of the room.

“Good evening, Rogers,” said Dick wearily. “I wish you wouldn’t try and look like Rembrandt’s ‘Christ at Emmaus’ with these spectacular chiaroscuro effects.”

Rogers gave vent to his usual nervous giggling laugh. “This is very nice of you to come and see me, Greenow.”

“How’s the Board of Trade?” Rogers was a Civil Servant by profession.

“Oh, business as usual, as the *Daily Mail* would say.” Rogers laughed again as though he had made a joke.

After a little talk of things indifferent, Dick brought the conversation round to himself.

“I believe I’m getting a bit neurasthenic,” he said. “Fits of depression, nervous pains, lassitude, anæmia of the will. I’ve come to you for professional advice. I want you to nose out my suppressed complexes, analyse me, dissect me. Will you do that for me?”

Rogers was evidently delighted. “I’ll do my best,” he said, with assumed modesty. “But I’m no good at the thing, so you mustn’t expect much.”

“I’m at your disposal,” said Dick.

Rogers placed his guest in a large arm-chair. “Relax your muscles and think of nothing at all.” Dick sat there flabby and abstracted while Rogers made his preparations. His apparatus consisted chiefly in a notebook and a stop-watch. He seated himself at the table.

“Now,” he said solemnly, “I want you to listen to me. I propose to read out a list of words; after each of the words you must say the first word that comes into your head. The very first, mind, however foolish it may seem. And say it as soon as it crosses your mind; don’t wait to think. I shall write down your answers and take the time between each question and reply.”

Rogers cleared his throat and started.

“Mother,” he said in a loud, clear voice. He always began his analyses with the family. For since the majority of kinks and complexes date from childhood, it is instructive to investigate the relations between the patient and those who surrounded him at an early age. “Mother.”

“Dead,” replied Dick immediately. He had scarcely known his mother.

“Father.”

“Dull.” One and a fifth seconds’ interval.

“Sister.” Rogers pricked his ears for the reply: his favourite incest-theory depended on it.

“Fabian Society,” said Dick, after two seconds’ interval. Rogers was a little disappointed. He was agreeably thrilled and excited by the answer he received to his next word: “Aunt.”

The seconds passed, bringing nothing with them; and then at last there floated into Dick’s mind the image of himself as a child, dressed in green velvet and lace, a perfect Bubbles boy, kneeling on Auntie Loo’s lap and arranging a troop of lead soldiers on the horizontal projection of her corsage.

“Bosom,” he said.

Rogers wrote down the word and underlined it. Six and three-fifths seconds: very significant. He turned now to the chapter of possible accidents productive of nervous shocks.

“Fire.”

“Coal.”

“Sea.”

“Sick.”

“Train.”

“Smell.”

And so on. Dull answers all the time. Evidently, nothing very catastrophic had ever happened to him. Now for a frontal attack on the fortress of sex itself.

“Women.” There was rather a long pause, four seconds, and then Dick replied, “Novelist.” Rogers was puzzled.

“Breast.”

“Chicken.” That was disappointing. Rogers could find no trace of those sinister moral censors, expurgators of impulse, suppressors of happiness. Perhaps the trouble lay in religion.

“Christ,” he said.

Dick replied, “Amen,” with the promptitude of a parish clerk.

“God.”

Dick’s mind remained a perfect blank. The word seemed to convey to him nothing at all. God, God. After a long time there appeared before his inward eye the face of a boy he had known at school and at Oxford, one Godfrey Wilkinson, called God for short.

“Wilkinson.” Ten seconds and a fifth.

A few more miscellaneous questions, and the list was exhausted. Almost suddenly, Dick fell into a kind of hypnotic sleep. Rogers sat pensive in front of his notes; sometimes he consulted a text-book. At the end of half an hour he awakened Dick to tell him that he had had, as a child, consciously or unconsciously, a great Freudian passion for his aunt; that later on he had had another passion, almost religious in its fervour and intensity, for somebody called Wilkinson; and that the cause of all his present troubles lay in one or other

of these episodes. If he liked, he (Rogers) would investigate the matter further with a view to establishing a cure.

Dick thanked him very much, thought it wasn't worth taking any more trouble, and went home.

VII

MILLICENT was organizing a hospital supply dépôt, organizing indefatigably, from morning till night. It was October; Dick had not seen his sister since those first hours of the war in Scotland; he had had too much to think about these last months to pay attention to anyone but himself. To-day, at last, he decided that he would go and pay her a visit. Millicent had commandeered a large house in Kensington from a family of Jews, who were anxious to live down a deplorable name by a display of patriotism. Dick found her sitting there in her office — young, formidable, beautiful, severe — at a big desk covered with papers.

"Well," said Dick, "you're winning the war, I see."

"You, I gather, are not," Millicent replied.

"I believe in the things I always believed in."

"So do I."

"But in a different way, my dear — in a different way," said Dick sadly. There was a silence.

"Had we better quarrel?" Millicent asked meditatively.

"I think we can manage with nothing worse than a coolness — for the duration."

"Very well, a coolness."

"A smouldering coolness."

"Good," said Millicent briskly. "Let it start smouldering at once. I must get on with my work. Good-bye, Dick. God bless you. Let me know sometimes how you get on."

“No need to ask how you get on,” said Dick with a smile, as he shook her hand. “I know by experience that you always get on, only too well, ruthlessly well.”

He went out. Millicent returned to her letters with concentrated ardour; a frown puckered the skin between her eyebrows.

Probably, Dick reflected as he made his way down the stairs, he wouldn’t see her again for a year or so. He couldn’t honestly say that it affected him much. Other people became daily more and more like ghosts, unreal, thin, vaporous; while every hour the consciousness of himself grew more intense and all-absorbing. The only person who was more than a shadow to him now was Hyman of the *Weekly International*. In those first horrible months of the war, when he was wrestling with Pearl Bellairs and failing to cast her out, it was Hyman who kept him from melancholy and suicide. Hyman made him write a long article every week, dragged him into the office to do sub-editorial work, kept him so busy that there were long hours when he had no time to brood over his own insoluble problems. And his enthusiasm was so passionate and sincere that sometimes even Dick was infected by it; he could believe that life was worth living and the cause worth fighting for. But not for long; for the devil would return, insistent and untiring. Pearl Bellairs was greedy for life; she was not content with her short midnight hours; she wanted the freedom of whole days. And whenever Dick was overtired, or ill or nervous, she leapt upon him and stamped him out of existence, till enough strength came back for him to reassert his personality. And the articles she wrote! The short stories! The recruiting songs! Dick dared not read them; they were terrible, terrible.

VIII

THE months passed by. The longer the war lasted, the longer it seemed likely to last. Dick supported life somehow. Then came the menace of conscription.

The *Weekly International* organized a great anti-conscription campaign, in which Hyman and Dick were the leading spirits. Dick was almost happy. This kind of

active work was new to him and he enjoyed it, finding it exciting and at the same time sedative. For a self-absorbed and brooding mind, pain itself is an anodyne. He enjoyed his incessant journeys, his speechmaking to queer audiences in obscure halls and chapels; he liked talking with earnest members of impossible Christian sects, pacifists who took not the faintest interest in the welfare of humanity at large, but were wholly absorbed in the salvation of their own souls and in keeping their consciences clear from the faintest trace of blood-guiltiness. He enjoyed the sense of power which came to him, when he roused the passion of the crowd to enthusiastic assent, or breasted the storm of antagonism. He enjoyed everything — even getting a bloody nose from a patriot hired and intoxicated by a great evening paper to break up one of his meetings. It all seemed tremendously exciting and important at the time. And yet when, in quiet moments, he came to look back on his days of activity, they seemed utterly empty and futile. What was left of them? Nothing, nothing at all. The momentary intoxication had died away, the stirred ant's-nest had gone back to normal life. Futility of action! There was nothing permanent, or decent, or worth while, except thought. And of that he was almost incapable now. His mind, when it was not occupied by the immediate and actual, turned inward morbidly upon itself. He looked at the manuscript of his book and wondered whether he would ever be able to go on with it. It seemed doubtful. Was he, then, condemned to pass the rest of his existence enslaved to the beastliness and futility of mere quotidian action? And even in action his powers were limited; if he exerted himself too much — and the limits of fatigue were soon reached — Pearl Bellairs, watching perpetually like a hungry tigress for her opportunity, leapt upon him and took possession of his conscious faculties. And then, it might be for a matter of hours or of days, he was lost, blotted off the register of living souls, while she performed, with intense and hideous industry, her self-appointed task. More than once his anti-conscription campaigns had been cut short and he himself had suddenly disappeared from public life, to return with the vaguest stories of illness or private affairs — stories that made his friends shake their heads and wonder which it was among the noble army of vices that

poor Dick Greenow was so mysteriously addicted to. Some said drink, some said women, some said opium, and some hinted at things infinitely darker and more horrid. Hyman asked him point-blank what it was, one morning when he had returned to the office after three days' unaccountable absence.

Dick blushed painfully. "It isn't anything you think," he said.

"What is it, then?" Hyman insisted.

"I can't tell you," Dick replied desperately and in torture, "but I swear it's nothing discreditable. I beg you won't ask me any more."

Hyman had to pretend to be satisfied with that.

IX

A TACTICAL move in the anti-conscription campaign was the foundation of a club, a place where people with pacific or generally advanced ideas could congregate.

"A club like this would soon be the intellectual centre of London," said Hyman, ever sanguine.

Dick shrugged his shoulders. He had a wide experience of pacifists.

"If you bring people together," Hyman went on, "they encourage one another to be bold — strengthen one another's faith."

"Yes," said Dick dyspeptically. "When they're in a herd, they can believe that they're much more numerous and important than they really are."

"But, man, they are numerous, they are important!" Hyman shouted and gesticulated.

Dick allowed himself to be persuaded into an optimism which he knew to be ill-founded. The consolations of religion do not console the less efficaciously for being illusory.

It was a longtime before they could think of a suitable name for their club. Dick suggested that it should be called the Sclopis Club. "Such a lovely name," he explained. "Sclopis — Sclopis; it tastes precious in the mouth." But the rest of the committee would not hear of it; they wanted a name that meant

something. One lady suggested that it should be called the Everyman Club; Dick objected with passion. “It makes one shudder,” he said. The lady thought it was a beautiful and uplifting name, but as Mr. Greenow was so strongly opposed, she wouldn’t press the claims of Everyman. Hyman wanted to call it the Pacifist Club, but that was judged too provocative. Finally, they agreed to call it the Novembrist Club, because it was November and they could think of no better title.

The inaugural dinner of the Novembrist Club was held at Piccolomini’s Restaurant. Piccolomini is in, but not exactly of, Soho, for it is a cross between a Soho restaurant and a Corner House, a hybrid which combines the worst qualities of both parents — the dirt and inefficiency of Soho, the size and vulgarity of Lyons. There is a large upper chamber reserved for agapes. Here, one wet and dismal winter’s evening, the Novembrists assembled.

Dick arrived early, and from his place near the door he watched his fellow-members come in. He didn’t much like the look of them. “Middle class” was what he found himself thinking; and he had to admit, when his conscience reproached him for it, that he did not like the middle classes, the lower middle classes, the lower classes. He was, there was no denying it, a bloodsucker at heart — cultured and intelligent, perhaps, but a bloodsucker none the less.

The meal began. Everything about it was profoundly suspect. The spoons were made of some pale pinchbeck metal, very light and flimsy; one expected them to melt in the soup, or one would have done, if the soup had been even tepid. The food was thick and greasy. Dick wondered what it really looked like under the concealing sauces. The wine left an indescribable taste that lingered on the palate, like the savour of brass or of charcoal fumes.

From childhood upwards Dick had suffered from the intensity of his visceral reactions to emotion. Fear and shyness were apt to make him feel very sick, and disgust produced in him a sensation of intolerable queasiness. Disgust had seized upon his mind to-night. He grew paler with the arrival of every dish, and the wine, instead of cheering him, made him feel much worse. His neighbours to right and left ate with revolting heartiness. On one side sat Miss Gibbs, garishly

dressed in ill-assorted colours that might be called futuristic; on the other was Mr. Something in pince-nez, rather ambrosial about the hair. Mr. Something was a poet, or so the man who introduced them had said. Miss Gibbs was just an ordinary member of the Intelligentsia, like the rest of us.

The Lower Classes, the Lower Classes . . .

"Are you interested in the Modern Theatre?" asked Mr. Something in his mellow voice. Too mellow — oh, much too mellow!

"Passably," said Dick.

"So am I," said Mr. Thingummy. "I am a vice-president of the Craftsmen's League of Joy, which perhaps you may have heard of."

Dick shook his head; this was going to be terrible.

"The objects of the Craftsmen's League of Joy," Mr. Thingummy continued, "or rather, one of the objects — for it has many — is to establish Little Theatres in every town and village in England, where simple, uplifting, beautiful plays might be acted. The people have no joy."

"They have the cinema and the music hall," said Dick. He was filled with a sudden senseless irritation. "They get all the joy they want out of the jokes of the comics and the legs of the women."

"Ah, but that is an impure joy," Mr. What's-his-name protested.

"Impure purple, Herbert Spenser's favourite colour," flashed irrelevantly through Dick's brain.

"Well, speaking for myself," he said aloud, "I know I get more joy out of a good pair of legs than out of any number of uplifting plays of the kind they'd be sure to act in your little theatres. The people ask for sex and you give them a stone."

How was it, he wondered, that the right opinions in the mouths of these people sounded so horribly cheap and wrong? They degraded what was noble; beauty became fly-blown at their touch. Their intellectual tradition was all wrong. Lower classes, it always came back to that. When they talked about war and the International, Dick felt a hot geyser of chauvinism bubbling up in his

breast. In order to say nothing stupid, he refrained from speaking at all. Miss Gibbs switched the conversation on to art. She admired all the right people. Dick told her that he thought Sir Luke Fildes to be the best modern artist. But his irritation knew no bounds when he found out a little later that Mr. Something had read the poems of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke. He felt inclined to say, "You may have read them, but of course you can't understand or appreciate them."

Lower Classes . . .

How clear and splendid were the ideas of right and justice! If only one could filter away the contaminating human element. . . . Reason compelled him to believe in democracy, in internationalism, in revolution; morality demanded justice for the oppressed. But neither morality nor reason would ever bring him to take pleasure in the company of democrats or revolutionaries, or make him find the oppressed, individually, any less antipathetic.

At the end of this nauseating meal, Dick was called on to make a speech. Rising to his feet, he began stammering and hesitating; he felt like an imbecile. Then suddenly inspiration came. The great religious ideas of Justice and Democracy swept like a rushing wind through his mind, purging it of all insignificant human and personal preferences or dislikes. He was filled with pentecostal fire. He spoke in a white heat of intellectual passion, dominating his hearers, infecting them with his own high enthusiasm. He sat down amid cheers. Miss Gibbs and Mr. Thingummy leaned towards him with flushed, shining faces.

"That was wonderful, Mr. Greenow. I've never heard anything like it," exclaimed Miss Gibbs, with genuine, unflattering enthusiasm.

Mr. Thing said something poetical about a trumpet-call. Dick looked from one to the other with blank and fishy eyes. So it was for these creatures he had been speaking!

Good God! . . .

X

DICK'S life was now a monotonous nightmare. The same impossible situation was repeated again and again. If it were not for the fact that he knew Pearl Bellairs to be entirely devoid of humour, Dick might have suspected that she was having a little quiet fun with him, so grotesque were the anomalies of his double life. Grotesque, but dreary, intolerably dreary. Situations which seem, in contemplation, romantic and adventurous have a habit of proving, when actually experienced, as dull and daily as a bank clerk's routine. When you read about it, a Jekyll and Hyde existence sounds delightfully amusing; but when you live through it, as Dick found to his cost, it is merely a boring horror.

In due course Dick was called up by the Military Authorities. He pleaded conscientious objection. The date of his appearance before the Tribunal was fixed. Dick did not much relish the prospect of being a Christian martyr; it seemed an anachronism. However, it would have to be done. He would be an absolutist; there would be a little buffeting, spitting, and scourging, followed by an indefinite term of hard labour. It was all very unpleasant. But nothing could be much more unpleasant than life as he was now living it. He didn't even mind very much if they killed him. Being or not being — the alternatives left him equally cold.

The days that preceded his appearance before the Tribunal were busy days, spent in consulting solicitors, preparing speeches, collecting witnesses.

"We'll give you a good run for your money," said Hyman. "I hope they'll be feeling a little uncomfortable by the time they have done with you, Greenow."

"Not nearly so uncomfortable as I shall be feeling," Dick replied, with a slightly melancholy smile.

The South Marylebone Tribunal sat in a gloomy and fetid chamber in a police station. Dick, who was extremely sensitive to his surroundings, felt his fatigue and nervousness perceptibly increase as he entered the room. Five or six pitiable creatures with paralytic mothers or one-man businesses were briskly disposed of, and then it was Dick's turn to present himself before his judges. He looked round the court, nodded to Hyman, smiled at Millicent, who had so far thawed

their wartime coolness as to come and see him condemned, caught other friendly eyes. It was as though he were about to be electrocuted. The preliminaries passed off; he found himself answering questions in a loud, clear voice. Then the Military Representative began to loom horribly large. The Military Representative was a solicitor's clerk disguised as a lieutenant in the Army Service Corps. He spoke in an accent that was more than genteel; it was rich, noble, aristocratic. Dick tried to remember where he had heard a man speaking like that before. He had it now. Once when he had been at Oxford after term was over. He had gone to see the Varieties, which come twice nightly and with cheap seats to the theatre after the undergraduates have departed. One of the turns had been a Nut, a descendant of the bloods and Champagne Charlies of earlier days. A young man in an alpaca evening suit and a monocle. He had danced, sung a song, spoken some patter. Sitting in the front row of the stalls, Dick had been able to see the large, swollen, tuberculous glands in his neck. They wobbled when he danced or sang. Fascinatingly horrible, those glands; and the young man, how terribly, painfully pathetic. . . . When the Military Representative spoke, he could hear again that wretched Nut's rendering of the Eton and Oxford voice. It unnerved him.

"What is your religion, Mr. Greenow?" the Military Representative asked.

Fascinated, Dick looked to see whether he too had tuberculous glands. The Lieutenant had to repeat his question sharply. When he was irritated, his voice went back to its more natural nasal twang. Dick recovered his presence of mind.

"I have no religion," he answered.

"But, surely, sir, you must have some kind of religion."

"Well, if I must, if it's in the Army Regulations, you had better put me down as an Albigensian, or a Bogomile, or, better still, as a Manichean. One can't find oneself in this court without possessing a profound sense of the reality and active existence of a power of evil equal to, if not greater than, the power of good."

"This is rather irrelevant, Mr. Greenow," said the Chairman.

"I apologize." Dick bowed to the court.

“But if,” the Military Representative continued— “if your objection is not religious, may I ask what it is?”

“It is based on a belief that all war is wrong, and that the solidarity of the human race can only be achieved in practice by protesting against war, wherever it appears and in whatever form.”

“Do you disbelieve in force, Mr. Greenow?”

“You might as well ask me if I disbelieve in gravitation. Of course, I believe in force: it is a fact.”

“What would you do if you saw a German violating your sister?” said the Military Representative, putting his deadliest question.

“Perhaps I had better ask my sister first,” Dick replied. “She is sitting just behind you in the court.”

The Military Representative was covered with confusion. He coughed and blew his nose. The case dragged on. Dick made a speech; the Military Representative made a speech; the Chairman made a speech. The atmosphere of the court-room grew fouler and fouler. Dick sickened and suffocated in the second-hand air. An immense lassitude took possession of him; he did not care about anything — about the cause, about himself, about Hyman or Millicent or Pearl Bellairs. He was just tired. Voices buzzed and drawled in his ears — sometimes his own voice, sometimes other people’s. He did not listen to what they said. He was tired — tired of all this idiotic talk, tired of the heat and smell. . . .

Tired of picking up very thistly wheat sheaves and propping them up in stooks on the yellow stubble. For that was what, suddenly, he found himself doing. Overhead the sky expanded in endless steppes of blue-hot cobalt. The pungent prickly dust of the dried sheaves plucked at his nose with imminent sneezes, made his eyes smart and water. In the distance a reaping-machine whirred and hummed. Dick looked blankly about him, wondering where he was. He was thankful, at any rate, not to be in that sweltering court-room; and it was a

mercy, too, to have escaped from the odious gentility of the Military Representative's accent. And, after all, there were worse occupations than harvesting.

Gradually, and bit by bit, Dick pieced together his history. He had, it seemed, done a cowardly and treacherous thing: deserted in the face of the enemy, betrayed his cause. He had a bitter letter from Hyman. "Why couldn't you have stuck it out? I thought it was in you. You've urged others to go to prison for their beliefs, but you get out of it yourself by sneaking off to a soft alternative service job on a friend's estate. You've brought discredit on the whole movement." It was very painful, but what could he answer? The truth was so ridiculous that nobody could be expected to swallow it. And yet the fact was that he had been as much startled to find himself working at Crome as anyone. It was all Pearl's doing.

He had found in his room a piece of paper covered with the large, flamboyant feminine writing which he knew to be Pearl's. It was evidently the rough copy of an article on the delights of being a land-girl: dewy dawns, rosy children's faces, quaint cottages, mossy thatch, milkmaids, healthy exercise. Pearl was being a land-girl; but he could hardly explain the fact to Hyman. Better not attempt to answer him.

Dick hated the manual labour of the farm. It was hard, monotonous, dirty, and depressing. It inhibited almost completely the functions of his brain. He was unable to think about anything at all; there was no opportunity to do anything but feel uncomfortable. God had not made him a Caliban to scatter ordure over fields, to pick up ordure from cattle-yards. His rôle was Prospero.

"Ban, Ban, Caliban" — it was to that derisive measure that he pumped water, sawed wood, mowed grass; it was a march for his slow, clotted feet as he followed the dung-carts up the winding lanes. "Ban, Ban, Caliban — Ban, Ban, Ban . . ."

"Oh, that bloody old fool Tolstoy," was his profoundest reflection on a general subject in three months of manual labour and communion with mother

earth.

He hated the work, and his fellow-workers hated him. They mistrusted him because they could not understand him, taking the silence of his overpowering shyness for arrogance and the contempt of one class for another. Dick longed to become friendly with them. His chief trouble was that he did not know what to say. At meal-times he would spend long minutes in cudgelling his brains for some suitable remark to make. And even if he thought of something good, like—"It looks as though it were going to be a good year for roots," he somehow hesitated to speak, feeling that such a remark, uttered in his exquisitely modulated tones, would be, somehow, a little ridiculous. It was the sort of thing that ought to be said rustically, with plenty of Z's and long vowels, in the manner of William Barnes. In the end, for lack of courage to act the yokel's part, he generally remained silent. While the others were eating their bread and cheese with laughter and talk, he sat like the skeleton at the feast — a skeleton that longed to join in the revelry, but had not the power to move its stony jaws. On the rare occasions that he actually succeeded in uttering something, the labourers looked at one another in surprise and alarm, as though it were indeed a skeleton that had spoken.

He was not much more popular with the other inhabitants of the village. Often, in the evenings, as he was returning from work, the children would pursue him, yelling. With the unerringly cruel instinct of the young they had recognized in him a fit object for abuse and lapidation. An outcast member of another class, from whom that class in casting him out had withdrawn its protection, an alien in speech and habit, a criminal, as their zealous schoolmaster lost no opportunity of reminding them, guilty of the blackest treason against God and man — he was the obviously predestined victim of childish persecution. When stones began to fly, and dung and precocious obscenity, he bowed his head and pretended not to notice that anything unusual was happening. It was difficult, however, to look quite dignified.

There were occasional short alleviations to the dreariness of his existence. One day, when he was engaged in his usual occupation of manuring, a familiar

figure suddenly appeared along the footpath through the field. It was Mrs. Cravister. She was evidently staying at the big house; one of the Manorial dachshunds preceded her. He took off his cap.

“Mr. Greenow!” she exclaimed, coming to a halt. “Ah, what a pleasure to see you again! Working on the land: so Tolstoyan. But I trust it doesn’t affect your æsthetic ideas in the same way as it did his. Fifty peasants singing together is music; but Bach’s chromatic fantasia is mere gibbering incomprehensibility.”

“I don’t do this for pleasure,” Dick explained. “It’s hard labour, meted out to the Conscientious Objector.”

“Of course, of course,” said Mrs. Cravister, raising her hand to arrest any further explanation. “I had forgotten. A conscientious objector, a Bible student. I remember how passionately devoted you were, even at school, to the Bible.”

She closed her eyes and nodded her head several times.

“On the contrary — —” Dick began; but it was no good. Mrs. Cravister had determined that he should be a Bible student and it was no use gainsaying her. She cut him short.

“Dear me, the Bible. . . . What a style! That alone would prove it to have been directly inspired. You remember how Mahomet appealed to the beauty of his style as a sign of his divine mission. Why has nobody done the same for the Bible? It remains for you, Mr. Greenow, to do so. You will write a book about it. How I envy you!”

“The style is very fine,” Dick ventured, “but don’t you think the matter occasionally leaves something to be desired?”

“The matter is nothing,” cried Mrs. Cravister, making a gesture that seemed to send all meaning flying like a pinch of salt along the wind— “nothing at all. It’s the style that counts. Think of Madame Bovary.”

“I certainly will,” said Dick.

Mrs. Cravister held out her hand. “Good-bye. Yes, I certainly envy you. I envy you your innocent labour and your incessant study of that most wonderful of books. If I were asked, Mr. Greenow, what book I should take with me to a desert island, what single solitary book, I should certainly say the Bible, though,

indeed, there are moments when I think I should choose *Tristram Shandy*. Good-bye."

Mrs. Cravister sailed slowly away. The little brown basset trotted ahead, straining his leash. One had the impression of a great ship being towed into harbour by a diminutive tug.

Dick was cheered by this glimpse of civilization and humanity. The unexpected arrival, one Saturday afternoon, of Millicent was not quite such an unmixed pleasure. "I've come to see how you're getting on," she announced, "and to put your cottage straight and make you comfortable."

"Very kind of you," said Dick. He didn't want his cottage put straight.

Millicent was in the Ministry of Munitions now, controlling three thousand female clerks with unsurpassed efficiency. Dick looked at her curiously, as she talked that evening of her doings. "To think I should have a sister like that," he said to himself. She was terrifying.

"You do enjoy bullying other people!" he exclaimed at last. "You've found your true vocation. One sees now how the new world will be arranged after the war. The women will continue to do all the bureaucratic jobs, all that entails routine and neatness and interfering with other people's affairs. And man, it is to be hoped, will be left free for the important statesman's business, free for creation and thought. He will stay at home and give proper education to the children, too. He is fit to do these things, because his mind is disinterested and detached. It's an arrangement which will liberate all man's best energies for their proper uses. The only flaw I can see in the system is that you women will be so fiendishly and ruthlessly tyrannical in your administration."

"You can't seriously expect me to argue with you," said Millicent.

"No, please don't. I am not strong enough. My dung-carrying has taken the edge off all my reasoning powers."

Millicent spent the next morning in completely rearranging Dick's furniture. By lunch-time every article in the cottage was occupying a new position.

“That’s much nicer,” said Millicent, surveying her work and seeing that it was good.

There was a knock at the door. Dick opened it and was astonished to find Hyman.

“I just ran down to see how you were getting on,” he explained.

“I’m getting on very well since my sister rearranged my furniture,” said Dick. He found it pleasing to have an opportunity of exercising his long unused powers of malicious irony. This was very mild, but with practice he would soon come on to something more spiteful and amusing.

Hyman shook hands with Millicent, scowling as he did so. He was irritated that she was there; he wanted to talk with Dick alone. He turned his back on her and began addressing Dick.

“Well,” he said, “I haven’t seen you since the fatal day. How is the turnip-hoeing?”

“Pretty beastly,” said Dick.

“Better than doing hard labour in a gaol, I suppose?”

Dick nodded his head wearily, foreseeing what must inevitably come.

“You’ve escaped that all right,” Hyman went on.

“Yes; you ought to be thankful,” Millicent chimed in.

“I still can’t understand why you did it, Greenow. It was a blow to me. I didn’t expect it of you.” Hyman spoke with feeling. “It was desertion; it was treason.”

“I agree,” said Millicent judicially. “He ought to have stuck to his principles.”

“He ought to have stuck to what was right, oughtn’t he, Miss Greenow?” Hyman turned towards Millicent, pleased at finding someone who shared his views.

“Of course,” she replied— “of course. I totally disagree with you about what is right. But if he believed it right not to fight, he certainly ought to have gone to prison for his belief.”

Dick lit a pipe with an air of nonchalance. He tried to disguise the fact that he was feeling extremely uncomfortable under these two pairs of merciless, accusing eyes.

“To my mind, at any rate,” said Millicent, “your position seems quite illogical and untenable, Dick.”

It was a relief to be talked to and not about.

“I’m sorry about that,” said Dick rather huskily — not a very intelligent remark, but what was there to say?

“Of course, it’s illogical and untenable. Your sister is quite right.” Hyman banged the table.

“I can’t understand what induced you to take it up — —”

“After you’d said you were going to be one of the absolutes,” cried Hyman, interrupting and continuing Millicent’s words.

“Why?” said Millicent.

“Why, why, why?” Hyman echoed.

Dick, who had been blowing out smoke at a great rate, put down his pipe. The taste of the tobacco was making him feel rather sick. “I wish you would stop,” he said wearily. “If I gave you the real reasons, you wouldn’t believe me. And I can’t invent any others that would be in the least convincing.”

“I believe the real reason is that you were afraid of prison.”

Dick leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. He did not mind being insulted now; it made no difference. Hyman and Millicent were still talking about him, but what they said did not interest him; he scarcely listened.

They went back to London together in the evening.

“Very intelligent woman, your sister,” said Hyman just before they were starting. “Pity she’s not on the right side about the war and so forth.”

Four weeks later Dick received a letter in which Hyman announced that he and Millicent had decided to get married.

“I am happy to think,” Dick wrote in his congratulatory reply, “that it was I who brought you together.”

He smiled as he read through the sentence; that was what the Christian martyr might say to the two lions who had scraped acquaintance over his bones in the amphitheatre.

One warm afternoon in the summer of 1918, Mr. Hobart, Clerk to the Wibley Town Council, was disturbed in the midst of his duties by the sudden entry into his office of a small dark man, dressed in corduroys and gaiters, but not having the air of a genuine agricultural labourer.

"What may I do for you?" inquired Mr. Hobart.

"I have come to inquire about my vote," said the stranger.

"Aren't you already registered?"

"Not yet. You see, it isn't long since the Act was passed giving us the vote."

Mr. Hobart stared.

"I don't quite follow," he said.

"I may not look it," said the stranger, putting his head on one side and looking arch— "I may not look it, but I will confess to you, Mr. — er — Mr. — er — —"

"Hobart."

"Mr. Hobart, that I am a woman of over thirty."

Mr. Hobart grew visibly paler. Then, assuming a forced smile and speaking as one speaks to a child or a spoiled animal, he said:

"I see — I see. Over thirty, dear me."

He looked at the bell, which was over by the fireplace at the other side of the room, and wondered how he should ring it without rousing the maniac's suspicions.

"Over thirty," the stranger went on. "You know my woman's secret. I am Miss Pearl Bellairs, the novelist. Perhaps you have read some of my books. Or are you too busy?"

"Oh no, I've read several," Mr. Hobart replied, smiling more and more brightly and speaking in even more coaxing and indulgent tones.

“Then we’re friends already, Mr. Hobart. Anyone who knows my books, knows me. My whole heart is in them. Now, you must tell me all about my poor little vote. I shall be very patriotic with it when the time comes to use it.”

Mr. Hobart saw his opportunity.

“Certainly, Miss Bellairs,” he said. “I will ring for my clerk and we’ll — er — we’ll take down the details.”

He got up, crossed the room, and rang the bell with violence.

“I’ll just go and see that he brings the right books,” he added, and darted to the door. Once outside in the passage, he mopped his face and heaved a sigh of relief. That had been a narrow shave, by Jove. A loony in the office — dangerous-looking brute, too.

On the following day Dick woke up and found himself in a bare whitewashed room, sparsely furnished with a little iron bed, a washstand, a chair, and table. He looked round him in surprise. Where had he got to this time? He went to the door and tried to open it; it was locked. An idea entered his mind: he was in barracks somewhere; the Military Authorities must have got hold of him somehow in spite of his exemption certificate. Or perhaps Pearl had gone and enlisted. . . . He turned next to the window, which was barred. Outside, he could see a courtyard, filled, not with soldiers, as he had expected, but a curious motley crew of individuals, some men and some women, wandering hither and thither with an air of complete aimlessness. Very odd, he thought — very odd. Beyond the courtyard, on the farther side of a phenomenally high wall, ran a railway line and beyond it a village, roofed with tile and thatch, and a tall church spire in the midst. Dick looked carefully at the spire. Didn’t he know it? Surely — yes, those imbricated copper plates with which it was covered, that gilded ship that served as wind vane, the little gargoyles at the corner of the tower there could be no doubt; it was Belbury church. Belbury — that was where the . . . No, no; he wouldn’t believe it. But looking down again into that high-walled courtyard, full of those queer, aimless folk, he was forced to admit it. The County Asylum stands at Belbury. He had often noticed it from the train, a huge,

gaunt building of sausage-coloured brick, standing close to the railway, on the opposite side of the line to Belbury village and church. He remembered how, the last time he had passed in the train, he had wondered what they did in the asylum. He had regarded it then as one of those mysterious, unapproachable places, like Lhassa or a Ladies' Lavatory, into which he would never penetrate. And now, here he was, looking out through the bars, like any other madman. It was all Pearl's doing, as usual. If there had been no bars, he would have thrown himself out of the window.

He sat down on his bed and began to think about what he should do. He would have to be very sane and show them by his behaviour and speech that he was no more mad than the commonalty of mankind. He would be extremely dignified about it all. If a warder or a doctor or somebody came in to see him, he would rise to his feet and say in the calmest and severest tones: "May I ask, pray, why I am detained here and upon whose authority?" That ought to stagger them. He practised that sentence, and the noble attitude with which he would accompany it, for the best part of an hour. Then, suddenly, there was the sound of a key in the lock. He hastily sat down again on the bed. A brisk little man of about forty, clean shaven and with pince-nez, stepped into the room, followed by a nurse and a warder in uniform. The doctor! Dick's heart was beating with absurd violence; he felt like an amateur actor at the first performance of an imperfectly rehearsed play. He rose, rather unsteadily, to his feet, and in a voice that quavered a little with an emotion he could not suppress, began:

"Pray I ask, may . . ."

Then, realizing that something had gone wrong, he hesitated, stammered, and came to a pause.

The doctor turned to the nurse.

"Did you hear that?" he asked. "He called me May. He seems to think everybody's a woman, not only himself."

Turning to Dick with a cheerful smile, he went on:

"Sit down, Miss Bellairs, please sit down."

It was too much. Dick burst into tears, flung himself upon the bed, and buried his face in the pillow. The doctor looked at him as he lay there sobbing, his whole body shaken and convulsed.

“A bad case, I fear.”

And the nurse nodded.

For the next three days Dick refused to eat. It was certainly unreasonable, but it seemed the only way of making a protest. On the fourth day the doctor signed a certificate to the effect that forcible feeding had become necessary. Accompanied by two warders and a nurse, he entered Dick’s room.

“Now, Miss Bellairs,” he said, making a last persuasive appeal, “do have a little of this nice soup. We have come to have lunch with you.”

“I refuse to eat,” said Dick icily, “as a protest against my unlawful detention in this place. I am as sane as any of you here.”

“Yes, yes.” The doctor’s voice was soothing. He made a sign to the warders. One was very large and stout, the other wiry, thin, sinister, like the second murderer in a play. They closed in on Dick.

“I won’t eat and I won’t be made to eat!” Dick cried. “Let me go!” he shouted at the fat warder, who had laid a hand on his shoulder. His temper was beginning to rise.

“Now, do behave yourself,” said the fat warder. “It ain’t a bit of use kicking up a row. Now, do take a little of this lovely soup,” he added wheedlingly.

“Let me go!” Dick screamed again, all his self-control gone. “I will not let myself be bullied.”

He began to struggle violently. The fat warder put an arm round his shoulders, as though he were an immense mother comforting an irritable child. Dick felt himself helpless; the struggle had quite exhausted him; he was weaker than he had any idea of. He began kicking the fat man’s shins; it was the only way he could still show fight.

“Temper, temper,” remonstrated the warder, more motherly than ever. The thin warder stooped down, slipped a strap round the kicking legs, and drew it tight. Dick could move no more. His fury found vent in words — vain, abusive, filthy words, such as he had not used since he was a schoolboy.

“Let me go,” he screamed— “let me go, you devils! You beasts, you swine! beasts and swine!” he howled again and again.

They soon had him securely strapped in a chair, his head held back ready for the doctor and his horrible-looking tubes. They were pushing the horrors up his nostrils. He coughed and choked, spat, shouted inarticulately, retched. It was like having a spoon put on your tongue and being told to say A-a-h, but worse; it was like jumping into the river and getting water up your nose — how he had always hated that! — only much worse. It was like almost everything unpleasant, only much, much worse than all. He exhausted himself struggling against his utterly immovable bonds. They had to carry him to his bed, he was so weak.

He lay there, unmoving — for he was unable to move — staring at the ceiling. He felt as though he were floating on air, unsupported, solid no longer; the sensation was not unpleasant. For that reason he refused to let his mind dwell upon it; he would think of nothing that was not painful, odious, horrible. He thought about the torture which had just been inflicted on him and of the monstrous injustice of which he was a victim. He thought of the millions who had been and were still being slaughtered in the war; he thought of their pain, all the countless separate pains of them; pain incommunicable, individual, beyond the reach of sympathy; infinities of pain pent within frail finite bodies; pain without sense or object, bringing with it no hope and no redemption, futile, unnecessary, stupid. In one supreme apocalyptic moment he saw, he felt the universe in all its horror.

They forcibly fed him again the following morning and again on the day after. On the fourth day pneumonia, the result of shock, complicated by acute inflammation of the throat and pleura, set in. The fever and pain gained ground. Dick had not the strength to resist their ravages, and his condition grew hourly

worse. His mind, however, continued to work clearly — too clearly. It occurred to him that he might very likely die. He asked for pencil and paper to be brought him, and putting forth all the little strength he had left, he began to make his testament.

"I am perfectly sane," he wrote at the top of the page, and underlined the words three times. "I am confined here by the most intol. injust." As soon as he began, he realized how little time and strength were left him; it was a waste to finish the long words. "They are killing me for my opins. I regard this war and all wars as utter bad. Capitalists' war. The devils will be smashed sooner later. Wish I could help. But it won't make any difference," he added on a new line and as though by an afterthought. "World will always be hell. Cap. or Lab., Engl. or Germ. — all beasts. One in a mill. is GOOD. I wasn't. Selfish intellect. Perhaps Pearl Bellairs better. If die, send corp. to hosp. for anatomy. Useful for once in my life!"

Quite suddenly, he lapsed into delirium. The clear lucidity of his mind became troubled. The real world disappeared from before his eyes, and in its place he saw a succession of bright, unsteady visions created by his sick fantasy. Scenes from his childhood, long forgotten, bubbled up and disappeared. Unknown, hideous faces crowded in upon him; old friends revisited him. He was living in a bewildering mixture of the familiar and the strange. And all the while, across this changing unsubstantial world, there hurried a continual, interminable procession of dromedaries — countless high-domed beasts, with gargoyle faces and stiff legs and necks that bobbed as though on springs. Do what he could, he was unable to drive them away. He lost his temper with the brutes at last, struck at them, shouted; but in vain. The room rang with his cries of, "Get away, you beasts. Bloody humps. None of your nonconformist faces here." And while he was yelling and gesticulating (with his left hand only), his right hand was still busily engaged in writing. The words were clear and legible; the sentences consecutive and eminently sane. Dick might rave, but Pearl Bellairs remained calm and in full possession of her deplorable faculties. And what was Pearl doing with her busy pencil, while Dick, like a frenzied Betsy Trotwood, shouted

at the trespassing camels? The first thing she did was to scratch out all that poor Dick had said about the war. Underneath it she wrote:

"We shall not sheathe the sword, which we have not lightly . . ." And then, evidently finding that memorable sentence too long, particularly so since the addition of Poland and Czecho-Slovakia to the list of Allies, she began again.

"We are fighting for honour and the defence of Small Nationalities. Plucky little Belgium! We went into the war with clean hands."

A little of Pearl's thought seemed at this moment to have slopped over into Dick's mind; for he suddenly stopped abusing his dromedaries and began to cry out in the most pitiable fashion, "Clean hands, clean hands! I can't get mine clean. I can't, I can't, I can't. I contaminate everything." And he kept rubbing his left hand against the bed-clothes and putting his fingers to his nose, only to exclaim, "Ugh, they still stink of goat!" and then to start rubbing again.

The right hand wrote on unperturbed. "No peace with the Hun until he is crushed and humiliated. Self-respecting Britons will refuse to shake a Hunnish hand for many a long year after the war. No more German waiters. Intern the Forty-Seven Thousand Hidden Hands in High Places!"

At this point, Pearl seemed to have been struck by a new idea. She took a clean page and began:

"To the Girls of England. I am a woman and proud of the fact. But, girls, I blushed for my sex to-day when I read in the papers that there had been cases of English girls talking to Hun prisoners, and not only talking to them, but allowing themselves to be kissed by them. Imagine! Clean, healthy British girls allowing themselves to be kissed by the swinish and bloodstained lips of the unspeakable Hun! Do you wonder that I blush for my sex? Stands England where she did? No, emphatically no, if these stories are true, and true — sadly and with a heavy bleeding heart do I admit it — true they are."

"Clean hands, clean hands," Dick was still muttering, and applying his ringers to his nose once more, "Christ," he cried, "how they stink! Goats, dung . . ."

"Is there any excuse for such conduct?" the pencil continued. "The most that can be said in palliation of the offence is that girls are thoughtless, that they do

not consider the full significance of their actions. But listen to me, girls of all ages, classes and creeds, from the blue-eyed, light-hearted flapper of sixteen to the stern-faced, hard-headed business woman — listen to me. There is a girlish charm about thoughtlessness, but there is a point beyond which thoughtlessness becomes criminal. A flapper may kiss a Hun without thinking what she is doing, merely for the fun of the thing; perhaps, even, out of misguided pity. Will she repeat the offence if she realizes, as she must realize if she will only think, that this thoughtless fun, this mawkish and hysterical pity, is nothing less than Treason? Treason — it is a sinister word, but . . .”

The pencil stopped writing; even Pearl was beginning to grow tired. Dick’s shouting had died away to a hoarse, faint whisper. Suddenly her attention was caught by the last words that Dick had written — the injunction to send his body, if he died, to a hospital for an anatomy. She put forth a great effort.

“NO. NO,” she wrote in huge capitals. “Bury me in a little country churchyard, with lovely marble angels like the ones in St. George’s at Windsor, over Princess Charlotte’s tomb. Not anatomy. Too horrible, too disgus . . .”

The coma which had blotted out Dick’s mind fell now upon hers as well. Two hours later Dick Greenow was dead; the fingers of his right hand still grasped a pencil. The scribbled papers were thrown away as being merely the written ravings of a madman; they were accustomed that sort of thing at the asylum.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

I

AT THE BEST of times it is a long way from Chicago to Blaybury in Wiltshire, but war has fixed between them a great gulf. In the circumstances, therefore, it seemed an act of singular devotion on the part of Peter Jacobsen to have come all the way from the Middle West, in the fourth year of war, on a visit to his old friend Petherton, when the project entailed a single-handed struggle with two Great Powers over the question of passports and the risk, when they had been obtained, of perishing miserably by the way, a victim of frightfulness.

At the expense of much time and more trouble Jacobsen had at last arrived; the gulf between Chicago and Blaybury was spanned. In the hall of Petherton's house a scene of welcome was being enacted under the dim gaze of six or seven brown family portraits by unknown masters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Old Alfred Petherton, a grey shawl over his shoulders — for he had to be careful, even in June, of draughts and colds — was shaking his guest's hand with interminable cordiality.

"My dear boy," he kept repeating, "it *is* a pleasure to see you. My dear boy . . ."

Jacobsen limply abandoned his forearm and waited in patience.

"I can never be grateful enough," Mr. Petherton went on— "never grateful enough to you for having taken all this endless trouble to come and see an old decrepit man — for that's what I am now, that's what I am, believe me."

"Oh, I assure you . . ." said Jacobsen, with vague deprecation. "Le vieux crétin qui pleurniche," he said to himself. French was a wonderfully expressive language, to be sure.

“My digestion and my heart have got much worse since I saw you last. But I think I must have told you about that in my letters.”

“You did indeed, and I was most grieved to hear it.”

“Grieved” — what a curious flavour that word had! Like somebody’s tea which used to recall the most delicious blends of forty years ago. But it was decidedly the *mot juste*. It had the right obituary note about it.

“Yes,” Mr. Petherton continued, “my palpitations are very bad now. Aren’t they, Marjorie?” He appealed to his daughter who was standing beside him.

“Father’s palpitations are very bad,” she replied dutifully.

It was as though they were talking about some precious heirloom long and lovingly cherished.

“And my digestion. . . . This physical infirmity makes all mental activity so difficult. All the same, I manage to do a little useful work. We’ll discuss that later, though. You must be feeling tired and dusty after your journey down. I’ll guide you to your room. Marjorie, will you get someone to take up his luggage?”

“I can take it myself,” said Jacobsen, and he picked up a small gladstone-bag that had been deposited by the door.

“Is that all?” Mr. Petherton asked.

“Yes, that’s all.”

As one living the life of reason, Jacobsen objected to owning things. One so easily became the slave of things and not their master. He liked to be free; he checked his possessive instincts and limited his possessions to the strictly essential. He was as much or as little at home at Blaybury or Pekin. He could have explained all this if he liked. But in the present case it wasn’t worth taking the trouble.

“This is your humble chamber,” said Mr. Petherton, throwing open the door of what was, indeed, a very handsome spare-room, bright with chintzes and cut flowers and silver candlesticks. “A poor thing, but your own.”

Courtly grace! Dear old man! Apt quotation! Jacobsen unpacked his bag and arranged its contents neatly and methodically in the various drawers and shelves of the wardrobe.

It was a good many years now since Jacobsen had come in the course of his grand educational tour to Oxford. He spent a couple of years there, for he liked the place, and its inhabitants were a source of unfailing amusement to him.

A Norwegian, born in the Argentine, educated in the United States, in France, and in Germany; a man with no nationality and no prejudices, enormously old in experience, he found something very new and fresh and entertaining about his fellow-students with their comic public-school traditions and fabulous ignorance of the world. He had quietly watched them doing their little antics, feeling all the time that a row of bars separated them from himself, and that he ought, after each particularly amusing trick, to offer them a bun or a handful of pea-nuts. In the intervals of sight-seeing in this strange and delightful Jardin des Plantes he read Greats, and it was through Aristotle that he had come into contact with Alfred Petherton, fellow and tutor of his college.

The name of Petherton is a respectable one in the academic world. You will find it on the title-page of such meritorious, if not exactly brilliant, books as *Plato's Predecessors*, *Three Scottish Metaphysicians*, *Introduction to the Study of Ethics*, *Essays in Neo-Idealism*. Some of his works are published in cheap editions as text-books.

One of those curious inexplicable friendships that often link the most unlikely people had sprung up between tutor and pupil, and had lasted unbroken for upwards of twenty years. Petherton felt a fatherly affection for the younger man, together with a father's pride, now that Jacobsen was a man of world-wide reputation, in having, as he supposed, spiritually begotten him. And now Jacobsen had travelled three or four thousand miles across a world at war just to see the old man. Petherton was profoundly touched.

“Did you see any submarines on the way over?” Marjorie asked, as she and Jacobsen were strolling together in the garden after breakfast the next day.

“I didn’t notice any; but then I am very unobservant about these things.”

There was a pause. At last, “I suppose there is a great deal of war-work being done in America now?” said Marjorie.

Jacobsen supposed so; and there floated across his mind a vision of massed bands, of orators with megaphones, of patriotic sky-signs, of streets made perilous by the organized highway robbery of Red Cross collectors. He was too lazy to describe it all; besides, she wouldn’t see the point of it.

“I should like to be able to do some war-work,” Marjorie explained apologetically. “But I have to look after father, and there’s the housekeeping, so I really haven’t the time.”

Jacobsen thought he detected a formula for the benefit of strangers. She evidently wanted to make things right about herself in people’s minds. Her remark about the housekeeping made Jacobsen think of the late Mrs. Petherton, her mother; she had been a good-looking, painfully sprightly woman with a hankering to shine in University society at Oxford. One quickly learned that she was related to bishops and country families; a hunter of ecclesiastical lions and a snob. He felt glad she was dead.

“Won’t it be awful when there’s no war-work,” he said. “People will have nothing to do or think about when peace comes.”

“I shall be glad. Housekeeping will be so much easier.”

“True. There are consolations.”

Marjorie looked at him suspiciously; she didn’t like being laughed at. What an undistinguished-looking little man he was! Short, stoutish, with waxed brown moustaches and a forehead that incipient baldness had made interminably high. He looked like the sort of man to whom one says: “Thank you, I’ll take it in notes with a pound’s worth of silver.” There were pouches under his eyes and pouches under his chin, and you could never guess from his expression what he was thinking about. She was glad that she was taller than he and could look down on him.

Mr. Petherton appeared from the house, his grey shawl over his shoulders and the crackling expanse of the *Times* between his hands.

"Good morrow," he cried.

To the Shakespearian heartiness of this greeting Marjorie returned her most icily modern "Morning." Her father always said "Good morrow" instead of "Good morning," and the fact irritated her with unfailing regularity every day of her life.

"There's a most interesting account," said Mr. Petherton, "by a young pilot of an air fight in to-day's paper," and as they walked up and down the gravel path he read the article, which was a column and a half in length.

Marjorie made no attempt to disguise her boredom, and occupied herself by reading something on the other side of the page, craning her neck round to see.

"Very interesting," said Jacobsen when it was finished.

Mr. Petherton had turned over and was now looking at the Court Circular page.

"I see," he said, "there's someone called Beryl Camberley-Belcher going to be married. Do you know if that's any relation of the Howard Camberley-Belchers, Marjorie?"

"I've no idea who the Howard Camberley-Belchers are," Marjorie answered rather sharply.

"Oh, I thought you did. Let me see. Howard Camberley-Belcher was at college with me. And he had a brother called James — or was it William? — and a sister who married one of the Riders, or at any rate some relation of the Riders; for I know the Camberley-Belchers and the Riders used to fit in somewhere. Dear me, I'm afraid my memory for names is going."

Marjorie went indoors to prepare the day's domestic campaign with the cook. When that was over she retired to her sitting-room and unlocked her very private desk. She must write to Guy this morning. Marjorie had known Guy Lambourne for years and years, almost as long as she could remember. The Lambournes were old family friends of the Pethertons: indeed they were, distantly,

connections; they “fitted in somewhere,” as Mr. Petherton would say — somewhere, about a couple of generations back. Marjorie was two years younger than Guy; they were both only children; circumstances had naturally thrown them a great deal together. Then Guy’s father had died, and not long afterwards his mother, and at the age of seventeen Guy had actually come to live with the Pethertons, for the old man was his guardian. And now they were engaged; had been, more or less, from the first year of the war.

Marjorie took pen, ink, and paper. “DEAR GUY,” she began — (“*We* aren’t sentimental,” she had once remarked, with a mixture of contempt and secret envy, to a friend who had confided that she and her fiancé never began with anything less than Darling.)— “I am longing for another of your letters. . . .” She went through the usual litany of longing. “It was father’s birthday yesterday; he is sixty-five. I cannot bear to think that some day you and I will be as old as that. Aunt Ellen sent him a Stilton cheese — a useful war-time present. How boring housekeeping is. By dint of thinking about cheeses my mind is rapidly turning into one — a Gruyère; where there isn’t cheese there are just holes, full of vacuum . . .”

She didn’t really mind housekeeping so much. She took it for granted, and did it just because it was there to be done. Guy, on the contrary, never took anything for granted; she made these demonstrations for his benefit.

“I read Keats’s letters, as you suggested, and thought them *too* beautiful . . .”

At the end of a page of rapture she paused and bit her pen. What was there to say next? It seemed absurd one should have to write letters about the books one had been reading. But there was nothing else to write about; nothing ever happened. After all, what had happened in her life? Her mother dying when she was sixteen; then the excitement of Guy coming to live with them; then the war, but that hadn’t meant much to her; then Guy falling in love, and their getting engaged. That was really all. She wished she could write about her feelings in an accurate, complicated way, like people in novels; but when she came to think about it, she didn’t seem to have any feelings to describe.

She looked at Guy's last letter from France. "Sometimes," he had written, "I am tortured by an intense physical desire for you. I can think of nothing but your beauty, your young, strong body. I hate that; I have to struggle to repress it. Do you forgive me?" It rather thrilled her that he should feel like that about her: he had always been so cold, so reserved, so much opposed to sentimentality — to the kisses and endearments she would, perhaps, secretly have liked. But he had seemed so right when he said, "We must love like rational beings, with our minds, not with our hands and lips." All the same . . .

She dipped her pen in the ink and began to write again. "I know the feelings you spoke of in your letter. Sometimes I long for you in the same way. I dreamt the other night I was holding you in my arms, and woke up hugging the pillow." She looked at what she had written. It was too awful, too vulgar! She would have to scratch it out. But no, she would leave it in spite of everything, just to see what he would think about it. She finished the letter quickly, sealed and stamped it, and rang for the maid to take it to the post. When the servant had gone, she shut up her desk with a bang. Bang — the letter had gone, irrevocably.

She picked up a large book lying on the table and began to read. It was the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*. Guy had said she must read Gibbon; she wouldn't be educated till she had read Gibbon. And so yesterday she had gone to her father in his library to get the book.

"Gibbon," Mr. Petherton had said, "certainly, my dear. How delightful it is to look at these grand old books again. One always finds something new every time."

Marjorie gave him to understand that she had never read it. She felt rather proud of her ignorance.

Mr. Petherton handed the first of eleven volumes to her. "A great book," he murmured— "an essential book. It fills the gap between your classical history and your mediæval stuff."

"Your" classical history, Marjorie repeated to herself, "your" classical history indeed! Her father had an irritating way of taking it for granted that she knew

everything, that classical history was as much hers as his. Only a day or two before he had turned to her at luncheon with, “Do you remember, dear child, whether it was Pomponazzi who denied the personal immortality of the soul, or else that queer fellow, Laurentius Valla? It’s gone out of my head for the moment.” Marjorie had quite lost her temper at the question — much to the innocent bewilderment of her poor father.

She had set to work with energy on the Gibbon; her bookmarker registered the fact that she had got through one hundred and twenty-three pages yesterday. Marjorie started reading. After two pages she stopped. She looked at the number of pages still remaining to be read — and this was only the first volume. She felt like a wasp sitting down to eat a vegetable marrow. Gibbon’s bulk was not perceptibly diminished by her first bite. It was too long. She shut the book and went out for a walk. Passing the Whites’ house, she saw her friend, Beatrice White that was, sitting on the lawn with her two babies. Beatrice hailed her, and she turned in.

“Pat a cake, pat a cake,” she said. At the age of ten months, baby John had already learnt the art of patting cakes. He slapped the outstretched hand offered him, and his face, round and smooth and pink like an enormous peach, beamed with pleasure.

“Isn’t he a darling!” Marjorie exclaimed. “You know, I’m sure he’s grown since last I saw him, which was on Tuesday.”

“He put on eleven ounces last week,” Beatrice affirmed.

“How wonderful! His hair’s coming on splendidly . . .”

It was Sunday the next day. Jacobsen appeared at breakfast in the neatest of black suits. He looked, Marjorie thought, more than ever like a cashier. She longed to tell him to hurry up or he’d miss the 8.53 for the second time this week and the manager would be annoyed. Marjorie herself was, rather consciously, not in Sunday best.

“What is the name of the Vicar?” Jacobsen inquired, as he helped himself to bacon.

“Trubshaw. Luke Trubshaw, I believe.”

“Does he preach well?”

“He didn’t when I used to hear him. But I don’t often go to church now, so I don’t know what he’s like these days.”

“Why don’t you go to church?” Jacobsen inquired, with a silkiness of tone which veiled the crude outlines of his leading question.

Marjorie was painfully conscious of blushing. She was filled with rage against Jacobsen. “Because,” she said firmly, “I don’t think it necessary to give expression to my religious feelings by making a lot of” — she hesitated a moment— “a lot of meaningless gestures with a crowd of other people.”

“You used to go,” said Jacobsen.

“When I was a child and hadn’t thought about these things.”

Jacobsen was silent, and concealed a smile in his coffee-cup. Really, he said to himself, there ought to be religious conscription for women — and for most men, too. It was grotesque the way these people thought they could stand by themselves — the fools, when there was the infinite authority of organized religion to support their ridiculous feebleness.

“Does Lambourne go to church?” he asked maliciously, and with an air of perfect naïveté and good faith.

Marjorie coloured again, and a fresh wave of hatred surged up within her. Even as she had said the words she had wondered whether Jacobsen would notice that the phrase “meaningless gestures” didn’t ring very much like one of her own coinages. “Gesture” — that was one of Guy’s words, like “incredible,” “exacerbate,” “impinge,” “sinister.” Of course all her present views about religion had come from Guy. She looked Jacobsen straight in the face and replied:

“Yes, I think he goes to church pretty regularly. But I really don’t know: his religion has nothing to do with me.”

Jacobsen was lost in delight and admiration.

Punctually at twenty minutes to eleven he set out for church. From where she was sitting in the summer-house Marjorie watched him as he crossed the garden,

incredibly absurd and incongruous in his black clothes among the blazing flowers and the young emerald of the trees. Now he was hidden behind the sweet-briar hedge, all except the hard black melon of his bowler hat, which she could see bobbing along between the topmost sprays.

She went on with her letter to Guy. ". . . What a strange man Mr. Jacobsen is. I suppose he is very clever, but I can't get very much out of him. We had an argument about religion at breakfast this morning; I rather scored off him. He has now gone off to church all by himself; — I really couldn't face the prospect of going with him — I hope he'll enjoy old Mr. Trubshaw's preaching!"

Jacobsen did enjoy Mr. Trubshaw's preaching enormously. He always made a point, in whatever part of Christendom he happened to be, of attending divine service. He had the greatest admiration of churches as institutions. In their solidity and unchangeableness he saw one of the few hopes for humanity. Further, he derived great pleasure from comparing the Church as an institution — splendid, powerful, eternal — with the childish imbecility of its representatives. How delightful it was to sit in the herded congregation and listen to the sincere outpourings of an intellect only a little less limited than that of an Australian aboriginal! How restful to feel oneself a member of a flock, guided by a good shepherd — himself a sheep! Then there was the scientific interest (he went to church as student of anthropology, as a Freudian psychologist) and the philosophic amusement of counting the undistributed middles and tabulating historically the exploded fallacies in the parson's discourse.

To-day Mr. Trubshaw preached a topical sermon about the Irish situation. His was the gospel of the *Morning Post*, slightly tempered by Christianity. It was our duty, he said, to pray for the Irish first of all, and if that had no effect upon recruiting, why, then, we must conscribe them as zealously as we had prayed before.

Jacobsen leaned back in his pew with a sigh of contentment. A connoisseur, he recognized that this was the right stuff.

"Well," said Mr. Petherton over the Sunday beef at lunch, "how did you like our dear Vicar?"

“He was splendid,” said Jacobsen, with grave enthusiasm. “One of the best sermons I’ve ever heard.”

“Indeed? I shall really have to go and hear him again. It must be nearly ten years since I listened to him.”

“He’s inimitable.”

Marjorie looked at Jacobsen carefully. He seemed to be perfectly serious. She was more than ever puzzled by the man.

The days went slipping by, hot blue days that passed like a flash almost without one’s noticing them, cold grey days, seeming interminable and without number, and about which one spoke with a sense of justified grievance, for the season was supposed to be summer. There was fighting going on in France — terrific battles, to judge from the headlines in the *Times*; but, after all, one day’s paper was very much like another’s. Marjorie read them dutifully, but didn’t honestly take in very much; at least she forgot about things very soon. She couldn’t keep count with the battles of Ypres, and when somebody told her that she ought to go and see the photographs of the *Vindictive,* she smiled vaguely and said Yes, without remembering precisely what the *Vindictive* was — a ship, she supposed.

Guy was in France, to be sure, but he was an Intelligence Officer now, so that she was hardly anxious about him at all. Clergymen used to say that the war was bringing us all back to a sense of the fundamental realities of life. She supposed it was true: Guy’s enforced absences were a pain to her, and the difficulties of housekeeping continually increased and multiplied.

Mr. Petherton took a more intelligent interest in the war than did his daughter. He prided himself on being able to see the thing as a whole, on taking an historical, God’s-eye view of it all. He talked about it at meal-times, insisting that the world must be made safe for democracy. Between meals he sat in the library working at his monumental History of Morals. To his dinner-table disquisitions Marjorie would listen more or less attentively, Jacobsen with an unfailing, bright, intelligent politeness. Jacobsen himself rarely volunteered a remark about the war; it was taken for granted that he thought about it in the

same way as all other right-thinking folk. Between meals he worked in his room or discussed the morals of the Italian Renaissance with his host. Marjorie could write to Guy that nothing was happening, and that but for his absence and the weather interfering so much with tennis, she would be perfectly happy.

Into the midst of this placidity there fell, delightful bolt from the blue, the announcement that Guy was getting leave at the end of July. “DARLING,” Marjorie wrote, “I am so excited to think that you will be with me in such a little — such a long, long time.” Indeed, she was so excited and delighted that she realized with a touch of remorse how comparatively little she had thought of him when there seemed no chance of seeing him, how dim a figure in absence he was. A week later she heard that George White had arranged to get leave at the same time so as to see Guy. She was glad; George was a charming boy, and Guy was so fond of him. The Whites were their nearest neighbours, and ever since Guy had come to live at Blaybury he had seen a great deal of young George.

“We shall be a most festive party,” said Mr. Petherton. “Roger will be coming to us just at the same time as Guy.”

“I’d quite forgotten Uncle Roger,” said Marjorie. “Of course, his holidays begin then, don’t they?”

The Reverend Roger was Alfred Petherton’s brother and a master at one of our most glorious public schools. Marjorie hardly agreed with her father in thinking that his presence would add anything to the “festiveness” of the party. It was a pity he should be coming at this particular moment. However, we all have our little cross to bear.

Mr. Petherton was feeling playful. “We must bring down,” he said, “the choicest Falernian, bottled when Gladstone was consul, for the occasion. We must prepare wreaths and unguents and hire a flute player and a couple of dancing girls . . .”

He spent the rest of the meal in quoting Horace, Catullus, the Greek Anthology, Petronius, and Sidonius Apollinarius. Marjorie’s knowledge of the dead languages was decidedly limited. Her thoughts were elsewhere, and it was

only dimly and as it were through a mist that she heard her father murmuring — whether merely to himself or with the hope of eliciting an answer from somebody, she hardly knew— “Let me see: how does that epigram go? — that one about the different kinds of fish and the garlands of roses, by Meleager, or is it Poseidippus? . . .”

II

GUY and Jacobsen were walking in the Dutch garden, an incongruous couple. On Guy military servitude had left no outwardly visible mark; out of uniform, he still looked like a tall, untidy undergraduate; he stooped and drooped as much as ever; his hair was still bushy and, to judge by the dim expression of his face, he had not yet learnt to think imperially. His khaki always looked like a disguise, like the most absurd fancy dress. Jacobsen trotted beside him, short, fattish, very sleek, and correct. They talked in a desultory way about things indifferent. Guy, anxious for a little intellectual exercise after so many months of discipline, had been trying to inveigle his companion into a philosophical discussion. Jacobsen consistently eluded his efforts; he was too lazy to talk seriously; there was no profit that he could see to be got out of this young man’s opinions, and he had not the faintest desire to make a disciple. He preferred, therefore, to discuss the war and the weather. It irritated him that people should want to trespass on the domain of thought — people who had no right to live anywhere but on the vegetative plane of mere existence. He wished they would simply be content to *be* or *do*, not try, so hopelessly, to think, when only one in a million can think with the least profit to himself or anyone else.

Out of the corner of his eye he looked at the dark, sensitive face of his companion; he ought to have gone into business at eighteen, was Jacobsen’s verdict. It was bad for him to think; he wasn’t strong enough.

A great sound of barking broke upon the calm of the garden. Looking up, the two strollers saw George White running across the green turf of the croquet lawn with a huge fawn-coloured dog bounding along at his side.

“Morning,” he shouted. He was hatless and out of breath. “I was taking Bella for a run, and thought I’d look in and see how you all were.”

“What a lovely dog!” Jacobsen exclaimed.

“An old English mastiff our — one aboriginal dog. She has a pedigree going straight back to Edward the Confessor.”

Jacobsen began a lively conversation with George on the virtues and shortcomings of dogs. Bella smelt his calves and then lifted up her gentle black eyes to look at him. She seemed satisfied.

He looked at them for a little; they were too much absorbed in their doggy conversation to pay attention to him. He made a gesture as though he had suddenly remembered something, gave a little grunt, and with a very preoccupied expression on his face turned to go towards the house. His elaborate piece of by-play escaped the notice of the intended spectators; Guy saw that it had, and felt more miserable and angry and jealous than ever. They would think he had slunk off because he wasn’t wanted — which was quite true — instead of believing that he had something very important to do, which was what he had intended they should believe.

A cloud of self-doubt settled upon him. Was his mind, after all, worthless, and the little things he had written — rubbish, not potential genius as he had hoped? Jacobsen was right in preferring George’s company. George was perfect, physically, a splendid creature; what could he himself claim?

“I’m second-rate,” he thought— “second-rate, physically, morally, mentally. Jacobsen is quite right.”

The best he could hope to be was a pedestrian literary man with quiet tastes.

NO, no, no! He clenched his hands and, as though to register his resolve before the universe, he said, aloud:

“I will do it; I will be first-rate, I will.”

He was covered with confusion on seeing a gardener pop up, surprised from behind a bank of rose-bushes. Talking to himself — the man must have thought him mad!

He hurried on across the lawn, entered the house, and ran upstairs to his room. There was not a second to lose; he must begin at once. He would write something — something that would last, solid, hard, shining. . . .

“Damn them all! I will do it, I can . . .”

There were writing materials and a table in his room. He selected a pen — with a Relief nib he would be able to go on for hours without getting tired — and a large square sheet of writing-paper.

“HATCH HOUSE,

BLAYBURY,

WILTS.

Station: Cogham, 3 miles; Nobes Monacorum, 4½ miles.”

Stupid of people to have their stationery printed in red, when black or blue is so much nicer! He inked over the letters.

He held up the paper to the light; there was a watermark, “Pimlico Bond.” What an admirable name for the hero of a novel! Pimlico Bond. . . .

“There’s be-eef in the la-arder

And du-ucks in the pond;

Crying dilly dilly, dilly dilly . . .”

He bit the end of his pen. “What I want to get,” he said to himself, “is something very hard, very external. Intense emotion, but one will somehow have got outside it.” He made a movement of hands, arms, and shoulders, tightening his muscles in an effort to express to himself physically that hardness and tightness and firmness of style after which he was struggling!

He began to draw on his virgin paper. A woman, naked, one arm lifted over her head, so that it pulled up her breast by that wonderful curving muscle that comes down from the shoulder. The inner surface of the thighs, remember, is slightly concave. The feet, seen from the front, are always a difficulty.

It would never do to leave that about. What would the servants think? He turned the nipples into eyes, drew heavy lines for nose, mouth, and chin, slopped

on the ink thick; it made a passable face now — though an acute observer might have detected the original nudity. He tore it up into very small pieces.

A crescendo booming filled the house. It was the gong. He looked at his watch. Lunch-time, and he had done nothing. O God! . . .

III

IT was dinner-time on the last evening of Guy's leave. The uncovered mahogany table was like a pool of brown unruffled water within whose depths flowers and the glinting shapes of glass and silver hung dimly reflected. Mr. Petherton sat at the head of the board, flanked by his brother Roger and Jacobsen. Youth, in the persons of Marjorie, Guy, and George White, had collected at the other end. They had reached the stage of dessert.

"This is excellent port," said Roger, sleek and glossy like a well-fed black cob under his silken clerical waistcoat. He was a strong, thick-set man of about fifty, with a red neck as thick as his head. His hair was cropped with military closeness; he liked to set a good example to the boys, some of whom showed distressing "æsthetic" tendencies and wore their hair long.

"I'm glad you like it. I mayn't touch it myself, of course. Have another glass." Alfred Petherton's face wore an expression of dyspeptic melancholy. He was wishing he hadn't taken quite so much of that duck.

"Thank you, I will." Roger took the decanter with a smile of satisfaction. "The tired schoolmaster is worthy of his second glass. White, you look rather pale; I think you must have another." Roger had a hearty, jocular manner, calculated to prove to his pupils that he was not one of the slimy sort of parsons, not a Creeping Jesus.

There was an absorbing conversation going on at the youthful end of the table. Secretly irritated at having been thus interrupted in the middle of it, White turned round and smiled vaguely at Roger.

"Oh, thank you, sir," he said, and pushed his glass forward to be filled. The "sir" slipped out unawares; it was, after all, such a little while since he had been

a schoolboy under Roger's dominion.

"One is lucky," Roger went on seriously, "to get any port wine at all now. I'm thankful to say I bought ten dozen from my old college some years ago to lay down; otherwise I don't know what I should do. My wine merchant tells me he couldn't let me have a single bottle. Indeed, he offered to buy some off me, if I'd sell. But I wasn't having any. A bottle in the cellar is worth ten shillings in the pocket these days. I always say that port has become a necessity now one gets so little meat. Lambourne! you are another of our brave defenders; you deserve a second glass."

"No, thanks," said Guy, hardly looking up. "I've had enough." He went on talking to Marjorie — about the different views of life held by the French and the Russians.

Roger helped himself to cherries. "One has to select them carefully," he remarked for the benefit of the unwillingly listening George. "There is nothing that gives you such stomach-aches as unripe cherries."

"I expect you're glad, Mr. Petherton, that holidays have begun at last?" said Jacobsen.

"Glad? I should think so. One is utterly dead beat at the end of the summer term. Isn't one, White?"

White had taken the opportunity to turn back again and listen to Guy's conversation; recalled, like a dog who has started off on a forbidden scent, he obediently assented that one did get tired at the end of the summer term.

"I suppose," said Jacobsen, "you still teach the same old things — Cæsar, Latin verses, Greek grammar, and the rest? We Americans can hardly believe that all that still goes on."

"Thank goodness," said Roger, "we still hammer a little solid stuff into them. But there's been a great deal of fuss lately about new curriculums and so forth. They do a lot of science now and things of that kind, but I don't believe the children learn anything at all. It's pure waste of time."

"So is all education, I dare say," said Jacobsen lightly.

“Not if you teach them discipline. That’s what’s wanted — discipline. Most of these little boys need plenty of beating, and they don’t get enough now. Besides, if you can’t hammer knowledge in at their heads, you can at least beat a little in at their tails.”

“You’re very ferocious, Roger,” said Mr. Petherton, smiling. He was feeling better; the duck was settling down.

“No, it’s the vital thing. The best thing the war has brought us is discipline. The country had got slack and wanted tightening up.” Roger’s face glowed with zeal.

From the other end of the table Guy’s voice could be heard saying, “Do you know César Franck’s ‘Dieu s’avance à travers la lande’? It’s one of the finest bits of religious music I know.”

Mr. Petherton’s face lighted up; he leaned forward. “No,” he said, throwing his answer unexpectedly into the midst of the young people’s conversation. “I don’t know it; but do you know this? Wait a minute.” He knitted his brows, and his lips moved as though he were trying to recapture a formula. “Ah, I’ve got it. Now, can you tell me this? The name of what famous piece of religious music do I utter when I order an old carpenter, once a Liberal but now a renegade to Conservatism, to make a hive for bees?”

Guy gave it up; his guardian beamed delightedly.

“Hoary Tory, oh, Judas! Make a bee-house,” he said. “Do you see? Oratorio *Judas Maccabeus.*”

Guy could have wished that this bit of flotsam from Mr. Petherton’s sportive youth had not been thus washed up at his feet. He felt that he had been peeping indecently close into the dark backward and abysm of time.

“That was a good one,” Mr. Petherton chuckled. “I must see if I can think of some more.”

Roger, who was not easily to be turned away from his favourite topic, waited till this irrelevant spark of levity had quite expired, and continued: “It’s a remarkable and noticeable fact that you never seem to get discipline combined

with the teaching of science or modern languages. Who ever heard of a science master having a good house at a school? Scientists' houses are always bad."

"How very strange!" said Jacobsen.

"Strange, but a fact. It seems to me a great mistake to give them houses at all if they can't keep discipline. And then there's the question of religion. Some of these men never come to chapel except when they're on duty. And then, I ask you, what happens when they prepare their boys for Confirmation? Why, I've known boys come to me who were supposed to have been prepared by one or other of these men, and, on asking them, I've found that they know nothing whatever about the most solemn facts of the Eucharist. — May I have some more of those excellent cherries please, White? — Of course, I do my best in such cases to tell the boys what I feel personally about these solemn things. But there generally isn't the time; one's life is so crowded; and so they go into Confirmation with only the very haziest knowledge of what it's all about. You see how absurd it is to let anyone but the classical men have anything to do with the boys' lives."

"Shake it well, dear," Mr. Petherton was saying to his daughter, who had come with his medicine.

"What is that stuff?" asked Roger.

"Oh, it's merely my peptones. I can hardly digest at all without it, you know."

"You have all my sympathies. My poor colleague, Flexner, suffers from chronic colitis. I can't imagine how he goes on with his work."

"No, indeed. I find I can do nothing strenuous."

Roger turned and seized once more on the unhappy George. "White," he said, "let this be a lesson to you. Take care of your inside; it's the secret of a happy old age."

Guy looked up quickly. "Don't worry about his old age," he said in a strange harsh voice, very different from the gentle, elaborately modulated tone in which he generally spoke. "He won't have an old age. His chances against surviving are about fourteen to three if the war goes on another year."

“Come,” said Roger, “don’t let’s be pessimistic.”

“But I’m not. I assure you, I’m giving you a most rosy view of George’s chance of reaching old age.”

It was felt that Guy’s remarks had been in poor taste. There was a silence; eyes floated vaguely and uneasily, trying not to encounter one another. Roger cracked a nut loudly. When he had sufficiently relished the situation, Jacobsen changed the subject by remarking:

“That was a fine bit of work by our destroyers this morning, wasn’t it?”

“It did one good to read about it,” said Mr. Petherton. “Quite the Nelson touch.”

Roger raised his glass. “Nelson!” he said, and emptied it at a gulp. “What a man! I am trying to persuade the Headmaster to make Trafalgar Day a holiday. It is the best way of reminding boys of things of that sort.”

“A curiously untypical Englishman to be a national hero, isn’t he?” said Jacobsen. “So emotional and lacking in Britannic phlegm.”

The Reverend Roger looked grave. “There’s one thing I’ve never been able to understand about Nelson, and that is, how a man who was so much the soul of honour and of patriotism could have been — er — immoral with Lady Hamilton. I know people say that it was the custom of the age, that these things meant nothing then, and so forth; but all the same, I repeat, I cannot understand how a man who was so intensely a patriotic Englishman could have done such a thing.”

“I fail to see what patriotism has got to do with it,” said Guy.

Roger fixed him with his most pedagogic look and said slowly and gravely, “Then I am sorry for you. I shouldn’t have thought it was necessary to tell an Englishman that purity of morals is a national tradition: you especially, a public-school man.”

“Let us go and have a hundred up at billiards,” said Mr. Petherton. “Roger, will you come? And you, George, and Guy?”

“I’m so incredibly bad,” Guy insisted, “I’d really rather not.”

“So am I,” said Jacobsen.

“Then, Marjorie, you must make the fourth.”

The billiard players trooped out; Guy and Jacobsen were left alone, brooding over the wreckage of dinner. There was a long silence. The two men sat smoking, Guy sitting in a sagging, crumpled attitude, like a half-empty sack abandoned on a chair, Jacobsen very upright and serene.

“Do you find you can suffer fools gladly?” asked Guy abruptly.

“Perfectly gladly.”

“I wish I could. The Reverend Roger has a tendency to make my blood boil.”

“But such a good soul,” Jacobsen insisted.

“I dare say, but a monster all the same.”

“You should take him more calmly. I make a point of never letting myself be moved by external things. I stick to my writing and thinking. Truth is beauty, beauty is truth, and so forth: after all, they’re the only things of solid value.” Jacobsen looked at the young man with a smile as he said these words. There is no doubt, he said to himself, that that boy ought to have gone into business; what a mistake this higher education is, to be sure.

“Of course, they’re the only things,” Guy burst out passionately. “You can afford to say so because you had the luck to be born twenty years before I was, and with five thousand miles of good deep water between you and Europe. Here am I, called upon to devote my life, in a very different way from which you devote yours to truth and beauty — to devote my life to — well, what? I’m not quite sure, but I preserve a touching faith that it is good. And you tell me to ignore external circumstances. Come and live in Flanders a little and try . . .” He launched forth into a tirade about agony and death and blood and putrefaction.

“What is one to do?” he concluded despairingly. “What the devil is right? I had meant to spend my life writing and thinking, trying to create something beautiful or discover something true. But oughtn’t one, after all, if one survives, to give up everything else and try to make this hideous den of a world a little more habitable?”

“I think you can take it that a world which has let itself be dragooned into this criminal folly is pretty hopeless. Follow your inclinations; or, better, go into a bank and make a lot of money.”

Guy burst out laughing, rather too loudly. “Admirable, admirable!” he said. “To return to our old topic of fools: frankly, Jacobsen, I cannot imagine why you should elect to pass your time with my dear old guardian. He’s a charming old man, but one must admit — —” He waved his hand.

“One must live somewhere,” said Jacobsen. “I find your guardian a most interesting man to be with. — Oh, do look at that dog!” On the hearth-rug Marjorie’s little Pekingese, Confucius, was preparing to lie down and go to sleep. He went assiduously through the solemn farce of scratching the floor, under the impression, no doubt, that he was making a comfortable nest to lie in. He turned round and round, scratching earnestly and methodically. Then he lay down, curled himself up in a ball, and was asleep in the twinkling of an eye.

“Isn’t that too wonderfully human!” exclaimed Jacobsen delightedly. Guy thought he could see now why Jacobsen enjoyed living with Mr. Petherton. The old man was so wonderfully human.

Later in the evening, when the billiards was over and Mr. Petherton had duly commented on the anachronism of introducing the game into Anthony and Cleopatra, Guy and Marjorie went for a stroll in the garden. The moon had risen above the trees and lit up the front of the house with its bright pale light that could not wake the sleeping colours of the world.

“Moonlight is the proper architectural light,” said Guy, as they stood looking at the house. The white light and the hard black shadows brought out all the elegance of its Georgian symmetry.

“Look, here’s the ghost of a rose.” Marjorie touched a big cool flower, which one guessed rather than saw to be red, a faint equivocal lunar crimson. “And, oh, smell the tobacco-plant flowers. Aren’t they delicious!”

“I always think there’s something very mysterious about perfume drifting through the dark like this. It seems to come from some perfectly different immaterial world, peopled by unembodied sensations, phantom passions. Think of the spiritual effect of incense in a dark church. One isn’t surprised that people have believed in the existence of the soul.”

They walked on in silence. Sometimes, accidentally, his hand would brush against hers in the movement of their march. Guy felt an intolerable emotion of expectancy, akin to fear. It made him feel almost physically sick.

“Do you remember,” he said abruptly, “that summer holiday our families spent together in Wales? It must have been nineteen four or five. I was ten and you were eight or thereabouts.”

“Of course I remember,” cried Marjorie. “Everything. There was that funny little toy railway from the slate quarries.”

“And do you remember our gold-mine? All those tons of yellow ironstone we collected and hoarded in a cave, fully believing they were nuggets. How incredibly remote it seems!”

“And you had a wonderful process by which you tested whether the stuff was real gold or not. It all passed triumphantly as genuine, I remember!”

“Having that secret together first made us friends, I believe.”

“I dare say,” said Marjorie. “Fourteen years ago — what a time! And you began educating me even then: all that stuff you told me about gold-mining, for instance.”

“Fourteen years,” Guy repeated reflectively, “and I shall be going out again to-morrow . . .”

“Don’t speak about it. I am so miserable when you’re away.” She genuinely forgot what a delightful summer she had had, except for the shortage of tennis.

“We must make this the happiest hour of our lives. Perhaps it may be the last we shall be together.” Guy looked up at the moon, and he perceived, with a sudden start, that it was a sphere islanded in an endless night, not a flat disk stuck on a wall not so very far away. It filled him with an infinite dreariness; he felt too insignificant to live at all.

“Guy, you mustn’t talk like that,” said Marjorie appealingly.

“We’ve got twelve hours,” said Guy in a meditative voice, “but that’s only clock-work time. You can give an hour the quality of everlastingness, and spend years which are as though they had never been. We get our immortality here and

now; it’s a question of quality, not of quantity. I don’t look forward to golden harps or anything of that sort. I know that when I am dead, I shall be dead; there isn’t any afterwards. If I’m killed, my immortality will be in your memory. Perhaps, too, somebody will read the things I’ve written, and in his mind I shall survive, feebly and partially. But in your mind I shall survive intact and whole.”

“But I’m sure we shall go on living after death. It can’t be the end.” Marjorie was conscious that she had heard those words before. Where? Oh yes, it was earnest Evangeline who had spoken them at the school debating society.

“I wouldn’t count on it,” Guy replied, with a little laugh. “You may get such a disappointment when you die.” Then in an altered voice, “I don’t want to die. I hate and fear death. But probably I shan’t be killed after all. All the same . . .” His voice faded out. They stepped into a tunnel of impenetrable darkness between two tall hornbeam hedges. He had become nothing but a voice, and now that had ceased; he had disappeared. The voice began again, low, quick, monotonous, a little breathless. “I remember once reading a poem by one of the old Provençal troubadours, telling how God had once granted him supreme happiness; for the night before he was to set out for the Crusade, it had been granted him to hold his lady in his arms — all the short eternal night through. Ains que j’aille oltre mer: when I was going beyond sea.” The voice stopped again. They were standing at the very mouth of the hornbeam alley, looking out from that close-pent river of shadow upon an ocean of pale moonlight.

“How still it is.” They did not speak; they hardly breathed. They became saturated with the quiet.

Marjorie broke the silence. “Do you want me as much as all that, Guy?” All through that long, speechless minute she had been trying to say the words, repeating them over to herself, longing to say them aloud, but paralysed, unable to. And at last she had spoken them, impersonally, as though through the mouth of someone else. She heard them very distinctly, and was amazed at the matter-of-factness of the tone.

Guy’s answer took the form of a question. “Well, suppose I were killed now,” he said, “should I ever have really lived?”

They had stepped out of the cavernous alley into the moonlight. She could see him clearly now, and there was something so drooping and dejected and pathetic about him, he seemed so much of a great, overgrown child that a wave of passionate pitifulness rushed through her, reinforcing other emotions less maternal. She longed to take him in her arms, stroke his hair, lullaby him, baby-fashion, to sleep upon her breast. And Guy, on his side, desired nothing better than to give his fatigues and sensibilities to her maternal care, to have his eyes kissed fast, and sleep to her soothing. In his relations with women — but his experience in this direction was deplorably small — he had, unconsciously at first but afterwards with a realization of what he was doing, played this child part. In moments of self-analysis he laughed at himself for acting the "child stunt," as he called it. Here he was — he hadn't noticed it yet — doing it again, drooping, dejected, wholly pathetic, feeble . . .

Marjorie was carried away by her emotion. She would give herself to her lover, would take possession of her helpless, pitiable child. She put her arms round his neck, lifted her face to his kisses, whispered something tender and inaudible.

Guy drew her towards him and began kissing the soft, warm mouth. He touched the bare arm that encircled his neck; the flesh was resilient under his fingers; he felt a desire to pinch it and tear it.

It had been just like this with that little slut Minnie. Just the same — all horrible lust. He remembered a curious physiological fact out of Havelock Ellis. He shuddered as though he had touched something disgusting, and pushed her away.

"No, no, no. It's horrible; it's odious. Drunk with moonlight and sentimentalizing about death. . . . Why not just say with Biblical frankness, Lie with me — Lie with me?"

That this love, which was to have been so marvellous and new and beautiful, should end libidinously and bestially like the affair, never remembered without a shiver of shame, with Minnie (the vulgarity of her!) — filled him with horror.

Marjorie burst into tears and ran away, wounded and trembling, into the solitude of the hornbeam shadow. “Go away, go away,” she sobbed, with such intensity of command that Guy, moved by an immediate remorse and the sight of tears to stop her and ask forgiveness, was constrained to let her go her ways.

A cool, impersonal calm had succeeded almost immediately to his outburst. Critically, he examined what he had done, and judged it, not without a certain feeling of satisfaction, to be the greatest “floater” of his life. But at least the thing was done and couldn’t be undone. He took the weak-willed man’s delight in the irrevocability of action. He walked up and down the lawn smoking a cigarette and thinking, clearly and quietly — remembering the past, questioning the future. When the cigarette was finished he went into the house.

He entered the smoking-room to hear Roger saying, “. . . It’s the poor who are having the good time now. Plenty to eat, plenty of money, and no taxes to pay. No taxes — that’s the sickening thing. Look at Alfred’s gardener, for instance. He gets twenty-five or thirty bob a week and an uncommon good house. He’s married, but only has one child. A man like that is uncommonly well off. He ought to be paying income-tax; he can perfectly well afford it.”

Mr. Petherton was listening somnolently, Jacobsen with his usual keen, intelligent politeness; George was playing with the blue Persian kitten.

It had been arranged that George should stay the night, because it was such a bore having to walk that mile and a bit home again in the dark. Guy took him up to his room and sat down on the bed for a final cigarette, while George was undressing. It was the hour of confidence — that rather perilous moment when fatigue has relaxed the fibres of the mind, making it ready and ripe for sentiment.

“It depresses me so much,” said Guy, “to think that you’re only twenty and that I’m just on twenty-four. You will be young and sprightly when the war ends; I shall be an old antique man.”

“Not so old as all that,” George answered, pulling off his shirt. His skin was very white, face, neck, and hands seeming dark brown by comparison; there was a sharply demarcated high-water mark of sunburn at throat and wrist.

“It horrifies me to think of the time one is wasting in this bloody war, growing stupider and grosser every day, achieving nothing at all. It will be five, six — God knows how many — years cut clean out of one’s life. You’ll have the world before you when it’s all over, but I shall have spent my best time.”

“Of course, it doesn’t make so much difference to me,” said George through a foam of tooth-brushing; “I’m not capable of doing anything of any particular value. It’s really all the same whether I lead a blameless life broking stocks or spend my time getting killed. But for you, I agree, it’s too bloody. . . .”

Guy smoked on in silence, his mind filled with a languid resentment against circumstance. George put on his pyjamas and crept under the sheet; he had to curl himself up into a ball, because Guy was lying across the end of the bed, and he couldn’t put his feet down.

“I suppose,” said Guy at last, meditatively— “I suppose the only consolations are, after all, women and wine. I shall really have to resort to them. Only women are mostly so fearfully boring and wine is so expensive now.”

“But not all women!” George, it was evident, was waiting to get a confidence off his chest.

“I gather you’ve found the exceptions.”

George poured forth. He had just spent six months at Chelsea — six dreary months on the barrack square; but there had been lucid intervals between the drills and the special courses, which he had filled with many notable voyages of discovery among unknown worlds. And chiefly, Columbus to his own soul, he had discovered all those psychological intricacies and potentialities, which only the passions bring to light. *Nosce teipsum*, it has been commanded; and a judicious cultivation of the passions is one of the surest roads to self-knowledge. To George, at barely twenty, it was all so amazingly new and exciting, and Guy listened to the story of his adventures with admiration and a touch of envy. He regretted the dismal and cloistered chastity — broken only once, and how sordidly! Wouldn’t he have learnt much more, he wondered — have been a more real and better human being if he had had George’s experiences? He would have

profited by them more than George could ever hope to do. There was the risk of George's getting involved in a mere foolish expense of spirit in a waste of shame. He might not be sufficiently an individual to remain himself in spite of his surroundings; his hand would be coloured by the dye he worked in. Guy felt sure that he himself would have run no risk; he would have come, seen, conquered, and returned intact and still himself, but enriched by the spoils of a new knowledge. Had he been wrong after all? Had life in the cloister of his own philosophy been wholly unprofitable?

He looked at George. It was not surprising that the ladies favoured him, glorious ephebus that he was.

"With a face and figure like mine," he reflected, "I shouldn't have been able to lead his life, even if I'd wanted to." He laughed inwardly.

"You really must meet her," George was saying enthusiastically.

Guy smiled. "No, I really mustn't. Let me give you a bit of perfectly good advice. Never attempt to share your joys with anyone else. People will sympathize with pain, but not with pleasure. Good night, George."

He bent over the pillow and kissed the smiling face that was as smooth as a child's to his lips.

Guy lay awake for a long time, and his eyes were dry and aching before sleep finally came upon him. He spent those dark interminable hours thinking — thinking hard, intensely, painfully. No sooner had he left George's room than a feeling of intense unhappiness took hold of him. "Distorted with misery," that was how he described himself; he loved to coin such phrases, for he felt the artist's need to express as well as to feel and think. Distorted with misery, he went to bed; distorted with misery, he lay and thought and thought. He had, positively, a sense of physical distortion: his guts were twisted, he had a hunched back, his legs were withered. . . .

He had the right to be miserable. He was going back to France to-morrow, he had trampled on his mistress's love, and he was beginning to doubt himself, to wonder whether his whole life hadn't been one ludicrous folly.

He reviewed his life, like a man about to die. Born in another age, he would, he supposed, have been religious. He had got over religion early, like the measles — at nine a Low Churchman, at twelve a Broad Churchman, and at fourteen an Agnostic — but he still retained the temperament of a religious man. Intellectually he was a Voltairian, emotionally a Bunyanite. To have arrived at this formula was, he felt, a distinct advance in self-knowledge. And what a fool he had been with Marjorie! The priggishness of his attitude — making her read Wordsworth when she didn't want to. Intellectual love — his phrases weren't always a blessing; how hopelessly he had deceived himself with words! And now this evening the crowning outrage, when he had behaved to her like a hysterical anchorite dealing with a temptation. His body tingled, at the recollection, with shame.

An idea occurred to him; he would go and see her, tiptoe downstairs to her room, kneel by her bed, ask for her forgiveness. He lay quite still imagining the whole scene. He even went so far as to get out of bed, open the door, which made a noise in the process like a peacock's scream, quite unnerving him, and creep to the head of the stairs. He stood there a long time, his feet growing colder and colder, and then decided that the adventure was really too sordidly like the episode at the beginning of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. The door screamed again as he returned; he lay in bed, trying to persuade himself that his self-control had been admirable and at the same time cursing his absence of courage in not carrying out what he had intended.

He remembered a lecture he had given Marjorie once on the subject of Sacred and Profane Love. Poor girl, how had she listened in patience? He could see her attending with such a serious expression on her face that she looked quite ugly. She looked so beautiful when she was laughing or happy; at the Whites', for instance, three nights ago, when George and she had danced after dinner and he had sat, secretly envious, reading a book in the corner of the room and looking superior. He wouldn't learn to dance, but always wished he could. It was a barbarous, aphrodisiacal occupation, he said, and he preferred to spend his time and energies in reading. Salvationist again! What a much wiser person George

had proved himself than he. He had no prejudices, no theoretical views about the conduct of life; he just lived, admirably, naturally, as the spirit or the flesh moved him. If only he could live his life again, if only he could abolish this evening's monstrous stupidity. . . .

Marjorie also lay awake. She too felt herself distorted with misery. How odiously cruel he had been, and how much she longed to forgive him! Perhaps he would come in the dark, when all the house was asleep, tiptoeing into the room very quietly to kneel by her bed and ask to be forgiven. Would he come, she wondered? She stared into the blackness above her and about her, willing him to come, commanding him — angry and wretched because he was so slow in coming, because he didn't come at all. They were both of them asleep before two.

Seven hours of sleep make a surprising difference to the state of mind. Guy, who thought he was distorted for life, woke to find himself healthily normal. Marjorie's angers and despairs had subsided. The hour they had together between breakfast and Guy's departure was filled with almost trivial conversation. Guy was determined to say something about last's night incident. But it was only at the very last moment, when the dog-cart was actually at the door, that he managed to bring out some stammered repentance for what had happened last night.

"Don't think about it," Marjorie had told him. So they had kissed and parted, and their relations were precisely the same as they had been before Guy came on leave.

George was sent out a week or two later, and a month after that they heard at Blaybury that he had lost a leg — fortunately below the knee.

"Poor boy!" said Mr. Petherton. "I must really write a line to his mother at once."

Jacobsen made no comment, but it was a surprise to him to find how much he had been moved by the news. George White had lost a leg; he couldn't get the thought out of his head. But only below the knee; he might be called lucky.

Lucky — things are deplorably relative, he reflected. One thanks God because He has thought fit to deprive one of His creatures of a limb.

"Neither delighteth He in any man's legs," eh? Nous avons changé tout cela.

George had lost a leg. There would be no more of that Olympian speed and strength and beauty. Jacobsen conjured up before his memory a vision of the boy running with his great fawn-coloured dog across green expanses of grass. How glorious he had looked, his fine brown hair blowing like fire in the wind of his own speed, his cheeks flushed, his eyes very bright. And how easily he ran, with long, bounding strides, looking down at the dog that jumped and barked at his side!

He had had a perfection, and now it was spoilt. Instead of a leg he had a stump. *Moignon*, the French called it; there was the right repulsive sound about *moignon* which was lacking in "stump." Soignons le moignon en l'oignant d'oignons.

Often, at night before he went to sleep, he couldn't help thinking of George and the war and all the millions of *moignons* there must be in the world. He had a dream one night of slimy red knobbles, large polyp-like things, growing as he looked at them, swelling between his hands — *moignons*, in fact.

George was well enough in the late autumn to come home. He had learnt to hop along on his crutches very skilfully, and his preposterous donkey-drawn bath-chair soon became a familiar object in the lanes of the neighbourhood. It was a grand sight to behold when George rattled past at the trot, leaning forward like a young Phœbus in his chariot and urging his unwilling beast with voice and crutch. He drove over to Blaybury almost every day; Marjorie and he had endless talks about life and love and Guy and other absorbing topics. With Jacobsen he played piquet and discussed a thousand subjects. He was always gay and happy — that was what especially lacerated Jacobsen's heart with pity.

IV

THE Christmas holidays had begun, and the Reverend Roger was back again at Blaybury. He was sitting at the writing-table in the drawing-room, engaged, at the moment, in biting the end of his pen and scratching his head. His face wore an expression of perplexity; one would have said that he was in the throes of literary composition. Which indeed he was: “Beloved ward of Alfred Petherton . . .” he said aloud. “Beloved ward . . .” He shook his head doubtfully.

The door opened and Jacobsen came into the room. Roger turned round at once.

“Have you heard the grievous news?” he said.

“No. What?”

“Poor Guy is dead. We got the telegram half an hour ago.”

“Good God!” said Jacobsen in an agonized voice which seemed to show that he had been startled out of the calm belonging to one who leads the life of reason. He had been conscious ever since George’s mutilation that his defences were growing weaker; external circumstance was steadily encroaching upon him. Now it had broken in and, for the moment, he was at its mercy. Guy dead. . . . He pulled himself together sufficiently to say, after a pause, “Well, I suppose it was only to be expected sooner or later. Poor boy.”

“Yes, it’s terrible, isn’t it?” said Roger, shaking his head. “I am just writing out an announcement to send to the *Times*. One can hardly say ‘the beloved ward of Alfred Petherton,’ can one? It doesn’t sound quite right; and yet one would like somehow to give public expression to the deep affection Alfred felt for him. ‘Beloved ward’ — no, decidedly it won’t do.”

“You’ll have to get round it somehow,” said Jacobsen. Roger’s presence somehow made a return to the life of reason easier.

“Poor Alfred,” the other went on. “You’ve no idea how hardly he takes it. He feels as though he had given a son.”

“What a waste it is!” Jacobsen exclaimed. He was altogether too deeply moved.

“I have done my best to console Alfred. One must always bear in mind for what Cause he died.”

“All those potentialities destroyed. He was an able fellow, was Guy.” Jacobsen was speaking more to himself than to his companion, but Roger took up the suggestion.

“Yes, he certainly was that. Alfred thought he was very promising. It is for his sake I am particularly sorry. I never got on very well with the boy myself. He was too eccentric for my taste. There’s such a thing as being too clever, isn’t there? It’s rather inhuman. He used to do most remarkable Greek iambics for me when he was a boy. I dare say he was a very good fellow under all that cleverness and queerness. It’s all very distressing, very grievous.”

“How was he killed?”

“Died of wounds yesterday morning. Do you think it would be a good thing to put in some quotation at the end of the announcement in the paper? Something like, ‘Dulce et Decorum,’ or ‘Sed Miles, sed Pro Patria,’ or ‘Per Ardua ad Astra’?”

“It hardly seems essential,” said Jacobsen.

“Perhaps not.” Roger’s lips moved silently; he was counting. “Forty-two words. I suppose that counts as eight lines. Poor Marjorie! I hope she won’t feel it too bitterly. Alfred told me they were unofficially engaged.”

“So I gathered.”

“I am afraid I shall have to break the news to her. Alfred is too much upset to be able to do anything himself. It will be a most painful task. Poor girl! I suppose as a matter of fact they would not have been able to marry for some time, as Guy had next to no money. These early marriages are very rash. Let me see: eight times three shillings is one pound four, isn’t it? I suppose they take cheques all right?”

“How old was he?” asked Jacobsen.

“Twenty-four and a few months.”

Jacobsen was walking restlessly up and down the room. “Just reaching maturity! One is thankful these days to have one’s own work and thoughts to

take the mind off these horrors."

"It's terrible, isn't it? — terrible. So many of my pupils have been killed now that I can hardly keep count of the number."

There was a tapping at the French window; it was Marjorie asking to be let in. She had been cutting holly and ivy for the Christmas decorations, and carried a basket full of dark, shining leaves.

Jacobsen unbolted the big window and Marjorie came in, flushed with the cold and smiling. Jacobsen had never seen her looking so handsome: she was superb, radiant, like Iphigenia coming in her wedding garments to the sacrifice.

"The holly is very poor this year," she remarked. "I am afraid we shan't make much of a show with our Christmas decorations."

Jacobsen took the opportunity of slipping out through the French window. Although it was unpleasantly cold, he walked up and down the flagged paths of the Dutch garden, hatless and overcoatless, for quite a long time.

Marjorie moved about the drawing-room fixing sprigs of holly round the picture frames. Her uncle watched her, hesitating to speak; he was feeling enormously uncomfortable.

"I am afraid," he said at last, "that your father's very upset this morning." His voice was husky; he made an explosive noise to clear his throat.

"Is it his palpitations?" Marjorie asked coolly; her father's infirmities did not cause her much anxiety.

"No, no." Roger realized that his opening gambit had been a mistake. "No. It is — er — a more mental affliction, and one which, I fear, will touch you closely too. Marjorie, you must be strong and courageous; we have just heard that Guy is dead."

"Guy dead?" She couldn't believe it; she had hardly envisaged the possibility; besides, he was on the Staff. "Oh, Uncle Roger, it isn't true."

"I am afraid there is no doubt. The War Office telegram came just after you had gone out for the holly."

Marjorie sat down on the sofa and hid her face in her hands. Guy dead; she would never see him again, never see him again, never; she began to cry.

Roger approached and stood, with his hand on her shoulder, in the attitude of a thought-reader. To those overwhelmed by sorrow the touch of a friendly hand is often comforting. They have fallen into an abyss, and the touching hand serves to remind them that life and God and human sympathy still exist, however bottomless the gulf of grief may seem. On Marjorie's shoulder her uncle's hand rested with a damp, heavy warmth that was peculiarly unpleasant.

"Dear child, it is very grievous, I know; but you must try and be strong and bear it bravely. We all have our cross to bear. We shall be celebrating the Birth of Christ in two days' time; remember with what patience He received the cup of agony. And then remember for what Cause Guy has given his life. He has died a hero's death, a martyr's death, witnessing to Heaven against the powers of evil." Roger was unconsciously slipping into the words of his last sermon in the school chapel. "You should feel pride in his death as well as sorrow. There, there, poor child." He patted her shoulder two or three times. "Perhaps it would be kinder to leave you now."

For some time after her uncle's departure Marjorie sat motionless in the same position, her body bent forward, her face in her hands. She kept on repeating the words, "Never again," and the sound of them filled her with despair and made her cry. They seemed to open up such a dreary grey infinite vista— "never again." They were as a spell evoking tears.

She got up at last and began walking aimlessly about the room. She paused in front of a little old black-framed mirror that hung near the window and looked at her reflection in the glass. She had expected somehow to look different, to have changed. She was surprised to find her face entirely unaltered: grave, melancholy perhaps, but still the same face she had looked at when she was doing her hair this morning. A curious idea entered her head; she wondered whether she would be able to smile now, at this dreadful moment. She moved the muscles of her face and was overwhelmed with shame at the sight of the mirthless grin that mocked her from the glass. What a beast she was! She burst

into tears and threw herself again on the sofa, burying her face in a cushion. The door opened, and by the noise of shuffling and tapping Marjorie recognized the approach of George White on his crutches. She did not look up. At the sight of the abject figure on the sofa, George halted, uncertain what he should do. Should he quietly go away again, or should he stay and try to say something comforting? The sight of her lying there gave him almost physical pain. He decided to stay.

He approached the sofa and stood over her, suspended on his crutches. Still she did not lift her head, but pressed her face deeper into the smothering blindness of the cushion, as though to shut out from her consciousness all the external world. George looked down at her in silence. The little delicate tendrils of hair on the nape of her neck were exquisitely beautiful.

“I was told about it,” he said at last, “just now, as I came in. It’s too awful. I think I cared for Guy more than for almost anyone in the world. We both did, didn’t we?”

She began sobbing again. George was overcome with remorse, feeling that he had somehow hurt her, somehow added to her pain by what he had said. “Poor child, poor child,” he said, almost aloud. She was a year older than he, but she seemed so helplessly and pathetically young now that she was crying.

Standing up for long tired him, and he lowered himself, slowly and painfully, into the sofa beside her. She looked up at last and began drying her eyes.

“I’m so wretched, George, so specially wretched because I feel I didn’t act rightly towards darling Guy. There were times, you know, when I wondered whether it wasn’t all a great mistake, our being engaged. Sometimes I felt I almost hated him. I’d been feeling so odious about him these last weeks. And now comes this, and it makes me realize how awful I’ve been towards him.” She found it a relief to confide and confess; George was so sympathetic, he would understand. “I’ve been a beast.”

Her voice broke, and it was as though something had broken in George’s head. He was overwhelmed with pity; he couldn’t bear it that she should suffer.

“You mustn’t distress yourself unnecessarily, Marjorie dear,” he begged her, stroking the back of her hand with his large hard palm. “Don’t.”

Marjorie went on remorselessly. “When Uncle Roger told me just now, do you know what I did? I said to myself, Do I really care? I couldn’t make out. I looked in the glass to see if I could tell from my face. Then I suddenly thought I’d see whether I could laugh, and I did. And that made me feel how detestable I was, and I started crying again. Oh, I have been a beast, George, haven’t I?”

She burst into a passion of tears and hid her face once more in the friendly cushion. George couldn’t bear it at all. He laid his hand on her shoulder and bent forward, close to her, till his face almost touched her hair. “Don’t,” he cried. “Don’t, Marjorie. You mustn’t torment yourself like this. I know you loved Guy; we both loved him. He would have wanted us to be happy and brave and to go on with life — not make his death a source of hopeless despair.” There was a silence, broken only by the agonizing sound of sobbing. “Marjorie, darling, you mustn’t cry.”

“There, I’m not,” said Marjorie through her tears. “I’ll try to stop. Guy wouldn’t have wanted us to cry for him. You’re right; he would have wanted us to live for him — worthily, in his splendid way.”

“We who knew him and loved him must make our lives a memorial of him.” In ordinary circumstances George would have died rather than make a remark like that. But in speaking of the dead, people forget themselves and conform to the peculiar obituary convention of thought and language. Spontaneously, unconsciously, George had conformed.

Marjorie wiped her eyes. “Thank you, George. You know so well what darling Guy would have liked. You’ve made me feel stronger to bear it. But, all the same, I do feel odious for what I thought about him sometimes. I didn’t love him enough. And now it’s too late. I shall never see him again.” The spell of that “never” worked again: Marjorie sobbed despairingly.

George’s distress knew no bounds. He put his arm round Marjorie’s shoulders and kissed her hair. “Don’t cry, Marjorie. Everybody feels like that sometimes,

even towards the people they love most. You really mustn't make yourself miserable."

Once more she lifted her face and looked at him with a heart-breaking, tearful smile. "You have been too sweet to me, George. I don't know what I should have done without you."

"Poor darling!" said George. "I can't bear to see you unhappy." Their faces were close to one another, and it seemed natural that at this point their lips should meet in a long kiss. "We'll remember only the splendid, glorious things about Guy," he went on— "what a wonderful person he was, and how much we loved him." He kissed her again.

"Perhaps our darling Guy is with us here even now," said Marjorie, with a look of ecstasy on her face.

"Perhaps he is," George echoed.

It was at this point that a heavy footstep was heard and a hand rattled at the door. Marjorie and George moved a little farther apart. The intruder was Roger, who bustled in, rubbing his hands with an air of conscious heartiness, studiously pretending that nothing untoward had occurred. It is our English tradition that we should conceal our emotions. "Well, well," he said. "I think we had better be going in to luncheon. The bell has gone."

EUPOMPUS GAVE SPLENDOUR TO ART BY NUMBERS

"I HAVE MADE a discovery," said Emberlin as I entered his room.

"What about?" I asked.

"A discovery," he replied, "about *Discoveries*." He radiated an unconcealed satisfaction; the conversation had evidently gone exactly as he had intended it to go. He had made his phrase, and, repeating it lovingly— "A discovery about *Discoveries*" — he smiled benignly at me, enjoying my look of mystification — an expression which, I confess, I had purposely exaggerated in order to give him pleasure. For Emberlin, in many ways so childish, took an especial delight in puzzling and nonplussing his acquaintances; and these small triumphs, these little "scores" off people afforded him some of his keenest pleasures. I always indulged his weakness when I could, for it was worth while being on Emberlin's good books. To be allowed to listen to his post-prandial conversation was a privilege indeed. Not only was he himself a consummately good talker, but he had also the power of stimulating others to talk well. He was like some subtle wine, intoxicating just to the Meredithian level of tipsiness. In his company you would find yourself lifted to the sphere of nimble and mercurial conceptions; you would suddenly realize that some miracle had occurred, that you were living no longer in a dull world of jumbled things but somewhere above the hotch-potch in a glassily perfect universe of ideas, where all was informed, consistent, symmetrical. And it was Emberlin who, godlike, had the power of creating this new and real world. He built it out of words, this crystal Eden, where no belly-going snake, devourer of quotidian dirt, might ever enter and disturb its harmonies. Since I first knew Emberlin I have come to have a greatly enhanced respect for magic and all the formules of its liturgy. If by words Emberlin can create a new world for me, can make my spirit slough off completely the domination of the old, why should not he or I or anyone, having found the

suitable phrases, exert by means of them an influence more vulgarly miraculous upon the world of mere things? Indeed, when I compare Emberlin and the common or garden black magician of commerce, it seems to me that Emberlin is the greater thaumaturge. But let that pass; I am straying from my purpose, which was to give some description of the man who so confidentially whispered to me that he had made a discovery about *Discoveries*.

In the best sense of the word, then, Emberlin was academic. For us who knew him his rooms were an oasis of aloofness planted secretly in the heart of the desert of London. He exhaled an atmosphere that combined the fantastic speculativeness of the undergraduate with the more mellowed oddity of incredibly wise and antique dons. He was immensely erudite, but in a wholly unencyclopædic way — a mine of irrelevant information, as his enemies said of him. He wrote a certain amount, but, like Mallarmé, avoided publication, deeming it akin to "the offence of exhibitionism." Once, however, in the folly of youth, some dozen years ago, he had published a volume of verses. He spent a good deal of time now in assiduously collecting copies of his book and burning them. There can be but very few left in the world now. My friend Cope had the fortune to pick one up the other day — a little blue book, which he showed me very secretly. I am at a loss to understand why Emberlin wishes to stamp out all trace of it. There is nothing to be ashamed of in the book; some of the verses, indeed, are, in their young ecstatic fashion, good. But they are certainly conceived in a style that is unlike that of his present poems. Perhaps it is that which makes him so implacable against them. What he writes now for very private manuscript circulation is curious stuff. I confess I prefer the earlier work; I do not like the stony, hard-edged quality of this sort of thing — the only one I can remember of his later productions. It is a sonnet on a porcelain figure of a woman, dug up at Cnossus:

"Her eyes of bright unwinking glaze
All imperturbable do not
Even make pretences to regard
The jutting absence of her stays

Where many a Syrian gallipot
Excites desire with spilth of nard.
The bistred rims above the fard
Of cheeks as red as bergamot
Attest that no shamefaced delays
Will clog fulfilment nor retard
Full payment of the Cyprian's praise
Down to the last remorseful jot.
Hail priestess of we know not what
Strange cult of Mycenean days!"

Regrettably, I cannot remember any of Emberlin's French poems. His peculiar muse expresses herself better, I think, in that language than in her native tongue.

Such is Emberlin; such, I should rather say, *was* he, for, as I propose to show, he is not now the man that he was when he whispered so confidentially to me, as I entered the room, that he had made a discovery about *Discoveries*.

I waited patiently till he had finished his little game of mystification and, when the moment seemed ripe, I asked him to explain himself. Emberlin was ready to open out.

"Well," he began, "these are the facts — a tedious introduction, I fear, but necessary. Years ago, when I was first reading Ben Jonson's *Discoveries*, that queer jotting of his, 'Eupompus gave splendour to Art by Numbers,' tickled my curiosity. You yourself must have been struck by the phrase, everybody must have noticed it; and everybody must have noticed too that no commentator has a word to say on the subject. That is the way of commentators — the obvious points fulsomely explained and discussed, the hard passages, about which one might want to know something passed over in the silence of sheer ignorance. 'Eupompus gave splendour to Art by Numbers' — the absurd phrase stuck in my head. At one time it positively haunted me. I used to chant it in my bath, set to music as an anthem. It went like this, so far as I remember" — and he burst into

song: “‘Eupompus, Eu-u-pompus gave sple-e-e-endour . . .’” and so on, through all the repetitions, the dragged-out rises and falls of a parodied anthem.

“I sing you this,” he said when he had finished, “just to show you what a hold that dreadful sentence took upon my mind. For eight years, off and on, its senselessness has besieged me. I have looked up Eupompus in all the obvious books of reference, of course. He is there all right — Alexandrian artist, eternized by some wretched little author in some even wretcheder little anecdote, which at the moment I entirely forget; it had nothing, at any rate, to do with the embellishment of art by numbers. Long ago I gave up the search as hopeless; Eupompus remained for me a shadowy figure of mystery, author of some nameless outrage, bestower of some forgotten benefit upon the art that he practised. His history seemed wrapt in an impenetrable darkness. And then yesterday I discovered all about him and his art and his numbers. A chance discovery, than which few things have given me a greater pleasure.

“I happened upon it, as I say, yesterday when I was glancing through a volume of Zuylerius. Not, of course, the Zuylerius one knows,” he added quickly, “otherwise one would have had the heart out of Eupompus’ secret years ago.”

“Of course,” I repeated, “not the familiar Zuylerius.”

“Exactly,” said Emberlin, taking seriously my flippancy, “not the familiar John Zuylerius, Junior, but the elder Henricus Zuylerius, a much less — though perhaps undeservedly so — renowned figure than his son. But this is not the time to discuss their respective merits. At any rate, I discovered in a volume of critical dialogues by the elder Zuylerius, the reference, to which, without doubt, Jonson was referring in his note. (It was of course a mere jotting, never meant to be printed, but which Jonson’s literary executors pitched into the book with all the rest of the available posthumous materials.) ‘Eupompus gave splendour to Art by Numbers’ — Zuylerius gives a very circumstantial account of the process. He must, I suppose, have found the sources for it in some writer now lost to us.”

Emberlin paused a moment to muse. The loss of the work of any ancient writer gave him the keenest sorrow. I rather believe he had written a version of the unrecovered books of Petronius. Some day I hope I shall be permitted to see what conception Emberlin has of the *Satyricon* as a whole. He would, I am sure, do Petronius justice — almost too much, perhaps.

"What was the story of Eupompus?" I asked. "I am all curiosity to know."

Emberlin heaved a sigh and went on.

"Zuylerius' narrative," he said, "is very bald, but on the whole lucid; and I think it gives one the main points of the story. I will give it you in my own words; that is preferable to reading his Dutch Latin. Eupompus, then, was one of the most fashionable portrait-painters of Alexandria. His clientele was large, his business immensely profitable. For a half-length in oils the great courtesans would pay him a month's earnings. He would paint likenesses of the merchant princes in exchange for the costliest of their outlandish treasures. Coal-black potentates would come a thousand miles out of Ethiopia to have a miniature limned on some specially choice panel of ivory; and for payment there would be camel-loads of gold and spices. Fame, riches, and honour came to him while he was yet young; an unparalleled career seemed to lie before him. And then, quite suddenly, he gave it all up — refused to paint another portrait. The doors of his studio were closed. It was in vain that clients, however rich, however distinguished, demanded admission; the slaves had their order; Eupompus would see no one but his own intimates."

Emberlin made a pause in his narrative.

"What was Eupompus doing?" I asked.

"He was, of course," said Emberlin, "occupied in giving splendour to Art by Numbers. And this, as far as I can gather from Zuylerius, is how it all happened. He just suddenly fell in love with numbers — head over ears, amorous of pure counting. Number seemed to him to be the sole reality, the only thing about which the mind of man could be certain. To count was the one thing worth doing, because it was the one thing you could be sure of doing right. Thus, art, that it may have any value at all, must ally itself with reality — must, that is,

possess a numerical foundation. He carried the idea into practice by painting the first picture in his new style. It was a gigantic canvas, covering several hundred square feet — I have no doubt that Eupompus could have told you the exact area to an inch — and upon it was represented an illimitable ocean covered, as far as the eye could reach in every direction, with a multitude of black swans. There were thirty-three thousand of these black swans, each, even though it might be but a speck on the horizon, distinctly limned. In the middle of the ocean was an island, upon which stood a more or less human figure having three eyes, three arms and legs, three breasts and three navels. In the leaden sky three suns were dimly expiring. There was nothing more in the picture; Zuylerius describes it exactly. Eupompus spent nine months of hard work in painting it. The privileged few who were allowed to see it pronounced it, finished, a masterpiece. They gathered round Eupompus in a little school, calling themselves the Philarithmics. They would sit for hours in front of his great work, contemplating the swans and counting them; according to the Philarithmics, to count and to contemplate were the same thing.

"Eupompus' next picture, representing an orchard of identical trees set in quincunxes, was regarded with less favour by the connoisseurs. His studies of crowds were, however, more highly esteemed; in these were portrayed masses of people arranged in groups that exactly imitated the number and position of the stars making up various of the more famous constellations. And then there was his famous picture of the amphitheatre, which created a furore among the Philarithmics. Zuylerius again gives us a detailed description. Tier upon tier of seats are seen, all occupied by strange Cyclopean figures. Each tier accommodates more people than the tier below, and the number rises in a complicated but regular progression. All the figures seated in the amphitheatre possess but a single eye, enormous and luminous, planted in the middle of the forehead: and all these thousands of single eyes are fixed, in a terrible and menacing scrutiny, upon a dwarf-like creature cowering pitiably in the arena. . . . He alone of the multitude possesses two eyes.

“I would give anything to see that picture,” Emberlin added, after a pause. “The colouring, you know; Zuylerius gives no hint, but I feel somehow certain that the dominant tone must have been a fierce brick-red — a red granite amphitheatre filled with a red-robed assembly, sharply defined against an implacable blue sky.”

“Their eyes would be green,” I suggested.

Emberlin closed his eyes to visualize the scene and then nodded a slow and rather dubious assent.

“Up to this point,” Emberlin resumed at length, “Zuylerius’ account is very clear. But his descriptions of the later philarithmic art become extremely obscure; I doubt whether he understood in the least what it was all about. I will give you such meaning as I manage to extract from his chaos. Eupompus seems to have grown tired of painting merely numbers of objects. He wanted now to represent Number itself. And then he conceived the plan of rendering visible the fundamental ideas of life through the medium of those purely numerical terms into which, according to him, they must ultimately resolve themselves. Zuylerius speaks vaguely of a picture of Eros, which seems to have consisted of a series of interlacing planes. Eupompus’ fancy seems next to have been taken by various of the Socratic dialogues upon the nature of general ideas, and he made a series of illustrations for them in the same arithmo-geometric style. Finally there is Zuylerius’ wild description of the last picture that Eupompus ever painted. I can make very little of it. The subject of the work, at least, is clearly stated; it was a representation of Pure Number, or God and the Universe, or whatever you like to call that pleasingly inane conception of totality. It was a picture of the cosmos seen, I take it, through a rather Neoplatonic *camera obscura* — very clear and in small. Zuylerius suggests a design of planes radiating out from a single point of light. I dare say something of the kind came in. Actually, I have no doubt, the work was a very adequate rendering in visible form of the conception of the one and the many, with all the intermediate stages of enlightenment between matter and the *Fons Deitatis*. However, it’s no use speculating what the picture may have been going to look like. Poor old Eupompus went mad before he had

completely finished it and, after he had dispatched two of the admiring Philarithmics with a hammer, he flung himself out of the window and broke his neck. That was the end of him, and that was how he gave splendour, regrettably transient, to Art by Numbers."

Emberlin stopped. We brooded over our pipes in silence; poor old Eupompus!

That was four months ago, and to-day Emberlin is a confirmed and apparently irreclaimable Philarithmic, a quite whole-hearted Eupompian.

It was always Emberlin's way to take up the ideas that he finds in books and to put them into practice. He was once, for example, a working alchemist, and attained to considerable proficiency in the Great Art. He studied mnemonics under Bruno and Raymond Lully, and constructed for himself a model of the latter's syllogizing machine, in hopes of gaining that universal knowledge which the Enlightened Doctor guaranteed to its user. This time it is Eupompianism, and the thing has taken hold of him. I have held up to him all the hideous warnings that I can find in history. But it is no use.

There is the pitiable spectacle of Dr. Johnson under the tyranny of an Eupompian ritual, counting the posts and the paving-stones of Fleet Street. He himself knew best how nearly a madman he was.

And then I count as Eupompians all gamblers, all calculating boys, all interpreters of the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse; then too the Elberfeld horses, most complete of all Eupompians.

And here was Emberlin joining himself to this sect, degrading himself to the level of counting beasts and irrational children and men, more or less insane. Dr. Johnson was at least born with a strain of the Eupompian aberration in him; Emberlin is busily and consciously acquiring it. My expostulations, the expostulations of all his friends, are as yet unavailing. It is in vain that I tell Emberlin that counting is the easiest thing in the world to do, that when I am utterly exhausted, my brain, for lack of ability to perform any other work, just counts and reckons, like a machine, like an Elberfeld horse. It all falls on deaf ears; Emberlin merely smiles and shows me some new numerical joke that he

has discovered. Emberlin can never enter a tiled bathroom now without counting how many courses of tiles there are from floor to ceiling. He regards it as an interesting fact that there are twenty-six rows of tiles in his bathroom and thirty-two in mine, while all the public lavatories in Holborn have the same number. He knows now how many paces it is from any one point in London to any other. I have given up going for walks with him. I am always made so distressingly conscious by his preoccupied look, that he is counting his steps.

His evenings, too, have become profoundly melancholy; the conversation, however well it may begin, always comes round to the same nauseating subject. We can never escape numbers; Eupompus haunts us. It is not as if we were mathematicians and could discuss problems of any interest or value. No, none of us are mathematicians, least of all Emberlin. Emberlin likes talking about such points as the numerical significance of the Trinity, the immense importance of its being three in one, not forgetting the even greater importance of its being one in three. He likes giving us statistics about the speed of light or the rate of growth in fingernails. He loves to speculate on the nature of odd and even numbers. And he seems to be unconscious how much he has changed for the worse. He is happy in an exclusively absorbing interest. It is as though some mental leprosy had fallen upon his intelligence.

In another year or so, I tell Emberlin, he may almost be able to compete with the calculating horses on their own ground. He will have lost all traces of his reason, but he will be able to extract cube roots in his head. It occurs to me that the reason why Eupompus killed himself was not that he was mad; on the contrary, it was because he was, temporarily, sane. He had been mad for years, and then suddenly the idiot’s self-complacency was lit up by a flash of sanity. By its momentary light he saw into what gulfs of imbecility he had plunged. He saw and understood, and the full horror, the lamentable absurdity of the situation made him desperate. He vindicated Eupompus against Eupompianism, humanity against the Philarithmics. It gives me the greatest pleasure to think that he disposed of two of that hideous crew before he died himself.

HAPPY FAMILIES

THE SCENE IS a conservatory. Luxuriant tropical plants are seen looming through a greenish aquarium twilight, punctuated here and there by the surprising pink of several Chinese lanterns hanging from the roof or on the branches of trees, while a warm yellow radiance streams out from the ball-room by a door on the left of the scene. Through the glass of the conservatory, at the back of the stage, one perceives a black-and-white landscape under the moon — expanses of snow, lined and dotted with coal-black hedges and trees. Outside is frost and death: but within the conservatory all is palpitating and steaming with tropical life and heat. Enormous fantastic plants encumber it; trees, creepers that writhe with serpentine life, orchids of every kind. Everywhere dense vegetation; horrible flowers that look like bottled spiders, like suppurating wounds; flowers with eyes and tongues, with moving, sensitive tentacles, with breasts and teeth and spotted skins.

The strains of a waltz float in through the ball-room door, and to that slow, soft music there enter, in parallel processions, the two families which are respectively Mr. Aston J. Tyrrell and Miss Topsy Garrick.

The doyen of the Tyrrell family is a young and perhaps too cultured literary man with rather long, dark brown hair, a face well cut and sensitive, if a trifle weak about the lower jaw, and a voice whose exquisite modulations could only be the product of education at one of the two Great Universities. We will call him plain Aston. Miss Topsy, the head of the Garrick family, is a young woman of not quite twenty, with sleek, yellow hair hanging, like a page’s, short and thick about her ears; boyish, too, in her slenderness and length of leg — boyish, but feminine and attractive to the last degree. Miss Topsy paints charmingly, sings in a small, pure voice that twists the heart and makes the bowels yearn in the hearing of it, is well educated, and has read, or at least heard of, most of the

best books in three languages, knows something, too, of economics and the doctrines of Freud.

They enter arm in arm, fresh from the dance, trailing behind them with their disengaged hands two absurd ventriloquist's dummies of themselves. They sit down on a bench placed in the middle of the stage under a kind of arbour festooned with fabulous flowers. The other members of the two families lurk in the tropical twilight of the background.

Aston advances his dummy and makes it speak, moving its mouth and limbs appropriately by means of the secret levers which his hand controls.

ASTON'S DUMMY.

What a perfect floor it is to-night!

TOPSY'S DUMMY.

Yes, it's like ice, isn't it? And such a good band.

ASTON'S DUMMY.

Oh yes, a very good band.

TOPSY'S DUMMY.

They play at dinner-time at the Necropole, you know.

ASTON'S DUMMY.

Really! (*A long, uncomfortable silence.*)

(*From under a lofty twangum tree emerges the figure of* CAIN WASHINGTON TYRRELL, ASTON'S *negro brother — for the* TYRRELLS, *I regret to say, have a lick of the tar-brush in them and* CAIN *is a Mendelian throwback to the pure Jamaican type.* CAIN *is stout and his black face shines with grease. The*

whites of his eyes are like enamel, his smile is chryselephantine. He is dressed in faultless evening dress and a ribbon of seals tinkles on his stomach. He walks with legs wide apart, the upper part of his body thrown back and his belly projecting, as though he were supporting the weight of an Aristophanic actor's costume. He struts up and down in front of the couple on the seat, grinning and slapping himself on the waistcoat.)

CAIN.

What hair, nyum nyum! and the nape of her neck; and her body — how slender! and what lovely movements, nyum nyum! (*Approaching* ASTON *and speaking into his ear.*) Eh? eh? eh?

ASTON.

Go away, you pig. Go away. (*He holds up his dummy as a shield:* CAIN *retires discomfited.*)

ASTON'S DUMMY.

Have you read any amusing novels lately?

TOPSY.

(*Speaking over the head of her dummy.*) No; I never read novels. They are mostly so frightful, aren't they?

ASTON.

(*Enthusiastically.*) How splendid! Neither do I. I only write them sometimes, that's all. (*They abandon their dummies, which fall limply into one another's arms and collapse on to the floor with an expiring sigh.*)

TOPSY.

You write them? I didn’t know. . . .

ASTON.

Oh, I’d very much rather you didn’t know. I shouldn’t like you ever to read one of them. They’re all awful: still, they keep the pot boiling, you know. But tell me, what do you read?

TOPSY.

Mostly history, and philosophy, and a little criticism and psychology, and lots of poetry.

ASTON.

My dear young lady! how wonderful, how altogether unexpectedly splendid. (CAIN *emerges with the third brother,* SIR JASPER, *who is a paler, thinner, more sinister and aristocratic* ASTON.)

CAIN.

Nyum nyum nyum. . . .

SIR JASPER.

What a perfect sentence that was of yours, Aston: quite Henry Jamesian! “My dear young lady” — as though you were forty years her senior; and the rare old-worldliness of that “altogether unexpectedly splendid”! Admirable. I don’t remember your ever employing quite exactly this opening gambit before: but of course there were things very like it. (*To* CAIN.) What a nasty spectacle you are, Cain, gnashing your teeth like that!

CAIN.

Nyum nyum nyum.

(ASTON *and* TOPSY *are enthusiastically talking about books: the two brothers, finding themselves quite unnoticed, retire into the shade of their twangum tree.* BELLE GARRICK *has been hovering behind* TOPSY *for some time past. She is more obviously pretty than her sister, full-bosomed and with a loose, red, laughing mouth. Unable to attract* TOPSY'S *attention, she turns round and calls,* "HENRIKA." *A pale face with wide, surprised eyes peeps round the trunk, hairy like a mammoth's leg, of a kadapoo tree with magenta leaves and flame-coloured blossoms. This is* HENRIKA, TOPSY'S *youngest sister. She is dressed in a little white muslin frock set off with blue ribbons.*)

HENRIKA.

(*Tiptoes forward.*) Here I am; what is it? I was rather frightened of that man. But he really seems quite nice and tame, doesn't he?

BELLE.

Of course he is! What a goose you are to hide like that!

HENRIKA.

He seems a nice, quiet, gentle man; and *so* clever.

BELLE.

What good hands he has, hasn't he? (*Approaching* TOPSY *and whispering in her ear.*) Your hair's going into your eyes, my dear. Toss it back in that pretty way you have. (TOPSY *tosses her head; the soft, golden bell of hair quivers elastically about her ears.*) That's right!

CAIN.

(*Bounding into the air and landing with feet apart, knees bent, and a hand on either knee.*) Oh, nyum nyum!

ASTON.

Oh, the beauty of that movement! It simply makes one catch one's breath with surprised pleasure, as the gesture of a perfect dancer might.

SIR JASPER.

Beautiful, wasn't it? — a pleasure purely æsthetic and æsthetically pure. Listen to Cain.

ASTON.

(*To* TOPSY.) And do you ever try writing yourself? I'm sure you ought to.

SIR JASPER.

Yes, yes, we're sure you ought to. Eh, Cain?

TOPSY.

Well, I have written a little poetry — or rather a few bad verses — at one time or another.

ASTON.

Really now! What about, may I ask?

TOPSY.

Well . . . (*hesitating*) about different things, you know. (*She fans herself rather nervously.*)

BELLE.

(*Leaning over* TOPSY'S *shoulder and addressing* ASTON *directly*.) Mostly about Love. (*She dwells long and voluptuously on the last word, pronouncing it "lovv" rather than "luvv."*)

CAIN.

Oh, dat's good, dat's good; dat's dam good. (*In moments of emotion* CAIN'S *manners and language savour more obviously than usual of the Old Plantation.*) Did yoh see her face den?

BELLE.

(*Repeats, slowly and solemnly.*) Mostly about Love.

HENRIKA.

Oh, oh. (*She covers her face with her hands.*) How could you? It makes me tingle all over. (*She runs behind the kadapoo tree again.*)

ASTON.

(*Very seriously and intelligently.*) Really. That's very interesting. I wish you'd let me see what you've done some time.

SIR JASPER.

We always like to see these things, don't we, Aston? Do you remember Mrs. Towler? How pretty she was! And the way we criticized her literary productions. . . .

ASTON.

Mrs. Towler. . . . (*He shudders as though he had touched something soft and filthy.*) Oh, don't, Jasper, don't!

SIR JASPER.

Dear Mrs. Towler! We were very nice about her poems, weren't we? Do you remember the one that began:

"My Love is like a silvern flower-de-luce

Within some wondrous dream-garden pent:

God made my lovely lily not for use,

But for an ornament."

Even Cain, I believe, saw the joke of that.

ASTON.

Mrs. Towler — oh, my God! But this is quite different: this girl really interests me.

SIR JASPER.

Oh yes, I know, I know. She interests you too, Cain, doesn't she?

CAIN.

(*Prances two or three steps of a cake-walk and sings.*) Oh, ma honey, oh, ma honey.

ASTON.

But, I tell you, this is quite different.

SIR JASPER.

Of course it is. Any fool could see that it was. I've admitted it already.

ASTON.

(*To* TOPSY.) You will show them me, won't you? I should so much like to see them.

TOPSY.

(*Covered with confusion.*) No, I really couldn't. You're a professional, you see.

HENRIKA.

(*From behind the kadapoo tree.*) No, you mustn't show them to him. They're really mine, you know, a great many of them.

BELLE.

Nonsense! (*She stoops down and moves* TOPSY'S *foot in such a way that a very well-shaped, white-stockinged leg is visible some way up the calf. Then, to* TOPSY.) Pull your skirt down, my dear. You're quite indecent.

CAIN.

(*Putting up his monocle.*) Oh, nyum nyum, ma honey! Come wid me to Dixie Land. . . .

SIR JASPER.

H'm, a little conscious, don't you think?

ASTON.

But even professionals are human, my dear young lady. And perhaps I might be able to give you some help with your writings.

TOPSY.

That's awfully kind of you, Mr. Tyrrell.

HENRIKA.

Oh, don't let him see them. I don't want him to. Don't let him.

ASTON.

(*With heavy charm.*) It always interests me so much when I hear of the young — and I trust you won't be offended if I include you in their number — when I hear of the young taking to writing. It is one of the most important duties that we of the older generation can perform — to help and encourage the young with their work. It's a great service to the cause of Art.

SIR JASPER.

That was what I was always saying to Mrs. Towler, if I remember rightly.

TOPSY.

I can't tell you, Mr. Tyrrell, how delightful it is to have one's work taken seriously. I am so grateful to you. May I send you my little efforts, then?

CAIN.

(*Executes a step dance to the furious clicking of a pair of bones.*)

SIR JASPER.

I congratulate you, Aston. A most masterful bit of strategy.

BELLE.

I wonder what he'll do next. Isn't it exciting? Topsy, toss your head again. That's right. Oh, I wish something would happen!

HENRIKA.

What have you done? Oh, Topsy, you really mustn't send him my poems.

BELLE.

You said he was such a nice man just now.

HENRIKA.

Oh yes, he's nice, I know. But then he's a man, you must admit that. I don't want him to see them.

TOPSY.

(*Firmly.*) You're being merely foolish, Henrika. Mr. Tyrrell, a very distinguished literary man, has been kind enough to take an interest in my work. His criticism will be the greatest help to me.

BELLE.

Of course it will, and he has such charming eyes. (*A pause. The music, which has, all this while, been faintly heard through the ball-room door, becomes more audible. They are playing a rich, creamy waltz.*) What delicious music! Henrika, come and have a dance. (*She seizes* HENRIKA *round the waist and begins to waltz.* HENRIKA *is reluctant at first, but little by little the rhythm of the dance takes possession of her till, with her half-closed eyes and languorous, trance-like movements, she might figure as the visible living symbol of the waltz.* ASTON *and* TOPSY *lean back in their seats, marking the time with a languid beating of*

the hand. CAIN *sways and swoons and revolves in his own peculiar and inimitable version of the dance.*)

SIR JASPER.

(*Who has been watching the whole scene with amusement.*) What a pretty spectacle! “Music hath charms. . . .”

HENRIKA.

(*In an almost extinct voice.*) Oh, Belle, Belle, I could go on dancing like this for ever. I feel quite intoxicated with it.

TOPSY.

(*To* ASTON.) What a jolly tune this is!

ASTON.

Isn’t it? It’s called “Dreams of Desire,” I believe.

BELLE.

What a pretty name!

TOPSY.

These are wonderful flowers here.

ASTON.

Let’s go and have a look at them.

(*They get up and walk round the conservatory. The flowers light up as they pass; in the midst of each is a small electric globe.*)

ASTON.

This purple one with eyes is the assafœtida flower. Don’t put your nose too near; it has a smell like burning flesh. This is a Cypripedium from Sumatra. It is the only man-eating flower in the world. Notice its double set of teeth. (*He puts a stick into the mouth of the flower, which instantly snaps to, like a steel trap.*) Nasty, vicious brute! These blossoms like purple sponges belong to the twangum tree; when you squeeze them they ooze blood. This is the Jonesia, the octopus of the floral world: each of its eight tentacles is armed with a sting capable of killing a horse. Now this is a most interesting and instructive flower — the patchouli bloom. It is perhaps the most striking example in nature of structural specialization brought about by Evolution. If only Darwin had lived to see the patchouli plant! You have heard of flowers specially adapting themselves to be fertilized by bees or butterflies or spiders and such-like? Well, this plant which grows in the forests of Guatemala can only be fertilized by English explorers. Observe the structure of the flower; at the base is a flat, projecting pan, containing the pistil; above it an overarching tube ending in a spout. On either side a small crevice about three-quarters of an inch in length may be discerned in the fleshy lobes of the calix. The English traveller seeing this plant is immediately struck by its resemblance to those penny-in-the-slot machines which provide scent for the public in the railway stations at home. Through sheer force of habit he takes a penny from his pocket and inserts it in one of the crevices or slots. Immediate result — a jet of highly scented liquid pollen is discharged from the spout upon the pistil lying below, and the plant is fertilized. Could anything be more miraculous? And yet there are those who deny the existence of God. Poor fools!

TOPSY.

Wonderful! (*Sniffing.*) What a good scent.

ASTON.

The purest patchouli.

BELLE.

How delicious! Oh, my dear . . . (*She shuts her eyes in ecstasy.*)

HENRIKA.

(*Drowsily.*) Delicious, ‘licious. . . .

SIR JASPER.

I always like these rather *canaille* perfumes. Their effect is admirable.

ASTON.

This is the leopard-flower. Observe its spotted skin and its thorns like agate claws. This is the singing Alocusia — Alocusia Cantatrix — discovered by Humboldt during his second voyage to the Amazons. If you stroke its throat in the right place, it will begin to sing like a nightingale. Allow me. (*He takes her by the wrist and guides her fingers towards the palpitating throat of a gigantic flower shaped like a gramophone trumpet. The Alocusia bursts into song; it has a voice like Caruso’s.*)

CAIN.

Oh, nyum nyum! What a hand! Oh, ma honey. (*He runs a thick black finger along* TOPSY’S *arm.*)

TOPSY.

What a remarkable flower!

BELLE.

I wonder whether he stroked my arm like that by accident or on purpose.

HENRIKA.

(*Gives a little shiver.*) He's touching me, he's touching me! But somehow I feel so sleepy I can't move.

TOPSY.

(*She moves on towards the next flower:* BELLE *does not allow her to disengage her hand at once.*) What a curious smell this one has!

ASTON.

Be careful, be careful! That's the chloroform plant.

TOPSY.

Oh, I feel quite dizzy and faint. That smell and the heat . . . (*She almost falls:* ASTON *puts out his arm and holds her up.*)

ASTON.

Poor child!

CAIN.

Poh chile, poh chile! (*He hovers round her, his hands almost touching her, trembling with excitement: his white eyeballs roll horribly.*)

ASTON.

I'll open the door. The air will make you feel better. (*He opens the conservatory door, still supporting* TOPSY *with his right arm. The wind is heard, fearfully whistling: a flurry of snow blows into the conservatory. The flowers utter*

piercing screams of rage and fear; their lights flicker wildly; several turn perfectly black and drop on to the floor writhing in agony. The floral octopus agitates its tentacles; the twangum blooms drip blood; all the leaves of all the trees clap together with a dry, scaly sound.)

TOPSY.

(*Faintly.*) Thank you; that's better.

ASTON.

(*Closing the door.*) Poor child! Come and sit down again; the chloroform flower is a real danger. (*Much moved, he leads her back towards the seat.*)

CAIN.

(*Executes a war dance round the seated couple.*) Poh chile, poh chile! Nyum nyum nyum.

SIR JASPER.

One perceives the well-known dangers of playing the Good Samaritan towards an afflicted member of the opposite sex. Pity has touched even our good Cain to tears.

BELLE.

Oh, I wonder what's going to happen! It's so exciting. I'm so glad Henrika's gone to sleep.

TOPSY.

It was silly of me to go all faint like that.

ASTON.

I ought to have warned you in time of the chloroform flower.

BELLE.

But it’s such a lovely feeling now — like being in a very hot bath with lots of verbena bath-salts, and hardly able to move with limpness, but just ever so comfortable and happy.

ASTON.

How do you feel now? I’m afraid you’re looking very pale. Poor child!

CAIN.

Poh chile, poh chile! . . .

SIR JASPER.

I don’t know much about these things, but it seems to me, my dear Aston, that the moment has decidedly arrived.

ASTON.

I’m so sorry. You poor little thing . . . (*He kisses her very gently on the forehead.*)

BELLE.

A — a — h.

HENRIKA.

Oh! He kissed me: but he’s so kind and good, so kind and good. (*She stirs and falls back again into her drowsy trance.*)

CAIN.

Poh chile, poh chile! (*He leans over* ASTON'S *shoulder and begins rudely kissing* TOPSY'S *trance-calm, parted lips.* TOPSY *opens her eyes and sees the black, greasy face, the chryselephantine smile, the pink, thick lips, the goggling eyeballs of white enamel. She screams.* HENRIKA *springs up and screams too.* TOPSY *slips on to the floor, and* CAIN *and* ASTON *are left face to face with* HENRIKA, *pale as death and with wide-open, terrified eyes. She is trembling in every limb.*)

ASTON.

(*Gives* CAIN *a push that sends him sprawling backwards, and falls on his knees before the pathetic figure of* HENRIKA.) Oh, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry. What a beast I am! I don't know what I can have been thinking of to do such a thing.

SIR JASPER.

My dear boy, I'm afraid you and Cain knew only too well what you were thinking of. Only too well . . .

ASTON.

Will you forgive me? I can't forgive myself.

HENRIKA.

Oh, you hurt me, you frightened me so much. I can't bear it. (*She cries.*)

ASTON.

O God! O God! (*The tears start into his eyes also. He takes* HENRIKA'S *hand and begins to kiss it.*) I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry.

SIR JASPER.

If you're not very careful, Aston, you'll have Cain to deal with again. (CAIN *has picked himself up and is creeping stealthily towards the couple in the centre of the conservatory.*)

ASTON.

(*Turning round.*) Cain, you brute, go to hell! (CAIN *slinks back.*) Oh, will you forgive me for having been such a swine? What can I do?

TOPSY.

(*Who has recovered her self-possession, rises to her feet and pushes* HENRIKA *into the background.*) Thank you, it is really quite all right. I think it would be best to say no more about it, to forget what has happened.

ASTON.

Will you forgive me, then?

TOPSY.

Of course, of course. Please get up, Mr. Tyrrell.

ASTON.

(*Climbing to his feet.*) I can't think how I ever came to be such a brute.

TOPSY.

(*Coldly.*) I thought we had agreed not to talk about this incident any further. (*There is a silence.*)

SIR JASPER.

Well, Aston? This has been rather fun.

BELLE.

I wish you hadn't been quite so cold with him, Topsy. Poor man! He really is very sorry. One can see that.

HENRIKA.

But did you see that awful face? (*She shudders and covers her eyes.*)

ASTON.

(*Picking up his dummy and manipulating it.*) It is very hot in here, is it not? Shall we go back to the dancing-room?

TOPSY.

(*Also takes up her dummy.*) Yes, let us go back.

ASTON'S DUMMY.

Isn't that "Roses in Picardy" that the band is playing?

TOPSY'S DUMMY.

I believe it is. What a very good band, don't you think?

ASTON'S DUMMY.

Yes; it plays during dinner, you know, at the Necropole. (*To* JASPER.) Lord, what a fool I am! I'd quite forgotten; it was she who told me so as we came in.

TOPSY'S DUMMY.

At the Necropole? Really.

ASTON’S DUMMY.

A very good band and a very good floor.

TOPSY’S DUMMY.

Yes, it’s a perfect floor, isn’t it? Like glass. . . . (*They go out, followed by their respective families.* BELLE *supports* HENRIKA, *who is still very weak after her shock.*)

BELLE.

How exciting it was, wasn’t it, Henrika?

HENRIKA.

Wasn’t it awful — too awful! Oh, that face. . . . (CAIN *follows* ASTON *out in silence and dejection.* SIR JASPER *brings up the rear of the procession. His face wears its usual expression of slightly bored amusement. He lights a cigarette.*)

SIR JASPER.

Charming evening, charming evening. . . . Now it’s over, I wonder whether it ever existed. (*He goes out. The conservatory is left empty. The flowers flash their luminous pistils; the eyes of the assafœtida blossoms solemnly wink; leaves shake and sway and rustle; several of the flowers are heard to utter a low chuckle, while the Alocusia, after whistling a few derisive notes, finally utters a loud, gross Oriental hiccough.*)

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY DESCENDS.

CYNTHIA

WHEN, SOME FIFTY years hence, my grandchildren ask me what I did when I was at Oxford in the remote days towards the beginning of our monstrous century, I shall look back across the widening gulf of time and tell them with perfect good faith that I never worked less than eight hours a day, that I took a keen interest in Social Service, and that coffee was the strongest stimulant in which I indulged. And they will very justly say — but I hope I shall be out of hearing. That is why I propose to write my memoirs as soon as possible, before I have had time to forget, so that having the truth before me I shall never in time to come be able, consciously or unconsciously, to tell lies about myself.

At present I have no time to write a complete account of that decisive period in my history. I must content myself therefore with describing a single incident of my undergraduate days. I have selected this one because it is curious and at the same time wholly characteristic of Oxford life before the war.

My friend Lykeham was an Exhibitioner at Swellfoot College. He combined blood (he was immensely proud of his Anglo-Saxon descent and the derivation of his name from Old English *lycam*, a corpse) with brains. His tastes were eccentric, his habits deplorable, the range of his information immense. As he is now dead, I will say no more about his character.

To proceed with my anecdote: I had gone one evening, as was my custom, to visit him in his rooms at Swellfoot. It was just after nine when I mounted the stairs, and great Tom was still tolling.

“In Thomae laude

Resono bim bam sine fraude,”

as the charmingly imbecile motto used to run, and to-night he was living up to it by bim-bamming away in a persistent *basso profondo* that made an astonishing background of discord to the sound of frantic guitar playing which emanated from Lykeham’s room. From the fury of his twanging I could tell that something

more than usually cataclysmic had happened, for mercifully it was only in moments of the greatest stress that Lykeham touched his guitar.

I entered the room with my hands over my ears. “For God’s sake — —” I implored. Through the open window Tom was shouting a deep E flat, with a spread chord of under-and over-tones, while the guitar gibbered shrilly and hysterically in D natural. Lykeham laughed, banged down his guitar on to the sofa with such violence that it gave forth a trembling groan from all its strings, and ran forward to meet me. He slapped me on the shoulder with painful heartiness; his whole face radiated joy and excitement.

I can sympathize with people’s pains, but not with their pleasures. There is something curiously boring about somebody else’s happiness.

“You are perspiring,” I said coldly.

Lykeham mopped himself, but went grinning.

“Well, what is it this time?” I asked. “Are you engaged to be married again?”

Lykeham burst forth with the triumphant pleasure of one who has at last found an opportunity of disburdening himself of an oppressive secret. “Far better than that,” he cried.

I groaned. “Some more than usually unpleasant amour, I suppose.” I knew that he had been in London the day before, a pressing engagement with the dentist having furnished an excuse to stay the night.

“Don’t be gross,” said Lykeham, with a nervous laugh which showed that my suspicions had been only too well founded.

“Well, let’s hear about the delectable Flossie or Effie or whatever her name was,” I said, with resignation.

“I tell you she was a goddess.”

“The goddess of reason, I suppose.”

“A goddess,” Lykeham continued; “the most wonderful creature I’ve ever seen. And the extraordinary thing is,” he added confidentially, and with ill-suppressed pride, “that it seems I myself am a god of sorts.”

“Of gardens; but do come down to facts.”

“I’ll tell you the whole story. It was like this: Last night I was in town, you know, and went to see that capital play that’s running at the Prince Consort’s. It’s one of those ingenious combinations of melodrama and problem play, which thrill you to the marrow and at the same time give you a virtuous feeling that you’ve been to see something serious. Well, I rolled in rather late, having secured an admirable place in the front row of the dress circle. I trampled in over the populace, and casually observed that there was a girl sitting next me, whom I apologized to for treading on her toes. I thought no more about her during the first act. In the interval, when the lights were on again, I turned round to look at things in general and discovered that there was a goddess sitting next me. One only had to look at her to see she was a goddess. She was quite incredibly beautiful — rather pale and virginal and slim, and at the same time very stately. I can’t describe her; she was simply perfect — there’s nothing more to be said.”

“Perfect,” I repeated, “but so were all the rest.”

“Fool!” Lykeham answered impatiently. “All the rest were just damned women. This was a goddess, I tell you. Don’t interrupt me any more. As I was looking with astonishment at her profile, she turned her head and looked squarely at me. I’ve never seen anything so lovely; I almost swooned away. Our eyes met — —”

“What an awful novelist’s expression!” I expostulated.

“I can’t help it; there’s no other word. Our eyes did meet, and we both fell simultaneously in love.”

“Speak for yourself.”

“I could see it in her eyes. Well, to go on. We looked at one another several times during that first interval, and then the second act began. In the course of the act, entirely accidentally, I knocked my programme on to the floor, and reaching down to get it I touched her hand. Well, there was obviously nothing else to do but to take hold of it.”

“And what did she do?”

“Nothing. We sat like that the whole of the rest of the act, rapturously happy and — —”

“And quietly perspiring palm to palm. I know exactly, so we can pass over that. Proceed.”

“Of course you don’t know in the least; you’ve never held a goddess’s hand. When the lights went up again I reluctantly dropped her hand, not liking the thought of the profane crowd seeing us, and for want of anything better to say, I asked her if she actually was a goddess. She said it was a curious question, as she’d been wondering what god I was. So we said, how incredible: and I said I was sure she was a goddess, and she said she was certain I was a god, and I bought some chocolates, and the third act began. Now, it being a melodrama, there was of course in the third act a murder and burglary scene, in which all the lights were turned out. In this thrilling moment of total blackness I suddenly felt her kiss me on the cheek.”

“I thought you said she was virginal.”

“So she was — absolutely, frozenly virginal; but she was made of a sort of burning ice, if you understand me. She was virginally passionate — just the combination you’d expect to find in a goddess. I admit I was startled when she kissed me, but with infinite presence of mind I kissed her back, on the mouth. Then the murder was finished and the lights went on again. Nothing much more happened till the end of the show, when I helped her on with her coat and we went out together, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, and got into a taxi. I told the man to drive somewhere where we could get supper, and he drove there.”

“Not without embracements by the way?”

“No, not without certain embracements.”

“Always passionately virginal?”

“Always virginally passionate.”

“Proceed.”

“Well, we had supper — a positively Olympian affair, nectar and ambrosia and stolen hand-pressures. She became more and more wonderful every moment. My God, you should have seen her eyes! The whole soul seemed to burn in their depths, like fire under the sea — —”

“For narrative,” I interrupted him, “the epic or heroic style is altogether more suitable than the lyrical.”

“Well, as I say, we had supper, and after that my memory becomes a sort of burning mist.”

“Let us make haste to draw the inevitable veil. What was her name?”

Lykeham confessed that he didn’t know; as she was a goddess, it didn’t really seem to matter what her earthly name was. How did he expect to find her again? He hadn’t thought of that, but knew she’d turn up somehow. I told him he was a fool, and asked which particular goddess he thought she was and which particular god he himself.

“We discussed that,” he said. “We first thought Ares and Aphrodite; but she wasn’t my idea of Aphrodite, and I don’t know that I’m very much like Ares.”

He looked pensively in the old Venetian mirror which hung over the fireplace. It was a complacent look, for Lykeham was rather vain about his personal appearance, which was, indeed, repulsive at first sight, but had, when you looked again, a certain strange and fascinating ugly beauty. Bearded, he would have made a passable Socrates. But Ares — no, certainly he wasn’t Ares.

“Perhaps you’re Hephæstus,” I suggested; but the idea was received coldly.

Was he sure that she was a goddess? Mightn’t she just have been a nymph of sorts? Europa, for instance. Lykeham repudiated the implied suggestion that he was a bull, nor would he hear of himself as a swan or a shower of gold. It was possible, however, he thought, that he was Apollo and she Daphne, reincarnated from her vegetable state. And though I laughed heartily at the idea of his being Phœbus Apollo, Lykeham stuck to the theory with increasing obstinacy. The more he thought of it the more it seemed to him probable that his nymph, with her burning cold virginal passion, was Daphne, while to doubt that he himself was Apollo seemed hardly to occur to him.

It was about a fortnight later, in June, towards the end of term, that we discovered Lykeham's Olympian identity. We had gone, Lykeham and I, for an after-dinner walk. We set out through the pale tranquillity of twilight, and following the towpath up the river as far as Godstow, halted at the inn for a glass of port and a talk with the glorious old female Falstaff in black silk who kept it. We were royally entertained with gossip and old wine, and after Lykeham had sung a comic song which had reduced the old lady to a quivering jelly of hysterical laughter, we set out once more, intending to go yet a little farther up the river before we turned back. Darkness had fallen by this time; the stars were lighted in the sky; it was the sort of summer night to which Marlowe compared Helen of Troy. Over the meadows invisible peewits wheeled and uttered their melancholy cry; the far-off thunder of the weir bore a continuous, even burden to all the other small noises of the night. Lykeham and I walked on in silence. We had covered perhaps a quarter of a mile when all at once my companion stopped and began looking fixedly westward towards Witham Hill. I paused too, and saw that he was staring at the thin crescent of the moon, which was preparing to set in the dark woods that crowned the eminence.

"What are you looking at?" I asked.

But Lykeham paid no attention, only muttered something to himself. Then suddenly he cried out, "It's she!" and started off at full gallop across the fields in the direction of the hill. Conceiving that he had gone suddenly mad, I followed. We crashed through the first hedge twenty yards apart. Then came the backwater; Lykeham leapt, flopped in three-quarters of the way across, and scrambled oozily ashore. I made a better jump and landed among the mud and rushes of the farther bank. Two more hedges and a ploughed field, a hedge, a road, a gate, another field, and then we were in Witham Wood itself. It was pitch black under the trees, and Lykeham had perforce to slacken his pace a little. I followed him by the noise he made crashing through the undergrowth and cursing when he hurt himself. That wood was a nightmare, but we got through it somehow and into the open glade at the top of the hill. Through the trees on the

farther side of the clearing shone the moon, seeming incredibly close at hand. Then, suddenly, along the very path of the moonlight, the figure of a woman came walking through the trees into the open. Lykeham rushed towards her and flung himself at her feet and embraced her knees; she stooped down and smoothed his ruffled hair. I turned and walked away; it is not for a mere mortal to look on at the embracements of the gods.

As I walked back, I wondered who on earth — or rather who in heaven — Lykeham could be. For here was chaste Cynthia giving herself to him in the most unequivocal fashion. Could he be Endymion? No, the idea was too preposterous to be entertained for a moment. But I could think of no other loved by the virgin moon. Yet surely I seemed dimly to recollect that there had been some favoured god; for the life of me I could not remember who. All the way back along the river path I searched my mind for his name, and always it eluded me.

But on my return I looked up the matter in Lemprière, and almost died of laughing when I discovered the truth. I thought of Lykeham's Venetian mirror and his complacent side glances at his own image, and his belief that he was Apollo, and I laughed and laughed. And when, considerably after midnight, Lykeham got back to college, I met him in the porch and took him quietly by the sleeve, and in his ear I whispered, "GOAT-FOOT," and then I roared with laughter once again.

THE BOOKSHOP

IT SEEMED INDEED an unlikely place to find a bookshop. All the other commercial enterprises of the street aimed at purveying the barest necessities to the busy squalor of the quarter. In this, the main arterial street, there was a specious glitter and life produced by the swift passage of the traffic. It was almost airy, almost gay. But all around great tracts of slum pullulated dankly. The inhabitants did their shopping in the grand street; they passed, holding gobbets of meat that showed glutinous even through the wrappings of paper; they cheapened linoleum at upholstery doors; women, black-bonneted and black-shawled, went shuffling to their marketing with dilapidated bags of straw plait. How should these, I wondered, buy books? And yet there it was, a tiny shop; and the windows were fitted with shelves, and there were the brown backs of books. To the right a large emporium overflowed into the street with its fabulously cheap furniture; to the left the curtained, discreet windows of an eating-house announced in chipped white letters the merits of sixpenny dinners. Between, so narrow as scarcely to prevent the junction of food and furniture, was the little shop. A door and four feet of dark window, that was the full extent of frontage. One saw here that literature was a luxury; it took its proportionable room here in this place of necessity. Still, the comfort was that it survived, definitely survived.

The owner of the shop was standing in the doorway, a little man, grizzle-bearded and with eyes very active round the corners of the spectacles that bridged his long, sharp nose.

“Trade is good?” I inquired.

“Better in my grandfather’s day,” he told me, shaking his head sadly.

“We grow progressively more Philistine,” I suggested.

“It is our cheap press. The ephemeral overwhelms the permanent, the classical.”

“This journalism,” I agreed, “or call it rather this piddling quotidianism, is the curse of our age.”

“Fit only for — —” He gesticulated clutchingly with his hands as though seeking the word.

“For the fire.”

The old man was triumphantly emphatic with his, “No: for the sewer.”

I laughed sympathetically at his passion. “We are delightfully at one in our views,” I told him. “May I look about me a little among your treasures?”

Within the shop was a brown twilight, redolent with old leather and the smell of that fine subtle dust that clings to the pages of forgotten books, as though preservative of their secrets — like the dry sand of Asian deserts beneath which, still incredibly intact, lie the treasures and the rubbish of a thousand years ago. I opened the first volume that came to my hand. It was a book of fashion-plates, tinted elaborately by hand in magenta and purple, maroon and solferino and puce and those melting shades of green that a yet earlier generation had called “the sorrows of Werther.” Beauties in crinolines swam with the amplitude of pavilioned ships across the pages. Their feet were represented as thin and flat and black, like tea-leaves shyly protruding from under their petticoats. Their faces were egg-shaped, sleeked round with hair of glossy black, and expressive of an immaculate purity. I thought of our modern fashion figures, with their heels and their arch of instep, their flattened faces and smile of pouting invitation. It was difficult not to be a deteriorationist. I am easily moved by symbols; there is something of a Quarles in my nature. Lacking the philosophic mind, I prefer to see my abstractions concretely imaged. And it occurred to me then that if I wanted an emblem to picture the sacredness of marriage and the influence of the home I could not do better than choose two little black feet like tea-leaves peeping out decorously from under the hem of wide, disguising petticoats. While heels and thoroughbred insteps should figure — oh well, the reverse.

The current of my thoughts was turned aside by the old man's voice. "I expect you are musical," he said.

Oh yes, I was a little; and he held out to me a bulky folio.

"Did you ever hear this?" he asked.

Robert the Devil: no, I never had. I did not doubt that it was a gap in my musical education.

The old man took the book and drew up a chair from the dim *penetralia* of the shop. It was then that I noticed a surprising fact: what I had, at a careless glance, taken to be a common counter I perceived now to be a piano of a square, unfamiliar shape. The old man sat down before it. "You must forgive any defects in its tone," he said, turning to me. "An early Broadwood, Georgian, you know, and has seen a deal of service in a hundred years."

He opened the lid, and the yellow keys grinned at me in the darkness like the teeth of an ancient horse.

The old man rustled pages till he found a desired place. "The ballet music," he said: "it's fine. Listen to this."

His bony, rather tremulous hands began suddenly to move with an astonishing nimbleness, and there rose up, faint and tinkling against the roar of the traffic, a gay pirouetting music. The instrument rattled considerably and the volume of sound was thin as the trickle of a drought-shrunken stream: but, still, it kept tune and the melody was there, filmy, aerial.

"And now for the drinking-song," cried the old man, warming excitedly to his work. He played a series of chords that mounted modulating upwards towards a breaking-point; so supremely operatic as positively to be a parody of that moment of tautening suspense, when the singers are bracing themselves for a burst of passion. And then it came, the drinking chorus. One pictured to oneself cloaked men, wildly jovial over the emptiness of cardboard flagons.

"Versiam' a tazza piena

Il generoso umor . . ."

The old man’s voice was cracked and shrill, but his enthusiasm made up for any defects in execution. I had never seen anyone so wholeheartedly a reveller.

He turned over a few more pages. “Ah, the ‘Valse Infernale,’” he said. “That’s good.” There was a little melancholy prelude and then the tune, not so infernal perhaps as one might have been led to expect, but still pleasant enough. I looked over his shoulder at the words and sang to his accompaniment.

“Demoni fatali
Fantasmi d’orror,
Dei regni infernali
Plaudite al signor.”

A great steam-driven brewer’s lorry roared past with its annihilating thunder and utterly blotted out the last line. The old man’s hands still moved over the yellow keys, my mouth opened and shut; but there was no sound of words or music. It was as though the fatal demons, the phantasms of horror, had made a sudden irruption into this peaceful, abstracted place.

I looked out through the narrow door. The traffic ceaselessly passed; men and women hurried along with set faces. Phantasms of horror, all of them: infernal realms wherein they dwelt. Outside, men lived under the tyranny of things. Their every action was determined by the orders of mere matter, by money, and the tools of their trade and the unthinking laws of habit and convention. But here I seemed to be safe from things, living at a remove from actuality; here where a bearded old man, improbable survival from some other time, indomitably played the music of romance, despite the fact that the phantasms of horror might occasionally drown the sound of it with their clamour.

“So: will you take it?” The voice of the old man broke across my thoughts. “I will let you have it for five shillings.” He was holding out the thick, dilapidated volume towards me. His face wore a look of strained anxiety. I could see how eager he was to get my five shillings, how necessary, poor man! for him. He has been, I thought with an unreasonable bitterness — he has been simply performing for my benefit, like a trained dog. His aloofness, his culture — all a business trick. I felt aggrieved. He was just one of the common phantasms of

horror masquerading as the angel of this somewhat comic paradise of contemplation. I gave him a couple of half-crowns and he began wrapping the book in paper.

“I tell you,” he said, “I’m sorry to part with it. I get attached to my books, you know; but they always have to go.”

He sighed with such an obvious genuineness of feeling that I repented of the judgment I had passed upon him. He was a reluctant inhabitant of the infernal realms, even as was I myself.

Outside they were beginning to cry the evening papers: a ship sunk, trenches captured, somebody’s new stirring speech. We looked at one another — the old bookseller and I — in silence. We understood one another without speech. Here were we in particular, and here was the whole of humanity in general, all faced by the hideous triumph of things. In this continued massacre of men, in this old man’s enforced sacrifice, matter equally triumphed. And walking homeward through Regent’s Park, I too found matter triumphing over me. My book was unconscionably heavy, and I wondered what in the world I should do with a piano score of *Robert the Devil* when I had got it home. It would only be another thing to weigh me down and hinder me; and at the moment it was very, oh, abominably, heavy. I leaned over the railings that ring round the ornamental water, and as unostentatiously as I could, I let the book fall into the bushes.

I often think it would be best not to attempt the solution of the problem of life. Living is hard enough without complicating the process by thinking about it. The wisest thing, perhaps, is to take for granted the “wearisome condition of humanity, born under one law, to another bound,” and to leave the matter at that, without an attempt to reconcile the incompatibles. Oh, the absurd difficulty of it all! And I have, moreover, wasted five shillings, which is serious, you know, in these thin times.

THE DEATH OF LULLY

THE SEA LAY in a breathing calm, and the galley, bosomed in its transparent water, stirred rhythmically to the slow pulse of its sleeping life. Down below there, fathoms away through the crystal-clear Mediterranean, the shadow of the ship lazily swung, moving, a long dark patch, very slowly back and forth across the white sand of the sea-bottom — very slowly, a scarcely perceptible advance and recession of the green darkness. Fishes sometimes passed, now hanging poised with idly tremulous fins, now darting onwards, effortless and incredibly swift; and always, as it seemed, utterly aimless, whether they rested or whether they moved; as the life of angels their life seemed mysterious and unknowable.

All was silence on board the ship. In their fetid cage below decks the rowers slept where they sat, chained, on their narrow benches. On deck the sailors lay sleeping or sat in little groups playing at dice. The fore-part of the deck was reserved, it seemed, for passengers of distinction. Two figures, a man and a woman, were reclining there on couches, their faces and half-bared limbs flushed in the coloured shadow that was thrown by the great red awning stretched above them.

It was a nobleman, the sailors had heard, and his mistress that they had on board. They had taken their passage at Scanderoon, and were homeward bound for Spain. Proud as sin these Spaniards were; the man treated them like slaves or dogs. As for the woman, she was well enough, but they could find as good a face and pair of breasts in their native Genoa. If anyone so much as looked at her from half the ship’s length away it sent her possessor into a rage. He had struck one man for smiling at her. Damned Catalonian, as jealous as a stag; they wished him the stag’s horns as well as its temper.

It was intensely hot even under the awning. The man woke from his uneasy sleep and reached out to where on a little table beside him stood a deep silver

cup of mixed wine and water. He drank a gulp of it; it was as warm as blood and hardly cooled his throat. He turned over and, leaning on his elbow, looked at his companion. She on her back, quietly breathing through parted lips, still asleep. He leaned across and pinched her on the breast, so that she woke up with a sudden start and cry of pain.

"Why did you wake me?" she asked.

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders. He had, indeed, had no reason for doing so, except that he did not like it that she should be comfortably asleep, while he was awake and unpleasantly conscious of the heat.

"It is hotter than ever," he said, with a kind of gloomy satisfaction at the thought that she would now have to suffer the same discomforts as himself. "The wine scorches instead of cooling; the sun seems no lower down the sky."

The woman pouted. "You pinched me cruelly," she said. "And I still do not know why you wanted to wake me."

He smiled again, this time with a good-humoured lasciviousness. "I wanted to kiss you," he said. He passed his hand over her body possessively, as a man might caress a dog.

Suddenly the quiet of the afternoon was shattered. A great clamour rose up, ragged and uneven, on the air. Shrill yells pierced the dull rumbling growl of bass voices, pierced the sound of beaten drums and hammered metal.

"What are they doing in the town?" asked the woman anxiously of her lover.

"God knows," he answered. "Perhaps the heathen hounds are making some trouble with our men."

He got up and walked to the rail of the ship. A quarter of a mile away, across the smooth water of the bay, stood the little African town at which they had stopped to call. The sunlight showed everything with a hard and merciless definition. Sky, palms, white houses, domes, and towers seemed as though made from some hard enamelled metal. A ridge of low red hills rolled away to right and left. The sunshine gave to everything in the scene the same clarity of detail,

so that to the eye of the onlooker there was no impression of distance. The whole thing seemed to be painted in flat upon a single plane.

The young man returned to his couch under the awning and lay down. It was hotter than ever, or seemed so, at least, since he had made the exertion of getting up. He thought of high cool pastures in the hills, with the pleasant sound of streams, far down and out of sight in their deep channels. He thought of winds that were fresh and scented — winds that were not mere breaths of dust and fire. He thought of the shade of cypresses, a narrow opaque strip of darkness; and he thought too of the green coolness, more diffused and fluid and transparent, of chestnut groves. And he thought of the people he remembered sitting under the trees — young people, gay and brightly dressed, whose life was all gaiety and deliciousness. There were the songs that they sang — he recalled the voices and the dancing of the strings. And there were perfumes and, when one drew closer, the faint intoxicating fragrance of a woman's body. He thought of the stories they told; one in particular came to his mind, a capital tale of a sorcerer who offered to change a peasant's wife into a mare, and how he gulled the husband and enjoyed the woman before his eyes, and the delightful excuses he made when she failed to change her shape. He smiled to himself at the thought of it, and stretching out a hand touched his mistress. Her bosom was soft to his fingers and damp with sweat; he had an unpleasant notion that she was melting in the heat.

"Why do you touch me?" she asked.

He made no reply, but turned away from her. He wondered how it would come to pass that people would rise again in the body. It seemed curious, considering the manifest activities of worms. And suppose one rose in the body that one possessed in age. He shuddered, picturing to himself what this woman would be like when she was sixty, seventy. She would be beyond words repulsive. Old men too were horrible. They stank, and their eyes were rheumy and rosiny, like the eyes of deer. He decided that he would kill himself before he grew old. He was eight-and-twenty now. He would give himself twelve years more. Then he would end it. His thoughts dimmed and faded away into sleep.

The woman looked at him as he slept. He was a good man, she thought, though sometimes cruel. He was different from all the other men she had known. Once, when she was sixteen and a beginner in the business of love, she had thought that all men were always drunk when they made love. They were all dirty and like beasts; she had felt herself superior to them. But this man was a nobleman. She could not understand him; his thoughts were always obscure. She felt herself infinitely inferior to him. She was afraid of him and his occasional cruelty; but still he was a good man, and he might do what he liked with her.

From far off came the sound of oars, a rhythmical splash and creak. Somebody shouted, and from startlingly close at hand one of the sailors hallooed back.

The young man woke up with a start.

“What is it?” he asked, turning with an angry look to the girl, as though he held her to be responsible for this breaking in upon his slumbers.

“The boat, I think,” she said. “It must be coming back from the shore.”

The boat’s crew came up over the side, and all the stagnant life of the ship flowed excitedly round them. They were the centre of a vortex towards which all were drawn. Even the young Catalonian, for all his hatred of these stinking Genoese shipmen, was sucked into the eddy. Everybody was talking at once, and in the general hubbub of question and answer there was nothing coherent to be made out. Piercingly distinct above all the noise came the voice of the little cabin-boy, who had been to shore with the boat’s crew. He was running round to everyone in turn repeating: “I hit one of them. You know. I hit one. With a stone on the forehead. Didn’t he bleed, ooh! didn’t he just!” And he would dance with uncontrollable excitement.

The captain held up his hand and shouted for silence. “One at a time, there,” he ordered, and when order had a little been restored, added grumblingly, “Like a pack of dogs on a bone. You talk, boatswain.”

“I hit one of them,” said the boy. Somebody cuffed him over the head, and he relapsed into silence.

When the boatswain's story had rambled through labyrinths of digression, over countless obstacles of interruptions and emendations, to its conclusion, the Spaniard went back to join his companion under the awning. He had assumed again his habitual indifference.

"Nearly butchered," he said languidly, in response to her eager questions. "They" — he jerked a hand in the direction of the town— "they were pelting an old fellow who had come there preaching the Faith. Left him dead on the beach. Our men had to run for it."

She could get no more out of him; he turned over and pretended to go to sleep.

Towards evening they received a visit from the captain. He was a large, handsome man, with gold ear-rings glinting from among a bush of black hair.

"Divine Providence," he remarked sententiously, after the usual courtesies had passed, "has called upon us to perform a very notable work."

"Indeed?" said the young man.

"No less a work," continued the captain, "than to save from the clutches of the infidels and heathen the precious remains of a holy martyr."

The captain let fall his pompous manner. It was evident that he had carefully prepared these pious sentences, they rolled so roundly off his tongue. But he was eager now to get on with his story, and it was in a homelier style that he went on: "If you knew these seas as well as I — and it's near twenty years now that I've been sailing them — you'd have some knowledge of this same holy man that — God rot their souls for it! — these cursed Arabs have done to death here. I've heard of him more than once in my time, and not always well spoken of; for, to tell the honest truth, he does more harm with his preachments to good Christian traders than ever he did good to black-hearted heathen dogs. Leave the bees alone, I say, and if you can get a little honey out of them quietly, so much the better; but he goes about among the beehives with a pole, stirring up trouble for himself and others too. Leave them alone to their damnation, is what I say, and

get what you can from them this side of hell. But, still, he has died a holy martyr's death. God rest his soul! A martyr is a wonderful thing, you know, and it's not for the likes of us to understand what they mean by it all.

"They do say, too, that he could make gold. And, to my mind, it would have been a thing more pleasing to God and man if he had stopped at home minting money for poor folks and dealing it round, so that there'd be no need to work any more and break oneself for a morsel of bread. Yes, he was great at gold-making and at the books too. They tell me he was called the Illuminated Doctor. But I know him still as plain Lully. I used to hear of him from my father, plain Lully, and no better once than he should have been.

"My father was a shipwright in Minorca in those days — how long since? Fifty, sixty years perhaps. He knew him then; he has often told me the tale. And a raffish young dog he was. Drinking, drabbing, and dicing he outdid them all, and between the bouts wrote poems, they say, which was more than the rest could do. But he gave it all up on the sudden. Gave away his lands, quitted his former companions, and turned hermit up in the hills, living alone like a fox in his burrow, high up above the vines. And all because of a woman and his own qualmish stomach."

The shipmaster paused and helped himself to a little wine. "And what did this woman do?" the girl asked curiously.

"Ah, it's not what she did but what she didn't do," the captain answered, with a leer and wink. "She kept him at his distance — all but once, all but once; and that was what put him on the road to being a martyr. But there, I'm outrunning myself. I must go more soberly.

"There was a lady of some consequence in the island — one of the Castellos, I think she was; her first name has quite slipped my memory — Anastasia, or something of the kind. Lully conceives a passion for her, and sighs and importunes her through I know not how many months and years. But her virtue stands steady as the judgment seat. Well, in the end, what happens was this. The story leaked out after it was all over, and he was turned hermit in the mountains. What happened, I say, was this. She tells him at last that he may come and see

her, fixing some solitary twilight place and time, her own room at nightfall. You can guess how he washes and curls and scents himself, shaves his chin, chews anises, musks over whatever of the goat may cling about the body. Off he goes, dreaming swoons and ecstasies, foretasting inconceivable sweets. Arrived, he finds the lady a little melancholy — her settled humour, but a man might expect a smile at such a time. Still, nothing abashed, he falls at her feet and pours out his piteous case, telling her he has sighed through seven years, not closed an eye for above a hundred nights, is forepined to a shadow, and, in a word, will perish unless she show some mercy. She, still melancholy her — settled humour, mark you — makes answer that she is ready to yield, and that her body is entirely his. With that, she lets herself be done with as he pleases, but always sorrowfully. 'You are all mine,' says he— 'all mine' — and unlaces her gorgeret to prove the same. But he was wrong. Another lover was already in her bosom, and his kisses had been passionate — oh, burning passionate, for he had kissed away half her left breast. From the nipple down it had all been gnawed away by a cancer.

"Bah, a man may see as bad as that any day in the street or at church-doors where beggars most congregate. I grant you that it is a nasty sight, worm-eaten flesh, but still — not enough, you will agree, to make yourself a hermit over. But there, I told you he had a queasiness of the stomach. But doubtless it was all in God's plan to make a holy martyr of him. But for that same queasiness of his, he would still be living there, a superannuated rake; or else have died in very foul odour, instead of passing, all embalmed with sanctity, to Paradise Gate.

"I know not what happened to him between his hermit-hood and his quest for martyrdom. I saw him first a dozen years ago, down Tunis way. They were always clapping him into prison or pulling out his beard for preaching. This time, it seems, they have made a holy martyr of him, done the business thoroughly with no bungling. Well, may he pray for our souls at the throne of God. I go in secretly to-night to steal his body. It lies on the shore there beyond the jetty. It will be a notable work, I tell you, to bring back so precious a corpse to Christendom. A most notable work. . . ."

The captain rubbed his hands.

It was after midnight, but there was still a bustle of activity on board the galley. At any moment they were expecting the arrival of the boat with the corpse of the martyr. A couch, neatly draped in black, with at its head and foot candles burning two by two, had been set out on the poop for the reception of the body. The captain called the young Spaniard and his mistress to come and see the bier.

“That’s a good bit of work for you,” he said, with justifiable pride. “I defy anyone to make a more decent resting-place for a martyr than that is. It could hardly have been done better on shore, with every appliance at hand. But we sailors, you know, can make anything out of nothing. A truckle-bed, a strip of tarred canvas, and four tallow dips from the cabin lanterns — there you are, a bier for a king.”

He hurried away, and a little later the young man and the girl could hear him giving orders and cursing somewhere down below. The candles burned almost without a tremor in the windless air, and the reflections of the stars were long, thin tracks of fire along the utterly calm water.

“Were there but perfumed flowers and the sound of a lute,” said the young Spaniard, “the night would tremble into passion of its own accord. Love should come unsought on such a night as this, among these black waters and the stars that sleep so peacefully on their bosom.”

He put his arm round the girl and bent his head to kiss her. But she averted her face. He could feel a shudder run her through the body.

“Not to-night,” she whispered. “I think of the poor dead man. I would rather pray.”

“No, no,” he cried. “Forget him. Remember only that we are alive, and that we have but little time and none to waste.”

He drew her into the shadow under the bulwark, and, sitting down on a coil of rope, crushed her body to his own and began kissing her with fury. She lay, at first, limp in his arms, but gradually she kindled to his passion.

A plash of oars announced the approach of the boat. The captain hallooed into the darkness: “Did you find him?”

“Yes, we have him here,” came back the answer.

“Good. Bring him alongside and we’ll hoist him up. We have the bier in readiness. He shall lie in state to-night.”

“But he’s not dead,” shouted back the voice from the night.

“Not dead?” repeated the captain, thunderstruck. “But what about the bier, then?”

A thin, feeble voice came back. “Your work will not be wasted, my friend. It will be but a short time before I need your bier.”

The captain, a little abashed, answered in a gentler tone, “We thought, holy father, that the heathens had done their worst and that Almighty God had already given you the martyr’s crown.”

By this time the boat had emerged from the darkness. In the stern sheets an old man was lying, his white hair and beard stained with blood, his Dominican’s robe torn and fouled with dust. At the sight of him, the captain pulled off his cap and dropped upon his knees.

“Give us your blessing, holy father,” he begged.

The old man raised his hand and wished him peace.

They lifted him on board and, at his own desire, laid him upon the bier which had been prepared for his dead body. “It would be a waste of trouble,” he said, “to put me anywhere else, seeing I shall in any case be lying there so soon.”

So there he lay, very still under the four candles. One might have taken him for dead already, but that his eyes, when he opened them, shone so brightly.

He dismissed from the poop everyone except the young Spaniard. “We are countrymen,” he said, “and of noble blood, both of us. I would rather have you near me than anyone else.”

The sailors knelt for a blessing and disappeared; soon they could be heard weighing the anchor; it was safest to be off before day. Like mourners at either side of the lighted bier crouched the Spaniard and his mistress. The body of the

old man, who was not yet dead, lay quiet under the candles. The martyr was silent for some time, but at last he opened his eyes and looked at the young man and the woman.

“I too,” he said, “was in love, once. In this year falls the jubilee of my last earthly passion; fifty years have run since last I longed after the flesh — fifty years since God opened my eyes to the hideousness of the corruption that man has brought upon himself.

“You are young, and your bodies are clean and straight, with no blotch or ulcer or leprous taint to mar their much-desired beauty; but because of your outward pride, your souls, it may be, fester inwardly the more.

“And yet God made all perfect; it is but accident and the evil of will that causes defaults. All metals should be gold, were it not that their elements willed evilly in their desire to combine. And so with men: the burning sulphur of passion, the salt of wisdom, the nimble mercurial soul should come together to make a golden being, incorruptible and rustless. But the elements mingle jarringly, not in a pure harmony of love, and gold is rare, while lead and iron and poisonous brass that leaves a taste as of remorse behind it are everywhere common.

“God opened my eyes to it before my youth had too utterly wasted itself to rottenness. It was half a hundred years ago, but I see her still, my Ambrosia, with her white, sad face and her naked body and that monstrous ill eating away at her breast.

“I have lived since then trying to amend the evil, trying to restore, as far as my poor powers would go, some measure of original perfection to the corrupted world. I have striven to give to all metals their true nature, to make true gold from the false, the unreal, the accidental metals, lead and copper and tin and iron. And I have essayed that more difficult alchemy, the transformation of men. I die now in my effort to purge away that most foul dross of misbelief from the souls of these heathen men. Have I achieved anything? I know not.”

The galley was moving now, its head turned seaward. The candles shivered in the wind of its speed, casting uncertain, changing shadows upon his face. There

was a long silence on the poop. The oars creaked and splashed. Sometimes a shout would come up from below, orders given by the overseer of the slaves, a curse, the sound of a blow. The old man spoke again, more weakly now, as though to himself.

“I have had eighty years of it,” he said— “eighty years in the midst of this corroding sea of hatred and strife. A man has need to keep pure and unalloyed his core of gold, that little centre of perfection with which all, even in this declination of time, are born. All other metal, though it be as tough as steel, as shining-hard as brass, will melt before the devouring bitterness of life. Hatred, lust, anger — the vile passions will corrode your will of iron, the warlike pomp of your front of brass. It needs the golden perfection of pure love and pure knowledge to withstand them.

“God has willed that I should be the stone — weak, indeed, in virtue — that has touched and transformed at least a little of baser metal into the gold that is above corruption. But it is hard work — thankless work. Man has made a hell of his world, and has set up gods of pain to rule it. Goatish gods, that revel and feast on the agony of it all, poring over the tortured world, like those hateful lovers, whose lust burns darkly into cruelty.

“Fever goads us through life in a delirium of madness. Thirsting for the swamps of evil whence the fever came, thirsting for the mirages of his own delirium, man rushes headlong he knows not whither. And all the time a devouring cancer gnaws at his entrails. It will kill him in the end, when even the ghastly inspiration of fever will not be enough to whip him on. He will lie there, cumbering the earth, a heap of rottenness and pain, until at last the cleansing fire comes to sweep the horror away.

“Fever and cancer; acids that burn and corrode. . . . I have had eighty years of it. Thank God, it is the end.”

It was already dawn; the candles were hardly visible now in the light, faded to nothing, like souls in prosperity. In a little while the old man was asleep.

The captain tiptoed up on to the poop and drew the young Spaniard aside for a confidential talk.

“Do you think he will die to-day?” he asked.

The young man nodded.

“God rest his soul,” said the captain piously. “But do you think it would be best to take his body to Minorca or to Genoa? At Minorca they would give much to have their own patron martyr. At the same time it would add to the glory of Genoa to possess so holy a relic, though he is in no way connected with the place. It’s there is my difficulty. Suppose, you see, that my people of Genoa did not want the body, he being from Minorca and not one of them. I should look a fool then, bringing it in in state. Oh, it’s hard, it’s hard. There’s so much to think about. I am not sure but what I hadn’t better put in at Minorca first. What do you think?”

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulder. “I have no advice to offer.”

“Lord,” said the captain as he bustled away, “life is a tangled knot to unravel.”

Mortal Coils

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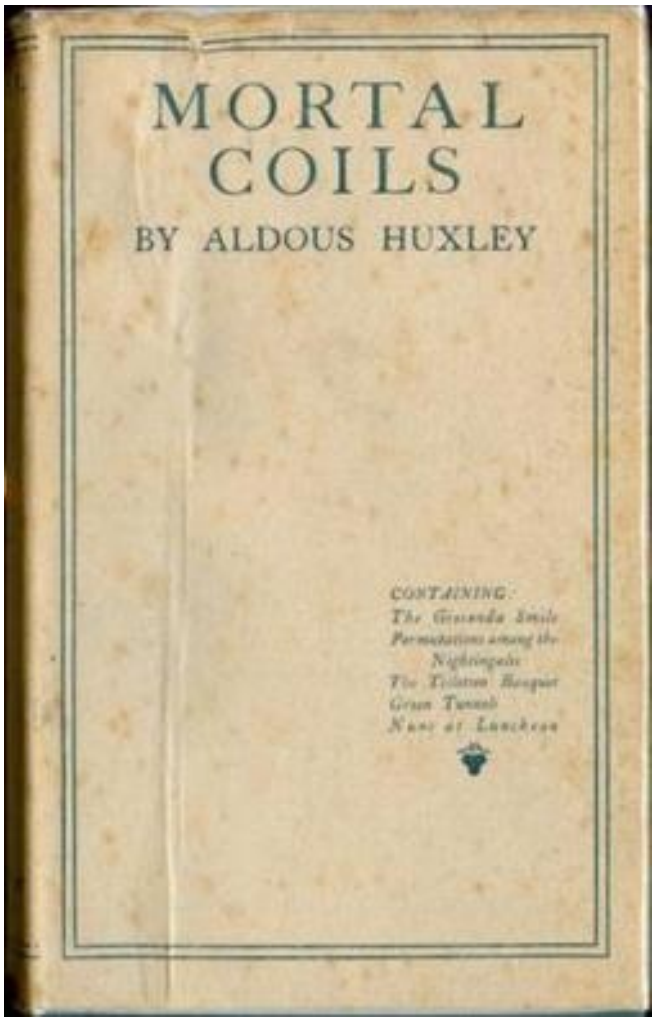

The first edition

THE GIOCONDA SMILE

I

"MISS SPENCE WILL be down directly, sir."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hutton, without turning round. Janet Spence's parlourmaid was so ugly — ugly on purpose, it always seemed to him, malignantly, criminally ugly — that he could not bear to look at her more than was necessary. The door closed. Left to himself, Mr. Hutton got up and began to wander round the room, looking with meditative eyes at the familiar objects it contained.

Photographs of Greek statuary, photographs of the Roman Forum, coloured prints of Italian masterpieces, all very safe and well known. Poor, dear Janet, what a prig — what an intellectual snob! Her real taste was illustrated in that water-colour by the pavement artist, the one she had paid half a crown for (and thirty-five shillings for the frame). How often his had heard her tell the story, how often expatiate on the beauties of that skilful imitation of an oleograph! "A real Artist in the streets," and you could hear the capital A in Artist as she spoke the words. She made you feel that part of his glory had entered into Janet Spence when she tendered him that half-crown for the copy of the oleograph. She was implying a compliment to her own taste and penetration. A genuine Old Master for half a crown. Poor, dear Janet!

Mr. Hutton came to a pause in front of a small oblong mirror. Stooping a little to get a full view of his face, he passed a white, well-manicured finger over his moustache. It was as curly, as freshly auburn as it had been twenty years ago. His hair still retained its colour, and there was no sign of baldness yet — only a certain elevation of the brow. "Shakespearean," thought Mr. Hutton, with a smile, as he surveyed the smooth and polished expanse of his forehead.

Others abide our question, thou art free.... Footsteps in the sea ... Majesty ... Shakespeare, thou shouldst be living at this hour. No, that was Milton, wasn't it? Milton, the Lady of Christ's. There was no lady about him. He was what the women, would call a manly man. That was why they liked him — for the curly auburn moustache and the discreet redolence of tobacco. Mr. Hutton smiled again; he enjoyed making fun of himself. Lady of Christ's? No, no. He was the Christ of Ladies. Very pretty, very pretty. The Christ of Ladies. Mr. Hutton wished there were somebody he could tell the joke to. Poor, dear Janet wouldn't appreciate it, alas?

He straightened himself up, patted his hair, and resumed his peregrination. Damn the Roman Forum; he hated those dreary photographs.

Suddenly he became aware that Janet Spence was in the room, standing near the door. Mr. Hutton started, as though he had been taken in some felonious act. To make these silent and spectral appearances was one of Janet Spence's peculiar talents. Perhaps she had been there all the time, had seen him looking at himself in the mirror. Impossible! But, still, it was disquieting.

"Oh, you gave me such a surprise," said Mr. Hutton, recovering his smile and advancing with outstretched hand to meet her.

Miss Spence was smiling too: her Gioconda smile, he had once called it, in a moment of half-ironical flattery. Miss Spence had taken the compliment seriously, and had always tried to live up to the Leonardo standard. She smiled on his silence while Mr. Hutton shook hands; that was part of the Gioconda business.

"I hope you're well," said Mr. Hutton. "You look it."

What a queer face she had! That small mouth pursed forward by the Gioconda expression into a little snout with a round hole in the middle as though for whistling — it was like a penholder seen from the front. Above the mouth a well-shaped nose, finely aquiline. Eyes large, lustrous, and dark, with the largeness, lustre, and darkness that seems to invite sties and an occasional blood-shot suffusion. They were fine eyes, but unchangingly grave. The penholder might do its Gioconda trick, but the eyes never altered in their earnestness.

Above them, a pair of boldly arched, heavily pencilled black eyebrows lent a surprising air of power, as of a Roman matron, to the upper portion of the face. Her hair was dark and equally Roman; Agrippina from the brows upward.

“I thought I’d just look in on my way home,” Mr. Hutton went on. “Ah, it’s good to be back here” — he indicated with a wave of his hand the flowers in the vases, the sunshine and greenery beyond the windows— “it’s good to be back in the country after a stuffy day of business in town.”

Miss Spence, who had sat down, pointed to a chair at her side.

“No, really, I cant sit down,” Mr. Hutton protested. “I must get back to see how poor Emily is. She was rather seedy this morning.” He sat down, nevertheless. “It’s these wretched liver chills. She’s always getting them. Women—” He broke off and coughed, so as to hide the fact that he had uttered. He was about to say that women with weak digestions ought not to marry; but the remark was too cruel, and he didn’t really believe it. Janet Spence, moreover, was a believer in eternal flames and spiritual attachments. “She hopes to be well enough,” he added, “to see you at luncheon to-morrow. Can you come? Do!” He smiled persuasively. “It’s my invitation too, you know.”

She dropped her eyes, and Mr. Hutton almost thought that he detected a certain reddening of the cheek. It was a tribute; he stroked his moustache.

“I should like to come if you think Emily’s really well enough to have a visitor.”

“Of course. You’ll do her good. You’ll do us both good. In married life three is often better company than two.”

“Oh, you’re cynical.”

Mr. Hutton always had a desire to say “Bow-wow-wow” whenever that last word was spoken. It irritated him more than any other word in the language. But instead of barking he made haste to protest.

“No, no. I’m only speaking a melancholy truth. Reality doesn’t always come up to the ideal, you know. But that doesn’t make me believe any the less in the ideal. Indeed, I believe in it passionately the ideal of a matrimony between two people in perfect accord. I think it’s realisable. I’m sure it is.”

He paused significantly and looked at her with an arch expression. A virgin of thirty-six, but still unwithered; she had her charms. And there was something really rather enigmatic about her. Miss Spence made no reply but continued to smile. There were times when Mr. Hutton got rather bored with the Gioconda. He stood up.

“I must really be going now. Farewell, mysterious Gioconda.” The smile grew intenser, focused itself, as it were, in a narrower snout. Mr. Hutton made a Cinquecento gesture, and kissed her extended hand. It was the first time he had done such a thing; the action seemed not to be resented. “I look forward to to-morrow.”

“Do you?”

For answer Mr. Hutton once more kissed her hand, then turned to go. Miss Spence accompanied him to the porch.

“Where’s your car?” she asked.

“I left it at the gate of the drive.”

“I’ll come and see you off.”

“No, no.” Mr. Hutton was playful, but determined. “You must do no such thing. I simply forbid you.”

“But I should like to come,” Miss Spence protested, throwing a rapid Gioconda at him.

Mr. Hutton held up his hand. “No,” he repeated, and then, with a gesture that was almost the blowing of a kiss, he started to run down the drive, lightly on his toes, with long, bounding strides like a boy’s. He was proud of that run; it was quite marvellously youthful. Still, he was glad the drive was no longer. At the last bend, before passing out of sight of the house, he halted and turned round. Miss Spence was still standing on the steps, smiling her smile. He waved his hand, and this time quite definitely and overtly wafted a kiss in her direction. Then, breaking once more into his magnificent canter, he rounded the last dark promontory of trees. Once out of sight of the house he let his high paces decline to a trot, and finally to a walk. He took out his handkerchief and began wiping his neck inside his collar. What fools, what fools! Had there ever been such an

ass as poor, dear Janet Spence? Never, unless it was himself. Decidedly he was the more malignant fool, since he, at least, was aware of his folly and still persisted in it. Why did he persist? Ah, the problem that was himself, the problem that was other people.

He had reached the gate. A large, prosperous-looking motor was standing at the side of the road.

“Home, M’Nab.” The chauffeur touched his cap. “And stop at the cross-roads on the way, as usual,” Mr. Hutton added, as he opened the door of the car. “Well?” he said, speaking into the obscurity that lurked within.

“Oh, Teddy Bear, what an age you’ve been!” It was a fresh and childish voice that spoke the words. There was the faintest hint of Cockney impurity about the vowel sounds.

Mr. Hutton bent his large form and darted into the car with the agility of an animal regaining its burrow.

“Have I?” he said, as he shut the door. The machine began to move. “You must have missed me a lot if you found the time so long.” He sat back in the low seat; a cherishing warmth enveloped him.

“Teddy Bear....” and with a sigh of contentment a charming little head declined on to Mr. Hutton’s shoulder. Ravished, he looked down sideways at the round, babyish face.

“Do you know, Doris, you look like the pictures of Louise de Kerouaille.” He passed his fingers through a mass of curly hair.

“Who’s Louise de Kera-whatever-it-is?” Doris spoke from remote distances.

“She was, alas! *Fuit*. We shall all be ‘was’ one of these days. Meanwhile....”

Mr. Hutton covered the babyish face with kisses. The car rushed smoothly along. McNab’s back, through the front window was stonily impassive, the back of a statue.

“Your hands,” Doris whispered. “Oh, you mustn’t touch me. They give me electric shocks.”

Mr. Hutton adored her for the virgin imbecility of the words. How late in one’s existence one makes the discovery of one’s body!

“The electricity isn’t in me, it’s in you.” He kissed her again, whispering her name several times: Doris, Doris, Doris. The scientific appellation of the sea-mouse, he was thinking as he kissed the throat, she offered him, white and extended like the throat of a victim awaiting the sacrificial knife. The sea-mouse was a sausage with iridescent fur: very peculiar. Or was Doris the sea cucumber, which turns itself inside out in moments of alarm? He would really have to go to Naples again, just to see the aquarium. These sea creatures were fabulous, unbelievably fantastic.

“Oh, Teddy Bear!” (More zoology; but he was only a land animal. His poor little jokes!) “Teddy Bear, I’m so happy.”

“So am I,” said Mr. Hutton. Was it true?

“But I wish I knew if it were right. Tell me, Teddy Bear, is it right or wrong?”

“Ah, my dear, that’s just what I’ve been wondering for the last thirty years.”

“Be serious, Teddy Bear. I want to know if this is right; if it’s right that I should be here with you and that we should love one another, and that it should give me electric shocks when you touch me.”

“Right? Well, it’s certainly good that you should have electric shocks rather than sexual repressions. Read Freud; repressions are the devil.”

“Oh, you don’t help me. Why aren’t you ever serious? If only you knew how miserable I am sometimes, thinking it’s not right. Perhaps, you know, there is a hell, and all that. I don t know what to do. Sometimes I think I ought to stop loving you.”

“But could you?” asked Mr. Hutton, confident in the powers of his seduction and his moustache.

“No, Teddy Bear, you know I couldn’t. But I could run away, I could hide from you, I could lock myself up and force myself not to come to you.”

“Silly little thing!” He tightened his embrace.

“Oh, dear, I hope it isn’t wrong. And there are times when I don’t care if it is.”

Mr. Hutton was touched. He had a certain protective affection for this little creature. He laid his cheek against her hair and so, interlaced, they sat in silence,

while the car, swaying and pitching a little as it hastened along, seemed to draw in the white road and the dusty hedges towards it devouringly.

“Good-bye, good-bye.”

The car moved on, gathered speed, vanished round a curve, and Doris was left standing by the sign-post at the cross-roads, still dizzy and weak with the languor born of those kisses and the electrical touch of those gentle hands. She had to take a deep breath, to draw herself up deliberately, before she was strong enough to start her homeward walk. She had half a mile in which to invent the necessary lies.

Alone, Mr. Hutton suddenly found himself the prey of an appalling boredom.

II

Mrs. Hutton was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, playing Patience. In spite of the warmth of the July evening a wood fire was burning on the hearth. A black Pomeranian, extenuated by the heat and the fatigues of digestion, slept before the blaze.

“Phew! Isn’t it rather hot in here?” Mr. Hutton asked as he entered the room.

“You know I have to keep warm, dear.” The voice seemed breaking on the verge of tears. “I get so shivery.”

“I hope you’re better this evening.”

“Not much, I’m afraid.”

The conversation stagnated. Mr. Hutton stood leaning his back against the mantelpiece. He looked down at the Pomeranian lying at his feet, and with the toe of his right boot he rolled the little dog over and rubbed its white-flecked chest and belly. The creature lay in an inert ecstasy. Mrs. Hutton continued to play Patience. Arrived at an *impasse*, she altered the position of one card, took back another, and went on playing. Her Patiences always came out.

“Dr. Libbard thinks I ought to go to Llandrindod Wells this summer.”

“Well — go, my dear — go, most certainly.”

Mr. Hutton was thinking of the events of the afternoon: how they had driven, Doris and he, up to the hanging wood, had left the car to wait for them under the shade of the trees, and walked together out into the windless sunshine of the chalk down.

“I’m to drink the waters for my liver, and he thinks I ought to have massage and electric treatment, too.”

Hat in hand, Doris had stalked four blue butterflies that were dancing together round a scabious flower with a motion that was like the flickering of blue fire. The blue fire burst and scattered into whirling sparks; she had given chase, laughing and shouting like a child.

“I’m sure it will do you good, my dear.”

“I was wondering if you’d come with me, dear.”

“But you know I’m going to Scotland at the end of the month.”

Mrs. Hutton looked up at him entreatingly. “It’s the journey,” she said. “The thought of it is such a nightmare. I don’t know if I can manage it. And you know I can’t sleep in hotels. And then there’s the luggage and all the worries. I can’t go alone.

“But you won’t be alone. You’ll have your maid with you.” He spoke impatiently. The sick woman was usurping the place of the healthy one. He was being dragged back from the memory of the sunlit down and the quick, laughing girl, back to this unhealthy, overheated room and its complaining occupant.

“I don’t think I shall be able to go.”

“But you must, my dear, if the doctor tells you to. And, besides, a change will do you good.”

“I don’t think so.”

“But Libbard thinks so, and he knows what he’s talking about.”

“No, I can’t face it. I’m too weak. I can’t go alone.” Mrs. Hutton pulled a handkerchief out of her black silk bag, and put it to her eyes.

“Nonsense, my dear, you must make the effort.”

“I had rather be left in peace to die here.” She was crying in earnest now.

“O Lord! Now do be reasonable. Listen now, please.” Mrs. Hutton only sobbed more violently. “Oh, what is one to do?” He shrugged his shoulders and walked out of the room.

Mr. Hutton was aware that he had not behaved with proper patience; but he could not help it. Very early in his manhood he had discovered that not only did he not feel sympathy for the poor, the weak, the diseased, and deformed; he actually hated them. Once, as an undergraduate, he spent three days at a mission in the East End. He had returned, filled with a profound and ineradicable disgust. Instead of pitying, he loathed the unfortunate. It was not, he knew, a very comely emotion; and he had been ashamed of it at first. In the end he had decided that it was temperamental, inevitable, and had felt no further qualms. Emily had been healthy and beautiful when he married her. He had loved her then. But now — was it his fault that she was like this?

Mr. Hutton dined alone. Food and drink left him more benevolent than he had been before dinner. To make amends for his show of exasperation he went up to his wife’s room and offered to read to her. She was touched, gratefully accepted the offer, and Mr. Hutton, who was particularly proud of his accent, suggested a little light reading in French.

“French? I am so fond of French.” Mrs. Hutton spoke of the language of Racine as though it were a dish of green peas.

Mr. Hutton ran down to the library and returned with a yellow volume. He began reading. The effort of pronouncing perfectly absorbed his whole attention. But how good his accent was! The fact of its goodness seemed to improve the quality of the novel he was reading.

At the end of fifteen pages an unmistakable sound aroused him. He looked up; Mrs. Hutton had gone to sleep. He sat still for a little while, looking with a dispassionate curiosity at the sleeping face. Once it had been beautiful; once, long ago, the sight of it, the recollection of it, had moved him with an emotion profounder, perhaps, than any he had felt before or since. Now it was lined and cadaverous. The skin was stretched tightly over the cheekbones, across the bridge of the sharp, bird-like nose. The closed eyes were set in profound bone-

rimmed sockets. The lamplight striking on the face from the side emphasised with light and shade its cavities and projections. It was the face of a dead Christ by Morales.

Le squelette était invisible
Au temps heureux de l'art païen.

He shivered a little, and tiptoed out of the room.

On the following day Mrs. Hutton came down to luncheon. She had had some unpleasant palpitations during the night, but she was feeling better now. Besides, she wanted to do honour to her guest. Miss Spence listened to her complaints about Llandrindod Wells, and was loud in sympathy, lavish with advice. Whatever she said was always said with intensity. She leaned forward, aimed, so to speak, like a gun, and fired her words. Bang! the charge in her soul was ignited, the words whizzed forth at the narrow barrel of her mouth. She was a machine-gun riddling her hostess with sympathy. Mr. Hutton had undergone similar bombardments, mostly of a literary or philosophic character — bombardments of Maeterlinck, of Mrs. Besant, of Bergson, of William James. To-day the missiles were medical. She talked about insomnia, she expatiated on the virtues of harmless drugs and beneficent specialists. Under the bombardment Mrs. Hutton opened out, like a flower in the sun.

Mr. Hutton looked on in silence. The spectacle of Janet Spence evoked in him an unfailing curiosity. He was not romantic enough to imagine that every face masked an interior physiognomy of beauty or strangeness, that every woman's small talk was like a vapour hanging over mysterious gulfs. His wife, for example, and Doris; they were nothing more than what they seemed to be. But with Janet Spence it was somehow different. Here one could be sure that there was some kind of a queer face behind the Gioconda smile and the Roman eyebrows. The only question was: What exactly was there? Mr. Hutton could never quite make out.

“But perhaps you won’t have to go to Llandrindod after all,” Miss Spence was saying. “If you get well quickly Dr. Libbard will let you off.”

“I only hope so. Indeed, I do really feel rather better to-day.”

Mr. Hutton felt ashamed. How much was it his own lack of sympathy that prevented her from feeling well every day? But he comforted himself by reflecting that it was only a case of feeling, not of being better. Sympathy does not mend a diseased liver or a weak heart.

“My dear, I wouldn’t eat those red currants if I were you,” he said, suddenly solicitous. “You know that Libbard has banned everything with skins and pips.”

“But I am so fond of them,” Mrs. Hutton protested, “and I feel so well to-day.”

“Don’t be a tyrant,” said Miss Spence, looking first at him and then at his wife. “Let the poor invalid have what she fancies; it will do her good.” She laid her hand on Mrs. Hutton’s arm and patted it affectionately two or three times.

“Thank you, my dear.” Mrs. Hutton helped herself to the stewed currants.

“Well, don’t blame me if they make you ill again.”

“Do I ever blame you, dear?”

“You have nothing to blame me for,” Mr. Hutton answered playfully. “I am the perfect husband.”

They sat in the garden after luncheon. From the island of shade under the old cypress tree they looked out across a flat expanse of lawn, in which the parterres of flowers shone with a metallic brilliance.

Mr. Hutton took a deep breath of the warm and fragrant air. “It’s good to be alive,” he said.

“Just to be alive,” his wife echoed, stretching one pale, knot-jointed hand into the sunlight.

A maid brought the coffee; the silver pots and the little blue cups were set on a folding table near the group of chairs.

“Oh, my medicine!” exclaimed Mrs. Hutton. “Run in and fetch it, Clara, will you? The white bottle on the sideboard.”

“I’ll go,” said Mr. Hutton. “I’ve got to go and fetch a cigar in any case.”

He ran in towards the house. On the threshold he turned round for an instant. The maid was walking back across the lawn. His wife was sitting up in her deck-chair, engaged in opening her white parasol. Miss Spence was bending over the table, pouring out the coffee. He passed into the cool obscurity of the house.

“Do you like sugar in your coffee?” Miss Spence inquired.

“Yes, please. Give me rather a lot. I’ll drink it after my medicine to take the taste away.”

Mrs. Hutton leaned back in her chair, lowering the sunshade over her eyes, so as to shut out from her vision the burning sky.

Behind her, Miss Spence was making a delicate clinking among the coffee-cups.

“I’ve given you three large spoonfuls. That ought to take the taste away. And here comes the medicine.”

Mr. Hutton had reappeared, carrying a wineglass, half full of a pale liquid.

“It smells delicious,” he said, as he handed it to his wife.

“That’s only the flavouring.” She drank it off at a gulp, shuddered, and made a grimace. “Ugh, it’s so nasty. Give me my coffee.”

Miss Spence gave her the cup; she sipped at it. “You’ve made it like syrup. But it’s very nice, after that atrocious medicine.”

At half-past three Mrs. Hutton complained that she did not feel as well as she had done, and went indoors to lie down. Her husband would have said something about the red currants, but checked himself; the triumph of an “I told you so” was too cheaply won. Instead, he was sympathetic, and gave her his arm to the house.

“A rest will do you good,” he said. “By the way, I shan’t be back till after dinner.”

“But why? Where are you going?”

“I promised to go to Johnson’s this evening. We have to discuss the war memorial, you know.”

“Oh, I wish you weren’t going.” Mrs. Hutton was almost in tears. “Can’t you stay? I don’t like being alone in the house.”

“But, my dear, I promised weeks ago.” It was a bother having to lie like this. “And now I must get back and look after Miss Spence.”

He kissed her on the forehead and went out again into the garden. Miss Spence received him aimed and intense.

“Your wife is dreadfully ill,” she fired off at him.

“I thought she cheered up so much when you came.”

“That was purely nervous, purely nervous. I was watching her closely. With a heart in that condition and her digestion wrecked — yes, wrecked — anything might happen.”

“Libbard doesn’t take so gloomy a view of poor Emily’s health.” Mr. Hutton held open the gate that led from the garden into the drive; Miss Spence’s car was standing by the front door.

“Libbard is only a country doctor. You ought to see a specialist.”

He could not refrain from laughing. “You have a macabre passion for specialists.”

Miss Spence held up her hand in protest. “I am serious. I think poor Emily is in a very bad state. Anything might happen at any moment.”

He handed her into the car and shut the door. The chauffeur started the engine and climbed into his place, ready to drive off.

“Shall I tell him to start?” He had no desire to continue the conversation.

Miss Spence leaned forward and shot a Gioconda in his direction. “Remember, I expect you to come and see me again soon.”

Mechanically he grinned, made a polite noise, and, as the car moved forward, waved his hand. He was happy to be alone.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Hutton himself drove away. Doris was waiting at the cross-roads. They dined together twenty miles from home, at a roadside hotel. It was one of those bad, expensive meals which are only cooked in country hotels frequented by motorists. It revolted Mr. Hutton, but Doris enjoyed it. She always enjoyed things. Mr. Hutton ordered a not very good brand of champagne. He was wishing he had spent the evening in his library.

When they started homewards Doris was a little tipsy and extremely affectionate. It was very dark inside the car, but looking forward, past the motionless form of M'Nab, they could see a bright and narrow universe of forms and colours scooped out of the night by the electric head-lamps.

It was after eleven when Mr. Hutton reached home. Dr. Libbard met him in the hall. He was a small man with delicate hands and well-formed features that were almost feminine. His brown eyes were large and melancholy. He used to waste a great deal of time sitting at the bedside of his patients, looking sadness through those eyes and talking in a sad, low voice about nothing in particular. His person exhaled a pleasing odour, decidedly antiseptic but at the same time suave and discreetly delicious.

"Libbard?" said Mr. Hutton in surprise. "You here? Is my wife ill?"

"We tried to fetch you earlier," the soft, melancholy voice replied. "It was thought you were at Mr. Johnson's, but they had no news of you there."

"No, I was detained. I had a breakdown," Mr. Hutton answered irritably. It was tiresome to be caught out in a lie.

"Your wife wanted to see you urgently."

"Well, I can go now." Mr. Hutton moved towards the stairs.

Dr. Libbard laid a hand on his arm. "I am afraid it's too late."

"Too late?" He began fumbling with his watch; it wouldn't come out of the pocket.

"Mrs. Hutton passed away half an hour ago."

The voice remained even in its softness, the melancholy of the eyes did not deepen. Dr. Libbard spoke of death as he would speak of a local cricket match. All things were equally vain and equally deplorable.

Mr. Hutton found himself thinking of Janet Spence's words. At any moment — at any moment. She had been extraordinarily right.

"What happened?" he asked. "What was the cause?"

Dr. Libbard explained. It was heart failure brought on by a violent attack of nausea, caused in its turn by the eating of something of an irritant nature. Red currants? Mr. Hutton suggested. Very likely. It had been too much for the heart.

There was chronic valvular disease: something had collapsed under the strain. It was all over; she could not have suffered much.

III

“It’s a pity they should have chosen the day of the Eton and Harrow match for the funeral,” old General Grego was saying as he stood, his top hat in his hand, under the shadow of the lych gate, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

Mr. Hutton overheard the remark and with difficulty restrained a desire to inflict grievous bodily pain on the General. He would have liked to hit the old brute in the middle of his big red face. Monstrous great mulberry, spotted with meal! Was there no respect for the dead? Did nobody care? In theory he didn’t much care; let the dead bury their dead. But here, at the graveside, he had found himself actually sobbing. Poor Emily, they had been pretty happy once. Now she was lying at the bottom of a seven-foot hole. And here was Grego complaining that he couldn’t go to the Eton and Harrow match.

Mr. Hutton looked round at the groups of black figures that were drifting slowly out of the churchyard towards the fleet of cabs and motors assembled in the road outside. Against the brilliant background of the July grass and flowers and foliage, they had a horribly alien and unnatural appearance. It pleased him to think that all these people would soon be dead, too.

That evening Mr. Hutton sat up late in his library reading the life of Milton. There was no particular reason why he should have chosen Milton; it was the book that first came to hand, that was all. It was after midnight when he had finished. He got up from his armchair, unbolted the French windows, and stepped out on to the little paved terrace. The night was quiet and clear. Mr. Hutton looked at the stars and at the holes between them, dropped his eyes to the dim lawns and hueless flowers of the garden, and let them wander over the farther landscape, black and grey under the moon.

He began to think with a kind of confused violence. There were the stars, there was Milton. A man can be somehow the peer of stars and night. Greatness, nobility. But is there seriously a difference between the noble and the ignoble? Milton, the stars, death, and himself — himself. The soul, the body; the higher and the lower nature. Perhaps there was something in it, after all. Milton had a god on his side and righteousness. What had he? Nothing, nothing whatever. There were only Doris's little breasts. What was the point of it all? Milton, the stars, death, and Emily in her grave, Doris and himself — always himself....

Oh, he was a futile and disgusting being. Everything convinced him of it. It was a solemn moment. He spoke aloud: "I will, I will." The sound of his own voice in the darkness was appalling; it seemed to him that he had sworn that infernal oath which binds even the gods: "I will, I will." There had been New Year's days and solemn anniversaries in the past, when he had felt the same contritions and recorded similar resolutions. They had all thinned away, these resolutions, like smoke, into nothingness. But this was a greater moment and he had pronounced a more fearful oath. In the future it was to be different. Yes, he would live by reason, he would be industrious, he would curb his appetites, he would devote his life to some good purpose. It was resolved and it would be so.

In practice he saw himself spending his mornings in agricultural pursuits, riding round with the bailiff, seeing that his land was farmed in the best modern way — silos and artificial manures and continuous cropping, and all that. The remainder of the day should be devoted to serious study. There was that book he had been intending to write for so long — *The Effect of Diseases on Civilisation*.

Mr. Hutton went to bed humble and contrite, but with a sense that grace had entered into him. He slept for seven and a half hours, and woke to find the sun brilliantly shining. The emotions of the evening before had been transformed by a good night's rest into his customary cheerfulness. It was not until a good many seconds after his return to conscious life that he remembered his resolution, his Stygian oath. Milton and death seemed somehow different in the sunlight. As for the stars, they were not there. But the resolutions were good; even in the daytime he could see that. He had his horse saddled after breakfast, and rode round the

farm with the bailiff. After luncheon he read Thucydides on the plague at Athens. In the evening he made a few notes on malaria in Southern Italy. While he was undressing he remembered that there was a good anecdote in Skelton's jest-book about the Sweating Sickness. He would have made a note of it if only he could have found a pencil.

On the sixth morning of his new life Mr. Hutton found among his correspondence an envelope addressed in that peculiarly vulgar handwriting which he knew to be Doris's. He opened it, and began to read. She didn't know what to say; words were so inadequate. His wife dying like that, and so suddenly — it was too terrible. Mr. Hutton sighed, but his interest revived somewhat as he read on:

"Death is so frightening, I never think of it when I can help it. But when something like this happens, or when I am feeling ill or depressed, then I can't help remembering it is there so close, and I think about all the wicked things I have done and about you and me, and I wonder what will happen, and I am so frightened. I am so lonely, Teddy Bear, and so unhappy, and I don't know what to do. I can't get rid of the idea of dying, I am so wretched and helpless without you. I didn't mean to write to you; I meant to wait till you were out of mourning and could come and see me again, but I was so lonely and miserable, Teddy Bear, I had to write. I couldn't help it. Forgive me, I want you so much; I have nobody in the world but you. You are so good and gentle and understanding; there is nobody like you. I shall never forget how good and kind you have been to me, and you are so clever and know so much, I can t understand how you ever came to pay any attention to me, I am so dull and stupid, much less like me and love me, because you do love me a little, don't you, Teddy Bear?"

Mr. Hutton was touched with shame and remorse. To be thanked like this, worshipped for having seduced the girl — it was too much. It had just been a piece of imbecile wantonness. Imbecile, idiotic: there was no other way to describe it. For, when all was said, he had derived very little pleasure from it. Taking all things together, he had probably been more bored than amused. Once upon a time he had believed himself to be a hedonist. But to be a hedonist

implies a certain process of reasoning, a deliberate choice of known pleasures, a rejection of known pains. This had been done without reason, against it. For he knew beforehand — so well, so well — that there was no interest or pleasure to be derived from these wretched affairs. And yet each time the vague itch came upon him he succumbed, involving himself once more in the old stupidity. There had been Maggie, his wife's maid, and Edith, the girl on the farm, and Mrs. Pringle, and the waitress in London, and others — there seemed to be dozens of them. It had all been so stale and boring. He knew it would be; he always knew. And yet, and yet.... Experience doesn't teach.

Poor little Doris! He would write to her kindly, comfortingly, but he wouldn't see her again. A servant came to tell him that his horse was saddled and waiting. He mounted and rode off. That morning the old bailiff was more irritating than usual.

Five days later Doris and Mr. Hutton ware sitting together on the pier at Southend; Doris, in white muslin with pink garnishings, radiated happiness; Mr. Hutton, legs outstretched and chair tilted, had pushed the panama back from his forehead, and was trying to feel like a tripper. That night, when Doris was asleep, breathing and warm by his side, he recaptured, in this moment of darkness and physical fatigue, the rather cosmic emotion which had possessed him that evening, not a fortnight ago, when he had made his great resolution. And so his solemn oath had already gone the way of so many other resolutions. Unreason had triumphed; at the first itch of desire he had given way. He was hopeless, hopeless.

For a long time he lay with closed eyes, ruminating his humiliation. The girl stirred in her sleep, Mr. Hutton turned over and looked in her direction. Enough faint light crept in between the half-drawn curtains to show her bare arm and shoulder, her neck, and the dark tangle of hair on the pillow. She was beautiful, desirable. Why did he lie there moaning over his sins? What did it matter? If he were hopeless, then so be it; he would make the best of his hopelessness. A glorious sense of irresponsibility suddenly filled him. He was free, magnificently

free. In a kind of exaltation he drew the girl towards him. She woke, bewildered, almost frightened under his rough kisses.

The storm of his desire subsided into a kind of serene merriment. The whole atmosphere seemed to be quivering with enormous silent laughter.

“Could anyone love you as much as I do, Teddy Bear?” The question came faintly from distant worlds of love.

“I think I know somebody who does,” Mr. Hutton replied. The submarine laughter was swelling, rising, ready to break the surface of silence and resound.

“Who? Tell me. What do you mean?” The voice had come very close; charged with suspicion, anguish, indignation, it belonged to this immediate world.

“A — ah!”

“Who?”

“You’ll never guess.” Mr. Hutton kept up the joke until it began to grow tedious, and then pronounced the name “Janet Spence.”

Doris was incredulous. “Miss Spence of the Manor? That old woman?” It was too ridiculous. Mr. Hutton laughed too.

“But it’s quite true,” he said. “She adores me.” Oh, the vast joke. He would go and see her as soon as he returned — see and conquer. “I believe she wants to marry me,” he added.

“But you wouldn’t ... you don’t intend....”

The air was fairly crepitating with humour. Mr. Hutton laughed aloud. “I intend to marry you,” he said. It seemed to him the best joke he had ever made in his life.

When Mr. Hutton left Southend he was once more a married man. It was agreed that, for the time being, the fact should be kept secret. In the autumn they would go abroad together, and the world should be informed. Meanwhile he was to go back to his own house and Doris to hers.

The day after his return he walked over in the afternoon to see Miss Spence. She received him with the old Gioconda.

“I was expecting you to come.”

“I couldn’t keep away,” Mr. Hutton gallantly replied.

They sat in the summer-house. It was a pleasant place — a little old stucco temple bowered among dense bushes of evergreen. Miss Spence had left her mark on it by hanging up over the seat a blue-and-white Della Robbia plaque.

“I am thinking of going to Italy this autumn,” said Mr. Hutton. He felt like a ginger-beer bottle, ready to pop with bubbling humorous excitement.

“Italy....” Miss Spence closed her eyes ecstatically. “I feel drawn there too.”

“Why not let yourself be drawn?”

“I don’t know. One somehow hasn’t the energy and initiative to set out alone.”

“Alone....” Ah, sound of guitars and throaty singing. “Yes, travelling alone isn’t much fun.”

Miss Spence lay back in her chair without speaking. Her eyes were still closed. Mr. Hutton stroked his moustache. The silence prolonged itself for what seemed a very long time.

Pressed to stay to dinner, Mr. Hutton did not refuse. The fun had hardly started. The table was laid in the loggia. Through its arches they looked out on to the sloping garden, to the valley below and the farther hills. Light ebbed away; the heat and silence were oppressive. A huge cloud was mounting up the sky, and there were distant breathings of thunder. The thunder drew nearer, a wind began to blow, and the first drops of rain fell. The table was cleared. Miss Spence and Mr. Hutton sat on in the growing darkness.

Miss Spence broke a long silence by saying meditatively.

“I think everyone has a right to a certain amount of happiness, don’t you?”

“Most certainly.” But what was she leading up to? Nobody makes generalisations about life unless they mean to talk about themselves. Happiness: he looked back on his own life, and saw a cheerful, placid existence disturbed by no great griefs or discomforts or alarms. He had always had money and freedom; he had been able to do very much as he wanted. Yes, he supposed he had been happy — happier than most men. And now he was not merely happy; he had

discovered in irresponsibility the secret of gaiety. He was about to say something about his happiness when Miss Spence went on speaking.

“People like you and me have a right to be happy some time in our lives.”

“Me?” said Mr. Hutton surprised.

“Poor Henry! Fate hasn’t treated either of us very well.”

“Oh, well, it might have treated me worse.”

“You re being cheerful. That’s brave of you. But don’t think I can’t see behind the mask.”

Miss Spence spoke louder and louder as the rain came down more and more heavily. Periodically the thunder cut across her utterances. She talked on, shouting against the noise.

“I have understood you so well and for so long.”

A flash revealed her, aimed and intent, leaning towards him. Her eyes were two profound and menacing gun-barrels. The darkness re-engulfed her.

“You were a lonely soul seeking a companion soul. I could sympathise with you in your solitude. Your marriage ...”

The thunder cut short the sentence. Miss Spence’s voice became audible once more with the words:

“... could offer no companionship to a man of your stamp. You needed a soul mate.”

A soul mate — he! a soul mate. It was incredibly fantastic. Georgette Leblanc, the ex-soul mate of Maurice Maeterlinck. He had seen that in the paper a few days ago. So it was thus that Janet Spence had painted him in her imagination — a soul-mater. And for Doris he was a picture of goodness and the cleverest man in the world. And actually, really, he was what? — Who knows?

“My heart went out to you. I could understand; I was lonely, too.” Miss Spence laid her hand on his knee. “You were so patient.” Another flash. She was still aimed, dangerously. “You never complained. But I could guess — I could guess.”

“How wonderful of you!” So he was an *âme incomprise*.

“Only a woman’s intuition....”

The thunder crashed and rumbled, died away, and only the sound of the ram was left. The thunder was his laughter, magnified, externalised. Flash and crash, there it was again, right on top of them.

“Don’t you feel that you have within you something that is akin to this storm?” He could imagine her leaning forward as she uttered the words. “Passion makes one the equal of the elements.”

What was his gambit now? Why, obviously, he should have said “Yes,” and ventured on some unequivocal gesture. But Mr. Hutton suddenly took fright. The ginger beer in him had gone flat. The woman was serious — terribly serious. He was appalled.

Passion? “No,” he desperately answered. “I am without passion.”

But his remark was either unheard or unheeded, for Miss Spence went on with a growing exaltation, speaking so rapidly, however, and in such a burningly intimate whisper that Mr. Hutton found it very difficult to distinguish what she was saying. She was telling him, as far as he could make out, the story of her life. The lightning was less frequent now, and there were long intervals of darkness. But at each flash he saw her still aiming towards him, still yearning forward with a terrifying intensity. Darkness, the rain, and then flash! her face was there, close at hand. A pale mask, greenish white; the large eyes, the narrow barrel of the mouth, the heavy eyebrows. Agrippina, or wasn’t it rather — yes, wasn’t it rather George Robey?

He began devising absurd plans for escaping. He might suddenly jump up, Pretending he had seen a burglar — Stop thief, stop thief! — and dash off into the night in pursuit. Or should he say that he felt faint, a heart attack? or that he had seen, a ghost — Emily’s ghost — in the garden? Absorbed in his childish plotting, he had ceased to pay any attention to Miss Spence’s words. The spasmodic clutching of her hand recalled his thoughts.

“I honoured you for that, Henry,” she was saying.

Honoured him for what?

“Marriage is a sacred tie, and your respect for it, even when the marriage was, as it was in your case, an unhappy one, made me respect you and admire you,

and — shall I dare say the word?—”

Oh, the burglar, the ghost in the garden! But it was too late.

“... yes, love you, Henry, all the more. But we’re free now, Henry.”

Free? There was a movement in the dark, and she was kneeling on the floor by his chair.

“Oh, Henry, Henry, I have been unhappy too.”

Her arms embraced him, and by the shaking of her body he could feel that she was sobbing. She might have been a suppliant crying for mercy.

“You mustn’t, Janet,” he protested. Those tears were terrible, terrible. “Not now, not now! You must be calm; you must go to bed.” He patted her shoulder, then got up, disengaging himself from her embrace. He left her still crouching on the floor beside the chair on which he had been sitting.

Groping his way into the hall, and without waiting to look for his hat, he went out of the house, taking infinite pains to close the front door noiselessly behind him. The clouds had blown over, and the moon was shining from a clear sky. There were puddles all along the road, and a noise of running water rose from the gutters and ditches. Mr. Hutton splashed along, not caring if he got wet.

How heartrendingly she had sobbed! With the emotions of pity and remorse that the recollection evoked in him there was a certain resentment: why couldn’t she have played the game that he was playing the heartless, amusing game? Yes, but he had known all the time that she wouldn’t, she couldn’t play that game; he had known and persisted.

What had she said about passion and the elements? Something absurdly stale, but true, true. There she was, a cloud black bosomed and charged with thunder, and he, like some absurd little Benjamin Franklin, had sent up a kite into the heart of the menace. Now he was complaining that his toy had drawn the lightning.

She was probably still kneeling by that chair in the loggia, crying.

But why hadn’t he been able to keep up the game? Why had his irresponsibility deserted him, leaving him suddenly sober in a cold world? There

were no answers to any of his questions. One idea burned steady and luminous in his mind — the idea of flight. He must get away at once.

IV

“What are you thinking about, Teddy Bear?”

“Nothing.”

There was a silence. Mr. Hutton remained motionless, his elbows on the parapet of the terrace, his chin in his hands, looking down over Florence. He had taken a villa on one of the hilltops to the south of the city. From a little raised terrace at the end of the garden one looked down a long fertile valley on to the town and beyond it to the bleak mass of Monte Morello and, eastward of it, to the peopled hill of Fiesole, dotted with white houses. Everything was clear and luminous in the September sunshine.

“Are you worried about anything?”

“No, thank you.”

“Tell me, Teddy Bear.”

“But, my dear, there’s nothing to tell.” Mr. Hutton turned round, smiled, and patted the girl’s hand. “I think you’d better go in and have your siesta. It’s too hot for you here.”

“Very well, Teddy Bear. Are you coming too?”

“When I’ve finished my cigar.”

“All right. But do hurry up and finish it, Teddy Bear.” Slowly, reluctantly, she descended the steps of the terrace and walked towards the house.

Mr. Hutton continued his contemplation of Florence. He had need to be alone. It was good sometimes to escape from Doris and the restless solicitude of her passion. He had never known the pains of loving hopelessly, but he was experiencing now the pains of being loved. These last weeks had been a period of growing discomfort. Doris was always with him, like an obsession, like a guilty conscience. Yes, it was good to be alone.

He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and opened it; not without reluctance. He hated letters; they always contained something unpleasant — nowadays, since his second marriage. This was from his sister. He began skimming through the insulting home-truths of which it was composed. The words “indecent haste,” “social suicide,” “scarcely cold in her grave,” “person of the lower classes,” all occurred. They were inevitable now in any communication from a well-meaning and right-thinking relative. Impatient, he was about to tear the stupid letter to pieces when his eye fell on a sentence at the bottom of the third page. His heart beat with uncomfortable violence as he read it. It was too monstrous! Janet Spence was going about telling everyone that he had poisoned his wife in order to marry Doris. What damnable malice! Ordinarily a man of the suavest temper, Mr. Hutton found himself trembling with rage. He took the childish satisfaction of calling names — he cursed the woman.

Then suddenly he saw the ridiculous side of the situation. The notion that he should have murdered anyone in order to marry Doris! If they only knew how miserably bored he was. Poor, dear Janet! She had tried to be malicious; she had only succeeded in being stupid.

A sound of footsteps aroused him; he looked round. In the garden below the little terrace the servant girl of the house was picking fruit. A Neapolitan, strayed somehow as far north as Florence, she was a specimen of the classical type — a little debased. Her profile might have been taken from a Sicilian coin of a bad period. Her features, carved floridly in the grand tradition, expressed an almost perfect stupidity. Her mouth was the most beautiful thing about her; the calligraphic hand of nature had richly curved it into an expression of mulish bad temper.... Under her hideous black clothes, Mr. Hutton divined a powerful body, firm and massive. He had looked at her before with a vague interest and curiosity. To-day the curiosity defined and focused itself into a desire. An idyll of Theocritus. Here was the woman; he, alas, was not precisely like a goatherd on the volcanic hills. He called to her.

“Armida!”

The smile with which she answered him was so provocative, attested so easy a virtue, that Mr. Hutton took fright. He was on the brink once more — on the brink. He must draw back, oh! quickly, quickly, before it was too late. The girl continued to look up at him.

"*Ha chiamito*?" she asked at last.

Stupidity or reason? Oh, there was no choice now. It was imbecility every time.

"*Scendo*" he called back to her. Twelve steps led from the garden to the terrace. Mr. Hutton counted them. Down, down, down, down.... He saw a vision of himself descending from one circle of the inferno to the next — from a darkness full of wind and hail to an abyss of stinking mud.

V

For a good many days the Hutton case had a place on the front page of every newspaper. There had been no more popular murder trial since George Smith had temporarily eclipsed the European War by drowning in a warm bath his seventh bride. The public imagination was stirred by this tale of a murder brought to light months after the date of the crime. Here, it was felt, was one of those incidents in human life, so notable because they are so rare, which do definitely justify the ways of God to man. A wicked man had been moved by an illicit passion to kill his wife. For months he had lived in sin and fancied security —— only to be dashed at last more horribly into the pit he had prepared for himself. Murder will out, and here was a case of it. The readers of the newspapers were in a position to follow every movement of the hand of God. There had been vague, but persistent, rumours in the neighbourhood; the police had taken action at last. Then came the exhumation order, the post-mortem examination, the inquest, the evidence of the experts, the verdict of the coroner's jury, the trial, the condemnation. For once Providence had done its duty,

obviously, grossly, didactically, as in a melodrama. The newspapers were right in making of the case the staple intellectual food of a whole season.

Mr. Hutton's first emotion when he was summoned from Italy to give evidence at the inquest was one of indignation. It was a monstrous, a scandalous thing that the police should take such idle, malicious gossip seriously. When the inquest was over he would bring an action for malicious prosecution against the Chief Constable; he would sue the Spence woman for slander.

The inquest was opened; the astonishing evidence unrolled itself. The experts had examined the body, and had found traces of arsenic; they were of opinion that the late Mrs. Hutton had died of arsenic poisoning.

Arsenic poisoning.... Emily had died of arsenic poisoning? After that, Mr. Hutton learned with surprise that there was enough arsenicated insecticide in his green-houses to poison an army.

It was now, quite suddenly, that he saw it: there was a case against him. Fascinated, he watched it growing, growing, like some monstrous tropical plant. It was enveloping him, surrounding him; he was lost in a tangled forest.

When was the poison administered? The experts agreed that it must have been swallowed eight or nine hours before death. About lunch-time? Yes, about lunch-time. Clara, the parlourmaid, was called. Mrs. Hutton, she remembered, had asked her to go and fetch her medicine. Mr. Hutton had volunteered to go instead; he had gone alone. Miss Spence — ah, the memory of the storm, the white aimed face! the horror of it all! — Miss Spence confirmed Clara's statement, and added that Mr. Hutton had come back with the medicine already poured out in a wineglass, not in the bottle.

Mr. Hutton's indignation evaporated. He was dismayed, frightened. It was all too fantastic to be taken seriously, and yet this nightmare was a fact it was actually happening.

M'Nab had seen them kissing, often. He had taken them for a drive on the day of Mrs. Hutton's death. He could see them reflected in the wind-screen, sometimes out of the tail of his eye.

The inquest was adjourned. That evening Doris went to bed with a headache. When he went to her room after dinner, Mr. Hutton found her crying.

“What’s the matter?” He sat down on the edge of her bed and began to stroke her hair. For a long time she did not answer, and he went on stroking her hair mechanically, almost unconsciously; sometimes, even he bent down and kissed her bare shoulder. He had his own affairs, however, to think about. What had happened? How was it that the stupid gossip had actually come true? Emily had died of arsenic poisoning. It was absurd, impossible. The order of things had been broken, and he was at the mercy of an irresponsibility. What had happened, what was going to happen? He was interrupted in the midst of his thoughts.

“It’s my fault — it’s my fault!” Doris suddenly sobbed out. “I shouldn’t have loved you; I oughtn’t to have let you love me. Why was I ever born?”

Mr. Hutton didn’t say anything but looked down in silence at the abject figure of misery lying on the bed.

“If they do anything to you I shall kill myself.”

She sat up, held him for a moment at arm’s length, and looked at him with a kind of violence, as though she were never to see him again.

“I love you, I love you, I love you.” She drew him, inert and passive, towards her, clasped him, pressed herself against him. “I didn’t know you loved me as much as that, Teddy Bear. But why did you do it — why did you do it?”

Mr. Hutton undid her clasping arms and got up. His face became very red. “You seem to take it for granted that I murdered my wife,” he said. “It’s really too grotesque. What do you all take me for? A cinema hero?” He had begun to lose his temper. All the exasperation, all the fear and bewilderment of the day, was transformed into a violent anger against her. “It’s all such damned stupidity. Haven’t you any conception of a civilised man’s mentality? Do I look the sort of man who’d go about slaughtering people? I suppose you imagined I was so insanely in love with you that I could commit any folly. When will you women understand that one isn’t insanely in love? All one asks for is a quiet life, which you won’t allow one to have. I don’t know what the devil ever induced me to

marry you. It was all a damned stupid, practical joke. And now you go about saying I'm a murderer. I won't stand it."

Mr. Hutton stamped towards the door. He had said horrible things, he knew — odious things that he ought speedily to unsay. But he wouldn't. He closed the door behind him.

"Teddy Bear!" He turned the handle; the latch clicked into place. Teddy Bear! The voice that came to him through the closed door was agonised. Should he go back? He ought to go back. He touched the handle, then withdrew his fingers and quickly walked away. When he was half-way down the stairs he halted. She might try to do something silly — throw herself out of the window or God knows what! He listened attentively; there was no sound. But he pictured her very clearly, tiptoeing across the room, lifting the sash as high as it would go, leaning out into the cold night air. It was raining a little. Under the window lay the paved terrace. How far below? Twenty-five or thirty feet? Once, when he was walking along Piccadilly, a dog had jumped out of a third-storey window of the Ritz. He had seen it fall; he had heard it strike the pavement. Should he go back? He was damned if he would; he hated her.

He sat for a long time in the library. What had happened? What was happening? He turned the question over and over in his mind and could find no answer. Suppose the nightmare dreamed itself out to its horrible conclusion. Death was waiting for him. His eyes filled with tears; he wanted so passionately to live. "Just to be alive." Poor Emily had wished it too, he remembered: "Just to be alive." There were still so many places in this astonishing world unvisited, so many queer delightful people still unknown, so many lovely women never so much as seen. The huge white oxen would still be dragging their wains along the Tuscan roads, the cypresses would still go up, straight as pillars, to the blue heaven; but he would not be there to see them. And the sweet southern wines — Tear of Christ and Blood of Judas — others would drink them, not he. Others would walk down the obscure and narrow lanes between the bookshelves in the London Library, sniffing the dusty perfume of good literature, peering at strange titles, discovering unknown names, exploring the fringes of vast domains of

knowledge. He would be lying in a hole in the ground. And why, why? Confusedly he felt that some extraordinary kind of justice was being done. In the past he had been wanton and imbecile and irresponsible. Now Fate was playing as wantonly, as irresponsibly, with him. It was tit for tat, and God existed after all.

He felt that he would like to pray. Forty years ago he used to kneel by his bed every evening. The nightly formula of his childhood came to him almost unsought from some long unopened chamber of the memory. “God bless Father and Mother, Tom and Cissie and the Baby, Mademoiselle and Nurse, and everyone that I love, and make me a good boy. Amen.” They were all dead now all except Cissie.

His mind seemed to soften and dissolve; a great calm descended upon his spirit. He went upstairs to ask Doris’s forgiveness. He found her lying on the couch at the foot of the bed. On the floor beside her stood a blue bottle of liniment, marked “Not to be taken”; she seemed to have drunk about half of it.

“You didn’t love me,” was all she said when she opened her eyes to find him bending over her.

Dr. Libbard arrived in time to prevent any very serious consequences. “You mustn’t do this again,” he said while Mr. Hutton was out of the room.

“What’s to prevent me?” she asked defiantly.

Dr. Libbard looked at her with his large, sad eyes. “There’s nothing to prevent you,” he said. “Only yourself and your baby. Isn’t it rather bad luck on your baby, not allowing it to come into the world because you want to go out of it?”

Doris was silent for a time. “All right,” she whispered. “I won’t.”

Mr. Hutton sat by her bedside for the rest of the night. He felt himself now to be indeed a murderer. For a time he persuaded himself that he loved this pitiable child. Dozing in his chair, he woke up, stiff and cold, to find himself drained dry, as it were, of every emotion. He had become nothing but a tired and suffering carcase. At six o’clock he undressed and went to bed for a couple of hours’

sleep. In the course of the same afternoon the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Wilful Murder," and Mr. Hutton was committed for trial.

VI

Miss Spence was not at all well. She had found her public appearances in the witness-box very trying, and when it was all over she had something that was very nearly a breakdown. She slept badly, and suffered from nervous indigestion. Dr. Libbard used to call every other day. She talked to him a great deal — mostly about the Hutton case.... Her moral indignation was always on the boil. Wasn't it appalling to think that one had had a murderer in one's house. Wasn't it extraordinary that one could have been for so long mistaken about the man's character? (But she had had an inkling from the first.) And then the girl he had gone off with — so low class, so little better than a prostitute. The news that the second Mrs. Hutton was expecting a baby the posthumous child of a condemned and executed criminal — revolted her; the thing was shocking an obscenity. Dr. Libbard answered her gently and vaguely, and prescribed bromide.

One morning he interrupted her in the midst of her customary tirade. "By the way," he said in his soft, melancholy voice, "I suppose it was really you who poisoned Mrs. Hutton."

Miss Spence stared at him for two or three seconds with enormous eyes, and then quietly said, "Yes." After that she started to cry.

"In the coffee, I suppose."

She seemed to nod assent. Dr. Libbard took out his fountain-pen, and in his neat, meticulous calligraphy wrote out a prescription for a sleeping draught.

PERMUTATIONS AMONG THE NIGHTINGALES

A PLAY

IT IS NIGHT on the terrace outside the Hotel Cimarosa. Part of the garden façade of the hotel is seen at the back of the stage — a bare white wall, with three French windows giving on to balconies about ten feet from the ground, and below them, leading from the terrace to the lounge, a double door of glass, open now, through which a yellow radiance streams out into the night. On the paved terrace stand two or three green iron tables and chairs. To the left a mass of dark foliage, ilex and cypress, in the shadow of which more tables and chairs are set. At the back to the left a strip of sky is visible between the corner of the hotel and the dark trees, blue and starry, for it is a marvellous June evening. Behind the trees the ground slopes steeply down and down to an old city in the valley below, of whose invisible presence you are made aware by the sound of many bells wafted up from a score of slender towers in a sweet and melancholy discord that seems to mourn the passing of each successive hour. When the curtain rises the terrace is almost deserted; the hotel dinner is not yet over. A single guest, COUNT ALBERTO TIRETTA, *is discovered, sitting in a position of histrionic despair at one of the little green tables. A waiter stands respectfully sympathetic at his side,* ALBERTO *is a little man with large lustrous eyes and a black moustache, about twenty-five years of age. He has the pathetic charm of an Italian street-boy with an organ — almost as pretty and sentimental as Murillo's little beggars.*

ALBERTO (*making a florid gesture with his right hand and with his left covering his eyes*). Whereupon, Waiter (*he is reciting a tale of woes*), she slammed the door in my face. (*He brings down his gesticulating right hand with a crash on to the table*.)

WAITER. In your face, Signore? Impossible!

ALBERTO. Impossible, but a fact. Some more brandy, please; I am a little weary. (*The waiter uncorks the bottle he has been holding under his arm and fills Alberto's glass.*)

WAITER. That will be one lira twenty-five, Signore.

ALBERTO (*throwing down a note*). Keep the change.

WAITER (*bowing*). Thank you, Signore. But if I were the Signore I should beat her. (*He holds up the Cognac bottle and by way of illustration slaps its black polished flanks.*)

ALBERTO. Beat her? But I tell you I am in love with her.

WAITER. All the more reason, then, Signore. It will be not only a stern disciplinary duty, but a pleasure as well; oh, I assure you, Signore, a pleasure.

ALBERTO. Enough, enough. You sully the melancholy beauty of my thoughts. My feelings at this moment are of an unheard-of delicacy and purity. Respect them, I beg you. Some more brandy, please.

WAITER (*pouring out the brandy*). Delicacy, purity.... Ah, believe me, Signore ... That will be one lira twenty-five.

ALBERTO (*throwing down another note with the same superbly aristocratic gesture*). Keep the change.

WAITER. Thank you, Signore. But as I was saying, Signore, delicacy, purity.... You think I do not understand such sentiments. Alas, Signore, beneath the humblest shirt-front there beats a heart. And if the Signore's sentiments are too much for him, I have a niece. Eighteen years old, and what eyes, what forms!

ALBERTO. Stop, stop. Respect my feelings, Waiter, as well as the ears of the young lady (*he points towards the glass doors*). Remember she is an American. (*The Waiter, bows and goes into the hotel*.)

SIDNEY DOLPHIN *and* MISS AMY TOOMIS

come out together on to the terrace. MISS AMY *supports a well-shaped head on one of the most graceful necks that ever issued from Minneapolis. The eyes are dark, limpid, ingenuous; the mouth expresses sensibility. She is twenty-two and the heiress of those ill-gotten Toomis millions.* SIDNEY DOLPHIN *has a romantic aristocratic appearance. The tailoring of* 1830 *would suit him. Balzac would have described his face as* plein de poésie. *In effect he does happen to be a poet. His two volumes of verse, "Zeotrope and 'Trembling Ears," have been recognised by intelligent critics as remarkable. How far they are poetry nobody, least of all Dolphin himself, is certain. They may be merely the ingenious products of a very cultured and elaborate brain. Mere curiosities; who knows? His age is twenty-seven. They sit down at one of the little iron tables,* ALBERTO *they do not see; the shadow of the trees conceals him. For his part, he is too much absorbed in savouring his own despair to pay any attention to the newcomers. There is a long, uncomfortable silence*. DOLPHIN *assumes the Thinker's mask — the bent brow, the frown, the finger to the forehead,* AMY *regards this romantic gargoyle with some astonishment. Pleased with her interest in him,* DOLPHIN *racks his brains to think of some way of exploiting this curiosity to his own advantage; but he is too shy to play any of the gambits which his ingenuity suggests.* AMY *makes a social effort and speaks, in chanting Middle Western tones.* AMY. It's been a wonderful day, hasn't it?

DOLPHIN (*starting, as though roused from profoundest thought*). Yes, yes, it has.

AMY. You don't often get it as fine as this in England, I guess.

DOLPHIN. Not often.

AMY. Nor do we over at home.

DOLPHIN. So I should suppose. (*Silence. A spasm of anguish crosses* DOLPHIN'S *face; then he reassumes the old Thinker's mask.* AMY *looks at him for a little longer, then, unable to suppress her growing curiosity, she says with a sudden burst of childish confidence:*)

AMY. It must be wonderful to be able to think as hard as you do, Mr. Dolphin. Or are you sad about something?

DOLPHIN (*looks up, smiles, and blushes; a spell has been broken*). The finger at the temple, Miss Toomis, is not the barrel of a revolver.

AMY. That means you're not specially sad about anything. Just thinking.

DOLPHIN. Just thinking.

AMY. What about?

DOLPHIN. Oh, just life, you know — life and letters.

AMY. Letters? Do you mean love letters.

DOLPHIN. No, no. Letters in the sense of literature; letters as opposed to life.

AMY. (*disappointed*). Oh, literature. They used to teach us literature at school. But I could never understand Emerson. What do you think about literature for?

DOLPHIN. It interests me, you know. I read it; I even try to write it.

AMY (*very much excited*). What, are you a writer, a poet, Mr. Dolphin?

DOLPHIN. Alas, it is only too true; I am.

AMY. But what do you write?

DOLPHIN. Verse and prose, Miss Toomis. Just verse and prose.

AMY (*with enthusiasm*). Isn't that interesting. I've never met a poet before, you know.

DOLPHIN. Fortunate being. Why, before I left England I attended a luncheon of the Poetry Union at which no less than a hundred and eighty-nine poets were present. The sight of them made me decide to go to Italy.

AMY. Will you show me your books?

DOLPHIN. Certainly not, Miss Toomis. That would ruin our friendship. I am insufferable in my writings. In them I give vent to all the horrible thoughts and impulses which I am too timid to express or put into practice in real life. Take me as you find me here, a decent specimen of a man, shy but able to talk intelligently when the layers of ice are broken, aimless, ineffective, but on the whole quite a good sort.

AMY. But I know that man already, Mr. Dolphin. I want to know the poet. Tell me what the poet is like.

DOLPHIN. He is older, Miss Toomis, than the rocks on which he sits. He is villainous. He is ... but there, I really must stop. It was you who set me going, though. Did you do it on purpose.

AMY. Do what on purpose?

DOLPHIN. Make me talk about myself. If you want to get people to like you, you must always lead the conversation on to the subject of their characters. Nothing pleases them so much. They'll talk with enthusiasm for hours and go

away saying that you're the most charming, cleverest person they've ever met. But of course you knew that already. You re Machiavellian.

AMY. Machiavellian? You're the first person that's ever said that. I always thought I was very simple and straight-forward. People say about me that.... Ah, now I'*m* talking about myself. That was unscrupulous of you. But you shouldn't have told me about the trick if you wanted it to succeed.

DOLPHIN. Yes. It was silly of me. If I hadn't, you'd have gone on talking about yourself and thought me the nicest man in the world.

AMY. I want to hear about your poetry. Are you writing any now?

DOLPHIN. I have composed the first line of a magnificent epic. But I can't get any further.

AMY. How does it go?

DOLPHIN. Like this (*he clears his throat*). "Casbeen has been, and Moghreb is no more." Ah, the transience of all sublunary things! But inspiration has stopped short there.

AMY. What exactly does it mean?

DOLPHIN. Ah, there you re asking too much, Miss Toomis. Waiter, some coffee for two.

WAITER (*who is standing in the door of the lounge*). Si, Signore. Will the lady and gentleman take it here, or in the gardens, perhaps?

DOLPHIN. A good suggestion. Why shouldn't the lady and gentleman take it in the garden?

AMY. Why not?

DOLPHIN. By the fountain, then, Waiter. We can talk about ourselves there to the tune of falling waters.

AMY. And you shall recite your poetry, Mr. Dolphin. I just love poetry. Do you know Mrs. Wilcox's *Poems of Passion*? (*They go out to the left. A nightingale utters two or three phrases of song and from far down the bells of the city jangle the three-quarters and die slowly away into the silence out of which they rose and came together.*)

(LUCREZIA GRATTAROL *has come out of the hotel just in time to overhear Miss Toomis's last remark, just in time to see her walk slowly away with a hand on* SIDNEY DOLPHIN's *arm.* LUCREZIA *has a fine thoroughbred appearance, an aquiline nose, a finely curved sensual mouth, a superb white brow, a quivering nostril. She is the last of a family whose name is as illustrious in Venetian annals as that of Foscarini, Tiepolo, or Tron. She stamps a preposterously high-heeled foot and tosses her head.*)

LUCREZIA. Passion! Passion, indeed. An American! (*She starts to run after the retreating couple, when* ALBERTO, *who has been sitting with his head between his hands, looks up and catches sight of the newcomer.*)

ALBERTO. Lucrezia!

LUCREZIA (*starts, for in the shade beneath the trees she had not seen him*). Oh! You gave me such a fright, Alberto. I'm in a hurry now. Later on, if you....

ALBERTO (*in a desperate voice that breaks into a sob*). Lucrezia! You must come and talk to me. You must.

LUCREZIA. But I tell you I can't now, Alberto. Later on.

ALBERTO (*the tears streaming down his cheeks*). Now, now, now! You must come now. I am lost if you don't.

LUCREZIA (*looking indecisively first at* ALBERTO *and then along the path down which* AMY *and* SIDNEY DOLPHIN *have disappeared*). But supposing I am lost if I do come?

ALBERTO. But you couldn't be as much lost as I am. Ah, you don't know what it is to suffer. Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt weiss wass ich leide. Oh, Lucrezia.... (*He sobs unrestrainedly*.)

LUCREZIA (*goes over to where* ALBERTO *is sitting. She pats his shoulder and his bowed head of black curly hair*). There, there, my little Bertino. Tell me what it is. You mustn't cry. There, there.

ALBERTO (*drying his eyes and rubbing his head, like a cat, avid of caresses, against her hand*). How can I thank you enough, Lucrezia? You are like a mother to me.

LUCREZIA. I know. That's just what's so dangerous.

ALBERTO (*lets his head fall upon her bosom*). I come to you for comfort, like a tired child, Lucrezia.

LUCREZIA. Poor darling! (*She strokes his hair, twines its thick black tendrils round her fingers*, ALBERTO *is abjectly pathetic*.)

ALBERTO (*with closed eyes and a seraphic smile*). Ah, the suavity, the beauty of this maternal instinct!

LUCREZIA (*with a sudden access of energy and passion*). The disgustingness of it, you mean. (*She pushes him from her. His head wobbles once, as though it were inanimate, before he straightens into life*.) The maternal instinct. Ugh. It's been the undoing of too many women. You men come with your sentimental babyishness and exploit it for your own lusts. Be a man, Bertino. Be a woman, I mean, if you can.

ALBERTO (*looking up at her with eyes full of doglike, dumb reproach*). Lucrezia! You, too? Is there nobody who cares for me? This is the unkindest cut of all. I may as well die. (*He relapses into tears*.)

LUCREZIA (*who has started to go, turns back, irresolute*). Now, don't cry, Bertino. Can't you behave like a reasonable being? (*She makes as though to go again*.)

ALBERTO (*through his sobs*). You too, Lucrezia! Oh, I can't bear it, I can't bear it.

LUCREZIA (*turning back desperately*). But what do you want me to do? Why should you expect *me* to hold your hand?

ALBERTO. I thought better of you, Lucrezia. Let me go. There is nothing left for me now but death. (*He rises to his feet, takes a step or two, and then collapses into another chair, unable to move*.)

LUCREZIA (*torn between anger and remorse*). Now do behave yourself sensibly, Bertino. There, there ... you mustn't cry. I'm sorry if I've hurt you. (*Looking towards the left along the path taken by* AMY *and* DOLPHIN.) Oh, damnation! (*She stamps her foot*.) Here, Bertino, do pull yourself together. (*She raises him up*.) There, now you must stop crying. (*But as soon as she lets go of him his head falls back on to the iron table with an unpleasant, meaty bump. That bump is too much for* LUCREZIA. *She bends over him, strokes his head, even kisses the lustrous curls*.) Oh, forgive me, forgive me! I have been a beast. But, tell me first, what's the matter, Bertino? What is it, my poor darling? Tell me.

ALBERTO. Nobody loves me.

LUCREZIA. But we're all devoted to you, Bertino mio.

ALBERTO. She isn’t. To-day she shut the door in my face.

LUCREZIA. She? You mean the French-woman, the one you told me about? Louise, wasn’t she?

ALBERTO. Yes, the one with the golden hair.

LUCREZIA. And the white legs. I remember: you saw her bathing.

ALBERTO (*lays his hand on his heart*). Ah, don’t remind me of it. (*His face twitches convulsively*.)

LUCREZIA. And now she’s gone and shut the door in your face.

ALBERTO. In my face, Lucrezia.

LUCREZIA. Poor darling!

ALBERTO. For me there is nothing now but the outer darkness.

LUCREZIA. Is the door shut forever, then?

ALBERTO. Definitively, for ever.

LUCREZIA. But have you tried knocking? Perhaps, after all, it might be opened again, if only a crack.

ALBERTO. What, bruise my hands against the granite of her heart?

LUCREZIA. Don’t be too poetical, Bertino mio. Why not try again, in any case?

ALBERTO. You give me courage.

LUCREZIA. There’s no harm in trying, you know.

ALBERTO. Courage to live, to conquer. (*He beats his breast*.) I am a man again, thanks to you, Lucrezia, my inspirer, my Muse, my Egeria. How can I be sufficiently grateful. (*He kisses her*.) I am the child of your spirit. (*He kisses her again*.)

LUCREZIA. Enough, enough. I am not ambitious to be a mother, yet awhile. Quickly now, Bertino, I know you will succeed.

ALBERTO (*cramming his hat down on his head and knocking with his walking-stick on the ground*). Succeed or die, Lucrezia. (*He goes out with a loud martial stamp*.)

LUCREZIA (*to the waiter who is passing across the stage with a coffee-pot and cups on a tray*). Have you seen the Signorina Toomis, Giuseppe?

WAITER. The Signorina is down in the garden. So is the Signore Dolphin. By the fountain, Signorina. This is the Signore's coffee.

LUCREZIA. Have you a mother, Giuseppe?

WAITER. Unfortunately, Signorina.

LUCREZIA. Unfortunately? Does she treat you badly, then?

WAITER. Like a dog, Signorina.

LUCREZIA. Ah, I should like to see your mother. I should like to ask her to give me some hints on how to bring up children.

WAITER. But surely, Signorina, you are not expecting, you — ah....

LUCREZIA. Only figuratively, Giuseppe. My children are spiritual children.

WAITER. Precisely, precisely. My mother, alas! is not a spiritual relation. Nor is my fiançée.

LUCREZIA. I didn't know you were engaged.

WAITER. To an angel of perdition. Believe me, Signorina, I go to my destruction in that woman — go with open eyes. There is no escape. She is what is called in the Holy Bible (*crosses himself*) a Fisher of Men.

LUCREZIA. You have remarkable connections, Giuseppe.

WAITER. I am honoured by your words, Signorina. But the coffee becomes cold. (*He hurries out to the left*.)

LUCREZIA. In the garden! By the fountain! And there's the nightingale beginning to sing in earnest! Good heavens! what may not already have happened? (*She runs out after the waiter*.)

(*Two persons emerge from the hotel*, the VICOMTE DE BARBAZANGE *and the* BARONESS KOCH DE WORMS. PAUL DE BARBAZANGE *is a young man — twenty-six perhaps of exquisite grace. Five foot ten, well built, dark hair, sleek as marble, the most refined aristocratic features, and a monocle*, SIMONE DE WORMS *is forty, a ripe Semitic beauty. Five years more and the bursting point of overripeness will have been reached. But now, thanks to massage, powerful corsets, skin foods, and powder, she is still a beauty — a beauty of the type Italians admire, cushioned, steatopygous.* PAUL, *who has a faultless taste in bric-à-brac and women, and is by instinct and upbringing an ardent anti-Semite, finds her infinitely repulsive. The Baronne enters with a loud shrill giggle. She gives* PAUL *a slap with her green feather fan*.)

SIMONE. Oh, you naughty boy! Quelle histoire. Mon Dieu! How dare you tell me such a story!

PAUL. For you, Baronne, I would risk anything even your displeasure.

SIMONE. Charming boy. But stories of that kind.... And you look so innocent, too! Do you know any more like it?

PAUL (*suddenly grave*). Not of that description. But I will tell you a story of another kind, a true story, a tragic story.

SIMONE. Did I ever tell you how I saw a woman run over by a train? Cut to pieces, literally, to pieces. So disagreeable. I'll tell you later. But now, what about your story?

PAUL. Oh, it's nothing, nothing.

SIMONE. But you promised to tell it me.

PAUL. It's only a commonplace anecdote. A young man, poor but noble, with a name and a position to keep up. A few youthful follies, a mountain of debts, and no way out except the revolver. This is all dull and obvious enough. But now follows the interesting part of the story. He is about to take that way out, when he meets the woman of his dreams, the goddess, the angel, the ideal. He loves, and he must die without a word. (*He turns his face away from the Baronne, as though his emotion were too much for him, which indeed it is.*)

SIMONE. Vicomte — Paul — this young man is you?

PAUL (*solemnly*). He is.

SIMONE. And the woman?

PAUL. Oh, I can't, I mayn't tell you.

SIMONE. The woman! Tell me, Paul.

PAUL (*turning towards her and falling on his knees*). The woman, Simone, is you. Ah, but I had no right to say it.

SIMONE (*quivering with emotion*). My Paul. (*She clasps his head to her bosom. A grimace of disgust contorts Paul's classical features. He endures Simone's caresses with a stoical patience*.) But what is this about a revolver? That is only a joke, Paul, isn't it? Say it isn't true.

PAUL. Alas, Simone, too true. (*He taps his coat pocket*.) There it lies. To-morrow I have a hundred and seventy thousand francs to pay, or be dishonoured. I cannot pay the sum. A Barbazange does not survive dishonour. My ancestors were Crusaders, preux chevaliers to a man. Their code is mine. Dishonour for me is worse than death.

SIMONE. Mon Dieu, Paul, how noble you are! (*She lays her hands on his shoulder, leans back, and surveys him at arm's length, a look of pride and anxious happiness on her face*.)

PAUL (*dropping his eyes modestly*). Not at all. I was born noble, and noblesse oblige, as we say in our family. Farewell, Simone, I love you — and I must die. My last thought will be of you. (*He kisses her hand, rises to his feet, and makes as though to go*.)

SIMONE (*clutching him by the arm*). No, Paul, no. You must not, shall not, do anything rash. A hundred and seventy thousand francs, did you say? It is paltry. Is there no one who could lend or give you the money?

PAUL. Not a soul. Farewell, Simone.

SIMONE. Stay, Paul. I hardly dare to ask it of you — you with such lofty ideas of honour — but would you ... from me?

PAUL. Take money from a woman? Ah, Simone, tempt me no more. I might do an ignoble act.

SIMONE. But from me, Paul, from me. I am not in your eyes a woman like any other woman, am I?

PAUL. It is true that my ancestors, the Crusaders, the preux chevaliers, might in all honour receive gifts from the ladies of their choice — chargers, swords, armour, or tenderer mementoes, such as gloves or garters. But money — no; who ever heard of their taking money?

SIMONE. But what would be the use of my giving you swords and horses? You could never use them. Consider, my knight, my noble Sir Paul, in these days the contests of chivalry have assumed a different form; the weapons and the armour have changed. Your sword must be of gold and paper; your breastplate of hard cash; your charger of gilt-edged securities. I offer you the shining panoply of the modern crusader. Will you accept it?

PAUL. You are eloquent, Simone. You could win over the devil himself with that angelic voice of yours. But it cannot be. Money is always money. The code is clear. I cannot accept your offer. Here is the way out. (*He takes an automatic pistol out of his pocket*.) Thank you, Simone, and good-bye. How wonderful is the love of a pure woman.

SIMONE. Paul, Paul, give that to me! (*She snatches the pistol from his hand*.) If anything were to happen to you, Paul, I should kill myself with this. You must live, you must consent to accept the money. You mustn’t let your honour make a martyr of you.

PAUL (*brushing a tear from his eyes*). No, I can’t.... Give me that pistol, I beg you.

SIMONE. For my sake, Paul.

PAUL. Oh, you make it impossible for me to act as the voices of dead ancestors tell me I should.... For your sake, then, Simone, I consent to live. For your sake I dare to accept the gift you offer.

SIMONE (*kissing his hand in an outburst of gratitude*). Thank you, thank you, Paul. How happy I am!

PAUL. I, too, light of my life.

SIMONE. My month's allowance arrived to-day. I have the cheque here. (*She takes it out of her corsage*.) Two hundred thousand francs. It's signed already. You can get it cashed as soon as the hanks open to-morrow.

PAUL (*moved by an outburst of genuine emotion kisses indiscriminately the cheque, the Baronne, his own hands*). My angel, you have saved me. How can I thank you? How can I love you enough? Ah, mon petit bouton de rose.

SIMONE. Oh, naughty, naughty! Not now, my Paul; you must wait till some other time.

PAUL. I burn with impatience.

SIMONE. Quelle fougue! Listen, then. In an hour's time, Paul chéri, in my boudoir; I shall be alone.

PAUL. An hour? It is an eternity.

SIMONE (*playfully*). An hour. I won't relent. Till then, my Paul. (*She blows a kiss and runs out: the scenery trembles at her passage.*)

(PAUL *looks at the cheque, then pulls out a large silk handkerchief and wipes his neck inside his collar*.) (DOLPHIN *drifts in from the left. He is smoking a cigarette, but he does not seem to be enjoying it*.)

PAUL. Alone?

DOLPHIN. Alas!

PAUL. Brooding on the universe as usual? I envy you your philosophic detachment. Personally, I find that the world is very much too much with us, and the devil too; (*he looks at the cheque in his hand*) and above all the flesh. My god, the flesh.... (*He wipes his neck again*.)

DOLPHIN. My philosophic detachment? But it's only a mask to hide the ineffectual longings I have to achieve contact with the world.

PAUL. But surely nothing is easier. One just makes a movement and impinges on one's fellow-beings.

DOLPHIN. Not with a temperament like mine. Imagine a shyness more powerful than curiosity or desire, a paralysis of all the faculties. You are a man of the world. You were born with a forehead of brass to affront every social emergency. Ah, if you knew what a torture it is to find yourself in the presence of someone a woman, perhaps — someone in whom you take an interest that is not merely philosophic; to find oneself in the presence of such a person and to be incapable, yes, physically incapable, of saying a word to express your interest in her or your desire to possess her intimacy. Ah, I notice I have slipped into the feminine. Inevitably, for of course the person is always a she.

PAUL. Of course, of course. That goes without saying. But what's the trouble? Women are so simple to deal with.

DOLPHIN. I know. Perfectly simply if one's in the right state of mind. I have found that out myself, for moments come alas, how rarely! — when I am filled with a spirit of confidence, possessed by some angel or devil of power. Ah, then I feel myself to be superb. I carry all before me. In those brief moments the whole secret of the world is revealed to me. I perceive that the supreme quality

in the human soul is effrontery. Genius in the man of action is simply the apotheosis of charlatanism. Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Mr. Gladstone, Lloyd George — what are they? Just ordinary human beings projected through the magic lantern of a prodigious effrontery and so magnified to a thousand times larger than life. Look at me. I am far more intelligent than any of these fabulous figures; my sensibility is more refined than theirs, I am morally superior to any of them. And yet, by my lack of charlatanism, I am made less than nothing. My qualities are projected through the wrong end of a telescope and the world perceives me far smaller than I really am. But the world — who cares about the world? The only people who matter are the women.

PAUL. Very true, my dear Dolphin. The women.... (*He looks at the cheque and mops himself once more with his mauve silk handkerchief.*)

DOLPHIN. To-night was one of my moments of triumph. I felt myself suddenly free of all my inhibitions.

PAUL. I hope you profited by the auspicious occasion.

DOLPHIN. I did. I was making headway. I had — but I don't know why I should bore you with my confidences. Curious that one should be dumb before intimates and open one's mind to an all but stranger. I must apologise.

PAUL. But I am all attention and sympathy, my dear Dolphin. And I take it a little hardly that you should regard me as a stranger. (*He lays a hand on Dolphin's shoulder.*)

DOLPHIN. Thank you, Barbazange, thank you. Well, if you consent to be the receptacle of my woes, I shall go on pouring them out.... Miss Toomis.... But tell me frankly what you think of her.

PAUL. Well....

DOLPHIN. A little too ingenuous, a little silly even, eh?

PAUL. Now you say so, she certainly isn't very intellectually stimulating.

DOLPHIN. Precisely. But ... oh, those china-blue eyes, that ingenuousness, that pathetic and enchanting silliness! She touches lost chords in one's heart. I love the Chromatic Fantasia of Bach, I am transported by Beethoven's hundred-and-eleventh Sonata; but the fact doesn't prevent my being moved to tears by the last luscious waltz played by the hotel orchestra. In the best constructed brains there are always spongy surfaces that are sensitive to picture postcards and Little Nelly and the End of a Perfect Day. Miss Toomis has found out my Achilles's heel. She is boring, ridiculous, absurd to a degree, but oh! how moving, how adorable.

PAUL. You're done for, my poor Dolphin, sunk — spurlos.

DOLPHIN. And I was getting on so well, was revelling in my new-found confidence, and, knowing its transience, was exploiting it for all I was worth. I had covered an enormous amount of ground and then, hey presto! at a blow all my labour was undone. Actuated by what malice I don't know, la Lucrezia swoops down like a vulture, and without a by-your-leave or excuse of any kind carries off Miss Toomis from under my very eyes. What a woman! She terrifies me. I am always running away from her.

PAUL. Which means, I suppose, that she is always pursuing you.

DOLPHIN. She has ruined my evening and, it may me, all my chances of success. My precious hour of self-confidence will be wasted (though I hope you'll not take offence at the word) — wasted on you.

PAUL. It will return.

DOLPHIN. But when — but when? Till it does I shall be impotent and in agony.

PAUL. I know the agony of waiting. I myself was engaged to a Rumanian princess in 1916. But owing to the sad collapse in the Rumanian rate of exchange I have had to postpone our union indefinitely. It is painful, but, believe me, it can be borne. (*He looks at the cheque and then at his watch*.) There are other things which are much worse. Believe me, Dolphin, it can be borne.

DOLPHIN. I suppose it can. For, when all is said, there are damned few of us who really take things much to heart. Julie de Lespinasses are happily not common. I am even subnormal. At twenty I believed myself passionate: one does at that age. But now, when I come to consider myself candidly, I find that I am really one of those who never deeply felt nor strongly willed. Everything is profoundly indifferent to me. I sometimes try to depress myself with the thought that the world is a cess-pool, that men are pathetic degenerates from the ape whose laboriously manufactured ideals are pure nonsense and find no rhyme in reality, that the whole of life is a bad joke which takes a long time coming to an end. But it really doesn't upset me. I don't care a curse. It's deplorable; one ought to care. The best people do care. Still, I must say I should like to get possession of Miss Toomis. Confound that Grattarol woman. What on earth did she want to rush me like that for, do you suppose?

PAUL. I expect we shall find out now. (PAUL *jerks his head towards the left.* LUCREZIA *and* AMY *are seen entering from the garden*, LUCREZIA *holds her companion's arm and marches with a firm step towards the two men*. AMY *suffers herself to be drugged along*.)

LUCREZIA. Vicomte, Miss Toomis wants you to tell her all about Correggio.

AMY (*rather scared*). Oh, really — I....

LUCREZIA. And (*sternly*) — and Michelangelo. She is so much interested in art.

AMY. But please — don’t trouble....

PAUL (*bowing gracefully*). I shall be delighted. And in return I hope Miss Toomis will tell me all about Longfellow.

AMY (*brightening*). Oh yes, don’t you just love Evangeline?

PAUL. I do; and with your help, Miss Toomis, I hope I shall learn to love her better.

LUCREZIA (*to* DOLPHIN, *who has been looking from* AMY *to the* VICOMTE *and back again at* AMY *with eyes that betray a certain disquietude*). You really must come and look at the moon rising over the hills, Mr. Dolphin. One sees it best from the lower terrace. Shall we go?

DOLPHIN (*starts and shrinks*). But it’s rather cold, isn’t it? I mean — I think I ought to go and write a letter.

LUCREZIA. Oh, you can do that to-morrow.

DOLPHIN. But really.

LUCREZIA. You’ve no idea how lovely the moon looks.

DOLPHIN. But I must....

LUCREZIA (*lays her hand on his sleeve and tows hint after her, crying as she goes*). The moon, the moon.... (PAUL *and* AMY *regard their exit in silence*.)

PAUL. He doesn’t look as though he much wanted to go and see the moon.

AMY. Perhaps he guesses what’s in store for him.

PAUL (*surprised*). What, you don’t mean to say you realised all the time?

AMY. Realised what?

PAUL. About la belle Lucrezia.

AMY. I don't know what you mean. All I know is that she means to give Mr. Dolphin a good talking to. He's so mercenary. It made me quite indignant when she told me about him. Such a schemer, too. You know in America we have very definite ideas about honour.

PAUL. Here too, Miss Toomis.

AMY. Not Mr. Dolphin. Oh dear, it made me so sad; more sad than angry. I can never be grateful enough to Signorina Grattarol.

PAUL. But I'm still at a loss to know exactly what you're talking about.

AMY. And I am quite bewildered myself. Would you have believed it of him? I thought him such a nice man.

PAUL. What has he done?

AMY. It's all for my money, Miss Grattarol told me. She knows. He was just asking me to marry him, and I believe I would have said Yes. But she came in just in the nick of time. It seems he only wanted to marry me because I'm so rich. He doesn't care for me at all. Miss Grattarol knows what he's like. It's awful, isn't it? Oh dear, I wouldn't have thought it of him.

PAUL. But you must forgive him, Miss Toomis. Money is a great temptation. Perhaps if you gave him another chance....

AMY. Impossible.

PAUL. Poor Dolphin! He's such a nice young fellow.

AMY. I thought so too. But he’s false.

PAUL. Don’t be too hard on him. Money probably means too much to him. It’s the fault of his upbringing. No one who has not lived among the traditions of our ancient aristocracy can be expected to have that contempt, almost that hatred of wealth, which is the sign of true nobility. If he had been brought up, as I was, in an old machicolated castle on the Loire, surrounded by ancestral ghosts, imbued with the spirit of the Crusaders and preux chevaliers who had inhabited the place in the past, if he had learnt to know what noblesse oblige really means, believe me, Miss Toomis, he could never have done such a thing.

AMY. I should just think he couldn’t, Monsieur de Barbazange.

PAUL. You have no idea, Miss Toomis, how difficult it is for a man of truly noble feelings to get over the fact of your great wealth. When I heard that you were the possessor of a hundred million dollars....

AMY. Oh, I’m afraid it’s more than that. It’s two hundred million.

PAUL. ... of two hundred million dollars, then ... it only makes it worse; I was very melancholy, Miss Toomis. For those two hundred million dollars were a barrier, which a descendant of Crusaders and preux chevaliers could not overleap. Honour, Miss Toomis, honour forbade. Ah, if only that accursed money had not stood in the way.... When I first saw you oh, how I was moved by that vision of beauty and innocence — I wanted nothing better than to stand gazing on you for ever. But then I heard about those millions. Dolphin was lucky to have felt no restraints. But enough, enough. (*He checks a rising tide of emotion*.) Give poor Dolphin another chance, Miss Toomis. At bottom he is a good fellow, and he may learn in time to esteem you for your own sake and to forget the dazzling millions.

AMY. Never. I can only marry a man who is entirely disinterested.

PAUL. But, can't you see, no disinterested man could ever bring himself to ask you? How could he prove his disinterestedness? No one would believe the purity of his intentions.

AMY (*much moved*). It is for me to judge. I know a disinterested man when I see him. Even in America we can understand honour.

PAUL (*with a sob in his voice*). Good-bye Miss Toomis.

AMY. But no, I don't want it to be good-bye.

PAUL. It must be. Never shall it be said of a Barbazange that he hunted a woman for her money.

AMY. But what does it matter what the world says, if I say the opposite?

PAUL. You say the opposite? Thank you, thank you. But no, good-bye.

AMY. Stop. Oh! you're forcing me to do a most unwomanly thing. You're making me ask you to marry me. You're the only disinterested man I've ever met or, to judge from what I've seen of the world, I'm ever likely to meet. Haven't you kept away from me in spite of your feelings? Haven't you even tried to make me listen to another man — a man not worthy to black your boots? Oh, it's so wonderful, so noble! It's like something in a picture play. Paul, I offer myself to you. Will you take me in spite of my millions?

PAUL (*falling on his knees and kissing the hem of* AMY'S *skirt*). My angel, you're right; what does it matter what the world says as long as you believe in me? Amy, amie, bien-aimée.... Ah, it's too good too, too good to be true! (*He rises to his feet and embraces her with an unfeigned enthusiasm*.)

AMY. Paul, Paul.... And so this is love. Isn't it wonderful?

PAUL (*looking round anxiously*). You mustn't tell anyone about our engagement, my Amy. They might say unpleasant things in the hotel, you know.

AMY. Of course I won't talk about it. We'll keep our happiness to ourselves, won't we?

PAUL. Entirely to ourselves; and to-morrow we'll go to Paris and arrange about being married.

AMY. Yes, yes; we'll take the eight o'clock train.

PAUL. Not the eight o clock, my darling. I have to go to the bank to-morrow to do a little business. We must wait till the twelve thirty.

AMY. Very well, then. The twelve-thirty. Oh, how happy I am!

PAUL. So am I, my sweetheart. More than I can tell you. (*The sound of a window being opened is heard. They look up and see the* BARONESS *dressed in a peignoir of the tenderest blue, emerging on to the right hand of the three balconies*.)

AMY. Oh, my soul! I think I'd better go in. Good-night, my Paul. (*She runs in*.)

SIMONE. Has that horrid little American girl gone? (*She peers down, then, reassured, she blows a kiss to* PAUL.) My Romeo!

PAUL. I come, Juliet.

SIMONE. There's a kiss for you.

PAUL (*throwing kisses with both hands*). And there's one for you. And another, and another. Two hundred million kisses, my angel.

SIMONE (*giggling*). What a lot!

PAUL. It is; you re quite right. Two hundred million.... I come, my Juliet. (*He darts into the hotel, pausing when just inside the door and out of sight of the* BARONESS, *to mop himself once again with his enormous handkerchief. The operation over, he advances with a resolute step, The* BARONESS *stands for a moment on the balcony. Then, seeing* DOLPHIN *and* LUCREZIA *coming in from the left, she retires, closing the window and drawing the curtains behind her*. DOLPHIN *comes striding in*; LUCREZIA *follows a little behind, looking anxiously up at him*.)

LUCREZIA. Please, please....

DOLPHIN. NO, I won t listen to anything more. (*He walks with an agitated step up and down the stage*. LUCREZIA *stands with one hand resting on the back of a chair and the other pressed on her heart.)* Do you mean to say you deliberately went and told her that I was only after her money? Oh, it's too bad, too bad. It's infamous. And I hadn't the faintest notion that she had any money. Besides, I don't want money; I have quite enough of my own. It's infamous, infamous!

LUCREZIA. I know it was a horrible thing to do. But I couldn't help it. How could I stand by and see you being carried off by that silly little creature?

DOLPHIN. But I cared for her.

LUCREZIA. But not as I cared for you. I've got red blood in my veins; she's got nothing but milk and water. You couldn't have been happy with her. I can give you love of a kind she could never dream of. What does she know of passion?

DOLPHIN. Nothing, I am thankful to say. I don't want passion; can't you understand that? I don't possess it myself and don't like it in others. I am a man of sentimental affections, with a touch of quiet sensuality. I don't want passion, I tell you. It's too violent; it frightens me. I couldn't possibly live with you. You'd utterly shatter my peace of mind in a day. Oh, how I wish you'd go away.

LUCREZIA. But Sidney, Sidney, can't you understand what it is to be madly in love with somebody? You can't be so cruel.

DOLPHIN. You didn't think much of my well-being when you interfered between Miss Toomis and me, did you? You've probably ruined my whole life, that's all. I really don't see why you should expect me to have any pity for you.

LUCREZIA. Very well, then, I shall kill myself. (*She bursts into tears*.)

DOLPHIN. Oh, but I assure you, one doesn't kill oneself for things like that. (*He approaches her and pats her on the shoulder*.) Come, come, don't worry about it.

LUCREZIA (*throws her arms round his neck*). Oh, Sidney, Sidney....

DOLPHIN (*freeing himself with surprising energy and promptitude from her embrace*). No, no, none of that, I beg. Another moment and we shall be losing our heads. Personally I think I shall go to bed now. I should advise you to do the same, Miss Grattarol. You're overwrought. We might all be better for a small dose of bromide. (*He goes in*.)

LUCREZIA (*looking up and stretching forth her hands*). Sidney.... (DOLPHIN *does not look round, and disappears through the glass door into the hotel*, LUCREZIA *covers her face with her hands and sits for a little sobbing silently. The nightingale sings on. Midnight sounds with an infinite melancholy from all the twenty campaniles of the city in the valley. From far away comes the spasmodic throbbing of a guitar and the singing of an Italian voice, high-pitched, passionate, throaty. The seconds pass*, LUCREZIA *rises to her feet and walks slowly into the hotel. On the threshold she encounters the* VICOMTE *coming out*.)

PAUL. You, Signorina Lucrezia? I've escaped for a breath of fresh, cool air. Mightn't we take a turn together? (LUCREZIA *shakes her head*.) Ah, well, then,

good-night. You'll be glad to hear that Miss Toomis knows all about Correggio now.

(*He inhales a deep breath of air. Then looking at his dinner-jacket he begins brushing at it with his hand. A lamentable figure creeps in from the left. It is* ALBERTO. *If he had a tail, it would be trailing on the ground between his legs*.)

PAUL. Hullo, Alberto. What is it? Been losing at cards?

ALBERTO. Worse than that.

PAUL. Creditors foreclosing?

ALBERTO. Much worse.

PAUL. Father ruined by imprudent speculations?

ALBERTO. No, no, no. It's nothing to do with money.

PAUL. Oh, well, then. It can't be anything very serious. It's women, I suppose.

ALBERTO. My mistress refuses to see me. I have been beating on her door for hours in vain.

PAUL. I wish we all had your luck, Bertino. Mine opens her door only too promptly. The difficulty is to get out again. Does yours use such an awful lot of this evil-smelling powder? I'm simply covered with it. Ugh! (*He brushes his coat again*.)

ALBERTO. Can't you be serious, Paul?

PAUL. Of course I can ... about a serious matter. But you can't expect me to pull a long face about your mistress, can you, now? Do look at things in their right proportions.

ALBERTO. It’s no use talking to you. You’re heartless, soulless.

PAUL. What you mean, my dear Alberto, is that I’m relatively speaking bodiless. Physical passion never goes to my head. I’m always *compos mentis*. You aren’t, that’s all.

ALBERTO. Oh, you disgust me. I think I shall hang myself to-night.

PAUL. Do. It will give us something to talk about at lunch to-morrow.

ALBERTO. Monster! (*He goes into the hotel,* PAUL *strolls out towards the garden, whistling an air from Mozart as he goes. The window on the left opens and* LUCREZIA *steps on to her balcony. Uncoiled, her red hair falls almost to her waist. Her nightdress is always half slipping off one shoulder or the other, like those loose-bodied Restoration gowns that reveal the tight-blown charms of Kneller’s Beauties. Her feet are bare. She is a marvellously romantic figure, as she stands there, leaning on the balustrade, and with eyes more sombre than night, gazing into the darkness. The nightingales, the bells, the guitar, and passionate voice strike up. Great stars palpitate in the sky. The moon has swum imperceptibly to the height of heaven. In the garden below flowers are yielding their souls into the air, censers invisible. It is too much, too much.... Large tears roll down* LUCREZIA’s *cheeks and fall with a splash to the ground. Suddenly, but with the noiselessness of a cat,* ALBERTO *appears, childish-looking in pink pajamas, on the middle of the three balconies. He sees* LUCREZIA, *but she is much too deeply absorbed in thought to have noticed his coming,* ALBERTO *plants his elbows on the rail of the balcony, covers his face, and begins to sob, at first inaudibly, then in a gradual quickening crescendo. At the seventh sob* LUCREZIA *starts and becomes aware of his presence*.)

LUCREZIA. Alberto. I didn’t know.... Have you been there long? (ALBERTO *makes no articulate reply, but his sobs keep on growing louder*.) Alberto, are you unhappy? Answer me.

ALBERTO (*with difficulty, after a pause*). Yes.

LUCREZIA. Didn't she let you in?

ALBERTO. No. (*His sobs become convulsive*.)

LUCREZIA. Poor boy.

ALBERTO (*lifting up a blubbered face to the moonlight*). I am so unhappy.

LUCREZIA. You can't be more unhappy than I am.

ALBERTO. Oh yes, I am. It's impossible to be unhappier than me.

LUCREZIA. But I *am* more unhappy.

ALBERTO. You re not. Oh, how can you be so cruel Lucrezia? (*He covers his face once more*.)

LUCREZIA. But I only said I was unhappy Alberto.

ALBERTO. Yes, I know. That showed you weren't thinking of me. Nobody loves me. I shall hang myself to-night with the cord of my dressing-gown.

LUCREZIA. NO, no, Alberto. You mustn't do anything rash.

ALBERTO. I shall. Your cruelty has been the last straw.

LUCREZIA. I'm sorry, Bertino mio. But if you only knew how miserable I was feeling. I didn't mean to be unsympathetic. Poor boy. I'm so sorry. There, don't cry, poor darling.

ALBERTO. Oh, I knew you wouldn't desert me, Lucrezia. You've always been a mother to me. (*He stretches out his hand and seizes hers, which has gone half-way to meet him; but the balconies are too far apart to allow him to kiss it. He*

makes an effort and fails. He is too short in the body,) Will you let me come onto your balcony, Lucrezia? I want to tell you how grateful I am.

LUCREZIA. But you can do that from your own balcony.

ALBERTO. Please, please, Lucrezia. You mustn't be cruel to me again. I can't bear it.

LUCREZIA. Well, then.... Just for a moment, but for no more, (BERTINO *climbs from one balcony to the other. One is a little reminded of the trousered monkeys on the barrel organs. Arrived, he kneels down and kisses* LUCREZIA'S *hand*.)

ALBERTO. You've saved me. You've given given me a fresh desire to live and a fresh faith in life. How can I thank you enough, Lucrezia, darling?

LUCREZIA (*patting his head*). There, there. *We* are just two unhappy creatures. We must try and comfort one another.

ALBERTO. What a brute I am! I never thought of your unhappiness. I am so selfish. What is it, Lucrezia?

LUCREZIA. I can't tell you, Bertino; but it's very painful.

ALBERTO. Poor child, poor child. (*His kisses, which started at the hand, have mounted, by this time, some way up the arm, changing perceptibly in character as they rise. At the shoulder they have a warmth which could not have been inferred from the respectful salutes which barely touched the fingers*.) Poor darling! You've given me consolation. Now you must let me comfort your unhappiness.

LUCREZIA (*with an effort*). I think you ought to go back now, Bertino.

ALBERTO. In a minute, my darling. There, there, poor Lucrezia. (*He puts an arm round her, kisses her hair and neck.* LUCREZIA *leans her bowed head against his chest. The sound of footsteps is heard. They both look up with scared, wide-open eyes*.)

LUCREZIA. We mustn't be seen here, Bertino. What would people think?

ALBERTO. I'll go back.

LUCREZIA. There's no time. You must come into my room. Quickly.

(*They slip through the French window, but not quickly enough to have escaped the notice of* PAUL, *returning from his midnight stroll. The* VICOMTE *stands for a moment looking up at the empty balcony. He laughs softly to himself, and, throwing his cigarette away, passes through the glass door into the house. All is now silent, save for the nightingales and the distant bells. The curtain comes down for a moment to indicate the passage of several hours. It rises again with the sun*. LUCREZIA's *window opens and she appears on the balcony. She stands a moment with one foot over the threshold of the long window in a listening pose. Then her eyes fall on the better half of a pair of pink pyjamas lying crumpled on the floor, like a body bereft of its soul; with her bare foot she turns it over. A little shudder plucks at her nerves, and she shakes her head as though, by this symbolic act, to shake off something clinging and contaminating. Then she steps out into the full glory of the early sun, stretching out her arms to the radiance. She bows her face into her hands, crying out loud to herself*.) LUCREZIA. Oh, why, why, why? (*The last of these Why's is caught by the* WAITER, *who has crept forth in shirt-sleeves and list-slippers, duster in hand, to clean the tables. He looks up at her admiringly, passes his tongue over his lips. Then, with a sigh, turns to dust the tables*.)

CURTAIN.

THE TILLOTSON BANQUET

I

YOUNG SPODE WAS not a snob; he was too intelligent for that, too fundamentally decent. Not a snob; but all the same he could not help feeling very well pleased at the thought that he was dining, alone and intimately, with Lord Badgery. It was a definite event in his life, a step forward, he felt, towards that final success, social, material, and literary, which he had come to London with the fixed intention of making. The conquest and capture of Badgery was an almost essential strategical move in the campaign.

Edmund, forty-seventh Baron Badgery, was a lineal descendant of that Edmund, surnamed Le Blayreau, who landed on English soil in the train of William the Conqueror. Ennobled by William Rufus, the Badgerys had been one of the very few baronial families to survive the Wars of the Roses and all the other changes and chances of English history. They were a sensible and philoprogenitive race. No Badgery had ever fought in any war, no Badgery had ever engaged in any kind of politics. They had been content to live and quietly to propagate their species in a huge machicolated Norman castle, surrounded by a triple moat, only sallying forth to cultivate their property and to collect their rents. In the eighteenth century, when life had become relatively secure, the Badgerys began to venture forth into civilised society. From boorish squires they blossomed into *grands seigneurs*, patrons of the arts, virtuosi. Their property was large, they were rich; and with the growth of industrialism their riches also grew. Villages on their estate turned into manufacturing towns, unsuspected coal was discovered beneath the surface of their barren moorlands. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Badgerys were among the richest of English noble families. The forty-seventh baron disposed of an income of at least two hundred thousand pounds a year. Following the great Badgery tradition, he had refused to

have anything to do with politics or war. He occupied himself by collecting pictures; he took an interest in theatrical productions; he was the friend and patron of men of letters, of painters, and musician. A personage, in a word, of considerable consequence in that particular world in which young Spode had elected to make his success.

Spode had only recently left the university. Simon Gollamy, the editor of the *World's Review* (the "Best of all possible Worlds"), had got to know him — he was always on the look out for youthful talent — had seen possibilities in the young man, and appointed him art critic of his paper. Gollamy liked to have young and teachable people about him. The possession of disciples flattered his vanity, and he found it easier, moreover, to run his paper with docile collaborators than with men grown obstinate and case-hardened with age. Spode had not done badly at his new job. At any rate, his articles had been intelligent enough to arouse the interest of Lord Badgery. It was, ultimately, to them that he owed the honour of sitting to night in the dining-room of Badgery House.

Fortified by several varieties of wine and a glass of aged brandy, Spode felt more confident and at ease than he had done the whole evening. Badgery was rather a disquieting host. He had an alarming habit of changing the subject of any conversation that had lasted for more than two minutes. Spode had found it, for example, horribly mortifying when his host, cutting across what was, he prided himself, a particularly subtle and illuminating disquisition on baroque art, had turned a wandering eye about the room and asked him abruptly whether he liked parrots. He had flushed and glanced suspiciously towards him, fancying that the man was trying to be offensive. But no; Badgery's white, fleshy, Hanoverian face wore an expression of perfect good faith. There was no malice in his small greenish eyes. He evidently did genuinely want to know if Spode liked parrots. The young man swallowed his irritation and replied that he did. Badgery then told a good story about parrots. Spode was on the point of capping it with a better story, when his host began to talk about Beethoven. And so the game went on. Spode cut his conversation to suit his host's requirements. In the course of ten minutes he had made a more or less witty epigram on Benvenuto

Cellini, Queen Victoria, sport, God, Stephen Phillips, and Moorish architecture. Lord Badgery thought him the most charming young man, and so intelligent.

“If you’ve quite finished your coffee,” he said, rising to his feet as he spoke, “we’ll go and look at the pictures.”

Spode jumped up with alacrity, and only then realised that he had drunk just ever so little too much. He would have to be careful, talk deliberately, plant his feet consciously, one after the other.

“This house is quite cluttered up with pictures,” Lord Badgery complained. “I had a whole wagon-load taken away to the country last week; but there are still far too many. My ancestors would have their portraits painted by Romney. Such a shocking artist, don’t you think? Why couldn’t they have chosen Gainsborough, or even Reynolds? I’ve had all the Romneys hung in the servants’ hall now. It’s such a comfort to know that one can never possibly see them again. I suppose you know all about the ancient Hittites?”

“Well....” the young man replied, with befitting modesty.

“Look at that, then.” He indicated a large stone head which stood in a case near the dining-room door. “It’s not Greek, or Egyptian, or Persian, or anything else; so if it isn’t ancient Hittite, I don’t know what it is. And that reminds me of that story about Lord George Sanger, the Circus King....” and, without giving Spode time to examine the Hittite relic, he led the way up the huge staircase, pausing every now and then in his anecdote to point out some new object of curiosity or beauty.

“I suppose you know Deburau’s pantomimes?” Spode rapped out as soon as the story was over. He was in an itch to let out his information about Deburau. Badgery had given him a perfect opening with his ridiculous Sanger. “What a perfect man, isn’t he? He used to....”

“This is my main gallery,” said Lord Badgery, throwing open one leaf of a tall folding door. “I must apologise for it. It looks like a roller-skating rink.” He fumbled with the electric switches and there was suddenly light — light that revealed an enormous gallery, duly receding into distance according to all the laws of perspective. “I dare say you’ve heard of my poor father,” Lord Badgery

continued. “A little insane, you know; sort of mechanical genius with a screw loose. He used to have a toy railway in this room. No end of fun he had, crawling about the floor after his trains. And all the pictures were stacked in the cellars. I can’t tell you what they were like when I found them: mushrooms growing out of the Botticellis. Now I’m rather proud of this Poussin; he painted it for Scarron.”

“Exquisite!” Spode exclaimed, making with his hand a gesture as though he were modelling a pure form in the air. “How splendid the onrush of those trees and leaning figures is! And the way they re caught up, as it were, and stemmed by that single godlike form opposing them with his contrary movement! And the draperies....”

But Lord Badgery had moved on, and was standing in front of a little fifteenth-century Virgin of carved wood.

“School of Rheims,” he explained.

They “did” the gallery at high speed. Badgery never permitted his guest to halt for more than forty seconds before any work of art. Spode would have liked to spend a few moments of recollection and tranquillity in front of some of these lovely things. But it was not permitted.

The gallery done, they passed into a little room leading out of it. At the sight of what the lights revealed, Spode gasped.

“It’s like something out of Balzac,” he exclaimed. “Un de ces salons dorés où se déploie un luxe insolent. You know.”

“My nineteenth-century chamber,” Badgery explained. “The best thing of its kind, I flatter myself, outside the State Apartments at Windsor.”

Spode tiptoed round the room, peering with astonishment at all the objects in glass, in gilded bronze, in china, in leathers, in embroidered and painted silk, in beads, in wax, objects of the most fantastic shapes and colours, all the queer products of a decadent tradition, with which the room was crowded. There were paintings on the walls — a Martin, a Wilkie, an early Landseer, several Ettys, a big Haydon, a slight pretty water-colour of a girl by Wainewright, the pupil of Blake and arsenic poisoner, a score of others. But the picture which arrested

Spode's attention was a medium sized canvas representing Troilus riding into Troy among the flowers and plaudits of an admiring crowd, and oblivious (you could see from his expression) of everything but the eyes of Cressida, who looked down at him from a window, with Pandarus smiling over her shoulder.

"What an absurd and enchanting picture!" Spode exclaimed.

"Ah, you've spotted my Troilus." Lord Badgery was pleased.

"What bright harmonious colours! Like Etty's, only stronger, not so obviously pretty. And there's an energy about it that reminds one of Haydon. Only Haydon could never have done anything so impeccable in taste. Who is it by?" Spode turned to his host inquiringly.

"You were right in detecting Haydon," Lord Badgery answered, "It's by his pupil, Tillotson. I wish I could get hold of more of his work. But nobody seems to know anything about him. And he seems to have done so little."

This time it was the younger man who interrupted.

"Tillotson, Tillotson...." He put his hand to his forehead. A frown incongruously distorted his round, floridly curved face. No ... yes, I have it. He looked up triumphantly with serene and childish brows. "Tillotson, Walter Tillotson — the man's still alive."

Badgery smiled. "This picture was painted in 1846, you know."

"Well, that's all right. Say he was born in 1820, painted his masterpiece when he was twenty-six, and it's 1913 now; that's to say he's only ninety-three. Not as old as Titian yet."

"But he's not been heard of since 1860," Lord Badgery protested.

"Precisely. Your mention of his name reminded me of the discovery I made the other day when I was looking through the obituary notices in the archives of the *World's Review*.(One has to bring them up to date every year or so for fear of being caught napping if one of these t old birds chooses to shuffle off suddenly.) Well, there, among them — I remember my astonishment at the time — there I found Walter Tillotson's biography. Pretty full to 1860, and then a blank, except for a pencil note in the early nineteen hundreds to the effect that he had returned

from the East. The obituary has never been used or added to. I draw the obvious conclusion: the old chap isn't dead yet. He's just been overlooked somehow."

"But this is extraordinary," Lord Badgery exclaimed. "You must find him, Spode — you must find him. I'll commission him to paint frescoes round this room. It's just what I've always vainly longed for a real nineteenth-century artist to decorate this place for me. Oh, we must find him at once — at once."

Lord Badgery strode up and down in a state of great excitement.

"I can see how this room could be made quite perfect," he went on. "We'd clear away all these cases and have the whole of that wall filled by a heroic fresco of Hector and Andromache, or 'Distraining for Rent', or Fanny Kemble as Belvidera in 'Venice Preserved' anything like that, provided it's in the grand manner of the 'thirties and 'forties. And here I'd have a landscape with lovely receding perspectives, or else something architectural and grand in the style of Belshazzar's feast. Then we'll have this Adam fireplace taken down and replaced by something Mauro-Gothic. And on these walls I'll have mirrors, or no! let me see...."

He sank into meditative silence, from which he finally roused himself to shout:

"The old man, the old man! Spode, we must find this astonishing old creature. And don't breathe a word to anybody. Tillotson shall be our secret. Oh, it's too perfect, it's incredible! Think of the frescoes."

Lord Badgery's face had become positively animated. He had talked of a single subject for nearly a quarter of an hour.

II

Three weeks later Lord Badgery was aroused from his usual after-luncheon somnolence by the arrival of a telegram. The message was a short one. "Found. — SPODE." A look of pleasure and intelligence made human Lord Badgery's

clayey face of surfeit. “No answer,” he said. The footman padded away on noiseless feet.

Lord Badgery closed his eyes and began to contemplate. Found! What a room he would have! There would be nothing like it in the world. The frescoes, the fireplace, the mirrors, the ceiling.... And a small, shrivelled old man clambering about the scaffolding, agile and quick like one of those whiskered little monkeys at the Zoo, painting away, painting away.... Fanny Kemble as Belvidera, Hector and Andromache, or why not the Duke of Clarence in the Butt, the Duke of Malmsey, the Butt of Clarence. ... Lord Badgery was asleep.

Spode did not lag long behind his telegram. He was at Badgery House by six o’clock. His lordship was in the nineteenth-century chamber, engaged in clearing away with his own hands the bric-à-brac. Spode found him looking hot and out of breath.

“Ah, there you are,” said Lord Badgery. You see me already preparing for the great man’s coming. Now you must tell me all about him.

“He’s older even than I thought,” said Spode. “He’s ninety-seven this year. Born in 1816. Incredible, isn’t it! There, I’m beginning at the wrong end.”

“Begin where you like,” said Badgery genially.

“I won’t tell you all the incidents of the hunt. You’ve no idea what a job I had to run him to earth. It was like a Sherlock Holmes story, immensely elaborate, too elaborate. I shall write a book about it some day. At any rate, I found him at last.”

“Where?”

“In a sort of respectable slum in Holloway, older and poorer and lonelier than you could have believed possible. I found out how it was he came to be forgotten, how he came to drop out of life in the way he did. He took it into his head, somewhere about the ‘sixties, to go to Palestine to get local colour for his religious pictures — scapegoats and things, you know. Well, he went to Jerusalem and then on to Mount Lebanon and on and on, and then, somewhere in the middle of Asia Minor, he got stuck. He got stuck for about forty years.”

“But what did he do all that time?”

“Oh, he painted, and started a mission, and converted three Turks, and taught the local Pashas the rudiments of English, Latin, and perspective, and God knows what else. Then, in about 1904, it seems to have occurred to him that he was getting rather old and had been away from home for rather a long time. So he made his way back to England, only to find that everyone he had known was dead, that the dealers had never heard of him and wouldn’t buy his pictures, that he was simply a ridiculous old figure of fun. So he got a job as a drawing-master in a girl’s school in Holloway, and there he’s been ever since, growing older and older, and feebler and feebler, and blinder and deafer, and generally more gaga, until finally the school has given him the sack. He had about ten pounds in the world when I found him. He lives in a kind of black hole in a basement full of beetles. When his ten pounds are spent, I suppose he’ll just quietly die there.”

Badgery held up a white hand. “No more, no more. I find literature quite depressing enough. I insist that life at least shall be a little gayer. Did you tell him I wanted him to paint my room?”

“But he can’t paint. He’s too blind and palsied.”

“Can’t paint?” Badgery exclaimed in horror. “Then what’s the good of the old creature?”

“Well, if you put it like that....” Spode began.

“I shall never have my frescoes. Ring the bell, will you?”

Spode rang.

“What right has Tillotson to go on existing if he can’t paint?” went on Lord Badgery petulantly. “After all, that was his only justification for occupying a place in the sun.”

“He doesn’t have much sun in his basement.”

The footman appeared at the door.

“Get someone to put all these things back in their places,” Lord Badgery commanded, indicating with a wave of the hand the ravaged cases, the confusion of glass and china with which he had littered the floor, the pictures unhooked. “We’ll go to the library, Spode; it’s more comfortable there.”

He led the way through the long gallery and down the stairs.

“I’m sorry old Tillotson has been such a disappointment,” said Spode sympathetically.

“Let us talk about something else; he ceases to interest me.

“But don’t you think we ought to do something about him? He’s only got ten pounds between him and the workhouse. And if you’d seen the blackbeetles in his basement!”

“Enough enough. I’ll do everything you think fitting.”

“I thought we might get up a subscription amongst lovers of the arts.”

“There aren’t any,” said Badgery.

“No; but there are plenty of people who will subscribe out of snobbism.”

“Not unless you give them something for their money.”

“That’s true. I hadn’t thought of that.” Spode was silent for a moment. “We might have a dinner in his honour. The Great Tillotson Banquet. Doyen of the British Art. A Link with the Past. Can’t you see it in the papers? I’d make a stunt of it in the *World’s Review*. That ought to bring in the snobs.”

“And we’ll invite a lot of artists and critics — all the ones who can’t stand one another. It will be fun to see them squabbling.” Badgery laughed. Then his face darkened once again. “Still,” he added, “it’ll be a very poor second best to my frescoes. You’ll stay to dinner, of course.”

“Well, since you suggest it. Thanks very much.”

III

The Tillotson Banquet was fixed to take place about three weeks later. Spode, who had charge of the arrangements, proved himself an excellent organiser. He secured the big banqueting-room at the Café Bomba, and was successful in bullying and cajoling the manager into giving fifty persons dinner at twelve shillings a head, including wine. He sent out invitations and collected subscriptions. He wrote an article on Tillotson in the *World’s Review* — one of those charming, witty articles couched in the tone of amused patronage and

contempt with which one speaks of the great men of 1840. Nor did he neglect Tillotson himself. He used to go to Holloway almost every day to listen to the old man's endless stories about Asia Minor and the Great Exhibition of '51 and Benjamin Robert Haydon. He was sincerely sorry for this relic of another age.

Mr. Tillotson's room was about ten feet below the level of the soil of South Holloway. A little grey light percolated through the area bars, forced a difficult passage through panes opaque with dirt, and spent itself, like a drop of milk that falls into an inkpot, among the inveterate shadows of the dungeon. The place was haunted by the spur smell of damp plaster and of woodwork that has begun to moulder secretly at the heart. A little miscellaneous furniture, including a bed, a washstand and chest of drawers, a table and one or two chairs, lurked in the obscure corners of the den or ventured furtively out into the open. Hither Spode now came almost every day, bringing the old man news of the progress of the banquet scheme. Every day he found Mr. Tillotson sitting in the same place under the window, bathing, as it were, in his tiny puddle of light. "The oldest man that ever wore grey hairs," Spode reflected as he looked at him. Only there were very few hairs left on that bald, unpolished head. At the sound of the visitor's knock Mr. Tillotson would turn in his chair, stare in the direction of the door with blinking, uncertain eyes. He was always full of apologies for being so slow in recognising who was there.

"No discourtesy meant," he would say, after asking. "It's not as if I had forgotten who you were. Only it's so dark and my sight isn't what it was."

After that he never failed to give a little laugh, and, pointing out of the window at the area railings, would say:

"Ah, this is the plate for somebody with good sight. It's the place for looking at ankles. It's the grand stand."

It was the day before the great event. Spode came as usual, and Mr. Tillotson punctually made his little joke about the ankles, and Spode, as punctually laughed.

"Well, Mr. Tillotson," he said, after the reverberation of the joke had died away, "to-morrow you make your re-entry into the world of art and fashion.

You'll find some changes."

"I've always had such extraordinary luck," said Mr. Tillotson, and Spode could see by his expression that he genuinely believed it, that he had forgotten the black hole and the blackbeetles and the almost exhausted ten pounds that stood between him and the workhouse. "What an amazing piece of good fortune, for instance, that you should have found me just when you did. Now, this dinner will bring me back to my place in the world. I shall have money, and in a little while — who knows? — I shall be able to see well enough to paint again. I believe my eyes are getting better, you know. Ah, the future is very rosy."

Mr. Tillotson looked up, his face puckered into a smile, and nodded his head in affirmation of his words.

"You believe in the life to come?" said Spode, and immediately flushed for shame at the cruelty of the words.

But Mr. Tillotson was in far too cheerful a mood to have caught their significance.

"Life to come," he repeated. "No, I don't believe in any of that stuff not since 1859. The 'Origin of Species' changed my views, you know. No life to come for me, thank you! You don't remember the excitement of course. You re very young Mr. Spode."

"Well, I'm not so old as I was," Spode replied. "You know how middle-aged one is as a schoolboy and undergraduate. Now I'm old enough to know I'm young."

Spode was about to develop this little paradox further, but he noticed that Mr. Tillotson had not been listening. He made a note of the gambit for use in companies that were more appreciative of the subtleties.

"You were talking about the 'Origin of Species,'" he said.

"Was I?" said Mr. Tillotson, waking from reverie.

"About its effect on your faith, Mr. Tillotson."

"To be sure, yes. It shattered my faith. But I remember a fine thing by the Poet Laureate, something about there being more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in all the ... all the ...: I forget exactly what; but you see the train of

thought. Oh, it was a bad time for religion. I am glad my master Haydon never lived to see it. He was a man of fervour. I remember him pacing up and down his studio in Lisson Grove, singing and shouting and praying all at once. It used almost to frighten me. Oh, but he was a wonderful man, a great man. Take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again. As usual, the Bard is right. But it was all very long ago, before your time, Mr. Spode."

"Well, I'm not as old as I was," said Spode, in the hope of having his paradox appreciated this time. But Mr. Tillotson went on without noticing the interruption.

"It's a very, very long time. And yet, when I look back on it, it all seems but a day or two ago. Strange that each day should seem so long and that many days added together should be less than an hour. How clearly I can see old Haydon pacing up and down! Much more clearly, indeed, than I see you, Mr. Spode. The eyes of memory don t grow dim. But my sight is improving, I assure you; it's improving daily. I shall soon be able to see those ankles." He laughed like a cracked bell — one of those little old bells, Spode fancied, that ring, with much rattling of wires, in the far-off servants quarters of ancient houses. "And very soon," Mr. Tillotson went on, "I shall be painting again. Ah, Mr. Spode, my luck is extraordinary. I believe in it, I trust in it. And after all, what is luck? Simply another name for Providence, in spite of the Origin of Species and the rest of it. How right the Laureate was when he said that there was more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in all the ... er, the ... er ... well, you know. I regard you, Mr. Spode, as the emissary of Providence. Your coming marked a turning-point in my life, and the beginning, for me, of happier days. Do you know, one of the first things I shall do when my fortunes are restored will be to buy a hedgehog."

"A hedgehog, Mr. Tillotson?"

"For the blackbeetles. There's nothing like a hedgehog for beetles. It will eat blackbeetles till it's sick, till it dies of surfeit. That reminds me of the time when I told my poor great master Haydon — in joke, of course — that he ought to send in a cartoon of King John dying of a surfeit of lampreys for the frescoes in

the new Houses of Parliament. As I told him, it's a most notable event in the annals of British liberty — the providential and exemplary removal of a tyrant."

Mr. Tillotson laughed again — the little bell in the deserted house; a ghostly hand pulling the cord in the drawing-room, and phantom footmen responding to the thin, flawed note.

"I remember he laughed, laughed like a bull in his old grand manner. But oh, it was a terrible blow when they rejected his design, a terrible blow. It was the first and fundamental cause of his suicide."

Mr. Tillotson paused. There was a long silence. Spode felt strangely moved, he hardly knew why, in the presence of this man, so frail, so ancient, in body three parts dead, in the spirit so full of life and hopeful patience. He felt ashamed. What was the use of his own youth and cleverness? He saw himself suddenly as a boy with a rattle scaring birds rattling his noisy cleverness, waving his arms in ceaseless and futile activity, never resting in his efforts to scare away the birds that were always trying to settle in his mind. And what birds! widewinged and beautiful, all those serene thoughts and faiths and emotions that only visit minds that have humbled themselves to quiet. Those gracious visitants he was for ever using all his energies to drive away. But this old man, with his hedgehogs and his honest doubts and all the rest of it — his mind was like a field made beautiful by the free coming and going, the unafraid alightings of a multitude of white, bright-winged creatures. He felt ashamed. But then, was it possible to alter one's life? Wasn't it a little absurd to risk a conversion? Spode shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll get you a hedgehog at once," he said. "They're sure to have some at Whiteley's."

Before he left that evening Spode made an alarming discovery. Mr. Tillotson did not possess a dress-suit. It was hopeless to think of getting one made at this short notice, and, besides, what an unnecessary expense!

"We shall have to borrow a suit, Mr. Tillotson. I ought to have thought of that before."

“Dear me, dear me.” Mr. Tillotson was a little chagrined by this unlucky discovery. “Borrow a suit?”

Spode hurried away for counsel to Badgery House. Lord Badgery surprisingly rose to the occasion. “Ask Boreham to come and see me,” he told the footman, who answered his ring.

Boreham was one of those immemorial butlers who linger on, generation after generation, in the houses of the great. He was over eighty now, bent, dried up, shrivelled with age.

“All old men are about the same size,” said Lord Badgery. It was a comforting theory. “Ah, here he is. Have you got a spare suit of evening clothes, Boreham?”

“I have an old suit, my lord, that I stopped wearing in let me see was it nineteen seven or eight?”

“That’s the very thing. I should be most grateful, Boreham, if you could lend it to me for Mr. Spode here for a day.”

The old man went out, and soon reappeared carrying over his arm a very old black suit. He held up the coat and trousers for inspection. In the light of day they were deplorable.

“You’ve no idea, sir,” said Boreham deprecatingly to Spode you’ve no idea how easy things get stained with grease and gravy and what not. However careful you are, sir — however careful.

“I should imagine so.” Spode was sympathetic.

“However careful, sir.”

“But in artificial light they’ll look all right.”

“Perfectly all right,” Lord Badgery repeated. “Thank you, Boreham; you shall have them back on Thursday.”

“You re welcome, my lord, I’m sure.” And the old man bowed and disappeared.

On the afternoon of the great day Spode carried up to Holloway a parcel containing Boreham’s retired evening-suit and all the necessary appurtenances in the way of shirts and collars. Owing to the darkness and his own feeble sight Mr.

Tillotson was happily unaware of the defects in the suit. He was in a state of extreme nervous agitation. It was with some difficulty that Spode could prevent him, although it was only three o'clock, from starting his toilet on the spot.

"Take it easy, Mr. Tillotson, take it easy. We needn't start till half-past seven, you know."

Spode left an hour later, and as soon as he was safely out of the room Mr. Tillotson began to prepare himself for the banquet. He lighted the gas and a couple of candles, and, blinking myopically at the image that fronted him in the tiny looking-glass that stood on his chest of drawers, he set to work, with all the ardour of a young girl preparing for her first ball. At six o'clock, when the last touches had been given, he was not unsatisfied.

He marched up and down his cellar, humming to himself the gay song which had been so popular in his middle years:

"*Oh, oh, Anna, Maria Jones!*
Queen of the tambourine, the cymbals, and the bones!"

Spode arrived an hour later in Lord Badgery's second Rolls-Royce. Opening the door of the old man's dungeon, he stood for a moment, wide-eyed with astonishment, on the threshold. Mr. Tillotson was standing by the empty grate, one elbow resting on the mantelpiece, one leg crossed over the other in a jaunty and gentlemanly attitude. The effect of the candlelight shining on his face was to deepen every line and wrinkle with intense black shadow; he looked immeasurably old. It was a noble and pathetic head. On the other hand, Boreham's out-worn evening-suit was simply buffoonish. The coat was too long in the sleeves and the tail; the trousers bagged in elephantine creases about his ankles. Some of the grease-spots were visible even in candlelight. The white tie, over which Mr. Tillotson had taken infinite pains and which he believed in his purblindness to be perfect, was fantastically lop-sided. He had buttoned up his waistcoat in such a fashion that one button was widowed of its hole and one hole

of its button. Across his shirt front lay the broad green ribbon of some unknown Order.

“Queen of the tambourine, the cymbals, and the bones,” Mr. Tillotson concluded in a gnat-like voice before welcoming his visitor.

“Well, Spode, here you are. I’m dressed already, you see. The suit, I flatter myself, fits very well, almost as though it had been made for me. I am all gratitude to the gentleman who was kind enough to lend it to me; I shall take the greatest care of it. It’s a dangerous thing to lend clothes. For loan oft loseth both itself and friend. The Bard is always right.”

“Just one thing,” said Spode. “A touch to your waistcoat.” He unbuttoned the dissipated garment and did it up again more symmetrically.

Mr. Tillotson was a little piqued at being found so absurdly in the wrong.

“Thanks, thanks,” he said, protestingly, trying to edge away from his valet. “It’s all right, you know; I can do it myself. Foolish oversight. I flatter myself the suit fits very well.”

“And perhaps the tie might....” Spode began tentatively. But the old man would not hear of it.

“No, no. The tie’s all right. I can tie a tie, Mr. Spode. The tie’s all right. Leave it as it is, I beg.”

“I like your Order.”

Mr. Tillotson looked down complacently at his shirt front. “Ah, you’ve noticed my Order. It’s a long time since I wore that. It was given me by the Grand Porte, you know, for services rendered in the Russo-Turkish War. It’s the Order of Chastity, the second class. They only give the first class to crowned heads, you know — browned heads and ambassadors. And only Pashas of the highest rank get the second. Mine’s the second. They only give the first class to crowned heads....”

“Of course, of course,” said Spode.

“Do you think I look all right, Mr. Spode?” Mr. Tillotson asked, a little anxiously.

“Splendid, Mr. Tillotson — splendid. The Order’s, magnificent.”

The old man’s face brightened once more. “I flatter myself,” he said, “that this borrowed suit fits me very well. But I don’t like borrowing clothes. For loan oft loseth both itself and friend, you know. And the Bard is always right.”

“Ugh, there’s one of those horrible beetles!” Spode exclaimed.

Mr. Tillotson bent down and stared at the floor. “I see it,” he said, and stamped on a small piece of coal, which crunched to powder under his foot. “I shall certainly buy a hedgehog.”

It was time for them to start. A crowd of little boys and girls had collected round Lord Badgery’s enormous car. The chauffeur, who felt that honour and dignity were at stake, pretended not to notice the children, but sat gazing, like a statue, into eternity. At the sight of Spode and Mr. Tillotson emerging from the house a yell of mingled awe and derision went up. It subsided to an astonished silence as they climbed into the car. “Bomba’s,” Spode directed. The Rolls-Royce gave a faintly stertorous sigh and began to move. The children yelled again, and ran along beside the car, waving their arms in a frenzy of excitement. It was then that Mr. Tillotson, with an incomparably noble gesture, leaned forward and tossed among the seething crowd of urchins his three last coppers.

IV

In Bomba’s big room the company was assembling. The long gilt-edged mirrors reflected a singular collection of people. Middle-aged Academicians shot suspicious glances at youths whom they suspected, only too correctly, of being iconoclasts, organisers of Post-Impressionist Exhibitions. Rival art critics, brought suddenly face to face, quivered with restrained hatred. Mrs. Nobes, Mrs. Cayman, and Mrs. Mandragore, those indefatigable hunters of artistic big game, came on one another all unawares in this well-stored menagerie, where each had expected to hunt alone, and were filled with rage. Through this crowd of mutually repellent vanities Lord Badgery moved with a suavity that seemed unconscious of all the feuds and hatreds. He was enjoying himself immensely.

Behind the heavy waxen mask of his face, ambushed behind the Hanoverian nose, the little lustreless pig's eyes, the pale thick lips, there lurked a small devil of happy malice that rocked with laughter.

"So nice of you to have come, Mrs. Mandragore, to do honour to England's artistic past. And I'm so glad to see you've brought dear Mrs. Cayman. And is that Mrs. Nobes, too? So it is! I hadn't noticed her before. How delightful! I knew we could depend on your love of art."

And he hurried away to seize the opportunity of introducing that eminent sculptor, Sir Herbert Herne, to the bright young critic who had called him, in the public prints, a monumental mason.

A moment later the Maître d'Hôtel came to the door of the gilded saloon and announced, loudly and impressively, "Mr. Walter Tillotson." Guided from behind by young Spode, Mr. Tillotson came into the room slowly and hesitatingly. In the glare of the lights his eyelids beat heavily, painfully, like the wings of an imprisoned moth, over his filmy eyes. Once inside the door he halted and drew himself up with a conscious assumption of dignity. Lord Badgery hurried forward and seized his hand.

"Welcome, Mr. Tillotson — welcome in the name of English art!"

Mr. Tillotson inclined his head in silence. He was too full of emotion to be able to reply.

"I should like to introduce you to a few of your younger colleagues, who have assembled here to do you honour."

Lord Badgery presented everyone in the room to the old painter, who bowed, shook hands, made little noises in his throat, but still found himself unable to speak. Mrs. Nobes, Mrs. Cayman, and Mrs. Mandragore all said charming things.

Dinner was served; the party took their places. Lord Badgery sat at the head of the table, with Mr. Tillotson on his right hand and Sir Herbert Herne on his left. Confronted with Bomba's succulent cooking and Bomba's wines, Mr. Tillotson ate and drank a good deal. He had the appetite of one who has lived on greens and potatoes for ten years among the blackbeetles. After the second glass

of wine he began to talk, suddenly and in a flood, as though a sluice had been pulled up.

“In Asia Minor,” he began, “it is the custom when one goes to dinner, to hiccough as a sign of appreciative fullness. *Eructavit cor meum*, as the Psalmist has it; he was an Oriental himself.”

Spode had arranged to sit next to Mrs. Cayman; he had designs upon her. She was an impossible woman, of course, but rich and useful; he wanted to bamboozle her into buying some of his young friends’ pictures.

“In a cellar?” Mrs. Cayman was saying, “with, blackbeetles? Oh, how dreadful! Poor old man! And he’s ninety-seven, didn’t you say? Isn’t that shocking! I only hope the subscription will be a large one. Of course, one wishes one could have given more oneself. But then, you know, one has so many expenses, and things are so difficult now.”

“I know, I know,” said Spode, with feeling.

“It’s all because of Labour,” Mrs. Cayman explained. “Of course, I should simply love to have him in to dinner sometimes. But, then, I feel he’s really too old, too *farouche* and *gâteux*; it would not be doing a kindness to him, would it? And so you are working with Mr. Gollamy now? What a charming man, so talented, such conversation....”

“*Eructavit cor meum*,” said Mr. Tillotson for the third time. Lord Badgery tried to head him off the subject of Turkish etiquette, but in vain.

By half-past nine a kinder vinolent atmosphere had put to sleep the hatreds and suspicions of before dinner. Sir Herbert Herne had discovered that the young Cubist sitting next him was not insane and actually knew a surprising amount about the Old Masters. For their part these young men had realised that their elders were not at all malignant; they were just very stupid and pathetic. It was only in the bosoms of Mrs. Nobes, Mrs. Cayman, and Mrs. Mandragore that hatred still reigned undiminished. Being ladies and old-fashioned, they had drunk almost no wine.

The moment for speech-making arrived. Lord Badgery rose to his feet, said what was expected of him, and called upon Sir Herbert to propose the toast of

the evening. Sir Herbert coughed, smiled and began. In the course of a speech that lasted twenty minutes he told anecdotes of Mr. Gladstone, Lord Leighton, Sir Almo Tadema, and the late Bishop, of Bombay; he made three puns, he quoted Shakespeare and Whittier, he was playful, he was eloquent, he was grave.... At the end of his harangue Sir Herbert handed to Mr. Tillotson a silk purse containing fifty-eight pounds ten shillings, the total amount of the subscription. The old man's health was drunk with acclamation.

Mr. Tillotson rose with difficulty to his feet. The dry, snakelike skin of his face was flushed; his tie was more crooked than ever; the green ribbon of the Order of Chastity of the second class had somehow climbed tip his crumpled and maculate shirt front.

"My lords, ladies, and gentlemen," he began in a choking voice, and then broke down completely. It was a very painful and pathetic spectacle. A feeling of intense discomfort afflicted the minds of all who looked upon that trembling relic of a man, as he stood there weeping and stammering. It was as though a breath of the wind of death had blown suddenly through the room, lifting the vapours of wine and tobacco-smoke, quenching the laughter and the candle flames. Eyes floated uneasily, not knowing where to look. Lord Badgery, with great presence of mind, offered the old man a glass of wine. Mr. Tillotson began to recover. The guests heard him murmur a few disconnected words.

"This great honour ... overwhelmed with kindness ... this magnificent banquet ... not used to it ... in Asia Minor ... *eructuvit cor meum*."

At this point Lord Badgery plucked sharply at one of his long coat tails. Mr. Tillotson paused, took another sip of wine, and then went on with a newly won coherence and energy.

"The life of the artist is a hard one. His work is unlike other men's work, which may be done mechanically, by rote and almost, as it were, in sleep. It demands from him a constant expense of spirit. He gives continually of his best life, and in return he receives much joy, it is true much fame, it may be — but of material blessings, very few. It is eighty years since first I devoted my life to the service of art; eighty years, and almost every one of those years has brought me

fresh and painful proof of what I have been saying: the artist's life is a hard one."

This unexpected deviation into sense increased the general feeling of discomfort. It became necessary to take the old man seriously, to regard him as a human being. Up till then he had been no more than an object of curiosity, a mummy in an absurd suit of evening-clothes with a green ribbon across the shirt front. People could not help wishing that they had subscribed a little more. Fifty-eight pounds ten it wasn't enormous. But happily for the peace of mind of the company, Mr. Tillotson paused again, took another sip of wine, and began to live up to his proper character by talking absurdly.

"When I consider the life of that great man, Benjamin Robert Haydon, one of the greatest men England has ever produced...." The audience heaved a sigh of relief; this was all as it should be. There was a burst of loud bravoing and clapping. Mr. Tillotson turned his dim eyes round the room, and smiled gratefully at the misty figures he beheld. "That great man, Benjamin Robert Haydon," he continued, "whom I am proud to call my master and who, it rejoices my heart to see, still lives in your memory and esteem, that great man, one of the greatest that England has ever produced, led a life so deplorable that I cannot think of it without a tear."

And with infinite repetitions and divagations, Mr. Tillotson related the history of B.R. Haydon, his imprisonments for debt, his battle with the Academy, his triumphs, his failures, his despair, his suicide. Half-past ten struck. Mr. Tillotson was declaiming against the stupid and prejudiced judges who had rejected Haydon's designs for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament in favour of the paltriest German scribblings.

"That great man, one of the greatest England has ever produced, that great Benjamin Robert Haydon, whom I am proud to call my master and who, it rejoices me to see, still lives on in your memory and esteem — at that affront his great heart burst; it was the unkindest cut of all. He who had worked all his life for the recognition, of the artist by the State, he who had petitioned every Prime Minister, including the Duke of Wellington, for thirty years, begging them to

employ artists to decorate public buildings, he to whom the scheme for decorating the Houses of Parliament was undeniably due....” Mr. Tillotson lost a grip on his syntax and began a new sentence. “It was the unkindest cut of all, it was the last straw. The artist’s life is a hard one.”

At eleven Mr. Tillotson was talking about the pre-Raphaelites. At a quarter past he had begun to tell the story of B.R. Haydon all over again. At twenty-five minutes to twelve he collapsed quite speechless into his chair. Most of the guests had already gone away; the few who remained made haste to depart. Lord Badgery led the old man to the door and packed him into the second Rolls-Royce. The Tillotson Banquet was over; it had been a pleasant evening, but a little too long.

Spode walked back to his rooms in Bloomsbury, whistling as he went. The arc lamps of Oxford Street reflected in the polished surface of the road; canals of dark bronze. He would have to bring that into an article some time. The Cayman woman had been very successfully nobbled. “Voi che sapete,” he whistled — somewhat out of tune, but he could not hear that.

When Mr. Tillotson’s landlady came in to call him on the following morning, she found the old man lying fully dressed on his bed. He looked very ill and very, very old; Boreham’s dress-suit was in a terrible state, and the green ribbon of the Order of Chastity was ruined. Mr. Tillotson lay very still, but he was not asleep. Hearing the sound of footsteps, he opened his eyes a little and faintly groaned. His landlady looked down at him menacingly.

“Disgusting!” she said, “disgusting, I call it. At your age.”

Mr. Tillotson groaned again. Making a great effort, he drew out of his trouser pocket a large silk purse, opened it, and extracted a sovereign.

“The artist’s life is a hard one, Mrs. Green,” he said, handing her the coin. “Would you mind sending for the doctor? I don’t feel very well. And oh, what shall I do about these clothes? What shall I say to the gentleman who was kind enough to lend them to me? Loan oft loseth both itself and friend. The Bard is always right.”

GREEN TUNNELS

"IN THE ITALIAN gardens of the thirteenth century...." Mr. Buzzacott interrupted himself to take another helping of the risotto which was being offered him. "Excellent risotto this," he observed. "Nobody who was not born in Milan can make it properly. So they say."

"So they say," Mr. Topes repeated in his sad, apologetic voice, and helped himself in his turn.

"Personally," said Mrs. Topes, with decision, "I find all Italian cooking abominable. I don't like the oil — especially hot. No, thank you." She recoiled from the proffered dish.

After the first mouthful Mr. Buzzacott put down his fork. "In the Italian gardens of the thirteenth century," he began again, making with his long, pale hand a curved and flowery gesture that ended with a clutch at his beard, "a frequent and most felicitous use was made of green tunnels."

"Green tunnels?" Barbara woke up suddenly from her tranced silence. "Green tunnels?"

"Yes, my dear," said her father. "Green tunnels. Arched alleys covered with vines or other creeping plants. Their length was often very considerable."

But Barbara had once more ceased to pay attention to what he was saying. Green tunnels — the word had floated down to her, through profound depths of reverie, across great spaces of abstraction, startling her like the sound of a strange-voiced bell. Green tunnels — what a wonderful idea. She would not listen to her father explaining the phrase into dullness. He made everything dull; an inverted alchemist, turning gold into lead. She pictured caverns in a great aquarium, long vistas between rocks and scarcely swaying weeds and pale, discoloured corals; endless dim green corridors with huge lazy fishes loitering

aimlessly along them. Green-faced monsters with goggling eyes and mouths that slowly opened and shut. Green tunnels....

“I have seen them illustrated in illuminated manuscripts of the period,” Mr. Buzzacott went on; once more he clutched his pointed brown beard — clutched and combed it with his long fingers.

Mr. Topes looked up. The glasses of his round owlish spectacles flashed as he moved his head. “I know what you mean,” he said.

“I have a very good mind to have one, planted in my garden here.”

“It will take a long time to grow,” said Mr. Topes. “In this sand, so close to the sea, you will only be able to plant vines. And they come up very slowly very slowly indeed.” He shook his head and the points of light danced wildly in his spectacles. His voice drooped hopelessly, his grey moustache drooped, his whole person drooped. Then, suddenly, he pulled himself up. A shy, apologetic smile appeared on his face. He wriggled uncomfortably. Then, with a final rapid shake of the head, he gave vent to a quotation:

But at my back I always hear
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near.”

He spoke deliberately, and his voice trembled a little. He always found it painfully difficult to say something choice and out of the ordinary; and yet what a wealth of remembered phrase, what apt new coinages were always surging through his mind!

“They don’t grow so slowly as all that,” said Mr. Buzzacott confidently. He was only just over fifty, and looked a handsome thirty-five. He gave himself at least another forty years; indeed, he had not yet begun to contemplate the possibility of ever concluding.

“Miss Barbara will enjoy it, perhaps — your green tunnel.” Mr. Topes sighed and looked across the table at his host’s daughter.

Barbara was sitting with her elbows on the table, her chin in her hands, staring in front of her. The sound of her own name reached her faintly. She

turned her head in Mr. Topes's direction and found herself confronted by the glitter of his round, convex spectacles. At the end of the green tunnel — she stared at the shining circles — hung the eyes of a goggling fish. They approached, floating, closer and closer, along the dim submarine corridor.

Confronted by this fixed regard, Mr. Topes looked away. What thoughtful eyes! He couldn't remember ever to have seen eyes so full of thought. There were certain Madonnas of Montagna, he reflected, very like hen mild little blonde Madonnas with slightly snub noses and very, very young. But he was old; it would be many years, in spite of Buzzacott, before the vines grew up into a green tunnel. He took a sip of wine; then, mechanically, sucked his drooping grey moustache.

"Arthur!"

At the sound of his wife's voice Mr. Topes started, raised his napkin to his mouth. Mrs. Topes did not permit the sucking of moustaches. It was only in moments of absent-mindedness that he ever offended, now.

"The Marchese Prampolini is coming here to take coffee," said Mr. Buzzacott suddenly. "I almost forgot to tell you."

"One of these Italian marquises, I suppose," said Mrs. Topes, who was no snob, except in England. She raised her chin with a little jerk.

Mr. Buzzacott executed an upward curve of the hand in her direction. "I assure you, Mrs. Topes, he belongs to a very old and distinguished family. They are Genoese in origin. You remember their palace, Barbara? Built by Alessi."

Barbara looked up. "Oh yes," she said vaguely. "Alessi. I know." Alessi: Aleppo — where a malignant and a turbaned Turk. *And* a turbaned; that had always seemed to her very funny.

"Several of his ancestors," Mr. Buzzacott went on, "distinguished themselves as vice-roys of Corsica. They did good work in the suppression of rebellion. Strange, isn't it" — he turned parenthetically to Mr. Topes— "the way in which sympathy is always on the side of rebels? What a fuss people made of Corsica! That ridiculous book of Gregorovius, for example. And the Irish, and the Poles, and all the rest of them. It always seems to me very superfluous and absurd."

“Isn’t it, perhaps, a little natural?” Mr. Topes began timorously and tentatively, but his host went on without listening.

“The present marquis,” he said, “is the head of the local Fascisti. They have done no end of good work in this district in the way of preserving law and order and keeping the lower classes in their place.”

“Ah, the Fascisti,” Mrs. Topes repeated approvingly. “One would like to see something of the kind in England. What with all these strikes....”

“He has asked me for a subscription to the funds of the organisation. I shall give him one, of course.”

“Of course.” Mrs. Topes nodded. “My nephew, the one who was a major during the war, volunteered in the last coal strike. He was sorry, I know, that it didn’t come to a fight. ‘Aunt Annie,’ he said to me, when I saw him last, ‘if there had been a fight we should have knocked them out completely — completely.’”

In Aleppo, the Fascisti, malignant *and* turbaned, were fighting, under the palm trees. Weren’t they palm trees, those tufted green plumes?

“What, no ice to-day? *Niente gelato?*” inquired Mr. Buzzacott as the maid put down the compote of peaches on the table.

Concetta apologised. The ice-making machine in the village had broken down. There would be no ice till to-morrow.

“Too bad,” said Mr. Buzzacott. “*Troppo male, Concetta*.”

Under the palm trees, Barbara saw them: they pranced about, fighting. They were mounted on big dogs, and in the trees were enormous many-coloured birds.

“Goodness me, the child’s asleep.” Mrs. Topes was proffering the dish of peaches. “How much longer am I to hold this in front of your nose, Barbara?”

Barbara felt herself blushing. “I’m so sorry,” she mumbled, and took the dish clumsily.

“Day-dreaming. It’s a bad habit.”

“It’s one we all succumb to sometimes,” put in Mr. Topes deprecatingly, with a little nervous tremble of the head.

“You may, my dear,” said his wife. “I do not.”

Mr. Topes lowered his eyes to his plate and went on eating.

“The marchese should be here at any moment now,” said Mr. Buzzacott, looking at his watch. “I hope he won’t be late. I find I suffer so much from any postponement of my siesta. This Italian heat,” he added, with growing plaintiveness, “one can’t be too careful.”

“Ah, but when I was with my father in India,” began Mrs. Topes in a tone of superiority: “he was an Indian civilian, you know....”

Aleppo, India — always the palm trees. Cavalcades of big dogs, and tigers too.

Concetta ushered in the marquis. Delighted. Pleased to meet. Speak English? Yés, yéss. *Pocchino.* Mrs. Topes: and Mr. Topes, the distinguished antiquarian. Ah, of course; know his name very well. My daughter. Charmed. Often seen the signorina bathing. Admired the way she dives. Beautiful — the hand made a long, caressing gesture. These athletic English signorine. The teeth flashed astonishingly white in the brown face, the dark eyes glittered. She felt herself blushing again, looked away, smiled foolishly. The marquis had already turned back to Mr. Buzzacott.

“So you have decided to settle in our Carrarese.”

Well, not settled exactly; Mr. Buzzacott wouldn’t go so far as to say settled. A villine for the summer months. The winter in Rome. One was forced to live abroad. Taxation in England.... Soon they were all talking. Barbara looked at them. Beside the marquis they all seemed half dead. His face flashed as he talked; he seemed to be boiling with life. Her father was limp and pale, like something long buried from the light; and Mr. Topes was all dry and shrivelled; and Mrs. Topes looked more than ever like something worked by clockwork. They were talking about Socialism and Fascisti, and all that. Barbara did not listen to what they were saying; but she looked at them, absorbed.

Good-bye, good-bye. The animated face with its flash of a smile was turned like a lamp from one to another. Now it was turned on her. Perhaps one evening she would come, with her father, and the Signora Topes. He and his sister gave little dances sometimes. Only the gramophone, of course. But that was better

than nothing, and the signorina must dance divinely — another flash — he could see that. He pressed her hand again. Good-bye.

It was time for the siesta.

“Don’t forget to pull down the mosquito netting, my dear,” Mr. Buzzacott exhorted. “There is always a danger of anophylines.”

“All right, father.” She moved towards the door without turning round to answer him. He was always terribly tiresome about mosquito nets. Once they had driven through the Campagna in a hired cab, completely enclosed in an improvised tent of netting. The monuments along the Appian Way had loomed up mistily as through bridal veils. And how everyone had laughed. But her father, of course, hadn’t so much as noticed it. He never noticed anything.

“Is it at Berlin, that charming little Madonna of Montagna’s?” Mr. Topes abruptly asked. “The one with the Donor kneeling in the left-hand corner as if about to kiss the foot of the Child.” His spectacles flashed in Mr. Buzzacott’s direction.

“Why do you ask?”

“I don’t know. I was just thinking of it.”

“I think you must mean the one in the Mond Collection.”

“Ah yes; very probably. In the Mond....”

Barbara opened the door and walked into the twilight of her shuttered room. It was hot even here; for another three hours it would hardly be possible to stir. And that old idiot, Mrs. Topes, always made a fuss if one came in to lunch with bare legs and one’s after-bathing tunic. “In India we always made a point of being properly and adequately dressed. An Englishwoman must keep up her position with natives, and to all intents and purposes Italians *are* natives.” And so she always had to put on shoes and stockings and a regular frock just at the hottest hour of the day. What an old ass that woman was! She slipped off her clothes as fast as she could. That was a little better.

Standing in front of the long mirror in the wardrobe door she came to the humiliating conclusion that she looked like a piece of badly toasted bread. Brown face, brown neck and shoulders, brown arms, brown legs from the knee

downwards; but all the rest of her was white, silly, effeminate, townish white. If only one could run about with no clothes on till one was like those little coppery children who rolled and tumbled in the burning sand! Now she was just underdone, half-baked, and wholly ridiculous. For a long time she looked at her pale image. She saw herself running, bronzed all over, along the sand; or through a field of flowers, narcissus and wild tulips; or in soft grass under grey olive trees. She turned round with a sudden start. There, in the shadows behind her.... No, of course there was nothing.

It was that awful picture in a magazine she had looked at, so many years ago, when she was a child. There was a lady sitting at her dressing-table, doing her hair in front of the glass; and a huge, hairy black monkey creeping up behind her. She always got the creeps when she looked at herself in a mirror. It was very silly. But still. She turned away from the mirror, crossed the room, and, without lowering the mosquito curtains, lay down on her bed. The flies buzzed about her, settled incessantly on her face. She shook her head, flapped at them angrily with her hands. There would be peace if she let down the netting. But she thought of the Appian Way seen mistily through the bridal veil and preferred to suffer the flies. In the end she had to surrender; the brutes were too much for her. But, at any rate, it wasn't the fear of anophylines that made her lower the netting.

Undisturbed now and motionless, she lay stretched stiffly out under the transparent bell of gauze. A specimen under a glass case. The fancy possessed her mind. She saw a huge museum with thousands of glass cases, full of fossils and butterflies and stuffed birds and mediæval spoons and armour and Florentine jewellery and mummies and carved ivory and illuminated manuscripts. But in one of the cases was a human being, shut up there alive.

All of a sudden she became horribly miserable. "Boring, boring, boring," she whispered, formulating the words aloud. Would it never stop being boring? The tears came into her eyes. How awful everything was! And perhaps it would go on being as bad as this all her life. Seventeen from seventy was fifty three. Fifty three years of it. And if she lived to a hundred there would be more than eighty.

The thought depressed her all the evening. Even her bath after tea did her no good. Swimming far out, far out, she lay there, floating on the warm water. Sometimes she looked at the sky, sometimes she turned her head towards the shore. Framed in their pinewoods, the villas looked as small and smug as the advertisement of a seaside resort. But behind them, across the level plain, were the mountains. Sharp, bare peaks of limestone, green woodland slopes and grey-green expanses of terraced olive trees — they seemed marvellously close and clear in this evening light. And beautiful, beautiful beyond words. But that, somehow, only made things worse. And Shelley had lived a few miles farther up the coast, there, behind the headland guarding the Gulf of Spezia. Shelley had been drowned in this milk-warm sea. That made it worse too.

The sun was getting very low and red over the sea. She swam slowly in. On the beach Mrs. Topes waited, disapprovingly. She had known somebody, a strong man, who had caught cramp from staying in too long. He sank like a stone. Like a stone. The queer people Mrs. Topes had known! And the funny things they did, the odd things that happened to them.

Dinner that evening was duller than ever. Barbara went early to bed. All night long the same old irritating cicada scraped and scraped among the pine trees, monotonous and regular as clockwork. Zip zip, zip zip zip. Boring, boring. Was the animal never bored by its own noise? It seemed odd that it shouldn’t be. But, when she came to think of it, nobody ever did get bored with their own noise. Mrs. Topes, for example; she never seemed to get bored. Zip zip, zip zip zip. The cicada went on without pause.

Concetta knocked at the door at half-past seven. The morning was as bright and cloudless as all the mornings were. Barbara jumped up, looked from one window at the mountains, from the other at the sea; all seemed to be well with them. All was well with her, too, this morning. Seated at the mirror, she did not so much as think of the big monkey in the far obscure corner of the room. A bathing dress and a bath-gown, sandals, a handkerchief round her head, and she was ready. Sleep had left no recollection of last night’s mortal boredom. She ran downstairs.

“Good morning, Mr. Topes.”

Mr. Topes was walking in the garden among the vines. He turned round, took off his hat, smiled a greeting.

“Good morning, Miss Barbara.” He paused. Then, with an embarrassed wriggle of introduction he went on; a queer little falter came into his voice. “A real Chaucerian morning, Miss Barbara. A May-day morning — only it happens to be September. Nature is fresh and bright, and there is at least one specimen in this dream garden” — he wriggled more uncomfortably than ever, and there was a tremulous glitter in his round spectacle lenses of the poet’s ‘yonge fresshe folkes.’ He bowed in her direction, smiled deprecatingly, and was silent. The remark, it seemed to him, now that he had finished speaking, was somehow not as good as he had thought it would be.

Barbara laughed. “Chaucer! They used to make us read the *Canterbury Tales* at school. But they always bored me. Are you going to bathe?”

“Not before breakfast.” Mr. Topes shook his head. “One is getting a little too old for that.”

“Is one?” Why did the silly old man always say ‘one’ when he meant ‘I’? She couldn’t help laughing at him. “Well, I must hurry, or else I shall be late for breakfast again, and you know how I catch it.”

She ran out, through the gate in the garden wall, across the beach, to the striped red-and-white bathing cabin that stood before the house. Fifty yards away she saw the Marchese Prampolini, still dripping from the sea, running up towards his bathing hut. Catching sight of her, he flashed a smile in her direction, gave a military salute. Barbara waved her hand, then thought that the gesture had been too familiar — but at this hour of the morning it was difficult not to have bad jolly manners — and added the corrective of a stiff bow. After all, she had only met him yesterday. Soon she was swimming out to sea, and, ugh! what a lot of horrible huge jelly-fish there were.

Mr. Topes had followed her slowly through the gate and across the sand. He watched her running down from the cabin, slender as a boy, with long, bounding strides. He watched her go jumping with great splashes through the deepening

water, then throw herself forward and begin to swim. He watched her till she was no more than a small dark dot far out.

Emerging from his cabin, the marquis met him walking slowly along the beach, his head bent down and his lips slightly moving as though he were repeating something, a prayer or a poem, to himself.

“Good morning, signore.” The marquis shook him by the hand with a more than English cordiality.

“Good morning,” replied Mr. Topes, allowing his hand to be shaken. He resented this interruption of his thoughts.

“She swims very well, Miss Buzzacott.”

“Very,” assented Mr. Topes, and smiled to himself to think what beautiful, poetical things he might have said, if he had chosen.

“Well, so, so,” said the marquis, too colloquial by half. He shook hands again, and the two men went their respective ways.

Barbara was still a hundred yards from the shore when she heard the crescendo and dying boom of the gong floating out from the villa. Damn! she’d be late again. She quickened her stroke and came splashing out through the shallows, flushed and breathless.

She’d be ten minutes late, she calculated; it would take her at least that to do her hair and dress. Mrs. Topes would be on the war-path again; though what business that old woman had to lecture her as she did, goodness only knew. She always succeeded in making herself horribly offensive and unpleasant.

The beach was quite deserted as she trotted, panting, across it, empty to right and left as far as she could see. If only she had a horse to go galloping at the water’s edge, miles and miles. Right away down to Bocca d’Arno she’d go, swim the river — she saw herself crouching on the horse’s back, as he swam, with legs tucked up on the saddle, trying not to get her feet wet — and gallop on again, goodness only knew where.

In front of the cabin she suddenly halted. There in the ruffled sand she had seen a writing. Big letters, faintly legible, sprawled across her path.

O CLARA D’ELLÉBEUSE.

She pieced the dim letters together. They hadn’t been there when she started out to bathe. Who?... She looked round. The beach was quite empty. And what was the meaning? “O Clara d’Ellébeuse.” She took her bath-gown from the cabin, slipped on her sandals, and ran back towards the house as fast as she could. She felt most horribly frightened.

It was a sultry, headachey sort of morning, with a hot sirocco that stirred the bunting on the flagstaffs. By midday the thunderclouds had covered half the sky. The sun still blazed on the sea, but over the mountains all was black and indigo. The storm broke noisily overhead just as they were drinking their after-luncheon coffee.

“Arthur,” said Mrs. Topes, painfully calm, “shut the shutters, please.”

She was not frightened, no. But she preferred not to see the lightning. When the room was darkened, she began to talk, suavely and incessantly.

Lying back in her deep arm-chair, Barbara was thinking of Clara d’Ellébeuse. What did it mean and who was Clara d’Ellébeuse? And why had he written it there for her to see? He — for there could be no doubt who had written it. The flash of teeth and eyes, the military salute; she knew she oughtn’t to have waved to him. He had written it there while she was swimming out. Written it and then run away. She rather liked that — just an extraordinary word on the sand, like the footprint in *Robinson Crusoe.*

“Personally,” Mrs. Topes was saying, “I prefer Harrod’s.”

The thunder crashed and rattled. It was rather exhilarating, Barbara thought; one felt, at any rate, that something was happening for a change. She remembered the little room half-way up the stairs at Lady Thingumy’s house, with the bookshelves and the green curtains and the orange shade on the light; and that awful young man like a white slug who had tried to kiss her there, at the dance last year. But that was different — not at all serious; and the young man had been so horribly ugly. She saw the marquis running up the beach, quick and alert. Copper coloured all over, with black hair. He was certainly very handsome. But as for being in love, well ... what did that exactly mean? Perhaps

when she knew him better. Even now she fancied she detected something. O Clara d'Ellébeuse. What an extraordinary thing it was.

With his long fingers Mr. Buzzacott combed his beard. This winter, he was thinking, he would put another thousand into Italian money when the exchange was favourable. In the spring it always seemed to drop back again. One could clear three hundred pounds on one's capital if the exchange went down to seventy. The income on three hundred was fifteen pounds a year, and fifteen pounds was now fifteen hundred lire. And fifteen hundred lire, when you came to think of it, was really sixty pounds. That was to say that one would make an addition of more than one pound a week to one's income by this simple little speculation. He became aware that Mrs. Topes had asked him a question.

"Yes, yes, perfectly," he said.

Mrs. Topes talked on; she was keeping up her morale. Was she right in believing that the thunder sounded a little less alarmingly loud and near?

Mr. Topes sat, polishing his spectacles with a white silk handkerchief. Vague and myopic between their puckered lids, his eyes seemed lost, homeless, unhappy. He was thinking about beauty. There were certain relations between the eyelids and the temples, between the breast and the shoulder; there were certain successions of sounds. But what about them? Ah, that was the problem — that was the problem. And there was youth, there was innocence. But it was all very obscure, and there were so many phrases, so many remembered pictures and melodies; he seemed to get himself entangled among them. And he was after all so old and so ineffective. He put on his spectacles again, and definition came into the foggy world beyond his eyes. The shuttered room was very dark. He could distinguish the Renaissance profile of Mr. Buzzacott, bearded and delicately featured. In her deep arm-chair Barbara appeared, faintly white, in an attitude relaxed and brooding. And Mrs. Topes was nothing more than a voice in the darkness. She had got on to the marriage of the Prince of Wales. Who would they eventually find for him?

Clara d'Ellébeuse, Clara d'Ellébeuse. She saw herself so clearly as the *marchesa*. They would have a house in Rome, a palace. She saw herself in the

Palazzo Spada — it had such a lovely vaulted passage leading from the courtyard to the gardens at the back. “MARCHESA PRAMPOLINI, PALAZZO SPADA, ROMA” — a great big visiting-card beautifully engraved. And she would go riding every day in the Pincio. “*Mi porta il mio cavallo*” she would say to the footman, who answered the bell. *Porta*? Would that be quite correct? Hardly. She’d have to take some proper Italian lessons to talk to the servants. One must never be ridiculous before servants. “*Voglio il mio cavallo.* Haughtily one would say it sitting at one’s writing-table in a riding-habit, without turning round. It would be a green riding-habit, with a black tricorne hat, braided with silver.

“*Prendero la mia collazzione al letto.”* Was that right for breakfast in bed? Because she would have breakfast in bed, always. And when she got up there would be lovely looking glasses with three panels where one could see oneself sideface. She saw herself leaning forward, powdering her nose, carefully, scientifically. With the monkey creeping up behind? Ooh. Horrible! *Ho paura di questa scimmia, questo scimmione*.

She would come back to lunch after her ride. Perhaps Prampolini would be there; she had rather left him out of the picture so far. “*Dov’ è il Marchese?*” “*Nella sala di pranza, signora*.” I began without you, I was so hungry. *Pasta asciutta*. Where have you been, my love? Riding, my dove. She supposed they’d get into the habit of saying that sort of thing. Everyone seemed to. And you? I have been out with the Fascisti.

Oh, these Fascisti! Would life be worth living when he was always going out with pistols and bombs and things? They would bring him back one day on a stretcher. She saw it. Pale, pale, with blood on him. *Il signore è ferito. Nel petto. Gruvamente. E morto*.

How could she bear it? It was too awful; too, too terrible. Her breath came in a kind of sob; she shuddered as though she had been hurt. *E morto, E morto*. The tears came into her eyes.

She was roused suddenly by a dazzling light. The storm had receded far enough into the distance to permit of Mrs. Topes’s opening the shutters.

“It’s quite stopped raining.”

To be disturbed in one’s intimate sorrow and self-abandonment at a death-bed by a stranger’s intrusion, an alien voice.... Barbara turned her face away from the light and surreptitiously wiped her eyes. They might see and ask her why she had been crying. She hated Mrs. Topes for opening the shutters; at the inrush of the light something beautiful had flown, an emotion had vanished, irrecoverably. It was a sacrilege.

Mr. Buzzacott looked at his watch. “Too late, I fear, for a siesta now,” he said. “Suppose we ring for an early tea.”

“An endless succession of meals,” said Mr. Topes, with a tremolo and a sigh. “That’s what life seems to be — real life.”

“I have been calculating” — Mr. Buzzacott turned his pale green eyes towards his guest— “that I may be able to afford that pretty little *cinque* cassone, after all. It would be a bit of a squeeze.” He played with his beard. “But still....”

After tea, Barbara and Mr. Topes went for a walk along the beach. She didn’t much want to go, but Mrs. Topes thought it would be good for her; so she had to. The storm had passed and the sky over the sea was clear. But the waves were still breaking with an incessant clamour on the outer shallows, driving wide sheets of water high up the beach, twenty or thirty yards above the line where, on a day of calm, the ripples ordinarily expired. Smooth, shining expanses of water advanced and receded like steel surfaces moved out and back by a huge machine. Through the rain-washed air the mountains appeared with an incredible clarity. Above them hung huge masses of cloud.

“Clouds over Carrara,” said Mr. Topes, deprecating his remark with a little shake of the head and a movement of the shoulders. “I like to fancy sometimes that the spirits of the great sculptors lodge among these marble hills, and that it is their unseen hands that carve the clouds into these enormous splendid shapes. I imagine their ghosts” — his voice trembled— “feeling about among superhuman conceptions, planning huge groups and friezes and monumental figures with blowing draperies; planning, conceiving, but never quite achieving. Look, there’s something of Michelangelo in that white cloud with the dark shadows

underneath it." Mr. Topes pointed, and Barbara, nodded and said, "Yes, yes," though she wasn't quite sure which cloud he meant. "It's like Night on the Medici tomb; all the power and passion are brooding inside it, pent up. And there, in that sweeping, gesticulating piece of vapour — you see the one I mean — there's a Bernini. All the passion's on the surface, expressed; the gesture's caught at its most violent. And that sleek, smug white fellow over there, that's a delicious absurd Canova." Mr. Topes chuckled.

"Why do you always talk about art?" said Barbara. "You bring these dead people into everything. What do I know about Canova or whoever it is?" They were none of them alive. She thought of that dark face, bright as a lamp with life. He at least wasn't dead. She wondered whether the letters were still there in the sand before the cabin. No, of course not; the rain and the wind would have blotted them out.

Mr. Topes was silent; he walked with slightly bent knees and his eyes were fixed on the ground; he wore a speckled black-and-white straw hat. He always thought of art; that was what was wrong with him. Like an old tree he was; built up of dead wood, with only a few fibres of life to keep him from rotting away. They walked on for a long time in silence.

"Here's the river," said Mr. Topes at last.

A few steps more and they were on the bank of a wide stream that came down slowly through the plain to the sea. Just inland from the beach it was fringed with pine trees; beyond the trees one could see the plain, and beyond the plain were the mountains. In this calm light after the storm everything looked strange. The colours seemed deeper and more intense than at ordinary times. And though all was so clear, there was a mysterious air of remoteness about the whole scene. There was no sound except the continuous breathing of the sea. They stood for a little while, looking; then turned back.

Far away along the beach two figures were slowly approaching. White flannel trousers, a pink skirt.

"Nature," Mr. Topes enunciated, with a shake of the head. "One always comes back to nature. At a moment such as this, in surroundings like these, one

realises it. One lives now — more quietly, perhaps, but more profoundly. Deep watery. Deep waters....”

The figures drew closer. Wasn’t it the marquis? And who was with him? Barbara strained her eyes to see.

“Most of one’s life,” Mr. Topes went on, “is one prolonged effort to prevent oneself thinking. Your father and I, we collect pictures and read about the dead. Other people achieve the same results by drinking, or breeding rabbits, or doing amateur carpentry. Anything rather than think calmly about the important things.”

Mr. Topes was silent. He looked about him, at the sea, at the mountains, at the great clouds, at his companion. A frail Montagna madonna, with the sea and the westering sun, the mountains and the storm, all eternity as a background. And he was sixty, with all a life, immensely long and yet timelessly short, behind him, an empty life. He thought of death and the miracles of beauty; behind his round, glittering spectacles he felt inclined to weep.

The approaching couple were quite near now.

“What a funny old walrus,” said the lady.

“Walrus? Your natural history is quite wrong.” The marquis laughed. “He’s much too dry to be a walrus. I should suggest some sort of an old cat.”

“Well, whatever he is, I’m sorry for that poor little girl. Think of having nobody better to go about with!”

“Pretty, isn’t she?”

“Yes, but too young, of course.”

“I like the innocence.”

“Innocence? Cher ami! These English girls. Oh, la la! They may look innocent But, believe me....”

“Sh, sh. They’ll hear you.”

“Pooh, they don’t understand Italian.”

The marquis raised his hand. “The old walrus....” he whispered; then addressed himself loudly and jovially to the newcomers.

“Good evening, signorina. Good evening, Mr. Topes. After a storm the air is always the purest, don’t you find, eh?”

Barbara nodded, leaving Mr. Topes to answer. It wasn’t his sister. It was the Russian woman, the one of whom Mrs. Topes used to say that it was a disgrace she should be allowed to stay at the hotel. She had turned away, dissociating herself from the conversation; Barbara looked at the line of her averted face. Mr. Topes was saying something about the Pastoral Symphony. Purple face powder in the daylight; it looked hideous.

“Well, au revoir.”

The flash of the marquis’s smile was directed at them. The Russian woman turned back from the sea, slightly bowed, smiled languidly. Her heavy white eyelids were almost closed; she seemed the prey of an enormous ennui.

“They jar a little,” said Mr. Topes when they were out of earshot— “they jar on the time, on the place, on the emotion. They haven’t the innocence for this ... this....” — he wriggled and tremoloed out the just, the all too precious word— “this prelapsarian landscape.”

He looked sideways at Barbara and wondered what she was so thoughtfully frowning over. Oh, lovely and delicate young creature! What could he adequately say of death and beauty and tenderness? Tenderness....

“All this,” he went on desperately, and waved his hand to indicate the sky, the sea, the mountains, “this scene is like something remembered, clear and utterly calm; remembered across great gulfs of intervening time.”

But that was not really what he wanted to say.

“You see what I mean?” he asked dubiously. She made no reply. How could she see? “This scene is so clear and pure and remote; you need the corresponding emotion. Those people were out of harmony. They weren’t clear and pure enough.” He seemed to be getting more muddled than ever. “It’s an emotion of the young and of the old. You could feel it, I could feel it. Those people couldn’t.” He was feeling his way through obscurities. Where would he finally arrive? “Certain poems express it. You know Francis Jammes? I have thought so much of his work lately. Art instead of life, as usual; but then I’m

made that way. I can’t help thinking of Jammes. Those delicate, exquisite things he wrote about Clara d’Ellébeuse.”

“Clara d’Ellébeuse?” She stopped and stared at him.

“You know the lines?” Mr. Topes smiled delightedly. “This makes me think, you make me think of them. ‘*F’aime dans les temps Clara d’Ellébeuse*....’ But, my dear Barbara, what is the matter?”

She had started crying, for no reason whatever.

NUNS AT LUNCHEON

"WHAT HAVE I been doing since you saw me last?" Miss Penny repeated my question in her loud, emphatic voice. "Well, when did you see me last?"

"It must have been June," I computed.

"Was that after I'd been proposed to by the Russian General?

"Yes; I remember hearing about the Russian General."

Miss Penny threw back her head and laughed. Her long earrings swung and rattled corpses hanging in chains: an agreeably literary simile. And her laughter was like brass, but that had been said before.

"That was an uproarous incident. It's sad you should have heard of it. I love my Russian General story. '*Vos yeux me rendent fou*.'" She laughed again.

Vos yeux — she had eyes like a hare's, flush with her head and very bright with a superficial and expressionless brightness. What a formidable woman. I felt sorry for the Russian General.

"'*Sans coeur et sans entrallies*,'" she went on, quoting the poor devil's words. "Such a delightful motto, don't you think? Like '*Sans peur et sans reproche*.' But let me think; what have I been doing since then?" Thoughtfully she bit into the crust of her bread with long, sharp, white teeth.

"Two mixed grills," I said parenthetically to the waiter.

"But of course," exclaimed Miss Penny suddenly. "I haven't seen you since my German trip. All sorts of adventures. My appendicitis; my nun."

"Your nun?"

"My marvellous nun. I must tell you all about her."

"Do." Miss Penny's anecdotes were always curious. I looked forward to an entertaining luncheon.

"You knew I'd been in Germany this autumn?"

"Well, I didn't, as a matter of fact. But still—"

“I was just wandering round.” Miss Penny described a circle in the air with her gaudily jewelled hand. She always twinkled with massive and improbable jewellery.

“Wandering round, living on three pounds a week, partly amusing myself, partly collecting material for a few little articles. ‘What it Feels Like to be a Conquered Nation’ — sob-stuff for the Liberal press, you know — and ‘How the Hun is Trying to Wriggle out of the Indemnity,’ for the other fellows. One has to make the best of all possible worlds, don’t you find? But we mustn’t talk shop. Well, I was wandering round, and very pleasant I found it. Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig. Then down to Munich and all over the place. One fine day I got to Grauburg. You know Grauburg? It’s one of those picture-book German towns with a castle on a hill, hanging beer-gardens, a Gothic church, an old university, a river, a pretty bridge, and forests all round. Charming. But I hadn’t much opportunity to appreciate the beauties of the place. The day after I arrived there — bang! — I went down with appendicitis — screaming, I may add.”

“But how appalling!”

“They whisked me off to hospital, and cut me open before you could say knife. Excellent surgeon, highly efficient Sisters of Charity to nurse me — I couldn’t have been in better hands. But it was a bore being tied there by the leg for four weeks — a great bore. Still, the thing had its compensations. There was my nun, for example. Ah, here’s the food, thank Heaven!”

The mixed grill proved to be excellent. Miss Penny’s description of the pun came to me in scraps and snatches. A round, pink, pretty face in a winged coif; blue eyes and regular features; teeth altogether too perfect — false, in fact; but the general effect extremely pleasing. A youthful Teutonic twenty eight.

“She wasn’t my nurse,” Miss Penny explained. “But I used to see her quite often when she came in to have a look at the *tolle Engländerin*. Her name was Sister Agatha. During the war, they told me, she had converted any number of wounded soldiers to the true faith — which wasn’t surprising, considering how pretty she was.”

“Did she try and convert you?” I asked.

“She wasn’t such a fool.” Miss Penny laughed, and rattled the miniature gallows of her ears.

I amused myself for a moment with the thought of Miss Penny’s conversion — Miss Penny confronting a vast assembly of Fathers of the Church, rattling her earrings at their discourses on the Trinity, laughing her appalling laugh at the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, meeting the stern look of the Grand Inquisitor with a flash of her bright, emotionless hare’s eyes. What was the secret of the woman’s formidableness?

But I was missing the story. What had happened? Ah yes, the gist of it was that Sister Agatha had appeared one morning, after two or three days absence, dressed, not as a nun, but in the overalls of a hospital charwoman, with a handkerchief instead of a winged coif on her shaven head.

“Dead,” said Miss Penny; “she looked as though she were dead. A walking corpse, that’s what she was. It was a shocking sight. I shouldn’t have thought it possible for anyone to change so much in so short a time. She walked painfully, as though she had been ill for months, and she had great burnt rings round her eyes and deep lines in her face. And the general expression of unhappiness — that was something quite appalling.”

She leaned out into the gangway between the two rows of tables, and caught the passing waiter by the end of one his coat-tails. The little Italian looked round with an expression of surprise that deepened into terror on his face.

“Half a pint of Guinness,” ordered Miss Penny. “And, after this, bring me some jam roll.”

“No jam roll to-day, madam.”

“Damn!” said Miss Penny. “Bring me what you like, then.”

She let go of the waiter’s tail and resumed her narrative.

“Where was I? Yes, I remember. She came into my room, I was telling you, with a bucket of water and a brush, dressed like a charwoman. Naturally I was rather surprised. ‘What on earth are you doing, Sister Agatha?’ I asked. No answer. She just shook her head, and began to scrub the floor. When she’d finished, she left the room without so much as looking at me again. ‘What’s

happened to Sister Agatha?' I asked my nurse when she next came in. 'Can't say.'— 'Won't say,' I said. No answer. It took nearly a week to find out what really had happened. Nobody dared tell me; it was *strengst verboten*, as they used to say in the good old days. But I wormed it out in the long run. My nurse, the doctor, the charwomen — I got something out of all of them. I always get what I want in the end." Miss Penny laughed like a horse.

"I'm sure you do," I said politely.

"Much obliged," acknowledged Miss Penny. "But to proceed. My information came to me in fragmentary whispers. 'Sister Agatha ran away with a man.' — Dear me.— 'One of the patients.' — You don't say so.— 'A criminal out of the jail.' — The plot thickens.— 'He ran away from her.' — It seems to grow thinner again.— 'They brought her back here; she's been disgraced. There's been a funeral service for her in the chapel — coffin and all. She had to be present at it — her own funeral. She isn't a nun any more. She has to do charwoman's work now, the roughest in the hospital. She's not allowed to speak to anybody, and nobody's allowed to speak to her. She's regarded as dead.'" Miss Penny paused to signal to the harassed little Italian. "My small 'Guinness,'" she called out.

"Coming, coming," and the foreign voice cried "Guinness" down the lift, and from below another voice echoed, "Guinness."

"I filled in the details bit by bit. There was our hero, to begin with; I had to bring him into the picture, which was rather difficult, as I had never seen him. But I got a photograph of him. The police circulated one when he got away; I don't suppose they ever caught him." Miss Penny opened her bag. "Here it is," she said. "I always carry it about with me; it's become a superstition. For years, I remember, I used to carry a little bit of heather tied up with string. Beautiful, isn't it? There's a sort of Renaissance look about it, don't you think? He was half-Italian, you know."

Italian. Ah, that explained it. I had been wondering how Bavaria could have produced this thin-faced creature with the big dark eyes, the finely modelled nose and chin, and the fleshy lips so royally and sensually curved.

“He’s certainly very superb,” I said, handing back the picture.

Miss Penny put it carefully away in her bag. “Isn’t he?” she said. “Quite marvellous. But his character and his mind were even better. I see him as one of those innocent, childlike monsters of iniquity who are simply unaware of the existence of right and wrong. And he had genius — the real Italian genius for engineering, for dominating and exploiting nature. A true son of the Roman aqueduct builders he was, and a brother of the electrical engineers. Only Kuno — that was his name — didn’t work in water; he worked in women. He knew how to harness the natural energy of passion; he made devotion drive his mills. The commercial exploitation of love-power, that was his specialty. I sometimes wonder,” Miss Penny added in a different tone, “whether I shall ever be exploited, when I get a little more middle-aged and celibate, by one of these young engineers of the passions. It would be humiliating, particularly as I’ve done so little exploiting from my side.”

She frowned and was silent for a moment. No, decidedly, Miss Penny was not beautiful; you could not even honestly say that she had charm or was attractive. That high Scotch colouring, those hare’s eyes, the voice, the terrifying laugh, and the size of her, the general formidableness of the woman. No, no, no.

“You said he had been in prison,” I said. The silence, with all its implications, was becoming embarrassing.

Miss Penny sighed, looked up, and nodded. “He was fool enough,” she said, “to leave the straight and certain road of female exploitation for the dangerous courses of burglary. We all have our occasional accesses of folly. They gave him a heavy sentence, but he succeeded in getting pneumonia, I think it was, a week after entering jail. He was transferred to the hospital. Sister Agatha, with her known talent for saving souls, was given him as his particular attendant. But it was he, I’m afraid, who did the converting.”

Miss Penny finished off the last mouthful of the ginger pudding which the waiter had brought in lieu of jam roll.

“I suppose you don’t smoke cheroots,” I said, as I opened my cigar-case.

“Well, as a matter of fact, I do,” Miss Penny replied. She looked sharply round the restaurant. “I must just see if there are any of those horrible little gossip paragraphers here to-day. One doesn’t want to figure in the social and personal column to-morrow morning: ‘A fact which is not so generally known as it ought to be is, that Miss Penny, the well-known woman journalist, always ends her luncheon with a six-inch Burma cheroot. I saw her yesterday in a restaurant — not a hundred miles from Carmelite Street — smoking like a house on fire.’ You know the touch. But the coast seems to be clear, thank goodness.”

She took a cheroot from the case, lit it at my proffered match, and went on talking.

“Yes, it was young Kuno who did the converting. Sister Agatha was converted back into the worldly Melpomene Fugger she had been before she became the bride of holiness.”

“Melpomene Fugger?”

“That was her name. I had her history from my old doctor. He had seen all Grauburg, living and dying and propagating for generations. Melpomene Fugger why, he had brought little Melpel into the world, little Melpchen. Her father was Professor Fugger, the great Professor Fugger, the *berümter Geolog*. Oh, yes, of course, I know the name. So well.... He was the man who wrote the standard work on Lemuria — you know, the hypothetical continent where the lemurs come from. I showed due respect. Liberal-minded he was, a disciple of Herder, a world-burgher, as they beautifully call it over there. Anglophile, too, and always ate porridge for breakfast — up till August 1914. Then, the radiant morning of the fifth, he renounced it for ever, solemnly and with tears in his eyes. The national food of a people who had betrayed culture and civilisation — how could he go on eating it? It would stick in his throat. In future he would have a lightly boiled egg. He sounded, I thought, altogether charming. And his daughter, Melpomene — she sounded charming, too; and such thick, yellow pig-tails when she was young! Her mother was dead, and a sister of the great Professor’s ruled the house with an iron rod. Aunt Bertha was her name. Well, Melpomene grew up, very plump and appetising. When she was seventeen, something very odious

and disagreeable happened to her. Even the doctor didn't know exactly what it was; but he wouldn't have been surprised if it had had something to do with the then Professor of Latin, an old friend of the family's, who combined, it seems, great erudition with a horrid fondness for very young ladies."

Miss Penny knocked half an inch of cigar ash into her empty glass.

"If I wrote short stories," she went on reflectively "(but it's too much bother), I should make this anecdote into a sort of potted life history, beginning with a scene immediately after this disagreeable event in Melpomene's life. I see the scene so clearly. Poor little Melpel is leaning over the bastions of Grauburg Castle, weeping into the June night and the mulberry trees in the garden thirty feet below. She is besieged by the memory of what happened this dreadful afternoon. Professor Engelmann, her father's old friend, with the magnificent red Assyrian beard.... Too awful — too awful! But then, as I was saying, short stones are really too much bother; or perhaps I'm too stupid to write them. I bequeath it to you. You know how to tick these things off."

"You're generous."

"Not at all," said Miss Penny. "My terms are ten per cent commission on the American sale. Incidentally there won't be an American sale. Poor Melpchen's history is not for the chaste public of Those States. But let me hear what you propose to do with Melpomene now you've got her on the castle bastions."

"That's simple," I said. "I know all about German university towns and castles on hills. I shall make her look into the June night, as you suggest; into the violet night with its points of golden flame. There will be the black silhouette of the castle, with its sharp roofs and hooded turrets, behind her. From the hanging beer-gardens in the town below the voices of the students, singing in perfect four-part harmony, will float up through the dark-blue spaces. '*Röslein, Röslein, Röslein rot*' and '*Das Ringlein sprang in zwei*' — the heart-rendingly sweet old songs will make her cry all the more. Her tears will patter like rain among the leaves of the mulberry trees in the garden below. Does that seem to you adequate?"

“Very nice,” said Miss Penny. “But how are you going to bring the sex problem and all of its horrors into the landscape?”

“Well, let me think.” I called to memory those distant foreign summers when I was completing my education. “I know. I shall suddenly bring a swarm of moving candles and Chinese lanterns under the mulberry trees. You imagine the rich lights and shadows, the jewel-bright leafage, the faces and moving limbs of men and women, seen for an instant and gone again. They are students and girls of the town come out to dance, this windless, blue June night, under the mulberry trees. And now they begin, thumping round and round in a ring, to the music of their own singing.

“*Wir können spielen*
Vio-vio-vio-lin
Wir können spielen
Vi-o-lin

“Now the rhythm changes, quickens.

“*Und wir können tanzen Bumstarara,*
Bumstarara, Bumstarara,
Und wir können tanzen Bumstarara,
Bumstarara-rara.

“The dance becomes a rush, an elephantine prancing on the dry lawn under the mulberry trees. And from the bastion Melpomene looks down and perceives, suddenly and apocalyptically, that everything in the world is sex, sex, sex. Men and women, male and female — always the same, and all, in the light of the horror of the afternoon, disgusting. That’s how I should do it, Miss Penny.”

“And very nice, too. But I wish you could find a place to bring in my conversation with the doctor. I shall never forget the way he cleared his throat, and coughed before embarking on the delicate subject. ‘You may know, ahem, gracious Miss,’ he began— ‘you may know that religious phenomena are often,

ahem, closely connected with sexual causes.' I replied that I had heard rumours which might justify me in believing this to be true among Roman Catholics, but that in the Church of England — and I for one was a practitioner of Anglicanismus — it was very different. 'That might be,' said the doctor; he had had no opportunity in the course of his long medical career of personally studying Anglicanismus. But he could vouch for the fact that among his patients, here in Grauburg, mysticismus was very often mixed up with the *Geschlechtsleben*. Melpomene was a case in point. After that hateful afternoon she had become extremely religious; the Professor of Latin had diverted her emotions out of their normal channels. She rebelled against the placid Agnosticismus of her father, and at night, in secret, when Aunt Bertha's dragon eyes were closed, she would read such forbidden books as *The Life of St. Theresa, The Little Flowers of St. Francis, The Imitation of Christ*, and the horribly enthralling *Book of Martyrs*. Aunt Bertha confiscated, these works whenever she came upon them; she considered them more pernicious than the novels of Marcel Prévost. The character of a good potential housewife might be completely undermined by reading of this kind. It was rather a relief for Melpomene when Aunt Bertha shuffled off, in the summer of 1911, this mortal coil. She was one of those indispensables of whom one makes the discovery, when they are gone, that one can get on quite as well without them. Poor Aunt Bertha!"

"One can imagine Melpomene trying to believe she was sorry, and horribly ashamed to find that she was really, in secret, almost glad." The suggestion seemed to me ingenious, but Miss Penny accepted it as obvious.

"Precisely," she said; "and the emotion would only further confirm and give new force to the tendencies which her aunt's death left her free to indulge as much as she liked. Remorse, contrition — they would lead to the idea of doing penance. And for one who was now wallowing in the martyrology, penance was the mortification of the flesh. She used to kneel for hours, at night, in the cold; she ate too little, and when her teeth ached, which they often did, — for she had a set, the doctor told me, which had given trouble from the very first, — she

would not go and see the dentist, but lay awake at night, savouring to the full her excruciations, and feeling triumphantly that they must, in some strange way, be pleasing to the Mysterious Powers. She went on like that for two or three years, till she was poisoned through and through. In the end she went down with gastric ulcer. It was three months before she came out of hospital, well for the first time in a long space of years, and with a brand new set of imperishable teeth, all gold and ivory. And in mind, too, she was changed — for the better, I suppose. The nuns who nursed her had made her see that in mortifying herself she had acted supererogatively and through spiritual pride; instead of doing right, she had sinned. The only road to salvation, they told her, lay in discipline, in the orderliness of established religion, in obedience to authority. Secretly, so as not to distress her poor father, whose Agnosticismus was extremely dogmatic, for all its unobtrusiveness, Melpomene became a Roman Catholic. She was twenty-two. Only a few months later came the war and Professor Fugger's eternal renunciation of porridge. He did not long survive the making of that patriotic gesture. In the autumn of 1914 he caught a fatal influenza. Melpomene was alone in the world. In the spring of 1915 there was a new and very conscientious Sister of Charity at work among the wounded, in the hospital of Grauburg. Here," explained Miss Penny, jabbing the air with her forefinger, "you put a line of asterisks or dots to signify a six years' gulf in the narrative. And you begin again right in the middle of a dialogue between Sister Agatha and the newly convalescent Kuno."

"What's their dialogue to be about?" I asked.

"Oh, that's easy enough," said Miss Penny. "Almost anything would do. What about this, for example? You explain that the fever has just abated; for the first time for days the young man is fully conscious. He feels himself to be well, reborn, as it were, in a new world — a world so bright and novel and jolly that he can't help laughing at the sight of it. He looks about him; the flies on the ceiling strike him as being extremely comic. How do they manage to walk upside down? They have suckers on their feet, says Sister Agatha, and wonders if her natural history is quite sound. Suckers on their feet — ha, ha! What an

uproarious notion! Suckers on their feet — that's good, that's damned good! You can say charming, pathetic, positively tender things about the irrelevant mirth of convalescents the more so in this particular case, where the mirth is expressed by a young man who is to be taken back to jail as soon as he can stand firmly on his legs. Ha, ha! Laugh on, unhappy boy. It is the quacking of the Fates, the Parcæ, the Norns!"

Miss Penny gave an exaggerated imitation of her own brassy laughter. At the sound of it the few lunchers who still lingered at the other tables looked up, startled.

"You can write pages about Destiny and its ironic quacking. It's tremendously impressive, and there's money in every line."

"You may be sure I shall."

"Good! Then I can get on with my story. The days pass and the first hilarity of convalescence fades away. The young man remembers and grows sullen; his strength comes back to him, and with it a sense of despair. His mind broods incessantly on the hateful future. As for the consolations of religion, he won't listen to them. Sister Agatha perseveres — oh, with what anxious solicitude! — in the attempt to make him understand and believe and be comforted. It is all so tremendously important, and in this case, somehow, more important than in any other. And now you see the *Geschlechtsleben* working yeastily and obscurely, and once again the quacking of the Norns is audible. By the way," said Miss Penny, changing her tone and leaning confidentially across the table, "I wish you'd tell me something. Tell me, do you really — honestly, I mean — do you seriously believe in literature?"

"Believe in literature?"

"I was thinking?" Miss Penny explained, "of Ironic Fate and the quacking of the Norns and all that."

"'M yes."

"And then there's this psychology and introspection business; and construction and good narrative and word pictures and *le mot juste* and verbal magic and striking metaphors."

I remembered that I had compared Miss Penny's tinkling earrings to skeletons hanging in chains.

"And then, finally, and to begin with — Alpha and Omega — there's ourselves, two professionals gloating, with an absolute lack of sympathy, over a seduced nun, and speculating on the best method of turning her misfortunes into cash. It's all very curious, isn't it? — when one begins to think about it dispassionately."

"Very curious," I agreed. "But, then, so is everything else if you look at it like that."

"No, no," said Miss Penny. "Nothing's so curious as our business. But I shall never get to the end of my story if I get started on first principles."

Miss Penny continued her narrative. I was still thinking of literature. Do you believe in it? Seriously? Ah! Luckily the question was quite meaningless. The story came to me rather vaguely, but it seemed that the young man was getting better; in a few more days, the doctor had said, he would be well — well enough to go back to jail. No, no. The question was meaningless. I would think about it no more. I concentrated my attention again.

"Sister Agatha," I heard Miss Penny saying, "prayed, exhorted, indoctrinated. Whenever she had half a minute to spare from her other duties she would come running into the young man's room. 'I wonder if you fully realise the importance of prayer?' she would ask, and, before he had time to answer, she would give him a breathless account of the uses and virtues of regular and patient supplication. Or else, it was: 'May I tell you about St. Theresa?' or 'St. Stephen, the first martyr — you know about him, don't you?' Kuno simply wouldn't listen at first. It seemed so fantastically irrelevant, such an absurd interruption to his thoughts, his serious, despairing thoughts about the future. Prison was real, imminent and this woman buzzed about him with her ridiculous fairy-tales. Then, suddenly, one day he began to listen, he showed signs of contrition and conversion. Sister Agatha announced her triumph to the other nuns, and there was rejoicing over the one lost sheep. Melpomene had never felt so happy in her life, and Kuno, looking at her radiant face, must have wondered how he could

have been such a fool as not to see from the first what was now so obvious. The woman had lost her head about him. And he had only four days now — four days in which to tap the tumultuous love power, to canalise it, to set it working for his escape. Why hadn't he started a week ago? He could have made certain of it then. But now? There was no knowing. Four days was a horribly short time."

"How did he do it?" I asked, for Miss Penny had paused.

"That's for you to say," she replied, and shook her earrings at me. "I don't know. Nobody knows, I imagine, except the two parties concerned and perhaps Sister Agatha's confessor. But one can reconstruct the crime, as they say. How would you have done it? You're a man, you ought to be familiar with the processes of amorous engineering."

"You flatter me," I answered. "Do you seriously suppose—" I extended my arms. Miss Penny laughed like a horse. "No. But, seriously, it's a problem. The case is a very special one. The person, a nun, the place, a hospital, the opportunities, few. There could be no favourable circumstances — no moonlight, no distant music; and any form of direct attack would be sure to fail. That audacious confidence which is your amorist's best weapon would be useless here."

"Obviously," said Miss Penny. "But there are surely other methods. There is the approach through pity and the maternal instincts. And there's the approach through Higher Things, through the soul. Kuno must have worked on those lines, don't you think? One can imagine him letting himself be converted, praying with her, and at the same time appealing for her sympathy and even threatening — with a great air of seriousness — to kill himself rather than go back to jail. You can write that up easily and convincingly enough. But it's the sort of thing that bores me so frightfully to do. That's why I can never bring myself to write fiction. What is the point of it all? And the way you literary men think yourselves so important — particularly if you write tragedies. It's all very queer, very queer indeed."

I made no comment. Miss Penny changed her tone and went on with the narrative.

“Well,” she said, “whatever the means employed, the engineering process was perfectly successful. Love was made to find out a way. On the afternoon before Kuno was to go back to prison, two Sisters of Charity walked out of the hospital gates, crossed the square in front of it, glided down the narrow streets towards the river, boarded a tram at the bridge, and did not descend till the car had reached its terminus in the farther suburbs. They began to walk briskly along the high road out into the country. ‘Look!’ said one of them, when they were clear of the houses; and with the gesture of a conjurer produced from nowhere a red leather purse. ‘Where did it come from?’ asked the other, opening her eyes. Memories of Elisha and the ravens, of the widow’s cruse, of the loaves and fishes, must have floated through the radiant fog in poor Melpomene’s mind. ‘The old lady I was sitting next to in the tram left her bag open. Nothing could have been simpler.’ ‘Kuno! You don’t mean to say you stole it?’ Kuno swore horribly. He had opened the purse. ‘Only sixty marks. Who’d have thought that an old camel, all dressed up in silk and furs, would only have sixty marks in her purse. And I must have a thousand at least to get away. It’s easy to reconstruct the rest of the conversation down to the inevitable, ‘For God’s sake, shut up,’ with which Kuno put an end to Melpomene’s dismayed moralising. They trudge on in silence. Kuno thinks desperately. Only sixty marks; he can do nothing with that. If only he had something to sell, a piece of jewellery, some gold or silver anything, anything. He knows such a good place for selling things. Is he to be caught again for lack of a few marks? Melpomene is also thinking. Evil must often be done that good may follow. After all, had not she herself stolen Sister Mary of the Purification’s clothes when she was asleep after night duty? Had not she run away from the convent, broken her vows? And yet how convinced she was that she was doing rightly! The mysterious Powers emphatically approved; she felt sure of it. And now there was the red purse. But what was a red purse in comparison with a saved soul — and, after all, what was she doing hut saving Kuno’s soul?” Miss Penny, who had adapted the voice and gestures of a debater

asking rhetorical questions, brought her hand with a slap on to the table. “Lord, what a bore this sort of stuff is!” she exclaimed. “Let’s get to the end of this dingy anecdote as quickly as possible. By this time, you must imagine, the shades of night were falling fast — the chill November twilight, and so on; but I leave the natural descriptions to you. Kuno gets into the ditch at the roadside and takes off his robes. One imagines that he would feel himself safer in trousers, more capable of acting with decision in a crisis. They tramp on for miles. Late in the evening they leave the high road and strike up through the fields towards the forest. At the fringe of the wood they find one of those wheeled huts where the shepherds sleep in the lambing season.

“The real ‘Maison du Berger.’”

“Precisely,” said Miss Penny, and she began to recite:

“*Si ton coeur gémissant du poids de notre vie*
Se traine et se débat comme un aigle blessé....

“How does it go on? I used to adore it all so much when I was a girl.

“Le seuil est perfumé, l’alcôve est large et sombre,
Et là parmi les fleurs, nous trouverons dans l’ombre,
Pour nos cheveux unis un lit silencieux.

“I could go on like this indefinitely.”

“Do,” I said.

“No, no. No, no. I’m determined to finish this wretched story. Kuno broke the padlock of the door. They entered. What happened in that little hut?” Miss Penny leaned forward at me. Her large hare’s eyes glittered, the long earrings swung and faintly tinkled. “Imagine the emotions of a virgin of thirty, and a nun at that, in the terrifying presence of desire. Imagine the easy, familiar brutalities of the young man. Oh, there’s pages to be made out of this — the absolutely impenetrable darkness, the smell of straw, the voices, the strangled crying, the movements! And one likes to fancy that the emotions pulsing about in that

confined space made palpable vibrations like a deep sound that shakes the air. Why, it's ready-made literature, this scene. In the morning," Miss Penny went on, after a pause, "two woodcutters on their way to work noticed that the door of the hut was ajar. They approached the hut cautiously, their axes raised and ready for a blow if there should be need of it. Peeping in, they saw a woman in a black dress lying face downward in the straw. Dead? No; she moved, she moaned. 'What's the matter?' A blubbered face, smeared with streaks of tear-clotted grey dust, is lifted towards them. 'What's the matter?'— 'He's gone!' What a queer, indistinct utterance. The woodcutters regard one another. What does she say? She's a foreigner, perhaps. 'What's the matter?' they repeat once more. The woman bursts out violently crying. 'Gone, gone! He's gone,' she sobs out in her vague, inarticulate way. 'Oh, gone. That's what she says. Who's gone?'— 'He's left me.'— 'What?'— 'Left me....'— 'What the devil...? Speak a little more distinctly.'— 'I can't,' she wails; 'he's taken my teeth.'— 'Your what?— 'My teeth!' — and the shrill voice breaks into a scream, and she falls back sobbing into the straw. The woodcutters look significantly at one another. They nod. One of them applies a thick yellow-nailed forefinger to his forehead."

Miss Penny looked at her watch. "Good heavens!" she said, "it's nearly half-past three. I must fly. Don't forget about the funeral service," she added, as she put on her coat. "The tapers, the black coffin, in the middle of the aisle, the nuns in their white-winged coifs, the gloomy chanting, and the poor cowering creature without any teeth, her face all caved in like an old woman's, wondering whether she wasn't really and in fact dead — wondering whether she wasn't already in hell. Good-bye."

Little Mexican

OR, YOUNG ARCHIMEDES

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Uncle Spencer

SOME PEOPLE I know can look back over the long series of their childish holidays and see in their memory always a different landscape — chalk downs or Swiss mountains; a blue and sunny sea or the grey, ever-troubled fringe of the ocean; heathery moors under the cloud with far away a patch of sunlight on the hills, golden as happiness and, like happiness, remote, precarious, impermanent, or the untroubled waters of Como, the cypresses and the Easter roses.

I envy them the variety of their impressions. For it is good to have seen something of the world with childish eyes, disinterestedly and uncritically, observing not what is useful or beautiful and interesting, but only such things as, to a being less than four feet high and having no knowledge of life or art, seem immediately significant. It is the beggars, it is the green umbrellas under which the cabmen sit when it rains, not Brunelleschi's dome, not the extortions of the hotel-keeper, not the tombs of the Medici that impress the childish traveller.

Such impressions, it is true, are of no particular value to us when we are grown up. (The famous wisdom of babes, with those childish intimations of immortality and all the rest, never really amounted to very much; and the man who studies the souls of children in the hope of finding out something about the souls of men is about as likely to discover something important as the man who thinks he can explain Beethoven by referring him to the savage origins of music or religion by referring it to the sexual instincts.) None the less, it is good to have had such childish impressions, if only for the sake of comparing (so that we may draw the philosophic moral) what we saw of a place when we were six or seven with what we see again at thirty.

My holidays had no variety. From the time when I first went to my preparatory school to the time when my parents came back for good from India — I was sixteen or seventeen then, I suppose — they were all passed with my

Uncle Spencer. For years the only places on the earth's surface of which I had any knowledge were Eastbourne, where I was at school; Dover (and that reduced itself to the harbour and station), where I embarked; Ostend, where Uncle Spencer met me; Brussels, where we changed trains; and finally Londres in Limburg, where my Uncle Spencer owned the sugar factory, which his mother, my grandmother, had inherited in her turn from her Belgian father, and had his home.

Hanging over the rail of the steamer as it moved slowly, stern foremost, through the narrow gullet of Ostend harbour, I used to strain my eyes, trying to pick out from among the crowd at the quay's edge the small, familiar figure. And always there he was, waving his coloured silk handkerchief, shouting inaudible greetings and advice, getting in the way of the porters and ticket-collectors, fidgeting with a hardly controllable impatience behind the barrier, until at last, squeezed and almost suffocated amongst the grown men and women — whom the process of disembarkation transformed as though by some malevolent Circean magic into brute beasts, reasonless and snarling — I struggled to shore, clutching in one hand my little bag and with the other holding to my head, if it was summer, a speckled straw, gaudy with the school colours; if winter, a preposterous bowler, whose eclipsing melon crammed over my ears made me look like a child in a comic paper pretending to be grown up.

"Well, here you are, here you are," my Uncle Spencer would say, snatching my Dag from me. "Eleven minutes late." And we would dash for the custom-house as though our lives depended on getting there before the other trans-beasted passengers.

My Uncle Spencer was a man of about forty when first I came from my preparatory school to stay with him. Thin he was, rather short, very quick, agile, and impulsive in his movements, with small feet and small, delicate hands. His face was narrow, clear-cut, steep, and aquiline; his eyes dark and extraordinarily bright, deeply set under overhanging brows; his hair was black, and he wore it rather long, brushed back from his forehead. At the sides of his head it had already begun to go grey, and above his ears, as it were, two grey wings were

folded against his head, so that, to look at him, one was reminded of Mercury in his winged cap.

“Hurry up!” he called. And I scampered after him. “Hurry up!”

But of course there was no use whatever in our hurrying; for even when we had had my little hand-bag examined, there was always the registered trunk to for; and that, for my Uncle Spencer, was agony. For though our places in the Brussels express were reserved, though he knew that the train would not in any circumstances start without us, this intellectual certainty was not enough to appease his passionate impatience, to allay his instinctive fears.

“Terribly slow,” he kept repeating. “Terribly slow.” And for the hundredth time he looked at his watch. “Dites-moi,” he would say, yet once more, to the sentry at the door of the customs-house, “le grand bagage...?” until in the end the fellow, exasperated by these questions Which it was not his business to answer, would say something rude; upon which my Uncle Spencer, outraged, would call him *mal élevé* and a *grossier personnage* — to the fury Of the sentry but correspondingly great relief of his own feelings; for after such an outburst he could wait in patience for a good five minutes, so far forgetting his anxiety about the trunk that he actually began talking to me about other subjects, asking how I had got on this term at school, what was my batting average, whether I liked Latin, and whether Old Thunderguts, which was the name we gave to the headmaster on account of his noble baritone, was still as ill-tempered as ever.

But at the end of the five minutes, unless the trunk had previously appeared, my Uncle Spencer began looking at his watch again.

“Scandalously slow,” he said. And addressing himself to another official, “Dites-moi, monsieur, le grand bagage...?”

But when at last we were safely in the train and there was nothing to prevent him from deploying all the graces and amiabilities of his character, my Uncle Spencer, all charm and kindness now, devoted himself wholeheartedly to me.

“Look!” he said; and from the pocket of his overcoat he pulled out a large and dampish parcel of whose existence my nose had long before made me aware. “Guess what’s in here.”

“Prawns,” I said, without an instant’s hesitation.

And prawns it was, a whole kilo of them. And there we sat in opposite corners of our first-class carriage, with the little folding table opened out between us and the pink prawns on the table, eating with infinite relish and throwing the rosy carapaces, the tails, and the sucked heads out of the window. And the Flemish plain moved past us; the long double files of poplars, planted along the banks of the canals, along the fringes of the high roads, moving as we moved, marched parallel with our course or presented, as we crossed them at right angles, for one significant flashing moment the entrance to Hobbema’s avenue. And now the belfries of Bruges beckoned from far off across the plain; a dozen more shrimps and we were roaring through its station, all gloom and ogives in honour of Memling and the Gothic past. By the time we had eaten another hectogram of prawns, the modern quarter of Ghent was reminding us that art was only five years old and had been invented in Vienna. At Alost the factory chimneys smoked; and before we knew where we were, we were almost on the outskirts of Brussels, with two or three hundred grammes of sea-fruit still intact on the table before us.

“Hurry up!” cried my Uncle Spencer, threatened by another access of anxiety. “We must finish them before we get to Brussels.”

And during the last five miles we ate furiously, shell and all; there was hardly time even to spit out the heads and tails.

“Nothing like prawns,” my Uncle Spencer never failed to say, as the express drew slowly into the station at Brussels, and the last tails and whiskers with the fishy paper were thrown out of the window. “Nothing like prawns when the brain is tired. It’s the phosphorus, you know. After all your end-of-term examinations you need them.” And then he patted me affectionately on the shoulder.

How often since then have I repeated in all earnestness my Uncle Spencer’s words. “It’s the phosphorus,” I assure my fagged friends, as I insist that they shall make their lunch off shellfish. The words come gushing spontaneously out of me; the opinion that prawns and oysters are good for brain-fag is very nearly

one of my fundamental and, so to say, instinctive beliefs. But sometimes, as I say the words, suddenly I think of my Uncle Spencer. I see him once more sitting opposite me in a corner of the Brussels express, his eyes flashing, his thin face expressively moving as he talks, while his quick, nervous fingers pick impatiently at the pink carapaces or with a disdainful gesture drop a whiskered head into the Flemish landscape outside the open window. And remembering my Uncle Spencer, I find myself somehow believing less firmly than I did in what I have been saying. And I wonder with a certain sense of disquietude how many other relics of my Uncle Spencer's spirit I still carry, all unconsciously, about with me.

How many of our beliefs — more serious even than the belief that prawns revive the tired brain — come to us haphazardly from sources far less trustworthy than my Uncle Spencer! The most intelligent men will be found holding opinions about certain things, inculcated in them during their childhood by nurses or stable-boys. And up to the very end of our adolescence, and even after, there are for all of us certain admired beings, whose words sink irresistibly into our minds, generating there beliefs which reason does not presume to question, and which though they may be quite out of harmony with all our other opinions persist along with them without our ever becoming aware of the contradictions between the two sets of ideas. Thus an emancipated young man, whose father happens to have been a distinguished Indian civilian, is an ardent apostle of liberty and self-determination; but insists that the Indians are and for ever will be completely incapable of governing themselves. And an art critic, extremely sound on Vlaminck and Marie Laurencin, will praise as masterly and in the grand manner — and praise sincerely, for he genuinely finds them so — the works of an artist whose dim pretentious paintings of the Tuscan landscape used to delight, because they reminded her of her youth, an old lady, now dead, but whom as a very young man he greatly loved and admired.

My Uncle Spencer was for me, in my boyhood, one of these admired beings, whose opinions possess a more than earthly value for the admiring listener. For years my most passionately cherished beliefs were his. Those opinions which I

formed myself, I held more diffidently, with less ardour; for they, after all, were only the fruits of my own judgment and observation, superficial rational growths; whereas the opinions I had taken from my Uncle Spencer — such as this belief in the curative properties of prawns — had nothing to do with my reason, but had been suggested directly into the subrational depths, where they seemed to attach themselves, like barnacles, to the very keel and bottom of my mind. Most of them, I hope, I have since contrived to scrape off; and a long, laborious, painful process it has been. But there are still, I dare say, a goodly number of them left, so deeply ingrained and grown in, that it is impossible for me to be aware of them. And I shall go down to my grave making certain judgments, holding certain opinions, regarding certain things and actions in a certain way — and the way, the opinions, the judgments will not be mine, but my Uncle Spencer's; and the obscure chambers of my mind will to the end be haunted by his bright, erratic, restless ghost.

There are some people whose habits of thought a boy or a young man might, with the greatest possible advantage to himself, make his own. But my Uncle Spencer was not one of them. His active mind darted hither and thither too wildly and erratically for it to be a safe guide for an inexperienced understanding. It was all too promptly logical to draw conclusions from false premises, too easily and enthusiastically accepted as true. Living as he did in solitude — in a mental solitude; for though he was no recluse and took his share in all social pleasures, the society of Longres could not offer much in the way of high intellectual companionship — he was able to give free play to the native eccentricity of his mind. Having nobody to check or direct him, he would rush headlong down intellectual roads that led nowhere or into morasses of nonsense. When, much later, I used to amuse myself by listening on Sunday afternoons to the speakers at Marble Arch, I used often to be reminded of my Uncle Spencer. For they, like Uncle Spencer, lived in solitude, apart from the main contemporary world of ideas, unaware, or so dimly aware that it hardly counted, of the very existence of organised and systematic science, not knowing even where to look for the accumulated stores of human knowledge. I have talked in

the Park to Bible students who boasted that during the day they cobbled or sold cheese, while at night they sat up learning Hebrew and studying the critics of the Holy Book. And I have been ashamed of my own idleness, ashamed of the poor use I have made of my opportunities. These humble scholars heroically pursuing enlightenment are touching and noble figures — but how often, alas, pathetically ludicrous too! For the critics my Bible students used to read and meditate upon Were always at least three-quarters of a century out of date — exploded Tübingen scholars or literal inspirationalists; their authorities were always books written before the invention of modern historical research; their philology was the picturesque *lucus a — non lucendo*, bloody from by-our-Lady type; their geology had irrefutable proofs of the existence of Atlantis; their physiology, if they happened to be atheists, was obsoletely mechanistic, if Christians, merely providential. All their dogged industry, all their years of heroic striving, had been completely wasted — wasted, at any rate, so far as the increase of human knowledge was concerned, but not for themselves, since the labour, the disinterested ambition, had brought them happiness.

My Uncle Spencer was spiritually a cousin of these Hyde Park orators and higher critics. He had all their passion for enlightenment and profound ideas, but not content with concentrating, like them, on a single subject such as the Bible, he allowed himself to be attracted by everything under the sun. The whole field of history, of science (or rather what my Uncle Spencer thought was science), of philosophy, religion, and art was his province. He had their industry too — an industry, in his case, rather erratic, fitful, and inconstant; for he would start passionately studying one subject, to turn after a little while to another whose aspect seemed to him at the moment more attractive. And like them he displayed — though to a less pronounced degree, since his education had been rather better than theirs (not much better, however, for he had never attended any seat of learning but one of our oldest and most hopeless public schools) — he displayed a vast unawareness of contemporary thought and an uncritical faith in authorities which to a more systematically educated man would have seemed quite obviously out of date; coupled with a profound ignorance of even the methods

by which one could acquire a more accurate or at any rate a more “modern” and fashionable knowledge of the universe.

My Uncle Spencer had views and information on almost every subject one cared to mention; but the information was almost invariably faulty and the judgments he based upon it fantastic. What things he used to tell me as we sat facing one another in the corners of our first-class carriage, with the prawns piled up in a little coralline mountain on the folding table between us! Fragments of his eager talk come back to me.

“There are cypresses in Lombardy that were planted by Julius Cæsar...

“The human race is descended from African pygmies. Adam was black and only four feet high....”

“*Similia similibus curantur*. Have you gone far enough with your Latin to know what that means?” (My Uncle Spencer was an enthusiastic homœopathist, and the words of Hahnemann were to him as a mystic formula, a kind of *Om mani hum* the repetition of which gave him an immense spiritual satisfaction.)

And once, I remember, as we were passing through the fabulous new station of Ghent — that station which fifteen or sixteen years later I was to see all smashed and gutted by the departing invaders — he began, apropos of a squad of soldiers standing on the platform, to tell me how a German professor had proved, mathematically, using the theories of ballistics and probabilities, that war was now impossible, modern quick-firing rifles and machine-guns being so efficient that it was, as my Uncle Spencer put it, “sci-en-tif-ic-ally impossible” for any body of men to remain alive within a mile of a sufficient number of mitrailleuses, moving backwards and forwards through the arc of a circle and firing continuously all the time. I passed my boyhood in the serene certainty that war was now a thing of the past.

Sometimes he would talk to me earnestly across the prawns of the cosmogonies of Boehme or Swedenborg.

But all this was so exceedingly obscure that I never took it in at all. In spite of my Uncle Spencer’s ascendancy over my mind I was never infected by his mystical enthusiasms. These mental dissipations had been my Uncle Spencer’s

wild oats. Reacting from the rather stuffily orthodox respectability of his upbringing, he ran into, not vice, not atheism, but Swedenborg. He had preserved — a legacy from his prosperous nineteenth - century youth — an easy optimism, a great belief in progress and the superiority of modern over ancient times, together with a convenient ignorance of the things about which it would have been disquieting to think too much. This agreeable notion of the world I sucked in easily and copiously with my little crustaceans; my views about the universe and the destinies of man were as rosy in those days as the prawns themselves.

It was not till seven or eight o'clock in the evening that we finally got to our destination. My Uncle Spencer's carriage — victoria or brougham, according to the season and the state of the weather — would be waiting for us at the station door. In we climbed and away we rolled on our rubbered wheels in a silence that seemed almost magical, so deafeningly did common carts and the mere station cabs go rattling over the cobbles of the long and dismal Rue de la Gare. Even in the winter, when there was nothing to be seen of it but an occasional green gas-lamp, with a little universe of pavement, brick wall and shuttered window dependent upon it and created by it out of the surrounding darkness, the Rue de la Gare was signally depressing, if only because it was so straight and long. But in summer, when the dismal brick houses by which it was flanked revealed themselves in the evening light, when the dust and the waste-paper came puffing along it in gusts of warm, stale-smelling wind, then the street seemed doubly long and disagreeable. But, on the other hand, the contrast between its sordidness and the cool, spacious Grand' Place into which, after what seemed a carefully studied preparatory twisting and turning among the narrow streets of the old town, it finally debouched, was all the more striking and refreshing. Like a ship floating out from between the jaws of a canyon into a wide and sunlit lake, our carriage emerged upon the Grand' Place. And the moment was solemn, breathlessly anticipated and theatrical, as though we were gliding in along the suspended calling of the oboes and bassoons, and the violins trembling with amorous anxiety all around us, rolling silently and with not a hitch in the stage

carpentry on to some vast and limelit stage where, as soon as we had taken up our position well forward and in the centre, something tremendous, one imagined, would suddenly begin to happen — a huge orchestral tutti from contrabass trombone to piccolo, from bell instrument to triangle, and then the tenor and soprano in such a duet as had never in all the history of opera been heard before.

But when it came to the point, our entrance was never quite so dramatic as all that. One found, when one actually got there, that one had mistaken one's opera; it wasn't *Parsifal* or — *;* it was *Pelltas* or perhaps the *Village Romeo and, Juliet.* For there was nothing grandiosely Wagnerian, nothing Italian and showy about the Grand' Place at Longres. The last light was rosy on its towers, the shadows of the promenaders stretched half across the place, and in the vast square the evening had room to be cool and quiet. The Gothic Church had a sharp steeple and the seminary by its side a tower, and the little seventeenth-century Hôtel de Ville, with its slender belfry, standing in the middle of that open space as though not afraid to let itself be seen from every side, was a miracle of gay and sober architecture; and the houses that looked out upon it had faces simple indeed, burgess and ingenuous, but not without a certain nobility, not without a kind of unassuming provincial elegance. In, then, we glided, and the suspended oboeings of our entrance, instead of leading up to some grand and gaudy burst of harmony, fruitily protracted themselves in this evening beauty, exulted quietly in the rosy light, meditated among the lengthening shadows; and the violins, ceasing to tremble with anticipation, swelled and mounted, like light and leaping towers, into the serene sky.

And if the clock happened to strike at the moment that we entered, how charmingly the notes of the mechanical carillon harmonised with this imaginary music! At the hours, the bells in the high tower of the Hôtel de Ville played a minuet and trio, tinkly and formal like the first composition of an infant Boccherini, which lasted till fully three minutes past. At the half-hours it was a patriotic air of the same length. But at the quarters the bells no more than began a tune. Three or four bars and the music broke off, leaving the listener

wondering what was to have followed, and attributing to this fragmentary stump of an air some rich; outflowering in the pregnant and musical silence, some subtle development which should have made the whole otherwise enchanting than the completed pieces that followed and preceded, and whose charm, indeed, consisted precisely in their old-fashioned mediocrity, in the ancient, cracked, and quavering sweetness of the bells that played them, and the defects in the mechanism, which imparted to the rhythm that peculiar and unforeseeable irregularity which the child at the piano, tongue between teeth, eyes anxiously glancing from printed notes to fingers and back again, laboriously introduces into the flawless evenness of “The Merry Peasant.”

This regular and repeated carillonage was end indeed still is — for the invaders spared the bells — an essential part of Longres, a feature like the silhouette of its three towers seen from far away between the poplars across the wide, flat land, characteristic and recognisable.

It is with a little laugh of amused delight that the stranger to Longres first hears the jigging airs and the clashes of thin, sweet harmony floating down upon him from the sky, note succeeding unmuted note, so that the vibrations mingle in the air, surrounding the clear outlines of the melody with a faint quivering halo of discord. After an hour or two the minuet and trio, the patriotic air, become all too familiar, ‘while with every repetition the broken fragments at the quarters grow more and more enigmatic, pregnant, dubious, and irritating. The pink light fades from the three towers, the Gothic intricacies of the church sink into a fiat black silhouette against the night sky; but still from high up in the topless darkness floats down, floats up and out over the house-tops, across the flat fields, the minuet and trio. The patriotic air continues still, even after sunset, to commemorate the great events of 1830; and still the fragments between, like pencillings in the notebook of a genius, suggest to the mind in the scribble of twenty notes a splendid theme and the possibility of fifteen hundred variations. At midnight the bells are still playing; at half-past one the stranger starts yet again out of his sleep; re-evoked at a quarter to four his speculations about the possible conclusions of the unfinished symphony keep him awake long enough

to hear the minuet and trio at the hour and to wonder how any one in Longres manages to sleep at all. But in a day or two he answers the question himself by sleeping unbrokenly through the hints from Beethoven's notebook, and the more deliberate evocations of Boccherini's childhood and the revolution of 1830. The disease creates its own antidote, and the habit of hearing the carillon induces gradually a state of special mental deafness in which the inhabitants of Longres permanently live.

Even as a small boy, to whom insomnia was a thing unknown, I found the bells, for the first night or two after my arrival in Longres, decidedly trying. My Uncle Spencer's house looked on to the Grand' Place itself, and my window on the third floor was within fifty yards of the belfry of the Hôtel de Ville and the source of the aerial music. Three-year-old Boccherini might have been in the room with me whenever the wind came from the south, banging his minuet in my ears. But after the second night he might bang and jangle as much as he liked; there was no bell in Longres could wake me.

What did wake me, however — every Saturday morning at about half-past four or five — was the pigs coming into market. One had to have spent a month of Saturdays in Longres before one could acquire the special mental deafness that could ignore the rumbling of cart-wheels over the cobbles and the squealing and grunting of two or three thousand pigs. And when one looked out what a sight it was! All the Grand' Place was divided up by rails into a multitude of pens and pounds, and every pound was seething with pink naked pigs that looked from above like so much Bergsonian *élan vital* in a state of incessant agitation. Men came and went between the enclosures, talking, bargaining, critically poking potential bacon or ham with the point of a stick. And when the bargain was struck, the owner would step into the pen, hunt down the victim, and, catching it up by one leather ear and its thin bootlace of a tail, carry it off amid grunts that ended in the piercing, long-drawn harmonics of a squeal to a netted cart or perhaps to some other pen a little farther down the line. Brought up in England to regard the infliction of discomfort upon an animal as being, if anything, rather more reprehensible than cruelty to my fellow-humans, I

remember being horrified by this spectacle. So, too, apparently was the German army of occupation. ‘For between 1914 and 1918 no pig in the Longres market might be lifted by tail or ear, the penalty for disobedience being a fine of twenty marks for the first offence, a hundred for the second, and after that a term of forced labour on the lines of communication. Of all the oppressive measures of the invader there was hardly one which more profoundly irritated the Limburgiac peasantry. Nero was unpopular with the people of Rome, not because of his crimes and vices, not because he was a tyrant and a murderer, but for having built in the middle of the city a palace so large that it blocked the entrance to several of the main roads. If the Romans hated him, it was because his golden house compelled them to make a circuit of a quarter of a mile every time they wanted to go shopping. The little customary liberties, the right to do in small things what we have always done, are more highly valued than the greater, more abstract, and less immediate freedoms. And, similarly, most people will rather run the risk of catching typhus than take a few irksome sanitary precautions to which they are not accustomed. In this particular case, moreover, there was the further question: How one to carry a pig except by its tail and ears? One must either throw the creature on its back and lift it up by its four cloven feet — a process hardly feasible, since a pig’s centre of gravity is so near the ground that it is all but impossible to topple him over. Or else — and this is what the people of Longres found themselves disgustedly compelled to do — one must throw one’s arms round the animal and carry it clasped to one’s bosom as though it were a baby, at the risk of being bitten in the ear and with the certainty of stinking like a hog for the rest of the day.

The first Saturday after the departure of the German troops was a bad morning for the pigs. To carry a pig by the tail was an outward and visible symbol of recovered liberty; and the squeals of the porkers mingled with the cheers of the population and the trills and clashing harmonies of the bells awakened by the carilloneur from their four years’ silence.

By ten o’clock the market was over. The railings of the pens had been cleared away, and but for the traces on the cobbles — and those too the municipal

scavengers were beginning to sweep up — I could have believed that the scene upon which I had looked from my window in the bright early light had been a scene in some agitated morning dream.

But more dream-like and fantastical was the aspect of the Grand' Place when, every year during the latter part of August, Longres indulged in its traditional kermesse. For then the whole huge square was covered with booths, with merry-go-rounds turning and twinkling in the sun, with swings and switchbacks, with temporary pinnacles rivalling in height with the permanent and secular towers of the town, and from whose summits one slid, whooping uncontrollably with horrified delight, down a polished spiral track to the ground below. There was bunting everywhere, there were sleek balloons and flags, there were gaudily painted signs. Against the grey walls of the church, against the whitewashed house - fronts, against the dark brickwork of the seminary and the soft yellow stucco of the gabled Hôtel de Ville, a sea of many colours beat tumultuously. And an immense and featureless noise that was a mingling of the music of four or five steam organs, of the voices of thousands of people, of the blowing of trumpets and whistles, the clashing of cymbals, the beating of drums, of shouting, of the howling of children, of enormous rustic laughter, filled the space between the houses from brim to brim — a noise so continuous and so amorphous that hearkening from my high window it was almost, after a time, as though there were no noise at all, but a new kind of silence, in which the tinkling of the infant Boccherini's minuet, the patriotic air, and the fragmentary symphonies had become for some obscure reason utterly inaudible.

And after sunset the white flares of acetylene and the red flares of coal-gas scooped out of the heart of the night a little private day, in which the fun went on more noisily than ever. And the gaslight striking up on to the towers mingled half-way up their shafts with the moonlight from above, so that to me at my window the belfries seemed to belong half to the earth, half to the pale silence overhead. But gradually, as the night wore on, earth abandoned its claims; the noise diminished; one after another the flares were put out, till at last the moon was left in absolute possession, with only a few dim greenish gas-lamps here and

there, making no attempt to dispute her authority. The towers were hers down to the roots, the booths and the hooded roundabouts, the Russian mountains, the swings — all wore the moon's livery of silver and black; and audible once more the bells seemed in her honour to sound a sweeter, dearer, more melancholy note.

But it was not only from my window that I viewed the kermesse. From the moment that the roundabouts began to turn, which was as soon as the eleven o'clock Mass on the last Sunday but one in August was over, to the moment when they finally came to rest, which was at about ten or eleven on the night of the following Sunday, I moved almost unceasingly among the delights of the fair. And what a fair it was! I have never seen its like in England. Such splendour, such mechanical perfection in the swings, switchbacks, merry-go-rounds, towers, and the like! Such astonishing richness and variety in the side-shows! And withal such marvellous cheapness.

When one was tired of sliding and swinging, of being whirled and jogged, one could go and see for a penny the man who pulled out handfuls of his skin, to pin it up with safety-pins into ornamental folds and pleats. Or one could see the woman with no arms who opened a bottle of champagne with her toes and drank, your health, lifting her glass to her lips with the same members. And then in another booth, over whose entry there waved — a concrete symbol of good faith — a pair of enormous female pantaloons, sat the Fat Woman — so fat that she could (and would, you were told, for four sous extra), in the words of the Flemish notice at the door, which I prefer to leave in their original dialectical obscurity, "heur gezicht bet heur tiekes wassen." Next to the Fat Woman's hutch was a much larger tent in which the celebrated Monsieur Figaro, with his wife and seven children, gave seven or eight times daily a dramatic version of the Passion of Our Saviour, at which even the priesthood was authorised to assist. The Figaro family was celebrated from one end of the country to another, and had been for I do not know how many years — forty or fifty at least. For there were several generations of Figaros; and if seven charming and entirely genuine children did indeed still tread the boards, it was not that the seven original sons

and daughters of old M. Figaro had remained by some miracle perpetually young; but that marrying and becoming middle-aged they had produced little Figaros of their own, who in their turn gave rise to more, so that the aged and original M. Figaro could count among the seven members of his suppositious family more than one of his great-grandchildren. So celebrated was M. Figaro that there was even a song about him, of which unfortunately I can remember only two lines:

"Et le voilà, et le voilà, Fi-ga-ro, Le plus comique de la Belgique, Fi-ga-ro!"

But on what grounds and in what remote epoch of history he had been called "Le plus comique de la Belgique," I was never able to discover. For the only part I ever saw the venerable old gentleman play was that of Caiaphas in the *Passion of Our Saviour*, which was one of the most moving, or at any rate one of the most harrowingly realistic, performances I ever remember to have seen; so much so, that the voices of the actors were often drowned by sobs and sometimes by the piercing screams of a child who thought that they were really and genuinely driving nails into the graceful young Figaro of the third generation, who played the part of the Saviour.

Not a day of my first kermesses passed without my going at least once, and sometimes two or three times, to see the Figaros at their performance; partly, no doubt, because, between the ages of nine and thirteen, I was an extremely devout broad churchman, and partly because the rôle of the Magdalene was played by a little girl of twelve or thereabouts, with whom I fell in love, wildly, extravagantly, as one only can love when one is a child. I would have given fortunes and years of my life to have had the courage to go round to the back after the performance and talk to her. But I did not dare; and to give an intellectual justification for my cowardice, I assured myself that it would have been unseemly on my part to intrude upon a privacy which I invested with all the sacredness of the Magdalene's public life, an act of sacrilege like going into church with one's hat on. Moreover, I comforted myself, I should have profited little by meeting my inamorata face to face, since in all likelihood she spoke nothing but Flemish, and besides my own language I only spoke at that time a

little French, with enough Latin to know what my Uncle Spencer meant when he said, "*Similia similibus curan*." My passion for the Magdalene lasted through three kermesses, but waned, or rather suddenly came to an end, when, rushing to the first of the Figaros' performances at the fourth, I saw that the little Magdalene, who was now getting on for sixteen, had become, like so many young girls in their middle teens, plump and moony almost to the point of grossness. And my love after falling to zero in the theatre was turned to positive disgust when I saw her, a couple of mornings later before the performance began, walking about the Grand' Place in a dark blue blouse with a sailor collar, a little blue skirt down to her knees, and a pair of bright yellow boots lacing high up on her full-blown calves, which they compressed so tightly that the exuberant flesh overflowed on to the leather. The next year one of old M. Figaro's great-grandchildren, who could hardly have been more than seven or eight, took her place on the stage. My Magdalene had left it — to get married, no doubt. All the Figaros married early: it was important that there should be no failure in the supply of juvenile apostles and holy women. But by that time I had ceased to take the slightest interest either in her, her family, or their sacred performance; for it was about the time of my fifth kermesse, if I remember rightly, that my period of atheism began — an atheism, however, still combined with all my Uncle Spencer's cheerful optimism about the universe.

My Uncle Spencer, though it would have annoyed him to hear any one say so, enjoyed the kermesse almost as much as I aid. In all the year, August was his best month; it contained within its thirty-one days less cause for anxiety, impatience, or irritation than any other month; so that my Uncle spencer, left in peace by the malignant; world, was free to be as high-spirited, as gay and kind-hearted as he possibly could be. And it was astonishing what a stock of these virtues he possessed. If he could have lived on one of those happy islands where nature provides bananas and cocoanuts enough for all and to spare, where the sun shines every day and a little tattooing is all the raiment one needs, where love is easy, commerce unknown, and neither sin nor progress ever heard of — if he could have lived on one of these carefree islands, how entirely happy and

how uniformly a saint my Uncle Spencer would have been! But cares and worldly preoccupations too often overlaid his gaiety, stopped up the vents of his kindness; and his quick, nervous, and impulsive temperament — in the Augusts of his life a bubbling source of high spirits — boiled up in a wild impatience, in bilious fountains of irritation, whenever he found himself confronted by the passive malignity of matter, the stupidity or duplicity of man.

He was at his worst during the Christmas holidays; for the season of universal goodwill happened unfortunately to coincide with the season of sugar-making. With the first frosts the beetroots were taken out of the ground, and every day for three or four months three hundred thousand kilograms of roots went floating down the labyrinth of little canals that led to the washing-machines and the formidable slicers of my Uncle Spencer's factory. From every vent of the huge building issued a sickening smell of boiled beetroot, mingled with the more penetrating stink of the waste products of the manufacture — the vegetable fibre drained of its juice, which was converted on the upper floors of the building into cattle food and in the backyard into manure. The activity during those few months of the beetroot season was feverish, was delirious. A wild orgy of work, day and night, three shifts in the twenty-four hours. And then the factory was shut up, and for the rest of the year it stood there, alone, in the open fields beyond the fringes of the town, desolate as a ruined abbey, lifeless and dumb.

During the beetroot season my Uncle Spencer was almost out of his mind. Rimmed with livid circles of fatigue, his eyes glittered like the eyes of madman; his thin face was no more than pale skin stretched over the starting bones. The slightest contrariety set him cursing and stamping with impatience; it was a torture for him to sit still. One Christmas holidays, I remember, something went wrong with the machinery at the factory, and for nearly five hours the slicers, the churning washers were still. My Uncle Spencer was almost a lost man when he got back to the Grand' Place for dinner that evening. It was as though a demon had possessed him, and had only been cast out as the result of a horrible labour.

If the breakdown had lasted another hour, I really believe he would have gone mad.

No, Christmas at Uncle Spencer's was never very cheerful. But by the Easter holidays he was beginning to recover. The frenzied making of sugar had given place to the calmer selling of it. My Uncle Spencer's good nature began to have a chance of reasserting itself. By August, at the end of a long, calm summer, he was perfect; and the kermesse found him at his most exquisitely mellow. But with September a certain premonitory anxiety began to show itself; the machinery had to be overhauled, the state of the labour market examined, and when, about the twentieth of the month, I left again for school, it was a frowning, melancholy, and taciturn Uncle Spencer who travelled with me from Longres to Brussels, from Brussels to Ostend, and who, preoccupied with other thoughts, waved absent-mindedly from the quay, while the steamer slowly slid out through the false calm of the harbour mouth towards a menacing and equinoctial Channel.

But at the kermesse, as I have said, my Uncle Spencer was at his richest and ripest. Enjoying it all as much as I did myself, he would spend long evenings with me, loitering among the attractions of the Grand' Place. He was sad, I think, that the dignity of his position as one of the leading citizens of Longres did not permit him to mount with me on the roundabouts, the swings, and the mountain railways. But a visit to the side-shows was not inconsistent with his gravity; we visited them all. While professing to find the exhibition of freaks and monsters a piece of deplorable bad taste, my Uncle Spencer never failed to take me to look at all of them. It was a cardinal point in his theory of education that the young should be brought as early as possible into contact with what he called the Realities of Life. And as nothing, it was obvious, could be more of a Reality than the armless woman or the man who pinned up his skin with safety-pins, it was important that I should make an early acquaintance with them, in spite of the undoubtedly defective taste of the exhibition. It was in obedience to the same educational principle that my Uncle Spencer took me, one Easter holidays, to see the Lunatic Asylum. But the impression made upon me by the huge prison-like building and its queer occupants — one of whom, I remember, gambolled playfully around me wherever I went, patting my cheeks or affectionately

pinching my legs — was so strong and disagreeable, that for several nights I could not sleep; or if I did, I was oppressed by hideous nightmares that woke me, screaming and sweating in the dark. My Uncle Spencer had to renounce his intention of taking me to see the anatomy room in the hospital.

Scattered among the monsters, the rifle-ranges, and the games of skill were little booths where one could buy drink and victuals. There was one vendor, for instance, who always did a roaring trade by selling, for two sous, as many raw mussels as any one could eat without coughing. Torn between his belief in the medicinal qualities of shellfish and his fear of typhoid fever, my Uncle Spencer hesitated whether he ought to allow me to spend my penny. In the end he gave his leave. (“It’s the phosphorus, you know.”) I put down my copper, took my mussel, bit, swallowed, and violently coughed. The fish were briny as though they had come out of the Dead Sea. The old vendor did an excellent business. Still, I have seen him sometimes looking anxious; for not all his customers were as susceptible as I. There were hardy young peasants who could put down half a pound of this Dead Sea fruit without turning a hair. In the end, however, the brine did its work on even the toughest gullet.

More satisfactory as food were the apple fritters, which were manufactured by thousands in a large temporary wooden structure that stood under the shade of the Hôtel de Ville. The Quality, like Uncle Spencer and myself, ate their fritters in the partial privacy of a number of little cubicles arranged like loose-boxes along one side of the building. My Uncle Spencer walked resolutely to our appointed box without looking to the left hand or to the right; and I was bidden to follow his example and not to show the least curiosity respecting the occupants of the other loose-boxes, whose entrances we might pass on the way to out own. There was a danger, my Uncle Spencer explained to me, that some of the families eating apple fritters in the loose-boxes might be Blacks — Blacks, I mean, politically, not ethnically — while we were Liberals or even, positively, Freemasons. Therefore — but as a mere stranger to Longres I was never, I confess, quite able to understand the force of this conclusion — therefore, though we might talk to male Blacks in a café, have business relations

and even be on terms of friendship with them, it was impossible for us to be known by the female Blacks, even under a booth and over the ferial apple fritters; so that we must not look into the loose-boxes for fear that we might see there a dear old friend who would be in the embarrassing situation of not being able to introduce us to his wife and daughters. I accepted, without understanding, this law; and it seemed to be a perfectly good law until the day came when I found that it forbade me to make the acquaintance of even a single one of the eleven ravishing daughters of M. Moulle. It seemed to me then a stupid law.

In front of the booths where they sold sweets my Uncle Spencer never cared to linger. It was not that he was stingy; on the contrary, he was extremely generous. Nor that he thought it bad for me to eat sweets; he had a professional belief in the virtues of sugar. The fact was that the display in the booths embarrassed him. For already at the kermesse one began to see a sprinkling of those little objects in chocolate which, between the Feast of St. Nicholas and the New Year, fill the windows of every confectioner's shop in Belgium. My Uncle Spencer had passed a third of a lifetime at Longues, but even after all these years he was still quite unable to excuse or understand the innocent coprophily of its inhabitants, The spectacle, in a sweet-shop window, of a little *pot de chambre* made of chocolate brought the blush of embarrassment to his cheeks. And when at the kermesse I asked him to buy me some barley-sugar or a few *bêtises de Cambrai,* he pretended not to have heard what I asked, but walked hastily on; for his quick eyes had seen, on one of the higher shelves of the confectioner's booth, a long line of little brown pots, on whose equivocal aspect it would have been an agony to him if, standing there and waiting for the barley-sugar to be weighed out, I had naively commented. Not that I ever should have commented upon them; for I was as thoroughly English as my Uncle Spencer himself — more thoroughly, indeed, as being a generation further away from the Flemish mother, the admixture of whose blood, however, had availed nothing against my uncle's English upbringing. Me, too, the little brown pots astonished and appalled by their lack of reticence. If my companion had been another schoolboy of my own age, I should have pointed at the nameless things and sniggered. But since I was

with my Uncle Spencer, I preserved with regard to them an eloquent and pregnant silence; I pretended not to have seen them, but so guiltily that my ignoring of them was in itself a comment that filled my poor Uncle Spencer with embarrassment. If we could have talked about them, if only we could have openly deplored them and denounced their makers, it would have been better. But obviously, somehow, we could not.

In the course of years, however, I learned, being young and still malleable, to be less astonished and appalled by the little chocolate pots and the other manifestations of the immemorial Flemish coprophily. In the end I took them almost for granted, like the natives themselves, till finally, when St. Nicholas had filled the shops with these scatological symbols, I could crunch a pot or two between meals as joyously and with as little self-consciousness as any Belgian child. But I had to eat my chocolate, when it was moulded in this particular form, out of my Uncle Spencer's sight. He, poor man, would have been horrified if he had seen me on these occasions.

On these occasions, then, I generally took refuge in the housekeeper's room — and in any case, at this Christmas season, when the sugar was being made, it was better to sit in the cheerful company of Mlle Leeauw than with my gloomy, irritable, demon-ridden Uncle Spencer. Mlle Leeauw was almost from the first one of my firmest and most trusted friends. She was a woman of, I suppose, about thirty-five when I first knew her, rather worn already by a life of active labour, but still preserving a measure of that blonde, decided, and regular beauty which had been hers in girlhood. She was the daughter of a small farmer near Longres, and had received the usual village education, supplemented, however, in recent years by what she had picked up from my Uncle Spencer, who occupied himself every now and then, in his erratic and enthusiastic way, with the improvement of her mind, lent her books from his library, and delivered lectures to her on the subjects that were at the moment nearest to his heart. Mlle Leeauw, unlike most women of her antecedents, felt an insatiable curiosity with regard to all that mysterious and fantastic knowledge which the rich and leisured keep shut up in their libraries; and not only in their books, as she had seen

herself (for as a girl had she not served as nursery-maid in the house of that celebrated collector, the Comte de Zuitigny?) not only in their books, but in their pictures too — some of which, Mlle Leeauw assured me, a child could have painted, so badly drawn they were, so unlike life (and yet the count had given heaven only knew how much for them), in their Chinese pots, in the patterns of the very carpets on the floor. Whatever my Uncle Spencer gave her she read with eagerness, she listened attentively to what he said; and there emerged, speck-like in the boundless blank ocean of her ignorance, a few little islands of strange knowledge. One, for example, was called homoeopathy; another the Construction - of - Domes (a subject on which my Uncle Spencer was prepared to talk with a copious and perverse erudition for hours at a time; his thesis being that any mason who knew how to turn the vaulted roof of an oven could have built the cupolas of St. Peter's, St. Paul's, and Santa Maria del Fiore, and that therefore the praises lavished on Michelangelo, Wren, and Brunelleschi were entirely undeserved). A third was called Anti - Vivisection. A fourth Swedenborg....

The result of my Uncle Spencer's teaching was to convince Mlle Leeauw that the knowledge of the rich was something even more fantastic than she had supposed — something unreal and utterly remote from life as it is actually lived, artificial and arbitrary, like the social activities of these same rich, who pass their time in one another's houses, eating at one another's expense, and being bored. —

This conviction of the complete futility of knowledge did not make her any the less eager to learn what my Uncle Spencer, whom she regarded as a mine and walking compendium of all human learning, could offer her. And she enchanted him by her respectful attentiveness, by the quickness of her understanding — for she was a woman of very great natural intelligence — and her eagerness for every fresh enlightenment. She did not confide to him her real opinion of knowledge, which was that it was a kind of curious irrelevant joke on the margin of life, worth learning for precisely the same reasons as it is worth learning to handle the fork at table — because it is one of the secrets of the rich.

Admiring my Uncle Spencer sincerely, she yet took nothing that he taught her seriously, and though, when with him, she believed in millionth-of-a-grain doses and high spiritual potencies, she continued, when she felt out of sorts or I had overeaten, to resort to the old tablespoonful of castor-oil; though with him she was a convinced Swedenborgian, in church she was entirely orthodox; though in his presence she thought vivisection monstrous, she would tell me with gusto of those happy childish days on the farm, when her father cut the pig's throat, her mother held the beast by the hind-legs, her sister danced on the body to make the blood flow, and she held the pail under the spouting artery.

If to my Uncle Spencer his housekeeper appeared as he liked to see her, and not as at ordinary times she really was, it was not that she practised with him a conscious insincerity. Hers was one of those quick, sensitive natures that adapt themselves almost automatically to the social atmosphere in which at the moment they happen to be. Thus with well-bred people she had beautiful manners; but the peasants from whose stock she had sprung found her as full of a hearty Flemish gusto, as grossly and innocently coarse as themselves. The core of her being remained solidly peasant; but the upper and conscious part of her mind was, so to speak, only loosely fastened to the foundation, so that it could turn freely this way and that, without strain or difficulty, according to changing circumstances. My Uncle Spencer valued her, not only as a competent, intelligent woman, which she always was in every company, but also because she was, considering her class and origins, so remarkably, well-mannered and refined, which, except with him and his likes, she was not.

With me, however, Mlle Leeauw was thoroughly natural and Flemish. With her quick and, I might say, instinctive understanding of character, she saw that my abashed reaction to coprology, being of so much more recent date than that of my Uncle Spencer, was much less strong, less deeply rooted. At the same time, she perceived that I had no great natural taste for grossness, no leaning to what I may call Flemishism; so that in my presence she could be her natural Flemish self and thus correct an absurd acquired delicacy without running the risk of encouraging to any undue or distressing degree a congenital bias in the

opposite direction. And I noticed that whenever Matthieu (or Tcheunke, as they called him), her cousin's boy, came into town and paid a call on her, Mlle Leeauw became almost as careful and refined as she was with my Uncle Spencer. Not that Tcheunke shared my uncle's susceptibilities. On the contrary, he took such an immoderate delight in everything that was excrementitious that she judged it best not in any way to indulge him in his taste, just as she judged it best not to indulge my national prejudice in favour of an excessive reticence about these and similar matters. She was right, I believe, in both cases.

Mlle Leeauw had an elder sister, Louise — Louiseke, in the language of Longres, where they put the symbol of the diminutive after almost every name. Louiseke, like her sister, had never married; and considering the ugliness of the woman — for she resembled Mlle Leéauw as a very mischievous caricature resembles its original, that is to say, very closely and at the same time hardly at all, the unlikeness being emphasised in this case by the fact that nature had, for the shaping of certain features, drawn on other ancestral sources, and worse ones, than those from which her sister's face had been made up — considering her ugliness, I repeat, it was not surprising. Though considering her dowry, perhaps it was. Louiseke was by no means rich; but she had the five hundred francs a year, or thereabouts, which her sister also had, after their father died and the farm was sold, together with another two hundred inherited from an old aunt of her mother's. This was a sufficient income to allow her to live without working in a leisure principally occupied by the performance of religious exercises.

On the outskirts of Longres there stands a small béguinage, long since abandoned by its Béguines, who are now all over Belgium a diminishing and nearly extinct community, and inhabited by a colony of ordinary poor folk. The little old gabled houses are built round the sides of a large grassy square, in the centre of which stands an abandoned church. Louiseke inhabited one of these houses, partly because the rent was very low, but also because she liked the religious associations of the place. There, in her peaked high house, looking out across the monastic quadrangle to the church, she could almost believe herself a

genuine Béguine. Every morning she went out to hear early Mass, and on Sundays and days of festival she was assiduous in church almost to the point of supererogation.

At my uncle Spencer's we saw a great deal of her; on her way to church, on her way home again, she never failed to drop in for a word with her sister Antonieke. Sometimes, I remember, she brought with her — hurrying on these occasions across the Grand' Place with the quick, anxious tread, the frightened, suspicious glances to left and right, of a traveller crossing a brigand-haunted moor — a large bag of green baize, full of strange treasures: the silver crown and sceptre of Our Lady, the gilded diadem of the Child, St. Joseph's halo, the jewelled silver book of I forget which Doctor of the Church, St. Dominick's lilies, and a mass of silver hearts with gilded flames coming out of them. Louiseke, whose zeal was noted and approved of by M. le Curé, had the rare privilege of being allowed to polish the jewellery belonging to the images in the church. A few days before each of the important feasts the painted plaster saints were stripped of their finery and the spoil handed over to Louiseke, who, not daring to walk with her precious burden under her arm as far as her own house in the béguinage, slipped across the Grand' Place to my Uncle Spencer's. There, on the table in Antonieke's room, the green baize bag was opened, and the treasures, horribly dirty and tarnished after their weeks or months of neglect, were spread out in the light A kind of paste was then made out of French chalk mixed with gin, which the two sisters applied to the crowns and hearts with nail-brushes, or if the work was fine and intricate, with an old toothbrush. The silver was then wiped dry with a cloth and polished with a piece of leather.

A feeling of manly pride forbade me to partake in what I felt to be a womanish labour; but I liked to stand by with my hands in my pockets, watching the sisters at work among these regal and sacred symbols, and trying to understand, so far as my limited knowledge of Flemish and my almost equally limited knowledge of life would admit, the gossip which Louiseke poured out incessantly in a tone of monotonous and unvarying censoriousness.

I myself always found Louiseke a little forbidding. She lacked the charm and the quality, which I can only call mellowness, of her sister; to me she seemed harsh, sour - tempered, and rather malevolent. But it is very possible that I judged her unfairly; for, I confess, I could never quite get over her ugliness. It was a sharp, hooky, witch-like type of ugliness, which at that time I found particularly repulsive.

How difficult it is, even with the best will in the world, even for a grown and reasonable man, to judge his fellow-beings without reference to their external appearance! Beauty is a letter of recommendation which it is almost impossible to ignore; and we attribute too often the ugliness of the face to the character. Or, to be more precise, we make no attempt to get beyond the opaque mask of the face to the realities behind it, but run away from the ugly at sight without even trying to find out what they are really like. That feeling of instinctive dislike which ugliness inspires in a grown man, but which he has reason and strength enough of will to suppress, or at least conceal, is uncontrollable in a child. At three or four years old a child will run screaming from the room at the aspect of a certain visitor whose face strikes him as disagreeable. Why? Because the ugly visitor is “naughty,” is a “bad man.” And up to a much later age, though we have succeeded in preventing ourselves from screaming when the ugly visitor makes his appearance, we do our best — at first, at any rate, or until his actions have strikingly proved that his face belies his character — to keep out of his way. So that if I always disliked Louiseke, it may be that she was not to blame, and that my own peculiar horror of ugliness made me attribute to her unpleasant characteristics which she did not in reality possess. She seemed to me, then, harsh and sour-tempered; perhaps she wasn’t; but, in any case, I thought so. And that accounts for the fact that I never got to know her, never tried to know her, as I knew her sister. Even after the extraordinary event which, a year or two after my first visit to Longres, was to alter completely the whole aspect of her life, I still made no effort to understand Louiseke’s character. How much I regret my remissness now! But, after all, one cannot blame a small boy for failing to have the same standards as a man. Today, in retrospect, I find Louiseke’s character

and actions in the highest degree carious and worthy of study. But twenty years ago, when I knew her, her ugliness at first appalled me, and always, even after I had got over my disgust, surrounded her, for me, with a kind of unbreathable atmosphere, through which I could never summon the active interest to penetrate. Moreover, the event which now strikes me as so extraordinary, seemed to me then almost normal and of no particular interest. And since she died before my opinion about it had had time to change, I can only give a child's impression of her character and a bald recital of the facts so far as I knew them.

It was, then, at my second or third kermesse that a side-show, novel not only for me (to whom indeed everything — fat women, fire-swallowers, elastic men, and down to the merest dwarfs and giants — was a novelty), but even to the oldest inhabitants of Longres, who might have been expected to have seen, in their time, almost everything that the world had ever parturated of marvels, rarities, monsters, and abortions, made its appearance on the Grand' Place. This was a troupe of devil dancers, self-styled Tibetan for the sake of the name's high-sounding and mysterious ring; but actually made up of two expatriated Hindus and a couple of swarthy meridional Frenchmen, who might pass at a pinch as the Aryan compatriots of these dark Dravidians. Not that it mattered much what the nationality or colour of the dancers might be; for on the stage they wore enormous masks — huge false heads, grinning, horned, and diabolic, which, it was claimed in the announcement, were those in which the ritual dances were performed before the Dalai Lama in the principal convent of Lhassa. Comparing my memories of them with such knowledge of oriental art as I now possess, I imagine that they came in reality from the shop of some theatrical property maker in Marseilles, from which place the devil dancers had originally started. But they were none the less startling and bloodcurdling for that; just as the dances themselves were none the less salaciously symbolical, none the less typically and conventionally "oriental" for having been in great measure invented by the Frenchmen, who provided all the plot and dramatic substance of the ballets, while the astonished and admiring Indians contributed only a few recollections of Siva worship and the cult of the beneficent *linga.*

This co-operation between East and West was what ensured the performance its success; the western substance satisfied by its perfect familiarity, while the eastern detail gave to the old situations a specious air of novelty and almost a new significance.

Charmed by the prospect of seeing what he supposed would be a few characteristic specimens of the religious rites of the mysterious East, and ambitious to improve my education by initiating me into the secrets of this Reality, my Uncle Spencer took me to see the dancers. But the dramatic pantomime of the Frenchmen represented a brand of Reality that my uncle did not at all approve of. He got up abruptly in the middle of the first dance, saying that he thought the circus would be more amusing; which, for me, it certainly was. For I was not of an age to appreciate either the plastic beauty or the peculiar moral significance of the devil dancers' performance.

"Hinduism," said my Uncle Spencer, as we threaded our way between the booths and the whirling machines, "has sadly degenerated from its original Brahmanistic purity." And he began to expound to me, raising his voice to make itself heard through the noise of the steam organs, the principles of Brahmanism. My Uncle Spencer had a great weakness for oriental religions.

"Well," asked Mlle Leeauw, when we got back for dinner, "and how did you enjoy the dancers?"

I told her that my Uncle Spencer had thought that I should find the circus more amusing. Antonieke nodded with a significant air of understanding. "Poor man," she said, and she went on to wonder how Louiseke, who was going to see the dancers that evening, would enjoy the show.

I never knew precisely what happened; for a mystery and, as it were, a zone of silence surrounded the event, and my curiosity about everything to do with Louiseke was too feeble to carry me through it. All I know is that, two or three days later, near the end of the kermesse, young Albert Snyders, the lawyer's son, came up to me in the street and asked, with the gleeful expression of one who says something which he is sure his interlocutor will find disagreeable: "Well,

and what do you think of your Louiseke and her carryings on with the black man?" —

I answered truthfully that I had heard nothing about any such thing, and that in any case Louiseke wasn't our Louiseke, and that I didn't care in the least what she did or what might happen to her.

"Not heard about it?" said young Snyders incredulously. "But the black man goes to her house every evening, and she gives him gin, and they sing together, and people see their shadows dancing on the curtains. Everybody's talking about it." —

I am afraid that I disappointed young Snyders. He had hoped to get a rise out of me, and he miserably failed. His errors were two: first, to have supposed that I regarded Louiseke as our Louiseke, merely because her sister happened to be my Uncle Spencer's housekeeper; and, secondly, to have attributed to me a knowledge of the world sufficient to allow me to realise the scandalousness of Louiseke's conduct. Whereas I disliked Louiseke, took no interest in her actions, and could, moreover, see nothing out of the ordinary in what she was supposed to have done.

Confronted by my unshakable calm, young Snyders retired, rather crestfallen. But he revenged himself before he went by telling me that I must be very stupid and, what I found more insulting, a great baby not to understand.

Antonieke, to whom I repeated young Snyders's words, merely said that the boy ought to be whipped, specifying with a wealth of precise detail and a gusto that were entirely Flemish how, with what instrument, and where the punishment ought to be applied. I thought no more about the incident. But I noticed after the kermesse was over and the Grand' Place had become once more the silent and empty Grand' Place of ordinary days, I noticed loitering aimlessly about the streets a stout, coffee-coloured man, whom the children of Longres, like those three rude boys in *Struwwelpeter,* pursued at a distance, contorting themselves with mirth. That year I went back to England earlier than usual; for I had been invited to spend the last three weeks of my holidays with a school friend (alas, at Hastings, so that my knowledge of the earth's surface was not materially

widened by the visit). When I returned to Longres for the Christmas holidays I found that Louiseke was no longer mere Louiseke, but the bride of a coffee-coloured husband. Madame Alphonse they called her; for nobody could bother with the devil dancer's real name: it had an Alin it somewhere — that was all that was known. Monsieur and Madame Alphonse. But the news when I heard it did not particularly impress me.

And even if I had been curious to know more, dense silence continued to envelop the episode. Antonieke never spoke to me of it; and lacking all interest in this kind of Reality, disapproving of it even, my Uncle Spencer seemed to take it silently for granted. That the subject was copiously discussed by the gossips of Longres I do not doubt; and remembering Louiseke's own censorious anecdotage, I can imagine how. But in my hearing it was never discussed; expressly, I imagine — for I lived under the protection of Antonieke, and people were afraid of Antonieke. So it came about that the story remained for me no more remarkable than that story recorded by Edward Lear of the

"... old Man of Jamaica
Who casually married a Quaker;
But she cried out, 'Alack,
I have married a black!'
Which distressed that old Man of Jamaica."

And perhaps, after all, that is the best way of regarding such incidents — unquestioningly, without inquisitiveness. For we are all much too curious about the affairs of our neighbours. Particularly about the affairs of an erotic nature. What an itch we have to know whether Mr. Smith makes love to his secretary, whether his wife consoles herself, whether a certain Cabinet Ministèr is really the satyr he is rumoured to be. And meanwhile the most incredible miracles are happening all round us: stones, when we lift them and let them go, fall to the ground; the sun shines; bees visit the flowers; seeds grow into plants, a cell in nine months multiplies its weight a few thousands of thousands of time, and is a

child; and men think, creating the world they live in. These things leave us almost perfectly indifferent.

But concerning the ways in which different individuals satisfy the cravings of one particular instinct we have, in spite of the frightful monotony of the situation, in spite of the one well-known, inevitable consummation, an endless and ever-fresh curiosity. Some day, perhaps, we may become a little tired of books whose theme is always this particular instinct. Some day, it may be, the successful novelist will write about man's relation to God, to nature, to his own thoughts and the obscure reality on which they work, not about man's relation with woman. Meanwhile, however...

By what stages the old maid passed from her devoutness and her censorious condemnation of love to her passion for the Dravidian, I can only guess. Most likely there were no stages at all, but the conversion was sudden and fulgurating, like that upon the road to Damascus — and like that, secretly and unconsciously prepared for, long before the event. It was the sheer wildness, no doubt, the triumphant bestiality and paganism of the dances that bowled her over, that irresistibly broke down the repressive barriers behind which, all too human, Louiseke's nature had so long chafed.

As to Alphonse himself, there could be no question about his motives. Devil dancing, he had found, was an exhausting, precarious, and not very profitable profession. He was growing stout, his heart was not so strong as it had been, he was beginning to feel himself middle-aged. Louiseke and her little income came as a providence. What did her face matter? He did not hesitate.

Monsieur and Madame Alphonse took a little shop in the Rue Neuve. Before he left India and turned devil dancer, Alphonse had been a cobbler in Madras — and as such was capable of contaminating a Brahman at a distance of twenty-four feet; now, having become an eater of beef and an outcast, he was morally infectious at no less than sixty-four feet. But in Longres, luckily, there were no Brahmans.

He was a large, fat, snub-faced, and shiny man, constantly smiling, with a smile that reminded me of a distended accordion. Many a pair of boots I took to

him to be soled — for Antonieke, though she was horrified at having what she called a negro for her brother-in-law, though she had quarrelled with her sister about her insane and monstrous folly, and would hardly be reconciled to her, Antonieke insisted that all our custom should go to the new cobbler. That, as she explained, “owed itself.” The duty of members of one family to forward one another’s affairs overrode, in her estimation, the mere personal quarrels that might arise between them.

My Uncle Spencer was a frequent caller at the cobbler’s shop, where he would sit for hours, while M. Alphonse tapped away at his last, listening to mythological anecdotes out of the “Ramayana” or “Mahabharata,” and discussing the Brahmanistic philosophy, of which, of course, he knew far more than a poor Sudra like Alphonse. My uncle Spencer would come back from these visits in the best of humours.

“A most interesting man, your brother-in-law,” he would say to Antonieke. “We had a long talk about Siva this afternoon. Most interesting!”

But Antonieke only shrugged her shoulders. “ — *Mais c’est nègre*” she muttered. And my uncle Spencer might assure her as much as he liked that Dravidians were not negroes and that Alphonse very likely had good Aryan blood in his veins. It was useless. Antonieke would not be persuaded, would not even listen. It was all very well for the rich to believe things like that, but a negro, after all, was a negro; and that was all about it.

M. Alphonse was a man of many accomplishments; for besides all the rest, he was an expert palmist and told fortunes from the hand with a gravity, a magisterial certainty, that were almost enough in themselves to make what he said come true. This magian and typically oriental accomplishment was learnt on the road between Marseilles and Longres from a charlatan in the travelling company of amusement makers with whom he had come. But he did the trick in the grand prophetic style, so that people credited his cheiromancy with all the magical authority of the mysterious East. But M. Alphonse could not be persuaded to prophesy for every corner. It was noticed that he selected his subjects almost exclusively from among his female customers, as though he

were only interested in the fates of women. I could hint as much as I liked that I should like to have my fortune told, I could ask him outright to look at my hand; but in vain. On these occasions he was always too busy to look, or was not feeling in she prophetic mood. But if a young woman should now come into the shop, time immediately created itself, the prophetic mood came back. And without waiting for her to ask him, he would seize her hand, pore over it, pat and prod the palm with his thick brown fingers, every now and then turning up towards his subject those dark eyes, made the darker and more expressive by the brilliance of the bluish whites in which *they* were set, and expanding his accordian smile. And he would prophesy love — a great deal of it — love with superb dark men, and rows of children; benevolent dark strangers and blond villains; unexpected fortunes, long life — all, in fact, that the heart could desire. And all the time he squeezed and patted the hand — white between his dark Dravidian paws — from which he read these secrets; he rolled his eyes within their shiny blue enamel setting, and across all the breadth of his fat cheeks the accordion of his smile opened and shut.

My pride and my young sense of justice were horribly offended on these occasions. The inconsistency of a man who had no time to tell my fortune, but an infinite leisure for others, seemed to me abstractly reprehensible and personally insulting. I professed, even at that age, not to believe in palmistry; that is to say, I found the fortunes which M. Alphonse prophesied for others absurd. But my interest in my own personality and my own fate was so enormous that it seemed to me, somehow, that everything said about me must have a certain significance. And if M. Alphonse had taken my hand, looked at it, and said, “You are generous; your head is as large as your heart; you will have a severe illness at thirty-eight, but your life after that will be healthy into extreme old age; you will make a large fortune early in your career, but you must beware of fair-haired strangers with blue eyes,” I should have made an exception and decided for the nonce that there must be something in it. But, alas, M. Alphonse never did take my hand; he never told me anything. I felt most cruelly offended, and I felt astonished too. For it seemed to me a most extraordinary thing that a

subject which was so obviously fascinating and so important as my character and future should not interest M. Alphonse as much as it did me. That he should prefer to dabble in the dull fates and silly insignificant characters of a lot of stupid young women seemed to me incredible and outrageous.

There was another who, it seemed, shared my opinion. That was Louiseke. If ever she came into the shop from the little back sitting-room — and; she was perpetually popping out through the dark doorway like a cuckoo oh: the stroke of noon from its clock — and found her husband telling the fortune of a female customer, her witch-like face would take on an expression more than ordinarily malevolent.

“Alphonse!” she would say significantly.

And Alphonse dropped his subject’s hand, looked round towards the door, and, rolling his enamelled eyes, creasing his fat cheeks in a charming smile, flashing his ivory teeth, would say something amiable.

But Louiseke did not cease to frown.

“If you must tell somebody’s fortune,” she said, when the customer had left the shop, “why don’t you tell the little gentleman’s?” pointing to me. “I’m sure he would be only too delighted.”

But instead of being grateful to Louiseke, instead of saying, “Oh, of course I’d like it,” and holding out my hand, I always perversely shook my head. “No, no,” I said. “I don’t want to worry M. Alphonse.” But I longed for Alphonse to insist on telling me about my exquisite and marvellous self. In my pride, I did not like to owe my happiness to Louiseke, I did not want to feel that I was taking advantage of her irritation and Alphonse’s desire to mollify her. And besides pride, I was actuated by that strange nameless perversity, which so often makes us insist on doing what we do not want to do — such as making love to a woman we do not like and whose intimacy, we know, will bring us nothing but vexation — or makes us stubbornly decline to do what we have been passionately desiring, merely because the opportunity of doing what we wanted has not presented itself in exactly the way we anticipated, or because the person who offered to fulfil our desires has not been sufficiently insistent with his offers.

Alphonse, on these occasions, having no curiosity about my future and taking no pleasure in kneading my small and dirty hand, always took my refusals quite literally and finally, and began to work again with a redoubled ardour. And I would leave the shop, vexed with myself for having let slip the opportunity when it was within my grasp; furious with Louiseke for having presented it in such a way that the seizing of it would be humiliating, and with Alphonse for his obtuseness in failing to observe; how much I desired that he should look at my hand, and his gross discourtesy for not insisting even in the teeth of my refusal.

Years passed; my holidays and the seasons succeeded one another with regularity. Summer and the green poplars and my Uncle Spencer's amiability gave place to the cold season of sugar-making, to scatological symbols in chocolate, to early darkness and the moral gloom of my Uncle Spencer's annual neurasthenia. And half-way between the two extremes came the Easter holidays, pale green and hopefully burgeoning, tepid with temperate warmth and a moderate amiability. There were terms, too, as well as holidays. Eastbourne knew me no more; my knowledge of the globe expanded; I became a public schoolboy.

At fifteen, I remember, I entered upon a period of priggishness which made me solemn beyond my years. There are many boys who do not know how young they are till they have come of age, and a young man is often much less on his dignity than a growing schoolboy, who is afraid of being despised for his callowness. It was during this period that I wrote from Longres a letter to one of my school friends, which he fortunately preserved, so that we were able to re-read it, years later, and to laugh and marvel at those grave, academic old gentlemen we were in our youth. He had written me a letter describing his sister's marriage, to which I replied in these terms:

"How rapidly, my dear Henry, the saffron robe and Hymen's torches give place to the nænia, the funeral urn, and the cypress! While your days have been passed among the jocundities of a marriage feast, mine have been darkened by the circumambient horrors of death. Such, indeed, is life."

And I underlined the philosophic reflection.

The horrors of death made more show in my sonorous antitheses than they did in my life. For though the event made a certain impression upon me — for it was the first thing of the kind that had happened within my own personal orbit — I cannot pretend that I was very seriously moved when Louiseke died, too old to have attempted the experiment, in giving birth to a half-Flemish, half-Dravidian daughter, who died with her.: My Uncle Spencer, anxious to introduce! me to the Realities of Life, took me to see the corpse. Death had a little tempered Louiseke's ugliness. In the presence of that absolute repose I suddenly felt ashamed of having always disliked Louiseke so much. I wanted to be able to explain to her that, if only I had known she was going to die, I would have been nicer to her, I would have tried to like her more. And all at once I found myself crying.

Downstairs in the back parlour M.

Alphonse was crying too, noisily, lamentably, as was his duty. Three days later, when his duty had been sufficiently done and the conventions satisfied, he became all at once exceedingly philosophic about his loss. Louiseke's little income, was now his; and adding to it what he made by his cobbling, he could live in almost princely style. A week or two after the funeral the kermesse began. His old companions, who had danced several times backwards and forwards across the face of Europe since they were last in Longres, reappeared unexpectedly on the Grand' Place. Alphonse treated himself to the pleasure of playing the generous host, and every evening when their show was over the devils unhorned themselves, and over the glasses in the little back parlour behind Alphonse's shop they talked convivially of old times, and congratulated their companion, a little enviously, on his prodigious good fortune.

In the years immediately preceding the war I was not often in Longres. My parents had come back from India; my holidays were passed with them. And when holidays transformed themselves into university vacations and I was old enough to look after myself, I spent most of my leisure in travelling in France, Italy, or Germany, and it was only rarely and fleetingly — on the way to Milan, on my way back from Cologne, or after a fortnight among the Dutch picture

galleries — that I now revisited the house on the Grand' Place, where I had passed so many, and on the whole such happy, days. I liked my Uncle Spencer still, but he had ceased to be an admired being, and his opinions, instead of rooting themselves and proliferating within my mind, as once they did, seemed mostly, the light of my own knowledge and experience, too fantastic even to be worth refuting. I listened to him now with all the young man's intolerance of the opinions of the old (and my Uncle Spencer, though only fifty, seemed to me utterly fossilised and antediluvian), acquiescing in all that he said with a smile in which a more suspicious and less single-hearted man would have seen the amused contempt. My Uncle Spencer was leaning during these years more and more towards the occult sciences. He talked less of the construction of domes and more of Hahnemann's mystic high potentials, more of Swedenborg, more of Brahmanistic philosophy, in which he had by this time thoroughly indoctrinated M. Alphonse; and he was enthusiastic now about a new topic — the calculating horses of Elberfeld, which, at that time, were making a great noise in the world by their startling ability to extract cube roots in their heads. Strong in the materialistic philosophy, the careless and unreflecting scepticism which were, in those days, the orthodoxy of every young man who thought himself intelligent, I found my Uncle Spencer's mystical and religious preoccupations marvellously ludicrous. I should think them less ridiculous now, when it is the easy creed of my boyhood that has come to look rather queer. Now it is possible — it is, indeed, almost necessary — for a man of science to be also a mystic. But there were excuses then for supposing that one could only combine mysticism with the faulty knowledge and the fantastic mental eccentricity of an Uncle Spencer. One lives and learns.

With Mlle Leeauw, on these later visits, I felt, I must confess, not entirely at my ease. Antonieke saw me as essentially the same little boy who had come so regularly all those years, holiday after holiday, to Longres. Her talk with me was always of the joyous events of the past — of which she had that extraordinarily accurate and detailed memory which men and women, whose minds are not exercised by intellectual preoccupations and who do not read much, always

astonish their more studious fellows by possessing. Plunged as I then was in all the newly discovered delights of history, philosophy, and art, I was too busy to take more than a very feeble interest in my childish past. Had there been skating on the canals in 1905? Had I been bitten by a horse-fly, the summer before, so poisonously that my cheek swelled up like a balloon and I had to go to bed? Possibly, possibly; now that I was reminded of these things I did, dimly, remember. But of what earthly interest were facts such as these when I had Plato, the novels of Dostoievsky, the frescoes of Michelangelo to think of? How entirely irrelevant they were to, shall we say, David Hume! How insipid compared with the sayings of Zarathustra, the Coriolan overture, the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud! But for poor Antonieke they were all her life. I felt all the time that I was not being as sympathetic with her as I ought to have been. But was it my ‘fault? Could I rebecome what I had been, or make her suddenly different from what she was?

At the beginning of August 1914 I was staying at Longres on my way to the Ardennes, where I meant to settle down quietly for a month or so with two or three friends, to do a little solid reading before going south to Italy in September. Strong in the faith of the German professor who had proved, by the theories of ballistics and probabilities, that war was now out of the question, my Uncle Spencer paid no attention to the premonitory rumbles. It was just another little Agadir crisis and would lead to nothing. I too — absorbed, I remember, in the reading of William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* — paid no attention; I did not even look at the papers. At that time, still, my Uncle Spencer’s convictions about the impossibility of war were also mine; I had had no experience to make me believe them unfounded, and, besides, they fitted in very well with my hopes, my aspirations, my political creed — for at that time I was an ardent syndicalist and internationalist.

And then, suddenly, it was all on top of us. —

My Uncle Spencer, however, remained perfectly optimistic. After a week of fighting, he prophesied, the German professor would be proved right and they would have to stop. My own feeling, I remember, was one of a rather childish

exhilaration; my excitement was much more powerful than my shock of horror. I felt rather as I had felt on the eve of the kermesse when, looking from my window, I gazed down at the mountebanks setting up their booths and engines in the square below. Something was really going to happen. That childish sense of excitement is, I suppose, the prevailing emotion at the beginning of a war. An intoxicating Bank Holiday air seems to blow through the streets. War is always popular, at the beginning.

I did not return immediately to England, but lingered for a few days at Longres, in the vague hope that I might "see something," or that perhaps my Uncle Spencer might really — as I still believed — be right, and that, perhaps, the whole thing would be over in a few days. My hope that I should "see something" was fulfilled. But the something was not one of those brilliant and romantic spectacles I had imagined. It consisted of a few little troops of refugees from the villages round Liège — unshaven men, and haggard women with long tear-marks on their dusty cheeks, and little boys and girls tottering along as though in their sleep, dumb and stupid with fatigue. My Uncle Spencer took a family of them into his house. "In a few days," he said, "when everything's over, they'll be able to go home again." And when indignantly Antonieke repeated to him their stories of burnings and shootings, he wouldn't believe them.

"After all," he said, "this is the twentieth century. These things don't happen nowadays. These poor people are too tired and frightened to know exactly what they are saying."

In the second week of August I went back to England. My Uncle Spencer was quite indignant when I suggested that he should come back with me. To begin with, he said, it would all be over so very soon. In the second place, this was the twentieth century — which was what the Cretans said, no doubt, when in 1500 B.C., after two thousand years of peace, prosperity, and progressive civilisation, they were threatened by the wild men from the north. In the third place, he must stay at Longres to look after his interests. I did not press him any further; it would have been useless.

“Good-bye, dear boy,” he said, and there was an unaccustomed note of emotion in his voice, “good-bye.”

The train slowly moved away. Looking out of the window, I could see him standing on the platform, waving his hat. His hair was white all over now, but his face was as young, his eyes as darkly bright, his small spare body as straight and agile as when I had known him first.

“Good-bye, good-bye.”

I was not to see him again for nearly five years.

Louvain was burnt on the 19th of August. The Germans entered Brussels on the 20th. Longres, though farther east than Louvain, was not occupied till two or three days later — for the town lay off the direct route to Brussels and the interior. One of the first acts of the German commandant was to put my Uncle Spencer and M. Alphonse under arrest. It was not that they had done anything; it was merely to their existence that he objected. The fact that they were British subjects was in itself extremely incriminating.

“Aber wir sind,” my Uncle Spencer protested in his rather rudimentary German, “im zwanzigsten jahrhunderd. Und der — or is it das? — krieg wird nicht lang...” he stammered, searched hopelessly for the word, “well, in any case,” he concluded, relapsing into his own language and happy to be able to express his astonished protest with fluency, “it won’t last a week.”

“So we hope,” the commandant replied in excellent English, smiling. “But meanwhile I regret...”

My Uncle Spencer and his fellow-Briton were locked up for the time being in the lunatic asylum. A few days later they were sent under escort to Brussels. Alphonse, my Uncle Spencer told me afterwards, bore his misfortune with exemplary and oriental patience. Mute, uncomplaining, obedient, he stayed where his captors put him, like a large brown bundle left by the traveller on the platform, while he goes to the buffet for a drink and a sandwich. And more decile than a mere bundle, mutely, obediently, he followed wherever he was led.

“I wish I could have imitated him,” said my Uncle Spencer. “But I couldn’t. My blood fairly boiled.”

And from what I remembered of him in the sugar-making season I could imagine the depth, the fury of my Uncle Spencer's impatience and irritation.

"But this is the twentieth century," he kept repeating to the guards. "And I have nothing to do with your beastly war. And where the devil are you taking us? And how much longer are we to wait in this damned station without our lunch?" He spoke as a rich man, accustomed to being able to buy every convenience and consideration. The soldiers, who had the patience of poor men and were well used to being ordered hither and thither, to waiting indefinitely in the place where they were told to wait, could not understand this wild irritation against what they regarded as the natural order of things. My Uncle Spencer first amused them; then, as his impatience grew greater instead of less, he began to annoy them.

In the end, one of his guards lost patience too, and gave him a great kick in the breech to make him hold his tongue. My Uncle Spencer turned round and rushed at the man; but another soldier tripped him up with his rifle, and he tumbled heavily to the ground. Slowly he picked himself up; the soldiers were roaring with laughter. Alphonse, like a brown package, stood where they had put him, motionless, expressionless, his eyes shut.

In the top floor of the Ministry of the Interior the German authorities had established a sort of temporary internment camp. All suspicious persons — dubious foreigners, recalcitrant natives, any one suspected by the invaders of possessing a dangerous influence over his neighbours — were sent to Brussels and shut up in the Ministry of the Interior, to remain there until the authorities should have time to go into their case. It was into this makeshift prison that my Uncle Spencer and his Dravidian compatriot were ushered, one sweltering afternoon towards the end of August. In an ordinary year, my Uncle Spencer reflected, the kermesse at Longres would now be in full swing. The fat woman would be washing her face with her bosom, the Figaros would be re-enacting amid sobs the Passion of Our Saviour, the armless lady would be drinking healths with her toes, the vendor of raw mussels would be listening anxiously for the first hoarse sound that might be taken for a cough. Where were they all this

year, all these good people? And where was he himself? Incredulously he looked about him.

In the attics of the Ministry of the Interior the company was strange and mixed. There were Belgian noblemen whom the invaders considered it unsafe to leave in their châteaux among their peasantry. There were a Russian countess and an anarchist, incarcerated on account of their nationality. There was an opera singer, who might be an international spy. There was a little golden-haired male impersonator, who had been appearing at a music-hall in Liège, and whose offence, like that of my Uncle Spencer and the Dravidian, was to have been a British subject. There were a number of miscellaneous Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, caught on the wrong side of the border. There was an organ-grinder, who had gone on playing the “Brabançonne” when told to stop, and a whole collection of other Belgians, of all classes and both sexes, from every part of the country, who had committed some crime or other, or perhaps had contrived merely to look suspicious, and who were now waiting to have their fate decided, as soon as the authorities should have time to pay attention to them.

Into this haphazardly assembled society my Uncle Spencer and the Dravidian were now casually dropped. The door closed behind them; they were left, like new arrivals in hell, to make the best of their situation.

The top floor of the Ministry of the Interior was divided up into one very large and a number of small rooms, the latter lined, for the most part, with pigeon-holes and filing cabinets in which were stored the paper products of years of bureaucratic activity.

In the smaller chambers the prisoners had placed the straw mattresses allotted to them by their gaolers; the men slept in the rooms at one end of the corridor, the women in those at the other end. The big room, which must once have housed the staff of the Ministry’s registry, still contained a number of desks, tables, and chairs; it served now as the prisoners’ drawing-room, dining-room, and recreation ground. There was no bathroom, and only one washing - basin and one *chalet de nécessité,* as my Uncle Spencer, with a characteristic

euphemism, always called it. Life in the attics of the Ministry of the Interior was not particularly agreeable.

My Uncle Spencer noticed that those of the prisoners who were not sunk in gloom and a sickening anxiety for the future, preserved an almost too boisterous cheerfulness. You had, it seemed, either to take this sort of thing as a prodigious joke, or brood over it as the most horrible of nightmares. There seemed to be no alternative. In time, no doubt, the two extremes would level down to the same calm resignation. But confinement had still been too short for that; the situation was still too new, dream-like, and phantasmagorical, and fate too uncertain.

The cheerful ones abounded in japes, loud laughter, and practical jokes. They had created in the prison a kind of private-school atmosphere. Those whose confinement was oldest (and some had been in the Ministry for nearly a week now, almost from the day of the German entry into Brussels) assumed the inalienable right of seniors to make the new arrivals feel raw and uncomfortable. Each freshman was subjected to a searching cross-examination, like that which awaits the new boy at his first school. Sometimes, if the latest victim seemed particularly ingenuous, they would, play a little practical joke on him.

The leader of the cheerful party was a middle-aged Belgian journalist — a powerful, stout man, with carroty red moustaches and a high crimson complexion, a huge roaring voice and a boundless gift for laughter and genial Rabelaisian conversation. At the appearance of the meek Dravidian he had fairly whooped with delight. So great, indeed, was his interest in Alphonse that my Uncle Spencer escaped with the most perfunctory examination and the minimum of playful “ragging.” It was perhaps for the best; my Uncle Spencer was in no mood to be trifled with, even by a fellow-sufferer.

Round poor Alphonse the journalist immediately improvised a farce. Sitting like a judge at one of the desks in the large room, he had the Dravidian brought before him, giving him to understand that he was the German commissary who had to deal with his case. Under cross-examination the Dravidian was made to tell his whole history. Born, Madras; profession, cobbler — a clerk took down all his answers as he delivered them. When he spoke of devil dancing, the judge

made him give a specimen of his performance there and then in front of the desk. The question of his marriage with Louiseke was gone into in the most intimate detail. Convinced that his liberty and probably his life depended on his sincerity, Alphonse answered every question as truthfully as he possibly could.

In the end, the journalist, clearing his throat, gravely summed up and gave judgment. Innocent. The prisoner would forthwith be released. On a large sheet of official paper he wrote *laissez passer*, signed it Von der Golz, and, opening a drawer of the desk, selected from among the numerous official seals it contained that with which, in happier times, certain agricultural diplomas were stamped. On the thick red wax appeared the figure of a prize shorthorn cow with, round it, the words: “Pour l’amélioration de la race bovine.”

“Here,” roared the journalist, handing him the sealed paper. “You may go.”

Poor Alphonse took his *laissez passer* and, bowing at intervals almost to the ground, retreated backwards out of the room. Joyously he picked up his hat and his little bundle, ran to the door, knocked and called. The sentry outside opened to see what was the matter. Alphonse produced his passport.

“Aber wass ist das?” asked the sentry.

Alphonse pointed to the seal: for the amelioration of the bovine race; to the signature: Von der Golz. The sentry, thinking that it was he, not the Dravidian, who was the victim of the joke, became annoyed. He pushed Alphonse roughly back through the door; and when, protesting, propitiatively murmuring and smiling, the poor man advanced again to explain to the sentry his mistake, the soldier picked up his rifle and with the butt gave him a prod in the belly, which sent him back, doubled up and coughing, along the corridor. The door slammed to. Vainly, when he had recovered, Alphonse hammered and shouted. It did not open again. My Uncle Spencer found him standing there — knocking, listening, knocking again. The tears were streaming down his cheeks; it was a long time before my Uncle Spencer could make him understand that the whole affair had been nothing but a joke. At last, however, Alphonse permitted himself to be led off to his mattress. In silence he lay down and closed his eyes. In his right hand he still held the passport — firmly, preciously between his thick brown fingers.

He would not throw it away; not yet. Perhaps if he went to sleep this incident at the door would prove, when he woke up, to have been a dream. The paper would have ceased to be a joke, and when, to-morrow, he showed it again, who knew? the sentry would present arms and he would walk downstairs; and all the soldiers in the courtyard would salute and he would walk out into the sunny streets, waving the signature, pointing to the thick red seal.

Quite still he lay there. His arm was crossed over his body. From between the fingers of his hand hung the paper. Bold, as only the signature of a conquering general could be, Von der Golz sprawled across the sheet. And in the bottom right-hand corner, stamped in the red wax, the image of the sacred cow was like a symbol of true salvation from across the separating ocean and the centuries. *Pour l'amélioration — la race bovine.*

But might it not be more reasonable, in the circumstances, to begin with the human race?

My Uncle Spencer left him to go and expostulate with the journalist on the barbarity of his joke. He found the man sitting on the floor — for there were not enough chairs to go round — teaching the golden-haired male impersonator how to swear in French.

"And this," he was saying, in his loud, jolly voice, "this is what you must say to Von der Golz if ever you see him." And he let off a string of abusive words, which the little male impersonator carefully repeated, distorted by her drawling English intonation, in her clear, shrill voice: "Sari esspayss de coshaw." The journalist roared with delighted laughter and slapped his thighs. "What comes after that?" she asked.

"Excuse me," said my Uncle Spencer, breaking in on the lesson. He was blushing slightly. He never liked hearing this sort of language — and in the mouth of a young woman (a compatriot too, it seemed) it sounded doubly distressing. "Excuse me." And he begged the journalist not to play any more jokes on Alphonse. "He takes it too much to heart," he explained.

At his description of the Dravidian's despair, the little male impersonator was touched almost to tears. And the journalist, who, like all the rest of us, had a

heart of gold whenever he was reminded of its existence — and, like all the rest of us, he needed pretty frequent reminders; for his own pleasures and interests prevented him very often from remembering it — the journalist was extremely sorry at what he had done, declared that he had no idea that Alphonse would take the little farce so seriously, and promised for the future to leave him in peace.

The days passed; the nightmare became habitual, followed a routine. Three times a day the meagre supply of unappetising food arrived and was consumed. Twice a day an officer with a little squad of soldiers behind him made a tour of inspection. In the morning one waited for one's turn to wash; but the afternoons were immense gulfs of hot time, which the prisoners tried to fill with games, with talk, with the reading of ancient dossiers from the files, with solitary brooding or with pacing up and down the corridor — twenty steps each way, up and down, up and down, till one had covered in one's imagination the distance between one loved and familiar place and another. Up and down, up and down. My Uncle Spencer sometimes walked along the poplar-lined high road between Longres and Waret; sometimes from Charing Cross along the Strand, under the railway bridge and up the hill to St. Paul's, and from St. Paul's to the Bank, and from the Bank tortuously to the Tower of London, the river, and the ships. Sometimes he walked with his brother from Chamonix to the Montanvert; from Grenoble over the pass to the Grande Chartreuse. Sometimes, less strenuously, he walked with his long-dead mother through the glades of Windsor Forest, where the grass is so green in early summer that it seem! as though each blade were an emerald illumined from within; and here and there among the oak trees the dark-leaved rhododendrons light their innumerable rosy lamps.

In the evening the cheerful ones, with the journalist at their head, organised entertainments for the amusement of the company. The journalist himself recited poems of his own composition about the Kaiser. One of the Frenchmen did some amateur conjuring with packs of cards, handkerchiefs, and coins. The opera singer bawled out at the top of his prodigious tenor, "La donna è mobile,"

"O sole mio," and when something more serious was called for, César Franck's "Dieu s'avance à travers la lande"; which last, however, he sang in so

richly operatic a style that my Uncle Spencer, who was very fond of this particular song, could hardly recognise it. But the most popular turn was always that of “the celebrated diva, Emmy Wendle,” as the journalist called her, when he introduced her to the company. The enthusiasm was tremendous when Emmy Wendle appeared — dressed in an Eton jacket, broad starched collar, striped trousers, and a top hat, and carrying in her hand a little cane — did two or three rattling clog dances and sang a song with the chorus:

“We are the nuts that get the girls
Every time;
We get the ones with the curly curls,
We get the peaches, we get the pearls —
Every time.”

And when, at the end of the turn, she took off her top hat, and, standing rigidly at attention, like a soldier, her childish snubby little face very grave, her blue eyes fixed on visions not of this world, sang in her tuneless street-urchin’s voice an astonishingly English version of the “Brabançonne,” then there was something more than enthusiasm. For men would suddenly feel the tears coming into their eyes, and women wept outright; and when it was over, everybody violently stamped and clapped and waved handkerchiefs, and laughed, and shouted imprecations against the Germans, and said “Vive la Belgique!” and ran to Emmy Wendle, and took her hand, or slapped her on the back as though she had really been a boy, or kissed her — but as though she were not a girl, and dressed in rather tight striped trousers at that — kissed her as though she were a symbol of the country, a visible and charming personification of their own patriotism and misfortunes.

When the evening’s entertainment was over, the company began to disperse. Stretched on their hard mattresses along the floor, the prisoners uneasily slept or lay awake through the sultry nights, listening to the steps of the sentries in the court below and hearing every now and then through the unnatural silence of the

invaded town, the heavy beat, beat, beat of a regiment marching along the deserted street, the rumble and sharp, hoofy clatter of a battery on the move towards some distant front.

The days passed. My Uncle Spencer soon grew accustomed to the strange little hell into which he had been dropped. He knew it by heart. A huge, square room, low-ceilinged and stifling under the hot leads. Men in their shirt-sleeves standing, or sitting, some on chairs, some on the corner of a desk or a table, some on the floor. Some leaned their elbows on the window-sill and looked out, satisfying their eyes with the sight of the trees in the park across the street, breathing a purer air — for the air in the room was stale, twice-breathed, and smelt of sweat, tobacco, and cabbage soup.

From the first the prisoners had divided themselves, automatically almost, into little separate groups. Equal in their misery, they still retained their social distinctions. The organ-grinder and the artisans and peasants always sat together in one corner on the floor, playing games with a greasy pack of cards, smoking and, in spite of expostulations, in spite of sincere efforts to restrain themselves, spitting on the floor all round them.

“Mine!” the organ-grinder would say triumphantly, and plank down his ace of hearts. “Mine!” And profusely, to emphasise his satisfaction, he spat. “Ah, pardon!” Remembering too late, he looked apologetically round the room. “Excuse me.” And he would get up, rub the gob of spittle into the floor with his boot, and going to the window would lean out and spit again — not that he felt any need to, having spat only a moment before, but for the sake of showing that he had good manners and could spit out of the window and not on the floor when he thought of it.

Another separate group was that of the aristocracy. There was the little old count with a face like a teapot — such shiny round cheeks, such a thin, irrelevant nose; and the young count with the monocle — the one so exquisitely affable with every one and yet so remote and aloof under all his politeness, the other so arrogant in manner, but one could see, so wistfully wishing that his social position would permit him to mingle with his spiritual equals. The old-count

politely laughed whenever the journalist or some other member of the cheerful party made a joke; the young count scowled, till the only smooth surface left in his corrugated face was the monocle. But he longed to be allowed to join in the horse-play and the jokes. With the two counts were associated two or three rich and important citizens, among them during the first days my Uncle Spencer. But other interests were to make him abandon their company almost completely after a while.

On the fringes of their circle hovered occasionally the Russian countess. This lady spent most of the day in her sleeping apartment, lying on her mattress and smoking cigarettes. She had decided views about the respect that was due to her rank, and expected the wash-house to be immediately evacuated whenever she expressed a desire to use it. On being told that she must wait her turn, she flew into a rage. When she was bored with being alone, she would come into the living-room to find somebody to talk to. On one occasion she took my Uncle Spencer aside and told him at great length and with a wealth of intimate detail about the ninth and greatest love affair of her life. In future, whenever my Uncle Spencer caught sight of her turning her large, dark, rather protruding eyes round the room, he took care to be absorbed in conversation with somebody else.

Her compatriot, the anarchist, was a Jewish-looking man with a black beard and a nose like the figure six. He associated himself with none of the little groups, was delighted by the war, which he gleefully prophesied would destroy so-called civilisation, and made a point of being as disagreeable as he could to every one — particularly to the countess, whom he was able to insult confidentially in Russian. It was in obedience to the same democratic principles that he possessed himself of the only arm-chair in the prison — it must have been the throne of at least a *chef de division* — refusing to part with it even for a lady or an invalid. He sat in it immovably all day, put it between his mattress and the wall at night, and took it with him even into the wash-house and the *chalet de nécessité.*

The cheerful party grouped itself, planet fashion, round the radiant jollity of the journalist. His favourite amusement was hunting through the files for curious

dossiers which he could read out, with appropriate comments and improvised emendations to the assembled group. But the most relished of all his jokes was played ritually every morning when he went through the papers of nobility of the whole Belgic aristocracy (discovered, neatly stowed away, in a cupboard in the corridor), selecting from among the noble names a few high-sounding titles which he would carry with him to the chalet of necessity. His disciples included a number of burgesses, French and Belgian; a rather odious and spotty young English bank clerk caught on his foreign holiday; the Russian countess in certain moods; the male impersonator, on and off; and the opera singer.

With this last my Uncle Spencer, who was a great lover of music and even a moderately accomplished pianist, made frequent attempts to talk about his favourite art. But the opera singer, he found, was only interested in music in so far as it affected the tenor voice. He had consequently never heard of Bach or Beethoven. On Leoncavallo, however, on Puccini, Saint-Saëns, and Gounod he was extremely knowledgeable. He was an imposing personage, with a large, handsome face and the gracious, condescending smile of a great man who does not object to talking even with you. With ladies, as he often gave it to be understood, he had a great success. But his fear of doing anything that might injure his voice was almost as powerful as his lasciviousness and his vanity; he passed his life, like a monk of the Thebaid, in a state of perpetual conflict. Outwardly and professedly a member of the cheerful party, the opera singer was secretly extremely concerned about, his future. In private he discussed with my Uncle Spencer the horrors of the situation.

More obviously melancholy was the little grey-haired professor of Latin who spent most of the day walking up and down the corridor like a wolf in a cage, brooding and pining. Poor Alphonse, squatting with his back to the wall near the door, was another sad and solitary figure. Sometimes he looked thoughtfully about him, watching his fellow-prisoners at their various occupations with the air of an inhabitant of eternity watching the incomprehensible antics of those who live in time. Sometimes he would spend whole hours with closed eyes in a state

of meditation. When some one spoke to him, he came back to the present as though from an immense distance.

But, for my Uncle Spencer, how remote, gradually, they all became! They receded, they seemed to lose light; and with their fading the figure of Emmy Wendle came closer, grew larger and brighter. From the first moment he set eyes on her, sitting there on the floor, taking her lesson in vituperation from the journalist, my Uncle Spencer had taken particular notice of her. Making his way towards the pair of them, he had been agreeably struck by the childishness and innocence of her appearance — by the little snub nose, the blue eyes, the yellow hair, so stubbornly curly that she had to wear it cut short like a boy's, for there was no oiling down or tying back a long mane of it; even in her private feminine life there was a hint — and it only made her seem the more childish — of male impersonation. And then, coming within earshot, it had been "sarl esspayss de coshaw" and a string besides of less endearing locutions proceeding from these lips. Startling, shocking. But a moment later, when he was telling them how hardly poor Alphonse had taken the joke, she said the most charming things and with such real feeling in her cockney voice, such a genuine expression of sympathy and commiseration on her face, that my Uncle Spencer wondered whether he had heard aright, or if that "sarl coshaw" and all the rest could really have been pronounced by so delicate and sensitive a creature.

The state of agination in which, my Uncle Spencer had lived ever since his arrest, the astonishing and horrible novelty of his situation, had doubtless in some measure predisposed him to falling in love. For it frequently happens that one emotion — providing that it is not so powerful as to make us unconscious of anything but itself — will stimulate us to feel another. Thus danger, if it is not acute enough to cause panic, tends to attach us to those with whom we risk it, the feelings of compassion, sympathy, and even love being stimulated and quickened by apprehension. Grief, in the same way, often brings with it a need of affection and even, though we do not like to admit it to ourselves, even obscurely a kind of desire; so that a passion of sorrow will convert itself by scarcely perceptible degrees, or sometimes suddenly, into a passion of love. My

Uncle Spencer's habitual attitude towards women was one of extreme reserve. Once, as a young man, he had been in love and engaged to be married but the object of his affections had jilted him for somebody else. Since then, partly from a fear of renewing his disappointment, partly out of a kind of romantic fidelity to the unfaithful one, he had avoided women, or at least taken pains not to fall in love any more, living always in a state of perfect celibacy, which would have done credit to the most virtuous of priests. But the agitations of the last few days had disturbed all his habits of life and thought. Apprehension of danger, an indignation that was a very different thing from the recurrent irritability of the sugar-making season, profound bewilderment, and a sense of mental disorientation had left him without his customary defences and in a state of more than ordinary susceptibility; so that when he saw, in the midst of his waking nightmare, that charming childish head, when he heard those gentle words of sympathy for the poor Dravidian, he was strangely moved; and he found himself aware of Emmy Wendle as he had not been aware of any woman since the first unfaithful one of his youth had left him.

Everything conspired to make my Uncle Spencer take an interest in Emmy Wendie — everything, not merely his own emotional state, but the place, the time, the outward circumstances. He might have gone to see her at the music hall every night for a year; and though he might have enjoyed her turn — and as a matter of fact he would not, for he would have thought it essentially rather vulgar — though he might have found her pretty and charming, it would never have occurred to him to try to make her acquaintance or introduce himself into her history. But here, in this detestable makeshift prison, she took on a new significance, she became the personification of all that was gracious, sweet, sympathetic, of all that was not war. And at the end of her performance (still, it was true, in poorish taste, but more permissible, seeing that it was given for the comfort of the afflicted) how profoundly impressive was her singing of the "Brabançonne"! She had become great with the greatness of the moment, with the grandeur of the emotions to which she was giving utterance in that harsh guttersnipe's voice of hers — singing of exultations, agonies, and man's

unconquerable mind. We attribute to the symbol something of the sacredness of the thing or idea symbolised. Two bits of wood set cross-wise are not two ordinary bits of wood, and a divinity has hedged the weakest and worst of kings. Similarly, at any crisis in our lives, the most trivial object, or a person in himself insignificant, may become, for some reason, charged with all the greatness of the moment.

Even the “sarl coshaw” incident had helped to raise my Uncle Spencer’s interest in Emmy Wendle. For if she was gentle, innocent, and young, if she personified in her small, bright self all the unhappiness and all the courage of a country, of the whole afflicted world, she was also fallible, feminine, and weak; she was subject to bad influences, she might be led astray. And the recollection of those gross phrases, candidly, innocently, and openly uttered (as the most prudish can always utter them when they happen to be in an unfamiliar language, round whose words custom has not crystallised that wealth of associations which give to the native locutions their peculiar and, from age to age, varying significance), filled my Uncle Spencer with alarm and with a missionary zeal to rescue so potentially beautiful and even grand a nature from corruption.

For her part, Emmy Wendle was charmed, at any rate during the first days, of their acquaintance, with my Uncle Spencer. He was English, to begin with, and spoke her language; he was also — which the equally English and intelligible bank clerk was not — a gentleman. More important for Emmy, in her present mood, he did not attempt to flirt with her. Emmy wanted no admirers, at the moment. In the present circumstances she felt that it would have been wrong, uncomely, and rather disreputable to think of flirtation. She sang the “Brabançonne” with too much religious ardour for that; the moment was too solemn, too extraordinary. True, the solemnity of the moment and the ardour of her patriotic feelings might, if a suitable young man had happened to find himself with her in the attics of the Ministry of the Interior, have caused her to fall in love with a fervour having almost the religious quality of her other feelings. But no suitable young man, unfortunately, presented himself. The bank clerk had spots on his face and was not a gentleman, the journalist was middle-

aged and too stout. Both tried to flirt with her. But their advances had, for Emmy, all the impropriety of a flirtation in a sacred place. With my Uncle Spencer, however, she felt entirely safe. It was not merely that he had white hair; Emmy had lived long enough to know that that symbol was no guarantee of decorous behaviour — on the contrary; but because he was, obviously, such a gentleman, because of the signs of unworldliness and mild idealism stamped all over his face.

At first, indeed, it was only to escape from the tiresome and indecorous attentions of the bank clerk and the journalist that she addressed herself to Uncle Spencer. But she soon came to like his company for its own sake; she began to take an interest in what he said, she listened seriously to my Uncle Spencer's invariably serious conversation — for he never talked except on profitable and intellectual themes, having no fund of ordinary small talk.

During the first days Emmy treated him with the respectful courtesy which, she felt, was due to a man of his age, position, and character. But later, when he began to follow her with his abject adoration, she became more familiar. Inevitably; for one cannot expect to be treated as old and important by some one at whom one looks with the appealing eyes of a dog. She called him Uncle Spenny and ordered him about, made him carry and fetch as though he were a trained animal. My Uncle Spencer was only too delighted, of course, to obey her. He was charmed by the familiarities she took with him. The period of her pretty teasing familiarity (intermediate between her respectfulness and her later cruelty) was the happiest, so far as my Uncle Spencer was concerned, in their brief connection. He loved and felt himself, if not loved in return, at least playfully tolerated.

Another man would have permitted himself to take liberties in return, to be sportive, gallant, and importunate. But my Uncle Spencer remained gravely and tenderly himself. His only reprisal for "Uncle Spenny" and the rest was to call her by her Christian name instead of "Miss Wendle," as he had always solemnly done before. Yes, Emmy felt herself safe with Uncle Spenny; almost too safe, perhaps.

My Uncle Spencer’s conversations were always, as I have s aid, of a very serious cast. They were even more serious at this time than usual; for the catastrophe, and now his passion, had brought on in his mind a very severe fit of thinking. There was so much that, in the light of the happenings of the last few weeks, needed reconsidering. From the German professor’s theory to the problem of good and evil; from the idea of progress (for, after all, was not this the twentieth century?) to the austere theory and the strange new fact of love; from internationalism to God — everything had to be considered afresh. And he considered them out loud with Emmy Wendle. Goodness, for example, was that no more than a relative thing, an affair of social conventions, gauged by merely local and accidental standards? Or was there something absolute, ultimate, and fundamental about the moral idea? And God — could God be absolutely good? And was there such a vast difference between the twentieth and other centuries?

Could fact ever rhyme with ideal? All these disturbing questions had to be asked and answered to his own satisfaction once again. —

It was characteristic of my Uncle Spencer that he answered them all — even after taking into consideration everything that had happened — on the hopeful side, just as he had done before the catastrophe; and what was more, with a deeper conviction. Before, he had accepted the cheerful idealistic view a little too easily. He had inherited it from the century in which he was born, had sucked it in from the respectable and ever-prospering elders among whom he had been brought up. Circumstances were now making that facile cheerfulness seem rather stupid. But it was precisely because he had to reconsider the objections to optimism, the arguments against hopefulness, not theoretically in the void, but practically and in the midst of personal and universal calamity (the latter very bearable if one is comfortably placed oneself, but real, but disturbing, if one is also suffering a little), that he now became convinced, more hardly but more profoundly, of the truth of what he had believed before, but lightly and, as he now saw, almost accidentally. Events were shortly to disturb this new-found conviction.

Emmy listened to him with rapture. The circumstances, the time, the place, inclined her to the serious and reflective mood. My Uncle Spencer's discourses were just what she needed at this particular moment. Naturally superstitious, she lived at all times under the protection of a small gold lucky pig and a coral cross which had once belonged to her mother. And when luck was bad, she went to church and consulted crystal gazers. That time she broke her leg and had to cancel that wonderful engagement to tour in Australia, she knew it was because she had been neglecting God in all the prosperous months before; she prayed and she promised amendment. When she got better, God sent her an offer from Cohen's Provincial Alhambras Ltd., in token that her repentance was accepted and she was forgiven. And now, though she had seemed to belong to the cheerful party in the attics of the Ministry of the Interior, her thoughts had secretly been very grave. At night, lying awake on her mattress, she wondered in the darkness what was the reason of all this — the war, her bad luck in getting caught by the Germans. Yes, what could the reason be? Why was God angry with her once again?

But of course she knew why. It was all that dreadful, dreadful business last June when she was working at Wimbledon. That young man who had waited for her at the stage door; and would she do him the honour of having supper with him? And she had said yes, though it was all against her rules. Yes: because he had such a beautiful voice, so refined, almost like a very high-class West and actor's voice. "I came to see the marionettes," he told her. "Marionettes never seem to get farther than the suburbs, do they? But I stayed for you."

They drove in a taxi all the way from Wimbledon to Piccadilly. "Some day," she said, pointing to the Pavilion, "you'll see my name there, in big electric letters: EMMY WENDLE." A hundred pounds a week and the real West End. What a dream!

He had such beautiful manners and he looked so handsome when you saw him in the light. They had champagne for supper.

In the darkness, Emmy blushed with retrospective shame. She buried her face in the pillow as though she were trying to hide from some searching glance. No

wonder God was angry. In an agony she kissed the coral cross. She pulled at the blue ribbon, at the end of which, between her two small breasts, hung the golden pig; she held the mascot in her hand, tightly, as though hoping to extract from it something of that power for happiness stored mysteriously within it, as the power to attract iron filings is stored within the magnet.

A few feet away the Russian countess heavily breathed. At the stertorous sound Emmy shuddered, remembering the wickedness that slumbered so near her. For if she herself had ceased to be, technically, a good girl, she was — now that her luck had turned — ashamed of it, she knew, from God's anger, that she had done wrong. But the countess, if sleep had not overtaken her, would have gone on boasting all night about her lovers. To middle-class Emmy the countess's frankness, her freedom from the ordinary prejudices, her aristocratic contempt for public opinion, and her assumption — the assumption of almost all idle women and of such idle as have nothing better to do or think about — that the only end of life is to make love, complicatedly, at leisure and with a great many people, seemed profoundly shocking. It didn't so much matter that she wasn't a good girl — or rather a good ripe widow. What seemed to Emmy so dreadful was that she should talk about it as though not being good were natural, to be taken for granted, and even positively meritorious. No wonder God was angry.

To Emmy my Uncle Spencer — or shall I call him now her Uncle Spenny? — came as a comforter and sustainer in her remorseful misery. His wandering speculations were not, it was true, always particularly relevant to her own trouble; nor did she always understand what he was talking about. But there was a certain quality in all his discourses, whatever the subject, which she found uplifting and sustaining. Thus my Uncle Spencer quoting Swedenborg to prove that, in spite of all present appearances to the contrary, things were probably all right, was the greatest of comforts. There was something about him like a very high-class clergyman — a West End clergyman, so to say. When he talked she felt better and in some sort safer.

He inspired in her so much confidence that one day, while the journalist was playing some noisy joke that kept all the rest of the company occupied, she took him aside into the embrasure of one of the windows and told him all, or nearly all, about the episode on account of which God was now so angry. My Uncle Spencer assured her that God didn't see things in quite the way she imagined; and that if He had decided that there must be a European War, it was not, in all human probability, to provide an excuse for getting Emmy Wendle — however guilty — locked up in the attics of the Ministry of the Interior at Brussels. As for the sin itself, my Uncle Spencer tried to make her believe that it was not quite so grave as she thought. He did not know that she only thought it grave because she was in prison and, naturally, depressed.

"No, no," he said comfortingly, "you mustn't take it to heart like that."

But the knowledge that this exquisite and innocent young creature had once — and if once, why not twice, why not (my Uncle Spencer left to his own midnight thoughts feverishly speculated), why not fifty times? — fallen from virtue distressed him. He had imagined her, it was true, surrounded by bad influences, like the journalist; but between being taught to say "sarl coshaw" and an actual lapse from virtue, there was a considerable difference. It had never occurred to my Uncle Spencer that Emmy could have got beyond the "coshaw" stage. And now he had it from her own lips that she had.

Celibate like a priest, my Uncle Spencer had not enjoyed the priest's: vicarious experience in the confessionals, He had not read those astonishing handbooks of practical psychology, fruit of the accumulated wisdom of centuries, from which the seminarist learns to understand his penitents, to classify and gauge their sins, and, incidentally — so crude, bald, and uncompromising are the descriptions of human vice that they contain — to loathe the temptations which, when rosily and delicately painted, can seem so damnably alluring. His ignorance of human beings was enormous. In his refinement he had preferred not to know; and circumstances, so far, had wonderfully conspired to spare him knowledge.

Years afterwards, I remember, when we met again, he asked me after a silence, and speaking with an effort, as though overcoming a repugnance, what I really thought about women and all “that sort of thing.” It was a subject about which at that time I happened to feel with the bitterness and mirthful cynicism of one who has been only too amply successful in love with the many in whom he took no interest, and lamentably and persistently unsuccessful with the one being, in whose case success would have been in the least worth while:

“You really think, then,” said my Uncle Spencer, when I paused for breath, “that a lot of that sort of thing actually does go on?”

I really did.

He sighed and shut his eyes, as though to conceal their expression from me. He was thinking of Emmy Wendle. How passionately he had hoped that I should prove her, necessarily and *a* virtuous!

There are certain sensitive and idealistic people in whom the discovery that the world is what it is brings on a sudden and violent reaction towards cynicism. From soaring in spheres of ideal purity they rush down into the mud, rub their noses in it, eat it, bathe and wallow. They lacerate their own highest feelings and delight in the pain. They take pleasure in defiling the things which before they thought beautiful and noble; they pore with a disgusted attention over the foul entrails of the things whose smooth and lovely skin was what they had once worshipped. —

Swift, surely, was one these — the greatest of them. His type our islands still produce; and more copiously, perhaps, during the last two or three generations than ever before. For the nineteenth century specialised in that romantic, optimistic idealism which postulates that man is on the whole good and inevitably becoming better. The idealism of the men of the Middle Ages was more sensible; for it insisted, to begin with, that man was mostly and essentially bad, a sinner by instinct and heredity. Their ideals, their religion, were divine and unnatural antidotes to original sin. They saw the worst first and could be astonished by no horror — only by the occasional miracle of sweetness and light. But their descendants of the romantic, optimistic, humanitarian century, in

which my Uncle Spencer was born and brought up, vented their idealism otherwise. They began by seeing the best; they insisted that men were naturally good, spiritual, and lovely. A sensitive youth brought up in this genial creed has only to come upon a characteristic specimen of original sin to be astonished, shocked, and disillusioned into despair. Circumstances and temperament had permitted my Uncle Spencer to retain his romantic optimism very much longer than most men.

The tardy recognition of the existence of original sin disturbed my Uncle Spencer's mind. But the effects of it were not immediate. At the moment, while he was in Emmys' pretty and intoxicating presence, and while she was still kind, he could not believe that she too had her share of original sin. And even when he forced himself to do so, her childish ingenuous face was in itself a complete excuse. It was later — and especially when he was separated from her — that the poison began slowly to work, embittering his whole spirit. At present Emmy's confession only served to increase his passion for her. For, to begin with, it made her seem more than ever in need of protection. And next, by painfully satisfying a little of his curiosity about her life, it quickened his desire to know all, to introduce himself completely into her history. And at the same time it provoked a retrospective jealousy, together with an intense present suspiciousness and an agonised anticipation of future dangers. His passion became like a painful disease. He pursued her with an incessant and abject devotion.

Relieved, partly by my Uncle Spencer's spiritual ministrations, partly by the medicating power of time, from her first access of remorse, depression, and self-reproach, Emmy began to recover her normal high spirits. My Uncle Spencer became less necessary to her as a comforter. His incomprehensible speculations began to bore her. Conversely, the jokes of the cheerful ones seemed more funny, while the gallantries of the journalist and the bank clerk appeared less repulsive, because — now that her mood had changed — they struck her as less incongruous and indecorous. She was no longer, spiritually speaking, in church. In church, my Uncle Spencer's undemonstrative and unimportunate devotion had seemed beautifully in place. But now that she was emerging again out of the

dim religious into the brightly secular mood, she found it rather ridiculous and, since she did not return the adoration, tiresome.

“If you could just see yourself now, Uncle Spenny,” she said to him, “the way you look.”

And she drew down the corners of her mouth, then opened her eyes in a fishy, reverential stare. Then the grimace in which my Uncle Spencer was supposed to see his adoration truly mirrored, disintegrated in laughter; the eyes screwed themselves up, a little horizontal wrinkle appeared near the tip of the snub nose, the mouth opened, waves of mirth seemed to ripple out from it across the face, and a shrill peal of laughter mocked him into an attempted smile.

“Do I really look like that?” he asked.

“You really do,” Emmy nodded. “Not a very cheerful thing to have staring at one day and night, is it?”

Sometimes — and this to my Uncle Spencer was inexpressibly painful — she would even bring in some third person to share the sport at his expense; she would associate the bank clerk, the opera singer, or the journalist in her mocking laughter. The teasing which, in the first days, had been so light and affectionate, became cruel.

Emmy would have been distressed, no doubt, if she had known how much she hurt him. But he did not complain. All she knew was that my Uncle Spencer was ridiculous. The temptation to say something smart and disagreeable about him was irresistible.

To my Uncle Spencer’s company she now preferred that of the journalist, the bank clerk, and the opera singer. With the bank clerk she talked about West End actors and actresses, music-hall artists, and cinema stars. True, he was not much of a gentleman; but on this absorbing subject he was extremely knowledgeable. The singer revealed to her the gorgeous and almost unknown universe of the operatic stage — a world of art so awe-inspiringly high that it was above even the West End. The journalist told her spicy stories of the Brussels stage. My Uncle Spencer would sit at the fringes of the group, listening in silence and across a gulf of separation, while Emmy and the bank clerk agreed that Clarice

Mayne was sweet, George Robey a scream, and Florence Smithson a really high-class artist. When asked for his opinion, my Uncle Spencer always had to admit that he had never seen the artist in question. Emmy and the bank clerk would set up a howl of derision; and the opera singer, with biting sarcasm, would ask my Uncle Spencer how a man who professed to be fond of music could have gone through life without even making an attempt to hear Caruso. My Uncle Spencer was too sadly depressed to try to explain.

The days passed. Sometimes a prisoner would be sent for and examined by the German authorities. The little old nobleman like a teapot was released a week after my Uncle Spencer's arrival; and a few days later the haughty and monocled one disappeared. Most of the peasants next vanished. Then the Russian anarchist was sent for, lengthily examined and sent back again, to find that his arm-chair was being occupied by the journalist.

In the fourth week of my Uncle Spencer's imprisonment Alphonse fell ill. The poor man had never recovered from the effects of the practical joke that had been played upon him on the day of his arrival. Melancholy, oppressed by fears, the more awful for being vague and without a definite object (for he could never grasp why and by whom he had been imprisoned; and as to his ultimate fate — no one could persuade him that it was to be anything but the most frightful and lingering of deaths), he sat brooding by himself in a corner. His free pardon, signed Von der Golz and sealed with the image of the Sacred Cow, he still preserved; for though he was now intellectually certain that the paper was valueless, he still hoped faintly in the depths of his being that it might turn out, one day, to be a talisman; and, in any case, the image of the Cow was very comforting. Every now and then he would take the paper out of his pocket, tenderly unfold it and gaze with large sad eyes at the sacred effigy: *Pour l'amélioration de la race bovine* — and tears would well up from under his eyelids, would hang suspended among the lashes and roll at last down his brown cheeks.

They were not so round now, those cheeks, as they had been. The skin sagged, the bright convex high-lights had lost their brilliance. Miserably he

pined. My Uncle Spencer did his best to cheer him. Alphonse was grateful, but would take no comfort. He had lost all interest even in women; and when, learning from my Uncle Spencer that the Indian was something of a prophet, Emmy asked him to read her hand, he looked at her listlessly as though she had been a mere male and not a male impersonator, and shook his head.

One morning he complained that he was feeling too ill to get up. His head was hot, he coughed, breathed shortly and with difficulty, felt a pain in his right lung. My Uncle Spencer tried to think what Hahnemann would have prescribed in the circumstances, and came to the conclusion that the thousandth of a grain of aconite was the appropriate remedy. Unhappily, there was not so much as a millionth of a grain of aconite to be found in all the prison. Inquiry produced only a bottle of aspirin tablets and, from the Russian countess, a packet of cocaine snuff. It was thought best to give the Dravidian a dose of each and wait for the doctor.

At his midday visit the inspecting officer was informed of Alphonse's state, and promised to have the doctor sent at once. But it was not, in point of fact, till the next morning that the doctor came. My Uncle Spencer, Meanwhile, constituted himself the Dravidian's nurse. The fact that Alphonse was the widower of his housekeeper's sister, and Shad lived in his city of adoption, made my Uncle Spencer feel somehow responsible for the poor Indian. Moreover, he was glad to have some definite occupation which would allow him to forget, if only partially and for an occasional moment, his unhappy passion.

From the first, Alphonse was certain that he was going to die. To my Uncle Spencer he foretold his impending extinction, not merely with equanimity, but almost with satisfaction. For by dying, he felt, he would be spiting and cheating his enemies, who desired so fiendishly to put an end to him at their own time and in their own horrible fashion. It was in vain that my Uncle Spencer assured him that he would not die, that there was nothing serious the matter with him. Alphonse stuck to his assertion.

"In eight days," he said, "I shall be dead."

And shutting his eyes, he was silent.

The doctor, when he came next day, diagnosed acute lobar pneumonia. Through the oppression of his fever, Alphonse smiled at my Uncle Spencer with a look almost of triumph. That night he was delirious and began to rave in a language my Uncle Spencer could not understand.

My Uncle Spencer listened in the darkness to the Dravidian's incomprehensible chattering; and all at once, with a shudder, with a sense of terror he felt — in the presence of this man of another race, speaking in an unknown tongue words uttered out of obscure depths for no man's hearing and which even his own soul did not hear or understand — he felt unutterably alone. He was imprisoned within himself. He was an island surrounded on every side by wide and bottomless solitudes. And while the Indian chattered away, now softly, persuasively, cajolingly, now with bursts of anger, now loudly laughing, he thought of all the millions and millions of men and women in the world — all alone, all solitary and confined. He thought of friends, incomprehensible to one another and opaque after a lifetime of companionship; he thought of lovers remote in one another's arms. And the hopelessness of his passion revealed itself to him — the hopelessness of every passion, since every passion aims at attaining to what, in the nature of things, is unattainable: the fusion and interpenetration of two lives, two separate histories, two solitary and for ever sundered individualities.

The Indian roared with laughter.

But the unattainableness of a thing was never a reason for ceasing to desire it. On the contrary, it tends to increase and even to create desire. Thus our love for those we know, and our longing to be with them, are often increased by their death. And the impossibility of ever communicating with him again will actually create out of indifference an affection, a respect and esteem for some one whose company in life seemed rather tedious than desirable. So, for the lover, the realisation that what he desires is unattainable, and that every possession will reveal yet vaster tracts of what is unpossessed and unpossessable, is not a deterrent, is not an antidote to his passion; but serves rather to exacerbate his

desire, sharpening it to a kind of desperation, and at the same time making the object of his desire seem more than ever precious.

The Indian chattered on, a ghost among the ghosts of his imagination, remote as though he were speaking from another world. And Emmy — was she not as far away, as unattainable? And being remote, she was the more desirable; being mysterious, she was the more lovely. A more brutal and experienced man than my Uncle Spencer would have devoted all his energies to seducing the young woman, knowing that after a time the satisfaction of his physical desire would probably make him cease to take any interest in her soul or her history. But physical possession was the last thing my Uncle Spencer thought of, and his love had taken the form of an immense desire for the impossible union, not of bodies, but of minds and lives. True, what he had so far learned about her mind and history was not particularly encouraging. But for my Uncle Spencer her silliness, love of pleasure, and frivolity were strange and mysterious qualities — for he had known few women in his life and none, before, like Emmy Wendle — rather lovely still in their unfamiliarity, and if recognised as at all bad, excused as being the symptoms of charming childishness and an unfortunate upbringing. Her solicitude, that first day, about poor Alphonse convinced him that she was fundamentally good-hearted; and if she had proved herself cruel since then towards himself, that was more by mistake and because of surrounding bad influences than from natural malignity. And, then, there was the way in which she sang the “Brabançonne.” It was noble, it was moving. To be able to sing like that one must have a fine and beautiful character. In thinking like this, my Uncle Spencer was forgetting that no characteristic is incompatible with any other, that any deadly sin may be found in company with any cardinal virtue, even the apparently contradictory virtue. But unfortunately that is the kind of wisdom which one invariably forgets precisely at the moment when it might be of use to one. One learns it almost in the cradle; at any rate, I remember at my preparatory school reading, in Professor Oman’s *Shorter History of England*, of “the heroic though profligate Duke of Ormond,” and of a great English king who was none the less, “a stuttering, lolling pedant with a tongue too big for his mouth.” But

though one knows well enough in theory that a duke can be licentious as well as brave, that majestic wisdom may be combined with pedantry and defective speech, yet in practice one continues to believe that an attractive woman is kind because she is charming, and virtuous because she rejects your first advances; without reflecting that the grace of her manner may thinly conceal an unyielding ruthlessness and selfishness, while the coyness in face of insistence may be a mere device for still more completely ensnaring the victim. It is only in the presence of unsympathetic persons that we remember that the most odious actions are compatible with the most genuinely noble sentiments, and that a man or woman who does one thing, while professing another, is not necessarily a conscious liar or hypocrite. If only we could steadfastly bear this knowledge in mind when we are with persons whom we find sympathetic!

Desiring Emmy as passionately as he did, my Uncle Spencer would not have had much difficulty in persuading himself — even in spite of her recent cruelty towards him — that the spirit with which he longed to unite his own Was on the whole a beautiful and interesting spirit; would indeed have had no difficulty at all, had it not been for that unfortunate confession of hers. This, though it flattered him as a token of her confidence in his discretion and wisdom, had sadly disturbed him and was continuing to disturb him more and more. For out of all her history — the history in which it was his longing to make himself entirely at home as though he had actually lived through it with her — this episode was almost the only chapter he knew. Like a thin ray of light her confession had picked it out for him, from the surrounding obscurity. And what an episode! The more my Uncle Spencer reflected on it, the more he found it distressing.

The brutal practical man my Uncle Spencer was not would have taken this incident from the past as being of good augury for his own future prospects. But since he did not desire, consciously at any rate the sort of success it augured, the knowledge of this incident brought him an unadulterated distress. For however much my Uncle Spencer might insist in his own mind on the guiltiness of external circumstance and of the other party, he could not entirely exonerate

Emmy. Nor could he pretend that she had not in some sort, if only physically, taken part in her own lapse. And perhaps she had participated willingly. And even if she had not, the thought that she had been defiled, however reluctantly, by the obscene contact was unspeakably painful to him. And while the Indian raved, and through the long, dark silences during which there was no sound but the unnaturally quick and shallow breathing, and sometimes a moan, and sometimes a dry cough, my Uncle Spencer painfully thought and thought; and his mind oscillated between a conviction of her purity and the fear that perhaps she was utterly corrupt. He saw in his imagination, now her childish face and the rapt expression upon it while she sang the "Brabançonne," now the sweet, solicitous look while she commiserated on poor Alphonse's unhappiness, and then, a moment later, endless embracements, kisses brutal and innumerable. And always he loved her.

Next day the Dravidian's fever was still high. The doctor, when he came, announced that red hepatisation of both lungs was already setting in. It was a grave case which ought to be at the hospital; but he had no authority to have the man sent there. He ordered tepid spongings to reduce the fever.

In the face of the very defective sanitary arrangements of the prison, my Uncle Spencer did his best. He had a crowd of willing assistants; everybody was anxious to do something helpful.

Nobody was more anxious than Emmy Wendle. The forced inaction of prison life, even when it was relieved by the jokes of the cheerful ones, by theatrical discussions and the facetious gallantry of the bank clerk and the journalist, was disagreeable to her. And the prospect of being able to do something, and particularly (since it was war-time, after all) of doing something useful and charitable, was welcomed by her with a real satisfaction. She sat by the Dravidian's mattress, talked to him, gave him what he asked for, did the disagreeable jobs that have to be done in the sick-room, ordered my Uncle Spencer and the others about, and seemed completely happy.

For his part, my Uncle Spencer was delighted by what he regarded as a reversion to her true self. There could be no doubt about it now: Emmy was

good, was kind, a ministering angel, and therefore (in spite of the professor's heroic though profligate duke), therefore pure, therefore interesting, therefore worthy of all the love he could give her. He forgot the confession, or at least he ceased to attach importance to it; he was no longer haunted by the odious images which too much brooding over it evoked in his mind. What convinced him, perhaps, better than everything of her essential goodness, was the fact that she was once more kind to him. Her young energy, fully occupied in practical work (which was not, however, sufficiently trying to overtax the strength or set the nerves on edge), did not have to vent itself in laughter and mockery, as it had done when she recovered from the mood of melancholy which had depressed it during the first days of her imprisonment. They were fellow-workers now.

The Dravidian, meanwhile, grew worse and worse, weaker and weaker every day. The doctor was positively irritated.

"The man has no business to be so ill as he is," he grumbled. "He's not old, he isn't an alcoholic or a syphilitic, his constitution is sound enough. He's just letting himself die. At this rate he'll never get past the crisis."

At this piece of news Emmy became grave. She had never seen death at close quarters — a defect in her education which my Uncle Spencer, if he had had the bringing up of her, would have remedied.

For death was one of those Realities of Life with which, he thought, every one ought to make the earliest possible acquaintance. Love, on the other hand, was not one of the desirable Realities. It never occurred to him to ask himself the reason for this invidious distinction. Indeed, there was no reason; it just was so.

"Tell me, Uncle Spenny," she whispered, when the doctor had gone, "what *does* really happen to people when they die?"

Charmed by this sign of Emmy's renewed interest in serious themes, my Uncle Spencer explained to her what Alphonse at any rate thought would happen to him.

At midday, over the repeated cabbage soup and the horrible boiled meat, the bank clerk, with characteristically tasteless facetiousness, asked, "How's our one little nigger boy?"

Emmy looked at him with disgust and anger. “I think you’re perfectly horrible,” she said. And, lowering her voice reverently, she went on, “The doctor says he’s going to die.”

The bank clerk was unabashed. “Oh, he’s going to kick the bucket, is he? Poor old blacky!”

Emmy made no answer; there was a general silence. It was as though somebody had started to make an unseemly noise in a church.

Afterwards, in the privacy of the little room, where, among the filing cabinets and the dusty papers, the Dravidian lay contentedly dying, Emmy turned to my Uncle Spencer and said, “You know, Uncle Spenny, I think you’re a wonderfully decent sort. I do, really.”

My Uncle Spencer was too much overcome to say anything but “Emmy, Emmy,” two or three times. He took her hand and, very gently, kissed it.

That afternoon they went on talking about all the things that might conceivably happen after one were dead. Emmy told my Uncle Spencer all that she had thought when she got the telegram — two years ago it was, and she was working in a hall at Glasgow, one of her first engagements, too — saying that her father had suddenly died. He drank too much, her father did; and he wasn’t kind to mother when he wasn’t himself. But she had been very fond of him, all the same; and when that telegram came she wondered and wondered....

My Uncle Spencer listened attentively, happy in having this new glimpse of her past; he forgot the other incident, which the beam of her confession had illumined for him.

Late that evening, after having lain for a long time quite still, as though he were asleep, Alphonse suddenly stirred, opened his large black eyes, and began to talk, at first in the incomprehensible language which came from him in delirium, then, when he realised that his listeners did not understand him, more slowly and in his strange pidgin-French.

“I have seen everything just now,” he said—” everything.”

“But what?” they asked.

“All that is going to happen. I have seen that this war will last a long time — a long time. More than fifty months.” And he prophesied enormous calamities.

My Uncle Spencer, who knew for certain that the war couldn’t possibly last more than three months, was incredulous. But Emmy, who had no preconceived ideas on war and a strong faith in oracles, stopped him impatiently when he wanted to bring the Dravidian to silence.

“Tell me,” she said, “what’s going to happen to us.” She had very little interest in the fate of civilisation.

“I am going to die,” Alphonse began.

My Uncle Spencer made certain deprecating little noises. “No, no,” he protested.

The Indian paid no attention to him. “I am going to die,” he repeated. “And you,” he said to my Uncle Spencer, “you will be let go and then again be put into prison. But not here. Somewhere else. A long way off. For a long time — a very long time. You will be very unhappy.” He shook his head. “I cannot help it; even though you have been so good to me. That is what I see. But the man who deceived me” — he meant the journalist—” he will very soon be set free and he will live in freedom, all the time. In such freedom as there will be here. And he who sits in the chair will at last go back to his own country. And he who sings will go free like the man who deceived me. And the small grey man will be sent to another prison in another country. And the fat woman with a red mouth will be sent to another country; but she will not be in prison. I think she will be married there — again.” The portraits were recognisably those of the Russian countess and the professor of Latin. “And the man with carbuncles on his face” (this was the bank clerk, no doubt) “will be sent to another prison in another country; and there he will die. And the woman in black who is so sad...”

But Emmy could bear to wait no longer. “What about me?” she asked. “Tell me what you see about me.”

The Dravidian closed his eyes and was silent for a moment. “You will be set free,” he said. “Soon. And some day,” he went on, “you will be the wife of this good man.” He indicated my Uncle Spencer. “But not yet; not for a long time;

till all this strife is at an end. You will have children... good fortune....” His words grew fainter; once more he closed his eyes. He sighed as though utterly exhausted. “Beware of fair strangers,” he murmured, reverting to the old familiar formula. He said no more.

Emmy and my Uncle Spencer were left looking at one another in silence.

“What do you think, Uncle Spenny?” she whispered at last. “Is it true?

Two hours later the Indian was dead.

My Uncle Spencer slept that night, or rather did not sleep, in the living-room. The corpse lay alone among the archives. The words of the Indian continued to echo and re-echo in his mind: “Some day you will be the wife of this kind man.” Perhaps, he thought, on the verge of death, the spirit already begins to try its wings in the new world. Perhaps already it has begun to! know the fringes, as it were, of secrets that are to be revealed to it. To my Uncle Spencer there was nothing repugnant in the idea. There was room in his universe for what are commonly and perhaps wrongly known as miracles. Perhaps the words were a promise, a statement of future fact. Lying on his back, his eyes fixed on the dark blue starry sky beyond the open window, he meditated on that problem of fixed fate and free will, with which the devils in Milton’s hell wasted their infernal leisure. And like a refrain the words repeated themselves: “Some day you will be the wife of this good man.” The stars moved slowly across the opening of the window. He did not sleep.

In the morning an order came for the release of the Journalist and the opera singer. Joyfully they said good-bye to their fellow-prisoners; the door closed behind them. Emmy turned to my Uncle Spencer with a look almost of terror in her eyes; the Indian’s prophesies were already beginning to come true. But they said nothing to one another. Two days later the bank clerk left for an internment camp in Germany.

And then, one morning, my Uncle Spencer himself was sent for. The order came quite suddenly; they left him no time to take leave. He was examined by the competent authority, found harmless, and permitted to return to Longres, where, however, he was to live under supervision. They did not even allow him

to go back to the prison and say good-bye; a soldier brought his effects from the Ministry; he was put on to the train, with orders to report to the commandant at Longres as soon as he arrived.

Antonieke received her master with tears of joy. But my Uncle Spencer took no pleasure in his recovered freedom. Emmy Wendle was still a prisoner. True, she would soon be set free; but then, he now realised to his horror, she did not know his address. He had been released at such startlingly short notice that he had had no time to arrange with her about the possibilities of future meetings; he had not even seen her on the morning of his liberation.

Two days after his return to Longres, he asked permission from the commandant, to whom he had to report himself every day, whether he might go to Brussels. He was asked why; my Uncle Spencer answered truthfully that it was to visit a friend in the prison from which he himself had just been released. Permission was at once refused.

My Uncle Spencer went to Brussels all the same. The sentry at the door of the prison arrested him as a suspicious person. He was sent back to Longres; the commandant talked to him menacingly. The next week, my Uncle Spencer tried again. It was sheer insanity, he knew; but doing something idiotic was preferable to doing nothing. He was again arrested.

This time they condemned him to internment in a camp in Germany. The Indian’s prophecies were being fulfilled with a remarkable accuracy. And the war did last for more than fifty months. And the carbuncular bank clerk, whom he found again in the internment camp, did, in fact, die....

What made him confide in me — me, whom he had known as a child and almost fathered — I do not know. Or perhaps I do know. Perhaps it was because he felt that I should be more competent to advise him on this sort of subject than his brother — my father — or old Mr. Bullinger, the Dante scholar, or any other of his friends. He would have felt ashamed, perhaps, to talk to them about this sort of thing. And he would have felt, too, that perhaps it wouldn’t be much good talking to them, and that I, in spite of my youth, or even because of it, might

actually be more experienced in these matters than they. Neither my father nor Mr. Bullinger, I imagine, knew very much about male impersonators.

At any rate, whatever the cause, it was to me that he talked about the whole affair, that spring of 1919, when he was staying with us in Sussex, recuperating after those dreary months of confinement. We used to go for long walks together, across the open downs, or between the grey pillars of the beechwoods; and painfully overcoming reluctance after reluctance, proceeding from confidence to more intimate confidence, my Uncle Spencer told me the whole story.

The story involved interminable discussions by the way. For we had to decide, first of all, whether there was any possible scientific explication of prophecy; whether there was such a thing as an absolute future braking to be lived through. And at much greater length, even, we had to argue about women — whether they were really “like that” (and into what depths of cynicism my poor Uncle Spencer had learned, during the long, embittered meditations of his prison days and nights, to plunge and wallow!), or whether they were like the angels he had desired them to be.

But more important than to speculate on Emmy’s possible character was to discover where she now was. More urgent than to wonder if prophecy could conceivably be reliable, was to take steps to fulfil this particular prophecy. For weeks my Uncle Spencer and I played at detectives.

I have often fancied that we must have looked, when we made our inquiries together, uncommonly like the traditional pair in the stories — my Uncle Spencer, the bright-eyed, cadaverous, sharp-featured genius, the Holmes of the combination; and I, moon-faced and chubby, a very youthful Watson. But, as a matter of fact, it was I, if I may say so without fatuity, who was the real Holmes of the two. My Uncle Spencer was too innocent of the world to know how to set about looking for a vanished mistress; just as he was too innocent of science to know how or where to find out what there was to be discovered on any abstracter subject.

It was I who took him to the British Museum and made him look up all the back numbers of the theatrical papers to see when Emmy had last advertised her desire to be engaged. It was I, the apparent Watson, who thought of the theatrical agencies and the stage doors of all the suburban music-halls. Sleuth-like in aspect, innocent at heart, my Uncle Spencer followed, marvelling at my familiarity with the ways of the strange world.

But I must temper my boasting by the confession that we were always entirely unsuccessful. No agency had heard of Emmy Wendle since 1914. Her card had appeared in no paper. The porters of music-halls remembered her, but only as something antediluvian. “Emmy Wendle? Oh yes, Emmy Wendle...” And scratching their heads, they strove by a mental effort to pass from the mere name to the person, like palaeontologists reconstructing the whole diplodocus from the single fossil bone.

Two or three times we were even given addresses. But the landladies of the lodging-houses where she had stayed did not even remember her; and the old aunt at Ealing, from whom we joyfully hoped so much, had washed her hands of Emmy two or three months before the war began. And the conviction she then had that Emmy was a bad girl was only intensified and confirmed by our impertinent inquiries. No, she knew nothing about Emmy Wendle, now, and didn’t want to know. And she’d trouble us to leave respectable people like herself in peace. And, defeated, we climbed back into our taxi, while the inhabitants of the squalid little street peered out at us and our vehicle, as though we had been visitors from another planet, and the metropolitan hackney carriage a fairy chariot.

“Perhaps she’s dead,” said my Uncle Spencer softly, after a long silence.

“Perhaps,” I said brutally, “she’s found a husband and retired into private life.”

My Uncle Spencer shut his eyes, sighed, and drew his hand across his forehead. What dreadful images filled his mind? He would almost have preferred that she should be dead.

“And yet the Indian,” he murmured, “he was always right...”

And perhaps he may still be right in this. Who knows?

Little Mexican

THE SHOPKEEPER CALLED it, affectionately, a little Mexican; and little, for a Mexican, it may have been. But in this Europe of ours, where space is limited and the scale smaller, the little Mexican was portentous, a giant among hats. It hung there, in the centre of the hatter's window, a huge black aureole, fit for a king among devils. But no devil walked that morning through the streets of Ravenna; only the mildest of literary tourists. Those were the days when very large hats seemed in my eyes very desirable, and it was on my head, all unworthy, that the aureole of darkness was destined to descend. On my head; for at the first sight of the hat, I had run into the shop, tried it on, found the size correct, and bought it, without bargaining, at a foreigner's price. I left the shop with the little Mexican on my head, and my shadow on the pavements of Ravenna was like the shadow of an umbrella pine.

The little Mexican is very old now, and moth-eaten and green. But I still preserve it. Occasionally, for old associations' sake, I even wear it. Dear Mexican! it represents for me a whole epoch of my life. It stands for emancipation and the first year at the university. It symbolizes the discovery of how many new things, new ideas, new sensations! — of French literature, of alcohol, of modern painting, of Nietzsche, of love, of metaphysics, of Mallarmé, of syndicalism, and of goodness knows what else. But, above all, I prize it because it reminds me of my first discovery of Italy. It re-evokes for me, my little Mexican, all the thrills and astonishments and virgin raptures of that first Italian tour in the early autumn of 1912. Urbino, Rimini, Ravenna, Ferrara, Modena, Mantua, Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Venice — my first impressions of all these fabulous names lie, like a hatful of jewels, in the crown of the little Mexican. Shall I ever have the heart to throw it away?

And then, of course, there is Tirabassi. Without the little Mexican I should never have made Tirabassi's acquaintance. He would never have taken me, in my small unemphatic English hat, for a painter. And I should never, in consequence, have seen the frescoes, never have talked with the old Count, never heard of the Colombella. Never.... When I think of that, the little Mexican seems to me more than ever precious.

It was, of course, very typical of Tirabassi to suppose, from the size of my hat, that I must be a painter. He had a neat military mind that refused to accept the vague disorder of the world. He was for ever labelling and pigeonholing and limiting his universe; and when the classified objects broke out of their pigeonholes and tore the labels from off their necks, Tirabassi was puzzled and annoyed. In any case, it was obvious to him from the first moment he saw me in the restaurant at Padua, that I must be a painter. All painters wear large black hats. I was wearing the little Mexican. Ergo, I was a painter. It was syllogistic, unescapable.

He sent the waiter to ask me whether I would do him the honour of taking coffee with him at his table. For the first moment, I must confess, I was a little alarmed. This dashing young lieutenant of cavalry — what on earth could he want with me? The most absurd fancies filled my mind: I had committed, all unconsciously, some frightful solecism; I had trodden on the toes of the lieutenant's honour, and he was about to challenge me to a duel. The choice of weapons, I rapidly reflected, would be mine. But what — oh, what on earth should I choose? Swords? I had never learnt to fence. Pistols? I had once fired six shots at a bottle, and missed it with every shot. Would there be time to write one or two letters, make some sort of a testament about my personal belongings? From this anguish of mind the waiter, returning a moment later with my fried octopus, delivered me. The Lieutenant Count, he explained in a whisper of confidence, bad a villa on the Brenta, not far from Strà. A villa — he spread out his hands in a generous gesture — full of paintings. Full, full, full. And he was anxious that I should see them, because he felt sure that I was interested in paintings. Oh, of course — I smiled rather foolishly, for the waiter seemed to

expect some sort of confirmatory interpolation from me — I *was* interested in paintings; very much. In that case, said the waiter, the Count would be delighted to take me to see them. He left me, still puzzled, but vastly relieved. At any rate, I was not being called upon to make the very embarrassing choice between swords and pistols.

Surreptitiously, whenever he was not looking in my direction, I examined the Lieutenant Count. His appearance was not typically Italian (but then what is a typical Italian?). He was not, that is to say, blue-jowled, beady-eyed, swarthy, and aquiline. On the contrary, he had pale ginger hair, grey eyes, a snub nose, and a freckled complexion. I knew plenty of young Englishmen who might have been Count Tirabassi's less vivacious brothers.

He received me, when the time came, with the most exquisite courtesy, apologizing for the unceremonious way in which he had made my acquaintance. "But as I felt sure," he said, "that you were interested in art, I thought you would forgive me for the sake of what I have to show you." I couldn't help wondering why the Count felt so certain about my interest in art. It was only later, when we left the restaurant together, that I understood; for, as I put on my hat to go, he pointed with a smile at the little Mexican. "One can see," he said, "that you are a real artist." I was left at a loss, not knowing what to answer.

After we had exchanged the preliminary courtesies, the Lieutenant plunged at once, entirely for my benefit I could see, into a conversation about art. "Nowadays," he said, "we Italians don't take enough interest in art. In a modern country, you see.. He shrugged his shoulders, leaving the sentence unfinished. "But I don't think that's right. I adore art. Simply adore it. When I see foreigners going round with their guidebooks, standing for half an hour in front of one picture, looking first at the book, then at the picture" — and here he gave the most brilliantly finished imitation of an Anglican clergyman conscientiously "doing" the Mantegna chapel: first a glance at the imaginary guidebook held open in his two hands, then, with the movement of a chicken that drinks, a lifting of the face towards an imaginary fresco, a long stare between puckered eyelids, a falling open of the mouth, and finally a turning back of the eyes towards the

inspired pages of Baedeker— “when I see them, I feel ashamed for us Italians.” The Count spoke very earnestly, feeling, no doubt, that his talent for mimicry had carried him a little too far. “And if they stand for half an hour looking at the thing, I go and stand there for an hour. That’s the way to understand great art. The only way.” He leaned back in his chair and sipped his coffee. “Unfortunately,” he added, after a moment, “one hasn’t got much time.”

I agreed with him. “When one can only get to Italy for a month at a stretch, like myself..

“Ah, but if only I could travel about the world like you!” The Count sighed. “But here I am, cooped up in this wretched town. And when I think of the enormous capital that’s hanging there on the walls of my house...” He checked himself, shaking his head. Then, changing his tone, he began to tell me about his house on the Brenta. It sounded altogether too good to be true. Carpioni, yes — I could believe in frescoes by Carpioni; almost any one might have those. But a hall by Veronese, but rooms by Tiepolo, all in the same house — that sounded incredible. I could not help believing that the Count’s enthusiasm for art had carried him away. But, in any case, to-morrow I should be able to judge for myself; the Count had invited me to lunch with him.

We left the restaurant. Still embarrassed by the Count’s references to my little Mexican, I walked by his side in silence up the arcaded street.

“I am going to introduce you to my father,” said the Count. “He, too, adores the arts.”

More than ever I felt myself a swindler. I had wriggled into the Count’s confidence on false pretences; my hat was a lie. I felt that I ought to do something to clear up the misunderstanding. But the Count was so busy complaining to me about his father that I had no opportunity to put in my explanation. I didn’t listen very attentively, I confess, to what he was saying. In the course of a year at Oxford, I had heard so many young men complain of their fathers. Not enough money, too much interference — the story was a stale one. And at that time, moreover, I was taking a very high philosophical line about this

sort of thing. I was pretending that people didn't interest me — only books, only ideas. What a fool one can make of oneself at that age!

"*Eccoci*," said the Count. We halted in front of the Café Pedrochi. "He always comes here for his coffee."

And where else, indeed, should he come for his coffee? Who, in Padua, would go anywhere else?

We found him sitting out on the terrace at the farther end of the building. I had never, I thought, seen a jollier-looking old gentleman. The old Count had a red weather-beaten face, with white moustaches bristling gallantly upwards and a white imperial in the grand Risorgimento manner of Victor Emmanuel the Second. Under the white tufty eyebrows, and set in the midst of a webwork of fine wrinkles, the eyes were brown and bright like a robin's. His long nose looked, somehow, more practically useful than the ordinary human nose, as though made for fine judicial sniffing, for delicate burrowing and probing. Thick set and strong, he sat there solidly in his chair, his knees apart, his hands clasped over the knob of his cane, carrying his paunch with dignity, nobiy I had almost said, before him. He was dressed all in white linen — for the weather was still very hot — and his wide grey hat was tilted rakishly forward over his left eye. It gave one a real satisfaction to look at him; he was so complete, so perfect in his kind.

The young Count introduced me. "This is an English gentleman. Signor..." He turned to me for the name.

"Oosselay," I said, having learnt by experience that that was as near as any Italian could be expected to get to it.

"Signor Oosselay," the young Count continued, "is an artist."

"Well, not exactly an artist," I was beginning; but he would not let me make an end.

"He is also very much interested in ancient art," he continued. "To-morrow I am taking him to Dolo to see the frescoes. I know he will like them."

We sat down at the old Count's table; critically he looked at me and nodded. "*Benissimo*," he said, and then added, "Let's hope you'll be able to do something

to help us sell the things."

This was startling. I looked in some perplexity towards the young Count. He was frowning angrily at his father. The old gentleman had evidently said the wrong thing; he had spoken, I guessed, too soon. At any rate, he took his son's hint and glided off serenely on another tack.

"The fervid phantasy of Tiepolo," he began rotundly, "the cool, unimpassioned splendour of Veronese — at Dolo you will see them contrasted." I listened attentively, while the old gentleman thundered on in what was evidendy a set speech. When it was over, the young Count got up; he had to be back at the barracks by half-past two. I too made as though to go; but the old man laid his hand on my arm. "Stay with me," he said. "I enjoy your conversation infinitely." And as he himself had hardly ceased speaking for one moment since first I set eyes on him, I could well believe it. With the gesture of a lady lifting her skirts out of the mud (and those were the days when skirts still had to be lifted) the young Count picked up his trailing sabre and swaggered off, very military, very brilliant and glittering, like a soldier on the stage, into the sunlight, out of sight.

The old man's bird-bright eyes followed him as he went. "A good boy, Fabio," he said, turning back to me at last, "a good son." He spoke affectionately; but there was a hint, I thought, in his smile, in the tone of his voice, a hint of amusement, of irony. It was as though he were adding, by implication, "But good boys, after all, are fools to be so good." I found myself, in spite of my affectation of detachment, extremely curious about this old gentleman. And he, for his part, was not the man to allow any one in his company to remain for long in splendid isolation. He insisted on my taking an interest in his affairs. He told me all about them — or at any rate all about some of them — pouring out his confidences with an astonishing absence of reserve. Next to the intimate and trusted friend, the perfect stranger is the best of all possible confidants. There is no commercial traveller, of moderately sympathetic appearance, who has not, in the course of his days in the train, his evenings in the parlours of commercial hotels, been made the repository of a thousand

intimate secrets — even in England. And in Italy — goodness knows what commercial travellers get told in Italy. Even I, a foreigner, speaking the language badly, and not very skilful anyhow in conducting a conversation with strangers, have heard queer things in the second-class carriages of Italian trains.... Here, too, on Pedrochi's terrace I was to hear queer things. A door was to be left ajar, and through the crack I was to have a peep at unfamiliar lives.

"What I should do without him," the old gentleman continued, "I really don't know. The way he manages the estate is simply wonderful." And he went rambling off into long digressions about the stupidity of peasants, the incompetence and dishonesty of bailiffs, the badness of the weather, the spread of phylloxera, the high price of manure. The upshot of it all was that, since Fabio had taken over the estate, everything had gone well; even the weather had improved. "It's such a relief," the Count concluded, "to feel that I have some one in charge on whom I can rely, some one I can trust, absolutely. It leaves me free to devote my mind to more important things."

I could not help wondering what the important things were; but it would have been impertinent, I felt, to ask. Instead, I put a more practical question. "But what will happen," I asked, "when your son's military duties take him away from Padua?"

The old Count gave me a wink and laid his forefinger, very deliberately, to the side of his long nose. The gesture was rich with significance. "They never will," he said. "It's all arranged. A little *combinazione*, you know. I have a friend in the Ministry. His military duties will always keep him in Padua." He winked again and smiled.

I could not help laughing, and the old Count joined in with a joyous ha-ha that was the expression of a profound satisfaction, that was, as it were, a burst of self-applause. He was evidently proud of his little *combinazione*. But he was prouder still of the other combination, about which he now confidentially leaned across the table to tell me. It was decidedly the subtler of the two.

"And it's not merely his military duties," he said, wagging at me the thick, yellow-nailed forefinger which he had laid against his nose, "it's not merely his

military duties that'll keep the boy in Padua. It's his domestic duties. He's married. I married him." He leaned back in his chair, and surveyed me, smiling. The little wrinkles round his eyes seemed to be alive. "That boy, I said to myself, must settle down. He must have a nest, or else he'll fly away. He must have roots, or else he'll run. And his poor old father will be left in the lurch. He's young, I thought, but he must marry. He *must* marry. At once." And the old gentleman made great play with his forefinger. It was a long story. His old friend, the Awocato Monaldeschi, had twelve children — three boys and nine girls. (And here there were digressions about the Awocato and the size of good Catholic families.) The eldest girl was just the right age for Fabio. No money, of course; but a good girl and pretty, and very well brought up and religious. Religious — that was very important, for it was essential that Fabio should have a large family — to keep him more effectually rooted, the old Count explained — and with these modern young women brought up outside the Church one could never be certain of children. Yes, her religion was most important; he had looked into that very carefully before selecting her. Well, the next thing, of course, was that Fabio should be induced to select her. It had been a matter of bringing the horse to water *and* making him drink. Oh, a most difficult and delicate business! For Fabio prided himself on his independence; and he was obstinate, like a mule. Nobody should interfere with his affairs, nobody should make him do what he didn't want to. And he was so touchy, he was so pig-headed that often he wouldn't do what he really wanted, merely because somebody else had suggested that he ought to do it. So I could imagine — the old Count spread out his hands before me — just how difficult and delicate a business it had been. Only a consummate diplomat could have succeeded. He did it by throwing them together a great deal and talking, meanwhile, about the rashness of early marriages, the uselessness of poor wives, the undesirability of wives not of noble birth. It worked like a charm; within four months, Fabio was engaged; two months later he was married, and ten months after that he had a son and heir. And now he was fixed, rooted. The old gentleman chuckled, and I could fancy that I was listening to the chuckling of some old white-haired tyrant

of the quattrocento, congratulating himself on the success of some peculiarly ingenious stroke of policy — a rich city induced to surrender itself by fraud, a dangerous rival lured by fair words into a cage and trapped. Poor Fabio, I thought; and also, what a waste of talent!

Yes, the old Count went on, now he would never go. He was not like his younger brother, Lucio. Lucio was a rogue, *Jurbo*, sly; he had no conscience. But Fabio had ideas about duty, and lived up to them. Once he had engaged himself, he would stick to his engagements, obstinately, with all the mulishness of his character. Well, now he lived on the estate, in the big painted house at Dolo. Three days a week he came into Padua for his military duties, and the rest of his time he devoted to the estate. It brought in, now, more than it had ever done before. But goodness knew, the old man complained, that was little enough. Bread and oil, and wine and milk, and chickens and beef — there was plenty of those and to spare. Fabio could have a family of fifty and they would never starve. But ready money — there wasn't much of that. "In England," the Count concluded, "you are rich. But we Italians..." He shook his head.

I spent the next quarter of an hour trying to persuade him that we were not all millionaires. But in vain. My statistics, based on somewhat imperfect memories of Mr and Mrs Sidney Webb, carried no conviction. In the end I gave it up.

The next morning Fabio appeared at the door of my hotel in a large, very old and very noisy Fiat. It was the family machine of-all-work, bruised, scratched, and dirtied by years of service. Fabio drove it with a brilliant and easy recklessness. We rushed through the town, swerving from one side of the narrow street to the other, with a disregard for the rules of the road which, in a pedantic country like England, would have meant at the least a five-pound fine and an endorsed licence. But here the Carabiniers, walking gravely in couples under the arcades, let us pass without comment. Right or left — after all, what did it matter?

"Why do you keep the silencer out?" I shouted through the frightful clamour of the engine.

Fabio slightly shrugged his shoulders. "*Ê più allegro cosi*," he answered.

I said no more. From a member of this hardy race which likes noise, which enjoys discomfort, a nerve-ridden Englishman could hardly hope to get much sympathy.

We were soon out of the town. Trailing behind us a seething white wake of dust and with the engine rattling off its explosions like a battery of machine-guns, we raced along the Fusina road. On either hand extended the cultivated plain. The road was bordered by ditches, and on the banks beyond, instead of hedges, stood rows of little pollards, with grape-laden vines festooned from tree to tree. White with the dust, tendrils, fruit, and leaves hung there like so much goldsmith's work sculptured in frosted metal, hung like the swags of fruit and foliage looped round the flanks of a great silver bowl. We hurried on. Soon, on our right hand, we had the Brenta, sunk deep between the banks of its canal. And now we were at Strà. Through gateways rich with fantastic stucco, down tunnels of undeciduous shade, we looked in a series of momentary glimpses into the heart of the park. And now for an instant the statues on the roof of the villa beckoned against the sky and were passed. On we went. To right and left, on either bank of the river, I got every now and then a glimpse of some enchanting mansion, gay and brilliant even in decay. Little baroque garden houses peeped at me over walls; and through great gates, at the end of powdery cypress avenues, half humorously, it seemed, the magniloquent and frivolous façades soared up in defiance of all the rules. I should have liked to do the journey slowly, to stop here and there, to look, to savour at leisure; but Fabio disdained to travel at anything less than fifty kilometres to the hour, and I had to be content with momentary and precarious glimpses. It was in these villas, I reflected, as we bumped along at the head of our desolation of white dust, that Casanova used to come and spend the summer; seducing the chamber-maids, taking advantage of terrified marchionesses in *caliches* during thunder-storms, bamboozling soft-witted old senators of Venice with his fortune-telling and black magic. Gorgeous and happy scoundrel! In spite of my professed detachment, I envied him. And, indeed, what was that famous detachment but a disguised expression of the envy which the successes and audacities of a Casanova must necessarily arouse in

every timid and diffident mind? If I lived in splendid isolation, it was because I lacked the audacity to make war — even to make entangling alliances. I was absorbed in these pleasing self-condemnatory thoughts, when the car slowed down and came to a standstill in front of a huge imposing gate. Fabio hooted impatiently on his horn; there was a scurry of footsteps, the sound of bolts being drawn, and the gate swung open. At the end of a short drive, very large and grave, very chaste and austere, stood the house. It was considerably older than most of the other villas I had seen in glimpses on our way. There was no frivolousness in its façade, no irregular grandiloquence. A great block of stuccoed brick; a central portico approached by steps and topped with a massive pediment; a row of rigid statues on the balustrade above the cornice. It was correctly, coldly even, Palladian. Fabio brought the car to a halt in front of the porch. We got out. At the top of the steps stood a young woman with a redheaded child in her arms. It was the Countess with the son and heir.

The Countess impressed me very agreeably. She was slim and tall — two or three inches taller than her husband; with dark hair, drawn back from the forehead and twisted into a knot on the nape of her neck; dark eyes, vague, lustrous, and melancholy, like the eyes of a gentle animal; a skin brown and transparent like darkened amber. Her manner was gentle and unemphatic. She rarely gesticulated; I never heard her raise her voice. She spoke, indeed, very little. The old Count had told me that his daughter-in-law was religious, and from her appearance I could easily believe it. She looked at you with the calm, remote regard of one whose life mostly goes on behind the eyes.

Fabio kissed his wife and then, bending his face towards the child, he made a frightful grimace and roared like a lion. It was all done in affection; but the poor little creature shrank away, terrified. Fabio laughed and pinched its ear.

“Don’t tease him,” said the Countess gently. “You’ll make him cry.”

Fabio turned to me. “That’s what comes of leaving a boy to be looked after by women. He cries at everything. Let’s come in,” he added. “At present we only use two or three rooms on the ground floor, and the kitchen in the basement. All the rest is deserted. I don’t know how these old fellows managed

to keep up their palaces. I can't." He shrugged his shoulders. Through a door on the right of the portico we passed into the house. "This is our drawing-room and dining-room combined."

It was a fine big room, nobly proportioned — a double cube, I guessed — with doorways of sculptured marble and a magnificent fireplace flanked by a pair of nymphs on whose bowed shoulders rested a sloping overmantel carved with coats of arms and festoons of foliage. Round the walls ran a frieze, painted in grisaille; in a graceful litter of cornucopias and panoplies, goddesses sumptuously reclined, cherubs wriggled and flew. The furniture was strangely mixed. Round a sixteenth-century dining-table that was a piece of Palladian architecture in wood, were ranged eight chairs in the Viennese secession style of 1905. A large chalet-shaped cuckoo clock from Bern hung on the wall between two cabinets of walnut, plastered and pedimented to look like little temples, and with heroic statuettes in yellow boxwood, standing in niches between the pillars. And then the pictures on the walls, the cretonnes with which the arm-chairs were covered! Tactfully, however, I admired everything, new as well as old.

"And now," said the Count, "for the frescoes."

I followed him through one of the marble-framed doorways and found myself at once in the great central hall of the villa. The Count turned round to me. "There!" he said, smiling triumphantly with the air of one who has really succeeded in producing a rabbit out of an empty hat. And, indeed, the spectacle was sufficiently astonishing.

The walls of the enormous room were completely covered with frescoes which it did not need much critical judgment or knowledge to perceive were genuine Veroneses. The authorship was obvious, palpable. Who else could have painted those harmoniously undulating groups of figures set in their splendid architectural frame? Who else but Veronese could have combined such splendour with such coolness, so much extravagant opulence with such exquisite suavity?

"*È grandioso!*" I said to the Count.

And indeed it was. Grandiose; there was no other word. A rich triumphal arcade ran all round the room, four or five arches appearing on each wall. Through the arches one looked into a garden; and there, against a background of cypresses and statues and far-away blue mountains, companies of Venetian ladies and gentlemen gravely disported themselves. Under one arch they were making music; through another, one saw them sitting round a table, drinking one another's health in glasses of red wine, while a little blackamoor in a livery of green and yellow carried round the silver jug. In the next panel they were watching a fight between a monkey and a cat. On the opposite wall a poet was reading his verses to the assembled company, and next to him Veronese himself — the self-portrait was recognizable — stood at his easel, painting the picture of an opulent blonde in rose-coloured satin. At the feet of the artist lay his dog; two parrots and a monkey were sitting on the marble balustrade in the middle distance.

I gazed with delight. "What a marvellous thing to possess!" I exclaimed, fairly carried away by my enthusiasm. "I envy you."

The Count made a little grimace and laughed. "Shall we come and look at the Tiepolos?" he asked.

We passed through a couple of cheerful rooms by Carpioni — satyrs chasing nymphs through a romantic forest and, on the fringes of a seascape, a very eccentric rape of mermaids by centaurs — to step across a threshold into that brilliant universe, at once delicate and violently extravagant, wild and subtly orderly, which Tiepolo, in the last days of Italian painting, so masterfully and magically created. It was the story of Eros and Psyche, and the tale ran through three large rooms, spreading itself even on to the ceilings, where, in a pale sky dappled with white and golden clouds, the appropriate deities balanced themselves, diving or ascending through the empyrean with that air of being perfectly at home in their element which seems to belong, in nature, only to fishes and perhaps a few winged insects and birds.

Fabio had boasted to me that, in front of a picture, he could outstare any foreigner. But I was such a mortally long time admiring these dazzling

phantasies that in the end he quite lost patience.

“I wanted to show you the farm before lunch,” he said, looking at his watch. “There’s only just time.” I followed him reluctantly.

We looked at the cows, the horses, the prize bull, the turkeys. We looked at the tall, thin haystacks, shaped like giant cigars set on end. We looked at the sacks of wheat in the barn. For lack of any better comment I told the Count that they reminded me of the sacks of wheat in English barns; he seemed delighted.

The farm buildings were set round an immense courtyard. We had explored three sides of this piazza; now we came to the fourth, which was occupied by a long, low building pierced with round archways and, I was surprised to see, completely empty.

“What’s this?” I asked, as we entered.

“It *is* nothing,” the Count replied. “But it might, some day, become... *chi* fa?” He stood there for a moment in silence, frowning pensively, with the expression of Napoleon on St Helena — dreaming of the future, regretting past opportunities for ever lost. His freckled face, ordinarily a lamp for brightness, became incongruously sombre. Then all at once he burst out — damning life, cursing fate, wishing to God he could get away and do something instead of wasting himself here. I listened, making every now and then a vague noise of sympathy. What could I do about it? And then, to my dismay, I found that I could do something about it, that I was expected to do something. I was being asked to help the Count to sell his frescoes. As an artist, it was obvious, I must be acquainted with rich patrons, museums, millionaires. I had seen the frescoes; I could honestly recommend them. And now there was this perfected process for transferring frescoes on to canvas. The walls could easily be peeled of their painting, the canvases rolled up and taken to Venice. And from there it would be the easiest thing in the world to smuggle them on board a ship and get away with them. As for prices — if he could get a million and a half of lire, so much the better; but he’d take a million, he’d even take three-quarters. And he’d give me ten per cent, commission....

And afterwards, when he'd sold his frescoes, what would he do? To begin with — the Count smiled at me triumphantly — he'd turn this empty building in which we were now standing into an up-to-date cheese-factory. He could start the business handsome!) on half a million, and then, using cheap female labour from the country round, he could be almost sure of making big profits at once. In a couple of years, he calculated, he'd be netting eighty of a hundred thousand a year from his cheeses. And then, ah then, he'd be independent, he'd be able to get away, he'd see the world. He'd go to Brazil and the Argentine. An enterprising man with capital could always do well out there. He'd go to New York, to London, to Berlin, to Paris. There was nothing he could not do.

But meanwhile the frescoes were still on the walls — beautiful, no doubt (for, the Count reminded me, he adored art), but futile; a huge capital frozen into the plaster, eating its head off, utterly useless. Whereas, with his cheese-factory...

Slowly we walked back towards the house.

I was in Venice again in the September of the following year, 1913. There were, I imagine, that autumn, more German honeymoon-couples, more parties of rucksacked Wander-Birds than there had ever been in Venice before. There were too many, in any case, for me; I packed my bag and took the train for Padua.

I had not originally intended to see young Tirabassi again. I didn't know, indeed, how pleased he would be to see me. For the frescoes, so far as I knew, at any rate, were still safely on the walls, the cheese-factory still remote in the future, in the imagination. I had written to him more than once, telling him that I was doing my best, but that at the moment, etcetera, etcetera. Not that I had ever held out much hope. I had made it clear from the first that my acquaintance among millionaires was limited, that I knew no directors of American museums, that I had nothing to do with any of the international picture dealers. But the Count's faith in me had remained, none the less, unshaken. It was the little Mexican, I believe, that inspired so much confidence. But now, after my letters, after all this lapse of time and nothing done, he might feel that I had let him down, deceived him somehow. That was why I took no steps to seek him out.

But chance overruled my decision. On the third day of my stay in Padua, I ran into him in the street. Or rather he ran into me.

It was nearly six o'clock, and I had strolled down to the Piazza del Santo. At that hour, when the slanting light is full of colour and the shadows are long and profound, the great church, with its cupolas and turrets and campaniles, takes on an aspect more than ever fantastic and oriental. I had walked round the church, and now I was standing at the foot of Donatello's statue, looking up at the grim bronze man, the ponderously stepping beast, when I suddenly became aware that some one was standing very close behind me. I took a step to one side and turned round. It was Fabio. Wearing his famous expression of the sight-seeing parson, he was gazing up at the statue, his mouth open in a vacant and fish-like gape. I burst out laughing.

"Did I look like that?" I asked.

"Precisely." He laughed too. "I've been watching you for the last ten minutes, mooning round the church. You English! Really..." He shook his head.

Together we strolled up the Via del Santo, talking as we went.

"I'm sorry I wasn't able to do anything about the frescoes," I said. "But really..." I entered into explanations.

"Some day, perhaps." Fabio was still optimistic.

"And how's the Countess?"

"Oh, she's very well," said Fabio, "considering. You know she had another son three or four months after you came to see us."

"No?"

"She's expecting another now." Fabio spoke rather gloomily, I thought. More than ever I admired the old Count's sagacity. But I was sorry, for his son's sake, that he had not a wider field in which to exercise his talents.

"And your father?" I asked. "Shall we find him sitting at Pedrochi's, as usual?"

Fabio laughed. "We shall not," he said significantly. "He's flown."

"Flown?"

"Gone, vanished, disappeared."

“But where?”

“Who knows?” said Fabio. “My father is like the swallows; he comes and he goes. Every year.... But the migration isn’t regular. Sometimes he goes away in the spring; sometimes it’s the autumn, sometimes it’s the summer.... One fine morning his man goes into his room to call him as usual, and he isn’t there. Vanished. He might be dead. Oh, but he isn’t” Fabio laughed. “Two or three months later, in he walks again, as though he were just coming back from a stroll in the Botanical Gardens. ‘Good evening. Good evening.’” Fabio imitated the old Count’s voice and manner, snuffing the air like a war-horse, twisting the ends of an imaginary white moustache. “‘How’s your mother? How are the girls? How have the grapes done this year?’ Snuff, snuff. ‘How’s Lucio? And who the devil has left all this rubbish lying about in my study?’”Fabio burst into an indignant roar that made the loiterers in the Via Roma turn, astonished, in our direction.

“And where does he go?” I asked.

“Nobody knows. My mother used to ask, once. But she soon gave it up. It was no good. ‘Where have you been, Ascanio?’

‘My dear, I’m afraid the olive crop is going to be very poor this year.’ Snuff, snuff. And when she pressed him, he would fly into a temper and slam the doors.... What do you say to an aperitif?” Pedrochi’s open doors invited. We entered, chose a retired table, and sat down.

“But what do you suppose the old gentleman does when he’s away?”

“Ah!” And making the richly significant gesture I had so much admired in his father, the young Count laid his finger against his nose and slowly, solemnly winked his left eye.

“You mean...?”

Fabio nodded. “There’s a little widow here in Padua.” With his extended finger the young Count described in the air an undulating line. “Nice and plump. Black eyes. I’ve noticed that she generally seems to be out of town just at the time the old man does his migrations. But it may, of course, be a mere coincidence.” The waiter brought us our vermouth. Pensively the young Count

sipped. The gaiety went out of his open, lamp-like face. “And meanwhile,” he went on slowly and in an altered voice, “I stay here, looking after the estate, so that the old man can go running round the world with his little pigeon — *la sua colombella*.” (The expression struck me as particularly choice.) “Oh, it’s funny, no doubt,” the young Count went on. “But it isn’t right. If I wasn’t married, I’d go clean away and try my luck somewhere else. I’d leave him to look after everything himself. But with a wife and two children — three children soon — how can I take the risk? At any rate, there’s plenty to eat as long as I stay here. My only hope,” he added, after a little pause, “is in the frescoes.”

Which implied, I reflected, that his only hope was in me; I felt sorry for him.

In the spring of 1914 I sent two rich Americans to look at Fabio’s villa. Neither of them made any offer to buy the frescoes; it would have astonished me if they had. But Fabio was greatly encouraged by their arrival. “I feel,” he wrote to me, “that a beginning has now been made. These Americans will go back to their country and tell their friends. Soon there will be a procession of millionaires coming to see the frescoes. Meanwhile, life is the same as ever. Rather worse, if anything. Our little daughter, whom we have christened Emilia, was born last month. My wife had a very bad time and is still far from well, which is very troublesome.” (It seemed a curious adjective to use, in the circumstances. But coming from Fabio, I understood it; he was one of those exceedingly healthy people to whom any sort of illness is mysterious, unaccountable, and above all extraordinarily tiresome and irritating.) “The day before yesterday my father disappeared again. I have not yet had time to find out if the Colombella has also vanished. My brother, Lucio, has succeeded in getting a motor-bicycle out of him, which is more than I ever managed to do. But then I was never one for creeping diplomatically round and round a thing, as he can do.... I have been going very carefully into the cheese-factory business lately, and I am not sure that it might not be more profitable to set up a silkweaving establishment instead. When you next come, I will go into details with you.”

But it was a very long time before I saw Padua and the Count again.... The War put an end to my yearly visits to Italy, and for various reasons, even when it

was over, I could not go south again as soon as I should have liked. Not till the autumn of 1921 did I embark again on the Venice express.

It was in an Italy not altogether familiar that I now found myself — an Italy full of violence and bloodshed. The Fascists and the Communists were still busily fighting. Roaring at the head of their dust-storms, the motor-lorries, loaded with cargoes of singing boys, careered across the country in search of adventure and lurking Bolshevism. One stood respectfully in the gutter while they passed; and through the flying dust, through the noise of the engine, a snatch of that singing would be blown back: "*Giovinezza*, *giovinezza*, *primavera di bellezza*..." (Youth, youth, springtime of beauty.) Where but in Italy would they have put such words to a political song? And then the proclamations, the manifestos, the denunciations, the appeals! Every hoarding and blank wall was plastered with them. Between the station and Pedrochi's I walked through a whole library of these things. "Citizens!" they would begin. "A heroic wind is to-day reviving the almost asphyxiated soul of our unhappy Italy, overcome by the poisonous fumes of Bolshevism and wallowing in ignoble abasement at the feet of the Nations." And they finished, for the most part, with references to Dante. I read them all with infinite pleasure.

I reached Pedrochi's at last. On the terrace, sitting in the very corner where I had seen him first, years before, was the old Count. He stared at me blankly when I saluted him, not recognizing me at all. I began to explain who I was; after a moment he cut me short, almost impatiently, protesting that he remembered now, perfectly well. I doubted very much whether he really did; but he was too proud to confess that he had forgotten. Meanwhile, he invited me to sit at his table.

At a first glance, from a distance, I fancied that the old Count had not aged a day since last I saw him. But I was wrong. From the street, I had only seen the rakish tilt of his hat, the bristling of his white moustache and imperial, the parted knees, the noble protrusion of the paunch. But now that I could look at him closely and at leisure, I saw that he was in fact a very different man. Under the tilted hat his face was unhealthily purple; the flesh sagged into pouches. In the

whites of his eyes, discoloured and as though tarnished with age, the little broken veins showed red. And, lustreless, the eyes themselves seemed to look without interest at what they saw. His shoulders were bent as though under a weight, and when he lifted his cup to his lips his hand trembled so much that a drop of coffee splashed on to the table. He was an old man now, old and tired.

"How's Fabio?" I asked; since 1916 I had had no news of him.

"Oh, Fabio's well," the old Count answered, "Fabio's very well. He has six children now, you know." And the old gentleman nodded and smiled at me without a trace of malice. He seemed quite to have forgotten the reasons for which he had been at so much pains to select a good Catholic for a daughter-in-law. "Six," he repeated. "And then, you know, he did very well in the war. We Tirabassi have always been warriors." Full of pride, he went on to tell me of Fabio's exploits and sufferings. Twice wounded, special promotion on the field of battle, splendid decorations. He was a major now.

"And do his military duties still keep him in Padua?"

The old gentleman nodded, and suddenly there appeared on his face something like the old smile. "A little *combinatione of* mine," he said, and chuckled.

"And the estate?" I asked.

Oh, that was doing all right, everything considered. It had got rather out of hand during the war, while Fabio was at the front. And then, afterwards, there had been a lot of trouble with the peasants; but Fabio and his Fascists were putting all that to rights. "With Fabio on the spot," said the old gentleman, "I have no anxieties." And then he began to tell me, all over again, about Fabio's exploits in the war.

The next day I took the train to Strà, and after an hour agreeably spent in the villa and the park, I walked on at my leisure towards Dolo. It took me a long time to get there, for on this occasion I was able to stop and look for as long as I liked at all the charming things on the way. Casanova seemed, now, a good deal less enviable, I noticed, looking inwards on myself, than he had when last I passed this way. I was nine years older.

The gates were open; I walked in. There stood the house, as grave and ponderous as ever, but shabbier than when I saw it last. The shutters needed painting, and here and there the stucco was peeling off in scabs. I approached. From within the house came a cheerful noise of children's laughter and shouting. The family, I supposed, was playing hide-and-seek, or trains, or perhaps some topical game of Fascists and Communists. As I climbed the steps of the porch, I could hear the sound of small feet racing over the tiled floors; in the empty rooms footsteps and shouting strangely echoed. And then suddenly, from the sitting-room on the right, came the sound of Fabio's voice, furiously shouting, "Oh, for God's sake," it yelled, "keep those wretched children quiet." And then, petulantly, it complained, "How do you expect me to do accounts with this sort of thing going on?" There was at once a profound and as it were unnatural silence; then the sound of small feet tiptoeing away, some whispering, a little nervous laugh. I rang the bell.

It was the Countess who opened the door. She stood for a moment hesitatingly, wondering who I was; then remembered, smiled, held out her hand. She had grown, I noticed, very thin, and with the wasting of her face, her eyes seemed to have become larger. Their expression was as gentle and serene as ever; she seemed to be looking at me from a distance.

"Fabio will be delighted to see you," she said, and she took me through the door on the right of the porch straight into the sitting-room. Fabio was sitting at the Palladian table in front of a heap of papers, biting the end of his pencil.

Even in his grey-green service uniform the young Count looked wonderfully brilliant, like a soldier on the stage. His face was still boyishly freckled, but the skin was deeply lined; he looked very much older than when I had seen him last-older than he really was. The open cheerfulness, the shining, lamp-like brightness were gone. On his snubby-featured face he wore a ludicrously incongruous expression of chronic melancholy. He brightened, it is true, for a moment when I appeared; I think he was genuinely glad to see me.

"*Caspita!*" he kept repeating. "*Caspita!*" (It was his favourite expression of astonishment, an odd, old-fashioned word.) "Who would have thought it? After

all this time!”

“And all the eternity of the war as well,” I said.

But when the first ebullition of surprise and pleasure subsided, the look of melancholy came back.

“It gives me the spleen,” he said, “to see you again; still travelling about; free to go where you like. If you knew what life was like here...”

“Well, in any case,” I said, feeling that I ought, for the Countess’s sake, to make some sort of protest, “in any case the war’s over, and you have escaped a real revolution. That’s something.”

“Oh, you’re as bad as Laura,” said the Count impatiently. He looked towards his wife, as though hoping that she would say something. But the Countess went on with her sewing without even looking up. The Count took my arm. “Come along,” he said, and his tone was almost one of anger. “Let’s take a turn outside.” His wife’s religious resignation, her patience, her serenity angered him, I could see, like a reprimand — tacit, indeed, and unintentionally given, but none the less galling.

Along the weed-grown paths of what had once, in the ancient days of splendour, been the garden, slowly we walked towards the farm. A few ragged box-trees grew along the fringes of the paths; once there had been neat hedges. Poised over a dry basin a Triton blew his waterless conch. At the end of the vista a pair of rapes — Pluto and Proserpine, Apollo and Daphne — writhed desparately against the sky.

“I saw your father yesterday,” I said. “He looks aged.”

“And so he ought,” said Fabio murderously. “He’s sixty-nine.”

I felt uncomfortably that the subject had become too serious for light conversation. I had wanted to ask after the Colombella; in the circumstances, I decided that it would be wiser to say nothing about her. I repressed my curiosity. We were walking now under the lea of the farm buildings.

“The cows look very healthy,” I said politely, looking through an open doorway. In the twilight within, six grey rumps plastered with dry dung

presented themselves in file; six long leather tails swished impatiently from side to side. Fabio made no comment; he only grunted.

"In any case," he went on slowly, after another silence, "he can't live much longer. I shall sell my share and clear off to South America, family or no family." It was a threat against his own destiny, a threat of which he must have known the vanity. He was deceiving himself to keep up his spirits.

"But I say," I exclaimed, taking another and better opportunity to change the conversation, "I see you have started a factory here after all." We had walked round to the farther side of the square. Through the windows of the long low building which, at my last visit, had stood untenanted, I saw the complicated shapes of machines, rows of them in a double line down the whole length of the building. "Looms? Then you decided against cheese? And the frescoes?" I turned questioningly towards the Count. I had a horrible fear that, when we got back to the house, I should find the great hall peeled of its Veroneses and a blank of plaster where once had been the history of Eros and Psyche.

"Oh, the frescoes are still there, what's left of them." And in spite of Fabio's long face, I was delighted at the news. "I persuaded my father to sell some of his house property in Padua, and we started this weaving business here two years ago. Just in time," Fabio added, "for the Communist revolution."

Poor Fabio, he had no luck. The peasants had seized his factory and had tried to possess themselves of his land. For three weeks he had lived at the villa in a state of siege, defending the place, with twenty Fascists to help him, against all the peasants of the countryside. The danger was over now; but the machines were broken, and in any case it was out of the question to start them again; feeling was still too high. And what, for Fabio, made it worse was the fact that his brother Lucio, who had also got a little capital out of the old man, had gone off to Bulgaria and invested it in a bootlace factory. It was the only bootlace factory in the country, and Lucio was making money hand over fist. Free as air he was, well off, with a lovely Turkish girl for a mistress. For Fabio, the Turkish girl was evidently the last straw. "*Una Turca, una vera Turca,*" he repeated, shaking his head. The female infidel symbolized in his eyes all that was exotic,

irregular, undomestic; all that was not the family; all that was remote from Padua and the estate.

"And they were such beautiful machines," said Fabio, pausing for a moment to look in at the last of the long line of windows. "Whether to sell them, whether to wait till all this has blown over and have them put right and try to start again — I don't know." He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. "Or just let things slide till the old man dies." We turned the corner of the square and began to walk back towards the house. "Sometimes," he added, after a silence, "I don't believe he ever will die."

The children were playing in the great hall of the Veroneses. The majestic double doors which gave on to the portico were ajar; through the opening we watched them for a moment without being seen. The family was formed up in order of battle. A redheaded boy of ten or eleven led the van, a brown boy followed. Then came three little girls, diminishing regularly in size like graded pearls; and finally a little toddling creature in blue linen crawlers. All six of them carried shouldered bamboos, and they were singing in ragged unison to a kind of trumpet call of three notes: "*All' armi i Fascisti; a morte i Communisti; a basso i Socialisti*" — over and over again. And as they sang they marched, round and round, earnestly, indefatigably. The huge empty room echoed like a swimming-bath. Remote under their triumphal arches, in their serene world of fantastic beauty, the silken ladies and gentlemen played their music, drank their wine; the poet declaimed, the painter poised his brush before the canvas; the monkeys clambered among the Roman ruins, the parrots dozed on the balustrades. "*All' armi i Fascisti, a morte i Communisti...*" I should have liked to stand there in silence, merely to see how long the children would continue their patriotic march. But Fabio had none of my scientific curiosity; or if he ever had, it had certainly been exhausted long before the last of his children was born. After indulging me for a moment with the spectacle, he pushed open the door and walked in. The children looked round and were immediately silent. What with his bad temper and his theory of education by teasing, they seemed to be thoroughly frightened of their father.

“Go on,” he said, “go on.” But they wouldn’t; they obviously couldn’t, in his terrifying presence. Unobtrusively they slipped away.

Fabio led me round the painted room. “Look here,” he said, “and look here.” In one of the walls of the great hall there were half a dozen bullet holes. A chip had been taken off one of the painted cornices; one lady was horriby wounded in the face; there were two or three holes in the landscape, and a monkey’s tail was severed. “That’s our friends, the peasants,” Fabio explained.

In the Carpioni rooms all was still well; the satyrs still pursued their nymphs, and in the room of the centaurs and the mermaids, the men who were half horses still galloped as tumultuously as ever into the sea, to ravish the women who were half fish. But the tale of Eros and Psyche had suffered dreadfully. The exquisite panel in which Tiepolo had painted Psyche holding up the lamp to look at her mysterious lover was no more than a faint, mildewy smudge. And where once the indignant young god had flown upwards to rejoin his Olympian relatives (who still, fortunately, swam about intact among the clouds on the ceiling) there was nothing but the palest ghost of an ascending Cupid, while Psyche weeping on the earth below was now quite invisible.

“That’s our friends the French,” said Fabio. “They were quartered here in 1918, and they didn’t trouble to shut the windows when it rained.”

Poor Fabio! Everything was against him. I had no consolation to offer. That autumn I sent him an art critic and three more Americans. But nothing came of their visits. The fact was that he had too much to offer. A picture — that might easily have been disposed of. But what could one do with a whole houseful of paintings like this?

The months passed. About Easter time of the next year I had another letter from Fabio. The olive crop had been poor. The Countess was expecting another baby and was far from well. The two eldest children were down with measles, and the last but one had what the Italians call an “asinine cough.” He expected all the children to catch both diseases in due course. He was very doubtful now if it would ever be worth while to restart his looms; the position of the silk trade was not so sound as it had been at the end of 1919. If only he had stuck to

cheese, as he first intended! Ludo had just made fifty thousand lire by a lucky stroke of speculation. But the female infidel had run off with a Rumanian. The old Count was ageing rapidly; when Fabio saw him last, he had told the same anecdote three times in the space of ten minutes. With these two pieces of good news — they were for him, I imagine, the only bright spots in the surrounding gloom — Fabio dosed his letter. I was left wondering why he troubled to write to me at all. It may be that he got a certain lacerating satisfaction by thus enumerating his troubles.

That August there was a musical festival in Salzburg. I had never been in Austria; the occasion seemed to me a good one. I went, and I enjoyed myself prodigiously. Salzburg at the moment is all in the movement. There are baroque churches in abundance; there are Italianate fountains; there are gardens and palaces that mimic in their extravagantly ponderous Teutonic way the gardens and palaces of Rome. And, choicest treasure of all, there is a tunnel, forty feet high, bored through a precipitous crag — a tunnel such as only a Prince Bishop of the seventeenth century could have dreamed of, having at either end an arch of triumph, with pilasters, broken pediments, statues, scutcheons, all carved out of the living rock — a masterpiece among tunnels, and in a town where everything, without being really good, is exquisitely “amusing,” the most amusing feature of all. Ah, decidedly, Salzburg is in the movement.

One afternoon I took the funicular up to the castle. There is a beer-terrace under the walls of the fortress from which you get a view that is starred in Baedeker. Below you on one side lies the town, spread out in the curving valley, with a river running through it, like a small and German version of Florence. From the other side of the terrace you look out over a panorama that makes no pretence to Italianism; it is as sweetly and romantically German as an air out of Weber’s *Freischûtz.* There are mountains on the horizon, spiky and blue like mountains in a picture book; and in the foreground, extending to the very foot of the extremely improbable crag on which the castle and the beer-garden are perched, stretches a flat green plain — miles upon miles of juicy meadows dotted with minusculous cows, with here and there a neat toy farm, or, more

rarely, a cluster of dolls' houses, with a spire going up glittering from the midst of them.

I was sitting with my blond beer in front of this delicious and slightly comical landscape, thinking comfortably of nothing in particular, when I heard behind me a rapturous voice exclaiming, "Bello, bello!" I looked round curiously — for it seemed to me somehow rather surprising to hear Italian spoken here — and saw one of those fine sumptuous women they admire so much in the South. She was a *bella grassa*, plump to the verge of overripeness and perilously near middle age; but still in her way exceedingly handsome. Her face had the proportions of an iceberg — one-fifth above water, four-fifths below. Ample and florid from the eyes downwards, it was almost foreheadless; the hair began immediately above the brows. The eyes themselves were dark, large, and, for my taste, at least, somewhat excessively tender in expression. I took her in in a moment and was about to look away again when her companion, who had been looking at the view on the other side, turned round. It was the old Count.

I was far more embarrassed, I believe, than he. I felt myself blushing, as our eyes met, as though it were I who had been travelling about the world with a Colombella and he who had caught me in the act. I did not know what to do — whether to smile and speak to him, or to turn away as though I had not recognized him, or to nod from a distance and then, discreetly, to disappear. But the old Count put an end to my irresolution by calling out my name in astonishment, by running up to me and seizing my hand. What a delight to see an old friend! Here of all places! In this God-forsaken country — though it was cheap enough, didn't I find? He would introduce me to a charming compatriot of his own, an Italian lady he had met yesterday in the train from Vienna.

I was made known to the Colombella, and we all sat down at my table. Speaking resolutely in Italian, the Count ordered two more beers. We talked. Or rather the Count talked; for the conversation was a monologue. He told us anecdotes of the Italy of fifty yean ago; he gave us imitations of the queer characters he had known; he even, at one moment, imitated the braying of an ass — I forgot in what context; but the braying remains vividly in my memory.

Snuffing the air between every sentence, he gave us his views on women. The Colombella screamed indignant protests, dissolved herself in laughter. The old Count twisted his moustaches, twinkling at her through the network of his wrinkles. Every now and then he turned in my direction and gave me a little wink.

I listened in astonishment. Was this the man who had told the same anecdote three times in ten minutes? I looked at the old Count. He was leaning towards the Colombella whispering something in her ear which made her laugh so much that she had to wipe the tears from her eyes. Turning away from her, he caught my eye; smiling, he shrugged his shoulders as though to say, "These women! What imbeciles, but how delicious, how indispensable!" Was this the tired old man I had seen a year ago sitting on Pedrochi's terrace? It seemed incredible.

"Well, good-bye, *a rivederci*." They had to get down into the town again. The funicular was waiting.

"I'm delighted to have seen you," said the old Count, shaking me affectionately by the hand.

"And so am I," I protested. "Particularly delighted to see you so well."

"Yes, I'm wonderfully well now," he said, blowing out his chest.

"And young," I went on. "Younger than I am! How have you done it?"

"Aha!" The old Count cocked his head on one side mysteriously.

More in joke than in earnest, "I believe you've been seeing Steinach in Vienna," I said. "Having a rejuvenating operation."

For all reply, the old Count raised the forefinger of his right hand, laying it first to his lips, then along the side of his nose, and as he did so he winked. Then clenching his fist, and with his thumb sticking rigidly up, he made a complicated gesture which would, I am sure, for an Italian, have been full of a profound and vital significance. To me, however, unfamiliar with the language of signs, the exact meaning was not entirely clear. But the Count offered no verbal explanation. Still without uttering a word, he raised his hat; then laying his finger once more to his lips, he turned and ran with an astonishing agility down

the steep path towards the little carriage of the funicular, in which the Colombella had already taken her seat.

Hubert and Minnie

FOR HUBERT LAPELL this first love-affair was extremely important. "Important" was the word he had used himself when he was writing about it in his diary. It was an event in his life, a real event for a change. It marked, he felt, a genuine turning-point in his spiritual development.

"Voltaire," he wrote in his diary — and he wrote it a second time in one of his letters to Minnie— "Voltaire said that one died twice: once with the death of the whole body and once before, with the death of one's capacity to love. And in the same way one is born twice, the second time being on the occasion when one first falls in love. One is born, then, into a new world — a world of intenser feelings, heightened values, more penetrating insights." And so on.

In point of actual fact Hubert found this new world a little disappointing. The intenser feelings proved to be rather mild; not by any means up to literary standards.

"I *tell thee I am mad*
In Cressid's love. Thou answer'st: she is fair,
Pour'st in the open ulcer of my heart
Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice...."

No, it certainly wasn't quite that. In his diary, in his letters to Minnie, he painted, it is true, a series of brilliant and romantic landscapes of the new world. But they were composite imaginary landscapes in the manner of Salvator Rosa — richer, wilder, more picturesquely clear-obscure than the real thing. Hubert would seize with avidity on the least velleity of an unhappiness, a physical desire, a spiritual yearning, to work it up in his letters and journals into something substantially romantic. There were times, generally very late at night,

when he succeeded in persuading himself that he was indeed the wildest, unhappiest, most passionate of lovers. But in the daytime he went about his business nourishing something like a grievance against love.The thing was a bit of a fraud; yes, really, he decided, rather a fraud. All the same, he supposed it was important.

For Minnie, however, love was no fraud at all. Almost from the first moment she had adored him. A common friend had brought him to one of her Wednesday evenings. “This is Mr Lapell; but he’s too young to be called anything but Hubert.” That was how he had been introduced. And, laughing, she had taken his hand and called him Hubert at once. He too had laughed, rather nervously. “My name’s Minnie,” she said. But he had been too shy to call her anything at all that evening. His brown hair was tufty and untidy, like a little boy’s, and he had shy grey eyes that never looked at you for more than a glimpse at a time, but turned away almost at once, as though they were afraid. Quickly he glanced at you, eagerly — then away again; and his musical voice, with its sudden emphases, its quick modulations from high to low, seemed always to address itself to a ghost floating low down and a little to one side of the person to whom he was talking. Above the brows was a forehead beautifully domed, with a pensive wrinkle running up from between the eyes. In repose his full-lipped mouth pouted a little, as though he were expressing some chronic discontent with the world. And, of course, thought Minnie, the world wasn’t beautiful enough for his idealism.

“But after all,” he had said earnestly that first evening, “one has the world of thought to live in. That, at any rate, is simple and clear and beautiful. One can always live apart from the brutal scramble.”

And from the depths of the arm-chair in which, fragile, tired, and in these rather “artistic” surroundings almost incongruously elegant, she was sitting, Helen Glamber laughed her clear little laugh. “I think, on the contrary,” she said (Minnie remembered every incident of that first evening), “I think one ought to rush about and know thousands of people, and eat and drink enormously, and make love incessantly, and shout and laugh and knock people over the head.”

And having vented these Rabelaisian sentiments, Mrs Glamber dropped back with a sigh of fatigue, covering her eyes with a thin white hand; for she had a splitting headache, and the light hurt her.

“Really!” Minnie protested, laughing. She would have felt rather shocked if any one eke had said that; but Helen Glamber was allowed to say anything.

Hubert reaffirmed his quietkm. Elegant, weary, infinitely fragile, Mrs Glamber lay back in her arm-chair, listening. Or perhaps, under her covering hand, she was trying to go to sleep.

She had adored him at first sight. Now that she looked back she could see that it had been at first sight. Adored him protectively, maternally — for he was only twenty and very young, in spite of the wrinkle between his brows, and the long words, and the undergraduate’s newly discovered knowledge; only twenty, and she was nearly twenty-nine. And she had fallen in love with his beauty, too. Ah, passionately.

Hubert, perceiving it later, was surprised and exceedingly flattered. This had never happened to him before. He enjoyed being worshipped, and since Minnie had fallen so violently in love with him, it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to be in love with Minnie. True, if she had not started by adoring him, it would never have occurred to Hubert to fall in love with her. At their first meeting he had found her certainly very nice, but not particularly exciting. Afterwards, the manifest expression of her adoration had made him find her more interesting, and in the end he had fallen in love himself. But perhaps it was not to be wondered at if he found the process a little disappointing.

But still, he reflected on those secret occasions when he had to admit to himself that something was wrong with this passion, love without possession could never, surely, in the nature of things, be quite the genuine article. In his diary he recorded aptly those two quatrains of John Donne:

“So *must pure lovers*’ *souls descend*
To affections and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,

Else a great prince in prison lies.

To our bodies turn we then, that so
Weak men on love revealed may look;
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
But yet the body is his book."

At their next meeting he recited them to Minnie. The conversation which followed, compounded as it was of philosophy and personal confidences, was exquisite. It really, Hubert felt, came up to literary standards.

The next morning Minnie rang up her friend Helen Glamber and asked if she might come to tea that afternoon. She had several things to talk to her about. Mrs. Glamber sighed as she hung up the receiver. "Minnie's coming to tea," she called, turning towards the open door.

From across the passage her husband's voice came back to her. "Good Lord!" it said in a tone of far-away horror, of absent-minded resignation; for John Glamber was deep in his work and there was only a little of him left, so to speak, above the surface to react to the bad news.

Helen Glamber sighed again, and propping herself more comfortably against her pillows she reached for her book. She knew that far-away voice and what it meant. It meant that he wouldn't answer if she went on with the conversation; only say "h'm" or "m'yes." And if she persisted after that, it meant that he'd say, plaintively, heart-breakingly, "Darling, you *must* let me get on with my work." And at that moment she would so much have liked to talk a little. Instead, she went on reading at the point where she had broken off to answer Minnie's telephone call.

"By this time the flames had enveloped the gynaeceum. Nineteen times did the heroic Patriarch of Alexandria venture into the blazing fabric, from which he succeeded in rescuing all but two of its lovely occupants, twenty-seven in number, all of whom he caused to be transported at once to his own private apartments...."

It was one of those instructive books John liked her to read. History, mystery, lesson, and law. But at the moment she didn't feel much like history. She felt like talking. And that was out of the question; absolutely out of it.

She put down her book and began to file her nails and think of poor Minnie. Yes, poor Minnie. Why was it that one couldn't help saying Good Lord! heart-feltly, when one heard she was coming to tea? And why did one never have the heart to refuse to let her come to tea? She was pathetic, but pathetic in such a boring way. There are some people you like being kind to, people you want to help and befriend. People that look at you with the eyes of sick monkeys. Your heart breaks when you see them. But poor Minnie had none of the charms of a sick monkey. She was just a great big healthy young woman of twenty-eight who ought to have been married and the mother of children, and who wasn't. She would have made such a good wife, such an admirably solicitous and careful mother. But it just happened that none of the men she knew had ever wanted to marry her. And why should they want to? When she came into a room, the light seemed to grow perceptibly dimmer, the electric tension slackened off. She brought no life with her; she absorbed what there was, she was like so much blotting-paper. No wonder nobody wanted to marry her. And yet, of course, it was the only thing. Particularly as she was always falling in love herself. The only thing.

"John!" Mrs Glamber suddenly called. "Is it really true about ferrets?"

"Ferrets?" the voice from across the passage repeated with a remote irritation. "Is what true about ferrets?"

"That the females die if they're not mated."

"How on earth should I know?"

"But you generally know everything."

"But, my darling, really..." The voice was plaintive, full of reproach.

Mrs Glamber clapped her hand over her mouth and only took it off again to blow a kiss. "All right," she said very quickly. "All right. Really. I'm sorry. I won't do it again. Really." She blew another kiss towards the door.

"But ferrets..." repeated the voice.

“Sh — sh, sh — sh.”

“Why ferrets?”

“Darling,” said Mrs Glamber almost sternly, “you really must go on with your work.”

Minnie came to tea. She put the case — hypothetically at first, as though it were the case of a third person; then, gaining courage, she put it personally. It was her own case. Out of the depths of her untroubled, pagan innocence, Helen Glamber brutally advised her. “If you want to go to bed with the young man,” she said, “go to bed with him. The thing has no importance in itself. At least not much. It’s only important because it makes possible more secret confidences, because it strengthens affection, makes the man in a way dependent on you. And then, of course, it’s the natural thing. I’m all for nature except when it comes to painting one’s face. They say that ferrets...” But Minnie noticed that she never finished the sentence. Appalled and fascinated, shocked and yet convinced, she listened.

“My darling,” said Mrs Glamber that evening when her husband came home — for he hadn’t been able to face Minnie; he had gone to the Club for tea— “who was it that invented religion, and sin, and all that? And why?”

John laughed. “It was invented by Adam,” he said, “for various little transcendental reasons which you would probably find it difficult to appreciate. But also for the very practical purpose of keeping Eve in order.”

“Well, if you call complicating people’s lives keeping them in order, then I dare say you’re right.” Mrs Glamber shook her head. “I find it all too obscure. At sixteen, yes. But one really ought to have grown out of that sort of thing by twenty. And at thirty — the woman’s nearly thirty, you know — well, really...” In the end, Minnie wrote to Hubert telling him that she had made up her mind. Hubert was staying in Hertfordshire with his friend Watchett. It was a big house, the food was good, one was very comfortable; and old Mr Watchett, moreover, had a very sound library. In the impenetrable shade of the Wellingtonias Hubert and Ted Watchett played croquet and discussed the best methods of cultivating the Me. You could do a good deal, they decided, with art — books, you know,

and pictures and music. “Listen to Stravinsky’s *Sacre*,” said Ted Watchett, “and you’re for ever excused from going to Tibet or the Gold Coast or any of those awful places. And then there’s Dostoievsky instead of murder, and D. H. Lawrence as a substitute for sex.”

“All the same,” said Hubert, “one must have a *certain* amount of actual non-imaginative experience.” He spoke earnestly, abstractedly; but Minnie’s letter was in his pocket. “*Gnosce teipsum.* You can’t really know yourself without coming into collision with events, can you?”

Next day, Ted’s cousin, Phoebe, arrived. She had red hair and a milky skin, and was more or less on the musical comedy stage. “One foot on and one foot off.” she explained. “The splits.” And there and then she did them, the splits, on the drawing-room carpet. “It’s quite easy,” she said, laughing, and jumped up again with an easy grace that fairly took one’s breath away. Ted didn’t like her. “Tiresome girl,” he said. “So silly, too. Consciously silly, silly on purpose, which makes it worse.” And, it was true, she did like boasting about the amount of champagne she could put away without getting buffy, and the number of times she had exceeded the generous allowance and been “blind to the world.” She liked talking about her admirers in terms which might make you suppose that they were all her accepted lovers. But then she had the justification of her vitality and her shining red hair.

“Vitality,” Hubert wrote in his diary (he contemplated a distant date, after, or preferably before, his death, when these confessions and aphorisms would be published), “vitality can make claims on the world almost as imperiously as can beauty. Sometimes beauty and vitality meet in one person.”

It was Hubert who arranged that they should stay at the mill. One of his friends had once been there with a reading party, and found the place comfortable, secluded, and admirably quiet. Quiet, that is to say, with the special quietness peculiar to mills. For the silence there was not the silence of night on a mountain; it was a silence made of continuous thunder. At nine o’clock every morning the mill-wheel began to turn, and its roaring never stopped all day. For the first moments the noise was terrifying, was almost unbearable. Then, after a

little, one grew accustomed to it. The thunder became, by reason of its very unintermittence, a perfect silence, wonderfuly rich and profound.

At the back of the mill was a little garden hemmed in on three sides by the house, the outhouses, and a high brick wall, and open on the fourth towards the water. Looking over the parapet, Minnie watched it sliding past. It was like a brown snake with arrowy markings on its back; and it crawled, it glided, it slid along for ever. She sat there, waiting: her train, from London, had brought her here soon after lunch; Hubert, coming across country from the Watchetts, would hardly arrive before six. The water flowed beneath her eyes like time, like destiny, smoothly towards some new and violent event.

The immense noise that in this garden was silence enveloped her. Inured, her mind moved in it as though in its native element. From beyond the parapet came the coolness and the weedy smell of water. But if she turned back towards the garden, she breathed at once the hot perfume of sunlight beating on flowers and ripening fruit. In the afternoon sunlight all the world was ripe. The old red house lay there, ripe, like a dropped plum; the walls were riper than the fruits of the nectarine trees so tenderly and neatly crucified on their warm bricks. And that richer silence of unremitting thunder seemed, as it were, the powdery bloom on a day that had come to exquisite maturity and was hanging, round as a peach and juicy with life and happiness, waiting in the sunshine for the bite of eager teeth.

At the heart of this fruit-ripe world Minnie waited. The water flowed towards the wheel; smoothly, smoothly — then it fell, it broke itself to pieces on the turning wheel. And time was sliding onwards, quietly towards an event that would shatter all the smoothness of her life.

“If you really want to go to bed with the young man, go to bed with him.” She could hear Helen’s clear, shrill voice saying impossible, brutal things. If any one else had said them, she would have run out of the room. But in Helen’s mouth they seemed, somehow, so simple, so innocuous, and so true. And yet all that other people had said or implied — at home, at school, among the people she was used to meeting — seemed equally true.

But then, of course, there was love. Hubert had written a Shakespearean sonnet which began:

"*Love hallows all whereon' tis truly placed,*
Turns dross to gold with one touch of his dart,
Makes matter mind, extremest passion chaste,
And builds a temple in the lustful heart."

She thought that very beautiful. And very true. It seemed to throw a bridge between Helen and the other people. Love, true love, made all the difference. It justified. Love — how much, how much she loved!

Time passed and the light grew richer as the sun declined out of the height of the sky. The day grew more and more deliciously ripe, swelling with unheard-of sweetness. Over its sun-flushed cheeks the thundery silence of the mill-wheel spread the softest, peachiest of blooms. Minnie sat on the parapet, waiting. Sometimes she looked down at the sliding water, sometimes she turned her eyes towards the garden. Time flowed, but she was now no more afraid of that shattering event that thundered there, in the future. The ripe sweetness of the afternoon seemed to enter into her spirit, filling it to the brim. There was no more room for doubts, or fearful anticipations, or regrets. She was happy. Tenderly, with a tenderness she could not have expressed in words, only with the gentlest of light kisses, with fingers caressingly drawn through the ruffled hair, she thought of Hubert, her Hubert.

Hubert, Hubert.... And suddenly, startlingly, he was standing there at her side.

"Oh," she said, and for a moment she stared at him with round brown eyes, in which there was nothing but astonishment. Then the expression changed. "Hubert," she said softly.

Hubert took her hand and dropped it again; looked at her for an instant, then turned away. Leaning on the parapet, he stared down into the sliding water; his face was unsmiling. For a long time both were silent. Minnie remained where she was, sitting quite still, her eyes fixed on the young man's averted face. She

was happy, happy, happy. The long day ripened and ripened, perfection after perfection.

“Minnie,” said the young man suddenly, and with a loud abruptness, as though he had been a long time deciding himself to speak and had at last succeeded in bringing out the prepared and pent-up words, “I feel I’ve behaved very badly towards you. I never ought to have asked you to come here. It was wrong. I’m sorry.”

“But I came because I wanted to,” Minnie exclaimed.

Hubert glanced at her, then turned away his eyes and went on addressing a ghost that floated, it seemed, just above the face of the sliding water. “It was too much to ask. I shouldn’t have done it. For a man it’s different. But for a woman..

“But, I tell you, I wanted to.”

“It’s too much.”

“It’s nothing,” said Minnie, “because I love you.” And leaning forward, she ran her fingers through his hair. Ah, tenderness that no words could express’. “You silly boy,” she whispered. “Did you think I didn’t love you enough for that?”

Hubert did not look up. The water slid and slid away before his eyes; Minnie’s fingers played in his hair, ran caressingly over the nape of his neck. He felt suddenly a positive hatred for this woman. Idiot! Why couldn’t she take a hint? He didn’t want her. And why on earth had he ever imagined that he did? All the way in the train he had been asking himself that question. Why? Why? And the question had asked itself still more urgently just now as, standing at the garden door, he had looked out between the apple tree and watched her, unobserved, through a long minute — watched her sitting there on the parapet, turning her vague brown eyes now at the water, now towards the garden, and smiling to herself with an expression that had seemed to him so dim and vacuous that he could almost have fancied her an imbecile.

And with Phoebe yesterday he had stood on the crest of the bare chalk down. Like a sea at their feet stretched the plain, and above the dim horizon towered heroic clouds. Fingers of the wind lifted the red locks of her hair. She stood as

though poised, ready to leap off into the boisterous air. “How I should like to fly!” she said. “There’s something particularly attractive about airmen, I always think.” And she had gone running down the hill.

But Minnie, with her dull hair, her apple-red cheeks, and big, slow body, was like a peasant girl. How had he ever persuaded himself that he wanted her? And what made it much worse, of course, was that she adored him, embarrassingly, tiresomely, like a too affectionate spaniel that insists on tumbling about at your feet and licking your hand just when you want to sit quietly and concentrate on serious things.

Hubert moved away, out of reach of her caressing hand. He lifted towards her for a moment a pair of eyes that had become, as it were, opaque with a cold anger; then dropped them again.

“The sacrifice is too great,” he said in a voice that sounded to him like somebody else’s voice. He found it very difficult to say this sort of thing convincingly. “I can’t ask it of you,” the actor pursued. “I won’t.”

“But it isn’t a sacrifice,” Minnie protested. “It’s a joy, it’s happiness. Oh, can’t you understand?”

Hubert did not answer. Motionless, his elbows on the parapet, he stared down into the water. Minnie looked at him, perplexed only, at first; but all at once she was seized with a nameless agonizing doubt that grew and grew within her, as the silence prolonged itself, like some dreadful cancer of the spirit, until it had eaten away all her happiness, until there was nothing left in her mind but doubt and apprehension.

“What is it?” she said at last. “Why are you so strange? What is it, Hubert? What is it?”

Leaning anxiously forward, she laid her two hands on either side of his averted face and turned it towards her. Blank and opaque with anger were the eyes. “What is it?” she repeated. “Hubert, what is it?”

Hubert disengaged himself. “It’s no good,” he said in a smothered voice. “No good at all. It was a mistake. I’m sorry. I think I’d better go away. The trap’s still at the door.

And without waiting for her to say anything, without explaining himself any further, he turned and walked quickly away, almost ran, towards the house. Well, thank goodness, he said to himself, he was out of that. He hadn’t done it very well, or handsomely, or courageously; but, at any rate, he was out of it. Poor Minnie! He felt sorry for her; but after all, what could he do about it? Poor Minnie! Still, it rather flattered his vanity to think that she would be mourning over him. And in any case, he reassured his conscience, she couldn’t really mind very much. But on the other hand, his vanity reminded him, she did adore him. Oh, she absolutely worshipped...

The door closed behind him. Minnie was alone again in the garden. Ripe, ripe it lay there in the late sunshine. Half of it was in shadow now; but the rest of it, in the coloured evening light, seemed to have come to the final and absolute perfection of maturity. Bloomy with thundery silence, the choicest fruit of all time hung there, deliciously sweet, sweet to the core; hung flushed and beautiful on the brink of darkness.

Minnie sat there quite still, wondering what had happened. Had he gone, had he really gone? The door closed behind him with a bang, and almost as though the sound were a signal prearranged, a man walked out from the mill on to the dam and closed the sluice. And all at once the wheel was still. Apocalyptically there was silence; the silence of soundlessness took the place of that other silence that was uninterrupted sound. Gulls opened endlessly out around her; she was alone. Across the void of soundlessness a belated bee trailed its thin buzzing; the sparrows chirped, and from across the water came the sound of voices and far-away laughter. And as though woken from a sleep, Minnie looked up and listened, fearfully, turning her head from side to side.

Fard

THEY HAD BEEN quarrelling now for nearly three-quarters of an hour. Muted and inarticulate, the voices floated down the corridor, from the other end of the flat. Stooping over her sewing, Sophie wondered, without much curiosity, what it was all about this time. It was Madame's voice that she heard most often. Shrill with anger and indignant with tears, it burst out in gusts, in gushes. Monsieur was more self-controlled, and his deeper voice was too softly pitched to penetrate easily the closed doors and to carry along the passage. To Sophie, in her cold little room, the quarrel sounded, most of the time, like a series of monologues by Madame, interrupted by strange and ominous silences. But every now and then Monsieur seemed to lose his temper outright, and then there was no silence between the gusts, but a harsh, deep, angry shout. Madame kept up her loud shrillness continuously and without flagging; her voice had, even in anger, a curious, level monotony. But Monsieur spoke now loudly, now softly, with emphases and modulations and sudden outbursts, so that his contributions to the squabble, when they were audible, sounded like a series of separate explosions. Bow, wow, wow-wow-wow, wow — a dog barking rather slowly.

After a time Sophie paid no more heed to the noise of quarrelling. She was mending one of Madame's camisoles, and the work required all her attention. She felt very tired; her body ached all over. It had been a hard day; so had yesterday, so had the day before. Every day was a hard day, and she wasn't so young as she had been. Two years more and she'd be fifty. Every day had been a hard day ever since she could remember. She thought of the sacks of potatoes she used to carry when she was a little girl in the country. Slowly, slowly she was walking along the dusty road with the sack over her shoulder. Ten steps more; she could manage that. Only it never was the end; one always had to begin again.

She looked up from her sewing, moved her head from side to side, blinked. She had begun to see lights and spots of colour dancing before her eyes; it often happened to her now. A sort of yellowish bright worm was wriggling up towards the right-hand corner of her field of vision; and though it was always moving upwards, upwards, it was always there in the same place. And there were stars of red and green that snapped and brightened and faded all round the worm. They moved between her and her sewing; they were there when she shut her eyes. After a moment she went on with her work; Madame wanted her camisole most particularly to-morrow morning. But it was difficult to see round the worm.

There was suddenly a great increase of noise from the other end of the corridor. A door had opened; words articulated themselves.

"... bien tort, mon ami, si tu crois que je suis ton esclave. Je ferai ce que je voudrai."

"Moi aussi." Monsieur uttered a harsh, dangerous laugh. There was the sound of heavy footsteps in the passage, a rattling in the umbrella stand; then the front door banged.

Sophie looked down again at her work. Oh, the worm, the coloured stars, the aching fatigue in all her limbs! If one could only spend a whole day in bed — in a huge bed, feathery, warm and soft, all the day long...

The ringing of the bell startled her. It always made her jump, that furious wasp-like buzzer. She got up, put her work down on the table, smoothed her apron, set straight her cap, and stepped out into the corridor. Once more the bell buzzed furiously. Madame was impatient.

"At last, Sophie. I thought you were never coming."

Sophie said nothing; there was nothing to say. Madame was standing in front of the open wardrobe. A bundle of dresses hung over her arm, and there were more of them lying in a heap on the bed.

"Une beauté à la Rubens," her husband used to call her when he was in an amorous mood. He liked these massive, splendid, great women. None of your flexible drain-pipes for him. "Hélène Fourmont" was his pet name for her.

“Some day,” Madame used to tell her friends, “some day I really must go to the Louvre and see my portrait. By Rubens, you know. It’s extraordinary that one should have lived all one’s life in Paris and never have seen the Louvre. Don’t you think so?”

She-was superb to-night. Her cheeks were flushed; her blue eyes shone with an unusual brilliance between their long lashes; her short, red-brown hair had broken wildly loose.

“To-morrow, Sophie,” she said dramatically, “we start for Rome. To-morrow morning.” She unhooked another dress from the wardrobe as she spoke, and threw it on to the bed. With the movement her dressing-gown flew open, and there was a vision of ornate underclothing and white exuberant flesh. “We must pack at once.”

“For how long, Madame?”

“A fortnight, three months — how should I know?”

“It makes a difference, Madame.”

“The important thing is to get away. I shall not return to this house, after what has been said to me to-night, till I am humbly asked to.”

“We had better take the large trunk, then, Madame; I will go and fetch it.”

The air in the box-room was sickly with the smell of dust and leather. The big trunk was jammed in a far corner. She had to bend and strain at it in order to pull it out. The worm and the coloured stars flickered before her eyes; she felt dizzy when she straightened herself up. “I’ll help you to pack, Sophie,” said Madame, when the servant returned, dragging the heavy trunk after her. What a death’s-head the old woman looked nowadays! She hated having old, ugly people near her. But Sophie was so efficient; it would be madness to get rid of her.

“Madame need not trouble.” There would be no end to it, Sophie knew, if Madame started opening drawers and throwing things about. “Madame had much better go to bed. It’s late.”

No, no. She wouldn’t be able to sleep. She was to such a degree enervated. These men... What an embeastment! One was not their slave. One would not be treated in this way.

Sophie was packing. A whole day in bed, in a huge, soft bed, like Madame's. One would doze, one would wake up for a moment, one would doze again.

"His latest game," Madame was saying indignantly, "is to tell me he hasn't got any money. I'm not to buy any clothes, he says. Too grotesque. I can't go about naked, can I?" She threw out her hands. "And as for saying he can't afford, that's simply nonsense. He can, perfectly well. Only he's mean, mean, horribly mean. And if he'd only do a little honest work, for a change, instead of writing silly verses and publishing them at his own expense, he'd have plenty and to spare." She walked up and down the room. "Besides," she went on, "there's his old father. What's he for, I should like to know? 'You must be proud of having a poet for a husband,' he says." She made her voice quaver like an old man's. "It's all I can do not to laugh in his face. 'And what beautiful verses Hégésippe writes about you! What passion, what fire!'" Thinking of the old man, she grimaced, wobbled her head, shook her finger, doddered on her legs. "And when one reflects that poor Hégésippe is bald, and dyes the few hairs he has left." She laughed. "As for the passion he talks so much about in his beastly verses," she laughed— "that's all pure invention. But, my good Sophie, what are you thinking of? Why are you packing that hideous old green dress?"

Sophie pulled out the dress without saying anything. Why did the woman choose this night to look so terribly ill? She had a yellow face and blue teeth. Madame shuddered; it was too horrible. She ought to send her to bed. But, after all, the work had to be done. What could one do about it? She felt more than ever aggrieved.

"Life is terrible." Sighing, she sat down heavily on the edge of the bed. The buoyant springs rocked her gently once or twice before they settled to rest. "To be married to a man like this. I shall soon be getting old and fat. And never once unfaithful. But look how he treats me." She got up again and began to wander aimlessly about the room. "I won't stand it, though," she burst out. She had halted in front of the long mirror, and was admiring her own splendid tragic figure. No one would believe, to look at her, that she was over thirty. Behind the beautiful tragedian she could see in the glass a thin, miserable, old creature, with

a yellow face and blue teeth, crouching over the trunk. Really, it was too disagreeable. Sophie looked like one of those beggar women one sees on a cold morning, standing in the gutter. Does one hurry past, trying not to look at them? Or does one stop, open one's purse, and give them one's copper and nickel — even as much as a two-franc note, if one has no change? But whatever one did, one always felt uncomfortable, one always felt apologetic for one's furs. That was what came of walking. If one had a car — but that was another of Hégésippe's meannesses — one wouldn't, rolling along behind closed windows, have to be conscious of them at all. She turned away from the glass.

"I won't stand it," she said, trying not to think of the beggar women, of blue teeth in a yellow face; "I won't stand it." She dropped into a chair.

But think of a lover with a yellow face and blue, uneven teeth! She closed her eyes, shuddered at the thought. It would be enough to make one sick. She felt impelled to take another look: Sophie's eyes were the colour of greenish lead, quite without life. What was one to do about it? The woman's face was a reproach, an accusation. And besides, the sight of it was making her feel positively ill. She had never been so profoundly enervated.

Sophie rose slowly and with difficulty from her knees; an expression of pain crossed her face. Slowly she walked to the chest of drawers, slowly counted out six pairs of silk stockings. She turned back towards the trunk. The woman was a walking corpse!

"Life is terrible," Madame repeated with conviction, "terrible, terrible, terrible."

She ought to send the woman to bed. But she would never be able to get her packing done by herself. And it was so important to get off to-morrow morning. She had told Hégésippe she would go, and he had simply laughed; he hadn't believed it. She must give him a lesson this time. In Rome she would see Luigino. Such a charming boy, and a marquis, too. Perhaps... But she could think of nothing but Sophie's face; the leaden eyes, the bluish teeth, the yellow, wrinkled skin.

“Sophie,” she said suddenly; it was with difficulty that she prevented herself screaming, “look on my dressing-table. You’ll see a box of rouge, the Dorin number twenty-four. Put a little on your cheeks. And there’s a stick of lip salve in the right-hand drawer.”

She kept her eyes resolutely shut while Sophie got up — with what a horrible creaking of the joints! — walked over to the dressing-table, and stood there, rustling faintly, through what seemed an eternity. What a life, my God, what a life! Slow footsteps trailed back again. She opened her eyes. Oh, that was far better, far better.

“Thank you, Sophie. You look much less tired now.” She got up briskly. “And now we must hurry.” Full of energy, she ran to the wardrobe. “Goodness me,” she exclaimed, throwing up her hands, “you’ve forgotten to put in my blue evening dress. How could you be so stupid, Sophie?”

The Portrait

"PICTURES," SAID MR Bigger; "you want to see some pictures?

Well, we have a very interesting mixed exhibition of modern stuff in our galleries at the moment. French and English, you know." The customer held up his hand, shook his head. "No, no. Nothing modern for me," he declared, in his pleasant northern English. "I want real pictures, old pictures. Rembrandt and Sir Joshua Reynolds and that sort of thing."

"Perfectly." Mr Bigger nodded. "Old Masters. Oh, of course we deal in the old as well as the modern."

"The fact is," said the other, "that I've just bought a rather large house — a Manor House," he added, in impressive tones.

Mr Bigger smiled; there was an ingenuousness about this simple-minded fellow which was most engaging. He wondered how the man had made his money. "A Manor House." The way he had said it was really charming. Here was a man who had worked his way up from serfdom to the lordship of a manor, from the broad base of the feudal pyramid to the narrow summit. His own history and all the history of classes had been implicit in that awed proud emphasis on the "Manor". But the stranger was running on; Mr Bigger could not allow his thoughts to wander farther. "In a house of this style," he was saying, "and with a position like mine to keep up, one must have a few pictures. Old Masters, you know; Rembrandts and What's-his-names."

"Of course," said Mr Bigger, "an Old Master is a symbol of social superiority."

"That's just it," cried the other, beaming; "you've said just what I wanted to say."

Mr Bigger bowed and smiled. It was delightful to find some one who took one's little ironies as sober seriousness.

“Of course, we should only need Old Masters downstairs, in the reception-room. It would be too much of a good thing to have them in the bedrooms too.”

“Altogether too much of a good thing,” Mr Bigger assented. “As a matter of fact,” the Lord of the Manor went on, “my daughter — she does a bit of sketching. And very pretty it is. I’m having some of her things framed to hang in the bedrooms. It’s useful having an artist in the family. Saves you buying pictures. But, of course, we must have something old downstairs.”

“I think I have exactly what you want.” Mr Bigger got up and rang the bell. “My daughter does a little sketching” — he pictured a large, blonde, barmaidish personage, thirty-one and not yet married, running a bit to seed. His secretary appeared at the door. “Bring me the Venetian portrait, Miss Pratt, the one in the back room. You know which I mean.”

“You’re very snug in here,” said the Lord of the Manor. “Business good, I hope.”

Mr Bigger sighed. “The slump,” he said. “We art dealers feel it worse than any one.”

“Ah, the slump.” The Lord of the Manor chuckled. “I foresaw it all the time. Some people seemed to think the good times were going to last for ever. What fools! I sold out of everything at the crest of the wave. That’s why I can buy pictures now.”

Mr. Bigger laughed too. This was the right sort of customer. “Wish I’d had anything to sell out during the boom,” he said.

The Lord of the Manor laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks. He was still laughing when Miss Pratt re-entered the room. She carried a picture, shieldwise, in her two hands, before her.

“Put it on the easel, Miss Pratt,” said Mr Bigger. “Now,” he turned to the Lord of the Manor, “what do you think of that?”

The picture that stood on the easel before them was a half-length portrait. Plump-faced, white-skinned, high-bosomed in her deeply scalloped dress of blue silk, the subject of the picture seemed a typical Italian lady of the middle eighteenth century. A little complacent smile curved the pouting lips, and in one

hand she held a black mask, as though she had just taken it off after a day of carnival.

“Very nice,” said the Lord of the Manor; but he added doubtfully, “It isn’t very like Rembrandt, is it? It’s all so clear and bright. Generally in Old Masters you can never see anything at all, they’re so dark and foggy.”

“Very true,” said Mr Bigger. “But not all Old Masters are like Rembrandt.”

“I suppose not” The Lord of the Manor seemed hardly to be convinced.

“This is eighteenth-century Venetian. Their colour was always luminous. Giangolini was the painter. He died young, you know. Not more than half a dozen of his pictures are known. And this is one.”

The Lord of the Manor nodded. He could appreciate the value of rarity.

“One notices at a first glance the influence of Longhi,” Mr Bigger went on airily. “And there is something of the morbidezza of Rosalba in the painting of the face.”

The Lord of the Manor was looking uncomfortably from Mr Bigger to the picture and from the picture to Mr Bigger. There is nothing so embarrassing as to be talked at by some one possessing more knowledge than you do. Mr Bigger pressed his advantage.

“Curious,” he went on, “that one sees nothing of Tiepolo’s manner in this. Don’t you think so?”

The Lord of the Manor nodded. His face wore a gloomy expression. The corners of his baby’s mouth drooped. One almost expected him to burst into tears.

“It’s pleasant,” said Mr Bigger, relenting at last, “to talk to somebody who really knows about painting. So few people do.”

“Well, I can’t say I’ve ever gone into the subject very deeply,” said the Lord of the Manor modestly. “But I know what I like when I see it.” His face brightened again, as he felt himself on safer ground.

“A natural instinct,” said Mr Bigger. “That’s a very precious gift. I could see by your face that you had it; I could see that the moment you came into the gallery.”

The Lord of the Manor was delighted. “Really, now,” he said. He felt himself growing larger, more important. “Really.” He cocked his head critically on one side. “Yes. I must say I think that’s a very fine bit of painting. Very fine. But the fact is, I should rather have liked a more historical piece, if you know what I mean. Something more ancestor-like, you know. A portrait of somebody with a story — like Anne Boleyn, or Nell Gwynn, or the Duke of Wellington, or some one like that.”

“But, my dear sir, I was just going to tell you. This picture has a story.” Mr Bigger leaned forward and tapped the Lord of the Manor on the knee. His eyes twinkled with benevolent and amused brightness under his bushy eyebrows. There was a knowing kindliness in his smile. “A most remarkable story is connected with the painting of that picture.”

“You don’t say so?” The Lord of the Manor raised his eyebrows.

Mr Bigger leaned back in his chair. “The lady you see there,” he said, indicating the portrait with a wave of the hand, “was the wife of the fourth Earl Hurtmore. The family is now extinct. The ninth Earl died only last year. I got this picture when the house was sold up. It’s sad to see the passing of these old ancestral homes.” Mr Bigger sighed. The Lord of the Manor looked solemn, as though he were in church. There was a moment’s silence; then Mr Bigger went on in a changed tone. “From his portraits, which I have seen, the fourth Earl seems to have been a long-faced, gloomy, grey-looking fellow. One can never imagine him young; he was the sort of man who looks permanently fifty. His chief interests in life were music and Roman antiquities. There’s one portrait of him holding an ivory flute in one hand and resting the other on a fragment of Roman carving. He spent at least half his life travelling in Italy, looking for antiques and listening to music. When he was about fifty-five, he suddenly decided that it was about time to get married. This was the lady of his choice.” Mr Bigger pointed to the picture. “His money and his title must have made up for many deficiencies. One can’t imagine, from her appearance, that Lady Hurtmore took a great deal of interest in Roman antiquities. Nor, I should think, did she care much for the science and history of music. She liked clothes, she

liked society, she liked gambling, she liked flirting, she liked enjoying herself. It doesn't seem that the newly wedded couple got on too well. But still, they avoided an open breach. A year after the marriage Lord Hurtmore decided to pay another visit to Italy. They reached Venice in the early autumn. For Lord Hurtmore, Venice meant unlimited music. It meant Galuppi's daily concerts at the orphanage of the Misericordia. It meant Piccini at Santa Maria. It meant new operas at the San Moise; it meant delicious cantatas at a hundred churches. It meant private concerts of amateurs; it meant Porpora and the finest singers in Europe; it meant Tartini and the greatest violinists. For Lady Hurtmore, Venice meant something rather different. It meant gambling at the Ridotto, masked balls, gay supper-parties — all the delights of the most amusing city in the world. Living their separate lives, both might have been happy here in Venice almost indefinitely. But one day Lord Hurtmore had the disastrous idea of having his wife's portrait painted. Young Giangolini was recommended to him as the promising, the coming painter. Lady Hurtmore began her sittings. Giangolini was handsome and dashing, Giangolini was young. He had an amorous technique as perfect as his artistic technique. Lady Hurtmore would have been more than human if she had been able to resist him. She was not more than human."

"None of us are, eh?" The Lord of the Manor dug his finger into Mr Bigger's ribs and laughed.

Politely, Mr Bigger joined in his mirth; when it had subsided, he went on. "In the end they decided to run away together across the border. They would live at Vienna — live on the Hurtmore family jewels, which the lady would be careful to pack in her suitcase. They were worth upwards of twenty thousand, the Hurtmore jewels; and in Vienna, under Maria-Theresa, one could live handsomely on the interest of twenty thousand.

"The arrangements were easily made. Giangolini had a friend who did everything for them — got them passports under an assumed name, hired horses to be in waiting on the mainland, placed his gondola at their disposal. They decided to flee on the day of the last sitting. The day came. Lord Hurtmore,

according to his usual custom, brought his wife to Giangolini's studio in a gondola, left her there, perched on the high-backed model's throne, and went off again to listen to Galuppi's concert at the Misericordia. It was the time of full carnival. Even in broad daylight people went about in masks. Lady Hurtmore wore one of black silk — you see her holding it, there, in the portrait. Her husband, though he was no reveller and disapproved of carnival junketings, preferred to conform to the grotesque fashion of his neighbours rather than attract attention to himself by not conforming.

"The long black cloak, the huge three-cornered black hat, the long-nosed mask of white paper were the ordinary attire of every Venetian gentleman in these carnival weeks. Lord Hurtmore did not care to be conspicuous; he wore the same. There must have been something richly absurd and incongruous in the spectacle of this grave and solemn-faced English milord dressed in the clown's uniform of a gay Venetian masker. 'Pantaloon in the clothes of Pulcinella,' was how the lovers described him to one another; the old dotard of the eternal comedy dressed up as the clown. Well, this morning, as I have said, Lord Hurtmore came as usual in his hired gondola, bringing his lady with him. And she in her turn was bringing, under the folds of her capacious cloak, a little leather box wherein, snug on their silken bed, reposed the Hurtmore jewels. Seated in the dark little cabin of the gondola they watched the churches, the richly fretted palazzi, the high mean houses gliding past them. From under his Punch's mask Lord Hurtmore's voice spoke gravely, slowly, imperturbably.

"'The learned Father Martini,' he said, 'has promised to do me the honour of coming to dine with us to-morrow. I doubt if any man knows more of musical history than he. I will ask you to be at pains to do him special honour.'

"'You may be sure I will, my lord.' She could hardly contain the laughing excitement that bubbled up within her. To-morrow at dinner-time she would be far away — over the frontier, beyond Gorizia, galloping along the Vienna road. Poor old Pantaloon! But no, she wasn't in the least sorry for him. After all, he had his music, he had his odds and ends of broken marble. Under her cloak she

clutched the jewel-case more tightly. How intoxicatingly amusing her secret was!”

Mr Bigger clasped his hands and pressed them dramatically over his heart. He was enjoying himself. He turned his long, foxy nose towards the Lord of the Manor, and smiled benevolently. The Lord of the Manor for his part was all attention.

“Well?” he inquired.

Mr Bigger unclasped his hands, and let them fall on to his knees.

“Well,” he said, “the gondola draws up at Giangolini’s door, Lord Hurtmore helps his wife out, leads her up to the painter’s great room on the first floor, commits her into his charge with his usual polite formula, and then goes off to hear Galuppi’s morning concert at the Misericordia. The lovers have a good two hours to make their final preparations.

“Old Pantaloon safely out of sight, up pops the painter’s useful friend, masked and cloaked like every one else in the streets and on the canals of this carnival Venice. There follow embracements and handshakings and laughter all round; everything has been so marvellously successful, not a suspicion roused. From under Lady Hurtmore’s cloak comes the jewel-case. She opens it, and there are loud Italian exclamations of astonishment and admiration.

The brilliants, the pearls, the great Hurtmore emeralds, the ruby clasps, the diamond ear-rings — all these bright, glittering things are lovingly examined, knowingly handled. Fifty thousand sequins at the least is the estimate of the useful friend. The two lovers throw themselves ecstatically into one another’s arms.

“The useful friend interrupts them; there are still a few last things to be done. They must go and sign for their passports at the Ministry of Police. Oh, a mere formality; but still it has to be done. He will go out at the same time and sell one of the lady’s diamonds to provide the necessary funds for the journey.”

Mr Bigger paused to light a cigarette. He blew a cloud of smoke, and went on.

“So they set out, all in their masks and capes, the useful friend in one direction, the painter and his mistress in another. Ah, love in Venice!” Mr Bigger turned up his eyes in ecstasy. “Have you ever been in Venice and in love, sir?” he inquired of the Lord of the Manor.

“Never farther than Dieppe,” said the Lord of the Manor, shaking his head.

“Ah, then you’ve missed one of life’s great experiences. You can never fully and completely understand what must have been the sensations of little Lady Hurtmore and the artist as they glided down the long canals, gazing at one another through the eyeholes of their masks. Sometimes, perhaps, they kissed — though it would have been difficult to do that without unmasking, and there was always the danger that some one might have recognized their naked faces through the windows of their little cabin. No, on the whole,” Mr Bigger concluded reflectively, “I expect they confined themselves to looking at one another. But in Venice, drowsing along the canals, one can almost be satisfied with looking — just looking.”

He caressed the air with his hand and let his voice droop away into silence. He took two or three puffs at his cigarette without saying anything. When he went on, his voice was very quiet and even.

“About half an hour after they had gone, a gondola drew up at Giangolini’s door and a man in a paper mask, wrapped in a black cloak and wearing on his head the inevitable three-cornered hat, got out and went upstairs to the painter’s room. It was empty. The portrait smiled sweetly and a little fatuously from the easel.

But no painter stood before it and the model’s throne was untenanted. The long-nosed mask looked about the room with an expressionless curiosity. The wandering glance came to rest at last on the jewel-case that stood where the lovers had carelessly left it, open on the table. Deep-set and darkly shadowed behind the grotesque mask, the eyes dwelt long and fixedly on this object. Long-nosed Pulcinella seemed to be wrapped in meditation.

“A few minutes later there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs, of two voices laughing together. The masker turned away to look out of the window.

Behind him the door opened noisily; drunk with excitement, with gay, laughable irresponsibility, the lovers burst in.

"'Aha, *caro amico!* Back already. What luck with the diamond?'

"The cloaked figure at the window did not stir; Giangolini rattled gaily on. There had been no trouble whatever about the signatures, no questions asked; he had the passports in his pocket. They could start at once.

"Lady Hurtmore suddenly began to laugh uncontrollably; she couldn't stop.

"'What's the matter?' asked Giangolini, laughing too.

"'I was thinking,' she gasped between the paroxysms of her mirth, T was thinking of old Pantaloon sitting at the Misericordia, solemn as an owl, listening' — she almost choked, and the words came out shrill and forced as though she were speaking through tears— 'listening to old Galuppi's boring old cantatas.'

"The man at the window turned round. 'Unfortunately, madam,' he said, 'the learned maestro was indisposed this morning. There was no concert.' He took off his mask. 'And so I took the liberty of returning earlier than usual.' The long, grey, unsmiling face of Lord Hurtmore confronted them.

"The lovers stared at him for a moment speechlessly. Lady Hurtmore put her hand to her heart; it had given a fearful jump, and she felt a horrible sensation in the pit of her stomach. Poor Giangolini had gone as white as his paper mask. Even in these days of *cicisbei*, of official gentlemen friends, there were cases on record of outraged and jealous husbands resorting to homicide. He was unarmed, but goodness only knew what weapons of destruction were concealed under that enigmatic black cloak. But Lord Hurtmore did nothing brutal or undignified. Gravely and calmly, as he did everything, he walked over to the table, picked up the jewel-case, closed it with the greatest care, and saying, 'My box, I think,' put it in his pocket and walked out of the room. The lovers were left looking questioningly at one another.

There was a silence.

"What happened then?" asked the Lord of the Manor.

"The anti-climax," Mr Bigger replied, shaking his head mournfully. "Giangolini had bargained to elope with fifty thousand sequins. Lady Hurtmore

didn’t, on reflection, much relish the idea of love in a cottage. Woman’s place, she decided at last, is the home — with the family jewels. But would Lord Hurtmore see the matter in precisely the same light? That was the question, the alarming, disquieting question. She decided to go and see for herself.

“She got back just in time for dinner. ‘His Illustrissimous Excellency is waiting in the dining-room,’ said the major-domo. The tall doors were flung open before her; she swam in majestically, chin held high — but with what a terror in her soul! Her husband was standing by the fireplace. He advanced to meet her.

“I was expecting you, madam,’ he said, and led her to her place.

“That was the only reference he ever made to the incident. In the afternoon he sent a servant to fetch the portrait from the painter’s studio. It formed part of their baggage when, a month later, they set out for England. The story has been passed down with the picture from one generation to the next. I had it from an old friend of the family when I bought the portrait last year.”

Mr Bigger threw his cigarette end into the grate. He flattered himself that he had told that tale very well.

‘Very interesting,’ said the Lord of the Manor, “very interesting indeed. Quite historical, isn’t it? One could hardly do better with Nell Gwynn or Anne Boleyn, could one?”

Mr Bigger smiled vaguely, distantly. He was thinking of Venice — the Russian countess staying in his pension, the tufted tree in the courtyard outside his bedroom, that strong, hot scent she used (it made you catch your breath when you first smelt it), and there was the bathing on the Lido, and the gondola, and the dome of the Salute against the hazy sky, looking just as it looked when Guardi painted it. How enormously long ago and far away it all seemed now! He was hardly more than a boy then; it had been his first great adventure. He woke up with a start from his reverie.

The Lord of the Manor was speaking. “How much, now, would you want for that picture?” he asked. His tone was detached, off-hand; hie was a rare one for bargaining.

“Well,” said Mr Bigger, quitting with reluctance the Russian countess, the paradisiacal Venice of five-and-twenty years ago, “I’ve asked as much as a thousand for less important works than this. But I don’t mind letting this go to you for seven-fifty.”

The Lord of the Manor whistled. “Seven-fifty?” he repeated. “It’s too much.”

“But, my dear sir,” Mr Bigger protested, “think what you’d have to pay for a Rembrandt of this size and quality — twenty thousand at least. Seven hundred and fifty isn’t at all too much. On the contrary, it’s very little considering the importance of the picture you’re getting. You have a good enough judgment to see that this is a very fine work of art.”

“Oh, I’m not denying that,” said the Lord of the Manor. “All I say is that seven-fifty’s a lot of money. Whe-ew! I’m glad my daughter does sketching. Think if I’d had to furnish the bedrooms with pictures at seven-fifty a time!” He laughed.

Mr Bigger smiled. “You must also remember,” he said, “that you’re making a very good investment. Late Venetians are going up. If I had any capital to spare —” The door opened and Miss Pratt’s blonde and frizzy head popped in.

“Mr Crowley wants to know if he can see you, Mr Bigger.”

Mr Bigger frowned. “Tell him to wait,” he said irritably. He coughed and turned back to the Lord of the Manor. “If I had any capital to spare, I’d put it all into late Venetians. Every penny.”

He wondered, as he said the words, how often he had told people that he’d put all his capital, if he had any, into primitives cubism, nigger sculpture, Japanese prints....

In the end the Lord of the Manor wrote him a cheque for six hundred and eighty.

“You might let me have a typewritten copy of the story,” he said, as he put on his hat. “It would be a good tale to tell one’s guests at dinner, don’t you think? I’d like to have the details quite correct.”

“Oh, of course, of course,” said Mr Bigger, “the details are most important.”

He ushered the little round man to the door. “Good morning. Good morning.” He was gone.

A tall, pale youth with side whiskers appeared in the doorway. His eyes were dark and melancholy; his expression, his general appearance, were romantic and at the same time a little pitiable. It was young Crowley, the painter.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting,” said Mr Bigger. “What did you want to see me for?”

Mr Crowley looked embarrassed, he hesitated. How he hated having to do this sort of thing! “The fact is,” he said at last, “I’m horribly short of money. I wondered if perhaps you wouldn’t mind — if it would be convenient to you — to pay me for that thing I did for you the other day. I’m awfully sorry to bother you like this.”

“Not at all, my dear fellow.” Mr Bigger felt sorry for this wretched creature who didn’t know how to look after himself. Poor young Crowley was as helpless as a baby. “How much did we settle it was to be?”

“Twenty pounds, I think it was,” said Mr Crowley timidly.

Mr Bigger took out his pocket-book. “We’ll make it twenty-five,” he said.

“Oh no, really, I couldn’t. Thanks very much.” Mr Crowley blushed like a girl. “I suppose you wouldn’t like to have a show of some of my landscapes, would you?” he asked, emboldened by Mr Bigger’s air of benevolence.

“No, no. Nothing of your own.” Mr Bigger shook his head inexorably.

“There’s no money in modern stuff. But I’ll take any number of those sham Old Masters of yours.” He drummed with his fingers on Lady Hurtmore’s sleekly painted shoulder. “Try another Venetian,” he added. “This one was a great success.”

Young Archimedes

IT WAS THE view which finally made us take the place. True, the house had its disadvantages. It was a long way out of town and had no telephone. The rent was unduly high, the drainage system poor. On windy nights, when the ill-fitting panes were rattling so furiously in the window-frames that you could fancy yourself in an hotel omnibus, the electric light, for some mysterious reason, used invariably to go out and leave you in the noisy dark. There was a splendid bathroom; but the electric pump, which was supposed to send up water from the rain-water tanks in the terrace, did not work. Punctually every autumn the drinking well ran dry. And our landlady was a liar and a cheat.

But these are the little disadvantages of every hired house, all over the world. For Italy they were not really at all serious. I have seen plenty of houses which had them all and a hundred others, without possessing the compensating advantages of ours — the southward facing garden and terrace for the winter and spring, the large cool rooms against the midsummer heat, the hilltop air and freedom from mosquitoes, and finally the view.

And what a view it was! Or rather, what a succession of views. For it was different every day; and without stirring from the house one had the impression of an incessant change of scene: all the delights of travel without its fatigues. There were autumn days when all the valleys were filled with mist and the crests of Apennines rose darkly out of a flat white lake. There were days when the mist invaded even our hilltop and we were enveloped in a soft vapour in which the mist-coloured olive trees, that sloped away below our windows towards the valley, disappeared as though into their own spiritual essence; and the only firm and definite things in the small, dim world within which we found ourselves confined were the two tall black cypresses growing on a little projecting terrace a hundred feet down the hill. Black, sharp, and solid, they stood there, twin

pillars of Hercules at the extremity of the known universe; and beyond them there was only pale cloud and round them only the cloudy olive trees.

These were the wintry days; but there were days of spring and autumn, days unchangingly cloudless, or — more lovely still — made various by the huge floating shapes of vapour that, snowy above the far-away snow-capped mountains, gradually unfolded, against the pale bright blue, enormous heroic gestures. And in the height of the sky the bellying draperies, the swans, the aerial marbles, hewed and left unfinished by gods grown tired of creation almost before they had begun, drifted sleeping along the wind, changing form as they moved. And the sun would come and go behind them; and now the town in the valley would fade and almost vanish in the shadow, and now, like an immense fretted jewel between the hills, it would glow as though by its own light. And looking across the nearer tributary valley that wound from below our crest down towards the Amo, looking over the low dark shoulder of hill on whose extreme promontory stood the towered church of San Miniato, one saw the huge dome airily hanging on its ribs of masonry, the square campanile, the sharp spire of Santa Croce, and the canopied tower of the Signoria, rising above the intricate maze of houses, distinct and brilliant, like small treasures carved out of precious stones. For a moment only, and then their light would fade away once more, and the travelling beam would pick out, among the indigo hills beyond, a single golden crest.

There were days when the air was wet with passed or with approaching rain, and all the distances seemed miraculously near and clear. The olive trees detached themselves one from another on the distant slopes; the far-away villages were lovely and pathetic like the most exquisite small toys. There were days in summer-time, days of impending thunder when, bright and sunlit against huge bellying masses of black and purple, the hills and the white houses shone as it were precariously, in a dying splendour, on the brink of some fearful calamity.

How the hills changed and varied! Every day and every hour of the day, almost, they were different. There would be moments when, looking across the

plain of Florence, one would see only a dark blue silhouette against the sky. The scene had no depth; there was only a hanging curtain painted flatly with the symbols of mountains. And then, suddenly almost, with the passing of a cloud, or when the sun had declined to a certain level in the sky, the flat scene transformed itself; and where there had been only a painted curtain, now there were ranges behind ranges of hills, graduated tone after tone from brown, or grey, or a green gold to far-away blue. Shapes that a moment before had been fused together indiscriminately into a single mass, now came apart into their constituents. Fiesole, which had seemed only a spur of Monte Morello, now revealed itself as the jutting headland of another system of hills, divided from the nearest bastions of its greater neighbour by a deep and shadowy valley.

At noon, during the heats of summer, the landscape became dim, powdery, vague, and almost colourless under the midday sun; the hills disappeared into the trembling fringes of the sky. But as the afternoon wore on the landscape emerged again, it dropped its anonymity, it climbed back out of nothingness into form and life. And its life, as the sun sank and slowly sank through the long afternoon, grew richer, grew more intense with every moment. The level light, with its attendant long, dark shadows, laid bare, so to speak, the anatomy of the land; the hills — each western escarpment shining, and each slope averted from the sunlight profoundly shadowed — became massive, jutty, and solid. Little folds and dimples in the seemingly even ground revealed themselves. Eastward from our hilltop, across the plain of the Ema, a great bluff cast its ever-increasing shadow; in the surrounding brightness of the valley a whole town lay eclipsed within it. And as the sun expired on the horizon, the further hills flushed in its warm light, till their illumined flanks were the colour of tawny roses; but the valleys were already filled with the blue mist of evening. And it mounted, mounted; the fire went out of the western windows of the populous slopes; only the crests were still alight, and at last they too were all extinct. The mountains faded and fused together again into a flat painting of mountains against the pale evening sky. In a little while it was night; and if the moon were full, a ghost of the dead scene still haunted the horizons.

Changeful in its beauty, this wide landscape always preserved a quality of humanness and domestication which made it, to my mind at any rate, the best of all landscapes to live with. Day by day one travelled through its different beauties; but the journey, like our ancestors' Grand Tour, was always a journey through civilization. For all its mountains, its steep slopes and deep valleys, the Tuscan scene is dominated by its inhabitants. They have cultivated every rood of ground that can be cultivated; their houses are thickly scattered even over the hills, and the valleys are populous. Solitary on the hilltop, one is not alone in a wilderness. Man's traces are across the country, and already — one feels it with satisfaction as one looks out across it — for centuries, for thousands of years, it has been his, submissive, tamed, and humanized. The wide, blank moorlands, the sands, the forests of innumerable trees — these are places for occasional visitation, healthful to the spirit which submits itself to them for not too long. But fiendish influences as well as divine haunt these total solitudes. The vegetative life of plants and things is alien and hostile to the human. Men cannot live at ease except where they have mastered their surroundings and where their accumulated lives outnumber and outweigh the vegetative lives about them. Stripped of its dark woods, planted, terraced, and tilled almost to the mountains' tops, the Tuscan landscape is humanized and safe. Sometimes upon those who live in the midst of it there comes a longing for some place that is solitary, inhuman, lifeless, or peopled only with alien life. But the longing is soon satisfied, and one is glad to return to the civilized and submissive scene.

I found that house on the hilltop the ideal dwelling-place. For there, safe in the midst of a humanized landscape, one was yet alone; one could be as solitary as one liked. Neighbours whom one never sees at close quarters are the ideal and perfect neighbours.

Our nearest neighbours, in terms of physical proximity, lived very near. We had two sets of them, as a matter of fact, almost in the same house with us. One was the peasant family, who lived in a long, low building, part dwelling-house, part stables, storerooms and cowsheds, adjoining the villa. Our other neighbours — intermittent neighbours, however, for they only ventured out of town every

now and then, during the most flawless weather — were the owners of the villa, who had reserved for themselves the smaller wing of the huge L-shaped house — a mere dozen rooms or so — leaving the remaining eighteen or twenty to us.

They were a curious couple, our proprietors. An old husband, grey, listless, tottering, seventy at least; and a signora of about forty, short, very plump, with tiny fat hands and feet and a pair of very large, very dark black eyes, which she used with all the skill of a born comedian. Her vitality, if you could have harnessed it and made it do some useful work, would have supplied a whole town with electric light. The physicists talk of deriving energy from the atom; they would be more profitably employed nearer home — in discovering some way of tapping those enormous stores of vital energy which accumulate in unemployed women of sanguine temperament and which, in the present imperfect state of social and scientific organization, vent themselves in ways that are generally so deplorable: in interfering with other people's affairs, in working up emotional scenes, in thinking about love and making it, and in bothering men till they cannot get on with their work.

Signora Bondi got rid of her superfluous energy, among other ways, by "doing in" her tenants. The old gentleman, who was a retired merchant with a reputation for the most perfect rectitude, was allowed to have no dealings with us. When we came to see the house, it was the wife who showed us round. It was she who, with a lavish display of charm, with irresistible rollings of the eyes, expatiated on the merits of the place, sang the praises of the electric pump, glorified the bathroom (considering which, she insisted, the rent was remarkably moderate), and when we suggested calling in a surveyor to look over the house, earnestly begged us, as though our well-being were her only consideration, not to waste our money unnecessarily in doing anything so superfluous. "After all," she said, "we are honest people. I wouldn't dream of letting you the house except in perfect condition. Have confidence." And she looked at me with an appealing, pained expression in her magnificent eyes, as though begging me not to insult her by my coarse suspiciousness. And leaving us no time to pursue the subject of surveyors any further, she began assuring us that our little boy was the

most beautiful angel she had ever seen. By the time our interview with Signora Bondi was at an end, we had definitely decided to take the house.

“Charming woman,” I said, as we left the house. But I think that Elizabeth was not quite so certain of it as I.

Then the pump episode began.

On the evening of our arrival in the house we switched on the electricity. The pump made a very professional whirring noise; but no water came out of the taps in the bathroom. We looked at one another doubtfully.

“Charming woman?” Elizabeth raised her eyebrows.

We asked for interviews; but somehow the old gentleman could never see us, and the Signora was invariably out or indisposed.

We left notes; they were never answered. In the end, we found that the only method of communicating with our landlords, who were living in the same house with us, was to go down into Florence and send a registered express letter to them. For this they had to sign two separate receipts and even, if we chose to pay forty centimes more, a third incriminating document, which was then returned to us. There could be no pretending, as there always was with ordinary letters or notes, that the communication had never been received. We began at last to get answers to our complaints. The Signora, who wrote all the letters, started by telling us that, naturally, the pump didn’t work, as the cisterns were empty, owing to the long drought. I had to walk three miles to the post office in order to register my letter reminding her that there had been a violent thunderstorm only last Wednesday, and that the tanks were consequently more than half full. The answer came back: bath water had not been guaranteed in the contract; and if I wanted it, why hadn’t I had the pump looked at before I took the house? Another walk into town to ask the Signora next door whether she remembered her adjurations to us to have confidence in her, and to inform her that the existence in a house of a bathroom was in itself an implicit guarantee of bath water. The reply to that was that the Signora couldn’t continue to have communications with people who wrote so rudely to her. After that I put the matter into the hands of a lawyer. Two months later the pump was actually

replaced. But we had to serve a writ on the lady before she gave in. And the costs were considerable.

One day, towards the end of the episode, I met the old gentleman in the road, taking his big maremman dog for a walk — or being taken, rather, for a walk by the dog. For where the dog pulled the old gentleman had perforce to follow. And when it stopped to smell, or scratch the ground, or leave against a gatepost its visiting-card or an offensive challenge, patiently, at his end of the leash, the old man had to wait. I passed him standing at the side of the road, a few hundred yards below our house. The dog was sniffing at the roots of one of the twin cypresses which grew one on either side of the entry to a farm; I heard the beast growling indignantly to itself, as though it scented an intolerable insult. Old Signor Bondi, leashed to his dog, was waiting. The knees inside the tubular grey trousers were slightly bent.

Leaning on his cane, he stood gazing mournfully and vacantly at the view. The whites of his old eyes were discoloured, like ancient billiard balls. In the grey, deeply wrinkled face, his nose was dyspeptically red. His white moustache, ragged and yellowing at the fringes, drooped in a melancholy curve. In his black tie he wore a very large diamond; perhaps that was what Signora Bondi had found so attractive about him.

I took off my hat as I approached. The old man stared at me absently, and it was only when I was already almost past him that he recollected who I was.

“Wait,” he called after me, “wait!” And he hastened down the road in pursuit. Taken utterly by surprise and at a disadvantage — for it was engaged in retorting to the affront imprinted on the cypress roots — the dog permitted itself to be jerked after him. Too much astonished to be anything but obedient, it followed its master. “Wait!”

I waited.

“My dear sir,” said the old gentleman, catching me by the lapel of my coat and blowing most disagreeably in my face, “I want to apologize.” He looked around him, as though afraid that even here he might be overheard. “I want to apologize,” he went on, “about that wretched pump business. I assure you that, if

it had been only my affair, I'd have put the thing right as soon as you asked. You were quite right: a bathroom is an implicit guarantee of bath water. I saw from the first that we should have no chance if it came to court. And besides, I think one ought to treat one's tenants as handsomely as one can afford to. But my wife" — he lowered his voice— "the fact is that she likes this sort of thing, even when she knows that she's in the wrong and must lose. And besides, she hoped, I dare say, that you'd get tired of asking and have the job done yourself. I told her from the first that we ought to give in; but she wouldn't listen. You see, she enjoys it. Still, now she sees that it must be done. In the course of the next two or three days you'll be having your bath water. But I thought I'd just like to tell you how..." But the Maremmano, which had recovered by this time from its surprise of a moment since, suddenly bounded, growling, up the road. The old gentleman tried to hold the beast, strained at the leash, tottered unsteadily, then gave way and allowed himself to be dragged off. "... how sorry I am," he went on, as he receded from me, "that this little misunderstanding.. But it was no use. "Good-bye." He smiled politely, made a little deprecating gesture, as though he had suddenly remembered a pressing engagement, and had no time to explain what it was. "Good-bye." He took off his hat and abandoned himself completely to the dog.

A week later the water really did begin to flow, and the day after our first bath Signora Bondi, dressed in dove-grey satin and wearing all her pearls, came to call.

"Is it peace now?" she asked, with a charming frankness, as she shook hands.

We assured her that, so far as we were concerned, it certainly was.

"But why *did* you write me such dreadfully rude letters?" she said, turning on me a reproachful glance that ought to have moved the most ruthless malefactor to contrition. "And then that writ. How *could* you? To a lady..."

I mumbled something about the pump and our wanting baths.

"But how could you expect me to listen to you while you were in that mood? Why didn't you set about it differently — politely, charmingly?" She smiled at me and dropped her fluttering eyelids.

I thought it best to change the conversation. It is disagreeable, when one is in the right, to be made to appear in the wrong.

A few weeks later we had a letter — duly registered and by express messenger — in which the Signora asked us whether we proposed to renew our lease (which was only for six months), and notifying us that, if we did, the rent would be raised 25 per cent., in consideration of the improvements which had been carried out. We thought ourselves lucky, at the end of much bargaining, to get the lease renewed for a whole year with an increase in the rent of only 15 per cent.

It was chiefly for the sake of the view that we put up with these intolerable extortions. But we had found other reasons, after a few days' residence, for liking the house. Of these the most cogent was that, in the peasant's youngest child, we had discovered what seemed the perfect playfellow for our own small boy. Between little Guido — for that was his name — and the youngest of his brothers and sisters there was a gap of six or seven years. His two elder brothers worked with their father in the fields; since the time of the mother's death, two or three years before we knew them, the eldest sister had ruled the house, and the younger, who had just left school, helped her and in between-whiles kept an eye on Guido, who by this time, however, needed very little looking after; for he was between six and seven years old and as precocious, self-assured, and responsible as the children of the poor, left as they are to themselves almost from the time they can walk, generally are.

Though fully two and a half years older than little Robin — and at that age thirty months are crammed with half a lifetime's experience — Guido took no undue advantage of his superior intelligence and strength. I have never seen a child more patient, tolerant, and untyrannical. He never laughed at Robin for his clumsy efforts to imitate his own prodigious feats; he did not tease or bully, but helped his small companion when he was in difficulties and explained when he could not understand. In return, Robin adored him, regarded him as the model and perfect Big Boy, and slavishly imitated him in every way he could.

These attempts of Robin's to imitate his companion were often exceedingly ludicrous. For by an obscure psychological law, words and actions in themselves quite serious become comic as soon as they are copied; and the more accurately, if the imitation is a deliberate parody, the funnier — for an overloaded imitation of some one we know does not make us laugh so much as one that is almost indistinguishably like the original. The bad imitation is only ludicrous when it is a piece of sincere and earnest flattery which does not quite come off. Robin's imitations were mostly of this kind. His heroic and unsuccessful attempts to perform the feats of strength and skill, which Guido could do with ease, were exquisitely comic. And his careful, long-drawn imitations of Guido's habits and mannerisms were no less amusing. Most ludicrous of all, because most earnestly undertaken and most incongruous in the imitator, were Robin's impersonations of Guido in the pensive mood. Guido was a thoughtful child, given to brooding and sudden abstractions. One would find him sitting in a corner by himself, chin in hand, elbow on knee, plunged, to all appearances, in the profoundest meditation. And sometimes, even in the midst of his play, he would suddenly break off, to stand, his hands behind his back, frowning and staring at the ground. When this happened, Robin became overawed and a little disquieted. In a puzzled silence he looked at his companion.

"Guido," he would say softly, "Guido." But Guido was generally too much preoccupied to answer; and Robin, not venturing to insist, would creep near him, and throwing himself as nearly as possible into Guido's attitude — standing Napoleonically, his hands clasped behind him, or sitting in the posture of Michelangelo's Lorenzo the Magnificent — would try to meditate too. Every few seconds he would turn his bright blue eyes towards the elder child to see whether he was doing it quite right. But at the end of a minute he began to grow impatient; meditation wasn't his strong point. "Guido," he called again and, louder, "Guido!" And he would take him by the hand and try to pull him away. Sometimes Guido roused himself from his reverie and went back to the interrupted game. Sometimes he paid no attention. Melancholy, perplexed, Robin had to take himself off to play by himself. And Guido would go on sitting

or standing there, quite still; and his eyes, if one looked into them, were beautiful in their grave and pensive calm.

They were large eyes, set far apart and, what was strange in a dark-haired Italian child, of a luminous pale blue-grey colour. They were not always grave and calm, as in these pensive moments. When he was playing, when he talked or laughed, they lit up; and the surface of those clear, pale lakes of thought seemed, as it were, to be shaken into brilliant sun-flashing ripples. Above those eyes was a beautiful forehead, high and steep and domed in a curve that was like the subtle curve of a rose petal. The nose was straight, the chin small and rather pointed, the mouth drooped a little sadly at the corners.

I have a snapshot of the two children sitting together on the parapet of the terrace. Guido sits almost facing the camera, but looking a little to one side and downwards; his hands are crossed in his lap and his expression, his attitude are thoughtful, grave, and meditative. It is Guido in one of those moods of abstraction into which he would pass even at the height of laughter and play — quite suddenly and completely, as though he had all at once taken it into his head to go away and had left the silent and beautiful body behind, like an empty house, to wait for his return. And by his side sits little Robin, turning to look up at him, his face half averted from the camera, but the curve of his cheek showing that he is laughing; one little raised hand is caught at the top of a gesture, the other clutches at Guido’s sleeve, as though he were urging him to come away and play. And the legs dangling from the parapet have been seen by the blinking instrument in the midst of an impatient wriggle; he is on the point of slipping down and running off to play hide-and-seek in the garden. All the essential characteristics of both the children are in that little snapshot.

“If Robin were not Robin,” Elizabeth used to say, “I could almost wish he were Guido.”

And even at that time, when I took no particular interest in the child, I agreed with her. Guido seemed to me one of the most charming little boys I had ever seen.

We were not alone in admiring him. Signora Bondi when, in those cordial intervals between our quarrels, she came to call, was constantly speaking of him. “Such a beautiful, beautiful child!” she would exclaim with enthusiasm. “It’s really a waste that he should belong to peasants who can’t afford to dress him properly. If he were mine, I should put him into black velvet; or little white knickers and a white knitted silk jersey with a red line at the collar and cuffs; or perhaps a white sailor suit would be pretty. And in winter a little fur coat, with a squirrel skin cap, and possibly Russian boots...” Her imagination was running away with her. “And I’d let his hair grow, like a page’s, and have it just curled up a little at the tips. And a straight fringe across his forehead. Every one would turn round and stare after us if I took him out with me in Via Tornabuoni.”

What you want, I should have liked to tell her, is not a child; it’s a clockwork doll or a performing monkey. But I did not say so — partly because I could not think of the Italian for a clockwork doll and partly because I did not want to risk having the rent raised another 15 per cent.

“Ah, if only I had a little boy like that!” She sighed and modestly dropped her eyelids. “I adore children. I sometimes think of adopting one — that is, if my husband would allow it.”

I thought of the poor old gentleman being dragged along at the heels of his big white dog and inwardly smiled.

“But I don’t know if he would,” the Signora was continuing, “I don’t know if he would.” She was silent for a moment, as though considering a new idea.

A few days later, when we were sitting in the garden after luncheon, drinking our coffee, Guido’s father, instead of passing with a nod and the usual cheerful good-day, halted in front of us and began to talk. He was a fine handsome man, not very tall, but well proportioned, quick and elastic in his movements, and full of life. He had a thin brown face, featured like a Roman’s and lit by a pair of the most intelligent-looking grey eyes I ever saw. They exhibited almost too much intelligence when, as not infrequently happened, he was trying, with an assumption of perfect frankness and a childlike innocence, to take one in or get something out of one. Delighting in itself, the intelligence shone there

mischievously. The face might be ingenuous, impassive, almost imbecile in its expression; but the eyes on these occasions gave him completely away. One knew, when they glittered like that, that one would have to be careful.

To-day, however, there was no dangerous light in them. He wanted nothing out of us, nothing of any value — only advice, which is a commodity, he knew, that most people are only too happy to part with. But he wanted advice on what was, for us, rather a delicate subject: on Signora Bondi. Carlo had often complained to us about her. The old man is good, he told us, very good and kind indeed. Which meant, I dare say, among other things, that he could easily be swindled. But his wife... Well, the woman was a beast. And he would tell us stories of her insatiable rapacity: she was always claiming more than the half of the produce which, by the laws of the métayage system, was the proprietor's due. He complained of her suspiciousness: she was for ever accusing him of sharp practices, of downright stealing — him, he struck his breast, the soul of honesty. He complained of her short-sighted avarice: she wouldn't spend enough on manure, wouldn't buy him another cow, wouldn't have electric light installed in the stables. And we had sympathized, but cautiously, without expressing too strong an opinion on the subject. The Italians are wonderfully non-committal in their speech; they will give nothing away to an interested person until they are quite certain that it is right and necessary and, above all, safe to do so. We had lived long enough among them to imitate their caution. What we said to Carlo would be sure, sooner or later, to get back to Signora Bondi. There was nothing to be gained by unnecessarily embittering our relations with the lady — only another 15 per cent., very likely, to be lost.

To-day he wasn't so much complaining as feeling perplexed.

The Signora had sent for him, it seemed, and asked him how he would like it if she were to make an offer — it was all very hypothetical in the cautious Italian style — to adopt little Guido. Carlo's first instinct had been to say that he wouldn't like it at all. But an answer like that would have been too coarsely committal. He had preferred to say that he would think about it. And now he was asking for our advice.

Do what you think best, was what in effect we replied. But we gave it distantly but distinctly to be understood that we didn't think that Signora Bondi would make a very good foster-mother for the child. And Carlo was inclined to agree. Besides, he was very fond of the boy.

"But the thing is," he concluded rather gloomily, "that if she has really set her heart on getting hold of the child, there's nothing she won't do to get him — nothing."

He too, I could see, would have liked the physicists to start on unemployed childless women of sanguine temperament before they tried to tackle the atom. Still, I reflected, as I watched him striding away along the terrace, singing powerfully from a brazen gullet as he went, there was force there, there was life enough in those elastic limbs, behind those bright grey eyes, to put up a good fight even against the accumulated vital energies of Signora Bondi.

It was a few days after this that my gramophone and two or three boxes of records arrived from England. They were a great comfort to us on the hilltop, providing as they did the only thing in which that spiritually fertile solitude — otherwise a perfect Swiss Family Robinson's island — was lacking: music. There is not much music to be heard nowadays in Florence. The times when Dr Burney could tour through Italy, listening to an unending succession of new operas, symphonies, quartets, cantatas, are gone. Gone are the days when a learned musician, inferior only to the Reverend Father Martini of Bologna, could admire what the peasants sang and the strolling players thrummed and scraped on their instruments. I have travelled for weeks through the peninsula and hardly heard a note that was not "Salome" or the Fascists' song. Rich in nothing else that makes life agreeable or even supportable, the northern metropolises are rich in music. That is perhaps the only inducement that a reasonable man can find for living there. The other attractions — organized gaiety, people, miscellaneous conversation, the social pleasures — what are those, after all, but an expense of spirit that buys nothing in return? And then the cold, the darkness, the mouldering dirt, the damp and squalor.... No, where there is no necessity that retains, music can be the only inducement. And that, thanks to the ingenious

Edison, can now be taken about in a box and unpacked in whatever solitude one chooses to visit. One can live at Benin, or Nuneaton, or Tozeur in the Sahara, and still hear Mozart quartets, and selections from the Well-Tempered Clavichord, and the Fifth Symphony, and the Brahms clarinet quintet, and motets by Palestrina.

Carlo, who had gone down to the station with his mule and cart to fetch the packing-case, was vastly interested in the machine.

“One will hear some music again,” he said, as he watched me unpacking the gramophone and the disks. “It is difficult to do much oneself.”

Still, I reflected, he managed to do a good deal. On warm nights we used to hear him, where he sat at the door of his house, playing his guitar and softly singing; the eldest boy shrilled out the melody on the mandoline, and sometimes the whole family would join in, and the darkness would be filled with their passionate, throaty singing. Piedigrotta songs they mostly sang; and the voices drooped slurringly from note to note, lazily climbed or jerked themselves with sudden sobbing emphases from one tone to another. At a distance and under the stars the effect was not unpleasing.

“Before the war,” he went on, “in normal times” (and Carlo had a hope, even a belief, that the normal times were coming back and that life would soon be as cheap and easy as it had been in the days before the flood), “I used to go and listen to the operas at the Politeama. Ah, they were magnificent. But it costs five lire now to get in.”

“Too much,” I agreed.

“Have you got *Trooatore*?” he asked.

I shook my head.

“*Rigoletto*?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“*Bohème? Fanciulla del West? Pagliacci?*”

I had to go on disappointing him.

“Not even *Normal* Or the *Barbiere?*”

I put on Battistini in “La ci darem” out of *Don Giovanni*. He agreed that the singing was good; but I could see that he didn’t much like the music. Why not? He found it difficult to explain.

“It’s not like *Pagliacci*,” he said at last.

“Not palpitating?” I suggested, using a word with which I was sure he would be familiar; for it occurs in every Italian political speech and patriotic leading article.

“Not palpitating,” he agreed.

And I reflected that it is precisely by the difference between *Pagliacci* and *Don Giovanni*, between the palpitating and the nonpalpitating, that modern musical taste is separated from the old. The corruption of the best, I thought, is the worst. Beethoven taught music to palpitate with his intellectual and spiritual passion. It has gone on palpitating ever since, but with the passion of inferior men. Indirectly, I thought, Beethoven is responsible for *Parsifal*, *Pagliacci*, and the *Pom of Fire;* still more indirectly for *Samson and Delilah* and “Ivy, cling to me.” Mozart’s melodies may be brilliant, memorable, infectious; but they don’t palpitate, don’t catch you between wind and water, don’t send the listener off into erotic ecstasies.

Carlo and his elder children found my gramophone, I am afraid, rather a disappointment. They were too polite, however, to say so openly; they merely ceased, after the first day or two, to take any interest in the machine and the music it played. They preferred the guitar and their own singing.

Guido, on the other hand, was immensely interested. And he liked, not the cheerful dance tunes, to whose sharp rhythms our little Robin loved to go stamping round and round the room, pretending that he was a whole regiment of soldiers, but the genuine stuff. The first record he heard, I remember, was that of the slow movement of Bach’s Concerto in D Minor for two violins. That was the disk I put on the turn-table as soon as Carlo had left me. It seemed to me, so to speak, the most musical piece of music with which I could refresh my long-parched mind — the coolest and clearest of all draughts. The movement had just got under way and was beginning to unfold its pure and melancholy beauties in

accordance with the laws of the most exacting intellectual logic, when the two children, Guido in front and little Robin breathlessly following, came clattering into the room from the loggia.

Guido came to a halt in front of the gramophone and stood there, motionless, listening. His pale blue-grey eyes opened themselves wide; making a little nervous gesture that I had often noticed in him before, he plucked at his lower lip with his thumb and forefinger. He must have taken a deep breath; for I noticed that, after listening for a few seconds, he sharply expired and drew in a fresh gulp of air. For an instant he looked at me — a questioning, astonished, rapturous look — gave a little laugh that ended in a kind of nervous shudder, and turned back towards the source of the incredible sounds. Slavishly imitating his elder comrade, Robin had also taken up his stand in front of the gramophone, and in exactly the same position, glancing at Guido from time to time to make sure that he was doing everything, down to plucking at his lip, in the correct way. But after a minute or so he became bored.

“Soldiers,” he said, turning to me; “I want soldiers. Like in London.” He remembered the rag-time and the jolly marches round and round the room.

I put my fingers to my lips. “Afterwards,” I whispered.

Robin managed to remain silent and still for perhaps another twenty seconds. Then he seized Guido by the arm, shouting, “Vieni, Guido! Soldiers. Soldati. Vieni giuocare soldati.”

It was then, for the first time, that I saw Guido impatient. “Vai!” he whispered angrily, slapped at Robin’s clutching hand and pushed him roughly away. And he leaned a little closer to the instrument, as though to make up by yet intenser listening for what the interruption had caused him to miss.

Robin looked at him, astonished. Such a thing had never happened before. Then he burst out crying and came to me for consolation.

When the quarrel was made up — and Guido was sincerely repentant, was as nice as he knew how to be when the music had stopped and his mind was free to think of Robin once more — I asked him how he liked the music. He said he

thought it was beautiful. But *bello* in Italian is too vague a word, too easily and frequently uttered, to mean very much.

“What did you like best?” I insisted. For he had seemed to enjoy it so much that I was curious to find out what had really impressed him.

He was silent for a moment, pensively frowning. “Well,” he said at last, “I liked the bit that went like this.” And he hummed a long phrase. “And then there’s the other thing singing at the same time — but what are those things,” he interrupted himself, “that sing like that?”

“They’re called violins,” I said.

“Violins.” He nodded. “Well, the other violin goes like this.” He hummed again. “Why can’t one sing both at once? And what is in that box? What makes it make that noise?” The child poured out his questions.

I answered him as best I could, showing him the little spirals on the disk, the needle, the diaphragm. I told him to remember how the string of the guitar trembled when one plucked it; sound is a shaking in the air, I told him, and I tried to explain how those shakings get printed on the black disk. Guido listened to me very gravely, nodding from time to time. I had the impression that he understood perfectly well everything I was saying.

By this time, however, poor Robin was so dreadfully bored that in pity for him -I had to send the two children out into the garden to play. Guido went obediently; but I could see that he would have preferred to stay indoors and listen to more music. A little while later, when I looked out, he was hiding in the dark recesses of the big bay tree, roaring like a lion, and Robin, laughing, but a little nervously, as though he were afraid that the horrible noise might possibly turn out, after all, to be the roaring of a real lion, was beating the bush with a stick, and shouting, “Come out, come out! I want to shoot you.”

After lunch, when Robin had gone upstairs for his afternoon sleep, he reappeared. “May I listen to the music now?” he asked. And for an hour he sat there in front of the instrument, his head cocked slightly on one side, listening while I put on one disk after another.

Thenceforward he came every afternoon. Very soon he knew all my library of records, had his preferences and dislikes, and could ask for what he wanted by humming the principal theme.

“I don’t like that one,” he said of Strauss’s “Till Eulenspiegel.”

“It’s like what we sing in our house. Not really like, you know. But somehow rather like, all the same. You understand?” He looked at us perplexedly and appealingly, as though begging us to understand what he meant and so save him from going on explaining. We nodded. Guido went on. “And then,” he said, “the end doesn’t seem to come properly out of the beginning. It’s not like the one you played the first time.” He hummed a bar or two from the slow movement of Bach’s D Minor Concerto.

“It isn’t,” I suggested, “like saying: All little boys like playing. Guido is a little boy. Therefore Guido likes playing.”

He frowned. “Yes, perhaps that’s it,” he said at last. “The one you played first is more like that. But, you know,” he added, with an excessive regard for truth, “I don’t like playing as much as Robin does.”

Wagner was among his dislikes; so was Debussy. When I played the record of one of Debussy’s Arabesques, he said, “Why does he say the same thing over and over again? He ought to say something new, or go on, or make the thing grow. Can’t he think of anything different?” But he was less censorious about the “Après-midi d’un Faune.”

“The things have beautiful voices,” he said.

Mozart overwhelmed him with delight. The duet from *Don Giovanni,* which his father had found insufficiently palpitating, enchanted Guido. But he preferred the quartets and the orchestral pieces.

“I like music,” he said, “better than singing.”

Most people, I reflected, like singing better than music; are more interested in the executant than in what he executes, and find the impersonal orchestra less moving than the soloist. The touch of the pianist is the human touch, and the soprano’s high C is the personal note. It is for the sake of his touch, that note, that audiences fill the concert halls.

Guido, however, preferred music. True, he liked “La ci darem”; he liked “Deh vieni alia finestra”; he thought “Chesoave zefiretto” so lovely that almost all our concerts had to begin with it. But he preferred the other things. The *Figaro* overture was one of his favourites. There is a passage not far from the beginning of the piece, where the first violins suddenly go rocketing up into the heights of loveliness; as the music approached that point, I used always to see a smile developing and gradually brightening on Guido’s face, and when, punctually, the thing happened, he clapped his hands and laughed aloud with pleasure.

On the other side of the same disk, it happened, was recorded Beethoven’s *Egmont* overture. He liked that almost better than *Figaro.*

“It has more voices,” he explained. And I was delighted by the acuteness of the criticism; for it is precisely in the richness of its orchestration that *Egmont* goes beyond *Figaro.*

But what stirred him almost more than anything was the *Coriolan* overture. The third movement of the Fifth Symphony, the second movement of the Seventh, the slow movement of the Emperor Concerto — all these things ran it pretty close. But none excited him so much as *Coriolan.* One day he made me play it three or four times in succession; then he put it away.

“I don’t think I want to hear that any more,” he said.

“Why not?”

“It’s too... too.. he hesitated, “too big,” he said at last. “I don’t really understand it. Play me the one that goes like this.” He hummed the phrase from the D Minor Concerto.

“Do you like that one better?” I asked.

He shook his head. “No, it’s not that exactly. But it’s easier.”

“Easier?” It seemed to me rather a queer word to apply to Bach.

“I understand it better.”

One afternoon, while we were in the middle of our concert, Signora Bondi was ushered in. She began at once to be overwhelmingly affectionate towards

the child; kissed him, patted his head, paid him the most outrageous compliments on his appearance. Guido edged away from her.

“And do you like music?” she asked.

The child nodded.

“I think he has a gift,” I said. “At any rate, he has a wonderful ear and a power of listening and criticizing such as I’ve never met with in a child of that age. We’re thinking of hiring a piano for him to learn on.”

A moment later I was cursing myself for my undue frankness in praising the boy. For Signora Bondi began immediately to protest that, if she could have the upbringing of the child, she would give him the best masters, bring out his talent, make an accomplished maestro of him — and, on the way, an infant prodigy. And at that moment, I am sure, she saw herself sitting maternally, in pearls and black satin, in the lea of the huge Steinway, while an angelic Guido, dressed like little Lord Fauntleroy, rattled out Liszt and Chopin, to the loud delight of a thronged auditorium. She saw the bouquets and all the elaborate floral tributes, heard the clapping and the few well-chosen words with which the veteran maestri, touched almost to tears, would hail the coming of the little genius. It became more than ever important for her to acquire the child.

“You’ve sent her away fairly ravening,” said Elizabeth, when Signora Bondi had gone. “Better tell her next time that you made a mistake, and that the boy’s got no musical talent whatever.”

In due course, the piano arrived. After giving him the minimum of preliminary instruction, I let Guido loose on it. He began by picking out for himself the melodies he had heard, reconstructing the harmonies in which they were embedded. After a few lessons, he understood the rudiments of musical notation and could read a simple passage at sight, albeit very slowly. The whole process of reading was still strange to him; he had picked up his letters somehow, but nobody had yet taught him to read whole words and sentences.

I took occasion, next time I saw Signora Bondi, to assure her that Guido had disappointed me. There was nothing in his musical talent, really. She professed to be very sorry to hear it; but I could see that she didn’t for a moment believe

me. Probably she thought that we were after the child too, and wanted to bag the infant prodigy for ourselves, before she could get in her claim, thus depriving her of what she regarded almost as her feudal right. For, after all, weren't they her peasants? If any one was to profit by adopting the child it ought to be herself.

Tactfully, diplomatically, she renewed her negotiations with Carlo. The boy, she put it to him, had genius. It was the foreign gentleman who had told her so, and he was the sort of man, clearly, who knew about such things. If Carlo would let her adopt the child, she'd have him trained. He'd become a great maestro and get engagements in the Argentine and the United States, in Paris and London. He'd earn millions and millions. Think of Caruso, for example. Part of the millions, she explained, would of course come to Carlo. But before they began to roll in, those millions, the boy would have to be trained. But training was very expensive. In his own interest, as well as in that of his son, he ought to let her take charge of the child. Carlo said he would think it over, and again applied to us for advice. We suggested that it would be best in any case to wait a little and see what progress the boy made.

He made, in spite of my assertions to Signora Bondi, excellent progress. Every afternoon, while Robin was asleep, he came for his concert and his lesson. He was getting along famously with his reading; his small fingers were acquiring strength and agility. But what to me was more interesting was that he had begun to make up little pieces on his own account. A few of them I took down as he played them and I have them still. Most of them, strangely enough, as I thought then, are canons. He had a passion for canons. When I explained to him the principles of the form he was enchanted.

"It is beautiful," he said, with admiration. "Beautiful, beautiful. And so easy!"

Again the word surprised me. The canon is not, after all, so conspicuously simple. Thenceforward he spent most of his time at the piano in working out little canons for his own amusement. They were often remarkably ingenious. But in the invention of other kinds of music he did not show himself so fertile as I had hoped. He composed and harmonized one or two solemn little airs like hymn tunes, with a few sprightlier pieces in the spirit of the military march. They were

extraordinary, of course, as being the inventions of a child. But a great many children can do extraordinary things; we are all geniuses up to the age of ten. But I had hoped that Guido was a child who was going to be a genius at forty; in which case what was extraordinary for an ordinary child was not extraordinary enough for him. “He’s hardly a Mozart,” we agreed, as we played his little pieces over. I felt, it must be confessed, almost aggrieved. Anything less than a Mozart, it seemed to me, was hardly worth thinking about.

He was not a Mozart. No. But he was somebody, as I was to find out, quite as extraordinary. It was one morning in the early summer that I made the discovery. I was sitting in the warm shade of our westward-facing balcony, working. Guido and Robin were playing in the little enclosed garden below. Absorbed in my work, it was only, I suppose, after the silence had prolonged itself a considerable time that I became aware that the children were making remarkably little noise. There was no shouting, no running about; only a quiet talking. Knowing by experience that when children are quiet it generally means that they are absorbed in some delicious mischief, I got up from my chair and looked over the balustrade to see what they were doing. I expected to catch them dabbling in water, making a bonfire, covering themselves with tar. But what I actually saw was Guido, with a burnt stick in his hand, demonstrating on the smooth paving-stones of the path, that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides.

Kneeling on the floor, he was drawing with the point of his blackened stick on the flagstones. And Robin, kneeling imitatively beside him, was growing, I could see, rather impatient with this very slow game.

“Guido,” he said. But Guido paid no attention. Pensively frowning, he went on with his diagram. “Guido!” The younger child bent down and then craned round his neck so as to look up into Guido’s face. “Why don’t you draw a train?”

“Afterwards,” said Guido. “But I just want to show you this first. It’s *so* beautiful,” he added cajolingly.

“But I want a train,” Robin persisted.

“In a moment. Do just wait a moment.” The tone was almost imploring. Robin armed himself with renewed patience. A minute later Guido had finished both his diagrams.

“There!” he said triumphantly, and straightened himself up to look at them. “Now I’ll explain.”

And he proceeded to prove the theorem of Pythagoras — not in Euclid’s way, but by the simpler and more satisfying method which was, in all probability, employed by Pythagoras himself. He had drawn a square and dissected it, by a pair of crossed perpendiculars, into two squares and two equal rectangles. The equal rectangles he divided up by their diagonals into four equal right-angled triangles. The two squares are then seen to be the squares on the two sides of any one of these triangles other than the hypotenuse. So much for the first diagram. In the next he took the four right-angled triangles into which the rectangles had been divided and rearranged them round the original square so that their right angles filled the corners of the square, the hypotenuses looked inwards, and the greater and less sides of the triangles were in continuation along the sides of the square (which are each equal to the sum of these sides). In this way the original square is redissected into four right-angled triangles and the square on the hypotenuse. The four triangles are equal to the two rectangles of the original dissection. Therefore the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the two squares — the squares on the other two sides — into which, with the rectangles, the original square was first dissected.

In very untechnical language, but clearly and with a relentless logic, Guido expounded his proof. Robin listened, with an expression on his bright, freckled face of perfect incomprehension.

“Treno,” he repeated from time to time. “Treno. Make a train.”

“In a moment,” Guido implored. “Wait a moment. But do just look at this. *Do.*” He coaxed and cajoled. “It’s so beautiful. It’s so easy.”

So easy.... The theorem of Pythagoras seemed to explain for me Guido’s musical predilections. It was not an infant Mozart we had been cherishing; it was a little Archimedes with, like most of his kind, an incidental musical twist.

“Treno, treno!” shouted Robin, growing more and more restless as the exposition went on. And when Guido insisted on going on with his proof, he lost his temper. “Cattivo Guido,” he shouted, and began to hit out at him with his fists.

“All right,” said Guido resignedly. “I’ll make a train.” And with his stick of charcoal he began to scribble on the stones.

I looked on for a moment in silence. It was not a very good train. Guido might be able to invent for himself and prove the theorem of Pythagoras; but he was not much of a draughtsman.

“Guido!” I called. The two children turned and looked up. “Who taught you to draw those squares?” It was conceivable, of course, that somebody might have taught him.

“Nobody.” He shook his head. Then, rather anxiously, as though he were afraid there might be something wrong about drawing squares, he went on to apologize and explain. “You see,” he said, “it seemed to me so beautiful. Because those squares” — he pointed at the two small squares in the first figure — “are just as big as this one.” And, indicating the square on the hypotenuse in the second diagram, he looked up at me with a deprecating smile.

I nodded. “Yes, it’s very beautiful,” I said— “it’s very beautiful indeed.”

An expression of delighted relief appeared on his face; he laughed with pleasure. “You see, it’s like this,” he went on, eager to initiate me into the glorious secret he had discovered. “You cut these two long squares” — he meant the rectangles— “into two slices. And then there are four slices, all just the same, because, because — oh, I ought to have said that before — because these long squares are the same, because those lines, you see..

“But I want a train,” protested Robin.

Leaning on the rail of the balcony, I watched the children below. I thought of the extraordinary thing I had just seen and of what it meant.

I thought of the vast differences between human beings. We classify men by the colour of their eyes and hair, the shape of their skulls. Would it not be more sensible to divide them up into intellectual species? There would be even wider

gulfs between the extreme mental types than between a Bushman and a Scandinavian. This child, I thought, when he grows up, will be to me, intellectually, what a man is to a dog. And there are other men and women who are, perhaps, almost as dogs to me.

Perhaps the men of genius are the only true men. In all the history of the race there have been only a few thousand real men. And the rest of us — what are we? Teachable animals. Without the help of the real men, we should have found out almost nothing at all. Almost all the ideas with which we are familiar could never have occurred to minds like ours. Plant the seeds there and they will grow; but our minds could never spontaneously have generated them.

There have been whole nations of dogs, I thought; whole epochs in which no Man was born. From the dull Egyptians the Greeks took crude experience and rules of thumb and made sciences. More than a thousand years passed before Archimedes had a comparable successor. There has been only one Buddha, one Jesus, only one Bach that we know of, one Michelangelo.

Is it by a mere chance, I wondered, that a Man is born from time to time? What causes a whole constellation of them to come contemporaneously into being and from out of a single people? Taine thought that Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael were born when they were because the time was ripe for great painters and the Italian scene congenial. In the mouth of a rationalizing nineteenth-century Frenchman the doctrine b strangely mystical; it may be none the less true for that. But what of those born out of time? Blake, for example. What of those?

The child, I thought, has had the fortune to be born at a time when he will be able to make good use of his capacities. He will find the most elaborate analytical methods lying ready to his hand; he will have a prodigious experience behind him. Suppose him born while Stone Henge was building; he might have spent a lifetime discovering the rudiments, guessing darkly where now he might have had a chance of proving. Born at the time of the Norman Conquest, he would have had to wrestle with all the preliminary difficulties created by an inadequate symbolism; it would have taken him long years, for example, to learn

the art of dividing MMMCCCCLXXXVIII by MCMXIX. In five years, nowadays, he will learn what it took generations of Men to discover.

And I thought of the fate of all the Men born so hopelessly out of time that they could achieve little or nothing of value. Beethoven born in Greece, I thought, would have had to be content to play thin melodies on the flute or lyre; in those intellectual surroundings it would hardly have been possible for him to imagine the nature of harmony.

From drawing trains, the children in the garden below had gone on to playing trains. They were trotting round and round; with blown round cheeks and pouting mouth, like the cherubic symbol of a wind, Robin puff-puffed, and Guido, holding the skirt of his smock, shuffled behind him, tooting. They ran forward, backed, stopped at imaginary stations, shunted, roared over bridges, crashed through tunnels, met with occasional collisions and derailments. The young Archimedes seemed to be just as happy as the little tow-headed barbarian. A few minutes ago he had been busy with the theorem of Pythagoras. Now, tooting indefatigably along imaginary rails, he was perfectly content to shuffle backwards and forwards among the flower-beds, between the pillars of the loggia, in and out of the dark tunnels of the laurel tree. The fact that one is going to be Archimedes does not prevent one from being an ordinary cheerful child meanwhile. I thought of this strange talent distinct and separate from the rest of the mind, independent, almost, of experience. The typical child-prodigies are musical and mathematical; the other talents ripen slowly under the influence of emotional experience and growth. Till he was thirty Balzac gave proof of nothing but ineptitude; but at four the young Mozart was already a musician, and some of Pascal’s most brilliant work was done before he was out of his teens.

In the weeks that followed, I alternated the daily piano lessons with lessons in mathematics. Hints rather than lessons they were; for I only made suggestions, indicated methods, and left the child himself to work out the ideas in detail. Thus I introduced him to algebra by showing him another proof of the theorem of Pythagoras. In this proof one drops a perpendicular from the right angle on to the hypotenuse, and arguing from the fact that the two triangles thus created are

similar to one another and to the original triangle, and that the proportions which their corresponding sides bear to one another are therefore equal, one can show in algebraical form that *c2+d2* (the squares on the other two sides) are equal to a2+b2 (the squares on the two segments of the hypotenuse) +2*ab;* which last, it is easy to show geometrically, is equal to *(a+b)2,* or the square on the hypotenuse. Guido was as much enchanted by the rudiments of algebra as he would have been if I had given him an engine worked by steam, with a methylated spirit lamp to heat the boiler; more enchanted, perhaps — for the engine would have got broken, and, remaining always itself, would in any case have lost its charm, while the rudiments of algebra continued to grow and blossom in his mind with an unfailing luxuriance. Every day he made the discovery of something which seemed to him exquisitely beautiful; the new toy was inexhaustible in its potentialities.

In the intervals of applying algebra to the second book of Euclid, we experimented with circles; we stuck bamboos into the parched earth, measured their shadows at different hours of the day, and drew exciting conclusions from our observations. Sometimes, for fun, we cut and folded sheets of paper so as to make cubes and pyramids. One afternoon Guido arrived carrying carefully between his small and rather grubby hands a flimsy dodecahedron.

“È tanto bello!” he said, as he showed us his paper crystal; and when I asked him how he had managed to make it, he merely smiled and said it had been so easy. I looked at Elizabeth and laughed. But it would have been more symbolically to the point, I felt, if I had gone down on all fours, wagged the spiritual outgrowth of my os coccyx, and barked my astonished admiration.

It was an uncommonly hot summer. By the beginning of July our little Robin, unaccustomed to these high temperatures, began to look pale and tired; he was listless, had lost his appetite and energy. The doctor advised mountain air. We decided to spend the next ten or twelve weeks in Switzerland. My parting gift to Guido was the first six books of Euclid in Italian. He turned over the pages, looking ecstatically at the figures.

“If only I knew how to read properly,” he said “I’m so stupid. But now I shall really try to learn.”

From our hotel near Grindelwald we sent the child, in Robin’s name, various post cards of cows, Alp-horns, Swiss chalets, edelweiss, and the like. We received no answers to these cards; but then we did not expect answers. Guido could not write, and there was no reason why his father or his sisters should take the trouble to write for him. No news, we took it, was good news. And then one day, early in September, there arrived at the hotel a strange letter. The manager had it stuck up on the glass-fronted notice-board in the hall, so that all the guests might see it, and whoever conscientiously thought that it belonged to him might claim it. Passing the board on the way into lunch, Elizabeth stopped to look at it.

“But it must be from Guido,” she said.

I came and looked at the envelope over her shoulder. It was unstamped and black with postmarks. Traced out in pencil, the big uncertain capital letters sprawled across its face. In the first line was written: AL BABBO DI ROBIN, and there followed a travestied version of the name of the hotel and the place. Round the address bewildered postal officials had scrawled suggested emendations. The letter had wandered for a fortnight at least, back and forth across the face of Europe.

“Al Babbo di Robin. To Robin’s father.” I laughed. “Pretty smart of the postmen to have got it here at all.” I went to the manager’s office, set forth the justice of my claim to the letter and, having paid the fifty-centime surcharge for the missing stamp, had the case unlocked and the letter given me. We went in to lunch.

“The writing’s magnificent,” we agreed, laughing, as we examined the address at close quarters. “Thanks to Euclid,” I added. “That’s what comes of pandering to the ruling passion.” But when I opened the envelope and looked at its contents I no longer laughed. The letter was brief and almost telegraphical in style. “SONO DALLA PADRONA,” it ran, “NON MI PIACE HA RUBATO IL MIO LIBRO NON VOOLIO SUONARE PIU VOQLIO TORNARB A CASA VENOA SUBITO GUIDO.”

“What is it?”

I handed Elizabeth the letter. “That blasted woman’s got hold of him,” I said.

Busts of men in Homburg hats, angels bathed in marble tears extinguishing torches, statues of little girls, cherubs, veiled figures, allegories and ruthlessrealisms — the strangest and most diverse idols beckoned and gesticulated as we passed. Printed indelibly on tin and embedded in the living rock, the brown photographs looked out, under glass, from the humbler crosses, headstones, and broken pillars. Dead ladies in the cubistic geometrical fashions of thirty years ago — two cones of black satin meeting point to point at the waist, and the arms; a sphere to the elbow, a polished cylinder below — smiled mournfully out of their marble frames; the smiling faces, the white hands, were the only recognizably human things that emerged from the solid geometry of their clothes. Men with black moustaches, men with white beards, young clean-shaven men, stared or averted their gaze to show a Roman profile. Children in their stiff best opened wide their eyes, smiled hopefully in anticipation of the little bird that was to issue from the camera’s muzzle, smiled sceptically in the knowledge that it wouldn’t, smiled laboriously and obediently because they had been told to. In spiky Gothic cottages of marble the richer dead privately reposed; through grilled doors one caught a glimpse of pale Inconsolables weeping, of distraught Geniuses guarding the secret of the tomb. The less prosperous sections of the majority slept in communities, close-crowded but elegantly housed under smooth continuous marble floors, whose every flagstone was the mouth of a separate grave.

These continental cemeteries, I thought, as Carlo and I made our way among the dead, are more frightful than ours, because these people pay more attention to their dead than we do. That primordial cult of corpses, that tender solicitude for their material well-being, which led the ancients to house their dead in stone, while they themselves lived between wattles and under thatch, still lingers here; persists, I thought, more vigorously than with us. There are a hundred gesticulating statues here for every one in an English graveyard. There are more family vaults, more “luxuriously appointed” (as they say of liners and hotels)

than one would find at home. And embedded in every tombstone there are photographs to remind the powdered bones within what form they will have to resume on the Day of Judgment; beside each are little hanging lamps to burn optimistically on All Soul's Day. To the Man who built the Pyramids they are nearer, I thought, than we.

"If I had known," Carlo kept repeating, "if only I had known." His voice came to me through my reflections as though from a distance. "At the time he didn't mind at all. How should I have known that he would take it so much to heart afterwards? And she deceived me, she lied to me."

I assured him yet once more that it wasn't his fault. Though, of course, it was, in part. It was mine too, in part; I ought to have thought of the possibility and somehow guarded against it. And he shouldn't have let the child go, even temporarily and on trial, even though the woman was bringing pressure to bear on him. And the pressure had been considerable. They had worked on the same holding for more than a hundred years, the men of Carlo's family; and now she had made the old man threaten to turn him out. It would be a dreadful thing to leave the place; and besides, another place wasn't so easy to And. It was made quite plain, however, that he could stay if he let her have the child. Only for a little to begin with; just to see how he got on. There would be no compulsion whatever on him to stay if he didn't like it. And it would be all to Guido's advantage; and to his father's, too, in the end. All that the Englishman had said about his not being such a good musician as he had thought at first was obviously untrue — mere jealousy and little-mindedness: the man wanted to take credit for Guido himself, that was all. And the boy, it was obvious, would learn nothing from him. What he needed was a real good professional master.

All the energy that, if the physicists had known their business, would have been driving dynamos, went into this campaign. It began the moment we were out of the house, intensively. She would have more chance of success, the Signora doubtless thought, if we weren't there. And besides, it was essential to take the opportunity when it offered itself and get hold of the child before we

could make our bid — for it was obvious to her that we wanted Guido just as much as she did.

Day after day she renewed the assault. At the end of a week she sent her husband to complain about the state of the vines: they were in a shocking condition; he had decided, or very nearly decided, to give Carlo notice. Meekly, shamefacedly, in obedience to higher orders, the old gentleman uttered his threats. Next day Signora Bondi returned to the attack. The padrone, she declared, had been in a towering passion; but she'd do her best, her very best, to mollify him. And after a significant pause she went on to talk about Guido.

In the end Carlo gave in. The woman was too persistent and she held too many trump cards. The child could go and stay with her for a month or two on trial. After that, if he really expressed a desire to remain with her, she could formally adopt him.

At the idea of going for a holiday to the seaside — and it was to the seaside, Signora Bondi told him, that they were going — Guido was pleased and excited. He had heard a lot about the sea from Robin. "Tanta acqua!" It had sounded almost too good to be true. And now he was actually to go and see this marvel. It was very cheerfully that he parted from his family.

But after the holiday by the sea was over, and Signora Bondi had brought him back to her town house in Florence, he began to be homesick. The Signora, it was true, treated him exceedingly kindly, bought him new clothes, took him out to tea in the Via Tomabuoni and filled him up with cakes, iced strawberryade, whipped cream, and chocolates. But she made him practise the piano more than he liked, and what was worse, she took away his Euclid, on the score that he wasted too much time with it. And when he said that he wanted to go home, she put him off with promises and excuses and downright lies. She told him that she couldn't take him at once, but that next week, if he were good and worked hard at his piano meanwhile, next week... And when the time came she told him that his father didn't want him back. And she redoubled her petting, gave him expensive presents, and stuffed him with yet unhealthier foods. To no purpose. Guido didn't like his new life, didn't want to practise scales, pined for his book,

and longed to be back with his brothers and sisters. Signora Bondi, meanwhile, continued to hope that time and chocolates would eventually make the child hers; and to keep his family at a distance, she wrote to Carlo every few days letters which still purported to come from the seaside (she took the trouble to send them to a friend, who posted them back again to Florence), and in which she painted the most charming picture of Guido's happiness.

It was then that Guido wrote his letter to me. Abandoned, as he supposed, by his family — for that they shouldn't take the trouble to come to see him when they were so near was only to be explained on the hypothesis that they really had given him up — he must have looked to me as his last and only hope. And the letter, with its fantastic address, had been nearly a fortnight on its way. A fortnight — it must have seemed hundreds of years; and as the centuries succeeded one another, gradually, no doubt, the poor child became convinced that I too had abandoned him. There was no hope left.

"Here we are," said Carlo.

I looked up and found myself confronted by an enormous monument. In a kind of grotto hollowed in the flanks of a monolith of grey sandstone, Sacred Love, in bronze, was embracing a funerary urn. And in bronze letters riveted into the stone was a long legend to the effect that the inconsolable Ernesto Bondi had raised this monument to the memory of his beloved wife, Annunziata, as a token of his undying love for one whom, snatched from him by a premature death, he hoped very soon to join beneath this stone. The first Signora Bondi had died in 1912. I thought of the old man leashed to his white dog; he must always, I reflected, have been a most uxorious husband.

"They buried him here."

We stood there for a long time in silence. I felt the tears coming into my eyes as I thought of the poor child lying there underground. I thought of those luminous grave eyes, and the curve of that beautiful forehead, the droop of the melancholy mouth, of the expression of delight which illumined his face when he learned of some new idea that pleased him, when he heard a piece of music that he liked. And this beautiful small being was dead; and the spirit that

inhabited this form, the amazing spirit, that too had been destroyed almost before it had begun to exist.

And the unhappiness that must have preceded the final act, the child's despair, the conviction of his utter abandonment — those were terrible to think of, terrible.

"I think we had better come away now," I said at last, and touched Carlo on the arm. He was standing there like a blind man, his eyes shut, his face slightly lifted towards the light; from between his closed eyelids the tears welled out, hung for a moment, and trickled down his cheeks. His lips trembled and I could see that he was making an effort to keep them still. "Come away," I repeated.

The face which had been still in its sorrow, was suddenly convulsed; he opened his eyes, and through the tears they were bright with a violent anger. "I shall kill her," he said, "I shall kill her. When I think of him throwing himself out, falling through the air..." With his two hands he made a violent gesture, bringing them down from over his head and arresting them with a sudden jerk when they were on a level with his breast. "And then crash." He shuddered. "She's as much responsible as though she had pushed him down herself. I shall kill her." He clenched his teeth.

To be angry is easier than to be sad, less painful. It is comforting to think of revenge. "Don't talk like that," I said. "It's no good. It's stupid. And what would be the point?" He had had those fits before, when grief became too painful and he had tried to escape from it. Anger had been the easiest way of escape. I had had, before this, to persuade him back into the harder path of grief. "It's stupid to talk like that," I repeated, and I led him away through the ghastly labyrinth of tombs, where death seemed more terrible even than it is.

By the time we had left the cemetery, and were walking down from San Miniato towards the Piazzale Michelangelo below, he had become calmer. His anger had subsided again into the sorrow from which it had derived all its strength and its bitterness. In the Piazzale we halted for a moment to look down at the city in the valley below us. It was a day of floating clouds — great shapes, white, golden, and grey; and between them patches of a thin, transparent blue. Its

lantern level, almost, with our eyes, the dome of the cathedral revealed itself in all its grandiose lightness, its vastness and aerial strength. On the innumerable brown and rosy roofs of the city the afternoon sunlight lay softly, sumptuously, and the towers were as though varnished and enamelled with an old gold. I thought of all the Men who had lived here and left the visible traces of their spirit and conceived extraordinary things. I thought of the dead child.

Two or Three Graces

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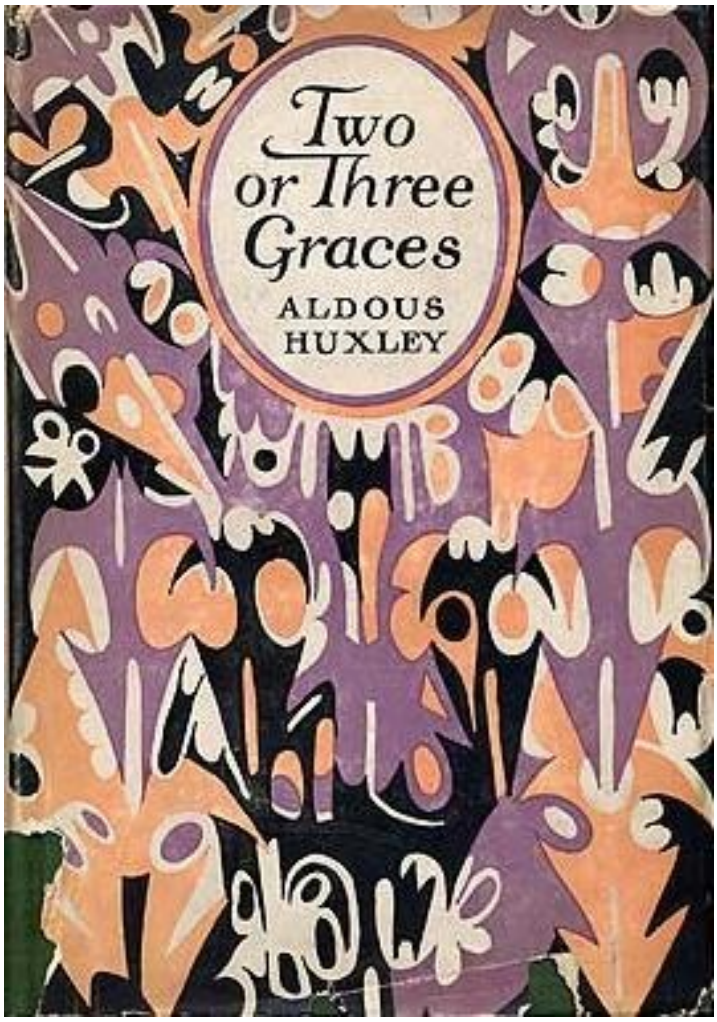

The first edition

Two or Three Graces

THE WORD ‘BORE’ is of doubtful etymology. Some authorities derive it from the verb meaning to pierce. A bore is a person who drills a hole in your spirit, who tunnels relentlessly through your patience, through all the crusts of voluntary deafness, inattention, rudeness, which you vainly interpose — through and through till he pierces to the very quick of your being. But there are other authorities, as good or even better, who would derive the word from the French bourrer, to stuff, to satiate. If this etymology be correct, a bore is one who stuffs you with his thick and suffocating discourse, who rams his suety personality, like a dumpling, down your throat. He stuffs you; and you, to use an apposite modern metaphor, are ‘fed up with him.’ I like to think, impossibly, that both these derivations of the word are correct; for bores are both piercers and stuffers. They are like dentists’ drills, and they are also like stale buns. But they are characterized by a further quality, which drills and dough-nuts do not possess; they cling. That is why (though no philologist) I venture to suggest a third derivation, from ‘burr.’ Burr, — bore — all the sticking, stuffing, piercing qualities of boredom are implicit in those three possible etymologies. Each of the “three of them deserves to be correct.

Herbert Comfrey was above all a sticking bore. He attached himself to any one who had the misfortune to come in contact with him; attached himself and could not be shaken off. A burr-bore, vegetable and passive; not actively penetrating. For Herbert, providentially, was not particularly talkative; he was too lazy and lymphatic for that. He was just exceedingly sociable, like a large sentimental dog that cannot bear to be left alone. Like a dog, he followed people about; he lay, metaphorically speaking, at their feet in front of the fire. And like a dog, he did not talk. It was just your company that made him happy; he was quite content if he might trot at your side or doze under your chair. He did not

demand that you should pay much attention to him; all that he asked was to be permitted to enjoy the light of your countenance and bask in the warmth of your presence. If once a week he got the equivalent of a pat on the head and a ‘Good dog, Herbert,’ he wagged his spirit’s tail and was perfectly happy.

To some of my friends — the quick, the impatient, the highly strung — poor vegetable Herbert was exasperating to the point of madness. His very virtues — that good nature of his, that placidity, that unshakable fidelity — infuriated them. Even his appearance drove them wild. The sight *of his* broad smiling face, of his big, lazy, dubberly body and limbs was alone sufficient to set their nerves twittering and jumping like a frightened avary. I have known people who, after living in the same house with Herbert for three days, have secretly packed their trunks, caught the first convenient train, and, leaving no address, nave travelled hundreds of miles in order to escape from him.

To me, poor Herbert was boring indeed, but not exasperatingly or intolerably so. Mine is a patient temper, my nerves are not easily set twittering. I even liked him in a way; he was such a good, faithful, kind old dog. And I soon acquired, in his dumb presence, a knack of quite ignoring him, of regarding him simply as a piece of furniture — so much so, that I sometimes caught myself on the point of carelessly setting down my emptied coffee-cup on his head as he sat on the floor beside me (he always sat on the floor whenever it was possible), or of flicking my cigarette ash into the inviting cranny between his neck and his coat collar.

As boys, Herbert and I had been at the same public school. But as we were in different houses and he was two years older than I (two years, at that age, is an enormous seniority), we had hardly ever spoken to one another. But none the less, it was on the strength of our old school that Herbert reintroduced himself into my life. His return was doubly disastrous. A bore entered my existence and, in the entering, drove out, temporarily at least, a being who, whatever his other qualities, was the very antithesis of boredom.

It was in a café of the Passage du Panorama in Paris that the thing happened. We had been sitting there for an hour, Kingham and. I, talking and drinking vermouth. It was characteristic of Kingham that he did most of both — drinking

as well as talking. Characteristic, too, that he should have been abusing me, among many other things, for wasting my time and spirit in precisely these two occupations.

‘You sit about,’ he said, ‘letting every thought in your head trickle out uselessly in talk. Not that there are many thoughts, of course, because you daren’t think. You do anything not to think. You create futile business, you rush about seeing people you don’t like and don’t take the slightest interest in, you drift from bar to bar, you swill till you’re stupefied — all because you daren’t think and can’t bring yourself to make the effort to do something serious and decent. It’s the result partly of laziness, partly of lack of faith — faith in anything. *Garçon!*’ He ordered another vermouth. ‘It’s the great modern vice,’ he went on, ‘the great temptation of every young man or woman who’s intelligent and acutely conscious. Everything that’s easy and momentarily diverting and anaesthetic tempts — people, chatter, drink, fornication. Everything that’s difficult and big, everything that needs thought and effort, repels. It’s the war that did it. Not to mention the peace. But it would have come gradually in any case. Modern life was making it inevitable. Look at the young people who had nothing to do with the war — were only children when it happened — they’re the worst of all. It’s time to stop, it’s time to do something. Can’t you see that you can’t go on like this? Can’t you see?’

He leaned across the table at me, angrily. He hated these vices which he had attributed to me, hated them with a special fury because they happened really to be his. He was confessing the weakness he hated in himself — hated and could not eradicate.

Kingham looked handsome in anger. He had dark eyes, beautiful and very bright; his hair was dark brown, fine and plentiful: a close-cut beard, redder than his hair, disguised the lower part of his face, with whose pale, young smoothness it seemed curiously incongruous. There was a brilliancy, a vividness about him. If I were less slow to kindle, I should have burned responsively with his every ardour being what I am, I could always remain cool, critical, and cautious, however passionately he might burn. My uninflammableness, I believe, had

somehow fascinated him. I exasperated him, but he continued to frequent my company — chiefly to abuse me, to tell me passionately how hopeless I was. I winced under these dissections; for though he often talked, as far as I was concerned, wildly at random (accusing me, as he-had done on this particular occasion, of the weakness which he felt and resented in himself), his analysis was often painfully exact and penetrating. I winced, but all the same I delighted in his company. We irritated one another profoundly; but we were friends.

I suppose I must have smiled at Kingham's question. Goodness knows, I am no teetotaller, I am not averse to wasting my time over agreeable futilities. But compared with Kingham — particularly the Kingham of 1920 — I am a monument of industry, dutiful steadiness, sobriety. I take no credit to myself for it; I happen to be one of nature's burgesses, that is all. I am as little capable of leading a perfectly disorderly life as I am of, shall we say, writing a good book. Kingham was born with both talents. Hence the absurdity, so far as I was concerned, of his hortatory question. I did not mean to smile, but some trace of my amusement must have appeared on my face, for Kingham suddenly became most passionately angry, 'You think it's a joke?' he cried, and thumped the marble table. 'I tell you, it's the sin against the Holy Ghost. It's unforgivable. It's burying your talent. Damn this blasted Bible,' he added with parenthetic fury. 'Why is it that one can never talk about anything serious without getting mixed up in it?'

'It happens to be quite a serious book.' I suggested.

'A lot you understand about it,' said Kingham. 'I tell you,' he went on impressively.... But at this moment Herbert made his second entry into my life, I felt a hand laid on my shoulder, looked up, and saw a stranger, 'Hullo, Wilkes,' said the stranger. 'You don't remember me.'

I looked more attentively, and had to admit that I didn't.

'I am Comfrey,' he explained, 'Herbert Comfrey. I was at Dunhill's, don't you remember? You were at Struthers', weren't you? Or was it Lane's?'

At the names of these pedagogues, who had figured so largely in my boyhood, recesses in my mind, long closed, suddenly burst open, as though

before a magical word. Visions of inky schoolrooms, football fields, cricket fields, fives courts, the school chapel, rose up confusedly; and from the midst of this educational chaos there disengaged itself the loutish figure of Comfrey of Dunhill's.

'Of course,' I said, and took him by the hand. Through the corner of my eye, I saw Kingham angrily frowning. 'How did you remember me?'

'Oh, I remember every one,' he answered. It was no vain boast, as I afterwards discovered; he — *did* remember. He remembered every one he had ever met, and all the trivial incidents of his past life. He had the enormous memory of royal personages and family retainers — the memory of those who never read, or reason, or reflect, and whose minds are therefore wholly free to indulge in retrospect. 'I never forget a face,' he added, and without being invited, sat down at our table. indignantly, Kingham threw himself back in his chair. He kicked me under the table. I looked at him and made a little grimace, signifying my helplessness.

I mumbled a perfunctory introduction. Kingham said nothing, only frowned more blackly, as he shook hands with Herbert. And for his part, Herbert was hardly more cordial. True, he smiled his amiable dim smile; but he said nothing, he hardly even looked at Kingham. He was in too much of a hurry to turn back to me and talk about the dear old school. The dear old school — it was the only subject that ever made Herbert really loquacious. It metamorphosed him from a merely vegetable burr-bore into an active, piercing dentist's drill of tediousness. He had a passion for the school, and thought that all ex-members of it ought to be in constant and friendly communication with one another. I have noticed that, as a general rule, people of decided individuality very rarely continue their schoolboy acquaintanceships into later life. It is only to be expected. The chances that they will have found in the tiny microcosm of school the sort of friends they will like when they are grown up — grown out of recognition — are obviously very small. Coteries whose bond of union consists in the fact that their component members happened to be at the same school at the same time are generally the dreariest of assemblages. It could scarcely be otherwise; men who

have no better reasons for associating with one another must be colourless indeed, and insipid. Poor Herbert, who regarded the accident of our having worn similarly striped caps and blazers at a certain period of our boyhood as being a sufficient reason for our entering into a bosom friendship, was only an extreme specimen of the type.

I put on my chilliest and most repellant manner. But in vain. Herbert talked and talked. Did I remember the exciting match against Winchester in 1910? And how poor old Mr. Cutler had been ragged? And that memorable occasion when Pye had climbed on to the roof of the school chapel, at night, and hung a chamber-pot on one of the Gothic pinnacles? Anxiously, I looked towards Kingham. He had exchanged his expression of anger for one of contempt, and was leaning back, his eyes shut, tilting his chair.

Kingham had never been to a public school. He had not had the luck (or the misfortune) to be born a hereditary, professional gentleman. He was proud of the fact, he sometimes even boasted of it. But that did not prevent him from being morbidly sensitive to anything that might be interpreted as a reference to his origin. He was always on the look-out for insults from ‘gentlemen,’ Veiled insults, insults offered unconsciously even, unintentionally, in perfect ignorance — any sort of insult was enough to set him quivering with pain and fury. More than once I had seen him take violent offence at words that were entirely well-intentioned. Would he regard Herbert’s dreary recollections of the dear old school as an insult? He was quite capable of it. I looked forward nervously to an outburst and a violent exit. But the scene, this time, was not to be acted in public. After listening for a few minutes to Herbert’s anecdotage, Kingham got up, excused himself with ironical politeness, and bade us good evening I laid my hand on his arm.

‘Do stay.’

‘A thousand regrets ‘; he laid his hand on his heart, smiled, bowed, and was gone, leaving me (I may add parenthetically that it was his habit) to pay for his drinks.

We public school men were left to ourselves.

The next morning I lay late in bed. At about eleven o'clock Kingham burst into my room. The scene which I had been spared the night before was enacted for me now with redoubled passion. Another man would have slept on the supposed insult and, waking, have found it negligible. Not so Kingham. He had brooded over his wrongs, till what was originally small had grown enormous. The truth was that Kingham liked scenes. He loved to flounder in emotion — his own and other people's. He was exhilarated by these baths of passion; he felt that he really lived, that he was more than a man, while he splashed about in them. And the intoxication was so delicious that he indulged in it without considering the consequences — or perhaps it would be truer to say that he considered the consequences (for intellectually no man could be clearer-sighted than Kingham) but deliberately ignored them.

When I say that he had a great facility for making scenes, I do not mean to imply that he ever simulated an emotion. He felt genuinely about things — genuinely and strongly, but too easily. And he took pleasure in cultivating and working up his emotions. For instance, what in other men would have been a passing irritation, held in check by self-control, to be modified very likely by subsequent impressions, was converted by Kingham, almost deliberately, into a wild fury which no second thoughts were allowed to assuage. Often these passions were the result of mere mistakes on the part of those who had provoked them. But once emotionally committed, Kingham would never admit a mistake — unless, of course, his passion for self-humiliation happened at the moment to be stronger than his passion for self-assertion. Often, too, he would take up unchanging emotional attitudes towards people. A single powerful impression would be allowed to dominate all other impressions. His intellect was put into blinkers, the most manifest facts were ignored; and until further orders the individual in question produced in Kingham only one particular set of reactions.

As he approached my bed. I could see from the expression on his white face that I was in for a bad quarter of an hour.

'Well?' I said, with an affectation of careless cordiality., 'I always knew you were an intellectual snob,' Kingham began in a low, intense voice, drawing up a

chair to my bedside as he spoke. ‘But really, I thought you were above being an ordinary, suburban, lower middle-class social snob.’

I made the grimace which in French novels is represented by the sign ‘ — ?’

‘I know that my father was a plumber,’ he went on, ‘and that I was educated at the expense of the State and by scholarships for the encouragement of clever paupers. I know I speak Cockney, and not Eton and Oxford. I know that my manners are bad and that I eat dirtily, and that I don’t wash my teeth enough.’ (None of these things were true; but it suited Kingham, at the moment, to believe that they were. He wanted to feel abased, in order that he might react with greater violence. He insulted himself in order that he might attribute the insults, under which he genuinely winced, to me, and so have an excuse for being angry with me.) ‘I know I’m a cad and a little bounder.’ He spoke the words with an extraordinary gusto, as though he enjoyed the pain he was inflicting on himself. ‘I know I’m an outsider, only tolerated for my cleverness. A sort of buffoon or tame monkey for the amusement of cultured gentlemen. I know all this, and I know you knew it. But I really thought you didn’t mind, that we met as human beings, not as specimens of upper and lower classes. I was fool enough to imagine that you liked me in spite of it all. I thought you even preferred me to the people in your own herd. It only shows what an innocent I am. No sooner does a gentleman come along, an old school chum, what?’ (derisively he assumed the public school accent as rendered on the music hall stage) ‘than you fling your arms round his neck and leave the dirty little outsider very definitely outside.’ He laughed ferociously.

‘My good Kingham,’ I began, ‘why will you make a bloody fool of yourself?’

But Kingham, who doubtless knew as well as I did that he was making a fool of himself, only went on with the process more vehemently. He was committed to making a fool of himself, and he liked it. Shifting his ground a little, he began telling me home truths — real home truths this time. In the end, I too began to get angry.

‘I’ll trouble you to get out,’ I said.

‘Oh, I’ve not finished yet.’

‘And stay out till you’ve got over your fit of hysterics. You’re behaving like a girl who needs a husband.’

‘As I was saying,’ Kingham went on in a voice that had become softer, more sinisterly quiet, more poisonously honied in proportion as mine had grown louder and harsher, ‘your great defect is spiritual impotence. Your morality, your art — they’re just impotence organized into systems. Your whole view of life — impotence again. Your very strength, such as it is — your horrible passive resistance — that’s based in impotence too.’

‘Which won’t prevent me from throwing you downstairs if you don’t clear out at once.’ It is one thing to know the truth about oneself; it is quite another thing to have it told one by somebody else. I knew myself a natural bourgeois; but when Kingham told me so — and in his words — it seemed to me that I was learning a new and horribly unpleasant truth.

‘Wait,’ Kingham drawled out with exasperating calm, ‘wait one moment. One more word before I go.’

‘Get out,’ I said. ‘Get out at once.’

There was a knock at the door. It opened. The large, ruddy face of Herbert Comfrey looked round it into the room.

‘ I hope I don’t disturb,’ said Herbert, grinning at us.

‘Oh, not a bit, not a bit,’ cried Kingham. He jumped up, and with an excessive politeness proffered his vacant chair. ‘I was just going. Do sit down. Wilkes was impatiently expecting you. Sit down, do sit down.’ He propelled Herbert towards the chair.

‘Really,’ Herbert began, politely protesting. But Kingham cut him short. ‘And now I leave you two old friends together,’ he said. ‘Good-bye. Good-bye. I’m only sorry I shan’t have an opportunity for saying that last word I wanted to say.’

Cumbrously, Herbert made as though to get up. ‘I’ll go,’ he said. ‘I had no idea.... I’m so sorry.’

But Kingham put his hands on his shoulders and forced him back into the chair. ‘No, no,’ he insisted. ‘Stay where you are. I’m off.’ And picking up his hat, he ran out of the room.

‘Queer fellow,’ said Herbert. ‘Who is he?’ ‘Oh, a friend of mine,’ I answered. My anger had dropped, and I wondered, sadly, whether in calling him a friend I was telling the truth. And to think that, if he were no longer my friend, it was because of this lumpish imbecile sitting by my bed! I looked at Herbert pensively. He smiled at me — a smile that was all good nature. One could not bear a grudge against such a man.

The breach was complete, at any rate for the time; it was more than two years before Kingham and I met again. But if I had lost Kingham, I had acquired Herbert Comfrey — only too completely. From that moment, my life in Paris was no longer my own; I had to share it with Herbert. Being at that moment quite unattached, a dog without a master, he fastened himself to me, taking it ingenuously for granted that I would be just as happy in his company as he was in mine. He established himself in my hotel, and for the rest of my stay in Paris I was almost never alone. I ought, I know, to have been firm with Herbert; I ought to have been rude, told him to go to the devil, kicked him downstairs. But I lacked the heart. I was too kind. (Another symptom of my spiritual impotence! My morality — impotence systematized. I know, I know.) Herbert preyed on me, and, like the Brahman who permits himself, unresistingly, to be devoured by every passing blood-sucker, from mosquitoes to tigers, I suffered him to prey on me. The most I did was occasionally to run away from him. Herbert was, fortunately, a sluggard. The Last Trump would hardly have got him out of bed before ten. When I wanted a day’s freedom, I ordered an eight-o’clock breakfast and left the hotel while Herbert was still asleep. Returning at night from these holidays, I would find him waiting, dog-like, in my room. I always had the impression that he had been waiting there the whole day — from dawn (or what for him was dawn — about noon) to midnight. And he was always so genuinely pleased to see me back that I was almost made to feel ashamed, as though I had committed an act of perfidy. I would begin to apologize and explain. I had had to go out early to see a man about something; and then I had met another man, who had asked me to have lunch with him; and then I had had to go to my dear old friend, Madame Dubois, for tea; after which I had dropped in on Langlois, and

we had dined and gone to a concert. In fine, as he could see, I could not have got back a minute earlier.

It was in answer to the reproaches of my own conscience that I made these apologies. Poor Herbert never complained; he was only too happy to see me back. I could not help feeling that his clinging fidelity had established some sort of claim on me, that I was somehow a little responsible for him. It was absurd, of course, unreasonable and preposterous. For why should I, the victim, feel pity for my persecutor? Preposterous; and yet the fact remained that I did feel pity for him. I have always been too tender-hearted, insufficiently ruthless.

The time came for me to return to London. Herbert, who had just enough money to make it unnecessary for him to do anything or to be anywhere at any particular time, packed his bags and got into the same train.

It was a very disagreeable journey; the train was crowded, the sea just choppy enough to make me sick. Coming on deck as we drew into Dover harbour, I found Herbert looking exasperatingly well. If I had not been feeling so ill,' I should have found an excuse for quarrelling with him. But I had not the requisite energy. Meanwhile, it must be admitted, Herbert made himself very useful about the luggage.

Experience was shortly to teach me that, instead of feeling exasperated with poor Herbert, I ought to have been thankful that he was not far worse. For Herbert, after all, was only a burr-bore, a passive vegetable clinger. I might have been fastened on by one who was actively and piercingly as well as just clingingly boring. Herbert might, for example, have been like his brother-in-law, John Peddley; and then there would have been only three alternatives left me: murder, suicide, exile. I was feeling annoyed with Herbert as we slid slowly across Dover harbour. A few hours later, I had realized that I ought to have been feeling thankful that he was no worse than he was. On Dover quay we met John Peddley.

Peddley was an active bore, the most active, I think, that I ever met; an indefatigable piercer, a relentless stuffier and crammer. He talked incessantly, and his knowledge of uninteresting subjects was really enormous. All that I

know of the Swiss banking system, of artificial manures, of the; law relating to insurance companies, of pig-breeding, of the ex-sultan of Turkey, of sugar rationing during the war, and a hundred other similar subjects, is due to Peddley. He was appalling, really appalling, there is no other word I know no human being with whom I would less willingly pass an hour. And yet the man was extremely amiable and full of good qualities. He had a kind heart. He was energetic and efficient. He was even intelligent. One could not listen to his account of insurance companies or artificial manures without realizing that he had completely mastered his subject. Moreover, a successful solicitor, like Peddley, cannot be a fool, at least, that is what those of us who are not solicitors like to believe. What made the man so afflicting was his genius for dulness, his self-assertive pedantry, his voice, his highly developed social instinct, and finally his insensitiveness. His genius for dulness caused him unfailingly to take an interest in the things which interested nobody else, and even when, by some mistake, he embarked on some more promising theme than the Swiss banking system, he had the power of rendering the most intrinsically fascinating of subjects profoundly dull. By a process of inverse alchemy he transmuted the purest gold to lead. His self-assertiveness and a certain pedagogic instinct made him ambitious to be the instructor of his fellows, he loved the sound of his own lecturing voice. And what a voice! Not unmusical, but loud, booming, persistent. It set up strange, nay, positively dangerous vibrations in one's head I could never listen to it for more than a few minutes without *feeling confused* and dizzy. If I had had to live with that voice, I believe I should have begun, one day, to turn and turn like those Japanese waltzing mice — for ever Peddley's voice affected the semi-circular canals. And then there was his sociability. It was a passion, a vice, he could not live without the company of his fellow-beings. It was an agony for him to be alone. He hunted company ferociously, as wild beasts pursue their prey. But the odd thing was that he never seemed to crave for friendship or intimacy. So far as I know, he had no friends, in the ordinarily accepted sense of the term. He desired only acquaintances and auditors, and acquaintances and reluctant auditors were all that he had. In the first period of

my acquaintance with Peddley I used to wonder what he did when he felt the need of confiding his intimate and private feelings. Later on I came to doubt whether, at ordinary times, he had any private life that needed talking about. Only very rarely and when something catastrophic had explosively shattered the crust of his public existence, did he ever develop a private life. When things were running smoothly in their regular daily grooves, he lived only on the public surface, at the office, at the club, at his own dinner-table, perfectly content so long as there was somebody present to listen to his talk. It mattered not that his auditors might be listening with manifest and extreme reluctance. Like Herbert — and indeed like most bores — John Peddley was more than half unaware of the people upon whom he inflicted himself. He realized that they were there, physically there, that was all. To their feelings and thoughts he was utterly insensitive. It was this insensitiveness, coupled with his passionate sociability, that gave him his power. He could hunt down his victims and torture them without remorse. The wolf, if he were really sensitive to the feelings of the lamb, might end by turning vegetarian. But he is not sensitive. He is aware only of his own hunger and the deliciousness of mutton. It was the same with John Peddley. Ignorant of the terror which he inspired, of the mental agonies which he inflicted, he could pursue his course relentlessly and with a perfect equanimity. My first impressions of John Peddley were not unfavourable. True, the halloo with which he greeted Herbert from the quay-side, as we were waiting our turn in the shoving crowd of human sheep to pass down the gangway on to dry land, sounded to me, in my present condition, rather distressingly hearty. And his appearance, when Herbert pointed him out to me, offended me by its robustious healthiness. Nor, when Herbert had introduced us, did I much appreciate the vehemence of his handshake and the loud volubility of his expressions of sympathy. But, on the other hand, he was very kind and efficient. He produced a silver flask from his pocket and made me take a swig of excellent old brandy. Noticing that I was chilled and green with cold, he insisted on my putting on his fur coat. He darted to the customhouse and returned, in an incredibly short space of time, with the official hieroglyph duly chalked upon our suitcases. A minute

later we were sitting in his car, rolling briskly out of Dover along the Canterbury road I was feeling, at the time, too ill to think and it hardly occurred to me that the situation was, after all, rather odd. Peddley had been waiting on the quay — but not for us, for we were unexpected. Waiting, then, for whom? The question did propound itself to me at the time, but uninsistently. There was no room in my mind for anything but the consciousness of sea-sickness I forgot to wonder, and took my seat in the car, as though it were the most, natural thing in the world that we should have been met at the quay by somebody who did not know that we were crossing. And the apparent naturalness of the situation was confirmed for me by the behaviour of my companions. For Peddley had taken it for granted from the first that we should come and stay with him at his country house. And Herbert, for whom one place was always just as good as another, had accepted the invitation at once I began by protesting, but feebly, and more out of politeness than in earnest. For it was not essential for me to get back to London that evening, and the prospect of that dismal journey from Dover, of the cab drive in the chill of the night across London, of a home-coming to fireless and deserted rooms, was very dreadful to me. If I accepted Peddley's invitation, I should find myself in less than half an hour in a warm, comfortable room, at rest and without responsibilities. The temptation to a sea-sick traveller was great, I succumbed 'Well,' said Peddley heartily, in his loud, trombone-like voice, 'well, this is luck' He brought down his hand with a tremendous dap on to my knee, as though he were patting a horse 'The greatest luck! Think of running into you and Herbert at the gangway! And carrying you off like this! Too delightful, too delightful'

I was warmed by his gladness, it seemed so genuine. And genuine it was — the genuine gladness of an ogre who has found a chubby infant straying alone in the woods 'Extraordinary,' Peddley went on, 'how many acquaintances one meets at Dover quay I come every day, you know, when I'm staying in the country, every day, to meet the afternoon boat. It's a great resource when one's feeling dull. All the advantages of a London club in the country. And there's always time for a good chat before the train starts. That's what makes me like

this district of Kent so much. I'm trying to persuade my landlord to sell me the house. I've nearly coaxed him, I think.'

'And then,' said Herbert, who had a way of occasionally breaking his habitual silence with one of those simple and devastatingly judicious reflections which render children so dangerous in polite, adult society, 'and then you'll find that every one will be travelling by aeroplane. You'll have to sell the house and move to Croydon, near the aerodrome' But Peddley was not the man to be put out by even the most terrible of terrible infants. Wrapped in his insensitiveness, he was not so much as aware of the infant's terribleness.

'Pooh!' he retorted 'I don't believe in aeroplanes. They'll never be safe or cheap or comfortable enough to compete with the steamers. Not in our day.' And he embarked on a long discourse about helicopters and gyroscopes, air pockets and the cost of petrol.

Meanwhile, I had begun to wonder, in some alarm, what manner of man this kind, efficient, hospitable host of mine could be. A man who, on his own confession, drove into Dover every afternoon to meet the packet, who waylaid sea-sick acquaintances and had good chats with them while they waited for the train, and who so much loved his afternoon diversions at the quay-side that he felt moved to refute in serious, technical argument the prophet of aerial travel. Decidedly, a strange, a dangerous man. And his voice, meanwhile, boomed and boomed in my ears till I felt dizzy with the sound of it. Too late, it occurred to me that it might have been better if I had faced that dreary journey, that chilly drive, that icy and inhospitable home-coming to empty rooms too late.

I discovered afterwards that Peddley's holidays were always spent at railway junctions, frontier towns and places of international resort, where he was likely to find a good supply of victims. For week-ends, Whitsun and Easter, he had his country house near Dover At Christmas time he always took a week or ten days on the French Riviera. And during the summer he simultaneously satisfied his social passions and his passion for mountain scenery by taking up some strategic position on the Franco-Swiss, Italo-French, or Swiss-Italian frontier, where he could go for walks in the hills and, in the intervals, meet the trans-continental

trains. One year he would take his family to Pontarlier, another to Valorbes, another to Modane, another to Brigue, another to Chiasso. In the course of a few years he had visited all the principal frontier towns in the mountainous parts of central and southern Europe. He knew the best seasons for each Valorbes, for example, had to be visited early in the season. It was in July and at the beginning of August that the greatest number of English people passed through on their way to Switzerland. When he had seen them on their homeward way at the end of August, Peddley would move on for a fortnight's stay to one of the. Italian frontier towns, so as to catch the September tourists on their way to Florence or Venice. His favourite haunt at this season was Modane. There are lots of good walks round Modane, and the principal trains wait there for two and a half hours Rosy with healthful exercise, Peddley would come striding down at the appointed hour to meet the express. The victim was marked down, caught, and led away to the station buffet. For the next two hours Peddley indulged in what he called 'a *really* good chat' Peddley's circle of acquaintanceship was enormous. There was his legal practice, to begin with, that brought him into professional contact with a great variety of people. Then there were his clubs, he was a member of three or four, which he frequented assiduously. And, finally, there was his own constantly hospitable dinner-table, it is astonishing what even the richest men will put up with for the sake of a good free meal. He was on talking terms with hundreds, almost thousands, of his fellows. It was not to be wondered at if he often spied familiar faces in the Modane customhouse. But there were many days, of course, when nobody of his acquaintance happened to be going South. On these occasions Peddley would seek out some particularly harassed - looking stranger and offer his assistance. The kindness, so far as Peddley was concerned, was entirely wholehearted, he was not conscious of the wolf concealed beneath his sheep's clothing. He just felt a desire to be friendly and helpful and, incidentally, chatty. And helpful he certainly was. But in the buffet, when the ordeal of the customhouse was over, the stranger would gradually come to the conclusion, as he listened to Peddley's masterly exposition

of the financial policy of Sweden, that he would have preferred, on the whole, to face the rapacious porters and the insolent douaniers alone and unassisted.

John Peddley had not yet enumerated all his reasons for supposing that aeroplanes would never cut out the cross-channel steamers, when we reached our destination ‘Ah, here we are,’ he said, and opened the door for me to get out ‘But as I was saying,’ he added, turning back to Herbert, ‘the great defect of gyroscopes is their weight and the excessive rigidity they give to the machine. Now I grant you, my dear boy.’

But I forget what he granted. All I remember is that he was still granting it when we entered the drawing-room, where Mrs Peddley was sitting with her children.

From the first, I found Grace Peddley charming. Positively and actively charming. And yet she was Herbert’s own sister and in many respects very like him. Which only shows (what, after all, is sufficiently obvious) that we are prepared to tolerate “and even admire in persons of the opposite sex qualities which infuriate us when we meet with them in persons of our own I found Herbert a bore because he was mentally blank and vague, because he was without initiative, because he attached himself and clung. But Grace, whose character was really very similar to Herbert’s, charmed me, in spite, or perhaps even because, of these qualities which made me rank her brother among the minor calamities of my existence.

But it is not only the moral and mental qualities of our fellow-beings that inspire our love or hate I should not, I am sure, have found Herbert so deplorable if he had been smaller and less cumbrous, less clumsy of body. He was altogether too much the lubber fiend for my taste Physically, Grace displayed little resemblance to her brother. She was tall, it is true, but slim and light of movement Herbert was thick, shambling and leaden-footed. In a heavy, large-featured way, Herbert was not unhandsome. He had a profile, his nose and chin were Roman and positively noble. At a distance you might mistake him for some formidable Caesarean man of action. But when you came close enough to see his

eyes and read the expression on that large pretentious face, you perceived that, if Roman, he was the dullest and blankest Roman of them all.

Grace was not in the least imposing or classical. You could never, at however great a distance, have mistaken her for the mother of the Gracchi. Her features were small and seemed, somehow, still indefinite, like the features of a child. A lot of dark red-brown hair which, at that epoch, when fashion still permitted women to have hair, she wore looped up in a couple of spirally coiled plaits over either ear, emphasized the pallor of that childish face. A pair of very round, wide-open grey eyes looked out from under the hair with an expression of slightly perplexed ingenuousness. Her face was the face of a rather ugly but very nice little girl. And when she smiled, she was suddenly almost beautiful Herbert smiled in the same way — a sudden smile, full of kindness and good nature. It was that smile of his that made it impossible, for me at any rate, to treat him with proper ruthlessness. In both of them, brother and sister, if was a singularly dim and helpless goodness that expressed itself in that smile — a gentle, inefficient kindliness that was tinged, in Herbert's case, with a sort of loutish rusticity. He was a bumpkin even in his goodness Grace's smile was dim, but expressive at the same time of a native refinement which Herbert did not possess. They were brother and sister, but hers was a soul of better, more aristocratic birth.

It was in her relations with her children that the inefficiency of Grace's benevolence revealed itself most clearly in practice. She loved them, but she didn't know what to do with them or how to treat them. It was lucky for her — and for the children too — that she could afford to keep nurses and governesses. She could never have brought her children up by herself. They would either have died in infancy, or, if they had survived the first two years of unpunctual and hopelessly unhygienic feeding, would have grown up into little savages. As it was, they had been well brought up by professional child-tamers, were healthy and, except towards their mother, beautifully behaved. Their mother, however, they regarded as a being of another species — a lovely and eminently adorable being, but not serious, like nurse or Miss Phillips, not really grown up, more than half a child, and what wasn't child, mostly fairy. Their mother was the elfin

being who permitted or even herself suggested the most fantastic bleaches of all the ordinary rules. It was she, for example, who had invented the sport of bathing, in summertime, under the revolving sprinkler which watered the lawn. It was she who had first suggested that excellent game, so strenuously disapproved of by Miss Phillips, nurse and father, of biting your slice of bread, at dinnertime, into the shape of a flower or a heart, a little bridge, a letter of the alphabet, a triangle, a railway engine. They adored her, but they would not take her seriously, as a person in authority, it never even occurred to them to obey her 'You're a little girl,' I once heard her four-year-old daughter explaining to her 'You're a little girl, mummy Miss Phillips is an old lady.'

Grace turned her wide, perplexed eyes in my direction 'You see,' she said despairingly, yet with a kind of triumph, as though she were conclusively proving a disputed point, 'you see! What *can* I do with them?'

She couldn't do anything. When she was alone with them, the children became like little wild beasts.

'But, children,' she would protest, 'children! You really mustn't' But she knew that she might as well have expostulated with a litter of grizzly bears.

Sometimes, when the protest was more than ordinarily loud and despairing, the children would look up from their absorbing mischief and reassuringly smile to her. 'It's all right, mummy,' they would say 'It's quite all right, you know.'

And then, helplessly, their mother would give it up.

In Herbert I found this helpless inefficiency intolerable. But the ineptitude of his sister had a certain style, even her clumsiness was somehow graceful. For clumsy she was. When it came to sewing, for example, her fingers were all thumbs. She had quite given up trying to sew when I first knew her. But she still regarded it as part of her maternal duty to knit warm mufflers — she never attempted anything more complicated than a muffler — for the children. She knitted very slowly, painfully concentrating her whole attention on the work in hand until, after a few minutes, exhausted by the mental strain, she was forced, with a great sigh, to give up and take a little rest. A muffler took months to

finish. And when it was finished, what an extraordinary object it was! A sort of woollen fishing-net.

‘Not *quite* right, I’m afraid,’ Grace would say, holding it out at arm’s length ‘Still,’ she added, cocking her head on one side and half closing her eyes, as though she were looking at a *pointillliste* picture, ‘it isn’t bad, considering.’

Secretly, she was very proud of these mufflers, proud with the pride of a child who has written its first letter or embroidered on canvas its first kettle-holder, with practically no help at all from nurse. It still seemed to her extraordinary that she could do things all by herself, unassisted.

This graceful ineptitude of hers amused and charmed me.. True, if I had had to marry it, I might not have found it quite so enchanting, if only for the reason that I should never have been able to afford a sufficiency of servants and child-tamers to counteract its effects on domestic, daily life. Nor, I am afraid, would the absurd charm of her intellectual vagueness have survived a long intimacy. For how vague, how bottomlessly vague she was! For example, she was quite incapable — and no experience could teach her — of realizing the value of money. At one moment she was lavishly extravagant, would spend pounds as though they were pence. The next, overvaluing her money as wildly as she had undervalued it, she would grudge every penny spent on the first necessities of life. Poor Peddley would sometimes come home from his office to find that there was nothing for dinner but lentils. Another man would have been violently and explosively annoyed, but Peddley, whose pedagogic passions were more powerful than his angel, only made a reasoned expostulation in the shape of a discourse on the meaning of money and the true nature of wealth, followed by a brief lecture on dietetics and the theory of calories Grace listened attentively and with humility. But try as she would, she could never remember a word of what he had said, or rather she remembered, partially, but remembered all wrong. The phrases which Peddley had built up into a rational discourse, Grace rearranged in her mind so as to make complete nonsense. It was the same with what she read. The arguments got turned upside down. The non-essential facts were vividly remembered, the essential forgotten. Dates were utterly meaningless to her. Poor

Grace! she was painfully conscious of her inefficiency of mind, she longed above everything to be learned, authoritative, capable. But though she read a great number of serious books — and read them with genuine pleasure, as well as on principle — she could never contrive to be well read. Inside her head everything got muddled. It was as though her mind were inhabited by some mischievous imp which delighted in taking to pieces the beautifully composed mosaics of learning and genius, and resetting the tesserae (after throwing a good many of them away) in the most fantastic and ludicrous disorder.

The consciousness of these defects made her particularly admire those who were distinguished by the opposite and positive qualities. It was this admiration, I am sure, which made her Peddley's wife. She was very young when he fell in love with her and asked her to marry him — eighteen to his thirty-four or thereabouts — very young and (being fresh from school, with its accompaniment of examination failures and pedagogic reproaches) more than ordinarily sensitive to her own shortcomings and to the merits of those unlike herself Peddley made his entry into her life. The well-documented accuracy of his knowledge of artificial manures and the Swiss banking system astonished her. True, she did not feel a passionate interest in these subjects, but for that she blamed herself, not him. He seemed to her the personification of learning and wisdom — omniscient, an encyclopaedia on legs.

It is not uncommon for schoolgirls to fall in love with their aged professors. It is the tribute paid by youth — by flighty, high-spirited, but passionately earnest youth — to venerable mind Grace was not lucky. The most venerable mind with which, at eighteen, she had yet come into contact was Peddley's Peddley's! She admired, she was awed by what seemed to her the towering, Newtonian intellect of the man. And when the Newtonian intellect laid itself at her feet, she felt at first astonished — was it possible that he, Peddley, the omniscient, should abase himself before one who had failed three times, lgnominiously, in the Cambridge Locals? — then flattered and profoundly grateful. Moreover, Peddley, unlike the proverbial professor, was neither grey-bearded nor decrepit. He was in the prime of life, extremely active, healthy, and energetic, good-looking, too, in the ruddy,

large-chinned style of those Keen Business Men one sees portrayed in advertisements and the illustrations of magazine stories. Quite inexperienced in these matters, she easily persuaded herself that her gratitude and her schoolgirl's excitement were the genuine passion of the novels. She imagined that she was in love with him. And it would have mattered little, in all probability, if she had not Peddley's tireless courtship would have ended infallibly by forcing her to surrender. There was no strength in Grace, she could be bullied into anything. In this case, however, only a very little bullying was necessary. At his second proposal, she accepted him. And so, in 1914, a month or two before the outbreak of war, they were married.

A marriage which began with the war might have been expected to be a strange, unusual, catastrophic marriage. But for the Peddleys, as a matter of fact, the war had next to no significance, it did not touch their life. For the first year John Peddley made Business as Usual his motto. Later, after being rejected for active service on account of his short sight, he enrolled himself as a temporary bureaucrat, was highly efficient in a number of jobs, had managed, when the medical boards became stricter, to make himself indispensable, as a sugar rationer, and ended up with an O B E.

Grace, meanwhile, lived quietly at home and gave birth, in three successive years, to three children. They kept her occupied, the war, for her, was an irrelevance. She witnessed neither its tragedies, nor its feverish and sordid farces. She knew as little of apprehension, suspense, grief, as she knew of the reckless extravagances, the intoxications, the too facile pleasures, the ferocious debaucheries which ran parallel with the agonies, which mingled and alternated with them. Ineffectually, Grace nursed her babies, she might have been living in the eighteenth century.

At the time I knew her first Grace had been married about six years. Her eldest child was five years old, her youngest about two Peddley, I judged, was still in love with her — in his own way, that is. The wild passion which had hurried him into a not very reasonable marriage, a passion mainly physical, had subsided. He was no longer mad about Grace, but he continued to find her

eminently desirable. Habit, moreover, had endeared her to him, had made her indispensable, it had become difficult for him to imagine an existence without her. But for all that, there was no intimacy between them. Possessing, as I have said, no private life of his own, Peddley did not understand the meaning of intimacy. He could give no confidences and therefore asked for none. He did not know what to do with them when they came to him unasked I do not know if Grace ever tried to confide in him, if so, she must soon have given it up as a bad job. One might as well have tried to confide into a gramophone, one might whisper the most secret and sacred thoughts into the trumpet of the machine, but there came back only a loud booming voice that expounded the financial policy of Sweden, food control, or the law relating to insurance companies — it depended which particular record out of the large, but still limited repertory, happened at the moment to be on the turn table. In the spiritual home of the Peddleys there was only a bedroom and a lecture-room — no sentimental boudoir for confidences, no quiet study pleasantly violated from time to time by feminine intrusion. Nothing between the physical intimacies of the bedroom and the impersonal relations of pupil and sonorously braying professor in the reverberant lecture-hall. And then, what lectures!

Grace, who still believed in the intellectual eminence of her husband, continued to blame herself for finding them tedious. But tedious they were to her, that was a fact she could not deny. Long practice had taught her to cultivate a kind of mental deafness Peddley’s discourses no longer got on her nerves, because she no longer heard them I have often seen her sitting, her wide eyes turned on Peddley with an expression, apparently, of rapt attention, seeming to drink in every word he uttered. It was so she must have sat in those first months of her marriage, when she really did listen, when she still tried her hardest to be interested and to remember correctly. Only in those days, I fancy, there can never have been quite so perfect a serenity on her face. There must have been little frowns of concentration and agonizingly suppressed yawns. Now there was only an unruffled calm, the calm of complete and absolute abstraction.

I found her out on the very first evening of our acquaintance John Peddley, who must have been told (I suppose by Herbert) that I was interested, more or less professionally, in music, began, in my honour, a long description of the mechanism of pianolas I was rather touched by this manifest effort to make me feel spiritually at home, and, though I was dizzied by the sound of his voice, made a great show of being interested in what he was saying. In a pause, while Peddley was helping himself to the vegetables (what a blessing it was to have a moment's respite from that maddening voice!), I turned to Grace and asked her politely, as a new guest should, whether she were as much interested in pianolas as her husband. She started, as though I had woken her out of sleep, turned on me a "pair of blank, rather frightened eyes, blushed scarlet.

'As much interested as John in *what*?' she asked 'Pianolas.'

'Oh, pianolas' And she uttered the word in a puzzled, bewildered tone which made it quite clear that she had no idea that pianolas had been the subject of conversation for at least the last ten minutes 'Pianolas?' she repeated almost incredulously. And she had seemed so deeply attentive.

I admired her for this power of absenting herself, for being, spiritually, not there I admired, but I also pitied. To have to live in surroundings from which it was necessary, in mere self-preservation, to absent oneself — that was pitiable indeed.

Next morning, assuming an invalid's privilege, I had breakfast in bed. By the time I came down from my room, Peddley and Herbert had set out for a hearty walk I found Grace alone, arranging flowers. We exchanged good-mornings. By the expression of her face, I could see that she found my presence rather formidable. A stranger, a high-brow, a musical critic — what to say to him? Courageously doing her duty, she began to talk to me about Bach. Did I like Bach? Didn't I think he was the greatest musician? I did my best to reply, but somehow, at that hour of the morning, there seemed to be very little to say about Bach. The conversation began to droop.

'And the *Well-Tempered Clavichord*,' she went on desperately 'What lovely things in that!'

‘And so useful for torturing children who learn the piano,’ I replied, as desperately. Facetiousness, the last resort.

But my words had touched a chord in Grace’s mind ‘Torture,’ she said ‘That’s the word I remember when I was at school.’

And there we were, happily launched at last upon an interesting, because a personal, subject Grace was as fond of her dear old school as Herbert was of his. But, with the rest of her sex, she had a better excuse for her fondness. For many women, the years spent in that uncomplicated, companionable, exciting, purely feminine world, which is the world of school, are the happiest of their lives Grace was one of them. She adored her school, she looked back on her schooldays as on a golden age True, there had been Cambridge. Locals and censorious mistresses, but on the other hand, there had been no Peddley, no annual child-bearing, no domestic responsibilities, no social duties, no money to be too lavish or too stingy with, no servants. She talked with enthusiasm, and I listened with pleasure.

An hour and a half later, when the bores came back, red-faced and ravenous, from their walk, we were sorry to be interrupted I had learned a great many facts about Grace’s girlhood I knew that she had had an unhappy passion for the younger of the visiting music mistresses, that one of her friends had received a love-letter from a boy of fifteen, beginning ‘I saw a photograph of you in the *Sketchy* walking in the Park with your mother. Can I ever forget it?’ I knew that she had had mumps for five weeks, that she had climbed on the roof by moonlight in pyjamas, that she was no good at hockey. From time to time most of us feel a need, often urgent and imperious, to talk about ourselves. We desire to assert our personalities, to insist on a fact which the world about us seems in danger of forgetting — the fact that we exist, that we are we. In some people the desire is so chronic and so strong, that they can never stop talking about themselves. Rather than be silent, they will pour out the most humiliating and discreditable confidences Grace was afflicted by no such perverse and extravagant longings, there was nothing of the exhibitionist in her. But she did like, every now and then, to have a good talk about her soul, her past history, her

future. She liked to talk, and she too rarely had an opportunity. In me she found a sympathetic listener and commentator. By the end of the morning she was regarding me as an old friend. And I, for my part, had found her charming. So charming, indeed, that for Grace's sake I was prepared to put up even with John Peddley's exposition of the law regarding insurance companies.

Within a few weeks of our first introduction we were finding it the most natural thing in the world that we should be constantly meeting. We talked a great deal, on these occasions, about ourselves, about Life and about Love — subjects which can be discussed with the fullest pleasure and profit only between persons of opposite sexes. On none of these three topics, it must be admitted, did Grace have very much of significance to say. She had lived very little and loved not at all, it was impossible, therefore, that she should know herself. But it was precisely this ignorance and her ingenuous, confident expression of it that charmed me.

'I feel I'm already old,' she complained to me 'Old and finished. Like those funny straw hats and leg-of-mutton sleeves in the bound volumes of the *Illustrated London News*,' she added, trying to make her meaning clearer for me I laughed at her 'You're absurdly young,' I said, 'and you haven't begun.'

She shook her head and sighed. When we talked about love, she professed a sad, middle-aged scepticism 'People make a most ridiculous fuss about it'

'Rightly.'

'But it's not worth making a fuss about,' she insisted 'Not in reality. Not outside of books.'

'Isn't it?' I said 'You'll think differently,' I told her, 'when you've waited two or three hours for somebody who hasn't turned up, when you can't sleep for wondering where somebody's been and with whom, and you want to cry — yes, you do cry — and you feel as though you were just going to have influenza.'

'Ah, but that isn't love,' Grace retorted sententiously, in the tone of one who has some private and certain source of information 'What is it, then?'

' It's' Grace hesitated and suddenly blushed, 'it's well, it's physical.'

I could not help laughing, uproariously Grace was vexed ‘Well, isn’t it true?’ she insisted obstinately.

‘Perfectly,’ I had to admit ‘But why isn’t that love?’ I added, hoping to elicit Grace’s views on the subject. She let me have them. They were positively Dantesque I can only suppose that Peddley’s ardours had left her cold, disgusted even. But Life and Love were not our only topics Grace’s ignorance and my own native reticence made it impossible for us to discuss these themes with any profit for very long at a stretch. In the intervals, like John Peddley, I played the pedagogic part. Through casual remarks of mine, Grace suddenly became aware of things whose very existence had previously been unknown to her — things like contemporary painting and literature, young music, new theories of art. It was a revelation. All her efforts, it seemed to her, all her strivings towards culture had been wasted. She had been laboriously trying to scale the wrong mountain, to force her way into the wrong sanctuary. At the top, if she had ever reached it, within the holy of holies, she would have found — what? a grotesque and moth-eaten collection of those funny little straw hats and leg-of-mutton sleeves from the bound volumes of the *Illustrated London News.* It was dreadful, it was humiliating. But now she had caught a glimpse of another sanctuary, upholstered by Martine, enriched by the offerings of the Poirets and Lanvins of the spirit, a modish, modern sanctuary, a fashionable Olympus. She was eager to climb, to enter.

Acting the part of those decayed gentlewomen who, for a consideration, introduce *parvenus* into good society, I made Grace acquainted with all that was smartest and latest in the world of the spirit I gave her lessons in intellectual etiquette, warned her against aesthetic *gaffes.* She listened attentively, and was soon tolerably at home in the unfamiliar world — knew what to say when confronted by a Dada poem, a picture by Picasso, a Schoenberg quartet, an Archipenko sculpture.

I was working, at that period, as a musical critic, and two or three times a week I used to take Grace with me to my concerts. It did not take me long to discover that she had very little feeling for music and no analytical

understanding of it. But she professed, hypocritically, to adore it. And as it bored me most excruciatingly to have to go by myself to listen to second-rate pianists playing the same old morsels of Liszt and Chopin, second-rate contraltos fruitily hooting Schubert and Brahms, second-rate fiddlers scraping away at Tartini and Wiemawski, I pretended to believe in Grace's enthusiasm for the musical art and took her with me to all the most painful recitals. If the hall were empty — which, to the eternal credit of the music-loving public, it generally was — one could get a seat at the back, far away from the other sparsely sprinkled auditors, and talk very pleasantly through the whole performance. At first, Grace was terribly shocked when, after listening judicially to the first three bars of *Du fast wie eine Blume* or the *Trillo del Diavolo*, I opened a conversation. She herself had a very perfect concert-goer's technique, and listened with the same expression of melancholy devotion, as though she were in church, to every item on the programme. My whispered chatter seemed to her sacrilegious. It was only when I assured her, professionally and *ex cathedra*, that the stuff wasn't worth listening to, that she would consent, albeit with considerable misgivings in the early days of our concert-going, to take her part in the conversation. In a little while, however, she grew accustomed to the outrage, so much so, that when the music or the performance happened to be good (a little detail which Grace was not sufficiently musical to notice) it was I who had to play the verger's part and hush her sacrilegious chatter in a place suddenly made holy. She learned in the end to take her cue from me — to look devout when I looked devout, to chatter when I chattered.

Once, rather maliciously, I put on my raptest expression while some maudlin incompetent was pounding out Rachmaninoff. After a quick glance at me through the tail of her eye, Grace also passed into ecstasy, gazing at the pianist as St. Theresa might have gazed at the uplifted Host. When the ordeal was over, she turned on me a pair of bright, shining eyes.

'Wasn't that splendid?' she said. And such is the power of self-suggestion, that she had genuinely enjoyed it 'I thought it the most revolting performance I ever listened to,' was my answer.

Poor Grace turned fiery red, the tears came into her eyes, to hide them from me, she averted her face ‘I thought it very good,’ she insisted, heroically ‘But of course I’m no judge.’

‘Oh, of course it wasn’t as bad as all that,’ I made haste to assure her. ‘One exaggerates, you know’ The sight of her unhappy face had made me feel profoundly penitent I had meant only to make mild fun of her, and I had managed somehow to hurt her, cruelly I wished to goodness that I had never played the stupid trick. It was a long time before she completely forgave me.

Later, when I knew her better, I came to understand why it was that she had taken my little clownery so hardly. Rudely and suddenly, my joke had shattered one of those delightful pictures of herself which Grace was for ever fancifully creating and trying to live up to. What had been a joke for me had been, for her, a kind of murder Grace was a born visualizer I discovered, for example, that she had what Galton calls a ‘number form’ When she had to do any sort of arithmetical calculation, she saw the figures arranged in space before her eyes. Each number had its own peculiar colour and its own position in the form. After a hundred the figures became dim, that was why she always found it so difficult to work in large numbers. The difference between three thousand, thirty thousand, and three hundred thousand was never immediately apparent to her, because in the case of these large numbers she could *see* nothing, they floated indistinctly on the blurred fringes of her number form. A million, however, she saw quite clearly, its place was high up, to the left, above her head, and it consisted of a huge pile of those envelopes they have at banks for putting money in — thousands and thousands of them, each marked with the word MILLION in large black letters. All her mental processes were a succession of visual images, and these mental pictures were so vivid as to rival in brightness and definition the images she received through her eyes. What she could not visualize, she could not think about.

I am myself a very poor visualizer I should find it very difficult, for example, to describe from memory the furniture in my room I know that there are so many chairs, so many tables, doors, bookshelves and so on, but I have no clear mental

vision of them. When I do mental arithmetic, I see no coloured numbers. The word Africa does not call up in my mind, as Grace assured me once that it always did in hers, a vision of sand with palm trees and lions. When I make plans for the future, I do not see myself, as though on the stage, playing a part in imaginary dramas I think without pictures, abstractly and in the void. That is why I cannot pretend to write with complete understanding of the workings of Grace's mind. The congenitally deaf are not the best judges of music I can only guess, only imaginatively reconstruct.

From what I gathered in conversation with her, I imagine that Grace was in the habit of vividly 'seeing herself' in every kind of situation. Some of these situations had no relation to her actual life, were the purely fantastic and hypothetical situations or daydreams. Others were real, or at any rate potentially real, situations. Living her life, she saw herself living it, acting in the scenes of the flat quotidian drama a very decided and definite part. Thus, when she went for a walk in the country, she saw herself walking — a female mountaineer for tireless strength and energy. When she accompanied Peddley on his annual expeditions to the Riviera, she saw herself as she climbed into the *wagon lit*, or swam along the Promenade des Anglais, as an immensely rich and haughty milady, envied by the *canaille*, remote and star-like above them. On certain socially important occasions at home, a similar character made its appearance I saw the milady once or twice during the first months of our acquaintanceship. Later on the milady turned into a very Parisian, very twentieth-cum-eighteenth-century *grande dame*. But of that in its place.

Grace was much assisted in these visualizations of herself by her clothes. In the costume which she donned for a two-mile walk in Kent she might have crossed the Andes. And in all her garments, for every occasion, one noticed the same dramatic appropriateness. It was a pity that she did not know how to change her features with her clothes. Her face, whether she lolled along the sea-fronts of the Riviera or addressed herself, in brogues, short skirts, and sweaters to the ascent of some Kentish hillock, was always the same — the face of a rather ugly but very nice little girl, a face that opened on to the world through

large, perplexed eyes, and that became, from time to time, suddenly and briefly beautiful with a dim benevolence when she smiled Grace's visions of herself were not merely momentary and occasional. There was generally one predominating character in which she saw herself over considerable periods of time. During the first four years of her marriage, for example, she had seen herself predominantly as the housewife and mother. But her manifest incapacity to act either of these parts successfully had gradually chilled her enthusiasm for them. She wanted to run the house, she saw herself tinkling about with keys, giving orders to the maids, but, in practice, whenever she interfered with the rule of her masterful old cook, everything went wrong. She loved her children, she pictured them growing up, healthy and good, under her influence, but they were always sick when she fed them, they behaved like beasts when she tried to make them obey. To one who tried to see herself as the complete, the almost German matron, it was not encouraging. By the time her last child was born, she had practically abandoned the attempt. From the first, the baby had been handed over, body and soul, to the nuises. And except when she was seized with a financial panic and forbade the ordering of anything but lentils, she let the old cook have her way. When I first met her, Grace was not seeing herself continuously in any one predominating rôle. Punctured by sharp experience, the matron had flattened out and collapsed, and the matron had had, so far, no successor. Left without an imaginary character to live up to, Grace had relapsed into that dim characterlessness which in her, as in Herbert, seemed to be the natural state. She still saw herself vividly enough in the separate, occasional incidents of her life — as the mountain climber, as the rich and haughty milady. But she saw no central and permanent figure in whose life these incidents of mountaineering and opulently visiting the Riviera occurred. She was a succession of points, so to speak not a line.

Her friendship with me was responsible for the emergence into her consciousness of a new permanent image of herself. She discovered in my company a new rôle, not so important, indeed, not so rich in potentialities as that of the matron, but still a leading lady's part. She had been so long without a

character that she eagerly embraced the opportunity of acquiring one, however incongruous. And incongruous it was, this new character, odd and eminently unsuitable Grace had come to see herself as a musical critic.

It was our concert-going — our professional concert-going — that had done it. If I had happened not to be a journalist, if we had paid for admission instead of coming in free on my complimentary tickets, it would never have occurred to her to see herself as a critic. Simple mortals, accustomed to pay for their pleasures, are always impressed by the sight of a free ticket. The critic's *jus primae nocits* seems to them an enviable thing. Sharing the marvellous privilege, Grace came to feel that she must also share the judicial duties of a critic. She saw herself distributing praise and blame — a rapturous listener when the performance was worth listening to, a contemptuous chatterer when it wasn't. Identifying herself with me — not the real but an ideal exalted me — she pictured herself as the final arbiter of musical reputations. My malicious little practical joke had thrown down this delightful image of herself. The critic had suddenly been murdered.

At the time I did not understand why poor Grace should have been so deeply hurt. It was only in the light of my later knowledge that I realized what must have been her feelings. It was only later, too, that I came to understand the significance of that curious little pantomime which she used regularly to perform as we entered a concert hall. That languid gait with which she strolled across the vestibule, dragging her feet with a kind of reluctance, as though she were on boring business, that sigh, that drooping of the eyelids as she stood, patiently while the attendant looked at my tickets, that air, when we were in the concert-room, of being perfectly at home, of owning the place (she used, I remember, to put her feet up on the seat in front), and that smile of overacted contempt, that wearily amused smile with which she used (once she had got over the idea that she was committing a sacrilege) to respond, during a bad performance, to my whispered chatter — these were the gait, the bored patience, the possessive at-homeness, the contempt of a hardened critic.

And what a quantity of music she bought at this time and never played! How many volumes of musical criticism and biography she took out of the library! And the grave pronouncements she used to make across the dinner-table!—'Beethoven was the greatest. of them all,' and so on in the same style I understood it all afterwards. And the better I understood, the more I regretted my cruel little joke. As the critic, she had been so happy. My joke destroyed that happiness. She became diffident and self-conscious, got actor's fright, and though I never repeated the jest, though I always encouraged her, after that, to believe in her musicianship, she could never wholeheartedly see herself in the part again.

But what a poor part, at the best of times, the critic's was! It was too dry, too intellectual and impersonal to be really satisfying. That it lay within my power to provide her with a much better rôle — the guilty wife's — I do not and did not at the time much doubt. True, when I knew her first Grace was a perfectly virtuous young woman. But her virtue was founded on no solid principle — on a profound love for her husband, for example, or on strong religious prejudices. It was not a virtue that in any way involved her intimate being. If she happened to be virtuous, it was more by accident than on principle or from psychological necessity. She had not yet had any occasion for not being virtuous, that was all. She could have been bullied or cajoled into infidelity as she had been bullied and cajoled by Peddley into marriage Grace floated vaguely on the surface of life without compass or destination, one had only to persuade her that adultery was Eldorado, and she would have shaped her course forthwith towards that magical shore. It was just a question of putting the case sufficiently speciously. She still retained, at this time, the prejudices of her excellent upper middle-class upbringing, but they were not very deeply rooted. Nothing in Grace was so deeply rooted that it could not quite easily be eradicated.

I realized these facts at the time. But I did not try to take advantage of them. The truth is that, though I liked Grace very much, I was never urgently in love with her. True, one can very agreeably and effectively act the part of the 'lover,' in the restricted and technical sense of that term, without being wildly in love.

And if both parties could always guarantee to keep their emotions in a state of equilibrium, these little sentimental sensualities would doubtless be most exquisitely diverting. But the equilibrium can never be guaranteed. The balanced hearts begin sooner or later, almost inevitably, to tilt towards love or hatred. In the end, one of the sentimental sensualities turns into a passion — whether of longing or disgust it matters not — and then, farewell to all hope of tranquillity I should be chary of saying so in Kingham's presence, but the fact remains that I like tranquillity. For me, the love-game, without love, is not worth the candle. Even as a mere hedonist I should have refrained. And I had other scruples — scruples which an overmastering passion might have overridden, but which were sufficient to keep a mere mild sensuality in check I was never Grace's lover, neither genuinely, by right of passion, nor technically by the accident of physical possession. Never her lover. An ironic fate had reserved for me a less glorious part — the part, not of the lover, but of the introducer of lovers. All unintentionally, I was to play benevolent Uncle Pandarus to Grace's Cressida. And there were two Troiluses.

The first of them was no less — or shouldn't I rather say 'no more'? for how absurdly his reputation was exaggerated! — than Clegg, *the* Clegg, Rodney Clegg, the painter I have known Clegg for years and liked him, in a way — liked him rather as one likes Grock, or Little Tich, or the Fratellini as a comic spectacle. This is not the best way of liking people, I know. But with Rodney it was the only way. You had either to like him as a purveyor of amusement, or dislike him as a human being. That, at any rate, was always my experience I have tried hard to get to know and like him intimately — off the stage, so to speak. But it was never any good. In the end, I gave up the attempt once and for all, took to regarding him quite frankly as a music-hall comedian, and was able, in consequence, thoroughly to enjoy his company. Whenever I feel like a tired business man, I go to see Rodney Clegg.

Perhaps, as a lover, Rodney was somehow different from his ordinary self. Perhaps he dropped his vanity and his worldliness. Perhaps he became unexpectedly humble and unselfish, forgot his snobbery, craved no longer for

cheap successes and, for love, thought the world well lost. Perhaps. Or more probably, I am afraid, he remained very much as he always was, and only in Grace's eyes seemed different from the Rodney whose chatter and little antics diverted the tired business man in me. Was hers the correct vision of him, or was mine? Neither, I take it. It must have been in the spring of 1921 that I first took Grace to Rodney's studio. For her, the visit was an event, she was about to see, for the first time in her life, a famous man. Particularly famous at the moment, it happened, for Rodney was very much in the papers that season. There had been a fuss about his latest exhibition. The critics, with a fine contemptuous inaccuracy, had branded his pictures as post-impressionistic, cubistic, futuristic, they threw any brick-bat that came to hand. And the pictures had been found improper as well as disturbingly 'modern' Professional moralists had been sent by the Sunday papers to look at them, they came back boiling with professional indignation Rodney was delighted, of course. This was fame — and a fame, moreover, that was perfectly compatible with prosperity. The outcry of the professional moralists did not interfere with his sales. He was doing a very good business.

Rodney's conversion to 'modern art,' instead of ruining him, had been the source of increased profit and an enhanced notoriety. With his unfailing, intuitive knowledge of what the public wanted, he had devised a formula which combined modernity with the more appealing graces of literature and pornography. Nothing, for example, could have been less academic than his nudes. They were monstrously elongated, the paint was laid on quite flatly, there was no modelling, no realistic light and shade, the human form was reduced to a paper silhouette. The eyes were round black boot-buttons, the nipples magenta berries, the lips vermilion hearts, the hair was represented by a collection of crinkly black lines. The exasperated critics of the older school protested that a child of ten could have painted them. But the child of ten who could have painted such pictures must have been an exceedingly perverse child. In comparison, Freud's Little Hans would have been an angel of purity. For Rodney's nudes, however unrealistic, were luscious and voluptuous, were even

positively indecent. What had distressed the public in the work of the French post-impressionists was not so much the distortion and the absence of realism as the repellant austerity, the intellectual asceticism, which rejected the appeal both of sex and of the anecdote Rodney had supplied the deficiencies. For these engagingly luscious nudities of his were never represented in the void, so to speak, but in all sorts of curious and amusing situations — taking tickets at railway stations, or riding bicycles, or sitting at cafés with negro jazz-bands in the background, drinking *crème de menthe.* All the people who felt that they ought to be in the movement, that it was a disgrace not to like modern art, discovered in Rodney Clegg, to their enormous delight, a modern artist whom they could really and honestly admire. His pictures sold like hot cakes.

The conversion to modernism marked the real beginning of Rodney's success. Not that he had been unknown or painfull) poor before his conversion. A man with Rodney's social talents, with Rodney's instinct for popularity, could never have known real obscurity or poverty. But all things are relative, before his conversion, Rodney had been obscurer and poorer than he deserved to be — He knew no duchesses, no millionaires, then, he had no deposit at the bank — only a current account that swelled and ebbed capriciously, like a mountain stream. His conversion changed all that.

When Grace and I paid our first visit, he was already on the upward path.

'I hope he isn't very formidable,' Grace said to me, as we were making our way to Hampstead to see him. She was always rather frightened by the prospect of meeting new people.

I laughed 'It depends what you're afraid of,' I said 'Of being treated with high-brow haughtiness, or losing your virtue I never heard of any woman who found him formidable in the first respect'

'Oh, that's all right, then,' said Grace looking relieved. Certainly, there was nothing very formidable in Rodney's appearance. At the age of thirty-five he had preserved (and he also cultivated with artful care) the appearance of a good-looking boy. He was small and neatly made, slim, and very agile in his movements. Under a mass of curly brown hair, which was always in a state of

picturesque and studied untidiness, his face was like the face of a lively and impertinent cherub. Smooth, rounded, almost unlined, it still preserved its boyish contours (There were always pots and pots of beauty cream on his dressing-table) His eyes were blue, bright and expressive. He had good teeth, and when he smiled two dimples appeared in his cheeks. He opened the studio door himself. Dressed in his butcher's blue overalls, he looked charming. One's instinct was to pat the curly head and say. 'Isn't he too sweet! Dressed up like that, pretending to be a workman!' Even I felt moved to make some such gesture. To a woman, a potential mother of chubby children, the temptation must have been almost irresistible.

Rodney was very cordial 'Dear old Dick!' he said, and patted me on the shoulder I had not seen him for some months, he had spent the winter abroad 'What a delight to see you!' I believe he genuinely liked me I introduced him to Grace. He kissed her hand 'Too charming of you to have come. And what an enchanting ring' he added, looking down again at her hand, which he still held in his own 'Do, please, let me look at it.'

Grace smiled and blushed with pleasure as she gave it him 'I got it in Florence,' she said 'I'm so glad you like it.'

It was certainly a charming piece of old. Italian jewellery. Sadly I reflected that I had known Grace intimately for more than six months and never so much as noticed the ring, far less made any comment on it. No wonder that I had been generally unlucky in love.

We found the studio littered with specimens of Rodney's latest artistic invention. Naked ladies in brown boots leading borzoi dogs, tenderly embracing one another in the middle of a still-life of bottles, guitars and newspapers (the old familiar modern still-life rendered acceptable to the great public and richly saleable by the introduction of the equivocal nudes), more naked ladies riding on bicycles (Rodney's favourite subject, his patent, so to say), playing the concertina, catching yellow butterflies in large green nets Rodney brought them out one by one. From her arm-chair in *front* of the easel, Grace looked at them,

her face wore that rapt religious expression which I had so often noticed in the concert-room ‘Lovely,’ she murmured, as canvas succeeded canvas, ‘too lovely.’

Looking at the pictures, I reflected with some amusement that, a year before, Rodney had been painting melodramatic crucifixions in the style of Tiepolo. At that time he had been an ardent Christian.

‘Art can’t live without religion,’ he used to say then ‘We must get back to religion’ And with his customary facility Rodney had got back to it. Oh, those pictures! They were really shocking in their accomplished insincerity. So emotional, so dramatic, and yet so utterly false and empty. The subjects, you felt, had been apprehended as a cinema producer might apprehend them, in terms of ‘effectiveness’ There were always great darknesses and tender serene lights, touches of vivid colour and portentous silhouettes. Very ‘stark,’ was what Rodney’s admirers used to call those pictures, I remember. They were too stark by half for my taste Rodney set up another canvas on the easel ‘I call this “The Bicycle made for Two,” he said.

It represented a negress and a blonde with a Chinese white skin, riding on a tandem bicycle against a background of gigantic pink and yellow roses. In the foreground, on the right, stood a plate of fruit, tilted forward towards the spectator, in the characteristic ‘modern’ style. A greyhound trotted along beside the bicycle.

‘Really too’ began Grace ecstatically. But finding no synonym for ‘lovely,’ the epithet which she had applied to all the other pictures, she got no further, but made one of those non-committal laudatory noises, which are so much more satisfactory than articulate speech, when you don’t know what to say to an artist about his works. She looked up at me ‘Isn’t it really?’ she asked.

‘Yes, absolutely’ I nodded my affirmation. Then, rather maliciously, ‘Tell me, Rodney,’ I said, ‘do you still paint religious pictures? I remember a most grandiose. Descent from the Cross you were busy on not so long ago.’

But my malice was disappointed Rodney was not in the least embarrassed by this reminder of the skeleton in his cupboard. He laughed.

‘Oh, *that?* he said ‘I painted it over. Nobody would buy. One cannot serve God and Mammon’ And he laughed again, heartily, at his own witticism.

It went into his repertory at once, that little joke. He took to introducing the subject of his religious paintings himself, in order to have an opportunity of bringing out the phrase, with a comical parody of clerical unction, at the end of his story. In the course of the next few weeks I heard him repeat it, in different assemblages, three or four times ‘God and Mammon,’ he chuckled again ‘Can’t be combined.’

‘Only goddesses and Mammon,’ I suggested, nodding in the direction of his picture. Later, I had the honour of hearing my words incorporated into Rodney’s performance. He had a wonderfully retentive memory ‘Precisely,’ he said ‘Goddesses, I’m happy to say, of a more popular religion. Are you a believer, Mrs Peddley?’ He smiled at her, raising his eyebrows ‘I am — fervently I’m *croyant* and’ (he emphasized the ‘and’ with arch significance) ‘*pratiquant*’ Grace laughed rather nervously, not knowing what to answer ‘Well, I suppose we all are,’ she said. She was not accustomed to this sort of gallantry.

Rodney smiled at her more impertinently than ever ‘How happy I should be,’ he said, ‘if I could make a convert of you!’ Grace repeated her nervous laugh and, to change the subject, began to talk about the pictures.

We sat there for some time, talking, drinking tea, smoking cigarettes I looked at my watch, it was half-past six I knew that Grace had a dinner-party that evening.

‘We shall have to go,’ I said to her ‘You’ll be late for your dinner’

‘Good heavens!’ cried Grace, when she heard what the time was. She jumped up ‘must fly Old Lady Wackerbath — imagine if I kept her waiting!’ She laughed, but breathlessly, and she had gone quite pale with anticipatory fright.

‘Stay, do stay,’ implored Rodney ‘Keep her waiting’

‘I daren’t’

‘But, my dear lady, you’re young,’ he insisted, ‘you have the right — I’d say the duty, if the word weren’t so coarse and masculine — to be unpunctual. At

your age you must do what you like. You see, I'm assuming that you like being here,' he added parenthetically.

She returned his smile 'Of course.'

'Well then, stay, do what you like, follow your caprices. After all, that's what you're there for' Rodney was very strong on the Eternal Feminine.'

Grace shook her head 'Good-bye I've loved it so much.'

Rodney sighed, looked sad and slowly shook his head 'If you'd loved it as much as all that,' he said, 'as much as I've loved it, you wouldn't be saying good-bye. But if you must' He smiled seductively, the teeth flashed, the dimples punctually appeared. He took her hand, bent over it and tenderly kissed it 'You must come again,' he added 'Soon And,' turning to me with a laugh, and patting my shoulder, 'without old Dick'

' He's frightfully amusing, isn't he?' Grace said to me a minute later when we had left the studio.

'Frightfully,' agreed, laying a certain emphasis on the adverb.

'And really,' she continued, 'most awfully nice, I thought.'

I made no comment 'And a wonderful painter,' she added. All at once I felt that I detested Rodney Clegg I thought of my own sterling qualities of mind and heart, and it seemed to me outrageous, it seemed to me scandalous and intolerable that people, that is to say women in general, and Grace in particular, should be impressed and taken in and charmed by this little middle-aged charlatan with the pretty boy's face and the horribly knowing, smart, impertinent manner. It seemed to me a disgrace I was on the point of giving vent to my indignation, but it occurred to me, luckily, just in time that I should only be quite superfluously making a fool of myself if I did. Nothing is more ridiculous than a scene of jealousy, particularly when the scene is made by somebody who has no right to make it and on no grounds whatever I held my tongue. My indignation against Rodney died down, I was able to laugh at myself. But driving southward through the slums of Camden Town, I looked attentively at Grace and found her more than ordinarily charming, desirable even I would have liked to tell her so and, telling, kiss her. But I lacked the necessary impudence, I felt diffident of my

capacity to carry the amorous undertaking through to a successful issue I said nothing, risked no gesture. But I decided, when the time should come for us to part, that I would kiss her hand. It was a thing I had never done before. At the last moment, however, it occurred to me that she might imagine that, in kissing her hand, I was only stupidly imitating Rodney Clegg I was afraid she might think that his example had emboldened me. We parted on the customary handshake. Four or five weeks after our visit to Rodney's studio, I went abroad for a six months' stay in France and Germany. In the interval, Grace and Rodney had met twice, the first time in my flat, for tea, the second at her house, where she had asked us both to lunch Rodney was brilliant on both occasions. A little too brilliant indeed — like a smile of false teeth, I thought. But Grace was dazzled. She had never met any one like this before. Her admiration delighted Rodney.

'Intelligent woman,' was his comment, as we left her house together after lunch. A few days later I set out for Paris 'You must promise to write,' said Grace in a voice full of sentiment when I came to say good-bye.

I promised, and made her promise too I did not know exactly why we should write to one another or what we should write about, but it seemed, none the less, important that we should write. Letter-writing has acquired a curious sentimental prestige which exalts it, in the realm of friendship, above mere conversation, perhaps because we are less shy at long range than face to face, because we dare to say more in written than in spoken words.

It was Grace who first kept her promise.

'MY DEAR DICK,' she wrote 'Do you remember what you said about Mozart? That his music seems so gay on the surface — so gay and careless, but underneath it is sad and melancholy, almost despairing I think life is like that, really. Everything goes with such a bustle, but what's it all for? And how sad, how sad it is! Now you mustn't flatter yourself by imagining that I feel like this just because you happen to have gone away — though as a matter of fact I *am* sorry you aren't here to talk about music and people and life and so forth. No, don't flatter yourself, because I've really felt like this for years, almost forever.

It’s, so to speak, the bass of my music, this feeling, it throbs along all the time, regardless of what may be happening in the treble. Jigs, minuets, mazurkas, Blue Danube waltzes, but the bass remains the same. This isn’t very good counterpoint, I know, but you see what I mean? The children have just left me, yelling Phyllis has just smashed that hideous Copenhagen rabbit Aunt Eleanor gave me for Christmas. I’m delighted, of course, but I mayn’t say so. And in any case, why must they always act such knockabouts? Sad, sad. And Lecky’s. *History of European Morals,* that’s sadder still. It’s a book I can never find my place in Page 100 seems exactly the same as page 200 No clue. So that — you know how conscientious I am — I always have to begin again at the beginning. It’s very discouraging I haven’t the spirit to begin again, yet again, this evening I write to you instead. But in a moment I must go and dress for dinner John’s partner is coming, surely no man has a right to be so bald. And Sir Walter Magellan, who is something at the Board of Trade and makes jokes, with Lady.

M — , who’s *so* affectionate. She has a way. of kissing me, suddenly and intently, like a snake striking. And she spits when she talks. Then there’s Molly Bone, who’s so nice, but why can’t she get married? And the Robsons, about whom there’s nothing to say. Nothing whatever. Nothing, nothing, nothing. That’s how I feel about it all I shall put on my old black frock and wear no jewels. Good-bye — GRACE’

Reading this letter, I regretted more than ever my lack of impudence and enterprise in the taxi, that day we had driven down from Rodney’s studio. It seemed to me, now, that the impudence would not have been resented I returned a letter of consolation, wrote again a week later, again ten days after that, and again, furiously, after another fortnight. A letter at last came back. It smelt of sandalwood and the stationery was pale yellow. In the past, Grace’s correspondence had always been odourless and white I looked and sniffed with a certain suspicion, then unfolded and read.

‘I am surprised, my good Dick,’ the letter began, that you don’t know us better. Haven’t you yet learned that we women don’t like the sound of the words. Must and Ought? We can’t abide to have our sense of duty appealed to. That was

why I never answered any of your impertinent letters. They were too full of “you must write, and “you promised” What do I care what I promised? That was long ago I am a different being now I have been thousands of different beings since then — re-born with each caprice. Now, at last, I choose, out of pure grace and kindness, to relent. Here’s a letter. But beware of trying to bully me again, don’t ever attempt to blackmail my conscience I may be crueller next time. This is a warning ‘Were you trying, with your descriptions of diversions and entertainments, to make me envious of your Paris? If so, you haven’t succeeded. We have our pleasures here too — even in London. For example, the most exquisite masked ball a few days since. Like Longhi’s Venice or Watteau’s Cythera — and at moments, let me add, towards the end of the evening, almost like Casanova’s Venice, almost like the gallant, *grivots* Arcadia of Boucher. But hush! It was in Chelsea, I’ll tell you no more. You might come bursting in on the next dance, pulling a long face because the band wasn’t playing Bach and the dancers weren’t talking about the “Critique of Pure Reason” For the fact is, my poor Dick, you’re too solemn and serious in your pleasures I shall really have to take you in hand, when you come back. You must be taught to be a little lighter and more fantastic. For the truth about you is that you’re absurdly Victorian. You’re still at the Life-is-real-life-is-earnest, Low - living - and - high - thinking stage. You lack the courage of your instincts I want to see you more frivolous and sociable, yes, and more gluttonous and lecherous, my good Dick. If I were as free as you are, oh, what an Epicurean I’d be! Repent of your ways, Dick, before it’s too late and you’re irrecoverably middle-aged. No more I am being called away on urgent pleasure GRACE’ I read through this extraordinary epistle several times. If the untidy, illegible writing had not been so certainly Grace’s, I should have doubted her authorship of the letter. That sham *dîx-huttième* language, those neorococo sentiments — these were not hers I had never heard her use the words ‘caprice’ or ‘pleasure’ she had never generalized in that dreadfully facile way about ‘we women’ What, then, had come over the woman since last she wrote? I put the two letters together. What could have happened? Mystery. Then, suddenly, I thought of Rodney Clegg, and where there had been

darkness I saw light. The light, I must confess, was extremely disagreeable to me, at any rate in its first, dawning I experienced a much more violent return of that jealousy which had overtaken me when I heard Grace expressing her admiration of Rodney's character and talents. And with the jealousy a proportionately violent renewal of my desires. An object hitherto indifferent may suddenly be invested in our eyes with an inestimable value by the mere fact that it has passed irrevocably out of our power into the possession of some one else. The moment that I suspected Grace of having become Rodney's mistress I began to imagine myself passionately, in love with her I tortured myself with distressing thoughts of their felicity, I cursed myself for having neglected opportunities that would never return. At one moment I even thought of rushing back to London, in the hope of snatching my now suddenly precious treasure out of Rodney's clutches. But the journey would have been expensive, I was luckily short of money. In the end I decided to stay where I was. Time passed and my good sense returned I realized that my passion was entirely imaginary, home-made, and self-suggested I pictured to myself what would have happened if I had returned to London under its influence. Burning with artificial flames, I should have burst dramatically into Grace's presence, only to discover, when I was actually with her, that I was not in love with her at all. Imaginary love can only flourish at a distance from its object, reality confines the fancy and puts it in its place I had imagined myself unhappy because Grace had given herself to Rodney, but the situation, I perceived, would have been infinitely more distressing if I had returned, had succeeded in capturing her for myself, and then discovered that, much as I liked and charming as I found her, I did not love her. It was deplorable, no doubt, that she should have been taken in by a charlatan like Rodney, it was a proof of bad taste on her part that she had not preferred to worship hopelessly, with an unrequited passion. Still, it was her business and in no way mine. If she felt that she could be happy with Rodney, well then, poor idiot! let her be happy. And so on. It was with reflections such as these that I solaced myself back into the indifference of a mere spectator. When Herbert

turned up a few days later at my hotel, I was able to ask him, quite without agitation, for news of Grace ‘Oh, she’s just the same as usual,’ said Herbert.

Crass fool.’ I pressed him ‘Doesn’t she go out more than she used to?’ I asked ‘To dances and that sort of thing? I had heard rumours that she was becoming so social” She may be,’ said Herbert ‘I hadn’t noticed anything in particular.’

It was hopeless I saw that if I wanted to know anything, I should have to use my own eyes and my own judgment. Meanwhile, I wrote to tell her how glad I was to know that she was happy and amusing herself. She replied with a long and very affected essay about ‘pleasures’ After that, the correspondence flagged.

A few months later — I had just returned to London — there was a party at Rodney’s studio, at which I was present Rodney’s latest masterpiece looked down from an easel set up at the end of the long room. It was an amusingly, indecent pastiche of the Douanier Rousseau ‘Wedding,’ the composition was called, and it represented a nuptial party, the bride and bridegroom at the centre, the relatives standing or sitting round them, grouped as though before the camera of a provincial photographer. In the background a draped column, palpably cardboard, a rustic bridge, fir-trees with snow and, in the sky, a large pink dirigible. The only eccentric feature of the picture was that, while the bridegroom and the other gentlemen of the party were duly clothed in black Sunday best, the ladies, except for boots and hats, were naked. The best critics were of opinion that ‘Wedding’ represented the highest flight, up to date, of Rodney’s genius. He was asking four hundred and fifty pounds for it, a few days later, I was told, he actually got them.

Under the stonily fixed regard of the nuptial group Rodney’s guests were diverting themselves. The usual people sat, or stood, or sprawled about, drinking white wine or whisky. Two of the young ladies had come dressed identically in the shirts and black velvet trousers of Gavarm’s *débardeurs.* Another was smoking a small briar pipe. As I came into the room I heard a young man saying in a loud, truculent voice ‘We’re absolutely modern, we are. Anybody can have my wife, so far as I’m concerned I don’t care. She’s free. And I’m free. That’s what I call modern.’

I could not help wondering why he should call it modern. To me it rather seemed primeval — almost pre-human. — Love, after all, is the new invention, promiscuous lust geologically old-fashioned. The really modern people, I reflected, are the Brownings I shook hands with Rodney ‘Don’t be too contemptuous of our simple London pleasures,’ he said.

I smiled, it amused me to hear on his lips the word with which Grace’s letters had made me so familiar ‘As good as the pleasures of Paris, any day,’ I answered, looking round the room. Through the crowd, I caught sight of Grace.

With an air of being spiritually and physically at home, she was moving from group to group. In Rodney’s rooms, I could see, she was regarded as the hostess. The mistress of the house, in the left-handed sense of the word (A pity, I reflected, that I could not share that little joke with Rodney; he would have enjoyed it so much, about any one else) In the intervals of conversation I curiously observed her, I compared the Grace before my eyes with the remembered image of Grace as I first knew her. That trick of swaying as she walked — rather as a serpent sways to the piping of the charmer — that was new. So, too, was the carriage of the hands — the left on the hip, the right held breast-high, palm upwards, with a cigarette between the fingers. And when she put the cigarette to her lips, she had a novel way of turning up her face and blowing the smoke almost perpendicularly into the air, which was indescribably dashing and Bohemian Haughty milady had vanished to be replaced by a new kind of aristocrat — the gay, terrible, beyond-good-and-evil variety.

From time to time snatches of her talk came to my ears. Gossip, invariably scandalous, criticisms of the latest exhibitions of pictures, recollections or anticipations of ‘perfect parties’ — these seemed to be the principal topics, all of them, in Grace’s mouth, quite unfamiliar to me. But the face, the vague-featured face of the nice but ugly little girl, the bewildered eyes, the occasional smile, so full of sweetness and a dim benevolence — these were still the same. And when I overheard her airily saying to one of her new friends of I know not what common acquaintance, ‘She’s almost too hospitable — positively keeps open bed, you know,’ I could have burst out laughing, so absurdly incongruous with

the face, the eyes, the smile, so palpably borrowed and not her own did the smart words seem.

Meanwhile, at the table, Rodney was doing one of his famous ‘non-stop’ drawings — a figure, a whole scene rendered in a single line, without lifting the pencil from the paper. He was the centre of an admiring group.

‘Isn’t it too enchanting?’

‘Exquisite!’

‘Ravishing!’

The words exploded laughingly all around him.

‘There,’ said Rodney, straightening himself up.

The paper was handed round for general inspection. Incredibly ingenious it was, that drawing, in a single sinuous line, of a fight between a bull and three naked female toreros. Every one applauded, called for more ‘What shall I do next?’ asked Rodney ‘Trick cyclists,’ somebody suggested ‘Stale, stale,’ he objected ‘Self portrait.’

Rodney shook his head ‘Too vain’

‘ Adam and Eve’

‘Or why not Salmon and Gluckstein?’ suggested some one else ‘Or the twelve Apostles’

‘I have it,’ shouted Rodney, waving his pencil ‘king George and Queen Mary’

He bent over his scribbling block, and in a couple of minutes had produced a oneline portrait of the Britannic Majesties. There was a roar of laughter. It was Grace who brought me the paper ‘Isn’t he wonderful?’ she said, looking at me with a kind of eager anxiety, as though she were anxious to have my commendation of her choice, my sacerdotal benediction.

I had only seen her once, for a brief unintimate moment, since my return. We had not mentioned Rodney’s name. But this evening, I saw, she was taking me into her confidence, she was begging me, without words, but none the less eloquently, to tell her that she had done well I don’t exactly know why she should have desired my blessing. She seemed to regard me as a sort of old, grey-

haired, avuncular Polonius (Not a very flattering opinion, considering that I was several years younger than Rodney himself) To her, my approval was the approval of embodied wisdom.

‘Isn’t he wonderful?’ she repeated ‘Do you know of any other man now living, except perhaps Picasso, who could improvise a thing like that? For fun — as a game.’

I handed the paper back to her. The day before, as it happened, finding myself in the neighbourhood, I had dropped in on Rodney at his studio. He was drawing when I entered, but, seeing me, had closed his book and come to meet me. While we were talking, the plumber called and Rodney had left the studio to give some instructions on the spot, in the bathroom I got up and strolled about the room, looking at the latest canvases. Perhaps too inquisitively, I opened the notebook in which he had been drawing when I entered. The book was blank but for the first three or four pages. These were covered with ‘non-stop’ drawings I counted seven distinct versions of the bull with the female toreros, and five, a little corrected and improved each time, of King George and Queen Mary I wondered at the time why he should be practising this peculiar kind of art, but feeling no urgent curiosity about the subject, I forgot, when he came back, to ask him. Now I understood.

‘Extraordinary,’ I said to Grace, as I returned her the paper— ‘Really extraordinary!’

Her smile of gratitude and pleasure was so beautiful that I felt quite ashamed of myself for knowing Rodney’s little secret.

Grace and I both lived in Kensington, it was I who drove her home when the party was over ‘Well, that was great fun,’ I said, as we settled into the taxi.

We had driven past a dozen lamp-posts before she spoke.

‘You know, Dick,’ she said, ‘I’m so happy’ She laid her hand on my knee, and for lack of any possible verbal comment, I gently patted it. There was another long silence ‘But why do you despise us all?’ she asked, turning on me suddenly.

‘But when did I ever say I despised you? I protested.

‘Oh, one needn’t say such things. They proclaim themselves.’

I laughed, but more out of embarrassment than because I was amused. ‘A woman’s intuition, what?’ I said facetiously ‘But you’ve really got too much of it, my dear Grace. You intuit things that aren’t there at all’

‘But you despise us all the same.’

‘I don’t. Why should I?’

‘Exactly. Why should you?’

‘Why?’ I repeated.

‘For the sake of what?’ she went on quickly ‘And in comparison with what do you find our ways so despicable? I’ll tell you. For the sake of something impossible and inhuman. And in comparison with something that doesn’t exist. It’s stupid, when there’s real life with all its pleasures.’ That word again — Rodney’s word! It seemed to me that she had a special, almost unctuous tone when she pronounced it ‘So delightful. So rich and varied. But you turn up your nose and find it all vapid and empty. Isn’t it true?’ she insisted.

‘No,’ I answered I could have told her that life doesn’t necessarily mean parties with white wine and whisky, social stunts, fornication and chatter I might have told her, but however studiously I might have generalized, it was obvious that my remarks would be interpreted (quite correctly, indeed) as a set of disparaging personalities. And I didn’t want to quarrel with Grace or offend her. And besides, when all was said, I did go to Rodney’s parties I was an accomplice. The knockabout amused me, I found it hard to deny myself the entertainment. My objection was only theoretical, I did what I denounced I had no right to strike pontifical attitudes and condemn ‘No, of course it isn’t true,’ I repeated Grace sighed ‘Of course, I can’t really expect you to admit it,’ she said ‘But bless you,’ she added with a forced and unnatural gaiety, ‘I don’t mind being despised. When one is rich, one can afford the luxury of being disapproved of. And I am rich, you know. Happiness, pleasures — I’ve got everything. And after all,’ she went on, with a certain argumentative truculence in her voice, ‘I’m a woman. What do I care for your ridiculous masculine

standards I do what I like, what amuses me' The quotation from Rodney rang a little false, I thought. There was a silence.

I wondered what John Peddley thought about it all, or whether any suspicion of what was happening had yet penetrated the horny carapace of his insensitiveness. And as though she were answering my unspoken question, Grace began again with a new seriousness 'And there's my other life, parallel. It doesn't make any difference to that, you know. Doesn't touch it I like John just as much as I did. And the children, of course.'

There was another long silence. All at once, I hardly know why, I felt profoundly sad. Listening to this young woman talking about her lover, I wished that I too were in love. Even the 'pleasures' glittered before my fancy with a new and tempting brilliance. My life seemed empty I found myself thinking of the melody of the Countess's song in *Figaro Dove sono i lei momenti di dolcezza e di placer?*

That Grace's adventure made little or no difference to her other life, I had an opportunity of judging for myself in the course of a subsequent week-end with the Peddleys in Kent John was there—' in great form,' as he put it himself, and Grace, and the children, and Grace's father and mother. Nothing could have been more domestic and less like Rodney's party, less 'modern' Indeed, I should be justified in writing that last word without its inverted commas. For there was something extraordinarily remote and uncontemporary about the whole household. The children were geologically remote in their childishness — only a little beyond the pithecanthropus stage. And Peddley was like a star, separated from the world by the unbridgeable gulfs of his egoism and unawareness. The subjects of his discourse might be contemporary, but spiritually, none the less, he was timeless, an inhabitant of blank and distant space. As for Grace's parents, they were only a generation away, but, goodness knows, that was far enough. They had opinions about socialism and sexual morality, and gentlemen, and what ought or ought not to be done by the best people — fixed, unalterable, habit-ingrained and by now almost instinctive opinions that made it impossible for them to understand or forgive the contemporary world.

This was especially true of Grace's mother. She was a big, handsome woman of about fifty-five, with the clear ringing voice of one who has been accustomed all her life to give orders. She busied herself in doing good works and generally keeping the poor in their places. Unlike her husband, who had a touch of Peddley's star-like remoteness, she was very conscious of contemporaneity and, consequently, very loud and frequent in her denunciations of it.

Grace's father, who had inherited money, filled his leisure by farming a small estate unprofitably, sitting on committees, and reading Persian, an acquirement of which, in his quiet way, he was very proud. It was a strangely disinterested hobby. He had never been to Persia and had not the slightest intention of ever going. He was quite uninterested in Persian literature or history, and was just as happy reading a Persian cookery book as the works of Hafiz or Rumi. What he liked was the language itself. He enjoyed the process of reading the unfamiliar letters, of looking up the words in the dictionary. For him, Persian was a kind of endlessly complicated Jigsaw puzzle. He studied it solely for the sake of killing time and in order not to think. A dim, hopeless sort of man was Mr Comfrey. And he had an irritating way of looking at you over the top of his spectacles with a puzzled expression, as though he had not understood what you meant, which, indeed, was generally the case. For Mr Comfrey was very slow of mind and made up for his knowledge of Persian by the most extraordinary ignorance of almost all other subjects under the sun 'Say that again,' he would say, when his incomprehension was too complete.

How strange, how utterly fantastic it seemed, that week-end I felt as though I had been suddenly lifted out of the contemporary world and plunged into a kind of limbo.

John Peddley's latest subject was the Einstein theory 'It's so simple,' he assured us the first evening, between the soup and the fish 'I don't pretend to be a mathematician or anything like one, but I understand it perfectly. All that it needs is a little common sense' And for the next half-hour the common sense came braying out, as though from the mouth of a trombone Grace's father looked at him dubiously over the top of his spectacles.

‘Say that again, will you?’ he said, after every second sentence.

And John Peddley was only too delighted to oblige.

At the other end of the table, Grace and her mother were discussing the children, their clothes, characters, education, diseases I longed to join in their conversation. But the simple domesticities were not for me I was a man, John Peddley and the intellect were my portion. Reluctantly, I turned back towards my host ‘What I’d like you to explain,’ Grace’s father was saying, ’is just exactly how time can be at right angles to length, breadth, and thickness. Where precisely does it come in?’ With two forks and a knife he indicated the three spatial dimensions ‘Where do you find room for another light angle?’

And John Peddley set himself to explain. It was terrible.

Meanwhile, at my other ear, Grace’s mother had begun to talk about the undesirable neighbours who had taken the house next to theirs on Campden Hill. A man and a woman, living together, unmarried. And the garden behind the houses was the common property of all the householders. What a situation! Leaving Peddley and the old gentleman to find room for the fourth right angle, I turned definitively to the ladies. For my benefit, Grace’s mother began the horrid story again from the beginning I was duly sympathetic.

Once, for a moment, I caught Grace’s eye. She smiled at me, she almost imperceptibly raised her eyebrows. That little grimace was deeply significant. In the first months of our friendship, I had often seen her in the company of her father and mother, and her bearing, on these occasions, had always impressed me I had never met a young woman of the generation which had come to maturity during the war who was so perfectly at ease with her elders, so unconstrainedly at home in their moral and mental atmosphere as was Grace. She had taken her father and mother entirely for granted, had regarded their views of life as the obvious, natural views of every sane human being. That embarrassment which — in these days, more perhaps than at any other period — afflicts young people when in the presence of their elders had never, so far as I had observed, touched Grace This smile of apologetic and slightly contemptuous

indulgence, this raising of the eyebrows, were symptomatic of a change Grace had become contemporary, even (in inverted commas) ‘modern.’

Outwardly, however, there was no change. The two worlds were parallel, they did not meet. They did not meet, even when Rodney came to dine *en famille*, even when John accompanied his wife to one of Rodney’s less aggressively ‘artistic’ (which in inverted commas means very much the same as ‘modern’) evening parties. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that Rodney’s world met John’s, but John’s did not meet Rodney’s. Only if Rodney had been a Zulu and his friends Chinese would John have noticed that they were at all different from the people he was used to meeting. The merely spiritual differences which distinguished them were too small for his notice. He moved through life surrounded by his own atmosphere, only the most glaring lights could penetrate that half opaque and intensely refractive medium. For John, Rodney and his friends were just people, like everybody else, people who could be button-holed and talked to about the Swiss banking system and Einstein’s theory, and the rationing of sugar. Sometimes, it was true, they seemed to him rather frivolous, their manners, sometimes, struck him as rather unduly brusque, and John had even remarked that they were sometimes rather coarse-spoken in the presence of ladies — or, if they happened to be ladies themselves, in the presence of gentlemen.

‘Curious, these young people,’ he said to me, after an evening at Rodney’s studio ‘Curious’ He shook his head ‘I don’t know that I quite understand them.’

Through a rift in his atmosphere he had caught a glimpse of the alien world beyond, he had seen something, not refracted, but as it really was. But John was quite incurious, careless of its significance, he shut out the unfamiliar vision.

‘I don’t know what your opinion about modern art may be,’ he went on, disappointing me of his comments on modern people ‘But what I always say is this.’

And he said it, copiously Modern art became another gramophone record added to his repertory. That was the net result of his meeting with Rodney and Rodney’s friends.

For the next few months I saw very little either of Grace or of Rodney I had met Catherine, and was too busy falling in love to do or think of anything else. We were married towards the close of 1921, and life became for me, gradually, once more normal.

From the first Catherine and Grace were friends Grace admired Catherine for her coolness, her quiet efficiency, her reliableness, admired and liked her Catherine's affection for Grace was protective and elder-sisterly, and at the same time, she found Grace slightly comic. Affections are not impaired by being tempered with a touch of benevolent laughter. Indeed, I would almost be prepared to risk a generalization and say that all true affections are tempered with laughter. For affection implies intimacy, and one cannot be intimate with another human being without discovering something to laugh at in his or her character. Almost all the truly virtuous characters in fiction are also slightly ridiculous, perhaps that is because their creators were so fond of them Catherine saw the joke — the rather pathetic joke — of Grace. But she liked her none the less, perhaps, even, the more. For the joke was appealing, it was a certain childishness that raised the laugh.

At the time of my marriage, Grace was acting the eternally feminine part more fervently than ever. She had begun to dress very smartly and rather eccentrically, and was generally unpunctual, not very unpunctual (she was by nature too courteous for that), but just enough to be able to say that she was horribly late, but that she couldn't help it, it was in her nature — her woman's nature. She blamed Catherine for dressing too sensibly 'You must be gayer in your clothes,' she insisted, 'more fantastic and capricious. It'll make you *feel* more fantastic. You think too masculmely.'

And to encourage her in thinking femininely, she gave her six pans of white kid gloves, marvellously piped with coloured leather and with fringed and intricately scalloped gauntlets. But perhaps the most feminine and fantastic thing about them was the fact that they were several sizes too small for Catherine's hand Grace had become a good deal more loquacious of late and her style of conversation had changed. Like her clothes, it was more fantastic than in the

past. The principle on which she made conversation was simple she said whatever came into her head. And into that vague, irresponsible head of hers the oddest things would come. A phantasmagoria of images, changing with every fresh impression or as the words of her interlocutor called up new associations, was for ever dancing across her field of mental vision. She put into words whatever she happened to see at any given moment. For instance, I might mention the musician Palestrina.

‘Yes, yes,’ Grace would say, ‘what a marvellous composer!’ Then, reacting to the. Italian reference, she would add in the same breath. ‘And the way they positively *drink* the macaroni. Like those labels that come out of the mouth of caricatures. You know.’

Sometimes I did know I skipped over the enormous ellipses in this allusive thinking and caught the reference. Sometimes, when the association of her ideas was too exclusively private, I was left uncomprehending. The new technique was rather disconcerting, but it was always amusing, in a way. The unexpectedness of her remarks, the very nonsensicality of them, surprised one into finding them witty.

As a child, Grace had been snubbed when she talked in this random, fantastic fashion ‘Talk sense,’ her governesses had said severely, when she told them during the geography lesson that she didn’t like South America because it looked like a boiled leg of mutton ‘Don’t be silly’ Grace was taught to be ashamed of her erratic fancy. She tried to talk sense — sense as governesses understand it — found it very difficult, and relapsed into silence Peddley was even more sensible, in the same style, than the governesses themselves, devastatingly sensible. He was incapable of understanding fancy. If Grace had ever told Peddley why she didn’t like South America, he would have been puzzled, he would have asked her to explain herself. And learning that it was the mutton-like shape of the continent on the map that prejudiced Grace against it, he would have given her statistics of South America’s real dimensions, would have pointed out that it extended from the tropics almost into the antarctic circle, that it contained the largest river and some of the highest mountains in the world, that Brazil

produced coffee and the Argentine beef, and that consequently, in actual fact, it was not in the very least like a boiled leg of mutton. With Peddley, Grace's only resources were laboriously talked sense or complete silence. In Rodney's circle, however, she found that her gift of nonsense was appreciated and applauded. An enthusiast for the 'fantastic' and the 'feminine,' Rodney encouraged her to talk at random, as the spirit of associative fancy might move her. Diffidently at first, Grace let herself go, her conversation achieved an immediate success. Her unstitched, fragmentary utterances were regarded as the last word in modern wit. People repeated her *bons mots.* A little bewildered by what had happened, Grace suddenly found herself in the movement, marching at the very head of the forces of contemporaneity. In the eighteenth century, when logic and science were the fashion, women tried to talk like the men. The twentieth century has reversed the process. Rodney did Grace the honour of appropriating to himself the happiest of her extravagances.

Success made Grace self-confident, and confident, she went forward triumphantly to further successes. It was a new and intoxicating experience for her. She lived in a state of chronic spiritual tipsiness.

'How stupid people are not to be happy!' she would say, whenever we discussed these eternal themes. To Catherine, who had taken my place as a confidant — my place and a much more intimate, more confidential place as well — she talked about love and Rodney.

'I can't think why people manage to make themselves unhappy about love,' she said 'Why can't everybody love gaily and freely, like us? Other people's love seems to be all black and clotted, like Devonshire cream made of ink. Ours is like champagne. That's what love ought to be like champagne Don't you think so?'

'I think I should prefer it to be like clear. water,' said Catherine. To me, later on, she expressed her doubts 'All this champagne and gaiety,' she said,— 'one can see that.

Rodney is a young man with a most wholesome fear of emotional entanglements.'

‘We all knew that,’ I said ‘You didn’t imagine, I suppose, that he was in love with her?’

‘I hoped,’ said Catherine ‘Because you didn’t know Rodney. Now you do — Champagne — you have the formula. The problem is Grace.’

Was she really in love with him? Catherine and I discussed the question I was of opinion that she was ‘When Rodney flutters off,’ I said, ‘she’ll be left there, broken.’

Catherine shook her head ‘She only imagines she’s in love,’ she insisted ‘It’s the huge excitement of it all that makes her happy, that, and the novelty of it, and her sense of importance, and her success. Not any deep passion for Rodney. She may think it’s a passion — a champagnish passion, if you like. But it isn’t really. There’s no passion, only champagne. It was his prestige and her boredom that made her fall to him originally. And now it’s her success and the fun of it that make her stick to him.’

Events were to show that Catherine was right, or at least more nearly light than I. But before I describe these events, I must tell how it was that Kingham re-entered my world. It was I who took the first step to end our ridiculous quarrel I should have made the attempt earlier, if it had not been for Kingham’s absence from Europe. A little while after our squabble he left, with a commission to write articles as he went, first for North Africa and thence for the further East I heard of him once or twice from people who had seen him at Tunis, at Colombo, at Canton. And I read the articles, the admirably original articles, as they appeared at intervals in the paper which had commissioned them. But direct communication with him I had none I did not write, for I was uncertain, to begin with, if my letter would ever reach him. And in any case, even if we had made up our quarrel by letter, what good would that have been? Reconciliations across eight thousand miles of space are never very satisfactory I waited till I heard of his return and then wrote him a long letter. Three days later he was sitting at our dinner-table.

‘This is good,’ he said, ‘this is very good’ He looked this way and that, quickly, taking in everything — the furniture, the books, Catherine, me — with

his bright, quick eyes ‘Definitely settled’

‘Oh, not so definitely as all that, let us hope’ I laughed in Catherine’s direction.

‘I envy you,’ he went on ‘To have got hold of something fixed, something solid and absolute — that’s wonderful. Domestic love, marriage — after all, it’s the nearest thing to an absolute that we can achieve, practically. And it takes on more value, when you’ve been rambling round the world for a bit, as I have. The world proves to you that nothing has any meaning except in relation to something else. Good, evil, justice, civilization, cruelty, beauty. You think you know what these words mean. And perhaps you do know, in Kensington. But go to India or China. You don’t know anything there. It’s uncomfortable at first, but then, how exciting! And how much more copiously and multifariously you begin to live! But precisely for that reason you feel the need for some sort of fixity and definition, some kind of absolute, not merely of the imagination, but in actual life. That’s where love comes in, and domesticity. Not to mention God and Death and the Immortality of the Soul and all the rest. When you live narrowly and snugly, those things seem absurd and superfluous. You don’t even appreciate your snugness. But multiply yourself with travelling, knock the bottom out of all your old certainties and prejudices and habits of thought, then you begin to see the real significance of domestic snugness, you appreciate the reality and importance of the other fixities’ He spoke with all his old passionate eagerness. His eyes had the same feverish, almost unearthly brightness. His face, which had been smooth and pale when I saw it last, was burnt by the sun and lined. He looked more mature, tougher and stronger than in the past ‘Yes, I envy you,’ he repeated ‘Then why don’t you get married yourself?’ asked Catherine

Kingham laughed ‘Why not, indeed? You’d better ask Dick. He knows me well enough to answer, I should think.’

‘No, tell us yourself,’ I said Kingham shook his head ‘It would be a case of cruelty to animals,’ he said enigmatically, and began to talk about something else ‘I envy you,’ he said again, later that same evening, when Catherine had gone to bed and we were alone together ‘I envy you. But you don’t deserve what

you've got. You haven't earned your right to a fixed domestic absolute, as I have I've realized, intimately and personally realized, the flux and the interdependence and the relativity of things, consequently I know and appreciate the meaning and value of fixity. But you — you're domestic just as you're moral, you're moral and domestic by nature, unconsciously, instinctively, without having known the opposites which give these attitudes their significance — like a worker bee, in fact, like a damned cabbage that just grows because it can't help it' I laughed 'I like the way you talk about flux and relativity,' I said, 'when you yourself are the fixed, unchanging antithesis of these things. The same old Kingham! Why, you're a walking fixity, you're the. Absolute in flesh and blood. How well I know those dear old home truths, for example!'

'But that doesn't prevent their being true,' he insisted laughing, but at the same time rather annoyed by what I had said 'And besides, I *have* changed. My views about everything are quite different. A sensitive man can't go round the world and come back with the same philosophy of life as the one he started with.'

'But he can come back with the same temperament, the same habits of feeling, the same instinctive reactions.'

Kingham ran his fingers through his hair and repeated his petulant laughter 'Well, I suppose he can,' he admitted reluctantly I was only too well justified in what I had said. A few days of renewed intimacy were enough to convince me that Kingham preserved all his old love of a scene, that he enjoyed as much as ever the luxury of a hot emotional bath. He burst in on me one morning, distracted with fury, to tell me about a violent quarrel he had had the previous evening with some insignificant young undergraduate — rather tipsy at that — who had told him (with considerable insight, I must admit, in spite of his tipsiness) that he, Kingham, was either insincere or hysterical.

'And the awful thing is that he may be right,' he added, when he had finished his story 'Perhaps I *am* insincere' Restlessly, he walked about the room. From time to time he withdrew a hand from the pocket into which it was deeply plunged and made a gesture, or ran the fingers through his hair 'Perhaps I'm just

a little comedian,' he went on, 'just a mouther of words, a ranter.' The self-laceration hurt him, but he enjoyed the pain 'Do I really feel things deeply?' he went on speculating 'Or do I just deceive myself into believing that I care? Is it all a mere he?' The operation continued interminably.

The tipsy undergraduate had diagnosed insincerity or hysteria. It was in my power to relieve Kingham of his haunting fear of insincerity by assuring him that the second of these alternatives was the more correct. But I doubted the efficacy of the consolation, and besides I had no desire for a quarrel I held my tongue I did not make Kingham known to Grace, for knowing that he had a passionate and rooted dislike of Rodney, I was afraid that, in spite of my preliminary warnings (or even precisely because of them, for the sake of creating an intolerably unpleasant situation) he might burst out, in Grace's presence, into some violent denunciation of her lover. It was a risk that was not worth running. And besides, I did not imagine that they would get on well together. We were intimate with both, but we kept them, so to speak, in separate water-tight compartments of our intimacy. One day, when I came home to dinner, I was greeted by Catherine with a piece of news.

'Rodney's being unfaithful,' she said 'Poor little Grace was here for tea to-day. She pretends not to mind — to be very modern and hard and gay about it. But I could see that she was dreadfully upset.'

'And who's the lucky lady?' I asked 'Mrs Mellila.'

'A step up in the world' I thought of the emeralds and the enormous pearls, which added lustre to the already dazzling Jewish beauty of Mrs Melilla 'He'll be in the baronetcy and peerage soon.'

'What a pig !' said Catherine indignantly.

'I'm so dreadfully sorry for poor Grace.'

'But according to your theory, she isn't really in love with him.'

'No, she isn't,' said Catherine 'Not *really.* But she thinks she is. And she'll think so much more, of course, now that he's leaving her. And besides, she has put so many of her eggs into his basket, this smashes them all. She'd committed

herself body and soul to Rodney and Rodneyism. This affair with Rodney gave sense to her whole existence. Can't you see that?'

'Perfectly' I remembered the days when Grace had seen herself as a musical critic and how cruelly I had murdered this comforting vision of herself by my little practical joke about the player of Rachmanmoff. A much more significant, much more intimately cherished dream was being murdered now.

She did her best, as Catherine had said, to be very 'modern' about it I saw her a few days later at one of Rodney's parties, she was smoking a great many cigarettes, drinking glass after glass of white wine and talking more wildly than ever. Her dress was a close-fitting sheath of silver tissue, designed so as to make the wearer look almost naked. Fatigued with sleeplessness, her eyes were circled with dark, bruise-coloured rings, seen in conjunction with the bright, unnatural red of her rouged cheeks and lips, these dark circles looked as though they had been painted on with a fard, to heighten the brilliance of the eyes, to hint provocatively at voluptuous fatigues and amorous vigils. She was having a great success and her admirers had never been more numerous. She flirted outrageously with all of them. Even when she was talking with me, she seemed to find it necessary to shoot languorous sidelong glances, to lean towards me, as though offering her whole person to my desires. But looking at her, I could see, under the fard, only the face of the nice but rather ugly little girl, it seemed, I thought, more than usually pathetic.

Rodney sat down at the table to do his usual non-stop drawing 'What shall it be?' he asked.

'Draw Jupiter and *all* his mistresses,' cried Grace, who was beginning to be rather tipsy 'Europa and Leda and Semele and Danae,' she dapped her hands at each name, 'and Io and Clio and Dio and Scio and Fi-fio and O-my-Eyeo.

The jest was not a very good one. But as most of Rodney's guests had drunk a good deal of wine and all were more or less intoxicated by the convivial atmosphere of a successful party, there was a general laugh Grace began to laugh too, almost hysterically. It was a long time before she could control herself.

Rodney, who had made no preparations for improvising a picture of Jove's mistresses, found an excuse for rejecting the suggestion. He ended by drawing Mrs Eddy pursued by a satyr.

Deserted by Rodney, Grace tried to pretend that it was she who was the deserter. The role of the capricious wanton seemed to her more in harmony with the Rodneyan conception of the eternal feminine as well as less humiliating than that of the victim. Provocatively, promiscuously, she flirted. In those first days of her despair she would, I believe, have accepted the advances of almost any tolerably presentable man. Masterman, for example, or Gane the journalist, or Levitski — it was one of those three, I surmised, judging by what I saw at the party, who would succeed to Rodney's felicity, and that very soon.

The day after the party, Grace paid another visit to Catherine. She brought a small powder-puff as a present. In return, she asked, though not in so many words, for comfort, advice, and above all for approval. In a crisis, on the spur of the moment, Grace could be rashly and unreflectingly impulsive, but when there was time to think, when it was a question of deliberately planning she was timorous, she hated to stand alone and take responsibilities. She liked to know that the part in which she saw herself was approved of by some trustworthy judge. The powder-puff was a bribe and an argument, an argument in favour of the eternal feminine, with all that that connoted, a bribe for the judge, an appeal to her affection, that she might approve of Grace's sentiments and conduct Grace put her case 'The mistake people make,' she said, 'is getting involved, like the man on the music-halls who does that turn with the fly-paper I refuse to be involved, that's my principle I think one ought to be heartless and just amuse oneself, that's all. Not worry about anything else.'

'But do you think one can really be amused if one doesn't worry and takes things heartlessly?' asked Catherine. '*Really* amused, I mean. Happy, if you'll permit me to use an old-fashioned word. Can one be happy?' She thought of Levitski, of Gane and Masterman.

Grace was silent, perhaps she too was thinking of them. Then, making an effort, 'Yes, yes,' she said with a kind of obstinate, determined gaiety, 'one can,

of course one can.'

I was at the Queen's Hall that afternoon. Coming out, when the concert was over, I caught sight of Kingham in the issuing crowd.

'Come home for a late cup of tea and stay to dinner.'

'All right,' he said.

We climbed on to a bus and rode westward. The sun had just set. Low down in the sky in front of us there were streaks of black and orange cloud, and above them a pale, watery-green expanse, limpid and calm up to the zenith. We rode for some time in silence, watching the lovely death of yet another of our days.

'It's all very well,' said Kingham at last, indicating these western serenities with a gesture of his fine, expressive hand, 'it's all very well, no doubt, for tired business men. Gives them comfort, I dare say, makes them feel agreeably repentant for the swindles they've committed during the day, and all that. Oh, it's full of uplift, I've no doubt. But I don't happen to be a tired business man. It just makes me sick.'

'Come, come,' I protested. He wouldn't listen to me 'I won't have Gray's 'Elegy' rammed down my throat,' he said 'What I feel like is. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, or *Zarathustra*, or the *Chants de Maldoror*.'

'Well, all that I can suggest' (I suggested it mildly) 'is that you should travel inside the bus and not look at the sunset.'

'Ass!' he said contemptuously. We came in, to find Grace still sitting there, over the tea-cups, with Catherine I was annoyed, still, there was nothing to be done about it I introduced Kingham All unconsciously, I was playing Pandarus for the second time.

My sources for the history of Grace's second love affair are tolerably copious. To begin with, I had opportunities of personally observing it, during a considerable part of its duration I heard much, too, from Kingham himself. For Kingham was not at all a discreet lover. He was as little capable of being secretive about this class of experiences as about any other. He simply had to talk. Talking renewed and multiplied the emotions which he described. Talk even created new emotions — emotions which he had not felt at the time but

which it occurred to him, when he was describing the scene, to think that he ought to have felt. He had no scruples about projecting these *sentiments d' escalier* backwards, anachronistically, into his past experience, falsifying history for the sake of future drama. To his memories of a scene with Grace he would add emotional complications, so that the next scene might be livelier. It was in the heat of talk that his finest emendations of history occurred to him. The genuine, or at any rate the on the whole more genuine, story came to me through Catherine from Grace. It was to Catherine that, in moments of crisis (and this particular love affair was almost uninterruptedly a crisis) Grace came for solace and counsel.

The affair began with a misunderstanding. No sooner had Kingham entered the room than Grace, who had been talking quite simply and naturally with Catherine, put on her brazen 'modern' manner of the party and began with a kind of desperate recklessness to demand the attention and provoke the desires of the newcomer. She knew Kingham's name, of course, and all about him. In Rodney's circle it was admitted, albeit with some reluctance, that the man had talent, but he was deplored as a barbarian.

'He's one of those tiresome people.' I once heard Rodney complain, 'who will talk about their soul — and your soul, which is almost worse. Terribly Salvation Army. One wouldn't be surprised to see him on Sundays in Hyde Park telling people what they ought to do to be saved.'

At the sight of him, Grace had felt, no doubt, that it would be amusing to bring this curious wild animal to heel and make it do tricks (It did not occur to her that it might be she who would be doing the tricks) Kingham was a quarry worthy of any huntswoman. Still, I believe that she would have flirted as outrageously with almost any stranger. This provocative attitude of hers — an attitude which might be described as one of chronic and universal unfaithfulness — was her retort to unkind fate and unfaithful Rodney. She wanted to capture a new lover — several lovers, even — in order to prove to Rodney, to the world at large and above all, surely, to herself, that she was modern, knew how to take love lightly and gaily, as the most exquisite of entertainments, and that, in a

word, she didn't care a pin. In another woman, this promiscuous flirtatiousness might have been distasteful, detestable even. But there was, in Grace, a certain fundamental innocence that rendered what ought, by all the rules, to have been the most reprehensible of actions entirely harmless. Text-book moralists would have called her bad, when in fact she was merely pathetic and a trifle comic. The text-books assign to every action its place in the moral hierarchy, the text-book moralists judge men exclusively by their actions. The method is crude and unscientific. For in reality certain characters have power to sterilize a dirty action, certain others infect and gangrene actions which, according to the book, should be regarded as clean. The harshest judges are those who have been so deeply hypnotized by the spell of the text-book' words, that they have become quite insensitive to reality. They can think only of words —

'purity,' 'vice,' 'depravity,' 'duty', the existence of men and women escapes their notice.

Grace, as I have said, possessed an innocence which made nonsense of all the words which might have been used to describe her actions. To any one but a text-book theorist it was obvious that the actions hardly mattered, her innocence remained intact. It was this same innocence which enabled her to give utterance — with perfect unconcern and a complete absence of daring affectation — to those scabrous sentiments, those more than scientific expressions which were almost *de rigueur* in the conversation of Rodney's circle. In a foreign language one can talk of subjects, one can unconcernedly use words, the uttering, the mention of which in one's native idiom would horribly embarrass. For Grace, all these words, the most genuinely. Old English, all these themes, however intimately connected by gossip with the names of known men and women, were foreign and remote. Even the universal language of coquettish gestures was foreign to her, she acted its provocations and innuendoes with a frankness which would have been shameless, if she had really known what they meant Kingham entered the room, she turned on him at once all her batteries of looks and smiles — a bombardment of provocations I knew Grace so well that, *in my* eyes, the performance seemed merely absurd. These smiles, these sidelong glances and

flutteringly dropped eyelids, this teasing mockery by which she!nitated Kingham into paying attention to her, struck me as wholly uncharacteristic of Grace and therefore ridiculous — above all, unconvincing. Yes, unconvincing I could not believe that any one could fail to see what Grace was really like. Was it possible that Kingham didn't realize just as well as I did that she was, in spirit, as in features, just a nice little girl, pretending without much success — particularly in this rôle — to be grown up?

It seemed to me incredible. But Kingham was certainly taken in. He accepted her at her face value of this particular moment — as an aristocratically reckless hedonist in wanton search of amusement, pleasure, excitement, and power. To the dangerous siren he took her to be, Kingham reacted with a mixed emotion that was half angry contempt, half amorous curiosity. On principle, Kingham violently disapproved of professional *femmes fatales*, sirens, vampires — all women, in fact, who make love and the subjugation of lovers the principal occupation of their lives. He thought it outrageous that self-respecting and useful men should suddenly find themselves at the mercy of these dangerous and irresponsible beings. What perhaps increased his moral indignation was the fact that he himself was constantly falling a victim to them. Youth, vitality, strong personality, frank and unbridled vice had irresistible attractions for him. He was drawn sometimes to the vulgarest possessors of these characteristics. He felt it an indignity, a humiliation (and yet, who knows? perhaps with Kingham this sense of humiliation was only another attraction), but he was none the less unfailingly drawn. He resisted, but never quite firmly enough (that, after all, would have spoiled all the fun) He resisted, succumbed and was subjected. But it must be admitted that his love, however abject it might be in the first moment of his surrender, was generally a vengeance in itself Kingham might suffer, but he contrived in most cases to inflict as much suffering as he received. And while he, with a part of his spirit at any rate, actually enjoyed pain, however acutely and genuinely felt, the tormentors whom he in his turn tormented were mostly quite normal young women with no taste for the pleasures of suffering. He got the best

of it, but he regarded himself, none the less, as the victim, and was consequently in a chronic state of moral indignation.

This first meeting convinced Kingham that Grace was the sort of woman she wanted to persuade him (not to mention herself) that she was — a vampire. — Like many persons of weak character and lacking in self-reliance, Grace was often extraordinarily reckless. Passive generally and acquiescent, she sometimes committed herself wildly to the most extravagant courses of action — not from any principle of decision, but because, precisely, she did not know what decision was, because she lacked the sense of responsibility, and was incapable of realizing the irrevocable nature of an act. She imagined that she could do things irresponsibly and without committing herself, and feeling no inward sense of commitment, she would embark on courses of action which — externalized and become a part of the great machine of the world — dragged her, sometimes reluctant, sometimes willing, but always ingenuously surprised, into situations the most bewilderingly unexpected. It was this irresponsible impulsiveness of a character lacking the power of making deliberate decisions (this coupled with her fatal capacity for seeing herself in any rôle that seemed, at the moment, attractive) that had made her at one moment a socialist canvasser at the municipal elections, at another, an occasional opium smoker in that sordid and dangerous den near the Commercial Docks which Tim Masterman used to frequent, at another, though she was terrified of horses, a rider to hounds, and at yet another — to her infinite distress, but having light-heartedly insisted that she didn’t know what modesty was, she couldn’t draw back — the model for one of Levitski’s nudes. And if she now threw herself at Kingham’s head (just as, a few nights before, she had thrown herself at Masterman’s, at Gane’s, at Levitski’s), it was irresponsibly, without considering what might be the results of her action, without even fully realizing that there would be any results at all. True, she saw herself as a ‘modern’ young woman, and her abandonment by Rodney had made her anxious, for the mere saving of her face, to capture a new lover, quickly. And yet it would be wrong to say that she had decided to employ coquettish provocations in order to get what she wanted. She had not decided anything, for

decision is deliberate and the fruit of calculation. She was just wildly indulging in action, in precisely the same way as she indulged in random speech, without thinking of what the deeds or the words committed her to. But whereas logical inconsistencies matter extremely little and false intellectual positions can easily be abandoned, the effects of action or of words leading to action are not so negligible. For action commits what is much more important than the intellect — the body. To get the bodily self out of a false position is a difficult and often painful business Grace, the indecisive, the all too easily and lightly moved to action, had often found it so to her cost. But that did not prevent her from repeating her mistake. Experience never does Kingham, as I have said, took her for what she irresponsibly wanted him to believe she was. He was duly provoked by what had been meant to be provocative. To this sort of amorous teasing he was extraordinarily susceptible. So much so, indeed, that his interest in Grace was no great tribute to her style. It was enough that a woman should exhibit a certain lively, vampirish interest in him, Kingham was almost certain to succumb to the attack I remember one occasion in Paris when he was positively swept off his feet by the shrill, metallic sallies of an American chorus-girl from the Folies Bergères.

This first impression of Grace — as a ‘modern,’ dangerously provocative, actively wanton vampire — persisted in Kingham’s mind and no evidence to the contrary could obliterate it. In the course of their first meeting, he had taken up his emotional attitude towards her, and the attitude once taken, he would not shift his ground, however palpable the proofs that he was wrong. Whether he ceased to be able to use his intelligence and became incapable of recognizing the facts that would have upset his prejudices, or whether he deliberately shut his eyes to what he did not wish to see, I do not exactly know. A powerful emotion had the double effect, I surmise, of rendering him at one and the same time stupid and most ingeniously perverse.

‘I think there’s something really devilish about the women of this generation,’ he said to me, in his intense, emphatic way, some two or three days later ‘Something devilish,’ he repeated, ‘really devilish.’ It was a trick of his, in

writing as well as in speech, to get hold of a word and, if he liked the sound of it, work it to death I laughed ‘Oh, come,’ I protested ‘Do you find Catherine, for example, so specially diabolic?’

‘She isn’t of this generation,’ Kingham answered ‘Spiritually, she doesn’t belong to it.’

I laughed again, it was always difficult arguing with Kingham You might think you had him cornered you raised your logical cudgel to smash him. But while you were bringing it down, he darted out from beneath the stroke through some little trap door of his own discovery, clean out of the argument. It was impossible to prove him in the wrong, for the simple reason that he never remained long enough in any one intellectual position to be proved anything.

‘No, not Catherine,’ he went on, after a little pause ‘I was thinking of that Peddley woman.’

‘Grace?’ I asked in some astonishment ‘Grace devilish?’

He nodded ‘Devilish,’ he repeated with conviction. The word, I could see, had acquired an enormous significance for him. It was the core round which, at the moment, all his thoughts and feelings were crystallizing. All his universe was arranging itself in patterns round the word ‘devilish,’ round the idea of devilishness in general, and Grace’s devilishness in particular.

I protested ‘Of all the un-devilish people I’ve ever known,’ I said, ‘Grace seems to me the most superlatively so.’

‘You don’t know her,’ he retorted.

‘But I’ve known her for years’

‘Not really known,’ insisted Kingham, diving through another of his little trap doors out of the argument— ‘You’ve never inspired her with one of her devilish concupiscences.’ (I thought of Grace and could not help smiling, the smile exasperated Kingham) ‘Grin away,’ he said ‘Imagine you’re omniscient, if it gives you any pleasure. All I say is this she’s never tried to hunt you down.’

‘I suppose you mean that she was rather stupidly flirtatious the other evening,’ I said Kingham nodded ‘It was devilish,’ he said softly, more for himself than for me ‘Devilish concupiscence.’

‘But I assure you,’ I went on, ‘that business the other night was all mere silliness. She’s childish, not devilish. She still sees herself in terms of Rodney Clegg, that’s all. And she wants to pretend, now that he’s deserted her, that she doesn’t care I’m not sure, indeed, that she doesn’t want to make us believe that it was she who deserted him. That’s why she wants to get hold of another lover quickly — for the sake of her prestige. But as for devilishness — why, the idea’s simply absurd. She isn’t definite enough to be a devil. She’s just what circumstances and her imagination and other people happen to make her. A child, that’s all.’

‘You may think you know her,’ Kingham persisted obstinately, ‘but you don’t. How can you, if you’ve never been hunted by her?’ *(* Bosh!’ I said impatiently ‘I tell you she’s devilish,’ he insisted.

‘Then why on earth did you accept her invitation to lunch with such alacrity?’

‘There are things that are unescapable, he answered oracularly.’

‘I give you up,’ I said, shrugging my shoulders. The man exasperated me ‘The best thing you can do, I added, ’is to go to your devil and be damned as quickly as possible’

‘That’s exactly where I am going,’ he said. And as though I had reminded him of an appointment, Kingham looked at his watch ‘And by God,’ he added, in a different voice, ‘I shall have to take a taxi, if I’m to get there in time.’

Kingham looked deeply put out, for he hated parting with money unnecessarily. He was tolerably well off now, but he still preserved the habits of prudence, almost of avarice, which he had acquired, painfully, in the days of his lower middle class boyhood and his poverty-stricken literary novitiate. He had asked Grace to dine with him in Soho, that had already cost him an effort. And now he was going to be compelled to take a taxi, so as to be in time to pay for the dinner. The thought of it made him suffer. And suffering for her sake, suffering a mean, unavowable pain for which he could not hope to get any sympathy, even his own, he found the ultimate cause of it, Grace, all the more devilish ‘Unescapable,’ he repeated, still frowning, as he put on his hat to go.

There was an expression positively of ferocity on his face ‘‘Unescapable’ He turned and left me ‘Poor Grace’.

‘I was thinking, as I closed the front door and walked back to my study. It was just as unescapable for her as for Kingham And I knew Kingham, my sympathies were all with Grace.

I was quite right, as it turned out, in according my sympathies as I did. For if any one ever needed, ever deserved sympathy, it was poor Grace, during those deplorable months of 1922 She fell in love with Kingham — fell in love, though it was the third time she had given herself, for the first, the very first time in her life, painfully, desperately, insanely. She had proposed to herself a repetition of her affair with Rodney. It was to be all charmingly perverse dalliances, with champagne and sandwiches and lightly tender conversation in the intervals, and exquisite little letters in the *dix-huiîème* manner, and evening parties, and amusing escapades. That was what it had been with Rodney. He made this kind of love, it must be admitted, with real style, it was charming Grace imagined that she would make it in just the same way with Rodney’s successor. And so she might have, more or less, if the successor had been Levitski, or Masterman, or Gane. But the successor was Kingham The choice was fatal, but the worst results of it might have been avoided if she had not loved him. Unloving, she might simply have left him when he made things too insupportable. But she did love him and, in love, she was utterly at his mercy Kingham had said that the thing was unescapable, and if for him it was so, that was due to the need he perversely felt of giving himself over periodically to strong emotions, the need of being humiliated and humiliating, of suffering and making other people suffer. What he had always loved was the passion itself, not the women who were the cause or excuse of it. These occasional orgies of passion were necessary to him, just as the periodical drinking bout is necessary to the dipsomaniac. After a certain amount of indulgence, the need was satisfied and he felt quite free to detach himself from the lover who had been dear to him only as the stimulator of his emotions, not for her own sake Kingham could satisfy his craving, it was an appetite that could be quenched by indulgence. But Grace’s desire was one of

those desperate, hopeless desires that can only be assuaged by a kind of miracle. What she desired was nothing less than to unite herself wholly with another being, to know him through and through and to be made free of all his secrets. Only the all but miraculous meeting of two equal loves, two equally confiding temperaments can bring fulfilment to that longing. There was no such meeting here.

Kingham made a habit of telling all his acquaintances, sooner or later, what he thought of them — which was invariably disagreeable. He called this process a ‘clearing of the atmosphere’ But in point of fact, it never cleared anything, it obscured and made turbid, it created thunder in clear skies Kingham might not admit the fact, but this was, none the less, precisely what he intended should happen. Clear skies bored him, he enjoyed storms. But always, when he had succeeded in provoking a storm, he expressed a genuine astonishment at the inability of the world at large to tolerate frankness, however sincere, however manifestly for its own good. Hurt by his brutally plain speaking, his old friends were reproached for being hurt. Few of Kingham’s loves or friendships had long survived the effects of his frankness. The affair with Grace was one of the exceptions. From the very beginning, Kingham had found it necessary to ‘clear the atmosphere ‘Even at their first meeting, in our house, he was rather rude. Later on, he developed into a kind of Timon of Athens. Her frivolity, her voluptuary’s philosophy of life, her heartlessness, her ‘devilish concupiscence’ — these were the characteristics about which he told her, with all the concentrated passion of which he was capable, what he indignantly thought I met him again, at the Queen’s Hall, on the day after his dinner in Soho.

‘I told her what I thought of her,’ he let me know.

‘ And what did she think about what you thought?’ I asked Kingham frowned ‘She seemed to be rather pleased than otherwise,’ he answered ‘That’s the devilish strength of these women. They simply glory in the things they ought to be ashamed of. It makes them impervious to anything decent. Impervious, and therefore utterly ruthless and unscrupulous.’

‘How incorrigibly romantic you are!’ I mocked at him.

Told — and very mildly, after all — what I thought of him, Kingham winced like a stung house. Other people's frankness hurt him just as much as his hurt other people, perhaps more. The only difference was that he enjoyed being hurt.

'What nonsense!' he began indignantly. His retort lasted as long as the interval and was only drowned by the first blaring chords of the *Meistersinger* overture. Bottled up within compulsory silence, what were his emotions? It amused me to speculate. Various, emphatic, tirelessly unflagging and working themselves up into ever more and more clotted complications — were they not the spiritual counterpart of this music to which we were now listening? When the Wagnerian tumult was over, Kingham continued his interrupted protest 'She seemed to be rather pleased' That, according to Kingham, had been Grace's reaction to his home truths I felt sure, on reflection, that he had observed her rightly. For Grace still saw herself in terms of Rodneyism — as 'modern' and 'eighteenth-century' (curious how these terms have come to be largely interchangeable) and what Rodney imagined to be 'eternally feminine' Of course she would be pleased at finding that Kingham had accepted her at her own valuation — and not only accepted her valuation but even voluntarily outbidden it by adding devilishness to the modernity, eighteenth-centuriness, and eternal femininity which she had modestly — too modestly, as she now perceived — attributed to herself. She took Kingham's denunciations as compliments and smiled with unaffected pleasure when he talked to her of her vampire's ruthlessness, when he reproached her with her devilish concupiscence for the shuddering souls as well as the less reluctant flesh of her victims. In Rodney's circle a temperament was as much *de rigueur* as a train and ostrich feathers at Court Grace saw herself as a prodigy of temperament, but she liked to have this vision of herself confirmed by outside testimony Kingham's home truths convinced her that she had seen herself correctly. The more abusive Kingham became, the better pleased she was and the more she liked him. She felt that he was really taking her seriously as a frivolous woman, that he was appreciating her as she deserved. His appreciation heightened her confidence and, under the ram of his anathemas, she played her part with an easier grace, a more stylish

perfection. The spectacle of Grace impertinently blossoming under what had been meant to blast exasperated Kingham. He abused her more violently, and the greater his violence, the more serenely airy her eternal, modern, eighteenth-century femininity. Underneath, meanwhile, and almost unconsciously, Grace was falling in love with him I have seen Kingham in his relations with many men and women. To none of them was he merely indifferent. Either they detested him — and I have never known a man who had more and bitterer enemies — or else they loved him (Many of the lovers, I may add, turned subsequently into haters) When I analyse my own feelings towards him, I am forced to the conclusion that I myself was in some manner in love with him. For why should I, who knew him so well and how insufferable he could be and, indeed, generally was, why should I have put up with him, in spite of everything? And why should I always have made such efforts to patch up all our incessant quarrels? Why shouldn't I have allowed him to go to the devil, so far as I was concerned, a dozen times? or at least thankfully accepted the estrangement which followed our most violent squabble — the squabble over poor loutish Herbert — and allowed the separation to lengthen into permanency? The only explanation is that, like all those who did not loathe him, I was somehow in love with Kingham. He was in some way important for me, deeply significant and necessary. In his presence I felt that my being expanded. There was suddenly, so to speak, a high tide within me, along dry, sand-silted, desolate channels of my being life strongly, sparklingly flowed. And Kingham was the moon that drew it up across the desert. All those whom we find sympathetic exercise, in a greater or less degree, this moon-like influence upon us, drawing up the tides of life till they cover what had been, in an antipathetic environment, parched and dead. But there are certain individuals who, by their proximity, raise a higher tide, and in a vastly greater number of souls, than the ordinary man or woman. Kingham was one of these exceptional beings. To those who found him sympathetic he was more sympathetic than other and much more obviously amiable acquaintances. There was a glow, a vividness, a brilliance about the man. He could charm you even when he was saying things with which you

disagreed, or doing things which you disapproved. Even his enemies admitted the existence and the power of this brilliant charm Catherine, who was not exactly an enemy, but who profoundly disliked his way of life and habits of mind, had to confess that, whenever he wanted and took the trouble to do so, he could silence, for the moment at any rate, all her prejudices and compel her, so long as he was actually there, in the room with her, to like him Grace started with no prejudices against him — no prejudices, beyond the opinion, inherited from Rodney, that the man was a savage, and savages, after all, are more attractive than repellant. She was suggestible and easily swayed by stronger and more definite personalities than her own. It was not surprising that she should succumb to his charm to the extent of first liking the man and soon wildly loving him.

It was some little time, however, before Grace discovered that she loved him. In the first days of their intimacy, she was too busy playing the modern part to realize that she felt so un-Rodneyan an *emotion.* Love, the real insane thing, was out of harmony with the character she had assumed. It needed a sudden, startling shock to make her understand what she felt for him, to make her, in the same moment, forget to be ‘modern’ and ‘feminine’ in Rodney’s sense of the terms, and become — what? I had meant to say ‘herself’ But after all, can one be said to be ‘oneself’ when one is being transfigured or dolorously distorted by love? In love, nobody is himself, or if you prefer, romantically, to put it the other way round, nobody is really himself when he is not in love. It comes to very much the same thing. The difference between Grace in love and Grace out of it seemed all the wider, because it was the difference between a Rodneyan eternal female and a woman, and a Kinghamized woman at that. For even in love, Grace saw herself in the part and saw herself, inevitably, in terms of her lover. Her Rodneyisms disappeared and were replaced by Kinghamisms. She saw herself no longer as a modern young aristocrat, but as the primevally ‘passional’ incarnation (‘passional’ was one of Kingham’s too favourite words) of her new lover’s feminine ideal. Their intimacy had lasted more than a month before Grace discovered the true nature of her feelings Kingham’s courtship had been

unremitting Denunciations of her devilishness had alternated with appeals to her to become his mistress Grace took the denunciations as compliments and laughingly replied to them at random with any nonsense that came into her head. These airy irrelevant retorts of hers, which Rodney would have applauded as the height of modern wit, seemed to Kingham the very height of diabolism ‘She’s like Nero,’ he said to me one day, ‘fiddling over Rome’

He was Rome — the centre of the universe — in flames Grace, having kindled, watched him burn and, in the face of his destruction, talked nonsense. What was more, she would not quench his conflagration. In spite of the ‘devilish concupiscence,’ which Kingham had attributed to her, she refused, during the first five or six weeks of their acquaintance, to become his mistress. She had captivated Kingham, that was sufficient to restore her self-confidence and that fantastic image of herself, as a successful, modern siren, which Rodney’s desertion had temporarily shattered. To have tumbled into his arms at once might, perhaps, have been in the di*x-huttième* part, but a certain native modesty prevented Grace from being perfectly consistent Kingham regarded her refusal to capitulate immediately as yet another piece of devilishness, according to his theory, she was exercising an unnatural self-control merely in order to torment him. A perverse taste for cruelty was added to his list of accusations Grace was charmed by this soft impeachment Kingham’s attacks had seemed to her, so far, more amusing than painful, more complimentary than insulting. She was still protected by the armour of her indifference. The realization that she loved him was soon to strip her of that armour, and with every increase of that love, her naked spirit was to grow more tremulously sensitive to Kingham’s assaults upon it. The critical, the apocalyptic event took place in Kingham’s rooms. It was a damp, hot afternoon of early summer. The sky was overcast when Grace arrived, and there was thunder in the air. She was wearing — the fact came out in her account to Catherine of the afternoon’s events — she was wearing, for the first time, a brand new frock from Paris, mouse-coloured, with two subtly harmonious, almost discordant, tones of red about the collar, and a repetition of the same colours at the cuffs and in a panel let into the skirt Poiret, I think, was

the inventor, and it was very modern and rather eccentrically elegant. In a word, it was a dress created for Rodney's mistress.

Grace, who was very much aware of herself in her clothes, had felt the incongruity most painfully, afterwards. The more so since, when she came in, she was feeling so happy about her dress. She was thinking what a success it was and how elegant, how original the people who saw her in the street must find her. And she was wondering what effect the dress would have on Kingham. She hoped, she thought that he would like it.

In his way, Kingham was nearly as observant in the matter of clothes as Rodney — True, he had not Rodney's almost professional eye for style and cut and smartness Rodney was a great couturier *manqué.* The fashionable dressmaker was visible in every picture he painted, he had mistaken his profession Kingham's way of looking at clothes was different. His was the moralist's eye, not the couturier's. For him, clothes were symbols, the visible expressions of states of soul. Thus, Grace's slightly eccentric, very dashing elegance seemed to him the expressive symbol of her devilishness. He regarded her clothes as an efflorescence of her spirit. They were part of her, and she was directly and wholly responsible for them. It never seemed to strike him that tailors, dressmakers and advisory friends might share the responsibility. He took in Grace's frock at a glance 'You've got a new dress on,' he said accusingly 'Do you like it?' she asked 'No,' said Kingham 'Why not?'

'Why not?' he repeated. 'Well, I suppose it's because the thing's so expressive of you, because it suits you so devilishly well'

' I should have thought that would be a reason for liking it'

'Oh, it would be, no doubt,' said Kingham, 'it would be, if I could just regard you as a spectacle, as something indifferent, to be looked at — that's all — like a picture. But you're not indifferent to me, and you know it and you deliberately torture me. How can I be expected to like what makes you seem more devilishly desirable and so increases my torture?'

He glared at her ferociously. It was with an effort that Grace kept her own gaze steady before those bright, dark, expressive eyes. He advanced towards her

and laid his two hands on her shoulders ‘To-day,’ he said, ‘you’re going to be my lover’

Grace shook her head, smiling a capricious, eternally feminine smile ‘Yes, you are’ His grip on her shoulders tightened ‘No, I’m not,’ Grace answered. She drew in her breath rather sharply, he was hurting her ‘I tell you, you are’

They looked at one another, face close to face, enemies Grace’s heart violently beat ‘At one moment, I thought he was going to throttle me,’ she told Catherine. But she braved it out, and conquered

Kingham withdrew his hands from her shoulders and turned away. He walked across to the other side of the room and, leaning against the wall in the embrasure of the window, looked out in silence at the grey sky. Greatly relieved, Grace sat down on the divan. With a saucy and defiant movement that was, unfortunately, quite lost on Kingham’s stubbornly presented back, she tucked up her feet under her. Opening her handbag, she took out her cigarette case, opened that in its turn, extracted a cigarette and lighted it — all very nonchalantly and deliberately. She was steadying her nerves to resist another attack — steadying her nerves and perhaps, at the same time, preparing to annoy him, when he should turn round, by the spectacle of her unconcernedness. She had expected a repetition of the violences of a moment since, of the familiar denunciations of all the other days. She was not prepared to resist the new kind of attack which he now launched against her emotions. When at last — and she had more than half finished her cigarette before the long silence was broken — Kingham turned round and came towards her, she saw that he was weeping Kingham, as I have said, was no comedian. All that he professed to feel he felt, I am sure, genuinely. But he felt too easily and he was too fond of feeling. In situations where others would have exercised a restraint upon themselves, Kingham gave free rein to his emotions, or even actually roused and goaded them into a more violent and more prolonged activity. He needed no dervish tricks to work himself up, no dancing, no howling and drumming, no self-laceration. He could do the thing inwardly, by intense concentration on the object of his desire or hatred, on the cause of his pain or pleasure. He brooded over his loves or his grievances, making them seem

more significant than they really were, he brooded, conjuring up in his imagination appropriate visions — of unpermitted raptures, when he was suffering from the pangs of desire, of scenes of insult, humiliation, rage, when he was angry with any one, of his own miserable self, when he desired to feel self-pity — himself, pictured as unloved, in solitude, utterly deserted, even dying. Long practice had made him an adept in the art of working up his emotions, of keeping himself uninterruptedly on the boil, so to speak, over a long period of time. In the course of these few brief weeks of his courtship, he had managed to convince himself that the interest he took in Grace was the most violent of passions and that he was suffering excruciatingly from her refusal — her devilish, her sadistic refusal — to be his mistress. Painfully and profoundly, he was enjoying it. The zest was still in the orgy, he felt no sense of satiety.

These tears were the result of a sudden and overwhelming feeling of self-pity, which had succeeded his mood of violence. He had perceived, all at once, that his violence was futile, it was absurd to suppose that he could shake or beat or throttle her into accepting him. He turned away in despair. He was alone, an, outcast, nobody cared for him, he was expending his spirit in a waste of shame — his precious, beautiful spirit — and there was no saving himself, the madness was too strong. He was done for, absolutely done for. Standing there, in the embrasure of the window, he had brooded over his miseries, until his sense of them became all of a sudden intolerable. The tears came into his eyes. He felt like a child, like a tired child who abandons himself, hopelessly, to misery.

All the animation went out of his face, it became like the face of a dead man, frozen into a mask of quiet misery. Pale, ruddy-bearded, delicately featured, it was like the face of a dead or dying Christ in some agonizing Flemish picture.

It was this dead Christ’s face that now turned back towards Grace Peddley. This dead Christ’s face — and it had been the face of Lucifer, burning with life and passion, menacingly, dangerously beautiful, that had turned put away from her. The eyes, which had shone so brightly then, were almost shut, giving the face an appearance of blindness, and between the half-closed lids there was a slow welling out of tears. The first sight of this suffering face startled her into a

kind of terror. But the terror was succeeded almost at once by a great pity. That face, at once lifeless and suffering! And those tears.' She had never seen a man shed tears before.

— She was overwhelmed by pity — by pity and, at the thought that it was all her fault, by a passion of repentance and self-abasement, by a desire to make amends. And at the same time she felt another and greater emotion, an emotion in which the pity and the repentance were included and from which they derived their strange intensity. It was the feeling that, for her, Kingham was the only person in the would who in any way mattered. It was love. In silence he crossed the room, dropped down on his knees before the divan where Grace, her cigarette still smoking between her fingers, half sat, half reclined, frozen by astonishment into a statue of lolling modernity, and laying his head in her lap, silently sobbed. The spell of Grace's immobility was broken. She bent forward over him, she caressed his hair. The gesture recalled to her attention the half-smoked cigarette, she threw it into the fire-place. Her fingers touched his scalp, the nape of his neck, his ears, his averted cheek 'My darling,' she whimpered, 'my darling. You mustn't cry. It's terrible when you cry' And she herself began to cry. For a long time they remained in the same position, Kingham kneeling, his face pressed against her knees, Grace bending over him, stroking his hair, both weeping. Our thoughts and feelings are interdependent. It is only in language, not in fact, that they are separate and sharply differentiated. Some men are better mathematicians when they are in love than when they are out of it, some are worse. But in either case the emotion of love conditions the working of the intellect. Still more powerfully does it affect the other emotions, such as pity, courage, shame, fear of ridicule, which it enhances or diminishes as the case may be. It may be laid down as a general rule that the feeling of one strong emotion predisposes us automatically to the feeling of other emotions, however apparently incongruous with the first. Thus joy may predispose to pity and shame to anger. Anger and grief may both dispose to sensual desire. Violent disputes often end in love-making, and there are sometimes strange orgies over new-made graves, orgies, to the eye of the indifferent spectator, most unseemly,

but which, as often as not, should be attributed less to a cynical lack of feeling than to its abundant presence. Grief creates a sense of loneliness, a desire in those who feel it to be comforted. At the same time, by throwing the whole personality into commotion, it renders the soul of the sufferer peculiarly susceptible to voluptuous influences and peculiarly unapt, in its state of disorganization, to exercise the customary self-restraints, so that when the desired comforter appears, it sometimes happens (conditions of sex and age being propitious) that sympathy is transformed, not merely into love, but into desires demanding immediate satisfaction. Some such transformation took place now. Tears gave place to kisses less and less tearful, to caresses and embracements. There were languors and ecstatic silences ‘I love you, I love you,’ Grace repeated, and was almost frightened by the vehemence of the new emotions, the intensity of the new and piercing sensations which she expressed in these old, blunted words, ‘I love you’.

And Kingham kissed her and permitted himself, for the moment, to be happy without reserve or inward comment, without a touch of that anticipated afterthought which turns the present into history, even as it unrolls itself, and — criticizing, appraising, judging and condemning — takes all the zest out of immediacy. He was simply happy. The time came for them to part ‘I must go’, said Grace, sighing. But the Grace who went was a different woman from the Grace who had come, two hours before. It was a worshipping, adoring Grace, a Grace made humble by love, a Grace for whom being modern and a *grande dome* and eighteenth-century and intellectually fashionable had suddenly ceased to have the slightest importance. Adjusting her hair before the glass, she was struck by the incongruity, the garish out-of-placeness of her new frock. Her love for Kingham, she felt, was something vast and significant, something positively holy, in the presence of that love, the new dress seemed a clown’s livery worn in a church. Next day she wore an old, pre-Rodney dress — white muslin with black dots, not at all showy, fashionable, or eccentric. Her soul had dressed itself, so to speak, to match. But Kingham, who had had time in the intervening hours to poison the memory of yesterday’s joy with every kind of venomous

afterthought, to discover subtle and horrible explanations for actions that were obviously innocent and simple, received her as though she had changed neither her dress nor her spirit and were indeed the woman whose part she had been playing all these weeks ‘Well,’ he said, as he opened the door to her, ‘I see you’ve come for more.’

Grace, who had expected to be received with the gentle and beautiful tenderness which he had displayed on the previous day, was cruelly surprised by the brutality of his tone, the coldness and bitterness of his expression ‘More what?’ she asked, and from brightly exultant her eyes became apprehensive in their expression, the smile with which she had so eagerly entered the room faded, as she halted in front of him. Anxiously she looked into his face ‘More what?’

Kingham laughed a loud, unpleasant, mirthless laugh, and pointed to the divan Grace’s devilish concupiscence — that was what he had been chiefly dwelling on since last he saw her. For the first second Grace did not understand what he meant. This particular aspect of their love was so far from her mind, that it did not occur to her to imagine that it could be in Kingham’s. Then all at once his meaning dawned upon her. The blood ran up into her cheeks ‘Kingham!’ she protested (Kingham was one of those men whom everybody, even his closest intimates, called by his surname. For the rest, he had only a pair of initials — J G I never knew what they stood for John George, I should think. But it was quite irrelevant, he was always ‘Kingham,’ pure and simple)— ‘Kingham! How can you say such things?’

‘How can I?’ he repeated mockingly ‘Why, by not keeping’ a fig-leaf over my mouth, which is where the truly respectable, who never talk about their vices, always keep it. Do what you like, but don’t talk about it, that’s respectability. But dear me,’ he bantered on, ‘I thought you were as much beyond respectability as you are beyond good and evil — or below, whichever the case may be’

Grace, who had come in expecting a kiss and gentle words, walked slowly away from him across the room, sat down on the divan and began to cry. A

moment later Kingham was holding her in his arms and kissing away her tears. He spoke no word, the kisses became more passionate. At first, she averted her face from them. But in the end she abandoned herself. For a time she was happy. She forgot Kingham's cruel words, or if she remembered them, she remembered them as words spoken in a nightmare — by mistake, so to say, not on purpose, not seriously. She had begun to feel almost perfectly reassured, when Kingham disengaged himself suddenly and roughly from her embrace, jumped up and began restlessly walking up and down the room, ruffling his hair as he went 'What a horrible thing it is to have a vice!' he began 'Something you carry about with you, but that isn't yourself. Something that's stronger than you are, that you want to resist and conquer, but can't. A vice, a vice' He was enchanted by the word, it became, for the moment, the core of his universe 'It's horrible. We're possessed by devils, that's what's wrong with us. We carry our private devils about with us, our vices, and they're too strong for us. They throw us down and horribly triumph' He shuddered disgustedly 'It's horrible to feel yourself being murdered by your vice. The devil spiritually murdering you, suffocating your soul with warm soft flesh. My devil uses you as his instrument of murder, your devil uses me. Our vices conspire, it's a conspiracy, a murder plot' By this time Grace was unhappier than she had ever been in her life before (And yet, if Rodney had said the same thing, expressed a little differently — in terms of compliments on her 'temperament' — she would have been delighted, two months ago)

'But you know I love you, you *know*, was all that she could say 'What makes you say these things, when you know?'

Kingham laughed 'Oh, I know,' he answered, 'I know, only too well I know what women like you mean by "love"'

'But I'm not a woman like' Grace hesitated,— 'like me' didn't sound quite sensible, somehow 'like that'

'Not like yourself?' Kingham asked derisively 'Not like what you think,' Grace insisted through the tangled confusion of words 'Not silly, I mean, not frivolous and all that. Not really' All those months with Rodney seemed a

dream, and yet she had really lived through them. And there had really been champagne and sandwiches, and more than scientific conversations— ‘Not now, at any rate,’ she added ‘Now I know you. It’s different, can’t you understand. Utterly different. Because I love you, love you, love you, love you.’

Any one else would have allowed himself to be convinced, at any rate for the moment, would have begged pardon, kissed and made friends. But, for Kingham, that would have been too easy, too emotionally flat. He stuck to his position.

‘ I know you do,’ he answered, averting his gaze, as he spoke, from that pathetic, suffering face, from those wide-open grey eyes, perplexed and agonized, that looked up at him so appealingly, so abjectly even ‘So do! Your devil loves me. My devil loves you.’

‘But no,’ Grace brokenly protested ‘But why?—’

‘ Loves violently,’ he went on in a loud voice, almost shouting, ‘irresistibly’ And as he spoke the words he swung round and precipitated himself upon her with a kind of fury ‘Do you know what it is,’ he went on, as he held her, struggling a little and reluctant in his arms, ‘do you know what it is to love, not a person, not even their whole body, but just some part of it — insanely? Do you know what it is when the vice-devil concentrates its whole desire on one point, focuses it inexorably until nothing else exists but the nape of a neck, or a pectoral muscle, a foot, a knee, a hand? This hand, for example’ He took her hand and lifted it towards his face ‘And not even a whole hand,’ he continued ‘Just the ball of a thumb, just that little cushion of flesh that’s marked off from the rest of the palm by the line of life, just that soft, resilient, strong little cushion of flesh.’

He began to kiss the spot on Grace’s hand ‘Don’t, don’t. You mustn’t’ She tried to pull her hand away. But Kingham held it fast. He went on kissing that soft, rounded swell of muscle at the base of her palm, insistently, again and again, kissing and kissing. And sometimes he would take the flesh between his teeth and would bite, gently at first, then with a gradually increasing force, until the pain became almost unbearable and Grace cried out, when he would fall to

kissing again, softly and tenderly, as though he were asking forgiveness, were trying to kiss the pain away Grace ceased to struggle and abandoned her hand to him, to do with what he liked. And little by little this insanely limited devil's love-making seemed to evoke a special voluptuous sensibility in that particular square inch of skin upon which it was concentrated. Her whole capacity for feeling pleasure seemed to focus itself at the base of her left hand. Even the gradually increasing pain, as his teeth closed more and more tightly on her flesh, was pleasurable. She abandoned herself, but, at the same time, she felt 'that there was something shameful and even horrible about this pleasure. What might have been simple and beautiful and joyous had been turned into something painful, complicated, ugly and obscure Kingham might congratulate himself on having produced a situation full of the most promising emotional possibilities I have reconstructed these scenes at some length because they were characteristic and typical of the whole affair. In his search for intense and painful emotions, Kingham displayed a perverse ingenuity, he was never at a loss for a pretext to complicate the simple and distort the natural. His great resource was always Grace's devilishness. Blind, as only Kingham could be blind, to all evidence to the contrary, he persisted in regarding Grace as a frivolous vampire, a monster of heartless vice. Her vampirishness and her vice were the qualities which attracted him to her, if he could have been convinced that she was really simple, innocent and childish, that her 'devilish concupiscence' was in actual fact an abject, unhappy adoration, he would have ceased to take any interest in her. Pleading meant as little to him as evidence. If Grace protested too vigorously, Kingham would bring up the affair with Rodney. What was that but vice, plain and unvarnished? Had not she herself admitted that she didn't love the man? Miserably, despairingly, Grace would confess in answer that she had certainly been silly and frivolous and feather-headed, but that now all that was done with. Everything was different, she was different, now. Because she loved him. To which Kingham would retort by expatiating with fiery eloquence about the horrors of vice, until at last Grace began to cry.

Grace’s devilishness formed the staple and chronic pretext for scenes. But Kingham was inventive and there were plenty of other excuses — Observant — for he was acutely ob. servant, wherever he chose not to be blind — Kingham had early realized the entirely vague and accidental nature of all Grace’s ideas, convictions, principles, and opinions. He perceived that what she thought about music, for example, was only a distorted and fragmentary version of what I thought, that her opinions on art were Rodney’s, muddled, that her philosophic and literary convictions were like a parboiled lobster— ‘the fading sable and the coming gules’ — half Rodney’s and half, already, his own. And perceiving these things, he mocked her for her intellectual hypocrisy and snobbery. He found plenty of opportunities for hurting and humiliating her. On other occasions, he would reproach her with untruthfulness and mean dissimulation, because she did not frankly tell John Peddley of her infidelity to him ‘I don’t want to make him unnecessarily miserable,’ Grace protested.

Kingham laughed derisively ‘A lot you care about anybody’s happiness,’ he said, ‘particularly his! The truth is that you want to make the best of both worlds — be respectable and vicious at the same time. At all costs, no frankness! It’s a case of the misplaced fig-leaf, as usual.’

And then there was a terrible scene, a whole series of terrible scenes, because Grace did not want to have a child by him.

‘Our only excuse,’ he raged at her, ‘the only thing that might justify us — and you won’t hear of it. It’s to be vice for vice’s sake, is it? The uncontaminated aesthetic doctrine.’

At other times, becoming strangely solicitous for the welfare of Grace’s children, he reproached her with being a bad, neglectful mother ‘And you knows it’s true,’ she said to Catherine, with remorseful conviction ‘It’s quite true I *do* neglect them.’

She invited Catherine to accompany her and the two youngest to the Zoo, the very next afternoon. Over the heads of little Pat and Mittie, among the elephants and apes, the bears and the screaming parrots, she talked to Grace about her love

and her unhappiness. And every now and then Pat or Mittie would interrupt with a question.

‘Mummy, why do fish swim?’

Or ‘How do you make tortoises?’

‘You know, you’re a great comfort,’ said Grace to Catherine, as they parted ‘I don’t know what I should do without you.’

The next time she came, she brought Catherine a present, not a powder-puff this time, not gloves or ribbons, but a copy of Dostoievsky’s *Letters from the Underworld* ‘You must read it,’ she insisted ‘You absolutely must. It’s so damnably *true*’ Grace’s life during this period was one of almost uninterrupted misery I say ‘almost uninterrupted’, for there were occasions when Kingham seemed to grow tired of violent emotions, of suffering, and the infliction of suffering, moments when he was all tenderness and an irresistible charm. For these brief spells of happiness, Grace was only too pathetically grateful. Her love, which an absolutely consistent ill-treatment might finally perhaps have crushed and eradicated, was revived by these occasional kindnesses into fresh outflowerings of a passionate adoration. Each time she hoped, she almost believed, that the happiness was going to be permanent. Bringing with her a few select aphorisms of Nietzsche, a pocket Leopardi, or the reproduction of one of Goya’s *Desastres de la Guerra*, she would come and tell Catherine how happy she was," how radiantly, miraculously happy. Almost she believed that, this time, her happiness was going to last for ever. Almost, but never quite. There was always a doubt, an unexpressed, secret, and agonizing fear. And always the doubt was duly justified, the fear was proved to be but too well founded. After two or three days’ holiday from his emotional orgy — two or three days of calm and kindness — Kingham would appear before her, scowling, his face dark, his eyes angry and accusing Grace looked at him and her heart would begin to beat with a painful irregularity and violence, she felt suddenly almost sick with anxious anticipation. Sometimes he burst out at once. Sometimes — and that was much worse — he kept her in a state of miserable suspense, that might be prolonged for hours, even for days, sulking in a gloomy silence and refusing,

when Grace asked him, to tell her what was the matter. If she ventured to approach him in one of these moods with a kiss or a soothing caress, he pushed her angrily away.

The excuses which he found for these renewals of tempest after calm were of the most various nature. One of the periods of happiness ended by his reproaching her with having been too tenderly amorous (too devilishly concupiscent) when he made love to her. On another occasion it was her crime to have remarked, two days before he chose actually to reproach her for it, that she liked the critical essays of Dryden (‘Such an intolerable piece of humbug and affectation,’ he complained ‘Just because it’s the fashion to admire these stupid, boring classical writers. Mere hypocrisy, that’s what it is’ And so on) Another time he was furious because she had insisted on taking a taxi all the way to Hampton Court. True, she had proposed from the first to pay for it. None the less, when the time came for paying, he had felt constrained in mere masculine decency to pull out his pocket-book. For one painful moment he had actually thought that she was going to accept his offer. He avenged himself for that moment of discomfort by accusing her of stupid and heartless extravagance.

‘There’s something extraordinarily coarse,’ he told her, ‘something horribly thick-skinned and unfeeling about people who have been born and brought up with money. The idea of spending a couple of pounds on a mere senseless caprice, when there are hundreds of thousands of people with no work, living precariously, or just not dying, on state charity! The idea!’

Grace, who had proposed the excursion because she thought that Hampton Court was the most romantic place in the world, and because it would be so wonderful to be two and lovers by the side of the Long Water, in the deep embrasures of the windows, before the old grey minors, before the triumphing Mantegnas — Grace was appalled that reality should have turned out so cruelly different from her anticipatory dreams. And meanwhile yet another moment of happiness had irrevocably passed. It was not surprising that Grace should have come to look tired and rather ill. She was paler than in the past and perceptibly thinner. Rimmed with dark circles of fatigue, her eyes seemed to have grown

larger and of a paler grey. Her face was still the face of a nice but rather ugly little girl — but of a little girl most horribly ill-treated, hopelessly and resignedly miserable. Confronted by this perfect resignation to unhappiness, Catherine became impatient ‘Nobody’s got any business to be so resigned,’ she said ‘Not nowadays, at any rate. We’ve got beyond the. Patient Griselda stage’

But the trouble was that Grace hadn’t got beyond it. She loved abjectly. When Catherine urged and implored her to break with Kingham, she only shook her head ‘But you’re unhappy,’ Catherine insisted ‘There’s no need for you to tell me that,’ said Grace, and the tears came into her eyes. Do you suppose I don’t know it?’

‘Then why don’t you leave him?’ asked Catherine ‘Why on earth don’t you?’

‘Because I can’t’ And after she had cried a little, she went on in a voice that was still unsteady and broken by an occasional sob ‘It’s as though there were a kind of devil in me, driving me on against my will. A kind of dark devil’ She had begun to think in terms of Kingham even about herself. The case seemed hopeless. We went abroad that summer, to the seaside, in. Italy. In the lee of that great limestone mountain which rises suddenly, like the mountain of Paradise, out of the Pomptine marshes and the blue plains of the Mediterranean, we bathed and basked and were filled with the virtue of the life-giving sun. It was here, on the flanks of this mountain, that the enchantress Circe had her palace Circeus Mons, Monte Circeo — the magic of her name has lingered, through Roman days, to the present. In coves at the mountain’s foot stand the rums of imperial villas, and walking under its western precipices you come upon the ghost of a Roman seaport, with the fishponds of Lucullus dose at hand, like bright eyes looking upwards out of the plain. At dawn, before the sun has filled all space with the quivering gauzes of heat and the colourless brightness of excessive light, at dawn and again at evening, when the air once more grows limpid and colour and distant form are re-born, a mountain shape appeals, far off, across the blue gulf of Terracina, a mountain shape and a plume of white unwavering smoke Vesuvius. And once, climbing before sunrise to the crest of our Circean hill, we saw them both — Vesuvius to the southward, across the pale sea and

northwards, beyond the green marshes, beyond the brown and ilex-dark Alban hills, the great symbolical dome of the world, St Peter's, glittering above the mists of the horizon. We stayed at Monte Circeo for upwards of two months, time enough to become brown as Indians and to have forgotten, or at least to have become utterly careless of, the world outside. We saw no newspapers, discouraged all correspondents by never answering their letters, which we hardly even took the trouble to lead, lived, in a word, the life of savages in the sun, at the edge of a tepid sea. All our friends and relations might have died, England been overwhelmed by war, pestilence and famine, all books, pictures, music destroyed irretrievably out of the world — at Monte Circeo we should not have cared a pin.

But the time came at last when it was necessary to return to London and make a little money. We loaded our bodies with unaccustomed garments, crammed our feet — our feet that had for so long enjoyed the liberty of sandals — into their imprisoning shoes, took the omnibus to Terracina and climbed into the train.

'Well,' I said, when we had managed at last to squeeze ourselves into the two vacant places which the extraordinary exuberance of a party of Neapolitans had painfully restricted, 'we're going back to civilization'

Catherine sighed and looked out of the window at the enchantress's mountain beckoning across the plain 'One might be excused,' she said, 'for making a little mistake and thinking it was hell we were going back to'

It was a dreadful journey. The compartment was crowded and the Neapolitans fabulously large, the weather hot, the tunnels frequent, and the smoke peculiarly black and poisonous. And with the physical there came a host of mental discomforts. How much money would there be in the bank when we got home? What bills would be awaiting us? Should I be able to get my book on Mozart finished by Christmas, as I had promised?

In what state should I find my invalid sister? Would it be necessary to pay a visit to the dentist? What should we do to placate all the people to whom we had never written? Wedged between the Neapolitans, I wondered. And looking at Catherine, I could see by the expression on her face that she was similarly

preoccupied. We were like Adam and Eve when the gates of the garden closed behind them.

At Genoa the Neapolitans got out and were replaced by passengers of more ordinary volume. The pressure in the compartment was somewhat relaxed. We were able to secure a couple of contiguous places. Conversation became possible.

‘I’ve been so much wondering,’ said Catherine, when at last we were able to talk, ‘what’s been happening all this time to poor little Grace. You know, I really *ought* to have written to her’ And she looked at me with an expression in which consciousness of guilt was mingled with reproach.

‘After all,’ I said, responding to her expression rather than to her words, ‘it wasn’t my fault if you were too lazy to write. Was it?’

‘Yes, it was,’ Catherine answered ‘Just as much yours as mine. You ought to have reminded me to write, you ought to have insisted. Instead of which you set the example and encouraged my laziness’

I shrugged my shoulders ‘One can’t argue with women’

‘Because they’re almost always in the right,’ said Catherine ‘But that isn’t the point Poor Grace is the point What’s happened to her, do you suppose? And that dreadful Kingham — what has he been up to? I wish I’d written.’

At Monte Circeo, it is true, we had often spoken of Grace and Kingham. But there, in the annihilating sunshine, among the enormous and, for northern eyes, the almost unreal beauties of that mythological landscape, they had seemed as remote and as unimportant as everything and everybody else in our other life Grace suffered. We knew it, no doubt, theoretically, but not, so to speak, practically — not personally, not with sympathetic realization. In the sun it had been hardly possible to realize anything beyond our own wellbeing. Expose a northern body to the sun and the soul within it seems to evaporate. The inrush from the source of physical life drives out the life of the spirit. The body must become inured to light and life before the soul can condense again into active existence. When we had talked of Grace at Monte Circeo, we had been a pair of almost soulless bodies in the sun. Our clothes, our shoes, the hideous discomfort

of the tram gave us back our souls. We talked of Grace now with rediscovered sympathy, speculating rattier anxiously on her fate ‘I feel that in some way we’re almost responsible for her,’ said Catherine ‘Oh, I wish I’d written to her! And why didn’t she write to me?’

I propounded a comforting theory ‘She probably hasn’t been with Kingham that the whole thing has died down by the time we get home.’

‘I wonder,’ said Catherine. We were destined to discover the truth, or at least some portion of it, sooner than we had expected. The first person I saw as I stepped out of the tram at Modane was John Peddley. He was standing on the platform some ten or fifteen yards away, scanning, with eyes that sharply turned this way and that, the faces of the passengers descending from the express. His glances were searching, quick, decisive. He might have been a detective posted there on the frontier to intercept the escape of a criminal. No crook, you felt, no gentleman cracksman, however astute, could hope to sneak or swagger past those all-seeing hunter’s eyes. It was that thought, the realization that the thing was hopeless, that made me check my first impulse, which was to flee — out of the station, anywhere — to hide — in the luggage-van, the lavatory, under a seat. No, the game was obviously up. There was no possible escape. Sooner or later, whatever I might do now, I should have to present myself at the customhouse, he would catch me there, infallibly. And the train was scheduled to wait for two and a half hours.

‘We’re in for it,’ I whispered to Catherine, as I helped her down on to the platform. She followed the direction of my glance and saw our waiting danger.

‘Heaven help us,’ she ejaculated with an unaccustomed piety, then added in another tone ‘But perhaps that means that Grace is here I shall go and ask him.’

‘Better not,’ I implored, still cherishing a foolish hope that we might somehow slip past him unobserved ‘Better not.’

But in that instant, Peddley turned round and saw us. His large, brown, handsome face beamed with sudden pleasure, he positively ran to meet us.

Those two and a half hours in John Peddley’s company at Modane confirmed for me a rather curious fact, of winch, hitherto, I had been only vaguely and

inarticulately aware the fact that one may be deeply and sympathetically interested in the feelings of individuals whose thoughts and opinions — all the products, in a word, of their intellects — are utterly indifferent, even wearisome and repulsive. We read the Autobiography of Alfieri, the Journals of Benjamin Robert Haydon, and read them with a passionate interest. But Alfieri's tragedies, but Haydon's historical pictures, all the things which, for the men themselves, constituted their claim on the world's attention, have simply ceased to exist, so far as we are concerned. Intellectually and artistically, these men were more than half dead. But emotionally they lived.

Mutatis mutandis, it was the same with John Peddley I had known him, till now, only as a relater of facts, an expounder of theories — as an intellect, in short, one of the most appallingly uninteresting intellects ever created I had known him only in his public capacity, so to speak, as the tireless lecturer of club smoking-rooms and dinner-tables I had never had a glimpse of him in private life. It was not to be wondered at, for, as I have said before, at ordinary times and when things were running smoothly, Peddley had no private life more complicated than the private life of his body. His feelings towards the majority of his fellow-beings were the simple emotions of the huntsman pleasure when he had caught his victim and could talk him to death, pain and a certain slight resentment when the prey escaped him. Towards his wife he felt the desires of a healthy man in early middle life, coupled with a real but rather unimaginative, habit born affection. It was an affection which took itself and its object, Grace, altogether too much for granted. In his own way, Peddley loved his wife, and it never occurred to him to doubt that she felt in the same way towards him, it seemed to him the natural inevitable thing, like having children and being fond of them, having a house and servants and coming home in the evening from the office to find dinner awaiting one. So inevitable, that it was quite unnecessary to talk or even to think about it, natural to the point of being taken publicly for granted, like the possession of a bank balance.

I had thought it impossible that Peddley should ever develop a private life, but I had been wrong I had not foreseen the possibility of his receiving a shock

violent enough to shake him out of complacency into self-questioning, a shock of sufficient strength to shiver the comfortable edifice of his daily, taken-for-granted life. That shock he had now received. It was a new and unfamiliar Peddley who now came running towards us ‘I’m so glad, I’m so particularly glad to see you,’ he said, as he approached us ‘Quite extraordinarily glad, you know.’

I have never had my hand so warmly shaken as it was then. Nor had Catherine, as I could see by the way she winced, as she abandoned her fingers to his crushing cordiality ‘You’re the very man particularly wanted to see,’ he went on, turning back to me. He stooped and picked up a couple of our suitcases ‘Let’s make a dash for the douane,’ he said ‘And then, when we’ve got those wretched formalities well over, we can have a bit of a talk.’

We followed him. Looking at Catherine, I made a grimace. The prospect of that bit of a talk appalled me Catherine gave me an answering look, then quickened her pace so as to come up with the energetically hurrying Peddley ‘Is Grace with you here?’ she asked Peddley halted, a suitcase in each hand ‘Well,’ he said, slowly and hesitatingly, as though it were possible to have metaphysical doubts about the correct answer to this question, ‘well, as a matter of fact, she isn’t. Not really’ He might have been discussing the problem of the Real Presence. As if reluctant to speak about the matter any further, he turned away and hurried on towards the customhouse, leaving Catherine’s next question—’ Shall we find her in London when we get back?’ — without an answer. The bit of a talk, when it came, was very different from what I had gloomily anticipated ‘Do you think your wife would mind,’ Peddley whispered to me, when the douanier had done with us and we were making our way towards the station restaurant, ‘if I had a few words with you alone?’

I answered that I was sure she wouldn’t, and said a word to Catherine, who replied, to me by a quick significant look, and to both of us together by a laughing dismissal ‘Go away and talk your stupid business if you want to,’ she said ‘I shall begin my lunch’ We walked out on to the platform. It had begun to rain, violently, as it only rains, among the mountains. The water beat on the vaulted glass roof of the station, filling all the space beneath with a dull,

continuous roar, we walked as though within an enormous drum, touched by the innumerable fingers of the rain. Through the open arches at either end of the station the shapes of mountains were dimly visible through veils of white, wind-driven water. We walked up and down for a minute or two without saying a word. Never, in my presence at any rate, had Peddley preserved so long a silence. Divining what embarrassments kept him in this unnatural state of speechlessness, I felt sorry for the man. In the end, after a couple of turns up and down the platform, he made an effort, cleared his throat and diffidently began in a small voice that was quite unlike that loud, self-assured, trombone-like voice in which he told one about the Swiss banking system ‘What I wanted to talk to you about,’ he said, ‘was Grace.’

The face he turned towards me as he spoke was full of a puzzled misery. That common-placely handsome mask was strangely puckered and lined. Under lifted eyebrows, his eyes regarded me, questionmgly, helplessly, unhappily.

I nodded and said nothing, it seemed the best way of encouraging him to proceed.

‘The fact is,’ he went on, turning away from me and looking at the ground, ‘the fact is’ But it was a long time before he could make up his mind to tell me what the fact was. Knowing so very well what the fact was, I could have laughed aloud, if pity had not been stronger in me than mockery, when he wound up with the pathetically euphemistic understatement ‘The fact is that Grace well, I believe she doesn’t love me. Not in the way she did. In fact I know it.’

‘How do you know it?’ I asked, after a little pause, hoping that he might have heard of the affair only through idle gossip, which I could proceed to deny.

‘She told me,’ he answered, and my hope disappeared ‘Ah’

So Kingham had had his way, I reflected. He had bullied her into telling Peddley the quite unnecessary truth, just for the sake of making the situation a little more difficult and painful than it need have been.

‘I’d noticed for some time,’ Peddley went on, after a silence, ‘that she’d been different.’

Even Peddley could be perspicacious after the event. And besides, the signs of her waning love had been sufficiently obvious and decisive Peddley might have no sympathetic imagination, but at any rate he had desires and knew when they were satisfied and when they weren't. He hinted at explanatory details 'But I never imagined,' he concluded— 'how could I imagine? — that it was because there was somebody else. How could I?' he repeated in a tone of ingenuous despair. You saw very clearly that it was, indeed, quite impossible for him to have imagined such a thing.

'Quite,' I said, affirming comfortingly I do not know exactly what proposition 'Quite.'

'Well then, one day,' he pursued, 'one day just before we had arranged to come out here into the mountains, as usual, she suddenly came and blurted it all out — quite suddenly, you know, without warning. It was dreadful. Dreadful.'

There was another pause.

'That fellow called Kingham,' he went on, breaking the silence, 'you know him? he's a friend of yours, isn't he?'

I nodded ‘Very able man, of course,’ said. Peddley, trying to be impartial and give the devil his due. ‘But, I must say, the only times I met him I found him rather unsympathetic.’ (I pictured the scene Peddley embarking on the law relating to insurance companies or, thoughtfully remembering that the chap was literary, on pianolas or modern art or the Einstein theory. And for his part, Kingham firmly and in all likelihood very rudely refusing to be made a victim of) ‘A bit too eccentric for my taste.’

‘Queer,’ I confirmed, ‘certainly. Perhaps a little mad sometimes.’

Peddley nodded ‘Well,’ he said slowly, ‘it was Kingham.’

I said nothing. Perhaps I ought to have ‘registered amazement,’ as they say in the world of the cinema, amazement, horror, indignation — above all amazement. But I am a poor comedian I made no grimaces, uttered no cries. In silence we walked slowly along the platform. The rain drummed on the roof overhead, through the archway at the end of the station the all but invisible ghosts of mountains loomed up behind white veils. We walked from. Italy towards France and back again from France towards. Italy ‘Who could have imagined it?’ said Peddley at last.

‘Anybody,’ I might, of course, have answered ‘Anybody who had a little imagination and who knew Grace, above all, who knew you’ But I held my tongue. For though there is something peculiarly ludicrous about the spectacle of a self-satisfaction suddenly punctured, it is shallow and unimaginative only to laugh at it. For the puncturing of self-satisfaction gives rise to a pain that can be quite as acute as that which is due to the nobler tragedies. Hurt vanity and exploded complacency may be comic as a spectacle, from the outside, but to those who feel the pain of them, who regard them from within, they are very far from ludicrous. The feelings and opinions of the actor, even in the morally lowest dramas, deserve as much consideration as the spectator’s Peddley’s astonishment that his wife could have preferred another man to himself was doubtless, from my point of view, a laughable exhibition. But the humiliating realization had genuinely hurt him, the astonishment had been mixed with a real pain. Merely to have mocked would have been a denial, in favour of the

spectator, of the actor's rights. Moreover, the pain which Peddley felt was not exclusively the product of an injured complacency. With the low and ludicrous were mingled other, more reputable emotions. His next words deprived me of whatever desire I might have had to laugh 'What am I to do?' Peddley went on, after another long pause, and looked at me again more miserably and bewilderedly than ever 'What *am* I to do?'

'Well,' I said cautiously, not knowing what to advise him, 'it surely depends how you feel about it all — about Grace in particular.'

'How I feel about her?' he repeated 'Well,' he hesitated, embarrassed, 'I'm fond of her, of course. Very fond of her' He paused *f* then, with a great effort, throwing down barriers which years of complacent silence, years of insensitive taking for granted had built up round the subject, he went on 'I love her.'

The utterance of that decisive word seemed to make things easier for Peddley It was as though an obstruction had been removed, the stream of confidences began to flow more easily and copiously 'You know,' he went on, 'I don't think I had quite realized how much I did love her till now. That's what makes it all so specially dreadful — the thought that I ought to have loved her more, or at least more consciously when I had the opportunity, when she loved me, the thought that if I had, I shouldn't, probably, be here now all alone, without her' He averted his face and was silent, while we walked half the length of the platform 'I think of her all the time, you know,' he continued 'I think how happy we used to be together and I wonder if we shall ever be happy again, as we were, or if it's all over, all finished' There was another pause 'And then,' he said, 'I think of her there in England, with that man, being happy with him, happier perhaps than she ever was with me, for perhaps she never really did love me, not like that' He shook his head 'Oh, it's dreadful, you know, it's dreadful I try to get these thoughts out of my head, but I can't I walk in the hills till I'm dead-beat, I try to distract myself by talking to people who come through on the trains. But it's no good I can't keep these thoughts away.'

I might have assured him, of course, that Grace was without doubt infinitely less happy with Kingham than she had ever been with him. But I doubted

whether the consolation would really be very efficacious ‘Perhaps it isn’t really serious,’ I suggested, feebly. ‘Perhaps it won’t last. She’ll come to her senses one of these days.’

Peddley sighed ‘That’s what I always hope, of course I was angry at first, when she told me that she wasn’t coming abroad and that she meant to stay with that man in England I told her that she could go to the devil, so far as I was concerned I told her that she’d only hear from me through my solicitor. But what was the good of that? I don’t want her to go to the devil, I want her to be with me I’m not angry any more, only miserable I’ve even swallowed my pride. What’s the good of being proud and not going back on your decisions, if it makes you unhappy? I’ve written and told her that I want her to come back, that I’ll be happy and grateful if she does’

‘And what has she answered?’ I asked ‘Nothing,’ said Peddley I imagined Peddley’s poor conventional letter, full of those worn phrases that make their appearance with such a mournful regularity in all the letters that are read in the divorce courts, or before coroners’ juries, when people have thrown themselves under trains for unrequited love. Miserable, cold, inadequate words! A solicitor, he had often dictated them, no doubt, to clients who desired to have their plea for the restitution of conjugal rights succinctly and decorously set down in black and white, for the benefit of the judge who was, in due course, to give it legal force. Old, blunted phrases, into which only the sympathy of the reader has power to instil a certain temporary life — he had had to write them unprofessionally this time, for himself Grace, I guessed, would have shown the letter to Kingham I imagined the derisive ferocity of his comments. A judicious analysis of its style can reduce almost any love-letter to emptiness and absurdity Kingham would have made that analysis with gusto and with a devilish skill. By his mockery he had doubtless shamed Grace out of her first spontaneous feelings, she had left the letter unanswered. But the feelings, I did not doubt, still lingered beneath the surface of her mind, pity for John Peddley and remorse for what she had done. And Kingham, I felt sure, would find some ingenious method for first encouraging, then deriding these emotions. That would agreeably complicate

their relations, would render her love for him a source of even greater pain to her than ever.

Peddley broke the rain-loud silence and the train of my speculations by saying ‘And if it is serious, if she goes on refusing to answer when I write — what then?’

‘Ah, but that won’t happen,’ I said, speaking with a conviction born of my knowledge of Kingham’s character. Sooner or later he would do something that would make it impossible for even the most abject of lovers to put up with him ‘You can be sure it won’t.’

‘I only wish I could,’ said Peddley dubiously he did not know Kingham, only Grace — and very imperfectly at that ‘I can’t guess what she means to do. It was all so unexpected — from Grace — I never imagined.’

For the first time he had begun to realize his ignorance of the woman to whom he was married. The consciousness of this ignorance ‘was one of the elements o*f* his distress ‘But if it is *serious*,’ *he went on*, *after a* pause, obstinately insisting on contemplating the worst of possibilities, ‘what am I to do? Let her go, like that, without a struggle? Set her free to go and be permanently and respectably happy with that man?’ (At the vision he thus conjured up of a domesticated Kingham, I inwardly smiled)— ‘That would be fairest to her, I suppose. But why should I be unfair to myself?’

Under the fingers of the drumming rain, in the presence of the ghostly, rain-blurred mountains, we prolonged the vain discussion. In the end I persuaded him to do nothing for the time being. To wait and see what the next days or weeks or months would bring. It was the only possible policy. When we returned to the station restaurant, Peddley was considerably more cheerful than when we had left it I had offered *no very* effectual consolation, invented no magical solution of his problems, but the mere fact that he had been able to talk and that I had been ordinarily sympathetic had been a relief and a comfort to him. He was positively rubbing his hands as he sat down beside ‘Well, Mrs Wilkes,’ he said in that professionally hearty tone which clergymen, doctors, lawyers, and all those whose business it is to talk frequently and copiously with people they do

not know, so easily acquire, ‘well, Mrs Wilkes, I’m afraid we’ve shamefully neglected you I’m afraid you’ll never forgive me for having carried off your husband in this disgraceful way’ And so on.

After a little, he abandoned this vein of graceful courtesy for more serious conversation.

‘I met a most interesting man at this station a few days ago,’ he began ‘A Greek. Theotocopulos was his name. A very remarkable man. He told me a number of most illuminating things about King Constantine and the present economic situation in Greece. He assured me, for one thing, that’ And the information about King Constantine and the economic situation in Hellas came pouring out. In Mr Theotocopulos, it was evident, John Peddley had found a kindred soul. When Greek meets Greek then comes, in this case, an exchange of anecdotes about the deposed sovereigns of eastern Europe — in a word, the tug of bores. From private, Peddley had returned to public life. We were thankful when it was time to continue our journey.

Kingham lived on the second floor of a once handsome and genteel eighteenth-century house, which presented its façade of blackened brick to a decayed residential street, leading northward from. Theobald’s Road towards the easternmost of the Bloomsbury Squares. It was a slummy street in which, since the war, a colony of poor but ‘artistic’ people from another class had settled. In the windows, curtains of dirty muslin alternated with orange curtains, scarlet curtains, curtains in large bright-coloured checks. It was not hard to know where respectable slumminess ended and gay Bohemianism began.

The front door of number twenty-three was permanently open I entered and addressed myself to the stairs. Reaching the second landing, I was surprised to find the door of Kingham’s rooms ajar I pushed it open and walked in.

‘Kingham,’ I called, ‘Kingham!’

There was no answer I stepped across the dark little vestibule and tapped at the door of the main sitting-room ‘Kingham!’ I called again more loudly I did not want to intrude indiscreetly upon some scene of domestic happiness or, more

probably, considering the relations existing between Grace and Kingham, of domestic strife ‘Kingham!’

The silence remained unbroken I walked in. The room was empty. Still calling discreetly as I went, I looked into the second sitting-room, the kitchen, the bedroom. A pair of suit-cases were standing, ready packed, just inside the bedroom door. Where could they be going? I wondered, hoped I should see them before they went. Meanwhile, I visited even the bathroom and the larder, the little flat was quite empty of life. They must have gone out, leaving the front door open behind them as they went. If preoccupation and absence of mind be signs of love, why then, I reflected, things must be going fairly well. It was twenty to six on my watch I decided to wait for their return. If they were not back within the hour, I would leave a note, asking them to come to see us, and go.

The two small and monstrously lofty sitting-rooms in Kingham’s flat had once been a single room of nobly classical proportions. A lath-and-plaster partition separated one room from the other, dividing into two unsymmetrical parts the gracefully moulded design which had adorned the ceiling of the original room. A single tall sash window, having no proportionable relation to the wall in which it found itself accidentally placed, illuminated either room — the larger inadequately, the smaller almost to excess. It was in the smaller and lighter of the two sitting-rooms that Kingham kept his books and his writing-table I entered it, looked round the shelves, and having selected two or three miscellaneous volumes, drew a chair up to the window and settled down to read ‘I have no patience,’ I read (and it was a volume of Kingham’s own writings that I had opened), ‘I have no patience with those silly prophets and Utopia-mongers who offer us prospects of uninterrupted happiness I have no patience with them. Are they too stupid even to realize their own stupidity? Can’t they see that if happiness were uninterrupted and well-being universal, these things would cease to be happiness and well-being and become merely boredom and daily bread, daily business, *Daily Mail*? Can’t they understand that, if everything in the world were pea-green, we shouldn’t know what pea-green was? “Asses, apes and

dogs!” (Milton too, thank God for Milton didn’t suffer fools gladly — Satan — portrait of the artist) Asses, apes and dogs. Are they too stupid to see that, in order to know happiness and virtue, men must also know misery and sin? The Utopia I offer is a world where happiness and unhappiness are more intense, where they more rapidly and violently alternate than here, with us. A world where men and women endowed with more than our modern sensitiveness, more than our acute and multifarious modern consciousness, shall know the unbridled pleasures, the cruelties and dangers of the ancient world, with all the scruples and remorses of Christianity, all its ecstasies, all its appalling fears. That is the Utopia I offer you — not a sterilized nursing home, with Swedish drill before breakfast, vegetarian cookery, classical music on the radio, chaste mixed sun-baths, and rational free love between aseptic sheets. Asses, apes and dogs!’

One thing at least, I reflected, as I turned the pages of the book in search of other attractive paragraphs, one thing at least could be said in Kingham’s favour, he was no mere academic theorist Kingham practised what he preached. He had defined Utopia, he was doing his best to realize it — in Grace’s company ‘Vows of chastity,’ the words caught my eye and I read on, ‘vows of chastity are ordinarily taken in that cold season, full of disgusts and remorses, which follows after excess. The taker of the oath believes the vow to be an unbreakable chain about his flesh. But he is wrong, the vow is no chain, only a hempen strand. When the blood is cold, it holds fast. But when, with the natural rebirth of appetite, the blood turns to flame, that fire burns through the hemp — the tindery hemp which the binder had thought to be a rope of steel — burns it, and the flesh breaks loose. With renewed satiety come coldness, disgust, remorse, more acute this time than before, and with them a repetition of the Stygian vows. And so on, round and round, like the days of the week, like summer and winter. Futile, you say, no doubt, weak-minded. But I don’t agree with you. Nothing that intensifies and quickens life is futile. These vows, these remorses and the deep-rooted feeling from which they spring — the feeling that the pleasure of the senses is somehow evil — sharpen this pleasure to the finest of points, multiply the

emotions to which it gives rise by creating, parallel with the body's delight, an anguish and tragedy of the mind.'

I had read them before, these abbreviated essays or expanded maxims (I do not know how to name them, Kingham himself had labelled them merely as 'Notions'), had read them more than once and always enjoyed their violence, their queerness, their rather terrifying sincerity. But this time, it seemed to me, I read them with greater understanding than in the past. My knowledge of Kingham's relations with Grace illuminated them for me, and they, in their turn, threw light on Kingham and his relations with Grace. For instance, there was that sentence about love 'All love is in the nature of a vengeance, the man revenges himself on the woman who has caught and humiliated him, the woman revenges herself on the man who has broken down her reserves and reluctances, who has dared to convert her from an individual into a mere member and mother of the species' It seemed particularly significant to me, now. I remember noticing, too, certain words about the sin against the Holy Ghost 'Only those who know the Holy Ghost are tempted to sin against him — indeed, can sin against him. One cannot waste a talent unless one first possesses it. One cannot do what is wrong, or stupid, or futile, unless one first knows what is right, what is reasonable, what is worth doing. Temptation begins with knowledge and grows as knowledge grows. A man knows that he has a soul to save and that it is a precious soul, it is for that very reason that he passes his time in such a way that it must infallibly be damned. You, reader,' the paragraph characteristically concluded, 'you who have no soul to save, will probably fail to understand what I am talking about.'

I was considering these words in the light of the recent increases of my knowledge of Kingham, when I was suddenly interrupted in the midst of my meditations by the voice of Kingham himself.

'It's no good,' it was saying 'Can't you understand?' The voice sounded all at once much louder, as the door of the larger sitting-room opened to admit the speaker and his companion. Their footsteps resounded on the uncarpeted boards

‘Why will you go on like this?’ He spoke wearily, like one who is tired of being importuned and desires only to be left in peace ‘Why will you?’

Because I love you’ Grace’s voice was low and dulled. It seemed to express a kind of obstinate misery ‘Oh, I know, I know,’ said Kingham with an impatience that was muted by fatigue. He sighed noisily ‘If you only knew how sick I was of all this unnecessary higgling and arguing!’ The tone was almost pathetic, it seemed to demand that one should condole with the speaker, that one should do one’s best to spare him pain. One might have imagined, from the tone of his voice, that Kingham was the persecuted victim of a relentless Grace. And it was thus indeed that he now saw himself, if, as I guessed, he had reached that inevitable closing phase of all his passions — the phase of emotional satiety. He had drunk his fill of strong feeling, the bout was over, for this time, the zest had gone out of the orgy. He wanted only to live quietly, soberly. And here was Grace, importuning him to continue the orgy. An orgy in cold blood — ugh! For a man sobered by complete satiety, the idea was disgustful, a thought to shudder at. No wonder he spoke thus plaintively ‘I tell you,’ he went on, ‘it’s settled. Definitely. Once and for all’

‘You mean it? You mean definitely that you’re going?’

‘Definitely,’ said Kingham ‘Then I mean what I’ve said,’ the miserable, dully obstinate voice replied ‘Definitely I shall kill myself if you go.’

My first impulse, when I heard Kingham’s voice, had been — goodness knows why — to hide myself. A sudden sense of guilt, a schoolboy’s terror of being caught, entirely possessed me. My heart beating, I jumped up and looked about me for some place of concealment. Then, after a second or two, my reason reasserted itself I remembered that I was not a schoolboy in danger of being caught and caned, that, after all, I had been waiting here in order to ask Kingham and Grace to dinner, and that, so far from hiding myself, I ought immediately to make my presence known to them. Meanwhile, sentence had succeeded sentence in their muffled altercation I realized that they were involved in some terrible, mortal quarrel, and realizing, I hesitated to interrupt them. One feels shy of breaking in on an exhibition of strong and intimate emotion. To intrude oneself,

clothed and armoured in one's daily indifference, upon naked and quivering souls is an insult, almost, one feels, an indecency. This was evidently no vulgar squabble, which could be allayed by a little tact, a beaming face and a tepid douche of platitude. Perhaps it was even so serious, so agonizing that it ought to be put an end to at all costs I wondered. Ought I to intervene? Knowing Kingham, I was afraid that my intermention might only make things worse. So far from shaming him into peace, it would in all probability have the effect of rousing all his latent violences. To continue an intimately emotional scene in the presence of a third party is a kind of indecency Kingham, I reflected, would probably be only too glad to enhance and complicate the painfulness of the scene by introducing into it this element of spiritual outrage I stood hesitating, wondering what I ought to do. Go in to them and run the risk of making things worse? Or stay where I was, at the alternative risk of being discovered, half an hour hence, and having to explain my most inexplicable presence? I was still hesitating when, from the other room, the muffled, obstinate voice of Grace pronounced those words.

'I shall kill myself if you go.'

'No, you won't,' said Kingham. 'I assure you, you won't' The weariness of his tone was tinged with a certain ironic mockery I imagined the excruciations which might result if I gave Kingham an audience to such a drama, and decided not to intervene — not yet, at any rate I tiptoed across the room and sat down where it would be impossible for me to be seen through the open door 'I've played that little farce myself,' Kingham went on 'Oh, dozens of times. Yes, and really persuaded myself at the moment that it was the genuinely tragic article.' Even without my intervention, his mockery was becoming brutal enough.

'I shall kill myself,' Grace repeated, softly and stubbornly.

'But as you see,' Kingham pursued, 'I'm still alive' A new vivacity had come into his weary voice 'Still alive and perfectly intact. The cyanide of potassium always turned out to be almond icing and however carefully I aimed at my cerebellum, I never managed to score anything but a miss' He laughed at his

own jest ‘Why will you talk in that way?’ Grace asked, with a weary patience ‘That stupid, cruel way?’

‘I may talk,’ said Kingham, ‘but it’s you who act. You’ve destroyed me, you’ve poisoned me you’re a poison in my blood. And you complain because I talk!’

He paused, as if expecting an answer but Grace said nothing. She had said all that there was for her to say so often, she had said ‘I love you,’ and had had the words so constantly and malevolently misunderstood, that it seemed to her, no doubt, a waste of breath to answer him.’

‘I suppose it’s distressing to lose a victim,’ gingham went on in the same ironic tone, ‘But you can’t really expect me to believe that it’s so distressing that you’ve got to kill yourself. Come, come, my dear Grace. That’s a bit thick’

‘I don’t expect you to believe anything,’ Grace replied ‘I just say what I mean and leave it at that I’m tired’ I could hear by the creaking of the springs that she had thrown herself down on the divan. There was a silence ‘So am I,’ said Kingham, breaking it at last ‘Mortally tired’ All the energy had gone out of his voice, it was once more blank and lifeless. There was another creaking of springs, he had evidently sat down beside her on the divan ‘Look here,’ he said, ‘for God’s sake let’s be reasonable’ From Kingham, the appeal was particularly cogent, I could not help smiling ‘I’m sorry I spoke like that just now. It was silly, it was bad-tempered. And you know the way one word begets another, one’s carried away I didn’t mean to hurt you. Let’s talk calmly. What’s the point of making an unnecessary fuss? The thing’s inevitable, fatal. A bad business, perhaps, but let’s try to make the best of it, not the worst.’

I listened in astonishment, while Kingham wearily unwound a string of such platitudes. Wearily, wearily, he seemed to be boring himself to death with his own words. Oh, to have done with it, to get away, to be free, never again to set eyes on her! I imagined his thoughts, his desires. There are moments in every amorous intimacy, when such thoughts occur to one or other of the lovers, when love has turned to weariness and disgust, and the only desire is a desire for solitude. Most lovers overcome this temporary weariness by simply not

permitting their minds to dwell on it. Feelings and desires to which no attention is paid soon die of inanition, for the attention of the conscious mind is their food and fuel. In due course love reasserts itself and the moment of weariness is forgotten. To Kingham, however, Kingham who gave his whole attention to every emotion or wish that brushed against his consciousness, the slightest velleity of weariness became profoundly significant. Nor was there, in his case, any real enduring love for the object of his thoughtfully fostered disgust, any strong and steady affection capable of overcoming what should have been only a temporary weanness. He loved because he felt the need of violent emotion Grace was a means to an end, not an end in herself. The end — satisfaction of his craving for emotional excitement — had been attained, the means had therefore ceased to possess the slightest value for him Grace would have been merely indifferent to him, if she had shown herself in this crisis as emotionally cold as he felt himself. But their feelings did not synchronize Grace was not weary, she loved him, on the contrary, more passionately than ever. Her importunate warmth had conspired with his own habit of introspection to turn weariness and emotional neutrality into positive disgust and even hatred. He was making an effort, however, not to show these violent feelings, moreover he was tired — too tired to want to give them their adequate expression. He would have liked to slip away quietly, without any fuss. Wearily, wearily, he uttered his sedative phrases. He might have been a curate giving Grace a heart-to-heart chat about Life ‘We must be sensible,’ he said. And ‘There are other things besides love’ He even talked about self-control and the consolations of work. It lasted a long time.

Suddenly Grace interrupted him ‘Stop!’ she cried in a startlingly loud voice ‘For heaven’s sake stop ‘How can you be so dishonest and stupid?’

‘I’m not,’ Kingham answered, sullenly ‘I was simply saying.

‘You were simply saying that you’re sick of me,’ said Grace, taking up his words ‘Simply saying it in a slimy, stupid, dishonest way. That you’re sick to death of me and that you wish to goodness. I’d go away and leave you in peace. Oh, I will, I will. You needn’t worry’ She uttered a kind of laugh. There was a long silence ‘Why don’t you go?’ said Grace at last. Her voice was muffled, as

though she were lying with her face buried in a cushion ‘Well,’ said Kingham awkwardly. ‘Perhaps it might be best’ He must have been feeling the beginnings of a sense of enormous relief, a joy which it would have been indecent to display, but which was bubbling only just beneath the surface ‘Good-bye, then, Grace,’ he said, in a tone that was almost cheerful ‘Let’s part friends.’

Grace’s laughter was muffled by the cushion. Then she must have sat up, for her voice, when she spoke a second later, was clear and unmated. ‘Kiss me,’ she said peremptorily ‘I want you to kiss me, just once more.’

There was a silence.

‘Not like that,’ Grace’s voice came almost angrily ‘Kiss me really, really, as though you still loved me’

Kingham must have tried to obey her, anything for a quiet life and a prompt release. There was another silence.

‘No, no’ The anger in Grace’s voice had turned to despair. ‘Go away, go, go. Do I disgust you so that you can’t even kiss me?’

‘But, my dear Grace’ he protested ‘GO, go, go’

‘ Very well, then,’ said Kingham in a dignified and slightly offended tone. But inwardly, what joy! Liberty, liberty! The key had turned in the lock, the prison door was opening ‘If you want me to, I will’ I heard him getting up from the divan ‘I’ll write to you when I get to Munich,’ he said.

I heard him walking to the door, along the passage to the bedroom, where, I suppose, he picked up his suit-cases, back along the passage to the outer door of the apartment. The latch clicked, the door squeaked on its hinges as it swung open, squeaked as it closed, there was an echoing bang.

I got up from my chair and cautiously peeped round the edge of the doorway into the other room Grace was lying on the divan in precisely the position I had imagined, quite still, her face buried in a cushion I stood there watching her for perhaps half a minute, wondering what I should say to her. Everything would sound inadequate, I reflected. Therefore, perhaps, the most inadequate of all possible words, the most perfectly banal, trivial and commonplace, would be the best in the circumstances.

I was pondering thus when suddenly that death-still body stirred into action Grace lifted her face from the pillow, listened for a second, intently, then with a series of swift motions, she turned on her side, raised herself to a sitting position, dropped her feet to the ground and, springing up, hastened across the room towards the door. Instinctively, I with-

drew into concealment I heard her cross the passage, heard the click and squeak of the front door as it opened. Then her voice, a strange, inhuman, strangled voice, called ‘Kingham ‘‘and again, after a listening silence that seemed portentously long, ‘Kingham!’ There was no answer.

After another silence, the door closed Grace’s footsteps approached once more, crossed the room, came to a halt I peeped out from my ambush. She was standing by the window, her forehead pressed against the glass, looking out — no, looking down, rather. Two storeys, three, if you counted the area that opened like a deep grave at the foot of the wall beneath the window — was she calculating the height? What were her thoughts?

All at once, she straightened herself up, stretched out her hands and began to raise the sash I walked into the room towards her.

At the sound of my footsteps, she turned and looked at me — but looked with the disquietingly blank, unrecognizing eyes and expressionless face of one who is blind. It seemed as though her mind were too completely preoccupied with its huge and dreadful idea to be able to focus itself at once on the trivialities of life.

‘Dear Grace,’ I said, ‘I’ve been looking for you Catherine sent me to ask you to come and have dinner with us.’

She continued to look at me blankly. After a second or two, the significance of my words seemed to reach her, it was as though she were far away, listening to sounds that laboured slowly across the intervening gulfs of space. When at last she had heard my words — heard them with her distant mind — she shook her head and her lips made the movement of saying ‘No.’

I took her arm and led her away from the window” ‘But you must,’ I said.

My voice seemed to come to her more quickly this time. It was only a moment after I had finished speaking that she again shook her head.

‘You must,’ I repeated ‘I heard everything, you know I shall make you come with me’

‘You heard?’ she repeated, staring at me.

I nodded, but did not speak. Picking up her small, close-fitting, casque-shaped hat from where it was lying on the floor, near the divan, I handed it to her. She turned with an automatic movement towards the dim, grey-glassed Venetian mirror that hung above the fireplace and adjusted it to her head a wisp of hair straggled over her temple, tidily, she tucked it away.

‘Now, let’s go,’ I said, and led her away, out of the flat, down the dark stairs, into the street. Walking towards Holborn in search of a taxi, I made futile conversation I talked, I remember, about the merits of omnibuses as opposed to undergrounds, about second-hand bookshops, and about cats Grace said nothing. She walked at my side, as though she were walking in her sleep.

Looking at that frozen, unhappy face — the face of a child who has suffered more than can be borne — I was filled with a pity that was almost remorse. I felt that it was somehow my fault, that it was heartless and insensitive of me not to be as unhappy as she was I felt, as I have often felt in the presence of the sick, the miserably and hopelessly poor, that I owed her an apology I felt that I ought to beg her pardon for being happily married, healthy, tolerably prosperous, content with my life. Has one a right to be happy in the presence of the unfortunate, to exult in life before those who desire to die? Has one a right?

‘The population of cats in London,’ I said, ‘must be very nearly as large as the population of human beings’

‘I should think so,’ Grace whispered, after a sufficient time had elapsed for her to hear, across the gulfs that, separated her mind from mine, what I had said. She spoke with a great effort, her voice was scarcely audible ‘Literally millions,’ I pursued. And then, fortunately, I caught sight of a taxi. Driving Rome to Kensington, I talked to her of our. Italian holiday I did not think it necessary, however, to tell her of our meeting with Peddley at Modane.

Arrived, I told Catherine in two words what had happened and, handing Grace over to her care, took refuge in my work-room I felt, I must confess,

profoundly and selfishly thankful to be back there, alone, with my books and my piano. It was the kind of thankfulness one feels, motoring out of town for the weekend, to escape from dark and sordid slums to a comfortable, cool-gardened country house, where one can forget that there exist other human beings beside oneself and one's amusing, cultivated friends, and that ninety-nine out of every hundred of them are doomed to misery I sat down at the piano and began to play the Arietta of Beethoven's Op 111.

I played it very badly, for more than half my mind was preoccupied with something other than the music I was wondering what would become of Grace now. Without Rodney, without Kingham, what would she do? What would she be? The question propounded itself insistently.

And then, all at once, the page of printed music before my eyes gave me the oracular reply *Da capo.* The hieroglyph sent me back to the beginning of my passage *Da capo.* After all, it was obvious *Da capo* John Peddley, the children,' the house, the blank existence of one who does not know how to live unassisted. Then another musical critic, a second me — introduction to the second theme. Then the second theme, *scherzando*, another Rodney. Or *molto agitato*, the equivalent of Kingham And then, inevitably, when the agnation had agitated itself to the climax of silence, *da capo* again to Peddley, the house, the children, the blankness of her unassisted life.

The miracle of the Arietta floated out from under my fingers. Ah, if only the music of our destinies could be like this!

Half-holiday

I

IT WAS SATURDAY afternoon and fine. In the hazy spring sunlight London was beautiful, like a city of the imagination. The lights were golden, the shadows blue and violet. Incorrigibly hopeful, the sooty trees in the Park were breaking into leaf; and the new green was unbelievably fresh and light and aerial, as though the tiny leaves had been cut out of the central emerald stripe of a rainbow. The miracle, to all who walked in the Park that afternoon, was manifest. What had been dead now lived; soot was budding into rainbow green. Yes, it was manifest. And, moreover, those who perceived this thaumaturgical change from death to life were themselves changed. There was something contagious about the vernal miracle. Loving more, the loitering couples under the trees were happier — or much more acutely miserable. Stout men took off their hats, and while the sun kissed their bald heads, made good resolutions — about whisky, about the pretty typist at the office, about early rising. Accosted by spring-intoxicated boys, young girls consented, in the teeth of all their upbringing and their alarm, to go for walks. Middle-aged gentlemen, strolling homewards through the Park, suddenly felt their crusted, business-grimy hearts burgeoning, like these trees, with kindness and generosity. They thought of their wives, thought of them with a sudden gush of affection, in spite of twenty years of marriage. “Must stop on the way back,” they said to themselves, “and buy the missus a little present.” What should it be? A box of candied fruits? She liked candied fruits. Or a pot of azaleas? Or... And then they remembered that it was Saturday afternoon. The shops would all be shut. And probably, they thought, sighing, the missus’s heart would also be shut; for the missus had not walked under the budding trees. Such is life, they reflected, looking sadly at the boats on

the glittering Serpentine, at the playing children, at the lovers sitting, hand in hand, on the green grass. Such is life; when the heart is open, the shops are generally shut. But they resolved nevertheless to try, in future, to control their tempers.

On Peter Brett, as on every one else who came within their range of influence, this bright spring sunlight and the new-budded trees profoundly worked. They made him feel, all at once, more lonely, more heart-broken than he had ever felt before. By contrast with the brightness around him, his soul seemed darker. The trees had broken into leaf; but he remained dead. The lovers walked in couples; he walked alone. In spite of the spring, in spite of the sunshine, in spite of the fact that to-day was Saturday and that to-morrow would be Sunday — or rather because of all these things which should have made him happy and which did make other people happy — he loitered through the miracle of Hyde Park feeling deeply miserable.

As usual, he turned for comfort to his imagination. For example, a lovely young creature would slip on a loose stone just in front of him and twist her ankle. Grown larger than life and handsomer, Peter would rush forward to administer first aid. He would take her in a taxi (for which he had money to pay) to her home — in Grosvenor Square. She turned out to be a peer’s daughter. They loved each other....

Or else he rescued a child that had fallen into the Round Pond and so earned the eternal gratitude, and more than the gratitude, of its rich young widowed mother. Yes, widowed; Peter always definitely specified her widowhood. His intentions were strictly honourable. He was still very young and had been well brought up.

Or else there was no preliminary accident. He just saw a young girl sitting on a bench by herself, looking very lonely and sad. Boldly, yet courteously, he approached, he took off his hat, he smiled. “I can see that you’re lonely,” he said; and he spoke elegantly and with ease, without a trace of his Lancashire accent, without so much as a hint of that dreadful stammer which, in real life, made speech such a torment to him. “I can see that you’re lonely. So am I. May I

sit down beside you?" She smiled, and he sat down. And then he told her that he was an orphan and that all he had was a married sister who lived in Rochdale. And she said, "I'm an orphan too." And that was a great bond between them. And they told one another how miserable they were. And she began to cry. And then he said, "Don't cry. You've got me." And at that she cheered up a little. And then they went to the pictures together. And finally, he supposed, they got married. But that part of the story was a little dim.

But of course, as a matter of fact, no accidents ever did happen and he never had the courage to tell any one how lonely he was; and his stammer was something awful; and he was small, he wore spectacles, and nearly always had pimples on his face; and his dark grey suit was growing very shabby and rather short in the sleeves; and his boots, though carefully blacked, looked just as cheap as they really were.

It was the boots which killed his imaginings this afternoon. Walking with downcast eyes, pensively, he was trying to decide what he should say to the peer's lovely young daughter in the taxi on the way to Grosvenor Square, when he suddenly became aware of his alternately striding boots, blackly obtruding themselves through the transparent phantoms of his inner life. How ugly they were! And how sadly unlike those elegant and sumptuously shining boots which encase the feet of the rich! They had been ugly enough when they were new; age had rendered them positively repulsive. No boot-trees had corrected the effects of walking, and the uppers, just above the toe-caps, were deeply and hideously wrinkled. Through the polish he could see a network of innumerable little cracks in the parched and shoddy leather. On the outer side of the left boot the toe-cap had come unstitched and had been coarsely sewn up again; the scar was only too visible. Worn by much lacing and unlacing, the eyeholes had lost their black enamel and revealed themselves obtrusively in their brassy nakedness.

Oh, they were horrible, his boots; they were disgusting! But they'd have to last him a long time yet. Peter began to re-make the calculations he had so often and often made before. If he spent three-halfpence less every day on his lunch; if, during the fine weather he were to walk to the office every morning instead of

taking the bus.... But however carefully and however often he made his calculations, twenty-seven and sixpence a week always remained twenty-seven and six. Boots were dear; and when he had saved up enough to buy a new pair, there was still the question of his suit. And, to make matters worse, it was spring; the leaves were coming out, the sun shone, and among the amorous couples he walked alone. Reality was too much for him to-day; he could not escape. The boots pursued him whenever he tried to flee, and dragged him back to the contemplation of his misery.

II

The two young women turned out of the crowded walk along the edge of the Serpentine, and struck uphill by a smaller path in the direction of Watts's statue. Peter followed them. An exquisite perfume lingered in the air behind them. He breathed it greedily and his heart began to beat with unaccustomed violence. They seemed to him marvellous and hardly human beings. They were all that was lovely and unattainable. He had met them walking down there, by the Serpentine, had been overwhelmed by that glimpse of a luxurious and arrogant beauty, had turned immediately and followed them. Why? He hardly knew himself. Merely in order that he might be near them; and perhaps with the fantastic, irrepressible hope that something might happen, some miracle, that should project him into their lives.

Greedily he sniffed their delicate perfume; with a kind of desperation, as though his life depended on it, he looked at them, he studied them. Both were tall. One of them wore a grey cloth coat, trimmed with dark grey fur. The other's coat was all of fur; a dozen or two of ruddily golden foxes had been killed in order that she might be warm among the chilly shadows of this spring afternoon. One of them wore grey and the other buff-coloured stockings. One walked on grey kid, the other on serpent's leather. Their hats were small and close-fitting. A small black French bulldog accompanied them running now at their heels,

now in front of them. The dog's collar was trimmed with brindled wolf's fur that stuck out like a ruff round its black head.

Peter walked so close behind them that, when they were out of the crowd, he could hear snatches of their talk. One had a cooing voice; the other spoke rather huskily.

"Such a divine man," the husky voice was saying, "such a really divine man!"

"So Elizabeth told me," said the cooing one.

"Such a perfect party, too," Husky went on. "He kept us laughing the whole evening. Everybody got rather buffy, too. When it was time to go, I said I'd walk and trust to luck to find a taxi on the way. Whereupon he invited me to come and look for a taxi in his heart. He said there were so many there, and all of them disengaged."

They both laughed. The chatter of a party of children who had come up from behind and were passing at this moment prevented Peter from hearing what was said next. Inwardly he cursed the children. Beastly little devils — they were making him lose his revelation. And what a revelation! Of how strange, unfamiliar and gaudy a life! Peter's dreams had always been idyllic and pastoral. Even with the peer's daughter he meant to live in the country, quietly and domestically. The world in which there are perfect parties where everybody gets rather buffy and divine men invite young goddesses to look for taxis in their hearts was utterly unknown to him. He had had a glimpse of it now; it fascinated him by its exotic and tropical strangeness. His whole ambition was now to enter this gorgeous world, to involve himself, somehow and at all costs, in the lives of these young goddesses. Suppose, now, they were both simultaneously to trip over that projecting root and twist their ankles. Suppose... But they both stepped over it in safety. And then, all at once, he saw a hope — in the bulldog.

The dog had left the path to sniff at the base of an elm tree growing a few yards away on the right. It had sniffed, it had growled, it had left a challenging souvenir of its visit and was now indignantly kicking up earth and twigs with its hinder paws against the tree, when a yellow Irish terrier trotted up and began in its turn to sniff, first at the tree, then at the bulldog. The bulldog stopped its

scrabbling in the dirt and sniffed at the terrier. Cautiously, the two beasts walked round one another, sniffing and growling as they went. Peter watched them for a moment with a vague and languid curiosity. His mind was elsewhere; he hardly saw the two dogs. Then, in an illuminating flash, it occurred to him that they might begin to fight. If they fought, he was a made man. He would rush in and separate them, heroically. He might even be bitten. But that didn't matter. Indeed, it would be all the better. A bite would be another claim on the goddesses' gratitude. Ardently, he hoped that the dogs would fight. The awful thing would be if the goddesses or the owners of the yellow terrier were to notice and interfere before the fight could begin. "Oh God," he fervently prayed, "don't let them call the dogs away from each other now. But let the dogs fight For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen." Peter had been piously brought up.

The children had passed. The voices of the goddesses once more became audible.

".. Such a fearful bore," the cooing one was saying. "I can never move a step without finding him there. And nothing penetrates his hide. I've told him that I hate Jews, that I think he's ugly and stupid and tactless and impertinent and boring. But it doesn't seem to make the slightest difference."

"You should make him useful, at any rate," said Husky.

"Oh, I do," affirmed Coo.

"Well, that's something."

"Something," Coo admitted. "But not much."

There was a pause. "Oh, God," prayed Peter, "don't let them see."

"If only," began Coo meditatively, "if only men would understand that..." A fearful noise of growling and barking violently interrupted her. The two young women turned in the direction from which the sound came.

"Pongo!" they shouted in chorus, anxiously and commandingly. And again, more urgently, "Pongo!"

But their cries were unavailing. Pongo and the yellow terrier were already fighting too furiously to pay any attention.

"Pongo! Pongo!"

And, “Benny!” the little girl and her stout nurse to whom the yellow terrier belonged as unavailing shouted.”Benny, come here!”

The moment had come, the passionately anticipated, the richly pregnant moment. Exultantly, Peter threw himself on the dogs. “Get away, you brute,” he shouted, kicking the Irish terrier. For the terrier was the enemy, the French bulldog — *their* French bulldog — the friend whom he had come, like one of the Olympian gods in the Iliad, to assist. “Get away!” In his excitement, he forgot that he had a stammer. The letter G was always a difficult one for him; but he managed on this occasion to shout “Get away” without a trace of hesitation. He grabbed at the dogs by their stumpy tails, by the scruffs of their necks, and tried to drag them apart. From time to time he kicked the yellow terrier. But it was the bulldog which bit him. Stupider even than Ajax, the bulldog had failed to understand that the immortal was fighting on his side. But Peter felt no resentment and, in the heat of the moment, hardly any pain. The blood came oozing out of a row of jagged holes in his left hand.

“Ooh!” cried Coo, as though it were her hand that had been bitten.

“Be careful,” anxiously admonished Husky. “Be careful.”

The sound of their voices nerved him to further efforts. He kicked and he tugged still harder; and at last, for a fraction of a second, he managed to part the angry beasts. For a fraction of a second neither dog had any portion of the other’s anatomy in his mouth. Peter seized the opportunity, and catching the French bulldog by the loose skin at the back of his neck, he lifted him, still furiously snapping, growling and struggling, into the air. The yellow terrier stood in front of him, barking and every now and then leaping up in a frantic effort to snap the dangling black paws of his enemy. But Peter, with the gesture of Perseus raising on high the severed head of the Gorgon, lifted the writhing Pongo out of danger to the highest stretch of his arm. The yellow dog he kept off with his foot; and the nurse and the little girl, who had by this time somewhat recovered their presence of mind, approached the furious animal from behind and succeeded at last in hooking the leash to his collar. His four rigidly planted paws skidding over the grass, the yellow terrier was dragged away by main

force, still barking, though feebly — for he was being half strangled by his efforts to escape. Suspended six feet above the ground by the leathery black scruff of his neck, Pongo vainly writhed.

Peter turned and approached the goddesses. Husky had narrow eyes and a sad mouth; it was a thin, tragic-looking face. Coo was rounder, pinker and whiter, bluer-eyed. Peter looked from one to the other and could not decide which was the more beautiful.

He lowered the writhing Pongo. “Here’s your dog,” was what he wanted to say. But the loveliness of these radiant creatures suddenly brought back all his self-consciousness and with his self-consciousness his stammer. “Here’s your..” he began; but could not bring out the dog. D, for Peter, was always a difficult letter.

For all common words beginning with a difficult letter Peter had a number of easier synonyms in readiness. Thus, he always called cats “pussies”, not out of any affectation of childishness, but because p was more pronouncable than the impossible c. Coal he had to render in the vaguer form of “fuel.” Dirt, with him, was always “muck.” In the discovery of synonyms he had become almost as ingenious as those Anglo-Saxon poets who using alliteration instead of rhyme, were compelled, in their efforts to make (shall we say) the sea begin with the same letter as its waves or its billows, to call it the “whale-road” or the “bath of the swans”. But Peter, who could not permit himself the full poetic licence of his Saxon ancestors, was reduced sometimes to spelling the most difficult words to which there happened to be no convenient and prosaic equivalent. Thus, he was never quite sure whether he should call a cup a mug or a c, u, p. And since “ovum” seemed to be the only synonym for egg, he was always reduced to talking of e, g, g’s.

At the present moment, it was the miserable little word “dog” that was holding up. Peter had several synonyms for dog. P being a slightly easier letter than d, he could, when not too nervous, say “pup.” Or if the p’s weren’t coming easily, he could call the animal, rather facetiously and mock-heroically, a “hound”. But the presence of the two goddesses was so unnerving, that Peter

found it as hopelessly impossible to pronounce a p or an h as a d. He hesitated painfully, trying to bring out in turn, first dog, then pup, then hound. His face became very red. He was in an agony.

“Here’s your whelp,” he managed to say at last. The word, he was conscious, was a little too Shakespearean for ordinary conversation. But it was the only one which came.

“Thank you most awfully,” said Coo.

“You were splendid, really splendid,” said Husky. “But I’m afraid you’re hurt.”

“Oh, it’s n-nothing,” Peter declared. And twisting his handkerchief round the bitten hand, he thrust it into his pocket.

Coo, meanwhile, had fastened the end of her leash to Pongo’s collar. “You can put him down now,” she said.

Peter did as he was told. The little black dog immediately bounded forward in the direction of his reluctantly retreating enemy. He came to the end of his tether with a jerk that brought him up on to his hind legs and kept him, barking, in the position of a rampant lion on a coat of arms.

“But are you sure it’s nothing?” Husky insisted. “Let me look at it.”

Obediently, Peter pulled off the handkerchief and held out his hand. It seemed to him that all was happening as he had hoped. Then he noticed with horror that the nails were dirty. If only, if only he had thought of washing before he went out! What would they think of him? Blushing, he tried to withdraw his hand. But Husky held it.

“Wait,” she said. And then added: “It’s a nasty bite.”

“Horrid,” affirmed Coo, who had also bent over it. “I’m so awfully sorry that my stupid dog should have...”

“You ought to go straight to a chemist,” said Husky, interrupting her, “and get him to disinfect it and tie it up.”

She lifted her eyes from his hand and looked into his face.

“A chemist,” echoed Coo, and also looked up.

Peter looked from one to the other, dazzled equally by the wide-open blue eyes and the narrowed, secret eyes of green. He smiled at them vaguely and vaguely shook his head. Unobtrusively he wrapped up his hand in his handkerchief and thrust it away, out of sight.

“It’s n-nothing,” he said.

“But you must,” insisted Husky.

“You must,” cried Coo.

“N-nothing,” he repeated. He didn’t want to go to a chemist. He wanted to stay with the goddesses.

Coo turned to Husky. “Qu’est-ce qu’on donne à ce petit bonhomme?” she asked, speaking very quickly and in a low voice.

Husky shrugged her shoulders and made a little grimace suggestive of uncertainty. “Il serait offensé, peut-être,” she suggested.

“Tu crois?”

Husky stole a rapid glance at the subject of their discussion, taking him in critically from his cheap felt hat to his cheap boots, from his pale spotty face to his rather dirty hands, from his steel framed spectacles to his leather watch-guard. Peter saw that she was looking at him and smiled at her with shy, vague rapture. How beautiful she was! He wondered what they had been whispering about together. Perhaps they were debating whether they should ask him to tea. And no sooner had the idea occurred to him than he was sure of it. Miraculously, things were happening just as they happened in his dreams. He wondered if he would have the face to tell them — this first time — that they could look for taxis in his heart.

Husky turned back to her companion. Once more she shrugged her shoulders. “Raiment, je ne sais pas,” she whispered.

“Si on lei donna it one livre?” suggested Coo.

Husky nodded. “Comme tu voudras.” And while the other turned away to fumble unobtrusively in her purse, she addressed herself to Peter.

“You were awfully brave,” she said, smiling.

Peter could only shake his head, blush and lower his eyes from before that steady, self-assured, cool gaze. He longed to look at her; but when it came to the point, he simply could not keep his eyes steadily fixed on those unwavering eyes of hers.

“Perhaps you’re used to dogs,” she went on. “Have you got one of your own?”

“N-no,” Peter managed to say.

“Ah, well, that makes it all the braver,” said Husky. Then, noticing that Coo had found the money she had been looking for, she took the boy’s hand and shook it, heartily. “Well, good-bye,” she said, smiling more exquisitely than ever. “We’re so awfully grateful to you. Most awfully,” she repeated. And as she did so, she wondered why she used that word “awfully” so often. Ordinarily she hardly ever used it. It had seemed suitable somehow, when she was talking with this creature. She was always very hearty and emphatic and schoolboyishly slangy when she was with the lower classes.

“G-g-g...” began Peter. Could they be going, he wondered in an agony, suddenly waking out of his comfortable and rosy dream. Really going, without asking him to tea or giving him their addresses? He wanted to implore them to stop a little longer, to let him see them again. But he knew that he wouldn’t be able to utter the necessary words. In the face of Husky’s good-bye he felt like a man who sees some fearful catastrophe impending and can do nothing to arrest it. “G-g...” he feebly stuttered. But he found himself shaking hands with the other one before he had got to the end of that fatal good-bye.

“You were really splendid,” said Coo, as she shook his hand. “Really splendid. And you simply must go to a chemist and have the bite disinfected at once. Good-bye, and thank you very, very, much.” As she spoke these last words she slipped a neatly folded one-pound note into his palm and with her two hands shut his fingers over it. “Thank you *so* much,” she repeated.

Violently blushing, Peter shook his head. “N-n...,” he began, and tried to make her take the note back.

But she only smiled more sweetly. “Yes, yes,” she insisted.

“Please.” And without waiting to hear any more, she turned and ran lightly after Husky, who had walked on, up the path, leading the reluctant Pongo, who still barked and strained heraldically at his leash.

“Well, that’s all right,” she said, as she came up with her companion.

“He accepted it?” asked Husky.

“Yes, yes.” She nodded. Then changing her tone, “Let me see,” she went on, “what were we saying when this wretched dog interrupted us?”

“N-no,” Peter managed to say at last. But she had already turned and was hurrying away. He took a couple of strides in pursuit; then checked himself. It was no good. It would only lead to further humiliation if he tried to explain. Why, they might even think, while he was standing there, straining to bring out his words, that he had run after them to ask for more. They might slip another pound into his hand and hurry away still faster. He watched them till they were out of sight, over the brow of the hill; then turned back towards the Serpentine.

In his imagination he re-acted the scene, not as it had really happened, but as it ought to have happened. When Coo slipped the note into his hand he smiled and courteously returned it, saying: “I’m afraid you’ve made a mistake. A quite justifiable mistake, I admit. For I look poor, and indeed I am poor. But I am a gentleman, you know. My father was a doctor in Rochdale. My mother was a doctor’s daughter. I went to a good school till my people died. They died when I was sixteen, within a few months of one another. So I had to go to work before I’d finished my schooling. But you see that I can’t take your money.” And then, becoming more gallant, personal and confidential, he went on: “I separated those beastly dogs because I wanted to do something for you and your friend. Because I thought you so beautiful and wonderful. So that even if I weren’t a gentleman, I wouldn’t take your money.” Coo was deeply touched by this little speech. She shook him by the hand and told him how sorry she was. And he put her at her ease by assuring her that her mistake had been perfectly comprehensible. And then she asked if he’d care to come along with them and take a cup of tea. And from this point onwards Peter’s imaginings became vaguer and rosier, till he was dreaming the old familiar dream of the peer’s daughter, the grateful widow and

the lonely orphan; only there happened to be two goddesses this time, and their faces, instead of being dim creations of fancy, were real and definite.

But he knew, even in the midst of his dreaming, that things hadn't happened like this. He knew that she had gone before he could say anything; and that even if he had run after them and tried to make his speech of explanation, he could never have done it. For example, he would have had to say that his father was a "medico," not a doctor (m being an easier letter than d). And when it came to telling them that his people had died, he would have had to say that they had "perished" — which would sound facetious, as though he were trying to make a joke of it. No, no, the truth must be faced. He had taken the money and they had gone away thinking that he was just some sort of a street loafer, who had risked a bite for the sake of a good tip. They hadn't even dreamed of treating him as an equal. As for asking him to tea and making him their friend...

But his fancy was still busy. It struck him that it had been quite unnecessary to make any explanation. He might simply have forced the note back into her hand, without saying a word. Why hadn't he done it? He had to excuse himself for his remissness. She had slipped away too quickly; that was the reason.

Or what if he had walked on ahead of them and ostentatiously given the money to the first street-boy he happened to meet? A good idea, that. Unfortunately it had not occurred to him at the time.

All that afternoon Peter walked and walked, thinking of what had happened, imagining creditable and satisfying alternatives. But all the time he knew that these alternatives were only fanciful. Sometimes the recollection of his humiliation was so vivid that it made him physically wince and shudder.

The light began to fail. In the grey and violet twilight the lovers pressed closer together as they walked, more frankly clasped one another beneath the trees. Strings of yellow lamps blossomed in the increasing darkness. High up in the pale sky overhead, a quarter of the moon made itself visible. He felt unhappier and lonelier than ever.

His bitten hand was by this time extremely painful. He left the Park and walked along Oxford Street till he found a chemist.

When his hand had been disinfected and bandaged he went into a tea-shop and ordered a poached e, g, g, a roll, and a mug of mocha, which he had to translate for the benefit of the uncomprehending waitress as a c, u, p of c, o, f, f, e, e.

“You seem to think I’m a loafer or a tout.” That’s what he ought to have said to her, indignantly and proudly. “You’ve insulted me. If you were a man, I’d knock you down. Take your dirty money.” But then, he reflected, he could hardly have expected them to become his friends, after that. On second thoughts, he decided that indignation would have been no good.

“Hurt your hand?” asked the waitress sympathetically, as she set down his egg and his mug of mocha.

Peter nodded. “B-bitten by a d-d... by a h-h-hound.” The word burst out at last, explosively.

Remembered shame made him blush as he spoke. Yes, they had taken him for a tout, they had treated him as though he didn’t really exist, as though he were just an instrument whose services you hired and to which, when the bill had been paid, you gave no further thought. The remembrance of humiliation was so vivid, the realization of it so profound and complete, that it affected not only his mind but his body too. His heart beat with unusual rapidity and violence; he felt sick. It was with the greatest difficulty that he managed to eat his egg and drink his mug of mocha.

Still remembering the painful reality, still feverishly constructing his fanciful alternatives to it, Peter left the tea-shop and, though he was very tired, resumed his aimless walking. He walked along Oxford Street as far as the Circus, turned down Regent Street, halted on Piccadilly to look at the epileptically twitching sky-signs, walked up Shaftesbury Avenue, and turning southwards made his way through by-streets towards the Strand.

In a street near Covent Garden a woman brushed against him. “Cheer up, dearie,” she said. “Don’t look so glum.”

Peter looked at her in astonishment. Was it possible that she should have been speaking to him? A woman — was it possible? He knew, of course, that she was

what people called a bad woman. But the fact that she should have spoken to him seemed none the less extraordinary; and he did not connect it, somehow, with her “badness”.

“Come along with me,” she wheedled.

Peter nodded. He could not believe it was true. She took his arm.

“You got money?” she asked anxiously.

He nodded again.

“You look as though you’d been to a funeral,” said the woman.

“I’m l-lonely,” he explained. He felt ready to weep. He even longed to weep — to weep and to be comforted. His voice trembled as he spoke.

“Lonely? That’s funny. A nice-looking boy like you’s got no call to be lonely.” She laughed significantly and without mirth.

Her bedroom was dimly and pinkly lighted. A smell of cheap scent and unwashed underlinen haunted the air.

“Wait a tick,” she said, and disappeared through a door into an inner room.

He sat there, waiting. A minute later she returned, wearing a kimono and bedroom slippers. She sat on his knees, threw her arms round his neck and began to kiss him. “Lovey,” she said in her cracked voice, “lovey.” Her eyes were hard and cold. Her breath smelt of spirits. Seen at close range she was indescribably horrible.

Peter saw her, it seemed to him for the first time — saw and completely realized her. He averted his face. Remembering the peer’s daughter who had sprained her ankle, the lonely orphan, the widow whose child had tumbled into the Round Pond; remembering Coo and Husky, he untwined her arms, he pushed her away from him, he sprang to his feet.

“S-sorry,” he said. “I must g-g... I’d forg-gotten something. I...” He picked up his hat and moved towards the door.

The woman ran after him and caught him by the arm. “You young devil, you,” she screamed. Her abuse was horrible and filthy. “Asking a girl and then trying to sneak away without paying. Oh, no you don’t, no you don’t. You...”

And the abuse began again.

Peter dipped his hand into his pocket, and pulled out Coo’s neatly folded note. “L-let me g-go,” he said as he gave it her.

While she was suspiciously unfolding it, he hurried away, slamming the door behind him, and ran down the dark stain, into the street.

The Monocle

THE DRAWING-ROOM WAS on the first floor. The indistinct, inarticulate noise of many voices floated down the stairs, like the roaring of a distant train. Gregory took off his greatcoat and handed it to the parlour-maid.

“Don’t trouble to show me up,” he said. “I know the way.” Always so considerate! And yet, for some reason, servants would never do anything for him; they despised and disliked him. “Don’t bother,” he insisted.

The parlour-maid, who was young, with high colours and yellow hair, looked at him, he thought, with silent contempt and walked away. In all probability, he reflected, she had never meant to show him up. He felt humiliated — yet once more.

A mirror hung at the bottom of the stairs. He peered at his image, gave his hair a pat, his tie a straightening touch. His face was smooth and egg-shaped; he had regular features, pale hair and a very small mouth, with cupid’s bow effects in the upper lip. A curate’s face. Secretly, he thought himself handsome and was always astonished that more people were not of his opinion.

Gregory mounted the stairs, polishing his monocle as he went. The volume of sound increased. At the landing, where the staircase turned, he could see the open door of the drawing-room. At first he could see only the upper quarter of the tall doorway and, through it, a patch of ceiling; but with every step he saw more — a strip of wall below the cornice, a picture, the heads of people, their whole bodies, their legs and feet. At the penultimate step, he inserted his monocle and replaced his handkerchief in his pocket. Squaring his shoulders, he marched in — almost militarily, he flattered himself. His hostess was standing near the window, at the other side of the room. He advanced towards her, already, though she had not yet seen him, mechanically smiling his greetings. The room was crowded, hot, and misty with cigarette smoke. The noise was

almost palpable; Gregory felt as though he were pushing his way laboriously through some denser element. Neck-deep, he waded through noise, still holding preciously above the flood his smile. He presented it, intact, to his hostess.

“Good evening, Hermione.”

“Ah, Gregory. How delightful. Good evening.”

“I adore your dress,” said Gregory, conscientiously following the advice of the enviably successful friend who had told him that one should never neglect to pay a compliment, however manifestly insincere. It wasn’t a bad dress, for that matter. But, of course, poor dear Hermione contrived to ruin anything she put on. She was quite malignantly ungraceful and ugly — on purpose, it always seemed to Gregory.” Too lovely,”he cooed in his rather high voice.

Hermione smiled with pleasure. “I’m so glad,” she began. But before she could get any further, a loud voice, nasally chanting, interrupted her.

“Behold the monster Polypheme, behold the monster Polypheme,” it quoted, musically, from *Acis and Galatea.*

Gregory flushed. A large hand slapped him in the middle of the back, below the shoulder blades. His body emitted the drumlike thud of a patted retriever.

“Well, Polypheme”; the voice had ceased to sing and was conversational— “well, Polypheme, how are you?”

“Very well, thanks,” Gregory replied, without looking round. It was that drunken South African brute, Paxton. “Very well, thanks, Silenus,” he added.

Paxton had called him Polypheme because of his monocle: Polypheme, the one-eyed, wheel-eyed Cyclops. Tit for mythological tat. In future, he would always call Paxton Silenus.

“Bravo!” shouted Paxton. Gregory winced and gasped under a second, heartier slap. “Pretty high-class, this party. Eh, Hermione? Pretty cultured, what? It isn’t every day that a hostess can hear her guests shooting Greco-Roman witticisms at one another. I congratulate you, Hermione.” He put his arm round her waist. “I congratulate you on us.”

Hermione disengaged herself. “Don’t be a bore, Paxton,” she said impatiently.

Paxton laughed theatrically. “Ha, ha!” A villain’s laugh on the melodrama stage. And it was not his laughter only that was theatrical; his whole person parodied the old-time tragedian. The steep aquiline profile, the deeply sunken eyes, the black hair worn rather long — they were characteristic. “A thousand apologies”: he spoke with an ironical courtesy. “The poor colonial forgets himself. Boozy and ill-mannered boor!”

“Idiot!” said Hermione, and moved away.

Gregory made a movement to follow her, but Paxton caught him by the sleeve. “Tell me,” he inquired earnestly, “why *do* you wear a monocle, Polypheme?”

“Well, if you really want to know,” Gregory answered stiffly, “for the simple reason that I happen to be short-sighted and astigmatic in the left eye and not in the right.”

“Short-sighted and astigmatic?” the other repeated in tones of affected astonishment. “Short-sighted and astigmatic? God forgive me — and I thought it was because you wanted to look like a duke on the musical-comedy stage.”

Gregory’s laugh was meant to be one of frankly amazed amusement. That any one should have imagined such a thing! Incredible, comical! But a note of embarrassment and discomfort sounded through the amusement. For in reality, of course, Paxton was so devilishly nearly right. Conscious, only too acutely, of his nullity, his provincialism, his lack of successful arrogance, he had made the oculist’s diagnosis an excuse for trying to look smarter, more insolent, and impressive. In vain. His eyeglass had done nothing to increase his self-confidence. He was never at ease when he wore it. Monocle-wearers, he decided, are like poets: born, not made. Cambridge had not eradicated the midland grammar-school boy. Cultured, with literary leanings, he was always aware of being the wealthy boot manufacturer’s heir. He could not get used to his monocle. Most of the time, in spite of the oculist’s recommendations, it dangled at the end of its string, a pendulum when he walked and involving itself messily, when he ate, in soup and tea, in marmalade and the butter. It was only occasionally, in specially favourable circumstances, that Gregory adjusted it to

his eye; more rarely still that he kept it, once adjusted, more than a few minutes, a few seconds even, without raising his eyebrow and letting it fall again. And how seldom circumstances *were* favourable to Gregory's eyeglass! Sometimes his environment was too sordid for it, sometimes too smart. To wear a monocle in the presence of the poor, the miserable, the analphabetic is too triumphantly pointed a comment on their lot. Moreover, the poor and the analphabetic have a most deplorable habit of laughing derisively at such symbols of superior caste. Gregory was not laughter-proof; he lacked the lordly confidence and unawareness of nature's monocle-wearers. He did not know how to ignore the poor, to treat them, if it were absolutely necessary to have dealings with them, as machines or domestic animals. He had seen too much of them in the days when his father was alive and had compelled him to take a practical interest in the business. It was the same lack of confidence that made him almost as chary of fixing his eyeglass in the presence of the rich. With them, he never felt quite sure that he had a right to his monocle. He felt himself a parvenu to monocularity. And then there were the intelligent. Their company, too, was most unfavourable to the eyeglass. Eyeglassed, how could one talk of serious things? "Mozart," you might say, for example, "Mozart is so pure, so spiritually beautiful." It was unthinkable to speak those words with a disk of crystal screwed into your left eye-socket. No, the environment was only too rarely favourable. Still, benignant circumstances did sometimes present themselves. Hermione's half-Bohemian parties, for example. But he had reckoned without Paxton.

Amused, amazed, he laughed. As though by accident, the monocle dropped from his eye. "Oh, put it back," cried Paxton, "put it back, I implore you," and himself caught the glass, where it dangled over Gregory's stomach, and tried to replace it.

Gregory stepped back; with one hand he pushed away his persecutor, with the other he tried to snatch the monocle from between his fingers. Paxton would not let it go.

"I implore you," Paxton kept repeating.

“Give it me at once,” said Gregory, furiously, but in a low voice, so that people should not look round and see the grotesque cause of the quarrel. He had never been so outrageously made a fool of.

Paxton gave it him at last. “Forgive me,” he said, with mock penitence. “Forgive a poor drunken colonial who doesn’t know what’s done in the best society and what isn’t. You must remember I’m only a boozer, just a poor, hard-working drunkard. You know those registration forms they give you in French hotels? Name, date of birth and so on. You know?”

Gregory nodded, with dignity.

“Well, when it comes to profession, I always write ‘ivrogne’. That is, when I’m sober enough to remember the French word. If I’m too far gone, I just put ‘Drunkard.’ They all know English, nowadays.”

“Oh,” said Gregory coldly.

“It’s a capital profession,” Paxton confided. “It permits you to do whatever you like — any damned thing that comes into your head. Throw your arms round any woman you fancy, tell her the most gross and fantastic impertinences, insult the men, laugh in people’s faces — everything’s permitted to the poor drunkard, particularly if he’s only a poor colonial and doesn’t know any better. *Verb sap.* Take the hint from me, old boy. Drop the monocle. It’s no damned good. Be a boozer; you’ll have much more fun. Which reminds me that I must go and find some more drink at all costs. I’m getting sober.”

He disappeared into the crowd. Relieved, Gregory looked round in search of familiar faces. As he looked, he polished his monocle, took the opportunity to wipe his forehead, then put the glass to his eye.

“Excuse me.” He oozed his way insinuatingly between the close-set chairs, passed like a slug (“Excuse me”) between the all but contiguous backs of two standing groups. “Excuse me.” He had seen acquaintances over there, by the fireplace: Ransom and Mary Haig and Miss Camperdown. He joined in their conversation: they were talking about Mrs Mandragore.

All the old familiar stories about that famous lion-huntress were being repeated. He himself repeated two or three, with suitable pantomime, perfected

by a hundred tellings. In the middle of a grimace, at the top of an elaborate gesture, he suddenly saw himself grimacing, gesticulating, he suddenly heard the cadences of his voice repeating, by heart, the old phrases. Why does one come to parties, why on earth? Always the same boring people, the same dull scandal, and one's own same parlour tricks. Each time. But he smirked, he mimed, he fluted and bellowed his story through to the end. His auditors even laughed; it was a success. But Gregory felt ashamed of himself. Ransom began telling the story of Mrs Mandragore and the Maharajah of Pataliapur. He groaned in the spirit. Why? he asked himself, why, why, why? Behind him, they were talking politics. Still pretending to smile at the Mandragore fable, he listened.

"It's the beginning of the end," the politician was saying, prophesying destructions in a loud and cheerful voice.

"'Dear Maharajah,'" Ransom imitated the Mandragore's intense voice, her aimed and yearning gestures, "'if you knew how I *adore* the East.'"

"Our unique position was due to the fact that we started the industrial system before any one else. Now, when the rest of the world has followed our example, we find it's a disadvantage to have started first. All our equipment is old-fash—"

"Gregory," called Mary Haig, "what's your story about the Unknown Soldier?"

"Unknown Soldier?" said Gregory vaguely, trying to catch what was being said behind him.

"The latest arrivals have the latest machinery. It's obvious. We..."

"You know the one. The Mandragore's party; you know."

"Oh, when she asked us all to tea to meet the Mother of the Unknown Soldier."

"... like Italy," the politician was saying in his loud, jolly voice. "In future, we shall always have one or two millions more population than we can employ. Living on the State."

One or two millions. He thought of the Derby. Perhaps there might be a hundred thousand in that crowd. Ten Derbies, twenty Derbies, all half-starved, walking through the streets with brass bands and banners. He let his monocle

fall. Must send five pounds to the London Hospital, he thought. Four thousand eight hundred a year. Thirteen pounds a day. Less taxes, of course. Taxes were terrible. Monstrous, sir, monstrous. He tried to feel as indignant about taxes as those old gentlemen who get red in the face when they talk about them. But somehow, he couldn't manage to do it And after all, taxes were no excuse, no justification. He felt all at once profoundly depressed. Still, he tried to comfort himself, not more than twenty or twenty-five out of the two million could live on his income. Twenty-five out of two millions — it was absurd, derisory! But he was not consoled.

"And the odd thing is," Ransom was still talking about the Mandragore, "she isn't really in the least interested in her lions. She'll begin telling you about what Anatole France said to her and then forget in the middle, out of pure boredom, what she's talking about."

Oh, God, God, thought Gregory. How often had he heard Ransom making the same reflections on the Mandragore's psychology! How often! He'd be bringing out that bit about the chimpanzees in half a moment. God help us!

"Have you ever watched the chimpanzees at the Zoo?" said Ransom. "The way they pick up a straw or a banana skin and examine it for a few seconds with a passionate attention." He went through a simian pantomine. "Then, suddenly, get utterly bored, let the thing drop from their fingers and look round vaguely in search of something else. They always remind me of the Mandragore and her guests. The way she begins, earnestly, as though you were the only person in the world; then all at once..."

Gregory could bear it no longer. He mumbled something to Miss Camperdown about having seen somebody he must talk to, and disappeared, "Excuse me," slug-like, through the crowd. Oh, the misery, the appalling gloom of it all! In a corner, he found young Crane and two or three other men with tumblers in their hands.

"Ah, Crane," he said, "for God's sake tell me where you got that drink."

That golden fluid — it seemed the only hope. Crane pointed in the direction of the archway leading into the back drawing-room. He raised his glass without

speaking, drank, and winked at Gregory over the top of it. He had a face that looked like an accident. Gregory oozed on through the crowd. “Excuse me,” he said aloud; but inwardly he was saying, “God help us.”

At the further end of the back drawing-room was a table with bottles and glasses. The professional drunkard was sitting on a sofa near by, glass in hand, making personal remarks to himself about all the people who came within earshot.

“Christ!” he was saying, as Gregory came up to the table. “Christ! Look at that!” *That* was the gaunt Mrs Labadie in cloth of gold and pearls. “Christ!” She had pounced on a shy young man entrenched behind the table.

“Tell me, Mr Foley,” she began, approaching her horse-like face very close to that of the young man and speaking appealingly, “you who know *all* about mathematics, tell me...”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed the professional drunkard. “In England’s green and pleasant land? Ha, ha, ha!” He laughed his melodramatic laugh.

Pretentious fool, thought Gregory. How romantic he thinks himself! The laughing philosopher, what? Drunk because the world isn’t good enough for him. Quite the little Faust.

“And Polypheme too,” Paxton soliloquized on, “funny little Polypheme!” He laughed again. “The heir to all the ages. Christ!”

With dignity, Gregory poured himself out some whisky and filled up the glass from the siphon — with dignity, with conscious grace and precision, as though he were acting the part of a man who helps himself to whisky and soda on the stage. He took a sip; then elaborately acted the part of one who takes out his handkerchief and blows his nose.

“Don’t they make one believe in birth control, all these people,” continued the professional drunkard. “If only their parents could have had a few intimate words with Stopes! Heigh ho!” He uttered a stylized Shakespearean sigh.

Buffoon, thought Gregory. And the worst is that if one called him one, he’d pretend that he’d said so himself, all the time And so he has, of course, just to be on the safe side. But in reality, it’s obvious, the man thinks of himself as a sort of

Musset or up-to-date Byron. A beautiful soul, darkened and embittered by experience. Ugh!

Still pretending to be unaware of the professional boozer's proximity, Gregory went through the actions of the man who sips.

"How *clear* you make it!" Mrs Labadie was saying, point blank, into the young mathematician's face. She smiled at him; the horse, thought Gregory, has a terribly human expression.

"Well," said the young mathematician nervously, "now we come on to Riemann."

"Riemann!" Mrs Labadie repeated, with a kind of ecstasy. "Riemann!" as though the geometrician's soul were in his name.

Gregory wished that there were somebody to talk to, somebody who would relieve him of the necessity of acting the part of unaware indifference before the scrutinizing eyes of Paxton. He leaned against the wall in the attitude of one who falls, all of a sudden, into a brown study. Blankly and pensively, he stared at a point on the opposite wall, high up, just below the ceiling. People must be wondering, he reflected, what he was thinking about. And what was he thinking about? Himself. Vanity, vanity. Oh, the gloom, the misery of it all!

"Polypheme!"

He pretended not to hear.

"Polypheme!" It was a shout this time.

Gregory slightly overacted the part of one who is suddenly aroused from profoundest meditation. He started; blinking, a little dazed, he turned his head.

"Ah, Paxton," he said. "Silenus! I hadn't noticed that you were there."

"Hadn't you?" said the professional drunkard. "That was damned clever of you. What were you thinking about so picturesquely there?"

"Oh, nothing," said Gregory, smiling with the modest confusion of the Thinker, caught in the act.

"Just what I imagined," said Paxton. "Nothing. Nothing at all. Jesus Christ!" he added, for himself.

Gregory's smile was rather sickly. He averted his face and passed once more into meditation. It seemed, in the circumstances, the best thing he could do. Dreamily, as though unconscious of what he was doing, he emptied his glass.

"Crippen!" he heard the professional drunkard muttering. "It's like a funeral. Joyless, joyless."

"Well, Gregory."

Gregory did another of his graceful starts, his dazed blinkings. He had been afraid, for a moment, that Spiller was going to respect his meditation and not speak to him. That would have been very embarrassing.

"Spiller!" he exclaimed with delight and astonishment. "My dear chap." He shook him heartily by the hand.

Square-faced, with a wide mouth and an immense forehead, framed in copious and curly hair, Spiller looked like a Victorian celebrity. His friends declared that he might actually have been a Georgian celebrity but for the fact that he preferred talking to writing.

"Just up for the day," explained Spiller. "I couldn't stand another hour of the bloody country. Working all day. No company but my own. I find I bore myself to death." He helped himself to whisky.

"Jesus! The great man! Ha, ha!" The professional drunkard covered his face with his hands and shuddered violently.

"Do you mean to say you came specially for this?" asked Gregory, waving his hand to indicate the party at large.

"Not specially. Incidentally. I heard that Hermione was giving a party, so I dropped in."

"Why *does* one go to parties?" said Gregory, unconsciously assuming something of the embittered Byronic manner of the professional drunkard.

"To satisfy the cravings of the herd instinct." Spiller replied to the rhetorical question without hesitation and with a pontifical air of infallibility. "Just as one pursues women to satisfy the cravings of the reproductive instinct." Spiller had an impressive way of making everything he said sound very scientific; it all

seemed to come straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak. Vague-minded Gregory found him most stimulating.

"You mean, one goes to parties just in order to be in a crowd?"

"Precisely," Spiller replied. "Just to feel the warmth of the herd around one and sniff the smell of one's fellow-humans." He snuffed the thick, hot air.

"I suppose you must be right," said Gregory. "It's certainly very hard to think of any other reason."

He looked round the room as though searching for other reasons. And surprisingly, he found one: Molly Voles. He had not seen her before; she must have only just arrived.

"I've got a capital idea for a new paper," began Spiller.

"Have you?" Gregory did not show much curiosity. How beautiful her neck was, and those thin arms!

"Art, literature, and science," Spiller continued. "The idea's a really modern one. It's to bring science into touch with the arts and so into touch with life. Life, art, science — all three would gain. You see the notion?"

"Yes," said Gregory, "I see." He was looking at Molly, hoping to catch her eye. He caught it at last, that cool and steady grey eye. She smiled and nodded.

"You like the idea?" asked Spiller.

"I think it's splendid," answered Gregory with a sudden warmth that astonished his interlocutor.

Spiller's large severe face shone with pleasure. "Oh, I'm glad," he said, "I'm very glad indeed that you like it so much."

"I think it's splendid," said Gregory extravagantly. "Simply splendid." She had seemed really glad to see him, he thought.

"I was thinking," Spiller pursued, with a rather elaborate casualness of manner, "I was thinking you might like to help me start the thing. One could float it comfortably with a thousand pounds of capital."

The enthusiasm faded out of Gregory's face: it became blank in its clerical roundness. He shook his head. "If I had a thousand pounds," he said regretfully. Damn the man! he was thinking. Setting me a trap like that.

“If,” repeated Spiller. “But, my dear fellow!” He laughed. “And besides, it’s a safe six per cent, investment. I can collect an extraordinarily strong set of contributors, you know.”

Gregory shook his head once more. “Alas,” he said, “alas!”

“And what’s more,” insisted Spiller, “you’d be a benefactor of society.”

“Impossible.” Gregory was firm; he planted his feet like a donkey and would not be moved. Money was the one thing he never had a difficulty in being firm about.

“But come,” said Spiller, “come. What’s a thousand pounds to a millionaire like you? You’ve got — how much *have* you got?”

Gregory stared him glassily in the eyes.

“Twelve hundred a year,” he said. “Say fourteen hundred.” He could see that Spiller didn’t believe him. Damn the man! Not that he really expected him to believe; but still... “And then there are one’s taxes,” he added plaintively, “and one’s contributions to charities.” He remembered that fiver he was going to send to the London Hospital. “The London Hospital, for example — always short of money.” He shook his head sadly. “Quite impossible, I’m afraid.” He thought of all the unemployed; ten Derby crowds, half starved, with banners and brass bands. He felt himself blushing. Damn the man! He was furious with Spiller.

Two voices sounded simultaneously in his ears: the professional drunkard’s and another, a woman’s — Molly’s.

“The succubus!” groaned the professional drunkard. ‘Il ne manquait que ça!”

“Impossible?” said Molly’s voice, unexpectedly repeating his latest word. “What’s impossible?”

“Well—” said Gregory, embarrassed, and hesitated.

It was Spiller who explained.

“Why, of course Gregory can put up a thousand pounds,” said Molly, when she had learned what was the subject at issue. She looked at him indignantly, contemptuously, as though reproaching him for his avarice.

“You know better than I, then,” said Gregory, trying to take the airy jocular line about the matter. He remembered what the enviably successful friend had

told him about compliments. “How lovely you look in that white dress, Molly!” he added, and tempered the jocularity of his smile with a glance that was meant to be at once insolent and tender. “Too lovely,” he repeated, and put up his monocle to look at her.

“Thank you,” she said, looking back at him unwaveringly. Her eyes were calm and bright. Against that firm and penetrating regard his jocularity, his attempt at insolent tenderness, punctured and crumpled up. He averted his eyes, he let fall his eyeglass. It was a weapon he did not dare or know how to use — it made him look ridiculous. He was like horse-faced Mrs Labadie flirting coquettishly with her fan.

“I’d like to discuss the question in any case,” he said to Spiller, glad of any excuse to escape from those eyes. “But I assure you I really can’t.... Not the whole thousand, at any rate,” he added, feeling despairingly that he had been forced against his will to surrender.

“Molly!” shouted the professional drunkard.

Obediently she went and sat down beside him on the sofa.

“Well, Tom,” she said, and laid her hand on his knee. “How are you?”

“As I always am, when you’re anywhere about,” answered the professional drunkard tragically: “insane.” He put his arm round her shoulders and leaned towards her. “Utterly insane.”

“I’d rather we didn’t sit like this, you know.” She smiled at him; they looked at one another closely. Then Paxton withdrew his arm and leaned back in his corner of the sofa.

Looking at them, Gregory was suddenly convinced that they were lovers. We needs must love the lowest when we see it. All Molly’s lovers were like that: ruffians.

He turned to Spiller. “Shouldn’t we go back to my rooms?” he suggested, interrupting him in the midst of a long explanatory discourse about the projected paper. “It’ll be quieter there and less stuffy.” Molly and Paxton, Molly and that drunken brute. Was it possible? It was certain: he had no doubts. “Let’s get out of this beastly place quickly,” he added.

“All right,” Spiller agreed. “One last lashing of whisky to support us on the way.” He reached for the bottle.

Gregory drank nearly half a tumbler, undiluted. A few yards down the street, he realized that he was rather tipsy.

“I think I must have a very feebly developed herd instinct,” he said. “How I hate these crowds!” Molly and Silenus-Paxtoni He imagined their loves. And he had thought that she had been glad to see him, when first he caught her eye.

They emerged into Bedford Square. The gardens were as darkly mysterious as a piece of country woodland. Woodland without, whisky within, combined to make Gregory’s melancholy vocal. *Che fard senz’ Euridice?* he softly sang.

“You can do without her very well,” said Spiller, replying to the quotation. “That’s the swindle and stupidity of love. Each time you feel convinced that it’s something immensely significant and everlasting: you feel infinitely. Each time. Three weeks later you’re beginning to find her boring; or somebody else rolls the eye and the infinite emotions are transferred and you’re off on another eternal week-end. It’s a sort of practical joke. Very stupid and disagreeable. But then nature’s humour isn’t ours.”

“You think it’s a joke, that infinite feeling?” asked Gregory indignantly. “I don’t. I believe that it represents something real, outside ourselves, something in the structure of the universe.”

“A different universe with every mistress, eh?”

“But if it occurs only once in a lifetime?” asked Gregory in a maudlin voice. He longed to tell his companion how unhappy he felt about Molly, how much unhappier than anybody had ever felt before.

“It doesn’t,” said Spiller.

“But if I say it does?” Gregory hiccoughed.

“That’s only due to lack of opportunities, Spiller replied in his most decisively scientific, *ex cathedra* manner.

“I don’t agree with you,” was all that Gregory could say, feebly. He decided not to mention his unhappiness. Spiller might not be a sympathetic listener. Coarse old devil!

“Personally,” Spiller continued, “I’ve long ago ceased trying to make sense of it. I just accept these infinite emotions for what they are — very stimulating and exciting while they last — and don’t attempt to rationalize or explain them. It’s the only sane and scientific way of treating the facts.”

There was a silence. They had emerged into the brilliance of the Tottenham Court Road. The polished roadway reflected the arc lamps. The entrances to the cinema palaces were caverns of glaring yellow light. A pair of buses roared past.

“They’re dangerous, those infinite emotions,” Spiller went on, “very dangerous. I once came within an inch of getting married on the strength of one of them. It began on a steamer. You know what steamers are. The extraordinary aphrodisiac effects sea voyaging has on people who aren’t used to it, especially women! They really ought to be studied by some competent physiologist. Of course, it may be simply the result of idleness, high feeding and constant proximity — though I doubt if you’d get the same results in similar circumstances on land. Perhaps the total change of environment, from earth to water, undermines the usual terrestrial prejudices. Perhaps the very shortness of the voyage helps — the sense that it’s so soon coming to an end that rosebuds must be gathered and hay made while the sun shines. Who knows?” He shrugged his shoulders. “But in any case, it’s most extraordinary. Well, it began, as I say, on a steamer.”

Gregory listened. A few minutes since the trees of Bedford Square had waved in the darkness of his boozily maudlin soul. The lights, the noise, the movement of the Tottenham Court Road were now behind his eyes as well as before them. He listened, grinning. The story lasted well into the Charing Gross Road.

By the time it had come to an end, Gregory was feeling in an entirely jolly and jaunty mood. He had associated himself with Spiller; Spiller’s adventures were his. He guffawed with laughter, he readjusted his monocle, which had been dangling all this time at the end of its string, which had been tinkling at every step against the buttons of his waistcoat. (A broken heart, it must be obvious to any one who has the slightest sensibility, cannot possibly wear an eyeglass.) He too was a bit of a dog, now. He hiccoughed; a certain suspicion of queasiness

tempered his jollity, but it was no more than the faintest suspicion. Yes, yes; he too knew all about life on steamers, even though the longest of his sea voyages had only been from Newhaven to Dieppe.

When they reached Cambridge Circus, the theatres were just disgorging their audiences. The pavements were crowded; the air was full of noise and the perfume of women. Overhead, the sky-signs winced and twitched. The theatre vestibules brightly glared. It was an inaristocratic and vulgar luxury, to which Gregory had no difficulty in feeling himself superior. Through his Cyclopean monocle, he gazed inquiringly at every woman they passed. He felt wonderfully reckless (the queasiness was the merest suspicion of an unpleasant sensation), wonderfully jolly and — yes, that was curious — large: larger than life. As for Molly Voles, he'd teach her.

"Lovely creature, that," he said, indicating a cloak of pink silk and gold, a close-cropped golden head.

Spiller nodded, indifferently. "About that paper of ours," he said thoughtfully. "I was thinking that we might start off with a series of articles on the metaphysical basis of science, the reasons, historical and philosophical, that we have for assuming that scientific truth is true."

"H'm," said Gregory.

"And concurrently a series on the meaning and point of art. Start right from the beginning in both cases. Quite a good idea, don't you think?"

"Quite," said Gregory. One of his monocular glances had been received with a smile of invitation; she was ugly, unfortunately, and obviously professional. Haughtily he glared past her, as though she were not there.

"But whether Tolstoy was right," Spiller was meditatively saying, "I never feel sure. Is it true, what he says, that the function of art is the conveyance of emotion? In part, I should say, but not exclusively, not exclusively." He shook his large head.

"I seem to be getting tipsier," said Gregory, more to himself than to his companion. He still walked correctly, but he was conscious, too conscious, of the fact. And the suspicion of queasiness was becoming well founded.

Spiller did not hear or, hearing, ignored the remark. “For me,” he continued, “the main function of art is to impart knowledge. The artist knows more than the rest of us. He is born knowing more about his soul than we know of ours, and more about the relations existing between his soul and the cosmos. He anticipates what will be common knowledge in a higher state of development. Most of our modems are primitives compared with the most advanced of the dead.”

“Quite,” said Gregory, not listening. His thoughts were elsewhere, with his eyes.

“Moreover,” Spiller went on, “he can say what he knows, and say it in such a way that our own rudimentary, incoherent, unrealized knowledge of what he talks about falls into a kind of pattern — like iron filings under the influence of the magnet.”

There were three of them — ravishingly, provocatively young — standing in a group at the pavement’s edge. They chattered, they stared with bright derisive eyes at the passers-by, they commented in audible whispers, they burst into irrepressible shrill laughter. Spiller and Gregory approached, were spied by one of the three, who nudged her fellows.

“Oh, Lord!”

They giggled, they laughed aloud, they were contorted with mockery.

“Look at old Golliwog!” That was for Spiller, who walked bareheaded, his large grey hat in his hand.

“And the nut!” Another yell for the monocle.

“It’s that magnetic power,” said Spiller, quite unaware of the lovely derision of which he was the object, “that power of organizing mental chaos into a pattern, which makes a truth uttered poetically, in art, more valuable than a truth uttered scientifically, in prose.”

Playfully reproving, Gregory wagged a finger at the mockers. There was a yet more piercing yell. The two men passed; smilingly Gregory looked back. He felt jauntier and jollier than ever; but the suspicion was ripening to a certainty.

“For instance,” said Spiller, “I may know well enough that all men are mortal. But this knowledge is organized and given aform, it is even actually increased and deepened, when Shakespeare talks about all our yesterdays having lighted fools the way to dusty death.”

Gregory was trying to think of an excuse for giving his companion the slip and turning back to dally with the three. He would love them all, simultaneously.

La touffe échevelée De baisers que les dieux gardaient si bien melée.

The Mallarméan phrase came back to him, imposing on his vague desires (old man Spiller was quite right, old imbecile!) the most elegant of forms. Spiller’s words came to him as though from a great distance.

“And the *Coriolan* overture is a piece of new knowledge, as well as a composer of existing chaotic knowledge.”

He would suggest dropping in at the Monico, pretext a call of nature, slip out and never return. Old imbecile, maundering on like that! Not but what it mightn’t have been quite interesting, at the right moment. But now... And he thought, no doubt, that he was going to tap him, Gregory, for a thousand pounds! Gregory could have laughed aloud. But his derision was tinged with an uneasy consciousness that his tipsiness had definitely taken a new and disquieting form.

“Some of Cézanne’s landscapes,” he heard Spiller saying.

Suddenly, from a shadowed doorway a few yards down the street in front of them, there emerged, slowly, tremulously, a thing: a bundle of black tatters that moved on a pair of old squashed boots, that was topped by a broken, dog’s-eared hat. It had a face, day-coloured and emaciated. It had hands, in one of which it held a little tray with match-boxes. It opened its mouth, from which two or three of the discoloured teeth were missing; it sang, all but inaudibly. Gregory thought he recognized “Nearer, my God, to Thee.” They approached.

“Certain frescoes of Giotto, certain early Greek sculptures,” Spiller went on with his interminable catalogue.

The thing looked at them, Gregory looked at the thing. Their eyes met. Gregory expanded his left eye-socket. The monocle dropped to the end of its silken tether. He felt in his right-hand trouser pocket, the pocket where he kept

his silver, for a sixpence, a shilling even. The pocket contained only four half-crowns. Half a crown? He hesitated, drew one of the coins half-way to the surface, then let it fall again with a chink. He dipped his left hand into his other trouser pocket, he withdrew it, full. Into the proffered tray he dropped three pennies and a halfpenny.

“No, I don’t want any matches,” he said.

Gratitude interrupted the hymn. Gregory had never felt so much ashamed in his life. His monode tinkled against the buttons of his waistcoat. Deliberately, he placed one foot before the other, walking with correctness, but as though on a tight-rope. Yet another insult to the thing. He wished to God he were sober. He wished to God he hadn’t desired with such precision that “dishevelled tuft of kisses”. Threepence-halfpenny! But he could still run back and give half a crown, two half-crowns. He could still run back. Step by step, as though on the tight-rope, he advanced, keeping step with Spiller. Four steps, five steps... eleven steps, twelve steps, thirteen steps. Oh, the unluckiness! Eighteen steps, nineteen.... Too late; it would be ridiculous to turn back now, it would be too conspicuously silly. Twenty-three, twenty-four steps. The suspicion was a certainty of queasiness, a growing certainty.

“At the same time,” Spiller was saying, “I really don’t see how the vast majority of scientific truths and hypotheses can ever become the subject of art. I don’t see how they can be given poetic, emotive significance without losing their precision. How could you render the electro-magnetic theory of light, for example, in a moving literary form? It simply can’t be done.”

“Oh, for God’s sake,” shouted Gregory with a sudden outburst of fury, “for God’s sake, shut up! How can you go on talking and talking away like this?” He hiccoughed again, more profoundly and menacingly than before.

“But why on earth not?” asked Spiller with a mild astonishment.

“Talking about art and science and poetry,” said Gregory tragically, almost with tears in his eyes, “when there are two million people in England on the brink of starvation. Two million.” He meant the repetition to be impressive, but he hiccoughed yet once more; he was feeling definitely rather sick. “Living in

stinking hovels," he went on, *decrescendo*, "promiscuously, herded together, like animals. Worse than animals."

They had halted; they confronted one another.

"How can you?" repeated Gregory, trying to reproduce the generous indignation of a moment since. But anticipations of nausea were creeping up from his stomach, like a miasma from a marsh, filling his mind, driving out from it every thought, every emotion except the horrid apprehension of being sick.

Spiller's large face suddenly lost its monumental, Victorian celebrity's appearance; it seemed to fall to pieces. The mouth opened, the eyes puckered up, the forehead broke into wrinkles and the deep lines running from either side of the nose to the corners of the mouth expanded and contracted wildly, like a pair of demented glove-stretchers. An immense sound came out of him. His great body was shaken with gigantic laughter.

Patiently — patience was all that was left him, patience and a fading hope — Gregory waited for the paroxysm to subside. He had made a fool of himself; he was being derided. But he was past caring.

Spiller so far recovered as to be able to speak. "You're wonderful, my dear Gregory," he said, gasping. The tears stood in his eyes. "Really superb." He took him affectionately by the arm and, still laughing, walked on. Gregory perforce walked too; he had no choice.

"If you don't mind," he said after a few steps, "I think we'll take a taxi."

"What, to Jermyn Street?" said Spiller.

"I think we'd better," Gregory insisted.

Climbing into the vehicle, he managed to entangle his monocle in the handle of the door. The string snapped: the glass dropped on the floor of the cab. Spiller picked it up and returned it to him.

"Thank you," said Gregory, and put it out of harm's way into a waistcoat pocket.

Fairy Godmother

AT 17 PURLIEU Villas it was a fairy godmother's arrival. The enormous Daimler — it looked larger than the house itself — rolled whispering up the street, dark blue and discreetly lustrous. ("Like stars on the sea" — the darkly glittering Daimler always reminded Susan of the Hebrew Melodies— "when the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.") Between lace curtains eyes followed its passage; it was rarely that forty horses passed these suburban windows. At the gate of Number Seventeen the portent came to a halt. The chauffeur jumped down and opened the door. The fairy godmother emerged.

Mrs Escobar was tall and slender, so abnormally so, that, fashionably dressed, she looked like a fashion-plate — fabulously elegant, beyond all reality.

She was wearing black to-day — a black suit very thinly piped at the cuffs and collar, at the pockets and along the seams of the skirt, with red. A high muslin stock encased her neck and from it depended an elaborate frill, which projected from between the lapels of her coat like the idly waving fin of a tropical fish. Her shoes were red; there was a touch of red in the garnishing of her gloves, another in her hat.

She stepped out of the car and, turning back towards the open door, "Well, Susan," she said, "you don't seem to be in any hurry to get out."

Susan, who was bending down to pick up the parcels scattered on the floor of the car, looked up.

"I'm just coming," she said.

She reached hurriedly for the bunch of white roses and the terrine of *foie gras.* Reaching, she dropped the box containing the chocolate cake.

Mrs Escobar laughed. "You old goose," she said, and a charming mockery set her voice deeply vibrating. "Gome out and let Robbins take the things. You'll

take them, Robbins," she added in a different tone, turning to the chauffeur, "you'll take them, won't you?"

She looked at him intimately; her smile was appealing, almost languishing.

"Won't you, Robbins?" she repeated, as though she were asking the most immense of personal favours.

That was Mrs Escobar's way. She liked to endow every relationship, the most casual, the most business-like or formal, with a certain intimate, heart-to-heart quality. She talked to shop assistants about their sweethearts, smiled at servants as though she wanted to make them her confidants or even her lovers, discussed philosophy with the plumber, gave chocolates to district messenger boys and even, when they were particularly cherubic, maternally kissed them. She wanted to "get into touch with people," as she called it, to finger and tweak their souls and squeeze the secrets out of their hearts. She wanted everybody to be aware of her, to like and adore her at first sight. Which did not prevent her from flying into rages with the shop assistants who could not provide her immediately with precisely the thing she wanted, from violently abusing the servants when they failed to answer the bell with a sufficient promptitude, from calling the dilatory plumber a thief and a liar, from dismissing the messenger boy who brought a present from the wrong admirer, not only chocolateless and unkissed, but without even a tip.

"Won't you?" And her look seemed to add, "for *my* sake." Her eyes were long and narrow. The lower lid described an almost straight horizontal line, the upper a gradual curve. Between the lids, a pair of pale blue irises rolled their lights expressively this way and that.

The chauffeur was young and new to his post. He blushed, he averted his eyes. "Oh yes, m'm, of course," he said, and touched his cap.

Susan abandoned the chocolate cake and the *foie gras* and stepped out. Her arms were full of parcels and flowers.

"You look like a little Mother Christmas," said Mrs Escobar, playfully affectionate. "Let me take something." She selected the bunch of white roses,

leaving to Susan the bag of oranges, the cold roast chicken, the tongue and the teddy bear.

Robbins opened the gate; they stepped into the little garden.

“Where’s Ruth?” said Mrs Escobar. “Isn’t she expecting us?” Her voice expressed disappointment and implied reproof.

Evidently, she had expected to be met at the gate and escorted across the garden.

“I suppose she couldn’t leave Baby,” said Susan, looking anxiously at Mrs Escobar over the top of her heaped-up parcels. “One can never be certain of being able to do what one wants when one’s got children, can one?” Still, she wished that Ruth had turned up at the gate. It would be dreadful if Mrs Escobar were to think her negligent or ungrateful. “Oh, Ruth, do come!” she said to herself, and she wished so hard that she found herself clenching her fists and contracting the muscles of her stomach.

The fists and the abdominal muscles did their work, for the door of the house suddenly burst open and Ruth came running down the steps, carrying Baby on her arm.

“I’m so sorry, Mrs Escobar,” she began. “But, you see, Baby was just...”

Mrs Escobar did not allow her to finish her sentence. Momentarily clouded, her face lit up again. She smiled, ravishingly. Her eyelids came still closer together; little lines radiated out from them, a halo of charming humour. “Here’s little Mother Christmas,” she said, pointing at Susan. “Loaded with goodness knows what! And a few poor flowers from me.” She raised the roses to her lips, kissed them and touched Ruth’s cheek with the half-opened flowers. “And how’s this delicious person?” She took the child’s little hand and kissed it. The child looked at her with large, grave eyes — candid and, by reason of their candour, profoundly critical, like the eyes of an angel on the day of judgment.

“How do you do,” he said in his solemn, childish voice.

“Sweet pet!” said Mrs Escobar and paid no further attention to him. She was not much interested in children. “And you, my dear?” she asked, addressing herself to Ruth. She kissed her. She kissed her on the lips.

“Very well, thanks, Mrs Escobar.”

Mrs Escobar scrutinized her at arm’s-length one hand on Ruth’s shoulder. “You certainly look well, my dear child,” she said. “And prettier than ever.” She thrust the great sheaf of roses into the crook of the young mother’s unoccupied arm. “What a sweet little Madonna!” she exclaimed, and, turning to Susan, “Did you ever see anything more charming?” she asked. Susan smiled and nodded, rather awkwardly; after all, Ruth was her elder sister. “And so absurdly, *absurdly* young!” Mrs Escobar went on. “Why, it’s positively a *détournement de mineur*, your being married and having a baby. Do you know, my dear, you really look younger than Susan. It’s a scandal.”

Embarrassed by Mrs Escobar’s point-blank praises, Ruth blushed. And it was not modesty alone that brought the blood to her cheeks. This insistence on the youthfulness of her appearance humiliated her. For it was mostly due, this air of childishness, to her clothes. She made her own frocks — rather “artistic” little affairs in brightly coloured linens or large checks — made them in the only way she knew how or had time to make them: straight up and down, with a yoke and no sleeves, to be worn over a shirt. Monotonously schoolgirlish! But what can you do, if you can’t afford to buy decent clothes? And her bobbed hair was dreadfully schoolgirlish too. She knew it. But again, what could she do about that? Let it grow? It would be such a trouble to keep tidy, and she had so little time. Have it shingled? But she would need to get it waved as well, and it would always have to be kept trimmed by a good hairdresser. All that meant money. Money, money, money!

No, if she looked so preposterously young, that was simply because she was poor. Susan was a baby, five years her junior. But she looked more grown-up. She looked grown-up, because she was properly dressed in frocks from a real dressmaker. Grown-up clothes, though she was only seventeen. And her cropped brown hair was beautifully waved. Mrs Escobar gave Susan everything she wanted. Every blessed thing.

Suddenly she found herself hating and despising this enviably happy sister of hers. After all, what was she? Just a little pet lap-dog in Mrs Escobar’s house.

Just a doll; Mrs Escobar amused herself by dressing her up, playing with her, making her say “Mama”. It was a despicable position, despicable. But even as she thought of Susan’s contemptibleness, she was complaining to the fates which had not permitted her to share Susan’s beatitude. Why should Susan have everything, when she...?

But then, all at once, she remembered Baby. She turned her head impulsively and kissed the child’s round, peach-pink cheek. The skin was smooth, soft and cool, like the petal of a flower. Thinking of Baby made her think of Jim. She imagined how he would kiss her when he came back from work. And this evening, while she sewed, he would read aloud from Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall.* How she adored him, when he sat there in his spectacles, reading! And the curious way he pronounced the word “Persians” — not “Pershuns,” but “Perzyans.” The thought of the Perzyans made her violently wish that he were there beside her, so that she could throw her arms round his neck and kiss him. Perzyans, Perzyans — she repeated the word to herself. Oh, *how* she adored him!

With a sudden outburst of affection, intensified at once by repentance for her odious thoughts and the recollection of Jim, she turned to her sister.

“Well, Sue,” she said. They kissed over the cold roast chicken and the tongue.

Mrs Escobar looked at the two sisters and, looking, was filled with pleasure. How charming they were, she thought; how fresh and young and pretty! She felt proud of them. For after all, were they not in some sort her own invention? A couple of young girls, nicely brought up, luxuriously even; then suddenly orphaned and left without a penny. They might simply have sunk, disappeared and never been heard of again. But Mrs Escobar, who had known their mother, came to the rescue. They were to come and live with her, poor children! and she would be their mother. A little ungratefully, as it always seemed to her, Ruth had preferred to accept young Jim Waterton’s offer of a premature and hazardous marriage. Waterton had no money, of course; he was only a boy, with all his career to make. But Ruth had made her choice, deliberately. They had been married nearly five years now. Mrs Escobar had been a little hurt. Still, she had

periodically paid her fairy godmother's visits to Purlieu Villas; she had stood plain human godmother to the baby. Susan, meanwhile, who was only thirteen when her father died, had grown up under Mrs Escobar's care. She was rising eighteen now, and charming.

"The greatest pleasure in the world," Mrs Escobar was fond of saying, "is being kind to other people." Particularly, she might have added, when the other people are young and ravishing little creatures who worship you.

"Dear children," she said, and, coming between them, she put an arm round either's waist. She felt all at once deeply and beautifully moved — much as she felt when she heard the Sermon on the Mount or the story of the woman taken in adultery read out in church. "Dear children." Her rich voice trembled a little, the tears came into her eyes. She pressed the two girls more closely to her. Interlaced, they walked along the path towards the door of the house. Robbins followed at a respectful distance, carrying the *foie gras* and the chocolate cake.

II

"But why isn't it a train?" asked Baby.

"But it's such a lovely bear."

"Such a beautiful...." Susan insisted.

The faces of the sisters expressed an embarrassed anxiety. Who could have foreseen it? Baby hated the teddy bear. He wanted a train, and nothing but a train. And Mrs Escobar had chosen the bear herself. It was a most special bear, comic in a rather artistic way, don't you know; made of black plush, with very large eyes of white leather and boot-buttons.

"And see how it rolls," wheedled Ruth. She gave the animal a push; it rolled across the floor. "On wheels," she added. Baby had a weakness for wheels.

Susan reached out and drew the bear back again. "And when you pull this string," she explained, "it roars." She pulled the string. The bear squeaked hoarsely.

“But I want a train,” insisted the child. “With rails and tunnels and signals.” He called them siggernals.

“Another time, my darling,” said Ruth. “Now go and give your bear a big kiss. Poor Teddy! He’s so sad.”

The child’s lips trembled, his face became distorted with grief, he began to cry. “I want siggernals,” he said. “Why doesn’t she bring me siggernals?” He pointed accusingly at Mrs Escobar.

“Poor pet,” said Mrs Escobar. “He shall have his siggernals.”

“No, no,” implored Ruth. “He really adores his bear, you know. It’s just a foolish idea he’s got into his head.”

“Poor *little* pet,” Mrs Escobar repeated. But how badly brought up the child was, she thought. So spoiled, and *blast* already. She had taken such trouble about the bear. A real work of art. Ruth ought to be told, for her own good and the child’s. But she was so touchy. How silly it was of people to be touchy about this sort of thing! Perhaps the best thing would be to talk to Susan about it and let her talk to Ruth quietly, when they were alone together.

Ruth tried to make a diversion. “Look at this lovely book Mrs Escobar has brought you.” She held up a brand new copy of Lear’s *Book of Nonsense.* “Look.” She turned over the pages invitingly before the child’s eyes.

“Don’t want to look,” Baby replied, determined to be a martyr. In the end, however, he could not resist the pictures. “What’s that?” he asked, sulkily, still trying to pretend that he wasn’t interested.

“Would you like me to read you one of these lovely poems?” asked Mrs Escobar, heaping coals of fire on the despiser of the bear.

“Oh yes,” cried Ruth with an anxious eagerness. “Yes, please.”

“Please,” repeated Susan.

Baby said nothing, but when his mother wanted to hand the book to Mrs Escobar, he tried to resist.... “It’s my book,” he said in a voice of loud and angry complaint.

“Hush,” said Ruth, and stroked his head soothingly. He relinquished the book.

“Which shall it be?” asked Mrs Escobar, turning over the pages of the volume. “‘The Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo’? Or ‘The Pobble who has no Toes’? Or ‘The Dong’? Or ‘The Owl and the Pussy Cat’? Which?” She looked up, smiling inquiringly.

“‘The Pobble,’” suggested Susan.

“I think ‘The Owl and the Pussy Cat’ would be the best to begin with,” said Ruth. “It’s easier to understand than the others. You’d like to hear about the Pussy, wouldn’t you, darling?”

The child nodded, unenthusiastically.

“Sweet pet!” said Mrs Escobar. “He shall have his Pussy. I love it too.” She found her place in the book, “‘The Owl and the Pussy Cat,’” she announced in a voice more richly and cooingly vibrant than the ordinary. Mrs Escobar had studied elocution with the best teachers, and was fond of acting, for charity. She had been unforgettable as Tosca in aid of the Hoxton Children’s Hospital. And then there was her orthopaedic Portia, her tuberculous Mrs Tanqueray (or was Mrs. Tanqueray for the incurables?).

“What’s a owl?” asked Baby.

Interrupted, Mrs Escobar began a preliminary reading of the poem to herself; her lips moved as she read.

“An owl’s a kind of big funny bird,” his mother answered and put her arm round him. She hoped he’d keep quieter if she held him like this.

“Do nowls bite?”

“Owls, darling, not nowls.”

“Do they bite?”

“Only when people tease them.”

“Why do people tease them?”

“Sh-sh!” said Ruth. “Now you must listen. Mrs Escobar’s going to read you a lovely story about an owl and a pussy.” Mrs Escobar, meanwhile, had been studying her poem. “Too charming!” she said, to nobody in particular, smiling as she spoke with eyes and lips. “Such poetry, really, though it is nonsense. After

all, what is poetry but nonsense? Divine nonsense.” Susan nodded her agreement. “Shall I begin?” Mrs Escobar inquired.

“Oh, do,” said Ruth, without ceasing to caress the child’s silky hair. He was calmer now.

Mrs Escobar began: —

“‘The aul and the pooseh-cut went to sea In a beautiful (after a little pause and with intensity) *pea-grreen* boat.

They took some honey and (the rich voice rose a tone and sank) plenty of money, Wrapped (little pause) up (little pause) in a five-pound note.’”

“What’s a five-pound note?” asked Baby.

Ruth pressed her hand more heavily on the head, as though to squeeze down his rising curiosity. “Sh-sh!” she said.

Ignoring the interruption, Mrs Escobar went on, after a brief dramatic silence, to the second stanza.

“‘The aul looked up to the starrs above (her voice thrilled deeply with the passion of the tropical and amorous night) And sang to a small (little pause) guitarr...’”

“Mummy, what’s a guit...?”

“Hush, pet, hush.” She could almost feel the child’s questioning spirit oozing out between her confining fingers.

With a green flash of emeralds, a many-coloured glitter of brilliants, Mrs Escobar laid her long white hand on her heart and raised her eyes towards imaginary constellations.

“‘Oh lovely poosseh, oh poosseh my love, What a (from high, the voice dropped emphatically) beautiful poosseh you are, you are, What a beautiful poosseh you are!”’

“But, mummy, do owls like cats?”

“Don’t talk, darling.”

“But you told me cats eat birds.”

“Not this cat, my pet.”

“But you said so, mummy...”

Mrs Escobar began the next stanza.

“‘Said the cut to the aul, You elegant faul, How charrmingly sweet you sing (Mrs Escobar’s voice became languishing).

Come, let us be murried; too long have we turned.

But *what* (pause; Mrs Escobar made a despairing gesture, luminous with rings) shall we do (pause) for the (her voice rose to the question) rring, the rring?

But *what* shall we do for the rring?

“‘So they sailed away for a yeerr and a day To the lund where the bong-tree grows....’”

“What’s a bongtrygroze, mummy?”

Mrs Escobar slightly raised her voice so as to cover the childish interruption and went on with her recitation.

‘“And there (pause) in a wood (pause) a *Pig-gywig* stood, With a rring...”

‘But, mummy..

“‘With a rring (Mrs Escobar repeated still more loudly, describing in the air, as she did so, a flashing circle) at the end of his nose, his nose....’”

“Mummy!” The child was furious with impatience; he shook his mother’s arm. “Why don’t you say? What is a bongtrygroze?”

“You must wait, my pet.’

Susan put her finger to her lips. “Sh-sh!” Oh, how she wished that he would be good! What would Mrs Escobar think? And her reading was so beautiful.

““With a rring (Mrs Escobar described a still larger circle) at the end of his nose’”

“It’s a kind of tree,” whispered Ruth.

“‘Deerr peeg, arre you willing to sell for one shilling Your rring? Said the Peeggy, I will.

So they took it a-way and were murried next day By the turrkey who lives on the hill (the dreamy note in Mrs Escobar’s voice made the turkey’s hill sound wonderfully blue, romantic and remote), By the turrkey who lived on the hill.

“‘They dined on mince and slices of quince, Which they ate with a runcible spoon, And...’”

“What’s runcible?”

“Hush, darling.”

“‘... hand in hand (the voice became cooingly tender, bloomy like a peach with velvety sentiment) by the edge...’”

“But why do you say sh-sh, like that?” the little boy shouted. He was so angry, that he began to hit his mother with his fists.

The interruption was so scandalous, that Mrs Escobar was forced to take notice of it. She contented herself with frowning and laying her finger on her lips.

“‘... by the edge of the sand (all the ocean was in Mrs Escobar’s voice), They danced (how gay and yet how exquisitely, how nuptially tender!) by the light (she spoke very slowly; she allowed her hand, which she had lifted, to come gradually down, like a tired bird, on to her knee) of the moo-oon.’”

If any one could have heard those final words, he would have heard interstellar space, and the mystery of planetary motion, and Don Juan’s serenade, and Juliet’s balcony. If any one could have heard them. But the scream which Baby uttered was so piercingly loud, that they were quite inaudible.

III

“I think you ought to talk to Ruth seriously one day,” said Mrs Escobar, on the way back from Purlieu Villas, “about Baby.

I don’t think she really brings him up at all well. He’s spoiled.”

The accusation was couched in general terms. But Susan began at once to apologize for what she felt sure was Baby’s particular offence.

“Of course,” she said, “the trouble was that there were so many words in the poem he didn’t understand.”

Mrs Escobar was annoyed at having been too well understood.

“The poem?” she repeated, as though she didn’t understand what Susan was talking about. “Oh, I didn’t mean that. I thought he was so good, considering, while I was reading. Didn’t you?”

Susan blushed, guiltily. “I thought he interrupted rather a lot,” she said.

Mrs Escobar laughed indulgently. “But what can you expect of a little child like that?” she said. “No, no; I was thinking of his behaviour in general. At tea, for example.... You really ought to talk to Ruth about it.”

Susan promised that she would.

Changing the subject, Mrs Escobar began to talk about Sydney Fell, who was coming to dinner that evening. Such a darling creature! She liked him more and more. He had a most beautiful mouth; so refined and sensitive, and yet at the same time so strong, so sensual. And he was so witty and such an accomplished amorist. Susan listened in misery and silence.

“Don’t you think so?” Mrs Escobar kept asking insistently. “Don’t you think he’s delightful?”

Susan suddenly burst out. “I hate him,” she said, and began to cry.

“You hate him?” said Mrs Escobar. “But why? Why? You’re not jealous, are you?” She laughed.

Susan shook her head.

“You are!” Mrs Escobar insisted. “You are!”

Susan continued obstinately to shake her head. But Mrs Escobar knew that she had got her revenge.

“You silly, silly child,” she said in a voice in which there were treasures of affection. She put her arm round the girl’s shoulders, drew her gently and tenderly towards her and began to kiss her wet face. Susan abandoned herself to her happiness.

Brief Candles

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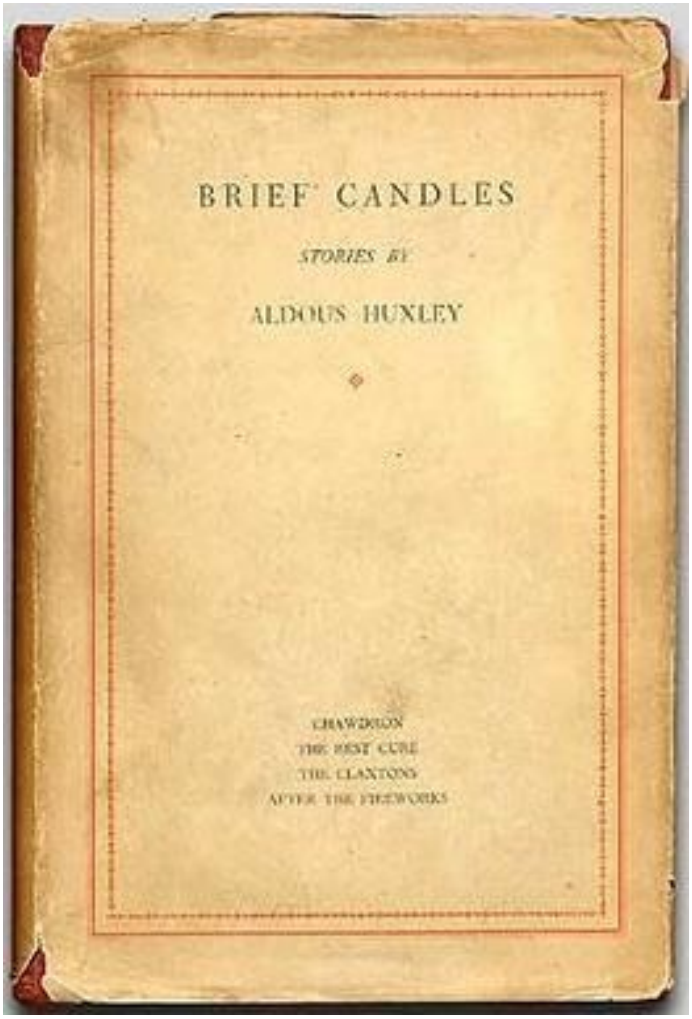
The Claxtons

After the Fireworks



The first edition

Chawdron

FROM BEHIND THE outspread *Times* I broke a silence. “Your friend Chawdron’s dead, I see.”

“Dead?” repeated Tilney, half incredulously. “Chawdron dead?”

“‘Suddenly, of heart failure,’” I went on, reading from the obituary, “‘at his residence in St James’s Square.’”

“Yes, his heart...” He spoke meditatively. “How old was he? Sixty?”

“Fifty-nine. I didn’t realize the ruffian had been rich for so long. ‘... the extraordinary business instinct, coupled with a truly Scottish doggedness and determination, which raised him, before he was thirty-five, from obscurity and comparative poverty to the height of opulence.’ Don’t you wish you could write like that? My father lost a quarter of a century’s savings in one of his companies.”

“Served him right for saving!” said Tilney with a sudden savagery. Surprised, I looked at him over the top of my paper. On his gnarled and ruddy face was an expression of angry gloom. The news had evidently depressed him. Besides, he was always ill-tempered at breakfast. My poor father was paying. “What sort of jam is that by you?” he asked fiercely.

“Strawberry.”

“Then I’ll have some marmalade.”

I passed him the marmalade and, ignoring his bad temper, “When the Old Man,” I continued, “and along with him, of course, most of the other shareholders, had sold out at about eighty per cent, dead loss, Chawdron did a little quiet conjuring and the price whizzed up again. But by that time he was the owner of practically all the stock.”

“I’m always on the side of the ruffians,” said Tilney. “On principle.”

“Oh, so am I. All the same, I do regret those twelve thousand pounds.”

Tilney said nothing. I returned to the obituary.

“What do they say about the New Guinea Oil Company scandal?” he asked after a silence.

“Very little; and the touch is beautifully light. ‘The findings of the Royal Commission were on the whole favourable, though it was generally considered at the time that Mr Chawdron had acted somewhat inconsiderately.’”

Tilney laughed. “‘Inconsiderately’ is good. I wish I made fourteen hundred thousand pounds each time I was inconsiderate.”

“Was that what he made out of the New Guinea Oil business?”

“So he told me, and I don’t think he exaggerated. He never lied for pleasure. Out of business hours he was remarkably honest.”

“You must have known him very well.”

“Intimately,” said Tilney, and, pushing away his plate, he began to fill his pipe.

“I envy you. What a specimen for one’s collection! But didn’t you get rather bored with living inside the museum, so to speak, behind the menagerie bars? Being intimate with a specimen — it must be trying.”

“Not if the specimen’s immensely rich,” Tilney answered. “You see, I’m partial to Napoleon brandy and Corona Coronas; parasitism has its rewards. And if you’re skilful, it needn’t have too many penalties. It’s possible to be a high-souled louse, an independent tapeworm. But Napoleon brandy and Coronas weren’t the only attractions Chawdron possessed for me. I have a disinterested, scientific curiosity about the enormously wealthy. A man with an income of more than fifty thousand a year is such a fantastic and improbable being. Chawdron was specially interesting because he’d *made* all his money — mainly dishonestly; that was the fascinating thing. He was a large-scale, Napoleonic crook. And, by God, he looked it! Did you know him by sight?”

I shook my head.

“Like an illustration to Lombroso. A criminal type. But intelligently criminal, not brutally. He wasn’t brutal.”

“I thought he was supposed to look like a chimpanzee,” I put in.

“He did,” said Tilney. “But, after all, a chimpanzee isn’t brutal-looking. What you’re struck by in a chimpanzee is its all-but-human appearance. So very intelligent, so nearly a man.

Chawdron’s face had just that look. But with a difference. The chimpanzee looks gentle and virtuous and quite without humour. Whereas Chawdron’s intelligent all-but-humanity was sly and, underneath the twinkling jocularity, quite ruthless. Oh, a strange, interesting creature! I got a lot of fun out of my study of him. But in the end, of course, he did bore me. Bored me to death. He was so drearily uneducated. Didn’t know the most obvious things, couldn’t understand a generalization. And then quite disgustingly without taste, without aesthetic sense or understanding. Metaphysically and artistically a cretin.”

“The obituarist doesn’t seem to be of your opinion.” I turned again to *The Times*. “Where is it now? Ah! ‘A remarkable writer was lost when Chawdron took up finance. Not entirely lost, however; for the brilliant *Autobiography*, published in 1921, remains as a lasting memorial to his talents as a stylist and narrator.’ What do you say to that?” I asked, looking up at Tilney.

He smiled enigmatically. “It’s quite true.”

“I never read the book, I confess. Is it any good?”

“It’s damned good.” His smile mocked, incomprehensibly. “Are you pulling my leg?”

“No, it was really and genuinely good.”

“Then he can hardly have been such an artistic cretin as you make out.”

“Can’t he?” Tilney echoed and, after a little pause, suddenly laughed aloud. “But he *was* a cretin,” he continued on a little gush of confidingness that seemed to sweep away the barriers of his willed discretion, “and the book *was* good. For the excellent reason that he didn’t write it. I wrote it.”

“You?” I looked at him, wondering if he were joking. But his face, after the quick illumination of laughter, had gone serious, almost gloomy. A curious face, I reflected. Handsome in its way, intelligent, aware, yet with something rather sinister about it, almost repulsive. The superficial charm and good humour of the man seemed to overlie a fundamental hardness, an uncaringness, a hostility even.

Too much good living, moreover, had left its marks on that face. It was patchily red and lumpy. The fine features had become rather gross. There was a coarseness mingled with the native refinement. Did I like Tilney or did I not? I never rightly knew. And perhaps the question was irrelevant. Perhaps Tilney was one of those men who are not meant to be liked or disliked as men — only as performers. I liked his conversation, I was amused, interested, instructed by what he said. To ask myself if I also liked what he *was* — this was, no doubt, beside the point.

Tilney got up from the table and began to walk up and down the room, his pipe between his teeth, smoking. “Poor Chawdron’s dead now, so there’s no reason...” He left the sentence unfinished, and for a few seconds was silent. Standing by the window, he looked out through the rain-blurred glass on to the greens and wet greys of the Kentish landscape. “England looks like the vegetables at a Bloomsbury boarding-house dinner,” he said slowly. “Horrible! Why do we live in this horrible country? Ugh!” He shuddered and turned away. There was another silence. The door opened and the maid came in to clear the breakfast table. I say “the maid”; but the brief impersonal term is inaccurate. Inaccurate, because wholly inadequate to describe Hawtrey. What came in, when the door opened, was personified efficiency, was a dragon, was stony ugliness, was a pillar of society, was the Ten Commandments on legs. Tilney, who did not know her, did not share my terror of the domestic monster. Unaware of the intense disapproval which I could feel her silently radiating (it was after ten; Tilney’s slug-a-bed habits had thrown out of gear the whole of her morning’s routine) he continued to walk up and down, while Hawtrey busied herself round the table. Suddenly he laughed. “Chawdron’s *Autobiography* was the only one of my books I ever made any money out of,” he said. I listened apprehensively, lest he should say anything which might shock or offend the dragon. “He turned over all the royalties to me,” Tilney went on. “I made the best part of three thousand pounds out of his *Autobiography*. Not to mention the five hundred he gave me for writing it.” (Was it quite delicate, I wondered, to talk of such large sums of money in front of one so incomparably more virtuous than ourselves and so

much poorer? Fortunately, Tilney changed the subject.) “You ought to read it,” he said. “I’m really quite offended that you haven’t. All that lower middle-class childhood in Peebles — it’s really masterly.” (“Lower middle-class” — I shuddered. Hawtrey’s father had owned a shop; but he had had misfortunes.) “It’s *Clayhanger* and *L’Education Sentimentale* and *David Copperfield* all rolled into one.

Really superb. And the first adventurings into the world of finance were pure Balzac — magnificent.” He laughed again, this time without bitterness, amusedly; he was warming to his subject. “I even put in a Rastignac soliloquy from the top of the dome of St Paul’s, made him shake his fist at the City. Poor old Chawdron! he was thrilled. ‘If only I’d known what an interesting life I’d had,’ he used to say to me. ‘Known while the life was going on.’”(I looked at Hawtrey to see if she was resenting the references to an interesting life. But her face was closed; she worked as though she were deaf.) “‘You wouldn’t have lived it,’ I told him. ‘You must leave the discovery of the excitingness to the artists.’”He was silent again. Hawtrey laid the last spoon on the tray and moved towards the door. Thank heaven! “Yes, the artist,” Tilney went on in a tone that had gone melancholy again. “I really was one, you know.” (The departing Hawtrey must have heard that damning confession. But then, I reflected, she always did know that I and my friends were a bad lot.) “Really *am* one,” he insisted. “*Qualis artifex!* But *pereo, pereo.* Somehow, I’ve never done anything but perish all my life. Perish, perish, perish. Out of laziness and because there always seemed so much time. But I’m going to be forty-eight next June. Forty-eight! There isn’t any time. And the laziness is such a habit. So’s the talking. It’s so easy to talk. And so amusing. At any rate for oneself.”

“For other people too,” I said; and the compliment was sincere. I might be uncertain whether or no I liked Tilney. But I genuinely liked his performance as a talker. Sometimes, perhaps, that performance was a little too professional. But, after all, an artist must be a professional.

“It’s what comes of being mostly Irish,” Tilney went on. “Talking’s the national vice. Like opium-smoking with the Chinese!” (Hawtrey re-entered

silently to sweep up the crumbs and fold the table-cloth.) “If you only knew the number of masterpieces I’ve allowed to evaporate at dinner tables, over the cigars and the whisky!” (Two things of which, I knew, the Pillar of Society virtuously disapproved.) “A whole library. I might have been — what? Well, I suppose I might have been a frightful old bore,” he answered himself with a forced selfmockery. “‘The Complete Works of Edmund Tilney, in Thirty-Eight Volumes, post octavo.’ I dare say the world ought to be grateful to me for sparing it *that.* All the same, I get a bit depressed when I look over the back numbers of the *Thursday Review* and read those measly little weekly articles of mine. *Parturiunt montes.*.

“But they’re good articles,” I protested. If I had been more truthful, I would have said that they were sometimes good — when he took the trouble to make them good. Sometimes, on the contrary...

“*Merci, cher maître!*” he answered ironically. “But hardly more perennial than brass, you must admit. Monuments of wood pulp. It’s depressing being a failure. Particularly if it’s your fault, if you might have been something else.”

I mumbled something. But what was there to say? Except as a professional talker, Tilney *had* been a failure. He had great talents and he was a literary journalist who sometimes wrote a good article. He had reason to feel depressed.

“And the absurd, ironical thing,” he continued, “is that the one really good piece of work I ever did is another man’s autobiography. I could never prove my authorship even if I wanted to. Old Chawdron was very careful to destroy all the evidences of the crime. The business arrangements were all verbal. No documents of any kind. And the manuscript, *my* manuscript — he bought it off me. It’s burnt.”

I laughed. “He took no risks with you.” Thank heaven! The dragon was preparing to leave the room for good.

“None whatever,” said Tilney. “He was going to be quite sure of wearing his laurel wreath. There was to be no other claimant. And at the time, of course, I didn’t care two pins. I took the high line about reputation. Good art — and Chawdron’s *Autobiography* was good art, a really first-rate novel — good art is

its own reward." (Hawtrey's comment on this was almost to slam the door as she departed.) "You know the style of thing? And in this case it was more than its own reward. There was money in it. Five hundred down and all the royalties. And I was horribly short of money at the moment. If I hadn't been, I'd never have written the book. Perhaps that's been one of my disadvantages — a small independent income and not very extravagant tastes. I happened to be in love with a very expensive young woman at the time when Chawdron made his offer. You can't go dancing and drinking champagne on five hundred a year. Chawdron's cheque was timely. And there I was, committed to writing his memoirs for him. A bore, of course. But luckily the young woman jilted me soon afterwards; so I had time to waste. And Chawdron was a ruthless taskmaster. And besides, I really enjoyed it once I got started. It really was its own reward. But now — now that the book's written and the money's spent and I'm soon going to be fifty, instead of forty as it was then — now, I must say, I'd rather like to have at least one good book to my credit. I'd like to be known as the author of that admirable novel, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Chawdron*, but, alas, I shan't be." He sighed. "It's Benjamin Chawdron, not Edmund Tilney, who'll have his little niche in the literary histories. Not that I care much for literary history. But I do rather care, I must confess, for the present anticipations of the niche. The drawingroom reputation, the mentions in the newspapers, the deference of the young, the sympathetic curiosity of the women. All the by-products of successful authorship. But there, I sold them to Chawdron. For a good price. I can't complain. Still, I *do* complain. Have you got any pipe tobacco? I've run out of mine."

I gave him my pouch. "If I had the energy," he went on, as he refilled his pipe, "or if I were desperately hard up, which, thank heaven and at the same time alas! I'm not at the moment, I could make another book out of Chawdron. Another and a better one. Better," he began explaining, and then interrupted himself to suck at the flame of the match he had lighted, "because... so much more... malicious." He threw the match away. "You can't write a good book without being malicious. In the *Autobiography* I made a hero of Chawdron. I

was paid to; besides, it was Chawdron himself who provided me with my documents. In this other book he'd be the villain. Or in other words, he'd be himself as others saw him, not as he saw himself. Which is, incidentally, the only valid difference between the virtuous and the wicked that I've ever been able to detect. When you yourself indulge in any of the deadly sins, you're always justified — they're never deadly. But when any one else indulges, you're very properly indignant. Old Rousseau had the courage to say that he was the most virtuous man in the world. The rest of us only silently believe it. But to return to Chawdron. What I'd like to do now is to write his biography, not his autobiography. And the biography of a rather different aspect of the man. Not about the man of action, the captain of industry, the Napoleon of finance and so forth. But about the domestic, the private, the sentimental Chawdron."

"*The Times* had its word about that," said I; and picking up the paper once more, I read: "'Under a disconcertingly brusque and even harsh manner Mr Chawdron concealed the kindliest of natures. A stranger meeting him for the first time was often repelled by a certain superficial roughness. It was only to his intimates that he revealed' — guess what!— 'the heart of gold beneath.'"

"Heart of gold!" Tilney took his pipe out of his mouth to laugh.

"And he also, I see, had 'a deep religious sense.'" I laid the paper down.

"Deep? It was bottomless."

"Extraordinary," I reflected aloud, "the way they *all* have hearts of gold and religious senses. Every single one, from the rough old man of science to the tough old business man and the gruff old statesman."

"Hearts of gold!" Tilney repeated. "But gold's much too hard. Hearts of putty, hearts of vaseline, hearts of hog-wash. That's more like it. Hearts of hog-wash. The tougher and bluffer and gruffer they are outside, the softer they are within. It's a law of nature. I've never come across an exception. Chawdron was the rule incarnate. Which is precisely what I want to show in this other, potential book of mine — the ruthless Napoleon of finance paying for his ruthlessness and his Napoleonism by dissolving internally into hog-wash. For that's what happened to him: he dissolved into hog-wash. Like the Strange Case of Mr

Valdemar in Edgar Allan Poe. I saw it with my own eyes. It's a terrifying spectacle. And the more terrifying when you realize that, but for the grace of God, there goes yourself — and still more so when you begin to doubt of the grace of God, when you see that there in fact you *do* go. Yes, you and I, my boy. For it isn't only the tough old business men who have the hearts of hog-wash. It's also, as you yourself remarked just now, the gruff old scientists, the rough old scholars, the bluff old admirals and bishops and all the other pillars of Christian society. It's everybody, in a word, who has made himself too hard in the head or the carapace; everybody who aspires to be non-human — whether angel or machine it doesn't matter. Super-humanity is as bad as sub-humanity, is the same thing finally. Which shows how careful one should be if one's an intellectual. Even the mildest sort of intellectual. Like me, for example. I'm not one of your genuine ascetic scholars. God forbid! But I'm decidedly high-brow, and I'm literary; I'm even what the newspapers call a 'thinker'. I suffer from a passion for ideas. Always have, from boyhood onwards. With what results? That I've never been attracted by any woman who wasn't a bitch."

I laughed. But Tilney held up his hand in a gesture of protest. "It's a serious matter," he said. "It's disastrous, even. Nothing but bitches. Imagine!"

"I'm imagining," I said. "But where do the books and the ideas come in? *Post* isn't necessarily *propter*."

"It's *propter* in this case all right. Thanks to the books and the ideas, I never learnt how to deal with real situations, with solid people and things. Personal relationships — I've never been able to manage them effectively. Only ideas. With ideas I'm at home. With the *idea* of personal relationships, for example. People think I'm an excellent psychologist. And I suppose I am. Spectatorially. But I'm a bad experiencer. I've lived most of my life posthumously, if you see what I mean; in reflections and conversations after the fact. As though my existence were a novel or a text-book of psychology or a biography, like any of the others on the library shelves. An awful situation. That was why I've always liked the bitches so much, always been so grateful to them — because they were

the only women I ever contrived to have a non-posthumous, contemporary, concrete relation with. The only ones." He smoked for a moment in silence.

"But why the only ones?" I asked.

"Why?" repeated Tilney. "But isn't it rather obvious? For the shy man, that is to say the man who doesn't know how to deal with real situations and people, bitches are the only possible lovers, because they're the only women who are prepared to come to meet him, the only ones who'll make the advances he doesn't know how to make."

I nodded. "Shy men have cause to be drawn to bitches: I see that. But why should the bitches be drawn to the shy men? What's their inducement to make those convenient advances? That's what I don't see."

"Oh, of course they don't make them unless the shy man's attractive," Tilney answered. "But in my case the bitches always were attracted. Always. And, quite frankly, they were right. I was tolerably picturesque, I had that professional Irish charm, I could talk, I was several hundred times more intelligent than any of the young men they were likely to know. And then, I fancy, my very shyness was an asset You see, it didn't really look like shyness. It exteriorized itself as a kind of god-like impersonality and remoteness — most exciting for such women. I had the charm in their eyes of Mount Everest or the North Pole — something difficult and unconquered that aroused the record-breaking instincts in them. And at the same time my shy remoteness made me seem somehow superior; and, as you know, few pleasures can be compared with the sport of dragging down superiority and proving that it's no better than oneself. My air of disinterested remoteness has always had a *succès fou* with the bitches. They all adore me because I'm so 'different. "But you're different, Edmund, you're different,'" he fluted in falsetto. "The bitches! Under their sentimentalities, their one desire, of course, was to reduce me as quickly as possible to the most ignoble undifference...."

"And were they successful?" I asked.

"Oh, always. Naturally. It's not because a man's shy and bookish that he isn't a *porco di prim' ordine.* Indeed, the more shyly bookish, the more likely he is to

be secretly porkish. Of if not a *porco,* at least an *asino,* an *oca*, a *vitello.* It's the rule, as I said just now; the law of nature. There's no escaping."

I laughed. "I wonder which of the animals I am?"

Tilney shook his head. "I'm not a zoologist. At least," he added, "not when I'm talking to the specimen under discussion. Ask your own conscience."

"And Chawdron?" I wanted to hear more about Chawdron. "Did Chawdron grunt, or bray, or moo?"

"A little of each. And if earwigs made a noise... No, not earwigs. Worse than that. Chawdron was an extreme case, and the extreme cases are right outside the animal kingdom."

"What are they, then? Vegetables?"

"No, no. Worse than vegetables. They're spiritual. Angels, that's what they are: putrefied angels. It's only in the earlier stages of the degeneration that they bleat and bray. After that they twang the harp and flap their wings. Pigs' wings, of course. They're Angels in pigs' clothing. Hearts of hog-wash. Did I ever tell you about Chawdron and Charlotte Salmon?"

"The 'cellist?"

He nodded. "What a woman!"

"And her playing! So clotted, so sagging, so greasy..." I fumbled for the apt description.

"So terribly Jewish, in a word," said Tilney. "That retching emotionalism, that sea-sickish spirituality — purely Hebraic. If only there were a few more Aryans in the world of music! The tears come into my eyes whenever I see a blonde beast at the piano. But that's by the way. I was going to tell you about Charlotte. You know her, of course?"

"Do I not!"

"Well, it was Charlotte who first revealed to me poor Chawdron's heart of hog-wash. Mine too, indirectly. It was one evening at old Cryle's. Chawdron was there, and Charlotte, and myself, and I forget who else. People from all the worlds, anyhow. Cryle, as you know, has a foot in each. He thinks it's his mission to bring them together. He's the match-maker between God and

Mammon. In this case he must have imagined that he'd really brought off the marriage. Chawdron was Mammon all right; and though you and I would be chary of labelling Charlotte as God, old Cryle, I'm sure, had no doubts. After all, she plays the 'cello; she's an Artist. What more can you want?"

"What indeed!"

"I must say, I admired Charlotte that evening," he went on. "She knew so exactly the line to take with Chawdron; which was the more surprising as with me she's never quite pulled it off. She tries the siren on me, very dashing and at the same time extremely mysterious. Her line is to answer my most ordinary remarks with something absolutely incomprehensible, but obviously very significant. If I ask her, for example: 'Are you going to the Derby this year?' she'll smile a really Etruscan smile and answer: 'No, I'm too busy watching the boat-race in my own heart.' Well, then, obviously it's my cue to be terribly intrigued. 'Fascinating Sphinx,' I ought to say, 'tell me more about your visceral boat-race,' or words to that effect. Whereupon it would almost certainly turn out that I was rowing stroke in the winning boat But I'm afraid I can't bring myself to do what's expected of me. I just say: 'What a pity! I was making up a party to go to Epsom' — and hastily walk away. No doubt, if she was less blackly Semitic I'd be passionately interested in her boat-race. But as it is, her manœuvre doesn't come off. She hadn't yet been able to think of a better one. With Chawdron, however, she discovered the correct strategy from the first moment. No siren, no mystery for him. His heart was too golden and hog-washy for that. Besides, he was fifty. It's the age when clergymen first begin to be preoccupied with the underclothing of little schoolgirls in trains, the age when eminent archaeologists start taking a really passionate interest in the Scout movement. Under Chawdron's criminal mask Charlotte detected the pig-like angel, the sentimental Pickwickian child-lover with a taste for the *détournement de mineurs.* Charlotte's a practical woman: a child was needed, she immediately became the child. And what a child! I've never seen anything like it. Such prattling! Such innocent big eyes! Such merry, merry laughter! Such a wonderfully ingenuous way of saying extremely *risqué* things without knowing

(sweet innocent) what they meant! I looked on and listened — staggered. Horrified too. The performance was really frightful. Suffer little children... But when the little child's twenty-eight and tough for her age — ah, no; of such is the kingdom of hell. For me, at any rate. But Chawdron was enchanted. Really did seem to imagine he'd got hold of something below the age of consent. I looked at him in amazement. Was it possible he should be taken in? The acting was so bad, so incredibly unconvincing. Sarah Bernhardt at seventy playing L'Aiglon looked more genuinely like a child than our tough little Charlotte. But Chawdron didn't see it. This man who had lived by his wits, and not merely lived, but made a gigantic fortune by them: — was it possible that the most brilliant financier of the age should be so fabulously stupid? 'Youth's infectious,' he said to me after dinner, when the women had gone out. And then — you should have seen the smile on his face: beatific, lubrically tender— 'She's like a jolly little kitten, don't you think?' But what I thought of was the New Guinea Oil Company. How was it possible? And then suddenly I perceived that it wasn't merely possible; it was absolutely necessary. Just because he'd made fourteen hundred thousand pounds out of the New Guinea Oil scandal, it was inevitable that he should mistake a jolly little tarantula like Charlotte for a jolly little kitten. Inevitable. Just as it was inevitable that I should be bowled over by every bitch that came my way. Chawdron had spent his life thinking of oil and stock markets and flotations. I'd spent mine reading the Best that has been Thought or Said. Neither of us had had the time or energy to live — completely and intensely live, as a human being ought to, on every plane of existence. So he was taken in by the pseudo-kitten, while I succumbed to the only too genuine bitch. Succumbed, what was worse, with full knowledge. For I was never really taken in. I always knew that the bitches were bitches and not milk-white hinds. And now I also know why I was captivated by them. But that, of course, didn't prevent me from continuing to be captivated by them. *Experientia* doesn't, in spite of Mrs Micawber's Papa. Nor does knowledge." He paused to relight his pipe.

"What does, then?" I asked.

Tilney shrugged his shoulders. “Nothing does, once you’ve gone off the normal instinctive rails.”

“I wonder if they really exist, those rails?”

“So do I, sometimes,” he confessed. “But I piously believe.”

“Rousseau and Shelley piously believed too. But has anybody ever seen a Natural Man? Those Noble Savages... Read Malinowsky about them; read Frazer; read..”

“Oh, I have, I have. And of course the savage isn’t noble. Primitives are horrible. I know. But then the Natural Man isn’t Primitive Man. He isn’t the raw material of humanity; he’s the finished product. The Natural Man is a manufactured article — no, not manufactured; rather, a work of art. What’s wrong with people like Chawdron is that they’re such bad works of art. Unnatural because inartistic. Ary Scheffer instead of Manet. But with this difference. An Ary Scheffer is statically bad; it doesn’t get worse with the passage of time. Whereas an inartistic human bring degenerates, dynamically. Once he’s started badly, he becomes more and more inartistic. It needs a moral earthquake to arrest the process. Mere flea-bites, like experience or knowledge, are quite unavailing. *Experientia* doesn’t If it did, I should never have succumbed as I did, never have got into financial straits, and therefore never have written Chawdron’s autobiography, never have had an opportunity for collecting the intimate and discreditable materials for the biography that, alas, I shall never write. No, no; experience didn’t save me from falling a victim yet once more. And to such a ruinously expensive specimen. Not that she was mercenary,” he put in parenthetically. “She was too well off to need to be. So well off, however, that the mere cost of feeding and amusing her in the style she was accustomed to being fed and amused in was utterly beyond my means. Of course she never realized it. People who are born with more than five thousand a year can’t be expected to realize. She’d have been terribly upset if she had; for she had a heart of gold — like all the rest of us.” He laughed mournfully. “Poor Sybil! I expect you remember her.”

The name evoked for me a pale-eyed, pale-haired ghost. “What an astonishingly lovely creature she was!”

“Was, was,” he echoed. “*Fuit.* Lovely and fatal. The agonies she made me suffer! But she was as fatal to herself as to other people. Poor Sybil! I could cry when I think of that inevitable course of hers, that predestined trajectory.” With a stretched forefinger he traced in the air a curve that rose and fell away again. “She had just passed the crest when I knew her. The descending branch of the curve was horribly steep. What depths awaited her! That horrible little East-Side Jew she even went to the trouble of marrying! And after the Jew, the Mexican Indian. And meanwhile a little champagne had become rather a lot of champagne, rather a lot of brandy; and the occasional Good Times came to be incessant, a necessity, but so boring, such a dismal routine, so terribly exhausting. I didn’t see her for four years after our final quarrel; and then (you’ve no idea how painful it was) I suddenly found myself shaking hands with a *momento mort.* So worn and ill and tired, so terribly old. Old at thirty-four. And the last time I’d seen her, she’d been radiant. Eighteen months later she was dead; but not before the Indian had given place to a Chinaman and the brandy to cocaine. It was all inevitable, of course, all perfectly foreseeable. Nemesis had functioned with exemplary regularity. Which only made it worse. Nemesis is all right for strangers and casual acquaintances. But for oneself, for the people one likes — ah, no! *We* ought to be allowed to sow without reaping. But we mayn’t. I sowed books and reaped Sybil. Sybil sowed me (not to mention the others) and reaped Mexicans, cocaine, death. Inevitable, but an outrage, an insulting denial of one’s uniqueness and difference. Whereas when people like Chawdron sow New Guinea Oil and reap kittenish Charlottes, one’s delighted; the punctuality of fate seems admirable.”

“I never knew that Charlotte had been reaped by Chawdron,”

I put in. “The harvesting must have been done with extraordinary discretion. Charlotte’s usually so fond of publicity, even in these matters. I should never have expected her...”

“But the reaping was very brief and partial,” Tilney explained.

That surprised me even more. “Charlotte who’s always so determined and clinging! And with Chawdron’s millions to cling to...”

“Oh, it wasn’t her fault that it went no further. She had every intention of being reaped and permanently garnered. But she had arranged to go to America for two months on a concert tour. It would have been troublesome to break the contract; Chawdron seemed thoroughly infatuated; two months are soon passed. So she went. Full of confidence. But when she came back, Chawdron was otherwise occupied.”

“Another kitten?”

“A kitten? Poor Charlotte was a grey-whiskered old tigress by comparison. She even came to me in her despair. No enigmatic subtleties this time; she’d forgotten she was the Sphinx. T think you ought to warn Mr Chawdron against that woman,’ she told me. ‘He ought to be made to realize that she’s exploiting him. It’s outrageous.’ She was full of righteous indignation. Not unnaturally. Even got angry with me because I wouldn’t do anything. ‘But he wants to be exploited,’ I told her. ‘It’s his only joy in life.’ Which was perfectly true. But I couldn’t resist being a little malicious. ‘What makes you want to spoil his fun?’ I asked. She got quite red in the face. ‘Because I think it’s disgusting.’” Tilney made his voice indignantly shrill. “‘It really shocks me to see a man like Mr Chawdron being made a fool of in that way.’ Poor Charlotte! Her feelings did her credit. But they were quite unavailing. Chawdron went on being made a fool of, in spite of her moral indignation. Charlotte had to retreat. The enemy was impregnably entrenched.”

“But who was she — the enemy?”

“The unlikeliest *femme fatale* you ever saw. Little; rather ugly; sickly — yes, genuinely sickly, I think, though she did a good deal of pathetic malingering too; altogether too much the lady — refined; you know the type. A governess; not the modern breezy, athletic sort of governess — the genteel, Jane Eyre, daughter-of-clergyman kind. Her only visible merit was that she was young. About twenty-five, I suppose.”

‘But how on earth did they meet? Millionaires and governesses...”

“A pure miracle,” said Tilney. “Chawdron himself detected the hand of Providence. That was the deep religious sense coming in. ‘If it hadn’t been for *both* my secretaries falling ill on the same day,’ he said to me solemnly (and you’ve no idea how ridiculous he looked when he was being solemn — the saintly forger, the burglar in the pulpit), ‘if it hadn’t been for that — and after all, how unlikely it is that both one’s secretaries should fall ill at the same moment; what a *fateful* thing to happen! — I should never have got to know my little Fairy.’ And you must imagine the last words pronounced with a reverent and beautiful smile — indescribably incongruous on that crook’s mug of his. ‘My little Fairy’ (her real name, incidentally, was Maggie Spindell), ‘my little Fairy!’” Tilney seraphically smiled and rolled up his eyes. “You can’t imagine the expression. St Charles Borromeo in the act of breaking into the till.”

“Painted by Carlo Dold,” I suggested.

“With the assistance of Rowlandson. Do you begin to get it?”

I nodded. “But the secretaries?” I was anxious to hear the story.

“They had orders to deal summarily with all begging letters, all communications from madmen, inventors, misunderstood genuises, and, finally, women. The job was a heavy one, I can tell you. You’ve no idea what a rich man’s post-bag is like. Fantastic. Well, as I say, Providence had given both private secretaries the ‘flu. Chawdron happened to have nothing better to do that morning (Providence again); so he started opening his own correspondence. The third letter he opened was from the Fairy. It bowled him over.”

“What was in it?”

Tilney shrugged his shoulders. “He never showed it me. But from what I gathered, she wrote about God and the Universe in general and her soul in particular, not to mention *his* soul. Having no taste, and being wholly without education, Chawdron was tremendously impressed by her philosophical rigmarole. It appealed to that deep religious sense! Indeed, he was so much impressed that he immediately wrote giving her an appointment. She came, saw, and conquered. ‘Providential, my dear boy, providential.’ And of course he was right. Only I’d have dechristened the power and called it Nemesis. Miss Spindell

was the instrument of Nemesis; she was Ate in the fancy dress that Chawdron's way of life had caused him to find irresistible. She was the finally ripened fruit of sowings in New Guinea Oil and the like."

"But if your account's correct," I put in, "delicious fruit — that is, *his* taste. Being exploited by kittens was his only joy; you said it yourself. Nemesis was rewarding him for his offences, not punishing."

Tilney paused in his striding up and down the room, meditatively knitted his brows and, taking his pipe out of his mouth, rubbed the side of his nose with the hot bowl. "Yes," he said slowly, "that's an important point. I've had it vaguely in my head before now; but now you've put it clearly. From the point of view of the offender, the punishments of Nemesis may actually look like rewards. Yes, it's quite true."

"In which case your Nemesis isn't much use as a policewoman." He held up his hand. "But Nemesis isn't a policewoman. Nemesis isn't moral. At least she's only incidentally moral, more or less by accident. Nemesis is something like gravitation, indifferent. All that she does is to guarantee that you shall reap what you sow. And if you sow self-stultification, as Chawdron did with his excessive interest in money, you reap grotesque humiliation. But as you're already reduced by your offences to a sub-human condition, you won't notice that the grotesque humiliation is a humiliation. There's your explanation why Nemesis sometimes seems to reward. What she brings is a humiliation only in the absolute sense — for the ideal and complete human being; or at any rate, in practice, for the nearly complete, the approaching-the-ideal human being. For the sub-human specimen it may seem a triumph, a consummation, a fulfilment of the heart's desire. But then, you must remember, the desiring heart is a heart of hog-wash...."

"Moral," I concluded: "Live sub-humanly and Nemesis may bring you happiness."

"Precisely. But *what* happiness!"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"But after all, for the relativist, one sort of happiness is as good as another. You're taking the God's-eye view."

“The Greek’s-eye view,” he corrected.

“As you like. But anyhow, from the Chawdron’s-eye view the happiness is perfect. Therefore we ought to make ourselves like Chawdron.”

Tilney nodded. “Yes,” he said, “you need to be a bit of a platonist to see that the punishments *are* punishments. And of course if there *were* another life... Or better still, metempsychosis: there are some unbelievably disgusting insects.... But even from the merely utilitarian point of view Chawdronism is dangerous. Socially dangerous. A society constructed by and for men can’t work if all its components are emotionally sub-men. When the majority of hearts have turned to hog-wash, something catastrophic must happen. So that Nemesis turns out to be a policewoman after all. I hope you’re satisfied.”

“Perfectly.”

“You always did have a very discreditable respect for law and order and morality,” he complained.

“They must exist...”

“I don’t know why,” he interrupted me.

“In order that you and I may be immoral in comfort,” I explained. “Law and order exist to make the world safe for lawless and disorderly individualists.”

“Not to mention ruffians like Chawdron. From whom, by the way, we seem to have wandered. Where was I?”

“You’d just got to his providential introduction to the Fairy.”

“Yes, yes. Well, as I said, she came, saw, conquered. Three days later she was installed in the house. He made her his librarian.”

“*And* his mistress, I suppose.”

Tilney raised his shoulders and threw out his hands in a questioning gesture. “Ah,” he said, “that’s the question. There you’re touching the heart of the mystery.”

“But you don’t mean to tell me...”

“I don’t mean to tell you anything, for the good reason that I don’t know. I only guess.”

“And what do you guess?”

“Sometimes one thing and sometimes another. The Fairy was genuinely enigmatic. None of poor Charlotte’s fabricated sphinxishness; a real mystery. With the Fairy anything was possible.”

“But not with Chawdron surely. In these matters, wasn’t he... well, all too human?”

“No, only sub-human. Which is rather different. The Fairy roused in him all his sub-human spirituality and religiosity. Whereas with Charlotte it was the no less sub-human passion for the *détournement de mineurs* that came to the surface.”

I objected. “That’s too crude and schematic to be good psychology. Emotional states aren’t so definite and clear-cut as that. There isn’t one compartment for spirituality and another, watertight, for the *détournement de mineurs.* There’s an overlapping, a fusion, a mixture.”

“You’re probably right,” said Tilney. “And, indeed, one of my conjectures was precisely of such a fusion. You know the sort of thing: discourses insensibly giving place to amorous action — though ‘action’ seems too strong a word to describe what I have in mind. Something ever so softly senile and girlish. Positively spiritual contacts. The loves of the angels — so angelic that, when it was all over, one wouldn’t be quite sure whether there had been any interruption in the mystical conversation or not Which would justify the Fairy in her righteous indignation when she heard of any one’s venturing to suppose that she was anything more than Chawdron’s librarian. She could almost honestly believe she wasn’t. ‘I think people are too horrid,’ she used to say to me on these occasions. T think they’re simply disgusting. Can’t they even believe in the possibility of purity?’ Angry she was, outraged, hurt. And the emotion seemed absolutely real. Which was such a rare occurrence in the Fairy’s life — at any rate, so it seemed to me — that I was forced to believe it had a genuine cause.”

“Aren’t we all genuinely angry when we hear that our acquaintances say the same sort of things about us as we say about them?”

“Of course; and the truer the gossip, the angrier we are. But the Fairy was angry because the gossip was untrue. She insisted on that — and insisted so

genuinely (this is the point I was trying to make) that I couldn't help believing she had some justification. Either nothing had happened, or else something so softly and slimily angelic that it slipped past the attention, escaped notice, counted for nothing."

"But after all," I protested, "it's not because one looks truthful that one's telling the truth."

"No. But then you didn't know the Fairy. She hardly ever looked or sounded truthful. There was hardly anything she said that didn't strike me as being in one way or another a manifest lie. So that when she did seem to be telling the truth (and it was incredible how rarely that happened), I was always impressed. I couldn't help thinking there must be a reason. That's why I attach such importance to the really heart-felt way she got angry when doubts were cast on the purity of her relations with Chawdron. I believe that they really were pure, or else, more probably, that the impurity was such a little one, so to speak, that she could honestly regard it as non-existent. You'd have had the same impression too, if you'd heard her. The genuineness of the anger, the outraged protest, was obvious. And then suddenly she remembered that she was a Christian, practically a saint; she'd start forgiving her enemies. 'One's sorry for them,' she'd say, 'because they don't know any better. Poor people! ignorant of all the finer feelings, all the more beautiful relationships.' I can't tell you how awful the word 'beautiful' was in her mouth! Really blood-curdling. Be-yütiful. Very long-drawn-out, with the oo sound thinned and refined into German u-modified. Be-yütiful. Ugh!" He shuddered. "It made one want to kill her. But then the whole tone of these Christian sentiments made one want to kill her. When she forgave the poor misguided people who couldn't see the be-yüty of her relations with Chawdron you were horrified, you felt sick, you went cold all over. For the whole thing was such a lie, so utterly and bottomlessly false. After the genuine anger against the scandalmongers, the fakeness rang even faker than usual. Obvious, unmistakable, painful — like an untuned piano, like a cuckoo in June. Chawdron was deaf to it, of course; just didn't hear the fakeness. If you have a deep religious sense, I suppose you don't notice those things. T think she has the

most beautiful character I've ever met with in a human being,' he used to tell me. ('Beautiful' again, you notice. Chawdron caught the trick from her. But in his mouth it was merely funny, not gruesome.) 'The most beautiful character' — and then his beatific smile. Grotesque! It was just the same as with Charlotte; he swallowed her whole. Charlotte played the jolly kitten and he accepted her as the jolly kitten. The Fairy's ambition was to be regarded as a sanctified Christian kitten; and duly, as a Christian kitten, a confirmed, communicant, Catholic, canonized Kitten, he did regard her. Incredible; but, there! if you spend all your wits and energies knowing about oil, you can't be expected to know much about anything else. You can't be expected to know the difference between tarantulas and kittens, for example; nor the difference between St Catherine of Siena and a little liar like Maggie Spindell."

"But did she know she was lying?" I asked. "Was she consciously a hypocrite?"

Tilney repeated his gesture of uncertainty. "*Chi lo sa*?" he said. "That's the finally unanswerable question. It takes us back to where we were just now with Chawdron — to the borderland between biography and autobiography. Which is more real: you as you see yourself, or you as others see you? you in your intentions and motives, or you in the product of your intentions? you in your actions, or you in the results of your actions? And anyhow, what *are* your intentions and motives? And who is the 'you' who has intentions? So that when you ask if the Fairy was a conscious liar and hypocrite, I just have to say that I don't know. Nobody knows. Not even the Fairy herself. For, after all, there were several Fairies. There was one that wanted to be fed and looked after and given money and perhaps married one day, if Chawdron's wife happened to die."

"I didn't know he had a wife," I interrupted in some astonishment.

"Mad," Tilney telegraphically explained. "Been in an asylum for the last twenty-five years. I'd have gone mad too, if I'd been married to Chawdron. But that didn't prevent the Fairy from aspiring to be the second Mrs C. Money is always money. Well, there was *that* Fairy — the adventuress, the Darwinian specimen struggling for existence. But there was also a Fairy that genuinely

wanted to be Christian and saintly. A spiritual Fairy. And if the spirituality happened to pay with tired business men like Chawdron — well, obviously, *tant mieux.*"

"But the falseness you spoke of, the lying, the hypocrisy?"

"Mere inefficiency," Tilney answered. "Just bad acting. For, when all's said and done, what is hypocrisy but bad acting? It differs from saintliness as a performance by Lucien Guitry differed from a performance by his son. One's artistically good and the other isn't."

I laughed. "You forget I'm a moralist; at least, you said I was. These aesthetic heresies..."

"Not heresies; just obvious statements of the facts. For what is the practice of morality? It's just pretending to be somebody that by nature you aren't. It's acting the part of a saint, or a hero, or a respectable citizen. What's the highest ethical ideal in Christianity? It's expressed in A Kempis's formula— 'The Imitation of Christ' So that the organized Churches turn out to be nothing but vast and elaborate Academies of Dramatic Art. And every school's a school of acting. Every family's a family of Crummleses. Every human being is brought up as a mummer. All education, aside from merely intellectual education, is just a series of rehearsals for the part of Jesus or Podsnap or Alexander the Great, or whoever the local favourite may be. A virtuous man is one who's learned his part thoroughly and acts it competently and convincingly. The saint and the hero are great actors; they're Kembles and Siddonses — people with a genius for representing heroic characters not their own; or people with the luck to be born so like the heroic ideal that they can just step straight into the part without rehearsal. The wicked are those who either can't or won't learn to act. Imagine a scene-shifter, slightly drunk, dressed in his overalls and smoking a pipe; he comes reeling on to the stage in the middle of the trial scene in the *Merchant of Venice,* shouts down Portia, gives Antonio a kick in the stem, knocks over a few Magnificos and pulls off Shylock's false beard. That's a criminal. As for a hypocrite — he's either a criminal interrupter disguised, temporarily and for his own purposes, as an actor (that's Tartuffe); or else (and I think this is the

commoner type) he's just a bad actor. By nature, like all the rest of us, he's a criminal interrupter; but he accepts the teaching of the local Academies of Dramatic Art and admits that man's highest duty is to act star parts to applauding houses. But he is wholly without talent. When he's thinking of his noble part, he mouths and rants and gesticulates, till you feel really ashamed as you watch him — ashamed for yourself, for him, for the human species. 'Methinks the lady, or gentleman, doth protest too much,' is what you say. And these protestations seem even more excessive when, a few moments later, you observe that the protester has forgotten altogether that he's playing a part and is behaving like the interrupting criminal that it's his nature to be. But he himself is so little the mummer, so utterly without a talent for convincing representation, that he simply doesn't notice his own interruptions; or if he notices them, does so only slightly and with the conviction that nobody else will notice them. In other words, most hypocrites are more or less unconscious hypocrites. The Fairy, I'm sure, was one of them. She was simply not aware of being an adventuress with an eye on Chawdron's millions. What she was conscious of was her rôle — the rôle of St Catherine of Siena. She believed in her acting; she was ambitious to be a high-class West-End artiste. But, unfortunately, she was without talent. She played her part so unnaturally, with such grotesque exaggerations, that a normally sensitive person could only shudder at the shameful spectacle. It was a performance that only the spiritually deaf and blind could be convinced by. And, thanks to his preoccupations with New Guinea Oil, Chawdron *was* spiritually deaf and blind. His deep religious sense was the deep religious sense of a sub-man. When she paraded the canonized kitten, I felt sea-sick; but Chawdron thought she had the most be-yütiful character he'd ever met with in a human being. And not only did he think she had the most beautiful character; he also, which was almost funnier, thought she had the finest mind. It was her metaphysical conversation that impressed him. She'd read a few snippets from Spinoza and Plato and some little book on the Christian mystics and a fair amount of that flabby theosophical literature that's so popular in Garden Suburbs and among retired colonels and ladies of a certain age; so she could talk about

the cosmos very profoundly. And, by God, she was profound! I used to lose my temper sometimes, it was such drivel, so dreadfully illiterate. But Chawdron listened reverently, fairly goggling with rapture and faith and admiration. He believed every word. When you're totally, uneducated and have amassed an enormous fortune by legal swindling, you can afford to believe in the illusoriness of matter, the non-existence of evil, the oneness of all diversity and the spirituality of everything. All his life he'd kept up his childhood's Presbyterianism-most piously. And now he grafted the Fairy's rigmarole on to the Catechism, or whatever it is that Presbyterians learn in infancy. He didn't see that there was any contradiction between the two metaphysics, just as he'd never seen that there was any incongruity in his being both a good Presbyterian and a consummate swindler. He had acted the Presbyterian part only on Sundays and when he was ill, never in business hours. Religion had never been permitted to invade the sanctities of private life. But with the advance of middle age his mind grew flabbier; the effects of a misspent life began to make themselves felt. And at the same time his retirement from business removed almost all the external distractions. His deep religious sense had more chance to express itself. He could wallow in sentimentality and silliness undisturbed. The Fairy made her providential appearance and showed him which were the softest emotional and intellectual muck-heaps to wallow on. He was grateful — loyally, but a little ludicrously. I shall never forget, for example, the time he talked about the Fairy's genius. We'd been dining at his house, he and I and the Fairy. A terrible dinner, with the Fairy, as a mixture between St Catherine of Siena and Mahatma Gandhi, explaining why she was a vegetarian and an ascetic. She had that awful genteel middle-class food complex which makes table manners at Lyons' Comer Houses so appallingly good — that haunting fear of being low or vulgar which causes people to eat as though they weren't eating. They never take a large mouthful, and only masticate with their front teeth, like rabbits. And they never touch anything with their fingers. I've actually seen a woman eating cherries with a knife and fork at one of those places. Most extraordinary and most repulsive. Well, the Fairy had that complex — a matter of class — but it was

rationalized, with her, in terms of *ahimsa* and ascetic Christianity. Well, she'd been chattering the whole evening about the spirit of love and its incompatibility with a meat diet, and the necessity of mortifying the body for the sake of the soul, and about Buddha and St Francis and mystical ecstasies and, above all, herself. Drove me almost crazy with irritation, not to mention the fact that she really began putting me off my food with her rhapsodies of pious horror and disgust I was thankful when at last she left us in peace to our brandy and cigars. But Chawdron leaned across the table towards me, spiritually beaming from every inch of that forger's face of his. 'Isn't she wonderful?' he said. 'Isn't she simply *wonderful*" Wonderful,' I agreed. And then, very solemnly, wagging his finger at me, 'I've known three great intellects in my time,' he said, 'three minds of genius — Lord Northcliffe, Mr John Morley, and this little girl. Those three.' And he leant back in his chair and nodded at me almost fiercely, as though challenging me to deny it."

"And did you accept the challenge?" I asked, laughing.

Tilney shook his head. "I just helped myself to another nip of his 1820 brandy; it was the only retort a rational man could make."

"And did the Fairy share Chawdron's opinion about her mind?"

"Oh, I think so," said Tilney, "I think so. She had a great conceit of herself. Like all these spiritual people. An inordinate conceit She played the superior rôle very badly and inconsistently. But all the same she was convinced of her superiority. Inevitably; for, you see, she had an enormous capacity for auto-suggestion. What she told herself three times became true. For example, I used at first to think there was some hocus-pocus about her asceticism. She ate so absurdly little in public and at meals that I fancied she must do a little tucking-in privately in between whiles. But later I came to the conclusion that I'd maligned her By dint of constantly telling herself and other people that eating was unspiritual and gross, not to mention impolite and lower-class, she'd genuinely succeeded, I believe, in making food disgust her. She'd got to a point where she really couldn't eat more than a very little. Which was one of the causes of her sickliness. She was just under-nourished. But under-nourishment was only *one*

of the causes. She was also diplomatically sick. She threatened to die as statesmen threaten to mobilize, in order to get what she wanted. Blackmail, in fact. Not for money; she was curiously disinterested in many ways. What she wanted was his interest, was power over him, was self-assertion. She had headaches for the same reason as a baby howls. If you give in to the baby and do what it wants, it'll howl again, it'll make a habit of howling. Chawdron was one of the weak-minded sort of parents. When the Fairy had one of her famous headaches, he was terribly disturbed. The way he fluttered round the sick-room with ice and hot-water bottles and eau-de-Cologne! *The Times* obituarist would have wept to see him; such a touching exhibition of the heart of gold! The result was that the Fairy used to have a headache every three or four days. It was absolutely intolerable."

"But were they purely imaginary, these headaches?"

Tilney shrugged his shoulders. "Yes and no. There was certainly a physiological basis. The woman did have pains in her head from time to time. It was only to be expected; she was run down, through not eating enough; she didn't take sufficient exercise, so she had chronic constipation; chronic constipation probably set up a slight chronic inflammation of the ovaries; and she certainly suffered from eye-strain — you could tell that from the beautifully vague, spiritual look in her eyes, the look that comes from uncorrected myopia. There were, as you see, plenty of physiological reasons for her headaches. Her body made her a present, so to speak, of the pain. Her mind then proceeded to work up this raw material. Into what remarkable forms! Touched by her imagination, the headaches became mystic, transcendental. It was infinity in a grain of sand and eternity in an intestinal stasis. Regularly every Tuesday and Friday she died — died with a beautiful Christian resignation, a martyr's fortitude. Chawdron used to come down from the sick-room with tears in his eyes. He'd never seen such patience, such courage, such grit. There were few men she wouldn't put to shame. She was a wonderful example. And so on. And I dare say it was all quite true. She started by malingering a little, by pretending that the headaches were worse than they were. But her imagination was too

lively for her; it got beyond her control. Her pretendings gradually came true and she really did suffer martyrdom each time; she really did very nearly die. And then she got into the habit of being a martyr, and the attacks came on regularly; imagination stimulated the normal activities of inflamed ovaries and poisoned intestines; the pain made its appearance and at once became the raw material of a mystic, spiritual martyrdom taking place on a higher plane. Anyhow, it was all very complicated and obscure. And, obviously, if the Fairy herself had given you an account of her existence at this time, it would have sounded like St Lawrence's reminiscences of life on the grill. Or rather it would have sounded like the insincere fabrication of such reminiscences. For the Fairy, as I've said before, was without talent, and sincerity and saintline are matters of talent. Hypocrisy and insincerity are the products of native incompetence. Those who are guilty of them are people without skill in the arts of behaviour and self-expression. The Fairy's talk would have sounded utterly false to you. But for her it was all genuine. She really suffered, really died, really was good and resigned and courageous. Just as the paranoiac is really Napoleon Bonaparte and the young man with *dementia pracox* is really being spied on and persecuted by a gang of fiendishly ingenious enemies. If I were to tell the story from *her* point of view, it would sound really beautiful — not be-yütiful, mind you; but truly and genuinely beautiful; for the good reason that *I* have a gift of expression, which the poor Fairy hadn't. So that, for all but emotional cretins like Chawdron, she was obviously a hypocrite and a liar. Also a bit of a pathological case. For that capacity for auto-suggestion really was rather pathological. She could make things come *too* true. Not merely diseases and martyrdoms and saintliness, but also historical facts, or rather historical not-facts. She authenticated the not-facts by simply repeating that they had happened. For example, she wanted people to believe — she wanted to believe herself — that she had been intimate with Chawdron for years and yean, from childhood, from the time of her birth. The fact that he had known her since she was 'so high' would explain and justly her present relationship with him. The scandalmongers would have no excuse for talking. So she proceeded bit by bit to fabricate a lifelong intimacy, even a bit of

an actual kinship, with her Uncle Benny. I told you that that was what she called him, didn't I? That nickname had its significance; it planted him at once in the table of consanguinity and so disinfected their relations, so to speak, automatically made them innocent."

"Or incestuous," I added.

"Or incestuous. Quite. But she didn't consider the D'Annunzioesque refinements. When she gave him that name, she promoted Chawdron to the rank of a dear old kinsman, or at least a dear old family friend. Sometimes she even called him 'Nunky Benny,' so as to show that she had known him from the cradle — had lisped of nunkies, for the nunkies came. But that wasn't enough. The evidence had to be fuller, more circumstantial. So she invented it — romps with Nunky in the hay, visits to the pantomime with him, a whole outfit of childish memories."

"But what about Chawdron?" I asked. "Did he share the invented memories?"

Tilney nodded. "But for him, of course, they *wen* invented. Other people, however, accepted them as facts. Her reminiscences were so detailed and circumstantial that, unless you *knew* she was a liar, you simply had to accept them. With Chawdron himself she couldn't, of course, pretend that she'd known him, literally and historically, all those years. Not at first, in any case. The lifelong intimacy started by being figurative and spiritual. 'I fed as though I'd known my uncle Benny ever since I was a tiny baby,' she said to me in his presence, quite soon after she'd first got to know him; and as always, on such occasions, she made her voice even more whiningly babyish than usual. Dreadful that voice was — so whiny-piny, so falsely sweet. 'Ever since I was a teeny, tiny baby. Don't you fed like that, Uncle Benny?' And Chawdron heartily agreed; of course he felt like that. From that time forward she began to expatiate on the incidents which ought to have occurred in that far-off childhood with darling Nunky. They were the same inddents, of course, as those which she actually remembered when she was talking to strangers and he wasn't there. She made him give her old photographs of himself — visions of him in high collars and frock-coats, in queer-looking Norfolk jackets, in a top-hat sitting in a

Victoria. They helped her to make her fancies real. With their aid and the aid of his reminiscences she constructed a whole life in common with him. ‘Do you remember, uncle Benny, the time we went to Cowes on your yacht and I fell into the sea?’ she’d ask. And Chawdron, who thoroughly entered into the game, would answer: ‘Of course I remember. And when we’d fished you out, we had to wrap you in hot blankets and give you warm rum and milk. And you got quite drunk.’

‘Was I funny when I was drunk, uncle Benny?’ And Chawdron would rather lamely and ponderously invent a few quaintnesses which were then incorporated in the history. So that on a future occasion the Fairy could begin: ‘Nunky Benny, do you remember those ridiculous things I said when you made me drunk with rum and hot milk that time I fell into the sea at Cowes?’ And so on. Chawdron loved the game, thought it simply too sweet and whimsical and touching — positively like something out of Barrie or A. A. Milne — and was never tired of playing it. As for the Fairy — for her it wasn’t a game at all. The not-facts had been repeated till they became facts. ‘But, come, Miss Spindell,’ I said to her once, when she’d been telling me — *me*! — about some adventure she’d had with Uncle Benny when she was a toddler, ‘come, come, Miss Spindell’ (I always called her that, though she longed to be my Fairy as well as Chawdron’s, and would have called me Uncle Ted if I’d given her the smallest encouragement; but I took a firm line; she was always Miss Spindell for me), ‘come,’ I said, ‘you seem to forget that it’s only just over a year since you saw Mr Chawdron for the first time.’ She looked at me quite blankly for a moment without saying anything. ‘You can’t seriously expect me to forget too,’ I added. Poor Fairy! The blankness suddenly gave place to a painful, blushing embarrassment. ‘Oh, of course,’ she began, and laughed nervously. ‘It’s as though I’d known him for ever. My imagination...’ She tailed off into silence, and a minute later made an excuse to leave me. I could see she was upset, physically upset, as though she’d been woken up too suddenly out of a sound sleep, jolted out of one world into another moving in a different direction. But when I saw her the next day, she seemed to be quite herself again. She had

suggested herself back into the dream world; from the other end of the table, at lunch, I heard her talking to an American business acquaintance of Chawdron's about the fun she and Uncle Benny used to have on his grouse moor in Scotland. But from that time forth, I noticed, she never talked to me about her apocryphal childhood again. A curious incident; it made me look at her hypocrisy in another light. It was then I began to realize that the lie in her soul was mainly an unconscious lie, the product of pathology and a lack of talent. Mainly; but sometimes, on the contrary, the lie was only too conscious and deliberate. The most extraordinary of them was the lie at the bottom of the great Affair of the Stigmata."

"The stigmata?" I echoed. "A pious lie, then."

"Pious." He nodded. "That was how she justified it to herself. Though, of course, in her eyes, all her lies were pious lies. Pious, because they served *her* purposes and she was a saint; her cause was sacred. And afterwards, of course, when she'd treated the lies to her process of imaginative disinfection, they ceased to be lies and fluttered away as snow-white pious truths. But to start with they were undoubtedly pious lies, even for her. The Affair of the Stigmata made that quite clear. I caught her in the act. It all began with a boil that developed on Chawdron's foot."

"Curious place to have a boil."

"Not common," he agreed. "I once had one there myself, when I was a boy. Most unpleasant, I can assure you. Well, the same thing happened to Chawdron. He and I were down at his country place, playing golf and in the intervals concocting the *Autobiography*. We'd settle down with brandy and cigars and I'd gently question him. Left to himself, he was apt to wander and become incoherent and unchronological. I had to canalize his narrative, so to speak. Remarkably frank he was. I learned some curious things about the business world, I can tell you. Needless to say, they're not in the *Autobiography*. I'm reserving them for the *Life*. Which means, alas, that nobody will ever know them. Well, as I say, we were down there in the country for a long week-end, Friday to Tuesday. The Fairy had stayed in London. Periodically she took her

librarianship very seriously and protested that she simply had to get on with the catalogue. T have my duties,' she said when Chawdron suggested that she should come down to the country with us. 'You must let me get on with my duties. I don't think one ought to be just frivolous; do you, Uncle Benny? Besides, I really love my work.' God, how she enraged me with that whiney-piney talk! But Chawdron, of course, was touched and enchanted. 'What an extraordinary little person she is!' he said to me as we left the house together. Even more extraordinary than you suppose, I thought. He went on rhapsodizing as far as Watford. But in a way, I could see, when we arrived, in a way he was quite pleased she hadn't come. It was a relief to him to be having a little masculine holiday. She had the wit to see that he needed these refreshments from time to time. Well, we duly played our golf, with the result that by Sunday morning poor Chawdron's boil, which had been a negligible little spot on the Friday, had swollen up with the chafing and the exercise into a massive red hemisphere that made walking an agony. Unpleasant, no doubt; but nothing, for any ordinary person, to get seriously upset about. Chawdron, however, wasn't an ordinary person where boils were concerned. He had a carbuncle-complex, a boilophobia. Excusably, perhaps; for it seems that his brother had died of some awful kind of gangrene that had started, to all appearances harmlessly, in a spot on his cheek. Chawdron couldn't develop a pimple without imagining that he'd caught his brother's disease. This affair on his foot scared him out of his wits. He saw the bone infected, the whole leg rotting away, amputations, death. I offered what comfort and encouragement I could and sent for the local doctor. He came at once and turned out to be a young man, very determined and efficient and confidence-inspiring. The boil was anaesthetized, lanced, cleaned out, tied up. Chawdron was promised there'd be no complications. And there weren't. The thing healed up quite normally. Chawdron decided to go back to town on the Tuesday, as he'd arranged. 'I wouldn't like to disappoint Fairy,' he explained.'She'd be so sad if I didn't come back when I'd promised. Besides, she might be nervous. You've no idea what an intuition that little girl has — almost uncanny, like second sight. She'd guess something was wrong and be

upset; and you know how bad it is for her to be upset.' I did indeed; those mystic headaches of hers were the bane of my life. No, no, I agreed. She mustn't be upset. So it was decided that the Fairy should be kept in blissful ignorance of the boil until Chawdron had actually arrived. But the question then arose: how should he arrive? We had gone down into the country in Chawdron's Bugatti. He had a weakness for speed. But it wasn't the car for an invalid. It was arranged that the chauffeur should drive the Bugatti up to town and come back with the Rolls. In the unlikely event of his seeing Miss Spindell, he was not to tell her why he had been sent to town. Those were his orders. The man went and duly returned with the Rolls. Chawdron was installed, almost as though he were in an ambulance, and we rolled majestically up to London. What a home-coming! In anticipation of the sympathy he would get from the Fairy, Chawdron began to have a slight relapse as we approached the house. 'I feel it throbbing,' he assured me; and when he got out of the, car, what a limp! As though he'd lost a leg at Gallipoli. Really heroic. The butler had to support him up to the drawingroom. He was lowered on to the sofa. 'Is Miss Spindell in her room?' The butler thought so. 'Then ask her to come down here at once.' The man went out; Chawdron closed his eyes — wearily, like a very sick man. He was preparing to get all the sympathy he could and, I could see, luxuriously relishing it in advance. 'Still throbbing?' I asked, rather irreverently. He nodded, without opening his eyes. 'Still throbbing.' The manner was grave and sepulchral. I had to make an effort not to laugh. There was a silence; we waited. And then the door opened. The Fairy appeared. But a maimed Fairy. One foot in a high-heeled shoe, the other in a slipper. Such a limp! 'Another leg lost at Gallipoli,' thought I. When be heard the door open, Chawdron shut his eyes tighter than ever and turned his face to the wall, or at any rate the back of the sofa. I could see that this rather embarrassed the Fairy. Her entrance had been dramatic; she had meant him to see her disablement at once; hadn't counted on finding a death-bed scene. She had hastily to improvise another piece of stage business, a new set of lines; the scene she had prepared wouldn't do. Which was the more embarrassing for her as I was there, looking on — a very cool spectator, as she knew; not in the

least a Maggie Spindell fan. She hesitated a second near the door, hoping Chawdron would look round; but he kept his eyes resolutely shut and his face averted. He'd evidently decided to play the moribund part for all it was worth. So, after one rather nervous glance at me, she limped across the room to the sofa. 'uncle Benny!' He gave a great start, as though he hadn't known she was there. 'Is that you, Fairy?' This was *pianissimo, con espressione.* Then, *molto agitato* from the Fairy; 'What is it, Nunky Benny? What is it? Oh, tell me.' She was close enough now to lay a hand on his shoulder. 'Tell me.' He turned his face towards her — the tenderly transfigured burglar. His heart overflowed— 'Fairy!' — a slop of hog-wash. 'But what's the matter, Nunky Benny?' 'Nothing, Fairy.' The tone implied that it was a heroic under-statement in the manner of Sir Philip Sidney. 'Only my foot'

'Your foot!' The Fairy registered such astonishment that we both fairly jumped. 'Something wrong with your foot?'

'Yes, why not?' Chawdron was rather annoyed; he wasn't getting the kind of sympathy he'd looked forward to. She turned to me. 'But when did it happen, Mr Tilney?' I was breezy. 'A nasty boil,' I explained. 'Walking round the course did it no good. It had to be lanced on Sunday." At about halfpast eleven on Sunday morning?'

'Yes, I suppose it was about halfpast eleven,' I said, thinking the question was an odd one. 'It was just halfpast eleven when *this* happened,' she said dramatically, pointing to her slippered foot. 'What's "this"?' asked Chawdron crossly. He was thoroughly annoyed at being swindled out of sympathy. I took pity on the Fairy; things seemed to be going so badly for her. I could see that she had prepared a coup and that it hadn't come off. 'Miss Spindell also seems to have hurt her foot,' I explained. 'You didn't see how she limped.' 'How did you hurt it?' asked Chawdron. He was still very grumpy. 'I was sitting quietly in the library, working at the catalogue,' she began: and I guessed, by the way the phrases came rolling out, that she was at last being able to make use of the material she had prepared, 'when suddenly, almost exactly at halfpast eleven (I remember looking at the clock), I felt a terrible pain in my foot. As though some

one were driving a sharp, sharp knife into it. It was so intense that I nearly fainted.' She paused for a moment, expecting appropriate comment. But Chawdron wouldn't make it. So I put in a polite 'Dear me, most extraordinary!' with which she had to be content. 'When I got up,' she continued, 'I could hardly stand, my foot hurt me so; and I've been limping ever since. And the most extraordinary thing is that there's a red mark on my foot, like a scar.' Another expectant pause. But still no word from Chawdron. He sat there with his mouth tight shut, and the lines that divided his cheeks from that wide simian upper lip of his were as though engraved in stone. The Fairy looked at him and saw that he had taken hopelessly the wrong line. Was it too late to remedy the mistake? She put the new plan of campaign into immediate execution. 'But you poor Nunky Benny!' she began, in the sort of tone in which you'd talk to a sick dog. 'How selfish of me to talk about my ailments, when you're lying there with your poor foot bandaged up!' The dog began to wag his tail at once. The beatific look returned to his face. He took her hand. I couldn't stand it. T think I'd better be going,' I said; and I went."

"But the foot?" I asked. "The stabbing pain at exactly halfpast eleven?"

"You may well ask. As Chawdron himself remarked, when next I saw him, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'" Tilney laughed. "The Fairy had triumphed. After he'd had his dose of mother love and Christian charity and kittenish sympathy, he'd been ready, I suppose, to listen to *her* story. The stabbing pain at eleven-thirty, the red scar. Strange, mysterious, unaccountable. He discussed it all with me, very gravely and judiciously. We talked of spiritualism and telepathy. We distinguished carefully between the miraculous and the super-normal. 'As you know,' he told me, 'I've been a good Presbyterian all my life, and as such have been inclined to dismiss as mere fabrications all the stories of the Romish saints. I never believed in the story of St Francis's stigmata, for example. But now I accept it!' Solemn and tremendous pause. 'Now I *know* it's true.' I just bowed my head in silence. But the next time I saw M'Crae, the chauffeur, I asked a few questions. Yes, he *had* seen Miss Spindell that day he drove the Bugatti up to London and came

back with the Rolls. He'd gone into the secretaries' office to see if there were any letters to take down for Mr Chawdron, and Miss Spindell had run into him as he came out. She'd asked him what he was doing in London and he hadn't been able to think of anything to answer, in spite of Mr Chawdron's orders, except the truth. It had been on his conscience ever since; he hoped it hadn't done any harm. 'On the contrary,' I assured him, and that I certainly wouldn't tell Mr Chawdron. Which I never did. I thought... But good heavens!" he interrupted himself; "what's this?" It was Hawtrey, who had come in to lay the table for lunch. She ignored us, actively. It was not only as though we didn't exist; it was as though we also had no right to exist. Tilney took out his watch. "Twenty past one. God almighty! Do you mean to say I've been talking here the whole morning since breakfast?"

"So it appears," I answered.

He groaned. "You see," he said, "you see what it is to have a gift of the gab. A whole precious morning utterly wasted."

"Not for me," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps not. But then for you the story was new and curious. Whereas for me it's known, it's stale."

"But for Shakespeare so was the story of Othello, even before he started to write it."

"Yes, but he *wrote*, he didn't talk. There was something to show for the time he'd spent. His Othello didn't just disappear into thin air, like my poor Chawdron." He sighed and was silent. Stone-faced and grim, Hawtrey went rustling starchily round the table; there was a clinking of steel and silver as she laid the places. I waited till she had left the room before I spoke again. When one's servants are more respectable than one is oneself (and nowadays they generally are), one cannot be too careful.

"And how did it end?" I asked.

"How did it end?" he repeated in a voice that had suddenly gone flat and dull; he was bored with his story, wanted to think of something else. "It ended, so far

as I was concerned, with my finishing the *Autobiography* and getting tired of its subject. I gradually faded out of Chawdron's existence. Like the Cheshire Cat."

"And the Fairy?"

"Faded out of life about a year after the Affair of the Stigmata. She retired to her mystic death-bed once too often. Her pretending came true at last; it was always the risk with her. She really did die."

The door opened; Hawtrey re-entered the room, carrying a dish.

"And Chawdron, I suppose, was inconsolable?" Inconsolability is, happily, a respectable subject.

Tilney nodded. "Took to spiritualism, of course. Nemesis again."

Hawtrey raised the lid of the dish; a smell of fried soles escaped into the air. "Luncheon is served," she said, with what seemed to me an ill-concealed contempt and disapproval.

"Luncheon is served," Tilney echoes, moving towards his place. He sat down and opened his napkin. "One meal after another, punctuality, day after day, day after day. Such a life. Which would be tolerable enough if something ever got done between meals. But in my case nothing does. Meal after meal, and between meals a vacuum, a kind of..." Hawtrey, who had been offering him the *sauce tartare* for the past several seconds, here gave him the discreetest nudge. Tilney turned his head. "Ah, thank you," he said, and helped himself.

The Rest Cure

SHE WAS A tiny woman, dark-haired and with grey-blue eyes, very large and arresting in a small pale face. A little girl's face, with small, delicate features, but worn — prematurely; for Mrs Tarwin was only twenty-eight; and the big, wide-open eyes were restless and unquietly bright. "Moira's got nerves," her husband would explain when people inquired why she wasn't with him. Nerves that couldn't stand the strain of London or New York. She had to take things quietly in Florence. A sort of rest cure. "Poor darling!" he would add in a voice that had suddenly become furry with sentiment; and he would illuminate his ordinarily rather blankly intelligent face with one of those lightning smiles of his — so wistful and tender and charming. Almost too charming, one felt uncomfortably. He turned on the charm and the wistfulness like electricity. Click! his face was briefly illumined. And then, click! the light went out again and he was once more the blankly intelligent research student. Cancer was his subject.

Poor Moira! Those nerves of her! She was full of caprices and obsessions. For example, when she leased the villa on the slopes of Bello Sguardo, she wanted to be allowed to cut down the cypresses at the end of the garden. "So terribly like a cemetery," she kept repeating to old Signori Bargioni. Old Bargioni was charming, but firm. He had no intention of sacrificing his cypresses. They gave the finishing touch of perfection to the loveliest view in all Florence; from the best bedroom window you saw the dome and Giotto's tower framed between their dark columns. Inexhaustibly loquacious, he tried to persuade her that cypresses weren't really at all funereal. For the Etruscans, on the contrary (he invented this little piece of archaeology on the spur of the moment), the cypress was a symbol of joy; the feasts of the vernal equinox concluded with dances round the sacred tree. Boecklin, it was true, had planted

cypresses on his Island of the Dead. But then Boecklin, after all... And if she really found the trees depressing, she could plant nasturtiums to climb up them. Or roses. Roses, which the Greeks...

"All right, all right," said Moira Tarwin hastily. "Let's leave the cypresses."

That voice, that endless flow of culture and foreign English! Old Bargioni was really terrible. She would have screamed if she had had to listen a moment longer. She yielded in mere self-defence.

"*E la Tanvinni?*" questioned Signora Bargioni when her husband came home.

He shrugged his shoulders. "*Una domina piuttosto sciocca*," was his verdict.

Rather silly. Old Bargioni was not the only man who had thought so. But he was one of the not so many who regarded her silliness as a fault. Most of the men who knew her were charmed by it; they adored while they smiled. In conjunction with that tiny stature, those eyes, that delicate childish face, her silliness inspired avuncular devotions and protective loves. She had a faculty for making men feel, by contrast, agreeably large, superior and intelligent. And as luck, or perhaps as ill luck, would have it, Moira had passed her life among men who were really intelligent and what is called superior. Old Sir Watney Croker, her grandfather, with whom she had lived ever since she was five (for her father and mother had both died young), was one of the most eminent physicians of his day. His early monograph on duodenal ulcers remains even now the classical work on the subject. Between one duodenal ulcer and another Sir Watney found leisure to adore and indulge and spoil his little granddaughter. Along with fly-fishing and metaphysics she was his hobby. Time passed; Moira grew up, chronologically; but Sir Watney went on treating her as a spoilt child, went on being enchanted by her birdy chirrupings and ingenuousness and impertinent *enfant-terrible-isms.* He encouraged, he almost compelled her to preserve her childishness. Keeping her a baby in spite of her age amused him. He loved her babyish and could only love her so. All those duodenal ulcers — perhaps they had done something to his sensibility, warped it a little, kept it somehow stunted and un-adult, like Moira herself. In the depths of his unspecialized, unprofessional being Sir Watney was a bit of a baby himself. Too much

preoccupation with the duodenum had prevented this neglected instinctive part of him from fully growing up. Like gravitates to like; old baby Watney loved the baby in Moira and wanted to keep the young woman permanently childish. Most of his friends shared Sir Watney's tastes. Doctors, judges, professors, civil servants — every member of Sir Watney's circle was professionally eminent, a veteran specialist. To be asked to one of his dinner parties was a privilege. On these august occasions Moira had always, from the age of seventeen, been present, the only woman at the table. Not really a woman, Sir Watney explained; a child. The veteran specialists were all her indulgent uncles. The more childish she was, the better they liked her. Moira gave them pet names. Professor Stagg, for example, the neo-Hegelian, was Uncle Bonzo; Mr Justice Gidley was Giddy Goat. And so on. When they teased, she answered back impertinently. How they laughed! When they started to discuss the Absolute or Britain's Industrial Future, she interjected some deliciously irrelevant remark that made them laugh even more heartily. Exquisite! And the next day the story would be told to colleagues in the law-courts or the hospital, to cronies at the Athenæum. In learned and professional circles Moira enjoyed a real celebrity. In the end she had ceased not only to be a woman; she had almost ceased to be a child. She was hardly more than their mascot.

At half-past nine she left the dining-room, and the talk would come back to ulcers and Reality and Emergent Evolution.

"One would like to keep her as a pet," John Tarwin had said as the door closed behind her on that first occasion he dined at Sir Watney's.

Professor Broadwater agreed. There was a little silence. It was Tarwin who broke it.

"What's your feeling," he asked, leaning forward with that expression of blank intelligence on his eager, sharp-featured face, "what's *your* feeling about the validity of experiments with artificially grafted tumours as opposed to natural tumours?"

Tarwin was only thirty-three and looked even younger among Sir Watney's veterans. He had already done good work, Sir Watney explained to his assembled guests before the young man's arrival, and might be expected to do much more. An interesting fellow too. Had been all over the place — tropical Africa, India, North and South America. Well off. Not tied to an academic job to earn his living. Had worked here in London, in Germany, at the Rockefeller Institute in New York, in Japan. Enviable opportunities. A great deal to be said for a private income. "Ah, here you are, Tarwin. Good evening. No, not at all late. This is Mr Justice Gidley, Professor Broadwater, Professor Stagg and — bless me! I hadn't noticed you, Moira; you're really too ultra microscopic — my granddaughter." Tarwin smiled down at her. She was really ravishing.

Well, now they had been married five years, Moira was thinking, as she powdered her face in front of the looking-glass. Tonino was coming to tea; she had been changing her frock. Through the window behind the mirror one looked down between the cypress trees onto Florence — a jumble of brown roofs, and above them, in the midst, the marble tower and the huge, up-leaping, airy dome. Five years. It was John's photograph in the leather travelling-frame that made her think of their marriage. Why did she keep it there on the dressing-table? Force of habit, she supposed. It wasn't as though the photograph reminded her of days that had been particularly happy. On the contrary. There was something, she now felt, slightly dishonest about keeping it there. Pretending to love him when she didn't.... She looked at it again. The profile was sharp and eager. The keen young research student intently focused on a tumour. She really liked him better as a research student than when he was having a soul, or being a poet or a lover. It seemed a dreadful thing to say — but there it was: the research student was of better quality than the human being.

She had always known it — or, rather, not known, felt it. The human being had always made her rather uncomfortable. The more human, the more uncomfortable. She oughtn't ever to have married him, of course. But he asked so persistently; and then he had so much vitality; everybody spoke so well of him; she rather liked his looks; and he seemed to lead such a jolly life, travelling

about the world; and she was tired of being a mascot for her grandfather's veterans. There were any number of such little reasons. Added together, she had fancied they would be the equivalent of the one big, cogent reason. But they weren't; she had made a mistake.

Yes, the more human, the more uncomfortable. The disturbing way he turned on the beautiful illumination of his smile! Turned it on suddenly, only to switch it off again with as little warning when something really serious, like cancer or philosophy, had to be discussed. And then his voice, when he was talking about Nature, or Love, or God, or something of that sort — furry with feeling! The quite unnecessarily moved and tremulous way he said Good-bye! "Like a Landseer dog," she told him once, before they were married, laughing and giving a ludicrous imitation of his too heart-felt "Good-bye, Moira." The mockery hurt him. John prided himself as much on his soul and his feelings as upon his intellect; as much on his appreciation of Nature and his poetical love-longings as upon his knowledge of tumours. Goethe was his favourite literary and historical character. Poet and man of science, deep thinker and ardent lover, artist in thought and in life — John saw himself in the rich part He made her read *Faust* and *Wilhelm Master*. Moira did her best to feign the enthusiasm she did not feel. Privately she thought Goethe a humbug.

"I oughtn't to have married him," she said to her image in the glass, and shook her head.

John was the pet-fancier as well as the loving educator. There were times when Moira's childishnesses delighted him as much as they had delighted Sir Watney and his veterans, when he laughed at every naïveté or impertinence she uttered, as though it were a piece of the most exquisite wit; and not only laughed, but drew public attention to it, led her on into fresh infantilities and repeated the stories of her exploits to any one who was prepared to listen to them. He was less enthusiastic, however, when Moira had been childish at his expense, when her silliness had in any way compromised *his* dignity or interests. On these occasions he lost his temper, called her a fool, told her she ought to be ashamed of herself. After which, controlling himself, he would become grave,

paternal, pedagogic. Moira would be made to feel, miserably, that she wasn't worthy of him. And finally he switched on the smile and made it all up with caresses that left her like a stone.

"And to think," she reflected, putting away her powder-puff, "to think of my spending all that time and energy trying to keep up with him."

All those scientific papers she had read, those outlines of medicine and physiology, those text-books of something or other (she couldn't even remember the name of the science), to say nothing of all that dreary stuff by Goethe! And then all the going out when she had a headache or was tired! All the meeting of people who bored her, but who were really, according to John, so interesting and important! All the travelling, the terribly strenuous sight-seeing, the calling on distinguished foreigners and their generally less distinguished wives! It was difficult for her to keep up even physically — her legs were so short and John was always in such a hurry. Mentally, in spite of all her efforts, she was always a hundred miles behind.

"Awful!" she said aloud.

Her whole marriage had really been awful. From that awful honeymoon at Capri, when he had made her walk too far, too fast, uphill, only to read her extracts from Wordsworth when they reached the *Anssichtspunkt*', when he had talked to her about love and made it, much too frequently, and told her the Latin names of the plants and butterflies — from that awful honeymoon to the time when, four months ago, her nerves had gone all to pieces and the doctor had said that she must take things quietly, apart from John. Awful! The life had nearly killed her. And it wasn't (she had come at last to realize), it wasn't really a life at all. It was just a galvanic activity, like the twitching of a dead frog's leg when you touch the nerve with an electrified wire. Not life, just galvanized death.

She remembered the last of their quarrels, just before the doctor had told her to go away. John had been sitting at her feet, with his head against her knee. And his head was beginning to go bald! She could hardly bear to look at those long hairs plastered across the scalp. And became he was tired with all that microscope work, tired and at the same time (not having made love to her, thank

goodness! for more than a fortnight) amorous, as she could tell by the look in his eyes, he was being very sentimental and talking in his furriest voice about Love and Beauty and the necessity for being like Goethe. Talking till she felt like screaming aloud. And at last she could bear it no longer.

"For goodness sake, John," she said in a voice that was on the shrill verge of being out of control, "be quiet!"

"What *is* the matter?" He looked up at her questioningly, pained.

"Talking like that!" She was indignant. "But you've never loved anybody, outside yourself. Nor felt the beauty of anything. Any more than that old humbug Goethe. You know what you *ought* to feel when there's a woman about, or a landscape; you know what the best people feel. And you deliberately set yourself to feel the same, out of your head."

John was wounded to the quick of his vanity. "How can you say that?"

"Because it's true, it's true. You only live out of your head. And it's a bald head too," she added, and began to laugh, uncontrollably.

What a scene there had been! She went on laughing all the time he raged at her; she couldn't stop.

"You're hysterical," he said at last; and then he calmed down. The poor child was ill. With an effort he switched on the expression of paternal tenderness and went to fetch the sal volatile.

One last dab at her lips, and there! she was ready. She went downstairs to the drawingroom, to find that Tonino had already arrived — he was always early — and was waiting. He rose as she entered, bowed over her outstretched hand and kissed it. Moira was always charmed by his florid, rather excessive Southern good manners. John was always too busy being the keen research student or the furry-voiced poet to have good manners. He didn't think politeness particularly important. It was the same with clothes. He was chronically ill-dressed. Tonino, on the other hand, was a model of dapper elegance. That pale grey suit, that lavender-coloured tie, those piebald shoes of white kid and patent leather — marvellous!

One of the pleasures or dangers of foreign travel is that you lose class-consciousness. At home you can never, with the best will in the world, forget it. Habit has rendered your own people as immediately legible as your own language. A word, a gesture are sufficient; your man is placed. But in foreign parts your fellows are unreadable. The less obvious products of upbringing — all the subtler refinements, the finer shades of vulgarity — escape your notice. The accent, the inflexion of voice, the vocabulary, the gestures tell you nothing. Between the duke and the insurance clerk, the profiteer and the country gentleman, your inexperienced eye and ear detect no difference. For Moira, Tonino seemed the characteristic flower of Italian gentility. She knew, of course, that he wasn't well off; but then, plenty of the nicest people are poor. She saw in him the equivalent of one of those younger sons of impoverished English squires — the sort of young man who advertises for work in the Agony Column of *The Times.* "Public School education, sporting tastes; would accept any well-paid position of trust and confidence." She would have been pained, indignant, and surprised to hear old Bargioni describing him, after their first meeting, as "*il tipo del parrucchiere napoletano*" — the typical Neapolitan barber. Signora Bargioni shook her head over the approaching scandal and was secretly delighted.

As a matter of actual fact Tonino was not a barber. He was the son of a capitalist — on a rather small scale, no doubt; but still a genuine capitalist. Vasari senior owned a restaurant at Pozzuoli and was ambitious to start a hotel. Tonino had been sent to study the tourist industry with a family friend who was the manager of one of the best establishments in Florence. When he had learnt all the secrets, he was to return to Pozzuoli and be the managing director of the rejuvenated boarding-house which his father was modestly proposing to rechristen the Grand Hotel Ritz-Carlton. Meanwhile, he was an underworked lounger in Florence. He had made Mrs Tarwin's acquaintance romantically, on the highway. Driving, as was her custom, alone, Moira had run over a nail. A puncture. Nothing is easier than changing wheels — nothing, that is to say, if you have sufficient muscular strength to undo the nuts which hold the punctured wheel to its axle. Moira had not. When Tonino came upon her, ten minutes after

the mishap, she was sitting on the running-board of the car, flushed and dishevelled with her efforts, and in tears.

"*Una signora forestiera*." At the café that evening Tonino recounted his adventure with a certain rather fatuous self-satisfaction. In the small bourgeoisie in which he had been brought up, a Foreign Lady was an almost fabulous creature, a being of legendary wealth, eccentricity, independence. "*Inglese*," he specified. "*Giovane*," and "*bella, bellissima*." His auditors were incredulous; beauty, for some reason, is not common among the specimens of English womanhood seen in foreign parts. "*Ricca*," he added. That sounded less intrinsically improbable; foreign ladies were all rich, almost by definition. Juicily, and with unction, Tonino described the car she drove, the luxurious villa she inhabited.

Acquaintance had ripened quickly into friendship. This was the fourth or fifth time in a fortnight that he had come to the house.

"A few poor flowers," said the young man in a tone of soft, ingratiating apology; and he brought forward his left hand, which he had been hiding behind his back. It held a bouquet of white roses.

"But how kind of you!" she cried in her bad Italian. "How lovely!" John never brought flowers to any one; he regarded that sort of thing as rather nonsensical. She smiled at Tonino over the blossoms. "Thank you a thousand times."

Making a deprecating gesture, he returned her smile. His teeth flashed pearly and even. His large eyes were bright, dark, liquid, and rather expressionless, like a gazelle's. He was exceedingly good-looking. "White roses for the white rose," he said.

Moira laughed. The compliment was ridiculous; but it pleased her all the same.

Paying compliments was not the only thing Tonino could do. He knew how to be useful. When, a few days later, Moira decided to have the rather dingy hall and dining-room redistempered, he was invaluable. It was he who haggled with the decorator, he who made scenes when there were delays, he who interpreted

Moira's rather special notions about colours to the workmen, he who superintended their activities.

"If it hadn't been for you," said Moira gratefully, when the work was finished, "I'd have been hopelessly swindled and they wouldn't have done anything properly."

It was such a comfort, she reflected, having a man about the place who didn't always have something more important to do and think about; a man who could spend his time being useful and a help. Such a comfort! And such a change! When she was with John, it was she who had to do all the tiresome, practical things. John always had his work, and his work took precedence of everything, including her convenience. Tonino was just an ordinary man, with nothing in the least superhuman about either himself or his functions. It was a great relief.

Little by little Moira came to rely on him for everything. He made himself universally useful. The fuses blew out; it was Tonino who replaced them. The hornets nested in the drawingroom chimney; heroically Tonino stank them out with sulphur. But his speciality was domestic economy. Brought up in a restaurant, he knew everything there was to be known about food and drink and prices. When the meat was unsatisfactory, he went to the butcher and threw the tough beefsteak in his teeth, almost literally. He beat down the extortionate charges of the greengrocer. With a man at the fish market he made a friendly arrangement whereby Moira was to have the pick of the soles and the red mullet. He bought her wine for her, her oil — wholesale, in huge glass demijohns; and Moira, who since Sir Watney's death could have afforded to drink nothing cheaper than Pol Roger igx I and do her cooking in imported yak's butter, exulted with him in long domestic conversations over economies of a farthing a quart or a shilling or two on a hundredweight. For Tonino the price and the quality of victuals and drink were matters of gravest importance. To secure a flask of Chianti for five lire ninety instead of six lire was, in his eyes, a real victory; and the victory became a triumph if it could be proved that the Chianti was fully three years old and had an alcohol content of more than fourteen per cent. By nature Moira was neither greedy nor avaricious. Her upbringing had

confirmed her in her natural tendencies. She had the disinterestedness of those who have never known a shortage of cash; and her abstemious indifference to the pleasures of the table had never been tempered by the housewife's preoccupation with other people's appetites and digestions. Never; for Sir Watney had kept a professional housekeeper, and with John Tarwin, who anyhow hardly noticed what he ate, and thought that women ought to spend their time doing more important and intellectual things than presiding over kitchens, she had lived for the greater part of their married life in hotels or service flats, or else in furnished rooms and in a chronic state of picnic. Tonino revealed to her the world of markets and the kitchen. Still accustomed to thinking, with John, that ordinary domestic life wasn't good enough, she laughed at first at his earnest preoccupation with meat and halfpence. But after a little she began to be infected by his almost religious enthusiasm for housekeeping; she began to discover that meat and halfpence were interesting after all, that they were real and important — much more real and important, for example, than reading Goethe when one found him a bore and a humbug. Tenderly brooded over by the most competent of solicitors and brokers, the late Sir Watney's fortune was bringing in a steady five per cent, free of tax. But in Tonino's company Moira could forget her bank balance. Descending from the financial Sinai on which she had been lifted so high above the common earth, she discovered, with him, the preoccupations of poverty. They were curiously interesting and exciting.

"The prices they ask for fish in Florence!" said Tonino, after a silence, when he had exhausted the subject of white rosse. "When I think how little we pay for octopus at Naples! It's scandalous."

"Scandalous!" echoed Moira with an indignation as genuine as his own. They talked, interminably.

Next day the sky was no longer blue, but opaquely white. There was no sunshine, only a diffused glare that threw no shadows. The landscape lay utterly lifeless under the dead and fishy stare of heaven. It was very hot, there was no wind, the air was hardly breathable and as though woolly. Moira woke up with a headache, and her nerves seemed to have an uneasy life of their own, apart from

hers. Like caged birds they were, fluttering and starting and twittering at every alarm; and her aching, tired body was their aviary. Quite against her own wish and intention she found herself in a temper with the maid and saying the unkindest things. She had to give her a pair of stockings to make up for it. When she was dressed, she wanted to write some letters; but her fountain-pen made a stain on her fingers and she was so furious that she threw the beastly thing out of the window. It broke to pieces on the flagstones below. She had nothing to write with; it was too exasperating. She washed the ink off her hands and took out her embroidery frame. But her fingers were all thumbs. And then she pricked herself with the needle. Oh, so painfully! The tears came into her eyes; she began to cry. And having begun, she couldn't stop. Assunta came in five minutes later and found her sobbing. "But what is it, signora?" she asked, made most affectionately solicitous by the gift of the stockings. Moria shook her head. "Go away," she said brokenly. The girl was insistent. "Go away," Moira repeated. How could she explain what was the matter when the only thing that had happened was that she had pricked her finger? Nothing was the matter. And yet everything was the matter, everything.

The everything that was the matter resolved itself finally into the weather. Even in the best of health Moira had always been painfully conscious of the approach of thunder. Her jangled nerves were more than ordinarily sensitive. The tears and furies and despairs of this horrible day had a purely meteorological cause. But they were none the less violent and agonizing for that. The hours passed dismally. Thickened by huge black clouds, the twilight came on in a sultry and expectant silence, and it was prematurely night. The reflection of distant lightnings, flashing far away below the horizon, illuminated the eastern sky. The peaks and ridges of the Apennines stood out black against the momentary pale expanses of silvered vapour and disappeared again in silence; the attentive hush was still unbroken. With a kind of sinking apprehension — for she was terrified of storms — Moira sat at her window, watching the black hills leap out against the silver and die again, leap out and die. The flashes brightened; and then, for the first time, she heard the approaching thunder, far

off and faint like the whisper of the sea in a shell. Moira shuddered. The clock in the hall struck nine, and, as though the sound were a signal prearranged, a gust of wind suddenly shook the magnolia tree that stood at the crossing of the paths in the garden below. Its long stiff leaves rattled together like scales of horn. There was another flash. In the brief white glare she could see the two funereal cypresses writhing and tossing as though in the desperate agitation of pain. And then all at once the storm burst catastrophically, it seemed directly overhead. At the savage violence of that icy downpour Moira shrank back and shut the window. A streak of white fire zig-zagged fearfully just behind the cypresses. The immediate thunder was like the splitting and fall of a solid vault. Moira rushed away from the window and threw herself on the bed. She covered her face with her hands. Through the continuous roaring of the rain the thunder crashed and reverberated, crashed again and sent the fragments of sound rolling unevenly in all directions through the night. The whole house trembled. In the window-frames the shaken glasses rattled like the panes of an old omnibus rolling across the cobbles.

“Oh God, oh God,” Moira kept repeating. In the enormous tumult her voice was small and, as it were, naked, utterly abject.

“But it’s too stupid to be frightened.” She remembered John’s voice, his brightly encouraging, superior manner. “The chances are thousands to one against your being struck. And anyhow, hiding your head won’t prevent the lightning from...”

How she hated him for being so reasonable and right! “Oh God!” There was another. “God, God, God...

And then suddenly a terrible thing happened; the light went out. Through her closed eyelids she saw no longer the red of translucent blood, but utter blackness. Uncovering her face, she opened her eyes and anxiously looked round — on blackness again. She fumbled for the switch by her bed, found it, turned and turned; the darkness remained impenetrable.

“Assunta!” she called.

And all at once the square of the window was a suddenly uncovered picture of the garden, seen against a background of mauve-white sky and shining, downpouring rain.

“Assunta!” Her voice was drowned in a crash that seemed to have exploded in the very roof. “Assunta, Assunta!” In a panic she stumbled across the grave-dark room to the door. Another flash revealed the handle. She opened. “Assunta!”

Her voice was hollow above the black gulf of the stairs. The thunder exploded again above her. With a crash and a tinkle of broken glass one of the windows in her room burst open. A blast of cold wind lifted her hair. A flight of papers rose from her writing-table and whirled with crackling wings through the darkness. One touched her cheek like a living thing and was gone. She screamed aloud. The door slammed behind her. She ran down the stairs in terror, as though the fiend were at her heels. In the hall she met Assunta and the cook coming towards her, lighting matches as they came.

“Assunta, the lights!” She clutched the girl’s arm.

Only the thunder answered. When the noise subsided, Assunta explained that the fuses had all blown out and that there wasn’t a candle in the house. Not a single candle, and only one more box of matches.

“But then we shall be left in the dark,” said Moira hysterically.

Through the three blackly reflecting windows of the hall three separate pictures of the streaming garden revealed themselves and vanished. The old Venetian mirrors on the walls blinked for an instant into life, like dead eyes briefly opened.

“In the dark,” she repeated with an almost mad insistence.

“Aie!” cried Assunta, and dropped the match that had begun to burn her fingers. The thunder fell on them out of a darkness made denser and more hopeless by the loss of light.

When the telephone bell rang, Tonino was sitting in the managerial room of his hotel, playing cards with the proprietor’s two sons and another friend. “Some

one to speak to you, Signor Tonino," said the under-porter, looking in. "A lady." He grinned significantly.

Tonino put on a dignified air and left the room. When he returned a few minutes later, he held his hat on one hand and was buttoning up his rain-coat with the other.

"Sorry," he said. "I've got to go out."

"Go out?" exclaimed the others incredulously. Beyond the shuttered windows the storm roared like a cataract and savagely exploded. "But where?" they asked. "Why? Are you mad?"

Tonino shrugged his shoulders, as though it were nothing to go out into a tornado, as though he were used to it. The *signora forestiera*, he explained, hating them for their inquisitiveness; the Tarwin — she had asked him to go up to Bello Sguardo at once. The fuses... not a candle in the house... utterly in the dark... very agitated... nerves....

"But on a night like this.... But you're not the electrician." The two so ns of the proprietor spoke in chorus. They felt, indignantly, that Tonino was letting himself be exploited.

But the third young man leaned back in his chair and laughed. "Fini, *caro, vai*," he said, and then, shaking his finger at Tonino knowingly, "*Ma fatti pagare per il tuo lavoro*," he added. "Get yourself paid for your trouble." Berto was notoriously the lady-killer, the tried specialist in amorous strategy, the acknowledged expert. "Take the opportunity." The others joined in his rather unpleasant laughter. Tonino also grinned and nodded.

The taxi rushed splashing through the wet deserted streets like a travelling fountain. Tonino sat in the darkness of the cab ruminating Berto's advice. She was pretty, certainly. But somehow — why was it? — it had hardly occurred to him to think of her as a possible mistress. He had been politely gallant with her — on principle almost, and by force of habit — but without really wanting to succeed; and when she had shown herself unresponsive, he hadn't cared. But perhaps he ought to have cared, perhaps he ought to have tried harder. In Berto's world it was a sporting duty to do one's best to seduce every woman one could.

The most admirable man was the man with the greatest number of women to his credit. Really lovely, Tonino went on to himself, trying to work up an enthusiasm for the sport. It would be a triumph to be proud of. The more so as she was a foreigner. And very rich. He thought with inward satisfaction of that big car, of the house, the servants, the silver. "*Certo*," he said to himself complacently, "mi vu*ol bene.*" She lilted him; there was no doubt of it. Meditatively he stroked his smooth face; the muscles stirred a little under his fingers. He was smiling to himself in the darkness; naively, an ingenuous prostitute's smile. "*Moira*," he said aloud. "*Moira. Strano, quel name. Piuttosto ridicolo.*"

It was Moira who opened the door for him. She had been standing at the window, looking out, waiting and waiting.

"Tonino!" She held out both her hands to him; she had never felt so glad to see any one.

The sky went momentarily whitish-mauve behind him as he stood there in the open doorway. The skirts of his rain-coat fluttered in the wind; a wet gust blew past him, chilling her face. The sky went black again. He slammed the door behind him. They were in utter darkness.

"Tonino, it was too sweet of you to have come. Really too..."

The thunder that interrupted her was like the end of the world. Moira shuddered. "Oh God!" she whimpered; and then suddenly she was pressing her face against his waistcoat and crying, and Tonino was holding her and stroking her hair. The next flash showed him the position of the sofa. In the ensuing darkness he carried her across the room, sat down and began to kiss her tear-wet face. She lay quite still in his arms, relaxed, like a frightened child that has at last found comfort. Tonino held her, kissing her softly again and again. "Ti *amo, Moira,*" he whispered. And it was true. Holding her, touching her in the dark, he did love her. "Ti *amo.*" How profoundly! "Ti *voglio un bene immenso,*" he went on, with a passion, a deep warm tenderness born almost suddenly of darkness and soft blind contact. Heavy and warm with life, she lay pressed against him. Her body curved and was solid under his hands, her cheeks were rounded and

cool, her eyelids round and tremulous and tear-wet, her mouth so soft, so soft under his touching lips. “Ti *amo*, *ti amo.*” He was breathless with love, and it was as though there were a hollowness at the centre of his being, a void of desiring tenderness that longed to be filled, that could only be filled by her, an emptiness that drew her towards him, into him, that drank her as an empty vessel eagerly drinks the water. Still, with closed eyes, quite still she lay there in his arms, suffering herself to be drunk up by his tenderness, to be drawn into the yearning vacancy of his heart, happy in being passive, in yielding herself to his soft insistent passion.

“*Fatli pagan, fatti pagare*.” The memory of Berto’s words transformed him suddenly from a lover into an amorous sportsman with a reputation to keep up and records to break. “*Fatti pagare.*” He risked a more intimate caress. But Moira winced so shudderingly at the touch that he desisted, ashamed of himself.

“*Ebbene,*” asked Berto when, an hour later, he returned, “did you mend the fuses?”

“Yes, I mended the fuses.”

“And did you get yourself paid?”

Tonino smiled an amorous sportsman’s smile. “A little on account,” he answered, and at once disliked himself for having spoken the words, disliked the others for laughing at them. Why did he go out of his way to spoil something which had been so beautiful? Pretexting a headache, he went upstairs to his bedroom. The storm had passed on, the moon was shining now out of a clear sky. He opened the window and looked out. A river of ink and quick-silver, the Arno flowed whispering past. In the street below the puddles shone like living eyes. The ghost of Caruso was singing from a gramophone, far away on the other side of the water. “*Stretti, stretti, nell’ estasi d’amor....*” Tonino was profoundly moved.

The sky was blue next morning, the sunlight glittered on the shiny leaves of the magnolia tree, the air was demurely windless. Sitting at her dressing-table, Moira looked out and wondered incredulously if such things as storms were possible. But the plants were broken and prostrate in their beds; the paths were

strewn with scattered leaves and petals. In spite of the soft air and the sunlight, last night's horrors had been more than a bad dream. Moira sighed and began to brush her hair. Set in its leather frame, John Tarwin's profile confronted her, brightly focused on imaginary tumours. Her eyes fixed on it, Moira went on mechanically brushing her hair. Then, suddenly, interrupting the rhythm of her movements, she got up, took the leather frame and, walking across the room, threw it up, out of sight, on to the top of the high wardrobe. There! She returned to her seat and, filled with a kind of frightened elation, went on with her interrupted brushing.

When she was dressed, she drove down to the town and spent an hour at Settepassi's, the jewellers. When she left, she was bowed out on to the Lungamo like a princess.

"No, don't smoke those," she said to Tonino that afternoon as he reached for a cigarette in the silver box that stood on the drawingroom mantelpiece. "I've got a few of those Egyptian ones you like. Got them specially for you." And, smiling, she handed him a little parcel.

Tonino thanked her profusely — too profusely, as was his custom. But when he had stripped away the paper and saw the polished gold of a large cigarette-case, he could only look at her in an embarrassed and inquiring amazement.

"Don't you think it's rather pretty?" she asked.

"Marvellous! But is it..." He hesitated. "Is it for me?"

Moira laughed with pleasure at his embarrassment. She had never seen him embarrassed before. He was always the self-possessed young man of the world, secure and impregnable within his armour of Southern good manners. She admired that elegant carapace. But it amused her for once to take him without it, to see him at a loss, blushing and stammering like a little boy. It amused and it pleased her; she liked him all the more for being the little boy as well as the polished and socially competent young man.

"For me?" she mimicked, laughing. "Do you like it?" Her tone changed; she became grave. "I wanted you to have something to remind you of last night." Tonino took her hands and silently kissed them. She had received him with such

offhanded gaiety, so nonchalantly, as though nothing had happened, that the tender references to last night's happenings (so carefully prepared as he walked up the hill) had remained unspoken. He had been afraid of saying the wrong thing and offending her. But now the spell was broken — and by Moira herself. "One oughtn't to forget one's good actions," Moira went on, abandoning him her hands. "Each time you take a cigarette out of this case, will you remember how kind and good you were to a silly ridiculous little fool?"

Tonino had had time to recover his manners. "I shall remember the most adorable, the most beautiful..." Still holding her hands, he looked at her for a moment in silence, eloquently. Moira smiled back at him. "Moira!" And she was in his arms. She shut her eyes and was passive in the strong circle of his arms, soft and passive against his firm body. "I love you, Moira." The breath of his whispering was warm on her cheek. "Ti *amo*." And suddenly his lips were on hers again, violently, impatiently kissing. Between the kisses his whispered words came passionate to her ears. "*Ti amopazzamente... piccina... tesoro... amort... cuore...*" Uttered in Italian, his love seemed somehow specially strong and deep. Things described in a strange language themselves take on a certain strangeness. "*Amami, Moira, amami. Mi am un po?*" He was insistent. "A little, Moira — do you love me a little?"

She opened her eyes and looked at him. Then, with a quick movement, she took his face between her two hands, drew it down and kissed him on the mouth. "Yes," she whispered, "I love you." And then, gently, she pushed him away. Tonino wanted to kiss her again. But Moira shook her head and slipped away from him. "No, no," she said with a kind of peremptory entreaty. "Don't spoil it all now."

The days passed, hot and golden. Summer approached. The nightingales sang unseen in the cool of the evening.

"*L'usigmiolo,*" Moira whispered softly to herself as she listened to the singing. "*L'usignuolo*." Even the nightingales were subtly better in Italian. The sun had set. They were sitting in the little summer-house at the end of the garden, looking out over the darkening landscape. The white-walled farms and

villas on the slope below stood out almost startlingly clear against the twilight of the olive trees, as though charged with some strange and novel significance. Moira sighed. “I’m so happy,” she said; Tonino took her hand. “Ridiculously happy.” For, after all, she was thinking, it *was* rather ridiculous to be so happy for no valid reason. John Tarwin had taught her to imagine that one could only be happy when one was doing something “interesting” (as he put it), or associating with people who were “worth while.” Tonino was nobody in particular, thank goodness! And going for picnics wasn’t exactly “interesting” in John’s sense of the word; nor was talking about the respective merits of different brands of car; nor teaching him to drive; nor going shopping; nor discussing the problem of new curtains for the drawingroom; nor, for that matter, sitting in the summer-house and saying nothing. In spite of which, or because of which, she was happy with an unprecedented happiness. “Ridiculously happy,” she repeated.

Tonino kissed her hand. “So am I,” he said. And he was not merely being polite. In his own way he was genuinely happy with her. People envied him sitting in that magnificent yellow car at her side. She was so pretty and elegant, so foreign too; he was proud to be seen about with her. And then the cigarette-case, the gold-mounted, agate-handled cane she had given him for his birthday.... Besides, he was really very fond of her, really, in an obscure way, in love with her. It was not for nothing that he had held and caressed her in the darkness of that night of thunder. Something of that deep and passionate tenderness, born suddenly of the night and their warm sightless contact, still remained in him — still remained even after the physical longings she then inspired had been vicariously satisfied. (And under Berto’s knowing guidance they *had* been satisfied, frequently.) If it hadn’t been for Berto’s satirical comments on the still platonic nature of his attachment, he would have been perfectly content.

“*Alle donne,*” Berto sententiously generalized, “*place sempre la violenza.* They long to be raped. You don’t know how to make love, my poor boy.” And he would hold up his own achievements as examples to be followed. For Berto, love was a kind of salacious vengeance on women for the crime of their purity.

Spurred on by his friend's mockeries, Tonino made another attempt to exact full payment for his mending of the fuses on the night of the storm. But his face was so soundly slapped, and the tone in which Moira threatened never to see him again unless he behaved himself was so convincingly stern, that he did not renew his attack. He contented himself with looking sad and complaining of her cruelty. But in spite of his occasionally long face, he was happy with her. Happy like a fireside cat. The car, the house, her elegant foreign prettiness, the marvellous presents she gave him, kept him happily purring.

The days passed and the weeks. Moira would have liked life to flow on like this forever, a gay bright stream with occasional reaches of calm sentimentality but never dangerously deep or turbulent, without fall or whirl or rapid. She wanted her existence to remain for ever what it was at this moment — a kind of game with a pleasant and emotionally exciting companion, a playing at living and loving. If only this happy play-time could last for ever!

It was John Tarwin who decreed that it should not. "ATTENDING CYTO LOGICAL CONGRESS ROME WILL STOP FEW DAYS ON WAY ARRIVING THURSDAY LOVE JOHN." That was the text of the telegram Moira found awaiting her on her return to the villa one evening. She read it and felt suddenly depressed and apprehensive. Why did he want to come? He would spoil everything. The bright evening went dead before her eyes; the happiness with which she had been brimming when she returned with Tonino from that marvellous drive among the Apennines was drained out of her. Her gloom retrospectively darkened the blue and golden beauty of the mountains, put out the bright flowers, dimmed the day's laughter and talk. "Why does he want to come?" Miserably and resentfully, she wondered. "And what's going to happen, what's going to happen?" She felt cold and rather breathless and almost sick with the questioning apprehension.

John's face, when he saw her standing there at the station, lit up instantaneously with all its hundred-candle-power tenderness and charm.

"My darling!" His voice was furry and tremulous. He leaned towards her; stiffening, Moira suffered herself to be kissed. His nails, she noticed disgustedly,

were dirty.

The prospect of a meal alone with John had appalled her; she had asked Tonino to dinner. Besides, she wanted John to meet him. To have kept Tonino's existence a secret from John would have been to admit that there was something wrong in her relations with him. And there wasn't. She wanted John to meet him just like that, naturally, as a matter of course. Whether he'd like Tonino when he'd met him was another question. Moira had her doubts. They were justified by the event. John had begun by protesting when he heard that she had invited a guest. Their first evening — how could she? The voice trembled — fur in a breeze. She had to listen to outpourings of sentiment. But finally, when dinner-time arrived, he switched off the pathos and became once more the research student. Brightly inquiring, blankly intelligent, John cross-questioned his guest about all the interesting and important things that were happening in Italy. What was the real political situation? How did the new educational system work? What did people think of the reformed penal code? On all these matters Tonino was, of course, far less well-informed than his interrogator. The Italy he knew was the Italy of his friends and his family, of shops and cafés and girls and the daily fight for money. All that historical, impersonal Italy, of which John so intelligently read in the high-class reviews, was utterly unknown to him. His answers to John's questions were childishly silly. Moira sat listening, dumb with misery.

"What *do* you find in that fellow?" her husband asked, when Tonino had taken his leave. "He struck me as quite particularly uninteresting."

Moira did not answer. There was a silence. John suddenly switched on his tenderly, protectively, yearningly marital smile. "Time to go to bed, my sweetheart," he said. Moira looked up at him and saw in his eyes that expression she knew so well and dreaded. "My sweetheart," he repeated, and the Landseer dog was also amorous. He put his arms round her and bent to kiss her face. Moira shuddered — but helplessly, dumbly, not knowing how to escape. He led her away.

When John had left her, she lay awake far into the night, remembering his ardours and his sentimentalities with a horror that the passage of time seemed actually to increase. Sleep came at last to deliver her.

Being an archaeologist, old Signor Bargioni was decidedly “interesting.”

“But he bores me to death,” said Moira when, next day, her husband suggested that they should go and see him. “That voice! And the way he goes on and on! And that beard! And his wife!”

John flushed with anger. “Don’t be childish,” he snapped out, forgetting how much he enjoyed her childishness when it didn’t interfere with his amusements or his business. “After all,” he insisted, “there’s probably no man living who knows more about Tuscany in the Dark Ages.”

Nevertheless, in spite of darkest Tuscany, John had to pay his call without her. He spent a most improving hour, chatting about Romanesque architecture and the Lombard kings. But just before he left, the conversation somehow took another turn; casually, as though by chance, Tonino’s name was mentioned. It was the signora who had insisted that it should be mentioned. Ignorance, her husband protested, is bliss. But Signora Bargioni loved scandal, and being middle-aged, ugly, envious, and malicious, was full of righteous indignation against the young wife and of hypocritical sympathy for the possibly injured husband. Poor Tarwin, she insisted — he ought to be warned. And so, tactfully, without seeming to say anything in particular, the old man dropped his hints.

Walking back to Bello Sguardo, John was uneasily pensive. It was not that he imagined that Moira had been, or was likely to prove, unfaithful. Such things really didn’t happen to oneself. Moira obviously liked the uninteresting young man; but, after all and in spite of her childishness, Moira was a civilized human being, She had been too well brought up to do anything stupid. Besides, he reflected, remembering the previous evening, remembering all the years of their marriage, she had no temperament; she didn’t know what passion was, she was utterly without sensuality. Her native childishness would reinforce her principles. Infants may be relied on to be pure; but not (and this was what troubled John Tarwin) worldly-wise. Moira wouldn’t allow herself to be made

love to; but she might easily let herself be swindled. Old Bargioni had been very discreet and non-committal; but it was obvious that he regarded this young fellow as an adventurer, out for what he could get. John frowned as he walked, and bit his Up.

He came home to find Moira and Tonino superintending the fitting of the new cretonne covers for the drawingroom chairs.

“Carefully, carefully,” Moira was saying to the upholsterer as he came in. She turned at the sound of his footsteps. A cloud seemed to obscure the brightness of her face when she saw him; but she made an effort to keep up her gaiety. “Come and look, John,” she called. “It’s like getting a very fat old lady into a very tight dress. Too ridiculous!”

But John did not smile with her; his face was a mask of stony gravity. He stalked up to the chair, nodded curtly to Tonino, curtly to the upholsterer, and stood there watching the work as though he were a stranger, a hostile stranger at that. The sight of Moira and Tonino laughing and talking together had roused in him a sudden and violent fury. “Disgusting little adventurer,” he said to himself ferociously behind his mask.

“It’s a pretty stuff, don’t you think?” said Moira. He only grunted.

“Very modern too,” added Tonino. “The shops are very modern here,” he went on, speaking with all the rather touchy insistence on up-to-dateness which characterizes the inhabitants of an under-bathroomed and over-monumented country.

“Indeed?” said John sarcastically.

Moira frowned. “You’ve no idea how helpful Tonino has been,” she said with a certain warmth.

Effusively Tonino began to deny that she had any obligation towards him. John Tarwin interrupted him. “Oh, I’ve no doubt he was helpful,” he said in the same sarcastic tone and with a little smile of contempt.

There was an uncomfortable silence. Then Tonino took his leave. The moment he was gone, Moira turned on her husband. Her face was pale, her lips

trembled. “How dare you speak to one of my friends like that?” she asked in a voice unsteady with anger.

John flared up. “Because I wanted to get rid of the fellow,” he answered; and the mask was off, his face was nakedly furious. “It’s disgusting to see a man like that hanging round the home. An adventurer. Exploiting your silliness. Sponging on you.”

“Tonino doesn’t sponge on me. And anyhow, what do you know about it?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “One hears things.”

“Oh, it’s those old beasts, is it?” She hated the Bargionis, *hated* them. “Instead of being grateful to Tonino for helping me! Which is more than you’ve ever done, John. You, with your beastly tumours and your rotten old *FaustV*’ The contempt in her voice was blasting. “Just leaving me to sink or swim. And when somebody comes along and is just humanly decent to me, you insult him. And you fly into a rage of jealousy became I’m normally grateful to him.”

John had had time to readjust his mask. “I don’t fly into any sort of rage,” he said, bottling his anger and speaking slowly and coldly. “I just don’t want you to be preyed upon by handsome, black-haired young pimps from the slums of Naples.”

“John!”

“Even if the preying *is* done platonically,” he went on. “Which I’m sure it is. But I don’t want to have even a platonic pimp about.” He spoke coldly, slowly, with the deliberate intention of hurting her as much as he could. “How much has he got out of you so far?”

Moira did not answer, but turned and hurried from the room.

Tonino had just got to the bottom of the hill, when a loud insistent hooting made him turn round. A big yellow car was close at his heels.

“Moira!” he called in astonishment. The car came to a halt beside him.

“Get in,” she commanded almost fiercely, as though she were angry with him. He did as he was told.

“But where did you think of going?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Anywhere. Let’s take the Bologna road, into the mountains.”

“But you’ve got no hat,” he objected, “no coat.”

She only laughed and, throwing the car into gear, drove off at full speed. John spent his evening in solitude. He began by reproaching himself. “I oughtn’t to have spoken so brutally,” he thought, when he heard of Moira’s precipitate departure. What tender, charming things he would say, when she came back, to make up for his hard words! And then, when she’d made peace, he would talk to her gently, paternally about the dangers of having bad friends. Even the anticipation of what he would say to her caused his face to light up with a beautiful smile. But when, three-quarters of an hour after dinner-time, he sat down to a lonely and overcooked meal, his mood had changed. “If she wants to sulk,” he said to himself, “why, let her sulk.” And as the hours passed, his heart grew harder. Midnight struck. His anger began to be tempered by a certain apprehension. Could anything have happened to her? He was anxious. But all the same he went to bed, on principle, firmly. Twenty minutes later he heard Moira’s step on the stairs and then the closing of her door. She was back; nothing had happened; perversely, he felt all the more exasperated with her for being safe. Would she come and say good-night? He waited.

Absently, meanwhile, mechanically, Moira had undressed. She was thinking of all that had happened in the eternity since she had left the house. That marvellous sunset in the mountains! Every westward slope was rosily gilded; below them lay a gulf of blue shadow. They had stood in silence, gazing. “Kiss me, Tonino,” she had suddenly whispered, and the touch of his lips had sent a kind of delicious apprehension fluttering under her skin. She pressed herself against him; his body was firm and solid with her clasp. She could feel the throb of his heart against her cheek, like something separately alive. Beat, beat, beat — and the throbbing life was not the life of the Tonino she knew, the Tonino who laughed and paid compliments and brought flowers; it was the life of some mysterious and separate power. A power with which the familiar individual Tonino happened to be connected, but almost irrelevantly. She shuddered a little. Mysterious and terrifying. But the terror was somehow attractive, like a dark precipice that allures. “Kiss me, Tonino, kiss me.” The light faded; the hills died

away into featureless flat shapes against the sky. “I’m cold,” she said at last, shivering. “Let’s go.” They dined at a little inn, high up between the two passes. When they drove away, it was night. He put his arm round her and kissed her neck, at the nape, where the cropped hair was harsh against his mouth. “You’ll make me drive into the ditch,” she laughed. But there was no laughter for Tonino. “Moira, Moira,” he repeated; and there was something like agony in his voice. “Moira.” And finally, at his suffering entreaty, she stopped the car. They got out. Under the chestnut trees, what utter darkness!

Moira slipped off her last garment and, naked before the mirror, looked at her image. It seemed the same as ever, her pale body; but in reality it was different, it was new, it had only just been born.

John still waited, but his wife did not come. “All right, then,” he said to himself, with a spiteful little anger that disguised itself as a god-like and impersonal serenity of justice; “let her sulk if she wants to. She only punishes herself.” He turned out the light and composed himself to sleep. Next morning he left for Rome and the Cytological Congress without saying good-bye; that would teach her. But “thank goodness!” was Moira’s first reflection when she heard that he had gone. And then, suddenly, she felt rather sorry for him. Poor John! Like a dead frog, galvanized; twitching, but never alive. He was pathetic really. She was so rich in happiness, that she could afford to be sorry for him. And in a way she was even grateful to him. If he hadn’t come, if he hadn’t behaved so unforgivably, nothing would have happened between Tonino and herself. Poor John! But all the same he was hopeless.

Day followed bright serene day. But Moira’s life no longer flowed like the clear and shallow stream it had been before John’s coming. It was turbulent now, there were depths and darknesses. And love was no longer a game with a pleasant companion; it was violent, all-absorbing, even rather terrible. Tonino became for her a kind of obsession. She was haunted by him — by his face, by his white teeth and his dark hair, by his hands and limbs and body. She wanted to be with him, to fed his nearness, to touch him. She would spend whole hours stroking his hair, ruffling it up, rearranging it fantastically, on end, like a

golliwog's, or with hanging fringes, or with the locks twisted up into horns. And when she had contrived some specially ludicrous effect, she dapped her hands and laughed, laughed, till the tears ran down her cheeks. "If you could see yourself now!" she cried. Offended by her laughter, "You play with me as though I were a doll," Tonino would protest with a rather ludicrous expression of angry dignity. The laughter would go out of Moira's face and, with a seriousness that was fierce, almost cruel, she would lean forward and kiss him, silently, violently, again and again.

Absent, he was still unescapably with her, like a guilty conscience. Her solitudes were endless meditations on the theme of him. Sometimes the longing for his tangible presence was too achingly painful to be borne. Disobeying all his injunctions, breaking all her promises, she would telephone for him to come to her, she would drive off in search of him. Once, at about midnight, Tonino was called down from his room at the hotel by a message that a lady wanted to speak to him. He found her sitting in the car. "But I couldn't help it, I simply couldn't help it," she cried, to excuse herself and mollify his anger. Tonino refused to be propitiated. Coming like this in the middle of the night! It was madness, it was scandalous! She sat there, listening, pale and with trembling lips and the tears in her eyes. He was silent at last. "But if you knew, Tonino," she whispered, "if you only knew..." She took his hand and kissed it, humbly.

Berto, when he heard the good news (for Tonino proudly told him at once), was curious to know whether the *signora forestier a* was as cold as Northern ladies were proverbially supposed to be.

"*Macche!*" Tonino protested vigorously. On the contrary. For a long time the two young sportsmen discussed the question of amorous temperatures, discussed it technically, professionally.

Tonino's raptures were not so extravagant as Moira's. So far as he was concerned, this sort of thing had happened before. Passion with Moira was not diminished by satisfaction, but rather, since the satisfaction was for her so novel, so intrinsically apocalyptic, increased. But that which caused her passion to increase produced in his a waning. He had got what he wanted; his night-

begotten, touch-born longing for her (dulled in the interval and diminished by all the sporting love-hunts undertaken with Berto) had been fulfilled. She was no longer the desired and unobtainable, but the possessed, the known. By her surrender she had lowered herself to the level of all the other women he had ever made love to; she was just another item in the sportsman's grand total.

His attitude towards her underwent a change. Familiarity began to blunt his courtesy; his manner became offhandedly marital. When he saw her after an absence, "*Ebbene, tesoro* he would say in a genially unromantic tone, and pat her once or twice on the back or shoulder, as one might pat a horse. He permitted her to run her own errands and even his. Moira was happy to be his servant. Her love for him was, in one at least of its aspects, almost abject. She was dog-like in her devotion. Tonino found her adoration very agreeable so long as it expressed itself in fetching and carrying, in falling in with his suggestions, and in making him presents. "But you mustn't, my darling, you shouldn't," he protested each time she gave him something. Nevertheless, he accepted a pearl tie-pin, a pair of diamond and enamel links, a half-hunter on a gold and platinum chain. But Moira's devotion expressed itself also in other ways. Love demands as much as it gives. She wanted so much — his heart, his physical presence, his caresses, his confidences, his time, his fidelity. She was tyrannous in her adoring abjection. She pestered him with devotion, Tonino was bored and irritated by her excessive love. The omniscient Berto, to whom he carried his troubles, advised him to take a strong line. Women, he pronounced, must be kept in their places, firmly. They love one all the better if they are a little maltreated.

Tonino followed his advice and, pretexting work and social engagements, reduced the number of his visits. What a relief to be free of her importunity! Disquieted, Moira presented him with an amber cigar-holder. He protested, accepted it, but gave her no more of Ids company in return. A set of diamond studs produced no better effect. He talked vaguely and magniloquently about his career and the necessity for unremitting labour; that was his excuse for not coming more often to see her. It was on the tip of her tongue, one afternoon, to say that *she* would be his career, would give him anything he wanted, if only...

But the memory of John's hateful words made her check herself. She was terrified lest he might make no difficulties about accepting her offer. "Stay with me this evening," she begged, throwing her arms round his neck. He suffered himself to be kissed.

"I wish I could stay," he said hypocritically. "But I have some important business this evening." The important business was playing billiards with Berto.

Moira looked at him for a moment in silence; then, dropping her hands from his shoulders, turned away. She had seen in his eyes a weariness that was almost a horror.

Summer drew on; but in Moira's soul there was no inward brightness to match the sunshine. She passed her days in a misery that was alternately restless and apathetic. Her nerves began once more to lead their own irresponsible life apart from hers. For no sufficient cause and against her will, she would find herself uncontrollably in a fury, or crying, or laughing. When Tonino came to see her, she was almost always, in spite of all her resolutions, bitterly angry or hysterically tearful. "But why do I behave like this?" she would ask herself despairingly. "Why do I say such things? I'm making him hate me." But the next time he came, she would act in precisely the same way. It was as though she were possessed by a devil. And it was not her mind only that was sick. When she ran too quickly upstairs, her heart seemed to stop beating for a moment and there was a whirling darkness before her eyes. She had an almost daily headache, lost appetite, could not digest what she ate. In her thin sallow face her eyes became enormous. Looking into the glass, she found herself hideous, old, repulsive. "No wonder he hates me," she thought, and she would brood, brood for hours over the idea that she had become physically disgusting to him, disgusting to look at, to touch, tainting the air with her breath. The idea became an obsession, indescribably painful and humiliating.

"*Questa donna!*" Tonino would complain with a sigh, when he came back from seeing her. Why didn't he leave her, then? Berto was all for strong measures. Tonino protested that he hadn't the courage; the poor woman would be too unhappy. But he also enjoyed a good dinner and going for drives in an

expensive car and receiving sumptuous additions to his wardrobe. He contented himself with complaining and being a Christian martyr. One evening his old friend Carlo Menardi introduced him to his sister. After that he bore his martyrdom with even less patience than before. Luisa Menardi was only seventeen, fresh, healthy, provocatively pretty, with rolling black eyes that said all sorts of things and an impertinent tongue. Tonino's business appointments became more numerous than ever. Moira was left to brood in solitude on the dreadful theme of her own repulsiveness.

Then, quite suddenly, Tonino's manner towards her underwent another change. He became once more assiduously tender, thoughtful, affectionate. Instead of hardening himself with a shrug of indifference against her tears, instead of returning anger for hysterical anger, he was patient with her, was lovingly and cheerfully gentle. Gradually, by a kind of spiritual infection, she too became loving and gentle. Almost reluctantly — for the devil in her was the enemy of life and happiness — she came up again into the light.

"My dear son," Vasari senior had written in his eloquent and disquieting letter, "I am not one to complain feebly of Destiny; my whole life has been one long act of Faith and unshatterable Will. But there are blows under which even the strongest man must stagger — blows which..." The letter rumbled on for pages in the same style. The hard unpleasant fact that emerged from under the eloquence was that Tonino's father had been speculating on the Naples stock exchange, speculating unsuccessfully. On the first of the next month he would be required to pay out some fifty thousand francs more than he could lay his hands on. The Grand Hotel Ritz-Carlton was doomed; he might even have to sell the restaurant. Was there anything Tonino could do?

"Is it possible?" said Moira with a sigh of happiness. "It seems too good to be true." She leaned against him; Tonino kissed her eyes and spoke caressing words. There was no moon; the dark-blue sky was thicky constellated; and, like another starry universe gone deliriously mad, the fire-flies darted, alternately eclipsed and shining, among the olive trees. "Darling," he said aloud, and wondered if this would be a propitious moment to speak. "*Piccina mia*." In the

end he decided to postpone matters for another day or two. In another day or two, he calculated, she wouldn't be able to refuse him anything.

Tonino's calculations were correct. She let him have the money, not only without hesitation, but eagerly, joyfully. The reluctance was all on his side, in the receiving. He was almost in tears as he took the cheque, and the tears were tears of genuine emotion. "You're an angel," he said, and his voice trembled. "You've saved us all." Moira cried outright as she kissed him. How could John have said those things? She cried and was happy. A pair of silver-backed hair-brushes accompanied the cheque — just to show that the money had made no difference to their relationship. Tonino recognized the delicacy of her intention and was touched. "You're too good to me," he insisted, "too good." He felt rather ashamed.

"Let's go for a long drive to-morrow," she suggested.

Tonino had arranged to go with Luisa and her brother to Prato. But so strong was his emotion, that he was on the point of accepting Moira's invitation and sacrificing Luisa.

"All right," he began, and then suddenly thought better of it. After all, he could go out with Moira any day. It was seldom that he had a chance of jaunting with Luisa. He struck his forehead, he made a despairing face. "But what am I thinking of!" he cried. "To-morrow's the day we're expecting the manager of the hotel company from Milan."

"But must you be there to see him?"

"Alas!"

It was too sad. Just how sad Moira only fully realized the next day. She had never felt so lonely, never longed so ardently for his presence and affection. Unsatisfied, her longings were an unbearable restlessness. Hoping to escape from the loneliness and ennui with which she had filled the house, the garden, the landscape, she took out the car and drove away at random, not knowing whither. An hour later she found herself at Pistoia, and Pistoia was as hateful as every other place; she headed the car homewards. At Prato there was a fair. The road was crowded; the air was rich with a haze of dust and the noise of brazen

music. In a field near the entrance to the town, the merry-go-rounds revolved with a glitter in the sunlight. A plunging horse held up the traffic. Moira stopped the car and looked about her at the crowd, at the swings, at the whirling roundabouts, looked with a cold hostility and distaste. Hateful! And suddenly there was Tonino sitting on a swan in the nearest merry-go-round, with a girl in pink muslin sitting in front of him between the white wings and the arching neck. Rising and falling as it went, the swan turned away out of sight. The music played on. *But poor poppa, poor poppa, he's got nothin' at all.* The swan reappeared. The girl in pink was looking back over her shoulder, smiling. She was very young, vulgarly pretty, shining and plumped with health. Tonino's lips moved; behind the wall of noise what was he saying? All that Moira knew was that the girl laughed; her laughter was like an explosion of sensual young life. Tonino raised his hand and took hold of her bare brown arm. Like an undulating planet, the swan once more wheeled away out of sight. Meanwhile, the plunging horse had been quieted, the traffic had begun to move forward. Behind her a horn hooted insistently. But Moira did not stir. Something in her soul desired that the agony should be repeated and prolonged. Hoot, hoot, hoot! She paid no attention. Rising and falling, the swan emerged once more from eclipse. This time Tonino saw her. Their eyes met; the laughter suddenly went out of his face. "*Porco madonna!*" shouted the infuriated motorist behind her, "can't you move on?" Moira threw the car into gear and shot forward along the dusty road.

The cheque was in the post; there was still time, Tonino reflected, to stop the payment of it.

"You're very silent," said Luisa teasingly, as they drove back towards Florence. Her brother was sitting in front, at the wheel; he had no eyes at the back of his head. But Tonino sat beside her like a dummy. "Why are you so silent?"

He looked at her, and his face was grave and stonily unresponsive to her bright and dimpling provocations. He sighed; then, making an effort, he smiled, rather wanly. Her hand was lying on her knee, palm upward, with a pathetic look

of being unemployed. Dutifully doing what was expected of him, Tonino reached out and took it.

At half-past six he was leaning his borrowed motor-cycle against the wall of Moira's villa. Feeling like a man who is about to undergo a dangerous operation, he rang the bell.

Moira was lying on her bed, had lain there ever since she came in; she was still wearing her dust-coat, she had not even taken off her shoes. Affecting an easy cheerfulness, as though nothing unusual had happened, Tonino entered almost jauntily.

"Lying down?" he said in a tone of surprised solicitude. "You haven't got a headache, have you?" His words fell, trivial and ridiculous, into abysses of significant silence. With a sinking of the heart, he sat down on the edge of the bed, he laid a hand on her knee. Moira did not stir, but lay with averted face, remote and unmoving. "What is it, my darling?" He patted her soothingly. "You're not upset because I went to Prato, are you?" he went on, in the incredulous voice of a man who is certain of a negative answer to his question. Still she said nothing. This silence was almost worse than the outcry he had anticipated. Desperately, knowing it was no good, he went on to talk about his old friend, Carlo Menardi, who had come round in his car to call for him; and as the director of the hotel company had left immediately after lunch — most unexpectedly — and as he'd thought Moira was certain to be out, he had finally yielded and gone along with Carlo and his party. Of course, if he'd realized that Moira hadn't gone out, he'd have asked her to join them. For his own sake her company would have made all the difference.

His voice was sweet, ingratiating, apologetic. "A black-haired pimp from the slums of Naples." John's words reverberated in her memory. And so Tonino had never cared for her at all, only for her money. That other woman... She saw again that pink dress, lighter in tone than the sleek, sunburnt skin; Tonino's hand on the bare brown arm; that flash of eyes and laughing teeth. And meanwhile he was talking on and on, ingratiatingly; his very voice was a lie.

"Go away," she said at last, without looking at him.

“But, my darling...” Bending over her, he tried to kiss her averted cheek. She turned and, with all her might, struck him in the face.

“You little devil!” he cried, made furious by the pain of the blow. He pulled out his handkerchief and held it to his bleeding lip. “Very well, then.” His voice trembled with anger. “If you want me to go, I’ll go. With pleasure.” He walked heavily away. The door slammed behind him.

But perhaps, thought Moira, as she listened to the sound of his footsteps receding on the stairs, perhaps it hadn’t really been so bad as it looked; perhaps she had misjudged him. She sat up; on the yellow counterpane was a little circular red stain — a drop of his blood. And it was she who had struck him.

“Tonino! she called; but the house was silent. “Tonino!” Still calling, she hurried downstairs, through the hall, out on to the porch. She was just in time to see him riding off through the gate on his motor-cycle. He was steering with one hand; the other still pressed a handkerchief to his mouth.

“Tonino, Tonino!” But either he didn’t, or else he wouldn’t hear her. The motor-cycle disappeared from view. And because he had gone, because he was angry, because of his bleeding lip, Moira was suddenly convinced that she had been accusing him falsely, that the wrong was all on her side. In a state of painful, uncontrollable agitation she ran to the garage. It was essential that she should catch him, speak to him, beg his pardon, implore him to come back. She started the car and drove out.

“One of these days,” John had warned her, “you’ll go over the edge of the bank, if you’re not careful. It’s a horrible turning.”

Coming out of the garage door, she pulled the wheel hard over as usual. But too impatient to be with Tonino, she pressed the accelerator at the same time. John’s prophecy was fulfilled. The car came too close to the edge of the bank; the dry earth crumbled and slid under its outer wheels. It tilted horribly, tottered for a long instant on the balancing point, and went over. But for the ilex tree, it would have gone crashing down the slope. As it was, the machine fell only a foot or so and came to rest, leaning drunkenly sideways with its flank against the bole of the tree. Shaken, but quite unhurt, Moira climbed over the edge of the car

and dropped to the ground. “Assunta! Giovanni!” The maids, the gardener came running. When they saw what had happened, there was a small babel of exclamations, questions, comments.

“But can’t you get it on to the drive again?” Moira insisted to the gardener; because it was necessary, absolutely necessary, that she should see Tonino at once.

Giovanni shook his head. It would take at least four men with levers and a pair of horses....

“Telephone for a taxi, then,” she ordered Assunta and hurried into the house. If she remained any longer with those chattering people, she’d begin to scream. Her nerves had come to separate life again; clenching her fists, she tried to fight them down.

Going up to her room, she sat down before the mirror and began, methodically and with deliberation (it was her will imposing itself on her nerves) to make up her face. She rubbed a little red on to her pale cheeks, painted her lips, dabbed on the powder. “I must look presentable,” she thought, and put on her smartest hat. But would the taxi never come? She struggled with her impatience. “My purse,” she said to herself. “I shall need some money for the cab.” She was pleased with herself for being so full of foresight, so coolly practical in spite of her nerves. “Yes, of course; my purse.”

But where was the purse? She remembered so clearly having thrown it on to the bed, when she came in from her drive. It was not there. She looked under the pillow, lifted the counterpane. Or perhaps it had fallen on the floor. She looked under the bed; the purse wasn’t there. Was it possible that she hadn’t put it on the bed at all? But it wasn’t on her dressing-table, nor on the mantelpiece, nor on any of the shelves, nor in any of the drawers of her wardrobe. Where, where, where? And suddenly a terrible thought occurred to her. Tonino... Was it possible? The seconds passed. The possibility became a dreadful certainty. A thief as well as... John’s words echoed in her head. “Black-haired pimp from the slums of Naples, black-haired pimp from the slums. And a thief as well. The bag was made of gold chain-work; there were more than four thousand lire in it. A

thief, a thief... She stood quite still, strained, rigid, her eyes staring. Then something broke, something seemed to collapse within her. She cried aloud as though under a sudden intolerable pain.

The sound of the shot brought them running upstairs. They found her lying face downwards across the bed, still faintly breathing. But she was dead before the doctor could come up from the town. On a bed standing, as hers stood, in an alcove, it was difficult to lay out the body. When they moved it out of its recess, there was the sound of a hard, rather metallic fall. Assunta bent down to see what had dropped.

“It’s her purse,” she said. “It must have got stuck between the bed and the wall.”

The Claxtons

*I*S THEIR LITTLE house on the common, how beautifully the Claxtons lived, how spiritually! Even the cat was a vegetarian — at any rate officially — even the cat. Which made little Sylvia's behaviour really quite inexcusable. For after all little Sylvia was human and six years old, whereas Pussy was only four and an animal. If Pussy could be content with greens and potatoes and milk and an occasional lump of nut butter, as a treat — Pussy, who had a tiger in her blood — surely Sylvia might be expected to refrain from surreptitious bacon-eating. Particularly in somebody else's house. What made the incident so specially painful to the Claxtons was that it had occurred under Judith's roof. It was the first time they had stayed with Judith since their marriage. Martha Claxton was rather afraid of her sister, afraid of her sharp tongue and her laughter and her scarifying irreverence. And on her own husband's account she was a little jealous of Judith's husband. Jack Bamborough's books were not only esteemed; they also brought in money. Whereas poor Herbert... "Herbert's art is too *inward*," his wife used to explain, "too spiritual for most people to understand." She resented Jack Bamborough's success; it was too complete. She wouldn't have minded so much if he had made pots of money in the teeth of critical contempt; or if the critics had approved and he had made nothing. But to earn praise *and* a thousand a year — that was too much. A man had no right to make the best of both worlds like that, when Herbert never sold anything and was utterly ignored. In spite of all which she had at last accepted Judith's often repeated invitation. After all, one ought to love one's sister and one's sister's husband. Also, all the chimneys in the house on the common needed sweeping, and the roof would have to be repaired where the rain was coming in. Judith's invitation arrived most conveniently. Martha accepted it. And then Sylvia went and did that really inexcusable thing. Coming down to breakfast before the

others she stole a rasher from the dish of bacon with which her aunt and uncle unregenerately began the day. Her mother's arrival prevented her from eating it on the spot; she had to hide it. Weeks later, when Judith was looking for something in the inlaid Italian cabinet, a little pool of dried grease in one of the drawers bore eloquent witness to the crime. The day passed; but Sylvia found no opportunity to consummate the outrage she had begun. It was only in the evening, while her little brother Paul was being given his bath, that she was able to retrieve the now stiff and clammy-cold rasher. With guilty speed she hurried upstairs with it and hid it under her pillow. When the lights were turned out she ate it. In the morning, the grease stains and a piece of gnawed rind betrayed her. Judith went into fits of inextinguishable laughter.

"It's like the Garden of Eden," she gasped between the ex plosions of her mirth. "The meat of the Pig of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But if you *will* surround bacon with categorical imperatives and mystery, what can you expect, my dear Martha?" Martha went on smiling her habitual smile of sweet forgiving benevolence. But inside she felt extremely angry; the child had made a fool of them all in front of Judith and Jack. She would have liked to give her a good smacking. Instead of which — for one must never be rough with a child, one must never let it see that one is annoyed — she reasoned with Sylvia, she explained, she appealed, more in sorrow than in anger, to her better feelings.

"Your daddy and I don't think it's right to make animals suffer when we can eat vegetables which don't suffer anything."

"How do you know they don't?" asked Sylvia, shooting out the question malignantly. Her face was ugly with sullen ill-temper.

"We don't think it right, darling," Mrs Claxton went on, ignoring the interruption. "And I'm sure you wouldn't either, if you realized. Think, my pet; to make that bacon, a poor little pig had to be killed. To be *killed,* Sylvia. Think of that. A poor innocent little pig that hadn't done anybody any harm."

"But I hate pigs," cried Sylvia. Her sullenness flared up into sudden ferocity; her eyes, that had been fixed and glassy with a dull resentment, darkly flashed. "I hate them, hate them, *hate* them."

“Quite right,” said Aunt Judith, who had come in most inopportunely in the middle of the lecture. “Quite right. Pigs *are* disgusting. That’s why people called them pigs.”

Martha was glad to get back to the little house on the common and their beautiful life, happy to escape from Judith’s irreverent laughter and the standing reproach of Jack’s success. On the common she ruled, she was the mistress of the family destinies. To the friends who came to visit them there she was fond of saying, with that smile of hers, “I feel that, in our way and on a tiny scale, we’ve built Jerusalem in England’s green and pleasant land.”

It was Martha’s great-grandfather who started the brewery business. Postgate’s Entire was a household word in Cheshire and Derbyshire. Martha’s share of the family fortune was about seven hundred a year. The Claxton’s spirituality and disinterestedness were the flowers of an economic plant whose roots were bathed in beer. But for the thirst of British workmen, Herbert would have had to spend his time and energies profitably doing instead of beautifully being. Beer and the fact that he had married Martha permitted him to cultivate the arts and the religions, to distinguish himself in a gross world as an apostle of idealism.

“It’s what’s called the division of labour,” Judith would laughingly say. “Other people drink. Martha and I think. Or at any rate we think we think.”

Herbert was one of those men who are never without a knapsack on their backs. Even in Bond Street, on the rare occasions when he went to London, Herbert looked as though he were just about to ascend Mont Blanc. The rucksack is a badge of spirituality. For the modern high-thinking, pure-hearted Teuton or Anglo-Saxon the scandal of the rucksack is what the scandal of the cross was to the Franciscans. When Herbert passed, long-legged and knickerbockered, his fair beard like a windy explosion round his face, his rucksack overflowing with the leeks and cabbages required in such profusion to support a purely graminivorous family, the street-boys yelled, the flappers whooped with laughter. Herbert ignored them, or else smiled through his beard forgivingly and with a rather studied humorousness. We all have our little

rucksack to bear. Herbert bore his not merely with resignation, but boldly, provocatively, flauntingly in the faces of men; and along with the rucksack the other symbols of difference, of separation from ordinary, gross humanity — the concealing beard, the knickerbockers, the Byronic shirt. He was proud of his difference.

"Oh, I know you think us ridiculous," he would say to his friends of the crass materialistic world, "I know you laugh at us for a set of cranks."

"But we don't, we don't," the friends would answer, politely lying.

"And yet, if it hadn't been for the cranks," Herbert pursued, "where would you be now, what would you be doing? You'd be beating children and torturing animals and hanging people for stealing a shilling, and doing all the other horrible things they did in the good old days."

He was proud, proud; he knew himself superior. So did Martha. In spite of her beautiful Christian smile, she too was certain of her superiority. That smile of hers — it was the hall-mark of her spirituality. A more benevolent version of Monna Lisa's smile, it kept her rather thin, bloodless lips almost chronically curved into a crescent of sweet and forgiving charitableness, it surcharged the natural sullenness of her face with a kind of irrelevant sweetness. It was the product of long years of wilful self-denial, of stubborn aspirations towards the highest, of conscious and determined love for humanity and her enemies. (And for Martha the terms were really identical; humanity, though she didn't of course admit it, *was* her enemy. She felt it hostile and *therefore* loved it, consciously and conscientiously; loved it because she really hated it.)

In the end habit had fixed the smile undetachably to her face. It remained there permanently shining, like the head-lamps of a motor-car inadvertently turned on and left to burn, unnecessarily, in the daylight Even when she was put out or downright angry, even when she was stubbornly, mulishly fighting to have her own will, the smile persisted. Framed between its pre-Raphaelitic loops of mouse-coloured hair the heavy, sullen-featured, rather unwholesomely pallid face continued to shine incongruously with forgiving love for the whole of

hateful, hostile humanity; only in the grey eyes was there any trace of the emotions which Martha so carefully repressed.

It was her great-grandfather and her grandfather who had made the money. Her father was already by birth and upbringing the landed gentleman. Brewing was only the dim but profitable background to more distinguished activities as a sportsman, an agriculturist, a breeder of horses and rhododendrons, a member of parliament and the best London clubs.

The fourth generation was obviously ripe for Art and Higher Thought. And duly, punctually, the adolescent Martha discovered William Morris and Mrs Besant, discovered Tolstoy and Rodin and Folk Dancing and Lao-tzse. Stubbornly, with all the force of her heavy will, she addressed herself to the conquest of spirituality, to the siege and capture of the Highest. And no less punctually than her sister, the adolescent Judith discovered French literature and was lightly enthusiastic (for it was in her nature to be light and gay) about Manet and Daumier, even, in due course, about Matisse and Cézanne. In the long run brewing almost infallibly leads to impressionism or theosophy or communism. But there are other roads to the spiritual heights; it was by one of these other roads that Herbert had travelled. There were no brewers among Herbert's ancestors. He came from a lower, at any rate a poorer, stratum of society. His father kept a drapery shop at Nantwich. Mr Claxton was a thin, feeble man with a taste for argumentation and pickled onions. Indigestion had spoilt his temper and the chronic consciousness of inferiority had made him a revolutionary and a domestic bully. In the intervals of work he read the literature of socialism and unbelief and nagged at his wife, who took refuge in non-conformist piety. Herbert was a clever boy with a knack for passing examinations. He did well at school. They were very proud of him at home, for he was an only child:

"You mark my words," his father would say, prophetically glowing in that quarter of an hour of beatitude which intervened between the eating of his dinner and the beginning of his dyspepsia, "that boy'll do something remarkable."

A few minutes later, with the first rumblings and convulsions of indigestion, he would be shouting at him in fury, cuffing him, sending him out of the room.

Being no good at games Herbert revenged himself on his more athletic rivals by reading. Those afternoons in the public library instead of on the football field, or at home with one of his father's revolutionary volumes, were the beginning of his difference and superiority. It was, when Martha first knew him, a political difference, an anti-Christian superiority. Her superiority was mainly artistic and spiritual. Martha's was the stronger character; in a little while Herbert's interest in socialism was entirely secondary to his interest in art, his anti-clericalism was tinctured by Oriental religiosity. It was only to be expected.

What was not to be expected was that they should have married at all, that they should ever even have met. It is not easy for the children of land-owning brewers and shop-owning drapers to meet and marry.

Morris-dancing accomplished the miracle. They came together in a certain garden in the suburbs of Nantwich where Mr Winslow, the Extension Lecturer, presided over the rather solemn stampings and prancings of all that was earnestly best among the youth of eastern Cheshire. To that suburban garden Martha drove in from the country, Herbert cycled out from the High Street. They met; love did the rest.

Martha was at that time twenty-four and, in her heavy, pallid style, not unhandsome. Herbert was a year older, a tall, disproportionately narrow young man, with a face strong-featured and aquiline, yet singularly mild ("a sheep in eagle's clothing" was how Judith had once described him), and very fair hair. Beard at that time he had none. Economic necessity still prevented him from advertising the fact of his difference and superiority. In the auctioneer's office, where Herbert worked as a clerk, a beard would have been as utterly inadmissible as knickerbockers, an open shirt, and that outward and visible symbol of inward grace, the rucksack. For Herbert these things only became possible when marriage and Martha's seven hundred yearly pounds had lifted him clear of the ineluctable workings of economic law. In those Nantwich days the most he could permit himself was a red tie and some private opinions.

It was Martha who did most of the loving. Dumbly, with a passion that was almost grim in its stubborn intensity, she adored him — his frail body, his long-

fingered, delicate hands, the aquiline face with its, for other eyes, rather spurious air of distinction and intelligence, all of him, all. “He has read William Morris and Tolstoy,” she wrote in her diary, “he’s one of the very few people I’ve met who feel *responsible* about things. Every one else is so terribly frivolous and self-centred and indifferent. Like Nero fiddling while Rome was burning. He isn’t like that. He’s conscious, he’s aware, he accepts the burden. That’s why I like him.” That was why, at any rate, she thought she liked him. But her passion was really for the physical Herbert Claxton. Heavily, like a dark cloud charged with thunder, she hung over him with a kind of menace, ready to break out on him with the lightnings of passion and domineering will. Herbert was charged with some of the electricity of passion which he had called out of her. Because she loved, he loved her in return. His vanity, too, was flattered; it was only theoretically that he despised class-distinctions and wealth.

The land-owning brewers were horrified when they heard from Martha that she was proposing to marry the son of a shopkeeper. Their objections only intensified Martha’s stubborn determination to have her own way. Even if she hadn’t loved him, she would have married him on principle, just because his father *was* a draper and because all this class business was an irrelevant nonsense. Besides, Herbert had talents. What sort of talents it was rather hard to specify. But whatever the talents might be, they were being smothered in the auctioneer’s office. Her seven hundred a year would give them scope. It was practically a duty to marry him.

“A man’s a man for all that,” she said to her father, quoting, in the hope of persuading him, from his favourite poet; she herself found Bums too gross and unspiritual.

“And a sheep’s a sheep,” retorted Mr Postgate, “and a woodlouse is a woodlouse — for all that and all that.”

Martha flushed darkly and turned away without saying anything more. Three weeks later she and the almost passive Herbert were married.

Well, now Sylvia was six years old and a handful, and little Paul, who was whiny and had adenoids, was just on five, and Herbert, under his wife’s

influence, had discovered unexpectedly enough that his talents were really artistic and was by this time a painter with an established reputation for lifeless ineptitude. With every reaffirmation of his lack of success he flaunted more defiantly than ever the scandal of the rucksack, the scandals of the knickerbockers and beard. Martha, meanwhile, talked about the inwardness of Herbert's art. They were able to persuade themselves that it was their superiority which prevented them from getting the recognition they deserved. Herbert's lack of success was even a proof (though not perhaps the most satisfactory kind of proof) of that superiority.

"But Herbert's time will come," Martha would affirm prophetically. "It's bound to come."

Meanwhile the little house on the Surrey common was overflowing with unsold pictures. Allegorical they were, painted very flatly in a style that was Early Indian tempered, wherever the Oriental originals ran too luxuriantly to breasts and wasp-waists and moonlike haunches, by the dreary respectability of Pu vis de Chavannes.

"And let me beg you, Herbert" — those had been Judith's parting words of advice as they stood on the platform waiting for the train to take them back again to their house on the common— "let me implore you: try to be a little more *indecent* in your paintings. Not so shockingly pure. You don't know how happy you'd make me if you could really be obscene for once. Really obscene."

It was a comfort, thought Martha, to be getting away from that sort of thing. Judith was really too... Her lips smiled, her hand waved good-bye.

"Isn't it lovely to come back to our own dear little house!" she cried, as the station taxi drove them bumpily over the track that led across the common to the garden gate. "Isn't it lovely?"

"Lovely!" said Herbert, dutifully echoing her rather forced rapture.

"Lovely!" repeated little Paul, rather thickly through his adenoids. He was a sweet child, when he wasn't whining, and always did and said what was expected of him.

Through the window of the cab Sylvia looked critically at the long low house among the trees. “I think Aunt Judith’s house is nicer,” she concluded with decision.

Martha turned upon her the sweet illumination of her smile. “Aunt Judith’s house is bigger,” she said, “and much grander. But this is Home, my sweet. Our very own Home.”

“All the same,” persisted Sylvia, “I like Aunt Judith’s house better.”

Martha smiled at her forgivingly and shook her head. “You’ll understand what I mean when you’re older,” she said. A strange child, she was thinking, a difficult child. Not like Paul, who was so easy. Too easy. Paul fell in with suggestions, did what he was told, took his colour from the spiritual environment. Not Sylvia. She had her own will. Paul was like his father. In the girl Martha saw something of her own stubbornness and passion and determination. If the will could be well directed... But the trouble was that it was so often hostile, resistant, contrary. Martha thought of that deplorable occasion, only a few months before, when Sylvia, in a fit of rage at not being allowed to do something she wanted to do, had spat in her father’s face. Herbert and Martha had agreed that she ought to be punished. But how? Not smacked, of course; smacking was out of the question. The important thing was to make the child realize the heinousness of what she had done. In the end they decided that the best thing would be for Herbert to talk to her very seriously (but very gently, of course), and then leave her to choose her own punishment. Let her conscience decide. It seemed an excellent idea.

“I want to tell you a story, Sylvia,” said Herbert that evening, taking the child on to his knees. “About a little girl, who had a daddy who loved her so much, so much.” Sylvia looked at him suspiciously, but said nothing. “And one day that little girl, who was sometimes rather a thoughtless little girl, though I don’t believe she was really naughty, was doing something that it wasn’t right or good for her to do. And her daddy told her not to. And what do you think that little girl did? She spat in her daddy’s face. And her daddy was very very sad. Because what his little girl did was wrong, wasn’t it?” Sylvia nodded a brief defiant

assent. “And when one has done something wrong, one must be punished, mustn’t one?” The child nodded again. Herbert was pleased; his words had had their effect; her conscience was being touched. Over the child’s head he exchanged a glance with Martha. “If you had been that daddy,” he went on, “and the little girl you loved so much had spat in your face, what would you have done, Sylvia?”

“Spat back,” Sylvia answered fiercely and without hesitation.

At the recollection of the scene Martha sighed. Sylvia was difficult, Sylvia was decidedly a problem. The cab drew up at the gate; the Claxtons unpacked themselves and their luggage. Inadequately tipped, the driver made his usual scene. Bearing his rucksack, Herbert turned away with a dignified patience. He was used to this sort of thing; it was a chronic martyrdom. The unpleasant duty of paying was always his. Martha only provided the cash. With what extreme and yearly growing reluctance! He was always between the devil of the undertipped and the deep sea of Martha’s avarice.

“Four miles’ drive and a tuppenny tip!” shouted the cab-driver at Herbert’s receding and rucksacked back.

Martha grudged him even the twopence. But convention demanded that something should be given. Conventions are stupid things; but even the Children of the Spirit must make some compromise with the World. In this case Martha was ready to compromise with the World to the extent of twopence. But no more. Herbert knew that she would have been very angry if he had given more. Not openly, of course; not explicitly. She never visibly lost her temper or her smile. But her forgiving disapproval would have weighed heavily on him for days. And for days she would have found excuses for economizing in order to make up for the wanton extravagance of a sixpenny instead of a twopenny tip. Her economies were mostly on the food, and their justification was always spiritual. Eating was gross; high living was incompatible with high thinking; it was dreadful to think of the poor going hungry while you yourself were living in luxurious gluttony. There would be a cutting down of butter and Brazil nuts, of the more palatable vegetables and the choicer fruits. Meals would come to

consist more and more exclusively of porridge, potatoes, cabbages, bread. Only when the original extravagance had been made up several hundred times would Martha begin to relax her asceticism. Herbert never ventured to complain. After one of these bouts of plain living he would for a long time be very careful to avoid other extravagances, even when, as in this case, his economies brought him into painful and humiliating conflict with those on whom they were practised.

"Next time," the taxi-driver was shouting, "I'll charge extra for the whiskers."

Herbert passed over the threshold and closed the door behind him. Safe! He took off his rucksack and deposited it carefully on a chair. Gross, vulgar brute! But anyhow he had taken himself off with the twopence. Martha would have no cause to complain or cut down the supply of peas and beans. In a mild and spiritual way Herbert was very fond of his food. So was Martha — darkly and violently fond of it. That was why she had become a vegetarian, why her economies were always at the expense of the stomach — precisely because she liked food so much. She suffered when she deprived herself of some delicious morsel. But there was a sense in which she loved her suffering more than the morsel. Denying herself, she felt her whole being irradiated by a glow of power; suffering, she was strengthened, her will was wound up, her energy enhanced. The damned-up instincts rose and rose behind the wall of voluntary mortification, deep and heavy with potentialities of force. In the struggle between the instincts Martha's love of power was generally strong enough to overcome her greed; among the hierarchy of pleasures, the joy of exerting the personal conscious will was more intense than the joy of eating even Turkish Delight or strawberries and cream. Not always, however; for there were occasions when, overcome by a sudden irresistible desire, Martha would buy and, in a single day, secretly consume a whole pound of chocolate creams, throwing herself upon the sweets with the same heavy violence as had characterized her first passion for Herbert. With the passage of time and the waning, after the birth of her two children, of her physical passion for her husband, Martha's orgies among the chocolates became more frequent. It was as

though her vital energies were being forced, by the closing of the sexual channel, to find explosive outlet in gluttony. After one of these orgies Martha always tended to become more than ordinarily strict in her ascetic spirituality.

Three weeks after the Claxtons' return to their little house on the common, the War broke out.

"It's changed most people," Judith remarked in the third year, "it's altered some out of all recognition. Not Herbert and Martha, though. It's just made them more so — more like themselves than they were before. Curious." She shook her head. "Very curious."

But it wasn't really curious at all; it was inevitable. The War could not help intensifying all that was characteristically Herbertian and Martha-ish in Herbert and Martha. It heightened their sense of remote superiority by separating them still further from the ordinary herd. For while ordinary people believed in the War, fought and worked to win, Herbert and Martha utterly disapproved and, on grounds that were partly Buddhistic, partly Socialist-International, partly Tolstoyan, refused to have anything to do with the accursed thing. In the midst of universal madness they almost alone were sane. And their superiority was proved and divinely hallowed by persecution. Unofficial disapproval was succeeded, after the passing of the Conscription Act, by official repression. Herbert pleaded a conscientious objection. He was sent to work on the land in Dorset, a martyr, a different and spiritually higher being. The act of a brutal War Office had definitely promoted him out of the ranks of common humanity. In this promotion Martha vicariously participated. But what most powerfully stimulated her spirituality was not War-time persecution so much as War-time financial instability, War-time increase in prices. In the first weeks of confusion she had been panic-stricken; she imagined that all her money was lost, she saw herself with Herbert and the children, hungry and houseless, begging from door to door. She immediately dismissed her two servants, she reduced the family food supply to a prison ration. Time passed and her money came in very much as usual. But Martha was so much delighted with the economies she had made that she would not revert to the old mode of life.

“After all,” she argued, “it’s really not pleasant to have strangers in the house to serve you. And then, why should they serve us? They who are just as good as we are.” It was a hypocritical tribute to Christian doctrine; they were really immeasurably inferior. “Just because we happen to be able to pay them — that’s why they have to serve us. It’s always made me feel uncomfortable and ashamed. Hasn’t it you, Herbert?”

“Always,” said Herbert, who always agreed with his wife.

“Besides,” she went on, “I think one ought to do one’s own work. One oughtn’t to get out of touch with the humble small realities of life. I’ve felt really happier since I’ve been doing the housework, haven’t you?”

Herbert nodded.

“And it’s so good for the children. It teaches them humility and service....”

Doing without servants saved a clear hundred and fifty a year. But the economies she made on food were soon counterbalanced by the results of scarcity and inflation. With every rise in prices Martha’s enthusiasm for ascetic spirituality became more than ever fervid and profound. So too did her conviction that the children would be spoilt and turned into worldlings if she sent them to an expensive boarding-school. “Herbert and I believe very strongly in home education, don’t we, Herbert?” And Herbert would agree that they believed in it very strongly indeed. Home education without a governess, insisted Martha. Why should one let one’s children be influenced by strangers? Perhaps badly influenced. Anyhow, not influenced in exactly the way one would influence them oneself. People hired governesses because they dreaded the hard work of educating their children. And of course it *was* hard work — the harder, the higher your ideals. But wasn’t it worth while making sacrifices for one’s children? With the uplifting question, Martha’s smile curved itself into a crescent of more than ordinary soulfulness. Of course it was worth it. The work was an incessant delight — wasn’t it, Herbert? For what could be more delightful, more profoundly soul-satisfying than to help your own children to grow up beautifully, to guide them, to mould their characters into ideal forms, to lead their thoughts and desires into the noblest channels? Not by any system of

compulsion, of course; children must never be compelled; the art of education was persuading children to mould themselves in the most ideal forms, was showing them how to be the makers of their own higher selves, was firing them with enthusiasm for what Martha felicitously described as “self-sculpture”.

On Sylvia, her mother had to admit to herself, this art of education was hard to practise. Sylvia didn’t want to sculpture herself, at any rate into the forms which Martha and Herbert found most beautiful. She was quite discouragingly without that sense of moral beauty on which the Claxtons relied as a means of education. It was ugly, they told her, to be rough, to disobey, to say rude things and tell lies. It was beautiful to be gentle and polite, obedient and truthful. “But I don’t mind being ugly,” Sylvia would retort. There was no possible answer except a spanking; and spanking was against the Claxtons’ principles.

Aesthetic and intellectual beauty seemed to mean as little to Sylvia as moral beauty. What difficulties they had to make her take an interest in the piano! Thu was the more extraordinary, her mother considered, as Sylvia was obviously musical; when she was two and a half she had already been able to sing “Three Blind Mice” in tune. But she didn’t want to learn her scales. Her mother talked to her about a wonderful little boy called Mozart. Sylvia hated Mozart. “No, no!” she would shout, whenever her mother mentioned the abhorred name. “I don’t want to hear.” And to make sure of not hearing, she would put her fingers in her ears. Nevertheless, by the time she was nine she could play “The Merry Peasant” from beginning to end without a mistake. Martha still had hopes of turning her into the musician of the family. Paul, meanwhile, was the future Giotto; it had been decided that he inherited his father’s talents. He accepted his career as docilely as he had consented to learn his letters. Sylvia, on the other hand, simply refused to read.

“But think,” said Martha ecstatically, “how *wonderful* it will be when you can open any book and read all the *beautiful* things people have written!” Her coaxing was ineffective.

“I like playing better,” said Sylvia obstinately, with that expression of sullen bad temper which was threatening to become as chronic as her mother’s smile.

True to their principles, Herbert and Martha let her play; but it was a grief to them.

“You make your daddy and mummy so sad,” they said, trying to appeal to her better feelings. “So sad. Won’t you try to read to make your daddy and mummy happy?” The child confronted them with an expression of sullen, stubborn wretchedness, and shook her head. “Just to please us,” they wheedled. “You make us *so* sad.” Sylvia looked from one mournfully forgiving face to the other and burst into tears.

“Naughty,” she sobbed incoherently. “Naughty. Go away.” She hated them for being sad, for making her sad. “No, go away, go away,” she screamed when they tried to comfort her. She cried inconsolably; but still she wouldn’t read.

Paul, on the other hand, was beautifully teachable and plastic. Slowly (for, with his adenoids, he was not a very intelligent boy) but with all the docility that could be desired, he learned to read about the lass on the ass in the grass and other such matters. “Hear how beautifully Paul reads,” Martha would say, in the hope of rousing Sylvia to emulation. But Sylvia would only make a contemptuous face and walk out of the room. In the end she taught herself to read secretly, in a couple of weeks. Her parents’ pride in the achievement was tempered when they discovered her motives for making the extraordinary effort.

“But what is this dreadful little book?” asked Martha, holding up the copy of “Nick Carter and the Michigan Boulevard Murderers” which she had discovered carefully hidden under Sylvia’s winter underclothing. On the cover was a picture of a man being thrown off the roof of a skyscraper by a gorilla.

The child snatched it from her. “It’s a lovely book,” she retorted, flushing darkly with an anger that was intensified by her sense of guilt.

“Darling,” said Martha, beautifully smiling on the surface of her annoyance, “you mustn’t snatch like-that. Snatching’s *ugly*.”

“Don’t care.”

“Let me look at it, please.” Martha held out her Hand. She smiled, but her pale face was heavily determined, her eyes commanded.

Sylvia confronted her, stubbornly she shook her head. “No, I don’t want you to.”

“Please,” begged her mother, more forgivingly and more commandingly than ever, “please”. And in the end, with a sudden outburst of tearful rage, Sylvia handed over the book and ran off into the garden. “Sylvia, Sylvia!” her mother called. But the child would not come back. To have stood by while her mother violated the secrets of her private world would have been unbearable.

Owing to his adenoids Paul looked and almost was an imbecile. Without being a Christian Scientist, Martha disbelieved in doctors; more particularly she disliked surgeons, perhaps because they were so expensive. She left Paul’s adenoids unextirpated; they grew and festered in his throat. From November to May he was never without a cold, a quinsy, an earache. The winter of 1921 was a particularly bad one for Paul. He began by getting influenza which turned into pneumonia, caught measles during his convalescence and developed at the New Year an infection of the middle ear which threatened to leave him permanently deaf. The doctor peremptorily advised an operation, treatment, a convalescence in Switzerland, at an altitude and in the sun. Martha hesitated to follow his advice. She had come to be so firmly convinced of her poverty that she did not see how she could possibly afford to do what the doctor ordered. In her perplexity she wrote to Judith. Two days later Judith arrived in person.

“But do you want to kill the boy?” she asked her sister fiercely. “Why didn’t you get him out of this filthy dank hole weeks ago?”

In a few hours she had arranged everything. Herbert and Martha were to start at once with the boy. They were to travel direct to Lausanne by sleeper. “But surely a sleeper’s hardly necessary,” objected Martha. “You forget” (she beautifully smiled), “we’re simple folk.”

“I only remember you’ve got a sick child with you,” said Judith, and the sleeper was booked. At Lausanne he was to be operated on. (Expensive reply-paid telegram to the clinic; poor Martha suffered.) And when he was well enough he was to go to a sanatorium at Leysin. (Another telegram, for which Judith paid, however. Martha forgot to give the money back.) Martha and

Herbert, meanwhile, were to find a good hotel, where Paul would join them as soon as his treatment was over. And they were to stay at least six months, and preferably a year. Sylvia, meanwhile, was to stay with her aunt in England; that would save Martha a lot of money. Judith would try to find a tenant for the house on the common.

“Talk of savages!” said Judith to her husband. “I’ve never seen such a little cannibal as Sylvia.”

“It’s what comes of having vegetarian parents, I suppose.”

“Poor little creature!” Judith went on with an indignant pity. “There are times when I’d like to drown Martha, she’s such a criminal fool. Bringing those children up without ever letting them go near another child of their own age! It’s scandalous! And then talking to them about spirituality and Jesus and *ahimsa* and beauty and goodness knows what! And not wanting them to play stupid games, but be artistic! And always being sweet, even when she’s furious! It’s dreadful, really dreadful! And so silly. Can’t she see that the best way of turning a child into a devil is to try to bring it up as an angel? Ah well...” She sighed and was silent, pensively; she herself had had no children and, if the doctors were right, never would have children.

The weeks passed and gradually the little savage was civilized. Her first lessons were lessons in the art of moderation. The food, which at the Bamboroughs’ house was good and plentiful, was at the beginning a terrible temptation to a child accustomed to the austerities of the spiritual life.

“There’ll be more to-morrow,” Judith would say, when the child asked for yet another helping of pudding. “You’re not a snake, you know; you can’t store up to-day’s overeating for next week’s dinners. The only thing you can do with too much food is to be sick with it.”

At first Sylvia would insist, would wheedle and whine for more. But luckily, as Judith remarked to her husband, luckily she had a delicate liver. Her aunt’s prophecies were only too punctually realized. After three or four bilious attacks Sylvia learned to control her greed. Her next lesson was in obedience. The obedience she was accustomed to give her parents was slow and grudging.

Herbert and Martha never, on principle, commanded, but only suggested. It was a system that had almost forced upon the child a habit of saying no, automatically, to whatever proposition was made to her. “No, no, no!” she regularly began, and then gradually suffered herself to be persuaded, reasoned, or moved by the expression of her parents’ sadness into a belated and generally grudging acquiescence. Obeying at long last, she felt an obscure resentment against those who had not compelled her to obey at once. Like most children, she would have liked to be relieved compulsorily of responsibility for her own actions; she was angry with her father and mother for forcing her to expend so much will in resisting them, such a quantity of painful emotion in finally letting her will be overcome. It would have been so much simpler if they had insisted from the first, had compelled her to obey at once, and so spared her all her spiritual effort and pain. Darkly and bitterly did she resent the incessant appeal they made to her better feelings. It wasn’t fair, it wasn’t fair. They had no right to smile and forgive and make her feel a beast, to fill her with sadness by being sad themselves. She felt that they were somehow taking a cruel advantage of her. And perversely, just because she hated their being sad, she deliberately went out of her way to say and do the things that would most sorely distress them. One of her favourite tricks was to threaten to “go and walk across the plank over the sluice.” Between the smooth pond and the shallow rippling of the stream, the gentle water became for a moment terrible. Pent in a narrow channel of oozy brickwork six feet of cataract tumbled with unceasing clamour into a black and heaving pool. It was a horrible place. How often her parents had begged her not to play near the sluice! Her threat would make them repeat their recommendations; they would implore her to be reasonable. “No, I won’t be reasonable,” Sylvia would shout and run off towards the sluice. If, in fact, she never ventured within five yards of the roaring gulf, that was because she was much more terrified for herself than her parents were for her. But she would go as near as she dared for the pleasure (the pleasure which she hated) of hearing her mother mournfully express her sadness at having a little girl so disobedient, so selfishly reckless of danger. She tried the same trick with her Aunt Judith. “I

shall go into the woods by myself," she menaced one day, scowling. To her great surprise, instead of begging her to be reasonable and not to distress the grown-ups by disobediently running into danger, Judith only shrugged her shoulders. "Trot along, then, if you want to be a little fool," she said without looking up from her letter. Indignantly, Sylvia trotted; but she was frightened of being alone in the huge wood. Only pride kept her from returning at once. Damp, dirty, tear-stained, and scratched, she was brought back two hours later by a gamekeeper.

"What luck," said Judith to her husband, "what enormous luck that the little idiot should have gone and got herself lost."

The scheme of things was marshalled against the child's delinquency. But Judith did not rely exclusively on the scheme of things to enforce her code; she provided her own sanctions. Obedience had to be prompt, or else there were prompt reprisals. Once Sylvia succeeded in provoking her aunt to real anger. The scene made a profound impression on her. An hour later she crept diffidently and humbly to where her aunt was sitting. "I'm sorry, Aunt Judith," she said, "I'm sorry," and burst into tears. It was the first time she had ever spontaneously asked for forgiveness.

The lessons which profited Sylvia most were those which she learned from other children. After a certain number of rather unsuccessful and occasionally painful experiments she learned to play, to behave as an equal among equals. Hitherto she had lived almost exclusively as a chronological inferior among grown-ups, in a state of unceasing rebellion and guerilla warfare. Her life had been one long *risorgimento* against forgiving Austrians and all too gentle, beautifully smiling Bourbons. With the little Carters from down the road, the little Holmeses from over the way, she was now suddenly required to adapt herself to democracy and parliamentary government. There were difficulties at first; but when in the end the little bandit had acquired the arts of civility, she was unprecedentedly happy. The grown-ups exploited the childish sociability for their own educational ends. Judith got up amateur theatricals; there was a juvenile performance of the *Midsummer Night's Dream.* Mrs Holmes, who was musical, organized the children's enthusiasm for making a noise into part-

singing. Mrs Carter taught them country dances. In a few months Sylvia had acquired all that passion for the higher life which her mother had been trying to cultivate for years, always in vain. She loved poetry, she loved music, she loved dancing — rather platonically, it was true; for Sylvia was one of those congenitally clumsy and aesthetically insensitive natures whose earnest passion for the arts is always destined to remain unconsummated. She loved ardently, but hopelessly; yet not unhappily, for she was not yet, perhaps, conscious of the hopelessness of her passion. She even loved the arithmetic and geography, the English history and French grammar, which Judith had arranged that she should imbibe, along with the little Carters, from the little Carters' formidable governess.

"Do you remember what she was like when she arrived?" said Judith one day to her husband.

He nodded, comparing in his mind the sullen little savage of nine months before with the gravely, earnestly radiant child who had just led the room.

"I feel like a lion-tamer,"Judith went on with a little laugh that covered a great love and a great pride. "But what does one do, Jack, when the lion takes to High Anglicanism? Dolly Carter's being prepared for confirmation and Sylvia's caught the infection." Judith sighed. "I suppose she's already thinking we're both damned."

"She'd be damned herself, if she didn't," Jack answered philosophically. "Much more seriously damned, what's more, because she'd be damned in *this* world. It would be a terrible flaw in her character if she didn't believe in some sort of rigmarole at this age."

"But suppose," said Judith, "she were to go on believing in it?"

Martha, meanwhile, had not been liking Switzerland, perhaps because it suited her, physically, too well. There was something, she felt, rather indecent about enjoying such perfect health as she enjoyed at Leysin. It was difficult, when one was feeling so full of animal spirits, to think very solicitously about suffering humanity and God, about Buddha and the higher life, and what not She resented the genial care-free selfishness of her own healthy body. Waking

periodically to conscience-stricken realizations that she had been thinking of nothing for hours and even days together but the pleasure of sitting in the sun, of breathing the aromatic air beneath the pines, of walking in the high meadows picking flowers and looking at the view, she would launch a campaign of intensive spirituality; but after a little while the sun and the bright eager air were too much for her, and she would relapse once more into a shamefully irresponsible state of mere wellbeing.

"I shall be glad," she kept saying, "when Paul is quite well again and we can go back to England."

And Herbert would agree with her, partly on principle, because, being resigned to his economic and moral inferiority, he always agreed with her, and partly because he too, though unprecedentedly healthy, found Switzerland spiritually unsatisfying. In a country where everybody wore knickerbockers, an open shirt, and a rucksack there was no superiority, no distinction in being so attired. The scandal of the top-hat would have been the equivalent at Leysin of the scandal of the cross; he felt himself undistinguishedly orthodox.

Fifteen months after their departure the Claxtons were back again in the house on the common. Martha had a cold and a touch of lumbago; deprived of mountain exercise, Herbert was already succumbing to the attacks of his old enemy, chronic constipation. They overflowed with spirituality.

Sylvia also returned to the house on the common, and, for the first weeks, it was Aunt Judith here and Aunt Judith there, at Aunt Judith's we did this, Aunt Judith never made me do that. Beautifully smiling, but with unacknowledged resentment at her heart, "Dearest," Martha would say, "I'm not Aunt Judith." She really hated her sister for having succeeded where she herself had failed. "You've done wonders with Sylvia," she wrote to Judith, "and Herbert and I can never be sufficiently grateful." And she would say the same in conversation to friends. "We can never be grateful enough to her, can we, Herbert?" And Herbert would punctually agree that they could never be grateful enough. But the more grateful to her sister she dutifully and even supererogatively was, the more Martha hated her, the more she resented Judith's success and her influence

over the child. True, the influence had been unequivocally good; but it was precisely because it had been so good that Martha resented it. It was unbearable to her that frivolous, unspiritual Judith should have been able to influence the child more happily than she had ever done. She had left Sylvia sullenly ill-mannered and disobedient, full of rebellious hatred for all the things which her parents admired; she returned to find her well behaved, obliging, passionately interested in music and poetry, earnestly preoccupied with the newly discovered problems of religion. It was unbearable. Patiently Martha set to work to undermine her sister's influence on the child. Judith's own work had made the task more easy for her. For thanks to Judith, Sylvia was now malleable. Contact with children of her own age had wanned and softened and sensitized her, had mitigated her savage egotism and opened her up towards external influences. The appeal to her better feelings could now be made with the certainty of evoking a positive, instead of a rebelliously negative, response. Martha made the appeal constantly and with skill. She harped (with a beautiful resignation, of course) on the family's poverty. If Aunt Judith did and permitted many things which were not done and permitted in the house on the common, that was because Aunt Judith was so much better off. She could afford many luxuries which the Claxtons had to do without. "Not that your father and I mind doing without," Martha insisted. "On the contrary. It's really rather a blessing not to be rich. You remember what Jesus said about rich people." Sylvia remembered and was thoughtful. Martha would develop her theme; being able to afford luxuries and actually indulging in them had a certain coarsening, despiritualizing effect. It was so easy to become worldly. The implication, of course, was that Aunt Judith and Uncle Jack had been tainted by worldliness. Poverty had happily preserved the Claxtons from the danger — poverty, and also, Martha insisted, their own meritorious wish. For of course they could have afforded to keep at least one servant, even in these difficult times; but they had preferred to do without, "because, you see, serving is better than being served." Jesus had said that the way of Mary was better than the way of Martha. "But I'm a Martha," said Martha Claxton, "who tries her best to be a Mary too. Martha *and* Mary —

that's the best way of all. Practical service *and* contemplation. Your father isn't one of those artists who selfishly detach themselves from all contact with the humble facts of life. He is a creator, but he is not too proud to do the humblest service." Poor Herbert! he couldn't have refused to do the humblest service, if Martha had commanded. Some artists, Martha continued, only thought of immediate success, only worked with an eye to profits and applause. But Sylvia's father, on the contrary, was one who worked without thought of the public, only for the sake of creating truth and beauty.

On Sylvia's mind these and similar discourses, constantly repeated with variations and in every emotional key, had a profound effect. With all the earnestness of puberty she desired to be good and spiritual and disinterested, she longed to sacrifice herself, it hardly mattered to what so long as the cause was noble. Her mother had now provided her with the cause. She gave herself up to it with all the stubborn energy of her nature. How fiercely she practised her piano! With what determination she read through even the dreariest books! She kept a notebook in which she copied out the most inspiring passages of her daily reading; and another in which she recorded her good resolutions, and with them, in an agonized and chronically remorseful diary, her failures to abide by the resolutions, her lapses from grace. "Greed. Promised I'd eat only one greengage. Took four at lunch. None to-morrow. O.G.H.M.T.B.G."

"What does O.G.H.M.T.B.G. mean?" asked Paul maliciously one day.

Sylvia flushed darkly. "You've been reading my diary!" she said. "Oh, you beast, you little beast." And suddenly she threw herself on her brother like a fury. His nose was bleeding when he got away from her. "If you ever look at it again, I'll kill you." And standing there with her clenched teeth and quivering nostrils, her hair flying loose round her pale face, she looked as though she meant it. "I'll kill you," she repeated. Her rage was justified; O.G.H.M.T.B.G. meant "O God, help me to be good."

That evening she came to Paul and asked his pardon.

Aunt Judith and Uncle Jack had been in America for the best part of a year.

“Yes, go; go by all means,” Martha had said when Judith’s letter came, inviting Sylvia to spend a few days with them in London. “You mustn’t miss such a chance of going to the opera and all those lovely concerts.”

“But is it quite fair, mother?” said Sylvia hesitatingly. “I mean, I don’t want to go and enjoy myself all alone. It seems somehow...”

“But you ought to go,” Martha interrupted her. She felt so certain of Sylvia now that she had no fears of Judith. “For a musician like you it’s a necessity to hear *Parsifal* and the *Magic Flute.* I was meaning to take you myself next year; but now the opportunity has turned up this year, you must take it. Gratefully,” she added, with a sweetening of her smile.

Sylvia went. *Parsifal* was like going to church, but much more so. Sylvia listened with a reverent excitement that was, however, interrupted from time to time by the consciousness, irrelevant, ignoble even, but oh, how painful that her frock, her stockings, her shoes were dreadfully different from those worn by that young girl of her own age, whom she had noticed in the row behind as she came in. And the girl, it had seemed to her, had returned her gaze derisively. Round the Holy Grail there was an explosion of bells and harmonious roaring. She felt ashamed of herself for thinking of such unworthy things in the presence of the mystery. And when, in the entr’acte, Aunt Judith offered her an ice, she refused almost indignantly.

Aunt Judith was surprised. “But you used to love ices so much.”

“But not now, Aunt Judith. Not now.” An ice in church — what sacrilege! She tried to think about the Grail. A vision of green satin shoes and a lovely mauve artificial flower floated up before her inward eye.

Next day they went shopping. It was a bright cloudless morning of early summer. The windows of the drapers’ shops in Oxford Street had blossomed with bright pale colours. The waxen dummies were all preparing to go to Ascot, to Henley, were already thinking of the Eton and Harrow match. The pavements were crowded; an immense blurred noise filled the air like a mist. The scarlet and golden buses looked regal and the sunlight glittered with a rich and oily radiance on the polished flanks of the passing limousines. A little procession of

unemployed slouched past with a brass band at their head making joyful music, as though they were only too happy to be unemployed, as though it were a real pleasure to be hungry.

Sylvia had not been in London for nearly two years, and these crowds, this noise, this innumerable wealth of curious and lovely things in every shining window went to her head. She felt even more excited than she had felt at *Parsifal.*

For an hour they wandered through Selfridge's. "And now, Sylvia," said Aunt Judith, when at last she had ticked off every item on her long list, "now you can choose whichever of these frocks you like best." She waved her hand. A display of Summer Modes for Misses surrounded them on every side. Lilac and lavender, primrose and pink and green, blue and mauve, white, flowery, spotted — a sort of herbaceous border of young frocks. "Whichever you like," Aunt Judith repeated. "Or if you'd prefer a frock for the evening..."

Green satin shoes and a big mauve flower. The girl had looked derisively. It was unworthy, unworthy.

"No, really, Aunt Judith." She blushed, she stammered. "Really, I don't need a frock. Really."..

"All the more reason for having it if you don't need it. Which one?"

"No, really. I don't, I can't..." And suddenly, to Aunt Judith's uncomprehending astonishment, she burst into tears.

The year was 1924. The house on the common basked in the soft late-April sunshine. Through the open windows of the drawing-room came the sound of Sylvia's practising. Stubbornly, with a kind of fixed determined fury, she was trying to master Chopin's Valse in D flat. Under her conscientious and insensitive fingers the lilt and languor of the dance rhythm was laboriously sentimental, like the rendering on the piano of a cornet solo outside a public house; and the quick flutter of semiquavers in the contrasting passages was a flutter, when Sylvia played, of mechanical butterflies, a beating of nickel-plated wings. Again and again she played, again and again. In the little copse on the other side of the stream at the bottom of the garden the birds went about their

business undisturbed. On the trees the new small leaves were like the spirits of leaves, almost immaterial, but vivid like little flames at the tip of every twig. Herbert was sitting on a tree stump in the middle of the wood doing those yoga breathing exercises, accompanied by auto-suggestion, which he found so good for his constipation. Closing his right nostril with a long forefinger, he breathed in deeply through his left — in, in, deeply, while he counted four heart-beats. Then through sixteen beats he held his breath and between each beat he said to himself very quickly, “I’m not constipated, I’m not constipated.” When he had made the affirmation sixteen times, he closed his left nostril and breathed out, while he counted eight, through his right After which he began again. The left nostril was the more favoured; for it breathed in with the air a faint cool sweetness of primroses and leaves and damp earth. Near him, on a camp stool, Paul was making a drawing of an oak tree. Art at all costs; beautiful, uplifting, disinterested Art. Paul was bored. Rotten old tree — what was the point of drawing it? All round him the sharp green spikes of the wild hyacinths came thrusting out of the dark mould. One had pierced through a dead leaf and lifted it, transfixed, into the air. A few more days of sunshine and every spike would break out into a blue flower. Next time his mother sent him into Godaiming on his bicycle, Paul was thinking, he’d see if he couldn’t overcharge her two shillings on the shopping instead of one, as he had done last time. Then he’d be able to buy some chocolate as well as go to the cinema; and perhaps even some cigarettes, though that might be dangerous....

“Well, Paul,” said his father, who had taken a sufficient dose of his mystical equivalent of Cascara, “how are you getting on?” He got up from the tree stump and walked across the glade to where the boy was sitting. The passage of time had altered Herbert very little; his explosive beard was still as blond as it had always been, he was as thin as ever, his head showed no signs of going bald. Only his teeth had visibly aged; his smile was discoloured and broken.

“But he really ought to go to a dentist,” Judith had insistently urged on her sister, the last time they met.

“He doesn’t want to,” Martha had replied. “He doesn’t really believe in them.” But perhaps her own reluctance to part with the necessary number of guineas had something to do with Herbert’s lack of faith in dentists. “Besides,” she went on, “Herbert hardly notices such merely material, physical things. He lives so much in the noumenal world that he’s hardly aware of the phenomenal. Really not aware.”

“Well, he jolly well ought to be aware,” Judith answered, “that’s all I can say.” She was indignant.

“How are you getting on?” Herbert repeated, and laid his hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“The bark’s most horribly difficult to get right,” Paul answered in a complainingly angry voice.

“That makes it all the more worth while to get right,” said Herbert. “Patience and work — they’re the only things. Do you know how a great man once defined genius?” Paul knew very well how a great man had once defined genius; but the definition seemed to him so stupid and such a personal insult to himself, that he did not answer, only grunted. His father bored him, maddeningly. “Genius,” Herbert went on, answering his own question, “genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains.” At that moment Paul detested his father.

“One two-and three-and One-and two-and three-and...” Under Sylvia’s fingers the mechanical butterflies continued to flap their metal wings. Her face was set, determined, angry; Herbert’s great man would have found genius in her. Behind her stiff determined back her mother came and went with a feather brush in her hand, dusting. Time had thickened and coarsened her; she walked heavily. Her hair had begun to go grey. When she had finished dusting, or rather when she was tired of it, she sat down. Sylvia was laboriously cornet-soloing through the dance rhythm. Martha closed her eyes. “Beautiful, beautiful!” she said, and smiled her most beautiful smile. “You play it beautifully, my darling.” She was proud of her daughter. Not merely as a musician; as a human being too. When she thought what trouble she had had with Sylvia in the old days... “Beautifully.” She rose at last and went upstairs to her bedroom. Unlocking a cupboard, she

took out a box of candied fruits and ate several cherries, a plum, and three apricots. Herbert had gone back to his studio and his unfinished picture of "Europe and America at the feet of Mother India." Paul pulled a catapult out of his pocket, fitted a buckshot into the leather pouch and let fly at a nuthatch that was running like a mouse up the oak tree on the other side of the glade. "Hell!" he said as the bird flew away unharmed. But the next shot was more fortunate. There was a spurt of flying feathers, there were two or three little squeaks. Running up Paul found a hen chaffinch lying in the grass. There was blood on the feathers. Thrilling with a kind of disgusted excitement Paul picked up the little body. How warm. It was the first time he had ever killed anything. What a good shot! But there was nobody he could talk to about it. Sylvia was no good: she was almost worse than mother about some things. With a fallen branch he scratched a hole and buried the little corpse, for fear somebody might find it and wonder how it had been killed. They'd be furious if they knew! He went into lunch feeling tremendously pleased with himself. But his face fell as he looked round the table. "Only this beastly cold stuff?"

"Paul, Paul," said his father reproachfully.

"Where's mother?"

"She's not eating to-day," Herbert answered.

"All the same," Paul grumbled under his breath, "she really might have taken the trouble to make something hot for us." Sylvia meanwhile sat without raising her eyes from her plate of potato salad, eating in silence.

Aldous Huxley was born in 1894, the third son of Leonard Huxley and grandson of T. H. Huxley. From a preparatory school (described in *Eyeless in Gaza)* he went on to Eton, which he left at seventeen owing to serious eye trouble which left him nearly blind. One eye recovered sufficiently for him to enter Oxford in 1913, but he had to abandon his hope of becoming a physician and was rejected for military service in 1914. In 1919 he married Maria Nys, a Belgian, and joined the *Athenaeum* magazine, writing biographical and architectural articles and reviews of Action, drama, music, and art. Having already published three books of verse, he began with *Limbo* and *Crome Yellow*

the series of stories and novels which combined dazzling intellectual dialogue and a surface cynicism with a ground of clear moral convictions, and exerted a strong emancipating influence. In the twenties Huxley lived mostly in Italy; in the thirties his home was near Toulon, France. To this period belonged *Brave New* ‘*World,* a pessimistic futurist novel and his best known. In 1937 the state of his eyes led him to move to California, where he became convinced of the value of mystical experience, the theme of several of his later works. After the death of his first wife in 1955, Huxley married Laura Archera. Their home was destroyed by fire in 1961; little survived apart from the manuscript of *Island,* his last novel. Aldous Huxley died in November 1963.

After the Fireworks

1

‘LATE AS USUAL. Late.’ Judd’s voice was censorious. The words fell sharp, like beak-blows. ‘As though I were a nut,’ Miles Fanning thought resentfully, ‘and he were a woodpecker. And yet he’s devotion itself, he’d do anything for me. Which is why, I suppose, he feels entitled to crack my shell each time he sees me.’ And he came to the conclusion, as he had so often come before, that he really didn’t like Colin Judd at all. ‘My oldest friend, whom I quite definitely don’t like. Still . . .’ Still, Judd was an asset, Judd was worth it.

‘Here are your letters,’ the sharp voice continued.

Fanning groaned as he took them. ‘Can’t one ever escape from letters? Even here, in Rome? They seem to get through everything. Like filter-passing bacteria. Those blessed days before post offices!’ Sipping, he examined, over the rim of his coffee cup, the addresses on the envelopes.

‘You’d be the first to complain if people didn’t write,’ Judd rapped out. ‘Here’s your egg. Boiled for three minutes exactly. I saw to it myself.’

Taking his egg, ‘On the contrary,’ Fanning answered, ‘I’d be the first to rejoice. If people write, it means they exist; and all I ask for is to be able to pretend that the world doesn’t exist. The wicked flee when no man pursueth. How well I understand them! But letters don’t allow you to be an ostrich. The Freudians say . . .’ He broke off suddenly. After all he was talking to Colin — to Colin. The confessional, self-accusatory manner was wholly misplaced. Pointless to give Colin the excuse to say something disagreeable. But what he had been going to say about the Freudians was amusing. ‘The Freudians,’ he began again.

But taking advantage of forty years of intimacy, Judd had already started to be disagreeable. ‘But you’d be miserable,’ he was saying, ‘if the post didn’t

bring you your regular dose of praise and admiration and sympathy and . . .'

'And humiliation,' added Fanning, who had opened one of the envelopes and was looking at the letter within. 'Listen to this. From my American publishers. Sales and Publicity Department. "My dear Mr Fanning." My dear, mark you. Wilbur F. Schmalz's dear. "My dear Mr Fanning, — Won't you take us into your confidence with regard to your plans for the Summer Vacation? What aspect of the Great Outdoors are you favouring this year? Ocean or Mountain, Woodland or purling Lake? I would esteem it a great privilege if you would inform me, as I am preparing a series of notes for the Literary Editors of our leading journals, who are, as I have often found in the past, exceedingly receptive to such personal material, particularly when accompanied by well-chosen snapshots. So won't you cooperate with us in providing this service? Very cordially yours, Wilbur F. Schmalz." Well, what do you think of that?'

'I think you'll answer him,' said Judd. 'Charmingly,' he added, envenoming his malice. Fanning gave a laugh, whose very ease and heartiness betrayed his discomfort. 'And you'll even send him a snapshot.'

Contemptuously — too contemptuously (he felt it at the time) — Fanning crumpled up the letter and threw it into the fireplace. The really humiliating thing, he reflected, was that Judd was quite right: he would write to Mr Schmalz about the Great Outdoors, he would send the first snapshot anybody took of him. There was a silence. Fanning ate two or three spoonfuls of egg. Perfectly boiled, for once. But still, what a relief that Colin was going away! After all, he reflected, there's a great deal to be said for a friend who has a house in Rome and who invites you to stay, even when he isn't there. To such a man much must be forgiven — even his infernal habit of being a woodpecker. He opened another envelope and began to read.

Possessive and preoccupied, like an anxious mother, Judd watched him. With all his talents and intelligence, Miles wasn't fit to face the world alone. Judd had told him so (peck, peck!) again and again. 'You're a child!' He had said it a thousand times. 'You ought to have somebody to look after you.' But if any one other than himself offered to do it, how bitterly jealous and resentful he became!

And the trouble was that there were always so many applicants for the post of Fanning's bear-leader. Foolish men or, worse and more frequently, foolish women, attracted to him by his reputation and then conquered by his charm. Judd hated and professed to be loftily contemptuous of them. And the more Fanning liked his admiring bear-leaders, the loftier Judd's contempt became. For that was the bitter and unforgivable thing: Fanning manifestly preferred their bear-leading to Judd's. They flattered the bear, they caressed and even worshipped him; and the bear, of course, was charming to them, until such time as he growled, or bit, or, more often, quietly slunk away. Then they were surprised, they were pained. Because, as Judd would say with a grim satisfaction, they didn't know what Fanning was really like. Whereas he did know and had known since they were schoolboys together, nearly forty years before. Therefore he had a right to like him — a right and, at the same time, a duty to tell him all the reasons why he ought not to like him. Fanning didn't much enjoy listening to these reasons; he preferred to go where the bear was a sacred animal. With that air, which seemed so natural on his grey sharp face, of being dispassionately impersonal, 'You're afraid of healthy criticism,' Judd would tell him. 'You always were, even as a boy.'

'He's Jehovah,' Fanning would complain. 'Life with Judd is one long Old Testament. Being one of the Chosen People must have been bad enough. But to be the Chosen Person, in the singular . . .' and he would shake his head. 'Terrible!'

And yet he had never seriously quarrelled with Colin Judd. Active unpleasantness was something which Fanning avoided as much as possible. He had never even made any determined attempt to fade out of Judd's existence as he had faded, at one time or another, out of the existence of so many once intimate bear-leaders. The habit of their intimacy was of too long standing and, besides, old Colin was so useful, so bottomlessly reliable. So Judd remained for him the Oldest Friend whom one definitely dislikes; while for Judd, he was the Oldest Friend whom one adores and at the same time hates for not adoring back, the Oldest Friend whom one never sees enough of, but whom, when he is there,

one finds insufferably exasperating, the Oldest Friend whom, in spite of all one's efforts, one is always getting on the nerves of.

'If only,' Judd was thinking, 'he could have faith!' The Catholic Church was there to help him. (Judd himself was a convert of more than twenty years' standing.) But the trouble was that Fanning didn't want to be helped by the Church; he could only see the comic side of Judd's religion. Judd was reserving his missionary efforts till his friend should be old or ill. But if only, meanwhile, if only, by some miracle of grace . . . So thought the good Catholic; but it was the jealous friend who felt and who obscurely schemed. Converted, Miles Fanning would be separated from his other friends and brought, Judd realized, nearer to himself.

Watching him, as he read his letter, Judd noticed, all at once, that Fanning's lips were twitching involuntarily into a smile. They were full lips, well cut, sensitive and sensual; his smiles were a little crooked. A dark fury suddenly fell on Colin Judd.

'Telling me that you'd like to get no letters!' he said with an icy vehemence. 'When you sit there grinning to yourself over some silly woman's flatteries.'

Amazed, amused, 'But what an outburst!' said Fanning, looking up from his letter.

Judd swallowed his rage; he had made a fool of himself. It was in a tone of calm dispassionate flatness that he spoke. Only his eyes remained angry. 'Was I right?' he asked.

'So far as the woman was concerned,' Fanning answered. 'But wrong about the flattery. Women have no time nowadays to talk about anything except themselves.'

'Which is only another way of flattering,' said Judd obstinately. 'They confide in you, because they think you'll like being treated as a person who understands.'

'Which is what, after all, I am. By profession even.' Fanning spoke with an exasperating mildness. 'What is a novelist, unless he's a person who understands?' He paused; but Judd made no answer, for the only words he could

have uttered would have been whirling words of rage and jealousy. He was jealous not only of the friends, the lovers, the admiring correspondents; he was jealous of a part of Fanning himself, of the artist, the public personage; for the artist, the public personage seemed so often to stand between his friend and himself. He hated, while he gloried in them.

Fanning looked at him for a moment, expectantly; but the other kept his mouth tight shut, his eyes averted. In the same exasperatingly gentle tone, ‘And flattery or no flattery,’ Fanning went on, ‘this is a charming letter. And the girl’s adorable.’

He was having his revenge. Nothing upset poor Colin Judd so much as having to listen to talk about women or love. He had a horror of anything connected with the act, the mere thought, of sex. Fanning called it his perversion. ‘You’re one of those unspeakable chastity-perverts,’ he would say, when he wanted to get his own back after a bout of pecking. ‘If I had children, I’d never allow them to frequent your company. Too dangerous.’ When he spoke of the forbidden subject, Judd would either writhe, a martyr, or else unchristianly explode. On this occasion he writhed and was silent. ‘Adorable,’ Fanning repeated, provocatively. ‘A ravishing little creature. Though of course she may be a huge great camel. That’s the danger of unknown correspondents. The best letter-writers are often camels. It’s a piece of natural history I’ve learned by the bitterest experience.’ Looking back at the letter, ‘All the same,’ he went on, ‘when a young girl writes to one that she’s sure one’s the only person in the world who can tell her exactly who and what (both heavily underlined) she is — well, one’s rather tempted, I must confess, to try yet once more. Because even if she were a camel she’d be a very young one. Twenty-one — isn’t that what she says?’ He turned over a page of the letter. ‘Yes; twenty-one. Also she writes in orange ink. And doesn’t like the Botticellis at the Uffizi. But I hadn’t told you; she’s at Florence. This letter has been to London and back. We’re practically neighbours. And here’s something that’s really rather good. Listen. “What I like about the Italian women is that they don’t seem to be rather ashamed of being women, like so many English girls are, because English girls seem to go about

apologizing for their figures, as though they were punctured, the way they hold themselves — it's really rather abject. But here they're all pleased and proud and not a bit apologetic or punctured, but just the opposite, which I really like, don't you?" Yes, I do,' Fanning answered, looking up from the letter. 'I like it very much indeed. I've always been opposed to these modern Ars est celare arsem fashions. I like unpuncturedness and I'm charmed by the letter. Yes, charmed. Aren't you?'

In a voice that trembled with hardly-restrained indignation, 'No, I'm not!' Judd answered; and without looking at Fanning, he got up and walked quickly out of the room.

2

Judd had gone to stay with his old Aunt Caroline at Montreux. It was an annual affair; for Judd lived chronometrically. Most of June and the first half of July were always devoted to Aunt Caroline and devoted, invariably, at Montreux. On the fifteenth of July, Aunt Caroline was rejoined by her friend Miss Gaskin and Judd was free to proceed to England. In England he stayed till September the thirteenth, when he returned to Rome— 'for the praying season,' as Fanning irreverently put it. The beautiful regularity of poor Colin's existence was a source of endless amusement to his friend. Fanning never had any plans. 'I just accept what turns up,' he would explain. 'Heads or tails — it's the only rational way of living. Chance generally knows so much better than we do. The Greeks elected most of their officials by lot — how wisely! Why shouldn't we toss up for Prime Ministers? We'd be much better governed. Or a sort of Calcutta Sweep for all the responsible posts in Church and State. The only horror would be if one were to win the sweep oneself. Imagine drawing the Permanent Under-Secretaryship for Education! Or the Archbishopric of Canterbury! Or the Vice-royalty of India! One would just have to drink weed-killer. But as things are, luckily . . .'

Luckily, he was at liberty, under the present dispensation, to stroll, very slowly, in a suit of cream-coloured silk, down the shady side of the Via Condotti towards the Spanish Steps. Slowly, slowly. The air was streaked with invisible bars of heat and cold. Coolness came flowing out of shadowed doorways, and at every transverse street the sun breathed fiercely. Like walking through the ghost of a zebra, he thought.

Three beautiful young women passed him, talking and laughing together. Like laughing flowers, like deer, like little horses. And of course absolutely unpunctured, unapologetic. He smiled to himself, thinking of the letter and also of his own reply to it.

A pair of pink and white monsters loomed up, as though from behind the glass of an aquarium. But not speechless. For ‘Grossartig!’ fell enthusiastically on Fanning’s ear as they passed, and ‘Fabelhaft!’ These Nordics! He shook his head. Time they were put a stop to.

In the looking-glasses of a milliner’s window a tall man in creamy-white walked slowly to meet him, hat in hand. The face was aquiline and eager, brown with much exposure to the sun. The waved, rather wiry hair was dark almost to blackness. It grew thickly, and the height of the forehead owed nothing to the approach of baldness. But what pleased Fanning most was the slimness and straightness of the tall figure. Those sedentary men of letters, with their sagging tremulous paunches — they were enough to make one hate the very thought of literature. What had been Fanning’s horror when, a year before, he had realized that his own paunch was showing the first preliminary signs of sagging! But Mr Hornibrooke’s exercises had been wonderful. ‘The Culture of the Abdomen.’ So much more important, as he had remarked in the course of the last few months at so many dinner tables, than the culture of the mind! For of course he had taken everybody into his confidence about the paunch. He took everybody into his confidence about almost everything. About his love-affairs and his literary projects; about his illnesses and his philosophy; his vices and his bank balance. He lived a rich and variegated private life in public; it was one of the secrets of his charm. To the indignant protests of poor jealous Colin, who reproached him

with being an exhibitionist, shameless, a self-exploiter, ‘You take everything so moralistically,’ he had answered. ‘You seem to imagine people do everything on purpose. But people do hardly anything on purpose. They behave as they do because they can’t help it; that’s what they happen to be like. “I am that I am”; Jehovah’s is the last word in realistic psychology. I am what I am — a sort of soft transparent jelly-fish. While you’re what you are — very tightly shut, opaque, heavily armoured: in a word, a giant clam. Morality doesn’t enter; it’s a case for scientific classification. You should be more of a Linnaeus, Colin, and less the Samuel Smiles.’ Judd had been reduced to a grumbling silence. What he really resented was the fact that Fanning’s confidences were given to upstart friends, to strangers even, before they were given to him. It was only to be expected. The clam’s shell keeps the outside things out as effectually as it keeps the inside things in. In Judd’s case, moreover, the shell served as an instrument of reproachful pinching.

From his cool street Fanning emerged into the Piazza di Spagna. The sunlight was stinging hot and dazzling. The flower venders on the steps sat in the midst of great explosions of colour. He bought a gardenia from one of them and stuck it in his buttonhole. From the windows of the English bookshop ‘The Return of Eurydice, by Miles Fanning’ stared at him again and again. They were making a regular display of his latest volume in Tauchnitz. Satisfactory, no doubt; but also, of course, rather ridiculous and even humiliating, when one reflected that the book would be read by people like that estimable upper middle-class couple there, with their noses at the next window — that Civil Servant, he guessed, with the sweet little artistic wife and the artistic little house on Campden Hill — would be read by them dutifully (for of course they worked hard to keep abreast of everything) and discussed at their charming little dinner parties and finally condemned as ‘extraordinarily brilliant, but . . .’ Yes, but, but. For they were obviously regular subscribers to Punch, were vertebrae in the backbone of England, were upholders of all that was depressingly finest, all that was lifelessly and genteelly best in the English upper-class tradition. And when they recognized him (as it was obvious to Fanning, in spite of their discreet

politeness, that they did) his vanity, instead of being flattered, was hurt. Being recognized by people like that — such was fame! What a humiliation, what a personal insult!

At Cook's, where he now went to draw some money on his letter of credit, Fame still pursued him, trumpeting. From behind the brass bars of his cage the cashier smiled knowingly as he counted out the bank-notes.

'Of course your name's very familiar to me, Mr Fanning,' he said; and his tone was at once ingratiating and self-satisfied; the compliment to Fanning was at the same time a compliment to himself. 'And if I may be permitted to say so,' he went on, pushing the money through the bars, as one might offer a piece of bread to an ape, 'gratters on your last book. Gratters,' he repeated, evidently delighted with his very public-schooly colloquialism.

'All gratitude for gratters,' Fanning answered and turned away. He was half amused, half annoyed. Amused by the absurdity of those more than Etonian congratulations, annoyed at the damned impertinence of the congratulator. So intolerably patronizing! he grumbled to himself. But most admirers were like that; they thought they were doing you an enormous favour by admiring you. And how much more they admired themselves for being capable of appreciating than they admired the object of their appreciation! And then there were the earnest ones who thanked you for giving such a perfect expression to their ideas and sentiments. They were the worst of all. For, after all, what were they thanking you for? For being their interpreter, their dragoman, for playing John the Baptist to their Messiah. Damn their impertinence! Yes, damn their impertinence!

'Mr Fanning.' A hand touched his elbow.

Still indignant with the thought of damned impertinences, Fanning turned round with an expression of such ferocity on his face, that the young woman who had addressed him involuntarily fell back.

'Oh . . . I'm so sorry,' she stammered; and her face, which had been bright, deliberately, with just such an impertinence as Fanning was damning, was discomposed into a childlike embarrassment. The blood tingled painfully in her

cheeks. Oh, what a fool, she thought, what a fool she was making of herself! This idiotic blushing! But the way he had turned round on her, as if he were going to bite . . . Still, even that was no excuse for blushing and saying she was sorry, as though she were still at school and he were Miss Huss. Idiot! she inwardly shouted at herself. And making an enormous effort, she readjusted her still scarlet face, giving it as good an expression of smiling nonchalance as she could summon up. ‘I’m sorry,’ she repeated, in a voice that was meant to be light, easy, ironically polite, but which came out (oh, idiot, idiot!) nervously shaky and uneven. ‘I’m afraid I disturbed you. But I just wanted to introduce . . . I mean, as you were passing . . .’

‘But how charming of you!’ said Fanning, who had had time to realize that this latest piece of impertinence was one to be blessed, not damned. ‘Charming!’ Yes, charming it was, that young face with the grey eyes and the little straight nose, like a cat’s, and the rather short upper lip. And the heroic way she had tried, through all her blushes, to be the accomplished woman of the world — that too was charming. And touchingly charming even were those rather red, large-wristed English hands, which she wasn’t yet old enough to have learnt the importance of tending into whiteness and softness. They were still the hands of a child, a tomboy. He gave her one of those quick, those brilliantly and yet mysteriously significant smiles of his; those smiles that were still so youthfully beautiful when they came spontaneously. But they could also be put on; he knew how to exploit their fabricated charm, deliberately. To a sensitive eye, the beauty of his expression was, on these occasions, subtly repulsive.

Reassured, ‘I’m Pamela Tarn,’ said the young girl, feeling warm with gratitude for the smile. He was handsomer, she was thinking, than in his photographs. And much more fascinating. It was a face that had to be seen in movement.

‘Pamela Tarn?’ he repeated questioningly.

‘The one who wrote you a letter.’ Her blush began to deepen again. ‘You answered so nicely. I mean, it was so kind . . . I thought. . .’

‘But of course!’ he cried, so loudly, that people looked round, startled. ‘Of course!’ He took her hand and held it, shaking it from time to time, for what seemed to Pamela hours. ‘The most enchanting letter. Only I’m so bad at names. So you’re Pamela Tarn.’ He looked at her appraisingly. She returned his look for a moment, then flinched away in confusion from his bright dark eyes.

‘Excuse me,’ said a chilly voice; and a very large suit of plus-fours edged past them to the door.

‘I like you,’ Fanning concluded, ignoring the plus-fours; she uttered an embarrassed little laugh. ‘But then, I liked you before. You don’t know how pleased I was with what you said about the difference between English and Italian women.’ The colour rose once more into Pamela’s cheeks. She had only written those sentences after long hesitation, and had written them then recklessly, dashing them down with a kind of anger, just because Miss Huss would have been horrified by their unwomanliness, just because Aunt Edith would have found them so distressing, just because they had, when she spoke them aloud one day in the streets of Florence, so shocked the two school-mistresses from Boston whom she had met at the pension and was doing the sights with. Fanning’s mention of them pleased her and at the same time made her feel dreadfully guilty. She hoped he wouldn’t be too specific about those differences; it seemed to her that everyone was listening. ‘So profound,’ he went on in his musical ringing voice. ‘But out of the mouths of babes, with all due respect.’ He smiled again, ‘And “punctured” — that was really the mot juste. I shall steal it and use it as my own.’

‘Permesso.’ This time it was a spotted muslin and brown arms and a whiff of synthetic carnations.

‘I think we’re rather in the way,’ said Pamela, who was becoming more and more uncomfortably aware of being conspicuous. And the spirit presences of Miss Huss, of Aunt Edith, of the two American ladies at Florence seemed to hang about her, hauntingly. ‘Perhaps we’d better . . . I mean . . .’ And, turning, she almost ran to the door.

‘Punctured, punctured,’ repeated his pursuing voice behind her. ‘Punctured with the shame of being warm-blooded mammals. Like those poor lank creatures that were standing at the counter in there,’ he added, coming abreast with her, as they stepped over the threshold into the heat and glare. ‘Did you see them? So pathetic. But, oh dear!’ he shook his head. ‘Oh dear, oh dear!’

She looked up at him, and Fanning saw in her face a new expression, an expression of mischief and laughing malice and youthful impertinence. Even her breasts, he now noticed with an amused appreciation, even her breasts were impertinent. Small, but beneath the pale blue stuff of her dress, pointed, firm, almost comically insistent. No ashamed deflation here.

‘Pathetic,’ she mockingly echoed, ‘but, oh dear, how horrible, how disgusting! Because they are disgusting,’ she added defiantly, in answer to his look of humorous protest. Here in the sunlight and with the noise of the town isolating her from everyone except Fanning, she had lost her embarrassment and her sense of guilt. The spiritual presences had evaporated. Pamela was annoyed with herself for having felt so uncomfortable among those awful old English cats at Cook’s. She thought of her mother; her mother had never been embarrassed, or at any rate she had always managed to turn her embarrassment into something else. Which was what Pamela was doing now. ‘Really disgusting,’ she almost truculently insisted. She was reasserting herself, she was taking a revenge.

‘You’re very ruthless to the poor old things,’ said Fanning. ‘So worthy in spite of their mangy dimness, so obviously good.’

‘I hate goodness,’ said Pamela with decision, speeding the parting ghosts of Miss Huss and Aunt Edith and the two ladies from Boston.

Fanning laughed aloud. ‘Ah, if only we all had the courage to say so, like you, my child!’ And with a familiar affectionate gesture, as though she were indeed a child and he had known her from the cradle, he dropped a hand on her shoulder. ‘To say so and to act up to our beliefs. As you do, I’m sure.’ And he gave the slim hard little shoulder a pat. ‘A world without goodness — it’d be Paradise.’

They walked some steps in silence. His hand lay heavy and strong on her shoulder, and a strange warmth that was somehow intenser than the warmth of mere flesh and blood seemed to radiate through her whole body. Her heart quickened its beating; an anxiety oppressed her lungs; her very mind was as though breathless.

‘Putting his hand on my shoulder like that!’ she was thinking. ‘It would have been cheek if some one else . . . Perhaps I ought to have been angry, perhaps . . .’ No, that would have been silly. ‘It’s silly to take things like that too seriously, as though one were Aunt Edith.’ But meanwhile his hand lay heavy on her shoulder, broodingly hot, its weight, its warmth insistently present in her consciousness.

She remembered characters in his books. Her namesake Pamela in Pastures New. Pamela the cold, but for that very reason an experimenter with passion; cold and therefore dangerous, full of power, fatal. Was she like Pamela? She had often thought so. But more recently she had often thought she was like Joan in The Return of Eurydice — Joan, who had emerged from the wintry dark underworld of an unawakened life with her husband (that awful, good, disinterested husband — so like Aunt Edith) into the warmth and brilliance of that transfiguring passion for Walter, for the adorable Walter whom she had always imagined must be so like Miles Fanning himself. She was sure of it now. But what of her own identity? Was she Joan, or was she Pamela? And which of the two would it be nicer to be? Warm Joan, with her happiness — but at the price of surrender? Or the cold, the unhappy, but conquering, dangerous Pamela? Or wouldn’t it perhaps be best to be a little of both at once? Or first one and then the other? And in any case there was to be no goodness in the Aunt Edith style; he had been sure she wasn’t good.

In her memory the voice of Aunt Edith sounded, as it had actually sounded only a few weeks before, in disapproving comment on her reference to the passionless, experimental Pamela of Pastures New. ‘It’s a book I don’t like. A most unnecessary book.’ And then, laying her hand on Pamela’s, ‘Dear child,’ she had added, with that earnest, that dutifully willed affectionateness, which

Pamela so bitterly resented, ‘I’d rather you didn’t read any of Miles Fanning’s books.’

‘Mother never objected to my reading them. So I don’t see . . .’ The triumphant consciousness of having at this very moment the hand that had written those unnecessary books upon her shoulder was promising to enrich her share of the remembered dialogue with a lofty impertinence which the original had hardly possessed. ‘I don’t see that you have the smallest right . . .’

Fanning’s voice fell startlingly across the eloquent silence. ‘A penny for your thoughts, Miss Pamela,’ it said.

He had been for some obscure reason suddenly depressed by his own last words. ‘A world without goodness — it’d be Paradise.’ But it wouldn’t, no more than now. The only paradises were fools’ paradises, ostriches’ paradises. It was as though he had suddenly lifted his head out of the sand and seen time bleeding away — like the stabbed bull at the end of a bull-fight, swaying on his legs and soundlessly spouting the red blood from his nostrils — bleeding, bleeding away stanchlessly into the darkness. And it was all, even the loveliness and the laughter and the sunlight, finally pointless. This young girl at his side, this beautiful pointless creature pointlessly walking down the Via del Babuino . . . The feelings crystallized themselves, as usual, into whole phrases in his mind, and suddenly the phrases were metrical.

Pointless and arm in arm with pointlessness,

I pace and pace the Street of the Baboon.

Imbecile! Annoyed with himself, he tried to shake off his mood of maudlin depression, he tried to force his spirit back into the ridiculous and charming universe it had inhabited, on the whole so happily, all the morning.

‘A penny for your thoughts,’ he said, with a certain rather forced jocularity, giving her shoulder a little clap. ‘Or forty centesimi, if you prefer them.’ And, dropping his hand to his side, ‘In Germany,’ he went on, ‘just after the War one could afford to be more munificent. There was a time when I regularly offered a hundred and ninety million marks for a thought — yes, and gained on the exchange. But now. . . .’

‘Well, if you really want to know,’ said Pamela, deciding to be bold, ‘I was thinking how much my Aunt Edith disapproved of your books.’

‘Did she? I suppose it was only to be expected. Seeing that I don’t write for aunts — at any rate, not for aunts in their specifically auntly capacity. Though, of course, when they’re off duty. . . .’

‘Aunt Edith’s never off duty.’

‘And I’m never on. So you see.’ He shrugged his shoulders. ‘But I’m sure,’ he added, ‘you never paid much attention to her disapproval.’

‘None,’ she answered, playing the un-good part for all it was worth. ‘I read Freud this spring,’ she boasted, ‘and Gide’s autobiography, and Krafft-Ebbing. . . .’

‘Which is more than I’ve ever done,’ he laughed.

The laugh encouraged her. ‘Not to mention all your books, years ago. You see,’ she added, suddenly fearful lest she might have said something to offend him, ‘my mother never minded my reading your books. I mean, she really encouraged me, even when I was only seventeen or eighteen. My mother died last year,’ she explained. There was a silence. ‘I’ve lived with Aunt Edith ever since,’ she went on. ‘Aunt Edith’s my father’s sister. Older than he was. Father died in 1923.’

‘So you’re all alone now?’ he questioned. ‘Except, of course, for Aunt Edith.’

‘Whom I’ve now left.’ She was almost boasting again. ‘Because when I was twenty-one . . .’

‘You stuck out your tongue at her and ran away. Poor Aunt Edith!’

‘I won’t have you being sorry for her,’ Pamela answered hotly. ‘She’s really awful, you know. Like poor Joan’s husband in The Return of Eurydice.’ How easy it was to talk to him!

‘So you even know,’ said Fanning, laughing, ‘what it’s like to be unhappily married. Already. Indissolubly wedded to a virtuous aunt.’

‘No joke, I can tell you. I’m the one to be sorry for. Besides, she didn’t mind my going away, whatever she might say.’

‘She did say something, then?’

‘Oh yes. She always says things. More in sorrow than in anger, you know. Like headmistresses. So gentle and good, I mean. When all the time she really thought me too awful. I used to call her Hippo, because she was such a hypocrite — and so fat. Enormous. Don’t you hate enormous people? No, she’s really delighted to get rid of me,’ Pamela concluded, ‘simply delighted.’ Her face was flushed and as though luminously alive; she spoke with a quick eagerness.

‘What a tremendous hurry she’s in,’ he was thinking, ‘to tell me all about herself. If she were older or uglier, what an intolerable egotism it would be! As intolerable as mine would be if I happened to be less intelligent. But as it is . . .’ His face, as he listened to her, expressed a sympathetic attention.

‘She always disliked me,’ Pamela had gone on. ‘Mother too. She couldn’t abide my mother, though she was always sweetly hippo-ish with her.’

‘And your mother — how did she respond?’

‘Well, not hippo-ishly, of course. She couldn’t be that. She treated Aunt Edith — well, how did she treat Aunt Edith?’ Pamela hesitated, frowning. ‘Well, I suppose you’d say she was just natural with the Hippo. I mean . . .’ She bit her lip. ‘Well, if she ever was really natural. I don’t know. Is anybody natural?’ She looked up questioningly at Fanning. ‘Am I natural, for example?’

Smiling a little at her choice of an example, ‘I should think almost certainly not,’ Fanning answered, more or less at random.

‘You’re right, of course,’ she said despairingly, and her face was suddenly tragic, almost there were tears in her eyes. ‘But isn’t it awful? I mean, isn’t it simply hopeless?’

Pleased that his chance shot should have gone home, ‘At your age,’ he said consolingly, ‘you can hardly expect to be natural. Naturalness is something you learn, painfully, by trial and error. Besides,’ he added, ‘there are some people who are unnatural by nature.’

‘Unnatural by nature,’ Pamela nodded, as she repeated the words, as though she were inwardly marshalling evidence to confirm their truth. ‘Yes, I believe that’s us,’ she concluded. ‘Mother and me. Not hippos, I mean, not poseuses, but

just unnatural by nature. You're quite right. As usual,' she added, with something that was almost resentment in her voice.

'I'm sorry,' he apologized.

'How is it you manage to know so much?' Pamela asked in the same resentful tone. By what right was he so easily omniscient, when she could only grope and guess in the dark?

Taking to himself a credit that belonged, in this case, to chance, 'Child's play, my dear Watson,' he answered banteringly. 'But I suppose you're too young to have heard of Sherlock Holmes. And anyhow,' he added, with an ironical seriousness, 'don't let's waste any more time talking about me.'

Pamela wasted no more time. 'I get so depressed with myself,' she said with a sigh. 'And after what you've told me I shall get still more depressed. Unnatural by nature. And by upbringing too. Because I see now that my mother was like that. I mean, she was unnatural by nature too.'

'Even with you?' he asked, thinking that this was becoming interesting. She nodded without speaking. He looked at her closely. 'Were you very fond of her?' was the question that now suggested itself.

After a moment of silence, 'I loved my father more,' she answered slowly. 'He was more . . . more reliable. I mean, you never quite knew where you were with my mother. Sometimes she almost forgot about me; or else she didn't forget me enough and spoiled me. And then sometimes she used to get into the most terrible rages with me. She really frightened me then. And said such terribly hurting things. But you mustn't think I didn't love her. I did.' The words seemed to release a spring; she was suddenly moved. There was a little silence. Making an effort, 'But that's what she was like,' she concluded at last.

'But I don't see,' said Fanning gently, 'that there was anything specially unnatural in spoiling you and then getting cross with you.' They were crossing the Piazza del Popolo; the traffic of four thronged streets intricately merged and parted in the open space. 'You must have been a charming child. And also . . . Look out!' He laid a hand on her arm. An electric bus passed noiselessly, a

whispering monster. ‘Also maddeningly exasperating. So where the unnaturalness came in . . .’

‘But if you’d known her,’ Pamela interrupted, ‘you’d have seen exactly where the unnaturalness . . .’

‘Forward!’ he called and, still holding her arm, he steered her on across the Piazza.

She suffered herself to be conducted blindly. ‘It came out in the way she spoiled me,’ she explained, raising her voice against the clatter of a passing lorry. ‘It’s so difficult to explain, though; because it’s something I felt. I mean, I’ve never really tried to put it into words till now. But it was as if . . . as if she weren’t just herself spoiling me, but the picture of a young mother — do you see what I mean? — spoiling the picture of a little girl. Even as a child I kind of felt it wasn’t quite as it should be. Later on I began to know it too, here.’ She tapped her forehead. ‘Particularly after father’s death, when I was beginning to grow up. There were times when it was almost like listening to recitations — dreadful. One feels so blushly and prickly; you know the feeling.’

He nodded. ‘Yes, I know. Awful!’

‘Awful,’ she repeated. ‘So you can understand what a beast I felt, when it took me that way. So disloyal, I mean. So ungrateful. Because she was being so wonderfully sweet to me. You’ve no idea. But it was just when she was being her sweetest that I got the feeling worst. I shall never forget when she made me call her Clare — that was her Christian name. “Because we’re going to be companions,” she said, and all that sort of thing. Which was simply too sweet and too nice of her. But if you’d heard the way she said it! So dreadfully unnatural. I mean, it was almost as bad as Aunt Edith reading Prospice. And yet I know she meant it, I know she wanted me to be her companion. But somehow something kind of went wrong on the way between the wanting and the saying. And then the doing seemed to go just as wrong as the saying. She always wanted to do things excitingly, romantically, like in a play. But you can’t make things be exciting and romantic, can you?’ Fanning shook his head. ‘She wanted to kind of force things to be thrilling by thinking and wishing, like Christian Science. But it

doesn’t work. We had wonderful times together; but she always tried to make out that they were more wonderful than they really were. Which only made them less wonderful. Going to the Paris Opera on a gala night is wonderful; but it’s never as wonderful as when Rastignac goes, is it?’

‘I should think it wasn’t!’ he agreed. ‘What an insult to Balzac to imagine that it could be!’

‘And the real thing’s less wonderful,’ she went on, ‘when you’re being asked all the time to see it as Balzac, and to be Balzac yourself. When you aren’t anything of the kind. Because, after all, what am I? Just good, ordinary, middle-class English.’

She pronounced the words with a kind of defiance. Fanning imagined that the defiance was for him and, laughing, prepared to pick up the ridiculous little glove. But the glove was not for him; Pamela had thrown it down to a memory, to a ghost, to one of her own sceptical and mocking selves. It had been on the last day of their last stay together in Paris — that exciting, exotic Paris of poor Clare’s imagination, to which their tickets from London never seemed quite to take them. They had gone to lunch at La Pérouse. ‘Such a marvellous, fantastic restaurant! It makes you feel as though you were back in the Second Empire.’ (Or was it the First Empire? Pamela could not exactly remember.) The rooms were so crowded with Americans, that it was with some difficulty that they secured a table. ‘We’ll have a marvellous lunch,’ Clare had said, as she unfolded her napkin. ‘And some day, when you’re in Paris with your lover, you’ll come here and order just the same things as we’re having today. And perhaps you’ll think of me. Will you, darling?’ And she had smiled at her daughter with that intense, expectant expression that was so often on her face, and the very memory of which made Pamela feel subtly uncomfortable. ‘How should I ever forget?’ she had answered, laying her hand on her mother’s and smiling. But after a second her eyes had wavered away from that fixed look, in which the intensity had remained as desperately on the stretch, the expectancy as wholly unsatisfied, as hungrily insatiable as ever. The waiter, thank goodness, had created a timely diversion; smiling at him confidentially, almost amorously, Clare had ordered

like a princess in a novel of high life. The bill, when it came, was enormous. Clare had had to scratch the bottom of her purse for the last stray piece of nickel. ‘It looks as though we should have to carry our own bags at Calais and Dover. I didn’t realize I’d run things so fine.’ Pamela had looked at the bill. ‘But, Clare,’ she had protested, looking up again at her mother with an expression of genuine horror, ‘it’s wicked! Two hundred and sixty francs for a lunch! It wasn’t worth it.’ The blood had risen darkly into Clare’s face. ‘How can you be so disgustingly bourgeoise, Pamela? So crass, so crawling?’ Incensed by the heaping up of this abuse, ‘I think it’s stupid to do things one can’t afford,’ the girl had answered; ‘stupid and vulgar.’ Trembling with rage, Clare had risen to her feet. ‘I’ll never take you out again. Never.’ (How often since then Pamela had recalled that terribly prophetic word!) ‘You’ll never understand life, you’ll never be anything but a sordid little middle-class Englishwoman. Never, never.’ And she had swept out of the room, like an insulted queen. Overheard by Pamela, as she undignifiedly followed, ‘Gee!’ an American voice had remarked, ‘it’s a regular cat-fight.’

The sound of another, real voice overlaid the remembered Middle Western accents.

‘But after all,’ Fanning was saying, ‘it’s better to be a good ordinary bourgeois than a bad ordinary bohemian, or a sham aristocrat, or a second-rate intellectual. . . .’

‘I’m not even third-rate,’ said Pamela mournfully. There had been a time when, under the influence of the now abhorred Miss Huss, she had thought she would like to go up to Oxford and read Greats. But Greek grammar was so awful . . . ‘Not even fourth-rate.’

‘Thank goodness,’ said Fanning. ‘Do you know what third-and fourth-rate intellectuals are? They’re professors of philology and organic chemistry at the minor universities, they’re founders and honorary life presidents of the Nuneaton Poetry Society and the Baron’s Court Debating Society; they’re the people who organize and sedulously attend all those Conferences for promoting international goodwill and the spread of culture that are perpetually being held at Buda-Pesth

and Prague and Stockholm. Admirable and indispensable creatures, of course! But impossibly dreary; one simply cannot have any relations with them. And how virtuously they disapprove of those of us who have something better to do than disseminate culture or foster goodwill — those of us who are concerned, for example, with creating beauty — like me; or, like you, my child, in deliciously being beauty.'

Pamela blushed with pleasure, and for that reason felt it necessary immediately to protest. 'All the same,' she said, 'it's rather humiliating not to be able to do anything but be. I mean, even a cow can be.'

'Damned well, too,' said Fanning. 'If I were as intensely as a cow is, I'd be uncommonly pleased with myself. But this is getting almost too metaphysical. And do you realize what the time is?' He held out his watch; it was ten past one. 'And where we are? At the Tiber. We've walked miles.' He waved his hand; a passing taxi swerved in to the pavement beside them. 'Let's go and eat some lunch. You're free?'

'Well . . .' She hesitated. It was marvellous, of course; so marvellous that she felt she ought to refuse. 'If I'm not a bore. I mean, I don't want to impose . . . I mean . . . .'

'You mean you'll come and have lunch. Good. Do you like marble halls and bands? Or local colour?'

Pamela hesitated. She remembered her mother once saying that Valadier and the Ulpia were the only two restaurants in Rome.

'Personally,' Fanning went on, 'I'm slightly avaricious about marble halls. I rather resent spending four times as much as eating about two-thirds as well. But I'll overcome my avarice if you prefer them.'

Pamela duly voted for local colour; he gave an address to the driver and they climbed into the cab.

'It's a genuinely Roman place,' Fanning explained. 'I hope you'll like it.'

'Oh, I'm sure I shall.' All the same, she did rather wish they were going to Valadier's.

2

3

Fanning's old friend, Dodo del Grillo, was in Rome for that one night and had urgently summoned him to dine. His arrival was loud and exclamatory.

'Best of all possible Dodos!' he cried, as he advanced with outstretched hands across the enormous baroque saloon. 'What an age! But what a pleasure!'

'At last, Miles,' she said reproachfully; he was twenty minutes late.

'But I know you'll forgive me.' And laying his two hands on her shoulders he bent down and kissed her. He made a habit of kissing all his women friends.

'And even if I didn't forgive, you wouldn't care two pins.'

'Not one.' He smiled his most charming smile. 'But if it gives you the smallest pleasure, I'm ready to say I'd be inconsolable.' His hands still resting on her shoulders, he looked at her searchingly, at arm's length. 'Younger than ever,' he concluded.

'I couldn't look as young as you do,' she answered. 'You know, Miles, you're positively indecent. Like Dorian Gray. What's your horrible secret?'

'Simply Mr Hornibrooke,' he explained. 'The culture of the abdomen. So much more important than the culture of the mind.' Dodo only faintly smiled; she had heard the joke before. Fanning was sensitive to smiles; he changed the subject. 'And where's the marquis?' he asked.

The marchesa shrugged her shoulders. Her husband was one of those dear old friends whom somehow one doesn't manage to see anything of nowadays. 'Filippo's in Tanganyika,' she explained. 'Hunting lions.'

'While you hunt them at home. And with what success! You've bagged what's probably the finest specimen in Europe this evening. Congratulations!' 'Merci, cher maître!' she laughed. 'Shall we go in to dinner?'

The words invited, irresistibly. 'If only I had the right to answer: Oui, chère maîtresse!' Though as a matter of fact, he reflected, he had never really found her at all interesting in that way. A woman without temperament. But very pretty once — that time (how many years ago?) when there had been that picnic on the river at Bray, and he had drunk a little too much champagne. 'If only!' he

repeated; and then was suddenly struck by a grotesque thought. Suppose she were to say yes, now — now! ‘If only I had the right!’

‘But luckily,’ said Dodo, turning back towards him, as she passed through the monumental door into the dining-room, ‘luckily you haven’t the right. You ought to congratulate me on my immense good sense. Will you sit there?’

‘Oh, I’ll congratulate. I’m always ready to congratulate people who have sense.’ He unfolded his napkin. ‘And to condole.’ Now that he knew himself safe, he could condole as much as he liked. ‘What you must have suffered, my poor sensible Dodo, what you must have missed!’

‘Suffered less,’ she answered, ‘and missed more unpleasantnesses than the women who didn’t have the sense to say no.’

‘What a mouthful of negatives! But that’s how sensible people always talk about love — in terms of negatives. Never of positives; they ignore those and go about sensibly avoiding the discomforts. Avoiding the pleasures and exultations too, poor sensible idiots! Avoiding all that’s valuable and significant. But it’s always like that. The human soul is a fried whiting. (What excellent red mullet this is, by the way! Really excellent.) Its tail is in its mouth. All progress finally leads back to the beginning again. The most sensible people — dearest Dodo, believe me — are the most foolish. The most intellectual are the stupidest. I’ve never met a really good metaphysician, for example, who wasn’t in one way or another bottomlessly stupid. And as for the really spiritual people, look what they revert to. Not merely to silliness and stupidity, but finally to crass non-existence. The highest spiritual state is ecstasy, which is just not being there at all. No, no; we’re all fried whitings. Heads are invariably tails.’

‘In which case,’ said Dodo, ‘tails must also be heads. So that if you want to make intellectual or spiritual progress, you must behave like a beast — is that it?’

Fanning held up his hand. ‘Not at all. If you rush too violently towards the tail, you run the risk of shooting down the whiting’s open mouth into its stomach, and even further. The wise man . . .’

‘So the whitings are fried without being cleaned?’

‘In parables,’ Fanning answered reprovingly, ‘whitings are always fried that way. The wise man, as I was saying, oscillates lightly from head to tail and back again. His whole existence — or shall we be more frank and say “my” whole existence? — is one continual oscillation. I am never too consistently sensible, like you; or too consistently feather-headed like some of my other friends. In a word,’ he wagged a finger, ‘I oscillate.’

Tired of generalizations, ‘And where exactly,’ Dodo inquired, ‘have you oscillated to at the moment? You’ve left me without your news so long. . . .’

‘Well, at the moment,’ he reflected aloud, ‘I suppose you might say I was at a dead point between desire and renunciation, between sense and sensuality.’

‘Again?’ She shook her head. ‘And who is she this time?’

Fanning helped himself to asparagus before replying. ‘Who is she?’ he echoed. ‘Well, to begin with, she’s the writer of admiring letters.’

Dodo made a grimace of disgust. ‘What a horror!’ For some reason she felt it necessary to be rather venomous about this new usurper of Fanning’s heart. ‘Vamping by correspondence — it’s really the lowest. . . .’

‘Oh, I agree,’ he said. ‘On principle and in theory I entirely agree.’

‘Then why . . .’ she began, annoyed by his agreement; but he interrupted her.

‘Spiritual adventuresses,’ he said. ‘That’s what they generally are, the women who write you letters. Spiritual adventuresses. I’ve suffered a lot from them in my time.’

‘I’m sure you have.’

‘They’re a curious type,’ he went on, ignoring her sarcasms. ‘Curious and rather horrible. I prefer the good old-fashioned vampire. At least one knew where one stood with her. There she was — out for money, for power, for a good time, occasionally, perhaps, for sensual satisfactions. It was all entirely above-board and obvious. But with the spiritual adventuress, on the contrary, everything’s most horribly turbid and obscure and slimy. You see, she doesn’t want money or the commonplace good time. She wants Higher Things — damn her neck! Not large pearls and a large motor-car, but a large soul — that’s what

she pines for: a large soul and a large intellect, and a huge philosophy, and enormous culture, and out-sizes in great thoughts.'

Dodo laughed. 'You're fiendishly cruel, Miles.'

'Cruelty can be a sacred duty,' he answered. 'Besides, I'm getting a little of my own back. If you knew what these spiritual vamps had done to me! I've been one of their appointed victims. Yes, appointed; for, you see, they can't have their Higher Things without attaching themselves to a Higher Person.'

'And are you one of the Higher People, Miles?'

'Should I be dining here with you, my dear, if I weren't?' And without waiting for Dodo's answer, 'They attach themselves like lice,' he went on. 'The contact with the Higher Person makes them feel high themselves; it magnifies them, it gives them significance, it satisfies their parasitic will to power. In the past they could have gone to religion — fastened themselves on the nearest priest (that's what the priest was there for), or sucked the spiritual blood of some saint. Nowadays they've got no professional victims; only a few charlatans and swamis and higher-thought-mongers. Or alternatively the artists. Yes, the artists. They find our souls particularly juicy. What I've suffered! Shall I ever forget that American woman who got so excited by my book on Blake that she came specially to Tunis to see me? She had an awful way of opening her mouth very wide when she talked, like a fish. You were perpetually seeing her tongue; and, what made it worse, her tongue was generally white. Most distressing. And how the tongue wagged! In spite of its whiteness. Wagged like mad, and mostly about the Divine Mind.'

'The Divine Mind?'

He nodded. 'It was her speciality. In Rochester, N.Y., where she lived, she was never out of touch with it. You've no idea what a lot of Divine Mind there is floating about in Rochester, particularly in the neighbourhood of women with busy husbands and incomes of over fifteen thousand dollars. If only she could have stuck to the Divine Mind! But the Divine Mind has one grave defect: it won't make love to you. That was why she'd come all the way to Tunis in search of a merely human specimen.'

‘And what did you do about it?’

‘Stood it nine days and then took the boat to Sicily. Like a thief in the night. The wicked flee, you know. God, how they can flee!’

‘And she?’

‘Went back to Rochester, I suppose. But I never opened any more of her letters. Just dropped them into the fire whenever I saw the writing. Ostrichism — it’s the only rational philosophy of conduct. According to the Freudians we’re all unconsciously trying to get back to. . .’

‘But poor woman!’ Dodo burst out. ‘She must have suffered.’

‘Nothing like what I suffered. Besides, she had the Divine Mind to go back to; which was her version of the Freudians’ pre-natal. . .’

‘But I suppose you’d encouraged her to come to Tunis?’

Reluctantly, Fanning gave up his Freudians. ‘She could write good letters,’ he admitted. ‘Inexplicably good, considering what she was at close range.’

‘But then you treated her abominably.’

‘But if you’d seen her, you’d realize how abominably she’d treated me.’

‘You?’

‘Yes, abominably — by merely existing. She taught me to be very shy of letters. That was why I was so pleasantly surprised this morning when my latest correspondent suddenly materialized at Cook’s. Really ravishing. One could forgive her everything for the sake of her face and that charming body. Everything, even the vamping. For a vamp I suppose she is, even this one. That is, if a woman can be a spiritual adventuress when she’s so young and pretty and well-made. Absolutely and sub specie aeternitatis, I suppose she can. But from the very sublunary point of view of the male victim, I doubt whether, at twenty-one. . .’

‘Only twenty-one?’ Dodo was disapproving. ‘But Miles!’

Fanning ignored her interruption. ‘And another thing you must remember,’ he went on, ’is that the spiritual vamp who’s come of age this year is not at all the same as the spiritual vamp who came of age fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years ago. She doesn’t bother much about Mysticism, or the Lower Classes, or the

Divine Mind, or any nonsense of that sort. No, she goes straight to the real point — the point which the older vamps approached in such a tiresomely circuitous fashion — she goes straight to herself. But straight!' He stabbed the air with his fruit-knife. 'A bee-line. Oh, it has a certain charm that directness. But whether it won't be rather frightful when they're older is another question. But then almost everything is rather frightful when people are older.'

'Thank you,' said Dodo. 'And what about you?'

'Oh, an old satyr,' he answered with that quick, brilliantly mysterious smile of his. 'A superannuated faun. I know it; only too well. But at the same time, most intolerably, a Higher Person. Which is what draws the spiritual vamps. Even the youngest ones. Not to talk to me about the Divine Mind, of course, or their views about Social Reform. But about themselves. Their Individualities, their Souls, their Inhibitions, their Unconsciouses, their Pasts, their Futures. For them, the Higher Things are all frankly and nakedly personal. And the function of the Higher Person is to act as a sort of psychoanalytical father confessor. He exists to tell them all about their strange and wonderful psyches. And meanwhile, of course, his friendship inflates their egotism. And if there should be any question of love, what a personal triumph!'

'Which is all very well,' objected Dodo. 'But what about the old satyr? Wouldn't it also be a bit of a triumph for him? You know, Miles,' she added gravely, 'it would really be scandalous if you were to take advantage. . . .'

'But I haven't the slightest intention of taking any advantages. If only for my own sake. Besides, the child is too ingenuously absurd. The most hair-raising theoretical knowledge of life, out of books. You should hear her prattling away about inverts and perverts and birth control — but prattling from unplumbed depths of innocence and practical ignorance. Very queer. And touching too. Much more touching than the old-fashioned innocences of the young creatures who thought babies were brought by storks. Knowing all about love and lust, but in the same way as one knows all about quadratic equations. And her knowledge of the other aspects of life is really of the same kind. What she's seen of the world she's seen in her mother's company. The worst guide imaginable, to judge

from the child's account. (Dead now, incidentally.) The sort of woman who could never live on top gear, so to speak — only at one or two imaginative removes from the facts. So that, in her company, what was nominally real life became actually just literature — yet more literature. Bad, inadequate Balzac in flesh and blood instead of genuine, good Balzac out of a set of nice green volumes. The child realizes it herself. Obscurely, of course; but distressfully. It's one of the reasons why she's applied to me: she hopes I can explain what's wrong. And correct it in practice. Which I won't do in any drastic manner, I promise you. Only mildly, by precept — that is, if I'm not too bored to do it at all.'

'What's the child's name?' Dodo asked.

'Pamela Tarn.'

'Tarn? But was her mother by any chance Clare Tarn?'

He nodded. 'That was it. She even made her daughter call her by her Christian name. The companion stunt.'

'But I used to know Clare Tarn quite well,' said Dodo in an astonished, feeling voice. 'These last years I'd hardly seen her. But when I was more in London just after the War. . . .'

'But this begins to be interesting,' said Fanning. 'New light on my little friend. . . .'

'Whom I absolutely forbid you,' said Dodo emphatically, 'to. . . .'

'Tamper with the honour of,' he suggested. 'Let's phrase it as nobly as possible.'

'No, seriously, Miles. I really won't have it. Poor Clare Tarn's daughter. If I didn't have to rush off tomorrow I'd ask her to come and see me, so as to warn her.'

Fanning laughed. 'She wouldn't thank you. And besides, if any one is to be warned, I'm the one who's in danger. But I shall be firm, Dodo — a rock. I won't allow her to seduce me.'

'You're incorrigible, Miles. But mind, if you dare. . . .'

‘But I won’t. Definitely.’ His tone was reassuring. ‘Meanwhile I must hear something about the mother.’

The marchesa shrugged her shoulders. ‘A woman who couldn’t live on top gear. You’ve really said the last word.’

‘But I want first words,’ he answered. ‘It’s not the verdict that’s interesting. It’s the whole case, it’s all the evidence. You’re subpoenaed, my dear. Speak up.’

‘Poor Clare!’

‘Oh, nil nisi bonum, of course, if that’s what disturbs you.’

‘She’d have so loved it to be not bonum, poor dear!’ said the marchesa, tempering her look of vague condolence with a little smile. ‘That was her great ambition — to be thought rather wicked. She’d have liked to have the reputation of a vampire. Not a spiritual one, mind you. The other sort. Lola Montes — that was her ideal.’

‘It’s an ideal,’ said Fanning, ‘that takes some realizing, I can tell you.’

Dodo nodded. ‘And that’s what she must have found out, pretty soon. She wasn’t born to be a fatal woman; she lacked the gifts. No staggering beauty, no mysterious fascination or intoxicating vitality. She was just very charming, that was all; and at the same time rather impossible and absurd. So that there weren’t any aspiring victims to be fatal to. And a vampire without victims is — well, what?’

‘Certainly not a vampire,’ he concluded.

‘Except, of course, in her own imagination, if she chooses to think so. In her own imagination Clare certainly was a vampire.’

‘Reduced, in fact, to being her own favourite character in fiction.’

‘Precisely. You always find the phrase.’

‘Only too fatally!’ He made a little grimace. ‘I often wish I didn’t. The luxury of being inarticulate! To be able to wallow indefinitely long in every feeling and sensation, instead of having to clamber out at once on to a hard, dry, definite phrase. But what about your Clare?’

‘Well, she started, of course, by being a riddle to me. Unanswerable, or rather answerable, answered, but so very strangely that I was still left wondering. I shall never forget the first time Filippo and I went to dine there. Poor Roger Tarn was still alive then. While the men were drinking their port, Clare and I were alone in the drawing-room. There was a little chit-chat, I remember, and then, with a kind of determined desperation, as though she’d that second screwed herself up to jumping off the Eiffel Tower, suddenly, out of the blue, she asked me if I’d ever had one of those wonderful Sicilian peasants — I can’t possibly reproduce the tone, the expression — as a lover. I was a bit taken aback, I must confess. “But we don’t live in Sicily,” was the only thing I could think of answering — too idiotically! “Our estates are all in Umbria and Tuscany.” “But the Tuscans are superb creatures too,” she insisted. Superb, I agreed. But, as it happens, I don’t have affairs with even the superbest peasants. Nor with anybody else, for that matter. Clare was dreadfully disappointed. I think she’d expected the most romantic confidences — moonlight and mandolines and stretti, stretti, nell’ estasì d’amor. She was really very ingenuous. “Do you mean to say you’ve really never . . .?” she insisted. I ought to have got angry, I suppose; but it was all so ridiculous, that I never thought of it. I just said, “Never,” and felt as though I were refusing her a favour. But she made up for my churlishness by being lavish to herself. But lavish! You can’t imagine what a tirade she let fly at me. How wonderful it was to get away from self-conscious, complicated, sentimental love! How profoundly satisfying to feel oneself at the mercy of the dumb, dark forces of physical passion! How intoxicating to humiliate one’s culture and one’s class feeling before some magnificent primitive, some earthily beautiful satyr, some divine animal! And so on, crescendo. And it ended with her telling me the story of her extraordinary affair with — was it a gamekeeper? or a young farmer? I forget. But there was something about rabbit-shooting in it, I know.’

‘It sounds like a chapter out of George Sand.’

‘It was.’

‘Or still more, I’m afraid,’ he said, making a wry face, ‘like a most deplorable parody of my Endymion and the Moon.’

‘Which I’ve never read, I’m ashamed to say.’

‘You should, if only to understand this Clare of yours.’

‘I will. Perhaps I’d have solved her more quickly, if I’d read it at the time. As it was I could only be amazed — and a little horrified. That rabbit-shooter!’ She shook her head. ‘He ought to have been so romantic. But I could only think of that awful yellow kitchen soap he’d be sure to wash himself with, or perhaps carbolic, so that he’d smell like washed dogs — dreadful! And the flannel shirts, not changed quite often enough. And the hands, so horny, with very short nails, perhaps broken. No, I simply couldn’t understand her.’

‘Which is to your discredit, Dodo, if I may say so.’

‘Perhaps. But you must admit, I never pretended to be anything but what I am — a perfectly frivolous and respectable member of the upper classes. With a taste, I must confess, for the scandalous. Which was one of the reasons, I suppose, why I became so intimate with poor Clare. I was really fascinated by her confidences.’

‘Going on the tiles vicariously, eh?’

‘Well, if you choose to put it grossly and vulgarly . . .’

‘Which I do choose,’ he interposed. ‘To be tactfully gross and appositely vulgar — that, my dear, is one of the ultimate artistic refinements. One day I shall write a monograph on the aesthetics of vulgarity. But meanwhile shall we say that you were inspired by an intense scientific curiosity to . . .’

Dodo laughed. ‘One of the tiresome things about you, Miles, is that one can never go on being angry with you.’

‘Yet another subject for a monograph!’ he answered, and his smile was at once confidential and ironical, affectionate and full of mockery. ‘But let’s hear what the scientific curiosity elicited?’

‘Well, to begin with, a lot of really rather embarrassingly intimate confidences and questions, which I needn’t repeat.’

‘No, don’t. I know what those feminine conversations are. I have a native modesty. . . .’

‘Oh, so have I. And, strangely enough, so had Clare. But somehow she wanted to outrage herself. You felt it all the time. She always had that desperate jumping-off-the-Eiffel-Tower manner, when she began to talk like that. It was a kind of martyrdom. But enjoyable. Perversely.’ Dodo shook her head. ‘Very puzzling. I used to have to make quite an effort to change the conversation from gynaecology to romance. Oh, those lovers of hers! Such stories! The most fantastic adventures in East End opium dens, in aeroplanes, and even, I remember (it was that very hot summer of ‘twenty-two), even in a refrigerator!’

‘My dear!’ protested Fanning.

‘Honestly! I’m only repeating what she told me.’

‘But do you mean to say you believed her?’

‘Well, by that time, I must admit, I was beginning to be rather sceptical. You see, I could never elicit the names of these creatures. Nor any detail. It was as though they didn’t exist outside the refrigerator and the aeroplane.’

‘How many of them were there?’

‘Only two at that particular moment. One was a Grand Passion, and the other a Caprice. A Caprice,’ she repeated, rolling the r. ‘It was one of poor Clare’s favourite words. I used to try and pump her. But she was mum. “I want them to be mysterious,” she told me the last time I pressed her for details, “anonymous, without an état civil. Why should I show you their passports and identity cards?” “Perhaps they haven’t got any,” I suggested. Which was malicious. I could see she was annoyed. But a week later she showed me their photographs. There they were; the camera cannot lie; I had to be convinced. The Grand Passion, I must say, was a very striking-looking creature. Thin-faced, worn, a bit Roman and sinister. The Caprice was more ordinarily the nice young Englishman. Rather childish and simple, Clare explained; and she gave me to understand that she was initiating him. It was the other, the Grand P., who thought of such refinements as the refrigerator. Also, she now confided to me for the first time, he was mildly a sadist. Having seen his face, I could believe it. “Am I ever likely to meet him?” I asked. She shook her head. He moved in a very different world from mine.’

‘A rabbit-shooter?’ Fanning asked.

‘No: an intellectual. That’s what I gathered.’

‘Golly!’

‘So there was not the slightest probability, as you can see, that I should ever meet him,’ Dodo laughed. ‘And yet almost the first face I saw on leaving Clare that afternoon was the Grand P.’s.’

‘Coming to pay his sadistic respects?’

‘Alas for poor Clare, no. He was behind glass in the show-case of a photographer in the Brompton Road, not a hundred yards from the Tarns’ house in Ovington Square. The identical portrait. I marched straight in. “Can you tell me who that is?” But it appears that photography is done under the seal of confession. They wouldn’t say. Could I order a copy? Well, yes, as a favour, they’d let me have one. Curiously enough, they told me, as they were taking down my name and address, another lady had come in only two or three days before and also ordered a copy. “Not by any chance a rather tall lady with light auburn hair and a rather amusing mole on the left cheek?” That did sound rather like the lady. “And with a very confidential manner,” I suggested, “as though you were her oldest friends?” Exactly, exactly; they were unanimous. That clinched it. Poor Clare, I thought, as I walked on towards the Park, poor, poor Clare!’

There was a silence.

‘Which only shows,’ said Fanning at last, ‘how right the Church has always been to persecute literature. The harm we imaginative writers do! Enormous! We ought all to be on the Index, everyone. Consider your Clare, for example. If it hadn’t been for books, she’d never have known that such things as passion and sensuality and perversity even existed. Never.’

‘Come, come,’ she protested.

But, ‘Never,’ Fanning repeated. ‘She was congenitally as cold as a fish; it’s obvious. Never had a spontaneous, untutored desire in her life. But she’d read a lot of books. Out of which she’d fabricated a theory of passion and perversity. Which she then consciously put into practice.’

‘Or rather didn’t put into practice. Only day-dreamed that she did.’

He nodded. ‘For the most part. But sometimes, I don’t mind betting, she realized the day-dreams in actual life. Desperately, as you so well described it, with her teeth clenched and her eyes shut, as though she were jumping off the Eiffel Tower. That rabbit-shooter, for instance. . . .’

‘But do you think the rabbit-shooter really existed?’

‘Perhaps not that particular one. But a rabbit-shooter, perhaps several rabbit-shooters — at one time or another, I’m sure, they genuinely existed. Though never genuinely, of course, for her. For her, it’s obvious, they were just phantoms, like the other inhabitants of her dreamery. Phantoms of flesh and blood, but still phantoms. I see her as a kind of Midas, turning everything she touched into imagination. Even in the embraces of a genuine, solid rabbit-shooter, she was still only indulging in her solitary sultry dream — a dream inspired by Shakespeare, or Mrs Barclay, or the Chevalier de Nerciat, or D’Annunzio, or whoever her favourite author may have been.’

‘Miles Fanning, perhaps,’ Dodo mockingly suggested.

‘Yes, I feared as much.’

‘What a responsibility!’

‘Which I absolutely refuse to accept. What have I ever written but solemn warnings against the vice of imagination? Sermons against mental licentiousness of every kind — intellectual licentiousness, mystical licentiousness, fantastic-amorous licentiousness. No, no. I’ll accept no responsibility. Or at least no special responsibility — only the generic responsibility of being an imaginative author, the original sin of writing in such a way as to influence people. And when I say “influence”, of course I don’t really mean influence. Because a writer can’t influence people, in the sense of making them think and feel and act as he does. He can only influence them to be more, or less, like one of their own selves. In other words, he’s never understood. (Thank goodness! because it would be very humiliating to be really understood by one’s readers.) What readers get out of him is never, finally, his ideas, but theirs. And when they try to imitate him or his creations, all that they can ever do is to act one of their own

potential roles. Take this particular case. Clare read and, I take it, was impressed. She took my warnings against mental licentiousness to heart and proceeded to do — what? Not to become a creature of spontaneous, unvitiated impulses — for the good reason that that wasn't in her power — but only to imagine that she was such a creature. She imagined herself a woman like the one I put into Endymion and the Moon and acted accordingly — or else didn't act, only dreamed; it makes very little difference. In a word, she did exactly what all my books told her not to do. Inevitably; it was her nature. I'd influenced her, yes. But she didn't become more like one of my heroines. She only became more intensely like herself. And then, you must remember, mine weren't the only books on her shelves. I think we can take it that she'd read Les Liaisons Dangereuses and Casanova and some biography, shall we say, of the Maréchal de Richelieu. So that those spontaneous unvitiated impulses — how ludicrous they are, anyhow, when you talk about them! — became identified in her mind with the most elegant forms of "caprice" — wasn't that the word? She was a child of nature — but with qualifications. The kind of child of nature that lived at Versailles or on the Grand Canal about 1760. Hence those rabbit-shooters and hence also those sadistic intellectuals, whether real or imaginary — and imaginary even when real. I may have been a favourite author. But I'm not responsible for the rabbit-shooters or the Grand P.s. Not more responsible than anyone else. She'd heard of the existence of love before she'd read me. We're all equally to blame, from Homer downwards. Plato wouldn't have any of us in his Republic. He was quite right, I believe. Quite right.'

'And what about the daughter?' Dodo asked, after a silence.

He shrugged his shoulders. 'In reaction against the mother, so far as I could judge. In reaction, but also influenced by her, unconsciously. And the influence is effective because, after all, she's her mother's daughter and probably resembles her mother, congenitally. But consciously, on the surface, she knows she doesn't want to live as though she were in a novel. And yet can't help it, because that's her nature, that's how she was brought up. But she's miserable,

because she realizes that fiction-life is fiction. Miserable and very anxious to get out — out through the covers of the novel into the real world.'

'And are you her idea of the real world?' Dodo inquired.

He laughed, 'Yes, I'm the real world. Strange as it may seem. And also, of course, pure fiction. The Writer, the Great Man — the Official Biographer's fiction, in a word. Or, better still, the autobiographer's fiction. Chateaubriand, shall we say. And her breaking out — that's fiction too. A pure Miles Fanningism, if ever there was one. And, poor child, she knows it. Which makes her so cross with herself. Cross with me too, in a curious obscure way. But at the same time she's thrilled. What a thrilling situation! And herself walking about in the middle of it. She looks on and wonders and wonders what the next instalment of the feuilleton's going to contain.'

'Well, there's one thing we're quite certain it's not going to contain, aren't we? Remember your promise, Miles.'

'I think of nothing else,' he bantered.

'Seriously, Miles, seriously.'

'I think of nothing else,' he repeated in a voice that was the parody of a Shakespearean actor's.

Dodo shook her finger at him. 'Mind,' she said, 'mind!' Then, pushing back her chair, 'Let's move into the drawing-room,' she went on. 'We shall be more comfortable there.'

4

'And to think,' Pamela was writing in her diary, 'how nervous I'd been beforehand, and the trouble I'd taken to work out the whole of our first meeting, question and answer, like the Shorter Catechism, instead of which I was like a fish in water, really at home, for the first time in my life, I believe. No, perhaps not more at home than with Ruth and Phyllis, but then they're girls, so they hardly count. Besides, when you've once been at home in the sea it doesn't seem much fun being at home in a little glass bowl, which is rather unfair to Ruth and

Phyllis, but after all it's not their fault and they can't help being little bowls, just as M.F. can't help being a sea, and when you've swum about a bit in all that intelligence and knowledge and really devilish understanding, well, you find the bowls rather narrow, though of course they're sweet little bowls and I shall always be very fond of them, especially Ruth. Which makes me wonder if what he said about Clare and me — unnatural by nature — is always true, because hasn't every unnatural person got somebody she can be natural with, or even that she can't help being natural with, like oxygen and that other stuff making water? Of course it's not guaranteed that you find the other person who makes you natural, and I think perhaps Clare never did find her person, because I don't believe it was Daddy. But in my case there's Ruth and Phyllis and now today M.F.; and he really proves it, because I was natural with him more than with anyone, even though he did say I was unnatural by nature. No, I feel that if I were with him always, I should always be my real self, just kind of easily spouting, like those lovely fountains we went to look at this afternoon, not all tied up in knots and squirting about vaguely in every kind of direction, and muddy at that, but beautifully clear in a big gushing spout, like what Joan in The Return of Eurydice finally became when she'd escaped from that awful, awful man and found Walter. But does that mean I'm in love with him?'

Pamela bit the end of her pen and stared, frowning, at the page before her. Scrawled large in orange ink, the question stared back. Disquietingly and insistently stared. She remembered a phrase of her mother's. 'But if you knew,' Clare had cried (Pamela could see her, wearing the black afternoon dress from Patou, and there were yellow roses in the bowl on the table under the window), 'if you knew what certain writers were to me! Shrines — there's no other word. I could worship the Tolstoy of Anna Karenina.' But Harry Braddon, to whom the words were addressed, had laughed at her. And, though she hated Harry Braddon, so had Pamela, mockingly. For it was absurd; nobody was a shrine, nobody. And anyhow, what was a shrine? Nothing. Not nowadays, not when one had stopped being a child. She told herself these things with a rather unnecessary emphasis, almost truculently, in the style of the professional atheists in Hyde

Park. One didn't worship — for the good reason that she herself once had worshipped. Miss Figgis, the classical mistress, had been her pash for more than a year. Which was why she had gone to Early Service so frequently in those days and been so keen to go up to Oxford and take Greats. (Besides, she had even, at that time, rather liked and admired Miss Huss. Ghastly old Hussy! It seemed incredible now.) But oh, that grammar! And Caesar was such a bore, and Livy still worse, and as for Greek. . . . She had tried very hard for a time. But when Miss Figgis so obviously preferred that priggish little beast Kathleen, Pamela had just let things slide. The bad marks had come in torrents and old Hussy had begun being more sorrowful than angry, and finally more angry than sorrowful. But she hadn't cared. What made not caring easier was that she had her mother behind her. 'I'm so delighted,' was what Clare had said when she heard that Pamela had given up wanting to go to Oxford. 'I'd have felt so terribly inferior if you'd turned out a blue-stocking. Having my frivolity rebuked by my own daughter!' Clare had always boasted of her frivolity. Once, under the influence of old Hussy and for the love of Miss Figgis, an earnest disapprover, Pamela had become an apostle of her mother's gospel. 'After all,' she had pointed out to Miss Figgis, 'Cleopatra didn't learn Greek.' And though Miss Figgis was able to point out, snubbingly, that the last of the Ptolemies had probably spoken nothing but Greek, Pamela could still insist that in principle she was quite right: Cleopatra hadn't learnt Greek, or what, if you were a Greek, corresponded to Greek. So why should she? She began to parade a violent and childish cynicism, a cynicism which was still (though she had learnt, since leaving school, to temper the ridiculous expression of it) her official creed. There were no shrines — though she sometimes, wistfully and rather shamefacedly, wished there were. One didn't, determinedly didn't worship. She herself might admire Fanning's books, did admire them, enormously. But as for worshipping — no, she absolutely declined. Clare had overdone it all somehow — as usual. Pamela was resolved that there should be no nonsense about her feelings.

'But does that mean I'm in love with him?' insisted the orange scrawl.

As though in search of an answer, Pamela turned back the pages of her diary (she had already covered nearly eight of them with her account of this memorable twelfth of June). ‘His face,’ she read, ’is very brown, almost like an Arab’s, except that he has blue eyes, as he lives mostly in the South, because he says that if you don’t live in the sun, you go slightly mad, which is why people in the North, like us and the Germans and the Americans, are so tiresome, though of course you go still madder where there’s too much sun, like in India, where they’re even more hopeless. He’s very good-looking and you don’t think of him as being either old or young, but as just being there, like that, and the way he smiles is really very extraordinary, and so are his eyes, and I simply adored his white silk suit.’ But the question was not yet answered. His silk suit wasn’t him, nor was his voice, even though he had ‘an awfully nice one, rather like that man who talks about books on the wireless, only nicer.’ She turned over a page. ‘But M.F. is different from most clever people,’ the orange scrawl proclaimed, ‘because he doesn’t make you feel a fool, even when he does laugh at you, and never, which is so ghastly with men like Professor Cobley, talks down to you in that awful patient, gentle way, which makes you feel a million times more of a worm than being snubbed or ignored, because, if you have any pride, that sort of intelligence without tears is just loathsome, as though you were being given milk pudding out of charity. No, M.F. talks to you on the level, and the extraordinary thing is that, while he’s talking to you and you’re talking to him, you are on a level with him, or at any rate you feel as though you were, which comes to the same thing. He’s like influenza, you catch his intelligence.’ Pamela let the leaves of the notebook flick past, one by one, under her thumb. The final words on the half-blank page once more stared at her, questioningly. ‘But does that mean I’m in love with him?’ Taking her pen from between her teeth, ‘Certainly,’ she wrote, ‘I do find him terribly attractive physically.’ She paused for a moment to reflect, then added, frowning as though with the effort of raising an elusive fact from the depths of memory, of solving a difficult problem in algebra: ‘Because really, when he put his hand on my shoulder, which would have been simply intolerable if anyone else had done it, but somehow with him I didn’t mind, I felt

all thrilled with an absolute frisson.' She ran her pen through the last word and substituted 'thrill', which she underlined to make it seem less lamely a repetition. 'Frisson' had been one of Clare's favourite words; hearing it pronounced in her mother's remembered voice, Pamela had felt a sudden mistrust of it; it seemed to cast a kind of doubt on the feelings it stood for, a doubt of which she was ashamed — it seemed so disloyal and the voice had sounded so startlingly, so heart-rendingly clear and near — but which she still couldn't help experiencing. She defended herself; 'frisson' had simply had to go, because the thrill was genuine, absolutely genuine, she insisted. 'For a moment,' she went on, writing very fast, as though she were trying to run away from the sad, disagreeable thoughts that had intruded upon her, 'I thought I was going to faint when he touched me, like when one's coming to after chloroform, which I've certainly never felt like with anyone else.' As a protest against the doubts inspired by that unfortunate frisson she underlined 'never', heavily. Never; it was quite true. When Harry Braddon had tried to kiss her, she had been furious and disgusted — disgusting beast! Saddening and reproachful, Clare's presence hovered round her once more; Clare had liked Harry Braddon. Still, he was a beast. Pamela had never told her mother about that kiss. She shut her eyes excludingly and thought instead of Cecil Rudge, poor, timid, unhappy little Cecil, whom she liked so much, was so genuinely sorry for. But when, that afternoon at Aunt Edith's, when at last, after an hour's visibly laborious screwing to the sticking point, he had had the courage to take her hand and say 'Pamela' and kiss it, she had just laughed, oh! unforgivably, but she simply couldn't help it; he was so ridiculous. Poor lamb, he had been terribly upset. 'But I'm so sorry,' she had gasped between the bursts of her laughter, 'so dreadfully sorry. Please don't be hurt.' But his face, she could see, was agonized. 'Please! Oh, I feel so miserable.' And she had gone off into another explosion of laughter which almost choked her. But when she could breathe again, she had run to him where he stood, averted and utterly unhappy, by the window, she had taken his hand and, when he still refused to look at her, had put her arm round his neck and kissed him. But the emotion that had filled her eyes with tears was

nothing like passion. As for Hugh Davies — why, it certainly had been rather thrilling when Hugh kissed her. It had been thrilling, but certainly not to fainting point. But then had she really felt like fainting today? a small voice questioned. She drowned the small voice with the scratching of her pen. ‘Consult the oracles of passion,’ she wrote and, laying down her pen, got up and crossed the room. A copy of The Return of Eurydice was lying on the bed; she picked it up and turned over the pages. Here it was! ‘Consult the oracles of passion,’ she read aloud, and her own voice sounded, she thought, strangely oracular in the solitude. ‘A god speaks in them, or else a devil, one can never tell which beforehand, nor even, in most cases, afterwards. And, when all is said, does it very much matter? God and devil are equally supernatural, that is the important thing; equally supernatural and therefore, in this all too flatly natural world of sense and science and society, equally desirable, equally significant.’ She shut the book and walked back to the table. ‘Which is what he said this afternoon,’ she went on writing, ‘but in that laughing way, when I said I could never see why one shouldn’t do what one liked, instead of all this Hussy and Hippo rigmarole about service and duty, and he said yes, that was what Rabelais had said’ (there seemed to be an awful lot of ‘saids’ in this sentence, but it couldn’t be helped; she scrawled on); ‘which I pretended I’d read — why can’t one tell the truth? particularly as I’d just been saying at the same time that one ought to say what one thinks as well as do what one likes; but it seems to be hopeless — and he said he entirely agreed, it was perfect, so long as you had the luck to like the sort of things that kept you on the right side of the prison bars and think the sort of things that don’t get you murdered when you say them. And I said I’d rather say what I thought and do what I liked and be murdered and put in gaol than be a Hippo, and he said I was an idealist, which annoyed me and I said I certainly wasn’t, all I was was someone who didn’t want to go mad with inhibitions. And he laughed, and I wanted to quote him his own words about the oracles, but somehow it was so shy-making that I didn’t. All the same, it’s what I intensely feel, that one ought to consult the oracles of passion. And I shall consult them.’ She leaned back in her chair and shut her eyes. The orange

question floated across the darkness: ‘But does that mean I’m in love with him?’ The oracle seemed to be saying yes. But oracles, she resolutely refused to remember, can be rigged to suit the interests of the questioner. Didn’t the admirer of The Return of Eurydice secretly want the oracle to say yes? Didn’t she think she’d almost fainted, because she’d wished she’d almost fainted, because she’d come desiring to faint? Pamela sighed; then, with a gesture of decision, she slapped her notebook to and put away her pen. It was time to get ready for dinner; she bustled about efficiently and distractingly among her trunks. But the question returned to her as she lay soaking in the warm other-world of her bath. By the time she got out she had boiled herself to such a pitch of giddiness that she could hardly stand.

For Pamela, dinner in solitude, especially the public solitude of hotels, was a punishment. Companionlessness and compulsory silence depressed her. Besides, she never felt quite eye-proof; she could never escape from the obsession that everyone was looking at her, judging, criticizing. Under a carapace of rather impertinent uncaringness she writhed distressfully. At Florence her loneliness had driven her to make friends with two not very young American women who were staying in her hotel. They were a bit earnest and good and dreary. But Pamela preferred even dreariness to solitude. She attached herself to them inseparably. They were touched. When she left for Rome, they promised to write to her, they made her promise to write to them. She was so young; they felt responsible; a steadying hand, the counsel of older friends . . . Pamela had already received two steadying letters. But she hadn’t answered them, never would answer them. The horrors of lonely dining cannot be alleviated by correspondence.

Walking down to her ordeal in the restaurant, she positively yearned for her dreary friends. But the hall was a desert of alien eyes and faces; and the waiter who led her through the hostile dining-room, had bowed, it seemed to her, with an ironical politeness, had mockingly smiled. She sat down haughtily at her table and almost wished she were under it. When the sommelier appeared with his list,

she ordered half a bottle of something absurdly expensive, for fear he might think she didn’t know anything about wine.

She had got as far as the fruit, when a presence loomed over her; she looked up. ‘You?’ Her delight was an illumination; the young man was dazzled. ‘What marvellous luck!’ Yet it was only Guy Browne, Guy whom she had met a few times at dances and found quite pleasant — that was all. ‘Think of your being in Rome!’ She made him sit down at her table. When she had finished her coffee, Guy suggested that they should go out and dance somewhere. They went. It was nearly three when Pamela got to bed. She had had a most enjoyable evening.

5

But how ungratefully she treated poor Guy when, next day at lunch, Fanning asked her how she had spent the evening! True, there were extenuating circumstances, chief among which was the fact that Fanning had kissed her when they met. By force of habit, he himself would have explained, if anyone had asked him why, because he kissed every presentable face. Kissing was in the great English tradition. ‘It’s the only way I can be like Chaucer,’ he liked to affirm. ‘Just as knowing a little Latin and less Greek is my only claim to resembling Shakespeare and as lying in bed till ten’s the nearest I get to Descartes.’ In this particular case, as perhaps in every other particular case, the force of habit had been seconded by a deliberate intention; he was accustomed to women being rather in love with him, he liked the amorous atmosphere and could use the simplest as well as the most complicated methods to create it. Moreover he was an experimentalist, he genuinely wanted to see what would happen. What happened was that Pamela was astonished, embarrassed, thrilled, delighted, bewildered. And what with her confused excitement and the enormous effort she had made to take it all as naturally and easily as he had done, she was betrayed into what, in other circumstances, would have been a scandalous ingratitude. But when one has just been kissed, for the first time and at one’s second meeting with him, kissed offhandedly and yet (she felt it) significantly,

by Miles Fanning — actually Miles Fanning! — little men like Guy Browne do seem rather negligible, even though one did have a very good time with them the evening before.

‘I’m afraid you must have been rather lonely last night,’ said Fanning, as they sat down to lunch. His sympathy hypocritically covered a certain satisfaction that it should be his absence that had condemned her to dreariness.

‘No, I met a friend,’ Pamela answered with a smile which the inward comparison of Guy with the author of The Return of Eurydice had tinged with a certain amused condescendingness.

‘A friend?’ He raised his eyebrows. ‘Amico or amica? Our English is so discreetly equivocal. With this key Bowdler locked up his heart. But I apologize. Co or ca?’

‘Co. He’s called Guy Browne and he’s here learning Italian to get into the Foreign Office. He’s a nice boy.’ Pamela might have been talking about a favourite, or even not quite favourite, retriever. ‘Nice; but nothing very special. I mean, not in the way of intelligence.’ She shook her head patronizingly over Guy’s very creditable First in History as a guttersnipe capriciously favoured by an archduke might learn in his protector’s company to shake his head and patronizingly smile at the name of a marquis of only four or five centuries’ standing. ‘He can dance, though,’ she admitted.

‘So I suppose you danced with him?’ said Fanning in a tone which, in spite of his amusement at the child’s assumption of an aged superiority, he couldn’t help making rather disobligingly sarcastic. It annoyed him to think that Pamela should have spent an evening, which he had pictured as dismally lonely, dancing with a young man.

‘Yes, we danced,’ said Pamela, nodding.

‘Where?’

‘Don’t ask me. We went to about six different places in the course of the evening.’

‘Of course you did,’ said Fanning almost bitterly. ‘Moving rapidly from one place to another and doing exactly the same thing in each — that seems to be the

young’s ideal of bliss.’

Speaking as a young who had risen above such things, but who still had to suffer from the folly of her unregenerate contemporaries, ‘It’s quite true,’ Pamela gravely confirmed.

‘They go to Pekin to listen to the wireless and to Benares to dance the fox-trot. I’ve seen them at it. It’s incomprehensible. And then the tooting up and down in automobiles, and the roaring up and down in aeroplanes, and the stinking up and down in motorboats. Up and down, up and down, just for the sake of not sitting still, of having never time to think or feel. No, I give them up, these young of yours.’ He shook his head. ‘But I’m becoming a minor prophet,’ he added; his good humour was beginning to return.

‘But after all,’ said Pamela, ‘we’re not all like that.’

Her gravity made him laugh. ‘There’s at least one who’s ready to let herself be bored by a tiresome survivor from another civilization. Thank you, Pamela.’ Leaning across the table, he took her hand and kissed it. ‘I’ve been horribly ungrateful,’ he went on, and his face as he looked at her was suddenly transfigured by the bright enigmatic beauty of his smile. ‘If you knew how charming you looked!’ he said; and it was true. That ingenuous face, those impertinent little breasts — charming. ‘And how charming you were! But of course you do know,’ a little demon prompted him to add: ‘no doubt Mr Browne told you last night.’

Pamela had blushed — a blush of pleasure, and embarrassed shyness, and excitement. What he had just said and done was more significant, she felt, even than the kiss he had given her when they met. Her cheeks burned; but she managed, with an effort, to keep her eyes unwaveringly on his. His last words made her frown. ‘He certainly didn’t,’ she answered. ‘He’d have got his face smacked.’

‘Is that a delicate hint?’ he asked. ‘If so,’ and he leaned forward, ‘here’s the other cheek.’

Her face went redder than ever. She felt suddenly miserable; he was only laughing at her. ‘Why do you laugh at me?’ she said aloud unhappily.

‘But I wasn’t,’ he protested. ‘I really did think you were annoyed.’

‘But why should I have been?’

‘I can’t imagine.’ He smiled. ‘But if you would have smacked Mr Browne’s face . . .’

‘But Guy’s quite different.’

It was Fanning’s turn to wince. ‘You mean he’s young, while I’m only a poor old imbecile who needn’t be taken seriously?’

‘Why are you so stupid?’ Pamela asked almost fiercely. ‘No, but I mean,’ she added in quick apology, ‘I mean . . . well, I don’t care two pins about Guy. So you see, it would annoy me if he tried to push in, like that. Whereas with somebody who does mean something to me . . .’ Pamela hesitated. ‘With you,’ she specified in a rather harsh, strained voice and with just that look of despairing determination, Fanning imagined, just that jumping-off-the-Eiffel-Tower expression, which her mother’s face must have assumed in moments such as this, ‘it’s quite different. I mean, with you of course I’m not annoyed. I’m pleased. Or at least I was pleased, till I saw you were just making a fool of me.’

Touched and flattered, ‘But, my dear child,’ Fanning protested, ‘I wasn’t doing anything of the kind. I meant what I said. And much more than I said,’ he added, in the teeth of the warning and reproachful outcry raised by his common sense. It was amusing to experiment, it was pleasant to be adored, exciting to be tempted (and how young she was, how perversely fresh!). There was even something quite agreeable in resisting temptation; it had the charms of a strenuous and difficult sport. Like mountain climbing. He smiled once more, consciously brilliant.

This time Pamela dropped her eyes. There was a silence which might have protracted itself uncomfortably, if the waiter had not broken it by bringing the tagliatelle. They began to eat. Pamela was all at once exuberantly gay.

After coffee they took a taxi and drove to the Villa Giulia. ‘For we mustn’t,’ Fanning explained, ‘neglect your education.’

‘Mustn’t we?’ she asked. ‘I often wonder why we mustn’t. Truthfully now, I mean without any hippoing and all that — why shouldn’t I neglect it? Why

should I go to this beastly museum?' She was preparing to play the cynical, boastfully unintellectual part which she had made her own. 'Why?' she repeated truculently. Behind the rather vulgar lowbrow mask she cultivated wistful yearnings and concealed the uneasy consciousness of inferiority. 'A lot of beastly old Roman odds and ends!' she grumbled; that was one for Miss Figgis.

'Roman?' said Fanning. 'God forbid! Etruscan.'

'Well, Etruscan, then; it's all the same, anyhow. Why shouldn't I neglect the Etruscans? I mean, what have they got to do with me — me?' And she gave her chest two or three little taps with the tip of a crooked forefinger.

'Nothing, my child,' he answered. 'Thank goodness, they've got absolutely nothing to do with you, or me, or anybody else.'

'Then why . . .?'

'Precisely for that reason. That's the definition of culture — knowing and thinking about things that have absolutely nothing to do with us. About Etruscans, for example; or the mountains on the moon; or cat's-cradle among the Chinese; or the Universe at large.'

'All the same,' she insisted, 'I still don't see.'

'Because you've never known people who weren't cultured. But make the acquaintance of a few practical businessmen — the kind who have no time to be anything but alternately efficient and tired. Or of a few workmen from the big towns. (Country people are different; they still have the remains of the old substitutes for culture — religion, folk-lore, tradition. The town fellows have lost the substitutes without acquiring the genuine article.) Get to know those people; they'll make you see the point of culture. Just as the Sahara'll make you see the point of water. And for the same reason: they're arid.'

'That's all very well; but what about people like Professor Cobley?'

'Whom I've happily never met,' he said, 'but can reconstruct from the expression on your face. Well, all that can be said about those people is: just try to imagine them if they'd never been irrigated. Gobi or Shamo.'

'Well, perhaps.' She was dubious.

‘And anyhow the biggest testimony to culture isn’t the soulless philistines — it’s the soulful ones. My sweet Pamela,’ he implored, laying a hand on her bare brown arm, ‘for heaven’s sake don’t run the risk of becoming a soulful philistine.’

‘But as I don’t know what that is,’ she answered, trying to persuade herself, as she spoke, that the touch of his hand was giving her a tremendous frisson — but it really wasn’t.

‘It’s what the name implies,’ he said. ‘A person without culture who goes in for having a soul. An illiterate idealist. A Higher Thinker with nothing to think about but his — or more often, I’m afraid, her — beastly little personal feelings and sensations. They spend their lives staring at their own navels and in the intervals trying to find other people who’ll take an interest and come and stare too. Oh, figuratively,’ he added, noticing the expression of astonishment which had passed across her face. ‘En tout bien, tout honneur. At least, sometimes and to begin with. Though I’ve known cases . . .’ But he decided it would be better not to speak about the lady from Rochester, N.Y. Pamela might be made to feel that the cap fitted. Which it did, except that her little head was such a charming one. ‘In the end,’ he said, ‘they go mad, these soulful philistines. Mad with self-consciousness and vanity and egotism and a kind of hopeless bewilderment; for when you’re utterly without culture, every fact’s an isolated, unconnected fact, every experience is unique and unprecedented. Your world’s made up of a few bright points floating about inexplicably in the midst of an unfathomable darkness. Terrifying! It’s enough to drive anyone mad. I’ve seen them, lots of them, gone utterly crazy. In the past they had organized religion, which meant that somebody had once been cultured for them, vicariously. But what with protestantism and the modernists, their philistinism’s absolute now. They’re alone with their own souls. Which is the worst companionship a human being can have. So bad that it sends you dotty. So beware, Pamela, beware! You’ll go mad if you think only of what has something to do with you. The Etruscans will keep you sane.’

‘Let’s hope so.’ She laughed. ‘But aren’t we there?’

The cab drew up at the door of the villa; they got out.

‘And remember that the things that start with having nothing to do with you,’ said Fanning, as he counted out the money for the entrance tickets, ‘turn out in the long run to have a great deal to do with you. Because they become a part of you and you of them. A soul can’t know or fully become itself without knowing and therefore to some extent becoming what isn’t itself. Which it does in various ways. By loving, for example.’

‘You mean . . .?’ The flame of interest brightened in her eyes.

But he went on remorselessly. ‘And by thinking of things that have nothing to do with you.’

‘Yes, I see.’ The flame had dimmed again.

‘Hence my concern about your education.’ He beckoned her through the turnstile into the museum. ‘A purely selfish concern,’ he added, smiling down at her. ‘Because I don’t want the most charming of my young friends to grow into a monster, whom I shall be compelled to flee from. So resign yourself to the Etruscans.’

‘I resign myself,’ said Pamela, laughing. His words had made her feel happy and excited. ‘You can begin.’ And in a theatrical voice, like that which used to make Ruth go off into such fits of laughter, ‘I am all ears,’ she added, ‘as they say in the Best Books.’ She pulled off her hat and shook out the imprisoned hair.

To Fanning, as he watched her, the gesture brought a sudden shock of pleasure. The impatient, exuberant youthfulness of it! And the little head, so beautifully shaped, so gracefully and proudly poised on its long neck! And her hair was drawn back smoothly from the face to explode in a thick tangle of curls on the nape of the neck. Ravishing!

‘All ears,’ she repeated, delightedly conscious of the admiration she was receiving.

‘All ears.’ And almost meditatively, ‘But do you know,’ he went on, ‘I’ve never even seen your ears. May I?’ And without waiting for her permission, he lifted up the soft, goldy-brown hair that lay in a curve, drooping, along the side of her head.

Pamela's face violently reddened; but she managed none the less to laugh. 'Are they as long and furry as you expected?' she asked.

He allowed the lifted hair to fall back into its place and, without answering her question, 'I've always,' he said, looking at her with a smile which she found disquietingly enigmatic and remote, 'I've always had a certain fellow-feeling for those savages who collect ears and thread them on strings, as necklaces.'

'But what a horror!' she cried out.

'You think so?' He raised his eyebrows.

But perhaps, Pamela was thinking, he was a sadist. In that book of Krafft-Ebbing's there had been a lot about sadists. It would be queer if he were . . .

'But what's certain,' Fanning went on in another, business-like voice, 'what's only too certain is that ears aren't culture. They've got too much to do with us. With me, at any rate. Much too much.' He smiled at her again. Pamela smiled back at him, fascinated and obscurely a little frightened; but the fright was an element in the fascination. She dropped her eyes. 'So don't let's waste any more time,' his voice went on. 'Culture to right of us, culture to left of us. Let's begin with this culture on the left. With the vases. They really have absolutely nothing to do with us.'

He began and Pamela listened. Not very attentively, however. She lifted her hand and, under the hair, touched her ear. 'A fellow-feeling for those savages.' She remembered his words with a little shudder. He'd almost meant them. And 'ears aren't culture. Too much to do with us. With me. Much too much.' He'd meant that too, genuinely and wholeheartedly. And his smile had been a confirmation of the words; yes, and a comment, full of mysterious significance. What had he meant? But surely it was obvious what he had meant. Or wasn't it obvious?

The face she turned towards him wore an expression of grave attention. And when he pointed to a vase and said, 'Look,' she looked, with what an air of concentrated intelligence! But as for knowing what he was talking about! She went on confusedly thinking that he had a fellow-feeling for those savages, and that her ears had too much to do with him, much too much, and that perhaps he

was in love with her, perhaps also that he was like those people in Krafft-Ebbing, perhaps . . . ; and it seemed to her that her blood must have turned into a kind of hot, red sodawater, all fizzy with little bubbles of fear and excitement.

She emerged, partially at least, out of this bubbly and agitated trance to hear him say, ‘Look at that, now.’ A tall statue towered over her. ‘The Apollo of Veii,’ he explained. ‘And really, you know, it is the most beautiful statue in the world. Each time I see it, I’m more firmly convinced of that.’

Dutifully, Pamela stared. The God stood there on his pedestal, one foot advanced, erect in his draperies. He had lost his arms, but the head was intact and the strange Etruscan face was smiling, enigmatically smiling. Rather like him, it suddenly occurred to her.

‘What’s it made of?’ she asked; for it was time to be intelligent.

‘Terracotta. Originally coloured.’

‘And what date?’

‘Late sixth century.’

‘b.c.?’ she queried, a little dubiously, and was relieved when he nodded. It really would have been rather awful if it had been a.d. ‘Who by?’

‘By Vulca, they say. But as that’s the only Etruscan sculptor they know the name of . . .’ He shrugged his shoulders, and the gesture expressed a double doubt — doubt whether the archaeologists were right and doubt whether it was really much good talking about Etruscan art to someone who didn’t feel quite certain whether the Apollo of Veii was made in the sixth century before or after Christ.

There was a long silence. Fanning looked at the statue. So did Pamela, who also, from time to time, looked at Fanning. She was on the point, more than once, of saying something; but his face was so meditatively glum that, on each occasion, she changed her mind. In the end, however, the silence became intolerable.

‘I think it’s extraordinarily fine,’ she announced in the rather religious voice that seemed appropriate. He only nodded. The silence prolonged itself, more

oppressive and embarrassing than ever. She made another and despairing effort. ‘Do you know, I think he’s really rather like you. I mean, the way he smiles. . . .’

Fanning’s petrified immobility broke once more into life. He turned towards her, laughing. ‘You’re irresistible, Pamela.’

‘Am I?’ Her tone was cold; she was offended. To be told you were irresistible always meant that you’d behaved like an imbecile child. But her conscience was clear; it was a gratuitous insult — the more intolerable since it had been offered by the man who, a moment before, had been saying that he had a fellow-feeling for those savages and that her ears had altogether too much to do with him.

Fanning noticed her sudden change of humour and obscurely divined the cause. ‘You’ve paid me the most irresistible compliment you could have invented,’ he said, doing his best to undo the effect of his words. For after all what did it matter, with little breasts like that and thin brown arms, if she did mix up the millenniums a bit? ‘You could hardly have pleased me more if you’d said I was another Rudolph Valentino.’

Pamela had to laugh.

‘But seriously,’ he said, ‘if you knew what this lovely God means to me, how much . . .’

Mollified by being once more spoken to seriously, ‘I think I can understand,’ she said in her most understanding voice.

‘No, I doubt if you can.’ He shook his head. ‘It’s a question of age, of the experience of a particular time that’s not your time. I shall never forget when I came back to Rome for the first time after the War and found this marvellous creature standing here. They only dug him up in ‘sixteen, you see. So there it was, a brand new experience, a new and apocalyptic voice out of the past. Some day I shall try to get it on to paper, all that this God has taught me.’ He gave a little sigh; she could see that he wasn’t thinking about her any more; he was talking for himself. ‘Some day,’ he repeated. ‘But it’s not ripe yet. You can’t write a thing before it’s ripe, before it wants to be written. But you can talk about it, you can take your mind for walks all round it and through it.’ He paused and, stretching out a hand, touched a fold of the God’s sculptured garment, as though

he were trying to establish a more intimate, more real connexion with the beauty before him. ‘Not that what he taught me was fundamentally new,’ he went on slowly. ‘It’s all in Homer, of course. It’s even partially expressed in the archaic Greek sculpture. Partially. But Apollo here expresses it wholly. He’s all Homer, all the ancient world, concentrated in a single lump of terracotta. That’s his novelty. And then the circumstances gave him a special point. It was just after the War that I first saw him — just after the apotheosis and the logical conclusion of all the things Apollo didn’t stand for. You can imagine how marvellously new he seemed by contrast. After that horrible enormity, he was a lovely symbol of the small, the local, the kindly. After all that extravagance of beastliness — yes, and all that extravagance of heroism and self-sacrifice — he seemed so beautifully sane. A God who doesn’t admit the separate existence of either heroics or diabolics, but somehow includes them in his own nature and turns them into something else — like two gases combining to make a liquid. Look at him,’ Fanning insisted. ‘Look at his face, look at his body, see how he stands. It’s obvious. He’s neither the God of heroics, nor the God of diabolics. And yet it’s equally obvious that he knows all about both, that he includes them, that he combines them into a third essence. It’s the same with Homer. There’s no tragedy in Homer. He’s pessimistic, yes; but never tragic. His heroes aren’t heroic in our sense of the word; they’re men.’ (Pamela took a very deep breath; if she had opened her mouth, it would have been a yawn.) ‘In fact, you can say there aren’t any heroes in Homer. Nor devils, nor sins. And none of our aspiring spiritualities, and, of course, none of our horrible, nauseating disgusts — because they’re the complement of being spiritual, they’re the tails to its heads. You couldn’t have had Homer writing “the expense of spirit in a waste of shame”. Though, of course, with Shakespeare, it may have been physiological; the passion violent and brief, and then the most terrible reaction. It’s the sort of thing that colours a whole life, a whole work. Only of course one’s never allowed to say so. All that one isn’t allowed to say!’ He laughed. Pamela also laughed. ‘But physiology or no physiology,’ Fanning went on, ‘he couldn’t have written like that if he’d lived before the great split — the great split that broke

life into spirit and matter, heroics and diabolics, virtue and sin and all the other accursed antitheses. Homer lived before the split; life hadn't been broken when he wrote. They're complete, his men and women, complete and real; for he leaves nothing out, he shirks no issue, even though there is no tragedy. He knows all about it — all.' He laid his hand again on the statue. 'And this God's his portrait. He's Homer, but with the Etruscan smile. Homer smiling at the sad, mysterious, beautiful absurdity of the world. The Greeks didn't see that divine absurdity as clearly as the Etruscans. Not even in Homer's day; and by the time you get to any sculptor who was anything like as accomplished as the man who made this, you'll find that they've lost it altogether. True, the earliest Greeks' God used to smile all right — or rather grin; for subtlety wasn't their strong point. But by the end of the sixth century they were already becoming a bit too heroic; they were developing those athlete's muscles and those tiresomely noble poses and damned superior faces. But our God here refused to be a prize-fighter or an actor-manager. There's no terribilità about him, no priggishness, no sentimentality. And yet without being in the least pretentious, he's beautiful, he's grand, he's authentically divine. The Greeks took the road that led to Michelangelo and Bernini and Thorwaldsen and Rodin. A rake's progress. These Etruscans were on a better track. If only people had had the sense to follow it! Or at least get back to it. But nobody has, except perhaps old Maillol. They've all allowed themselves to be lured away. Plato was the arch-seducer. It was he who first sent us whoring after spirituality and heroics, whoring after the complementary demons of disgust and sin. We needs must love — well, not the highest, except sometimes by accident — but always the most extravagant and exciting. Tragedy was much more exciting than Homer's luminous pessimism, than this God's smiling awareness of the divine absurdity. Being alternately a hero and a sinner is much more sensational than being an integrated man. So as men seem to have the Yellow Press in the blood, like syphilis, they went back on Homer and Apollo; they followed Plato and Euripides. And Plato and Euripides handed them over to the Stoics and the Neo-Platonists. And these in turn handed

humanity over to the Christians. And the Christians have handed us over to Henry Ford and the machines. So here we are.'

Pamela nodded intelligently. But what she was chiefly conscious of was the ache in her feet. If only she could sit down!

But, 'How poetical and appropriate,' Fanning began again, 'that the God should have risen from the grave exactly when he did, in 1916! Rising up in the midst of the insanity, like a beautiful, smiling reproach from another world. It was dramatic. At least I felt it so, when I saw him for the first time just after the War. The resurrection of Apollo, the Etruscan Apollo. I've been his worshipper and self-appointed priest ever since. Or at any rate I've tried to be. But it's difficult.' He shook his head. 'Perhaps it's even impossible for us to recapture . . .' He left the sentence unfinished and, taking her arm, led her out into the great courtyard of the Villa. Under the arcades was a bench. Thank goodness, said Pamela inwardly. They sat down.

'You see,' he went on, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped, 'you can't get away from the things that the God protests against. Because they've become a part of you. Tradition and education have driven them into your very bones. It's a case of what I was speaking about just now — of the things that have nothing to do with you coming by force of habit to have everything to do with you. Which is why I'd like you to get Apollo and his Etruscans into your system while you're still young. It may save you trouble. Or on the other hand,' he added with a rueful little laugh, 'it may not. Because I really don't know if he's everybody's God. He may do for me — and do, only because I've got Plato and Jesus in my bones. But does he do for you? Chi lo sa? The older one grows, the more often one asks that question. Until, of course, one's arteries begin to harden, and then one's opinions begin to harden too, harden till they fossilize into certainty. But meanwhile, chi lo sa? chi lo sa? And after all it's quite agreeable, not knowing. And knowing, and at the same time knowing that it's no practical use knowing — that's not disagreeable either. Knowing, for example, that it would be good to live according to this God's

commandments, but knowing at the same time that one couldn’t do it even if one tried, because one’s very guts and skeleton are already pledged to other Gods.’

‘I should have thought that was awful,’ said Pamela.

‘For you, perhaps. But I happen to have a certain natural affection for the accomplished fact. I like and respect it, even when it is a bit depressing. Thus, it’s a fact that I’d like to think and live in the unsplit, Apollonian way. But it’s also a fact — and the fact as such is lovable — that I can’t help indulging in aspirations and disgusts; I can’t help thinking in terms of heroics and diabolics. Because the division, the splitness, has been worked right into my bones. So has the microbe of sensationalism; I can’t help wallowing in the excitements of mysticism and the tragic sense. Can’t help it.’ He shook his head. ‘Though perhaps I’ve wallowed in them rather more than I was justified in wallowing — justified by my upbringing, I mean. There was a time when I was really quite perversely preoccupied with mystical experiences and ecstasies and private universes.’

‘Private universes?’ she questioned.

‘Yes, private, not shared. You create one, you live in it, each time you’re in love, for example.’ (Brightly serious, Pamela nodded her understanding and agreement; yes, yes, she knew all about that.) ‘Each time you’re spiritually exalted,’ he went on, ‘each time you’re drunk, even. Everybody has his own favourite short cuts to the other world. Mine, in those days, was opium.’

‘Opium?’ She opened her eyes very wide. ‘Do you mean to say you smoked opium?’ She was thrilled. Opium was a vice of the first order.

‘It’s as good a way of becoming supernatural,’ he answered, ‘as looking at one’s nose or one’s navel, or not eating, or repeating a word over and over again, till it loses its sense and you forget how to think. All roads lead to Rome. The only bother about opium is that it’s rather an unwholesome road. I had to go to a nursing home in Cannes to get disintoxicated.’

‘All the same,’ said Pamela, doing her best to imitate the quiet casualness of his manner, ‘it must be rather delicious, isn’t it? Awfully exciting, I mean,’ she added, forgetting not to be thrilled.

‘Too exciting.’ He shook his head. ‘That’s the trouble. We needs must love the excitingest when we see it. The supernatural is exciting. But I don’t want to love the supernatural, I want to love the natural. Not that a little supernaturalness isn’t, of course, perfectly natural and necessary. But you can overdo it. I overdid it then. I was all the time in t’other world, never here. I stopped smoking because I was ill. But even if I hadn’t been, I’d have stopped sooner or later for aesthetic reasons. The supernatural world is so terribly baroque — altogether too Counter-Reformation and Bernini. At its best it can be Greco. But you can have too much even of Greco. A big dose of him makes you begin to pine for Vulca and his Apollo.’

‘But doesn’t it work the other way too?’ she asked. ‘I mean, don’t you sometimes long to start smoking again?’ She was secretly hoping that he’d let her try a pipe or two.

Fanning shook his head. ‘One doesn’t get tired of very good bread,’ he answered. ‘Apollo’s like that. I don’t pine for supernatural excitements. Which doesn’t mean,’ he added, ‘that I don’t in practice run after them. You can’t disintoxicate yourself of your culture. That sticks deeper than a mere taste for opium. I’d like to be able to think and live in the spirit of the God. But the fact remains that I can’t.’

‘Can’t you?’ said Pamela with a polite sympathy. She was more interested in the opium.

‘No, no, you can’t entirely disintoxicate yourself of mysticism and the tragic sense. You can’t take a Turvey treatment for spirituality and disgust. You can’t. Not nowadays. Acceptance is impossible in a split world like ours. You’ve got to recoil. In the circumstances it’s right and proper. But absolutely it’s wrong. If only one could accept as this God accepts, smiling like that . . .’

‘But you do smile like that,’ she insisted.

He laughed and, unclasping his hands, straightened himself up in his seat. ‘But unhappily,’ he said, ‘a man can smile and smile and not be Apollo. Meanwhile, what’s becoming of your education? Shouldn’t we . . .?’

‘Well, if you like,’ she assented dubiously. ‘Only my feet are rather tired. I mean, there’s something about sight-seeing . . .’

‘There is indeed,’ said Fanning. ‘But I was prepared to be a martyr to culture. Still, I’m thankful you’re not.’ He smiled at her, and Pamela was pleased to find herself once more at the focus of his attention. It had been very interesting to hear him talk about his philosophy and all that. But all the same . . .

‘Twenty to four,’ said Fanning, looking at his watch. ‘I’ve an idea; shouldn’t we drive out to Monte Cavo and spend the evening up there in the cool? There’s a view. And a really very eatable dinner.’

‘I’d love to. But . . .’ Pamela hesitated. ‘Well, you see I did tell Guy I’d go out with him this evening.’

He was annoyed. ‘Well, if you prefer . . .’

‘But I don’t prefer,’ she answered hastily. ‘I mean, I’d much rather go with you. Only I wondered how I’d let Guy know I wasn’t . . .’

‘Don’t let him know,’ Fanning answered, abusing his victory. ‘After all, what are young men there for, except to wait when young women don’t keep their appointments? It’s their function in life.’

Pamela laughed. His words had given her a pleasing sense of importance and power. ‘Poor Guy!’ she said through her laughter, and her eyes were insolently bright.

‘You little hypocrite.’

‘I’m not,’ she protested. ‘I really am sorry for him.’

‘A little hypocrite and a little devil,’ was his verdict. He rose to his feet. ‘If you could see your own eyes now! But andiamo.’ He held out his hand to help her up. ‘I’m beginning to be rather afraid of you.’

‘What nonsense!’ She was delighted. They walked together towards the door.

Fanning made the driver go out by the Appian Way. ‘For the sake of your education,’ he explained, pointing at the ruined tombs, ‘which we can continue, thank heaven, in comfort, and at twenty miles an hour.’

Leaning back luxuriously in her corner, Pamela laughed. ‘But I must say,’ she had to admit, ‘it is really rather lovely.’

From Albano the road mounted through the chestnut woods towards Rocca di Papa. A few miles brought them to a turning on the right; the car came to a halt.

‘It’s barred,’ said Pamela, looking out of the window. Fanning had taken out his pocket-book and was hunting among the bank-notes and the old letters. ‘The road’s private,’ he explained. ‘They ask for your card — heaven knows why. The only trouble being, of course, that I’ve never possessed such a thing as a visiting-card in my life. Still, I generally have one or two belonging to other people. Ah, here we are! Good!’ He produced two pieces of pasteboard. A gatekeeper had appeared and was waiting by the door of the car. ‘Shall we say we’re Count Keyserling?’ said Fanning, handing her the count’s card. ‘Or alternatively,’ he read from the other, ‘that we’re Herbert Watson, Funeral Furnisher, Funerals conducted with Efficiency and Reverence, Motor Hearses for use in every part of the Country.’ He shook his head. ‘The last relic of my poor old friend Tom Hatchard. Died last year. I had to bury him. Poor Tom! On the whole I think we’d better be Herbert Watson. Ecco!’ He handed out the card; the man saluted and went to open the gate. ‘But give me back Count Keyserling.’ Fanning stretched out his hand. ‘He’ll come in useful another time.’

The car started and went roaring up the zig-zag ascent. Lying back in her corner, Pamela laughed and laughed, inextinguishably.

‘But what is the joke?’ he asked.

She didn’t know herself. Mr Watson and the Count had only been a pretext; this enormous laughter, which they had released, sprang from some other, deeper source. And perhaps it was a mere accident that it should be laughter at all. Another pretext, a different finger on the trigger, and it might have been tears, or anger, or singing ‘Constantinople’ at the top of her voice — anything.

She was limp when they reached the top. Fanning made her sit down where she could see the view and himself went off to order cold drinks at the bar of the little inn that had once been the monastery of Monte Cavo.

Pamela sat where he had left her. The wooded slopes fell steeply away beneath her, down, down to the blue shining of the Alban Lake; and that toy palace perched on the hill beyond was the Pope’s, that tiny city in a picture-

book, Marino. Beyond a dark ridge on the left the round eye of Nemi looked up from its crater. Far off, behind Albano an expanse of blue steel, burnished beneath the sun, was the Tyrrhenian, and flat like the sea, but golden with ripening corn and powdered goldenly with a haze of dust, the Campagna stretched away from the feet of the subsiding hills, away and up towards a fading horizon, on which the blue ghosts of mountains floated on a level with her eyes. In the midst of the expanse a half-seen golden chaos was Rome. Through the haze the dome of St Peter's shone faintly in the sun with a glitter as of muted glass. There was an enormous silence, sad, sad but somehow consoling. A sacred silence. And yet when, coming up from behind her, Fanning broke it, his voice, for Pamela, committed no iconoclasm; for it seemed, in the world of her feelings, to belong to the silence, it was made, as it were, of the same intimate and friendly substance. He squatted down on his heels beside her, laying a hand on her shoulder to steady himself.

'What a panorama of space and time!' he said. 'So many miles, such an expanse of centuries! You can still walk on the paved road that led to the temple here. The generals used to march up sometimes in triumph. With elephants.'

The silence enveloped them again, bringing them together; and they were alone and as though conspiratorially isolated in an atmosphere of solemn amorousness.

'I signori son serviti,' said a slightly ironic voice behind them.

'That's our drinks,' said Fanning. 'Perhaps we'd better . . .' He got up and, as he unbent them, his knees cracked stiffly. He stooped to rub them, for they ached; his joints were old. 'Fool!' he said to himself, and decided that tomorrow he'd go to Venice. She was too young, too dangerously and perversely fresh.

They drank their lemonade in silence. Pamela's face wore an expression of grave serenity which it touched and flattered and moved him to see. Still, he was a fool to be touched and flattered and moved.

'Let's go for a bit of a stroll,' he said, when they had slaked their thirst. She got up without a word, obediently, as though she had become his slave.

It was breathless under the trees and there was a smell of damp, hot greenness, a hum and flicker of insects in the probing slants of sunlight. But in the open spaces the air of the heights was quick and nimble, in spite of the sun; the broom-flower blazed among the rocks; and round the bushes where the honeysuckle had clambered, there hung invisible islands of perfume, cool and fresh in the midst of the hot sea of bracken smell. Pamela moved here and there with little exclamations of delight, pulling at the tough sprays of honeysuckle. ‘Oh, look!’ she called to him in her rapturous voice. ‘Come and look!’

‘I’m looking,’ he shouted back across the intervening space. ‘With a telescope. With the eye of faith,’ he corrected; for she had moved out of sight. He sat down on a smooth rock and lighted a cigarette. Venice, he reflected, would be rather boring at this particular season. In a few minutes Pamela came back to him, flushed, with a great bunch of honeysuckle between her hands.

‘You know, you ought to have come,’ she said reproachfully. ‘There were such lovely pieces I couldn’t reach.’

Fanning shook his head. ‘He also serves who only sits and smokes,’ he said, and made room for her on the stone beside him. ‘And what’s more,’ he went on, ‘ ”let Austin have his swink to him reserved”. Yes, let him. How wholeheartedly I’ve always agreed with Chaucer’s Monk! Besides, you seem to forget, my child, that I’m an old, old gentleman.’ He was playing the safe, the prudent part. Perhaps if he played it hard enough, it wouldn’t be necessary to go to Venice.

Pamela paid no attention to what he was saying. ‘Would you like this one for your buttonhole, Miles?’ she asked, holding up a many-trumpeted flower. It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name, and the accomplishment of this much-meditated act of daring made her blush. ‘I’ll stick it in,’ she added, leaning forward, so that he shouldn’t see her reddened cheeks, till her face was almost touching his coat.

Near and thus offered (for it was an offer, he had no doubt of that, a deliberate offer) why shouldn’t he take this lovely, this terribly and desperately tempting freshness? It was a matter of stretching out one’s hands. But no; it would be too insane. She was near, this warm young flesh, this scent of her hair,

near and offered — with what an innocent perversity, what a touchingly ingenuous and uncomprehending shamelessness! But he sat woodenly still, feeling all of a sudden as he had felt when, a lanky boy, he had been too shy, too utterly terrified, in spite of his longings, to kiss that Jenny — what on earth was her name? — that Jenny Something-or-Other he had danced the polka with at Uncle Fred's one Christmas, how many centuries ago! — and yet only yesterday, only this instant.

'There!' said Pamela, and drew back. Her cheeks had had time to cool a little.

'Thank you.' There was a silence.

'Do you know,' she said at last, efficiently, 'you've got a button loose on your coat.'

He fingered the hanging button. 'What a damning proof of celibacy!'

'If only I had a needle and thread . . .'

'Don't make your offer too lightly. If you knew what a quantity of unmended stuff I've got at home . . .'

'I'll come and do it all tomorrow,' she promised, feeling delightfully protective and important.

'Beware,' he said. 'I'll take you at your word. It's sweated labour.'

'I don't mind. I'll come.'

'Punctually at ten-thirty, then.' He had forgotten about Venice. 'I shall be a ruthless taskmaster.'

Nemi was already in shadow when they walked back; but the higher slopes were transfigured with the setting sunlight. Pamela halted at a twist of the path and turned back towards the western sky. Looking up, Fanning saw her standing there, goldenly flushed, the colours of her skin, her hair, her dress, the flowers in her hands, supernaturally heightened and intensified in the almost level light.

'I think this is the most lovely place I've ever seen.' Her voice was solemn with a natural piety. 'But you're not looking,' she added in a different tone, reproachfully.

'I'm looking at you,' he answered. After all, if he stopped in time, it didn't matter his behaving like a fool — it didn't finally matter and, meanwhile, was

very agreeable.

An expression of impertinent mischief chased away the solemnity from her face. ‘Trying to see my ears again?’ she asked; and, breaking off a honeysuckle blossom, she threw it down in his face, then turned and ran up the steep path.

‘Don’t imagine I’m going to pursue,’ he called after her. ‘The Pan and Syrinx business is a winter pastime. Like football.’

Her laughter came down to him from among the trees; he followed the retreating sound. Pamela waited for him at the top of the hill and they walked back together towards the inn.

‘Aren’t there any ruins here?’ she asked. ‘I mean, for my education.’

He shook his head. ‘The Young Pretender’s brother pulled them all down and built a monastery with them. For the Passionist Fathers,’ he added after a little pause. ‘I feel rather like a Passionist Father myself at the moment.’ They walked on without speaking, enveloped by the huge, the amorously significant silence.

But a few minutes later, at the dinner table, they were exuberantly gay. The food was well cooked, the wine an admirable Falernian. Fanning began to talk about his early loves. Vaguely at first, but later, under Pamela’s questioning, with an ever-increasing wealth of specific detail. They were indiscreet, impudent questions, which at ordinary times she couldn’t have uttered, or at least have only despairingly forced out, with a suicide’s determination. But she was a little tipsy now, tipsy with the wine and her own laughing exultation; she rapped them out easily, without a tremor. ‘As though you were the immortal Sigmund himself,’ he assured her, laughing. Her impudence and that knowledgeable, scientific ingenuousness amused him, rather perversely; he told her everything she asked.

When she had finished with his early loves, she questioned him about the opium. Fanning described his private universes and that charming nurse who had looked after him while he was being disintoxicated. He went on to talk about the black poverty he’d been reduced to by the drug. ‘Because you can’t do journalism or write novels in the other world,’ he explained. ‘At least I never

could.’ And he told her of the debts he still owed and of his present arrangements with his publishers.

Almost suddenly the night was cold and Fanning became aware that the bottle had been empty for a long time. He threw away the stump of his cigar. ‘Let’s go.’ They took their seats and the car set off, carrying with it the narrow world of form and colour created by its head-lamps. They were alone in the darkness of their padded box. An hour before Fanning had decided that he would take this opportunity to kiss her. But he was haunted suddenly by the memory of an Australian who had once complained to him of the sufferings of a young colonial in England. ‘In Sydney,’ he had said, ‘when I get into a taxi with a nice girl, I know exactly what to do. And I know exactly what to do when I’m in an American taxi. But when I apply my knowledge in London — God, isn’t there a row!’ How vulgar and stupid it all was! Not merely a fool, but a vulgar, stupid fool. He sat unmoving in his corner. When the lights of Rome were round them, he took her hand and kissed it.

‘Good night.’

She thanked him. ‘I’ve had the loveliest day.’ But her eyes were puzzled and unhappy. Meeting them, Fanning suddenly regretted his self-restraint, wished that he had been stupid and vulgar. And, after all, would it have been so stupid and vulgar? You could make any action seem anything you liked, from saintly to disgusting, by describing it in the appropriate words. But his regrets had come too late. Here was her hotel. He drove home to his solitude feeling exceedingly depressed.

6

June 14th. Spent the morning with M., who lives in a house belonging to a friend of his who is a Catholic and lives in Rome, M. says, because he likes to get his popery straight from the horse’s mouth. A nice house, old, standing just back from the Forum, which I said I thought was like a rubbish heap and he agreed with me, in spite of my education, and said he always preferred live dogs to dead

lions and thinks it’s awful the way the Fascists are pulling down nice ordinary houses and making holes to find more of these beastly pillars and things. I sewed on a lot of buttons, etc., as he’s living in only two rooms on the ground floor and the servants are on their holiday, so he eats out and an old woman comes to clean up in the afternoons, but doesn’t do any mending, which meant a lot for me, but I liked doing it, in spite of the darning, because he sat with me all the time, sometimes talking, sometimes just working. When he’s writing or sitting with his pen in his hand thinking, his face is quite still and terribly serious and far, far away, as though he were a picture, or more like some sort of not human person, a sort of angel, if one can imagine them without nightdresses and long hair, really rather frightening, so that one longed to shout or throw a reel of cotton at him so as to change him back again into a man. He has very beautiful hands, rather long and bony, but strong. Sometimes, after he’d sat thinking for a long time, he’d get up and walk about the room, frowning and looking kind of angry, which was still more terrifying — sitting there while he walked up and down quite close to me, as though he were absolutely alone. But one time he suddenly stopped his walking up and down and said how profusely he apologized for his toes, because I was darning, and it was really very wonderful to see him suddenly changed back from that picture-angel sort of creature into a human being. Then he sat down by me and said he’d been spending the morning wrestling with the problem of speaking the truth in books; so I said, but haven’t you always spoken it? because that always seemed to me the chief point of M.’s books. But he said, not much, because most of it was quite unspeakable in our world, as we found it too shocking and humiliating. So I said, all the same I didn’t see why it shouldn’t be spoken, and he said, nor did he in theory, but in practice he didn’t want to be lynched. And he said, look for example at those advertisements in American magazines with the photos and life stories of people with unpleasant breath. So I said, yes, aren’t they simply too awful. Because they really do make one shudder. And he said, precisely, there you are, and they’re so successful because everyone thinks them so perfectly awful. They’re outraged by them, he said, just as you’re outraged, and they rush off and buy the

stuff in sheer terror, because they're so terrified of being an outrage physically to other people. And he said, that's only one small sample of all the class of truths, pleasant and unpleasant, that you can't speak, except in scientific books, but that doesn't count, because you deliberately leave your feelings outside in the cloakroom when you're being scientific. And just because they're unspeakable, we pretend they're unimportant, but they aren't, on the contrary, they're terribly important, and he said, you've only got to examine your memory quite sincerely for five minutes to realize it, and of course he's quite right. When I think of Miss Poole giving me piano lessons — but no, really, one can't write these things, and yet one obviously ought to, because they are so important, the humiliating physical facts, both pleasant and unpleasant (though I must say, most of the ones I can think of seem to be unpleasant), so important in all human relationships, he says, even in love, which is really rather awful, but of course one must admit it. And M. said it would take a whole generation of being shocked and humiliated and lynching the shockers and humiliators before people could settle down to listening to that sort of truth calmly, which they did do, he says, at certain times in the past, at any rate much more so than now. And he says that when they can listen to it completely calmly, the world will be quite different from what it is now, so I asked, in what way? but he said he couldn't clearly imagine, only he knew it would be different. After that he went back to his table and wrote very quickly for about half an hour without stopping, and I longed to ask him if he'd been writing the truth, and if so, what about, but I didn't have the nerve, which was stupid.

We lunched at our usual place, which I really don't much like, as who wants to look at fat businessmen and farmers from the country simply drinking spaghetti? even if the spaghetti is good, but M. prefers it to the big places, because he says that in Rome one must do as the Romans do, not as the Americans. Still, I must say I do like looking at people who dress well and have good manners and nice jewels and things, which I told him, so he said all right, we'd go to Valadier tomorrow to see how the rich ate macaroni, which made me wretched, as it looked as though I'd been cadging, and of course that's the last

thing in the world I meant to do, to make him waste a lot of money on me, particularly after what he told me yesterday about his debts and what he made on the average, which still seems to me shockingly little, considering who he is, so I said no, wouldn't he lunch with me at Valadier's, and he laughed and said it was the first time he'd heard of a gigolo of fifty being taken out by a woman of twenty. That rather upset me — the way it seemed to bring what we are to each other on to the wrong level, making it all a sort of joke and sniggery, like something in Punch. Which is hateful, I can't bear it. And I have the feeling that he does it on purpose, as a kind of protection, because he doesn't want to care too much, and that's why he's always saying he's so old, which is all nonsense, because you're only as old as you feel, and sometimes I even feel older than he does, like when he gets so amused and interested with little boys in the street playing that game of sticking out your fingers and calling a number, or when he talks about that awful old Dickens. Which I told him, but he only laughed and said age is a circle and you grow into a lot of the things you grew out of, because the whole world is a fried whiting with its tail in its mouth, which only confirms what I said about his saying he was old being all nonsense. Which I told him and he said, quite right, he only said he felt old when he wished that he felt old. Which made me see still more clearly that it was just a defence. A defence of me, I suppose, and all that sort of nonsense. What I'd have liked to say, only I didn't, was that I don't want to be defended, particularly if being defended means his defending himself against me and making stupid jokes about gigolos and old gentlemen. Because I think he really does rather care underneath — from the way he looks at me sometimes — and he'd like to say so and act so, but he won't on principle, which is really against all his principles, and some time I shall tell him so. I insisted he should lunch with me and in the end he said he would, and then he was suddenly very silent and, I thought, glum and unhappy, and after coffee he said he'd have to go home and write all the rest of the day. So I came back to the hotel and had a rest and wrote this, and now it's nearly seven and I feel terribly sad, almost like crying. Next day. Rang up Guy and had less

difficulty than I expected getting him to forgive me for yesterday, in fact he almost apologized himself. Danced till 2.15.

June 15th. M. still sad and didn't kiss me when we met, on purpose, which made me angry, it's so humiliating to be defended. He was wearing an open shirt, like Byron, which suited him; but I told him, you look like the devil when you're sad (which is true, because his face ought to move, not be still), and he said that was what came of feeling and behaving like an angel; so of course I asked why he didn't behave like a devil, because in that case he'd look like an angel, and I preferred his looks to his morals, and then I blushed, like an idiot. But really it is too stupid that women aren't supposed to say what they think. Why can't we say, I like you, or whatever it is, without being thought a kind of monster, if we say it first, and even thinking ourselves monsters? Because one ought to say what one thinks and do what one likes, or else one becomes like Aunt Edith, hippo-ish and dead inside. Which is after all what M.'s constantly saying in his books, so he oughtn't to humiliate me with his beastly defendings. Lunch at Valadier's was really rather a bore. Afterwards we went and sat in a church, because it was so hot, a huge affair full of pink marble and frescoes and marble babies and gold. M. says that the modern equivalent is Lyons' Corner House, and that the Jesuits were so successful because they gave the poor a chance of feeling what it was like to live in a palace, or something better than a palace, because he says the chief difference between a Corner House and the state rooms at Buckingham Palace is that the Corner House is so much more sumptuous, almost as sumptuous as these Jesuit churches. I asked him if he believed in God and he said he believed in a great many gods, it depended on what he was doing, or being, or feeling at the moment. He said he believed in Apollo when he was working, and in Bacchus when he was drinking, and in Buddha when he felt depressed, and in Venus when he was making love, and in the Devil when he was afraid or angry, and in the Categorical Imperative when he had to do his duty. I asked him which he believed in now and he said he didn't quite know, but he thought it was the Categorical Imperative, which really

made me furious, so I answered that I only believed in the Devil and Venus, which made him laugh, and he said I looked as though I were going to jump off the Eiffel Tower, and I was just going to say what I thought of his hippo-ishness, I mean I'd really made up my mind, when a most horrible old verger rushed up and said we must leave the church, because it seems the Pope doesn't allow you to be in a church with bare arms, which is really too indecent. But M. said that after all it wasn't surprising, because every god has to protect himself against hostile gods, and the gods of bare skin are hostile to the gods of souls and clothes, and he made me stop in front of a shop window where there were some mirrors and said, you can see for yourself, and I must say I really did look very nice in that pale green linen which goes so awfully well with the skin, when one's a bit sunburnt. But he said, it's not merely a question of seeing, you must touch too, so I stroked my arms and said yes; they were nice and smooth, and he said, precisely, and then he stroked my arm very lightly, like a moth crawling, agonizingly creepy but delicious, once or twice, looking very serious and attentive, as though he were tuning a piano, which made me laugh, and I said I supposed he was experimenting to see if the Pope was in the right, and then he gave me the most horrible pinch and said, yes, the Pope was quite right and I ought to be muffled in Jaeger from top to toe. But I was so angry with the pain, because he pinched me really terribly, that I just rushed off without saying anything and jumped into a cab that was passing and drove straight to the hotel. But I was so wretched by the time I got there that I started crying in the lift and the lift man said he hoped I hadn't had any dispiacere di famiglia, which made me laugh and that made the crying much worse, and then I suddenly thought of Clare and felt such a horrible beast, so I lay on my bed and simply howled for about an hour, and then I got up and wrote a letter and sent one of the hotel boys with it to M.'s address, saying I was so sorry and would he come at once. But he didn't come, not for hours and hours, and it was simply too awful, because I thought he was offended, or despising, because I'd been such a fool, and I wondered whether he really did like me at all and whether this defending theory wasn't just my imagination. But at last, when I'd quite given him up and was so

miserable I didn’t know what I should do, he suddenly appeared — because he’d only that moment gone back to the house and found my note — and was too wonderfully sweet to me, and said he was so sorry, but he’d been on edge (though he didn’t say why, but I know now that the defending theory wasn’t just imagination) and I said I was so sorry and I cried, but I was happy, and then we laughed because it had all been so stupid and then M. quoted a bit of Homer which meant that after they’d eaten and drunk they wept for their friends and after they’d wept a little they went to sleep, so we went out and had dinner and after dinner we went and danced, and he dances really very well, but we stopped before midnight, because he said the noise of the jazz would drive him crazy. He was perfectly sweet, but though he didn’t say anything sniggery, I could feel he was on the defensive all the time, sweetly and friendlily on the defensive, and when he said good night he only kissed my hand.

June 18th. Stayed in bed till lunch re-reading The Return of Eurydice. I understand Joan so well now, better and better, she’s so like me in all she feels and thinks. M. went to Tivoli for the day to see some Italian friends who have a house there. What is he like with other people, I wonder? Got two tickets for the fireworks tomorrow night, the hotel porter says they’ll be good, because it’s the first Girandola since the War. Went to the Villa Borghese in the afternoon for my education, to give M. a surprise when he comes back, and I must say some of the pictures and statues were very lovely, but the most awful looking fat man would follow me round all the time, and finally the old beast even had the impertinence to speak to me, so I just said, Lei è un porco, which I must say was very effective. But it’s extraordinary how things do just depend on looks and being sympathique, because if he hadn’t looked such a pig, I shouldn’t have thought him so piggish, which shows again what rot hippo-ism is. Went to bed early and finished Eurydice. This is the fifth time I’ve read it.

‘Oh, it was marvellous before the War, the Girandola. Really marvellous.’

‘But then what wasn’t marvellous before the War?’ said Pamela sarcastically. These references to a Golden Age in which she had had no part always annoyed her.

Fanning laughed. ‘Another one in the eye for the aged gentleman!’

There, he had slipped back again behind his defences! She did not answer for fear of giving him some excuse to dig himself in, impregnably. This hateful bantering with feelings! They walked on in silence. The night was breathlessly warm; the sounds of brassy music came to them faintly through the dim enormous noise of a crowd that thickened with every step they took towards the Piazza del Popolo. In the end they had to shove their way by main force.

Sunk head over ears in this vast sea of animal contacts, animal smells and noise, Pamela was afraid. ‘Isn’t it awful?’ she said, looking up at him over her shoulder; and she shuddered. But at the same time she rather liked her fear, because it seemed in some way to break down the barriers that separated them, to bring him closer to her — close with a physical closeness of protective contact that was also, increasingly, a closeness of thought and feeling.

‘You’re all right,’ he reassured her through the tumult. He was standing behind her, encircling her with his arms. ‘I won’t let you be squashed’; and as he spoke he fended off the menacing lurch of a large back. ‘Ignorante!’ he shouted at it.

A terrific explosion interrupted the distant selections from Rigoletto and the sky was suddenly full of coloured lights; the Girandola had begun. A wave of impatience ran through the advancing crowd; they were violently pushed and jostled. But, ‘It’s all right,’ Fanning kept repeating, ‘it’s all right.’ They were squeezed together in a staggering embrace. Pamela was terrified, but it was with a kind of swooning pleasure that she shut her eyes and abandoned herself limply in his arms.

‘Ma piano!’ shouted Fanning at the nearest jostlers. ‘Piano!’ and ‘ ’Sblood!’ he said in English, for he had the affectation of using literary oaths. ‘Hell and Death!’ But in the tumult his words were as though unspoken. He was silent; and

suddenly, in the midst of that heaving chaos of noise and rough contacts, of movement and heat and smell, suddenly he became aware that his lips were almost touching her hair, and that under his right hand was the firm resilience of her breast. He hesitated for a moment on the threshold of his sensuality, then averted his face, shifted the position of his hand.

‘At last!’

The haven to which their tickets admitted them was a little garden on the western side of the Piazza, opposite the Pincio and the source of the fireworks. The place was crowded, but not oppressively. Fanning was tall enough to overlook the interposed heads, and when Pamela had climbed on to a little parapet that separated one terrace of the garden from another, she too could see perfectly.

‘But you’ll let me lean on you,’ she said, laying a hand on his shoulder, ‘because there’s a fat woman next me who’s steadily squeezing me off. I think she’s expanding with the heat.’

‘And she almost certainly understands English. So for heaven’s sake. . . .’

A fresh volley of explosions from the other side of the great square interrupted him and drowned the answering mockery of her laughter. ‘Ooh! ooh!’ the crowd was moaning in a kind of amorous agony. Magical flowers in a delirium of growth, the rockets mounted on their slender stalks and, ah! high up above the Pincian hill, dazzlingly, deafeningly, in a bunch of stars and a thunder-clap, they blossomed.

‘Isn’t it marvellous?’ said Pamela, looking down at him with shining eyes. ‘Oh God!’ she added, in another voice. ‘She’s expanding again. Help!’ And for a moment she was on the verge of falling. She leaned on him so heavily that he had to make an effort not to be pushed sideways. She managed to straighten herself up again into equilibrium.

‘I’ve got you in case . . .’ He put his arm round her knees to steady her.

‘Shall I see if I can puncture the old beast with a pin?’ And Fanning knew, by the tone of her voice, that she was genuinely prepared to make the experiment.

‘If you do,’ he said, ‘I shall leave you to be lynched alone.’

Pamela felt his arm tighten a little about her thighs. ‘Coward!’ she mocked and pulled his hair.

‘Martyrdom’s not in my line,’ he laughed back. ‘Not even martyrdom for your sake.’ But her youth was a perversity, her freshness a kind of provocative vice. He had taken a step across that supernatural threshold. He had given — after all, why not? — a certain licence to his desires. Amid their multitudinous uncoiling, his body seemed to be coming to a new and obscure life of its own. When the time came he would revoke the licence, step back again into the daily world.

There was another bang, another, and the obelisk at the centre of the Piazza leapt out sharp and black against apocalypse after apocalypse of jewelled light. And through the now flushed, now pearly-brilliant, now emerald-shining smoke-clouds, a pine tree, a palm, a stretch of grass emerged, like strange unearthly visions of pine and palm and grass, from the darkness of the else invisible gardens.

There was an interval of mere lamplight-like sobriety, said Fanning, between two pipes of opium, like daily life after an ecstasy. And perhaps, he was thinking, the time to step back again had already come. ‘If only one could live without any lucid intervals,’ he concluded.

‘I don’t see why not.’ She spoke with a kind of provocative defiance, as though challenging him to contradict her. Her heart beat very fast, exultantly. ‘I mean, why shouldn’t it be fireworks all the time?’

‘Because it just isn’t, that’s all. Unhappily.’ It was time to step back again; but he didn’t step back.

‘Well, then, it’s a case of damn the intervals and enjoy . . . Oh!’

She started. That prodigious bang had sent a large red moon sailing almost slowly into the sky. It burst into a shower of meteors that whistled as they fell, expiringly.

Fanning imitated their plaintive noise. ‘Sad, sad,’ he commented. ‘Even the fireworks can be sad.’

She turned on him fiercely. ‘Only because you want them to be sad. Yes, you want them to be. Why do you want them to be sad?’

Yes, why? It was a pertinent question. She felt his arm tighten again round her knees and was triumphant. He was defending himself no more, he was listening to those oracles. But at the root of his deliberate recklessness, its contradiction and its cause, his sadness obscurely persisted. ‘But I don’t want them to be sad,’ he protested.

Another garden of rockets began to blossom. Laughing, triumphant, Pamela laid her hand on his head.

‘I feel so superior up here,’ she said.

‘On a pedestal, what?’ He laughed. ‘ ”Guardami ben; ben son, ben son Beatrice!” ’

‘Such a comfort you’re not bald,’ she said, her fingers in his hair. ‘That must be a great disadvantage of pedestals — I mean, seeing the baldness of the men down below.’

‘But the great advantage of pedestals, as I now suddenly see for the first time . . .’ Another explosion covered his voice ‘. . . make it possible . . .’ Bang!

‘Oh, look!’ A bluish light was brightening, brightening.

‘. . . possible for even the baldest . . .’ There was a continuous uninterrupted rattle of detonations. Fanning gave it up. What he had meant to say was that pedestals gave even the baldest men unrivalled opportunities for pinching the idol’s legs.

‘What were you saying?’ she shouted through the battle.

‘Nothing,’ he yelled back. He had meant, of course, to suit the action to the word, playfully. But the fates had decided otherwise and he wasn’t really sorry. For he was tired; he had realized it almost suddenly. All this standing. He was no good at standing nowadays.

A cataract of silver fire was pouring down the slopes of the Pincian Hill, and the shining smoke-clouds rolled away from it like the spray from a tumbling river. And suddenly, above it, the eagle of Savoy emerged from the darkness, enormous, perched on the lictor’s axe and rods. There was applause and patriotic

music. Then, gradually, the brightness of the cataract grew dim; the sources of its silver streaming were one by one dried up. The eagle moulted its shining plumage, the axe and rods faded, faded and at last were gone. Lit faintly by only the common lamplight, the smoke drifted slowly away towards the north. A spasm of motion ran through the huge crowd in the square below them. The show was over.

'But I feel,' said Pamela, as they shoved their way back towards the open streets, 'I feel as though the rockets were still popping off inside me.' And she began to sing to herself as she walked.

Fanning made no comment. He was thinking of that Girandola he'd seen with Alice and Tony and Laurina Frescobaldi — was it in 1907 or 1908? Tony was an ambassador now, and Alice was dead, and one of Laurina's sons (he recalled the expression of despair on that worn, but still handsome face, when she had told him yesterday, at Tivoli) was already old enough to be getting housemaids into trouble.

'Not only rockets,' Pamela went on, interrupting her singing, 'but even catherine-wheels. I feel all catherine-wheely. You know, like when one's a little drunk.' And she went on again with 'Old Man River,' tipsily happy and excited.

The crowd grew thinner around them and at last they were almost alone. Pamela's singing abruptly ceased. Here, in the open, in the cool of the dark night it had suddenly become inappropriate, a little shameful. She glanced anxiously at her companion; had he too remarked that inappropriateness, been shocked by it? But Fanning had noticed nothing; she wished he had. Head bent, his hands behind his back, he was walking at her side, but in another universe. When had his spirit gone away from her, and why? She didn't know, hadn't noticed. Those inward fireworks, that private festival of exultation had occupied her whole attention. She had been too excitedly happy with being in love to be able to think of the object of that love. But now, abruptly sobered, she had become aware of him again, repentantly at first, and then, as she realized his new remoteness, with a sinking of the heart. What had happened in these few moments? She was on the point of addressing him, then checked herself. Her apprehension grew and

grew till it became a kind of terrified certainty that he'd never loved her at all, that he'd suddenly begun to hate her. But why, but why? They walked on.

'How lovely it is here!' she said at last. Her voice was timid and unnatural. 'And so deliciously cool.' They had emerged on to the embankment of the Tiber. Above the river, a second invisible river of air flowed softly through the hot night. 'Shall we stop for a moment?' He nodded without speaking. 'I mean, only if you want to,' she added. He nodded again.

They stood, leaning on the parapet, looking down at the black water. There was a long, long silence. Pamela waited for him to say something, to make a gesture; but he did not stir, the word never came. It was as though he were at the other end of the world. She felt almost sick with unhappiness. Heart-beat after heart-beat, the silence prolonged itself.

Fanning was thinking of tomorrow's journey. How he hated the train! And in this heat . . . But it was necessary. The wicked flee, and in this case the fleeing would be an act of virtue-painful. Was it love? Or just an itch of desire, of the rather crazy, dirty desire of an ageing man? 'A cinquant' anni si diventa un po' pazzo.' He heard his own voice speaking, laughingly, mournfully, to Laurina. 'Pazzo e porco. Si, anch' io diventò un porco. Le minorenni — a cinquant' anni, sa, sono un ossessione. Proprio un' ossessione.' Was that all — just an obsession of crazy desire? Or was it love? Or wasn't there any difference, was it just a question of names and approving or disapproving tones of voice? What was certain was that you could be as desperately unhappy when you were robbed of your crazy desire as when you were robbed of your love. A porco suffers as much as Dante. And perhaps Beatrice too was lovely, in Dante's memory, with the perversity of youth, the shamelessness of innocence, the vice of freshness. Still, the wicked flee, the wicked flee. If only he'd had the strength of mind to flee before! A touch made him start. Pamela had taken his hand.

'Miles!' Her voice was strained and abnormal. Fanning turned towards her and was almost frightened by the look of determined despair he saw on her face. The Eiffel Tower . . . 'Miles!'

'What is it?'

‘Why don’t you speak to me?’

He shrugged his shoulders. ‘I didn’t happen to be feeling very loquacious. For a change,’ he added, self-mockingly, in the hope (he knew it for a vain one) of being able to turn away her desperate attack with a counter-attack of laughter.

She ignored his counter-attack. ‘Why do you shut yourself away from me like this?’ she asked. ‘Why do you hate me?’

‘But, my sweet child . . .’

‘Yes, you hate me. You shut me away. Why are you so cruel, Miles?’ Her voice broke; she was crying. Lifting his hand, she kissed it, passionately, despairingly. ‘I love you so much, Miles. I love you.’ His hand was wet with her tears when, almost by force, he managed to draw it away from her.

He put his arm round her, comfortingly. But he was annoyed as well as touched, annoyed by her despairing determination, by the way she had made up her mind to jump off the Eiffel Tower, screwed up her courage turn by turn. And now she was jumping — but how gracelessly! The way he had positively had to struggle for his hand! There was something forced and unnatural about the whole scene. She was being a character in fiction. But characters in fiction suffer. He patted her shoulder, he made consolatory murmurs. Consoling her for being in love with him! But the idea of explaining and protesting and being lucidly reasonable was appalling to him at the moment, absolutely appalling. He hoped that she’d just permit herself to be consoled and ask no further questions, just leave the whole situation comfortably inarticulate. But his hope was again disappointed.

‘Why do you hate me, Miles?’ she insisted.

‘But, Pamela . . .’

‘Because you did care a little, you did. I mean, I could see you cared. And now, suddenly . . . What have I done, Miles?’

‘But nothing, my child, nothing.’ He could not keep a note of exasperation out of his voice. If only she’d allow him to be silent!

‘Nothing? But I can hear from the way you speak that there’s something.’ She returned to her old refrain. ‘Because you did care, Miles; a little, you did.’ She

looked up at him, but he had moved away from her, he had averted his eyes towards the street. ‘You did, Miles.’

Oh God! he was groaning to himself, God! And aloud (for she had made his silence untenable, she had driven him out into articulateness), ‘I cared too much,’ he said. ‘It would be so easy to do something stupid and irreparable, something mad, yes and bad, bad. I like you too much in other ways to want to run that risk. Perhaps, if I were twenty years younger . . . But I’m too old. It wouldn’t do. And you’re too young, you can’t really understand, you . . . Oh, thank God, there’s a taxi.’ And he darted forward, waving and shouting. Saved! But when they had shut themselves into the cab, he found that the new situation was even more perilous than the old.

‘Miles!’ A flash of lamplight through the window of the cab revealed her face to him. His words had consoled her; she was smiling, was trying to look happy; but under the attempted happiness her expression was more desperately determined than ever. She was not yet at the bottom of her Tower. ‘Miles!’ And sliding across the seat towards him, she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. ‘Take me, Miles,’ she said, speaking in quick abrupt little spurts, as though she were forcing the words out with violence against a resistance. He recognized the suicide’s voice, despairing, strained, and at the same time, flat, lifeless. ‘Take me. If you want me . . .’

Fanning tried to protest, to disengage himself, gently, from her embrace.

‘But I want you to take me, Miles,’ she insisted. ‘I want you . . .’ She kissed him again, she pressed herself against his hard body. ‘I want you, Miles. Even if it is stupid and mad,’ she added in another little spurt of desperation, making answer to the expression on his face, to the words she wouldn’t permit him to utter. ‘And it isn’t. I mean, love isn’t stupid or mad. And even if it were, I don’t care. Yes, I want to be stupid and mad. Even if it were to kill me. So take me, Miles.’ She kissed him again. ‘Take me.’

He turned away his mouth from those soft lips. She was forcing him back across the threshold. His body was uneasy with awakenings and supernatural dawn.

Held up by a tram at the corner of a narrow street, the cab was at a standstill. With quick strong gestures Fanning unclasped her arms from round his neck and, taking her two hands in his, he kissed first one and then the other. ‘Good-bye, Pamela,’ he whispered, and, throwing open the door, he was half out of the cab before she realized what he was doing.

‘But what are you doing, Miles? Where . . .’ The door slammed. He thrust some money into the driver’s hand and almost ran. Pamela rose to her feet to follow him, but the cab started with a sudden jerk that threw her off her balance, and she fell back on to the seat.

‘Miles!’ she called, and then, ‘Stop!’

But the driver either didn’t hear, or else paid no attention. She did not call again, but sat, covering her face with her hands, crying and feeling so agonizingly unhappy that she thought she would die of it.

8

‘By the time you receive this letter, I shall be — no, not dead, Pamela, though I know how thrilled and proud you’d be, through your temporary inconsolability, if I were to blow my brains out — not dead, but (what will be almost worse in these dog-days) in the train, bound for some anonymous refuge. Yes, a refuge, as though you were my worst enemy. Which in fact you almost are at the moment, for the good reason that you’re acting as your own enemy. If I were less fond of you, I’d stay and join forces with you against yourself. And, frankly, I wish I were less fond of you. Do you know how desirable you are? Not yet, I suppose, not consciously, in spite of Prof. Krafft-Ebbing and the novels of Miles F. You can’t yet know what a terrible army with banners you are, you and your eyes and your laughter and your impertinent breasts, like La Maja’s, and those anti-educational ears in ambush under the hair. You can’t know. But I know. Only too well. Just how well you’ll realize, perhaps, fifteen or twenty years from now. For a time will come when the freshness of young bodies, the ingenuousness of young minds will begin to strike you as a scandal of shining beauty and

attractiveness, and then finally as a kind of maddeningly alluring perversity, as the exhibition of a kind of irresistibly dangerous vice. The madness of the desirer — for middle-aged desires are mostly more or less mad desires — comes off on the desired object, staining it, degrading it. Which isn't agreeable if you happen to be fond of the object, as well as desiring. Dear object, let's be a little reasonable — oh, entirely against all my principles; I accept all the reproaches you made me the other day. But what are principles for but to be gone against in moments of crisis? And this is a moment of crisis. Consider: I'm thirty years older than you are; and even if one doesn't look one's age, one is one's age, somehow, somewhere; and even if one doesn't feel it, fifty's always fifty and twenty-one's twenty-one. And when you've considered that, let me put a few questions. First: are you prepared to be a disreputable woman? To which, of course, you answer yes, because you don't care two pins about what the old cats say. But I put another question: Do you know, by experience, what it's like to be a disreputable woman? And you must answer, no. Whereupon I retort: If you can't answer yes to the second, you've got no right to answer yes to the first. And I don't intend to give you the opportunity of answering yes to the second question. Which is all pure Podsnapism. But there are certain circumstances in which Podsnap is quite right.

'Sweet Pamela, believe me when I say it would be fatal. For when you say you love me, what do you mean? Who and what is it you love? I'll tell you. You love the author of Eurydice and of all those portraits of yourself he's filled his books with. You love the celebrated man, who was not only unsnubbing and attentive, but obviously admiring. Even before you saw him, you vaguely loved his reputation, and now you love his odd confidences. You love a kind of conversation you haven't heard before. You love a weakness in him which you think you can dominate and protect. You love — as I, of course, intended you to love — a certain fascinating manner. You even love a rather romantic and still youthful appearance. And when I say (which as yet, you know, I haven't said) that I love you, what do I mean? That I'm amused, and charmed, and flattered, and touched, and puzzled, and affectionate, in a word, a Passionist Father. But

chiefly that I find you terribly desirable — an army with banners. Bring these two loves together and what's the result? A manifold disaster. To begin with, the nearer you come to me and the longer you remain with me, the more alien you'll find me, the more fundamentally remote. Inevitably. For you and I are foreigners to one another, foreigners in time. Which is a greater foreignness than the foreignness of space and language. You don't realize it now, because you don't know me — you're only in love, at first sight (like Joan in Eurydice!) and, what's more, not really with me, with your imagination of me. When you come to know me better — well, you'll find that you know me much worse. And then one day you'll be attracted by a temporal compatriot. Perhaps, indeed, you're attracted already, only your imagination won't allow you to admit it. What about that long-suffering Guy of yours? Of whom I was, and am, so horribly jealous — jealous with the malignity of a weaker for a stronger rival; for though I seem to hold all the cards at the moment, the ace of trumps is his: he's young. And one day, when you're tired of living at cross-purposes with me, you'll suddenly realize it; you'll perceive that he speaks your language, that he inhabits your world of thought and feeling, that he belongs, in a word, to your nation — that great and terrible nation, which I love and fear and hate, the nation of Youth. In the end, of course, you'll leave the foreigner for the compatriot. But not before you've inflicted a good deal of suffering on everyone concerned, including yourself. And meanwhile, what about me? Shall I be still there for you to leave? Who knows? Not I, at any rate. I can no more answer for my future desires than for the Shah of Persia. For my future affection, yes. But it may last (how often, alas, affections do last that way!) only on condition of its object being absent. There are so many friends whom one's fond of when they're not there. Will you be one of them? It's the more possible since, after all, you're just as alien to me as I am to you. My country's called Middle-Ageia and every one who was out of the egg of childhood before 1914 is my compatriot. Through all my desires, shouldn't I also pine to hear my own language, to speak with those who share the national traditions? Of course. But the tragedy of middle-aged life is that its army with banners is hardly ever captained by a compatriot. Passion is divorced

from understanding, and the ageing man's desire attaches itself with an almost insane violence to precisely those outrageously fresh young bodies that house the most alien souls. Conversely, for the body of an understood and understanding soul, he seldom feels desire. And now, Pamela, suppose that my sentiment of your alienness should come to be stronger (as some time it must) than my desire for the lovely scandal of your young body. What then? This time I can answer; for I am answering for a self that changes very little through every change of circumstances — the self that doesn't intend to put up with more discomfort than it can possibly avoid; the self that, as the Freudians tell us, is homesick for that earthly paradise from which we've all been banished, our mother's womb, the only place on earth where man is genuinely omnipotent, where his every desire is satisfied, where he is perfectly at home and adapted to his surroundings, and therefore perfectly happy. Out of the womb we're in an unfriendly world, in which our wishes aren't anticipated, where we're no longer magically omnipotent, where we don't fit, where we're not snugly at home. What's to be done in this world? Either face out the reality, fight with it, resignedly or heroically accept to suffer or struggle. Or else flee. In practice even the strongest heroes do a bit of fleeing — away from responsibility into deliberate ignorance, away from uncomfortable fact into imagination. Even the strongest. And conversely even the weakest fleers can make themselves strong. No, not the weakest; that's a mistake. The weakest become day-dreamers, masturbators, paranoiacs. The strong fleer is one who starts with considerable advantages. Take my case. I'm so endowed by nature that I can have a great many of the prizes of life for the asking — success, money in reasonable quantities, love. In other words I'm not entirely out of the womb; I can still, even in the extra-uterine world, have at least some of my desires magically satisfied. To have my wishes fulfilled I don't have to rush off every time to some imaginary womb-substitute. I have the power to construct a womb for myself out of the materials of the real world. But of course it's not a completely perfect and water-tight womb; no post-natal uterus can ever in the nature of things be that. It lets in a lot of unpleasantness and alienness and obstruction to wishes. Which I

deal with by flight, systematic flight, into unawareness, into deliberate ignorance, into irresponsibility. It's a weakness which is a source of strength. For when you can flee at will and with success (which is only possible if nature has granted you, as she has to me, the possibility of anarchic independence of society), what quantities of energy you save, what an enormous amount of emotional and mental wear and tear is spared you! I flee from business by leaving all my affairs in the hands of lawyers and agents, I flee from criticism (both from the humiliations of misplaced and wrongly motived praise and from the pain of even the most contemptible vermin's blame) by simply not reading what anybody writes of me. I flee from time by living as far as possible only in and for the present. I flee from cold weather by taking the train or ship to places where it's warm. And from women I don't love any more, I flee by just silently vanishing. For, like Palmerston, I never explain and never apologize. I just fade out. I decline to admit their existence. I consign their letters to the waste-paper basket, along with the press cuttings. Simple, crude even, but incredibly effective, if one's ready to be ruthless in one's weakness, as I am. Yes, quite ruthless, Pamela. If my desire grew weary or I felt homesick for the company of my compatriots, I'd just run away, determinedly, however painfully much you might still be in love with me, or your imagination, or your own hurt pride and humiliated self-love. And you, I fancy, would have as little mercy on my desires if they should happen to outlive what you imagine to be your passion for me. So that our love-affair, if we were fools enough to embark on it, would be a race towards a series of successive goals — a race through boredom, misunderstanding, disillusion, towards the final winning-post of cruelty and betrayal. Which of us is likely to win the race? The betting, I should say, is about even, with a slight tendency in favour of myself. But there's not going to be a winner or a loser, for the good reason that there's not going to be any race. I'm too fond of you, Pamela, to . . .'

'Miles!'

Fanning started so violently that a drop of ink was jerked from his pen on to the paper. He felt as though his heart had fallen into an awful gulf of emptiness.

‘Miles!’

He looked round. Two hands were clutching the bars of the unshuttered window and, as though desperately essaying to emerge from a subterranean captivity, the upper part of a face was peering in, over the high sill, with wide unhappy eyes.

‘But Pamela!’ There was reproach in his astonishment.

It was to the implied rebuke that she penitently answered. ‘I couldn’t help it, Miles,’ she said; and, behind the bars, he saw her reddened eyes suddenly brighten and overflow with tears. ‘I simply had to come.’ Her voice trembled on the verge of breaking. ‘Had to.’

The tears, her words and that unhappy voice were moving. But he didn’t want to be moved, he was angry with himself for feeling the emotion, with her for inspiring it. ‘But, my dear child!’ he began, and the reproach in his voice had shrilled to a kind of exasperation — the exasperation of one who feels himself hemmed in and helpless, increasingly helpless, against circumstances. ‘But I thought we’d settled,’ he began and broke off. He rose, and walked agitatedly towards the fireplace, agitatedly back again, like a beast in a cage; he was caught, hemmed in between those tearful eyes behind the bars and his own pity, with all those dangerous feelings that have their root in pity. ‘I thought,’ he began once more.

But, ‘Oh!’ came her sharp cry, and looking again towards the window he saw that only the two small hands and a pair of straining wrists were visible. The tragical face had vanished.

‘Pamela?’

‘It’s all right.’ Her voice came rather muffled and remote. ‘I slipped. I was standing on a little kind of ledge affair. The window’s so high from the ground,’ she added plaintively.

‘My poor child!’ he said on a little laugh of amused commiseration. The reproach, the exasperation had gone out of his voice. He was conquered by the comic patheticness of her. Hanging on to the bars with those small, those rather red and childishly untended hands! And tumbling off the perch she had had to

climb on, because the window was so high from the ground! A wave of sentimentality submerged him. ‘I’ll come and open the door.’ He ran into the hall.

Waiting outside in the darkness, she heard the bolts being shot back, one by one. Clank, clank! and then ‘Damn!’ came his voice from the other side of the door. ‘These things are so stiff . . . I’m barricaded up as though I were in a safe.’ She stood there waiting. The door shook as he tugged at the recalcitrant bolt. The waiting seemed interminable. And all at once a huge, black weariness settled on her. The energy of wrought-up despair deserted her and she was left empty of everything but a tired misery. What was the good, what was the good of coming like this to be turned away again? For he would turn her away; he didn’t want her. What was the good of renewing suffering, of once more dying?

‘Hell and Death!’ On the other side of the door Fanning was cursing like an Elizabethan.

Hell and Death. The words reverberated in Pamela’s mind. The pains of Hell, the darkness and dissolution of Death. What was the good?

Clank! Another bolt had gone back. ‘Thank goodness. We’re almost . . .’ A chain rattled. At the sound Pamela turned and ran in a blind terror down the dimly lighted street.

‘At last!’ The door swung back and Fanning stepped out. But the sentimental tenderness of his outstretched hands wasted itself on empty night. Twenty yards away a pair of pale legs twinkled in the darkness. ‘Pamela!’ he called in astonishment. ‘What the devil . . .?’ The wasting on emptiness of his feelings had startled him into annoyance. He felt like one who has put forth all his strength to strike something and, missing his aim, swipes the unresisting air, grotesquely. ‘Pamela!’ he called again, yet louder.

She did not turn at the sound of his voice, but ran on. These wretched high-heeled shoes! ‘Pamela!’ And then came the sound of his pursuing footsteps. She tried to run faster. But the pursuing footsteps came nearer and nearer. It was no good. Nothing was any good. She slackened her speed to a walk.

‘But what on earth?’ he asked from just behind her, almost angrily. Pursuing, he had called up within him the soul of a pursuer, angry and desirous. ‘What on earth?’ And suddenly his hand was on her shoulder. She trembled a little at the touch. ‘But why?’ he insisted. ‘Why do you suddenly run away?’

But Pamela only shook her averted head. She wouldn’t speak, wouldn’t meet his eyes. Fanning looked down at her intently, questioningly. Why? And as he looked at that weary hopeless face, he began to divine the reason. The anger of the pursuit subsided in him. Respecting her dumb, averted misery, he too was silent. He drew her comfortingly towards him. His arm round her shoulders, Pamela suffered herself to be led back towards the house.

Which would be best, he was wondering with the surface of his mind: to telephone for a taxi to take her back to the hotel, or to see if he could make up a bed for her in one of the upstairs rooms? But in the depths of his being he knew quite well that he would do neither of these things. He knew that he would be her lover. And yet, in spite of this deep knowledge, the surface mind still continued to discuss its little problem of cabs and bed-linen. Discussed it sensibly, discussed it dutifully. Because it would be a madness, he told himself, a criminal madness if he didn’t send for the taxi or prepare that upstairs room. But the dark certainty of the depths rose suddenly and exploded at the surface in a bubble of ironic laughter, in a brutal and cynical word. ‘Comedian!’ he said to himself, to the self that agitatedly thought of telephones and taxis and pillow-slips. ‘Seeing that it’s obvious I’m going to have her.’ And, rising from the depths, her nakedness presented itself to him palpably in an integral and immediate contact with his whole being. But this was shameful, shameful. He pushed the naked Anadyomene back into the depths. Very well, then (his surface mind resumed its busy efficient rattle), seeing that it was perhaps rather late to start telephoning for taxis, he’d rig up one of the rooms on the first floor. But if he couldn’t find any sheets . . .? But here was the house, the open door.

Pamela stepped across the threshold. The hall was almost dark. Through a curtained doorway on the left issued a thin blade of yellow light. Passive in her tired misery, she waited. Behind her the chain rattled, as it had rattled only a few

moments before, when she had fled from the ominous sound, and clank, clank! the bolts were thrust back into place.

‘There,’ said Fanning’s voice. ‘And now . . .’ With a click, the darkness yielded suddenly to brilliant light.

Pamela uttered a little cry and covered her face with her hands. ‘Oh, please,’ she begged, ‘please.’ The light hurt her, was a sort of outrage. She didn’t want to see, couldn’t bear to be seen.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said, and the comforting darkness returned. ‘This way.’ Taking her arm he led her towards the lighted doorway on the left. ‘Shut your eyes,’ he commanded, as they approached the curtain. ‘We’ve got to go into the light again; but I’ll turn it out the moment I can get to the switch. Now!’ She shut her eyes and suddenly, as the curtain rings rattled, she saw, through her closed eyelids, the red shining of transparent blood. Still holding her arm, he led her forward into the room.

Pamela lifted her free hand to her face. ‘Please don’t look at me,’ she whispered. ‘I don’t want you to see me like this. I mean, I couldn’t bear . . .’ Her voice faded to silence.

‘I won’t look,’ he assured her. ‘And anyhow,’ he added, when they had taken two or three more steps across the room, ‘now I can’t.’ And he turned the switch.

The pale translucent red went black again before her eyes. Pamela sighed. ‘I’m so tired,’ she whispered. Her eyes were still shut; she was too tired to open them.

‘Take off your coat.’ A hand pulled at her sleeve. First one bare arm, then the other slipped out into the coolness.

Fanning threw the coat over a chair. Turning back, he could see her, by the tempered darkness that entered through the window, standing motionless before him, passive, wearily waiting, her face, her limp arms pale against the shadowy blackness.

‘Poor Pamela,’ she heard him say, and then suddenly light finger-tips were sliding in a moth-winged caress along her arm. ‘You’d better lie down and rest.’ The hand closed round her arm, she was pushed gently forward. That taxi, he

was still thinking, the upstairs room . . . But his fingers preserved the silky memory of her skin, the flesh of her arm was warm and firm against his palm. In the darkness, the supernatural world was coming mysteriously, thrillingly into existence; he was once more standing upon its threshold.

‘There, sit down,’ came his voice. She obeyed; a low divan received her. ‘Lean back.’ She let herself fall on to pillows. Her feet were lifted on to the couch. She lay quite still. ‘As though I were dead,’ she thought, ‘as though I were dead.’ She was aware, through the darkness of her closed eyes, of his warm breathing presence, impending and very near. ‘As though I were dead,’ she inwardly repeated with a kind of pleasure. For the pain of her misery had ebbed away into the warm darkness, and to be tired, she found, to be utterly tired and to lie there utterly still were pleasures. ‘As though I were dead.’ And the light reiterated touch of his finger-tips along her arm — what were those caresses but another mode, a soothing and delicious mode, of gently dying?

In the morning, on his way to the kitchen to prepare their coffee, Fanning caught sight of his littered writing-table. He halted to collect the scattered sheets. Waiting for the water to boil, he read. ‘By the time you receive this letter, I shall be — no, not dead, Pamela . . .’ He crumpled up each page as he had finished reading it and threw it into the dust-bin.

9

The architectural background was like something out of Alma Tadema. But the figures that moved across the sunlit atrium, that lingered beneath the colonnades and in the coloured shadow of the awnings, the figures were Hogarthian and Rowlandsonian, were the ferocious satires of Daumier and Rouveyre. Huge jellied females overflowed the chairs on which they sat. Sagging and with the gait of gorged bears, old men went slowly shambling down the porticoes. Like princes preceded by their outriders, the rich fat burgesses strutted with dignity behind their bellies. There was hungry prowling of gaunt emaciated men and women, yellow-skinned and with tragical, bile-injected eyes. And, conspicuous

by their trailing blackness, these bloated or cadaverous pencillings from an anti-clerical notebook were priests.

In the midst of so many monsters Pamela was a lovely miracle of health and beauty. These three months had subtly transformed her. The rather wavering and intermittent savoir-vivre, the child's forced easiness of manner, had given place to a woman's certainty, to that repose even in action, that decision even in repose, which are the ordinary fruits of the intimate knowledge, the physical understanding of love.

'For it isn't only murder that will out,' as Fanning had remarked some few days after the evening of the fireworks. 'It isn't only murder. If you could see yourself, my child! It's almost indecent. Anyone could tell that you'd been in bed with your lover. Could tell in the dark, even; you're luminous, positively luminous. All shining and smooth and pearly with love-making. It's really an embarrassment to walk about with you. I've a good mind to make you wear a veil.'

She had laughed, delightedly. 'But I don't mind them seeing. I want them to see. I mean, why should one be ashamed of being happy?'

That had been three months since. At present she had no happiness to be ashamed of. It was by no shining of eyes, no luminous soft pearliness of smoothed and rounded contour that she now betrayed herself. All that her manner, her pose, her gestures proclaimed was the fact that there had been such shinings and pearly smoothings, once. As for the present, her shut and sullen face announced only that she was discontented with it and with the man who, sitting beside her, was the symbol and the embodiment of that unsatisfactory present. A rather sickly embodiment at the moment, a thin and jaundiced symbol. For Fanning was hollow-cheeked, his eyes darkly ringed, his skin pale and sallow under the yellowed tan. He was on his way to becoming one of those pump-room monsters at whom they were now looking, almost incredulously. For, 'Incredible!' was Fanning's comment. 'Didn't I tell you that they simply weren't to be believed?'

Pamela shrugged her shoulders, almost imperceptibly, and did not answer. She did not feel like answering, she wanted to be uninterested, sullen, bored.

‘How right old Butler was!’ he went on, rousing himself by the stimulus of his own talk from the depression into which his liver and Pamela had plunged him. ‘Making the Erewhonians punish illness as a crime — how right! Because they are criminals, all these people. Criminally ugly and deformed, criminally incapable of enjoyment. Look at them. It’s a caution. And when I think that I’m one of them . . .’ He shook his head. ‘But let’s hope this will make me a reformed character.’ And he emptied, with a grimace of disgust, his glass of tepid salt water. ‘Revolting! But I suppose it’s right that Montecatini should be a place of punishment as well as cure. One can’t be allowed to commit jaundice with impunity. I must go and get another glass of my punishment — my purgatory, in every sense of the word,’ he added, smiling at his own joke. He rose to his feet painfully (every movement was now a painful effort for him) and left her, threading his way through the crowd to where, behind their marble counters, the pump-room barmaids dispensed warm laxatives from rows of polished brass taps.

The animation had died out of Fanning’s face as he turned away. No longer distracted and self-stimulated by talk, he relapsed at once into melancholy. Waiting his turn behind two bulging monsignori at the pump, he looked so gloomily wretched, that a passing connoisseur of the waters pointed him out to his companion as a typical example of the hepatic pessimist. But bile, as a matter of fact, was not the only cause of Fanning’s depression. There was also Pamela. And Pamela — he admitted it, though the fact belonged to that great class of humiliating phenomena whose existence we are always trying to ignore — Pamela, after all, was the cause of the bile. For if he had not been so extenuated by that crazy love-making in the narrow cells of the Passionist Fathers at Monte Cavo, he would never have taken chill and the chill would never have settled on his liver and turned to jaundice. As it was, however, that night of the full moon had finished him. They had gone out, groping their way through the terrors of the nocturnal woods, to a little grassy terrace among the bushes, from which

there was a view of Nemi. Deep sunk in its socket of impenetrable darkness and more than half eclipsed by shadow, the eye of water gleamed up at them secretly, as though through eyelids almost closed. Under the brightness of the moon, the hills, the woods seemed to be struggling out of ghostly greyness towards colour, towards the warmth of life. They had sat there for a while, in silence, looking. Then, taking her in his arms, ‘ ”Ceda al tatto la vista, al labro il lume” ’ he had quoted with a kind of mockery — mocking her for the surrender to which he knew he could bring her, even against her will, even though, as he could see, she had made up her mind to sulk at him, mocking himself at the same time for the folly which drove him, weary and undesiring, to make the gesture. ‘ ”Al labbro il lume,” ’ he repeated with that undercurrent of derision in his voice, and leaned towards her. Desire returned to him as he touched her, and with it a kind of exultation, a renewal (temporary, he knew, and illusory) of all his energies.

‘No, Miles. Don’t. I don’t want . . .’ And she had averted her face, for she was angry, resentful, she wanted to sulk. Fanning knew it, mockingly, and mockingly he had turned back her face towards him— ‘al labro il lume’ — and found her lips. She struggled a little in his arms, protested, and then was silent, lay still. His kisses had had the power to transform her. She was another person, different from the one who had sulked and been resentful. Or rather she was two people — the sulky and resentful one, with another person superimposed, a person who quiveringly sank and melted under his kisses, melted and sank down, down towards that mystical death, that apocalypse, that almost terrible transfiguration. But beneath, to one side, stood always the angry sulker, unappeased, unreconciled, ready to emerge again (full of a new resentment for the way she had been undignifiedly hustled off the stage) the moment the other should have retired. His realization of this made Fanning all the more perversely ardent, quickened the folly of his passion with a kind of derisive hostility. He drew his lips across her cheek, and suddenly their soft electrical touch on her ear made her shudder. ‘Don’t!’ she implored, dreading and yet desiring what was to come. Gently, inexorably his teeth closed, and the petal of cartilage was a firm

elastic resistance between them. She shuddered yet more violently. Fanning relaxed the muscles of his jaws, then tightened them once more, gently, against that exquisite resistance. The felt beauty of rounded warmth and resilience was under his hand. In the darkness they were inhabitants of the supernatural world.

But at midnight they had found themselves, almost suddenly, on earth again, shiveringly cold under the moon. Cold, cold to the quick, Fanning had picked himself up. They stumbled homewards through the woods, in silence. It was in a kind of trance of chilled and sickened exhaustion that he had at last dropped down on his bed in the convent cell. Next morning he was ill. The liver was always his weak point. That had been nearly three weeks ago.

The second of the two monsignori moved away; Fanning stepped into his place. The barmaid handed him his hot dilute sulphate of soda. He deposited fifty centesimi as a largesse and walked off, meditatively sipping. But returning to the place from which he had come, he found their chairs occupied by a pair of obese Milanese businessmen. Pamela had gone. He explored the Alma Tadema background; but there was no sign of her. She had evidently gone back to the hotel. Fanning, who still had five more glasses of water to get through, took his place among the monsters round the band-stand.

In her room at the hotel Pamela was writing up her diary. ‘September 20th. Montecatini seems a beastly sort of hole, particularly if you come to a wretched little hotel like this, which M. insisted on doing, because he knows the proprietor, who is an old drunkard and also cooks the meals, and M. has long talks with him and says he’s like a character in Shakespeare, which is all very well, but I’d prefer better food and a room with a bath, not to mention the awfulness of the other people in the hotel, one of whom is the chief undertaker in Florence, who’s always boasting to the other people at meal times about his business and what a fine motor hearse with gilded angels he’s got and the number of counts and dukes he’s buried. M. had a long conversation with him and the old drunkard after dinner yesterday evening about how you preserve corpses on ice and the way to make money by buying up the best sites at the cemetery and holding them till you could ask five times as much as you paid,

and it was the first time I'd seen him looking cheerful and amused since his illness and even for some time before, but I was so horrified that I went off to bed. This morning at eight to the pump-room, where M. has to drink eight glasses of different kinds of water before breakfast and there are hundreds of hideous people all carrying mugs, and huge fountains of purgatives, and a band playing the "Geisha", so I came away after half an hour, leaving M. to his waters, because I really can't be expected to watch him drinking, and it appears there are six hundred W.C.s.'

She laid down her pen and, turning round in her chair, sat for some time pensively staring at her own reflection in the wardrobe mirror. 'If you look long enough,' (she heard Clare's voice, she saw Clare, inwardly, sitting at her dressing-table), 'you begin to wonder if it isn't somebody else. And perhaps, after all, one is somebody else, all the time.' Somebody else, Pamela repeated to herself, somebody else. But was that a spot on her cheek, or a mosquito bite? A mosquito, thank goodness. 'Oh God,' she said aloud, and in the looking-glass somebody else moved her lips, 'if only I knew what to do! If only I were dead!' She touched wood hastily. Stupid to say such things. But if only one knew, one were certain! All at once she gave a little stiff sharp shudder of disgust, she grimaced as though she had bitten on something sour. Oh, oh! she groaned; for she had suddenly seen herself in the act of dressing, there, in that moon-flecked darkness, among the bushes, that hateful night just before Miles fell ill. Furious because he'd humiliated her, hating him; she hadn't wanted to and he'd made her. Somebody else had enjoyed beyond the limits of enjoyment, had suffered a pleasure transmuted into its opposite. Or rather she had done the suffering. And then that further humiliation of having to ask him to help her look for her suspender belt! And there were leaves in her hair. And when she got back to the hotel, she found a spider squashed against her skin under the chemise. Yes, she had found the spider, not somebody else.

*

Between the brackish sips Fanning was reading in his pocket edition of the Paradiso. ‘L’acqua che prendo giammai non si corse,’ he murmured;

‘Minerva spira e conducemi Apollo,

e nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse,’

He closed his eyes. ’E nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse.’ What a marvel! ‘And the nine Muses point me to the Bears.’ Even translated the spell did not entirely lose its potency. ‘How glad I shall be,’ he thought, ‘to be able to do a little work again.’

‘Il caffé?’ said a voice at his elbow. ‘Non lo bevo mai, mai. Per il fegato, sa, è pessimo. Si dice anche che per gl’intestini . . .’ The voice receded out of hearing.

Fanning took another gulp of salt water and resumed his reading.

Voi altri pochi che drizzante il collo

per tempo al pan degli angeli, del quale

vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo . . .

The voice had returned. ‘Pesce bollito, carne ai ferri o arrostita, patate lesse . . .’

He shut his ears and continued. But when he came to

La concreata e perpetua sete

del deiforme regno,

he had to stop again. This craning for angels’ bread, this thirsting for the godlike kingdom . . . The words reverberated questioningly in his mind. After all, why not? Particularly when man’s bread made you sick (he thought with horror of that dreadful vomiting of bile), when it was a case of pesce bollito and you weren’t allowed to thirst for anything more palatable than this stuff. (He swigged again.) These were the circumstances when Christianity became appropriate. Christians, according to Pascal, ought to live like sick men; conversely, sick men can hardly escape being Christians. How pleased Colin Judd would be! But the thought of Colin was depressing, if only all Christians were like Dante! But in that case, what a frightful world it would be! Frightful.

La concreata e perpetua sete

del deiforme regno cen portava

Veloci, quasi come il ciel vedete.

Beatrice in suso ed io in lei guardava. . . .

He thought of Pamela at the fireworks. On that pedestal. Ben son, ben son Beatrice on that pedestal. He remembered what he had said beneath the blossoming of the rockets; and also what he had meant to say about those legs which the pedestal made it so easy for the worshipper to pinch. Those legs, how remote now, how utterly irrelevant! He finished off his third glass of Torretta and, rising, made his way to the bar for his first of Regina. Yes, how utterly irrelevant! he thought. A complete solution of continuity. You were on the leg level, then you vomited bile, and as soon as you were able to think of anything but vomiting, you found yourself on the Dante level. He handed his mug to the barmaid. She rolled black eyes at him as she filled it. Some liverish gentlemen, it seemed, could still feel amorous. Or perhaps it was only the obese ones. Fanning deposited his offering and retired. Irrelevant, irrelevant. It seemed, now, the unlikeliest story. And yet there it was, a fact. And Pamela was solid, too, too solid.

Phrases floated up, neat and ready-made, to the surface of his mind.

‘What does he see in her? What on earth can she see in him?’

‘But it’s not a question of sight, it’s a question of touch.’

And he remembered — sentiments-centimètres — that French pun about love, so appallingly cynical, so humiliatingly true. ‘But only humiliating,’ he assured himself, ‘because we choose to think it so, arbitrarily, only cynical because Beatrice in suso e io in lei guardava; only appalling because we’re creatures who sometimes vomit bile and because, even without vomiting, we sometimes feel ourselves naturally Christians.’ But in any case, nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse. Meanwhile, however . . . He tilted another gill of water down his throat. And when he was well enough to work, wouldn’t he also be well enough to thirst again for that other godlike kingdom, with its different ecstasies, its other peace beyond all understanding? But tant mieux, tant mieux, so long as the Bears remained unmoved and the Muses went on pointing.

*

Pamela was looking through her diary. ‘June 24th,’ she read. ‘Spent the evening with M. and afterwards he said how lucky it was for me that I’d been seduced by him, which hurt my feelings (that word, I mean) and also rather annoyed me, so I said he certainly hadn’t seduced me, and he said, all right, if I liked to say that I’d seduced him, he didn’t mind, but anyhow it was lucky because almost anybody else wouldn’t have been such a good psychologist as he, not to mention physiologist, and I should have hated it. But I said, how could he say such things? because it wasn’t that at all and I was happy because I love him, but M. laughed and said, you don’t, and I said, I do, and he said, you don’t, but if it gives you any pleasure to imagine you do, imagine, which upset me still more, his not believing, which is due to his not wanting to love himself, because I do love. . . .’

Pamela quickly turned the page. She couldn’t read that sort of thing now.

‘June 25th. Went to the Vatican where M. . . .’ She skipped nearly a page of Miles’s remarks on classical art and the significance of orgies in the ancient religions; on the duty of being happy and having the sun inside you, like a bunch of ripe grapes; on making the world appear infinite and holy by an improvement of sensual enjoyment; on taking things untragically, unponderously.

‘M. dined out and I spent the evening with Guy, the first time since the night of the fireworks, and he asked me what I’d been doing all this time, so I said, nothing in particular, but I felt myself blushing, and he said, anyhow you look extraordinarily well and happy and pretty, which also made me rather uncomfortable, because of what M. said the other day about murder will out, but then I laughed, because it was the only thing to do, and Guy asked what I was laughing about, so I said, nothing, but I could see by the way he looked at me that he was rather thrilled, which pleased me, and we had a very nice dinner and he told me about a girl he’d been in love with in Ireland and it seems they went camping together for a week, but he was never her lover because she had a kind of terror of being touched, but afterwards she went to America and got married.

Later on, in the taxi, he took my hand and even tried to kiss me, but I laughed, because it was somehow very funny, I don't know why, but afterwards, when he persisted, I got angry with him.'

'June 27th. Went to look at mosaics today, rather fine, but what a pity they're all in churches and always pictures of Jesus and sheep and apostles and so forth. On the way home we passed a wine shop and M. went in and ordered a dozen bottles of champagne, because he said that love can exist without passion, or understanding, or respect, but not without champagne. So I asked him if he really loved me, and he said, Je t'adore, in French, but I said, no, do you really love me? But he said, silence is golden and it's better to use one's mouth for kissing and drinking champagne and eating caviar, because he'd also bought some caviar; and if you start talking about love and thinking about love, you get everything wrong, because it's not meant to be talked about, but acted, and if people want to talk and think, they'd better talk about mosaics and that sort of thing. But I still went on asking him if he loved me. . . .'

'Fool, fool!' said Pamela aloud. She was ashamed of herself. Dithering on like that! At any rate Miles had been honest; she had to admit that. He'd taken care to keep the thing on the champagne level. And he'd always told her that she was imagining it all. Which had been intolerable, of course; he'd been wrong to be so right. She remembered how she had cried when he refused to answer her insistent question; had cried and afterwards allowed herself to be consoled. They went back to his house for supper; he opened a bottle of champagne, they ate the caviar. Next day he sent her that poem. It had arrived at the same time as some flowers from Guy. She reopened her notebook. Here it was.

At the red fountain's core the thud of drums
Quickens; for hairy-footed moths explore
This aviary of nerves; the woken birds
Flutter and cry in the branched blood; a bee
Hums with his million-times-repeated stroke
On lips your breast promotes geometers

To measure curves, to take the height of mountains,
The depth and silken slant of dells unseen.
I read your youth, as the blind student spells
With finger-tips the song from Cymbeline.
Caressing and caressed, my hands perceive
(In lieu of eyes) old Titian’s paradise
With Eve unaproned; and the Maja dressed
Whisks off her muslins, that my skin may know
The blind night’s beauty of brooding heat and cool,
Of silk and fibre, or molten-moist and dry,
Resistance and resilience.
But the drum
Throbs with yet faster beat, the wild birds go
Through their red liquid sky with wings yet more
Frantic and yet more desperate crying. Come!
The magical door its soft and breathing valves
Has set ajar. Beyond the threshold lie
Worlds after worlds receding into light,
As rare old wines on the ravished tongue renew
A miracle that deepens, that expands,
Blossoms, and changes hue, and chimes, and shines.
Birds in the blood and doubled drums incite
Us to the conquest of these new, strange lands
Beyond the threshold, where all common times,
Things, places, thoughts, events expire, and life
Enters eternity.
The darkness stirs, the trees are wet with rain;
Knock and it shall be opened, oh, again
Again! The child is eager for its dam
And I the mother am of thirsty lips,
Oh, knock again!

Wild darkness wets this sound of strings.
How smooth it slides among the clarinets,
How easily slips through the trumpetings!
Sound glides through sound, and lo! the apocalypse,
The burst of wings above a sunlit sea.
Must this eternal music make an end?
Prolong, prolong these all but final chords!
Oh, wounded sevenths, breathlessly suspend
Our fear of dying, our desire to know
The song's last words!
Almost Bethesda sleeps, uneasily.
A bubble domes the flatness; gyre on gyre,
The waves expand, expire, as in the deeps
The woken spring subsides
Play, music, play!
Reckless of death, a singing giant rides
His storm of music, rides; and suddenly
The tremulous mirror of the moon is broken;
On the farthest beaches of our soul, our flesh,
The tides of pleasure foaming into pain
Mount, hugely mount; break; and retire again.
The final word is sung, the last word spoken.

'Do I like it, or do I rather hate it? I don't know.'

'June 28th. When I saw M. at lunch today, I told him I didn't really know if I liked his poem, I mean apart from literature, and he said, yes, perhaps the young are more romantic than they think, which rather annoyed me, because I believe he imagined I was shocked, which is too ridiculous. All the same, I don't like it.'

Pamela sighed and shut her eyes, so as to be able to think more privately, without distractions. From this distance of time she could see all that had

happened in perspective, as it were, and as a whole. It was her pride, she could see, her fear of looking ridiculously romantic that had changed the quality of her feelings towards Miles — a pride and a fear on which he had played, deliberately. She had given herself with passion and desperately, tragically, as she imagined that Joan would have desperately given herself, at first sight, to a reluctant Walter. But the love he had offered her in return was a thing of laughter and frank, admitted sensuality, was a gay and easy companionship enriched, but uncomplicated, by pleasure. From the first he had refused to come up to her emotional level. From the first he had taken it for granted — and his taking it for granted was in itself an act of moral compulsion — that she should descend to his. And she had descended — reluctantly at first, but afterwards without a struggle. For she came to realize, almost suddenly, that after all she didn't really love him in the tragically passionate way she had supposed she loved him. In a propitious emotional climate her belief that she was a despairing Joan might perhaps have survived, at any rate for a time. But it was a hot-house growth of the imagination; in the cool dry air of his laughter and cheerfully cynical frankness it had withered. And all at once she had found herself, not satisfied, indeed, with what he offered, but superficially content. She returned him what he gave. Less even than he gave. For soon it became apparent to her that their roles were being reversed, that the desperate one was no longer herself, but Miles. For 'desperate' — that was the only word to describe the quality of his desires. From light and gay — and perhaps, she thought, the lightness had been forced, the gaiety fabricated for the occasion as a defence against the tragical vehemence of her attack and own desires — his sensuality had become heavy, serious, intense. She had found herself the object of a kind of focused rage. It had been frightening sometimes, frightening and rather humiliating; for she had often felt that, so far as he was concerned, she wasn't there at all; that the body between those strong, those ruthless and yet delicate, erudite, subtly intelligent hands of his, that were like a surgeon's or a sculptor's hands, was not her body, was no one's body, indeed, but a kind of abstraction, tangible, yes, desperately tangible, but still an abstraction. She would have liked to rebel; but the surgeon was a

master of his craft, the sculptor’s fingers were delicately learned and intelligent. He had the art to overcome her reluctances, to infect her with some of his strange, concentrated seriousness. Against her will. In the intervals he resumed his old manner; but the laughter was apt to be bitter and spiteful, there was a mocking brutality in the frankness.

Pamela squeezed her eyes more tightly shut and shook her head, frowning at her memories. For distraction she turned back to her diary.

‘June 30th. Lunched with Guy, who was really rather tiresome, because what is more boring than somebody being in love with you, when you’re not in love with them? Which I told him quite frankly, and I could see he was dreadfully upset, but what was I to do?’

Poor Guy! she thought, and she was indignant, not with herself, but with Fanning. She turned over several pages. It was July now and they were at Ostia for the bathing. It was at Ostia that that desperate seriousness had come into his desire. The long hot hours of the siesta were propitious to his earnest madness. Propitious also to his talents, for he worked well in the heat. Behind her lowered eyelids Pamela had a vision of him sitting at his table, stripped to a pair of shorts, sitting there, pen in hand, in the next room and with an open door between them, but somehow at an infinite distance. Terrifyingly remote, a stranger more foreign for being known so well, the inhabitant of other worlds to which she had no access. They were worlds which she was already beginning to hate. His books were splendid, of course; still, it wasn’t much fun being with a man who, for half the time, wasn’t there at all. She saw him sitting there, a beautiful naked stranger, brown and wiry, with a face like brown marble, stonily focused on his paper. And then suddenly this stranger rose and came towards her through the door, across the room. ‘Well?’ she heard herself saying. But the stranger did not answer. Sitting down on the edge of her bed, he took the sewing out of her hands and threw it aside on to the dressing-table. She tried to protest, but he laid a hand on her mouth. Wordlessly he shook his head. Then, uncovering her mouth, he kissed her. Under his surgeon’s, his sculptor’s hands, her body was moulded to a symbol of pleasure. His face was focused and intent, but not on her, on something else, and serious, serious, like a martyr’s, like a mathematician’s, like a criminal’s. An hour later he was back at his table in the next room, in the next world, remote, a stranger once again — but he had never ceased to be a stranger.

Pamela turned over two or three more pages. On July 12th they went sailing and she had felt sick; Miles had been provokingly well all the time. The whole of the sixteenth had been spent in Rome. On the nineteenth they drove to Cerveteri

to see the Etruscan tombs. She had been furious with him, because he had put out the lamp and made horrible noises in the cold sepulchral darkness, underground — furious with terror, for she hated the dark.

Impatiently Pamela went on turning the pages. There was no point in reading; none of the really important things were recorded. Of the earnest madness of his love-making, of those hands, that reluctantly suffered pleasure she hadn't been able to bring herself to write. And yet those were the things that mattered. She remembered how she had tried to imagine that she was like her namesake of Pastures New — the fatal woman whose cool detachment gives her such power over her lovers. But the facts had proved too stubborn; it was simply impossible for her to pretend that this handsome fancy-picture was her portrait. The days flicked past under her thumb.

'July 30th. On the beach this morning we met some friends of M.'s, a journalist called Pedder, who has just come to Rome as correspondent for some paper or other, and his wife, rather awful, I thought, both of them, but M. seemed to be extraordinarily pleased to see them, and they bathed with us and afterwards came and had lunch at our hotel, which was rather boring so far as I was concerned, because they talked a lot about people I didn't know, and then there was a long discussion about politics and history and so forth, too high-brow, but what was intolerable was that the woman thought she ought to be kind and talk to me meanwhile about something I could understand, so she talked about shops in Rome and the best places for getting clothes, which was rather ridiculous, as she's obviously one of those absurd arty women, who appeared in M.'s novels as young girls just before and during the War, so advanced in those days, with extraordinary coloured stockings and frocks like pictures by Augustus John. Anyhow, what she was wearing at lunch was really too fancy-dress, and really at her age one ought to have a little more sense of the decencies, because she must have been quite thirty-five. So that the idea of talking about smart shops in Rome was quite ludicrous to start with, and anyhow it was so insulting to me, because it implied that I was too young and half-witted to be able to take

an interest in their beastly conversation. But afterwards, apropos of some philosophical theory or other, M. began talking about his opium smoking, and he told them all the things he'd told me and a lot more besides, and it made me feel very uncomfortable and then miserable and rather angry, because I thought it was only me he talked to like that, so confidentially, but now I see he makes confidences to everybody and it's not a sign of his being particularly fond of a person, or in love with them, or anything like that. Which made me realize that I'm even less important to him than I thought, and I found I minded much more than I expected I should mind, because I thought I'd got past minding. But I do mind.'

Pamela shut her eyes again. 'I ought to have gone away then,' she said to herself. 'Gone straight away.' But instead of retiring, she had tried to come closer. Her resentment — for oh, how bitterly she resented those Pedders and his confidential manner towards them! — had quickened her love. She wanted to insist on being more specially favoured than a mere Pedder; and, loving him, she had the right to insist. By a process of imaginative incubation, she managed to revive some of the emotions she had felt before the night of the fireworks. Tragically, with a suicide's determination, she tried to force herself upon him. Fanning fought a retreating battle, ruthlessly. Oh, how cruel he could be, Pamela was thinking, how pitilessly cruel! The way he could shut himself up as though in an iron box of indifference! The way he could just fade out into absent silence, into another world! The way he could flutter out of an embarrassing emotional situation on the wings of some brilliant irrelevance! And the way he could flutter back again, the way he could compel you, with his charm, with the touch of his hands, to reopen the gates of your life to him, when you'd made up your mind to shut them against him for ever! And not content with forcing you to yield, he would mock you for your surrender, mock himself too for having attacked — jeering, but without seeming to jeer, indirectly, in some terrible little generalization about the weakness of the human soul, the follies and insanities of the body. Yes, how cruel he could be! She reopened her eyes.

‘August 10th. M. still very glum and depressed and silent, like a wall when I come near. I think he sometimes hates me for loving him. At lunch he said he’d got to go into Rome this afternoon, and he went and didn’t come back till late, almost midnight. Waiting for him, I couldn’t help crying.’

‘August 11th. Those Pedders came to lunch again today and all M.’s glumness vanished the moment he saw them and he was charming all through lunch and so amusing, that I couldn’t help laughing, though I felt more like crying, because why should he be so much nicer and more friendly with them than with me? After lunch, when we went to rest, he came into my room and wanted to kiss me, but I wouldn’t let him, because I said, I don’t want to owe your fits of niceness to somebody else, and I asked him, why? why was he so much nicer to them than to me? And he said they were his people, they belonged to the same time as he did and meeting them was like meeting another Englishman in the middle of a crowd of Kaffirs in Africa. So I said, I suppose I’m the Kaffirs, and he laughed and said, no, not quite Kaffirs, not more than a Rotary Club dinner in Kansas City, with the Pedders playing the part of a man one had known at Balliol in ‘ninety-nine. Which made me cry, and he sat on the edge of the bed and took my hand and said he was very sorry, but that’s what life was like, and it couldn’t be helped, because time was always time, but people weren’t always the same people, but sometimes one person and sometimes another, sometimes Pedder-fanciers and sometimes Pamela-fanciers, and it wasn’t my fault that I hadn’t heard the first performance of Pelléas in 1902 and it wasn’t Pedder’s fault that he had, and therefore Pedder was his compatriot and I wasn’t. But I said, after all, Miles, you’re my lover, doesn’t that make any difference? But he said, it’s a question of speech, and bodies don’t speak, only minds, and when two minds are of different ages it’s hard for them to understand each other when they speak, but bodies can understand each other, because they don’t talk, thank God, he said, because it’s such a comfort to stop talking sometimes, to stop thinking and just be, for a change. But I said that might be all right for him, but just being was my ordinary life and the change for me was

talking, was being friends with somebody who knew how to talk and do all the other things talking implies, and I'd imagined I was that, besides just being somebody he went to bed with, and that was why I was so miserable, because I found I wasn't, and those beastly Pedders were. But he said, damn the Pedders, damn the Pedders for making you cry! and he was so divinely sweet and gentle that it was like gradually sinking, sinking and being drowned. But afterwards he began laughing again in that rather hurting way, and he said, your body's so much more beautiful than their minds — that is, so long as one's a Pamela-fancier; which I am, he said, or rather was and shall be, but now I must go and work, and he got up and went to his room, and I was wretched again.'

The entries of a few days later were dated from Monte Cavo. A superstitious belief in the genius of place had made Pamela insist on the change of quarters. They had been happy on Monte Cavo; perhaps they would be happy there again. And so, suddenly, the sea didn't suit her, she needed mountain air. But the genius of place is an unreliable deity. She had been as unhappy on the hill-top as by the sea. No, not quite so unhappy, perhaps. In the absence of the Pedders, the passion which their coming had renewed declined again. Perhaps it would have declined even if they had still been there. For the tissue of her imagination was, at the best of times, but a ragged curtain. Every now and then she came to a hole and through the hole she could see a fragment of reality, such as the bald and obvious fact that she didn't love Miles Fanning. True, after a peep through one of these indiscreet holes she felt it necessary to repent for having seen the facts, she would work herself up again into believing her fancies. But her faith was never entirely whole-hearted. Under the superficial layer of imaginative suffering lay a fundamental and real indifference. Looking back now, from the further shore of his illness, Pamela felt astonished that she could have gone on obstinately imagining, in spite of those loop-holes on reality, that she loved him. 'Because I didn't,' she said to herself, clear-sighted, weeks too late. 'I didn't.' But the belief that she did had continued, even on Monte Cavo, to envenom those genuinely painful wounds inflicted by him on her pride, her self-respect,

inflicted with a strange malice that seemed to grow on him with the passage of the days.

‘August 23rd,’ She had turned again to the notebook. ‘M. gave me this at lunch to-day.

Sensual heat and sorrow cold
Are undivided twins;
For there where sorrow ends, consoled,
Lubricity begins.

I told him I didn't exactly see what the point of it was, but I supposed it was meant to be hurting, because he's always trying to be hurting now, but he said, no, it was just a Great Thought for putting into Christmas crackers. But he did mean to hurt, and yet in one way he's crazy about me, he's . . .'

Yes, crazy was the right word. The more and the more crazily he had desired her, the more he had seemed to want to hurt her, to hurt himself too — for every wound he inflicted on her was inflicted at the same time on himself. 'Why on earth didn't I leave him?' she wondered as she allowed a few more days to flick past.

'August 29th. A letter this morning from Guy in Scotland, so no wonder he took such an endless time to answer mine, which is a relief in one way, because I was beginning to wonder if he wasn't answering on purpose, but also rather depressing, as he says he isn't coming back to Rome till after the middle of September and goodness knows what will have happened by that time. So I felt very melancholy all the morning, sitting under the big tree in front of the monastery, such a marvellous huge old tree with very bright bits of sky between the leaves and bits of sun on the ground and moving across my frock, so that the sadness somehow got mixed up with the loveliness, which it often does do in a queer way, I find. M. came out unexpectedly and suggested going for a little walk before lunch, and he was very sweet for a change, but I dare say it was because he'd worked well. And I said, do you remember the first time we came up to Monte Cavo? and we talked about that afternoon and what fun it had been, even the museum, I said, even my education, because the Apollo was lovely. But he shook his head and said, Apollo, Apollo, lama sabachthani, and when I asked why he thought his Apollo had abandoned him he said it was because of Jesus and the Devil, and you're the Devil, I'm afraid, and he laughed and kissed my

hand, but I ought to wring your neck, he said. For something that's your fault, I said, because it's you who make me a Devil for yourself. But he said it was me who made him make me into a Devil. So I asked how? And he said just by existing, just by having my particular shape, size, colour, and consistency, because if I'd looked like a beetle and felt like wood, I'd have never made him make me into a Devil. So I asked him why he didn't just go away seeing that what was wrong with me was that I was there at all. But that's easier said than done, he said, because a Devil's one of the very few things you can't run away from. And I asked why not? And he said because you can't run away from yourself and a Devil is at least half you. Besides, he said, the essence of a vice is that it is a vice — it holds you. Unless it unscrews itself, I said, because I'd made up my mind that minute that I'd go away, and it was such a relief having made up my mind, that I wasn't furious or miserable any more, and when M. smiled and said, if it can unscrew itself, I just laughed.'

A little too early, she reflected, as she read the words; she had laughed too early. That night had been the night of the full moon (oh, the humiliation of that lost suspender belt, the horror of that spider squashed against her skin!) and the next day he had begun to be ill. It had been impossible, morally impossible to leave him while he was ill. But how ghastly illness was! She shuddered with horror. Ghastly! 'I'm sorry to be so repulsive,' he had said to her one day, and from her place at his bedside she had protested, but hypocritically, hypocritically. As Aunt Edith might have protested. Still, one's got to be hippo-ish, she excused herself, simply got to be sometimes. 'But, thank goodness,' she thought, 'he's better now.' In a day or two he'd be quite fit to look after himself. These waters were supposed to be miraculous.

She took a sheet of writing-paper from the box on the table and uncorked the bottle of ink.

'Dear Guy,' she began, 'I wonder if you're back in Rome yet?'

Miscellaneous Short Stories

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Eupompus Gave Splendour to Art by Numbers

"I HAVE MADE a discovery," said Emberlin as I entered his room.

"What about?" I asked.

"A discovery," he replied, "about *Discoveries*." He radiated an unconcealed satisfaction; the conversation had evidently gone exactly as he had intended it to go. He had made his phrase, and, repeating it lovingly— "A discovery about *Discoveries*" — he smiled benignly at me, enjoying my look of mystification — an expression which, I confess, I had purposely exaggerated in order to give him pleasure. For Emberlin, in many ways so childish, took an especial delight in puzzling and nonplussing his acquaintances; and these small triumphs, these little "scores" off people afforded him some of his keenest pleasures. I always indulged his weakness when I could, for it was worth while being in Emberlin's good books. To be allowed to listen to his post-prandial conversation was a privilege indeed. Not only was he himself a consummately good talker, but he had also the power of stimulating others to talk well. He was like some subtle wine, intoxicating just to the Meredithian level of tipsiness. In his company you would find yourself lifted to the sphere of nimble and mercurial conceptions; you would suddenly realize that some miracle had occurred, that you were living no longer in a dull world of jumbled things but somewhere above the hotch-potch in a glassily perfect universe of ideas, where all was informed, consistent, symmetrical. And it was Emberlin who, godlike, had the power of creating this new and real world. He built it out of words, this crystal Eden, where no belly-going snake, devourer of quotidian dirt, might ever enter and disturb its harmonies. Since I first knew Emberlin I have come to have a greatly enhanced respect for magic and all the formulas of its liturgy. If by words Emberlin can create a new world for me, can make my spirit slough off completely the domination of the old, why should not he or I or anyone, having found the

suitable phrases, exert by means of them an influence more vulgarly miraculous upon the world of mere things? Indeed when I compare Emberlin and the common or garden black magician of commerce, it seems to me that Emberlin is the greater thaumaturge. But let that pass; I am straying from my purpose, which was to give some description of the man who so confidently whispered to me that he had made a discovery about *Discoveries.*

In the best sense of the word, then, Emberlin was academic. For us who knew him his rooms were an oasis of aloofness planted secretly in the heart of the desert of London. He exhaled an atmosphere that combined the fantastic speculativeness of the undergraduate with the more mellowed oddity of incredibly wise and antique dons. He was immensely erudite, but in a wholly un-encyclopaedic way — a mine of irrelevant information, as his enemies said of him. He wrote a certain amount, but, like Mallarmé, avoided publication, deeming it akin to "the offence of exhibitionism." Once, however, in the folly of youth, some dozen years ago, he had published a volume of verses. He spent a good deal of time now in assiduously collecting copies of his book and burning them. There can be but very few left in the world now. My friend Cope had the fortune to pick one up the other day — a little blue book, which he showed me very secretly. I am at a loss to understand why Emberlin wishes to stamp out all trace of it. There is nothing to be ashamed of in the book; some of the verses, indeed, are, in their young ecstatic fashion, good. But they are certainly conceived in a style that is unlike that of his present poems. Perhaps it is that which makes him so implacable against them. What he writes now for very private manuscript circulation is curious stuff. I confess I prefer the earlier work; I do not like the stony, hard-edged quality of this sort of thing — the only one I can remember of his later productions. It is a sonnet on a porcelain figure of a woman, dug up at Cnossus:

"*Her eyes of bright unwinking glaze*
All imperturbable do not
Even make pretences to regard

The jutting absence of her stays
Where many a Syrian gallipot
Excites desire with spilth of nard.
The bistred rims above the fard
Of cheeks as red as bergamot
Attest that no shamefaced delays
Will clog fulfilment nor retard
Full payment of the Cyprian's praise
Down to the last remorseful jot.
Hail priestess of we know not what
Strange cult of Mycenean days!"

Regrettably, I cannot remember any of Emberlin's French poems. His peculiar muse expresses herself better, I think, in that language than in her native tongue.

Such is Emberlin; such, I should rather say, *was* he, for, as I propose to show, he is not now the man that he was when he whispered so confidentially to me, as I entered the room, that he had made a discovery about *Discoveries.*

I waited patiently till he had finished his little game of mystification and, when the moment seemed ripe, I asked him to explain himself. Emberlin was ready to open out.

"Well," he began, "these are the facts — a tedious introduction, I fear, but necessary. Years ago, when I was first reading Ben Jonson's *Discoveries*, that queer jotting of his, 'Eupompus gave splendour to Art by Numbers', tickled my curiosity. You yourself must have been struck by the phrase, everybody must have noticed it; and everybody must have noticed too that no commentator has a word to say on the subject. That is the way of commentators — the obvious points fulsomely explained and discussed, the hard passages, about which one might want to know something passed over in the silence of sheer ignorance.'Eupompus gave splendour to Art by Numbers' — the absurd phrase stuck in my head. At one time it positively haunted me. I used to chant it in my

bath, set to music as an anthem. It went like this, so far as I remember" — and he burst into song: "'Eupompus, Eu-upompus gave sple-e-e-endour...'" and so on, through all the repetitions, the dragged-out rises and falls of a parodied anthem.

"I sing you this," he said when he had finished, "just to show you what a hold that dreadful sentence took upon my mind. For eight years, off and on, its senselessness has besieged me. I have looked up Eupompus in all the obvious books of reference, of course. He is there all right — Alexandrian artist, eternized by some wretched little author in some even wretcheder little anecdote, which at the moment I entirely forget; it had nothing, at any rate, to do with the embellishment of art by numbers.

Long ago I gave up the search as hopeless; Eupompus remained for me a shadowy figure of mystery, author of some nameless outrage, bestower of some forgotten benefit upon the art that he practised. His history seemed wrapt in an impenetrable darkness. And then yesterday I discovered all about him and his art and his numbers. A chance discovery, than which few things have given me a greater pleasure.

"I happened upon it, as a I say, yesterday when I was glancing through a volume of Zuylerius. Not, of course, the Zuylerius one knows," he added quickly, "otherwise one would have had the heart out of Eupompus' secret years ago."

"Of course," I repeated, "not the familiar Zuylerius."

"Exactly," said Emberlin, taking seriously my flippancy, "not the familiar John Zuylerius, Junior, but the elder Henricus Zuylerius, a much less — though perhaps undeservedly so — renowned figure than his son. But this is not the time to discuss their respective merits. At any rate, I discovered in a volume of critical dialogues by the elder Zuylerius, the reference, to which, without doubt, Jonson was referring in his note. (It was of course a mere jotting, never meant to be printed, but which Jonson's literary executors pitched into the book with all the rest of the available posthumous materials.)'Eupompus gave splendour to Art

by Numbers' — Zuylerius gives a very circumstantial account of the process. He must, I suppose, have found the sources for it in some writer now lost to us."

Emberlin paused a moment to muse. The loss of the work of any ancient writer gave him the keenest sorrow. I rather believe he had written a version of the unrecovered books of Petronius. Some day I hope I shall be permitted to see what conception Emberlin has of the *Satyricon* as a whole. He would, I am sure, do Petronius justice — almost too much, perhaps.

"What was the story of Eupompus?" I asked. "I am all curiosity to know."

Emberlin heaved a sigh and went on.

"Zuylerius' narrative," he said, "is very bald, but on the whole lucid; and I think it gives one the main points of the story. I will give it you in my own words; that is preferable to reading his Dutch Latin. Eupompus, then, was one of the most fashionable portrait-painters of Alexandria. His clientele was large, his business immensely profitable. For a half-length in oils the great courtesans would pay him a month's earnings. He would paint likenesses of the merchant princes in exchange for the costliest of their outlandish treasures. Coal-black potentates would come a thousand miles out of Ethiopia to have a miniature limned on some specially choice panel of ivory; and for payment there would be camel-loads of gold and spices. Fame, riches, and honour came to him while he was yet young; an unparalleled career seemed to lie before him. And then, quite suddenly, he gave it all up — refused to paint another portrait. The doors of his studio were closed. It was in vain that clients, however rich, however distinguished, demanded admission; the slaves had their order; Eupompus would see no one but his own intimates."

Emberlin made a pause in his narrative.

"What was Eupompus doing?" I asked.

"He was, of course," said Emberlin, "occupied in giving splendour to Art by Numbers. And this, as far as I can gather from Zuylerius, is how it all happened. He just suddenly fell in love with numbers — head over ears, amorous of pure counting. Number seemed to him to be the sole reality, the only thing about which the mind of man could be certain. To count was the one thing worth

doing, because it was the one thing you could be sure of doing right. Thus, art, that it may have any value at all, must ally itself with reality — must, that is, possess a numerical foundation. He carried the idea into practice by painting the first picture in his new style. It was a gigantic canvas, covering several hundred square feet — I have no doubt that Eupompus could have told you the exact area to an inch — and upon it was represented an illimitable ocean covered, as far as the eye could reach in every direction, with a multitude of black swans. There were thirty-three thousand of these black swans, each, even though it might be but a speck on the horizon, distinctly limned. In the middle of the ocean was an island, upon which stood a more or less human figure having three eyes, three arms and legs, three breasts and three navels. In the leaden sky three suns were dimly expiring. There was nothing more in the picture; Zuylerius describes it exactly. Eupompus spent nine months of hard work in painting it. The privileged few who were allowed to see it pronounced it, finished, a masterpiece. They gathered round Eupompus in a little school, calling themselves the Philarithmics. They would sit for hours in front of his great work, contemplating the swans and counting them; according to the Philarithmics, to count and to contemplate were the same thing.

Eupompus' next picture, representing an orchard of identical trees set in quincunxes, was regarded with less favour by the connoisseurs. His studies of crowds were, however, more highly esteemed; in these were portrayed masses of people arranged in groups that exactly imitated the number and position of the stars making up various of the more famous constellations. And then there was his famous picture of the amphitheatre, which created a furore among the Philarithmics. Zuylerius again gives us a detailed description. Tier upon tier of seats are seen, all occupied by strange Cyclopean figures. Each tier accommodates more people than the tier below, and the number rises in a complicated but regular progression. All the figures seated in the amphitheatre possess but a single eye, enormous and luminous, planted in the middle of the forehead: and all these thousands of single eyes are fixed, in a terrible and

menacing scrutiny, upon a dwarf-like creature cowering pitiably in the arena.... He alone of the multitude possesses two eyes.

“I would give anything to see that picture,” Emberlin added, after a pause. “The colouring, you know; Zuylerius gives no hint, but I feel somehow certain that the dominant tone must have been a fierce brick-red — a red granite amphitheatre filled with a red-robed assembly, sharply defined against an implacable blue sky.”

“Their eyes would be green,” I suggested.

Emberlin closed his eyes to visualize the scene and then nodded a slow and rather dubious assent.

“Up to this point,” Emberlin resumed at length, “Zuylerius’ account is very clear. But his descriptions of the later philarithmic art become extremely obscure; I doubt whether he understood in the least what it was all about I will give you such meaning as I manage to extract from his chaos. Eupompus seems to have grown tired of painting merely numbers of objects. He wanted now to represent Number itself. And then he conceived the plan of rendering visible the fundamental ideas of life through the medium of those purely numerical terms into which, according to him, they must ultimately resolve themselves. Zuylerius speaks vaguely of a picture of Eros, which seems to have consisted of a series of interlacing planes. Eupompus’ fancy seems next to have been taken by various of the Socratic dialogues upon the nature of general ideas, and he made a series of illustrations for them in the same arithmogeometric style. Finally there is Zuylerius’ wild description of the last picture that Eupompus ever painted. I can make very little of it. The subject of the work, at least, is clearly stated; it was a representation of Pure Number, or God and the Universe, or whatever you like to call that pleasingly inane conception of totality. It was a picture of the cosmos seen, I take it, through a rather Neoplatonic *camera obscura* — very clear and in small. Zuylerius suggests a design of planes radiating out from a single point of light. I dare say something of the kind came in. Actually, I have no doubt, the work was a very adequate rendering in visible form of the conception of the one and the many, with all the intermediate stages of enlightenment between matter

and the *Fans Deitatis*. However, it's no use speculating what the picture may have been going to look like. Poor old Eupompus went mad before he had completely finished it and, after he had dispatched two of the admiring Philarithmics with a hammer, he flung himself out of the window and broke his neck. That was the end of him, and that was how he gave splendour, regrettably transient, to Art by Numbers."

Emberlin stopped. We brooded over our pipes in silence; poor old Eupompus!

That was four months ago, and to-day Emberlin is a confirmed and apparently irreclaimable Philarithmic, a quite wholehearted Eupompian.

It was always Emberlin's way to take up the ideas that he finds in books and to put them into practice. He was once, for example, a working alchemist, and attained to considerable proficiency in the Great Art. He studied mnemonics under Bruno and Raymond Lully, and constructed for himself a model of the latter's syllogizing machine, in hopes of gaining that universal knowledge which the Enlightened Doctor guaranteed to its user. This time it is Eupompianism, and the thing has taken hold of him. I have held up to him all the hideous warnings that I can find in history. But it is no use.

There is the pitiable spectacle of Dr Johnson under the tyranny of an Eupompian ritual, counting the posts and the paving-stones of Fleet Street. He himself knew best how nearly a madman he was.

And then I count as Eupompians all gamblers, all calculating boys, all interpreters of the prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse; then too the Elberfeld horses, most complete of all Eupompians.

And here was Emberlin joining himself to this sect, degrading himself to the level of counting beasts and irrational children and men, more or less insane. Dr Johnson was at least born with a strain of the Eupompian aberration in him; Emberlin is busily and consciously acquiring it. My expostulations, the expostulations of all his friends, are as yet unavailing. It is in vain that I tell Emberlin that counting is the easiest thing in the world to do, that when I am utterly exhausted, my brain, for lack of ability to perform any other work, just

counts and reckons, like a machine, like an Elberfeld horse. It all falls on deaf ears; Emberlain merely smiles and shows me some new numerical joke that he has discovered. Emberlin can never enter a tiled bathroom now without counting how many courses of tiles there are from floor to ceiling. He regards it as an interesting fact that there are twenty-six rows of tiles in his bathroom and thirty-two in mine, while all the public lavatories in Holborn have the same number. He knows now how many paces it is from any one point in London to any other. I have given up going for walks with him. I am always made so distressingly conscious by his preoccupied look, that he is counting his steps.

His evenings, too, have become profoundly melancholy; the conversation, however well it may begin, always comes round to the same nauseating subject. We can never escape numbers; Eupompus haunts us. It is not as if we were mathematicians and could discuss problems of any interest or value. No, none of us are mathematicians, least of all Emberlin. Emberlin likes talking about such points as the numerical significance of the Trinity, the immense importance of its being three in one, not forgetting the even greater importance of its being one in three. He likes giving us statistics about the speed of light or the rate of growth in fingernails. He loves to speculate on the nature of odd and even numbers. And he seems to be unconscious how much he has changed for the worse. He is happy in an exclusively absorbing interest. It is as though some mental leprosy had fallen upon his intelligence.

In another year or so, I tell Emberlin, he may almost be able to compete with the calculating horses on their own ground. He will have lost all traces of his reason, but he will be able to extract cube roots in his head. It occurs to me that the reason why Eupompus killed himself was not that he was mad; on the contrary, it was because he was, temporarily, sane. He had been mad for years, and then suddenly the idiot’s self-complacency was lit up by a flash of sanity. By its momentary light he saw into what gulfs of imbecility he had plunged. He saw and understood, and the full horror, the lamentable absurdity of the situation made him desperate. He vindicated Eupompus against Eupompianism, humanity

against the Philarithmics. It gives me the greatest pleasure to think that he disposed of two of that hideous crew before he died himself.

Sir Hercules

THE INFANT WHO was destined to become the fourth baronet of the name of Lapith was born in the year 1740. He was a very small baby, weighing not more than three pounds at birth, but from the first he was sturdy and healthy. In honour of his maternal grandfather, Sir Hercules Occam of Bishop's Occam, he was christened Hercules. His mother, like many other mothers, kept a notebook, in which his progress from month to month was recorded. He walked at ten months, and before his second year was out he had learnt to speak a number of words. At three years he weighed but twenty-four pounds, and at six, though he could read and write perfectly and showed a remarkable aptitude for music, he was no larger and heavier than a well-grown child of two. Meanwhile, his mother had borne two other children, a boy and a girl, one of whom died of croup during infancy, while the other was carried off by smallpox before it reached the age of five. Hercules remained the only surviving child.

On his twelfth birthday Hercules was still only three feet and two inches in height. His head, which was very handsome and nobly shaped, was too big for his body, but otherwise he was exquisitely proportioned and, for his size, of great strength and agility. His parents, in the hope of making him grow, consulted all the most eminent physicians of the time. Their various prescriptions were followed to the letter, but in vain. One ordered a very plentiful meat diet; another exercise; a third constructed a little rack, modelled on those employed by the Holy Inquisition, on which young Hercules was stretched, with excruciating torments, for half an hour every morning and evening. In the course of the next three years Hercules gained perhaps two inches. After that his growth stopped completely, and he remained for the rest of his life a pigmy of three feet and four inches. His father, who had built the most extravagant hopes upon his son, planning for him in his imagination a military

career equal to that of Marlborough, found himself a disappointed man. “I have brought an abortion into the world,” he would say, and he took so violent a dislike to his son that the boy dared scarcely come into his presence. His temper, which had been serene, was turned by disappointment to moroseness and savagery. He avoided all company (being, as he said, ashamed to show himself, the father of a lus*us nature,* among normal, healthy human beings), and took to solitary drinking, which carried him very rapidly to his grave; for the year before Hercules came of age his father was taken off by an apoplexy. His mother, whose love for him had increased with the growth of his father’s unkindness, did not long survive, but little more than a year after her husband’s death succumbed, after eating two dozen of oysters, to an attack of typhoid fever.

Hercules thus found himself at the age of twenty-one alone in the world, and master of a considerable fortune, including the estate and mansion of Crome. The beauty and intelligence of his childhood had survived into his manly age, and, but for his dwarfish stature, he would have taken his place among the handsomest and most accomplished young men of his time. He was well read in Greek and Latin authors, as well as in all the moderns of any merit who had written in English, French, or Italian. He had a good ear for music, and was no indifferent performer on the violin, which he used to play like a bass viol, seated on a chair with the instrument between his legs. To the music of the harpsichord and clavichord he was extremely partial, but the smallness of his hands made it impossible for him ever to perform upon these instruments. He had a small ivory flute made for him, on which, whenever he was melancholy, he used to play a simple country air or jig, affirming that this rustic music had more power to dear and raise the spirits than the most artificial productions of the masters. From an early age he practised the composition of poetry, but, though conscious of his great powers in this art, he would never publish any specimen of his writing. “My stature,” he would say, “is reflected in my verses; if the public were to read them it would not be because I am a poet, but because I am a dwarf.” Several MS. books of Sir Hercules’s poems survive. A single specimen will suffice to illustrate his qualities as a poet

In ancient days, while yet the world was young,
Ere Abram fed his flocks or Homer sung;
When blacksmith Tubal tamed creative fire,
And Jabal dwelt in tents and Jubal struck the lyre;
Flesh grown corrupt brought forth a monstrous birth
And obscene giants trod the shrinking earth,
Till God, impatient of their sinful brood,
Gave rein to wrath and drown'd them in the Flood.
Teeming again, repeopled Tellus bore
The lubber Hero and the Man of War;
Huge towers of Brawn, topp'd with an empty Skull,
Witlessly bold, heroically dull.
Long ages pass'd and Man grown more refin'd,
Slighter in music but of vaster Mind,
Smiled at his grandsire's broadsword, bow and bill,
And learn'd to wield the Pencil and the Quill.
The glowing canvas and the written page
Immortaliz'd his name from age to age,
His name emblazon'd on Fame's temple wall;
For Art grew great as Humankind grew small.
Thus man's long progress step by step we trace;
The Giant dies, the hero takes his place;
The Giant vile, the dull heroic Block:

At one we shudder and at one we mock.
Man last appears. In him the Soul's pure flame
Bums brightlier in a not inord'nate frame.
Of old when Heroes fought and Giants swarmed,
Men were huge mounds of matter scarce inform'd;
Wearied by leavening so oast a mass,

The spirit slept and all the mind was crass.
The smaller carcase of these later days
Is soon inform'd; the Soul unwearied plays
And like a Pharos darts abroad her mental rays.
But can we think that Providence will stay
Man's footsteps here upon the upward way?
Mankind in understanding and in grace
Advanc'd so far beyond the Giants' race?
Hence impious thought! Still led by GOD'S own Hand,
Mankind proceeds towards the Promised Land.
A time will come (prophetic, I descry
Remoter dawns along the gloomy sky),
When happy mortals of a Golden Age
Will backward turn the dark historic page,
And in our vaunted race of Men behold
A form as gross, a Mind as dead and cold,
As we in Giants see, in warriors of old.
A time will come, wherein the soul shall be
From all superfluous matter wholly free:
When the light body, agile as a fawn's,
Shall sport with grace along the velvet lawns.
Nature's most delicate and final birth,
Mankind perfected shall possess the earth.
But ah, not yet! For still the Giants' race,
Huge, though diminish'd, tramps the Earth's fair face;
Gross and repulsive, yet perversely proud,
Men of their imperfections boast aloud.
Vain of their bulk, of all they still retain
Of giant ugliness absurdly vain;
At all that's small they point their stupid scorn
And, monsters, think themselves divinely born.

Sad is the Fate of those, ah, sad indeed,
The rare precursors of the nobler breed!
Who come man's golden glory to foretell,
But pointing Heav'nwards live themselves in Hell.

As soon as he came into the estate, Sir Hercules set about remodelling his household. For though by no means ashamed of his deformity — indeed, if we may judge from the poem quoted above, he regarded himself as being in many ways superior to the ordinary race of man — he found the presence of full-grown men and women embarrassing. Realizing, too, that he must abandon all ambitions in the great world, he determined to retire absolutely from it and to create, as it were, at Crome a private world of his own, in which all should be proportionable to himself. Accordingly, he discharged all the old servants of the house and replaced them gradually, as he was able to find suitable successors, by others of dwarfish stature. In the course of a few years he had assembled about himself a numerous household, no member of which was above four feet high and the smallest among them scarcely two feet and six inches. His father's dogs, such as setters, mastiffs, greyhounds, and a pack of beagles, he sold or gave away as too large and too boisterous for his house, replacing them by pugs and King Charles spaniels and whatever other breeds of dog were the smallest. His father's stable was also sold. For his own use, whether riding or driving, he had six black Shetland ponies, with four very choice piebald animals of New Forest breed.

Having thus settled his household entirely to his own satisfaction, it only remained for him to find some suitable companion with whom to share this paradise. Sir Hercules had a susceptible heart, and had more than once, between the ages of sixteen and twenty, felt what it was to love. But here his deformity had been a source of the most bitter humiliation, for, having once dared to declare himself to a young lady of his choice, he had been received with laughter. On his persisting, she had picked him up and shaken him like an importunate child, telling him to run away and plague her no more. The story

soon got about — indeed, the young lady herself used to tell it as a particularly pleasant anecdote — and the taunts and mockery it occasioned were a source of the most acute distress to Hercules. From the poems written at this period we gather that he meditated taking his own life. In course of time, however, he lived down this humiliation; but never again, though he often fell in love, and that very passionately, did he dare to make any advances to those in whom he was interested. After coming to the estate and finding that he was in a position to create his own world as he desired it, he saw that, if he was to have a wife — which he very much desired, being of an affectionate and, indeed, amorous temper — he must choose her as he had chosen his servants — from among the race of dwarfs. But to find a suitable wife was, he found, a matter of some difficulty; for he would marry none who was not distinguished by beauty and gentle birth. The dwarfish daughter of Lord Bemboro he refused on the ground that besides being a pigmy she was hunchbacked; while another young lady, an orphan belonging to a very good family in Hampshire, was rejected by him because her face, like that of so many dwarfs, was wizened and repulsive. Finally, when he was almost despairing of success, he heard from a reliable source that Count Titimalo, a Venetian nobleman, possessed a daughter of exquisite beauty and great accomplishments, who was but three feet in height. Setting out at once for Venice, he went immediately on his arrival to pay his respects to the count, whom he found living with his wife and five children in a very mean apartment in one of the poorer quarters of the town. Indeed, the count was so far reduced in his circumstances that he was even then negotiating (so it was rumoured) with a travelling company of clowns and acrobats, who had had the misfortune to lose their performing dwarf, for the sale of his diminutive daughter Filoména. Sir Hercules arrived in time to save her from this untoward fate, for he was so much charmed by Filomena’s grace and beauty, that at the end of three days’ courtship he made her a formal offer of marriage, which was accepted by her no less joyfully than by her father, who perceived in an English son-in-law a rich and unfailing source of revenue. After an unostentatious marriage, at which the English ambassador acted as one of the witnesses, Sir

Hercules and his bride returned by sea to England, where they settled down, as it proved, to a life of uneventful happiness.

Crome and its household of dwarfs delighted Filomena, who felt herself now for the first time to be a free woman living among her equals in a friendly world. She had many tastes in common with her husband, especially that of music. She had a beautiful voice, of a power surprising in one so small, and could touch A in alt without effort. Accompanied by her husband on his fine Cremona fiddle, which he played, as we have noted before, as one plays a bass viol, she would sing all the liveliest and tenderest airs from the operas and cantatas of her native country. Seated together at the harpsichord, they found that they could with their four hands play all the music written for two hands of ordinary size, a circumstance which gave Sir Hercules unfailing pleasure.

When they were not making music or reading together, which they often did, both in English and Italian, they spent their time in healthful outdoor exercises, sometimes rowing in a little boat on the lake, but more often riding or driving, occupations in which, because they were entirely new to her, Filomena especially delighted. When she had become a perfectly proficient rider, Filomena and her husband used often to go hunting in the park, at that time very much more extensive than it is now. They hunted not foxes nor hares, but rabbits, using a pack of about thirty black and fawn-coloured pugs, a kind of dog which, when not overfed, can course a rabbit as well as any of the smaller breeds. Four dwarf grooms, dressed in scarlet liveries and mounted on white Exmoor ponies, hunted the pack, while their master and mistress, in green habits, followed either on the black Shetlands or on the piebald New Forest ponies. A picture of the whole hunt — dogs, horses, grooms, and masters — was painted by William Stubbs, whose work Sir Hercules admired so much that he invited him, though a man of ordinary stature, to come and stay at the mansion for the purpose of executing this picture. Stubbs likewise painted a portrait of Sir Hercules and his lady driving in their green enamelled calash drawn by four black Shetlands. Sir Hercules wears a plum-coloured velvet coat and white breeches; Filoména is dressed in flowered muslin and a very large hat with pink

feathers. The two figures in their gay carriage stand out sharply against a dark background of trees; but to the left of the picture the trees fall away and disappear, so that the four black ponies are seen against a pale and strangely lurid sky that has the golden-brown colour of thunder-clouds lighted up by the sun.

In this way four years passed happily by. At the end of that time Filoména found herself great with child. Sir Hercules was overjoyed. “If God is good,” he wrote in his day-book, “the name of Lapith will be preserved and our rarer and more delicate race transmitted through the generations until in the fullness of time the world shall recognize the superiority of those beings whom now it uses to make mock of.” On his wife’s being brought to bed of a son he wrote a poem to the same effect. The child was christened Ferdinando in memory of the builder of the house.

With the passage of the months a certain sense of disquiet began to invade the minds of Sir Hercules and his lady. For the child was growing with an extraordinary rapidity. At a year he weighed as much as Hercules had weighed when he was three. “Ferdinando goes *crescendo*,” wrote Filoména in her diary. “It seems not natural.” At eighteen months the baby was almost as tall as their smallest jockey, who was a man of thirty-six. Could it be that Ferdinando was destined to become a man of the normal, gigantic dimensions? It was a thought to which neither of his parents dared yet give open utterance, but in the secrecy of their respective diaries they brooded over it in terror and dismay.

On his third birthday Ferdinando was taller than his mother and not more than a couple of inches short of his father’s height. “To-day for the first time,” wrote Sir Hercules, “we discussed the situation. The hideous truth can be concealed no longer: Ferdinando is not one of us. On this, his third birthday, a day when we should have been rejoicing at the health, the strength, and beauty of our child, we wept together over the ruin of our happiness. God give us strength to bear this cross.”

At the age of eight Ferdinando was so large and so exuberantly healthy that his parents decided, though reluctantly, to send him to school. He was packed off

to Eton at the beginning of the next half. A profound peace settled upon the house. Ferdinando returned for the summer holidays larger and stronger than ever. One day he knocked down the butler and broke his arm. “He is rough, inconsiderate, unamenable to persuasion,” wrote his father. “The only thing that will teach him manners is corporal chastisement.” Ferdinando, who at this age was already seventeen inches taller than his father, received no corporal chastisement.

One summer holidays about three years later Ferdinando returned to Crome accompanied by a very large mastiff dog. He had bought it from an old man at Windsor who found the beast too expensive to feed. It was a savage, unreliable animal; hardly had it entered the house when it attacked one of Sir Hercules’s favourite pugs, seizing the creature in its jaws and shaking it till it was nearly dead. Extremely put out by this occurrence, Sir Hercules ordered that the beast should be chained up in the stable-yard. Ferdinando sullenly answered that the dog was his, and he would keep it where he pleased. His father, growing angry, bade him take the animal out of the house at once, on pain of his utmost displeasure. Ferdinando refused to move. His mother at this moment coming into the room, the dog flew at her, knocked her down, and in a twinkling had very severely mauled her arm and shoulder; in another instant it must infallibly have had her by the throat, had not Sir Hercules drawn his sword and stabbed the animal to the heart. Turning on his son, he ordered him to leave the room immediately, as being unfit to remain in the same place with the mother whom he had nearly murdered. So aweinspiring was the spectacle of Sir Hercules standing with one foot on the carcase of the gigantic dog, his sword drawn and still bloody, so commanding were his voice, his gestures, and the expression of his face, that Ferdinando slunk out of the room in terror and behaved himself for all the rest of the vacation in an entirely exemplary fashion. His mother soon recovered from the bites of the mastiff, but the effect on her mind of this adventure was ineradicable; from that time forth she lived always among imaginary terrors.

The two years which Ferdinando spent on the Continent, making the Grand Tour, were a period of happy repose for his parents. But even now the thought of the future haunted them; nor were they able to solace themselves with all the diversions of their younger days. The Lady Filomena had lost her voice and Sir Hercules was grown too rheumatical to play the violin. He, it is true, still rode after his pugs, but his wife felt herself too old and, since the episode of the mastiff, too nervous for such sports. At most, to please her husband, she would follow the hunt at a distance in a little gig drawn by the safest and oldest of the Shetlands.

The day fixed for Ferdinando's return came round. Filomena, sick with vague dreads and presentiments, retired to her chamber and her bed. Sir Hercules received his son alone. A giant in a brown travelling-suit entered the room. "Welcome home, my son," said Sir Hercules in a voice that trembled a little.

"I hope I see you well, sir." Ferdinando bent down to shake hands, then straightened himself up again. The top of his father's head reached to the level of his hip.

Ferdinando had not come alone. Two friends of his own age accompanied him, and each of the young men had brought a servant. Not for thirty years had Crome been desecrated by the presence of so many members of the common race of men. Sir Hercules was appalled and indignant, but the laws of hospitality had to be obeyed. He received the young gentlemen with grave politeness and sent the servants to the kitchen, with orders that they should be well cared for.

The old family dining-table was dragged out into the light and dusted (Sir Hercules and his lady were accustomed to dine at a small table twenty inches high). Simon, the aged butler, who could only just look over the edge of the big table, was helped at supper by the three servants brought by Ferdinando and his guests.

Sir Hercules presided, and with his usual grace supported a conversation on the pleasures of foreign travel, the beauties of art and nature to be met with abroad, the opera at Venice, the singing of the orphans in the churches of the same city, and on other topics of a similar nature. The young men were not

particularly attentive to his discourses; they were occupied in watching the efforts of the butler to change the plates and replenish the glasses. They covered their laughter by violent and repeated fits of coughing or choking. Sir Hercules affected not to notice, but changed the subject of the conversation to sport. Upon this one of the young men asked whether it was true, as he had heard, that he used to hunt the rabbit with a pack of pug dogs. Sir Hercules replied that it was, and proceeded to describe the chase in some detail. The young men roared with laughter.

When supper was over, Sir Hercules climbed down from his chair and, giving as his excuse that he must see how his lady did, bade them good-night. The sound of laughter followed him up the stairs. Filomena was not asleep; she had been lying on her bed listening to the sound of enormous laughter and the tread of strangely heavy feet on the stairs and along the corridors. Sir Hercules drew a chair to her bedside and sat there for a long time in silence, holding his wife's hand and sometimes gently squeezing it. At about ten o'clock they were startled by a violent noise. There was a breaking of glass, a stamping of feet, with an outburst of shouts and laughter. The uproar continuing for several minutes, Sir Hercules rose to his feet and, in spite of his wife's entreaties, prepared to go and see what was happening. There was no light on the staircase, and Sir Hercules groped his way down cautiously, lowering himself from stair to stair and standing for a moment on each tread before adventuring on a new step. The noise was louder here; the shouting articulated itself into recognizable words and phrases. A line of light was visible under the dining-room door. Sir Hercules tiptoed across the hall towards it. Just as he approached the door there was another terrific crash of breaking glass and jangled metal. What could they be doing? Standing on tiptoe he managed to look through the keyhole. In the middle of the ravaged table old Simon, the butler, so primed with drink that he could scarcely keep his balance, was dancing a jig. His feet crunched and tinkled among the broken glass, and his shoes were wet with spilt wine. The three young men sat round, thumping the table with their hands or with the empty wine bottles, shouting and laughing encouragement. The three servants leaning

against the wall laughed too. Ferdinando suddenly threw a handful of walnuts at the dancer's head, which so dazed and surprised the little man that he staggered and fell down on his back, upsetting a decanter and several glasses. They raised him up, gave him some brandy to drink, thumped him on the back. The old man smiled and hiccoughed, "To-morrow," said Ferdinando, "we'll have a concerted ballet of the whole household."

"With father Hercules wearing his club and lion-skin," added one of his companions, and all three roared with laughter.

Sir Hercules would look and listen no further. He crossed the hall once more and began to climb the stairs, lifting his knees painfully high at each degree. This was the end; there was no place for him now in the world, no place for him and Ferdinando together.

His wife was still awake; to her questioning glance he answered, 'They are making mock of old Simon. To-morrow it will be our turn." They were silent for a time.

At last Filoména said, "I do not want to see to-morrow."

"It is better not," said Sir Hercules. Going into his closet he wrote in his day-book a full and particular account of all the events of the evening. While he was still engaged in this task he rang for a servant and ordered hot water and a bath to be made ready for him at eleven o'clock. When he had finished writing he went into his wife's room, and preparing a dose of opium twenty times as strong as that which she was accustomed to take when she could not sleep, he brought it to her, saying, "Here is your sleeping-draught."

Filoména took the glass and lay for a little time, but did not drink immediately. The tears came into her eyes. "Do you remember the songs we used to sing, sitting out there *sulla terrazza* in summer-time?" She began singing softly in her ghost of a cracked voice a few bars from Stradella's "*Amor, amor, non dormir piu*."

"And you playing on the violin. It seems such a short time ago, and yet so long, long, long. *Addio, amort. A rivederti*." She drank off the draught and, laying back on the pillow, closed her eyes. Sir Hercules kissed her hand and

tiptoed away, as though he were afraid of waking her. He returned to his closet, and having recorded his wife's last words to him, he poured into his bath the water that had been brought up in accordance with his orders. The water being too hot for him to get into the bath at once, he took down from the shelf his copy of Suetonius. He wished to read how Seneca had died. He opened the book at random. "But dwarfs," he read, "he held in abhorrence as being *lusus natura* and of evil omen." He winced as though he had been struck. This same Augustus, he remembered, had exhibited in the amphitheatre a young man called Lucius, of good family, who was not quite two feet in height and weighed seventeen pounds, but had a stentorian voice. He turned over the pages. Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero: it was a tale of growing horror. "Seneca his preceptor, he forced to kill himself." And there was Petronius, who had called his friends about him at the last, bidding them talk to him, not of the consolations of philosophy, but of love and gallantry, while the life was ebbing away through his opened veins. Dipping his pen once more in the ink he wrote on the last page of his diary: "He died a Roman death." Then, putting the toes of one foot into the water and finding that it was not too hot, he threw off his dressing-gown and, taking a razor in his hand, sat down in the bath. With one deep cut he severed the artery in his left wrist, then lay back and composed his mind to meditation. The blood oozed out, floating through the water in dissolving wreaths and spirals. In a little while the whole bath was tinged with pink. The colour deepened; Sir Hercules felt himself mastered by an invincible drowsiness; he was sinking from vague dream to dream. Soon he was sound asleep. There was not much blood in his small body.

The Short Stories

Huxley attended Balliol College at Oxford from 1913-16.

List of Short Stories in Chronological Order

FARCICAL HISTORY OF RICHARD GREENOW
HAPPILY EVER AFTER
EUPOMPUS GAVE SPLENDOUR TO ART BY NUMBERS
HAPPY FAMILIES
CYNTHIA
THE BOOKSHOP
THE DEATH OF LULLY
THE GIOCONDA SMILE
PERMUTATIONS AMONG THE NIGHTINGALES
THE TILLOTSON BANQUET
GREEN TUNNELS
NUNS AT LUNCHEON
UNCLE SPENCER
LITTLE MEXICAN
HUBERT AND MINNIE
FARD
THE PORTRAIT
YOUNG ARCHIMEDES
TWO OR THREE GRACES
HALF-HOLIDAY
THE MONOCLE
FAIRY GODMOTHER
CHAWDRON
THE REST CURE
THE CLAXTONS
AFTER THE FIREWORKS
EUPOMPUS GAVE SPLENDOUR TO ART BY NUMBERS

SIR HERCULES

List of Short Stories in Alphabetical Order

AFTER THE FIREWORKS
CHAWDRON
CYNTHIA
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EUPOMPUS GAVE SPLENDOUR TO ART BY NUMBERS
FAIRY GODMOTHER
FARCICAL HISTORY OF RICHARD GREENOW
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HALF-HOLIDAY
HAPPILY EVER AFTER
HAPPY FAMILIES
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THE MONOCLE
THE PORTRAIT
THE REST CURE
THE TILLOTSON BANQUET
TWO OR THREE GRACES
UNCLE SPENCER

YOUNG ARCHIMEDES

The Poetry Collections

During World War I, Huxley spent much of his time at Garsington Manor near Oxford, home of Lady Ottoline Morrell, working as a farm labourer. There he met several Bloomsbury figures, including Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead and Clive Bell.

The Burning Wheel

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THE BURNING WHEEL.

Wearied of its own turning,
Distressed with its own busy restlessness,
Yearning to draw the circumferent pain —
The rim that is dizzy with speed —
To the motionless centre, there to rest,
The wheel must strain through agony
On agony contracting, returning
Into the core of steel.
And at last the wheel has rest, is still,
Shrunk to an adamant core:
Fulfilling its will in fixity.
But the yearning atoms, as they grind
Closer and closer, more and more
Fiercely together, beget
A flaming fire upward leaping,
Billowing out in a burning,
Passionate, fierce desire to find
The infinite calm of the mother's breast.
And there the flame is a Christ-child sleeping,
Bright, tenderly radiant;
All bitterness lost in the infinite
Peace of the mother's bosom.
But death comes creeping in a tide
Of slow oblivion, till the flame in fear
Wakes from the sleep of its quiet brightness
And burns with a darkening passion and pain,
Lest, all forgetting in quiet, it perish.
And as it burns and anguishes it quickens,
Begetting once again the wheel that yearns —

Sick with its speed — for the terrible stillness
Of the adamant core and the steel-hard chain.
And so once more
Shall the wheel revolve till its anguish cease
In the iron anguish of fixity;
Till once again
Flame billows out to infinity,
Sinking to a sleep of brightness
In that vast oblivious peace.

DOORS OF THE TEMPLE.

Many are the doors of the spirit that lead
Into the inmost shrine:
And I count the gates of the temple divine,
Since the god of the place is God indeed.
And these are the gates that God decreed
Should lead to his house: — kisses and wine,
Cool depths of thought, youth without rest,
And calm old age, prayer and desire,
The lover’s and mother’s breast,
The fire of sense and the poet’s fire.

But he that worships the gates alone,
Forgetting the shrine beyond, shall see
The great valves open suddenly,
Revealing, not God’s radiant throne,
But the fires of wrath and agony.

VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM.

Up from the darkness on the laughing stage
A sudden trap-door shot you unawares,
Incarnate Tragedy, with your strange airs
Of courteous sadness. Nothing could assuage
The secular grief that was your heritage,
Passed down the long line to the last that bears
The name, a gift of yearnings and despairs
Too greatly noble for this iron age.

Time moved for you not in quotidian beats,
But in the long slow rhythm the ages keep
In their immortal symphony. You taught
That not in the harsh turmoil of the streets
Does life consist; you bade the soul drink deep
Of infinite things, saying: "The rest is naught."

DARKNESS.

My close-walled soul has never known
That innermost darkness, dazzling sight,
Like the blind point, whence the visions spring
In the core of the gazer’s chrysolite ...
The mystic darkness that laps God’s throne
In a splendour beyond imagining,
So passing bright.

But the many twisted darknesses
That range the city to and fro,
In aimless subtlety pass and part
And ebb and glutinously flow;
Darkness of lust and avarice,
Of the crippled body and the crooked heart ...
These darknesses I know.

MOLE.

Tunnelled in solid blackness creeps
The old mole-soul, and wakes or sleeps,
He knows not which, but tunnels on
Through ages of oblivion;
Until at last the long constraint
Of each-hand wall is lost, and faint
Comes daylight creeping from afar,
And mole-work grows crepuscular.
Tunnel meets air and bursts; mole sees
Men hugely walking ... or are they trees?
And far horizons smoking blue,
And chasing clouds for ever new?
Green hills, like lighted lamps aglow
Or quenching ‘neath the cloud-shadow;
Quenching and blazing turn by turn,
Spring’s great green signals fitfully burn.
Mole travels on, but finds the steering
A harder task of pioneering
Than when he thridded through the strait
Blind catacombs that ancient fate
Had carved for him. Stupid and dumb
And blind and touchless he had come
A way without a turn; but here,
Under the sky, the passenger
Chooses his own best way; and mole
Distracted wanders, yet his hole
Regrets not much wherein he crept,
But runs, a joyous nympholept,
This way and that, by all made mad —
River nymph and oread

River nymph and dread,
Ocean’s daughters and Lorelei,
Combing the silken mystery,
The glaucous gold of her rivery tresses —
Each haunts the traveller, each possesses
The drunken wavering soul awhile;
Then with a phantom’s cock-crow smile
Mocks craving with sheer vanishment.

Mole-eyes grow hawk’s: knowledge is lent
In grudging driblets that pay high
Unconscionable usury
To unrelenting life. Mole learns
To travel more secure; the turns
Of his long way less puzzling seem,
And all those magic forms that gleam
In airy invitation cheat
Less often than they did of old.

The earth slopes upward, fold by fold
Of quiet hills that meet the gold
Serenity of western skies.
Over the world’s edge with clear eyes
Our mole transcendent sees his way
Tunnelled in light: he must obey
Necessity again and thrid
Close catacombs as erst he did,
Fate’s tunnellings, himself must bore
Through the sunset’s inmost core.
The guiding walls to each-hand shine
Luminous and crystalline;
And mole shall tunnel on and on,

Till night let fall oblivion.

THE TWO SEASONS.

Summer, on himself intent,
Passed without, for nothing caring
Save his own high festival.
My windows, blind and winkless staring,
Wondered what the pageant meant,
Nor ever understood at all.
And oh, the pains of sentiment!
The loneliness beyond all bearing ...
Mucus and spleen and gall!

But now that grey November peers
In at my fire-bright window pane?
And all its misty spires and trees
Loom in upon me through the rain
And question of the light that cheers
The room within — now my soul sees
Life, where of old were sepulchres;
And in these new-found sympathies
Sinks petty hopes and loves and fears,
And knows that life is not in vain.

TWO REALITIES.

A waggon passed with scarlet wheels
And a yellow body, shining new.
“Splendid!” said I. “How fine it feels
To be alive, when beauty peels
The grimy husk from life.” And you Said, “Splendid!” and I thought you’d seen
That waggon blazing down the street;
But I looked and saw that your gaze had been
On a child that was kicking an obscene
Brown ordure with his feet.

Our souls are elephants, thought I,
Remote behind a prisoning grill,
With trunks thrust out to peer and pry
And pounce upon reality;
And each at his own sweet will Seizes the bun that he likes best
And passes over all the rest.

QUOTIDIAN VISION.

There is a sadness in the street,
And sullenly the folk I meet
Droop their heads as they walk along,
Without a smile, without a song.
A mist of cold and muffling grey
Falls, fold by fold, on another day
That dies unwept. But suddenly,
Under a tunnelled arch I see
On flank and haunch the chestnut gleam
Of horses in a lamplit steam;
And the dead world moves for me once more
With beauty for its living core.

VISION.

I had been sitting alone with books,
Till doubt was a black disease,
When I heard the cheerful shout of rooks
In the bare, prophetic trees.

Bare trees, prophetic of new birth,
You lift your branches clean and free
To be a beacon to the earth,
A flame of wrath for all to see.

And the rooks in the branches laugh and shout
To those that can hear and understand;
“Walk through the gloomy ways of doubt
With the torch of vision in your hand.”

THE MIRROR.

Slow-moving moonlight once did pass
Across the dreaming looking-glass,
Where, sunk inviolably deep,
Old secrets unforgotten sleep
Of beauties unforgettable.

But dusty cobwebs are woven now
Across that mirror, which of old
Saw fingers drawing back the gold
From an untroubled brow;
And the depths are blinded to the moon,
And their secrets forgotten, for ever untold.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF LAFORGUE.

Youth as it opens out discloses
The sinister metempsychosis
Of lilies dead and turned to roses
Red as an angry dawn.
But lilies, remember, are grave-side flowers,
While slow bright rose-leaves sail
Adrift on the music of happiest hours;
And those lilies, cold and pale,
Hide fiery roses beneath the lawn
Of the young bride’s parting veil.

PHILOSOPHY.

“God needs no christening,”
Pantheist mutters,
“Love opens shutters
On heaven’s glistening.
Flesh, key-hole listening,
Hears what God utters” ...
Yes, but God stutters.

PHILOCLEA IN THE FOREST.

I.

‘TWas I that leaned to Amoret
With: “What if the briars have tangled Time,
Till, lost in the wood-ways, he quite forget
How plaintive in cities at midnight sounds the chime
Of bells slow-dying from discord to the hush whence
they rose and met.

“And in the forest we shall live free,
Free from the bondage that Time has made
To hedge our soul from its liberty?
We shall not fear what is mighty, and unafraid
Shall look wide-eyed at beauty, nor shrink from its majesty.”

But Amoret answered me again:
“We are lost in the forest, you and I;
Lost, lost, not free, though no bonds restrain;
For no spire rises for comfort, no landmark in the sky,
And the long glades as they curve from sight are dark
with a nameless pain.

And Time creates what he devours, —
Music that sweetly dreams itself away,
Frail-swung leaves of autumn and the scent of flowers,
And the beauty of that poised moment, when the day
Hangs ‘twixt the quiet of darkness and the mirth of the
sunlit hours.”

II.

Mottled and grey and brown they pass,
The wood-moths, wheeling, fluttering;
And we chase and they vanish; and in the grass
Are starry flowers, and the birds sing
Faint broken songs of the dying spring.
And on the beech-bole, smooth and grey,
Some lover of an older day
Has carved in time-blurred lettering
One word only— “Alas.”

III.

Lutes, I forbid you! You must never play,
When shimmeringly, glimpse by glimpse
Seen through the leaves, the silken figures sway
In measured dance. Never at shut of day,
When Time perversely loitering limps
Through endless twilights, should your strings
Whisper of light remembered things
That happened long ago and far away:
Lutes, I forbid you! You must never play...

And you, pale marble statues, far descried
Where vistas open suddenly,
I bid you shew yourselves no more, but hide
Your loveliness, lest too much glorified
By western radiance slantingly
Shot down the glade, you turn from stone
To living gods, immortal grown,
And, ageless, mock my beauty’s fleeting pride,
You pale, relentless statues, far descried...

BOOKS AND THOUGHTS.

Old ghosts that death forgot to ferry
Across the Lethe of the years-
These are my friends, and at their tears
I weep and with their mirth am merry.
On a high tower, whose battlements
Give me all heaven at a glance,
I lie long summer nights in trance,
Drowsed by the murmurs and the scents
That rise from earth, while the sky above me
Merges its peace with my soul’s peace,
Deep meeting deep. No stir can move me,
Nought break the quiet of my release:
In vain the windy sunlight raves
At the hush and gloom of polar caves.

CONTRARY TO NATURE AND ARISTOTLE.

One head of my soul’s amphisbaena
Turns to the daytime’s dust and sweat;
But evenings come, when I would forget
The sordid strife of the arena.

And then my other self will creep
Along the scented twilight lanes
To where a little house contains
A hoard of books, a gift of sleep.

Its windows throw a friendly light
Between the narrowing shutter slats,
And, golden as the eyes of cats,
Shine me a welcome through the night.

ESCAPE.

I seek the quietude of stones
Or of great oxen, dewlap-deep
In meadows of lush grass, where sleep
Drifts, tufted, on the air or drones
On flowery traffic. Sleep atones
For sin, comforting eyes that weep.
O’er me, Lethean darkness, creep
Unfelt as tides through dead men’s bones!

In that metallic sea of hair,
Fragrance! I come to drown despair
Of wings in dark forgetfulness.
No love ... Love is self-known, aspires
To heights unearthly. I ask less, —
Sleep born of satisfied desires.

THE GARDEN.

There shall be dark trees round me: — I insist
On cypresses: I’m terribly romantic —
And glimpsed between shall move the whole Atlantic,
Now leaden dull, now subtle with grey mist,
Now many jewelled, when the waves are kissed
By revelling sunlight and the corybantic
South-Western wind: so, troubled, passion-frantic,
The poet’s mind boils gold and amethyst.

There shall be seen the infinite endeavour
Of a sad fountain, white against the sky
And poised as it strains up, but doomed to break
In weeping music; ever fair and ever
Young ... and the bright-eyed wood-gods as they slake
Their thirst in it, are silent, reverently ...

THE CANAL.

No dip and dart of swallows wakes the black
Slumber of the canal: — a mirror dead
For lack of loveliness remembered
From ancient azures and green trees, for lack
Of some white beauty given and flung back,
Secret, to her that gave: no sun has bled
To wake an echo here of answering red;
The surface stirs to no leaf’s wind-blown track.

Between unseeing walls the waters rest,
Lifeless and hushed, till suddenly a swan
Glides from some broader river blue as day,
And with the mirrored magic of his breast
Creates within that barren water-way
New life, new loveliness, and passes on.

THE IDEAL FOUND WANTING.

I’m sick of clownery and Owlglass tricks;
Damn the whole crowd of you I I hate you all.
The same, night after night, from powdered stall
To sweating gallery, your faces fix
In flux an idiot mean. The Apteryx
You worship is no victory; you call
On old stupidity, God made to crawl
For tempting with world-wisdom’s narcotics.

I’ll break a window through my prison! See,
The sunset bleeds among the roofs; comes night,
Dark blue and calm as music dying out.
Is it escape? No, the laugh’s turned on me!
I kicked at cardboard, gaped at red limelight;
You laughed and cheered my latest knockabout.

MISPLACED LOVE.

Red wine that slowly leaned and brimmed the shell
Of pearl, where lips had touched, as light and swift
As naked petals of the rose adrift
Upon the lazy-luted ritournelle
Of summer bee-song: laughing as they fell,
Gold memories: dream incense, childhood’s gift,
Blue as the smoke that far horizons lift,
Tenuous as the wings of Ariel: — These treasured things I laid upon the pyre;
And the flame kindled, and I fanned it high,
And, strong in hope, could watch the crumbling past.
Eager I knelt before the waning fire,
Phoenix, to greet thine immortality ...
But there was naught but ashes at the last.

SONNET.

Were I to die, you'd break your heart, you say.
Well, if it do but bend, I'm satisfied —
Bend and rebound — for hearts are temper-tried,
Mild steel, not hardened, with the spring and play
Of excellent tough swords. It's not that way
That you'll be perishing. But when I've died,
When snap! my light goes out, what will betide
You, if the heart-breaks give you leave to stay?

What will be left, I wonder, if you lose
All that you gave me? "All? A year or so
Out of a life," you say. But worlds, say I,
Of kisses timeless given in ecstasy
That gave me Real You. I die: you go
With me. What's left? Limbs, clothes, a pair of shoes?...

SENTIMENTAL SUMMER.

The West has plucked its flowers and has thrown
Them fading on the night. Out of the sky’s
Black depths there smiles a greeting from those eyes,
Where all the Real, all I have ever known
Of the divine is held. And not alone
Do I stand here now ... a presence seems to rise:
Your voice sounds near across my memories,
And answering fingers brush against my own.

Yes, it is you: for evening holds those strands
Of fire and darkness twined in one to make
Your loveliness a web of magic mesh,
Whose cross-weft harmony of soul and flesh
Shadows a thought or glows, when smiles awake,
Like sunlight passionate on southern lands.

THE CHOICE.

Comrade, now that you’re merry
And therefore true,
Say — where would you like to die
And have your friend to bury
What once was you?
“On the top of a hill
With a peaceful view
Of country where all is still?”...
Great God, not I!
I’d lie in the street
Where two streams meet
And there’s noise enough to fill
The outer ear,
While within the brain can beat
Marches of death and life,
Glory and joy and fear,
Peace of the sort that moves
And clash of strife
And routs of armies fleeing.
There would I shake myself clear
Out of the deep-set grooves
Of my sluggish being.

THE HIGHER SENSUALISM.

There’s a church by a lake in Italy
Stands white on a hill against the sky?
And a path of immemorial cobbles
Leads up and up, where the pilgrim hobbles
Past a score or so of neat reposories,
Where you stop and breathe and tell your rosaries
To the shrined terra-cotta mannikins,
That expound with the liveliest quirks and grins
Known texts of Scripture. But no long stay
Should the pilgrim make upon his way;
But as means to the end these shrines stand here
To guide to something holier,
The church on the hilltop.

Your heaven’s so,
With a path leading up to it past a row
Of votary Priapulids;
At each you pause and tell your beads
Along the quintuple strings of sense:
Then on, to face Heaven’s eminence,
New stimulated, new inspired.

SONNET.

If that a sparkle of true starshine be
That led my way; if some diviner thing
Than common thought urged me to fashioning
Close-woven links of burnished poetry;
Then all the heaven that one time dwelt in me
Has fled, leaving the body triumphing.
Dead flesh it seems, with not a dream to bring
Visions that better warm immediacy.

Why have my visions left me, what could kill
That feeble spark, which yet had life and heat?
Fulfilment shewed a present rich and fair:
I strive to mount, but catch the nearest still:
Souls have been drowned between heart’s beat and beat,
And trapped and tangled in a woman’s hair.

FORMAL VERSES.

I.

Mother of all my future memories,
Mistress of my new life, which but to-day
Began, when I beheld, deep in your eyes,
My own love mirrored and the warm surprise
Of the first kiss swept both our souls away, Your love has freed me; for I was oppressed
By my own devil, whose unwholesome breath
Tarnished my youth, leaving to me at best
Age lacking comfort of a soul at rest
And weariness beyond the hope of death.

II.

Ah, those were days of silent happiness!
I never spoke, and had no need to speak,
While on the windy down-land, cheek by cheek,
The slow-driven sun beheld us. Each caress
Had oratory for its own defence;
And when I kissed or felt her fingers press,
I envied not Demosthenes his Greek,
Nor Tully for his Latin eloquence.

PERILS OF THE SMALL HOURS.

When life burns low as the fire in the grate
And all the evening’s books are read,
I sit alone, save for the dead
And the lovers I have grown to hate.

But all at once the narrow gloom
Of hatred and despair expands
In tenderness: thought stretches hands
To welcome to the midnight room Another presence: — a memory
Of how last year in the sunlit field,
Laughing, you suddenly revealed
Beauty in immortality.

For so it is; a gesture strips
Life bare of all its make-believe.
All unprepared we may receive
Our casual apocalypse.

Sheer beauty, then you seemed to stir
Unbodied soul; soul sleeps to-night,
And love comes, dimming spirit’s sight,
When body plays interpreter.

COMPLAINT.

I have tried to remember the familiar places, —
The pillared gloom of the beechwoods, the towns
by the sea, —
I have tried to people the past with dear known faces,
But you were haunting me.

Like a remorse, insistent, pitiless,
You have filled my spirit, you were ever at hand;
You have mocked my gods with your new loveliness:
Broken the old shrines stand.

RETURN TO AN OLD HOME.

In this wood — how the hazels have grown! —
I left a treasure all my own
Of childish kisses and laughter and pain;
Left, till I might come back again
To take from the familiar earth
My hoarded secret and count its worth.
And all the spider-work of the years,
All the time-spun gossamers,
Dewed with each succeeding spring;
And the piled up leaves the Autumns fling
To the sweet corruption of death on death....
At the sudden stir of my spirit’s breath
All scattered. New and fair and bright
As ever it was, before my sight
The treasure lay, and nothing missed.
So having handled all and kissed,
I put them back, adding one new
And precious memory of you.

FRAGMENT.

We’re German scholars poring over life,
As over a Greek manuscript that’s torn
And stained beyond repair. Our eyes of horn
Read one or two poor letters; and what strife,
What books on books begotten for their sake!
But we enjoy it; and meanwhile neglect
The line that’s left us perfect from the wrecked
Rich argosy, clear beyond doubts to make
Conjectures of. So in my universe
Of scribbled half-hid meanings you appear,
Sole perfect symbol of the highest sphere;
And life’s great matrix crystal, whose depths nurse
Soul’s infinite reflections, glows in you
With now uncertain radiance...

THE WALK.

I. THROUGH THE SUBURBS.

Provincial Sunday broods above the town:
The street’s asleep; through a dim window drifts
A small romance that hiccoughs up and down
An air all trills and runs and sudden lifts
To yearning sevenths poised ... not Chopin quite,
But, oh, romantic; a tinsel world made bright
With rose and honeysuckle’s paper blooms,
And where the moon’s blue limelight and the glooms
Of last-act scenes of passion are discreet.
And when the tinkling stops and leaves the street
Blank in the sunlight of the afternoon
You feel a curtain dropped. Poor little tune!
Perhaps our grandmother’s dull girlhood days
Were fired by you with radiances of pink,
Heavenly, brighter far than she could think
Anything might be ... till a greater blaze
Tinged life’s horizon, when he kissed her first,
Our grandpapa. But a thin ghost still plays
In music down the street, echoing the plaint
Of far romance with its own sadder song
Of Everyday; and as they walk along,...
The young man and the woman, deep immersed
In all the suburb-comedy around ...
They seem to catch coherence in the sound
Of that ghost-music, and the words come faint: —
Oh the months and the days,
Oh sleeps and dinners,
Oh the planning of ways

And quotidian means!
Oh endless vistas of mutton and greens,
Oh weekly mimblings of prayer and praise,
Oh Evenings with All the Winners!
Monday sends the clothes to the wash
And Saturday brings them home again:
Mon Dieu, la vie est par trop moche
And Destiny is a sale caboche;
But I'll give you heaven
In a dominant seven,
And you shall not have lived in vain.

"In vain," the girl repeats, "in vain, in vain ..."
Your suburb's whole philosophy leads there.
The ox-stall for our happiness, for pain,
Poignant and sweet, the dull narcotic ache
Of wretchedness, and in resigned despair
A grim contentment ... ashen fruits to slake
A nameless, quenchless thirst. The tinkling rain
Of that small sentimental music wets
Your parching suburb: it may sprout ... who knows?...
In something red and silken like a rose,
In sheaves of almost genuine violets.

Faint chords, your sadness, secular, immense,
Brims to the bursting this poor Actual heart.
For surging through the floodgates that the sense
On sudden lightly opens sweeps the Whole
Into the narrow compass of its part.

He.

Inedited sensation of the soul!
You'd have us bless the Hire-Purchase System,
Which now allows the poorest vampers
To feel, as they abuse their piano's dampers,
That angels have stooped down and kissed 'em
With Ave-Maries from the infinite.
But poor old Infinite's dead. Long live his heir,
Lord Here-and-Now ... for all the rest
Is windy nothingness, or at the best
Home-made Chimera, bodied with despair,
Headed with formless, foolish hope.

She.

No, no!
We live in verse, for all things rhyme
With something out of space and time.

He.

But in the suburb here life needs must flow
In journalistic prose ...

She.

But we have set
Our faces towards the further hills, where yet
The wind untainted and unbound may blow.

II. FROM THE CREST.

So through the squalor, till the sky unfolds
To right and left its fringes, penned no more,
A thin canal, ‘twixt shore and ugly shore
Of hovels, poured contiguous from the moulds
Of Gothic horror. Town is left at last,
Save for the tentacles that probe,... a squat
Dun house or two, allotments, plot on plot
Of cabbage, jejune, ripe or passed,
Chequering with sick yellow or verdigris
The necropolitan ground; and neat paved ways
That edge the road ... the town’s last nerves ... and cease,
As if in sudden shame, where hedges raise
Their dusty greenery on either hand.
Their path mounts slowly up the hill;
And, as they walk, to right and left expand
The plain and the golden uplands and the blue
Faint smoke of distances that fade from view;
And at their feet, remote and still?
The city spreads itself.

He.

That glabrous dome that lifts itself so grand,
There in the marish, is the omphalos,
The navel, umbo, middle, central boss
Of the unique, sole, true Cloud-Cuckoo Land.
Drowsy with Sunday bells and Sunday beer
Afoam in silver rumkins, there it basks,
Thinking of labours past and future tasks
And pondering on the end, forever near,

Yet ever distant as the rainbow’s spring.
For still in Cuckoo-Land they’re labouring,
With hopes undamped and undiscouraged hearts:
A little musty, but superb, they sit,
Piecing a god together bit by bit
Out of the chaos of his sundered parts.
Unmoved, nay pitying, they view the grins
And lewd grimaces of the folk that jeer ...
The vulgar herd, gross monster at the best,
Obscenum Mobile, the uttermost sphere,
Alas, too much the mover of the rest,
Though they turn sungates to its widdershins ...

And in some half a million years perhaps
God may at last be made ... a new, true Pan,
An Isis templed in the soul of man,
An Aphrodite with her thousand paps
Streaming eternal wisdom.
Yes, and man’s vessel, all pavilioned out
With silk and flags in the fair wind astream,
Shall make the port at last, with a great shout
Ringing from all her decks, and rocking there shall dream
For ever, and dream true ... calm in those roads
As lovers’ souls at evening, when they swim
Between the despairing sunset and the dim
Blue memories of mountains lost to sight
But, like half fancied, half remembered episodes
Of childhood, guessed at through the veils of night.
And the worn sailors at the mast who heard
The first far bells and knew the sound for home,
Who marked the land-weeds and the sand-stained foam

And through the storm-blast saw a wildered bird
Seek refuge at the mast-head ... these at last
Shall earn due praise when all the hubbub’s past;
And Cuckoo-Landers not a few shall prove.

She.

You have fast closed the temple gates;
You stand without in the noon-tides glow,
But the innermost darkness, where God waits,
You do not know, you cannot know.

The Defeat of Youth and Other Poems

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THE DEFEAT OF YOUTH

I. UNDER THE TREES.

There had been phantoms, pale-remembered shapes
Of this and this occasion, sisterly
In their resemblances, each effigy
Crowned with the same bright hair above the nape’s
White rounded firmness, and each body alert
With such swift loveliness, that very rest
Seemed a poised movement: ... phantoms that impressed
But a faint influence and could bless or hurt
No more than dreams. And these ghost things were she;
For formless still, without identity,
Not one she seemed, not clear, but many and dim.
One face among the legions of the street,
Indifferent mystery, she was for him
Something still uncreated, incomplete.

II.

Bright windy sunshine and the shadow of cloud
Quicken the heavy summer to new birth
Of life and motion on the drowsing earth;
The huge elms stir, till all the air is loud
With their awakening from the muffled sleep
Of long hot days. And on the wavering line
That marks the alternate ebb of shade and shine,
Under the trees, a little group is deep
In laughing talk. The shadow as it flows
Across them dims the lustre of a rose,
Quenches the bright clear gold of hair, the green
Of a girl’s dress, and life seems faint. The light
Swings back, and in the rose a fire is seen.

Gold hair’s aflame and green grows emerald bright.

III.

She leans, and there is laughter in the face
She turns towards him; and it seems a door
Suddenly opened on some desolate place
With a burst of light and music. What before
Was hidden shines in loveliness revealed.
Now first he sees her beautiful, and knows
That he must love her; and the doom is sealed
Of all his happiness and all the woes
That shall be born of pregnant years hereafter.
The swift poise of a head, a flutter of laughter —
And love flows in on him, its vastness pent
Within his narrow life: the pain it brings,
Boundless; for love is infinite discontent
With the poor lonely life of transient things.

IV.

Men see their god, an immanence divine,
Smile through the curve of flesh or moulded clay,
In bare ploughed lands that go sloping away
To meet the sky in one clean exquisite line.
Out of the short-seen dawns of ecstasy
They draw new beauty, whence new thoughts are born
And in their turn conceive, as grains of corn
Germ and create new life and endlessly
Shall live creating. Out of earthly seeds
Springs the aerial flower. One spirit proceeds
Through change, the same in body and in soul —

The spirit of life and love that triumphs still
In its slow struggle towards some far-off goal
Through lust and death and the bitterness of will.

V.

One spirit it is that stirs the fathomless deep
Of human minds, that shakes the elms in storm,
That sings in passionate music, or on warm
Still evenings bosoms forth the tufted sleep
Of thistle-seeds that wait a travelling wind.
One spirit shapes the subtle rhythms of thought
And the long thundering seas; the soul is wrought
Of one stuff with the body — matter and mind
Woven together in so close a mesh
That flowers may blossom into a song, that flesh
May strangely teach the loveliest holiest things
To watching spirits. Truth is brought to birth
Not in some vacant heaven: its beauty springs
From the dear bosom of material earth.

VI. IN THE HAY-LOFT.

The darkness in the loft is sweet and warm
With the stored hay ... darkness intensified
By one bright shaft that enters through the wide
Tall doors from under fringes of a storm
Which makes the doomed sun brighter. On the hay,
Perched mountain-high they sit, and silently
Watch the motes dance and look at the dark sky
And mark how heartbreakingly far away
And yet how close and clear the distance seems,
While all at hand is cloud — brightness of dreams
Unrealisable, yet seen so clear,
So only just beyond the dark. They wait,
Scarce knowing what they wait for, half in fear;
Expectance draws the curtain from their fate.

VII.

The silence of the storm weighs heavily
On their strained spirits: sometimes one will say
Some trivial thing as though to ward away
Mysterious powers, that imminently lie
In wait, with the strong exorcising grace
Of everyday’s futility. Desire
Becomes upon a sudden a crystal fire,
Defined and hard: — If he could kiss her face,
Could kiss her hair! As if by chance, her hand
Brushes on his ... Ah, can she understand?
Or is she pedestalled above the touch
Of his desire? He wonders: dare he seek
From her that little, that infinitely much?

And suddenly she kissed him on the cheek.

VIII. MOUNTAINS.

A stronger gust catches the cloud and twists
A spindle of rifted darkness through its heart,
A gash in the damp grey, which, thrust apart,
Reveals black depths a moment. Then the mists
Shut down again; a white uneasy sea
Heaves round the climbers and beneath their feet.
He strains on upwards through the wind and sleet,
Poised, or swift moving, or laboriously
Lifting his weight. And if he should let go,
What would he find down there, down there below
The curtain of the mist? What would he find
Beyond the dim and stifling now and here,
Beneath the unsettled turmoil of his mind?
Oh, there were nameless depths: he shrank with fear.

IX.

The hills more glorious in their coat of snow
Rise all around him, in the valleys run
Bright streams, and there are lakes that catch the sun,
And sunlit fields of emerald far below
That seem alive with inward light. In smoke
The far horizons fade; and there is peace
On everything, a sense of blessed release
From wilful strife. Like some prophetic cloak
The spirit of the mountains has descended
On all the world, and its unrest is ended.
Even the sea, glimpsed far away, seems still,
Hushed to a silver peace its storm and strife.
Mountains of vision, calm above fate and will,

You hold the promise of the freer life.

X. IN THE LITTLE ROOM.

London unfurls its incense-coloured dusk
Before the panes, rich but a while ago
With the charred gold and the red ember-glow
Of dying sunset. Houses quit the husk
Of secrecy, which, through the day, returns
A blank to all enquiry: but at nights
The cheerfulness of fire and lamp invites
The darkness inward, curious of what burns
With such a coloured life when all is dead —
The daylight world outside, with overhead
White clouds, and where we walk, the blaze
Of wet and sunlit streets, shops and the stream
Of glittering traffic — all that the nights erase,
Colour and speed, surviving but in dream.

XI.

Outside the dusk, but in the little room
All is alive with light, which brightly glints
On curving cup or the stiff folds of chintz,
Evoking its own whiteness. Shadows loom,
Bulging and black, upon the walls, where hang
Rich coloured plates of beauties that appeal
Less to the sense of sight than to the feel,
So moistly satin are their breasts. A pang,
Almost of pain, runs through him when he sees
Hanging, a homeless marvel, next to these,
The silken breastplate of a mandarin,
Centuries dead, which he had given her.
Exquisite miracle, when men could spin

Jay’s wing and belly of the kingfisher!

XII.

In silence and as though expectantly
She crouches at his feet, while he caresses
His light-drawn fingers with the touch of tresses
Sleeked round her head, close-banded lustrously,
Save where at nape and temple the smooth brown
Sleaves out into a pale transparent mist
Of hair and tangled light. So to exist,
Poised ‘twixt the deep of thought where spirits drown
Life in a void impalpable nothingness,
And, on the other side, the pain and stress
Of clamorous action and the gnawing fire
Of will, focal upon a point of earth — even thus
To sit, eternally without desire
And yet self-known, were happiness for us.

XIII.

She turns her head and in a flash of laughter
Looks up at him: and helplessly he feels
That life has circled with returning wheels
Back to a starting-point. Before and after
Merge in this instant, momently the same:
For it was thus she leaned and laughing turned
When, manifest, the spirit of beauty burned
In her young body with an inward flame,
And first he knew and loved her. In full tide
Life halts within him, suddenly stupefied.
Sight blackness, lightning-struck; but blindly tender
He draws her up to meet him, and she lies

He draws her up to meet him, and she lies
Close folded by his arms in glad surrender,
Smiling, and with drooped head and half closed eyes.

XIV.

“I give you all; would that I might give more.”
He sees the colour dawn across her cheeks
And die again to white; marks as she speaks
The trembling of her lips, as though she bore
Some sudden pain and hardly mastered it.
Within his arms he feels her shuddering,
Piteously trembling like some wild wood-thing
Caught unawares. Compassion infinite
Mounts up within him. Thus to hold and keep
And comfort her distressed, lull her to sleep
And gently kiss her brow and hair and eyes
Seems love perfected — templed high and white
Against the calm of golden autumn skies,
And shining quenchlessly with vestal light.

XV.

But passion ambushed by the aerial shrine
Comes forth to dance, a hoofed obscenity,
His satyr’s dance, with laughter in his eye,
And cruelty along the scarlet line
Of his bright smiling mouth. All uncontrolled,
Love’s rebel servant, he delights to beat
The maddening quick dry rhythm of goatish feet
Even in the sanctuary, and makes bold
To mime himself the godhead of the place.
He turns in terror from her trance-calmed face,

From the white-lidded languor of her eyes,
From lips that passion never shook before,
But glad in the promise of her sacrifice:
“I give you all; would that I might give more.”

XVI.

He is afraid, seeing her lie so still,
So utterly his own; afraid lest she
Should open wide her eyes and let him see
The passionate conquest of her virgin will
Shine there in triumph, starry-bright with tears.
He thrusts her from him: face and hair and breast,
Hands he had touched, lips that his lips had pressed,
Seem things deadly to be desired. He fears
Lest she should body forth in palpable shame
Those dreams and longings that his blood, aflame
Through the hot dark of summer nights, had dreamed
And longed. Must all his love, then, turn to this?
Was lust the end of what so pure had seemed?
He must escape, ah God! her touch, her kiss.

XVII. IN THE PARK.

Laughing, “To-night,” I said to him, “the Park
Has turned the garden of a symbolist.
Those old great trees that rise above the mist,
Gold with the light of evening, and the dark
Still water, where the dying sun evokes
An echoed glory — here I recognize
Those ancient gardens mirrored by the eyes
Of poets that hate the world of common folks,
Like you and me and that thin pious crowd,
Which yonder sings its hymns, so humbly proud
Of holiness. The garden of escape
Lies here; a small green world, and still the bride
Of quietness, although an imminent rape
Roars ceaselessly about on every side.”

XVIII.

I had forgotten what I had lightly said,
And without speech, without a thought I went,
Steeped in that golden quiet, all content
To drink the transient beauty as it sped
Out of eternal darkness into time
To light and burn and know itself a fire;
Yet doomed — ah, fate of the fulfilled desire! —
To fade, a meteor, paying for the crime
Of living glorious in the denser air
Of our material earth. A strange despair,
An agony, yet strangely, subtly sweet
And tender as an unpassionate caress,
Filled me ... Oh laughter! youth’s conceit

Grown almost conscious of youth’s feebleness!

XIX.

He spoke abrupt across my dream: “Dear Garden,
A stranger to your magic peace, I stand
Beyond your walls, lost in a fevered land
Of stones and fire. Would that the gods would harden
My soul against its torment, or would blind
Those yearning glimpses of a life at rest
In perfect beauty — glimpses at the best
Through unpassed bars. And here, without, the wind
Of scattering passion blows: and women pass
Glitter-eyed down putrid alleys where the glass
Of some grimed window suddenly parades —
Ah, sickening heart-beat of desire! — the grace
Of bare and milk-warm flesh: the vision fades,
And at the pane shows a blind tortured face.”

XX. SELF-TORMENT.

The days pass by, empty of thought and will:
His thought grows stagnant at its very springs,
With every channel on the world of things
Dammed up, and thus, by its long standing still,
Poisons itself and sickens to decay.
All his high love for her, his fair desire,
Loses its light; and a dull rancorous fire,
Burning darkness and bitterness that prey
Upon his heart are left. His spirit burns
Sometimes with hatred, or the hatred turns
To a fierce lust for her, more cruel than hate,
Till he is weary wrestling with its force:
And evermore she haunts him, early and late,
As pitilessly as an old remorse.

XXI.

Streets and the solitude of country places
Were once his friends. But as a man born blind,
Opening his eyes from lovely dreams, might find
The world a desert and men’s larval faces
So hateful, he would wish to seek again
The darkness and his old chimeric sight
Of beauties inward — so, that fresh delight,
Vision of bright fields and angelic men,
That love which made him all the world, is gone.
Hating and hated now, he stands alone,
An island-point, measureless gulfs apart
From other lives, from the old happiness
Of being more than self, when heart to heart

Gave all, yet grew the greater, not the less.

XXII. THE QUARRY IN THE WOOD.

Swiftly deliberate, he seeks the place.
A small wind stirs, the copse is bright in the sun:
Like quicksilver the shine and shadow run
Across the leaves. A bramble whips his face,
The tears spring fast, and through the rainbow mist
He sees a world that wavers like the flame
Of a blown candle. Tears of pain and shame,
And lips that once had laughed and sung and kissed
Trembling in the passion of his sobbing breath!
The world a candle shuddering to its death,
And life a darkness, blind and utterly void
Of any love or goodness: all deceit,
This friendship and this God: all shams destroyed,
And truth seen now.
Earth fails beneath his feet.

SONG OF POPLARS

hepherd, to yon tall poplars tune your flute:
Let them pierce, keenly, subtly shrill,
The slow blue rumour of the hill;
Let the grass cry with an anguish of evening gold,
And the great sky be mute.

Then hearken how the poplar trees unfold
Their buds, yet close and gummed and blind,
In airy leafage of the mind,
Rustling in silvery whispers the twin-hued scales
That fade not nor grow old.

“Poplars and fountains and you cypress spires
Springing in dark and rusty flame,
Seek you aught that hath a name?
Or say, say: Are you all an upward agony
Of undefined desires?

“Say, are you happy in the golden march
Of sunlight all across the day?
Or do you watch the uncertain way
That leads the withering moon on cloudy stairs
Over the heaven’s wide arch?

“Is it towards sorrow or towards joy you lift
The sharpness of your trembling spears?
Or do you seek, through the grey tears
That blur the sky, in the heart of the triumphing blue,

A deeper, calmer rift?”

So; I have tuned my music to the trees,
And there were voices, dim below
Their shrillness, voices swelling slow
In the blue murmur of hills, and a golden cry
And then vast silences.

THE REEF

My green aquarium of phantom fish,
Goggling in on me through the misty panes;
My rotting leaves and fields spongy with rains;
My few clear quiet autumn days — I wish

I could leave all, clearness and mistiness;
Sodden or goldenly crystal, all too still.
Yes, and I too rot with the leaves that fill
The hollows in the woods; I am grown less Than human, listless, aimless as the green
Idiot fishes of my aquarium,
Who loiter down their dim tunnels and come
And look at me and drift away, nought seen

Or understood, but only glazedly
Reflected. Upwards, upwards through the shadows,
Through the lush sponginess of deep-sea meadows
Where hare-lipped monsters batten, let me ply Winged fins, bursting this matrix dark to find
Jewels and movement, mintage of sunlight
Scattered largely by the profuse wind,
And gulfs of blue brightness, too deep for sight.

Free, newly born, on roads of music and air
Speeding and singing, I shall seek the place
Where all the shining threads of water race,
Drawn in green ropes and foamy meshes. There, On the red fretted ramparts of a tower
Of coral rooted in the depths, shall break
An endless sequence of joy and speed and power:
Green shall shatter to foam; flake with white flake Shall create an instant's

Green shall shatter to foam, flake with white flake Shall create an instant's shining constellation
Upon the blue; and all the air shall be
Full of a million wings that swift and free
Laugh in the sun, all power and strong elation.

Yes, I shall seek that reef, which is beyond
All isles however magically sleeping
In tideless seas, uncharted and unconned
Save by blind eyes; beyond the laughter and weeping That brood like a cloud over the lands of men.
Movement, passion of colour and pure wings,
Curving to cut like knives — these are the things
I search for: — passion beyond the ken Of our foiled violences, and, more swift
Than any blow which man aims against time,
The invulnerable, motion that shall rift
All dimness with the lightning of a rhyme, Or note, or colour. And the body shall be
Quick as the mind; and will shall find release
From bondage to brute things; and joyously
Soul, will and body, in the strength of triune peace, Shall live the perfect grace of power unwasted.
And love consummate, marvellously blending
Passion and reverence in a single spring
Of quickening force, till now never yet tasted, But ever ceaselessly thirsted for, shall crown
The new life with its ageless starry fire.
I go to seek that reef, far down, far down
Below the edge of everyday's desire, Beyond the magical islands, where of old
I was content, dreaming, to give the lie
To misery. They were all strong and bold
That thither came; and shall I dare to try?

WINTER DREAM

OH wind-swept towers,
Oh endlessly blossoming trees,
White clouds and lucid eyes,
And pools in the rocks whose unplumbed blue is pregnant
With who knows what of subtlety
And magical curves and limbs —
White Anadyomene and her shallow breasts
Mother-of-pearled with light.

And oh the April, April of straight soft hair,
Falling smooth as the mountain water and brown;
The April of little leaves unblinded,
Of rosy nipples and innocence
And the blue languor of weary eyelids.

Across a huge gulf I fling my voice
And my desires together:
Across a huge gulf ... on the other bank
Crouches April with her hair as smooth and straight and brown
As falling waters.
Oh brave curve upwards and outwards.
Oh despair of the downward tilting —
Despair still beautiful
As a great star one has watched all night
Wheeling down under the hills.
Silence widens and darkens;
Voice and desires have dropped out of sight.
I am all alone, dreaming she would come and kiss me.

THE FLOWERS

Day after day,
At spring’s return,
I watch my flowers, how they burn
Their lives away.

The candle crocus
And daffodil gold
Drink fire of the sunshine —
Quickly cold.

And the proud tulip —
How red he glows! —
Is quenched ere summer
Can kindle the rose.

Purple as the innermost
Core of a sinking flame,
Deep in the leaves the violets smoulder
To the dust whence they came.

Day after day
At spring’s return,
I watch my flowers, how they burn
Their lives away,
Day after day ...

THE ELMS

ine as the dust of plumy fountains blowing
Across the lanterns of a revelling night,
The tiny leaves of April’s earliest growing
Powder the trees — so vaporously light,
They seem to float, billows of emerald foam
Blown by the South on its bright airy tide,
Seeming less trees than things beatified,
Come from the world of thought which was their home.

For a while only. Rooted strong and fast,
Soon will they lift towards the summer sky
Their mountain-mass of clotted greenery.
Their immaterial season quickly past,
They grow opaque, and therefore needs must die,
Since every earth to earth returns at last.

OUT OF THE WINDOW

In the middle of countries, far from hills and sea,
Are the little places one passes by in trains
And never stops at; where the skies extend
Uninterrupted, and the level plains
Stretch green and yellow and green without an end.
And behind the glass of their Grand Express
Folk yawn away a province through,
With nothing to think of, nothing to do,
Nothing even to look at — never a “view”
In this damned wilderness.
But I look out of the window and find
Much to satisfy the mind.
Mark how the furrows, formed and wheeled
In a motion orderly and staid,
Sweep, as we pass, across the field
Like a drilled army on parade.
And here’s a market-garden, barred
With stripe on stripe of varied greens ...
Bright potatoes, flower starred,
And the opacous colour of beans.
Each line deliberately swings
Towards me, till I see a straight
Green avenue to the heart of things,
The glimpse of a sudden opened gate
Piercing the adverse walls of fate ...
A moment only, and then, fast, fast,
The gate swings to, the avenue closes;
Fate laughs, and once more interposes
Its barriers.

The train has passed.

INSPIRATION

Noonday upon the Alpine meadows
Pours its avalanche of Light
And blazing flowers: the very shadows
Translucent are and bright.
It seems a glory that nought surpasses —
Passion of angels in form and hue —
When, lo! from the jewelled heaven of the grasses
Leaps a lightning of sudden blue.
Dimming the sun-drunk petals,
Bright even unto pain,
The grasshopper flashes, settles,
And then is quenched again.

SUMMER STILLNESS

The stars are golden instants in the deep
Flawless expanse of night: the moon is set:
The river sleeps, entranced, a smooth cool sleep
Seeming so motionless that I forget
The hollow booming bridges, where it slides,
Dark with the sad looks that it bears along,
Towards a sea whose unreturning tides
Ravish the sighted ships and the sailors’ song.

ANNIVERSARIES

Once more the windless days are here,
Quiet of autumn, when the year
Halts and looks backward and draws breath
Before it plunges into death.
Silver of mist and gossamers,
Through-shine of noonday's glassy gold,
Pale blue of skies, where nothing stirs
Save one blanched leaf, weary and old,
That over and over slowly falls
From the mute elm-trees, hanging on air
Like tattered flags along the walls
Of chapels deep in sunlit prayer.
Once more ... Within its flawless glass
To-day reflects that other day,
When, under the bracken, on the grass,
We who were lovers happily lay
And hardly spoke, or framed a thought
That was not one with the calm hills
And crystal sky. Ourselves were nought,
Our gusty passions, our burning wills
Dissolved in boundlessness, and we
Were almost bodiless, almost free.

The wind has shattered silver and gold.
Night after night of sparkling cold,
Orion lifts his tangled feet
From where the tossing branches beat
In a fine surf against the sky.
So the trance ended, and we grew
Restless, we knew not how or why;

And there were sudden gusts that blew
Our dreaming banners into storm;
We wore the uncertain crumbling form
Of a brown swirl of windy leaves,
A phantom shape that stirs and heaves
Shuddering from earth, to fall again
With a dry whisper of withered rain.

Last, from the dead and shrunken days
We conjured spring, lighting the blaze
Of burnished tulips in the dark;
And from black frost we struck a spark
Of blue delight and fragrance new,
A little world of flowers and dew.
Winter for us was over and done:
The drought of fluttering leaves had grown
Emerald shining in the sun,
As light as glass, as firm as stone.
Real once more: for we had passed
Through passion into thought again;
Shaped our desires and made that fast
Which was before a cloudy pain;
Moulded the dimness, fixed, defined
In a fair statue, strong and free,
Twin bodies flaming into mind,
Poised on the brink of ecstasy.

ITALY

There is a country in my mind,
Lovelier than a poet blind
Could dream of, who had never known
This world of drought and dust and stone
In all its ugliness: a place
Full of an all but human grace;
Whose dells retain the printed form
Of heavenly sleep, and seem yet warm
From some pure body newly risen;
Where matter is no more a prison,
But freedom for the soul to know
Its native beauty. For things glow
There with an inward truth and are
All fire and colour like a star.
And in that land are domes and towers
That hang as light and bright as flowers
Upon the sky, and seem a birth
Rather of air than solid earth.

Sometimes I dream that walking there
In the green shade, all unaware
At a new turn of the golden glade,
I shall see her, and as though afraid
Shall halt a moment and almost fall
For passing faintness, like a man
Who feels the sudden spirit of Pan
Brimming his narrow soul with all
The illimitable world. And she,
Turning her head, will let me see
The first sharp dawn of her surprise

Turning to welcome in her eyes.
And I shall come and take my lover
And looking on her re-discover
All her beauty: — her dark hair
And the little ears beneath it, where
Roses of lucid shadow sleep;
Her brooding mouth, and in the deep
Wells of her eyes reflected stars ...

Oh, the imperishable things
That hands and lips as well as words
Shall speak! Oh movement of white wings,
Oh wheeling galaxies of birds ...!

THE ALIEN

A petal drifted loose
From a great magnolia bloom,
Your face hung in the gloom,
Floating, white and close.

We seemed alone: but another
Bent o’er you with lips of flame,
Unknown, without a name,
Hated, and yet my brother.

Your one short moan of pain
Was an exorcising spell:
The devil flew back to hell;
We were alone again.

A LITTLE MEMORY

White in the moonlight,
Wet with dew,
We have known the languor
Of being two.

We have been weary
As children are,
When over them, radiant,
A stooping star, Bends their Good-Night,
Kissed and smiled: —
Each was mother,
Each was child.

Child, from your forehead
I kissed the hair,
Gently, ah, gently:
And you were Mistress and mother
When on your breast
I lay so safely
And could rest.

WAKING

Darkness had stretched its colour,
Deep blue across the pane:
No cloud to make night duller,
No moon with its tarnish stain;
But only here and there a star,
One sharp point of frosty fire,
Hanging infinitely far
In mockery of our life and death
And all our small desire.

Now in this hour of waking
From under brows of stone,
A new pale day is breaking
And the deep night is gone.
Sordid now, and mean and small
The daylight world is seen again,
With only the veils of mist that fall
Deaf and muffling over all
To hide its ugliness and pain.

But to-day this dawn of meanness
Shines in my eyes, as when
The new world's brightness and cleanness
Broke on the first of men.
For the light that shows the huddled things
Of this close-pressing earth,
Shines also on your face and brings
All its dear beauty back to me
In a new miracle of birth.

I see you asleep and unpassioned,
White-faced in the dusk of your hair —
Your beauty so fleetingly fashioned
That it filled me once with despair
To look on its exquisite transience
And think that our love and thought and laughter
Puff out with the death of our flickering sense,
While we pass ever on and away
Towards some blank hereafter.

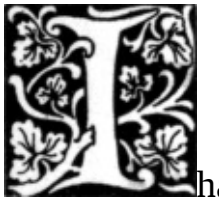
But now I am happy, knowing
That swift time is our friend,
And that our love’s passionate glowing,
Though it turn ash in the end,
Is a rose of fire that must blossom its way
Through temporal stuff, nor else could be
More than a nothing. Into day
The boundless spaces of night contract
And in your opening eyes I see
Night born in day, in time eternity.

BY THE FIRE

We who are lovers sit by the fire,
Cradled warm ‘twixt thought and will,
Sit and drowse like sleeping dogs
In the equipoise of all desire,
Sit and listen to the still
Small hiss and whisper of green logs
That burn away, that burn away
With the sound of a far-off falling stream
Of threaded water blown to steam,
Grey ghost in the mountain world of grey.
Vapours blue as distance rise
Between the hissing logs that show
A glimpse of rosy heat below;
And candles watch with tireless eyes
While we sit drowsing here. I know,
Dimly, that there exists a world,
That there is time perhaps, and space
Other and wider than this place,
Where at the fireside drowsily curled
We hear the whisper and watch the flame
Burn blinkless and inscrutable.
And then I know those other names
That through my brain from cell to cell
Echo — reverberated shout
Of waiters mournful along corridors:
But nobody carries the orders out,
And the names (dear friends, your name and yours)
Evoke no sign. But here I sit
On the wide hearth, and there are you:

That is enough and only true.
The world and the friends that lived in it
Are shadows: you alone remain
Real in this drowsing room,
Full of the whispers of distant rain
And candles staring into the gloom.

VALEDICTORY

 had remarked — how sharply one observes
When life is disappearing round the curves
Of yet another corner, out of sight! —
I had remarked when it was “good luck” and “good night”
And “a good journey to you,” on her face
Certain enigmas penned in the hieroglyphs
Of that half frown and queer fixed smile and trace
Of clouded thought in those brown eyes,
Always so happily clear of hows and ifs —
My poor bleared mind! — and haunting whys.

There I stood, holding her farewell hand,
(Pressing my life and soul and all
The world to one good-bye, till, small
And smaller pressed, why there I’d stand
Dead when they vanished with the sight of her).
And I saw that she had grown aware,
Queer puzzled face! of other things
Beyond the present and her own young speed,
Of yesterday and what new days might breed
Monstrously when the future brings
A charger with your late-lamented head:
Aware of other people’s lives and will,
Aware, perhaps, aware even of me ...
The joyous hope of it! But still
I pitied her; for it was sad to see
A goddess shorn of her divinity.

In the midst of her speed she had made pause,
And doubts with all their threat of claws,
Outstripped till now by her unconsciousness,
Had seized on her; she was proved mortal now.
“Live, only live! For you were meant
Never to know a thought’s distress,
But a long glad astonishment
At the world’s beauty and your own.
The pity of you, goddess, grown
Perplexed and mortal.”
Yet ... yet ... can it be
That she is aware, perhaps, even of me?

And life recedes, recedes; the curve is bare,
My handkerchief flutters blankly in the air;
And the question rumbles in the void:
Was she aware, was she after all aware?

LOVE SONG

Dear absurd child — too dear to my cost I’ve found —
God made your soul for pleasure, not for use:
It cleaves no way, but angled broad obtuse,
Impinges with a slabby-bellied sound
Full upon life, and on the rind of things
Rubs its sleek self and utters purr and snore
And all the gamut of satisfied murmurings,
Content with that, nor wishes anything more.

A happy infant, daubed to the eyes in juice
Of peaches that flush bloody at the core,
Naked you bask upon a south-sea shore,
While o’er your tumbling bosom the hair floats loose.

The wild flowers bloom and die; the heavens go round
With the song of wheeling planetary rings:
You wriggle in the sun; each moment brings
Its freight for you; in all things pleasures abound.

You taste and smile, then this for the next pass over;
And there’s no future for you and no past,
And when, absurdly, death arrives at last,
‘Twill please you awhile to kiss your latest lover.

PRIVATE PROPERTY

All fly — yet who is misanthrope? —
The actual men and things that pass
Jostling, to wither as the grass
So soon: and (be it heaven’s hope,
Or poetry’s kaleidoscope,
Or love or wine, at feast, at mass)
Each owns a paradise of glass
Where never a yearning heliotrope
Pursues the sun’s ascent or slope;
For the sun dreams there, and no time is or was.

Like fauns embossed in our domain,
We look abroad, and our calm eyes
Mark how the goatish gods of pain
Revel; and if by grim surprise
They break into our paradise,
Patient we build its beauty up again.

REVELATION

At your mouth, white and milk-warm sphinx,
I taste a strange apocalypse:
Your subtle taper finger-tips
Weave me new heavens, yet, methinks,
I know the wiles and each iynx
That brought me passionate to your lips:
I know you bare as laughter strips
Your charnel beauty; yet my spirit drinks Pure knowledge from this tainted well,
And now hears voices yet unheard
Within it, and without it sees
That world of which the poets tell
Their vision in the stammered word
Of those that wake from piercing ecstasies.

MINOAN PORCELAIN

Her eyes of bright unwinking glaze
All imperturbable do not
Even make pretences to regard
The justing absence of her stays,
Where many a Tyrian gallipot
Excites desire with spilth of nard.
The bistred rims above the fard
Of cheeks as red as bergamot
Attest that no shamefaced delays
Will clog fulfilment, nor retard
Full payment of the Cyprian’s praise
Down to the last remorseful jot.
Hail priestess of we know not what
Strange cult of Mycenean days!

THE DECAMERON

Noon with a depth of shadow beneath the trees
Shakes in the heat, quivers to the sound of lutes:
Half shaded, half sunlit, a great bowl of fruits
Glistens purple and golden: the flasks of wine
Cool in their panniers of snow: silks muffle and shine:
Dim velvet, where through the leaves a sunbeam shoots,
Rifts in a pane of scarlet: fingers tapping the roots
Keep languid time to the music’s soft slow decline.

Suddenly from the gate rises up a cry,
Hideous broken laughter, scarce human in sound;
Gaunt clawed hands, thrust through the bars despairingly,
Clutch fast at the scented air, while on the ground
Lie the poor plague-stricken carrions, who have found
Strength to crawl forth and curse the sunshine and die.

IN UNCERTAINTY TO A LADY

I am not one of those who sip,
Like a quotidian bock,
Cheap idylls from a languid lip
Prepared to yawn or mock.

I wait the indubitable word,
The great Unconscious Cue.
Has it been spoken and unheard?
Spoken, perhaps, by you ...?

CRAPULOUS IMPRESSION
(To J.S.)

Still life, still life ... the high-lights shine
Hard and sharp on the bottles: the wine
Stands firmly solid in the glasses,
Smooth yellow ice, through which there passes
The lamp's bright pencil of down-struck light.
The fruits metallically gleam,
Globey in their heaped-up bowl,
And there are faces against the night
Of the outer room — faces that seem
Part of this still, still life ... they've lost their soul.

And amongst these frozen faces you smiled,
Surprised, surprisingly, like a child:
And out of the frozen welter of sound
Your voice came quietly, quietly.
"What about God?" you said. "I have found
Much to be said for Totality.
All, I take it, is God: God's all —
This bottle, for instance ..." I recall,
Dimly, that you took God by the neck —
God-in-the-bottle — and pushed Him across:
But I, without a moment's loss
Moved God-in-the-salt in front and shouted: "Check!"

THE LIFE THEORETIC

While I have been fumbling over books
And thinking about God and the Devil and all,
Other young men have been battling with the days
And others have been kissing the beautiful women.
They have brazen faces like battering-rams.
But I who think about books and such —
I crumble to impotent dust before the struggling,
And the women palsy me with fear.
But when it comes to fumbling over books
And thinking about God and the Devil and all,
Why, there I am.
But perhaps the battering-rams are in the right of it,
Perhaps, perhaps ... God knows.

COMPLAINT OF A POET MANQUÉ

We judge by appearance merely:
If I can’t think strangely, I can at least look queerly.
So I grew the hair so long on my head
That my mother wouldn’t know me,
Till a woman in a night-club said,
As I was passing by,
“Hullo, here comes Salome ...”

I looked in the dirty gilt-edged glass,
And, oh Salome; there I was —
Positively jewelled, half a vampire,
With the soul in my eyes hanging dizzily
Like the gatherer of proverbial samphire
Over the brink of the crag of sense,
Looking down from perilous eminence
Into a gulf of windy night.
And there’s straw in my tempestuous hair,
And I’m not a poet: but never despair!
I’ll madly live the poems I shall never write.

SOCIAL AMENITIES

I am getting on well with this anecdote,
When suddenly I recall
The many times I have told it of old,
And all the worked-up phrases, and the dying fall
Of voice, well timed in the crisis, the note
Of mock-heroic ingeniously struck —
The whole thing sticks in my throat,
And my face all tingles and pricks with shame
For myself and my hearers.
These are the social pleasures, my God!
But I finish the story triumphantly all the same.

TOPIARY

Hailing sometimes to understand
Why there are folk whose flesh should seem
Like carrion puffed with noisome steam,
Fly-blown to the eye that looks on it,
Fly-blown to the touch of a hand;
Why there are men without any legs,
Whizzing along on little trollies
With long long arms like apes':
Failing to see why God the Topiarist
Should train and carve and twist
Men's bodies into such fantastic shapes:
Yes, failing to see the point of it all, I sometimes wish
That I were a fabulous thing in a fool's mind,
Or, at the ocean bottom, in a world that is deaf and blind,
Very remote and happy, a great goggling fish.

ON THE BUS

Sitting on the top of the ‘bus,
I bite my pipe and look at the sky.
Over my shoulder the smoke streams out
And my life with it.
“Conservation of energy,” you say.
But I burn, I tell you, I burn;
And the smoke of me streams out
In a vanishing skein of grey.
Crash and bump ... my poor bruised body!
I am a harp of twittering strings,
An elegant instrument, but infinitely second-hand,
And if I have not got phthisis it is only an accident.
Droll phenomena!

POINTS AND LINES

Instants in the quiet, small sharp stars,
Pierce my spirit with a thrust whose speed
Baffles even the grasp of time.
Oh that I might reflect them
As swiftly, as keenly as they shine.
But I am a pool of waters, summer-still,
And the stars are mirrored across me;
Those stabbing points of the sky
Turned to a thread of shaken silver,
A long fine thread.

PANIC

The eyes of the portraits on the wall
Look at me, follow me,
Stare incessantly:
I take it their glance means nothing at all?
— Clearly, oh clearly! Nothing at all ...

Out in the gardens by the lake
The sleeping peacocks suddenly wake;
Out in the gardens, moonlit and forlorn,
Each of them sounds his mournful horn:
Shrill peals that waver and crack and break.
What can have made the peacocks wake?

RETURN FROM BUSINESS

Evenings in trains,
When the little black twittering ghosts
Along the brims of cuttings,
Against the luminous sky,
Interrupt with their hurrying rumour every thought
Save that one is young and setting,
Headlong westering,
And there is no recapture.

STANZAS

Thought is an unseen net wherein our mind
Is taken and vainly struggles to be free:
Words, that should loose our spirit, do but bind
New fetters on our hoped-for liberty:
And action bears us onward like a stream
Past fabulous shores, scarce seen in our swift course;
Glorious — and yet its headlong currents seem
Backwaters of some nobler purer force.

There are slow curves, more subtle far than thought,
That stoop to carry the grace of a girl’s breast;
And hanging flowers, so exquisitely wrought
In airy metal, that they seem possessed
Of souls; and there are distant hills that lift
The shoulder of a goddess towards the light;
And arrowy trees, sudden and sharp and swift,
Piercing the spirit deeply with delight.

Would I might make these miracles my own!
Like a pure angel, thinking colour and form,
Hardening to rage in a flame of chiselled stone,
Spilling my love like sunlight, golden and warm
On noonday flowers, speaking the song of birds
Among the branches, whispering the fall of rain,
Beyond all thought, past action and past words,
I would live in beauty, free from self and pain.

POEM

Books and a coloured skein of thoughts were mine;
And magic words lay ripening in my soul
Till their much-whispered music turned a wine
Whose subtlest power was all in my control.

These things were mine, and they were real for me
As lips and darling eyes and a warm breast:
For I could love a phrase, a melody,
Like a fair woman, worshipped and possessed.

I scorned all fire that outward of the eyes
Could kindle passion; scorned, yet was afraid;
Feared, and yet envied those more deeply wise
Who saw the bright earth beckon and obeyed.

But a time came when, turning full of hate
And weariness from my remembered themes,
I wished my poet's pipe could modulate
Beauty more palpable than words and dreams.

All loveliness with which an act informs
The dim uncertain chaos of desire
Is mine to-day; it touches me, it warms
Body and spirit with its outward fire.

I am mine no more: I have become a part
Of that great earth that draws a breath and stirs
To meet the spring. But I could wish my heart
Were still a winter of frosty gossamers.

SCENES OF THE MIND

I have run where festival was loud
With drum and brass among the crowd
Of panic revellers, whose cries
Affront the quiet of the skies;
Whose dancing lights contract the deep
Infinity of night and sleep
To a narrow turmoil of troubled fire.
And I have found my heart’s desire
In beechen caverns that autumn fills
With the blue shadowiness of distant hills;
Whose luminous grey pillars bear
The stooping sky: calm is the air,
Nor any sound is heard to mar
That crystal silence — as from far,
Far off a man may see
The busy world all utterly
Hushed as an old memorial scene.
Long evenings I have sat and been
Strangely content, while in my hands
I held a wealth of coloured strands,
Shimmering plaits of silk and skeins
Of soft bright wool. Each colour drains
New life at the lamp’s round pool of gold;
Each sinks again when I withhold
The quickening radiance, to a wan
And shadowy oblivion
Of what it was. And in my mind
Beauty or sudden love has shined
And wakened colour in what was dead

And turned to gold the sullen lead
Of mean desires and everyday's
Poor thoughts and customary ways.
Sometimes in lands where mountains throw
Their silent spell on all below,
Drawing a magic circle wide
About their feet on every side,
Robbed of all speech and thought and act,
I have seen God in the cataract.
In falling water and in flame,
Never at rest, yet still the same,
God shows himself. And I have known
The swift fire frozen into stone,
And water frozen changelessly
Into the death of gems. And I
Long sitting by the thunderous mill
Have seen the headlong wheel made still,
And in the silence that ensued
Have known the endless solitude
Of being dead and utterly nought.
Inhabitant of mine own thought,
I look abroad, and all I see
Is my creation, made for me:
Along my thread of life are pearled
The moments that make up the world.

L’APRÈS-MIDI D’UN FAUNE

(From the French of Stéphane Mallarmé.)

I would immortalize these nymphs: so bright
Their sunlit colouring, so airy light,
It floats like drowsing down. Loved I a dream?
My doubts, born of oblivious darkness, seem
A subtle tracery of branches grown
The tree’s true self — proving that I have known
No triumph, but the shadow of a rose.
But think. These nymphs, their loveliness ... suppose
They bodied forth your senses’ fabulous thirst?
Illusion! which the blue eyes of the first,
As cold and chaste as is the weeping spring,
Beget: the other, sighing, passioning,
Is she the wind, warm in your fleece at noon?
No, through this quiet, when a weary swoon
Crushes and chokes the latest faint essay
Of morning, cool against the encroaching day,
There is no murmuring water, save the gush
Of my clear fluted notes; and in the hush
Blows never a wind, save that which through my reed
Puffs out before the rain of notes can speed
Upon the air, with that calm breath of art
That mounts the unwrinkled zenith visibly,
Where inspiration seeks its native sky.
You fringes of a calm Sicilian lake,
The sun’s own mirror which I love to take,
Silent beneath your starry flowers, tell
How here I cut the hollow rushes, well

Tamed by my skill, when on the glaucous gold
Of distant lawns about their fountain cold
A living whiteness stirs like a lazy wave;
And at the first slow notes my panpipes gave
These flocking swans, these naiads, rather, fly
Or dive. Noon burns inert and tawny dry,
Nor marks how clean that Hymen slipped away
From me who seek in song the real A.
Wake, then, to the first ardour and the sight,
O lonely faun, of the old fierce white light,
With, lilies, one of you for innocence.
Other than their lips' delicate pretence,
The light caress that quiets treacherous lovers,
My breast, I know not how to tell, discovers
The bitten print of some immortal's kiss.
But hush! a mystery so great as this
I dare not tell, save to my double reed,
Which, sharer of my every joy and need,
Dreams down its cadenced monologues that we
Falsely confuse the beauties that we see
With the bright palpable shapes our song creates:
My flute, as loud as passion modulates,
Purges the common dream of flank and breast,
Seen through closed eyes and inwardly caressed,
Of every empty and monotonous line.

Bloom then, O Syrinx, in thy flight malign,
A reed once more beside our trysting-lake.
Proud of my music, let me often make
A song of goddesses and see their rape
Profanely done on many a painted shape.

So when the grape’s transparent juice I drain,
I quell regret for pleasures past and feign
A new real grape. For holding towards the sky
The empty skin, I blow it tight and lie
Dream-drunk till evening, eyeing it.
Tell o’er
Remembered joys and plump the grape once more.
Between the reeds I saw their bodies gleam
Who cool no mortal fever in the stream
Crying to the woods the rage of their desire:
And their bright hair went down in jewelled fire
Where crystal broke and dazzled shudderingly.
I check my swift pursuit: for see where lie,
Bruised, being twins in love, by languor sweet,
Two sleeping girls, clasped at my very feet.
I seize and run with them, nor part the pair,
Breaking this covert of frail petals, where
Roses drink scent of the sun and our light play
‘Mid tumbled flowers shall match the death of day.
I love that virginal fury — ah, the wild
Thrill when a maiden body shrinks, defiled,
Shuddering like arctic light, from lips that sear
Its nakedness ... the flesh in secret fear!
Contagiously through my linked pair it flies
Where innocence in either, struggling, dies,
Wet with fond tears or some less piteous dew.
Gay in the conquest of these fears, I grew
So rash that I must needs the sheaf divide
Of ruffled kisses heaven itself had tied.
For as I leaned to stifle in the hair
Of one my passionate laughter (taking care

With a stretched finger, that her innocence
Might stain with her companion's kindling sense
To touch the younger little one, who lay
Child-like unblushing) my ungrateful prey
Slips from me, freed by passion's sudden death,
Nor heeds the frenzy of my sobbing breath.

Let it pass! others of their hair shall twist
A rope to drag me to those joys I missed.
See how the ripe pomegranates bursting red
To quench the thirst of the mumbling bees have bled;
So too our blood, kindled by some chance fire,
Flows for the swarming legions of desire.
At evening, when the woodland green turns gold
And ashen grey, 'mid the quenched leaves, behold!
Red Etna glows, by Venus visited,
Walking the lava with her snowy tread
Whene'er the flames in thunderous slumber die.
I hold the goddess!
Ah, sure penalty!

But the unthinking soul and body swoon
At last beneath the heavy hush of noon.
Forgetful let me lie where summer's drouth
Sifts fine the sand and then with gaping mouth
Dream planet-struck by the grape's round wine-red star.

Nymphs, I shall see the shade that now you are.

THE LOUSE-HUNTERS

(From the French of Rimbaud).

When the child’s forehead, full of torments red,
Cries out for sleep and its pale host of dreams,
His two big sisters come unto his bed,
Having long fingers, tipped with silvery gleams.

They set him at a casement, open wide
On seas of flowers that stir in the blue airs,
And through his curls, all wet with dew, they slide
Those terrible searching finger-tips of theirs.

He hears them breathing, softly, fearfully,
Honey-sweet ruminations, slow respired:
Then a sharp hiss breaks time and melody —
Spittle indrawn, old kisses new-desired.

Down through the perfumed silences he hears
Their eyelids fluttering: long fingers thrill,
Probing a lassitude bedimmed with tears,
While the nails crunch at every louse they kill.

He is drunk with Languor — soft accordion-sigh,
Delirious wine of Love in Idleness;
Longings for tears come welling up and die,
As slow or swift he feels their magical caress.

Leda

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LEDA

BROWN and bright as an agate, mountain-cool,
Eurotas singing slips from pool to pool;
Down rocky gullies; through the cavernous pines
And chestnut groves; down where the terraced vines
And gardens overhang; through valleys grey
With olive trees, into a soundless bay
Of the Ægean. Silent and asleep
Lie those pools now: but where they dream most deep,
Men sometimes see ripples of shining hair
And the young grace of bodies pale and bare,
Shimmering far down — the ghosts these mirrors hold
Of all the beauty they beheld of old,
White limbs and heavenly eyes and the hair's river of gold,
For once these banks were peopled: Spartan girls
Loosed here their maiden girdles and their curls,
And stooping o'er the level water stole
His darling mirror from the sun through whole
Rapturous hours of gazing.
The first star
Of all this milky constellation, far
Lovelier than any nymph of wood or green,
Was she whom Tyndarus had made his queen
For her sheer beauty and subtly moving grace —
Leda, the fairest of our mortal race.
Hymen had lit his torches but one week
About her bed (and still o'er her young cheek
Passed rosy shadows of those thoughts that sped
Across her mind, still virgin, still unwed,

For all her body was her own no more),
When Leda with her maidens to the shore
Of bright Eurotas came, to escape the heat
Of summer noon in waters coolly sweet.
By a brown pool which opened smooth and clear
Below the wrinkled water of a weir
They sat them down under an old fir-tree
To rest: and to the laughing melody
Of their sweet speech the river's rippling bore
A liquid burden, while the sun did pour
Pure colour out of heaven upon the earth.
The meadows seethed with the incessant mirth
Of grasshoppers, seen only when they flew
Their curves of scarlet or sudden dazzling blue.
Within the fir-tree's round of unpierced shade
The maidens sat with laughter and talk, or played,
Gravely intent, their game of knuckle-bones;
Or tossed from hand to hand the old dry cones
Littered about the tree. And one did sing
A ballad of some far-off Spartan king,
Who took a wife, but left her, well-away!
Slain by his foes upon their wedding-day.
"That was a piteous story," Leda sighed,
"To be a widow ere she was a bride."
"Better," said one, "to live a virgin life
Alone, and never know the name of wife
And bear the ugly burden of a child
And have great pain by it. Let me live wild,
A bird untamed by man!" "Nay," cried another,
"I would be wife, if I should not be mother.
Cypris I honour; let the vulgar pay

Their gross vows to Lucina when they pray.
Our finer spirits would be blunted quite
By bestial teeming; but Love's rare delight
Wings the rapt soul towards Olympus' height."
"Delight?" cried Leda. "Love to me has brought
Nothing but pain and a world of shameful thought.
When they say love is sweet, the poets lie;
'Tis but a trick to catch poor maidens by.
What are their boasted pleasures? I am queen
To the most royal king the world has seen;
Therefore I should, if any woman might,
Know at its full that exquisite delight.
Yet these few days since I was made a wife
Have held more bitterness than all my life,
While I was yet a child." The great bright tears
Slipped through her lashes. "Oh, my childish years!
Years that were all my own, too sadly few,
When I was happy — and yet never knew
How happy till to-day!" Her maidens came
About her as she wept, whispering her name,
Leda, sweet Leda, with a hundred dear
Caressing words to soothe her heavy cheer.
At last she started up with a fierce pride
Upon her face. "I am a queen," she cried,
"But had forgotten it a while; and you,
Wenches of mine, you were forgetful too.
Undress me. We would bathe ourself." So proud
A queen she stood, that all her maidens bowed
In trembling fear and scarcely dared approach
To do her bidding. But at last the brooch
Pinned at her shoulder is undone, the wide

Girdle of silk beneath her breasts untied;
The tunic falls about her feet, and she
Steps from the crocus folds of drapery,
Dazzlingly naked, into the warm sun.
God-like she stood; then broke into a run,
Leaping and laughing in the light, as though
Life through her veins coursed with so swift a flow
Of generous blood and fire that to remain
Too long in statued queenliness were pain
To that quick soul, avid of speed and joy.
She ran, easily bounding, like a boy,
Narrow of haunch and slim and firm of breast.
Lovelier she seemed in motion than at rest,
If that might be, when she was never less,
Moving or still, than perfect loveliness.
At last, with cheeks afire and heaving flank,
She checked her race, and on the river's bank
Stood looking down at her own echoed shape
And at the fish that, aimlessly agape,
Hung midway up their heaven of flawless glass,
Like angels waiting for eternity to pass.
Leda drew breath and plunged; her gasping cry
Splashed up; the water circled brokenly
Out from that pearly shudder of dipped limbs;
The glittering pool laughed up its flowery brims,
And everything, save the poor fish, rejoiced:
Their idiot contemplation of the Moist,
The Cold, the Watery, was in a trice
Ended when Leda broke their crystal paradise.
Jove in his high Olympian chamber lay
Hugely supine, striving to charm away

In sleep the long, intolerable noon.
But heedless Morpheus still withheld his boon,
And Jove upon his silk-pavilioned bed
Tossed wrathful and awake. His fevered head
Swarmed with a thousand fancies, which forecast
Delights to be, or savoured pleasures past.
Closing his eyes, he saw his eagle swift,
Headlong as his own thunder, stoop and lift
On pinions upward labouring the prize
Of beauty ravished for the envious skies.
He saw again that bright, adulterous pair,
Trapped by the limping husband unaware,
Fast in each other's arms, and faster in the snare —
And laughed remembering. Sometimes his thought
Went wandering over the earth and sought
Familiar places — temples by the sea,
Cities and islands; here a sacred tree
And there a cavern of shy nymphs.
He rolled
About his bed, in many a rich fold
Crumpling his Babylonian coverlet,
And yawned and stretched. The smell of his own sweat
Brought back to mind his Libyan desert-fane
Of mottled granite, with its endless train
Of pilgrim camels, reeking towards the sky
Ammonian incense to his hornèd deity;
The while their masters worshipped, offering
Huge teeth of ivory, while some would bring
Their Ethiop wives — sleek wineskins of black silk,
Jellied and huge from drinking asses' milk
Through years of tropical idleness, to pray

For offspring (whom he ever sent away
With prayers unanswered, lest their ebon race
Might breed and blacken the earth’s comely face).
Noon pressed on him a hotter, heavier weight.
O Love in Idleness! how celibate
He felt! Libido like a nemesis
Scourged him with itching memories of bliss.
The satin of imagined skin was sleek
And supply warm against his lips and cheek,
And deep within soft hair’s dishevelled dusk
His eyelids fluttered; like a flowery musk
The scent of a young body seemed to float
Faintly about him, close and yet remote —
For perfume and the essence of music dwell
In other worlds among the asphodel
Of unembodied life. Then all had flown;
His dream had melted. In his bed, alone,
Jove sweating lay and moaned, and longed in vain
To still the pulses of his burning pain.
In sheer despair at last he leapt from bed,
Opened the window and thrust forth his head
Into Olympian ether. One fierce frown
Rifted the clouds, and he was looking down
Into a gulf of azure calm; the rack
Seethed round about, tempestuously black;
But the god’s eye could hold its angry thunders back.
There lay the world, down through the chasméd blue,
Stretched out from edge to edge unto his view;
And in the midst, bright as a summer’s day
At breathless noon, the Mediterranean lay;
And Ocean round the world’s dim fringes tossed

His glaucous waves in mist and distance lost;
And Pontus and the livid Caspian Sea
Stirred in their nightmare sleep uneasily.
And ‘twixt the seas rolled the wide fertile land,
Dappled with green and tracts of tawny sand,
And rich, dark fallows and fields of flowers aglow
And the white, changeless silences of snow;
While here and there towns, like a living eye
Unclosed on earth’s blind face, towards the sky
Glanced their bright conscious beauty. Yet the sight
Of his fair earth gave him but small delight
Now in his restlessness: its beauty could
Do nought to quench the fever in his blood.
Desire lends sharpness to his searching eyes;
Over the world his focused passion flies
Quicker than chasing sunlight on a day
Of storm and golden April. Far away
He sees the tranquil rivers of the East,
Mirrors of many a strange barbaric feast,
Where un-Hellenic dancing-girls contort
Their yellow limbs, and gibbering masks make sport
Under the moons of many-coloured light
That swing their lantern-fruitage in the night
Of overarching trees. To him it seems
An alien world, peopled by insane dreams.
But these are nothing to the monstrous shapes —
Not men so much as bastardy of apes —
That meet his eyes in Africa. Between
Leaves of grey fungoid pulp and poisonous green,
White eyes from black and browless faces stare.
Dryads with star-flowers in their woolly hair

Dance to the flaccid clapping of their own
Black dangling dugs through forests overgrown,
Platted with writhing creepers. Horrified,
He sees them how they leap and dance, or glide,
Glimpse after black glimpse of a satin skin,
Among unthinkable flowers, to pause and grin
Out through a trellis of suppurating lips,
Of mottled tentacles barbed at the tips
And bloated hands and wattles and red lobes
Of pendulous gristle and enormous probes
Of pink and slashed and tasselled flesh . . .
He turns
Northward his sickened sight. The desert burns
All life away. Here in the forkéd shade
Of twin-humped towering dromedaries laid,
A few gaunt folk are sleeping: fierce they seem
Even in sleep, and restless as they dream.
He would be fearful of a desert bride
As of a brown asp at his sleeping side,
Fearful of her white teeth and cunning arts.
Further, yet further, to the ultimate parts
Of the wide earth he looks, where Britons go
Painted among their swamps, and through the snow
Huge hairy snuffling beasts pursue their prey —
Fierce men, as hairy and as huge as they.
Bewildered furrows deepen the Thunderer’s scowl;
This world so vast, so variously foul —
Who can have made its ugliness? In what
Revolting fancy were the Forms begot
Of all these monsters? What strange deity —
So barbarously not a Greek! — was he

Who could mismake such beings in his own
Distorted image. Nay, the Greeks alone
Were men; in Greece alone were bodies fair,
Minds comely. In that all-but-island there,
Cleaving the blue sea with its promontories,
Lies the world’s hope, the seed of all the glories
That are to be; there, too, must surely live
She who alone can medicinably give
Ease with her beauty to the Thunderer’s pain.
Downwards he bends his fiery eyes again,
Glaring on Hellas. Like a beam of light,
His intent glances touch the mountain height
With passing flame and probe the valleys deep,
Rift the dense forest and the age-old sleep
Of vaulted antres on whose pebbly floor
Gallop the loud-hoofed Centaurs; and the roar
Of more than human shouting underground
Pulses in living palpable waves of sound
From wall to wall, until it rumbles out
Into the air; and at that hollow shout
That seems an utterance of the whole vast hill,
The shepherds cease their laughter and are still.
Cities asleep under the noonday sky
Stir at the passage of his burning eye;
And in their huts the startled peasants blink
At the swift flash that bursts through every chink
Of wattled walls, hearkening in fearful wonder
Through lengthened seconds for the crash of thunder —
Which follows not: they are the more afraid.
Jove seeks amain. Many a country maid,
Whose sandalled feet pass down familiar ways

Among the olives, but whose spirit strays
Through lovelier lands of fancy, suddenly
Starts broad awake out of her dream to see
A light that is not of the sun, a light
Darted by living eyes, consciously bright;
She sees and feels it like a subtle flame
Mantling her limbs with fear and maiden shame
And strange desire. Longing and terrified,
She hides her face, like a new-wedded bride
Who feels rough hands that seize and hold her fast;
And swooning falls. The terrible light has passed;
She wakes; the sun still shines, the olive trees
Tremble to whispering silver in the breeze
And all is as it was, save she alone
In whose dazed eyes this deathless light has shone:
For never, never from this day forth will she
In earth's poor passion find felicity,
Or love of mortal man. A god's desire
Has seared her soul; nought but the same strong fire
Can kindle the dead ash to life again,
And all her years will be a lonely pain.
Many a thousand had he looked upon,
Thousands of mortals, young and old; but none —
Virgin, or young ephebus, or the flower
Of womanhood culled in its full-blown hour —
Could please the Thunderer's sight or touch his mind;
The longed-for loveliness was yet to find.
Had beauty fled, and was there nothing fair
Under the moon? The fury of despair
Raged in the breast of heaven's Almighty Lord;
He gnashed his foamy teeth and rolled and roared

In bull-like agony. Then a great calm
Descended on him: cool and healing balm
Touched his immortal fury. He had spied
Young Leda where she stood, poised on the river-side.
Even as she broke the river's smooth expanse,
Leda was conscious of that hungry glance,
And knew it for an eye of fearful power
That did so hot and thunderously lour,
She knew not whence, on her frail nakedness.
Jove's heart held but one thought: he must possess
That perfect form or die — possess or die.
Unheeded prayers and supplications fly,
Thick as a flock of birds, about his ears,
And smoke of incense rises; but he hears
Nought but the soft falls of that melody
Which is the speech of Leda; he can see
Nought but that almost spiritual grace
Which is her body, and that heavenly face
Where gay, sweet thoughts shine through, and eyes are bright
With purity and the soul's inward light.
Have her he must: the teasel-fingered burr
Sticks not so fast in a wild beast's tangled fur
As that insistent longing in the soul
Of mighty Jove. Gods, men, earth, heaven, the whole
Vast universe was blotted from his thought
And nought remained but Leda's laughter, nought
But Leda's eyes. Magnified by his lust,
She was the whole world now; have her he must, he must . . .
His spirit worked; how should he gain his end
With most deliciousness? What better friend,
What counsellor more subtle could he find

Than lovely Aphrodite, ever kind
To hapless lovers, ever cunning, too,
In all the tortuous ways of love to do
And plan the best? To Paphos then! His will
And act were one; and straight, invisible,
He stood in Paphos, breathing the languid air
By Aphrodite's couch. O heavenly fair
She was, and smooth and marvellously young!
On Tyrian silk she lay, and purple hung
About her bed in folds of fluted light
And shadow, dark as wine. Two doves, more white
Even than the white hand on the purple lying
Like a pale flower wearily dropped, were flying
With wings that made an odoriferous stir,
Dropping faint dews of bakkaris and myrrh,
Musk and the soul of sweet flowers cunningly
Ravished from transient petals as they die.
Two stripling cupids on her either hand
Stood near with winnowing plumes and gently fanned
Her hot, love-fevered cheeks and eyelids burning.
Another, crouched at the bed's foot, was turning
A mass of scattered parchments — vows or plaints
Or glad triumphant thanks which Venus' saints,
Martyrs and heroes, on her altars strewed
With bitterest tears or gifts of gratitude.
From the pile heaped at Aphrodite's feet
The boy would take a leaf, and in his sweet,
Clear voice would read what mortal tongues can tell
In stammering verse of those ineffable
Pleasures and pains of love, heaven and uttermost hell.
Jove hidden stood and heard him read these lines

Of votive thanks —
Cypris, this little silver lamp to thee
I dedicate.
It was my fellow-watcher, shared with me
Those swift, short hours, when raised above my fate
In Sphenura’s white arms I drank
Of immortality.
“A pretty lamp, and I will have it placed
Beside the narrow bed of some too chaste
Sister of virgin Artemis, to be
A night-long witness of her cruelty.
Read me another, boy,” and Venus bent
Her ear to listen to this short lament.
Cypris, Cypris, I am betrayed!
Under the same wide mantle laid
I found them, faithless, shameless pair!
Making love with tangled hair.
“Alas,” the goddess cried, “nor god, nor man,
Nor medicinable balm, nor magic can
Cast out the demon jealousy, whose breath
Withers the rose of life, save only time and death.”
Another sheet he took and read again.
Farewell to love, and hail the long, slow pain
Of memory that backward turns to joy.
O I have danced enough and enough sung;
My feet shall be still now and my voice mute;
Thine are these withered wreaths, this Lydian flute,
Cypris; I once was young.
And piêtous Aphrodite wept to think
How fadingly upon death’s very brink
Beauty and love take hands for one short kiss —

And then the wreaths are dust, the bright-eyed bliss
Perished, and the flute still. “Read on, read on.”
But ere the page could start, a lightning shone
Suddenly through the room, and they were ‘ware
Of some great terrible presence looming there.
And it took shape — huge limbs, whose every line
A symbol was of power and strength divine,
And it was Jove.
“Daughter, I come,” said he,
“For counsel in a case that touches me
Close, to the very life.” And he straightway
Told her of all his restlessness that day
And of his sight of Leda, and how great
Was his desire. And so in close debate
Sat the two gods, planning their rape; while she,
Who was to be their victim, joyously
Laughed like a child in the sudden breathless chill
And splashed and swam, forgetting every ill
And every fear and all, save only this:
That she was young, and it was perfect bliss
To be alive where suns so goldenly shine,
And bees go drunk with fragrant honey-wine,
And the cicadas sing from morn till night,
And rivers run so cool and pure and bright . . .
Stretched all her length, arms under head, she lay
In the deep grass, while the sun kissed away
The drops that sleeked her skin. Slender and fine
As those old images of the gods that shine
With smooth-worn silver, polished through the years
By the touching lips of countless worshippers,
Her body was; and the sun’s golden heat

Clothed her in softest flame from head to feet
And was her mantle, that she scarcely knew
The conscious sense of nakedness. The blue,
Far hills and the faint fringes of the sky
Shimmered and pulsed in the heat uneasily,
And hidden in the grass, cicadas shrill
Dizzied the air with ceaseless noise, until
A listener might wonder if they cried
In his own head or in the world outside.
Sometimes she shut her eyelids, and wrapped round
In a red darkness, with the muffled sound
And throb of blood beating within her brain,
Savoured intensely to the verge of pain
Her own young life, hoarded it up behind
Her shuttered lids, until, too long confined,
It burst them open and her prisoned soul
Flew forth and took possession of the whole
Exquisite world about her and was made
A part of it. Meanwhile her maidens played,
Singing an ancient song of death and birth,
Seed-time and harvest, old as the grey earth,
And moving to their music in a dance
As immemorial. A numbing trance
Came gradually over her, as though
Flake after downy-feathered flake of snow
Had muffled all her senses, drifting deep
And warm and quiet.
From this all-but sleep
She started into life again; the sky
Was full of a strange tumult suddenly —
Beating of mighty wings and shrill-voiced fear

And the hoarse scream of rapine following near.
In the high windlessness above her flew,
Dazzlingly white on the untroubled blue,
A splendid swan, with outstretched neck and wing
Spread fathom wide, and closely following
An eagle, tawny and black. This god-like pair
Circled and swooped through the calm of upper air,
The eagle striking and the white swan still
‘Scaping as though by happy miracle
The imminent talons. For the twentieth time
The furious hunter stooped, to miss and climb
A mounting spiral into the height again.
He hung there poised, eyeing the grassy plain
Far, far beneath, where the girls’ upturned faces
Were like white flowers that bloom in open places
Among the scarcely budded woods. And they
Breathlessly watched and waited; long he lay,
Becalmed upon that tideless sea of light,
While the great swan with slow and creaking flight
Went slanting down towards safety, where the stream
Shines through the trees below, with glance and gleam
Of blue aerial eyes that seem to give
Sense to the sightless earth and make it live.
The ponderous wings beat on and no pursuit:
Stiff as the painted kite that guards the fruit,
Afloat o’er orchards ripe, the eagle yet
Hung as at anchor, seeming to forget
His uncaught prey, his rage unsatisfied.
Still, quiet, dead . . . and then the quickest-eyed
Had lost him. Like a star unsphered, a stone
Dropped from the vault of heaven, a javelin thrown,

He swooped upon his prey. Down, down he came,
And through his plumes with a noise of wind-blown flame
Loud roared the air. From Leda's lips a cry
Broke, and she hid her face — she could not see him die,
Her lovely, hapless swan.
Ah, had she heard,
Even as the eagle hurtled past, the word
That treacherous pair exchanged. "Peace," cried the swan;
"Peace, daughter. All my strength will soon be gone,
Wasted in tedious flying, ere I come
Where my desire hath set its only home."
"Go," said the eagle, "I have played my part,
Roused pity for your plight in Leda's heart
(Pity the mother of voluptuousness).
Go, father Jove; be happy; for success
Attends this moment."
On the queen's numbed sense
Fell a glad shout that ended sick suspense,
Bidding her lift once more towards the light
Her eyes, by pity closed against a sight
Of blood and death — her eyes, how happy now
To see the swan still safe, while far below,
Brought by the force of his eluded stroke
So near to earth that with his wings he woke
A gust whose sudden silvery motion stirred
The meadow grass, struggled the sombre bird
Of rage and rapine. Loud his scream and hoarse
With baffled fury as he urged his course
Upwards again on threshing pinions wide.
But the fair swan, not daring to abide
This last assault, dropped with the speed of fear

Towards the river. Like a winged spear,
Outstretching his long neck, rigid and straight,
Aimed at where Leda on the bank did wait
With open arms and kind, uplifted eyes
And voice of tender pity, down he flies.
Nearer, nearer, terribly swift, he sped
Directly at the queen; then widely spread
Resisting wings, and breaking his descent
‘Gainst his own wind, all speed and fury spent,
The great swan fluttered slowly down to rest
And sweet security on Leda’s breast.
Menacingly the eagle wheeled above her;
But Leda, like a noble-hearted lover
Keeping his child-beloved from tyrannous harm,
Stood o’er the swan and, with one slender arm
Imperiously lifted, waved away
The savage foe, still hungry for his prey.
Baffled at last, he mounted out of sight
And the sky was void — save for a single white
Swan’s feather moulted from a harassed wing
That down, down, with a rhythmic balancing
From side to side dropped sleeping on the air.
Down, slowly down over that dazzling pair,
Whose different grace in union was a birth
Of unimagined beauty on the earth:
So lovely that the maidens standing round
Dared scarcely look. Couched on the flowery ground
Young Leda lay, and to her side did press
The swan’s proud-arching opulent loveliness,
Stroking the snow-soft plumage of his breast
With fingers slowly drawn, themselves caressed

By the warm softness where they lingered, loth
To break away. Sometimes against their growth
Ruffling the feathers inlaid like little scales
On his sleek neck, the pointed finger-nails
Rasped on the warm, dry, puckered skin beneath;
And feeling it she shuddered, and her teeth
Grated on edge; for there was something strange
And snake-like in the touch. He, in exchange,
Gave back to her, stretching his eager neck,
For every kiss a little amorous peck;
Rubbing his silver head on her gold tresses,
And with the nip of horny dry caresses
Leaving upon her young white breast and cheek
And arms the red print of his playful beak.
Closer he nestled, mingling with the slim
Austerity of virginal flank and limb
His curved and florid beauty, till she felt
That downy warmth strike through her flesh and melt
The bones and marrow of her strength away.
One lifted arm bent o’er her brow, she lay
With limbs relaxed, scarce breathing, deathly still;
Save when a quick, involuntary thrill
Shook her sometimes with passing shudderings,
As though some hand had plucked the aching strings
Of life itself, tense with expectancy.
And over her the swan shook slowly free
The folded glory of his wings, and made
A white-walled tent of soft and luminous shade
To be her veil and keep her from the shame
Of naked light and the sun’s noonday flame.
Hushed lay the earth and the wide, careless sky.

Then one sharp sound, that might have been a cry
Of utmost pleasure or of utmost pain,
Broke sobbing forth, and all was still again.

THE BIRTH OF GOD

NIGHT is a void about me; I lie alone;
And water drips, like an idiot clicking his tongue,
Senselessly, ceaselessly, endlessly drips
Into the waiting silence, grown
Emptier for this small inhuman sound.
My love is gone, my love who is tender and young.
O smooth warm body! O passionate lips!
I have stretched forth hands in the dark and nothing found:
The silence is huge as the sky — I lie alone —
My narrow room, a darkness that knows no bound.

How shall I fill this measureless
Deep void that the taking away
Of a child’s slim beauty has made?
Slender she is and small, but the loneliness
She has left is a night no stars allay,
And I am cold and afraid.

Long, long ago, cut off from the wolfish pack,
From the warm, immediate touch of friends and mate,
Lost and alone, alone in the utter black
Of a forest night, some far-off, beast-like man,
Cowed by the cold indifferent hate
Of the northern silence, crouched in fear,
When through his bleared and suffering mind
A sudden tremor of comfort ran,
And the void was filled by a rushing wind,
And he breathed a sense of something friendly and near,
And in privation the life of God began.

Love, from your loss shall a god be born to fill
The emptiness, where once you were,
With friendly knowledge and more than a lover’s will
To ease despair?
Shall I feed longing with what it hungers after,
Seeing in earth and sea and air
A lover’s smiles, hearing a lover’s laughter,
Feeling love everywhere?

The night drags on. Darkness and silence grow,
And with them my desire has grown,
My bitter need. Alas, I know,
I know that here I lie alone.

ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH

BENEATH the sunlight and blue of all-but Autumn
The grass sleeps goldenly; woodland and distant hill
Shine through the gauzy air in a dust of golden pollen,
And even the glittering leaves are almost still.

Scattered on the grass, like a ragman’s bundles carelessly dropped,
Men sleep outstretched or, sprawling, bask in the sun;
Here glows a woman’s bright dress and here a child is sitting,
And I lie down and am one of the sleepers, one Like the rest of this tumbled crowd. Do they all, I wonder,
Feel anguish grow with the calm day’s slow decline,
Longing, as I, for a shattering wind, a passion
Of bodily pain to be the soul’s anodyne?

SYMPATHY

THE irony of being two . . . !
Grey eyes, wide open suddenly,
Regard me and enquire; I see a face
Grave and unquiet in tenderness.
Heart-rending question of women — never answered:
“Tell me, tell me, what are you thinking of?”
Oh, the pain and foolishness of love!
What can I do but make my old grimace,
Ending it with a kiss, as I always do?

MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM

DIAPHENIA, drunk with sleep,
Drunk with pleasure, drunk with fatigue,
Feels her Corydon’s fingers creep —
Ring-finger, middle finger, index, thumb —
Strummingly over the smooth sleek drum
Of her thorax.
Meanwhile Händel’s Gigue
Turns in Corydon’s absent mind
To Yakka-Hoola.
She can find
No difference in the thrilling touch
Of one who, now, in everything
Is God-like. “Was there ever such
Passion as ours?”
His pianoing
Gives place to simple arithmetic’s
Simplest constatations: — six
Letters in Gneiss and three in Gnu:
Luncheon to-day cost three and two;
In a year — he couldn’t calculate
Three-sixty-five times thirty-eight,
Figuring with printless fingers on
Her living parchment.
“Corydon!
I faint, faint, faint at your dear touch.
Say, is it possible . . . to love too much?”

FROM THE PILLAR

SIMEON, the withered stylite,
Sat gloomily looking down
Upon each roof and skylight
In all the seething town.

And in every upper chamber,
On roofs, where the orange flowers
Make weary men remember
The perfume of long-dead hours, He saw the wine-drenched riot
Of harlots and human beasts,
And how celestial quiet
Was shattered by their feasts.

The steam of fetid vices
From a thousand lupanars,
Like smoke of sacrifices,
Reeked up to the heedless stars.

And the saint from his high fastness
Of purity apart
Cursed them and their unchasteness,
And envied them in his heart.

JONAH

A CREAM of phosphorescent light
Floats on the wash that to and fro
Slides round his feet — enough to show
Many a pendulous stalactite
Of naked mucus, whorls and wreaths
And huge festoons of mottled tripes
And smaller palpitating pipes
Through which a yeasty liquor seethes.

Seated upon the convex mound
Of one vast kidney, Jonah prays
And sings his canticles and hymns,
Making the hollow vault resound
God’s goodness and mysterious ways,
Till the great fish spouts music as he swims.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

SWAN, Swan,
Yesterday you were
The whitest of things in this dark winter.
To-day the snow has made of your plumes
An unwashed pocket handkercher,
An unwashed pocket handkercher . . .
“Lancashire, to Lancashire!” —
Tune of the antique trains long ago:
Each summer holiday a milestone
Backwards, backwards: —
Tenby, Barmouth, and year by year
All the different hues of the sea,
Blue, green and blue.
But on this river of muddy jade
There swims a yellow swan,
And along the bank the snow lies dazzlingly white.

A MELODY BY SCARLATTI

HOW clear under the trees,
How softly the music flows,
Rippling from one still pool to another
Into the lake of silence.

A SUNSET

OVER against the triumph and the close —
Amber and green and rose —
Of this short day,
The pale ghost of the moon grows living-bright
Once more, as the last light
Ebbs slowly away.
Darkening the fringes of these western glories
The black phantasmagories
Of cloud advance
With noiseless footing — vague and villainous shapes,
Wrapped in their ragged fustian capes,
Of some grotesque romance.
But overhead where, like a pool between
Dark rocks, the sky is green
And clear and deep,
Floats windlessly a cloud, with curving breast
Flushed by the fiery west,
In god-like sleep . . .
And in my mind opens a sudden door
That lets me see once more
A little room
With night beyond the window, chill and damp,
And one green-lighted lamp
Tempering the gloom,
While here within, close to me, touching me
(Even the memory
Of my desire
Shakes me like fear), you sit with scattered hair;
And all your body bare

Before the fire
Is lapped about with rosy flame. . . . But still,
Here on the lonely hill,
I walk alone;
Silvery green is the moon’s lamp overhead,
The cloud sleeps warm and red,
And you are gone.

LIFE AND ART

YOU have sweet flowers for your pleasure;
You laugh with the bountiful earth
In its richness of summer treasure:
Where now are your flowers and your mirth?
Petals and cadenced laughter,
Each in a dying fall,
Droop out of life; and after
Is nothing; they were all.

But we from the death of roses
That three suns perfume and gild
With a kiss, till the fourth discloses
A withered wreath, have distilled
The fulness of one rare phial,
Whose nimble life shall outrun
The circling shadow on the dial,
Outlast the tyrannous sun.

FIRST PHILOSOPHER’S SONG

A POOR degenerate from the ape,
Whose hands are four, whose tail’s a limb,
I contemplate my flaccid shape
And know I may not rival him, Save with my mind — a nimbler beast
Possessing a thousand sinewy tails,
A thousand hands, with which it scales,
Greedy of luscious truth, the greased Poles and the coco palms of thought,
Thrids easily through the mangrove maze
Of metaphysics, walks the taut
Frail dangerous liana ways That link across wide gulfs remote
Analogies between tree and tree;
Outruns the hare, outhops the goat;
Mind fabulous, mind sublime and free!

But oh, the sound of simian mirth!
Mind, issued from the monkey’s womb,
Is still umbilical to earth,
Earth its home and earth its tomb.

SECOND PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

IF, O my Lesbia, I should commit,
Not fornication, dear, but suicide,
My Thames-blown body (Pliny vouches it)
Would drift face upwards on the oily tide
With the other garbage, till it putrefied.

But you, if all your lovers' frozen hearts
Conspired to send you, desperate, to drown —
Your maiden modesty would float face down,
And men would weep upon your hinder parts.

'Tis the Lord's doing. Marvellous is the plan
By which this best of worlds is wisely planned.
One law He made for woman, one for man:
We bow the head and do not understand.

FIFTH PHILOSOPHER’S SONG

A MILLION million spermatozoa,
All of them alive:
Out of their cataclysm but one poor Noah
Dare hope to survive.

And among that billion minus one
Might have chanced to be
Shakespeare, another Newton, a new Donne —
But the One was Me.

Shame to have ousted your betters thus,
Taking ark while the others remained outside!
Better for all of us, froward Homunculus,
If you’d quietly died!

NINTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

GOD'S in His Heaven: He never issues
(Wise Man!) to visit this world of ours.
Unchecked the cancer gnaws our tissues,
Stops to lick chops and then again devours.

Those find, who most delight to roam
'Mid castles of remotest Spain,
That there's, thank Heaven, no place like home;
So they set out upon their travels again.

Beauty for some provides escape,
Who gain a happiness in eyeing
The gorgeous buttocks of the ape
Or Autumn sunsets exquisitely dying.

And some to better worlds than this
Mount up on wings as frail and misty
As passion's all-too-transient kiss
(Though afterwards — oh, omne animal triste!) But I, too rational by half
To live but where I bodily am.
Can only do my best to laugh.
Can only sip my misery dram by dram.

While happier mortals take to drink,
A dolorous dipsomaniac,
Fuddled with grief I sit and think,
Looking upon the bile when it is black.

Then brim the bowl with atrabilious liquor!
We'll pledge our Empire vast across the flood:

For Blood, as all men know, than Water’s thicker,
But water’s wider, thank the Lord, than Blood.

MORNING SCENE

LIGHT through the latticed blind
Spans the dim intermediate space
With parallels of luminous dust
To gild a nuptial couch, where Goya’s mind
Conceived those agonising hands, that hair
Scattered, and half a sunlit bosom bare,
And, imminently above them, a red face
Fixed in the imbecile earnestness of lust.

VERREY’S

HERE, every winter’s night at eight,
Epicurus lies in state,
Two candles at his head and two
Candles at his feet. A few
Choice spirits watch beneath the vault
Of his dim chapel, where default
Of music fills the pregnant air
With subtler requiem and prayer
Than ever an organ wrought with notes
Spouted from its tubal throats.
Black Ethiopia’s Holy Child,
The Cradled Bottle, breathes its mild
Meek spirit on the ravished nose,
The palate and the tongue of those
Who piously partake with me
Of this funereal agape.

FRASCATI’S

BUBBLE-BREASTED swells the dome
Of this my spiritual home,
From whose nave the chandelier,
Schaffhausen frozen, tumbles sheer.
We in the round balcony sit,
Lean o’er and look into the pit
Where feed the human bears beneath,
Champing with their gilded teeth.
What negroid holiday makes free
With such priapic revelry?
What songs? What gongs? What nameless rites?
What gods like wooden stalagmites?
What steam of blood or kidney pie?
What blasts of Bantu melody?
Ragtime. . . . But when the wearied Band
Swoons to a waltz, I take her hand.
And there we sit in blissful calm,
Quietly sweating palm to palm.

FATIGUE

THE mind has lost its Aristotelian elegance of shape: there is only a darkness where bubbles and inconsequent balloons float up to burst their luminous cheeks and vanish.

A woman with a basket on her head: a Chinese lantern quite askew: the vague bright bulging of chemists' window bottles; and then in my ears the distant noise of a great river of people. And phrases, phrases —

It is only a question of saddle-bags,

Stane Street and Gondibert,

Foals in Iceland (or was it Foals in aspic?).

As that small reddish devil turns away with an insolent jut of his hindquarters, I become aware that his curling pug's tail is an electric bell-push. But that does not disquiet me so much as the sight of all these polished statues twinkling with high lights and all of them grotesque and all of them colossal.

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

THE machine is ready to start. The symbolic beasts grow resty, curveting where they stand at their places in the great blue circle of the year. The Showman's voice rings out. "Montez, mesdames et messieurs, montez. You, sir, must bestride the Ram. You will take the Scorpion. Yours, madame, is the Goat. As for you there, blackguard boy, you must be content with the Fishes. I have allotted you the Virgin, mademoiselle." . . . "Polisson!" "Pardon, pardon. Evidemment, c'est le Sagittaire qu'on demande. Ohé, les dards! The rest must take what comes. The Twins shall counterpoise one another in the Scales. So, so. Now away we go, away."

Ha, what keen air. Wind of the upper spaces. Snuff it deep, drink in the intoxication of our speed. Hark how the music swells and rings. . . . sphery music, music of every vagabond planet, every rooted star; sound of winds and seas and all the simmering millions of life. Moving, singing . . . so with a roar and a rush round we go and round, for ever whirling on a ceaseless Bank Holiday of drunken life and speed.

But I happened to look inwards among the machinery of our roundabout, and there I saw a slobbering cretin grinding at a wheel and sweating as he ground, and grinding eternally. And when I perceived that he was the author of all our speed and that the music was of his making, that everything depended on his grinding wheel, I thought I would like to get off. But we were going too fast.

BACK STREETS

BACK streets, gutters of stagnating darkness where men breathe something that is not so much air as a kind of rarefied slime. . . . I look back down the tunnelled darkness of a drain to where, at the mouth, a broader, windier water-way glitters with the gay speed and motion of sunlit life. But around all is dimly rotting; and the inhabitants are those squamous, phosphorescent creatures that darkness and decay beget. Little men, sheathed tightly in clothes of an exaggeratedly fashionable cheapness, hurry along the pavements, jaunty and at the same time furtive. There is a thin layer of slime over all of them. And then there are the eyes of the women, with their hard glitter that is only of the surface. They see acutely, but in a glassy, superficial way, taking in the objects round them no more than my western windows retain the imprint of the sunset that enriches them.

Back streets, exhalations of a difficulty puberty, I once lived on the fringes of them.

LAST THINGS

THERE have been visions, dark in the minds of men, death and corruption dancing across the secular abyss that separates eternity from time to where sits the ineluctable judge, waiting, waiting through the ages, and ponders all his predestinated decrees. There will be judgment, and each, in an agony of shame, reluctant yet compelled, will turn his own accuser. For

Tunc tua gesta noxia
Secreta quoque turpia
Videbunt mille millia
Virorum circumstantia.

There under the unwinking gaze of all the legions of just men made perfect, the poor prisoner will uncover each dirty secret of his heart, will act over again each shameful scene of his life. And those eyes of saints and angels will shine impassively down upon his beastliness, and to him, as he looks at their steady brilliance, they will seem a million of little blazing loopholes slotted in the walls of hell.

Hildebert, this was your vision as you brooded over death and judgment, hell and heaven, in your cloister, a thousand years ago. Do you not envy us our peace of mind who know not four ultimates, but only one? For whom the first of the Last Things is also the last — us, whom death annihilates with all our shame and all our folly, leaving no trace behind.

GOTHIC

SHARP spires pierce upwards, and the clouds are full of tumbling bells. Reckless, breakneck, head over heels down an airy spiral of stairs run the bells. “Upon Paul’s steeple stands a tree.”

Up again and then once more to the bottom, two steps at a time. “As full of apples as can be.”

Up again and down again: centuries of climbing have not worn the crystal smoothness of the degrees.

Along the bellying clouds the little boys of London Town come running, running as best they may, seeing that at every step they sink ankle-deep through the woolly surface into the black heart of thunder beneath.

The apples on the trees are swaying in the wind, rocking to the clamour of bells. The leaves are of bright green copper, and rattle together with a scaly sound. At the roots of the tree sit four gargoyles playing a little serious game with dice. The hunch-backed ape has won from the manticore that crooked French crown with a hole in it which the manticore got from the friar with the strawberry nose; he had it in turn as an alms from the grave knight who lies with crossed legs down there, through the clouds and the dizzy mist of bell-ringing, where the great church is a hollow ship, full of bright candles, and stable in the midst of dark tempestuous seas.

EVENING PARTY

“SANS Espoir, sans Espoir . . .” sang the lady while the piano laboriously opened its box of old sardines in treacle. One detected ptomaine in the syrup. Sans Espoir . . . I thought of the rhymes — soir, nonchaloir, reposoir — the dying falls of a symbolism grown sadly suicidal before the broad Flemish back of the singer, the dewlaps of her audience. Sans Espoir. The listeners wore the frozen rapture of those who gaze upon the uplifted Host.

Catching one another’s eye, we had a simultaneous vision of pews, of hyenas and hysteria.

Three candles were burning. They behaved like English aristocrats in a French novel — perfectly, impassively. I tried to imitate their milordliness.

One of the candles flickered, snickered. Was it a draught or was it laughter? Flickering, snickering — candles, you betrayed me. I had to laugh too.

BEAUTY

I

THERE is a sea somewhere — whether in the lampless crypts of the earth, or among sunlit islands, or that which is an unfathomable and terrifying question between the archipelagos of stars — there is a sea (and perhaps its tides have filled those green transparent pools that glint like eyes in a spring storm-cloud) which is for ever troubled and in travail — a bubbling and a heaving up of waters as though for the birth of a fountain.

The sick and the crippled lie along the brims in expectation of the miracle. And at last, at last . . .

A funnel of white water is twisted up and so stands, straight and still by the very speed of its motion.

It drinks the light; slowly it is infused with colour, rose and mother-of-pearl. Slowly it takes shape, a heavenly body.

O dazzling Anadyomene!

The flakes of foam break into white birds about her head, fall again in a soft avalanche of flowers. Perpetual miracle, beauty endlessly born.

II

STEAMERS, in all your travelling have you trailed the meshes of your long expiring white nets across this sea, or dipped in it your sliding rail, or balanced your shadow far far down upon its glass-green sand? Or, forgetting the preoccupations of commerce and the well-oiled predestination of your machinery, did you ever put in at the real Paphos?

III

IN the city of Troy, whither our Argonautical voyages had carried us, we found Helen and that lamentable Cressid who was to Chaucer the feminine paradox, untenably fantastic but so devastatingly actual, the crystal ideal — flawed; and

to Shakespeare the inevitable trull, flayed to show her physiological machinery and the logical conclusion of every the most heartrendingly ingenuous gesture of maidenhood. (But, bless you! our gorge doesn't rise. We are cynically well up in the damning Theory of woman, which makes it all the more amusing to watch ourselves in the ecstatic practice of her. Unforeseen perversity.)

Fabulous Helen! At her firm breasts they used to mould delicate drinking cups which made the sourest vinegar richly poisonous.

The geometry of her body had utterly outwitted Euclid, and the Philosophers were baffled by curves of a subtlety infinitely more elusive and Eleusinian than the most oracular speculations of Parmenides. They did their best to make a coherent system out of the incompatible, but empirically established, facts of her. Time, for instance, was abolished within the circle of her arms. "It is eternity when her lips touch me," Paris had remarked. And yet this same Paris was manifestly and notoriously falling into a decline, had lost whatever sense or beauty he once possessed, together with his memory and all skill in the nine arts which are memory's daughters. How was it then, these perplexed philosophers wondered, that she could at one and the same moment give eternity like a goddess, while she was vampiring away with that divine thirsty mouth of hers the last dregs of a poor mortal life? They sought an insufficient refuge in Heraclitus' theory of opposites.

Meanwhile Troilus was always to be found at sunset, pacing up and down the walls by the western gate — quite mad. At dusk the Greek camp-fires would blossom along Xanthus banks — one after another, a myriad lights dancing in the dark.

As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
O'er heaven's pure azure spreads her something light.

He would repeat the simile to himself, but could never remember the correct epithets. Not that they mattered — any more than anything else.

IV

THERE are fine cities in the world — Manhattan, Ecbatana and Hecatompylus — but this city of Troy is the most fabulous of them all. Rome was seven hills of butcher's meat, Athens an abstraction of marble, in Alexandria the steam of kidney-puddings revolted the cœnobites, darkness and size render London inappreciable, Paris is full of sparrows, the snow lies gritty on Berlin, Moscow has no verisimilitude, all the East is peopled by masks and apes and larvæ. But this city of Troy is most of all real and fabulous with its charnel beauty.

"Is not Helen the end of our search — paradisal little World, symbol and epitome of the Great? Dawn sleeps in the transparent shadow of roses within her ear. The stainless candour of infinity — far-off peaks in summer and the Milky Way — has taken marvellous form in her. The Little World has its meteors, too, comets and shadowy clouds of hair, stars at whose glance men go planet-struck. Meteors — yes, and history it has. The past is still alive in the fragrance of her hair, and her young body breathes forth memories as old as the beginning of life — Eros first of gods. In her is the goal. I rest here with Helen."

"Fool," I said, "quote your Faustus. I go further."

V

FURTHER — but a hundred Liliputian tethers prevent me, the white nerves which tie soul to skin. And the whole air is aching with epidermical magnetism. Further, further. But Troy is the birthplace of my homesickness. Troy is more than a patriotism, for it is built of my very flesh; the remembrance of it is a fire that sticks and tears when I would pull it off.

But further. One last look at Troilus where he stands by the western gate, staring over the plain. Further. When I have learnt the truth, I will return and build a new palace with domes less ominously like breasts, and there I will invent a safer Helen and a less paradoxical Cressid, and my harem will be a library for enlightenment.

VI

HERE are pagodas of diminishing bells. The leopard sleeps in the depth of his rosy cavern, and when he breathes it is a smell of irresistible sweetness; in the bestiaries he is the symbol of Christ in His sepulchre.

This listening conch has collected all the rumours of pantheism; the dew in this veined cup is the sacrament of nature, while these pale thuribles worship in the dark with yellow lamps and incense.

Everywhere alchemical profusion — the golden mintage of glades and ripples, vigils of passion enriched with silver under the fingers of the moon; everywhere lavishness, colour, music; the smoothness of machinery, incredible and fantastic ingenuities. God has lost his half-hunter in the desert.

But we have not come to worship among these Gothic beeches, for all their pillars and the lace-work of their green windows. We are looking for other things than churches.

VII

TREES, the half-fossilised exuberances of a passionate life, petrified fountains of intemperance — with their abolition begins the realm of reason.

Geometry, lines and planes, smooth edges, the ordered horror of perspectives. In this country there are pavements bright and sleek as water. The walls are precipices to which giants have nailed a perpetual cataract of marble. The fringes of the sky are scalloped with a pattern of domes and minarets. At night, too, the down-struck lamps are pyramids of phantom green and the perfect circle they make upon the pavement is magical.

Look over the parapet of the Acropolis. The bridges go dizzily down on their swaying catenaries, the gull’s flight chained fast. The walls drop clear into the valley, all the millions of basalt blocks calcined into a single red monolith, fluted with thirstily shining organ pipes, which seem for ever wet. There are no crevices for moss and toadflax, and even the claws of the yellow lichen slip on its polished flanks.

The valley is all paved and inlaid with rivers of steel. No trees, for they have

been abolished.
“Glorious unnature,” cries the watcher at the parapet. His voice launches into the abyss, following the curve of the bridges. “Glorious unnature. We have triumphed.”
But his laughter as it descends is like a flight of broken steps.

VIII

LET us abandon ourselves to Time, which is beauty’s essence. We live among the perpetual degenerations of apotheoses. Sunset dissolves into soft grey snow and the deep ocean of midnight, boundless as forgetfulness or some yet undiscovered Pacific, contracts into the green puddle of the dawn. The flowers burn to dust with their own brightness. On the banks of ancient rivers stand the pitiful stumps of huge towers and the ghosts of dead men straining to return into life. The woods are full of the smell of transience. Beauty, then, is that moment of descent when apotheosis tilts its wings downwards into the gulf. The ends of the curve lose themselves parabolically somewhere in infinity. Our sentimental eyes see only the middle section of this degeneration, knowing neither the upper nor the lower extremes, which some have thought to meet, godhead and annihilation.
Old Curiosity Shops! If I have said “Mortality is beauty,” it was a weakness. The sense of time is a symptom of anæmia of the soul, through which flows angelic ichor. We must escape from the dust of the shop.
Cloistered darkness and sleep offer us their lotuses. Not to perceive where all is ugly, eaten into by the syphilis of time, heart-sickening — this is beauty; not to desire where death is the only consummation — wisdom.
Night is a measureless deep silence: daybreak brings back the fœtid gutters of the town. O supreme beauty of a night that knows no limitations — stars or the jagged edges of cock-crowing. Desperate, my mind has desired it: never my blood, whose pulse is a rhythm of the world.
At the other extreme, Beatrice lacks solidity, is as unresponsive to your kisses as

mathematics. She too is an oubliette, not a way of life; an oubliette that, admittedly, shoots you upwards into light, not down to death; but it comes to the same thing in the end.

What, then, is the common measure? To take the world as it is, but metaphorically, informing the chaos of nature with a soul, qualifying transience with eternity.

When flowers are thoughts, and lonely poplars fountains of aspiring longing; when our actions are the poem of which all geographies and architectures and every science and all the unclassed individual odds and ends are the words, when even Helen's white voluptuousness matches some candour of the soul — then it will have been found, the permanent and living loveliness.

It is not a far-fetched, dear-bought gem; no pomander to be smelt only when the crowd becomes too stinkingly insistent; it is not a birth of rare oboes or violins, not visible only from ten to six by state permission at a nominal charge, not a thing richly apart, but an ethic, a way of belief and of practice, of faith and works, mediæval in its implication with the very threads of life. I desire no Paphian cloister of pink monks. Rather a rosy Brotherhood of Common Life, eating, drinking; marrying and giving in marriage; taking and taken in adultery; reading, thinking, and when thinking fails, feeling immeasurably more subtly, sometimes perhaps creating.

Arduous search for one who is chained by his desires to dead carcases, whose eyes are dimmed with tears by the slow heart-breaking twilights full of old family ghosts laid in lavender, whose despair cries out for opiate and anodyne, craving gross sleep or a place on the airy unsupported pinnacles which hang in the sterile upper chambers of ether.

Ventre à terre, head in air — your centaurs are your only poets. Their hoofs strike sparks from the flints and they see both very near and immensely far.

SOLES OCCIDERE ET REDIRE POSSUNT

FOREWORD

JOHN RIDLEY, THE subject of this poem, was killed in February 1918. “If I should perish,” he wrote to me only five weeks before his death, “if I should perish — and one isn’t exactly a ‘good life’ at the moment — I wish you’d write something about me. It isn’t vanity (for I know you’ll do me, if anything, rather less than justice!), not vanity, I repeat; but that queer irrational desire one has for immortality of any kind, however short and precarious — for frankly, my dear, I doubt whether your verses will be so very much more perennial than brass. Still, they’ll be something. One can’t, of course, believe in any au-delà for one’s personal self; one would have first to believe in some kind of a friendly god. And as for being a spiritualist spook, one of those wretched beings who seem to spend their eternity in trying to communicate with the earth by a single telephone, where the number is always engaged, and the line chronically out of order — well, all I can say is, Heaven preserve me from such a future life. No, my only hope is you — and a damned poor guarantee for eternity. Don’t make of me a khaki image, I beg. I’d rather you simply said of me, as Erasmus did of his brother, ‘Strenuus compotor, nec scortator ignavus.’ I sincerely hope, of course, that you won’t have to write the thing at all — hope not, but have very little doubt you will. Good-bye.”

The following poem is a tentative and provisional attempt to comply with his request. Ridley was an adolescent, and suffered from that instability of mind “produced by the mental conflict forced upon man by his sensitiveness to herd suggestion on the one hand and to experience on the other” (I quote from Mr. Trotter’s memorable work on Herd Instinct), that characteristic instability which makes adolescence so feebly sceptical, so inefficient, so profoundly unhappy. I have fished up a single day from Ridley’s forgotten existence. It has a bedraggled air in the sunlight, this poor wisp of Lethean weed. Fortunately, however, it will soon be allowed to drop back into the water, where we shall all,

in due course, join it. “The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been.”

I BETWEEN the drawing of the blind
And being aware of yet another day
There came to him behind
Close, pregnant eyelids, like a flame of blue,
Intense, untroubled by the wind,
A Mediterranean bay,
Bearing a brazen beak and foamless oars
To where, marmoreally smooth and bright,
The steps soar up in one pure flight
From the sea’s edge to the palace doors,
That have shut, have shut their valves of bronze —
And the windows too are lifeless eyes.
The galley grated on the stone;
He stepped out — and was alone:
No white-sailed hopes, no clouds, nor swans
To shatter the ocean’s calm, to break the sky’s.
Up the slow stairs:
Did he know it was a dream?
First one foot up, then the other foot,
Shuddering like a mandrake root
That hears the truffle-dog at work
And draws a breath to scream;
To moan, to scream.
The gates swing wide,
And it is coolly dark inside,
And corridors stretch out and out,
Joining the ceilings to their floors,
And parallels ring wedding bells

And through a hundred thousand doors
Perspective has abolished doubt.
But one of the doors was shut,
And behind it the subtlest lutanist
Was shaking a broken necklace of tinkling notes,
And somehow it was feminine music.
Strange exultant fear of desire, when hearts
Beat brokenly. He laid his hand on the latch —
And woke among his familiar books and pictures;
Real as his dream? He wondered. Ten to nine.
Thursday. Wasn't he lunching at his aunt's?
Distressing circumstance.
But then he was taking Jenny out to dine,
Which was some consolation. What a chin!
Civilized ten thousand years, and still
No better way than rasping a pale mask
With imminent suicide, steel or obsidian:
Repulsive task!
And the more odious for being quotidian.
If one should live till eighty-five . . .
And the dead, do they still shave? The horrible dead, are they alive?
But that lute, playing across his dream . . .
Quick drops breaking the sleep of the water-wheel,
Song and ebbing whisper of a summer stream,
Music's endless inconsequence that would reveal
To souls that listened for it, the all
Unseizable confidence, the mystic Rose,
Could it but find the magical fall
That droops, droops and dies into the perfect close . . .
And why so feminine? But one could feel
The unseen woman sitting there behind

The door, making her ceaseless slow appeal
To all that prowls and growls in the caves beneath
The libraries and parlours of the mind.
If only one were rational, if only
At least one had the illusion of being so . . .
Nine o'clock. Still in bed. Warm, but how lonely!
He wept to think of all those single beds,
Those desperate night-long solitudes,
Those mental Salons full of nudes.
Shelley was great when he was twenty-four.
Eight thousand nights alone — minus, perhaps,
Six, or no! seven, certainly not more.
Five little bits of heaven
(Tum-de-rum, de-rum, de-rum),
Five little bits of Heaven and one that was a lapse,
High-priced disgust: it stopped him suddenly
In the midst of laughter and talk with a tingling down the
(Like infants' impoliteness, a terrible infant's brightness),
And he would shut his eyes so as not to see
His own hot blushes calling him a swine.
Atrocious memory! For memory should be
Of things secure and dead, being past,
Not living and disquieting. At last
He threw the nightmare of his blankets off.
Cloudy ammonia, camels in your bath:
The earth hath bubbles as the water hath:
He was not of them, too, too solidly
Always himself. What foam of kissing lips,
Pouting, parting with the ghost of the seven sips
One smacks for hiccoughs!
Pitiable to be

Quite so deplorably naked when one strips.
There was his scar, a panel of old rose
Slashed in the elegant buff of his trunk hose;
Adonis punctured by his amorous boar,
Permanent souvenir of the Great War.
One of God's jokes, typically good,
That wound of his. How perfect that he should
Have suffered it for — what?

II OH, the dear front page of the Times!
Chronicle of essential history:
Marriage, birth, and the sly mysteriousness
Of lovers' greetings, of lovers' meetings,
And dirty death, impartially paid
To courage and the old decayed.
But nobody had been born to-day,
Nobody married that he knew,
Nobody died and nobody even killed;
He felt a little aggrieved —
Nobody even killed.
But, to make up: "Tuesday, Colchester train:
Wanted Brown Eyes' address, with a view to meeting again."
Dear Brown Eyes, it had been nice of her
To talk so friendly to a lonely traveller!
Why is it nobody ever talks to me?
And now, here was a letter from Helen.
Better to open it rather than thus
Dwell in a long muse and maze
Over the scrawled address and the postmark,
Staring stupidly.
Love — was there no escape?

Was it always there, always there?
The same huge and dominant shape,
Like Windsor Castle leaning over the plain;
And the letter a vista cut through the musing forest,
At the end the old Round Tower,
Singing its refrain:
Here we are, here we are, here we are again!
The life so short, so vast love's science and art,
So many conditions of felicity.
"Darling, will you become a part
Of my poor physiology?
And, my beloved, may I have
The latchkey of your history?
And while this corpse is what it is
Dear, we must share geographies."
So many conditions of felicity.
And now time was a widening gulf and space,
A fixed between, and fate still kept them apart.
Her voice quite gone; distance had blurred her face.
The life so short, so vast love's science and art.
So many conditions — and yet, once,
Four whole days,
Four short days of perishing time,
They had fulfilled them all.
But that was long ago, ah! long ago,
Like the last horse bus, or the Christmas pantomime,
Or the Bells, oh, the Bells, of Edgar Allan Poe.

III "HELEN, your letter, proving, I suppose,
That you exist somewhere in space, who knows?
Somewhere in time, perhaps, arrives this morning,

Reminding me with a note of Lutheran warning
That faith’s the test, not works. Works! — any fool
Can do them if he tries to; but what school
Can teach one to credit the ridiculous,
The palpably non-existent? So with us,
Votaries of the copulative cult,
In this affair of love, quicumque vult,
Whoever would be saved, must love without
Adjunct of sense or reason, must not doubt
Although the deity be far removed,
Remote, invisible; who is not loved
Best by voluptuous works, but by the faith
That lives in absence and the body’s death.
I have no faith, and even in love remain
Agnostic. Are you here? The fact is plain,
Constated by the heavenly vision of you,
Maybe by the mouth’s warm touch; and that I love you,
I then most surely know, most painfully.
But now you’ve robbed the temple, leaving me
A poor invisibility to adore,
Now that, alas, you’re vanished, gone . . . no more;
You take my drift. I only ask your leave
To be a little unfaithful — not to you,
My dear, to whom I was and will be true,
But to your absence. Hence no cause to grieve;
For absence may be cheated of a kiss —
Lightly and laughing — with no prejudice
To the so longed-for presence, which some day
Will crown the presence of
Le Vostre J.
(As dear unhappy Troilus would say).”

IV

OH, the maggots, the maggots in his brains!
Words, words and words.
A birth of rhymes and the strangest,
The most unlikely superfœtations —
New deep thoughts begot by a jingle upon a pun,
New worlds glimpsed through the window of a word
That has ceased, somehow, to be opaque.
All the muses buzzing in his head.
Autobiography crystallised under his pen, thus:
“When I was young enough not to know youth,
I was a Faun whose loves were Byzantine
Among stiff trees. Before me naked Truth
Creaked on her intellectual legs, divine
In being inhuman, and was never caught
By all my speed; for she could outrun thought.
Now I am old enough to know I am young,
I chase more plastic beauties, but inspire
Life in their clay, purity in their dung
With the creative breath of my desire.
And utter truth is now made manifest
When on a certain sleeping face and breast
The moonlight dreams and silver chords are strung,
And a god’s hand touches the aching lyre.”
He read it through: a pretty, clinquant thing,
Like bright spontaneous bird-song in the spring,
Instinct with instinct, full of dewy freshness.
Yes, he had genius, if he chose to use it;
If he chose to — but it was too much trouble,
And he preferred reading. He lit his pipe,

Opened his book, plunged in and soon was drowned
In pleasant seas . . . to rise again and find
One o'clock struck and his unshaven face
Still like a record in a musical box,
And Auntie Loo miles off in Bloomsbury.

V

i.

THE Open Sesame of "Master John,"
And then the broad silk bosom of Aunt Loo.
"Dear John, this is a pleasure. How are you?"
"Well, thanks. Where's Uncle Will?" "Your uncle's gone
To Bath for his lumbago. He gets on
As well as anyone can hope to do
At his age — for you know he's seventy-two;
But still, he does his bit. He sits upon
The local Tribunal at home, and takes
Parties of wounded soldiers out in brakes
To see the country. And three times a week
He still goes up to business in the City;
And then, sometimes, at night he has to speak
In Village Halls for the War Aims Committee."

ii.

"Well, have you any news about the war?
What do they say in France?" "I daren't repeat
The things they say." "You see we've got some meat
For you, dear John. Really, I think before
To-day I've had no lamb this year. We score

By getting decent vegetables to eat,
Sent up from home. This is a good receipt:
The touch of garlic makes it. Have some more.
Poor Tom was wounded on the twenty-third;
Did you know that? And just to-day I heard
News from your uncle that his nephew James
Is dead — Matilda's eldest boy." "I knew
One of those boys, but I'm so bad at names.
Mine had red hair." "Oh, now, that must be Hugh."

iii.

"Colonel McGillicuddy came to dine
Quietly here, a night or two ago.
He's on the Staff and very much in the know
About all sorts of things. His special line
Is Tanks. He says we've got a new design
Of super-Tank, with big guns, that can go
(I think he said) at thirty miles or so
An hour. That ought to make them whine
For peace. He also said, if I remember,
That the war couldn't last beyond September,
Because the Germans' trucks were wearing out
And couldn't be replaced. I only hope
It's true. You know your uncle has no doubt
That the whole thing was plotted by the Pope . . ."
". . . Good-bye, dear John. We have had a nice talk.
You must soon come again. Good-bye, good-bye. . . ."
He tottered forth, full of the melancholy
That comes of surfeit, and began to walk
Slowly towards Oxford Street. The brazen sky

Burned overhead. Beneath his feet the stones
Were a grey incandescence, and his bones
Melted within him, and his bowels yearned.

VI THE crowd, the crowd — oh, he could almost cry
To see those myriad faces hurrying by,
And each a strong tower rooted in the past
On dark unknown foundations, each made fast
With locks nobody knew the secret of,
No key could open: save that perhaps love
Might push the bars half back and just peep in —
And see strange sights, it may be. But for him
They were locked donjons, every window bright
With beckoning mystery; and then, Good Night!
The lamp was out, they were passed, they were gone
For ever . . . ever. And one might have been
The hero or the friend long sought, and one
Was the loveliest face his eyes had ever seen,
(Vanished as soon) and he went lonely on.
Then in a sudden fearful vision he saw
The whole world spread before him — a vast sphere
Of seething atoms moving to one law:
“Be individual. Approach, draw near,
Yes, even touch: but never join, never be
Other than your own selves eternally.”
And there are tangents, tangents of thought that aim
Out through the gaps between the patterned stars
At some fantastic dream without a name
That like the moon shining through prison bars,
Visits the mind with madness. So they fly,
Those soaring tangents, till the first jet tires,

Failing, faltering half-way up the sky,
And breaks — poor slender fountain that aspires
Against the whole strength of the heavy earth
Within whose womb, darkly, it took birth.
Oh, how remote he walked along the street,
Jostling with other lumps of human meat!
He was so tired. The café doors invite.
Caverned within them, still lingers the night
In shadowy coolness, soothing the seared sight.
He sat there smoking, soulless and wholly crass,
Sunk to the eyes in the warm sodden morass
Of his own guts, wearily, wearily
Ruminating visions of mortality —
Memento Moris from the pink alcove,
Nightmare oppressiveness of profane love.
Cesspool within, and without him he could see
Nothing but mounds of flesh and harlotry.
Like a half-pricked bubble pendulous in space,
The buttered leatheriness of a Jew’s face
Looms through cigar-smoke; red and ghastly white,
Death’s-head women fascinate the sight.
It was the nightmare of a corpse. Dead, dead . . .
Oh, to wake up, to live again! he fled
From that foul place and from himself.

VII TWIN domes of the Alhambra,
Veiled tenderness of the sky above the Square:
He sat him down in the gardens, under the trees,
And in the dust, with the point of his umbrella,
Drew pictures of the crosses we have to bear.
The poor may starve, the sick have horrible pains —

But there are pale eyes even in the London planes.
Men may make war and money, mischief and love —
But about us are colours and the sky above.
Yes, here, where the golden domes ring clear,
And the planes patiently, hopefully renew
Their green refrain from year to year
To the dim spring burden of London's husky blue,
Here he could see the folly of it. How?
Confine a boundless possible within
The prison of an ineluctable Now?
Go slave to pain, woo forth original sin
Out of her lair — and all by a foolish Act?
Madness! But now, Wordsworth of Leicester Square,
He'd learnt his lesson, learnt by the mere fact
Of the place existing, so finely unaware
Of syphilis and the restless in and out
Of public lavatories, and evening shout
Of winners and disasters, races and war.
Troubles come thick enough. Why call for more
By suiting action to the divine Word?
His spleen was chronic, true; but he preferred
Its subtle agony to the brute force
That tugged the barbs of deep-anchored remorse.
The sunlight wrapped folds of soft golden silk
About him, and the air was warm as milk
Against his skin. Long sitting still had made
Cramped soreness such a pleasure, he was afraid
To shift his tortured limbs, lest he should mar
Life's evenness. London's noise from afar
Smoothed out its harshness to soothe his thoughts asleep,
Sound that made silence much more calm and deep.

The domes of gold, the leaves, emerald bright,
Were intense, piercing arrows of delight.
He did not think; thought was a shallow thing
To his deep sense of life, of mere being.
He looked at his hand, lying there on his knee,
The blue veins branching, the tendons cunningly
Dancing like jacks in a piano if he shook
A knot-boned finger. Only to look and look,
Till he knew it, each hair and every pore —
It seemed enough: what need of anything more?
Thought, a blind alley; action, which at best
Is cudgelling water that goes back to rest
As soon as you give over your violences.
No, wisdom culls the flowers of the five senses,
Savouring the secret sweetness they afford:
Instead of which he had a Medical Board
Next week, and they would pass him fit. Good Lord!
Well, let all pass.
But one must outdo fate,
Wear clothes more modish than the fashion, run
Faster than time, not merely stand and wait;
Do in a flash what cannot be undone
Through ten eternities. Predestinate?
So would God be — that is, if there were one:
General epidemic which spoils nobody's fun.
Action, action! Quickly rise and do
The most irreparable things; beget,
In one brief consummation of the will,
Remorse, reaction, wretchedness, regret.
Action! This was no time for sitting still.
He crushed his hat down over his eyes

And walked with a stamp to symbolise
Action, action — left, right, left;
Planting his feet with a slabby beat,
Taking strange Procrustean steps,
Lengthened, shortened to avoid
Touching the lines between the stones —
A thing which makes God so annoyed.
Action, action! First of all
He spent three pounds he couldn't afford
In buying a book he didn't want,
For the mere sake of having been
Irrevocably extravagant.
Then feeling very bold, he pressed
The bell of a chance house; it might
Disclose some New Arabian Night
Behind its grimy husk, who knows?
The seconds passed; all was dead.
Arrogantly he rang once more.
His heart thumped on sheer silence; but at last
There was a shuffling; something behind the door
Became approaching panic, and he fled.

VIII "MISERY," he said, "to have no chin,
Nothing but brains and sex and taste:
Only omissively to sin,
Weakly kind and cowardly chaste.
But when the war is over,
I will go to the East and plant
Tea and rubber, and make much money.
I will eat the black sweat of niggers
And flagellate them with whips.

I shall be enormously myself,
Incarnate Chin.”
The anguish of thinking ill of oneself
(St. Paul’s religion, poignant beyond words)
Turns ere you know it to faint minor thirds
Before the ritualistic pomps of the world —
The glass-grey silver of rivers, silken skies unfurled,
Urim and Thummim of dawn and sun-setting,
And the lawn sleeves of a great episcopal cloud,
Matins of song and vesperal murmuring,
Incense of night-long flowers and earth new-ploughed;
All beauties of sweetness and all that shine or sing.
Conscience is smoothed by beauty’s subtle fingers
Into voluptuousness, where nothing lingers
Of bitterness, saving a sorrow that is
Rather a languor than a sense of pain.
So, from the tunnel of St. Martin’s Lane
Sailing into the open Square, he felt
His self-reproach, his good resolutions melt
Into an ecstasy, gentle as balm,
Before the spire, etched black and white on the calm
Of a pale windless sky, St. Martin’s spire,
And the shadows sleeping beneath the portico
And the crowd hurrying, ceaselessly, to and fro.
Alas, the bleached and slender tower that aches
Upon the gauzy sky, where blueness breaks
Into sweet hoarseness, veiled with love and tender
As the dove’s voice alone in the woods: too slender,
Too finely pencilled — black and bleaching white
On smoky mist, too clear in the keen light
Of utmost summer: and oh! the lives that pass

In one swift stream of colour, too, too bright,
Too swift — and all the lives unknown,
Alone.
Alas. . . .
A truce to summer and beauty and the pain
Of being too consciously alive among
The things that pass and the things that remain,
(Oh, equal sadness!) the pain of being young.
Truce, truce. . . . Once again he fled; —
All his life, it seemed, was a flight; —
Fled and found
Sanctuary in a cinema house.
Huge faces loomed and burst,
Like bubbles in a black wind.
He shut his eyes on them and in a little
Slept; slept, while the pictures
Passed and returned, passed once more and returned.
And he, like God in the midst of the wheeling world,
Slept on; and when he woke it was eight o'clock.
Jenny? Revenge is sweet; he will have kept
Dear Jenny waiting.

IX

TALL straight poplars stand in a meadow;
The wind and sun caress them, dappling
The deep green grass with shine and shadow;
And a little apart one slender sapling
Sways in the wind and almost seems
Conscious of its own supple grace,
And shakes its twin-hued leaves and gleams

With silvery laughter, filling the place
Where it stands with a sudden flash of human
Beauty and grace; till from her tree
Steps forth the dryad, now turned woman,
And sways to meet him. It is she.
Food and drink, food and drink:
Olives as firm and sleek and green
As the breasts of a sea god’s daughter,
Swimming far down where the corpses sink
Through the dense shadowy water.
Silver and black on flank and back,
The glossy sardine mourns its head.
The red anchovy and the beetroot red,
With carrots, build a gorgeous stair —
Bronze, apoplexy and Venetian hair —
And the green pallor of the salad round
Sharpens their clarion sound.
De lady take hors d’œuvres? and de gentleman too?
Per due! Due! Echo answers: Du’ . . .
“So, Jenny, you’ve found another Perfect Man.”
“Perfect, perhaps; but not so sweet as you,
Not such a baby.” “Me? A baby. Why,
I am older than the rocks on which I sit. . . .”
Oh, how delightful, talking about oneself!
Golden wine, pale as a Tuscan primitive,
And wine’s strange taste, half loathsome, half delicious:
Come, my Lesbia, let us love and live.
What though the mind still think that one thing’s vicious
More than another? If the thought can give
This wine’s rich savour to our laughing kiss,
Let us preserve the Christian prejudice.

Oh, there are shynesses and silences,
Shynesses and silences!
But luckily God also gave us wine.
“Jenny, adorable—” (what draws the line
At the mere word “love”?) “has anyone the right
To look so lovely as you look to-night,
To have such eyes, such a helmet of bright hair?”
But candidly, he wondered, do I care?
He heard her voice and himself spoke,
But like faint light through a cloud of smoke,
There came, unreal and far away,
Mere sounds utterly empty — like the drone
Of prayers, crambe repetita, prayers and praise,
Long, long ago, in the old School Chapel days;
Senseless, but so intrusive on one’s own
Interior life one couldn’t even think . . .
O sweet, rare, perilous, retchy drink!
Another glass . . .

X

HOW cool is the moonless summer night, how sweet
After the noise and the dizzy choking heat!
The bloodless lamps look down upon their own
Green image in the polished roadway thrown,
And onward and out of sight the great road runs,
Smooth and dark as a river of calm bronze.
Freedom and widening space: his life expands,
Ready, it seems, to burst the iron bands
Of self, to fuse with other lives and be
Not one but the world, no longer “I” but “She.”

See, like the dolorous memory
Of happy times in misery,
An aged hansom fills the street
With the superannuated beat
Of hollow hoofs and bells that chime
Out of another quieter time.
“Good-night,” the last kiss, “and God bless you, my dear.”
So, she was gone, she who had been so near,
So breathing-warm — soft mouth and hands and hair —
A moment since. Had she been really there,
Close at his side, and had he kissed her? It seemed
Unlikely as something somebody else had dreamed
And talked about at breakfast, being a bore:
Improbable, unsubstantial, dim, yet more
Real than the rest of life; real as the blaze
Of a sudden-seen picture, as the lightning phrase
With which the poet-gods strangely create
Their brief bright world beyond the reach of fate.
Yet he could wonder now if he had kissed
Her or his own loved thoughts. Did she exist
Now she was history and safely stowed
Down in the past? There (with a conscious smile),
There let her rest eternal. And meanwhile,
Lamp-fringed towards meeting parallels, the road
Stretched out and out, and the old weary horse,
Come from the past, went jogging his homeward course
Uphill through time to some demoded place,
On ghostly hoofs back to the safe Has-Been: —
But fact returns insistent as remorse;
Uphill towards Hampstead, back to the year of grace
Nineteen hundred and seventeen.

XI BETWEEN the drawing of the blind
And being aware of yet another day . . .

The Cicadas and Other Poems

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THEATRE OF VARIETIES

Circle on circle the hanging gardens descend,
Sloping from upper darkness, each flower face
Open, turned to the light and laughter and life
Of the sun-like stage. And all the space between,
Like the hot fringes of a summer sky,
Is quick with trumpets, beats with the pulse of drums,
Athwart whose sultry thunders rise and fall
Flute fountains and the swallow flight of strings.
Music, the revelation and marvellous lie!
On the bright trestles tumblers, tamer of beasts,
Dancers and clowns affirm their fury of life.

“The World-Renowned Van Hogen Mogen in
The Master Mystery of Modern Times”.

He talks, he talks; more powerfully than even
Music his quick words hammer on men’s minds.
“Observe this hat, ladies and gentlemen;
Empty, observe, empty as the universe
Before the Head for which this Hat is made
Was or could think. Empty, observe, observe.”
The rabbit kicks; a bunch of paper flowers
Blooms in the limelight; paper tape unrolls,
Endless, a clue. “Ladies and gentlemen...”
Sharp, sharp on malleable minds his words
Hammer. The little Indian boy
Enters the basket. Bright, an Ethiop’s sword
Transfixes it and bleeding is withdrawn.
Death draws and petrifies the watching faces.

“Ladies and gentlemen”: the great Van Hogen Mogen
Smiles and is kind. A puddle of dark blood
Slowly expands. “The irremediable
Has been and is no more.”
Empty of all but blood, the basket gapes.
“Arise!” he calls, and blows his horn. “Arise!”
And bird-like from the highest gallery
The little Indian answers.
Shout upon shout, the hanging gardens reverberate.
Happy because the irremediable is healed,
Happy because they have seen the impossible,
Because they are freed from the dull daily law,
They shout, they shout. And great Van Hogen Mogen
Modestly bows, graciously smiles. The band
Confirms the lie with cymbals and bassoons,
The curtain falls. How quickly the walls recede,
How soon the petrified gargoyles re-become
Women and men! who fill the warm thick air
With rumour of their loves and discontents,
Not suffering even great Hogen Mogen —
Only begetter out of empty hats
Of rose and rabbit, raiser from the dead
To invade the sanctity of private life.

The Six Aerial Sisters Polpetini
Dive dangerously from trapeze to far
Trapeze, like stars, and know not how to fall.
For if they did and if, of his silver balls,
Sclopis, the juggler, dropped but one - but one
Of all the flying atoms which he builds
With his quick throwing into a solid arch

What panic then would shake the pale flower faces
Blooming so tranquilly in their hanging beds!
What a cold blast of fear! But patrons must not,
And since they must not, cannot be alarmed.
Hence Sclopis, hence (the proof is manifest)
The Six Aerial Ones infallibly
Function, and have done, and for ever will.

Professor Chubb's Automaton performs
Upon the viols and virginals, plays chess,
Ombre and loo, mistigri, tric-trac, pushpin,
Sings Lilliburlero in falsetto, answers
All questions put to it, and with its rubber feet
Noiselessly dances the antique heydiguy.
"Is it a man?" the terrible infant wonders.
And "no", they say, whose business it is
To say such infants nay. And "no" again
They shout when, after watching Dobbs and Debs
Step simultaneously through intricate dances,
Hammer the same tune with their rattling clogs
In faultless unison, the infant asks,
"And they, are they machines?"

Music, the revelation and marvellous lie,
Rebuilds in the minds of all a suave and curving
Kingdom of Heaven, where the saxophone
Affirms everlasting loves, the drums deny
Death, and where great Tenorio, when he sings,
Makes Picardy bloom only with perfumed roses,
And never a rotting corpse in all its earth.
Play, music, play! In God's bright limelight eyes

An angel walks and with one rolling glance
Blesses each hungry flower in the hanging gardens.
“Divine,” they cry, having no words by which
To call the nameless spade a spade, “Divine
Zenocrate!” There are dark mysteries
Whose name is beauty, strange revelations called
Love, and a gulph of pleasure and of awe
Where words fall vain and wingless in the dark;
The seen Ineffable, the felt but all-Unknown
And Undescribed, is God. “Divine, divine!”
The god-intoxicated shout goes up.
“Divine Zenocrate!”
“Father,” the terrible infant’s voice is shrill,
“Say, father, why does the lady wear no skirts?”
She wears no skirts; God’s eyes have never been brighter.
The face flowers open in her emanation.
She is suave and curving Kingdom of Heaven
Made visible, and in her sugared song
The ear finds paradise. Divine, divine!
Her belly is like a mound of wheat, her breasts
Are towers, her hair like a flock of goats.
Her foot is feat with diamond toes
And she - divine Zenocrate And she on legs of ruby goes.
The face flowers tremble in the rushing wind
Of her loud singing. A poet in the pit
Jots down in tears the words of her Siren song.
So every spirit as it is most pure,
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it the rarer body doth procure
To habit in, and is more fairly dight
With cheerful grace and amiable sight:

For of the soul the body form doth take;
And soul is form and doth the body make.
“Now, boys, together. All with me,” she cries
Through the long sweet suspense of dominant chords;
“For of the soul,” her voice is paradise,
“For of the soul the body form doth take;
And soul is form and doth the body make.”
Zenocrate, alone, alone divine!

God save the King. Music’s last practical joke
Still bugling in their ears of war and glory,
The folk emerge into the night.
Already next week’s bills are being posted:
Urim and Thummim, cross-talk comedians;
Ringpok, the Magian of Tibet;
The Two Bedelias; Ruby and Truby Dix;
Sam Foy and Troupe of Serio-Comic Cyclists...
Theatre of immemorial varieties,
Old mummery, but mummers never the same!
Twice nightly every night from now till doomsday
The hanging gardens, bedded with pale flower faces,
Young flowers in the old old gardens, will echo
With ever new, with ever new delight.

A HIGHWAY ROBBERY

It is a scene of murder - elegant, is it not?
You lutanists, who play to naked Queens,
As summer sleep or music under trees,
As luncheon on the grass - the grass on which
The country copulatives make sport, the pale
Grass with the tall tubed hats, the inky coats
And rosy, rosy among the funeral black
(Memento Vivere) a naked girl.
But here the sleepers bleed, the tumbling couples
Struggle, but not in love; the naked girl
Kneels at the feet of one who hesitates,
Voluptuously, between a rape and a murder.

Bandits angelical and you, rich corpses!
Truth is your sister, Goodness your spouse.
Towering skies lean down and tall, tall trees
Impose their pale arsenical benediction,
Making all seem exquisitely remote
And small and silent, like a village fair
Seen from the hill-top, far far below.
And yet they walk on the village green to whom
The fair is huge, tumultuous, formidable. Earth
Lies unremembered beneath the feet of dancers
Who, looking up, see not the sky, but towers
And bright invading domes and the fierce swings,
Scythe-like, reaping and ravaging the quiet.
And when night falls, the shuddering gas-flares scoop
Out of the topless dark a little vault

Of smoky gold, wherein the dancers still
Jig away, gods of a home-made universe.

CALIGULA OR THE TRIUMPH OF BEAUTY

Prow after prow, the floating ships
Bridge the blue gulph; the road is laid;
And Caesar on a piebald horse
Prances with all his cavalcade.

Drunk with their own quick blood they go.
The waves flash as with seeing eyes;
The tumbling cliff's mimic their speed,
And they have filled the vacant skies With waltzing Gods and Virtues, set
Aeolus roaring with their shout,
Made Vesta's temple on the cape
Spin like a circus roundabout.

The twined caduceus in his hand,
And having golden wings for spurs,
Young Caesar dressed as God looks on
And cheers his jolly mariners; Cheers as they heave from off the bridge
The trippers from the seaside town;
Laughs as they bang the bobbing heads
And shove them bubbling down to drown.

There sweeps a spiral curve of gesture
From the allegoric sky;
Beauty, like conscious lightning, runs
Through Jove's ribbed trunk and Juno's thigh, Slides down the flank of Mars and takes
From Virtue's rump a dizzier twist,
Licks round a cloud and whirling stoops
Earthwards to Caesar's lifted fist.

A burgess tumbles from the bridge
Headlong, and hurrying Beauty slips
From Caesar through the plunging legs
To the blue sea between the ships.

NERO AND SPORUS OR THE TRIUMPH OF ART

The Christians by whose muddy light
Dimly, dimly I divine
Your eyes and see your pallid beauty
Like a pale night-primrose shine, Colourless in the dark, revere
A God who slowly died that they
Might suffer the less, who bore the pain
Of all time in a single day,
The pain of all men in a single
Wounded body and sad heart.

The yellow marble, smooth as water,
Builds me a Golden House: and there
The marble Gods sleep in their strength
And the white Parian girls are fair.

Roses and waxen oleanders,
Green grape bunches and the flushed peach
All beautiful things I taste, touch, see,
Knowing, loving, becoming each.

The ship went down, my mother swam:
I wedded and myself was wed:
Old Claudius died of emperor-bane:
Old Seneca too slowly bled.

The wild beast and the victim both,
The ravisher and the wincing bride,
King of the world and a slave's slave,
Terror-haunted, deified — All these, sweet Sporus, I, an artist,
Am and, an artist, needs must be.

Is the tune Lydian? I have loved you.
And you have heard my symphony Of wailing voices and clashed brass,
With long shrill flutings that suspend
Pain o’er a muttering gulph of terrors,
And piercing blasts of joy that end, Gods, in what discord! — could I have
So hymned the Furies, were the bane
Still sap within the hemlock stalk,
The red swords virgin-bright again?

Or take a child’s love that is all
Worship, all tenderness and trust,
A dawn-web, dewy and fragile - take
And with the violence of lust Tear and defile it. You shall hear
The breaking dumbness and the thin
Harsh crying that is the very music
Of shame and the remorse of sin.

Christ died; the artist lives for all;
Loves, and his naked marbles stand
Pure as a column on the sky,
Whose lips, whose breasts, whose thighs demand Not our humiliation, not
The shuddering of an after-shame;
And of his agonies men know
Only the beauty born of them.

Christ died, but living Nero turns
Your mute remorse to song; he gives
To idiot Fate eyes like a lover’s,
And while his music plays, God lives.

NERO AND SPORUS

II

Dark stirrings in the perfumed air
Touch your cheeks, lift your hair.
With softer fingers I caress,
Sporus, all your loveliness.
Round as a fruit, tree-tangled shines
The moon; and fire-flies in the vines,
Like stars in a delirious sky,
Gleam and go out. Unceasingly
The fountains fall, the nightingales
Sing. But time flows and love avails
Nothing. The Christians smoulder red;
Their brave blue-hearted flames are dead;
And you, sweet Sporus, you and I
We too must die, we too must die.

MYTHOLOGICAL INCIDENT

Through the pale skeleton of woods
Orion walks. The North Wind lays
Its cold lips to the twin steel flutes
That are his gun, and plays.

Knee-deep he goes, where penny-wiser
Than all his kind who steal and hoard,
Year after year some sylvan miser
His copper wealth has stored.

The Queen of Love and Beauty lays
In neighbouring beechen aisles her baits
Bread-crumbs and the golden maize.
Patiently she waits.

And when the unwary pheasant comes
To fill his painted maw with crumbs,
Accurately the sporting Queen
Takes aim. The bird has been.

Secure, Orion walks her way.
The Cyprian loads, presents, makes fire.
He falls. ’Tis Venus all entire
Attached to her recumbent prey.

FEMMES DAMNÉES

(from the French of Charles Baudelaire) The lamps had languisht and their light was pale;
On cushions deep Hippolyta reclined.
Those potent kisses that had torn the veil
From her young candour filled her dreaming mind.

With tempest-troubled eyes she sought the blue
Heaven of her innocence, how far away!
Like some sad traveller, who turns to view
The dim horizons passed at dawn of day.

Tears and the muffled light of weary eyes,
The stupor and the dull voluptuous trance,
Limp arms, like weapons dropped by one who flies
All served her fragile beauty to enhance.

Calm at her feet and joyful, Delphine lay
And gazed at her with ardent eyes and bright,
Like some strong beast that, having mauled its prey,
Draws back to mark the imprint of its bite.

Strong and yet bowed, superbly on her knees,
She snuffed her triumph, on that frailer grace
Poring voluptuously, as though to seize
The signs of thanks upon the other’s face.

Gazing, she sought in her pale victim’s eye
The speechless canticle that pleasure sings,
The infinite gratitude that, like a sigh,
Mounts slowly from the spirit’s deepest springs.

“Now, now you understand (for love like ours
Is proof enough) that ‘twere a sin to throw
The sacred holocaust of your first flowers
To those whose breath might parch them as they blow.

“Light falls my kiss, as the ephemeral wing
That scarcely stirs the shining of a lake.
What ruinous pain your lover’s kiss would bring!
A plough that leaves a furrow in its wake.

“Over you, like a herd of ponderous kine,
Man’s love will pass and his caresses fall
Like trampling hooves. Then turn your face to mine;
Turn, oh my heart, my half of me, my all!

“Turn, turn, that I may see their starry lights,
Your eyes of azure; turn. For one dear glance
I will reveal love’s most obscure delights,
And you shall drowse in pleasure’s endless trance.”

“Not thankless, nor repentant in the least
Is your Hippolyta.” She raised her head.
“But one who from some grim nocturnal feast
Returns at dawn feels less disquieted.

“I bear a weight of terrors, and dark hosts
Of phantoms haunt my steps and seem to lead.
I walk, compelled, behind these beckoning ghosts
Down sliding roads and under skies that bleed.

“Is ours so strange an act, so full of shame?
Explain the terrors that disturb my bliss.

When you say, Love, I tremble at the name;
And yet my mouth is thirsty for your kiss.

“Ah, look not so, dear sister, look not so!
You whom I love, even though that love should be
A snare for my undoing, even though
Loving I am lost for all eternity.”

Delphine looked up, and fate was in her eye.
From the god’s tripod and beneath his spell,
Shaking her tragic locks, she made reply:
“Who in love’s presence dares to speak of hell?

“Thinker of useless thoughts, let him be cursed,
Who in his folly, venturing to vex
A question answerless and barren, first
With wrong and right involved the things of sex!

“He who in mystical accord conjoins
Shadow with heat, dusk with the noon’s high fire,
Shall never warm the palsy of his loins
At that red sun which mortals call desire.

“Go, seek some lubber groom’s deflowering lust;
Take him your heart and leave me here despised!
Go - and bring back, all horror and disgust,
The livid breasts man’s love has stigmatized.

“One may not serve two masters here below.”
But the child answered: “I am torn apart,
I feel my inmost being rent, as though
A gulf had yawned - the gulf that is my heart.

“Naught may this monster’s desperate thirst assuage,
As fire ’tis hot, as space itself profound
Naught stay the Fury from her quenchless rage,
Who with her torch explores its bleeding wound.

“Curtain the world away and let us try
If lassitude will bring the boon of rest.
In your deep bosom I would sink and die,
Would find the grave’s fresh coolness on your breast.”

Hence, lamentable victims, get you hence!
Hell yawns beneath, your road is straight and steep.
Where all the crimes receive their recompense
Wind-whipped and seething in the lowest deep With a huge roaring as of storms and fires,
Go down, mad phantoms, doomed to seek in vain
The ne’er-won goal of unassuaged desires,
And in your pleasures find eternal pain!

Sunless your caverns are; the fever damps
That filter in through every crannied vent
Break out with marsh-fire into sudden lamps
And steep your bodies with their frightful scent.

The barrenness of pleasures harsh and stale
Makes mad your thirst and parches up your skin;
And like an old flag volleying in the gale,
Your whole flesh shudders in the blasts of sin.

Far from your kind, outlawed and reprobate,
Go, prowl like wolves through desert worlds apart!

Disordered souls, fashion your own dark fate,
And flee the god you carry in your heart.

ARABIA INFELIX

Under a ceiling of cobalt
And mirrored by as void a blue,
Wet only with the wind-blown salt,
The Arabian land implores a dew.

Parched, parched are the hills, and dumb
That thundering voice of the ravine;
Round the dead springs the birds are seen
No more, no more at evening come (Like lovely thoughts to one who dwells
In quiet, like enchanting hopes)
The leopards and the shy gazelles
And the light-footed antelopes.

Death starts at every rattling gust
That in the withered torrent's bed
Whirls up a phantom of grey dust
And, dying, lets the ghost fall dead.

Dust in a dance may seem to live;
But laid, not blown, it brings to birth.
Not wind, but only rain can give
Life, and to a patient earth.

Hot wind from this Arabian land
Chases the clouds, withholds the rain.
No footstep prints the restless sand
Wherein who sows, he sows in vain.

If there were water, if there were
But a shower, a little fountain springing,
How rich would be the perfumed air,

And the green woods with shade and singing Bright hills, but by the sun accursed,
Peaceful, but with the peace of hell —
Once on these barren slopes there fell
A plague more violent than thirst: Anguish to kill inveterate pain
And mortal slaking of desire;
Dew, and a long-awaited rain —
A dew of blood, a rain of fire.

Into a vacant sky the moist
Gray pledge of spring and coming leaves
Swam, and the thirsty hills rejoiced,
All golden with their future sheaves.

Flower-phantoms in the parching air
Nodded, and trees ungrown were bowed;
With love like madness, like despair,
The mountain yearned towards the cloud.

And she in silence slowly came,
Oh! to transfigure, to renew,
Came laden with a gift of dew,
But with it dropped the lightning’s flame; A flame that rent the crags apart,
But rending made a road between
For water to the mountain’s heart,
That left a scar, but left it green.

Faithless the cloud and fugitive;
An empty heaven nor burns, nor wets;
At peace, the barren land regrets
Those agonies that made it live.

THE MOOR

Champion of souls and holiness, upholder
Of all the virtues, father of the Church,
Honest, honest, honest Iago! how
Crusadingly, with what indignant zeal
(Ora pro nobis), caracoling on
Your high horse and emblazoned, gules on white,
Did you ride forth (Oh, pray for us), ride forth
Against the dark-skinned hosts of evil, ride,
Martyr and saint, against those paynim hosts, Having for shield all Sinai, and for sword,
To smite rebellion and avenge the Lord,
The sharp, the shining certainty of faith!
(*Ora pro nobis*) point us out the Way.

"Lily bright and stinking mud:
Fair is fair and foul is ill.
With her, on her, what you will.
This fire must be put out with blood,
Put out with blood."

But for a glint, a hint of questing eyes,
Invisible, darkness through darkness goes
On feet that even in their victim's dreaming
Wake not an echo.
Lost, he is lost; and yet thus wholly in darkness
Melted, the Moor is more Othello than when,
Green-glittering, the sharp Venetian day
Revealed him armed and kingly and commanding
Captain of men.

How still she lies, this naked Desdemona,
All but a child and sleeping and alone,
How still and white!
Whose breasts, whose arms, the very trustfulness
Of her closed eyelids and unhurried breath
More than a philtre maddeningly invite
Lust and those hands, those huge dark hands, and death.

“For oh, the lily and the mud!
Fair is still fair and foulness, ill.
With her, on her, what you will.
This fire must be put out with blood.”

Well, now the fire is out, and the light too;
All, all put out. In Desdemona’s place
Lies now a carrion. That fixed grimace
Of lidless eyes and starting tongue
Derides his foolishness. Cover her face;
This thing but now was beautiful and young.
Honest Iago’s Christian work is over;
Short, short the parleying at the Golden Gate.
“For I am one who made the Night ashamed
Of his own essence, that his dark was dark;
One who with good St. Jerome’s filthy tongue
Tainted desire and taught the Moor to scorn
His love’s pale body, and because she had
Lain gladly in his arms, to call her whore
And strangle her for whoredom.” So he spoke,
And with majestic motion heaven’s high door
Rolled musically apart its burnished vans
To grant him entrance.

Turning back meanwhile
From outer darkness, Othello and his bride
Perceive the globe of heaven like one small lamp
Burning alone at midnight in the abyss
Of some cathedral cavern; pause, and then
With face once more averted, hand in hand,
Explore the unseen treasures of the dark.

NOBLEST ROMANS

Columns and unageing fountains,
Jets of frost and living foam —
Let them leap from seven mountains,
The seven hills of Rome.

Flanked by arch and echoing arch,
Let the streets in triumph go;
Bid the aqueducts to march
Tireless through the plain below.

Column-high in the blue air,
Let the marble Caesars stand;
Let the gods, who living were
Romans, lift a golden hand.

Many, but each alone, a crowd,
Yet of Romans, throng their shrine;
Worshippers themselves divine,
Gods to gods superbly bowed; Romans bowed to shapes that they,
Sculptors of the mind, set free;
Supplicant that they may be
Peers of those to whom they pray.

ORION

Tree-tangled still, autumn Orion climbs
Up from among the North Wind’s shuddering emblems
Into the torrent void
And dark abstraction of invisible power,
The heart and boreal substance of the night.

Pleione flees before him, and behind,
Still sunken, but prophetically near,
Death in the Scorpion hunts him up the sky
And round the vault of time, round the slow-curving year,
Follows unescapably
And to the end, aye, and beyond the end
Will follow, follow; for of all the gods
Death only cannot die.

The rest are mortal. And how many lie
Already with their creatures’ ancient dust!
Dead even in us who live - or hardly live,
Since of our hearts impiety has made, Not tombs indeed (for they are holy; tombs
Secretly live with everlasting Death’s
Dark and mysterious life),
But curious shops and learned lumber rooms
Of bone and stone and every mummied thing,
Where Death himself his sacred sting
Forgets (how studiously forgotten
Amid the irrelevant to and fro of feet!),
Where by the peeping and the chattering,
The loud forgetfulness seemingly slain,
He lies with all the rest - and yet we know,

In secret yet we know,
Death is not dead, not dead but only sleeping,
And soon will rise again.

Not so the rest. Only the Scorpion burns
In our unpeopled heaven of empty names
And insubstantial echoes; only Death
Still claims our prayers, and still to those who pray
Returns his own dark blood and quickening breath,
Returns the ominous mystery of fear.
Where are the gods of dancing and desire?
Anger and joy, laughter and tears and wine,
Those other mysteries of fire and flame,
Those more divine than Death's — ah, where are they?
Only a ghost between the shuddering trees,
Only a name and ghostly numbers climb;
And where a god pursued and fled,
Only a ghostly time, a ghostly place
Attends on other ghostly times and places.
Orion and the rest are dead.

And yet to-night, here in the exulting wind,
Amid the enormous laughters of a soul
At once the world's and mine,
God-like Orion and all his brother stars
Shine as with living eyes,
With eyes that glance a recognition, glance a sign
Across the quickened dark, across the gulphs
That separate no more,
But, like wide seas that yet bring home the freight
Of man's mad yearning for a further shore,

Join with a living touch, unbrokenly,
Life to mysterious life,
The Hunter’s alien essence to my own.

Orion lives; yet I who know him living,
Elsewhere and otherwise
Know him for dead, and dead beyond all hope,
For ’tis the infertile and unquickening death
Of measured places and recorded times,
The death of names and numbers that he dies.
Only the phantom of Orion climbs.
Put out the eyes, put out the living eyes
And look elsewhere; yes, look and think and be
Elsewhere and otherwise.
But *here* and *thus* are also in their right,
Are in their right divine to send this wind of laughter
Rushing through the cloudless dark
And through my being; have a right divine
And imprescriptible now to reveal
The starry god, the right to make me feel,
As even now, as even now I feel,
His living presence near me in the night.

A curved and figured glass hangs between light and light,
Between the glow within us and the glow
Of what mysterious sun without?
Vast over earth and sky, or focussed burningly
Upon the tender quick, our spirits throw
Each way their images - each way the forms
O! shall it be of beauty, shall it be
The naked skeletons of doubt?

Or else, symbolically dark, the cloudy forms
Of mystery, or dark (but dark with death)
Shapes of sad knowledge and defiling hate?
“Lighten our darkness, Lord.” With what pure faith,
What confident hope our fathers once implored
The Light! But ’tis the shitten Lord of Flies
Who with his loathsome bounties now fulfils
On us their prayers. Our fathers prayed for light.
Through windows at their supplication scoured
Bare of the sacred blazons, but instead
Daubed with the dung-god’s filth, all living eyes,
Whether of stars or men, look merely dead;
While on the vaulted crystal of the night
Our guttering souls project,
Not the Wild Huntsman, not the Heavenly Hosts,
But only times and places, only names and ghosts.

And yet, for all the learned Lord of Dung,
The choice is ours, the choice is always ours,
To see or not to see the living powers
That move behind the numbered points and times.
The Fly King rules; but still the choice remains
With us his subjects, we are free, are free
To love our fate or loathe it; to rejoice
Or weep or wearily accept; are free,
For all the scouring of our souls, for all
The miring of their crystal, free to give
Even to an empty sky, to vacant names,
Or not to give, our worship; free to turn
Lifewards, within, without, to what transcends
The squalor of our personal ends and aims,

Or not to turn; yes, free to die or live;
Free to be thus and passionately here,
Or otherwise and otherwhere;
Free, in a word, to learn or not to learn
The art to think and musically do
And feel and be, the never more than now
Difficult art harmoniously to live
All poetry - the midnight of Macbeth
And ripe Odysseus and the undying light
Of Gemma's star and Cleopatra's death
And Falstaff in his cups; the art to live
That discipline of flowers, that solemn dance
Of sliding weights and harnessed powers
Which is a picture; or to live the grave
And stoical recession, row on row,
Of equal columns, live the passionate leaping,
The mutual yearning, meeting, marrying,
And then the flame-still rapture, the fierce trance
Of consummation in the Gothic night.

The choice is always ours. Then, let me choose
The longest art, the hard Promethean way
Cherishingly to tend and feed and fan
That inward fire, whose small precarious flame,
Kindled or quenched, creates
The noble or the ignoble men we are,
The worlds we live in and the very fates,
Our bright or muddy star.

Up from among the emblems of the wind
Into its heart of power,

The Huntsman climbs, and all his living stars
Are bright, and all are mine.

MEDITATION

What now caresses you, a year ago
Bent to the wind that sends a travelling wave
Almost of silver through the silky com
Westward of Calgary; or two weeks since
Bleated in Gloster market, lowed at Thame,
And slowly bled to give my lips desire;
Or in the teeming darkness, fathoms down,
Hung, one of millions, poised between the ooze
And the wind's foamy skirts; or feathered flew,
Or deathwards ran before the following gun.
And all day long, knee deep in the wet grass,
The piebald cows of Edam chewed and chewed,
That what was cheese might pulse thus feverishly;
And now, prophetically, even now
They ponder in their ruminating jaws
My future body, which in Tuscan fields
Yet grows, yet grunts among the acorns, yet
Is salt and iron, water and touchless air,
Is only numbers variously moved,
Is nothing, yet will love your nothingness.
Vast forms of dust, tawny and tall and vague,
March through the desert, creatures of the wind.
Wind, blowing whither, blowing whence, who knows?
Wind was the soul that raised them from the sand,
Moved and sustained their movement, and at last
Abating, let them fall in separate grains
Slowly to earth and left an empty sky.

SEPTEMBER

Spring is past and over these many days,
Spring and summer. The leaves of September droop,
Yellowing and all but dead on the patient trees.
Nor is there any hope in me. I walk
Slowly homewards. Night is empty and dark
Behind my eyes as it is dark without
And empty round about me and over me.
Spring is past and over these many days,
But, looking up, suddenly I see
Leaves in the upthrown light of a street lamp shining,
Clear and luminous, young and so transparent,
They seem but the coloured foam of air, green fire,
No more than the scarce-embodied thoughts of leaves.
And it is spring within that circle of light.
Oh, magical brightness! The old leaves are made new.
In the mind, too, some coloured accident
Of beauty revives and makes all young again,
A chance light shines and suddenly it is spring.

SEASONS

Blood of the world, time stanchless flows;
The wound is mortal and is mine.
I act, but not to my design,
Choose, but ’twas ever fate that chose,
Would flee, but there are doors that close.
Winter has set its muddy sign
Without me and within. The rose
Dies also in my heart and no stars shine.

But nightingales call back the sun;
The doors are down and I can run,
Can laugh, for destiny is dead.
All springs are hoarded in the flowers;
Quick flow the intoxicating hours,
For wine as well as blood is red.

STORM AT NIGHT

Oh, how aquarium-still, how brooding-warm
This paradise! How peacefully in the womb
Of war itself, and at the heart of storm
How safely - safely a captive, in a tomb
I lie and, listening to the wild assault,
The pause and once-more fury of the gale,
Feel through the cracks of my sepulchral vault
The fine-drawn probe of air, and watch the pale
Unearthly lightnings leaps across the sky
Like sudden sperm and die and leap again.
The thunder calls and every spasm of fire
Beckons, a signal, to that old desire
In calm for tempest and at ease for pain.
Dreaming of strength and courage, here I lie.

MEDITERRANEAN

This tideless sapphire uniformly brims
Its jewelled circle of Tyrrhenian shore.
No vapours tarnish, not a cloud bedims,
And time descending only more and more
Makes rich, makes deep the unretiring gem.
And yet for me who look on it, how wide
The world of mud to which my thoughts condemn
This loathing vision of a sunken tide!
The ebb is mine. Life to its lowest neap
Withdrawn reveals that black and hideous shoal
Where I lie stranded. Oh deliver me
From this defiling death! Moon of the soul,
Call back the tide that ran so strong and deep,
Call back the shining jewel of the sea.

TIDE

And if the tide should be for ever low,
The silted channels turned to ooze and mire?
And this grey delta - if it still should grow,
Bank after bank, and still the sea retire?
Retire beyond the halcyon hopes of noon
And silver night, the thread of wind and wave,
Past all the dark compulsion of the moon,
Past resurrection, past her power to save?
There is a firm consenting to disaster,
Proud resignation to accepted pain.
Pain quickens him who makes himself its master,
And quickening battle crowns both loss and gain.
But to this silting of the soul, who gives
Consent is no more man, no longer lives.

FÊTE NATIONALE

These lamps, like some miraculous gift of rain,
Evoke an April from the dusty weight
Of leaves that hang resigned and know their fate,
Expecting autumn: they are young again.
And young these dancers underneath the trees
Who pass and pass, how many all at one!
Like things of wax beneath an Indian sun,
Melted in music. Oh, to be one of these,
Of these the born inhabitants of earth,
Each other’s joyful captives! Oh, to be
Safe home from those far islands, where the free,
Whose exile buys the honour of their birth,
Hark back across the liberating sea
To the lost continent of tears and mirth!

MIDSUMMER DAY

This day was midsummer, the longest tarrying
Time makes between two sleeps. What have I done
With this longest of so few days, how spent,
Dear God, the golden, golden gift of sun?
Virginal, when I rose, the morning lay
Ready for beauty’s rape, for wisdom’s marrying.
I wrote: only an inky spider went,
Smear after smear, across the unsullied day.
If there were other places, if there were
But other days than this longest of few;
If one had courage, did one dare to do
That which alone might kill what now defaces
This the one place of all the countless places,
This only day when one will never dare!

AUTUMN STILLNESS

Gray is the air and silent as the sea’s
Abysmal calm. One solitary bird
Calls from far time and other boughs than these;
But the remembering silence sleeps, unstirred.
All seems achieved, dried up the source of things.
Or is the world too weary to invite
Winters unborn and bid the latent springs
Break out in flower, in fragrance, voice and light?
June once was here; in this autumnal amber
Lingers intangible the small clear trace
Of his ephemeral flight, for ever still.
No more to hope, but only to remember:
Let there be silence round the slumbering will,
And if time beckons, turn away your face.

APENNINE

In this parcht Apennine the sheep-bells must
Serve with their tinkling for the liquid lapse
And coolness, even in the noonday dust,
Of absent streams - more liquidly, perhaps,
Than water’s self, if water were to gush
Between the dry ribs of these bleaching hills:
For in the womb of every pregnant hush
A music sleeps; and when some phantom tills,
Arabia’s punctual blossoming discloses
Hues more than earthly, iris and evening gold.
But vain those fountains, vain the ethereal roses!
There breathes no fragrance but of roots and mould,
No quenching flows but in those humbler streams
Whose source is earth, is earth and not our dreams.

ENDING OF 1930 VERSION: For of all silence the most pregnant hush
Is music, and the waste that Fancy tills
Breeds heavenly flowers... but flowers for our delight
Sometimes too pure, of too celestial birth.
For in rich Fancy’s and in art’s despite
There blows no fragrance but of alien earth,
No quenching flows but in the humble streams
Whose source is earth, is earth, and not our dreams.

ALMERIA

Winds have no moving emblems here, but scour
A vacant darkness, an untempered light;
No branches bend, never a tortured flower
Shudders, root-weary, on the verge of flight;
Winged future, withered past, no seeds nor leaves
Attest those swift invisible feet: they run
Free through a naked land, whose breast receives
All the fierce ardour of a naked sun.
You have the Light for lover. Fortunate Earth!
Conceive the fruit of his divine desire.
But the dry dust is all she brings to birth,
That child of clay by even celestial fire.
Then come, soft rain and tender clouds, abate
This shining love that has the force of hate.

PAGAN YEAR

Heaven’s eyes are shut, but cannot wholly kill
The colours of the winter world. Suppressed
And yet how strong, shining in secret, still
Cinder and brooding sable and plum attest
The absent Light. He with his longed rebirth
Unclots the world to an airy dream of leaves;
Shines on; the thin dream ripens into earth,
And the huge elms hang dark above the sheaves.
Magical autumn! All the woods are foxes,
Dozing outstretched in the almost silvery sun.
Oh, bright sad woods and melancholy sky,
Is there no cure for beauty but to run
Yet faster as faster flee hours, flowers and doxies
And dying music, until we also die?

ARMOUR

Crabs in their shells, because they cannot play
Don Juan or the flageolet, are safe;
And every stout Sir Roger, stout Sir Ralph,
Every Black Prince, Bayard and Bourchier may
(Their ribs and rumps hermetically canned)
Securely laugh at arrow, sword and mace.
But in their polished and annealed embrace,
Beneath their iron kiss and iron hand,
The soft defenceless lips and flowery breast,
The tender, tender belly of love receive
From helm and clasping cop and urgent greave
So deep a bruise that, mortally possessed,
Love dies. Only the vulnerable will
Holds what it takes and, holding, does not kill.

SHEEP

Seeing a country churchyard, when the grey
Monuments walked, I with a second glance,
Doubting, postponed the apparent judgment day
To watch instead the random slow advance
Across the down of a hundred nibbling sheep.
And yet these tombs, half fancied and half seen
In the dim world between waking and sleep,
These headstones browsing on their plot of green,
Were sheep indeed and emblems of all life.
For man to dust, dust turns to grass, and grass
Grows wool and feeds on grass. The butcher’s knife
Works magic, and the ephemeral sheep forms pass
Through swift tombs and through silent tombs, until
Once more God’s acre feeds across the hill.

BLACK COUNTRY

Count yourselves happy that you are not rewarded
For your deserts with brimstone from on high.
Mean, mean among the slag-heaps, mean and sordid,
Your smoking town proclaims its blasphemy.
And yet, too merciful, the offended light
Forgives not only, but with vesperal gold
And roses of the sun repays your spite.
Shining transfigured in the Northern cold,
Instead of chimneys rise Italian towers,
While temples at their feet, not factories, shine;
And like the yet unbodied dream of flowers
Hangs the flushed smoke, through which these eyes divine
Enormous gestures of the gods' fierce wooing,
The nacreous flights, the limbs of bronze pursuing.
There is no future, there is no more past,
No roots nor fruits, but momentary flowers.
Lie still, only lie still and night will last,
Silent and dark, not for a space of hours,
But everlastingly. Let me forget
All but your perfume, every night but this,
The shame, the fruitless weeping, the regret.
Only lie still: this faint and quiet bliss
Shall flower upon the brink of sleep and spread,
Till there is nothing else but you and I
Clasped in a timeless silence. But like one
Who, doomed to die, at morning will be dead,
I know, though night seem dateless, that the sky
Must brighten soon before to-morrow's sun.

THE PERGOLA

Pillars, round which the wooden serpents clamber
Towards their own leaves, support the emerald shade,
The eyes, the amethysts, the clustered amber,
That weave the ceiling of this colonnade.
How many thousand Tyrrhenian Septembers
Muskily ripen in a sun-warmed skin!
With all my autumns. For this tongue remembers
Grapes that made sweet a sick child’s medicine,
Grapes of the South and of the submarine
Dusk of an English hot-house. But when night
Lids every shining glance of sky between
Leaves now extinct, groping, bereft of sight,
I reach for grapes, but from an inward vine
Pluck sea-cold nipples, still bedewed with brine.

LINES

All day the wheels turn;
All day long the roaring of wheels, the rasping
Weave their imprisoning lattices of noise,
And hammers, hammers in the substance of the world
Carve out another cavernous world, a narrow
Sepulchre, and seal it from the sky,
Lord, with how great a stone!

Only a little beyond the factory walls
Silence is a flawless bowl of crystal,
Brimming, brimming with who can say beforehand,
Who can, returning, even remember what
Beautiful secret. Only a little beyond
These hateful walls the birds among the branches
Secretly come and go.

Time also sleeps, but on the darkening threshold
Of each eternity pauses a moment
And still is time, but empty; still is time,
And therefore knows his emptiness.
The walls are crumbled, the stone is rolled away
(Is there one within? is there a resurrection?);
Stars through the ruined lattices bear witness,
Bear further witness to the further silence,
Witness to the night.

Night is pregnant; silence, alive with voices;
The fullness of the tomb is but corruption;
Only the lifted stone invites the messengers,
Only the empty sepulchre, and only

Now and then, evokes
That from which from the sepulchre arises.

Shy strangers, visiting feet came softly treading,
Came very softly sometimes in the darkness,
Oh, of what far nights and distant tombs!
Came suddenly into the empty time,
Came secretly and lingered secretly,
And through the unsealed door
Beckoned me on to follow.

I have made time empty again; empty, it invites them;
They do not come; have rolled away the stone,
But lie unrisen, lie unvisited.
Merciful God, bid them to come again!
Sometimes in winter
Sea-birds follow the plough,
And the bare field is all alive with wings,
With their white wings and unafraid alightings,
Sometimes in winter. And will they come again?

THE CICADAS

Sightless, I breathe and touch; this night of pines
Is needly, resinous and rough with bark.
Through every crevice in the tangible dark
The moonlessness above it all but shines.

Limp hangs the leafy sky; never a breeze
Stirs, nor a foot in all this sleeping ground;
And there is silence underneath the trees
The living silence of continuous sound.

For like inveterate remorse, like shrill
Delirium throbbing in the fevered brain,
An unseen people of cicadas fill
Night with their one harsh note, again, again.

Again, again, with what insensate zest!
What fury of persistence, hour by hour!
Filled with what devil that denies them rest,
Drunk with what source of pleasure and of power!

Life is their madness, life that all night long
Bids them to sing and sing, they know not why;
Mad cause and senseless burden of their song;
For life commands, and Life! is all their cry.

I hear them sing, who in the double night
Of clouds and branches fancied that I went
Through my own spirit’s dark discouragement,
Deprived of inward as of outward sight: Who, seeking, even as here in the wild wood,
A lamp to beckon through my tangled fate,

Found only darkness and, disconsolate,
Mourned the lost purpose and the vanished good.

Now in my empty heart the crickets' shout
Re-echoing denies and still denies
With stubborn folly all my learned doubt,
In madness more than I in reason wise.

Life, life! The word is magical. They sing,
And in my darkened soul the great sun shines;
My fancy blossoms with remembered spring,
And all my autumns ripen on the vines.

Life! and each knuckle of the fig-tree's pale
Dead skeleton breaks out with emerald fire.
Life! and the tulips blow, the nightingale
Calls back the rose, calls back the old desire: And old desire that is for ever new,
Desire, life's earliest and latest birth,
Life's instrument to suffer and to do,
Springs with the roses from the teeming earth; Desire that from the world's bright body strips
Deforming time and makes each kiss the first;
That gives to hearts, to satiated lips
The endless bounty of to-morrow's thirst.

Time passes, and the watery moonrise peers
Between the tree-trunks. But no outer light
Tempers the chances of our groping years,
No moon beyond our labyrinthine night.

Clueless we go; but I have heard thy voice,
Divine Unreason! harping in the leaves,

And grieve no more; for wisdom never grieves,
And thou hast taught me wisdom; I rejoice.

THE YELLOW MUSTARD

Cabined beneath low vaults of cloud,
Sultry and still, the fields do lie,
Like one wrapt living in his shroud,
Who stifles silently.

Stripped of all beauty not their own
The gulfs of shade, the golden bloom
Grey mountain-heaps of slag and stone
Wall in the silent tomb.

I, through this emblem of a mind
Dark with repinings, slowly went,
Its captive, and myself confined
In like discouragement.

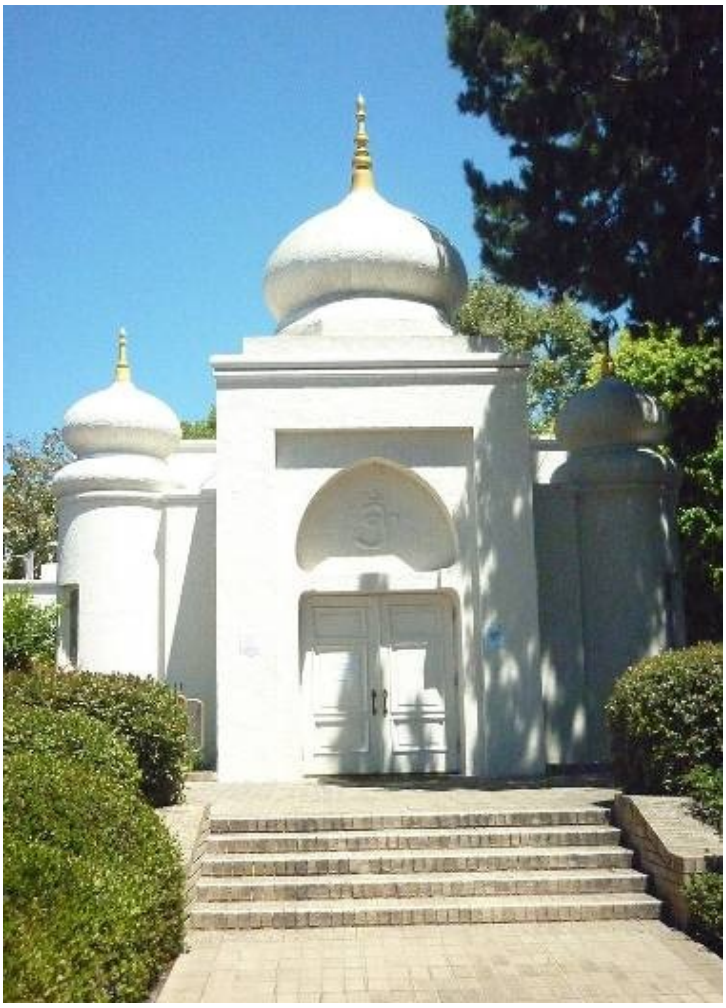
When, at a winding of the way,
A sudden glory met my eye,
As though a single, conquering ray
Had rent the cloudy sky And touched, transfiguringly bright
In that dull plain, one luminous field;
And there the miracle of light
Lay goldenly revealed.

And yet the reasons for despair
Hung dark, without one rift of blue;
No loophole to the living air
Had let the glory through.

In their own soil those acres found
The sunlight of a flowering weed;

For still there sleeps in every ground
Some grain of mustard seed.

The Poems



The temple at the headquarters of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood — from 1939 until his death in 1963, Huxley had an extensive association with the Vedanta Society of Southern California, founded and headed by Swami Prabhavananda. Together with Gerald Heard, Christopher Isherwood and other followers he was initiated by the Swami and was taught meditation and spiritual practices.

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Selected Non-Fiction

Huxley's last home and where he died was located at the top of Mulholland Highway, beneath the first "O" in the Hollywood sign.

The Olive Tree and Other Essays

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NOTE

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The essays entitled ‘Crébillon the Younger’ and ‘In a Tunisian Oasis’ were included in the author’s ‘Essays New and Old,’ published in a limited edition in 1926. The remaining essays in this volume have not previously appeared in book form.

WRITERS AND READERS

IN EUROPE AND America universal primary education has created a reading public which is practically co-extensive with the adult population. Demand has called forth a correspondingly huge supply: twenty thousand million pounds of wood pulp and esparto grass are annually blackened with printer's ink; the production of newspapers takes rank, in many countries, among the major industries; in English, French and German alone, forty thousand new books are published every year.

A vast activity of writers, a vast and hungry passivity of readers. And when the two come together, what happens? How much and in what ways do the readers respond to the writers? What is the extent, what the limitations, of the influence exercised by writers on their readers? How do extraneous circumstances affect that influence? What are the laws of its waxing and its waning? Hard questions; and the more one thinks about them, the harder they seem. But seeing that they are of intimate concern to all of us (for all of us are readers, with an annual average consumption of probably a million words a year), it will be worth while at least to look for the answers.

The relations existing between scientific writers and their readers are governed by rules agreed upon in advance. So far as we are concerned, there is no problem of scientific literature; and I shall therefore make no further reference to the subject. For the purposes of this analysis, non-scientific writing may be divided into three main classes. In the first we place that vast corpus of literature which is not even intended to have any positive effect upon the reader — all that doughy, woolly, anodyne writing that exists merely to fill a gap of leisure, to kill time and prevent thought, to deaden and diffuse emotion. To a considerable extent reading has become, for almost all of us, an addiction, like cigarette-smoking. We read, most of the time, not because we wish to instruct

ourselves, not because we long to have our feelings touched and our imagination fired, but because reading is one of our bad habits, because we suffer when we have time to spare and no printed matter with which to plug the void. Deprived of their newspapers or a novel, reading-addicts will fall back on cookery books, on the literature that is wrapped round bottles of patent medicine, on those instructions for keeping the contents crisp which are printed on the outside of boxes of breakfast cereals. On anything. Of this kind of literature — the literature that exists merely because the second nature of habituated readers abhors a vacuum — it is unnecessary to say more than that there is a great deal of it and that it effectively performs its function.

Into the second class I put the two main types of propagandist literature — that which aims at modifying the religious and ethical opinions and the personal behaviour of its readers, and that which aims at modifying their social, political and economic opinions and behaviour.

For the sake of convenience, and because it must be given a name, we will call the third class imaginative literature. Such literature does not set out to be specifically propagandist, but may none the less profoundly affect its readers' habits of thought, feeling and action.

Let us begin with the propagandists.

What hosts of them there are! All over the world thousands of men and women pass their whole lives denouncing, instructing, commanding, cajoling, imploring their fellows. With what results? One finds it rather hard to say. Most propagandists do their work in the dark, draw bows at a venture. They write; but they don't know how far they will succeed in influencing their readers, nor what are the best means for influencing them, nor how long their influence will last. There is, as yet, no science of propaganda.

This fact may seem the more surprising when we reflect that there is something not far removed from a science of advertising. In the course of years advertisers have come to be fairly expert at selling things to the public. They know accurately enough the potentialities and limitations of different kinds of propaganda — what you can do, for example, by mere statement and repetition;

by appeals to such well-organized sentiments as snobbery and the urge towards social conformity; by playing on the animal instincts, such as greed, lust and especially fear in all its forms, from the fear of sickness and death to the fear of being ugly, absurd or physically repugnant to one's fellows.

If, then, commercial propagandists know their business so well, why is it that ethical and political propagandists should know theirs on the whole so badly? The answer is that the problems with which the advertisers have to deal are fundamentally unlike the problems which confront moralists and, in most cases, politicians. A great deal of advertising is concerned with matters of no importance whatsoever. Thus, I need soap; but it makes not the smallest difference to me whether I buy soap manufactured by X or soap manufactured by Y. This being so, I can allow myself to be influenced in my choice by such entirely irrelevant considerations as the sex appeal of the girl who smiles so alluringly from X's posters, or the puns and comic drawings on Y's. In many cases, of course, I do not need the commodity at all. But as I have a certain amount of money to spare and am possessed by the strange desire to collect unnecessary objects, I succumb easily to anyone who asks me to buy superfluities and luxuries. In these cases commercial propaganda is an invitation to give in to a natural or acquired craving. In no circumstances does it ever call upon the reader to resist a temptation; always it begs him to succumb. It is not very difficult to persuade people to do what they are all longing to do.

When readers are asked to buy luxuries and superfluities, or to choose between two brands of the same indispensable necessity, nothing serious is at stake. Advertising is concerned, in these cases, with secondary and marginal values. In other cases, however, it matters or seems to matter a great deal whether the reader allows himself to be influenced by the commercial propagandist or no. Suffering from some pain or physical disability, he is told of the extraordinary cures effected by M's pills or N's lotion. Naturally, he buys at once. In such cases the advertiser has only to make the article persuasively known; the reader's urgent need does the rest.

Ethical and political propagandists have a very different task. The business of the moralist is to persuade people to overcome their egotism and their personal cravings, in the interest either of a supernatural order, or of their own higher selves, or of society. The philosophies underlying the ethical teaching may vary; but the practical advice remains in all cases the same, and this advice is in the main unpleasant; whereas the advice given by commercial propagandists is in the main thoroughly pleasant. There is only one fly in the ointment offered by commercial propagandists; they want your money. Some political propagandists are also moralists; they invite their readers to repress their cravings and set limits to their egotistical impulses, to work and suffer for some cause which is to bring happiness in the future. Others demand no personal effort from their readers — merely their adherence to a party, whose success will save the world automatically and, so to speak, from the outside. The first has to persuade people to do something which is on the whole disagreeable. The second has to persuade them of the correctness of a policy which, though it imposes no immediate discomforts, admittedly brings no immediate rewards. Both must compete with other propagandists. The art of political propaganda is much less highly developed than the art of commercial propaganda; it is not surprising.

Long experience has taught the moralists that the mere advertising of virtue is not enough to make people virtuous. During the last few thousands of years, incalculable quantities of hortatory literature have been produced in every civilized country of the world. The moral standard remains, none the less, pretty low. True, if all this ethical propaganda had never been made, the standard might be even lower. We can’t tell. I suspect, however, that if we could measure it, we should find that the mechanical efficiency of ethical propaganda through literature was seldom in excess of one per cent. In individual cases and where, for some reason, circumstances are peculiarly favourable, written propaganda may be more efficient than in others. But, in general, if people behave as well as they do, it is not because they have read about good behaviour and the social or metaphysical reasons for being virtuous; it is because they have been subjected, during childhood, to a more or less intensive, more or less systematic training in

good behaviour. The propagandists of morality do not rely exclusively or even mainly on the written word.

Unlike the advertisers, political and social propagandists generally work in the dark and are quite uncertain as to the kind of effects they will be able to produce upon their readers. Propagandists themselves seldom admit this fact. Like the rest of us, they like to insist upon their own importance. Moreover, there has been a tendency among historians and political theorists to lend support to their claims. This is not surprising. Being themselves professional writers, historians and political theorists are naturally prone to exaggerate the significance of literature. In most studies of modern history, a great deal of space is devoted to the analysis of different political and economic theories; and it is tacitly or explicitly assumed that the propagation of these theories in the writings of literary men had a more or less decisive influence on the course of history. In other and more reverberant words, the literary men are credited with having ‘built Nineveh with their sighing and Babel itself with their mirth.’ Let us try to discover how far the facts confirm or invalidate this proud claim.

Consider the propagandist activities of the periodical press. Rich men and politicians have a fixed belief that if they can control the press they will be able to control public opinion — to control it even in a country where democratic institutions are allowed to function without gross interference. They buy up newspapers — partly in order to make money (for the production of newspapers is a very profitable industry), but mainly in the confident hope of being able to persuade the electorate to do what they want it to do. But in fact, as recent history proves, they fail just as often as they succeed. Thus, we see that the electoral successes of the English Liberal Party before the war, and of the Labour Party after, were won in the teeth of opposition by a newspaper press that was and is overwhelmingly conservative. It can be shown by a simple arithmetical calculation that there must be millions of English men and women who regularly read a tory newspaper and regularly vote against the tories. The same is true of France, where it is clear that many readers of the conservative press vote socialist and even communist at elections. We are led to two

conclusions: first, that most people choose their daily paper, not for its opinions, but for its entertainingness, its capacity to amuse and fill the vacancies of leisure. Second, that written propaganda is less efficacious than the habits and prejudices, the class loyalties and professional interests of the readers.

Nor must we forget that propaganda is largely at the mercy of circumstances. Sometimes circumstances fight against propaganda; at other times, they fight no less effectively on its side. Thus, during the khaki election which returned the first Coalition Government under Lloyd George, and during the gold-standard election of 1931, circumstances fought on the same side as the majority of press propagandists — and fought with tremendous effect. Significant, in this context, is the case of Allied propaganda during the World War. Up till the summer of 1918 the propaganda designed to undermine the will-to-fight of the German troops was almost perfectly ineffective. During and after that summer, when hunger and a series of unsuccessful battles had prepared the ground for it, this propaganda achieved its purpose. But the leaflets which Lord Northcliffe's organization scattered with such good effect during July and August could have done absolutely nothing to discourage the German troops during their victorious offensive against Saint-Quentin in the month of March.

Propaganda by even the greatest masters of style is as much at the mercy of circumstances as propaganda by the worst journalists. Ruskin's diatribes against machinery and the factory system influenced only those who were in an economic position similar to his own; on those who profited by machinery and the factory system they had no influence whatever. From the beginning of the twelfth century to the time of the Council of Trent, denunciations of ecclesiastical and monastic abuses were poured forth almost without intermission. And yet, in spite of the eloquence of great writers and great churchmen, like St. Bernard and St. Bonaventura, nothing was done. It needed the circumstances of the Reformation to produce the counter-Reformation. Upon his contemporaries the influence of Voltaire was enormous. Lucian had as much talent as Voltaire and wrote of religion with the same disintegrating irony. And yet, so far as we can judge, his writings were completely without effect. The

Syrians of the second century were busily engaged in converting themselves to Christianity and a number of other Oriental religions; Lucian's irony fell on ears that were deaf to everything but theology and occultism. In France, during the first half of the eighteenth century, a peculiar combination of historical circumstances had predisposed the educated to a certain religious and political scepticism; people were ready and eager to welcome Voltaire's attacks on the existing order of things. Political and religious propaganda is effective, it would seem, only upon those who are already partly or entirely convinced of its truth.

Let us consider a modern example. Since the war two well-written and persuasive pieces of propaganda have figured among the very best of best-sellers — I refer to Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front, and H. G. Wells's Outline of History. In Europe and America many millions of people read the German's indictment of war and the Englishman's plea for internationalism. With what results? It is hard indeed to say. All that we can be sure of is that nationalistic feeling was never so acutely inflamed as it is to-day and the expenditure on armaments never higher. Once more, circumstances have been more effective in moulding men's minds than conscious literary propagandists. The influence of Wells and Remarque, which was doubtless considerable at the time of the appearance of their books, lasted only as long as the post-war disgust with fighting and the post-war era of prosperity. A new generation, whose members had no first-hand knowledge of war, came to maturity, and along with it appeared the great depression. In the desperate effort to preserve a local prosperity, governments raised tariffs, established quotas, subsidized exports. Economic nationalism was everywhere intensified. For every people all foreigners were automatically transformed into enemies. At the same time despair and the sense of having been wronged, of being the victims of a monstrous injustice, were driving millions to seek consolation and a vicarious triumph in the religion of nationalism. Why, we may ask in passing, did these unhappy victims of war choose nationalism as their consolation rather than Christianity? The reason is to be sought, not in the superior efficacy of nationalist propaganda, but in the historical situation as a whole. The prestige of

science is not sufficiently great to induce men to apply scientific methods to the affairs of social and individual existence; it is great enough, however, to make them reject the tenets of the transcendental religions. For a large part of the population, science has made the Christian dogmas intellectually unacceptable. Contemporary superstition is therefore compelled to assume a positivistic form. The desire to worship persists, but since modern men find it impossible to believe in any but observable entities, it follows that they must vent this desire upon gods that can be actually seen and heard, or whose existence can at least be easily inferred from the facts of immediate experience. Nations and dictators are only too clearly observable. It is on these tribal deities that the longing to worship now vents itself. One of the oddest and most unexpected results of scientific progress has been the general reversion from monotheism to local idolatries. The beginnings of this process are clearly observable among the German philosophers at the opening of the nineteenth century. Take a Moravian Brother; endow him with a great deal of intelligence, and subject him to a good eighteenth-century education and a first-hand experience of invasion and foreign tyranny; the result will be a deeply religious man, incapable of finding intellectual satisfaction in the traditional Christianity of his childhood, but ready to pour out all his devotion, all his will-to-worship, upon the nation. In a single word, the result will be Fichte. In Fichte's Addresses to the German Nation, the religion of Nazism is to a great extent anticipated. But whereas the Nazis have invented a jargon of their own, Fichte, it is significant, still employs the language of Pietism. He writes of patriotic experiences in the same words as were used by the Moravians to describe religious experiences. In Fichte, as well as in a number of his less eminent contemporaries, we can actually study an intermediate type between two distinct species — the revivalist Christian and the revivalist nation-worshipper. Since the introduction of universal education innumerable people have gone through a process akin to that which caused Fichte to become dissatisfied with the Pietism of his childhood and made it natural for him to seek another outlet for his will-to-worship. The Napoleonic invasion gave intensity to Fichte's religion of nationalism; defeat and an

imperfect victory in the World War have done the same for the Germans and Italians of our own generation. In a word, the historical circumstances of recent years have conspired to intensify nationalism and throw discredit on internationalism, whether religious or political, whether based on Christian theology or a rationalistic view of the world. At the same time, of course, governments have deliberately fostered nationalistic fervour to serve their own political purposes. To these causes must be added the apparently normal human tendency to delight in periodical changes of intellectual and emotional fashion. The very popularity of an author during a certain period is a reason why he should become unpopular later on. The conversions due to the preaching of Wells and Remarque were in general superficial and short-lived. It is not to be wondered at.

But now, let us suppose for the sake of argument, that these conversions had been for the most part profound and, in spite of changed conditions, lasting. Would that fact have greatly altered the present situation, so long as the world's rulers had remained unconverted? It is possible to argue that the really influential book is not that which converts ten millions of casual readers, but rather that which converts the very few who, at any given moment, succeed in seizing power. Marx and Sorel have been influential in the modern world, not so much because they were best-sellers (Sorel in particular was not at all a widely read author), but because among their few readers were two men, called respectively Lenin and Mussolini. In a less spectacular way, but still profoundly, the writings of Jeremy Bentham affected the course of nineteenth-century history. Their circulation was not large; but they counted among their readers men like Chadwick, Grote, Romilly, Brougham — administrators, educationists, legal reformers, who did their best to put into practice what Bentham had preached. It may be that the future ruler of some great country will grow up with a passion for Wells. In that case, The Outline will be not merely a record of past history, but indirectly a maker of history to come. Up to the present, in spite of its circulation, it has not affected the course of history.

Social and political propaganda, as I have said, is effective, as a rule, only upon those whom circumstances have partly or completely convinced of its truth. In other words, it is influential only when it is a rationalization of the desires, sentiments, prejudices or interests of those to whom it is addressed. A theology or a political theory may be defined as an intellectual device for enabling people to do in cold blood things which, without the theology or the theory, they could only do in the heat of passion. Circumstances, whether external or internal and purely psychological, produce in certain persons a state of discontent, for example, a desire for change, a passionate aspiration for something new. These emotional states may find occasional outlet in violent but undirected activity. But now comes the writer with a theology or a political theory, in terms of which these vague feelings can be rationalized. The energy developed by the prevailing passions of the masses is given a direction and at the same time strengthened and made continuous. Sporadic outbursts are converted by the rationalization into purposive and unremitting activity. The mechanism of successful propaganda may be roughly summed up as follows. Men accept the propagandist's theology or political theory, because it apparently justifies and explains the sentiments and desires evoked in them by the circumstances. The theory may, of course, be completely absurd from a scientific point of view; but this is of no importance so long as men believe it to be true. Having accepted the theory, men will work in obedience to its precepts even in times of emotional tranquillity. Moreover, the theory will often cause them to perform in cold blood acts which they would hardly have performed even in a state of emotional excitement.

Our nature abhors a moral and intellectual vacuum. Passion and self-interest may be our chief motives; but we hate to admit the fact even to ourselves. We are not happy unless our acts of passion can be made to look as though they were dictated by reason, unless self-interest be explained and embellished so as to seem to be idealistic. Particular grievances call not only for redress, but also for the formulation of universally valid reasons why they should be redressed. Particular cravings cry aloud to be legitimized in terms of a rational philosophy

and a traditionally acceptable ethic. The moral and intellectual vacuum is perpetually in process of formation, and it sucks into itself whatever explanatory or justificatory writing happens at the moment to be available. Clean or dirty, brackish or sweet — any water will serve the turn of a pump that has been emptied of its air. And, analogously, any philosophical writing, good, bad or indifferent, will serve the turn of people who are under the compulsion of desire or of self-interest, and who consequently feel the need of intellectual and moral justification. Hence the extraordinary success, at a particular historical moment, of books that, to a later generation, seem almost completely valueless; hence the temporary importance and power of manifestly second-rate and negligible writers. Let us consider a concrete example. The organization of eighteenth-century French society was hopelessly inefficient, and its pattern so anachronistic that great numbers of individual Frenchmen, unable to fit into the scheme of things, suffered acute discomfort. The sense of grievance and the desire for change were intense; and correspondingly intense was the desire for a philosophy that should rationalize this desire and legitimize this grievance in terms of pure reason and absolute justice. Yearning to be filled, the moral and intellectual vacuum sucked into itself whatever writings were available. Among these was the De l'Esprit of Helvétius. This is a thoroughly bad book, full of preposterous stuff. But though obviously untrue, some of its theses (such as that which affirmed the equality of all intellects and the consequent possibility of transforming any child at will into a Newton or a Raphael) were well suited to rationalize and justify the contemporary claims for political, religious and economic reform. During a few years the book was invested with a significance, and exercised an influence, which its intrinsic literary and philosophical merits could not justify. Its fortune was made, not by the ability of its author, but by the needs of its readers.

There have been writers whose influence depended neither on their own powers, nor yet on the necessities of their readers, but simply upon fashion. To us, the writings of most of the original fourteenth-and fifteenth-century humanists seem wholly unreadable. Nor are we singular in our judgment; for

within a hundred years their works had fallen into an almost complete oblivion. And yet, for their contemporaries, these works were exciting and persuasive. The fact that a man could turn out a tolerably specious imitation of Cicero or Sallust was, for two whole generations of Renaissance readers, a sufficient reason for attaching importance to what he wrote. Gian Galeazzo Visconti of Milan was often heard to say that a thousand Florentine cavalry could not do him so much harm as a single Latin letter from the Chancellor of Florence, the humanist Coluccio Salutati. The rediscovery of ancient literature was an event of profound significance. It is easy to understand why so much importance came to be attached, during the fifteenth century, to pure Latinity: why it was that scholars like Valla and Poggio should have wielded such extraordinary power. But the fashion which, a century later, invested the ruffianly Pietro Aretino with the almost magical prestige that had belonged to the original humanists is wholly unaccountable. Aretino was a lively writer, some of whose works can still be read with interest. But why he should have wielded the influence that he did, and why all the kings and princes in Europe should have thought it worth while to pay him blackmail, are mysteries which we cannot explain, except by saying that for some reason he became the mode.

At every period of history certain writings are regarded by all or some members of a given society as being ex hypothesi true. They are therefore charged with an unquestionable authority. To show that this authority is on the side of the cause he supports has always been one of the propagandist’s tasks. Where it is not possible for him to make them serve his purposes the propagandist has to discredit the existing authorities. The devil opens the attack by quoting Scripture; then, when the quotations fail him, trots out the Higher Criticism and shows that Scripture has no more authority than the Pickwick Papers. At any given moment there are certain fixed landmarks of authority; the propaganda of the period has to orientate itself in relation to these landmarks. Correct orientation to existing authority is one of the conditions making for success of propaganda.

We see, then, that the effectiveness of propaganda is determined by the circumstances of the time when it is written. These circumstances are of two kinds — circumstances external to the individual, and internal or psychological circumstances. External circumstances may change catastrophically, as during a war; or gradually, as when means of production are altered and economic prosperity is increased or diminished. Changes in external circumstances are, of course, accompanied by changes in internal circumstances. But internal circumstances may also change on their own account, independently, to a certain extent, of external circumstances and according to an autonomous rhythm of their own. History pursues an undulatory course; and these undulations are the result, to some extent at least, of the tendency displayed by human beings to react, after a certain time, away from the prevailing habits of thought and feeling towards other habits. (This process is greatly complicated by the fact that in modern heterogeneous societies there are numerous co-existing groups with different habits of thought and feeling. But it is unnecessary to discuss these complications here.) The autonomous nature of psychological undulations is confirmed by the facts of history. Thus the ardour of all violently active religious and political movements has generally given place to relative indifference and worldliness after a period of anything from a few months to twenty-five years.

‘All active religions,’ writes Professor Crane Brinton, in the concluding paragraph of his recently published Decade of Revolution, ‘tend to become inactive within a generation at most. The wise, experienced and consistently inactive religious institution known as the Roman Catholic Church has always been threatened by outbreaks of active religion. Until Luther, at least, such outbreaks were tamed, strait-jacketed with laws and institutions. . . . Since the Reformation the great outbreaks of active religion have taken place outside the Church of Rome. Of these, the earliest, Calvinism, has long since been sobered. . . . The second, Jacobinism, has in the Third Republic made its compromise with the flesh. . . . The third, Marxism, would appear to the outsider to be entering the inactive stage, at least in Russia.’ It is worth while to illustrate the undulations of history by a few concrete examples. It took the Franciscan movement about

twenty years to lose the passion of its early zeal. Francis founded his first cell in 1209, and the Bull by which Gregory IX set aside his Testament and permitted trustees to hold and administer property for the benefit of the Order was promulgated in 1230. The French Revolution had its Thermidorean reaction after only five years, Savonarola ruled the city of Florence for eight years; but the popular reaction against his movement of religious and moral reform had begun some time before the end. The great Kentucky Revival lasted from 1797 to about 1805; but the Welsh Revival of 1904 was over in two years.

It is probably true to say that movements make up in duration what they lack in intensity. Thus, it seems to have taken a full generation for educated Englishmen to react away from the genteel religious scepticism which prevailed at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Addison complained that in his time the very appearances of Christianity had vanished; Leibniz could record the fact that in England even ‘natural religion’ was languishing. And these are opinions which the facts confirm. The literature of unbelief was as popular as fiction. For example, Woolston’s Discourses against miracles sold upwards of thirty thousand copies. But a change was at hand. In a letter dated 1776 and addressed to Gibbon on the publication of the first volume of his history, Hume summed up his impressions of contemporary English thought in the following words: ‘Among many other marks of decline, the prevalence of superstition in England prognosticates the fall of philosophy and decay of taste.’ Fourteen years later, in 1790, Burke remarked that ‘not one man born within the last forty years has read a word of Collins, Toland, Tyndal, or of any of that flock of so-called free-thinkers. Atheism is not only against our reason; it is against our instinct.’ Forty years is probably a pretty accurate computation. Charles Wesley was converted in 1736 and John in 1738. By 1750 the movement of which those conversions were at once a symptom and a cause must have gone far enough to spoil the market for deistic literature. After several minor fluctuations, a new period of educated scepticism set in about the middle of the nineteenth century and was succeeded towards the end of the century by another reaction towards faith. Owing, however, to the assaults of nineteenth-century rationalism, this new faith

could not be exclusively Christian or transcendental in character, but expressed itself in terms of a variety of pseudo-religious forms, of which the most important was nationalism. Rudyard Kipling was the early twentieth-century equivalent of Cardinal Newman and Wesley. The mistake of all propagandists has been to suppose that the psychological movement which they observe in the society around them is destined to go on continuously in the same direction. Thus we see that in a time of scepticism, sceptical propagandists announce with triumph that superstition is dead and reason triumphant. In a time of religious reaction, Christian and nationalistic propagandists announced with equal satisfaction and certainty that scepticism has for ever been destroyed. Both, it is hardly necessary to say, are wrong. The course of history is undulatory, because (among other reasons) self-conscious men and women easily grow tired of a mode of thought and feeling which has lasted for more than a certain time. Propaganda gives force and direction to the successive movements of popular feeling and desire; but it does not do much to create those movements. The propagandist is a man who canalizes an already existing stream. In a land where there is no water, he digs in vain.

In a democratic state, any propagandist will have rivals competing with him for the support of the public. In totalitarian states there is no liberty of expression for writers and no liberty of choice for their readers. There is only one propagandist — the State.

That all-powerful rulers who make a regular use of terrorism should also be the most active propagandists known to history seems at first sight paradoxical. But you can do anything with bayonets except sit on them. Even a despot cannot govern for any length of time without the consent of his subjects. Dictatorial propaganda aims first of all at the legitimizing in popular estimation of the dictator’s government. Old-established governments do not need to produce certificates of legitimacy. Long habit makes it seem ‘natural’ to people that they should be ruled by an absolute or constitutional monarch, by a republican president, by a prince bishop, by an oligarchy of senatorial families — whichever the case may be. New rulers have to prove that they have not usurped

their title, but possess some higher right to govern than the mere fact of having grabbed power. Usurpation, like any other crime, has to justify itself in terms of the prevailing code of values — in terms, that is to say, of the very system which brands it as a crime. For example, in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were two acknowledged sources of political power: the Empire and the Church. For this reason the men who had succeeded, by fraud or violence, in seizing the government of a city, generally hastened to have themselves appointed Vicars of the Church or Hereditary Captains of the Empire. To be able to tyrannize effectively they needed the title and appearance of constitutional authority. Since the French Revolution the recognized sources of power have been the People and the Nation. When modern despots have to legitimize their usurpations they do so in terms of nationalism and of that humanitarian democracy they themselves have overthrown. They issue propaganda to prove that their regime is for the good of the people or else, if the economic facts make nonsense of such a claim, for the good of that mystical entity, different from and superior to the mere individuals composing it, the Nation. But the general acknowledgment that his government is legitimate is not enough for the totalitarian dictator; he demands from his subjects that they shall all think and feel alike, and he uses every device of propaganda in order to make them think and feel alike. Complete psychological homogeneity occurs among primitive peoples. But the conditions of such homogeneity are, first, that the population shall be small; secondly, that it shall live in an isolation due either to geography or to the exclusiveness of the local religion; and, thirdly, that its system of production shall be more or less completely unspecialized. European dictators may wish and try to make their peoples as homogeneous as a tribe of Melanesians, to impose upon them a conformity as complete as that which exists among the Australian aborigines. But circumstances must finally prove too strong for them. Fifty million professionally specialized men and women cannot live together without emphasizing one another’s natural diversities. Nor, with the best will in the world, can the dictator isolate himself from all contact with the outside world. This is one of the reasons why, in the long run, he is bound to fail.

Meanwhile, he is sure of at least a partial and temporary success. Dictatorial propaganda demands obedience and even considerable financial and other sacrifices; but by way of compensation it assures the individual that, as a member of a chosen nation, race, or class, he is superior to all other individuals in the world; it dissipates his sense of personal inferiority by investing him with the vicarious glory of the community; it gives him reasons for thinking well of himself, it provides with enemies whom he may blame for his own shortcomings and upon whom he may vent his latent brutality and love of bullying. Commercial propaganda is acceptable, because it encourages men and women to satisfy their sensuous cravings and offers them escapes from their physical pains and discomforts. Dictatorial propaganda, which is always nationalistic or revolutionary propaganda, is acceptable because it encourages men and women to give free rein to their pride, vanity and other egotistical tendencies, and because it provides them with psychological devices for overcoming their sense of personal inferiority. Dictatorial propaganda promotes the ugly reality of prejudice and passion to the rank of an ideal. Dictators are the popes of nationalism; and the creed of nationalism is that what ought to be is merely what is, only a good deal more so. All individuals seek justifications for such passions as envy, hatred, avarice and cruelty; by means of nationalistic and revolutionary propaganda, dictators provide them with such justifications. It follows, therefore, that this propaganda of the dictators is certain to enjoy a certain temporary popularity. In the long run, as I have said, the impossibility of reducing a huge, educated population to the spiritual homogeneity of a savage tribe will tell against it. Furthermore, human beings have a strong tendency towards rationality and decency. (If they had not, they would not desire to legitimize their prejudices and their passions.) A doctrine that identifies what ought to be with the lowest elements of actual reality cannot remain acceptable for long. Finally, policies based upon a tribal morality simply won’t work in the modern world. The danger is that, in process of proving that they don’t work, the dictators may destroy that world.

Dictatorial propaganda may be classified under two heads: negative and positive. Positive propaganda consists of all that is written, negative propaganda, of all that is not written. In all dictatorial propaganda, silence is at least as important as speech, suppressio veri as suggestio falsi. Indeed, the negative propaganda of silence is probably more effective as an instrument of persuasion and mental regimentation than speech. Silence creates the conditions in which such words as are spoken or written take most effect.

An excess of positive propaganda evokes boredom and exasperation in the minds of those to whom it is addressed. Advertising experts are well aware that, after a certain point, an increase in the pressure of salesmanship produces rapidly diminishing and finally negative returns. What is true of commercial propaganda seems to be equally true, in this respect, of political propaganda. Thus, most observers agree that at the Danzig elections, the Nazi propagandists harmed their cause by ‘protesting too much.’ Danzig, however, was a free city; the opposition was allowed to speak and the ground had not been prepared for positive propaganda by a preliminary course of silence and suppression. What are the effects of excessive positive propaganda within the totalitarian state? Reliable evidence is not available. Significant, however, in this context is the decline, since the advent of Nazism, in the circulation of German newspapers. Protesting too much and all in the same way, the propagandists succeeded only in disgusting their readers. Suppressio veri has one enormous advantage over suggestio falsi: in order to say nothing, you do not have to be a great stylist. People may get bored with positive propaganda; but where negative propaganda is so effective that there is no alternative to the spoken and written suggestions that come to them, all but the most independent end by accepting those suggestions.

The propagandists of the future will probably be chemists and physiologists as well as writers. A cachet containing three-quarters of a gramme of chloral and three-quarters of a milligram of scopolamine will produce in the person who swallows it a state of complete psychological malleability, akin to the state of a subject under deep hypnosis. Any suggestion made to the patient while in this

artificially induced trance penetrates to the very depths of the sub-conscious mind and may produce a permanent modification in the habitual modes of thought and feeling. In France, where the technique has been in experimental use for several years, it has been found that two or three courses of suggestion under chloral and scopolamine can change the habits even of the victims of alcohol and irrepressible sexual addictions. A peculiarity of the drug is that the amnesia which follows it is retrospective; the patient has no memories of a period which begins several hours before the drug's administrations. Catch a man unawares and give him a cachet; he will return to consciousness firmly believing all the suggestions you have made during his stupor and wholly unaware of the way this astonishing conversion has been effected. A system of propaganda, combining pharmacology with literature, should be completely and infallibly effective. The thought is extremely disquieting.

So far, I have dealt with the influence exercised by writers who wish to persuade their readers to adopt some particular kind of social or political attitude. We must now consider the ways in which writers influence readers as private individuals. The influence of writers in the sphere of personal thought, feeling and behaviour is probably even more important than their influence in the sphere of politics. But the task of defining that influence or of exactly assessing its amount is one of extraordinary difficulty. 'Art,' it has been said, 'is the forgiveness of sins.' In the best art we perceive persons, things and situations more clearly than in life and as though they were in some way more real than realities themselves. But this clearer perception is at the same time less personal and egotistic. Writers who permit their readers to see in this intense but impersonal way exercise an influence which, though not easily definable, is certainly profound and salutary.

Works of imaginative literature have another and more easily recognizable effect; by a kind of suggestion they modify the characters of those who read them. The French philosopher, Jules de Gaultier, has said that one of the essential faculties of the human being is 'the power granted to man to conceive himself as other than he is.' He calls this power 'bovarism' after the heroine of

Flaubert's novel Madame Bovary. To some extent all men and women live under false names, are disguised as someone else, assume, whether consciously or unconsciously, a borrowed character. This persona, as Jung calls it, is formed to a great extent by a process of imitation. Sometimes the imitation is of living human beings, sometimes of fictional or historic characters; sometimes of virtuous and socially desirable personages, sometimes of criminals and adventurers. It may be, in the significant phrase of Thomas à Kempis, the Imitation of Christ; or it may be the imitation of the heroines of Mr. Michael Arlen's novels; the imitation of Julius Caesar or of the Buddha; of Mussolini or Werther; of Stavrogin or Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux or the gunmen of penny dreadfuls. People have bovarized themselves into the likeness of every kind of real or imaginary being. Sometimes the imitator chooses a model fairly like himself; but it also happens that he chooses one who is profoundly dissimilar. What de Gaultier calls the bovaric angle between reality and assumed persona may be wide or narrow. In extreme cases the bovaric angle can be equal to two right angles. In other words, the real and assumed characters may have exactly opposite tendencies. Most of us, I imagine, go through life with a bovaric angle of between forty-five and ninety degrees.

Teachers have always tried to exploit the bovaric tendencies of their pupils, and the historical and literary model for imitation has from time immemorial played an important part in all moral education. Like other propagandists, however, educators are still unable to foresee how their pupils will respond to moral propaganda. Sometimes the response is positive, sometimes negative. We do not yet know enough to say, in any given circumstances, which it will be. The influence of books is certainly very great; but nobody, least of all their writers, can say in advance who will be influenced, or in what way, or for how long. The extreme form of bovarism is paranoia. Here the individual plays a part so wholeheartedly that he comes to believe that he actually is the character he is impersonating. The influence of books on paranoiacs must be very considerable. People suffering from the paranoia of persecution often imagine that they are the victims of a diabolical secret society, which is identified with some real

organization, such as that of the Freemasons or the Jesuits, about which the patient has read in history books or perhaps in works of fiction. In cases of the paranoia of ambition, books certainly serve to canalize the patient's madness. Megalomaniacs believe themselves to be divine or royal personages, or descendants of great historical figures, of whom they can have heard only in books. There is material here for an interesting medico-literary study.

Incidentally it may be remarked that many authors are themselves mildly paranoid in character. Books become popular because they vicariously satisfy a common wish. In many cases, also, they are written with the aim of satisfying the author's secret wishes, of realizing, if only in words, his bovaristic dreams. Consult a library catalogue and you will find that more books have been written on the career of Napoleon than on any other single subject. This fact casts a strange and rather terrifying light on the mentality of modern European writers and readers. How are we going to get rid of war, so long as people find their keenest bovaristic satisfaction in the story of the world's most spectacular militarist?

The course of psychological history is undulatory; therefore it happens that the literary models most commonly imitated at one period lose their popularity with succeeding generations. Thus, in the early eighteenth century, what Englishman or Frenchman would have desired to imitate those monsters of honour, who figured in the romances and plays of the later sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries? And who at the same period would have dreamed of assuming the sentimental roles so popular after about 1760? In a majority of cases readers choose to play the parts that come easiest to them. Thus it is obviously extremely difficult to act the part of a saint. For this reason the New Testament, though more widely read in Europe and over a longer period than any other book, has produced relatively few successful imitators of its central character. People have always preferred to play parts that would allow them to satisfy their appetites or their will to power. As in the time of Paolo and Francesca, the favourite heroes are still personages like Lancelot — great warriors and great lovers.

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante,
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,
la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse;
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.

Dante provides us with a perfect example of erotic bovarism actively at work.

Certain fictional personages continue to make their appeal even over long periods and through considerable fluctuations in the habits of thought and feeling. Stendhal's Julien Sorel, for example, is still alive in France; and I was interested to learn from a Communist friend that this exemplar of ruthless individualism had recently achieved a great popularity in Russia. The vitality of Hamlet after more than three hundred years remains so great that the Nazis have found it necessary to discountenance revivals of the tragedy for fear that it should cause young Germans to forget the 'heroic' rôle which they are now supposed to play.

It sometimes happens that writers who are without influence on the habits of thought and feeling of their contemporaries begin to exercise such an influence after their death, when circumstances have so changed as to make their doctrine more acceptable. Thus, William Blake's peculiar sexual mysticism did not come into its own until the twentieth century. Blake died in 1827; but in a certain sense he was a contemporary of D. H. Lawrence. Along with Lawrence, he exercised a considerable influence over many people in post-war England and elsewhere. Whether the nature of this influence was what either Blake or Lawrence would have liked it to be is extremely doubtful. In a majority of cases, we may suspect, the mystical doctrines of Blake and Lawrence were used by their readers merely as a justification for a desire to indulge in the maximum amount of sexual promiscuity with a minimum amount of responsibility. That Lawrence passionately disapproved of such a use being made of his writings, I know; and it is highly probable that Blake would have shared his feelings. It is one of the ironies of the writer's fate that he can never be quite sure what sort of influence

he will have upon his readers. Lawrence's books, as we have seen, were used as justifications for sexual promiscuity. For this reason they were outlawed by the Nazis when they first came into power, as mere Schmutzliteratur. Now, it appears, the Nazis have changed their minds about Lawrence; and his writings are accepted as justifications for violence, anti-rationalism, idolatry and the worship of blood. That Lawrence meant to make his readers turn from intellectualism and conscious emotionalism towards the Dark Gods of instinct and physiology, is unquestionable. But it is safe to say that he did not mean to turn them into Nazis. Men are influenced by books to assume a character that is not entirely their own; but the character they assume may be quite different from the character idealized by the writer.

Even propagandists may achieve results quite unlike those they meant to achieve by their writings. For example, by persistently attacking an institution authors hope to persuade either its supporters or its victims to reform it. But in practice they may just as easily produce a precisely opposite effect. For invectives often act as a kind of vaccination against the danger of reform. Mr. Shaw's writings are revolutionary in intention, and yet he has become a favourite among the more intelligent members of the bourgeoisie; they read his satires and denunciations, laugh at themselves a little, decide that it's all really too bad; then, feeling that they have paid the tribute which capitalism owes to social justice, close the book and go on behaving as they have always behaved. The works of revolutionary writers may serve as prophylactics against revolution. Instead of producing the active will to change, they produce cynicism, which is the acceptance of things as they are, combined with the derisive knowledge that they couldn't be worse — a knowledge that is felt by the person who possesses it to excuse him from making any personal effort to change the intolerable situation. Cynicism can affect not only those who profit by the existence of an undesirable state of things, but also those who are its victims. During the centuries which preceded the Reformation, cynical acceptance of the evils of ecclesiastical corruption was common among those who paid the piper as well as among those who called the tune, among the

intelligent laity as well as among the princes of the Church. The fact of corruption was accepted as inevitable, like bad weather — a kind of bad weather that was at the same time a joke. Boccaccio, Chaucer, Poggio and their lesser contemporaries denounced, but at the same time they laughed. Poggio's employers at the Vatican (he was a papal secretary) laughed with them. At a later date Erasmus's ecclesiastical and princely friends laughed no less heartily over his satirical comments on kings and clerics. So did all the rest of the reading public. For Erasmus was, for his period, a prodigious best-seller. The Paris edition of his Colloquies sold twenty-four thousand copies in a few weeks — an incredibly large figure, when one reflects that the book was written in Latin. Of his Praise of Folly a hundred editions were printed between 1512 and 1676 — most of them during the earlier part of that period.

After Luther had taken his revolutionary action, and when it had become clear that the movement for reform was a serious menace to the existing order of things, the official attitude towards Erasmus's writings began to change. In 1528 the Colloquies were suppressed, as being dangerously subversive. From fosterers of an amused acceptance and prophylactics against revolution, his denunciatory and satirical writings had been transformed, by the new circumstances, into dangerous revolutionary propaganda. Erasmus's failure to achieve what he meant to achieve was doubly complete. He meant to persuade the existing hierarchy to reform itself; he only succeeded in making it cynically laugh at itself. Then came Luther; and the writings which their author had penned as propaganda for rational reform within the Church were transformed automatically into propaganda for a revolution, of which he disapproved. And when the Church did reform itself, it was not at all in the Erasmian way. But luckily for Erasmus, he was not there to witness that reformation. Three years before the Society of Jesus came into the world the old humanist had passed out of it — none too early.

Let us return to our imaginative literature. Readers, as we have seen, often borrow characters from books in order to use them, bovaristically, in real life. But they also reverse this process and, projecting themselves out of reality into

literature, live a compensatory life of fantasy between the lines of print. One of the main functions of all popular fiction, drama and now the cinema has been to provide people with the means of assuaging, vicariously and in fancy, their unsatisfied longings, with the psychological equivalents of stimulants and narcotics. The power of such literature to impose upon those whom we may call its addicts a kind of drugged acceptance of even the most sordid realities is probably very considerable. In real life one Englishman out of every sixty thousand is a peer, one out of every three hundred thousand has an income of a hundred thousand pounds a year. A census of fictional characters has never, so far as I know, been made; but I should guess that one out of a hundred, perhaps even one out of fifty, was either a lord, or a millionaire, or both at once. The presence of so many aristocrats and plutocrats in our literature has two causes. The first is that the rich and powerful enjoy more liberty than the poor and so are in a position to make their own tragedies, not merely to have disaster forced upon them from outside. There can be no drama without personal choice; and, proverbially, beggars cannot be choosers. Only people with incomes can afford to do much choosing in this world. ‘Their rich and noble souls’ (to quote one of Butler’s Erewhonian authors) ‘can defy all material impediment; whereas the souls of the poor are clogged and hampered by matter, which sticks fast about them as treacle to the wings of a fly. . . . This is the secret of the homage which we see rich men receive from those who are poorer than themselves.’ Of the homage, too, that they receive from authors. The rich, the powerful and the talented are freer than ordinary folk and are therefore the predestined subjects of imaginative literature. The other reason why literature is so lavish with wealth and titles is to be sought in the very fact that the real world is so niggardly of these things. Authors themselves and their readers desire imaginary compensations for their poverty and social insignificance. In the lordly and gilded world of literature they get it. Nor are poverty and powerlessness their only troubles; it is more than likely that they are also plain, have an insufficient or unromantic sex life; are married and wish they weren’t, or unmarried and wish they were; are too old or too young; in a word, are themselves and not

somebody else. Hence those Don Juans, those melting beauties, those innocent young kittens, those beautifully brutal boys, those luscious adventuresses. Hence Hollywood, hence the beauty chorus. When I was last at Margate a gigantic new movie palace had just been opened. Its name implied a whole social programme, a complete theory of art; it was called ‘Dreamland.’ At the present time, the cinema acts far more effectively as the opium of the people than does religion.

Hitherto I have described the more obvious effects produced by imaginative literature upon its readers. But it works also less conspicuously and in subtler ways:

Who prop, thou ask’st, in these bad days, my mind? . . .
He much, the old man, who, clearest-soul’d of men,
Saw The Wide Prospect and the Asian Fen,
And Tmolus hill, and Smyrna bay, though blind. . . .

And, in The Waste Land, Mr. Eliot uses the same metaphor:

O swallow swallow
Le Prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe
Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih.

Words have power to support, to buttress, to hold together. And are at the same time moulds, into which we pour our own thought — and it takes their nobler and more splendid form — at the same time channels and conduits into which we divert the stream of our being — and it flows significantly towards a comprehensible end. They prop, they give form and direction to our experience. And at the same time they themselves provide experience of a new kind, intense, pure, unalloyed with irrelevance. Words expressing desire may be more moving than the presence of the desired person. The hatred we feel at the sight of our enemies is often less intense than the hatred we feel when we read a curse or an invective. In words men find a new universe of thought and feeling, clearer and more comprehensible than the universe of daily experience. The verbal universe

is at once a mould for reality and a substitute for it, a superior reality. And what props the mind, what shores up its impending ruin, is contact with this superior reality of ordered beauty and significance.

In the past the minds of cultured Europeans were shaped and shored up by the Bible and the Greek and Latin classics. Men's philosophy of life tended to crystallize itself in phrases from the Gospels or the Odes of Horace, from the Iliad or the Psalms. Job and Sappho, Juvenal and the Preacher gave style to their despairs, their loves, their indignations, their cynicisms. Experience taught them the wisdom that flowed along verbal channels prepared by Aeschylus and Solomon; and the existence of these verbal channels was itself an invitation to learn wisdom from experience. To-day most of us resemble Shakespeare in at least one important respect: we know little Latin and less Greek. Even the Bible is rapidly becoming, if not a closed, at any rate a very rarely opened book. The phrases of the Authorized Version no longer prop and mould and canalize our minds. St. Paul and the Psalmist have gone the way of Virgil and Horace. What authors have taken their place? Whose words support contemporary men and women? The answer is that there exists no single set of authoritative books. The common ground of all the Western cultures has slipped away from under our feet.

Locally authoritative literatures are filling the vacuum created by the virtual disappearance from the modern consciousness of those internationally authoritative literatures which dominated men's minds in the past. Mein Kampf is a gospel and has had a sale comparable to that of the Bible — two million copies in ten years. For Russians, Marx and Lenin have become what Aristotle was for educated Europeans in the thirteenth century. (Lenin's works, in twenty-seven volumes, have already sold four million sets.) In Italy Mussolini ha sempre ragione; no higher claim was made by the orthodox for Moses or the Evangelists.

The peoples of the West no longer share a literature and a system of ancient wisdom. All that they now have in common is science and information. Now, science is knowledge, not wisdom; deals with quantities, not with the qualities of

which we are immediately aware. In so far as we are enjoying and suffering beings, its words seem to us mostly irrelevant and beside the point. Moreover, these words are arranged without art; therefore possess no magical power and are incapable of propping or moulding the mind of the reader.

The same is true of that other bond of union between the peoples, shared information. The disseminators of information often try to write with the compulsive magic of art; but how rarely they succeed! It is not with fragments of the daily paper that we shore up our ruins.

The literature of information has, as its subject-matter, events which people feel to be humanly relevant. Unfortunately, journalism treats these profoundly interesting themes in what is, for all its flashing brilliance, a profoundly uninteresting, superficial way. Moreover, its business is to record history from day to day; it can never afford to linger over any particular episode. As little can the reader afford to linger. Even if the daily paper were well written, its very dailiness would preclude the possibility of his remembering any part of its contents. Materially, a thing of printer's ink and wood pulp, a newspaper does not outlast the day of its publication; by sunset it is in the dust-bin or the cess-pool. In the reader's memory its contents survive hardly so long. Nobody who reads — as well as all the rest — two or three papers a day can possibly be expected to remember what is in them. Yesterday's news is chased out of mind by to-day's. We remember what we read several times and with intense concentration. It was thus, because they were authoritative and had a mysterious prestige, that the Bible and the Greek and Latin classics were read. It is not thus that we read the Daily Mail or the Petit Parisien.

In modern scientific method we have a technique for invention; technological progress proceeds at an accelerating speed. But social change is inevitably associated with technological progress. To quicken the rate of the second is to quicken the rate of the first. The subject-matter of the literature of information has been enormously increased and has become more disquietingly significant than ever before. At the same time improvements in the technique for supplying information have created a demand for information. Our tendency is to attach an

ever-increasing importance to news and to that quality of last-minute contemporaneity which invests even certain works of art, even certain scientific hypotheses and philosophical speculations, with the glamour of a political assassination or a Derby result. Accustomed as we are to devouring information, we make a habit of reading a great deal very rapidly. There must be many people who, once having escaped from school or the university, never read anything with concentration or more than once. They have no verbal props to shore against their ruins. Nor, indeed, do they need any props. A mind that is sufficiently pulverized and sufficiently agitated supports itself by the very violence of its motion. It ceases to be a ruin and becomes a whirling sandstorm.

In a certain sense our passion for information defeats its own object, which is increased knowledge of the world and other human beings. We are provided with a vastly greater supply of facts than our ancestors ever had an opportunity of considering. And yet our knowledge of other peoples is probably less thorough and intimate than theirs. In 1500 an educated Frenchman or German knew very little about current political events in England and nothing at all of the activities, so lavishly recorded in our literature of information, of English criminals, aristocrats, sportsmen, actresses. Nevertheless, he probably knew more about the intimate intellectual and emotional processes of Englishmen than his better-informed descendants know to-day. This knowledge was derived from introspection. Knowing himself he knew them. Minds moulded by the same religious and secular literatures were in a position to understand one another in a way which is inconceivable to men who have in common only science and information. By discrediting the Bible and providing a more obviously useful substitute for the study of the dead languages, triumphant science has completed the work of spiritual disunion which was begun when it undermined belief in transcendental religion and so prepared the way for the positivistic superstitions of nationalism and dictator-worship. It remains to be seen whether it will discover a way to put this shattered Humpty-Dumpty together again.

T. H. HUXLEY AS A LITERARY MAN*

MR. G. K. Chesterton has a genius for saying new and surprising things about old subjects. We are grateful to him for his originality. But there is such a thing as being too original by half; and it sometimes happens that what Mr. Chesterton says is so new and so surprising that it has very little perceptible relevance to the subject under discussion. For example, in that stimulating little book, The Victorian Age in Literature, he says of Lord Macaulay and T. H. Huxley that 'they were both much more under the influence of their own admirable rhetoric than they knew. Huxley, especially, was much more a literary than a scientific man.'

Well, this is new and surprising enough — new and surprising, indeed, to the point of being quite untrue. The records of Huxley's scientific achievements are there to prove the contrary. He was a man of science first of all — a man of science who also had, what quite a number of men of science before and after his day have had, a literary gift.

Being myself of the literary profession, I think I can guess how a fellow man of letters would arrive at the conclusion so boldly enunciated in Mr. Chesterton's book. The process is simplicity itself. All that is required is a little systematic and selective ignorance. Ostrich-like, one shuts one's eyes to the scientific achievements of one's subject. One refrains from reading any of his technical papers (and, incidentally, even if one did read them, one would not understand them); and one concentrates exclusively on his more accessible, his more specifically literary productions. The result is that one comes, logically and inevitably, to the conclusion that 'Huxley, especially, was much more a literary than a scientific man.' Q.E.D. It is as evident as a proposition of Euclid.

It would be easy to apply the same process to other men of science and to arrive at exactly similar conclusions. Thus, if you choose to forget the

‘Experimental Researches’ and remember only the Calvinistic sermons, you can say of Faraday that he was much less a man of science than a nonconformist preacher. Concentrate on Clerk Maxwell’s beautiful letters, and you will be able to conclude that the author of the electromagnetic theory of light was not so much the successor of Newton as of *Mme.* de Sévigné and Horace Walpole. And if you listen to the musical improvisations rather than to the lectures on relativity, you will have every reason for saying that Einstein is more significant as a violinist than as a mathematical physicist.

Such conclusions are based, as I have said, on systematic and selective ignorance. Now, systematic ignorance of past science is doubtless deplorable. But, however deplorable, it is not, except with a special effort, to be avoided. Those who have not had a scientific education are incapable of understanding the technicalities of any scientific paper. Those who have been educated in one branch of science are hardly better off than laymen, when it comes to understanding a paper in some other branch. And those who have been educated in the particular science under consideration have no need to refer to the original papers of their predecessors. Every generation of scientific men starts where the previous generation left off; and the most advanced discoveries of one age constitute the elementary axioms of the next. We are not in the habit of inspecting the foundations of the houses in which we live; and, similarly, men of science are not in the habit of referring to the original paper of their predecessors. ‘I am toiling over my chapter about Owen,’ writes Huxley towards the end of his life, in 1894. ‘The thing that strikes me most is, how he and I and all the things we fought about belong to antiquity.’ It was, to a large extent, thanks to Huxley’s own labours that they belonged to antiquity. A prolific discoverer is continuously superannuating his earlier self.

Except, then, for the historians of science, nobody studies at first hand those contributions to knowledge to which the great discoverers of the past owe their scientific reputations. By what seems a strange paradox, the older scientists survive mainly as artists. A work of art can never be taken for granted, and so

forgotten; neither can it ever be disproved and therefore thrown aside. Science is soon out of date, art is not.

Of this fact Huxley himself was well aware. In one of his letters he comments upon it with characteristic humour. ‘At the Christmas dinner,’ we are told in his biography, ‘he invariably delighted the children by carving wonderful beasts, generally pigs, out of orange peel. When the marriage of his eldest daughter had taken her away from this important function, she was sent the best specimen as a reminder. “I call it,” he writes in the accompanying letter, “Piggurne, or Harmony in Orange and White.” ’ This was written in 1878, the year of Whistler’s action against Ruskin; nocturnes and colour harmonies were very much ‘in the news.’ ‘ ”Preserve it, my dear child,” he goes on, “as evidence of the paternal genius, when those light and fugitive productions which are buried in the Philosophical Transactions and elsewhere are forgotten.” ’

The jesting words express a truth. Productions published in the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society may not be light; but they are in a very real sense fugitive. The substance of a scientific paper is incorporated into the general stock of knowledge; but the paper itself is doomed to oblivion. Not so the pig made of orange peel. If sufficiently well carved, it may continue to give pleasure and to excite admiration for an indefinite period — or at any rate so long as the peel holds together. What is true of orange-peel pigs is true, a fortiori, of those monuments more lasting than brass, well-written books.

As a scientific man, Huxley, like all his great contemporaries and predecessors, is now a mere historical figure. Most of us are content to accept his scientific reputation on authority, without ever having consulted the original evidence on which it was based. As a literary man, however, he is still a living force. His non-technical writings have the persistent contemporariness that is a quality of all good art. People go on reading his books and enjoying them. Mr. Chesterton affirms, as a matter of historical fact, that Huxley ‘was much more of a literary than a scientific man.’ In which Mr. Chesterton is wrong. But if he had said that Huxley ’is much more of a literary than a scientific man,’ he would have been quite right. In so far as Huxley is still alive, influential and

contemporary, it is as the man of letters. Such is the privilege of art. Orange-peel pigs are less transient than scientific papers.

There are several ways in which I might deal with Huxley's career as a man of letters. There is, for example, the biographical approach. But the biographical ground has been so thoroughly covered in the Life and Letters that I could do nothing in this line but summarize what has been said before. I prefer, therefore, to approach the subject as a purely literary critic. Now, much has been written in rather vague and general terms of Huxley's style. I shall, accordingly, try to do something more definite and precise. Taking characteristic specimens of Huxley's writings, I shall analyse them with a view to showing what exactly were the technical means he employed to produce his effects. Critics, it seems to me, content themselves too often with the mere application of epithets. Majestic, flat, sublime, passionate — criticism is in many cases just a calling of laudatory or disparaging names. But this is not enough. Critics should take pains to show why such and such a piece of writing provokes us to call it by such and such a name. The observable facts of literature are words arranged in certain patterns. The words have a meaning independent of the pattern in which they are arranged; but it is the pattern that gives to this meaning its peculiar quality and intensity; that can make a statement seem somehow truer or somehow less true than the truth. Moreover, a word-pattern of one kind will cause us to say of its inventor: 'This man is (for example) sincere'; of another kind: 'This man is affected and false.' It is the business of the literary artist to make word-patterns in such a way that his readers shall be compelled to draw certain inferences from them. It is the business of the critic to show how our judgments are affected by variations in word-patterns. This is what I shall try to do in the present case.

But before beginning my analysis of Huxley's achievements as a literary artist, I think it would be advisable to say a few words by way of general introduction about the relations between literature and science.

The function of language is twofold: to communicate emotion and to give information. The rudimentary language of the lower animals seems to be purely emotive. Beasts make noises to express desire, fear, anger and the like; to let off

their superfluous energy; and to make their presence known to their fellow-creatures. Never do they express a concept. When a startled blackbird flies off at our approach with his characteristic cry, he is not saying, ‘There is a man’; he is saying, ‘I am afraid’ — or rather, he is simply screaming with terror. And at the sound of the scream, other blackbirds are terrified. Communication is by emotional infection, never, apparently, by conceptual statement.

Man has invented concepts. He does not merely scream with terror: he also says why and of what he is afraid. The noises he makes stand for classes of objects. He can do what the animal can never do: he can make an exact statement untinged by passion. In other words, he can write scientifically.

But because he can do this, it does not follow that he very often wants to do it. In most of the circumstances of life, he wants not only to inform, but also to move — above all, to be moved as well as to be informed. Literature is the art of making statements movingly.

Now, the emotions which a literary statement may cause us to feel are of two distinct types. They may be what I will call the ‘biological emotions’ — emotions, that is to say, with a survival value, such as fear, anger, delight or disgust, all of which we share with the lower animals. Or they may be more specifically human emotions — luxury feelings, which we might lose without seriously imperilling our chances of survival.

Literature, in common with the other arts, arouses in us, over and above any kind of biological emotion, a certain luxury feeling, to which we give the name of the aesthetic emotion. We describe as beautiful anything which makes us experience this feeling.

Let us now consider the case of a writer who is trying to make a statement which shall cause his readers to have a certain biological feeling — say, a feeling of anger. By using words with suitable significances and associations, by expressing himself in terms of metaphors that call up the right kind of images, he can make it clear to his readers that he feels angry himself (or, vicariously, in the person of a fictional character) and that he wants them to feel angry too. Whether they respond or remain unmoved depends, to a very considerable

extent, on his powers as an artist — on his powers, that is to say, as a giver of aesthetic emotions. If he can arrange his words and phrases in a pattern which his readers will consider beautiful, then he is likely to succeed. If not, he is likely to fail. Biological feelings can be well and promptly communicated only by words arranged so as to give us aesthetic feelings. And the same thing is true even of the most abstract ideas. We are more likely to take in an idea which is expressed with art, beautifully, than if it is expressed in language that gives us no aesthetic satisfaction.

True, facts and theories can be communicated in terms that give the reader no aesthetic satisfaction. So can the passions. But neither passion nor facts and theories can be communicated rapidly and persuasively in such terms. Whatever is expressed with art — whether it be a lover's despair or a metaphysical theory — pierces the mind and compels assent and acceptance. Against that which is expressed without art, our understandings are naturally armoured. We have a certain difficulty in taking in anything that is not intrinsically elegant; a certain eagerness to accept anything that moves us aesthetically. Handsome faces are sometimes associated with ugly characters; and in the same way, alas! literary art may be associated with untruth. The natural human tendency to believe what is beautiful has been the source of innumerable errors. If only Plato had written as badly as Immanuel Kant! But his voice was, unfortunately, the voice of an angel, even when it was uttering demonstrable nonsense. And if Darwin's style had been as excellent as Samuel Butler's, Mr. Bernard Shaw would not at present be a preacher of Lamarckism— 'a doctrine,' as Professor J. B. S. Haldane has remarked, 'supported by far less positive evidence than exists for the reality of witchcraft.'

Science is investigation. But if it were only investigation, it would be without fruit, and useless. Henry Cavendish investigated for the mere fun of the thing, and left the world in ignorance of his most important discoveries. Our admiration for his genius is tempered by a certain disapproval; we feel that such a man is selfish and anti-social. Science is investigation; yes. But it is also, and

no less essentially, communication. But all communication is literature. In one of its aspects, then, science is a branch of literature.

It may be objected that I apply the term ‘literature’ too indiscriminately — that, instead of using the word to cover all verbal communications whatsoever, I should limit its connotation to a certain class of communications. To this objection, I reply interrogatively: Which particular class of verbal communications constitutes literature? The answers to this question are generally very vague. For example, literature has been defined as ‘the interpretation of life through the medium of words’; while a distinction is often drawn between ‘words used to record observations of fact, either as an end in themselves, or as a basis for generalizations, and words used as a means for transferring experience.’ But, frankly, this sort of thing won’t do; it is too hazy. Not much better is the distinction between literature and science implied by Wordsworth in his preface to the Lyrical Ballads. ‘The remotest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, or the mineralogist will be as proper objects of the poet’s art as any upon which he is now employed, if the time should ever come, when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings.’ But who, we may inquire, are the people whom Wordsworth calls ‘us’? Is it not obvious that the more intelligent a man is, and the more highly cultivated, the wider will be the range of things which are ‘material to him as an enjoying and suffering being’? Moreover, as every verbal communication can be made well or badly, every verbal communication is susceptible of affecting some men, at any rate, as aesthetic enjoyers and sufferers. It goes without saying, of course, that only those who understand the terms in which the communication is made will have any aesthetic feelings about it. Englishmen are clearly not the best judges of Chinese poetry, and those who have not had a scientific education will be unable to understand, much less to appreciate and enjoy, works written in a highly technical language. But for anyone who knows what they are talking about, the very mathematicians are men of letters — men of algebraical letters, no doubt; but even χ and sigma and

psi can be aesthetically good or bad, litterae humaniores or inhuman letters. I have heard mathematicians groaning over the demonstrations of Kelvin. Ponderous and clumsy, they bludgeon the mind into a reluctant assent. Whereas to be convinced by Clerk Maxwell's elegant equations is a pleasure; and reading Niels Abel on hyperelliptic functions is almost, it seems, like listening to Mozart's chamber music. For the mathematically illiterate, like myself, these things are, of course, mere scribblings, without significance and without form. For those whom Nature has endowed with suitable talents and who have had the right education, they are works of art, some exquisite, some atrociously bad. What is true of a mathematical argument is equally true of arguments couched in words. Even plain records of observed fact may be, in their own way, beautiful or ugly. From all which we must conclude that all verbal communications whatsoever are literature.

Some kinds of literature, however, are more widely accessible than others. Also, certain classes of experience give more artistic scope to those who communicate them than do certain other classes of experience. For example, a man who writes about his experiences of love or pain has more scope for arranging words in an aesthetically satisfying way than one who sets out to give an account of his observations on, say, deep-sea fish. All communications are literature; but their potentialities for beauty are unequal. A good account of deep-sea fish can never be as richly, variously and subtly beautiful as a good poem about love. But, on the other hand, a bad account of fish can probably never be so monstrous as a bad love-poem.

To make clearer what I have been saying, let me give two specific examples. The following is an extract from an article in the Encyclopaedia Britannica on the furnishing of Anglican churches after the Reformation: 'When tables were substituted for altars in the English churches, these were not merely movable, but, at the administration of the Lord's Supper, were actually moved into the body of the church, and placed table-wise — that is, with the long sides turned to the north and south, and the narrow ends to the east and west. In the time of Archbishop Laud, however, the present practice of the Church of England was

introduced. The communion table, though still of wood and movable, is, in fact, never moved; it is placed altar-wise — that is, with the longer axis running north and south. Often there is a reredos behind it; it is also fenced in by rails to preserve it from profanation of various kinds.'

This is a simple and, as it happens, not a very good specimen of scientific literature. We read it without feeling any emotion, whether biological or aesthetic. The words are neither exciting nor beautiful; they are merely informative — and informative in what is, on the whole, rather an inelegant way.

Let us now listen to what Milton had to say on the same subject. 'The table of communion, now become a table of separation, stands like an exalted platform on the brow of the quire, fortified with bulwark and barricado to keep off the profane touch of the laics, whilst the obscene and surfeited priest scruples not to paw and mammock the sacramental bread as familiarly as his tavern biscuit.'

This is a statement about church furnishing; but not, as I think you may have noticed, a scientific statement — that is to say, a merely informative and unimpassioned statement. Milton, it is clear, designed to communicate, along with the facts about altars, certain biological feelings of his own — as hatred of priests and sympathy for an exploited laity. Thanks to the skilful use of a number of technical literary devices — devices which, unfortunately, I have no time to describe and analyse — the passage also gives us a lively feeling of aesthetic satisfaction. Milton communicates what he has to say with art; that is to say, he communicates it successfully. He really makes us feel, at any rate while we are reading him, some of his own indignation.

Huxley, as I shall show in due course, was an artist in both these kinds of literature — an artist in pure scientific statement, and also, on occasion, an artist in the communication of what I have called the biological feelings. Both his pure scientific and his emotive statements arouse aesthetic feelings; in other words, each kind of statement is, in its own way, beautiful.

Huxley realized very well the importance of being an artist. Of the Germans he writes: 'As men of research in positive science they are magnificently laborious and accurate. But most of them have no notion of style, and seem to

compose their books with a pitchfork.' Determined that his own books should not justify a similar reproach, he cultivated his literary gifts with conscientious industry. 'It constantly becomes more and more difficult for me to finish things satisfactorily,' he writes to Hooker in 1860. The reason for this was that his standard of literary excellence was constantly becoming higher. Let me quote in this context a letter to his French translator, de Varigny. 'I am quite conscious that the condensed and idiomatic English into which I always try to put my thoughts must present many difficulties to a translator. . . . The fact is that I have a great love and respect for my native tongue, and take great pains to use it properly. Sometimes I write essays half a dozen times before I can get them into the proper shape; and I believe I become more fastidious as I grow older.' It was an effective fastidiousness; Huxley undoubtedly wrote better as he grew older.

What were his artistic principles and ideals? The following passage from a letter to the Pall Mall Gazette in 1886 is illuminating:

'That a young Englishman may be turned out of one of our universities, "epopt and perfect," as far as their system takes him, and yet ignorant of the noble literature which has grown up in these islands during the last three centuries, no less than of the philosophical and political ideas which have most profoundly influenced modern civilization, is a fact in the history of the nineteenth century which the twentieth will find hard to believe; though perhaps it is not more incredible than our current superstition that whoso wishes to write and speak English well should mould his style after the models furnished by classical antiquity. For my part, I venture to doubt the wisdom of attempting to mould one's style by any other process than that of striving after the clear and forcible expression of definite conceptions; in which process the Glassian precept, "first catch your definite conceptions," is probably the most difficult to obey. But still I mark among distinguished contemporary speakers and writers of English, saturated with antiquity, not a few to whom, it seems to me, the study of Hobbes might have taught dignity, of Swift, concision and clearness, of Goldsmith and Defoe, simplicity.

‘Well, among a hundred young men whose university career is finished, is there one whose attention has ever been directed by his literary instructors to a page of Hobbes, or Swift, or Goldsmith, or Defoe? In my boyhood we were familiar with Robinson Crusoe, The Vicar of Wakefield and Gulliver’s Travels; and though the treasures of “Middle English” were hidden from us, my impression is that we ran less chance of learning to write and speak the “middling English” of popular orators and head masters than if we had been perfect in such mysteries and ignorant of those three masterpieces. It has been the fashion to decry the eighteenth century, as young fops laugh at their fathers. But we were there in germ; and a “Professor of Eighteenth-Century History and Literature” who knew his business might tell young Englishmen more of that which it is profoundly important that they should know, but which at present remains hidden from them, than any other instructor: and, incidentally, they would learn to know good English when they see or hear it — perhaps even to distinguish between slipshod copiousness and true eloquence, and that alone would be a great gain.’

To literary beginners, Huxley’s advice was: ‘Say that which has to be said in such language that you can stand cross-examination on each word.’ And again: ‘Be clear, though you may be convicted of error. If you are clearly wrong, you will run up against a fact sometime and get set right. If you shuffle with your subject and study chiefly to use language which will give you a loophole of escape either way, there is no hope for you.’ ‘Veracity,’ he said on another occasion, ’is the heart of morality.’ It was also the heart of his literary style. For all those rhetorical devices by means of which the sophist and the politician seek to make the worse appear the better cause Huxley felt an almost passionate disapproval. ‘When some chieftain,’ he wrote, ‘famous in political warfare, ventures into the region of letters or of science, in full confidence that the methods which have brought fame and honour in his own province will answer there, he is apt to forget that he will be judged by those people on whom rhetorical artifices have long since ceased to take effect; and to whom mere

dexterity in putting together cleverly ambiguous phrases, and even the great art of offensive misrepresentation, are unspeakably wearisome.'

The chieftain in question was Mr. Gladstone, with whom, in 1891, Huxley was having the Gadarene swine controversy. Four years later, in the last year of his life, Huxley was to remark, in a conversation recorded by Mr. Wilfrid Ward, on the philosophical methods of another eminent politician, Mr. Arthur Balfour. 'No human being holds the opinion he (Balfour) speaks of as Naturalism. He is a good debater. He knows the value of a word. The word "Naturalism" has a bad sound and unpleasant associations. It would tell against us in the House of Commons, and so it will with his readers.' Huxley was also a good debater; he also knew the value of a word. But his passion for veracity always kept him from taking any unfair rhetorical advantages of an opponent. The candour with which he acknowledged a weakness in his own case was always complete, and though he made full use of a rich variety of literary devices to bring home what he wanted to say, he never abused his great rhetorical powers. Truth was more important to him than personal triumph, and he relied more on a forceful clarity to convince his readers than on the brilliant and exciting ambiguities of propagandist eloquence.

For the purposes of literary analysis, Huxley's writings may be divided into three classes: first, the purely descriptive; secondly, the philosophical and sociological; and thirdly, the controversial and (to use once more a repellant, but irreplaceable, word) the emotive. To the first of these classes belong the technical scientific papers; to the second, the studies of Hume and Berkeley and a number of essays on metaphysical, ethical and educational subjects; and to the third, certain of the essays on Christian and Hebrew tradition and the essays containing criticisms of other people's ideas or a defence of his own. It is hardly necessary to say that, in reality, the three classes overlap. The descriptive papers contain philosophical matter in the form of generalizations and scientific hypotheses. The philosophical and sociological essays have their controversial and their emotionally moving passages; and as most of the controversies are on philosophical subjects, the controversial essays are to a considerable extent

purely philosophical. Still, imperfect as it is, the classification is none the less useful. The writings of the first two classes are strictly scientific writings; that is to say, they are meant to communicate facts and ideas, not passions. They are of the same kind as the passage from the Encyclopaedia quoted at an earlier stage in this lecture. The writings of the third class belong to the same genus as my quotation from Milton. They are intended to communicate feelings as well as information — and biological feeling as well as pure aesthetic feeling. I propose now to deal with these three classes of Huxley's writings in order.

To describe with precision even the simplest object is extremely difficult. Just how difficult only those who have attempted the task professionally can realize. Let me ask you to imagine yourselves suddenly called upon to explain to some Martian visitor the exact form, function and mode of operation of, say, a corkscrew. The thing seems simple enough; and yet I suspect that, after a few minutes of stammering hesitations, most of us would find ourselves reduced to making spiral gestures with a forefinger and going through a pantomime of bottle-opening. The difficulties of describing in a clear and intelligible way such an incomparably more elaborate piece of machinery as a living organism, for example, are proportionately greater.

Not only is exact description difficult; it is also, of all kinds of writing, that which has in it the least potentialities of beauty. The object to be described stares the author uncompromisingly in the face. His business is to render its likeness in words, point by point, in such a way that someone who had never seen it would be able to reconstruct it from his description, as from a blue print. He must therefore call every spade consistently and exclusively a spade — never anything else. But the higher forms of literature depend for many of their most delicate effects on spades being called on occasion by other names. Non-scientific writers are free to use a variety of synonyms to express the same idea in subtly different ways; are free to employ words with variously coloured overtones of association; are free to express themselves, in terms now of one metaphor, now of another. Not so the maker of verbal blue prints. The only beauties he can hope, or, indeed, has any right to create are beauties of orderly

composition and, in detail, of verbal clarity. Huxley's scientific papers prove him to have had a remarkable talent for this austere and ungrateful kind of writing. His descriptions of the most complicated organic structures are astonishingly lucid. We are reminded, as we read, that their author was an accomplished draughtsman. 'I should make it absolutely necessary,' he writes in one of his essays on education, 'for everybody to learn to draw. . . . You will find it,' he goes on, 'an implement of learning of extreme value. It gives you the means of training the young in attention and accuracy, which are two things in which all mankind are more deficient than in any other mental quality whatever. The whole of my life has been spent in trying to give my proper attention to things and to be accurate, and I have not succeeded as well as I could wish; and other people, I am afraid, are not much more fortunate.' No artist, I suppose, has ever succeeded as well as he could wish; but many have succeeded as well as other, less talented people could wish. In its own kind, such a book as Huxley's Treatise on the Crayfish is a model of excellence. Quotation cannot do justice to the composition of the book as a whole, and the unavoidable use of technical terms makes the citing even of short extracts unsuitable on such an occasion as the present. The following passage may serve, however, to give some idea of the lucidity of Huxley's descriptive style:

'In the dorsal wall of the heart two small oval apertures are visible, provided with valvular lips, which open inwards, or towards the internal cavity of the heart. There is a similar aperture in each of the two lateral faces of the heart, and two others in its inferior face, making six in all. These apertures readily admit fluid into the heart, but oppose its exit. On the other hand, at the origins of the arteries there are small valvular folds directed in such a manner as to permit the exit of fluid from the heart, while they prevent its entrance.'

This is nakedly plain and unadorned; but it does what it was intended to do — it gives the reader a satisfyingly accurate picture of what is being described. Some modern popularizers of science have sought to 'humanize' their writing. The following is an example of the late Dr. Dorsey's humanized — his all-too-humanized — scientific style:

‘If we find that the thing we trust to pick the mother of our children is simply a double-barrelled pump, knowledge of our heart or the liquid refreshment it pumps to our brains will not grow more nerve cells, but it should make us less nervous and more respectful of the pump and the refreshment it delivers; when it stops, the brain starves to death.’

Obscure almost to meaninglessness, vulgar, vague — this is the humanization of science with a vengeance! Deplorably but, I suppose, naturally enough, this kind of popular science is thoroughly popular in the other, the box-office sense of the term. Tennyson’s generalization, that we needs must love the highest when we see it, has but the slenderest justification in observable fact.

So much for the writings of the first class. Those of the second are more interesting, both to the general reader and to the literary critic. Philosophical writings have much higher potentialities of beauty than purely descriptive writings. The descriptive writer is confined within the narrow prison of the material objects whose likeness he is trying to render. The philosopher is the inhabitant of a much more spacious, because a purely mental, universe. There is, if I may so express myself, more room in the theory of knowledge than in a crayfish’s heart. No doubt, if we could feel as certain about epistemology as we do about the shape and function of crustacean viscera, the philosopher’s universe would be as narrow as the descriptive naturalist’s. But we do not feel as certain. Ignorance has many advantages. Man’s uncertainties in regard to all the major issues of life allow the philosopher much enviable freedom — freedom, among other things, to employ all kinds of artistic devices, from the use of which the descriptive naturalist is quite debarred.

The passages from Huxley’s philosophical writings which I now propose to quote and analyse have been chosen mainly, of course, because they exhibit characteristic excellences of style, but partly, also, for the sake of their content. Huxley’s philosophical doctrines are outside my province, and I shall not discuss them. What I have done, however, is to choose as my literary examples passages which illustrate his views on a number of important questions. They show how cautious and profound a thinker he was — how very far from being that arrogant

and cocksure materialist at whom, as at a convenient Aunt Sally, certain contemporary publicists are wont to fling their dialectical brickbats.

Huxley's use of purely rhythmical effects was always masterly, and my first three examples are intended to illustrate his practice in this branch of literary art. Here is a paragraph on scientific hypotheses:

'All science starts with hypotheses — in other words, with assumptions that are unproved, while they may be, and often are, erroneous, but which are better than nothing to the searcher after order in the maze of phenomena. And the historical progress of every science depends on the criticism of hypotheses — on the gradual stripping off, that is, of their untrue or superfluous parts — until there remains only that exact verbal expression of as much as we know of the facts, and no more, which constitutes a perfect scientific theory.'

The substance of this paragraph happens to be intrinsically correct. But we are the more willing to believe its truth because of the way in which that truth is expressed. Huxley's utterance has something peculiarly judicious and persuasive about it. The secret is to be found in his rhythm. If we analyse the crucial first sentence, we shall find that it consists of three more or less equal long phrases, followed by three more or less equal short ones. Thus:

'All science starts with hypotheses —
in other words, with assumptions that are unproved,
while they may be, and often are, erroneous;
but which are better than nothing

to the searcher after order
in the maze of phenomena.’

The long opening phrases state all that can be said against hypotheses — state it with a firm and heavy emphasis. Then, suddenly, in the second half of the sentence, the movement quickens, and the brisk and lively rhythm of the three last phrases brings home the value of hypotheses with an appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities as well as to the intellect.

My second example is from a passage dealing with ‘those who oppose the doctrine of necessity’:

‘They rest [writes Huxley] on the absurd presumption that the proposition “I can do as I like” is contradictory to the doctrine of necessity. The answer is: nobody doubts that, at any rate within certain limits, you can do as you like. But what determines your likings and dislikings? Did you make your own constitution? Is it your contrivance that one thing is pleasant and another is painful? And even if it were, why did you prefer to make it after the one fashion rather than the other? The passionate assertion of the consciousness of their freedom, which is the favourite refuge of the opponents of the doctrine of necessity, is mere futility, for nobody denies it. What they really have to do, if they would upset the necessarian argument, is to prove that they are free to associate any emotion whatever with any idea whatever; to like pain as much as pleasure, vice as much as virtue; in short, to prove that, whatever may be the fixity of order of the universe of things, that of thought is given over to chance.’

Again, this is a very sound argument; but its penetrative force and immediate persuasiveness are unquestionably increased by the manner of its expression. The anti-necessarian case is attacked in a series of short, sharp phrases, each carrying a simple question demanding a simple and, for the arguer’s opponents, a most damaging answer:

‘But what determines your likings and dislikings?
Did you make your own constitution?
Is it your contrivance that one thing is pleasant and another is painful?’

The phrases lengthen as the argument deals with subtler points of detail; then, in the last sentence, where Huxley convicts his opponents of upholding an absurdity, they contract to the emphatically alliterative brevity of

‘to like pain as much as pleasure,
vice as much as virtue.’

After which the absurdity of the anti-necessarian case is generalized; there is a long preparatory phrase, followed by a brief, simple and, we are made to feel, definitive conclusion:

‘to prove that, whatever may be the fixity of order
of the universe of things,
that of thought is given over to chance.’

The persuasive effectiveness of these last phrases is enhanced by the use of alliteration. ‘Things’ and ‘thought’ are key words. Their alliterative resemblance serves to emphasize the unjustifiable distinction which the anti-necessarians draw between the two worlds. And the insistent recurrence in both phrases of the v-sound of prove, whatever, universe and of given and over enhances the same effect.

The passage I am now about to quote is remarkable both for what it says and for the particularly solemn and noble manner of the saying:

‘In whichever way we look at the matter, morality is based on feeling, not on reason; though reason alone is competent to trace out the effects of our actions and thereby dictate conduct. Justice is founded on the love of one’s neighbour; and goodness is a kind of beauty. The moral law, like the laws of physical nature, rests in the long run upon instinctive intuitions, and is neither more nor less “innate” and “necessary” than they are. Some people cannot by any means be got to understand the first book of Euclid; but the truths of mathematics are no less necessary and binding on the great mass of mankind. Some there are who cannot feel the difference between the “Sonata Appassionate” and “Cherry Ripe,” or between a gravestone-cutter’s cherub and the Apollo Belvedere; but the canons of art are none the less acknowledged. While some there may be who, devoid of sympathy, are incapable of a sense of duty; but neither does their

existence affect the foundations of morality. Such pathological deviations from true manhood are merely the halt, the lame and the blind of the world of consciousness; and the anatomist of the mind leaves them aside, as the anatomist of the body would ignore abnormal specimens.

‘And as there are Pascals and Mozarts, Newtons and Raphaels, in whom the innate faculty for science or art needs but a touch to spring into full vigour, and through whom the human race obtains new possibilities of knowledge and new conceptions of beauty; so there have been men of moral genius, to whom we owe ideals of duty and visions of moral perfection, which ordinary mankind could never have attained; though, happily for them, they can feel the beauty of a vision which lay beyond the reach of their dull imaginations, and count life well spent in shaping some faint image of it in the actual world.’

As a piece of reflective writing, this is quite admirable; and it will be worth while, I think, to take some trouble to analyse out the technical devices which make it so effective. The secret of the peculiar beauty of this grave and noble passage is to be found, I believe, in the author’s use of what, for lack of a better term, I will call ‘caesura-sentences.’ Hebrew literature provides the classical type of the caesura-sentence. Open any of the poetical books of the Bible at random, and you will find all the examples you want. ‘His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth.’ Or, ‘Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.’ The whole system of Hebrew poetry was based on the division of each sentence by a caesura into two distinct, but related clauses. Anglo-Saxon verse was written on a somewhat similar principle. The caesura-sentence is common in the work of some of the greatest English prose-writers. One of them, Sir Thomas Browne, used it constantly. Here, for example, is a characteristic passage from the ‘Urn Burial’: ‘Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings. We slightly remember our felicities, and the smartest strokes of affliction leave but short smart upon us. Sense endureth no extremities, and sorrows destroy us or themselves.’ It was Browne, I think, who first demonstrated the peculiar suitability of the caesura-

sentence for the expression of grave meditations on the nature of things, for the utterance of profound and rather melancholy aphorisms. The clauses into which he divides his sentence are generally short. Sometimes the two clauses are more or less evenly balanced. Sometimes a longer clause is succeeded by a shorter, and the effect is one of finality, of the last word having been spoken. Sometimes the shorter comes first, and the long clause after the caesura seems to open up wide prospects of contemplation and speculative argument.

I could give other examples of the use of caesura-sentences by writers as far apart as Dr. Johnson and De Quincey. But time presses; and besides, these examples would be superfluous. For, as it so happens, Huxley's use of the caesura-sentence is very similar to Browne's. He employs it, in the great majority of cases, when he wants to express himself in meditative aphorisms about the nature of life in general. Thus: 'Ignorance is visited as sharply as wilful disobedience — incapacity meets with the same punishment as crime.' Again, 'Pain and sorrow knock at our doors more loudly than pleasure and happiness; and the prints of their heavy footsteps are less easily effaced.' Here is another example, where the clauses are much shorter: 'There is but one right, and the possibilities of wrong are infinite.' Here yet one more, in which, as the statement made is more complicated, the clauses have to be longer than usual: 'It is one of the last lessons one learns from experience, but not the least important, that a heavy tax is levied upon all forms of success; and that failure is one of the commonest disguises assumed by blessings.'

In the long passage quoted just now much of that effect of noble and meditative gravity is obtained by the judicious use of caesura-sentences. The tone is set by a sentence that might almost have been penned by Sir Thomas Browne himself: 'Justice is founded on the love of one's neighbour; and goodness is a kind of beauty.' All the rest of the first paragraph is built up of fundamentally similar caesura-sentences, some almost as brief and simple as the foregoing, some long and complicated, but preserving through their length and complication the peculiar quality (as of a sad and deeply reflective soliloquy, an

argument of the mind with its inmost self), the musically pensive essence of the Brownean formula.

Before leaving the subject of Huxley's philosophical writings, I must say something about his use of images and his choice of words. Since accuracy and veracity were the qualities at which he consistently aimed, Huxley was sparing in the use of images. Ideas can be very vividly expressed in terms of metaphor and simile; but, since analogies are rarely complete, this vividness is too often achieved at the cost of precision. Seldom, and only with the greatest caution, does Huxley attempt anything like a full-blown simile. The most striking one I can remember is that in which he compares living beings to the whirlpool below Niagara:

'However changeful is the contour of its crest, this wave has been visible, approximately in the same place, and with the same general form, for centuries past. Seen from a mile off, it would seem to be a stationary hillock of water. Viewed closely, it is a typical expression of the conflicting impulses generated by a swift rush of material particles. Now, with all our appliances, we cannot get within a good many miles, so to speak, of the crayfish. If we could, we should see that it was nothing but the constant form of a similar turmoil of material molecules, which are constantly flowing into the animal on one side, and streaming out on the other.'

Only where analogies were as close as this one between the living body and the vortex would Huxley venture to make use of similes. He was never prepared to enliven the manner of his books at the expense of their matter.

Huxley's vocabulary is probably the weakest point in all his literary equipment. True, it was perfectly adequate to the clear and forceful statement of his ideas. But the sensitive reader cannot help feeling that the choice of words might, without any impairment of scientific efficiency, have been more exquisite. For example, we miss in his writings that studied alternation of words of Greek and Latin with words of Teutonic origin — an alternation so rich, when skilfully handled, as by Milton, in powerful and startling literary effects. To illustrate the defects in Huxley's vocabulary would be a lengthy and laborious

process, which I cannot undertake in the time at my disposal. It must be enough to say that, good as his choice of words generally is, it might unquestionably have been better.

Let us turn now to the third division of Huxley's writings, the controversial and emotive. As a controversialist, Huxley was severe, but always courteous. We must not expect to find in his polemical writings those thunderous comminations, that jeering and abuse which make Milton's prose such lively reading. Still, he could be sarcastic enough when he wanted, and his wit was pointed and barbed by the elegance with which he expressed himself. Here is a passage from a brief biography of Descartes, which shows what was the nature of his talents in this direction:

'Trained by the best educators of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits; naturally endowed with a dialectic grasp and subtlety which even they could hardly improve; and with a passion for getting at the truth which even they could hardly impair, Descartes possessed in addition a rare mastery of literary expression.'

One could quote many similar passages. From the neat antithesis to the odd and laughter-provoking word — Huxley used every device for the expression of sarcasm and irony.

In the passages in which his aim was to convey, along with ideas, a certain quality of passion, Huxley resorted very often to literary allusion — particularly to biblical allusion. Here is a characteristic example:

'The politician tells us, "You must educate the masses because they are going to be masters." The clergy join in the cry for education, for they affirm that the people are drifting away from church and chapel into the broadest infidelity. The manufacturers and the capitalists swell the chorus lustily. They declare that ignorance makes bad workmen; that England will soon be unable to turn out cotton goods, or steam engines, cheaper than other people; and then, Ichabod! Ichabod! the glory will be departed from us. And a few voices are lifted up in favour of the doctrine that the masses should be educated because they are men

and women with unlimited capacities of being, doing and suffering, and that it is as true now as ever it was, that the people perish for lack of knowledge.'

Here the two, or rather the three, biblical references produce a variety of powerful emotional effects — produce them, let us note in passing, only upon those who know their Bible. Those who do not know their Bible will fail to appreciate the chief beauties of this passage almost as completely as those who do not know their Functions of Complex Variables must fail to appreciate the beauties of Niels Abel's mathematical literature. Every writer assumes in his readers a knowledge of the work of certain other writers. His assumptions, I may add, are frequently quite unjustified.

Let us now consider the emotional effects which Huxley aimed at producing and which, upon those who know the sacred writings as well as he, he did and still does produce. Ichabod, it will be remembered, was so named, 'because the glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken.' To mention Ichabod in this context is to imply a richly sarcastic disquisition on the nature of the capitalists' god. The tone changes, in the last sentence, from ironical to earnest and pathetic; and those final words, 'the people perish for lack of knowledge,' put us in mind of two noble biblical passages: one from the book of the prophet Hosea, who affirms that 'the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land' and that 'the people are destroyed for lack of knowledge'; the other from the book of Proverbs, to the effect that 'where there is no vision, the people perish.' The double reference produces the effect Huxley desired. The true reason for universal education could not be stated more concisely or more movingly.

Occasionally, Huxley's biblical references take the form, not of direct citation, but of the use of little tags of obsolescent language borrowed from the Authorized Version. After a long passage of lucid and essentially modern exposition, he will sometimes announce the oncoming of his peroration by a phrase or two of sixteenth-century prayer-book or Bible English. Our modern taste has veered away from this practice; but among writers of the early and middle nineteenth century it was very common. Lamb and his contemporaries

were constantly dropping into Wardour Street Elizabethan; Carlyle's writings are a warehouse of every kind of fancy-dress language; Herman Melville made a habit of breaking out, whenever he was excited, into bogus Shakespeare; the very love-letters of the Brownings are peppered with learned archaisms. Indeed, one of the major defects of nineteenth-century literature, at any rate in our eyes, was its inordinate literariness, its habit of verbal dressing up and playing stylistic charades. That Huxley should have made brief and occasional use of the literary devices so freely exploited by his contemporaries is not surprising. Fortunately, his passion for veracity prevented him from overdoing the literariness.

I have constantly spoken, in the course of these analyses, of 'literary devices.' The phrase is a rather unfortunate one; for it is liable to call up in the hearer's mind a picture of someone laboriously practising a mixture of card-sharping and cookery. The words make us visualize the man of letters turning over the pages of some literary Mrs. Beeton in quest of the best recipe for an epigram or a dirge; or else as a trickster preparing for his game with the reader by carefully marking the cards. But in point of fact the man of letters does most of his work not by calculation, not by the application of formulas, but by aesthetic intuition. He has something to say, and he sets it down in the words which he finds most satisfying aesthetically. After the event comes the critic, who discovers that he was using a certain kind of literary device, which can be classified in its proper chapter of the cookery-book. The process is largely irreversible. Lacking talent, you cannot, out of the cookery-book, concoct a good work of art. The best you can hope to do is to produce an imitation, which may, for a short time, deceive the unwary into thinking it the genuine article.

Huxley's was unquestionably the genuine article. In this necessarily perfunctory discussion of a few characteristic examples of his writing, I have tried to show why he was a great man of letters, and how he produced those artistic effects, which cause us to make this critical judgment. The analysis might be carried much further, but not by a lecturer and not within the lecturer's allotted hour. 'Had we but world enough and time . . .' Alas! we never have.

* Delivered as the Huxley Memorial Lecture, 1932.

WORDS AND BEHAVIOUR

WORDS FORM THE thread on which we string our experiences. Without them we should live spasmodically and intermittently. Hatred itself is not so strong that animals will not forget it, if distracted, even in the presence of the enemy. Watch a pair of cats, crouching on the brink of a fight. Balefully the eyes glare; from far down in the throat of each come bursts of a strange, strangled noise of defiance; as though animated by a life of their own, the tails twitch and tremble. What aimed intensity of loathing! Another moment and surely there must be an explosion. But no; all of a sudden one of the two creatures turns away, hoists a hind leg in a more than fascist salute and, with the same fixed and focussed attention as it had given a moment before to its enemy, begins to make a lingual toilet. Animal love is as much at the mercy of distractions as animal hatred. The dumb creation lives a life made up of discrete and mutually irrelevant episodes. Such as it is, the consistency of human characters is due to the words upon which all human experiences are strung. We are purposeful because we can describe our feelings in rememberable words, can justify and rationalize our desires in terms of some kind of argument. Faced by an enemy we do not allow an itch to distract us from our emotions; the mere word ‘enemy’ is enough to keep us reminded of our hatred, to convince us that we do well to be angry. Similarly the word ‘love’ bridges for us those chasms of momentary indifference and boredom which gape from time to time between even the most ardent lovers. Feeling and desire provide us with our motive power; words give continuity to what we do and to a considerable extent determine our direction. Inappropriate and badly chosen words vitiate thought and lead to wrong or foolish conduct. Most ignorances are vincible, and in the greater number of cases stupidity is what the Buddha pronounced it to be, a sin. For, consciously or sub-consciously, it is with deliberation that we do not know or fail to understand — because incomprehension allows us, with a good conscience, to evade unpleasant

obligations and responsibilities, because ignorance is the best excuse for going on doing what one likes, but ought not, to do. Our egotisms are incessantly fighting to preserve themselves, not only from external enemies, but also from the assaults of the other and better self with which they are so uncomfortably associated. Ignorance is egotism's most effective defence against that Dr. Jekyll in us who desires perfection; stupidity, its subtlest stratagem. If, as so often happens, we choose to give continuity to our experience by means of words which falsify the facts, this is because the falsification is somehow to our advantage as egotists.

Consider, for example, the case of war. War is enormously discreditable to those who order it to be waged and even to those who merely tolerate its existence. Furthermore, to developed sensibilities the facts of war are revolting and horrifying. To falsify these facts, and by so doing to make war seem less evil than it really is, and our own responsibility in tolerating war less heavy, is doubly to our advantage. By suppressing and distorting the truth, we protect our sensibilities and preserve our self-esteem. Now, language is, among other things, a device which men use for suppressing and distorting the truth. Finding the reality of war too unpleasant to contemplate, we create a verbal alternative to that reality, parallel with it, but in quality quite different from it. That which we contemplate thenceforward is not that to which we react emotionally and upon which we pass our moral judgments, is not war as it is in fact, but the fiction of war as it exists in our pleasantly falsifying verbiage. Our stupidity in using inappropriate language turns out, on analysis, to be the most refined cunning.

The most shocking fact about war is that its victims and its instruments are individual human beings, and that these individual human beings are condemned by the monstrous conventions of politics to murder or be murdered in quarrels not their own, to inflict upon the innocent and, innocent themselves of any crime against their enemies, to suffer cruelties of every kind.

The language of strategy and politics is designed, so far as it is possible, to conceal this fact, to make it appear as though wars were not fought by individuals drilled to murder one another in cold blood and without provocation,

but either by impersonal and therefore wholly non-moral and impassible forces, or else by personified abstractions.

Here are a few examples of the first kind of falsification. In place of ‘cavalrymen’ or ‘foot-soldiers’ military writers like to speak of ‘sabres’ and ‘rifles.’ Here is a sentence from a description of the Battle of Marengo: ‘According to Victor’s report, the French retreat was orderly; it is certain, at any rate, that the regiments held together, for the six thousand Austrian sabres found no opportunity to charge home.’ The battle is between sabres in line and muskets in échelon — a mere clash of ironmongery.

On other occasions there is no question of anything so vulgarly material as ironmongery. The battles are between Platonic ideas, between the abstractions of physics and mathematics. Forces interact; weights are flung into scales; masses are set in motion. Or else it is all a matter of geometry. Lines swing and sweep; are protracted or curved; pivot on a fixed point.

Alternatively the combatants are personal, in the sense that they are personifications. There is ‘the enemy,’ in the singular, making ‘his’ plans, striking ‘his’ blows. The attribution of personal characteristics to collectivities, to geographical expressions, to institutions, is a source, as we shall see, of endless confusions in political thought, of innumerable political mistakes and crimes. Personification in politics is an error which we make because it is to our advantage as egotists to be able to feel violently proud of our country and of ourselves as belonging to it, and to believe that all the misfortunes due to our own mistakes are really the work of the Foreigner. It is easier to feel violently towards a person than towards an abstraction; hence our habit of making political personifications. In some cases military personifications are merely special instances of political personifications. A particular collectivity, the army or the warring nation, is given the name and, along with the name, the attributes of a single person, in order that we may be able to love or hate it more intensely than we could do if we thought of it as what it really is: a number of diverse individuals. In other cases personification is used for the purpose of concealing the fundamental absurdity and monstrosity of war. What is absurd and

monstrous about war is that men who have no personal quarrel should be trained to murder one another in cold blood. By personifying opposing armies or countries, we are able to think of war as a conflict between individuals. The same result is obtained by writing of war as though it were carried on exclusively by the generals in command and not by the private soldiers in their armies. (‘Rennenkampf had pressed back von Schubert.’) The implication in both cases is that war is indistinguishable from a bout of fisticuffs in a bar room. Whereas in reality it is profoundly different. A scrap between two individuals is forgivable; mass murder, deliberately organized, is a monstrous iniquity. We still choose to use war as an instrument of policy; and to comprehend the full wickedness and absurdity of war would therefore be inconvenient. For, once we understood, we should have to make some effort to get rid of the abominable thing. Accordingly, when we talk about war, we use a language which conceals or embellishes its reality. Ignoring the facts, so far as we possibly can, we imply that battles are not fought by soldiers, but by things, principles, allegories, personified collectivities, or (at the most human) by opposing commanders, pitched against one another in single combat. For the same reason, when we have to describe the processes and the results of war, we employ a rich variety of euphemisms. Even the most violently patriotic and militaristic are reluctant to call a spade by its own name. To conceal their intentions even from themselves, they make use of picturesque metaphors. We find them, for example, clamouring for war planes numerous and powerful enough to go and ‘destroy the hornets in their nests’ — in other words, to go and throw thermite, high explosives and vesicants upon the inhabitants of neighbouring countries before they have time to come and do the same to us. And how reassuring is the language of historians and strategists! They write admiringly of those military geniuses who know ‘when to strike at the enemy’s line’ (a single combatant deranges the geometrical constructions of a personification); when to ‘turn his flank’; when to ‘execute an enveloping movement.’ As though they were engineers discussing the strength of materials and the distribution of stresses, they talk of abstract entities called ‘man power’ and ‘fire power.’ They sum up the long-drawn sufferings and

atrocities of trench warfare in the phrase, ‘a war of attrition’; the massacre and mangling of human beings is assimilated to the grinding of a lens.

A dangerously abstract word, which figures in all discussions about war, is ‘force.’ Those who believe in organizing collective security by means of military pacts against a possible aggressor are particularly fond of this word. ‘You cannot,’ they say, ‘have international justice unless you are prepared to impose it by force.’ ‘Peace-loving countries must unite to use force against aggressive dictatorships.’ ‘Democratic institutions must be protected, if need be, by force.’ And so on.

Now, the word ‘force,’ when used in reference to human relations, has no single, definite meaning. There is the ‘force’ used by parents when, without resort to any kind of physical violence, they compel their children to act or refrain from acting in some particular way. There is the ‘force’ used by attendants in an asylum when they try to prevent a maniac from hurting himself or others. There is the ‘force’ used by the police when they control a crowd, and that other ‘force’ which they use in a baton charge. And finally there is the ‘force’ used in war. This, of course, varies with the technological devices at the disposal of the belligerents, with the policies they are pursuing, and with the particular circumstances of the war in question. But in general it may be said that, in war, ‘force’ connotes violence and fraud used to the limit of the combatants’ capacity.

Variations in quantity, if sufficiently great, produce variations in quality. The ‘force’ that is war, particularly modern war, is very different from the ‘force’ that is police action, and the use of the same abstract word to describe the two dissimilar processes is profoundly misleading. (Still more misleading, of course, is the explicit assimilation of a war, waged by allied League-of-Nations powers against an aggressor, to police action against a criminal. The first is the use of violence and fraud without limit against innocent and guilty alike; the second is the use of strictly limited violence and a minimum of fraud exclusively against the guilty.)

Reality is a succession of concrete and particular situations. When we think about such situations we should use the particular and concrete words which apply to them. If we use abstract words which apply equally well (and equally badly) to other, quite dissimilar situations, it is certain that we shall think incorrectly.

Let us take the sentences quoted above and translate the abstract word ‘force’ into language that will render (however inadequately) the concrete and particular realities of contemporary warfare.

‘You cannot have international justice, unless you are prepared to impose it by force.’ Translated, this becomes: ‘You cannot have international justice unless you are prepared, with a view to imposing a just settlement, to drop thermite, high explosives and vesicants upon the inhabitants of foreign cities and to have thermite, high explosives and vesicants dropped in return upon the inhabitants of your cities.’ At the end of this proceeding, justice is to be imposed by the victorious party — that is, if there is a victorious party. It should be remarked that justice was to have been imposed by the victorious party at the end of the last war. But, unfortunately, after four years of fighting, the temper of the victors was such that they were quite incapable of making a just settlement. The Allies are reaping in Nazi Germany what they sowed at Versailles. The victors of the next war will have undergone intensive bombardments with thermite, high explosives and vesicants. Will their temper be better than that of the Allies in 1918? Will they be in a fitter state to make a just settlement? The answer, quite obviously, is: No. It is psychologically all but impossible that justice should be secured by the methods of contemporary warfare.

The next two sentences may be taken together. ‘Peace-loving countries must unite to use force against aggressive dictatorships. Democratic institutions must be protected, if need be, by force.’ Let us translate. ‘Peace-loving countries must unite to throw thermite, high explosives and vesicants on the inhabitants of countries ruled by aggressive dictators. They must do this, and of course abide the consequences, in order to preserve peace and democratic institutions.’ Two questions immediately propound themselves. First, is it likely that peace can be

secured by a process calculated to reduce the orderly life of our complicated societies to chaos? And, second, is it likely that democratic institutions will flourish in a state of chaos? Again, the answers are pretty clearly in the negative.

By using the abstract word ‘force,’ instead of terms which at least attempt to describe the realities of war as it is to-day, the preachers of collective security through military collaboration disguise from themselves and from others, not only the contemporary facts, but also the probable consequences of their favourite policy. The attempt to secure justice, peace and democracy by ‘force’ seems reasonable enough until we realize, first, that this non-committal word stands, in the circumstances of our age, for activities which can hardly fail to result in social chaos; and second, that the consequences of social chaos are injustice, chronic warfare and tyranny. The moment we think in concrete and particular terms of the concrete and particular process called ‘modern war,’ we see that a policy which worked (or at least didn’t result in complete disaster) in the past has no prospect whatever of working in the immediate future. The attempt to secure justice, peace and democracy by means of a ‘force,’ which means, at this particular moment of history, thermite, high explosives and vesicants, is about as reasonable as the attempt to put out a fire with a colourless liquid that happens to be, not water, but petrol.

What applies to the ‘force’ that is war applies in large measure to the ‘force’ that is revolution. It seems inherently very unlikely that social justice and social peace can be secured by thermite, high explosives and vesicants. At first, it may be, the parties in a civil war would hesitate to use such instruments on their fellow-countrymen. But there can be little doubt that, if the conflict were prolonged (as it probably would be between the evenly balanced Right and Left of a highly industrialized society), the combatants would end by losing their scruples.

The alternatives confronting us seem to be plain enough. Either we invent and conscientiously employ a new technique for making revolutions and settling international disputes; or else we cling to the old technique and, using ‘force’ (that is to say, thermite, high explosives and vesicants), destroy ourselves. Those

who, for whatever motive, disguise the nature of the second alternative under inappropriate language, render the world a grave disservice. They lead us into one of the temptations we find it hardest to resist — the temptation to run away from reality, to pretend that facts are not what they are. Like Shelley (but without Shelley's acute awareness of what he was doing) we are perpetually weaving

A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun
Of this familiar life.

We protect our minds by an elaborate system of abstractions, ambiguities, metaphors and similes from the reality we do not wish to know too clearly; we lie to ourselves, in order that we may still have the excuse of ignorance, the alibi of stupidity and incomprehension, possessing which we can continue with a good conscience to commit and tolerate the most monstrous crimes:

The poor wretch who has learned his only prayers
From curses, who knows scarcely words enough
To ask a blessing from his Heavenly Father,
Becomes a fluent phraseman, absolute
And technical in victories and defeats,
And all our dainty terms for fratricide;
Terms which we trundle smoothly o'er our tongues
Like mere abstractions, empty sounds to which
We join no meaning and attach no form!
As if the soldier died without a wound:
As if the fibres of this godlike frame
Were gored without a pang: as if the wretch
Who fell in battle, doing bloody deeds,
Passed off to Heaven translated and not killed;
As though he had no wife to pine for him,
No God to judge him.

The language we use about war is inappropriate, and its inappropriateness is designed to conceal a reality so odious that we do not wish to know it. The

language we use about politics is also inappropriate; but here our mistake has a different purpose. Our principal aim in this case is to arouse and, having aroused, to rationalize and justify such intrinsically agreeable sentiments as pride and hatred, self-esteem and contempt for others. To achieve this end we speak about the facts of politics in words which more or less completely misrepresent them.

The concrete realities of politics are individual human beings, living together in national groups. Politicians — and to some extent we are all politicians — substitute abstractions for these concrete realities, and having done this, proceed to invest each abstraction with an appearance of concreteness by personifying it. For example, the concrete reality of which 'Britain' is the abstraction consists of some forty-odd millions of diverse individuals living on an island off the west coast of Europe. The personification of this abstraction appears, in classical fancy-dress and holding a very large toasting fork, on the backside of our copper coinage; appears in verbal form, every time we talk about international politics. 'Britain,' the abstraction from forty millions of Britons, is endowed with thoughts, sensibilities and emotions, even with a sex — for, in spite of John Bull, the country is always a female.

Now, it is of course possible that 'Britain' is more than a mere name — is an entity that possesses some kind of reality distinct from that of the individuals constituting the group to which the name is applied. But this entity, if it exists, is certainly not a young lady with a toasting fork; nor is it possible to believe (though some eminent philosophers have preached the doctrine) that it should possess anything in the nature of a personal will. One must agree with T. H. Green that 'there can be nothing in a nation, however exalted its mission, or in a society however perfectly organized, which is not in the persons composing the nation or the society. . . . We cannot suppose a national spirit and will to exist except as the spirit and will of individuals.' But the moment we start resolutely thinking about our world in terms of individual persons we find ourselves at the same time thinking in terms of universality. 'The great rational religions,' writes Professor Whitehead, 'are the outcome of the emergence of a religious consciousness that is universal, as distinguished from tribal, or even social.

Because it is universal, it introduces the note of solitariness.' (And he might have added that, because it is solitary, it introduces the note of universality.) 'The reason of this connection between universality and solitude is that universality is a disconnection from immediate surroundings.' And conversely the disconnection from immediate surroundings, particularly such social surrounding as the tribe or nation, the insistence on the person as the fundamental reality, leads to the conception of an all-embracing unity.

A nation, then, may be more than a mere abstraction, may possess some kind of real existence apart from its constituent members. But there is no reason to suppose that it is a person; indeed, there is every reason to suppose that it isn't. Those who speak as though it were a person (and some go further than this and speak as though it were a personal god) do so, because it is to their interest as egotists to make precisely this mistake.

In the case of the ruling class these interests are in part material. The personification of the nation as a sacred being, different from and superior to its constituent members, is merely (I quote the words of a great French jurist, Léon Duguit) 'a way of imposing authority by making people believe it is an authority de jure and not merely de facto.' By habitually talking of the nation as though it were a person with thoughts, feelings and a will of its own, the rulers of a country legitimate their own powers. Personification leads easily to deification; and where the nation is deified, its government ceases to be a mere convenience, like drains or a telephone system, and, partaking in the sacredness of the entity it represents, claims to give orders by divine right and demands the unquestioning obedience due to a god. Rulers seldom find it hard to recognize their friends. Hegel, the man who elaborated an inappropriate figure of speech into a complete philosophy of politics, was a favourite of the Prussian government. 'Es ist,' he had written, 'es ist der Gang Gottes in der Welt, das der Staat ist.' The decoration bestowed on him by Frederick William III was richly deserved.

Unlike their rulers, the ruled have no material interest in using inappropriate language about states and nations. For them, the reward of being mistaken is psychological. The personified and deified nation becomes, in the minds of the

individuals composing it, a kind of enlargement of themselves. The superhuman qualities which belong to the young lady with the toasting fork, the young lady with plaits and a brass soutien-gorge, the young lady in a Phrygian bonnet, are claimed by individual Englishmen, Germans and Frenchmen as being, at least in part, their own. Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori. But there would be no need to die, no need of war, if it had not been even sweeter to boast and swagger for one's country, to hate, despise, swindle and bully for it. Loyalty to the personified nation, or to the personified class or party, justifies the loyal in indulging all those passions which good manners and the moral code do not allow them to display in their relations with their neighbours. The personified entity is a being, not only great and noble, but also insanely proud, vain and touchy; fiercely rapacious; a braggart; bound by no considerations of right and wrong. (Hegel condemned as hopelessly shallow all those who dared to apply ethical standards to the activities of nations. To condone and applaud every iniquity committed in the name of the State was to him a sign of philosophical profundity.) Identifying themselves with this god, individuals find relief from the constraints of ordinary social decency, feel themselves justified in giving rein, within duly prescribed limits, to their criminal proclivities. As a loyal nationalist or party-man, one can enjoy the luxury of behaving badly with a good conscience.

The evil passions are further justified by another linguistic error — the error of speaking about certain categories of persons as though they were mere embodied abstractions. Foreigners and those who disagree with us are not thought of as men and women like ourselves and our fellow-countrymen; they are thought of as representatives and, so to say, symbols of a class. In so far as they have any personality at all, it is the personality we mistakenly attribute to their class — a personality that is, by definition, intrinsically evil. We know that the harming or killing of men and women is wrong, and we are reluctant consciously to do what we know to be wrong. But when particular men and women are thought of merely as representatives of a class, which has previously been defined as evil and personified in the shape of a devil, then the reluctance

to hurt or murder disappears. Brown, Jones and Robinson are no longer thought of as Brown, Jones and Robinson, but as heretics, gentiles, Yids, niggers, barbarians, Huns, communists, capitalists, fascists, liberals — whichever the case may be. When they have been called such names and assimilated to the accursed class to which the names apply, Brown, Jones and Robinson cease to be conceived as what they really are — human persons — and become for the users of this fatally inappropriate language mere vermin or, worse, demons whom it is right and proper to destroy as thoroughly and as painfully as possible. Wherever persons are present, questions of morality arise. Rulers of nations and leaders of parties find morality embarrassing. That is why they take such pains to depersonalize their opponents. All propaganda directed against an opposing group has but one aim: to substitute diabolical abstractions for concrete persons. The propagandist's purpose is to make one set of people forget that certain other sets of people are human. By robbing them of their personality, he puts them outside the pale of moral obligation. Mere symbols can have no rights — particularly when that of which they are symbolical is, by definition, evil.

Politics can become moral only on one condition: that its problems shall be spoken of and thought about exclusively in terms of concrete reality; that is to say, of persons. To depersonify human beings and to personify abstractions are complementary errors which lead, by an inexorable logic, to war between nations and to idolatrous worship of the State, with consequent governmental oppression. All current political thought is a mixture, in varying proportions, between thought in terms of concrete realities and thought in terms of depersonified symbols and personified abstractions. In the democratic countries the problems of internal politics are thought about mainly in terms of concrete reality; those of external politics, mainly in terms of abstractions and symbols. In dictatorial countries the proportion of concrete to abstract and symbolic thought is lower than in democratic countries. Dictators talk little of persons, much of personified abstractions, such as the Nation, the State, the Party, and much of depersonified symbols, such as Yids, Bolshies, Capitalists. The stupidity of politicians who talk about a world of persons as though it were not a world of

persons is due in the main to self-interest. In a fictitious world of symbols and personified abstractions, rulers find that they can rule more effectively, and the ruled, that they can gratify instincts which the conventions of good manners and the imperatives of morality demand that they should repress. To think correctly is the condition of behaving well. It is also in itself a moral act; those who would think correctly must resist considerable temptations.

MODERN FETISHISM

THE CULT OF relics was first rationalized in terms of Christian theology by Cyril of Jerusalem. Unrationalized, it had, of course, existed since the time of the earliest martyrs. Indeed, it had existed long before the coming of Christianity. The Christian cult of relics is merely a special case of an immemorial and universal tendency to attribute mana to certain inanimate objects. The word fetish is derived from the Latin factitius, and 'was first used in connection with Africa by the Portuguese discoverers of the last half of the fifteenth century; relics of saints, rosaries and images were then abundant all over Europe and were regarded as possessing magical virtue; they were termed by the Portuguese feitiços (i.e. charms). Early voyagers to West Africa applied this term to the wooden figures, stones, etc., regarded as the temporary residence of gods or spirits, and to charms.' There were good anthropologists four hundred years before the invention of anthropology.

Relic worship was officially abolished by all the Protestant reformers. But just as it preceded, so too this cult has survived, Catholicism. Where such deep-rooted tendencies as fetishism are concerned, all that reformers can hope to abolish is the temporary form, not the abiding substance. Officially rejected by theologians, fetishism does not cease to exist. All that happens is that, from being public and respectable, its manifestations become secret, personal and slightly shameful. Defined in terms of sociology, magic is merely unauthorized, private religion. During the war there were probably more fetishes in use among Protestants and agnostics than in the whole of Africa and Melanesia, more even than in the Europe of the later Middle Ages, when churches numbered their relics by the thousand. Nor, of course, has the cult of public fetishes and avowable relics altogether disappeared; it has merely moved away from the churches and established itself elsewhere. Thus, the flag has taken the place, as a

cult object, of the cross; and in the icon corner one sees the image, not of a saint, but of the local dictator or a favourite political author. Even the ancient cult of bones and mummies has been laicized and brought up to date. The graves of the martyrs of the Commune are yearly visited by great crowds of Parisian workmen; and, in the Kremlin, stuffed and refrigerated, Lenin is preserved as an object of adoration for millions of pious atheists. Nor are benighted foreigners the only modern relic worshippers; for at this present moment (1933) we in England are being simultaneously invited, as Maecenases, and, as tax-payers, compelled to contribute towards the purchase, as a national fetish, of the Codex Sinaiticus.

'There are people,' the Director of the British Museum is reported as saying, 'people who criticize the spending of such a large sum of money at a time like this; but the offer by the Government (of £1 for every £1 subscribed by the public) shows that they realize the importance of watching over the intellectual needs as well as the material needs of the nation.' And Sir Frederic Kenyon concludes a letter to The Times with the sentence: 'Where millions are spent on the material needs and amusements of the people, may not £100,000 be properly spent upon their minds and souls?' To this question I hasten to return an enthusiastic affirmative. I should like to see a great deal more than a hundred thousand pounds spent on people's 'minds and souls.' But the money spent on the Codex Sinaiticus is not money spent on 'minds and souls'; it is money spent on a relic, a mere feitiço. And the Government which helps to purchase such feitiços is not 'watching over the intellectual interests of the nation'; it is indulging, at the tax-payer's expense, in a costly gesture of superstition and idolatry.

All spiritual values may be catalogued under one or other of the three heads: Good, True, Beautiful. Let us dispassionately consider the Codex Sinaiticus and try to estimate its position under each of these three categories.

I will begin with Beauty. Where does the Codex stand in the hierarchy of things beautiful? Obviously, very low. True, the large uncial script in which it is

written is pleasant enough; but the book is not and does not claim to be a work of art. At the best, it is a pretty little piece of competent craftsmanship.

Let us consider it now in relation to Truth. Its truth value was very considerable; for the study of the manuscript led to the discovery of a number of interesting and hitherto unknown facts about the text of the Bible. But is there any reason to suppose that further study will elicit any new facts of importance? And, for the purposes of scholarship, does the original manuscript possess any marked and significant superiority over photographic reproductions? And, finally, what is there to prevent the searchers after more historical truth from going to Russia to look for it?

We come now to the category of Goodness. Of what makes for goodness the Codex clearly possesses no more than any other copy of the Bible. Indeed, for practical purposes, it actually possesses less than the Authorized Version you can buy for five shillings at the nearest bookseller's. For the five-shilling Bible is comprehensible and available; whereas the Codex is kept locked up in a box and can be read only by experts. Its light is permanently under a bushel. The ordinary visitor to the British Museum looks at it through two intervening layers, one of plate glass, the other of his own ignorance. What he understands of the Codex is nil. What he feels, if he feels anything when he examines it, is a vague sentimental awe, mingled with self-satisfaction. The Codex for him is just an equivalent — yet another equivalent — of Shakespeare's birthplace. Having peered at it and perhaps taken off his hat to it, he goes away with the comfortable conviction that he has done his duty by Culture and Religion. A bus trip to Stratford-on-Avon is for thousands of Shakespeare's fellow-countrymen sufficient excuse for never looking into Macbeth or Hamlet. They feel that they have done enough by paying an idolatrous visit to the shrine of the Bard; to read him would be a work of supererogation. It is now to be the same with the Bible. The Codex Sinaiticus stands to the Bible in exactly the same relation as Anne Hathaway's cottage to the works of Shakespeare. If you regard idolatry as a good thing, then you will wholeheartedly approve of the purchase of the Codex.

I happen to regard idolatry as a very bad thing — all the worse for the fact that it has roots that go deep into our human and sub-human nature.

The general conclusions which impose themselves are these. The Codex is not beautiful. Its truth value seems to be pretty well exhausted; and anyhow such truth value as it still does possess is as readily available in facsimile as in the original, and in Leningrad as in London. Finally, its powers to propagate the good which, in common with all other copies of the Bible, it contains, is exceptionally, almost uniquely, small. On the contrary, its power to propagate a habit of stupid and irrational idolatry is exceptionally great.

In view of all this, one may be permitted to wonder how precisely ‘the intellectual needs of the nation’ are being served by the acquisition of this costly fetish; or in what sense, other than a purely Pickwickian one, it can be said that our hundred thousand pounds are being spent upon the people’s ‘minds and souls,’ The truth of the matter is that the purchase is wholly unjustifiable in terms of a rationally idealistic philosophy. Spiritually, the Codex is valueless. If it is precious, it is precious only for its rarity, its associations and because it is superstitiously felt to contain some kind of mana.

There is in almost all human beings a stamp-collector and a fetish-worshipper; and it is to these personages that the Codex makes its appeal. Our hundred thousand pounds have bought us an object which is a mixture between the British Guiana Two-Cent, 1851, and the Thaumaturgical Arm of St. Francis Xavier.

The tendencies to superstition and mere collecting are, as I have said, almost universal; they are not for that reason rational or good. A Government which professes to care about ‘the mind and soul of the people,’ to watch over ‘the intellectual needs of the nation,’ has no business to spend public money for the gratification of these absurd and always slightly discreditable passions. Its business is to encourage all manifestations of the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

The Government’s action seems the more unjustifiable when we reflect that it has consistently put forward the plea of economy as an excuse for cutting down

the grants (small enough, heaven knows, at the best of times) for scientific research. ‘It has been decided to concentrate available funds on the work of the most immediate practical value to industry, leaving to happier times the expansion of work, of which the results could only be available at some more distant date.’ In other and less hideously official words, it has been decided that the pursuit of truth for truth’s sake is too expensive. But when it comes to buying a stamp-collector’s fetish, fifty thousand pounds of other people’s money are stumped up without the smallest hesitation.

What applies to Truth applies also to Beauty. The Government is too poor to spend more than a miserably small sum on the acquisition of beautiful objects, or on the encouragement of men and women capable of adding to the existing store of artistic beauty. But it has money to spare for idolatry and mere bibliophily. Our National Church had the good sense to abolish the cult of relics; our National Government has now officially reversed the policy of these reforming idealists, and the tax-payer is to find fifty thousand pounds for the purchase of a fetish.

LITERATURE AND EXAMINATIONS

IT HAPPENS ON the average once every three or four months. The postman drops into my letter-box an envelope addressed in an unfamiliar writing and postmarked anywhere from Oslo to Algiers. Opening it, I find a letter, sometimes in strange English, sometimes in one of the foreign languages with which an ordinarily cultured person is supposed to be familiar. The writer begins by an apology. He (or as often she) is sorry to trouble me, but the fact is that he or she is a student at the university of X or Y or Z, and that, in order to obtain his or her Doctorate of Letters, Diploma of Pedagogy, Bachelorship of Modern Languages, Aggregation to the University, or whatever the thing may happen to be called, he or she is writing a thesis about my books — or more often about some particular aspect of my books, such as their style, their construction, the influence upon them of other books, the idea of God in them, their Weltanschauung or Geschlechtsphilosophie. This being so, will I kindly furnish biographical material, a bibliography of all the reviews and criticisms written in every language, together with copies of such books as the writer happens to have been unable to obtain. In many cases the letter ends with an appeal to my better feelings: will I please do everything that is asked of me, because, if I don't, the writer will be unable to obtain the coveted post at the local University, Lycée, Gymnasium, Preparatoria, or what not, and will have to be content with a job as a teacher in an elementary school.

My feelings when one of these letters arrives are extremely mixed. That I should be treated as though I were a classical author of some earlier century, simultaneously amuses and depresses me, tickles my self-esteem and at the same time punctures it. I like very naturally to think that I am being read; but the idea that I am being studied fills me, after the first outburst of laughter, with a deepening gloom. There is something extremely disagreeable about being treated

as though one were dead when one supposes — perhaps (and this is the really disquieting thought) mistakenly — that one is still very much alive. Nor is the anticipation of posthumous Fame any compensating satisfaction. For to be sufficiently famous to deserve elaborate study in a modern university is quite humiliatingly easy. Merely to have published is now a sufficient claim to academic attention. As time passes and the numbers of aspirants to diplomas and doctorates continues to pile up, it becomes increasingly difficult to find any significant aspect of a good writer's work which has not already formed the subject of a thesis. The candidate for academic honours has no choice but to study the insignificant aspects of a good writer's work or else the work, not yet explored, because universally deemed not worth exploring, of a bad writer. Universities do me the honour of treating me as though I were defunct and a classic; but it is an honour, alas, that I share with Flecknoe and Pixéricourt, with Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau and Nahum Tate.

Walter Raleigh used to say that the teaching of literature always verged on the absurd. He understated the case. The teaching of literature often oversteps the verge and tumbles headlong into the most grotesque absurdity. It is absurd, for example, that students should be forced to spend months and years of their lives on the study of writers who are, by universal consent, of no importance whatsoever. It is equally absurd that they should spend months and years on the study of unimportant aspects of the work of good writers. Very many of the scores of theses produced each year in the various universities of the world are totally pointless. But the teaching of literature produces other absurdities no less monstrous than the learned thesis about a trivial theme. Comparatively few students aspire to specialized learning. For every doctor there are hundreds of bachelors. These obtain their degrees by retailing at second hand a little of the learning and a good deal of the literary criticism of others. Fashions in criticism change, and the candidate must be able to regurgitate the judgment in vogue in academic circles at the time of his ordeal. Success in literary examinations comes to those who know, among other things, what formulae happen, momentarily, to be correct.

What applies to literature applies also to the fine arts. For there are now academic institutions which actually give people degrees in art — minor degrees for those who know a list of dates and can repeat the proper ritual mantras about pictures and churches and statues; higher degrees to those who undertake profound original researches into the work of the deservedly neglected artists of the past.

The ultimate cause for this on the whole deplorable state of things is economic. Degrees have a definite cash value. The possession of a given diploma may make all the difference (as my correspondents so often point out in their appeals to my better feelings) between low wages and a low social position in an elementary school and good wages, with considerable social prestige, in the hierarchy of secondary education. Literature and fine arts figure in most curricula at the present time; men and women aspire to teach these subjects; headmasters and education authorities want to be able to distinguish between those who are ‘qualified’ to teach them and those who are not; universities oblige by creating faculties of literature and fine arts, complete with all the apparatus of diplomas, degrees and doctorates.

Now it is obviously necessary that, for examination purposes, literature and the fine arts should convert themselves, at any rate partially, into parodies of the exact sciences. Literature and art appeal as much to the affective and conative as to the merely cognitive side of man’s being. But if you are going to give people marks for literature and art, you must ask them questions that can be answered correctly or incorrectly, you must set them tasks which can be performed only by dint of persevering industriousness. Candidates for the lower degrees will be required, like candidates for the lower degrees in chemistry, say, or biology, to read text-books and do ‘practical’ work. (In the case of literature, this practical work consists, like the theoretical work, in reading. But whereas theoretical reading is a reading of text-books, practical reading is a reading of the original texts.) Candidates for the higher degrees are expected, like the prospective doctor of science, to do a piece of original research and record their discoveries in a thesis. Even the laboratory methods of exact science are parodied. Literature

does not lend itself to being weighed or measured; but at least its material embodiments can be minutely observed and accurately reproduced. The editing of texts has become a branch of microscopy.

It is quite true, of course, that literature and the fine arts have non-literary and non-artistic aspects. They provide important documents in the fields, for example, of social and economic history, of psychology, of philology and the philosophy of language. Moreover, writers and artists employ techniques of expression which profitably lend themselves to scientific analysis. Thus, the alchimie du verbe, as Rimbaud called it, can be made to yield some at least of its strange secrets; the geometry and optics of picture-making are worthy of the most serious study. In so far as they are not literature and not art, literature and art can be subjected most fruitfully to the methods of science. And, in effect, much excellent work in history, psychology and so forth has been done by the writers of supposedly literary and artistic theses. All would be well if universities would insist that such work is frankly historical, psychological and the rest, and that it has little or nothing to do with literature as literature, or with art as art. But unfortunately this necessary distinction is not drawn. Under the present dispensation, absurd pseudo-scientific research — into the date, shall we say, of John Chalkhill's second marriage, into the indebtedness of Shadwell to Molière — is as freely encouraged as genuinely scientific research carried out for the purpose of establishing significant relations between one set of facts and another. Moreover, the scientifically treatable, non-literary and non-artistic aspects of literature and art are kept hopelessly mixed up with their purely literary and artistic aspects. Candidates are given marks for displaying symptoms, not merely of knowledge, but also of sensibility and judgment — other people's sensibility, in general practice, and other people's judgment. Perfectly good scientific work has to be accompanied by the repetition of the mantras of fashionable criticism. The aesthetic heart must be worn, all through the weary hours of the final examination, palpitating on the sleeve. Every candidate for the bachelorship or doctorate is expected to overflow with the

pious phrases of ‘appreciation.’ The present examination system is calculated to produce the literary and artistic equivalents of Tartufe and Pecksniff.

That men should hypocritically pay the tribute that philistinism owes to culture is greatly to be desired. The tendency to be realistic and hard-boiled is as dangerous in the sphere of culture as in that of politics. You cannot appeal to the humanitarianism of a fascist who starts out with the realistic assumption that because, in fact, might generally prevails, might is therefore right and should never make any concessions at all. Similarly you cannot appeal to the cultural piety of a low-brow who thinks that, because most human beings are like himself, low-browism is therefore right and ought to triumph over high-browism. Without moral hypocrisy and intellectual snobbery, the decencies of life would lead a most precarious existence.

Intellectual snobbery, I insist, is an excellent thing; but, as of all excellent things, there may be too much of it. An examination system that encourages the candidate for a degree to adorn his non-literary and non-artistic knowledge of literature and art with a veneer of ‘appreciative’ cant is calculated to produce an excessive number of cultural Pecksniffs, each convinced, on the strength of his diploma, that he is always right. Under a more rational system of education, degrees in literature and art would not be given. Literary and artistic documents would, however, be used as the material of scientific researches in other fields. Feats of mere industry for industry’s sake, such as the compilation of theses about writers valueless from a literary point of view and of no particular historical, psychological, economic or other interest, would be discouraged. The application of exact scientific methods to the typography of old books could safely be left to the voluntary enthusiasm of Nature’s philatelists and crossword puzzlers. Meanwhile, of course, efforts would be made to encourage students to read and to look at works of art. Groups would be organized for the reading of papers and the discussion of literary and artistic problems. There would also be exercises in the art of writing clearly and correctly. In this way the natural sensibilities of the students might be developed, and the tendency, so much encouraged by the examination system, to mug up other people’s judgments and

repeat them, mechanically and without reflection, severely discouraged. At the same time students would be able to feel that their scientific work — the study of the significant non-literary and non-artistic aspects of literary and artistic documents — was genuinely valuable and enlightening, not the mere parody of scientific work that, too often, they are expected to do at present.

As things stand at present, it would be very difficult to make the kind of changes I have indicated above, for the simple reason that there are very many people who, for economic reasons, want degrees in literature and the fine arts. The employers of academic labour regard such degrees as qualifications for comparatively well-paid posts. It will be impossible to change the existing examination system until they have been educated to think differently.

ENGLISH SNOBBERY

AFTER A HOLIDAY from periodical literature, I am always staggered, when I get back to a well-stocked reading-room, by the inordinate snobbery of the English press. In no other country do so many newspapers devote so large a proportion of their space to a chronicle of the activities of the merely rich or the merely ennobled. Nowhere else in Europe is gossip-writing a highly paid and creditable profession; nowhere else would such a headline as ‘Peer’s Cousin in Car Smash’ be even imaginable. And where else but in England can one find three expensive but flourishing weeklies devoted to absolutely nothing but the life of the rich and the titled? Not to mention the several other weeklies in which this absorbing theme occupies, not indeed an exclusive, but still an important place.

On whom, one wonders, do these expensive weeklies live? To some extent, of course, upon the elect whom they exhibit walking in the Park with friends, attending race-meetings, eating dinners for Incurables or dancing in fancy dress for Crippled Children. Upon those, in a word, whose photographs have actually been published in their pages and upon all such as may reasonably hope, one memorable day, to achieve the same distinction. The ranks of the snapshot-worthy have recently been swelled by a considerable mass of new recruits. In the past, only the really rich, the definitely titled, the unequivocally West End stars were ever photographed. To-day, in search, no doubt, of new subscribers, the exploiters of snobbery go forth and fairly rake the County hedges and ditches for their material. Captain and Mrs. Knapweed-Knapweed with their daughter Angelica (‘Peggy’) are now portrayed, walking with friends at hunt steeplechases. A sad decline. But business is business. There are not enough earls or actresses. The Knapweed-Knapweeds must be called in to fill the void.

There are in England only one hundred thousand persons whose income exceeds two thousand pounds a year. Of these not more, I imagine, than ten thousand can even hope to qualify for a place in the snobbery-exploiting weeklies. Compared with the earls and the actresses, the Knapweed-Knapweeds are numerous; but they are not a circulation — and a circulation is precisely what the snobbery-exploiting weeklies possess. These weeklies must be read — disinterestedly, in a certain sense — by thousands for whom the possibility of personally figuring among the walkers-in-parks, or even among their anonymous friends, is simply unimaginable. There is a snobbery which, like virtue, is its own reward.

What precisely, one speculates, is the nature of that reward? For most of the readers of the gossip columns their wealthier contemporaries take rank with film stars and the heroes and heroines of novels. Reading of their activities, they enjoy vicariously the pleasures — those amazingly boring and unvariegated pleasures — of the rich. What is quotidian reality for earls, actresses and Knapweed-Knapweeds is for them a delightful, compensatory fiction.

There are others, no doubt, who read for the sake of sarcastically laughing. How many? It is impossible to say. They cannot constitute a majority of newspaper readers; for if they did there would very soon be no more society or gossip columns to laugh at. One is forced rather reluctantly to the conclusion that most readers either positively enjoy the snobbery columns of their newspapers, or else accept them with resignation, as part of the established order of things, like the income tax or rain in summer.

Why should the English public proclaim itself so much more keenly interested in the doings of the rich and the titled than the public in other countries? Attachment to tradition may be invoked as one of the causes. The habit, established in long-past days when a title really meant something, of regarding a lord with a kind of awed curiosity still persists in a vestigial state, like the spiritual equivalent of the vermiform appendix. Elsewhere revolution has roughly excised this survival from the days of feudalism. But the last English revolution, that of 1688, was itself made by the aristocracy; instead of being cut

out, the appendix rooted itself more firmly in the national consciousness. Another point: the English standard of living is high. There is an immense sub-middle class with enough money to preserve it from rancorous envy of the rich, but not enough to preserve it from boredom; it needs vicarious compensations and manages to find them in the gossip columns.

So much for the snobbery of the people who can never hope to be caught by the camera walking in the Park or drinking champagne for charity. We have now to consider the snobbery of those who have actually enjoyed this privilege. It is, of course, among these last that the passion is most intense. The objects of snobbery are themselves the greatest snobs.

That which, for the vulgar, is no more than a survival of something which once was useful, takes rank in the interior economy of the elect as a vital organ — no mere appendix, but an essential part of the aristocratic intestine. For the rich and the titled, snobbery is not a superfluous luxury, but a necessity; their self-regarding instincts impose it upon them. They are snobs because, like the rest of us, they are egotists. They admire the rich and titled for the good reason that the rich and titled are themselves.

This kind of snobbery exists wherever there is a privileged class. In other countries, however, gestures of aristocratic and plutocratic self-admiration are not received with sympathy, therefore are not made, except in private. For reasons which I have tried to explain above, large numbers of the English derive from gossip column and society weekly a deep satisfaction. They are prepared to listen to the privileged class congratulating itself. Where ears are willing, talk tends to be loud and long. The snobbery of the ruling classes in England is allowed the freest possible expression. Daily it takes the offered opportunity.

TIME AND THE MACHINE

TIME, AS WE know it, is a very recent invention. The modern time-sense is hardly older than the United States. It is a by-product of industrialism — a sort of psychological analogue of synthetic perfumes and aniline dyes.

Time is our tyrant. We are chronically aware of the moving minute hand, even of the moving second hand. We have to be. There are trains to be caught, clocks to be punched, tasks to be done in specified periods, records to be broken by fractions of a second, machines that set the pace and have to be kept up with. Our consciousness of the smallest units of time is now acute. To us, for example, the moment 8.17 a.m. means something — something very important, if it happens to be the starting time of our daily train. To our ancestors, such an odd eccentric instant was without significance — did not even exist. In inventing the locomotive, Watt and Stevenson were part inventors of time.

Another time-emphasizing entity is the factory and its dependent, the office. Factories exist for the purpose of getting certain quantities of goods made in a certain time. The old artisan worked as it suited him; with the result that consumers generally had to wait for the goods they had ordered from him. The factory is a device for making workmen hurry. The machine revolves so often each minute; so many movements have to be made, so many pieces produced each hour. Result: the factory worker (and the same is true, mutatis mutandis, of the office worker) is compelled to know time in its smallest fractions. In the hand-work age there was no such compulsion to be aware of minutes and seconds.

Our awareness of time has reached such a pitch of intensity that we suffer acutely whenever our travels take us into some corner of the world where people are not interested in minutes and seconds. The unpunctuality of the Orient, for example, is appalling to those who come freshly from a land of fixed meal-times

and regular train services. For a modern American or Englishman, waiting is a psychological torture. An Indian accepts the blank hours with resignation, even with satisfaction. He has not lost the fine art of doing nothing. Our notion of time as a collection of minutes, each of which must be filled with some business or amusement, is wholly alien to the Oriental, just as it was wholly alien to the Greek. For the man who lives in a pre-industrial world, time moves at a slow and easy pace; he does not care about each minute, for the good reason that he has not been made conscious of the existence of minutes.

This brings us to a seeming paradox. Acutely aware of the smallest constituent particles of time — of time, as measured by clock-work and train arrivals and the revolutions of machines — industrialized man has to a great extent lost the old awareness of time in its larger divisions. The time of which we have knowledge is artificial, machine-made time. Of natural, cosmic time, as it is measured out by sun and moon, we are for the most part almost wholly unconscious. Pre-industrial people know time in its daily, monthly and seasonal rhythms. They are aware of sunrise, noon and sunset; of the full moon and the new; of equinox and solstice; of spring and summer, autumn and winter. All the old religions, including Catholic Christianity, have insisted on this daily and seasonal rhythm. Pre-industrial man was never allowed to forget the majestic movement of cosmic time.

Industrialism and urbanism have changed all this. One can live and work in a town without being aware of the daily march of the sun across the sky; without ever seeing the moon and stars. Broadway and Piccadilly are our Milky Way; our constellations are outlined in neon tubes. Even changes of season affect the townsman very little. He is the inhabitant of an artificial universe that is, to a great extent, walled off from the world of nature. Outside the walls, time is cosmic and moves with the motion of sun and stars. Within, it is an affair of revolving wheels and is measured in seconds and minutes — at its longest, in eight-hour days and six-day weeks. We have a new consciousness; but it has been purchased at the expense of the old consciousness.

NEW-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

THE NAME IS still the same; but the thing is almost unrecognizably different from what Charles Dickens meant by ‘Christmas.’ For example, there was no tree at Dingley Dell, and, except for five shillings to Sam Weller, not a single present was given. Christmas, for Mr. Pickwick and his friends, was an affair of copious eating and still more copious drinking, interrupted by bouts of home-made fun and purely domestic horseplay.

For us, three generations later, the word connotes the Prince Consort’s imported Teutonic evergreen; connotes all those endless presents, which it is such a burden to buy and such an embarrassment to receive; connotes restaurants, dance halls, theatres, cabarets — all the highly organized, professional entertainments provided by the astute business men who run the amusement industry. Only the name connects the new-fashioned Christmas with the Pickwickian festival.

The tree, of course, was a mere accident. If Queen Victoria had married a Frenchman we should probably be giving one another étrennes and ushering in the year with a series of calls on the most remote and the most personally antipathetic of our innumerable relations. (Relations, in France, are innumerable.) As it was, she took to herself a prince from the land of tannenbaums. It is therefore to a tannenbaum’s green branches, and upon Christmas Day, that we attach our gifts.

The tree, I repeat, was an accident, a thing outside the realm of determinism, a product of personal idiosyncrasy. But all the other changes in our Christmas habits, which have taken place since Dickens wrote of Dingley Dell, are the results of great impersonal processes. During Dickens’s lifetime, and still more rapidly after his death, industrial production enormously and continuously increased. But production cannot increase unless there is a corresponding

increase in consumption. It became necessary to stimulate consumption, to provide the home public with reasons, or, better still, with compelling unreasons, for consuming. Hence the rise of advertisement, and hence the gradual and, as time went on, the more and more deliberate canalization into industrially profitable channels of all such common human impulses and emotions as lent themselves to the process.

The producer who succeeds in thus canalizing some universal human urge opens up for himself and his successors an inexhaustible gold mine. Thus, art and industry have flourished from time immemorial in the rich soil of bereavement and the fear of death. Weddings have been almost as profitable to commerce as funerals, and within the last few years an American man of genius has discovered how even filial affection may be made a justification for increased consumption; the florists and candy manufacturers of the United States have reason to bless the inventor of Mother's Day.

The love of excitement is as deeply planted in human nature as the love of a mother; the desire for change, for novelty, for a relief from the monotony of every day, as strong as sexual desire or the terror of death. Men have instituted festivals and holidays to satisfy these cravings. Mr. Pickwick's Christmas was a typical feast day of the old style — a time of jollification and excitement, a gaudily glittering 'captain jewel in the carcanet' of grey, uneventful days. Psychologically, it performed its function. Not economically, however — that is, so far as we are concerned. The Pickwickian Christmas did very little to stimulate consumption; it was mainly a gratuitous festivity. A few vintners and distillers and poulterers were the only people whom it greatly profited financially. This was a state of things which an ever-increasingly efficient industrialism could not possibly afford to tolerate. Christmas, accordingly, was canalized. The deep festal impulse of man was harnessed and made to turn a very respectable little wheel in the mills of industry. To-day Christmas is an important economic event. The distributors of goods spend large sums in advertising potential gifts, and (since the man who pays the piper calls the tune) the newspapers reinforce their advertisements by fostering a notion that the

mutual goodwill of modern Christians can be expressed only by the exchange of manufactured articles.

The last thirty years have witnessed the promotion of innkeeping and showmanship to the rank of major commercial enterprises. Major commercial enterprises spend money on advertising. Therefore, newspapers are always suggesting that a good time can be enjoyed only by those who take what is offered them by entertainment manufacturers. The Dickensian Christmas-at-Home receives only perfunctory lip-service from a press which draws a steady income from the catering and amusement trades. Home-made fun is gratuitous, and gratuitousness is something which an industrialized world cannot afford to tolerate.

HISTORICAL GENERALIZATIONS

MR. DAWSON CALLS his study* of the Dark Ages ‘an Introduction to the History of European Unity.’ The words ring a trifle ironically in the ear. That mediaeval unity of culture and religion to which Mr. Dawson’s period led up never prevented good Catholic Europeans from cutting one another’s throats. Christendom may have been one; but it was in a chronic condition of civil war. What is the value, we may ask, of such a purely platonic unity? What, indeed, is the meaning of the term? To some extent, at least, historians must be behaviourists. If at any given epoch men behave as though they were not united, then surely the society which they constitute can hardly be called a unity. Can the spiritual substance of unity possess reciprocal throat-cutting as one of its accidents and still remain itself? It is a nice question.

We may be at one with Mr. Dawson in ‘feeling once more the need for spiritual or at least moral unity,’ we may be dissatisfied with ‘a civilization that finds its unity in external and superficial things and ignores the deeper needs of man’s spiritual nature’; but we must also bear in mind that political and economic unification, though ‘external and superficial,’ are of equal importance with cultural and spiritual unification. Indeed, the latter cannot be said to exist (except in a platonic and Pickwickian sense) without the former. The unity of mediaeval Christendom never manifested itself as an observable fact of experience; throat-cutting and political disunion made the manifestation impossible.

Mr. Dawson’s title-page has delayed me too long. It is time to consider his book. This is quite admirable. Following Mr. Dawson’s light, the unspecialized reader finds himself able to thread his way through those obscure corridors of time which extend from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Norman Conquest. The Dark Ages lose their darkness, take on form and significance. Thanks to Mr.

Dawson’s erudition and his gift of marshalling facts, we begin to have a notion of what it is all about.

The book is short, the period long. Mr. Dawson has had to select, compress and generalize in order to carry us through the centuries at the required speed. For the most part, he generalizes with a sobriety and a caution worthy of the highest praise. We meet, in his pages, with none of those ‘deep’ metaphysical hypotheses, in terms of which some modern German historians have so excitingly and so unjustifiably interpreted the course of past events. Mr. Dawson is an intellectual ascetic who conscientiously refrains from indulging in such delicious but dangerous extravagances. For this he deserves all our gratitude.

Occasionally, it is true, Mr. Dawson makes a generalization with which I find myself (with all the diffidence of an unlearned dilettante) disagreeing. For example, ‘the modern European,’ he says, ’is accustomed to look on society as essentially concerned with the present life, and with material needs, and on religion as an influence on the moral life of the individual. But to the Byzantine, and indeed to mediaeval man in general, the primary society was the religious one, and economic and secular affairs were a secondary consideration.’ In confirmation of this Mr. Dawson quotes, among other documents, a passage from the writings of St. Gregory Nazianzen on the interest universally displayed by his fourth-century contemporaries in theology. ‘The money changer will talk about the Begotten and the Unbegotten, instead of giving you your money, and if you want a bath, the bath keeper assures you that the Son surely proceeds from nothing.’ What Mr. Dawson does not mention is that, in another passage, this same Gregory reproaches the people of Constantinople with an excessive interest in chariot racing — an interest which, in the time of Justinian, a century and a half later, had become so maniacally passionate that Greens and Blues were murdering one another by hundreds and even thousands. Again we must apply the Behaviourist test. If men behave as though they took a passionate interest in something — and it is difficult to prove your devotion to a cause more effectively than by killing and being killed for it — then we must presume that that interest is genuine, a primary rather than a secondary consideration. The

actual facts seem to demonstrate that some Byzantines were passionately interested in religion, others (or perhaps they were the same) were no less passionately interested in sport. At any rate, they behaved about both in the same way and were as ready to undergo martyrdom for their favourite jockey as for their favourite article in the Athanasian Creed. The trouble with such generalizations as that of Mr. Dawson is that they ignore the fact that society is never homogeneous and that human beings belong to many different mental species. This seems to be true even in primitive societies displaying the maximum of ‘co-consciousness’ on the part of their members. Thus, the anthropologist, Radin, well known for his work among the Red Indians, has come to the conclusion that monotheistic beliefs are correlated with a specific temperament and so may be expected to crop up with a certain specific frequency, irrespective of culture. If this is true (and it is in accord with our personal experience of civilized life and with the results of anthropological research among primitive peoples), then what becomes of a generalization like Mr. Dawson’s? Obviously, it falls to the ground. You can no more indict an age than you can a nation.

At every epoch some people are primarily interested in the things of the other world, some in the things of this world. The chief difference between a religious and a non-religious epoch would seem to be this: that in a religious epoch those whose main interest is in secular affairs tend to justify that interest in terms of theology (the Greens would hate the Blues for being unorthodox, and vice versa) and to find transcendental motives for sublunary action. In a non-religious age, this-worldly people are free to believe that the things in which they take an interest are intrinsically valuable, while naturally religious people are driven to look for this-worldly justifications (social and political) for their other-worldliness. Sociologically considered, the superiority of a religious to a non-religious epoch lies in the fact that people have more and more powerful motives for action. The trouble is that you can never be certain whether the action undertaken for religious reasons is going to be good or bad. A characteristic example of mixed action undertaken for religious motives is provided by the

pious Mgr. de Belzunce who distinguished himself during the great plague of Marseilles as much by his acts of heroic Christian charity as by his revolting sectarian intolerance.

It took the Lynds and their assistants eighteen months of intensive personal investigation to bring together the materials for their classic study of a modern industrial community, ‘Middletown.’ This community, as it happened, was a particularly homogeneous one; the Lynds’ researches showed that anyone born in Middletown with unusual abilities took the earliest possible opportunity of going somewhere else. Nevertheless, even in this more than ordinarily homogeneous town, the investigators met with many distinct human types, many fundamentally different attitudes towards the problems of life. There existed, of course, a behaviour pattern which was, statistically, normal. But the departures from the norm were considerable. After reading ‘Middletown’ one becomes more than ever suspicious of the generalizations of historians about the character and mentality of the men and women of past ages. For upon what are these generalizations based? Upon an originally inadequate documentation further reduced by the ravages of time to a random collection of literary and archaeological odds and ends. As statements about the past, such generalizations are therefore of dubious value. They must always be taken with a grain of salt; at best they are only half or three-quarter truths. If they have value, it is as stimulants to make us think about the present. Generalized history is a branch of speculation, connected (often rather arbitrarily and uneasily) with certain facts about the past. Circumstances alter, each age must think its own thoughts. Not until there is a settled and definitive world order can there be such a thing as a settled and definitive version of human history.

* The Making of Europe, by Christopher Dawson. London, Sheed and Ward, 1932. 12s. 6d.

CRÉBILLON THE YOUNGER

PROPHECY IS MAINLY interesting for the light it throws on the age in which it is uttered. The Apocalypse, for example, tells us how a Christian felt about the world at the end of the first century. Manifestly ludicrous as a forecast, Mercier's L'An 2240 is worth reading, because it shows us what were the ideals of an earnest and rather stupid Frenchman in the year 1770. And the ideals of an earnest and very intelligent Englishman of the early twentieth century may be studied, in all their process of development, in the long series of Mr. Wells's prophetic books. Our notions of the future have something of that significance which Freud attributes to our dreams. And not our notions of the future only: our notions of the past as well. For if prophecy is an expression of our contemporary fears and wishes, so too, to a very great extent, is history — or at least what passes for history among the mass of ordinary unprofessional folk. Utopias, earthly paradises and earthly hells are flowers of the imagination which contrive to blossom and luxuriate even in the midst of the stoniest dates and documents, even within the fixed and narrow boundaries of established fact. The works of St. Thomas survive; we have a record of the acts of Innocent III. But that does not prevent our pictures of the Middle Ages from being as various and as highly coloured as our pictures of Utopia, the Servile State or the New Jerusalem. We see the past through the refractive medium of our prejudices, our tastes, our contemporary fears and hopes. The facts of history exist; but they hardly trouble us. We select and interpret our documents till they square with our theories.

The eighteenth century is a period which has been interpreted and reinterpreted in the most surprisingly various ways: by its own philosophers (for the eighteenth century was highly self-conscious) as the age of reason and enlightenment; by the Romantics and their strange heirs, the Reactionaries and the Early Victorians, as the age of vice and spiritual drought; by the later nineteenth-century sceptics, who curiously combined the strictest Protestant

morality with the most dogmatically anti-Christian philosophy, as an age of reason indeed, but of more than dubious character; by the Beardsleyites of the ‘nineties, as an epoch of deliciously depraved frivolity, of futile and therefore truly aesthetic elegance. The popular conception of the eighteenth century at the present day is a mixture of Beardsley’s and Voltaire’s. We find its morals and its manners in the highest degree ‘amusing’; and when we want a stick to beat the corpses of the Eminent Victorians we apply to Hume or Gibbon, to Voltaire or Helvétius, to Horace Walpole or Madame du Deffand. For the simpler-minded among us, the eighteenth century is summed up by Mr. Nigel Playfair’s version of The Beggar’s Opera. The more sophisticated find their dix-huitième in the original French documents (judiciously selected) or in the ironic pages of Mr. Lytton Strachey.

Charming historical Utopia! A moment’s thought, however, is sufficient to show how arbitrarily we have abstracted it from reality. For who, after all, were the most important, the most durable and influential men that the century produced? The names of Bach, Handel and Mozart present themselves immediately to the mind; of Swedenborg and Wesley and Blake; of Dr. Johnson, Bishop Berkeley and Kant. Of none of these can it be said that he fits very easily into the scheme of The Beggar’s Opera. True, our pianists and conductors have tried, Procrustes-like, to squeeze the musicians into the dix-huitième mould. They play Bach mechanically, Handel lightly, Mozart frivolously, without feeling and therefore without sense, and call the process a ‘classical’ interpretation. But let that pass. The fact remains that the greatest men of the eighteenth century are not in the least what we should call dix-huitième.

It must not be imagined, however, that our particular ‘eighteenth century’ is completely mythical. Something like it did genuinely exist, during a couple of generations, among a small class of people in most European countries, especially France. The fact that we have chosen to recreate a whole historical epoch in the image of this intellectually free and morally licentious dix-huitième throws some light on our own problems, our own twentieth-century bugbears, our own desires. For a certain section of contemporary society the terms

‘modern’ and ‘eighteenth century’ are almost synonymous. Like our ancestors, we too are in revolt against intellectual authority and moral ‘prejudices.’ Perhaps the chief difference between them and us is that they believed in pure reason as well as extra-conjugal love; we Bergsonians do not.

One of the most characteristic representatives of this particular dix-huitième which we have chosen to exalt at the expense of all the other possible eighteenth centuries is Crébillon the Younger. We find in his novels all the qualities which we regard as typical of the period: elegance, frivolity, a complete absence of moral ‘prejudices,’ especially on the subject of love, a certain dry spirit of detachment and analysis. Le Sopha and La Nuit et le Moment are documents which, taken by themselves, completely justify our current conception of the age in which they were written. For that reason alone they deserve to be read. One should always be prepared to quote authorities in support of one’s theories. Moreover, they are worth reading for their own sakes. For Crébillon was a psychologist and, in his own limited field, one of the most acute of his age.

The typically modern method of presenting character differs from that employed by the novelists of the eighteenth century. In our novels we offer the facts in a so-to-speak raw state, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions from them. The older psychologists treated the facts to a preliminary process of intellectual digestion; they gave their readers something more than the mere behaviouristic material on which psychological judgments are based; they gave them the conclusions they themselves had already drawn from the facts. Compare Constant’s Adolphe with the Ulysses of James Joyce; the difference of method is manifest. Crébillon is a characteristic eighteenth-century psychologist. With the dry intellectual precision of his age, he describes and comments on his characters, analyses their behaviour, draws conclusions, formulates generalizations. What a contemporary novelist would imply in twenty pages of description and talk, he expresses outright in two or three sentences that are an intellectual summing up of all the evidence. The novelist who employs the older method gains in definition and clarity what he loses in realism, in life, in

expansive implication and suggestion. There is much to be said for both methods of presentation; most of all, perhaps, for a combination of the two.

So much for Crébillon's method of presenting character. It is time to consider the sort of people and the particular aspect of their characters which he liked to present. His heroes and heroines are the men and women of our own favourite dix-huitième — the eighteenth century whose representative man is rather Casanova than Bach, rather the Cardinal de Bernis than Wesley. They are aristocrats who fill their indefinite leisure with an amateur's interest in literature, art, and even science (see, for the scientific interests, Cléandre's story, in La Nuit et le Moment, of his physico-physiological argument with Julie); with talk and social intercourse, with gambling and country sports; and above all, with that most perfect of time-killers, l'amour. Crébillon's main, his almost exclusive preoccupation is with the last of these aristocratic amusements. And it is on his psychology of love — of a certain kind of love — that his claim to literary immortality must be based.

Crébillon's special province is that obscure borderland between soul and body, where physiology and psychology meet and mingle and are reciprocally complicated. It is a province of which, during the last century and in this country, at any rate, we have heard but the scantiest accounts. It was only with birth that physiology ever made its entrance into the Victorian novel, not with conception. In these matters, Crébillon's age was more scientific. The existence of physiology was frankly admitted at every stage of the reproductive process. It was mentioned in connection with every kind of love, from l'amour passion to l'amour goût. It was freely discussed, and its phenomena described, classified and explained. The relations between the senses and the imagination, between love and pleasure, between desire and the affections are methodically defined in that literature of which Crébillon's stories are representative. And it is very right that they should be so defined. For no analysis of love can claim to be complete which ignores the physiological basis and accompaniment of the passion. Love, says Donne in his nearest approach to a versified epigram,

Love's not so pure and abstract as they use

To say, who have no mistress but their Muse.

The distinction between sacred and profane, spiritual and fleshly love is an arbitrary, gratuitous and metaphysical distinction. The most spiritual love is rooted in the flesh; the most sacred is only profane love sublimated and refined. To ignore these obvious facts is foolish and slightly dishonest. And indeed, they never have been ignored except by the psychologists of the nineteenth century. The writers of every other age have always admitted them. It was in aristocratic France, however, and during the eighteenth century, that they were most closely and accurately studied. Crébillon fils is one of the acutest, one of the most scientific of the students.

Scientific — I apply the epithet deliberately, not vaguely and at random. For Crébillon's attitude towards the phenomena of sex seems to me precisely that of the true scientific investigator. It is with a mind entirely open and unbiassed that he approaches the subject. He contrives to forget that love is a matter of the most intimate human concern, that it has been from time immemorial the subject of philosophical speculation and moral precept. Making a clean sweep of all the prejudices, he sets to work, coolly and with detachment, as though the subject of his investigations were something as remote, as utterly divorced from good and evil, as spiral nebulae, liver flukes or the aurora borealis.

Men have always tended to attribute to the objects of their intense emotions, and even to the emotions themselves, some kind of cosmical significance. Mystics and lovers, for example, have never been content to find the justification for their feelings in the feelings themselves: they have asked us to believe that these feelings possess a universal truth value as well as, for themselves, a personal behaviour value. And they have invented cosmogonies and metaphysical systems to justify and explain their emotional attitudes. The fact that all these metaphysical systems are, scientifically speaking, almost certainly untrue in no way affects the value for the individual and for whole societies of the emotions and attitudes which gave them birth. Thus, mysticism will always be a beautiful and precious thing, even though it should be conclusively proved that all the philosophical systems based upon it are nonsensical. And one can be

convinced of the superiority of spiritual to carnal, of ‘conjugial’ to ‘scortatory’ love without believing a word of Plato or Swedenborg.

In a quiet and entirely unpretentious way Crébillon was an expounder of the scientific truth about love — that its basis is physiological; that the intense and beautiful emotions which it arouses cannot be philosophically justified or explained, but should be gratefully accepted for what they are: feelings significant in themselves and of the highest practical importance for those who experience them. He is no vulgar and stupid cynic who denies the existence, because he cannot accept the current metaphysical explanation, of any feelings higher than the merely physical. ‘Les plaisirs gagnent toujours à être ennoblis,’ says Crébillon, through the mouth of the Duke in Le Hasard au Coin du Feu. It is the man of science who speaks, the unprejudiced observer, the accepter of facts. Pleasure is a fact; so is nobility. He admits the existence of both. Pleasure gains by being ennobled: that is the practical, experimental justification of all the high, aspiring, seemingly infinite emotions evoked by love. True, it may be objected that Crébillon gives too little space in his analysis of love to that which ennobles pleasure and too much to pleasure pure and simple. He would have been more truly scientific if he had reversed the balance; for that which ennobles is of more practical significance, both to individuals and to societies, than that which is ennobled. We may excuse him, perhaps, by supposing that, in the society in which he lived (the Pompadour was his patroness), his opportunities for observing the ennobling passions were scarce in comparison with his opportunities for observing the raw physiological material on which such passions work.

But it is foolish as well as ungrateful to criticize an author for what he has failed to achieve. The reader’s business is with what the writer has done, not with what he has left undone. And Crébillon, after all, did do something which, whatever its limitations, was worth doing. What writer, for example, has spoken more acutely on the somewhat scabrous, but none the less important subject of feminine ‘temperament’? I cannot do better than quote a specimen of his analysis, with the generalization he draws from it. He is speaking here of a

woman whose imagination is more ardent than her senses, and who, living in a society where this imagination is perpetually being fired, is for ever desperately trying to experience the pleasures of which she dreams. ‘Elle a l’imagination fort vive et fort déréglée, et quoique l’inutilité des épreuves qu’elle a faites en certain genre eût dû la corriger d’en faire, elle ne veut pas se persuader qu’elle soit née plus malheureuse qu’elle croit que d’autres ne le sont, et elle se flatte toujours qu’il est réservé au dernier qu’elle prend de la rendre aussi sensible qu’elle désire de l’être. Je ne doute même pas que cette idée ne soit la source de ses déréglements et de la peine qu’elle prend de jouer ce qu’elle ne sent pas. . . . Je dirai plus, c’est qu’aujourd’hui il est prouvé que ce sont les femmes à qui les plaisirs de l’amour sont les moins nécessaires qui les recherchent avec la plus de fureur, et que les trois quarts de celles qui se sont perdues avaient reçu de la nature tout ce qu’il leur fallait pour ne l’être pas.’ Admirable description of a type not at all uncommon in all societies where love-making is regarded as the proper study of womankind! The type, I repeat, is not uncommon; but Crébillon’s succinct and accurate description of it something almost unique.

Here is another passage in which he analyses the motives of a different type of cold woman — a much more dangerous type, it may be remarked: the type to which all successful adventuresses belong. ‘Soit caprice, soit vanité, la chose du monde qui lui plaît le plus est d’inspirer de désirs; elle jouit du moins des transports de son amant. D’ailleurs, la froideur de ses sens n’empêche pas sa tête de s’animer, et si la nature lui a refusé ce que l’on appelle le plaisir, elle lui a en échange donné une sorte de volupté qui n’existe, à la vérité, que dans ses idées; mais qui lui fait peut-être éprouver quelque chose de plus délicat que ce qui ne part que des sens. Pour vous,’ adds Clitandre, addressing his companion, ‘pour vous, plus heureuse qu’elle, vous avez, si je ne me trompe, rassemblé les deux.’

It would be possible to compile out of the works of Crébillon a whole collection of such character-sketches and aphorisms. ‘What every Young Don Juan ought to Know’ might serve as title to this florilegium. It should be placed in the hands of all those, women as well as men, who propose to lead, professionally, the arduous and difficult life of leisure. Here are a few of the

aphorisms which will deserve to find a place in this anthology of psychological wisdom.

‘Une jolie femme dépend bien moins d’elle-même que des circonstances; et par malheur il s’en trouve tant, de si peu prévues, de si pressantes, qu’il n’y a point à s’étonner si, après plusieurs aventures, elle n’a connu ni l’amour, ni son cœur. Il s’ensuit que ce qu’on croit la dernière fantaisie d’une femme est bien souvent sa première passion.’

‘Les sens ont aussi leur délicatesse; à un certain point on les émeut; qu’on le passe, on les révolte.’

‘L’on n’occupe pas longtemps l’imagination d’une femme sans aller jusqu’à son cœur, ou du moins sans que par les effets cela ne revienne au même.’

Of Crébillon’s life there is but little to say. It was quite uneventful. The record of it, singularly scanty, contains almost no unusual or surprising element. It was precisely the life which you would expect the author of Le Sopha to have led: a cheerful, social, literary life in the Paris of Louis XV. Crébillon was born on St. Valentine’s Day, 1707, thus achieving legitimacy by fifteen days; for his parents were only married on the thirty-first of January. His father was Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, the tragic poet who provoked the envy and the competitive rivalry of Voltaire. I am not ashamed to say that I have never read a line of the elder Crébillon’s works. Life is not so long that one can afford to spend even the briefest time in the perusal of eighteenth-century French tragedians.

The literary career of the younger Crébillon began in the theatre. In association with the actors Romagnesi, Biancolelli and Riccoboni he composed a number of satirical pieces and parodies for the Italian comedians. It was at this period that he confided to Sébastien Mercier, ‘qu’il n’avait encore achevé la lecture des tragédies de son père, mais que cela viendrait. Il regardait la tragédie française comme la farce la plus complète qu’ait pu inventer l’esprit humain.’

His first successful novel, Tanzai et Néardarné, Histoire Japonaise, was published in 1734. It was so successful, indeed, and so Japanese, that Crébillon, accused of satirizing the Cardinal de Rohan and other important persons, was

arrested and thrown into prison, from which, however, the good graces of a royal reader soon released him.

Tanzai was followed in 1736 by Les Égarements du Cœur et de l'Esprit, and in 1740 by Le Sopha. It was the epoch of Crébillon's social triumphs. He was for some time perpetual chairman of the famous dinners of the Caveau, and there were many other societies of which he was, officially or unofficially, the leading light.

In 1748 he married — somewhat tardily, for he had had a child by her two years before — an English wife, Lady Mary Howard. It is said that the poor lady squinted, was very ugly, awkward in society, shy and deeply religious. Crébillon seems, none the less, to have been a model husband, while the marriage lasted; which was not very long, however, for Lady Mary died about 1756. Their only child died in infancy a short time after being legitimated.

It was in 1759 that the favour of Madame de Pompadour procured for Crébillon the post of Royal Censor of Literature. He performed his duties conscientiously and to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. On the death of his father, in 1762, he received a pension. In 1774 he became Police Censor as well as Royal Censor. In 1777 he died. For all practical purposes, however, he had been dead fifteen years or more. 'Il y a longtemps,' said his obituarist, 'très longtemps même, qu'il avait eu le chagrin de se voir survivre à lui-même.' Melancholy fate! It caused his contemporaries to do him, towards the end, something less than justice. The most enthusiastic of his epitaphs is cool enough:

Dans ce tombeau gît Crébillon.
Qui? le fameux tragique? — Non!
Celui qui le mieux peignit l'âme
Du petit-maître et de la femme.

The praise is faint. It is meant, perhaps, to damn. But it does not succeed in damning. To have been the best painter of anybody's soul, even the fop's, even the eighteenth-century lady's, is a fine achievement. 'Je fus étonnée,' says one of Crébillon's characters, describing the charms of her lover's conversation, 'je fus étonnée de la sorte de consistance que les objets les plus frivoles semblaient

prendre entre ses mains.’ The whole merit of that French eighteenth century, of which Crébillon was the representative man, consisted precisely in giving ‘a sort of consistency to the most frivolous objects.’ To lead a life of leisure gracefully is an art, and though we can all do nothing, few of us contrive to do it well. It is scarcely possible to imagine a life more hopelessly futile than that which was led by the men and women of the old French aristocracy. Intrinsically, such a life seems ghastly in its emptiness and sterility. And yet, somehow, by sheer force of style, these frivolous creatures of the dix-huitième contrived to fill the emptiness, to coax the most charming and elegant flowers from the sterility of their existence. To the most futile of lives they gave ‘a sort of consistency’; they endowed nothingness with solidity and form. Crébillon shared this power with his contemporaries. The conquests of the petit-maître, the prompt surrenders of Célie and Cidalise and Julie — these are his theme. It seems unpromising in its smallness and its triviality. But by dint of treating it seriously — with the double seriousness of the scientific observer and the literary artist — he has made out of it something which we in our turn are compelled to take seriously. Like Célie, we are astonished.

JUSTIFICATIONS

WELL BEATEN BY the Don, Masetto lies groaning in the darkness. To him comes Zerlina, repentantly tender. Kneeling beside him, ‘Vedrai, carino,’ she promises in a melody of the most ravishing elegance,

Vedrai, carino,
se sei buonino,

che bel rimedio
  ti voglio dar.
È naturale,
non da disgusto,

e lo speziale
non lo sa far.
È un certo balsamo
che porto adosso.
Dare te'l posso,
se il vuoi provar.

And after half a dozen repetitions of tocca mi qua, qua and twenty bars of deliciously melodious twiddles, the orchestra ends up, pianissimo, but how definitely and satisfyingly! with the chord of C major, and the newly married lovers retire to enjoy their bliss.

È naturale, non da disgusto . . . Da Ponte evidently spoke for himself. This is his description of the manner in which the libretto of Don Giovanni was composed: 'I sat down at my writing-table and stayed there for twelve hours on end, with a little bottle of Tokay on my right hand, an inkstand in the middle, and a box of Seville tobacco on the left. A beautiful young girl of sixteen was living in my house with her mother, who looked after the household. (I should have wished to love her only as a daughter — but . . .) She came into my room whenever I rang the bell, which in truth was fairly often, and particularly when my inspiration seemed to begin to cool. She brought me now a biscuit, now a cup of coffee, or again nothing but her own lovely face, always gay, always smiling, and made precisely to inspire poetic fancy and brilliant ideas.' It is a scene from a settecento Earthly Paradise — before the Fall of 1789. The mind is its own place, and there have always been plenty of men and women whose home was Da Ponte's Eden. The rest of us are not so fortunate. In the world we inhabit, that certo balsamo which Zerlina and her young friends carry about with them is listed as one of the dangerous drugs. Its administration is not permitted, except under a medical certificate. In the moral pharmacopœias of all civilized countries it is official in only one form — matrimony. Made up in this way the bel rimedio is 'a remedy against sin.' Made up in any other way, it is sin.

Those who, like Da Ponte, are untroubled in this matter by qualms of conscience, merely ignore the prescriptions of the pharmacopœia. If they want

the balm, they take it, in whatever form and from any bootlegger who is willing to supply it. The behaviour of these drug traffickers is so straightforward, their thoughts and feelings so transparently comprehensible, that it is unnecessary to pay any further attention to them. It is just a matter of tocca mi qua, qua, and there's an end of it.

But there is another class of men and women, the scrupulous, for whom this simple solution is morally impossible. They want the certo balsamo in forms that are not official; they feel impelled to give an unduly violent expression to their lust for power, or social position or money. Current morality condemns these wishes. It would be possible for them, by breaking the law discreetly, to get all they want without discomfort; but they are not prepared even to think of themselves as law-breakers. They reject an enjoyment which is illicit, refuse to be the furtive evaders of a rule of which their own furtiveness tacitly confirms the validity. Declining the dishonourable rôle of bootleggers, they claim to be on the right side of the law, they insist on the essential orthodoxy of their actions. Other people condemn them; they retort by inventing philosophies to prove that they are right.

Many people carry scrupulousness a stage further. There is no question of their committing an act that has been pronounced illegal or immoral. They take their certo balsamo as prescribed; they indulge their avarice and their lust for power only in such ways as convention regards as respectable. But all sensualities and egotisms are essentially irrational; and, along with their animal cravings, men feel a hunger and thirst for explanation, for reasonableness, for righteousness. Even a licit indulgence in the irrational can be distressing to the scrupulous. Law and the local system of morality may pronounce such indulgences to be harmless; but they feel it necessary to invent more elaborate justifications of their own.

A complete history of justifications would be, to a great extent, identical with a history of thought. Most political, ethical and even cosmological systems have been essentially justificatory. They are the work either of men in rebellion

against the existing system, or of the scrupulous, or of the defenders of orthodoxy.

To be effective, justifications have to be made in terms of the philosophy which condemns the acts or thoughts that it is desired to justify. The scrupulous are concerned to prove that the irrational they so much dread is in truth rational or even divine; the rebels, that they are really, if the matter be examined with an unprejudiced eye, more Catholic than the Pope and more royalist than the King. Conversely, the supporters of an established system will try to show that they have on their side, not only tradition and divine revelation, but also logic and considerations of utility.

An elaborate system of justification often does more than it was intended to do. In justifying one set of thoughts, impulses and actions, the author finds (or his readers find) that he is logically committed to believing in the rightness of other doings and other feelings, which he had not originally thought of justifying. Thus, a system intended originally to justify simple fornication may turn out to be logically capable of justifying murder. Those who want to commit murder will seize on the excuse offered by the system, and even those who don't will find themselves impelled by the force of logic into this course.

Philosophies are devices for making it possible to do, coolly, continuously and with a good conscience, things which otherwise one could do only in the heat of passion, spasmodically and under the threat of subsequent remorse. Unsophisticated by thought, anger soon dies down; but supply a man with a philosophy proving that he is right to be angry, and he will go on performing in cold blood the acts of malice which otherwise he could have performed only when the fit was upon him. Philosophies, which their authors devised in order to justify some relatively harmless craving, have been subsequently made the excuse for monstrous iniquities. For example, the seventeenth-century Puritans were anxious to prove that there was no incompatibility between trade and wealth on the one hand and Christian virtues on the other. The philosophy which they concocted out of the Old Testament hid much more than it was meant to do. Not only did it prove that rich nonconformist merchants were thoroughly

virtuous; it also proved that workmen, peasants and, in general, all the poor were thoroughly vicious, therefore that they deserved all the miseries they suffered, and a good many more as well. The surprising thing about the industrial revolution is not that capitalists and entrepreneurs should have behaved badly; it is that they should have been so serenely convinced of their perfect goodness. For this the philosophy of the Puritans, reinforced at a later period by that of the political economists, was responsible.

In the pages which follow, I shall illustrate these general remarks on justification by a few concrete examples chosen almost at random from the illimitable literature of the subject. The choice has been determined more by the hazards of my recent reading than by anything else. My only guiding principle has been that the examples should be curious, striking and even, in certain cases, extravagant. It is by studying madness that psychologists have learnt to understand the workings of the healthy mind. Similarly, it is in the most absurd and fantastic instances that the mechanism of the essentially normal and commonplace process of justification is seen most clearly at work. If my principal examples are concerned with the certo balsamo, it is because the theological and philosophical devices which have been invented for the justification of sexual activity, whether licit or illicit, have generally been more fantastic and far-fetched than those by which men have sought to moralize their swindles and murders, their cruelties and rapacities, the manifestations of their vanity, pride and personal ambition.

My first examples belong to the class of justifications by religious experience. Such justifications tend to be especially extravagant where the prevailing theological system is one which postulates the reality of guidance by a personal God. For men and women brought up in such a system, it is easy to justify any action by identifying the desire to perform it with the direct prompting of the deity. In certain of these theological systems, God is regarded as completely transcendent and of a nature utterly incommensurable with man’s. This being so, He becomes capable of anything; we must not be surprised to find God guiding

us to perform acts which would be judged, by merely human standards, as crimes and lunacies.

Kierkegaard wrote a whole book on this subject, choosing as his theme the story of Abraham and Isaac. The command to sacrifice Isaac was, he insists, genuinely divine. God's ways are so emphatically not ours that there is no cause for astonishment in His ordering His servant to commit a crime. Such 'temporary suspensions of the moral order' are proofs of God's omnipotence and transcendence. Kierkegaard's choice of an example is significant. His God is a justifier of cruelty, not of sensuality. The idea that there could be a temporary suspension of the laws of sexual morality is evidently repugnant to him. That God should prompt to murder is, to his mind, more easily conceivable than that He should prompt to an act of sexual indulgence. Kierkegaard's attitude is widely shared at the present day. There are plenty of pious churchmen who consider that God approves of men killing their fellows in war, but who would be horrified at the suggestion that fornication and adultery can ever be anything but detestable in His eyes. Those who invoke guidance to justify behaviour commonly regarded as immoral may be grouped in two main classes. In the first class we place those whom Dante would have consigned to the lower circles of hell — the violent and malicious; in the second we place the merely incontinent whose chief preoccupation is with the certo balsamo and who find themselves divinely guided towards sexual promiscuity. The two classes cannot in practice be sharply distinguished. Those who are guided towards promiscuity may also be guided, as we shall see, towards pride, fraud and violence.

In choosing the sacrifice of Isaac as his example, Kierkegaard displayed a certain timidity. For after all, this particular suspension of the moral order was not complete; the angel and that eleventh-hour ram saved Isaac from the knife. If he had really had the courage of his convictions, Kierkegaard would have chosen a case like that of Thomas Schucker, the Swiss Anabaptist who, in 1527, cut off his brother's head. 'He called together a numerous assembly and declared to the company that he perceived himself under the influence of the spirit of God. Upon which he commanded his brother to kneel down, and took a sword. His

father and mother and some others demanded what he was about to do. Be satisfied, replied he, I will do nothing but what is revealed to me by our heavenly father. The company waited impatiently for the event, when they saw him draw his sword and cut off his brother's head. He was punished by the magistrates as his crime deserved; but he showed no signs of repentance, and declared upon the scaffold that he had executed the orders of God.' The most remarkable feature of this story is not that Schucker should have felt himself guided to cut off his brother's head; it is that the brother should have consented to let his head be cut off and that the numerous assembly should have looked on without a protest. Under the influence of his religion and justified by its theology, Schucker was merely taking too seriously a childish fantasy of murder. But the victim and the spectators had no such fantasies; if they behaved in the way they did, it was because it seemed to them inherently probable that Schucker's revelation was valid.

Those who believe that God gives guidance are forced to admit that what feels like a divine command is in fact very often a prompting from some all too human source. Accordingly they advise anyone who receives what seems a guidance to confide it to others and ask their opinion upon it. A guidance that can stand up to the criticism of a group may be relied upon as being of divine origin. Thomas Schucker's guidance came through this test with flying colours. We must either believe that an act of criminal imbecility can be divinely inspired, or that the test is far from infallible. The case of Thomas Schucker is not unique; it is merely a particularly extravagant specimen of a very common type of religious aberration. A group under supposedly divine guidance is not quite so frequently the victim of absurd fantasies and disreputable desires as is an individual; but the difference is merely one of degree, not of kind. There is no dogma so queer, no behaviour so eccentric or even outrageous, but a group of people can be found to think it divinely inspired.

Here, for example, is the case, chosen from among a thousand others, of the Reverend Henry James Prince and his disciples. Prince was born in 1811 in the West Country; was articled to a doctor; then, at twenty-six, decided to take

Orders. A journal which he kept at this period was published in 1859 for the edification of his followers. It is a typical specimen of evangelical literature. One opens it at random upon such entries as this, for September 20th, 1835: ‘In the evening I found strength to expound John iii. with boldness to a party of Mr. M. C.’s and then to pray with them. Afterwards spoke seriously to F. H., endeavouring to convince him that he needed a new heart. At night was assaulted with a severe trial, when I found it exceedingly difficult to resist the idolatrous feeling of self-complacency on account of those doings.’ A month later he ‘dined at Dr. H.’s and spent a rational evening. He lent me Bickersteth’s Guide to Prophecy, and gave me a book by Mr. Cunningham on the Millennium.’ On May 17th, 1837, ‘Jesus vouchsafed after dinner to visit my soul with His love; it was quite delicious to my poor barren soul; my heart melted over the dying Lamb, and the sight of His bleeding love was such that for a season my soul seemed quite swallowed up in the enjoyment of His dying love; I felt that I had done the bloody deed, and loathed myself; all that I could do was to sigh and weep and look and love.’

In the following spring Prince entered St. David’s College, at Lampeter, to prepare for ordination. He was an exemplary student — too exemplary, indeed, for the taste of most of his fellows, who resented the zeal for self-improvement displayed by Prince and a small band of earnest companions. One of these companions, Arthur Augustus Rees, published in 1846 a pamphlet, The Rise and Progress of the Heresy of the Rev. H. J. Prince, which contains an account of the young man’s career at Lampeter. It was, so it seems, the reading of a book called The Life and Writings of Gerhard Tersteegen (Tersteegen was a German pietist of the eighteenth century) that launched young Prince upon the course that was to lead him to the Agapemone. Tersteegen convinced him of the importance of living always under guidance; so much so, that ‘at length he was determined to say or do nothing without a previous intimation of the divine mind. For example, if Mr. P. were about to take a walk and there were every appearance of rain, he would not carry out his umbrella without first asking the will of God.’ In due course, he came to believe that he could always discover what the will of God

really was: an infallible intuition revealed it in every conjunction of life. Judged by ordinary standards, God's advice might often seem rather injudicious; but since it was God's it was right. Prince would always act upon it, even in defiance of his judgment.

The will of God had a good deal to do with Prince's two marriages. The first, contracted while still a student at Lampeter, was with a Miss Martha Freeman. This lady was old enough to be her husband's mother, but possessed by way of compensation an independent income. A friend of Prince's family, she had contributed towards the expenses of the young man's education. In return he converted her from Catholicism to Anglicanism, and had acted almost from boyhood as her spiritual adviser. Their relationship was simultaneously that of husband and wife, mother and son, spiritual father and daughter. Alas! the couple had little time to enjoy this complicated bliss; a few months only after Prince's ordination to the curacy of Charlinch, in Somerset, the poor old lady died. Whereupon, with a haste which his friends could only regard as indecent, but which he himself explained as being due to the will of God, he married Miss Julia Starky, sister of the rector of the parish.

Mr. Starky was Prince's senior by some years; but from the first his relations to his new curate were those of disciple to master. Prince, it is evident, was one of those born snake-charmers and lion-tamers who go through life effortlessly dominating their fellow-men and women. Such magnetism is a dangerous gift, which it is almost impossible not to abuse or be abused by. Prince duly succumbed to the temptations into which his own powers led him; he fascinated others into believing him a superior being; feasted his self-esteem on their adulation until it swelled to monstrous proportions; then invoked the Almighty to justify his pretensions and to moralize his sexual eccentricities.

In The Charlinch Revival, which he published in 1842 (in order, 'under the Divine blessing, to stir up the hearts of the Lord's people'), Prince reveals himself to us at the moment when he first discovered the full extent of his powers. Charlinch was an agricultural parish, peopled by stolid Saxon rustics, in whom the temperature of religious zeal was little, if at all, above absolute zero.

The revival began in October 1841. Mr. Prince, who had for some time been ‘shut up’ and deprived of his ordinary power to preach a stirring sermon, found himself suddenly inspired. There was a memorable Sunday afternoon when ‘the church was unusually full, but the minister felt as if he had nothing to say; he was still shut up. In the pulpit, however, the spirit of prayer came on him and he prayed for twenty minutes with considerable unction. He then told his congregation that he would read the text to them, Ephesians v. 14, and that if the Lord were pleased to speak by him He would; and if not, that he must hold his tongue, as he could not speak from himself. He had scarcely spoken these words, when the Spirit came upon him with power: certainly he did not preach, but the Holy Ghost preached by him. The word was not vehement, and far too solemn to be violent; but it was searching like fire, heavy as a hammer, and sharper than a two-edged sword.’ The congregation was overwhelmed. ‘Several men and women sobbed aloud; the head of most dropped on their breast, the hearts of all were awestruck. (One boy excepted.)’ Galvanized, the parish started out of its secular repose. The revival had begun.

Prince’s next great victory was won in the Sunday School, where he ‘had laboured fourteen months without witnessing so much as one child become even serious.’ On December 10th, 1841, about fifty children were assembled in the Charlinch school. ‘In a few minutes, the Holy Ghost came upon the minister with the most tremendous power. . . . About twenty of the children were pierced to the heart by it, and appeared to be in great distress; but the bigger boys continued unmoved, and some of them even seemed disposed to laugh. In a short time, however, the word reached them too, and they were smitten to the heart with a most dreadful conviction of their sin and danger. . . . In about ten minutes the spectacle presented by the schoolroom was truly awful; out of fifty children present there were not so many as ten that could stand upright. Boys and girls, great and small together, were either leaning against the wall quite overcome by their feelings of distress, or else bowed down with their faces hidden in their hands, and sobbing in the severest agony.’ The triumph was complete. ‘Who can

possibly resist the conviction that the hand of the Lord hath done this?' Certainly not the Reverend Henry James Prince.

The revivalists were so excessively zealous that, in May 1842, the Bishop of Bath and Wells revoked Mr. Prince's licence to preach. Charlinch was becoming too hot to hold its curate. He migrated; but a similar fate overtook him in two other parishes. Finally, 'after some months waiting on God for guidance in faith and prayer,' he left the Established Church and started to preach on his own — at Brighton, where he founded an Adullam Chapel; at Weymouth, where Mr. Starky, who had also had a difference with the Bishop, was ministering to a considerable flock of Starkyites; at Spaxton, a village near Charlinch and the site of the future Agapemone.

The heroes of tragedy are torn between love and honour — in other words, between egoism and egotism, between craving and pride, between the urge to indulge oneself and the urge to dominate others. In Prince there was no conflict. The two motives presented themselves not simultaneously but in succession. He began with the pursuit of honour and, having achieved it, went on to love. His first systematic efforts at justification were made on behalf of his ambition and vanity; it was not till later that he used his theology and his religious experiences for moralizing his sensualities.

It was in the spring of 1843 that he wrote to his friend Rees to inform him that the Holy Ghost had taken up its residence within himself; and by the end of the same year he had evolved a complete system of theology, based firmly upon the foundation of unquestionable experience: the experience of his identity with the spirit of God. This theology subsequently underwent certain modifications under the pressure of his desires. As the claims of sensuality became more insistent, new theological dogmas had to be invented to justify them. In 1843 pride and vanity were in the ascendant, and the refinements of the doctrine elaborated twelve years later in The Little Book Open — refinements intended to sanctify Prince's cravings for the certo balsamo — had not yet been invented. The fully developed doctrine will be described in due course. Meanwhile, we must see how Brother Prince, as he now called himself, was guided to deal with the

important problem of finance. His methods were simplicity itself. Disciples would come down to breakfast to find a note couched in some such words as these: ‘The Lord hath need of £50 to be used for a special purpose unto His glory. The spirit would have this known unto you. Amen.’ So great was the faith of those to whom such communications were addressed that they would sit down at once to draw the cheque. So far so good. But it soon became clear that what the Lord really needed was capital — a good solid lump of it. And in due course the capital appeared. Here is the story of the first twenty thousand.

After being deprived of his curacy at Charlinch, Prince spent some months as curate of Stoke, in Suffolk. Here he made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Nottidge, and their four unmarried daughters. These ladies, who were no longer in their first youth, became Prince’s disciples and, when he left Stoke (under orders, this time, from the Bishop of Ely), followed him to Brighton and subsequently into the west of England. In 1844, Mr. Nottidge died, leaving each of his daughters about six thousand pounds. Shortly afterwards God intimated to Brother Prince that it was His will that three of the Miss Nottidges, Agnes, Harriet and Clara, should marry three of Prince’s followers, George Thomas, Lewis Price and William Cobbe, respectively. The ladies hesitated for a moment, then decided that the will of God must be obeyed, and the three marriages were celebrated simultaneously, at Swansea, on July 9th, 1845. In the following year Agnes parted from her husband — not, however, before parting with her six thousand pounds, which had been made over on her marriage to Mr. Thomas, who in his turn had made them over (for such was the will of God) to Brother Prince. The Cobbes and Prices did likewise. These gifts, to which were added a thousand pounds from Starky, and no less than ten thousand from a Mr. Malin and four Miss Malins, formed the nucleus of a considerable fortune which was afterwards invested in the purchase and maintenance of the Agapemone.

Meanwhile, the fourth Miss Nottidge (aged forty-four and called Louisa) had returned to her mother in Suffolk. Not for long, however. In December 1845 she came at Prince’s invitation — or rather, at the invitation of the Holy Ghost — to Weymouth; thence, after some months, migrated to Charlinch. She was living

quietly there in a cottage, with Mrs. Prince, when her brother, the Rev. Edmund Nottidge, and her brother-in-law, Frederick Ripley, drove up in a chaise and abducted her. Louisa was taken first of all to her mother's house in London; but on 'declaring that Prince was the Almighty in human form, she was, on the 12th of November 1846, upon the usual medical certificate, placed in a private lunatic asylum in Middlesex, where she continued until the 14th of May 1848, when she was discharged by the order of the Lunacy Commissioner.' From the asylum, Louisa hurried straight back to Spaxton and, within three days of her release, had transferred the whole of her property to Brother Prince. These six thousand pounds were dearly bought; for their transfer was to lead, twelve years later, to a lawsuit which was a source of much pain to the Spaxton community. Louisa died in 1858, and in 1860 her brother, Ralph Nottidge, filed a suit against Prince in the Court of Chancery, for the return of £5728, 7s. 7d. 'In 1848,' runs the summary of the case in the Law Journal Reports, 'a person pretending that he had a divine mission obtained a gift of stock from a lady by imposing a belief on her mind that he sustained a supernatural character. The lady's relations were aware of the gift at the time it was made, and she resided with and was supported by the donee from 1848 up to her death in 1858. Upon a bill by the administrator of the lady, the Court ordered the donee to refund the stock, with interest thereon from the time of her death.' And now the point which made the decision worthy of record: 'Whether the donee really believed that he was the supernatural being he represented himself to be, was immaterial.'

At the time of Louisa's release from her asylum, Nottidge v. Prince was still in the distant future. The present was a season of triumph. Crowds came to listen to the preaching of the Two Witnesses, as Prince and Starky called themselves; the number of believers increased; money came pouring in. Brother Prince decided to found a community to be called The Agapemone, or Abode of Love. Two hundred acres of land were bought at Spaxton, a handsome mansion erected, gardens laid out. The hothouses were filled with exotic plants, the stables with magnificent horses, the cellars with the choicest Madeira and claret. There was a chapel, complete with stained-glass windows and Gothic trimmings,

but a chapel that was at the same time the principal drawing-room. It was furnished with arm-chairs, a comfortable sofa and a billiard-table. To the sinless and perfected inhabitants of the Agapemone all activities were holy; a game of snooker was a sacrament like any other.

Into the Agapemone Brother Prince settled down with some sixty disciples — gentlefolk and servants. His state, in these early years, was lordly. He bought the Queen-Dowager's equipage with four white horses and drove through the countryside as though he were an emperor. In London, when he visited the Great Exhibition of 1851, his open carriage was preceded by outriders, bareheaded, as befitted men in the presence of the Lord. Letters were sent through the post addressed to 'Our Lord God, Spaxton, Somerset,' and were duly delivered. Brother Prince, or 'Beloved' as now he preferred to be called by his followers, had climbed to the pinnacle of Honour. It was time for Love.

At the beginning of the 'fifties a young lady called Miss Paterson had joined the flock. Hepworth Dixon, who visited the Agapemone some years later, has left a description of a certain fascinating 'Sister Zoe,' whom he identified (though she refused to give her mundane name) with the ci-devant Paterson. In a pale, romantic way, Sister Zoe was extremely beautiful. 'Guercino might have painted such a girl for one of his rapt and mounting angels.' Beloved was smitten. But a man whose soul was the residence of the Holy Ghost — who had indeed, by this time, actually become the Holy Ghost — could hardly be content with a bootlegged balsamo. His affair with Zoe had to be justified. He might, of course, have written her a little note to the effect that the Lord had need of her for a special purpose unto His glory. But he must have felt that this would not be enough. Beloved lived in a society which honoured the Low Church mill-owner, growing rich on sweated labour, but was horrified by sexual impropriety. A man might grind the faces of the poor; but so long as he refrained from caressing his neighbours' wives and daughters, he was regarded as virtuous. In money matters Beloved had found plain guidance quite sufficient; but when it came to sensuality, more elaborate justifications were needed. These were set out in The Little Book Open, published in 1856. After a brief introduction, the theme of the

Little Book is announced in capital letters for all to understand. The subject of Brother Prince's testimony is 'THE REDEMPTION OF THE BODY.' The Gospel 'addressed itself to the soul of man. It left out the flesh.' Beloved had appeared to remedy this defect.

The cosmology and theology, in terms of which Mr. Prince rationalized his desire to have an affair with Miss Paterson, may be briefly summed up as follows. God enters periodically into covenants with man, through chosen individuals. The first covenant was at the Creation, and Adam was God's witness. The second was at the Flood, and the witness was Noah. The third was entered into after the building of the Tower of Babel; Abraham was the witness on this occasion. The fourth, with Jesus as witness, at the Redemption upon the cross. And now, at Spaxton, 'God, in Jesus Christ, has again entered into covenant with man, at the resurrection of mankind, and I am His witness. This one man, myself, has Jesus Christ selected and appointed His witness to His counsel and purpose, to conclude the day of grace and to introduce the day of judgment, to close the dispensation of the spirit and to enter into covenant with the FLESH.' How sorely the poor flesh needed this covenant! It had become God's enemy at the Fall — with an enmity that 'neither the holiness of the law could eradicate, nor the Grace of God amend. . . . Even the dying love of a crucified Redeemer never once took away the enmity of the flesh of the believer against God; but rather brought it the more to light.' The Gospel had saved only souls, not flesh. Beloved had come to save the flesh. He had already 'revealed the mind of the Lord concerning the dispensation of the spirit — the Gospel — by living it as a spiritual body.' (I neglected to remark before that Henry James Prince had for some time ceased to exist, and that what people took for the ex-curate of Charlinch was a visible manifestation of the Spirit of God.) Having lived the Gospel in a spiritual body, 'he was now to bring to light, or reveal, the mind of the Lord concerning flesh, by living it in flesh. Accordingly there was given unto him a reed like unto a rod; and the angel said, arise and measure the temple of God. He did so.'

The circumstances in which he did so were singular in the extreme. He announced to the people in the Agapemone that ‘it was now God’s purpose to extend His love from heaven to earth, from spirit to flesh, from soul to body. . . . Agreeably thereto He (the Holy Ghost) took flesh — a woman. He did this through Brother Prince, as flesh; yet not Brother Prince as natural flesh . . . Thus the Holy Ghost took flesh in the person of those whom He had called as flesh. Thus He did measure the temple of God; and the reed like unto a rod wherewith He did measure it was the flesh He had taken.’ Having thus explained the meaning of his symbol, Brother Prince launches into an account of his taking of the flesh. ‘He took the flesh absolutely in His sovereign will. . . . He had no respect for any other will than His own. He was not influenced by what others would think or say. He did not even consult or in any way make known His intention to the flesh He took, until He actually did take it in the presence of others; and then He took it with power and authority, as flesh that belonged to God and was at His absolute disposal; so that in the taking of it He left it no choice of its own. He took it in free grace. It was flesh He took; flesh that knew not God, that wanted not God, that was ignorant of Him; and, like all other flesh in its nature, contrary to the spirit. He took it as it was — ignorant, indifferent, independent, at enmity against God, and having nothing to commend it to Him. He took it in love. Not because it loved Him, for it did not; but because it pleased Him to set His love upon it. And though He took it in absolute power and authority, without consulting its pleasure, or even giving it a choice, yet He took it in love; for having taken it, the manner of His life with it was such as flesh could not but know and appreciate as love.

‘Moreover, although it was natural flesh He took, and therefore flesh indifferent to and at enmity with God, He never for a moment made it sensible of this, but in everything and at all times, regarded it and treated it according to His own mind, WHICH WAS TO SEE NO EVIL IN IT; in fact, He loved it as His own flesh.

‘According to the purpose He had declared, He kept it with Him continually, by day and by night. He took it openly with Him wherever He went, not being

ashamed of it; and made its life happy and agreeable by affording it the enjoyment of every simple and innocent gratification.'

Through this muddy verbiage, we divine the oddest realities. From Hepworth Dixon, who had sources of information not available at the present time, we learn that the covenant of God (in the person of Mr. Prince) with the flesh (in the person of Miss Paterson) was sealed in a public act of worship, upon the sofa in that consecrated billiard-room at Spaxton. Beloved had announced in advance that the great event was to take place on a given day and at a predetermined hour. What he did not reveal in advance was the name of the particular piece of flesh which was to be reconciled. One can reconstruct the scene: the little congregation sitting in apprehensive expectation round the billiard-table in the chapel; the solemn entry of Beloved; a few prayers offered by the two Anointed Ones, otherwise Messrs. Thomas and Starky; the singing in unison of one of those hymns composed by Beloved in his own honour; then, falling upon the vibrant religious silence, the words of Beloved, announcing the name of the chosen flesh. One can reconstruct the scene, I repeat; but when it comes to Miss Paterson's thoughts and feelings, imagination boggles. 'He took it in love. Not because it loved Him, for it did not; but because it pleased Him to set His love upon it.' To set His love upon it, 'with power and authority, and in the presence of others.' Whether Beloved would have behaved in this extraordinary way if he had been a mere bootlegger of sexual pleasures may be doubted. But in justifying his desires for Miss Paterson, he had created a theology which made the performance in the billiard-room a sacred duty. As plain Mr. Prince, he would never have thought of executing more than a straightforward seduction. As the divine witness of a new dispensation, he was bound to do something spectacular and uncommon. He did it, with a vengeance.

The public initiation in the billiard-room was not the last of Miss Paterson's ordeals. New trials were in store for her; in due course, she became pregnant. Now, according to the Princean theology there was to be no birth under the new dispensation, just as there was to be no death. Beloved and his followers had become immortal and at the same time divinely sterile. In spite of which, it soon

became apparent that Sister Zoe was in a family way. For a moment, Beloved was at a loss to understand. Then, from on high, the explanation was vouchsafed. Doomed to annihilation, Satan was making a last despairing effort. Miss Paterson's baby was the result. How it was received when it arrived, this child of flesh by the Holy Ghost through the instrumentality of the Devil, is not recorded; nor how it was brought up. Sitting in the billiard-saloon-chapel, on the very sofa where the covenant had been sealed, Hepworth Dixon saw a solitary little creature playing in the garden outside. It is our only glimpse of this most unwelcome of children.

The case of Nottidge v. Prince was heard in 1860 — at a moment, that is to say, when the mid-nineteenth-century reaction towards rationalism was setting in. It is a significant fact that, between 1859, the year of the Irish revival, and 1873, the year of Moody's first visit to Edinburgh, we have no record of any considerable outburst of religious excitement in Great Britain. If the fortunes of the Agapemone began henceforward to decline, that was not solely due to the strictures of Vice-Chancellor Stuart; it was also and perhaps mainly due to the fact that people with money were losing their interest in Covenants and Anointed Ones. If they wanted justifications for unorthodox behaviour they looked for them elsewhere than in theology. The chosen band lived on at Spaxton, steadily shrinking as the immortals who composed it died off, steadily growing poorer as the value of money declined and the original capital was eroded away. Beloved lingered on and on, outliving all his original followers, outliving even the age of rationalism. For in the later 'eighties the tide began to turn. Intellect went out of fashion. Nietzsche was regarded as a great thinker, Bergson had written his first books, and money began to pour once more into the coffers of the Agapemone. A branch was opened at Clapton, where an Ark of the Covenant was built at a cost of nearly twenty thousand pounds. After Beloved's death in 1899, the pastor of the Ark, the Rev. T. H. Smyth Pigott, became Beloved II, and, with a punctuality that bespeaks the unchangeableness of basic human motives, proceeded to repeat all that his predecessor had done. The urge to domination had first to be satisfied and theologically justified; then the craving for the certo

balsamo. Smyth Pigott did both — becoming God in 1902 and producing, in 1905 and 1908, two illegitimate children called respectively Glory and Power. In due course, he also died. The Agapemone still exists.

Both in doctrine and in practice, Brother Prince was wildly unorthodox. Coventry Patmore's loves were nuptial and his religion Catholic. But, for scrupulous souls, even nuptial love is an odd, inexplicable kind of activity, requiring to be rationalized and sanctified. Patmore found what he required in the ancient doctrine which sees in the consummation of human passion a type and symbol of the union of God with souls and with the Church. The doctrine, I repeat, is old and unorthodox. Patmore's eccentricity consisted in insisting upon its truth with excessive emphasis, in taking too literally an analogy that most writers have preferred to regard as a kind of poetical metaphor. In a prose work, Sponsa Dei, this literalness of interpretation was pushed, indeed, so far that a clerical friend advised the book's suppression. But the published poems and, above all, the little volume of aphorisms, The Rod, the Root and the Flower, make it sufficiently clear what the lost book must have contained.

Patmore suffuses the whole universe, natural as well as supernatural, with sex. 'No writer, sacred or profane, ever uses the words "he" or "him" of the soul. It is always "she" or "her"; so universal is the intuitive knowledge that the soul, with regard to God who is her life, is feminine.' (A whole book could be written on the way in which thought has been affected by the accidents of grammar. The word anima means the principle of animal life, as opposed to animus, which stands for the principle of spiritual life. For some odd reason Christian theologians labelled their particular conception of the soul with the first and less appropriate of these two words. Grammatically, the Latin Christian soul was feminine; what more natural than to suppose that it was in some sort physiologically female? For Greeks the soul might be either feminine or neuter. Either psyche or, the word habitually used by St. Paul, pneuma. Brought up on anima, modern theologians have preferred to this non-committal neuter the personifiable feminine substantive. It is owing to a grammatical prejudice that

earnest ladies call themselves psychic rather than pneumatic, and that Coventry Patmore was able to justify his connubial tastes in terms of Catholic theology.)

The soul, then, is a woman; and ‘woman, according to the Salve Regina, is our Life, our Sweetness and our Hope. God is so only in so far as He is “made flesh” *i.e.* Woman. The Flesh of God is the Head of man, says St. Augustine. Thus the Last is indeed the First. “The lifting of her eyelash is my Lord.” ’ Again, ‘Woman is the visible glory of God . . . The Word made Flesh is the Word made Woman.’ ‘Heaven becomes very intelligible and attractive when it is discovered to be — Woman.’

Feminine, the soul knows her God in a consummated marriage. For ‘all knowledge worthy of the name is nuptial knowledge.’ Even death is a form of married love — charged as it is with ‘a hope intense of kisses close beyond conceit of sense.’ Mysticism is essentially connubial. ‘Lovers put out the candle and draw the curtains when they wish to see the god and the goddess; and, in the higher Communion, the night of thought is the light of perception.’ God is discovered by touch and ‘the Beatific vision is not seen by the eyes, but is a substance which is sucked as through a nipple.’ ‘God Himself becomes a concrete object and an intelligible joy when contemplated as the eternal felicity of a lover with the beloved, the Ante-type and very original of the Love which inspires the poet and the thrush.’ Conversely, the felicity of the lover with the beloved and the inenarrable experiences of touch are foretastes of the Beatific Vision. ‘There are some who even in this life can say, “Under the Tree where my Mother was debauched, Thou has redeemed me.” ’

The most distinctive feature of Patmore’s doctrine is that which attributes to God a kind of nostalgie de la boue and therefore justifies the more god-like among human beings (such, of course, as Patmore himself) in seeking out and cultivating the extremes of sensual irrationality.

‘Enough,’ he makes the woman, Psyche, cry,
‘Enough, enough, ambrosial plumed Boy!
My bosom is aweary of thy breath.
Thou kissest joy to death.

Have pity of my clay-conceived birth
And maiden’s simple mood,
Which longs for ether and infinitude,
As thou, being God, crav’st littleness and earth.’

The mystery of the Incarnation provides Patmore with an analogy to marital bliss. Addressing himself to the Virgin, he writes as follows:

Life’s cradle and death’s tomb!
To lie within whose womb,
There, with divine self-will infatuate,
Love-captive to the thing He did create,
Thy God did not abhor,

No more
Than Man, in Youth’s high spousal tide,

Abhors at last to touch

The strange lips of his long-procrastinating Bride;

Nay, not the least imagined part as much!

Ora pro me!

He returns again to the same theme in other poems. In ‘The Dream,’ for example, we read:

The pride of personality,

Seeking its highest, aspires to die,

And in unspeakably profound
Humiliation, Love is crown’d!

And from his exaltation still
Into his ocean of good-will

He curiously casts the lead

To find strange depths of lowlihead.

It is, however, in The Rod, the Root and the Flower that the theme is treated most fully. ‘Spirit craves conjunction with and eternal captivity to that which is not spirit; and the higher the spirit, the greater the craving. God desires depths of humiliation and contrast of which man has no idea; so that the stony callousness and ignorance which we bemoan in ourselves may not impossibly be an additional cause in Him of desire for us. . . . Human love requires to be grounded in the sensitive nature, in order to give counterpoise and reality to its spiritual heights.

‘What if the love of God demands even a deeper foundation in the unspiritual and in the junction and reconcilement of “the Highest with the Lowest”? There are obscure longings in the natural man; glimpses of felicities of an “Unknown Eros,” which it is perhaps worse than vain to endeavour to indulge; a desire for fruits of the Tree of Knowledge which seem to promise that we “shall be as Gods,” if we partake of them. Maybe, to such of us as become Gods by participation, these fruits will be found fruits of the Tree of Life, as are other fruits, which, in the eating, have only “a savour of death unto death,” until they have been refused, in obedience to a temporary prohibition, and only tasted in God’s season and with the divine appetite of Grace. Meantime, it is permitted to such as have qualified themselves for such contemplation, to meditate upon the dim glimpse we can catch of such things, as they exist in God, who, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, knows matter, as he knows all his creation, with love and desire.’

What lies behind the veils of this mysterious utterance? We can only obscurely guess.

Odd examples of justifications by guidance and theology could be multiplied indefinitely. There are the refined and aristocratic Muckers in East Prussia, with their ritual of exhibitionism and long-drawn sexual confessions; there are the Perfectionist Bundlers, a sect of American ladies who were guided to burst into clergymen’s bedrooms at night; there were the Revivalists, with their spiritual

wives — so closely allied in practice, if not in theory, to the Mormons with their all too solid and tangible harems. Or again, one could mention the reverend gentleman who boasted that ‘he could carry a virgin in each hand without the least stir of unholy passion,’ or the ladies described by Mrs. Whitall Smith in her Personal Experiences of Fanaticism, who cultivated the art of giving themselves physical ‘thrills,’ under the impression that they were receiving the Baptism of the Spirit. One could mention the early Spiritualists. Here is a statement made by one of them in 1867: ‘During a year and a half I became very impressible; in fact a medium; the invisible guides impressed me with many ideas of a religious nature. Among other things I became strongly impressed with the incompatibility between myself and my wife; and, on the other hand, with the growing affinity between Mrs. Swain and myself. . . . Nine-tenths of the mediums I ever knew were in this unsettled state, either divorced or living with an affinity. The majority of spiritualists teach Swedenborg’s doctrine of one affinity, appointed by Providence, for all eternity; although they do not blame people for consorting when there is an attraction; else, how is the affinity to be found? Another class travelled from place to place, finding a great many affinities everywhere.’

It would be possible, I repeat, to multiply such instances indefinitely. Possible, but not particularly profitable. The principles of religious justification have been sufficiently illustrated by the few characteristic examples I have given. What follows is an example of philosophical justification — chosen deliberately for its revealing extravagance. The work in question is Laurence Oliphant’s Sympneumata, published, near the end of its author’s life, in 1885. Oliphant’s was an oddly variegated career. He was born at Cape Town and brought up in Ceylon. As a young man he visited Nepal and Russia, served as Lord Elgin’s secretary at Washington and again, after a visit to Circassia during the Crimean War, in China. In 1861, when he was thirty-two, he was appointed first secretary in Japan; but his diplomatic career was cut short by an attack on the Legation, in which he almost lost his life. He returned to Europe, served as Times correspondent in Poland and Holstein, and in the intervals dined out in the

best society and wrote successful novels. In 1865 he was elected to Parliament. Three years later he resigned his seat and emigrated to America, to become a member of ‘the Brotherhood of the New Life,’ a community founded by Thomas Harris on the shores of Lake Erie. Harris was an American Brother Prince. He possessed all Beloved’s magnetic power with all Beloved’s lust for domination and all his preoccupation with the certo balsamo. Like Beloved, he was consistently guided to relieve his followers of all their available cash and, again like Beloved, he had invented a theology proving that he was divine and justifying him in going to bed with any woman he had a mind to. The story of Oliphant’s strange servitude to the Prophet of Brocton has been told in the biography written by his cousin, Margaret Oliphant, the novelist. I need not repeat it here. Suffice it to say that Oliphant, together with his mother, Lady Oliphant, and his wife, Alice Le Strange, remained under Harris’s spell for thirteen years. Lady Oliphant, indeed, escaped only by death. Laurence and Alice broke away, after a long and scandalous conflict, in 1881. But it was only from the man Harris that they had parted, not from his ideas. Freed from his clutches, they proceeded at once to the Holy Land, where they set up a community of their own (suppressed in due course at the instance of the London Vigilance Association) and wrote in collaboration the work which I shall now describe.

The sub-title of Sympneumata is ‘Evolutionary Forces now Active in Man.’ The words announce unequivocally that justification, in this case, will not be in terms of theology or religious experience, but of hard-boiled secular thought. Oliphant was addressing himself to a public that ranked The Origin of Species above the Apocalypse. He wanted to behave very much as Beloved and Mr. Harris had behaved; but he felt it necessary to justify this behaviour in terms of the philosophy most highly esteemed by his contemporaries. The appeal is no longer to religion but to science. True, the science is peculiar; but that does not matter. The significant fact is that Oliphant should have found it natural to use even the ridiculous parody of science for the justification of his sexual desires.

He begins his book with an account of human evolution. Originally, it appears, man was a being composed of matter in the fluid state. At a certain moment in his history there occurred ‘a catastrophe, of which the tradition survives in so many forms under the name of “the fall.’ ” What was the nature of this catastrophe? ‘A precipitation of the period of reproduction’ — whatever that may have been. The result was that the original, liquid man came to be encrusted with grosser matter.

A divine energy, the energy of love, radiates out from the core of every human individual. ‘If the action of this force could be maintained in a constant projection from the centre to the circumference, it would necessarily remain absolutely pure and holy.’ Unfortunately, currents flow in from the lower creation. ‘Rushing like a torrent towards the centre, it (the current of lower life) meets the divine outward streaming current, and produces a shock throughout the nervous system, which is utterly foreign to the orderly and divine expression of emotion.’

But a change is at hand. During the nineteenth century Evolution has been producing new types of human beings, gifted with ‘an acute sensibility for perceiving the quality of the dynamic impulsion, that plays through the nerve fluids.’ This dynamic impulsion, as we have seen, is divine; and the new, nineteenth-century human beings discover ‘to their astonishment that, while their emotions acquire a character of spiritualization, a delicacy and a subtle fervour, by which they can only judge them to be discarding more and more the earthliness of things earthly, they nevertheless connect themselves with the physical organism by an increasing sensational consciousness. . . . That disconnection between high and pathetic feeling and bodily sensation, which has prevailed in the human mind, ceases to be possible, and man begins to have sensational acquaintance with his interior organism, as being the seat of his loftiest and purest emotions.’ That modern man should be subject to such apocalyptic sensations is not surprising; for evolution is changing his whole structure. ‘Evolution’s work on the superincumbent atoms, changing their constitution and bringing into the spaces tenanted by the corruptible flesh atoms

developed from the inner nature of the body's form, is bringing to these same surfaces the power to endure the acute and intense sensations generated by divine heat currents.' 'The immanence of God in man, so much asserted and so little felt, becomes now a physical fact; as physical as marital affection, as the ardours of heroism, as the tremors of alarm — but more absolutely and unmistakably physical; and acting upon the surface with an intensity superior to that of any other known sensation, in the degree in which it corresponds with the more profound depth from which it has taken its rise.' The new man is 'a vessel charged with holy force.' This force cannot act freely 'unless human beings participated in the active and emotional being who is to them the sex-complement, whom we term the Sympneuma.' (We recognize Harris's Counterparts and our old friends, the Affinities and Spiritual Wives.) Thanks to Evolution (blessed deus ex machina!), 'the quality of the intense vitality which God presses down upon us at this hour, burns with some fuller ardour as His sex-completeness than the world could receive before.' For this reason 'the value of history, of philosophy becomes nil as a basis for the deduction of theories as to what the man of this age may feel, can know, or should do.'

There follows next a section of the book addressed primarily to the ladies. Evolution has changed woman as profoundly as it has changed man. The 'suppression of her active powers' has been succeeded by her 'surprised awakening at the embrace that steals upon her sense — as her Sympneuma's form constructs itself around and over her — presenting her at last, in those organic realms of her sub-surfaces, where she reflected before, as on a vapoury void, the confused images of dreams and disfigured truths, with a fixed organism, constructed to take up at once the waves of her deep vibrations, and through which her contact is reopened into the whole connected world of potent manhood.' But potent manhood, it obscurely appears, is not to perform its ordinary, vulgar functions. There are to be no babies, only sympneumatous sensations. Therefore, O woman, in this age of sharp transition, there is a marvellous lesson for you to learn that has not yet been dreamt of. . . . Revive, for the airs of heaven breathe on you now to that effect, in the folded petals of

your deepest nature. Body forth at last, bring forth the joy of nature's depths — man makes a new demand on you, and asks not for himself but for all people. He craves not now the commerce of the dissevered sexes, nor the production of fresh peopling in their forms, for he lives now in the expanding chambers of his own sub-surfaces, where the Sympneuma's presence pervades and satisfies sensation, and bids the old activities of exterior forms make long pause, awaiting high conditions.' That which has happened in the course of evolution is that which ought to have happened. Not only is it possible for modern woman to enjoy it, it is also her duty 'to demand of God the draughts of the supreme elixir which waits to shower into human nature.'

Not unnaturally, Oliphant regards the intellect as a danger. Its roots are too 'slightly grounded in the pregnant bowels of the moral nature' to be capable of appreciating the significance of the sympneumatous revelation. Therefore get rid of the intellect; 'let loose the powers of actual nature in you — man-woman, woman-man — that God may be incarnate! . . . Hurl right and left and far all claims of systems of thought and life that served of old their time, if they now cling upon your skirts and burden your free ascent. . . . Lo! on the little field of your frail nature is room for mightiest peace, for the full immensity of reconciliation to God's demands and man's — room for the meeting in you of heaven and earth.' Science, in the shape of Oliphant's fluid atoms and evolving sub-surfaces, brings us to the same harbour as Patmore's Catholicism and the divine guidance of the ex-evangelical parson, Brother Prince. No, not quite to the same harbour; for through the book's dark phrases one half perceives, half guesses that Oliphant liked his certo balsamo in some oddly refined and alembicated form. 'When he (man) has once experienced by repetition the unerring tendency of delight, intense, sensational, to visit him spontaneously, the painfully acquired enjoyments that he knew before, of body, intellect or spirit, fade and grow valueless.' This is as near as our author ever comes to lifting the veil. One closes the book, not altogether certain of his meaning, but at any rate divining enough to know that 'liberal shepherds give a grosser name' to the sympneumatous experience.

Oliphant's obscurity is lightened by the probing beam directed upon him by Mrs. Whitall Smith. A female disciple of the Oliphants told her 'that Mrs. Oliphant was doing a wonderful missionary work among the Arabs in Palestine by imparting to them what the Oliphants called "Sympneumata," which they claimed was the coming of the spiritual counterpart to the individual. She said the way Mrs. Oliphant accomplished this was by getting into bed with these Arabs, no matter how degraded and dirty they were, and the contact of her body brought about, as she supposed, the coming of the counterpart. It was a great trial for her to do this, and she felt that she was performing a most holy mission. As she was one of the most refined and cultivated of English ladies, it is evident that nothing but a strong sense of duty could have induced her to such a course.' We have here a good example of the way in which a philosophy invented to justify one set of actions leads logically to the justification — nay, to the imposition as positive duties — of other and much stranger acts, of which the justifier originally never dreamt.

Mrs. Smith's next contact with Oliphant was through a young lady who had been engaged to one of the Sympneumatist's disciples. Introduced to Oliphant, she was deeply impressed by his appearance and manner. He gave her religious instruction, in the course of which he 'took more and more liberties with her, and at last induced her to share his bed, with the idea that the personal touch would bring about the sympneumata for which she so longed. . . . Finally, when he thought the time was ripe, he began to urge her to spread the blessing by herself enticing young men into the same relations with her as his own.' The girl was disquieted and, after taking advice, broke off her engagement. The young man remained faithful to his master. Mrs. Smith reveals the reason for this loyalty. 'Mr. Oliphant's idea was that the sexual passion was the only real spiritual life, and that in order to be spiritually alive you must continually keep that passion excited. The consequence was that he could never write anything except when his passions were aroused. His influence over the young Scotchman was so great that he had induced him to believe entirely in this theory, and he too was never happy for a single moment unless his own passions were excited.'

A favourite instrument of philosophical justification is the conception of nature. Nature, one finds, is invoked in almost every controversy about matters of conduct — not by one party only, but by both. Rebels will justify rebellion, and the orthodox their orthodoxy, in the same way — by an appeal to nature. Rebellion is in accordance with nature; therefore permissible and right. Conversely, orthodoxy is right, not only because it is divinely revealed, but also because it is in accordance with nature. Thus, we learn from St. Thomas that fornication is a sin, because, among other reasons, it is unnatural. For it is 'natural in the human species for the male to be able to know his own offspring for certain, because he has the education of that offspring; but the certainty would be destroyed if there were promiscuous intercourse.' Therefore fornication is unnatural. If nature is that which is (and there is no other legitimate definition), then such arguments as St. Thomas's are perfectly meaningless. Some men wish to know and educate their offspring; some do not. Some indulge in fornication, some refrain. Both types of behaviour occur and we have no right to say that one is natural and the other unnatural. Writers who speak of the unnaturalness of asceticism are making the same mistake as their opponents. Asceticism, like licentiousness, is an observable fact; in other words, it is natural. For scholastically minded people, nature is not that which is; the nature of a thing is practically identical with its essence, and its essence is a metaphysical entity, not susceptible of observation. The scholastic method may be represented schematically as follows: you take a collection of beings, you set your fancy and your ingenuity to work and, out of your inner consciousness, you evolve (with the aid of such literature as you regard as authoritative) a conception of their essential character. This you call their 'nature.' When any member of the group in question behaves in a way which does not conform to your a priori conception of his essence, you say that the behaviour is unnatural. The scholastics sought to rationalize revelation by proving that revelation was in accord with nature; but what they called 'nature' was entirely home-made. All they did was to justify one metaphysical conception in terms of another metaphysical conception. Owing to the vagueness and ambiguity of language,

this proceeding was and still is remarkably successful. By ‘nature’ the scholastically minded mean ‘metaphysical essence’; but the word also connotes ‘that which is.’ They trade on the fact that most readers attach to ‘nature’ its second meaning and can therefore be induced to accept as a record of observation or a sober piece of inference any a priori absurdity which may be passed off under that reassuring name.

The thirst for rationality and righteousness is almost as insistent as the thirst for sexual pleasure and for the gratification of pride. There will always be cravings to justify and always a desire for justification. Justificatory theories are often nonsensical; but this would not greatly matter, if they justified only those desires and actions immediately responsible for their invention. The real trouble about most of these theories is that they justify and indeed logically impose upon those who accept them modes of thought and behaviour to which mere irrational cravings would never have prompted them. The cases described in the preceding pages are mainly farcical in their extravagance. It is difficult for people whose main preoccupation is sensual enjoyment to do harm on a very large scale. But where the cravings to be justified are cravings for power, glory and the like, the case is different. The tree is known by its fruits. Judged by this standard, sympneumatism, for example, is a joke; nationalism, which is a theory intrinsically almost as preposterous as poor Oliphant’s, is a tragedy and a menace.

All justificatory theories are determined by the prevailing systems of philosophy and ethics. These, in their turn, are in part determined and themselves in part determine the economic and social circumstances of the age. Changes of circumstance result in changed philosophies; changed philosophies provide men with the motive power for changing circumstances. The reformer must attack simultaneously on all the fronts, from the metaphysical to the economic; if he does not, he cannot hope to achieve more than a partial success.

How can justificatory theories be made less extravagant? How can they be prevented from justifying all kinds of monstrous actions, which the original inventor of the theory never felt the impulse to perform? A complete answer to

these questions would have to contain, among other things, a full-scale programme of social and economic reform and text-books — more comprehensive than any yet written — of social and individual psychology. All I can do here is to offer a few reflections on the purely intellectual aspects of the question.

All justifications in terms of science and rationalistic philosophy are ultimately utilitarian in appeal. They aim at showing that the particular action which it is desired to justify is useful, either to the individual or to the community. The science and the rationalistic argument are intended to demonstrate this utility. The cure for extravagance in these cases is knowledge. True, it is not an infallible cure. A man may know that the action he desires to perform is bad for him; but if his desire is strong enough, he will either ignore his knowledge or else manipulate it in such a way as to make it seem to justify his behaviour. The Nazi race-scientists furnish a case in point. Most of these men are highly educated; in other words, they have been given every opportunity for discovering what to the great majority of biologists outside Germany is obvious: that most of the stuff talked about Nordics and Aryans is simply rubbish. They have been given this opportunity, but they have not taken it — they have not wished to take it. Knowledge, I repeat, is not an infallible cure for extravagance in justificatory theories; but at least it sets certain obstacles in the way of extravagance. People who know the facts can never be quite so free to indulge in fantasy as those who don’t.

Justification in religious terms seems to tend towards extravagance in proportion as God is thought of as personal. ‘Temporary suspensions of morality’ are essentially personal acts; and those who are ‘guided’ to suspend morality do so under the belief that they are receiving orders from a superior and inscrutable Divine Person. The historical records show that they persist in doing this even where theology lays it down that the Divine Person is absolutely good. Similarly, men persist in attributing to a personal God a special interest in their own nation, even where theology has defined Him as the Father of all. That this should be so is not surprising: it is difficult, if one thinks of God as a person, not

to think of Him as similar to the only persons with whom one has direct acquaintance — oneself and one's fellows.

We must ask ourselves whether belief in the personality of God is, first, logically necessary; and, second, pragmatically valuable. It is impossible in this place to set forth the arguments for and against the personality of God. The matter has been summed up by Professor Whitehead in his Religion in the Making, and I cannot do better than quote his words:

'There is a large concurrence in the negative doctrine that this religious experience does not include any direct intuition of a definite person, or individual. . . .

'The evidence for the assertion of general, though not universal, concurrence in the doctrine of no direct vision of a personal God, can only be found by a consideration of the religious thought of the civilized world. . . .

'Throughout India and China religious thought, so far as it has been interpreted in precise form, disclaims the intuition of any ultimate personality substantial to the universe. This is true of Confucian philosophy, Buddhist philosophy and Hindoo philosophy. There may be personal embodiments, but the substratum is impersonal.

'Christian theology has also, in the main, adopted the position that there is no direct intuition of such an ultimate personal substratum for the world. It maintains the doctrine of the existence of a personal God as a truth, but holds that our belief in it is based upon inference.'

In order to calculate the pragmatic value of belief in a personal God, it would be necessary to collect and carefully weigh all the available historical and psychological evidence.

From the little I know about the subject, I should guess that the results of such an investigation would be more or less as follows. Belief in a personal God tends to heighten the believer's energy and to strengthen his will. So far so good. But energy can be used to achieve undesirable as well as desirable ends; and a strong will misdirected is the source of endless trouble. A personal God, as we have already seen, tends, in spite of all theological precautions, to be thought of as

similar to a human person. Thus, it comes about that the believer feels himself justified in giving rein to such all too human tendencies as pride, anger, jealousy and hatred, by the reflection that, in doing so, he is behaving like a God who is a person. The frequency with which men have identified the prompting of their own passions with the personal guidance of God who is Himself (the sacred books affirm it) subject to passion, is really appalling. Belief in a personal God has released a vast amount of energy directed towards good ends; but it has probably released an almost equal amount of energy directed towards ends which were evil. This consideration, taken in conjunction with the philosophical improbability of the dogma, should make us extremely chary of accepting belief in a personal deity.

D. H. LAWRENCE

‘I ALWAYS SAY, my motto is “Art for my sake.” ’ The words are from a letter written by Lawrence before the war. ‘If I want to write, I write — and if I don’t want to, I won’t. The difficulty is to find exactly the form one’s passion — work is produced by passion with me, like kisses — is it with you? — wants to take.’

‘Art for my sake.’ But even though for my sake, still art. Lawrence was always and unescapably an artist. Yes, unescapably is the word; for there were moments when he wanted to escape from his destiny. ‘I wish from the bottom of my heart that the fates had not stigmatized me “writer.” It is a sickening business.’ But against the decree of fate there is no appeal. Nor was it by any means all the time that Lawrence wanted to appeal. His complaints were only occasional, and he was provoked to make them, not by any hatred of art as such, but by hatred of the pains and humiliations incidental to practising as an artist. Writing to Edward Garnett, ‘Why, why,’ he asks, ‘should we be plagued with literature and such-like tomfoolery? Why can’t we live decent, honourable lives, without the critics in the Little Theatre fretting us?’ The publication of a work of art is always the exposure of a nakedness, the throwing of something delicate and sensitive to the ‘asses, apes and dogs.’ Mostly, however, Lawrence loved his destiny, loved the art of which he was a master — as who, that is a master, can fail to do? Besides, art, as he practised it, and as, at the bottom, every artist, even the most pharisaically ‘pure,’ practises it, was ‘art for my sake.’ It was useful to him, pragmatically helpful. ‘One sheds one’s sicknesses in books — repeats and presents again one’s emotions to be master of them.’ And, anyhow, liking or disliking were finally irrelevant in the face of the fact that Lawrence was in a real sense possessed by his creative genius. He could not help himself. ‘I am doing a novel,’ he writes in an early letter, ‘a novel which I have never grasped. Damn its eyes, there I am at and I’ve no notion what it’s about. I hate it. F. says

it is good. But it's like a novel in a foreign language I don't know very well — I can only just make out what it's about.' To this strange force within him, to this power that created his works of art, there was nothing to do but submit. Lawrence submitted, completely and with reverence. 'I often think one ought to be able to pray before one works — and then leave it to the Lord. Isn't it hard work to come to real grips with one's imagination — throw everything overboard. I always feel as though I stood naked for the fire of Almighty God to go through me — and it's rather an awful feeling. One has to be so terribly religious to be an artist.' Conversely, he might have added, one has to be terribly an artist, terribly conscious of 'inspiration' and the compelling force of genius, to be religious as Lawrence was religious.

It is impossible to write about Lawrence except as an artist. He was an artist first of all, and the fact of his being an artist explains a life which seems, if you forget it, inexplicably strange. In Son of Woman, Mr. Middleton Murry has written at great length about Lawrence — but about a Lawrence whom you would never suspect, from reading that curious essay in destructive hagiography, of being an artist. For Mr. Murry almost completely ignores the fact that his subject — his victim, I had almost said — was one whom 'the fates had stigmatized "writer." ' His book is Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark — for all its metaphysical subtleties and its Freudian ingenuities, very largely irrelevant. The absurdity of his critical method becomes the more manifest when we reflect that nobody would ever have heard of a Lawrence who was not an artist.

An artist is the sort of artist he is, because he happens to possess certain gifts. And he leads the sort of life he does in fact lead, because he is an artist, and an artist with a particular kind of mental endowment. Now there are general abilities and there are special talents. A man who is born with a great share of some special talent is probably less deeply affected by nurture than one whose ability is generalized. His gift is his fate, and he follows a predestined course, from which no ordinary power can deflect him. In spite of Helvétius and Dr. Watson, it seems pretty obvious that no amount of education — including under

that term everything from the Œdipus complex to the English Public School system — could have prevented Mozart from being a musician, or musicianship from being the central fact in Mozart's life. And how would a different education have modified the expression of, say, Blake's gift? It is, of course, impossible to answer. One can only express the unverifiable conviction that an art so profoundly individual and original, so manifestly 'inspired,' would have remained fundamentally the same whatever (within reasonable limits) had been the circumstances of Blake's upbringing. Lawrence, as Mr. F. R. Leavis insists, has many affinities with Blake. 'He had the same gift of knowing what he was interested in, the same power of distinguishing his own feelings and emotions from conventional sentiment, the same "terrifying honesty." ' Like Blake, like any man possessed of great special talents, he was predestined by his gifts. Explanations of him in terms of a Freudian hypothesis of nurture may be interesting, but they do not explain. That Lawrence was profoundly affected by his love for his mother and by her excessive love for him, is obvious to anyone who has read Sons and Lovers. None the less it is, to me at any rate, almost equally obvious that even if his mother had died when he was a child, Lawrence would still have been, essentially and fundamentally, Lawrence. Lawrence's biography does not account for Lawrence's achievement. On the contrary, his achievement, or rather the gift that made the achievement possible, accounts for a great deal of his biography. He lived as he lived, because he was, intrinsically and from birth, what he was. If we would write intelligibly of Lawrence, we must answer, with all their implications, two questions: first, what sort of gifts did he have? and secondly, how did the possession of these gifts affect the way he responded to experience?

Lawrence's special and characteristic gift was an extraordinary sensitiveness to what Wordsworth called 'unknown modes of being.' He was always intensely aware of the mystery of the world, and the mystery was always for him a numen, divine. Lawrence could never forget, as most of us almost continuously forget, the dark presence of the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of man's

conscious mind. This special sensibility was accompanied by a prodigious power of rendering the immediately experienced otherness in terms of literary art.

Such was Lawrence's peculiar gift. His possession of it accounts for many things. It accounts, to begin with, for his attitude towards sex. His particular experiences as a son and as a lover may have intensified his preoccupation with the subject; but they certainly did not make it. Whatever his experiences, Lawrence must have been preoccupied with sex; his gift made it inevitable. For Lawrence, the significance of the sexual experience was this: that, in it, the immediate, non-mental knowledge of divine otherness is brought, so to speak, to a focus — a focus of darkness. Parodying Matthew Arnold's famous formula, we may say that sex is something not ourselves that makes for — not righteousness, for the essence of religion is not righteousness; there is a spiritual world, as Kierkegaard insists, beyond the ethical — rather, that makes for life, for divineness, for union with the mystery. Paradoxically, this something not ourselves is yet a something lodged within us; this quintessence of otherness is yet the quintessence of our proper being. 'And God the Father, the Inscrutable, the Unknowable, we know in the flesh, in Woman. She is the door for our in-going and our out-coming. In her we go back to the Father; but like the witnesses of the transfiguration, blind and unconscious.' Yes, blind and unconscious; otherwise it is a revelation, not of divine otherness, but of very human evil. 'The embrace of love, which should bring darkness and oblivion, would with these lovers (the hero and heroine of one of Poe's tales) be a daytime thing, bringing more heightened consciousness, visions, spectrum-visions, prismatic. The evil thing that daytime love-making is, and all sex-palaver!' How Lawrence hated Eleonora and Ligeia and Roderick Usher and all such soulful Mrs. Shandies, male as well as female! What a horror, too, he had of all Don Juans, all knowing sensualists and conscious libertines! (About the time he was writing Lady Chatterley's Lover he read the memoirs of Casanova, and was profoundly shocked.) And how bitterly he loathed the Wilhelm-Meisterish view of love as an education, as a means to culture, a Sandow-exerciser for the soul! To use love in this way, consciously and deliberately, seemed to Lawrence wrong, almost a

blasphemy. ‘It seems to me queer,’ he says to a fellow-writer, ‘that you prefer to present men chiefly — as if you cared for women not so much for what they were in themselves as for what the men saw in them. So that after all in your work women seem not to have an existence, save they are the projections of the men. . . . It’s the positivity of women you seem to deny — make them sort of instrumental.’ The instrumentality of Wilhelm Meister’s women shocked Lawrence profoundly.

(Here, in a parenthesis, let me remark on the fact that Lawrence’s doctrine is constantly invoked by people, of whom Lawrence himself would passionately have disapproved, in defence of a behaviour which he would have found deplorable or even revolting. That this should have happened is by no means, of course, a condemnation of the doctrine. The same philosophy of life may be good or bad according as the person who accepts it and lives by it is intrinsically fine or base. Tartufe’s doctrine was the same, after all, as Pascal’s. There have been refined fetish-worshippers, and unspeakably swinish Christians. To the preacher of a new way of life the most depressing thing that can happen is, surely, success. For success permits him to see how those he has converted distort and debase and make ignoble parodies of his teaching. If Francis of Assisi had lived to be a hundred, what bitterness he would have tasted! Happily for the saint, he died at forty-five, still relatively undisillusioned, because still on the threshold of the great success of his order. Writers influence their readers, preachers their auditors — but always, at bottom, to be more themselves. If the reader’s self happens to be intrinsically similar to the writer’s, then the influence is what the writer would wish it to be. If he is intrinsically unlike the writer, then he will probably twist the writer’s doctrine into a rationalization of beliefs, an excuse for behaviour, wholly alien to the beliefs and behaviour approved by the writer. Lawrence has suffered the fate of every man whose works have exercised an influence upon his fellows. It was inevitable and in the nature of things.)

For someone with a gift for sensing the mystery of otherness, true love must necessarily be, in Lawrence’s vocabulary, nocturnal. So must true knowledge. Nocturnal and tactual — a touching in the night. Man inhabits, for his own

convenience, a home-made universe within the greater alien world of external matter and his own irrationality. Out of the illimitable blackness of that world the light of his customary thinking scoops, as it were, a little illuminated cave — a tunnel of brightness, in which, from the birth of consciousness to its death, he lives, moves and has his being. For most of us this bright tunnel is the whole world. We ignore the outer darkness; or if we cannot ignore it, if it presses too insistently upon us, we disapprove, being afraid. Not so Lawrence. He had eyes that could see, beyond the walls of light, far into the darkness, sensitive fingers that kept him continually aware of the environing mystery. He could not be content with the home-made, human tunnel, could not conceive that anyone else should be content with it. Moreover — and in this he was unlike those others, to whom the world's mystery is continuously present, the great philosophers and men of science — he did not want to increase the illuminated area; he approved of the outer darkness, he felt at home in it. Most men live in a little puddle of light thrown by the gig-lamps of habit and their immediate interest; but there is also the pure and powerful illumination of the disinterested scientific intellect. To Lawrence, both lights were suspect, both seemed to falsify what was, for him, the immediately apprehended reality — the darkness of mystery. 'My great religion,' he was already saying in 1912, 'is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what the blood feels, and believes, and says, is always true.' Like Blake, who had prayed to be delivered from 'single vision and Newton's sleep': like Keats, who had drunk destruction to Newton for having explained the rainbow, Lawrence disapproved of too much knowledge, on the score that it diminished men's sense of wonder and blunted their sensitiveness to the great mystery. His dislike of science was passionate and expressed itself in the most fantastically unreasonable terms. 'All scientists are liars,' he would say, when I brought up some experimentally established fact, which he happened to dislike. 'Liars, liars!' It was a most convenient theory. I remember in particular one long and violent argument on evolution, in the reality of which Lawrence always passionately disbelieved. 'But look at the evidence, Lawrence,' I insisted, 'look

at all the evidence.' His answer was characteristic. 'But I don't care about evidence. Evidence doesn't mean anything to me. I don't feel it here.' And he pressed his two hands on his solar plexus. I abandoned the argument and thereafter never, if I could avoid it, mentioned the hated name of science in his presence. Lawrence could give so much, and what he gave was so valuable, that it was absurd and profitless to spend one's time with him disputing about a matter in which he absolutely refused to take a rational interest. Whatever the intellectual consequences, he remained through thick and thin unshakably loyal to his own genius. The daimon which possessed him was, he felt, a divine thing, which he would never deny or explain away, never even ask to accept a compromise. This loyalty to his own self, or rather to his gift, to the strange and powerful numen which, he felt, used him as its tabernacle, is fundamental in Lawrence and accounts, as nothing else can do, for all that the world found strange in his beliefs and his behaviour. It was not an incapacity to understand that made him reject those generalizations and abstractions by means of which the philosophers and the men of science try to open a path for the human spirit through the chaos of phenomena. Not incapacity, I repeat; for Lawrence had, over and above his peculiar gift, an extremely acute intelligence. He was a clever man as well as a man of genius. (In his boyhood and adolescence he had been a great passer of examinations.) He could have understood the aim and methods of science perfectly well if he had wanted to. Indeed, he did understand them perfectly well; and it was for that very reason that he rejected them. For the methods of science and critical philosophy were incompatible with the exercise of his gift — the immediate perception and artistic rendering of divine otherness. And their aim, which is to push back the frontier of the unknown, was not to be reconciled with his aim, which was to remain as intimately as possible in contact with the surrounding darkness. And so, in spite of their enormous prestige, he rejected science and critical philosophy; he remained loyal to his gift. Exclusively loyal. He would not attempt to qualify or explain his immediate knowledge of the mystery, would not even attempt to supplement it by other, abstract knowledge. 'These terrible, conscious birds, like Poe and his Ligeia,

deny the very life that is in them; they want to turn it all into talk, into knowing. And so life, which will not be known, leaves them.' Lawrence refused to know abstractly. He preferred to live; and he wanted other people to live.

No man is by nature complete and universal; he cannot have first-hand knowledge of every kind of possible human experience. Universality, therefore, can only be achieved by those who mentally simulate living experience — by the knowers, in a word, by people like Goethe (an artist for whom Lawrence always felt the most intense repugnance).

Again, no man is by nature perfect, and none can spontaneously achieve perfection. The greatest gift is a limited gift. Perfection, whether ethical or aesthetic, must be the result of knowing and of the laborious application of knowledge. Formal aesthetics are an affair of rules and the best classical models; formal morality, of the ten commandments and the imitation of Christ.

Lawrence would have nothing to do with proceedings so 'unnatural,' so disloyal to the gift, to the resident or visiting numen. Hence his aesthetic principle, that art must be wholly spontaneous, and, like the artist, imperfect, limited and transient. Hence, too, his ethical principle, that a man's first moral duty is not to attempt to live above his human station, or beyond his inherited psychological income.

The great work of art and the monument more perennial than brass are, in their very perfection and everlastingness, inhuman — too much of a good thing. Lawrence did not approve of them. Art, he thought, should flower from an immediate impulse towards self-expression or communication, and should wither with the passing of the impulse. Of all building materials Lawrence liked adobe the best; its extreme plasticity and extreme impermanence endeared it to him. There could be no everlasting pyramids in adobe, no mathematically accurate Parthenons. Nor, thank heaven, in wood. Lawrence loved the Etruscans, among other reasons, because they built wooden temples, which have not survived. Stone oppressed him with its indestructible solidity, its capacity to take and indefinitely keep the hard uncompromising forms of pure geometry. Great buildings made him feel uncomfortable, even when they were beautiful. He felt

something of the same discomfort in the presence of any highly finished work of art. In music, for example, he liked the folk-song, because it was a slight thing, born of immediate impulse. The symphony oppressed him; it was too big, too elaborate, too carefully and consciously worked out, too ‘would-be’ — to use a characteristic Lawrencian expression. He was quite determined that none of his writings should be ‘would-be.’ He allowed them to flower as they liked from the depths of his being and would never use his conscious intellect to force them into a semblance of more than human perfection, or more than human universality. It was characteristic of him that he hardly ever corrected or patched what he had written. I have often heard him say, indeed, that he was incapable of correcting. If he was dissatisfied with what he had written, he did not, as most authors do, file, clip, insert, transpose; he rewrote. In other words, he gave the daimon another chance to say what it wanted to say. There are, I believe, three complete and totally distinct manuscripts of Lady Chatterley’s Lover. Nor was this by any means the only novel that he wrote more than once. He was determined that all he produced should spring direct from the mysterious, irrational source of power within him. The conscious intellect should never be allowed to come and impose, after the event, its abstract pattern of perfection.

It was the same in the sphere of ethics as in that of art. ‘They want me to have form: that means, they want me to have their pernicious, ossiferous, skin-and-grief form, and I won’t.’ This was written about his novels; but it is just as applicable to his life. Every man, Lawrence insisted, must be an artist in life, must create his own moral form. The art of living is harder than the art of writing. ‘It is a much more delicate thing to make love, and win love, than to declare love.’ All the more reason, therefore, for practising this art with the most refined and subtle sensibility; all the more reason for not accepting that ‘pernicious skin-and-grief form’ of morality, which they are always trying to impose on one. It is the business of the sensitive artist in life to accept his own nature as it is, not to try to force it into another shape. He must take the material given him — the weaknesses and irrationalities, as well as the sense and the virtues; the mysterious darkness and otherness no less than the light of reason

and the conscious ego — must take them all and weave them together into a satisfactory pattern; his pattern, not somebody else's pattern. 'Once I said to myself: "How can I blame — why be angry?" . . . Now I say: "When anger comes with bright eyes, he may do his will. In me he will hardly shake off the hand of God. He is one of the archangels, with a fiery sword. God sent him — it is beyond my knowing." ' This was written in 1910. Even at the very beginning of his career Lawrence was envisaging man as simply the locus of a polytheism. Given his particular gifts of sensitiveness and of expression it was inevitable. Just as it was inevitable that a man of Blake's peculiar genius should formulate the very similar doctrine of the independence of states of being. All the generally accepted systems of philosophy and of ethics aim at policing man's polytheism in the name of some Jehovah of intellectual and moral consistency. For Lawrence this was an indefensible proceeding. One god had as much right to exist as another, and the dark ones were as genuinely divine as the bright. Perhaps (since Lawrence was so specially sensitive to the quality of dark godhead and so specially gifted to express it in art), perhaps even more divine. Anyhow, the polytheism was a democracy. This conception of human nature resulted in the formulation of two rather surprising doctrines, one ontological and the other ethical. The first is what I may call the Doctrine of Cosmic Pointlessness. 'There is no point. Life and Love are life and love, a bunch of violets is a bunch of violets, and to drag in the idea of a point is to ruin everything. Live and let live, love and let love, flower and fade, and follow the natural curve, which flows on, pointless.'

Ontological pointlessness has its ethical counterpart in the doctrine of insouciance. 'They simply are eaten up with caring. They are so busy caring about Fascism or Leagues of Nations or whether France is right or whether Marriage is threatened, that they never know where they are. They certainly never live on the spot where they are. They inhabit abstract space, the desert void of politics, principles, right and wrong, and so forth. They are doomed to be abstract. Talking to them is like trying to have a human relationship with the letter x in algebra.' As early as 1911 his advice to his sister was: 'Don't meddle

with religion. I would leave all that alone, if I were you, and try to occupy myself fully in the present.'

Reading such passages — and they abound in every book that Lawrence wrote — I am always reminded of that section of the Pensées in which Pascal, speaks of the absurd distractions with which men fill their leisure, so that there shall be no hole or cranny left for a serious thought to lodge itself in their consciousness. Lawrence also inveighs against divertissements, but not against the same divertissements as Pascal. For him, there were two great and criminal distractions. First, work, which he regarded as a mere stupefacient, like opium. ('Don't exhaust yourself too much,' he writes to an industrious friend; 'it is immoral.' Immoral, because, among other reasons, it is too easy, a shirking of man's first duty, which is to live. 'Think of the rest and peace, the positive sloth and luxury of idleness that work is.' Lawrence had a real puritan's disapproval of the vice of working. He attacked the gospel of work for the same reasons as Chrysippus attacked Aristotle's gospel of pure intellectualism — on the ground that it was, in the old Stoic's words, 'only a kind of amusement' and that real living was a more serious affair than labour or abstract speculations.) The other inexcusable distraction, in Lawrence's eyes, was 'spirituality,' that lofty musing on the ultimate nature of things which constitutes, for Pascal, 'the whole dignity and business of man.' Pascal was horrified that human beings could so far forget the infinite and the eternal as to 'dance and play the lute and sing and make verses.' Lawrence was no less appalled that they could so far forget all the delights and difficulties of immediate living as to remember eternity and infinity, to say nothing of the League of Nations and the Sanctity of Marriage. Both were great artists; and so each is able to convince us that he is at any rate partly right. Just how far each is right, this is not the place to discuss. Nor, indeed, is the question susceptible of a definite answer. 'Mental consciousness,' wrote Lawrence, 'is a purely individual affair. Some men are born to be highly and delicately conscious.' Some are not. Moreover, each of the ages of man has its suitable philosophy of life. (Lawrence's, I should say, was not a very good philosophy for old age or failing powers.) Besides, there are certain conjunctions

of circumstances in which spontaneous living is the great distraction and certain others in which it is almost criminal to divert oneself with eternity or the League of Nations. Lawrence's peculiar genius was such that he insisted on spontaneous living to the exclusion of ideals and fixed principles; on intuition to the exclusion of abstract reasoning. Pascal, with a very different gift, evolved, inevitably, a very different philosophy.

Lawrence's dislike of abstract knowledge and pure spirituality made him a kind of mystical materialist. Thus, the moon affects him strongly; therefore it cannot be a 'stony cold world, like a world of our own gone cold. Nonsense. It is a globe of dynamic substance, like radium or phosphorus, coagulated upon a vivid pole of energy.' Matter must be intrinsically as lively as the mind which perceives it and is moved by the perception. Vivid and violent spiritual effects must have correspondingly vivid and violent material causes. And, conversely, any violent feeling or desire in the mind must be capable of producing violent effects upon external matter. Lawrence could not bring himself to believe that the spirit can be moved, moved even to madness, without imparting the smallest corresponding movement to the external world. He was a subjectivist as well as a materialist; in other words, he believed in the possibility, in some form or another, of magic. Lawrence's mystical materialism found characteristic expression in the curious cosmology and physiology of his speculative essays, and in his restatement of the strange Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. To his mind, the survival of the spirit was not enough; for the spirit is a man's conscious identity, and Lawrence did not want to be always identical to himself; he wanted to know otherness — to know it by being it, know it in the living flesh, which is always essentially other. Therefore there must be a resurrection of the body.

Loyalty to his genius left him no choice; Lawrence had to insist on those mysterious forces of otherness which are scattered without, and darkly concentrated within, the body and mind of man. He had to, even though, by doing so, he imposed upon himself, as a writer of novels, a very serious handicap. For according to his view of things most of men's activities were more

or less criminal distractions from the proper business of human living. He refused to write of such distractions; that is to say, he refused to write of the main activities of the contemporary world. But as though this drastic limitation of his subject were not sufficient, he went still further and, in some of his novels, refused even to write of human personalities in the accepted sense of the term. The Rainbow and Women in Love (and indeed to a lesser extent all his novels) are the practical applications of a theory, which is set forth in a very interesting and important letter to Edward Garnett, dated June 5th, 1914. 'Somehow, that which is physic — non-human in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element, which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent. The certain moral scheme is what I object to. In Turgenev, and in Tolstoi, and in Dostoievsky, the moral scheme into which all the characters fit — and it is nearly the same scheme — is, whatever the extraordinariness of the characters themselves, dull, old, dead. When Marinetti writes: "It is the solidity of a blade of steel that is interesting by itself, that is, the incomprehending and inhuman alliance of its molecules in resistance to, let us say, a bullet. The heat of a piece of wood or iron is in fact more passionate, for us, than the laughter or tears of a woman" — then I know what he means. He is stupid, as an artist, for contrasting the heat of the iron and the laugh of the woman. Because what is interesting in the laugh of the woman is the same as the binding of the molecules of steel or their action in heat: it is the inhuman will, call it physiology or like Marinetti, physiology of matter, that fascinates me. I don't so much care about what the woman feels — in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an ego to feel with. I only care about what the woman is — what she is — inhumanly, physiologically, materially — according to the use of the word. . . . You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace

the history of the diamond — but I say, “Diamond, what! This is carbon.” And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.)’

The dangers and difficulties of this method are obvious. Criticizing Stendhal, Professor Saintsbury long since remarked on ‘that psychological realism which is perhaps a more different thing from psychological reality than our clever ones for two generations have been willing to admit, or, perhaps, able to perceive.’

Psychological reality, like physical reality, is determined by our mental and bodily make-up. Common sense, working on the evidence supplied by our unaided senses, postulates a world in which physical reality consists of such things as solid tables and chairs, bits of coal, water, air. Carrying its investigations further, science discovers that these samples of physical reality are ‘really’ composed of atoms of different elements, and these atoms, in their turn, are ‘really’ composed of more or less numerous electrons and protons arranged in a variety of patterns. Similarly, there is a common-sense, pragmatic conception of psychological reality; and also an un-common-sense conception. For ordinary practical purposes we conceive human beings as creatures with characters. But analysis of their behaviour can be carried so far, that they cease to have characters and reveal themselves as collections of psychological atoms. Lawrence (as might have been expected of a man who could always perceive the otherness behind the most reassuringly familiar phenomenon) took the un-common-sense view of psychology. Hence the strangeness of his novels; and hence also, it must be admitted, certain qualities of violent monotony and intense indistinctness, qualities which make some of them, for all their richness and their unexpected beauty, so curiously difficult to get through. Most of us are more interested in diamonds and coal than in undifferentiated carbon, however vividly described. I have known readers whose reaction to Lawrence’s books was very much the same as Lawrence’s own reaction to the theory of evolution. What he wrote meant nothing to them because they ‘did not feel it here’ — in the solar plexus. (That Lawrence, the hater of scientific knowing, should have applied to psychology methods which he himself compared to those of chemical analysis, may seem strange. But we must remember that his analysis was done, not

intellectually, but by an immediate process of intuition; that he was able, as it were, to feel the carbon in diamonds and coal, to taste the hydrogen and oxygen in his glass of water.)

Lawrence, then, possessed, or, if you care to put it the other way round, was possessed by, a gift — a gift to which he was unshakably loyal. I have tried to show how the possession and the loyalty influenced his thinking and writing. How did they affect his life? The answer shall be, as far as possible, in Lawrence's own words. To Catherine Carswell Lawrence once wrote: 'I think you are the only woman I have met who is so intrinsically detached, so essentially separate and isolated, as to be a real writer or artist or recorder. Your relations with other people are only excursions from yourself. And to want children, and common human fulfilments, is rather a falsity for you, I think. You were never made to "meet and mingle," but to remain intact, essentially, whatever your experiences may be.'

Lawrence's knowledge of 'the artist' was manifestly personal knowledge. He knew by actual experience that the 'real writer' is an essentially separate being, who must not desire to meet and mingle and who betrays himself when he hankers too yearningly after common human fulfilments. All artists know these facts about their species, and many of them have recorded their knowledge. Recorded it, very often, with distress; being intrinsically detached is no joke. Lawrence certainly suffered his whole life from the essential solitude to which his gift condemned him. 'What ails me,' he wrote to the psychologist, Dr. Trigant Burrow, 'is the absolute frustration of my primeval societal instinct. . . . I think societal instinct much deeper than sex instinct — and societal repression much more devastating. There is no repression of the sexual individual comparable to the repression of the societal man in me, by the individual ego, my own and everybody else's. . . . Myself, I suffer badly from being so cut off. . . . At times one is forced to be essentially a hermit. I don't want to be. But anything else is either a personal tussle, or a money tussle; sickening: except, of course, just for ordinary acquaintance, which remains acquaintance. One has no real human relations — that is so devastating.' One has no real human relations:

it is the complaint of every artist. The artist's first duty is to his genius, his daimon; he cannot serve two masters. Lawrence, as it happened, had an extraordinary gift for establishing an intimate relationship with almost anyone he met. 'Here' (in the Bournemouth boarding-house where he was staying after his illness, in 1912), 'I get mixed up in people's lives so — it's very interesting, sometimes a bit painful, often jolly. But I run to such close intimacy with folk, it is complicating. But I love to have myself in a bit of a tangle.' His love for his art was greater, however, than his love for a tangle; and whenever the tangle threatened to compromise his activities as an artist, it was the tangle that was sacrificed: he retired. Lawrence's only deep and abiding human relationship was with his wife. ('It is hopeless for me,' he wrote to a fellow-artist, 'to try to do anything without I have a woman at the back of me. . . . Böcklin — or somebody like him — daren't sit in a café except with his back to the wall. I daren't sit in the world without a woman behind me. . . . A woman that I love sort of keeps me in direct communication with the unknown, in which otherwise I am a bit lost.') For the rest, he was condemned by his gift to an essential separateness. Often, it is true, he blamed the world for his exile. 'And it comes to this, that the oneness of mankind is destroyed in me (by the war). I am I, and you are you, and all heaven and hell lie in the chasm between. Believe me, I am infinitely hurt by being thus torn off from the body of mankind, but so it is and it is right.' It was right because, in reality, it was not the war that had torn him from the body of mankind; it was his own talent, the strange divinity to which he owed his primary allegiance. 'I will not live any more in this time,' he wrote on another occasion. 'I know what it is. I reject it. As far as I possibly can, I will stand outside this time. I will live my life and, if possible, be happy. Though the whole world slides in horror down into the bottomless pit . . . I believe that the highest virtue is to be happy, living in the greatest truth, not submitting to the falsehood of these personal times.' The adjective is profoundly significant. Of all the possible words of disparagement which might be applied to our uneasy age 'personal' is surely about the last that would occur to most of us. To Lawrence it was the first. His gift was a gift of feeling and rendering the unknown, the

mysteriously other. To one possessed by such a gift, almost any age would have seemed unduly and dangerously personal. He had to reject and escape. But when he had escaped, he could not help deploring the absence of ‘real human relationships.’ Spasmodically, he tried to establish contact with the body of mankind. There were the recurrent projects for colonies in remote corners of the earth; they all fell through. There were his efforts to join existing political organizations; but somehow ‘I seem to have lost touch altogether with the “Progressive” clique. In Croydon, the Socialists are so stupid and the Fabians so flat.’ (Not only in Croydon, alas.) Then, during the war, there was his plan to co-operate with a few friends to take independent political action; but ‘I would like to be remote, in Italy, writing my soul’s words. To have to speak in the body is a violation to me.’ And in the end he wouldn’t violate himself; he remained aloof, remote, ‘essentially separate.’ ‘It isn’t scenery one lives by,’ he wrote from Cornwall in 1916, ‘but the freedom of moving about alone.’ How acutely he suffered from this freedom by which he lived! Kangaroo describes a later stage of the debate between the solitary artist and the man who wanted social responsibilities and contact with the body of mankind. Lawrence, like the hero of his novel, decided against contact. He was by nature not a leader of men, but a prophet, a voice crying in the wilderness — the wilderness of his own isolation. The desert was his place, and yet he felt himself an exile in it. To Rolf Gardiner he wrote, in 1926: ‘I should love to be connected with something, with some few people, in something. As far as anything matters, I have always been very much alone, and regretted it. But I can’t belong to clubs, or societies, or Freemasons, or any other damn thing. So if there is, with you, an activity I can belong to, I shall thank my stars. But, of course, I shall be wary beyond words, of committing myself.’ He was in fact so wary that he never committed himself, but died remote and unconnected as he had lived. The daimon would not allow it to be otherwise.

(Whether Lawrence might not have been happier if he had disobeyed his daimon and forced himself at least into mechanical and external connection with the body of mankind, I forbear to speculate. Spontaneity is not the only and

infallible secret of happiness; nor is a ‘would-be’ existence necessarily disastrous. But this is by the way.)

It was, I think, the sense of being cut off that sent Lawrence on his restless wanderings round the earth. His travels were at once a flight and a search: a search for some society with which he could establish contact, for a world where the times were not personal and conscious knowing had not yet perverted living; a search and at the same time a flight from the miseries and evils of the society into which he had been born, and for which, in spite of his artist’s detachment, he could not help feeling profoundly responsible. He felt himself ‘English in the teeth of all the world, even in the teeth of England’: that was why he had to go to Ceylon and Australia and Mexico. He could not have felt so intensely English in England without involving himself in corporative political action, without belonging and being attached; but to attach himself was something he could not bring himself to do, something that the artist in him felt as a violation. He was at once too English and too intensely an artist to stay at home. ‘Perhaps it is necessary for me to try these places, perhaps it is my destiny to know the world. It only excites the outside of me. The inside it leaves more isolated and stoic than ever. That’s how it is. It is all a form of running away from oneself and the great problems, all this wild west and the strange Australia. But I try to keep quite clear. One forms not the faintest inward attachment, especially here in America.’

His search was as fruitless as his flight was ineffective. He could not escape either from his homesickness or his sense of responsibility; and he never found a society to which he could belong. In a kind of despair, he plunged yet deeper into the surrounding mystery, into the dark night of that otherness whose essence and symbol is the sexual experience. In Lady Chatterley’s Lover Lawrence wrote the epilogue to his travels and, from his long and fruitless experience of flight and search, drew what was, for him, the inevitable moral. It is a strange and beautiful book; but inexpressibly sad. But then so, at bottom, was its author’s life.

Lawrence's psychological isolation resulted, as we have seen, in his seeking physical isolation from the body of mankind. This physical isolation reacted upon his thoughts. 'Don't mind if I am impertinent,' he wrote to one of his correspondents at the end of a rather dogmatic letter. 'Living here alone one gets so different — sort of ex-cathedra.' To live in isolation, above the medley, has its advantages; but it also imposes certain penalties. Those who take a bird's-eye view of the world often see clearly and comprehensively; but they tend to ignore all tiresome details, all the difficulties of social life and, ignoring, to judge too sweepingly and to condemn too lightly. Nietzsche spent his most fruitful years perched on the tops of mountains, or plunged in the yet more abysmal solitude of boarding-houses by the Mediterranean. That was why, a delicate and sensitive man, he could be so bloodthirstily censorious — so wrong, for all his gifts, as well as so right. From the deserts of New Mexico, from rustic Tuscany or Sicily, from the Australian bush, Lawrence observed and judged and advised the distant world of men. The judgments, as might be expected, were often sweeping and violent; the advice, though admirable as far as it went, inadequate. Political advice from even the most greatly gifted of religious innovators is always inadequate; for it is never, at bottom, advice about politics, but always about something else. Differences in quantity, if sufficiently great, produce differences of quality. This sheet of paper, for example, is qualitatively different from the electrons of which it is composed. An analogous difference divides the politician's world from the world of the artist, or the moralist, or the religious teacher. 'It is the business of the artist,' writes Lawrence, 'to follow it (the war) to the heart of the individual fighters — not to talk in armies and nations and numbers — but to track it home — home — their war — and it's at the bottom of almost every Englishman's heart — the war — the desire of war — the will to war — and at the bottom of every German heart.' But an appeal to the individual heart can have very little effect on politics, which is a science of averages. An actuary can tell you how many people are likely to commit suicide next year; and no artist or moralist or Messiah can, by an appeal to the individual heart, prevent his forecast from being remarkably correct. If the things which are

Caesar's differ from the things which are God's, it is because Caesar's things are numbered by the thousands and millions, whereas God's things are single individual souls. The things of Lawrence's Dark God were not even individual souls; they were the psychological atoms whose patterned coming together constitutes a soul. When Lawrence offers political advice, it refers to matters which are not really political at all. The political world of enormous numbers was to him a nightmare, and he fled from it. Primitive communities are so small that their politics are essentially unpolitical; that, for Lawrence, was one of their greatest charms. Looking back from some far-away and underpopulated vantage-point at the enormous, innumerable modern world, he was appalled by what he saw. He condemned, he advised, but at bottom and finally he felt himself impotent to deal with Caesar's alien and inhuman problems. 'I wish there were miracles,' was his final despairing comment. 'I am tired of the old laborious way of working things to their conclusions.' But, alas, there are no miracles, and faith, even the faith of a man of genius, moves no mountains.

Enough of explanation and interpretation. To those who knew Lawrence, not why, but that he was what he happened to be, is the important fact. I remember very clearly my first meeting with him. The place was London, the time 1915. But Lawrence's passionate talk was of the geographically remote and of the personally very near. Of the horrors in the middle distance — war, winter, the town — he would not speak. For he was on the point, so he imagined, of setting off to Florida — to Florida, where he was going to plant that colony of escape, of which up to the last he never ceased to dream. Sometimes the name and site of this seed of a happier and different world were purely fanciful. It was called Rananim, for example, and was an island like Prospero's. Sometimes it had its place on the map and its name was Florida, Cornwall, Sicily, Mexico and again, for a time, the English countryside. That wintry afternoon in 1915 it was Florida. Before tea was over he asked me if I would join the colony, and though I was an intellectually cautious young man, not at all inclined to enthusiasms, though Lawrence had startled and embarrassed me with sincerities of a kind to which my upbringing had not accustomed me, I answered yes.

Fortunately, no doubt, the Florida scheme fell through. Cities of God have always crumbled; and Lawrence's city — his village, rather, for he hated cities — his Village of the Dark God would doubtless have disintegrated like all the rest. It was better that it should have remained, as it was always to remain, a project and a hope. And I knew this even as I said I would join the colony. But there was something about Lawrence which made such knowledge, when one was in his presence, curiously irrelevant. He might propose impracticable schemes, he might say or write things that were demonstrably incorrect or even, on occasion (as when he talked about science), absurd. But to a very considerable extent it didn't matter. What mattered was always Lawrence himself, was the fire that burned within him, that glowed with so strange and marvellous a radiance in almost all he wrote.

My second meeting with Lawrence took place some years later, during one of his brief revisitings of that after-war England, which he had come so much to dread and to dislike. Then in 1925, while in India, I received a letter from Spotorno. He had read some essays I had written on Italian travel; said he liked them; suggested a meeting. The next year we were in Florence and so was he. From that time, till his death, we were often together — at Florence, at Forte dei Marmi, for a whole winter at Diablerets, at Bandol, in Paris, at Chexbres, at Forte again, and finally at Vence where he died.

In a spasmodically kept diary I find this entry under the date of December 27th, 1927: 'Lunched and spent the p.m. with the Lawrences. D. H. L. in admirable form, talking wonderfully. He is one of the few people I feel real respect and admiration for. Of most other eminent people I have met I feel that at any rate I belong to the same species as they do. But this man has something different and superior in kind, not degree.'

'Different and superior in kind.' I think almost everyone who knew him well must have felt that Lawrence was this. A being, somehow, of another order, more sensitive, more highly conscious, more capable of feeling than even the most gifted of common men. He had, of course, his weaknesses and defects; he had his intellectual limitations — limitations which he seemed to have

deliberately imposed upon himself. But these weaknesses and defects and limitations did not affect the fact of his superior otherness. They diminished him quantitively, so to speak; whereas the otherness was qualitative. Spill half your glass of wine and what remains is still wine. Water, however full the glass may be, is always tasteless and without colour.

To be with Lawrence was a kind of adventure, a voyage of discovery into newness and otherness. For, being himself of a different order, he inhabited a different universe from that of common men — a brighter and intenser world, of which, while he spoke, he would make you free. He looked at things with the eyes, so it seemed, of a man who had been at the brink of death and to whom, as he emerges from the darkness, the world reveals itself as unfathomably beautiful and mysterious. For Lawrence, existence was one continuous convalescence; it was as though he were newly reborn from a mortal illness every day of his life. What these convalescent eyes saw, his most casual speech would reveal. A walk with him in the country was a walk through that marvellously rich and significant landscape which is at once the background and the principal personage of all his novels. He seemed to know, by personal experience, what it was like to be a tree or a daisy or a breaking wave or even the mysterious moon itself. He could get inside the skin of an animal and tell you in the most convincing detail how it felt and how, dimly, inhumanly, it thought. Of Black-Eyed Susan, for example, the cow at his New Mexican ranch, he was never tired of speaking, nor was I ever tired of listening to his account of her character and her bovine philosophy.

‘He sees,’ Vernon Lee once said to me, ‘more than a human being ought to see. Perhaps,’ she added, ‘that’s why he hates humanity so much.’ Why also he loved it so much. And not only humanity: nature too, and even the supernatural. For wherever he looked, he saw more than a human being ought to see; saw more and therefore loved and hated more. To be with him was to find oneself transported to one of the frontiers of human consciousness. For an inhabitant of the safe metropolis of thought and feeling it was a most exciting experience.

One of the great charms of Lawrence as a companion was that he could never be bored and so could never be boring. He was able to absorb himself completely in what he was doing at the moment; and he regarded no task as too humble for him to undertake, nor so trivial that it was not worth his while to do it well. He could cook, he could sew, he could darn a stocking and milk a cow, he was an efficient wood-cutter and a good hand at embroidery, fires always burned when he had laid them, and a floor, after Lawrence had scrubbed it, was thoroughly clean. Moreover, he possessed what is, for a highly strung and highly intelligent man, an even more remarkable accomplishment: he knew how to do nothing. He could just sit and be perfectly content. And his contentment, while one remained in his company, was infectious.

As infectious as Lawrence's contented placidity were his high spirits and his laughter. Even in the last years of his life, when his illness had got the upper hand and was killing him inch-meal, Lawrence could still laugh, on occasion, with something of the old and exuberant gaiety. Often, alas, towards the end, the laughter was bitter, and the high spirits almost terrifyingly savage. I have heard him sometimes speak of men and their ways with a kind of demoniac mockery, to which it was painful, for all the extraordinary brilliance and profundity of what he said, to listen. The secret consciousness of his dissolution filled the last years of his life with an overpowering sadness. (How tragically the splendid curve of the letters droops, at the end, towards the darkness!) It was, however, in terms of anger that he chose to express this sadness. Emotional indecency always shocked him profoundly, and, since anger seemed to him less indecent as an emotion than a resigned or complaining melancholy, he preferred to be angry. He took his revenge on the fate that had made him sad by fiercely deriding everything. And because the sadness of the slowly dying man was so unspeakably deep, his mockery was frighteningly savage. The laughter of the earlier Lawrence and, on occasion, as I have said, even the later Lawrence was without bitterness and wholly delightful.

Vitality has the attractiveness of beauty, and in Lawrence there was a continuously springing fountain of vitality. It went on welling up in him,

leaping, now and then, into a great explosion of bright foam and iridescence, long after the time when, by all the rules of medicine, he should have been dead. For the last two years he was like a flame burning on in miraculous disregard of the fact that there was no more fuel to justify its existence. One grew, in spite of constantly renewed alarms, so well accustomed to seeing the flame blazing away, self-fed, in its broken and empty lamp that one almost came to believe that the miracle would be prolonged indefinitely. But it could not be. When, after several months of separation, I saw him again at Vence in the early spring of 1930, the miracle was at an end, the flame guttering to extinction. A few days later it was quenched.

Beautiful and absorbingly interesting in themselves, his letters are also of the highest importance as biographical documents. In them, Lawrence has written his life and painted his own portrait. Few men have given more of themselves in their letters. Lawrence is there almost in his entirety. Almost, for he obeyed both of Robert Burns's injunctions:

Aye free, aff han' your story tell,
When wi' a bosom crony;
But still keep something to yoursel'
Ye scarcely tell to ony.

The letters show us Lawrence as he was in his daily living. We see him in all his moods. (And it is curious and amusing to note how his mood will change according to his correspondent. 'My kindliness makes me sometimes a bit false,' he says of himself severely. In other words, he knew how to adapt himself. To one correspondent he is gay, at moments even larky — because larkiness is expected of him. To another he is gravely reflective. To a third he speaks the language of prophesying and revelation.) We follow him from one vividly seen and recorded landscape to another. We watch him during the war, a subjectivist and a solitary artist, desperately fighting his battle against the nightmare of objective facts and all the inhumanly numerous things that are Caesar's. Fighting and, inevitably, losing. And after the war we accompany him round the world, as he seeks, now in one continent now in another, some external desert to match the

inner wilderness from which he utters his prophetic cry, or some community of which he can feel himself a member. We see him being drawn towards his fellows and then repelled again, making up his mind to force himself into some relation with society and then suddenly changing it again, and letting himself drift once more on the current of circumstances and his own inclinations. And finally, as his illness begins to get the better of him, we see him obscured by a dark cloud of sadness — the terrible sadness, out of which, in one mood, he wrote his savage Nettles, in another, The Man Who Died, that lovely and profoundly moving story of the miracle for which somewhere in his mind he still hoped — still hoped, against the certain knowledge that it could never happen.

In the earlier part of his career especially, and again towards the end, Lawrence was a most prolific correspondent. There was, however, an intermediate period during his time of wandering, when he seems to have written very little. Of letters with the date of these after-war years, not more than a dozen or two have so far turned up; and there seems to be no reason to believe that further inquiries will reveal the existence of many more. It is not because they have been destroyed or are being withheld that Lawrence’s letters of this period are so scarce; it is because, for one reason or another, he did not then care to write letters, that he did not want to feel himself in relationship with anyone. After a time, the stream begins again. But the later letters, though plentiful and good, are neither so numerous nor so richly and variously delightful as the earlier. One feels that Lawrence no longer wanted to give of himself so fully to his correspondents as in the past.

B. R. HAYDON

TWO LIKENESSES OF Haydon hang in the National Portrait Gallery. One, by Miss Zornlin, is a full face, and might be a prophetic portrait of Mussolini. That vast and noble brow, enlarged and ennobled by incipient baldness beyond the limits of verisimilitude; those flashing eyes; that square strong jaw; that wide mouth with its full, floridly sculptured lips; that powerful neck — are not these Il Duce's very features? But Miss Zornlin was not a very good painter. A competent portraitist knows how to imply the profile in the full face. Miss Zornlin's implications are entirely misleading, and if it were not for Haydon's own self-portrait in the National Gallery, and the drawing of him as a youth in the possession of Sir Robert Witt, we should never have guessed that this truculent dictator was the possessor of a very large yet delicately modelled and somehow frail-looking aquiline nose, and a chin which, while not exactly weak, was not so formidably protuberant as one might have expected. It is as though Mussolini had been strangely blended with Cardinal Newman.

From whatever angle one looks at it, the face is remarkable. One would notice it in a crowd; one would know at once that it belonged to some unusual spirit. It is a face that bears the stigmata almost of genius. Haydon had only to look in the glass to realize that he was a great man.

Nor was a grand appearance Nature's only gift to him. The other attributes of genius — a little tinged, it is true, with vulgarity — were not lacking. He was endowed with a sharp and comprehensive intelligence; an excellent judgment (except where his own productions were concerned); a daemonic vitality; the proverbial 'infinite capacity for taking pains'; a mystical sense of inspiration, and a boundless belief in his own powers. His special gifts were literary and discursive. His brain teemed with general ideas. He was an acute observer of character; he could talk, and he could write. He had a gift of expression, even a

literary style. Never was anyone more clearly cut out to be an author. Or, if the outlet of literature had been denied him, he would have made a good politician, a first-rate soldier (‘I did not command bayonets and cannons. Would to God,’ he says himself, ‘I had!’); he might even — if we may judge from his laborious studies in anatomy and his facility in the propounding of theories — have been a tolerably efficient man of science. The one gift which Nature had quite obviously denied him was the gift of expressing himself in form and colour. One has only to glance at one of Haydon’s drawings to perceive that the man had absolutely no artistic talent. The lines are hard, heavy, uncertain and utterly insensitive. He fumbles painfully and blunderingly after likeness to nature, and when he cannot achieve realism falls back on the cheapest art-student tricks. The paintings — such of them, at any rate, as I have seen in the original or in reproductions — are entirely without composition. They abound in bad drawing and disproportions. The colour is crude and inharmonious. In his enormous Agony in the Garden, which now reposes in the cellars of the Victoria and Albert Museum, a shapeless Saviour (straight from the studio and illumined by a strong North light) kneels in the right foreground. Behind Him lies a Rembrandtesque night, full of torch flames, of ruddily illuminated faces and portentous chiaroscuro. The ground is apparently meant to slope up from the place where the Saviour is kneeling. But it slopes in such a curious way that the background seems to be on a level with, if not actually in front of, the figure in the foreground. One is forced to imagine a Mount of Olives constructed like those Tudor houses, in which each storey projects a little farther forward than the one below. The painting is broad, dashing, and amateurishly uncertain. In the draperies, and in what is visible of the landscape, one notices great swishing brush strokes entirely devoid of meaning, whole passages daubed in for the sole reason that every inch of the canvas has got to be covered with paint. The thing is ludicrous. The Agony in the Garden is admittedly one of the least successful of Haydon’s pictures. I regret that I have never seen his best — Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem, and The Raising of Lazarus. The former is at Cincinnati; to judge by the photographs it bears a certain very distant resemblance to a picture.

Where the latter is, I do not know; nor have I ever seen it reproduced. But after having looked at the Agony in the Garden, the portraits at the National Portrait Gallery, and the various reproductions in Sir Robert Witt's library, I feel quite justified in saying that it must be entirely worthless.

Most children are geniuses, and perhaps there may have been some excuse for admiring the scribblings of the infant Haydon. Half the five-year-olds in any country are Raphaels; one in a hundred retains his genius at the age of ten. One in a million of these childish talents survives puberty. Some Imp of the Perverse must have suggested to young Haydon that he was destined to preserve his baby gift and become a painter. Outraged nature protested. The boy was afflicted with a disease of the eyes that permanently weakened his sight. To a natural incapacity to draw or paint was now added an inability to see. It was a broad hint. But the Imp of the Perverse and Haydon's will were very strong. Illness only reinforced the boy's decision to become a painter. All his exuberant energy, which a piece of judicious advice or a happy accident might have harnessed to some congenial labour, was now directed to painting. His self-confidence became a confidence in his powers as an artist. His heavenly muse breathed artistic inspirations. He had, as he tells us, 'perpetual and irresistible urgings of future greatness.' And again, 'I have been like a man with air balloons under his armpits and ether in his soul. While I was painting, walking or thinking, beaming flashes of energy followed and impressed me.' To have refused, in such circumstances, to devote oneself body and soul to painting would have been the sin against the Holy Ghost. On another occasion, after having conceived my background stronger than ever, I strode about the room imitating the blast of a trumpet — my cheeks full of blood, my heart beating with a glorious heat. Oh, who would exchange these moments for a throne?' These ecstatic moments came to him whenever his mind was occupied with something that specially interested it. He would spend a whole evening 'in a torrent of feeling about Homer.' On the day after the news of Waterloo had come through to London, he 'got up in a steam of feeling and read all the papers till he was faint.' Since he had elected painting as the chief concern of his life, it was natural that these

delicious and inspiring moments came oftenest while he was at work on a picture. They justified his belief in his own powers, in the same way as the raptures of the mystic justify his belief in a personal God. An emotion so intense must, it is felt, have some adequate external cause. Similarly, the sentiments of a lover are so enormous that it seems impossible that they should have been aroused by plain Miss Jones or plainer Mr. Brown. Something cosmic, something divine must have crept in somewhere. Nothing short of the Absolute could account for such ecstasies. A whole literature of platonizing love-poems has arisen, in order that Mr. Robinson's feelings for Miss Smith might be satisfactorily accounted for. Something analogous took place in Haydon's case. Full-blooded, emotional, a sort of Gargantua turned idealistic and romantic, he was easily excited and, when excited, felt profoundly. He could not believe that such prodigious emotions as his were not due to some proportionate cause. If he felt grandly about his painting, that was because his painting was grand, and because to paint was his mission in life, his divinely ordained duty. Of the divine approbation he was, indeed, directly convinced. We find references in the Autobiography and Journals to voices which commanded him to embark, even in the midst of financial ruin, on vast and unsaleable works. To his prayers for guidance (and Haydon was always praying) were vouchsafed, so he believed, encouraging replies. And every small success, every happy coincidence — the opportune arrival, for example, of a cheque or a commission — was interpreted by him as a friendly message from the Almighty. It is not to be wondered at if, in the teeth of failure and of hostile criticism, he should have gone on believing in himself. What matter the sneers of human connoisseurs when one knows, one is certain that the Heavenly Critic approves?

And then there was Haydon's pride, there was Haydon's ambition. Right or wrong, he had embarked on a painter's career. He was too proud to admit failure and withdraw. And his ambition to excel was inordinate, his vanity was without bounds. He admits (and his frankness is engaging, his perspicacity even in the midst of so much self-deception is remarkable) that he was 'always panting for distinction, even at a funeral (for I felt angry at Opie's that I wasn't in the first

coach).' He wanted to be in the first coach at the christening of a new school of English painting. Portrait making, the sham beau idéal, petty genre painting were to be ousted from their pre-eminence and historical painting on a colossal scale was to take their place. Haydon was to be the father of the new school. 'The production of this picture (Dentatus) must and will be considered an epoch in British Art.' And towards the end of his life he records: 'I thought once of putting up a brass plate (on his old house in Lisson Grove), Here Haydon Painted His Solomon, 1813.'

Sanguine and very susceptible to flattery, Haydon was always ready to believe that the smallest stroke of good fortune must be the herald of complete success, that a word of praise was the first note in that chorus of universal commendation for which he was always anxiously listening. When a 'lady of the highest rank' remarked (with that charming and entirely meaningless politeness of which only ladies of the highest rank know the secret): 'We look to you, Mr. Haydon, to revive the Art,' poor Haydon 'anticipated all sorts of glory, greatness and fame.' He was a man who dramatized his own life, who saw himself acting his own part, not merely as he was playing it at the moment, but in the future too. 'I walked about the room, looked into the glass, anticipated what the foreign ambassadors would say, studied my French for a good accent, believed that all the Sovereigns of Europe would hail an English youth who could paint a heroic picture.'

The 'Sovereigns of Europe,' it may be remarked parenthetically, played a great part in Haydon's imaginative life. Of burgess origin, and endowed with a romantic temperament, Haydon was — fatally and inevitably — a snob. The prestige of great names and titles impressed him profoundly. The picturesqueness of traditional aristocracy and the splendours of wealth went violently to his romantic head, just as they went to Balzac's. We have seen how absurdly elated he felt when the 'lady of the highest rank' looked to him to 'revive the Art.' He was as much delighted when Sir George Beaumont and his family 'allowed that nothing could exceed the eye of my horse.' Even the approbation of a noble savage (if only sufficiently noble) was intoxicating to

Haydon, who records complacently that the Persian Ambassador remarked of his Jerusalem ‘in good English and in a loud voice, “I like the elbow of soldier.” ’ But bitter experience soon taught him that lordly patrons are fickle and their favour not to be relied on. He realized that he had taken their praises of his historical pictures too seriously. ‘I forgot,’ he sadly remarks, ‘that the same praise would have been applied to the portrait of a racehorse or of a favourite pug.’ He discovered to his cost that lords and ladies ‘are ambitious of the éclat of discovering genius, but their hearts are seldom engaged for it.’ And — yet more painful discovery for a man of Haydon’s intelligence and acquirements— ‘I find the artists most favoured by the great are those of no education, or those who conceal what they have. The love of power and superiority is not trod on if a man of genius is ignorant when a gentleman is informed. “Great folks,” said Johnson, “don’t like to have their mouths stopped.” ’ Haydon was rash enough to be right about the Elgin Marbles. The great were all on the side of Payne Knight and grotesquely wrong. They did not enjoy being told so. But though he early discovered the truth about aristocratic art patrons — namely, that they regard artists as mere court fools existing for the entertainment of their endless leisure, that they take no genuine interest in art, and are, for the most part, bottomlessly frivolous — though he knew all this, he yet retained an extraordinary affection and respect for lords. How excessively and abjectly he enjoys his week-end with Lord Egremont at Petworth! ‘The very flies at Petworth seem to know that there is room for their existence, that the windows are theirs. Dogs, horses, cows, deer and pigs, peasantry and servants, guests and family, children and parents, all share alike his (Lord Egremont’s) bounty and opulence and luxury.’

He dramatized himself in misfortune no less than in success. It is a fallen Titan who goes to the Debtor’s Prison and haggles with creditors. And in spite of everything, how much he enjoys his grandly and dramatically unhappy position at the time when his reforming zeal had made him, in 1832, the official painter of the radical party! At half-past nine he would be in the pawnshop raising money on the silver coffee-pot; at ten he would be sitting in the palace of some peer of the realm, sketching the grand patrician profile and discussing high

politics. The afternoon would be spent imploring attorneys to give him time; the evening at some luscious rout where ‘the beauty of the women, the exquisite, fresh, nosegay sweetness of their looks, the rich crimson velvet, and white satin, and lace, and muslin, and diamonds, with their black eyes and peachy complexions, and snowy necks, and delicate forms, and graceful motions, and sweet nothingness of conversation bewildered and distracted him.’ Pauper and pampered pet of society, frequenter of drawing-rooms and pawnshops — the rôle was dramatic, picturesque, positively Shakespearean. He dwells at length, emphatically and almost with pleasure, on his own romantic misery.

Haydon was at all times very conscious of his own character. He is his own favourite hero of fiction. He realizes his own energy, genius and vitality, and describes them dramatically in a bold Homeric style. We find him in his journals constantly comparing himself to one or other of the nobler animals. He ‘flies to the city to raise money, like an eagle.’ He bathes at Margate ‘like a bull in June.’ He is constantly walking up and down his studio or furiously painting ‘like a lion.’ (And we know from what he says in his journal, after dissecting one, how much lions meant to Haydon. ‘Spent the whole day with a lion and came home with a contempt for the human species.’)

Haydon’s belief in himself was infectious, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say contagious — for it was only while one was actually in the presence of the man himself that one could fully believe in his powers as an artist. In front of his pictures, even his most admiring friends must occasionally have had their doubts. But the man had such a masterful and magnetic personality, was so large, so exuberantly vital, so intelligent and plausible, such a good critic of all art but his own, so well read, such an entertaining talker, that it was impossible not to take fire at his ardour; it was difficult when he said, ‘I am a great artist,’ not to believe him. All those, it would be true to say, who came into personal contact with Haydon believed in him. All — from Keats (who lent him money) and Wordsworth (who addressed two admirable sonnets to him) to the poor wine merchant, of whom Haydon records ‘I showed him Solomon and appealed to him whether I ought, after such an effort, to be without

a glass of wine, which my medical man had recommended. “Certainly not,” said he. “I’ll send you a dozen.” ’ And he sent them, gratis. Lamb and Hazlitt and the Hunts were among his friends and admirers. His landlord, Newton, was infinitely kind to him. His colourman provided him, on indefinite credit, with canvases of unheard-of dimensions on which to paint unsaleable historical pictures. Sir Walter Scott not only admired and liked him, but gave him money. His servant, the faithful Sammons, seems positively to have worshipped him. There was a magic about the man, a magic which began to evaporate as the years passed and a generation arose which had not known him in his dazzling prime, and the man himself grew old and querulous and hysterical with failure and repeated disappointment and chronic poverty. With the final pistol-shot the magic was totally dissipated. The pictures remain, deplorable monuments of a wasted life. The real, the magical Haydon can only be divined from the Autobiography.

Haydon was sixty when he committed suicide. One can only feel astonished that he did not kill himself before. A few years of the life which Haydon led for the best part of forty years would have sufficed to drive most men into suicide, or madness, or the selling of their principles. Haydon’s energy, his sanguine temperament kept him struggling on, year after year, decade after decade. His later journals make the most distressing reading. In the course of his desperate and never-ending hunt for cash, what agonized anxieties, what humiliations were his daily lot! Familiarity with humiliation seems, indeed, in the long run to have blunted his sensibilities. One has the impression that, after some years of chronic misfortune, it no longer cost him much to write a begging letter or draw up for publication a pathetic statement of his accounts. He was never, even in his early days, very scrupulous about financial matters. The story of his debt to Keats is not told in the Autobiography; it must be read in Keats’s own letters. It is not, assuredly, very creditable to Haydon. With his usual frankness, Haydon admitted his unscrupulousness about money. ‘Too proud to do small modest things that I might obtain fair means of existence as I proceeded with my great work, I thought it no degradation to borrow.’ And again, ‘I have £400 at Coutts’s,

thought I, never thinking how I was to return it, but trusting in God for all.' Haydon trusted a great deal in God. It salved his conscience to feel that the Almighty was standing security for his I.O.U.'s. But if he was not very honest, he had his justifications. To begin with, he could not afford to be scrupulous. Strict financial honesty is easy only for those whose bank balances are long, or who draw a regular wage and are without ambition. Haydon was filled with vast ambitions, believed himself the greatest painter of his age, and had no money. He felt that the world owed him something for existing, for being the genius that he was. Loans and gifts were received on account of the world's debt to him; he had a certain divine right to them, even when they came from people who could not afford to lend or give. Still he did always honestly try to pay back, later if not sooner, the money he had borrowed. One has only to read the following passage to realize that Haydon had a nice, if peculiar, sense of honour — not to mention a financial ability amounting almost to genius. 'In one hour and a half I had ten pounds to pay on my honour and only £2, 15s. in my pocket. I drove away to Newton, paid him £2, 15s. and borrowed £10. I then drove away to my friend and paid him the ten pounds, and borrowed five pounds more, but felt relieved I had not broke my honour.'

It must not be thought that Haydon's exertions brought him nothing. First and last, he made considerable sums of money, which might have sufficed to keep a single man in comfort. But Haydon was married. His wife, who was a widow, brought him two small children and no dowry. His own family was numerous. Once every fifty or sixty pages his journals announce a fresh confinement; another little Haydon enters the world. A few years pass, and with a regularity almost as unfailing the little Haydons shuffle off again. One stepson, it is true, reached manhood before he had a promising career in the navy cut short, in the Indian Ocean, by the bite of a sea-serpent. But his case was exceptional. Most of the children died in infancy. After a time one loses count of the births and deaths. I have an impression that about half a dozen children must have survived their father and that about as many died before they were six years old. Perhaps

if one hunted among the sooty grasses of Paddington Green, in the shadow of Mrs. Siddons's monument, one might still find their little tombstones.

Haydon was a most conscientious father — rather too conscientious, considering that he could not possibly afford to educate his children as aristocratically as he did. Some of the most pressing debts of his later years were for his sons' tutorial and college dues at Oxford and Cambridge.

Towards the end of his life Haydon was no longer too proud to do 'small modest things.' His ambition was still to paint huge historical pictures; but meanwhile, to keep the pot boiling, he was prepared to stoop to a pettier kind of art. He painted portraits — that is, when he could find sitters. But he hated portrait painting. Lacking, as he did, any understanding of, or interest in, the formal side of art, he could never paint for painting's sake. He was only interested in the literature of painting; he needed a subject to stimulate his imagination. 'In portrait,' he complains, 'I lose that divine feeling of inspiration which I always had in history. I feel a common man.' What he really liked painting was something in the style of The Plagues of Egypt. 'A Sphinx or two, a pyramid or so, with the front groups lighted by torches, would make this a subject terrific and appalling.' There was nothing very terrific or appalling about the stout business men and their wives and ugly daughters who came to have their portraits painted at twenty-five or thirty pounds a time. Moreover, Haydon was, as he himself admits, a very bad portrait painter. He soon lost whatever patronage he had. He felt the loss as something of a relief.

More congenial, at any rate to begin with, and no less lucrative than portraits, were his fancy pictures of Napoleon musing. Haydon's first picture of Napoleon on St. Helena caught the public fancy. It represents the Emperor standing on a crag, with his back to the spectator, contemplating the Atlantic Ocean, the remains of a sunset and the crescent moon. The piece was engraved and sold well. Sir Robert Peel bought the original. Replicas were ordered in quantities. For years Haydon lived on Napoleon musing — musing, not merely on St. Helena, but at Fontainebleau, in his bedroom, on the ocean, at Marengo, in Egypt before the pyramids. He turned them out by the dozen. Haydon also

painted a picture of the Duke of Wellington musing on the field of Waterloo; but the piece was much less successful. Perhaps it was felt that the picture lacked verisimilitude. French tyrants might muse; but not an English general, not a Wellesley, a Duke, a Prime Minister.

Haydon's self-confidence remained apparently unshaken to the end. Indeed, as failure was heaped upon failure, disappointment on disappointment, it expressed itself more vehemently than ever, with a kind of shrill, hysterical defiance. After the rejection of the cartoons which he had prepared for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament — the cruellest blow of Haydon's whole unhappy career — he tried to comfort himself by insisting with an almost insane violence on his own genius. 'What magic! what fire! what unerring hand and eye! what a gift of God! I bow and am grateful.' And looking at his Solomon ('this wonderful picture') he asks himself: 'Ought I to fear comparison of it with the Duke of Sutherland's Murillo, or any other picture?' And he answers with a confidence that would be ludicrous if it were not painfully pathetic, 'Certainly not!' At this period, too, he liked to insist more strongly than ever on the altruistic, the self-sacrificingly patriotic character of his whole career. He had always claimed that he was working for the glory of British Art. By the end of his life he was saying that he 'had devoted himself without a selfish feeling to the honour of his country.' The sense that he was a martyr to a great cause gave him, no doubt, a certain comfort in his misery.

His religion was another source of comfort. His journals reveal him in close and constant communication with his Maker. There is something curiously primitive about his prayers. He asks for specific material benefits, for the providential and almost miraculous solution of particular difficulties. This is how he prepares for one of his exhibitions: 'Grant, during the exhibition, nothing may happen to dull its success, but that it may go on in one continuous stream of triumphant success to the last instant. O God, thou knowest I am in the clutches of a villain; grant me the power to get out of them, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. And subdue the evil disposition of that villain, so that I may extricate myself from his power without getting further into it.' (An only too accurate

description of Haydon's ordinary method of paying off debts.) 'Grant this for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen, with all my soul.' The prayer, alas, was not answered. On the day that Haydon opened his exhibition, Barnum arrived in town with General Tom Thumb. Unconsciously cruel, he hired a room in the Egyptian Hall next to Haydon's. Standing at the door of his empty gallery, the unhappy artist could watch the crowds that surged and shoved and fought in a Gadarene scramble to see the dwarf.

But enough of misery and failure and incompetence. Haydon was something more than a bad and deservedly unsuccessful painter. He was a great personality to begin with. And in the second place he was, as I like to think, a born writer who wasted his life making absurd pictures when he might have been making excellent books. One book, however, he did contrive to make. The Autobiography reveals his powers. Reading it, one realizes the enormity of that initial mistake which sent him from his father's bookshop to the Academy schools. As a romantic novelist what might he not have achieved? Sadly one speculates.

There were times when Haydon himself seems to have speculated even as we do. 'The truth is,' he remarks near the end of his life, 'I am fonder of books than of anything else on earth. I consider myself, and ever shall, a man of great powers, excited to an art which limits their exercise. In politics, law or literature they would have had a full and glorious swing. . . . It is a curious proof of this that I have pawned my studies, my prints, my lay figures, but have kept my darling authors.' The avowal is complete. What genuine, born painter would call painting an art which limits the exercise of great powers? Such a criticism could only come from a man to whom painting was but another and less effectual way of writing dramas, novels or history.

It is, I repeat, as a novelist that Haydon would best have exhibited his powers. I can imagine great rambling books in which absurd sublimities ('a Sphinx or two, a pyramid or so') and much rhapsodical philosophizing would have alternated in the approved Shakespearean or Faustian style, with admirable passages of well-observed, naturalistic comic relief. We should yawn over the

philosophy and perhaps smile at the sublimities (as we smile and yawn even at Byron's; who can now read Manfred, or Cain?); but we should eagerly devour the comic chapters. The Autobiography permits us to imagine how good these chapters might have been.

Haydon was an acute observer, and he knew how to tell a story. How vividly, for example, he has seen this tea-party at Mrs. Siddons's, how well he has described it! 'After her first reading (from Shakespeare) the men retired to tea. While we were all eating toast and tingling cups and saucers, she began again. It was like the effect of a Mass bell at Madrid. All noise ceased, we slunk to our seats like boors, two or three of the most distinguished men of the day with the very toast in their mouths, afraid to bite. It was curious to see Lawrence in this predicament, to hear him bite by degrees and then stop, for fear of making too much crackle, his eyes full of water from the constraint; and at the same time to hear Mrs. Siddons's "eye of newt and toe of frog," and then to see Lawrence give a sly bite and then look awed and pretend to be listening. I went away highly gratified and as I stood on the landing-place to get cool, I overheard my own servant in the hall say, "What! is that the old lady making such a noise?" "Yes." "Why, she makes as much noise as ever." "Yes," was the answer, "she tunes her pipes as well as ever she did." ' There are, in the Autobiography, scores of such admirable little narratives and descriptions.

Haydon's anecdotes about the celebrated men with whom he came in contact are revealing as well as entertaining. They prove that he had more than a memory, a sense of character, an instinctive feeling for the significant detail. Most of the anecdotes are well known and have often been reprinted. But I cannot resist quoting two little stories about Wordsworth, which are less celebrated than they deserve to be. One day Haydon and Wordsworth went together to an art gallery. 'In the corner stood the group of Cupid and Psyche kissing. After looking some time, he turned round to me with an expression I shall never forget, and said, "The Dev-ils!" ' From this one anecdote a subtle psychologist might almost have divined the youthful escapade in France, the illegitimate daughter, the subsequent remorse and respectability. The other story

is hardly less illuminating. ‘One day Wordsworth at a large party leaned forward in a moment of silence and said: “Davy, do you know the reason I published my ‘White Doe’ in quarto?” “No,” said Davy, slightly blushing at the attention this awakened. “To express my own opinion of it,” replied Wordsworth.’

Merely as a verbal technician Haydon was singularly gifted. When he is writing about something which deeply interests and excites him, his style takes on a florid and violent brilliance all its own. For example, this is how, at the coronation of George IV, he describes the royal entrance. ‘Three or four of high rank appear from behind the throne; an interval is left; the crowd scarce breathe. Something rustles; and a being buried in satin, feathers and diamonds rolls gracefully into his seat. The room rises with a sort of feathered, silken thunder.’ He knows how to use his adjectives with admirable effect. The most accomplished writer might envy his description of the Duke of Sussex’s voice as ‘loud, royal and asthmatic.’ And how one shudders at the glance of a ‘tremendous, globular and demoniacal eye!’ How one loves the waitresses at the eating-house where the young and always susceptible Haydon used to dine! When they heard that he was bankrupt, these ‘pretty girls eyed me with a lustrous regret.’

Haydon could argue with force and clarity. He could be witty as well as floridly brilliant. The man who could talk of Charles Lamb ‘stuttering his quaintness in snatches, like the Fool in Lear, and with as much beauty,’ certainly knew how to turn a phrase. He could imply a complete criticism in a dozen words; when he has said of West’s classical pictures that ‘the Venuses looked as though they had never been naked before,’ there is nothing more to add; the last word on neo-classicism has been uttered. And what a sound, what a neatly pointed comment on English portrait painting is contained in the following brief sentences! ‘Portraiture is always independent of art and has little or nothing to do with it. It is one of the staple manufactures of the Empire. Wherever the British settle, wherever they colonize, they carry, and will ever carry, trial by jury, horse-racing and portrait painting.’ And let us hope they will ever carry a good supply of those indomitable madmen who have made the British Empire

and English literature, English politics and English science the extraordinary things they are. Haydon was one of these glorious lunatics. An ironic fate decreed that he should waste his madness in the practice of an art for which he was not gifted. But though wasted, the insanity was genuine and of good quality. The Autobiography makes us wish that it might have been better directed.

WATERWORKS AND KINGS

IN THE CHANCELLERIES of eighteenth-century Europe nobody bothered very much about Hesse. Its hostility was not a menace, its friendship brought no positive advantages. Hesse was only one of the lesser German states — a tenth-rate Power.

Tenth-rate: and yet, on the outskirts of Kassel, which was the capital of this absurdly unimportant principality, there stands a palace large and splendid enough to house a full-blown emperor. And from the main façade of this palace there rises to the very top of the neighbouring mountain one of the most magnificent architectural gardens in the world. This garden, which is like a straight wide corridor of formal stone-work driven through the hillside forest, climbs up to a nondescript building in the grandest Roman manner, almost as large as a cathedral and surmounted by a colossal bronze statue of Hercules. Between Hercules at the top and the palace at the bottom lies an immense series of terraces, with fountains and cascades, pools, grottos, spouting tritons, dolphins, nereids and all the other mythological fauna of an eighteenth-century water-garden. The spectacle, when the waters are flowing, is magnificent. There must be the best part of two miles of neo-classic cataract and elegantly canalized foam. The waterworks at Versailles are tame and trivial in comparison.

It was Whit Sunday when I was at Kassel. With almost the entire population of the town I had climbed up to the shrine of Hercules on the hilltop. Standing there in the shadow of the god, with the waters in full splash below me and the sunshine brilliant on the green dome of the palace at the long cataract's foot, I found myself prosaically speculating about ways and means and motives. How could a mere prince of Hesse run to such imperial splendours? And why, having somehow raised the money, should he elect to spend it in so fantastically wasteful a fashion? And, finally, why did the Hessians ever put up with his

extravagance? The money, after all, was theirs; seeing it all squandered on a house and a garden, why didn't they rise up against their silly, irresponsible tyrant?

The answer to these last questions was being provided, even as I asked them, by the good citizens of Kassel around me. Schön, herrlich, prachtvoll — their admiration exploded emphatically on every side. Without any doubt, they were thoroughly enjoying themselves. In six generations, humanity cannot undergo any fundamental change. There is no reason to suppose that the Hessians of 1750 were greatly different from those of 1932. Whenever the prince allowed his subjects to visit his waterworks, they came and, I have no doubt, admired and enjoyed their admiration just as much as their descendants do to-day. The psychology of revolutionaries is apt to be a trifle crude. The magnificent display of wealth does not necessarily, as they imagine, excite a passion of envy in the hearts of the poor. Given a reasonable amount of prosperity, it excites, more often, nothing but pleasure. The Hessians did not rise up and kill their prince for having wasted so much money on his house and garden; on the contrary, they were probably grateful to him for having realized in solid stone and rainbow-flashing water their own vague day-dreams of a fairy-tale magnificence. One of the functions of royalty is to provide people with a vicarious, but none the less real, fulfilment of their wishes. Kings who make a fine show are popular; and the people not only forgive, but actually commend, extravagances which, to the good Marxian, must seem merely criminal. Wise kings always earmarked a certain percentage of their income for display. Palaces and waterworks were good publicity for kingship, just as an impressive office building is good publicity for a business corporation. Business, indeed, has inherited many of the responsibilities of royalty. It shares with the State and the municipality the important duty of providing the common people with vicarious wish-fulfilments. Kings no longer build palaces; but newspapers and insurance companies do. Popular restaurants are as richly marbled as the mausoleum of the Escorial; hotels are more splendid than Versailles. In every society there must always be some person or some organization whose task it is to realize the day-dreams of

the masses. Life in a perfectly sensible, utilitarian community would be intolerably dreary. Occasional explosions of magnificent folly are as essential to human well-being as a sewage system. More so, probably. Sanitary plumbing, it is significant to note, is a very recent invention; the splendours of kingship are as old as civilization itself.

IN A TUNISIAN OASIS

WAKING AT DAWN, I looked out of the window. We were in the desert. On either side of the railway an immense plain, flat as Holland, but tawny instead of green, stretched out interminably. On the horizon, instead of windmills, a row of camels was silhouetted against the grey sky. Mile after mile, the train rolled slowly southward.

At Tozeur, when at last we arrived, it had just finished raining — for the first time in two and a half years — and now the wind had sprung up; there was a sandstorm. A thick brown fog, whirled into eddies by the wind, gritty to the skin, abolished the landscape from before our smarting eyes. We sneezed; there was sand in our ears, in our hair, between our teeth. It was horrible. I felt depressed, but not surprised. The weather is always horrible when I travel.

Once, in a French hotel, I was accused of having brought with me the flat black bugs, of whose presence among my bed-clothes I complained to a self-righteous proprietress. I defended myself with energy against the impeachment. Bugs — no; I am innocent of bugs. But when it comes to bad weather, I have to plead guilty. Rain, frost, wind, snow, hail, fog — I bring them with me wherever I go. I bring them to places where they have never been heard of, at seasons when it is impossible that they should occur. What delightful skating there will be in the Spice Islands when I arrive! On this particular journey I had brought with me to every place on my itinerary the most appalling meteorological calamities. At Naples, for example, it was the snow. Coming out of the theatre on the night of our arrival, we found it lying an inch deep under the palm trees in the public gardens. And Vesuvius, next morning, glittered white, like Fujiyama, against the pale spring sky. At Palermo there was a cloud-burst. ‘Between the Syrtes and soft Sicily’ we passed through a tempest of hail, lightning and wind. At Tunis it very nearly froze. At Sousse the wind was so violent that the stiff

board-like leaves of the cactuses swayed and trembled in the air like aspens. And now, on the day of our arrival at Tozeur, it had rained for the first time in thirty months, and there was a sandstorm. No, I was not in the least surprised; but I could not help feeling a little gloomy.

Towards evening the wind somewhat abated; the sand began to drop out of the air. At midday the brown curtain had been impenetrable at fifty yards. It thinned, grew gauzier; one could see objects at a hundred, two hundred yards. From the windows of the hotel bedroom in which we had sat all day, trying — but in vain, for it came through even invisible crannies — to escape from the wind-blown sand, we could see the fringes of a dense forest of palm trees, the dome of a little mosque, houses of sun-dried brick and thin brown men in flapping night-shirts walking, with muffled faces and bent heads, against the wind, or riding, sometimes astride, sometimes sideways, on the bony rumps of patient little asses. Two very professional tourists in sun helmets — there was no sun — emerged round the corner of a street. A malicious gust of wind caught them unawares; simultaneously the two helmets shot into the air, thudded, rolled in the dust. The too professional tourists scuttled in pursuit. The spectacle cheered us a little; we descended, we ventured out of doors.

A melancholy Arab offered to show us round the town. Knowing how hard it is to find one's way in these smelly labyrinths, we accepted his offer. His knowledge of French was limited; so too, in consequence, was the information he gave us. He employed what I may call the Berlitz method. Thus, when a column of whirling sand rose up and jumped at us round the corner of a street, our guide turned to us and said, pointing: 'Poussière.' We might have guessed it ourselves.

He led us interminably through narrow, many-cornered streets, between eyeless walls, half crumbled and tottering.

'Village,' he explained. 'Très plaisant.' We did not altogether agree with him.

A walk through an Arab village is reminiscent of walks through Ostia or Pompeii. Roman remains are generally in a better state of preservation, and

cleaner; that is all. One is astonished to see, among these dusty ruins, white-robed families crouching over their repasts.

Our guide patted a brown mud wall.

‘Briques,’ he said, and repeated the word several times, so that we might be certain what he meant.

These bricks, which are of sun-dried mud, are sometimes, on the façades of the more considerable houses, arranged in a series of simple and pleasing patterns — diamonds, quincunxes, hexagons. A local art which nobody now takes the trouble to practise — nobody, that is, except the Europeans, who, with characteristic energy, have used and wildly abused the traditional ornamentation on the walls of the station and the principal hotel. It is a curious and characteristic fact that, whenever in Tunisia one sees a particularly Oriental piece of architecture, it is sure to have been built by the French, since 1881. The cathedral of Carthage, the law courts and schools of Tunis — these are more Moorish than the Alhambra, Moorish as only Oriental tea-rooms in Paris or London can be Moorish. In thirty years the French have produced buildings more typically and intensely Arabian than the Arabs themselves contrived to do in the course of thirteen centuries.

We passed into the market-place.

‘Viande,’ said our guide, fingering as he passed a well-thumbed collop of mutton, lying among the dust and flies on a little booth.

We nodded.

‘Très joli,’ commented our guide. ‘Très plaisant.’ Noisily he spat on the ground. The proprietor of the booth spat too. We hurried away; it needs time to grow inured to Tunisian habits. These frightful hoickings in the throat, these sibilant explosions and semi-liquid impacts are almost the national music of the country.

There are in the desert of southern Tunisia three great oases: Gabes by the sea, a little north of that island of Djerba which is, traditionally, the classical Island of the Lotus Eaters; Tozeur, to the west of it, some seventy miles inland; and Nefta, fifteen miles west of Tozeur, the starting-point of the caravans which

trade between southern Tunisia and the great oases of the Algerian Sahara, Biskra and Touggourt. These oases are all of much the same size, each consisting of some six or seven thousand acres of cultivated ground, and are all three remarkable for their numerous and copious springs. In the middle of the desert, suddenly, a hundred fountains come welling out of the sand; rivers run, a network of little canals is dug. An innumerable forest of date palms springs up — a forest whose undergrowth is corn and roses, vines and apricot trees, olives and pomegranates, pepper trees, castor-oil trees, banana trees, every precious plant of the temperate and the subtropical zones. No rain falls on these little Edens — except on the days of my arrival — but the springs, fed from who knows what distant source, flow inexhaustibly and have flowed at least since Roman times. Islanded among the sands, their green luxuriance is a standing miracle. That it should have been in a desert, with here and there such islands of palm trees, that Judaism and Mohammedanism took their rise is a thing which, since I have seen an oasis, astonishes me. The religion which, in such a country, would naturally suggest itself to me would be no abstract monotheism, but the adoration of life, of the forces of green and growing nature. In an oasis, it seems to me, the worship of Pan and of the Great Mother should be celebrated with an almost desperate earnestness. The nymphs of water and of trees ought surely, here, to receive a passionate gratitude. In the desert, I should infallibly have invented the Greek mythology. The Jews and the Arabs discovered Jahweh and Allah. I find it strange.

Of the three great Tunisian oases, my favourite is Nefta. Gabes runs it close for beauty, while the proximity of the sea gives it a charm which Nefta lacks. But, on the other hand, Gabes is less fertile than Nefta and, socially, more sophisticated. There must be the best part of two hundred Europeans living at Gabes. There is dancing once a week at the hotel. Gabes is quite the little Paris. The same objection applies to Tozeur, which has a railway station and positively teems with French officials. Nefta, with fourteen thousand Arabs, has a white population of a dozen or thereabouts. A hundred Frenchmen can always make a Paris; twelve, I am happy to say, cannot. The only non-Arabian feature of Nefta

is its hotel, which is clean, comfortable, French and efficient. At Nefta one may live among barbarians, in the Middle Ages, and at the same time, for thirty francs a day, enjoy the advantages of contemporary Western civilization. What could be more delightful?

We set off next morning by car, across the desert. From Tozeur the road mounts slightly to a plateau which dominates the surrounding country. The day was clear and sunny. We looked down on the green island of Tozeur — four hundred thousand palm trees among the sands. Beyond the oasis we could see the chotts, glittering in the sun. The chotts are shallow depressions in the ground, at one time, no doubt, the beds of considerable lakes. There is no water in them now; but the soil is furred with a bright saline efflorescence. At a distance, you could swear you saw the sea. For the rest, the landscape was all sand and lion-coloured rock.

We bumped on across the desert. Every now and then we passed a camel, a string of camels. Their owners walked or rode on asses beside them. The womenfolk were perched among the baggage on the hump — a testimony, most eloquent in this Mohammedan country, to the great discomfort of camel riding. Once we met a small Citroën lorry, crammed to overflowing with white-robed Arabs. In the Sahara, the automobile has begun to challenge the supremacy of the camel. Little ten-horse-power Citroëns dart about the desert. For the rougher mountainous country special six-wheeled cars are needed, and with caterpillar wheels one may even affront the soft and shifting sand of the dunes. Motor buses now ply across the desert. A line, we were told, was shortly to be inaugurated between Nefta and Touggourt, across two hundred kilometres of sand. In a few years, no doubt, we shall all have visited Lake Tchad and Timbuctoo. Should one be glad or sorry? I find it difficult to decide.

The hotel at Nefta is a long low building, occupying one whole side of the market-square. From your bedroom window you watch the Arabs living; they do it unhurriedly and with a dignified inefficiency. Endlessly haggling, they buy and sell. The vendor offers a mutton chop, slightly soiled; the buyer professes himself outraged by a price which would be exorbitant if the goods were

spotlessly first-hand. It takes them half an hour to come to a compromise. On the ground white bundles doze in the sun; when the sun grows too hot, they roll a few yards and doze again in the shade. The notables of the town, the rich proprietors of palm trees, stroll past with the dignity of Roman senators. Their garments are of the finest wool; they carry walking sticks; they wear European shoes and socks, and on their bare brown calves — a little touch entirely characteristic of the real as opposed to the literary East — pale mauve or shell-pink sock suspenders. Wild men ride in from the desert. Some of them, trusting to common sense as well as Allah to preserve them from ophthalmia, wear smoked motor goggles. With much shouting, much reverberant thumping of dusty, moth-eaten hides, a string of camels is driven in. They kneel, they are unloaded. Supercilious and haughty, they turn this way and that, like the dowagers of very aristocratic families at a plebeian evening party. Then, all at once, one of them stretches out its long neck limply along the ground and shuts its eyes. The movement is one of hopeless weariness; the grotesque animal is suddenly pathetic. And what groanings, what gurglings in the throat, what enormous sighs when their masters begin to reload them! Every additional package evokes a bubbling protest, and when at last they have to rise from their knees, they moan as though their hearts were broken. Blind beggars sit patiently awaiting the alms they never receive. Their raw eyelids black with flies, small children play contentedly in the dust. If Allah wills it, they too will be blind one day: blessed be the name of Allah.

Sitting at our window, we watch the spectacle. And at night, after a pink and yellow sunset with silhouetted palm trees and domes against the sky (for my taste, I am afraid, altogether too like the coloured plates in the illustrated Bible), at night huge stars come out in the indigo sky, the cafés are little caves of yellow light, draped figures move in the narrow streets with lanterns in their hands, and on the flat roofs of the houses one sees the prowling shadows of enormous watch-dogs. There is silence, the silence of the desert: from time to time there comes to us, very distinctly, the distant sound of spitting.

Walking among the crowds of the market-place or along the narrow labyrinthine streets, I was always agreeably surprised by the apathetically courteous aloofness of Arab manners. It had been the same in Tunis and the other larger towns. It is only by Jews and Europeanized Arabs that the tourist is pestered: through the native quarters he walks untroubled. There are beggars in plenty, of course, hawkers, guides, cab drivers; and when you pass, they faintly stir, it is true, from their impassive calm. They stretch out hands, they offer Arab antiquities of the most genuine German manufacture, they propose to take you the round of the sights, they invite you into their fly-blown vehicles. But they do all these things politely and quite uninsistently. A single refusal suffices to check their nascent importunity. You shake your head; they relapse once more into the apathy from which your appearance momentarily roused them — resignedly: nay, almost, you feel, with a sense of relief that it had not, after all, been necessary to disturb themselves. Coming from Naples, we had been particularly struck by this lethargic politeness. For in Naples the beggars claim an alms noisily and as though by right. If you refuse to ride, the cabmen of Pozzuoli follow you up the road, alternately cursing and whining, and at every hundred yards reducing their price by yet another ten per cent. The guides at Pompeii fairly insist on being taken; they cry aloud, they show their certificates, they enumerate their wives and starving children. As for the hawkers, they simply will not let you go. What, you don’t want coloured photographs of Vesuvius? Then look at these corals. No corals? But here is the last word in cigarette holders. You do not smoke? But in any case, you shave; these razor blades, now . . . You shake your head. Then toothpicks, magnifying glasses, celluloid combs. Stubbornly, you continue to refuse. The hawker plays his last card — an ace, it must be admitted, and of trumps. He comes very close to you, he blows garlic and alcohol confidentially into your face. From an inner pocket he produces an envelope; he opens it, he presses the contents into your hand. You may not want corals or razor blades, views of Vesuvius or celluloid combs; he admits it. But can you honestly say — honestly, with your hand on your heart — that you have

no use for pornographic engravings? And for nothing, sir, positively for nothing. Ten francs apiece; the set of twelve for a hundred. . . .

The touts, the pimps, the mendicants of Italy are the energetic members of a conquering, progressive race. The Neapolitan cabman is a disciple of Samuel Smiles; the vendors of pornographic post cards and the sturdy beggars live their lives with a strenuousness that would have earned the commendation of a Roosevelt. Self-help and the strenuous life do not flourish on the other shore of the Mediterranean. In Tunisia the tourist walks abroad unpestered. The Arabs have no future.

And yet there were periods in the past when the Arabs were a progressing people. During the centuries which immediately followed Mohammed's apostolate, the Arabs had a future — a future and a most formidable present. Too much insistence on the fatalism inherent in their religion has reduced them to the condition of static lethargy and supine incuriousness in which they now find themselves. That they might still have a future if they changed their philosophy of life must be obvious to anyone who has watched the behaviour of Arab children, who have not yet had time to be influenced by the prevailing fatalism of Islam. Arab children are as lively, as inquisitive, as tiresome and as charming as the children of the most progressively Western people. At Nefta the adult beggars and donkey drivers might leave us, resignedly, in peace; but the children were unescapable. We could never stir abroad without finding a little troop of them frisking around us. It was in vain that we tried to drive them away; they accompanied us, whether we liked it or no, on every walk, and, when the walk was over, claimed wages for their importunate fidelity.

To provide tourists with guidance they did not need — this, we found, was the staple profession of the little boys of Nefta. But they had other and more ingenious ways of making money. Close and acute observers of tourists, they had made an important psychological discovery about this curious race of beings. Foreigners, they found out, especially elderly female foreigners, have a preposterous tenderness for animals. The little boys of Nefta have systematically exploited this discovery. Their methods, which we had frequent opportunities of

observing, are simple and effective. In front of the hotel a gang of little ruffians is perpetually on the watch. A tourist shows himself, or herself, on one of the balconies: immediately the general of the troop — or perhaps it would be better to call him the director of the company, for it is obvious that the whole affair is organized on a strictly business footing — runs forward to within easy coin-tossing distance. From somewhere about his person he produces a captive bird — generally some brightly coloured little creature not unlike a goldfinch. Smiling up at the tourist, he shows his prize. ‘Oiseau,’ he explains in his pidgin French. When the tourist has been made to understand that the bird is alive, the little boy proceeds, with the elaborate gestures of a conjurer, to pretend to wring its neck, to pull off its legs and wings, to pluck out its feathers. For a tender-hearted tourist the menacing pantomime is unbearable.

‘Lâche la bête. Je te donne dix sous.’

Released, the bird flaps ineffectually away, as well as its clipped wings will permit. The coins are duly thrown and in the twinkling of an eye picked up. And the little boys scamper off to recapture the feebly fluttering source of their income. After seeing an old English lady blackmailed out of a small fortune for the ten-times-repeated release of a single captive, we hardened our hearts whenever birds were produced for our benefit. The little boys went through the most elaborately savage mimicry. We looked on calmly. In actual fact, we observed, they never did their victims any harm. A bird, it was obvious, was far too valuable to be lightly killed; goldfinches during the tourist season laid golden eggs. Besides, they were really very nice little boys and fond of their pets. When they saw that we had seen through their trick and could not be induced to pay ransom, they grinned up at us without malice and knowingly, as though we were their accomplices, and carefully put the birds away.

The importunity of the little boys was tiresome when one wanted to be alone. But if one happened to be in the mood for it, their company was exceedingly entertaining. The exploitation of the tourists was a monopoly which the most active of the children had arrogated, by force and cunning, to themselves. There was a little gang of them who shared the loot and kept competitors at a distance.

By the time we left, we had got to know them very well. When we walked abroad, small strangers tried to join our party; but they were savagely driven away with shouts and blows. We were private property; no trespassing was tolerated. It was only by threatening to stop their wages that we could persuade the captains of the Nefta tourist industry to desist from persecuting their rivals. There was one particularly charming little boy — mythically beautiful, as only Arab children can be beautiful — who was the object of their special fury. The captains of the tourist industry were ugly: they dreaded the rivalry of this lovely child. And they were right; he was irresistible. We insisted on his being permitted to accompany us.

‘But why do you send him away?’ we asked.

‘Lui méchant,’ the captains of industry replied in their rudimentary French. ‘Lui casser un touriste.’

‘He smashed a tourist?’ we repeated in some astonishment.

They nodded. Blushing, even the child himself seemed reluctantly to admit the truth of their accusations. We could get no further explanations; none of them knew enough French to give them. ‘Lui méchant. Lui casser un touriste.’ That was all we could discover. The lovely child looked at us appealingly. We decided to run the risk of being smashed and let him come with us. I may add that we came back from all our walks quite intact.

Under the palm trees, through that labyrinth of paths and running streams, we wandered interminably with our rabble of little guides. Most often it was to that part of the oasis called the Corbeille that we went. At the bottom of a rounded valley, theatre-shaped and with smooth steep sides of sand, a score of springs suddenly gush out. There are little lakes, jade green like those pools beneath the cypresses of the Villa d’Este at Tivoli. Round their borders the palm trees go jetting up, like fountains fixed in their upward aspiring gesture, their drooping crown of leaves a green spray arrested on the point of falling. Fountains of life — and five yards away the smooth unbroken slopes of sand glare in the sun. A little river flows out from the lakes, at first between high banks, then into an open sheet of water where the children paddle and bathe, the beasts come down

to drink, the women do their washing. The river is the main road in this part of the oasis. The Arabs, when they want to get from place to place, tuck up their night-shirts and wade. Shoes and stockings, not to mention the necessity for keeping up their dignified prestige, do not permit Europeans to follow their example. It is only on mule-back that Europeans use the river road. On foot, with our little guides, we had to scramble precariously on the slopes of crumbling banks, to go balancing across bridges made of a single palm stem, to overleap the mud walls of gardens. The owners of these gardens had a way of making us indirectly pay toll for our passage across their property. Politely, they asked us if we would like a drink of palm wine. It was impossible to say no; we protested that we should be delighted. With the agility of a monkey, a boy would fairly run up a palm tree, to bring down with him a little earthenware pot full of the sap which flows from an incision made for the purpose at the top of the stem, in the centre of the crown of leaves. The pot, never too scrupulously clean, was offered to us; we had to drink, or at least pretend to drink, a horribly sickly fluid tasting of sugared water slightly flavoured with the smell of fresh cabbage leaves. One was happy to pay a franc or two to be allowed to return the stuff untasted to the owner. I may add here that none of the drinks indigenous to Nefta are satisfactory. The palm juice makes one sick, the milk is rather goaty, and the water is impregnated with magnesia, has a taste of Carlsbad or Hunyadi Janos, and produces on all but hardened drinkers of it the same physiological effects as do the waters of those more celebrated springs. There is no alternative but wine. And fortunately Tunisia is rich in admirable vintages. The red wines of Carthage are really delicious, and even the smallest of vins ordinaires are very drinkable.

A fertile oasis possesses a characteristic colour scheme of its own, which is entirely unlike that of any landscape in Italy or the north. The fundamental note is struck by the palms. Their foliage, except where the stiff shiny leaves metallically reflect the light, is a rich blue-green. Beneath them, one walks in a luminous aquarium shadow, broken by innumerable vivid shafts of sunlight that scatter gold over the ground or, touching the trunks of the palm trees, make them shine a pale ashy pink through the subaqueous shadow. There is pink, too, in the

glaring whiteness of the sand beyond the fringes of the oasis. Under the palms, beside the brown or jade-coloured water, glows the bright emerald green of corn or the deciduous trees of the north, with here and there the huge yellowish leaves of a banana tree, the smoky grey of olives, or the bare bone-white and writhing form of a fig tree.

As the sun gradually sinks, the aquarium shadow beneath the palm trees grows bluer, denser; you imagine yourself descending through layer after darkening layer of water. Only the pale skeletons of the fig trees stand out distinctly; the waters gleam like eyes in the dark ground; the ghost of a little marabout or chapel shows its domed silhouette, white and strangely definite in the growing darkness, through a gap in the trees. But looking up from the depths of this submarine twilight, one sees the bright pale sky of evening, and against it, still touched by the level, rosily-golden light, gleaming as though transmuted into sheets of precious metal, the highest leaves of the palm trees.

A little wind springs up; the palm leaves rattle together; it is suddenly cold. ‘En avant,’ we call. Our little guides quicken their pace. We follow them through the darkening mazes of the palm forest, out into the open. The village lies high on the desert plateau above the oasis, desert-coloured, like an arid outcrop of the tawny rock. We mount to its nearest gate. Through passage-ways between blank walls, under long dark tunnels the children lead us — an obscure and tortuous way which we never succeeded in thoroughly mastering — back to the square market-place at the centre of the town. The windows of the inn glimmer invitingly. At the door we pay off the captains of industry and the little tourist-smasher; we enter. Within the hotel it is provincial France.

For longer expeditions entailing the use of mules or asses, we had to take grown-up guides. They knew almost as little French as the children, and their intelligence was wrapped impenetrably in the folds of fatalism. Talking to an Islamically educated Arab is like talking to a pious European of the fourteenth century. Every phenomenon is referred by them to its final cause — to God. About the immediate causes of things — precisely how they happen — they

seem to feel not the slightest interest. Indeed, it is not even admitted that there are such things as immediate causes: God is directly responsible for everything.

‘Do you think it will rain?’ you ask, pointing to menacing clouds overhead.

‘If God wills,’ is the answer.

You pass the native hospital. ‘Are the doctors good?’

‘In our country,’ the Arab gravely replies, in the tone of Solomon, ‘we say that doctors are of no avail. If Allah wills that a man shall die, he will die. If not, he will recover.’

All of which is profoundly true, so true, indeed, that it is not worth saying. To the Arab, however, it seems the last word in human wisdom. For him, God is the perfectly adequate explanation of everything; he leaves fate to do things unassisted, in its own way — that is to say, from the human point of view, the worst way.

It is difficult for us to realize nowadays that our fathers once thought much as the Arabs do now. As late as the seventeenth century, the chemist Boyle found it necessary to protest against what I may call this Arabian view of things.

‘For to explicate a phenomenon,’ he wrote, ‘it is not enough to ascribe it to one general efficient, but we must intelligibly show the particular manner, how that general cause produces the proposed effect. He must be a very dull inquirer who, demanding an account of the phenomena of a watch, shall rest satisfied with being told that it is an engine made by a watchmaker; though nothing be declared thereby of the structure and coaptation of the spring, wheels, balance, etc., and the manner how they act on one another so as to make the needle point out the true time of the day.’

The Arabs were once the continuators of the Greek tradition; they produced men of science. They have relapsed — all except those who are educated according to Western methods — into pre-scientific fatalism, with its attendant incuriosity and apathy. They are the ‘dull inquirers who, demanding an account of the phenomena of a watch, rest satisfied with being told that it is an engine made by a watchmaker.’ The result of their satisfaction with this extremely unsatisfactory answer is that their villages look like the ruins of villages, that the

blow-flies sit undisturbedly feeding on the eyelids of those whom Allah has predestined to blindness, that half their babies die, and that, politically, they are not their own masters.

THE OLIVE TREE

THE TREE OF Life; the Bodhi Tree; Yggdrasil and the Burning Bush: Populus Alcidae gratissima, vitis Iaccho,

formosae myrtus Veneri, sua laurea Phoebo. . . .

Everywhere and, before the world was finally laicized, at all times, trees have been worshipped. It is not to be wondered at. The tree is an intrinsically ‘numinous’ being. Solidified, a great fountain of life rises in the trunk, spreads in the branches, scatters in a spray of leaves and flowers and fruits. With a slow, silent ferocity the roots go burrowing down into the earth. Tender, yet irresistible, life battles with the unliving stones and has the mastery. Half hidden in the darkness, half displayed in the air of heaven, the tree stands there, magnificent, a manifest god. Even to-day we feel its majesty and beauty — feel in certain circumstances its rather fearful quality of otherness, strangeness, hostility. Trees in the mass can be almost terrible. There are devils in the great pine-woods of the North, in the swarming equatorial jungle. Alone in a forest one sometimes becomes aware of the silence — the thick, clotted, living silence of the trees; one realizes one’s isolation in the midst of a vast concourse of alien presences. Herne the Hunter was something more than the ghost of a Windsor gamekeeper. He was probably a survival of Jupiter Cernunnus; a lineal descendant of the Cretan Zeus; a wood god who in some of his aspects was frightening and even malignant.

He blasts the tree, and takes the cattle,
And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain
In a most hideous and dreadful manner.

Even in a royal forest and only twenty miles from London, the serried trees can inspire terror. Alone or in small groups, trees are benignly numinous. The alienness of the forest is so much attenuated in the park or the orchard that it changes its emotional sign and from oppressively sinister becomes delightful. Tamed and isolated, those leaping fountains of non-human life bring only refreshment to spirits parched by the dusty commerce of the world. Poetry is full of groves and shrubberies. One thinks of Milton, landscape-gardening in Eden, of Pope, at Twickenham. One remembers Coleridge's sycamore and Marvell's green thought in a green shade. Chaucer's love of trees was so great that he had to compile a whole catalogue in order to express it.

But, Lorde, so I was glad and wel begoon!
For over al, where I myn eyen caste,
Weren trees, claad with levys that ay shal laste,
Eche in his kynde, with colours fressh and grene
As emerawde, that joy was for to sene.
The bylder oke, and eke the hardy asshe,
The peler (pillar) elme, the cofre unto careyne,
The box pipe tree, holme to whippes lasshe,
The saylynge firre, the cipresse deth to pleyne,
The sheter (shooter) ewe, the aspe for shaftes pleyne,
The olyve of pes, and eke the drunken vyne
The victor palme, the laurere, to, devyne.

I like them all, but especially the olive. For what it symbolizes, first of all — peace with its leaves and joy with its golden oil. True, the crown of olive was originally worn by Roman conquerors at ovation; the peace it proclaimed was the peace of victory, the peace which is too often only the tranquillity of exhaustion or complete annihilation. Rome and its customs have passed, and we remember of the olive only the fact that it stood for peace, not the circumstances in which it did so.

Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd,

And peace proclaims olives of endless age.

We are a long way from the imperator riding in triumph through the streets of Rome.

The association of olive leaves with peace is like the association of the number seven with good luck, or the colour green with hope. It is an arbitrary and, so to say, metaphysical association. That is why it has survived in the popular imagination down to the present day. Even in countries where the olive tree does not grow, men understand what is meant by ‘the olive branch’ and can recognize, in a political cartoon, its pointed leaves. The association of olive oil with joy had a pragmatic reason. Applied externally, oil was supposed to have medicinal properties. In the ancient world those who could afford it were in the habit of oiling themselves at every opportunity. A shiny and well lubricated face was thought to be beautiful; it was also a sign of prosperity. To the ancient Mediterranean peoples the association of oil with joy seemed inevitable and obvious. Our habits are not those of the Romans, Greeks and Hebrews. What to them was ‘natural’ is to-day hardly even imaginable. Patterns of behaviour change, and ideas which are associated in virtue of the pattern existing at a given moment of history will cease to be associated when that pattern exists no more. But ideas which are associated arbitrarily, in virtue of some principle, or some absence of principle, unconnected with current behaviour patterns, will remain associated through changing circumstances. One must be something of an archaeologist to remember the old and once thoroughly reasonable association between olive oil and joy; the equally old, but quite unreasonable and arbitrary association between olive leaves and peace has survived intact into the machine age.

It is surprising, I often think, that our Protestant bibliolaters should have paid so little attention to the oil which played such an important part in the daily lives of the ancient Hebrews. All that was greasy possessed for the Jews a profound religious, social and sensuous significance. Oil was used for anointing kings, priests and sacred edifices. On festal days men’s cheeks and noses fairly shone with it; a matt-surfaced face was a sign of mourning. Then there were the animal

fats. Fat meat was always a particularly welcome sacrifice. Unlike the modern child, Jehovah revelled in mutton fat. His worshippers shared this taste. ‘Eat ye that which is good,’ advises Isaiah, ‘and let your soul delight itself in fatness.’ As for the prosperously wicked, ‘they have more than their heart can wish’ and the proof of it is that ‘their eyes stand out with fatness.’ The world of the Old Testament, it is evident, was one where fats were scarce and correspondingly esteemed. One of our chief sources of edible fat, the pig, was taboo to the Israelites. Butter and lard depend on a supply of grass long enough for cows to get their tongues round. But the pastures of Palestine are thin, short and precarious. Cows there had no milk to spare, and oxen were too valuable as draught animals to be used for suet. Only the sheep and the olive remained as sources of that physiologically necessary and therefore delicious fatness in which the Hebrew soul took such delight. How intense that delight was is proved by the way in which the Psalmist describes his religious experiences. ‘Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. . . . My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips.’ In this age of Danish bacon and unlimited margarine it would never occur to a religious writer to liken the mystical ecstasy to a good guzzle at the Savoy. If he wanted to describe it in terms of a sensuous experience, he would probably choose a sexual metaphor. Square meals are now too common to be ranked as epoch-making treats.

The ‘olyve of pes’ is, then, a symbol and I love it for what it stands for. I love it also for what it is in itself, aesthetically; for what it is in relation to the Mediterranean landscape in which it beautifully plays its part.

The English are Germans who have partially ‘gone Latin.’ But for William the Conqueror and the Angevins we should be just another nation of Teutons, speaking some uninteresting dialect of Dutch or Danish. The Normans gave us the English language, that beautifully compounded mixture of French and Saxon; and the English language moulded the English mind. By Latin out of German: such is our pedigree. We are essentially mongrels: that is the whole point of us. To be mongrels is our mission. If we would fulfil this mission

adequately we must take pains to cultivate our mongrelism. Our Saxon and Celtic flesh requires to be constantly rewedded to the Latin spirit. For the most part the English have always realized this truth and acted upon it. From the time of Chaucer onwards almost all our writers have turned, by a kind of infallible instinct, like swallows, towards the South — towards the phantoms of Greece and Rome, towards the living realities of France and Italy. On the rare occasions when, losing their orientation, they have turned eastward and northward, the results have been deplorable. The works of Carlyle are there, an awful warning, to remind us of what happens when the English forget that their duty is to be mongrels and go whoring, within the bounds of consanguinity, after German gods.

The olive tree is an emblem of the Latinity towards which our migrant's instinct commands us perpetually to turn. As well as for peace and for joy, it stands for all that makes us specifically English rather than Teutonic; for those Mediterranean influences without which Chaucer and Shakespeare could never have become what they learned from France and Italy, from Rome and Greece, to be — the most essentially native of our poets. The olive tree is, so to speak, the complement of the oak; and the bright hard-edged landscapes in which it figures are the necessary correctives of those gauzy and indeterminate lovelinesses of the English scene. Under a polished sky the olives state their aesthetic case without the qualifications of mist, of shifting lights, of atmospheric perspective, which give to English landscapes their subtle and melancholy beauty. A perfect beauty in its way; but, as of all good things, one can have too much of it. The British Constitution is a most admirable invention; but it is good to come back occasionally to fixed first principles and the firm outline of syllogistic argument.

With clarity and definition is associated a certain physical spareness. Most of the great deciduous trees of England give one the impression, at any rate in summer, of being rather obese. In Scandinavian mythology Embla, the elm, was the first woman. Those who have lived much with old elm trees — and I spent a good part of my boyhood under their ponderous shade — will agree that the

Scandinavians were men of insight. There is in effect something blowsily female about those vast trees that brood with all their bulging masses of foliage above the meadows of the home counties. In winter they are giant skeletons; and for a moment in the early spring a cloud of transparent emerald vapour floats in the air; but by June they have settled down to an enormous middle age.

By comparison the olive tree seems an athlete in training. It sits lightly on the earth and its foliage is never completely opaque. There is always air between the thin grey and silver leaves of the olive, always the flash of light within its shadows. By the end of summer the foliage of our northern trees is a great clot of dark unmitigated green. In the olive the lump is always leavened.

The landscape of the equator is, as the traveller discovers to his no small surprise, singularly like the landscape of the more luxuriant parts of southern England. He finds the same thick woods and, where man has cleared them, the same park-like expanses of luscious greenery. The whole is illumined by the same cloudy sky, alternately bright and dark, and wetted by precisely those showers of hot water which render yet more oppressive the sultriness of July days in the Thames valley or in Devonshire. The equator is England in summer, but raised, so to speak, to a higher power. Falmouth cubed equals Singapore. Between the equatorial and the temperate zone lies a belt of drought; even Provence is half a desert. The equator is dank, the tropics and the sub-tropics are predominantly dry. The Sahara and Arabia, the wastes of India and Central Asia and North America are a girdle round the earth of sand and naked rock. The Mediterranean lies on the fringes of this desert belt and the olive is its tree — the tree of a region of sun-lit clarity separating the damps of the equator from the damps of the North. It is the symbol of a classicism enclosed between two romanticisms.

‘And where,’ Sir George Beaumont inquired of Constable, ‘where do you put your brown tree?’ The reply was disquieting: the eccentric fellow didn’t put it anywhere. There are no brown trees in Constable’s landscapes. Breaking the tradition of more than a century, he boldly insisted on painting his trees bright green. Sir George, who had been brought up to think of English landscape in

terms of raw Sienna and ochre, was bewildered. So was Chantrey. His criticism of Constable's style took a practical form. When 'Hadleigh Castle' was sent to the Academy he took a pot of bitumen and glazed the whole foreground with a coat of rich brown. Constable had to spend several hours patiently scratching it off again. To paint a bright green tree and make a successful picture of it requires genius of no uncommon order. Nature is embarrassingly brilliant and variegated; only the greatest colourists know how to deal with such a shining profusion. Doubtful of their powers, the more cautious prefer to transpose reality into another and simpler key. The key of brown, for example. The England of the eighteenth-century painters is chronically autumnal.

At all seasons of the year the olive achieves that sober neutrality of tone which the deciduous trees of the North put on only in autumn and winter. 'Where do you put your grey tree?' If you are painting in Provence, or Tuscany, you put it everywhere. At every season of the year the landscape is full of grey trees. The olive is essentially a painter's tree. It does not need to be transposed into another key, and it can be rendered completely in terms of pigment that are as old as the art of painting.

Large expanses of the Mediterranean scene are by Nature herself conceived and executed in the earth colours. Your grey tree and its background of bare bone-like hills, red-brown earth and the all but black cypresses and pines are within the range of the most ascetic palette. Derain can render Provence with half a dozen tubes of colour. How instructive to compare his olives with those of Renoir! White, black, terra verde — Derain's rendering of the grey tree is complete. But it is not the only complete rendering. Renoir was a man with a passion for bright gay colours. To this passion he added an extraordinary virtuosity in combining them. It was not in his nature to be content with a black, white and earth-green olive. His grey trees have shadows of cadmium green, and where they look towards the sun, are suffused with a glow of pink. Now, no olive has ever shown a trace of any colour warmer than the faint ochre of withering leaves and summer dusts. Nevertheless these pink trees, which in Renoir's paintings of Cagnes recall the exuberant girls of his latest, rosiest

manner, are somehow quite startlingly like the cold grey olives which they apparently misrepresent. The rendering, so different from Derain's, is equally complete and satisfying.

If I could paint and had the necessary time, I should devote myself for a few years to making pictures only of olive trees. What a wealth of variations upon a single theme! Above Pietrasanta, for example, the first slopes of the Apuan Alps rise steeply from the plain in a series of terraces built up, step after step, by generations of patient cultivators. The risers of this great staircase are retaining walls of unmortared limestone; the treads, of grass. And on every terrace grow the olives. They are ancient trees; their boles are gnarled, their branches strangely elbowed. Between the sharp narrow leaves one sees the sky; and beneath them in the thin softly tempered light there are sheep grazing. Far off, on a level with the eye, lies the sea. There is one picture, one series of pictures.

But olives will grow on the plain as well as on the hillside. Between Seville and Cordoba the rolling country is covered with what is almost a forest of olive trees. It is a woodland scene. Elsewhere they are planted more sparsely. I think, for example, of that plain at the foot of the Maures in Provence. In spring, beside the road from Toulon to Fréjus, the ploughed earth is a rich Pozzuoli red. Above it hang the olives, grey, with soft black shadows and their highest leaves flashing white against the sky; and, between the olives, peach trees in blossom — burning bushes of shell-pink flame in violent and irreconcilable conflict with the red earth. A problem, there, for the most accomplished painter.

In sunlight Renoir saw a flash of madder breaking out of the grey foliage. Under a clouded sky, with rain impending, the olives glitter with an equal but very different intensity. There is no warmth in them now; the leaves shine white, as though illumined from within by a kind of lunar radiance. The soft black of the shadows is deepened to the extreme of night. In every tree there is simultaneously moonlight and darkness. Under the approaching storm the olives take on another kind of being; they become more conspicuous in the landscape, more significant. Of what? Significant of what? But to that question, when we ask it, nature always stubbornly refuses to return a clear reply. At the sight of

those mysterious lunar trees, at once so dark and so brilliant beneath the clouds, we ask, as Zechariah asked of the angel: ‘What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.’ And that, I imagine, is about as explicit and comprehensible an answer as our Wordsworthian questionings are ever likely to receive.

Provence is a painter’s paradise, and its tree, the olive, the painter’s own tree. But there are disquieting signs of change. During the last few years there has been a steady destruction of olive orchards. Magnificent old trees are being cut, their wood sold for firing and the land they occupied planted with vines. Fifty years from now, it may be, the olive tree will almost have disappeared from southern France, and Provence will wear another aspect. It may be, I repeat; it is not certain. Nothing is certain nowadays except change. Even the majestic stability of agriculture has been shaken by the progress of technology. Thirty years ago, for example, the farmers of the Rhône valley grew rich on silkworms. Then came the invention of viscose. The caterpillars tried to compete with the machines and failed. The female form is now swathed in woodpulp, and between Lyons and Avignon the mulberry tree and its attendant worm are all but extinct. Vines were next planted. But North Africa was also planting vines. In a year of plenty vin ordinaire fetches about a penny a quart. The vines have been rooted up again, and to-day the prosperity of the Rhône valley depends on peach trees. A few years from now, no doubt, the Germans will be making synthetic peaches out of sawdust or coal tar. And then — what?

The enemy of the olive tree is the peanut. Arachis hypogaea grows like a weed all over the tropics and its seeds are fifty per cent. pure oil. The olive is slow-growing, capricious in its yield, requires much pruning, and the fruit must be hand picked. Peanut oil is half the price of olive oil. The Italians, who wish to keep their olive trees, have almost forbidden the use of peanut oil. The French,

on the other hand, are the greatest importers of peanuts in Europe. Most of the oil they make is re-exported; but enough remains in France to imperil the olives of Provence. Will they go the way of the mulberry trees? Or will some new invention come rushing up in the nick of time with a reprieve? It seems that, suitably treated, olive oil makes an excellent lubricant, capable of standing up to high temperatures. Thirty years from now, mineral lubricants will be growing scarce. Along with the castor-oil plant, the olive tree may come again triumphantly into its own. Perhaps. Or perhaps not. The future of Provençal landscape is in the hands of the chemists. It is in their power to preserve it as it is, or to alter it out of all recognition.

It would not be the first time in the course of its history that the landscape of Provence has changed its face. The Provence that we know — terraced vineyard and olive orchard alternating with pine-woods and those deserts of limestone and prickly bushes which are locally called garrigues — is profoundly unlike the Provence of Roman and mediaeval times. It was a land, then, of great forests. The hills were covered with a splendid growth of ilex trees and Aleppo pines. The surviving Forêt du Dom allows us to guess what these woods — the last outposts towards the south of the forests of the temperate zone — were like. To-day the garrigues, those end products of a long degeneration, have taken their place. The story of Provençal vegetation is a decline and fall, that begins with the ilex wood and ends with the garrigue.

The process of destruction is a familiar one. The trees were cut for firewood and shipbuilding. (The naval arsenal at Toulon devoured the forest for miles around.) The glass industry ate its way from the plain into the mountains, carrying with it irreparable destruction. Meanwhile, the farmers and the shepherds were busy, cutting into the woods in search of more land for the plough, burning them in order to have more pasture for their beasts. The young trees sprouted again — only to be eaten by the sheep and goats. In the end they gave up the struggle and what had been forest turned at last to a blasted heath. The long process of degradation ends in the garrigue. And even this blasted heath is not quite the end. Beyond the true garrigue, with its cistus, its broom, its

prickly dwarf oak, there lie a series of false garrigues, vegetably speaking worse than the true. On purpose or by accident, somebody sets fire to the scrub. In the following spring the new shoots are eaten down to the ground. A coarse grass — baouco in Provençal — is all that manages to spring up. The shepherd is happy; his beasts can feed, as they could not do on the garrigue. But sheep and goats are ravenous. The new pasture is soon overgrazed. The baouco is torn up by the roots and disappears, giving place to ferocious blue thistles and the poisonous asphodel. With the asphodel the process is complete. Degradation can go no further. The asphodel is sheep-proof and even, thanks to its deeply planted tubers, fire-proof. And it allows very little else to grow in its neighbourhood. If protected long enough from fire and animals, the garrigue will gradually build itself up again into a forest. But a desert of asphodels obstinately remains itself.

Efforts are now being made to reafforest the blasted heaths of Provence. In an age of cigarette-smoking tourists the task is difficult and the interruptions by fire frequent and disheartening. One can hardly doubt, however, of the ultimate success of the undertaking. The chemists may spare the olive trees; and yet the face of Provence may still be changed. For the proper background to the olive trees is the thinly fledged limestone of the hills — pinkish and white and pale blue in the distance, like Cézanne’s Mont Sainte Victoire. Reafforested, these hills will be almost black with ilex and pine. Half the painter’s paradise will have gone, if the desert is brought back to life. With the cutting of the olive trees the other half will follow.

What are You Going to Do About it?

THE CASE FOR CONSTRUCTIVE PEACE

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What are you going to do about it?

The case for constructive peace

FEELING, WILLING, THINKING — these are the three modes of ordinary human activity. To be complete, life must be lived simultaneously on all three planes. To concentrate on only one mode at the expense of the rest, or on two at the expense of the third, is to court immediate or postponed disaster. In any important vital situation it is never enough to feel, never enough to will, never enough merely to think. We must do all at once.

Many naturally sensitive and gentle people have an intense feeling that there should be no more war. In some of these, feeling is accompanied by a determination that there shall be no more war, a will-to-peace that is ready to translate itself into action. But feeling without will or thought is impotent and tends to degenerate into mere self-indulgence. Feeling accompanied by will may result in action; but if there is no guiding thought, it is likely that the action will be ineffective because blind and misdirected. In this pamphlet an attempt is made to provide all those who ***feel*** that war is an abomination, all who ***will*** that it shall cease, with an intellectual justification for their attitude; to show that their feeling and willing are essentially reasonable, that what is called the utopian dream of pacifism is in fact a practical policy — indeed, the only practical, the only realistic policy that there is.

Pacifists are people who have broken with an old-established convention of thought and, like all innovators, find themselves constantly subjected, off the platform as well as on it, to a process of more or less intelligent heckling. This being so, it has seemed best to state the pacifist case in terms of a series of answers to common antipacifist objections. It is proposed to deal with these objections in order, beginning with the most general, based on considerations of

biology, and proceeding to the most specific, based on a consideration of contemporary politics.

I

THE FIRST OBJECTION raised by our imaginary heckler is that "war is a law of nature." Therefore, it is argued, we cannot get rid of it. What are the facts? They are these: conflict is certainly common in the animal kingdom. But, with very rare exceptions, conflict is between isolated individuals. "War" in the sense of conflict between armies exists among certain species of social insects. But it is significant that these insects do not make war on members of their own species, only on those of other species. Man is probably unique in making war on his own species.

Tennyson wrote of "Nature red in tooth and claw." But an animal can be bloodthirsty without being war-like. The activities of such creatures as tigers, sharks and weasels are no more war-like than those of butchers and sportsmen. The carnivores kill members of other species either for food or else, like fox-hunters and pheasant-shooters, to amuse themselves. Conflicts between individual animals of the same species are common enough. But again they are no more war-like than duels or pothouse brawls among human beings. Like human beings, animals fight mainly for love, sometimes (as with the birds that defend their "territory") for property, sometimes for social position. But they do not make war. War is quite definitely not a "law of nature."

II

GENERALS WHO INSPECT the O.T.C.'s of public schools are fond of telling their youthful audiences that "man is a fighting animal." Now, in the sense that, like stags, men quarrel for love, like white-throats, for property, and, like barn-door fowls, for position in society, this statement may be regarded as true. Like even the mildest animals — and it is probable that our pre-human ancestors were gentle creatures something like the tarsias of to-day — men have always done a good deal of "scrapping." In some places and at some epochs of history this "scrapping" was a violent and savage affair; at others, relatively harmless: it has been entirely a matter of convention. Thus, in Europe, three hundred years ago, "the best people" were expected to fight a duel on the slightest provocation; now they are not expected to do so. Within the life-time of men still with us, games of rugby football ended, and were meant to end, in broken legs. On the modern football field broken legs are no longer in fashion. The rules for casual individual "scrapping" and for those organized group-contests which we call sport, have been changed, on the whole, for the better. The rules of war, on the contrary, have changed in every way for the worse. In the eighteenth century Marlborough gave a day's notice before beginning the bombardment of a town. To-day even a formal declaration of war is coming to be regarded as unnecessary. (Italy, for example, dispensed with it completely when attacking Abyssinia.) "A declaration of war," writes General Ludendorff, "is a waste of time and also it sometimes unfortunately, brands the nation who makes it." Therefore, if we want to win and at the same time to avoid being stigmatized as aggressors, we should attack without warning.

To sum up, man is a fighting animal in the sense that he is a "scrapping animal." It is for man and man alone to decide whether he shall do his "scrapping" murderously or according to rules which limit the amount of

violence used or even, as in the case of non-violent resistance, abolish it altogether. Mass murder is no more a necessity than individual murder. In 1600 duelling must have seemed to many intelligent people a law of nature. But the fact remains that we have abolished duelling. There is no reason why we should not abolish war.

III

AT THIS POINT the objector appeals to Darwin. “The struggle for existence,” he insists, “goes on in the human as well as in the sub-human world. War is the method by which nature selects the fittest human beings.”

But whom or what does war select for survival? The answer is that, so far as individuals are concerned, it selects women, children and such men as are too old or infirm to bear arms. The young and the strong, who do the fighting, are eliminated; and the larger the army and the more efficient the weapons, the greater the number of young, strong men who will be killed. War selects dysgenically.

The objector now falls back on a second line of defence. War may be a clumsy way of selecting individuals; but its real value lies in its power to select the best stocks, governments and cultures. But if we look at the records of history we see that war has done its selection in a very erratic way. Sometimes, it is true, victory in war does unquestionably lead to replacement of the defeated by the victorious stock. But this can happen only when the victors exterminate their enemies or else drive them out of the territories previously occupied by them. This was the case, for example, in North America — a very thinly inhabited country. More often, however, the conquerors do not exterminate the conquered, but settle down among them as a ruling minority. Miscegenation takes place and the victors soon lose whatever racial purity they may have possessed and become ethnically assimilated to the vanquished. A stock may lose the military, but win the biological, battle.

What is true of race is true of cultures and governments. Sometimes conquerors impose their cultures and governmental methods on the vanquished. Sometimes they fail to do so. Of the cultures by which the modern world has been most profoundly influenced, two — the Hebrew and the Greek — were the

cultures of peoples who suffered final and complete military defeat at the hands of their enemies. War, we may agree, selects races, cultures and governments. But with a fine impartiality it selects those of the vanquished at least as often as it selects those of the victors.

IV

SO MUCH FOR the third objection; now for the fourth. “We may dislike war,” says the heckler, “but war has always been used as an instrument of policy and we must presume that it always will be so used. Consider the lessons of history and be resigned to the inevitable evil.”

Now, until recent years, the lessons of history lent a certain support to the militarists. Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Babylonians, Sumerians — all used war as an instrument of policy. The written records and archæological documents seemed to show that wars had been invariably correlated with civilization. Primitive peoples, like the Eskimos, might be ignorant of war and find the very idea of it inconceivable. But the civilized had always used it — and presumably would always continue to use it. Recent archæological research has shown that this correlation between war and civilization has not been invariable. The civilization of the Indus Valley was as rich and elaborate as those of Sumer and Egypt. But it was a civilization that knew nothing of war. No weapons have been found in its buried cities, nor any trace of fortification. This fact is of the highest significance. It proves that it is possible for men to enjoy the advantages of a complex urban civilization without having to pay for them by periodical mass-murders. What men have done, they can do again. History teaches us that war is not inevitable. Once again, it is for us to choose whether we use war or some other method of settling the ordinary and unavoidable conflicts between groups of men. Where there’s a will — and, along with will, feeling and intelligence — there’s a way. The nature of that way will be discussed later.

V

THE FIFTH OBJECTION comes from those who insist that the only sanction of social order is violence. “If there is to be peace or justice, it must be imposed by force. In the case of the international community of sovereign states, this peace-securing, justice-creating force is war. Therefore there must be war.”

(i) This objection raises three points which must be dealt with separately. First, is it true that social order rests on force? When we come to look at the facts, we find that, though force plays a part in preserving order within a community, that part is extremely small. Moreover, the part played by force becomes proportionately smaller the longer peaceful methods have been used. The resolute refusal of the English to arm their police is one of the reasons why England is a law-abiding country, in which it is so seldom necessary to use force. But even in the least law-abiding of countries the real sanctions for order and justice are public opinion and the desire felt by every individual to be thought well of by his fellows. Force cannot impose permanent order on a people which is hostile to the wielders of force. There can be no stable government that is not government by consent. Even dictators realize that ruthlessness is not enough. Hence that flood of propaganda designed to make their regime popular, not only at home but also beyond their own frontiers. Even in prisons where the governor has more absolute control over his subjects than any dictator, it has been found that a man who is unpopular with the prisoners cannot rule them. Societies exist and are orderly because, in the last resort, the forces in human nature making for co-operation are stronger than those divisive forces making for anti-social conduct. Incidentally, war itself presupposes this preponderance of co-operative over divisive tendencies. An army could not be raised or, once raised, held together, if it were not for the co-operative spirit in each of its members. Once more, the choice is ours: we may either arbitrarily limit the co-

operative spirit within the boundaries of a clan or nation; or we may allow it to have free play over the whole world. To love one's neighbour as oneself may mean much or little, according to our interpretation of the word "neighbour." It is left to us to decide whether that interpretation shall be narrow or broad.

(ii) Now for the second point: Can the force employed by the police within a national community be assimilated to the forces used by armies in settling disputes between such communities? Certainly not. Except in times of revolutions, civil war or political anarchy, the amount of force employed within the national community is strictly limited by law and by public opinion. (In England policemen are unarmed, and their power to use force is thus physically reduced to a minimum.) Modern war, on the contrary, is the deliberate use of practically unlimited violence and fraud. A difference in degree, if sufficiently great, turns into a difference in kind. Moreover the aim of war is radically different from the aim of police action. War aims at destruction. Police action does not. From the social point of view the "force" that is war is something quite different from the "force" that is police action. The end of war is destruction, and it employs unrestricted violence as its means. The end of police action is restraint, and its methods are to a great extent non-violent.

(iii) The third point to be considered is this. Even the most ruthless militarists have generally proclaimed that the end they were pursuing was peace. Theologians and philosophers have often justified war on the same grounds: war is permissible because it is a method for securing peace and justice. But, in point of fact, have peace and justice ever been secured by war? Is it possible, in the nature of things, that they can be secured by war? In so far as we are scientists, technicians, or artists, we all admit that the means employed determine the ends achieved. For example, a village blacksmith may be earnestly and sincerely desirous of making a Rolls-Royce engine. But the means at his disposal fatally determine his ends and the thing which finally emerges from the smithy will be very different from the instrument of precision that he intended to make. What is so obviously true of technology and science is no less true of all human

activities. The man who uses violence as a means for securing the love of his family will certainly achieve quite another end. The state which makes war on a neighbour will create, not peace, but the makings of a war of revenge. The means determine the ends; and however excellent intentions may be, bad or merely unsuitable means must inevitably produce results quite unlike the good ends originally proposed. The heckler who adjures us to consider the lessons of history is in fact adjuring us to realize that once war has been adopted as a regular instrument of policy, once the idea that violence is the proper way of getting things done has become established as a truism, there can be no secure and lasting peace, only a series of truces between wars. For war, however "just" it may seem, cannot be waged without the commission of frightful injustices; frightful injustices cannot be committed without arousing the resentment and hatred of those on whom they are committed, or on their friends or successors; and resentment and hatred cannot be satisfied except by revenge. But how can military defeat be avenged except by a military victory? The successive wars to which the historian points are the strongest possible argument against war as a method of securing peace and justice. The means determine the ends, and the end achieved by war is not peace, but more war.

In the past, very fortunately, the means for making war were inadequate. To-day they are so effective that, for the first time in history, indiscriminate and even unintentional massacre has become not only possible but even inevitable. There was a time when civil populations were not slaughtered except by the deliberate order of the conqueror. From this time forward, however humane the commanders of the opposing armies, civil populations can hardly fail to be massacred. Planes, gas, thermite make it all but inevitable. The means of destruction have become so efficient that destruction will be more complete and more indiscriminate than ever before. In clinging to war as an instrument of policy, we are running risks which our ancestors never ran.

VI

THE SIXTH OBJECTION to pacifism is based on moral grounds. “War,” we are told, “is a school of virtues; peace, a school of effeminacy, degeneracy and vice.”

In his ***Philosophy of War*** Steinmetz went much further than this and affirmed that war was not merely a school of virtues, but actually the source of all the virtues, even the most unwarlike. How did early men learn to co-operate with one another? By making war on their fellows. Where did love and mutual aid originate? On the battlefield, among brothers in arms. And so on. Steinmetz’s views are so manifestly absurd that it is unnecessary to discuss them. But our theoretical heckler’s more modest attempt to justify war on moral grounds deserves to be treated seriously. For that war is a school of virtues is in fact true. Courage, self-control, endurance, a spirit of comradeship, a readiness to make the sacrifice of life itself — these are the qualities without which men cannot become good soldiers, or at any rate good subordinate soldiers; for history shows that a man may become a brilliant commander and yet be almost a moral imbecile. The two greatest military geniuses of modern times, Marlborough and Napoleon, were despicable human beings. There was something almost diabolic in the character of Frederick the Great. At the end of the world war almost the only member of the German High Command who displayed the military virtues was Hindenburg. The others disguised themselves and hurried across the frontier into the safety of a neutral country. Such examples could be multiplied. “Great soldiers” have often lacked all the good qualities which we associate with the military profession.

To return to the virtues of the subordinate soldier: these are intrinsically admirable. But do they justify war? This question cannot be answered unless we know, first, what is the price of these virtues in terms of individual vice and

social ruin, and, second, whether war is the only school in which they can be learnt.

Now, it is obvious that the soldier's characteristic virtues are accompanied by equally characteristic vices. The efficient soldier must hate and be angry, must know how to be inhuman, must be troubled, where his enemies are concerned, with no scruples or sensibilities. Moreover, his way of life tends to encourage in him a certain recklessness. He doesn't care for anything or anyone except his fellows and the traditions of his corps. Recklessness is a soil from which some good and much evil may spring — acts of uncommon generosity, but also acts of uncommon brutality.

Nor is this all. Military discipline demands unquestioning obedience. The subordinate soldier is a man who has handed over his reason and his conscience into the keeping of another. But a man who has given up reason and conscience is a man who has given up the most typically human characteristics of human beings. The government of an army is a special and extreme case of that most soul-destroying of all forms of government, a tyranny or, as we now prefer to call it, a dictatorship.

War, then, exacts a gigantic price for the military virtues. Vice and crime are the conditions of their very existence. Can it be right to cultivate virtue by means of wickedness? Those who believe that there exists, apart from self-interest and social convention, a real and absolute goodness, will answer at once that it cannot be right. No man is justified in doing an evil thing that good, as he believes, may come of it.

This view of what ought to be is confirmed by our investigations into what is. For we find that the military virtues can and do exist in individuals devoted not to war, but to the furtherance of peace. The causes of religion and humanitarianism have had their noble soldiers — soldiers whose courage, endurance and self-control were not set off by any personal vice, any crime against society. War is only one, and that the worst, of schools in which men can learn the military virtues.

VII

"YOU HAVE MADE a good case against war," says the objector; "but you have failed to show what is the practical alternative to war. Indeed, you can't do so, because there is no practical alternative. Pacifism doesn't work."

The answer to this is a flat contradiction. Pacifism ***does*** work. True, there is no pacifist technique for arresting shells in mid-trajectory or even for persuading the airmen circling above a city to refrain from dropping their bombs. Pacifism is in the main preventive. If the principles of Pacifism are consistently put into practice the big guns will never be let off and the airmen will never be ordered to drop their bombs. The best way of dealing with typhoid is not to cure it, but to prevent its breaking out. Pacifism is to war what clean water and clean milk are to typhoid; it makes the outbreak of war impossible. But though mainly preventive, pacifism is also, as we shall see, a technique of conflict — a way of fighting without the use of violence.

If you treat other people well, other people will generally treat you well. It is possible to go further and to say that, if you have the opportunity of going on treating them well, they will at last ***invariably*** reciprocate your treatment. Suspicious people may start by reacting badly; but in the long run, trust, affection and disinterestedness will always be answered by trust, affection and disinterestedness. This fact, the truth of which we have all had occasion to demonstrate in our relations with our fellows, is the sure foundation upon which the theory and technique of pacifism are based.

The theory and technique of militarism are based on a psychological assumption that is self-evidently absurd. The militarist sets out to secure other people's good will by making war on them — that is to say by treating them as badly as he possibly can. But it is a matter of everyday experience that if you treat other people badly they will answer (unless, of course, they happen to be

saints or trained pacifists) either by treating you badly at once, or, if the power to return evil for evil is lacking, by waiting in fear, anger and hatred for an opportunity to treat you badly later on. Unless followed by an act of reparation, war will always be answered by war. Hate breeds hate, and violence, violence.

In our relations with other human beings we have all of us, at some time or another, made use of the pacifist technique. By treating people well, we have prevented them from treating us badly or have persuaded them to change their malevolence into kindness. More consciously and consistently, preventive pacifism is employed by doctors when they treat lunatics, by anthropologists when they approach suspicious and unfriendly savages, by naturalists in their dealings with wild animals. On a large scale the methods, not only of preventive, but also of what may be called combative, pacifism were successfully practised by the early Christians in their conflict with the authorities of the Roman Empire; by William Penn and the first settlers of Pennsylvania towards the Redskins; by practically the whole Hungarian nation when, in the sixties of last century, the Emperor Francis Joseph was trying to subordinate that country to Austria in violation of the existing treaty of union; by Gandhi and his followers, first in South Africa and then in India. Furthermore, large numbers of industrial strikes have been conducted on strictly pacifist lines, often with remarkable success. There is enough historical evidence to show that the pacifist technique is unquestionably effective. Why, then, has it not been more widely used as an instrument of policy, a method for preventing the outbreak of disputes between individuals and groups or (once the conflict has begun) for conducting the struggle in a non-violent way? Once more it is a question, not of impossibilities, not of obstacles existing in the nature of things, but of our own free will. If pacifism has been used less frequently than war, the reason is simple. We have refused to take the trouble to anticipate impending evil, and so prevent its coming to pass; when the conflict has broken out, we have refused to control our passions of anger, hatred and malice, and have allowed them full rein in acts of violence. It is in our power to make a different choice.

In the following paragraphs we shall try to describe two kinds of pacifism, combative and preventive. Combative pacifism may be defined as the strategy and tactics of non-violent resistance to violence. Non-violent resistance is a technique which relies on the fact that it is impossible to display the virtues of courage, patience, devotion and disinterestedness without evoking sooner or later a response from even the most ardent and highly trained practitioners of the militaristic technique.

It takes two to make a quarrel. Most men find that they can be violent only towards people who show the appropriate reactions — fear, rage, or a mixture of the two. One can use violence on a man who angrily resists and one can use it on a man who shows terror. But when someone turns up who reacts to violence without anger and without fear, it becomes very difficult to go on using the violence. The non-violent resister is a man who refuses to play the part assigned to him by the rules of the game; the result is that the other player finds it difficult and at last impossible to go on playing his part. In mass movements of non-violent resistance, detachments of volunteers present themselves without fear and without anger to the forces sent against them. As one falls, another takes his place, until at last even highly disciplined soldiers or policemen find it impossible to go on using the militaristic technique in which they have been trained.

Meanwhile the spectacle of suffering voluntarily accepted creates in the minds of all who witness the scene or who read of it, a feeling of sympathy for the non-violent and indignation against the violent. Nor is that all. In the end it evokes from the violent themselves a reluctant feeling of respect and admiration for their victims. A situation arises in which it becomes relatively easy for violent attackers and non-violent resisters to negotiate an honourable settlement, reasonably satisfactory to both parties. All those who use violence instinctively recognize the peculiar power of non-violent resistance and do their best to prevent it from being used by their opponents. Faced by determined but peaceful strikers, industrialists have frequently made use of ***agents provocateurs***, to foment a spirit of violence. They ***want*** to have their windows broken; they ***want***

stones to be thrown at the police. Why? Because they know that, once the strikers take to violence, their fate is sealed. They can be coerced, and public opinion will be on the side of the coercers.

A display of non-violent resistance has the effect of emphasizing among all concerned the great truth of human solidarity. The fact that noble behaviour should have power to evoke a response, even among the enemies of those who are so behaving, is a most reassuring reminder that all men are at one in a profound spiritual unity.

Non-violent resistance can be successfully undertaken only by trained troops. In a later paragraph the nature of the training required and the functions of these soldiers of peace will be discussed.

From this description of non-violence it must be fairly obvious that non-violent resistance cannot be used to any considerable extent in modern war, which is waged almost exclusively by means of long-range weapons inflicting indiscriminate destruction. Once war has broken out, pacifists are almost helpless. Therefore it must be prevented from breaking out. But it can only be prevented from breaking out if at least one government of an important sovereign state chooses to act pacifistically towards its neighbours. The practical task before pacifists in this country is to persuade the government to act pacifistically towards other governments. In later sections we shall discuss, first, the sort of policy that a government determined to prevent an outbreak of war should pursue (section X); second, the means by which individual pacifists should seek to induce their government to adopt such a policy (section XII).

VIII

"THE CHURCH DOES not condemn war," says an orthodox heckler. "Why am I expected to be more pacifist than the bishops?"

The Church does not condemn war; but Jesus did condemn it. Moreover, the Christians who lived during the first three centuries of our era not only believed that Jesus had condemned war, but themselves repeated the condemnation in more specific terms. Here it is possible to give only the briefest summary of the historical evidence. Those who wish to study this subject in detail should consult the articles on war in Hastings' ***Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*** and in ***The Dictionary of the Apostolic Church***. A fuller account is given by C. J. Cadoux, D.D., in his book ***The Early Christian Attitude to War***.

Among the Early Fathers, Justin Martyr and Tatian in the second century, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian and Hippolytus in the third, Arnobius, Eusebius and Lactantius in the fourth, all regarded war as organized iniquity. Here are a few characteristic quotations from their writings on the subject.

The first two are from the ***Divinæ Institutiones*** of Lactantius. "When God prohibits killing, He not only forbids us to commit brigandage, which is not allowed even by the public laws; but He warns us that not even those things which are regarded as legal among men are to be done. And so it will not be lawful for a just man to serve as a soldier . . . nor to accuse anyone of a capital offence, since it makes no difference whether thou killest with a sword or with a word, since killing itself is forbidden. And so in this commandment of God no exception at all ought to be made that it is always wrong to kill a man."

"How can he be just who injures, hates, despoils, kills? And those who strive to be of advantage to their own country (in war) do all these things."

Tertullian remarks that truth, gentleness and justice cannot be obtained by means of war. "Who shall produce these results with the sword and not rather

those which are the contrary of gentleness and justice, namely deceit and harshness and injustice, which are of course the proper business of battles?" (An excellent statement of the almost invariably neglected truth that means determine ends and that good ends cannot be achieved by bad or even inappropriate means.)

Origen writes of his co-religionists that "we no longer take 'sword' against a 'nation,' nor do we learn 'any more to make war,' having become sons of peace for the sake of Jesus who is our leader, instead of following the ancestral customs in which we were strangers to the covenants."

In the Canons of Hippolytus we read that a soldier who professes Christianity is to be excluded from the sacrament, until such time as he has done penance for the blood he has shed.

In the early part of the fourth century Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. The Cross was used as a military standard and the pious Constantine had the nails with which Jesus had been crucified converted into a helmet for himself and bits for his war-horse. The act was profoundly symbolical. In the words of Dean Milman, "the meek and peaceful Jesus had become a God of battle."

The new political situation soon found reflection in Christian theory. Already in the middle years of the fourth century, Athanasius, the father of orthodoxy, is saying that "to destroy opponents in war is lawful and worthy of praise." St. Ambrose thirty years later and St. Augustine at the beginning of the fifth century repeat and elaborate this argument. We find Augustine saying that "many things have to be done in which we have to pay regard, not to our own kindly inclinations, but to the real interests of others, and their interests may require that they should be treated, much as they may dislike it, with a certain benignant asperity." It is a justification in advance of the Inquisition and the wars of religion — indeed of war of every kind; for now that infallibility has been claimed by sovereign states, the rulers of each nation know exactly what is best for all other nations and feel it their duty, merely in the highest interests of their neighbours, to use a "certain benignant asperity" towards them.

Modern Christians have used a number of arguments to justify their complete disregard of the precepts of Jesus in regard to war. Of the two most commonly employed, the first is the argument which asserts that Jesus meant his followers to accept the “spirit” of his teachings, without being bound by the “letter.” In other words, that he meant them to ignore his words completely and go on behaving, in all the practical details of life, as though they had never been uttered. The Pauline distinction between “letter” and “spirit” has been made the justification for every kind of iniquity.

The second argument is that Jesus meant his ethical system to apply only to relations obtaining between persons, not to those obtaining between nations. This is to imply that Jesus sanctioned mass murder between any two groups which at any given moment of history happen to regard themselves as autonomous and sovereign. It is hardly necessary to say that there is nothing in the gospels to substantiate such an interpretation of Christ’s teaching.

IX

"THE CAUSES OF war are economic and can be eliminated only by a change in the economic system."

First of all, the causes of war are not exclusively economic. There have been wars of religion, wars of prestige, even wars for the sake of destruction. In the second place, even in those cases where the immediate cause of conflict between nations have been economic in character the fact that nations exist and act as war-making units cannot be explained in economic terms. Wars, we are told, are made by capitalists and armament makers for their own private interests. But capitalists and armament makers need troops to do the fighting, an electorate to back their policy. They get their troops and their electorate because the violent divisive passions of nationalistic pride, vanity and hatred are present in the masses of their countrymen. Hence the need for pacifist organizations pledged to the realization of human unity through non-violence.

Wars, then, are not exclusively economic in origin. Let us, however, admit for the sake of argument that the factors which make for war are mainly economic and that a suitable change in the existing economic system would eliminate those causes. We are still faced by the all-important question: How do you propose to change the existing system? By violence, say the revolutionaries. But if violence is used as the means, the end achieved will inevitably be different from the end proposed. In Russia, the end proposed was Communism. Ruthless and prolonged violence was used to achieve that end. With what result? That contemporary Russian society is ***not*** communistic; it is an elaborately hierarchical society, ruled by a small group of men who are ready to employ the extremes of physical and economical coercion against those who disagree with their views; a society in which, according to reliable observers, the exclusive and ultimately bellicose spirit nationalism is growing in intensity; a society in which the principle of

authority is accepted without question, and violence is taken for granted. Within Russian society the economic system has been changed to this extent, that individuals cannot own the means of production and are therefore unable, as owners, to coerce their fellow human beings. But though individuals cannot coerce as owners, they can coerce as representatives of the State. (Let us remember, incidentally, that “the State” is merely a name for certain individuals using power either lawlessly or else according to certain rules.) The principle of coercion has survived the revolution and is in fact still ruthlessly applied. As the revolution was violent and coercive, it could not be otherwise. The violent means so conditioned the end proposed that it was impossible for that end to be what the revolutionaries had intended it to be — that is, Communism within the country and international co-operation without its borders. True, other countries have not done anything to make such co-operation easy; but the fact remains that Russia possesses the largest army in the world and that pride in this army is inculcated in Russian citizens from their tenderest years. Countries which possess and are proud of large armies almost invariably end, as history shows, by making use of them against their neighbours. To sum up, the economic system has been changed in Russia; but it was changed with violence; therefore it has remained natural for Russians to regard the use of violence, both within the country and without, as normal and inevitable. International war and coercion at home will continue to exist for just so long as people regard these things as suitable, as even conceivable, instruments of policy. The pacifist does not object to the ends originally proposed by the revolutionaries; on the contrary, he regards such ends as being intrinsically desirable. What he rejects is the means by which the revolutionaries set out to realize these ends. And he rejects them for two reasons; first, because he believes that an evil act is always evil, whatever the reason given for its performance; and, second, because he sees that, as a matter of fact, bad means make the good ends unrealizable. If Communism is to be achieved it can only be by non-violent means.

The pacifist differs from the Marxian revolutionary on another important issue. While the Marxian puts the whole blame for the present state of the world

on the existing economic system and on those who profit by that system, the pacifist is prepared to admit that he also may be to some extent responsible. The pacifist does not believe that the Kingdom of God can be imposed on mankind from without, by means of a change of organization. He believes that, if the Kingdom is to be realized, he himself must work for it, and work for it not only as a public figure, but also in his private life.

"It is not the munition makers but the masses, who by their votes elect and support governments and administrations committed to the pursuit of policies of economic nationalism, who are the real 'merchants of death.' Italian Fascists, German National Socialists and Japanese Imperialists, despite their common doctrine of violence, have done no more to make future wars inevitable than has the American Democracy by means of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff, the war debt policy and its performance at the London Economic Conference. It is, to be sure, unmistakable that a country as richly endowed materially as is the United States can, at least temporarily, achieve domestic prosperity by means of purely monopolistic economic policies. But it should be equally evident that a people which permits and encourages its government to pursue such politics, deliberately bolts and bars the door to world peace." These words are taken from the concluding chapter of ***The Price of Peace***, a book published in 1935 by two American economists, Frank H. Simonds and Brooks Emeny. They are writing of the American Democracy; but every word of what they say applies ***mutatis mutandis*** to the British Democracy. In a later paragraph the authors specifically mention our country. The British and American people, they say, have resolved "to combine the profits of exclusive nationalism with the benefits of internationalism. . . . They have invited all peoples to join them in a partnership to preserve peace, but have reserved to themselves the profits of such peace, while leaving to the others the privilege of paying the costs." Not unnaturally the others are declining the invitation. The pacifist insists that if we want other people to make sacrifices we must begin by making sacrifices ourselves; that it is only by being generous (even at our own expense) and by telling the truth

(even though that truth be to our own discredit) that we shall elicit generosity and truth from others.

X

"GENERAL PRINCIPLES," SAYS the objector, "are all very fine; but we live in a world of particular and specific realities. How do you expect your pacifism to work in the circumstances of the present moment? What about Italy and Abyssinia, for example? What about sanctions? What about Germany? What about Japan?"

The pacifist solution to these pressing contemporary problems can be outlined quite briefly. Let us begin by describing the historical antecedents which have led up to the present situation. Germany, Italy and Japan are three countries whose position in the post-war world is fundamentally similar. All suffer from a sense of grievance — of grievance, moreover, which the existing circumstances of the world very largely justify. Germany suffered military defeat and prolonged humiliation at the hands of her conquerors. During the boom years, she was helped, for purely commercial motives, by Allied and American capitalists, who helped to earn large profits by financing German industry; then came the slump; as much foreign capital as could be withdrawn was withdrawn, tariff barriers were everywhere set up or, if they already existed, raised still higher. It became more and more difficult for German industrialists either to sell what they had manufactured or, owing to monetary difficulties and the absence of colonies, to procure raw materials. The Nazis have promised to extricate Germany from this intolerable situation by force of arms, if necessary.

Italy emerged from the War nominally a victor, but in fact little the better off for her espousal of the Allied cause. The clauses of the disgraceful Secret Treaties were not, because they could not be, fulfilled, and the Italians received no colonial mandates. Emigration of Italians was progressively restricted until during the slump it fell almost to zero. For more than thirteen years the Fascists

have been promising to make Italy great and prosperous. Since October, 1935 they have been attempting to keep that promise at the expense of Abyssinia.

At the Versailles Peace Conference, the Japanese were collectively insulted by President Wilson, who insisted that a nation of yellow men could not be treated on the same terms as a nation of white men. During the succeeding years tariff barriers have everywhere been raised against cheap Japanese goods, while America and the British Dominions have completely prohibited the immigration of Japanese citizens. Meanwhile, in Japan, population has rapidly increased. In Japan the army has done what the Nazis and the Fascists did in Germany and Italy; it has promised to rescue the country from its present plight by force of arms. What is more, it has begun to fulfil this promise — at the expense of China. What the Japanese have done in Manchuria, the Italians are at present trying to do in Abyssinia and the Germans are hoping to do in Middle Europe and possibly Russia.

Over against these three hungry and thwarted powers stand four satiated powers, possessing between them the greater part of the world's surface and most of the raw materials indispensable to modern industry. These four powers are the British Empire, the United States, France and Russia. To these must be added Holland, Belgium and Portugal — three small powers whose considerable colonial possessions are guaranteed (for as long as it suits them to do so) by England and France. The satisfied powers enjoy their present privileged position in regard to materials, land and markets, partly as a result of historical accident, partly in virtue of a policy of conquest pursued above all during the nineteenth century. So long as these four powers remain possessed of what they now own and so long as they persist in their present monopolistic policies, the three great unsatisfied powers must of necessity remain unsatisfied. Objectively, this means that the standard of living among the unsatisfied must continue steadily to decline; subjectively, it means that they will cherish a feeling of intense resentment against the satisfied, together with a passionate conviction that they have been given less than justice.

The re-distribution of territory after the Napoleonic wars was ethnically unsound. Ruled by alien governments, large bodies of men and women — Italians, Greeks, Poles and many others — felt that they were being treated unjustly; and this sense of injustice was so intense that people preferred the risks and horrors of war to a peace which they felt to be humiliating. The peace of Versailles was, ethnically speaking, a tolerably good peace. Economically, however, it was a thoroughly bad peace. The peoples of three great countries (as well as of numerous small countries) feel that they have been and are being treated unjustly. And so intense is this feeling, so painful is the process of gradual and steady impoverishment to which they are being subjected, that for great masses of these people war — even modern war — seems preferable to peace, as they know it to-day.

That the existence of unsatisfied powers represents a source of constant danger to world peace is clearly recognized. To guard against this danger the monopolistic powers spend ever-increasing sums on armaments. They hope by this threatening display of force to frighten the unsatisfied powers into renouncing their claims for justice. In the event of the unsatisfied powers refusing to renounce these claims and going to war, the monopolistic powers expect to be able to win.

Militarists are incurably romantic, constitutionally incapable of facing facts. To the realistic pacifist it is obvious that the present policy of the monopolistic states is hopelessly chimerical. For, first of all, the peoples of the unsatisfied countries are so desperate that threats will not deter them from resorting to a war which to them may seem actually preferable to peace, as they know it at present. And, secondly, once war is made, it is quite impossible to predict what will happen. The monopolistic powers may emerge victorious — that is if anyone emerges at all. Or they may not. And even if they win, victory may be obtained at a cost too great for men to pay. Up till now militarism has been a policy, bad indeed, but, thanks to the inefficiency of armaments, not so destructive as many conquerors would doubtless have liked it to be. One war, it is true, inevitably led to another; but in the interval the warring countries and their cultures managed to

survive. Where societies are highly complex and weapons extremely destructive, militarism ceases to be a policy of anything but mass suicide.

The pacifist's alternative to militarism is a policy that has the double merit of being not only morally right, but also strictly practical and business-like. Guided by the moral intuition that it can never in any circumstances be right to do evil and by the two empirically verified generalizations, first, that means determine ends and, second, that by behaving well to other people you can always, in the long run, induce other people to behave well to you, he lays it down that the only right and practical policy is a policy based on truth and generosity. How shall such a policy of truth and generosity be applied to the particular circumstance of the present time? The answer is clear. The great monopolistic powers should immediately summon a conference at which the unsatisfied powers, great and small, should be invited to state their grievance and claims. When this has been done it would be possible, given intelligence and good will, to work out a scheme of territorial, economic and monetary readjustments for the benefit of all. That certain immediate sacrifices would have to be made by the monopolistic powers is inevitable. These sacrifices would be in part sacrifices of economic advantages, in part, perhaps mainly, of prestige — which is the polite and diplomatic word for pride and vanity. It is unnecessary to go into details here. Suffice it to say that there would have to be agreement as to the supply of tropical raw materials; an agreement on monetary policy; an agreement with regard to industrial production and markets; an agreement on tariffs; an agreement on migration.

The calling of such a conference as has been described above constitutes the only practical solution of the difficult problem of sanctions against Italy. People of good will are painfully perplexed because it seems to them that sanctionist countries are on the horns of a dilemma. Either sanctions must be intensified, in which case it is probable that Italy will in desperation, precipitate a European war; or else Abyssinia must be sacrificed, in which case a wanton act of aggression will have been rewarded at the expense of the victim. In fact there is a third and better alternative, a more excellent way between the horns of the

dilemma. A world conference can be called immediately for the permanent settling of the justifiable claims, not only of Italy, but of all the other dissatisfied powers. The immediate application of pacifist principles offers the hope of the solution of problems which, if they are left to complicate themselves, may become almost insoluble.

To reach any kind of international agreement is difficult, for the simple reason that nations are regarded by their representatives as wholly immoral beings, insanely proud, touchy, fierce and rapacious. In spite, however, of this monstrous conception of sovereignty, agreements do in fact get made and, what is more remarkable, are often observed, at any rate for a time, quite honourably. What can be and has been done piece-meal and on a small scale can be done, if we so desire, on a large scale and consistently.

The greatest immediate sacrifices, as has been said before, will have to come from those who possess the most. These sacrifices, however, will be negligible in comparison with the sacrifices which will be demanded from us by another war. Negligible in comparison even with those which are at present being demanded by the mere preparation for another war.

What of the League of Nations? There is, unhappily, much truth in the Italian contention that the League in its present form is an instrument for preserving the ***status quo***. The League is in fact controlled by the two great monopolistic nations of Western Europe, England and France. These nations are unwilling to sacrifice their present superiority and, though this superiority was won by the use of violence in the past, they prefer to seem righteously indignant (and in fact since successful nations always have short memories, ***are*** righteously indignant) at the use of violence by unsatisfied countries at the present time. To be of value, the League must continue permanently the work begun by our proposed conference and become an instrument for securing equality of opportunity for all nations through the international control of raw materials, markets, production and currency.

XI

"TALKING ABOUT LEAGUES and Conferences in the present crisis," objects the heckler, "is like fiddling while Rome burns. Our civilization is in danger; our political system, one of the few democracies left in the world, is menaced. We must be prepared to fight for their preservation and, in order to fight, we must be well armed. Ours is a sacred trust, and we therefore have no right to take the risks of pacifism."

That time presses is, alas, only too true. Pacifists must act quickly. The sooner they can persuade their government to summon a conference of the kind described above, the better its chances will be. During recent months official spokesmen have several times stated the government's intention of some day summoning a preventive conference of all the nations. Unhappily they have always gone on to make nonsense of this profession of good intentions by insisting that the moment for putting them into practice had not yet arrived. The government's peace policy may be briefly stated as follows: "We agree that a preventive conference should be summoned; but we think that the international situation is not at present auspicious. Therefore we shall not summon the conference now. Meanwhile we propose to treble our air force, strengthen our navy and increase our military effectives." But if, in existing circumstances, international feeling is too bad for it to be possible to call a conference, what will it be after we have increased our armaments? Incomparably worse; for the unsatisfied powers will see in our military preparations only another threat to themselves, an attempt to perpetuate by force of arms the present injustices. Many people who genuinely desire peace believe that large-scale rearmament will bring peace nearer. The theory is that potential peace-breakers will be frightened by our display of force into good behaviour. Such belief is wholly at variance with the facts of history. Accumulation of armaments by one power has

always led, first, to accumulation of armaments by other powers and then, when the financial strain became unbearable, to war. As usual, it is a matter of relating means to ends. Armaments, as history shows, are ***not*** appropriate means for achieving peace.

Let us consider the other objections made by our heckler. Pacifism certainly has its risks. But so has militarism; and the risks of militarism are far greater than those of pacifism. Militarism cannot fail to lead us into war, whereas pacifism has a very good chance of preventing war from breaking out.

The nations of the world live within a malevolently charmed circle of suspicion, hatred and fear. By pursuing a policy of pacifism, and only by pursuing a policy of pacifism, we can break out of the circle. One generous gesture on the part of a great nation might be enough to set the whole world free. More than any other nation, Britain is in a position to make that gesture. “To make it,” protests the militarists, “is to court disaster.” But to go on preparing for war and thereby rendering war inevitable is also to court disaster — disaster more certain and more complete.

Which is better, to take a risk for a good cause, or to march to certain perdition for a bad one?

XII

THIS TIME THE questioner is not hostile. “I am a convinced pacifist,” he begins, “I have signed a pledge that I will take no part in another war. But war is still in the future, I want to do something now — something that will prevent the war from breaking out. What can I do?”

Let us try to answer this as briefly as possible. To sign a pledge refusing to take any part in another war is commendable. But it is not enough. Prevention is always better than cure; and where modern war is concerned it is in fact the only course open. For the next European war will begin without warning, will be waged at long range by scientific weapons capable of spreading indiscriminate destruction. Pacifists may have the best will in the world; but in these circumstances they will be able to do very little to cure the disease once it has broken out. Therefore, while there is yet time, they must do all in their power to prevent the disease from breaking out.

In a vague way practically everyone is now a pacifist. But the number of those who are prepared to put themselves to inconvenience for their opinions is always small. Most pacifists will go to the trouble of voting for peace; for the rest, they will be what the pun upon their name implies — merely passive. Active or Constructive Pacifists are, and must be content to remain, a minority. How is this minority to make itself effective? By uniting, first of all. But there are unions and unions. The formation of yet another subscription-collecting, literature-distributing and possibly pledge-signing society is not enough. The Constructive Peace Movement must be all these things; but it must be something else as well. It must be a kind of religious order, membership of which involves the acceptance of a certain way of life, and entails devoted and unremitting personal service for the cause.

What is the best form for such an organization to take? History leaves us in no doubt. The Early Christians, the founders of the monastic and mendicant orders, the Quakers, the Wesleyans, the Communists (to mention but a few of those responsible for important social movements) — all used fundamentally the same type of organization: an affiliation of small groups. Here are a few tentative suggestions for the organization of the Constructive Peace Movement. The local unit is a small team of not less than five or more than ten members. These teams meet at least once a week for discussion, for mutual help and criticism, for mutual strengthening in the common faith, for the performance in common of spiritual exercises. In any district where a number of teams exist, particular tasks may be assigned to each. Some teams should undertake propaganda; others should form themselves into study circles to investigate particular aspects — whether personal, social or international — of the general problem of peace. All should attempt to put the principles of Constructive Peace into regular practice. Thus, every group should be an unlimited liability company, in which each member assumes responsibility for all the rest. In some cases groups may feel inclined to assume special social responsibilities, as for example, towards a particular destitute family or a certain category of people, such as released prisoners, patients in a local hospital and the like. At monthly intervals all the groups of the district should meet to pool information and experience. Larger meetings and demonstrations would be organized from time to time by a central office.

At the present time Constructive Pacifists have one immediate task to which they should devote a good part of their energies. This immediate task is to persuade the government of this country to apply the obvious principles of preventive pacifism to the present international situation. This it can do by calling at the earliest possible date a conference for the discussion of the economic and political causes of war and the elaboration of a world-wide scheme for eliminating those causes. Constructive Pacifists must try to get the eleven millions of well-meaning but passive pacifists who voted for the Peace Ballot to implement their rather vague aspirations by a signature in favour of this

particular policy — the only policy that is in the least likely to give them the peace for which they expressed their desire last year. Time will show what other tasks must be undertaken; but for the moment this is certainly the most important.

So much for the organization and immediate policy. In these concluding paragraphs we shall offer a few haphazard remarks of a more general nature.

The philosophy which underlies Constructive Pacifism has been described by implication in an earlier paragraph. But it seems advisable to state it more explicitly here. The philosophy of Constructive Pacifism proceeds from a consideration of what is to a statement of what ought to be — from empirical fact to idea. The facts upon which the doctrine is based are these. First, all men are capable of love for their fellows. Second, the limitations imposed upon this love are of such a nature that it is always possible for the individual, if he so desires, to transcend them. Third, love and goodness are infectious. So are hatred and evil.

The Constructive Pacifist formulates his belief in some such words as these. The spirit is one and all men are potentially at one in the spirit. Any thought or act which denies the fundamental unity of mankind is wrong and, in a certain sense, false; any thought or act which affirms it is right and true. It is in the power of every individual to choose whether he shall deny or affirm the unity of mankind in an ultimate spiritual reality.

The political, social and individual ideals of Constructive Peace follow logically from its doctrine. The pacifist’s social and international policy have already been sufficiently described. It is necessary, however, to say a few words about his individual way of life. The whole philosophy of Constructive Peace is based on a consideration of the facts of personal relationship between man and man. Hence it is impossible that Constructive Pacifism should be merely a large-scale and, so to speak, abstract policy. It must also be a way of life. There are men who profess to be pacifists in international politics, but who are tyrants in their families, bullying employers, ruthless and unscrupulous competitors. Such men are not only hypocrites; they are also fools. Nobody but a fool can suppose

that it is possible for a government to behave as a pacifist, when the individuals it represents conduct their private affairs in an essentially militaristic way. Constructive Peace must be first of all a personal ethic, a way of life for individuals; only on that condition will it come to be embodied, permanently and securely, in forms of social and international organization. There is another, immediately cogent reason why those who accept the doctrines and responsibilities of Constructive Peace should do their best to conform to the pacifist way of life. The finally convincing argument in favour of any doctrine is personal example. By their fruits ye shall know them; and unless the moral fruits of Constructive Peace are good, its doctrine will not be accepted. Soldiers are admired for their courage, their endurance, their self-sacrifice; the military virtues are the best propaganda for militarism. The Constructive Pacifist must exhibit all the finest military virtues together with others that the soldier cannot possess; if he does, his life will be his best propaganda.

It is easy to talk about a more excellent way of life, immensely difficult to live it. Five Latin words sum up the moral history of every man and woman who has ever lived.

Video meliora, proboque; Deteriora sequor.

“I see the better and approve it; the worse is what I pursue.” Hell is paved, not only with good intentions, but also with the most exquisite sensibilities, the noblest expressions of fine feeling, the profoundest insights into ethical truths. We know and we feel; but knowledge and feeling are not able, in a great many cases, to affect the sources of our will. For the sources of the will lie below the level of consciousness in a mental region where intellect and feeling are largely inoperative. Whatever else they may be — and many theological and psychological theories have been elaborated in order to explain their nature and their mode of action — religious rites, prayer and meditation are devices for affecting the sources of the will. It is a matter of empirical experience that regular meditation on, say, courage or peace often helps the meditate to be brave

and serene. Prayer for moral strength and tenacity of purpose is in fact quite often answered. Those who, to express in symbolic action their attachment to a cause, take part in impressive ceremonies and rites, frequently come away strengthened in their power to resist temptations and make sacrifices for the cause. There is good evidence that the practice of some kind of spiritual exercise in common is extremely helpful to those who undertake it. Groups whose members are believing Christians will naturally adopt Christian forms of devotion. To those who are not affiliated to any Christian church we would tentatively recommend some form of group meditation on such subjects as peace, man's unity, the spiritual reality underlying all phenomena and the virtues which Constructive Pacifists should exhibit in their daily lives. Meditation is a psychological technique whose efficacy does not depend on previous theological belief. It can be successfully practised by anyone who is prepared to take the necessary trouble. It is an exercise of the soul, just as running or jumping are exercises of the body. Constructive Pacifists are athletes in training for an event of much more than Olympic importance. They will be wise to use all the exercises that their predecessors in the endless struggle for the embodiment of goodness upon the earth have tested out and found to be useful.

“A Human Document”

LETTERS FROM LEAVENWORTH

Character, “Bad”: *The story of a conscientious objector as told in the letters of Harold Studley Gray. Edited by Kenneth Irving Brown. Harpers, now $1.25.*

This is not the story of a theoretical conscientious objector to war, but of a real one, who kept his conscience, refusing not only to fight but to accept any form of “non-combatant” service under conscription, focusing his protest directly against the exercise of the state’s power to draft him for war service — and taking the consequences! The consequences were fourteen months federal imprisonment involving a court martial sentence of twenty-five years, the imprisonment being terminated by a dishonorable discharge from the army one year after the close of the war. On the reverse side of his discharge paper in the space for “remarks,” was written the laconic comment: “Character, ‘Bad.’”

I commend this book to all sorts and conditions of readers. It is a human document of gripping and illuminating power. But there is one group to which I commend it particularly, namely, the 14,000 ministers and rabbis who recently in a questionnaire indicated their present purpose not to sanction or participate in any future war. This book will enable them to see realistically what the consequences of their decision, and that of the laymen who agree with them, are likely to be. If another war comes, the Harold Grays will tax the capacity of the nation’s prisons.

Charles Clayton Morrison,
in the *Christian Century*.

The Perennial Philosophy

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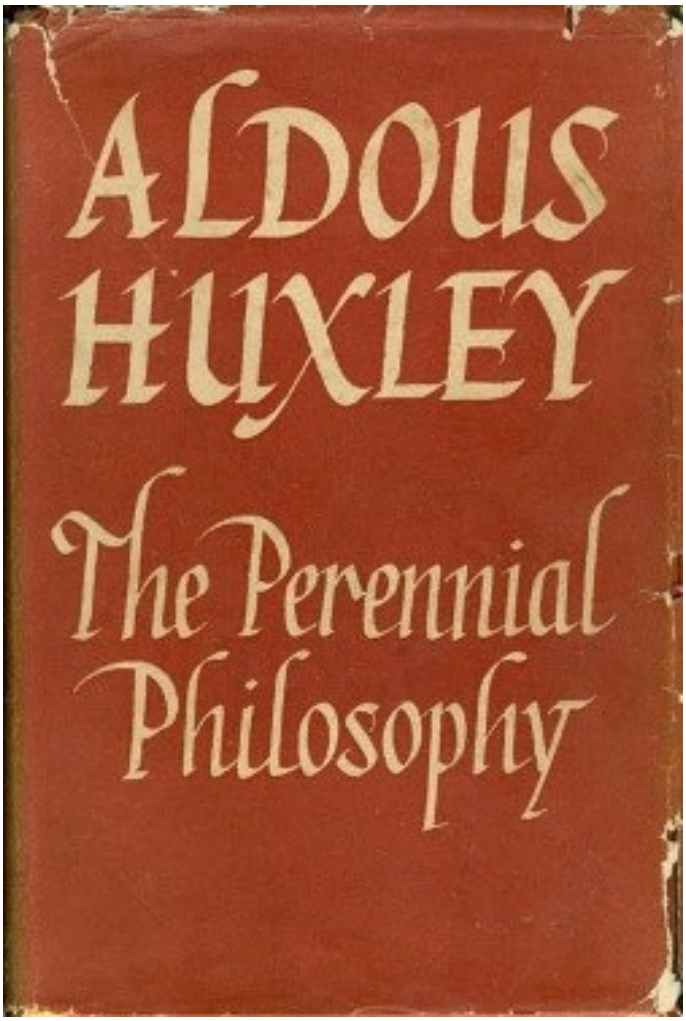

The first edition

Introduction

PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS - the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing - the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being - the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the Perennial Philosophy may be found among the traditionary lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions. A version of this Highest Common Factor in all preceding and subsequent theologies was first committed to writing more than twenty-five centuries ago, and since that time the inexhaustible theme has been treated again and again, from the standpoint of every religious tradition and in all the principal languages of Asia and Europe. In the pages that follow I have brought together a number of selections from these writings, chosen mainly for their significance - because they effectively illustrated some particular point in the general system of the Perennial Philosophy - but also for their intrinsic beauty and memorableness. These selections are arranged under various heads and embedded, so to speak, in a commentary of my own, designed to illustrate and connect, to develop and, where necessary, to elucidate.

Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and amount of knowing. For example, the being of a child is transformed by growth and education into that of a man; among the results of this transformation is a revolutionary change in the way of knowing and the amount and character of the things known. As the individual grows up, his knowledge becomes more conceptual and systematic in form, and its factual, utilitarian content is enormously increased. But these gains

are offset by a certain deterioration in the quality of immediate apprehension, a blunting and a loss of intuitive power. Or consider the change in his being which the scientist is able to induce mechanically by means of his instruments. Equipped with a spectroscope and a sixty-inch reflector an astronomer becomes, so far as eyesight is concerned, a superhuman creature; and, as we should naturally expect, the knowledge possessed by this superhuman creature is very different, both in quantity and quality, from that which can be acquired by a stargazer with unmodified, merely human eyes.

Nor are changes in the knower's physiological or intellectual being the only ones to affect his knowledge. What we know depends also on what, as moral beings, we choose to make ourselves. 'Practice,' in the words of William James, 'may change our theoretical horizon, and this in a twofold way: it may lead into new worlds and secure new powers. Knowledge we could never attain, remaining what we are, may be attainable in consequence of higher powers and a higher life, which we may morally achieve.' To put the matter more succinctly, 'Blessed arc the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' And the same idea has been expressed by the Sufi poet, Jalal-uddin Rumi, in terms of a scientific metaphor: 'The astrolabe of the mysteries of God is love.'

This book, I repeat, is an anthology of the Perennial Philosophy; but, though an anthology, it contains but few extracts from the writings of professional men of letters and, though illustrating a philosophy, hardly anything from the professional philosophers. The reason for this is very simple. The Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. Why should this be so? We do not know. It is just one of those facts which we have to accept, whether we like them or not and however implausible and unlikely they may seem. Nothing in our everyday experience gives us any reason for supposing that water is made up of hydrogen and oxygen; and yet when we subject water to certain rather drastic treatments,

the nature of its constituent elements becomes manifest. Similarly, nothing in our everyday experience gives us much reason for supposing that the mind of the average sensual man has, as one of its constituents, something resembling, or identical with, the Reality substantial to the manifold world; and yet, when that mind is subjected to certain rather drastic treatments, the divine element, of which it is in part at least composed, becomes manifest, not only to the mind itself, but also, by its reflection in external behaviour, to other minds. It is only by making physical experiments that we can discover the intimate nature of matter and its potentialities. And it is only by making psychological and moral experiments that we can discover the intimate nature of mind and its potentialities. In the ordinary circumstances of average sensual life these potentialities of the mind remain latent and unmanifested. If we would realize them, we must fulfil certain conditions and obey certain rules, which experience has shown empirically to be valid.

In regard to few professional philosophers and men of letters is there any evidence that they did very much in the way of fulfilling the necessary conditions of direct spiritual knowledge. When poets or metaphysicians talk about the subject matter of the Perennial Philosophy, it is generally at second hand. But in every age there have been some men and women who chose to fulfil the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were thus enabled to apprehend and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences. To such firsthand exponents of the Perennial Philosophy those who knew them have generally given the name of ‘saint’ or ‘prophet,’

‘sage’ or ‘enlightened one.’ And it is mainly to these, because there is good reason for supposing that they knew what they were talking about, and not to the professional philosophers or men of letters, that I have gone for my selections.

In India two classes of scripture are recognized: the Shruti, or inspired writings which are their own authority, since they are the product of immediate

insight into ultimate Reality; and the Smriti, which are based upon the Shruti and from them derive such authority as they have. ‘The Shruti,’ in Shankara’s words, ‘depends upon direct perception. The Smriti plays a part analogous to induction, since, like induction, it derives its authority from an authority other than itself.’ This book, then, is an anthology, with explanatory comments, of passages drawn from the Shruti and Smriti of many times and places. Unfortunately, familiarity, with traditionally hallowed writings tends to breed, not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad - namely a kind of reverential insensibility, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words. For this reason, when selecting material to illustrate the doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy, as they were formulated in the West, I have gone almost always to sources other than the Bible. This Christian Smriti, from which I have drawn, is based upon the Shruti of the canonical books, but has the great advantage of being less well known and therefore more vivid and, so to say, more audible than they are. Moreover, much of this Smriti is the work of genuinely saintly men and women, who have qualified themselves to know at first hand what they are talking about. Consequently it may be regarded as being itself a form of inspired and self-validating Shruti - and this in a much higher degree than many of the writings now included in the Biblical canon.

In recent years a number of attempts have been made to work out a system of empirical theology. But in spite of the subtlety and intellectual power of such writers as Sorley, Oman and Tennant, the effort has met with only a partial success. Even in the hands of its ablest exponents empirical theology is not particularly convincing. The reason, it seems to me, must be sought in the fact that the empirical theologians have confined their attention more or less exclusively to the experience of those whom the theologians of an older school called ‘the unregenerate’ - that is to say, the experience of people who have not gone very far in fulfilling the necessary conditions of spiritual knowledge. But it is a fact, confirmed and re-confirmed during two or three thousand years of religious history, that the ultimate Reality is not clearly and immediately apprehended, except by those who have made themselves loving, pure in heart

and poor in spirit. This being so, it is hardly surprising that a theology based upon the experience of nice, ordinary, unregenerate people should carry so little conviction. This kind of empirical theology is on precisely the same footing as an empirical astronomy, based upon the experience of naked-eye observers. With the unaided eye a small, faint smudge can be detected in the constellation of Orion, and doubtless an imposing cosmological theory could be based upon the observation of this smudge. But no amount of such theorizing, however ingenious, could ever tell us as much about the galactic and extra-galactic nebulae as can direct acquaintance by means of a good telescope, camera and spectroscope. Analogously, no amount of theorizing about such hints as may be darkly glimpsed within the ordinary, unregenerate experience of the manifold world can tell us as much about divine Reality as can be directly apprehended by a mind in a state of detachment, charity and humility. Natural science is empirical; but it does not confine itself to the experience of human beings in their merely human and unmodified condition. Why empirical theologians should feel themselves obliged to submit to this handicap, goodness only knows. And of course, so long as they confine empirical experience within these all too human limits, they arc doomed to the perpetual stultification of their best efforts. From the material they have chosen to consider, no mind, however brilliantly gifted, can infer more than a set of possibilities or, at the very best, specious probabilities. The self-validating certainty of direct awareness cannot in the very nature of things be achieved except by those equipped with the moral ‘astrolabe of God’s mysteries’. If one is not oneself a sage or saint, the best thing one can do, in the field of metaphysics, is to study the works of those who were, and who, because they had modified their merely human mode of being, were capable of a more than merely human kind and amount of knowledge.

1. That Art Thou

IN STUDYING THE Perennial Philosophy we can begin either at the bottom, with practice and morality; or at the top, with a consideration of metaphysical truths; or, finally, in the middle, at the focal point where mind and matter, action and thought have their meeting place in human psychology.

The lower gate is that preferred by strictly practical teachers — men who, like Gautama Buddha, have no use for speculation and whose primary concern is to put out in men's hearts the hideous fires of greed, resentment and infatuation. Through the upper gate go those whose vocation it is to think and speculate - the born philosophers and theologians. The middle gate gives entrance to the exponents of what has been called 'spiritual religion' - the devout contemplatives of India, the Sufis of Islam, the Catholic mystics of the later Middle Ages, and, in the Protestant tradition, such men as Denk and Franck and Castellio, as Everard and John Smith and the first Quakers and William Law.

It is through this central door, and just because it is central, that we shall make our entry into the subject matter of this book. The psychology of the Perennial Philosophy has its source in metaphysics and issues logically in a characteristic way of life and system of ethics. Starting from this mid-point of doctrine, it is easy for the mind to move in either direction.

In the present section we shall confine our attention to but a single feature of this traditional psychology - the most important, the most emphatically insisted upon by all exponents of the Perennial Philosophy and, we may add, the least psychological. For the doctrine that is to be illustrated in this section belongs to autology rather than psychology - to the science, not of the personal ego, but of that eternal Self in the depth of particular, individualized selves, and identical with, or at least akin to, the divine Ground. Based upon the direct experience of those who have fulfilled the necessary conditions of such knowledge, this

teaching is expressed most succinctly in the Sanskrit formula, *tat Ivam asi* (‘That art thou’): the Atman, or immanent eternal Self, is one with Brahman, the Absolute Principle of all existence; and the last end of every human being is to discover the fact for himself, to find out Who he really is.

The more God is in all things, the more He is outside them. The more He is within, the more without.

Eckhart Only the transcendent, the completely other, can be immanent without being modified by the becoming of that in which it dwells. The Perennial Philosophy teaches that it is desirable and indeed necessary to know the spiritual Ground of things, not only within the soul, but also outside in the world and, beyond world and soul, in its transcendent otherness - ‘in heaven.’

Though GOD is everywhere present, yet He is only present to thee in the deepest and most central part of thy soul. The natural senses cannot possess God or unite thee to Him; nay, thy inward faculties of understanding, will and memory can only reach after God, but cannot be the place of His habitation in thee. But there is a root or depth of thee from whence all these faculties come forth, as lines from a centre, or as branches from the body of the tree. This depth is called the centre, the fund or bottom of the soul. This depth is the unity, the eternity - I had almost said the infinity - of thy soul; for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it or give it rest but the infinity of God.

William Law This extract seems to contradict what was said above; but the contradiction is not a real one. God within and God without - these arc two abstract notions, which can be entertained by the understanding and expressed in words. But the facts to which these notions refer cannot be realized and experienced except in ‘the deepest and most central part of the soul.’ And this is true no less of God without than of God within. But though the two abstract notions have to be realized (to use a spatial metaphor) in the same place, the intrinsic nature of the realization of God within is qualitatively different from that of the realization of God without, and each in turn is different from that of the realization of the Ground as simultaneously within and without - as the Self

of the perceiver and at the same time (in the words of the Bhagavad-Gita) as ‘That by which all this world is pervaded.’

When Svetaketu was twelve years old he was sent to a teacher with whom he studied until he was twenty-four. After learning all the Vedas, he returned home full of conceit in the belief that he was consummately well educated, and very censorious.

His father said to him, ‘Svetaketu, my child, you who are so full of your learning and so censorious, have you asked for that knowledge by which we hear the unbearable, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived and know what cannot be known?’

‘What is that knowledge, sir?’ asked Svetaketu.

His father replied, ‘As by knowing one lump of clay all that is made of clay is known, the difference being only in name, but the truth being that all is clay - so, my child, is that knowledge, knowing which we know all.’

‘But surely these venerable teachers of mine are ignorant of this knowledge; for if they possessed it they would have imparted it to me. Do you, sir, therefore, give me that knowledge.’

‘So be it,’ said the father... And he said, ‘Bring me a fruit of the nyagrodha tree.’

‘Here is one, sir.’

‘Break it.’

‘It is broken, sir.’

‘What do you see there?’

‘Some seeds, sir, exceedingly small.’

‘Break one of these.’

‘It is broken, sir.’

‘What do you see there?’

‘Nothing at all.’

The father said, ‘My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there - in that very essence stands the being of the huge nyagrodha tree. In that which

is the subtle essence all that exists has its self. That is the True, that is the Self, and thou, Svetaketu, art That.'

'Pray, sir,' said the son, 'tell me more.'

'Be it so, my child,' the father replied; and he said, 'Place this salt in water, and come to me tomorrow morning.'

The son did as he was told.

Next morning the father said, 'Bring me the salt which you put in the water.'

The son looked for it, but could not find it; for the salt, of course, had dissolved.

The father said, 'Taste some of the water from the surface of the vessel. How is it?'

'Salty.'

'Taste some from the middle. How is it?'

'Salty.'

'Taste some from the bottom. How is it?'

'Salty.'

The father said, 'Throw the water away and then come back to me again.'

The son did so; but the salt was not lost, for salt exists for ever. Then the father said, 'Here likewise in this body of yours, my son, you do not perceive the True; but there in fact it is. In that which is the subtle essence, all that exists has its self. That is the True, that is the Self, and thou, Svetaketu, art That.'

From the Chandogya Upanishad The man who wishes to know the 'That' which is 'thou' may set to work in any one of three ways. He may begin by looking inwards into his own particular *thou* and, by a process of 'dying to self - self in reasoning, self in willing, self in feeling - come at last to a knowledge of the Self, the Kingdom of God that is within. Or else he may begin with the *thous* existing outside himself, and may try to realize their essential unity with God and, through God, with one another and with his own being. Or, finally (and this is doubtless the best way), he may seek to approach the ultimate That both from within and from without, so that he comes to realize God experimentally as at once the principle of his own *thou* and of all other *thous*, animate and inanimate.

The completely illuminated human being knows, with Law, that God ’is present in the deepest and most central part of his own soul’; but he is also and at the same time one of those who, in the words of Plotinus, see all things, not in process of becoming, but in Being, and see themselves in the other. Each being contains in itself the whole intelligible world. Therefore All is everywhere. Each is there All, and All is each. Man as he now is has ceased to be the All. But when he ceases to be an individual, he raises himself again and penetrates the whole world.

It is from the more or less obscure intuition of the oneness that is the ground and principle of all multiplicity that philosophy takes its source. And not alone philosophy, but natural science as well. All science, in Meyerson’s phrase, is the reduction of multiplicities to identities. Divining the One within and beyond the many, we find an intrinsic plausibility in any explanation of the diverse in terms of a single principle.

‘I’he philosophy of the Upanishads reappears, developed and enriched, in the Bhagavad-Gita and was finally systematized, in the ninth century of our era, by Shankara. Shankara’s teaching (simultaneously theoretical and practical, as is that of all true exponents of the Perennial Philosophy) is summarized in his versified treatise, *Viveka-Chudamani* (‘The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom’). All the following passages are taken from this conveniently brief and untechnical work.

The Atman is that by which the universe is pervaded, but which nothing pervades; which causes all things to shine, but which all things cannot make to shine...

The nature of the one Reality must be known by one’s own clear spiritual perception; it cannot be known through a pandit (learned man). Similarly the form of the moon can only be known through one’s own eyes. How can it be known through others?

Who but the Atman is capable of removing the bonds of ignorance, passion and self-interested action?...

Liberation cannot be achieved except by the perception of the identity of the individual spirit with the universal Spirit. It can be achieved neither by Yoga

(physical training), nor by Sankhya (speculative philosophy), nor by the practice of religious ceremonies, nor by mere learning...

Disease is not cured by pronouncing the name of medicine, but by taking medicine. Deliverance is not achieved by repeating the word ‘Brahman,’ but by directly experiencing Brahman...

The Atman is the Witness of the individual mind and its operations. It is absolute knowledge...

The wise man is one who understands that the essence of Brahman and of Atman is Pure Consciousness, and who realizes their absolute identity. The identity of Brahman and Atman is affirmed in hundreds of sacred texts...

Caste, creed, family and lineage do not exist in Brahman. Brahman has neither name nor form, transcends merit and demerit, is beyond time, space and the objects of sense-experience. Such is Brahman, and ‘thou are That.’ Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness.

Supreme, beyond the power of speech to express, Brahman may yet be apprehended by the eye of pure illumination. Pure, absolute and eternal Reality - such is Brahman, and ‘thou art That.’ Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness...

Though One, Brahman is the cause of the many. There is no other cause. And yet Brahman is independent of the law of causation. Such is Brahman, and ‘thou art That.’ Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness...

The truth of Brahman may be understood intellectually. But (even in those who so understand) the desire for personal separateness is deep-rooted and powerful, for it exists from beginningless time. It creates the notion, ‘I am the actor, I am he who experiences.’ This notion is the cause of bondage to conditional existence, birth and death. It can be removed only by the earnest effort to live constantly in union with Brahman. By the sages, the eradication of this notion and the craving for personal separateness is called Liberation.

It is ignorance that causes us to identify ourselves with the body, the ego, the senses, or anything that is not the Atman. He is a wise man who overcomes this ignorance by devotion to the Atman...

When a man follows the way of the world, or the way of the flesh, or the way of tradition (ie when he believes in religious rites and the letter of the scriptures, as though they were intrinsically sacred), knowledge of Reality cannot arise in him.

The wise say that this threefold way is like an iron chain, binding the feet of him who aspires to escape from the prison-house of this world. He who frees himself from the chain achieves Deliverance.

Shankara In the Taoist formulations of the Perennial Philosophy there is an insistence, no less forcible than in the Upanishads, the Gita and the writings of Shankara, upon the universal immanence of the transcendent spiritual Ground of all existence. What follows is an extract from one of the great classics of Taoist literature, the Book of Chuang Tzu, most of which seems to have been written around the turn of the fourth and third centuries B.C.

Do not ask whether the Principle is in this or in that; it is in all beings. It is on this account that we apply to it the epithets of supreme, universal, total... It has ordained that all things should be limited, but is Itself unlimited, infinite. As to what pertains to manifestation, the Principle causes the succession of its phases, but is not this succession. It is the author of causes and effects, but is not the causes and effects. It is the author of condensations and dissipations (birth and death, changes of state), but is not itself condensations and dissipations. All proceeds from It and is under its influence. It is in all things, but is not identical with beings, for it is neither differentiated nor limited.

Chuang Tzu From Taoism we pass to that Mahayana Buddhism which, in the Far East, came to be so closely associated with Taoism, borrowing and bestowing until the two came at last to be fused in what is known as Zen. The Lankavatara Sutra, from which the following extract is taken, was the scripture which the founder of Zen Buddhism expressly recommended to his first disciples.

Those who vainly reason without understanding the truth are lost in the jungle of the Vijnanas (the various forms of relative knowledge), running about here and there and trying to justify their view of ego-substance.

The self realized in your inmost consciousness appears in its purity; this is the Tathagata-garbha (literally, Buddha-womb), which is not the realm of those given over to mere reasoning.., Pure in its own nature and free from the category of finite and infinite, Universal Mind is the undefiled Buddha-womb, which is wrongly apprehended by sentient beings.

Lankavatara Sutra One Nature, perfect and pervading, circulates in all natures, One Reality, all-comprehensive, contains within itself all realities. The one Moon reflects itself wherever there is a sheet of water, And all the moons in the waters are embraced within the one Moon.

The Dharma-body (the Absolute) of all the Buddhas enters into my own being.

And my own being is found in union with theirs...

The Inner Light is beyond praise and blame; Like space it knows no boundaries, Yet it is even here, within us, ever retaining its serenity and fullness.

It is only when you hunt for it that you lose it; You cannot take hold of it, but equally you cannot get rid of it, And while you can do neither, it goes on its own way.

You remain silent and it speaks; you speak and it is dumb; The great gate of charity is wide open, with no obstacles before it.

Yung-chia Ta-shih I am not competent, nor is this the place to discuss the doctrinal differences between Buddhism and Hinduism. Let it suffice to point out that, when he insisted that human beings arc by nature ‘non-Atman,’ the Buddha was evidently speaking about the personal self and not the universal Self. The Brahman controversialists, who appear in certain of the Pali scriptures, never so much as mention the Vedanta doctrine of the identity of Atman and Godhead and the non-identity of ego and Atman. What they maintain and Gautama denies is the substantial nature and eternal persistence of the individual psyche. ‘As an unintelligent man seeks for the abode of music in the body of the lute, so docs he look for a soul within the *skandhas* (the material and psychic aggregates, of which the individual mind-body is composed).’ About the existence of the Atman that is Brahman, as about most other metaphysical

matters, the Buddha declines to speak, on the ground that such discussions do not tend to edification or spiritual progress among the members of a monastic order, such as he had founded. But though it has its dangers, though it may become the most absorbing, because the most serious and noblest, of distractions, metaphysical thinking is unavoidable and finally necessary. Even the Hinayanists found this, and the later Mahayanists were to develop, in connection with the practice of their religion, a splendid and imposing system of cosmological, ethical and psychological thought. This system was based upon the postulates of a strict idealism and professed to dispense with the idea of God. But moral and spiritual experience was too strong for philosophical theory, and under the inspiration of direct experience, the writers of the Mahayana sutras found themselves using all their ingenuity to explain why the Tathagata and the Bodhisattvas display an infinite charity towards beings that do not really exist. At the same time they stretched the framework of subjective idealism so as to make room for Universal Mind; qualified the idea of soullessness with the doctrine that, if purified, the individual mind can identify itself with the Universal Mind of Buddha-womb; and, while maintaining godlessness, asserted that this realizable Universal Mind is the inner consciousness of the eternal Buddha and that the Buddha-mind is associated with ‘a great compassionate heart which desires the liberation of every sentient being and bestows divine grace on all who make a serious effort to achieve man’s final end. In a word, despite their inauspicious vocabulary, the best of the Mahayana sutras contain an authentic formulation of the Perennial Philosophy - a formulation which in some respects (as we shall see when we come to the section, ‘God in the World’) is more complete than any other.

In India, as in Persia, Mohammedan thought came to be enriched by the doctrine that God is immanent as well as transcendent, while to Mohammedan practice were added the moral disciplines and ‘spiritual exercises,’ by means of which the soul is prepared for contemplation or the unitive knowledge of the Godhead. It is a significant historical fact that the poet-saint Kabir is claimed as a coreligionist both by Moslems and Hindus. The politics of those whose goal is

beyond time are always pacific; it is the idolaters of past and future, of reactionary memory and Utopian dream, who do the persecuting and make the wars.

Behold but One in all things; it is the second that leads you astray.

Kabir That this insight into the nature of things and the origin of good and evil is not confined exclusively to the saint, but is recognized obscurely by every human being, is proved by the very structure of our language. For language, as Richard Trench pointed out long ago, is often ‘wiser, not merely than the vulgar, but even than the wisest of those who speak it. Sometimes it locks up truths which were once well known, but have been forgotten. In other cases it holds the germs of truths which, though they were never plainly discerned, the genius of its framers caught a glimpse of in a happy moment of divination.’ For example, how significant it is that in the Indo-European languages, as Darmsteter has pointed out, the root meaning ‘two’ should connote badness. The Greek prefix dys-(as in dyspepsia) and the Latin dis-(as in dishonourable) are both derived from ‘duo.’ The cognate his gives a pejorative sense to such modern French words as *bévue* (‘blunder’, literally ‘two-sight’). Traces of that ‘second which leads you astray’ can be found in ‘dubious,’

‘doubt’ and *Zweifel* - for to doubt is to be double-minded. Bunyan has his Mr Facing-both-ways, and modern American slang its ‘two-timers.’ Obscurely and unconsciously wise, our language confirms the findings of the mystics and proclaims the essential badness of division - a word, incidentally, in which our old enemy ‘two’ makes another decisive appearance.

Here it may be remarked that the cult of unity on the political level is only an idolatrous *ersatz* for the genuine religion of unity on the personal and spiritual levels. Totalitarian regimes justify their existence by means of a philosophy of political monism, according to which the state is God on earth, unification under the heel of the divine state is salvation, and all means to such unification, however intrinsically wicked, are right and may be used without scruple. This political monism leads in practice to excessive privilege and power for the few and oppression for the many, to discontent at home and war abroad. But

excessive privilege and power are standing temptations to pride, greed, vanity and cruelty, oppression results in fear and envy; war breeds hatred, misery and despair. All such negative emotions are fatal to the spiritual life. Only the pure in heart and poor in spirit can come to the unitive knowledge of God. Hence, the attempt to impose more unity upon societies than their individual members are ready for makes it psychologically almost impossible for those individuals to realize their unity with the divine Ground and with one another.

Among the Christians and the Sufis, to whose writings we now return, the concern is primarily with the human mind and its divine essence.

My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself.

St Catherine of Genoa In those respects in which the soul is unlike God, it is also unlike itself.

St Bernard I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, 'O thou I!'

Bayazid of Bistun Two of the recorded anecdotes about this Sufi saint deserve to be quoted here. 'When Bayazid was asked how old he was, he replied, "Four years." They said, "How can that be?" He answered, "I have been veiled from God by the world for seventy years, but I have seen Him during the last four years. The period during which one is veiled does not belong to one's life."' On another occasion someone knocked at the saint's door and cried, 'Is Bayazid here?' Bayazid answered, 'Is anybody here except God?'

To gauge the soul we must gauge it with God, for the Ground of God and the Ground of the Soul are one and the same.

Eckhart The spirit possesses God essentially in naked nature, and God the spirit.

Ruysbroeck For though she sink all sinking in the oneness of divinity, she never touches bottom. For it is of the very essence of the soul that she is powerless to plumb the depths of her creator. And here one cannot speak of the soul any more, for she has lost her nature vonder in the oneness of divine essence. There she is no more called soul, but is called immeasurable being.

Eckhart The knower and the known are one. Simple people imagine that they should see God, as if He stood there and they here. This is not so. God and I, we are one in knowledge.

Eckhart ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ in me.’ Or perhaps it might be more accurate to use the verb transitively and say, I live, yet not I; for it is the Logos who *lives me*’ - lives me as an actor lives his part. In such a case, of course, the actor is always infinitely superior to the rôle. Where real life is concerned, there arc no Shakespearean characters, there are only Addisonian Catos or, more often, grotesque Monsieur Perrichons and Charley’s Aunts mistaking themselves for Julius Caesar or the Prince of Denmark. But by a merciful dispensation it is always in the power of every *dramatis persona* to get his low, stupid lines pronounced and supernaturally transfigured by the divine equivalent of a Garrick.

O my God, how does it happen in this poor old world that Thou art so great and yet nobody finds Thee, that Thou callest so loudly and nobody hears Thee, that Thou art so near and nobody feels Thee, that Thou givest Thyself to everybody and nobody knows Thy name? Men flee from Thee and say they cannot find Thee; they turn their backs and say they cannot see Thee; they stop their ears and say they cannot hear Thee.

Hans Denk Between the Catholic mystics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and the Quakers of the seventeenth there yawns a wide gap of time made hideous, so far as religion is concerned, with interdenominational wars and persecutions. But the gulf was bridged by a succession of men, whom Rufus Jones, in the only accessible English work devoted to their lives and teachings, has called the ‘Spiritual Reformers.’ Denk, Franck, Castellio, Weigel, Everard, the Cambridge Platonists - in spite of the murdering and the madness, the apostolic succession remains unbroken. The truths that had been spoken in the *Theologia Germanica* — that book which Luther professed to love so much and from which, if we may judge from his career, he learned so singularly little - were being uttered once again by Englishmen during the Civil War and under the Cromwellian dictatorship. The mystical tradition, perpetuated by the

Protestant Spiritual Reformers, had become diffused, as it were, in the religious atmosphere of the time when George Fox had his first great ‘opening’ and knew by direct experience: that Every Man was enlightened by the Divine Light of Christ, and I saw it shine through all; And that they that believed in it came out of Condemnation and came to the Light of Life, and became the Children of it; And that they that hated it and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure Openings of Light, without the help of any Man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it.

From Fox’s Journal The doctrine of the Inner Light achieved a clearer formulation in the writings of the second generation of Quakers. ‘There is,’ wrote William Penn, ‘something nearer to us than Scriptures, to wit, the Word in the heart from which all Scriptures come.’ And a little later Robert Barclay sought to explain the direct experience of *lal Ivam asi* in terms of an Augustinian theology that had, of course, to be considerably stretched and trimmed before it could fit the facts. Man, he declared in his famous theses, is a fallen being, incapable of good, unless united to the Divine Light. This Divine Light is Christ within the human soul, and is as universal as the seed of sin. All men, heathen as well as Christian, are endowed with the Inward Light, even though they may know nothing of the outward history of Christ’s life. Justification is for those who do not resist the Inner Light and so permit of a new birth of holiness within them.

Goodness needeth not to enter into the soul, for it is there already, only it is unperceived.

Theologica Germanica When the Ten Thousand things are viewed in their oneness, we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been.

Sen T’sen

It is because we don’t know Who we are, because we are unaware that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, that we behave in the generally silly, the often insane, the sometimes criminal ways that are so characteristically human. We arc saved, we are liberated and enlightened, by perceiving the hitherto unperceived

good that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground and remaining where, without knowing it, we have always been. Plato speaks in the same sense when he says, in the *Republic*, that ‘the virtue of wisdom more than anything else contains a divine clement which always remains. And in the *Theaetetus* he makes the point, so frequently insisted upon by those who have practised spiritual religion, that it is only by becoming Godlike that we can know God — and to become Godlike is to identify ourselves with the divine clement which in fact constitutes our essential nature, but of which, in our mainly voluntary ignorance, we choose to remain unaware.

They are on the way to truth who apprehend God by means of the divine, Light by the light.

Philo

Philo was the exponent of the Hellenistic Mystery Religion which grew up, as Professor Good enough has shown, among the Jews of the Dispersion between about 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. Reinterpreting the Pentateuch in terms of a metaphysical system derived from Platonism, Neo-Pythagoreanism and Stoicism, Philo transformed the wholly transcendental and almost anthropomorphically personal God of the Old Testament into the immanent-transcendent Absolute Mind of the Perennial Philosophy. But even from the orthodox scribes and Pharisees of that momentous century which witnessed along with the dissemination of Philo's doctrines, the first beginnings of Christianity and the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, even from the guardians of the Law we hear significantly mystical utterances. Hillel, the great rabbi whose teachings on humility and the love of God and man read like an earlier, cruder version of some of the Gospel sermons, is reported to have spoken these words to an assemblage in the courts of the Temple. 'If I am here' (it is Jehovah who is speaking through the mouth of his prophet), 'everyone is here. If I am not here, no one is here.'

The Beloved is all in all; the lover merely veils Him;
The Beloved is all that lives, the lover a dead thing.

Jalal-uddin Rumi

There is a spirit in the soul, untouched by time and flesh, flowing from the Spirit, remaining in the Spirit, itself wholly spiritual. In this principle is God, ever verdant, ever flowering in all the joy and glory of His actual Self. Sometimes I have called this principle the Tabernacle of the soul, sometimes a spiritual Light, anon I say it is a Spark. But now I say that it is more exalted over this and that than the heavens are exalted above the earth. So now name it in a

nobler fashion... It is free of all names and void of ail forms. It is one and simple, as God is one and simple, and no man can in any wise behold it. —

Eckhart

Crude formulations of some of the doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy are to be found in the thought-systems of the uncivilized and so-called primitive peoples of the world. Among the Maoris, for example, every human being is regarded as a compound of four elements - a divine eternal principle, known as the *toiora;* an ego, which disappears at death; a ghost-shadow, or psyche, which survives death; and finally a body. Among the Oglala Indians the divine element is called the *sican,* and this is regarded as identical with the *ton,* or divine essence of the world. Other elements of the self are the *nagi,* or personality, and *niya,* or vital soul. After death the *sican* is reunited with the divine Ground of all things, the *nagi* survives in the ghost world of psychic phenomena and the *niya* disappears into the material universe.

In regard to no twentieth-century 'primitive' society can we rule out the possibility of influence by, or borrowing from, some higher culture. Consequently, we have no right to argue from the present to the past. Because many contemporary savages have an esoteric philosophy that is monotheistic with a monotheism that is sometimes of the 'That art thou' variety, were are not entitled to infer offhand that neolithic or palaeolithic men held similar views.

More legitimate and more intrinsically plausible are the inferences that may be drawn from what we know about our own physiology and psychology. We know that human minds have proved themselves capable of everything from imbecility to Quantum Theory, from *Mein Kampf* and sadism to the sanctity of Philip Neri, from metaphysics to crossword puzzles, power politics and the *Missa Solemnis.* We also know that human minds are in some way associated with human brains, and we have fairly good reasons for supposing that there have been no considerable changes in the size and conformation of human brains for a good many thousands of years. Consequently it seems justifiable to infer that human minds in the remote past were capable of as many and as various kinds and degrees of activity as are minds at the present time.

It is, however, certain that many activities undertaken by some minds at the present time were not, in the remote past, undertaken by any minds at all. For this there arc several obvious reasons. Certain thoughts are practically unthinkable except in terms of an appropriate language and within the framework of an appropriate system of classification. Where these necessary instruments do not exist, the thoughts in question are not expressed and not even conceived. Nor is this all: the incentive to develop the instruments of certain kinds of thinking is not always present. For long periods of history and prehistory it would seem that men and women, though perfectly capable of doing so, did not wish to pay attention to problems which their descendants found absorbingly interesting. For example, there is no reason to suppose that, between the thirteenth century and the twentieth, the human mind underwent any kind of evolutionary change, comparable to the change, let us say, in the physical structure of the horse's foot during an incomparably longer span of geological time. What happened was that men turned their attention from certain aspects of reality to certain other aspects. The result, among other things, was the development of the natural sciences. Our perceptions and our understanding arc directed, in large measure, by our will.

We are aware of, and we think about, the things which, for one reason or another, we want to see and understand. Where there's a will there is always an intellectual way. The capacities of the human mind are almost indefinitely great. Whatever we will to do, whether it be to come to the unitive knowledge of the Godhead, or to manufacture self-propelled flame-throwers — that we are able to do, provided always that the willing be sufficiently intense and sustained.

It is clear that many of the things to which modern men have chosen to pay attention were ignored by their predecessors. Consequently the very means for thinking clearly and fruitfully about those things remained uninvented, not merely during prehistoric times, but even to the opening of the modern era.

The lack of a suitable vocabulary and an adequate frame of reference, and the absence of any strong and sustained desire to invent these necessary instruments of thought - here are two sufficient reasons why so many of the almost endless

potentialities of the human mind remained for so long unactualized. Another and, on its own level, equally cogent reason is this: much of the world's most original and fruitful thinking is done by people of poor physique and of a thoroughly unpractical turn of mind. Because this is so, and because the value of pure thought, whether analytical or integral, has everywhere been more or less clearly recognized, provision was and still is made by every civilized society for giving thinkers a measure of protection from the ordinary strains and stresses of social life. The hermitage, the monastery, the college, the academy and the research laboratory; the begging bowl, the endowment, patronage and the grant of taxpayers' money - such are the principal devices that have been used by actives to conserve that rare bird, the religious, philosophical, artistic or scientific contemplative. In many primitive societies conditions are hard and there is no surplus wealth. The born contemplative has to face the struggle for existence and social predominance without protection. The result, in most cases, is that he either dies young or is too desperately busy merely keeping alive to be able to devote his attention to anything else. When this happens the prevailing philosophy will be that of the hardy, extraverted man of action.

All this sheds some light — dim, it is true, and merely inferential - on the problem of the perennialness of the Perennial Philosophy. In India the scriptures were regarded, not as revelations made at some given moment of history, but as eternal gospels, existent from everlasting to everlasting, inasmuch as coeval with man, or for that matter with any other kind of corporeal or incorporeal being possessed of reason. A similar point of view is expressed by Aristotle, who regards the fundamental truths of religion as everlasting and indestructible. There have been ascents and falls, periods (literally 'roads around' or cycles) of progress and regress; but the great fact of God as the First Mover of a universe which partakes of his divinity has always been recognized. In the light of what we know about prehistoric man (and what we know amounts to nothing more than a few chipped stones, some paintings, drawings and sculptures) and of what we may legitimately infer from other, better documented fields of knowledge, what are we to think of these traditional doctrines? My own view is that they

may be true. We know that born contemplatives in the realm both of analytic and of integral thought have turned up in fair numbers and at frequent intervals during recorded history. There is therefore every reason to suppose that they turned up before history was recorded. That many of these people died young or were unable to exercise their talents is certain. But a few of them must have survived. In this context it is highly significant that among many contemporary primitives, two thought-patterns are found - an exoteric pattern for the unphilosophic many and an esoteric pattern (often monotheistic, with a belief in a God not merely of power, but of goodness and wisdom) for the initiated few. There is no reason to suppose that circumstances were any harder for prehistoric men than they are for many contemporary savages. But if an esoteric monotheism of the kind that seems to come natural to the born thinker is possible in modern savage societies, the majority of whose members accept the sort of polytheistic philosophy that seems to come natural to men of action, a similar esoteric doctrine might have been current in prehistoric societies. True, the modern esoteric doctrines may have been derived from higher cultures. But the significant fact remains that, if so derived, they yet had a meaning for certain members of the primitive society and were considered valuable enough to be carefully preserved. We have seen that many thoughts are unthinkable apart from an appropriate vocabulary and frame of reference. But the fundamental ideas of the Perennial Philosophy can be formulated in a very simple vocabulary, and the experiences to which the ideas refer can and indeed must be had immediately and apart from any vocabulary whatsoever. Strange openings and theophanies are granted to quite small children, who are often profoundly and permanently affected by these experiences. We have no reason to suppose that what happens now to persons with small vocabularies did not happen in remote antiquity. In the modern world (as Vaughan and Traherne and Wordsworth, among others, have told us) the child tends to grow out of his direct awareness of the one Ground of things; for the habit of analytical thought is fatal to the intuitions of integral thinking, whether on the psychic or the spiritual level. Psychic preoccupations may be and often are a major obstacle in the way of

genuine spirituality. In primitive societies now (and, presumably, in the remote past) there is much preoccupation with, and a widespread talent for, psychic thinking. But a few people may have worked their way through psychic into genuinely spiritual experience-just as, even in modern industrialized societies, a few people work their way out of the prevailing preoccupation with matter and through the prevailing habits of analytical thought into the direct experience of the spiritual Ground of things.

Such, then, very briefly arc the reasons for supposing that the historical traditions of oriental and our own classical antiquity may be true. It is interesting to find that at least one distinguished contemporary ethnologist is in agreement with Aristotle and the Vedantists. ‘Orthodox ethnology,’ writes Dr Paul Radin in his *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, ‘has been nothing but an enthusiastic and quite uncritical attempt to apply the Darwinian theory of evolution to the facts of social experience.’ And he adds that ‘no progress in ethnology will be achieved until scholars rid themselves once and for all of the curious notion that everything possesses a history; until they realize that certain ideas and certain concepts are as ultimate for man, as a social being, as specific physiological reactions are ultimate for him, as a biological being.’ Among these ultimate concepts, in Dr Radin’s view, is that of monotheism. Such monotheism is often no more than the recognition of a single dark and numinous Power ruling the world. But it may sometimes be genuinely ethical and spiritual.

The nineteenth century’s mania for history and prophetic Utopianism tended to blind the eyes of even its acutest thinkers to the timeless facts of eternity. Thus we find T. H. Green writing of mystical union as though it were an evolutionary process and not as all the evidence seems to show, a state which man, as man, has always had it in his power to realize. ‘An animal organism, which has its history in time, gradually becomes the vehicle of an eternally complete consciousness, which in itself can have no history, but a history of the process by which the anima organism becomes its vehicle.’ But in actual fact it is only in regard to peripheral knowledge that there has been a genuine historical development. Without much lapse o time and much accumulation of skills and

information there can be but an imperfect knowledge of the material world. But direct awareness of the ‘eternally complete consciousness,’ which is the ground of the material world, is a possibility occasionally actualized by some human beings at almost any stage of their own personal development, from childhood to old age, and at any period of their race’s history.

2. The Nature of the Ground

OUR STARTING POINT has been the psychological doctrine, ‘That art thou.’ The question that now quite naturally presents itself is a metaphysical one: What is the That to which the thou can discover itself to be akin?

To this the fully developed Perennial Philosophy has at all times and in all places given fundamentally the same answer. The divine Ground of all existence is a spiritual Absolute, ineffable in terms of discursive thought, but (in certain circumstances) susceptible of being directly experienced and realized by the human being. This Absolute is the God-without-form of Hindu and Christian mystical phraseology. The last end of man, the ultimate reason for human existence, is unitive knowledge of the divine Ground - the knowledge that can come only to those who arc prepared to ‘die to self’ and so make room, as it were, for God. Out of any given generation of men and women very few will achieve the final end of human existence; but the opportunity for coming to unitive knowledge will, in one way or another, continually be offered until all sentient beings realize Who in fact they are.

The Absolute Ground of all existence has a personal aspect. The activity of Brahman is Isvara, and Isvara is further manifested in the Hindu Trinity and, at a more distant remove, in the other deities or angels of the Indian pantheon. Analogously, for Christian mystics, the ineffable, attributeless Godhead is manifested in a Trinity of Persons, of whom it is possible to predicate such human attributes as goodness, wisdom, mercy and love, but in a supereminent degree.

Finally there is an incarnation of God in a human being, who possesses the same qualities of character as the personal God, but who exhibits them under the limitations necessarily imposed by confinement within a material body born into the world at a given moment of time. For Christians there has been and, *ex*

hypothest, can be but one such divine incarnation; for Indians there can be and have been many. In Christendom as well as in the East, contemplatives who follow the path of devotion conceive of, and indeed directly perceive, the incarnation as a constantly renewed fact of experience. Christ is for ever being begotten within the soul by the Father, and the play of Krishna is the pseudo-historical symbol of an everlasting truth of psychology and metaphysics — the fact that, in relation to God, the personal soul is always feminine and passive.

Mahayana Buddhism teaches these same metaphysical doctrines in terms of the 'Three Bodies of Buddha — the absolute Dharmakaya, known also as the Primordial Buddha, or Mind, or the Clear Light of the Void, the Sambhogakaya, corresponding to Isvara or the personal God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; and finally the Nirmanakaya, the material body, in which the Logos is incarnated upon earth as a living, historical Buddha.

Among the Sufis, Al Haqq, the Real, seems to be thought of as the abyss of Godhead underlying the personal Allah, while the Prophet is taken out of history and regarded as the incarnation of the Logos.

Some idea of the inexhaustible richness of the divine nature can be obtained by analysing, word by word, the invocation with which the Lord's Prayer begins - 'Our Father who art in heaven.' God is ours — ours in the same intimate sense that our consciousness and life arc ours. But as well as immanently ours, God is also transcendently the personal Father, who loves his creatures and to whom love and allegiance arc owed by them in return. 'Our Father who *art*': when we come to consider the verb in isolation, we perceive that the immanent-transcendent personal God is also the immanent-transcendent One, the essence and principle of all existence. And, finally God's being is 'in heaven'; the divine nature is other than, and incommensurable with, the nature of the creatures in whom God is immanent. That is why we can attain to the unitive knowledge of God only when we become in some measure Godlike, only when we permit God's kingdom to come by making our own creaturely kingdom go.

God may be worshipped and contemplated in any of his aspects. But to persist in worshipping only one aspect to the exclusion of all the rest is to run

into grave spiritual peril. Thus, if we approach God with the preconceived idea that He is exclusively the personal, transcendental, all-powerful ruler of the world, we run the risk of becoming entangled in a religion of rites, propitiatory sacrifices (sometimes of the most horrible nature) and legalistic observances. Inevitably so; for if God is an unapproachable potentate out there, giving mysterious orders, this kind of religion is entirely appropriate to the cosmic situation. The best that can be said for ritualistic legalism is that it improves conduct. It docs little, however, to alter character and nothing of itself to modify consciousness.

Things arc a great deal better when the transcendent, omnipotent personal God is regarded as also a loving Father. The sincere worship of such a God changes character as well as conduct, and does something to modify consciousness. But the complete transformation of consciousness, which is ‘enlightenment,’

‘deliverance,’

‘salvation,’ comes only when God is thought of as the Perennial Philosophy affirms Him to be - immanent as well as transcendent, supra-personal as well as personal - and when religious practices are adapted to this conception.

When God is regarded as exclusively immanent, legalism and external practices are abandoned and there is a concentration on the Inner Light. The dangers now are quietism and antinomianism, a partial modification of consciousness that is useless or even harmful, because it is not accompanied by the transformation of character which is the necessary prerequisite of a total, complete and spiritually fruitful transformation of consciousness.

Finally it is possible to think of God as an exclusively supra-personal being. For many persons this conception is too ‘philosophical’ to provide an adequate motive for doing anything practical about their beliefs. Hence, for them, it is of no value.

It would be a mistake, of course, to suppose that people who worship one aspect of God to the exclusion of all the rest must inevitably run into the different kinds of trouble described above. If they are not too stubborn in their

ready-made beliefs, if they submit with docility to what happens to them in the process of worshipping, the God who is both immanent and transcendent, personal and more than personal, may reveal Himself to them in his fullness. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is easier for us to reach our goal if we arc not handicapped by a set of erroneous or inadequate beliefs about the right way to get there and the nature of what we are looking for.

Who is God? I can think of no better answer than, He who is. Nothing is more appropriate to the eternity which God is. If you call God good, or great, or blessed, or wise, or anything else of this sort, it is included in these words, namely, He is.

St Bernard The purpose of all words is to illustrate the meaning of an object. When they are heard, they should enable the hearer to understand this meaning, and this according to the four categories of substance, of activity, of quality and of relationship. For example, *cow* and *horse* belong to the category of substance. *He cooks* or *he prays* belongs to the category of activity. *White* and *black* belong to the category of quality. *Having money* or *possessing cows* belongs to the category of relationship. Now there is no class of substance to which the Brahman belongs, no common genus. It cannot therefore be denoted by words which, like ‘being’ in the ordinary sense, signify a category of things. Nor can it be denoted by quality, for it is without qualities; nor yet by activity, because it is without activity - ‘at rest, without parts or activity,’ according to the Scriptures. Neither can it be denoted by relationship, for it is ‘without a second’ and is not the object of anything but its own self. Therefore it cannot be defined by word or idea; as the Scripture says, it is the One ‘before whom words recoil.’

Shankara

It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang; The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind.

Truly, ‘Only he that rids himself forever of desire can see the Secret Essences.’

He that has never rid himself of desire can see only the Outcomes.

Lao Tzu One of the greatest favours bestowed on the soul transiently in this life is to enable it to see so distinctly and to feel so profoundly that it cannot comprehend God at all. These souls are herein somewhat like the saints in heaven, where they who know Him most perfectly perceive most clearly that He is infinitely incomprehensible; for those who have the less clear vision do not perceive so clearly as do these others how greatly He transcends their vision.

St John of the Cross When I came out of the Godhead into multiplicity, then all things proclaimed, ‘There is a God’ (the personal Creator). Now this cannot make me blessed, for hereby I realize myself as creature.

But in the breaking through I am more than all creatures; I am neither God nor creature; I am that which I was and shall remain, now and for ever more. There I receive a thrust which carries me above all angels. By this thrust I become so rich that God is not sufficient for me, in so far as He is only God in his divine works. For in thus breaking through, I perceive what God and I are in common. There I am what I was. There I neither increase nor decrease. For there I am the immovable which moves all things. Here man has won again what he is eternally and ever shall be. Here God is received into the soul.

Eckhart

The Godhead gave all things up to God. The Godhead is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not. It is God who has the treasure and the bride in him, the Godhead is as void as though it were not.

Eckhart

We can understand something of what lies beyond our experience by considering analogous cases lying within our experience. Thus, the relations subsisting between the world and God and between God and the Godhead seen

to be analogous, in some measure at least, to those that hold between the body (with its environment) and th< psyche, and between the psyche and the spirit. In the light of what we know about the second — and what we know i: not, unfortunately, very much — we may be able to form some not too hopelessly inadequate notions about the first.

Mind affects its body in four ways - subconsciously through that unbelievably subtle physiological intelligence which Driesch hypostatized under the name of the entel echy; consciously, by deliberate acts of will; subconsciously again, by the reaction upon the physical organism of emotional states having nothing to do with the organs or processes reacted upon; and, cither consciously or subconsciously, in certain ‘supernormal’ manifestations. Outside the body matter can be influenced by the mind in two ways - first, by means of the body, and second, by a ‘supernormal process,’ recently studied under laboratory conditions and described as ‘the PK effect.’ Similarly, the mind can establish relations with other minds either indirectly, by willing its body to undertake symbolic activities, such as speech or writing; or ‘supernormally,’ by the direct approach of mind-reading, telepathy, extra-sensory perception.

Let us now consider these relationships a little more closely. In some fields the physiological intelligence works on its own initiative, as when it directs the never-ceasing processes of breathing, say, or assimilation. In others it acts at the behest of the conscious mind, as when we will to accomplish some action, but do not and cannot will the muscular, glandular, nervous and vascular means to the desired end. The apparently simple act of mimicry well illustrates the extraordinary nature of the feats performed by the physiological intelligence. When a parrot (making use, let us remember, of the beak, tongue and throat of a bird) imitates the sounds produced by the lips, teeth, palate and vocal cords of a man articulating words, what precisely happens? Responding in some as yet entirely uncomprehended way to the conscious mind’s desire to imitate some remembered or immediately perceived event, the physiological intelligence sets in motion large numbers of muscles, co-ordinating their efforts with such exquisite skill that the result is a more or less perfect copy of the original.

Working on its own level, the conscious mind not merely of a parrot, but of the most highly gifted of human beings, would find itself completely baffled by a problem of comparable complexity.

As an example of the third way in which our minds affect matter, we may cite the all-too-familiar phenomenon of ‘nervous indigestion.’ In certain persons symptoms of dyspepsia make their appearance when the conscious mind is troubled by such negative emotions as fear, envy, anger or hatred. These emotions are directed towards events or persons in the outer environment; but in some way or other they adversely affect the physiological intelligence and this derangement results, among other things, in ‘nervous indigestion.’ From tuberculosis and gastric ulcer to heart disease and even dental caries, numerous physical ailments have been found to be closely correlated with certain undesirable states of the conscious mind. Conversely every physician knows that a calm and cheerful patient is much more likely to recover than one who is agitated and depressed.

Finally we come to such occurrences as faith healing and levitation — occurrences ‘supernormally strange, but nevertheless attested by masses of evidence which it is hard to discount completely. Precisely how faith cures diseases (whether at Lourdes or in the hypnotist’s consulting room), or how St Joseph of Cupertino was able to ignore the laws of gravitation, we do not know. (But let us remember that we are less ignorant of the way in which minds and bodies arc related in the most ordinary of everyday activities.) In the same way we arc unable to form any idea of the *modus operandi* of what Professor Rhine has called the PK effect. Nevertheless the fact that the fall of dice can be influenced by the mental states of certain individuals seems now to have been established beyond the possibility of doubt. And if the PK effect can be demonstrated in the laboratory and measured by statistical methods, then, obviously, the intrinsic credibility of the scattered anecdotal evidence for the direct influence of mind upon matter, not merely within the body, but outside in the external world, is thereby notably increased. The same is true of extra-sensory perception. Apparent examples of it arc constantly turning up in

ordinary life. But science is almost impotent to cope with the particular case, the isolated instance. Promoting their methodological ineptitude to the rank of a criterion of truth, dogmatic scientists have often branded everything beyond the pale of their limited competence as unreal and even impossible. But when tests for ESP can be repeated under standardized conditions, the subject comes under the jurisdiction of the law of probabilities and achieves (in the teeth of what passionate opposition!) a measure of scientific respectability.

Such, very baldly and briefly, arc the most important things we know about mind in regard to its capacity to influence matter. From this modest knowledge about ourselves, what are we entitled to conclude in regard to the divine object of our nearly total ignorance?

First, as to creation: if a human mind can directly influence matter not merely within, but even outside its body, then a divine mind, immanent in the universe or transcendent to it, may be presumed to be capable of imposing forms upon a pre-existing chaos of formless matter, or even, perhaps, of thinking substance as well as forms into existence.

Once created or divinely informed, the universe has to be sustained. The necessity for a continuous recreation of the world becomes manifest, according to Descartes, ‘when we consider the nature of time, or the duration of things; for this is of such a kind that its parts arc not mutually dependent and never co-existent; and, accordingly, from the fact that we are now it docs not necessarily follow that we shall be a moment afterwards, unless some cause, viz that which first produced us, shall, as it were, continually reproduce us, that is, conserve us.’ Here we seem to have something analogous, on the cosmic level, to that physiological intelligence which, in men and the lower animals, unsleepingly performs the task of seeing that bodies behave as they should. Indeed, the physiological intelligence may plausibly be regarded as a special aspect of the general recreating Logos. In Chinese phraseology it is the Tao as it manifests itself on the level of living bodies.

The bodies of human beings are affected by the good or bad states of their minds. Analogously, the existence at the heart of things of a divine serenity and

goodwill may be regarded as one of the reasons why the world's sickness, though chronic, has not proved fatal. And if, in the psychic universe, there should be other and more than human consciousnesses obsessed by thoughts of evil and egotism and rebellion, this would account, perhaps, for some of the quite extravagant and improbable wickedness of human behaviour.

The acts willed by our minds are accomplished either through the instrumentality of the physiological intelligence and the body, or, very exceptionally, and to a limited extent, by direct supernormal means of the PK variety. Analogously the physical situations willed by a divine Providence may be arranged by the perpetually creating Mind that sustains the universe — in which case Providence will appear to do its work by wholly natural means; or else, very exceptionally, the divine Mind may act directly on the universe from the outside, as it were — in which case the workings of Providence and the gifts of grace will appear to be miraculous. Similarly, the divine Mind may choose to communicate with finite minds either by manipulating the world of men and things in ways which the Particular mind to be reached at that moment will find meaningful; or else there may be direct communication by something resembling thought transference.

In Eckhart's phrase, God, the creator and perpetual recreator of the world, 'becomes and disbecomes.' In other words He is, to some extent at least, in time. A temporal God might have the nature of the traditional Hebrew God of the Old Testament; or He might be a limited deity of the kind described by certain philosophical theologians of the present century; or alternatively He might be an emergent God, starting unspiritually at Alpha and becoming gradually more divine as the aeons rolled on towards some hypothetical Omega. (Why the movement should be towards more and better rather than less and worse, upwards rather than downwards or in undulations, onwards rather than round and round, one really doesn't know. There seems to be no reason why a God who is exclusively temporal — a God who merely becomes and is ungrounded in eternity - should not be as completely at the mercy of time as is the individual mind apart from the spirit. A God who becomes is a God who also disbecomes,

and it is the disbecoming which may ultimately prevail, so that the last state of emergent deity may be worse than the first.)

The ground in which the multifarious and time-bound psyche is rooted is a simple, timeless awareness. By making ourselves pure in heart and poor in spirit we can discover and be identified with this awareness. In the spirit we not only have, but arc, the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground.

Analogously, God in time is grounded in the eternal now of the modeless Godhead. It is in the Godhead that things, lives and minds have their being; it is through God that they have their becoming - a becoming whose goal and purpose is to return to the eternity of the Ground.

Meanwhile, I beseech you by the eternal and imperishable truth, and by my soul, consider; grasp the unheard-of. God and Godhead are as distinct as heaven and earth. Heaven stands a thousand miles above the earth, and even so the Godhead is above God. God becomes and disbecomes. Whoever understands this preaching, I wish him well. But even if nobody had been here I must still have preached this to the poor-box.

Eckhart

Like St Augustine, Eckhart was to some extent the victim of his own literary talents. *Le style c'est l'homme.* No doubt. But the converse is also partly true. *L'homme c'est le style.* Because we have a gift for writing in a certain way, we find ourselves, in some sort, becoming our way of writing. We mould ourselves in the likeness of our particular brand of eloquence. Eckhart was one of the inventors of German prose, and he was tempted by his new-found mastery of forceful expression to commit himself to extreme positions - to be doctrinally the image of his powerful and over-emphatic sentences. A statement like the foregoing would lead one to believe that he despised what the Vadantists call the 'lower knowledge' of Brahman, not as the Absolute Ground of all things, but as the personal God. In reality he, like the Vedantists, accepts the lower knowledge as genuine knowledge and regards devotion to the personal God as the best

preparation for the unitive knowledge of the Godhead. Another point to remember is that the attributeless Godhead of Vedanta, of Mahayana Buddhism, of Christian and Sufi mysticism is the Ground of all the qualities possessed by the personal God and the Incarnation. ‘God is not good, I am good, says Eckhart in his violent and excessive way. What he really meant was, ‘I am just humanly good; God is supereminently good; the Godhead *is*, and his “isness” *(istigkeit*, in Eckhart’s German) contains goodness, love, wisdom and all the rest in their essence and principle.’ In consequence, the Godhead is never, for the exponent of the Perennial Philosophy, the mere Absolute of academic metaphysics, but something more purely perfect, more reverently to be adored than even the personal God or his human incarnation - a Being towards whom it is possible to feel the most intense devotion and in relation to whom it is necessary (if one is to come to that unitive knowledge which is man’s final end) to practise a discipline more arduous and unremitting than any imposed by ecclesiastical authority.

There is a distinction and differentiation, according to our reason, between God and the Godhead, between action and rest. The fruitful nature of the Persons ever worketh in a living differentiation. But the simple Being of God, according to the nature thereof, is an eternal Rest of God and of all created things.

Ruysbroeck

(In the Reality unitively known by the mystic), we can speak no more of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, nor of any creature, but only one Being, which is the very substance of the Divine Persons. There were we all one before our creation, for this is our superessence. There the Godhead is in simple essence without activity.

Ruysbroeck

The holy light of faith is so pure that, compared with it, particular lights are but impurities; and even ideas of the saints, of the Blessed Virgin, and the sight

of Jesus Christ in his humanity are impediments in the way of the sight of God in his purity.

J J Olier

Coming as it docs from a devout Catholic of the Counter-Reformation, this statement may seem somewhat startling. But we must remember that Olier (who was a man of saintly life and one of the most influential religious teachers of the seventeenth century) is speaking here about a state of consciousness, to which few people ever come. To those on the ordinary levels of being he recommends other modes of knowledge. One of his penitents, for example, was advised to read, as a corrective to St John of the Cross and other exponents of pure mystical theology, St Gertrude's revelations of the incarnate and even physiological aspects of the deity. In Olier's opinion, as in that of most directors of souls, whether Catholic or Indian, it was mere folly to recommend the worship of God-without-form to persons who are in a condition to understand only the personal and the incarnate aspects of the divine Ground. This is a perfectly sensible attitude, and we are justified in adopting a policy in accordance with it — provided always that we clearly remember that its adoption may be attended by certain spiritual dangers and disadvantages. The nature of these dangers and disadvantages will be illustrated and discussed in another section. For the present it will suffice to quote the warning words of Philo: 'He who thinks that God has any quality and is not the One, injures not God, but himself.'

Thou must love God as not-God, not-Spirit, not-person, not-image, but as He is, a sheer, pure absolute One, sundered from all two-ness, and in whom we must eternally sink from nothingness to nothingness.

Eckhart

What Eckhart describes as the pure One, the absolute not-God in whom we must sink from nothingness to nothingness is called in Mahayana Buddhism the

Clear Light of the Void. What follows is part of a formula addressed by the Tibetan priest to a person in the act of death.

O nobly born, the time has now come for thee to seek the Path. Thy breathing is about to cease. In the past thy teacher hath set thee face to face with the Clear Light; and now thou art about to experience it in its Reality in the *Bardo* state (the 'intermediate state' immediately following death, in which the soul is judged - or rather judges itself by choosing, in accord with the character formed during its life on earth, what sort of an after-life it shall have). In this *Bardo* state all things are like the cloudless sky, and the naked, immaculate Intellect is like unto a translucent void without circumference or centre. At this moment know thou thyself and abide in that state. I, too, at this time, am setting thee face to face.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

Going back further into the past, we find in one of the earliest Upanishads the classical description of the Absolute One as a Super-Essential NoThing.

The significance of Brahman is expressed by *neti neti* (not so, not so); for beyond this, that you say it is not so, there is nothing further. Its name, however, is 'the Reality of reality.' That is to say, the senses are real, and the Brahman is their Reality.

Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad

In other words, there is a hierarchy of the real. The manifold world of our everyday experience is real with a relative reality that is, on its own level, unquestionable; but this relative reality has its being within and because of the absolute Reality, which, on account of the incommensurable otherness of its eternal nature, we can never hope to describe, even though it is possible for us directly to apprehend it.

The extract which follows next is of great historical significance, since it was mainly through the ‘Mystical Theology’ and the ‘Divine Names’ of the fifth-century author who wrote under the name of Dionysius the Arcopagite that medieval Christendom established contact with Neoplatonism and thus, at several removes, with the metaphysical thought and discipline of India. In the ninth century Scotus Erigena translated the two books into Latin, and from that time forth their influence upon the philosophical speculations and the religious life of the West was wide, deep and beneficent. It was to the authority of the Arcopagite that the Christian exponents of the Perennial Philosophy appealed, whenever they were menaced (and they were always being menaced) by those whose primary interest was in ritual, legalism and ecclesiastical organization. And because Dionysius was mistakenly identified with St Paul’s first Athenian convert, his authority was regarded as all but apostolic; therefore, according to the rules of the Catholic game, the appeal to it could not lightly be dismissed, even by those to whom the books meant less than nothing. In spite of their maddening eccentricity, the men and women who followed the Dionysian path had to be tolerated. And once left free to produce the fruits of the spirit, a number of them arrived at such a conspicuous degree of sanctity that it became impossible even for the heads of the Spanish Inquisition to condemn the tree from which such fruits had sprung.

The simple, absolute and immutable mysteries of divine Truth are hidden in the super-luminous darkness of that silence which revealeth in secret. For this darkness, though of deepest obscurity, is yet radiantly clear; and, though beyond touch and sight, it more than fills our unseeing minds with splendours of transcendent beauty... We long exceedingly to dwell in this translucent darkness and, through not seeing and not knowing, to see Him who is beyond both vision and knowledge - by the very fact of neither seeing Him nor knowing Him. For this is truly to see and to know and, through the abandonment of all things, to praise Him who is beyond and above all things. For this is not unlike the art of those who carve a life-like image from stone: removing from around it all that impedes clear vision of the latent form, revealing its hidden beauty solely by

taking away. For it is, as I believe, more fitting to praise Him by taking away than by ascription; for we ascribe attributes to Him, when we start from universals and come down through the intermediate to the particulars. But here we take away all things from Him going up from particulars to universals, that we may know openly the unknowable, which is hidden in and under all things that may be known. And we behold that darkness beyond being, concealed under all natural light.

Dionysius the Areopagite

The world as it appears to common sense consists of an indefinite number of successive and presumably causally connected events, involving an indefinite number of separate, individual things, lives and thoughts, the whole constituting a presumably orderly cosmos. It is in order to describe, discuss and manage this common-sense universe that human languages have been developed.

Whenever, for any reason, we wish to think of the world, not as it appears to common sense, but as a continuum, we find that our traditional syntax and vocabulary are quite inadequate. Mathematicians have therefore been compelled to invent radically new symbol-systems for this express purpose. But the divine Ground of all existence is not merely a continuum, it is also out of time, and different, not merely in degree, but in kind from the worlds to which traditional language and the languages of mathematics are adequate. Hence, in all expositions of the Perennial Philosophy, the frequency of paradox, of verbal extravagance, sometimes even of seeming blasphemy. Nobody has yet invented a Spiritual Calculus, in terms of which we may talk coherently about the divine Ground and of the world conceived as its manifestation. For the present, therefore, we must be patient with the linguistic eccentricities of those who are compelled to describe one order of experience in terms of a symbol-system, whose relevance is to the facts of another and quite different order.

So far, then, as a fully adequate expression of the Perennial Philosophy is concerned, there exists a problem in semantics that is finally insoluble. The fact

is one which must be steadily borne in mind by all who read its formulations. Only in this way shall we be able to understand even remotely what is being talked about. Consider, for example, those negative definitions of the transcendent and immanent Ground of being. In statements such as Eckhart's, God is equated with nothing. And in a certain sense the equation is exact; for God is certainly no thing. In the phrase used by Scotus Erigena God is not a what; He is a That. In other words, the Ground can be denoted as being *there*, but not defined as having qualities. This means that discursive knowledge *about* the Ground is not merely, like all inferential knowledge, a thing at one remove, or even at several removes, from the reality of immediate acquaintance; it is and, because of the very nature of our language and our standard patterns of thought, it must be, paradoxical knowledge. Direct knowledge *of* the Ground cannot be had except by union, and union can be achieved only by the annihilation of the self-regarding ego, which is the barrier separating the 'thou' from the 'That.'

3. Personality, Sanctity, Divine Incarnation

IN ENGLISH, WORDS of Latin origin tend to carry overtones of intellectual, moral and aesthetic ‘classiness’ - overtones which are not carried, as a rule, by their Anglo-Saxon equivalents. ‘Maternal,’ for instance, means the same as ‘motherly,’

‘intoxicated’ as ‘drunk’ - but with what subtly important shades of difference! And when Shakespeare needed a name for a comic character, it was Sir Toby Belch that he chose, not Cavalier Tobias Eructation.

The word ‘personality’ is derived from the Latin and its upper partials are in the highest degree respectable. For some odd philological reason, the Saxon equivalent of ‘personality’ is hardly ever used. Which is a pity. For if it were used - used as currently as ‘belch’ is used for ‘eructation’ - would people make such a reverential fuss about the thing connoted as certain English-speaking philosophers, moralists and theologians have recently done? ‘Personality,’ we are constantly being assured, is the highest form of reality with which we are acquainted. But surely people would think twice about making or accepting this affirmation if, instead of ‘personality,’ the word employed had been its Teutonic synonym, ‘selfness.’ For ‘selfness,’ though it means precisely the same, carries none of the high-class overtones that go with ‘personality.’ On the contrary, its primary meaning comes to us embedded, as it were, in discords, like the note of a cracked bell. For, as all exponents of the Perennial Philosophy have constantly insisted, man’s obsessive consciousness of, and insistence on being, a separate self is the final and most formidable obstacle to the unitive knowledge of God. To be a self is, for them, the original sin, and to die to self, in feeling, will and intellect, is the final and all-inclusive virtue. It is the memory of these utterances that calls up the unfavourable overtones with which the word ‘selfness’ is associated. The all too favourable overtones of ‘personality’ are evoked in part

by its intrinsically solemn Latinity, but also by reminiscences of what has been said about the ‘persons’ of the Trinity. But the persons of the Trinity have nothing in common with the flesh-and-blood persons of our everyday acquaintance - nothing, that is to say, except that indwelling Spirit, with which we ought and are intended to identify ourselves, but which most of us prefer to ignore in favour of our separate selfness. That this God-eclipsing and anti-spiritual selfness should have been given the same name as is applied to the God who is a Spirit, is, to say the least of it, unfortunate. Like all such mistakes it is probably, in some obscure and subconscious way, voluntary and purposeful. We love our selfness; we want to be justified in our love; therefore we christen it with the same name as is applied by theologians to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But now thou askest me how thou mayest destroy this naked knowing and feeling of thine own being. For peradventure thou thinkest that if it were destroyed, all other hindrances were destroyed; and if thou thinkest thus, thou thinkest right truly. But to this I answer thee and I say, that without a full special grace full freely given by God, and also a full according ableness on thy part to receive this grace, this naked knowing and feeling of thy being may in nowise be destroyed. And this ableness is nought else but a strong and a deep ghostly sorrow... All men have matter of sorrow; but most specially he feeleth matter of sorrow that knoweth and feeleth that he *is.* All other sorrows in comparison to this be but as it were game to earnest. For he may make sorrow earnestly that knoweth and feeleth not only what he is, but that he is. And whoso felt never this sorrow, let him make sorrow; for he hath never yet felt perfect sorrow. This sorrow, when it is had, cleanseth the soul, not only of sin, but also of pain that it hath deserved for sin; and also it maketh a soul able to receive that joy, the which reaveth from a man all knowing and feeling of his being.

This sorrow, if it be truly conceived, is full of holy desire; and else a man might never in this life abide it or bear it. For were it not that a soul were somewhat fed with a manner of comfort by his right working, he should not be able to bear that pain that he hath by the knowing and feeling of his being. For as often as he would have a true knowing and a feeling of his God in purity of spirit

(as it may be here), and then feeleth that he may not - for he findeth evermore his knowing and his feeling as it were occupied and filled with a foul stinking lump of himself, the which must always be hated and despised and forsaken, if he shall be God’s perfect disciple, taught by Himself in the mount of perfection - so oft he goeth nigh mad for sorrow...

This sorrow and this desire must every soul have and feel in itself (either in this manner or in another), as God vouchsafeth to teach his ghostly disciples according to his good will and their according ableness in body and in soul, in degree and disposition, ere the time be that they may perfectly be oned unto God in perfect charity such as may be had here, if God vouchsafeth.

The Cloud of Unknowing

What is the nature of this ‘stinking lump’ of selfness or personality, which has to be so passionately repented of and so completely died to, before there can be any ‘true knowing of God in purity of spirit’? The most meagre and noncommittal hypothesis is that of Hume. ‘Mankind,’ he says, ‘are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement.’ An almost identical answer is given by the Buddhists, whose doctrine of *analta* is the denial of any permanent soul, existing behind the flux of experience and the various psycho-physical *skandhas* (closely corresponding to Hume’s ‘bundles’), which constitute the more enduring elements of personality. Hume and the Buddhists give a sufficiently realistic description of selfness in action; but they fail to explain how or why the bundles ever became bundles. Did their constituent atoms of experience come together of their own accord? And, if so, why, or by what means, and within what kind of a non-spatial universe? To give a plausible answer to these questions in terms of *anatta* is so difficult that we are forced to abandon the doctrine in favour of the notion that, behind the flux and within the bundles, there exists some kind of permanent soul, by which experience is organized and which in turn makes use of that organized experience to become a particular and unique personality. This is the view of the orthodox Hinduism, from which Buddhist thought parted company, and of almost all European thought from before the time of Aristotle to the present day. But whereas most contemporary thinkers make an attempt to describe human nature in terms of a dichotomy of interacting psyche and physique, or an inseparable wholeness of these two elements within particular embodied selves, all the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy make, in one form or another, the affirmation that man is a kind of trinity composed of body, psyche and spirit. Selfness or personality is a product of the first two elements. The third element (that *quidquid increatum et increabile*, as Eckhart called it) is akin to, or even identical with, the divine Spirit that is the Ground of all being. Man’s final end, the purpose of his

existence, is to love, know and be united with the immanent and transcendent Godhead. And this identification of self with spiritual not-self can be achieved only by ‘dying to’ selfness and living to spirit.

What could begin to deny self, if there were not something in man different from self?

William Law

What is man? An angel, an animal, a void, a world, a nothing surrounded by God, indigent of God, capable of God, filled with God, if it so desires.

Bérulle

The separate creaturely life, as opposed to life in union with God, is only a life of various appetites, hungers and wants, and cannot possibly be anything else. God Himself cannot make a creature to be in itself, or in its own nature, anything else but a state of emptiness. The highest life that is natural and creaturely can go no higher than this; it can only be a bare capacity for goodness and cannot possibly be a good and happy life but by the life of God dwelling in and in union with it. And this is the twofold life that, of all necessity, must be united in every good and perfect and happy creature.

William Law

The Scriptures say of human beings that there is an outward man and along with him an inner man.

To the outward man belong those things that depend on the soul, but are connected with the flesh and are blended with it, and the cooperative functions of the several members, such as the eye, the ear, the tongue, the hand and so on.

The Scripture speaks of all this as the old man, the earthy man, the outward person, the enemy, the servant.

Within us all is the other person, the inner man, whom the Scripture calls the new man, the heavenly man, the young person, the friend, the aristocrat.

Eckhart

The seed of God is in us. Given an intelligent and hard-working farmer, it will thrive and grow up to God, whose seed it is; and accordingly its fruits will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God seed into God.

Eckhart

The will is free and we are at liberty to identify our being either exclusively with our selfness and its interests, regarded as independent of indwelling Spirit and transcendent Godhead (in which case we shall be passively damned or actively fiendish), or exclusively with the divine within us and without (in which case we shall be saints), or finally with self at one moment or in one context and with spiritual not-self at other moments and in other contexts (in which case we shall be average citizens, too theocentric to be wholly lost, and too egocentric to achieve enlightenment and a total deliverance). Since human craving can never be satisfied except by the unitive knowledge of God and since the mind-body is capable of an enormous variety of experiences, we are free to identify ourselves with an almost infinite number of possible objects - with the pleasures of gluttony, for example, or intemperance, or sensuality; with money, power or fame; with our family, regarded as a possession or actually an extension and projection of our own selfness; with our goods and chattels, our hobbies, our collections; with our artistic or scientific talents; with some favourite branch of knowledge, some fascinating ‘special subject’; with our professions, our political parties, our churches; with our pains and illnesses; with our memories of success or misfortune, our hopes, fears and schemes for the future; and finally with the eternal Reality within which and by which all the rest has its being. And we are free, of course, to identify ourselves with more than one of these things simultaneously or in succession. Hence the quite astonishingly improbable combination of traits making up a complex personality. Thus a man can be at once the craftiest of politicians and the dupe of his own verbiage, can have a passion for brandy and money, and an equal passion for the poetry of George Meredith and under-age girls and his mother, for horse-racing and detective stories and the good of his country - the whole accompanied by a sneaking fear of hell-fire, a hatred of Spinoza and an unblemished record for Sunday church-going. A person born with one kind of psycho-physical constitution will be tempted to identify himself with one set of interests and passions, while a person

with another kind of temperament will be tempted to make very different identifications. But these temptations (though extremely powerful, if the constitutional bias is strongly marked) do not have to be succumbed to; people can and do resist them, can and do refuse to identify themselves with what it would be all too easy and natural for them to be; can and do become better and quite other than their own selves. In this context the following brief article on 'How Men Behave in Crisis' (published in a recent issue of *Harper's Magazine)* is highly significant. 'A young psychiatrist, who went as a medical observer on five combat missions of the Eighth Air Force in England, says that in times of great stress and danger men are likely to react quite uniformly, even though under normal circumstances they differ widely in personality. He went on one mission, during which the B-17 plane and crew were so severely damaged that survival seemed impossible. He had already studied the "on the ground" personalities of the crew and had found that they represented a great diversity of human types. Of their behaviour in crisis he reported: '"Their reactions were remarkably alike. During the violent combat and in the acute emergencies that arose during it, they were all quietly precise on the interphone and decisive in action. The tail gunner, right waist gunner and navigator were severely wounded early in the fight, but all three kept at their duties efficiently and without cessation. The burden of emergency work fell on the pilot, engineer and ball turret gunner, and all functioned with rapidity, skilful effectiveness and no lost motion. The burden of the decisions, during, but particularly after the combat, rested essentially on the pilot and, in secondary details, on the co-pilot and bombardier. The decisions, arrived at with care and speed, were unquestioned once they were made, and proved excellent. In the period when disaster was momentarily expected, the alternative plans of action were made clearly and with no thought other than the safety of the entire crew. All at this point were quiet, unobtrusively cheerful and ready for anything. There was at no time paralysis, panic, unclear thinking, faulty or confused judgment, or self-seeking in any one of them.

‘“One could not possibly have inferred from their behaviour that this one was a man of unstable moods and that that one was a shy, quiet, introspective man. They all became outwardly calm, precise in thought and rapid in action.

‘“Such action is typical of a crew who know intimately what fear is, so that they can use, without being distracted by, its physiological concomitants; who are well trained, so that they can direct their action with clarity; and who have all the more than personal trust inherent in a unified team.’”

We see then that, when the crisis came, each of these young men forgot the particular personality which he had built up out of the elements provided by his heredity and the environment in which he had grown up; that one resisted the normally irresistible temptation to identify himself with his mood of the moment, another the temptation to identify himself with his private day-dreams, and so on with the rest; and that all of them behaved in the same strikingly similar and wholly admirable way. It was as though the crisis and the preliminary training for crisis had lifted them out of their divergent personalities and raised them to the same higher level.

Sometimes crisis alone, without any preparatory training, is sufficient to make a man forget to be his customary self and become, for the time being, something quite different. Thus the most unlikely people will, under the influence of disaster, temporarily turn into heroes, martyrs, selfless labourers for the good of their fellows. Very often, too, the proximity of death produces similar results. For example, Samuel Johnson behaved in one way during almost the whole of his life and in quite another way during his last illness. The fascinatingly complex personality, in which six generations of Boswellians have taken so much delight - the learned boor and glutton, the kind-hearted bully, the superstitious intellectual, the convinced Christian who was a fetishist, the courageous man who was terrified of death - became, while he was actually dying, simple, single, serene and God-centred.

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is, for very many persons, much easier to behave selflessly in time of crisis than it is when life is taking its normal course in undisturbed tranquillity. When the going is easy, there is nothing to make us

forget our precious selfness, nothing (except our own will to mortification and the knowledge of God) to distract our minds from the distractions with which we have chosen to be identified; we are at perfect liberty to wallow in our personality to our heart's content. And how we wallow! It is for this reason that all masters of the spiritual life insist so strongly upon the importance of little things.

God requires a faithful fulfilment of the merest trifle given us to do, rather than the most ardent aspiration to things to which we are not called.

St François de Sales

There is no one in the world who cannot arrive without difficulty at the most eminent perfection by fulfilling with love obscure and common duties.

J. P. de Caussade

Some people measure the worth of good actions only by their natural qualities or their difficulty, giving the preference to what is conspicuous or brilliant. Such men forget that Christian virtues, which are God's inspirations, should be viewed from the side of grace, not that of nature. The dignity and difficulty of a good action certainly affects what is technically called its accidental worth, but all its essential worth comes from love alone.

Jean Pierre Camus (quoting St François de Sales) The saint is one who knows that every moment of our human life is a moment of crisis; for at every moment we are called upon to make an all-important decision - to choose between the way that leads to death and spiritual darkness and the way that leads towards light and life; between interests exclusively temporal and the eternal order; between our personal will, or the will of some projection of our personality, and the will of God. In order to fit himself to deal with the emergencies of his way of life, the saint undertakes appropriate training of mind

and body, just as the soldier does. But whereas the objectives of military training are limited and very simple, namely, to make men courageous, cool-headed and cooperatively efficient in the business of killing other men, with whom, personally, they have no quarrel, the objectives of spiritual training are much less narrowly specialized. Here the aim is primarily to bring human beings to a state in which, because there are no longer any God-eclipsing obstacles between themselves and Reality, they are able to be aware continuously of the divine Ground of their own and all other beings; secondarily, as a means to this end, to meet all, even the most trivial circumstances of daily living, without malice, greed, self-assertion or voluntary ignorance, but consistently with love and understanding. Because its objectives are not limited, because, for the lover of God, every moment is a moment of crisis, spiritual training is incomparably more difficult and searching than military training. There are many good soldiers, few saints.

We have seen that, in critical emergencies, soldiers specifically trained to cope with that kind of thing tend to forget the inborn and acquired idiosyncrasies with which they normally identify their being and, transcending selfness, to behave in the same, one-pointed, better-than-personal way. What is true of soldiers is also true of saints, but with this important difference - that the aim of spiritual training is to make people become selfless in *every* circumstance of life, while the aim of military training is to make them selfless only in certain very special circumstances and in relation to only certain classes of human beings. This could not be otherwise; for all that we are and will and do depends, in the last analysis, upon what we believe the Nature of Things to be. The philosophy that rationalizes power politics and justifies war and military training is always (whatever the official religion of the politicians and war makers) some wildly unrealistic doctrine of national, racial or ideological idolatry, having, as its inevitable corollaries, the notions of *Herrenvolk* and ‘the lesser breeds without the Law.’

The biographies of the saints testify unequivocally to the fact that spiritual training leads to a transcendence of personality, not merely in the special

circumstances of battle, but in all circumstances and in relation to all creatures, so that the saint ‘loves his enemies’ or, if he is a Buddhist, does not even recognize the existence of enemies, but treats all sentient beings, sub-human as well as human, with the same compassion and disinterested goodwill. Those who win through to the unitive knowledge of God set out upon their course from the most diverse starting points. One is a man, another a woman; one a born active, another a born contemplative. No two of them inherit the same temperament and physical constitution, and their lives are passed in material, moral and intellectual environments that are profoundly dissimilar. Nevertheless, in so far as they are saints, in so far as they possess the unitive knowledge that makes them ‘perfect as their Father which is in heaven is perfect,’ they arc all astonishingly alike. Their actions are uniformly selfless and they are constantly recollected, so that at every moment they know who they are and what is their true relation to the universe and its spiritual Ground. Of even plain average people it may be said that their name is Legion - much more so of exceptionally complex personalities, who identify themselves with a wide diversity of moods, cravings and opinions. Saints, on the contrary, are neither double-minded nor half-hearted, but single and, however great their intellectual gifts, profoundly simple. The multiplicity of Legion has given place to one-pointedness - not to any of those evil one-pointednesses of ambition or covetousness, or lust for power and fame, not even to any of the nobler, but still all too human one-pointednesses of art, scholarship and science, regarded as ends in themselves, but to the supreme, more than human one-pointedness that is the very being of those souls who consciously and consistently pursue man’s final end, the knowledge of eternal Reality. In one of the Pali scriptures there is a significant anecdote about the Brahman Drona who, ‘seeing the Blessed One sitting at the foot of a tree, asked him, “Are you a *deva*?” And the Exalted One answered, “I am not.”

“Are you a *gandharva*?”

“I am not.”

“Are you a*yaksha?*”

“I am not.”

“Are you a man?”

“I am not a man.” On the Brahman asking what he might be, the Blessed One replied, “Those evil influences, those cravings, whose non-destruction would have individualized me as a *deva*, a *gandharva*, a *yaksha* (three types of supernatural being), or a man, I have completely annihilated. Know therefore that I am Buddha.’”

Here we may remark in passing that it is only the one-pointed who arc truly capable of worshipping one God. Monotheism as a theory can be entertained even by a person whose name is Legion. But when it comes to passing from theory to practice, from discursive knowledge about to immediate acquaintance with the one God, there cannot be monotheism except where there is singleness of heart. Knowledge is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. Where the knower is poly-psychic the universe he knows by immediate experience is polytheistic. The Buddha declined to make any statement in regard to the ultimate divine Reality. All he would talk about was *nirvana*, which is the name of the experience that comes to the totally selfless and one-pointed. To this same experience others have given the name of union with Brahman, with Al Haqq, with the immanent and transcendent Godhead. Maintaining, in this matter, the attitude of a strict operationalist, the Buddha would speak only of the spiritual experience, not of the metaphysical entity presumed by the theologians of other religions, as also of later Buddhism, to be the object and (since in contemplation the knower, the known and the knowledge are all one) at the same time the subject and substance of that experience.

When a man lacks discrimination, his will wanders in all directions, after innumerable aims. Those who lack discrimination may quote the letter of the scripture; but they are really denying its inner truth. They are full of worldly desires and hungry for the rewards of heaven. They use beautiful figures of speech; they teach elaborate rituals, which are supposed to obtain pleasure and power for those who practise them. But, actually, they understand nothing except the law of Karma that chains men to rebirth.

Those whose discrimination is stolen away by such talk grow deeply attached to pleasure and power. And so they are unable to develop that one-pointed concentration of the will, which leads a man to absorption in God.

Bhagavad-Gita

Among the cultivated and mentally active, hagiography is now a very unpopular form of literature. The fact is not at all surprising. The cultivated and the mentally active have an insatiable appetite for novelty, diversity and distraction. But the saints, however commanding their talents and whatever the nature of their professional activities, arc all incessantly preoccupied with only one subject - spiritual Reality and the means by which they and their fellows can come to the unitive knowledge of that Reality. And as for their actions - these arc as monotonously uniform as their thoughts; for in all circumstances they behave selflessly, patiently and with indefatigable charity. No wonder, then, if the biographies of such men and women remain unread. For one well-educated person who knows anything about William Law there are two or three hundred who have read Boswell's life of his younger contemporary. Why? Because, until he actually lay dying, Johnson indulged himself in the most fascinating of multiple personalities; whereas Law, for all the superiority of his talents, was almost absurdly simple and single-minded. Legion prefers to read about Legion. It is for this reason that, in the whole repertory of epic, drama and the novel, there are hardly any representations of true theocentric saints.

O Friend, hope for Him whilst you live, know whilst you live, understand whilst you live; for in life deliverance abides.

If your bonds be not broken whilst living, what hope of deliverance in death?

It is but an empty dream that the soul shall have union with Him because it has passed from the body; If He is found now, He is found then; If not, we do but go to dwell in the City of Death.

Kabir

This figure in the form of a sun (the description is of the engraved frontispiece to the first edition of *The Rule of Perfection)* represents the will of God. The faces placed here in the sun represent souls living in the divine will. These faces are arranged in three concentric circles, showing the three degrees of this divine will. The first or outermost degree signifies the souls of the active life; the second, those of the fife of contemplation; the third, those of the life of supereminence. Outside the first circle are many tools, such as pincers and hammers, denoting the active life. But round the second circle we have placed nothing at all, in order to signify that in this kind of contemplative life, without any other speculations or practices, one must follow the leading of the will of God. The tools are on the ground and in shadow, inasmuch as outward works are in themselves full of darkness. These tools, however, are touched by a ray of the sun, to show that works may be enlightened and illuminated by the will of God.

The light of the divine will shines but little on the faces of the first circle; much more on those of the second; while those of the third or innermost circle are resplendent. The features of the first show up most clearly; the second, less; the third, hardly at all. This signifies that the souls of the first degree are much in themselves; those of the second degree are less in themselves and more in God; those in the third degree are almost nothing in themselves and all in God, absorbed in his essential will. All these faces have their eyes fixed on the will of God.

Benet of Canfield

It is in virtue of his absorption in God and just because he has not identified his being with the inborn and acquired elements of his private personality, that the saint is able to exercise his entirely non-coercive and therefore entirely beneficent influence on individuals and even on whole societies. Or, to be more accurate, it is because he has purged himself of selfness that divine Reality is able to use him as a channel of grace and power. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ - the eternal Logos - liveth in me.' True of the saint, this must *a fortiori* be true of the Avatar, or incarnation of God. If, in so far as he was a saint, St Paul was 'not I,' then certainly Christ was 'not I'; and to talk, as so many liberal churchmen now do, of worshipping 'the personality of Jesus,' is an absurdity. For, obviously, had Jesus remained content merely to have a personality, like the rest of us, he would never have exercised the kind of influence which in fact he did exercise, and it would never have occurred to anyone to regard him as a divine incarnation and to identify him with the Logos. That he came to be thought of as the Christ was due to the fact that he had passed beyond selfness and had become the bodily and mental conduit through which a more than personal, supernatural life flowed down into the world.

Souls which have come to the unitive knowledge of God arc, in Benet of Canfield's phrase, 'almost nothing in themselves and all in God.' This vanishing residue of selfness persists because, in some slight measure, they still identify their being with some innate psycho-physical idiosyncrasy, some acquired habit of thought or feeling, some convention or unanalysed prejudice current in the social environment. Jesus was almost wholly absorbed in the essential will of God; but in spite of this, he may have retained some elements of selfness. To what extent there was any 'I,' associated with the more-than-personal, divine 'Not-I,' it is very difficult, on the basis of the existing evidence, to judge. For example, did Jesus interpret his experience of divine Reality and his own spontaneous inferences from that experience in terms of those fascinating apocalyptic notions current in contemporary Jewish circles? Some eminent

scholars have argued that the doctrine of the world's imminent dissolution was the central core of his teaching. Others, equally learned, have held that it was attributed to him by the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, and that Jesus himself did not identify his experience and his theological thinking with locally popular opinions. Which party is right? Goodness knows. On this subject, as on so many others, the existing evidence does not permit of a certain and unambiguous answer.

The moral of all this is plain. The quantity and quality of the surviving biographical documents are such that we have no means of knowing what the residual personality of Jesus was really like. But if the Gospels tell us very little about the 'I' which was Jesus, they make up for this deficiency by telling us inferentially, in the parables and discourses, a good deal about the spiritual 'not-I,' whose manifest presence in the mortal man was the reason why his disciples called him the Christ and identified him with the eternal Logos.

The biography of a saint or avatar is valuable only in so far as it throws light upon the means by which, in the circumstances of a particular human life, the 'I' was purged away so as to make room for the divine 'not-I.' The authors of the Synoptic Gospels did not choose to write such a biography, and no amount of criticism or ingenious surmise can call it into existence. In the course of the last hundred years an enormous sum of energy has been expended on the attempt to make documents yield more evidence than in fact they contain. However regrettable may be the Synoptists' lack of interest in biography, and whatever objections may be raised against the theologies of Paul and John, there can still be no doubt that their instinct was essentially sound. Each in his own way wrote about the eternal 'not-I' of Christ rather than the historical T; each in his own way stressed that element in the life of Jesus, in which, because it is more-than-personal, all persons can participate. (The nature of selfness is such that one person cannot be a part of another person. A self can contain or be contained by something that is either less or more than a self, it can never contain or be contained by a self.) The doctrine that God can be incarnated in human form is found in most of the principal historic expositions of the Perennial Philosophy -

in Hinduism, in Mahayana Buddhism, in Christianity and in the Mohammedanism of the Sufis, by whom the Prophet was equated with the eternal Logos.

When goodness grows weak,
When evil increases,
I make myself a body.

In every age I come back
To deliver the holy,
To destroy the sin of the sinner,
To establish righteousness.

He who knows the nature
Of my task and my holy birth

Is not reborn
When he leaves this body;
He comes to Me.

Flying from tear,
From lust and anger,
He hides in Me,
His refuge and safety.
Burnt clean in the blaze of my being,
In Me many find home.

Bhagavad-Güa

Then the Blessed One spoke and said: ‘Know, Vasetha, that from time to time a Tathagata is born into the world, a fully Enlightened One blessed and worthy, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy with’ knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to erring mortals, a teacher of gods and men, a Blessed Buddha. He thoroughly understands this universe, as though he saw it face to face... The Truth does he proclaim both in its letter and in its spirit, lovely in its origin, lovely in its progress, lovely in its consummation. A higher life doth he make known in all its purity and in all its perfectness.

Tevigga butta

Krishna is an incarnation of Brahman, Gautama Buddha of what the Mahayanists called the Dharmakaya, Suchness, Mind, the spiritual Ground of all being. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation of the Godhead in human form differs from that of India and the Far East inasmuch as it affirms that there has been and can be only one Avatar.

What we do depends in large measure upon what we think, and if what we do is evil, there is good empirical reason for supposing that our thought-patterns are inadequate to material, mental or spiritual reality. Because Christians believed that there had been only one Avatar, Christian history has been disgraced by more and bloodier crusades, interdenominational wars, persecutions and proselytizing imperialism than has the history of Hinduism and Buddhism. Absurd and idolatrous doctrines, affirming the quasi-divine nature of sovereign states and their rulers, have led oriental, no less than Western, peoples into innumerable political wars; but because they have not believed in an exclusive revelation at one sole instant of time, or in the quasi-divinity of an ecclesiastical organization, oriental peoples have kept remarkably clear of the mass murder for religion's sake, which has been so dreadfully frequent in Christendom. And while, in this important respect, the level of public morality has been lower in the West than in the East, the levels of exceptional sanctity and of ordinary individual morality have not, so far as one can judge from the available evidence, been any higher. If the tree is indeed known by its fruits, Christianity's departure from the norm of the Perennial Philosophy would seem to be philosophically unjustifiable.

The Logos passes out of eternity into time for no other purpose than to assist the beings, whose bodily form he takes, to pass out of time into eternity. If the Avatar's appearance upon the stage of history is enormously important, this is due to the fact that by his teaching he points out, and by his being a channel of grace and divine power he actually is, the means by which human beings may transcend the limitations of history. The author of the Fourth Gospel affirms that

the Word became flesh; but in another passage he adds that the flesh profiteth nothing - nothing, that is to say, in itself, but a great deal, of course, as a means to the union with immanent and transcendent Spirit. In this context it is very interesting to consider the development of Buddhism. ‘Under the forms of religious or mystical imagery,’ writes R. E. Johnston in his *Buddhist China,* ‘the Mahayana expresses the universal, whereas Hinayana cannot set itself free from the domination of historical fact.’ In the words of an eminent orientalist, Amanda K. Coomaraswamy, ‘The Mahayanist believer is warned - precisely as the worshipper of Krishna is warned in the Vaishnavite scriptures that the Krishna Lila is not a history, but a process for ever unfolded in the heart of man - that matters of historical fact arc without religious significance’ (except, we should add, in so far as they point to or themselves constitute the means - whether remote or proximate, whether political, ethical or spiritual - by which men may come to deliverance from selfness and the temporal order.) In the West, the mystics went some way towards liberating Christianity from its unfortunate servitude to historic fact (or, to be more accurate, to those various mixtures of contemporary record with subsequent inference and phantasy, which have, at different epochs, been accepted as historic fact). From the writings of Eckhart, Tauler and Ruysbroeck, of Boehme, William Law and the Quakers, it would be possible to extract a spiritualized and universalized Christianity, whose narratives should refer, not to history as it was, or as someone afterwards thought it ought to be, but to ‘processes forever unfolded in the heart of man.’ But unfortunately the influence of the mystics was never powerful enough to bring about a radical Mahayanist revolution in the West. In spite of them, Christianity has remained a religion in which the pure Perennial Philosophy has been overlaid, now more, now less, by an idolatrous preoccupation with events and things in time - events and things regarded not merely as useful means, but as ends, intrinsically sacred and indeed divine. Moreover, such improvements on history as were made in the course of centuries were, most imprudently, treated as though they themselves were a part of history - a procedure which put a powerful weapon into the hands of Protestant and, later, of Rationalist

controversialists. How much wiser it would have been to admit the perfectly avowable fact that, when the sternness of Christ the Judge had been unduly emphasized, men and women felt the need of personifying the divine compassion in a new form, with the result that the figure of the Virgin, mediatrix to the mediator, came into increased prominence. And when, in course of time, the Queen of Heaven was felt to be too awe-inspiring, compassion was repersonified in the homely figure of St Joseph, who thus became mediator to the mediatrix to the mediator. In exactly the same way Buddhist worshippers felt that the historic Sakyamuni, with his insistence on recollectedness, discrimination and a total dying to self as the principal means of liberation, was too stern and too intellectual. The result was that the love and compassion which Sakyamuni had also inculcated came to be personified in Buddhas such as Amida and Maitreya - divine characters completely removed from history, inasmuch as their temporal career was situated somewhere in the distant past or distant future. Here it may be remarked that the vast numbers of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, of whom the Mahayanist theologians speak, are commensurate with the vastness of their cosmology. Time, for them, is beginningless, and the innumerable universes, every one of them supporting sentient beings of every possible variety, are born, evolve, decay and die, only to repeat the same cycle - again and again, until the final inconceivably remote consummation, when every sentient being in all the worlds shall have won to deliverance out of time into eternal Suchness or Buddhahood. This cosmological background to Buddhism has affinities with the world picture of modern astronomy - especially with that version of it offered in the recently published theory of Dr Weiszàcker regarding the formation of planets. If the Weiszâcker hypothesis is correct, the production of a planetary system would be a normal episode in the life of every star. There are forty thousand million stars in our own galactic system alone, and beyond our galaxy other galaxies, indefinitely. If, as we have no choice but to believe, spiritual laws governing consciousness are uniform throughout the whole planet-bearing and presumably life-supporting universe, then certainly there is plenty of room, and at the same time, no doubt, the most agonizing and desperate need, for

those innumerable redemptive incarnations of Suchness, upon whose shining multitudes the Mahayanists love to dwell.

For my part, I think the chief reason which prompted the invisible God to become visible in the flesh and to hold converse with men was to lead carnal men, who are only able to love carnally, to the healthful love of his flesh, and afterwards, little by little, to spiritual love.

St Bernard

St Bernard's doctrine of 'carnal love of Christ' has been admirably summed up by Professor Étienne Gilson in his book, *The Mystical Theology of St Bernard.* 'Knowledge of self already expanded into *social* carnal love of the neighbour, so like oneself in misery, is now a second time expanded into a carnal love of Christ, the model of compassion, since for our salvation He has become the Man of Sorrows. Here then is the place occupied in Cistercian mysticism by the meditation on the visible Humanity of Christ. It is but a beginning, but an absolutely necessary beginning... Charity, of course, is essentially spiritual, and a love of this kind can be no more than its first moment. It is too much bound up with the senses, unless we know how to make use of it with prudence, and to lean on it only as something to be surpassed. In expressing himself thus, Bernard merely codified the teachings of his own experience; for we have it from him that he was much given to the practice of this sensitive love at the outset of his "conversion"; later on he was to consider it an advance to have passed beyond it; not, that is to say, to have forgotten it, but to have added another, which outweighs it as the rational and spiritual outweigh the carnal. Nevertheless, this beginning is already a summit.

'This sensitive affection for Christ was always presented by St Bernard as love of a relatively inferior order. It is so precisely on account of its sensitive character, for charity is of a purely spiritual essence. In right the soul should be able to enter directly into union, in virtue of its spiritual powers, with a God Who is pure spirit. The Incarnation, moreover, should be regarded as one of the consequences of man's transgression, so that love for the Person of Christ is, as a matter of fact, bound up with the history of a fall which need not, and should not, have happened. St Bernard furthermore, and in several places, notes that this affection cannot stand safely alone, but needs to be supported by what he calls "science". He had examples before him of the deviations into which even the most ardent devotion can fall, when it is not allied with, and ruled by a sane theology.'

Can the many fantastic and mutually incompatible theories of expiation and atonement, which have been grafted on to the Christian doctrine of divine incarnation, be regarded as indispensable elements in a ‘sane theology’? I find it difficult to imagine how anyone who has looked into a history of these notions, as expounded, for example, by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, by Athanasius and Augustine, by Anselm and Luther, by Calvin and Grotius, can plausibly answer this question in the affirmative. In the present context, it will be enough to call attention to one of the bitterest of all the bitter ironies of history. For the Christ of the Gospels, lawyers seemed further from the Kingdom of Heaven, more hopelessly impervious to Reality, than almost any other class of human beings except the rich. But Christian theology, especially that of the Western churches, was the product of minds imbued with Jewish and Roman legalism. In all too many instances the immediate insights of the Avatar and the theocentric saint were rationalized into a system, not by philosophers, but by speculative barristers and metaphysical jurists. Why should what Abbot John Chapman calls ‘the problem of *reconciling* (not merely uniting) Mysticism and Christianity’ be so extremely difficult? Simply because so much Roman and Protestant thinking was done by those very lawyers whom Christ regarded as being peculiarly incapable of understanding the true Nature of Things. ‘The Abbot (Chapman is apparently referring to Abbot Marmion) says St John of the Cross is like a sponge full of Christianity. You can squeeze it all out, and the full mystical theory (in other words, the pure Perennial Philosophy) remains. Consequently for fifteen years or so I hated St John of the Cross and called him a Buddhist. I loved St Teresa and read her over and over again. She is first a Christian, only secondarily a mystic. Then I found I had wasted fifteen years, so far as prayer was concerned.’

Now see the meaning of these two sayings of Christ s. The one, No man cometh unto the Father but by me,’ that is through my life. The other saying, ‘No man cometh unto me except the Father draw him’; that is, he does not take my life upon him and follow after me, except he is moved and drawn of my Father,

that is, of the Simple and Perfect Good, of which St Paul saith, ‘When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.’

Theologia Germanica

In other words, there must be imitation of Christ before there can be identification with the Father; and there must be essential identity or likeness between the human spirit and the God who is Spirit in order that the idea of imitating the earthly behaviour of the incarnate Godhead should ever cross anybody's mind. Christian theologians speak of the possibility of 'deification,' but deny that there is identity of substance between spiritual Reality and the human spirit. In Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism, as also among the Sufis, spirit and Spirit are held to be the same substance; Atman is Brahman; That art thou.

When not enlightened, Buddhas are no other than ordinary beings; when there is enlightenment, ordinary beings at once turn into Buddhas.

Hui Neng

Every human being can thus become an Avatar by adoption, but not by his unaided efforts. He must be shown the way, and he must be aided by divine grace. That men and women may be thus instructed and helped, the Godhead assumes the form of an ordinary human being, who has to earn deliverance and enlightenment in the way that is prescribed by the divine Nature of Things - namely, by charity, by a total dying to self and a total, one-pointed awareness. Thus enlightened, the Avatar can reveal the way of enlightenment to others and help them actually to become what they already potentially are. *Tel qu'en Lui-même enfin l'éternité le change.* And of course the eternity which transforms us into Ourselves is not the experience of mere persistence after bodily death. There will be no experience of timeless Reality then, unless there is the same or similar knowledge within the world of time and matter. By precept and by example, the Avatar teaches that this transforming knowledge is possible, that all sentient beings are called to it and that, sooner or later, in one way or another, all must finally come to it.

4. God in the World

‘THAT ART THOU’; Behold but One in all things’ - God within and God without. There is a way to Reality in and through the soul, and there is a way to Reality in and through the world. Whether the ultimate goal can be reached by following either of these ways to the exclusion of the other is to be doubted. The third, best and hardest way is that which leads to the divine Ground simultaneously in the perceiver and in that which is perceived.

The Mind is no other than the Buddha, and Buddha is no other than sentient being. When Mind assumes the form of a sentient being, it has suffered no decrease; when it has become a Buddha, it has added nothing to itself.

Huang-Po

All creatures have existed eternally in the divine essence, as in their exemplar. So far as they conform to the divine idea, all beings were, before their creation, one thing with the essence of God. (God creates into time what was and is in eternity.) Eternally, all creatures are God in God... So far as they are in God, they are the same life, the same essence, the same power, the same One, and nothing less.

Suso

The image of God is found essentially and personally in all mankind. Each possesses it whole, entire and undivided, and all together not more than one alone. In this way we are all one, intimately united in our eternal image, which is the image of God and the source in us of all our life. Our created essence and our life are attached to it without mediation as to their eternal cause.

Ruysbroeck

God who, in his simple substance, is all everywhere equally, nevertheless, in efficacy, is in rational creatures in another way than in irrational, and in good rational creatures in another way than in the bad. He is in irrational creatures in such a way as not to be comprehended by them; by all rational ones, however, he can be comprehended through knowledge; but only by the good is he to be comprehended also through love.

St Bernard

When is a man in mere understanding? I answer, ‘When a man sees one thing separated from another.’ And when is a man above mere understanding? That I can tell you: ‘When a man sees All in all, then a man stands beyond mere understanding.’

Eckhart

There are four kinds of Dhyana (spiritual disciplines). What are these four? They are, first, the Dhyana practised by the ignorant; second, the Dhyana devoted to the examination of meaning; third, the Dhyana with Suchness for its object; fourth, the Dhyana of the Tathagatas (Buddhas).

What is meant by the Dhyana practised by the ignorant? It is the one resorted to by the Yogins who exercise themselves in the disciplines of Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas (contemplatives and 'solitary Buddhas' of the Hinayana school), who perceiving that there is no ego substance, that the body is a shadow and a skeleton which is transient, impure and full of suffering, persistently cling to these notions, which are regarded as just so and not otherwise, and who, starting from them advance by stages until they reach the cessation where there are no thoughts. This is called the Dhyana practised by the ignorant.

What then is Dhyana devoted to the examination of meaning? It is the one practised by those who having gone beyond the egolessness of things, beyond individuality and generality, beyond the untenability of such ideas as 'self,'

'other' and 'both,' which are held by the philosophers, proceed to examine and follow up the meaning of the various aspects of Bodhisattvahood. This is the Dhyana devoted to the examination of meaning.

What is the Dhyana with Tathata (or Suchness) as its object? When the Yogin recognizes that the discrimination of the two forms of egolessness is mere imagination and that where he establishes himself in the reality of Suchness there is no rising of discrimination - this I call the Dhyana with Suchness for its What is the Dhyana of the Tathagata? When the Yogin, entering upon the stage of Tathagatahood and abiding in the triple bliss characterizing self-realization attained by noble wisdom, devotes himself for the sake of all beings to the accomplishment of incomprehensible works - this I call the Dhyana of the Tathagata.

Lankavatara Sutra

When followers of Zen fail to go beyond the world of their senses and thoughts, all their doings and movements are of no significance. But when the senses and thoughts are annihilated all the passages to Universal Mind are blocked, and no entrance then becomes possible. The original Mind is to be recognized along with the working of the senses and thoughts — only it does not belong to them, nor yet is it independent of them. Do not build up your views upon your senses and thoughts, do not base your understanding upon your senses and thoughts; but at the same time do not seek the Mind away from your senses and thoughts, do not try to grasp Reality by rejecting your senses and thoughts. When you are neither attached to, nor detached from, them, then you enjoy your perfect unobstructed freedom, then you have your seat of enlightenment.

Huang-Po

Every individual being, from the atom up to the most highly organized of living bodies and the most exalted of finite minds, may be thought of, in René Guénon's phrase, as a point where a ray of the primordial Godhead meets one of the differentiated, creaturely emanations of that same Godhead's creative energy. The creature, as creature, may be very far from God, in the sense that it lacks the intelligence to discover the nature of the divine Ground of its being. But the creature in its eternal essence - as the meeting place of creatureliness and primordial Godhead - is one of the infinite number of points where divine Reality is wholly or eternally present. Because of this, rational beings can come to the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground, non-rational and inanimate beings may reveal to rational beings the fullness of God's presence within their material forms. The poet's or the painter's vision of the divine in nature, the worshipper's awareness of a holy presence in the sacrament, symbol or image - these are not entirely subjective. True, such perceptions cannot be had by all perceivers, for knowledge is a function of being; but the thing known is

independent of the mode and nature of the knower. What the poet and painter see, and try to record for us, is actually there, waiting to be apprehended by anyone who has the right kind of faculties. Similarly, in the image or the sacramental object the divine Ground is wholly present. Faith and devotion prepare the worshipper's mind for perceiving the ray of Godhead at its point of intersection with the particular fragment of matter before him. Incidentally, by being worshipped, such symbols become the centres of a field of force. The longings, emotions and imaginations of those who kneel and for generations have knelt before the shrine create, as it were, an enduring vortex in the psychic medium, so that the image lives with a secondary, inferior divine life projected on to it by its worshippers, as well as with the primary divine life which, in common with all other animate and inanimate beings, it possesses in virtue of its relation to the divine Ground. The religious experience of sacramentalists and image worshippers may be perfectly genuine and objective; but it is not always or necessarily an experience of God or the Godhead. It may be, and perhaps in most cases it actually is, an experience of the field of force generated by the minds of past and present worshippers and projected on to the sacramental object where it sticks, so to speak, in a condition of what may be called secondhand objectivity, waiting to be perceived by minds suitably attuned to it. How desirable this kind of experience really is will have to be discussed in another section. All that need be said here is that the iconoclast's contempt for sacraments and symbols, as being nothing but mummery with sticks and stones, is quite unjustified.

> The workmen still in doubt what course to take,
> Whether I'd best a saint or hog-trough make,
> After debate resolved me for a saint;
> And so famed Loyala I represent.

The all too Protestant satirist forgot that God is in the hog-trough no less than in the conventionally sacred image. 'Lift the stone and you will find me,' affirms

the best known of the Oxyrhinchus Logia of Jesus, ‘cleave the wood, and I am there.’ Those who have personally and immediately realized the truth of this saying and, along with it, the truth of Brahmanism’s ‘That art thou’ are wholly delivered.

The Sravaka (literally ‘hearer,’ the name given by Mahayana Buddhists to contemplatives of the Hinayana school) fails to perceive that Mind, as it is in itself, has no stages, no causation. Disciplining himself in the cause, he has attained the result and abides in the samadhi (contemplation) of Emptiness for ever so many aeons. However enlightened in this way, the Sravaka is not at all on the right track. From the point of view of the Bodhisattva, this is like suffering the torture of hell. The Sravaka has buried himself in Emptiness and does not know how to get out of his quiet contemplation, for he has no insight into the Buddha-nature itself.

Mo Tsu

When Enlightenment is perfected, a Bodhisattva is free from the bondage of things, but does not seek to be delivered from things.

Samsara (the world of becoming) is not hated by him, nor is Nirvana loved. When perfect Enlightenment shines, it is neither bondage nor deliverance.

Prunabuddha-sutra

The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness - to its heights we can always reach - when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. ‘Earth is His footing,’ says the Upanishad, whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe.

Sri Aurobindo

‘To heights we can always come.’ For those of us who are still splashing about in the lower ooze, the phrase has a rather ironical ring. Neverthless, in the light of even the most distant acquaintance with the heights and the fullness, it is possible to understand what its author means. To discover the Kingdom of God exclusively within oneself is easier than to discover it, not only there, but also in the outer world of minds and things and living creatures. It is easier because the heights within reveal themselves to those who are ready to exclude from their purview all that lies without. And though this exclusion may be a painful and mortificatory process, the fact remains that it is less arduous than the process of inclusion, by which we come to know the fullness as well as the heights of spiritual life. Where there is exclusive concentration on the heights within, temptations and distractions arc avoided and there is a general denial and suppression. But when the hope is to know God inclusively - to realize the divine Ground in the world as well as in the soul, temptations and distractions must not be avoided, but submitted to and used as opportunities for advance; there must be no suppression of outward-turning activities, but a transformation of them so that they become sacramental. Mortification becomes more searching and more subtle; there is need of unsleeping awareness and, on the levels of thought, feeling and conduct, the constant exercise of something like an artist’s tact and taste.

It is in the literature of Mahayana and especially of Zen Buddhism that we find the best account of the psychology of the man for whom *samsara* and *nirvana,* time and eternity, arc one and the same. More systematically perhaps than any other religion, the Buddhism of the Far East teaches the way to spiritual Knowledge in its fullness as well as in its heights, in and through the world as well as in and through the soul. In this context we may point to a highly significant fact, which is that the incomparable landscape painting of China and Japan was essentially a religious art, inspired by Taoism and Zen Buddhism; in Europe, on the contrary, landscape painting and the poetry of ‘nature worship’

were secular arts which arose when Christianity was in decline, and derived little or no inspiration from Christian ideals.

‘Blind, deaf, dumb!

Infinitely beyond the reach of imaginative contrivances!’

In these lines Seccho has swept everything away for you - what you see together with what you do not see, what you hear together with what you do not hear, and what you talk about together with what you cannot talk about. All these are completely brushed off, and you attain the life of the blind, deaf and dumb. Here all your imaginations, contrivances and calculations are once and for all put an end to; they are no more made use of. This is where lies the highest point of Zen, this is where we have true blindness, true deafness and true dumbness, each in its artless and effectless aspect.

‘Above the heavens and below the heavens!

How ludicrous, how disheartening!’

Here Seccho lifts up with one hand and with the other puts down. Tell me what he finds to be ludicrous, what he finds to be disheartening. It is ludicrous that this dumb person is not dumb after all, that this deaf person is not after all deaf; it is disheartening that the one who is not at all blind is blind for all that, and that the one who is not at all deaf is deaf for all that.

‘Li-lou does not know how to discriminate right colour.’

Li-lou lived in the reign of the Emperor Huang. He is said to have been able to distinguish the point of a soft hair at a distance of one hundred paces. His eyesight was extraordinary. When the Emperor Huang took a pleasure cruise on the River Ch’in, he dropped his precious jewel in the water and made Li fetch it up. But he failed. The Emperor made Ch’ih-kou search for it; but he also failed to find it. Later Hsiang-wang was ordered to get it, and he got it. Hence, ‘When Hsiang-wang goes down, the precious gem shines most brilliantly; But where Li-lou walks about, the waves rise even to the sky.’ When we come to these higher spheres, even the eyes of Li-lou are incapable of discriminating the right colour.

‘How can Shih-kuang recognize the mysterious tune?’ Shih-kuang was the son of Ching-kuang of Chin in the province of Chiang under the Chou dynasty. His other name was Tzu-yeh. He could thoroughly distinguish the five sounds and the six notes; he could even hear the ants fighting on the other side of a hill. When Chin and Ch’u were at war, Shih-kuang could tell, just by softly fingering the strings of his lute, that the engagement would surely be unfavourable for Ch’u. In spite of his extraordinary sensitiveness Seccho declares that he is unable to recognize the mysterious tune. After all, one who is not at all deaf is really deaf. The most exquisite note in the higher spheres is beyond the hearing of Shih-kuang. Says Seccho, I am not going to be a Lilou, nor a Shih-kuang; for ‘What life can compare with this? Sitting quietly by the window, I watch the leaves fall and the flowers bloom, as the seasons come and go.’

When one reaches this stage of realization, seeing is no-seeing, hearing is no-hearing, preaching is no-preaching. When hungry one eats, when tired one sleeps. Let the leaves fall, let the flowers bloom as they like. When the leaves fall, I know it is the autumn; when the flowers bloom, I know it is the spring.

Having swept everything clean before you, Seccho now opens a passage-way, saying: ‘Do you understand, or not?

An iron bar without a hole!’

He has done all he could for you; he is exhausted - only able to turn round and present you with this iron bar without a hole. It is a most significant expression. Look and see with your own eyes! If you hesitate, you miss the mark for ever.

Yengo (the author of this commentary) now raised his staff and said, ‘Do you see?’ He then struck his chair and said, ‘Do you hear?’ Coming down from the chair, he said, ‘Was anything talked about?’

What precisely is the significance of that iron bar without a hole? I do not pretend to know. Zen has always specialized in nonsense as a means of stimulating the mind to go forward to that which is beyond sense; so perhaps the point of the bar resides precisely in its pointlessness and in our disturbed, bewildered reaction to that pointlessness.

In the root divine Wisdom is all-Brahman; in the stem she is all-illusion; in the flower she is all-World; and in the fruit, all-Liberation.

The Sravakas and the Pratyekabuddhas, when they reach the eighth stage of the Bodhisattva's discipline, become so intoxicated with the bliss of mental tranquillity that they fail to realize that the visible world is nothing but the Mind. They are still in the realm of individuation; their insight is not yet pure. The Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, are alive to their original vows, flowing out of the all-embracing love that is in their hearts. They do not enter into Nirvana (as a state separate from the world of becoming); they know that the visible world is nothing but a manifestation of Mind itself.

Condensed from the Lankavatara Sutra

A conscious being alone understands what is meant by moving; To those not endowed with consciousness the moving is unintelligible.

If you exercise yourself in the practice of keeping your mind unmoved, The immovable you gain is that of one who has no consciousness.

If you are desirous for the truly immovable, The immovable is in the moving itself, And this immovable is the truly immovable one.

There is no seed of Buddhahood where there is no consciousness.

Mark well how varied are the aspects of the immovable one, And know that the first reality is immovable.

Only when this reality is attained Is the true working of Suchness understood.

Hui Neng

These phrases about the unmoving first mover remind one of Aristotle. But between Aristotle and the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy within the great religious traditions there is this vast difference: Aristotle is primarily concerned with cosmology, the Perennial Philosophers arc primarily concerned with liberation and enlightenment: Aristotle is content to know about the unmoving mover, from the outside and theoretically; the aim of the Perennial Philosophers is to become directly aware of it, to know it unitively, so that they and others may actually become the unmoving One. This unitive knowledge can be knowledge in the heights, or knowledge in the fullness, or knowledge simultaneously in the heights and the fullness. Spiritual knowledge exclusively in the heights of the soul was rejected by Mahayana Buddhism as inadequate. The similar rejection of quietism within the Christian tradition will be touched upon in the section, 'Contemplation and Action.' Meanwhile it is interesting to find that the problem which aroused such acrimonious debate throughout seventeenth-century Europe had arisen for the Buddhists at a considerably earlier epoch. But whereas in Catholic Europe the outcome of the battle over Molinos, Mme Guyon and Fenelon was to all intents and purposes the extinction of mysticism for the best part of two centuries, in Asia the two parties were tolerant enough to agree to differ. Hinayana spirituality continued to explore the heights within, while the Mahayanist masters held up the ideal not of the Arhat, but of the Bodhisattva, and pointed the way to spiritual knowledge in its fullness as well as in its heights. What follows is a poetical account, by a Zen saint of the eighteenth century, of the state of those who have realized the Zen ideal.

Abiding with the non-particular which is in particulars,
Going or returning, they remain for ever unmoved.
Taking hold of the not-thought which lies in thoughts,
In their every act they hear the voice of Truth.
How boundless the sky of contemplation!

How transparent the moonlight of the four-fold Wisdom!
As the Truth reveals itself in its eternal tranquillity,
This very earth is the Lotous-Land of Purity,
And this body is the body of the Buddha.

Hakuin

Nature’s intent is neither food, nor drink, nor clothing, nor comfort, nor anything else from which God is left out. Whether you like it or not, whether you know it or not, secretly Nature seeks and hunts and tries to ferret out the track in which God may be found.

Eckhart

Any ilea as it is in God is nobler than the highest of the angels in himself.

Eckhart

My inner man relishes things not as creatures but as the gift of God. But to my innermost man they savour not of God’s gift, but of ever and aye.

Eckhart

Pigs eat acorns, but neither consider the sun that gave them life nor the influence of the heavens by which they were nourished, nor the very root of the tree from whence they came.

Thomas Traherne

Your enjoyment of the world is never right till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father's palace; and look upon the skies, the earth and the air as celestial joys; having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels. The bride of a monarch, in her husband's chamber, hath no such causes of delight as you.

You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars; and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you. Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and kings in sceptres, you can never enjoy the world.

Till your spirit filleth the whole world, and the stars are your jewels; till you are as familiar with the ways of God in all ages as with your walk and table; till you are intimately acquainted with that shady nothing out of which the world was made; till you love men so as to desire their happiness with a thirst equal to the zeal of your own; till you delight in God for being good to all; you never enjoy the world. Till you more feel it than your private estate, and are more present in the hemisphere, considering the glories and the beauties there, than in your own house; till you remember how lately you were made, and how wonderful it was when you came into it; and more rejoice in the palace of your glory than if it had been made today morning.

Yet further, you never enjoyed the world aright, till you so love the beauty of enjoying it, that you are covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it. And so perfectly hate the abominable corruption of men in despising it that you had rather suffer the flames of hell than willingly be guilty of their error.

The world is a mirror of Infinite Beauty, yet no man sees it. It is a Temple of Majesty, yet no man regards it. It is a region of Light and Peace, did not men disquiet it. It is the Paradise of God. It is more to man since he is fallen, than it was before. It is the place of Angels and the Gate of Heaven. When Jacob waked

out of his dream, he said, God is here, and I wish it not. How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the House of God and the Gate of Heaven.

Thomas Traherne

Before going on to discuss the means whereby it is possible to come to the fullness as well as the height of spiritual knowledge, let us briefly consider the experience of those who have been privileged to 'behold the One in all things,' but have made no efforts to perceive it within themselves. A great deal of interesting material on this subject may be found in Buck's *Cosmic Consciousness.* All that need be said here is that such 'cosmic consciousness' may come unsought and is in the nature of what Catholic theologians call a 'gratuitous grace.' One may have a gratuitous grace (the power of healing, for example, or foreknowledge) while in a state of mortal sin, and the gift is neither necessary to, nor sufficient for, salvation. At the best such sudden accessions of 'cosmic consciousness' as are described by Buck are merely unusual invitations to further personal effort in the direction of the inner height as well as the external fullness of knowledge. In a great many cases the invitation is not accepted; the gift is prized for the ecstatic pleasure it brings; its coming is remembered nostalgically and, if the recipient happens to be a poet, written about with eloquence - as Byron, for example, wrote in a splendid passage of *Childe Harold,* as Wordsworth wrote in *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude.* In these matters no human being may presume to pass definitive judgment upon another human being; but it is at least permissible to say that, on the basis of the biographical evidence, there is no reason to suppose that either Wordsworth or Byron ever seriously did anything about the theophanies they described; nor is there any evidence that these theophanies were of themselves sufficient to transform their characters.

That enormous egotism, to which De Quincey and Keats and Haydon bear witness, seems to have remained with Wordsworth to the end. And Byron was as fascinatingly and tragi-comically Byronic after he had beheld the One in all things as he was before.

In this context it is interesting to compare Wordsworth with another great nature lover and man of letters, St Bernard. 'Let Nature be your teacher,' says

the first; and he goes on to affirm that One impulse from the vernal wood

Will tell you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

St Bernard speaks in what seems a similar strain. ‘What I know of the divine sciences and Holy Scripture, I learnt in woods and fields. I have had no other masters than the beeches and the oaks.’ And in another of his letters he says: ‘Listen to a man of experience: thou wilt learn more in the woods than in books. Trees and stones will teach thee more than thou canst acquire from the mouth of a magister.’ The phrases are similar; but their inner significance is very different. In Augustine’s language, God alone is to be enjoyed; creatures are not to be enjoyed but used - used with love and compassion and a wondering, detached appreciation, as means to the knowledge of that which may be enjoyed. Wordsworth, like almost all other literary Nature-worshippers, preaches the enjoyment of creatures rather than their use for the attainment of spiritual ends - a use which, as we shall see, entails much self-discipline for the user. For Bernard it goes without saying that his correspondents are actively practising this self-discipline and that Nature, though loved and heeded as a teacher, is only being used as a means to God, not enjoyed as though she were God. The beauty of flowers and landscape is not merely to be relished as one ‘wanders lonely as a cloud’ about the countryside, is not merely to be pleasurably remembered when one is lying ‘in vacant or in pensive mood’ on the sofa in the library, after tea. The reaction must be a little more strenuous and purposeful. ‘Here, my brothers,’ says an ancient Buddhist author, ‘are the roots of trees, here are empty places; meditate.’ The truth is, of course, that the world is only for those who have deserved it; for, in Philo’s words, ‘even though a man may be incapable of making himself worthy of the creator of the cosmos, yet he ought to try to make himself worthy of the cosmos. He ought to transform himself from being a man into the nature of the cosmos and become, if one may say so, a little cosmos.’ For those who have not deserved the world, either by making themselves worthy

of its creator (that is to say, by non-attachment and a total self-naughting), or, less arduously, by making themselves worthy of the cosmos (by bringing order and a measure of unity to the manifold confusion of undisciplined human personality), the world is, spiritually speaking, a very dangerous place.

That *nirvana* and *samsara* are one is a fact about the nature of the universe; but it is a fact which cannot be fully realized or directly experienced, except by souls far advanced in spirituality. For ordinary, nice, unregenerate people to accept this truth by hearsay, and to act upon it in practice, is merely to court disaster. All the dismal story of antinomianism is there to warn us of what happens when men and women make practical applications of a merely intellectual and unrealized theory that all is God and God is all. And hardly less depressing than the spectacle of antinomianism is that of the earnestly respectable 'well-rounded life' of good citizens who do their best to live sacramentally, but don't in fact have any direct acquaintance with that for which the sacramental activity really stands. Dr Oman, in his *The Natural and the Supernatural,* writes at length of the theme that 'reconciliation to the evanescent is revelation of the eternal'; and in a recent volume, *Science, Religion and the Future,* Canon Raven applauds Dr Oman for having stated the principles of theology in which there could be no ultimate antithesis between nature and grace, science and religion, in which, indeed, the worlds of the scientist and the theologian arc seen to be one and the same. All this is in full accord with Taoism and Zen Buddhism and with such Christian teachings as St Augustine's *Ama et fac quod vis* and Father Lallemant's advice to theocentric contemplatives to go out and act in the world, since their actions are the only ones capable of doing any real good to the world. But what neither Dr Oman nor Canon Raven makes sufficiently clear is that nature and grace, *samsara* and *nirvana,* perpetual perishing and eternity, are really and experientially one only to persons who have fulfilled certain conditions. *Fac quod vis* in the temporal world - but only when you have learnt the infinitely difficult art of loving God with all your mind and heart and your neighbour as yourself. If you haven't learnt this lesson, you will either be an antinomian eccentric or criminal or else a respectable well-

rounded-lifer, who has left himself no time to understand either nature or grace. The Gospels are perfectly clear about the process by which, and by which alone, a man may gain the right to live in the world as though he were at home in it: he must make a total denial of selfhood, submit to a complete and absolute mortification. At one period of his career, Jesus himself seems to have undertaken austerities, not merely of the mind, but of the body. There is the record of his forty day's fast and his statement, evidently drawn from personal experience, that some demons cannot be cast out except by those who have fasted much as well as prayed. (The Curé d'Ars, whose knowledge of miracles and corporal penance was based on personal experience, insists on the close correlation between severe bodily austerities and the power to get petitionary prayer answered in ways that are sometimes supernormal.) The Pharisees reproached Jesus because he 'came eating and drinking,' and associated with 'publicans and sinners'; they ignored, or were unaware of, the fact that this apparently worldly prophet had at one time rivalled the physical austerities of John the Baptist and was practising the spiritual mortifications which he consistently preached. The pattern of Jesus' life is essentially similar to that of the ideal sage, whose career is traced in the 'Oxherding Pictures,' so popular among Zen Buddhists. The wild ox, symbolizing the unregenerate self, is caught, made to change its direction, then tamed and gradually transformed from black to white. Regeneration goes so far that for a time the ox is completely lost, so that nothing remains to be pictured but the full-orbed moon, symbolizing Mind, Suchness, the Ground. But this is not the final stage. In the end, the herdsman comes back to the world of men, riding on the back of his ox. Because he now loves, loves to the extent of being identified with the divine object of his love, he can do what he likes; for what he likes is what the Nature of Things likes. He is found in company with wine-bibbers and butchers; he and they are all converted into Buddhas. For him, there is complete reconciliation to the evanescent and, through that reconciliation, revelation of the eternal. But for nice ordinary unregenerate people the only reconciliation to the evanescent is that of indulged passions, of distractions submitted to and enjoyed. To tell such persons that

evanescence and eternity are the same, and not immediately to qualify the statement, is positively fatal - for, in practice, they are not the same except to the saint; and there is no record that anybody ever came to sanctity who did not, at the outset of his or her career, behave as if evanescence and eternity, nature and grace, were profoundly different and in many respects incompatible. As always, the path of spirituality is a knife-edge between abysses. On one side is the danger of mere rejection and escape, on the other the danger of mere acceptance and the enjoyment of things which should only be used as instruments or symbols. The versified caption which accompanies the last of the 'Oxherding Pictures' runs as follows: Even beyond the ultimate limits there extends a passage-way,

By which he comes back to the six realms of existence.
Every worldly affair is now a Buddhist work,
And wherever he goes he finds his home air.
Like a gem he stands out even in the mud,
Like pure gold he shines even in the furnace.
Along the endless road (of birth and death) he walks sufficient unto himself.
In all circumstances he moves tranquil and unattached.

The means whereby man's final end is to be attained will be described and illustrated at length in the section on 'Mortification and Non-attachment.' This section, however, is mainly concerned with the disciplining of the will. But the disciplining of the will must have as its accompaniment a no less thorough disciplining of the consciousness. There has to be a conversion, sudden or otherwise, not merely of the heart, but also of the senses and of the perceiving mind. What follows is a brief account of this *metanoia*, as the Greeks called it, this total and radical 'change of mind.'

It is in the Indian and Far Eastern formulations of the Perennial Philosophy that this subject is most systematically treated. What is prescribed is a process of conscious discrimination between the personal self and the Self that is identical with Brahman, between the individual ego and the Buddha-womb or Universal

Mind. The result of this discrimination is a more or less sudden and complete ‘revulsion’ of consciousness, and the realization of a state of ‘no-mind,’ which may be described as the freedom from perceptual and intellectual attachment to the ego-principle. This state of ‘no-mind’ exists, as it were, on a knife-edge between the carelessness of the average sensual man and the strained over-eagerness of the zealot for salvation. To achieve it, one must walk delicately and, to maintain it, must learn to combine the most intense alertness with a tranquil and self-denying passivity, the most indomitable determination with a perfect submission to the leadings of the spirit. ‘When no-mind is sought after by a mind,’ says Huang-Po, ‘that is making it a particular object of thought. There is only testimony of silence; it goes beyond thinking.’ In other words, we, as separate individuals, must not try to think it, but rather permit ourselves to be thought by it. Similarly, in the Diamond Sutra we read that if a Bodhisattva, in his attempt to realize Suchness, ‘retains the thought of an ego, a person, a separate being, or a soul, he is no longer a Bodhisattva.’ Al-Ghazzali, the philosopher of Sufism, also stresses the need for intellectual humbleness and docility. ‘If the thought that he is effaced from self occurs to one who is in *fana* (a term roughly corresponding to Zen’s “no-mind”, or *mushin),* that is a defect. The highest state is to be effaced from effacement.’ There is an ecstatic effacement-from-effacement in the interior heights of the Atman-Brahman; and there is another, more comprehensive effacement-from-effacement, not only in the inner heights, but also in and through the world, in the waking, everyday knowledge of God in his fullness.

A man must become truly poor and as free from his own creaturely will as he was when he was born. And I tell you, by the eternal truth, that so long as you *desire* to fulfil the will of God and have any hankering after eternity and God, for just so long you are not truly poor. He alone has true spiritual poverty who wills nothing, knows nothing, desires nothing.

Eckhart

The Perfect Way knows no difficulties,
Except that it refuses to make preferences.
Only when freed from hate and love
Does it reveal itself fully and without disguise.

A tenth of an inch's difference,
And heaven and earth are set apart.
If you wish to see it before your own eyes,
Have no fixed thoughts either for or against it.

To set up what you like against what you dislike -
This is the disease of the mind.
When the deep meaning of the Way is not understood,
Peace of mind is disturbed to no purpose...

Pursue not the outer entanglements,
Dwell not in the inner void;
Be serene in the oneness of things,
And dualism vanishes of itself.

When you strive to gain quiescence by stopping motion,
The quiescence so gained is ever in motion.
So long as you tarry in such dualism,
How can you realize oneness?

And when oneness is not thoroughly grasped,
Loss is sustained in two ways:
The denying of external reality is the assertion of it,
And the assertion of Emptiness (the Absolute) is the denying of it...

Transformations going on in the empty world that confronts us
Appear to be real because of Ignorance.
Do not strive to seek after the True,
Only cease to cherish opinions.

The two exist because of the One;
But hold not even to this One.
When a mind is not disturbed,
The ten thousand things offer no offence...

If an eye never falls asleep,
All dreams will cease of themselves;
If the Mind retains its absoluteness,
The ten thousand things are of one substance.

When the deep mystery of one Suchness is fathomed,
All of a sudden we forget the external entanglements;
When the ten thousand things are viewed in their oneness,
We return to the origin and remain where we have always been...

One in all,
All in One -
If only this is realized,
No more worry about not being perfect!

When Mind and each believing mind are not divided,
And undivided are each believing mind and Mind,
This is where words fail,
For it is not of the past, present or future.

The Third Patriarch of Zen

Do what you are doing now, suffer what you are suffering now; to do all this with holiness, nothing need be changed but your hearts. Sanctity consists in *willing* what happens to us by God's order. *de Caussade* The seventeenth-century Frenchman's vocabulary is very different from that of the seventh-century Chinaman's. But the advice they give is fundamentally similar. Conformity to the will of God, submission, docility to the leadings of the Holy Ghost — in practice, if not verbally, these arc the same as conformity to the Perfect Way, refusing to have preferences and cherish opinions, keeping the eyes open so that dreams may cease and Truth reveal itself.

The world inhabited by ordinary, nice, unregenerate people is mainly dull (so dull that they have to distract their minds from being aware of it by all sorts of artificial 'amusements'), sometimes briefly and intensely pleasurable, occasionally or quite often disagreeable and even agonizing. For those who have deserved the world by making themselves fit to see God within it as well as within their own souls, it wears a very different aspect.

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold. The gates at first were the end of the world. The green trees, when I saw them first through one of the gates, transported and ravished me; their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The Men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubim! And young men glittering and sparkling angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die. But all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifested in the light of the day, and something infinite behind everything appeared; which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the

temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the world was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it... And so it was that with much ado I was corrupted and made to learn the dirty devices of the world. Which now I unlearn, and become as it were a little child again, that I may enter into the Kingdom of *Thomas Traherne*

Therefore I give you still another thought, which is yet purer and more spiritual: In the Kingdom of Heaven all is in all, all is one, and all is ours.

Eckhart

The doctrine that God is in the world has an important practical corollary - the sacredness of Nature, and the sinfulness and folly of man’s overweening efforts to be her master rather than her intelligently docile collaborator. Sub-human lives and even things are to be treated with respect and understanding, not brutally oppressed to serve our human ends.

The ruler of the Southern Ocean was Shu, the ruler of the Northern Ocean was Hu, and the ruler of the Centre was Chaos. Shu and Hu were continually meeting in the land of Chaos, who treated them very well. They consulted together how they might repay his kindness, and said: ‘Men all have seven orifices for the purpose of seeing, hearing, eating and breathing, while this ruler alone has not a single one. Let us try to make them for him. Accordingly they dug one orifice in him every day. At the end of seven days Chaos died.

Chuang Tzu

In this delicately comic parable Chaos is Nature in the state of *wu-wei* — non-assertion or equilibrium. Shu and Hu are the living images of those busy persons who thought they would improve on Nature by turning dry prairies into wheat fields, and produced deserts; who proudly proclaimed the Conquest of the Air, and then discovered that they had defeated civilization; who chopped down vast forests to provide the newsprint demanded by that universal literacy which was to make the world safe for intelligence and democracy, and got wholesale erosion, pulp magazines and the organs of Fascist, Communist, capitalist and nationalist propaganda. In brief Shu and Hu are devotees of the apocalyptic religion of Inevitable Progress, and their creed is that the Kingdom of Heaven is outside you, and in the future. Chuang Tzu, on the other hand, like all good Taoists, has no desire to bully Nature into subserving ill-considered temporal ends, at variance with the final end of men as formulated in the Perennial Philosophy. His wish is to work with Nature, so as to produce material and social conditions in which individuals may realize Tao on every level from the physiological up to the spiritual.

Compared with that of the Taoists and Far Eastern Buddhists, the Christian attitude towards Nature has been curiously insensitive and often downright domineering and violent. Taking their cue from an unfortunate remark in Genesis, Catholic moralists have regarded animals as mere things which men do right to exploit for their own ends. Like landscape painting, the humanitarian movement in Europe was an almost completely secular affair. In the Far East both were essentially religious.

The Greeks believed that *hubris* was always followed by *nemesis*, that if you went too far you would get a knock on the head to remind you that the gods will not tolerate insolence on the part of mortal men. In the sphere of human relations, the modern mind understands the doctrine of *hubris* and regards it as mainly true. We wish pride to have a fall, and we see that very often it docs fall.

To have too much power over one's fellows, to be too rich, too violent, too ambitious - all this invites punishment, and in the long run, we notice, punishment of one sort or another duly comes. But the Greeks did not stop there. Because they regarded Nature as in some way divine, they felt that it had to be respected and they were convinced that a hubristic lack of respect for Nature would be punished by avenging *nemesis.* In 'The Persians,' Aeschylus gives the reasons - the ultimate, metaphysical reasons - for the barbarians' defeat. Xerxes was punished for two offences - overweening imperialism directed against the Athenians, and overweening imperialism directed against Nature. He tried to enslave his fellow-men, and he tried to enslave the sea, by building a bridge across the Hellespont.

Atossa. From shore to shore he bridged the Hellespont.
Ghost of Darius. What, could he chain the mighty Bosphorus?
Atossa. Even so, some god assisting his design.
Ghost of Darius. Some god of power to cloud his better sense.

Today we recognize and condemn the first kind of imperialism; but most of us ignore the existence and even the very possibility of the second. And yet the author of *Erewhon* was certainly not a fool, and now that we are paying the appalling price for our much touted 'conquest of Nature' his book seems more than ever topical. And Butler was not the only nineteenth-century sceptic in regard to Inevitable Progress. A generation or more before him, Alfred de Vigny was writing about the new technological marvel of his days, the steam engine — writing in a tone very different from the enthusiastic roarings and trumpetings of his great contemporary, Victor Hugo.

Sur le taureau de fer, qui fume, souffle et beugle, L'homme est monté trop tôt. Nul ne connaît encor Quels orages en lui porte ce rude aveugle,
Et le gai voyageur lui livre son trésor.

And a little later in the same poem he adds:

Tous se sont dit: 'Allons,' mais aucun n 'est le maître D'un dragon mugissant qu 'un savant a fait naître.
Nous nous sommes joués à plus fort que nous tous.

Looking backwards across the carnage and the devastation, we can see that Vigny was perfectly right. None of those gay travellers, of whom Victor Hugo was the most vociferously eloquent, had the faintest notion where that first, funny little Puffing Billy was taking them. Or rather they had a very clear notion, but it happened to be entirely false. For they were convinced that Puffing Billy was hauling them at full speed towards universal peace and the brotherhood of man; while the newspapers which they were so proud of being able to read, as the train rumbled along towards its Utopian destination not more than fifty years or so away, were the guarantee that liberty and reason would soon be everywhere triumphant. Puffing Billy has now turned into a four-motored bomber loaded with white phosphorus and high explosives, and the free press is everywhere the servant of its advertisers, of a pressure group, or of the government. And yet, for some inexplicable reason, the travellers (now far from gay) still hold fast to the religion of Inevitable Progress - which is, in the last analysis, the hope and faith (in the teeth of all human experience) that one can get something for nothing. How much saner and more realistic is the Greek view that every victory has to be paid for, and that, for some victories, the price exacted is so high that it outweighs any advantage that may be obtained! Modern man no longer regards Nature as being in any sense divine and feels perfectly free to behave towards her as an overweening conqueror and tyrant. The spoils of recent technological imperialism have been enormous; but meanwhile *nemesis* has seen to it that we get our kicks as well as halfpence. For example, has the ability to travel in twelve hours from New York to Los Angeles given more pleasure to the human race than the dropping of bombs and fire has given pain? There is no known method of computing the amount of felicity or

goodness in the world at large. What is obvious, however, is that the advantages accruing from recent technological advances - or, in Greek phraseology, from recent acts of *hubris* directed against Nature - are generally accompanied by corresponding disadvantages, that gains in one direction entail losses in other directions, and that we never get something except for something. Whether the net result of these elaborate credit and debit operations is a genuine Progress in virtue, happiness, charity and intelligence is something we can never definitely determine. It is because the reality of Progress can never be determined that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have had to treat it as an article of religious faith. To the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy, the question whether Progress is inevitable or even real is not a matter of primary importance. For them, the important thing is that individual men and women should come to the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground, and what interests them in regard to the social environment is not its progressiveness or non-progressiveness (whatever those terms may mean), but the degree to which it helps or hinders individuals in their advance towards man’s final end.

5. Charity

HE THAT LOVETH not knoweth not God, for God is love.

i John iv

By love may He be gotten and holden, but by thought never.

The Cloud of Unknowing Whosoever studies to reach contemplation (i.e. unitive knowledge) should begin by searchingly enquiring of himself how much he loves. For love is the motive power of the mind *(machina mentis),* which draws it out of the world and raises it on high.

St Gregory the Great

The astrolabe of the mysteries of God is love.

Jalal-uddin Rumi

Heavens, deal so still!

Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man That slaves your ordinance, that will not see Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly.

Shakespeare

Love is infallible; it has no errors, for all errors are the want of love.

William Law

We can only love what we know, and we can never know completely what we do not love. Love is a mode of knowledge, and when the love is sufficiently disinterested and sufficiently intense, the knowledge becomes unitive knowledge and so takes on the quality of infallibility. Where there is no disinterested love (or, more briefly, no charity), there is only biased self-love, and consequently only a partial and distorted knowledge both of the self and of the world of things, lives, minds and spirit outside the self. The lust-dieted man ‘slaves the ordinances of Heaven’ - that is to say, he subordinates the laws of Nature and the spirit to his own cravings. The result is that ‘he does not feel’ and therefore makes himself incapable of knowledge. His ignorance is ultimately voluntary; if he cannot see, it is because ‘he will not see.’ Such voluntary ignorance inevitably has its negative reward. *Nemesis* follows *hubris* - sometimes in a spectacular way, as when the self-blinded man (Macbeth, Othello, Lear) falls into the trap which his own ambition or possessiveness or petulant vanity has prepared for him; sometimes in a less obvious way, as in the cases where power, prosperity and reputation endure to the end but at the cost of an ever-increasing imperviousness to grace and enlightenment, an ever completer inability to escape, now or hereafter, from the stifling prison of selfness and separateness. How profound can be the spiritual ignorance by which such ‘enslavers of heaven’s ordinances’ are punished is indicated by the behaviour of Cardinal Richelieu on his death-bed. The priest who attended him urged the great man to prepare his soul for its coming ordeal by forgiving all his enemies. ‘I have never had any enemies,’ the Cardinal replied with the calm sincerity of an ignorance which long years of intrigue and avarice and ambition had rendered as absolute as had been his political power, ‘save only those of the State.’ Like Napoleon, but in a different way, he was ‘feeling heaven’s power,’ because he had refused to feel charity and therefore refused to know the truth about his own soul or anything else.

Here on earth the love of God is better than the knowledge of God, while it is better to know inferior things than to love them.

By knowing them we raise them, in a way, to our intelligence, whereas by loving them we stoop towards them and may become subservient to them, as the miser to his gold.

St Thomas Aquinas (paraphrased)

This remark seems, at first sight, to be incompatible with what precedes it. But in reality St Thomas is merely distinguishing between the various forms of love and knowledge. It is better to love-know God than just to know about God, without love, through the reading of a treatise on theology. Gold, on the other hand, should never be known with the miser's love, or rather concupiscence, but either abstractly, as the scientific investigator knows it, or else with the disinterested love-knowledge of the artist in metal, or of the spectator, who love-knows the goldsmith's work, not for its cash value, not for the sake of possessing it, but just because it is beautiful. And the same applies to all created things, lives and minds. It is bad to love-know them with self-centred attachment and cupidity; it is somewhat better to know them with scientific dispassion; it is best to supplement abstract knowledge-without-cupidity with true disinterested love-knowledge, having the quality of aesthetic delight, or of charity, or of both combined.

We make an idol of truth itself; for truth apart from charity is not God, but his image and idol, which we must neither love nor worship.

Pascal By a kind of philological accident (which is probably no accident at all, but one of the more subtle expressions of man's deep-seated will to ignorance and spiritual darkness), the word 'charity' has come, in modern English, to be synonymous with 'almsgiving,' and is almost never used in its original sense, as signifying the highest and most divine form of love. Owing to this impoverishment of our, at the best of times, very inadequate vocabulary of psychological and spiritual terms, the word 'love' has to assume an added burden. 'God is love,' we repeat glibly, and that we must 'love our neighbours as ourselves'; but 'love,' unfortunately, stands for everything from what happens

when, on the screen, two close-ups rapturously collide to what happens when a John Woolman or a Peter Claver feels a concern about Negro slaves, because they are temples of the Holy Spirit - from what happens when crowds shout and sing and wave flags in the *Sport-Palast* or the Red Square to what happens when a solitary contemplative becomes absorbed in the prayer of simple regard. Ambiguity in vocabulary leads to confusion of thought; and, in this matter of love, confusion of thought admirably serves the purpose of an unregenerate and divided human nature that is determined to make the best of both worlds - to say that it is serving God, while in fact it is serving Mammon, Mars or Priapus.

Systematically or in brief aphorism and parable, the masters of the spiritual life have described the nature of true charity and have distinguished it from the other, lower forms of love. Let us consider its principal characteristics in order. First, charity is disinterested, seeking no reward, nor allowing itself to be diminished by any return of evil for its good. God is to be loved for Himself, not for his gifts, and persons and things arc to be loved for God’s sake, because they are temples of the Holy Ghost. Moreover, since charity is disinterested, it must of necessity be universal.

Love seeks no cause beyond itself and no fruit; it is its own fruit, its own enjoyment. I love because I love; I love in order that I may love... Of all the motions and affections of the soul, love is the only one by means of which the creature, though not on equal terms, is able to treat with the Creator and to give back something resembling what has been given to it... When God loves, He only desires to be loved, knowing that love will render all those who love Him happy.

St Bernard

For as love has no by-ends, wills nothing but its own increase, so everything is as oil to its flame; it must have that which it wills and cannot be disappointed, because everything (including unkindness on the part of those loved) naturally helps it to live in its own way and to bring forth its own work.

William Law

Those who speak ill of me are really my good friends.
When, being slandered, I cherish neither enmity nor preference, There grows within me the power of love and humility, which is born of the Unborn.

Kung-chia Ta-shih

Some people want to see God with their eyes as they see a cow, and to love Him as they love their cow - for the milk and cheese and profit it brings them. This is how it is with people who love God for the sake of outward wealth or inward comfort. They do not rightly love God, when they love Him for their own advantage. Indeed, I tell you the truth, any object you have in your mind, however good, will be a barrier between you and the inmost Truth.

Eckhart

A beggar, Lord, I ask of Thee More than a thousand kings could ask.
Each one wants something, which he asks of Thee.
I come to ask Thee to give me Thyself.

Ansari of Herat

I will have nothing to do with a love which would be for God or in God. This is a love which pure love cannot abide; for pure love is God Himself.

St Catherine of Genoa

As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her son, her only son, so let there be good will without measure between all beings. Let good will without

measure prevail in the whole world, above, below, around, unstinted, unmixed with any feeling of differing or opposing interests. If a man remain steadfastly in this state of mind all the time he is awake, then is come to pass the saying, ‘Even in this world holiness has been found.’

Metta Sutta

Learn to look with an equal eye upon all beings, seeing the one Self in all.

Srimad Bhagavatam The second distinguishing mark of charity is that, unlike the lower forms of love, it is not an emotion. It begins as an act of the will and is consummated as a purely spiritual awareness, a unitive love-knowledge of the essence of its object.

Let everyone understand that real love of God does not consist in tear-shedding, nor in that sweetness and tenderness for which usually we long, just because they console us, but in serving God injustice, fortitude of soul and humility.

St Teresa

The worth of love does not consist of high feelings, but in detachment, in patience under all trials for the sake of God whom we love.

St John of the Cross

By love I do not mean any natural tenderness, which is more or less in people according to their constitution; but I mean a larger principle of the soul, founded in reason and piety, which makes us tender, kind and gentle to all our fellow creatures as creatures of God, and for his sake.

William Law

The nature of charity, or the love-knowledge of God, is defined by Shankara, the great Vedantist saint an philosopher of the ninth century, in the thirty-second couplet of his *Viveka-Chudamani.*

Among the instruments of emancipation the supreme is devotion. Contemplation of the true form of the real Self (the Atman which is identical with Brahman) is said to be devotion.

In other words, the highest form of the love of God is an immediate spiritual intuition, by which the 'knower, known and knowledge are made one.' The means to, and earlier stages of, this supreme love-knowledge of Spirit by spirit are described by Shankara in the preceding verses of his philosophical poem, and consist in acts of a will directed towards the denial of selfness in thought, feeling and action, towards desirelessness and non-attachment or (to use the corresponding Christian term) 'holy indifference,' towards a cheerful acceptance of affliction, without self-pity and without thought of returning evil for evil, and finally towards unsleeping and one-pointed mindfulness of the Godhead who is at once transcendent and, because transcendent, immanent in every soul.

It is plain that no distinct object whatever that pleases the will can be God; and, for that reason, if the will is to be united with Him, it must empty itself, cast away every disorderly affection of the desire, every satisfaction it may distinctly have, high and low, temporal and spiritual, so that, purified and cleansed from all unruly satisfactions, joys and desires, it may be wholly occupied, with all its affections, in loving God. For if the will can in any way comprehend God and be united with Him, it cannot be through any capacity of the desire, but only by love; and as all the delight, sweetness and joy, of which the will is sensible, is not love, it follows that none of these pleasing impressions can be the adequate means of uniting the will to God. These adequate means consist in an act of the will. And because an act of the will is quite distinct from feeling, it is by an act that the will is united with God and rests in Him; that act is love. This union is never wrought by feeling or exertion of the desire; for these remain in the soul as aims and ends. It is only as motives of love that feelings can be of service, if the will is bent on going onwards, and for nothing else...

He, then, is very unwise who, when sweetness and spiritual delight fail him, thinks for that reason that God has abandoned him; and when he finds them again, rejoices and is glad, thinking that he has in that way come to possess God.

More unwise still is he who goes about seeking for sweetness in God, rejoices in it, and dwells upon it; for in so doing he is not seeking after God with the will grounded in the emptiness of faith and charity, but only in spiritual sweetness and delight, which is a created thing, following herein in his own will and fond pleasure... It is impossible for the will to attain to the sweetness and bliss of the divine union otherwise than in detachment, in refusing to the desire every pleasure in the things of heaven and earth.

St John of the Cross Love (the sensible love of the emotions) does not unify. True, it unites in act; but it does not unite in essence.

Eckhart

The reason why sensible love even of the highest object cannot unite the soul to its divine Ground in spiritual essence is that, like all other emotions of the heart, sensible love intensifies that selfness, which is the final obstacle in the way of such union. ‘The damned are in eternal movement without any mixture of rest; we mortals, who arc yet in this pilgrimage, have now movement, now rest... Only God has repose without movement.’ Consequently it is only if we abide in the peace of God that passes all understanding that we can abide in the knowledge and love of God. And to the peace that passes understanding we have to go by way of the humble and very ordinary peace which can be understood by everybody - peace between nations and within them (for wars and violent revolutions have the effect of more or less totally eclipsing God for the majority of those involved in them);- peace between individuals and within the individual soul (for personal quarrels and private fears, loves, hates, ambitions and distractions are, in their petty way, no less fatal to the development of the spiritual life than arc the greater calamities). We have to will the peace that it is within our power to get for ourselves and others, in order that we may be fit to

receive that other peace, which is a fruit of the Spirit and the condition, as St Paul implied, of the unitive knowledge-love of God.

It is by means of tranquillity of mind that you are able to transmute this false mind of death and rebirth into the clear Intuitive Mind and, by so doing, to realize the primal and enlightening Essence of Mind. You should make this your starting point for spiritual practices. Having harmonized your starting point with your goal, you will be able by right practice to attain your true end of perfect Enlightenment.

If you wish to tranquillize your mind and restore its original purity, you must proceed as you would do if you were purifying a jar of muddy water. You first let it stand, until the sediment settles at the bottom, when the water will become clear, which corresponds with the state of the mind before it was troubled by defiling passions. Then you carefully strain off the pure water... When the mind becomes tranquillized and concentrated into perfect unity, then all things will be seen, not in their separateness, but in their unity, wherein there is no place for the passions to enter, and which is in full conformity with the mysterious and indescribable purity of Nirvana.

Surangama Sutra

This identity out of the One into the One and with the One is the source and fountainhead and breaking forth of glowing Love.

Eckhart

Spiritual progress, as we have had occasion to discover in several other contexts, is always spiritual and reciprocal. Peace from distractions and emotional agitations is the way to charity; and charity, or unitive love-knowledge, is the way to the higher peace of God. And the same is true of humility, which is the third characteristic mark of charity. Humility is a

necessary condition of the highest form of love, and the highest form of love makes possible the consummation of humility in a total self-naughting.

Would you be a pilgrim on the road of Love?

The first condition is that you make yourself humble as dust and ashes.

Ansari of Herat

I have but one word to say to you concerning love for your neighbour, namely that nothing save humility can mould you to it; nothing but the consciousness of your own weakness can make you indulgent and pitiful to that of others. You will answer, I quite understand that humility should produce forbearance towards others, but how am I first to acquire humility? Two things combined will bring that about; you must never separate them. The first is contemplation of the deep gulf, whence God's all-powerful hand has drawn you out, and over which He ever holds you, so to say, suspended. The second is the presence of that all-penetrating God. It is only in beholding and loving God that we can learn forgetfulness of self, measure duly the nothingness which has dazzled us, and accustom ourselves thankfully to decrease beneath that great Majesty which absorbs all things. Love God and you will be humble; love God and you will throw off the love of self; love God and you will love all that He gives you to love for love of Him.

Fénelon

Feelings, as we have seen, may be of service as motives of charity; but charity as charity has its beginning in the will - will to peace and humility in oneself, will to patience and kindness towards one's fellow-creatures, will to that disinterested love of God which 'asks nothing and refuses nothing." But the will can be strengthened by exercise and confirmed by perseverance. This is very clearly brought out in the following record — delightful for its Boswellian

vividness - of a conversation between the young Bishop of Belley and his beloved friend and master, François de Sales.

I once asked the Bishop of Geneva what one must do to attain perfection. ‘You must love God with all your heart,’ he answered, ‘and your neighbour as yourself.’

‘I did not ask wherein perfection lies,’ I rejoined, ‘but how to attain it.’

‘Charity,’ he said again, ‘that is both the means and the end, the only way by which we can reach that perfection which is, after all, but Charity itself...Just as the soul is the life of the body, so charity is the life of the soul.’

‘I know all that,’ I said. ‘But I want to know *how* one is to love God with all one’s heart and one’s neighbour as oneself.’

But again he answered, ‘We must love God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves.’

‘I am no further than I was,’ I replied. ‘Tell me how to acquire such love.’

‘The best way, the shortest and easiest way of loving God with all one’s heart is to love Him wholly and heartily!’

He would give no other answer. At last, however, the Bishop said, ‘There are many besides you who want me to tell them of methods and systems and secret ways of becoming perfect, and I can only tell them that the whole secret is a hearty love of God, and the only way of attaining that love is by loving. You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working; and just so you learn to love God and man by loving. All those who think to learn in any other way deceive themselves. If you want to love God, go on loving Him more and more. Begin as a mere apprentice, and the very power of love will lead you on to become a master in the art. Those who have made most progress will continually press on, never believing themselves to have reached their end; for charity should go on increasing until we draw our last breath.’

Jean Pierre Camus

The passage from what St Bernard calls the ‘carnal love’ of the sacred humanity to the spiritual love of the Godhead, from the emotional love that can only unite lover and beloved in act to the perfect charity which unifies them in spiritual substance, is reflected in religious practice as the passage from meditation, discursive and affective, to infused contemplation. All Christian writers insist that the spiritual love of the Godhead is superior to the carnal love of the humanity, which serves as introduction and means to man’s final end in unitive love-knowledge of the divine Ground; but all insist no less strongly that carnal love is a necessary introduction and an indispensable means. Oriental writers would agree that this is true for many persons, but not for all, since there are some born contemplatives who are able to ‘harmonize their starting point with their goal’ and to embark directly upon the Yoga of Knowledge. It is from the point of view of the born contemplative that the greatest of Taoist philosophers writes in the following passage.

Those men who in a special way regard Heaven as Father and have, as it were, a personal love for it, how much more should they love what is above Heaven as Father! Other men in a special way regard their rulers as better than themselves and they, as it were, personally die for them. How much more should they die for what is truer than a ruler; When the springs dry up, the fish are all together on dry land. They then moisten each other with their dampness and keep each other wet with their slime. But this is not to be compared with forgetting each other in a river or lake.

Chuang Tzu

The slime of personal and emotional love is remotely similar to the water of the Godhead’s spiritual being, but of inferior quality and (precisely because the love is emotional and therefore personal) of insufficient quantity. Having, by their voluntary ignorance, wrong-doing and wrong being, caused the divine springs to dry up, human beings can do something to mitigate the horrors of their situation by ‘keeping one another wet with their slime.’ But there can be no

happiness or safety in time and no deliverance into eternity, until they give up thinking that slime is enough and, by abandoning themselves to what is in fact their element, call back the eternal waters. To those who seek first the Kingdom of God, all the rest will be added. From those who, like the modern idolaters of progress, seek first all the rest in the expectation that (after the harnessing of atomic power and the next revolution but three) the Kingdom of God will be added, everything will be taken away. And yet we continue to trust in progress, to regard personal slime as the highest form of spiritual moisture and to prefer an agonizing and impossible existence on dry land to love, joy and peace in our native ocean.

The sect of lovers is distinct from all others; Lovers have a religion and a faith all their own.

Jalal-uddin Rumi

The soul lives by that which it loves rather than in the body which it animates. For it has not its life in the body, but rather gives it to the body and lives in that which it loves.

St John of the Cross

Temperance is love surrendering itself wholly to Him who is its object; courage is love bearing all things gladly for the sake of Him who is its object; justice is love serving only Him who is its object, and therefore rightly ruling, prudence is love making wise distinctions between what hinders and what helps itself.

St Augustine

The distinguishing marks of charity arc disinterestedness, tranquillity and humility. But where there is disinterestedness there is neither greed for personal

advantage nor fear for personal loss or punishment; where there is tranquillity, there is neither craving nor aversion, but a steady will to conform to the divine Tao or Logos on every level of existence and a steady awareness of the divine Suchness and what should be one's own relations to it; and where there is humility there is no censoriousness and no glorification of the ego or any projected alter-ego at the expense of others, who are recognized as having the same weaknesses and faults, but also the same capacity for transcending them in the unitive knowledge of God, as one has oneself. From all this it follows that charity is the root and substance of morality, and that where there is little charity there will be much avoidable evil. All this has been summed up in Augustine's formula: 'Love, and do what you like.' Among the later elaborations of the Augustinian theme we may cite the following from the writings of John Everard, one of those spiritually minded seventeenth-century divines whose teachings fell on the deaf ears of warring factions and, when the revolution and the military dictatorship were at an end, on the even deafer ears of Restoration clergymen and their successors in the Augustan age. (Just how deaf those ears could be we may judge by what Swift wrote of his beloved and morally perfect Houyhnhnms. The subject matter of their conversations, as of their poetry, consisted of such things as 'friendship and benevolence, the visible operations of nature or ancient traditions; the bounds and limits of virtue, the unerring rules of reason.' Never once do the ideas of God, or charity, or deliverance engage their minds. Which shows sufficiently clearly what the Dean of St Patrick's thought of the religion by which he made his money.) Turn the man loose who has found the living guide within him, and then let him neglect the outward if he can! Just as you would say to a man who loves his wife with all tenderness, 'You are at liberty to beat her, hurt her or kill her, if you want to.'

John Everard

From this it follows that, where there is charity, there can be no coercion.

God forces no one, for love cannot compel, and God’s service, therefore, is a thing of perfect freedom.

Hans Denk

But just because it cannot compel, charity has a kind of authority, a non-coercive power, by means of which it defends itself and gets its beneficent will done in the world - not always, of course, not inevitably or automatically (for individuals and, still more, organizations can be impenetrably armoured against divine influence), but in a surprisingly large number of cases.

Heaven arms with pity those whom it would not see destroyed.

Lao Tzu

‘He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me’ - in those who harbour such thoughts hatred will never cease.

‘He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me’ - in those who do not harbour such thoughts hatred will cease.

For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time - this is an old rule.

Dhammapada

Our present economic, social and international arrangements are based, in large measure, upon organized lovelessness. We begin by lacking charity towards Nature, so that instead of trying to co-operate with Tao or the Logos on the inanimate and sub-human levels, we try to dominate and exploit, we waste the earth’s mineral resources, ruin its soil, ravage its forests, pour filth into its rivers and poisonous fumes into its air. From lovelessness in relation to Nature we advance to lovelessness in relation to art — a lovelessness so extreme that we have effectively killed all the fundamental or useful arts and set-up various kinds of mass-production by machines in their place. And of course this lovelessness

in regard to art is at the same time a lovelessness in regard to the human beings who have to perform the fool-proof and grace-proof tasks imposed by our mechanical art-surrogates and by the interminable paper work connected with mass-production and mass-distribution. With mass-production and mass-distribution go mass-financing, and the three have conspired to expropriate ever-increasing numbers of small owners of land and productive equipment, thus reducing the sum of freedom among the majority and increasing the power of a minority to exercise a coercive control over the lives of their fellows. This coercively controlling minority is composed of private capitalists or governmental bureaucrats or of both classes of bosses acting in collaboration — and, of course, the coercive and therefore essentially loveless nature of the control remains the same, whether the bosses call themselves ‘company directors’ or ‘civil servants.’ The only difference between these two kinds of oligarchical rulers is that the first derive more of their power from wealth than from position within a conventionally respected hierarchy, while the second derive more power from position than from wealth. Upon this fairly uniform groundwork of loveless relationships are imposed others, which vary widely from one society to another, according to local conditions and local habits of thought and feeling. Here are a few examples: contempt and exploitation of coloured minorities living among white majorities, or of coloured majorities governed by minorities of white imperialists; hatred of Jews, Catholics, Freemasons or of any other minority whose language, habits, appearance or religion happens to differ from those of the local majority. And the crowning superstructure of uncharity is the organized lovelessness of the relations between state and sovereign state - a lovelessness that expresses itself in the axiomatic assumption that it is right and natural for national organizations to behave like thieves and murderers, armed to the teeth and ready, at the first favourable opportunity, to steal and kill. (Just how axiomatic is this assumption about the nature of nationhood is shown by the history of Central America. So long as the arbitrarily delimited territories of Central America were called provinces of the Spanish colonial empire, there was peace between their inhabitants. But early in

the nineteenth century the various administrative districts of the Spanish empire broke from their allegiance to the ‘mother country’ and decided to become nations on the European model. Result: they immediately went to war with one another. Why? Because, by definition, a sovereign national state is an organization that has the right and duty to coerce its members to steal and kill on the largest possible scale.) ‘Lead us not into temptation’ must be the guiding principle of all social organization, and the temptations to be guarded against and, so far as possible, eliminated by means of appropriate economic and political arrangements are temptations against charity, that is to say, against the disinterested love of God, Nature and man. First, the dissemination and general acceptance of any form of the Perennial Philosophy will do something to preserve men and women from the temptation to idolatrous worship of things in time - church-worship, state-worship, revolutionary future-worship, humanistic self-worship, all of them essentially and necessarily opposed to charity. Next come decentralization, widespread private ownership of land and the means of production on a small scale, discouragement of monopoly by state or corporation, division of economic and political power (the only guarantee, as Lord Acton was never tired of insisting, of civil liberty under law). These social rearrangements would do much to prevent ambitious individuals, organizations and governments from being led into the temptation of behaving tyrannously; while co-operatives, democratically controlled professional organizations and town meetings would deliver the masses of the people from the temptation of making their decentralized individualism too rugged. But of course none of these intrinsically desirable reforms can possibly be carried out, so long as it is thought right and natural that sovereign states should prepare to make war on one another. For modern war cannot be waged except by countries with an over-developed capital goods industry; countries in which economic power is wielded either by the state or by a few monopolistic corporations which it is easy to tax and, if necessary, temporarily to nationalize; countries where the labouring masses, being without property, are rootless, easily transferable from one place to another, highly regimented by factory discipline. Any decentralized society of

free, uncoerced small owners, with a properly balanced economy must, in a war-making world such as ours, be at the mercy of one whose production is highly mechanized and centralized, whose people are without property and therefore easily coercible, and whose economy is lop-sided. This is why the one desire of industrially undeveloped countries like Mexico and China is to become like Germany, or England, or the United States. So long as the organized lovelessness of war and preparation for war remains, there can be no mitigation, on any large, nationwide or world-wide scale, of the organized lovelessness of our economic and political relationships. War and preparation for war are standing temptations to make the present bad, God eclipsing arrangements of society progressively worse as technology becomes progressively more efficient.

6. Mortification, Non-Attachment, Right Livelihood

THIS TREASURE OF the Kingdom of God has been hidden by time and multiplicity and the soul's own works, or briefly by its creaturely nature. But in the measure that the soul can separate itself from this multiplicity, to that extent it reveals within itself the Kingdom of God. Here the soul and the Godhead are one.

Eckhart

‘OUR KINGDOM GO’ is the necessary and unavoidable corollary of ‘Thy kingdom come.’ For the more there is of self, the less there is of God. The divine eternal fullness of life can be gained only by those who have deliberately lost the partial, separative life of craving and self-interest, of egocentric thinking, feeling, wishing and acting. Mortification or deliberate dying to self is inculcated with an uncompromising firmness in the canonical writings of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and most of the other major and minor religions of the world, and by every theocentric saint and spiritual reformer who has ever lived out and expounded the principle of the Perennial Philosophy. But this ‘self-naughting’ is never (at least by anyone who knows what he is talking about) regarded as an end in itself. It possesses merely an instrumental value, as the indispensable means to something else. In the words of one whom we have often had occasion to cite in earlier sections, it is necessary for all of us to ‘learn the true nature and worth of all self-denials and mortifications.’

As to their nature, considered in themselves, they have nothing of goodness or holiness, nor are any real part of our sanctification, they are not the true food or nourishment of the Divine Life in our souls, they have no quickening, sanctifying power in them; their only worth consists in this, that they remove the impediments of holiness, break down that which stands between God and us, and make way for the quickening, sanctifying spirit of God to operate on our souls, which operation of God is the one only thing that can raise the Divine Life in the soul, or help it to the smallest degree of real holiness or spiritual life... Hence we may learn the reason why many people not only lose the benefit, but are even the worse for all their mortifications. It is because they mistake the whole nature and worth of them. They practise them for their own sakes, as things good in themselves; they think them to be real parts of holiness, and so rest in them and look no further, but grow full of self-esteem and self-admiration for their own progress in them. This makes them self-sufficient, morose, severe judges of all those that fall short of their mortifications. And thus their self-denials do only

that for them which indulgences do for other people: they withstand and hinder the operation of God upon their souls, and instead of being really self-denials, they strengthen and keep up the kingdom of self.

William Law

The rout and destruction of the passions, while a good, is not the ultimate good; the discovery of Wisdom is the surpassing good. When this is found, all the people will sing.

Philo

Dame Gertrude More

Living in religion (as I can speak by experience) if one is not in a right course of prayer and other exercises between God and our soul, one's nature groweth much worse than ever it would have been, if one had lived in the world. For pride and self-love, which are rooted in the soul by sin, find means to strengthen themselves exceedingly in religion, if the soul is not in a course that may teach her and procure her true humility. For by the corrections and contradictions of the will (which cannot be avoided by any living in a religious community) I find my heart grown, as I may say, as hard as a stone; and nothing would have been able to soften it but by being put into a course of prayer, by which the soul tendeth towards God and learneth of Him the lesson of truly humbling herself.

Once, when I was grumbling over being obliged to eat meat and do no penance, I heard it said that sometimes there was more of self-love than desire of penance in such sorrow.

St Teresa

That the mortified are, in some respects, often much worse than the unmortified is a commonplace of history, fiction and descriptive psychology. Thus, the Puritan may practise all the cardinal virtues - prudence, fortitude, temperance and chastity - and yet remain a thoroughly bad man; for, in all too many cases, these virtues of his are accompanied by, and indeed causally connected with, the sins of pride, envy, chronic anger and an uncharitableness pushed sometimes to the level of active cruelty. Mistaking the means for the end, the Puritan has fancied himself holy because he is stoically austere. But stoical austerity is merely the exaltation of the more creditable side of the ego at the expense of the less creditable. Holiness, on the contrary, is the total denial of the separative self, in its creditable no less than its discreditable aspects, and the abandonment of the will to God. To the extent that there is attachment to 'I,'

'me,'

'mine,' there is no attachment to, and therefore no unitive knowledge of, the divine Ground. Mortification has to be carried to the pitch of non-attachment or (in the phrase of St François de Sales) 'holy indifference'; otherwise it merely transfers self-will from one channel to another, not merely without decrease in the total volume of that self-will, but sometimes with an actual increase. As usual, the corruption of the best is the worst. The difference between the mortified but still proud and self-centred stoic and the unmortified hedonist consists in this: the latter, being flabby, shiftless and at heart rather ashamed of himself, lacks the energy and the motive to do much harm except to his own body, mind and spirit; the former, because he has all the secondary virtues and looks down on those who arc not like himself, is morally equipped to wish and to be able to do harm on the very largest scale and with a perfectly untroubled conscience. These are obvious facts; and yet, in the current religious jargon of our day the word 'immoral' is reserved almost exclusively for the carnally self-indulgent. The covetous and the ambitious, the respectable toughs and those who cloak their lust for power and place under the right sort of idealistic cant, are not

merely unblamed; they are even held up as models of virtue and godliness. The representatives of the organized churches begin by putting haloes on the heads of the people who do most to make wars and revolutions, then go on, rather plaintively, to wonder why the world should be in such a mess.

Mortification is not, as many people seem to imagine, a matter, primarily, of severe physical austerities. It is possible that, for certain persons in certain circumstances, the practice of severe physical austerities may prove helpful in advance towards man's final end. In most cases, however, it would seem that what is gained by such austerities is not liberation, but something quite different - the achievement of 'psychic' powers. The ability to get petitionary prayer answered, the power to heal and work other miracles, the knack of looking into the future or into other people's minds - these, it would seem, arc often related in some kind of causal connection with fasting, watching and the self-infliction of pain. Most of the great theocentric saints and spiritual teachers have admitted the existence of supernormal powers, only, however, to deplore them. To think that such *Siddhis*, as the Indians call them, have anything to do with liberation is, they say, a dangerous illusion. These things are either irrelevant to the main issue of life, or, if too much prized and attended to, an obstacle in the way of spiritual advance. Nor arc these the only objections to physical austerities. Carried to extremes, they may be dangerous to health - and without health the steady persistence of effort required by the spiritual life is very difficult of achievement. And being difficult, painful and generally conspicuous, physical austerities are a standing temptation to vanity and the competitive spirit of record breaking. 'When thou didst give thyself up to physical mortification, thou wast great, thou wast admired.' So writes Suso of his own experiences - experiences which led him, just as Gautama Buddha had been led many centuries before, to give up his course of bodily penance. And St Teresa remarks how much easier it is to impose great penances upon oneself than to suffer in patience, charity and humbleness the ordinary everyday crosses of family life (which did not prevent her, incidentally, from practising, to the very day of her death, the most excruciating forms of self-torture. Whether these austerities really helped her to

come to the unitive knowledge of God, or whether they were prized and persisted in because of the psychic powers they helped to develop, there is no means of determining.) Our dear Saint (François de Sales) disapproved of immoderate fasting. He used to say that the spirit could not endure the body when overfed, but that, if underfed, the body could not endure the spirit.

Jean Pierre Camus

When the will, the moment it feels any joy in sensible things rises upwards in that joy to God, and when sensible things move it to pray, it should not neglect them, it should make use of them for so holy an exercise; because sensible things, in these conditions, subserve the end for which God created them, namely to be occasions for making Him better known and loved.

St John of the Cross

He who is not conscious of liberty of spirit among the things of sense and sweetness - things which should serve as motives to prayer - and whose will rests and feeds upon them, ought to abstain from the use of them; for to him they are a hindrance on the road to God.

St John of the Cross

One man may declare that he cannot fast; but can he declare that he cannot love God? Another may affirm that he cannot preserve virginity or sell ail his goods in order to give the price to the poor; but can he tell me that he cannot love his enemies? All that is necessary is to look into one’s own heart; for what God asks of us is not found at a great distance.

St Jerome

Anybody who wishes to do so can get all, and indeed more than all, the mortification he wants out of the incidents of ordinary, day-to-day living, without ever resorting to harsh bodily penance. Here are the rules laid down by the author of *Holy Wisdom* for Dame Gertrude More.

First, that she should do all that belonged to her to do by any law, human or Divine. Secondly, that she was to refrain from doing those things that were forbidden her by human or Divine Law, or by Divine inspiration. Thirdly, that she should bear with as much patience or resignation as possible all crosses and contradictions to her natural will, which were inflicted by the hand of God. Such, for instance, were aridities, temptations, afflictions or bodily pain, sickness and infirmity; or again, the loss of friends or want of necessaries and comforts. All this was to be endured patiently, whether the crosses came direct from God or by means of His creatures... These indeed were mortifications enough for Dame Gertrude, or for any other soul, and there was no need for anyone to advise or impose others.

Augustine Baker

To sum up, that mortification is the best which results in the elimination of self-will, self-interest, self-centred thinking, wishing and imagining. Extreme physical austerities arc not likely to achieve this kind of mortification. But the acceptance of what happens to us (apart, of course, from our own sins) in the course of daily living *is* likely to produce this result. If specific exercises in self-denial are undertaken, they should be inconspicuous, non-competitive and uninjurious to health. Thus, in the matter of diet, most people will find it sufficiently mortifying to refrain from eating all the things which the experts in nutrition condemn as unwholesome. And where social relations are concerned, self-denial should take the form, not of showy acts of would-be humility, but of control of the tongue and the moods - in refraining from saying anything uncharitable or merely frivolous (which means, in practice, refraining from about fifty per cent of ordinary conversation), and in behaving calmly and with quiet cheerfulness when external circumstances or the state of our bodies predisposes us to anxiety, gloom or an excessive elation.

When a man practises charity in order to be reborn in heaven, or for fame, or reward, or from fear, such charity can obtain no pure effect.

Sutra on the Distinction and Protection of the Dharma

When Prince Wen Wang was on a tour of inspection in Tsang, he saw an old man fishing. But his fishing was not real fishing, for he did not fish in order to catch fish, but to amuse himself. So Wen Wang wished to employ him in the administration of government, but feared lest his own ministers, uncles and brothers might object. On the other hand, if he let the old man go, he could not bear to think of the people being deprived of such an influence.

Chuang Tzu

God, if I worship Thee in fear of hell, burn me in hell. And if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not Thine everlasting Beauty.

Rahi ‘a Rabi’a, the Sufi woman-saint, speaks, thinks and feels in terms of devotional theism; the Buddhist theologian, in terms of impersonal moral Law; the Chinese philosopher, with characteristic humour, in terms of politics; but all three insist on the need for non-attachment to self-interest - insist on it as strongly as does Christ when he reproaches the Pharisees for their egocentric piety, as does the Krishna of the Bhagavad-Gita when he tells Arjuna to do his divinely ordained duty without personal craving for, or fear of, the fruits of his actions.

St Ignatius Loyola was once asked what his feelings would be if the Pope were to suppress the Company of Jesus. ‘A quarter of an hour of prayer,’ he answered, ‘and I should think no more about it.’

This is, perhaps, the most difficult of all mortifications - to achieve a ‘holy indifference’ to the temporal success or failure of the cause to which one has devoted one’s best energies. If it triumphs, well and good; and if it meets defeat, that also is well and good, if only in ways that, to a limited and time-bound mind, are here and now entirely incomprehensible.

By a man without passions I mean one who does not permit good or evil to disturb his inward economy, but rather falls in with what happens and does not add to the sum of his mortality.

Chuang Tzu

The fitting disposition for union with God is not that the soul should understand, feel, taste or imagine anything on the subject of the nature of God, or any other thing whatever, but should remain in that pureness and love which is perfect resignation and complete detachment from all things for God alone.

St John of the Cross

Disquietude is always vanity, because it serves no good. Yes, even if the whole world were thrown into confusion and all things in it, disquietude on that account would be vanity.

St John of the Cross

Sufficient not only unto the day, but also unto the place, is the evil thereof. Agitation over happenings which we are powerless to modify, either because they have not yet occurred, or else are occurring at an inaccessible distance from us, achieves nothing beyond the inoculation of here and now with the remote or anticipated evil that is the object of our distress. Listening four or five times a day to newscasters and commentators, reading the morning papers and all the weeklies and monthlies - nowadays, this is described as ‘taking an intelligent interest in politics.’ St John of the Cross would have called it indulgence in idle curiosity and the cultivation of disquietude for disquietude’s sake.

I want very little, and what I do want I have very little wish for. I have hardly any desires, but if I were to be born again, I should have none at all. We should ask nothing and refuse nothing, but leave ourselves in the arms of divine Providence without wasting time in any desire, except to will what God wills of us.

St François de Sales

Push far enough towards the Void,
Hold fast enough for Quietness,
And of the ten thousand things none but can be worked on by you.
I have beheld them, whither they go back.
See, all things howsoever they flourish
Return to the root from which they grew.
This return to the Root is called Quietness;
Quietness is called submission to Fate;
What has submitted to Fate becomes part of the always-so;
To know the always-so is to be illumined;
Not to know it means to go blindly to disaster.

Lao Tzu

I wish I could join the ‘Solitaries’ (on Caldey Island), instead of being Superior and having to write books. But I don’t wish to have what I wish, of course.

Abbot John Chapman

We must not wish anything other than what happens from moment to moment, all the while, however, exercising ourselves in goodness.

St Catherine of Genoa

In the practice of mortification as in most other fields, advance is along a knife-edge. On one side lurks the Scylla of egocentric austerity, on the other the Charybdis of an uncaring quietism. The holy indifference inculcated by the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy is neither stoicism nor mere passivity. It is rather an active resignation. Self-will is renounced, not that there may be a total holiday from willing, but that the divine will may use the mortified mind and body as its instrument for good. Or we may say, with Kabir, that 'the devout seeker is he who mingles in his heart the double currents of love and detachment, like the mingling of the streams of Ganges and Jumna.' Until we put an end to particular attachments, there can be no love of God with the whole heart, mind and strength and no universal charity towards all creatures for God's sake. Hence the hard sayings in the Gospels about the need to renounce exclusive family ties. And if the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head, if the Tathagata and the Bodhisattvas 'have their thoughts awakened to the nature of Reality without abiding in anything whatever,' this is because a truly Godlike love which, like the sun, shines equally upon the just and the unjust, is impossible to a mind imprisoned in private preferences and aversions.

The soul that is attached to anything, however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of divine union. For whether it be a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds the bird, it matters not, if it really holds fast; for, until the cord be broken, the bird cannot fly. So the soul, held by the bonds of human affections, however slight they may be, cannot, while they last, make its way to God.

St John of the Cross

There are some who are newly delivered from their sins and so, though they are resolved to love God, they are still novices and apprentices, soft and weak... They love a number of superfluous, vain and dangerous things at the same time as Our Lord. Though they love God above all things, they yet continue to take pleasure in many things which they do not love according to God, but besides Him - things such as slight inordinations in word, gesture, clothing, pastimes and frivolities.

St François de Sales

There are souls who have made some progress in divine love, and have cut off all the love they had for dangerous things; yet they still have dangerous and superfluous loves, because they love what God wills them to love, but with excess and too tender and passionate a love... The love of our relations, friends and benefactors is itself according to God, but we may love them excessively; as also our vocations, however spiritual they be; and our devotional exercises (which we should yet love very greatly) may be loved inordinately, when we set them above obedience and the more general good, or care for them as an end, when they are only means.

St François de Sales

The goods of God, which are beyond all measure, can only be contained in an empty and solitary heart.

St John of the Cross

Suppose a boat is crossing a river and another boat, an empty one, is about to collide with it. Even an irritable man would not lose his temper. But suppose there was someone in the second boat. Then the occupant of the first would shout to him to keep clear. And if he did not hear the first time, nor even when called to three times, bad language would inevitably follow. In the first case there was no anger, in the second there was - because in the first case the boat was empty, in the second it was occupied. And so it is with man. If he could only pass empty through life, who would be able to injure him?

Chuang Tzu

When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found.

Anonymous Sufi Aphorism

It is by losing the egocentric life that we save the hitherto latent and undiscovered life which, in the spiritual part of our being, we share with the divine Ground. This newfound life is ‘more abundant’ than the other, and of a different and higher kind. Its possession is liberation into the eternal, and liberation is beatitude. Necessarily so; for the Brahman, who is one with the Atman, is not only Being and Knowledge, but also Bliss, and, after Love and Peace, the final fruit of the Spirit is Joy. Mortification is painful, but the pain is one of the pre-conditions of blessedness. This fact of spiritual experience is sometimes obscured by the language in which it is described. Thus, when Christ says that the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be entered except by those who are as little children, we are apt to forget (so touching are the images evoked by the simple phrase) that a man cannot become childlike unless he chooses to undertake the most strenuous and searching course of self-denial. In practice the command to become as little children is identical with the command to lose one’s life. As Traherne makes clear in the beautiful passage quoted in the section on ‘God in the World,’ one cannot know created Nature in all its essentially sacred beauty, unless one first unlearns the dirty devices of adult humanity. Seen through the dung-coloured spectacles of self-interest, the universe looks singularly like a dung-heap; and as, through long wearing, the spectacles have grown on to the eyeballs, the process of ‘cleansing the doors of perception’ is often, at any rate in the earlier stages of the spiritual life, painfully like a surgical operation. Later on, it is true, even self-naughting may be suffused with the joy of the Spirit. On this point the following passage from the fourteenth-century *Scale of Perfection* is illuminating.

Many a man hath the virtues of humility, patience and charity towards his neighbours, only in the reason and will, and hath no spiritual delight nor love in them; for ofttimes he feeleth grudging, heaviness and bitterness for to do them, but yet nevertheless he doth them, but ’tis only by stirring of reason for dread of God. This man hath these virtues in reason and will, but not the love of them in

affection. But when, by the grace of Jesus and by ghostly and bodily exercise, reason is turned into light and will into love, then hath he virtues in affection; for he hath so gnawn on the bitter bark or shell of the nut that at length he hath broken it and now feeds on the kernel; that is to say, the virtues which were first heavy for to practise are now turned into a very delight and savour.

Walter Hilton

As long as I am this or that, or have this or that, I am not all things and I have not all things. Become pure till you neither are nor have either this or that; then you are omnipresent and, being neither this nor that, are all things.

Eckhart

The point so dramatically emphasized by Eckhart in these lines is one that has often been made by the moralists and psychologists of the spiritual life. It is only when we have renounced our preoccupation with ‘I,’

‘me,’

‘mine’ that we can truly possess the world in which we live. Everything is ours, provided that we regard nothing as our property. And not only is everything ours; it is also everybody else s.

True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take way.

There can be no complete communism except in the goods of the spirit and, to some extent also, of the mind, and only when such goods are possessed by men and women in a state of non-attachment and self-denial. Some degree of mortification, it should be noted, is an indispensable prerequisite for the creation and enjoyment even of merely intellectual and aesthetic goods. Those who choose the profession of artist, philosopher or man of science, choose, in many cases, a life of poverty and unrewarded hard work. But these are by no means the only mortifications they have to undertake. When he looks at the world, the artist must deny his ordinary human tendency to think of things in utilitarian, self-regarding terms. Similarly, the critical philosopher must mortify his common sense, while the research worker must steadfastly resist the temptations to over-simplify and think conventionally, and must make himself docile to the leadings of mysterious Fact. And what is true of the creators of aesthetic and intellectual goods is also true of the enjoyers of such goods, when created. That these mortifications are by no means trifling has been shown again and again in the course of history. One thinks, for example, of the intellectually mortified Socrates and the hemlock with which his unmortified compatriots rewarded him. One thinks of the heroic efforts that had to be made by Galileo and his

contemporaries to break with the Aristotelian convention of thought, and the no less heroic efforts that have to be made today by any scientist who believes that there is more in the universe than can be discovered by employing the time-hallowed recipes of Descartes. Such mortifications have their reward in a state of consciousness that corresponds, on a lower level, to spiritual beatitude. The artist — and the philosopher and the man of science are also artists — knows the bliss of aesthetic contemplation, discovery and non-attached possession.

The goods of the intellect, the emotions and the imagination are real goods; but they are not the final good, and when we treat them as ends in themselves, we fall into idolatry. Mortification of will, desire and action is not enough; there must also be mortification in the fields of knowing, thinking, feeling and fancying.

Man's intellectual faculties are by the Fall in a much worse state than his animal appetites and want a much greater self-denial. And when own will, own understanding and own imagination have their natural strength indulged and gratified, and are made seemingly rich and honourable with the treasures acquired from a study of the *Belles Lettres*, they will just as much help poor fallen man to be like-minded with Christ as the art of cookery, well and duly studied, will help a professor of the Gospel to the spirit and practice of Christian abstinence.

William Law

Because it was German and spelt with a *K*, *Kultur* was an object, during the First World War, of derisive contempt. All this has now been changed. In Russia, Literature, Art and Science have become the three persons of a new humanistic Trinity. Nor is the cult of Culture confined to the Soviet Union. It is practised by a majority of intellectuals in the capitalist democracies. Clever, hard-boiled journalists, who write about everything else with the condescending cynicism of people who know all about God, Man and the Universe, and have seen through the whole absurd caboodle, fairly fall over themselves when it comes to Culture. With an earnestness and enthusiasm that arc, in the circumstances, unutterably ludicrous, they invite us to share their positively religious emotions in the face of High Art, as represented by the latest murals or civic centres; they insist that so long as Mrs X goes on writing her inimitable novels and Mr Y his more than Coleridgean criticism, the world, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, makes sense. The same over-valuation of Culture, the same belief that Art and Literature are ends in themselves and can flourish in isolation from a reasonable and realistic philosophy of life, have even invaded the schools and colleges. Among ‘advanced’ educationists there are many people who seem to think that all will be well so long as adolescents are permitted to ‘express themselves,’ and small children are encouraged to be ‘creative’ in the art class. But, alas, plasticine and self-expression will not solve the problems of education. Nor will technology and vocational guidance; nor the classics and the Hundred Best Books. The following criticisms of education were made more than two and a half centuries ago; but they are as relevant today as they were in the seventeenth century.

He knoweth nothing as he ought to know, who thinks he knoweth anything without seeing its place and the manner how it relateth to God, angels and men, and to all the creatures in earth, heaven and hell, time and eternity.

Thomas Traherne

Nevertheless some things were defective too (at Oxford under the Commonwealth). There was never a tutor that did professly teach Felicity, though that be the mistress of all the other sciences. Nor did any of us study these things but as *aliens,* which we ought to have studied as our own enjoyments. We studied to inform our knowledge, but knew not for what end we studied. And for lack of aiming at a certain end, we erred in the manner.

Thomas Traherne

In Traherne's vocabulary 'felicity' means 'beatitude,' which is identical in practice with liberation, which, in its turn, is the unitive knowledge of God in the heights within and in the fullness without as well as within.

What follows is an account of the intellectual mortifications which must be practised by those whose primary concern is with the knowledge of the Godhead in the interior heights of the soul.

Happy is the man who, by continually effacing all images and through introversion and the lifting up of his mind to God, at last forgets and leaves behind all such hindrances. For by such means only, he operates inwardly, with his naked, pure, simple intellect and affections, about the most pure and simple object, God. Therefore see that thy whole exercise about God within thee may depend wholly and only on that naked intellect, affection and will. For indeed, this exercise cannot be discharged by any bodily organ, or by the external senses, but only by that which constitutes the essence of man - understanding and love. If, therefore, thou desirest a safe stair and short path to arrive at the end of true bliss, then, with an intent mind, earnestly desire and aspire after continual cleanness of heart and purity of mind. Add to this a constant calm tranquillity of the senses, and a recollecting of the affections of the heart, continually fixing them above. Work to simplify the heart, that being immovable and at peace from any invading vain phantasms, thou mayest always stand fast in the Lord within thee, to that degree as if thy soul had already entered the always present now of eternity - that is, the state of deity. To mount to God is to enter into oneself. For he who so mounts and enters and goes above and beyond himself, he truly mounts up to God. The mind must then raise itself above itself and say, 'He who above all I need is above all I know.' And so carried into the darkness of the mind, gathering itself into that all-sufficient good, it learns to stay at home and with its whole affection it cleaves and becomes habitually fixed in the supreme good within. Thus continue, until thou becomest immutable and dost arrive at

that true life which is God Himself, perpetually, without any vicissitude of space or time, reposing in that inward quiet and secret mansion of the deity.

Albertus Magnus (?)

Some men love knowledge and discernment as the best and most excellent of all things. Behold, then knowledge and discernment come to be loved more than that which is discerned; for the false natural light loveth its knowledge and powers, which are itself, more than what is known. And were it possible that this false natural light should understand the simple Truth, as it is in God and in truth, it still would not lose its own property, that is, it could not depart from itself and its own things.

Theologia Germanica

The relationship between moral action and spiritual knowledge is circular, as it were, and reciprocal. Selfless behaviour makes possible an accession of knowledge, and the accession of knowledge makes possible the performance of further and more genuinely selfless actions, which in their turn enhance the agent's capacity for knowing. And so on, if all goes well and there is perfect docility and obedience, indefinitely. The process is summed up in a few lines of the Maitrayana Upanishad. A man undertakes right action (which includes, of course, right recollectedness and right meditation), and this enables him to catch a glimpse of the Self that underlies his separate individuality. 'Having seen his own self as the Self, he becomes selfless (and therefore acts selflessly) and in virtue of selflessness he is to be conceived as unconditioned. This is the highest mystery, betokening emancipation; through selflessness he has no part in pleasure or pain (in other words, he enters a state of non-attachment or holy indifference), but achieves absoluteness' (or as Albertus Magnus phrases it, 'becomes immutable and arrives at that true life which is God Himself).

When mortification is perfect, its most characteristic fruit is simplicity.

A simple heart will love all that is most precious on earth, husband or wife, parent or child, brother or friend, without marring its singleness; external things will have no attraction save inasmuch as they lead souls to Him; all exaggeration or unreality, affectation and falsehood must pass away from such a one, as the dews dry up before the sunshine. The single motive is to please God, and hence arises total indifference as to what others say and think, so that words and actions are perfectly simple and natural, as in his sight only. Such Christian simplicity is the very perfection of interior life - God, his will and pleasure, its sole object.

N. Grou

And here is a more extended account of the matter by one of the greatest masters of psychological analysis.

In the world, when people call anyone simple, they generally mean a foolish, ignorant, credulous person. But real simplicity, so far from being foolish, is almost sublime. All good men like and admire it, are conscious of sinning against it, observe it in others and know what it involves; and yet they could not precisely define it. I should say that simplicity is an uprightness of soul which prevents self-consciousness. It is not the same as sincerity, which is a much humbler virtue. Many people are sincere who are not simple. They say nothing but what they believe to be true, and do not aim at appearing anything but what they are. But they are for ever thinking about themselves, weighing their every word and thought, and dwelling upon themselves in apprehension of having done too much or too little. These people are sincere but they are not simple. They are not at their ease with others, nor others with them. There is nothing easy, frank, unrestrained or natural about them. One feels that one would like less admirable people better, who were not so stiff.

To be absorbed in the world around and never turn a thought within, as is the blind condition of some who are carried away by what is pleasant and tangible, is one extreme as opposed to simplicity. And to be self-absorbed in all matters, whether it be duty to God or man, is the other extreme, which makes a person wise in his own conceit - reserved, self-conscious, uneasy at the least thing which disturbs his inward self-complacency. Such false wisdom, in spite of its solemnity, is hardly less vain and foolish than the folly of those who plunge headlong into worldly pleasures. The one is intoxicated by his outward surroundings, the other by what he believes himself to be doing inwardly; but both are in a state of intoxication, and the last is a worse state than the first, because it seems to be wise, though it is not really, and so people do not try to be cured. Real simplicity lies in a *juste milieu* equally free from thoughtlessness and affectation, in which the soul is not overwhelmed by externals, so as to be unable to reflect, nor yet given up to the endless refinements, which self-consciousness induces. That soul which looks where it is going without losing time arguing

over every step, or looking back perpetually, possesses true simplicity. Such simplicity is indeed a great treasure. How shall we attain to it? I would give all I possess for it; it is the costly pearl of Holy Scripture.

The first step, then, is for the soul to put away outward things and look within so as to know its own real interest; so far all is right and natural; thus much is only a wise self-love, which seeks to avoid the intoxication of the world.

In the next step the soul must add the contemplation of God, whom it fears, to that of self. This is a faint approach to the real wisdom, but the soul is still greatly self-absorbed: it is not satisfied with fearing God; it wants to be certain that it does fear Him and fears lest it fear Him not, going round in a perpetual circle of self-consciousness. All this restless dwelling on self is very far from the peace and freedom of real love; but that is yet in the distance; the soul must needs go through a season of trial, and were it suddenly plunged into a state of rest, it would not know how to use it.

The third step is that, ceasing from a restless self-contemplation, the soul begins to dwell upon God instead, and by degrees forgets itself in Him. It becomes full of Him and ceases to feed upon self. Such a soul is not blinded to its own faults or indifferent to its own errors; it is more conscious of them than ever, and increased light shows them in plainer form, but this self-knowledge comes from God, and therefore it is not restless or uneasy.

Fénelon

How admirably acute and subtle this is! One of the most extraordinary, because most gratuitous, pieces of twentieth-century vanity is the assumption that nobody knew anything about psychology before the days of Freud. But the real truth is that most modern psychologists understand human beings less well than did the ablest of their predecessors. Fénelon and La Rochefoucauld knew all about the surface rationalization of deep, discreditable motives in the subconscious, and were fully aware that sexuality and the will to power were, all too often, the effective forces at work under the polite mask of the *persona.*

Machiavelli had drawn Pareto's distinction between 'residues' and 'derivations' - between the real, self-interested motives for political action and the fancy theories, principles and ideals in terms of which such action is explained and justified to the credulous public. Like Buddha's and St Augustine's, Pascal's view of human virtue and rationality could not have been more realistically low. But all these men, even La Rochefoucauld, even Machiavelli, were aware of certain facts which twentieth-century psychologists have chosen to ignore - the fact that human nature is tripartite, consisting of a spirit as well as of a mind and body; the fact that we live on the border-line between two worlds, the temporal and the eternal, the physical-vital-human and the divine; the fact that, though nothing in himself, man is 'a nothing surrounded by God, indigent of God, capable of God and filled with God, if he so desires.'

The Christian simplicity, of which Grou and Fénelon write, is the same thing as the virtue so much admired by Lao Tzu and his successors. According to these Chinese sages, personal sins and social maladjustments are all due to the fact that men have separated themselves from their divine source and live according to their own will and notions, not according to Tao - which is the Great Way, the Logos, the Nature of Things, as it manifests itself on every plane from the physical, up through the animal and the mental, to the spiritual. Enlightenment comes when we give up self-will and make ourselves docile to the workings of Tao in the world around us and in our own bodies, minds and spirits. Sometimes the Taoist philosophers write as though they believed in Rousseau's Noble Savage, and (being Chinese and therefore much more concerned with the concrete and the practical than with the merely speculative) they are fond of prescribing methods by which rulers may reduce the complexity of civilization and so preserve their subjects from the corrupting influences of man-made and therefore Tao-eclipsing conventions of thought, feeling and action. But the rulers who are to perform this task for the masses must themselves be sages; and to become a sage, one must get rid of all the rigidities of unregenerate adulthood and become again as a little child. For only that which is soft and docile is truly alive; that which conquers and outlives everything is

that which adapts itself to everything, that which always seeks the lowest place - not the hard rock, but the water that wears away the everlasting hills. The simplicity and spontaneity of the perfect sage are the fruits of mortification - mortification of the will and, by recollectedness and meditation, of the mind. Only the most highly disciplined artist can recapture, on a higher level, the spontaneity of the child with its first paint-box. Nothing is more difficult than to be simple.

'May I ask,' said Yen Hui, 'in what consists the fasting of the heart?'

'Cultivate unity,' replied Confucius. 'You do your hearing, not with your ears, but with your mind; not with your mind, but with your very soul. But let the hearing stop with the ears. Let the working of the mind stop with itself. Then the soul will be a negative existence, passively responsive to externals. In such a negative existence, only Tao can abide. And that negative state is the fasting of the heart.'

'Then,' said Yen Hui, 'the reason I could not get the use of this method is my own individuality. If I could get the use of it, my individuality would have gone. Is this what you mean by the negative state?'

'Exactly so,' replied the Master. 'Let me tell you. If you can enter the domain of this prince (a bad ruler whom Yen Hui was ambitious to reform) without offending his *amour propre*, cheerful if he hears you, passive if he does not; without science, without drugs, simply living there in a state of complete indifference - you will be near success... Look at that window. Through it an empty room becomes bright with scenery; but the landscape stops outside. In this sense you may use your ears and eyes to communicate within, but shut out all wisdom (in the sense of conventional, copybook maxims) from your mind. This is the method for regenerating all creation.'

Chuang Tzu

Mortification may be regarded, in this context, as the process of study, by which we learn at last to have unstudied reactions to events - reactions in harmony with Tao, Suchness, the Will of God. Those who have made themselves docile to the divine Nature of Things, those who respond to circumstances, not with craving and aversion, but with the love that permits them to do spontaneously what they like; those who can truthfully say, Not I, but God in me - such men and women are compared by the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy to children, to fools and simpletons, even sometimes, as in the following passage, to drunkards.

A drunken man who falls out of a cart, though he may suffer, does not die. His bones are the same as other people’s; but he meets his accident in a different way. His spirit is in a condition of security. He is not conscious of riding in the cart; neither is he conscious of falling out of it. Ideas of life, death, fear and the like cannot penetrate his breast; and so he does not suffer from contact with objective existence. If such security is to be got from wine, how much more is it to be got from God?

Chuang Tzu

It is by long obedience and hard work that the artist comes to unforced spontaneity and consummate mastery. Knowing that he can never create anything on his own account, out of the top layers, so to speak, of his personal consciousness, he submits obediently to the workings of ‘inspiration’; and knowing that the medium in which he works has its own self-nature, which must not be ignored or violently overridden, he makes himself its patient servant and, in this way, achieves perfect freedom of expression. But life is also an art, and the man who would become a consummate artist in living must follow, on all the levels of his being, the same procedure as that by which the painter or the sculptor or any other craftsman comes to his own more limited perfection.

Prince Hui’s cook was cutting up a bullock. Every blow of his knife, every heave of his shoulders, every tread of his foot, every *whshh* of rent flesh, every *chhk* of the chopper, was in perfect harmony - rhythmical like the Dance of the Mulberry Grove, simultaneous like the chords of the Ching Shou.

‘Well done!’ cried the Prince. ‘Yours is skill indeed.’

‘Sire,’ replied the cook, ‘I have always devoted myself to Tao. It is better than skill. When I first began to cut up bullocks, I saw before me simply whole bullocks. After three years’ practice I saw no more whole animals. And now I work with my mind and not with my eye. When my senses bid me stop, but my mind urges me on, I fall back upon eternal principles. I follow such openings or cavities as there may be, according to the natural constitution of the animal. I do not attempt to cut through joints, still less through large bones.

‘A good cook changes his chopper once a year - because he cuts. An ordinary cook, once a month - because he hacks. But I have had this chopper nineteen years, and though I have cut up many thousands of bullocks, its edge is as if fresh from the whetstone. For at the joints there are always interstices, and the edge of a chopper being without thickness, it remains only to insert that which is without thickness into such an interstice. By these means the interstice will be

enlarged, and the blade will find plenty of room. It is thus that I have kept my chopper for nineteen years, as though fresh from the whetstone.

‘Nevertheless, when I come upon a hard part, where the blade meets with a difficulty, I am all caution. I fix my eyes on it. I stay my hand, and gently apply the blade, until with a *hwah* the part yields like earth crumbling to the ground. Then I withdraw the blade and stand up and look around; and at last I wipe my chopper and put it carefully away.’

‘Bravo!’ cried the Prince. ‘From the words of this cook I have learnt how to take care of my life.’

Chuang Tzu

In the first seven branches of his Eightfold Path the Buddha describes the conditions that must be fulfilled by anyone who desires to come to that right contemplation which is the eighth and final branch. The fulfilment of these conditions entails the undertaking of a course of the most searching and comprehensive mortification - mortification of intellect and will, craving and emotion, thought, speech, action and, finally, means of livelihood. Certain professions are more or less completely incompatible with the achievement of man's final end; and there are certain ways of making a living which do so much physical and, above all, so much moral, intellectual and spiritual harm that, even if they could be practised in a non-attached spirit (which is generally impossible), they would still have to be eschewed by anyone dedicated to the task of liberating, not only himself, but others. The exponents of the Perennial Philosophy are not content to avoid and forbid the practice of criminal professions, such as brothel-keeping, forgery, racketeering and the like; they also avoid themselves, and warn others against, a number of ways of livelihood commonly regarded as legitimate. Thus, in many Buddhist societies, the manufacture of arms, the concoction of intoxicating liquors and the wholesale purveying of butcher's meat were not, as in contemporary Christendom, rewarded by wealth, peerages and political influence; they were deplored as businesses which, it was thought, made it particularly difficult for their practitioners and for other members of the communities in which they were practised to achieve enlightenment and liberation. Similarly, in medieval Europe, Christians were forbidden to make a living by the taking of interest on money or by cornering the market. As Tawney and others have shown, it was only after the Reformation that coupon-clipping, usury and gambling in stocks and commodities became respectable and received ecclesiastical approval.

For the Quakers, soldiering was and is a form of wrong livelihood - war being, in their eyes, anti-Christian, not so much because it causes suffering as because it propagates hatred, puts a premium on fraud and cruelty, infects whole

societies with anger, fear, pride and uncharitableness. Such passions eclipse the Inner Light, and therefore the wars by which they are aroused and intensified must be regarded, whatever their immediate political outcome, as crusades to make the world safe for spiritual darkness.

It has been found, as a matter of experience, that it is dangerous to lay down detailed and inflexible rules for right livelihood - dangerous, because most people see no reason for being righteous overmuch and consequently respond to the imposition of too rigid a code by hypocrisy or open rebellion. In the Christian tradition, for example, a distinction is made between the precepts, which arc binding on all and sundry, and the counsels of perfection, binding only upon those who feel drawn towards a total renunciation of the world.' The precepts include the ordinary moral code and the commandment to love God with all one's heart, strength and mind, and one's neighbour as oneself. Some of those who make a serious effort to obey this last and greatest commandment find that they cannot do so whole-heartedly unless they follow the counsels and sever all connections with the world. Nevertheless it is possible for men and women to achieve that 'perfection,' which is deliverance into the unitive knowledge of God, without abandoning the married state and without selling all they have and giving the price to the poor. Effective poverty (possessing no money) is by no means always affective poverty (being indifferent to money). One man may be poor, but desperately concerned with what money can buy, full of cravings, envy and bitter self-pity. Another may have money, but no attachment to money or the things, powers and privileges that money can buy. 'Evangelical poverty' is a combination of effective with affective poverty; but a genuine poverty of spirit is possible even in those who are not effectively poor. It will be seen, then, that the problems of right livelihood, in so far as they lie outside the jurisdiction of the common moral code, are strictly personal. The way in which any individual problem presents itself and the nature of the appropriate solution depend upon the degree of knowledge, moral sensibility and spiritual insight achieved by the individual concerned. For this reason no universally applicable rules can be formulated except in the most general terms. 'Here are my three treasures,' says

Lao Tzu. ‘Guard and keep them! The first is pity, the second frugality, the third refusal to be foremost of all things under heaven.’ And when Jesus is asked by a stranger to settle a dispute between himself and his brother over an inheritance, he refuses (since he does not know the circumstances) to be judge in the case and merely utters a general warning against covetousness.

Ga-San instructed his adherents one day: ‘Those who speak against killing, and who desire to spare the lives of all conscious beings, are right. It is good to protect even animals and insects. But what about those persons who kill time, what about those who destroy wealth, and those who murder the economy of their society? We should not overlook them. Again, what of the one who preaches without enlightenment? He is killing Buddhism.’ *From ‘One Hundred and One Zen Stories’*

Once the noble Ibrahim, as he sat on his throne,
Heard a clamour and noise of cries on the roof,
Also heavy footsteps on the roof of his palace.
He said to himself, ‘Whose heavy feet are these?’
He shouted from the window, ‘Who goes there?’
The guards, filled with confusion, bowed their heads, saying,
‘It is we, going the rounds in search.’
He said, ‘What seek ye?’ They said, ‘Our camels.’
He said, ‘Who ever searched for camels on a housetop?’
They said, ‘We follow thy example,
Who seekest union with God, while sitting on a throne.’

Jalal-uddin Rumi

Of all social, moral and spiritual problems that of power is the most chronically urgent and the most difficult of solution. Craving for power is not a vice of the body, consequently knows none of the limitations imposed by a tired or satiated physiology upon gluttony, intemperance and lust. Growing with every

successive satisfaction, the appetite for power can manifest itself indefinitely, without interruption by bodily fatigue or sickness. Moreover, the nature of society is such that the higher a man climbs in the political, economic or religious hierarchy, the greater are his opportunities and resources for exercising power. But climbing the hierarchical ladder is ordinarily a slow process, and the ambitious rarely reach the top till they are well advanced in life. The older he grows, the more chances does the power lover have for indulging his besetting sin, the more continuously is he subjected to temptations and the more glamorous do those temptations become. In this respect his situation is profoundly different from that of the debauchee. The latter may never voluntarily leave his vices, but at least, as he advances in years, he finds his vices leaving him; the former neither leaves his vices nor is left by them. Instead of bringing to the power lover a merciful respite from his addictions, old age is apt to intensify them by making it easier for him to satisfy his cravings on a larger scale and in a more spectacular way. That is why, in Acton's words, 'all great men are bad.' Can we therefore be surprised if political action, undertaken, in all too many cases, not for the public good, but solely or at least primarily to gratify the power lusts of bad men, should prove so often either self-stultifying or downright disastrous?

'*L'état c'est moi,*' says the tyrant; and this is true, of course, not only of the autocrat at the apex of the pyramid, but of all the members of the ruling minority through whom he governs and who are, in fact, the real rulers of the nation. Moreover, so long as the policy which gratifies the power lusts of the ruling class is successful, and so long as the price of success is not too high, even the masses of the ruled will feel that the state is themselves - a vast and splendid projection of the individual's intrinsically insignificant ego. The little man can satisfy his lust for power vicariously through the activities of the imperialistic state, just as the big man does; the difference between them is one of degree, not of kind.

No infallible method for controlling the political manifestations of the lust for power has ever been devised. Since power is of its very essence indefinitely

expansive, it cannot be checked except by colliding with another power. Hence, any society that values liberty, in the sense of government by law rather than by class interest or personal decree, must see to it that the power of its rulers is divided.

National unity means national servitude to a single man and his supporting oligarchy. Organized and balanced disunity is the necessary condition of liberty. His Majesty's Loyal Opposition is the loyalest, because the most genuinely useful section of any liberty-loving community. Furthermore, since the appetite for power is purely mental and therefore insatiable and impervious to disease or old age, no community that values liberty can afford to give its rulers long tenures of office. The Carthusian Order, which was 'never reformed because never deformed' owed its long immunity from corruption to the fact that its abbots were elected for periods of only a single year. In ancient Rome the amount of liberty under law was in inverse ratio to the length of the magistrates' terms of office. These rules for controlling the lust for power are very easy to formulate, but very difficult, as history shows, to enforce in practice. They are particularly difficult to enforce at a period like the present, when time-hallowed political machinery is being rendered obsolete by rapid technological change and when the salutary principle of organized and balanced disunity requires to be embodied in new and more appropriate institutions.

Acton, the learned Catholic historian, was of the opinion that all great men are bad; Rumi, the Persian poet and mystic, thought that to seek for union with God while occupying a throne was an undertaking hardly less senseless than looking for camels among the chimney-pots. A slightly more optimistic note is sounded by St François de Sales, whose views on the matter were recorded by his Boswellizing disciple, the young Bishop of Belley.

'*Mon Père,*' I said one day, 'how is it possible for those who are themselves high in office to practise the virtue of obedience?'

François de Sales replied, 'They have greater and more excellent ways of doing so than their inferiors.'

As I did not understand this reply, he went on to say, ‘Those who are bound by obedience are usually subject to one superior only... But those who are themselves superiors have a wider field for obedience, even while they command; for if they bear in mind that it is God who has placed them over other men, and gives them the rule they have, they will exercise it out of obedience to God, and thus, even while commanding, they will obey. Moreover, there is no position so high but that it is subject to a spiritual superior in what concerns the conscience and the soul. But there is a yet higher point of obedience to which all superiors may aspire, even that to which St Paul alludes, when he says, “Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all.” It is by such universal obedience to everyone that we become “all things to all men”; and serving everyone for Our Lord’s sake, we esteem all to be our superiors.’

In accordance with this rule, I have often observed how François de Sales treated everyone, even the most insignificant persons who approached him, as though he were the inferior, never repulsing anyone, never refusing to enter into conversation, to speak or to listen, never betraying the slightest sign of weariness, impatience and annoyance, however importunate or ill-timed the interruption. To those who asked him why he thus wasted his time his constant reply was, ‘It is God’s will; it is what He requires of me; what more need I ask? While I am doing this, I am not required to do anything else. God’s Holy Will is the centre from which all we do must radiate; all else is mere weariness and excitement.’

Jean Pierre Camus

We see, then, that a ‘great man’ can be good - good enough even to aspire to unitive knowledge of the divine Ground - provided that, while exercising power, he fulfils two conditions. First, he must deny himself all the personal advantages of power and must practise the patience and recollectedness without which there cannot be love either of man or God. And, second, he must realize that the accident of possessing temporal power does not give him spiritual authority, which belongs only to those seers, living or dead, who have achieved a direct insight into the Nature of Things. A society, in which the boss is mad enough to believe himself a prophet, is a society doomed to destruction. A viable society is one in which those who have qualified themselves to see indicate the goals to be aimed at, while those whose business it is to rule respect the authority and listen to the advice of the seers. In theory, at least, all this was well understood in India and, until the Reformation, in Europe, where ‘no position was so high but that it was subject to a spiritual superior in what concerned the conscience and soul.’ Unfortunately the churches tried to make the best of both worlds - to combine spiritual authority with temporal power, wielded either directly or at one remove, from behind the throne. But spiritual authority can be exercised only by those who are perfectly disinterested and whose motives are therefore above suspicion. An ecclesiastical organization may call itself the Mystical Body of Christ; but if its prelates are slave-holders and the rulers of states, as they were in the past, or if the corporation is a large-scale capitalist, as is the case today, no titles, however honorific, can conceal the fact that, when it passes judgment, it does so as an interested party with some political or economic axe to grind. True, in matters which do not directly concern the temporal powers of the corporation, individual churchmen can be, and have actually proved themselves perfectly disinterested — consequently can possess and have possessed, genuine spiritual authority. St Philip Neri’s is a case in point. Possessing absolutely no temporal power, he yet exercised a prodigious influence over sixteenth-century Europe. But for that influence, it may be doubted whether the efforts of the Council of

Trent to reform the Roman church from within would have met with much success.

In actual practice how many great men have ever fulfilled, or are ever likely to fulfil, the conditions which alone render power innocuous to the ruler as well as to the ruled? Obviously, very few. Except by saints, the problem of power is finally insoluble. But since genuine self-government is possible only in very small groups, societies on a national or supernational scale will always be ruled by oligarchical minorities, whose members come to power because they have a lust for power. This means that the problem of power will always arise and, since it cannot be solved except by people like François de Sales, will always make trouble. And this, in its turn, means that we cannot expect the large-scale societies of the future to be much better than were the societies of the past during the brief periods when they were at their best.

7. Truth

WHY DOST THOU prate of God? Whatever thou sayest of Him is untrue.

Eckhart

In religious literature the word ‘truth’ is used indiscriminately in at least three distinct and very different senses. Thus, it is sometimes treated as a synonym for ‘fact,’ as when it is affirmed that God is Truth - meaning that He is the primordial Reality. But this is clearly not the meaning of the word in such a phrase as ‘worshipping God in spirit and in truth.’ Here, it is obvious, ‘truth’ signifies direct apprehension of spiritual Fact, as opposed to second-hand knowledge *about* Reality, formulated in sentences and accepted on authority or because an argument from previously granted postulates was logically convincing. And finally there is the more ordinary meaning of the word, as in such a sentence as, ‘This statement is the truth,’ where we mean to assert that the verbal symbols of which the statement is composed correspond to the facts to which it refers. When Eckhart writes that ‘Whatever thou sayest of God is untrue,’ he is not affirming that all theological statements are false. In so far as there can be any correspondence between human symbols and divine Fact, some theological statements are as true as it is possible for us to make them. Himself a theologian, Eckhart would certainly have admitted this. But besides being a theologian, Eckhart was a mystic. And being a mystic, he understood very vividly what the modern semanticist is so busily (and, also, so unsuccessfully) trying to drum into contemporary minds - namely, that words are not the same as things and that a knowledge of words about facts is in no sense equivalent to a direct and immediate apprehension of the facts themselves. What Eckhart actually asserts is this: whatever one may say about God can never in any circumstances be the ‘truth’ in the first two meanings of that much abused and ambiguous word. By implication St Thomas Aquinas was saying exactly the same thing when, after his experience of infused contemplation, he refused to go on with his theological work, declaring that everything he had written up to that time was as mere straw compared with the immediate knowledge, which had been vouchsafed to him. Two hundred years earlier, in Bagdad, the great Mohammedan theologian, Al-Ghazzali, had similarly turned from the consideration of truths about God to the contemplation and direct apprehension

of Truth-the-Fact, from the purely intellectual discipline of the philosophers to the moral and spiritual discipline of the Sufis.

The moral of all this is obvious. Whenever we hear or read about ‘truth,’ we should always pause long enough to ask ourselves in which of the three senses listed above the word is, at the moment, being used. By taking this simple precaution (and to take it is a genuinely virtuous act of intellectual honesty) we shall save ourselves a great deal of disturbing and quite unnecessary mental confusion.

Wishing to entice the blind, The Buddha playfully let words escape from his golden mouth; Heaven and earth are filled, ever since, with entangling briars.

Dai-o Kokushi

There is nothing true anywhere, The True is nowhere to be found.

If you say you see the True, This seeing is not the true one.

When the True is left to itself, There is nothing false in it, for it is Mind itself.

When Mind in itself is not liberated from the false, There is nothing true; nowhere is the True to be found.

Hui Neng

The truth indeed has never been preached by the Buddha, seeing that one has to realize it within onself.

Sutralamkara

The further one travels, the less one knows.

Lao Tzu

‘Listen to this!’ shouted Monkey. ‘After all the trouble we had getting here from China, and after you specially ordered that we were to be given the scriptures, Anada and Kasyapa made a fraudulent delivery of goods. They gave us blank copies to take away; I ask you, what is the good of that to us?’

‘You needn’t shout,’ said the Buddha, smiling. ‘... As a matter of fact, it is such blank scolls as these that are the true scriptures. But I quite see that the people of China are too foolish and ignorant to believe this, so there is nothing for it but to give them copies with some writing on.’

Wu Ch ‘êng-ên

The philosophers indeed are clever enough, but wanting in wisdom; As to the others, they are either ignorant or puerile!

They take an empty fist as containing something real and the pointing finger as the object pointed at.

Because the finger is adhered to as though it were the Moon, all their efforts are lost.

Yoka Daishi

What is known as the teaching of the Buddha is not the teaching of the Buddha.

Diamond Sutra

‘What is the ultimate teaching of Buddhism?’

‘You won’t understand it until you have it.’

Shih-t’ou

The subject matter of the Perennial Philosophy is the nature of eternal, spiritual Reality; but the language in which it must be formulated was developed for the purpose of dealing with phenomena in time. That is why, in all these formulations, we find an element of paradox. The nature of Truth-the-Fact cannot be described by means of verbal symbols that do not adequately correspond to it. At best it can be hinted at in terms of *non sequiturs* and contradictions.

To these unavoidable paradoxes some spiritual writers have chosen to add deliberate and calculated enormities of language — hard sayings, exaggerations, ironic or humorous extravagances, designed to startle and shock the reader out of that self-satisfied complacency which is the original sin of the intellect. Of this second kind of paradox the masters of Taoism and Zen Buddhism were particularly fond. The latter; indeed, made use of paralogisms and even of nonsense as a device for ‘taking the kingdom of heaven by violence.’ Aspirants to the life of perfection were encouraged to practise discursive meditation on some completely non-logical formula. The result was a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole self-centred and world-centred discursive process, a sudden breaking through from ‘reason’ (in the language of scholastic philosophy) to intuitive ‘intellect,’ capable of a genuine insight into the divine Ground of all being. This method strikes us as odd and eccentric: but the fact remains that it worked to the extent of producing in many persons the final *metanoia,* or transformation of consciousness and character.

Zen’s use of almost comic extravagance to emphasize the philosophic truths it regarded as most important is well illustrated in the first of the extracts cited above. We are not intended seriously to imagine that an Avatar preaches in order

to play a practical joke on the human race. But meanwhile what the author has succeeded in doing is to startle us out of our habitual complacency about the home-made verbal universe in which we normally do most of our living. Words are not facts, and still less are they the primordial Fact. If we take them too seriously, we shall lose our way in a forest of entangling briars. But if, on the contrary, we don't take them seriously enough, we shall still remain unaware that there is a way to lose or a goal to be reached. If the Enlightened did not preach, there would be no deliverance for anyone. But because human minds and human languages are what they arc, this necessary and indispensable preaching is beset with dangers. The history of all the religions is similar in one important respect; some of their adherents are enlightened and delivered, because they have chosen to react appropriately to the words which the founders have let fall; others achieve a partial salvation by reacting with partial appropriateness; yet others harm themselves and their fellows by reacting with a total inappropriateness - either ignoring the words altogether or, more often, taking them too seriously and treating them as though they were identical with the Fact to which they refer.

That words are at once indispensable and, in many cases, fatal has been recognized by all the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy. Thus, Jesus spoke of himself as bringing into the world something even worse than briars - a sword. St Paul distinguished between the letter that kills and the spirit that gives life. And throughout the centuries that followed, the masters of Christian spirituality have found it necessary to harp again and again upon a theme which has never been outdated because *homo loquax,* the talking animal, is still as naively delighted by his chief accomplishment, still as helplessly the victim of his own words, as he was when the Tower of Babel was being built.

Recent years have seen the publication of numerous works on semantics and of an ocean of nationalistic, racialistic and militaristic propaganda. Never have so many capable writers warned mankind against the dangers of wrong speech - and never have words been used more recklessly by politicians or taken more seriously by the public. The fact is surely proof enough that, under changing

forms, the old problems remain what they always were — urgent, unsolved and, to all appearances, insoluble.

All that the imagination can imagine and the reason conceive and understand in this life is not, and cannot be, a proximate means of union with God.

St John of the Cross

Jejune and barren speculations may unfold the plicatures of Truth’s garment, but they cannot discover her lovely face.

John Smith, the Platonist

In all faces is shown the Face of faces, veiled and in a riddle. Howbeit, unveiled it is not seen, until, above all faces, a man enter into a certain secret and mystic silence, where there is no knowing or concept of a face. This mist, cloud, darkness or ignorance, into which he that seeketh thy Face entereth, when he goeth beyond all knowledge or concept, is the state below which thy Face cannot be found, except veiled; but that very darkness revealeth thy Face to be there beyond all veils. Flence I observe how needful it is for me to enter into the darkness and to admit the coincidence of opposites, beyond all the grasp of reason, and there to seek the Truth, where impossibility meeteth us.

Nicholas of Cusa

As the Godhead is nameless, and all naming is alien to Him, so also the soul is nameless; for it is here the same as God.

Eckhart

God being, as He is, inaccessible, do not rest in the consideration of objects perceptible to the senses and comprehended by the understanding. This is to be content with what is less than God; so doing, you will destroy the energy of the soul, which is necessary for walking with Him.

St John of the Cross

To find or know God in reality by any outward proofs, or by anything but by God Himself made manifest and self-evident in you, will never be your case either here or hereafter. For neither God, nor heaven, nor hell, nor the devil, nor the flesh, can be any otherwise knowable in you or by you but by their own existence and manifestation in you. And all pretended knowledge of any of these things, beyond and without this self-evident sensibility of their birth within you, is only such knowledge of them as the blind man hath of the light that hath never entered into him.

William Law What follows is a summary by an eminent scholar of the Indian doctrines concerning *jnana*, the liberating knowledge of Brahman or the divine Ground.

Jnana is eternal, is general, is necessary and is not a personal knowledge of this man or that man. It is there, as knowledge in the *Atman* itself, and lies there hidden under all *avidya* (ignorance) - irremovable, though it may be obscured, unprovable, because self-evident, needing no proof, because itself giving to all proof the ground of possibility. These sentences come near to Eckhart's 'knowledge' and to the teaching of Augustine on the Eternal Truth in the soul which, itself immediately certain, is the ground of all certainty and is a possession, not of A or B, but of 'the soul.'

Rudolf Otto

The science of aesthetics is not the same as, nor even a proximate means to, the practice and appreciation of the arts. How can one learn to have an eye for pictures, or to become a good painter? Certainly not by reading Benedetto Croce. One learns to paint by painting, and one learns to appreciate pictures by going to picture galleries and looking at them.

But this is not to say that Croce and his fellows have wasted their time. We should be grateful to them for their labours in building up a system of thought, by means of which the immediately apprehended significance and value of art can be assessed in the light of general knowledge, related to other facts of experience and, in this way and to this extent, ‘explained.’

What is true of aesthetics is also true of theology. Theological speculation is valuable in so far as it enables those who have had immediate experience of various aspects of God to form intelligible ideas about the nature of the divine Ground, and of their own experience of the Ground in relation to other experiences. And when a coherent system of theology has been worked out, it is useful in so far as it convinces those who study it that there is nothing inherently self-contradictory about the postulate of the divine Ground and that, for those who are ready to fulfil certain conditions, the postulate may become a realized Fact. In no circumstances, however, can the study of theology or the mind’s assent to theological propositions take the place of what Law calls ‘the birth of God within.’ For theory is not practice, and words are not the things for which they stand.

Theology as we know it has been formed by the great mystics, especially St Augustine and St Thomas. Plenty of other great theologians - especially St Gregory and St Bernard, even down to Suarez - would not have had such insight without mystic superknowledge.

Against this we must set Dr Tennant's view - namely, that religious experience is something real and unique, but does not add anything to the experiencer's knowledge of ultimate Reality and must always be interpreted in terms of an idea of God derived from other sources. A study of the facts would suggest that both these opinions are to some degree correct. The facts of mystical insight (together with the facts of what is taken to be historic revelation) are rationalized in terms of general knowledge and become the basis of a theology. And, reciprocally, an existing theology in terms of general knowledge exercises a profound influence upon those who have undertaken the spiritual life, causing them, if it is low, to be content with a low form of experience, if it is high, to reject as inadequate the experience of any form of reality having characteristics incompatible with those of the God described in the books. Thus mystics make theology, and theology makes mystics.

A person who gives assent to untrue dogma, or who pays all his attention and allegiance to one true dogma in a comprehensive system, while neglecting the others (as many Christians concentrate exclusively on the humanity of the Second Person of the Trinity and ignore the Father and the Holy Ghost), runs the risk of limiting in advance his direct apprehension of Reality. In religion as in natural science, experience is determined only by experience. It is fatal to prejudge it, to compel it to fit the mould imposed by a theory which either does not correspond to the facts at all, or corresponds to only some of the facts. 'Do not strive to seek after the true,' writes a Zen master, 'only cease to cherish opinions.' There is only one way to cure the results of belief in a false or incomplete theology and it is the same as the only known way of passing from belief in even the truest theology to knowledge or primordial Fact - selflessness, docility, openness to the datum of Eternity. Opinions arc things which we make and can therefore understand, formulate and argue about. But 'to rest in the consideration of objects perceptible to the sense or comprehended by the understanding is to be content,' in the words of St John of the Cross, 'with what

is less than God.' Unitive knowledge of God is possible only to those who 'have ceased to cherish opinions' — even opinions that are as true as it is possible for verbalized abstractions to be.

Up then, noble soul! Put on thy jumping shoes which are intellect and love, and overleap the worship of thy mental powers, overleap thine understanding and spring into the heart of God, into his hiddenness where thou art hidden from all creatures.

Eckhart

With the lamp of word and discrimination one must go beyond word and discrimination and enter upon the path of realization.

Lankavatara Sutra

The word ‘intellect’ is used by Eckhart in the scholastic sense of immediate intuition. ‘Intellect and reason,’ says Aquinas, ‘arc not two powers, but distinct as the perfect from the imperfect... The intellect means, an intimate penetration of truth; the reason, enquiry and discourse.’ It is by following, and then abandoning, the rational and emotional path of ‘word and discrimination’ that one is enabled to enter upon the intellectual or intuitive ‘path of realization.’ And yet, in spite of the warnings pronounced by those who, through selflessness, have passed from letter to spirit and from theory to immediate knowledge, the organized Christian churches have persisted in the fatal habit of mistaking means for ends. The verbal statements of theology’s more or less adequate rationalizations of experience have been taken too seriously and treated with the reverence that is due only to the Fact they are intended to describe. It has been fancied that souls are saved if assent is given to what is locally regarded as the correct formula, lost if it is withheld. The two words, *filioque,* may not have been the sole cause of the schism between the Eastern and Western churches; but they were unquestionably the pretext and *casus belli.*

The over-valuation of words and formulae may be regarded as a special case of that over-valuation of the things of time, which is so fatally characteristic of historic Christianity. To know Truth-as-Fact and to know it unitively, ‘in spirit and in truth-as-immediate-apprehension’ - this is deliverance, in this ‘standeth our eternal life.’ To be familiar with the verbalized truths, which symbolically correspond to Truth-as-Fact in so far as it can be known in, or inferred from, truth-as-immediate-apprehension, or truth-as-historic-revelation - this is not salvation, but merely the study of a special branch of philosophy. Even the most ordinary experience of a thing or event in time can never be fully or adequately described in words. The experience of seeing the sky or having neuralgia is incommunicable; the best we can do is to say ‘blue’ or ‘pain,’ in the hope that those who hear us may have had experiences similar to our own and so be able to supply their own version of the meaning. God, however, is not a thing or

event in time, and the time-bound words which cannot do justice even to temporal matters are even more inadequate to the intrinsic nature and our own unitive experience of that which belongs to an incommonsurably different order. To suppose that people can be saved by studying and giving assent to formulae is like supposing that one can get to Timbuctoo by poring over a map of Africa. Maps are symbols, and even the best of them arc inaccurate and imperfect symbols. But to anyone who really wants to reach a given destination, a map is indispensably useful as indicating the direction in which the traveller should set out and the roads which he must take.

In later Buddhist philosophy words are regarded as one of the prime determining factors in the creative evolution of human beings. In this philosophy five categories of being are recognized - Name, Appearance, Discrimination, Right Knowledge, Suchness. The first three are related for evil, the last two for good. Appearances are discriminated by the sense organs, then reified by naming, so that words are taken for things and symbols are used as the measure of reality. According to this view, language is a main source of the sense of separateness and the blasphemous idea of individual self-sufficiency, with their inevitable corollaries of greed, envy, lust for power, anger and cruelty. And from these evil passions there springs the necessity of an indefinitely protracted and repeated separate existence under the same, self-perpetuated conditions of craving and infatuation. The only escape is through a creative act of the will, assisted by Buddha-grace, leading through selflessness to Right Knowledge, which consists, among other things, in a proper appraisal of Names, Appearances and Discrimination. In and through Right Knowledge, one emerges from the infatuating delusion of ‘I,’

‘me,’

‘mine,’ and, resisting the temptation to deny the world in a state of premature and one-sided ecstasy, or to affirm it by living like the average sensual man, one comes at last to the transfiguring awareness that *samsara* and *nirvana* are one, to the unitive apprehension of pure Suchness - the ultimate Ground, which can only be indicated, never adequately described in verbal symbols.

In connection with the Mahayanist view that words play an important and even creative part in the evolution of unregenerate human nature, we may mention Hume's arguments against the reality of causation. These arguments start from the postulate that all events are 'loose and separate' from one another and proceed with faultless logic to a conclusion that makes complete nonsense of all organized thought or purposive action. The fallacy, as Professor Stout has pointed out, lies in the preliminary postulate. And when we ask ourselves what it was that induced Hume to make this odd and quite unrealistic assumption that events are 'loose and separate,' we see that his only reason for flying in the face of immediate experience was the fact that things and happenings arc symbolically represented in thought by nouns, verbs and adjectives, and that these words are, in effect, 'loose and separate' from one another in a way which the events and things they stand for quite obviously are not. Taking words as the measure of things, instead of using things as the measure of words, Hume imposed the discreet and, so to say, *pointilliste* pattern of language upon the continuum of actual experience - with the impossibly paradoxical results with which we are all familiar. Most human beings are not philosophers and care not at all for consistency in thought or action. Thus, in some circumstances they take it for granted that events are not 'loose and separate,' but coexist or follow one another within the organized and organizing field of a cosmic whole. But on other occasions, where the opposite view is more nearly in accord with their passions or interests, they adopt, all unconsciously, the Humian position and treat events as though they were as independent of one another and the rest of the world as the words by which they are symbolized. This is generally true of all occurrences involving 'I,' 'me,' 'mine.' Reifying the 'loose and separate' names, we regard the things as also loose and separate — not subject to law, not involved in the network of relationships, by which in fact they arc so obviously bound up with their physical, social and spiritual environment. We regard as absurd the idea that there is no causal process in nature and no organic connection between events and things in the lives of other people; but at the same time we accept as axiomatic the notion that our own sacred ego is 'loose

and separate' from the universe, a law unto itself above the moral *dharma* and even, in many respects, above the natural law of causality. Both in Buddhism and Catholicism, monks and nuns were encouraged to avoid the personal pronoun and to speak of themselves in terms of circumlocutions that clearly indicated their real relationship with the cosmic reality and their fellow-creatures. The precaution was a wise one. Our responses to familiar words are conditioned reflexes. By changing the stimulus, we can do something to change the response. No Pavlov bell, no salivation; no harping on words like 'me' and 'mine,' no purely automatic and unreflecting egotism. When a monk speaks of himself, not as 'I,' but as 'this sinner' or 'this unprofitable servant,' he tends to stop taking his 'loose and separate' selfhood for granted, and makes himself aware of his real, organic relationship with God and his neighbours.

In practice words are used for other purposes than for making statements about facts. Very often they are used rhetorically, in order to arouse the passions and direct the will towards some course of action regarded as desirable. And sometimes, too, they are used poetically - that is to say, they are used in such a way that, besides making a statement about real or imaginary things and events, and besides appealing rhetorically to the will and the passions, they cause the reader to be aware that they are beautiful. Beauty in art or nature is a matter of relationships between things not in themselves intrinsically beautiful. There is nothing beautiful, for example, about the vocables 'time,' or 'syllable.' But when they are used in such a phrase as 'to the last syllabic of recorded time,' the relationship between the sound of the component words, between our ideas of the things for which they stand, and between the overtones of association with which each word and the phrase as a whole are charged, is apprehended, by a direct and immediate intuition, as being beautiful.

About the rhetorical use of words nothing much need be said. There is rhetoric for good causes and there is rhetoric for bad causes - rhetoric which is tolerably true to facts as well as emotionally moving, and rhetoric which is unconsciously or deliberately a lie. To learn to discriminate between the different kinds of rhetoric is an essential part of intellectual morality; and

intellectual morality is as necessary a pre-condition of the spiritual life as is the control of the will and the guard of heart and tongue.

We have now to consider a more difficult problem. How should the poetic use of words be related to the life of the spirit? (And, of course, what applies to the poetical use of words applies equally to the pictorial use of pigments, the musical use of sounds, the sculptural use of clay or stone - in a word, to all the arts.) ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty.’ But unfortunately Keats failed to specify in which of its principal meanings he was using the word ‘truth.’ Some critics have assumed that he was using it in the third of the senses listed at the opening of this section, and have therefore dismissed the aphorism as nonsensical. Zn+H2SO4=Zn+H2. This is a truth in the third sense of the word - and, manifestly, this truth is not identical with beauty. But no less manifestly Keats was not talking about this kind of ‘truth.’ He was using the word primarily in its first sense, as a synonym for ‘fact,’ and secondarily with the significance attached to it in the Johannine phrase, ‘to worship God in truth.’ His sentence, therefore, carries two meanings. ‘Beauty is the Primordial Fact, and the Primordial Fact is Beauty, the principle of all particular beauties’; and ‘Beauty is an immediate experience, and this immediate experience is identical with Beauty-as-Principle, Beauty-as-Primordial-Fact.’ The first of these statements is fully in accord with the doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy. Among the trinities in which the ineffable One makes itself manifest is the trinity of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. We perceive beauty in the harmonious intervals between the parts of a whole. In this context the divine Ground might be paradoxically defined as Pure Interval, independent of what is separated and harmonized within the totality.

With Keats’s statement in its secondary meaning the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy would certainly disagree. The experience of beauty in art or in nature may be qualitatively akin to the immediate, unitive experience of the divine Ground or Godhead; but it is not the same as that experience, and the particular beauty-fact experienced, though partaking in some sort of the divine nature, is at several removes from the Godhead. The poet, the nature lover, the

aesthete are granted apprehensions of Reality analogous to those vouchsafed to the selfless contemplative; but because they have not troubled to make themselves perfectly selfless, they are incapable of knowing the divine Beauty in its fullness, as it is in itself. The poet is born with the capacity of arranging words in such a way that something of the quality of the graces and inspirations he has received can make itself felt to other human beings in the white spaces, so to speak, between the lines of his verse. This is a great and precious gift; but if the poet remains content with his gift, if he persists in worshipping the beauty in art and nature without going on to make himself capable, through selflessness, of apprehending Beauty as it is in the divine Ground, then he is only an idolater. True, his idolatry is among the highest of which human beings are capable; but an idolatry, none the less, it remains.

The experience of beauty is pure, self-manifested, compounded equally of joy and consciousness, free from admixture of any other perception, the very twin brother of mystical experience, and the very life of it is supersensuous wonder... It is enjoyed by those who are competent thereto, in identity, just as the form of God is itself the joy with which it is recognized.

Visvanatha

What follows is the last composition of a Zen nun, who had been in her youth a great beauty and an accomplished poetess.

Sixty-six times have these eyes beheld the changing scenes of Autumn.

I have said enough about moonlight, Ask me no more.

Only listen to the voice of pines and cedars, when no wind stirs.

Ryo-Nen

The silence under windless trees is what Mallarmé would call a *creux néant musicien.* But whereas the music for which the poet listened was merely aesthetic and imaginative, it was to pure Suchness that the self-naughted contemplative was laying herself open. ‘Be still and know that I am God.’

This truth is to be lived, it is not to be merely pronounced with the mouth...

There is really nothing to argue about in this teaching; Any arguing is sure to go against the intent of it.

Doctrines given up to controversy and argumentation lead of themselves to birth and death.

Hui Neng

Away, then, with the fictions and workings of discursive reason, either for or against Christianity! They are only the wanton spirit of the mind, whilst ignorant of God and insensible of its own nature and condition. Death and life are the only things in question; life is God living and working in the soul; death is the soul living and working according to the sense and reason of bestial flesh and blood. Both this life and this death are of their own growth, growing from their own seed within us, not as busy reason talks and directs, but as the heart turns either to the one or to the other.

William Law

Can I explain the Friend to one for whom He is no Friend?

Jalal-uddin Rumi

When a mother cries to her sucking babe, ‘Come, O son, I am thy mother!’
Does the child answer, ‘O mother, show a proof That I shall find comfort in taking thy milk’?

Jalal-uddin Rumi

Great truths do not take hold of the hearts of the masses. And now, as all the world is in error, how shall I, though I know the true path, how shall I guide? If I know that I cannot succeed and yet try to force success, this would be but another source of error. Better then to desist and strive no more. But if I do not strive, who will?

Chuang Tzu

Between the horns of Chuang Tzu's dilemma there is no way but that of love, peace and joy. Only those who manifest their possession, in however small a measure, of the fruits of the Spirit can persuade others that the life of the spirit is worth living. Argument and controversy are almost useless; in many cases, indeed, they are positively harmful. But this, of course, is a thing that clever men with a gift for syllogisms and sarcasm find it peculiarly hard to admit. Milton, no doubt, genuinely believed that he was working for truth, righteousness and the glory of God by exploding in torrents of learned scurrility against the enemies of his favourite dictator and his favourite brand of nonconformity. In actual fact, of course, he and other controversialists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did nothing but harm to the cause of true religion, for which, on one side or the other, they fought with an equal learning and ingenuity and with the same foul-mouthed intemperance of language. The successive controversies went on, with occasional lucid intervals, for about two hundred years — Papists arguing with anti-Papists, Protestants with other Protestants, Jesuits with Quietists and Jansenists. When the noise finally died down, Christianity (which, like any other religion, can survive only if it manifests the fruits of the Spirit) was all but dead; the real religion of most educated Europeans was now nationalistic idolatry. During the eighteenth century this change to idolatry seemed (after the atrocities committed in the name of Christianity by Wallenstein and Tilly) to be a change for the better. This was because the ruling classes were determined that the horrors of the wars of religion should not be repeated and therefore deliberately tempered power politics with gentlemanliness. Symptoms of gentlemanliness can still be observed in the Napoleonic and Crimean wars. But the national Molochs were steadily devouring the eighteenth-century ideal. During the First and Second World Wars we have witnessed the total elimination of the old checks and self-restraints. The consequences of political idolatry now display themselves without the smallest mitigation either of humanistic honour and etiquette or of transcendental religion. By its internecine quarrels over words,

forms of organization, money and power, historic Christianity consummated the work of self-destruction, to which its excessive preoccupation with things in time had from the first so tragically committed it.

Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment; Cleverness is mere opinion, bewilderment is intuition.

Jalal-uddin Rumi

Reason is like an officer when the King appears; The officer then loses his power and hides himself.

Reason is the shadow cast by God; God is the sun.

Jalal-uddin Rumi

Non-rational creatures do not look before or after, but live in the animal eternity of a perpetual present; instinct is their animal grace and constant inspiration; and they are never tempted to live otherwise than in accord with their own animal *dharma*, or immanent law. Thanks to his reasoning powers and to the instrument of reason, language, man (in his merely human condition) lives nostalgically, apprehensively and hopefully in the past and future as well as in the present; has no instincts to tell him what to do; must rely on personal cleverness, rather than on inspiration from the divine Nature of Things; finds himself in a condition of chronic civil war between passion and prudence and, on a higher level of awareness and ethical sensibility, between egotism and dawning spirituality. But this ‘wearisome condition of humanity’ is the indispensable prerequisite of enlightenment and deliverance. Man must live in time in order to be able to advance into eternity, no longer on the animal, but on the spiritual level; he must be conscious of himself as a separate ego in order to be able consciously to transcend separate selfhood; he must do battle with the lower self in order that he may become identified with that higher Self within him, which is akin to the divine Not-Self; and finally he must make use of his cleverness in

order to pass beyond cleverness to the intellectual vision of Truth, the immediate, unitive knowledge of the divine Ground. Reason and its works ‘are not and cannot be a proximate means of union with God.’ The proximate means is ‘intellect,’ in the scholastic sense of the word, or spirit. In the last analysis the use and purpose of reason is to create the internal and external conditions favourable to its own transfiguration by and into spirit. It is the lamp by which it finds the way to go beyond itself. We see, then, that as a means to a proximate means to an End, discursive reasoning is of enormous value. But if, in our pride and madness, we treat it as a proximate means to the divine End (as so many religious people have done and still do), or if, denying the existence of an eternal End, we regard it as at once the means to Progress and its ever-receding goal in time, cleverness becomes the enemy, a source of spiritual blindness, moral evil and social disaster. At no period in history has cleverness been so highly valued or, in certain directions, so widely and efficiently trained as at the present time. And at no time have intellectual vision and spirituality been less esteemed, or the End to which they are proximate means less widely and less earnestly sought for. Because technology advances, we fancy that we are making corresponding progress all along the line; because we have considerable power over inanimate nature, we are convinced that we are the self-sufficient masters of our fate and captains of our souls; and because cleverness has given us technology and power, we believe, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, that we have only to go on being yet cleverer in a yet more systematic way to achieve social order, international peace and personal happiness.

In Wu Ch’êng-ên’s extraordinary masterpiece (so admirably translated by Mr Arthur Waley) there is an episode, at once comical and profound, in which Monkey (who, in the allegory, is the incarnation of human cleverness) gets to heaven and there causes so much trouble that at last Buddha has to be called in to deal with him. It ends in the following passage: ‘I’ll have a wager with you,’ said Buddha. ‘If you are really so clever, jump off the palm of my right hand. If you succeed, I’ll tell the Jade Emperor to come and live with me in the Western Paradise, and you shall have his throne without more ado. But if you fail, you

shall go back to earth and do penance there for many a kalpa before you come back to me with your talk.'

'This Buddha,' Monkey thought to himself, 'is a perfect fool. I can jump a hundred and eight thousand leagues, while his palm cannot be as much as eight inches across. How could I fail to jump clear of it?'

'You're sure you're in a position to do this for me?' he asked.

'Of course I am,' said Buddha.

He stretched out his right hand, which looked about the size of a lotus leaf. Monkey put his cudgel behind his ear and leapt with all his might. 'That's all right,' he said to himself. 'I'm right off it now.' He was whizzing so fast that he was almost invisible, and Buddha, watching him with the eye of wisdom, saw a mere whirligig shoot along.

Monkey came at last to five pink pillars, sticking up into the air. 'This is the end of the World,' said Monkey to himself. 'All I have got to do is to go back to Buddha and claim my forfeit. The Throne is mine.'

'Wait a minute,' he said presently, 'I'd better just leave a record of some kind, in case I have trouble with Buddha.' He plucked a hair and blew on it with magic breath, crying 'Change!' It changed at once into a writing brush charged with heavy ink, and at the base of the central pillar he wrote, 'The Great Sage Equal to Heaven reached this place.' Then, to mark his disrespect, he relieved nature at the bottom of the first pillar, and somersaulted back to where he had come from. Standing on Buddha's palm, he said, 'Well, I've gone and come back. You can go and tell the Jade Emperor to hand over the palaces of Heaven.'

'You stinking ape,' said Buddha, 'you've been on the palm of my hand all the time.'

'You're quite mistaken,' said Monkey. 'I got to the end of the World, where I saw five flesh-coloured pillars sticking up into the sky. I wrote something on one of them. I'll take you there and show you, if you like.'

'No need for that,' said Buddha. 'Just look down.'

Monkey peered down with his fiery, steely eyes, and there at the base of the middle finger of Buddha's hand he saw written the words, 'The Great Sage

Equal to Heaven reached this place,' and from the fork between the thumb and first finger came a smell of monkey's urine.

From Monkey And so, having triumphantly urinated on the proffered hand of Wisdom, the Monkey within us turns back and, full of a bumptious confidence in his own omnipotence, sets out to refashion the world of men and things into something nearer to his heart's desire. Sometimes his intentions are good, sometimes consciously bad. But, whatever the intentions may be, the results of action undertaken by even the most brilliant cleverness, when it is unenlightened by the divine Nature of Things, unsubordinated to the Spirit, are generally evil. That this has always been clearly understood by humanity at large is proved by the usages of language. 'Cunning' and 'canny' are equivalent to 'knowing,' and all three adjectives pass a more or less unfavourable moral judgment on those to whom they are applied. 'Conceit' is just 'concept'; but what a man's mind conceives most clearly is the supreme value of his own ego. 'Shrewd,' which is the participai form of 'shrew,' meaning malicious, and is connected with 'beshrew,' to curse, is now applied, by way of rather dubious compliment, to astute business men and attorneys. Wizards arc so called because they arc wise - wise, of course, in the sense that, in American slang, a 'wise guy' is wise. Conversely, an idiot was once popularly known as an innocent. 'This use of innocent,' says Richard Trench, 'assumes that to hurt and harm is the chief employment, towards which men turn their intellectual powers; that where they are wise, they are oftenest wise to do evil.' Meanwhile it goes without saying that cleverness and accumulated knowledge are indispensable, but always as means to proximate means, and never as proximate means or, what is even worse, as ends in themselves. *Quid faceret eruditio sine dilectione?* says St Bernard. *Inflaret. Quid, absque eruditione dilectio? Erraret.* What would learning do without love? It would puff up. And love without learning? It would go astray.

Such as men themselves are, such will God Himself seem to them to be.

John Smith, the Platonist

Men’s minds perceive second causes, But only prophets perceive the action of the First Cause.

Jalal-uddin Rumi

The amount and kind of knowledge we acquire depends first upon the will and, second, upon our psycho-physical constitution and the modifications imposed upon it by environment and our own choice. Thus, Professor Burkitt has pointed out that, where technological discovery is concerned ‘man’s desire has been the important factor. Once something is definitely ‘.. anted, again and again it has been produced in an extremely short time... Conversely, nothing will teach the Bushmen of South Africa to plant and herd. They have no desire to do so.’ The same is true in regard to ethical and spiritual discoveries. ‘You are as holy as you wish to be,’ was the motto given by Ruysbroeck to the students who came to visit him. And he might have added, ‘You can therefore know as much of Reality as you wish to know’ - for knowledge is in the knower according to the mode of the knower, and the mode of the knower is, in certain all-important respects, within the knower’s control.

Liberating knowledge of God comes to the pure in heart and poor in spirit; and though such purity and poverty are enormously difficult of achievement, they are nevertheless possible to all.

She said, moreover, that if one would attain to purity of mind it was necessary to abstain altogether from any judgment on one’s neighbour and from all empty talk about his conduct. In creatures one should always seek only for the will of God. With great force she said: ‘For no reason whatever should one judge the actions of creatures or their motives. Even when we see that it is an actual sin, we ought not to pass judgment on it, but have holy and sincere compassion and offer it up to God with humble and devout prayer.’

From the Testament of St Catherine of Siena, written down by Tommaso di Petra

This total abstention from judgment upon one's fellows is only one of the conditions of inward purity. The others have already been described in the section on 'Mortification.'

Learning consists in adding to one's stock day by day. The practice of Tao consists in subtracting day by day: subtracting and yet again subtracting until one has reached inactivity.

Lao Tzu

It is the inactivity of self-will and ego-centred cleverness that makes possible the activity within the empty and purified soul of the eternal Suchness. And when eternity is known in the heights within, it is also known in the fullness of experience, outside in the world.

Peter Steriy

Didst thou ever descry a glorious eternity in a winged moment of time? Didst thou ever see a bright infinite in the narrow point of an object? Then thou knowest what spirit means - the spire-top, whither all things ascend harmoniously, where they meet and sit contented in an unfathomed Depth of Life.

8. Religion and Temperament

IT SEEMS BEST at his point to turn back for a moment from ethics to psychology, where a very important problem awaits us - a problem to which the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy have given a great deal of attention. What precisely is the relation between individual constitution and temperament on the one hand and the kind and degree of spiritual knowledge on the other? The materials for a comprehensively accurate answer to this question arc not available - except, perhaps, in the form of that incommunicable science, based upon intuition and long practice, that exists in the minds of experienced 'spiritual directors.' But the answer that *can* be given, though incomplete, is highly significant.

All knowledge, as we have seen, is a function of being. Or, to phrase the same idea in scholastic terms, the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. In the Introduction reference was made to the effect upon knowledge of changes of being along what may be called its vertical axis, in the direction of sanctity or its opposite. But there is also variation in the horizontal plane. Congenitally by psychophysical constitution, each one of us is born into a certain position on this horizontal plane. It is a vast territory, still imperfectly explored, a continent stretching all the way from imbecility to genius, from shrinking weakness to aggressive strength, from cruelty to Pickwickian kindliness, from self-revealing sociability to taciturn misanthropy and love of solitude, from an almost frantic lasciviousness to an almost untempted continence.

From any point on this huge expanse of possible human nature an individual can move almost indefinitely up or down, towards union with the divine Ground of his own and all other beings, or towards the last, the infernal extremes of separateness and selfhood. But where horizontal movement is concerned there is

far less freedom. It is impossible for one kind of physical constitution to transform itself into another kind; and the particular temperament associated with a given physical constitution can be modified only within narrow limits. With the best will in the world and the best social environment, all that anyone can hope to do is to make the best of his congenital psychophysical make-up; to change the fundamental patterns of constitution and temperament is beyond his power.

In the course of the last thirty centuries many attempts have been made to work out a classification system in terms of which human differences could be measured and described. For example, there is the ancient Hindu method of classifying people according to the psycho-physico-social categories of caste. There are the primarily medical classifications associated with the name of Hippocrates, classifications in terms of two main ‘habits’ - the phthisic and the apoplectic - or of the four humours (blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile) and the four qualities (hot, cold, moist and dry). More recently there have been the various physiognomic systems of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; the crude and merely psychological dichotomy of introversion and extraversion; the more complete, but still inadequate, psychophysical classifications proposed by Kretschmer, Stockard Viola and others; and finally the system, more comprehensive, more flexibly adequate to the complex facts than all those which preceded it, worked out by Dr William Sheldon and his collaborators.

In the present section our concern is with classifications of human differences in relation to the problems of the spiritual life. Traditional systems will be described and illustrated, and the findings of the Perennial Philosophy will be compared with the conclusions reached by the most recent scientific research.

In the West, the traditional Catholic classification of human beings is based upon the Gospel anecdote of Martha and Mary. The way of Martha is the way of salvation through action, the way of Mary is the way through contemplation. Following Aristotle, who in this as in many other matters was in accord with the Perennial Philosophy, Catholic thinkers have regarded contemplation (the

highest term of which is the unitive knowledge of the Godhead) as man's final end, and therefore have always held that Mary's was indeed the better way.

Significantly enough, it is in essentially similar terms that Dr Radin classifies and (by implication) evaluates primitive human beings in so far as they are philosophers and religious devotees. For him there is no doubt that the higher monotheistic forms of primitive religion are created (or should one rather say, with Plato, *discovered?)* by people belonging to the first of the two great psychophysical classes of human beings - the men of thought. To those belonging to the other class, the men of action, is due the creation or discovery of the lower, unphilosophical, polytheistic kinds of religion.

This simple dichotomy is a classification of human differences that is valid so far as it goes. But like all such dichotomies, whether physical (like Hippocrates' division of humanity into those of phthisic and those of apoplectic habit) or psychological (like Jung's classification in terms of introvert and extrovert), this grouping of the religions into those who think and those who act, those who follow the way of Martha and those who follow the way of Mary, is inadequate to the facts. And of course no director of souls, no head of a religious organization, is ever, in actual practice, content with this all too simple system. Underlying the best Catholic writing on prayer and the best Catholic practice in the matter of recognizing vocations and assigning duties, we sense the existence of an implicit and unformulated classification of human differences more complete and more realistic than the explicit dichotomy of action and contemplation.

In Hindu thought the outlines of this completer and more adequate classification are clearly indicated. The ways leading to the delivering union with God are not two, but three - the way of works, the way of knowledge and the way of devotion. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Sri Krishna instructs Arjuna in all three paths - liberation through action without attachment; liberation through knowledge of the Self and the Absolute Ground of all being with which it is identical; and liberation through intense devotion to the personal God or the divine incarnation.

Do without attachment the work you have to do; for a man who does his work without attachment attains the Supreme Goal verily. By action alone men like Janaka attained perfection.

But there is also the way of Mary.

Freed from passion, fear and anger, absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, and purified by the fires of Knowledge, many have become one with my Being.

And again:

Those who have completely controlled their senses and are of even mind under all conditions and thus contemplate the Imperishable, the Ineffable, the Unmanifest, the Omnipresent, the Incomprehensible, the Eternal - they, devoted to the welfare of all beings, attain Me alone and none else.

But the path of contemplation is not easy.

The task of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest is the more difficult; for, to those who are in the body, the realization of the Unmanifest is hard. But those who consecrate all their actions to Me (as the personal God, or as the divine Incarnation), who regard Me as the supreme Goal, who worship Me and meditate upon Me with single-minded concentration - for those whose minds are thus absorbed in Me, I become ere long the Saviour from the world’s ocean of mortality.

These three ways of deliverance are precisely correlated with the three categories, in terms of which Sheldon has worked out what is, without question, the best and most adequate classification of human differences. Human beings, he has shown, vary continuously between the viable extremes of a tri-polar

system; and physical and psychological measurements can be devised, whereby any given individual may be accurately located in relation to the three co-ordinates. Or we can put the matter differently and say that any given individual is a mixture, in varying proportions, of three physical and three closely related psychological components. The strength of each component can be measured according to empirically determined procedures. To the three physical components Sheldon gives the names of endomorphy, mesomorphy and ectomorphy. The individual with a high degree of endomorphy is predominantly soft and rounded and may easily become grossly fat. The high mesomorph is hard, big-boned and strong-muscled. The high ectomorph is slender and has small bones and stringy, weak, unemphatic muscles. The endomorph has a huge gut, a gut that may be more than twice as heavy and twice as long as that of the extreme ectomorph. In a real sense his or her body is built around the digestive tract. The centrally significant fact of mesomorphic physique, on the other hand, is the powerful musculature, while that of the ectomorph is the oversensitive and (since the ratio of body surface to mass is higher in ectomorphs than in either of the other types) relatively unprotected nervous system.

With endomorphic constitution is closely correlated a temperamental pattern, which Sheldon calls viscerotonia. Significant among the viscerotonic traits are love of food and, characteristically, love of eating in common; love of comfort and luxury; love of ceremoniousness; indiscriminate amiability and love of people as such; fear of solitude and craving for company; uninhibited expression of emotion; love of childhood, in the form of nostalgia towards one’s own past and in an intense enjoyment of family life; craving for affection and social support, and need of people when in trouble. The temperament that is related to mesomorphy is called somatotonia. In this the dominating traits are love of muscular activity, aggressiveness and lust for power; indifference to pain; callousness in regard to other people’s feelings; a love of combat and competitiveness; a high degree of physical courage; a nostalgic feeling, not for childhood, but for youth, the period of maximum muscular power; a need for activity when in trouble.

From the foregoing descriptions it will be seen how inadequate is the Jungian conception of extraversion, as a simple antithesis to introversion. Extraversion is not simple; it is of two radically different kinds. There is the emotional, sociable extraversion of the viscerotonic endomorph — the person who is always seeking company and telling everybody just what he feels. And there is the extraversion of the big-muscled somatotonic - the person who looks outward on the world as a place where he can exercise power, where he can bend people to his will and shape things to his heart's desire. One is the genial extraversion of the salesman, the Rotarian good mixer, the liberal Protestant clergyman. The other is the extraversion of the engineer who works off his lust for power on things, of the sportsman and the professional blood-and-iron soldier, of the ambitious business executive and politician, of the dictator, whether in the home or at the head of a state.

With cerebrotonia, the temperament that is correlated with ectomorphic physique, we leave the genial world of Pickwick, the strenuously competitive world of Hotspur, and pass into an entirely different and somewhat disquieting kind of universe — that of Hamlet and Ivan Karamazov. The extreme cerebrotonic is the over-alert, oversensitive introvert, who is more concerned with what goes on behind his eyes - with the constructions of thought and imagination, with the variations of feeling and consciousness - than with that external world, to which, in their different ways, the viscerotonic and the somatotonic pay their primary attention and allegiance. Cerebrotonics have little or no desire to dominate, nor do they feel the viscerotonic's indiscriminate liking for people as people; on the contrary they want to live and let live, and their passion for privacy is intense. Solitary confinement, the most terrible punishment that can be inflicted on the soft, round, genial person, is, for the cerebrotonic, no punishment at all. For him the ultimate horror is the boarding school and the barracks. In company cerebrotonics are nervous and shy, tensely inhibited and unpredictably moody. (It is a significant fact that no extreme cerebrotonic has ever been a good actor or actress.) Cerebrotonics hate to slam doors or raise their voices, and suffer acutely from the unrestrained bellowing

and trampling of the somatotonic. Their manner is restrained, and when it comes to expressing their feelings they are extremely reserved. The emotional gush of the viscerotonic strikes them as offensively shallow and even insincere, nor have they any patience with viscerotonic ceremoniousness and love of luxury and magnificence. They do not easily form habits and find it hard to adapt their lives to the routines which come so naturally to somatotonics. Owing to their oversensitiveness, cerebrotonics are often extremely, almost insanely sexual; but they are hardly ever tempted to take to drink — for alcohol, which heightens the natural aggressiveness of the somatotonic and increases the relaxed amiability of the viscerotonic, merely makes them feel ill and depressed. Each in his own way, the viscerotonic and the somatotonic are well adapted to the world they live in; but the introverted cerebrotonic is in some sort incommensurable with the things and people and institutions that surround him. Consequently a remarkably high proportion of extreme cerebrotonics fail to make good as normal citizens and average pillars of society. But if many fail, many also become abnormal on the higher side of the average. In universities, monasteries and research laboratories - wherever sheltered conditions are provided for those whose small guts and feeble muscles do not permit them to eat or fight their way through the ordinary rough and tumble — the percentage of outstandingly gifted and accomplished cerebrotonics will almost always be very high. Realizing the importance of this extreme, over-evolved and scarcely viable type of human being, all civilizations have provided in one way or another for its protection.

In the light of these descriptions we can understand more clearly the Bhagavad-Gita’s classification of paths to salvation. The path of devotion is the path naturally followed by the person in whom the viscerotonic component is high. His inborn tendency to externalize the emotions he spontaneously feels in regard to persons can be disciplined and canalized, so that a merely animal gregariousness and a merely human kindliness become transformed into charity - devotion to the personal God and universal goodwill and compassion towards all sentient beings.

The path of works is for those whose extraversion is of the somatotonic kind, those who in all circumstances feel the need to ‘do something.’ In the unregenerate somatotonic this craving for action is always associated with aggressiveness, self-assertion and the lust for power. For the born *Kshatriya*, or warrior-ruler, the task, as Krishna explains to Arjuna, is to get rid of those fatal accompaniments to the love of action and to work without regard to the fruits of work, in a state of complete non-attachment to self. Which is, of course, like everything else, a good deal easier said than done.

Finally, there is the way of knowledge, through the modification of consciousness, until it ceases to be ego-centred and becomes centred in and united with the divine Ground. This is the way to which the extreme cerebrotonic is naturally drawn. His special discipline consists in the mortification of his innate tendency towards introversion for its own sake, towards thought and imagination and self-analysis as ends in themselves rather than as means towards the ultimate transcendence of phantasy and discursive reasoning in the timeless act of pure intellectual intuition.

Within the general population, as we have seen, variation is continuous, and in most people the three components are fairly evenly mixed. Those exhibiting extreme predominance of any one component are relatively rare. And yet, in spite of their rarity, it is by the thought-patterns characteristic of these extreme individuals that theology and ethics, at any rate on the theoretical side, have been mainly dominated. The reason for this is simple. Any extreme position is more uncompromisingly clear and therefore more easily recognized and understood than the intermediate positions, which are the natural thought-pattern of the person in whom the constituent components of personality are evenly balanced. These intermediate positions, it should be noted, do not in any sense contain or reconcile the extreme positions; they are merely other thought-patterns added to the list of possible systems. The construction of an all-embracing system of metaphysics, ethics and psychology is a task that can never be accomplished by any single individual, for the sufficient reason that he *is* an individual with one particular kind of constitution and temperament and therefore capable of

knowing only according to the mode of his own being. Hence the advantages inherent in what may be called the anthological approach to truth.

The Sanskrit *dharma* - one of the key words in Indian formulations of the Perennial Philosophy - has two principal meanings. The *dharma* of an individual is, first of all, his essential nature, the intrinsic law of his being and development. But *dharma* also signifies the law of righteousness and piety. The implications of this double meaning are clear: a man's duty, how he ought to live, what he ought to believe and what he ought to do about his beliefs - these things are conditioned by his essential-nature, his constitution and temperament. Going a good deal further than do the Catholics, with their doctrine of vocations, the Indians admit the right of individuals with different *dharmas* to worship different aspects or conceptions of the divine. Hence the almost total absence, among Hindus and Buddhists, of bloody persecutions, religious wars and proselytizing imperialism.

It should, however, be remarked that, within its own ecclesiastical fold, Catholicism has been almost as tolerant as Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism. Nominally one, each of these religions consists, in fact, of a number of very different religions, covering the whole gamut of thought and behaviour from fetishism, through polytheism, through legalistic monotheism, through devotion to the sacred humanity of the Avatar, to the profession of the Perennial Philosophy and the practice of a purely spiritual religion that seeks the unitive knowledge of the Absolute Godhead. These tolerated religions-within-a-religion are not, of course, regarded as equally valuable or equally true. To worship polytheistically may be one's *dharma;* nevertheless the fact remains that man's final end is the unitive knowledge of the Godhead, and all the historical formulations of the Perennial Philosophy are agreed that every human being ought, and perhaps in some way or other actually will, achieve that end. 'All souls,' writes Father Garrigou-Lagrange, 'receive a general remote call to the mystical life; and if all were faithful in avoiding, as they should, not merely mortal but venial sin, if they were, each according to his condition, docile to the Holy Ghost, and if they lived long enough, a day would come when they would

receive the proximate and efficaciou? vocation to a high perfection and to the mystical life properly so called.' With this statement Hindu and Buddhist theologians would probably agree; but they would add that every soul will in fact eventually attain this 'high perfection.' All are called, but in any given generation few are chosen, because few choose themselves. But the series of conscious existences, corporeal or incorporeal, is indefinitely long; there is therefore time and opportunity for everyone to learn the necessary lessons. Moreover, there will always be helpers. For periodically there arc 'descents' of the Godhead into physical form; and at all times there are future Buddhas ready, on the threshold of reunion with the Intelligible Light, to renounce the bliss of immediate liberation in order to return as saviours and teachers again and again into the world of suffering and time and evil, until at last every sentient being shall have been delivered into eternity.

The practical consequences of this doctrine are clear enough. The lower forms of religion, whether emotional, active or intellectual, are never to be accepted as final. True, each of them comes naturally to persons of a certain kind of constitution and temperament; but the *dharma* or duty of any given individual is not to remain complacently fixed in the imperfect religion that happens to suit him; it is rather to transcend it, not by impossibly denying the modes of thought, behaviour and feeling that are natural to him, but by making use of them, so that by means of nature he may pass beyond nature. Thus the introvert uses 'discrimination' (in the Indian phrase), and so learns to distinguish the mental activities of the ego from the principal consciousness of the Self, which is akin to, or identical with, the divine Ground. The emotional extravert learns to 'hate his father and mother' (in other words, to give up his selfish attachment to the pleasures of indiscriminately loving and being loved), concentrates his devotion on the personal or incarnate aspect of God, and comes at last to love the Absolute Godhead by an act, no longer of feeling, but of will illuminated by knowledge. And finally there is that other kind of extravert, whose concern is not with the pleasures of giving or receiving affection, but with the satisfaction of his lust for power over things, events and persons. Using his own nature to

transcend his own nature, he must follow the path laid down in the Bhagavad-Gita for the bewildered Arjuna - the path of work without attachment to the fruits of work, the path of what St François de Sales calls ‘holy indifference,’ the path that leads through the forgetting of self to the discovery of the Self.

In the course of history it has often happened that one or other of the imperfect religions has been taken too seriously and regarded as good and true in itself, instead of as a means to the ultimate end of all religion. The effects of such mistakes are often disastrous. For example, many Protestant sects have insisted on the necessity, or at least the extreme desirability, of a violent conversion. But violent conversion, as Sheldon has pointed out, is a phenomenon confined almost exclusively to persons with a high degree of somatotonia. These persons are so intensely extraverted as to be quite unaware of what is happening in the lower levels of their minds. If for any reason their attention comes to be turned inwards, the resulting self-knowledge, because of its novelty and strangeness, presents itself with the force and quality of a revelation and their *metanoia*, or change of mind, is sudden and thrilling. This change may be to religion, or it may be to something else - for example, to psycho-analysis. To insist upon the necessity of violent conversion as the only means to salvation is about as sensible as it would be to insist upon the necessity of having a large face, heavy bones and powerful muscles. To those naturally subject to this kind of emotional upheaval, the doctrine that makes salvation dependent on conversion gives a complacency that is quite fatal to spiritual growth, while those who are incapable of it are filled with a no less fatal despair. Other examples of inadequate theologies based upon psychological ignorance could easily be cited. One remembers, for instance, the sad case of Calvin, the cerebrotonic who took his own intellectual constructions so seriously that he lost all sense of reality, both human and spiritual. And then there is our liberal Protestantism, that predominantly viscerotonic heresy, which seems to have forgotten the very existence of the Father, Spirit and Logos and equates Christianity with an emotional attachment to Christ’s humanity or (to use the currently popular phrase) ‘the personality of Jesus,’ worshipped idolatrously as

though there were no other God. Even within all-comprehensive Catholicism we constantly hear complaints of the ignorant and self-centred directors, who impose upon the souls under their charge a religious *dharma* wholly unsuited to their nature - with results which writers such as St John of the Cross describe as wholly pernicious. We see, then, that it is natural for us to think of God as possessed of the qualities which our temperament tends to make us perceive in Him; but unless nature finds a way of transcending itself by means of itself, we are lost. In the last analysis Philo is quite right in saying that those who do not conceive God purely and simply as the One, injure, not God of course, but themselves and, along with themselves, their fellows.

The way of knowledge comes most naturally to persons whose temperament is predominantly cerebrotonic. By this I do not mean that the following of this way is easy for the cerebrotonic. His specially besetting sins are just as difficult to overcome as are the sins which beset the power-loving somatotonic and the extreme viscerotonic with his gluttony for food and comfort and social approval. Rather I mean that the idea that such a way exists and can be followed (either by discrimination, or through non-attached work and one-pointed devotion) is one which spontaneously occurs to the cerebrotonic. At all levels of culture he is the natural monotheist; and this natural monotheist, as Dr Radin's examples of primitive theology clearly show, is often a monotheist of the *tat tvam asi*, inner-light school. Persons committed by their temperament to one or other of the two kinds of extraversion are natural polytheists. But natural polytheists can, without much difficulty, be convinced of the theoretical superiority of monotheism. The nature of human reason is such that there is an intrinsic plausibility about any hypothesis which seeks to explain the manifold in terms of unity, to reduce apparent multiplicity to essential identity. And from this theoretical monotheism the half-converted polytheist can, if he chooses, go on (through practices suitable to his own particular temperament) to actual realization of the divine Ground of his own and all other beings. He *can,* I repeat, and sometimes he actually does. But very often he does not. There are many theoretical monotheists whose whole life and every action prove that in reality they are still what their temperament

inclines them to be - polytheists, worshippers not of the one God they sometimes talk about, but of the many gods, nationalistic and technological, financial and familial, to whom in practice they pay their allegiance.

In Christian art the Saviour has almost invariably been represented as slender, small-boned, unemphatically muscled. Large, powerful Christs are a rather shocking exception to a very ancient rule. Of Rubens' crucifixions William Blake contemptuously wrote:

I understood Christ was a carpenter
And not a brewer's servant, my good sir.

In a word, the traditional Jesus is thought of as a man of predominantly ectomorphic physique and therefore, by implication, of predominantly cerebrotonic temperament. The central core of primitive Christian doctrine confirms the essential correctness of the iconographie tradition. The religion of the Gospels is what we should expect from a cerebrotonic - not, of course, from any cerebrotonic, but from one who had used the psychophysical peculiarities of his own nature to transcend nature, who had followed his particular *dharma* to its spiritual goal. The insistence that the Kingdom of Heaven is within; the ignoring of ritual; the slightly contemptuous attitude towards legalism, towards the ceremonial routines of organized religion, towards hallowed days and places; the general otherworldliness; the emphasis laid upon restraint, not merely of overt action, but even of desire and unexpressed intention; the indifference to the splendours of material civilization and the love of poverty as one of the greatest of goods; the doctrine that non-attachment must be carried even into the sphere of family relationships and that even devotion to the highest goals of merely human ideals, even the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, may be idolatrous distractions from the love of God — all these are characteristically cerebrotonic ideas, such as would never have occurred spontaneously to the extraverted power lover or the equally extraverted viscerotonic.

Primitive Buddhism is no less predominantly cerebrotonic than primitive Christianity, and so is Vedanta, the metaphysical discipline which lies at the heart of Hinduism. Confucianism, on the contrary, is a mainly viscerotonic system - familial, ceremonious and thoroughly this-worldly. And in Mohammedanism we find a system which incorporates strongly somatotonic elements. Hence Islam's black record of holy wars and persecutions - a record comparable to that of later Christianity, after that religion had so far compromised with unregenerate somatotonia as to call its ecclesiastical organization 'the Church Militant.'

So far as the achievement of man's final end is concerned, it is as much of a handicap to be an extreme cerebrotonic or an extreme viscerotonic as it is to be an extreme somatotonic. But whereas the cerebrotonic and the viscerotonic cannot do much harm except to themselves and those in immediate contact with them, the extreme somatotonic, with his native aggressiveness, plays havoc with whole societies. From one point of view civilization may be defined as a complex of religious, legal and educational devices for preventing extreme somatotonics from doing too much mischief, and for directing their irrepressible energies into socially desirable channels. Confucianism and Chinese culture have sought to achieve this end by inculcating filial piety, good manners and an amiably viscerotonic epicureanism - the whole reinforced somewhat incongruously by the cerebrotonic spirituality and restraints of Buddhism and classical Taoism. In India the caste system represents an attempt to subordinate military, political and financial power to spiritual authority; and the education given to all classes still insists so strongly upon the fact that man's final end is unitive knowledge of God that even at the present time, even after nearly two hundred years of gradually accelerating Europeanization, successful somatotonics will, in middle life, given up wealth, position and power to end their days as humble seekers after enlightenment. In Catholic Europe, as in India, there was an effort to subordinate temporal power to spiritual authority; but since the Church itself exercised temporal power through the agency of political prelates and mitred business men, the effort was never more than

partially successful. After the Reformation even the pious wish to limit temporal power by means of spiritual authority was completely abandoned. Henry VIII made himself, in Stubbs's words 'the Pope, the whole Pope, and something more than the Pope,' and his example has been followed by most heads of states ever since. Power has been limited only by other powers, not by an appeal to first principles as interpreted by those who are morally and spiritually qualified to know what they are talking about. Meanwhile, the interest in religion has everywhere declined and even among believing Christians the Perennial Philosophy has been to a great extent replaced by a metaphysic of inevitable progress and an evolving God, by a passionate concern, not with eternity, but with future time. And almost suddenly, within the last quarter of a century, there has been consummated what Sheldon calls 'a somatotonic revolution,' directed against all that is characteristically cerebrotonic in the theory and practice of traditional Christian culture. Here are a few symptoms of this somatotonic revolution.

In traditional Christianity, as in all the great religious formulations of the Perennial Philosophy, it was axiomatic that contemplation is the end and purpose of action. Today the great majority even of professed Christians regard action (directed towards material and social progress) as the end, and analytic thought (there is no question any longer of integral thought, or contemplation) as the means to that end.

In traditional Christianity, as in the other formulations of the Perennial Philosophy, the secret of happiness and the way to salvation were to be sought, not in the external environment, but in the individual's state of mind with regard to the environment. Today the all-important thing is not the state of the mind but the state of the environment. Happiness and moral progress depend, it is thought, on bigger and better gadgets and a higher standard of living.

In traditional Christian education the stress was all on restraint; with the recent rise of the 'progressive school' it is all on activity and 'self-expression.'

Traditionally Christian good manners outlawed all expressions of pleasure in the satisfaction of physical appetites. 'You may love a screeching owl, but you

must not love a roasted fowl' - such was the rhyme on which children were brought up in the nurseries of only fifty years ago. Today the young unceasingly proclaim how much they 'love' and 'adore' different kinds of food and drink; adolescents and adults talk about the 'thrills' they derive from the stimulation of their sexuality. The popular philosophy of life has ceased to be based on the classics of devotion and the rules of aristocratic good breeding, and is now moulded by the writers of advertising copy, whose one idea is to persuade everybody to be as extraverted and uninhibitedly greedy as possible, since of course it is only the possessive, the restless, the distracted, who spend money on the things that advertisers want to sell. Technological progress is in part the product of the somatotonic revolution, in part the producer and sustainer of that revolution. The extraverted attention results in technological discoveries. (Significantly enough, a high degree of material civilization has always been associated with the large-scale and officially sanctioned practice of polytheism.) In their turn, technological discoveries have resulted in mass-production; and mass-production, it is obvious, cannot be kept going at full blast except by persuading the whole population to accept the somatotonic *Weltanschauung* and act accordingly.

Like technological progress, with which it is so closely associated in so many ways, modern war is at once a cause and a result of the somatotonic revolution. Nazi education, which was specifically education for war, had two principal aims: to encourage the manifestation of somatotonia in those most richly endowed with that component of personality, and to make the rest of the population feel ashamed of its relaxed amiability or its inward-looking sensitiveness and tendency towards self-restraint and tender-mindedness. During the war the enemies of Nazism have been compelled, of course, to borrow from the Nazis' educational philosophy. All over the world millions of young men and even of young women are being systematically educated to be 'tough' and to value 'toughness' beyond every other moral quality. With this system of somatotonic ethics is associated the idolatrous and polytheistic theology of nationalism - a pseudo-religion far stronger at the present time for evil and

division than is Christianity, or any other monotheistic religion, for unification and good. In the past most societies tried systematically to discourage somatotonia. This was a measure of self-defence; they did not want to be physically destroyed by the power-loving aggressiveness of their most active minority, and they did not want to be spiritually blinded by an excess of extraversion. During the last few years all this has been changed. What, we may apprehensively wonder, will be the result of the current world-wide reversal of an immemorial social policy? Time alone will show.

9. Self-Knowledge

IN OTHER LIVING creatures ignorance of self is nature; in man it is vice.

Boethius

Vice may be defined as a course of behaviour consented to by the will and having results which are bad, primarily because they are God-eclipsing and, secondarily, because they are physically or psychologically harmful to the agent or his fellows. Ignorance of self is something that answers to this description. In its origins it is voluntary; for by introspection and by listening to other people's judgments of our character we can all, if we so desire, come to a very shrewd understanding of our flaws and weaknesses and the real, as opposed to the avowed and advertised, motives of our actions. If most of us remain ignorant of ourselves, it is because self-knowledge is painful and we prefer the pleasures of illusion. As for the consequences of such ignorance, these are bad by every criterion, from the utilitarian to the transcendental. Bad because self-ignorance leads to unrealistic behaviour and so causes every kind of trouble for everyone concerned; and bad because, without self-knowledge, there can be no true humility, therefore no effective self-naughting, therefore no unitive knowledge of the divine Ground underlying the self and ordinarily eclipsed by it.

The importance, the indispensable necessity, of self-knowledge has been stressed by the saints and doctors of every one of the great religious traditions. To us in the West, the most familiar voice is that of Socrates. More systematically than Socrates the Indian exponents of the Perennial Philosophy harped on the same theme. There is, for example, the Buddha, whose discourse on 'The Setting-Up of Mindfulness' expounds (with that positively inexorable exhaustiveness characteristic of the Pali scriptures) the whole art of self-

knowledge in all its branches - knowledge of one's body, one's senses, one's feelings, one's thoughts. This art of self-knowledge is practised with two aims in view. The proximate aim is that 'a brother, as to the body, continues so to look upon the body, that he remains ardent, self-possessed and mindful, having overcome both the hankering and dejection common in the world. And in the same way as to feelings, thoughts and ideas, he so looks upon each that he remains ardent, self-possessed and mindful, without hankering or dejection.' Beyond and through this desirable psychological condition lies the final end of man, knowledge of that which underlies the individualized self. In their own vocabulary, Christian writers express the same ideas.

A man has many skins in himself, covering the depths of his heart. Man knows so many things; he does not know himself. Why, thirty or forty skins or hides, just like an ox's or a bear's, so thick and hard, cover the soul. Go into your own ground and learn to know yourself there.

Eckhart

Fools regard themselves as awake now — so personal is their knowledge. It may be as a prince or it may be as a herdsman, but so cock-sure of themselves!

Chuang Tzu

This metaphor of waking from dreams recurs again and again in the various expositions of the Perennial Philosophy. In this context liberation might be defined as the process of waking up out of the nonsense, nightmares and illusory pleasures of what is ordinarily called real life into the awareness of eternity. The 'sober certainty of waking bliss' - that wonderful phrase in which Milton described the experience of the noblest kind of music - comes, I suppose, about as near as words can get to enlightenment and deliverance.

Thou (the human being) art that which is not. I am that I am. If thou perceivest this truth in thy soul, never shall the enemy deceive thee; thou shalt escape all his snares.

St Catherine of Siena Knowledge of ourselves teaches us whence we come, where we are and whither we are going. We come from God and we are in exile; and it is because our potency of affection tends towards God that we are aware of this state of exile.

Ruysbroeck

Spiritual progress is through the growing knowledge of the self as nothing and of the Godhead as all-embracing Reality. (Such knowledge, of course, is worthless if it is merely theoretical; to be effective, it must be realized as an immediate, intuitive experience and appropriately acted upon.) Of one great master of the spiritual life Professor Étienne Gilson writes: 'The displacement of fear by Charity by way of the practice of humility — in that consists the whole of St Bernard's ascesis, its beginning, its development and its term.' Fear, worry, anxiety - these form the central core of individualized selfhood. Fear cannot be got rid of by personal effort, but only by the ego's absorption in a cause greater than its own interests. Absorption in any cause will rid the mind of some of its fears; but only absorption in the loving and knowing of the divine Ground can rid it of *all* fear. For when the cause is less than the highest, the sense of fear and anxiety is transferred from the self to the cause - as when heroic self-sacrifice for a loved individual or institution is accompanied by anxiety in regard to that for which the sacrifice is made. Whereas if the sacrifice is made for God, and for others for God's sake, there can be no fear or abiding anxiety, since nothing can be a menace to the divine Ground and even failure and disaster are to be accepted as being in accord with the divine will. In few men and women is the love of God intense enough to cast out this projected fear and anxiety for cherished persons and institutions. The reason is to be sought in the fact that few men and women are humble enough to be capable of loving as they should. And

they lack the necessary humility because they are without the fully realized knowledge of their own personal nothingness.

Humility does not consist in hiding our talents and virtues, in thinking ourselves worse and more ordinary than we are, but in possessing a clear knowledge of all that is lacking in us and in not exalting ourselves for that which we have, seeing that God has freely given it us and that, with all His gifts, we are still of infinitely little importance.

Lacordaire

As the light grows, we see ourselves to be worse than we thought. We are amazed at our former blindness as we see issuing from our heart a whole swarm of shameful feelings, like filthy reptiles crawling from a hidden cave. But we must be neither amazed nor disturbed. We are not worse than we were; on the contrary, we are better. But while our faults diminish, the light we see them by waxes brighter, and we are filled with horror. So long as there is no sign of cure, we are unaware of the depth of our disease; we are in a state of blind presumption and hardness, the prey of self-delusion. While we go with the stream, we are unconscious of its rapid course; but when we begin to stem it ever so little, it makes itself felt.

Fénelon

My daughter, build yourself two cells. First a real cell so that you do not run about much and talk, unless it is needful, or you can do it out of love for your neighbour. Next build yourself a spiritual cell, which you can always take with you, and that is the cell of true self-knowledge; you will find there the knowledge of God’s goodness to you. Here there are really two cells in one, and if you live in one you must also live in the other; otherwise the soul will either despair or be presumptuous. If you dwelt in self-knowledge alone, you would

despair; if you dwelt in the knowledge of God alone, you would be tempted to presumption. One must go with the other, and thus you will reach perfection.

St Catherine of Siena

10. Grace and Free Will

DELIVERANCE IS OUT of time into eternity, and is achieved by obedience and docility to the eternal Nature of Things. We have been given free will, in order that we may will our self-will out of existence and so come to live continuously in a 'state of grace.' All our actions must be directed, in the last analysis, to making ourselves passive in relation to the activity and the being of divine Reality. We are, as it were, aeolian harps, endowed with the power either to expose themselves to the wind of the Spirit or to shut themselves away from it.

The Valley Spirit never dies.
It is called the Mysterious Female.
And the doorway of the Mysterious Female
Is the base from which Heaven and Earth spring.
It is there within us all the time.
Draw upon it as you will, it never runs dry.

Lao Tzu

In every exposition of the Perennial Philosophy the human soul is regarded as feminine in relation to the Godhead, the personal God and even the Order of Nature. *Hubris*, which is the original sin, consists in regarding the personal ego as self-sufficiently masculine in relation to the Spirit within and to Nature without, and in behaving accordingly.

St Paul drew a very useful and illuminating distinction between the *psyche* and the *pneuma*. But the latter word never achieved any degree of popularity, and the hopelessly ambiguous term, *psyche*, came to be used indifferently for either the personal consciousness or the spirit. And why, in the Western church,

did devotional writers choose to speak of man's *anima* (which for the Romans signified the lower, animal soul) instead of using the word traditionally reserved for the rational soul, namely *animus?* The answer, I suspect, is that they were anxious to stress by every means in their power the essential femininity of the human spirit in its relations with God. *Pneuma*, being grammatically neuter, and *animus*, being masculine, were felt to be less suitable than *anima* and *psyche.* Consider this concrete example; given the structure of Greek and Latin, it would have been very difficult for the speakers of these languages to identify anything but a grammatically feminine soul with the heroine of the Song of Songs - an allegorical figure who, for long centuries, played the same part in Christian thought and sentiment as the Gopi Maidens played in the theology and devotion of the Hindus.

Take note of this fundamental truth. Everything that works in nature and creature, except sin, is the working of God in nature and creature. The creature has nothing else in its power but the free use of its will, and its free will hath no other power but that of concurring with, or resisting, the working of God in nature. The creature with its free will can bring nothing into being, nor make any alteration in the working of nature; it can only change its own state or place in the working of nature, and so feel or find something in its state that it did not feel or find before.

William Law

Defined in psychological terms, grace is something other than our self-conscious personal self, by which we are helped. We have experience of three kinds of such helps - animal grace, human grace and spiritual grace. Animal grace comes when we are living in full accord with our own nature on the biological level - not abusing our bodies by excess, not interfering with the workings of our indwelling animal intelligence by conscious cravings and aversions, but living wholesomely and laying ourselves open to the 'virtue of the

sun and the spirit of the air.' The reward of being thus in harmony with Tao or the Logos in its physical and physiological aspects is a sense of wellbeing, an awareness of life as good, not for any reason, but just because it is life. There is no question, when we are in a condition of animal grace, of *propter vitam vivendi perdere causas;* for in this state there is no distinction between the reasons for living and life itself. Life, like virtue, is then its own reward. But, of course, the fullness of animal grace is reserved for animals. Man's nature is such that he must live a self-conscious life in time, not in a blissful subrational eternity on the hither side of good and evil. Consequently animal grace is something that he knows only spasmodically in an occasional holiday from self-consciousness, or as an accompaniment to other states, in which life is not its own reward but has to be lived for a reason outside itself.

Human grace comes to us either from persons, or from social groups, or from our own wishes, hopes and imaginings projected outside ourselves and persisting somehow in the psychic medium in a state of what may be called second-hand objectivity. We have all had experience of the different types of human grace. There is, for example, the grace which, during childhood, comes from mother, father, nurse or beloved teacher. At a later stage we experience the grace of friends; the grace of men and women morally better and wiser than ourselves; the grace of the *guru,* or spiritual director. Then there is the grace which comes to us because of our attachment to country, party, church or other social organization - a grace which has helped even the feeblest and most timid individuals to achieve what, without it, would have been impossible. And finally there is the grace which we derive from our ideals, whether low or high, whether conceived of in abstract terms or bodied forth in imaginary personifications. To this last type, it would seem, belong many of the graces experienced by the pious adherents of the various religions. The help received by those who devotedly adore or pray to some personal saint, deity or Avatar is often, we may guess, not a genuinely spiritual grace, but a human grace, coming back to the worshipper from the vortex of psychic power set up by repeated acts (his own and other people's) of faith, yearning and imagination.

Spiritual grace cannot be received continuously or in its fullness, except by those who have willed away their self-will to the point of being able truthfully to say, ‘Not I, but God in me.’ There are, however, few people so irremediably self-condemned to imprisonment within their own personality as to be wholly incapable of receiving the graces which are from instant to instant being offered to every soul. By fits and starts most of us contrive to forget, if only partially, our preoccupation with ‘I,’

‘me,’

‘mine,’ and so become capable of receiving, if only partially, the graces which, in that moment, are being offered us.

Spiritual grace originates from the divine Ground of all being, and it is given for the purpose of helping man to achieve his final end, which is to return out of time and selfhood to that Ground. It resembles animal grace in being derived from a source wholly other than our self-conscious, human selves; indeed, it is the same thing as animal grace, but manifesting itself on a higher level of the ascending spiral that leads from matter to the Godhead. In any given instance, human grace may be wholly good, inasmuch as it helps the recipient in the task of achieving the unitive knowledge of God; but because of its source in the individualized self, it is always a little suspect and, in many cases, of course, the help it gives is help towards the achievement of ends very different from the true end of our existence.

All our goodness is a loan; God is the owner. God works and his work is God.

St John of the Cross

Perpetual inspiration is as necessary to the life of goodness, holiness and happiness as perpetual respiration is necessary to animal life.

William Law

Conversely, of course, the life of goodness, holiness and beatitude is a necessary condition of perpetual inspiration. The relations between action and contemplation, ethics and spirituality are circular and reciprocal. Each is at once; cause and effect.

It was when the Great Way declined that human kindness and morality arose.

Lao Tzu

Chinese verbs are tenseless. This statement as to a hypothetical event in history refers at the same time to the present and the future. It means simply this: that with the rise of self-consciousness, animal grace is no longer sufficient for the conduct of life, and must be supplemented by conscious and deliberate choices between right and wrong — choices which have to be made in the light of a clearly formulated ethical code. But, as the Taoist sages are never tired of repeating, codes of ethics and deliberate choices made by the surface will are only a second best. The individualized will and the superficial intelligence arc to be used for the purpose of recapturing the old animal relation to Tao, but on a higher, spiritual level. The goal is perpetual inspiration from sources beyond the personal self; and the means are ‘human kindness and morality,’ leading to the charity, which is unitive knowledge of Tao, as at once the Ground and Logos.

Lord, Thou hast given me my being of such a nature that it can continually make itself more able to receive thy grace and goodness. And this power, which I have of Thee, wherein I have a living image of Thine almighty power, is free will. By this I can either enlarge or restrict my capacity for Thy grace.

Nicholas of Cusa

Shun asked Ch’eng, saying, ‘Can one get Tao so as to have it for oneself?’
‘Your very body,’ replied Ch’eng, ’is not your own. How should Tao be?’
‘If my body,’ said Shun, ’is not my own, pray whose is it?’

‘It is the delegated image of God,’ replied Ch’eng. ‘Your life is not your own. It is the delegated harmony of God. Your individuality is not your own. It is the delegated adaptability of God. Your posterity is not your own. It is the delegated exuviae of God. You move, but know not how. You are at rest, but know not why. You taste, but know not the cause. These are the operations of God’s laws. How then should you get Tao so as to have it for your own?’

Chuang Tzu

It is within my power either to serve God, or not to serve Him. Serving Him I add to my own good and the good of the whole world. Not serving Him, I forfeit my own good and deprive the world of that good, which was in my power to create.

Leo Tolstoy

God did not deprive thee of the operation of his love, but thou didst deprive Him of thy co-operation. God would never have rejected thee, if you hadst not rejected his love. O all-good God, thou dost not forsake unless forsaken, thou never takest away thy gifts until we take away our hearts.

St François de Sales Ch’ing, the chief carpenter, was carving wood into a stand for musical instruments. When finished, the work appeared to those who saw it as though of supernatural execution; and the Prince of Lu asked him, saying, ‘What mystery is there in your art?’

‘No mystery, Your Highness,’ replied Ch’ing. ‘And yet there is something. When I am about to make such a stand, I guard against any diminution of my vital power. I first reduce my mind to absolute quiescence. Three days in this condition and I become oblivious of any reward to be gained. Five days, and I become oblivious of any fame to be acquired. Seven days, and I become unconscious of my four limbs and my physical frame. Then, with no thought of the Court present in my mind, my skill becomes concentrated, and all disturbing

elements from without are gone. I enter some mountain forest, I search for a suitable tree. It contains the form required, which is afterwards elaborated. I see the stand in my mind's eye, and then set to work. Beyond that there is nothing. I bring my own native capacity into relation with that of the wood. What was suspected to be of supernatural execution in my own work was due solely to this.

Chuang Tzu

The artist's inspiration may be either a human or a spiritual grace, or a mixture of both. High artistic achievement is impossible without at least those forms of intellectual, emotional and physical mortification appropriate to the kind of art which is being practised. Over and above this course of what may be called professional mortification, some artists have practised the kind of self-naughting which is the indispensable pre-condition of the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground. Fra Angelico, for example, prepared himself for his work by means of prayer and meditation; and from the foregoing extract from Chuang Tzu we see how essentially religious (and not merely professional) was the Taoist craftsman's approach to his art.

Here we may remark in passing that mechanization is incompatible with inspiration. The artisan could do and often did do a thoroughly bad job. But if, like Ch'ing, the chief carpenter, he cared for his art and were ready to do what was necessary to make himself docile to inspiration, he could and sometimes did do a job so good that it seemed 'as though of supernatural execution.' Among the many and enormous advantages of efficient automatic machinery is this: it is completely fool-proof. But every gain has to be paid for. The automatic machine is fool-proof; but just because it is fool-proof it is also grace-proof. The man who tends such a machine is impervious to every form of aesthetic inspiration, whether of human or of genuinely spiritual origin. 'Industry without art is brutality.' But actually Ruskin maligns the brutes. The industrious bird or insect is inspired, when it works, by the infallible animal grace of instinct - by Tao as it manifests itself on the level immediately above the physiological. The industrial worker at his fool-proof and grace-proof machine does his job in a man-made

universe of punctual automata — a universe that lies entirely beyond the pale of Tao on any level, brutal, human or spiritual.

In this context we may mention those sudden theophanies which are sometimes vouchsafed to children and sometimes to adults, who may be poets or Philistines, learned or unsophisticated, but who have this in common, that they have done nothing at all to prepare for what has happened to them. These gratuitous graces, which have inspired much literary and pictorial art, some splendid and some (where inspiration was not seconded by native talent) pathetically inadequate, seem generally to belong to one or other of two main classes — sudden and profoundly impressive perception of ultimate Reality as Love, Light and Bliss, and a no less impressive perception of it as dark, aweinspiring and inscrutable Power. In memorable forms, Wordsworth has recorded his own experience of both these aspects of the divine Ground.

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream, The earth and every common sight, To me did seem Apparelled in celestial light.

And so on. But that was not the only vision.

Lustily I dipped my oars into the silent lake, And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat

Went heaving through the water like a swan;

When, from behind that craggy steep, till then The horizon’s bound, a huge peak, black and huge, As if with voluntary power instinct,

Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,

And growing still in stature, the grim shape

Towered up between me and the stars...

But after I had seen

That spectacle, for many days my brain

Worked with a dim and undetermined sense

Of unknown modes of being; o’er my thoughts

There hung a darkness, call it solitude,

Or blank desertion.

Significantly enough, it is to this second aspect of Reality that primitive minds seem to have been most receptive. The formidable God, to whom Job at last submits, is an ‘unknown mode of Being,’ whose most characteristic creations are Behemoth and Leviathan. He is the sort of God who calls, in Kierkegaard’s phrase, for ‘teleological suspensions of morality,’ chiefly in the form of blood sacrifices, even human sacrifices. The Hindu goddess, Kali, in her more frightful aspects, is another manifestation of the same unknown mode of Being. And by many contemporary savages the underlying Ground is apprehended and theologically rationalized as sheer, unmitigated Power, which has to be propitiatively worshipped and, if possible, turned to profitable use by means of a compulsive magic-To think of God as mere Power, and not also, at the same time as Power, Love and Wisdom, comes quite naturally to the ordinary, unregenerate human mind. Only the totally selfless are in a position to know experimentally that, in spite of everything, ‘all will be well’ and, in some way, already *is* well. ‘The philosopher who denies divine providence,’ says Rumi, ’is a stranger to the perception of the saints.’ Only those who have the perception of the saints can know all the time and by immediate experience that divine Reality manifests itself as a Power that is loving, compassionate and wise. The rest of us are not yet in a spiritual position to do more than accept their findings on faith. If it were not for the records they have left behind, we should be more inclined to agree with Job and the primitives.

Inspirations prevent us, and even before they are thought of make themselves felt; but after we have felt them it is ours either to consent to them, so as to second and follow their attractions, or else to dissent and repulse them. They make themselves felt without us, but they do not make us consent without us.

St François de Sales

Our free will can hinder the course of inspiration, and when the favourable gale of God's grace swells the sails of our soul, it is in our power to refuse consent and thereby hinder the effect of the wind's favour; but when our spirit sails along and makes its voyage prosperously, it is not we who make the gale of inspiration blow for us, nor we who make our sails swell with it, nor we who give motion to the ship of our heart; but we simply receive the gale, consent to its motion and let our ship sail under it, not hindering it by our resistance.

St François de Sales

Grace is necessary to salvation, free will equally so — but grace in order to give salvation, free will in order to receive it. Therefore we should not attribute part of the good work to grace and part to free will; it is performed in its entirety by the common and inseparable action of both; entirely by grace, entirely by free will, but springing from the first in the second.

St Bernard

St Bernard distinguishes between *voluntas communis* and *voluntas propria*. *Voluntas communis* is common in two senses; it is the will to share, and it is the will common to man and God. For practical purposes it is equivalent to charity. *Voluntas propria* is the will to get and hold for oneself, and is the root of all sin. In its cognitive aspect, *voluntas propria* is the same as *sensum proprium*, which is one's own opinion, cherished because it is one's own and therefore always morally wrong, even though it may be theoretically correct.

Two students from the University of Paris came to visit Ruysbroeck and asked him to furnish them with a short phrase or motto, which might serve them as a rule of life.

Vos estis tam sancti sicut vultis, Ruysbroeck answered. 'You are as holy as you will to be.'

God is bound to act, to pour Himself into thee as soon as He shall find thee ready.

Eckhart

The will is that which has all power; it makes heaven and it makes hell; for there is no hell but where the will of the creature is turned from God, nor any heaven but where the will of the creature worketh with God.

William Law O man, consider thyself! Here thou standest in the earnest perpetual strife of good and evil; all nature is continually at work to bring forth the great redemption; the whole creation is travailing in pain and laborious working to be delivered from the vanity of time; and wilt thou be asleep? Everything thou hearest or seest says nothing, shows nothing to thee but what either eternal light or eternal darkness has brought forth; for as day and night divide the whole of our time, so heaven and hell divide all our thoughts, words and actions. Stir which way thou wilt, do or design what thou wilt, thou must be an agent with the one or the other. Thou canst not stand still, because thou livest in the perpetual workings of temporal and eternal nature; if thou workest not with the good, the evil that is in nature carries thee along with it. Thou hast the height and depth of eternity in thee and therefore, be doing what thou wilt, either in the closet, the field, the shop or the church, thou art sowing that which grows and must be reaped in eternity.

William Law

God expects but one thing of you, and that is that you should come out of yourself in so far as you are a created being and let God be God in you.

Eckhart

For those who take pleasure in theological speculations based upon scriptural texts and dogmatic postulates, there arc the thousands of pages of Catholic and Protestant controversy upon grace, works, faith and justification. And for students of comparative religion there are scholarly commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita, on the works of Ramanuja and those later Vaishnavites, whose doctrine of grace bears a striking resemblance to that of Luther; there are histories of Buddhism which duly trace the development of that religion from the Hinayanist doctrine that salvation is the fruit of strenuous self-help to the Mahayanist doctrine that it cannot be achieved without the grace of the Primordial Buddha, whose inner consciousness and ‘great compassionate heart’ constitute the eternal Suchness of things. For the rest of us, the foregoing quotations from writers within the Christian and early Taoist tradition provide, it seems to me, an adequate account of the observable facts of grace and inspiration and their relation to the observable facts of free will.

11. Good and Evil

DESIRE IS THE first datum of our consciousness; we are born into sympathy and antipathy, wishing and willing. Unconsciously at first, then consciously, we evaluate: ‘This is good, that is bad.’ And a little later we discover obligation. ‘This, being good, ought to be done; that, being bad, ought not to be done.’

All evaluations are not equally valid. We are called upon to pass judgment on what our desires and dislikes affirm to be good or bad. Very often we discover that the verdict of the higher court is at variance with the decision reached so quickly and light-heartedly in the court of first instance. In the light of what we know about ourselves, our fellow-beings and the world at large, we discover that what at first seemed good may, in the long run or in the larger context, be bad, and that what first seemed bad may be a good which we feel ourselves under obligation to accomplish.

When we say that a man is possessed of penetrating moral insight we mean that his judgment of value-claims is sound; that he knows enough to be able to say what is good in the longest run and the largest context. When we say that a man has a strong moral character, we mean that he is ready to act upon the findings of his insight, even when these findings are unpleasantly or even excruciatingly at variance with his first, spontaneous valuations.

In actual practice moral insight is never a strictly personal matter. The judge administers a system of law and is guided by precedent. In other words, every individual is the member of a community, which has a moral code based upon past findings of what in fact is good in the longer run and the wider context. In most circumstances most of the members of any given society permit themselves to be guided by the generally accepted code of morals; a few reject the code, either in its entirety or in part; and a few choose to live by another, higher and more exacting code. In Christian phraseology, there are the few who stubbornly

persist in living in a state of mortal sin and anti-social lawlessness; there are the many who obey the laws, make the Precepts of Morality their guide, repent of mortal sins when they commit them, but do not make much effort to avoid venial sins; and finally there are the few whose righteousness ‘exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,’ who are guided by the Counsels of Perfection and have the insight to perceive and the character to avoid venial sins and even imperfections.

Philosophers and theologians have sought to establish a theoretical basis for the existing moral codes, by whose aid individual men and women pass judgment on their spontaneous evaluations. From Moses to Bentham, from Epicurus to Calvin, from the Christian and Buddhist philosophies of universal love to the lunatic doctrines of nationalism and racial superiority - the list is long and the span of thought enormously wide. But fortunately there is no need for us to consider these various theories. Our concern is only with the Perennial Philosophy and with the system of ethical principles which those who believe in that philosophy have used, when passing judgment on their own and other people’s evaluations. The questions that we have to ask in this section are simple enough, and simple too are the answers. As always, the difficulties begin only when we pass from theory to practice, from ethical principle to particular application.

Granted that the ground of the individual soul is akin to, or identical with, the divine Ground of all existence, and granted that this divine Ground is an ineffable Godhead that manifests itself as personal God or even as the incarnate Logos, what is the ultimate nature of good and evil, and what the true purpose and last end of human life?

The answers to these questions will be given to a great extent in the words of that most surprising product of the English eighteenth century, William Law. (How very odd our educational system is! Students of English literature are forced to read the graceful journalism of Steele and Addison, are expected to know all about the minor novels of Defoe and the tiny elegances of Matthew Prior. But they can pass all their examinations *summa cum laude* without having

so much as looked into the writings of a man who was not only a master of English prose, but also one of the most interesting thinkers of his period and one of the most endearingly saintly figures in the whole history of Anglicanism.) Our current neglect of Law is yet another of the many indications that twentieth-century educators have ceased to be concerned with questions of ultimate truth or meaning and (apart from mere vocational training) are interested solely in the disseminatioin of a rootless and irrelevant culture, and the fostering of the solemn foolery of scholarship for scholarship's sake.

Nothing burns in hell but the self.

Theologia Germanica

The mind is on fire, thoughts are on fire. Mind-consciousness and the impressions received by the mind, and the sensations that arise from the impressions that the mind receives - these too are on fire.

And with what are they on fire? With the fire of greed, with the fire of resentment, with the fire of infatuation; with birth, old age and death, with sorrow and lamentation, with misery and grief and despair they are on fire.

From the Buddha's Fire Sermon If thou hast not seen the devil, look at thine own self.

Jalal-uddin Rumi

Your own self is your own Cain that murders your own Abel. For every action and motion of self has the spirit of Anti-Christ and murders the divine life within you.

William Law

The city of God is made by the love of God pushed to the contempt of self; the earthly city, by the love of self pushed to the contempt of God.

St Augustine

The difference between a good and a bad man does not lie in this, that the one wills that which is good and the other does not, but solely in this, that the one concurs with the living inspiring spirit of God within him, and the other resists it, and can be chargeable with evil only because he resists it.

William Law

People should think less about what they ought to do and more about what they ought to be. If only their being were good, their works would shine forth brightly. Do not imagine that you can ground your salvation upon actions; it must rest on what you *are.* The ground upon which good character rests is the very same ground from which man's work derives its value, namely a mind wholly turned to God. Verily, if you were so minded, you might tread on a stone and it would be more pious work than if you, simply for your own profit, were to receive the Body of the Lord and were wanting in spiritual detachment.

Eckhart

Man is made by his belief. As he believes, so he is.

Bhagavad-Gita

It is mind which gives to things their quality, their foundation and their being. Whoever speaks or acts with impure mind, him sorrow follows, as the wheel follows the steps of the ox that draws the cart.

Dhammapada

The nature of a man's being determines the nature of his actions; and the nature of his being comes to manifestation first of all in the mind. What he craves and thinks, what he believes and feels - this is, so to speak, the Logos, by whose agency an individual's fundamental character performs its creative acts. These acts will be beautiful and morally good if the being is God-centred, bad and ugly if it is centred in the personal self. 'The stone,' says Eckhart, 'performs its work without ceasing, day and night.' For even when it is not actually falling the stone has weight. A man's being is his potential energy directed towards or away from God; and it is by this potential energy that he will be judged as good or evil — for it is possible, in the language of the Gospel, to commit adultery and murder in the heart, even while remaining blameless in action.

Covetousness, envy, pride and wrath are the four elements of self, or nature, or hell, all of them inseparable from it. And the reason why it must be thus, and cannot be otherwise, is because the natural life of the creature is brought forth for the participation of some high supernatural good in the Creator. But it could have no fitness, no possible capacity to receive such good, unless it was in itself both an extremity of want and an extremity of desire for some high good. When therefore this natural life is deprived of or fallen from God, it can be nothing else in itself but an extremity of want continually desiring, and an extremity of desire continually wanting. And because it is that, its whole life can be nothing else but a plague and torment of covetousness, envy, pride and wrath, all which is precisely nature, self, or hell. Now covetousness, pride and envy are not three different things, but only three different names for the restless workings of one and the same will or desire. Wrath, which is a fourth birth from these three, can have no existence till one or all of these three are contradicted, or have something done to them that is contrary to their will. These four properties generate their own torment. They have no outward cause, nor any inward power of altering themselves. And therefore all self or nature must be in this state until some supernatural good comes into it, or gets a birth in it. Whilst man indeed lives among the vanities of time, his covetousness, envy, pride and wrath may be

in a tolerable state, may hold him to a mixture of peace and trouble; they may have at times their gratifications as well as their torments. But when death has put an end to the vanity of all earthly cheats, the soul that is not born again of the Supernatural Word and Spirit of God, must find itself unavoidably devoured or shut up in its own insatiable, unchangeable, self-tormenting covetousness, envy, pride and wrath.

William Law

It is true that you cannot properly express the degree of your sinfulness; but that is because it is impossible, in this life, to represent sins in all their true ugliness; nor shall we ever know them as they really are except in the light of God. God gives to some souls an impression of the enormity of sin, by which He makes them feel that sin is incomparably greater than it seems. Such souls must conceive their sins as faith represents them (that is, as they are in themselves), but must be content to describe them in such human words as their mouth is able to utter.

Charles de Condren

Lucifer, when he stood in his natural nobility, as God had created him, was a pure noble creature. But when he kept to self, when he possessed himself and his natural nobility as a property, he fell and became, instead of an angel, a devil. So it is with man. If he remains in himself and possesses himself of his natural nobility as a property, he falls and becomes, instead of a man, a devil.

The Following of Christ

If a delicious fragrant fruit had a power of separating itself from the rich spirit, fine taste, smell and colour, which it receives from the virtue of the air and the spirit of the sun, or if it could, in the beginning of its growth, turn away from

the sun and receive no virtue from it, then it would stand in its own first birth of wrath, sourness, bitterness, astringency, just as the devils do, who have turned back into their own dark root and have rejected the Light and Spirit of God. So that the hellish nature of a devil is nothing but its own first forms of life withdrawn or separated from the heavenly Light and Love; just as the sourness, bitterness and astringency of a fruit are nothing else but the first form of its vegetable life, before it has reached the virtue of the sun and the spirit of the air. And as a fruit, if it had a sensibility of itself, would be full of torment as soon as it was shut up in the first forms of its life, in its own astringency, sourness and stinging bitterness, so the angels, when they had turned back into these very same first forms of their own life, and broke off from the heavenly Light and Love of God, became their own hell. No hell was made for them, no new qualities came into them, no vengeance or pains from the Lord of Love fell on them; they only stood in that state of division and separation from the Son and Holy Spirit of God, which by their own motion they had made for themselves. They had nothing in them but what they had from God, the first forms of a heavenly life; but they had them in a state of self-torment, because they had separated them from birth of Love and Light.

William Law

In all the possibility of things there is and can be but one happiness and one misery. The one misery is nature and creature left to itself, the one happiness is the Life, the Light, the Spirit of God, manifested in nature and creature. This is the true meaning of the words of Our Lord: There is but one that is good, and that is God.

William Law

Men are not in hell because God is angry with them; they are in wrath and darkness because they have done to the light, which infinitely flows forth from

God, as that man does to the light of the sun, who puts out his own eyes.

William Law

Though the light and comfort of the outward world keeps even the worst of men from any constant strong sensibility of that wrathful, fiery, dark and self-tormenting nature that is the very essence of every fallen unregenerate soul, yet every man in the world has more or less frequent and strong intimations given him that so it is with him in the inmost ground of his soul. How many inventions are some people forced to have recourse to in order to keep off a certain inward uneasiness, which they are afraid of and know not whence it comes? Alas, it is because there is a fallen spirit, a dark aching fire within them, which has never had its proper relief and is trying to discover itself and calling out for help at every cessation of worldly joy.

William Law

In the Hebrew-Christian tradition the Fall is subsequent to creation and is due exclusively to the egocentric use of a free will, which ought to have remained centred in the divine Ground and not in the separate selfhood. The myth of Genesis embodies a very important psychological truth, but falls short of being an entirely satisfactory symbol, because it fails to mention, much less to account for, the fact of evil and suffering in the non-human world. To be adequate to our experience the myth would have to be modified in two ways. In the first place, it would have to make clear that creation, the incomprehensible passage from the unmanifested One into the manifest multiplicity of nature, from eternity into time, is not merely the prelude and necessary condition of the Fall; to some extent it *is* the Fall. And in the second place, it would have to indicate that something analogous to free will may exist below the human level.

That the passage from the unity of spiritual to the manifoldness of temporal being is an essential part of the Fall is clearly stated in the Buddhist and Hindu

renderings of the Perennial Philosophy. Pain and evil are inseparable from individual existence in a world of time; and, for human beings, there is an intensification of this inevitable pain and evil when the desire is turned towards the self and the many, rather than towards the divine Ground. To this we might speculatively add the opinion that perhaps even sub-human existences may be endowed (both individually and collectively, as kinds and species) with something resembling the power of choice. There is the extraordinary fact that ‘man stands alone’ - that, so far as we can judge, every other species is a species of living fossils, capable only of degeneration and extinction, not of further evolutionary advance. In the phraseology of Scholastic Aristotelianism, matter possesses an appetite for form - not necessarily for the best form, but for form as such. Looking about us in the world of living things, we observe (with a delighted wonder, touched occasionally, it must be admitted, with a certain questioning dismay) the innumerable forms, always beautiful, often extravagantly odd and sometimes even sinister, in which the insatiable appetite of matter has found its satisfaction. Of all this living matter only that which is organized as human beings has succeeded in finding a form capable, at any rate on the mental side, of further development. All the rest is now locked up in forms that can only remain what they are or, if they change, only change for the worse. It looks as though, in the cosmic intelligence test, all living matter, except the human, had succumbed, at one time or another during its biological career, to the temptation of assuming, not the ultimately best, but the immediately most profitable form. By an act of something analogous to free will every species, except the human, has chosen the quick returns of specialization, the present rapture of being perfect, but perfect on a low level of being. The result is that they all stand at the end of evolutionary blind alleys. To the initial cosmic Fall of creation, of multitudinous manifestation in time, they have added the obscurely biological equivalent of man’s voluntary Fall. As species, they have chosen the immediate satisfaction of the self rather than the capacity for reunion with the divine Ground. For this wrong choice, the non-human forms of life are punished negatively, by being debarred from realizing the supreme good, to which only

the unspecialized and therefore freer, more highly conscious human form is capable. But it must be remembered, of course, that the capacity for supreme good is achieved only at the price of becoming also capable of extreme evil. Animals do not suffer in so many ways, nor, we feel pretty certain, to the same extent as do men and women. Further, they are quite innocent of that literally diabolic wickedness which, together with sanctity, is one of the distinguishing marks of the human species.

We see then that, for the Perennial Philosophy, good is the separate selfs conformity to, and finally annihilation in, the divine Ground which gives it being; evil, the intensification of separateness, the refusal to know that the Ground exists. This doctrine is, of course, perfectly compatible with the formulation of ethical principles as a series of negative and positive divine commandments, or even in terms of social utility. The crimes which are everywhere forbidden proceed from states of mind which are everywhere condemned as wrong; and these wrong states of mind are, as a matter of empirical fact, absolutely incompatible with that unitive knowledge of the divine Ground, which, according to the Perennial Philosophy, is the supreme good.

12. Time and Eternity

THE UNIVERSE IS an everlasting succession of events; but its ground, according to the Perennial Philosophy, is the timeless now of the divine Spirit. A classical statement of the relationship between time and eternity may be found in the later chapters of the *Consolations of Philosophy*, where Boethius summarizes the conceptions of his predecessors, notably of Plotinus.

It is one thing to be carried through an endless life, another thing to embrace the whole presence of an endless life together, which is manifestly proper to the divine Mind.

The temporal world seems to emulate in part that which it cannot fully obtain or express, tying itself to whatever presence there is in this exiguous and fleeting moment - a presence which, since it carries a certain image of that abiding Presence, gives to whatever may partake of it the quality of seeming to have being. But because it could not stay, it undertook an infinite journey of time; and so it came to pass that, by going, it continued that life, whose plenitude it could not comprehend by staying.

Boethius Since God hath always an eternal and present state, His knowledge, surpassing time's notions, remaineth in the simplicity of His presence and, comprehending the infinite of what is past and to come, considereth all things as though they were in the act of being accomplished.

Boethius Knowledge of what is happening now does not determine the event. What is ordinarily called God's foreknowledge is in reality a timeless now-knowledge, which is compatible with the freedom of the human creature's will in time.

The manifest world and whatever is moved in any sort take their causes, order and forms from the stability of the divine Mind. This hath determined manifold ways for doing things; which ways being considered in the purity of God's

understanding are named Providence; but being referred to those things which He moveth and disposeth are called Fate... Providence is the very divine Reason itself, which disposeth all things. But Fate is a disposition inherent in changeable things, by which Providence connecteth all things in their due order. For Providence equally embraceth all things together, though diverse, though infinite; but Fate puts into motion all things, distributed by places, forms and times; so that the unfolding of the temporal order, being united in the foresight of the divine Mind, is Providence, and the same uniting, being digested and unfolded in time, is called Fate... As a workman conceiving the form of anything in his mind, taketh his work in hand and executeth by order of time that which he had simply and in a moment foreseen, so God by his Providence disposeth whatever is to be done with simplicity and stability, and by Fate effecteth by manifold ways and in the order of time, those very things which He disposeth... All that is under Fate is also subject to Providence. But some things which are under Providence are above the course of Fate. For they are those things which, being stably fixed in virtue of their nearness to the first divinity, exceed the order of Fate’s mobility.

Boethius

The concept of a clock enfolds all succession in time. In the concept the sixth hour is not earlier than the seventh or eighth, although the clock never strikes the hour, save when the concept biddeth.

Nicholas of Cusa

From Hobbes onwards, the enemies of the Perennial Philosophy have denied the existence of an eternal now. According to these thinkers, time and change are fundamental; there is no other reality. Moreover, future events are completely indeterminate, and even God can have no knowledge of them. Consequently God cannot be described as Alpha and Omega - merely as Alpha and Lambda, or

whatever other intermediate letter of the temporal alphabet is now in process of being spelled out. But the anecdotal evidence collected by the Society for Psychical Research and the statistical evidence accumulated during many thousands of laboratory tests for extra-sensory perception point inescapably to the conclusion that even human minds are capable of foreknowledge. And if a finite consciousness can know what card is going to be turned up three seconds from now, or what shipwreck is going to take place next week, then there is nothing impossible or even intrinsically improbable in the idea of an infinite consciousness that can know now events indefinitely remote in what, for us, is future time. The 'specious present' in which human beings live may be, and perhaps always is, something more than a brief section of transition from known past to unknown future, regarded, because of the vividness of memory, as the instant we call 'now'; it may and perhaps always does contain a portion of the immediate and even of the relatively distant future. For the Godhead, the specious present may be precisely that *interminabilis vitae tota simul et perpétua possessio,* of which Boethius speaks.

The existence of the eternal now is sometimes denied on the ground that a temporal order cannot co-exist with another order which is non-temporal; and that it is impossible for a changing substance to be united with a changeless substance. This objection, it is obvious, would be valid if the non-temporal order were of a mechanical nature, or if the changeless substance were possessed of spatial and material qualities. But according to the Perennial Philosophy, the eternal now is a consciousness; the divine Ground is spirit; the being of Brahman is *chit,* or knowledge. That a temporal world should be known and, in being known, sustained and perpetually created by an eternal consciousness is an idea which contains nothing self-contradictory.

Finally we come to the arguments directed against those who have asserted that the eternal Ground can be unitively known by human minds. This claim is regarded as absurd because it involves the assertion, 'At one time I am eternal, at another time I am in time.' But this statement is absurd only if man is a being of a twofold nature, capable of living on only one level. But if, as the exponents of

the Perennial Philosophy have always maintained, man is not only a body and a psyche, but also a spirit, and if he can at will live either on the merely human plane or else in harmony and even in union with the divine Ground of his being, then the statement makes perfectly good sense. The body is always in time, the spirit is always timeless and the psyche is an amphibious creature compelled by the laws of man's being to associate itself to some extent with its body, but capable, if it so desires, of experiencing and being identified with its spirit and, through its spirit, with the divine Ground. The spirit remains always what it eternally is; but man is so constituted that his psyche cannot always remain identified with the spirit. In the statement, 'At one time I am eternal, at another time I am in time,' the word 'I' stands for the psyche, which passes from time to eternity when it is identified with the spirit and passes again from eternity to time, either voluntarily or by involuntary necessity, when it chooses or is compelled to identify itself with the body.

'The Sufi,' says Jalal-uddin Rumi, 'is the son of time present.' Spiritual progress is a spiral advance. We start as infants in the animal eternity of life in the moment, without anxiety for the future or regret for the past; we grow up into the specifically human condition of those who look before and after, who live to a great extent, not in the present but in memory and anticipation, not spontaneously but by rule and with prudence, in repentance and fear and hope; and we can continue, if we so desire, up and on in a returning sweep towards a point corresponding to our starting place in animality, but incommensurably above it. Once more life is lived in the moment - the life now, not of a sub-human creature, but of a being in whom charity has cast out fear, vision has taken the place of hope, selflessness has put a stop to the positive egotism of complacent reminiscence and the negative egotism of remorse. The present moment is the only aperture through which the soul can pass out of time into eternity, through which grace can pass out of eternity into the soul, and through which charity can pass from one soul in time to another soul in time. That is why the Sufi and, along with him, every other practising exponent of the Perennial Philosophy is, or tries to be, a son of time present.

Past and future veil God from our sight;
Burn up both of them with fire. How long
Wilt thou be partitioned by these segments, like a reed?
So long as a reed is partitioned, it is not privy to secrets, Nor is it vocal in response to lip and breathing.

Jalal-uddin Rumi

This emptying of the memory, though the advantages of it are not so great as those of the state of union, yet merely because it delivers souls from much sorrow, grief and sadness, besides imperfections and sins, is in reality a great good.

St John of the Cross

In the idealistic cosmology of Mahayana Buddhism memory plays the part of a rather maleficent demiurge. 'When the triple world is surveyed by the Bodhisattva, he perceives that its existence is due to memory that has been accumulated since the beginningless past, but wrongly interpreted' (Lankavatara Sutra). The word here translated as 'memory' means literally 'perfuming.' The mind-body carries with it the ineradicable smell of all that has been thought and done, desired and felt, throughout its racial and personal past. The Chinese translate the Sanskrit term by two symbols, signifying 'habit-energy.' The world is what (in our eyes) it is, because of all the consciously or unconsciously and physiologically remembered habits formed by our ancestors or by ourselves, either in our present life or in previous existences. These remembered bad habits cause us to believe that multiplicity is the sole reality and that the idea of 'I,'
'me,'
'mine' represents the ultimate truth. *Nirvana* consists in 'seeing into the abode of reality as it is,' and not reality *quoad nos*, as it seems to us. Obviously,

this cannot be achieved so long as there is an ‘us,’ to which reality can be relative. Hence the need, stressed by every exponent of the Perennial Philosophy, for mortification, for dying to self. And this must be a mortification not only of the appetities, the feelings and the will, but also of the reasoning powers, of consciousness itself and of that which makes our consciousness what it is - our personal memory and our inherited habit-energies. To achieve complete deliverance, conversion from sin is not enough; there must also be a conversion of the mind, a *paravritti*, as the Mahayanists call it, or revulsion in the very depths of consciousness. As the result of this revulsion, the habit-energies of accumulated memory are destroyed and, along with them, the sense of being a separate ego. Reality is no longer perceived *quoad nos* (for the good reason that there is no longer a *nos* to perceive it), but as it is in itself. In Blake’s words, ‘If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be seen as it is, infinite.’ By those who are pure in heart and poor in spirit, *samsara* and *nirvana*, appearance and reality, time and eternity are experienced as one and the same.

Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time. And not only time but temporalities, not only temporal things but temporal affections; not only temporal affections but the very taint and smell of time.

Eckhart

Rejoice in God all the time, says St Paul. He rejoices all the time who rejoices above time and free from time. Three things prevent a man from knowing God. The first is time, the second is corporeality, the third is multiplicity. That God may come in these things must go out - except thou have them in a higher, better way: multitude summed up to one in thee.

Eckhart

Whenever God is thought of as being wholly in time, there is a tendency to regard Him as a ‘numinous’ rather than a moral being, a God of mere unmitigated Power rather than a God of Power, Wisdom and Love, an inscrutable and dangerous potentate to be propitiated by sacrifices, not a Spirit to be worshipped in spirit. All this is only natural; for time is a perpetual perishing and a God who is wholly in time is a God who destroys as fast as He creates. Nature is as incomprehensibly appalling as it is lovely and bountiful. If the Divine does not transcend the temporal order in which it is immanent, and if the human spirit does not transcend its time-bound soul, then there is no possibility of ‘justifying the ways of God to man.’ God as manifested in the universe is the irresistible Being who speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, and whose emblems are Behemoth and Leviathan, the war horse and the eagle. It is this same Being who is described in the apocalyptic eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita. ‘O Supreme Spirit,’ says Arjuna, addressing himself to the Krishna whom he now knows to be the incarnation of the Godhead, ‘I long to see your Isvara-form’ - that is to say, his form as God of the world, Nature, the temporal order. Krishna answers, ‘You shall behold the whole universe, with all things animate and inanimate, within this body of mine.’ Arjuna’s reaction to the revelation is one of amazement and fear.

Ah, my God, I see all gods within your body;
Each in his degree, the multitude of creatures;
See Lord Brahma seated upon his lotus,
See all the sages and the holy serpents.

Universal Form, I see you without limit,
Infinite of eyes, arms, mouths, and bellies -

See, and find no end, midst or beginning.

There follows a long passage, enlarging on the omnipotence and all-comprehensiveness of God in his Isvara-form. Then the quality of the vision changes, the Arjuna realizes, with fear and trembling, that the God of the universe is a God of destruction as well as of creation.

Now with frightful tusks your mouths are gnashing, Flaring like the fires of Doomsday morning - North, south, east and west seem all confounded -

Lord of devas, world's abode, have mercy!...

Swift as many rivers streaming to the ocean,
Rush the heroes to your fiery gullets,
Moth-like to meet the flame of their destruction.
Headlong these plunge into you and perish...

Tell me who you are, and were from the beginning,
You of aspect grim. O God of gods, be gracious.
Take my homage, Lord. From me your ways are hidden.
'Tell me who you are.' The answer is clear and unequivocal.

I am come as Time, the waster of the peoples,
Ready for the hour that ripens to their ruin.

But the God who comes so terribly as Time also exists timelessly as the Godhead, as Brahman, whose essence is *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ananda*, Being, Awareness, Bliss; and within and beyond man's time-tortured psyche is his spirit, 'uncreated and uncreatable,' as Eckhart says, the Atman which is akin to or even identical with Brahman. The Gita, like all other formulations of the Perennial Philosophy, justifies God's ways to man by affirming - and the affirmation is based upon observation and immediate experience - that man can, if he so desires, die to his separate temporal selfness and so come to union with timeless Spirit. It affirms,

too, that the Avatar becomes incarnate in order to assist human beings to achieve this union. This he does in three ways - by teaching the true doctrine in a world blinded by voluntary ignorance; by inviting souls to a ‘carnal love’ of his humanity, not indeed as an end in itself, but as the means to spiritual love-knowledge of Spirit; and finally by serving as a channel of grace.

God who is Spirit can only be worshipped in spirit and for his own sake; but God in time is normally worshipped by material means with a view of achieving temporal ends. God in time is manifestly the destroyer as well as the creator; and because this is so, it has seemed proper to worship him by methods which are as terrible as the destructions he himself inflicts. Hence, the India, the blood sacrifices to Kali, in her aspect as Nature-the-Destroyer; hence those offerings of children to ‘the Molochs,’ denounced by the Hebrew prophets; hence the human sacrifices practised, for example, by the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, the Druids, the Aztecs. In all such cases the divinity addressed was a god in time, or a personification of Nature, which is nothing else but Time itself, the devourer of its own offspring; and in all cases the purpose of the rite was to obtain a future benefit or to avoid one of the enormous evils which Time and Nature for ever hold in store. For this it was thought to be worth while to pay a high price in that currency of suffering, which the Destroyer so evidently valued. The importance of the temporal end justified the use of means that were intrinsically terrible, because intrinsically time-like. Sublimated traces of these ancient patterns of thought and behaviour are still to be found in certain theories of the Atonement, and in the conception of the Mass as a perpetually repeated sacrifice of the God-Man.

In the modern world the gods to whom human sacrifice is offered are personifications, not of Nature, but of man’s own, home-made political ideals. These, of course, all refer to events in time - actual events in the past or the present, fancied events in the future. And here it should be noted that the philosophy which affirms the existence and the immediate realizableness of eternity is related to one kind of political theory and practice; the philosophy which affirms that what goes on in time is the only reality, results in a different

kind of theory and justifies quite another kind of political practice. This has been clearly recognized by Marxist writers, who point out that when Christianity is mainly preoccupied with events in time, it is a ‘revolutionary religion,’ and that when, under mystical influences, it stresses the Eternal Gospel, of which the historical or pseudo-historical facts recorded in Scripture are but-symbols, it becomes politically ‘static’ and ‘reactionary.’

This Marxian account of the matter is somewhat oversimplified. It is not quite true to say that all theologies and philosophies whose primary concern is with time, rather than eternity, are necessarily revolutionary. The aim of all revolutions is to make the future radically different from and better than the past. But some time-obsessed philosophies are primarily concerned with the past, not the future, and their politics are entirely a matter of preserving or restoring the *status quo* and getting back to the good old days. But the retrospective time-worshippers have one thing in common with the revolutionary devotees of the bigger and better future; they are prepared to use unlimited violence to achieve their ends. It is here that we discover the essential difference between the politics of eternity-philosophers and the politics of time-philosophers. For the latter, the ultimate good is to be found in the temporal world - in a future, where everyone will be happy because all are doing and thinking something either entirely new and unprecedented or, alternatively, something old, traditional and hallowed. And because the ultimate good lies in time, they feel justified in making use of any temporal means for achieving it. The Inquisition burns and tortures in order to perpetuate a creed, a ritual and an ecclesiastico-politico-financial organization regarded as necessary to men’s eternal salvation. Bible-worshipping Protestants fight long and savage wars, in order to make the world safe for what they fondly imagine to be the genuinely antique Christianity of apostolic times. Jacobins and Bolsheviks are ready to sacrifice millions of human lives for the sake of a political and economic future gorgeously unlike the present. And now all Europe and most of Asia has had to be sacrificed to a crystal-gazer’s vision of a perpetual Co-Prosperity and the Thousand-Year Reich. From the records of history it seems to be abundantly clear that most of the religions and

philosophies which take time too seriously are correlated with political theories that inculcate and justify the use of large-scale violence. The only exceptions are those simple Epicurean faiths, in which the reaction to an all too real time is ‘Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.’ This is not a very noble, nor even a very realistic kind of morality. But it seems to make a good deal more sense than the revolutionary ethic: ‘Die (and kill), for tomorrow someone else will eat, drink and be merry.’ In practice, of course, the prospect even of somebody else’s future merriment is extremely precarious. For the process of wholesale dying and killing creates material, social and psychological conditions that practically guarantee the revolution against the achievement of its beneficent ends.

For those whose philosophy does not compel them to take time with an excessive seriousness the ultimate good is to be sought neither in the revolutionary’s progressive social apocalypse, nor in the reactionary’s revived and perpetuated past, but in an eternal divine now which those who sufficiently desire this good can realize as a fact of immediate experience. The mere act of dying is not in itself a passport to eternity; nor can wholesale killing do anything to bring deliverance either to the slayers or the slain or their posterity. The peace that passes all understanding is the fruit of liberation into eternity; but in its ordinary everyday form peace is also the root of liberation. For where there are violent passions and compelling distractions, this ultimate good can never be realized. That is one of the reasons why the policy correlated with eternity-philosophies is tolerant and non-violent. The other reason is that the eternity, whose realization is the ultimate good, is a kingdom of heaven within. Thou art That; and though That is immortal and impassible, the killing and torturing of individual ‘thous’ is a matter of cosmic significance, inasmuch as it interferes with the normal and natural relationship between individual souls and the divine eternal Ground of all being. Every violence is, over and above everything else, a sacrilegious rebellion against the divine order.

Passing now from theory to historical fact, we find that the religions, whose theology has been least preoccupied with events in time and most concerned with eternity, have been consistently the least violent and the most humane in political practice. Unlike early Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism (all of them obsessed with time), Hinduism and Buddhism have never been persecuting faiths, have preached almost no holy wars and have refrained from that proselytizing religious imperialism, which has gone hand in hand with the political and economic oppression of the coloured peoples. For four hundred years, from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, most of the Christian nations of Europe have spent a good part of their time and energy in attacking, conquering and exploiting their non-Christian neighbours in other continents. In the course of these centuries many individual churchmen did their best to mitigate the consequences of such iniquities; but none of the major Christian churches officially condemned them. The first collective protest against the slave system, introduced by the English and the Spaniards into the New World, was made in 1688 by the Quaker Meeting of Germantown. This fact is highly significant. Of all Christian sects in the seventeenth century, the Quakers were the least obsessed with history, the least addicted to the idolatry of things in time. They believed that the inner light was in all human beings and that salvation came to those who lived in conformity with that light and was not dependent on the profession of belief in historical or pseudo-historical events, nor on the performance of certain rites, nor on the support of a particular ecclesiastical organization. Moreover, their eternity-philosophy preserved them from the materialistic apocalypticism of that progress-worship which in recent times has justified every kind of iniquity from war and revolution to sweated labour, slavery and the exploitation of savages and children - has justified them on the ground that the supreme good is in future time and that any temporal means, however intrinsically horrible, may be used to achieve that good. Because Quaker theology was a form of eternity-philosophy, Quaker political theory rejected war and persecution as means to ideal ends, denounced slavery and proclaimed racial equality. Members of other

denominations had done good work for the African victims of the white man's rapacity. One thinks, for example, of St Peter Claver at Cartagena. But this heroically charitable 'slave of the slaves' never raised his voice against the institution of slavery or the criminal trade by which it was sustained; nor, so far as the extant documents reveal, did he ever, like John Woolman, attempt to persuade the slave-owners to free their human chattels. The reason, presumably, was that Claver was a Jesuit, vowed to perfect obedience and constrained by his theology to regard a certain political and ecclesiastical organization as being the mystical body of Christ. The heads of this organization had not pronounced against slavery or the slave trade. Who was he, Pedro Claver, to express a thought not officially approved by his superiors?

Another practical corollary of the great historical eternity-philosophies, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, is a morality inculcating kindness to animals. Judaism and orthodox Christianity taught that animals might be used as things, for the realization of man's temporal ends. Even St Francis' attitude towards the brute creation was not entirely unequivocal. True, he converted a wolf and preached sermons to birds; but when Brother Juniper hacked the feet off a living pig in order to satisfy a sick man's craving for fried trotters, the saint merely blamed his disciple's intemperate zeal in damaging a valuable piece of private property. It was not until the nineteenth century, when orthodox Christianity had lost much of its power over European minds, that the idea that it might be a good thing to behave humanely towards animals began to make headway. This new morality was correlated with the new interest in Nature, which had been stimulated by the romantic poets and the men of science. Because it was not founded upon an eternity-philosophy, a doctrine of divinity dwelling in all living creatures, the modern movement in favour of kindness to animals was and is perfectly compatible with intolerance, persecution and systematic cruelty towards human beings. Young Nazis are taught to be gentle with dogs and cats, ruthless with Jews. That is because Nazism is a typical time-philosophy, which regards the ultimate good as existing, not in eternity, but in the future. Jews are,

ex hypothesi, obstacles in the way of realization of the supreme good; dogs and cats are not. The rest follows logically.

Selfishness and partiality are very inhuman and base qualities even in the things of this world; but in the doctrines of religion they are of a baser nature. Now, this is the greatest evil that the division of the church has brought forth; it raises in every communion a selfish, partial orthodoxy, which consists in courageously defending all that it has, and condemning all that it has not. And thus every champion is trained up in defence of their own truth, their own learning and their own church, and he has the most merit, the most honour, who likes everything, defends everything, among themselves, and leaves nothing uncensored in those that are of a different communion. Now, how can truth and goodness and union and religion be more struck at than by such defenders of it? If you ask why the great Bishop of Meaux wrote so many learned books against all parts of the Reformation, it is because he was born in France and bred up in the bosom of Mother Church. Had he been born in England, had Oxford or Cambridge been his *Alma Mater,* he might have rivalled our great Bishop Stillingfleet, and would have wrote as many learned folios against the Church of Rome as he has done. And yet I will venture to say that if each Church could produce but one man apiece that had the piety of an apostle and the impartial love of the first Christians in the first Church at Jerusalem, that a Protestant and a Papist of this stamp would not want half a sheet of paper to hold their articles of union, nor be half an hour before they were of one religion. If, therefore, it should be said that churches are divided, estranged and made unfriendly to one another by a learning, a logic, a history, a criticism in the hands of partiality, it would be saying that which each particular church too much proves to be true. Ask why even the best amongst the Catholics are very shy of owning the validity of the orders of our Church; it is because they are afraid of removing any odium from the Reformation. Ask why no Protestants anywhere touch upon the benefit or necessity of celibacy in those who are separated from worldly business to preach the gospel; it is because that would be seeming to lessen the Roman error of not suffering marriage in her clergy. Ask why even the most worthy and pious

among the clergy of the Established Church are afraid to assert the sufficiency of the Divine Light, the necessity of seeking only the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit; it is because the Quakers, who have broke off from the church, have made this doctrine their corner-stone. If we loved truth as such, if we sought for it for its own sake, if we loved our neighbour as ourselves, if we desired nothing by our religion but to be acceptable to God, if we equally desired the salvation of all men, if we were afraid of error only because of its harmful nature to us and our fellow-creatures, then nothing of this spirit could have any place in us.

There is therefore a catholic spirit, a communion of saints in the love of God and all goodness, which no one can learn from that which is called orthodoxy in particular churches, but is only to be had by a total dying to all worldly views, by a pure love of God, and by such an unction from above as delivers the mind from all selfishness and makes it love truth and goodness with an equality of affection in every man, whether he is Christian, Jew or Gentile. He that would obtain this divine and catholic spirit in this disordered, divided state of things, and live in a divided part of the church without partaking of its division, must have these three truths deeply fixed in his mind. First, that universal love, which gives the whole strength of the heart to God, and makes us love every man as we love ourselves, is the noblest, the most divine, the Godlike state of the soul, and is the utmost perfection to which the most perfect religion can raise us; and that no religion does any man any good but so far as it brings this perfection of love into him. This truth will show us that true orthodoxy can nowhere be found but in a pure disinterested love of God and our neighbour. Second, that in this present divided state of the church, truth itself is torn and divided asunder; and that, therefore, he can be the only true catholic who has more of truth and less of error than is hedged in by any divided part. This truth will enable us to live in a divided part unhurt by its division, and keep us in a true liberty and fitness to be edified and assisted by all the good that we hear or see in any other part of the church... Thirdly, he must always have in mind this great truth, that it is the glory of the Divine Justice to have no respect of parties or persons, but to stand equally

disposed to that which is right and wrong as well in the Jew as in the Gentile. He therefore that would like as God likes, and condemn as God condemns, must have neither the eyes of the Papist nor the Protestant; he must like no truth the less because Ignatius Loyola or John Bunyan were very zealous for it, nor have the less aversion to any error, because Dr Trapp or George Fox had brought it forth.

William Law

Dr Trapp was the author of a religious tract entitled ‘On the Nature, Folly, Sin and Danger of Being Righteous Overmuch.’ One of Law’s controversial pieces was an answer to this work.

Benares is to the East, Mecca to the West; but explore your own heart, for there are both Rama and Allah.

Kabir

Like the bee gathering honey from different flowers, the wise man accepts the essence of different Scriptures and sees only the good in all religions.

From the Srimad Bhagavatam

His Sacred Majesty the King does reverence to men of all sects, whether ascetics or householders, by gifts and various forms of reverence. His Sacred Majesty, however, cares not so much for gifts of external reverence as that there should be a growth in the essence of the matter in all sects. The growth of the essence of the matter assumes various forms, but the root of it is restraint of speech, to wit, a man must not do reverence to his own sect or disparage that of another without reason. Depreciation should be for specific reasons only; for the sects of other people all deserve reverence for one reason or another... He who does deserve reverence to his own sect, while disparaging the sects of others

wholly from attachment to his own, with intent to enhance the glory of his own sect, in reality by such conduct inflicts the severest injury on his own sect. Concord therefore is meritorious, to wit, hearkening and hearkening willingly to the Law of Piety, as accepted by other people.

Edict of Asoka

It would be difficult, alas, to find any edict of a Christian king to match Asoka's. In the West the good old rule, the simple plan, was glorification of one's own sect, disparagement and even persecution of all others. Recently, however, governments have changed their policy. Proselytizing and persecuting zeal is reserved for the political pseudoreligions, such as Communism, Fascism and nationalism; and unless they are thought to stand in the way of advance towards the temporal ends professed by such pseudoreligions, the various manifestations of the Perennial Philosophy are treated with a contemptuously tolerant indifference.

The children of God are very dear but very queer, very nice but very narrow.

Sadhu Sundar Singh

Such was the conclusion to which the most celebrated of Indian converts was forced after some years of association with his fellow Christians. There are many honourable exceptions, of course; but the rule even among learned Protestants and Catholics is a certain blandly bumptious provincialism which, if it did not constitute such a grave offence against charity and truth, would be just uproariously funny. A hundred years ago, hardly anything was known of Sanskrit, Pali or Chinese. The ignorance of European scholars was sufficient reason for their provincialism. Today, when more or less adequate translations are available in plenty, there is not only no reason for it, there is no excuse. And yet most European and American authors of books about religion and metaphysics write as though nobody had ever thought about these subjects,

except the Jews, the Greeks and the Christians of the Mediterranean basin and western Europe. This display of what, in the twentieth century, is an entirely voluntary and deliberate ignorance is not only absurd and discreditable; it is also socially dangerous. Like any other form of imperialism, theological imperialism is a menace to permanent world peace. The reign of violence will never come to an end until, first, most human beings accept the same, true philosophy of life; until, second, this Perennial Philosophy is recognized as the highest factor common to all the world religions; until, third, the adherents of every religion renounce the idolatrous time-philosophies, with which, in their own particular faith, the Perennial Philosophy of eternity has been overlaid; until, fourth, there is a worldwide rejection of all the political pseudoreligions, which place man's supreme good in future time and therefore justify and commend the commission of every sort of present iniquity as a means to that end. If these conditions are not fulfilled, no amount of political planning, no economic blue-prints however ingeniously drawn, can prevent the recrudescence of war and revolution.

13. Salvation, Deliverance, Enlightenment

SALVATION - BUT from what? Deliverance - out of which particular situation into what other situation? Men have given many answers to these questions, and because human temperaments are of such profoundly different kinds, because social situations are so various and fashions of thought and feeling so compelling while they last, the answers are many and mutually incompatible.

There is first of all material salvationism. In its simplest form this is merely the will to live expressing itself in a formulated desire to escape from circumstances that menace life. In practice, the effective fulfilment of such a wish depends on two things: the application of intelligence to particular economic and political problems, and the creation and maintenance of an atmosphere of goodwill, in which intelligence can do its work to the best advantage. But men are not content to be merely kind and clever within the limits of a concrete situation. They aspire to relate their actions, and the thoughts and feelings accompanying those actions, to general principles and a philosophy on the cosmic scale. When this directing and explanatory philosophy is not the Perennial Philosophy or one of the historical theologies more or less closely connected with the Perennial Philosophy, it takes the form of a pseudo-religion, a system of organized idolatry. Thus, the simple wish not to starve, the well-founded conviction that it is very difficult to be good or wise or happy when one is desperately hungry, comes to be elaborated, under the influence of the metaphysic of Inevitable Progress, into prophetic Utopianism; the desire to escape from oppression and exploitation comes to be explained and guided by a belief in apocalyptic revolutionism, combined, not always in theory, but invariably in practice, with the Moloch-worship of the nation as the highest of all goods. In all these cases salvation is regarded as a deliverance, by means of a variety of political and economic devices, out of the miseries and evils

associated with bad material conditions into another set of future material conditions so much better than the present that, somehow or other, they will cause everybody to be perfectly happy, wise and virtuous. Officially promulgated in all the totalitarian countries, whether of the right or the left, this confession of faith is still only semi-official in the nominally Christian world of capitalistic democracy, where it is drummed into the popular mind, not by the representatives of state or church, but by those most influential of popular moralists and philosophers, the writers of advertising copy (the only authors in all the history of literature whose works are read every day by every member *of* the population).

In the theologies of the various religions, salvation is also regarded as a deliverance out of folly, evil and misery into happiness, goodness and wisdom. But political and economic means are held to be subsidiary to the cultivation of personal holiness, to the acquiring of personal merit and to the maintenance of personal faith in some divine principle or person having power, in one way or another, to forgive and sanctify the individual soul. Moreover, the end to be achieved is not regarded as existing in some Utopian future period, beginning, say, in the twenty-second century or perhaps even a little earlier, if our favourite politicians remain in power and make the right laws; the end exists in heaven.' This last phrase has two very different meanings. For what is probably the majority of those who profess the great historical religions, it signifies and has always signified a happy posthumous condition of indefinite personal survival, conceived of as a reward for good behaviour and correct belief and a compensation for the miseries inseparable from life in a body. But for those who, within the various religious traditions, have accepted the Perennial Philosophy as a theory and have done their best to live it out in practice, 'heaven' is something else. They aspire to be delivered out of separate selfhood in time into eternity as realized in the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground. Since the Ground can and ought to be unitively known in the present life (whose ultimate end and purpose is nothing but this knowledge), 'heaven' is not an exclusively posthumous condition. He only is completely 'saved' who is

delivered here and now. As to the means to salvation, these are simultaneously ethical, intellectual and spiritual and have been summed up with admirable clarity and economy in the Buddha's Eightfold Path. Complete deliverance is conditional on the following: first, Right Belief in the all too obvious truth that the cause of pain and evil is craving for separative, egocentred existence, with its corollary that there can be no deliverance from evil, whether personal or collective, except by getting rid of such craving and the obsession of 'I,' 'me,' 'mine'; second, Right Will, the will to deliver oneself and others; third, Right Speech, directed by compassion and charity towards all sentient beings; fourth, Right Action, with the aim of creating arid maintaining peace and goodwill; fifth, Right Means of Livelihood, or the choice only of such professions as are not harmful, in their exercise, to any human being or, if possible, any living creature; sixth, Right Effort towards Self-control; seventh, Right Attention or Recollectedness, to be practised in all the circumstances of life, so that we may never do evil by mere thoughtlessness, because 'we know not what we do'; and, eighth, Right Contemplation, the unitive knowledge of the Ground, to which recollectedness and the ethical self-naughting prescribed in the first six branches of the Path give access. Such then are the means which it is within the power of the human being to employ in order to achieve man's final end and be 'saved'. Of the means which are employed by the divine Ground for helping human beings to reach their goal, the Buddha of the Pali scriptures (a teacher whose dislike of 'footless questions' is no less intense than that of the severest experimental physicist of the twentieth century) declines to speak. All he is prepared to talk about is 'sorrow and the ending of sorrow' - the huge brute fact of pain and evil and the other, no less empirical fact that there is a method by which the individual can free himself from evil and do something to diminish the sum of evil in the world around him. It is only in Mahayana Buddhism that the mysteries of grace are discussed with anything like the fullness of treatment accorded to the subject in the speculations of Hindu and especially Christian theology. The primitive, Hinayana teaching on deliverance is simply an elaboration of the Buddha's last recorded words: 'Decay is inherent in all

component things. Work out your own salvation with diligence.' As in the well-known passage quoted below, all the stress is upon personal effort.

Therefore, Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves, be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp; hold fast to the Truth as a refuge. Look not for a refuge in anyone beside yourselves. And those, Ananda, who either now or after I am dead shall be a lamp unto themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to the Truth as their lamp, and holding fast to the Truth as their refuge, shall not look for refuge to anyone beside themselves - it is they who shall reach the very topmost Height. But they must be anxious to learn.

What follows is a passage freely translated from the Chandogya Upanishad. The truth which this little myth is meant to illustrate is that there are as many conceptions of salvation as there are degrees of spiritual knowledge and that the kind of liberation (or enslavement) actually achieved by any individual soul depends upon the extent to which that soul chooses to dissipate its essentially voluntary ignorance.

That Self who is free from impurities, from old age and death, from grief and thirst and hunger, whose desire is true and whose desires come true - that Self is to be sought after and enquired about, that Self is to be realized.

The Devas (gods or angels) and the Asuras (demons or titans) both heard of this Truth. They thought: 'Let us seek after and realize this Self, so that we can obtain all worlds and the fulfilment of all desires.'

Thereupon Indra from the Devas and Virochana from the Asuras approached Prajapati, the famous teacher. They lived with him as pupils for thirty-two years. Then Prajapati asked them: 'For what reason have you both lived here all this time?' They replied: 'We have heard that one who realizes the Self obtains all the worlds and all his desires. We have lived here because we want to be taught the Self.'

Prajapati said to them: 'The person who is seen in the eye - that is the Self. That is immortal, that is fearless and that is Brahman.'

'Sir,' enquired the disciples, 'who is seen reflected in water or in a mirror?'

‘He, the Atman,’ was the reply. ‘He indeed is seen in all these.’ Then Prajapati added: ‘Look at yourselves in the water, and whatever you do not understand, come and tell me.’

Indra and Virochana pored over their reflections in the water, and when they were asked what they had seen of the Self, they replied: ‘Sir, we see the Self; we see even the hair and nails.’

Then Prajapati ordered them to put on their finest clothes and look again at their ‘selves’ in the water. This they did and when asked again what they had seen, they answered: ‘We see the Self, exactly like ourselves, well adorned and in our finest clothes.’

Then said Prajapati: ‘The Self is indeed seen in these. That Self is immortal and fearless, and that is Brahman.’ And the pupils went away, pleased at heart.

But looking after them, Prajapati lamented thus: ‘Both of them departed without analysing or discriminating, and without comprehending the true Self. Whoever follows this false doctrine of the Self must perish.’

Satisfied that he had found the Self, Virochana returned to the Asuras and began to teach them that the bodily self alone is to be worshipped, that the body alone is to be served, and that he who worships the ego and serves the body gains both worlds, this and the next. And this in effect is the doctrine of the Asuras.

But Indra, on his way back to the Devas, realized the uselessness of this knowledge. ‘As this Self,’ he reflected, ‘seems to be well adorned when the body is well adorned, well dressed when the body is well dressed, so too will it be blind if the body is blind, lame if the body is lame, deformed if the body is deformed. Nay more, this same Self will die when the body dies. I see no good in such knowledge.’ So Indra returned to Prajapati for further instruction. Prajapati compelled him to live with him for another span of thirty-two years; after which he began to instruct him, step by step, as it were.

Prajapati said: ‘He who moves about in dreams, enjoying and glorified - he is the Self. That is immortal and fearless, and that is Brahman.’

Pleased at heart, Indra again departed. But before he had rejoined the other angelic beings, he realized the uselessness of that knowledge also. ‘True it is,’ he thought within himself, ‘that this new Self is not blind if the body is blind, not lame, nor hurt, if the body is lame or hurt. But even in dreams the Self is conscious of many sufferings. So I see no good in this teaching.’

Accordingly he went back to Prajapati for more instruction, and Prajapati made him live with him for thirty-two years more. At the end of that time Prajapati taught him thus: ‘When a person is asleep, resting in perfect tranquillity, dreaming no dreams, then he realizes the Self. That is immortal and fearless, and that is Brahman.’

Satisfied, Indra went away. But even before he had reached home, he felt the uselessness of this knowledge also. ‘When one is asleep,’ he thought, ‘one does not know oneself as “This is I.”

One is not in fact conscious of any existence. That state is almost annihilation. I see no good in this knowledge either.’

So Indra went back once again to be taught. Prajapati made him stay with him for five years more. At the end of that time Prajapati taught him the highest truth of the Self.

‘This body,’ he said, ’is mortal, forever in the clutch of death. But within it resides the Self, immortal, and without form. This Self, when associated in consciousness with the body, is subject to pleasure and pain; and so long as this association continues, no man can find freedom from pains and pleasures. But when the association comes to an end, there is an end also of pain and pleasure. Rising above physical consciousness, knowing the Self as distinct from the sense-organs and the mind, knowing Him in his true light, one rejoices and one is free.’

From the Chandogya Upanishad

Having realized his own self as the Self, a man becomes selfless; and in virtue of selflessness he is to be conceived as unconditioned. This is the highest

mystery, betokening emancipation; through selflessness he has no part in pleasure or pain, but attains absoluteness.

Maitrayana Upanishad

We should mark and know of a very truth that all manner of virtue and goodness, and even that Eternal Good, which is God Himself, can never make a man virtuous, good or happy so long as it is outside the soul, that is, so long as the man is holding converse with outward things through his senses and reason, and does not withdraw into himself and learn to understand his own life, who and what he is.

Theologia Germanica

Indeed, the saving truth has never been preached by the Buddha, seeing that one has to realize it within oneself.

Sutralamkara

In what does salvation consist? Not in any historical faith or knowledge of anything absent or distant, not in any variety of restraints, rules and methods of practising virtue, not in any formality of opinion about faith and works, repentance, forgiveness of sins, or justification and sanctification, not in any truth or righteousness that you can have from yourself, from the best of men and books, but solely and wholly from the life of God, or Christ of God, quickened and born again in you, in other words in the restoration and perfect union of the first twofold life in humanity.

William Law

Law is using here the phraseology of Boehme and those other ‘Spiritual Reformers,’ whom the orthodox Protestants, Lutheran, Calvinistic and Anglican, agreed (it was one of the very few points they were able to agree on) either to ignore or to persecute. But it is clear that what he and they call the new birth of God within the soul is essentially the same fact of experience as that which the Hindus, two thousand and more years before, described as the realization of the Self as within and yet transcendantly other than the individual ego.

Not by the slothful, nor the fool, the undiscerning, is that Nirvana to be reached, which is the untying of all knots.

Iti-vuttaka

This seems sufficiently self-evident. But most of us take pleasure in being lazy, cannot be bothered to be constantly recollected and yet passionately desire to be saved from the results of sloth and unawareness. Consequently there has been a widespread wish for and belief in Saviours who will step into our lives, above all at the hour of their termination, and, like Alexander, cut the Gordian knots which we have been too lazy to untie. But God is not mocked. The nature of things is such that the unitive knowledge of the Ground which is contingent upon the achievement of a total selflessness cannot possibly be realized, even with outside help, by those who are not yet selfless. The salvation obtained by belief in the saving power of Amida, say, or Jesus is not the total deliverance described in the Upanishads, the Buddhist scriptures and the writings of the Christian mystics. It is something different, not merely in degree, but in kind.

Talk as much philosophy as you please, worship as many gods as you like, observe all ceremonies, sing devoted praises to any number of divine beings - liberation never comes, even at the end of a hundred aeons, without the realization of the Oneness of Self.

Shankara

This Self is not realizable by study nor even by intelligence and learning. The Self reveals its essence only to him who applies himself to the Self. He who has not given up the ways of vice, who cannot control himself, who is not at peace within, whose mind is distracted, can never realize the Self, though full of all the learning in the world.

Katha Upanishad

Nirvana is where there is no birth, no extinction; it is seeing into the state of Suchness, absolutely transcending all the categories constructed by mind; for it is the Tathagata's inner consciousness.

Lankavatara Sutra

The false or at best imperfect salvations described in the Chandogya Upanishad are of three kinds. There is first the pseudo-salvation associated with the belief that matter is the ultimate Reality. Virochana, the demonic being who is the apotheosis of power-loving, extraverted somatotonia, finds it perfectly natural to identify himself with his body, and he goes back to the other Titans to seek a purely material salvation. Incarnated in the present century, Virochana would have been an ardent Communist, Fascist or nationalist. Indra sees through material salvationism and is then offered dream-salvation, deliverance out of bodily existence into the intermediate world between matter and spirit — that fascinatingly odd and exciting psychic universe, out of which miracles and foreknowledge, 'spirit communications' and extra-sensory perceptions make their startling irruptions into ordinary life. But this freer kind of individualized existence is still all too personal and egocentric to satisfy a soul conscious of its own incompleteness and eager to be made whole. Indra accordingly goes further and is tempted to accept the undifferentiated consciousness of deep sleep, of false *samadhi* and quietistic trance, as the final deliverance. But he refuses, in Brahmananda's words, to mistake *tamas* for *sattvas*, sloth and sub-consciousness

for poise and super-consciousness. And so, by discrimination, he comes to the realization of the Self, which is the enlightenment of the darkness that is ignorance and the deliverance from the mortal consequences of that ignorance.

The illusory salvations, against which we were warned in the other extracts, are of a different kind. The emphasis here is upon idolatry and superstition - above all the idolatrous worship of the analytical reason and its notions, and the superstitious belief in rites, dogmas and confessions of faith as being somehow magically efficacious in themselves. Many Christians, as Law implies, have been guilty of these idolatries and superstitions. For them, complete deliverance into union with the divine Ground is impossible, either in this world or posthumously. The best they can hope for is a meritorious but still egocentric life in the body and some sort of happy posthumous 'longevity,' as the Chinese call it, some form of survival, paradisal perhaps, but still involved in time, separateness and multiplicity.

The beatitude into which the enlightened soul is delivered is something quite different from pleasure. What, then, is its nature? The quotations which follow provide at least a partial answer. Blessedness depends on-nonattachment and selflessness, therefore can be enjoyed without satiety and without revulsion; is a participation in eternity, and therefore remains itself without diminution or fluctuation.

Henceforth in the real Brahman, he (the liberated spirit) becomes perfected and another. His fruit is the untying of bonds. Without desires, he attains to bliss eternal and immeasurable, and therein abides.

Maitrayana Upanishad

God is to be enjoyed, creatures only used as means to That which is to be enjoyed.

St Augustine

There is this difference between spiritual and corporal pleasures, that corporal ones beget a desire before we have obtained them and, after we have obtained them, a disgust; but spiritual pleasures, on the contrary, are not cared for when we have them not, but are desired when we have them.

St Gregory the Great

When a man is in one of these two states (beatitude or dark night of the soul) all is right with him, and he is as safe in hell as in heaven. And so long as a man is on earth, it is possible for him to pass often-times from one to the other — nay, even within the space of a day and night, and all without his own doing. But when a man is in neither of these two states, he holds converse with the creatures, and wavereth hither and thither and knoweth not what manner of man he is.

Theologia Germanica

Much of the literature of Sufism is poetical. Sometimes this poetry is rather strained and extravagant, sometimes beautiful with a luminous simplicity, sometimes darkly and almost disquietingly enigmatic. To this last class belong the utterances of that Moslem saint of the tenth century, Niffari the Egyptian. This is what he wrote on the subject of salvation.

God made me behold the sea, and I saw the ships sinking and the planks floating; then the planks too were submerged. And God said to me, ‘Those who voyage are not saved.’ And He said to me, ‘Those who, instead of voyaging, cast themselves into the sea, take a risk.’ And He said to me, ‘Those who voyage and take no risk shall perish.’ And He said to me, ‘The surface of the sea is a gleam that cannot be reached. And the bottom is a darkness impenetrable. And between the two are great fishes, which are to be feared.’

The allegory is fairly clear. The ships that bear the individual voyagers across the sea of life are sects and churches, collections of dogmas and religious organizations. The planks which also sink at last are all good works falling short

of total self-surrender and all faith less absolute than the unitive knowledge of God. Liberation into eternity is the result of ‘throwing oneself into the sea’; in the language of the Gospels, one must lose one’s life in order to save it. But throwing oneself into the sea is a risky business - not so risky, of course, as travelling in a vast *Queen Mary*, fitted up with the very latest in dogmatic conveniences and liturgical decorations, and bound either for Davy Jones’s locker or at best, the wrong port, but still quite dangerous enough. For the surface of the sea - the divine Ground as it is manifested in the world of time and multiplicity - gleams with a reflected radiance that can no more be seized than the image of beauty in a mirror; while the bottom, the Ground as it is eternally in itself, seems merely darkness to the analytic mind, as it peers down into the depths; and when the analytic mind decides to join the will in the final necessary plunge into self-naughting it must run the gauntlet, as it sinks down, of those devouring pseudo-salvations described in the Chandogya Upanishad - dream-salvation into that fascinating psychic world, where the ego still survives, but with a happier and more untrammelled kind of life, or else the sleep-salvation of false *samadhi*, of unity in sub-consciousness instead of unity in super-consciousness.

Niffari’s estimate of any individual’s chances of achieving man’s final end does not err on the side of excessive optimism. But then no saint or founder of a religion, no exponent of the Perennial Philosophy, has ever been optimistic. ‘Many are called, but few are chosen.’ Those who do not choose to be chosen cannot hope for anything better than some form of partial salvation under conditions that will permit them to advance towards complete deliverance.

14. Immortality and Survival

IMMORTALITY IS PARTICIPATION in the eternal now of the divine Ground; survival is persistence in one of the forms of time. Immortality is the result of total deliverance. Survival is the lot of those who are partially delivered into some heaven, or who are not delivered at all, but find themselves, by the law of their own untranscended nature, compelled to choose some purgatorial or embodied servitude even more painful than the one they have just left.

Goodness and virtue make men know and love, believe and delight in their immortality. When the soul is purged and enlightened by true sanctity, it is more capable of those divine irradiations, whereby it feels itself in conjunction with God. It knows that almighty Love, by which it lives, is stronger than death. It knows that God will never forsake His own life, which He has quickened in the soul. Those breathings and gaspings after an eternal participation of Him are but the energy of His own breath within us.

John Smith the Platonist I have maintained ere this and I still maintain that I already possess all that is granted to me in eternity. For God in the fullness of his Godhead dwells eternally in his image - the soul.

Eckhart

Troubled or still, water is always water. What difference can embodiment or disembodiment make to the Liberated? Whether calm or in tempest, the sameness of the Ocean suffers no change.

Yogavasistha

To the question ‘Where does the soul go, when the body dies?’
Jacob Boehme answered: ‘There is no necessity for it-to go anywhere.’

The word Tathagata (one of the names of the Buddha) signifies one who does not go to anywhere and does not come from anywhere; and therefore is he called Tathagata (Thus-gone), holy and fully enlightened.

Diamond Sutra

Seeing Him alone, one transcends death; there is no other way.
Svetasvatara Upanishad God, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life...

Book of Common Prayer

I died a mineral and became a plant.
I died a plant and rose an animal.
I died an animal and I was man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
Yet once more I shall die as man, to soar With the blessed angels; but even from angelhood I must pass on. All except God perishes.
When I have sacrificed my angel soul,
I shall become that which no mind ever conceived.
O, let me not exist! for Non-Existence proclaims, ‘To Him we shall return.’

Jalal-uddin Rumi

There is a general agreement, East and West, that life in a body provides uniquely good opportunities for achieving salvation or deliverance. Catholic and Mahayana Buddhist doctrine is alike in insisting that the soul in its disembodied state after death cannot acquire merit, but merely suffers in purgatory the

consequences of its past acts. But whereas Catholic orthodoxy declares that there is no possibility of progress in the next world, and that the degree of the soul's beatitude is determined solely by what it has done and thought in its earthly life, the eschatologists of the Orient affirm that there are certain posthumous conditions in which meritorious souls are capable of advancing from a heaven of happy personal survival to genuine immortality in union with the timeless, eternal Godhead. And, of course, there is also the possibility (indeed, for most individuals, the necessity) of returning to some form of embodied life, in which the advance towards complete beatification, or deliverance through enlightenment, can be continued. Meanwhile, the fact that one has been born in a human body is one of the things for which, says Shankara, one should daily give thanks to God.

The spiritual creature which we are has need of a body, without which it could nowise attain that knowledge which it obtains as the only approach to those things, by knowledge of which it is made blessed.

St Bernard

Having achieved human birth, a rare and blessed incarnation, the wise man, leaving all vanity to those who are vain, should strive to know God, and Him only, before life passes into death.

Srimad Bhagavatam Good men spiritualize their bodies; bad men incarnate their souls.

Benjamin Whichcote

More precisely, good men spiritualize their mind-bodies; bad men incarnate and mentalize their spirits. The completely spiritualized mind-body is a Tathagata, who doesn't go anywhere when he dies, for the good reason that he is already, actually and consciously, where everyone has always potentially been without knowing. The person who has not, in this life, gone into Thusness, into

the eternal principle of all states of being, goes at death into some particular state, cither purgatorial or paradisal. In the Hindu scriptures and their commentaries several different kinds of posthumous salvation are distinguished. The ‘thus-gone’ soul is completely delivered into complete union with the divine Ground; but it is also possible to achieve other kinds of *mukti,* or liberation, even while retaining a form of purified I-consciousness. The nature of any individual’s deliverance after death depends upon three factors: the degree of holiness achieved by him while in the body, the particular aspect of the divine Reality to which he gave his primary allegiance, and the particular path he chose to follow. Similarly, in the *Divine Comedy,* Paradise has its various circles; but whereas in the oriental eschatologies the saved soul can go out of even sublimated individuality, out of survival even in some kind of celestial time, to a complete deliverance into the eternal, Dante’s souls remain for ever where (after passing through the unmeritorious sufferings of purgatory) they find themselves as the result of their single incarnation in a body. Orthodox Christian doctrine does not admit the possibility, either in the posthumous state or in some other embodiment, of any further growth towards the ultimate perfection of a total union with the Godhead. But in the Hindu and Buddhist versions of the Perennial Philosophy the divine mercy is matched by the divine patience: both are infinite. For oriental theologians there is no eternal damnation; there are only purgatories and then an indefinite series of second chances to go forward towards not only man’s, but the whole creation’s final end — total reunion with the Ground of all being.

Preoccupation with posthumous deliverance is not one of the means to such deliverance, and may easily, indeed, become an obstacle in the way of advance towards it. There is not the slightest reason to suppose that ardent spiritualists are more likely to be saved than those who have never attended a séance or familiarized themselves with the literature, speculative or evidential. My intention here is not to add to that literature, but rather to give the baldest summary of what has been written about the subject of survival within the various religious traditions.

In oriental discussions of the subject, that which survives death is not the personality. Buddhism accepts the doctrine of reincarnation; but it is not a soul that passes on (Buddhism denies the existence of a soul); it is the character. What we choose to make our mental and physical constitution in the course of our life on earth affects the psychic medium within which individual minds lead a part at least of their amphibious existence, and this modification of the medium results, after the body's death, in the initiation of a new existence either in a heaven, or a purgatory, or another body.

In the Vedanta cosmology there is, over and above the Atman or spiritual Self, identical with the divine Ground, something in the nature of a soul that reincarnates in a gross or subtle body, or manifests itself in some incorporeal state. This soul is not the personality of the defunct, but rather the particularized I-consciousness out of which a personality arises.

Either one of these conceptions of survival is logically self-consistent and can be made to 'save the appearances' - in other words, to fit the odd and obscure facts of psychical research. The only personalities with which we have any direct acquaintance are incarnate beings, compounds of a body and some unknown *x*. But if *x* plus a body equals a personality, then, obviously, it is impossible for *x* minus a body to equal the same thing. The apparently personal entities which psychical research sometimes seems to discover can only be regarded as temporary pseudopersonalities compounded of *x* and the medium's body.

These two conceptions are not mutually exclusive, and survival may be the joint product of a persistent consciousness and a modification of the psychic medium. If this is so, it is possible for a given human being to survive in more than one posthumous form. His 'soul' - the nonpersonal ground and principle of past and future personalities - may go marching on in one mode of being, while the traces left by his thoughts and volitions in the psychic medium may become the origin of new individualized existences, having quite other modes of being.

15. Silence

THE FATHER UTTERED one Word; that Word is His Son, and He utters Him for ever in everlasting silence; and in silence the soul has to hear it.

St John of the Cross

The spiritual life is nothing else but the working of the Spirit of God within us, and therefore our own silence must be a great part of our preparation for it, and much speaking or delight in it will be often no small hindrance of that good which we can only have from hearing what the Spirit and voice of God speaketh within us... Rhetoric and fine language about the things of the spirit is a vainer babble than in other matters; and he that thinks to grow in true goodness by hearing or speaking flaming words or striking expressions, as is now much the way of the world, may have a great deal of talk, but will have little of his conversation in heaven.

William Law

He who knows does not speak;
He who speaks does not know.

Lao Tzu

Unrestrained and indiscriminate talk is morally evil and spiritually dangerous. ‘But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.’ This may seem a very hard saying. And yet if we pass in review the words we have given vent to in the course of the

average day, we shall find that the greater number of them may be classified under three main heads: words inspired by malice and uncharitableness towards our neighbours; words inspired by greed, sensuality and self-love; words inspired by pure imbecility and uttered without rhyme or reason, but merely for the sake of making a distracting noise. These are idle words; and we shall find, if we look into the matter, that they tend to outnumber the words that are dictated by reason, charity or necessity. And if the unspoken words of our mind's endless, idiot monologue are counted, the majority for idleness becomes, for most of us, overwhelmingly large.

All these idle words, the silly no less than the self-regarding and the uncharitable, are impediments in the way of the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground, a dance of dust and flies obscuring the inward and the outward Light. The guard of the tongue (which is also, of course, a guard of the mind) is not only one of the most difficult and searching of all mortifications; it is also the most fruitful.

When the hen has laid, she must needs cackle. And what does she get by it? Straightway comes the chough and robs her of her eggs, and devours all that of which she should have brought forth her live birds. And just so that wicked chough, the devil, beareth away from the cackling anchoresses, and swalloweth up all the goods they have brought forth, and which ought, as birds, to bear them up towards heaven, if it had not been cackled.

Modernized from the Ancren Riwle You cannot practise too rigid a fast from the charms of worldly talk.

Fénelon

What need of so much news from abroad, when all that concerns either life or death is all transacting and at work within us?

William Law

My dear Mother, heed well the precepts of the saints, who have all warned those who would become holy to speak little of themselves and their own affairs.

St François de Sales (in a letter to St Jeanne de Chantai) A dog is not considered a good dog because he is a good barker.

A man is not considered a good man because he is a good talker.

Chuang Tzu

The dog barks; the Caravan passes.

Arabic Proverb

It was not from want of will that I have refrained from writing to you, for truly do I wish you all good; but because it seemed to me that enough has been said already to effect all that is needful, and that what is wanting (if indeed anything be wanting) is not writing or speaking - whereof ordinarily there is more than enough - but silence and work. For whereas speaking distracts, silence and work collect thoughts and strengthen the spirit. As soon therefore as a person understands what has been said to him for his good, there is no further need to hear or to discuss; but to set himself in earnest to practise what he has learnt with silence and attention, in humility, charity and contempt of self.

St John of the Cross

Molinos (and doubtless he was not the first to use this classification) distinguished three degrees of silence - silence of the mouth, silence of the mind and silence of the will. To refrain from idle talk is hard; to quiet the gibbering of memory and imagination is much harder; hardest of all is to still the voices of craving and aversion within the will.

The twentieth century is, among other things, the Age of Noise. Physical noise, mental noise and noise of desire - we hold history’s record for all of them.

And no wonder; for all the resources of our almost miraculous technology have been thrown into the current assault against silence. That most popular and influential of all recent inventions, the radio, is nothing but a conduit through which prefabricated din can flow into our homes. And this din goes far deeper, of course, than the ear-drums. It penetrates the mind, filling it with a babel of distractions - news items, mutually irrelevant bits of information, blasts of corybantic or sentimental music, continually repeated doses of drama that bring no catharsis, but merely create a craving for daily or even hourly emotional enemas. And where, as in most countries, the broadcasting stations support themselves by selling time to advertisers, the noise is carried from the ears, through the realms of phantasy, knowledge and feeling to the ego's central core of wish and desire. Spoken or printed, broadcast over the ether or on wood-pulp, all advertising copy has but one purpose - to prevent the will from ever achieving silence. Desirelessness is the condition of deliverance and illumination. The condition of an expanding and technologically progressive system of mass-production is universal craving. Advertising is the organized effort to extend and intensify craving - to extend and intensify, that is to say, the workings of that force, which (as all the saints and teachers of all the higher religions have always taught) is the principal cause of suffering and wrong-doing and the greatest obstacle between the human soul and its divine Ground.

16. Prayer

THE WORD ‘PRAYER’ is applied to at least four distinct procedures - petition, intercession, adoration, contemplation. Petition is the asking of something for ourselves. Intercession is the asking of something for other people. Adoration is the use of intellect, feeling, will and imagination in making acts of devotion directed towards God in his personal aspect or as incarnated in human form. Contemplation is that condition of alert passivity in which the soul lays itself open to the divine Ground within and without, the immanent and transcendent Godhead.

Psychologically, it is all but impossible for a human being to practise contemplation without preparing for it by some kind of adoration and without feeling the need to revert at more or less frequent intervals to intercession and some form at least of petition. On the other hand, it is both possible and easy to practise petition apart not only from contemplation, but also from adoration and, in rare cases of extreme and unmitigated egotism, even from intercession. Petitionary and intercessory prayer may be used - and used, what is more, with what would ordinarily be regarded as success - without any but the most perfunctory and superficial reference to God in any of his aspects. To acquire the knack of getting his petitions answered, a man does not have to know or love God, or even to know or love the image of God in his own mind. All that he requires is a burning sense of the importance of his own ego and its desires, coupled with a firm conviction that there exists, out there in the universe, something not himself which can be wheedled or dragooned into satisfying those desires. If I repeat ‘My will be done,’ with the necessary degree of faith and persistency, the chances are that, sooner or later and somehow or other, I shall get what I want. Whether my will coincides with the will of God, and whether in getting what I want I shall get what is spiritually, morally or even materially

good for me, are questions which I cannot answer in advance. Only time and eternity will show. Meanwhile we shall be well advised to heed the warnings of folk-lore. Those anonymous realists who wrote the world's fairy stories knew a great deal about wishes and their fulfilment. They knew, first of all, that in certain circumstances petitions actually get themselves answered; but they also knew that God is not the only answerer and that if one asks for something in the wrong spirit, it may in effect be given - but given with a vengeance and not by a divine Giver. Getting what one wants by means of self-regarding petition is a form of *hubris*, which invites its condign and appropriate *nemesis*. Thus, the folk-lore of the North American Indian is full of stories about people who fast and pray egotistically, in order to get more than a reasonable man ought to have, and who, receiving what they ask for, thereby bring about their own downfall. From the other side of the world come all the tales of the men and women who make use of some kind of magic to get their petitions answered - always with farcical or catastrophic consequence. Hardly ever do the Three Wishes of our traditional fairy lore lead to anything but a bad end for the successful wisher.

Picture God as saying to you, 'My son, why is it that day by day you rise and pray, and genuflect, and even strike the ground with your forehead, nay, sometimes even shed tears, while you say to Me: "My Father, my God, give me wealth!" If I were to give it to you, you would think yourself of some importance, you would fancy you had gained something very great. Because you asked for it, you have it. But take care to make good use of it. Before you had it you were humble; now that you have begun to be rich you despise the poor. What kind of a good is that which only makes you worse? For worse you are, since you were bad already. And that it would make you worse you knew not; hence you asked it of Me. I gave it you and I proved you; you have found - and you are found out! Ask of Me better things than these, greater things than these. Ask of Me spiritual things. Ask of Me Myself.'

St Augustine

O Lord, I, a beggar, ask of Thee more than a thousand kings may ask of Thee. Each one has something he needs to ask of Thee; I have come to ask Thee to give me Thyself.

Ansari of Herat

In the words of Aquinas, it is legitimate for us to pray for anything which it is legitimate for us to desire. There are some things that nobody has the right to desire — such as the fruits of crime or wrong-doing. Other things may be legitimately desired by people on one level of spiritual development, but should not be desired (and indeed cease to be desired) by those on another, higher level. Thus, St François de Sales had reached a point where he could say, 'I have hardly any desires, but if I were to be born again I should have none at all. We should ask nothing and refuse nothing, but leave ourselves in the arms of divine Providence without wasting time in any desire, except to will what God wills of us.' But meanwhile the third clause of the Lord's Prayer is repeated daily by millions, who have not the slightest intention of letting any will be done, except their own.

The savour of wandering in the ocean of deathless life has rid me of all my asking; As the tree is in the seed, so all diseases are in this asking.

Kabir

Lord, I know not what to ask of thee. Thou only knowest what I need. Thou lovest me better than I know how to love myself. Father, give to thy child that which he himself knows not how to ask. Smite or heal, depress me or raise me up: I adore all thy purposes without knowing them. I am silent; I offer myself up in a sacrifice; I yield myself to Thee; I would have no other desire than to accomplish thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray Thyself in me.

Fénelon

(A dervish was tempted by the devil to cease calling upon Allah, on the ground that Allah never answered, ‘Here am I.’ The Prophet Khadir appeared to him in a vision with a message from God.) Was it not I who summoned thee to my service?

Was it not I who made thee busy with my name?

Thy calling ‘Allah!’ *was* my ‘Here am I.’

Jalal-uddin Rumi

I pray God the Omnipotent to place us in the ranks of his chosen, among the number of those whom He directs to the path of safety; in whom He inspires fervour lest they forget Him; whom He cleanses from all defilement, that nothing may remain in them except Himself; yea, of those whom He indwells completely, that they may adore none beside Him.

Al-Ghazzali

About intercession, as about so many other subjects, it is William Law who writes most clearly, simply and to the point.

By considering yourself as an advocate with God for your neighbours and acquaintances, you would never find it hard to be at peace with them yourself. It would be easy for you to bear with and forgive those, for whom you particularly implored the divine mercy and forgiveness.

William Law

Intercession is the best arbitrator of all differences, the best promoter of true friendship, the best cure and preservative against all unkind tempers, all angry and haughty passions.

William Law

You cannot possibly have any ill-temper, or show any unkind behaviour to a man for whose welfare you are so much concerned, as to be his advocate with God in private. For you cannot possibly despise and ridicule that man whom your private prayers recommend to the love and favour of God.

William Law

Intercession, then, is at once the means to, and the expression of, the love of one's neighbour. And in the same way adoration is the means to, and the expression of, the love of God - a love that finds its consummation in the unitive knowledge of the Godhead which is the fruit of contemplation. It is to these higher forms of communion with God that the authors of the following extracts refer whenever they use the word 'prayer.'

The aim and end of prayer is to revere, to recognize and to adore the sovereign majesty of God, through what He is in Himself rather than what He is in regard to us, and rather to love his goodness by the love of that goodness itself than for what it sends us.

Bourgoing

In prayer he (Charles de Condren) did not stop at the frontiers of his knowledge and his reasoning. He adored God and his mysteries as they are in themselves and not as he understood them.

Amelote

'What God is in Himself,'

'God and his mysteries as they are in themselves' — the phrases have a Kantian ring. But if Kant was right and the Thing in itself is unknowable,

Bourgoing, De Condren and all the other masters of the spiritual life were engaged in a wild-goose chase. But Kant was right only as regards minds that have not yet come to enlightenment and deliverance. To such minds Reality, whether material, psychic or spiritual, presents itself as it is darkened, tinged and refracted by the medium of their own individual natures. But in those who are pure in heart and poor in spirit there is no distortion of Reality, because there is no separate selfhood to obscure or refract, no painted lantern slide of intellectual beliefs and hallowed imagery to give a personal and historical colouring to the 'white radiance of Eternity.' For such minds, as Olier says, 'even ideas of the saints, of the Blessed Virgin, and the sight of Jesus Christ in his humanity are impediments in the way of the sight of God in his purity.' The Thing in itself *can* be perceived - but only by one who, in himself, is nothing.

By prayer I do not understand petition or supplication which, according to the doctrines of the schools, is exercised principally by the understanding, being a signification of what the person desires to receive from God. But prayer here specially meant is an offering and giving to God whatsoever He may justly require from us.

Now prayer, in its general notion, may be defined to be an elevation of the mind to God, or more largely and expressly thus: prayer is an actuation of an intellective soul towards God, expressing, or at least implying, an entire dependence on Him as the author and fountain of all good, a will and readiness to give Him his due, which is no less than all love, all obedience, adoration, glory and worship, by humbling and annihilating the self and all creatures in his presence; and lastly, a desire and intention to aspire to an union of spirit with Him.

Hence it appears that prayer is the most perfect and most divine action that a rational soul is capable of. It is of all actions and duties the most indispensably necessary.

Augustine Baker

Lord, teach me to seek Thee and reveal Thyself to me when I seek Thee. For I cannot seek Thee except Thou teach me, nor find Thee except Thou reveal Thyself. Let me seek Thee in longing, let me long for Thee in seeking: let me find Thee in love and love Thee in finding. Lord, I acknowledge and I thank Thee that Thou hast created me in this Thine image, in order that I may be mindful of Thee, may conceive of Thee and love Thee: but that image has been so consumed and wasted away by vices and obscured by the smoke of wrong-doing that it cannot achieve that for which it was made, except Thou renew it and create it anew. Is the eye of the soul darkened by its infirmity, or dazzled by Thy glory? Surely, it is both darkened in itself and dazzled by Thee. Lord, this is the unapproachable light in which Thou dwellest. Truly I see it not, because it is too bright for me; and yet whatever I see, I see through it, as the weak eye sees what it sees through the light of the sun, which in the sun itself it cannot look upon. Oh supreme and unapproachable light, oh holy and blessed truth, how far art Thou from me who am so near to Thee, how far art Thou removed from my vision, though I am so near to Thine! Everywhere Thou art wholly present, and I see Thee not. In Thee I move and in Thee I have my being, and cannot come to Thee, Thou art within me and about me, and I feel Thee not.

St Anselm

Oh Lord, put no trust in me; for I shall surely fail if Thou uphold me not.

St Philip Neri

To pretend to devotion without great humility and renunciation of all worldly tempers is to pretend to impossibilities. He that would be devout must first be humble, have a full sense of his own miseries and wants and the vanity of the world, and then his soul will be full of desire after God. A proud, or vain, or worldly-minded man may use a manual of prayers, but he cannot be devout,

because devotion is the application of an humble heart to God as its only happiness.

William Law

The spirit, in order to work, must have all sensible images, both good and bad, removed. The beginner in a spiritual course commences with the use of good sensible images, and it is impossible to begin in a good spiritual course with the exercises of the spirit... Those souls who have not a propensity to the interior must abide always in the exercises, in which sensible images are used, and these souls will find the sensible exercises very profitable to themselves and to others, and pleasing to God. And this is the way of the active life. But others, who have the propensity to the interior, do not always remain in the exercises of the senses, but after a time these will give place to the exercises of the spirit, which are independent of the senses and the imagination and consist simply in the elevation of the will of the intellective soul to God... The soul elevates her will towards God, apprehended by the understanding as a spirit, and not as an imaginary thing, the human spirit in this way aspiring to a union with the Divine Spirit.

Augustine Baker

You tell me you do nothing in prayer. But what do you want to do in prayer except what you are doing, which is, presenting and representing your nothingness and misery to God? When beggars expose their ulcers and their necessities to our sight, that is the best appeal they can make. But from what you tell me, you sometimes do nothing of this, but lie there like a shadow or a statue. They put statues in palaces simply to please the prince’s eyes. Be content to be that in the presence of God: He will bring the statue to life when He pleases.

St François de Sales

I have come to see that I do not limit my mind enough simply to prayer, that I always want to do something myself in it, wherein I do very wrong... I wish most definitely to cut off and separate my mind from all that, and to hold it with all my strength, as much as I can, to the sole regard and simple unity. By allowing the fear of being ineffectual to enter into the state of prayer, and by wishing to accomplish something myself, I spoilt it all.

St Jeanne Chantal

So long as you seek Buddhahood, specifically exercising yourself for it, there is no attainment for you.

Yung-chia Ta-shih 'How does a man set himself in harmony with the Tao?'

Shih-t'ou 'I am already out of harmony.'

How shall I grasp it? Do not grasp it. That which remains when there is no more grasping is the Self.

Panchadasi

I order you to remain simply either in God or close to God, without trying to do anything there, and without asking anything of Him, unless He urges it.

St François de Sales

Adoration is an activity of the loving, but still separate, individuality. Contemplation is the state of union with the divine Ground of all being. The highest prayer is the most passive. Inevitably; for the less there is of self, the more there is of God. That is why the path to passive or infused contemplation is so hard and, for many, so painful — a passage through successive or simultaneous Dark Nights, in which the pilgrim must die to the life of sense as

an end in itself, to the life of private and even of traditionally hallowed thinking and believing, and finally to the deep source of all ignorance and evil, the life of the separate, individualized will.

17. Suffering

THE GODHEAD IS impassible; for where there is perfection and unity, there can be no suffering. The capacity to suffer arises where there is imperfection, disunity and separation from an embracing totality; and the capacity is actualized to the extent that imperfection, disunity and separateness are accompanied by an urge towards the intensification of these creaturely conditions. For the individual who achieves unity within his own organism and union with the divine Ground, there is an end of suffering. The goal of creation is the return of all sentient beings out of separateness and that infatuating urge-to-separateness which results in suffering, through unitive knowledge, into the wholeness of eternal Reality.

The elements which make up man produce a capacity for pain.
The cause of pain is the craving for individual life.
Deliverance from craving does away with pain.
The way of deliverance is the Eightfold Path.

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism The urge-to-separateness, or craving for independent and individualized existence, can manifest itself on all the levels of life, from the merely cellular and physiological, through the instinctive, to the fully conscious. It can be the craving of a whole organism for the intensification of its separateness from the environment and the divine Ground. Or it can be the urge of a part within an organism for an intensification of its own partial life as distinct from (and consequently at the expense of) the life of the organism as a whole. In the first case we speak of impulse, passion, desire, self-will, sin; in the second, we describe what is happening as illness, injury, functional or organic disorder. In both cases the craving for separateness results in suffering, not only

for the craver, but also for the craver's sentient environment - other organisms in the external world, or other organs within the same organism. In one way suffering is entirely private; in another, fatally contagious. No living creature is able to experience the suffering of another creature. But the craving for separateness which, sooner or later, directly or indirectly, results in some form of private and unshareable suffering for the craver, also results, sooner or later, directly or indirectly, in suffering (equally private and unshareable) for others. Suffering and moral evil have the same source — a craving for the intensification of the separateness which is the primary datum of all creatureliness.

It will be as well to illustrate these generalizations by a few examples. Let us consider first the suffering inflicted by living organisms on themselves and on other living organisms in the mere process of keeping alive. The cause of such suffering is the craving for individual existence, expressing itself specifically in the form of hunger. Hunger is entirely natural - a part of every creature's *dharma.* The suffering it causes alike to the hungry and to those who satisfy their hunger is inseparable from the existence of sentient creatures. The existence of sentient creatures has a goal and purpose which is ultimately the supreme good of every one of them. But meanwhile the suffering of creatures remains a fact and is a necessary part of creatureliness. In so far as this is the case, creation is the beginning of the Fall. The consummation of the Fall takes place when creatures seek to intensify their separateness beyond the limits prescribed by the law of their being. On the biological level the Fall would seem to have been consummated very frequently during the course of evolutionary history. Every species, except the human, chose immediate, short-range success by means of specialization. But specialization always leads into blind alleys. It is only by remaining precariously generalized that an organism can advance towards that rational intelligence which is its compensation for not having a body and instincts perfectly adapted to one particular kind of life in one particular kind of environment. Rational intelligence makes possible unparalleled worldly success

on the one hand and, on the other, a further advance towards spirituality and a return, through unitive knowledge, to the divine Ground.

Because the human species refrained from consummating the Fall on the biological level, human individuals now possess the momentous power of choosing either selflessness and union with God, or the intensification of separate selfhood in ways and to a degree, which are entirely beyond the ken of the lower animals. Their capacity for good is infinite, since they can, if they so desire, make room within themselves for divine Reality. But at the same time their capacity for evil is, not indeed infinite (since evil is always ultimately self-destructive and therefore temporary), but uniquely great. Hell is total separation from God, and the devil is the will to that separation. Being rational and free, human beings are capable of being diabolic. This is a feat which no animal can duplicate, for no animal is sufficiently clever, sufficiently purposeful, sufficiently strong-willed or sufficiently moral to be a devil. (We should note that, to be diabolic on the grand scale, one must, like Milton's Satan, exhibit in a high degree all the moral virtues, except only charity and wisdom.) Man's capacity to crave more violently than any animal for the intensification of his separateness results not only in moral evil and the sufferings which moral evil inflicts, in one way or another, upon the victims of evil and the perpetrators of it, but also in certain characteristically human derangements of the body. Animals suffer mainly from contagious diseases, which assume epidemic proportions whenever the urge to reproduction combines with exceptionally favourable circumstances to produce overcrowding, and from diseases due to infestation by parasites. (These last are simply a special case of the sufferings that must inevitably arise when many species of creatures coexist and can only survive at one another's expense.) Civilized man has been fairly successful in protecting himself against these plagues, but in their place he has called up a formidable array of degenerative diseases hardly known among the lower animals. Most of these degenerative diseases are due to the fact that civilized human beings do not, on any level of their being, live in harmony with Tao, or the divine Nature of Things. They love to intensify their selfhood through gluttony, therefore eat

the wrong food and too much of it; they inflict upon themselves chronic anxiety over money and, because they crave excitement, chronic over-stimulation; they suffer, during their working hours, from the chronic boredom and frustration imposed by the sort of jobs that have to be done in order to satisfy the artificially stimulated demand for the fruits of fully mechanized mass-production. Among the consequences of these wrong uses of the psycho-physical organism are degenerative changes in particular organs, such as the heart, kidneys, pancreas, intestines and arteries. Asserting their partial selfhood in a kind of declaration of independence from the organism as a whole, the degenerating organs cause suffering to themselves and their physiological environment. In exactly the same way the human individual asserts his own partial selfhood and his separateness from his neighbours, from Nature and from God - with disastrous consequences to himself, his family, his friends and society in general. And, reciprocally, a disordered society, professional group or family, living by a false philosophy, influences its members to assert their individual selfhood and separateness, just as the wrongliving and wrong-thinking individual influences his own organs to assert, by some excess or defect of function, their partial selfhood at the expense of the total organism.

The effects of suffering may be morally and spiritually bad, neutral or good, according to the way in which the suffering is endured and reacted to. In other words, it may stimulate in the sufferer a conscious or unconscious craving for the intensification of his separateness; or it may leave the craving such as it was before the suffering; or, finally, it may mitigate it and so become a means for advance towards self-abandonment and the love and knowledge of God. Which of these three alternatives shall be realized depends, in the last analysis, upon the sufferer’s choice. This seems to be true even on the sub-human level. The higher animals, at any rate, often seem to resign themselves to pain, sickness and death with a kind of serene acceptance of what the divine Nature of Things has decreed for them. But in other cases there is panic, fear and struggle, a frenzied resistance to those decrees. To some extent, at least, the embodied animal self appears to be free, in the face of suffering, to choose self-abandonment or self-

assertion. For embodied human selves, this freedom of choice is unquestionable. The choice of self-abandonment in suffering makes possible the reception of grace - grace on the spiritual level, in the form of an accession of the love and knowledge of God, and grace in the mental and physiological levels, in the form of a diminution of fear, self-concern and even of pain.

When we conceive the love of suffering, we lose the sensibility of the senses and dead, dead we will live in that garden.

St Catherine of Siena

He who suffers for love does not suffer, for all suffering is forgot.

Eckhart

In this life there is not purgatory, but only heaven or hell; for he who bears afflictions with patience has paradise, and he who does not has hell.

St Philip Neri

Many sufferings are the immediate consequence of moral evil, and these cannot have any good effects upon the sufferer, so long as the causes of his distress are not eradicated.

Each sin begetteth a special spiritual suffering. A suffering of this kind is like unto that of hell, for the more you suffer, the worse you become. This happeneth to sinners; the more they suffer through their sins, the more wicked they become; and they fall continually more and more into their sins in order to get free from their suffering.

The Following of Christ

The idea of vicarious suffering has too often been formulated in crudely juridical and commercial terms. A has committed an offence for which the law decrees a certain punishment; B voluntarily undergoes the punishment; justice and the law-giver's honour are satisfied; consequently A may go free. Or else it is a matter of debts and repayments. A owes C a sum which he cannot pay; B steps in with the cash and so prevents C from foreclosing on the mortgage. Applied to the facts of man's suffering and his relations to the divine Ground, these conceptions are neither enlightening nor edifying. The orthodox doctrine of the Atonement attributes to God characteristics that would be discreditable even to a human potentate, and its model of the universe is not the product of spiritual insight rationalized by philosophic reflection, but rather the projection of a lawyer's phantasy. But in spite of these deplorable crudities in their formulation, the idea of vicarious suffering and the other, closely related idea of the transferability of merit are based upon genuine facts of experience. The selfless and God-filled person can and does act as a channel through which grace is able to pass into the unfortunate being who has made himself impervious to the divine by the habitual craving for intensifications of his own separateness and selfhood. It is because of this that the saints are able to exercise authority, all the greater for being entirely non-compulsive, over their fellow-beings. They 'transfer merit' to those who are in need of it; but that which converts the victims of self-will and puts them on the path of liberation is not the merit of the saintly individual - a merit that consists in his having made himself capable of eternal Reality, as a pipe, by being cleaned out, is made capable of water; it is rather the divine charge he carries, the eternal Reality for which he has become the conduit. And similarly, in vicarious suffering, it is not the actual pains experienced by the saint which are redemptive - for to believe that God is angry at sin and that his anger cannot be propitiated except by the offer of a certain sum of pain is to blaspheme against the divine Nature. No, what saves is the gift from beyond the temporal order, brought to those imprisoned in selfhood by these selfless and God-filled persons, who have been ready to accept suffering, in order to help their fellows. The Bodhisattva's vow is a promise to forgo the

immediate fruits of enlightenment and to accept rebirth and its inevitable concomitants, pain and death, again and again, until such time as, thanks to his labours and the graces of which, being selfless, he is the channel, all sentient beings shall have come to final and complete deliverance.

I saw a mass of matter of a dull gloomy colour between the North and the East, and was informed that this mass was human beings, in as great misery as they could be, and live; and that I was mixed up with them and henceforth I must not consider myself as a distinct or separate being.

John Woolman

Why must the righteous and the innocent endure undeserved suffering? For anyone who conceives of human individuals as Hume conceived of events and things, as ‘loose and separate,’ the question admits of no acceptable answer. But, in fact, human individuals are not loose and separate, and the only reason why we think they are is our own wrongly interpreted self-interest. We want to ‘do what we damned well like,’ to have ‘a good time’ and no responsibilities. Consequently, we find it convenient to be misled by the inadequacies of language and to believe (not always, of course, but just when it suits us) that things, persons and events arc as completely distinct and separate one from another as the words by means of which we think about them. The truth is, of course, that we are all organically related to God, to Nature and to our fellowmen. If every human being were constantly and consciously in a proper relationship with his divine, natural and social environments there would be only so much suffering as Creation makes inevitable. But actually most human beings arc chronically in an improper relation to God, Nature and some at least of their fellows. The results of these wrong relationships are manifest on the social level as wars, revolutions, exploitation and disorder; on the natural level, as waste and exhaustion of irreplaceable resources; on the biological level, as degenerative diseases and the deterioration of racial stocks; on the moral level, as an overweening bumptiousness; and on the spiritual level, as blindness to divine

Reality and complete ignorance of the reason and purpose of human existence. In such circumstances it would be extraordinary if the innocent and righteous did not suffer-just as it would be extraordinary if the innocent kidneys and the righteous heart were not to suffer for the sins of a licorous palate and overloaded stomach, sins, we may add, imposed upon those organs by the will of the gluttonous individual to whom they belong, as he himself belongs to a society which other individuals, his contemporaries and predecessors, have built up into a vast and enduring incarnation of disorder, inflicting suffering upon its members and infecting them with its own ignorance and wickedness. The righteous man can escape suffering only by accepting it and passing beyond it; and he can accomplish this only by being converted from righteousness to total selflessness and God-centredness, by ceasing to be just a Pharisee, or good citizen, and becoming ‘perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ The difficulties in the way of such a transfiguration are, obviously, enormous. But of those who ‘speak with authority,’ who has ever said that the road to complete deliverance was easy or the gate anything but ‘straight and narrow’?

18. Faith

THE WORD 'FAITH' has a variety of meanings, which it is important to distinguish. In some contexts it is used as a synonym for 'trust,' as when we say that we have faith in Dr X's diagnostic skill or in lawyer Y's integrity. Analogous to this is our 'faith' in authority - the belief that what certain persons say about certain subjects is likely, because of their special qualifications, to be true. On other occasions 'faith' stands for belief in propositions which we have not had occasion to verify for ourselves, but which we know that we could verify if we had the inclination, the opportunity and the necessary capacities. In this sense of the word we have 'faith,' even though we may never have been to Australia, that there is such a creature as a duck-billed platypus; we have 'faith' in the atomic theory even though we may never have performed the experiments on which that theory rests, and be incapable of understanding the mathematics by which it is supported. And finally there is the 'faith,' which is a belief in propositions which we know we cannot verify, even if we should desire to do so - propositions such as those of the Athanasian Creed or those which constitute the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This kind of 'faith' is defined by the Scholastics as an act of the intellect moved to assent by the will.

Faith in the first three senses of the word plays a very important part, not only in the activities of everyday life, but even in those of pure and applied science. *Credo ut inlelligam* - and also, we should add, *ut agam* and *ut vivant.* Faith is a pre-condition of all systematic knowing, all purposive doing and all decent living. Societies are held together, not primarily by the fear of the many for the coercive power of the few, but by a widespread faith in the other fellow's decency. Such a faith tends to create its own object, while the widespread mutual mistrust, due, for example, to war or domestic dissension, creates the object of mistrust. Passing now from the moral to the intellectual sphere, we find faith

lying at the root of all organized thinking. Science and technology could not exist unless we had faith in the reliability of the universe - unless, in Clerk Maxwell's words, we implicitly believed that the book of Nature is really a book and not a magazine, a coherent work of art and not a hodge-podge of mutually irrelevant snippets. To this general faith in the reasonableness and trustworthiness of the world the searcher after truth must add two kinds of special faith - faith in the authority of qualified experts, sufficient to permit him to take their word for statements which he personally has not verified; and faith in his own working hypotheses, sufficient to induce him to test his provisional beliefs by means of appropriate action. This action may confirm the belief which inspired it. Alternatively it may bring proof that the original working hypothesis was ill founded, in which case it will have to be modified until it becomes comformable to the facts and so passes from the realm of faith to that of knowledge.

The fourth kind of faith is the thing which is commonly called 'religious faith.' The usage is justifiable, not because the other kinds of faith are not fundamental in religion just as they are in secular affairs, but because this willed assent to propositions which are known to be unverifiable occurs in religion, and only in religion, as a characteristic addition to faith as trust, faith in authority and faith in unverified but verifiable propositions. This is the kind of faith which, according to Christian theologians, justifies and saves. In its extreme and most uncompromising form, such a doctrine can be very dangerous. Here, for example, is a passage from one of Luther's letters. *Esto peccator, et pecca fortiter; sed fortius crede et gaude in Christo, qui victor est peccati, mortis et mundi. Peccandum est quam diu sic sumus; vita haec non est habitatio justitiae.* ('Be a sinner and sin strongly; but yet more strongly believe and rejoice in Christ, who is the conqueror of sin, death and the world. So long as we are as we are, there must be sinning; this life is not the dwelling place of righteousness.') To the danger that faith in the doctrine of justification by faith may serve as an excuse for and even an invitation to sin must be added another danger, namely, that the faith which is supposed to save may be faith in propositions not merely

unverifiable, but repugnant to reason and the moral sense, and entirely at variance with the findings of those who have fulfilled the conditions of spiritual insight into the Nature of Things. ‘This is the acme of faith,’ says Luther in his *De Servo Arbilrio,* ‘to believe that God who saves so few and condemns so many, is merciful; that He is just who, at his own pleasure, has made us necessarily doomed to damnation, so that He seems to delight in the torture of the wretched and to be more deserving of hate than of love. If by any effort of reason I could conceive how God, who shows so much anger and harshness, could be merciful and just, there would be no need of faith.’ Revelation (which, when it is genuine, is simply the record of the immediate experience of those who are pure enough in heart and poor enough in spirit to be able to see God) says nothing at all of these hideous doctrines, to which the will forces the quite naturally and rightly reluctant intellect to give assent. Such notions arc the product, not of the insight of saints, but of the busy phantasy of jurists, who were so far from having transcended selfness and the prejudices of education that they had the folly and presumption to interpret the universe in terms of the Jewish and Roman law with which they happened to be familiar. ‘Woe unto you lawyers,’ said Christ. The denunciation was prophetic and for all time.

The core and spiritual heart of all the higher religions is the Perennial Philosophy; and the Perennial Philosophy can be assented to and acted upon without resort to the kind of faith about which Luther was writing in the foregoing passages. There must, of course, be faith as trust - for confidence in one’s fellows is the beginning of charity towards men, and confidence not only in the material, but also the moral and spiritual reliability of the universe, is the beginning of charity or love-knowledge in relation to God. There must also be faith in authority - the authority of those whose selflessness has qualified them to know the spiritual Ground of all being by direct acquaintance as well as by report. And finally there must be faith in such propositions about Reality as are enunciated by philosophers in the light of genuine revelation-propositions which the believer knows that he can, if he is prepared to fulfil the necessary conditions, verify for himself. But, so long as the Perennial Philosophy is

accepted in its essential simplicity, there is no need of willed assent to propositions known in advance to be unverifiable. Here it is necessary to add that such unverifiable propositions may become verifiable to the extent that intense faith affects the psychic substratum and so creates an existence, whose derived objectivity can actually be discovered 'out there.' Let us, however, remember that an existence which derives its objectivity from the mental activity of those who intensely believe in it cannot possibly be the spiritual Ground of the world, and that a mind busily engaged in the voluntary and intellectual activity, which is 'religious faith,' cannot possibly be in the state of selflessness and alert passivity which is the necessary condition of the unitive knowledge of the Ground. That is why the Buddhists affirm that 'loving faith leads to heaven; but obedience to the Dharma leads to Nirvana.' Faith in the existence and power of any supernatural entity which is less than ultimate spiritual Reality, and in any form of worship that falls short of self-naughting, will certainly, if the object of faith is intrinsically good, result in improvement of character, and probably in posthumous survival of the improved personality under 'heavenly' conditions. But this personal survival within what is still the temporal order is not the eternal life of timeless union with the Spirit. This eternal life 'stands in the knowledge' of the Godhead, not in faith in anything less than the Godhead.

The immortality attained through the acquisition of any objective condition (e g., the condition - merited through good works, which have been inspired by love of, and faith in, something less than the supreme Godhead - of being united in act to what is worshipped) is liable to end; for it is distinctly stated in the Scriptures that *karma* is never the cause of emancipation.

Shankara

Karma is the causal sequence in time, from which we are delivered solely by 'dying to' the temporal self and becoming united with the eternal, which is beyond time and cause. For 'as to the notion of a First Cause, or a *Causa Sui*' (to quote the words of an eminent theologian and philosopher, Dr F. R. Tennant), 'we have, on the one hand, to bear in mind that we refute ourselves in trying to

establish it by extension of the application of the causal category, for causality when universalized contains a contradiction; and, on the other, to remember that the ultimate Ground simply “is.”’ Only when the individual also ‘simply is,’ by reason of his union through love-knowledge with the Ground, can there be any question of complete and eternal liberation.

19. God is not mocked

WHY HAST THOU said, ‘I have sinned so much, And God in His mercy has not punished my sins’?

How many times do I smite thee, and thou knowest not!

Thou art bound in my chains from head to foot.

On thy heart is rust on rust collected So that thou art blind to divine mysteries.

When a man is stubborn and follows evil practices, He casts dust in the eyes of his discernment.

Old shame for sin and calling on God quit him; Dust five layers deep settles on his mirror, Rust spots begin to gnaw his iron, The colour of his jewel grows less and less.

Julal-uddin Rumi

If there is freedom (and even Determinists consistently act as if they were certain of it) and if (as everyone who has qualified himself to talk about the subject has always been convinced) there is a spiritual Reality, which it is the final end and purpose of consciousness to know; then all life is in the nature of an intelligence test, and the higher the level of awareness and the greater the potentialities of the creature, the more searchingly difficult will be the questions asked. For, in Bagehot’s words, ‘we could not be what we ought to be, if we lived in the sort of universe we should expect... A latent Providence, a confused life, an odd material world, an existence broken short in the midst and on a sudden, are not real difficulties, but real helps; for they, or something like them, are essential conditions of a moral life in a subordinate being.’ Because we are free, it is possible for us to answer life’s questions either well or badly. If we

answer them badly, we shall bring down upon ourselves self-stultification. Most often this self-stultification will take subtle and not immediately detectable forms, as when our failure to answer properly makes it impossible for us to realize the higher potentialities of our being. Sometimes, on the contrary, the self-stultification is manifest on the physical level, and may involve not only individuals as individuals, but entire societies, which go down in catastrophe or sink more slowly into decay. The giving of correct answers is rewarded primarily by spiritual growth and progressive realization of latent potentialities, and secondarily (when circumstances make it possible) by the adding of all the rest to the realized kingdom of God. *Karma* exists; but its equivalence of act and award is not always obvious and material, as the earlier Buddhist and Hebrew writers ingenuously imagined that it should be. The bad man in prosperity may, all unknown to himself, be darkened and corroded with inward rust, while the good man under afflictions may be in the rewarding process of spiritual growth. No, God is not mocked; but also, let us always remember, He is not understood.

Perd nella giustizia sempitema la vista che riceve vostro mondo, com'occhioper lo mar, dentro s'interna, chè, benchi dalla proda veggia il fonda, in pelago nol vede, e non di meno è Ii, ma cela lui l'esser profondo.

('Wherefore, in the eternal justice, such sight as your earth receives is engulfed, like the eye in the sea; for though by the shore it can see the bottom, in the ocean it cannot see it; yet none the less the bottom is there, but the depth hides it.') Love is the plummet as well as the astrolabe of God's mysteries, and the pure in heart can see far down into the depths of the divine justice, to catch a glimpse, not indeed of the details of the cosmic process, but at least of its principle and nature. These insights permit them to say, with Juliana of Norwich, that all shall be well, that, in spite of time, all *is* well, and that the problem of evil has its solution in the eternity, which men can, if they so desire, experience, but can never describe.

But, you urge, if men sin from the necessity of their nature, they are excusable; you do not explain, however, what you would infer from this fact. Is

it perhaps that God will be prevented from growing angry with them? Or is it rather that they have deserved that blessedness which consists in the knowledge and love of God? If you mean the former, I altogether agree that God does not grow angry and that all things happen by his decree. But I deny that, for this reason, all men ought to be happy. Surely men may be excusable and nevertheless miss happiness, and be tormented in many ways. A horse is excusable for being a horse and not a man; but nevertheless he must needs be a horse and not a man. One who goes mad from the bite of a dog is excusable; yet it is right that he should die of suffocation. So, too, he who cannot rule his passions, nor hold them in check out of respect for the law, while he may be excusable on the ground of weakness, is incapable of enjoying conformity of spirit and knowledge and love of God; and he is lost inevitably.

Spinoza

Horizontally and vertically, in physical and temperamental kind as well as in degree of inborn ability and native goodness, human beings differ profoundly one from another. Why? To what end and for what past causes? ‘Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.’ The man of science, on the contrary, would say that the responsibility rested with the parents who had caused the blindness of their child either by having the wrong kind of genes, or by contracting some avoidable disease. Hindu or Buddhist believers in reincarnation according to the laws of *karma* (the destiny which, by their actions, individuals and groups of individuals impose upon themselves, one another and their descendants) would give another answer and say that, owing to what he had done in previous existences, the blind man had predestined himself to choose the sort of parents from whom he would have to inherit blindness.

These three answers are not mutually incompatible. The parents are responsible for making the child what, by heredity and upbringing, he turns out

to be. The soul or character incarnated in the child is of such a nature, owing to past behaviour, that it is forced to select those particular parents. And collaborating with the material and efficient causes is the final cause, the teleological pull from in front. This teleological pull is a pull from the divine Ground of things acting upon that part of the timeless now, which a finite mind must regard as the future. Men sin and their parents sin; but the works of God have to be manifested in every sentient being (either by exceptional ways, as in this case of supernormal healing, or in the ordinary course of events) - have to be manifested again and again, with the infinite patience of eternity, until at last the creature makes itself fit for the perfect and consummate manifestation of unitive knowledge, of the state of not I, but God in me.'

'*Karma,*' according to the Hindus, 'never dispels ignorance, being under the same category with it. Knowledge alone dispels ignorance, just as light alone dispels darkness.'

In other words, the causal process takes place within time and cannot possibly result in deliverance from time. Such a deliverance can only be achieved as a consequence of the intervention of eternity in the temporal domain; and eternity cannot intervene unless the individual will makes a creative act of self-denial, thus producing, as it were, a vacuum into which eternity can flow. To suppose that the causal process in time can of itself result in deliverance from time is like supposing that water will rise into a space from which the air has not been previously exhausted.

The right relation between prayer and conduct is not that conduct is supremely important and prayer may help it, but that prayer is supremely important and conduct tests it.

Archbishop Temple The aim and purpose of human life is the unitive knowledge-of God. Among the indispensable means to that end is right conduct, and by the degree and kind of virtue achieved, the degree of liberating knowledge may be assessed and its quality evaluated. In a word, the tree is known by its fruits; God is not mocked.

Religious beliefs and practices are certainly not the only factors determining the behaviour of a given society. But, no less certainly, they are among the determining factors. At least to some extent, the collective conduct of a nation is a test of the religion prevailing within it, a criterion by which we may legitimately judge the doctrinal validity of that religion and its practical efficiency in helping individuals to advance towards the goal of human existence.

In the past the nations of Christendom persecuted in the name of their faith, fought religious wars and undertook crusades against infidels and heretics; today they have ceased to be Christian in anything but name, and the only religion they profess is some brand of local idolatry, such as nationalism, state-worship, boss-worship and revolutionism. From these fruits of (among other things) historic Christianity, what inferences can we draw as to the nature of the tree? The answer has already been given in the section on ‘Time and Eternity.’ If Christians used to be persecutors and are now no longer Christians, the reason is that the Perennial Philosophy incorporated in their religion was overlaid by wrong beliefs that led inevitably, since God is never mocked, to wrong actions. These wrong beliefs had one element in common - namely, an overvaluation of happenings in time and an under-valuation of the everlasting, timeless fact of eternity. Thus, belief in the supreme importance for salvation of remote historical events resulted in bloody disputes over the interpretation of the not very adequate and often conflicting records. And belief in the sacredness, nay, the actual divinity, of the ecclesiastico-politico-financial organizations, which developed after the fall of the Roman Empire, not only added bitterness to the all too human struggles for their control, but served to rationalize and justify the worst excesses of those who fought for place, wealth and power within and through the Church. But this is not the whole story. The same overvaluation of events in time, which once caused Christians to persecute and fight religious wars, led at last to a widespread indifference to a religion that, in spite of everything, was still in part preoccupied with eternity. But nature abhors a vacuum, and into the yawning void of this indifference there flowed the tide of

political idolatry. The practical consequences of such idolatry, as we now see, arc total war, revolution and tyranny.

Meanwhile, on the credit side of the balance sheet, we find such items as the following: an immense increase in technical and governmental efficiency and an immense increase in scientific knowledge - each of them a result of the general shift of Western man’s attention from the eternal to the temporal order, first within the sphere of Christianity and then, inevitably, outside it.

20. Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum

WOULD YOU KNOW whence it is that so many false spirits have appeared in the world, who have deceived themselves and others with false fire and false light, laying claim to information, illumination and openings of the divine Life, particularly to do wonders under extraordinary calls from God? It is this: they have turned to God without turning from themselves; would be alive to God before they are dead to their own nature. Now religion in the hands of self, or corrupt nature, serves only to discover vices of a worse kind than in nature left to itself. Hence are all the disorderly passions of religious men, which burn in a worse flame than passions only employed about worldly matters; pride, selfexaltation, hatred and persecution, under a cloak of religious zeal, will sanctify actions which nature, left to itself, would be ashamed to own.

William Law 'Turning to God without turning from self - the formula is absurdly simple; and yet, simple as it is, it explains all the follies and iniquities committed in the name of religion. Those who turn to God without turning from themselves are tempted to evil in several characteristic and easily recognizable ways. They are tempted, first of all, to practise magical rites, by means of which they hope to compel God to answer their petitions and, in general, to serve their private or collective ends. All the ugly business of sacrifice, incantation and what Jesus called 'vain repetition' is a product of this wish to treat God as a means to indefinite self-aggrandizement, rather than as an end to be reached through total self-denial. Next, they arc tempted to use the name of God to justify what they do in pursuit of place, power and wealth. And because they believe themselves to have divine justification for their actions, they proceed, with a good conscience, to perpetrate abominations, 'which nature, left to itself, would be ashamed to own.' Throughout recorded history an incredible sum of mischief has been done by ambitious idealists, self-deluded by their own

verbiage and a lust for power into a conviction that they were acting for the highest good of their fellow-men. In the past, the justification for such wickedness was ‘God’ or ‘the Church,’ or ‘the True Faith’; today idealists kill and torture and exploit in the name of ‘the Revolution,’

‘the New Order,’

‘the World of the Common Man,’ or simply ‘the Future.’ Finally there are the temptations which arise when the falsely religious begin to acquire the powers which are the fruit of their pious and magical practices. For, let there be no mistake, sacrifice, incantation and ‘vain repetition’ actually do produce fruits, especially when practised in conjunction with physical austerities. Men who turn towards God without turning away from themselves do not, of course, reach God; but if they devote themselves energetically enough to their pseudo-religion, they will get results. Some of these results are doubtless the product of auto-suggestion. (It was through ‘vain repetition’ that Coué got his patients to cure themselves of their diseases.) Others are due, apparently, to that ‘something not ourselves’ in the psychic medium - that something which makes, not necessarily for righteousness, but always for power. Whether this something is a piece of second-hand objectivity, projected into the medium by the individual worshipper and his fellows and predecessors; whether it is a piece of first-hand objectivity, corresponding, on the psychic level, to the data of the material universe; or whether it is a combination of both these things, it is impossible to determine. All that need be said in this place is that people who turn towards God without turning from themselves often seem to acquire a knack of getting their petitions answered and sometimes develop considerable supernormal powers, such as those of psychic healing and extra-sensory perception. But, it may be asked: Is it necessarily a good thing to be able to get one’s petitions answered in the way one wants them to be? And how far is it spiritually profitable to be possessed of these ‘miraculous’ powers? These are questions which were considered in the chapter on ‘Prayer’ and will be further discussed in the chapter on ‘The Miraculous.’

The Grand Augur, in his ceremonial robes, approached the shambles and thus addressed the pigs. ‘How can you object to die? I shall fatten you for three months. I shall discipline myself for ten days and fast for three. I shall strew fine grass and place you bodily upon a carved sacrificial dish. Does not this satisfy you?’

Then, speaking from the pigs’ point of view, he continued: ‘It is better perhaps, after all, to live on bran and escape from the shambles.’

‘But then,’ he added, speaking from his own point of view, ‘to enjoy honour when alive, one would readily die on a war-shield or in the headsman’s basket.’

So he rejected the pigs’ point of view and adopted his own point of view. In what sense, then, was he different from the pigs?

Chuang Tzu Anyone who sacrifices anything but his own person or his own interests is on exactly the same level as Chuang Tzu’s pigs. The pigs seek their own advantage inasmuch as they prefer life and bran to honour and the shambles; the sacrifices seek their own advantage inasmuch as they prefer the magical, God-constraining death of pigs to the death of their own passions and self-will. And what applies to sacrifice, applies equally to incantations, rituals and vain repetitions, when these are used (as they all too frequently are, even in the higher religions) as a form of compulsive magic. Rites and vain repetitions have a legitimate place in religion as aids to recollectedness, reminders of truth momentarily forgotten in the turmoil of worldly distractions. When spoken or performed as a kind of magic, their use is either completely pointless; or else (and this is worse) it may have ego-enhancing results, which do not in any way contribute to the attainment of man’s final end.

The vestments of Isis are variegated to represent the cosmos; that of Osiris is white, symbolizing the Intelligible Light beyond the cosmos.

Plutarch So long as the symbol remains, in the worshipper’s mind, firmly attached and instrumental to that which is symbolized, the use of such things as white and variegated vestments can do no harm. But if the symbol breaks loose, as it were, and becomes an end in itself, then we have, at the best, a futile

aestheticism and sentimentality, at the worst a form of psychologically effective magic.

All externals must yield to love; for they are for the sake of love, and not love for them.

Hans Denk Ceremonies in themselves are not sin; but whoever supposes that he can attain to life either by baptism or by partaking of bread is still in superstition.

Hans Denk John Everard If you be always handling the letter of the Word, always licking the letter, always chewing upon that, what great thing do you? No marvel you are such starvelings.

While the Right Law still prevailed, innumerable were the converts who fathomed the depths of the Dharma by merely listening to half a stanza or even to a single phrase of the Buddha's teaching. But as we come to the age of similitude and to these latter days of Buddhism, we are indeed far away from the sage. People find themselves drowning in a sea of letters; they do not know how to get at the one substance which alone is truth. This was what caused the appearance of the Fathers (of Zen Buddhism) who, pointing directly at the human mind, told us to see here the ultimate ground of all things and thereby to attain Buddhahood. This is known as a special transmission outside the scriptural teaching. If one is endowed with superior talents or a special sharpness of mind, a gesture or a word will suffice to give one an immediate knowledge of the truth. Hence, since they were advocates of 'special transmission,' Ummon treated the (historical) Buddha with the utmost irreverence and Yakusan forbade his followers even to read the sutras.

Zen is the name given to this branch of Buddhism, which keeps itself away from the Buddha. It is also called the mystical branch, because it does not adhere to the literal meaning of the sutras. It is for this reason that those who blindly follow the steps of Buddha are sure to deride Zen, while those who have no liking for the letter are naturally inclined towards the mystical approach. The followers of the two schools know how to shake the head at each other, but fail to realize that they are after all complementary. Is not Zen one of the six virtues

of perfectior? If so, how can it conflict with the teachings of the Buddha? In my view, Zen is the outcome of the Buddha's teaching, and the mystical issues from the letters. There is no reason why a man should shun Zen because of the Buddha's teaching; nor need we disregard the letters on account of the mystical teachings of Zen... Students of scriptural Buddhism run the risk of becoming sticklers for the scriptures, the real meaning of which they fail to understand. By such men ultimate reality is never grasped, and for them Zen would mean salvation. Whereas those who study Zen are too apt to run into the habit of making empty talks and practising sophistry. They fail to understand the significance of letters. To save them, the study of Buddhist scriptures is recommended. It is only when these one-sided views are mutually corrected that there is a perfect appreciation of the Buddha's teaching.

Chiang Chih-chi

It would be hard to find a better summing up of the conclusions, to which any spiritually and psychologically realistic mind must sooner or later come, than the foregoing paragraphs written in the eleventh century by one of the masters of Zen Buddhism.

The extract that follows is a moving protest against the crimes and follies perpetrated in the name of religion by those sixteenth-century Reformers who had turned to God without turning away from themselves and who were therefore far more keenly interested in the temporal aspects of historic Christianity - the ecclesiastical organization, the logic-chopping, the letter of Scripture - than in the Spirit who must be worshipped in spirit, the eternal Reality in the selfless knowledge of whom stands man's eternal life. Its author was Sebastian Castellio, who was at one time Calvin's favourite disciple, but who parted company with his master when the latter burned Servetus for heresy against his own heresy. Fortunately Castellio was living in Basel when he made his plea for charity and common decency; penned in Geneva, it would have earned him torture and death.

If you, illustrious Prince (the words were addressed to the Duke of Wurtemberg) had informed your subjects that you were coming to visit them at an unnamed time, and had requested them to be prepared in white garments to meet you at your coming, what would you do if on arrival you should find that, instead of robing themselves in white, they had spent their time in violent debate about your person - some insisting that you were in France, others that you were in Spain; some declaring that you would come on horseback, others that you would come by chariot; some holding that you would come with great pomp and others that you would come without any train or following? And what especially would you say if they debated not only with words, but with blows of fist and sword strokes, and if some succeeded in killing and destroying others who differed from them? 'He will come on horseback.'

'No, he will not; it will be by chariot.' 'You lie.'

'I do *not; you* are the liar.'

'Take that' — a blow with the fist. 'Take *that*' - a sword-thrust through the body. Prince, what would you think of such citizens? Christ asked us to put on the white robes of a pure and holy life; but what occupies our thoughts? We dispute not only of the way to Christ, but of his relation to God the Father, of the Trinity, of predestination, of free will, of the nature of God, of the angels, of the condition of the soul after death - of a multitude of matters that are not essential to salvation; matters, moreover, which can never be known until our hearts are pure; for they are things which must be spiritually perceived.

Sebastian Castellio Europe got the kind of theology it liked. But it also got, along with other unanticipated by-products, the Thirty Years War, capitalism and the first rudiments of modern Germany. 'If we wish,' Dean Inge has recently written, 'to find a scapegoat on whose shoulders may we lay the miseries which Germany has brought upon the world... I am more and more convinced that the worst evil genius of that country is not Hitler or Bismarck or Frederick the Great, but Martin Luther... It (Lutheranism) worships a God who is neither just nor merciful... The Law of Nature, which ought to be the court of appeal against unjust authority, is identified (by Luther) with the existing order of society, to

which absolute obedience is due.’ And so on. Right belief is the first branch of the Eightfold Path leading to deliverance; the root and primal cause of bondage is wrong belief, or ignorance — an ignorance, let us remember, which is never completely invincible, but always, in the last analysis, a matter of will. If we don’t know, it is because we find it more convenient not to know. Original ignorance is the same thing as original sin.

21. Idolatry

TO EDUCATED PERSONS the more primitive kinds of idolatry have ceased to be attractive. They find it easy to resist the temptation to believe that particular natural objects are gods, or that certain symbols and images are the very forms of divine entities and as such must be worshipped and propitiated. True, much fetishistic superstition survives even today. But though it survives, it is not considered respectable. Like drinking and prostitution, the primitive forms of idolatry are tolerated, but not approved. Their place in the accredited hierarchy of values is among the lowest.

How different is the case with the developed and more modern forms of idolatry! These have achieved not merely survival, but the highest degree of respectability. They are recommended by men of science as an up-to-date substitute for genuine religion and by many professional religious teachers are equated with the worship of God. All this may be deplorable; but it is not in the least surprising. Our education disparages the more primitive forms of idolatry; but at the same time it disparages, or at the best it ignores, the Perennial Philosophy and the practice of spirituality. In place of mumbo-jumbo at the bottom and of the immanent and transcendent Godhead at the top, it sets up, as objects of admiration, faith and worship, a pantheon of strictly human ideas and ideals. In academic circles and among those who have been subjected to higher education, there are few fetishists and few devout contemplatives; but the enthusiastic devotees of some form of political or social idolatry arc as common as blackberries. Significantly enough, I have observed, when making use of university libraries, that books on spiritual religion were taken out much less frequently than was the case in public libraries, patronized in the main by men and women who had not enjoyed the advantages, or suffered under the handicaps, of prolonged academic instruction.

The many varieties of higher idolatry may be classed under three main heads: technological, political and moral. Technological idolatry is the most ingenuous and primitive of the three; for its devotees, like those of the lower idolatry, believe that their redemption and liberation depend upon material objects - in this case gadgets. Technological idolatry is the religion whose doctrines are promulgated, explicitly or by implication, in the advertisement pages of our newspapers and magazines - the source, we may add parenthetically, from which millions of men, women and children in the capitalistic countries derive their working philosophy of life. In Soviet Russia too, technological idolatry was strenuously preached, becoming, during the years of that country's industrialization, a kind of state religion. So whole-hearted is the modern faith in technological idols that (despite all the lessons of mechanized warfare) it is impossible to discover in the popular thinking of our time any trace of the ancient and profoundly realistic doctrine of *hubris* and inevitable *nemesis.* There is a very general belief that, where gadgets are concerned, we can get something for nothing - can enjoy all the advantages of an elaborate, top-heavy and constantly advancing technology without having to pay for them by any compensating disadvantages.

Only a little less ingenuous are the political idolaters. For the worship of redemptive gadgets these have substituted the worship of redemptive social and economic organizations. Impose the right kind of organizations upon human beings, and all their problems, from sin and unhappiness to nationalism and war, will automatically disappear. Most political idolaters are also technological idolaters - and this in spite of the fact that the two pseudoreligions are finally incompatible, since technological progress at its present rate makes nonsense of any political blue-print, however ingeniously drawn, within a matter, not of generations, but of years and sometimes even of months. Further, the human being is, 'unfortunately, a creature endowed with free will; and if, for any reason, individuals do not choose to make it work, even the best organization will not produce the results it was intended to produce.

The moral idolaters are realists inasmuch as they see that gadgets and organizations are not enough to guarantee the triumph of virtue and the increase of happiness, and that the individuals who compose societies and use machines are the arbiters who finally determine whether there shall be decency in personal relationship, order or disorder in society. Material and organizational instruments are indispensable, and a good tool is preferable to a bad one. But in listless or malicious hands the finest instrument is either useless or a means to evil.

The moralists cease to be realistic and commit idolatry inasmuch as they worship, not God, but their own ethical ideals, inasmuch as they treat virtue as an end in itself and not as the necessary condition of the knowledge and love of God - a knowledge and love without which that virtue will never be made perfect or even socially effective.

What follows is an extract from a very remarkable letter written in 1836 by Thomas Arnold to his old pupil and future biographer, A. P. Stanley. ‘Fanaticism is idolatry; and it has the moral evil of idolatry in it; that is, a fanatic worships something which is the creation of his own desire, and thus even his self-devotion in support of it is only an apparent self-devotion; for in fact it is making the parts of his nature or his mind, which he least values, offer sacrifice to that which he most values. The moral fault, as it appears to me, is the idolatry - the setting up of some idea which is most kindred to our own minds, and the putting it in the place of Christ, who alone cannot be made an idol and inspire idolatry, because He combines all ideas of perfection and exhibits them in their just harmony and combination. Now in my own mind, by its natural tendency - that is, taking my mind at its best - truth and justice would be the idols I should follow; and they would be idols, for they would not supply *all* the food which the mind wants, and whilst worshipping them, reverence and humility and tenderness might very likely be forgotten. But Christ Himself includes at once truth and justice and all these other qualities too... Narrow-mindedness tends to wickedness, because it does not extend its watchfulness to every part of our moral nature, and the neglect fosters wickedness in the parts so neglected.’

As a piece of psychological analysis this is admirable. Its only defect is one of omission; for it neglects to take into account those influxes from the eternal order into the temporal, which are called grace or inspiration. Grace and inspiration arc given when, and to the extent to which, a human being gives up self-will and abandons himself, moment by moment, through constant recollectedness and non-attachment, to the will of God. As well as the animal and spiritual graces, whose source is the divine Nature of Things, there are human pseudo-graces - such as, for example, the accessions of strength and virtue that follow self-devotion to some form of political or moral idolatry. To distinguish the true grace from the false is often difficult; but as time and circumstances reveal the full extent of their consequences on the soul, discrimination becomes possible even to observers having no special gifts of insight. Where the grace is genuinely ‘supernatural,’ an amelioration in one aspect of the total personality is not paid for by atrophy or deterioration elsewhere. The virtue which is accompanied and perfected by the love and knowledge of God is something quite different from the ‘righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees’ which, for Christ, was among the worst of moral evils. Hardness, fanatisicm, uncharitableness and spiritual pride — these are the ordinary byproducts of a course of stoical self-improvement by means of personal effort, either unassisted or, if assisted, seconded only by the pseudo-graces which are given when the individual devotes himself to the achievement of an end which is not his true end, when the goal is not God, but merely a magnified projection of his own favourite ideas or moral excellences. The idolatrous worship of ethical values in and for themselves defeats its own object — and defeats it not only because, as Arnold insists, there is a lack of allround development, but also and above all because even the highest forms of moral idolatry arc God-eclipsing and therefore guarantee the idolater against the enlightening and liberating knowledge of Reality.

22. Emotionalism

YOU HAVE SPENT all your life in the belief that you are wholly devoted to others, and never self-seeking. Nothing so feeds self-conceit as this sort of internal testimony that one is quite free from self-love and always generously devoted to one's neighbours. But all this devotion that seems to be for others is really for yourself. Your self-love reaches to the point of perpetual self-congratulation that you are free from it; all your sensitiveness is lest you might not be fully satisfied with self; this is at the root of all your scruples. It is the 'I' which makes you so keen and sensitive. You want God as well as man to be always satisfied with you, and you want to be satisfied with yourself in all your dealings with God.

Fénelon Besides, you are not accustomed to be contented with a simple good will — your self-love wants a lively emotion, a reassuring pleasure, some kind of charm or excitement. You are too much used to be guided by imagination and to suppose that your mind and will are inactive, unless you are conscious of their workings. And thus you are dependent upon a kind of excitement similar to that which the passions arouse, or theatrical representations. By dint of refinement you fall into the opposite extreme — a real coarseness of imagination. Nothing is more opposed, not only to the life of faith, but also to true wisdom. There is no more dangerous illusion than the fancies by which people try to avoid illusion. It is imagination which leads us astray; and the certainty which we seek through imagination, feeling, and taste, is one of the most dangerous sources from which fanaticism springs. This is the gulf of vanity and corruption which God would make you discover in your heart; you must look upon it with the calm and simplicity belonging to true humility. It is mere self-love to be inconsolable at seeing one's own imperfections; but to stand face to face with them, neither

flattering nor tolerating them, seeking to correct oneself without becoming pettish - this is to desire what is good for its own sake, and for God's.

A letter from the Archbishop of Cambrai — what an event, what a signal honour! And yet it must have been with a certain trepidation that one broke the emblazoned seal. To ask for advice and a frank opinion of oneself from a man who combines the character of a saint with the talents of a Marcel Proust, is to ask for the severest kind of shock to one's self-esteem. And duly, in the most exquisitely lucid prose, the shock would be administered - and, along with the shock, the spiritual antidote to its excruciating consequences. Fénelon never hesitated to disintegrate a correspondent's complacent ego; but the disintegration was always performed with a view to reintegration on a higher, non-egotistic level.

This particular letter is not only an admirable piece of character analysis; it also contains some very interesting remarks on the subject of emotional excitement in its relation to the life of the spirit.

The phrase, 'religion of experience,' has two distinct and mutually incompatible meanings. There is the 'experience' of which the Perennial Philosophy treats - the direct apprehension of the divine Ground in an act of intuition possible, in its fullness, only to the selflessly pure in heart. And there is the 'experience' induced by revivalist sermons, impressive ceremonials, or the deliberate efforts of one's own imagination. This 'experience' is a state of emotional excitement — an excitement which may be mild and enduring or brief and epileptically violent, which is sometimes exultant in tone and sometimes despairing, which expresses itself here in song and dance, there in uncontrollable weeping. But emotional excitement, whatever its cause and whatever its nature, is always excitement of that individualized self, which must be died to by anyone who aspires to live to divine Reality. 'Experience' as emotion about God (the highest form of this kind of excitement) is incompatible with 'experience' as immediate awareness of God by a pure heart which has mortified even its most exalted emotions. That is why Fénelon, in the foregoing extract, insists upon the need for 'calm and simplicity,' why St François de Sales is never tired of

preaching the serenity which he himself so consistently practised, why all the Buddhist scriptures harp on tranquillity of mind as a necessary condition of deliverance. The peace that passes all understanding is one of the fruits of the spirit. But there is also the peace that does not pass understanding, the humbler peace of emotional self-control and self-denial; this is not a fruit of the spirit, but rather one of its indispensable roots.

The imperfect destroy true devotion, because they seek sensible sweetness in prayer.

St John of the Cross

The fly that touches honey cannot use its wings; so the soul that clings to spiritual sweetness ruins its freedom and hinders contemplation.

St John of the Cross

What is true of the sweet emotions is equally true of the bitter. For as some people enjoy bad health, so others enjoy a bad conscience. Repentance is *metanoia*, or ‘change of mind’; and without it there cannot be even a beginning of the spiritual life - for the life of the spirit is incompatible with the life of that ‘old man,’ whose acts, whose thoughts, whose very existence are obstructing evils which have to be repented. This necessary change of mind is normally accompanied by sorrow and self-loathing. But these emotions are not to be persisted in and must never be allowed to become a settled habit of remorse. In Middle’

English ‘remorse’ is rendered, with a literalness which to modern readers is at once startling and stimulating, as ‘again-bite.’ In this cannibalistic encounter, who bites whom? Observation and self-analysis provide the answer: the creditable aspects of the self bite the discreditable and are themselves bitten, receiving wounds that fester with incurable shame and despair. But, in Fénelon’s

words, ‘it is mere self-love to be inconsolable at seeing one’s own imperfections.’ Self-reproach is painful; but the very pain is a reassuring proof that the self is still intact; so long as attention is fixed on the delinquent ego, it cannot be fixed upon God and the ego (which lives upon attention and dies only when that sustenance is withheld) cannot be dissolved in the divine Light.

Eschew as though it were a hell the consideration of yourself and your offences. No one should ever think of these things except to humiliate himself and love Our Lord. It is enough to regard yourself *in general* as a sinner, even as there are many saints in heaven who were such.

Charles de Condren

Faults will turn to good, provided we use them to our own humiliation, without slackening in the effort to correct ourselves. Discouragement serves no possible purpose; it is simply the despair of wounded self-love. The real way of profiting by the humiliation of one’s own faults is to face them in their true hideousness, without ceasing to hope in God, while hoping nothing from self.

Fénelon

Came she (Mary Magdalene) down from the height of her desire for God into the depth of her sinful life, and searched in the foul stinking fen and dunghill of her soul? Nay, surely she did not do so. And why? Because God let her know by His grace in her soul that she should never so bring it about. For so might she sooner have raised in herself an ableness to have often sinned than have purchased by that work any plain forgiveness of all her sins.

The Cloud of Unknowing In the light of what has been said above, we can understand the peculiar spiritual dangers by which every kind of predominantly emotional religion is always menaced. A hell-fire faith that uses the theatrical techniques of revivalism in order to stimulate remorse and induce the crisis of

sudden conversion; a saviour cult that is for ever stirring up what St Bernard calls the *amor carnalis* or fleshly love of the Avatar and personal God; a ritualistic mystery-religion that generates high feelings of awe and reverence and aesthetic ecstasy by means of its sacraments and ceremonials, its music and its incense, its numinous darkness and sacred lights — in its own special way, each one of these runs the risk of becoming a form of psychological idolatry, in which God is identified with the ego's affective attitude towards God and finally the emotion becomes an end in itself, to be eagerly sought after and worshipped, as the addicts of a drug spend life in the pursuit of their artificial paradise. All this is obvious enough. But it is no less obvious that religions that make no appeal to the emotions have very few adherents. Moreover, when pseudoreligions with a strong emotional appeal make their appearance, they immediately win millions of enthusiastic devotees from among the masses to whom the real religions have ceased to have a meaning or to be a comfort. But whereas no adherent of a pseudoreligion (such as one of our current political idolatries, compounded of nationalism and revolutionism) can possibly go forward into the way of genuine spirituality, such a way always remains open to the adherents of even the most highly emotionalized varieties of genuine religion. Those who have actually followed this way to its end in the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground constitute a very small minority of the total. Many arc called; but, since few choose to be chosen, few are chosen. The rest, say the oriental exponents of the Perennial Philosophy, earn themselves another chance, in circumstances more or less propitious according to their deserts, to take the cosmic intelligence test. If they are 'saved,' their incomplete and undefinitive deliverance is into some paradisal state of freer personal existence, from which (directly or through further incarnations) they may go on to the final release into eternity. If they are 'lost,' their 'hell' is a temporal and temporary condition of thicker darkness and more oppressive bondage to self-will, the root and principle of all evil.

We see, then, that if it is persisted in, the way of emotional religion may lead, indeed, to a great good, but not to the greatest. But the emotional way opens into the way of unitive knowledge, and those who care to go on in this other way are

well prepared for their task if they have used the emotional approach without succumbing to the temptations which have beset them on the way. Only the perfectly selfless and enlightened can do good that does not, in some way or other, have to be paid for by actual or potential evils. The religious systems of the world have been built up, in the main, by men and women who were not completely selfless or enlightened. Hence all religions have had their dark and even frightful aspects, while the good they do is rarely gratuitous, but must, in most cases, be paid for, either on the nail or by instalments. The emotion-rousing doctrines and practices, which play so important a part in all the world's organized religions, are no exception to this rule. They do good, but not gratuitously. The price paid varies according to the nature of the individual worshippers. Some of these choose to wallow in emotionalism and, becoming idolaters of feeling, pay for the good of their religion by a spiritual evil that may actually outweigh that good. Others resist the temptation to self-enhancement and go forward to the mortification of self, including the selfs emotional side, and to the worship of God rather than of their own feelings and fancies about God. The further they go in this direction, the less they have to pay for the good which emotionalism brought them and which, but for emotionalism, most of them might never have had.

23. The Miraculous

REVELATIONS ARE THE aberration of faith; they are an amusement that spoils simplicity in relation to God, that embarrasses the soul and makes it swerve from its directness in relation to God. They distract the soul and occupy it with other things than God. Special illuminations, auditions, prophecies and the rest are marks of weakness in a soul that cannot support the assaults of temptation or of anxiety about the future and God's judgment upon it. Prophecies are also marks of creaturely curiosity in a soul to whom God is indulgent and to whom, as a father to his importunate child, he gives a few trifling sweetmeats to satisfy its appetite.

J.J. Olier

The slightest degree of sanctifying grace is superior to a miracle, which is supernatural only by reason of its cause, by its mode of production *(quoad modum)*, not by its intimate reality; the life restored to a corpse is only the natural life, low indeed in comparison with that of grace.

R. Garrigou-Lagrange

Can you walk on water? You have done no better than a straw. Can you fly in the air? You have done no better than a bluebottle. Conquer your heart; then you may become somebody.

Ansari of Herat

The abnormal bodily states, by which the immediate awareness of the divine Ground is often accompanied, arc not, of course, essential parts of that experience. Many mystics, indeed, deplored such things as being signs, not of divine grace, but of the body's weakness. To levitate, to go into trance, to lose the use of one's senses - in De Condren's words, this is 'to receive the effects of God and his holy communications in a very animal and carnal way.'

'One ounce of sanctifying grace,' he (St François de Sales) used to say, 'is worth more than a hundredweight of those graces which theologians call "gratuitous," among which is the gift of miracles. It is possible to receive such gifts and yet to be in mortal sin; nor are they necessary to salvation.

Jean Pierre Camus The Sufis regard miracles as'veils' intervening between the soul and God. The masters of Hindu spirituality urge their disciples to pay no attention to the *siddhis,* or psychic powers, which may come to them unsought, as a byproduct of one-pointed contemplation. The cultivation of these powers, they warn, distracts the soul from Reality and sets up insurmountable obstacles in the way of enlightenment and deliverance. A similar attitude is taken by the best Buddhist teachers, and in one of the Pali scriptures there is an anecdote recording the Buddha's own characteristically dry comment on a prodigious feat of levitation performed by one of his disciplies. 'This,' he said, 'will not conduce to the conversion of the unconverted, nor to the advantage of the converted.' Then he went back to talking about deliverance.

Because they know nothing of spirituality and regard the material world and their hypotheses about it as supremely significant, rationalists are anxious to convince themselves and others that miracles do not and cannot happen. Because they have had experience of the spiritual life and its byproducts, the exponents of the Perennial Philosophy are convinced that miracles do happen, but regard them as things of little importance, and that mainly negative and anti-spiritual.

The miracles which at present are in greatest demand, and of which there is the steadiest supply, are those of psychic healing. In what circumstances and to what extent the power of psychic healing should be used has been clearly indicated in the Gospel: 'Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy

sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed and walk?' If one can 'forgive sins,' one can safely use the gift of healing. But the forgiving of sins is possible, in its fullness, only to those who 'speak with authority,' in virtue of being selfless channels of the divine Spirit. To these theocentric saints the ordinary, unregenerate human being reacts with a mixture of love and awe - longing to be close to them and yet constrained by their very holiness to say, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.' Such holiness makes holy to the extent that the sins of those who approach it are forgiven and they are enabled to make a new start, to face the consequences of their past wrong-doings (for of course the consequences remain) in a new spirit that makes it possible for them to neutralize the evil or turn it into positive good. A less perfect kind of forgiveness can be bestowed by those who are not themselves outstandingly holy, but who speak with the delegated authority of an institution which the sinner believes to be in some way a channel of supernatural grace. In this case the contact between unregenerate soul and divine Spirit is not direct, but is mediated through the sinner's imagination.

Those who are holy in virtue of being selfless channels of the Spirit may practise psychic healing with perfect safety; for they will know which of the sick are ready to accept forgiveness along with the mere miracle of a bodily cure. Those who are not holy, but who can forgive sins in virtue of belonging to an institution which is believed to be a channel of grace, may also practise healing with a fair confidence that they will not do more harm than good. But unfortunately the knack of psychic healing seems in some persons to be inborn, while others can acquire it without acquiring the smallest degree of holiness. ('It is possible to receive such graces and yet be in mortal sin.') Such persons will use their knack indiscriminately, either to show off or for profit. Often they produce spectacular cures - but, lacking the power to forgive sins or even to understand the psychological correlates, conditions or causes of the symptoms they have so miraculously dispelled, they leave a soul empty, swept and garnished against the coming of seven other devils worse than the first.

24. Ritual, Symbol, Sacrament

ASWALA: YAJNAVALKYA, SINCE everything connected with the sacrifice is pervaded by death and is subject to death, by what means can the sacrificer overcome death?

YAJNAVALKYA: By the knowledge of the identity between the sacrificer, the fire and the ritual word. For the ritual word is indeed the sacrificer, and the ritual word is the fire, and the fire, which is one with Brahman, is the sacrificer. This knowledge leads to liberation. This knowledge leads one beyond death.

Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad In other words, rites, sacraments, and ceremonials are valuable to the extent that they remind those who take part in them of the true Nature of Things, remind them of what ought to be and (if only they would be docile to the immanent and transcendent Spirit) of what actually might be their own relation to the world and its divine Ground. Theoretically any ritual or sacrament is as good as any other ritual or sacrament, provided always that the object symbolized be in fact some aspect of divine Reality and that the relation between symbol and fact be clearly defined and constant. In the same way, one language is theoretically as good as another. Human experience can be thought about as effectively in Chinese as in English or French. But in practice Chinese is the best language for those brought up in China, English for those brought up in England and French for those brought up in France. It is, of course, much easier to learn the order of a rite and to understand its doctrinal significance than to master the intricacies of a foreign language. Nevertheless what has been said of language is true, in large measure, of religious ritual. For persons who have been brought up to think of God by means of one set of symbols, it is very hard to think of Him in terms of other and, in their eyes, unhallowed sets of words, ceremonies and images.

The Lord Buddha then warned Subhuti, saying, ‘Subhuti, do not think that the Tathagata ever considers in his own mind: I ought to enunciate a system of teaching for the elucidation of the Dharma. You should never cherish such a thought. And why? Because if any disciple harboured such a thought he would not only be misunderstanding the Tathagata’s teaching, but he would be slandering him as well. Moreover, the expression “a system of teaching” has no meaning; for Truth (in the sense of Reality) cannot be cut up into pieces and arranged into a system. The words can only be used as a figure of speech.’

Diamond Sutra

But for all their inadequacy and their radical unlikeness to the facts to which they refer, words remain the most reliable and accurate of our symbols. Whenever we want to have a precise report of facts or ideas, we must resort to words. A ceremony, a carved or painted image, may convey more meanings and overtones of meaning in a smaller compass and with greater vividness than can a verbal formula; but it is liable to convey them in a form that is much more vague and indefinite. One often meets, in modern literature, with the notion that mediaeval churches were the architectural, sculptural and pictorial equivalents of a theological *summa,* and that mediaeval worshippers who admired the works of art around them were thereby enlightened on the subject of doctrine. This view was evidently not shared by the more earnest churchmen of the Middle Ages. Coulton cites the utterances of preachers who complained that congregations were getting entirely false ideas of Catholicism by looking at the pictures in the churches instead of listening to sermons. (Similarly, in our own day the Catholic Indians of Central America have evolved the wildest heresies by brooding on the carved and painted symbols with which the Conquistadors filled their churches.) St Bernard’s objection to the richness of Cluniac architecture, sculpture and ceremonial was motivated by intellectual as well as strictly moral considerations. ‘So great and marvellous a variety of divers forms meets the eye that one is tempted to read in the marbles rather than in the books, to pass the whole day

looking at these carvings one after another rather than in meditating on the law of God.' It is in imageless contemplation that the soul comes to the unitive knowledge of Reality; consequently, for those who, like St Bernard and his Cistercians, are really concerned to achieve man's final end, the fewer distracting symbols the better.

Most men worship the gods because they want success in their worldly undertakings. This kind of material success can be gained very quickly (by such worship), here on earth.

Bhagavad-Gila

Among those who are purified by their good deeds there are four kinds of men who worship Me: the world-weary, the seeker for knowledge, the seeker for happiness and the man of spiritual discrimination. The man of discrimination is the highest of these. He is continually united with Me. He devotes himself to Me always, and to no other. For I am very dear to that man, and he to Me.

Certainly, all these are noble;
But the man of discrimination
I see as my very Self.
For he alone loves
Me Because I am Myself,
The last and only goal
Of his devoted heart.

Through many a long life
His discrimination ripens;
He makes Me his refuge,
Knows that Brahman is all.
How rare are such great ones!

Men whose discrimination has been blunted by worldly desires, establish this or that ritual or cult and resort to various deities, according to the impulse of their inborn nature. But no matter what deity a devotee chooses to worship, if he has faith, I make his faith unwavering. Endowed with the faith I give him, he worships that deity and gets from it everything he prays for. In reality, I alone am the giver.

But these men of small understanding pray only for what is transient and perishable. The worshippers of the devas will go to the devas. Those who worship Me will come to Me.

Bhagavad-Gita

If sacramental rites are constantly repeated in a spirit of faith and devotion, a more or less enduring effect is produced in the psychic medium, in which individual minds bathe and from which they have, so to speak, been crystallized out into personalities more or less fully developed, according to the more or less perfect development of the bodies with which they are associated. (Of this psychic medium an eminent contemporary philosopher, Dr C. D. Broad, has written, in an essay on telepathy contributed to the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, as follows: 'We must therefore consider seriously the possibility that a person's experience initiates more or less permanent modifications of structure or process in something which is neither his mind nor his brain. There is no reason to suppose that this substratum would be anything to which possessive adjectives, such as "mine" and "yours" and "his," could properly be applied, as they can be to minds and animated bodies... Modifications which have been produced in the substratum by certain of M's past experiences are activated by N's present experiences or interests, and they become cause factors in producing or modifying N's later experiences.') Within this psychic medium or non-personal substratum of individual minds, something which we may think of metaphorically as a vortex persists as an independent existence, possessing its own derived and secondary objectivity, so that,

wherever the rites are performed, those whose faith and devotion arc sufficiently intense actually discover something ‘out there,’ as distinct from the subjective something in their own imaginations. And so long as this projected psychic entity is nourished by the faith and love of its worshippers, it will possess, not merely objectivity, but power to get people’s prayers answered. Ultimately, of course, ‘I alone am the giver,’ in the sense that all this happens in accordance with the divine laws governing the universe in its psychic and spiritual, no less than its material, aspects. Nevertheless, the devas (those imperfect forms under which, because of their own voluntary ignorance, men worship the divine Ground) may be thought of as relatively independent powers. The primitive notion that the gods feed on the sacrifices made to them is simply the crude expression of a profound truth. When their worship falls off, when faith and devotion lose their intensity, the devas sicken and finally die. Europe is full of old shrines, whose saints and Virgins and relics have lost the power and the secondhand psychic objectivity which they once possessed. Thus, when Chaucer lived and wrote, the deva called Thomas Becket was giving to any Canterbury pilgrim, who had sufficient faith, all the boons he could ask for. This once-powerful deity is now stone-dead; but there arc still certain churches in the West, certain mosques and temples in the East, where even the most irreligious and un-psychic tourist cannot fail to be aware of some intensely ‘numinous’ presence. It would, of course, be a mistake to imagine that this presence is the presence of that God who is a Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit; it is rather the psychic presence of men’s thoughts and feelings about the particular, limited form of God, to which they have resorted ‘according to the impulse of their inborn nature’ - thoughts and feelings projected into objectivity and haunting the sacred place in the same way as thoughts and feelings of another kind, but of equal intensity, haunt the scenes of some past suffering or crime. The presence in these consecrated buildings, the presence evoked by the performance of traditional rites, the presence inherent in a sacramental object, name or formula - all these are real presences, but real presences, not of God or the Avatar, but of something which, though it may reflect the divine Reality, is yet less and other than it.

Dulcis Jesu memoria dans vera cordi gaudia: sed super mel et omnia ejus dulcis praesentia.

‘Sweet is the memory of Jesus, giving true joys to the heart; but sweeter beyond honey and all else is his presence.’ This opening stanza of the famous twelfth-century hymn summarizes in fifteen words the relations subsisting between ritual and real presence and the character of the worshipper’s reaction to each. Systematically cultivated *memoria* (a thing in itself full of sweetness) first contributes to the evocation, then results, for certain souls, in the immediate apprehension of *praesentia*, which brings with it joys of a totally different and higher kind. This presence (whose projected objectivity is occasionally so complete as to be apprehensible not merely by the devout worshipper, but by more or less indifferent outsiders) is always that of the divine being who has been previously remembered, Jesus here, Krishna or Amitabha Buddha there.

The value of this practice (repetition of the name of Amitabha Buddha) is this. So long as one person practises his method (of spirituality) and another practises a different method, they counterbalance one another and their meeting is just the same as their not meeting. Whereas if two persons practise the same method, their mindfulness tends to become deeper and deeper, and they tend to remember each other and to develop affinities for each other, life after life. Moreover, whoever recites the name of Amitabha Buddha, whether in the present time or in future time, will surely see the Buddha Amitabha and never become separated from him. By reason of that association, just as one associating with a maker of perfumes becomes permeated with the same perfumes, so he will become perfumed by Amitabha’s compassion, and will become enlightened without resort to any other expedient means.

Surangama Sutra

We see then that intense faith and devotion, coupled with perseverance by many persons in the same forms of worship or spiritual exercise, have a tendency to objectify the idea or memory which is their content and so to create, in some sort, a numinous real presence, which worshippers actually find ‘out there’ no less, and in quite another way, than ‘in here.’ In so far as this is the case, the ritualist is perfectly correct in attributing to his hallowed acts and words a power which, in another context, would be called magical. The *manlram* works, the sacrifice really docs something, the sacrament confers grace *ex opere operato*: these arc, or rather may be, matters of direct experience, facts which anyone who chooses to fulfil the necessary conditions can verify empirically for himself. But the grace conferred *ex opere operato* is not always spiritual grace and the hallowed acts and formulae have a power which is not necessarily from God. Worshippers can, and very often do, get grace and power from one another and from the faith and devotion of their predecessors, projected into independent psychic existences that are hauntingly associated with certain places, words and acts. A great deal of ritualistic religion is not spirituality, but occultism, a refined and well-meaning kind of white magic. Now, just as there is no harm in art, say, or science, but a great deal of good, provided always that these activities are not regarded as ends, but simply as means to the final end of all life, so too there is no harm in white magic, but the possibilities of much good, so long as it is treated, not as true religion, but as one of the roads to true religion - an effective way of reminding people with a certain kind of psycho-physical make-up that there is a God, ‘in knowledge of whom standeth their eternal life.’ If ritualistic white magic is regarded as being in itself true religion; if the real presences it evokes are taken to be God in Himself and not the projections of human thoughts and feelings about God or even about something less than God; and if the sacramental rites are performed and attended for the sake of the ‘spiritual sweetness’ experienced and the powers and advantages conferred - then there is idolatry. This idolatry is, at its best, a very lofty and, in many ways, beneficent kind of religion. But the consequences of worshipping God as anything but Spirit and in any way except in spirit and in truth are necessarily undesirable in

this sense - that they lead only to a partial salvation and delay the soul's ultimate reunion with the eternal Ground.

That very large numbers of men and women have an ineradicable desire for rites and ceremonies is clearly demonstrated by the history of religion. Almost all the Hebrew prophets were opposed to ritualism. 'Rend your hearts and not your garments.'

'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'

'I hate, I despise your feasts; I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.' And yet, in spite of the fact that what the prophets wrote was regarded as divinely inspired, the Temple at Jerusalem continued to be, for hundreds of years after their time, the centre of a religion of rites, ceremonials and blood sacrifice. (It may be remarked in passing that the shedding of blood, one's own or that of animals or other human beings, seems to be a peculiarly efficacious way of constraining the 'occult' or psychic world to answer petitions and confer supernormal powers. If this is a fact, as from the anthropological and antiquarian evidence it appears to be, it would supply yet another cogent reason for avoiding animal sacrifices, savage bodily austerities and even, since thought is a form of action, that imaginative gloating over spilled blood which is so common in certain Christian circles.) What the Jews did in spite of their prophets, Christians have done in spite of Christ. The Christ of the Gospels is a preacher and not a dispenser of sacraments or performer of rites; he speaks against vain repetitions; he insists on the supreme importance of private worship; he has no use for sacrifices and not much use for the Temple. But this did not prevent historic Christianity from going its own, all too human, way. A precisely similar development took place in Buddhism. For the Buddha of the Pali scriptures, ritual was one of the fetters holding back the soul from enlightenment and liberation. Nevertheless, the religion he founded has made full use of ceremonies, vain repetitions and sacramental rites.

There would seem to be two main reasons for the observed developments of the historical religions. First, most people do not want spirituality or deliverance, but rather a religion that gives them emotional satisfactions, answers to prayer,

supernormal powers and partial salvation in some sort of posthumous heaven. Second, some of those few who do desire spirituality and deliverance find that, for them, the most effective means to those ends arc ceremonies, ‘vain repetitions’ and sacramental rites. It is by participating in these acts and uttering these formulae that they are most powerfully reminded of the eternal Ground of all being; it is by immersing themselves in the symbols that they can most easily come through to that which is symbolized. Every thing, event or thought is a point of intersection between creature and Creator, between a more or less distant manifestation of God and a ray, so to speak, of the unmanifest Godhead; every thing, event or thought can therefore be made the doorway through which a soul may pass out of time into eternity. That is why ritualistic and sacramental religion can lead to deliverance. But at the same time every human being loves power and self-enhancement, and every hallowed ceremony, form of words or sacramental rite is a channel through which power can flow out of the fascinating psychic universe into the universe of embodied selves. That is why ritualistic and sacramental religion can also lead away from deliverance.

There is another disadvantage inherent in any system of organized sacramentalism, and that is that it gives to the priestly caste a power which it is all too natural for them to abuse. In a society which has been taught that salvation is exclusively or mainly through certain sacraments, and that these sacraments can be administered effectively only by a professional priesthood, that professional priesthood will possess an enormous coercive power. The possession of such power is a standing temptation to use it for individual satisfaction and corporate aggrandizement. To a temptation of this kind, if repeated often enough, most human beings who are not saints almost inevitably succumb. That is why Christ taught his disciples to pray that they should not be led into temptation. This is, or should be, the guiding principle of all social reform - to organize the economic, political and social relationships between human beings in such a way that there shall be, for any given individual or group within the society, a minimum of temptations to covetousness, pride, cruelty and lust for power. Men and women being what they are, it is only by reducing the

number and intensity of temptations that human societies can be, in some measure at least, delivered from evil. Now, the sort of temptations to which a priestly caste is exposed in a society that accepts a predominantly sacramental religion are such that none but the most saintly persons can be expected consistently to resist them. What happens when ministers of religion are led into these temptations is clearly illustrated by the history of the Roman Church. Because Catholic Christianity taught a version of the Perennial Philosophy it produced a succession of great saints. But because the Perennial Philosophy was overlaid with an excessive amount of sacramentalism and with an idolatrous preoccupation with things in time, the less saintly members of its hierarchy were exposed to enormous and quite unnecessary temptations and, duly succumbing to them, launched out into persecution, simony, power politics, secret diplomacy, high finance and collaboration with despots.

I very much doubt whether, since the Lord by his grace brought me into the faith of his dear Son, I have ever broken bread or drunk wine, even in the ordinary course of life, without remembrance of, and some devout feeling regarding, the broken body and the blood-shedding of my dear Lord and Saviour.

Stephen Grellet We have seen that, when they are promoted to be the central core of organized religious worship, ritualism and sacramentalism are by no means unmixed blessings. But that the whole of a man’s workaday life should be transformed by him into a kind of continuous ritual, that every object in the world around him should be regarded as a symbol of the world’s eternal Ground, that all his actions should be performed sacramentally - this would seem to be wholly desirable. All the masters of the spiritual life, from the authors of the Upanishads to Socrates, from Buddha to St Bernard, are agreed that without self-knowledge there cannot be adequate knowledge of God, that without a constant recollectedness there can be no complete deliverance. The man who has learnt to regard things as symbols, persons as temples of the Holy Spirit and actions as sacraments, is a man who has learned constantly to remind himself who he is,

where he stands in relation to the universe and its Ground, how he should behave towards his fellows and what he must do to come to his final end.

‘Because of this indwelling of the Logos,’ writes Mr Kenneth Saunders in his valuable study of the Fourth Gospel, the Gita and the Lotus Sutra, ‘all things have a reality. They are sacraments, not illusions like the phenomenal word of the Vedanta.’ That the Logos is in things, lives and conscious minds, and they in the Logos, was taught much more emphatically and explicitly by the Vedantists than by the author of the Fourth Gospel; and the same idea is, of course, basic in the theology of Taoism. But though all things in fact exist at the intersection between a divine manifestation and a ray of the unmanifest Godhead, it by no means follows that everyone always knows that this is so. On the contrary, the vast majority of human beings believe that their own selfness and the objects around them possess a reality in themselves, wholly independent of the Logos. This belief leads them to identify their being with their sensations, cravings and private notions, and in its turn this self-identification with what they are not effectively walls them off from divine influence and the very possibility of deliverance. To most of us on most occasions things are not symbols and actions are not sacramental; and we have to teach ourselves, consciously and deliberately, to remember that they are.

The world is imprisoned in its own activity, except when actions are performed as worship of God. Therefore you must perform every action sacramentally (as if it were *yajna*, the sacrifice that, in its divine Logos-essence, is identical with the Godhead to whom it is offered), and be free from all attachment to results.

Bhagavad-Gita

Precisely similar teachings are found in Christian writers, who recommend that persons and even things should be regarded as temples of the Holy Ghost and that everything done or suffered should be constantly ‘offered to God’.

It is hardly necessary to add that this process of conscious sacramentalization can be applied only to such actions as are not intrinsically evil. Somewhat unfortunately, the Gita was not originally published as an independent work, but as a theological digression within an epic poem; and since, like most epics, the Mahabharata is largely concerned with the exploits of warriors, it is primarily in relation to warfare that the Gita's advice to act with non-attachment and for God's sake only is given. Now, war is accompanied and followed, among other things, by a widespread dissemination of anger and hatred, pride, cruelty and fear. But, it may be asked, is it possible (the Nature of Things being what it is) to sacramentalize actions whose psychological by-products are so completely God-eclipsing as arc these passions? The Buddha of the Pali scriptures would certainly have answered this question in the negative. So would the Lao Tzu of the Tao Teh King. So would the Christ of the Synoptic Gospels. The Krishna of the Gita (who is also, by a kind of literary accident, the Krishna of the Mahabharata) gives an affirmative answer. But this affirmative answer, it should be remembered, is hedged around with limiting conditions. Non-attached slaughter is recommended only to those who are warriors by caste, and to whom warfare is a duty and vocation. But what is duty or *dharma* for the Kshatriya is *adharma* and forbidden to the Brahman; nor is it any part of the normal vocation or caste duty of the mercantile and labouring classes. Any confusion of castes, any assumption by one man of another man's vocation and duties of state, is always, say the Hindus, a moral evil and a menace to social stability. Thus, it is the business of the Brahmans to fit themselves to be seers, so that they may be able to explain to their fellow-men the nature of the universe, of man's last end and of the way to liberation. When soldiers or administrators, or usurers, or manufacturers or workers usurp the functions of the Brahmans and formulate a philosophy of life in accordance with their variously distorted notions of the universe, then society is thrown into confusion. Similarly confusion reigns when the Brahman, the man of non-coercive spiritual authority, assumes the coercive power of the Kshatriya, or when the Kshatriya's job of ruling is usurped by bankers and stock-jobbers, or finally when the warrior caste's *dharma* of

fighting is imposed, by conscription, on Brahman, Vaisya and Sudra alike. The history of Europe during the later Middle Ages and Renaissance is largely a history of the social confusions that arise when large numbers of those who should be seers abandon spiritual authority in favour of money and political power. And contemporary history is the hideous record of what happens when political bosses, business men or class-conscious proletarians assume the Brahman's function of formulating a philosophy of life; when usurers dictate policy and debate the issues of war and peace; and when the warrior's caste duty is imposed on all and sundry, regardless of psycho-physical make-up and vocation.

25. Spiritual Exercises

RITES, SACRAMENTS, CEREMONIES, liturgies - all these belong to public worship. They are devices, by means of which the individual members of a congregation are reminded of the true Nature of Things and of their proper relations to one another, the universe and God. What ritual is to public worship, spiritual exercises are to private devotion. They are devices to be used by the solitary individual when he enters into his closet, shuts the door and prays to his Father which is in secret. Like all other devices, from psalm-singing to Swedish exercises and from logic to internal-combustion engines, spiritual exercises can be used cither well or badly. Some of those who use spiritual exercises make progress in the life of the spirit; others, using the same exercises, make no progress. To believe that their use either constitutes enlightenment or guarantees it, is mere idolatry and superstition. To neglect them altogether, to refuse to find out whether and in what way they can help in the achievement of our final end, is nothing but self-opinionatedness and stubborn obscurantism.

St François de Sales used to say, ‘I hear of nothing but perfection on every side, so far as talk goes; but I see very few people who really practise it. Everybody has his own notion of perfection. One man thinks it lies in the cut of his clothes, another in fasting, a third in almsgiving, or in frequenting the Sacraments, in meditation, or in some special gift of contemplation, or in extraordinary gifts or graces - but they are all mistaken, as it seems to me, because they confuse the means, or the results with the end and cause.

‘For my part, the only perfection I know of is a hearty love of God, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself. Charity is the only virtue which rightly unites us to God and man. Such union is our final aim and end, and all the rest is mere delusion.’

Jean Pierre Camus

St François himself recommended the use of spiritual exercises as a means to the love of God and one's neighbours, and affirmed that such exercises deserved to be greatly cherished; but this affection for the set forms and hours of mental prayer must never, he warned, be allowed to become excessive. To neglect any urgent call to charity or obedience for the sake of practising one's spiritual exercises would be to neglect the end and the proximate means for the sake of means which are not proximate, but at several removes from the ultimate goal.

Spiritual exercises constitute a special class of ascetic practices, whose purpose is, primarily, to prepare the intellect and emotions for those higher forms of prayer in which the soul is essentially passive in relation to divine Reality, and secondarily, by means of this self-exposure to the Light and of the increased self-knowledge and self-loathing resulting from it, to modify character.

In the Orient the systemization of mental prayer was carried out at some unknown but certainly very early date. Both in India and China spiritual exercises (accompanied or preceded by more or less elaborate physical exercises, especially breathing exercises) arc known to have been used several centuries before the birth of Christ. In the West, the monks of the Thebaid spent a good part of each day in meditation as a means to contemplation or the unitive knowledge of God; and, at all periods of Christian history, more or less methodical mental prayer has been largely used to supplement the vocal praying of public and private worship. But the systemization of mental prayer into elaborate spiritual exercises was not undertaken, it would seem, until near the end of the Middle Ages, when reformers within the Church popularized this new form of spirituality in an effort to revivify a decaying monasticism and to reinforce the religious life of a laity that had been bewildered by the Great Schism and profoundly shocked by the corruption of the clergy. Among these early systematizers the most effective and influential were the canons of Windesheim, who were in close touch with the Brethren of the Common Life.

During the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries spiritual exercises became, one might almost say, positively fashionable. The early Jesuits had shown what extraordinary transformations of character, what intensities of will and devotion, could be achieved by men systematically trained on the intellectual and imaginative exercises of St Ignatius Loyola, and as the prestige of the Jesuits stood very high, at this time, in Catholic Europe, the prestige of spiritual exercises also stood high. Throughout the first century of the Counter-Reformation numerous systems of mental prayer (many of them, unlike the Ignatian exercises, specifically mystical) were composed, published and eagerly bought. After the Quietist controversy mysticism fell into disrepute and, along with mysticism, many of the once popular systems, which their authors had designed to assist the soul on the path towards contemplation. For more detailed information on this interesting and important subject the reader should consult Pourrat's *Christian Spirituality,* Bede Frost's *The Art of Mental Prayer,* Edward Leen's *Progress through Mental Prayer* and Aelfrida Tillyard's *Spiritual Exercises.* Here it is only possible to give a few characteristic specimens from the various religious traditions.

Know that when you learn to lose yourself, you will reach the Beloved. There is no other secret to be learnt, and more than this is not known to me.

Ansari of Herat

Six hundred years later, as we have seen, St François de Sales was saying very much the same thing to young Camus and all the others who came to him in the ingenuous hope that he could reveal some easy and infallible trick for achieving the unitive knowledge of God. But to lose self in the Beloved - there is no other secret. And yet the Sufis, like their Christian counterparts, made ample use of spiritual exercises — not, of course, as ends in themselves, not even as proximate means, but as means to the proximate means of union with God, namely selfless and loving contemplation.

For twelve years I was the smith of my soul. I put it in the furnace of austerity and burned it in the fire of combat, I laid it on the anvil of reproach and smote it with the hammer of blame until I made of my soul a mirror. Five years I was the mirror of myself and was ever polishing that mirror with divers acts of worship and piety. Then for a year I gazed in contemplation. On my waist I saw a girdle of pride and vanity and self-conceit and reliance on devotion and approbation of my works. I laboured for five years more until that girdle became worn out and I professed Islam anew. I looked and saw that all created things were dead. I pronounced four *akbirs* over them and returned from the funeral of them all, and without intrusion of creatures, through God's help alone, I attained unto God.

Bayazid of Bistun

The simplest and most widely practised form of spiritual exercise is repetition of the divine name, or of some phrase affirming God's existence and the soul's dependence upon Him.

And therefore, when thou purposest thee to this work (of contemplation), and feelest by grace that thou art called by God, lift up thine heart unto God with a meek stirring of love. And mean God that made thee, and bought thee, and graciously called thee to thy degree, and receive none other thought of God. And yet not all these, except thou desirest; for a naked intent directed unto God, without any other cause than Himself, sufficeth wholly.

And if thou desirest to have this intent lapped and folden in one word, so that thou mayest have better hold thereupon, take thee but a little word of one syllable, for so it is better than of two; for the shorter the word, the better it accordeth with the work of the spirit. And such a word is this word GOD or this word LOVE. Choose whichever thou wilt, or another; whatever word thou likest best of one syllable. And fasten this word to thy heart that so it may never go thence for anything that befalleth.

The word shall be thy shield and thy spear, whether thou ridest on peace or on war. With this word thou shalt beat on this cloud and this darkness above thee.

With this word thou shalt smite down all manner of thought under the *cloud of forgetting*. Insomuch that, if any thought press upon thee to ask what thou wouldst have, answer with no more words than with this one word (GOD or LOVE). And if he offer of his great learning to expound to thee that word, say to him that thou wilt have it all whole, and not broken nor undone. And if thou wilt hold fast to this purpose, be sure that that thought will no while bide.

The Cloud of Unknowing

In another chapter the author of the *Cloud* suggests that the word symbolizing our final end should sometimes be alternated with a word denoting our present position in relation to that end. The words to be repeated in this exercise arc SIN and GOD.

Not breaking or expounding these words with curiosity of wit, considering the qualities of these words, as if thou wouldst by that consideration increase thy devotion. I believe it should never be so in this case and in this work. But hold them all whole, these words; and mean by SIN a *lump*, thou knowest never what, none other thing but thyself... And because ever the whiles thou livest in this wretched life, thou must always feel in some part this foul stinking lump of sin, as it were oned and congealed with the substance of thy being, therefore shalt thou alternately mean these two words - SIN and GOD. With this general understanding that, if thou hadst God, then shouldst thou lack sin; and mightest thou lack sin, then shouldst thou have God.

The Cloud of Unknowing

The shaykh took my hand and led me into the convent. I sat down in the portico, and the shaykh picked up a book and began to read. As is the way of scholars, I could not help wondering what the book was.

The shaykh perceived my thoughts. ‘Abu Said,’ he said, ‘all the hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets were sent to preach one word. They bade the

people say, “Allah,” and devote themselves to Him. Those who heard this word by the ear alone let it go out by the other ear; but those who heard it with their souls imprinted it on their souls and repeated it until it penetrated their hearts and souls, and their whole beings became this word. They were made independent of the pronunciation of the word; they were released from the sound of the letters. Having understood the spiritual meaning of this word, they became so absorbed in it that they were no more conscious of their own non-existence.’

Abu Sa ‘id

Take a short verse of a psalm, and it shall be shield and buckler to you against all your foes.

Cassian, quoting Abbot Isaac

In India the repetition of the divine name or the *mantram* (a short devotional or doctrinal affirmation) is called *japam* and is a favourite spiritual exercise among all the sects of Hinduism and Buddhism. The shortest *mantram* is OM - a spoken symbol that concentrates within itself the whole Vedanta philosophy. To this and other *manlrams* Hindus attribute a kind of magical power. The repetition of them is a sacramental act, conferring grace *ex opere operato.* A similar efficacy was and indeed still is attributed to sacred words and formulae by Buddhists, Moslems, Jews and Christians. And, of course, just as traditional religious rites seem to possess the power to evoke the real presence of existents projected into physic objectivity by the faith and devotion of generations of worshippers, so too long-hallowed words and phrases may become channels for conveying powers other and greater than those belonging to the individual who happens at the moment to be pronouncing them. And meanwhile the constant repetition of ‘this word GOD or this word LOVE’ may, in favourable circumstances, have a profound effect upon the subconscious mind, inducing that selfless one-pointedness of will and thought and feeling, without which the

unitive knowledge of God is impossible. Furthermore, it may happen that, if the word is simply repeated ‘all whole, and not broken up or undone’ by discursive analysis, the Fact for which the word stands will end by presenting itself to the soul in the form of an integral intuition. When this happens, ‘the doors of the letters of this word are opened’ (to use the language of the Sufis) and the soul passes through into Reality. But though all this *may* happen, it need not necessarily happen. For there is no spiritual patent medicine, no pleasant and infallible panacea for souls suffering from separateness and the deprivation of God. No, there is no guaranteed cure; and, if used improperly, the medicine of spiritual exercises may start a new disease or aggravate the old. For example, a mere mechanical repetition of the divine name can result in a kind of numbed stupefaction that is as much below analytical thought as intellectual vision is above it. And because the sacred word constitutes a kind of prejudgment of the experience induced by its repetition, this stupefaction, or some other abnormal state, is taken to be the immediate awareness of Reality and is idolatrously cultivated and hunted after, with a turning of the will towards what is supposed to be God before there has been a turning of it away from the self.

The dangers which beset the practiser of *japam*, who is insufficiently mortified and insufficiently recollected and aware, are encountered in the same or different forms by those who make use of more elaborate spiritual exercises. Intense concentration on an image or idea, such as is recommended by many teachers, both Eastern and Western, may be very helpful for certain persons in certain circumstances, very harmful in other eases. It is helpful when the concentration results in such mental stillness, such a silence of intellect, will and feeling, that the divine Word can be uttered within the soul. It is harmful when the image concentrated upon becomes so hallucinatingly real that it is taken for objective Reality and idolatrously worshipped; harmful, too, when the exercise of concentration produces unusual psycho-physical results, in which the person experiencing them takes a personal pride, as being special graces and divine communications. Of these unusual psycho-physical occurrences the most ordinary arc visions and auditions, foreknowledge, telepathy and other psychic

powers, and the curious bodily phenomenon of intense heat. Many persons who practise concentration exercises experience this heat occasionally. A number of Christian saints, of whom the best known arc St Philip of Neri and St Catherine of Siena, have experienced it continuously. In the East techniques have been developed whereby the accession of heat resulting from intense concentration can be regulated, controlled and put to do useful work, such as keeping the contemplative warm in freezing weather. In Europe, where the phenomenon is not well understood, many would-be contemplatives have experienced this heat, and have imagined it to be some special divine favour, or even the experience of union, and being insufficiently mortified and humble, have fallen into idolatry and a God-eclipsing spiritual pride.

The following passage from one of the great Mahayana scriptures contains a searching criticism of the kind of spiritual exercises prescribed by Hinayanist teachers - concentration on symbolic objects, meditations on transience and decay (to wean the soul away from attachment to earthly things), on the different virtues which must be cultivated, on the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism. (Many of these exercises arc described at length in *The Path of Purity,* a book which has been translated in full and published by the Pali Text Society. Mahayanist exercises arc described in the Surangama Sutra, translated by Dwight Goddard, and in the volume on *Tibetan Yoga,* edited by Dr Evans-Wentz.)

In his exercise the Yogin sees (imaginatively) the form of the sun or moon, or something looking like a lotus, or the underworld, or various forms, such as sky, fire and the like. All these appearances lead him in the way of the philosophers; they throw him down into the state of Sravakahood, into the realm of the Pratyeka-buddhas. When all these are put aside and there is a state of imagelessness, then a condition in conformity with Suchness presents itself, and the Buddhas will come together from all their countries and with their shining hands will touch the head of this benefactor.

Lankavatara Sutra

In other words intense concentration on any image (even if the image be a sacred symbol, like the lotus) or on any idea, from the idea of hell to the idea of some desirable virtue or its apotheosis in one of the divine attributes, is always concentration on something produced by one's own mind. Sometimes, in mortified and recollected persons, the art of concentration merges into the state of openness and alert passivity, in which true contemplation becomes possible. But sometimes the fact that the concentration is on a product of the concentrator's own mind results in some kind of false or incomplete contemplation. Suchness, or the divine Ground of all being, reveals itself to those in whom there is no ego-centredness (nor even any alter-ego-centredness) either of will, imagination, feeling or intellect.

I say, then, that introversion must be rejected, because extraversion must never be admitted; but one must live continuously in the abyss of the divine Essence and in the nothingness of things; and if at times a man finds himself separated from them (the divine Essence and created nothingness) he must return to them, not by introversion, but by annihilation.

Renet of Canfield

Introversion is the process condemned in the Lankavatara Sutra as the way of the Yogin, the way that leads at worst to idolatry, at best to a partial knowledge of God in the heights within, never to a complete knowledge in the fullness without as well as within. Annihilation (of which Father Benet distinguishes two kinds, passive and active) is for the Mahayanist the 'state of imagelessness' in contemplation and, in active life, the state of total non-attachment, in which eternity can be apprehended within time, and *samsara* is known to be one with *nirvana*.

And therefore, if thou wilt stand and not fall, cease never in thine intent, but beat evermore on this cloud of unknowing that is betwixt thee and thy God, with a sharp dart of longing love. And, loathe to think of aught under God. And go

not thence for anything that befalleth. For this only is that work that destroyed) the ground and the root of sin...

Yea, and what more? Weep thou never so much for sorrow of thy sins, or of the passion of Christ, or have thou never so much thought of the joys of heaven, what may it do to thee? Surely much good, much help, much profit, much grace will it get thee. But in comparison of this blind stirring of love, it is but little that it doth, or may do, without this. This by itself is the *best part* part of Mary, without these other. They without it profit but little or nought. It destroyeth not only the ground and the root of sin, as it may be here, but also it getteth virtues. For if it be truly conceived, all virtues shall be subtly and perfectly conceived, felt and comprehended in it, without any mingling of thine intent. And have a man never so many virtues without it, all they be mingled with some crooked intent, for the which they be imperfect. For virtue is nought else but an ordered and measured affection, plainly directed unto God for Himself.

The Cloud of Unknowing

If exercises in concentration, repetitions of the divine name, or meditation on God's attributes or on imagined scenes in the life of saint or Avatar help those who make use of them to come to selflessness, openness and (to use Augustine Baker's phrase) that 'love of the pure divinity,' which makes possible the soul's union with the Godhead, then such spiritual exercises are wholly good and desirable. If they have other results - well, the tree is known by its fruits.

Benet of Canfield, the English Capuchin who wrote *The Rule of Perfection* and was the spiritual guide of Mme Acarie and Cardinal Bérulle, hints in his treatise at a method by which concentration on an image may be made to lead up to imageless contemplation, 'blind beholding,'

'love of the pure divinity.' The period of mental prayer is to begin with intense concentration on a scene of Christ's passion; then the mind is, as it were, to abolish this imagination of the sacred humanity and to pass from it to the formless and attributeless Godhead which that humanity incarnates. A strikingly

similar exercise is described in the *Bardo Thodol* or Tibetan Book of the Dead (a work of quite extraordinary profundity and beauty, now fortunately available in translation with a valuable introduction and notes by Dr Evans-Wentz).

Whosoever thy tutelary deity may be, meditate upon the form for much time - as being apparent, yet non-existent in reality, like a form produced by a magician... Then let the visualization of the tutelary deity melt away from the extremities, till nothing at all remaineth visible of it; and put thyself in the state of the Clearness and the Voidness - which thou canst not conceive as something — and abide in that state for a little while. Again meditate upon the tutelary deity; again meditate upon the Clear Light; do this alternately. Afterwards allow thine own intellect to melt away gradually, beginning from the extremities.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

As a final summing up of the whole matter we may cite a sentence of Eckhart's. 'He who seeks God under settled form lays hold of the form, while missing the God concealed in it.' Here, the key word is 'settled.' It is permissible to seek God provisionally under a form which is from the first recognized as merely a symbol of Reality, and a symbol which must sooner or later be discarded in favour of what it stands for. To seek Him under a settled form - settled because regarded as the very shape of Reality - is to commit oneself to illusion and a kind of idolatry.

The chief impediments in the way of taking up the practice of some form of mental prayer are ignorance of the Nature of Things (which has never, of course, been more abysmal than in this age of compulsory education) and the absorption in self-interest, in positive and negative emotions connected with the passions and with what is technically known as a 'good time.' And when the practice has been taken up, the chief impediments in the way of advance towards the goal of mental prayer are distractions.

Probably all persons, even the most saintly, suffer to some extent from distractions. But it is obvious that a person who, in the intervals of mental

prayer, leads a dispersed, unrecollected, self-centred life will have more and worse distractions to contend with than one who lives one-pointedly, never forgetting who he is and how related to the universe and its divine Ground. Some of the most profitable spiritual exercises actually make use of distractions, in such a way that these impediments to self-abandonment, mental silence and passivity in relation to God arc transformed into means of progress.

But first, by way of preface to the description of these exercises, it should be remarked that all teachers of the art of mental prayer concur in advising their pupils never to use violent efforts of the surface will against the distractions which arise in the mind during periods of recollection. The reason for this has been succinctly stated by Benet of Canfield in his *Rule of Perfection.* 'The more a man operates, the more he is and exists. And the more he is and exists, the less of God is and exists within him.' Every enhancement of the separate personal self produces a corresponding dimunition of that self s awareness of divine Reality. But any violent reaction of the surface will against distractions automatically enhances the separate, personal self and therefore reduces the individual's chances of coming to the knowledge and love of God. In the process of trying forcibly to abolish our God-eclipsing day-dreams, we merely deepen the darkness of our native ignorance. This being so, we must give up the attempt to fight distractions and find ways either of circumventing them, or of somehow making use of them. For example, if we have already achieved a certain degree of alert passivity in relation to Reality and distractions intervene, we can simply 'look over the shoulder' of the malicious and concupiscent imbecile who stands between us and the object of our 'simple regard.' The distractions now appear in the foreground of consciousness; we take notice of their presence, then, lightly and gently, without any straining of the will, we shift the focus of attention to Reality which we glimpse, or divine, or (by past experience or an act of faith) merely know about, in the background. In many cases, their effortless shift of attention will cause the distractions to lose their obsessive 'thereness' and, for a time at least, to disappear.

If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point quite gently and replace it tenderly in its Master's presence. And even if you did nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back and place it again in Our Lord's presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed.

St François de Sales

In this case the circumvention of distractions constitutes a valuable lesson in patience and perseverance. Another and more direct method of making use of the monkey in our heart is described in *The Cloud of Unknowing.*

When thou feelest that thou mayest in no wise put them (distractions) down, cower then down under them as a caitiff and a coward overcome in battle, and think it is but folly to strive any longer with them, and therefore thou yieldest thyself to God in the hands of thine enemies... And surely, I think, if this device be truly conceived, it is nought else but a true knowing and a feeling of thyself as thou art, a wretch and a filthy thing, far worse than nought; the which knowing and feeling is meekness (humility). And this meekness meriteth to have God mightily descending to venge thee on thine enemies, so as to take thee up and cherishingly dry thy ghostly eyes, as the father doth to the child that is at the point to perish under the mouths of wild swine and mad biting bears.

The Cloud of Unknowing

Finally, there is the exercise, much employed in India, which consists in dispassionately examining the distractions as they arise and in tracing them back, through the memory of particular thoughts, feelings and actions, to their origins in temperament and character, constitution and acquired habit. This procedure reveals to the soul the true reasons for its separation from the divine Ground of its being. It comes to realize that its spiritual ignorance is due to the inert recalcitrance or positive rebelliousness of its selfhood, and it discovers,

specifically, the points where that eclipsing selfhood congeals, as it were, into the hardest, densest clots. Then, having made the resolution to do what it can, in the course of daily living, to rid itself of these impediments to Light, it quietly puts aside the thought of them and, empty, purged and silent, passively exposes itself to whatever it may be that lies beyond and within.

'*Noverim me, noverim Te,*' St Francis of Assisi used to repeat. Self-knowledge, leading to self-hatred and humility, is the condition of the love and knowledge of God. Spiritual exercises that make use of distractions have this great merit, that they increase self-knowledge. Every soul that approaches God must be aware of who and what it is. To practise a form of mental or vocal prayer that is, so to speak, above one's moral station is to act a lie: and the consequences of such lying are wrong notions about God, idolatrous worship of private and unrealistic phantasies and (for lack of the humility of self-knowledge) spiritual pride.

It is hardly necessary to add that this method has, like every other, its dangers as well as its advantages. For those who employ it there is a standing temptation to forget the end in the all too squalidly personal means — to become absorbed in a whitewashing or remorseful essay in autobiography to the exclusion of the pure Divinity, before whom the 'angry ape' played all the fantastic tricks which he now so relishingly remembers.

We come now to what may be called the spiritual exercises of daily life. The problem, here, is simple enough - how to keep oneself reminded, during the hours of work and recreation, that there is a good deal more to the universe than that which meets the eye of one absorbed in business or pleasure? There is no single solution to this problem. Some kinds of work and recreation are so simple and unexactive that they permit of continuous repetition of sacred name or phrase, unbroken thought about divine Reality, or, what is still better, uninterrupted mental silence and alert passivity. Such occupations as were the daily task of Brother Lawrence (whose 'practice of the presence of God' has enjoyed a kind of celebrity in circles otherwise completely uninterested in mental prayer or spiritual exercises) were almost all of this simple and

unexacting kind. But there are other tasks too complex to admit of this constant recollectedness. Thus, to quote Eckhart, ‘a celebrant of the mass who is over-intent on recollection is liable to make mistakes. The best way is to try to concentrate the mind before and afterwards, but, when saying it, to do so quite straightforwardly.’ This advice applies to any occupation demanding undivided attention. But undivided attention is seldom demanded and is with difficulty sustained for long periods at a stretch. There are always intervals of relaxation. Everyone is free to choose whether these intervals shall be filled with day-dreaming or with something better.

Whoever has God in mind, simply and solely God, in all things, such a man carries God with him into all his works and into all places, and God alone does all his works. He seeks nothing but God, nothing seems good to him but God. He becomes one with God in every thought. Just as no multiplicity can dissipate God, so nothing can dissipate this man or make him multiple.

Eckhart

I do not mean that we ought voluntarily to put ourselves in the way of dissipating influences; God forbid! That would be tempting God and seeking danger. But such distractions as come in any way providentially, if met with due precaution and carefully guarded hours of prayer and reading, will turn to good. Often those things which make you sigh for solitude are more profitable to your humiliation and self-denial than the most utter solitude itself would be... Sometimes a stimulating book of devotion, a fervent meditation, a striking conversation, may flatter your tastes and make you feel self-satisfied and complacent, imagining yourself far advanced towards perfection; and by filling you with unreal notions, be all the time swelling your pride and making you come from your religious exercises less tolerant of whatever crosses your will. I would have you hold fast to this simple rule: seek nothing dissipating, but bear quietly with whatever God sends without your seeking it, whether of dissipation or interruption. It is a great delusion to seek God afar off in matters perhaps quite

unattainable, ignoring that He is beside us in our daily annoyances, so long as we bear humbly and bravely all those which arise from the manifold imperfections of our neighbours and ourselves.

Fénelon Consider that your life is a perpetual perishing, and lift up your mind to God above all whenever the strikes, saying, ‘God I adore your eternal being; I am happy that my being should perish every moment, so that at every moment it may render homage to your eternity.’

J J Olier When you are walking alone, or elsewhere, glance at the general will of God, by which He wills all the works of his mercy and justice in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and approve, praise and then love that sovereign will, all holy, all just, all beautiful. Glance next at the special will of God, by which He loves his own, and works in them in divers ways, by consolation and tribulation. And then you should ponder a little, considering the variety of consolations, but especially of tribulations, that the good suffer; and then with great humility approve, praise and love all this will. Consider that will in your own person, in all the good or ill that happens to you and may happen to you, except sin; then approve, praise and love all that, protesting that you will ever cherish, honour and adore that sovereign will, and submitting to God’s pleasure and giving Him all who are yours, amongst whom am I. End in a great confidence in that will, that it will work all good for us and our happiness. I add that, when you have performed this exercise two or three times in this way, you can shorten it, vary it and arrange it, as you find best, for it should often be thrust into your heart as an aspiration.

St François de Sites

Dwelling in the light, there is no occasion at all for stumbling, for all things are discovered in the light. When thou art walking abroad it is present with thee in thy bosom, thou needest not to say, Lo here, or Lo there; and as thou layest in thy bed, it is present to teach thee and judge thy wandering mind, which wanders abroad, and thy high thoughts and imaginations, and makes them subject. For

following thy thoughts, thou art quickly lost. By dwelling in this light, it will discover to thee the body of sin and thy corruptions and fallen estate, where thou art. In that light which shows thee all this, stand; go neither to the right nor to the left.

George Fox

The extract which follows is taken from the translation by Waitao and Goddard of the Chinese text of *The Awakening of Faith*, by Ashvaghosha - a work originally composed in Sanskrit during the first century of our era, but of which the original has been lost. Ashvaghosha devotes a section of his treatise to the ‘expedient means,’ as they arc called in Buddhist terminology, whereby unitive knowledge of Thusness may be achieved. The list of these indispensable means includes charity and compassion towards all sentient beings, sub-human as well as human, self-naughting or mortification, personal devotion to the incarnations of the Absolute Buddha-nature, and spiritual exercises designed to free the mind from its infatuating desires for separateness and independent selfhood and so make it capable of realizing the identity of its own essence with the universal Essence of Mind. Of these various ‘expedient means’ I will cite only the last two - the Way of Tranquillity, and the Way of Wisdom.

I he Way of Tranquillity. The purpose of this discipline is twofold: to bring to a standstill all disturbing thoughts (and all discriminating thoughts are disturbing), to quiet all engrossing moods and emotions, so that it will be possible to concentrate the mind for the purpose of meditation and realization. Secondly, when the mind is tranquillized by stopping all discursive thinking, to practise ‘reflection’ or meditation, not in a discriminating, analytical way, but in a more intellectual way (cp the scholastic distinction between reason and intellect), by realizing the meaning and significances of one’s thoughts and experiences. By this twofold practice of ‘stopping and realizing’ one’s faith, which has already been awakened, will be developed, and gradually the two aspects of this practice will merge into one another - the mind perfectly tranquil,

but most active in realization. In the past one naturally had confidence in one's faculty of discrimination (analytical thinking), but this is now to be eradicated and ended.

Those who are practising 'stopping' should retire to some quiet place and there, sitting erect, earnestly seek to tranquillize and concentrate the mind. While one may at first think of one's breathing, it is not wise to continue this practice very long, nor to let the mind rest on any particular appearances, or sights, or conceptions, arising from the senses, such as the primal elements of earth, water, fire and ether (objects on which Hinayanists were wont to concentrate at one stage of their spiritual training), nor to let it rest on any of the mind's perceptions, particularizations, discriminations, moods or emotions. All kinds of ideation are to be discarded as fast as they arise; even the notions of controlling and discarding are to be got rid of. One's mind should become like a mirror, reflecting things, but not judging them or retaining them. Conceptions of themselves have no substance; let them arise and pass away unheeded. Conceptions arising from the senses and lower mind will not take form of themselves, unless they are grasped by the attention; if they are ignored, there will be no appearing and no disappearing. The same is true of conditions outside the mind; they should not be allowed to engross one's attention and so to hinder one's practice. The mind cannot be absolutely vacant, and as the thoughts arising from the senses and the lower mind are discarded and ignored, one must supply their place by right meditation. The question then arises: what is right meditation? The reply is: right meditation is the realization of mind itself, of its pure undifferentiated Essence. When the mind is fixed on its pure Essence, there should be no lingering notions of the self, even of the self in the act of realizing, nor of realization as a phenomenon...

The Way of Wisdom. The purpose of this discipline is to bring a man into the habit of applying the insight that has come to him as the result of the preceding disciplines. When one is rising, standing, walking, doing something, stopping, one should constantly concentrate one's mind on the act and the doing of it, not on one's relation to the act, or its character or value. One should think: there is

walking, there is stopping, there is realizing; not, I am walking, I am doing this, it is a good thing, it is disagreeable, I am gaining merit, it is I who am realizing how wonderful it is. Thence come vagrant thoughts, feelings of elation or of failure and unhappiness. Instead of all this, one should simply practise concentration of the mind on the act itself, understanding it to be an expedient means for attaining tranquillity of mind, realization, insight and Wisdom; and one should follow the practice in faith, willingness and gladness. After long practice the bondage of old habits becomes weakened and disappears, and in its place appear confidence, satisfaction, awareness and tranquillity.

What is this Way of Wisdom designed to accomplish? There are three classes of conditions that hinder one from advancing along the path to Enlightenment. First, there are the allurements arising from the senses, from external conditions and from the discriminating mind. Second, there are the internal conditions of the mind, its thoughts, desires and mood. All these the earlier practices (ethical and modificatory) are designed to eliminate. In the third class of impediments are placed the individual's instinctive and fundamental (and therefore most insidious and persistent) urges - the will to live and to enjoy, the will to cherish one's personality, the will to propagate, which give rise to greed and lust, fear and anger, infatuation, pride and egotism. The practice of the Wisdom Paramita is designed to control and eliminate these fundamental and instinctive hindrances. By means of it the mind gradually grows clearer, more luminous, more peaceful.

Insight becomes more penetrating, faith deepens and broadens, until they merge into the inconceivable Samadhi of the Mind's Pure Essence. As one continues the practice of the Way of Wisdom, one yields less and less to thoughts of comfort or desolation; faith becomes surer, more pervasive, beneficent and joyous; and fear of retrogression vanishes. But do not think that the consummation is to be attained easily or quickly; many rebirths may be necessary, many aeons may have to elapse. So long as doubts, unbelief, slanders, evil conduct, hindrances of karma, weakness of faith, pride, sloth and mental agitation persist, so long as even their shadows linger, there can be no attainment

of the Samadhi of the Buddhas. But he who has attained to the radiance of the highest Samadhi, or unitive Knowledge, will be able to realize, with all the Buddhas, the perfect unity of all sentient beings with Buddhahood's Dharmakaya. In the pure Dharmakaya there is no dualism, neither shadow or differentiation. All sentient beings, if only they were able to realize it, are already in Nirvana. The Mind's pure Essence is Highest Samadhi, is *Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi,* is *Prajna Paramita,* is Highest Perfect Wisdom.

Ashvaghosha

26. Perseverance and Regularity

HE WHO INTERRUPTS the course of his spiritual exercises and prayer is like a man who allows a bird to escape from his hand; he can hardly catch it again.

St John of the Cross Si volumus non redire, currendum est. (If we wish not to go backwards, we must run.) *Pelagius*

If thou shouldst say, ‘It is enough, I have reached perfection,’ all is lost. For it is the function of perfection to make one know one’s imperfection.

St Augustine The Buddhists have a similar saying to the effect that, if an arhat thinks to himself that he is an arhat, that is proof that he is not an arhat.

I tell you that no one can experience this birth (of God realized in the soul) without a mighty effort. No one can attain this birth unless he can withdraw his mind entirely from things.

Eckhart

If a sharp penance had been laid upon me, I know of none that I would not very often have willingly undertaken, rather than prepare myself for prayer by self-recollection. And certainly the violence with which Satan assailed me was so irresistible, or my evil habits were so strong, that I did not betake myself to prayer; and the sadness I felt on entering the oratory was so great that it required all the courage I had to force myself in. They say of me that my courage is not slight, and it is known that God has given me a courage beyond that of a woman; but I have made a bad use of it. In the end Our Lord came to my relief, and when I had done this violence to myself, I found greater peace and joy than I sometimes had when I had a desire to pray.

St Teresa

To one of his spiritual children our dear father (St François de Sales) said, ‘Be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself. I mean, do not be disheartened by your imperfections, but always rise up with fresh courage. I am glad you make a fresh beginning daily; there is no better means of attaining to the spiritual life than by continually beginning again, and never thinking that we have done enough. How are we to be patient in bearing with our neighbour’s faults, if we are impatient in bearing with our own? He who is fretted by his own failings will not correct them; all profitable correction comes from a calm, peaceful mind.’

Jean Pierre Camus

There are scarce any souls that give themselves to internal prayer but some time or other do find themselves in great indisposition thereto, having great obscurities in the mind and great insensibility in their affections, so that if imperfect souls be not well instructed and prepared, they will be in danger, in case that such contradictions of inferior nature continue long, to be dejected, yea, and perhaps deterred from pursuing prayer, for they will be apt to think that their recollections are to no purpose at all, since, for as much as seems to them, whatsoever they think or actuate towards God is a mere loss of time and of no worth at all; and therefore that it would be more profitable for them to employ their time some other way.

Yea, some souls there are conducted by Almighty God by no other way, but only by such prayer of aridity, finding no sensible contentment in any recollection, but, on the contrary, continual pain and contradiction, and yet, by a privy grace and courage imprinted deeply in the spirit, cease not for all that, but resolutely break through all difficulties and continue, the best way they can, their internal exercises to the great advancement of their spirit.

Augustine Baker

27. Contemplation, Action and Social Utility

IN ALL THE historic formulations of the Perennial Philosophy it is axiomatic that the end of human life is contemplation, or the direct and intuitive awareness of God; that action is the means to that end; that a society is good to the extent that it renders contemplation possible for its members; and that the existence of at least a minority of contemplatives is necessary for the well-being of any society. In the popular philosophy of our own time it goes without saying that the end of human life is action; that contemplation (above all in its lower forms of discursive thought) is the means to that end; that a society is good to the extent that the actions of its members make for progress in technology and organization (a progress which is assumed to be causally related to ethical and cultural advance); and that a minority of contemplatives is perfectly useless and perhaps even harmful to the community which tolerates it. To expatiate further on the modern *Weltanschauung* is unnecessary; explicitly or by implication it is set forth on every page of the advertising sections of every newspaper and magazine. The extracts that follow have been chosen in order to illustrate the older, truer, less familiar theses of the Perennial Philosophy.

Work is for the purification of the mind, not for the perception of Reality. The realization of Truth is brought about by discrimination, and not in the least by ten millions of acts.

Shankara

Now, the last end of each thing is that which is intended by the first author or mover of that thing; and the first author and mover of the universe is an intellect. Consequently, the last end of the universe must be the good of the intellect; and this is truth. Therefore truth must be the last end of the whole universe, and the

consideration thereof must be the chief occupation of wisdom. And for this reason divine Wisdom, clothed in flesh, declares that He came into the world to make known the truth... Moreover Aristotle defines the First Philosophy as being the knowledge of truth, not of any truth, but of that truth which is the source of all truth, of that, namely, which refers to the first principle of being of all things; wherefore its truth is the principle of all truth, since the disposition of things is the same in truth as in being.

St Thomas Aquinas

A thing may belong to the contemplative life in two ways, essentially or as a predisposition... The moral virtues belong to the contemplative life as a predisposition. For the act of contemplation, in which the contemplative life essentially consists, is hindered both by the impetuosity of the passions and by outward disturbances. Now the moral virtues curb the impetuosity of the passions and quell the disturbance of outward occupations. Hence moral virtues belong to the contemplative life as a predisposition.

St Thomas Aquinas

These works (of mercy), though they be but active, yet they help very much, and dispose a man in the beginning to attain afterwards to contemplation.

Walter Hilton

In Buddhism, as in Vedanta and in all but the most recent forms of Christianity, right action is the means by which the mind is prepared for contemplation. The first seven branches of the Eightfold Path arc the active, ethical preparation for unitive knowledge of Suchness. Only those who consistently practise the Four Virtuous Acts, in which all other virtues arc included - namely, the requital of hatred by love, resignation, ‘holy indifference’

or desirelessness, obedience to the *dharma* or Nature of Things - can hope to achieve the liberating realization that *samsara* and *nirvana* are one, that the soul and all other beings have as their living principle the Intelligible Light or Buddha-womb.

A question now, quite naturally, presents itself: Who is called to that highest form of prayer which is contemplation? The answer is unequivocally plain. All arc called to contemplation, because all are called to achieve deliverance, which is nothing else but the knowledge that unites the knower with what is known, namely the eternal Ground or Godhead. The oriental exponents of the Perennial Philosophy would probably deny that everyone is called here and now; in this particular life, they would say, it may be to all intents and purposes impossible for a given individual to achieve more than a partial deliverance, such as personal survival in some kind of ‘heaven,’ from which there may be either an advance towards total liberation or else a return to those material conditions which, as all the masters of the spiritual life agree, are so uniquely propitious for taking the cosmic intelligence test that results in enlightenment. In orthodox Christianity it is denied that the individual soul can have more than one incarnation, or that it can make any progress in its posthumous existence. If it goes to hell, it stays there. If it goes to purgatory, it merely expiates past evil doing, so as to become capable of the beatific vision. And when it gets to heaven, it has just so much of the beatific vision as its conduct during its one brief life on earth made it capable of, and everlastingly no more. Granted these postulates, it follows that, if all arc called to contemplation, they arc called to it from that particular position in the hierarchy of being, to which nature, nurture, free will and grace have conspired to assign them. In the words of an eminent contemporary theologian, Father Garrigou-Lagrange, ‘all souls receive a general remote call to the mystical life, and if all were faithful in avoiding, as they should, not only mortal but venial sins, if they were, each according to his condition, generally docile to the Holy Ghost, and if they lived long enough, a day would come when they would receive the proximate and efficacious vocation to a high perfection and to the mystical life properly so called.’ This

view - that the life of mystical contemplation is the proper and normal development of the ‘interior life’ of recollectedness and devotion to God - is then justified by the following considerations. First, the principle of the two lifes is the same. Second, it is only in the life of mystical contemplation that the interior life finds its consummation. Third, their end, which is eternal life, is the same; moreover, only the life of mystical contemplation prepares immediately and perfectly for that end.

There are few contemplatives, because few souls are perfectly humble.

The Imitation of Christ

God does not reserve such a lofty vocation (that of mystical contemplation) to certain souls only; on the contrary, He is willing that all should embrace it. But He finds few who permit Him to work such sublime things for them. There are many who when He sends them trials, shrink from the labour and refuse to bear with the dryness and mortification, instead of submitting, as they must, with perfect patience.

St John of the Cross

This assertion that all arc called to contemplation seems to conflict with what we know about the inborn varieties of temperament and with the doctrine that there are at least three principal roads to liberation - the ways of works and devotion as well as the way of knowledge. But the conflict is more apparent than real. If the ways of devotion and works lead to liberation, it is because they lead into the way of knowledge. For total deliverance comes only through unitive knowledge. A soul which docs not go on from the ways of devotion and works into the way of knowledge is not totally delivered, but achieves at the best the incomplete salvation of ‘heaven.’ Coming now to the question of temperament, we find that, in effect, certain individuals arc naturally drawn to lay the main doctrinal and practical emphasis in one place, certain others elsewhere. But

though there may be born devotees, born workers, born contemplatives, it is nevertheless true that even those at the extreme limits of temperamental eccentricity arc capable of making use of other ways than that to which they arc naturally drawn. Given the requisite degree of obedience to the leadings of the Light, the born contemplative can learn to purify his heart by work and direct his mind by one-pointed adoration; the born devotee and the born worker can learn to 'be still and know that I am God.' Nobody need be the victim of his peculiar talents. Few or many, of this stamp or of that, they arc given us to be used for the gaining of one great end. We have the power to choose whether to use them well or badly - in the easier, worse way or the harder and better.

Those who are more adapted to the active life can prepare themselves for contemplation in the practice of the active life, while those who are more adapted to the contemplative life can take upon themselves the works of the active life so as to become yet more apt for contemplation.

St Thomas Aquinas

He who is strong in faith, weak in understanding, will generally place his confidence in good-for-nothing people and believe in the wrong object. He who is strong in understanding, weak in faith, leans towards dishonesty and is difficult to cure, like a disease caused by medicine. One in whom both are equal believes in the right object.

He who is strong in concentration, weak in energy, is overcome by idleness, since concentration partakes of the nature of idleness. He who is strong in energy, weak in concentration, is overcome by distractions, since energy partakes of the nature of distraction. Therefore they should be made equal to one another, since from equality in both comes contemplation and ecstasy...

Mindfulness should be strong everywhere, for mindfulness keeps the mind away from distraction, into which it might fall, since faith, energy and understanding partake of the nature of distraction: and away from idleness, into which it might fall, since concentration partakes of the nature of idleness.

Buddhaghosha

At this point it is worth remarking parenthetically that God is by no means the only possible object of contemplation. There have been and still are many philosophic, aesthetic and scientific contemplatives. One-pointed concentration on that which is not the highest may become a dangerous form of idolatry. In a letter to Hooker, Darwin wrote that ‘it is a cursed evil to any man to become so absorbed in any subject as I am in mine.’ It is an evil because such one-pointedness may result in the more or less total atrophy of all but one side of the mind. Darwin himself records that in later life he was unable to take the smallest interest in poetry, art or religion. Professionally, in relation to his chosen speciality, a man may be completely mature. Spiritually and sometimes even ethically, in relation to God and his neighbours, he may be hardly more than a foetus.

In cases where the one-pointed contemplation is of God there is also the risk that the mind’s unemployed capacities may atrophy. The hermits of Tibet and the Thebaïd were certainly one-pointed, but with a one-pointedness of exclusion and mutilation. It may be, however, that if they had been more truly ‘docile to the Holy Ghost,’ they would have come to understand that the one-pointedness of exclusion is at best a preparation for the one-pointedness of inclusion - the realization of God in the fullness of cosmic being as well as in the interior height of the individual soul. Like the Taoist sage, they would at last have turned back into the world riding on their tamed and regenerate individuality; they would have ‘come eating and drinking,’ would have associated with ‘publicans and sinners’ or their Buddhist equivalents, ‘wine-bibbers and butchers.’ For the fully enlightened, totally liberated person, *samsara* and *nirvana,* time and eternity, the phenomenal and the Real, are essentially one. His whole life is an unsleeping and one-pointed contemplation of the Godhead in and through the things, lives, minds and events of the world of becoming. There is here no mutilation of the soul, no atrophy of any of its powers and capacities. Rather, there is a general

enhancement and intensification of consciousness, and at the same time an extension and transfiguration. No saint has ever complained that absorption in God was a ‘cursed evil.’

In the beginning was the Word; behold Him to whom Mary listened. And the Word was made flesh; behold Him whom Martha served.

St Augustine

God aspires us into Himself in contemplation, and then we must be wholly His; but afterwards the Spirit of God expires us without, for the practice of love and good works.

Ruysbroeck

Action, says Aquinas, should be something added to the life of prayer, not something taken away from it. One of the reasons for this recommendation is strictly utilitarian; action that is ‘taken away from the life of prayer’ is action unenlightened by contact with Reality, uninspired and unguided; consequently it is apt to be ineffective and even harmful. ‘The sages of old,’ says Chuang Tzu, ‘first got Tao for themselves, then got it for others.’ There can be no taking of motes out of other people’s eyes so long as the beam in our own eye prevents us from seeing the divine Sun and working by its light. Speaking of those who prefer immediate action to acquiring, through contemplation, the power to act well, St John of the Cross asks, ‘What do they accomplish?’ And he answers, *Poco mas que nada, y a veces nada, y aun a veces dano* (‘Little more than nothing, and sometimes nothing at all, and sometimes even harm’). Income must balance expenditure. This is necessary not merely on the economic level, but also on the physiological, the intellectual, the ethical and the spiritual. We cannot put forth physical energy unless we stoke our body with fuel in the form of food. We cannot hope to utter anything worth saying, unless we read and inwardly digest the utterances of our betters. We cannot act rightly and

effectively unless we arc in the habit of laying ourselves open to leadings of the divine Nature of Things. We must draw in the goods of eternity in order to be able to give out the goods of time. But the goods of eternity cannot be had except by giving up at least a little of our time to silently waiting for them. This means that the life in which ethical expenditure is balanced by spiritual income must be a life in which action alternates with repose, speech with alertly passive silence. *Otium sanctum quaerit carilas veritalis; negotium justum suscipil nécessitas caritalis* (‘The love of Truth seeks holy leisure; the necessity of love undertakes righteous action’). The bodies of men and animals arc reciprocating engines, in which tension is always succeeded by relaxation. Even the unsleeping heart rests between beat and beat.

There is nothing in living Nature that even distantly resembles man’s greatest technical invention, the continuously revolving wheel. (It is this fact, no doubt, which accounts for the boredom, weariness and apathy of those who, in modern factories, are forced to adapt their bodily and mental movements to circular motions of mechnically uniform velocity.) ‘What a man takes in by contemplation,’ says Eckhart, ‘that he pours out in love.’ The well-meaning humanist and the merely muscular Christian, who imagines that he can obey the second of the great commandments without taking time even to think how best he may love God with all his heart, soul and mind, are people engaged in the impossible task of pouring unceasingly from a container that is never replenished.

Daughters of Charity ought to love prayer as the body loves the soul. And just as the body cannot live without the soul, so the soul cannot live without prayer. And in so far as a daughter prays as she ought to pray, she will do well. She will not walk, she will run in the ways of the Lord, and will be raised to a high degree of the love of God.

St Vincent de Paul

Households, cities, countries and nations have enjoyed great happiness, when a single individual has taken heed of the Good and Beautiful... Such men not only liberate themselves; they fill those they meet with a free mind.

Philo

Similar views arc expressed by Al-Ghazzali, who regards the mystics not only as the ultimate source of our knowledge of the soul and its capacities and defects, but as the salt which preserves human societies from decay. ‘In the time of the philosophers,’ he writes, ‘as at every other period, there existed some of these fervent mystics. God does not deprive this world of them, for they are its sustainers.’ It is they who, dying to themselves, become capable of perpetual inspiration and so arc made the instruments through which divine grace is mediated to those whose unregenerate nature is impervious to the delicate touches of the Spirit.

Science, Liberty and Peace

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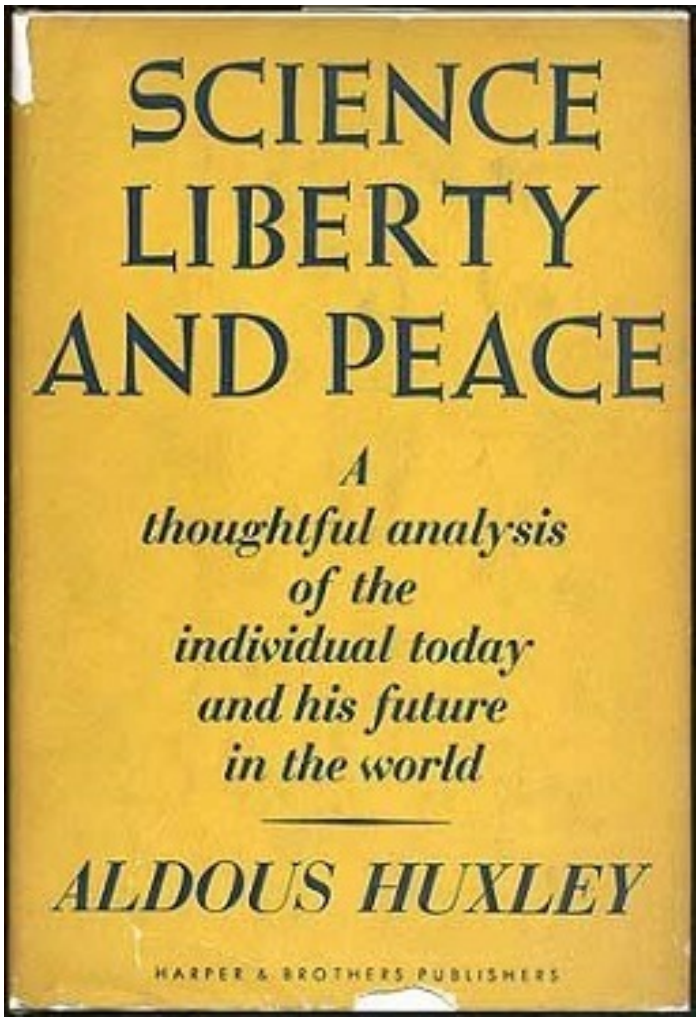

The first edition

I.

‘IF THE ARRANGEMENT of society is bad (as ours is), and a small number of people have power over the majority and oppress it, every victory over Nature will inevitably serve only to increase that power and that oppression. This is what is actually happening.’

It is nearly half a century since Tolstoy wrote these words, and what was happening then has gone on happening ever since. Science and technology have made notable advances in the intervening years — and so has the centralization of political and economic power, so have oligarchy and despotism. It need hardly be added that science is not the only causative factor involved in this process. No social evil can possibly have only one cause. Hence the difficulty, in any given case, of finding a complete cure. All that is being maintained here is that progressive science is one of the causative factors involved in the progressive decline of liberty and the progressive centralization of power, which have occurred during the twentieth century.

Applied science touches the lives of individuals and societies at many different points and in a great variety of contexts, and therefore the ways in which it has increased the power of the few over the majority are correspondingly many and various. In the paragraphs that follow I shall enumerate the more obviously significant of these ways, shall indicate how and by what means applied science has contributed hitherto toward the centralization of power in the hands of a small ruling minority, and also how and by what means such tendencies may be resisted and ultimately, perhaps, reversed.

1. In the course of the past two or three generations science and technology have equipped the political bosses who control the various national states with unprecedentedly efficient instruments of coercion. The tank, the flame-thrower and the bomber — to mention but a few of these instruments — have made

nonsense of the old techniques of popular revolt. At the same time the recent revolutionary improvements in the means of transport and communications have vastly strengthened the hands of the police. In his own peculiar way, Fouché was a man of first-rate abilities; but compared with the secret police force at the disposal of a modern dictatorship or even of a modern democracy, the instrument of oppression, which he was able to forge for Napoleon, was an absurdly clumsy piece of machinery. In the past, personal and political liberty depended to a considerable extent upon governmental inefficiency. The spirit of tyranny was always more than willing; but its organization and material equipment were generally weak. Progressive science and technology have changed all this completely. Today, if the central executive wishes to act oppressively, it finds an almost miraculously efficient machine of coercion standing ready to be set in motion. Thanks to the genius and co-operative industry of highly trained physicists, chemists, metallurgists and mechanical inventors, tyrants are able to dragoon larger numbers of people more effectively, and strategists can kill and destroy more indiscriminately and at greater distances, than ever before. On many fronts nature has been conquered; but, as Tolstoy foresaw, man and his liberties have sustained a succession of defeats.

Overwhelming scientific and technological superiority cannot be resisted on their own plane. In 1848 the sporting gun was a match for the muskets of the soldiery, and a barricade made of overturned carts, sandbags and paving stones was a sufficient protection against cavalry and muzzle-loading cannon. After a century of scientific and technological progress no weapons available to the masses of the people can compete with those in the arsenals controlled by the ruling minority. Consequently, if any resistance is to be offered by the many to the few, it must be offered in a field in which technological superiority does not count. In countries where democratic institutions exist and the executive is prepared to abide by the rules of the democratic game, the many can protect themselves against the ruling few by using their right to vote, to strike, to organize pressure groups, to petition the legislature, to hold meetings and conduct press campaigns in favour of reform. But where there are no democratic

institutions, or where a hitherto democratic government declines any longer to abide by the rules of the game, a majority which feels itself oppressed may be driven to resort to direct action. But since science and technology, in conquering nature have thereby enormously increased the military and police power of the ruling few, this direct action cannot hope for a successful outcome, if it is violent; for in any armed conflict, the side which has the tanks, planes and flame-throwers cannot fail to defeat the side which is armed at the very best only with small arms and hand grenades.

Is there any way out of the unfavourable political situation in which, thanks to applied science, the masses now find themselves? So far only one hopeful issue has been discovered. In South Africa and, later, in India, Gandhi and his followers were confronted by an oppressive government armed with overwhelming military might. Gandhi, who is not only an idealist and a man of principle, but also an intensely practical politician, attempted to cope with this seemingly desperate situation by organizing a non-violent form of direct action, which he called satyagraha. For a full account of the methods and results of satyagraha the reader is referred to War without Violence by Krishnalal Shridharani (New York, 1939). Here it is only necessary to state that the method achieved a number of striking successes against odds which, from a military point of view, were overwhelmingly great. To those who think that the record of Gandhi's achievements is irrelevant to the historical and psychological situation of the industrial West, Mr. Shridharani makes the following answer:

My contact with the Western world has led me to think that, contrary to popular belief, satyagraha, once consciously and deliberately adopted, has more fertile fields in which to grow and flourish in the West than in the Orient. Like war, satyagraha demands public spirit, self-sacrifice, organization and discipline for its successful operation, and I have found these qualities displayed in Western communities more than in my own. Perhaps the best craftsmen in the art of violence may still be the most effective wielders of non-violent direct action. It is but a question, in the words of William James, of 'opinion-making men seizing historic opportunities.'

It is often argued that satyagraha cannot work against an organization whose leaders are prepared to exploit their military superiority without qualm or scruple. And of course this may very well be the case. No more than any other form of political action, violent or otherwise, can satyagraha guarantee success. But even though, against an entirely ruthless and fanatical opponent, non-co-operation and what Thoreau called ‘civil disobedience,’ coupled with a disciplined willingness to accept and even to court sacrificial suffering, may prove unavailing, the resulting situation could not be, materially, any worse than it would have been if the intolerable oppression had been passively accepted or else resisted unavailingly by force; while, psychologically and morally, it would in all probability be very much better — better for those participating in the satyagraha and better in the eyes of spectators and of those who merely heard of the achievement at second hand.

In the years ahead it seems possible that satyagraha may take root in the West — not primarily as the result of any ‘change of heart,’ but simply because it provides the masses, especially in the conquered countries, with their only practicable form of political action. The Germans of the Ruhr and the Palatinate resorted to satyagraha against the French in 1923. The movement was spontaneous; philosophically, ethically and organizationally, it had not been prepared for. It was for this reason that it finally broke down. But it lasted long enough to prove that a Western people — and a people more thoroughly indoctrinated with militarism than any other — was perfectly capable of non-violent direct action, involving the cheerful acceptance of sacrificial suffering. Similar movements of satyagraha (more conscious of themselves this time, and better prepared for) may again be initiated among the masses of conquered Germany. The impracticability of any other kind of political action makes it very possible that this will happen sooner or later. It would be one of the happier ironies of history if the nation which produced Klausewitz and Bernhardi and Hitler were to be forced by circumstances to become the first large-scale exponent in the West of that non-violent direct action which has become, in this

age of scientific progress, humanity's only practical substitute for hopeless revolution and self-stultifying or suicidal war.

2. The pen and the voice are at least as mighty as the sword; for the sword is wielded in obedience to the spoken or the written word. Progressive technology has strengthened the powers that be by providing them not only with bigger and better instruments of coercion, but also with instruments of persuasion incomparably superior to those at the disposal of earlier rulers. The rotary press and, more recently, the radio have contributed greatly to the concentration of political and economic power. James Mill believed that, when everybody had learned to read, the reign of reason and democracy would be assured for ever. But in actual historical fact the spread of free compulsory education, and, along with it, the cheapening and acceleration of the older methods of printing, have almost everywhere been followed by an increase in the power of ruling oligarchies at the expense of the masses. The reasons for this are obvious. A newspaper combining attractiveness with cheapness cannot be produced unless it is subsidized either by advertisers (that is to say, the people who control centralized finance and large-scale, mass-producing and mass-distributing industry), or by some organization desirous, for its own purposes, of influencing public opinion, or by the central government. In countries where the press is said to be free, newspapers are subsidized primarily by advertisers, and to a lesser extent by political parties, financial or professional groups. In countries where the press is not free, newspapers are subsidized by the central government. The man who pays the piper always calls the tune. In capitalist democracies the popular press supports its advertisers by inculcating the benefits of centralized industry and finance, coupled with as much centralized government as will enable these institutions to function at a profit. In totalitarian states all newspapers preach the virtues of governmental omnipotence, one-party politics and state control of everything. In both cases progressive technology has strengthened the hands of the local bosses by providing them with the means of persuading the many that concentration of political and economic power is for the general benefit.

What is true of the press is equally true of the radio. Spoken words are more exciting than words printed on wood pulp. In the past a great orator could reach, at the most, only a few thousand listeners. Today, thanks to applied science, a dictator with a gift of the gab is able to pour his emotionally charged evangel into the ears of tens of millions. What Mark Antony could do to the mob assembled round Caesar's corpse, his modern counterpart can do to entire nations. Never have so many been so much at the mercy of so few.

Undesirable propaganda will not cease until the persons who pay for propaganda either change their minds, or are replaced by other persons willing to pay for something else. Meanwhile there is no remedy for the evil except personal self-denial. Reading newspapers and listening to the radio are psychological addictions; and psychological addictions, like the physiological addictions to drugs, tobacco and alcohol, can only be put an end to by a voluntary effort on the part of the addict. So long as people yield to the craving to read about murders and divorces and to look at the comic strips, or to listen to soap operas and swing music, they must expect to be influenced by the propaganda which always accompanies these habit-forming stimuli. A questionnaire on reading habits was recently addressed by the heads of a New York labour union to its membership. Among the questions asked were: What newspaper do you regularly read? and what newspaper do you consider the least trustworthy and most untruthful? Sixty per cent. of the membership agreed that newspaper X was the most untruthful sheet in the New York area, but over forty per cent. admitted to making it their daily reading — because of its superior comic strips and more violent sensationalism. As usual, it is a case of video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor — I see the better and I approve; but the worse is what I pursue. Under the present dispensation, nothing but self-denial on the part of readers can diminish the influence of newspaper X. Continued indulgence in psychological addictions has to be paid for, and the price is undesirable propaganda.

3. By supplying the ruling oligarchy with more effective instruments of coercion and persuasion, applied science has contributed directly to the

centralization of power in the hands of the few. But it has also made important indirect contributions to the same end. It has done this in two ways; first, by introducing over ever larger areas of the industrial and agricultural economy the methods of large-scale mass production and mass distribution; second, by creating, through its very progressiveness, an economic and social insecurity which drives all those concerned, owners and managers no less than workers, to seek the assistance of the national state. Let us now consider these two power-centralizing factors in greater detail.

(a) In applying the results of disinterested scientific research, inventors and technicians have paid more attention to the problem of equipping large concerns with the expensive machinery of mass production and mass distribution than to that of providing individuals or co-operating groups with cheap and simple, but effective, means of production for their own subsistence and for the needs of a local market. The reason for this is that there has been more money in working for the mass producers and mass distributors; and the mass producers and mass distributors have had more money because financiers have seen that there was more profit for them, and more power, in a centralized than in a decentralized system of production.

Here, in parenthesis, let us note that concentration of financial power preceded the scientific revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was largely responsible for making our industrial civilization the hateful thing it was and, for the most part, still is. Throughout Europe, land and natural resources were not owned outright by the people, represented by a multitude of small-holders; nor were they the property of a sovereign, leasing to small tenants and spending the rent (which is the monetary expression of the social value of land) for social purposes. The best part of the land and its natural resources was the monopoly of a small class of landlords, who appropriated the social values of what should, quite obviously, have been everybody’s property, to their own private use. Hence the early centralization of financial power — a power that was used to exploit the new technological discoveries for the benefit, not of individual small producers or co-operating groups, but for that of the class which

alone possessed accumulations of money. Centralized finance begot centralized industry, and in due course the profits of centralized industry increased the power of centralized finance, so that it was able to proceed ever further in the direction of completely centralized production and distribution.

The centralizing of industrial capacity in big mass-producing factories has resulted in the centralization of a large part of the population in cities and in the reduction of ever-increasing numbers of individuals to complete dependence upon a few private capitalists and their managers, or upon the one public capitalist, the state, represented by politicians and working through civil servants. So far as liberty is concerned, there is little to choose between the two types of boss. Up to the present, state-controlled enterprises have been closely modelled upon those of capitalist big business. Nationalization has not stopped short at land and natural resources, nor have the land and natural resources been nationalized with the purpose of giving individuals or co-operating groups free access to the means of small-scale production, personal liberty and self-government. On the contrary, the objects nationalized include, besides land and natural resources, the tools of production, and that nationalization has been undertaken with a view to strengthening the state (that is to say, the politicians momentarily in power) against its subjects and not at all with the purpose of liberating individual men and women from economic dependence upon bosses. But economic dependence upon bosses is always bad, because, quite obviously, it is not easily reconcilable with local and professional self-government or with civil and personal liberty. Democratic institutions are likely to work best at times and in places where at least a good part of the citizens have access to enough land and possess sufficient tools and professional skill to be able to provide for their subsistence without recourse to financially potent private capitalists or to the government. Where, as in the contemporary Western world, great numbers of the citizens own nothing (not even, in many cases, a skill, since the operation of semi-automatic machines does not require a skill), personal liberty and political and civil rights are to a more or less considerable extent dependent upon the grace of the capitalistic or national owners and managers of the means of

production and distribution, and upon their willingness to abide by the rules of the democratic game. To forward their interests and to protect themselves against oppression, propertyless workers combine in trade unions. These have done much to bridle the ambition and covetousness of capitalists and to improve the conditions of labour. But trade unions are as subject to giganticism and centralization as are the industries to which they are related. Consequently it happens all too frequently that the masses of unionized workers find themselves dependent upon, and subordinated to, two governing oligarchies — that of the bosses and that of the union leaders. Over the first they have no control at all, except by strike and the threat of strike; over the second their control is at best remote and rather shadowy. Self-government, which is the very essence of democratic freedom, is more or less completely absent from their professional lives. This is ultimately due, as we have seen, to propertylessness and consequent dependence upon the private or public owners and managers of the means of mass production and mass distribution; and propertylessness is due in its turn to (among other things) the progress of applied science — a progress which, under the auspices of centralized finance, has hitherto favoured mass production at the expense of production on a small scale for personal or co-operative use, or to supply a local market.

In the most highly industrialized countries, applied science and its ally, and master, centralized finance, have profoundly changed the traditional pattern of agricultural life. Thus, in the United States, the percentage of the population making its living from the land has been reduced in recent years to only a fifth of the total. Meanwhile the size of individual holdings of land has tended to increase, as powerful corporations add field to field in the effort to exploit mechanized farming to its economic limit. Small-scale farmers, who used to be primarily concerned with subsistence, secondarily with a cash crop, have been largely replaced by men whose primary concern is with cash crops and who use the cash so earned to buy ‘nationally advertised,’ processed and denatured foods at the grocer’s.

In Russia the process of centralizing and consolidating the control of land and of industrializing agricultural production has been carried out by government decree and by means of the liquidation of a whole class of society. It would appear, however, that a measure of small-scale private ownership, or quasi-ownership, has had to be reintroduced in order to increase agricultural efficiency by improving the morale of the workers.

(b) Among the ordinary results of the rapid progress of applied science are technological unemployment and the sudden and unexpected necessity of changing long-established habits of agricultural and industrial production. When too rapid, changes of position or state are very disturbing to living organisms, sometimes even fatal. That is why, when we get out of a plane in mid-air, we use a parachute, why, when we take a Turkish bath, we do not plunge immediately into the hottest chamber. Analogously, social, economic and political changes can take place too rapidly and too frequently for human well-being. A highly progressive technology entails incessant and often very rapid and startling changes of economic, political and ethical state; and such changes tend to keep the societies subjected to them in a chronically uncomfortable and unstable condition. Some day, perhaps, social scientists will be able to tell us what is the optimum rate of change, and what the optimum amount of it at any one time. For the present, Western societies remain at the mercy of their progressive technologies, to the intense discomfort of everybody concerned. Man as a moral, social and political being is sacrificed to homo faber, or man the smith, the inventor and forger of new gadgets.

And meanwhile, of course, technological unemployment is always with us; for every labour-saving device, every substitution of a new and more efficient technique for an older and less efficient one, results in a local and temporary diminution of the labour force. In the long run the persons displaced, as the result of technological advance, may find themselves reabsorbed by other industries or even (since increased efficiency results in lowered prices, greater demand and an expansion of production sufficient, in some cases, to offset the original technological unemployment) by the industry from which they were

discharged. But what may happen in the long run is of little interest to propertyless persons who are compelled by hunger and the elements to do their living exclusively in the short run. For such persons the chief consequence of progressive science is a chronic social and economic insecurity.

Here, as in an earlier paragraph, it is necessary to stress the fact that the progress of applied science is not the only causative factor involved. Mass unemployment and periodical slumps have a variety of interlocking causes — meteorological, financial and psychological causes as well as those connected with science and technology. Concerning the relative importance of these factors the experts are not yet agreed. Many theories of slumps and unemployment have been formulated, each of which emphasizes one of the known causative factors at the expense of all the rest. None of these theories is universally accepted; but all of them — and this, for our present purpose, is the important point — are agreed that technological unemployment is a reality and that the progress of applied science does in fact play an important part in creating the economic and social insecurity which is the plague of modern industrial societies.

In the capitalist countries the nature of the monetary and financial systems has been such that, whenever a boom gets under way, the issuers of credit are compelled by the traditional rules of banking to withdraw credit and so to convert the boom into a slump. At the same time the owners of mass-producing industry are compelled by the rules of the game of profit-making to practise what Thorstein Veblen used to call ‘capitalist sabotage’ — in other words, they are compelled by the necessity of making profits to prevent their managers from producing as many goods and at as cheap a rate as they are technically equipped to do. In both cases the result of following the traditional rules is an accentuation of the social and economic insecurity normally resulting from technological progress. State socialists hold that the remedy for these evils can be found only in the nationalization of banking, land and Industry — in other words, in the complete and final centralization of economic as well as political power in the hands of the currently ruling politicians and their managers. But power is in its essence expansive, and cannot be curbed except by other powers of equal or at

least comparable magnitude. Under a regime of state socialism there would be no power systems within a community capable of opposing any serious resistance to the politically and economically almighty executive. The political bosses and civil servants in control of the state would themselves be controlled by nothing stronger than a paper constitution. In cases where state socialism succeeds capitalist democracy by non-violent, constitutional means, the rules of the political game are likely to remain, in many respects, identical with those prevailing under the older regime. For as long as the new system is administered by men brought up under democratic traditions, the constitutional rules will probably be observed. But when these men are succeeded by a new generation, born and brought up in a society dominated by the omnipotent state, what then? Only the most ingenuously optimistic, the most wilfully blind to the facts of history and psychology, can believe that paper guarantees of liberty — guarantees wholly unsupported by the realities of political and economic power — will be scrupulously respected by those who have known only the facts of governmental omnipotence on the one hand and, on the other, of mass dependence upon, and consequently subservience to, the state and its representatives.

We see, then, that technological progress results in economic and social insecurity, and that this insecurity is greatly aggravated, in the capitalist countries, by the necessity of abiding by the traditional rules of private banking, financing and mass production. By nationalizing, or at the least by rigidly controlling, industry, agriculture and banking, the state could probably get rid of periodical depressions and would be in a position to mitigate, by financial and political measures, the worst consequences of scientific progress. In this way the advantages of centralized finance, mass-producing industry and quasi-industrial agriculture could be reconciled with social and economic security for the masses. But everything has its price, and it seems unlikely that security achieved in this way could for long co-exist with that liberty under law which, as Acton was never tired of insisting, is the end of all political action, all social and economic arrangements.

At the present time the horrors of insecurity, as exemplified above all in mass unemployment, have impressed themselves so deeply upon the popular mind that, if offered the choice between liberty and security, most people would almost unhesitatingly vote for security. Similar situations have occurred at other periods of history. Thus, in the years which witnessed the final disintegration of the Roman Empire, the insecurity of life and property was such that many hitherto free peasants and yeomen voluntarily made over their land and even their persons to the nearest great lord, in exchange for his protection. It was better, they felt, to be the serf or even the domestic slave of a powerful noble than to be free, but at the mercy of bandits, barbarians and the men-at-arms of other hereditary magnates. The sources of our present insecurity are not the same as were the sources of the insecurity of fifteen hundred years ago; but in both cases the reaction to insecurity is identical — namely, a general wish to exchange freedom for protection, independence for guaranteed subsistence in the service of the holders of great power. But great power invariably exercises a corrupting influence on those who wield it; and when, in due course, the tyranny of the bosses in control of the omnipotent state becomes unbearable, the masses who now pine for security will begin to pine even more ardently for liberty. That they will be able to extort liberty from a ruling minority equipped by science with the very latest in self-propelled flame-throwers and atomic missiles seems in the highest degree unlikely. It is in satyagraha, or non-violent direct action, that the only hope of future revolutions resides. Meanwhile there is no question, in the contemporary world, of any popular movement in favour of liberty. On the contrary, the masses are everywhere clamouring for ever greater governmental control of everything. Nor are these demands exclusively confined to the masses. The owners and managers of the various capitalist systems of production are also victims of the general insecurity. They too would like a measure of government control — enough control to guarantee profits, but not so much, of course, as to constitute expropriation or nationalization.

Is there any way in which the material advantages of progressive technology can be combined not only with security, but also with freedom? My own view,

which is essentially that of the Decentralists, is that, so long as the results of pure science are applied for the purpose of making our system of mass-producing and mass-distributing industry more expensively elaborate and more highly specialized, there can be nothing but ever greater centralization of power in ever fewer hands. And the corollary of this centralization of economic and political power is the progressive loss by the masses of their civil liberties, their personal independence and their opportunities for self-government. But here we must note that there is nothing in the results of disinterested scientific research which makes it inevitable that they should be applied for the benefit of centralized finance, industry and government. If inventors and technicians so chose, they could just as well apply the results of pure science for the purpose of increasing the economic self-sufficiency and consequently the political independence of small owners, working either on their own or in co-operative groups, concerned not with mass distribution, but with subsistence and the supply of a local market. The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; and the same is true of applied science. Human beings have certain physical and psychological wants. They require food, clothing and shelter; and, for moral and mental health, they need to be given the opportunity to develop their latent potentialities to the fullest degree compatible with the freedom and well-being of others. And beyond these primary psychological needs lies man's spiritual need — the need, in theological language, to achieve his Final End, which is the unitive knowledge of ultimate Reality, the realization that Atman and Brahman are one, that the body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, that Tao or the Logos is at once transcendent and immanent.

Now it seems pretty obvious that man's psychological, to say nothing of his spiritual, needs cannot be fulfilled unless, first, he has a fair measure of personal independence and personal responsibility within and toward a self-governing group, unless, secondly, his work possesses a certain aesthetic value and human significance, and unless, in the third place, he is related to his natural environment in some organic, rooted and symbiotic way. But in modern industrial societies vast numbers of men and women pass their whole lives in

hideous cities, are wholly dependent for their livelihood upon a capitalistic or governmental boss, have to perform manual or clerical work that is repetitive, mechanical and intrinsically meaningless, are rootless, propertyless and entirely divorced from the world of nature, to which, as animals, they still belong and in which, as human beings, they might (if they were sufficiently humble and docile) discover the spiritual Reality in which the whole world, animate and inanimate, has its being. The reason for this dismal state of things is the progressive application of the results of pure science for the benefit of mass-producing and mass-distributing industry, and with the unconscious or conscious purpose of furthering centralization of power in finance, manufacture and government.

But now let us suppose that those who make it their business to apply the results of pure science to economic ends should elect to do so, not primarily for the benefit of big business, big cities and big government, but with the conscious aim of providing individuals with the means of doing profitable and intrinsically significant work, of helping men and women to achieve independence from bosses, so that they may become their own employers, or members of a self-governing, co-operative group working for subsistence and a local market. Suppose, I repeat, that this were henceforward to become the acknowledged purpose guiding the labours of inventors and engineers. Seconded by appropriate legislation, this differently orientated technological progress would result, not as at present in the further concentration of power and the completer subordination of the many to the few, but in a progressive decentralization of population, of accessibility of land, of ownership of the means of production, of political and economic power. Ralph Borsodi's studies have shown that mass-producing and mass-distributing methods are technologically justified in about one-third of the total production of goods. In regard to the remaining two-thirds, the economies effected by mass-production are offset by the increased costs involved in mass distribution over great areas, so that local production by individuals or co-operating groups, working for subsistence and a neighbourhood market, is more economical than mass production in vast centralized factories. And to these

economic advantages of decentralization must be added the social advantages of a more humanly satisfying life for more people, a greater measure of genuine self-governing democracy and a blessed freedom from the silly or pernicious adult education provided by the mass producers of consumer goods through the medium of advertisements.

4. The continuous advance of science and technology has profoundly affected the prevailing mental climate. The basic postulates of thought have been changed, so that what to our fathers seemed obviously true and important strikes us as either false or negligible and beside the point. Let us consider a few of the more significant of these changes and their effects upon the social and political life of our times.

(a) Unlike art, science is genuinely progressive. Achievement in the fields of research and technology is cumulative; each generation begins at the point where its predecessor left off. Furthermore, the results of disinterested research were from the first applied in such a way that the upper and middle classes of all industrialized societies found themselves becoming steadily richer and richer. It was, therefore, only to be expected that the professional thinkers who sprang from these classes, and who were familiar with the methods and achievements of science, should have based upon the facts of technological and economic progress a general theory of human life. The world, they affirmed, was becoming materially, intellectually and morally better and better, and this amelioration was in some way inevitable. The theory of progress — a theory that soon became a dogma, indeed an axiom of popular thought — was novel and, from an orthodox Christian point of view, heretical. For orthodoxy, man was a fallen being. Humanity if not actively deteriorating, was statically bad, with a badness which only grace in co-operation with the individual’s free will could possibly mitigate. In illustration of this, let us consider how the thirteenth century was regarded by those who lived through it, and how it is regarded by modern historians. For the latter it seems one of the most glorious periods in European history; the former were unanimous (as Professor Coulton has shown) in regarding it as an age of peculiar wickedness and manifest degeneracy. Even

in the age of Queen Elizabeth thoughtful men were still talking of humanity's decline. It was not until the late seventeenth century (the age of the rise of modern science) that the note of bumptious self-congratulation began to be sounded, not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the dogma of inevitable progress became an unquestioned article of popular faith.

The belief in all-round progress is based upon the wishful dream that one can get something for nothing. Its underlying assumption is that gains in one field do not have to be paid for by losses in other fields. For the ancient Greeks, hubris, or overweening insolence, whether directed against the gods, or one's fellow-men, or nature, was sure to be followed, sooner or later, in one way or another, by avenging Nemesis. Unlike the Greeks, we of the twentieth century believe that we can be insolent with impunity.

So intense is our faith in the dogma of inevitable progress that it has survived two world wars and still remains flourishing in spite of totalitarianism and the revival of slavery, concentration camps and saturation bombing.

Faith in progress has affected contemporary political life by reviving and popularizing, in an up-to-date, pseudo-scientific and this-worldly form, the old Jewish and Christian apocalypticism. A glorious destiny awaits mankind, a coming Golden Age, in which more ingenious gadgets, more grandiose plans and more elaborate social institutions, will somehow have created a race of better and brighter human beings. Man's Final End is not in the eternal timeless Now, but in a not too distant utopian future. In order to secure the peace and happiness of their great-great-grandchildren, the masses ought to accept and their rulers need feel no qualms in imposing, any amount of war and slavery, of suffering and moral evil, in the present. It is a highly significant fact that all modern dictators, whether of the Right or of the Left, talk incessantly about the golden Future, and justify the most atrocious acts here and now, on the ground that they are means to that glorious end. But the one thing we all know about the future is that we are completely ignorant of what is going to happen, and that what does in fact happen is often very different from what we anticipated. Consequently any faith based upon hypothetical occurrences a long time hence

must always, in the very nature of things, be hopelessly unrealistic. In practice, faith in the bigger and better future is one of the most potent enemies to present liberty; for rulers feel themselves justified in imposing the most monstrous tyrannies on their subjects for the sake of the wholly imaginary fruits which these tyrannies are expected (only an implicit faith in progress can say why) to bear some time, let us say, in the twenty-first or twenty-second century.

(b) As theory, pure science is concerned with the reduction of diversity to identity. As a praxis, scientific research proceeds by simplification. These habits of scientific thought and action have, to a certain extent, been carried over into the theory and practice of contemporary politics. Where a centralized authority undertakes to make plans, for an entire society, it is compelled by the bewildering complexity of the given facts to follow the example of the scientific experimenter, who arbitrarily simplifies his problem in order to make it manageable. In the laboratory this is a sound and entirely justifiable procedure. But when applied to the problems of human society, the process of simplification is a process, inevitably, of restraint and regimentation, of curtailment of liberty and denial of individual rights. This reduction of human diversity to a military and quasi-mechanical identity is achieved by propaganda, by legal enactments and, if necessary, by brute force — by the imprisonment, exile or liquidation of those persons, or those classes, who persist in their perverse desire to remain themselves and are obstinate in their reluctance to conform to the pattern which the political and economic bosses find it, at the moment, most convenient to impose. Philosophically, this ironing out of individual idiosyncrasies is held to be respectable, because it is analogous to what is done by scientists, when they arbitrarily simplify an all too complex reality, so as to make nature comprehensible in terms of a few general laws. A highly organized and regimented society, whose members exhibit a minimum of personal peculiarities, and whose collective behaviour is governed by a single master plan imposed from above, is felt by the planners and even (such is the power of propaganda) by the plannees to be more ‘scientific’, and therefore

better, than a society of independent, freely co-operating and self-governing individuals.

(c) The first step in this simplification of reality, without which (since human minds are finite and nature is infinite) scientific thought and action would be impossible, is a process of abstraction. Confronted by the data of experience, men of science begin by leaving out of account all those aspects of the facts which do not lend themselves to measurement and to explanation in terms of antecedent causes rather than of purpose, intention and values. Pragmatically they are justified in acting in this odd and extremely arbitrary way; for by concentrating exclusively on the measurable aspects of such elements of experience as can be explained in terms of a causal system they have been able to achieve a great and ever increasing control over the energies of nature. But power is not the same thing as insight and, as a representation of reality, the scientific picture of the world is inadequate, for the simple reason that science does not even profess to deal with experience as a whole, but only with certain aspects of it in certain contexts. All this is quite clearly understood by the more philosophically minded men of science. But unfortunately some scientists, many technicians and most consumers of gadgets have lacked the time and the inclination to examine the philosophical foundations and background of the sciences. Consequently they tend to accept the world picture implicit in the theories of science as a complete and exhaustive account of reality; they tend to regard those aspects of experience which scientists leave out of account, because they are incompetent to deal with them, as being somehow less real than the aspects which science has arbitrarily chosen to abstract from out of the infinitely rich totality of given facts. Because of the prestige of science as a source of power, and because of the general neglect of philosophy, the popular Weltanschauung of our times contains a large element of what may be called ‘nothing-but’ thinking. Human beings, it is more or less tacitly assumed, are nothing but bodies, animals, even machines; the only really real elements of reality are matter and energy in their measurable aspects; values are nothing but illusions that have somehow got themselves mixed up with our experience of the

world; mental happenings are nothing but epiphenomena, produced by and entirely dependent upon physiology; spirituality is nothing but wish fulfilment and misdirected sex; and so on. The political consequences of this ‘nothing-but’ philosophy are clearly apparent in that widespread indifference to the values of human personality and human life which are so characteristic of the present age. Within the past thirty years, this indifference has expressed itself in a number of dangerous and disquieting ways. We have witnessed, first of all, the wholesale revival of slavery in its worst and most inhuman forms — slavery imposed upon political heretics living under the various dictatorships, slavery imposed upon whole classes of conquered populations, slavery imposed upon prisoners of war. Next, we note the increasing indiscriminateness of slaughter during wartime. Area bombing, saturation bombing, rocket bombing, bombing by atomic missiles — the indiscriminateness has steadily increased throughout the Second World War, until now no nation even makes a pretence of observing the traditional distinction between civilians and combatants, innocent and guilty, but all devote themselves methodically and scientifically to general massacre and wholesale destruction. Other practical consequences of our ‘nothing-but’ philosophies of life are the employment by civilized people, with a high standard of scientific and technological training, of torture, human vivisection and the systematic starvation of entire populations. And finally there is the phenomenon of forced migration — the removal at the point of the bayonet of millions of men, women and children from their homes to other places, where most of them will die of hunger, exposure and disease.

Unrealistic beliefs tend to result in foolish or morally evil actions; and such wrong beliefs cannot be got rid of, except by teaching right, or at least less erroneous, beliefs. If the ministers, of the various sects and religions would abandon sentimentality and superstition, and devote themselves to teaching their flocks that the Final End of man is not in the unknowable utopian future, but in the timeless eternity of the Inner Light, which every human being is capable, if he so desires, of realizing here and now, then the myth of progress would lose its harmfulness as a justifier of present tyranny and wrongdoing. If scientists and

technicians could be persuaded to read, for example, the essays in Edward Carpenter's Civilization, Its Cause and Cure, together with Professor Burtt's Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science and the speculative writings of Sir Arthur Eddington, the disastrous notion that the contemporary scientific world picture is a complete representation of reality, and the no less disastrous habit of 'nothing-but' evaluations of social and psychological facts, might perhaps be eliminated, to the great advantage of suffering humanity. But quis custodiet custodes? — who is going to guard the guardians of our civilization, and who is going to teach its teachers? Our basic trouble is that, in spite of everything that has happened, everybody thinks he is right. In the past, despots committed the crimes that despots always do commit — but committed them with a conscience that was sometimes distinctly uneasy. They had been brought up as Christians, as Hindus, as Moslems or Buddhists, and in the depths of their being they knew that they were doing wrong, because what they were doing was contrary to the teachings of their religion. Today the political boss has been brought up in our more enlightened and scientific environment. Consequently he is able to perpetrate his outrages with a perfectly clear conscience, convinced that he is acting for humanity's highest good — for is he not expediting the coming of the glorious future promised by Progress? is he not tidying up a messily individualistic society? is he not doing his utmost to substitute the wisdom of experts for the foolishness of men and women who want to do what they think (how erroneously, since of course they are not experts!) is best for them? And then there are the pastors and the schoolmasters. They have their Ph.D.s and their D.D.s, their academic positions and their cures of souls, their habits of authority and their high perches in the pulpit or on the lecture platform. Why should they change their long-established habits and the hallowed traditions of the organizations of which they are the living pillars? The most important lesson of history, it has been said, is that nobody ever learns history's lessons. The enormous catastrophes of recent years have left the survivors thinking very much as they thought before. A horde of Bourbons, we return to what we call peace, having learned nothing and forgotten nothing — forgotten nothing,

except, of course, the causes of war, which (whatever our intentions and our well-worded ideals) we do everything in our power to perpetuate.

II.

IN A WORLD where the concentration of economic power is advantageous to the ruling minority, it is only natural that the results of disinterested scientific research should be applied in such a way as to foster large-scale mass production and mass distribution. And in a world where nationalism is taken for granted, and where the values of nationalism are held to be supreme, it is only natural that these same results should be applied to the end of producing and continually improving the instruments of war. Because it paid them to do so, men of science, inventors and engineers have worked to build up a system of centralized industry; and because, as nationalists, they thought it was their duty (and also, it must be added, because the duty was often a very profitable one), they have worked to produce such marvels of technological ingenuity as tanks, bombers, flame-throwers and atomic missiles.

'Nationality,' wrote Lord Acton in 1862, 'does not aim either at liberty or prosperity, both of which it sacrifices to the imperative necessity of making the nation the mould and measure of the state. Its course will be marked with material as well as moral ruin.' Acton's prophecy is still in the terrible process of fulfilment. The material havoc wrought by applied science in the service of nationalism is such that it will take a generation to repair the damage. For many millions of men, women and especially children, the moral ruin caused by the war is irreparable; to the end of their lives they are doomed to remain psychologically warped, crippled and stunted. And these, of course, are not the only gifts of the nationalism which (having repudiated all belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man) we have set up as our idolatrous religion. The world is parcelled out into some fifty-odd administrative units, calling themselves nations. In each of these nations there is a state religion — namely, the worship of the nation regarded as the supreme value, or God. To be

a worshipper of one of the fifty-odd national Molochs is, necessarily and automatically, to be a crusader against the worshippers of all the other national Molochs. Nationalism leads to moral ruin because it denies universality, denies the existence of a single God, denies the value of the human being as a human being; and because, at the same time, it affirms exclusiveness, encourages vanity, pride and self-satisfaction, stimulates hatred and proclaims the necessity and the rightness of war. The fatal consequences of nationalism have been demonstrated again and again in the course of history. Consider, for example, the civilization of ancient Greece — the highest, in many respects, ever achieved in the Western world. After only a brief life it perished, self-destroyed by nationalism. Each city-state worshipped itself and consequently hated and despised its neighbours. The Greek world of the great poets, artists and philosophers was chronically in a state of civil war. In the end it bled to death, the victim of idolatrous and separatist patriotism. Fortunately, the Macedonians were at hand to take over.

The modern world differs from that of ancient Greece in degree and scale, not in kind. What separatist patriotism did for the inhabitants of a few thousand square miles in the eastern Mediterranean, it is doing today for the population of the entire planet. As Athens and Sparta died of idolatry and flag-waving and jingoism, so we shall die of idolatry and flag-waving and jingoism. But whereas the technologists at the service of the various Greek nationalisms had got no further than chariots and javelins, the technologists at the service of our fifty-odd self-worshipping administrative units have given us bombers that can fly non-stop for eight thousand miles, incendiaries that nobody can put out, and atomic missiles that are guaranteed to do to whole cities what a quart of boiling water does to an ants' nest.

'Lead us not into temptation.' The presence of this phrase in the Lord's Prayer reveals its author's profoundly realistic appreciation of human nature. Why should we pray that we may not be led into temptation? For the excellent reason that, as all experience proves, whenever temptations to evil are sufficiently strong and sufficiently frequent, men and women generally succumb

to them. The existence of powerful armaments constitutes for their possessors a standing temptation to resort to violence. Si vis bellum, para bellum: and when the preparations for war are carried on with all the resources of progressive science and technology, the temptation to aggression, to the defence or consolidation of legitimate interests, to the realization of a manifest destiny (the names and justifications vary, but the nature of the consequent war remains the same), becomes progressively more intense, until at some critical moment — the moment when nation X feels certain of being, in some strategically significant way, better armed than nations Y and Z — it turns into a categorical imperative, a divine command to go to war for the greater glory of the nation-god. Nor is this the only temptation to present itself. Recent progress in the applied science of armament-making has been a progress in the development of weapons that will destroy more indiscriminately at greater distances. High explosives and incendiaries, the heavy bomber and the jet-propelled robot plane, the rocket and finally the atomic missile — taken together these constitute a powerful temptation to ignore the traditional rules of war and to obliterate wholesale entire civilian populations and their dwellings. To this temptation all the belligerents in the Second World War succumbed. And so long as governments and manufacturers continue to subsidize research into the science and technology of armaments, these temptations will remain, irresistibly beckoning to nationalistic power lovers, just as drink and sex and money beckon to their respective addicts.

In recent months many persons have optimistically argued that the harnessing of atomic energy must (because that energy is so destructive) put an end to men’s inveterate habit of making war. Similar arguments have been set forth in the past. Whenever progressive applied science has produced some strikingly more efficient instrument of slaughter, hopes have been voiced, and facts and figures marshalled to prove, that henceforward war would be too expensive in life, suffering and money to be worth waging. Nevertheless wars have still been fought. Methods of defence against the new destructive weapon are devised and yet more efficient instruments of counterattack are invented. Advances in technology do not abolish the institution of war; they merely modify its

manifestations. In the present instance it seems quite possible that there may be no defence against atomic missiles. But this does not necessarily presage the end of warfare. The collective mentality of nations — the mentality which reasonable adults have to adopt, when making important decisions in the field of international politics — is that of a delinquent boy of fourteen, at once cunning and childish, malevolent and silly, maniacally egotistical, touchy and acquisitive, and at the same time ludicrously boastful and vain. When the issues involved are of no great weight, the adults in control of a nation's policy are permitted, by the rules of the curious game they are playing, to behave like adults. But as soon as important economic interests or national prestige is involved, this grown-up Jekyll retires and his place is taken by an adolescent Hyde, whose ethical standards are those of a boy-gangster and whose Weltanschauung seems to have been formed by a study of Houston Stewart Chamberlain and the more sanguinary comic strips. And let us remember that this same delinquent boy who, concealed in the middle-aged body of a politician, decrees that millions shall do and suffer the utmost in scientifically organized malice, resides within us all, ready and waiting, whenever some crisis makes us forget our surface rationality and idealism, to come out into the open. To this boy-gangster in our midst, the natural reaction to the atom bomb is not an impulse to put an end to war by getting rid of its causes in nationalism, economic rivalry and the craving for power. Rather it is an impulse to make use of the new powers provided by science for the purpose of establishing world dominion for his particular gang. It is a highly significant fact that people love to talk about a war to end war, or a war to preserve democracy; they do not love to talk about peace to end war, or self-governing democracy (which is the polar antithesis of militarism) to preserve democracy. Like the adult, with whom he is associated, the nationalistic boy-gangster is frightened of what atomic power may do to him and his world. Nevertheless he continues to think in terms of gang rivalry and his own supremacy. 'If,' he argues, 'our gang can get its scientists to perfect the rocket and the atom bomb, if it can get its manufacturers to produce enough plutonium and uranium 235, to build enough launching ramps and robot planes and V2's,

then all that need be done is to press a few buttons and bang! the war to end war will be over, and I shall be the boss of the whole planet.' Because of the boy-gangster in every Foreign Office, every war department and every private home, we may expect that, in the years immediately ahead of us, all the (technologically speaking) advanced nations will spend vast sums upon armament research and the manufacture of new weapons capable of more indiscriminate destruction at ever greater distances. This research will be secret — an affair of 'Manhattan Projects' and 'Tube Alloys' — and much of the manufacture will be carried on at the bottom of mines and caverns. And at some moment — unless, by a miracle, Jekyll should contrive to get the upper hand — the temptation to press those buttons will become irresistible; the juvenile delinquent in some Ministry for Foreign Affairs will call up his colleague at the Ministry of National Defence and bang! the war to make the world yet safer for delinquency will have begun.

In discussing the possibility of abolishing war, another important point to be remembered is that the preparation for war and sometimes even war itself are things which a highly centralized government finds very useful for its own totalitarian purposes. Thus, peacetime conscription is always justified on the ground that it constitutes an insurance against war, or at least against defeat in war. In actual fact, of course, nations which have adopted peacetime conscription have fought just as many wars as they fought before adopting it, and have suffered just as many defeats. The real, the unavowed reason for peacetime conscription must be sought in the all too natural desire of a powerful, centralized government to regiment and control its subjects by placing them, actually or potentially, under martial law and by arrogating to itself the right, whenever it so desires (as, for example, during an inconvenient strike), to call them to the colours. In these days of atomic weapons, mass armies would seem to have become something of an anachronism. Nevertheless, no country which imposed peacetime conscription in the past shows any inclination to relax its grip upon the masses of its people. Moreover, in countries where peacetime conscription was previously unheard-of there are many high military and civilian

officials who advocate the imposition of permanent military servitude upon the masses.

There is also another way in which the preparation for war is useful to the holders of centralized political power. When things go badly at home, when popular discontent becomes inconveniently articulate, it is always possible, in a world where war-making remains an almost sacred habit, to shift the people's attention away from domestic to foreign and military affairs. A flood of xenophobic or imperialistic propaganda is released by the government-controlled instruments of persuasion, a 'strong policy' is adopted toward some foreign power, an appeal for 'national unity' (in other words, unquestioning obedience to the ruling oligarchy) is launched, and at once it becomes unpatriotic for anybody to voice even the most justifiable complaints against mismanagement or oppression. It is difficult to see how any highly centralized government could afford to dispense with militarism and the threat of foreign war. This constitutes yet another argument for the division and dispersal of power, the de-institutionalizing of politics and economics and the substitution, wherever possible, of regional co-operative self-help for centralized mass production and mass distribution, and of regional, co-operative self-government for state intervention and state control.

Finally, we have to consider the part played by militarism in solving those problems of economic and social insecurity, which, as we have seen, are the curse of a technologically progressive society. The great depression of the 1930's was accompanied, in all industrialized countries, by mass unemployment. This fearful social sickness was treated in a variety of ways. Thus, in Great Britain an ambitious housing programme was launched; in the United States the Roosevelt administration resorted to public works, 'pump priming' and restriction of agricultural output with a view to raising prices. These measures were only partially successful. The numbers of the unemployed were reduced, but unemployment was by no means eliminated. Complete success came only when Hitler embarked upon large-scale rearmament. As though by magic, unemployment was banished — first from Germany and, later, as other countries

took fright and joined the armament race, throughout the rest of the industrialized world. A cure had been found for the insecurity which is the fruit of scientific and technological progress when it is at the service of centralized finance. But the price of the temporary cure was death and destruction, and the last state of all the nations concerned was incomparably worse than the first. Nevertheless it seems quite possible that wholesale rearmament may, at some future date, again be used to palliate the symptoms of unemployment.

It should be remarked that, under the present dispensation, armaments are the only goods that are given away without consideration of costs or profits. Modern war is, among other things, a competition among nations as to which can hand out, free, gratis and for nothing, the largest amount of capital goods in the shortest time. These capital goods are all maleficent and unproductive; but the thought occurs to one that something resembling wartime prosperity might be made permanent if there were more giving away at cost, or even for nothing, and less selling at a profit and paying of interest. Were this to happen, we should have a centralized financing, mass production and mass distribution, combined with a political system, approximating state socialism. That this arrangement would in some ways be preferable to the present dispensation seems likely enough. But we must remember that any government enjoying a monopoly of political and economic power is exposed to almost irresistible temptations to tyranny. There has never been a time when too much power did not corrupt its possessors, and there is absolutely no reason to suppose that, in this respect, the future behaviour of human beings will be in any way different from their behaviour in the past and at the present time. The arguments for the limitation and decentralization of power remain valid, even when that power is concentrated in the hands of an oligarchy of socialists — a phrase which is actually a contradiction in terms; for, to quote Mr. Middleton Murry: ‘Socialism by autocracy or oligarchy is not socialism, or anything like it.’ It is just benevolent despotism; and there is nothing in the record of history to justify us in the belief that any benevolent despotism will for long retain its benevolence. The appetite for power grows with every successive satisfaction of that most

alluring and pernicious of all the lusts. Against the temptations to abuse power there is no armour except sanctity. But since very few human beings are prepared to pay the price of sanctity and very few saints desire power, mere common sense demands that the amount of power wielded by any individual or organization of individuals should be strictly limited and that the principle of self-government (which is the principle of the division of power, the balancing and compromise of independent forces) should be applied, and applied to the extreme practicable limit, in every field of human activity. This entails the de-institutionalization of many political and economic procedures, which are at present planned from above by the functionaries of private capitalism or the national state. In present circumstances it is most unlikely that this highly desirable process of decentralization and de-institutionalization will be carried out. By the education they have received in schools and, later, at the hands of the writers of advertising copy and political propaganda, the great majority of men and women have been conditioned to believe that progressive institutionalization, controlled by private capitalists, or the state, or both together, is an intrinsically beneficent thing and at the same time an inevitable and quasi-natural development. Those who have a reasoned belief in the current centralist philosophy and those, much more numerous, who take it for granted by an act of implicit faith, cannot be expected to look with anything but suspicion on the ideas of de-institutionalization, self-help and self-government. What is needed is a restatement of the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance — a restatement, not abstract and general, but fully documented with an account of all the presently available techniques for achieving independence within a localized, co-operative community. These techniques are of many kinds — agricultural techniques designed to supply the basic social unit, the family, with its staple food supply; mechanical techniques for the production of many consumer goods for a local market; financial techniques, such as those of the credit union, by means of which individuals can borrow money without increasing the power of the state or of commercial banks; legal techniques, through which a community can protect itself against the profiteer who

speculates in land values, which he has done nothing whatever to increase. At present this documented and practical restatement of an old doctrine is being made by such men as Wilfred Wellock in England, as Ralph Borsodi and the writers who contribute to Free America in the United States. In the enormous bellowing chorus of advertisers singing the praises of centralized mass-producing and mass-distributing industry, and of Left-wing propagandists singing the praises of the omnipotent state, these few isolated voices have some difficulty in making themselves heard. If it were not for the fact that, in the past, apparently negligible movements, originating among individuals without any political power, have yet exercised a prodigious influence over mankind, there would be reason for discouragement. But fortunately it is not impossible that the presently tiny piece of decentralist leaven may end by leavening the whole huge lump of contemporary society.

It is not impossible, I repeat; but it must be added that, so long as the nations stick to their ancient habit of war-making, it is highly improbable. For the nature of modern war is such that it cannot be successfully waged by any nation which does not possess a highly developed, not to say hypertrophied, capital-goods industry supplemented by a mass-producing consumer-goods industry capable of rapid expansion and conversion for wartime needs. Furthermore it cannot be waged successfully, except by nations which can mobilize their entire man-power and woman-power in universal military or industrial conscription. But universal conscription is most easily imposed where large numbers of the population are rootless, propertyless and entirely dependent for their livelihood upon the state or upon large-scale private employers. Such persons constitute that dream of every militaristic dictator — a ‘fluid labour force,’ which can be shifted at will from one place or one unskilled job to another place or job. Again, big centralized corporations and their wage-earning employees can be taxed much more easily and profitably than small-scale farmers working primarily for subsistence and only secondarily for cash, or than independent or co-operative producers of commodities for a localized market. For this reason anything like a popular movement in the direction of decentralization could hardly be tolerated

by any government desirous of becoming or remaining a ‘great power.’ It may be argued that the bomber and the rocket may force all nations to undertake a geographical dispersion of industries; but such dispersion can take place without any real decentralization of political and economic power, any real increase of individual independence from governmental or capitalist control, or any expansion of the present area of voluntary co-operation, self-government and de-institutionalized activity.

‘Science’ is an abstract word, and when we are trying to think about concrete political and economic problems, it is best to talk concretely, not of science but of the people who work in the various scientific fields, from the fields of uncontaminated theory and disinterested research into basic problems to those of applied science and technology. Assuming that the abolition of war is desirable, we proceed to ask ourselves how scientific workers can help to achieve this end.

1. As individuals or in organized groups, scientific workers can take three kinds of action against war. There is, first, the possibility of negative action in the form of a refusal, on conscientious grounds, to participate in work having as its purpose the killing, torture or enslavement of human beings. Christianity once insisted, and Buddhism still insists, upon the importance of ‘right livelihood.’ There are certain professions so intrinsically harmful that no individual ought to practise them. In the eyes of medieval Catholic theologians, for example, the profession of a moneylender or of a speculator was beyond the pale: they held that a man could not live by usury and the manipulation of the commodity markets, and still be regarded as a Christian. Similarly, for Buddha and his followers, a man could not be regarded as a Buddhist, if he made his living by the manufacture of arms or intoxicants. Men of science and technologists would do well, as individuals and in their national and international organizations, to consider the problem of right livelihood in its relation to their own contemporary activities. Is it possible to work on the development of instruments of ever more indiscriminate slaughter and to remain — not a good Christian or a good Buddhist; for in scientific and technological circles religion is now out of fashion — but a good human being? Is it possible to go on believing that one is working

for the good of mankind, while applying the results of disinterested research in ways which demonstrably increase the power of the ruling capitalist or governmental minority at the expense of personal liberty and local and professional self-government? These and similar questions need to be asked and carefully answered by scientific workers — asked and answered, if possible, on the level of their international organizations. Meanwhile it is to be hoped and perhaps expected that a certain number of individual scientists and technicians will take the negative stand against war and the centralization of power which is war's inevitable accompaniment, by refusing to collaborate in any project whose purpose is the destruction or enslavement of human beings.

2. Negative action is good so far as it goes, but it needs to be supplemented by action of a positive and constructive kind. Such positive action may be classified under two heads: (a) action which takes its start in politics, to end in the field of science: and (b) action which takes its start in science, to end in politics.

(a) Several suggestions have recently been made for the political control, in the interests of humanity, of the activities of scientists and technologists. Thus, in the course of an interesting two-day debate in the House of Lords (May 29 and 30, 1945) Lord Vansittart urged the necessity of subjecting all German laboratories, whether attached to universities or supported by the state or by private industrialists, to strict supervision over a long term of years. Only in this way, he claimed, could the danger of a war of revenge, waged with new 'secret weapons,' be avoided. More realistically, Lord Brabazon proposed that this supervision of scientific developments should not be confined exclusively to the defeated nations — nations whose opportunities for the large-scale manufacture of new weapons would, for many years at least, be small. His suggestion was that, under the final peace treaties, an international committee of inspection should be constituted, having authority to enter laboratories and factories in any part of the world. In Lord Brabazon's view, the only alternative to such a scheme of international inspection would be an armament race between Britain and the United States on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other. By

intensive research the Anglo-Saxon group might hope to obtain the lead in such a race, and so discourage attack by other powers. Lord Brabazon's speech was made before the dropping of the first atomic bomb. As things now stand, the United States and Britain already possess an enormous lead in the post-war armament race. For a few years they may keep that lead. Then other nations (unless, of course, they are previously blown to bits by the present possessors of the bomb, or unless reason, surrender of absolute sovereignty and world government come to replace nationalism) will be supplied by their scientists with the same or even better methods for manufacturing atomic missiles. Meanwhile the desirability of an international inspectorate charged with preserving humanity from the triumphs of science is even greater now than it was before Hiroshima. The existence of an international inspectorate would involve the adoption of another security measure, advocated in the course of the same debate by Lord Strabolgi — namely, the pooling of all scientific discoveries considered by competent experts to be actually or potentially a danger to mankind.

Similar suggestions have been made on the other side of the Atlantic, and it now remains to be seen whether, and to what extent, the United Nations will act upon them. Meanwhile Messrs. Truman, Attlee and King have decided to keep such secrets as their scientists and engineers still possess until 'enforceable safeguards' against their use for destructive purposes can be devised.

What is to be the nature of those 'enforceable safeguards'? As yet, it would seem, nobody has any very clear idea. In principle, the proposals for a pooling of dangerous knowledge and for an international inspectorate are excellent; and, to some, the theory of an 'international police force' seems attractive and even workable. But, alas, from principle to application and from theory to practice the road is long and hard. Two disturbing questions inevitably propound themselves. First, will the various national governments concerned agree to act upon these suggestions? Second, if they do agree, will they and the men of science they employ consent to play the game according to the internationally imposed rules? In attempting to answer these questions one must weigh the power of

enlightened self-interest against the power of nationalistic passions and prejudices. Enlightened self-interest will unquestioningly vote for world government, international inspection and the pooling of information. But unfortunately, in some of the most important issues of life, human beings do not act from considerations of enlightened self-interest. If they did, we should now be living in something very like paradise. In the field of international politics, as we have seen, the gravest decisions are always taken, not by reasonable adults but by boy-gangsters. Despite the lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is quite possible that some national governments will refuse to allow their laboratories and factories to be inspected — and, of course, the refusal of even one government will entail the general abandonment of the scheme. Alternatively, the principle of international inspection will be accepted; but at first some and then (when suspicion has been aroused) all the governments concerned will conspire with the scientists in their employ to carry on research in caves or forests or mountain fastnesses, where no prying eye can see what they are up to. It may perhaps seem unlikely that workers trained in the methods of science should support their political bosses in machinations so manifestly senseless, as well as immoral. But it is not because men have learned to behave rationally in the laboratory that they can be trusted to behave rationally toward foreigners and unpopular minorities, or even toward their own wives and children. Until a very few years ago the best scientific and technological education available was given in Germany; but most of the persons who received that education not only worked for the Nazi bosses, but believed in their doctrines and were swayed by the nationalistic passions which they so skilfully exploited. The case of Germany is not unique. In all countries nationalistic passions (of the same kind as were manifested in Germany, but at a somewhat lower level of intensity) are almost as common among scientists and technicians as in other classes of society. In spite of their training (perhaps, indeed, owing to the narrowly specialized character of that training, because of it), scientists and technicians are perfectly capable of the most dangerously irrational prejudice, nor are they immune to deceitful propaganda. The same men who reject as superstitious the belief in a

transcendent and immanent spiritual Reality beyond and within phenomena, prove by their actions that they find no difficulty in worshipping as a supreme god whichever one of the world's fifty-odd nations they happen to belong to, and in accepting the infallibility of the local Foreign Office and the quasi-divinity of the local political boss. In view of all this we need not be surprised if the plans for an international inspectorate and the pooling of scientific knowledge should fail in practice to produce the good results expected of them.

(b) We must now consider the specifically scientific action which might be taken by men of science and technicians with a view to diminishing the probability of war and so to increasing the sum of human liberty. Such action can only be taken on the plane of applied science. Basic research is essentially disinterested. Men undertake it because, in the words used by the boy Clerk Maxwell, they want to find out 'what's the go' of things — to discover how nature works and how its parts are related within a causal system. What is subsequently done with the results of disinterested research is something which the researcher cannot foresee, and for which he is not responsible. Thus, Clerk Maxwell's own adult curiosity to find out the go of such things as light and magnetism led him to certain conclusions, and these conclusions have since been utilized by technicians for the development of instruments, which are now used, in the main, for the dissemination of maudlin drama, cigarette advertising, bad music and government-sponsored or capitalist-sponsored propaganda. Clerk Maxwell would probably have been horrified by all these uses of the radio, and he is, of course, in no way to blame for them. In practice, it would seem, basic research cannot be planned, except perhaps to the extent of subsidizing inquiry into branches of knowledge which, for whatever reason, appear to have been unduly neglected. If the facilities for research are supplied, men and women with an overpowering desire to find out the go of things will always be forthcoming to make use of them. The planning of scientific activity with a view to achieving certain predetermined political, social and economic ends must begin at the point where the results of disinterested research are applied to the solution of practical problems. Individually and through their professional organizations, scientists

and technicians could do a great deal to direct the planning toward humane and reasonable ends.

In theory everyone agreed that applied science was made for man and not man for applied science. In practice great masses of human beings have again and again been sacrificed to applied science. The conflict between science, as it has been applied up to the present, and human interests was clearly stated by Thorstein Veblen in his Science in the Modern World. In this essay Veblen distinguishes between what he calls the pragmatic and the scientific point of view. Pragmatically human beings know pretty well what is good for them, and have developed myths and fairy tales, proverbs and popular philosophies, behaviour-patterns and moralities, in order to illustrate and embody their findings about life. The findings of science — especially of science as applied for the benefit of the holders of centralized economic and political power — are frequently in conflict with humanity's pragmatic values, and this conflict has been and still is the source of much unhappiness, frustration and bitterness. The enormous practical importance of the clash between scientific (or rather applied-scientific) values and pragmatic human values is stressed in an editorial which appeared in a recent issue (July 22, 1945) of the leading British scientific journal Nature. In maintaining industrial morals 'the central difficulty,' writes the author of this article, 'is essentially the inevitable opposition which develops between the scientific approach to the human problems of production and the political approach of the administrator, trained in the method of accommodation and compromise. The balancing of opinion and the compromise of different points of view, which is the essence of the political process, may be totally at odds with the scientific approach to questions of industrial management. What is required is not the surrender of scientific principles of established accuracy, or the ignoring of accepted fact, but the combination or integration of both the political and scientific approach in a solution which satisfies both the scientific and the psychological or political requirements.'

Let us begin by noting that in any discussion of economic or political problems, the word 'integration' is always a danger signal; for it is always tacitly

assumed that the work of integration is carried out by somebody standing above the processes and persons to be integrated. In other words, whenever people call for ‘integration’ they are always calling for the exercise of centralized governmental power and for yet another extension of the process of institutionalization. But power is always corrupting, and no human being or group of human beings is to be trusted with too much of it for too long. When science is applied in such a way as to create a form of production, which cannot be run efficiently without coming into sharp conflict with fundamental human values, and which therefore continually calls for the intervention of a governmental authority having power to ‘integrate’ the conflicting persons and points of view, it may be fairly presumed that the application of the results of disinterested research has been, humanly speaking, misguided and undesirable. Up to the present time applied science has not been used mainly or primarily for the benefit of humanity at large, or (to put the matter less abstractly) for the benefit of individual men and women, considered as personalities each one of which is capable, given suitable material and social conditions, of a moral and spiritual development amounting, in some cases, to a total transfiguration; rather man has been used for applied science, for the technicians who enjoy designing more and more complicated gadgets, and for the financial and governmental interests which profit by the centralization of power. If applied science is henceforward to be used for man, technicians and scientists will have to adopt a professional policy, consciously and deliberately designed to serve fundamental human needs and to forward the causes of peace and personal liberty. Such a policy could not be worked out in detail except by an international organization of scientific workers, highly trained in their respective fields, so that each could contribute his or her share of skill or information toward the realization of the common end — namely, the welfare, liberty and peace of the individuals composing the human race. It would be absurd for me to try to anticipate the findings of this hypothetical group of experts; but it is possible, without too much presumption, to indicate in a general way a few of the lines which their discussion would have to follow.

Humanity’s primary requirement is a sufficiency of food; but it is primarily by considerations of power that the policies of national governments are at present dictated. The ruling minorities of the world invariably contrive to have enough, and (to judge by the disgusting descriptions of recent diplomatic banquets) more than enough to eat, consequently they tend to take food for granted and to think first, and at times almost exclusively, in terms of the questions: Who shall bully whom? But the great majority of the men, women and children on this planet are in no position to take food for granted. Their first and often their exclusive concern is the next meal. The question as to who shall bully whom is of hardly more than academic interest to them. They would like, of course, to be left in peace to go their own way; but they know by bitter experience that, under the present dispensation, there will always be a ruling minority to order them about, to bully and badger them in the name of the divine Nation, the omniscient Party, the sacred Principles of this or that political doctrine. They are therefore unable to take much interest in the national and international policies, which are the prime concern of the well-fed power lovers at the top of the social pyramid.

At the San Francisco Conference the only problems discussed were problems of power. The basic problem of mankind — the problem of getting enough to eat — was relegated to an obscure international committee on agriculture. And yet it is surely obvious that if genuine international agreement is ever to be reached and preserved, it must be an agreement with regard to problems which, first, are of vital interest to the great masses of humanity and which, second, are capable of solution without resort to war or the threat of war. The problems of power are primarily the concern of the ruling few, and the nature of power is essentially expansive, so that there is not the least prospect of power problems being solved, when one expanding system collides with another expanding system, except by means of organized, scientific violence or war. But war on the modern scale shatters the thin, precarious crust of civilization and precipitates vast numbers of human beings into an abyss of misery and slow death, of moral apathy or positive and frenzied diabolism. If politicians were sincere in their loudly

expressed desire for peace, they would do all they could to by-pass the absolutely insoluble problems of power by concentrating all their attention, during international conferences and diplomatic discussion, on the one great problem which every member of the human race is concerned to solve — the one great problem which not only does not require military violence for its solution, but which, for the world at large, is wholly insoluble so long as the old games of militarism and power politics continue to be played. The first item on the agenda of every meeting between the representatives of the various nations should be: How are all men, women and children to get enough to eat?

It is fashionable nowadays to say that Malthus was wrong, because he did not foresee that improved methods of transportation can now guarantee that food surpluses produced in one area shall be quickly and cheaply transferred to another, where there is a shortage. But first of all, modern transportation methods break down whenever the power politicians resort to modern war, and even when the fighting stops they are apt to remain disrupted long enough to guarantee the starvation of millions of persons. And, secondly, no country in which population has outstripped the local food supply can, under present conditions, establish a claim on the surpluses of other countries without paying for them in cash or exports. Great Britain and the other countries in western Europe, which cannot feed their dense populations, have been able, in times of peace, to pay for the food they imported by means of the export of manufactured goods. But industrially backward India and China — countries in which Malthus' nightmare has come true with a vengeance and on the largest scale — produce few manufactured goods, consequently lack the means to buy from underpopulated areas the food they need. But when and if they develop mass-producing industries to the point at which they are able to export enough to pay for the food their rapidly expanding populations require, what will be the effect upon world trade and international politics? Japan had to export manufactured goods in order to pay for the food that could not be produced on the overcrowded home islands. Goods produced by workers with a low standard of living came into competition with goods produced by the better paid workers of

the West, and undersold them. The West's retort was political and consisted of the imposition of high tariffs, quotas and embargoes. To these restrictions on her trade Japan's answer was the plan for creating a vast Asiatic empire at the expense of China and of the Western imperialist powers. The result was war. What will happen when India and China are as highly industrialized as pre-war Japan and seek to exchange their low-priced manufactured goods for food, in competition with Western powers, whose standard of living is a great deal higher than theirs? Nobody can foretell the future; but undoubtedly the rapid industrialization of Asia (with equipment, let it be remembered, of the very latest and best post-war design) is pregnant with the most dangerous possibilities.

It is at this point that internationally organized scientists and technicians might contribute greatly to the cause of peace by planning a world-wide campaign, not merely for greater food production, but also (and this is the really important point) for regional self-sufficiency in food production. Greater food production can be obtained relatively easily by the opening up of the earth's vast subarctic regions at present almost completely sterile. Spectacular progress has recently been made in this direction by the agricultural scientists of the Soviet Union; and presumably what can be done in Siberia can also be done in northern Canada. Powerful ice-breakers are already being used to solve the problems of transportation by sea and river; and perhaps commercial submarines, specially equipped for travelling under the ice, may in the future ensure a regular service between Arctic ports and the rest of the world. Any increase of the world's too scanty food supply is to be welcomed. But our rejoicings must be tempered by two considerations. First, the surpluses of food produced by the still hypothetical Arctic granaries of Siberia and Canada will have to be transferred by ship, plane and rail to the overpopulated areas of the world. This means that no supplies would be available in wartime. Second, possession of food-producing Arctic areas constitutes a natural monopoly, and this natural monopoly will not, as in the past, be in the hands of politically weak nations, such as Argentina and Australia, but will be controlled by the two great power systems of the post-war period — the Russian power system and the Anglo-American power system.

That their monopolies of food surpluses will be used as weapons in the game of power politics seems more than probable. ‘Lead us not into temptation.’ The opening up of the Arctic will be undoubtedly a great good. But it will also be a great temptation for the power politicians — a temptation to exploit a natural monopoly in order to gain influence and finally control over hitherto independent countries, in which population has outstripped the food supply.

It would seem, then, that any scientific and technological campaign aimed at the fostering of international peace and political and personal liberty must, if it is to succeed, increase the total planetary food supply by increasing the various regional supplies to the point of self-sufficiency. Recent history makes it abundantly clear that nations, as at present constituted, are quite unfit to have extensive commercial dealings with one another. International trade has always, hitherto, gone hand in hand with war, imperialism and the ruthless exploitation of industrially backward peoples by the highly industrialized powers. Hence the desirability of reducing international trade to a minimum, until such time as nationalist passions lose their intensity and it becomes possible to establish some form of world government. As a first step in this direction, scientific and technical means must be found for making it possible for even the most densely populated countries to feed their inhabitants. The improvement of existing food plants and domestic animals; the acclimatization in hitherto inhospitable regions of plants that have proved useful elsewhere; the reduction of the present enormous waste of food by the improvement of insect controls and the multiplication of refrigerating units; the more systematic exploitation of seas and lakes as sources of food; the development of entirely new foods, such as edible yeasts; the synthesizing of sugars as a food for such edible yeasts; the synthesizing of chlorophyll so as to make direct use of solar energy in food production — these are a few of the lines along which important advances might be made in a relatively short time.

Hardly less important than regional self-sufficiency in food is self-sufficiency in power for industry, agriculture and transportation. One of the contributing causes of recent wars has been international competition for the world’s strictly

localized sources of petroleum, and the current jockeying for position in the Middle East, where all the surviving great powers have staked out claims to Persian, Mesopotamian and Arabian oil, bodes ill for the future. Organized science could diminish these temptations to armed conflict by finding means for providing all countries, whatever their natural resources, with a sufficiency of power. Water power has already been pretty well exploited. Besides, over large areas of the earth's surface there are no mountains and therefore no sources of hydro-electric power. But across the plains where water stands almost still, the air often moves in strong and regular currents. Small windmills have been turning for centuries; but the use of large-scale wind turbines is still, strangely enough, only in the experimental stage. Until recently the direct use of solar power has been impracticable, owing to the technical difficulty of constructing suitable reflectors. A few months ago, however, it was announced that Russian engineers had developed a cheap and simple method for constructing paraboloid mirrors of large size, capable of producing superheated steam and even of melting iron. This discovery could be made to contribute very greatly to the decentralization of production and population and the creation of a new type of agrarian society making use of cheap and inexhaustible power for the benefit of individual small-holders or self-governing, co-operative groups. For the peoples of such tropical countries as India and Africa the new device for directly harnessing solar power should be of enormous and enduring benefit — unless, of course, those at present possessing economic and political power should choose to build mass-producing factories around enormous mirrors, thus perverting the invention to their own centralistic purposes, instead of encouraging its small-scale use for the benefit of individuals and village communities. The technicians of solar power will be confronted with a clear-cut choice. They can work either for the completer enslavement of the industrially backward peoples of the tropics, or for their progressive liberation from the twin curses of poverty and servitude to political and economic bosses.

The storage of the potentialities of power is almost as important as the production of power. One of the most urgent tasks before applied science is the

development of some portable source of power to replace petroleum — a most undesirable fuel from the political point of view, since deposits of it are rare and unevenly distributed over the earth's surface, thus constituting natural monopolies which, when in the hands of strong nations, are used to increase their strength at the expense of their neighbours and, when possessed by weak ones, are coveted by the strong and constitute almost irresistible temptations to imperialism and war. From the political and human point of view, the most desirable substitute for petroleum would be an efficient battery for storing the electric power produced by water, wind or the sun. Further research into atomic structure may perhaps suggest new methods for the construction of such a battery.

Meanwhile it is possible that means may be devised, within the next few years, for applying atomic energy to the purposes of peace, as it is now being applied to those of war. Would not this technological development solve the whole problem of power for industry and transportation? The answer to this question may turn out to be simultaneously affirmative and negative. The problems of power may indeed be solved — but solved in the wrong way, by which I mean in a way favourable to centralization and the ruling minority, not for the benefit of individuals and co-operative, self-governing groups. If the raw material of atomic energy must be sought in radioactive deposits, occurring sporadically, here and there, over the earth's surface, then we have natural monopoly with all its undesirable political consequences, all its temptations to power politics, war, imperialistic aggression and exploitation. But of course it is always possible that other methods of releasing atomic energy may be discovered — methods that will not involve the use of uranium. In this case there will be no natural monopoly. But the process of releasing atomic energy will always be a very difficult and complicated affair, to be accomplished only on the largest scale and in the most elaborately equipped factories. Furthermore, whatever political agreements may be made, the fact that atomic energy possesses unique destructive potentialities will always constitute a temptation to the boy-gangster who lurks within every patriotic nationalist. And even if a

world government should be set up within a fairly short space of time, this will not necessarily guarantee peace. The Pax Romana was a very uneasy affair, troubled at almost every imperial death by civil strife over the question of succession. So long as the lust for power persists as a human trait — and in persons of a certain kind of physique and temperament this lust is overmasteringly strong — no political arrangement, however well contrived, can guarantee peace. For such men the instruments of violence are as fearfully tempting as are, to others, the bodies of women. Of all instruments of violence, those powered by atomic energy are the most decisively destructive; and for power lovers, even under a system of world government, the temptation to resort to these all too simple and effective means for gratifying their lust will be great indeed. In view of all this, we must conclude that atomic energy is, and for a long time is likely to remain, a source of industrial power that is, politically and humanly speaking, in the highest degree undesirable.

It is not necessary in this place, nor am I competent, to enter any further into the hypothetical policy of internationally organized science. If that policy is to make a real contribution toward the maintenance of peace and the spread of political and personal liberty, it must be patterned throughout along the decentralist lines laid down in the preceding discussion of the two basic problems of food and power. Will scientists and technicians collaborate to formulate and pursue some such policy as that which has been adumbrated here? Or will they permit themselves, as they have done only too often in the past, to become the conscious or unconscious instruments of militarists, imperialists and a ruling oligarchy of capitalistic or governmental bosses? Time alone will show. Meanwhile, it is to be hoped that all concerned will carefully consider a suggestion made by Dr. Gene Weltfish in the September, 1945, issue of the Scientific Monthly. Before embarking upon practice, all physicians swear a professional oath — the oath of Hippocrates — that they will not take improper advantage of their position, but always remember their responsibilities toward suffering humanity. Technicians and scientists, proposes Dr. Weltfish, should take a similar oath in some such words as the following: ‘I pledge myself that I

will use my knowledge for the good of humanity and against the destructive forces of the world and the ruthless intent of men; and that I will work together with my fellow scientists of whatever nation, creed or colour for these our common ends.'

THE END

The Devils of Loudun

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CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS IN 1605 that Joseph Hall, the satirist and future bishop, made his first visit to Flanders. “Along our way how many churches saw we demolished, nothing left but rude heaps to tell the passenger, there hath been both devotion and hostility. Oh, the miserable footsteps of war! . . . But (which I wondered at) churches fall, and Jesuits’ colleges rise everywhere. There is no city where these are not rearing or built. Whence cometh this? Is it for that devotion is not so necessary as policy? These men (as we say of the fox) fare best when they are most cursed. None so much spited of their own; none so hated of all; none so opposed of by ours; and yet these ill weeds grow.”

They grew for a very simple and sufficient reason: the public wanted them. For the Jesuits themselves, “policy,” as Hall and his whole generation knew very well, was the first consideration. The schools had been called into existence for the purpose of strengthening the Roman Church against its enemies, the “libertines” and the Protestants. The good fathers hoped, by their teaching, to create a class of educated laymen totally devoted to the interests of the Church. In the words of Cerutti — words which drove the indignant Michelet almost to frenzy— “as we swathe the limbs of an infant in the cradle to give them a right proportion, so it is necessary from his earliest youth to swathe, so to speak, his will, that it may preserve through his life a happy and salutary suppleness.” The spirit of domination was willing enough, but the flesh of propagandist method was weak. In spite of the swaddling of their wills, some of the Jesuits’ best pupils left school to become free thinkers or even, like Jean Labadie, Protestants. So far as “policy” was concerned, the system was never as efficient as its creators had hoped. But the public was not interested in policy; the public was interested in good schools, where their boys could learn all that a gentleman ought to know. Better than most other purveyors of education, the Jesuits

supplied the demand. “What did I observe during the seven years I passed under the Jesuits’ roof? A life full of moderation, diligence and order. They devoted every hour of the day to our education, or to the strict fulfillment of their vows. As evidence of this, I appeal to the testimony of the thousands who, like myself, were educated by them.” So wrote Voltaire. His words bear witness to the excellence of the Jesuits’ teaching methods. At the same time, and yet more emphatically, his entire career bears witness to the failure of that “policy,” which the teaching methods were intended to serve.

When Voltaire went to school, the Jesuit colleges were familiar features of the educational scene. A century earlier their merits had seemed positively revolutionary. In an age when most pedagogues were amateurs in everything except the handling of the birch, their disciplinary methods were relatively humane and their professors carefully chosen and systematically trained. They taught a peculiarly elegant Latin and the very latest in optics, geography and mathematics, together with “dramatics” (their end-of-term theatricals were famous), good manners, respect for the Church and (in France, at least, and after Henri IV’s conversion) obedience to the royal authority. For all these reasons the Jesuit colleges recommended themselves to every member of the typical upper-class family — to the tender-hearted mother, who could not bear to think of her darling undergoing the tortures of an old-fashioned education; to the learned ecclesiastical uncle, with his concern for sound doctrine and a Ciceronian style; and finally to the father who, as a patriotic official, approved of monarchical principles and, as a prudent bourgeois, counted on the Company’s backstairs influence to help their pupil to a job, a place at court, an ecclesiastical sinecure. Here, for example, is a very substantial couple — M. Corneille of Rouen, Avocat du Roy à la Table de Marbre du Palais, and his wife, Marthe le Pesant. Their son, Pierre, is such a promising boy that they decide to send him to the Jesuits. Here is M. Joachim Descartes, Counselor of the Parlement of Rennes. In 1604 he takes his youngest — a bright little fellow of eight, called René — to the recently founded and royally endowed Jesuit College of La Flèche. And here too, at about the same date, is the learned Canon Grandier of Saintes. He has a

nephew, son of another lawyer not quite so rich and aristocratic as M. Descartes or M. Corneille, but still eminently respectable. The boy, called Urbain, is now fourteen years old and wonderfully clever. He deserves to be given the best of educations, and in the neighborhood of Saintes the best education available is to be had at the Jesuit College of Bordeaux.

This celebrated seat of learning comprised a high school for boys, a liberal arts college, a seminary, and a School of Advanced Studies for ordained postgraduates. Here the precociously brilliant Urbain Grandier spent more than ten years, first as schoolboy, and later as undergraduate, theological student and, after his ordination in 1615, as Jesuit novice. Not that he intended to enter the Company; for he felt no vocation to subject himself to so rigid a discipline. No, his career was to be made, not in a religious order, but as a secular priest. In that profession a man of his native abilities, pushed and protected by the most powerful organization within the Church, could hope to go far. There might be a chaplaincy to some great noble, the tutorship of some future marshal of France, some cardinal in the bud. There might be invitations to display his remarkable eloquence before bishops, before princesses of the blood, even before the Queen herself. There might be diplomatic missions, appointments of high administrative posts, rich sinecures, juicy pluralities. There might — though this was unlikely, considering that he was not of noble birth — but there conceivably might be some princely bishopric to gild and gladden his declining years.

At the outset of his career circumstances seemed to authorize the most sanguine of these expectations. For at twenty-seven, after two years of advanced theology and philosophy, young Father Grandier received his reward for so many long semesters of diligence and good behavior. By the Company of Jesus, in whose gift it lay, he was presented to the important living of Saint-Pierre du Marché at Loudun. At the same time, and thanks to the same benefactors, he was made a canon of the collegial church of the Holy Cross. His foot was on the ladder; all he now had to do was to climb.

Loudun, as its new parson rode slowly toward his destination, revealed itself as a little city on a hill, dominated by two tall towers — the spire of St. Peter’s

and the medieval keep of the great castle. As a symbol, as a sociological hieroglyph, Loudun's skyline was somewhat out of date. That spire still threw its Gothic shadow across the town; but a good part of the townspeople were Huguenots who abhorred the Church to which it belonged. That huge donjon, built by the Counts of Poitiers, was still a place of formidable strength; but Richelieu would soon be in power and the days of local autonomy and provincial fortresses were numbered. All unknowing the parson was riding into the last act of a sectarian war, into the prologue to a nationalist revolution.

At the city gates a corpse or two hung, moldering, from the municipal gallows. Within the walls, there were the usual dirty streets, the customary gamut of smells, from wood smoke to excrement, from geese to incense, from baking bread to horses, swine and unwashed humanity.

Peasants, and artisans, journeymen, and domestics — the poor were a negligible and anonymous majority of the city's fourteen thousand inhabitants. A little above them the shopkeepers, the master craftsmen, the small officials clustered precariously on the lowest rung of bourgeois respectability. Above these again — totally dependent upon their inferiors, but enjoying unquestioned privileges and ruling them by a divine right — were the rich merchants, the professional men, the people of quality in their hierarchical order: the petty gentry and the larger landowners, the feudal magnates and the lordly prelates. Here and there one could find a few small oases of culture and disinterested intelligence. Outside these oases the mental atmosphere was suffocatingly provincial. Among the rich, the concern with money and property, with rights and privileges, was passionate and chronic. For the two or three thousand, at the most, who could afford litigation or needed professional legal advice, there were, at Loudun, no less than twenty barristers, eighteen solicitors, eighteen bailiffs and eight notaries.

Such time and energy as were left over from the preoccupation with possessions were devoted to the cozy little monotonies, the recurrent joys and agonies of family life; to gossip about the neighbors; to the formalities of religion and, since Loudun was a city divided against itself, to the inexhaustible

acerbities of theological controversy. Of the existence at Loudun, during the parson's incumbency, of any genuinely spiritual religion there is no evidence. Widespread concern with the spiritual life arises only in the neighborhood of exceptional individuals who know by direct experience that God is a Spirit and must be worshiped in spirit. Along with a good supply of scoundrels, Loudun had its share of the upright and the well-intentioned, the pious and even the devout. But it had no saints, no man or woman whose mere presence is the self-validating proof of a deeper insight into the eternal reality, a closer unison with the divine ground of all being. Not until sixty years later did such a person appear within the city walls. When, after the most harrowing physical and spiritual adventures, Louise du Tronchay came at last to work in the hospital of Loudun, she at once became the center of an intense and eager spiritual life. People of all ages and of every class came flocking to ask her about God, to beg for her advice and help. "They love us too much here," Louise wrote to her old confessor in Paris. "I feel quite ashamed of it; for when I speak of God, people are so much moved that they start crying. I am afraid of contributing to the good opinion they have of me." She longed to run away and hide; but she was the prisoner of a city's devotion. When she prayed, the sick were often healed. To her shame and mortification, Louise was held responsible for their recovery. "If I ever did a miracle," she wrote, "I should think myself damned." After a few years she was ordered by her directors to move away from Loudun. For the people there was now no longer any living window through which the Light might shine. In a little while the fervor cooled; the interest in the life of the spirit died down. Loudun returned to its normal state — the state it had been in when, two generations earlier, Urbain Grandier rode into town.

From the first, public sentiment in regard to the new parson was sharply divided. Most of the devouter sex approved of him. The late Curé had been a doddering nonentity. His successor was a man in the prime of youth, tall, athletic, with an air of grave authority, even (according to one contemporary) of majesty. He had large dark eyes and, under his biretta, an abundance of crinkly black hair. His forehead was high, his nose aquiline, his lips red, full and mobile.

An elegant Van Dyck beard adorned his chin, and on his upper lip he wore a narrow mustache sedulously trained and pomaded so that its curling ends confronted one another, on either side of the nose, like a pair of coquettish question marks. To post-Faustian eyes his portrait suggests a fleshier, not unamiable and only slightly less intelligent Mephistopheles in clerical fancy dress.

To this seductive appearance Grandier added the social virtues of good manners and lively conversation. He could turn a compliment with easy grace, and the look with which he accompanied his words was more flattering, if the lady happened to be at all presentable, than the words themselves. The new parson, it was only too obvious, took an interest in his female parishioners that was more than merely pastoral.

Grandier lived in the gray dawn of what may be called the Era of Respectability. Throughout the Middle Ages and during the earlier part of the modern period the gulf between official Catholic theory and the actual practice of individual ecclesiastics had been enormous, unbridged and seemingly unbridgeable. It is difficult to find any medieval or Renaissance writer who does not take it for granted that, from highest prelate to humblest friar, the majority of clergymen are thoroughly disreputable. Ecclesiastical corruption begot the Reformation, and in its turn the Reformation produced the Counter Reformation. After the Council of Trent scandalous Popes became less and less common, until finally, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the breed died out completely. Even some of the bishops, whose only qualification for preferment was the fact that they were the younger sons of noblemen, now made a certain effort to behave themselves. Among the lower clergy abuses were checked from above by a more vigilant and efficient ecclesiastical administration, and from within, by the zeal radiating from such organizations as the Society of Jesus and the Congregation of the Oratory. In France, where the monarchy was making use of the Church as an instrument for increasing the central power at the expense of the Protestants, the great nobles and the traditions of provincial autonomy, clerical respectability was a matter of royal concern. The masses will not revere

a Church whose ministers are guilty of scandalous conduct. But in a country where not only l'Etat, but also l'Eglise, c'est Moi, disrespect for the Church is disrespect for the King. "I remember," writes Bayle in one of the interminable footnotes of his great Dictionary, "I remember that I one day asked a Gentleman who was relating to me numberless Irregularities of the Venetian Clergy, how it came to pass that the Senate suffered such a thing, so little to the Honour of Religion and the State. He replied, that the public Good obliged the Sovereign to use this Indulgence; and, to explain this Riddle, he added that the Senate was well pleased that the Priests and Monks were held in the utmost contempt by the People, since, for that reason, they would be less capable of causing an Insurrection among them. One of the Reasons, says he, why the Jesuits there are disagreeable to the Prince is because they preserve the Decorum of their Character; and thus, being the more respected by the inferior People, are more capable of raising a Sedition." In France, during the whole of the seventeenth century, state policy toward clerical irregularities was the exact opposite of that pursued by the Venetian Senate. Because it was afraid of ecclesiastical encroachment, the latter liked to see its clergymen conducting themselves like pigs and disliked the respectable Jesuits. Politically powerful and strongly Gallican, the French monarchy had no reason to fear the Pope, and found the Church very useful as a machine for governing. For this reason it favored the Jesuits and discouraged priestly incontinence, or at least priestly indiscretion. The new parson had embarked on his career at a time when clerical scandals, though still frequent, were becoming increasingly distasteful to those in authority.

In his autobiographical account of a seventeenth-century boyhood and youth, Grandier's younger contemporary, Jean-Jacques Bouchard, has left us a document so clinically objective, so completely free from all expressions of regret, from any kind of moral judgment, that nineteenth-century scholars could publish it only for private circulation and with emphatic comments on the author's unspeakable depravity. For a generation brought up on Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, on Hirschfeld and Kinsey, Bouchard's book no longer seems

outrageous. But though it has ceased to shock, it must still astonish. For how startling it is to find a subject of Louis XIII writing of the less creditable forms of sexual activity in the flat, matter-of-fact style of a modern college girl answering an anthropologist's questionnaire, or a psychiatrist recording a case history! Descartes was ten years his senior; but long before the philosopher had started to vivisect those writhing automata, to which the vulgar attach the names of dog and cat, Bouchard was conducting a series of psycho-chemico-physiological experiments on his mother's chambermaid. The girl, when he first took notice of her, was pious and almost aggressively virtuous. With the patience and acumen of a Pavlov, Bouchard reconditioned this product of implicit faith so that she became at last a devotee of Natural Philosophy, as ready to be observed and experimented upon as to undertake researches on her own account. On the table next to Jean-Jacques' bed were piled half a dozen folio volumes on anatomy and medicine. Between two assignations, or even between two experimental caresses, this odd forerunner of Ploss and Bartels would open his De Generatione, his Fernelius or his Ferandus and consult the relevant chapter, subsection and paragraph. But, unlike most of his contemporaries, he would accept nothing on authority. Lemnius and Rodericus a Castro might say what they liked about the strange and alarming properties of menstrual blood; Jean-Jacques was determined to see for himself whether it really did all the things it was reputed to do. Seconded by the now willing chambermaid, he made a succession of trials, only to find that, from time immemorial, the doctors, the philosophers and the theologians had been talking through their mortarboards and birettas. Menstrual blood did not kill grass, did not tarnish mirrors, did not blast the buds of the vine, did not dissolve asphalt and did not produce ineradicable spots of rust on the blade of a knife. Biological science lost one of its most promising investigators when, in order to get out of marrying his collaborator and corpus vile, Bouchard precipitately left Paris in order to seek his fortune at the papal court. All he wanted was a bishopric in partibus, or even, at a pinch, in Brittany — some unpretentious little benefice of six or seven thousand livres a year; that was all. (Six thousand five hundred livres was the

income derived by Descartes from the judicious investment of his patrimony. It was not princely; but at least it permitted a philosopher to live like a gentleman.) Poor Bouchard was never beneficed. Known to his contemporaries only as the ridiculous author of a Panglossia, or collection of verses in forty-six languages, including Coptic, Peruvian and Japanese, he died before he was forty.

Loudun's new parson was too normal and had too hearty an appetite to think of turning his bed into a laboratory. But, like Bouchard, Grandier was the scion of a respectable bourgeois family; like Bouchard, he had been educated at an ecclesiastical boarding school; like Bouchard, he was clever, learned and an enthusiastic humanist; and like Bouchard, he hoped to make a brilliant career in the Church. Socially and culturally, if not temperamentally, the two men had much in common. Consequently what Bouchard has to say of his childhood, his school days and his holiday diversions at home may be regarded as being indirectly evidential in regard to Grandier.

The world revealed by the Confessions is very like the world revealed to us by modern sexologists — but, if anything, a little more so. We see the small fry indulging in sexual play — indulging in it freely and frequently; for there seems to be singularly little adult interference with their activities. At school, under the good Fathers, there are no strenuous games, and the boys' superfluous energy can find no vent except in incessant masturbation and the practice, on half-holidays, of homosexuality. Pep talks and pulpit eloquence, confession and devotional exercises are to some slight extent restraining influences. Bouchard records that, at the four great feasts of the Church, he would refrain from his customary sexual practices for as long as eight or ten days at a stretch. But, try as he might, he never succeeded in prolonging these interims of chastity to a full fortnight, quoy que la dévotion le gourmandast assez — despite the fact that he was not a little checked and chided by devotion. In any given set of circumstances our actual behavior is represented by the diagonal of a parallelogram of forces having appetite or interest as its base and, as its upright, our ethical or religious ideals. In Bouchard's case and, we may suppose, in the case of the other boys whom he names as his companions in pleasure, the

devotional upright was so short that the angle between the long base and the diagonal of manifest behavior was of only a very few degrees.

When he was at home for the holidays Bouchard's parents assigned him sleeping quarters in the same room with an adolescent chambermaid. This girl was all virtue while she was awake, but could not, it was obvious, be responsible for what happened while she was asleep. And according to her private system of casuistry, it made no difference whether she was really asleep or merely pretending. Later on, when Jean-Jacques's school days were over, there was a little peasant girl who minded the cows in the orchard. For a halfpenny, she was ready to grant any favors her young master might demand. Yet another maid, who had left because Bouchard's half brother, the Prior of Cassan, had tried to seduce her, now re-entered the family's service and soon became Jean-Jacques's guinea pig and co-worker in the sexual experimentation described in the second half of the Confessions.

Between Bouchard and the heir to the throne of France the gulf was wide and deep. And yet the moral atmosphere in which the future Louis XIII was brought up is similar in many respects to that breathed by his humbler contemporary. In the Journal of Dr. Jean Héroard, the little prince's physician, we possess a long and detailed record of a seventeenth-century childhood. True, the Dauphin was a very exceptional child — the first son born to a King of France in more than eighty years. But the very preciousness of this unique infant throws into yet sharper relief certain, to us, most extraordinary features of his upbringing. If this sort of thing was good enough for a child, for whom, by definition, nothing was good enough, then what, we may ask ourselves, was good enough for ordinary children? To start with, the Dauphin was brought up with a whole flock of his father's illegitimate children by three or four different mothers. Some of these left-handed brothers and sisters were older than himself, some younger. By the age of three — and perhaps earlier — he knew very clearly what bastards were and in what manner they were fabricated. The language in which this information was communicated was so consistently coarse that the child was

often shocked by it. “Fi donc!” he would say of his Gouvernante, *Mme.* de Montglat, “how nasty she is!”

Henry IV was very partial to dirty songs, and his courtiers and servants knew large numbers of them, which they were forever singing as they went about their business in the palace. And when they were not vocalizing their smut, the Prince’s attendants, male and female, liked to joke obscenely with the child about his father’s bastards and his own future wife (for he was already as good as betrothed), the Infanta, Anne of Austria. Moreover, the Dauphin’s sexual education was not merely verbal. At night the child would often be taken into the beds of his waiting women — beds which they shared (without nightdresses or pajamas) either with other women or their husbands. It seems likely enough that, by the time he was four or five, the little boy knew all the facts of life, and knew them not merely by hearsay, but by inspection. This seems all the more probable since a seventeenth-century palace was totally without privacy. Architects had not yet invented the corridor. To get from one part of the building to another, one simply walked through a succession of other people’s rooms, in which literally anything might be going on. And there was also the matter of etiquette. Less fortunate in this respect than his or her inferiors, a royal personage was never permitted to be alone. If one’s blood were blue, one was born in a crowd, one died in a crowd, one even relieved nature in a crowd and on occasion one had to make love in a crowd. And the character of the circumambient architecture was such that one could scarcely avoid the spectacle of others being born, dying, relieving nature and making love. In later life Louis XIII displayed a decided aversion for women, a decided, though probably platonic, inclination for men, and a decided repugnance for all kinds of physical deformity and disease. The behavior of *Mme.* de Montglat and the other ladies of the court may easily have accounted for the first and also, by a natural reaction, for the second of these two traits; as for the third — who knows what repulsive squalors the child may not have stumbled upon in the all too public bedchambers of Saint-Germain-en-Laye?

Such, then, was the kind of world in which the new parson had been brought up — a world in which the traditional sexual taboos lay very lightly on the ignorant and poverty-stricken majority and not too heavily upon their betters; a world where duchesses joked like Juliet's nurse and the conversation of great ladies was a nastier and stupider echo of the Wife of Bath's; where a man of means and good social standing could (if he were not too squeamish in the matter of dirt and lice) satisfy his appetites almost ad libitum; and where, even among the cultivated and the thoughtful, the teachings of religion were taken for the most part in a rather Pickwickian sense, so that the gulf between theory and overt behavior, though a little narrower than in the medieval Ages of Faith, was yet sufficiently enormous. A product of this world, Urbain Grandier went to his parish with every intention of making the best both of it and of the other, the heavenly universe beyond the abhorred chasm. Ronsard was his favorite poet, and Ronsard had written certain Stanzas which perfectly expressed the young parson's point of view.

Quand au temple nous serons,
Agenouillés nous ferons
Les dévots selon la guise
De ceux qui, pour louer Dieu,

Humbles se courbent au lieu
Le plus secret de l’Eglise.

Mais quand au lit nous serons,
Entrelacés nous ferons

Les lascifs selon les guises

Des amants qui librement
Pratiquent folâtrement
Dans les draps cent mignardises.

It was a description of “the well-rounded life,” and a well-rounded life was what this healthy young humanist was resolved to lead. But a priest’s life is not supposed to be well-rounded; it is supposed to be one-pointed — a compass, not a weathercock. In order to keep his life one-pointed, the priest assumes certain obligations, makes certain promises. In Grandier’s case the obligations had been assumed and the vows pronounced with a mental restriction, which he was to make public — and then only for a single reader — in a little treatise on the celibacy of the clergy, written some ten years after his first coming to Loudun.

Against celibacy Grandier makes use of two main arguments. The first may be summed up in the following syllogism. “A promise to perform the impossible is not binding. For the young male, continence is impossible. Therefore no vow involving such continence is binding.” And if this does not suffice, here is a second argument based on the universally accepted maxim that we are not bound by promises extorted under duress. “The priest does not embrace celibacy for the love of celibacy, but solely that he may be admitted to holy orders.” His vow “does not proceed from his will, but is imposed upon him by the Church, which compels him, willy-nilly, to accept this hard condition, without which he may not practice the sacerdotal profession.” The upshot of all this was that Grandier felt himself at perfect liberty ultimately to marry and, meanwhile, to lead the well-rounded life with any pretty woman who was ready to be co-operative.

To the prudes in his congregation the new parson’s amorous propensities seemed the most horrible of scandals; but the prudes were in a minority. To the rest, even to those who had every intention of remaining virtuous, there was something pleasantly exciting in the situation created by the incumbency of a man of Grandier’s appearance, habits and reputation. Sex mingles easily with religion, and their blending has one of those slightly repulsive and yet exquisite and poignant flavors, which startle the palate like a revelation — of what? That, precisely, is the question.

Grandier's popularity with the women was enough, of itself, to make him extremely unpopular among the men. From the first, the husbands and fathers of his female parishioners were deeply suspicious of this clever young dandy with his fine manners and his gift of the gab. And even if the new parson had been a saint, why should such a plum as the living of St. Peter's go to a foreigner? What was wrong with the local boys? Loudun's tithes should go to Loudun's own sons. And, to make matters worse, the foreigner had not come alone. He had brought with him a mother, three brothers and a sister. For one of those brothers he had already found a job in the office of the town's chief magistrate. Another, who was a priest, had been appointed chief vicar of St. Peter's. The third, also in orders, had no official position, but prowled around hungrily on the lookout for clerical odd jobs. It was an invasion.

Even the grumblers had to admit, however, that M. Grandier could preach a thundering good sermon, and was a very able priest, full of sound doctrine and even of secular learning. But his very merits told against him. Because he was a man of wit and wide reading, Grandier was from the first received by the most aristocratic and cultivated personages in the town. Doors which had always remained closed to the rich bumpkins, the uncouth officials, the louts of gentle birth, who constituted the high, but not the highest, society of Loudun, were immediately opened to this young whippersnapper from another province. Bitter was the resentment of the excluded notables, when they heard of his intimacy, first with Jean d'Armagnac, the newly appointed Governor of the town and castle, and then with Loudun's most famous citizen, the aged Scévole de Sainte-Marthe, eminent alike as jurisconsult and statesman, as historian and poet. D'Armagnac thought so highly of the parson's abilities and discretion that, during his absences at court, he entrusted to Grandier the entire management of his affairs. To Sainte-Marthe the Curé recommended himself, above all, as a humanist who knew the classics and could therefore appreciate at its true worth the old gentleman's Virgilian masterpiece, Paediotrophiae Libri Tres — a didactic poem on the care and feeding of infants, so popular that no less than ten editions were called for during the author's lifetime, and at the same time so

elegant, so correct, that Ronsard could say that “he preferred the author of these verses to all the poets of our age, and would maintain it however great the displeasure he might thereby give to Bembo, to Navagero and the divine Fracastoro.” Alas, how transitory is fame, how absolute the vanity of human pretensions! For us, Cardinal Bembo is hardly more than a name, Andrea Navagero rather less, and such immortality as is enjoyed by the divine Fracastoro belongs to him solely in virtue of the fact that he gave a politer nickname to the pox by writing, in flawless Latin, a medical eclogue about the unhappy Prince Syphilus who, after many sufferings, was relieved of the morbus Gallicus by copious draughts of a decoction of guaiacum. The dead languages grow ever deader, and the three books of Paediotrophia treat of a less dramatic phase of the sexual cycle than the libri tres of the Syphilid. Once read by everyone, once reckoned as diviner than the divine, Scévole de Sainte-Marthe has now vanished into the darkness. But at the time when Grandier made his acquaintance, he was still in his sunset glory, the grandest of Grand Old Men, a kind of National Monument. To be received into his intimacy was like dining with Notre Dame de Paris or dropping in for a chat with the Pont du Gard. In the splendid house to which this Elder Statesman and Dean of Humaner Letters had now retired Grandier talked familiarly with the great man and his hardly less distinguished sons and grandsons. And there were visiting celebrities — the Prince of Wales, incognito; Théophraste Renaudot, unorthodox physician, philanthropist and father of French journalism; Ismaël Boulliau, the future author of the monumental Astronomia Philolaica and the first observer to determine with precision the periodicity of a variable star. To these were joined such local lights as Guillaume de Cerisay, the Bailli, or Chief Magistrate of Loudun, and Louis Trincant, the Public Prosecutor, a pious and learned man who had been a schoolfellow of Abel de Sainte-Marthe and who shared the family’s taste for literature and antiquarian research.

Hardly less gratifying than the friendship of these choice spirits was the enmity displayed by all the others, the outsiders. To be mistrusted by the stupid because he was so clever, to be envied by the inept because he had made good,

to be loathed by the dull for his wit, by the boors for his breeding and by the unattractive for his success with women — what a tribute to his universal superiority! And the hatred was not one-sided. Grandier detested his enemies as heartily as they detested him. “ ’Damn’ braces, ‘bless’ relaxes.” There are many people for whom hate and rage pay a higher dividend of immediate satisfaction than love. Congenitally aggressive, they soon become adrenalin addicts, deliberately indulging their ugliest passions for the sake of the ‘kick’ they derive from their psychically stimulated endocrines. Knowing that one self-assertion always ends by evoking other and hostile self-assertions, they sedulously cultivate their truculence. And, sure enough, very soon they find themselves in the thick of a fight. But a fight is what they most enjoy; for it is while they are fighting that their blood chemistry makes them feel most intensely themselves. ‘Feeling good,’ they naturally assume that they are good. Adrenalin addiction is rationalized as Righteous Indignation and finally, like the prophet Jonah, they are convinced, unshakably, that they do well to be angry.

Almost from the first moment of his arrival at Loudun, Grandier was involved in a series of unseemly but, so far as he was concerned, thoroughly enjoyable quarrels. One gentleman actually drew his sword against the parson. With another, the Lieutenant Criminel, who headed the local police force, he indulged in a public slanging match, which soon degenerated into physical violence. Outnumbered, the parson and his acolytes had to barricade themselves in the chapel of the castle. Next day Grandier complained to the ecclesiastical court and the Lieutenant Criminel was duly reprimanded for his part in the scandalous affair. For the Curé it was a triumph — but at a price. An influential man who had merely felt an unreasoned dislike for him was now his mortal and inveterate enemy, on the watch for any opportunity to be revenged.

As a matter of elementary prudence no less than of Christian principle, the parson should have done his utmost to conciliate the enmities by which he was surrounded. But in spite of all those years with the Jesuits, Grandier was still very far from being a Christian; and in spite of all the good advice he received from d’Armagnac and his other friends, he was incapable, where his passions

were involved, of acting with prudence. A long religious training had not abolished or even mitigated his self-love; it had served only to provide the ego with a theological alibi. The untutored egotist merely wants what he wants. Give him a religious education, and it becomes obvious to him, it becomes axiomatic, that what he wants is what God wants, that his cause is the cause of whatever he may happen to regard as the True Church and that any compromise is a metaphysical Munich, an appeasement of Radical Evil. “Agree with thine adversary while thou art in the way with him.” To men like Grandier, Christ’s advice seems like a blasphemous invitation to make a pact with Beelzebub. Instead of trying to come to terms with his enemies, the parson set to work to exacerbate their hostility by every means in his power. And his power, in this respect, amounted almost to genius.

The Good Fairy, who visits the cradles of the privileged, is often the Bad Fairy in a luminous disguise. She comes loaded with presents; but her bounty, all too often, is fatal. To Urbain Grandier, for example, the Good Fairy had brought, along with solid talents, the most dazzling of all gifts, and the most dangerous — eloquence. Spoken by a good actor — and every great preacher, every successful advocate and politician is, among other things, a consummate actor — words can exercise an almost magical power over their hearers. Because of the essential irrationality of this power, even the best-intentioned of public speakers probably do more harm than good. When an orator, by the mere magic of words and a golden voice, persuades his audience of the rightness of a bad cause, we are very properly shocked. We ought to feel the same dismay whenever we find the same irrelevant tricks being used to persuade people of the rightness of a good cause. The belief engendered may be desirable, but the grounds for it are intrinsically wrong, and those who use the devices of oratory for instilling even right beliefs are guilty of pandering to the least creditable elements in human nature. By exercising their disastrous gift of the gab, they deepen the quasi-hypnotic trance in which most human beings live and from which it is the aim and purpose of all true philosophy, all genuinely spiritual religion to deliver them. Moreover, there cannot be effective oratory without oversimplification. But you cannot

oversimplify without distorting the facts. Even when he is doing his best to tell the truth, the successful orator is ipso facto a liar. And most successful orators, it is hardly necessary to add, are not even trying to tell the truth; they are trying to evoke sympathy for their friends and antipathy for their opponents. Grandier, alas, was one of the majority. Sunday after Sunday, in the pulpit of St. Peter's, he gave his celebrated imitations of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, of Demosthenes, of Savonarola, even of Rabelais — for he was as good at derision as at righteous indignation, at irony as at apocalyptic thunder.

Nature abhors a vacuum, even in the mind. Today the aching void of boredom is filled and perpetually renewed by movies and radio, television and the comic strips. More fortunate than we, or else less fortunate (who knows?), our ancestors depended, for the assuagement of their ennui, on the weekly performances of their parish priest, supplemented from time to time by the discourses of visiting Capuchins or traveling Jesuits. Preaching is an art, and in this, as in all other arts, the bad performers far outnumber the good. The parishioners of St. Peter's in the Market could congratulate themselves on possessing, in the Reverend Grandier, a superb virtuoso, ready and able to improvise entertainingly on the sublimest Christian mystery as well as on the most touchy, the most delicate and scabrous of parochial issues. How roundly he denounced abuses, how fearlessly he reproved even those in high places! The chronically bored majority were delighted. Their applause merely served to increase the fury of those who had been made the victims of the parson's eloquence.

Among these victims were the monks of the various orders which had, since the cessation of open hostilities between Huguenots and Catholics, established houses in the once Protestant city. Grandier's prime reason for disliking the monks was the fact that he himself was a secular priest and as loyal to his caste as the good soldier is loyal to his regiment, the good undergraduate to his school, the good Communist or Nazi to his party. Loyalty to organization A always entails some degree of suspicion, contempt or downright loathing of organizations, B, C, D and all the rest. And this is true even of component

groups within a larger, superordinated whole. Ecclesiastical history exhibits a hierarchy of hatreds, descending by orderly degrees from the Church's official and ecumenical hatred of heretics and infidels to the particular hatreds of Order for Order, school for school, province for province and theologian for theologian.

"It would be good," St. Francis de Sales wrote in 1612, "it would be good, through the intervention of pious and prudent prelates, to bring about union and mutual understanding between the Sorbonne and the Jesuit Fathers. If in France the bishops, the Sorbonne and the Orders were thoroughly united, in ten years it would be all up with heresy." (Œuvres XV, 188) It would be all up with heresy because, as the saint says in another place, "Whoever preaches with love preaches sufficiently against heresy, though he may never utter a controversial word." (Œuvres VI, 309) A Church divided by intestine hatreds cannot systematically practice love and cannot, without manifest hypocrisy, preach it. But instead of union there was continued dissension; instead of love there was the odium theologicum and the aggressive patriotism of caste and school and order. To the feud between the Jesuits and the Sorbonne was soon added the feud between the Jansenists and an alliance of Jesuits and Salesians. And after that came the long-drawn battle over Quietism and Disinterested Love. In the end the Gallican Church's quarrels, internal and external, were settled, not by love or persuasion, but by authoritarian ukase. For the heretics there were the dragonnades and finally the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. For the squabbling ecclesiastics there were papal bulls and threats of excommunication. Order was restored, but in the most unedifying way possible, by means the most coarsely unspiritual, the least religious and humane.

Partisan loyalty is socially disastrous; but for individuals it can be richly rewarding — more rewarding, in many ways, than even concupiscence or avarice. Whoremongers and money-grubbers find it hard to feel very proud of their activities. But partisanship is a complex passion which permits those who indulge in it to make the best of both worlds. Because they do these things for the sake of a group which is, by definition, good and even sacred, they can

admire themselves and loathe their neighbors, they can seek power and money, can enjoy the pleasures of aggression and cruelty, not merely without feeling guilty, but with a positive glow of conscious virtue. Loyalty to their group transforms these pleasant vices into acts of heroism. Partisans are aware of themselves, not as sinners or criminals, but as altruists and idealists. And with certain qualifications, this is in fact what they are. The only trouble is that their altruism is merely egotism at one remove, and that the ideal, for which they are ready in many cases to lay down their lives, is nothing but the rationalization of corporate interests and party passions.

When Grandier criticized the monks of Loudun, it was, we may be sure, with a sense of righteous zeal, a consciousness of doing God's work. For God, it went without saying, was on the side of the secular clergy and of Grandier's good friends, the Jesuits. Carmelites and Capuchins were all very well within the walls of their monasteries, or conducting missions in out-of-the-way villages. But they had no business to poke their noses into the affairs of an urban bourgeoisie. God had decreed that the rich and respectable should be guided by the secular clergy, with a little assistance perhaps from the good fathers of the Company of Jesus. One of the new parson's first acts was to announce from the pulpit that the faithful were under an obligation to make confession to their parish priest, not to any outsider. The women, who did most of the confessing, were only too ready to obey. Their parish priest was now a clean, good-looking young scholar, with the manners of a gentleman. One could not say as much of the average Capuchin or Carmelite director. Almost overnight the monks lost most of their fair penitents and, along with them, most of their influence in the town. Grandier followed up this first broadside with a succession of uncomplimentary references to the Carmelites' principal source of income — a miracle-working image called Notre-Dame de Recouvrance. There had been a time when a whole quarter of the city was filled with inns and boardinghouses for the accommodation of the pilgrims who came to beg the image for health or a husband, for an heir or better luck. But now Notre-Dame de Recouvrance had a formidable rival in Notre-Dame des Ardilliers, whose church was at Saumur only a few leagues from

Loudun. There are fashions in saints, just as there are fashions in medical treatment and women's hats. Every great church has its history of upstart images, of parvenu relics ruthlessly displacing the older wonder-workers, only to be elbowed out of public favor, in their turn, by some newer and momentarily more attractive thaumaturge. Why did Notre-Dame des Ardilliers come to seem, almost suddenly, so vastly superior to Notre-Dame de Recouvrance? The most obvious of the doubtless very numerous reasons was that Notre-Dame des Ardilliers was in charge of the Oratorians and, as Grandier's first biographer, Aubin, remarks, "All the world agrees that the Priests of the Oratory are able men and more cunning than the Carmelites." The Oratorians, it should be recalled, were secular priests. Perhaps this helps to explain Grandier's skeptical coolness toward Notre-Dame de Recouvrance. Loyalty to his caste impelled him to work for the profit and glory of the secular clergy and for the discredit and ruin of the monks. Notre-Dame de Recouvrance would certainly have sunk into oblivion, even if Grandier had never come to Loudun. But the Carmelites preferred to have another opinion. To think about events realistically, in terms of multiple causations, is hard and emotionally unrewarding. How much easier, how much more agreeable to trace each effect to a single and, if possible, a personal cause! To the illusion of understanding will be joined, in this case, the pleasure of hero worship, if the circumstances are favorable, and the equal, or even greater pleasure, if they should be unfavorable, of persecuting a scapegoat.

To these petty enemies Grandier soon added another capable of doing him immeasurably greater harm. Early in 1618, at a religious convention attended by all the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the neighborhood, Grandier went out of his way to offend the Prior of Coussay by rudely claiming precedence over him in a solemn procession through the streets of Loudun. Technically the parson's position was unassailable. In a procession originating in his own church, a Canon of Sainte-Croix had a right to walk in front of the Prior of Coussay. And this right held good even when, as was here the case, the Prior was at the same time a Bishop. But there is such a thing as courtesy; and there is also such a

thing as circumspection. The Prior of Coussay was the Bishop of Luçon, and the Bishop of Luçon was Armand-Jean du Plessis de Richelieu.

At the moment — and this was an additional reason for behaving with magnanimous politeness — Richelieu was out of favor. In 1617 his patron, the Italian gangster, Concini, had been assassinated. This coup d'état was engineered by Luynes and approved by the young King. Richelieu was excluded from power and unceremoniously driven from the court. But was there any reason for supposing that this exile would be perpetual? There was no reason at all. And, in effect, a year later, after a brief banishment to Avignon, the indispensable Bishop of Luçon was recalled to Paris. By 1622 he was the King's First Minister and a Cardinal.

Gratuitously, for the mere pleasure of asserting himself, Grandier had offended a man who was very soon to become the absolute ruler of France. Later, the parson would have reason to regret his incivility. Meanwhile the thought of his exploit filled him with a childish satisfaction. A commoner, an obscure parish priest, he had lowered the pride of a Queen's favorite, a bishop, an aristocrat. He felt the elation of a small boy who has made a long nose at the teacher and "got away with it" unpunished.

Richelieu himself, in later years, derived an identical pleasure from behaving toward princes of the blood exactly as Urbain Grandier had behaved toward him. "To think," said his old uncle, as he watched the Cardinal calmly taking precedence of the Duke of Savoy, "to think that I should have lived to see the grandson of lawyer Laporte walking into a room before the grandson of Charles V!" Another horrid little boy had triumphantly got away with it.

The pattern of Grandier's life at Loudun was now set. He fulfilled his clerical duties and in the intervals discreetly frequented the prettier widows, spent convivial evenings in the houses of his intellectual friends and quarreled with an ever widening circle of enemies. It was a thoroughly agreeable existence, satisfying alike to head and heart, to the gonads and the adrenals, to the social persona and his private self. There had as yet been no gross or manifest misfortune in his life. He could still imagine that his amusements were

gratuitous, that he could desire with impunity and abhor without effect. In fact, of course, destiny had already begun to render its account, but unobtrusively. He had suffered no hurt that he could feel, only an imperceptible coarsening and hardening, only a progressive darkening of the inner light, a gradual narrowing of the soul's window on the side of eternity. To a man of Grandier's temperament — the sanguine-choleric, according to the Constitutional Medicine of his day — it still seemed obvious that all was right with the world. And if all was right with the world, then God must be in His Heaven. The parson was happy. Or, to put it a little more precisely, in the alternation of his moods, it was the manic that still predominated.

In the spring of 1623, full of years and honors, Scévole de Sainte-Marthe died and was buried with all due pomp in the church of St. Pierre du Marché. Six months later, at a memorial service attended by all the notables of Loudun and Châtellerault, of Chinon and Poitiers, Grandier spoke the great man's oraison funèbre. It was a long and splendid oration in the manner (not yet old-fashioned, for the first edition of Balzac's stylistically revolutionary letters did not appear until the following year) of the "devout humanists." The elaborate sentences glittered with quotations from the classics and the Bible. A showy and superfluous erudition exhibited itself complacently at every turn. The periods rumbled with an artificial thunder. For those who liked this sort of thing — and in 1623 who did not? — this, most decidedly, was the sort of thing they would like. Grandier's oration was received with general applause. Abel de Sainte-Marthe was so much moved by the parson's eloquence that he penned and published a Latin epigram on the subject. No less flattering were the lines which M. Trincant, the public prosecutor, wrote in the vernacular.

Ce n'est pas sans grande raison
Qu'on a choisi ce personnage
Pour entreprendre l'oraison
Du plus grand homme de son âge;
Il fallait véritablement

Une éloquence sans faconde

Pour louer celuy dignement

Qui m’eut point de second au monde.

Poor M. Trincant! His passion for the Muses was genuine but hopeless. He loved them, but they, it is evident, did not love him. But if he could not write poetry, he could at least talk about it. After 1623 the Public Prosecutor’s drawing room became the center of Loudun’s intellectual life. It was a pretty feeble life, now that Sainte-Marthe was gone. Trincant himself was a well-read man; but most of his friends and relatives were not. Excluded from the Hotel Sainte-Marthe, these people had, unfortunately, a prescriptive right to an invitation from the Public Prosecutor. But when they came in at the door, learning and good conversation flew out of the window. How could it be otherwise with those bevies of cackling women; those lawyers who knew about nothing except statutes and procedure; those country squires whose only interests were dogs and horses? And finally there were M. Adam, the apothecary, and M. Mannoury, the surgeon — Adam, the long-nosed, Mannoury, the moon-faced and pot-bellied. With all the gravity of doctors of the Sorbonne, they held forth on the virtues of antimony and blood-letting, on the value of soap in clysters and the cautery in the treatment of gunshot wounds. Then, lowering their voices, they would speak (always, of course, in strictest confidence) of the Marquis’s pox, of the King’s Counsel’s wife’s second miscarriage, of the Bailiff’s sister’s young daughter’s green sickness. At once absurd and pretentious, solemn and grotesque, the apothecary and the surgeon were predestined butts. They invited sarcasm, they solicited the shafts of derision. With the merciless ferocity of a clever man who will go to any lengths for the sake of a laugh, the parson gave them what they asked for. In a very little while he had two new enemies.

And meanwhile another was in the making. The Public Prosecutor was a middle-aged widower with two marriageable daughters, of whom the elder, Philippe, was so remarkably pretty that, throughout the winter of 1623, the parson found himself looking more and more frequently in her direction.

Watching the girl as she moved among her father’s guests, he compared her appraisingly with his mental image of that spritely young widow whom he was

now consoling, every Tuesday afternoon, for the untimely death of her poor dear husband, the vintner. Ninon was unschooled, could hardly sign her own name. But under the inconsolable sable of her weeds, the full-blown flesh was only just beginning to lose its firmness. There were treasures there of warmth and whiteness; there was an inexhaustible fund of sensuality, at once frenzied and scientific, violent and yet admirably docile and well-trained. And, thank God, there had been no barriers of prudery to be laboriously demolished, no wearisome preliminaries of Platonic idealization and Petrarchian courtship to be gone through! At their third meeting, he had ventured to quote the opening lines of one of his favorite poems.

Souvent j’ai menti les ébats
Des nuits, t’ayant entre mes bras
    Folâtre toute nue;
Mais telle jouissance, hélas!
    Encor m’est inconnue.

There had been no protest, only the frankest laughter and a look out of the corner of the eye, very brief but unequivocal. At the end of his fifth visit, he had been in a position to quote Tahureau again.

Adieu, ma petite maîtresse,
Adieu, ma gorgette et mon sein,
Adieu, ma délicate main,
Adieu, donc, mon téton d’albâtre,
Adieu, ma cuissette folâtre,
Adieu, mon oeil, adieu, mon cœur,
Adieu, ma friande douceur!
Mais avant que je me départe,
Avant que plus loin je m’écarte,
Que je tâte encore ce flanc
Et le rond de ce marbre blanc

Good-by, but only until the day after tomorrow, when she would come to St. Peter’s for her weekly confession — he was a stickler for weekly confessions —

and the usual penance. And between then and next Tuesday he would have preached the sermon he was now preparing for the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin — the finest thing he had done since M. de Sainte-Marthe's funeral oration. What eloquence, what choice and profound learning, what subtle, but eminently sound theology! Applause, felicitations! The Lieutenant Criminel would be furious, the friars green with envy. "M. le Curé, you have surpassed yourself. Your Reverence is incomparable." He would go to his next assignation in a blaze of glory, and for a victor's crown she would give him her encircling arms, for guerdon those kisses of hers, those caresses, that ultimate deification in the heaven of her embrace. Let the Carmelites talk of their ecstasies, their celestial touches, their extraordinary graces and spiritual nuptials! He had his Ninon, and Ninon was enough. But looking again at Philippe he wondered whether, after all, she was enough. Widows were a great consolation, and he saw no reason for giving up his Tuesdays; but widows were most emphatically not virgins, widows knew too much, widows were beginning to run to fat. Whereas Philippe still had the thin bony arms of a little girl, the apple-round breasts and smooth columnar neck of an adolescent. And how ravishing was this mixture of youthful grace and youthful awkwardness! How touching and at the same time how provocative and exciting were these transitions from a bold, almost foolhardy coquetry to sudden panic! Overacting the part of Cleopatra, she invited every man to constitute himself an Antony. But let any man show signs of accepting the invitation, and the Queen of Egypt vanished; only a frightened child remained, begging for mercy. And then, as soon as mercy had been granted, back came the Siren, chanting allurements, dangling forbidden fruits with an effrontery of which only the totally depraved and the totally innocent are capable. Innocence, purity — what a glorious peroration he had composed upon that sublimest of themes! Women would weep when he pronounced it — now thunderously, now in the tenderest whisper — from the pulpit of his church. Even the men would be touched. The purity of the dew-dabbled lily, the innocence of lambs and little children. Yes, the friars would be green with envy. But, except in sermons and in heaven, all lilies fester sooner or

later into rottenness; the ewe lamb is predestined, first to the indefatigably lustful ram, then to the butcher; and in Hell the damned walk on a living pavement, tessellated with the tiny carcasses of unbaptized babies. Since the Fall, total innocence has been identical, for all practical purposes, with total depravity. Every young girl is potentially the most knowing of widows and, thanks to Original Sin, every potential impurity is already, even in the most innocent, more than half actualized. To help it to complete actualization, to watch the still virginal bud unfold into the rank and blowzy flower — this would be a pleasure not only of the senses, but also of the reflective intellect and will. It would be a moral and, so to say, a metaphysical sensuality.

And Philippe was not merely young and virginal. She was also of good family, piously brought up and highly accomplished. Pretty as paint, but knew her catechism; played the lute, but went regularly to church; had the manners of a fine lady, but liked reading and even knew some Latin. The capture of such a prey would tickle the hunter's self-esteem and be regarded, by all who knew of it, as a great and memorable exploit.

In the aristocratic world of a few years later, "women," according to Bussy-Rabutin, "gained as much esteem for men as arms." The conquest of a celebrated beauty was equivalent, very nearly, to the conquest of a province. For their triumphs in the boudoir and the bed, such men as Marsillac and Nemours and the Chevalier de Grammont enjoyed a fame almost equal, while it lasted, to that of Gustavus Adolphus or Wallenstein. In the fashionable slang of the time, one "embarked" on one of these glorious affairs, embarked deliberately and self-consciously for the express purpose of cutting a more considerable figure in the world. Sex can be used either for self-affirmation or for self-transcendence — either to intensify the ego and consolidate the social persona by some kind of conspicuous "embarkation" and heroic conquest, or else to annihilate the persona and transcend the ego in an obscure rapture of sensuality, a frenzy of romantic passion or, more creditably, in the mutual charity of the perfect marriage. With his peasant girls and his middle-class widows of little scruple and large appetite, the parson could get all the self-transcendence he wanted.

Philippe Trincant now offered an occasion for the most agreeable and modish kind of self-affirmation — with a hoped-for sequel, when the conquest had been consummated, of some peculiarly rare and precious kind of sensual self-transcendence.

Delicious dream! But a most troublesome obstacle stood in the way of its fulfillment. Philippe's father was Louis Trincant, and Louis Trincant was the parson's best friend, his staunchest and most resolute ally against the monks, the Lieutenant Criminel and the rest of his adversaries. Louis Trincant trusted him, trusted him so completely that he had made his daughters give up their old confessor so that they might become Grandier's penitents. And would the Curé be good enough to read them an occasional lecture on filial duty and maidenly modesty? Didn't he agree that Guillaume Rogier was not quite good enough for Philippe, but would make a very suitable match for Françoise? And surely Philippe ought to keep up her Latin. Could he possibly find time to give her an occasional lesson? To abuse such trust would be the blackest of crimes. And yet its very blackness was a reason for committing it. On all the levels of our being, from the muscular and sensational to the moral and the intellectual, every tendency generates its own opposite. We look at something red, and visual induction intensifies our perception of green and even, in certain circumstances, causes us to see a green halo round the red object, a green afterimage when the object has been removed. We will a movement; one set of muscles is stimulated and, automatically, by spinal induction, the opposing muscles are inhibited. The same principle holds good on the higher levels of consciousness. Every yes begets a corresponding no. "There is more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in all the creeds." And there is (as Butler pointed out long since, and as we shall have occasion to observe on many occasions during the course of this history), there is more doubt in honest faith, believe me, than in all the Bradlaughs and all the Marxist textbooks. In moral education induction poses a peculiarly difficult problem. If every yes tends automatically to evoke its corresponding no, how can we inculcate right conduct without at the same time inductively inculcating the wrong conduct which is its opposite? Methods for

circumventing induction exist; but that they are not always well applied is sufficiently proved by the existence of vast numbers of stubborn and “contrary” children, of adolescents who are consistently “agin the government,” of perverse and antinomian adults. Even the well-balanced and the self-controlled are sometimes aware of a paradoxical temptation to do the exact opposite of what they know they ought to do. It is a temptation, very often, to an evil without point or profit, to a gratuitous and, so to say, disinterested outrage against common sense and common decency. Most of these inductive temptations are successfully resisted — most, but by no means all. Every now and then sensible and fundamentally decent people will embark, all of a sudden, on courses of which they themselves are the first to disapprove. In these cases the evil-doer acts as though he were possessed by some entity different from and malignantly hostile to his ordinary self. In fact, he is the victim of a neutral mechanism, which (as not uncommonly happens with machines) has got out of hand and, from being the servant of its possessor, has become his master. Philippe was exceedingly attractive and “the strongest oaths are straw to the fire in the blood.” But as well as fire in the blood there is induction in the brain. Trincant was the parson’s best friend. The very act of recognizing that such a thing would be monstrous created in Grandier’s mind a perverse desire to betray him. Instead of making a supreme effort to resist the temptation the parson tried to find reasons for yielding. He kept telling himself that the father of such a delicious morsel as Philippe had no right to behave so trustfully. It was sheer folly — no, worse than folly; it was a crime that deserved condign punishment. Latin lessons, indeed! It was the story all over again of Héloise and Abelard, with the Public Prosecutor as Uncle Fulbert, inviting the ravisher to make himself at home. Only one thing was lacking — the privilege, so freely accorded to Héloise’s tutor, of using the birch. And perhaps if he asked for it, the imbecile Trincant would grant him even that. . . .

Time passed. The widow continued to enjoy her Tuesdays; but on most of the other days of the week Grandier was to be found at the Public Prosecutor’s.

Françoise was already married; but Philippe was still at home and making excellent progress with her Latin.

Omne adeo genus in terris hominumque ferarum
et genus aequoreum, pecudes, pictaeque volucres
in furias, ignesque ruunt; amor omnibus idem.
And even the vegetables feel the tender passion.

Nutant et mutua palmae

foedera, populeo suspirat populus ictu,

et platano platanus, alnoque assibilat alnus.

Laboriously Philippe translated for him the tenderer passages in the poets, the more scabrous episodes in mythology. With a self-denial which his widow made it rather easy for him to practice, the parson refrained from anything like an assault upon his pupil's honor, from anything that might even be interpreted as a declaration or a proposition. He merely made himself charming and interesting, told the girl two or three times a week that she was the most intelligent woman he had ever known and occasionally looked at her in a way that made Philippe drop her eyes and blush. It was all rather a waste of time, but not unamusing. And luckily there was always Ninon; luckily, too, the girl could not read his thoughts.

They sat in the same room, but not in the same universe. No longer a child, but not yet a woman, Philippe was the inhabitant of that rosy limbo of phantasy which lies between innocence and experience. Her home was not at Loudun, not among these frumps and bores and boors, but with a god in a private Elysium, transfigured by the radiance of dawning love and imaginary sex. Those dark eyes of his, those mustaches, those white and well-kept hands — they haunted her like a guilty conscience. And what wit he had, what profundity of knowledge! An archangel, as wise as he was beautiful and as kind as he was wise. And he thought her clever, he praised her diligence; above all he had a certain way of looking at her. Was it possible that he . . . ? But no, no, it was sacrilegious even to think such thoughts, it was a sin. But how could she ever confess it — to him?

She concentrated all her attention on the Latin.

Turpe senex miles, turpe selinis amor.

But a moment later she was overwhelmed by a vague but violent longing. In her imagination memories of inchoate pleasures found themselves suddenly associated with those all-seeing eyes, those white yet hairy hands. The printed page swam before her eyes; she hesitated, stammered. "The filthy old soldier,"

she brought out at last. He gave her a little rap over the knuckles with his ruler and told her she was lucky not to be a boy; for if a boy had made that kind of blunder, he would have felt obliged to take decidedly sterner measures. He flourished the ruler. Most decidedly sterner. She looked at him, then quickly turned away. The blood rushed into her cheeks.

Already firmly established in the prosaic and disillusioned contentment of a happy marriage, Françoise brought back to her sister firsthand reports from the matrimonial front. Philippe listened with interest, but knew that, where she herself was concerned, everything would always be quite different. The daydream prolonged itself, was elaborated into greater and ever greater detail. At one moment she was living at the parsonage as his housekeeper. At another he had been elevated to the see of Poitiers and there was an underground passage between the episcopal palace and her house in the suburbs. Alternatively she had inherited a hundred thousand crowns, whereupon he left the Church and they passed their time between the court and their estate in the country.

But always, sooner or later, she had to wake up again to the dismal realization that she was Philippe Trincant and he, M. le Curé; that even if he loved her (and she had no reason for supposing that he did) he could never say so; and that even if he were to say so, it would always be her duty to stop her ears. But meanwhile what happiness it was, over her seam, her book, her embroidery frame, to imagine the impossible! And then the excruciating joy of hearing his knock, his step, his voice! The delicious ordeal, the heavenly purgatory of sitting with him in her father's library, translating Ovid, deliberately making mistakes so that he would threaten to whip her, listening to that rich sonorous voice as it talked of the Cardinal, of the rebellious Protestants, of the war in Germany, of the Jesuits' position on prevenient Grace, of his own prospects for preferment. If only matters could go on like this forever! But it was like asking (just because the end of a madrigal is so beautiful, just because the evening light turns everything it touches into something else, something incomparably lovelier) it was like asking for a lifetime of summer sunsets, for dying falls in perpetuity. With a part of her mind she knew that she was deceiving herself; but for a few blissful weeks she

was able, by closing the eyes of her reason, to believe that life had come to a halt in Paradise and would never resume its march. It was as though the gulf between fantasy and the actual had been abolished. Real life and her daydreams were momentarily the same. Her imaginings were no longer the consoling denial of the facts; the facts had identified themselves with her imaginings. It was a bliss, she felt, without sin, because so eventless, so completely inward; a bliss like that of Heaven, a bliss to which she could give herself wholeheartedly, without fear or self-reproach. And the more completely she abandoned herself to it, the intenser it became until at last she found it impossible to keep it to herself. One day she spoke of it in the confessional — guardedly, of course, without hinting, as she imagined, that it was the confessor himself who was the cause of these emotions.

Confession succeeded confession. The parson listened attentively, and every now and then put a question which proved to her how far he was from suspecting the truth, how completely he had been taken in by her innocent deception. Gaining courage, Philippe told him everything, everything in the most intimate detail. Her happiness at this time seemed to have passed the limits of the possible and was a kind of enduring paroxysm, an exquisite frenzy which she could renew at will, could go on renewing forever. Forever, forever. And then the day came when she made her slip of the tongue, when, instead of “him,” she said “you,” and then tried to withdraw the word, became confused and, under his questioning, burst into tears and confessed the truth.

“At last,” Grandier said to himself, “at last!”

And now it was all plain sailing — just a matter of carefully graduated words and gestures, of a tenderness modulating by insensible degrees from the professionally Christian to the Petrarchian, and from the Petrarchian to the all too human and the self-transcendently animal. Descent is always easy, and in this case there would be plenty of casuistry to lubricate the slide, and, after the bottom had been reached, all the absolution a girl could ask for.

A few months later there was an embarkation in form. Frankly, it was a little disappointing. Why couldn’t he have been content with the widow?

For Philippe, meanwhile, eventless and inner bliss had given place to the frightening reality of passion avowed and reciprocated, to the long-drawn torments of moral struggle, to prayers for strength, to vows that she would never yield, and at last, in a kind of despair, as though she were throwing herself over a cliff, to surrender. Surrender had brought with it none of the things she had imagined it would bring. Instead, it had brought the revelation, in her archangel, of a demented brute and the discovery, in the depths of her own mind and body, at first of the predestined victim, the suffering and therefore happy martyr, and then, suddenly, apocalyptically, of an alien no less unlike herself than that ferocious embodiment of passion had been unlike the eloquent preacher, the witty and exquisitely polished humanist with whom originally she had fallen in love. But falling in love, as she now perceived, was not the same as loving. It was as an imagination that one fell in love, and what one fell in love with was only an abstraction. When one loved, one loved a complete existence and loved it with one's whole being, with the soul and every fiber of the body, with the self and this other, this new-found alien beneath, beyond and within the self. She was all love and only love. Nothing but love existed — nothing.

Nothing? With an almost audible snigger, Fate sprung the trap she had been preparing for herself. And there she was, pinned helplessly between physiology and the social order — pregnant but unmarried, dishonored beyond redemption. The inconceivable had become the actual; that which had been out of the question was now a fact. The moon waxed, hung for a glorious night or two in its full splendor, then waned, like the last hope, and disappeared. There was nothing for it but to die in his arms — to die, or if that were impossible, at least forget for a little and be someone else.

Alarmed by so much violence, such a recklessness of self-abandonment, the parson tried to modulate her passion into a lighter and less tragic key. He accompanied his caresses with apt quotations from the livelier classics. Quantum, quale latus, quam juvenile femur! In the intermissions of love he told improper stories from the Dames Galantes of Brantôme, he whispered into her ear a few of the enormities so diligently catalogued by Sanchez in his folio on

matrimony. But her face never changed its expression. It was like a face in marble, a face on a tomb, closed, unresponsive, pure even of life. And when at last she reopened her eyes, it was as though she were looking at him from another world, a world where there was only suffering and a fixed despair. The look disquieted him; but to his solicitous questioning her only answer was to lift her hands, catch him by his thick black curls and pull him down to her mouth, to her proffered throat and breast.

Then one day, in the middle of his story about King Francis's drinking cups for debutantes — those flagons engraved on the inside with amorous postures, which revealed themselves a little more completely with every sip of the concealing wine — she interrupted him with the curt announcement that she was going to have a baby, and immediately burst into a paroxysm of uncontrollable sobbing.

Shifting his hand from the bosom to the bowed head and changing his tone, without any transition, from the bawdy to the clerical, the parson told her that she must learn to bear her cross with Christian resignation. Then, remembering the visit he had promised to pay to poor *Mme.* de Brou, who had a cancer of the womb and needed all the spiritual consolation he could give her, he took his leave.

After that he was too busy to give her any more lessons. Except as a penitent, Philippe never saw him alone. And when, in the confessional, she tried to speak to him as a person — as the man she had loved, the man who, as she still believed, had loved her — she found, confronting her, only the priest, only the transubstantiator of bread and wine, the giver of absolution and the assigner of penance. How eloquently he urged her to repent, to throw herself on the divine mercy! And when she mentioned their past love, he rebuked her with an almost prophetic indignation, for thus complacently wallowing in her filth; when she asked him despairingly what she was to do, he told her with unction that, as a Christian, she must be, not merely resigned to the humiliation which it was God's good pleasure that she should suffer; she must embrace and actively will it. Of his own share in her misadventure he would not allow her to speak. Every

soul must bear the burden of its own wrongdoing. One’s own sins were not excused by the sins which others might, or might not, have committed. If she came to the confessional, it was in order to ask forgiveness for what she had done, not to inquire into the conscience of others. And with that, bewildered and in tears, she would be dismissed.

The spectacle of her unhappiness evoked in him neither pity nor remorse, but only a sense of grievance. The siege had been tedious, the capture without glory, the subsequent enjoyment only moderate. And now with this precipitate and untimely fecundity, she was threatening his honor, his very existence. A little bastard on top of all his other troubles — it would be the ruin of him! He had never really cared for the girl; now he actively disliked her. And she was no longer even pretty. Pregnancy and worry had conspired to give her the expression of a whipped dog, the complexion of a child with worms. In conjunction with all the rest, her temporary unattractiveness made him feel not only that he had no further obligations toward her, but that she had done him an injury and, by impugning his taste, insulted him into the bargain. It was with a good conscience that he now took the course which, since there was no acceptable alternative, he would have had to take even with a bad one. He decided to brazen it out, to deny everything. Not only would he act and speak, he would even think and inwardly feel, as though nothing of the kind had ever, or could have, happened, as though the very idea of an intimacy with Philippe Trincant were absurd, preposterous, utterly out of the question.

Le cœur le mieux donné tient toujours à demi,
Chacun s’aime un peu mieux toujours que son ami.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WEEKS PASSED. Philippe went abroad less and less frequently and at last even gave up going to church. She was ill, she said, and had to keep to her room. Her friend, Marthe le Pelletier, a girl of good family, but orphaned and very poor, came to live in the house as her nurse and companion. Still suspecting nothing, still indignant if anyone even so much as hinted at the truth or breathed a word against the parson, M. Trincant talked with parental concern about peccant humors and impending phthisis. Dr. Fanton, the attending physician, discreetly said nothing to anybody. The rest of Loudun either winked and sniggered, or else indulged in the pleasures of righteous indignation. When they met him, the parson's enemies dropped envenomed hints; his graver friends shook their heads at him, the more Rabelaisian dug him in the ribs and offered ribald congratulations. To all of them Grandier replied that he did not know what they were talking about. For those who were not already prejudiced against him, his frank yet dignified manner and the manifest sincerity of his words were proof enough of his innocence. It was morally impossible that such a man could have done the things his calumniators accused him of. In the houses of such distinguished persons as M. de Cerisay and *Mme.* de Brou he was still a welcome guest. And their doors remained open to him, even after that of the Public Prosecutor had been closed. For, in the end, even Trincant's eyes were opened to the true nature of his daughter's indisposition. Cross-questioned, she confessed the truth. From having been the parson's staunchest friend Trincant became, overnight, the most implacable and the most dangerous of his enemies. Grandier had forged another and an essential link in the chain that was to draw him to his doom.

The baby came at last. Through the closed shutters, through the heavy quilts and curtains, by which it had been hoped to stifle every sound, the screaming of the young mother, muffled but perfectly distinct, gave notice of the blessed event to all M. Trincant's eagerly expectant neighbors. Within an hour the news was all over town and by the following morning a scurrilous "Ode to the Public Prosecutor's Bastard Granddaughter" had been pinned to the doors of the law court. Some Protestant hand was suspected; for M. Trincant was exceedingly orthodox and had taken every opportunity to thwart and harass his heretical fellow citizens.

Meanwhile, with a self-sacrificing generosity, which stands out all the more conspicuously because of the prevailing moral squalor, Marthe le Pelletier had publicly assumed the baby's maternity. It was she who had sinned, she who had been forced to hide her shame. Philippe was merely the benefactress who had given her a place of refuge. Nobody, of course, believed a word of it; but the gesture was admired. When the infant was a week old, Marthe placed it with the young peasant woman who had agreed to serve as its foster mother. The act was done conspicuously, so that all the world could see. Still unconvinced, the Protestants went on talking. To silence their ribald skepticism, the Public Prosecutor resorted to a peculiarly odious legal stratagem. He had Marthe le Pelletier arrested in the open street and brought before a magistrate. There, under oath and in the presence of witnesses, she was required to sign an act, whereby she officially recognized the child as hers and accepted the responsibility for its future maintenance. Because she loved her friend, Marthe signed. One copy of the act was filed in the record office, the other M. Trincant triumphantly pocketed. Duly attested, the lie was now legally true. For minds trained in the law, legal truth is the same thing as truth without qualification. To everyone else, as the Public Prosecutor discovered to his chagrin, the equivalence seems very far from evident. Even after he had read the act aloud, even after they had seen the signature with their own eyes, touched the official seal with their own fingers, his friends only smiled politely and talked about something else, while his enemies laughed aloud and made offensive remarks. Such was the malignity

of the Protestants, that one of their ministers publicly maintained that perjury is a graver sin than fornication, and that the liar who forswears himself in order to conceal a scandal is more deserving of hell-fire than the person by whose lewdness the scandal was originally caused.

A long and eventful century separated the middle age of Dr. Samuel Garth from the youth of William Shakespeare. In government, in social and economic organization, in physics and mathematics, in philosophy and the arts, there had been revolutionary changes. But there was at least one institution that remained, at the end of the period, exactly what it had been at the beginning — the drugstore. In the apothecary's shop described by Romeo,

a tortoise hung,
An alligator stuff'd, and other skins
Of ill-shap'd fishes, and about the shelves
A beggarly account of empty boxes,
Green earthen pots, bladders and musty seeds.

In his Dispensary Garth paints an almost identical picture.

Here mummies lay, most reverently stale,
And there the tortoise hung her coat of mail;
Not far from some large shark's devouring head
The flying fish their finny pinions spread.
Aloft in rows large poppy heads were strung
And, near, a scaly alligator hung;
In this place drugs in musty heaps decay'd
In that dried bladders and drawn teeth were laid.

This temple of science, which is at the same time a magician's laboratory and a side show at a country fair, is a most expressive symbol of that strange agglomeration of incongruities, the seventeenth-century mind. For the age of Descartes and Newton was also the age of Fludd and Sir Kenelm Digby; the age of logarithms and analytical geometry was no less the age of the weapon salve, the Sympathetic Powder, the theory of Signatures. Robert Boyle, who wrote The Sceptical Chemist and was one of the founders of the Royal Society, left a

volume of recipes for home remedies. Culled from an oak at the full moon, mistletoe berries dried, powdered and mixed with black cherry water, will cure epilepsy. For apoplectic fits, one must take mastic (the resin exuded by lentisk bushes on the island of Chios), extract the essential oil by distillation in a copper alembic and blow two or three drops, through a quill, into one of the patient's nostrils, "and after a while into the other." The scientific spirit was already vigorously alive. But no less vigorously alive was the spirit of the medicine man and the witch.

M. Adam's pharmacy in the Rue des Marchands was of the middle rank, neither beggarly nor grandiose, but solidly provincial. Too modest for mummies or a rhinoceros horn, it could yet boast of several West Indian turtles, the foetus of a whale and an eight-foot crocodile. And the stock was plentiful and varied. On the shelves were all the herbs of the Galenists' repertory, all the new-fangled chemicals of the followers of Valentine and Paracelsus. Rhubarb and aloes were there in plenty; but so was calomel or, as M. Adam preferred to call it, Draco mitigatus, the mitigated Dragon. There was colocynth, if you liked a vegetable liver pill; but there was also Tartar emetic and metallic antimony, if you were ready to venture on a more modern treatment. And if you had had the misfortune to be lucky in love with the wrong kind of nymph or swain, you could take your choice between Arbor vitae and Hydrargyrum cum Creta, between Sarsaparilla and an inunction of Blue Ointment. With all these, as well as with dried vipers, horses' hoofs and human bones, M. Adam could supply his customers out of stock. The more costly specifics — powdered sapphires, for example, or pearls — had to be specially ordered and paid for in advance.

From this time forth the apothecary's shop became the regular meeting place and headquarters of a cabal, whose single aim was to be revenged on Urbain Grandier. The leading spirits in this conspiracy were the Public Prosecutor, his nephew, Canon Mignon, the Lieutenant Criminel, and his father-in-law, Mesmin de Silly, Mannoury, the surgeon, and M. Adam himself, whose position as pill-maker, tooth-drawer and clyster-giver to the community provided him with unrivaled opportunities for the collection of information.

Thus, from *Mme.* Chauvin, the notary's wife, he had learned (in strictest confidence, while he made up a vermifuge for her little Théophile) that the parson had just invested eight hundred livres in a first mortgage. The rascal was growing rich.

And here was a piece of bad news. From M. d'Armagnac's second footman's sister-in-law, who had a female complaint and was a regular customer for dried mugwort, the apothecary had heard that Grandier was to dine next day at the Castle. At this the Public Prosecutor frowned, the Lieutenant Criminel swore and shook his head. D'Armagnac was not merely the Governor; he was one of the King's favorites. That such a man should be the parson's friend and protector was indeed deplorable.

There was a long and gloomy silence, broken at last by Canon Mignon, who declared that their only hope lay in a good scandal. Somehow or other they would have to arrange to catch him in flagrante delicto. What about the vintner's widow?

Sadly the apothecary had to admit that, in that quarter, he had nothing to report that was at all satisfactory. The widow herself knew how to keep her mouth shut, her maid had proved incorruptible, and when, the other night, he had tried to peep through a chink in the shutters, someone had leaned out of an upper window with a brimming chamber pot. . . .

Time passed. With a serene and majestic impudence, the parson went about his business and his pleasures as usual. And soon the strangest rumors began to reach the apothecary's ears. The parson was spending more and more of his time with the town's most distinguished prude and dévote, *Mlle.* de Brou.

Madeleine was the second of the three daughters of René de Brou, a man of substantial fortune and noble birth, related to all the best families of the province. Her two sisters were married, one to a physician, the other to a country gentleman; but at thirty Madeleine was still unwed and fancy free. Suitors had not been lacking; but she had rejected every offer, preferring to stay at home, look after her aging parents and think her own thought. She was one of those quiet and enigmatic young women, who repress strong emotions under a grave

aloofness of manner. Esteemed by her elders, she had few friends among her contemporaries and juniors, who regarded her as a prig and, because she did not take pleasure in their loud amusements, a spoilsport. Besides she was altogether too pious. Religion was all very well; but it should never be allowed to invade the sanctities of private life. And when it came to frequent communion, confessing every other day and kneeling for hours, as Madeleine used to do, in front of the image of Our Lady — well, that was really too much of a good thing. They left her alone. It was precisely what Madeleine wanted them to do.

Then her father died. And a little later her mother developed a cancer. During her long and painful illness, Grandier had found time, in the intervals between Philippe Trincant and the vintner's widow, to visit the poor lady and bring her the consolations of religion. On her deathbed *Mme.* de Brou recommended her daughter to his pastoral care. The parson promised to guard Madeleine's material and spiritual interests as though they were his own. In his peculiar fashion he was to keep that promise.

Madeleine's first thought, after her mother's death, was to sever all her worldly ties and enter religion. But when she consulted her spiritual director, she found that he was against the plan. Outside the cloister, Grandier insisted, she could do more good than within. Among the Ursulines or the Carmelites, she would be hiding her light under a bushel. Her place was here, at Loudun; her vocation, to give a shining example of wisdom to all those foolish virgins whose thought was only of perishable vanities. He spoke eloquently and there was a divine unction in his words. His eyes were bright, his whole face seemed to shine with an inner fire of zeal and inspiration. He looked, Madeleine thought, like an apostle, like an angel. Everything he said was true, axiomatically, self-evidently.

She went on living in the old house; but it seemed very dark now, very empty, and she took to spending a great part of each day with her friend (almost her only friend), Françoise Grandier, who lived with her brother at the parsonage. Sometimes — what could be more natural? — Urbain would join them as they sat there, stitching for the poor or richly embroidering for Our Lady or one of the

saints; and suddenly the world would seem brighter and so full of a divine significance that she felt her soul overflowing with happiness.

This time Grandier fell into his own trap. His strategy — the old familiar strategy of the professional seducer — had called for coolness in the face of a deliberately kindled fire, for a detached sensuality pitting itself against passion and exploiting the infinities of love for its own strictly limited purposes. But as the campaign advanced, something went wrong — or rather something went right. For the first time in his life Grandier found himself in love; in love not merely with the prospect of future sensualities, not merely with an innocence which it would be fun to corrupt, a social superiority whose humiliation would be his triumph, but with a woman recognized as a person and loved for what she actually was. The rake underwent a conversion to monogamy. It was a great step forward — but a step forward which a priest of the Roman Church could not take without involving himself in endless difficulties, ethical and theological, ecclesiastical and social. It was in order to get clear of some of these difficulties that Grandier wrote the little treatise on the celibacy of the clergy, to which reference was made in an earlier chapter. Nobody likes to think of himself as immoral and heretical; but at the same time nobody likes to renounce a course of action dictated by powerful impulses, especially when these impulses are recognized as being in their nature good, as tending toward a higher and more abundant life. Hence all the curious literature of rationalization and justification — rationalization of impulse or intuition in terms of whatever philosophy happens, at the given time and place, to be fashionable, justification of unorthodox actions by reference to the current moral code, reinterpreted to fit the particular occasion. Grandier's treatise is a characteristic specimen of this touching and often exceedingly odd branch of apologetics. He loves Madeleine de Brou and knows that this love of his is something intrinsically good; but according to the bylaws of the organization to which he belongs, even this intrinsically good love is bad. He must therefore find some argument to prove that the bylaws do not mean what they say or that he himself did not mean what he said when he agreed, under oath, to abide by them. For a clever man, nothing

is easier than to find arguments that will convince him that he is doing right when he is doing what he wants to do. For Grandier the arguments in his treatise seemed irrefragably convincing. What is somewhat more remarkable, they seemed irrefragably convincing to Madeleine. Religious almost to scrupulosity, virtuous not only on principle, but by habit and temperament, she regarded the rules of the Church as so many categorical imperatives and would have died rather than sin against chastity. But she was in love — for the first time and with a passion the more violent for having taken possession of a nature so inward, so long and so consistently held in check. The heart had its reasons, and when Grandier argued that the vow of celibacy was not binding and that a priest might marry, she believed him. If she became his wife, she would be allowed to love him — indeed, it would be her duty to love him. Ergo — for logic is irresistible — the ethics and theology of her lover's treatise were beyond reproach. And so it came to pass that one midnight, in the empty, echoing church, Grandier fulfilled his promise to *Mme.* de Brou by going through a ceremony of marriage with the orphan she had left to his care. As priest he asked himself whether he took this woman to be his wedded wife, and as bridegroom he answered in the affirmative, he slipped the ring upon her finger. As priest he invoked a blessing, and as groom he knelt to receive it. It was a fantastic ceremony; but in defiance of law and custom, of Church and state, they chose to believe in its validity. Loving one another, they knew that, in the sight of God, they were truly married.

In the sight of God, perhaps — but most certainly not in the sight of men. So far as the good people of Loudun were concerned, Madeleine was merely the latest of their parson's concubines — a little sainte nitouche, who looked as though butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, but in fact was no better than she should be; a prude who had suddenly revealed herself as a whore and was prostituting her body in the most shameless manner to this cassocked Priapus, this goat in a biretta.

Among those who met each afternoon under M. Adam's crocodile, indignation was louder, malignity more venomous than in any other quarter. Loathing the parson, but unable, so discreetly had he managed his affairs, to turn

this latest outrage to his disadvantage, they indemnified themselves for their enforced inaction by resorting to bad language. There was nothing they could do; but at least they could talk. And talk they did — to so many people and in terms so insulting that Madeleine's relatives decided at last that something would have to be done about it. What they thought of Madeleine's liaison with her confessor is not recorded. All we know is that, like Trincant, they were strong believers in the power of legal truth to take the place of truth unqualified. Magna est veritas legitima, et praevalebit. Acting upon this maxim, they persuaded Madeleine to bring an action for slander against M. Adam. The case was heard before the Parlement of Paris and the apothecary was found guilty. A local landowner, who was no friend of the de Brous and who detested Grandier, stood surety for him and an appeal was lodged. There was a second hearing, and the decision of the lower court was confirmed. Poor M. Adam was sentenced to pay six hundred and forty livres parisis in damages, to bear the entire costs of the two trials and, in the presence of the magistrates of the city and of Madeleine de Brou and her relations, to kneel, bareheaded, and to say "in a loud and intelligible voice that he had, temerariously and maliciously, uttered atrocious and scandalous words against the said damsel, for the which he was to ask pardon of God, of the King, of Justice and of the said Mademoiselle de Brou, acknowledging her to be a maiden of virtue and honor." And so it was done. Legal truth had triumphantly prevailed. Lawyers themselves, the Public Prosecutor and the Lieutenant Criminel admitted defeat. In any future attack on Grandier, Madeleine, they saw, would have to be left in peace. After all, her mother had been a Chauvet; de Cerisay was her cousin; de Brous had intermarried with the Tabarts, the Dreux, the Genebauts. Whatever she might do, a girl with relatives of such importance could not possibly be anything but fille de bien et d'honneur. Meanwhile, it was too bad that the apothecary should have been completely ruined. However, such is life, such the mysterious dispensations of Providence. All of us have our little crosses, and every man, as the apostle so justly remarked, shall bear his own burden.

Two new recruits were now added to the cabal against Grandier. The first was a lawyer of some importance, Pierre Menuau, the King's Advocate. For years past he had pestered Madeleine with proposals of marriage. Her refusals had not discouraged him and he still had hopes of some day winning the girl, the dowry and the ramifying family influence. Great, therefore, was his fury on discovering that Madeleine had bilked him of what he regarded as his rights by bestowing herself upon the parson. Trincant listened sympathetically to his outcry and, by way of consolation, offered him a place on the council of war. The invitation was accepted with alacrity and from now on Menuau was one of the most active members of the cabal.

The second of Grandier's new enemies was a friend of Menuau's, called Jacques de Thibault, a country gentleman who had been a soldier and was now, as an unofficial agent for Cardinal Richelieu, dabbling in provincial politics. From the first Thibault had disliked the parson. A twopenny-halfpenny little priest, a member of the lower middle classes — and he sports the mustaches of a cavalryman, he affects the manners of a lord, he shows off his Latin as though he were a Doctor of the Sorbonne! And now he has the impudence to debauch the King's Advocate's intended bride! Obviously this sort of thing could not be allowed to go on.

Thibault's first step was to address himself to one of Grandier's most powerful friends and protectors, the Marquis du Bellay. He talked so loud and backed up his denunciations with a catalogue of so many real and imaginary offenses that the Marquis changed camps and henceforward treated his erstwhile friend as persona non grata. Grandier was deeply hurt and not a little disquieted. Officious friends hastened to tell him of the part which Thibault had played in the affair and, the next time the two men met, the parson (who was in full canonicals and about to enter the church of Sainte-Croix) accosted his enemy with bitter words of reproach. For all answer Thibault lifted his malacca cane and aimed a blow at Grandier's head. A new phase of the battle of Loudun had begun.

Grandier was the first to act. Vowing vengeance on Thibault, he set off the very next morning for Paris. Violence against the person of a priest was sacrilege, was blasphemy in action. He would appeal to the Parlement, to the Attorney General, to the Chancellor, to the King himself.

Within the hour M. Adam was fully informed of his departure and the purpose of his journey. Dropping his pestle, he hurried off to tell the Public Prosecutor, who immediately sent a servant to summon the other members of the cabal. They came and, after some discussion, worked out a plan of counterattack. While the parson was away in Paris complaining to the King, they would go to Poitiers and complain to the Bishop. A document was drawn up in the best legal style. In it Grandier was accused of having debauched innumerable married women and young girls, of being profane and impious, of never reading his breviary and of having committed fornication within the precincts of his church. To transform these statements into legal truths was easy. M. Adam was dispatched to the cattle market and soon came back with two seedy-looking individuals who professed themselves willing, for a small consideration, to sign anything that might be set before them. Bougreau knew how to write, but Cherbonneau could only make his mark. When it was all over, they took their money and went gleefully away to get drunk.

Next morning the Public Prosecutor and the Lieutenant Criminel mounted their horses and rode at their leisure to Poitiers. There they called on the Bishop’s legal representative, the Promoter of the Officiality. To their great delight they found that Grandier was already on the diocesan black list. Rumors of the parson’s amorous exploits had reached the ears of his superiors. And to lubricity and indiscretion had been added the graver sin of uppishness. Only recently, for example, the fellow had had the insolence to encroach on episcopal authority by granting, and being paid for, a dispensation to marry without the preliminary publication of banns. It was time to clip the cockerel’s wings. These gentlemen from Loudun had arrived most opportunely.

Carrying a letter of recommendation from the Promoter of the Officiality, Trincant and Hervé trotted off to see the Bishop, who was residing in his

splendid castle of Dissay some four leagues out of town.

Henry-Louis Chasteignier de la Rochepozay was that rare phenomenon, a prelate by grace of noble birth who was at the same time a man of learning and the author of portentous works of Biblical exegesis. His father, Louis de la Rochepozay, was the patron and lifelong friend of Joseph Scaliger, and the young lord and predestined bishop had had the advantage of being tutored by that incomparable scholar, “the greatest intellect,” in Mark Pattison’s words, “that has ever spent itself in acquiring knowledge.” It is greatly to his credit that, in spite of Scaliger’s Protestantism and in the teeth of the Jesuits’ abominable campaign of slander against the author of De emendatione temporum, he remained steadfastly loyal to his old master. Toward all other heretics M. de la Rochepozay showed himself implacably hostile. He detested the Huguenots, who were so numerous in his diocese, and did everything in his power to make their lives uncomfortable. But like charity, like the rain which falls on the garden parties of the just as well as on those of the unjust, bad temper is divinely impartial. When his own Catholics annoyed him, the Bishop was ready to treat them just as badly as he treated the Protestants. Thus, in 1614, according to a letter written by the Prince de Condé to the Regent, Marie de Médicis, there were two hundred families encamped outside the town and unable to return to their houses because their pastor, plus meschant que le diable, had ordered his arquebusiers to shoot at them if they tried to pass through the gates. And what was their crime? Fidelity to the governor appointed by the Queen, but disliked by M. de la Rochepozay. The Prince asked Her Majesty to punish “the unheard-of insolence of this priest.” Nothing, of course, was done, and the good Bishop continued to reign at Poitiers until, in 1651, at a ripe old age, he was carried off by an apoplectic stroke.

A testy aristocrat and petty tyrant, a book-loving scholar, for whom the world beyond his study door was merely a source of maddening interruptions to the serious business of reading — such was the man who now gave audience to Grandier’s enemies. In half an hour he had come to a decision. The parson was a nuisance and must be taught a lesson. A secretary was sent for and an order for

Grandier's arrest and transfer to the episcopal prisons at Poitiers was drawn up, signed and sealed. The document was then handed over to Trincant and the Lieutenant Criminel to be made use of at their discretion.

In Paris, meanwhile, Grandier had lodged his complaint with the Parlement and been received (thanks to d'Armagnac) in private audience by the King. Deeply moved by the parson's recital of his wrongs, Louis XIII gave orders that justice should be done with all possible expedition, and within a matter of days Thibault was served a summons to appear before the Parlement of Paris. He set out immediately, taking with him the order for Grandier's arrest. The case was heard. Everything seemed to be going in favor of the parson, when Thibault dramatically produced the Bishop's warrant and handed it to the judges. They read it and immediately adjourned the case until such time as Grandier should have cleared himself with his superior. It was a triumph for the parson's enemies.

At Loudun, in the meantime, an official inquiry into Grandier's behavior was being conducted, at first under the impartial presidency of the Lieutenant Civil, Louis Chauvet, and later, when Chauvet had resigned in disgust, under that, pre-eminently partial, of the Public Prosecutor. Accusations now poured in from all sides. The Reverend Meschin, one of Grandier's vicars at St. Peter's, affirmed that he had seen the parson sporting with women on the floor (surely a little too stony for such amusements) of his own church. Another clergyman, the Reverend Martin Boulliau, had hidden behind a pillar and spied upon his colleague while he talked to *Mme.* de Dreux, the deceased mother-in-law of M. de Cerisay, the Bailli, in the family pew. Trincant improved this testimony by substituting the words, "committing the veneric act," for the original statement, in which there was merely a question of "speaking to the said lady while laying his hand upon her arm." The only persons who did not bear witness against the parson were those whose testimony would have been the most convincing — the easy-going servant girls, the dissatisfied wives, the all too consolable widows, and Philippe Trincant, and Madeleine de Brou.

On the advice of d'Armagnac, who promised to write on his behalf to M. de la Rochepozay and the Promoter of the Officiality, Grandier decided to present himself voluntarily before the Bishop. Returning secretly from Paris, he spent only a single night at the parsonage. Next day, at sunrise, he was in the saddle again. By breakfast time the apothecary knew everything. An hour later, Thibault, who had returned to Loudun two days before, was galloping along the road to Poitiers. Going directly to the episcopal palace, he informed the authorities that Grandier was in town, trying to avoid the humiliation of arrest by a show of voluntary submission. At all costs he must not be allowed to play such a trick. The Promoter of the Officiality agreed with him. As Grandier left his lodging to walk to the palace, he was arrested by the King's Sergeant and led off, protesting, but sans scandale, ès prisons episcopales dudict Poitiers.

The episcopal prisons of the said Poitiers were situated in one of the towers of his lordship's palace. Here Grandier was consigned to the jailer, Lucas Gouiller, and locked up in a dank and almost lightless cell. The date was November 15, 1629. Less than a month had passed since the quarrel with Thibault.

It was bitterly cold, but the prisoner was not allowed to send for warm clothes and when, a few days later, his mother asked permission to visit him, it was refused. After two weeks of this horribly rigorous confinement he wrote a piteous letter to M. de la Rochepozay. "My lord," it began, "I had always believed and even taught that affliction was the true road to heaven, but I had never made trial of it until your goodness, moved by fear for my perdition and a desire for my salvation, flung me into this place, where fifteen days of misery have brought me nearer to God than forty years of previous prosperity had ever done." This is followed by an elaborately literary passage, full of conceits and Biblical allusions. God, it seems, has "happily conjoined the face of a man with that of the lion, in other words your moderation with the passion of my enemies who, wishing to destroy me like another Joseph, have brought about my advancement in the kingdom of God." So much so that his hate has been turned into love, his thirst for vengeance into a desire to serve those who have wronged him. And after a flowery paragraph about Lazarus, he concludes with the plea

that, since the end of punishment is amendment of life and since, after two weeks in prison, his own life has been amended, he should forthwith be released.

It is always hard to believe that frank and unaffected emotion can find expression in the curious devices of a labored style. But literature is not the same as life. Art is governed by one set of rules, conduct by another. The early seventeenth-century absurdity of Grandier's epistolary manner is perfectly compatible with a real sincerity of feeling. There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of his belief that affliction had brought him nearer to God. Unfortunately for himself, he knew too little about his own nature to realize that a renewal of prosperity would infallibly (unless he made enormous and persistent efforts) undo the work of affliction, and undo it, not in fifteen days, but in the first fifteen minutes.

Grandier's letter did not mollify the Bishop. Still less did the letters he now received from M. d'Armagnac and M. d'Armagnac's good friend, the Archbishop of Bordeaux. That this odious little man should have such influential friends was bad enough. But that these friends should venture to dictate to him, a de la Rochepozay, a scholar compared with whom the Archbishop was no better than one of his own horses, that they should presume to advise him what to do with an insubordinate priestling — this was absolutely intolerable. He gave orders that Grandier should be treated even worse than before.

The parson's only visitors, during all this unhappy time, were the Jesuits. He had been their pupil and they did not now desert him. Along with spiritual consolations the good fathers brought him warm socks and letters from the outside world. From these last he learned that d'Armagnac had won over the Attorney General, that the Attorney General had ordered Trincant, as Public Prosecutor of Loudun, to reopen the case against Thibault, that Thibault had come to d'Armagnac with a view to an accommodation, but that Messieurs les esclezeasticques (the governor's orthography is consistently astounding) had advised against any compromise, since it would faire tort à vostre ynosance. The parson took new heart, wrote another letter to the Bishop about his own case, but got no answer; wrote yet another, when Thibault directly approached him with

an offer to settle out of court, and still got no answer. Early in December the witnesses who had been paid to accuse him were heard at Poitiers. Even upon judges prejudiced in their favor, the impression they made was altogether deplorable. Next it was the turn of Grandier's vicar, Gervais Meschin, and the other clerical Peeping Tom who had seen him in the pew with *Mme.* de Dreux. Their testimony turned out to be almost as unconvincing as that of Bougreau and Cherbonneau. To find anyone guilty on such evidence seemed impossible. But M. de la Rochepozay was not the man to be turned aside from his course by such trifles as equity or legal procedure. On the third of January, sixteen hundred and thirty, judgment was finally pronounced. Grandier was condemned to fast on bread and water every Friday for three months and was forbidden, for five years in the diocese of Poitiers and forever in the town of Loudun, to exercise the sacerdotal function. For the parson this sentence spelled financial ruin and the blasting of all his hopes of future preferment. But meanwhile he was a free man again — free to live once more in his own well-warmed house, to eat a good dinner (except on Fridays), to talk with his relatives and friends, to be visited (with what an infinity of precautions!) by the woman who believed herself to be his wife — and free, finally, to appeal from M. de la Rochepozay to his ecclesiastical superior, the Archbishop of Bordeaux. With copious expressions of respect, but none the less firmly, Grandier wrote to Poitiers announcing his decision to take the case to the metropolitan. Incensed beyond measure, M. de la Rochepozay could yet do nothing to prevent this intolerable affront to his pride. Canon law — could anything be more subversive? — conceded that worms had rights and even permitted them, in certain circumstances, to turn.

To Trincant and the other members of the cabal, the news that Grandier intended to appeal was most unwelcome. The Archbishop was on intimate terms with d'Armagnac, and disliked M. de la Rochepozay. There was every reason to fear that the appeal, if made, would be successful. In which case Loudun would be saddled with the parson forever. To prevent that appeal from being made, Grandier's enemies themselves appealed — not to the higher ecclesiastical court, but to the Parlement of Paris. The Bishop and his officiality were ecclesiastical

judges and could impose only spiritual punishments, such as fasting and, in extreme cases, excommunication. There could be no hanging, no maiming or branding, no condemnation to the galleys, except at the decree of a civil magistrate. If Grandier was guilty enough to merit interdiction a divinis, then most certainly he was guilty enough to be tried before the high court. The appeal was lodged and a date at the end of the following August was set for the trial.

This time it was the parson's turn to feel disturbed. The case of René Sophier, the country parson who, only six years before, had been burned alive for "spiritual incests and sacrilegious impudicities" was as fresh in his memory as in that of the Public Prosecutor. D'Armagnac, at whose country house he spent most of that spring and summer, reassured him. After all, Sophier had been caught in the act, Sophier had no friends at court. Whereas here there was no evidence and the Attorney General had already promised his assistance, or at least his benevolent neutrality. Everything would be all right. And, in effect, when the case came up for a hearing, the judges did the very thing which Grandier's enemies had hoped they would not do: they ordered a new trial before the Lieutenant Criminel of Poitiers. This time the judges would be impartial, the witnesses would find themselves subjected to the most searching cross-examination. The prospects were so alarming that Cherbonneau vanished into thin air and Bougreau not merely withdrew his accusation, but confessed that he had been paid to put his name to it. Of the two priests the elder, Martin Boulliau had long since disavowed the statements attributed to him by the Public Prosecutor, and now, a few days before the opening of the new trial, the younger, Gervais Meschin, came to Grandier's brother and, in a fit of panic mingled perhaps with remorse, dictated a statement to the effect that everything he had said as to Grandier's impiety, his sporting with maids and matrons on the floor of the church, his midnight parties with women in the parsonage, was totally untrue and that he had made statements at the suggestion and on the solicitation of those who were conducting the inquiry. No less damning was the testimony volunteered by one of the canons of Sainte-Croix who now revealed

that Trincant had come to him secretly and had tried first to wheedle and then to browbeat him into making unfounded accusations against his colleague.

When the case came to trial there was no evidence against the parson, but a great deal of evidence against his accusers. Thoroughly discredited, the Public Prosecutor found himself on the horns of a dilemma. If he told the truth about his daughter, Grandier would be condemned and his own disgraceful conduct explained and in some measure excused. But to tell the truth would be to expose Philippe to dishonor and himself to contempt or a derisive pity. He held his peace. Philippe was saved from ignominy; but Grandier, the object of all his hatred, was absolved and his own reputation, as a gentleman, as a lawyer, as a public servant, was irreparably tarnished.

There was now, for Grandier, no more danger of being burned alive for spiritual incests; but the interdiction a divinis remained in force and, since M. de la Rochepozay would not relent, there was nothing for it but to proceed with the appeal to the metropolitan. The archbishopric of Bordeaux was at this time a family living of the house of Escoubleau de Sourdis. Thanks to the fact that his mother, Isabeau Babou de la Bourdaisière, was the aunt of Gabrielle d'Estrées, the favorite mistress of Henri IV, François de Sourdis had risen very rapidly in his chosen career. At twenty-three he was given a cardinal's hat and the following year, 1599, became Archbishop of Bordeaux. In 1600 he made a journey to Rome, where he was nicknamed, a little unkindly, Il Cardinale Sordido, arcivescovo di Bordello. Returning to his see, he divided his time between founding religious houses and quarreling, over trifles but ferociously, with the local Parlement, which at one moment he excommunicated with all the solemnities of bell, book and candle. In 1628, after a reign of almost thirty years, he died and was succeeded by his younger brother, Henri de Sourdis.

Tallemant's notes on the new Archbishop begin as follows. "Mme. de Sourdis, his mother, told him on her deathbed that he was the son of the Chancellor de Chiverny, that she had procured for him the bishopric of Maillezais and several other benefices, and that she begged him to be content with a diamond, without asking anything from the property of her late husband.

He answered: ‘Mother, I was never willing to believe that you were no better than you should be (que vous ne valiez rien); but I now perceive that it is true.’ This did not prevent him from getting the fifty thousand crowns of his lawful portion like the other brothers and sisters, for he won his lawsuit.”

As Bishop of Maillezais (another family living, which his uncle had occupied before him), Henri de Sourdis led the life of a gay young courtier. Debarred from the responsibilities of marriage, he did not feel it necessary to deny himself the pleasures of love. Because he wasted so much of his substance upon these pleasures, *Mlle.* du Tillet, with characteristically Gallic thriftiness, advised his brother’s wife, Jeanne de Sourdis, to faire l’amour avec M. l’évesque de Maillezais, vostre beau-frère. “ ’Jesus, Mademoiselle! What are you saying?’ cried *Mme.* de Sourdis. ‘What am I saying?’ the other retorted. ‘I am saying that it is not good that money should go out of the family. Your mother-in-law did the same thing with her brother-in-law, who was also Bishop of Maillezais.’ ”

In the intervals of love the young Bishop occupied himself chiefly with war, first on land as Quartermaster General and Intendent of Artillery, and later at sea, as a captain of ships and as First Lord of the Admiralty. In this last capacity he virtually created the French Navy.

At Bordeaux Henri de Sourdis followed in his brother’s footsteps by quarreling with the Governor, M. d’Epernon, over such questions as the Archbishop’s right to a state entry and the Governor’s claim to a first choice of the freshest fish. Matters were carried to such a pitch that one day the Governor ordered his men to stop and turn back the Archbishop’s coach. To avenge this insult the Archbishop excommunicated M. d’Epernon’s guards and suspended in advance any priest who should say Mass in his private chapel. At the same time he gave orders that public prayers for the Duke of Epernon’s conversion should be read in all the churches of Bordeaux. The infuriated Duke counterattacked by forbidding the holding of any meeting of more than three persons within the precints of the archiepiscopal palace. When this order was communicated to him, M. de Sourdis rushed out into the streets, calling upon the people to protect the liberty of the Church. Issuing from his own quarters to quell the tumult, the

Governor came face to face with the Archbishop and, in a frenzy of exasperation, struck him with his cane. M. de Sourdis pronounced him ipso facto excommunicate. The dispute was referred to Richelieu, who chose to support M. de Sourdis. The Duke was banished to his estates and the Archbishop remained in triumphant possession of the field. In later life M. de Sourdis himself fell into disgrace. “During his exile,” writes Tallement, “he learned a little theology.”

Such a man was perfectly fitted to understand and appreciate Urbain Grandier. Himself devoted to the sex, he viewed the parson’s peccadilloes with sympathetic indulgence. Himself a fighter, he admired pugnacity even in an underling. Besides, the parson talked well, refrained from cant, had a fund of useful information and amusing anecdotes, and was altogether a most agreeable companion. “Il vous affectionne bien fort,” d’Armagnac wrote to the parson, after the latter’s visit to M. de Sourdis in the spring of 1631, and the liking soon found a practical expression. The Archbishop gave orders that the case should be reviewed by the Officiality of Bordeaux.

All this time the great nationalistic revolution, initiated by Cardinal Richelieu, had been making steady progress and now, almost suddenly, it began to affect the private life of every personage involved in this petty provincial drama. To break the power of the Protestants and the feudal magnates, Richelieu had persuaded the King and Council to order the demolition of every fortress in the realm. Innumerable were the towers already razed, the moats filled in, the ramparts transformed into tree-lined alleys. And now it was the turn of the castle of Loudun. Founded by the Romans, rebuilt and enlarged again and again throughout the Middle Ages, it was the strongest fortress in all Poitou. A circuit of walls defended by eighteen towers crowned the hill upon which the city was built, and within this circuit was a second moat, a second wall and, overtopping all the rest, the huge medieval keep, restored in 1626 by the present Governor, Jean d’Armagnac. The repairs and interior remodelling had cost him a pretty penny; but he had received private assurances from the King, whom he served as first lord of the bedchamber, that, even if the rest of the castle were destroyed, the donjon would be left standing.

Richelieu, meanwhile, had his own views on the matter, and they did not coincide with the King's. For him d'Armagnac was merely an unimportant little courtier and Loudun a nest of potentially dangerous Huguenots. True, these Huguenots had remained loyal during all the recent uprisings of their coreligionists — in the South under the Duc de Roharn, at La Rochelle in alliance with the English. But today's loyalty was no guarantee against tomorrow's rebellion. And anyhow they were heretics. No, no, the castle must be razed and, along with the castle, must go all the ancient privileges of a town which, by remaining predominantly Protestant, had proved itself unworthy of them. The Cardinal's plan was to transfer these privileges to his own town, the neighboring and still hypothetical city of Richelieu, which was now building, or to be built, around the home of his ancestors.

At Loudun public sentiment was strongly against the demolition of the castle. It was a time when domestic peace was still a precarious novelty. Deprived of their fortress, the townspeople, Catholic as well as Protestant, felt that they would be (in d'Armagnac's words) "at the mercy of all kinds of soldiery and subject to frequent pillage." Moreover, rumors of the Cardinal's secret intentions were already abroad. By the time he had done with it, poor old Loudun would be no better than a village — and a half-deserted village at that. Because of his friendship with the Governor, Grandier was unequivocally on the side of the majority. His private enemies, almost without exception, were Cardinalists, who cared nothing for the future of Loudun, but were only concerned to curry favor with Richelieu by clamoring for demolition and working against the Governor. At the very moment when Grandier seemed about to score a final victory, he was threatened by a power enormously greater than any with which he had yet had to cope.

All this time the parson's social position was oddly paradoxical. He had been interdicted a divinis; but he was still the Curé of St. Peter's, where his brother, the first vicar, acted on his behalf. His friends were still kind; but his enemies treated him as an outcast, beyond the pale of respectable society. And yet, from behind the scenes, this outcast was exercising most of the functions of a royal

governor. D'Armagnac was compelled to spend the greater part of his time at court, in attendance upon the King. During his absence he was represented at Loudun by his wife and a faithful lieutenant. Both the lieutenant and *Mme.* d'Armagnac had been given explicit orders to consult with Grandier on every important issue. The disgraced and suspended priest was acting as the town's vice-governor and the guardian of the family of its first citizen.

In the course of that summer of 1631 M. Trincant retired into private life. His colleagues and the public at large had been profoundly shocked by the revelations made at Grandier's second trial. A man who was prepared, for the sake of private vengeance, to commit perjury, to suborn witnesses, to falsify written testimony, was obviously unfitted to hold a responsible legal position. Under quiet but persistent pressure Trincant resigned. Instead of selling (as he was entitled to do) the reversion of his post, he gave it away to Louis Moussaut — but gave it on a condition. The young lawyer would not become Loudun's Public Prosecutor until after his marriage with Philippe Trincant. For Henri IV, Paris had been worth a Mass. For M. Moussaut a good job was worth his fiancée's lost virginity and the ribaldry of the Protestants. After a quiet wedding, Philippe settled down to serve her sentence — forty years of loveless marriage.

In the following November Grandier was summoned to the Abbey of Saint-Jouin-de-Marnes, one of the favorite residences of the much-beneficed Archbishop of Bordeaux. Here he learned that his appeal from M. de la Rochepozay's sentence had been successful. The interdiction a divinis was lifted and he was free once again to exercise his functions as Curé of St. Peter's. M. de Sourdis accompanied this announcement with some friendly and eminently sensible advice. Legal rehabilitation, he pointed out, would not disarm the fury of his enemies, it would tend rather to intensify it. Seeing that these enemies were numerous and powerful, would it not be wiser, more conducive to a quiet life, to leave Loudon and start afresh in some other parish? Grandier promised to consider these suggestions, but had already made up his mind to do nothing about them. He was the parson of Loudun and at Loudun he intended to stay, in spite of his enemies — or rather because of them. They wanted him to go; very

well, he would remain, just to annoy them and because he enjoyed a fight, because, like Martin Luther, he loved to be angry.

Besides these, the parson had other and less discreditable reasons for wishing to stay. Loudun was Madeleine's home, and it would be very difficult for her to leave it. And there was his friend, Jean d'Armagnac, who now had as much need of Grandier's help as Grandier had once had need of his. To leave Loudun in the midst of the battle over the castle would be like deserting an ally in the face of the enemy.

On his way home from Saint-Jouin, Grandier dismounted at the parsonage of one of the villages on his road and asked if he might cut a branch from the handsome bay tree growing in the garden. The old priest gladly gave his permission. Nothing like bay leaves, he remarked, for improving the flavor of wild duck and roast venison. And nothing like bay leaves, Grandier added, for celebrating a triumph. It was with the victor's laurel in his hand that he rode through the streets of Loudun. That evening, after nearly two years of silence, the parson's ringing voice was heard again in St. Peter's. Beneath the apothecary's crocodile, meanwhile, the members of the cabal acknowledged their defeat and grimly debated their next move.

A new phase of the struggle was to open sooner than they or anyone else expected. A day or two after Grandier's triumphant return from Saint-Jouin, a distinguished visitor arrived in town and took lodgings at the Swan and Cross. This visitor was Jean de Martin, Baron de Laubardemont, First President of the Court of Appeal (cour des aides) of Guyenne, a member of the Council of State and now His Majesty's special Commissioner for the demolition of the castle of Loudun. For a man of only forty-one M. de Laubardemont had gone far. His career was a demonstration of the fact that, in certain circumstances, crawling is a more effective means of locomotion than walking upright, and that the best crawlers are also the deadliest biters. All his life Laubardemont had systematically crawled before the powerful and bitten the defenseless. And now he was reaping his reward; he had become one of His Eminence's favorite subordinates.

In appearance and manner the Baron had modeled himself, two hundred and some odd years before the event, on Dickens's Uriah Heep. The long, squirming body, the damp hands incessantly rubbed, the constant protestations of humility and good will — all were there. And so was the underlying malignancy, so was the ruthless eye to the main chance.

This was Laubardemont's second visit to Loudun. He had come there in the previous year to represent the King at the baptism of one of d'Armagnac's children. For this reason the Governor, somewhat naïvely, believed that Laubardemont was his devoted friend. But the Baron had no friends and was devoted only to the powerful. D'Armagnac wielded no effective power; he was merely the favorite of a King, who had invariably shown himself too weak to say no to his first minister. The favorite had had His Majesty's assurance that the donjon would not be razed; but His Eminence had made up his mind that it must go. This being so, it was a foregone conclusion that sooner or later (and more probably sooner) the King would withdraw his promise. Whereupon the favorite would be revealed for what he was — a mere cipher, a titled nonentity. Before leaving for Poitou, Laubardemont had called on the Governor and made the usual offers of service, the customary protestations of everlasting friendship. And while at Loudun he was assiduous in his attentions to *Mme.* d'Armagnac, he went out of his way to be polite to the parson. Secretly, however, he held long consultations with Trincant, Hervé, Mesmin de Silly and the other Cardinalists. Grandier, whose private intelligence service was at least as good as the apothecary's, was very soon apprised of these meetings. He wrote to the Governor, warning him to be on his guard against Laubardemont and, above all, against Laubardemont's master, the Cardinal. D'Armagnac replied triumphantly that the King had just written personally to his Commissioner with explicit orders that the keep was to be left standing. That would settle the matter, once and for all.

The royal missive was delivered about the middle of December, 1631. Laubardemont merely put it in his pocket and said nothing about it. The demolition of the outer walls and towers went steadily forward and when, in

January, Laubardemont left Loudun to attend to more pressing business elsewhere, the wreckers were getting very close to the keep. Grandier questioned the engineer in charge of the work. His orders were to demolish everything. Acting on his own initiative, the parson gave orders to the soldiers under the Governor's command to form a cordon round the inner fortress.

In February Laubardemont returned and, perceiving that, for the moment, the game was up, apologized to *Mme.* d'Armagnac for his unaccountable oversight and finally published the King's letter. Temporarily the keep had been saved, but for how long and at what price? Michel Lucas, His Majesty's private secretary and a faithful agent of the Cardinal, received orders to undermine d'Armagnac's influence with his royal master. As for the parson — he would be dealt with in due course and as occasion offered.

Grandier and d'Armagnac scored their last and their most suicidal victory in the early summer of 1632. A courier was bribed, a budget of letters from the Cardinalists to Michel Lucas was intercepted. These letters contained, along with much malicious slander against the Governor, clear proofs that the men who had written them were working wholeheartedly for the ruin of Loudun. D'Armagnac, who was staying at his country house of Lamotte, rode unannounced into the city and, to the sound of the tocsin, summoned an assembly of the people. The incriminating letters were read aloud, and such was the popular fury that Hervé, Trincant and the rest had to go into hiding. But the Governor's triumph was short-lived. Returning a few days later to court, he found that the news of his exploit had preceded him and that the Cardinal had taken it very badly. La Vrillière, the Secretary of State, and a faithful friend, took him aside and told him that he would have to choose between his donjon and his offices under the crown. In no circumstances would His Eminence permit him to keep both. And in any case, whatever might be the present intentions of His Majesty, the donjon was going to be demolished. D'Armagnac took the hint. From that time forth he offered no further resistance. A year later the King wrote another letter to his Commissioner. "Monsieur de Laubardemont, having heard of your diligence . . . I write this letter to express my satisfaction, and because the donjon still remains

to be demolished, you will not fail to cause it to be razed entirely, without reserving anything." As usual, the Cardinal had had his way.

Meanwhile Grandier had been fighting his own battles as well as the Governor's. Within a few days of his reinstatement as Curé of St. Peter's, his enemies appealed to the Bishop of Poitiers for permission to receive the sacraments from other hands than those, so notoriously impure, of their parish priest. M. de la Rochepozay was only too happy to oblige. By doing so he would be punishing the man who had dared to appeal against his sentence and at the same time would be telling the Archbishop exactly what he thought of him and his precious absolutions. This dispensation gave occasion for new scandals. In the summer of 1632 Louis Moussaut and his wife, Philippe, came to St. Peter's with their first-born. Instead of leaving the christening to one of his vicars, Grandier offered, with inconceivable bad taste, to perform the rite himself. Moussaut produced the Bishop's dispensation. Grandier insisted that it was illegal and, after a violent altercation with his ex-mistress's husband, brought a lawsuit to enforce his claims.

While the new case was pending, an old one had been revived. Forgotten were all the Christian sentiments of the letter he had written from prison — all those fine phrases about hate having turned into love, the thirst for vengeance giving place to a desire to serve those who had wronged him. Thibault had struck him, and Thibault should be made to pay. D'Armagnac repeatedly advised him to settle out of court. But the parson ignored all Thibault's offers of an accommodation and, as soon as he had been rehabilitated, pressed the old charges for all they were worth. But Thibault had friends at court, and though Grandier finally won his case, the damages assigned were humiliatingly small. For the sake of twenty-four livres parisis he had destroyed the last hope of reconciliation, or at least of an understanding, with his enemies.

CHAPTER THREE

WHILE URBAIN GRANDIER was thus engaged in riding the wheel of fortune from triumph to defeat and back again to precarious triumph, a younger contemporary of his was fighting another kind of battle for a prize incomparably higher. As a schoolboy at the College of Bordeaux, Jean-Joseph Surin must often have seen, among the theological students or the Jesuit novices, a particularly handsome young priest, must often heard his masters speak approvingly of M. Grandier's zeal and M. Grandier's abilities. Grandier left Bordeaux in 1617, and Surin was never to set eyes on him again. When he came to Loudun in the late autumn of 1634, the parson was already dead, and his ashes had been scattered to the four winds.

Grandier and Surin — two men nearly of an age, brought up in the same school, by the same masters, in the same humanistic and religious discipline, both priests, the one secular, the other a Jesuit, and yet predestined to be the inhabitants of incommensurable universes. Grandier was the average sensual man — only a little more so. His universe, as the record of his life sufficiently proves, was "the world," in the sense in which that word is used so frequently in the Gospels and Epistles. "Woe unto the world because of offenses!" "I pray not for the world." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

"The world" is man's experience as it appears to, and is molded by, his ego. It is that less abundant life, which is lived according to the dictates of the insulated self. It is nature denatured by the distorting spectacles of our appetites and revulsions. It is the finite divorced from the Eternal. It is multiplicity in isolation

from its non-dual Ground. It is time apprehended as one damned thing after another. It is a system of verbal categories taking the place of the fathomlessly beautiful and mysterious particulars which constitute reality. It is a notion labeled “God.” It is the Universe equated with the words of our utilitarian vocabulary.

Over against “the world” stands “the other world,” the Kingdom of God within. Towards this Kingdom Surin had, since the beginnings of his self-conscious life, always felt himself attracted. Rich and distinguished, his family was also pious, with a piety that was practical and self-sacrificing. Before he died, Jean-Joseph’s father had deeded a considerable property to the Society of Jesus, and after her husband’s death, *Mme.* Surin realized a long-cherished dream by entering the cloister as a Carmelite nun. The elder Surins must have brought up their son with a systematic and conscientious severity. Fifty years later, looking back over his childhood, Surin could discover only one short interlude of happiness. He was eight, and there had been a case of plague in the household. The child was quarantined in a cottage in the country. The season was summer, the place most beautiful, his governess had orders to let him enjoy himself, his relations came to visit him, bringing all kinds of wonderful presents. “My days were spent in playing and running wild, without having to be afraid of anyone.” (What a painfully revealing phrase!) “After this quarantine, I was sent to learn my letters, and my bad times began, and a leading of Our Lord that lay so heavy upon me that, from that time until four or five years ago, my sufferings were very great and went on increasing until they reached the highest pitch of which, so I think, our nature is capable.”

Jean-Joseph was put to school with the Jesuits. They taught him all he knew, and when the time came for him to choose a vocation, it was to the Society that he unquestioningly turned. From another source, meanwhile, he had learned something even better than good Latin, something even more important than scholastic theology. During some five years of Surin’s boyhood and adolescence the Prioress of the Carmelite convent at Bordeaux was a Spanish nun, called Sister Isabel of the Angels. Sister Isabel had been a companion and disciple of

St. Teresa and, in middle life, was assigned, with several other nuns, to the missionary work of bringing to France St. Teresa's new model of an order and St. Teresa's spiritual practices and mystical doctrine. To any pious soul who genuinely desired to listen, Sister Isabel was always ready to expound these high and arduous teachings. Among those who came to her most regularly and listened most earnestly, was a rather undersized schoolboy of twelve. The boy was Jean-Joseph, and this was the way he liked to spend his half-holidays. Through the bars of the parlor grating, he listened spellbound to a voice that talked, in laboring and guttural French, of the love of God and the bliss of union, of humility and self-naughting, of the purification of the heart and the emptying of the busy and distracted mind. Listening, the boy felt himself filled with the heroic ambition to do battle with world and flesh, with principalities and powers — to fight and conquer, that he might be fit, at last, to give himself to God. Wholeheartedly he threw himself into the spiritual combat. Shortly after his thirteenth birthday he was vouchsafed what seemed to be a sign of God's favor, a presage of ultimate victory. Praying one day in the Carmelite church, he became aware of a supernatural light, a light that seemed to reveal the essential nature of God and at the same time to manifest all the divine attributes.

The memory of that illumination and of the unearthly bliss by which the experience had been accompanied never left him. It preserved him, in the same sort of social and educational environment as Grandier's and as Bouchard's, from identifying himself, as these others had done, with "the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life." It was not that that pride and those lusts left him unmoved. On the contrary, he found them horribly attractive. Surin was one of those frail, nervous beings in whom the sexual impulse is powerful almost to frenzy. Moreover, his talents as a writer were considerable and in later years he was tempted, not unnaturally, to equate his total personality with those gifts and become a professional man of letters, primarily concerned with the problems of aesthetics. This invitation to succumb to the most respectable of "the lusts of the eye" was reinforced by vanity and worldly ambition. He would have relished the taste of fame, would have enjoyed, while seeming of course to

deprecate, the praise of critics, the plaudits of an adoring public. But the last infirmity of noble mind is just as fatal, so far as the spiritual life is concerned, as the first infirmity of the ignoble. Jean-Joseph's temptations, the creditable no less than the discreditable, were very powerful; but in the light of that remembered glory he could recognize them for what they were. Surin died a virgin, burned the greater part of his literary productions and was content to be not merely not famous, but (as we shall see) positively infamous. Painfully, with heroic perseverance and against the unimaginable obstacles which will be described in a later chapter, he addressed himself to the task of achieving Christian perfection. But before we embark on the history of his strange pilgrimage, let us pause for a little to examine what it is that drives men and women to undertake such voyages into the unknown.

II

Introspection, observation and the records of human behavior in the past and at the present time, make it very clear that an urge to self-transcendence is almost as widespread and, at times, quite as powerful as the urge to self-assertion. Men desire to intensify their consciousness of being what they have come to regard as "themselves," but they also desire — and desire, very often, with irresistible violence — the consciousness of being someone else. In a word, they long to get out of themselves, to pass beyond the limits of that tiny island universe, within which every individual finds himself confined. This wish for self-transcendence is not identical with the wish to escape from physical or mental pain. In many cases, it is true, the wish to escape from pain reinforces the desire for self-transcendence. But the latter can exist without the former. If this were not so, healthy and successful individuals, who have (in the jargon of psychiatry) "made an excellent adjustment to life," would never feel the urge to go beyond themselves. But in fact they do. Even among those whom nature and fortune have most richly endowed, we find, and find not infrequently, a deep-seated horror of their own selfhood, a passionate yearning to get free of the repulsive

little identity to which the very perfection of their "adjustment to life" has condemned them (unless they appeal to the Higher Court) without reprieve. Any man or woman, the most happy (by the world's standards) no less than the most wretched, may come, suddenly or gradually, to what the author of The Cloud of Unknowing calls "the naked knowing and feeling of thine own being." This immediate awareness of selfhood begets an agonizing desire to go beyond the insulated ego. "I am gall," writes Hopkins,

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.
Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

Complete damnation is being one's sweating self, but worse. Being one's sweating self, but not worse, merely no better, is partial damnation, and this partial damnation is everyday life, is our consciousness, generally dulled, but sometimes acute and "naked," of behaving like the average sensual human beings we are. "All men have matter of sorrow," says the author of The Cloud, "but most specially he feeleth matter of sorrow who knoweth and feeleth that he is. All other sorrows in comparison to this be but as it were game to earnest. For he may make sorrow earnestly that knoweth and feeleth not only what he is, but that he is. And who has never felt this sorrow, let him make sorrow; for he hath never yet felt perfect sorrow. This sorrow, when it is had, cleanseth the soul not only of sin, but also of the pain it hath deserved for sin; and also it maketh a soul able to receive that joy, the which reaveth from a man all knowing and feeling of his being."

If we experience an urge to self-transcendence, it is because, in some obscure way and in spite of our conscious ignorance, we know who we really are. We know (or, to be more accurate, something within us knows) that the ground of our individual knowing is identical with the Ground of all knowing and all being; that Atman (Mind in the act of choosing to take the temporal point of

view) is the same as Brahman (Mind in its eternal essence). We know all this, even though we may never have heard of the doctrines in which the primordial Fact has been described, even though, if we happen to be familiar with them, we may regard these doctrines as so much moonshine. And we also know their practical corollary, which is that the final end, purpose and point of our existence is to make room in the "thou" for the "That," is to step aside so that the Ground can come to the surface of our consciousness, is to "die" so completely that we can say, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." When the phenomenal ego transcends itself, the essential Self is free to realize, in terms of a finite consciousness, the fact of its own eternity, together with the correlative fact that every particular in the world of experience partakes of the timeless and the infinite. This is liberation, this is enlightenment, this is the beatific vision, in which all things are perceived as they are "in themselves" and not in relation to a craving and abhorring ego.

The primordial Fact that That art thou is a fact of individual consciousness. For the purposes of religion, this fact of consciousness has to be externalized and objectified by the projection of an infinite deity, standing apart from the finite. At the same time the primordial Duty of getting out of the way, so that the Ground can come to the surface of the finite consciousness, is projected outward as the duty to win salvation within the framework of the Faith. From these two original projections religions have derived their dogmas, their theories of mediation, their symbols, their rites, their rules and precepts. Those who conform to the rules, who worship the mediators, who perform the rites, who believe in the dogmas and adore a God "out there," beyond the finite, may expect, with the aid of divine grace, to achieve salvation. Whether or not they achieve the enlightenment, which accompanies the realization of the primordial Fact, depends on something other than the faithful practice of religion. Insofar as it helps the individual to forget himself and his ready-made opinions about the universe, religion will prepare the way for realization. Insofar as it arouses and justifies such passions as fear, scrupulosity, righteous indignation, institutional patriotism and crusading hate, insofar as it harps on the saving virtues of certain

theological notions, certain hallowed arrangements of words, religion is an obstacle in the way of realization.

The primordial Fact and the primordial Duty can be formulated, more or less adequately, in the vocabulary of all the major religions. In the terms employed by Christian theology we may define realization as the soul's union with God as a Trinity, a three in one. It is simultaneously union with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost — union with the source and Ground of all being, union with the manifestation of that Ground in a human consciousness and union with the spirit which links the Unknowable to the known.

Union with any single person of the Trinity, to the exclusion of the other two, is not realization. Thus, union exclusively with the Father is a knowledge, by ecstatic participation, of the Ground in its eternal essence and not, at the same time, in its manifestation in the finite. The completely liberating and enlightening experience is that of the eternal in time, the non-dual in multiplicity. For the Bodhisattva, according to the Mahayanist tradition, the world-obliterating ecstasies of the Hinayanist Sravaka are not realization, but barriers to realization. In the West the assault on Quietism was motivated by ecclesiastical considerations and resulted in persecution. In the East the Sravaka was not punished; he was merely told that he was on the wrong track. "The Sravaka," says Ma-tsu, "is enlightened, and yet going astray. The ordinary man is off the right path, and yet in a way enlightened. The Sravaka fails to perceive that Mind as it is in itself knows no stages, no causation, no imagination. Disciplining himself in the cause, he has attained the result and abides in the Samadhi of Emptiness for ever so many aeons. However enlightened in this way, the Sravaka is not at all on the right track. From the point of view of the Bodhisattva this (the abiding in the Samadhi of Emptiness) is like suffering the tortures of hell. The Sravaka has buried himself in emptiness and does not know how to get out of his quiet contemplation, for he has no insight into the Buddha-nature."

Unitive knowledge of the Father alone excludes a knowledge of the world as it is "in itself" — a multiplicity manifesting the non-dual Infinite, a temporal

order participating in the eternal. If the world is to be known as it is “in itself,” there must be union not only with the Father, but with the Son and Holy Spirit as well.

Union with the Son is the assimilation of the personality to a model of loving selflessness. Union with the Holy Spirit is at once the means to, and the fruit of the individual’s self-transcendence into loving selflessness. Together they make possible the awareness of what, unconsciously, we enjoy at every moment — union with the Father. In cases where union with the Son is pursued too exclusively — where attention is centered upon the humanity of the historical mediator — religion tends to become an affair, outwardly, of “works” and inwardly of imaginings, visions and self-induced emotions. But in themselves neither works, nor visions, nor emotions directed toward a remembered or imagined person, are enough. Their value, so far as liberation and enlightenment are concerned, is purely instrumental. They are means to selflessness (or to be more precise, they may be means to selflessness) and thus make it possible for the individual, who does the works, or sees the visions and feels the emotions, to become conscious of the divine Ground in which, without knowing it, he has always had his being. The complement of works, imaginings and emotions is faith — not faith in the sense of belief in a set of theological and historical affirmations, nor in the sense of a passionate conviction of being saved by someone else’s merits, but faith as confidence in the order of things, faith as a theory about human and divine nature, as a working hypothesis resolutely acted upon in the expectation that what began as an assumption will come to be transformed, sooner or later, into an actual experience, by participation, of a reality which, for the insulated self, is unknowable.

Unknowableness, we may remark, is normally an attribute not only of the divine Ground of our being, but also of much else that lies, so to speak, between this Ground and our everyday consciousness. To those, for example, who undergo tests for ESP, or prevision, there is no perceptible distinction between success and failure. The process of guessing feels exactly the same, whether the result be a score attributable to mere chance, or markedly above or below that

figure. This is consistently true of test situations in the laboratory. But it is not always true of situations of a more significant kind. From the many well-authenticated cases on record it is clear that ESP and prevision sometimes take place spontaneously, and that the persons in whom they occur are aware of the event and strongly convinced of the truth of the information which is being conveyed. In the spiritual field we find analogous records of spontaneous theophanies. By a grace of sudden intuition, the normally unknowable makes itself known, and the knowledge is self-validating beyond the possibility of doubt. In men and women who have achieved a high degree of selflessness, these insights, from being rare and brief, may become habitual. Union with the Son through works and union with the Holy Spirit, through docility to inspiration, make possible a conscious and transfiguring union with the Father. In this state of union objects are no longer perceived as related to an insulated ego, but are known "as they are in themselves" — in other words, as they are in relation to, in ultimate identity with, the divine Ground of all being.

For the purposes of enlightenment and liberation, a too exclusive union with the Spirit is no less unsatisfactory than a too exclusive union with the Father in world-obliterating ecstasy, or with the Son in outward works and inward imaginings and emotions. Where union with Spirit is sought to the exclusion of the other unions, we find the thought-patterns of occultism, the behavior-patterns of psychics and sensitives. Sensitives are persons who have been born with, or have acquired, the knack of being conscious of events taking place on those subliminal levels, where the embodied mind loses its individuality and there is a merging with the psychic medium (to use a physical metaphor), out of which the personal self has been crystallized. Within this medium are many other crystallizations, each one with its blurred edges, its melting and interpenetrating boundaries. Some of these crystallizations are the minds of other embodied beings; others, the "psychic factors" which survive bodily death. Some, no doubt, are the idea-patterns, created by suffering, enjoying and reflecting individuals and persisting, as objects of possible experience, "out there" in the psychic medium. And, finally, yet others of these crystallizations may be

nonhuman entities, beneficent, malicious or merely alien. Foredoomed to failure are all those who aim exclusively at union with the Spirit. If they ignore the call to union with the Son through works, if they forget that the final end of human life is the liberating and transfiguring knowledge of the Father, in whom we have our being, they will never reach their goal. For them, there will be no union with the Spirit; there will be a mere merging with spirit, with every Tom, Dick and Harry of a psychic world, most of whose inhabitants are no nearer to enlightenment than we are, while some may actually be more impenetrable to the Light than the most opaque of incarnate beings.

Obscurely, we know who we really are. Hence our grief at having to seem to be what we are not, and hence the passionate desire to overstep the limits of this imprisoning ego. The only liberating self-transcendence is through selflessness and docility to inspiration (in other words, union with the Son and the Holy Spirit) into the consciousness of that union with the Father in which, without knowing it, we have always lived. But liberating self-transcendence is easier to describe than to achieve. For those who are deterred by the difficulties of the ascending road, there are other, less arduous alternatives. Self-transcendence is by no means invariably upward. Indeed, in most cases, it is an escape either downward into a state below that of personality, or else horizontally into something wider than the ego, but not higher, not essentially other. We are forever trying to mitigate the effects of the collective Fall into insulated selfhood by another, strictly private fall into animality and mental derangement, or by some more or less creditable self-dispersion into art or science, into politics, a hobby or a job. Needless to say, these substitutes for upward self-transcendence, these escapes into subhuman or merely human surrogates for Grace, are unsatisfactory at the best and, at the worst, disastrous.

III

The Provincial Letters take rank among the most consummate masterpieces of literary art. What precision, what verbal elegance, what a pregnant lucidity! And

what delicate sarcasm, what an urbane ferocity! The pleasure we derive from Pascal's performance is apt to blind us to the fact that, in the squabble between Jesuits and Jansenists, our incomparable virtuoso was fighting for what, in the main, was the worse cause. That the Jesuits finally triumphed over the Jansenists was certainly no unmixed blessing. But at least it was less of a curse than would have been, in all probability, the triumph of Pascal's party. Committed to the Jansenist doctrine of predestined damnation for almost everyone and to the Jansenist ethic of unbending puritanism, the Church might easily have become an instrument of almost unmitigated evil. As it actually turned out, the Jesuits prevailed. In doctrine, the extravagances of Jansenist Augustinianism were tempered by a dose of semi-Pelagian common sense. (At other periods the extravagances of Pelagianism — those of Helvétius, for example, those of J. B. Watson and Lysenko in our own day — have had to be tempered by appropriate doses of semi-Augustinian common sense.) In practice rigorism gave place to a more indulgent attitude. This more indulgent attitude was justified by a casuistry whose aim was always to prove that what looked like a mortal sin was in fact venial; and this casuistry was rationalized in terms of the theory of Probabilism, by means of which the multiplicity of authoritative opinions was used in order to give the sinner the benefit of every possible doubt. To the rigid and all too consistent Pascal, Probabilism seemed utterly immoral. For us, the theory and the kind of casuistry it justified possess one enormous merit: between them they reduce to absurdity the hideous doctrine of everlasting damnation. A hell, from which one can be saved by a quibble that would carry no weight with a police magistrate, cannot be taken very seriously. The intention of the Jesuit casuists and moral philosophers was, by leniency, to keep even the worldliest and most sinful men and women within the bounds of the Church and thereby to strengthen the organization as a whole and their own Order in particular. To some extent they achieved this intended end. But at the same time they achieved a considerable schism within the fold and, implicitly, a reductio ad absurdum of one of orthodox Christianity's cardinal doctrines — the doctrine of infinite punishment for finite offenses. The rapid spread, from 1650 onward, of deism,

“free thought” and atheism was an end-product of many co-operating causes. Among those causes were Jesuit casuistry, Jesuit Probabilism and those Provincial Letters, in which, with unsurpassable artistic skill, Pascal ferociously caricatured them.

The Jesuits who played a part, directly or at one remove, in our strange drama were singularly unlike the good fathers of the Provincial Letters. They had nothing to do with politics; they had hardly any contacts with “the world” and its denizens; the austerity of their lives was heroic almost to madness, and they preached the same austerity to their friends and disciples, who were all, as were they themselves, contemplatives dedicated to the achievement of Christian perfection. They were mystics in that school of Jesuit mysticism, whose most eminent representative had been Father Alvarez, the director of St. Teresa. Alvarez was censured by one General of the Society for practicing and teaching contemplation, as opposed to discursive meditation along the lines of the Ignatian exercises. A later General, Aquaviva, exonerated him and, in so doing, laid down what may be called the official Jesuit policy in regard to contemplative prayer. “Those persons are to be blamed who attempt prematurely and temerariously to launch out into high contemplation. However, we must not go to the lengths of flying in the face of the constant experience of the holy Fathers by despising contemplation and forbidding it to our members. For it is well established by the experience and authority of many Fathers that true and profound contemplation possesses more force and efficacity than all other methods of prayer, both for subduing and casting down human pride and for exciting lukewarm souls to execute their Superiors’ commands and work with ardor for the salvation of souls.” During the first half of the seventeenth century those members of the Society who showed a marked vocation for the mystical life were permitted, and indeed encouraged, to devote themselves to contemplation within the framework of their essentially active Order. At a later period, after the condemnation of Molinos and during the bitter controversy over Quietism, passive contemplation came to be regarded by the majority of Jesuits with considerable suspicion.

In the last two volumes of his Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France, Bremond picturesquely dramatizes the conflict between the “asceticist” majority within the Order and a minority of frustrated contemplatives. Pottier, the learned Jesuit historian of Lallemant and his disciples, has subjected Bremond’s thesis to severe and destructive criticism. Contemplation, he insists, was never officially condemned and individual contemplatives continued, even in the worst days of the anti-Quietist movement, to flourish within the Society.

In the sixteen-thirties Quietism was still half a century in the future, and the debate over contemplation had not yet been envenomed by accusations of heresy. For Vitelleschi, the General, and his hierarchy of Superiors, the problem was purely practical. Did the practice of contemplation produce better Jesuits than the practice of discursive meditation, or did it not?

From 1628 until his retirement, for reasons of health, in 1632, a great Jesuit contemplative, Father Louis Lallemant held the post of Instructor at the College of Rouen. Surin was sent to Rouen in the autumn of 1629 and remained there, with a group of twelve or fifteen other young priests, who had come for their “second novitiate,” until the late spring of 1630. Throughout that memorable semester he listened to daily lectures by the Instructor and prepared himself, by prayer and penance, for a life of Christian perfection within the framework of the Ignatian rule.

The outlines of Lallemant’s teaching as recorded briefly by Surin and, at greater length, by his fellow pupil, Father Rigoleuc, were worked up from the original notes by a later Jesuit, Father Champion, and issued, in the last years of the seventeenth century, under the title of La Doctrine Spirituelle du Père Louis Lallemant.

In Lallemant’s doctrine there was nothing basically novel. How could there be? The end pursued was that unitive knowledge of God, which is the goal of all who aspire to upward self-transcendence. And the means to that end were strictly orthodox — frequent communion, a scrupulous fulfillment of the Jesuit vow of obedience, systematic mortification of the “natural man,” self-examination and a constant “guard of the heart,” daily meditations on the

Passion and, for those who were ready for it, the passive prayer of “simple regard,” the alert waiting on God in the hope of an infusion of the grace of contemplation. The themes were ancient; but the manner, in which Lallemant first experienced and then expressed them, was personal and original. The Doctrine, as formulated by the master and his pupils, has its own special character, its tone and peculiar flavor.

In Lallemant’s teaching special emphasis was laid on purification of the heart and docility to the leadings of the Holy Ghost. In other words, he taught that conscious union with the Father can only be hoped for, where there has been union with the Son through works and devotion, and union with the Spirit in the alert passivity of contemplation.

Purification of the heart is to be achieved by intense devotion, by frequent communion and by an unsleeping self-awareness, aimed at the detection and mortification of every impulse to sensuality, pride and self-love. Of devotional feelings and imaginings, and of their relations to enlightenment, there will be occasion to speak in a later chapter. In this place our themes are the processes of mortification and the “natural man,” who has to be mortified. The corollary of “Thy kingdom come” is “our kingdom go.” On that matter all are agreed. But all are not agreed as to the best way of making our kingdom go. Should it be conquered by force of arms? Or should it be converted? Lallemant was a rigorist, who took a very gloomy and Augustinian view of the total depravity of fallen nature. As a good Jesuit, he advocated leniency toward sinners and the worldly. But the tone of his theological thought was deeply pessimistic, and toward himself and all those who aspired to perfection he was implacable. For them, as for him, no course was open but that of a mortification pushed to the limits of human endurance. “It is certain,” writes Champion in his brief biography of Father Lallemant, “that his bodily austerities exceeded his strength and that their excess, in the judgment of his most intimate friends, greatly shortened his life.”

It is interesting, in this context, to read what Lallemant’s other contemporary, John Donne, the Romanist turned Anglican, the repentant poet turned preacher and theologian, has to say on this matter of self-punishment. “Foreign crosses,

other men's merits are not mine; spontaneous and voluntary crosses, contracted by mine own sin, are not mine; neither are devious, and remote, and unnecessary crosses, my crosses. Since I am bound to take up my cross, there must be a cross that is mine to take up, a cross prepared by God, and laid in my way, which is temptations or tribulations in my calling; and I must not go out of my way to seek a cross; for so it is not mine, nor laid for my taking up. I am not bound to hunt after a persecution, nor to stand it and not fly, nor to affront a plague and not remove, nor to open myself to an injury and not defend. I am not bound to starve myself by inordinate fasting, nor to tear my flesh by inhuman whipping and flagellations. I am bound to take up my cross; and that is only mine, which the hand of God hath laid for me, that is, in the way of my calling, temptations and tribulations incident to that."

These views are by no means exclusively Protestant. At one time or another they have been expressed by many of the greatest Catholic saints and theologians. And yet physical penance, carried often to extreme lengths, remained a common practice in the Roman Church for long centuries. There were two reasons for this, one doctrinal and the other psycho-physiological. For many, self-punishment was a substitute for purgatory. The alternative was between torture now and much worse torture in the posthumous future. But there were also other and obscurer reasons for bodily austerities. For those whose goal is self-transcendence, fasting, insomnia and physical pain are "alteratives" (to borrow a word from the older pharmacology); they bring about a change of state, they cause the patient to be other than he was. On the physical level these alteratives, if administered to excess, may result in a downward self-transcendence, ending in disease and even, as in Lallemant's case, in premature death. But on the way to this undesirable consummation, or in cases where they are used with moderation, physical austerities may be made the instruments of horizontal and even of upward self-transcendence. When the body goes hungry, there is often a period of unusual mental lucidity. A lack of sleep tends to lower the threshold between the conscious and the subconscious. Pain, when not too extreme, is a tonic shock to organisms deeply and complacently sunk in the ruts

of habit. Practiced by men of prayer, these self-punishments may actually facilitate the process of upward self-transcendence. More frequently, however, they give access, not to the divine Ground of all being, but to that queer "psychic" world which lies, so to say, between the Ground and the upper, the more personal levels of the subconscious and conscious mind. Those who gain access to this psychic world — and the practice of physical austerities would seem to be a royal road to the occult — often acquire powers of the kind which our ancestors called "supernatural" or "miraculous." Such powers and the psychic states accompanying them were often confused with spiritual enlightenment. In fact, of course, this kind of self-transcendence is merely horizontal, and not upward. But psychic experiences are so strangely fascinating that many men and women have been willing and even eager to undergo the self-tortures which make them possible. Consciously and as theologians, Lallemant and his disciples never believed that "extraordinary graces" were the same as union with God, or indeed that they had any necessary connection with it. (Many "extraordinary graces," as we shall see, are indistinguishable in their manifestations from the workings of "evil spirits.") But conscious belief is not the sole determinant of conduct and it seems possible that Lallemant and probable that Surin felt themselves strongly drawn toward the austerities which did in fact help them to obtain "extraordinary graces," and that they rationalized this attraction in terms of such orthodox beliefs as that the natural man is intrinsically evil and must be got rid of at any cost and by any means, however violent.

Lallemant's hostility to nature was directed outward as well as inward. For him, the fallen world was full of snares and riddled with pitfalls. To take pleasure in creatures, to love their beauty, to inquire overmuch into the mysteries of mind and life and matter — these, to him, were dangerous distractions from the proper study of mankind, which is not man, not nature, but God and the way to a knowledge of God. For a Jesuit the problem of achieving Christian perfection was peculiarly difficult. The Society was not a contemplative order, whose members lived in seclusion and devoted their lives only to prayer. It was

an active order, an order of apostles, dedicated to the saving of souls and pledged to fight the battles of the Church in the world. Lallemant's conception of the ideal Jesuit is summed up in the notes, in which Surin recorded his master's teaching. The essence, the whole point of the Society consists in this: that it "joins together things which in appearance are contrary, such as learning and humility, youth and chastity, diversity of nations and a perfect charity. . . . In our life we must mingle a deep love of heavenly things with scientific studies and other natural occupations. Now, it is very easy to rush to one extreme or the other. One may have too great a passion for the sciences and neglect prayer and spiritual things. Or, if one aspires to become a spiritual man, one may neglect to cultivate, as one should, such natural talents as doctrinal knowledge, eloquence and prudence." The excellence of the Jesuit spirit consists in this, "that it honors and imitates the manner in which the divine was united with all that was human in Jesus Christ, with the faculties of his soul, with the members of his body, with his blood, and it deified all. . . . But this alliance is difficult. That is why those among us who do not realize the perfection of our spirit, tend to cling to natural and human advantages, being destitute of the supernatural and the divine." The Jesuit who fails to live up to the spirit of the Society turns into the Jesuit of popular imagination, and not infrequently of historical fact — worldly, ambitious, intriguing. "The man who fails to apply himself wholeheartedly to the inner life falls inevitably into these defects; for the poverty-stricken and starving soul must needs cling to something in the hope of satisfying its hunger."

For Lallemant, the life of perfection is a life simultaneously active and contemplative, a life lived at the same time in the infinite and the finite, in time and in eternity. This ideal is the highest which a rational being can conceive — the highest and at the same time the most realistic, the most conformable to the given facts of human and divine nature. But when they discussed the practical problems involved in the realization of this ideal, Lallemant and his disciples displayed a narrow and self-stultifying rigorism. The "nature" which is to be united with the divine is not nature in its totality, but a strictly limited segment of human nature — a talent for study, or for preaching, for business or for

organization. Nonhuman nature finds no place in Surin's summary and is only passingly referred to in the longer account of Lallemant's teaching given by Rigoleuc. And yet Christ told his followers to consider the lilies — and to consider them, be it noted, in an almost Taoist spirit, not as emblems of something all too human, but as blessedly other, as autonomous creatures living according to the law of their own being and in union (perfect except for its unconsciousness) with the Order of Things. The author of Proverbs bids the sluggard consider the ways of the prudent ant. But Christ delights in the lilies precisely because they are not prudent, because they neither toil nor spin and yet are incomparably lovelier than the most gorgeous of Hebrew kings. Like Walt Whitman's "Animals,"

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania for owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole earth.

Christ's lilies are worlds apart from the flowers with which St. Francis de Sales opens his chapter on the purification of the soul. These flowers, he tells Philothea, are the good desires of the heart. The Introduction abounds in references to nature — but to nature as seen through the eyes of Pliny and the authors of the bestiaries, to nature as emblematic of man, nature as consistently the schoolmarm and the moralist. But the lilies of the field enjoy a glory which has this in common with the Order of the Garter — that "there's no damned merit about it." That, precisely, is their point; that is why, for us human beings, they are so refreshing and, on a level much deeper than that of morality, so profoundly instructive. "The Great Way," says the Third Patriarch of Zen,

The Great Way is no harder than men themselves
Make it by not refusing to prefer;
For where there is no abhorrence, where there is no
Frenzy to have, the Way lies manifest.

As always in real life, we are in the midst of paradoxes and antinomies — bound to choose the good rather than the evil, but bound at the same time, if we wish to realize our union with the divine Ground of all being, to choose without craving and aversion, without imposing upon the universe our own notions of utility or morality.

Insofar as they ignore nonhuman nature, or treat it as merely symbolic of human nature, as merely instrumental and subordinate to man, the teachings of Lallemant and Surin are characteristic of their time and country. French literature of the seventeenth century is astonishingly poor in expressions of any but a strictly utilitarian or symbolic interest in birds, flowers, animals, landscape. In the whole of Tartufe, for example, there is only one reference to nonhuman nature — a single line, and that most marvelously unpoetical.

La campagne à present n'est pas beaucoup fleurie. No truer word was ever spoken. So far as literature was concerned, the French countryside, during those years which led up to and included the Grand Siècle, were almost flowerless. The lilies of the field were there all right; but the poets did not consider them. The rule had its exceptions, of course; but they were few — Théophile de Viau, Tristan l'Hermite and, later, La Fontaine, who occasionally wrote of the brute creation not as men in fur and feathers, but as beings of another, though related, order, to be looked at as they are in themselves and to be loved for their own sake and for God's. In the Discours à Madame de la Sablière there is a beautiful passage on the then fashionable philosophy, whose exponents proclaim:

Que la beste est une machine;
Qu'en elle tout se fait sans choix et par ressorts:
Nul sentiment, point d'âme, en elle tout est corps . . .
L'animal se sent agité
De mouvements que le vulgaire appelle
Tristesse, joye, amour, plaisir, douleur cruelle,
Ou quelque autre de ces estats.
Mais ce n'est point cela; ne cous y trompez pas.

This summary of the odious Cartesian doctrine — a doctrine, incidentally, not so far removed from the orthodox Catholic view that the brutes are without souls and may therefore be used by human beings as though they were mere things — is followed by a series of examples of animal intelligence, in the stag, the partridge and the beaver. The whole passage is as fine, in its own way, as anything in the whole range of reflective poetry.

It stands, however, almost alone. In the writings of La Fontaine's great contemporaries, nonhuman nature plays almost no part whatever. The world in which Corneille's enormous heroes act out their tragedies is that of a closely organized, hierarchical society. "L'espace cornélien c'est la Cité," writes M. Octave Nadal. The yet more strictly limited universe of Racine's heroines and the somewhat featureless males, who serve as pretexts for their anguish, is as windowless as the Cornelian City. The sublimity of these post-Senecan tragedies is stuffy and confined, the pathos without air, without elbow room, without background. We are far indeed from King Lear and As You Like It, from A Midsummer Night's Dream and Macbeth. In practically any comedy or tragedy of Shakespeare one cannot read twenty lines without being made aware that, behind the clowns, the criminals, the heroes, behind the flirts and the weeping queens, beyond all that is agonizingly or farcically human, and yet symbiotic with man, immanent in his consciousness and consubstantial with his being, there lie the everlasting data, the given facts of planetary and cosmic existence on every level, animate and inanimate, mindless and purposively conscious. A poetry that represents man in isolation from nature, represents him inadequately. And analogously a spirituality which seeks to know God only within human souls, and not at the same time in the nonhuman universe with which in fact we are indissolubly related, is a spirituality which cannot know the fullness of divine being. "My deepest conviction," writes an eminent Catholic philosopher of our time, M. Gabriel Marcel, "my deepest and most unshakable conviction — and if it is heretical, so much the worse for orthodoxy — is that, whatever all the thinkers and doctors have said, it is not God's will at all to be loved by us against the Creation, but rather glorified through the Creation, and with the Creation as

our starting point. That is why I find so many devotional books intolerable." In this respect, the least intolerable book of seventeenth-century devotion would be Traherne's Centuries of Meditations. For this English poet and theologian, there is no question of a God set up against the creation. On the contrary, God is to be glorified through the creation, to be realized in the creation — infinity in a grain of sand and eternity in a flower. The man who, in Traherne's phrase, "attains the World" in disinterested contemplation, thereby attains God, and finds that all the rest has been added. "Is it not a sweet thing to have all covetousness and ambition satisfied, suspicion and infidelity removed, courage and joy infused? Yet is all this in the fruition of the World attained. For thereby is God seen in all his wisdom, power, goodness and glory." Lallemant speaks of the mingling of seemingly incompatible elements, the natural and the supernatural, in the life of perfection. But, as we have seen, what he calls "nature" is not nature in its fullness, but merely an excerpt. Traherne advocated the same mingling of incompatibles, but accepted nature in its totality and in its smallest details. The lilies and the ravens are to be considered, not quoad nos, but selflessly, an sich — which is the same as saying "in God." And here is sand and a flower growing from among the grains: contemplate these things lovingly and you will see them transfigured by the immanence of eternity and infinity. It is worth remarking that this experience of a divinity immanent in natural objects came also to Surin. In a few brief notations he records that there were times when he actually perceived the full majesty of God in a tree, a passing animal. But, strangely enough, he never wrote at any length about this beatific vision of the Absolute in the relative. And even to the recipients of his spiritual letters he never suggested that obedience to Christ's injunction to consider the lilies might help the blindly groping soul to come to a knowledge of God. One can only suppose that the acquired belief in the total depravity of fallen nature was stronger, in his mind, than the givenness of his own experience. The dogmatic words he had learned at Sunday School were opaque enough to eclipse the immediate Fact. "If you wish to see It before your eyes," writes the Third Patriarch of Zen, "have no fixed notions either for or against It." But fixing notions is the professional occupation

of theologians, and both Surin and his master were theologians before they were seekers for enlightenment.

In Lallemant's scheme of ascesis purification of the heart was to be accompanied and completed by constant docility to the leadings of the Holy Ghost. One of the seven Gifts of the Spirit is Intelligence, and the vice opposed to Intelligence is "coarseness in regard to spiritual things." This coarseness is the ordinary state of the unregenerate, who are more or less completely blind to the inner light and more or less completely deaf to inspiration. By mortifying his self-regarding impulses, by setting up a witness to his thoughts and "a little sentinel to keep an eye on the movements of the heart," a man can sharpen his perceptions to the point where he becomes aware of the messages coming up from the obscure depths of the mind — messages in the form of intuitive knowledge, of direct commands, of symbolic dreams and phantasies. The heart that is constantly watched and guarded becomes capable of all the graces and in the end is truly "possessed and governed by the Holy Spirit."

But on the way to this consummation there may be possessions of a very different kind. For by no means all inspirations are divine, or even moral, even relevant. How are we to distinguish between the leadings of the not-I who is the Holy Spirit and of that other not-I who is sometimes an imbecile, sometimes a lunatic and sometimes a malevolent criminal? Bayle cites the case of a pious young Anabaptist, who felt inspired one day to cut off his brother's head. The predestined victim had read his Bible, knew that this sort of thing had happened before, recognized the divine origin of the inspiration and, in the presence of a large assemblage of the faithful, permitted himself, like a second Isaac, to be decapitated. Such teleological suspensions of morality, as Kierkegaard elegantly calls them, are all very well in the Book of Genesis, but not in real life. In real life we have to guard against the gruesome pranks of the maniac within. Lallemant was very well aware that many of our inspirations are most certainly not from God, and was careful to take due precautions against illusion. To those of his colleagues who objected that his doctrine of docility to the Holy Ghost was suspiciously like the Calvinist doctrine of the inner spirit, he answered: first,

that, it was an article of faith that no good work could be accomplished without a leading of the Holy Spirit in the form of an inspiration and, second, that divine inspiration presupposed the Catholic Faith, the traditions of the Church and the obedience due to ecclesiastical superiors. If an inspiration prompted a man to go against the faith or the Church, it could not possibly be divine.

This is one way — and a very effective way — of guarding against the extravagances of the indwelling maniac. The Quakers had another. Persons who felt a concern to do something unusual or momentous were advised to consult with a number of "weighty Friends" and to abide by their opinion as to the nature of the inspiration. Lallemant advocates the same procedure. Indeed, he asserts that the Holy Ghost actually "prompts us to consult with judicious persons and to conform our conduct to the opinion of others."

No good work can be accomplished without an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This, Lallemant could point out to his critics, is an article of the Catholic faith. To those of his colleagues who "complained that they did not have this kind of leading by the Holy Spirit and that they were unable to experience it," he answered that, if they were in a state of grace, such inspirations were never wanting, even though they might be unaware of them. And he added that they would certainly become aware of divine inspiration if they behaved themselves as they ought. But instead of that, "they chose to live outside themselves, hardly ever coming home to look into their own souls, making the examination of conscience (to which they were bound by their vows) in a very superficial way and taking into consideration only such faults as are obvious to outsiders, without trying to seek out their inner roots in the passions and in dominant habits, and without examining the state and tendency of the soul and the feelings of the heart." That such persons could not experience the leading of the Holy Ghost was hardly surprising. "How could they know it? They do not even know their inward sins, which are their own acts freely performed by themselves. But as soon as they choose to create within themselves the appropriate conditions for such knowledge, they will infallibly have it."

All this explains why most would-be good works are ineffective to the point of being almost bad. If hell is paved with good intentions, it is because most people, being self-blinded to the inner light, are actually incapable of having a purely good intention. For this reason, says Lallemant, action must always be in direct proportion to contemplation. “The more inward we are, the more we may undertake outward activities; the less inward, the more we should refrain from trying to do good.” Again, “one busies oneself with works of zeal and charity; but is it from a pure motive of zeal and charity? Is it not, perhaps, because one finds a personal satisfaction in this kind of thing, because one does not care for prayer or study, because one cannot bear to stay in one’s room, cannot stomach seclusion and recollectedness?” A priest may have a large and devoted congregation; but his words and works will bear fruit “only in proportion to his union with God and his detachment from his own interests.” The appearances of doing good are often profoundly deceptive. Souls are saved by the holy, not by the busy. “Action must never be allowed to be an obstacle to our union with God, but must serve rather to bind us more closely and lovingly to Him.” For “just as there are certain humors which, when they are too abundant, cause the death of the body, so in the religious life, when action predominates to excess and is not tempered by prayer and meditation, it infallibly stifles the spirit.” Hence the fruitlessness of so many lives, seemingly so meritorious, so brilliant and so productive. Without the selfless inwardness which is the condition of inspiration, talent is fruitless, zeal and hard work produce nothing of spiritual value. “A man of prayer can do more in a single year than another can accomplish in a whole lifetime.” Exclusively outward work may be effective in changing outward circumstances; but the worker who wishes to change men’s reactions to circumstances — and one can react destructively and suicidally to even the best environment — must begin by purifying his own soul and making it capable of inspiration. A merely outward man may work like a Trojan and talk like Demosthenes; but “an inward man will make more impression on hearts and minds by a single word animated by the spirit of God” than the other can do by all his efforts, all his cleverness and learning.

How does it actually feel to be “possessed and governed by the Holy Spirit?” This state of conscious and continuous inspiration was described, with the most delicate precision of self-analysis, by Surin’s younger contemporary, Armelle Nicolas, affectionately known throughout her native Brittany as la bonne Armelle. This uneducated servant girl, who lived the life of a contemplative saint while cooking the dinner, scrubbing floors and looking after the children, was incapable of writing her own story. But fortunately it was written for her by a very intelligent nun, who succeeded in drawing her out and in recording her confidences almost verbatim. “Losing sight of herself and all the workings of her mind, Armelle no longer envisaged herself as acting in anything, but as suffering and passively submitting to the workings which God accomplished in and by her; so that it seemed to her that, while she possessed a body, it was only that she might be moved and governed by the Spirit of God. It was into this state that she entered after God had so peremptorily commanded her to make room for Him. . . . When she thought of her body or her mind, she no longer said “my body,” or “my mind”; for the word “my” had been banished, and she used to say that everything belonged to God.

“I remember hearing her say that, from the time that God had made Himself the absolute master of her being, she had been dismissed as effectively as, in the past, she herself had given notice” (Armelle’s metaphors were all drawn from the professional vocabulary of a maid of all work) “to those other things” (her bad habits, her self-regarding impulses). “Once dismissed, her mind was not permitted to see or understand what God was working in the inmost recesses of her soul, nor to interfere with its own workings. It was as though her mind remained, huddled up, outside the door of this central chamber, where God alone might freely enter, waiting there like a lackey for his master’s orders. And the mind did not find itself alone in this situation; but it seemed sometimes that an infinite number of angels kept it company, standing around the dwelling-place of God, so as to prevent anything from crossing the threshold.” This state of things lasted some time. Then God permitted her conscious self to enter the central chamber of the soul — to enter and actually see the divine perfections with

which it was now filled, with which, indeed, it had always been filled; but like everyone else, she had not known it. The inner Light was intense beyond her capacity to bear it, and for a time her body suffered excruciatingly. In the end, she acquired some measure of tolerance and was able to support the consciousness of her enlightenment without too much distress.

Remarkable in itself; Armelle's self-analysis is doubly interesting as being yet another piece among the many pieces of evidence all pointing to the same conclusion: namely, that the phenomenal self is underlain by a Pure Ego or Atman, which is of the same nature as the divine Ground of all being. Outside the central chamber where (until the soul has become selfless) "none but God may enter," between the divine Ground and the conscious self, lies the subliminal mind, almost impersonal at its melting fringe, but crystallizing, as the phenomenal self is approached, into the personal subconscious with its accumulations of septic rubbish, its swarms of rats and black beetles and its occasional scorpions and vipers. This personal subconscious is the haunt of our indwelling criminal lunatic, the locus of Original Sin. But the fact that the ego is associated with a maniac is not incompatible with the fact that it is also associated (all unconsciously) with the divine Ground. We are born with Original Sin; but we are also born with Original Virtue — with a capacity for grace, in the language of Western theology, with a "spark," a "fine point of the soul," a fragment of unfallen consciousness, surviving from the state of primal innocence and technically known as the synteresis. Freudian psychologists pay far more attention to Original Sin than to Original Virtue. They pore over the rats and the black beetles, but are reluctant to see the inner Light. Jung and his followers have shown themselves to be somewhat more realistic. Overstepping the limits of the personal subconscious, they have begun to explore the realm where the mind, growing more and more impersonal, merges into the psychic medium, out of which individual selves are crystallized. Jungian psychology goes beyond the immanent maniac, but stops short of the immanent God.

And yet, I repeat, there is plenty of evidence for the existence of an Original Virtue underlying Original Sin. Armelle's experience was not unique. The

knowledge that there is a central chamber of the soul, blazing with the light of divine love and wisdom, has come, in the course of history, to multitudes of human beings. It came, among others, to Father Surin — and came, as will be recorded in a later chapter, in conjunction with a knowledge, no less immediate and no less overpowering, of the horrors at large in the psychic medium and the poisonous vermin in the personal subconscious. At one and the same instant he was aware of God and of Satan, he knew beyond all doubt that he was eternally united with the divine Ground of all being, and yet was convinced that he was already and irrevocably damned. In the end, as we shall see, it was the consciousness of God that prevailed. In that tormented mind, Original Sin was finally swallowed up in the infinity of a much more Original, because timeless, Virtue.

Mystical experiences, theophanies, flashes of what has been called cosmic consciousness — these are not to be had for the asking, cannot be repeated uniformly and at will in the laboratory. But if the experience of the central chamber of the soul is not to be commanded, certain experiences of approach to that center, of being within its field, of standing at the door (in Armelle's words) among a company of angels, are repeatable, if not uniformly indeed (for only the most elementary psychological experiences can be repeated with anything like uniformity), but at least sufficiently often to indicate the nature of the transcendent Limit, toward which they all converge. For example, those who have experimented with hypnosis find that, at a certain depth of trance, it happens not too infrequently that subjects, if they are left alone and not distracted, will become aware of an immanent serenity and goodness that is often associated with a perception of light and of spaces vast but not solitary. Sometimes the entranced person feels impelled to speak about his or her experience. Deleuze, who was one of the best observers in the second generation of Animal Magnetists, records that this state of somnambulism is characterized by a complete detachment from all personal interests, by the absence of passion, by indifference to acquired opinions and prejudices and by "a novel manner of viewing objects, a quick and direct judgment, accompanied with an intimate

conviction. . . . Thus the somnambulist possesses at the same time the torch which gives him his light and the compass that points out his way. This torch and this compass," Deleuze concludes, "are not the product of somnambulism; they are always in us, but the distracting cares of the world, the passions and, above all, pride, and attachment to perishable things prevent us from perceiving the one and consulting the other." (Less dangerously and more effectively than the drugs which sometimes produce "anaesthetic revelations," hypnotism temporarily abolishes distractions and allays the passions, leaving the consciousness free to occupy itself with what lies beyond the haunt of the immanent maniac.) "In this new situation," Deleuze continues, "the mind is filled with religious ideas, with which, perhaps, it was never before occupied." Between the somnambulist's new way of viewing the world and his normal state there is a difference "so prodigious that he sometimes feels as though he were inspired; he regards himself as the organ of a superior intelligence, but this does not excite his vanity."

Deleuze's findings are confirmed by those of an experienced woman psychiatrist who for many years has made a study of automatic writing. In conversation this lady has informed me that, sooner or later, most automatists produce scripts in which certain metaphysical ideas are set forth. The theme of these scripts is always the same: namely, that the ground of the individual soul is identical with the divine Ground of all being. Returning to their normal state, the automatists read what they have written and often find it in complete disharmony with what they have always believed.

In this context it seems worth while to remark that (as F. W. H. Myers pointed out many years ago) the moral tone of mediumistic utterances about life in general is almost invariably above reproach. Because of their style, such utterances may be dismissed as mere twaddle. But however soggy the language, however commonplace the thoughts (and for the last thirty centuries at least, all the great truths have been commonplaces), the twaddle is always harmless and might even, if psychics could only write a little better, be uplifting. The inference to be drawn from all this is that in certain states of trance mediums go

beyond the personal subconscious, beyond the verminous realm of Original Sin, into an area of subliminal mind in which, like a radiation from some distant source, the influence of Original Virtue makes itself faintly but still distinctly felt. Meanwhile, of course, if they neglect to make union with the Father their end and union with the Son, through works, a means to that end, they are in constant danger of finding themselves inspired, not by the Holy Ghost, but by all manner of inferior entities, some indigenous to their own personal subconscious, others existing “out there” in the psychic medium, some harmless or positively helpful, but others in the highest degree undesirable.

With these inferential confirmations of the reality of mystical experience, with this evidence at one remove, Lallemant and his disciples did not have to concern themselves. They had their firsthand knowledge and, to validate it, an authoritative literature ranging from the Mystical Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite to the almost contemporary writings of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. Of the reality and the divine nature of the end, to which purification of the heart and docility to the Holy Spirit were the principal means, there was never, in their minds the slightest question. In the past great servants of God had written of their experiences, and the orthodoxy of these writings had been guaranteed by the Doctors of the Church. And now, in the present, they themselves had lived through the agonizing Dark Nights of the senses and the will, and had known the peace which passeth all understanding.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOR THOSE WHO had no vocation for it, life in a seventeenth-century convent was merely a succession of boredoms and frustrations, mitigated in some slight degree by an occasional Schwaermerei, by gossip with visitors in the parlor, and by absorption, during leisure hours, in some innocent but entirely footling hobby. Father Surin, in his Letters, speaks of the ornaments in plaited straw, upon which many good sisters of his acquaintance spent the greater part of their spare time. Their masterpiece, in this line, was a miniature straw coach, drawn by six straw horses, and destined to adorn the dressing table of an aristocratic patroness. Of the nuns of the Visitation Father de la Colombière writes that, though the rules of the order are admirably designed to lead souls to the highest perfection, and though he has met certain Visitandines of exalted holiness, it remains true, nevertheless, "that religious houses are filled with persons who keep their rules, get up, go to Mass, to prayer, to confession, to communion merely because it is the habit, because the bell tolls and because others do the same. Their heart has almost no part in what they do. They have their little notions, their little plans, which keep them busy; the things of God enter their minds only as things indifferent. Relatives and friends, whether within the convent or without, use up all their affections, so that there is left over for God only some kind of sluggish and forced emotion by no means acceptable to Him. . . . Communities which ought to be furnaces in which souls are forever on fire with the love of God, remain instead in a condition of frightful mediocrity, and God grant that things may not go from bad to worse."

To Jean Racine, Port-Royal seemed uniquely admirable because of "the solitude of the parlor, the little eagerness shown by the nuns to enter into conversation, their lack of curiosity about the things of the world and even about

the affairs of their neighbors.” From this catalogue of Port-Royal’s merits we can infer the corresponding defects of other, less remarkable convents.

The house of Ursuline nuns, which was established at Loudun in 1626, was neither better nor worse than the average. Most of the seventeen nuns were young noblewomen, who had embraced monastic life, not out of any overmastering desire to follow the evangelical counsels and achieve Christian perfection, but because there was not enough money at home to provide them with dowries commensurate with their birth and acceptable to suitors of corresponding rank. There was nothing scandalous in their conduct and nothing particularly edifying. They observed their rule, but observed it with resignation rather than enthusiasm.

Life at Loudun was hard. The nuns of the new foundation had arrived without money in a town that was half Protestant and wholly stingy. The only house they could afford to rent was a gloomy old building, which nobody else would live in because it was notoriously haunted. They had no furniture and for some time were compelled to sleep on the floor. The pupils, on whom they relied for their living, were slow in presenting themselves, and for a time these blue-blooded de Sazillys and d’Escoubleaus, these de Barbèzieres and de la Mottes, these de Belciels and de Dampierres, were compelled to work with their hands and to go without meat, not only on Fridays, but on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays as well. After a few months, snobbery came to their rescue. When bourgeois Loudun discovered that, for a very modest fee, it could have its female offspring taught good French and courtly manners by a second cousin once removed of Cardinal de Richelieu, by an even closer relative of Cardinal de Sourdis, by the younger daughter of a marquis and a niece of the Bishop of Poitiers, boarders and day pupils came thick and fast.

With them, at last, came prosperity. Servants were hired to do the dirty work, beef and mutton reappeared on the refectory table and the mattresses were taken off the floor and placed on wooden bedsteads.

In 1627 the Prioress of the new community was transferred to another house of the order and a new superior was appointed in her place. Her name in religion

was Jeanne des Anges; in the world it had been Jeanne de Belciel, daughter of Louis de Belciel, Baron de Coze, and of Charlotte Goumart d'Eschillais, who came of a family hardly less ancient and eminent than his own. Born in 1602, she was now in her middle twenties, her face rather pretty, but her body diminutive almost to dwarfishness and slightly deformed — presumably by some tubercular affection of the bones. Jeanne's education had been only slightly less rudimentary than that of most young ladies of her time; but she was possessed of considerable native intelligence, combined, however, with a temperament and a character, which had made her a trial to others and her own worst enemy. Because of her deformity the child was physically unattractive; and the consciousness of being misshapen, the painful knowledge that she was an object either of repugnance or of pity, aroused in her a chronic resentment, which made it impossible for her either to feel affection or to permit herself to be loved. Disliking and consequently disliked, she lived in a defensive shell, issuing forth only to attack her enemies — and everybody, a priori, was an enemy — with sudden sarcasms or strange outbursts of jeering laughter. "I noticed," Surin was to write of her, "that the Mother Superior had a certain jocosity of nature which excited her to laugh and crack jokes (bouffonner) and that the demon, Balaam, did his best to cherish and maintain this humor. I saw that this spirit was wholly opposed to the seriousness with which one ought to take the things of God, and that it fostered in her a certain glee which destroys the compunction of heart indispensable to a perfect conversion to God. I saw that a single hour of this kind of jocularity was enough to ruin everything I had built up in the course of many days, and I induced in her a strong desire to rid herself of this enemy." There is a laughter that is perfectly compatible with "the things of God" — a laughter of humility and self-criticism, a laughter of good-natured tolerance, a laughter in lieu of despair or indignation at the world's perverse absurdity. Very different from any of these, Jeanne's laughter was either of derision or of cynicism. Directed against others, never against herself, the first was a symptom of the unreconciled hunchback's desire to be revenged on destiny by putting other people in their place — and their place, in spite of all appearances, was

below her. Motivated by the same craving for compensatory dominance, the second was a more impersonal jeering and joking at all that, by current standards, was most solemn, lofty and grand.

Persons of Jeanne's character are apt to make a good deal of trouble, both for themselves and for other people. Incapable of coping with a very unpleasant child, her parents packed her off to an elderly aunt, who was the prioress of a neighboring abbey. After two or three years she was ignominiously returned; the nuns could do nothing with her. Time passed, and life in the paternal château became so odious to her that even a cloister seemed preferable to home. She entered the Ursuline house at Poitiers, passed through the usual novitiate and took her vows. As might have been expected, Jeanne did not make a very satisfactory nun; but her family was rich and influential, and the Superior deemed it expedient to put up with her. And then, almost overnight, there was a marvelous change for the better. Ever since her coming to Loudun Sœur Jeanne had behaved with exemplary piety and diligence. The young woman who, at Poitiers, had been so insubordinate, so wanting in zeal, so slack in the performance of her duties, was now the perfect religious — obedient, hard-working and devout. Deeply impressed by this conversion, the retiring Prioress recommended Sister Jane as the person best fitted to take her place.

Fifteen years later the convert gave her own version of this episode. "I took good care," she wrote, "to make myself indispensable to those in authority, and since there were but few nuns, the Superior was obliged to assign me to all the offices of the community. It was not that she could not do without me, for she had other nuns more capable and better than I; it was merely that I imposed upon her by a thousand little compliances and so made myself necessary to her. I knew so well how to adapt myself to her humor and to prevail upon her, that at last she found nothing well done except what was done by me; she even believed that I was good and virtuous. This puffed up my heart to such an extent that I had no difficulty in performing actions which seemed to be worthy of esteem. I knew how to dissimulate and I made use of hypocrisy, so that my Superior might go on thinking well of me and be favorable to my inclinations; and in effect she

granted me many privileges which I abused, and since she was herself good and virtuous and believed that I too intended to go to God with Christian perfection, she often invited me to converse with worthy monks, which I did in order to humor her and to pass the time."

When the worthy monks took their leave, they would push through the grille some newly translated classic of the spiritual life. One day it was a treatise by Blosius; another, the life of the Blessed Mother Teresa of Avila, written by herself, with St. Augustine's Confessions and Del Rio on angels thrown in for good measure. As she read these books, as she learned to discuss their contents with the prioress and the good fathers, Sœur Jeanne found her attitude insensibly changing. These pious talks in the parlor, these studies in the literature of mysticism, ceased to be mere time-killers and became means to a specific end. If she read the mystics, if she talked with the visiting Carmelites of perfection, it was not at all "for the sake of her own advancement in the spiritual life, but solely in order to seem clever and to outshine all the other nuns in every kind of company." The unreconciled hunchback's craving for superiority had found another outlet, a new and fascinating field in which to operate. There were still occasional outbursts of sarcasm and cynical buffoonery; but in the graver intervals Sister Jane was now the expert in spirituality, the learned consultant on all matters of mystical theology. Exalted by her new-found knowledge, she could now look down on her sisters with an altogether delightful mingling of contempt and pity. True, they were pious, they were trying, poor things, to be good — but with what a piddling kind of virtue, what an ignorant and, one might say, brutish devotion! What did they know of extraordinary graces? What of spiritual touches, of rapts and inspirations, of aridities and the night of the senses? And the answer, the highly gratifying answer to all these questions was that they knew nothing at all. Whereas she — the little dwarf with one shoulder higher than the other — she knew practically everything.

Mme. Bovary came to a bad end because she imagined herself to be the kind of person she in fact was not. Perceiving that Flaubert's heroine embodied a very widespread human tendency, Jules de Gaultier coined from her name the word

“bovarism” and wrote a book on the subject, which is well worth the reading. Bovarism is by no means invariably disastrous. On the contrary, the process of imagining that we are what we are not, and of acting upon this imagination, is one of the most effective mechanisms of education. The title of the most enduring of all books of Christian devotion — The Imitation of Christ — bears eloquent witness to this fact. It is by thinking and acting in any given situation, not as we would normally think and act, but rather as we imagine that we should do, if we were like some other and better person, that we finally cease to be like our old selves and come, instead, to resemble our ideal model.

Sometimes, of course, the ideal is low and the chosen model more or less undesirable. But the bovaristic mechanism of imagining ourselves to be what we are not, and of thinking and acting as though that fancy were a fact, remains the same. There is, for example, a bovarism in the realm of vice — the bovarism of the good boy who conscientiously takes to drinking and whoring in order to be like some generally admired he-man or daredevil. There is a bovarism in the field of hierarchical relationships — the bovarism of the bourgeois snob who imagines himself to be an aristocrat and tries to behave as such. There is a political bovarism — the bovarism of those who practice the imitation of Lenin or Webb or Mussolini. There is a cultural and aesthetic bovarism — the bovarism of the précieuses ridicules, the bovarism of the modern philistine who is converted overnight from the cover of the Saturday Evening Post to Picasso. And finally there is bovarism in religion — and we have at one end of the scale the saint who wholeheartedly imitates Christ and, at the other, the hypocrite who tries to look like a saint in order the more effectively to pursue his own unholy ends. In the middle ground, somewhere between the two extremes of Tartufe and St. John of the Cross, there exists a third, hybrid variety of religious bovarists. These, the absurd but often touching comedians of the spiritual life, are neither consciously wicked nor resolutely holy. Their all too human desire is to make the best of both worlds. They aspire to be saved — but without going to too much trouble; they hope to be rewarded — but only for looking like heroes, only for talking like contemplatives, not for doing or being. The faith which sustains

them is the illusion, half recognized as such, half earnestly believed in, that by saying “Lord, Lord” sufficiently often they will contrive, somehow or other, to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Without “Lord, Lord,” or some more elaborate doctrinal or devotional equivalent, the process of religious bovarization would be difficult, in some cases all but impossible. The pen is mightier than the sword in this sense; that it is by means of verbalized thought that we direct and maintain our efforts. But it is possible to make use of words as a substitute for effort, to live in a purely verbal universe and not in the given world of immediate experience. To change a vocabulary is easy; to change external circumstances or our own ingrained habits is hard and tiresome. The religious bovarist who is not prepared to undertake a wholehearted imitation of Christ contents himself with the acquisition of a new vocabulary. But a new vocabulary is not the same thing as a new environment or a new character. The letter kills, or merely leaves inert; it is the spirit, it is the reality underlying verbal signs, which gives new life. Phrases which, at their first formulation, expressed significant experiences, tend (such is the nature of human beings and their religious organizations) to become a mere jargon, a pious slang, by means of which the hypocrite disguises his conscious wickedness and the more or less harmless comedian tries to deceive himself and impress his fellows. As we should expect, Tartufe speaks and teaches others to speak the language of the sons and servants of God.

De toutes amitiés il détache mon âme,
Et je verrai mourir frère, enfants, mère et femme
Que je m’en soucierais autant que de cela.

We recognize a distorted echo of the Gospels, a parody of the Ignatian and Salesian doctrine of holy indifference. And how movingly, when at last he is unmasked, does the hypocrite confess his total depravity! All the saints have always believed themselves to be enormous sinners, and Tartufe is no exception to the rule.

Oui, mon frère, je suis un méchant, un coupable,
Un malheureux pécheur, tout plein d’iniquité,

Le plus grand scélérat qui jamais ait été.

It is the language of St. Catherine of Siena — and the language, when she remembers to speak it, of Sœur Jeanne des Anges in her Autobiography.

Even when he is making passes at Elmire, Tartufe employs the phraseology of the devout. “De vos regards divins l’ineffable douceur” — applied to God or to Christ, the words are to be found in the writings of every Christian mystic. “C’en est fait,” cries the indignant Orgon, when at last he discovers the truth,

C’en est fait, je renonce à tous les gens de bien;

J’en aurai désormais une horreur effroyable,

Et m’en vais devenir pour eux pire qu’un diable.

His more sensible brother has to give him a little lecture on semantics. Because some gens de bien are not what they seem to be, it does not follow that all are villains or comedians. Every case must be considered on its own merits.

In the course of the seventeenth century several eminent directors of souls — Cardinal Bona was one of them, the Jesuit, Father Guilloré was another — published exhaustive treatises on the problems of distinguishing false spirituality from the genuine article, mere words from living substance, fraud and phantasy from “extraordinary graces.” Subjected to tests of the kind proposed by these writers, it seems most improbable that Sœur Jeanne would for long have succeeded in “getting away with it.” Unhappily, her directors were only too uncritically anxious to give her the benefit of every doubt. Sane or hysterical, but in either condition the consummate actress, Sœur Jeanne had the misfortune to be taken seriously on every occasion except, as we shall see, the one when she was doing her best to tell the plain unvarnished truth.

If her directors took her seriously, it was either because they had their own, not too creditable reasons for believing in her extraordinary graces, or else because they were committed by temperament and Weltanschauung to this kind of illusion. How seriously, we may now ask, did she take herself? How seriously was she taken by her fellow nuns? We can only guess at the answers to these questions.

There must be times when, however word-perfect in their impressive roles, the comedians of the spiritual life become uneasily conscious that something is not quite right, that perhaps, after all, God is not mocked and that even human beings may not (appalling thought!) be quite so dumb as one might be led to suppose.

This last truth seems to have dawned upon Sœur Jeanne at a fairly early stage in her long-drawn impersonation of St. Teresa. “God,” she writes, “very often permitted that things should happen to me at the hands of creatures, which gave me much pain.” Through the obscuring veils of this odd jargon we divine the ironic shrug with which Sister X received some specially eloquent discourse on the Spiritual Marriage, the hard-boiled comment made by Sister Y on Jeanne’s new trick, in church, of rolling up her eyes and pressing her hands, like some saint in a baroque picture, over a bosom wildly palpitating with extraordinary graces. We all imagine ourselves to be simultaneously clear-sighted and impenetrable; but, except when blinded by some infatuation, other people can see through us just as easily as we can see through them. The discovery of this fact is apt to be exceedingly disconcerting.

Fortunately for Sœur Jeanne — or perhaps very unfortunately — the first Prioress of the Loudun house was less perspicacious than those other creatures, whose ironic skepticism had given her so much pain. Deeply impressed by her young pupil’s holy conversation and exemplary behavior, the good mother had felt no hesitation in recommending Jeanne’s appointment as Prioress. And now the appointment had been made, and here she was — only twenty-five and the head of a house, the queen of a tiny empire, whose seventeen subjects were bound by Holy Obedience to take her orders and listen to her advice.

Now that victory had been won, now that the fruits of a long and arduous campaign were securely in her grasp, Sœur Jeanne felt that she was entitled to a holiday. She went on with her mystical reading, she continued, on occasion, to talk very learnedly about Christian perfection; but in the intervals she permitted herself — indeed, as Superior, she actually commanded herself — to take it easy. In the parlor, where she was now free to spend as much time as she liked,

the new Prioress indulged in interminable conversations with her friends and acquaintances of the uncloistered world. Years later she piously expressed the wish that she might be permitted to set forth “all the faults I committed and caused to be committed in the course of conversations which were not strictly necessary; for then it would be seen how dangerous it is to expose young nuns with such facility at the grilles of their convent parlors, even though their talk may seem to be wholly spiritual.” Yes, even the most spiritual discourses, as the Prioress knew only too well, had a curious way of winding up as something very different. One started out with a series of edifying remarks about the devotion to St. Joseph, about meditation and the precise moment when it might be allowed to give place to the prayer of simple regard, about holy indifference and the practice of the presence of God — one started with these things and then, before one knew where one was or how precisely one had got there, one was discussing, yet again, the exploits of the fascinating and abominable M. Grandier.

“That shameless creature in the Rue du Lion d’Or. . . . That young hussy who was M. Hervé’s housekeeper before he got married. . . . That cobbler’s daughter who was now in the service of Her Majesty, the Queen Mother, and who kept him posted about all that went on at court. . . . And his penitents. . . . One shudders to think. . . . Yes, in the sacristy, Reverend Mother, in the sacristy — not fifteen paces from the Blessed Sacrament. . . . And that poor little Trincant, seduced, you might say, under her father’s nose, in his own library. And now it was *Mlle.* de Brou. Yes, that prude, that precisian. So much attached to virginity that she would never marry. So devout that, when her mother died, she talked of turning Carmelite. Instead of which. . . .”

Instead of which. . . . In her own case, the Prioress reflected, there had been no “instead.” A novice at nineteen, a nun when she was barely of age. And yet, after the death of her sisters and her two brothers, her parents had begged her to come home and get married and give them grandchildren. Why had she refused? Why, though she hated this dismal life between four walls, had she persisted in

taking the final vows? Was it for the love of God, or out of dislike for her mother? Was it to spite M. de Coze or to please Jesus?

She thought with envy of Madeleine de Brou. No choleric father, no prying mother; plenty of money; and her own mistress, free to do as she pleased. And now she had Grandier.

Envy modulated into hatred and contempt.

This hypocrite, with her pale face like the face of a virgin martyr in a picture book! This soft-spoken dissembler, with her beads and her long prayers and her pocket edition of the Bishop of Geneva in red morocco! And all the time, under those black weeds, behind those downcast eyes, what a burning, what lechery! No better than that slut in the Rue du Lion d'Or, no better than the cobbler's daughter, or the little Trincant. And these at least had the excuse of being young or widowed; which was more than could be said for that old maid of thirty-five, with a figure like a Maypole and no looks at all. Whereas she, the Prioress, was still in her twenties, and Sister Claire de Sazilly used to say that her face under its coif was like an angel's, peeping through a cloud. And what eyes! Everybody had always admired her eyes — even her mother, even her detestable old aunt, the Abbess. If only she could get him as far as the parlor! Then she would look at him through the grille — look at him fixedly, searchingly, with eyes that should reveal her soul in all its nakedness. Yes, in all its nakedness; for the grille was not the adjunct of modesty; it was in lieu of modesty. Restraint had been taken out of the mind and embodied in an iron lattice. Behind bars one could be shameless.

But, alas, the opportunity for shamelessness never presented itself. The parson had no reasons, either professional or personal, for visiting the convent. He was not the nuns' director, he had no relatives among their pupils. His lawsuits and his parochial duties left him no leisure for mindless chatter, or talk about perfection, and his mistresses left him no appetite for new and hazardous "embarkations." Month succeeded month, year followed year, and the Prioress had still found no occasion for the deployment of those irresistible eyes of hers; so far as she was concerned, Grandier remained merely a name — but a name of

power, a name that conjured up unavowable phantasies, spirits familiar and unclean, a demon of curiosity, an incubus of concupiscence.

A bad reputation is the mental equivalent of the purely physiological appeals issued by animals during their mating seasons — cries, odors and even, in the case of certain moths, infrared radiation. In a woman, a name for promiscuity constitutes a standing invitation to every male within gossip range. And how fascinating, even to the most respectable ladies, is the professional seducer, the hardened breaker of hearts! In the imagination of his female parishioners Grandier's amorous exploits took on heroic proportions. He became a mythical figure, part Jupiter, part Satyr — bestially lustful and yet, or therefore, divinely attractive. At the time of his trial, a married lady, belonging to one of Loudun's most honorable families, testified that, after administering communion, the parson had looked at her fixedly, whereupon she "was seized with a violent love for him, which began with a little thrill in all her members." Another met him in the street and was incontinently overcome by "an extraordinary passion." A third merely looked at him as he was entering a church and felt "exceedingly great emotions, together with impulses such that she would very much have liked to sleep with him there and then." All these ladies were notoriously virtuous and of unblemished reputation. Each of them, moreover, had a home with a man in it and a growing family. The poor Prioress had nothing to do, no husband, no children and no vocation. What wonder if she too fell in love with the delicious monster! "La mère prieure en fut tellement troublée, qu'elle ne parlait plus que de Grandier, qu'elle disait estre l'objet de touttes ses affections." That double t in touttes seems to raise all to a higher power, so that Grandier becomes the object of affections beyond the limit of experience, affections which it was impossible for anyone to feel — and yet she felt them in all their monstrous and perverse enormity. The thought of the parson haunted her continuously. Her meditations, which should have been a practice of the presence of God, were a practice, instead, of the presence of Urbain Grandier, or rather of the obscenely fascinating image which had crystallized, in her fancy, around his name. Hers was the unobjective and therefore limitless and insane desire of the moth for the

star, of the schoolgirl for the crooner, of the bored and frustrated housewife for Rudolph Valentino. On such merely carnal sins as gluttony and lust, the body imposes, by its very nature and constitution, certain limits. But however weak the flesh, the spirit is always indefinitely willing. To sins of the will and the imagination kind nature sets no limits. Avarice and the lust for power are as nearly infinite as anything in this sublunary world can be. And so is the thing which D. H. Lawrence called "sex in the head." As heroic passion, it is one of the last infirmities of noble mind. As imagined sensuality, it is one of the first infirmities of the insane mind. And in either case (being free of the body and the limitations imposed by fatigue, by boredom, by the essential irrelevance of material happenings to our ideas and fancies), it partakes of the infinite. Behind her bars the Prioress found herself the victim of an insatiable monster, her own imagination. In her own person she combined the trembling and lacerated quarry with an infernal analogue of the Hound of Heaven. As might have been expected, her health broke down and by 1629 Sœur Jeanne was suffering from a psychosomatic "derangement of the stomach which," according to Dr. Rogier and the surgeon Mannoury, "rendered her so weak that it was with difficulty that she could walk."

All this time, let us remember, the Ursulines' pensionnat was purveying reading and writing, the catechism and deportment, to a growing enrollment of young girls. How, one wonders, did the pupils react to the ministrations of a headmistress in the clutch of a sexual obsession, of teachers already infected by the hysteria of their principal? To this question the documents provide, unfortunately, no answer. All we know is that it was not until a later stage of the proceedings that indignant parents began to remove their children from the good sisters' care. For the present, it would seem, the mental atmosphere of the convent was not so manifestly abnormal as to arouse alarm. Then, early in the fifth year of the Prioress's reign, there occurred a series of events which, though unimportant in themselves, were destined to have enormous consequences.

The first of these events was the death of the Ursulines' director, Canon Moussaut. A most worthy priest, the Canon had conscientiously done his best for

the new community, but his best, since he was on the brink of second childhood, had not been very good. He understood nothing of his penitents; and his penitents, on their side, paid no attention to anything he said.

At the news of Moussaut's death, the Prioress tried her hardest to look sad; but inwardly she was filled with an effervescent elation. At last, at last!

As soon as the old gentleman was safely buried, she dispatched a letter to Grandier. It began with a paragraph about the irreparable loss sustained by the community, went on to stress her own and her sisters' need for spiritual guidance by some director no less wise and holy than the dear defunct, and ended with an invitation to Grandier to step into the Canon's shoes. Except for the spelling, which had always been Sœur Jeanne's weakest point, the letter was altogether admirable. Reading through the fair copy, the Prioress could not see how he could possibly resist an appeal at once so heartfelt, so pious, so delicately flattering.

But Grandier's answer, when it came, was a polite refusal. Not only did he feel himself unworthy of so high an honor; he was also much too busy with his duties as a parish priest.

From the pinnacle of joy, the Prioress tumbled headlong into a disappointment in which grief was mingled with hurt pride, and out of which there grew, as she ruminated the bitter cud of her defeat, a cold persistent rage, a steady malignancy of hatred.

To implement this loathing was by no means easy; for the parson inhabited a world into which it was impossible for a cloistered nun to penetrate. She could not go to him; and he would not go to her. Their nearest approach to a personal contact came when Madeleine de Brou called at the convent to visit her niece, who was one of the boarders. Entering the parlor, Madeleine found the Prioress confronting her on the other side of the grille. She uttered a polite greeting and was answered by a torrent of abuse that became more shrilly violent with every passing moment. "Whore, strumpet, debaucher of priests, committer of the ultimate sacrilege!" Through the bars the Prioress spat at her rival. Madeleine turned and fled.

The last hope of a personal, face-to-face vengeance was now gone. But one thing, at least, Sœur Jeanne could still do: she could associate herself and the whole community under her charge with Grandier's avowed enemies. Without delay she sent for the man who, of all the local clerics, had the most cogent reasons for detesting him. Ill-favored, congenitally lame, devoid of talent no less than of charm, Canon Mignon had always envied the parson's good looks, quick wit and easy successes. To this general and, so to say, antecedent antipathy had been added, over the years, a number of more specific grounds for dislike — Grandier's sarcasms, the seduction of Mignon's cousin, Philippe Trincant, and, more recently, a quarrel over a piece of property disputed between the collegial church of *Ste*. Croix and the parish of St. Pierre. Acting against the advice of his fellow canons, Mignon had taken the case to court and, as they had all prophesied, lost it. He was still smarting under this humiliation, when the Prioress summoned him to the convent parlor, and, after talking at large about the spiritual life and in particular of the parson's scandalous behavior, invited him to become the nuns' confessor. The offer was immediately accepted. A new ally had joined the forces leagued against Grandier. Precisely how that ally was to be made use of, Mignon did not yet know. But, like a good general, he was prepared to seize every opportunity that might present itself.

In the Prioress's mind, meanwhile, the new hatred for Grandier had not abolished, had not even mitigated, the old obsessive desires. The imagined hero of her waking or nocturnal dreams remained the same; but now he was no longer the Prince Charming, for whom one left the casement open at night, but an importunate incubus, who delighted in inflicting upon his victim the outrage of an unwelcome but irrepressible pleasure. After Moussaut's death Sœur Jeanne dreamed on several occasions that the old man had come back from purgatory to implore his former penitents for the assistance of their prayers. But even as he plaintively spoke, everything changed and "it was no longer the person of her late confessor, but the face and semblance of Urbain Grandier who, altering his words and behavior at the same time as his figure, talked to her of amours, plied her with caresses no less insolent than unchaste, and pressed her to grant him

what was no longer hers to dispose of, that which, by her vows, she had consecrated to her divine Bridegroom.”

In the mornings the Prioress would recount these nocturnal adventures to her fellow nuns. The tales lost nothing in the telling and, within a very little while, two other young ladies — Sœur Claire de Sazilly (Cardinal Richelieu’s cousin) and another Claire, a lay sister, were also having visions of importunate clergymen and hearing a voice that whispered the most indelicate propositions in their ears.

The next, the determining event in the long series which led at last to the parson’s destruction, was a rather silly practical joke. Devised by a committee of the younger nuns and their older pupils, for the purpose of frightening the babies and the pious and simple-minded elders, the joke was a simple hallowe’en affair of pretended apparitions and poltergeists. The house, in which the nuns and their boarders were lodged, had a reputation, as we have already seen, for being haunted. Its occupants were therefore well prepared to be terrified when, shortly after the old Canon’s death, a white-sheeted figure was seen to glide about the dormitories. After the first visitation, all doors were carefully bolted; but the phantoms either made their way along the leads and entered through the windows, or else were admitted by their fifth column within the rooms. Clothes were plucked off the beds, faces were touched by icy fingers. Overhead, in the attics, there was a groaning and a rattling of chains. The children screamed; the Reverend Mothers crossed themselves and appealed to St. Joseph. In vain. After a few quiet nights the ghosts would be back again. The school and convent were in a panic.

Seated at his listening post in the confessional, Canon Mignon knew about everything — about the incubi in the cells, about the ghosts in the dormitories, about the practical jokers in the attics. He knew about everything — and suddenly a light dawned and the finger of Providence was manifest. All things, he now perceived, were working together for good. He would work with them. To this end, he reprimanded the jokers, but ordered them to say nothing about their pranks. He instilled a new terror into the victims of those pranks by telling

them that the things they had taken for ghosts were more probably devils. And he confirmed the Mother Superior and her fellow visionaries in their hallucinations by assuring them that their nightly visitants were real and manifestly satanic. After which he repaired, with four or five of the parson's most influential enemies, to M. Trincant's country house at Puydardane, a league from town. There, before the assembled council of war, he gave an account of what was happening in the convent and showed how the situation might be exploited to Grandier's disadvantage. The matter was discussed and a plan of campaign, complete with secret weapons, psychological warfare and a supernatural intelligence service, was drawn up. The conspirators parted in the highest of spirits. This time, they all felt, they had him — on toast.

Mignon's next step was to call on the Carmelites. What he needed was a good exorcist. Could the Reverend Fathers provide one? Enthusiastically the Prior gave him, not one, but three — Fathers Eusèbe de Saint-Michel, Pierre-Thomas de Saint-Charles and Antonin de la Charité. With Mignon, they set to work at once and were so successful in their operations that, within a few days, all except two or three of the oldest nuns were having nightly visits from the parson.

After a time rumors began to leak out of the haunted nunnery, and in a little while it was a matter of common knowledge that the good sisters were all possessed by devils, and that the devils laid the blame for everything on the sprightly M. Grandier. The Protestants, as can be imagined, were delighted. That a popish priest had conspired with Satan to debauch an entire convent of Ursulines was almost enough to console them for the fall of La Rochelle.

As for the parson himself, he merely shrugged his shoulders. After all, he had never so much as set eyes on the Prioress and her frantic sisters. What these demented women said about him was merely the product of their malady — melancholy adust combined with a touch of furor uterinus. Debarred from men, the poor things must needs imagine an incubus. When these remarks were reported to Canon Mignon he only smiled and remarked that he laughs best who laughs last.

Meanwhile the labor of exorcising all these demoniacs was so great that, after some months of heroic wrestling with the demons, the Canon had to call for reinforcements. The first to be summoned was Pierre Rangier, the Curé of Veniers, a man who owed his very considerable influence in the diocese and his universal unpopularity to the fact that he had made himself the Bishop's spy and secret agent. With Rangier participating in the exorcisms, the Canon could feel confident that there would be no skepticism in high places. The possession would be official and orthodox.

To Rangier's was soon added the collaboration of another priest of a very different stamp. M. Barré, Curé of Saint-Jacques in the neighboring town of Chinon, was one of those negative Christians, to whom the Devil is incomparably more real and more interesting than God. He saw the print of cloven hoofs in everything; he recognized Satan's work in all the odd, all the disastrous, all the too pleasurable events of human life. Enjoying nothing so much as a good tussle with Belial or Beelzebub, he was forever fabricating and exorcising demoniacs. Thanks to his efforts, Chinon was full of raving girls, bewitched cows, husbands unable, because of some sorcerer's malignant spells, to perform their conjugal duties. In his parish nobody could complain that life was uninteresting; what with the Curé and the Devil, there was never a dull moment.

Mignon's invitation was accepted with alacrity, and a few days later Barré arrived from Chinon at the head of a procession formed by a large body of his more fanatical parishioners. To his great disgust he found that, up to this time, the exorcisms had been conducted behind closed doors. To hide one's light under a bushel — what an idea! Why not give the public a chance to be edified? The doors of the Ursulines' chapel were thrown open; the mob poured in. At his third attempt, Barré succeeded in sending the Mother Superior into convulsions. "Bereaved of sense and reason," Sœur Jeanne rolled on the floor. The spectators were delighted, especially when she showed her legs. Finally, after many "violences, vexations, howlings and grindings of teeth, two of which at the back of the mouth were broken," the Devil obeyed the order to leave his victim in

peace. The Prioress lay exhausted; M. Barré wiped the sweat from his forehead. And now it was the turn of Canon Mignon and Sœur Claire de Sazilly, of Father Eusebius and the lay sister, of M. Rangier and Sister Gabrielle of the Incarnation. The performance ended only with the ending of the day. The spectators trooped out into the autumnal twilight. It was universally agreed that, not since the coming of those traveling acrobats, with the two dwarfs and the performing bears, had poor old Loudun been treated to such a good show as this. And all free of charge — for of course you didn't have to put anything in the bag, when it was passed round, and if you did give something, a farthing would make as good a jingle as a sixpence.

Two days later, on October 8th, 1632, Barré won his first major victory, by routing Asmodeus, one of the seven devils who had taken up residence in the body of the Prioress. Speaking through the lips of the demoniac, Asmodeus revealed that he was entrenched in the lower belly. For more than two hours Barré wrestled with him. Again and again the sonorous Latin phrases rumbled forth. "Exorciso te, immundissime spiritus, omnis incursio adversarii, omne phantasma, omnis legio, in nomine Domini nostri Jesus Christi; eradicare et effugare ab hoc plasmate Dei." And then there would be a sprinkling of holy water, a laying on of hands, a laying on of the stole, of the breviary, of relics. "Adjuro te, serpens antique, per Judicem vivorum et mortuorum, per factorem tuum, per factorem mundi, per eum qui habet potestatem mittendi te in gehennam, ut ab hoc famulo Dei, qui ad sinum Ecclesiae recurrit, cum metu et exercitu furoris tui festinus discedas." But instead of departing, Asmodeus merely laughed and uttered a few playful blasphemies. Another man would have admitted defeat. Not so M. Barré. He ordered the Prioress to be carried to her cell and sent in haste for the apothecary. M. Adam came, bringing with him the classical emblem of his profession, the huge brass syringe of Molièresque farce and seventeenth-century medical reality. A quart of holy water was ready for him. The syringe was filled, and M. Adam approached the bed on which the Mother Superior was lying. Perceiving that his last hour was at hand, Asmodeus threw a fit. In vain. The Prioress's limbs were pinioned, strong hands held down

the writhing body and, with the skill born of long practice, M. Adam administered the miraculous enema. Two minutes later, Asmodeus had taken his departure.

In the autobiography which she wrote some years later, Sœur Jeanne assures us that during the first months of her possession, her mind was so confused that she could remember nothing of what had happened to her. The statement may be true — or it may not. There are many things which we would like to forget, which we do our best to suppress, but which in fact we go on remembering only too vividly. M. Adam's syringe, for example. . . .

From insulated selfhood there are many ways of escape into a larval condition of subhumanity. This state partakes of the Nothingness, which is the theme of so many of Mallarmé's poems.

Mais ta chevelure est une rivière tiède,

Où noyer sans remords l'âme qui nous obsède,

Et trouver le Néant que tu ne connais pas.

But for many persons, absolute Nothingness is not enough. What they want is a Nothing with negative qualities, a Nonentity that stinks and is hideous.

Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse juive,

Comme au long d'un cadavre un cadavre étendu. . . .

This also is an experience of Nothingness — but with a vengeance. And it is precisely in Nothingness-with-a-vengeance that certain minds discover what is, for them, the most satisfying kind of experienced otherness. In Jeanne des Anges, the longing for self-transcendence was powerful in proportion to the intensity of her native egotism and the frustrating circumstances of her environment. In later years she was to pretend to try, and even actually to try without pretense, to achieve an upward self-transcendence into the life of the spirit. But at this stage in her career the only avenue of escape that presented itself was a descent into sexuality. She had begun by deliberately indulging in the imagination of an intimacy with her beau ténébreux, the unknown but titillatingly notorious M. Grandier. But in time deliberate and occasional indulgence turned into irresistible addiction. Habit converted her sexual

phantasies into an imperious necessity. The beau ténébreux took on an autonomous existence that was altogether independent of her will. Instead of being the mistress of her imagination, she was now its slave. Slavery is humiliating; and yet the consciousness of being no longer in control of one's own thoughts and actions is a form, inferior no doubt, but effective, of that self-transcendence to which all human beings aspire. Sœur Jeanne had tried to free herself from her servitude to the erotic images she had conjured up; but the only freedom she could achieve was freedom to be the self she abhorred. There was nothing for it but to slide down again into the dungeon of her addiction.

And now, after months of this inward struggle, she was in the hands of the egregious M. Barré. The phantasy of a downward self-transcendence had been transformed into the brute fact of his actually treating her as something less than human — as some queer kind of animal, to be exhibited to the rabble like a performing ape, as a less than personal creature fit only to be bawled at, manipulated, sent by reiterated suggestion into fits and finally subjected, against what remained of her will and in spite of the remnants of her modesty, to the outrage of a forcible colonic irrigation. Barré had treated her to an experience that was the equivalent, more or less, of a rape in a public lavatory.

The person who was once Sœur Jeanne des Anges, Prioress of the Ursulines of Loudun, had been annihilated — annihilated, not in the Mallarméan fashion, but in the Baudelairean, with a vengeance. Parodying the Pauline phrase, she could say of herself, "I live, yet not I, but dirt, but humiliation, but mere physiology liveth in me." During the exorcisms she was no longer a subject; she was only an object with intense sensations. It was horrible, but it was also wonderful — an outrage but at the same time a revelation and, in the literal sense of the word, an ecstasy, a standing outside of the odious and all too familiar self.

At this period, it should be noted, Sœur Jeanne had no intimate sense of being a demoniac. Mignon and Barré told her that she was infested by devils and in the ravings induced by their exorcisms she herself would say as much. But she had, as yet, no feeling of being possessed by the seven demons (six after the

departure of Asmodeus) who were supposed to be encamped in her tiny body. Here is her own analysis of the situation.

"I did not then believe that one could be possessed without having given consent to, or made a pact with, the devil; in which I was mistaken, for the most innocent and even the most holy can be possessed. I myself was not of the number of the innocent; for thousands upon thousands of times I had given myself over to the devil by committing sin and making continual resistance to grace. . . . The demons insinuated themselves into my mind and inclinations, in such sort that, through the evil dispositions they found in me, they made of me one and the same substance with themselves. . . . Ordinarily the demons acted in conformity with the feelings I had in my soul; this they did so subtly that I myself did not believe that I had any demons within me. I felt insulted when people showed that they suspected me of being possessed, and if anyone talked to me of my possession by the demons, I felt a violent emotion of anger and could not control the expression of my resentment." This means that the person who could not help dreaming of M. Grandier, the person whom M. Barré was treating as a kind of laboratory animal, was not conscious, outside the exorcisms and during waking hours, of being in any way abnormal. The ecstasies of humiliation and of hallucinatory sensuality were being inflicted upon a mind that still felt itself to be that of an average sensual woman who had had the bad luck to land in a convent, when she ought to have married and reared a family.

Of the state of mind of M. Barré and the other exorcists we know nothing at firsthand. They left no autobiographies and wrote no letters. Until Father Surin made his entry upon the scene, some two years later, the history of the men involved in this prolonged psychological orgy is completely lacking in personal touches. Fortunately for us, Surin was an introvert with an urge to self-revelation, a born "sharer" whose passion for confession amply made up for the reticences of his colleagues. Writing of these early years spent at Loudun and, later, at Bordeaux, Surin complains of being subjected to almost continual temptations of the flesh. Given the circumstances of an exorcist's life in a convent of demoniac nuns, the fact is hardly surprising. At the center of a troop

of hysterical women, all in a state of chronic sexual excitement, he was the chartered Male, imperious and tyrannical. The abjection in which his charges were so ecstatically wallowing served only to emphasize the triumphant masculinity of the exorcist's role. Their passivity heightened his sense of being the master. In the midst of uncontrollable frenzies, he was lucid and strong; in the midst of so much animality he was the only human being; in the midst of demons, he was the representative of God. And as the representative of God, he was privileged to do what he liked with these creatures of a lower order — to make them perform tricks, to send them into convulsions, to manhandle them as though they were recalcitrant sows or heifers, to prescribe the enema or the whip. In their more lucid moments the demoniacs would confide to their masters — with what an obscene delight in thus trampling underfoot the conventions which had been an essential part of their personality! — the most unavowable facts about their physiological condition, the most lurid phantasies dredged up from the oozy depths of the subconscious. The kind of relation that could exist between exorcists and supposedly demoniac nuns is well illustrated by the following extract from a contemporary account of the possession of the Ursulines of Auxonne, which began in 1658 and continued until 1661. "The nuns declare, and so do the priests, that by means of exorcism, they (the priests) relieved them of hernias, qu'ils leur ont fait rentrer des boyaux qui leur sortaient de la matrice, that they cured them in an instant of the lacerations of the womb caused by the sorcerers, that they caused the expulsion des bastons couverts de prépuces de sorciers qui leur avoient esté mis dans la matrice, des bouts de chandelles, des bastons couverts de langes et d'aultres instruments d'infamie, comme des boyaux et aultres choses desquelles les magiciens et les sorciers s'étaient servis pour faire sur elles des actions impures. They also declare that the priests cured them of colics, stomach aches and headaches, that they cured hardenings of the breast by confession; that they checked hemorrhages by exorcism, and, by means of holy water taken through the mouth, that they put an end to bloatings of the belly caused by copulation with demons and sorcerers.

“Three of the nuns announce, without beating about the bush, that they have undergone copulation with demons and been deflowered. Five others declare that they have suffered, at the hands of sorcerers, magicians and demons, actions which modesty forbids them to mention, but which in fact are none other than those described by the first three. The said exorcists bear witness to the truth of all the above statements.” (See Barbe Buvée et la pretendue possession des Ursulines d’Auxonne, by Dr. Samuel Garnier, Paris, 1895, p-15.)

What a cozy squalor, what surgical intimacies! The dirt is moral as well as material; the physiological miseries are matched by the spiritual and the intellectual. And over everything, like a richly smelly fog, hangs an oppressive sexuality, thick enough to be cut with a knife and ubiquitous, inescapable. The physicians who, at the order of the Parlement of Burgundy, visited the nuns, found no evidence of possession, but many indications that all or most of them were suffering from a malady to which our fathers gave the name of furor uterinus. The symptoms of this disease were “heat accompanied by an inextinguishable appetite for venery” and an inability, on the part of the younger sisters, to “think or talk about anything but sex.”

Such was the atmosphere in a convent of demoniac nuns, and such the persons with whom, in an intimacy that was a compound of the intimacies existing between gynecologist and patient, trainer and animal, adored psychiatrist and loquacious neurotic, the officiating priest passed many hours of every day and night. For the exorcists of Auxonne the temptations were too powerful and there is good reason to believe that they took advantage of their situation to seduce the nuns committed to their charge. No such accusation was brought against the priests and monks who worked on Sœur Jeanne and the other hysterics of Loudun. There was, as Surin bore witness, a constant temptation; but it was resisted. The long-drawn debauch took place in the imagination and was never physical.

The expulsion of Asmodeus was so notable a victory and the nuns were by this time so well trained to act their demoniac parts that Mignon and the other enemies of Grandier now felt themselves strong enough to take official action.

Accordingly, on the eleventh of October, Pierre Rangier, the parson of Veniers, was sent to the office of the city's Chief Magistrate, M. de Cerisay. He gave an account of what had happened and invited the Bailli and his Lieutenant, Louis Chauvet, to come and see for themselves. The invitation was accepted and that same afternoon the two magistrates, with their clerk, called at the convent, were received by Barré and Canon Mignon and taken up "to a high-ceilinged room furnished with seven small beds, one of which was occupied by the lay sister and another by the Mother Superior. The latter was surrounded by several Carmelites, by some nuns of the convent, by Mathurin Rousseau, priest and Canon of Sainte-Croix and by the surgeon, Mannoury." At the sight of the Bailli and his Lieutenant, the Prioress (in the words of the minutes drawn up by the Magistrate's clerk) "began to make very violent movements, with certain noises like the grunts of a small pig, then buried herself under the bedclothes, ground her teeth and made various other contortions such as might be made by a person out of her wits. At her right was a Carmelite and on her left hand the said Mignon, who stuck two fingers, namely the thumb and the forefinger, in the said Mother Superior's mouth and performed exorcisms and conjurations in our presence."

In the course of these exorcisms and conjurations it transpired that Sœur Jeanne had been possessed through the material agency of two diabolic "pacts" — one consisting of three hawthorn prickles, the other of a bunch of roses which she had found on the stairs and stuck in her belt, "whereupon she was attacked by a great trembling in her right arm and was seized by love for Grandier all the time of her orisons, being unable to keep her mind on anything except the representation of Grandier's person which had been inwardly impressed upon her."

Asked in Latin, "Who sent these flowers?" the Prioress, "after having delayed and hesitated, answered as though under constraint, Urbanus. Thereupon the said Mignon said, Dic qualitatem. She said, Sacerdos. He said, Cujus ecclesiae? and the said nun replied, Santi Petri, which last words she pronounced rather badly."

When the exorcism was over, Mignon took the Bailli aside and, in the presence of Canon Rousseau and M. Chauvet, remarked that the present case seemed to bear a striking resemblance to that of Louis Gauffridi, the Provençal priest who, twenty years earlier, had been burned alive for bewitching and debauching certain Ursulines of Marseilles.

With the mention of Gauffridi, the cat was out of the bag. The strategy of the new campaign against the parson stood clearly revealed. He was to be accused of sorcery and magic, brought to trial and, if acquitted, ruined in reputation, if condemned, sent to the stake.

CHAPTER FIVE

AND SO GRANDIER was accused of sorcery and the Ursulines were possessed by devils. We read these statements and smile; but before the smile can expand into a grin or explode in a guffaw, let us try to discover what precisely was the meaning attached to these words during the first half of the seventeenth century. And since, at this period, sorcery was everywhere a crime, let us begin with the legal aspects of the problem.

Sir Edward Coke, the greatest English lawyer of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean age, defined a witch as "a person who hath conference with the Devil, to consult with him or to do some act." Under the Statute of 1563 witchcraft was punished by death only when it could be proved that the witch had made an attempt on someone's life. But in the first year of James's reign this statute was replaced by a new and harsher law. After 1603 the capital offense was no longer murder by supernatural means, but the simple fact of being proved a witch. The act performed by the accused might be harmless, as in the case of divination, or even beneficent, as in the case of healing by means of spells and charms. If there were proof that it had been performed through "conference with the Devil," or by the intrinsically diabolical methods of magic, the act was criminal and the performer of it was to be condemned to death.

This was an English and a Protestant ruling; but it was fully in accord with Canon Law and Catholic practice. Kramer and Sprenger, the learned Dominican authors of the Malleus Maleficarum (for almost two centuries the textbook and vade mecum of all witch-hunters, Lutheran and Calvinist no less than Catholic) cite many authorities to prove that the proper penalty for witchcraft, fortune-telling, the practice of any kind of magic art, is death. "For witchcraft is high treason against God's majesty. And so they (the accused) are to be put to the torture to make them confess. Any person, whatever his rank or position, upon

such an accusation may be put to the torture. And he who is found guilty, even if he confess his crime, let him be racked, let him suffer all other tortures prescribed by law in order that he may be punished in proportion to his offence."

Behind these laws stood an immemorial tradition of demonic intervention in human affairs and, more specifically, the revealed truths that the devil is the Prince of this World and the sworn enemy of God and God's children. Sometimes the devil works on his own account; sometimes he does his mischiefs through the instrumentality of human beings. "And if it be asked whether the Devil is more apt to injure men and creatures by himself than through a witch, it can be said that there is no comparison between the two cases. For he is infinitely more apt to do harm through the agency of witches. First, because he thus gives greater offence to God by usurping to himself a creature dedicated to Him. Secondly, because, when God is the more offended, He allows him the more power of injuring men. And thirdly, for his own gain, which he places in the perdition of souls."

In medieval and early modern Christendom the situation of sorcerers and their clients was almost precisely analogous to that of Jews under Hitler, capitalists under Stalin, Communists and fellow travelers in the United States. They were regarded as the agents of a Foreign Power, unpatriotic at the best and, at the worst, traitors, heretics, enemies of the people. Death was the penalty meted out to these metaphysical Quislings of the past and, in most parts of the contemporary world, death is the penalty which awaits the political and secular devil-worshipers known here as Reds, there as Reactionaries. In the briefly liberal nineteenth century men like Michelet found it difficult not merely to forgive, but even to understand the savagery with which sorcerers had once been treated. Too hard on the past, they were at the same time too complacent about their present and far too optimistic in regard to the future — to us! They were rationalists who fondly imagined that the decay of traditional religion would put an end to such deviltries as the persecution of heretics, the torture and burning of witches. Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum. But looking back and up, from our vantage point on the descending road of modern history, we now see that all

the evils of religion can flourish without any belief in the supernatural, that convinced materialists are ready to worship their own jerry-built creations as though they were the Absolute, and that self-styled humanists will persecute their adversaries with all the zeal of Inquisitors exterminating the devotees of a personal and transcendent Satan. Such behavior-patterns antedate and outlive the beliefs which, at any given moment, seem to motivate them. Few people now believe in the Devil; but very many enjoy behaving as their ancestors behaved when the Fiend was a reality as unquestionable as his Opposite Number. In order to justify their behavior, they turn their theories into dogmas, their bylaws into First Principles, their political bosses into Gods and all those who disagree with them into incarnate devils. This idolatrous transformation of the relative into the Absolute and the all too human into the Divine, makes it possible for them to indulge their ugliest passions with a clear conscience and in the certainty that they are working for the Highest Good. And when the current beliefs come, in their turn, to look silly, a new set will be invented, so that the immemorial madness may continue to wear its customary mask of legality, idealism and true religion.

In principle, as we have seen, the law relating to witchcraft was exceedingly simple. Anyone who deliberately had dealings with the devil was guilty of a capital crime. To describe how this law was administered in practice would require much more space than can here be given. Suffice it to say that, while some judges were manifestly prejudiced, many did their best to give the accused a fair trial. But even a fair trial was, by our present Western standards, a monstrous caricature of justice. “The laws,” we read in Malleus Maleficarum, “allow that any witness whatever is to be admitted in evidence against them.” And not only were all and sundry, including children, and the mortal enemies of the accused, admitted as witnesses; all kinds of evidence were also admitted — gossip, hearsay, inferences, remembered dreams, statements made by demoniacs. Always in order, torture was frequently (though by no means invariably) employed to extort confessions. And along with torture went false promises in regard to the final sentence. In the Malleus this matter of false

promises is discussed with all the authors' customary acumen and thoroughness. There are three possible alternatives. If he chooses the first, the judge may promise the witch her life (on condition, of course, that she reveal the names of other witches) and may intend to keep the promise. The only deception he practices is to let it be understood by the accused that the death penalty is to be commuted to some mild punishment, such as exile, whereas in petto he has decided to condemn her to perpetual solitary confinement on bread and water.

A second alternative is preferred by those who think that, "after she has been consigned to prison in this way, the promise to spare her life should be kept for a time, but that after a certain period she should be burned."

"A third opinion is that the judge may safely promise the accused her life, but in such a way that he should afterward disclaim the duty of passing sentence upon her, deputing another judge in his place."

(How richly significant is that little word, "safely"! Systematic lying is something which puts the liar's soul into considerable jeopardy. Ergo, if you find it expedient to lie, be sure to make such mental reservations as will cause you to seem to yourself — if not to others, or to a God who is most certainly not mocked — a worthy candidate for paradise.)

To contemporary Western eyes, the most absurd, as well as the most iniquitous feature of a medieval or early-modern witch trial was the fact that almost any of the odd and untoward events of daily life might legitimately be treated as the effects of diabolic intervention brought about by the magic arts of a sorcerer. Here, for example, is a part of the evidence on which one of the two witches tried in 1664, at Bury St. Edmunds, before the future Lord Chief Justice, Sir Matthew Hale, was condemned to be hanged. In the course of a quarrel, the accused had cursed and threatened one of her neighbors. After this, the man testified, "so soon as his sows pigged, the pigs would leap and caper, and immediately fall down dead." Nor was this all. A little later he was "vexed with a number of lice of extraordinary bigness." Against such supernatural vermin, the current methods of disinfection were unavailing and the witness had no alternative but to consign two of his best suits to the flames. Sir Matthew Hale

was a just judge, a lover of moderation, a man of wide learning, scientific as well as literary and legal. That he should have taken this kind of evidence seriously seems now almost incredible. But the fact remains that he did take it seriously. The reason is to be sought, presumably, in the fact that, as well as all the rest, Hale was exceedingly pious. But in a fundamentalist age piety involved belief in a personal devil and the duty to extirpate the witches who were his servants. Moreover, granted the truth of everything contained in the Judeo-Christian tradition, there was an antecedent probability that, if preceded by an old woman's curse, the death of piglets and the multiplication of lice were supernatural events, due to the intervention of Satan on behalf of one of his votaries.

Into the Biblical lore of devils and witches had been incorporated a number of popular superstitions which came at last to be treated with the same veneration as was accorded to revealed truths of Scripture. For example, until late in the seventeenth century, all inquisitors and most civil magistrates accepted without question the validity of what may be called the physical tests of witchcraft. Did the body of the accused exhibit unusual marks? Could you find in it any spots insensitive to the prick of a needle? Were there, above all, any of those "little teats," or supernumerary nipples, at which some familiar — toad or cat — might suck and fatten? If so, your suspect was undoubtedly a witch; for tradition affirmed that these were the brands and seals with which the devil marked his own. (Since nine per cent of all males and a little under five per cent of all females are born with supernumerary nipples, there was never any shortage of predestined victims. Nature punctually did her part; the judges, with their unexamined postulates and first principles, did the rest.)

Of the other popular superstitions which had crystallized into axioms there are three which, because of the enormous miseries entailed by their general acceptance, deserve at least a brief mention. These are the beliefs that, by invoking the devil's aid, witches can cause tempests, diseases and sexual impotence. In the Malleus Kramer and Sprenger treat these notions as self-evident truths, established not merely by common sense but also by the authority

of the greatest Doctors. “St. Thomas, in his commentary on Job, says as follows: It must be confessed that, with God’s permission, the devils can disturb the air, raise up winds and make the fire fall from heaven. For, although in the matter of taking various shapes, corporeal nature is not at the command of any Angel, either good or bad, but only at that of God the Creator, yet, in the matter of local motion, corporeal nature has to obey the spiritual nature. . . . But winds and rain and other similar disturbances of the air can be caused by the mere movement of vapours released from the earth or the water; therefore the natural power of devils is sufficient to cause such things. So says St. Thomas.”

As for diseases, “there is no infirmity, not even leprosy or epilepsy, which cannot be caused by witches, with God’s permission. And this is proved by the fact that no sort of infirmity is excluded by the Doctors.”

The authority of the Doctors is confirmed by our authors’ personal observations. “For we have often found that certain people have been visited with epilepsy or the falling sickness by means of eggs which have been buried with dead bodies, especially the dead bodies of witches . . . particularly when these eggs have been given to a person either in food or drink.”

In regard to impotence, our authors draw a sharp distinction between the natural variety and the supernatural. Natural impotence is the incapacity to have sexual relations with any member of the opposite sex. Supernatural impotence, caused by magic spells and devils, is incapacity in relation to one person only (especially a wife or husband), potency being unimpaired in regard to all other members of the opposite sex. It should be noted, say the authors, that God permits more bewitchments to be performed in relation to the generative powers than in any other department of human life, the reason being that, since the Fall, there exists in everything that pertains to sex “a greater corruption than in the case of other human actions.”

Devastating storms are not uncommon, selective impotence affects most men at some time or another, and disease is never absent. In a world where law, theology and popular superstition were all agreed in holding witches responsible for these everyday occurrences, the occasions for spying and the opportunities

for delation and persecution were innumerable. At the height of the sixteenth-century witch hunts, social life in certain parts of Germany must have been very like social life under the Nazis, or in a country newly subjected to Communist domination.

Under torture, or moved by a sense of duty or some hysterical compulsion, a man would denounce his wife, a woman her best friends, a child its parents, a servant his master. And these were not the only evils to be met with in a devil-haunted society. On many individuals the incessant suggestions of bewitchment, the daily warnings against the devil had a disastrous effect. Some of the more timorous were driven out of their minds, some actually killed by the ever-present fear. On the ambitious and the resentful this harping on supernatural dangers had quite another effect. In order to win the prizes they so frantically coveted, men like Bothwell, women like *Mme.* de Montespan were ready to exploit the resources of black magic to their criminal limit. And if one felt oneself oppressed and frustrated, if one bore a grudge against society at large and one's neighbors in particular, what more natural than that one should appeal to those who, according to St. Thomas and the rest, were capable of doing such enormous mischiefs? By paying so much attention to the devil and by treating witchcraft as the most heinous of crimes, the theologians and the inquisitors actually spread the beliefs and fostered the practices which they were trying so hard to repress. By the beginning of the eighteenth century witchcraft had ceased to be a serious social problem. It died out, among other reasons, because almost nobody now bothered to repress it. For the less it was persecuted, the less it was propagandized. Attention had shifted from the supernatural to the natural. From about 1700 to the present day all persecutions in the West have been secular and, one might say, humanistic. For us, Radical Evil has ceased to be something metaphysical and has become political or economic. And that Radical Evil now incarnates itself, not in sorcerers and magicians (for we like to think of ourselves as positivists), but in the representatives of some hated class or nation. The springs of action and the rationalizations have undergone a certain change; but the hatreds motivated and the ferocities justified are all too familiar.

The Church, as we have seen, taught that witchcraft was a terrible and ubiquitous reality, and with appropriate ruthlessness the Law acted upon that teaching. To what extent was Public Opinion in accord with the official view of the matter? The sentiments of the unlettered and inarticulate majority can only be inferred from their recorded actions and from the comments of the educated.

In its chapter devoted to the bewitchment of animals, the Malleus throws a curious sidelight on that medieval village life, for which the sentimentalists, whose dislike of the present blinds them to the no less enormous horrors of the past, still nostalgically yearn. “There is not,” we read, “even the smallest farm where women do not injure each other’s cows by drying up their milk (through the use of spells), and very often killing them.” Four generations later we find, in the writings of two English divines, George Gifford and Samuel Harsnett, essentially similar accounts of rustic life in a devil-haunted society. “Some woman,” writes Gifford, “doth fall out bitterly with her neighbour; there followeth some great hurt. . . . There is a suspicion conceived. Within few years after she is in some jar with another. He is also plagued. This is noted of all. Great fame is spread of the matter. Mother W. is a witch. . . . Well, Mother W. doth begin to be very odious and terrible unto many, her neighbours dare say nothing but yet in their hearts they wish she were hanged. Shortly after another falls sick and doth pine. The neighbours come to visit him. ‘Well, neighbour,’ saith one, ‘do you not suspect some naughty dealing? Did you never anger Mother W.?’ ‘Truly, neighbour,’ saith he, ‘I have not liked the woman a long time. I cannot tell how I should displease her, except it were this other day, my wife prayed her, and so did I, that she would keep her hens out of my garden. . . . I think verily she hath bewitched me.’ Everybody saith now that Mother W. is a witch indeed. . . . It is out of all doubt, for there were which saw a weasel run from her houseward into his yard even a little before he fell sick. The sick man dieth and taketh it upon his death that he is bewitched. Then is Mother W. apprehended and sent to prison; she is arraigned and condemned and, being at the gallows, taketh it upon her death that she is not guilty.” And here is what Harsnett writes in his Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures. “Why then,

ho, beware, look about you, my neighbours! If any of you have a sheep sick of the giddies, or an hog of the mumps, or an horse of the staggers, or a knavish boy of the school, or an idle girl of the wheel, or a young drab of the sullens, and hath not fat enough for her porridge, nor her father and mother butter enough for their bread . . . and then withal old Mother Nobs hath called her by chance ‘idle young hussy,’ or bid the devil scratch her, then no doubt but Mother Nobs is the witch.” These pictures of rustic communities solidly based on superstition, fear and mutual malice are curiously depressing — all the more so because they are so modern, so topical and up-to-date. They remind us all too forcibly of certain pages in La Vingt-Cinquième Heure and 1984 — pages in which the Rumanian describes the nightmare events of the present and the immediate past, the Englishman foretells the yet more diabolic future.

The foregoing accounts by educated men of inarticulate Public Opinion are sufficiently illuminating. But deeds speak even louder than words, and a society that periodically lynches its witches proclaims, most emphatically, its faith in magic and its fear of the devil. Here is an example drawn from French history and almost contemporary with the events related in this book. In the summer of 1644, after a very violent and destructive hailstorm, the inhabitants of several villages near Beaune banded together in order to take vengeance on the incarnate fiends who had thus wantonly ruined their crops. Under the leadership of a seventeen-year-old boy, who claimed to have an infallible nose for witches, they ducked a number of women and then beat them to death. Other suspects were burned with red-hot shovels, pushed into brick kilns or thrown headlong from high places. To put an end to this panic reign of terror, the Parlement of Dijon had to send two special commissioners at the head of a strong force of police.

We see then that inarticulate Public Opinion was in full agreement with the theologians and the lawyers. Among the educated, however, there was no such unanimity of approval. Kramer and Sprenger write with indignation of those — and at the end of the fifteenth century they were already numerous — who doubted the reality of witchcraft. They point out that all the theologians and canonists are at one in condemning the error of “those who say that there is no

witchcraft in the world, but only in the imagination of men who, through their ignorance of hidden causes, which no man yet understands, ascribe certain natural effects to witchcraft, as though they were effected not by hidden causes, but by devils working either by themselves or in conjunction with witches. And though all the other Doctors condemn this error as a pure falsehood, St. Thomas impugns it more vigorously and stigmatizes it as actual heresy, saying that this error proceeds from the root of infidelity."

This theoretical conclusion raises a practical problem. The question arises whether people who maintain that witches do not exist are to be regarded as notorious heretics, or whether they are to be regarded as gravely suspect of holding heretical opinions. It seems that the first opinion is the correct one. But though all persons "convicted of such evil doctrine" have deserved excommunication, with all the penalties thereto attached, "we must take into consideration the very great number of persons who, owing to their ignorance, will surely be found guilty of this error. And since the error is very common, the rigor of strict justice may be tempered with mercy." On the other hand, "let no man think he may escape by pleading ignorance. For those who have gone astray through ignorance of this kind may be found to have sinned very gravely."

In a word, the official attitude of the Church was such that, though disbelief in witchcraft was undoubtedly a heresy, the disbeliever was in no immediate danger of punishment. Nevertheless, he remained gravely suspect and, if he persisted in his false doctrine after being apprised of the Catholic truth, might get into serious trouble. Hence the caution displayed by Montaigne in the eleventh chapter of his Third Book. "The witches of my neighborhood are in danger of their lives when anyone brings to bear fresh witness to the reality of their visions. To reconcile the examples which Holy Writ gives us of such things — examples most certain and irrefutable — and to bring them into comparison with those that happen in modern times, since we can see neither the causes of them nor the means by which they took place, needs a greater ingenuity than ours." It may be that God alone can tell what is a miracle and what is not. God must be believed; but do we have to believe a mere man, "one of ourselves, who is

amazed at his own telling — and he must necessarily be amazed, if he is not out of his wits." And Montaigne concludes with one of those golden sentences which deserve to be inscribed over the altar of every church, above the bench of every magistrate, on the walls of every lecture hall, every senate and parliament, every government office and council chamber. "After all," (write the words in neon, write in letters as tall as a man!) "after all, it is rating one's conjectures at a very high price to roast a man alive on the strength of them."

Half a century later Selden showed himself less cautious, but also less humane. "The law against witches does not prove that there be any; but it punishes the malice of those people that use such means to take away men's lives. If one should profess that by turning his hat thrice, and crying 'Buzz,' he could take away a man's life, though in truth he could do no such thing, yet this were a just law made by the State that whosoever should turn his hat thrice and cry 'Buzz,' with an intention to take away a man's life, shall be put to death." Selden was enough of a skeptic to disapprove the elevation of conjectures to the rank of dogmas; but at the same time he was lawyer enough to think that roasting a man alive for thinking he was a witch might be right and proper. Montaigne had also been bred to the law; but his mind had obstinately refused to take the legalistic stain. When he thought of witches, he found himself considering, not their punishable malice, but their perhaps not incurable malady. "In all conscience," he writes, "I should rather have prescribed them hellebore [a drug supposed to be effective in purging melancholy and therefore in curing madness] than hemlock."

The first systematic assaults against the practice of witch-hunting and the theory of diabolic intervention came from the German physician, Johann Weier, in 1563, and from Reginald Scot, the Kentish squire, who published his Discovery of Witchcraft in 1584. The nonconformist Gifford and the Anglican Harsnett shared Scot's skepticism in regard to contemporary instances of witchcraft, but could not go so far as he did in questioning the Biblical references to possession, magic and pacts with the devil.

Over against the skeptics we find a notable array of believers. First in eminence as in time stands the great Jean Bodin who tells us that he wrote his Démonomanie des Sorciers, among other reasons, “to serve as an answer to those who endeavor, by their books, as far as possible to excuse sorcerers; insomuch as it seems as if they were influenced by the Devil himself to publish these fine books.” Such skeptics, Bodin thinks, deserve to be sent to the stake along with the witches whom their doubts serve to protect and justify.

In his Demonologie James I took up the same position. The rationalistic Weier, he says, is an apologist for sorcerers, and by his book he “bewrays himself to have been one of that profession.”

Of James I’s eminent contemporaries, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Bacon seem to have been on the side of the believers. Later in the century we find the case for witchcraft being argued in England by philosophers like Henry More and Cudworth, by learned physicians and scholars such as Sir Thomas Browne and Glanvil, and by lawyers of the caliber of Sir Matthew Hale and Sir George Mackenzie.

In seventeenth-century France all the theologians accepted the reality of witchcraft; but not all of the clergy were practicing witch-hunters. To many the whole business seemed extremely indecorous and a menace to good order and public tranquility. They deplored the zeal of their more fanatical colleagues and did their best to restrain it. A similar situation existed among the lawyers. Some of them were only too happy to burn a woman “pour avoir, en pissant dans un trou, composé une nuée de grêle qui ravagea le territoire de son village” (this particular burning took place at Dôle, in 1610); but there were others, the moderates, who believed, no doubt, in the theory of witches, but were unwilling, in practice, to proceed against them.

But under an absolute monarchy the decisive opinion is that of the King. Louis XIII was much concerned with the devil, but his son was not. In 1672 Louis XIV gave orders that all the persons recently condemned for witchcraft by the Parlement of Rouen should have their sentences commuted to banishment. The Parlement protested; but their arguments, the theological no less than the

legal, left the Monarch unmoved. It was his good pleasure that these witches should not be burned, and that was sufficient, that was that.

When considering the events which took place at Loudun we must clearly distinguish between the alleged possession of the nuns and the alleged cause of that possession — the magic arts employed by Grandier. In what follows I shall deal in the main with the question of Grandier's guilt, leaving the problem of possession to be considered in a later chapter.

Father Tranquille, a member of one of the earlier teams of exorcists, published in 1634 a True Relation of the Just Proceedings Observed in the Matter of the Possession of the Ursulines of Loudun and in the Trial of Urbain Grandier. The title is deceptive; for the pamphlet is not a true relation of anything, but merely a polemic, a rhetorical defense of the exorcists and the judges against what was quite evidently a general skepticism and an almost universal disapprobation. In 1634, it is clear, most educated people were doubtful of the reality of the nuns' possession, were convinced of Grandier's innocence and were shocked and disgusted by the iniquitous conduct of his trial. Father Tranquille rushed into print in the hope that a little pulpit eloquence would bring his readers to a more proper frame of mind. His efforts were not successful. True, the King and Queen were firm believers; but their courtiers, almost to a man, were not. Of the persons of quality who came to see the exorcisms, very few believed in the genuineness of the possession — and, of course, if the possession were not real, then Grandier could not be guilty. Most of the visiting physicians came away with the conviction that the phenomena they had seen were all too natural. Ménage, Théophraste Renaudot, Ismaël Boulliau — all the men of letters, who wrote about Grandier after his death, stoutly maintained his innocence.

On the side of the believers were the great masses of illiterate Catholics. (The illiterate Protestants, it goes without saying, were in this case unanimously skeptical.) That all the exorcists believed in Grandier's guilt and the genuineness of the possession seems certain. They believed even when, like Mignon, they had helped to fake the evidence which sent Grandier to the stake. (The history of

spiritualism makes it very clear that fraud, especially pious fraud, is perfectly compatible with faith.) Of the opinions of the mass of the clergy we know next to nothing. As professional exorcists, the members of the religious orders were presumably on the side of Mignon, Barré and the rest. But what of the secular priests? Did they care to believe, and to preach, that one of their number had sold his soul to the devil and put a spell on seventeen Ursulines?

We know at least that among the higher clergy opinion was sharply divided. The Archbishop of Bordeaux was convinced that Grandier was innocent and that the nuns were suffering from a combination of Canon Mignon and furor uterinus. The Bishop of Poitiers, on the other hand, was convinced that the nuns were really possessed and that Grandier was a sorcerer. And what of the supreme ecclesiastical authority, what of the Cardinal-Duke? In one context, as we shall see, Richelieu was completely skeptical; in another he exhibited the faith of a charcoal burner. The thing was obviously a hoax; and yet, in a Pickwickian sense, and sometimes even in a non-Pickwickian sense, it was all perfectly true.

Magic, whether white or black, was the art and science of compassing natural ends by supernatural (though not divine) means. All witches made use of magic and the powers of more or less evil spirits; but some of them were also adherents of what in Italy was called la vecchia religione.

“In order to clear the ground,” writes Miss Margaret Murray in the introduction of her valuable study, The Witch-Cult in Western Europe, “I make a sharp distinction between Operative Witchcraft and Ritual Witchcraft. Under Operative Witchcraft I class all charms and spells, whether used by a professed witch or a professed Christian, whether intended for good or for evil, for killing or for curing. Such charms and spells are common to every nation and country, and are practised by the priests and people of every religion. They are part of the common heritage of the human race. . . . Ritual Witchcraft — or, as I propose to call it, the Dianic cult — embraces the religious beliefs and ritual of the people known in late medieval times as ‘Witches.’ The evidence proves that, underlying the Christian religion was a cult practised by many classes of the community, chiefly, however, by the more ignorant or those in the less thickly inhabited parts

of the country. It can be traced back to pre-Christian times and appears to be the ancient religion of Western Europe."

In that year of grace, sixteen hundred and thirty-two, more than a thousand years had gone by since Western Europe was "converted to Christianity"; and yet the ancient fertility religion, considerably corrupted by the fact of being chronically "agin the government," was still alive, still boasted its confessors and heroic martyrs, still had an ecclesiastical organization — identical, according to Cotton Mather, to that of his own Congregational Church. The fact of the old faith's survival seems somewhat less astonishing, when we remember that, after four centuries of missionary effort, the Indians of Guatemala are not perceptibly more Catholic today than they were in the first generation after the coming of Alvarado. In another seven or eight hundred years the religious situation in Central America may have come, perhaps, to resemble that which prevailed in seventeenth-century Europe, where a majority of Christians bitterly persecuted a minority attached to the older faith.

(In some districts the members of the Dianic cult and their fellow travelers may actually have constituted a majority of the population. Remy, Boguet and de Lancre have left accounts respectively of Lorraine, the Jura and the Basque country, as they found them at the turn of the seventeenth century. From their books it is clear that in these outlying regions, most people were, to some extent at least, of the old religion. Hedging their bets, they worshiped God by day and the devil at night. Among the Basques many priests used to celebrate both kinds of Mass, the black as well as the white. Lancre burned three of these eccentric clergymen, lost five who escaped from the condemned cell, and vehemently suspected a host of others.)

The central ceremony of Ritual Witchcraft was the so-called "Sabbath" — a word of unknown origin, having no relation to its Hebrew homonym. Sabbaths were celebrated four times a year — on Candlemass Day, February 2nd, on Rood Mass Day, May 1st, on Lammas Day, August 1st, and on the eve of All Hallows, October 31st. These were great festivals, often attended by hundreds of devotees, who came from considerable distances. Between Sabbaths there were

weekly “Esbats” for small congregations in the villages where the ancient religion was still practiced. At all high Sabbaths the devil himself was invariably present, in the person of some man who had inherited, or otherwise acquired, the honor of being the incarnation of the two-faced god of the Dianic cult. The worshipers paid homage to the god by kissing his reverse face — a mask worn, beneath an animal’s tail, on the devil’s backside. There was then, for some at least of the female devotees, a ritual copulation with the god, who was equipped for this purpose with an artificial phallus of horn or metal. This ceremony was followed by a picnic (for the Sabbaths were celebrated out of doors, near sacred trees or stones), by dancing and finally by a promiscuous sexual orgy that had, no doubt, originally been a magical operation for increasing the fertility of the animals on which primitive hunters and herdsmen depend for their livelihood. The prevailing atmosphere at the Sabbaths was one of good fellowship and mindless, animal joy. When captured and brought to trial, many of those who had taken part in the Sabbath resolutely refused, even under torture, even at the stake, to abjure the religion which had brought them so much happiness.

In the eyes of the Church and of the civil magistrates membership in the devil’s party was an aggravation of the crime of witchcraft. A witch who had attended the Sabbath was worse than a witch who had strictly confined herself to private practice. To attend the Sabbath was to profess openly that one preferred the Dianic cult to Christianity. Moreover, the witches’ organization was a secret society which might be used by ambitious leaders for political purposes. That Bothwell had thus made use of the Scottish covens seems almost certain. Still more certain is the fact that Elizabeth and her Privy Council were convinced, rightly or wrongly, that foreign and native Catholics were employing witches and magicians to take the Queen’s life. In France, according to Bodin, the sorcerers constituted a kind of Mafia, with members in every class of society and branches in every town and village.

That his crime might seem more abominable, Grandier was accused at his trial not merely of operative witchcraft, but also of participation in the rites of the Sabbath, of membership in the diabolic church.

The spectacle thus evoked of a pupil of the Jesuits solemnly renouncing his baptism, of a priest hurrying from the altar to do homage to the devil, of a grave and learned ecclesiastic dancing jigs with conjurors and tumbling in the hay with an assortment of witches, goats and incubi, was one well calculated to appall the pious, to tickle the groundlings and to bring joy to the Protestants.

CHAPTER SIX

DE CERISAY'S PRELIMINARY investigations had left him convinced that there was no genuine possession — only a sickness, improved by some little fraud on the part of the nuns, by a great deal of malice on the part of Canon Mignon and by the superstition, fanaticism and professional self-interest of the other ecclesiastics involved in the affair. There could be no cure, it was obvious, until the exorcisms had been stopped. But when he tried to put an end to these suggestions, which were systematically driving the nuns out of their wits, Mignon and Barré triumphantly produced a written order from the Bishop, charging them to go on exorcising the Ursulines until further notice. Unwilling to risk a scandal, de Cerisay gave his permission for the exorcisms to continue, but insisted on being present during the performance. On one of these occasions, it is recorded, there was a terrifying noise in the chimney and a cat suddenly appeared in the fireplace. The animal was pursued, caught, sprinkled with holy water, signed with the cross and adjured in Latin to depart. After which it was discovered that this devil in disguise was the nuns' pet Tom, who had been out on the tiles and was taking a short cut home. The laughter was loud and Rabelaisian.

Next day Mignon and Barré had the impudence to shut the convent door in de Cerisay's face. With his fellow magistrates he was kept waiting outside in the autumnal weather, while, contrary to his orders, the two priests exorcised their victims without official witnesses. Returning to his chambers, the indignant judge dictated a letter to the exorcists. Their actions, he declared, were such as to create "a vehement suspicion of trickery and suggestion." Moreover, "the Superior of the convent having publicly accused and defamed Grandier, by saying that he had a compact with the devils, nothing thereafter should have been done in secret; on the contrary, everything must now be done in the face of

justice and in our presence." Alarmed by so much firmness, the exorcists apologized and reported that the nuns had calmed down and that consequently further exorcisms would, for the time being, be unnecessary.

Meanwhile Grandier had ridden to Poitiers to appeal to the Bishop. But when he called, M. de la Rochepozay was indisposed and could only send a message by his chaplain to the effect that "M. Grandier should sue before the royal judges and that he, the Bishop, would be most happy if he could obtain justice in this affair."

The parson returned to Loudun and at once applied to the Bailli for a restraining order against Mignon and his accomplices. De Cerisay promptly issued an injunction forbidding anyone, of whatever rank or quality, to harm or traduce the said Curé of Saint-Pierre. At the same time he expressly ordered Mignon to do no more exorcising. The Canon retorted that he was answerable only to his ecclesiastical superiors and that he did not recognize the Bailli's authority in a matter which, since it involved the devil, was wholly spiritual.

In the interval Barré had returned to his parishioners at Chinon. There were no more public exorcisms. But every day Canon Mignon spent long hours with his penitents, reading them chapters from Father Michaelis's best-selling report of the Gauffridy case, assuring them that Grandier was as great a magician as his Provençal colleague and that they too had been bewitched. By this time the behavior of the good sisters had become so eccentric that the parents of their pupils took fright; soon the boarders were all withdrawn and such few day pupils as still ventured into the convent brought back the most disquieting reports. Halfway through their arithmetic lesson, Sister Claire of St. John had started to laugh uncontrollably, as though someone were tickling her. In the refectory Sister Martha had had a fight with Sister Louise of Jesus. What screaming! And the bad language!

Late in November, Barré was called back from Chinon and, under his influence, everybody's symptoms at once became much worse. The convent was now a madhouse. Mannoury, the surgeon, and Adam, the apothecary, took alarm and summoned the leading physicians of the town in consultation. They came

and, after examining the nuns, made a written report to the Bailli. Their conclusions were as follows: “the nuns are certainly transported, but we do not consider that this has happened through the workings of demons and spirits. . . . Their alleged possession seems to us more illusory than real.” To all but the exorcists and Grandier’s enemies, this report seemed conclusive. Grandier made another appeal to de Cerisay and de Cerisay renewed his efforts to put a stop to the exorcisms. Once again Mignon and Barré defied him, and once again he shrank from the scandal that would follow the use of physical force against priests. Instead, he wrote a letter to the Bishop, appealing to his lordship to put a stop to an affair which was “the sorriest piece of knavery invented for many ages past.” Grandier, he went on, had never seen the nuns or had anything to do with them; “and if he had devils at his beck and call, he would have used them to avenge the violences and insults to which he has been subjected.”

To this letter M. de la Rochepozay vouchsafed no reply. Grandier had offended him by appealing from his decision. Therefore anything that might be done to harm the parson was entirely right, proper and just.

De Cerisay now wrote a second letter, this time to the head of the Officiality. More fully than to the Bishop he entered into the details of the grotesque and horrible farce which was being played at Loudun. “M. Mignon is already saying that M. Barré is a saint, and they are reciprocally canonizing one another without waiting for the judgment of their superiors.” Barré corrects the devil when he goes astray in the labyrinth of grammar, and challenges unbelievers “to do as he does and put a finger in the demoniac’s mouth. Father Rouseau, a Cordelier, was caught and bitten so hard that he was constrained to pull the nun’s nose with his other hand, to make her let go, crying, ‘Au diable, au diable!’ much louder than our kitchen maids cry, ‘Au chat, au chat!’ when puss has run off with something. After which the question was propounded why the fiend had bitten a consecrated finger, and it was concluded that the Bishop must have been stingy with the holy oils, and that the unction did not get as far as the finger.” Several fledgling priests tried their hands at exorcism, among them a brother of Philippe Trincant. But this young man made so many mistakes in Latin — hoste as the vocative of

hostis, and da gloria Deo — that the educated public could not keep a straight face and he had to be withdrawn. Moreover, adds de Cerisay, “even at the height of her convulsions, the nun on whom he was working would not permit M. Trincant to put his fingers in her mouth (for he is somewhat dirty) and insistently asked for another priest.” In spite of all which “the good father Guardian of the Capuchins is astonished at the hardness of heart of the people of Loudun and amazed by their reluctance to believe. At Tours, he assures us, he would have got them to swallow such a miracle as easily as butter. He and certain others have declared that those who do not believe are atheists and already damned.”

This letter also remained unanswered, and the horrible farce was allowed to go on, day after day, until the middle of December, when M. de Sourdis came most opportunely to stay at his abbey, Saint-Jouin-des-Marnes. Unofficially by Grandier and officially by de Cerisay the Archbishop was informed of what was happening and asked to intervene. M. de Sourdis immediately sent his personal physician to look into the matter. Knowing that the doctor was a man who would tolerate no nonsense and that his master, the Metropolitan, was frankly skeptical, the nuns took fright and during the whole time of the investigation behaved themselves like so many lambs. There was no sign of possession. The doctor made his report to this effect and in the last days of December, 1632, the Archbishop published an ordinance. Henceforward Mignon was not to exorcise at all, and Barré might do so only in conjunction with two exorcists appointed by the Metropolitan, a Jesuit from Poitiers and an Oratorian from Tours. No one else might take part in the exorcisms.

The prohibition was almost unnecessary; for during the months that followed there were no devils to exorcise. No longer stimulated by priestly suggestions, the frenzies of the nuns gave place to a dismal, morning-after condition, in which mental confusion was mingled with shame, remorse and the conviction of enormous sin. For what if the Archbishop were right? What if there never had been any devils? Then all these monstrous things they had done and said could be imputed to them as crimes. Possessed, they were guiltless. Unpossessed, they would have to answer, at the Last Judgment, for blasphemy and unchastity, for

lies and malice. At their feet hell yawned appallingly. And meanwhile, to make matters worse, there was no money and everybody had turned against them. Everybody — the parents of their pupils, the pious ladies of the town, the crowds of sightseers, and even their own relatives. Yes, even their own relatives; for now that they had ceased to be possessed, now that, in the judgment of the Archbishop, they were either impostors or the victims of melancholy and enforced continence, they had become disgraces to their families, and as such were repudiated, disavowed, their allowances cut off. Meat and butter disappeared from the refectory table, servants from the kitchen. The nuns were forced to do their own housework; and when the housework was done, they had to earn their bread by taking in plain sewing, by spinning wool for rapacious cloth merchants who took advantage of their needs and their misfortunes by paying them even less than the current rate for sweated labor. Hungry, oppressed by incessant toil, haunted by metaphysical terrors and a sense of guilt, the poor women looked back nostalgically to the happy days of their possession. Winter gave place to spring, and spring to a no less wretched summer. Then, in the autumn of 1633, hope revived. The King had changed his mind about the castle keep, and M. de Laubardemont was once again a guest at the Swan and Cross. Mesmin de Silly and the other cardinalists were exultant. D'Armagnac had lost the game; the castle was doomed. Nothing now remained but to get rid of the insufferable parson. At his very first interview with the King's Commissioner, Mesmin broached the subject of the possession. Laubardemont listened attentively. As a man who, in his time, had judged and burned several dozens of witches, he could legitimately claim to be an expert in matters supernatural.

Next day he called at the convent in the Rue Paquin. Canon Mignon confirmed Mesmin's story; so did the Mother Superior; so did the Cardinal's kinswoman, Sister Claire de Sazilly, and so did Laubardemont's two sisters-in-law, the demoiselles de Dampierre. The bodies of all the good sisters had been infested by evil spirits; the spirits had been introduced by magic, and the magician was Urbain Grandier. These truths had been vouched for by the devils themselves, and were therefore beyond doubt. And yet His Grace, the

Archbishop, had said there was no real possession, and thereby disgraced them in the eyes of the world. It was a monstrous injustice, and they begged M. de Laubardemont to use his influence with His Eminence and His Majesty to have something done about it. Laubardemont was sympathetic, but made no promises. Personally, he liked nothing better than a good witch trial. But how did the Cardinal feel about such matters? It was hard indeed to say. Sometimes he seemed to take them very seriously indeed. But the next time you saw him, the chances were that he would be talking about the supernatural in the derisive tones of a disciple of Charron or Montaigne. By those who serve him, a great man must be treated as a mixture between a god, a naughty child and a wild beast. The god must be worshiped, the child amused and bamboozled and the wild beast placated and, when aroused, avoided. The courtier who, by an unwelcome suggestion, annoys this insane trinity of superhuman pretension, subhuman ferocity and infantile silliness, is merely asking for trouble. The nuns might weep and implore; but until he had discovered which way the wind was blowing, Laubardemont had no intention of doing anything to help them.

A few days later Loudun was honored by the visit of a very distinguished personage, Henri de Condé. This prince of the blood royal was a notorious sodomite, who combined the most sordid avarice with an exemplary piety. In politics he had once been an anti-Cardinalist, but now that Richelieu’s position seemed impregnable, he had become the most fawning of His Eminence’s sycophants. Informed of the possession, the prince at once expressed a desire to see for himself. Canon Mignon and the nuns were only too happy to oblige. Accompanied by Laubardemont and a numerous suite, Condé drove in state to the convent, was received by Mignon and ushered into the chapel, where a solemn Mass was celebrated. At first the nuns observed the most perfect decorum; but at the moment of communion, the Prioress, Sœur Claire and Sœur Agnès went into convulsions and rolled on the floor, howling obscenities and blasphemies. The rest of the community followed suit and for an hour or two the church looked like a mixture between a bear-garden and a brothel. Greatly edified, the prince declared that doubt was no longer possible and urged

Laubardemont to write at once to the Cardinal, informing His Eminence of what was going on. “But the Commissioner,” as we learn from a contemporary narrative, “gave no inkling as to what he thought about this strange spectacle. However, after returning to the inn, he felt himself deeply moved by compassion for the deplorable condition of the nuns. To cloak his real feelings, he invited Grandier’s friends to dinner and, along with them, Grandier himself.” It must have been a delightful party.

To spur the overcautious Laubardemont into action, the parson’s enemies now came forward with a new and graver accusation. Grandier was not merely a sorcerer, who had denied his faith, rebelled against God and bewitched a whole convent of nuns; he was also the author of a violent and obscene attack on the Cardinal, published six years earlier, in 1627, under the title, Lettre de la Cordonnière de Loudun. Almost certainly Grandier did not write this pamphlet; but since he was the friend and correspondent of the lady-cobbler after whom the lampoon was named, since he had once very likely been her lover, it was not altogether unreasonable to suppose that he might have written it.

Catherine Hammon was a bright and pretty little proletarian who, in 1616, while Marie de Médicis was staying at Loudun, attracted the Queen’s attention, was taken into her service and soon became, officially, the royal shoemaker and, unofficially, a royal confidante and factotum. Grandier had known her (all too intimately, it was said) during the period of the Queen’s exile at Blois, when the girl came home for a time to Loudun. Later on, when she returned to her post, Catherine, who knew how to write, kept the parson informed of what was going on at court. Her letters were so amusing that Grandier used to read their spicier passages aloud to his friends. Among those friends was M. Trincant, the Public Prosecutor and father of the delicious Philippe. It was this same M. Trincant, no longer his friend, but the most implacable of his enemies, who now accused Catherine Hammon’s correspondent of being the author of the Cordonnière. This time Laubardemont made no effort to conceal his feelings. What the Cardinal really thought about witches and devils might be uncertain; but what he thought about critics of his administration, his family and himself had never been in any

doubt. To disagree with Richelieu's political opinion was to invite dismissal from the public service, financial ruin and exile; to insult him was to run the risk of death on the gallows or even (since an edict of 1626 had declared that libelous pamphleteering was a crime of lèse-majesté) at the stake or on the wheel. For only printing the Cordonnière, a wretched tradesman had been sent to the galleys. If he were ever caught, what would be done to the author? Confident, this time, that his zeal would find favor in the sight of His Eminence, Laubardemont took copious notes of all that M. Trincant said. And meanwhile Mesmin had not been idle. Grandier, as we have seen, was an avowed enemy of the monks and friars, and with very few exceptions the monks and friars of Loudun were the avowed enemies of Grandier. The Carmelites had the most substantial reasons for hating Grandier; but the Carmelites were in no position to give effect to their hatred. The Capuchins had suffered less at Grandier's hands, but their power to hurt him was incomparably greater. For the Capuchins were colleagues of Father Joseph, and were in regular correspondence with that Eminence Grise who was the confidant, chief advisor and right-hand man of the Cardinal. It was to the Gray Friars, therefore, and not to the White that Mesmin confided the new accusations against Grandier. The response was all that he could have desired. A letter to Father Joseph was immediately drafted, and Laubardemont, who was on the point of returning to Paris, was asked to deliver it in person. Laubardemont accepted the commission and, the same day, invited Grandier and his friends to a farewell dinner, at which he drank the parson's health, assured him of undying friendship and promised to do everything in his power to assist him in his struggle against a cabal of unscrupulous enemies. So much kindness, and offered so generously, so spontaneously! Grandier was moved almost to tears.

Next day Laubardemont rode to Chinon, where he spent the evening with the most sincerely fanatical believer in the parson's guilt. M. Barré received the royal Commissioner with all due deference and, at his request, handed over the minutes of all the exorcisms, in the course of which the nuns had accused Grandier of bewitching them. After breakfast, on the following morning,

Laubardemont was entertained by the antics of some local demoniacs; then bidding farewell to the exorcist, he took the road to Paris.

Immediately after his arrival, he had an interview with Father Joseph, then, a few days later, a more decisive interview with the two Eminences, the scarlet and the gray, in consultation. Laubardemont read M. Barré's minutes of the exorcisms, and Father Joseph read the letter in which his Capuchin colleagues had accused the parson of being the long-sought author of the Cordonnière. Richelieu decided that the matter was grave enough to be considered at the next meeting of the Council of State. On the day appointed (November 30, 1633), the King, the Cardinal, Father Joseph, the Secretary of State, the Chancellor and Laubardemont assembled at Ruel. The possession of the Ursulines of Loudun was the first item on the agenda. Briefly but luridly Laubardemont told his story, and Louis XIII, who was a firm and terrified believer in devils, unhesitatingly decided that something would have to be done about it. A document was then and there drawn up, signed by the King, countersigned by the Secretary of State, and sealed, in yellow wax, with the Great Seal. By the terms of this document Laubardemont was commissioned to go to Loudun, investigate the facts of the possession, examine the accusations leveled by the devils against Grandier and, if they appeared to be well-founded, bring the magician to trial.

In the sixteen twenties and thirties, witch trials were still of common occurrence; but of all the dozens of persons accused, during these years, of trafficking with the devil, Grandier was the only one in whose case Richelieu took a keen and sustained interest. Father Tranquille, the Capuchin exorcist who, in 1634, wrote a pamphlet on behalf of Laubardemont and the devils, declares that "it is to the zeal of the Eminentissimous Cardinal that we owe the first undertaking of this affair" — a fact to which "the letters he wrote to M. de Laubardemont sufficiently bear witness." As for the Commissioner, "he never instituted any procedure for proving the possession without first fully informing His Majesty and my lord Cardinal." Tranquille's testimony is confirmed by that of other contemporaries, who write of the almost daily exchange of letters between Richelieu and his agent at Loudun.

What were the reasons for this extraordinary concern over a case, apparently, of such small importance? Like His Eminence's contemporaries, we must be content with guesses. That the desire for personal vengeance was an important motive seems certain. In 1618, when Richelieu was only Bishop of Luçon and Abbot of Coussay, this whippersnapper of a parson had been rude to him. And now there was good reason to believe that the same Grandier was responsible for the outrageous libels and insults contained in the Cordonnière. True, the accusation was one which it would be all but impossible to substantiate in a court of law. But for merely having been suspected of such a crime, the man deserved to be got rid of. And this was not all. The guilty parson was the incumbent of a guilty parish. Loudun was still a stronghold of Protestantism. Too prudent to compromise themselves at the time of the uprising which ended in 1628 with the capture of La Rochelle, the Huguenots of Poitou had done nothing to deserve open and systematic persecution. The Edict of Nantes still stood and, intolerable as they were, the Calvinists had to be tolerated. But now suppose that it could be proved, out of the mouths of the good sisters, that these gentlemen of the so-called Reformed Religion had been in secret league with an enemy even worse than the English — with the devil himself? In that case there would be ample justification for doing what he had long been planning to do: namely, to deprive Loudun of all its rights and privileges, and to transfer them to his own brand-new city of Richelieu. And even this was not all. The devils might be useful in yet other ways. If people could be made to believe that Loudun was but the beachhead of a regular invasion from hell, then it might be possible to revive the Inquisition in France. And how convenient that would be! How greatly it would facilitate the Cardinal's self-appointed task of centralizing all power in the absolute monarchy! As we know from our own experience of such secular devils as the Jews, the Communists, the Bourgeois Imperialists, the best way to establish and justify a police state is to keep harping on the dangers of a Fifth Column. Richelieu made only one mistake: he overestimated his compatriots' belief in the supernatural. Seeing that he was in the middle of the

Thirty Years' War, he would probably have done better with a Fifth Column of Spaniards and Austrians than with mere spirits, however infernal.

Laubardemont lost no time. By December 6th he was back again at Loudun. From a house in the suburbs he sent secretly for the Public Prosecutor and the Chief of Police, Guillaume Aubin. They came. Laubardemont showed them his commission and a royal warrant for Grandier's arrest.

Aubin had always liked the parson. That night he sent Grandier a message, informing him of Laubardemont's return and urging immediate flight. Grandier thanked him; but, fondly imagining that innocence had nothing to fear, ignored his friend's advice. Next morning, on his way to church, he was arrested. Mesmin and Trincant, Mignon and Menuau, the apothecary and the surgeon — in spite of the earliness of the hour, they were all on hand to see the fun. It was to the sound of jeering laughter that Grandier was led away to the coach, which was to carry him to his appointed prison in the castle of Angers.

The parsonage was now searched, and all Grandier's books and papers were impounded. Disappointingly enough, his library contained not a single work on the Black Art; but it did contain (and this was very nearly as damning) a copy of the Lettre de la Cordonnière, together with the manuscript of that Treatise on Sacerdotal Celibacy, which Grandier had written in order to salve the conscience of *Mlle.* de Brou.

In convivial moments Laubardemont had been heard to remark that if he could get hold of only three lines of a man's handwriting, he could find a reason for hanging him. In the Treatise and the pamphlet against the Cardinal, he already had the amplest justification not merely for a hanging, but for the rack, the wheel, the stake. And the search had revealed other treasures. For example, there were all the letters written to the parson by Jean d'Armagnac — letters which, if he ever made a nuisance of himself, could certainly be used to send the royal favorite into exile or to the scaffold. And here were the absolutions granted by the Archbishop of Bordeaux. At the moment M. de Sourdis was doing very well at the Admiralty; but if at any time he should do less well, these proofs that he had once absolved a notorious magician might come in very handy.

Meanwhile, of course, they must be kept out of Grandier's hands; for if he could show no proof that he had been absolved by the Metropolitan, then his condemnation by the Bishop of Poitiers still held good. And if it still held good, Grandier was the priest who had performed the veneric act in church. And if he were capable of that, then, obviously, he was capable of bewitching seventeen nuns.

The weeks that followed were a long orgy of licensed spite, of perjury consecrated by the Church, of hatred and envy, not merely unrepressed, but officially rewarded. The Bishop of Poitiers issued a monitory, denouncing Grandier and inviting the faithful to inform against him. The injunction was eagerly obeyed. Whole volumes of malicious gossip were transcribed by Laubardemont and his clerks. The case of 1630 was reopened, and all the witnesses who had confessed to perjury now swore that all the lies they had recanted were gospel truth. At these preliminary hearings Grandier was neither present in person, nor represented by counsel. Laubardemont did not permit the case for the defense to be stated, and when Grandier's mother protested against the iniquitous and even illegal methods which were being employed, he merely tore up her petitions. In January, 1634, the old lady gave notice that she was appealing, in her son's name, to the Parlement of Paris. Laubardemont, meanwhile, was at Angers, cross-questioning the prisoner. His efforts were fruitless. Grandier, who had been informed of the appeal and who felt confident that his case would soon be tried before another and less manifestly prejudiced judge, refused to answer the Commissioner's questions. After a week of alternate browbeating and cajolery, Laubardemont gave up in disgust and hurried back to Paris and the Cardinal. Set in motion by old *Mme.* Grandier, the ponderous machinery of the law was slowly but surely grinding its way toward an appeal. But an appeal was the last thing that either Laubardemont or his master desired. The judges of the high court were passionately concerned with legality, and jealous, on principle, of the executive branch of the government. If they were permitted to review the case, Laubardemont's reputation as a lawyer would be ruined and His Eminence would have to give up a scheme to which,

for reasons best known to himself, he was greatly attached. In March, Richelieu took the matter to the Council of State. The devils, he explained to the King, were counterattacking, and only by the most energetic action could they be checked and turned back. As usual, Louis XIII permitted himself to be convinced. The Secretary of State drew up the necessary documents. Under the royal hand and seal it was now decreed that "without regard to the appeal at present lodged with the Parlement, which His Majesty hereby annuls, my lord Laubardemont shall continue the action initiated against Grandier. . . : to which end the King renews his commission for as long as may be necessary, debars the Parlement of Paris and all other judges from taking cognizance of the case, and forbids the parties from suing before them, under penalty of a fine of five hundred livres."

Thus placed above the law and armed with unlimited powers, the Cardinal's agent returned to Loudun early in April and began at once to set the stage for the next act of his gruesome comedy. The city, he found, had no prison strong enough, or uncomfortable enough, to house a magician. The attic of a house belonging to Canon Mignon was placed at the Commissioner's disposal. To make it devil-proof, Laubardemont had the windows bricked up, the door fitted with a new lock and heavy bolts and the chimney (that witches' postern) closed with a stout iron grating. Under military escort, Grandier was brought back to Loudun and locked up in this dark and airless cell. No bed was allowed him and he had to sleep, like an animal, on a truss of straw. His jailers were a certain Bontemps (who had borne false witness against him in 1630) and Bontemps's shrewish wife. Throughout the long trial, they treated him with unwavering malignity.

Having secured his prisoner, Laubardemont now turned all his attention to the principal, indeed the only, witnesses for the prosecution — Sœur Jeanne and the sixteen other demoniacs. Disobeying the orders of their Archbishop, Canon Mignon and his colleagues had been working hard to undo the salutary effects of six months of enforced quiet. After a few public exorcisms the good sisters were all as frantic as they had ever been. Laubardemont gave them no respite. Day

after day, morning and evening, the wretched women were taken in batches to the various churches of the city and put through their tricks. These tricks were always the same. Like modern mediums, who go on doing exactly what the Fox Sisters did a hundred years ago, these earlier demoniacs and their exorcists were incapable of inventing anything new. Time after time there were the all too familiar convulsions, the same old obscenities, the conventional blasphemies, the boastful claims, constantly repeated, but never substantiated, to supernormal powers. But the show was good enough, and dirty enough, to attract the public. By word of mouth, in pamphlets and broadsheets, from hundreds of pulpits, news of the possession spread far and wide. From every province of France and even from abroad, sightseers came flocking to the exorcisms. With the eclipse of the Carmelites' miracle-working Notre-Dame de Recouvrance, Loudun had lost almost the whole of its tourist trade. Now, thanks to the devils, all and more than all was restored. The inns and the lodging houses were filled to capacity, and the good Carmelites, who had a monopoly of the lay demoniacs (for the hysterical infection had spread beyond the convent walls) were now as prosperous as in the best of the good old days of the pilgrimages. Meanwhile the Ursulines were growing positively rich. From the royal treasury they now received a regular subsidy, which was augmented by the alms of the faithful and the handsome gratuities left by those tourists of high rank, for whom some specially miraculous performance had been staged.

During the spring and summer of 1634 the main purpose of the exorcisms was not the deliverance of the nuns, but the indictment of Grandier. The aim was to prove, out of the mouth of Satan himself, that the parson was a magician and had bewitched the nuns. But Satan is, by definition, the Father of Lies, and his evidence is therefore worthless. To this argument Laubardemont, his exorcists and the Bishop of Poitiers replied by affirming that, when duly constrained by a priest of the Roman Church, devils are bound to tell the truth. In other words, anything to which a hysterical nun was ready, at the instigation of her exorcist, to affirm on oath, was for all practical purposes a divine revelation. For inquisitors, this doctrine was a real convenience. But it had one grave defect: it

was manifestly unorthodox. In the year 1610 a committee of learned theologians had discussed the admissibility of diabolic evidence and issued the following authoritative decision. “We, the undersigned Doctors of the Faculty of Paris, touching certain questions which have been proposed to us, are of the opinion that one must never admit the accusation of demons, still less must one exploit exorcisms for the purpose of discovering a man’s faults or for determining if he is a magician; and we are further of the opinion that, even if the said exorcisms should have been applied in the presence of the Holy Sacrament, with the devil forced to swear an oath (which is a ceremony of which we do not at all approve), one must not for all that give any credit to his words, the devil being always a liar and the Father of Lies.” Furthermore, the devil is man’s sworn enemy, and is therefore ready to endure all the torments of exorcism for the sake of doing harm to a single soul. If the devil’s evidence were admitted, the most virtuous people would be in the greatest danger; for it is precisely against these that Satan rages most violently “Wherefore St. Thomas (Book 22, Question 9, Article 22) maintains with the authority of St. Chrysostom, Daemoni, Etiam Vera Dicenti, Non Est Credendum. [The devil must not be believed, even when he tells the truth].” We must follow the example of Christ, who imposed silence on the demons even when they spoke truth, by calling him the Son of God. “Whence it appears that, in the absence of other proofs, one must never proceed against those who are accused by devils. And we note that this is well observed in France, where judges do not recognize these depositions.” Twenty-four years later, Laubardemont and his colleagues recognized nothing else. For the humanity and good sense of the orthodox view, the exorcists had substituted, and the Cardinal’s agents had eagerly accepted, a heresy that was both monstrously silly and dangerous in the extreme. Ismaël Boulliau, the astronomer-priest who had served under Grandier as one of the vicars of Saint-Pierre du Marché, qualified the new doctrine as “impious, erroneous, execrable and abominable — a doctrine which turns Christians into idolaters, undermines the very foundations of the Christian religion, opens the door to calumny and will make it possible for the devil to immolate human victims in the name, not of Moloch, but of a

fiendish and infernal dogma." That the fiendish and infernal dogma was fully approved by Richelieu is certain. The fact is recorded by Laubardemont himself and by the author of the Démonomanie de Loudun, Pillet de la Mesnardiére, the Cardinal's personal physician.

Licensed, sometimes even suggested, and always respectfully listened to, the diabolic depositions came pouring in just as fast as Laubardemont needed them. Thus he found it desirable that Grandier should be not merely a magician, but also a high priest in the Old Religion. The word went round, and immediately one of the lay demoniacs obliged by confessing (through the mouth of a devil who had been duly constrained by one of the Carmelite exorcists) that she had prostituted herself to the parson, and that the parson had expressed his appreciation by offering to take her to the Sabbath and make her a princess at the devil's court. Grandier affirmed that he had never so much as laid eyes on the girl. But Satan had spoken and to doubt his word would be sacrilege.

Some witches, as is well known, have supernumerary nipples; others acquire, at the touch of the devil's finger, one or more small areas of insensibility, where the prick of a needle causes no pain and draws no blood. Grandier had no extra teats; ergo he must carry, somewhere on his person, those pain-free spots, by which the Evil One marks his own. Where precisely were those spots? As early as April 26th the Prioress had given the answer. There were five marks in all — one on the shoulder, at the place where criminals are branded, two more on the buttocks, very near the fundament, and one on either testicle. (A Quoi Rèvent les Jeunes Filles?) To confirm the truth of this statement, Mannoury, the surgeon, was ordered to do a little vivisection. In the presence of two apothecaries and several doctors, Grandier was stripped, shaved all over, blind-folded and then systematically pricked to the bone with a long, sharp probe. Ten years before, in Trincant's drawing room, the parson had made fun of this ignorant and pompous ass. Now the ass was getting his own back, and with a vengeance. The pain was excruciating and, through the bricked-up windows, the prisoner's screams could be heard by an ever-growing crowd of the curious in the street below. In the official summary of the counts on which Grandier was condemned, we learn

that, owing to the great difficulty of locating such small areas of insensibility, only two out of the five marks described by the Prioress were actually discovered. But, for Laubardemont's purposes, two were amply sufficient. Mannoury's methods, it may be added, were admirably simple and effective. After a score of agonizing jabs, he would reverse the probe and press the blunt end against the parson's flesh. Miraculously, there was no pain. The devil had marked the spot. Had he been permitted to go on long enough, there is no doubt that Mannoury would have discovered all the marks. Unfortunately, one of the apothecaries (an untrustworthy stranger from Tours) was less complaisant than the village doctors whom Laubardemont had assembled to control the experiment. Catching Mannoury in the act of cheating, the man protested. In vain. His minority report was merely ignored. Meanwhile, Mannoury and the others had proved themselves to be most gratifyingly co-operative. Laubardemont was able to announce that Science had now corroborated the revelations of hell.

For the most part, of course, Science did not have to corroborate; ex hypothesi, the revelations of hell were true. When Grandier was confronted by his accusers, they rushed at him like a pack of Maenads, screaming through the mouths of all their devils that it was he who had bewitched them, he who, every night for four whole months, had prowled through the convent making passes at them and whispering obscene cajoleries in their ears. Conscientiously Laubardemont and his clerks made notes of everything that was said. The minutes were duly signed, countersigned and filed in duplicate at the record office. Factually, theologically and now legally, it was all true.

To make the parson's guilt still truer the exorcists produced a number of "pacts," which had appeared mysteriously in the cells, or (better still) had been vomited up, undigested, in the midst of a paroxysm. It was by means of these pacts that the good sisters had been, and were still being, bewitched. Here, for example, was a piece of paper, stained with three drops of blood and containing eight orange pips; here, a bundle of five straws; here, a little package of cinders, worms, hairs and nail parings. But it was Jeanne des Anges who, as usual, outdid

all the rest. On June 17th, while possessed by Leviathan, she threw up a pact containing (according to her devils) a piece of the heart of a child, sacrificed in 1631 at a witches' Sabbath near Orléans, the ashes of a consecrated wafer and some of Grandier's blood and semen.

There were moments when the new doctrine was a source of embarrassment. One morning, for example, a devil (duly constrained and in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament) remarked that M. de Laubardemont was a cuckold. The clerk conscientiously recorded the statement and Laubardemont, who had not been present at the exorcism, signed the minute without reading it, and appended the usual postscript to the effect that, to the best of his knowledge, everything contained in the procès-verbal was true. When the matter came to light, there was much Rabelaisian laughter. It was annoying, of course, but of no serious consequence. Compromising documents could always be destroyed, stupid clerks dismissed and impertinent devils recalled to their duty by a good scolding or even a smacking. All in all, the advantages of the new doctrine far outweighed its drawbacks.

One of these advantages, as Laubardemont was quick to realize, consisted in this: that it was now possible (through the mouth of a devil who had been duly constrained in the presence of the Sacrament) to flatter the Cardinal in an entirely new and supernatural manner. In the minutes of an exorcism of May 20, 1634, written entirely in Laubardemont's hand, we read the following: "Question: 'What do you say about the great Cardinal, the protector of France?' The devil answered, swearing by the name of God, 'He is the scourge of all my good friends.' Question: 'Who are your good friends?' Answer: 'The heretics.' Question: 'What are the other heroic aspects of his person?' Answer: 'His work for the relief of the people, the gift of government, which he has received from God, his desire to preserve peace in Christendom, the single-minded love he bears to the King's person.' " It was a handsome tribute and, coming as it did, direct from hell, it could be accepted as the simple truth. The nuns were far gone in hysteria, but never so far gone as to forget which side their bread was buttered. Throughout the possession, as Dr. Legué has pointed out, God, Christ

and the Virgin were constantly blasphemed, but never Louis XIII and never, above all, His Eminence. The good sisters knew well enough that, against Heaven, they could let off steam with impunity. But if they were rude to the Cardinal. . . . Well, see what was happening to M. Grandier.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AT ANY GIVEN time and place certain thoughts are completely unthinkable. But this radical unthinkableness of certain thoughts is not paralleled by any radical unfeelableness of certain emotions, or any radical undoableness of the actions inspired by such emotions. Anything can at all times be felt and acted upon, albeit sometimes with great difficulty and in the teeth of general disapproval. But though individuals can always feel and do whatever their temperament and constitution permit them to feel and do, they cannot think about their experiences except within the frame of reference which, at that particular time and place, has come to seem self-evident. Interpretation is in terms of the prevailing thought-pattern, and this thought-pattern conditions to some extent the expression of urges and emotions, but can never completely inhibit them. For example, a firm belief in eternal damnation can coexist in the believer's mind with the knowledge that he or she is committing mortal sin. In this context let me quote the eminently judicious remarks which Bayle has hidden away in a note on Thomas Sanchez, that learned Jesuit who, in 1592, published a folio on Marriage, which his contemporaries and immediate successors regarded as by far the filthiest book ever written. "We do not know the domestic privacy of the ancient Pagans, as we know those of the countries where auricular confession is practiced; and therefore we cannot tell whether marriage was so brutishly dishonored among the Pagans as it is among the Christians; but at least it is probable that the Infidels did not surpass, in this respect, many persons who believe all the doctrines of the Gospel. They therefore believe what the Scripture teaches us of Heaven and Hell, they believe in purgatory and the other doctrines of the Romish communion; and yet in the midst of this persuasion, you see them plunged into abominable impurities, which are not fit to be named, and which draw down severe reproaches upon the head of such authors as dare to mention

them. I observe this against those who persuade themselves that the corruption of manners proceeds from men's doubting or being ignorant that there is another life after this." In 1592 sexual behavior was evidently very similar to what it is today. The change has been only in the thoughts about that behavior. In early modern times the thoughts of a Havelock Ellis or a Krafft-Ebing would have been unthinkable. But the emotions and actions described by these modern sexologists were just as feelable and doable in an intellectual context of hell-fire as they are in the secularist societies of our own time.

In the paragraphs which follow I shall describe very briefly the frame of reference within which the men of the early seventeenth century did their thinking about human nature. This frame of reference was so ancient and so intimately associated with traditional Christian doctrine that it was universally regarded as a structure of self-evident truths. Today, though still most lamentably ignorant, we know enough to feel quite certain that, in many respects, the older thought-pattern was inadequate to the given facts of experience.

How, we may ask, did this manifest inadequacy of theory affect the behavior of men and women in the ordinary affairs of daily life? The answer would seem to be that, in some instances, the effect was imperceptible, in other cases, great and momentous.

A man can be an excellent practical psychologist and yet be completely ignorant of the current psychological theories. What is even more remarkable is that a man can be well versed in psychological theories which are demonstrably inadequate, and yet remain, thanks to his native insight, an excellent practical psychologist.

On the other hand, a wrong theory of human nature (such as the theory which explains hysteria in terms of diabolic possession) may evoke the worst passions and justify the most fiendish of cruelties. Theory is simultaneously not very important and very important indeed.

What was the theory of human nature, in terms of which Grandier's contemporaries interpreted ordinary behavior and such strange happenings as

those which took place at Loudun? The answers to this question will be given, for the most part, in the words of Robert Burton, whose chapters on the anatomy of the Soul contain a brief and remarkably lucid summary of the philosophy which everyone, before the time of Descartes, took for granted and regarded as practically axiomatic.

"The soul is immortal, created of nothing, and so infused into the child or embryo in his mother's womb, six months after conception; not as the brutes, which are ex traduce (handed on by parent to offspring) and, dying with them, vanish into nothing." The soul is simple in the sense that it cannot be split or disintegrated. In the etymological sense of the word, it is a psychological atom — something which cannot be cut up. But this simple and indivisible soul of man has a three-fold manifestation. It is in some sort a trinity in unity, comprising a vegetal, a sensitive and a rational soul. The vegetal soul is defined as " 'a substantial act of an organical body, by which it is nourished, augmented and begets another like unto itself.' In which definition, three several operations are specified — altrix, auctrix, procreatrix. The first is nutrition, whose object is nourishment, meat, drink and the like; his organ, the liver in sensible creatures, in plants, the root or sap. His object is to turn the nutriment into the substance of the body nourished, which he performs by natural heat. . . . As this nutritive faculty serves to nourish the body, so doth the augmenting faculty (the second operation or power of the vegetal faculty) to the increasing of it in quantity . . . and to make it grow till it comes to his due proportion and perfect shape." The third faculty of the vegetal soul is the procreative — the faculty of reproducing its kind.

Next in order is the sensitive soul, "which is as far beyond the other in dignity as a beast is preferred to a plant, having those vegetal powers included in it. 'Tis defined as an 'Act of an organical body, by which it lives, hath sense, appetite, judgment, breath and motion.' . . . The general organ is the brain, from which principally the sensible operations are derived. The sensible soul is divided into two parts, apprehending or moving. . . . The apprehensive faculty is subdivided into two parts, inward or outward. Outward, as the five senses, of touching,

hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting. . . . Inward are three — common sense, phantasy, memory." Common sense judges, compares and organizes the messages brought to it by the special organs of sense, such as the eye and the ear. Phantasy examines more fully the data of common sense, "and keeps them longer, recalling them to mind again, or making new of his own." Memory takes all that comes to it from phantasy and the common sense and "stores it away in a good register."

In man imagination "is subject and governed by reason, or at least should be; but in brutes it hath no superior, but is ratio brutorum, all the reason they have." The second power of the sensitive soul is the moving faculty, which in turn is "divided into two faculties, the power of appetite, and of moving from place to place."

And finally there is the rational soul, "which is defined by philosophers to be 'the first substantial act of a natural, human, organical body, by which a man lives, perceives and understands, freely doing all things, and with election.' Out of which definition we may gather that this rational soul includes the powers and performs the duties of the two other, which are contained in it, and all three faculties make one soul, which is inorganical of itself, although it be in all parts (of the body), and incorporeal, using their organs and working by them. It is divided into two parts, differing in office only, not in essence: the understanding, which is the rational power apprehending; the will, which is the rational power moving; to which two, all the other rational powers are subject and reduced."

Such was the theory in terms of which our ancestors thought about themselves and tried to explain the facts of human experience and behavior. Because it was very old, and because many of its elements were theological dogmas, or corollaries of dogmas, the theory seemed axiomatically true. But if the theory were true, then certain notions, which today seem obvious to the point of self-evidence, could not be entertained and were for all practical purposes unthinkable. Let us consider a couple of concrete examples.

Here is Miss Beauchamp, a blameless but rather sickly young woman, full of high principles, inhibitions and anxiety. From time to time she plays truant from

herself and behaves like a very naughty and exuberantly healthy child of ten. Questioned under hypnosis, this enfant terrible insists that she is not Miss Beauchamp, but someone else called Sally. After some hours or days, Sally disappears and Miss Beauchamp returns to consciousness — but returns only to her own consciousness, not to Sally's; for she remembers nothing of what was done, in her name and through the agency of her body, while the latter was in control. Sally, on the contrary, knows all that goes on in Miss Beauchamp's mind and makes use of that knowledge to embarrass and torment the other tenant of their shared body. Because he could think of these odd facts in terms of a well-substantiated theory of subconscious mental activity, and because he was acquainted with the techniques of hypnosis, Dr. Morton Prince, the psychiatrist in charge of this famous case, was able to solve Miss Beauchamp's problems and to bring her, for the first time in many years, to a state of physical and mental health.

In certain respects the case of Sœur Jeanne was essentially similar to that of Miss Beauchamp. Periodically she took a holiday from her habitual self, and from being a respectable nun of good family became, for a few hours or days, a savage, blaspheming, utterly shameless virago, who called herself now Asmodeus, now Balaam, now Leviathan. When the Prioress returned to self-consciousness, she had no recollection of what these others had said and done in her absence. Such were the facts. How were they to be explained? Some observers attributed the whole deplorable business to deliberate fraud; others to "melancholy" — a derangement of the humoral equilibrium of the body, resulting in a derangement of the mind. For those who could not, or would not, accept these hypotheses, only one alternative explanation remained — diabolic possession. Given the theory in terms of which they had to think, it was impossible for them to come to any other conclusion. By a definition which was the corollary of a Christian dogma, the "soul" — in other words, the conscious and personal part of the mind — was an atom, simple and indivisible. The modern notion of a split personality was therefore unthinkable. If two or more selves appeared, concurrently or alternately, to occupy the same body, it could

not be because of a disintegration of that not too securely tied bundle of psychophysical elements which we call a person; no, it must be because of a temporary expulsion from the body of the indivisible soul and its temporary replacement by one or more of the innumerable superhuman spirits who (it was a matter of revealed truth) inhabited the universe.

Our second example is that of a hypnotized person — any hypnotized person — in whom the operator has produced a state of catalepsy. The nature of hypnosis and the way in which suggestion acts upon the autonomic nervous system are still imperfectly understood; but at least we know that it is very easy to put certain persons into a trance and that, when they are in this state, some part of their subconscious mind will cause their body to obey the suggestions given by the operator, or sometimes by their own supraliminal selves. At Loudun this cataleptic rigidity, which any competent operator can induce in any good subject, was regarded by the faithful as a work of Satan. Necessarily so; for the nature of current psychological theories was such that the phenomenon must be due either to deliberate cheating, or to a supernatural agency. You might search the writings of Aristotle and Augustine, of Galen and the Arabians; in none of them could you find any hint of what we now call the subconscious mind. For our ancestors there was only the soul or conscious self, on the one hand, and on the other God, the saints and a host of good and evil spirits. Our conception of a vast intermediate world of subconscious mental activity, much more extensive and, in certain respects, more effective than the activity of the conscious self, was unthinkable. The current theory of human nature had left no place for it; consequently, so far as our ancestors were concerned, it did not exist. The phenomena which we now explain in terms of this subconscious activity had either to be denied altogether, or else attributed to the action of nonhuman spirits. Thus, catalepsy was either a humbug or a symptom of diabolic infestation. When he attended an exorcism in the autumn of 1635, young Thomas Killigrew was invited by the friar in charge of the proceedings to feel the nun’s stony limbs — to feel, to confess the power of the Evil One and the yet greater power of the Church Militant, and then, God willing, to be converted

from heresy, as his good friend Walter Montague had been in the preceding year. “I must tell you the truth,” wrote Killigrew in a letter describing the event, “I only felt firm flesh, strong arms and legs held out stiff.” (Note how completely the nuns have ceased to be regarded as human beings with a right to privacy or respect. The good father who performs the exorcisms behaves exactly like the proprietor of a side show at a fair. “Step up, ladies and gentlemen, step up! Seeing is believing, but pinching our fat girl’s legs is the naked truth.” These spouses of Christ have been turned into cabaret performers and circus freaks.) “But others,” Killigrew continues, “affirm that she was all stiff, and heavy as iron; but they had more faith than I, and it seemed that the miracle appeared more visible to them than to me.” How significant is that word “miracle”! If the nuns are not shamming, then the corpselike rigidity of their limbs must be due to supernatural causes. No other explanation is possible.

The coming of Descartes and the general acceptance of what at that time seemed a more “scientific” theory of human nature did not improve matters; indeed, in some respects it caused men’s thinking about themselves to become less realistic than it had been under the older dispensation. Devils passed out of the picture; but along with the devils went any kind of serious consideration of the phenomena once attributed to diabolic agency. The exorcists had at least recognized such facts as trance, catalepsy, split personality and extrasensory perception. The psychologists who came after Descartes were inclined either to dismiss the facts as nonexistent, or to account for them, if they did not permit themselves to be dismissed, as the product of a something called “imagination.” For men of science, “imagination” was almost synonymous with “illusion.” The phenomena attributed to it (such as the cures which Mesmer effected during the magnetic sleep) might safely and properly be ignored. Descartes’s mighty effort to think geometrically about human nature had led, no doubt, to the formulation of some admirably “clear ideas.” But unhappily these clear ideas could be entertained only by those who chose to ignore a whole class of highly significant facts. Pre-Cartesian philosophers took account of these facts and were compelled by their own psychological theories to attribute them to supernatural causes.

Today we are able to accept the facts and to explain them without having recourse to devils. We can think of the mind (as opposed to the "spirit," or "pure ego," or "Atman") as something radically different from the Cartesian and pre-Cartesian soul. The soul of the earlier philosophers was dogmatically defined as simple, indivisible and immortal. For us, it is manifestly a compound, whose identity, in Ribot's words, "is a question of number." This bundle of elements can be disintegrated and, though it probably survives bodily death, it survives in time, as something subject to change and to ultimate dissolution. Immortality belongs not to the psyche but to the spirit, with which, if it so chooses, the psyche may identify itself. According to Descartes, minds have consciousness as their essence; they can interact with the matter in their own body, but not directly with other matter or with other minds. Pre-Cartesian thinkers would probably have agreed with all these propositions except the first. Consciousness, for them, was the essence of the rational soul; but many of the operations of sensitive and vegetal souls were unconscious. Descartes regarded the body as a self-regulating automaton, and therefore had no need to postulate the existence of these subsidiary souls. Between the conscious "I" and what one may call the Physiological Unconscious, we now infer the existence of wide ranges of subconscious mental activity. Moreover, we have to admit, if we accept the evidence for extrasensory perception and psychokinesis, that on the subconscious level minds can and do act directly upon other minds and upon matter outside their respective bodies. The queer happenings which Descartes and his followers chose to ignore, and which his predecessors accepted as facts, but could only explain in terms of diabolic infestation, are now recognized as being due to the natural operations of a mind, whose range, whose powers and whose weaknesses are all far greater than a study of its conscious aspect would lead us to believe.

We see, then, that if the idea of fraud were excluded, the only purely psychological explanation of what was happening at Loudun was an explanation in terms of sorcery and possession. But there were many who never thought of the matter in purely psychological terms. To them it seemed obvious that such

phenomena as were manifested by Sœur Jeanne could be explained in terms of physiology and ought to be treated accordingly. The more Draconian among them prescribed the application to the bare skin of a good birch rod. Tallemant records that the Marquis de Couldray-Montpensier withdrew his two possessed daughters from the hands of the exorcists and "had them well fed and soundly whipped; the devil took his leave immediately." At Loudun itself, during the later stages of the possession, the whip was prescribed with increasing frequency, and Surin records that devils who merely laughed at the rites of the Church were often routed by the discipline.

In many cases old-fashioned whipping was probably just as effective as modern shock treatment, and for the same reasons: namely, that the subconscious mind developed such a fear of the tortures prepared for its body that, rather than undergo them again, it decided to stop behaving as though it were crazy. Up to the opening years of the nineteenth century, shock treatment by whipping was regularly employed in all cases of unequivocal insanity.

In the bonny halls of Bedlam,
Ere I was one-and-twenty,
I had bracelets strong, sweet whips ding-dong,
And prayer and fasting plenty
Now I do sing, "Any food, any feeding,
Feeding, drink or clothing?
Come dame, or maid, be not afraid,
Poor Tom will injure nothing."

Poor Tom was a subject of Queen Elizabeth. But even in the days of George III, two hundred years later, the two houses of Parliament passed a bill authorizing the court physicians to scourge the lunatic king.

For simple neurosis or hysteria, birching was not the invariable treatment. These maladies were caused, according to the medical theories current at the time, by too much black bile, in the wrong place. "Galen," says Robert Burton, "imputeth all to the cold that is black, and thinks that, the spirits being darkened and the substance of the brain cloudy and dark, all the objects thereof appear

terrible, and the mind itself, by these dark, obscure, gross fumes, ascending from black humours, is in continual darkness, fear and sorrow." Averroës scoffs at Galen for his reasons; so does Hercules de Saxonia. But they are "copiously censured and confuted by Aelianus Montaltus, Lodovicus Mercatus, Altomarus, Guianerius, Bright, Laurentius Valesius. Distemperature, they conclude, makes black juice, blackness obscures the spirits, the spirits obscured cause fear and sorrow. Laurentius supposeth these black fumes offend especially the Diaphragma, or midriff, and so, consequently, the mind, which is obscured as the Sun by a cloud. To this opinion of Galen almost all the Greeks and Arabians subscribe, the Latins new and old; as children are affrighted in the dark, so are melancholy men at all times, as having the inward cause with them, and still carrying it about. Which black vapours, whether they proceed from the black blood about the heart, (as Thomas Wright, Jesuit, thinks in his treatise of the passions of the mind) or stomach, spleen, midriff, or all the misaffected parts together, it boots not; they keep the mind in a perpetual dungeon, and oppress it with continual fears, anxieties, sorrows, etc."

The physiological picture is of a kind of smoke or fog arising from unwholesome blood or diseased viscera, and either directly darkening the brain and mind, or else in some way clogging the tubes (for the nerves were regarded as hollow pipes) along which the natural, vital and animal spirits are supposed to flow.

In reading the scientific literature of early modern times one is struck by its strange mingling of the wildest supernaturalism with the crudest, the most naïve kind of materialism. This primitive materialism differs from modern materialism in two important respects. In the first place the "matter" with which the older theory deals is something which does not lend itself (owing to the nature of the descriptive terms employed) to exact measurement. We hear only of heat and cold, dryness and moisture, lightness and heaviness. No attempt is ever made to elucidate the meaning of these qualitative expressions in terms of quantity. In its fine structure the "matter" of our ancestors was nonmeasurable, and

consequently nothing much could ever be done about it. And where nothing can be done, very little can be understood.

The second point of difference is no less important than the first. To us, “matter” reveals itself as a something in perpetual activity — a something, indeed, whose essence is nothing other than activity. All matter is forever doing something, and of all forms of matter the colloids composing living bodies are the most frantically busy — but with a frenzy marvelously integrated, so that the activity of one part of the organism regulates and in turn is regulated by the activities of other parts, in a harmonious dance of energies. For the ancients, and for medieval and early modern thinkers, matter was mere stuff, intrinsically inert, even in the living body where its activities were due exclusively to the workings of the vegetal soul in plants, of the vegetal and sensitive soul in the brutes, and, in man, of that trinity in unity, the vegetal, sensitive and rational soul. Physiological processes were explained not in terms of chemistry, for chemistry as a science was nonexistent; nor in terms of electrical impulses, for nothing was yet known of electricity; nor in terms of cellular activity, for there was no microscope and nobody had ever seen a cell; they were explained (with no trouble at all) in terms of action on inert matter by special faculties of the soul. There was a faculty of growth, for example, a faculty of nutrition, a faculty of secretion — a faculty for any and every process that might be observed. For philosophers it was wonderfully convenient; but when men tried to pass from words to the given facts of nature, they found that the theory of special faculties was of no practical use whatever.

The crudity of the older materialism is clearly expressed in the language of its exponents. Physiological problems are discussed in metaphors drawn from what goes on in the kitchen, the smelter and the privy. There are boilings and simmerings and strainings; there are refinings and extractions; there are putrefactions, miasmic exhalations from the cesspool and their pestilential condensations upstairs, on the piano nobile. In terms such as these, fruitful thinking about the human organism is very difficult. The good doctors were men with a natural gift, who did not permit their learning to interfere too much with

their diagnostic intuitions and their talent for helping nature to perform her miracles of healing. Along with much useless or dangerous nonsense, there is in Burton's huge compilation not a little excellent sense. Most of the nonsense derives from the current scientific theories; most of the sense from the openminded empiricism of shrewd and kindly men who loved their fellows, had a special knack with the sick and trusted in the vis medicatrix Naturae.

For details of the strictly medical treatment of melancholy, whether due to natural or supernatural causes, the reader is referred to Burton's absurd and charming book. For our present purposes it is enough to remark that, during the whole time of the possession, Sœur Jeanne and her fellow nuns were under constant medical supervision. In their case, unfortunately, none of the more sensible methods of treatment described by Burton were ever applied. For them there was no question of a change of air, of diet, of occupation. They were merely bled and purged and made to swallow innumerable pills and draughts. So drastic was this medication that some of the independent physicians who examined them were of the opinion that their disease was aggravated (as so many diseases are still aggravated) by overzealous attempts to bring about a cure. The nuns, they discovered, were being given large and frequent doses of antimony. Perhaps that was all that was wrong with them.

(To appreciate the full historical import of this diagnosis, we must bear in mind that, at the time of the possession, what may be called the Battle of Antimony had been raging for three generations and was still going strong. By the heretical anti-Galenists the metal and its compounds were regarded as miracle drugs, specific for practically everything. Under pressure from the orthodox right wing of the medical profession, the Parlement of Paris had issued an edict prohibiting their use in France. But the law had proved to be unenforceable. Half a century after its passage, Grandier's good friend and Loudun's most famous medical son, Théophraste Renaudot, was zealously proclaiming the virtue of antimony. His younger contemporary, Gui Patin, the author of the famous Letters, was no less violent on the other side. In the light of modern research we can see that Patin was more nearly in the right than

Renaudot and the other anti-Galenists. Certain compounds of antimony are specific in the treatment of the tropical disease known as kala-azar. In most other conditions, the use of the metal or its compounds is hardly worth the risks involved. Medically speaking, there was no justification for such indiscriminate use as was made of the drug during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From the economic point of view, however, the justification was ample. M. Adam and his fellow apothecaries sold Perpetual Pills of metallic antimony. These were swallowed, irritated the mucous membrane as they passed through the intestine, thus acting as a purgative, and could be recovered from the chamber pot, washed and used again, indefinitely. After the first capital outlay, there was no further need for spending money on cathartics. Dr. Patin might fulminate and the Parlement forbid; but for the costive French bourgeois, the appeal of antimony was irresistible. Perpetual Pills were treated as heirlooms and after passing through one generation were passed on to the next.)

It is worth remarking parenthetically that Paracelsus, the greatest of the early anti-Galenists, owed his enthusiasm for antimony to a false analogy. “Just as antimony purifies gold and leaves no slag in it, in the same form and shape it purifies the human body.” The same kind of false analogy between the arts of the metalworker and the alchemist on the one hand and the arts of the doctor and dietician on the other led to the belief that the value of foods increased with their increasing refinement — that white bread was better than brown, that a much-stewed bouillon was superior to the unconcentrated meats and vegetables of which it was composed. It was assumed that “coarse” foods coarsened the people who ate them. “Cheese, milk and oatcakes,” Paracelsus says, “cannot give one a subtle disposition.” It was only with the isolation of the vitamins, a generation ago, that the old false analogies with alchemy ceased to play havoc with our theories of diet.

The existence of a well developed medical treatment of “melancholy” was in no way incompatible with the existence of a widespread belief, even among the doctors, in the reality of possession and diabolic infestation. Some people, writes Burton “laugh at all such stories.” But on the opposite side are “most lawyers,

divines, physicians, philosophers." Ben Jonson, in The Devil is an Ass, has left us a vivid description of the seventeenth-century mind, divided between credulity and skepticism, between a reliance on the supernatural (above all in its less creditable aspects) and a bumptious confidence in the new-found powers of applied science. In the play, Fitzdottrel is introduced as a dabbler in the magic arts, who longs to meet with a devil, because devils know the site of hidden treasures. But to this belief in magic and the power of Satan is conjoined a no less powerful belief in the quasi-rational and pseudoscientific schemes of those fraudulent inventors and company promoters whom our fathers called "projectors." When Fitzdottrel tells his wife that his projector has worked out a plan, which will infallibly make him eighteen million pounds and secure him a dukedom, she shakes her head and tells him not to put too much trust "in these false spirits." "Spirits!" cries Fitzdottrel,

Spirits! O no such thing, wife; wit, mere wit.
This man defies the Devil and all his works.
He does't by engine and devices, he!
He has his winged ploughs that go with sails,
Will plough you forty acres at once! and mills
Will spout you water ten miles off.

However farcically the figure of fun, Fitzdottrel is nonetheless a truly Representative Man. He stands for a whole epoch, whose intellectual life was straddled insecurely between two worlds. That he tried to make the worst of both worlds, instead of the best, is also sadly typical. For the unregenerate, occultism and "projects" are considerably more attractive than pure science and the worship of God in spirit.

In Burton's book, as in the history of the nuns of Loudun, these two worlds coexist and are taken for granted. There is melancholy and there is an approved medical treatment for melancholy. At the same time it is well known that magic and possession are common causes of disease, both of mind and of body. And no wonder! For "not so much as an hair-breadth empty in heaven, earth, or waters, above or under the earth. The air is not so full of flies in summer as it is at all

times of invisible devils; this Paracelsus stiffly maintains, and that they have every one their several Chaos." The number of these spirits must be infinite; "for if that be true that some of our Mathematicians say: if a stone could fall from the starry heaven or eighth sphere, and should pass every hour an hundred miles, it would be 65 years, or more, before it would come to ground, by reason of the great distance of heaven from earth, which contains, as some say, 170 million 803 miles . . . how many such spirits may it contain?" In the circumstances, the truly surprising thing was not the fact of an occasional possession, but the fact that most people could go through life without becoming demoniacs.

II

We have seen that the plausibility of the hypothesis of possession was exactly proportionate to the inadequacy of a physiology without cell structure or chemistry, and of a psychology which took practically no account of mental activity on subconscious levels. Once universal, belief in possession is entertained at the present time only by Roman Catholics and Spiritists. The latter explain certain phenomena of the seance room in terms of the temporary possession of the medium's organism by the surviving psyche of some dead human being. The former deny possession by departed souls, but explain certain cases of mental and physical derangement in terms of possession by devils, certain psychophysical accompaniments of mystical or premystical states in terms of possession by some divine agency.

There is nothing, so far as I can see, self-contradictory in the idea of possession. The notion is not one to be ruled out a priori, on the ground that it is a "a relic of ancient superstition." It should be treated rather as a working hypothesis, which may be cautiously entertained in any case where other forms of explanation are found to be inadequate to the facts. In practice modern exorcists seem to be agreed that most cases of suspected possession are in fact due to hysteria and can best be treated by the standard methods of psychiatry. In a few instances, however, they find evidence of something more than hysteria

and assert that only exorcism and the casting out of the possessing spirit can effect a cure.

Possession of a medium's organism by the discarnate spirit, or "psychic factor," of defunct human beings has been invoked to explain certain phenomena, such as evidential scripts and utterances, for which it would otherwise be difficult to account. The earlier evidence for such possession may be conveniently studied in F. W. H. Myers's Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death, the more recent in Mr. G. N. M. Tyrell's The Personality of Man.

Professor Oesterreich, in his richly documented study of the subject has pointed out that, while belief in diabolic possession sharply declined during the nineteenth century, belief in possession by departed spirits became, during the same period, much more common. Thus, neurotics who, at an earlier epoch, would have attributed their malady to devils, were inclined, after the rise of the Fox Sisters, to lay the blame on the discarnate souls of evil men or women. With the recent advances in technology, the notion of possession has taken a new form. Neurotic patients often complain that they are being influenced, against their will, by some kind of radio messages transmitted by their enemies. The Malicious Animal Magnetism which haunted poor Mrs. Eddy's imagination for so many years has now been transformed into Malicious Electronics.

In the sixteen hundreds there was no radio and very little belief in possession by discarnate spirits. Burton cites the opinion that devils are merely the souls of the malevolent dead, but cites it only to remark that it is an "absurd tenet." For him, possession was a fact, and was exclusively by devils. (For Myers, two and a half centuries later, possession was also a fact, but exclusively by the spirits of the dead.)

Do devils exist? And, if so, were they present in the bodies of Sœur Jeanne and her fellow nuns? As with the notion of possession, I can see nothing intrinsically absurd or self-contradictory in the notion that there may be nonhuman spirits, good, bad and indifferent. Nothing compels us to believe that the only intelligences in the universe are those connected with the bodies of

human beings and the lower animals. If the evidence for clairvoyance, telepathy and prevision is accepted (and it is becoming increasingly difficult to reject it), then we must allow that there are mental processes which are largely independent of space, time and matter. And if this is so, there seems to be no reason for denying a priori that there may be nonhuman intelligences, either completely discarnate, or else associated with cosmic energy in some way of which we are still ignorant. (We are still ignorant, incidentally, of the way in which human minds are associated with that highly organized vortex of cosmic energy known as a body. That some association exists is evident; but how energy gets transformed into mental processes, and how mental processes affect energy, we still have no idea.)

In the Christian religion devils have, until very recent times, played an exceedingly important part — and this from the very beginning. For, as Fr. A. Lefèvre S. J. has remarked, "the devil has but a small place in the Old Testament; his empire is not yet revealed. The New Testament discloses him as chief of the leagued forces of evil." In the current translations of the Lord's Prayer we ask to be delivered from evil. But is it certain that apo tou ponerou is neuter rather than masculine? Does not the very structure of the prayer imply that the word refers to a person? "Lead us not into temptation, but (on the contrary) deliver us from the Evil One, the Tempter."

In theory and by theological definition Christianity is not Manichaeism. For Christians, evil is not a substance, not a real and elementary principle. It is merely a privation of good, a diminution of being in creatures who derive their essential being from God. Satan is not Ahriman under another name, is not an eternal principle of Darkness over against the divine principle of Light. Satan is merely the most considerable among a vast number of individual angels who, at a given moment of time, chose to separate themselves from God. It is only by courtesy that we call him the Evil One. There are many evil ones, of whom Satan is the Chief Executive. Devils are persons, and each one has his character, his temperament, his humors, crotchets and idiosyncrasies. There are power-loving devils, lustful devils, covetous devils, proud and conceited devils.

Moreover, some devils are much more important than others; for they retain, even in hell, the positions they occupied in the heavenly hierarchy, before their fall. Those who in heaven were merely angels or archangels are lower-class devils of small account. Those who were once Dominions or Principalities or Powers, now constitute the haute bourgeoisie of hell. The quondam Cherubim and Seraphim are an aristocracy, whose power is very great and whose physical presence (according to the information supplied to Father Surin by Asmodeus) can make itself felt within a circle thirty leagues in diameter. At least one seventeenth-century theologian, Father Ludovico Sinistrari, maintained that human beings could be possessed, or at least obsessed, not merely by devils, but also, and more frequently, by nonmalignant spiritual entities — the fauns, nymphs and satyrs of the ancients, the hobgoblins of the European peasantry, the poltergeists of modern psychical researchers. According to Sinistrari, most incubi and succubi were merely natural phenomena, no worse and no better than buttercups, say, or grasshoppers. At Loudun, unfortunately, this kindly theory was never broached. The insanely libidinous imaginings of the nuns were all attributed to Satan and his messengers.

Theologians, I repeat, have carefully guarded against Manichaean dualism; but, at all times, all too many Christians have behaved as though the devil were a First Principle, on the same footing as God. They have paid more attention to evil and the problem of its eradications than to good and the methods by which individual goodness may be deepened, and the sum of goodness increased. The effects which follow too constant and intense a concentration upon evil are always disastrous. Those who crusade, not for God in themselves, but against the devil in others, never succeed in making the world better, but leave it either as it was, or sometimes even perceptibly worse than it was, before the crusade began. By thinking primarily of evil we tend, however excellent our intentions, to create occasions for evil to manifest itself.

Though frequently Manichaean in practice, Christianity was never Manichaean in its dogmas. In this respect it differs from our modern idolatries of communism and nationalism, which are Manichaean not only in action, but also

in creed and theory. Today it is everywhere self-evident that we are on the side of Light, they on the side of Darkness. And being on the side of Darkness, they deserve to be punished and must be liquidated (since our divinity justifies everything) by the most fiendish means at our disposal. By idolatrously worshiping ourselves as Ormuzd, and by regarding the other fellow as Ahriman, the Principle of Evil, we of the twentieth century are doing our best to guarantee the triumph of diabolism in our time. And on a very small stage, this precisely was what the exorcists were doing at Loudun. By idolatrously identifying God with the political interests of their sect, by concentrating their thoughts and their efforts on the powers of evil, they were doing their best to guarantee the triumph (local, fortunately, and temporary) of that Satan, against whom they were supposed to be fighting.

For our present purposes it is unnecessary either to affirm or deny the existence of nonhuman intelligences capable of possessing the bodies of men and women. The only question we have to ask ourselves is this: granted the existence of such intelligences, is there any reason to believe that they were responsible for what happened to the Ursulines of Loudun? Modern Catholic historians are unanimously agreed that Grandier was innocent of the crime for which he was tried and condemned; but some of them — they are cited by the Abbé Bremond in his Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France — are still convinced that the nuns were the victims of a genuine possession. How such an opinion can be held by anyone who has read the relevant documents, and who has even the slightest knowledge of abnormal psychology, I confess myself unable to understand. There is nothing in the behavior of the nuns which cannot be paralleled in the many cases of hysteria recorded, and successfully treated, by modern psychiatrists. And there is no evidence that any of the nuns ever manifested any of the paranormal powers which, according to the doctrines of the Roman Church, are the hallmarks of a genuine diabolic invasion.

How is true possession to be distinguished from fraud or the symptoms of disease? The Church prescribes four tests — the language test, the test of preternatural physical strength, the test of levitation and the test of clairvoyance

and prevision. If a person can on occasion understand, or better still, speak a language, of which, in his normal state, he is completely ignorant; if he can manifest the physical miracle of levitation or perform unaccountable feats of strength, and if he can correctly predict the future or describe events taking place at a distance — then that person may be presumed to be possessed by devils. (Alternatively, he may be presumed to be the recipient of extraordinary graces; for in many instances divine and infernal miracles are, most unhappily, identical. The levitation of saintly ecstatics is distinguishable from the levitation of ecstatic demoniacs only in virtue of the moral antecedents and consequences of the event. These moral antecedents and consequences are often hard to assess, and it has sometimes happened that even the holiest persons have been suspected of producing their ESP phenomena and their PK effects by diabolic means.)

Such are the official and time-hallowed criteria of diabolic possession. For us, these ESP and PK phenomena prove only that the old notion of a completely watertight soul is untenable. Below and beyond the conscious self lie vast ranges of subconscious activity, some worse than the ego and some better. Some stupider and some, in certain respects, far more intelligent. At its fringes this subconscious self overlaps and merges with not-self, with the psychic medium in which all selves bathe and through which they can directly communicate with one another and with cosmic Mind. And somewhere on these subconscious levels individual minds make contact with energy, and make contact with it not merely in their own body, but also (if the anecdotic and statistical evidence may be trusted) outside their own body. The older psychology, as we have seen, was compelled by its own dogmatic definitions to ignore subconscious mental activity; in order to account for the observed facts, it had to postulate the devil.

For the moment, let us place ourselves in the intellectual position of the exorcists and their contemporaries. Accepting as valid the Church’s criteria of possession, let us examine the evidence on which the nuns were pronounced to be demoniacs and the parson, a sorcerer. We will begin with the test which, because it was the easiest of application, was in practice the most frequently applied — the test of language.

For all the Christians of an earlier day, “speaking with tongues” was an extraordinary grace, a gratuitous gift of the Holy Spirit. But it was also (such is the strangely equivocal nature of the universe) a sure symptom of possession by devils. In the great majority of cases, glossolalia is not a clear and unmistakable speaking of some hitherto unknown tongue. It is a more or less articulate, more or less systematic gibberish, exhibiting certain resemblances to some form of traditional speech and consequently interpretable, by listeners of good will, as a rather obscure utterance in some language with which they happen to be familiar. In the cases where persons in a state of trance have shown an unequivocal knowledge of some language of which they were consciously ignorant, investigation has generally revealed the fact that they had spoken the language during childhood and subsequently forgotten it, or that they had heard it spoken and, without understanding the meaning of the words had unconsciously familiarized themselves with their sound. For the rest there is, in the words of F. W. H. Myers, “little evidence of the acquisition — telepathy apart — of any actual mass of fresh knowledge, such as a new language, or a stage of mathematical knowledge unreached before.” In the light of what we know, through systematic psychical research, of trance mediumship and automatic writing, it seems questionable whether any alleged demoniac ever passed the test of language in a completely unambiguous and decided manner. What is certain is that the recorded cases of complete failure are very numerous, while the recorded successes are mostly partial and rather unconvincing. Some of the ecclesiastical investigators of possession applied the language test in very ingenious and effective ways. In 1598, for example, Marthe Brossier made a great name for herself by exhibiting the symptoms of possession. One of these symptoms — a thoroughly traditional and orthodox symptom — consisted in going into convulsions every time a prayer or an exorcism was read over her. (Devils hate God and the Church; consequently they tend to fly into a rage every time they hear the hallowed words of the Bible or the prayer book.) To test Marthe’s paranormal knowledge of Latin, the Bishop of Orléans opened his Petronius and solemnly intoned the somewhat unedifying story of the Matron of

Ephesus. The effect was magical. Before the first sonorous sentence had been completed, Marthe was rolling on the floor, cursing the Bishop for what he was making her suffer by his reading of the Sacred Word. It is worth remarking that, far from putting an end to Marthe's career as a demoniac, this incident actually helped her to go forward to fresh triumphs. Fleeing from the Bishop, she put herself under the protection of the Capuchins, who proclaimed that she had been unjustly persecuted and made use of her to draw enormous crowds to their exorcisms.

The Petronius test was never, so far as I know, applied to the Ursulines of Loudun. The nearest approach to such a test was made by a visiting nobleman who handed the exorcist a box in which, so he whispered, there were some exceedingly holy relics. The box was applied to the head of one of the nuns, who immediately exhibited all the symptoms of intense pain and threw a fit. Much delighted, the good friar returned the box to its owner, who thereupon opened it and revealed that, except for a few cinders, it was completely empty. "Ah, my lord," cried the exorcist, "what sort of a trick have you played upon us." "Reverend Father," answered the nobleman, "what sort of a trick have you been playing upon us?"

At Loudun, simple language tests were frequently tried, but always without success. Here is the account of an incident which de Nion, who was a firm believer in the reality of the nuns' possession, regarded as convincingly miraculous. Speaking in Greek, the Bishop of Nîmes orders Sister Claire to bring him her beads and say an Ave Maria. Sister Claire responds by bringing first a pin and then some aniseed. Being urged to obey, she says, "I see you want something else," and finally brings the beads and offers to say an Ave.

In most cases the miracle was even less astounding. All the nuns who knew no Latin were possessed by devils who also knew no Latin. To account for this strange fact, one of the Franciscan exorcists explained in a sermon that there are uneducated devils as well as educated ones. The only educated devils at Loudun were those who had invaded the Prioress. But even Jeanne's devils were not conspicuously learned. Here is part of the procès-verbal of the exorcism

performed before M. de Cerisay on November 24, 1632. “M. Barré holds up the Host and asks the devil, ‘Quem adoras?’ Answer: ‘Jesus Christus.’ Whereupon M. Daniel Drouyn, Assessor of the Provost’s Office, said in a rather loud voice, ‘This devil is not congruous.’ The exorcist then changed his question to, ‘Quis est iste quem adoras?’ She answered, ‘Jesu Christe.’ Upon which several persons remarked, ‘What bad Latin!’ But the exorcist retorted that she had said, ‘Adoro te, Jesu Christe.’ Afterward a little nun came in, roaring with laughter and repeating, ‘Grandier, Grandier!’ Then the lay sister, Caire, entered the room neighing like a horse.”

Poor Jeanne! She had never learnt enough Latin to understand all this nonsense about nominatives and accusatives and vocatives. Jesus Christus, Jesu Christe — she had given them everything she could remember; and still they said it was bad Latin!

M. de Cerisay, meanwhile, had declared that he would willingly believe in the possibility of possession, “if the said Superior would answer categorically two or three of his interrogations.” But when the questions were asked, there was no reply. Completely floored, Sœur Jeanne had to take refuge in a convulsion and a little howling.

On the day following this very unconvincing demonstration, Barré went to de Cerisay and protested that his actions were pure, and without passion or evil intentions. “Placing the ciborium on his head, he prayed that it might confound him, if he had made use of any malpractices, suggestions or persuasions in regard to the nuns in all this affair. When he had finished the Prior of the Carmelites stepped forward and made similar protestations and imprecations; he also held the holy ciborium on his head and prayed that the maledictions of Dathan and Abiram might fall upon him, if he had sinned or been at fault in this affair.” Barré and the Prior were probably fanatical enough to be sincerely blind to the nature of their actions, and it was, no doubt, with a clear conscience that they swore these enormous oaths. Canon Mignon, we note, thought it wiser to put nothing on his head and to call down no thunderbolts.

Among the distinguished British tourists, who visited Loudun during the years of the possession, was young John Maitland, afterward Duke of Lauderdale. Maitland's father had told him of a Scottish peasant woman, through whose mouth a demon had corrected the bad Latin of a Presbyterian minister, and the young man had consequently grown up with an a priori belief in possession. In the hope of confirming this belief by direct observation of demoniacs, Maitland undertook two continental journeys, one to Antwerp, the other to Loudun. In both cases, alas, he was disappointed. At Antwerp, "I saw only some great Holland wenches hear exorcism patiently and belch most abominably." At Loudun, matters were a little livelier, but no more evidential. "When I had seen exorcising enough of three or four of them in the chapel, and could hear nothing but wanton wenches singing bawdy songs in French, I began to suspect a fourbe." He complained to a Jesuit, who commended his "holy curiosity" in coming to Loudun, and told him to go that evening to the parish church, where he would be amply satisfied. "In the parish church I saw a great many people gazing and a wench pretty well taught to play tricks, yet nothing so much as I have seen twenty tumblers or rope dancers do. Back I came to the nuns' chapel, where I saw the Jesuits still hard at work, at several altars, and one poor Capuchin, who was an object of pity, for he was possessed by a melancholy fancy that devils were running about his head, and was constantly applying relics. I saw the Mother Superior exorcised, and saw the hand, on which they would have made me believe the names Jesus, Maria, Joseph, were written by miracle, (but it was apparent to me that it was done with aquafortis); then my patience was quite spent, and I went to a Jesuit and told him my mind fully. He still maintained a real possession, and I desired, for a trial, to speak a strange language. He asked, 'What language?' I told him, 'I would not tell; but neither he nor all these devils should understand me.' [Presumably it was the Gaelic of his native Scotland that Maitland had in mind.] He asked me if I would be converted upon the trial (for he had discovered I was no papist). I told him, 'That was not the question, nor could all the devils in hell pervert me; but the question was, if that was a real possession, and if any could understand me, I would

confess it under my hand.' His answer was, 'These devils have not traveled,' and this I replied to with loud laughter."

According to the Franciscan, these devils were uneducated; according to the Jesuit, they had never traveled. Such explanations of their inability to understand foreign languages seemed a little lame, and for the benefit of those who were unwilling to accept them, the nuns and their exorcists added a couple of new and, so they hoped, more cogent explanations. If the devils could not speak Greek or Hebrew, it was because the pact they had made with Grandier included a special clause to the effect that in no circumstances would they speak Greek or Hebrew. And if that was not enough, then there was the final, the clinching explanation, that it was not God's will that these particular devils should speak with tongues. Deus non vult — or as Sister Jane was apt to say, in her pidgin Latin, Deus non volo. On the conscious level, the blunder was doubtless attributable to mere ignorance. But in an obscure way our ignorances are often voluntary. On the subliminal level, that Deus non volo, that "I, God, do not wish," may very well have expressed the sentiments of Jeanne's profounder ego.

The tests for clairvoyance seem to have been as uniformly unsuccessful as the language tests. De Cerisay, for example, arranged with Grandier that the latter should spend the day at the house of one of his colleagues; then went to the convent and, in the course of the exorcism, asked the Superior to say where, at that moment, the parson was. Without hesitation, Sœur Jeanne answered that he was in the great hall of the castle with M. d'Armagnac.

On another occasion one of Jeanne's devils affirmed that he had had to take a brief trip to Paris in order to escort the soul of a newly departed procureur du Parlement, called M. Proust, to the infernal regions. Inquiry revealed that there had never been a procureur called Proust and that no procureur had died on the day specified.

During Grandier's trial another of the Prioress's devils swore on the sacraments that Grandier's books of magic were stored in the house of Madeleine de Brou. The house was searched. There were no books of magic —

but at least Madeleine had been well frightened, humiliated and insulted, which was all that really interested the Mother Superior.

In his accounts of the possession Surin admits that the nuns often failed to pass the ESP tests devised by examining magistrates, or arranged for the edification and amusement of distinguished tourists. In consequence of these failures many members of his own order refused to believe that the nuns were suffering from anything more supernatural than melancholy and furor uterinus. Surin points out that these skeptics among his colleagues had never visited Loudun for more than a few days at a time. But like the spirit of God, the spirit of evil bloweth where and when it listeth. To be certain of seeing it blow, one had to be on the spot, day and night, for months at a stretch. Speaking as one of the resident exorcists, Surin affirms that Sœur Jeanne repeatedly read his thoughts before he uttered them. That a highly sensitive hysteric, such as Sœur Jeanne, could have lived nearly three years in the closest intimacy with a highly sensitive spiritual director, such as Father Surin, and not have developed some degree of telepathic rapport with him would be indeed surprising. Dr. Ehrenwald and others have pointed out that this kind of rapport between doctor and patient is sometimes established in the course of psychoanalytic treatment. The relationship between demoniac and exorcist is probably even more intimate than that between psychiatrist and neurotic. And in this particular case, let us remember, the exorcist was obsessed by the same devils as had invaded his penitent.

Surin, then, was fully convinced that the Prioress could, on occasion, successfully read the thoughts of those around her. But by dogmatic definition anyone who could read another’s thoughts was possessed by a devil — or alternatively was the recipient of an extraordinary grace. The notion that ESP might be a natural faculty, latent in all minds and manifest in a few, never seems, for a single instant, to have entered his head, or, for that matter, the head of any of his contemporaries or predecessors. Either the phenomena of telepathy and clairvoyance did not exist, or they were the work of spirits, whom one might presume, unless the thought-reader were manifestly a saint, to be devils. Surin

deviated from strict orthodoxy in only one point: he believed that devils could read minds directly, whereas the most authoritative theologians were of the opinion that they could do so only indirectly, by inference from the bodily changes accompanying thought.

In the Malleus Maleficarum, it is asserted, on the best possible authority, that devils cannot possess the will and the understanding, but only the body and such mental faculties as are most closely allied to the body. In many cases devils do not even possess the whole of the demoniac's body, but only a small part of it — a single organ, one or two muscle groups, or bones. Pillet de la Mesnardière, one of Richelieu's personal physicians, has left us a list of the names and local habitations of all the devils who took part in the possessions of Loudun. Leviathan, he tells us, occupied the center of the Prioress's forehead; Beherit was lodged in her stomach; Balaam under the second rib on the right side; Isacaaron under the last rib on the left. Eazaz and Caron lived respectively under the heart and in the center of the forehead of Sister Louise of Jesus. Sister Agnes de la Motte-Baracé had Asmodeus under the heart and Beherit in the orifice of the stomach. Sister Claire de Sazilly harbored seven devils in her body — Zabulon in the forehead, Nephthali in the right arm; Sans Fin, alias Grandier of the Dominations, under the second rib on the right; Elymi, to one side of the stomach; the Enemy of the Virgin, in the neck; Verrine in the left temple and Concupiscence, of the Order of Cherubim, in the left rib. Sister Seraphica had a bewitchment of the stomach, consisting of a drop of water guarded by Baruch or, in his absence, by Carreau. Sister Anne d'Escoubleau had a magic barberry leaf in her stomach under the care of Elymi, who simultaneously watched over the purple damson in the stomach of her sister. Among the lay demoniacs Elizabeth Blanchard had a devil under each armpit, with another called Coal of Impurity in her left buttock. Yet others were lodged under the navel, below the heart and under the left pap. Four demons occupied the body of Françoise Filatreau — Ginnillion in the forebrain; Jabel, a wanderer through every part of the organism; Buffetison below the navel; and Dog's Tail, of the Order of Archangels, in the stomach.

From their many mansions within the victim's body the devils sallied forth, one at a time, to work upon the humors, the spirits, the senses and the phantasy. In this way they could influence the mind, even though they were unable to possess it. The will is free, and only God can look into the understanding. From this it followed that a possessed person could not directly read another's mind. If devils sometimes seemed to have ESP, it was because they were observant and clever, and could therefore infer a man's secret thoughts from his overt behavior.

At Loudun, ESP phenomena may have occurred (Surin at least was convinced of the fact). But if they did occur, they occurred spontaneously, and never in the test situations devised by the investigating lawyers and physicians. But the Church taught that devils could be compelled by the exorcist to do his bidding. If, when duly constrained, the demoniacs failed to demonstrate ESP under test conditions, then it followed, according to the rules of the theological and legal games, that they were not possessed. Unfortunately for Grandier and, indeed, for everyone else concerned, the games in this case were not played according to the rules.

From the mental criteria of possession we now pass to the physical. In regard to levitation, Sister Jane's devils had indicated at an early stage of the proceedings that, in their pact with Grandier, there was an article which specifically barred all supernatural floatings. And anyhow those who longed to see such marvels were displaying too much curiosity, nimia curiositas, a thing which Deus very definitely non volo. And yet though she herself had never professed to be levitated, some of her supporters confidently asserted, with M. de Nion, that on several occasions "the Mother Superior was carried off her feet and suspended in the air at a height of twenty-four inches." De Nion was an honest man, who probably believed what he said. Which only shows how extremely cautious one must always be in the matter of believing believers.

Some of the other nuns were less prudent than their Superior. Early in May, 1634, the devil Eazaz promised that he would raise Sister Louise of Jesus three feet into the air. Not to be outdone, Cerberus offered to do the same for Sister Catherine of the Presentation. Alas, neither of the young ladies succeeded in

getting off the ground. A little later, Beherit, who was lodged in the pit of Sister Agnes de la Motte-Baracé's stomach, swore that he would cause Laubardemont's skull cap to leave his head and fly up to the roof of the chapel. A crowd assembled to see the miracle. It did not take place. After that, all requests for levitation were met with a polite refusal.

Tests for preternatural strength were carried out by Dr. Mark Duncan, the Scottish physician who was the Principal of the Protestant College at Saumur. Grasping the wrists of one of the demoniacs, he found it easy to prevent her from striking him or from breaking out of his control. After this humiliating display of diabolical weakness, the exorcists confined themselves to inviting unbelievers to stick their fingers in the good sisters' mouths, and see if the devil would bite them. When Duncan and the others declined the invitation, it was held by all right-thinking people to be an acknowledgment of the reality of the possession.

From all this it must be evident that if, as the Roman Church maintained, ESP phenomena and PK effects are the hallmark of diabolic possession (or, alternatively, are extraordinary graces), then the Ursulines of Loudun were merely hysterics who had fallen into the hands, not of the fiend, not of the living God, but of a crew of exorcists, all superstitious, all hungry for publicity, and some deliberately dishonest and consciously malevolent.

In the absence of any evidence for ESP or PK, the exorcists and their supporters were compelled to fall back on even less convincing arguments. The nuns, they asserted, must be possessed by devils; for how, otherwise, could one account for the shamelessness of their actions, the smut and irreligion of their conversation? "In what school of rakes and atheists," asks Father Tranquille, "have they learned to spew forth such blasphemies and obscenities?" And with a touch almost of boastfulness, de Nion assures us that the good sisters "made use of expressions so filthy as to shame the most debauched of men, while their acts, both in exposing themselves and in inviting lewd behavior from those present, would have astounded the inhabitants of the lowest brothel in the country." As for their oaths and blasphemies — these were "so unheard of that they could not have suggested themselves to a merely human mind."

How touchingly ingenuous this is! Alas, there is no horror which cannot suggest itself to human minds. “We know what we are,” says Ophelia, “but we know not what we may be.” Practically all of us are capable of practically anything. And this is true even of persons who have been brought up in the practice of the most austere morality. What is called “induction” is not confined to the lower levels of the brain and nervous system. It also takes place in the cortex, and is the physical basis of that ambivalence of sentiment which is so striking a feature of man’s psychological life. Every positive begets its corresponding negative. The sight of something red is followed by a green afterimage. The opposing muscle groups involved in any action automatically bring one another into play. And on a higher level we find such things as a hatred that accompanies love, a derision begotten by respect and awe. In a word, the inductive process is ubiquitously active. Sister Jane and her fellow nuns had had religion and chastity drummed into them from childhood. By induction, these lessons had called into existence, within the brain and its associated mind, a psychophysical center, from which there emanated contradictory lessons in irreligion and obscenity. (Every collection of spiritual letters abounds in references to those frightful temptations against the faith and against chastity, to which the seekers after perfection are peculiarly subject. Good directors point out that such temptations are normal and almost inevitable features of the spiritual life and must not be permitted to cause undue distress.) At ordinary times these negative thoughts and feelings were repressed or, if they rose into consciousness, were by an effort of will denied any outlet in speech or action. Weakened by psychosomatic disease, made frantic by her indulgence in forbidden and unrealizable phantasies, the Prioress lost all power to control these undesirable results of the inductive process. Hysterical behavior is infectious, and her example was followed by the other nuns. Soon the whole convent was throwing fits, blaspheming and talking smut. For the sake of a publicity which was thought to be good for their respective Orders and the Church at large, or with the deliberate intention of using the nuns as instruments for the destruction of Grandier, the exorcists did everything in their power to foster and increase the

scandal. The nuns were forced to perform their antics in public, were encouraged to blaspheme for distinguished visitors and to tickle the groundlings with displays of extravagant immodesty. We have already seen that, at the beginning of her malady, the Prioress did not believe herself to be possessed. It was only after her confessor and the other exorcists had repeatedly assured her that she was full of devils that Sister Jane came at last to be convinced that she was a demoniac and that her business, henceforth, was to behave as such. And the same was true of some at least of the other nuns. From a pamphlet published in 1634 we learn that Sister Agnes had frequently remarked, during exorcism, that she was not possessed, but that the friars had said she was and had constrained her to undergo exorcism. And "on the preceding twenty-sixth of June, the exorcist having by mistake let fall some burning sulphur on Sister Claire's lip, the poor girl burst into tears, saying that, 'Since she had been told she was possessed, she was ready to believe it, but that she did not on that account deserve to be treated in this way.' " The work begun spontaneously by hysteria was completed by the suggestions of Mignon, Barré, Tranquille and the rest. All this was clearly understood at the time. "Granted that there is no cheat in the matter," wrote the author of the anonymous pamphlet cited above, "does it follow that the nuns are possessed? May it not be that, in their folly and mistaken imagination, they believe themselves to be possessed, when in fact they are not?" This, continues our author, can happen to nuns in three ways. First, as a result of fasts, watchings and meditations on hell and Satan. Second, in consequence of some remark made by their confessor — something which makes them think they are being tempted by devils. "And thirdly, the confessor, seeing them act strangely, may imagine in his ignorance that they are possessed or bewitched, and may afterward persuade them of the fact by the influence he exercises over their minds." In the present case the mistaken belief in possession was due to the third of these causes. Like the mercurial and antimonial poisonings of earlier days, like the sulfa poisoning and serum-fevers of the present, the Loudun epidemic was an "iatrogenic disease," produced and fostered by the very physicians who were supposed to be restoring the patients to

health. The guilt of the exorcists seems the more enormous when we remember that their proceedings were in direct violation of the rules laid down by the Church. According to these rules, exorcisms were to be performed in private, the demons were not to be allowed to express their opinions, they were never to be believed, they were consistently to be treated with contempt. At Loudun, the nuns were exhibited to enormous crowds, their demons were encouraged to hold forth on every subject from sex to transubstantiation, their statements were accepted as gospel truth and they were treated as distinguished visitors from the next world, whose utterances had the authority almost of the Bible. If they blasphemed and talked bawdy — well, that was just their pretty way. And anyhow bawdry and blasphemy were box office. The faithful fairly lapped them up and came back, in their thousands, for more.

Supernatural blasphemy, more than human bawdry — and if these were not sufficient proofs of diabolic possession, what about the nuns' contortions? what about their exploits in the acrobatic field? Levitation had quickly been ruled out; but if the good sisters never rose into the air, they at least performed the most amazing feats on the floor. Sometimes, says de Nion, "they passed the left foot over the shoulder to the cheek. They also passed their feet over the head, until the big toes touched the nose. Others again were able to stretch their legs so far to the left and right that they sat on the ground, without any space being visible between their bodies and the floor. One, the Mother Superior, stretched her legs to such an extraordinary extent that, from toe to toe, the distance was seven feet, though she herself was but four feet high." Reading such accounts of the nuns' performances, one is forced to the conclusion that, as well as naturaliter Christiana, the feminine soul is naturaliter Drum-Majoretta. So far as the Eternal Feminine is concerned, a taste for acrobacy and exhibitionism would seem to be built in, only awaiting a favorable opportunity to manifest itself in handsprings and back somersaults. In the case of cloistered contemplatives, such opportunities are not of frequent occurrence. It took seven devils and Canon Mignon to create the circumstances in which, at long last, it became possible for Sister Jane to do the splits.

That the nuns found a deep satisfaction in their gymnastics is proved by de Nion's statement that, though for months at a stretch they were "tortured by the devils twice a day," their health in no way suffered. On the contrary, "those who were somewhat delicate seemed healthier than before the possession." The latent drum majorettes, the cabaret dancers in posse had been permitted to come to the surface and, for the first time, these poor girls without a vocation for prayer were truly happy.

Alas, their happiness was not unmitigated. They had their lucid intervals. They were aware, from time to time, of what was being done to them, of what they themselves were doing to the wretched man, with whom they had all frantically imagined themselves to be in love. We have seen that, as early as June 26th, Sister Claire had been complaining of the manner in which the exorcists were treating her. On July 3rd, in the chapel of the castle, she suddenly burst into tears and, between her sobs, declared that everything she had said about Grandier, during the preceding weeks, was a tissue of lies and calumnies, and that she had acted throughout under orders from Father Lactance, Canon Mignon and the Carmelites. Four days later, in a yet wilder passion of remorse and rebellion, she tried to run away, but was caught as she left the church and brought back, struggling and weeping, to the good fathers. Emboldened by her example, Sister Agnes (that beau petit diable, whom Killigrew was to see, more than a year later, still groveling at the feet of her Capuchin) appealed to the spectators, who had come to see her show those now familiar legs of hers, begging with tears in her eyes to be delivered from her horrible captivity among the exorcists. But the exorcists always had the last word. Sister Agnes's entreaties, Sister Claire's attempt at flight, her retractations and qualms of conscience — these, it was only too obvious, were the work of Grandier's lord and protector, the devil. If a nun withdrew what she had said against the parson, that was proof positive that Satan was speaking through her mouth and that what she had originally affirmed was the indubitable truth.

It was in the case of the Prioress that this argument was used with the greatest effect. One of the judges wrote a brief summary of the counts on which Grandier

was condemned. In the sixth paragraph of this document we read what follows. “Of all the accidents by which the good sisters were tormented, none seems stranger than that which befell the Mother Superior. The day after she gave her evidence, while M. de Laubardemont was taking the deposition of another nun, the Prioress appeared in the convent yard, dressed only in her chemise, and stood there for the space of two hours, in the pouring rain, bareheaded, a rope round her neck, a candle in her hand. When the parlor door was opened, she rushed forward, fell on her knees before M. de Laubardemont and declared that she had come to make amends for the offense she had committed in accusing the innocent Grandier. After which, having retired, she fastened the rope to a tree in the garden and would have hanged herself if the other sisters had not come running to the rescue.”

Another man might have supposed that the Prioress had told a pack of lies and was suffering the well-deserved agonies of remorse. Not so M. de Laubardemont. To him it was manifest that this show of contrition had been put on by Balaam or Leviathan, constrained thereto by the spells of the magician. So far from exculpating the parson, Sœur Jeanne’s confession and attempted suicide made it more certain than ever that he was guilty.

It was no good. From the prison they had built for themselves — the prison of obscene phantasies now objectified as facts, of deliberate lies now treated as revealed truths — the nuns would never be able to escape. The Cardinal had now gone so far that he could not afford to let them repent. And could they themselves have afforded to persist in that repentance? By retracting what they had said about Grandier they would condemn themselves, not merely in this world but also in the next. On second thought, they all decided to believe their exorcists. The good fathers assured them that what felt so horribly like remorse was only a diabolic illusion; that what looked in retrospect like the most monstrous of lies was actually a truth, and a truth so wholesome, so Catholic, that the Church was ready to guarantee both its orthodoxy and its correspondence with the facts. They listened, they suffered themselves to be persuaded. And when it became impossible to go on pretending to believe this

abominable nonsense, they took refuge in delirium. Horizontally, on the level of everyday reality, there was no escape from their prison. And as for upward self-transcendence — there was no question, in the midst of all this fiendish preoccupation with fiends, of lifting up the soul to God. But downward the road was still wide open. And downward they went, again and again — sometimes voluntarily, in a desperate effort to escape from the knowledge of their guilt and humiliation; sometimes, when their madness and the suggestions of the exorcists were too much for them, against their will and in spite of themselves. Down into convulsions; down into swinish squalor or maniacal rage. Down, far down, below the level of personality, into that subhuman world, in which it seemed natural for an aristocrat to play tricks for the amusement of the mob, for a nun to blaspheme and strike indecent postures and shout unmentionable words. And then down, still further, down into stupor, down into catalepsy, down into the ultimate bliss of total unconsciousness, of absolute and complete oblivion.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"DULY CONSTRAINED, THE devil is bound to tell the truth." Granted this major premise, there was literally nothing which could not be made to follow. Thus, M. de Laubardemont disliked the Huguenots. Seventeen devil-infested Ursulines stood ready to swear on the Blessed Sacrament that the Huguenots were Satan's friends and faithful servants. This being the case, the Commissioner felt himself fully justified in disregarding the Edict of Nantes. The Calvinists of Loudun were first deprived of their cemetery. Let them bury the carcasses of their dead somewhere else. Then came the turn of the Protestant College. The school's commodious buildings were confiscated and handed over to the Ursulines. In their rented convent there had been no room for the crowds of pious sightseers who thronged the city. Now at last the good sisters could be exorcised with all the publicity they deserved and without having to traipse out in all weathers to Sainte-Croix or the Eglise du Château.

Hardly less detestable than the Huguenots were those bad Catholics who obstinately refused to believe in Grandier's guilt, in the reality of the possession and in the absolute orthodoxy of the Capuchins' new doctrine. Lactance and Tranquille fulminated against them from the pulpit. These people, they bawled, were no better than heretics; their doubt was a mortal sin and they were already as good as damned. Mesmin and Trincant, meanwhile, went about accusing the skeptics of disloyalty to the King and (yet worse) conspiracy against His Eminence. And through the mouths of Mignon's nuns and the Carmelites' lay hysterics, a score of devils announced that they were all magicians who had trafficked with Satan. From some of M. Barré's demoniacs at Chinon came word that even the irreproachable Bailli, M. de Cerisay, was a dabbler in the Black Art. Another demoniac denounced two priests, Fathers Buron and Frogier, for attempted rape. On the accusation of the Prioress, Madeleine de Brou was

charged with witchcraft, arrested and imprisoned. Thanks to their wealth and high connections, her relatives managed to get her released on bail. But after Grandier's trial was over, Madeleine was rearrested. An appeal to Messieurs des Grands-Jours (the judges of the peripatetic Court of Appeal, which traveled through the kingdom, looking into scandals and miscarriages of justice) brought an injunction against Laubardemont. The Commissioner retorted with an injunction against the appellant. Fortunately for Madeleine, the Cardinal did not think her important enough to justify a quarrel with the judiciary. Laubardemont was instructed to drop the case, and the Prioress had to forego the pleasures of revenge. As for poor Madeleine, she did what her lover had dissuaded her from doing after her mother's death — took the veil and disappeared forever into a convent.

Other accusations, meanwhile, were flying as thick as dust on the wind. Now it was the local debutantes who were singled out for attack. In her playful way, Sister Agnes would declare that nowhere in the world was there so much unchastity as at Loudun. Sister Claire would name names and specify sins. Sister Louise and Sister Jane would add that all the girls were budding witches, and the proceedings would end with the usual indecent postures, filthy language and shrieks of maniacal laughter.

On other occasions respectable gentlemen were accused of having attended the Sabbath and kissed the devil's rump. And their wives had fornicated with incubi, their sisters had bewitched the neighbor's chickens, their maiden aunts had caused a virtuous young man to be impotent on his wedding night. And all the time, through the tiny airholes in his bricked-up windows, Grandier was magically distributing his sperm — to the witches as a reward, to the wives and daughters of the Cardinalists in the spiteful hope of bringing them to undeserved shame.

All these malignant ravings were recorded, verbatim, by Laubardemont and his clerks. Those who were accused by the devils — those, in other words, who were obnoxious to the Commissioner and the exorcists — were summoned to

Laubardemont's office, were questioned, browbeaten, menaced with legal proceedings that might cost them their lives.

One day in July, on a tip from Beherit, Laubardemont had the doors of Sainte-Croix closed on a considerable assemblage of young ladies. The girls were then frisked by Capuchins. But the pacts with Satan which they were all supposed to be carrying about their persons were not revealed by even the most thorough search. Although Beherit had been duly constrained, for some odd reason he had failed to tell the truth.

Week in, week out, Capuchins, Recollets and Carmelites yelled and gesticulated from every pulpit; but the skeptics were not convinced, the protests against the iniquitous handling of the case against Grandier grew louder and more frequent. Anonymous rhymers made epigrams on the Commissioner. Setting old tunes to new words, men sang about him derisively in the streets and over their wine in the taverns. Under cover of darkness, pasquinades against the good fathers were nailed to the church doors. Interrogated, Dog's Tail and Leviathan named a Protestant and some schoolboys as the culprits. They were arrested; but nothing could be proved against them, and they had to be set free again. Sentries were now posted outside the churches. The only result was that the libels were pinned to other doors. On the second of July the exasperated Commissioner issued a proclamation. Henceforth it was expressly forbidden to do or even say anything "against the nuns or other persons of the said Loudun, afflicted by evil spirits, or against their exorcists, or against those who assist the exorcists." Anyone who disobeyed was liable to a fine of ten thousand livres or, if it should seem necessary, to yet graver pains, both financial and bodily. After this the critics became more cautious; the devils and the exorcists could give vent to their calumnies without risk of contradiction. In the words of the anonymous author of some contemporary Remarques et Considérations pour la Justification du Curé de Loudun, "God, who can only speak truth, is now dethroned and the Evil One put in His place, who utters nought but cheats and vanity; and this vanity must be believed as truth. Is not this to resuscitate paganism? People say, moreover, that it is most convenient that the devil should

name so many magicians and sorcerers; for by this means they will be tried, their goods will be confiscated and a share will be given, if he likes, to Pierre Menuau, who, however, may be content, as may also his cousin, Canon Mignon, with the death of the parson and the ruin of the town's most respectable families."

At the beginning of August Father Tranquille published a short treatise, setting forth and justifying the new doctrine: "Duly constrained, the devil is bound to tell the truth." The book had the approval of the Bishop of Poitiers and was hailed by Laubardemont as the last word in orthodox theology. Doubt was no longer permissible. Grandier was a magician and so, in a smaller way, was that insolently upright M. de Cerisay. Excepting those whose parents were good Cardinalists, all the girls of Loudun were whores and witches. And half the town's population was already damned for lack of faith in the devils.

Two days after the publication of Tranquille's book, the Bailli summoned a meeting of notables. Loudun's predicament was discussed and it was decided that de Cerisay and his Lieutenant, Louis Chauvet, should go to Paris and petition the King for protection against the high-handed actions of his Commissioner. The only dissentient voices were those of Moussaut, the Public Prosecutor, Menuau, and Hervé, the Lieutenant Criminel. Asked by de Cerisay whether he accepted the new doctrine and approved of what was being done to his fellow citizens in the names of Balaam, Dog's Tail and company, Hervé replied that "the King, the Cardinal and the Bishop of Poitiers believed in the possession, and that, so far as he was concerned, was enough." For our twentieth-century ears, this appeal to the infallibility of political bosses has a remarkably modern ring.

Next day de Cerisay and Chauvet set out for Paris. They were the bearers of a petition in which the just complaints and apprehensions of the people of Loudun were clearly set forth. Laubardemont's proceedings were severely blamed and the Capuchins' new doctrine was shown to be "against the express prohibition of God's law" and contrary to the authority of the Fathers of the Church, of St. Thomas and of the whole faculty of the Sorbonne, which had formally

condemned a similar doctrine in 1625. In view of all this the petitioners begged His Majesty to order the Sorbonne to examine Tranquille's book and further requested that all those defamed by the demons and their exorcists might be permitted to appeal to the Parlement of Paris, "which is the natural judge of such matters."

At court the two magistrates sought out Jean d'Armagnac, who immediately went to the King and asked him to receive them. The answer was a blunt refusal. De Cerisay and Chauvet left their petition with the King's private secretary (who was the Cardinal's creature and an avowed enemy of Loudun), then took the homeward road.

In their absence Laubardemont had issued another proclamation. It was now forbidden, under pain of a fine of twenty thousand livres, to hold any public meeting whatsoever. After this the devil's enemies gave no further trouble.

The preliminary investigations were now completed; it was time at last for the trial. Laubardemont had hoped to recruit some at least of the judges from among the principal magistrates of Loudun. He was disappointed. De Cerisay, de Bourgneuf, Charles Chauvet and Louis Chauvet — all refused to be parties to a judicial murder. The Commissioner tried cajolery; then, when that failed, hinted darkly at the consequences of His Eminence's displeasure. In vain. The four lawyers stood firm. Laubardemont was forced to look further afield — to Chinon and Châtellerault, to Poitiers and Tours and Orléans, to La Flèche and Saint-Maixent and Beaufort. In the end he had a panel of thirteen complaisant magistrates and, after some trouble with an overscrupulous lawyer called Pierre Fournier, who refused to play the game according to the Cardinal's rules, a thoroughly reliable Public Prosecutor.

By the middle of the second week of August everything was ready. After hearing Mass and taking Communion, the judges assembled in the Carmelite convent and began listening to the evidence accumulated by Laubardemont during the preceding months. The Bishop of Poitiers had formally guaranteed the genuineness of the possession. This meant that real devils had spoken through the mouths of the Ursulines, and these real devils had sworn again and again that

Grandier was a sorcerer. But, “duly constrained, the devil is bound to tell the truth.” Therefore . . . Q.E.D.

Grandier’s condemnation was so certain, and the certainty was so notorious, that tourists were already pouring into Loudun for the execution. During those hot August days thirty thousand persons — more than twice the normal population of the city — were competing for beds and meals and stake-side seats.

Most of us find it very hard to believe that we could ever have enjoyed the spectacle of a public execution. But before we start to congratulate ourselves on our finer feelings, let us remember, first, that we have never been permitted to see an execution and, second, that when executions were public, a hanging seemed as attractive as a Punch and Judy show, while a burning was the equivalent of a Bayreuth Festival or an Oberammergau Passion Play — a great event for which it was worth while to make a long and expensive pilgrimage. When public executions were abolished, it was not because the majority desired their abolition; it was because a small minority of exceptionally sensitive reformers possessed sufficient influence to have them banned. In one of its aspects, civilization may be defined as a systematic withholding from individuals of certain occasions for barbarous behavior. In recent years we have discovered that when, after a period of withholding, those occasions are once more offered, men and women, seemingly no worse than we are, have shown themselves ready and even eager to take them.

The King and the Cardinal, Laubardemont and the judges, the townspeople and the tourists — all of them knew what was going to happen. The only person for whom the condemnation was not a foregone conclusion was the prisoner. Even as late as the end of the first week in August, Grandier still believed that he was just an ordinary defendant in a trial, whose irregularities were accidental and would be set straight as soon as attention had been called to them. His Factum (the written statement of his case) and the letter which he smuggled out of prison for delivery to the King, were evidently written by a man who was still convinced that his judges could be moved by statements of fact and logical

arguments, that they took an interest in Catholic doctrine and might be expected to bow to the authority of accredited theologians. Pathetic illusion! Laubardemont and his tame magistrates were the agents of a man who was not concerned with fact, or logic, or law, or theology, but only with personal vengeance and a political experiment, carefully designed to show how far, in this third decade of the seventeenth century, the methods of totalitarian dictatorship could safely be pushed.

When the devils' depositions had all been heard, the prisoner was called to the bar. In the Factum, which was read aloud by defending counsel, Grandier answered his infernal accusers, stressed the illegality of the proceedings and Laubardemont's bias, denounced the exorcists for their systematic prompting of the demoniacs, and proved that the Capuchins' new doctrine was a dangerous heresy. The Judges sat there, shifting in their chairs with unconcealed impatience, whispering among themselves, laughing, picking their noses, doodling with squeaky quills on the paper before them. Grandier looked at them, and suddenly it was manifest to him that there was no hope.

He was taken back to his cell. In the windowless attic the heat was horribly oppressive. Lying sleepless on his pile of straw, he could hear the drunken singing of some Breton sightseers, who had come for the big show and were trying to while away the dreary time of waiting. Only a few more days now. . . . And all this horror was undeserved. He had done nothing, he was absolutely innocent. Yes, absolutely innocent. But their malice had pursued him, patiently, persistently; and now this huge machine of organized injustice was closing in on him. He could fight, but they were invincibly strong; he could use his wits and his eloquence, but they did not even listen. Now there was nothing but to beg for mercy, and they would only laugh. He was trapped — snared like one of those rabbits he had caught as a boy in the fields at home. Screaming in the noose, and the noose grew tighter as the animal struggled, but never quite tight enough to stop the screaming. To stop the screaming you had to knock it over the head with a stick. And suddenly he found himself overcome by a horrible mingling of anger and frustration and self-pity and an agonizing fear. To the screaming

rabbit he had brought the release of a single, merciful blow. But they — what did they have in store for him? The words he had written at the end of his letter to the King came back to him, “I remember that, while I was a student at Bordeaux, fifteen or sixteen years ago, a monk was burned for sorcery; but the clergy and his fellow monks did their best to save him, even though he had made confession of his crime. But in my own case I may say, not without resentment, that monks and nuns and my own colleagues, canons like myself, have conspired to destroy me, though I have not been convicted of anything remotely resembling sorcery.” He closed his eyes and, in imagination, saw the monk’s distorted face through the roaring curtain of flame. “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. . . .” And then the screaming became inarticulate, became the screaming of the snared rabbit, and there was nobody to take mercy, nobody to put an end to the agony.

The terror became so unbearable that, involuntarily, he cried aloud. The sound of his own voice startled him. He sat up and looked around him. The darkness was impenetrable. And suddenly he was overcome with shame. Crying in the night, like a woman, like a frightened child! He frowned to himself, he clenched his fists. Nobody should ever call him a coward. Let them do their worst! He was ready for it. They should find his courage greater than their malice, stronger than any torment their cruelty could devise.

The parson lay down again — but not to sleep. He had the will to heroism; but his body was in a panic. The heart throbbed uncontrollably. Shuddering with the mindless fears of the nervous system, his muscles were made yet tenser by his conscious effort to overcome that purely physical terror. He tried to pray; but “God” was a word without meaning, “Christ” and “Mary” were empty names. He could think only of the approaching ignominy, of death in unspeakable pain, of the monstrous injustice of which he was the victim. It was all completely unthinkable; and yet it was a fact, it was actually happening. If only he had taken the Archbishop’s advice and left the parish eighteen months ago! And why had he refused to listen to Guillaume Aubin? What madness had made him stay and let himself be arrested? The fancy of what might have been made the present reality seemed even more unbearable. Even more unbearable. . . . And yet he

resolved to bear it. Manfully. They hoped to see him cringe and cower. But never would he give them that satisfaction, never. Gritting his teeth, he pitted his will against their spite. But the blood was still banging in his ears, and as he turned uneasily on the straw, he realized that his body was bathed in a profuse sweat.

The horror of the night was immeasurably long; and yet here, in an instant, was the dawn, and he was nearer by a day to that other, that infinitely worse and final horror.

At five o'clock the cell door was opened and the jailer announced a visitor. It was Father Ambrose, of the Order of Augustinian Canons, who had come in pure charity to ask if he could be of any help or comfort to the prisoner. Grandier hastily dressed, then knelt and began the general confession of a whole lifetime of faults and shortcomings. They were all old sins, for which he had done penance and received absolution — old sins, and yet brand new; for now, for the first time, he recognized them for what they were: barriers against grace, doors deliberately slammed in the face of God. In words and forms he had been a Christian, he had been a priest; in thoughts and acts and feelings he had never worshiped anything but himself. "My kingdom come, My will be done" — the kingdom of lust and greed and vanity, the will to cut a figure, the will to trample underfoot, to triumph and exult. For the first time in his life he knew the meaning of contrition — not doctrinally, not by scholastic definition, but from within, as an anguish of regret and self-condemnation. When the confession was over, he was bitterly weeping, not for what he was to suffer, but for what he had done.

Father Ambrose pronounced the formula of absolution, then gave him communion, and spoke a little about the will of God. Nothing was to be asked for, he said, and nothing refused. Except for sin, all that might happen to one was not merely to be accepted with resignation; it was to be willed, moment by moment, as God's will for that particular moment. Suffering was to be willed, affliction was to be willed, the humiliations resulting from personal weakness and ineptitude were to be willed. And in the act of being willed they would be

understood. And in the act of being understood they would be transfigured, would be seen, not with the eyes of the natural man, but as God saw them.

The parson listened. It was all in the Bishop of Geneva, it was all in St. Ignatius. Not only had he heard it all before; he had even said it — a thousand times and much more eloquently, much more forcefully than poor dear Father Ambrose could ever hope to say it. But the old man was in earnest, the old man obviously knew what he was talking about. Mumbled in a toothless mouth, without elegance, even without grammar — the words were like lamps, suddenly illuminating a mind that had been darkened by too much brooding over past hurts, too much relishing of future pleasures or imaginary triumphs.

"God is here," mumbled the tired old voice, "and Christ is now. Here in your prison, now in the midst of your humiliations and your sufferings."

The door was opened again, and it was Bontemps, the jailer. He had reported Father Ambrose's visit to the Commissioner, and M. de Laubardemont had sent peremptory orders that His Reverence was to leave immediately and not return. If the prisoner wanted to see a priest, he could ask for Father Tranquille or Father Lactance.

The old friar was hustled out of the room; but his words remained, and the meaning of them was becoming clearer and clearer. "God is here and Christ is now" — and, so far as the soul was concerned, could be nowhere else and at no other instant. All this pitting of the will against his enemies, all this defiance of unjust fate, these resolves to be heroic and indomitable — how futile, considering that God was always present, how utterly pointless!

At seven the parson was taken to the Carmelite convent, for another sight of the judges assembled to condemn him. But God was among them; even when Laubardemont tried to trip him up in his answers, Christ was there. On some of the magistrates the calm dignity of Grandier's manner made a profound impression. But Father Tranquille explained it very simply: it was all the devil's doing. What looked like calm was merely the brazen insolence of hell; and this dignity was nothing but the outward expression of unrepentant pride.

The judges saw the defendant only three times in all. Then, very early on the morning of the eighteenth, after the usual pious preliminaries, they rendered their decision. It was unanimous. Grandier was to be subjected to “the question” both ordinary and extraordinary; he was then to kneel at the doors of St. Peter’s and St. Ursula’s and there, with a rope round his neck and a two-pound taper in his hand, ask pardon of God, the King and Justice; next, he was to be taken to the Place Sainte-Croix, tied to a stake and burned alive; after which his ashes were to be scattered to the four winds. The sentence, writes Father Tranquille, was truly celestial; for Laubardemont and his thirteen judges were “as much in heaven by reason of their piety and their fervent devotions as on earth through the exercise of their functions.”

No sooner had sentence been pronounced than Laubardemont sent orders to the surgeons Mannoury and Fourneau to proceed immediately to the prison. Mannoury was the first to arrive; but was so much disconcerted by what Grandier said to him about his earlier exploits with the needle that he retired in a panic, leaving to his colleague the task of preparing the victim for execution. The judges’ orders were that Grandier should be shaved all over — head, face and body. Fourneau, who was convinced of the parson’s innocence, respectfully apologized for what he had to do, then set to work.

The parson was stripped. The razor passed over his skin. In a few minutes his body was as hairless as a eunuch’s. Next, the rich black curls were sheared to a bristly stubble; the scalp was lathered and shaved clean. Then it was the turn of the Mephistophelean mustaches and the little beard.

“And now the eyebrows,” said a voice from the doorway.

Startled, they turned their heads. It was Laubardemont. Reluctantly, Fourneau did as he was told. That face, which so many women had found so irresistibly handsome, was now the mask, grotesquely bald, of the clown in a harlequinade.

“Good,” said the Commissioner, “good! And now the fingernails.”

Fourneau was puzzled.

“The fingernails,” Laubardemont repeated. “You will now pull out the fingernails.”

This time the surgeon refused to obey. Laubardemont began by being genuinely astonished. What was wrong? After all, the man was a convicted sorcerer. But the convicted sorcerer, the other retorted, was still a man. The Commissioner grew angry; but in spite of all his threats, the surgeon stood firm. There was no time to send for another operator, and Laubardemont had to be content with the partial disfigurement of his victim by shaving.

Dressed only in a long nightshirt and a pair of worn out slippers, Grandier was taken downstairs, bundled into a closed carriage and driven to the courthouse. Townspeople and tourists thronged the approaches; but only a favored few — high officials, men of rank with their wives and daughters, half a dozen faithful Cardinalists from among the bourgeoisie — were permitted to enter. Silks rustled; there was a rich glow of velvet, a glittering of jewels, a smell of civet and ambergris. In full canonicals Father Lactance and Father Tranquille entered the judgment hall. With consecrated whisks they scattered holy water over everything within range, intoning as they did so the formulas of exorcism. Then a door was opened and, in his nightgown and slippers, but with a skull cap and biretta on his shaven head, Grandier appeared on the threshold. After he too had been thoroughly sprinkled, the guards led him up the whole length of the hall and made him kneel before the judges' bench. His hands were tied behind his back, and it was therefore impossible for him to bare his head. The clerk of the court stepped forward, snatched off his hat and cap and flung them down contemptuously on the floor. At the sight of that pale, hairless clown, several of the ladies giggled hysterically. An usher called for silence. The clerk put on his spectacles, cleared his throat and started to read the sentence — first, half a page of legal jargon; then a long description of the amende honorable which the prisoner was to make; then the condemnation to death at the stake; then a digression about the commemorative plaque to be set up in the Ursulines' chapel at a cost of one hundred and fifty livres, chargeable to the prisoner's confiscated estate; and finally, as a kind of afterthought, a casual mention of the tortures, ordinary and extraordinary, which were to precede the burning. "Pronounced at

the said Loudun, August 18, 1634, and executed," the clerk concluded emphatically, "the same day."

There was a long silence. Then Grandier addressed his judges.

"My lords," he said slowly and distinctly, "I call God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost to witness, together with the Virgin, my sole advocate, that I have never been a sorcerer, have never committed sacrilege and have never known any other magic than that of Holy Scripture, the which I have always preached. I adore my Savior and pray that I may partake in the merit of the blood of His Passion."

He raised his eyes to heaven; then, after a moment, lowered them again to look at the Commissioner and his thirteen stipendiaries. In a tone almost of intimacy, as though they were his friends, he told them that he was afraid for his salvation — afraid lest the hideous torments prepared for his body might drive his poor soul to despair and, through that gravest of sins, to eternal damnation. Surely their lordships did not intend to kill a soul? And, that being so, surely they would be pleased, in their mercy, to mitigate, if only a little, the rigor of his punishment?

He paused for a few seconds and looked questioningly from face to stony face. From the women's benches came the sound of another of those half-suppressed giggles. Once again the parson knew that there was no hope — no hope except in this God who was here and would not desert him, this Christ who was now, who would go on being now at every moment of his martyrdom.

Opening his mouth again, he began to talk about the martyrs. These holy witnesses had died for the love of God and the honor of Jesus Christ — had died on the wheel, in the flames, under the sword, riddled with arrows, torn and devoured by wild beasts. Never would he venture to compare himself with such as these; but at least he might hope that an infinitely merciful God would permit him to atone by his sufferings for all the sins of a vain and disordered life.

The parson's words were so touching, and the fate which awaited him so monstrously cruel, that all but his most inveterate enemies were moved to pity. Some of the women who had giggled at the antics of the clown now found

themselves in tears. The ushers called for silence. In vain. The sobbing was uncontrollable. Laubardemont was greatly disturbed. Nothing was going according to plan. Better than anyone else he must have known that Grandier was not guilty of the crimes for which he was to be tortured and burned alive. And yet, in some sublimely Pickwickian sense, the parson was a sorcerer. On the basis of a thousand pages of worthless evidence, thirteen hireling judges had said so. Therefore, though certainly false, it must somehow be true. Now, by all the rules of the game, Grandier should be spending his last hours in despair and rebellion, cursing the devil who had ensnared him and the God who was sending him to hell. Instead of which, the scoundrel was talking like a good Catholic and giving the most touching, the most heart-rending example of Christian resignation. The thing was insufferable. And what would His Eminence say, when he heard that the only result of this carefully stage-managed ceremony had been to convince the spectators that the parson was innocent? There was only one thing to do, and Laubardemont, who was a man of decision, promptly did it.

"Clear the court," he ordered.

The ushers and the archers of the guard hastened to obey. Angrily protesting, the gentry and their ladies were herded out into the corridors and the waiting rooms. The doors were closed behind them. Save for Grandier, his guards and judges, the two friars and a handful of city officials, the great hall was empty.

Laubardemont now addressed the prisoner. Let him confess his guilt and reveal the names of his accomplices. Then and only then the judges might consider his appeal for mitigation of their sentence.

The parson answered that he could not name accomplices he had never had, nor confess to crimes of which he was completely innocent. . . .

But Laubardemont wanted a confession; indeed, he urgently needed one — needed it in order to confound the skeptics and silence the critics of his proceedings. From severe, his manner became, all of a sudden, positively genial. He gave orders that Grandier's hands should be untied, then pulled a paper out of his pocket, dipped a pen in the inkpot and offered it to the prisoner. If he signed, it would be unnecessary to resort to torture.

According to all the rules, a convicted criminal should have jumped at this chance to buy himself a little mercy. Gauffridi, for example, the priestly magician of Marseilles, had ended by putting his name to anything and everything. But once again Grandier refused to play the game.

"I must beg your lordship to excuse me," he said.

"Just a little signature," Laubardemont wheedled. And when the other protested that his conscience would not permit him to affirm a lie, the Commissioner implored him to reconsider his decision — for his own sake, to spare his poor body unnecessary pain, to save his imperiled soul, to cheat the devil and reconcile himself to the God he had so grievously offended.

According to Father Tranquille, Laubardemont actually wept while he was making this final appeal for a confession. We need not doubt the friar's word. Richelieu's hangman possessed a genuine gift of tears. The eye-witness account of the last hours of Cinq-Mars and de Thou paints a picture of Laubardemont blubbering like a crocodile over the young men he had just condemned to death. In the present case tears were as unavailing as threats had been. Grandier persisted in his refusal to sign a false confession. To Lactance and Tranquille, the fact was further, final proof of guilt. It was Lucifer who had closed the prisoner's mouth and hardened his heart against repentance.

Laubardemont turned off his tears. In a tone of cold fury he told the parson that this was the last proffer of mercy. Would he sign? Grandier shook his head. Laubardemont beckoned to the captain of the guards and ordered him to take the prisoner upstairs to the torture chamber. Grandier made no outcry. All he asked was that Father Ambrose might be sent for, to be with him during his ordeal. But Father Ambrose was not available. After his unauthorized visit to the prison, he had been ordered to leave the city. Grandier then asked for the assistance of Father Grillau, the Warden of the Cordeliers. But the Cordeliers were in bad odor for their refusal to accept the Capuchins' new doctrine, or to have anything to do with the possession. And anyhow Grillau was known to have been on friendly terms with the parson and his family. Laubardemont refused to let him

be sent for. If the prisoner wished for spiritual consolation, he might address himself to Lactance and Tranquille — the most relentless of his enemies.

"I see what it is," said Grandier bitterly. "Not content with torturing my body, you wish to destroy my soul by plunging it into despair. One day you will have to answer for this to my Redeemer."

Since Laubardemont's time, evil has made some progress. Under Communist dictators, those who come to trial before a People's Court invariably confess the crimes of which they have been accused — confess them even when they are imaginary. In the past, confession was by no means invariable. Even under torture, even at the stake, Grandier protested his innocence. And Grandier's case was by no means unique. Many persons, women no less than men, went through similar experiences with the same indomitable constancy. Our ancestors invented the rack and the iron maiden, the boot and the water torture; but in the subtler arts of breaking the will and reducing the human being to subhumanity, they still had much to learn. In a sense, it may be, they did not even wish to learn these things. They had been brought up in a religion which taught that the will is free, the soul immortal; and they acted upon these beliefs even in relation to their enemies. Yes, even the traitor, even the convicted devil-worshiper had a soul which might yet be saved; and the most ferocious judges never refused him the consolations of a religion which went on offering salvation to the very end. Before and during execution, a priest was always at hand, doing his best to reconcile the departing criminal with his Creator. By a kind of blessed inconsistency, our fathers respected the personality even of those whom they were tormenting with red-hot pincers or breaking on the wheel.

For the totalitarian of our more enlightened century, there is no soul and no Creator; there is merely a lump of physiological raw material molded by conditioned reflexes and social pressures into what, by courtesy, is still called a human being. This product of the man-made environment is without intrinsic significance and possesses no rights to self-determination. It exists for Society and must conform to the Collective Will. In practice, of course, Society is nothing but the national State, and as a matter of brute fact, the Collective Will is

merely the dictator's will-to-power, sometimes mitigated, sometimes distorted to the verge of lunacy, by some pseudoscientific theory of what, in the gorgeous future, will be good for an actuarial abstraction labeled "Humanity." Individuals are defined as the products and the instruments of Society. From this it follows that the political bosses, who claim to represent Society, are justified in committing any conceivable atrocity against such persons as they may choose to call Society's enemies. Physical extermination by shooting (or, more profitably, by overwork in a slave labor camp) is not enough. It is a matter of observable fact that men and women are not the mere creatures of Society. But official theory proclaims that they are. Therefore it becomes necessary to depersonalize the "enemies of Society" in order to transform the official lie into truth. For those who know the trick, this reduction of the human to the subhuman, of the free individual to the obedient automaton, is a relatively simple matter. The personality of man is far less monolithic than the theologians were compelled by their dogmas to assume. The soul is not the same as the Spirit, but is merely associated with it. In itself, and until it consciously chooses to make way for the Spirit, it is no more than a rather loosely tied bundle of not very stable psychological elements. This composite entity can quite easily be disintegrated by anyone ruthless enough to wish to try and skillful enough to do the job in the right way.

In the seventeenth century this particular kind of ruthlessness was hardly thinkable, and the relevant skills were therefore never developed. Laubardemont was unable to extract the confession he so urgently needed; and though he would not allow the parson to choose his confessor, he conceded in principle that even a convicted sorcerer had a right to spiritual consolation.

The services of Tranquille and Lactance were offered and, very naturally, refused. Grandier was then given a quarter of an hour in which to reconcile his soul with God and prepare for his martyrdom.

The parson knelt and began to pray out loud.

"Great God and Sovereign Judge, help of the helpless and oppressed, succor me, give me the strength to bear the pains to which I have been condemned.

Receive my soul into the beatitude of your saints, remit my sins, forgive this vilest and most despicable of your servants.

“Searcher of hearts, you know I am in no wise guilty of the crimes imputed to me, and that the fire which I must undergo is but the punishment of my concupiscence. Redeemer of mankind, forgive my enemies and my accusers; but cause them to see their sins, that they may repent. Holy Virgin, protector of the penitent, graciously receive my unhappy mother into your heavenly company; console her for the loss of a son who fears no other pains but those which she must endure on that earth, from which he is so soon to depart.”

He was silent. Not my will, but Thine. God here, among the instruments of torture; Christ now, in the hour of extremest anguish.

La Grange, the captain of the guards, was recording in his notebook what he remembered of the parson’s prayer. Laubardemont approached and asked the young officer what he was writing. Informed, he grew angry and wanted to confiscate the notebook. But La Grange defended his property, and the Commissioner had to be content with ordering him on no account to show what he had written to anyone else. Grandier was an unrepentant magician, and unrepentant magicians are not supposed to pray.

In Father Tranquille’s account of the trial and execution, and in the other narratives written from the official standpoint, the parson is made to behave in the most naïvely diabolistic manner. Instead of praying, he sings an improper song. Presented with the Crucifix, he turns away in abhorrence. The name of the Blessed Virgin never passes his lips; and though he sometimes pronouces the word “God,” it is obvious to every right-thinking person that what he really means is “Lucifer.”

Unfortunately for their thesis, these pious propagandists were not the only ones to leave a record of the proceedings. Laubardemont might enjoin secrecy; but he had no way of compelling La Grange to obey his orders. And there were other unbiased observers of the events — some of them, such as Ismaël Boulliau, the astronomer, known to us by name, others whose surviving manuscripts remain anonymous.

The clock struck, and the prisoner's brief respite was at an end. He was bound, stretched out on the floor, with his legs, from the knees to the feet, enclosed between four oaken boards, of which the outer pair were fixed, while the two inner ones were movable. By driving wedges into the space separating the two movable boards, it was possible to crush the victim's legs against the fixed framework of the machine. The difference between ordinary and extraordinary torture was measured by the number of progressively thicker wedges hammered home. Because it was invariably (though not immediately) fatal, the question extraordinary was administered only to condemned criminals, who were to be executed without delay.

While the prisoner was being prepared for the question, Fathers Lactance and Tranquille exorcised the ropes, the boards, the wedges and the mallets. This was very necessary; for if they were not driven out of these objects, the devils might, by their infernal arts, prevent the torture from being as excruciating as it ought to be. When the friars had finished their sprinkling and their muttering, the executioner stepped forward, raised his ponderous mallet and, like a man splitting a knotty piece of timber, brought it down with all his force. There was an uncontrollable shriek of pain. Father Lactance bent over the victim and asked in Latin if he would confess. But Grandier only shook his head.

The first wedge was driven home between the knees. Then another was inserted at the level of the feet and when that had been hammered to the head, the thin end of a third and heavier wedge was tapped into position immediately below the first. There was the thud of the mallet, the shriek of pain — then silence. The victim's lips were moving. Was it a confession? The friar cupped his ear; but all he could hear was the word "God," repeated several times, and then, "Do not abandon me, do not allow this pain to cause me to forget you." He turned to the executioner and told him to get on with his work.

At the second stroke on the fourth wedge there was a loud cracking sound. Several bones of the feet and ankles had broken. For a moment, the parson fainted away.

"Cogne, cogne!" Father Lactance yelled to the executioner. "Hit, hit!"

The prisoner opened his eyes again.

“Father,” he whispered, “where is the charity of St. Francis?”

The disciple of St. Francis vouchsafed no answer.

“Cogne!” he said again. And when the blow had fallen, he turned back to the prisoner. “Dicas, dicas!”

But there was nothing to tell. A fifth wedge was inserted.

“Dicas!” The mallet hung suspended. “Dicas!”

The victim looked at the executioner, looked at the friar, then closed his eyes.

“Torture me as you like,” he said in Latin. “In a little while it will be all one, forever.”

“Cogne!”

The blow fell, and there was a noise of splintering bone.

Breathless and sweating in the summer heat, the executioner handed the mallet to his assistant. And now it was Tranquille’s turn to talk to the prisoner. In a tone of sweet reasonableness, he set forth the manifest advantages of a confession — advantages not merely in the next world, but here and now.

The parson listened and, when he had finished, asked him a question.

“Father,” he said, “do you believe on your conscience that a man ought, merely to be delivered from pain, to confess a crime he has not committed?”

Brushing aside these obviously Satanic sophisms, Tranquille continued his urgings.

The parson whispered that he was very ready to own up to all his real offenses.

“I have been a man, I have loved women. . . .”

But that was not what Laubardemont and the Franciscans wished to hear.

“You have been a magician, you have had commerce with devils.”

And when the parson protested yet once more that he was innocent, a sixth wedge was hammered home, then a seventh, then an eighth. From ordinary, the question had reached the traditional limits of the extraordinary. The bones of the knees, the shins, the ankles, the feet — all were shattered. Their splinters projected through the mangled flesh and, along with the blood, there was an

ooze of marrow. But still the friars could extort no admission of guilt — only that screaming and, in the intervals, the whispered name of God.

The eighth wedge was the last of the regular set. Laubardemont called for more — for a cruelty beyond the merely extraordinary. The executioner went out to the storeroom and came back with two new wedges. When he learned that they were no thicker than the last of the original set, Laubardemont flew into a rage and threatened the man with a whipping. But meanwhile, as the friars pointed out, wedge number seven at the knee could be replaced by a duplicate of wedge number eight at the ankle. One of the new wedges was inserted between the boards and this time it was Father Lactance who swung the mallet.

“Dicas!” he shouted after every blow. “Dicas, dicas!”

Not to be outdone, Father Tranquille took the mallet from his colleague, adjusted the tenth wedge and, in three mighty strokes, banged it home.

Grandier had fainted again, and it almost looked as if he might be dead before they could get him to the stake. Besides, there were no more wedges. Reluctantly — for this stubborn frustrater of all his best-laid plans deserved to be tortured forever — Laubardemont called a halt. This first phase of Grandier’s martyrdom had lasted three quarters of an hour. The machine was taken apart, and the executioners lifted their victim onto a stool. He looked down at his horribly mangled legs, then at the Commissioner and his thirteen accomplices.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “attendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus. Behold, and see if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow.”

On Laubardemont’s orders he was carried to another room and laid on a bench. It was a stifling day in August; but the parson was shivering with the cold of extreme surgical shock. La Grange covered him with a rug and filled a glass of wine for him to drink.

Meanwhile Lactance and Tranquille were trying to make the best of what had been a deplorably bad job. To all who questioned them they answered that indeed it was true — the magician had refused to confess, even under torture. And the reason was only too obvious. Grandier had called upon God to give him strength, and his God, who was Lucifer, had made him insensible to pain. They

might have gone on all day, wedge after wedge; it would have availed them nothing.

To prove to himself that this was true, another of the exorcists, Father Archangel, resolved to make a little experiment. This experiment was described, a few days later, in a public discourse, which was recorded as follows by one of the auditors. “The said Father Archangel remarked that the devil had granted him (Grandier) insensibility inasmuch as, being stretched out on a bench, with his knees, which had been crushed by the Gehenna, covered with a green rug, this rug being raised by the said Father somewhat roughly, and the said Father even poking his legs and knees, he did not complain of the pain which the said Father might be causing him.” From this it followed, first, that Grandier had felt no pain, second, that Satan had made him insensible, third, that (to quote the Capuchin’s very words) “when he spoke favorably of God, he meant the devil, and when he said that he detested the devil, he meant that he detested God,” and, fourthly and finally, that every precaution must be taken to make sure that, at the stake, he should feel the full effect of the flames.

When Father Archangel had gone, it was the turn, yet once more, of the Commissioner. For more than two hours Laubardemont sat beside his victim, employing all the arts of persuasion to extort the signature which would excuse his own illegal proceedings, would whitewash the Cardinal, would justify the future use of inquisitorial methods in every case where hysterical nuns could be induced by their confessors to accuse the enemies of the regime. That signature was indispensable; but try as he might — and M. de Gastynes, who was present at the interview, declared that he had “never heard anything so abominable” as those specious arguments, those cajoleries, those hypocritical sighs and sobs — the Commissioner was unable to get what he wanted. To everything he could say, Grandier replied that it was morally impossible for him to put his name to a statement which he knew, and God knew (and doubtless the Commissioner knew) to be absolutely false. In the end Laubardemont had to admit defeat. He called La Grange and told him to send for the executioners.

They came. Grandier was dressed in a shirt impregnated with sulphur; then a rope was tied round his neck and he was carried down to the courtyard, where a cart, drawn by six mules, was standing ready. He was hoisted up and set on a bench. The driver shouted to his beasts; and preceded by a company of archers and followed by Laubardemont and the thirteen tame magistrates, the cart rumbled slowly into the street. A halt was made, and the sentence was once more read aloud. Then the mules moved on. At the door of St. Peter's — the door through which, for so many years the parson had come and gone with his air of confident and majestic dignity — the procession came to a standstill. The two-pound taper was placed in Grandier's hand and he was lifted down from the cart to beg pardon, as the sentence had prescribed, for his crimes. But there were no knees to kneel on, and when they lowered him to the ground, he fell forward on his face. The executioners had to lift him up again. At this moment, Father Grillau, the Warden of the Cordeliers, issued from the church and, pushing past the archers of the guard, bent over the prisoner and embraced him.

Deeply moved, Grandier asked for his prayers and the prayers of all his community — the only one in Loudun which had steadily refused to co-operate with the parson's enemies.

Grillau promised to pray for the condemned man, urged him to put his trust in God and the Redeemer, then gave him a message from his mother. She was praying for him at the feet of Our Lady, and she sent her blessing.

Both men were weeping. A murmur of sympathy ran through the crowd. Laubardemont heard it and was furious. Would nothing ever go as he had planned it? By all the rules, the rabble should be trying to lynch this trafficker with the devil. Instead of which, they were lamenting his cruel fate. He hurried forward and peremptorily ordered the guards to send the Cordelier away. In the scuffle which followed, one of the attendant Capuchins took the opportunity to hit Grandier over his shaven head with a cudgel.

When order had been restored, the parson said what he had to say — but added, after asking pardon of God, the King and Justice, that, though a great sinner, he was completely innocent of the crime for which he was now to suffer.

While the executioners were carrying him back to the cart, a friar harangued the tourists and townspeople, assuring them that they would be committing a very grave sin if they ventured to pray for this unrepentant magician.

The procession moved on. At the door of the Ursuline convent the ceremony of asking pardon of God, King and Justice was repeated. But when the Clerk ordered him to ask pardon of the Prioress and all the good sisters, the prisoner answered that he had never done them any harm, and could only pray to God that He would forgive them. Then seeing Moussaut, the husband of Philippe Trincant and one of the most implacable of his enemies, he asked him to forget the past and added with a curious little touch of that courtly politeness for which he had been famous, “je meurs votre serviteur — I die your most obedient servant.” Moussaut turned away his face and refused to answer.

Not all of Grandier’s enemies were so un-Christian. René Bernier, one of the priests who had testified against him when he was accused of improper behavior, pushed his way through the crowd in order to ask the parson’s forgiveness and to offer to say a Mass on his behalf. The parson took his hand and gratefully kissed it.

In the Place Sainte-Croix more than six thousand persons were jammed into a space which would have been uncomfortably narrow for half their number. Every window had been rented, and there were spectators even on the roofs and among the gargoyles of the church. A grandstand had been set up for the judges and Laubardemont’s particular friends; but the rabble had occupied every seat and had to be dislodged by the guards at the point of the pike and halberd. It was only after a pitched battle that these very important personages could be seated.

Even the most important personage of all had the greatest difficulty in reaching the place appointed for him. It took the prisoner half an hour to cover the last hundred yards to the stake, and his guards were compelled to fight for every inch of the way.

Not far from the north wall of the church a stout post, fifteen feet high, had been driven into the ground. About its base were piled layers of faggots, logs and straw, and since the victim was no longer capable of standing on those shattered

feet of his, a small iron seat had been fastened to the post a couple of feet above the firewood. For all the importance of the event, all its enormous notoriety, the expenses of the execution were remarkably modest. A certain Deliard was paid nineteen livres sixteen sols for “the wood used for the bonfire of Master Urbain Grandier, together with the post to which he was tied.” For “an iron seat weighing twelve pounds, at the rate of three sols four deniers per pound, together with six nails wherewith to attach the said seat to Master Urbain Grandier’s stake,” Jacquet, the locksmith, received forty-two sols. For one day’s hire of five horses, used by the archers kindly lent for the occasion by the Provost of Chinon, and for one day’s hire of six mules, a cart and two men, the widow Morin was paid one hundred and eight sols. Four livres were spent on the prisoner’s two shirts — the plain one in which he was tortured and the sulphured article in which he was burned. The two-pound candle used in the ceremony of the amende honorable cost forty sols, and wine for the executioners, thirteen. Add to these expenses the payment for work done by the doorkeeper of Sainte-Croix and a couple of assistants, and you had a grand total of twenty-nine livres, two sols and six deniers.

Grandier was taken down from the cart, lifted onto the iron seat and securely lashed to the post. His back was turned to the church, his face to the grandstand and the façade of a house in which he had once felt himself as much at home as in his own parsonage. It was the house where he had made all those jokes at the expense of Adam and Mannoury, where he had entertained the company with readings from Catherine Hammon’s letters, where he had taught a young girl Latin and seduced her, where he had transformed his best friend into the most relentless of his enemies. Louis Trincant was sitting now at the window of his drawing room, and with him were Canon Mignon and Thibault. At the sight of the hairless clown who had once been Urbain Grandier, they laughed triumphantly. The parson looked up and met their eyes. Thibault waved his hand as though to an old friend, and M. Trincant, who was sipping white wine and water, raised his glass and drank to the father of his bastard grandchild.

Partly in shame — for he remembered those Latin lessons and his abandonment of the desperately weeping girl — and partly out of a fear lest the spectacle of their triumph might move him to bitterness and make him forget that God was even here, even now, Grandier dropped his eyes.

A hand touched him on the shoulder. It was La Grange, the captain of the guard, who had come to ask the parson's forgiveness for what he had been obliged to do. Then he made two promises: the prisoner would be allowed to make a speech and, before the fire was lighted, he would be strangled. Grandier thanked him, and La Grange turned away to give his orders to the executioner, who immediately prepared a noose.

Meanwhile the friars were busy with their exorcisms.

"Ecce crucem Domini, fugite partes adversae, vicit leo de tribu Juda, radix David. Exorciso te, creatura ligni, in nomine Dei patris omnipotentis, et in nomine Jesus Christi filii ejus Domini nostri, et in virtute Spiritus sancti. . . ."

They sprinkled the wood, the straw, the glowing coals of the brazier that stood ready beside the pyre; they sprinkled the earth, the air, the victim, the executioners, the spectators. This time, they swore, no devil should prevent the wretch from suffering to the extreme limit of his capacity for pain. Several times the parson tried to address the crowd; but no sooner had he begun than they threw holy water in his face or hit him on the mouth with an iron crucifix. When he flinched from the blow, the friars would shout triumphantly that the renegade was denying his Redeemer. And all the time Father Lactance kept calling on the prisoner to confess.

"Dicas!" he shouted.

The word caught the fancy of the onlookers and for the brief and horrible remainder of his life the Recollet was always known in Loudun as Father Dicas.

"Dicas! Dicas!"

For the thousandth time Grandier answered that he had nothing to confess.

"And now," he added, "give me the kiss of peace and let me die."

At first Lactance refused; but when the crowd protested against such an un-Christian malignity, he climbed onto the pile of faggots and kissed the parson's

cheek.

“Judas!” cried a voice, and a score of others took up the refrain.

“Judas, Judas. . . .”

Lactance heard them and, in a passion of uncontrollable rage, jumped down from the pyre, seized a twist of straw and, lighting it in the brazier, waved the flame in the victim’s face. Let him confess who he was — the devil’s servant! Let him confess, let him renounce his master!

“Father,” said Grandier with a calm and gentle dignity that contrasted strangely with the almost hysterical malice of his accusers, “I am about to meet the God who is my witness that I have spoken the truth.”

“Confess,” the friar fairly screamed. “Confess! . . . You have only a moment to live.”

“Only a moment,” the parson repeated slowly. “Only a moment — and then I go to that just and fearful judgment to which, Reverend Father, you too must soon be called.”

Without waiting to hear anything more, Father Lactance threw his torch onto the straw of the pyre. Hardly visible in the bright afternoon sunshine, a little flame appeared and began to creep, growing larger as it advanced, toward the bundles of dry kindling. Following the Recollet’s example, Father Archangel set fire to the straw on the opposite side of the pyre. A thin blue haze of smoke rose into the windless air. Then, with a cheerful crackling, like the noise that accompanies the drinking of mulled wine on a winter evening, by the hearth, one of the faggots caught fire.

The prisoner heard the sound and, turning his head, saw the gay dancing of flames.

“Is this what you promised me?” he called to La Grange in a tone of agonized protest.

And suddenly the divine presence was eclipsed. There was no God, no Christ, nothing but fear.

La Grange shouted indignantly at the friars and tried to extinguish the nearest flames. But there were too many of them to be stamped out; and here was Father

Tranquille setting fire to the straw behind the parson's back, here was Father Lactance lighting another torch at the brazier.

"Strangle him," he ordered. And the crowd took up the cry. "Strangle, strangle!"

The executioner ran for his noose, only to discover that one of the Capuchins had surreptitiously knotted the rope so that it could not be used. By the time the knots were undone, it was too late. Between the executioner and the victim he had intended to save from this last agony there was a wall of flame, a billowing curtain of smoke. Meanwhile, with whisk and holy water pot, the friars were ridding the bonfire of its remaining devils.

"Exorciso te, creatura ignis. . . ."

The water hissed among the burning logs and was turned in an instant to steam. From the further side of the wall of flames came a sound of screaming. The exorcism, it was evident, had begun to take effect. The friars paused for a moment to give thanks; then, with faith renewed and energy redoubled, they set to work again.

"Draco nequissime, serpens antique, immundissime spiritus. . . ."

At this moment a large black fly appeared from nowhere, bumped into Father Lactance's face and dropped on the opened pages of his book of exorcisms. A fly — and as large as a walnut! And Beelzebub was the Lord of Flies!

"Imperat tibi Martyrum sanguis," he shouted above the roaring of the fire, "Imperat tibi continentia Confessorum. . . ."

With a pretematurally loud buzz the insect took wing and disappeared into the smoke.

"In nomine Agni, qui ambulavit super aspidem et basiliscum. . . ."

All at once the screams were strangled by a paroxysm of coughing. The wretch was trying to cheat them by dying of suffocation! To frustrate this latest of Satan's wiles, Lactance hurled a whiskful of holy water into the smoke.

"Exorciso te, creatura fumi. Effugiat atque discedat a te nequitia omnis ac versutia diabolicae fraudis. . . ."

It worked! The coughing stopped. There was another cry, then silence. And suddenly, to the consternation of the Recollet and his Capuchin colleagues, the blackened thing at the center of the bonfire began to speak.

“Deus meus,” it said, “miserere mei Deus.” And then, in French, “Forgive them, forgive my enemies.”

The coughing began again. A moment later the cords which bound him to the post gave way and the victim tumbled sideways among the blazing logs.

The fire burned on, the good Fathers continued to sprinkle and intone. Suddenly a flock of pigeons came swooping down from the church and started to wheel around the roaring column of flame and smoke. The crowd shouted, the archers waved their halberds at the birds, Lactance and Tranquille splashed them on the wing with holy water. In vain. The pigeons were not to be driven away. Round and round they flew, diving through the smoke, singeing their feathers in the flames. Both parties claimed a miracle. For the parson’s enemies the birds, quite obviously, were a troop of devils, come to fetch away his soul. For his friends, they were emblems of the Holy Ghost and living proof of his innocence. It never seems to have occurred to anyone that they were just pigeons, obeying the laws of their own, their blessedly other-than-human nature.

When the fire had burned itself out, the executioner scattered four shovelfuls of ashes, one toward each of the cardinal points of the compass. Then the crowd surged forward. Burning their fingers, men and women rummaged in the hot flaky dust, hunting for teeth, for fragments of the skull and pelvis, for any cinder showing the black smear of burned flesh. A few, no doubt, were merely souvenir hunters; but most of them were in search of relics, for a charm to bring luck or compel reluctant love, for a talisman against headaches or constipation or the malice of enemies. And these charred odds and ends would be no less effective if the parson were guilty of the crimes imputed to him than if he were innocent. The power to work miracles lies, not in the source of a relic, but in its reputation, however acquired. Constant throughout history, a certain percentage of human beings can be restored to health or happiness by practically anything that has been well advertised — from Lourdes to witchcraft, from the Ganges to patent

medicines and Mrs. Eddy, from the thaumaturgical arm of St. Francis Xavier to those “pigges bones,” which Chaucer’s Pardoner carried in a glass for all to see and worship. If Grandier were what the Capuchins had said he was, that was excellent: even in ashes, a sorcerer is richly charged with power. And his relics would be charged with no less power if the parson were guiltless; for in that case he would be a martyr, equal to the best of them. In a little while most of the ashes had disappeared. Horribly tired and thirsty, but happy in the thought that their pockets were bulging with relics, tourists and townsfolk drifted away in search of a drink and the chance to take off their shoes.

That evening, after only the briefest of rests and the lightest of refreshments, the good Fathers reassembled at the Ursuline convent. The Prioress was exorcised, duly went into convulsions and in response to Lactance’s questioning, announced that the black fly was none other than Baruch, the parson’s familiar. And why had Baruch hurled himself so rudely on the book of exorcisms? Sœur Jeanne bent herself backward until her head touched her heels, then did the splits and finally answered that he had been trying to throw the book into the fire. It was all so edifying that the friars decided to break off for the night and begin again next morning, in public.

On the following day the sisters were taken to Sainte-Croix. Many of the tourists were still in town, and the church was crowded to the doors. The Prioress was exorcised and, after the usual preliminaries, identified herself as Isacaaron, the only devil presently at home; for all the other tenants of her body had gone back to hell for the wild party which had been organized for the reception of Grandier’s soul.

Judiciously questioned, Sœur Jeanne confirmed what the exorcists had been saying all along — namely, that when Grandier had said “God” he always meant “Satan,” and that when he had renounced the devil, he had actually been renouncing Christ.

Lactance then wanted to know what kind of torments the parson was suffering down there, and was evidently rather disappointed when the Prioress told him that the worst of them was the privation of God.

No doubt, no doubt. But what were the physical tortures?

After a good deal of pressing Sœur Jeanne replied that Grandier “had a special torture for each of the sins he had committed, especially those of the flesh.”

And what about the execution? Had the devil been able to prevent the wretch from suffering?

Alas, replied Isacaaron, Satan had been frustrated by the exorcisms. If the fire had not been blessed, the parson would have felt nothing. But thanks to the labors of Lactance, Tranquille and Archangel he had suffered excruciatingly.

But not so excruciatingly, cried the exorcist, as he was suffering now! And with a kind of gloating horror, Father Lactance brought the conversation back to hell. In which of hell’s many mansions was the magician lodged? How had Lucifer received him? What precisely was being done to him at this moment? Sister Jane’s Isacaaron did his best to answer. Then, when his imagination began to flag, Sister Agnes was thrown into fits, and Beherit was invited to say his piece.

That evening, at the convent, the friars noticed that Father Lactance looked pale and seemed strangely preoccupied. Was he feeling ill?

Father Lactance shook his head. No, he was not ill. But the prisoner had asked to see Father Grillau, and they had denied him. Could it be that they had committed a sin by making it impossible for him to confess?

His colleagues did their best to reassure him, but without success. Next morning, after a sleepless night, Lactance was in a fever.

“God is punishing me,” he kept repeating, “God is punishing me.”

He was bled by Mannoury, was purged by M. Adam. The fever subsided for a little, then returned. And now he began to see things, to hear things. Grandier under torture, screaming. Grandier at the stake, asking God to forgive his enemies. And then devils, swarms of devils. They entered his body, they set him raving, they made him kick his legs and bite the pillows, they filled his mouth with the most horrible blasphemies.

On September 18th, exactly one month after Grandier's execution, Father Lactance knocked the crucifix out of the hand of the priest who had administered Extreme Unction, and died. Laubardemont paid for a handsome funeral, and Father Tranquille preached a sermon, in which he extolled the Recollet as a model of holiness and proclaimed that he had been murdered by Satan, who had thus revenged himself for all the affronts and humiliations inflicted on him by this most heroic of God's servants.

The next to go was Mannoury, the surgeon. One night, shortly after the death of Father Lactance, he was sent for to bleed a sick man, who lived near the Porte du Martrai. On the way home, his servant with a lantern walking ahead of him, he saw Urbain Grandier. Naked, as when he had been pricked for the devil's marks, the parson was standing in the Rue du Grand-Pavé, between the counterscarps of the castle and the Cordeliers' garden. Mannoury halted, and his servant saw him staring into the vacant blackness, heard him asking someone, who wasn't there, what he wanted. There was no answer. Then the surgeon began to tremble all over. A moment later, he fell to the ground, screaming for pardon. Within the week he, too, was dead.

After that it was the turn of Louis Chauvet, one of the upright judges who had refused to take part in the hellish tomfoolery of the trial. The Prioress and most of her nuns had accused him of being a magician, and M. Barré was able to confirm their testimony through the mouths of several demoniacs in his own parish, at Chinon. Fear of what might happen to him, if the Cardinal should choose to take these ravings seriously, preyed on Chauvet's mind. He sank into a melancholy, then into madness, then into a decline, which killed him before the winter was out.

Tranquille was of tougher fiber than the others. It was not until 1638 that he finally succumbed to the consequences of a too exclusive preoccupation with evil. By his hatred of Grandier he had helped to raise the devils; by his scandalous insistence on public exorcisms, he had done his best to keep them alive. Now the devils turned against him. God is not mocked; he was reaping what he had deliberately sown.

At first the obsessions were rare and of no great force. But little by little Dog's Tail and Leviathan gained the upper hand. During the last year of his life, Father Tranquille was behaving like the nuns whose hysteria he had so carefully fostered — rolling on the floor, cursing, yelling, sticking out his tongue, hissing, barking, neighing. Nor was this all. The "stinking Owl of Hell," as his Capuchin biographer picturesquely nicknames the devil, plagued him with hardly resistible temptations against chastity, against humility, against patience, faith and devotion. He called on the Virgin, on St. Joseph, on St. Francis and St. Bonaventure. In vain. The possession went from bad to worse.

On Whitsunday, 1638, Tranquille preached his last sermon; for two or three days more he managed to say Mass; then he took to his bed with a sickness nonetheless mortal for being obviously psychosomatic. "He threw up ordures, which were judged to be diabolic Pacts. . . . Every time he took a little nourishment, the devils made him retch with a violence that would have killed the healthiest person." And meanwhile he suffered from headaches and pains in the heart, "of a kind of which there is no mention in Galen or Hippocrates." By the end of the week "he was vomiting filths and stinks so insupportable, that his attendants had to throw them out without delay, so fearfully was the room infected by them." On the Monday after Whitsun, Extreme Unction was administered. The devils left the dying man and forthwith entered the body of another friar, who was kneeling by the bed. The new demoniac became so frantic, that he had to be held by half a dozen of his colleagues, who had the greatest difficulty in preventing him from kicking the hardly lifeless corpse.

On the day of the funeral, Father Tranquille lay in state. "No sooner was the service over than the people flung themselves upon him. Some applied their rosaries to his body, others cut from his habit little pieces which they preserved as relics. So great was the press that the coffin was smashed, and the body disturbed in countless ways, each man tugging it toward himself so as to get his snippet. And assuredly the good Father would have been left stark naked, had it not been for several persons of honor, who formed a guard to protect him from

the indiscreet devotion of the people, who, after cutting up the habit, would probably have mangled the corpse itself.”

The shreds of Father Tranquille’s habit, the ashes of the man he had tortured and burned alive. . . . Everything was equivocal. The magician had died a martyr; his fiendish executioner was now a saint — but a saint who was possessed by Beelzebub. Only one thing was certain: a fetish is a fetish. So lend me your knife; after you with the shears!

CHAPTER NINE

GRANDIER WAS GONE, but Eazaz remained, Coal of Impurity remained, Zabulon went marching along. To many, the fact seemed unaccountable. But where the cause persists, the effects will always follow. It was Canon Mignon and the exorcists who had originally crystallized the nuns' hysteria into the forms of devils, and it was Canon Mignon and the exorcists who now kept the possession alive. Twice every day, Sundays excepted, the demoniacs were put through their tricks. As might have been expected, they were no better — they were even a little worse — than they had been while the magician was alive.

Toward the end of September Laubardemont informed the Cardinal that he had appealed to the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits had a reputation for learning and ability. From these masters of all the sciences the public would surely "accept, with less contradiction, the evidence for the truth of this possession."

Many Jesuits, including Vitelleschi, the General of the Order, were for politely refusing to have anything to do with the possession. But it was too late to raise objections. Laubardemont's invitation was speedily followed by a royal command. Through the King, His Eminence had spoken.

On the fifteenth of December, 1634, four Jesuit Fathers rode into Loudun. Among them was Jean-Joseph Surin. Father Bohyre, the Provincial of Aquitaine, had selected him for the task of exorcism, and had then, on the advice of his council, countermanded the order. Too late. Surin had already left Marennes. The original appointment was permitted to stand.

Surin was now thirty-four, nel mezzo del cammin, his character formed, the pattern of his thinking already fixed. His fellow Jesuits thought highly of his abilities, recognized his zeal and respected the austerity of his life, the fervor of his pursuit of Christian perfection. But their admiration was tempered by certain misgivings. Father Surin had all the makings of a man of heroic virtue; but there

was something about him which caused the more prudent of his colleagues and superiors to shake their heads. They detected in him a certain extravagance, a too-muchness in act and word. He liked to say that “the man who does not have excessive ideas in regard to God will never come near Him.” And of course it was true — provided always that the excessive ideas were of the right kind. Some of the young Father’s excessive ideas, though orthodox enough, seemed to deviate from the highroad of discretion. For example, he maintained that we ought to be ready to die for the people with whom we live, “while at the same time preserving ourselves from them as though they were our enemies” — a proposition hardly calculated to improve the quality of communal living in the Society’s houses and colleges. As well as antisocial, his excessive ideas made him overrighteous to the point of scrupulosity. “We ought,” he said, “to bewail our vanities as sacrileges, to punish with the utmost severity our ignorances and inadvertences.” And to this inhuman rigorism in the name of perfection he added what seemed to many of his elders and contemporaries an indiscreet and even dangerous interest in those “extraordinary graces,” which are sometimes vouchsafed to the holy, but which are entirely unnecessary to salvation or to sanctification. “From his earliest childhood,” his friend, Father Anginot was to write many years later, “he has felt powerfully drawn toward such things, and has esteemed them too highly. It has been necessary to humor him in this and to allow him to travel by a road which was not the common and ordinary way.”

At the fishing port of Marennes, where he had spent most of the four years following the close of his “second novitiate” at Rouen, Surin acted as director to two remarkable women — *Mme.* du Verger, the wife of a prosperous and pious merchant, and Madeleine Boinet, the converted daughter of a Protestant tinker. Both were active contemplatives and both (Mme. du Verger especially) had been favored by “extraordinary graces.” Surin’s interest in their visions and ecstasies was so great that he copied out long extracts from *Mme.* du Verger’s diary and wrote circumstantial accounts of both women for circulation, in manuscript, among his friends. There was, of course, nothing wrong in all this. But why pay so much attention to a subject so essentially ambiguous, so full of snares and

perils? Ordinary graces were the only ones that would bring a soul to heaven; so why bother with the extraordinary — all the more so as one never knew whether such things were from God, from imagination, from deliberate fraud or from the devil? If Father Surin wanted to go to perfection, let him go by that royal road which was good enough for the rank and file of the Society — the road of obedience and active zeal, the road of vocal prayer and discursive meditation.

What made matters worse, so far as his critics were concerned, was the fact that Surin was a sick man, a victim of neurosis or, as it was then called, “melancholy.” For at least two years before his coming to Loudun, he had suffered from incapacitating psychosomatic disturbances. The slightest physical effort brought on intense muscular pains. When he tried to read, he was soon forced by excruciating headaches to give up. His mind was darkened and confused, and he lived in the midst of “agonies and pressures so extreme that he did not know what would become of him.” Could it be that the singularities of his conduct and his teaching were all the products of a sick mind in an unhealthy body?

Surin records that many of his fellow Jesuits were not convinced, to the very end, that the nuns were genuinely possessed. Even before coming to Loudun, he himself was troubled by no such doubts. He was persuaded that the world is at all times visibly and miraculously interpenetrated by the supernatural. And this conviction was the source, in its turn, of a wholesale credulity. People had merely to say that they had had dealings with saints, or angels, or devils; Surin believed them without question or criticism. Most conspicuously he lacked “the discernment of spirits.” Indeed, he was wanting even in judgment and plain common sense. Surin was that not uncommon paradox — a man of great abilities who is, at the same time, a bit of a fool. He could never have echoed the opening words of Monsieur Teste: La bêtise n’est pas mon fort. Along with intelligence and sanctity, silliness was his strong point.

Surin’s first sight of the demoniacs was at one of the public exorcisms, at which Tranquille, Mignon and the Carmelites were officiating. He had come to Loudun, convinced of the reality of the possession; this spectacle raised his

conviction to a higher power of certainty. The devils, he knew, were absolutely genuine, “and God gave him so much compassion for the state of the possessed that he could not restrain his tears.” He was wasting his sympathy — or at least misplacing it. “The devil,” writes Sœur Jeanne, “often beguiled me by a certain pleasure, which I took in my agitations and the other extraordinary things he did to my body. I took an extreme delight in hearing these things spoken about, and was happy that I gave the impression of being more gravely tormented than the others.” Unduly prolonged, every pleasure turns into its opposite; it was only when the exorcists went too far that the good sisters ceased to enjoy their possession. Taken in moderation, the public exorcisms, like any other kind of orgy, were intrinsically agreeable. This was a fact, which persons accustomed to self-examination in the light of a strict morality, could hardly fail to find disturbing. Despite the fact that souls were held to be guiltless of the sinful acts performed while in the paroxysm of possession, Sœur Jeanne suffered from a chronic remorse of conscience. “And no wonder; for I perceived very clearly that in most instances I was the prime cause of my disorders, and that the devil only acted upon the cues I myself had given him.” She knew that when she behaved outrageously, it was not because she had freely willed the outrage. Nevertheless, “I feel certain, to my great confusion, that I made it possible for the devil to do such things, and that he would not have had the power to do them if I had not allied myself with him. . . . When I made a strong resistance, all these furies would disappear as suddenly as they had come; but, alas, it happened only too frequently that I did not make a great effort to resist them.” Perceiving that they were guilty, not of what they did when they were out of their wits, but of what they had failed to do before their hysteria got the better of them, the nuns suffered excruciatingly from a sense of guilt. From this conviction of sin the debauches of possession and exorcism came as so many happy holidays. Tears were in order, not for these frenzies and indecencies, but for the lucid intervals between them.

To Surin, long before his arrival in Loudun, had been assigned the honor of exorcising the Mother Superior. When Laubardemont told her that he had called

in the Jesuits and that she was to have as her director the ablest and holiest young Father in the Province of Aquitaine, Sœur Jeanne had been greatly alarmed. Jesuits were not like these slow-witted Capuchins and Carmelites, whom it had always been so easy to deceive. They were clever, they were well educated; and this Father Surin was holy into the bargain, a man of prayer, a great contemplative. He would see through her at once, would know when she was really possessed and when she was only acting, or at least collaborating with her devils. She pleaded with Laubardemont to be left to her old exorcists — to dear Canon Mignon, to the good Father Tranquille and the worthy Carmelites. But Laubardemont and his master had made up their minds. They needed acceptable evidence for the possession, and only the Jesuits could provide it. With a bad grace, Sœur Jeanne submitted. During the weeks which preceded Surin's arrival, she did her best to find out everything that could be discovered about her new exorcist. She wrote letters to friends in other convents, asking for information; she pumped the local Jesuits. Her purpose in all this was to "study the humor of the man to whom I had been assigned," and, having found out all she could, "to behave toward him with as little openness as possible, without giving him any information about the state of my soul. To this resolve I was only too faithful." When the new exorcist arrived, she knew enough about his life at Marennes to be able to make sarcastic references to ta Boinette (her devils' derisive name for Madeleine Boinet). Surin held up his hands in amazement. It was a miracle — infernal no doubt, but manifestly genuine.

Sœur Jeanne had made up her mind to keep her secrets to herself, and she acted upon this resolution by feeling and expressing an intense aversion for her new exorcist and by going into fits (in her own words, "being troubled inwardly and outwardly by the demons") whenever Surin tried to question her about the condition of her soul. When he approached, she ran away and, if compelled to listen to him, she howled and stuck out her tongue. In all this, Sœur Jeanne remarks, "she greatly exercised his virtue. But he had the charity to attribute her disposition to the devil."

All the nuns suffered from remorse and a conviction, in spite of their devils, of having gravely sinned; but the Prioress had a more pressing and a more conspicuous reason than any of her sisters for feeling guilty. Shortly after the execution of Grandier, Isacaaron, who was a devil of concupiscence “took advantage of my slackness to give me most horrible temptations against chastity. He performed an operation upon my body, the strangest and most furious that could be imagined; thereafter he persuaded me that I was great with child, in such sort that I firmly believed the fact and exhibited all the signs.” She confided in her sisters, and soon a score of devils had announced the pregnancy. The exorcists reported the matter to the Commissioner and the Commissioner reported to His Eminence. Menstruation, he wrote, had ceased for the past three months; there were constant vomitings, with a derangement of the stomach, secretion of milk and a marked enlargement of the belly. As the weeks passed, the Prioress became more and more painfully agitated. If she bore a child, she herself and, with her, the community of which she was the head and her whole Order, would be disgraced. She was filled with a despair, from which the only relief was a visit from Isacaaron. These visits were of almost nightly occurrence. In the darkness of her cell she would hear noises and feel the bed trembling. Hands drew back the sheet; voices whispered flatteries and indecencies in her ear. Sometimes there was a strange light in the room, and she would see the form of a goat, a lion, a snake, a man. Sometimes she fell into a catalepsy and while she lay there, unable to move, it was as though small animals were crawling under the bedclothes, tickling her body with their paws and probing snouts. Then the wheedling voice would ask her, yet once more, for just a little love, for just the tiniest favor. And when she answered that “her honor was in the hands of God and that He would dispose of it according to his will,” she was tumbled out of bed and beaten so violently that her face was quite disfigured and her body covered with bruises. “It happened very often that he treated me in this way, but God gave me more courage than I would have dared to hope for. And yet I was so wicked that I took pride in these trifling combats, thinking that I must be very pleasing to God and that therefore had no reason for dreading, as I had done, the

reproaches of my conscience. Nevertheless, I found it impossible to stifle my remorse, or to prevent myself from believing that I was not what God wished me to be."

Isacaaron was the chief culprit, and it was against Isacaaron that Surin directed all his energies, all the thunders of the ritual. Audi ergo et time, Satana, malorum radix, fomes vitiorum. . . . Nothing availed. "Since I would not reveal my temptations, they increased more and more." And as Isacaaron became stronger, so did Sœur Jeanne's despair, so did her anxieties on account of the steadily advancing pregnancy. Shortly before Christmas she found means to procure certain drugs — mugwort, no doubt, and aristolochium and colocynth, the three simples to which Galenic science and the desperate optimism of girls in trouble attributed abortifacient powers. But what if the child should die, unbaptized? Its soul would be lost eternally. She threw the drugs away.

Another plan now suggested itself. She would go to the kitchen, borrow the cook's largest knife, cut herself open, extract the baby, baptize it and then either recover, or die herself. On New Year's Day, 1635, she made a general confession, "without, however, revealing my plans to the confessor." The following day, armed with her knife and carrying a basin of water for the baptism, she shut herself up in a little room on the top floor of the convent. There was a crucifix in the room. Sœur Jeanne knelt before it, and prayed God to "forgive her death and that of the little creature, in case I should murder myself and it, for I was resolved to smother it as soon as it was baptized." While she was undressing, she was overtaken by de petittes appréhensions d'estre damnée; but these little apprehensions were not strong enough to divert her from her evil design. After taking off her habit, she cut a large hole in her chemise with a pair of scissors, picked up the knife and began to thrust it between the two ribs nearest to the stomach, "with a strong resolution to proceed to the bitter end." But though they often attempt suicide, hysterics very rarely succeed. "Behold the merciful stroke of Providence which prevented me from doing what I had intended! I was suddenly thrown down with inexpressible violence. The knife was snatched out of my hand and placed before me at the foot of the crucifix." A

voice cried, “Desist!” Sœur Jeanne raised her eyes to the crucifix. The Christ detached one of his arms from the cross and held out his hand to her. Divine words were spoken, after which there was a muttering and howling of devils. The Prioress resolved, there and then, to change her way of life and be wholly converted. Meanwhile, however, the pregnancy continued and Isacaaron had by no means given up hope. One night he offered, for a consideration, to bring her a magic plaster which would, if applied to the stomach, put an end to her pregnancy. The Prioress was sorely tempted to accept his terms, but, on second thoughts decided to say no. The exasperated devil gave her a sound beating. Another time Isacaaron wept and complained so mournfully that Sœur Jeanne was touched to the heart and “felt a desire for the same thing to present itself again.” It did. There seemed to be no reason why this sort of thing should not go on indefinitely.

Greatly perplexed, Laubardemont sent to Le Mans for the celebrated Dr. du Chêne. He came, made a thorough examination of the Prioress and pronounced her pregnancy to be genuine. Laubardemont’s perplexity gave place to alarm. How would the Protestants take the news? Fortunately for everyone concerned, Isacaaron made his appearance at a public exorcism and flatly contradicted the doctor. All the telltale symptoms, from morning sickness to the flow of milk, had been contrived by demons. “He was then constrained to make me throw up all the accumulations of blood, which he had amassed in my body. This happened in the presence of a bishop, several doctors and many other persons.” All the signs of pregnancy disappeared forthwith and never returned.

The spectators gave thanks to God; and so, with her lips, did the Prioress. But in the privacy of her mind she had her doubts. “The demons,” she records, “did their best to persuade me that what had happened when Our Lord prevented me from cutting myself open, in order to be freed from my so-called pregnancy, was not from God; and therefore that I ought to treat the whole thing as mere illusion, keep quiet about it and not trouble to mention it in confession.” Later on these doubts were laid to rest and she was able to convince herself that there had been a miracle.

For Surin the miracle was never in question. So far as he was concerned, everything that happened at Loudun was supernatural. His faith was gluttonous and indiscriminate. He believed in the possession. He believed in Grandier's guilt. He believed that other magicians were at work upon the nuns. He believed that the devil, duly constrained, is bound to tell the truth. He believed that public exorcisms were for the good of the Catholic religion and that innumerable libertines and Huguenots would be converted by hearing the devils testify to the reality of transubstantiation. He believed, finally, in Sister Jane and the products of her imagination. Credulity is a grave intellectual sin, which only the most invincible ignorance can justify. In Surin's case the ignorance was vincible and even voluntary. We have seen that, in spite of the prevailing intellectual climate, many of his Jesuit colleagues displayed none of his indecent eagerness to believe. Doubting the possession, they were free to refuse their assent to all the absurd and hideous nonsense which the new exorcist, with his morbid interest in extraordinary graces and disgraces, had accepted without so much as an attempt at criticism. Silliness, as we have seen, was one of Surin's strong points. But so was holiness, so was heroic zeal. His goal was Christian perfection — that dying to self, which makes it possible for a soul to receive the grace of union with God. And this goal he proposed not only for himself, but for all who could be persuaded to travel with him along the path of purification and docility to the Holy Spirit. Others had listened to him — so why not the Prioress? The idea came to him — and he felt it to be an inspiration — while he was still at Marennes. He would supplement exorcism with the kind of training in the life of the spirit, which he himself had received from Mother Isabel and Father Lallemant. He would deliver the demoniac's soul by raising it into the Light.

A day or two after his arrival at Loudun he broached the subject to Sœur Jeanne, and was answered by a peal of laughter from Isacaaron, a snarl, from Leviathan, of angry contempt. This woman, they reminded him, was their property, a common lodging house for devils; and he talked to her of spiritual exercises, he urged her to prepare her soul for union with God! Why, it was

more than two years since she had even attempted to practice mental prayer. Contemplation, indeed! Christian perfection! The laughter became uproarious.

But Surin was not to be deterred. Day after day, in spite of the blasphemies and the convulsions, he returned to the charge. He had set the Hound of Heaven on her tracks, and he meant to follow his quarry to the death — the death which is eternal Life. The Prioress tried to escape; but he dogged her footsteps, he haunted her with his prayers and homilies. He spoke to her of the spiritual life, he begged God to give her the strength to undertake its arduous preliminaries, he described the beatitude of union. Sœur Jeanne interrupted him with peals of laughter, jokes about his precious Boinette, enormous belches, snatches of song, imitations of pigs at feeding time. But the voice murmured on, indefatigably.

One day, after a peculiarly horrible display of diabolic beastliness, Surin prayed that he might be permitted to suffer on behalf of the Prioress and in her stead. He wanted to feel all that the devils had caused Sœur Jeanne to feel; he was ready himself to be possessed, “provided that it should please the divine Goodness to cure her and lead her into the practice of virtue.” He further asked that he might be allowed to undergo the ultimate humiliation of being regarded as a lunatic. Such prayers, the moralists and theologians assure us, ought never to be offered. Unhappily, prudence was not one of Surin’s virtues. The unwise, the utterly illegitimate petition was uttered. But prayers, if earnest, have a way of getting themselves answered — sometimes, no doubt, by a direct divine intervention; but more often, we may suspect, because the nature of ideas is such that they tend to become objectified, to take a form, material or psychological, in fact or in symbol, in the waking world or in dream. Surin had prayed that he might suffer as Sœur Jeanne had suffered. On January 19th he began to be obsessed.

Perhaps it would have happened even if he had never prayed. The devils had already killed Father Lactance, and Father Tranquille was soon to go the same way. Indeed, according to Surin, there was not one of the exorcists who was not in some degree beset by the demons they had helped to evoke and were doing their best to keep alive. No man can concentrate his attention upon evil, or even

upon the idea of evil, and remain unaffected. To be more against the devil than for God is exceedingly dangerous. Every crusader is apt to go mad. He is haunted by the wickedness which he attributes to his enemies; it becomes in some sort a part of him.

Possession is more often secular than supernatural. Men are possessed by their thoughts of a hated person, a hated class, race or nation. At the present time the destinies of the world are in the hands of self-made demoniacs — of men who are possessed by, and who manifest, the evil they have chosen to see in others. They do not believe in devils; but they have tried their hardest to be possessed — have tried and been triumphantly successful. And since they believe even less in God than in the devil, it seems very unlikely that they will ever be able to cure themselves of their possession. Concentrating his attention upon the idea of a supernatural and metaphysical evil, Surin drove himself to a pitch of madness uncommon among secular demoniacs. But his idea of good was also supernatural and metaphysical, and in the end it saved him.

Early in May, Surin wrote to his friend and fellow Jesuit, Father d'Attichy, giving him a full account of what had happened to him. "Since last writing, I have fallen into a state far removed from anything I could have foreseen, but thoroughly consonant with the leadings of God's Providence in regard to my soul. . . . I am engaged upon a struggle with four of hell's most malignant devils. . . . The least important battlefield is that of exorcism; for my enemies have made themselves known in secret, night and day, in a thousand different ways. . . . For the last three and a half months I have never been without a devil on duty. Things have come to such a pass that (for my sins, as I think) God has permitted . . . the devils to pass out of the possessed person's body and, entering into mine, to assault me, to throw me down, to torment me so that all can see, possessing me for several hours at a stretch like a demoniac.

"I find it almost impossible to explain what happens to me during this time, how this alien spirit is united to mine, without depriving me of consciousness or of inner freedom, and yet constituting a second 'me,' as though I had two souls, of which one is dispossessed of my body and the use of its organs, and keeps its

quarters, watching the other, the intruder, doing whatever it likes. These two spirits do battle within the limits of a field, which is the body. The very soul is as though divided, and in one of its parts is the subject of diabolical impressions and, in the other, of such feelings as are proper to it or are inspired by God. At one and the same time I feel a great peace, as being under God's good pleasure, and on the other hand (without knowing how) an overpowering rage and loathing of God, expressing itself in frantic struggles (astonishing to those who watch them) to separate myself from Him. At one and the same time I experience a great joy and delight and, on the other hand, a misery that finds vent in wailings and lamentations, like those of the damned. I feel the state of damnation and apprehend it. I feel as if I had been pierced by the pricks of despair in that alien soul which seems to be mine; and meanwhile the other soul lives in complete confidence, makes light of all such feelings, and curses the being who is their cause. I even feel that the cries uttered by my mouth come from both souls at once; and I find it hard to determine whether they are the product of joy or frenzy. The shudderings which come upon me, when the Blessed Sacrament is applied to any part of my body, are caused simultaneously (so it seems to me) by the horror of its proximity, which I find unbearable, and by a heartfelt reverence. . . .

"When, under the impulsion of one of these two souls, I try to make the sign of the cross on my mouth, the other soul turns my hand aside, or takes the finger between the teeth and savagely bites it. I find that mental prayer is never easier or more tranquil than in the midst of these agitations, while the body is rolling on the ground and the ministers of the Church are speaking to me as though to a devil, loading me with maledictions. I cannot describe to you the joy I feel in thus finding myself turned into a devil, not by rebellion against God, but by a calamity which plainly symbolizes the state to which sin has reduced me. . . .

"When the other demoniacs see me in this state, it is a joy to see how they exult, to hear how the devils make sport of! 'Physician, heal thyself! Now's the time to get up in the pulpit! A pretty sight to see that thing preaching!' . . . What a favor this is — to know by experience the state from which Jesus Christ has

drawn me, to realize the greatness of his redemption, not by hearsay, but by the actual feeling of the state from which we have been redeemed! . . .

"This is where I now stand, this is how I am almost every day. I have become a subject of dispute. Is there true possession? Is it possible for ministers of the Church to fall into such troubles? Some say that all this is God's chastisement upon me, a punishment for some illusion; others say something else. As for me, I hold my peace and have no wish to change my fate, being firmly convinced that nothing is better than to be reduced to the utmost extremity. . . ."

(In his later writings Surin developed this theme more fully. There are, he insisted, many cases in which God makes use of possession as a part of the purgative process which must precede illumination. "It is one of God's more ordinary leadings in the ways of grace to permit the devil to possess or obsess souls which He wishes to raise to a high degree of holiness." Devils cannot possess the will, and cannot force their victims into sin. Diabolic inspirations of blasphemy, impurity and hatred of God leave the soul unstained. Indeed, they actually do good, inasmuch as they cause the soul to feel as much humiliation as it would do, if such horrors were committed voluntarily. These humiliations and the agonies and apprehensions, with which the demons fill the mind, are "the crucible which burns away, down to the quick of the heart, down to the very marrow of the bones, all self-love." And meanwhile, God Himself is at work on the suffering soul, and His operations are "so strong, so insinuating and ravishing, that one can say of this soul that it is one of the loveliest works of His mercy.")

Surin concluded his letter to Father d'Attichy with a plea for secrecy and discretion. "Except for my confessor and my superiors, you are the only person to whom I have confided these things." The confidence was sadly misplaced. Father d'Attichy showed the letter to all and sundry. Numerous copies of it were made and circulated, and within a few months it had got into print, as a broadsheet. Along with the condemned murderers and the six-legged calves, Surin took his place as a news item for the amusement of the groundlings.

From now on, Leviathan and Isacaaron were never far away. But between their assaults on his body, and actually during their obsession of his soul, Surin was able to proceed with his mission — the sanctification of Sœur Jeanne. When she ran away he followed. Cornered, she turned and raged at him. He paid no attention. Kneeling at her feet, he prayed for her; sitting beside her, he whispered the spiritual doctrine of Father Lallemant into her unwilling ears. “Interior perfection, docility to the Holy Spirit, purification of the heart, conversion of the will to God. . . .” Her devils writhed and gibbered; but he went on — went on even though, within his own mind, he could hear the sneering of Leviathan, the obscene promptings of Isacaaron, the demon of impurity.

Surin had more than the devils to contend with. Even in her hours of sanity — above all, perhaps, in her hours of sanity — the Prioress still disliked him. She disliked him because she feared him, because she was afraid of being exposed by his perspicacity as what, in her lucid intervals, she knew herself to be — half actress, half unrepentant sinner, wholly hysterical. He begged her to be frank with him. The answer was either a howling of fiends, or a declaration by the nun that there was nothing to confide.

The relations between the energumen and her exorcist were complicated by the fact that, during Easter week, Sœur Jeanne was suddenly overcome by “very evil desires and a sentiment of most lawless affection” for the man she so much feared and detested. She could not bring herself to confess her secret, and it was Surin himself who, after three hours of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, first referred to these “infamous temptations.” “If anyone,” writes Sœur Jeanne, “was ever dumbfounded, it was I on this occasion.” The hour was late, and he left her to ruminate her astonishment. In the end, she decided, yet once more, to change not merely her behavior toward Surin, but her whole way of life. It was a resolution of the surface will. Down below, in the subconscious, the demons had other views. She tried to read; her mind became a blank. She tried to think of God, to hold her soul in His presence; at once she developed a splitting headache, together with “strange obfuscations and weaknesses.” For all these symptoms Surin had one sovereign remedy: mental prayer. She agreed to try it.

The devils redoubled their fury. At the first mention of interior perfection, they threw her body into convulsions. Surin made her lie on a table and bound her securely with ropes, so that she could not move. Then he kneeled beside her and, whispering in her ear, put into words a model meditation. “I took as my subject the conversion of the heart to God and its desire to consecrate itself completely to Him. I made three separate points, which I explained in an affective manner, making all the acts on behalf of the Mother.” Day after day this ceremony was repeated. Tied down, as though she were to undergo a surgical operation, the Prioress was at God’s mercy. She struggled, she shouted; but through all the noise she could still hear the voice of her implacable well-wisher. Sometimes Leviathan would turn his attention to the exorcist, and suddenly Father Surin would find himself unable to speak. From the Prioress came whoops of fiendish laughter. Then the current was turned on again; the prayers, the whispered teaching continued from the point where they had been interrupted.

When the devils became too violent, Surin would reach for a silver box containing a consecrated wafer and apply it to the Prioress’s heart or forehead. After the first agonized convulsion, “she was moved to great devotion, all the more so as I whispered in her ear all that it pleased God to inspire me with. She became very attentive to what I said, and was plunged in a profound recollectedness. The effect upon her heart was so great . . . that the tears streamed from her eyes.”

It was a conversion — but a conversion in the context of hysteria, a conversion on the stage of an imaginary theater. Eight years before, as a young nun trying to curry favor with her Superior, Sœur Jeanne had briefly flaunted the ambition to become a second St. Teresa. Except for the old lady, nobody had been impressed. Then she was appointed Prioress, she had the run of the parlor; mysticism began to seem less interesting. After that, almost suddenly, had come her obsession with the erotic dream to which she gave the name of Grandier. Her neurosis deepened, Canon Mignon talked of devils, practiced exorcisms, lent her his own copy of Michaelis’s book on the Gauffridi case. She read it and forthwith saw herself as the queen of the demoniacs. Her ambition at this time

was to outdo them all in everything — in blasphemy, in grunting, in filthy language, in acrobatics. She knew, of course, that “all the disorders of her soul were founded on her own character” and that “she ought to blame herself for these disorders, without invoking extraneous causes.” Under the influence of Michaelis and Mignon, these native defects had been crystallized into seven devils. And now the devils had their own autonomous life and were her masters. To get rid of them, she would have to get rid of her bad habits and her ugly tendencies. And to do that; as her new director kept telling her, she would have to pray, to expose herself to the divine Light. Surin’s ardor was infectious; she was touched by the man’s sincerity, was aware, behind the symptoms of his obsession, that he knew, by profound experience, what he was talking about. After listening to him, she longed to go to God; but she longed to go in the most spectacular way possible, before a large and admiring audience. She had been the queen of the demoniacs; now she desired to be a saint — or, rather, she desired to be known as a saint, to be canonized here and now, to work miracles, to be invoked in prayer. . . .

She threw herself into the new role with all her usual energy. From thirty minutes a day, the quota of mental prayer was raised to three or four hours, and to make herself fit for illumination she undertook a course of the harshest physical austerities. She exchanged her feather bed for uncushioned boards; she made decoctions of wormwood to be poured, in lieu of sauce, over her food; she wore a hair shirt and a belt spiked with nails; she beat herself with a whip at least three times a day, and sometimes, so she assures us, for as much as seven hours in a single twenty-four hour period. Surin, who was a great believer in the discipline, encouraged her to persevere. He had noticed that devils who merely laughed at the rites of the Church were often put to flight in a few minutes by a good whipping. And the whip was as good for natural melancholy as for supernatural possession. St. Teresa had made the same discovery. “I say it again (for I have seen and have had much to do with many persons troubled with this disease of melancholy) that there is no other remedy, but to conquer them by every means in our power. . . . If words be not enough, have recourse to

penances, and let them be heavy, if light penances will not do. It seems unjust," the saint adds, "to punish the sick sister, who cannot help herself, as though she were well." But, first of all, let it be remembered that these neurotics do enormous harm to the souls of others. Moreover, "I really believe that the mischief comes very often from a spirit undisciplined, wanting in humility and badly trained. . . . Under the pretense of this temper (of melancholy) Satan seeks to gain many souls. It is more common in our day than it used to be; the reason is that all self-will and license are now called melancholy." Among persons who took for granted the absolute freedom of the will and the total depravity of nature, this short way with neurotics was apparently very effective. Would it work today? In some cases, perhaps. For the rest, "talking it out" is likely, in the present intellectual climate, to have better results than self-inflicted shock treatment.

What with the exorcisms and the coming and going of the tourists, the convent chapel was becoming too noisy for the whispered colloquies between Sœur Jeanne and her director. In the early summer of 1635 they began to meet more privately in an attic under the tiles. A makeshift grille was set up. Through the bars Surin gave his instructions or expounded mystical theology. And through the bars, the Prioress told him of her temptations, her combats with the demons, her experiences (already marvelous) in the course of mental prayer. Then in silence they would meditate together, and the attic became, in Surin's words, "a house of angels and a paradise of delights," in which both were favored with extraordinary graces. One day, while meditating on the contempt to which Jesus had been exposed during his Passion, Sœur Jeanne went into an ecstasy. When it was over, she reported, through the grating, "that she had come so near to God that she had received, as it were, a kiss from his mouth."

And meanwhile what did the other exorcists think about all this? What were the opinions of the good folk of Loudun? Surin tells us that he "heard people murmuring: What can this Jesuit be doing every day with a possessed nun? I answered inwardly: You do not know the importance of the affair I am engaged on. I seemed to see heaven and hell all on fire for this soul, the one in love, the

other in fury, each of them straining to carry her off." But what he saw was not seen by anyone else. All that the others knew was that, instead of subjecting his penitent to the full rigor of the exorcisms, Surin was spending hours in private conversation, trying to teach her (in spite of her devils) to lead the life of Christian perfection. To his colleagues, the attempt seemed merely foolish, all the more so as Surin was himself obsessed and in frequent need of exorcism on his own account. (In May, when Gaston d'Orléans, the King's brother, came to see the devils, he had been publicly possessed by Isacaaron, who passed out of Sœur Jeanne's body into Surin's. While the demoniac sat calm, sane and ironically smiling, her exorcist rolled on the floor. The Prince, of course, was delighted; but for Jean-Joseph it had been another in the long series of humiliations to which an inscrutable Providence was subjecting him.) Nobody questioned the purity of Surin's intentions or actions; but all regarded his conduct as indiscreet, and all deplored the gossip to which, inevitably, it gave rise. By the end of the summer the Provincial was being advised to recall him to Bordeaux.

Meanwhile the Prioress had had her full share of trials. In her new part, as the great contemplative saint, she was giving a performance which ought to have brought the house down. Instead of that, "Our Lord permitted that I should have much to suffer in my conversations with my sisters, through the workings of the devils, who tormented them; for most of them conceived a great aversion for me, on account of the change in my behavior and way of life, which they recognized in me. The demons persuaded them that it was the devil who had wrought this change, so that I might be in a position to pass judgment on their character and behavior. Whenever I was with them, the demons induced some of them to jeer at me and make fun of all I said and did, a thing which was most painful to me." During their exorcisms, the nuns used to refer to their Superior as le diable dévot, the devout devil. Their opinion was shared by the exorcists. Except for Surin, all the attendant Fathers were skeptical. It was in vain that Sœur Jeanne assured them that the great St. Joseph had obtained for her the gift of mental prayer, in vain that she modestly claimed to have been "raised by the Divine

Majesty to the degree of contemplation, by means of which I received great illuminations, and Our Lord communicated himself to my soul in a special and private manner." Instead of prostrating themselves before this walking fount of divine wisdom, the exorcists merely told her that this was the kind of illusion to which the possessed were peculiarly subject. Confronted by so much hardness of heart, the Prioress could only retreat, either into madness, or into the attic, with her dear, good, credulous Father Surin.

But even Father Surin was a trial to her. He was ready enough to believe all that she said about her extraordinary graces; but his ideals of sanctity were uncomfortably high, and his estimation of Sœur Jeanne's character uncomfortably low. To confess that one is proud and sensual is one thing; to be told these home truths by someone else is another and very different matter. And Surin was not content with telling Sœur Jeanne what her faults were; he was forever trying to correct them. He was convinced that the Prioress was possessed by devils; but he was also convinced that the devils derived their power from the victim's own defects. By getting rid of the defects one would get rid of the demons. It was therefore necessary, in Surin's words, "to attack the horse in order to overthrow the rider." But the horse found it most unpleasant to be attacked. For, though Sœur Jeanne had resolved to "go to God with perfection," though she already saw herself as a saint and was pained when other people saw only the unconscious (or perhaps the all too conscious) comedian, she found the process of sanctification extremely painful and distressing. Surin took her very seriously as an ecstatic — and that was flattering; that was all as it should be. But, unfortunately for the Prioress, he took her still more seriously as a penitent and an ascetic. When she became too uppish, he snubbed her. When she asked for showy penances — public confession of her sin, degradation to the rank of a lay sister — he insisted, instead, on the practice of small, inconspicuous, but unremitting mortifications. When, as sometimes happened, she played the great lady, he treated her as though she were a scullery maid. Exasperated, she took refuge in Leviathan's proud anger, in Behemoth's ravings against God, in Balaam's buffoonery. Instead of resorting to exorcisms, which, by this time, all

the devils thoroughly enjoyed, Surin ordered the infesting entities to whip themselves. And, since the Prioress always retained enough liberty and enough genuine desire for self-improvement to give her consent, the demons had to obey. “We can stand up to the Church,” they said, “we can defy the priests. But we cannot resist the will of this bitch.” Whining or cursing, according to their various temperaments, they swung the discipline. Leviathan was the hardest hitter; Behemoth, a close second. But Balaam and, above all, Isacaaron had a horror of pain, and could hardly be induced to hurt themselves. “It was an admirable spectacle,” says Surin, “when the demon of sensuality inflicted the punishment.” The blows were light, but the screams were piercing, the tears profuse. The devils could take less punishment than Sœur Jeanne in her normal state. Once it took a whole hour of flagellation to dispel certain psychosomatic symptoms brought on by Leviathan; but on most occasions a few minutes of self-punishment were enough. The possessor took flight, and Sœur Jeanne was free to resume the march toward perfection.

It was a tedious march and, for Sœur Jeanne at least, perfection had one grave defect: it was as inconspicuous as those nagging little mortifications prescribed by Father Surin. You were raised to the degree of contemplation, you were honored by private communications from on high. But what was there to show for it? Nothing at all. You had to tell them about the graces you had received, and all they did was to shake their heads or shrug their shoulders. And when you behaved as the blessed Mother Teresa must have behaved, they either roared with laughter or flew into a rage and called you a hypocrite. Something more convincing was needed, something spectacular, something obviously supernatural.

Diabolical miracles were no longer in order; for Sœur Jeanne had ceased to be the queen of the demoniacs and was now aspiring to immediate canonization. The first of her divine miracles took place in February, 1635. One day Isacaaron confessed that three anonymous magicians, two from Loudun, one a Parisian, had come into possession of three consecrated wafers, which they intended to burn. Surin immediately ordered Isacaaron to go and fetch the wafers, which

were hidden under a mattress in Paris. Isacaaron disappeared and did not return. Balaam was then commanded to go to his assistance, stubbornly refused, but was finally forced, by the help of Surin's good angel, to obey. The orders were that the wafers should be produced at the after-dinner exorcism on the following day. At the appointed time, Balaam and Isacaaron made their appearance and, after much resistance and many contortions of the Prioress's body, announced that the wafers were in a niche above the tabernacle. "The demons then caused the Mother Superior's body, which was very small, to stretch." At the end of its elongated arm the hand was thrust into the niche and came out with a neatly folded sheet of paper containing three wafers.

To this painfully fishy marvel Surin attached enormous importance. In Sœur Jeanne's autobiography it is not so much as mentioned. Was she ashamed of the trick she had so successfully played on her trusting director? Or was it that she found the miracle essentially unsatisfactory? True, she had played the principal part in the affair; but the affair was not primarily hers. What she needed was a miracle all her own, and in the autumn of that same year she finally got what she wanted.

Toward the end of October, yielding to the pressure of public opinion within the Order, the Provincial of Aquitaine gave orders that Surin should return to Bordeaux and that his place at Loudun should be taken by another, less eccentric exorcist. The news got out. Leviathan exulted; but Sœur Jeanne, when she came to her senses, was greatly distressed. Something, she felt, would have to be done. She prayed to St. Joseph, and had a strong conviction "that God would help us and that this proud demon would be humiliated." After this, for three or four days, she was ill in bed; then suddenly felt well enough to ask to be exorcised. "It happened that day (it was the fifth of November) that many persons of quality were present in the church to watch the exorcisms; this was not without a special providence of God." (Special providences were the rule, where very important personages were concerned. It was always in the presence of the nobility that the devils performed their greatest feats.)

The exorcism began and “Leviathan appeared in an altogether extraordinary manner, boasting that he had triumphed over the minister of the Church.” Surin counterattacked by ordering the demon to adore the Blessed Sacrament. There were the customary howls and convulsions. Then “God in his mercy granted us more than we could have dared to hope.” Leviathan prostrated himself — or, to be more accurate, he prostrated Sœur Jeanne at the feet of the exorcist. He acknowledged that he had plotted against Surin’s honor and begged to be forgiven; then, after one last paroxysm, he left the Prioress’s body — forever. It was a triumph for Surin and a vindication of his method. Impressed, the other exorcists changed their tune, the Provincial gave him another chance. Sœur Jeanne had got what she wanted and, in doing so, had demonstrated that, while she was possessed by devils, the devils were, to some extent at least, possessed by her. They had power to make her behave like a lunatic; but when she chose to use it, she had power to make them behave as though they didn’t exist.

After the departure of Leviathan, a bloody cross appeared on the Prioress’s forehead and remained there, plainly visible, for three full weeks. This was good; but something much better was to follow. Balaam now announced that he was ready to go and promised that, when he took his leave, he would write his name on the Prioress’s left hand, where it should remain until her death. The prospect of being thus branded indelibly with the signature of the spirit of buffoonery did not appeal to Sœur Jeanne. How much better if the demon could be constrained to write the name, say, of St. Joseph! On Surin’s advice, she embarked on a course of nine consecutive communions in honor of the saint. Balaam did all he could to interrupt the novena. But illness and mental obfuscation were without avail; the Prioress struggled on. One morning, just before the hour of mass, Balaam and Behemoth — buffoonery and blasphemy — got into her head and set up such a turmoil and confusion that, though she knew quite well that she was doing wrong, she could not resist a mad impulse to rush headlong to the refectory. There “I breakfasted with such intemperateness that I ate, at this one meal, more than three famished persons could have eaten in a whole day.” Communion was now out of the question. Overcome with grief,

Sœur Jeanne appealed to Surin for help. He put on his stole and gave the necessary orders. “The demon re-entered my head and forthwith caused me to vomit with such abundance that it was quite inconceivable.” Balaam now swore that the stomach was completely empty, and Father Surin judged that she might safely take communion. “And thus I went on with my novena to the end.”

On November 29th the spirit of buffoonery finally took his leave. Among the spectators on this occasion were two Englishmen — Walter Montague, son of the first Earl of Manchester and a new-made Catholic with all the convert’s will-to-believe-everything, and his young friend and protégé, Thomas Killigrew, the future playwright. A few days after the event Killigrew wrote a long letter to a friend in England, describing all that he had seen at Loudun. The experience, he says, had been “beyond his expectation.” Going from chapel to chapel in the convent church, he had seen, on the first day of his visit, four or five of the energumens, quietly kneeling in prayer, each with her exorcist kneeling behind her and holding one end of a string, the other end of which was tied round the nun’s neck. Small crosses were fastened to this string, which served as a leash to control, in some small measure, the frenzies of the devils. For the moment, however, all was peace and quiet, and “I saw nothing but kneeling.” In the course of the next half hour, two of the nuns became unruly. One of them flew at a friar’s throat; the other stuck out her tongue, threw her arms about the neck of her exorcist and tried to kiss him. All the while, through the gratings separating the church from the convent, came a sound of howling. After that the young man was called by Walter Montague to witness a display of diabolic thought-reading. The devils succeeded with the convert, but were not so successful with Killigrew. In the intervals of this performance they offered prayers for Calvin and heaped curses on the Church of Rome. When one of the fiends departed, the tourists asked where he had gone. The nun’s reply was so unequivocal that the Editor of the European Magazine could not bring himself to print it.

Next came the exorcism of pretty little Sister Agnes. Killigrew’s account of this has already been given in an earlier chapter. The spectacle of this delicious creature being held down by a pair of sturdy peasants, while her friar

triumphantly set his foot first on her breast, then on the white throat, filled our young cavalier with horror and disgust.

Next day it all began again; but this time the performance ended in a more interesting, a less revolting manner. “Prayers being ended,” writes Killigrew, “she (the Prioress) turned herself to the friar [Surin], who cast a string of crosses about her neck, and there tied it with three knots. She kneeled still, and ceased not to pray till the strings were fastened; but then she stood up and quitted her beads; and after a reverence made to the altar, she went to a seat like a couch with one end, made purposely for the exorcism, whereof there are diverse in the chapel.” [It would be interesting to know if any of these ancestors of the psychoanalyst’s sofa are still extant.] “The head of this seat stood to the altar; she went to it with so much humility that you would have thought that this patience would merit enough, without the prayers of the priests, to chase out the devil. When she came to it, she lay down and helped the priest to bind her to it with two ropes, one about her waist, another about her thighs and legs. When she was bound, and saw the priest with the box wherein the sacrament was included, she sighed and trembled with a sense of the tortures she was to suffer. Nor is this a particular humility and patience that she showed; for they are all so, and in the same instances. When this exorcism was performed, another of the possessed called another of the Fathers unto her, and set her seat herself, and then lay down upon it, and tied herself upon it as the other did. ’Tis strange to see how modestly they go to the altar, when they are themselves, and how they walk in the nunneries. Their modest looks and faces express what they are (maids vowed to religion). This nun, upon the beginning of the exorcism, lay as if she had slept. . . .” Surin now set to work on the Prioress. In a few minutes Balaam made his appearance. There were writhings and convulsions, abominable blasphemies, frightful grimaces. Sœur Jeanne’s belly suddenly swelled, until it looked like that of a woman far gone in pregnancy; then the breasts puffed themselves up to the size of the belly. The exorcist applied relics to each part as it was affected, and the swellings subsided. Killigrew now stepped forward and touched her hand — it was cool; felt her pulse — it was calm and slow. The Prioress pushed

him aside and began to claw at her coif. A moment later the bald, close-shaven head was bare. She rolled up her eyes, she stuck out her tongue. It was prodigiously swollen, black in color and had the pimply texture of morocco leather. Surin now untied her, ordering Balaam to adore the Sacrament. Sœur Jeanne slid backward off the seat and landed on the floor. For a long time Balaam stubbornly resisted; but at last he was bullied into performing the act of worship demanded of him. “Then,” writes Killigrew, “as she lay on her back, she bent her waist like a tumbler and went so, shoving herself with her heels, on her bare shaven head, all about the chapel after the friar. And many other strange, unnatural postures, beyond anything that ever I saw, or could believe possible for any man or woman to do. Nor was this a sudden motion, and away; but a continuous thing, which she did for above an hour together; and yet not out of breath nor hot with all the motions she used.” All this time the tongue hung out, “swollen to an incredible bigness, and never within her mouth from the first falling into her fit; I never saw her for a moment contract it. Then I heard her, after she had given a start and a shriek that you would have thought had torn her to pieces, speak one word and that was, ‘Joseph.’ At which all the priests started up and cried, ‘That is the sign, look for the mark!’ On which one, seeing her hold out her arm, looked for it. Mr. Montague and myself did the same very earnestly; and on her hand I saw a color rise, a little ruddy, and run for the length of an inch along her vein, and in that a great many red specks, which made a distinct word; and it was the same she spake, ‘Joseph.’ This mark the Jesuit said the devil promised, when he went out, he would make.” Minutes of the proceedings were drawn up and signed by the officiating exorcists. Montague then added a postscript in English, to which he and Killigrew put their names. And so, the letter gaily concludes, “I hope you will believe it, or at leastways say there are more liars than myself, and greater, though there be none more

your humble servant than

Thomas Killigrew.”

To the name of St. Joseph were added, in due course, those of Jesus, of Mary and of François de Sales. Bright red at their first appearance, these names tended to fade after a week or two, but were then renewed by Sister Jane’s good angel. The process was repeated at irregular intervals from the winter of 1635 to St. John’s Day, 1662. After that date the names disappeared completely, “for no known reason,” writes Surin, “except that, to be rid of the continual importunity of those whose desire to see them distracted her from Our Lord, the Mother Superior had insistently prayed to be released from this affliction.”

Surin, together with some of his colleagues and a majority of the general public, believed that this novel form of stigmatization was an extraordinary grace from God. Among his educated contemporaries there was a general skepticism. These people had not believed in the reality of the possession, and they did not now believe in the divine origin of the names. Some, like John Maitland, were of the opinion that they had been etched into the skin with an acid; others that they might have been traced on the surface with colored starch. Many remarked on the fact that, instead of being distributed on both hands, all the names were crowded onto the left — where it would be easier for a right-handed person to write them.

In their edition of Sœur Jeanne’s autobiography Drs. Gabriel Legué and Gilles de la Tourette, both of them pupils of Charcot, incline to the belief that the writing on the hand was produced by autosuggestion, and support this view by citing several modern examples of hysterical stigmatization. It should be added that in most cases of hysteria the skin becomes peculiarly sensitive. A fingernail lightly drawn over its surface raises a red welt that may last for several hours.

Autosuggestion, deliberate fraud or a mixture of both — we are at liberty to take our choice of explanations. For myself, I incline to the third hypothesis. The stigmata were probably spontaneous enough to seem to Jeanne herself genuinely miraculous. And if they were genuinely miraculous, there could be no harm in improving on the phenomenon so as to make it more edifying to the public and

more creditable to herself. Her sacred names were like Sir Walter Scott's novels — founded on fact, but considerably beholden to imagination and art.

Sœur Jeanne had now had her own, her private miracle. And it was not merely private, it was chronic. Renewed by her good angel, the sacred names were ever present, and could be shown at any time to distinguished visitors or the crowds of common sightseers. She was now a walking relic.

Isacaaron took flight on January 7, 1636. Only Behemoth remained; but this demon of blasphemy was tougher than all the rest put together. Exorcisms, penances, mental prayer — nothing availed. Religion had been forced upon an unwilling and undisciplined mind, and the inductive reaction of that mind had been an irreligion so violent and so shocking that the normal personality had felt obliged to dissociate itself from this negation of everything it reverenced. The negation became a Someone-Else, an evil spirit leading an autonomous existence in the mind, causing confusion within and scandal without. Surin wrestled with Behemoth for ten more months; then, in October, broke down completely. The Provincial recalled him to Bordeaux, and another Jesuit took over the direction of the Prioress.

Father Ressès was a great believer in what may be called "straight" exorcism. He was persuaded, says Sœur Jeanne, that those who watched the exorcisms were greatly benefited by the sight of demons adoring the Sacrament. Surin had tried to "overthrow the rider by attacking the horse." Ressès attacked the rider directly and in public — and attacked him regardless of the horse's feelings and without any attempt to modify its behavior.

"One day," writes the Prioress, "a celebrated company being assembled, the good Father planned to perform some exorcisms for their spiritual good." The Prioress told her director that she was feeling ill and that the exorcisms would do her harm. "But the good Father, who was most anxious to perform the exorcisms, told me to take courage and trust in God; after which he began the exorcism." Sœur Jeanne was put through all her tricks, with the result that she took to her bed with a high fever and a pain in her side. Dr. Fanton, a Huguenot, but the best physician in the town, was called in. She was bled three times and

given medicine. It was so effective that there was “an evacuation and flux of blood lasting seven or eight days.” She felt better; then, after a few more days, fell ill again. “Father Ressès thought fit to recommence the exorcisms; after which I was troubled by violent nausea and vomiting.” This was followed by fever, pain in the side and spitting of blood. Fanton was recalled, pronounced that she had pleurisy, bled her seven times in as many days and administered four clysters. After which he informed her that her malady was mortal. That night Sœur Jeanne heard an inward voice. It told her that she would not die, but that God would bring her into the last extremity of danger in order, the more gloriously, to manifest His power by healing her when she was at the very doors of death. For two days she seemed to grow steadily worse and weaker, so much so that, on the seventh of February, Extreme Unction was administered. The doctor was then sent for, and while she was awaiting his arrival Sœur Jeanne uttered the following prayer: “Lord, I have always thought that You wished to display some extraordinary mark of your power in healing me of this sickness; if this be the case, reduce me to such a state that, when he sees me, the doctor will judge that I am past help.” Dr. Fanton came and pronounced that she had only one or two hours to live. Hurrying home he penned a report to Laubardemont, who was then in Paris. The pulse, he wrote, was convulsive, the stomach distended; the state of weakness was such that no remedies, not even a clyster, could have any effect. However, she was being given a small suppository in the hope that it might relieve an “oppression, so great that it cannot be described.” Not that this palliative would make any real difference; for the patient was in extremis. At half past six Sœur Jeanne fell into a lethargy and had a vision of her good angel in the form of a wonderfully beautiful youth of eighteen, with long fair curls. The angel, we are told by Surin, was the living image of the Duc de Beaufort, son of César de Vendôme, and grandson of Henri IV and Gabrielle d’Estrées. This prince had recently been in Loudun to see the devils, and his shoulder-length bob of golden hair had made a profound impression on the Prioress. After the angel came St. Joseph, who laid his hand on Sœur Jeanne’s right side, at the spot where she felt the greatest pain, and anointed her with

some kind of oil. “After which I came to my senses and found myself completely cured.”

It was another miracle. Yet again Sœur Jeanne had demonstrated that, to some extent at least, she possessed her possessors. She had willed and suggested the expulsion of Leviathan, and now she had willed and suggested the disappearance of all the symptoms of an acute and apparently fatal psychosomatic illness.

She got out of bed, dressed, went down to the chapel and joined her sisters in singing a Te Deum. Dr. Fanton was sent for again and, after being told of what had happened, remarked that the power of God is greater than that of our remedies. “Nevertheless,” writes the Prioress, “he would not be converted and declined in future to take care of us.”

Poor Dr. Fanton! After Laubardemont’s return to Loudun, he was called before a commission of magistrates and asked to sign a certificate to the effect that his patient’s restoration to health had been miraculous. He refused. Pressed to explain the reasons for this refusal he answered that the sudden passage from mortal sickness to perfect health might easily have happened in the course of nature, “By reason of the sensible issue of the humor, or by its insensible excretion through the pores of the skin, or else by the conveyance of the humor from the part where it caused these accidents to another, less important part. Furthermore the distressing symptoms produced by the humor being in a certain place can be relieved without the necessity of a change of part; this is brought about by mitigation of the humor as it is subdued by nature, or by the onset of another humor which, being less savage, will blunt the acrimony of the first humor.” Dr. Fanton added “that manifest excretion is by urines and fluxes of the intestines, or by vomits, sweats and losses of blood; and that insensible excretion takes place when the parts discharge themselves insensibly; these last kinds of excretion are most frequent among patients who work up hot humors, notably bile, without seeing the signs of coction which precede such excretions, even though it may be in the moment of crisis and of the discharge of nature. It is obvious that, in the cure of diseases, smaller quantities of humors must leave the

body when these have previously been evacuated by remedies, which carry away not merely the antecedent cause of diseases, but also their conjoint causes. To which must be added that, in their movements, the humors observe certain regular hours." Molière, we perceive, invented nothing: he merely recorded.

Two days passed. Then the Prioress suddenly remembered that she had not wiped away the unction which had cured her, so that some of it must still be on her chemise. In the presence of the sub-Prioress she removed her habit. "Both of us smelled an admirable odor; I took off my chemise, which we then cut at the waist. On it were five drops of this divine balm, which gave forth an excellent perfume."

"Where are your young mistresses?" Gorgibus asks at the beginning of Les Précieuses Ridicules. "In their room," says Marotte. "What are they up to?" "Making pomade for the lips." It was an age when every woman of fashion had to be her own Elizabeth Arden. Recipes for face creams and hand lotions, for rouge and perfume, were treasured as secret weapons or generously exchanged between particular friends. In her youth at home, and even since her profession, Sœur Jeanne had been a famous cosmetician and amateur pharmacist. St. Joseph's unction came, we may suspect, from a source some way this side of heaven. But, meanwhile, there the Five Drops were, for all to see. "It is not to be believed," writes the Prioress, "how great was the devotion of the people toward this blessed unction and how many miracles God worked by means of it."

Sœur Jeanne now had two first-class prodigies to her credit, with a stigmatized hand and a perfumed chemise as perpetual witnesses to the extraordinary graces she had received. But this was not yet enough. At Loudun, she felt, her light had been put under a bushel. True, there were the tourists, the visiting princes, lords and prelates. But think of all the millions who would never make the pilgrimage! Think of the King and Queen! Think of His Eminence! Think of all the Dukes and Marquises, all the Marshals of France, all the Papal Legates, the Envoys Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary, the Doctors of the Sorbonne, the Deans, the Abbots, the Bishops and Archbishops! Shouldn't these

be given a chance to admire the marvels, to see and hear the humble recipient of such astounding favors?

Coming from her own lips, the suggestion might have seemed presumptuous, and so it was Behemoth who first broached the subject. When, after the most strenuous of exorcisms, Father Ressès asked him why he so stubbornly resisted, the fiend replied that he would never leave the Prioress's body until that body had made a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. François de Sales at Annecy, in Savoy. Exorcism followed exorcism. Under the torrent of anathemas Behemoth merely smiled. To his earlier ultimatum he now added another condition: Father Surin must be recalled — otherwise even the trip to Annecy would be of no avail.

By the middle of June Surin was back at Loudun. But the pilgrimage proved harder to arrange. Vitelleschi, the General of the Order, did not like the idea of one of his Jesuits promenading through France with a nun; and on his side the Bishop of Poitiers did not like the idea of one of his nuns promenading with a Jesuit. Besides, there was the question of money. The royal treasury was, as usual, empty. What with the subsidies to the nuns and the salaries of the exorcists, the possession had already cost a pretty penny. There was nothing to spare for jaunts to Savoy. Behemoth stuck to his guns. As a great concession, he agreed to take his leave at Loudun — but only if Sœur Jeanne and Surin were permitted to make a vow to go to Annecy afterward. In the end he had his way. Surin and Sœur Jeanne were permitted to meet at the tomb of St. Francis, but would have to go and come by different roads. The vows were made and, a little later, on October 15th, Behemoth departed. Sœur Jeanne was free. Two weeks later Surin returned to Bordeaux. The following spring Father Tranquille died in a paroxysm of demoniac frenzy. The treasury ceased to pay the salary of the surviving exorcists, who were all recalled to their various houses. Left to themselves such devils as remained soon took their leave. After six years of incessant struggle, the Church Militant gave up the fight. Its enemies promptly disappeared. The long orgy was at an end. If there had been no exorcists, it would never have begun.

CHAPTER TEN

WITH SŒUR JEANNE'S pilgrimage we emerge for a few brief weeks from the shades of a provincial cloister into the great world. It is the world of the history books, the world of royal personages and intriguing courtiers, the world of duchesses with a taste for love and prelates with a taste for power, the world of high policy and high fashion, of Rubens and Descartes, of science, literature, learning. From Loudun and the company of a mystic, seven devils and sixteen hysterics, the Prioress now stepped out into the full glare of the seventeenth century.

The charm of history and its enigmatic lesson consist in the fact that, from age to age, nothing changes and yet everything is completely different. In the personages of other times and alien cultures we recognize our all too human selves and yet are aware, as we do so, that the frame of reference within which we do our living has changed, since their day, out of all recognition, that propositions which seemed axiomatic then are now untenable and that what we regard as the most self-evident postulates could not, at an earlier period, find entrance into even the most boldly speculative mind. But however great, however important for thought and technology, for social organization and behavior, the differences between then and now are always peripheral. At the center remains a fundamental identity. Insofar as they are incarnated minds, subject to physical decay and death, capable of pain and pleasure, driven by craving and abhorrence and oscillating between the desire for self-assertion and the desire for self-transcendence, human beings are faced, at every time and place, with the same problems, are confronted by the same temptations and are permitted by the Order of Things to make the same choice between unregeneracy and enlightenment. The context changes, but the gist and the meaning are invariable.

Sœur Jeanne was in no position to understand the prodigious developments in scientific thought and practice, which had begun to take place in the world around her. Of those aspects of seventeenth-century culture represented by Galileo and Descartes, by Harvey and van Helmont, the Prioress was totally unaware. What she had known as a child and what she now rediscovered in the course of her pilgrimage was the social hierarchy and the conventions of thought and feeling and behavior, to which the existence of that hierarchy gave rise.

In one of its aspects the culture of the seventeenth century, especially in France, was simply a prolonged effort, on the part of the ruling minority, to overstep the limitations of organic existence. More than at almost any other period of recent history, men and women aspired to identify themselves with their social persona. They were not content merely to bear a great name; they longed to be it. Their ambition was actually to become the offices they held, the dignities they had acquired or inherited. Hence the elaboration of baroque ceremonial, hence those rigid and complex codes of precedence, of honor, of good manners. Relations were not between human beings, but between titles, genealogies and positions. Who had the right to sit in the royal presence? For Saint-Simon, at the end of the century, the question was one of capital importance. Three generations earlier, similar questions had preyed upon the mind of the infant Louis XIII. By the time he was four he had come to feel very strongly that his bastard half-brother, the Duke of Vendôme, should not be permitted to eat his meals with him or remain covered in his presence. When Henri IV decreed that “Féfé Vendôme” was to sit at the Dauphin’s table and keep his hat on while dining, the little Prince was forced to obey — but with the worst possible grace. Nothing more vividly illuminates the theory and practice of the Divine Right of Kings than this matter of the royal hat. At nine years of age Louis XIII passed from the care of a governess to that of a governor. In the presence of a being who was, by definition, divine, the King’s tutor remained permanently hatless. And this rule held good even when (as the late King and the Queen Mother had charged him to do) he was inflicting corporal punishment on his pupil. On these occasions the monarch, with his hat on, but his pants off, was

birched till the blood ran by a subject, reverently bareheaded, as though before the Sacrament on the altar. The spectacle, as we try to visualize it, is unforgettably instructive. “There’s a divinity doth hedge a king, rough-hew him how we may.”

The longing to be something more than mere flesh and blood reveals itself very clearly in the arts of our period. Kings and queens, lords and ladies, liked to think of themselves as Rubens represented their persons and their allegorized characteristics — as superhumanly energetic, divinely healthy, heroically commanding. They were ready to pay through the nose in order to see themselves as Van Dyck portraits — elegant, refined, infinitely aristocratic. In the theater they loved the heroes and heroines of Corneille, loved them for their mere size, loved them for their monolithic and superhuman consistency, their cult of the will, their worship of themselves. And ever more strictly, as the years went by, they insisted on the unities of time, place and action; for what they wished to see in their tragic theater was not life as it is, but life corrected, life reduced to order, life as it might be if only men and women were something other than what in fact they are.

In the field of domestic architecture the desire for a more than human grandiosity was no less conspicuously displayed. The fact was remarked by a poet who was a boy when the Palais Cardinal was building and who died before Versailles was completed — Andrew Marvell.

Why should, of all things, man unrul’d
Such unproportioned dwellings build?
The beasts are by their dens express’d
And birds contrive an equal nest;
The low-roofed tortoises do dwell
In cases fit of tortoise-shell:
No creature loves an empty space;
Their bodies measure out their place.
But he, superfluously spread,
Demands more room alive than dead,

And in his hollow palace goes
Where winds, as he, themselves may lose.
What need of all this marble crust
T'impark the wanton mote of dust?

And as the marble crusts expanded, the periwigs of the wanton motes imparked within them became more luxuriant, the heels of their shoes yet higher. Tottering on stilts and crowned with towering piles of horsehair, the Grand Monarch and his courtiers proclaimed themselves larger than life and hairier than Samson at the height of his virility.

Needless to say, these attempts to overstep the limits set by nature were always unsuccessful. Doubly so; for not only did our seventeenth-century ancestors fail to be, they failed even to seem, superhuman. The absurd and bumptious spirit was willing enough; but the flesh was incurably weak. The Grand Siècle did not possess the material and organizational resources, without which the game of pretending to be superhuman cannot be played. That sublimity, those prodigies of grandeur, which Richelieu and Louis XIV so ardently desired, can be achieved only by the greatest of stage managers, by a Ziegfeld, a Cochran, a Max Reinhardt. But great showmanship depends on an armory of gadgets, a well-stocked property room and the highly trained and disciplined collaboration of all concerned. In the Grand Siècle such training and discipline were lacking, and even the material basis of theatrical sublimity — the machina which introduces and, indeed, creates the deus — was deficient. Even Richelieu, even the Sun King were "Old Men of Thermopylae, who never did anything properly." Versailles itself was curiously unimpressive — gigantic but trivial, grandiose but of no effect. Seventeenth-century pageantry was sloppy to a degree. Nothing was adequately rehearsed, and the most grotesque of avoidable mishaps would mar the most solemn of occasions. Consider, for example, the case of La Grande Mademoiselle, that pathetic figure of fun who was Louis XIV's first cousin. After death, according to the curious custom of the time, her body was dissected and buried piecemeal — here the head and there a limb or two, here the heart and there the entrails. These last were so badly

embalmed that, even after treatment, they went on fermenting. The gases of putrefaction accumulated and the porphyry urn containing the viscera became a kind of anatomic bomb, which suddenly exploded, in the middle of the funeral service, to the horror and dismay of all present.

Such physiological accidents were by no means exclusively posthumous. The authors of memoirs and the collectors of anecdotes abound in stories about belching in high places, about the breaking of wind in a royal presence, about the gamy aroma of kings, the bromidrosis of dukes and marshals. Henri IV's feet and armpits enjoyed an international reputation. Bellegarde had a perpetually running nose, Bassompierre a set of toes which rivaled those of his royal master. The copiousness of these anecdotes and the delighted amusement, which the telling of them evidently evoked, were in direct proportion to the enormity of kingly and aristocratic pretensions. It was precisely because great men tried to seem more than human that the rest of the world welcomed any reminder that, in part at least, they were still merely animal.

Identifying himself with a persona which was simultaneously princely, sacerdotal, political and literary, Cardinal Richelieu comported himself as though he were a demigod. But the wretched man had to play his part in a body which disease had rendered so repulsive that there were times when people could hardly bear to sit in the same room with him. He suffered from tubercular osteitis of his right arm and a fissure of the fundament, and was thus forced to live in the fetid atmosphere of his own suppuration. Musk and civet disguised but could not abolish this carrion odor of decay. Richelieu could never escape from the humiliating knowledge that he was an object, to all around him, of physical abhorrence. This brutally violent contrast between the quasi-divine persona and the body of death, with which it was associated, strongly impressed the popular imagination. When the relics of St. Fiacre (the miraculous specific for hemorrhoids) were brought from Meaux to the Cardinal's palace, an anonymous poet celebrated the occasion with a copy of verses which would have delighted Dean Swift.

Cependant sans sortir un pas hors de sa chambre

Qu’il faisait parfumer toute de muse et d’ambre,
Pour n’estonner le Sainct de cette injection
Qui du parfait ministre est l’imperfection,
Et modérer un peu l’odeur puantissime
Qui sort du cul pourry de l’Eminentissime. . . .

And here is another fragment from a ballad describing the great man’s last illness.

Il vit grouiller les vers dans ses salles ulceres,
Il vit mourir son bras —
Son bras qui l’Europe alluma tant de guerres,
Qui brusla tant d’autels. . . .

Between the rotting body of the actual man and the glory of the persona, the gulf was unbridgeable. In Jules de Gaultier’s phrase, “the Bovaric angle” separating fact from phantasy approximated to one hundred and eighty degrees. To a generation, which had been brought up to regard the divine right of kings and priests and nobles as axiomatic, and which therefore welcomed every opportunity of pricking the bubble of its rulers’ pretensions, the case of Cardinal Richelieu was the most acceptable of parables. Hubris invites its corresponding Nemesis. That dreadful stench, those worms battening on the living corpse, seemed poetically just and appropriate. During the Cardinal’s last hours, when the relics had failed to work and the doctors had given him up, an old peasant woman, who had a reputation as a healer, was called to the great man’s bedside. Muttering spells, she administered her panacea — four ounces of horse dung macerated in a pint of white wine. It was with the taste of excrement in his mouth that the arbiter of Europe’s destinies gave up the ghost.

When Sœur Jeanne was taken to see him, Richelieu was at the highest pinnacle of his glory, but already a sick man, suffering much pain and in constant need of medical attention. “My lord Cardinal had been bled that day, and all the doors of his château of Ruel were closed, even to bishops and marshals of France; nonetheless we were introduced into his antechamber, though he himself was in bed.” After dinner (“it was magnificent, and we were

served by his pages") the Mother Superior and an Ursuline companion were ushered into the bedroom, knelt to receive His Eminence's benediction and could only with difficulty be persuaded to rise and take chairs. ("The contestation of politeness on his part and of humility on ours lasted quite a long time; but at last I was obliged to obey.")

Richelieu began the conversation by remarking that the Prioress was under great obligations to God, inasmuch as He had chosen her, in this age of unbelief, to suffer for the honor of the Church, the conversion of souls and the confounding of the wicked.

Sœur Jeanne replied with a paean of gratitude. She and her sisters would never forget that, while the rest of the world had treated them as crazy impostors, His Eminence had been to them not merely a father, but a mother, a nurse and a protector as well.

But the Cardinal would not permit himself to be thanked. On the contrary, he felt himself extremely obliged to Providence for having given him the opportunity and the means to assist the afflicted. (All these things, the Prioress remarks, were spoken "with a ravishing grace and much sweetness.")

Next, the great man asked if he might look at the sacred names inscribed on Sister Jane's left hand. And after the sacred names it was the turn of the unction of St. Joseph. The chemise was unfolded. Before taking it into his hands, the Cardinal piously took off his nightcap; then he sniffed at the blessed object and exclaiming, "That smells perfectly good!" kissed it twice. After which, holding the chemise "with respect and admiration," he pressed it against a reliquary which was standing on the table beside the bed — presumably in order to recharge its contents with the mana inhering in the unction. At his request the Prioress described (for the how many hundredth time?) the miracle of her healing, then knelt for another blessing. The interview was over. Next day His Eminence sent her five hundred crowns to defray the expenses of her pilgrimage.

One reads Sœur Jeanne's account of this interview, then turns to the letters in which the Cardinal had ironically twitted Gaston d'Orléans with his credulity in regard to the possession. "I am delighted to hear that the devils of Loudun have

converted Your Highness and that you have now quite forgotten the oaths with which your mouth was habitually filled." And again, "the assistance you will receive from the master of the devils of Loudun will be powerful enough to enable you, in a very short time, to make a long journey on the road to virtue." On another occasion he learns by a courier who is "one of the devils of Loudun" that the Prince has contracted a disease, whose nature is sufficiently indicated by the fact that "you have deserved it." Richelieu commiserates with His Highness and offers him "the exorcisms of the good Father Joseph" as a remedy. Addressed to the King's brother by the man who had had Grandier burned for trafficking with devils, these letters are as astounding for their insolence as for their ironic skepticism. The insolence may be attributed to that urge to "score off" his social superiors which remained, throughout life, an incongruously childish element in the Cardinal's complex character. And what of the skepticism, the cynical irony? What was His Eminence's real opinion of witchcraft and possession, of the calligraphic stigmata and the blessed chemise? The best answer, I would guess, is that, when he felt well and was in the company of laymen, the Cardinal regarded the whole affair as either a fraud, or an illusion, or a mixture of both. If he affected to believe in the devils, it was solely for political reasons. Like Canning, he had called in the New World to redress the balance of the Old — the only difference being that, in his case, the New World was not America, but hell. True, the public's reaction to the devils had been unsatisfactory. In the face of so general a skepticism, his plans for an inquisitorial Gestapo to fight sorcery and incidentally to strengthen the royal authority had had to be abandoned. But it is always good to know what not to do, and the experiment, though negative in its results, had been well worth making. True, an innocent man had been tortured and burned alive. But after all one can't make omelettes without breaking eggs. And anyhow the parson had been a nuisance and was better out of the way.

But then the trouble in his shoulder would flare up again, and his fistula would keep him awake at nights with its intolerable pain. The doctors were called in; but how little they could do! The efficacy of medicine depended upon

the vis medicatrix Naturae. But in this wretched body of his nature seemed to have lost her healing power. Could it be that his sickness had a supernatural origin? He sent for relics and holy images, he asked for prayers to be said on his behalf. And meanwhile, in secret, he consulted his horoscope, he fingered his tried and trusted talismans, he repeated under his breath the spells he had learned in childhood from his old nurse. When sickness came, when the doors of his palace were closed "even to bishops and marshals of France," he was ready to believe in anything — even in Urbain Grandier's guilt, even in the unction of St. Joseph.

For Sœur Jeanne, the interview with His Eminence was but one in a long series of triumphs and excitements. From Loudun to Paris, and from Paris to Annecy, she moved in a blaze of glory, traveling from popular ovation to popular ovation, and from one aristocratic reception to others yet more flattering to her vanity.

At Tours she was received, with marks of "extraordinary kindness" by the Archbishop, Bertrand de Chaux, an old gentleman of eighty, much addicted to gambling, who had recently made himself notoriously ridiculous by falling head over ears in love with a lady fifty years his junior, the charming *Mme*. de Chevreuse. "He'll do anything I like," she used to say. "All I have to do is, when we are at table, to let him pinch my thigh." After listening to Sœur Jeanne's story, the Archbishop gave orders that the sacred names should be examined by a committee of physicians. The examination was made, and the Prioress came through with flying colors. From four thousand a day the crowds of sightseers besieging the convent, in which she was lodged, rose to seven thousand.

There was another interview with the Archbishop, this time to meet Gaston d'Orléans, detained at Tours by his liaison with a sixteen-year-old girl called Louise de la Marbelière, who later bore him a son, was duly abandoned by her royal lover and finally became a nun. "The Duke of Orléans came to meet me as far as the door of the drawing room; he welcomed me warmly, congratulated me on my deliverance and said, 'I once came to Loudun; the devils who were in you gave me a great fright; they served to cure me of my habit of swearing, and there

and then I resolved to be a better man than I had been up till that time.' " After which he hurried back to Louise.

From Tours the Prioress and her companions proceeded to Amboise. So many people wanted to look at the sacred names that it was necessary to keep the convent parlor open until eleven at night.

At Blois, next day, the doors of the inn at which Sœur Jeanne was dining, were forcibly broken open by the crowd.

At Orléans, she was visited at the Ursuline convent by the bishop, who examined her hand and then exclaimed, "We must not hide God's work, we must give satisfaction to the people!" The doors of the convent were then thrown open, so that the crowds could gaze their fill at the sacred names through the grating.

In Paris the Prioress lodged at the house of M. de Laubardemont. Here she was visited frequently by M. de Chevreuse and the Prince de Guémenée, as well as by a daily multitude of twenty thousand members of the lower orders. "What was most embarrassing," writes Sœur Jeanne, "was that people were not content merely to look at my hand, but asked me a thousand questions about the possession and the expulsion of the devils; which obliged us to issue a printed booklet, in which the public was informed of the most considerable events which had occurred during the entrance of the demons into my body and their departure therefrom, with additional matter regarding the impression of the sacred names upon my hand."

There followed a visit to M. de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris. His politeness in accompanying the Prioress as far as her coach made such an impression that all Paris now thronged to see her and it became necessary to seat this supernatural equivalent of a movie star at a window on the ground floor of the Hotel de Laubardemont, where the mob could look at her. From four in the morning until ten at night she sat there, her elbow on a cushion, her miraculous hand dangling out of the window. "I was given no leisure to hear Mass or to eat my meals. The weather was very hot and the crowd so increased the heat that my head began to swim and I finally fell in a faint on the floor."

The visit to Cardinal Richelieu took place on the twenty-fifth of May and a few days later, at the command of the Queen, the Prioress was taken in Laubardemont's coach to Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Here she had a long conversation with Anne of Austria, who for more than an hour held the miraculous hand between her own royal fingers, "gazing in admiration at a thing which, until then, had never been seen, since the first beginnings of the Church. She exclaimed, 'How can anyone disapprove of a thing so marvelous, a thing that inspires so much devotion? Those who decry and condemn this marvel are the enemies of the Church.' "

A report of the marvel was brought to the King, who decided to come and see for himself. He looked attentively at the sacred names, then said, "I never doubted the truth of this miracle; but seeing it as I now see it, I find my faith strengthened." Then he sent for those of his courtiers who had shown themselves most skeptical as to the reality of the possession.

"What do you say to that?" the King asked, showing them Sœur Jeanne's hand.

"But these people," writes the Prioress, "would not give in. Moved by a principle of charity, I have never mentioned the names of these gentlemen."

The only embarrassing moment in what was otherwise a perfect day came when the Queen asked to be given a little piece of the sacred chemise, "in order that she might obtain from God, through the prayers of St. Joseph, a happy delivery." (At this time Anne of Austria was six months pregnant with the future Louis XIV.) The Prioress had to answer that she did not think it was the will of God that a thing so precious should be cut in pieces. If Her Majesty absolutely commanded it, she was ready to leave her the whole chemise. However, she ventured to point out that, if the chemise were left in her possession, an infinite number of souls devoted to St. Joseph would derive great consolation from seeing with their own eyes a true relic of their patron saint. The Queen allowed herself to be persuaded, and the Prioress returned to Paris with her chemise intact.

After that visit to Saint-Germain everything seemed a little flat — even a two-hour interview with the Archbishop of Sens, even crowds of thirty thousand, even a chat with the papal Nuncio, who said that “it was one of the finest things ever seen in the Church of God,” and that he simply couldn’t understand how “the Huguenots contrived to persist in their blindness after so sensible a proof of the verities they had opposed.”

Sœur Jeanne and her companions left Paris on the twentieth of June and found the usual crowds, prelates and very important persons awaiting them at every halt. At Lyon, which they reached fourteen days after their departure from Paris, they were visited by the Archbishop, Cardinal Alphonse de Richelieu, the Prime Minister’s elder brother. It had been intended by his parents that Alphonse should become a Knight of Malta. But all Knights of Malta had to be able to swim, and since Alphonse could never learn to swim, he had to be content with the family bishopric of Luçon, which he soon resigned in order to become a Carthusian monk. After his brother’s accession to power, he was taken out of the Grande Chartreuse, made Archbishop first of Aix, then of Lyon, and given a Cardinal’s hat. He had the reputation of an excellent prelate, but was subject to occasional fits of mental derangement. During these fits he would put on a crimson robe embroidered with gold thread and affirm that he was God the Father. (This kind of thing seems to have run in the family; for there is a tradition, which may or may not be true, that his younger brother sometimes imagined himself to be a horse.)

Cardinal Alphonse’s interest in the sacred names was intense to the point of being surgical. Could they be erased by natural means? He took a pair of scissors and began the experiment. “I took the liberty,” writes Sœur Jeanne, “of saying, ‘My lord, you are hurting me.’ ” The Cardinal then sent for his doctor and ordered him to shave the names off. “I objected and said, ‘My lord, I have no orders from my superiors to undergo these trials.’ My lord Cardinal asked me who these superiors might be.” The Prioress’s answer was a master stroke. Her superior of superiors was the Cardinal-Duke, Cardinal Alphonse’s brother. The experiment was promptly called off.

Next morning, who should turn up but Father Surin. He had already been to Annecy and was on his way home. Afflicted by hysterical dumbness, which he attributed to the operations of the devil, Surin prayed for deliverance at the tomb of St. François de Sales — in vain. The Visitandines of Annecy possessed a large supply of dried blood, which the saint's valet had collected, over a long period of years, adding to his stock every time his master was bled by the barber-surgeon. The Abbess, Jeanne de Chantal, was so much distressed by Surin's affliction that she gave him a clot of this dried blood to eat. For a moment he was able to speak. "Jesu Maria," he cried; but that was all, and he could say no more.

After some discussion and a consultation with the Jesuit fathers of Lyon, it was decided that Surin and his companion, Father Thomas, should turn back and accompany the Prioress to the goal of her pilgrimage. On the road to Grenoble something which Sœur Jeanne qualifies merely as "somewhat extraordinary" took place. Father Thomas intoned the Veni Creator, and immediately Father Surin responded. From that moment he was able (at least for some time) to speak without impediment.

At Grenoble Surin made use of his new-found voice to preach a number of eloquent sermons on the unction of St. Joseph and the sacred names. There is something at once lamentable and sublime in the spectacle of this great lover of God passionately maintaining that evil had been good and falsehood, truth. Shouting from the pulpit, he spends the last resources of a sick body, a mind tottering on the brink of disintegration, in an effort to persuade his hearers of the rightness of a judicial murder, the otherworldliness of hysteria and the miraculousness of fraud. It was all done, of course, for the greater glory of God. But the subjective morality of intentions requires to be supplemented by the objective and utilitarian morality of results. One may mean well; but if one acts in an unrealistic and inappropriate manner, the consequences can only be disastrous. By their credulity and their reluctance to think of human psychology in any but the old, dogmatic terms, men like Surin made it certain that the breach between traditional religion and developing science should come to seem

unbridgeable. Surin was a man of great ability, and therefore had no right to be as silly as, in this instance, he proved himself to be. That he made himself a martyr to his zeal cannot excuse the fact that this zeal was misdirected.

At Annecy, which they reached a day or two after leaving Grenoble, they found that the fame of St. Joseph's unction had preceded them. People came from as much as eight leagues away to see and smell. From morning till night Surin and Thomas were kept busy at the task of bringing the sacred chemise into contact with the objects brought for that purpose by the faithful — rosaries, crosses, medals, even bits of cotton and paper.

The Prioress, meanwhile, was lodged in the Visitandine convent, whose Abbess was *Mme.* de Chantal. We turn to her autobiography, expecting to find that she has devoted at least as many pages to this saintly friend and disciple of St. François as she had given to Anne of Austria or the unspeakable Gaston d'Orléans. But we are disappointed. The only reference to St. Jeanne Chantal occurs in the following paragraph.

"The places, where the unction was, became dirty. Madame de Chantal and her nuns laundered the linen on which the unction was, and the unctions retained their ordinary color."

What were the reasons for this strange silence in regard to a person so remarkable as the founder of the Visitation? One can only speculate. Can it be that *Mme.* de Chantal was too perspicacious and that, when Sœur Jeanne embarked upon her celebrated impersonation of St. Teresa, she was not impressed? Saints tend to acquire a most embarrassing gift for looking through the persona at the real self behind the mask, and it may be that poor Sister Jane suddenly found herself spiritually naked before this formidably gentle old woman — naked and, all of a sudden, overpoweringly ashamed.

At Briare, on the homeward road, the two Jesuits took leave of their companions. Sœur Jeanne was never again to see the man who had sacrificed himself in order to bring her back to sanity. Surin and Thomas turned westward to Bordeaux; the others took the road to Paris, where Sœur Jeanne had a rendezvous with the Queen. She reached Saint-Germain just in time. During the

night of September 4, 1638, the labor pains began. The Blessed Virgin's girdle, which had been brought from Notre-Dame du Puy, was fastened about the Queen's waist and the Prioress's chemise was spread over the royal abdomen. At eleven o'clock on the following morning Anne of Austria was safely delivered of the male child who, five years later, was to become Louis XIV. "Thus it was," wrote Surin, "that St. Joseph demonstrated his mighty power, not only in securing for the Queen a happy delivery, but also in presenting France with a King incomparable in power and in greatness of mind, a King of rare discretion, of admirable prudence and of a godliness without previous example."

As soon as the Queen was out of all danger, Sœur Jeanne packed up her chemise and took the homeward road to Loudun. The doors of the convent opened, then closed behind her, forever. Her crowded hour of glorious life was over; but she could not immediately reconcile herself to the humdrum routine, which was henceforth to be her lot. A little before Christmas she fell ill with congestion of the lungs. Her life, according to her own account, was despaired of. "Our Lord," she told her confessor, "has given me a great desire to go to heaven; but he has also conveyed to me the knowledge that, if I were to remain on earth a while longer, I could do Him some service. And so, Reverend Father, if you will but apply the holy unction, I shall most assuredly be healed." The miracle seemed so certain to occur, that Sœur Jeanne's confessor as good as sent out invitations for the blessed occasion. On Christmas night "there assembled in our church an incredible multitude of people desirous of witnessing my recovery." Persons of quality were accommodated with seats in a chamber adjoining the Prioress's bedroom, into which they could look through a grating. "After nightfall, I being at the height of my sickness, Father Alange, a Jesuit, in full canonicals, including the chasuble, entered our room, bearing the holy unction. Drawing near to my bed, he placed the relic on my head and began to repeat the litanies of St. Joseph which he intended to say in their entirety. No sooner had he placed that holy deposit (dépôt) on my head than I felt myself entirely cured. However, I decided to say nothing until the good father had finished the litanies. Then I announced the fact and asked for my clothes."

Perhaps this second and all too punctual miracle failed to make any very great impression on the public. In any case it was the last of its kind.

Time passed. The Thirty Years' War went on and on. Richelieu grew richer and richer, and the people more and more miserable. There were peasant revolts against high taxes, and bourgeois revolts (in which Pascal's father participated) against the lowering of interest rates on government bonds. Among the Ursulines of Loudun life went on as usual. Every few weeks the Good Angel (who was still M. de Beaufort, but in miniature, being now only three and a half feet high and not more than sixteen years old) renewed the fading names on the Prioress's left hand. Enclosed now in a handsome reliquary, her chemise, with the unction of St. Joseph, had taken its place among the convent's most precious and most efficacious relics.

At the end of 1642 Richelieu died and was followed to the grave, a few months later, by Louis XIII. On behalf of the five-year-old King, Anne of Austria and her lover, Cardinal Mazarin, ineptly ruled the country.

In 1644 Sœur Jeanne began to write her memoirs and acquired a new Jesuit director, Father Saint-Jure, to whom she sent her own and Surin's still unfinished, work on the devils. Saint-Jure lent the manuscripts to the Bishop of Evreux, and the Bishop, who was in charge of the demoniacs of Louviers, proceeded to direct this new and, if possible, even more revolting orgy of madness and malice along the lines laid down at Loudun. "I think," Laubardemont wrote to the Prioress, "I think that your correspondence with Father Saint-Jure has been of great service in this present affair."

Less successful than the Louviers affair was the possession organized by M. Barré at Chinon. At first all seemed to be going well. A host of young women, including some belonging to the best families of the town, succumbed to the psychological infection. Blasphemy, convulsions, denunciations, obscenity — everything was in order. Unfortunately, one of the demoniac girls, called Beloquin, had a grudge against M. Giloire, a local priest. Going to church early one morning, she poured a bottleful of chicken's blood on the high altar, then announced, during M. Barré's exorcism, that it was her own, shed at midnight,

while M. Giloire was violating her. Barré, of course, believed every word of it and began to question the other girls' devils, with a view to collecting more incriminating evidence against his colleague. But the woman, from whom Beloquin had bought the chicken, confided her suspicions to a magistrate. The Lieutenant Criminel started an investigation. Barré was indignant and Beloquin counterattacked with excruciating pains in the hypochondries, magically induced, so her devils declared, by M. Giloire. Unimpressed, the Lieutenant Criminel called more witnesses. To escape from him, Beloquin fled to Tours, whose Archbishop was notoriously in favor of possessions. But the Archbishop was out of town and his place had been taken by an unsympathetic Coadjutor. He listened to Beloquin's stories, then called in two midwives, who discovered that the pains, though real enough, were due to the presence in the uterus of a small pewter cannon ball. Cross-examined, the girl admitted that she had put it there herself. After which poor M. Barré was deprived of all his benefices and banished from the archidiocese of Touraine. He ended his days obscurely, as a pensioner in a monastery at Le Mans.

At Loudun, in the meantime, the devils had been tolerably quiet. On one memorable occasion, it is true, "I saw before me the forms of two exceedingly horrible men, and smelt a great stink. Each of these men carried rods; they seized me, took off my clothes, tied me to the bed post and birched me for the space of half an hour or more." Fortunately, as her chemise had been pulled up over her head, the Prioress did not see herself naked. And when the two stinking personages pulled it down again and untied her, she "did not notice that anything occurred which was contrary to modesty." There were some subsequent assaults from the same quarter; but in the main the miracles recorded by Sœur Jeanne during the next twenty years were celestial in origin. For example, her heart was split in two and marked, inwardly and invisibly, with the instruments of the Passion. On several occasions the souls of departed sisters appeared and spoke of purgatory. And all the time, of course, the sacred names were being exhibited through the parlor grating to visitors of quality, some devout, others merely curious or downright skeptical. At every renewal of the names, and frequently

betweenwhiles, the Angel appeared and gave a prodigious amount of good advice, which was passed on, in interminable letters, to her director. He also gave advice to third parties — to gentlemen involved in lawsuits, to anxious mothers who wanted to know whether it would be better to marry off their daughters, rather disadvantageously, now, or to hang on in the hope of a better match presenting itself before it was too late for anything but the convent.

In 1648 the Thirty Years' War came to an end. The power of the Habsburgs was broken and a third of the inhabitants of Germany had been liquidated. Europe was now ready for the antics of the Grand Monarque and French hegemony. It was a triumph. But meanwhile there was an interlude of anarchy, Fronde succeeded Fronde. Mazarin exiled himself and returned to power; retired once more and reappeared; then vanished forever from the scene.

At about the same time, obscure and out of favor, Laubardemont died. His only son had turned highwayman and been killed. His last surviving daughter had been obliged to take the veil and was now an Ursuline at Loudun, under her father's old protégée.

In January, 1656, the first of the Provincial Letters was published, and four months later occurred the great Jansenist miracle — the healing of Pascal's niece's eye by the Holy Thom preserved at Port-Royal.

A year later Saint-Jure died, and the Prioress had nobody to write to except other nuns and poor Father Surin, who was still too ill to reply. What was her joy when, at the beginning of 1658, she received a letter in Surin's hand — the first in more than twenty years. "How admirable," she wrote to her friend *Mme.* du Houx, now a nun of the Visitation at Rennes, "how admirable is the leading of God, who having deprived me of Father Saint-Jure, now brings the dear Father of my soul into the condition of being able to write to me! Only a few days before receiving his letter, I had written to him at length about the state of my soul."

She went on writing about the state of her soul — to Surin, to *Mme.* du Houx, to anyone who was ready to read and reply. If they were ever published, the Prioress's surviving letters would fill several volumes. And how many more

must have been lost! Sœur Jeanne, it is evident, was still under the impression that the “inner life” is a life of constant self-analysis in public. But in fact, of course, the inner life begins where the analyzable self leaves off. The soul that goes on talking about its states thereby prevents itself from knowing its divine ground. “It was not from want of will that I have refrained from writing to you, for truly I wish you all good; but because it seemed to me that enough has been said to effect all that is needed, and that what is wanting (if anything be wanting) is not writing or speaking — whereof ordinarily there is more than enough — but silence and work.” These words were addressed by St. John of the Cross to a group of nuns, who had complained that he did not answer the letters in which they had so minutely catalogued their mental states. But “speaking distracts; silence and work collect the thoughts and strengthen the spirit.” Nothing, alas, could silence the Prioress. She was as copious as *Mme.* de Sévigné; but the gossip was exclusively about herself.

In 1660, with the Restoration, the two British tourists, who had seen Sœur Jeanne in all her diabolic glory, at last came into their own. Tom Killigrew was made a Groom of the Bedchamber and licensed to build a theater, where he might put on plays without submitting them to censorship. As for John Maitland, who had been taken prisoner at Worcester and had spent nine years in confinement — he now became Secretary of State and the new King’s prime favorite.

The prioress, meanwhile, was feeling her age. She was ailing, and her double role of walking relic and verger, of sacred object and loquacious guide, fatigued her now beyond endurance. In 1662 the sacred names were renewed for the last time; thenceforward there was nothing for the devout or the curious to see. But though the miracles had ceased, the spiritual pretension remained as great as ever. “I propose,” Surin wrote to her in one of his letters, “to speak to you of the prime necessity, of the very basis of grace — I mean humility. Let me beg you, then, to act in such a way that this holy humility may become the true and solid foundation of your soul. These things of which we speak in our letters — things, very often, of a sublime and lofty nature — must in no wise be permitted to

compromise that virtue." In spite of his credulity, in spite of his overestimation of the merely miraculous, Surin understood his correspondent only too well. Sœur Jeanne belonged to what, at that particular moment of history, was evidently a very common subspecies of bovarists. Just how common, we may infer from a note in Pascal's Pensées. In St. Teresa, he writes, "what pleases God is her profound humility in revelations; what pleases men is the knowledge revealed to her. And so we work ourselves to death trying to imitate her words, imagining that thereby we are imitating her state of being. We neither love the virtue which God loves, nor do we try to bring ourselves into the state of being which God loves."

With part of her mind Sœur Jeanne was probably convinced that she actually was the heroine of her own comedy. With another she must have been even more certain of the contrary. *Mme.* du Houx who, on more than one occasion, spent long months at Loudun was of opinion that her poor friend was living almost all the time in illusion.

Did that illusion persist to the very end? Or did Sœur Jeanne at least succeed in dying, not as the heroine before the footlights, but as herself behind the scenes? It was absurd, this backstage self of hers, it was pathetic; but if she would but acknowledge the fact, if she would only cease to impersonate the authoress of the Interior Castle, all might still be well. So long as she insisted on pretending to be someone else, there was no chance; but if she humbly confessed to being herself, then perhaps she might discover that, in reality, she had always been Someone Else.

After her death, which came in January, 1665, the Prioress's comedy was transformed by the surviving members of the Community into the broadest of farces. The corpse was decapitated and Sœur Jeanne's head took its place, in a silver-gilt box with crystal windows, beside the sacred chemise. A provincial artist was commissioned to paint an enormous picture of the expulsion of Behemoth. At the center of the composition the Prioress was shown kneeling in ecstasy before Father Surin, who was assisted by Father Tranquille and a Carmelite. In the middle distance sat Gaston d'Orléans and his Duchess,

majestically looking on. Behind them, at a window, could be seen the faces of spectators of less exalted rank. Surrounded by a gloria and accompanied by cherubim, St. Joseph hovered overhead. In his right hand he held three thunderbolts, to be hurled at the black host of imps and demons that issued from between the demoniac's parted lips.

For more than eighty years this picture hung in the Ursulines' chapel and was an object of popular devotion. But in 1750 a visiting bishop of Poitiers ordered its removal. Tom between institutional patriotism and the duty to obey, the good sisters compromised by hanging a second, yet larger painting over the first. The Prioress might be in eclipse, but she was still there. Not, however, for very long. The convent fell on evil days and in 1772 was suppressed. The picture was entrusted to a canon of Sainte-Croix, the chemise and the mummified head were sent, in all probability, to some other, more fortunate nunnery of the Order. All three have now disappeared.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WE PARTICIPATE IN a tragedy; at a comedy we only look. The tragic author feels himself into his personages; and so, from the other side, does the reader or listener. But in pure comedy there is no identification between creator and literary creature, between spectator and spectacle. The author looks, judges and records, from the outside; and from the outside his audience observes what he has recorded, judges as he has judged and, if the comedy is good enough, laughs. Pure comedy cannot be kept up for very long. That is why so many of the greatest comic writers have adopted the impure form, in which there is a constant transition from outwardness to inwardness, and back again. At one moment we merely see and judge and laugh; the next, we are made to sympathize and even to identify ourselves with one who, a few seconds before, was merely an object. Every figure of fun is potentially an Amiel or a Bashkirtseff; and every tormented author of confessions or an intimate journal can be seen, if we so desire, as a figure of fun.

Jeanne des Anges was one of those unfortunate human beings who consistently invite the outward approach, the purely comic treatment. And this in spite of the fact that she wrote confessions, which were intended to evoke the reader's heartfelt sympathy with her very considerable sufferings. That we can read these confessions and still think of the poor Prioress as a comic figure is due to the fact that she was supremely an actress; and that, as an actress, she was almost always external even to herself. The "I" who does her confessing is sometimes a pastiche of St. Augustine, sometimes the queen of the demoniacs, sometimes the second St. Teresa — and sometimes, giving the whole show away, a shrewd and momentarily sincere young woman, who knows precisely who she is and how she is related to these other, more romantic personages. Without, of course, desiring to turn herself into a figure of fun, Sœur Jeanne

employs all the devices of the comic writer — the sudden shift from mask to absurd face; the emphasis, the excessive protestations; the pious verbiage that so naively rationalizes some all too human wish below the surface.

Moreover, Sœur Jeanne wrote her confessions without reflecting that her readers might have other sources of information about the facts therein recorded. Thus, from the official record of the counts upon which Grandier was condemned, we know that the Prioress and several other nuns were overpowered by remorse at what they had done and tried to withdraw a testimony which they knew, even in the paroxysms of hysteria, to be completely false. Sœur Jeanne's autobiography abounds in the conventional avowals of vanity, of pride, of lukewarmness. But of her greatest offense — the systematic lying which had brought an innocent man to the question and the flames — she makes no mention. Nor does she ever refer to the only creditable episode in the whole hideous story — her repentance and the public confession of her guilt. On second thoughts she preferred to accept the cynical assurances of Laubardemont and the Capuchins: her contrition was a trick of the devils, her lies were gospel truth. Any account of this episode, even the most favorable, would inevitably have spoiled her portrait of the authoress as a victim of the devil, miraculously rescued by God. Suppressing the strange and tragic facts, she chose to identify herself with an essentially bookish fiction. This sort of thing is the very stuff of comedy.

In the course of his life Jean-Joseph Surin thought, wrote and did many foolish, ill-judged and even grotesque things. But for anyone who has read his letters and his memoirs he must always remain an essentially tragic figure, in whose sufferings (however odd and however, in a certain sense, well-deserved) we always participate. We know him as he knew himself — from inside and without disguise. The "I" who does his confessing is always Jean-Joseph, never someone else, more romantic, never, as with the poor Prioress, that other, spectacular personage, who invariably ends by letting the cat out of the bag and so transforming the would-be sublime into the comic, the downright farcical.

The beginnings of Surin's long tragedy have already been described. An iron will, directed by the highest ideal of spiritual perfection and by erroneous notions as to the relations between Absolute and relative, between God and nature, had overdriven a weak constitution, a temperament in unstable equilibrium. He was a sick man even before he came to Loudun. There, though he tried to mitigate the Manichaean excesses of the other exorcists, he became the victim of a too close and intense preoccupation with the idea and the apparent fact of radical Evil. The devils derived their strength from the very violence of the campaign, which was waged against them. Strength in the nuns, and strength in their exorcists. Under the influence of an organized obsession with evil, the normally latent tendencies (tendencies to license and blasphemy, to which, by induction, a strict religious discipline always gives rise) came rushing to the surface. Lactance and Tranquille died in convulsions, "hand and foot in Belial's gripe." Surin underwent the same self-inflicted ordeal, but survived.

While working at Loudun, Surin found time, between the exorcisms and his own seizures, to write many letters. But except to his indiscreet friend, Father d'Attichy, he made no confidences. Meditation, mortification, purity of heart — these are the ordinary themes of his letters. The devils and his own trials are scarcely mentioned.

"In regard to your mental prayer," he writes to one of his cloistered correspondents, "I do not take it as a bad sign that you should be unable, as you tell me, to keep your mind fixed on some particular subject, which you have prepared in advance. I advise you not to pin yourself down to any specific topic, but to go to your prayers with the same freedom of heart, with which, in the past, you used to go to Mother d'Arrérac's room, to talk with her and help her to pass the time. To these meetings you did not bring an agenda of carefully studied subjects for discussion; for that would have put an end to the pleasure of your conversation. You went to her with a general disposition to foment and cultivate your friendship. Go to God in the same way."

"Love the dear God," he writes to another of his friends, "and permit Him to do as He likes. Where He works, the soul should give up its own coarse way of

acting. Do this, and remain exposed to the will of Love, and to its power. Lay aside your busy practices, which are mingled with many imperfections that need to be purified."

And what is this divine Love, to whose will and power the soul is required to expose itself? "Love's work is to ravage, to destroy, to abolish, and then to make new, to set up again, to resuscitate. It is marvelously terrible and marvelously sweet; and the more terrible, the more desirable, the more attractive. To this Love we must resolutely give ourselves. I shall not be happy until I have seen it triumph over you, to the point of consuming and annihilating you."

In Surin's case the process of annihilation was only just beginning. During the greater part of 1637 and the first months of 1638 he was a sick man, but a sick man with intervals of health. His malady consisted of a series of departures from a state that was still tolerably normal.

"This obsession," he wrote twenty-five years later in La Science Expérimentale des choses de l'autre vie, "was accompanied by extraordinary mental vigor and cheerfulness, which helped him to bear this burden not merely with patience, but with contentment." True, sustained concentration was already out of the question; he could not study. But he could make use of the fruits of earlier studies in astonishing improvisations. Inhibited, not knowing what he was going to say, or whether he would be able to open his mouth, he would climb up into the pulpit, with the feelings of a condemned criminal mounting the scaffold. Then, suddenly he would feel "a dilatation of the interior sense and the heat of so strong a grace that he would discharge his heart like a trumpet, with a mighty power of voice and thought, as if he had been another man. . . . A pipe had been opened, disgorging into his mind an abundance of strength and knowledge."

Then came a sudden change. The pipe was stopped; the torrent of inspiration dried up. The sickness took a new form, and was no longer the spasmodic obsession of a relatively normal soul in touch with its God, but a total deprivation of light, accompanied by a diminution and degradation of the whole man into something less than himself. In a series of letters, written for the most

part in 1638, and addressed to a nun who had passed through experiences similar to his own, Surin describes the first beginnings of that new phase of his malady.

In part, at least, his sufferings were physical. There were days and weeks when a low, but almost unremitting fever, kept him in a state of extreme weakness. At other times he suffered from a kind of partial paralysis. He still had some control over his limbs; but every movement cost him an enormous effort and was often accompanied by pain. The smallest actions were torturing ordeals, and every task, the most trifling and ordinary, was a labor of Hercules. It would take him two or three hours to unfasten the hooks on his cassock. As for completely undressing, it was a physical impossibility. For nearly twenty years, Surin slept in his clothes. Once a week, however, it was necessary (if he was to remain free of vermin, “for which I had a great aversion”) to change his shirt. “I suffered so enormously from this change of linen that sometimes I would spend almost the whole of the night from Saturday to Sunday in taking off the soiled shirt and putting on the clean one. Such was the pain involved that, if ever I seemed to find some gleam of happiness, it was always before Thursday, whereas from Thursday onward I suffered the greatest anguish, thinking of my change of shirt; for this was a torture from which, if I could have had my choice, I would have ransomed myself by almost any other kind of suffering.”

Eating was almost as bad as dressing and undressing. Shirts were changed only once a week. But these Sisyphean cuttings of meat, these raisings of forks to mouth, these laborious graspings and takings of the glass, were daily ordeals, all the more unbearable because of a total lack of appetite and the diner’s knowledge that he would probably throw up everything he had eaten or, if he did not, would suffer from excruciating indigestion.

The doctors did their best for him. He was bled, he was purged, he was made to take warm baths. Nothing did any good. The symptoms were physical, no doubt; but their cause was to be sought, not in the patient’s corrupted blood and peccant humors, but in his mind.

That mind had ceased to be possessed. The struggle was no longer between Leviathan and a soul that, in spite of him, was tranquilly conscious of the

presence of God. It was between a certain notion of God and a certain notion of nature, with Surin's divided spirit fighting on both sides and getting the worst of every encounter.

That the infinite must include the finite and must therefore be totally present at every point of space, every instant of time, seems sufficiently evident. To avoid this obvious conclusion and to escape its practical consequences, the older and more rigorous Christian thinkers expended all their ingenuity, the severer Christian moralists all their persuasions and coercions.

This is a fallen world, proclaimed the thinkers, and nature, human and subhuman, is radically corrupt. Therefore, said the moralists, nature must be fought on every front — suppressed within, ignored and depreciated without.

But it is only through the datum of nature that we can hope to receive the donum of Grace. It is only by accepting the given, as it is given, that we may qualify for the Gift. It is only through the facts that we can come to the primordial Fact. "Do not hunt after the truth," advises one of the Zen masters, "only cease to cherish opinions." And the Christian mystics say substantially the same thing — with this difference, however, that they have to make an exception in favor of the opinions known as dogmas, articles of faith, pious traditions and the like. But at best these are but signposts; and if we "take the pointing finger for the Moon," we shall certainly go astray. The Fact must be approached through the facts; it cannot be known by means of words, or by means of phantasies inspired by words. The heavenly kingdom can be made to come on earth; it cannot be made to come in our imagination or in our discursive reasonings. And it cannot come even on earth, so long as we persist in living, not on the earth as it is actually given, but as it appears to an ego obsessed by the idea of separateness, by cravings and abhorrences, by compensatory phantasies and by ready-made propositions about the nature of things. Our kingdom must go before God's can come. There must be a mortification, not of nature, but of our fatal tendency to set up something of our own contriving in the place of nature. We have to get rid of our catalogue of likes and dislikes, of the verbal patterns to which we expect reality to conform, of the fancies into which we

retire, when the facts do not come up to our expectation. This is the “holy indifference” of St. François de Sales; this is de Caussade’s “abandonment,” the conscious willing, moment by moment, of what actually happens; this is that “refusal to prefer” which, in Zen phraseology, is the mark of the Perfect Way.

On authority and because of certain experiences of his own, Surin believed that God could be known directly, in a transfiguring union of the soul with the divine Ground of its own and the world’s being. But he also cherished the opinion that, because of our first parents’ sin, nature is totally depraved, and that this depravity sets a great gulf between the Creator and the creature. Given these notions about God and the universe (notions idolatrously regarded as interchangeable with facts and the primordial Fact), Surin felt that it was only logical to attempt the eradication from his mind-body of every element of nature that could be uprooted without actually causing death. In his old age he recognized that he had made a mistake. “For it must be remarked that, several years before he went to Loudun, the Father” [Surin is writing of himself in the third person] “had held himself exceedingly tight (s’était extrèmement serré) for reasons of mortification, and in an effort to remain unceasingly in the presence of God; and though there was in this some commendable zeal, there were also great excesses in the reserve and constraint of his mind. For this reason he was in a condition of cramped contraction (rétrécissetnent), which was assuredly blameworthy, though well meant.” Because he cherished the opinion that the infinite is somehow outside the finite, that God is in some way opposed to his creation, Surin had tried to mortify, not his egotistic attitude toward nature, not the fancies and notions which he had set up in the place of nature, but nature itself, the given facts of embodied existence among human beings on this particular planet.

“Hate nature,” is his advice, “and let it suffer the humiliations God wills for it.” Nature has been “condemned and sentenced to death,” and the sentence is just; that is why we must “allow God to flay and crucify us at His pleasure.” That it was His pleasure, Surin knew by the bitterest experience. Cherishing the opinion of nature’s total depravity, he had transformed the world-weariness,

which is so common a symptom of neurosis, into a loathing for his own humanity, an abhorrence for his environment — a loathing and an abhorrence all the more intense because he still had cravings, because creatures, though disgusting, were still a source of temptation. In one of his letters he states that, for some days past, he has had some business to transact. To his sick nature the occupation brings a certain relief. He feels a little less miserable, until the moment comes when he realizes that the improvement was due to the fact that "every moment had been filled with infidelities." His misery returns, aggravated by a sense of guilt, a conviction of sin. He feels a chronic remorse. But it is a remorse which does not spur him to action; for he finds himself incapable of action, incapable even of confession, so that he has to "swallow his sins like water, to feed on them as though on bread." He lives in a paralysis of the will and the faculties, but not of the sensibilities. For though he cannot do anything, he can still suffer. "The more one is stripped, the more acutely does one feel the blows." He is in "the void of death." But this void is more than a mere absence; it is nothingness with a vengeance, "hideous and horrible, it is an abyss, where there can be no help or relief from any creature," and where the Creator is a tormentor, for whom the victim can feel only hatred. The new Master demands to reign alone; that is why He is making his servant's life utterly unlivable; that is why nature has been hunted down to its last retreat and is being slowly tortured to death. Nothing remains of the personality but its most repulsive elements. Surin can no longer think, or study, or pray, or do good works, or lift up his heart to his Maker in love and gratitude; but "the sensual and animal side of his nature" is still alive and "plunged in crime and abomination." And so are the criminally frivolous cravings for diversion, so are pride and self-love and ambition. Annihilated from within by neurosis and his rigorist opinions, he resolves to accelerate the destruction of nature by mortifying himself from without. There are still certain occupations that bring him a little relief from his miseries. He gives them up; for it is necessary, he feels, to "join outward emptiness to inward emptiness." By this means the very hope of external support will be removed, and nature will be left, utterly defenseless, to the mercy of God.

Meanwhile the doctors have ordered him to eat plenty of meat; but he cannot bring himself to obey. God has sent him this sickness as a means of purgation. If he tries to get well prematurely, he will be thwarting the divine will.

Health is rejected, business and recreation are rejected. But there are still those flashy products of his talents and learning — the sermons, the theological treatises, the homilies, the devotional poems, at which he has worked so hard and of which he is still so wickedly vain. After long and torturing indecision, he feels a strong impulse to destroy everything he has ever written. The manuscripts of several books, together with many other papers, are torn up and burned. He is now "despoiled of everything and abandoned stark naked to his sufferings." He is "in the hands of the Workman who (I assure you) presses on with his work forcing me to travel by hard roads, which my nature revolts against taking."

A few months later the road had become so hard that Surin was physically and mentally incapable of describing it. From 1639 to 1657 there is a great gap in his correspondence, a total blank. During all this time he suffered from a kind of pathological illiteracy, and was incapable either of writing or reading. At moments it was difficult for him even to speak. He was in solitary confinement, cut off from all communication with the outside world. Exile from humanity was bad enough; but it was as nothing to that exile from God, to which he was now condemned. Not long after his return from Annecy, Surin came to be convinced (and the conviction endured for many years) that he was already damned. Nothing now remained for him but to wait, in utter despair, for a death which was predestined to be the passage from hell on earth to an infinitely more terrible hell in hell.

His confessor and his superiors assured him that God's mercy is boundless and that, so long as there is life, there can be no certainty of damnation. One learned theologian proved the point by syllogisms; another came to the infirmary loaded with folios and proved it by the authority of the Doctors of the Church. It was all in vain. Surin knew that he was lost and that the devils, over whom he had so recently triumphed, were gleefully preparing a place for him among the everlasting fires. Men might talk as they liked; but facts and his own deeds

spoke louder than any words. Everything that happened, everything he felt and was inspired to do, confirmed him in his conviction. If he sat near the fire, a burning ember (the symbol of eternal damnation) was sure to jump out at him. If he entered a church, it was always at the moment when some phrase about God's justice, some denunciation of the wicked, was read or sung — for him. If he listened to a sermon, he would invariably hear the preacher affirm that there was a lost soul in the congregation — it was his. Once, when he had gone to pray at the bedside of a dying brother, the conviction came to him that, like Urbain Grandier, he was a sorcerer and had the power to command devils to enter the bodies of innocent persons. And that was what he was doing now — putting a spell upon the dying man. Ordering Leviathan, the demon of pride to enter into him. Summoning Isacaaron, the demon of lust, Balaam, the spirit of buffoonery, Behemoth, the lord of all blasphemies. A man was standing on the brink of eternity, ready to take the last, decisive step. If, when he took that step, his soul were full of love and faith, all would go well with him. If not . . . Surin could actually smell the sulphur, could hear the howling and the gnashing of teeth — and yet, against his will (or was he doing it voluntarily?) he kept calling on the devils, he kept hoping that they would show themselves. All at once the sick man stirred uneasily in his bed and began to talk — not as he had done before, of resignation to God's will, not of Christ and Mary, not of the divine mercy and the joys of paradise, but incoherently of the flapping of black wings, of assailing doubts and unspeakable terrors. With an overpowering sense of horror, Surin realized that it was perfectly true: he was a sorcerer.

To these external and inferential proofs of his damnation were added the inward assurances inspired in his mind by some alien and evidently supernatural power. "He who speaks of God," he wrote, "speaks of a sea of rigors and (if I dare say it) of severities, passing all measure." In those long hours of helplessness, while he lay pinned to his bed by a paralysis of the will, an alternate collapse and cramping of the muscles, he received "impressions of God's fury so great that there is no pain in the world to compare with it." Year followed year, and one kind of suffering was succeeded by another; but the sense

of God’s enmity never wavered within him. He knew it intellectually; he felt it as an enormous weight, pressing upon him — the weight of divine judgment. Et pondus ejus ferre non potui. He could not bear it, and yet there it always was.

To reinforce this felt conviction, there were repeated visions — so vivid, so substantial, that he was hard put to it to decide whether he had seen them with the eyes of the mind or with those of the body. They were visions, for the most part, of Christ. Not of Christ the Redeemer, but of Christ the Judge. Not of Christ teaching or Christ suffering, but of Christ on the Last Day, Christ as the unrepentant sinner sees him at the moment of death, Christ as he appears to the damned souls in the pit of hell, Christ wearing “an insupportable look” of anger, of abhorrence, of vengeful hatred. Sometimes Surin saw him as an armed man in a scarlet cloak. Sometimes, floating in the air at the height of a pike, the vision would stand guard at church doors, forbidding the sinner to enter. Sometimes, as a visible and tangible something, Christ seemed to radiate from the Sacrament and was experienced by the sick man as a current of loathing so powerful that, on one occasion, it actually knocked him off a ladder, from which he was watching a religious procession. (At other times — such is the intensity of the doubt which honest faith creates, by induction, in the minds of the believer — he knew for a certainty that Calvin was right and that Christ was not really present in the Sacrament. The dilemma admitted of no passage between its horns. When he knew, by direct experience, that Christ was in the consecrated wafer, he knew, by direct experience, that Christ had damned him. But he was no less certainly damned, when he knew with the heretics, that the doctrine of the real presence was untrue.)

Surin’s visions were not of Christ alone. Sometimes he saw the Blessed Virgin, frowning at him with an expression of disgust and indignation. Raising her hand, she would discharge a bolt of avenging lightning, and his whole being, mental and physical, would feel the pain of it. Sometimes other saints rose up before him, each with his “insupportable look” and thunderbolt. Surin would see them in his dreams and wake up with a start and in agony, as the lightning struck him. The most unlikely saints made their appearance. One night, for example, he

was transfixed by a bolt from the hand of “St. Edward, King of England.” (Was this Edward the Martyr? Or can it have been poor Edward the Confessor?) In any case, St. Edward displayed a “horrible anger against me; and I am convinced that this [throwing of thunderbolts by saints] is what happens in hell.”

At the beginning of his long exile from heaven and the world of men, Surin was still capable, at least on his good days, of trying to re-establish contact with his surroundings. “I was always running after my superiors and the other Jesuits in order to pour into their ears an account of what was going on in my soul.” In vain. (One of the chief horrors of mental derangement, as of extreme physical disability, consists in the fact that “between us and you there is a great gulf fixed.” The state of the catatonic, for example, is incommensurable with the state of the normal man or woman. The universe inhabited by the paralyzed is radically different from the world known to those who have the full use of their bodies. Love may build a bridge, but cannot abolish the gulf; and where there is no love, there is not even a bridge.) Surin ran after his superiors and his colleagues; but they understood nothing of what he told them; they did not even wish to sympathize. “I recognized the truth of what St. Teresa said: that there is no pain more unbearable than that of falling into the hands of a confessor who is too prudent.” Impatiently, they moved away from him. He caught them by the sleeve and tried, yet again, to explain what was happening to him. It was all so simple, so obvious, so unutterably terrible! They smiled contemptuously and tapped their foreheads. The man was mad and, what was more, he had brought his madness on himself. God, they assured him, was punishing him for his pride and his singularity — for wanting to be more spiritual than other people, for imagining that he could go to perfection by some eccentric, un-Jesuit road of his own choosing. Surin protested against their judgment. “That natural common sense, on which our faith is built, fortifies us so strongly against the objects of the other life that, so soon as a man asserts that he is damned, other people treat the idea as though it were an expression of madness.” But the follies of the melancholy and the hypochondriacal are of quite another kind — to imagine, for example, that “one is a jug, or a cardinal,” or (if one is actually a cardinal, like

Alphonse de Richelieu) that one is God the Father. To believe that one is damned, Surin insisted, was never a sign of madness; and to prove his point, he cited the cases of Henry Suso, of St. Ignatius, of Blosius, of St. Teresa, of St. John of the Cross. At one time or another all of these had believed themselves to be damned; and all of them had been both sane and eminently holy. But the prudent ones either refused to listen, or if they did hear him out (with what an undisguised impatience!) were not convinced.

Their attitude deepened Surin's already enormous misery and drove him yet further along the road to despair. On the seventeenth of May, 1645, at the little Jesuit house at Saint-Macaire, near Bordeaux, he tried to commit suicide. All the preceding night he had wrestled with the temptation to self-murder and most of the morning was spent in prayer before the Holy Sacrament. "A little before dinner time he went up to his room. Entering it, he saw that the window was open, went to it and, after looking down at the precipice which had inspired this mad instinct in his mind [the house was built on a rocky eminence above the river], withdrew into the middle of the room, still facing the window. There he lost all consciousness and suddenly, as if he had been asleep, without any knowledge of what he was doing, he was hurled out of the window." The body fell, bounced on a projection of the rock and came to rest at the water's edge. The thigh bone was broken; but there were no internal injuries. Prompted by his inveterate passion for the miraculous, Surin rounds off the account of his tragedy with an almost comic postscript. "At the very moment of this accident, and at the very place where the fall took place, a Huguenot came down to the river, and while being ferried across he made jokes about the occurrence. Once over, he remounted and, in the meadow, on a perfectly smooth road, his horse threw him and he broke his arm, and he himself said that God had punished him because he had laughed at the Father for trying to fly, and he, from a much smaller height, had fallen into the same mishap. Now, the height from which the Father fell is great enough to be fatal; for less than a month since a cat, which was trying to catch a sparrow, fell from the same place, and was killed, though these animals, being light and adroit, ordinarily fall without hurting themselves."

Surin's leg was set and, after some months, he was able to walk, though always, thenceforward, with a limp. The mind, however, was not to be cured so easily as the body. The temptation to despair persisted for years. High places continued to hold a fearful fascination. He could not look at a knife or a rope without an intense desire to hang himself or cut his own throat.

And the urge to destruction was directed outward as well as inward. There were times when Surin found himself filled with an almost irresistible desire to set fire to the house in which he was living. The buildings and their human occupants, the library with all its treasures of wisdom and devotion, the chapel, the vestments, the crucifixes, the Blessed Sacrament itself — all should be reduced to ashes. Only a fiend could harbor such malice. But that precisely was what he was — a damned soul, a devil incarnate, hated by God and hating in return. For him, this kind of wickedness would be entirely in order. And yet, lost though he knew himself to be, there was still a part of him that rejected the evil which it was his duty, as one of the damned, to think and feel and do. The temptations to suicide and arson were strong; but he struggled against them. And meanwhile those all too prudent persons who surrounded him were taking no chances. After his first attempt at self-murder he was either watched by a lay brother, or actually tied with ropes to his bed. For the next three years Surin was subjected to that systematic inhumanity which our fathers reserved for the insane.

By those who get a kick out of this sort of thing (and they are very numerous) inhumanity is enjoyed for its own sake, but often, nonetheless, with a bad conscience. To allay their sense of guilt, the bullies and the sadists provide themselves with creditable excuses for their favorite sport. Thus, brutality toward children is rationalized as discipline, as obedience to the Word of God— "he that spareth the rod, hateth his son." Brutality toward criminals is a corollary of the Categorical Imperative. Brutality toward religious or political heretics is a blow for the True Faith. Brutality toward members of an alien race is justified by arguments drawn from what may once have passed for Science. Once universal, brutality toward the insane is not yet extinct — for the mad are horribly

exasperating. But this brutality is no longer rationalized, as it was in the past, in theological terms. The people who tormented Surin and the other victims of hysteria or psychosis did so, first, because they enjoyed being brutal and, second, because they were convinced that they did well to be brutal. And they believed that they did well, because, ex hypothesi, the mad had always brought their troubles upon themselves. For some manifest or obscure sin, they were being punished by God, who permitted devils to besiege or obsess them. Both as God's enemies and as temporary incarnations of radical evil, they deserved to be maltreated. And maltreated they were — with a good conscience and a heart-warming sense that the divine will was being done on earth, as in heaven. The Bedlamite was beaten, starved, chained up in the filthiest of dungeons. If he was visited by a minister of religion, it was to be told that it was all his own fault and that God was angry with him. To the general public he was a mixture between a baboon and a mountebank, with some of the characteristics of a condemned criminal thrown in. On Sundays and holidays one took the children to see the insane, as one takes them now to the zoo or the circus. And there were no rules against teasing the animals. On the contrary, the animals being what they were, the enemies of God, tormenting them was not merely permissible; it was a duty. The sane person who is treated as a lunatic and subjected to every kind of insult and practical joke — this is a favorite theme of sixteenth-and seventeenth-century dramatists and storytellers. One thinks of Malvolio, one thinks of Lasca's Dr. Manente, one thinks of the wretched victim in Grimmelshausen's Simplicissimus. And the facts are even more unpleasant than the fictions.

Louise du Tronchay has left an account of her experiences in the great Parisian madhouse of the Salpêtrière, to which she was committed, in 1674, after being found in the streets, screaming and laughing to herself, and followed by large numbers of stray cats. These cats aroused a vehement suspicion that, as well as mad, she was a witch. At the hospital, she was chained up in a cage for the public amusement. Through the bars visitors would poke her with their walking sticks and make jokes about the cats and the punishment reserved for witches. That dirty straw she was lying on — what a fine blaze it would make

when she was brought to execution! Every few weeks new straw was provided and the old was burned in the courtyard. Louise would be brought to look at the flames and hear the gleeful shouts of “Fire for the witch!” One Sunday she was made to listen to a sermon, of which she herself was the subject. The preacher exhibited her to his congregation as an awful example of the way in which God punishes sin. In this world it was a cage in the Salpêtrière; in the next it would be hell. And while the wretched victim sobbed and shuddered, he expatiated with relish on the flames, the stench, the draughts of boiling oil, the scourges of red-hot wire — forever and ever, Amen.

Under this regimen Louise, very naturally, grew worse and worse. That she finally recovered was due to the common decency of one man — a visiting priest who treated her kindly and had the charity to teach her to pray.

Surin’s experiences were essentially similar. True, he was spared the mental and physical tortures of life in a public madhouse. But even in the infirmary of a Jesuit college, even among the highly educated scholars and dedicated Christians who were his colleagues, there were horrors enough. The lay brother, who acted as his attendant, beat him unmercifully. The schoolboys, if ever they caught a glimpse of the crazed Father, would hoot and jeer. Of such actors such actions were only to be expected. They were not to be expected of grave and learned priests, his brothers, his fellow apostles. And yet how crassly insensitive, how totally without the bowels of compassion they proved themselves to be! There were the bluff and hearty ones, the Muscular Christians, who assured him that there was nothing wrong with him, who forced him to do all the things it was impossible for him to do, and then laughed when he cried out in pain and told him it was all imagination. There were the malignant moralists who came and sat at his bedside and told him, at enormous length and with evident satisfaction, that he was only getting what he had so richly deserved. There were the priests who visited him out of curiosity and to be amused, who talked nonsense to him as though he were a child or a cretin, who showed off their wit, their priceless sense of humor, by being waggish at his expense, by making derisive jokes which they assumed, because he could not answer, that he could not understand.

On one occasion “a Father of some importance came to the infirmary, where I was all alone, sitting on my bed, looked at me fixedly for a long time and then, though I had done him no harm and had no wish to do him any, gave me a well aimed slap in the face; after which he went out.”

Surin did his best to turn these brutalities to the profit of his soul. God desired that he should be humiliated by being thought mad and treated as an outlaw, with no right to men’s respect, no right even to their pity. He resigned himself to what was happening; he went further and actively willed his own humiliation. But this conscious effort to reconcile himself to his fate was not enough, of itself, to effect a cure. As in the case of Louise du Tronchay, the healing agent was another’s kindness. In 1648 Father Bastide, the only one of his colleagues who had persistently argued that Surin was not irretrievably mad, was appointed to the rectorship of the college of Saintes. He asked for permission to take the invalid with him. It was granted. At Saintes, for the first time in ten years, Surin found himself treated with sympathy and consideration — as a sick man undergoing a spiritual ordeal, not as a kind of criminal undergoing punishment at the hands of God and therefore deserving of yet more punishment at the hands of men. It was still all but impossible for him to leave his prison and communicate with the world; but now the world was moving in and trying to communicate with him.

The patient’s first responses to this new treatment were physical. For years, chronic anxiety had kept his breathing so shallow that he seemed to be living always on the brink of asphyxiation. Now, almost suddenly, his diaphragm started to move; he breathed deeply, he was able to fill his lungs with life-giving air. “All my muscles had been locked tight, as though with clasps, and now one clasp was opened, then another, with extraordinary relief.” He was experiencing in his body an analogue of spiritual liberation. Those who have suffered from asthma or hay fever know the horror of being physically cut off from the cosmic environment, and the bliss, when they recover, of being restored to it. On the spiritual level most human beings suffer from the equivalent of asthma, but are only very obscurely and fitfully aware that they are living in a state of chronic

asphyxiation. A few, however, know themselves for what they are — nonbreathers. Desperately they pant for air; and if at last they contrive to fill their lungs, what an unspeakable blessedness!

In the course of his strange career, Surin was alternately strangled and released, locked up in stifling darkness and transported to a mountain top in the sun. And his lungs reflected the state of his soul — cramped and rigid when the soul was stifled, dilated when it drew breath. The words serré, bandé, retréci, and their antithesis, dilaté, recur again and again in Surin's writings. They express the cardinal fact of his experience — a violent oscillation between the extremes of tension and release, of a contraction into less than self and a letting go into more abundant Life. It was an experience of the same kind as that which is so minutely described in Maine de Biran's diary, as that which finds its most powerfully beautiful expression in certain poems of George Herbert and Henry Vaughan — an experience made up of a succession of incommensurables.

In Surin's case psychological release was sometimes accompanied by an altogether extraordinary degree of thoracic dilation. During one period of ecstatic self-abandonment he found that his leather waistcoat, which was laced up the front, like a boot, had to be let out five or six inches. (As a young man, St. Philip Neri experienced an ecstatic dilatation so extreme that his heart became permanently enlarged and he broke two ribs. In spite, or because, of which, he lived to a ripe old age, working prodigiously to the very end.)

Surin was always conscious that there was an actual, as well as a merely etymological connection between breath and spirit. He lists four types of breathing — a breath of the devil, of nature, of grace and of glory — and assures us that he has had experience of each. Unfortunately he does not elaborate on his statement and we are left in ignorance of what he actually discovered in the field of pranayana.

Thanks to Father Bastide's kindness, Surin had recovered the sense of being a member of the human race. But Bastide could speak only for men and not for God — or, to be more accurate, for Surin's cherished notion of God. The invalid could breathe again; but it was still impossible for him to read or write or say

Mass, to walk, or eat, or undress without discomfort or even acute pain. These disabilities were all related to Surin's enduring conviction that he was damned. It was a source of terror and despair, from which the only effective distractions were pain and acute illness. To feel better mentally he had to feel worse physically.

The strangest feature of Surin's malady is the fact that there was a part of his mind which was never ill. Unable to read or write, unable to perform the simplest actions without excruciating and disabling pain, convinced of his own damnation, haunted by compulsions to suicide, to blasphemy, to impurity, to heresy (at one moment he was a convinced Calvinist, at another a believing and practicing Manichee), Surin retained, during the whole of his long ordeal, an unimpaired capacity for literary composition. During the first ten years of his madness, he composed mainly in verse. Setting new words to popular tunes, he converted innumerable ballads and drinking songs into Christian canticles. Here are some lines about St. Teresa and St. Catherine of Genoa, from a ballad entitled Les Saints enivrés d'Amour to the tune of J'ai rencontré un Allemand.

J'aperçus d'un autre côté,
Une vierge rare en beauté,
  Qu'on appelle Thérèse;
Son visage tout allumé
Montrait bien qu'elle avait humé
  De ce vin à son aise.
Elle me dit: "Prends-en pour toi,
Bois-en et chantes avec moi:
Dieu, Dieu, Dieu, je ne veux que Dieu:
  Tout le reste me pèse."

Une Génoise, dont le cœur
Etait plein de cette liqueur,
  Semblait lui faire escorte:
Elle aussi rouge qu'un charbon

S’écriait: “Que ce vin est bon. . . .”

That the verses are feeble and the taste atrocious was due to a want, not of health, but of talent. Surin’s poetry was as poor when he was sane as when he was out of his wits. His gift (and it was considerable) was for the clear and exhaustive exposition of a subject in prose. And this precisely was what, during the second half of his illness, he actually undertook. Composing in his head and dictating every evening to an amanuensis, he produced, between 1651 and 1655, his greatest work, Le Catéchisme Spirituel. This is a treatise comparable in scope and in intrinsic merit to the Holy Wisdom of its author’s English contemporary, Augustine Baker. In spite of its great length of more than a thousand duodecimo pages, the Catechism remains a very readable book. True, the surface texture of the writing is somewhat uninteresting; but this is not the fault of Surin, whose pleasantly old-fashioned style has been corrected, in the modern editions of the book, by what his nineteenth-century editor calls, with unconscious irony, “a friendly hand.” Luckily, the friendly hand could not spoil the book’s essential qualities of simplicity even in the subtlest analyses, of matter-of-factness even when it deals with the sublime.

At the time he composed his Catechism, Surin was incapable of consulting books of reference, or of going back over his own manuscript. And yet, in spite of this, the references to other authors are copious and apt, and the work itself is admirably well organized in a series of returns to the same themes, which are treated on each occasion from a different viewpoint, or with a graduated increase of elaboration. To compose such a book under such handicaps required a prodigious memory and exceptional powers of concentration. But Surin, though somewhat better than he had been at his worst, was still generally regarded (and not without reason) as a lunatic.

To be mad with lucidity and in complete possession of one’s intellectual faculties — this, surely, must be one of the most terrible of experiences. Unimpaired, Surin’s reason looked on helplessly, while his imagination, his emotions and his autonomic nervous system comported themselves like an alliance of criminal maniacs, bent on his destruction. It was a struggle, in the last

analysis, between the active person and the victim of suggestion, between Surin the realist, doing his best to cope with actual facts, and Surin the verbalist, converting words into hideous pseudo-realities, in regard to which it was only logical to feel terror and despair.

Surin's was merely an extreme case of the universal human predicament. "In the beginning was the word." So far as human history is concerned, the statement is perfectly true. Language is the instrument of man's progress out of animality, and language is the cause of man's deviation from animal innocence and animal conformity to the nature of things into madness and diabolism. Words are at once indispensable and fatal. Treated as working hypotheses, propositions about the world are instruments, by means of which we are enabled progressively to understand the world. Treated as absolute truths, as dogmas to be swallowed, as idols to be worshiped, propositions about the world distort our vision of reality and lead us into all kinds of inappropriate behavior. "Wishing to entice the blind," says Dai-o Kokushi, "the Buddha playfully let words escape from his golden mouth. Heaven and earth have been filled, ever since, with entangling briars." And the briars have not been exclusively of Far Eastern manufacture. If Christ came "not to send peace on earth, but a sword," it was because he and his followers had no choice but to embody their insights in words. Like all other words, these Christian words were sometimes inadequate, sometimes too sweeping, and always imprecise — therefore always susceptible of being interpreted in many different ways. Treated as working hypotheses — as useful frames of reference, within which to organize and cope with the given facts of human existence — propositions made up of these words have been of inestimable value. Treated as dogmas and idols, they have been the cause of such enormous evils as theological hatred, religious wars and ecclesiastical imperialism, together with such minor horrors as the orgy at Loudun and Surin's self-suggested madness.

Moralists harp on the duty of controlling the passions; and of course they are quite right to do so. Unhappily most of them have failed to harp on the no less essential duty of controlling words and the reasoning based upon them. Crimes

of passion are committed only in hot blood, and blood is only occasionally hot. But words are with us all the time, and words (owing, no doubt, to the conditioning of early childhood) are charged with a suggestive power so prodigious as to justify, in some sort, the belief in spells and magic formulas. Far more dangerous than crimes of passion are the crimes of idealism — the crimes which are instigated, fostered and moralized by hallowed words. Such crimes are planned when the pulse is normal and committed in cold blood and with unwavering perseverance over a long course of years. In the past, the words which dictated the crimes of idealism were predominantly religious; now they are predominantly political. The dogmas are no longer metaphysical, but positivistic and ideological. The only things that remain unchanged are the idolatrous superstition of those who swallow the dogmas, and the systematic madness, the diabolic ferocity, with which they act upon their beliefs.

Transferred from the laboratory and the study to the church, the parliament and the council chamber, the notion of working hypotheses might liberate mankind from its collective insanities, its chronic compulsions to wholesale murder and mass suicide. The fundamental human problem is ecological: men must learn how to live with the cosmos on all its levels, from the material to the spiritual. As a race, we have to discover how a huge and rapidly increasing population can go on existing satisfactorily on a planet of limited size and possessed of resources, many of which are wasting assets that can never be renewed. As individuals, we have to find out how to establish a satisfactory relationship with that infinite Mind, from which we habitually imagine ourselves to be isolated. By concentrating our attention on the datum and the Donum we shall develop, as a kind of byproduct, satisfactory methods of getting on with one another. “Seek ye first the Kingdom, and all the rest shall be added.” But instead of that, we insist on first seeking all the rest — the all too human interests born of self-centered passion on the one hand and idolatrous word-worship on the other. The result of this is that our basic ecological problems remain unsolved and insoluble. Concentration on power politics makes it impossible for organized societies to improve their relationship with the planet.

Concentration on idolatrously worshiped word-systems makes it impossible for individuals to improve their relations with the primordial Fact. Seeking first all the rest, we lose not only it, but the Kingdom as well, and the earth on which alone the Kingdom can come.

In Surin's case certain of the propositions he had been taught to worship as dogmas drove him out of his mind by creating occasions for terror and despair. But fortunately there were other propositions, more encouraging and equally dogmatic.

On October 12, 1655, one of the Fathers at the College of Bordeaux (to which, by this time, Surin had returned) came to his room to hear his confession and prepare him for communion. The only grave sin of which the sick man could accuse himself was that of not having behaved sufficiently wickedly; for, since God had already damned him, it was only right that he should live up to his damnation by wallowing in all the vices, whereas in fact he always tried to be virtuous. "To say that a Christian ought to feel scruples in regard to doing good will seem ridiculous to the reader, as it now does to me." These words were written in 1663. In 1655 Surin still felt that it was his duty, as a lost soul, to be wholly bad. But, in spite of this duty, he found it morally impossible to be anything but good. In this, he was convinced, he had committed a sin more enormous than that of premeditated murder. It was this sin which he now confessed, "not as a man living on the earth, for whom there is still hope, but as one of the damned." The confessor, who was evidently a kindly, sensible man, well acquainted with Surin's weakness for the extraordinary, assured his penitent that, though not at all prone to this kind of thing, he had often felt a strong impression, call it an inspiration, that all would finally be well. "You will recognize your mistake, you will be able to think and act like other men, you will die in peace." The words made a profound impression on Surin's mind, and from that moment the suffocating cloud of fear and misery began to lift. God had not rejected him; there was still hope. Hope for recovery in this world, hope for salvation in the next.

With hope came a slow return to health. One by one the physical inhibitions and paralyses disappeared. The first to go was the inability to write. One day, in 1657, after eighteen years of enforced illiteracy, he picked up a pen and was able to scrawl three pages of thoughts on the spiritual life. The characters were “so confused that they seemed scarcely human”; but that did not matter. What mattered was that his hand had at last been able to co-operate, however inadequately, with his mind.

Three years later he recovered the ability to walk. It happened while he was staying in the country, at the house of a friend. At the beginning of his stay, he had to be carried by two footmen from his bedroom to the dining room, “for I could not take a step without great pain. These pains were not like the pains of paralytics; they were pains which tended toward a shrinking and contraction of the stomach, and at the same time I used to feel a great violence in my bowels.” On October 27, 1660, one of his relatives called to see him and, when the time came for him to go, Surin painfully dragged himself to the door to say good-by. Standing there, after the visitor’s departure, he looked out into the garden “and began to study, with a certain distinctness, the objects that were in it, a thing which, on account of an extreme debility of the nerves, I had not been able to do for fifteen years.” Feeling, instead of the familiar pains, “a certain suavity,” he went down the five or six steps into the garden and looked about him for a little while longer. Looked at the black mold and the shiny green of the box hedges, looked at the lawns and the Michaelmas daisies and the alley of pleached hornbeams. Looked at the low hills in the distance with their autumnal woods, fox-brown under the pale sky, in the almost silvery sunlight. There was no wind, and the silence was like an enormous crystal, and everywhere was a living mystery of colors merging, of forms distinct and separate, of the innumerable and the one, of passing time and the presence of eternity.

Next day Surin ventured out again into the universe he had almost forgotten; and, the day after that, his voyage of rediscovery took him as far as the well — and it did not invite him to suicide. He even left the garden and walked, ankle-

deep in the dead leaves, through the little wood that lay beyond the walls. He was cured.

Surin accounts for his unawareness of the external world by an “extreme debility of the nerves.” But this debility never prevented him from concentrating his attention on theological notions and the phantasies to which those notions gave rise. Actually it was his obsession with these images and abstractions which so disastrously cut him off from the natural world. Long before the onset of his illness he had forced himself to live, at one remove from the given facts, in a world where words and reactions to words were more important than things and lives. With the sublime insanity of one who carries a faith to its logical conclusions, Lallemant had taught that “we ought not to see or wonder at anything on this earth except the Holy Sacrament. If God were capable of wonder, He would wonder only at this mystery, and that of the Incarnation. . . . After the Incarnation, we ought not to wonder at anything.” In neither seeing nor wondering at anything in the given world, Surin was merely acting on his master’s injunctions. Hoping to deserve the Donum, he ignored the datum. But the highest Gift is by means of the given. The Kingdom of God comes on earth and through the perception of earth as it is in itself, and not as it appears to a will distorted by self-centered cravings and revulsions, to an intellect distorted by ready-made beliefs.

As a rigorist theologian, convinced of the total depravity of a fallen world, Surin agreed with Lallemant that there was nothing in nature worth looking or wondering at. But his theories were not in accord with his immediate experience. “Sometimes,” he writes in Le Catéchisme Spirituel, “the Holy Spirit enlightens the soul successively and by degrees; and then He takes advantage of everything that presents itself to consciousness — animals, trees, flowers or anything else in creation — in order to instruct the soul in the great truths and to teach her secretly what she must do for the service of God.” And here is another passage in the same vein. “In a flower, in a tiny insect, God makes manifest to souls all the treasures of his wisdom and goodness; and there needs no more to provoke a new conflagration of love.” Writing directly of himself, Surin records that “on a

number of occasions my soul was invested with these states of glory, and the sunlight seemed to grow incomparably brighter than usual, and yet was so soft and bearable that it seemed to be of another kind than natural sunlight. Once when I was in this state, I went out into the garden of our college at Bordeaux; and so great was this light that I seemed to myself to be walking in paradise." Every color was more "intense and natural," every form more exquisitely distinct than at ordinary times. Spontaneously and by a kind of blessed accident, he had entered that infinite and eternal world, which we would all inhabit if only, in Blake's words, "the doors of perception were cleansed." But the glory departed and, through all the years of his illness, never returned. "Nothing remains to me but the memory of a very great thing, surpassing in beauty and grandeur all that I have experienced in this world."

That a man, for whom the Kingdom had actually manifested itself upon earth should yet subscribe to the rigorist's wholesale dismissal of all created things, is a melancholy tribute to the obsessive power of mere words and notions. He had had experiences of God in nature; but instead of making a systematic devotional use of these experiences, as Traherne was to do in his Centuries of Meditations, Surin chose to revert, after each theophany, to the old insane refusal to see or wonder at anything in creation. Instead, he concentrated all his attention on the more dismal propositions in his creed and on his own emotional and imaginative reactions to those propositions. No more certain way of shutting out the infinite goodness could possibly have been devised.

Each time Antaeus touched the earth, he received a new accession of strength. That was why Hercules had to lift him up and strangle him in mid-air. Simultaneously the giant and the hero, Surin both experienced the healing which comes from a contact with nature and, by sheer will power, raised himself from the ground and wrung his own neck. He had aspired to liberation; but because he conceived of union with the Son as a systematic denial of the essential divinity of nature, he had realized only the partial enlightenment of union with the Father apart from the manifested world, together with union with the Spirit in all kinds of psychic experiences. In its opening phase, Surin's cure was not a passage

from darkness into that “sober certainty of waking bliss,” which comes when mind permits Mind to know itself, through a finite consciousness, for what it really is; it was rather the exchange of a profoundly abnormal condition for another condition of opposite sign, in which “extraordinary graces” became as ordinary as extraordinary desolations had been before. It should be remarked that, even in the worst times of his malady, Surin had experienced brief flashes of joy, ephemeral convictions that, in spite of his damnation, God was eternally with him. These flashes were now multiplied, these convictions, from being momentary, became lasting. Psychic experience succeeded psychic experience, and every vision was luminous and encouraging, every feeling was one of bliss. But “to honor Our Lord as He deserves to be honored, you should disentangle your heart from all attachment to spiritual delights and perceptible graces. You should in no wise depend upon these things. Faith alone should be your support. It is faith which raises us to God in purity; for it leaves the soul in emptiness, and it is this emptiness which is filled by God.” So Surin had written, more than twenty years before, to one of the nuns who asked him for advice. And it was in the same vein that Father Bastide — the man to whose charity he owed the first inception of his cure — now spoke to Surin. However elevated they may be, however consoling, psychic experiences are not enlightenment, nor even the means to enlightenment. And Bastide did not say these things on his own authority. He had all the accredited mystics of the Church behind him, he could quote St. John of the Cross. For some time Surin did his best to follow Bastide’s advice. But his extraordinary graces came crowding in upon him, incessantly, insistently. And when he rejected them, they changed their sign once more, and turned into aridities and desolations. God seemed now to have withdrawn again and left him on the brink of the old despair. In spite of Bastide, in spite of St. John of the Cross, Surin went back to his visions, his locutions, his ecstasies, his inspirations. In the course of the ensuing controversy the two disputants and their Superior, Father Anginot, appealed to Jeanne des Anges. Would she kindly ask her Good Angel what he thought about extraordinary graces? The Good Angel began by favoring Bastide’s cause. Surin protested, and after the

exchange of many letters between Sœur Jeanne and the three Jesuits, the Angel announced that both disputants were in the right, inasmuch as each was doing his best to serve God in his own way. Surin was fully satisfied and so was Anginot. Bastide, however, stuck to his guns and even went so far as to suggest that it was time for Sœur Jeanne to break off communications with the heavenly counterpart of M. de Beaufort. Nor was he the only one to raise objections. In 1659, Surin informed the Prioress that an eminent ecclesiastic had complained "that you have set up a kind of shop for finding out from your Angel all the things people press you to ask of him, that you have a regular information bureau for marriages, lawsuits and other things of the kind." This sort of thing must be stopped immediately — not, as Father Bastide had suggested, by breaking off relations with the Angel, but by consulting him only for spiritual purposes.

Time passed. Surin was well enough now to visit the sick, to hear confessions, to preach, to write, to direct souls by word of mouth or by letter. His behavior was still somewhat odd, and his superiors thought it necessary to censor all his letters, incoming and outgoing, for fear that they might contain unorthodoxies or at least embarrassing extravagances. Their suspicions were groundless. The man who had dictated Le Catéchisme Spirituel, while (to all appearances) out of his mind, could be relied on to display an equal prudence now that he was well.

In 1663 he wrote the Science Expérimentale, with its history of the possession and its account of his own subsequent trials. Louis XIV was already well embarked on his disastrous career; but Surin was not interested in "public affairs and the schemes of the great." He had the sacraments, he had the gospels to read and ruminate, he had his experiences of God; these were enough. In certain respects, indeed, they were more than enough; for he was growing old, he was losing his strength, "and love does not go too well with weakness; for it requires a stout vessel to resist the pressure of its workings." The almost manic well-being of a few years before had gone; the regular and easy succession of extraordinary graces was a thing of the past. But he had something else, something better. To Sœur Jeanne he writes that "God has recently given me

some slight knowledge of His love. But what a difference there is between the depth of the soul and its faculties! For in effect the soul is often rich in its depths and actually glutted with the supernatural treasures of grace, while its faculties are in a state of utter poverty. In her depths, as I say, the soul has a very high, very delicate, very fruitful sense of God, accompanied by a most comforting love and a wondrous dilatation of the heart, without, however, being able to communicate any of these things to other people. Outwardly, persons in this state give the impression of being without any taste (for the things of religion), devoid of all talent and reduced to an extremity of indigence. . . . There is an exceedingly great distress when the soul is unable, if the expression may be permitted, to disgorge herself through her faculties; the overplus within her causes an oppression more painful than can be imagined. What is happening in the soul's depths is like the banking up of great waters, whose mass, for lack of an issue by which to escape, overwhelms her with an unbearable weight and causes a deathly exhaustion." In some impossibly paradoxical way, a finite being contains the infinite and is almost annihilated by the experience. But Surin does not complain. It is a blessed anguish, a death devoutly to be desired.

In the midst of his ecstasies and visions, Surin had been on a track that led, no doubt, through very picturesque country, but toward a luminous dead end. Now that the extraordinary graces were over, now that he was free to be aware of the proximity of total Awareness, he had achieved the possibility of enlightenment. For now at last he was living "in faith," precisely as Bastide had urged him to do. Now at last he was standing in intellectual and imaginative nakedness before the given facts of the world and his own life — empty that he might be filled, poor that he might be made supremely rich. "I am told," he writes two years before his death, "that there are pearl fishers, who have a pipe that goes from the sea floor to the surface, where it is buoyed up with corks, and that through this pipe they breathe — and are yet at the bottom of the sea. I do not know if this be true; but in any case it expresses very well what I have to say; for the soul has a pipe that goes to heaven, a channel, says St. Catherine of Genoa, that leads to the very heart of God. Through it she breathes wisdom and love, and is sustained.

While the soul is here, fishing for pearls at the bottom of the earth, she speaks with other souls, she preaches, she does God's business; and all the time there is a pipe that goes to heaven to draw down eternal life and consolation. . . . In this state the soul is at once happy and wretched. And yet I think she is really happy. . . . For without visions or ecstasies or suspensions of the senses, in the midst of the ordinary miseries of earthly life, in weakness and many-sided impotency, our Lord gives something that passes all understanding and all measure. . . . This something is a certain wound of love which, without any visible outward effect, pierces the soul and keeps it incessantly longing for God."

And so, fishing for pearls at the bottom of the earth, his pipe between his teeth, his lungs dilated by the air from another world, the old man advanced toward his consummation. A few months before he died, Surin finished the last of his devotional writings, Questions sur l'Amour de Dieu. Reading certain passages of this book, we divine that the last barrier had now gone down and that, for one more soul, the Kingdom had come on earth. Through that channel to the very heart of God had flowed "a peace that is not merely a calm, like the lull of the sea, or the tranquil flow of mighty rivers; but it enters into us, this divine peace and repose, like a flooding torrent; and the soul, after so many tempests, feels, as it were, an inundation of peace; and the relish of divine repose not only enters the soul, not only takes her captive, but comes upon her, like the onrush of a multitude of waters.

"We find that, in the Apocalypse, the Spirit of God makes mention of a music of harps and lutes that is like thunder. Such are the marvelous ways of God — to make a thunder like well-tuned lutes and a symphony of lutes like thunder. Likewise, who will ever believe or imagine that there can be torrents of peace, which sweep away the dykes, which breach the levees and shatter the sea walls? And yet this is what actually happens, and it is the nature of God to make assaults of peace and silences of love. . . . God's peace is like a river, whose course was in one country and has been diverted into another by the breaking of a dyke. This invading peace does things which do not seem proper to the nature of peace; for it comes with a rush, it comes with impetuosity; and this belongs

only to the peace of God. Only the peace of God can march in such equipage, like the noise of the rising tide as it comes, not to ravage the land, but to fill the bed prepared for it by God. It comes as though fiercely, it comes with a roaring, even though the sea be calm. This roaring is caused only by the abundance of the waters, and not by their fury; for the moving of the waters is not by a tempest, but by the waters themselves, in all their native calm, when there is not a breath of wind. The sea in its fullness comes to visit the earth and to kiss the shores assigned for its limits. It comes in majesty and in magnificence. Even so it is in the soul when, after long suffering, the immensity of peace comes to visit her — and not a breath of wind to make a ripple on its surface. This is a divine peace, which brings with it the treasures of God and all the wealth of His Kingdom. It has its harbingers, the halcyons and heralding birds that announce its approach; these are the visits of angels which precede it. It comes like an element of the other life, with a sound of celestial harmony and with such swiftness that the soul is utterly overthrown, not because she has made any resistance to the blessing, but because of its very abundance. This abundance does no violence except to the obstacles in the way of its benediction; and all the animals that are not peaceable take flight before the onset of this peace. And with peace come all the treasures promised to Jerusalem — cassia and amber and the other rarities upon her shores. Even so comes this divine peace — comes with abundance, comes with a wealth of blessings, comes with all the precious treasures of grace."

More than thirty years before, at Marennes, Surin had often watched the calm, irresistible mounting of the Atlantic tides; and now the memory of that everyday marvel was the means by which this consummated soul was able, at last, to "disgorge herself" in a not inadequate expression of the experienced Fact. Tel qu'en Lui-même enfin l'éternité le change, he had come to the place where, without knowing it, he had always been; and when, in the spring of 1665 death overtook him, there was, as Jacob Boehme had said, "no necessity for him to go anywhere": he was already there.

EPILOGUE

(IN AMPLIFICATION OF material in Chapter Three)

Without an understanding of man's deep-seated urge to self-transcendence, of his very natural reluctance to take the hard, ascending way, and his search for some bogus liberation either below or to one side of his personality, we cannot hope to make sense of our own particular period of history or indeed of history in general, of life as it was lived in the past and as it is lived today. For this reason I propose to discuss some of the more common Grace-substitutes, into which and by means of which men and women have tried to escape from the tormenting consciousness of being merely themselves.

In France there is now one retailer of alcohol to every hundred inhabitants, more or less. In the United States there are probably at least a million desperate alcoholics, besides a much larger number of very heavy drinkers whose disease has not yet become mortal. Regarding the consumption of intoxicants in the past we have no precise or statistical knowledge. In Western Europe, among the Celts and Teutons, and throughout medieval and early modern times, the individual intake of alcohol was probably even greater than it is today. On the many occasions when we drink tea, or coffee, or soda pop, our ancestors refreshed themselves with wine, beer, mead and, in later centuries, with gin, brandy and usquebaugh. The regular drinking of water was a penance imposed on wrongdoers, or accepted by the religious, along with occasional vegetarianism, as a very severe mortification. Not to drink an intoxicant was an eccentricity sufficiently remarkable to call for comment and the using of a more or less disparaging nickname. Hence such patronymics as the Italian Bevilacqua, the French Boileau and the English Drink water.

Alcohol is but one of the many drugs employed by human beings as avenues of escape from the insulated self. Of the natural narcotics, stimulants and

hallucinators there is, I believe, not a single one whose properties have not been known from time immemorial. Modern research has given us a host of brand new synthetics; but in regard to the natural poisons it has merely developed better methods of extracting, concentrating and recombining those already known. From poppy to curare, from Andean coca to Indian hemp and Siberian agaric, every plant or bush or fungus capable, when ingested, of stupefying or exciting or evoking visions, has long since been discovered and systematically employed. The fact is strangely significant; for it seems to prove that, always and everywhere, human beings have felt the radical inadequacy of their personal existence, the misery of being their insulated selves and not something else, something wider, something in Wordsworthian phrase, “far more deeply interfused.” Exploring the world around him, primitive man evidently “tried all things and held fast to that which was good.” For the purpose of self-preservation the good is every edible fruit and leaf, every wholesome seed, root and nut. But in another context — the context of self-dissatisfaction and the urge to self-transcendence — the good is everything in nature by means of which the quality of individual consciousness can be changed. Such drug-induced changes may be manifestly for the worse, may be at the price of present discomfort and future addiction, degeneration and premature death. All this is of no moment. What matters is the awareness, if only for an hour or two, if only for a few minutes, of being someone or, more often, something other than the insulated self. “I live, yet not I, but wine or opium or peyotl or hashish liveth in me.” To go beyond the limits of the insulated ego is such a liberation that, even when self-transcendence is through nausea into frenzy, through cramps into hallucinations and coma, the drug-induced experience has been regarded by primitives and even by the highly civilized as intrinsically divine. Ecstasy through intoxication is still an essential part of the religion of many African, South American and Polynesian peoples. It was once, as the surviving documents clearly prove, a no less essential part of the religion of the Celts, the Teutons, the Greeks, the peoples of the Middle East and the Aryan conquerors of India. It is not merely that “beer does more than Milton can to justify God’s

ways to man.” Beer is the god. Among the Celts, Sabazios was the divine name given to the felt alienation of being dead drunk on ale. Further to the south, Dionysos was, among other things, the supernatural objectification of the psychophysical effects of too much wine. In Vedic mythology, Indra was the god of that now unidentifiable drug called soma. Hero, slayer of dragons, he was the magnified projection upon heaven of the strange and glorious otherness experienced by the intoxicated. Made one with the drug, he becomes, as Soma-Indra, the source of immortality, the mediator between the human and the divine.

In modern times beer and the other toxic short cuts to self-transcendence are no longer officially worshiped as gods. Theory has undergone a change, but not practice; for in practice millions upon millions of civilized men and women continue to pay their devotions, not to the liberating and transfiguring Spirit, but to alcohol, to hashish, to opium and its derivatives, to the barbiturates, and the other synthetic additions to the age-old catalogue of poisons capable of causing self-transcendence. In every case, of course, what seems a god is actually a devil, what seems a liberation is in fact an enslavement. The self-transcendence is invariably downward into the less than human, the lower than personal.

Like intoxication, elementary sexuality, indulged in for its own sake and divorced from love, was once a god, worshiped not only as the principle of fecundity, but as a manifestation of the radical Otherness immanent in every human being. In theory, elementary sexuality has long since ceased to be a god. But in practice it can still boast of a countless host of sectaries.

There is an elementary sexuality which is innocent, and there is an elementary sexuality which is morally and aesthetically squalid. D. H. Lawrence has written very beautifully of the first; Jean Genêt, with horrifying power and in copious detail, of the second. The sexuality of Eden and the sexuality of the sewer — both of them have power to carry the individual beyond the limits of his or her insulated self. But the second and (one would sadly guess) the commoner variety takes those who indulge in it to a lower level of subhumanity, evokes the consciousness, and leaves the memory, of a completer alienation, than does the first. Hence, for all those who feel the urge to escape from their imprisoning

identity, the perennial attraction of debauchery and of such strange equivalents of debauchery as have been described in the course of this narrative.

In most civilized communities public opinion condemns debauchery and drug addiction as being ethically wrong. And to moral disapproval is added fiscal discouragement and legal repression. Alcohol is heavily taxed, the sale of narcotics is everywhere prohibited and certain sexual practices are treated as crimes. But when we pass from drug-taking and elementary sexuality to the third main avenue of downward self-transcendence, we find, on the part of moralists and legislators, a very different and much more indulgent attitude. This seems all the more surprising since crowd-delirium, as we may call it, is more immediately dangerous to social order, more dramatically a menace to that thin crust of decency, reasonableness and mutual tolerance which constitutes a civilization, than either drink or debauchery. True, a generalized and long-continued habit of overindulgence in sexuality may result, as J. D. Unwin has argued, in lowering the energy level of an entire society, thereby rendering it incapable of reaching or maintaining a high degree of civilization. Similarly drug addiction, if sufficiently widespread may lower the military, economic and political efficiency of the society in which it prevails. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries raw alcohol was the secret weapon of the European slave traders; heroin, in the twentieth, of the Japanese militarists. Dead drunk, the Negro was an easy prey. As for the Chinese drug addict, he could be relied upon to make no trouble for his conquerors. But these cases are exceptional. When left to itself, a society generally manages to come to terms with its favorite poison. The drug is a parasite on the body politic, but a parasite which its host (to speak metaphorically) has strength and sense enough to keep under control. And the same applies to sexuality. No society which based its sexual practices upon the theories of the Marquis de Sade could possibly survive; and in fact no society has ever come near to doing such a thing. Even the most easygoing of the Polynesian paradises have their rules and regulations, their categorical imperatives and commandments. Against excessive sexuality, as against excessive drug-taking, societies seem to be able to protect themselves with some

degree of success. Their defense against crowd-delirium and its often disastrous consequences is, in all too many cases, far less adequate. The professional moralists who inveigh against drunkenness are strangely silent about the equally disgusting vice of herd-intoxication — of downward self-transcendence into subhumanity by the process of getting together in a mob.

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." In the midst of two or three hundred, the divine presence becomes more problematical. And when the numbers run into the thousands, or tens of thousands, the likelihood of God being there, in the consciousness of each individual, declines almost to the vanishing point. For such is the nature of an excited crowd (and every crowd is automatically self-exciting) that, where two or three thousand are gathered together, there is an absence not merely of deity, but even of common humanity. The fact of being one of a multitude delivers a man from his consciousness of being an insulated self and carries him down into a less than personal realm, where there are no responsibilities, no right or wrong, no need for thought or judgment or discrimination — only a strong vague sense of togetherness, only a shared excitement, a collective alienation. And the alienation is at once more prolonged and less exhausting than that induced by debauchery; the morning after less depressing than that which follows self-poisoning by alcohol or morphine. Moreover, the crowd-delirium can be indulged in, not merely without a bad conscience, but actually, in many cases, with a positive glow of conscious virtue. For, so far from condemning the practice of downward self-transcendence through herd-intoxication, the leaders of church and state have actively encouraged the practice whenever it could be used for the furtherance of their own ends. Individually and in the co-ordinated and purposive groups which constitute a healthy society, men and women display a certain capacity for rational thought and free choice in the light of ethical principles. Herded into mobs, the same men and women behave as though they possessed neither reason nor free will. Crowd-intoxication reduces them to a condition of infra-personal and antisocial irresponsibility. Drugged by the mysterious poison which every excited herd secretes, they fall into a state of

heightened suggestibility, resembling that which follows an injection of sodium amytal or the induction, by whatever means, of a light hypnotic trance. While in this state they will believe any nonsense that may be bawled at them, will act upon any command or exhortation, however senseless, mad or criminal. To men and women under the influence of herd-poison, “whatever I say three times is true” — and whatever I say three hundred times is Revelation, is the directly inspired Word of God. That is why men in authority — the priests and the rulers of peoples — have never unequivocally proclaimed the immorality of this form of downward self-transcendence. True, crowd-delirium evoked by members of the opposition and in the name of heretical principles has everywhere been denounced by those in power. But crowd-delirium aroused by government agents, crowd-delirium in the name of orthodoxy, is an entirely different matter. In all cases where it can be made to serve the interests of the men controlling church and state, downward self-transcendence by means of herd-intoxication is treated as something legitimate, and even highly desirable. Pilgrimages and political rallies, corybantic revivals and patriotic parades — these things are ethically right so long as they are our pilgrimages, our rallies, our revivals and our parades. The fact that most of those who take part in these affairs are temporarily dehumanized by herd-poison is of no account in comparison with the fact that their dehumanization may be used to consolidate the religious and political powers that be.

When crowd-delirium is exploited for the benefit of governments and orthodox churches, the exploiters are always very careful not to allow the intoxication to go too far. The ruling minorities make use of their subjects’ craving for downward self-transcendence in order, first, to amuse and distract them and, second, to get them into a subpersonal state of heightened suggestibility. Religious and political ceremonials are welcomed by the masses as opportunities for getting drunk on herd-poison, and by their rulers as opportunities for planting suggestions in minds which have momentarily ceased to be capable of reason or free will.

The final symptom of herd-intoxication is a maniacal violence. Instances of crowd-delirium culminating in gratuitous destructiveness, in ferocious self-mutilation, in fratricidal savagery without purpose and against the elementary interests of all concerned, are to be met with on almost every page of the anthropologists' textbooks and — a little less frequently, but still with dismal regularity — in the histories of even the most highly civilized peoples. Except when they wish to liquidate an unpopular minority the official representatives of state and church are chary of evoking a frenzy which they cannot be sure of controlling. No such scruples restrain the revolutionary leader, who hates the status quo and has only one wish — to create a chaos on which, when he comes to power, he may impose a new kind of order. When the revolutionary exploits men's urge to downward self-transcendence, he exploits it to the frantic and demoniac limit. To men and women sick of being their insulated selves and weary of the responsibilities which go with membership in a purposive human group, he offers exciting opportunities for "getting away from it all" in parades and demonstrations and public meetings. The organs of the body politic are purposive groups. A crowd is the social equivalent of a cancer. The poison it secretes depersonalizes its constituent members to the point where they start to behave with a savage violence, of which, in their normal state, they would be completely incapable. The revolutionary encourages his followers to manifest this last and worst symptom of herd-intoxication and then proceeds to direct their frenzy against his enemies, the holders of political, economic and religious power.

In the course of the last forty years the techniques for exploiting man's urge toward this most dangerous form of downward self-transcendence have reached a pitch of perfection unmatched in all of history. To begin with, there are more people to the square mile than ever before, and the means of transporting vast herds of them from considerable distances, and of concentrating them in a single building or arena, are much more efficient than in the past. Meanwhile, new and previously undreamed-of devices for exciting mobs have been invented. There is the radio, which has enormously extended the range of the demagogue's raucous

yelling. There is the loudspeaker, amplifying and indefinitely reduplicating the heady music of class-hatred and militant nationalism. There is the camera (of which it was once naively said that “it cannot lie”) and its offspring, the movies and television; these three have made the objectification of tendentious phantasy absurdly easy. And finally there is that greatest of our social inventions, free, compulsory education. Everyone now knows how to read and everyone consequently is at the mercy of the propagandists, governmental or commercial, who own the pulp factories, the linotype machines and the rotary presses. Assemble a mob of men and women previously conditioned by a daily reading of newspapers; treat them to amplified band music, bright lights, and the oratory of a demagogue who (as demagogues always are) is simultaneously the exploiter and the victim of herd-intoxication, and in next to no time you can reduce them to a state of almost mindless subhumanity. Never before have so few been in a position to make fools, maniacs or criminals of so many.

In Communist Russia, in Fascist Italy, in Nazi Germany, the exploiters of humanity’s fatal taste for herd-poison have followed an identical course. When in revolutionary opposition, they encouraged the mobs under their influence to become destructively violent. Later, when they had come to power, it was only in relation to foreigners and selected scapegoats that they permitted herd-intoxication to run its full course. Having acquired a vested interest in the status quo, they now checked the descent into subhumanity at a point well this side of frenzy. For these neo-conservatives, mass intoxication was chiefly valuable, henceforward, as a means for heightening their subjects’ suggestibility and so rendering them more docile to the expressions of authoritarian will. Being in a crowd is the best known antidote to independent thought. Hence the dictators’ rooted objection to “mere psychology” and a private life. “Intellectuals of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your brains.”

Drugs, elementary sexuality and herd-intoxication — these are the three most popular avenues of downward self-transcendence. There are many others, not so well trodden as these great descending highways, but leading no less surely to the same infra-personal goal. Consider, for example, the way of rhythmic

movement. In primitive religions prolonged rhythmic movement is very commonly resorted to for the purpose of inducing a state of infra-personal and subhuman ecstasy. The same technique for achieving the same end has been used by many civilized peoples — by the Greeks, for example, by the Hindus, by many of the orders of Dervishes in the Islamic world, by such Christian sects as the Shakers and the Holy Rollers. In all these cases rhythmic movement, long-drawn and repetitive, is a form of ritual deliberately practiced for the sake of the downward self-transcendence resulting from it. History also records many sporadic outbreaks of involuntary and uncontrollable jigging, swaying and head-wagging. These epidemics of what in one region is called Tarantism, in another St. Vitus's dance, have generally occurred in times of trouble following wars, pestilences and famines, and are most common where malaria is endemic. The unwitting purpose of the men and women who succumb to these collective manias is the same as that pursued by the sectaries who use the dance as a religious rite — namely, to escape from insulated selfhood into a state in which there are no responsibilities, no guilt-laden past or haunting future, but only the present, blissful consciousness of being someone else.

Intimately associated with the ecstasy-producing rite of rhythmic movement is the ecstasy-producing rite of rhythmic sound. Music is as vast as human nature and has something to say to men and women on every level of their being, from the self-regardingly sentimental to the abstractly intellectual, from the merely visceral to the spiritual. In one of its innumerable forms music is a powerful drug, partly stimulant and partly narcotic, but wholly alterative. No man, however highly civilized, can listen for very long to African drumming, or Indian chanting, or Welsh hymn-singing, and retain intact his critical and self-conscious personality. It would be interesting to take a group of the most eminent philosophers from the best universities, shut them up in a hot room with Moroccan dervishes or Haitian voodooists, and measure, with a stop watch, the strength of their psychological resistance to the effects of rhythmic sound. Would the Logical Positivists be able to hold out longer than the Subjective Idealists? Would the Marxists prove tougher than the Thomists or the

Vedantists? What a fascinating, what a fruitful field for experiment! Meanwhile, all we can safely predict is that, if exposed long enough to the tom-toms and the singing, every one of our philosophers would end by capering and howling with the savages.

The ways of rhythmic movement and of rhythmic sound are generally superimposed, so to speak, upon the way of herd-intoxication. But there are also private roads, roads which can be taken by the solitary traveler who has no taste for crowds, or no strong faith in the principles, institutions and persons in whose name crowds are assembled. One of these private roads is the way of the mantram, the way of what Christ called "vain repetition." In public worship "vain repetition" is almost always associated with rhythmic sound. Litanies and the like are chanted, or at least intoned. It is as music that they produce their quasi-hypnotic effects. "Vain repetition," when practiced privately, acts upon the mind, not because of its association with rhythmic sound (for it works even when the words are merely imagined), but in virtue of a concentration of attention and memory. The constant reiteration of the same word or phrase frequently brings on a state of light or even profound trance. Once induced, this trance can either be enjoyed for its own sake, as a delicious sense of infra-personal otherness, or else deliberately used for the purpose of improving personal conduct by autosuggestion and of preparing the way for the ultimate achievement of upward self-transcendence. Of the second possibility more will be said in a later paragraph. Here our concern is with "vain repetition" as a descending road into an infra-personal alienation.

We must now consider a strictly physiological method of escape from insulated selfhood. The way of corporal penance. The destructive violence which is the final symptom of herd-intoxication is not invariably directed outward. The history of religion abounds in gruesome tales of gregarious self-whipping, self-gashing, self-gelding, even self-killing. These acts are the consequences of crowd-delirium, and are performed in a state of frenzy. Very different is the corporal penance undertaken privately and in cold blood. Here the self-torment is initiated by an act of the personal will; but its result (in some cases at least) is

a temporary transformation of the insulated personality into something else. In itself, this something else is the consciousness, so intense as to be exclusive, of physical pain. The self-tortured person identifies himself with his pain and, in becoming merely the awareness of his suffering body, is delivered from that sense of past guilt and present frustration, that obsessive anxiety about the future, which constitute so large a part of the neurotic ego. There has been an escape from selfhood, a downward passage into a state of pure physiological excruciation. But the self-tormentor need not necessarily remain in this region of infra-personal consciousness. Like the man who makes use of “vain repetition” to go beyond himself, he may be able to use his temporary alienation from selfhood as the bridge, so to speak, leading upward into the life of the spirit.

This raises a very important and difficult question. To what extent, and in what circumstances, is it possible for a man to make use of the descending road as a way to spiritual self-transcendence? As first sight it would seem obvious that the way down is not and can never be the way up. But in the realm of existence matters are not quite so simple as they are in our beautifully tidy world of words. In actual life a downward movement may sometimes be made the beginning of an ascent. When the shell of the ego has been cracked and there begins to be a consciousness of the subliminal and physiological othernesses underlying personality, it sometimes happens that we catch a glimpse, fleeting but apocalyptic, of that other Otherness, which is the Ground of all being. So long as we are confined within our insulated selfhood, we remain unaware of the various not-selves with which we are associated — the organic not-self, the subconscious not-self, the collective not-self of the psychic medium in which all our thinking and feeling have their existence, and the immanent and transcendent not-self of the Spirit. Any escape, even by a descending road, out of insulated selfhood makes possible at least a momentary awareness of the not-self on every level, including the highest. William James, in his Varieties of Religious Experience, gives instances of “anaesthetic revelations,” following the inhalation of laughing gas. Similar theophanies are sometimes experienced by alcoholics, and there are probably moments in the course of intoxication by almost any

drug, when awareness of a not-self superior to the disintegrating ego becomes briefly possible. But these occasional flashes of revelation are bought at an enormous price. For the drug-taker, the moment of spiritual awareness (if it comes at all) gives place very soon to subhuman stupor, frenzy or hallucination, followed by dismal hangovers and, in the long run, by a permanent and fatal impairment of bodily health and mental power. Very occasionally a single "anaesthetic revelation" may act, like any other theophany, to incite its recipient to an effort of self-transformation and upward self-transcendence. But the fact that such a thing sometimes happens can never justify the employment of chemical methods of self-transcendence. This is a descending road and most of those who take it will come to a state of degradation, where periods of subhuman ecstasy alternate with periods of conscious selfhood so wretched that any escape, even if it be into the slow suicide of drug addiction, will seem preferable to being a person.

What is true of drugs is true, mutatis mutandis, of elementary sexuality. The road runs downhill; but on the way there may occasionally be theophanies. The Dark Gods, as Lawrence called them, may change their sign and become bright. In India there is a Tantric yoga, based upon an elaborate psychophysiological technique, whose purpose is to transform the downward self-transcendence of elementary sexuality into an upward self-transcendence. In the West the nearest equivalent to these Tantric practices was the sexual discipline devised by John Humphrey Noyes and practiced by the members of the Oneida Community. At Oneida elementary sexuality was not only successfully civilized; it was made compatible with, and subordinate to, a form of Protestant Christianity, sincerely preached and earnestly acted upon.

Herd-intoxication disintegrates the ego more thoroughly than does elementary sexuality. Its frenzies, its follies, its heightened suggestibility can be matched only in the intoxications induced by such drugs as alcohol, hashish and heroin. But even to the member of an excited mob there may come (at some relatively early stage of his downward self-transcendence) a genuine revelation of the Otherness that is above selfhood. This is one of the reasons why some good may

sometimes come out of even the most corybantic of revival meetings. Some good as well as very great evil may also result from the fact that men and women in a crowd tend to become more than ordinarily suggestible. While in this state they are subjected to exhortations which have the force, when they come once again to their senses, of posthypnotic commands. Like the demagogue, the revivalist and the ritualist disintegrate the ego of their hearers by herding them together and dosing them with plenty of vain repetition and rhythmic sound. Then, unlike the demagogue, they give suggestions some of which may be genuinely Christian. These, if they "take," result in a reintegration of broken-down personalities on a somewhat higher level. There can also be reintegrations of personality under the influence of the posthypnotic commands issued by a rabble-rousing politician. But these commands are all incitements to hatred on the one hand and to blind obedience and compensatory illusion on the other. Initiated by a massive dose of herd-poison, confirmed and directed by the rhetoric of a maniac who is at the same time a Machiavellian exploiter of other men's weakness, political "conversion" results in the creation of a new personality worse than the old and much more dangerous because wholeheartedly devoted to a party whose first aim is the liquidation of its opponents.

I have distinguished between demagogues and religionists, on the ground that the latter may sometimes do some good, whereas the former can scarcely, in the very nature of things, do anything but harm. But it must not be imagined that the religious exploiters of herd-intoxication are wholly guiltless. On the contrary, they have been responsible in the past for mischiefs almost as enormous as those brought upon their victims (along with the victims of those victims) by the revolutionary demagogues of our own time. In the course of the last six or seven generations, the power of religious organizations to do evil has, throughout the Western world, considerably declined. Primarily this is due to the astounding progress of applied science and the consequent demand by the masses for compensatory illusions that have an air of being positivistic rather than metaphysical. The demagogues offer such pseudo-positivistic illusions and the

churches do not. As the attractiveness of the churches declines, so also does their influence, so do their wealth, their political power and, along with these, their capacity for doing evil on a large scale. Circumstances have now delivered the churchmen from certain of the temptations, to which, in earlier centuries, their predecessors almost invariably succumbed. They would be well advised voluntarily to deliver themselves from such temptations as still remain. Conspicuous among these is the temptation to acquire power by pandering to men's insatiable craving for downward self-transcendence. Deliberately to induce herd-intoxication — even if it is done in the name of religion, even if it is all supposedly "for the good" of the intoxicated — cannot be morally justified.

On the subject of horizontal self-transcendence very little need be said — not because the phenomenon is unimportant (far from it), but because it is too obvious to require analysis and of occurrence too frequent to be readily classifiable.

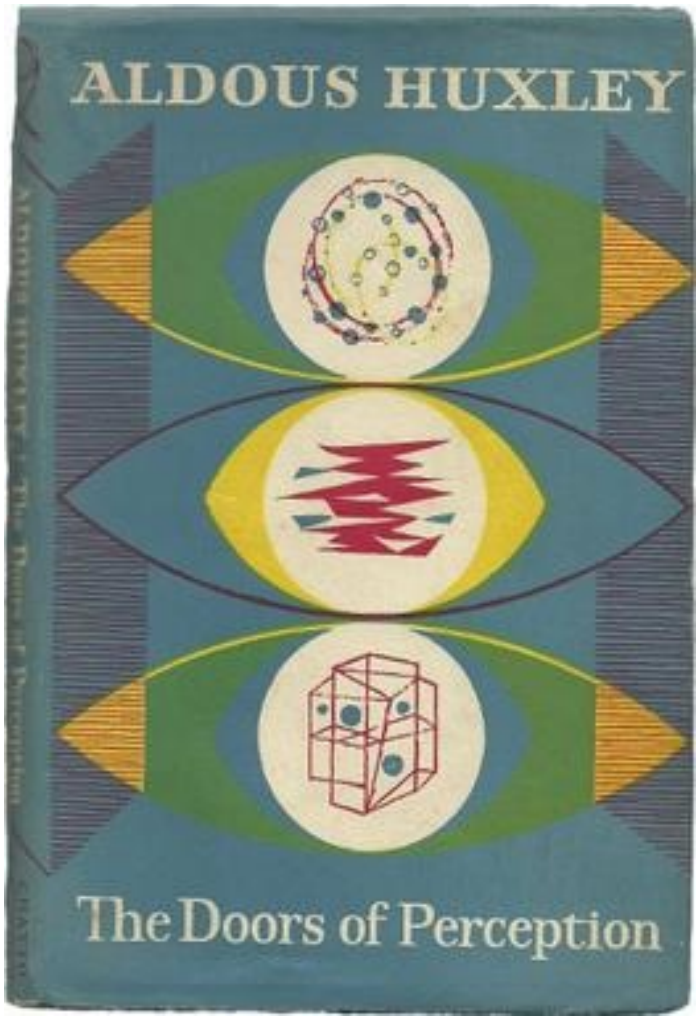
In order to escape from the horrors of insulated selfhood most men and women choose, most of the time, to go neither up nor down, but sideways. They identify themselves with some cause wider than their own immediate interests, but not degradingly lower and, if higher, higher only within the range of current social values. This horizontal, or nearly horizontal, self-transcendence may be into something as trivial as a hobby, or as precious as married love. It can be brought about through self-identification with any human activity, from running a business to research in nuclear physics, from composing music to collecting stamps, from campaigning for political office to educating children or studying the mating habits of birds. Horizontal self-transcendence is of the utmost importance. Without it, there would be no art, no science, no law, no philosophy, indeed no civilization. And there would also be no war, no odium theologicum or ideologicum, no systematic intolerance, no persecution. These great goods and these enormous evils are the fruits of man's capacity for total and continuous self-identification with an idea, a feeling, a cause. How can we have the good without the evil, a high civilization without saturation bombing or the extermination of religious and political heretics? The answer is that we cannot

have it so long as our self-transcendence remains merely horizontal. When we identify ourselves with an idea or a cause we are in fact worshiping something homemade, something partial and parochial, something that, however noble, is yet all too human. “Patriotism,” as a great patriot concluded on the eve of her execution by her country’s enemies, “is not enough.” Neither is socialism, nor communism, nor capitalism; neither is art, nor science, nor public order, nor any given religion or church. All these are indispensable, but none of them is enough. Civilization demands from the individual devoted self-identification with the highest of human causes. But if this self-identification with what is human is not accompanied by a conscious and consistent effort to achieve upward self-transcendence into the universal life of the Spirit, the goods achieved will always be mingled with counterbalancing evils. “We make,” wrote Pascal, “an idol of truth itself; for truth without charity is not God, but His image and idol, which we must neither love or worship.” And it is not merely wrong to worship an idol; it is also exceedingly inexpedient. The worship of truth apart from charity — self-identification with science unaccompanied by self-identification with the Ground of all being — results in the kind of situation which now confronts us. Every idol, however exalted, turns out, in the long run, to be a Moloch, hungry for human sacrifice.

The Doors of Perception

First published in 1954, *The Doors of Perception* is a non-fiction work, exploring Huxley's interest in psychedelic drugs as a source of freeing consciousness and increasing awareness. The author dedicated the book to his first wife, Maria, who would die the following year of cancer; they had been married for more than thirty-five years and had one child together, Matthew, who would become a well-known epidemiologist and author. The title of the work references a line in William Blake's 1790-93 book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in which the poet writes 'If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite'. Interestingly, Huxley's novel inspired Jim Morrison to name his band, *The Doors* and was endorsed by the controversial psychologist, Timothy Leary.

The opening of *The Doors of Perception* describes the history of mescaline in Western science and explains that the source of the drug is the Peyote cactus. Huxley states that in 1953 he decided to aid the research into mescaline by being a 'guinea pig' and consuming the drug. He then proceeds to relate in fine detail his experience of the substance over the course of the day and how it affected his perception and appreciation of certain famous works of art and music. Huxley believes that for most people the 'longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul'. He does not believe that experiences under mescaline or any other drug could truly provide 'the realization of the end and ultimate purpose of human life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision', but he does believe taking the substance offers a small reprieve from 'ordinary perception' and the opportunity to really see 'the outer and inner world'.



The first edition of the book

The poet William Blake by Thomas Phillips, 1807

FOR M.

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.

WILLIAM BLAKE

THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION

IT WAS IN 1886 that the German pharmacologist, Ludwig Lewin, published the first systematic study of the cactus, to which his own name was subsequently given. *Anhalonium Lewinii* was new to science. To primitive religion and the Indians of Mexico and the American Southwest it was a friend of immemorially long standing. Indeed, it was much more than a friend. In the words of one of the early Spanish visitors to the New World, 'they eat a root which they call Peyotl, and which they venerate as though it were a deity.'

Why they should have venerated it as a deity became apparent when such eminent psychologists as Jaensch, Havelock Ellis and Weir Mitchell began their experiments with mescalin, the active principle of peyotl. True, they stopped short at a point well this side of idolatry; but all concurred in assigning to mescalin a position among drugs of unique distinction. Administered in suitable doses, it changes the quality of consciousness more profoundly and yet is less toxic than any other substance in the pharmacologist's repertory.

Mescalin research has been going on sporadically ever since the days of Lewin and Havelock Ellis. Chemists have not merely isolated the alkaloid; they have learned how to synthesize it, so that the supply no longer depends on the sparse and intermittent crop of a desert cactus. Alienists have dosed themselves with mescalin in the hope thereby of coming to a better, a first-hand understanding of their patients' mental processes. Working unfortunately upon too few subjects within too narrow a range of circumstances, psychologists have observed and catalogued some of the drug's more striking effects. Neurologists and physiologists have found out something about the mechanism of its action upon the central nervous system. And at least one professional philosopher has taken mescalin for the light it may throw on such ancient unsolved riddles as the place of mind in nature and the relationship between brain and consciousness.

There matters rested until, two or three years ago, a new and perhaps highly significant fact was observed. Actually the fact had been staring everyone in the face for several decades; but nobody, as it happened, had noticed it until a young English psychiatrist, at present working in Canada, was struck by the close similarity, in chemical composition, between mescalin and adrenalin. Further research revealed that lysergic acid, an extremely potent hallucinogen derived from ergot, has a structural biochemical relationship to the others. Then came the discovery that adrenochrome, which is a product of the decomposition of adrenalin, can produce many of the symptoms observed in mescalin intoxication. But adrenochrome probably occurs spontaneously in the human body. In other words, each one of us may be capable of manufacturing a chemical, minute doses of which are known to cause profound changes in consciousness. Certain of these changes are similar to those which occur in that most characteristic plague of the twentieth century, schizophrenia. Is the mental disorder due to a chemical disorder? And is the chemical disorder due, in its turn, to psychological distresses affecting the adrenals? It would be rash and premature to affirm it. The most we can say is that some kind of a *prima facie* case has been made out. Meanwhile the clue is being systematically followed, the sleuths – biochemists, psychiatrists, psychologists – are on the trail.

By a series of, for me, extremely fortunate circumstances I found myself, in the spring of 1953, squarely athwart that trail. One of the sleuths had come on business to California. In spite of seventy years of mescalin research, the psychological material at his disposal was still absurdly inadequate, and he was anxious to add to it. I was on the spot and willing, indeed eager, to be a guinea-pig. Thus it came about that, one bright May morning, I swallowed four-tenths of a gramme of mescalin dissolved in half a glass of water and sat down to wait for the results.

We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves. The martyrs go hand in hand into the arena; they are crucified alone. Embraced, the lovers desperately try to fuse their insulated ecstasies into a single self-transcendence; in vain. By its very nature

every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude. Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies – all these are private and, except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable. We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves. From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes.

Most island universes are sufficiently like one another to permit of inferential understanding or even of mutual empathy or 'feeling into.' Thus, remembering our own bereavements and humiliations, we can condole with others in analogous circumstances, can put ourselves (always, of course, in a slightly Pickwickian sense) in their places. But in certain cases communication between universes is incomplete or even non-existent. The mind is its own place, and the places inhabited by the insane and the exceptionally gifted are so different from the places where ordinary men and women live, that there is little or no common ground of memory to serve as a basis for understanding or fellow feeling. Words are uttered, but fail to enlighten. The things and events to which the symbols refer belong to mutually exclusive realms of experience.

To see ourselves as others see us is a most salutary gift. Hardly less important is the capacity to see others as they see themselves. But what if these others belong to a different species and inhabit a radically alien universe? For example, how can the sane get to know what it actually feels like to be mad? Or, short of being born again as a visionary, a medium or a musical genius, how can we ever visit the worlds which, to Blake, to Swedenborg, to Johann Sebastian Bach, were home? And how can a man at the extreme limits of ectomorphy and cerebrotonia ever put himself in the place of one at the limits of endomorphy and viscerotonia or, except within certain circumscribed areas, share the feelings of one who stands at the limits of mesomorphy and somatotonia? To the unmitigated behaviourist such questions, I suppose, are meaningless. But for those who theoretically believe what in practice they know to be true – namely, that there is an inside to experience as well as an outside – the problems posed are real problems, all the more grave for being, some completely insoluble, some soluble only in exceptional circumstances and by methods not available to everyone.

Thus, it seems virtually certain that I shall never know what it feels like to be Sir John Falstaff or Joe Louis. On the other hand, it had always seemed to me possible that, through hypnosis, for example, or autohypnosis, by means of systematic meditation, or else by taking the appropriate drug, I might so change my ordinary mode of consciousness as to be able to know, from the inside, what the visionary, the medium, even the mystic were talking about.

From what I had read of the mescalin experience I was convinced in advance that the drug would admit me, at least for a few hours, into the kind of inner world described by Blake and Æ. But what I had expected did not happen. I had expected to lie with my eyes shut, looking at visions of many-coloured geometries, of animated architectures, rich with gems and fabulously lovely, of landscapes with heroic figures, of symbolic dramas trembling perpetually on the verge of the ultimate revelation. But I had not reckoned, it was evident, with the idiosyncrasies of my mental make-up, the facts of my temperament, training and habits.

I am and, for as long as I can remember, I have always been a poor visualizer. Words, even the pregnant words of poets, do not evoke pictures in my mind. No hypnagogic visions greet me on the verge of sleep. When I recall something, the memory does not present itself to me as a vividly seen event or object. By an effort of the will, I can evoke a not very vivid image of what happened yesterday afternoon, of how the Lungarno used to look before the bridges were destroyed, of the Bayswater Road when the only buses were green and tiny and drawn by aged horses at three and a half miles an hour. But such images have little substance and absolutely no autonomous life of their own. They stand to real, perceived objects in the same relation as Homer’s ghosts stood to the men of flesh and blood, who came to visit them in the shades. Only when I have a high temperature do my mental images come to independent life. To those in whom the faculty of visualization is strong my inner world must seem curiously drab, limited and uninteresting. This was the world – a poor thing but my own – which I expected to see transformed into something completely unlike itself.

The change which actually took place in that world was in no sense revolutionary. Half an hour after swallowing the drug I became aware of a slow dance of golden lights. A little later there were sumptuous red surfaces swelling and expanding from bright nodes of energy that vibrated with a continuously changing, patterned life. At another time the closing of my eyes revealed a complex of grey structures, within which pale blueish spheres kept emerging into intense solidity and, having emerged, would slide noiselessly upwards, out of sight. But at no time were there faces or forms of men or animals. I saw no landscapes, no enormous spaces, no magical growth and metamorphosis of buildings, nothing remotely like a drama or a parable. The other world to which mescalin admitted me was not the world of visions; it existed out there, in what I could see with my eyes open. The great change was in the realm of objective fact. What had happened to my subjective universe was relatively unimportant.

I took my pill at eleven. An hour and half later I was sitting in my study, looking intently at a small glass vase. The vase contained only three flowers – a full-blown Belle of Portugal rose, shell pink with a hint at every petal's base of a hotter, flamier hue; a large magenta and cream-coloured carnation; and, pale purple at the end of its broken stalk, the bold heraldic blossom of an iris. Fortuitous and provisional, the little nosegay broke all the rules of traditional good taste. At breakfast that morning I had been struck by the lively dissonance of its colours. But that was no longer the point. I was not looking now at an unusual flower arrangement. I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation – the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence.

'Is it agreeable?' somebody asked. (During this part of the experiment, all conversations were recorded on a dictating machine, and it has been possible for me to refresh my memory of what was said.)

'Neither agreeable nor disagreeable,' I answered. 'It just *is*.'

Istigkeit – wasn't that the word Meister Eckhart liked to use? 'Is-ness.' The Being of Platonic philosophy – except that Plato seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming, and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea. He could never, poor

fellow, have seen a bunch of flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged; could never have perceived that what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they were – a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence.

I continued to look at the flowers, and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing – but of a breathing without returns to a starting-point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning. Words like Grace and Transfiguration came to my mind, and this of course was what, among other things, they stood for. My eyes travelled from the rose to the carnation, and from that feathery incandescence to the smooth scrolls of sentient amethyst which were the iris. The Beatific Vision, *Sat Chit Ananda*, Being-Awareness-Bliss – for the first time I understood, not on the verbal level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to. And then I remembered a passage I had read in one of Suzuki's essays. 'What is the Dharma-Body of the Buddha?' (The Dharma-Body of the Buddha is another way of saying Mind, Suchness, the Void, the Godhead.) The question is asked in a Zen monastery by an earnest and bewildered novice. And with the prompt irrelevance of one of the Marx Brothers, the Master answers, 'The hedge at the bottom of the garden.' 'And the man who realizes this truth,' the novice dubiously enquires, 'what, may I ask, is he?' Groucho gives him a whack over the shoulders with his staff and answers, 'A golden-haired lion.'

It had been, when I read it, only a vaguely pregnant piece of nonsense. Now it was all as clear as day, as evident as Euclid. Of course the Dharma-Body of the Buddha was the hedge at the bottom of the garden. At the same time, and no less obviously, it was these flowers, it was anything that I – or rather the blessed Not-I released for a moment from my throttling embrace – cared to look at. The

books, for example, with which my study walls were lined. Like the flowers, they glowed, when I looked at them, with brighter colours, a profounder significance. Red books, like rubies; emerald books; books bound in white jade; books of agate, of aquamarine, of yellow topaz; lapis lazuli books whose colour was so intense, so intrinsically meaningful, that they seemed to be on the point of leaving the shelves to thrust themselves more insistently on my attention.

'What about spatial relationships?' the investigator enquired, as I was looking at the books.

It was difficult to answer. True, the perspective looked rather odd, and the walls of the room no longer seemed to meet in right angles. But these were not the really important facts. The really important facts were that spatial relationships had ceased to matter very much and that my mind was perceiving the world in terms of other than spatial categories. At ordinary times the eye concerns itself with such problems as *Where? – How far? – How situated in relation to what?* In the mescalin experience the implied questions to which the eye responds are of another order. Place and distance cease to be of much interest. The mind does its perceiving in terms of intensity of existence, profundity of significance, relationships within a pattern. I saw the books, but was not at all concerned with their positions in space. What I noticed, what impressed itself upon my mind was the fact that all of them glowed with living light and that in some the glory was more manifest than in others. In this context, position and the three dimensions were beside the point. Not, of course, that the category of space had been abolished. When I got up and walked about, I could do so quite normally, without misjudging the whereabouts of objects. Space was still there; but it had lost its predominance. The mind was primarily concerned, not with measures and locations, but with being and meaning.

And along with indifference to space there went an even completer indifference to time.

'There seems to be plenty of it,' was all I would answer when the investigator asked me to say what I felt about time.

Plenty of it, but exactly how much was entirely irrelevant. I could, of course, have looked at my watch; but my watch, I knew, was in another universe. My actual experience had been, was still, of an indefinite duration or alternatively of a perpetual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse.

From the books the investigator directed my attention to the furniture. A small typing-table stood in the centre of the room; beyond it, from my point of view, was a wicker chair and beyond that a desk. The three pieces formed an intricate pattern of horizontals, uprights and diagonals – a pattern all the more interesting for not being interpreted in terms of spatial relationships. Table, chair and desk came together in a composition that was like something by Braque or Juan Gris, a still life recognizably related to the objective world, but rendered without depth, without any attempt at photographic realism. I was looking at my furniture, not as the utilitarian who has to sit on chairs, to write at desks and tables, and not as the camera-man or scientific recorder, but as the pure aesthete whose concern is only with forms and their relationships within the field of vision or the picture space. But as I looked, this purely aesthetic Cubist's-eye view gave place to what I can only describe as the sacramental vision of reality. I was back where I had been when I was looking at the flowers – back in a world where everything shone with the Inner Light, and was infinite in its significance. The legs, for example of that chair – how miraculous their tubularity, how supernatural their polished smoothness! I spent several minutes – or was it several centuries? – not merely gazing at those bamboo legs, but actually *being* them – or rather being myself in them; or, to be still more accurate (for 'I' was not involved in the case, nor in a certain sense were 'they') being my Not-self in the Not-self which was the chair.

Reflecting on my experience, I find myself agreeing with the eminent Cambridge philosopher, Dr C. D. Broad, 'that we should do well to consider much more seriously than we have hitherto been inclined to do the type of theory which Bergson put forward in connection with memory and sense perception. The suggestion is that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main *eliminative* and not productive. Each person is at each

moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful.' According to such a theory, each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funnelled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet. To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he or she has been born – the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. That which, in the language of religion, is called 'this world' is the universe of reduced awareness, expressed and, as it were, petrified by language. The various 'other worlds,' with which human beings erratically make contact are so many elements in the totality of the awareness belonging to Mind at Large. Most people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve. In others temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate 'spiritual exercises,' or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these permanent or temporary by-passes there flows, not indeed the perception 'of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe' (for

the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve, which still excludes the total content of Mind at Large), but something more than, and above all something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality.

The brain is provided with a number of enzyme systems which serve to co-ordinate its workings. Some of these enzymes regulate the supply of glucose to the brain cells. Mescalin inhibits the production of these enzymes and thus lowers the amount of glucose available to an organ that is in constant need of sugar. When mescalin reduces the brain's normal ration of sugar, what happens? Too few cases have been observed, and therefore a comprehensive answer cannot yet be given. But what happens to the majority of the few who have taken mescalin under supervision can be summarized as follows.

(I) The ability to remember and to 'think straight' is little if at all reduced. (Listening to the recordings of my conversation under the influence of the drug, I cannot discover that I was then any stupider than I am at ordinary times.)

(2) Visual impressions are greatly intensified and the eye recovers some of the perceptual innocence of childhood, when the sensum was not immediately and automatically subordinated to the concept. Interest in space is diminished and interest in time falls almost to zero.

(3) Though the intellect remains unimpaired and though perception is enormously improved, the will suffers a profound change for the worse. The mescalin taker sees no reason for doing anything in particular and finds most of the causes for which, at ordinary times, he was prepared to act and suffer, profoundly uninteresting. He can't be bothered with them, for the good reason that he has better things to think about.

(4) These better things may be experienced (as I experienced them) 'out there,' or 'in here,' or in both worlds, the inner and the outer, simultaneously or successively. That they *are* better seems to be self-evident to all mescalin takers who come to the drug with a sound liver and an untroubled mind.

These effects of mescalin are the sort of effects you could expect to follow the administration of a drug having the power to impair the efficiency of the

cerebral reducing valve. When the brain runs out of sugar, the undernourished ego grows weak, can't be bothered to undertake the necessary chores, and loses all interest in those spatial and temporal relationships which mean so much to an organism bent on getting on in the world. As Mind at Large seeps past the no longer watertight valve, all kinds of biologically useless things start to happen. In some cases there may be extra-sensory perceptions. Other persons discover a world of visionary beauty. To others again is revealed the glory, the infinite value and meaningfulness of naked existence, of the given, unconceptualized event. In the final stage of egolessness there is an 'obscure knowledge' that All is in all – that All is actually each. This is as near, I take it, as a finite mind can ever come to 'perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe.'

In this context, how significant is the enormous heightening, under mescalin, of the perception of colour! For certain animals it is biologically very important to be able to distinguish certain hues. But beyond the limits of their utilitarian spectrum, most creatures are completely colour blind. Bees, for example, spend most of their time 'deflowering the fresh virgins of the spring'; but, as von Frisch has shown, they can recognize only a very few colours. Man's highly developed colour sense is a biological luxury – inestimably precious to him as an intellectual and spiritual being, but unnecessary to his survival as an animal. To judge by the adjectives which Homer puts into their mouths, the heroes of the Trojan War hardly excelled the bees in their capacity to distinguish colours. In this respect, at least, mankind's advance has been prodigious.

Mescalin raises all colours to a higher power and makes the percipient aware of innumerable fine shades of difference, to which, at ordinary times, he is completely blind. It would seem that, for Mind at Large, the so-called secondary characters of things are primary. Unlike Locke, it evidently feels that colours are more important, better worth attending to than masses, positions and dimensions. Like mescalin takers, many mystics perceive supernaturally brilliant colours, not only with the inward eye, but even in the objective world around them. Similar reports are made by psychics and sensitives. There are certain mediums to whom

the mescalin taker's brief revelation is a matter, during long periods, of daily and hourly experience.

From this long but indispensable excursion into the realm of theory we may now return to the miraculous facts – four bamboo chair legs in the middle of a room. Like Wordsworth's daffodils, they brought all manner of wealth – the gift, beyond price, of a new direct insight into the very Nature of Things, together with a more modest treasure of understanding in the field, especially, of the arts.

A rose is a rose is a rose. But these chair legs were chair legs were St Michael and all angels. Four or five hours after the event, when the effects of a cerebral sugar shortage were wearing off, I was taken for a little tour of the city, which included a visit, towards sundown, to what is modestly claimed to be The World's Biggest Drug Store. At the Back of the W.B.D.S., among the toys, the greeting cards and comics stood a row, surprisingly enough, of art books. I picked up the first volume that came to hand. It was on Van Gogh, and the picture at which the book opened was *The Chair* – that astounding portrait of a *Ding an Sich*, which the mad painter saw, with a kind of adoring terror, and tried to render on his canvas. But it was a task to which the power even of genius proved wholly inadequate. The chair Van Gogh had seen was obviously the same in essence as the chair I had seen. But, though incomparably more real than the chair of ordinary perception, the chair in his picture remained no more than an unusually expressive symbol of the fact. The fact had been manifested Suchness; this was only an emblem. Such emblems are sources of true knowledge about the Nature of Things, and this true knowledge may serve to prepare the mind which accepts it for immediate insights on its own account. But that is all. However expressive, symbols can never be the things they stand for.

It would be interesting, in this context, to make a study of the works of art available to the great knowers of Suchness. What sort of pictures did Eckhart look at? What sculptures and paintings played a part in the religious experience of St John of the Cross, of Hakuin, of Hui-neng, of William Law? The questions are beyond my power to answer; but I strongly suspect that most of the great knowers of Suchness paid very little attention to art – some refusing to have

anything to do with it at all, others being content with what a critical eye would regard as second-rate, or even tenth-rate, works. (To a person whose transfigured and transfiguring mind can see the All in every *this*, the first-rateness or tenth-rateness of even a religious painting will be a matter of the most sovereign indifference.) Art, I suppose, is only for beginners, or else for those resolute dead-enders, who have made up their minds to be content with the *ersatz* of Suchness, with symbols rather than with what they signify, with the elegantly composed recipe in lieu of actual dinner.

I returned the Van Gogh to its rack and picked up the volume standing next to it. It was a book on Botticelli. I turned the pages. *The Birth of Venus* – never one of my favourites. *Venus and Mars*, that loveliness so passionately denounced by poor Ruskin at the height of his long-drawn-out sexual tragedy. The marvellously rich and intricate *Calumny of Apelles*. And then a somewhat less familiar and not very good picture, *Judith*. My attention was arrested and I gazed in fascination, not at the pale neurotic heroine or her attendant, not at the victim's hairy head or the vernal landscape in the background, but at the purplish silk of Judith's pleated bodice and long wind-blown skirts.

This was something I had seen before – seen that very morning, between the flowers and the furniture, when I looked down by chance, and went on passionately staring by choice, at my own crossed legs. Those folds in the trousers – what a labyrinth of endlessly significant complexity! And the texture of the grey flannel – how rich, how deeply, mysteriously sumptuous! And here they were again, in Botticelli's picture.

Civilized human beings wear clothes, therefore there can be no portraiture, no mythological or historical story telling without representations of folded textiles. But though it may account for the origins, mere tailoring can never explain the luxuriant development of drapery as a major theme of all the plastic arts. Artists, it is obvious, have always loved drapery for its own sake – or, rather, for their own. When you paint or carve drapery, you are painting or carving forms which, for all practical purposes, are non-representational – the kind of unconditioned forms on which artists even in the most naturalistic tradition like to let

themselves go. In the average Madonna or Apostle the strictly human, fully representational element accounts for about ten per cent of the whole. All the rest consists of many coloured variations on the inexhaustible theme of crumpled wool or linen. And these non-representational nine-tenths of a Madonna or an Apostle may be just as important qualitatively as they are in quantity. Very often they set the tone of the whole work of art, they state the key in which the theme is being rendered, they express the mood, the temperament, the attitude to life of the artist. Stoical serenity reveals itself in the smooth surfaces, the broad untortured folds of Piero's draperies. Torn between fact and wish, between cynicism and idealism, Bernini tempers the all but caricatural verisimilitude of his faces with enormous sartorial abstractions, which are the embodiment, in stone or bronze, of the everlasting commonplaces of rhetoric – the heroism, the holiness, the sublimity to which mankind perpetually aspires, for the most part in vain. And here are El Greco's disquietingly visceral skirts and mantles; here are the sharp, twisting, flame-like folds in which Cosimo Tura clothes his figures: in the first, traditional spirituality breaks down into a nameless physiological yearning; in the second, there writhes an agonized sense of the world's essential strangeness and hostility. Or consider Watteau; his men and women play lutes, get ready for balls and harlequinades, embark, on velvet lawns and under noble trees, for the Cythera of every lover's dream; their enormous melancholy and the flayed, excruciating sensibility of their creator find expression, not in the actions recorded, not in the gestures and the faces portrayed, but in the relief and texture of their taffeta skirts, their satin capes and doublets. Not an inch of smooth surface here, not a moment of peace or confidence, only a silken wilderness of countless tiny pleats and wrinkles, with an incessant modulation – inner uncertainty rendered with the perfect assurance of a master hand – of tone into tone, of one indeterminate colour into another. In life, man proposes, God disposes. In the plastic arts the proposing is done by the subject matter; that which disposes is ultimately the artist's temperament, proximately (at least in portraiture, history and genre) the carved or painted drapery. Between them these two may decree that a *fête galante* shall move to tears, that a crucifixion

shall be serene to the point of cheerfulness, that a stigmatization shall be almost intolerably sexy, that the likeness of a prodigy of female brainlessness (I am thinking now of Ingres' incomparable Mme Moitessier) shall express the austerest, the most uncompromising intellectuality.

But this is not the whole story. Draperies, as I had now discovered, are much more than devices for the introduction of non-representational forms into naturalistic paintings and sculptures. What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescalin, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time. His perception is not limited to what is biologically or socially useful. A little of the knowledge belonging to Mind at Large oozes past the reducing value of brain and ego into his consciousness. It is a knowledge of the intrinsic significance of every existent. For the artist as for the mescalin taker, draperies are living hieroglyphs that stand in some peculiarly expressive way for the unfathomable mystery of pure being. More even than the chair, though less perhaps than those wholly supernatural flowers, the folds of my grey flannel trousers were charged with 'is-ness.' To what they owed this privileged status, I cannot say. Is it, perhaps, because the forms of folded drapery are so strange and dramatic that they catch the eye and in this way force the miraculous fact of sheer existence upon the attention? Who knows? What is important is less the reason for the experience than the experience itself. Poring over Judith's skirts, there in the World's Biggest Drug Store, I knew that Botticelli – and not Botticelli alone, but many others too – had looked at draperies with the same transfigured and transfiguring eyes as had been mine that morning. They had seen the *Istigkeit*, the Allness and Infinity of folded cloth and had done their best to render it in paint or stone. Necessarily, of course, without success. For the glory and the wonder of pure existence belong to another order, beyond the power of even the highest art to express. But in Judith's skirt I could clearly see what, if I had been a painter of genius, I might have made of my old grey flannels. Not much, heaven knows, in comparison with the reality; but enough to delight generation after generation of beholders, enough to make them understand at least a little of

the true significance of what, in our pathetic imbecility, we call ‘mere things’ and disregard in favour of television.

‘This is how one ought to see,’ I kept saying as I looked down at my trousers, or glanced at the jewelled books in the shelves, at the legs of my infinitely more than Van-Goghian chair. ‘This is how one ought to see, how things really are.’ And yet there were reservations. For if one always saw like this, one would never want to do anything else. Just looking, just being the divine Not-self of flower, of book, of chair, of flannel. That would be enough. But in that case what about other people? What about human relations? In the recording of that morning’s conversations I find the question constantly repeated ‘What about human relations?’ How could one reconcile this timeless bliss of seeing as one ought to see with the temporal duties of doing what one ought to do and feeling as one ought to feel? ‘One ought to be able,’ I said, ‘to see these trousers as infinitely important and human beings as still more infinitely important.’ One ought – but in practice it seemed to be impossible. This participation in the manifest glory of things left no room, so to speak, for the ordinary, the necessary concerns of human existence, above all for concerns involving persons. For persons are selves and, in one respect at least, I was now a Not-self, simultaneously perceiving and being the Not-self of the things around me. To this new-born Not-self, the behaviour, the appearance, the very thought of the self it had momentarily ceased to be, and of other selves, its one-time fellows, seemed not indeed distasteful (for distastefulness was not one of the categories in terms of which I was thinking), but enormously irrelevant. Compelled by the investigator to analyse and report on what I was doing (and how I longed to be left alone with Eternity in a flower, Infinity in four chair legs and the Absolute in the folds of a pair of flannel trousers!) I realized that I was deliberately avoiding the eyes of those who were with me in the room, deliberately refraining from being too much aware of them. One was my wife, the other a man I respected and greatly liked; but both belonged to the world from which, for the moment, mescalin had delivered me – the world of selves, of time, of moral judgments and utilitarian considerations, the world (and it was this aspect of human life

which I wished, above all else, to forget) of self-assertion, of cocksureness, of over-valued words and idolatrously worshipped notions.

At this stage of the proceedings I was handed a large coloured reproduction of the well-known self portrait by Cézanne – the head and shoulders of a man in a large straw hat, red-cheeked, red-lipped, with rich black whiskers and a dark unfriendly eye. It is a magnificent painting; but it was not as a painting that I now saw it. For the head promptly took on a third dimension and came to life as a small goblin-like man looking out through a window in the page before me. I started to laugh. And when they asked me why, 'What pretensions!' I kept repeating. 'Who on earth does he think he is?' The question was not addressed to Cézanne in particular, but to the human species at large. Who did they all think they were?

'It's like Arnold Bennett in the Dolomites,' I said, suddenly remembering a scene, happily immortalized in a snapshot of A. B. some four or five years before his death toddling along a wintry road at Cortina d'Ampezzo. Around him lay the virgin snow; in the background was a more than gothic aspiration of red crags. And there was dear, kind, unhappy A. B. consciously overacting the role of his favourite character in fiction, himself, the Card in person. There he went, toddling slowly in the bright Alpine sunshine, his thumbs in the armholes of a yellow waistcoat which bulged, a little lower down, with the graceful curve of a Regency bow window at Brighton – his head thrown back as though to aim some stammered utterance, howitzer-like, at the blue dome of heaven. What he actually said, I have forgotten; but what his whole manner, air and posture fairly shouted was, 'I'm as good as those damned mountains.' And in some ways, of course, he was infinitely better; but not, as he knew very well, in the way his favourite character in fiction liked to imagine.

Successfully (whatever that may mean) or unsuccessfully, we all overact the part of our favourite character in fiction. And the fact, the almost infinitely unlikely fact, of actually being Cézanne makes no difference. For the consummate painter, with his little pipe-line to Mind at Large by-passing the

brain-valve and ego-filter, was also and just as genuinely this whiskered goblin with the unfriendly eye.

For relief I turned back to the folds in my trousers. ‘This is how one ought to see,’ I repeated yet again. And I might have added, ‘These are the sort of things one ought to look at.’ Things without pretensions, satisfied to be merely themselves, sufficient in their suchness, not acting a part, not trying, insanely, to go it alone, in isolation from the Dharma-Body, in Luciferian defiance of the grace of God.

‘The nearest approach to this,’ I said, ‘would be a Vermeer.’

Yes, a Vermeer. For that mysterious artist was trebly gifted – with the vision that perceives the Dharma-Body as the hedge at the bottom of the garden, with the talent to render as much of the vision as the limitations of human capacity permit, and with the prudence to confine himself in his paintings to the more manageable aspects of reality; for though Vermeer represented human beings, he was always a painter of still life. Cézanne, who told his female sitters to do their best to look like apples, tried to paint portraits in the same spirit. But his pippin-like women are more nearly related to Plato’s Ideas than to the Dharma-Body in the hedge. They are Eternity and Infinity seen, not in sand or flower, but in the abstractions of some very superior band of geometry, Vermeer never asked his girls to look like apples. On the contrary, he insisted on their being girls to the very limit – but always with the proviso that they refrain from behaving girlishly. They might sit or quietly stand but never giggle, never display self-consciousness, never say their prayers or pine for absent sweethearts, never gossip, never gaze enviously at other women’s babies, never flirt, never love nor hate nor work. In the act of doing any of these things they would doubtless become more intensely themselves, but would cease, for that very reason, to manifest their divine essential Not-self. In Blake’s phrase, the doors of Vermeer’s perception were only partially cleansed. A single panel had become almost perfectly transparent; the rest of the door was still muddy. The essential Not-self could be perceived very clearly in things and in living creatures on the hither side of good and evil. In human beings it was visible only when they were

in repose, their minds untroubled, their bodies motionless. In these circumstances Vermeer could see Suchness in all its heavenly beauty – could see and, in some small measure, render it in a subtle and sumptuous still life. Vermeer is undoubtedly the greatest painter of human still lives. But there have been others, for example, Vermeer's French contemporaries, the Le Nain brothers. They set out, I suppose, to be *genre* painters; but what they actually produced was a series of human still lives, in which their cleansed perception of the infinite significance of all things is rendered not, as with Vermeer, by a subtle enrichment of colour, and texture, but by a heightened clarity, an obsessive distinctness of form, within an austere, almost monochromatic tonality. In our own day we have had Vuillard, the painter, at his best, of unforgettably splendid pictures of the Dharma-Body manifested in a bourgeois bedroom, of the Absolute blazing away in the midst of some stockbroker's family in a suburban garden, taking tea.

Ce qui fait que l'ancien bandagiste renie
Le comptoir dont le faste alléchait les passants,
C'est son jardin d'Auteuil, où, veufs de tout encens,
Les Zinnias ont l'air d'être en tôle vernie.

For Laurent Taillade the spectacle was merely obscene. But if the retired rubber goods merchant had sat still enough, Vuillard would have seen in him only the Dharma-Body, would have painted, in the zinnias, the goldfish pool, the villa's Moorish tower and Chinese lanterns, a corner of Eden before the Fall.

But meanwhile my question remained unanswered. How was this cleansed perception to be reconciled with a proper concern with human relations, with the necessary chores and duties, to say nothing of charity and practical compassion? The age-old debate between the actives and the contemplatives was being renewed – renewed, so far as I was concerned, with an unprecedented poignancy. For until this morning I had known contemplation only in its humbler, its more ordinary forms – as discursive thinking; as a rapt absorption in

poetry or painting or music; as a patient waiting upon those inspirations, without which even the prosiest writer cannot hope to accomplish anything; as occasional glimpses, in nature, of Wordsworth's 'something far more deeply interfused'; as systematic silence leading, sometimes, to hints of an 'obscure knowledge.' But now I knew contemplation at its height. At its height, but not yet in its fullness. For in its fullness the way of Mary includes the way of Martha and raises it, so to speak, to its own higher power. Mescalin opens up the way of Mary, but shuts the door on that of Martha. It gives access to contemplation – but to a contemplation that is incompatible with action and even with the will to action, the very thought of action. In the intervals between his revelations the mescalin taker is apt to feel that, though in one way everything is supremely as it should be, in another there is something wrong. His problem is essentially the same as that which confronts the quietist, the *arhat* and, on another level, the landscape painter and the painter of human still lives. Mescalin can never solve that problem: it can only pose it, apocalyptically, for those to whom it had never before presented itself. The full and final solution can be found only by those who are prepared to implement the right kind of *Weltanschauung* by means of the right kind of behaviour and the right kind of constant and unstrained alertness. Over against the quietist stands the active-contemplative, the saint, the man who, in Eckhart's phrase, is ready to come down from the seventh heaven in order to bring a cup of water to his sick brother. Over against the *arhat*, retreating from appearances into an entirely transcendental Nirvana, stands the Bodhisattva, for whom Suchness and the world of contingencies are one, and for whose boundless compassion every one of those contingencies is an occasion not only for transfiguring insight, but also for the most practical charity. And in the universe of art, over against Vermeer and the other painters of human still lives, over against the masters of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, over against Constable and Turner, against Sisley and Seurat and Cézanne stands the all-inclusive art of Rembrandt. These are enormous names, inaccessible eminences. For myself, on this memorable May morning, I could only be grateful for an experience which had shown me, more clearly than I have ever

seen it before, the true nature of the challenge and the completely liberating response.

Let me add, before we leave this subject, that there is no form of contemplation, even the most quietistic, which is without its ethical values. Half at least of all morality is negative and consists in keeping out of mischief. The Lord's prayer is less than fifty words long, and six of those words are devoted to asking God not to lead us into temptation. The one-sided contemplative leaves undone many things that he ought to do; but to make up for it he refrains from doing a host of things he ought not to do. The sum of evil, Pascal remarked, would be much diminished if men could only learn to sit quietly in their rooms. The contemplative whose perception has been cleansed does not have to stay in his room. He can go about his business, so completely satisfied to see and be a part of the divine Order of Things that he will never even be tempted to indulge in what Traherne called 'the dirty Devices of the world.' When we feel ourselves to be sole heirs of the universe, when 'the sea flows in our veins ... and the stars are our jewels,' when all things are perceived as infinite and holy, what motive can we have for covetousness or self-assertion, for the pursuit of power or the drearier forms of pleasure? Contemplatives are not likely to become gamblers, or procurers, or drunkards; they do not as a rule preach intolerance, or make war; do not find it necessary to rob, swindle or grind the faces of the poor. And to these enormous negative virtues we may add another which, though hard to define, is both positive and important. The *arhat* and the quietist may not practise contemplation in its fullness; but if they practise it at all, they may bring back enlightening reports of another, a transcendent country of the mind; and if they practise it in the height, they will become conduits through which some beneficent influence can flow out of that other country into a world of darkened selves, chronically dying for lack of it.

Meanwhile I had turned, at the investigator's request, from the portrait of Cézanne to what was going on, inside my head, when I shut my eyes. This time, the inscape was curiously unrewarding. The field of vision was filled with

brightly coloured, constantly changing structures that seemed to be made of plastic or enamelled tin.

‘Cheap,’ I commented. ‘Trivial. Like things in a Five and Ten.’

And all this shoddiness existed in a closed, cramped universe.

‘It’s as though one were below decks in a ship,’ I said. ‘A five-and-tencent ship.’

And as I looked, it became very clear that this five-and-tencent ship was in some way connected with human pretensions. This suffocating interior of a dime-store ship was my own personal self; these gimcrack mobiles of tin and plastic were my personal contributions to the universe.

I felt the lesson to be salutary, but was sorry, none the less, that it had had to be administered at this moment and in this form. As a rule the mescalin taker discovers an inner world as manifestly a datum, as self-evidently infinite and holy, as that transfigured outer world which I had seen with my eyes open. From the first, my own case had been different. Mescalin had endowed me temporarily with the power to see things with my eyes shut; but it could not, or at least on this occasion did not, reveal an inscape remotely comparable to my flowers or chair or flannels ‘out there.’ What it had allowed me to perceive, inside, was not the Dharma-Body in images, but my own mind; not archetypal Suchness, but a set of symbols – in other words, a homemade substitute for Suchness.

Most visualizers are transformed by mescalin into visionaries. Some of them – and they are perhaps more numerous than is generally supposed – require no transformation; they are visionaries all the time. The mental species to which Blake belonged is fairly widely distributed even in the urban-industrial societies of the present day. The poet-artist’s uniqueness does not consist in the fact that (to quote from his *Descriptive Catalogue*) he actually *saw* ‘those wonderful originals called in the Sacred Scriptures the Cherubim.’ It does not consist in the fact that ‘these wonderful originals seen in my visions were some of them one hundred feet in height ... all containing mythological and recondite meaning.’ It consists solely in his ability to render, in words or (somewhat less successfully) in line and colour, some hint at least of a not excessively uncommon experience.

The untalented visionary may perceive an inner reality no less tremendous, beautiful and significant than the world beheld by Blake; but he lacks altogether the ability to express, in literary or plastic symbols, what he has seen.

From the records of religion and the surviving monuments of poetry and the plastic arts it is very plain that, at most times and in most places, men have attached more importance to the inscape than to objective existents, have felt that what they saw with their eyes shut possessed a spiritually higher significance than what they saw with their eyes open. The reason? Familiarity breeds contempt, and how to survive is a problem ranging in urgency from the chronically tedious to the excruciating. The outer world is what we wake up to every morning of our lives, is the place where, willy-nilly, we must try to make our living. In the inner world there is neither work nor monotony. We visit it only in dreams and musings, and its strangeness is such that we never find the same world on two successive occasions. What wonder, then, if human beings in their search for the divine have generally preferred to look within! Generally, but not always. In their art no less than in their religion, the Taoists and the Zen Buddhists looked beyond visions to the Void, and through the Void at ‘the ten thousand things’ of objective reality. Because of their doctrine of the Word made flesh, Christians should have been able, from the first, to adopt a similar attitude towards the universe around them. But because of the doctrine of the Fall, they found it very hard to do so. As recently as three hundred years ago an expression of thorough-going world denial and even world condemnation was both orthodox and comprehensible. ‘We should feel wonder at nothing at all in Nature, except only the Incarnation of Christ.’ In the seventeenth century, Lallemant’s phrase seemed to make sense. Today it has the ring of madness.

In China the rise of landscape painting to the rank of a major art form took place about a thousand, in Japan about six hundred and in Europe about three hundred years ago. The equation of Dharma-Body with hedge was made by those Zen Masters, who wedded Taoist naturalism with Buddhist transcendentalism. It was, therefore, only in the Far East that landscape painters consciously regarded their art as religious. In the West religious painting was a

matter of portraying sacred personages, of illustrating hallowed texts. Landscape painters regarded themselves as secularists. Today we recognize in Seurat one of the supreme masters of what may be called mystical landscape painting. And yet this man who was able, more effectively than any other, to render the One in the many, became quite indignant when somebody praised him for the 'poetry' of his work. 'I merely apply the System,' he protested. In other words he was merely a *pointilliste* and, in his own eyes, nothing else. A similar anecdote is told of John Constable. One day towards the end of his life, Blake met Constable at Hampstead and was shown one of the younger artist's sketches. In spite of his contempt for naturalistic art, the old visionary knew a good thing when he saw it – except, of course, when it was by Rubens. 'This is not drawing,' he cried, 'this is inspiration!' 'I had meant it to be drawing,' was Constable's characteristic answer. Both men were right. It *was* drawing, precise and veracious, and at the same time it *was* inspiration – inspiration of an order at least as high as Blake's. The pine trees on the Heath had actually been seen as identical with the Dharma-Body. The sketch was a rendering, necessarily imperfect but still profoundly impressive, of what a cleansed perception had revealed to the open eyes of a great painter. From a contemplation, in the tradition of Wordsworth and Whitman, of the Dharma-Body as hedge, and from visions, such as Blake's, of the 'wonderful originals' within the mind, contemporary poets have retreated into an investigation of the personal, as opposed to the more than personal, subconscious and to a rendering, in highly abstract terms, not of the given, objective fact, but of mere scientific and theological notions. And something similar has happened in the field of painting. Here we have witnessed a general retreat from landscape, the predominant art form of the nineteenth century. This retreat from landscape has not been into that other, inner divine Datum, with which most of the traditional schools of the past were concerned, that Archetypal World, where men have always found the raw materials of myth and religion. No, it has been a retreat from the outward Datum into the personal subconscious, into a mental world more squalid and more tightly closed than even the world of conscious personality. These contraptions of tin and highly coloured plastic –

where had I seen them before? In every picture gallery that exhibits the latest in non-representational art.

And now someone produced a phonograph and put a record on the turntable. I listened with pleasure, but experienced nothing comparable to my seen apocalypses of flowers or flannel. Would a naturally gifted musician *hear* the revelations which, for me, had been exclusively visual? It would be interesting to make the experiment. Meanwhile, though not transfigured, though retaining its normal quality and intensity, the music contributed not a little to my understanding of what had happened to me and of the wider problems which those happenings had raised.

Instrumental music, oddly enough, left me rather cold. Mozart's C-minor Piano Concerto was interrupted after the first movement, and a recording of some madrigals by Gesualdo took its place.

'These voices,' I said appreciatively, 'these voices – they're a kind of bridge back to the human world.'

And a bridge they remained even while singing the most startlingly chromatic of the mad prince's compositions. Through the uneven phrases of the madrigals, the music pursued its course, never sticking to the same key for two bars together. In Gesualdo, that fantastic character out of a Webster melodrama, psychological disintegration had exaggerated, had pushed, to the extreme limit, a tendency inherent in modal as opposed to fully tonal music. The resulting works sounded as though they might have been written by the later Schoenberg.

'And yet,' I felt myself constrained to say, as I listened to these strange products of a Counter-Reformation psychosis working upon a late mediaeval art form, 'and yet it does not matter that he's all in bits. The whole is disorganized. But each individual fragment is in order, is a representative of a Higher Order. The Higher Order prevails even in the disintegration. The totality is present even in the broken pieces. More clearly present, perhaps, than in a completely coherent work. At least you aren't lulled into a sense of false security by some merely human, merely fabricated order. You have to rely on your immediate perception of the ultimate order. So in a certain sense disintegration may have its

advantages. But of course it's dangerous, horribly dangerous. Suppose you couldn't get back, out of the chaos....'

From Gesualdo's madrigals we jumped, across a gulf of three centuries, to Alban Berg and the *Lyric Suite*.

'This,' I announced in advance, 'is going to be hell.'

But, as it turned out, I was wrong. Actually the music sounded rather funny. Dredged up from the personal subconscious, agony succeeded twelve-tone agony; but what struck me was only the essential incongruity between a psychological disintegration even completer than Gesualdo's and the prodigious resources, in talent and technique, employed in its expression.

'Isn't he sorry for himself?' I commented with a derisive lack of sympathy. And then, '*Katzenmusik* – learned *Katzenmusik.*' And finally, after a few more minutes of the anguish, 'Who cares what his feelings are? Why can't he pay attention to something else?'

As a criticism of what is undoubtedly a very remarkable work, it was unfair and inadequate – but not, I think, irrelevant. I cite it for what it is worth and because that is how, in a state of pure contemplation, I reacted to the *Lyric Suite*.

When it was over, the investigator suggested a walk in the garden. I was willing; and though my body seemed to have dissociated itself almost completely from my mind – or, to be more accurate, though my awareness of the transfigured outer world was no longer accompanied by an awareness of my physical organism – found myself able to get up, open the French-window and walk out with only a minimum of hesitation. It was odd, of course, to feel that 'I' was not the same as these arms and legs 'out there,' as this wholly objective trunk and neck and even head. It was odd; but one soon got used to it. And anyhow the body seemed perfectly well able to look after itself. In reality, of course, it always does look after itself. All that the conscious ego can do is to formulate wishes, which are then carried out by forces which it controls very little and understands not at all. When it does anything more – when it tries too hard, for example, when it worries, when it becomes apprehensive about the future – it lowers the effectiveness of those forces and may even cause the

devitalized body to fall ill. In my present state, awareness was not referred to an ego; it was, so to speak, on its own. This meant that the physiological intelligence controlling the body was also on its own. For the moment that interfering neurotic who, in waking hours, tries to run the show was blessedly out of the way.

From the French-window I walked out under a kind of pergola covered in part by a climbing rose tree, in part by laths, one inch wide with half an inch of space between them. The sun was shining and the shadows of the laths made a zebra-like pattern on the ground and across the seat and back of a garden chair, which was standing at this end of the pergola. That chair – shall I ever forget it? Where the shadows fell on the canvas upholstery, stripes of a deep but glowing indigo alternated with stripes of an incandescence so intensely bright that it was hard to believe that they could be made of anything but blue fire. For what seemed an immensely long time I gazed without knowing, even without wishing to know, what it was that confronted me. At any other time I would have seen a chair barred with alternate light and shade. Today the percept had swallowed up the concept. I was so completely absorbed in looking, so thunderstruck by what I actually saw, that I could not be aware of anything else. Garden furniture, laths, sunlight, shadow – these were no more than names and notions, mere verbalizations, for utilitarian or scientific purposes, after the event. The event was this succession of azure furnace-doors separated by gulfs of unfathomable gentian. It was inexpressibly wonderful, wonderful to the point, almost, of being terrifying. And suddenly I had an inkling of what it must feel like to be mad. Schizophrenia has its heavens as well as its hells and purgatories, I remember what an old friend, dead these many years, told me about his mad wife. One day in the early stages of the disease, when she still had her lucid intervals, he had gone to the hospital to talk to her about their children. She listened for a time, then cut him short. How could he bear to waste his time on a couple of absent children, when all that really mattered, here and now, was the unspeakable beauty of the patterns he made, in this brown tweed jacket, every time he moved his arms? Alas, this paradise of cleansed perception, of pure, one-sided

contemplation, was not to endure. The blissful intermissions became rarer, became briefer, until finally there were no more of them; there was only horror.

Most takers of mescalin experience only the heavenly part of schizophrenia. The drug brings hell and purgatory only to those who have had a recent case of jaundice, or who suffer from periodical depressions or a chronic anxiety. If, like the other drugs of remotely comparable power, mescalin were notoriously toxic, the taking of it would be enough, of itself, to cause anxiety. But the reasonably healthy person knows in advance that, so far as he is concerned, mescalin is completely innocuous, that its effects will pass off after eight or ten hours, leaving no hangover and consequently no craving for a renewal of the dose. Fortified by this knowledge, he embarks upon the experiment without fear – in other words, without any pre-disposition to convert an unprecedentedly strange and other than human experience into something appalling, something actually diabolical.

Confronted by a chair which looked like the Last Judgment – or, to be more accurate, by a Last Judgment which, after a long time and with considerable difficulty, I recognized as a chair – I found myself all at once on the brink of panic. This, I suddenly felt, was going too far. Too far, even though the going was into intenser beauty, deeper significance. The fear, as I analyse it in retrospect, was of being overwhelmed, of disintegrating under a pressure of reality greater than a mind, accustomed to living most of the time in a cosy world of symbols, could possibly bear. The literature of religious experience abounds in references to the pains and terrors overwhelming those who have come, too suddenly, face to face with some manifestation of the *Mysterium tremendum*. In theological language, this fear is due to the incompatibility between man’s egotism and the divine purity, between man’s self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God. Following Boehme and William Law, we may say that, by unregenerate souls, the divine Light at its full blaze can be apprehended only as a burning, purgatorial fire. An almost identical doctrine is to be found in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, where the departed soul is described as shrinking in agony from the Clear Light of the Void, and even from

the lesser, tempered Lights, in order to rush headlong into the comforting darkness of selfhood as a reborn human being, or even as a beast, an unhappy ghost, a denizen of hell. Anything rather than the burning brightness of unmitigated Reality – anything!

The schizophrenic is a soul not merely unregenerate, but desperately sick into the bargain. His sickness consists in the inability to take refuge from inner and outer reality (as the sane person habitually does) in the homemade universe of common sense – the strictly human world of useful notions, shared symbols and socially acceptable conventions. The schizophrenic is like a man permanently under the influence of mescalin, and therefore unable to shut off the experience of a reality which he is not holy enough to live with, which he cannot explain away because it is the most stubborn of primary facts, and which, because it never permits him to look at the world with merely human eyes, scares him into interpreting its unremitting strangeness, its burning intensity of significance, as the manifestations of human or even cosmic malevolence, calling for the most desperate counter-measures, from murderous violence at one end of the scale to catatonia, or psychological suicide, at the other. And once embarked upon the downward, the infernal road, one would never be able to stop. That, now, was only too obvious.

‘If you started in the wrong way,’ I said in answer to the investigator’s questions, ‘everything that happened would be a proof of the conspiracy against you. It would all be self-validating. You couldn’t draw a breath without knowing it was part of the plot.’

‘So you think you know where madness lies?’

My answer was a convinced and heartfelt, ‘Yes.’

‘And you couldn’t control it?’

‘No, I couldn’t control it. If one began with fear and hate as the major premiss, one would have to go on to the conclusion.’

‘Would you be able,’ my wife asked, ‘to fix your attention on what *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* calls the Clear Light?’

I was doubtful.

‘Would it keep the evil away, if you could hold it? Or would you not be able to hold it?’

I considered the question for some time.

‘Perhaps,’ I answered at last, ‘perhaps I could – but only if there were somebody there to tell me about the Clear Light. One couldn’t do it by oneself. That’s the point, I suppose, of the Tibetan ritual – someone sitting there all the time and telling you what’s what.’

After listening to the record of this part of the experiment, I took down my copy of Evans-Wentz’s edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and opened at random. ‘O nobly born, let not thy mind be distracted.’ That was the problem – to remain undistracted. Undistracted by the memory of past sins, by imagined pleasure, by the bitter aftertaste of old wrongs and humiliations, by all the fears and hates and cravings that ordinarily eclipse the Light. What those Buddhist monks did for the dying and the dead, might not the modern psychiatrist do for the insane? Let there be a voice to assure them, by day and even while they are asleep, that in spite of all the terror, all the bewilderment and confusion, the ultimate Reality remains unshakably itself and is of the same substance as the inner light of even the most cruelly tormented mind. By means of such devices as recorders, clock-controlled switches, public address systems and pillow speakers it should be very easy to keep the inmates of even an understaffed institution constantly reminded of this primordial fact. Perhaps a few of the lost souls might in this way be helped to win some measure of control over the universe – at once beautiful and appalling, but always other than human, always totally incomprehensible – in which they find themselves condemned to live.

None too soon, I was steered away from the disquieting splendours of my garden chair. Drooping in green parabolas from the hedge, the ivy fronds shone with a kind of glassy, jade-like radiance. A moment later a clump of Red Hot Pokers, in full bloom, had exploded into my field of vision. So passionately alive that they seemed to be standing on the very brink of utterance, the flowers strained upwards into the blue. Like the chair under the laths, they protested too

much. I looked down at the leaves and discovered a cavernous intricacy of the most delicate green lights and shadows, pulsing with undecipherable mystery.

Roses:
The flowers are easy to paint,
The leaves difficult.

Shiki's *haiku* (which I quote in F. H. Blyth's translation) expresses, by indirection, exactly what I then felt – the excessive, the too obvious glory of the flowers, as contrasted with the subtler miracle of their foliage.

We walked out into the street. A large pale blue automobile was standing at the kerb. At the sight of it, I was suddenly overcome by enormous merriment. What complacency, what an absurd self-satisfaction beamed from those bulging surfaces of glossiest enamel! Man had created the thing in his own image – or rather in the image of his favourite character in fiction. I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks.

We re-entered the house. A meal had been prepared. Somebody, who was not yet identical with myself, fell to with ravenous appetite. From a considerable distance and without much interest, I looked on.

When the meal had been eaten, we got into the car and went for a drive. The effects of the mescalin were already on the decline: but the flowers in the gardens still trembled on the brink of being supernatural, the pepper trees and carobs along the side streets still manifestly belonged to some sacred grove. Eden alternated with Dodona, Yggdrasil with the mystic Rose. And then, abruptly, we were at an intersection, waiting to cross Sunset Boulevard. Before us the cars were rolling by in a steady stream – thousands of them, all bright and shiny like an advertiser's dream and each more ludicrous than the last. Once again I was convulsed with laughter.

The Red Sea of traffic parted at last, and we crossed into another oasis of trees and lawns and roses. In a few minutes we had climbed to a vantage point in the hills, and there was the city spread out beneath us. Rather disappointingly, it

looked very like the city I had seen on other occasions. So far as I was concerned, transfiguration was proportional to distance. The nearer, the more divinely other. This vast, dim panorama was hardly different from itself.

We drove on, and so long as we remained in the hills, with view succeeding distant view, significance was at its everyday level, well below transfiguration point. The magic began to work again only when we turned down into a new suburb and were gliding between two rows of houses. Here, in spite of the peculiar hideousness of the architecture, there were renewals of transcendental otherness, hints of the morning's heaven. Brick chimneys and green composition roofs glowed in the sunshine, like fragments of the New Jerusalem. And all at once I saw what Guardi had seen and (with what incomparable skill!) had so often rendered in his paintings – a stucco wall with a shadow slanting across it, blank but unforgettably beautiful, empty but charged with all the meaning and the mystery of existence. The Revelation dawned and was gone again within a fraction of a second. The car had moved on; time was uncovering another manifestation of the eternal Suchness. 'Within sameness there is difference. But that difference should be different from sameness is in no wise the intention of all the Buddhas. Their intention is both totality and differentiation.' This bank of red and white geraniums, for example – it was entirely different from that stucco wall a hundred yards up the road. But the 'is-ness' of both was the same, the eternal quality of their transience was the same.

An hour later, with ten more miles and the visit to the World's Biggest Drug Store safely behind us, we were back at home, and I had returned to that reassuring but profoundly unsatisfactory state known as 'being in one's right mind.'

That humanity at large will ever be able to dispense with Artificial Paradises seems very unlikely. Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul. Art and religion, carnivals and saturnalia, dancing and listening to oratory – all these have served, in H. G. Wells' phrase,

as Doors in the Wall. And for private, for everyday use there have always been chemical intoxicants. All the vegetable sedatives and narcotics, all the euphorics that grow on trees, the hallucinogens that ripen in berries or can be squeezed from roots – all, without exception, have been known and systematically used by human beings from time immemorial. And to these natural modifiers of consciousness modern science has added its quota of synthetics – chloral, for example, and benzedrine, the bromides and the barbiturates.

Most of these modifiers of consciousness cannot now be taken except under doctor's orders, or else illegally and at considerable risk. For unrestricted use the West has permitted only alcohol and tobacco. All the other chemical Doors in the Wall are labelled Dope, and their unauthorized takers are Fiends.

We now spend a good deal more on drink and smoke than we spend on education. This, of course, is not surprising. The urge to escape from selfhood and the environment is in almost everyone almost all the time. The urge to do something for the young is strong only in parents, and in them only for the few years during which their children go to school. Equally unsurprising is the current attitude towards drink and smoke. In spite of the growing army of hopeless alcoholics, in spite of the hundreds of thousands of persons annually maimed or killed by drunken drivers, popular comedians still crack jokes about alcohol and its addicts. And in spite of the evidence linking cigarettes with lung cancer, practically everybody regards tobacco smoking as being hardly less normal and natural than eating. From the point of view of the rationalist utilitarian this may seem odd. For the historian, it is exactly what you would expect. A firm conviction of the material reality of Hell never prevented mediaeval Christians from doing what their ambition, lust or covetousness suggested. Lung cancer, traffic accidents and the millions of miserable and misery-creating alcoholics are facts even more certain than was, in Dante's day, the fact of the Inferno. But all such facts are remote and unsubstantial compared with the near, felt fact of a craving, here and now, for release or sedation, for a drink or a smoke.

Ours is the age, among other things, of the automobile and of rocketing population. Alcohol is incompatible with safety on the roads, and its production, like that of tobacco, condemns to virtual sterility many millions of acres of the most fertile soil. The problems raised by alcohol and tobacco cannot, it goes without saying, be solved by prohibition. The universal and ever-present urge to self-transcendence is not to be abolished by slamming the currently popular Doors in the Wall. The only reasonable policy is to open other, better doors in the hope of inducing men and women to exchange their old bad habits for new and less harmful ones. Some of these other, better doors will be social and technological in nature, others religious or psychological, others dietetic, educational, athletic. But the need for frequent chemical vacations from intolerable selfhood and repulsive surroundings will undoubtedly remain. What is needed is a new drug which will relieve and console our suffering species without doing more harm in the long run than it does good in the short. Such a drug must be potent in minute doses and synthesizable. If it does not possess these qualities, its production, like that of wine, beer, spirits and tobacco will interfere with the raising of indispensable food and fibres. It must be less toxic than opium or cocaine, less likely to produce undesirable social consequences than alcohol or the barbiturates, less inimical to heart and lungs than the tars and nicotine of cigarettes. And, on the positive side, it should produce changes in consciousness more interesting, more intrinsically valuable than mere sedation or dreaminess, delusions of omnipotence or release from inhibition.

To most people, mescalin is almost completely innocuous. Unlike alcohol, it does not drive the taker into the kind of uninhibited action which results in brawls, crimes of violence and traffic accidents. A man under the influence of mescalin quietly minds his own business. Moreover, the business he minds is an experience of the most enlightening kind, which does not have to be paid for (and this is surely important) by a compensatory hangover. Of the long-range consequences of regular mescalin taking we know very little. The Indians who consume peyote buttons do not seem to be physically or morally degraded by the habit. However, the available evidence is still scarce and sketchy.

Although obviously superior to cocaine, opium, alcohol and tobacco, mescalin is not yet the ideal drug. Along with the happily transfigured majority of mescalin takers there is a minority that finds in the drug only hell or purgatory. Moreover, for a drug that is to be used, like alcohol, for general consumption, its effects last for an inconveniently long time. But chemistry and physiology are capable nowadays of practically anything. If the psychologists and sociologists will define the ideal, the neurologists and pharmacologists can be relied upon to discover the means whereby that ideal can be realized or at least (for perhaps this kind of ideal can never, in the very nature of things, be fully realized) more nearly approached than in the wine-bibbing past, the whisky-drinking, marijuana-smoking and barbiturate-swallowing present.

The urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is, as I have said, a principal appetite of the soul. When, for whatever reason, men and women fail to transcend themselves by means of worship, good works and spiritual exercises, they are apt to resort to religion's chemical surrogates – alcohol and 'goof-pills' in the modern West, alcohol and opium in the East, hashish in the Mohammedan world, alcohol and marijuana in Central America, alcohol and coca in the Andes, alcohol and the barbiturates in the more up-to-date regions of South America. In *Poisons Sacrés, Ivresses Divines* Philippe de Félice has written at length and with a wealth of documentation on the immemorial connection between religion and the taking of drugs. Here, in summary or in direct quotation, are his conclusions. The employment for religious purposes of toxic substances is 'extraordinarily widespread ... The practices studied in this volume can be observed in every region of the earth, among primitives no less than among those who have reached a high pitch of civilization. We are therefore dealing not with exceptional facts, which might justifiably be overlooked, but with a general and, in the widest sense of the word, a human phenomenon, the kind of phenomenon which cannot be disregarded by anyone who is trying to discover what religion is, and what are the deep needs which it must satisfy.'

Ideally, everyone should be able to find self-transcendence in some form of pure or applied religion. In practice it seems very unlikely that this hoped for

consummation will ever be realized. There are, and doubtless there always will be, good churchmen and good churchwomen for whom, unfortunately, piety is not enough. The late G.K. Chesterton, who wrote at least as lyrically of drink as of devotion, may serve as their eloquent spokesman.

The modern Churches, with some exceptions among the Protestant denominations, tolerate alcohol; but even the most tolerant have made no attempt to convert the drug to Christianity, or to sacramentalize its use. The pious drinker is forced to take his religion in one compartment, his religion-surrogate in another. And perhaps this is inevitable. Drinking cannot be sacramentalized except in religions which set no store on decorum. The worship of Dionysos or the Celtic god of beer was a loud and disorderly affair. The rites of Christianity are incompatible with even religious drunkenness. This does no harm to the distillers, but is very bad for Christianity. Countless persons desire self-transcendence and would be glad to find it in church. But, alas, 'the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.' They take part in rites, they listen to sermons, they repeat prayers; but their thirst remains unassuaged. Disappointed, they turn to the bottle. For a time at least and in a kind of way, it works. Church may still be attended; but it is no more than the Musical Bank of Butler's *Erewhon*. God may still be acknowledged; but He is God only on the verbal level, only in a strictly Pickwickian sense. The effective object of worship is the bottle and the sole religious experience is that state of uninhibited and belligerent euphoria which follows the ingestion of the third cocktail.

We see, then, that Christianity and alcohol do not and cannot mix. Christianity and mescalin seem to be much more compatible. This has been demonstrated by many tribes of Indians, from Texas to as far north as Wisconsin. Among these tribes are to be found groups affiliated with the Native American Church, a sect whose principal rite is a kind of Early Christian Agape, or Love-Feast, where slices of peyote take the place of the sacramental bread and wine. These Native Americans regard the cactus as God's special gift to the Indians, and equate its effects with the workings of the divine Spirit.

Professor J. S. Slotkin – one of the very few white men ever to have participated in the rites of a Peyotist congregation – says of his fellow worshippers that they are ‘certainly not stupefied or drunk ... They never get out of rhythm or fumble their words, as a drunken or stupefied man would do ... They are all quiet, courteous and considerate of one another. I have never been in any white man’s house of worship where there is either so much religious feeling or decorum.’ And what, we may ask, are these devout and well-behaved Peyotists experiencing? Not the mild sense of virtue which sustains the average Sunday churchgoer through ninety minutes of boredom. Not even those high feelings, inspired by thoughts of the Creator and the Redeemer, the Judge and the Comforter, which animate the pious. For these Native Americans, religious experience is something more direct and illuminating, more spontaneous, less the homemade product of the superficial, self-conscious mind. Sometimes (according to the reports collected by Dr Slotkin) they see visions, which may be of Christ Himself. Sometimes they hear the voice of the Great Spirit. Sometimes they become aware of the presence of God and of those personal shortcomings which must be corrected if they are to do His will. The practical consequences of these chemical openings of doors into the Other World seem to be wholly good. Dr Slotkin reports that habitual Peyotists are on the whole more industrious, more temperate (many of them abstain altogether from alcohol), more peaceable than non-Peyotists. A tree with such satisfactory fruits cannot be condemned out of hand as evil.

In sacramentalizing the use of peyote, the Indians of the Native American Church have done something which is at once psychologically sound and historically respectable. In the early centuries of Christianity many pagan rites and festivals were baptized, so to say, and made to serve the purposes of the Church. These jollifications were not particularly edifying; but they assuaged a certain psychological hunger and, instead of trying to suppress them, the earlier missionaries had the sense to accept them for what they were, soul-satisfying expressions of fundamental urges, and to incorporate them into the fabric of the new religion. What the Native Americans have done is essentially similar. They

have taken a pagan custom (a custom, incidentally, far more elevating and enlightening than most of the rather brutish carousals and mummeries adopted from European paganism) and given it a Christian significance.

Though but recently introduced into the northern United States, peyote-eating and the religion based upon it have become important symbols of the Red Man's right to spiritual independence. Some Indians have reacted to white supremacy by becoming Americanized, others by retreating into traditional Indianism. But some have tried to make the best of both worlds, indeed of all the worlds – the best of Indianism, the best of Christianity, and the best of those Other Worlds of transcendental experience, where the soul knows itself as unconditioned and of like nature with the divine. Hence the Native American Church. In it two great appetites of the soul – the urge to independence and self-determination and the urge to self-transcendence – were fused with, and interpreted in the light of, a third – the urge to worship, to justify the ways of God to man, to explain the universe by means of a coherent theology.

Lo, the poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Clothes him in front, but leaves him bare behind.

But actually it is we, the rich and highly educated whites, who have left ourselves bare behind. We cover our anterior nakedness with some philosophy – Christian, Marxian, Freudo-Physicalist – but abaft we remain uncovered, at the mercy of all the winds of circumstance. The poor Indian, on the other hand, has had the wit to protect his rear by supplementing the fig-leaf of a theology with the breech-clout of transcendental experience.

I am not so foolish as to equate what happens under the influence of mescalin or of any other drug, prepared or in the future preparable, with the realization of the end and ultimate purpose of human life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision. All I am suggesting is that the mescalin experience is what Catholic theologians call 'a gratuitous grace,' not necessary to salvation but potentially helpful and to be accepted thankfully, if made available. To be shaken out of the ruts of

ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and the inner world, not as they appear to an animal obsessed with survival or to a human being obsessed with words and notions, but as they are apprehended, directly and unconditionally, by Mind at Large – thus an experience of inestimable value to everyone and especially to the intellectual. For the intellectual is by definition the man for whom, in Goethe's phrase, 'the word is essentially fruitful.' He is the man who feels that 'what we perceive by the eye is foreign to us as such and need not impress us deeply.' And yet, though himself an intellectual and one of the supreme masters of language, Goethe did not always agree with his own evaluation of the word. 'We talk,' he wrote in middle life, 'far too much. We should talk less and draw more. I personally should like to renounce speech altogether and, like organic Nature, communicate everything I have to say in sketches. That fig tree, this little snake, the cocoon on my window sill quietly awaiting its future – all these are momentous signatures. A person able to decipher their meaning properly would soon be able to dispense with the written or the spoken word altogether. The more I think of it, there is something futile, mediocre, even (I am tempted to say) foppish about speech. By contrast, how the gravity of Nature and her silence startle you, when you stand face to face with her, undistracted, before a barren ridge or in the desolation of the ancient hills.' We can never dispense with language and the other symbol systems; for it is by means of them, and only by their means, that we have raised ourselves above the brutes, to the level of human beings. But we can easily become the victims as well as the beneficiaries of these systems. We must learn how to handle words effectively; but at the same time we must preserve and, if necessary, intensify our ability to look at the world directly and not through that half-opaque medium of concepts, which distorts every given fact into the all too familiar likeness of some generic label or explanatory abstraction.

Literary or scientific, liberal or specialist, all our education is predominantly verbal and therefore fails to accomplish what it is supposed to do. Instead of transforming children into fully developed adults, it turns out students of the natural sciences who are completely unaware of Nature as the primary fact of

experience, it inflicts upon the world students of the Humanities who know nothing of humanity, their own or anyone else's.

Gestalt psychologists, such as Samuel Renshaw, have devised methods for widening the range and increasing the acuity of human perceptions. But do our educators apply them? The answer is, No.

Teachers in every field of psycho-physical skill, from seeing to tennis, from tightrope walking to prayer, have discovered, by trial and error, the conditions of optimum functioning within their special fields. But have any of the great Foundations financed a project for co-ordinating these empirical findings into a general theory and practice of heightened creativeness? Again, so far as I am aware, the answer is, No.

All sorts of cultists and queer fish teach all kinds of techniques for achieving health, contentment, peace of mind; and for many of their hearers many of these techniques are demonstrably effective. But do we see respectable psychologists, philosophers and clergymen boldly descending into those odd and sometimes malodorous wells, at the bottom of which poor Truth is so often condemned to sit? Yet once more the answer is, No.

And now look at the history of mescalin research. Seventy years ago men of first-rate ability described the transcendental experiences which come to those who, in good health, under proper conditions and in the right spirit, take the drug. How many philosophers, how many theologians, how many professional educators have had the curiosity to open this Door in the Wall? The answer, for all practical purposes, is, None.

In a world where education is predominantly verbal, highly educated people find it all but impossible to pay serious attention to anything but words and notions. There is always money for, there are always doctorates in, the learned foolery of research into what, for scholars, is the all-important problem: Who influenced whom to say what when? Even in this age of technology the verbal Humanities are honoured. The non-verbal Humanities, the arts of being directly aware of the given facts of our existence, are almost completely ignored. A catalogue, a bibliography, a definitive edition of a third-rate versifier's *ipsissima*

verba, a stupendous index to end all indexes – any genuinely Alexandrian project is sure of approval and financial support. But when it comes to finding out how you and I, our children and grandchildren, may become more perceptive, more intensely aware of inward and outward reality, more open to the Spirit, less apt, by psychological malpractices, to make ourselves physically ill, and more capable of controlling our own autonomic nervous system – when it comes to any form of non-verbal education more fundamental (and more likely to be of some practical use) than Swedish Drill, no really respectable person in any really respectable university or church will do anything about it. Verbalists are suspicious of the non-verbal; rationalists fear the given, non-rational fact; intellectuals feel that 'what we perceive by the eye (or in any other way) is foreign to us as such and need not impress us deeply.' Besides, this matter of education in the non-verbal Humanities will not fit into any of the established pigeon-holes. It is not religion, not neurology, not gymnastics, not morality or civics, not even experimental psychology. This being so, the subject is, for academic and ecclesiastical purposes, non-existent and may safely be ignored altogether or left, with a patronizing smile, to those whom the Pharisees of verbal orthodoxy call cranks, quacks, charlatans and unqualified amateurs.

'I have always found,' Blake wrote rather bitterly, 'that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise. This they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning.'

Systematic reasoning is something we could not, as a species or as individuals, possibly do without. But neither, if we are to remain sane, can we possibly do without direct perception, the more unsystematic the better, of the inner and outer worlds into which we have been born. This given reality is an infinite which passes all understanding and yet admits of being directly and in some sort totally apprehended. It is a transcendence belonging to another order than the human, and yet it may be present to us as a felt immanence, an experienced participation. To be enlightened is to be aware, always, of total reality in its immanent otherness – to be aware of it and yet to remain in a condition to survive as an animal, to think and feel as a human being, to resort

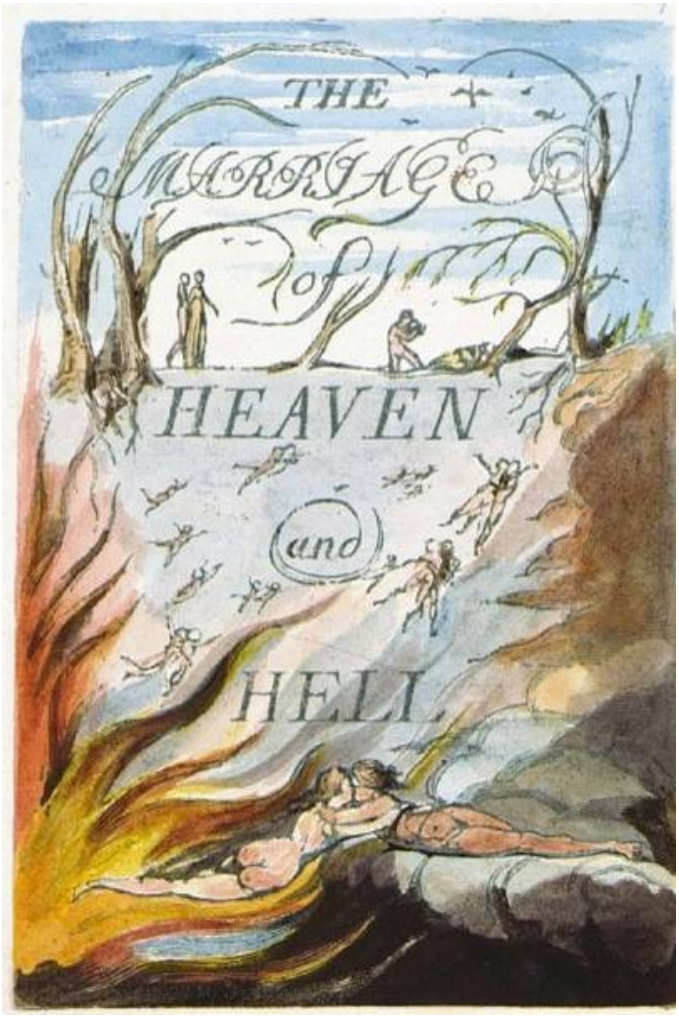
whenever expedient to systematic reasoning. Our goal is to discover that we have always been where we ought to be. Unhappily we make the task exceedingly difficult for ourselves. Meanwhile, however, there are gratuitous graces in the form of partial and fleeting realizations. Under a more realistic, a less exclusively verbal system of education than ours, every Angel (in Blake's sense of that word) would be permitted as a sabbatical treat, would be urged and even, if necessary, compelled to take an occasional trip through some chemical Door in the Wall into the world of transcendental experience. If it terrified him, it would be unfortunate but probably salutary. If it brought him a brief but timeless illumination, so much the better. In either case the Angel might lose a little of the confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning and the consciousness of having read all the books.

Near the end of his life Aquinas experienced Infused Contemplation. Thereafter he refused to go back to work on his unfinished book. Compared with *this* everything he had read and argued about and written – Aristotle and the Sentences, the Questions, the Propositions, the majestic Summas – was no better than chaff or straw. For most intellectuals such a sit-down strike would be inadvisable, even morally wrong. But the Angelic Doctor had done more systematic reasoning than any twelve ordinary Angels, and was already ripe for death. He had earned the right, in those last months of his mortality, to turn from merely symbolic straw and chaff to the bread of actual and substantial Fact. For Angels of a lower order and with better prospects of longevity, there must be a return to the straw. But the man who comes back through the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser but less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend.

Heaven and Hell

Heaven and Hell was first published in 1956 by Chatto & Windus in Britain and Harper & Brothers in America. The title of the essay is taken from William Blake's 1790-93 book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which also served as the inspiration for Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*. Blake's work describes a tour of hell, depicted as a place of uninhibited existence rather than a pit of torture and perpetual pain. Blake believed that it was necessary to recognise the physical and material as divine and to embrace both the good and the bad of human nature, as 'Without Contraries is no progression'. The work was highly controversial and was written during a febrile political climate, when the British ruling-class became increasing concerned about the effects of the French Revolution.

In the *Foreword* to *Heaven and Hell*, Huxley describes the work as a sequel to *The Doors of Perception* and states that in this new essay he has 'tried to set down' the 'results of this new understanding' on how 'other minds think and feel and perceive', gained from his experience on mescaline. The text explores the nature of visionary experience via what Huxley describes as 'antipodes': parts of the mind and mental states that remain inaccessible for many people. He states that there are only two 'sufficiently reliable' methods for people to discover their antipodes and 'the world of Visionary Experience' and they are psychedelic drugs and hypnosis. He goes on to describe how this special visionary experience has permeated the greatest works of art throughout history, but has not always been 'blissful'. It has also been 'negative' or 'infernal', as is exemplified in Franz Kafka's literature or van Gogh's later landscape paintings.



William Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'

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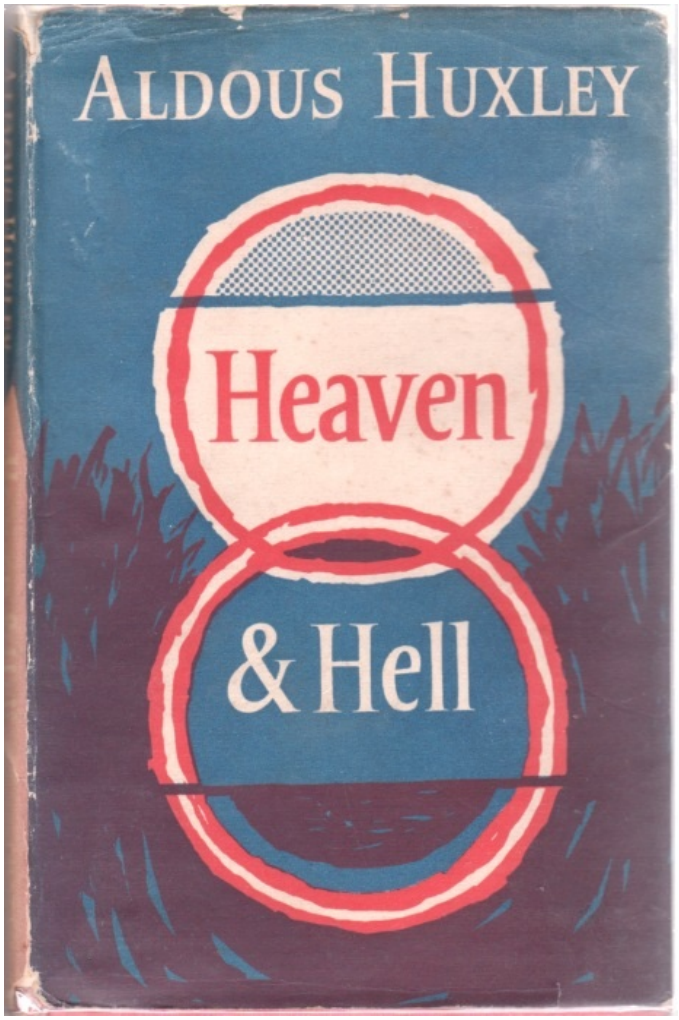


The first edition

FOREWORD

THIS LITTLE BOOK is a sequel to *The Doors of Perception*. For a person in whom ‘the candle of vision’ never burns spontaneously, the mescalin experience is doubly illuminating. It throws light on the hitherto unknown regions of his own mind; and at the same time it throws light, indirectly, on other minds, more richly gifted in respect to vision than his own. Reflecting on his experience, he comes to a new and better understanding of the ways in which those other minds perceive and feel and think, of the cosmological notions which seem to them self-evident, and of the works of art through which they feel impelled to express themselves. In what follows I have tried to set down, more or less systematically, the results of this new understanding.

A. H.

HEAVEN AND HELL

IN THE HISTORY of science the collector of specimens preceded the zoologist and followed the exponents of natural theology and magic. He had ceased to study animals in the spirit of the authors of the Bestiaries, for whom the ant was incarnate industry, the panther an emblem, surprisingly enough, of Christ, the polecat a shocking example of uninhibited lasciviousness. But, except in a rudimentary way, he was not yet a physiologist, ecologist or student of animal behaviour. His primary concern was to make a census, to catch, kill, stuff and describe as many kinds of beasts as he could lay his hands on.

Like the earth of a hundred years ago, our mind still has its darkest Africas, its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian basins. In relation to the fauna of these regions we are not yet zoologists, we are mere naturalists and collectors of specimens. The fact is unfortunate; but we have to accept it, we have to make the best of it. However lowly, the work of the collector must be done, before we can proceed to the higher scientific tasks of classification, analysis, experiment and theory making.

Like the giraffe and the duck-billed platypus, the creatures inhabiting these remoter regions of the mind are exceedingly improbable. Nevertheless they exist, they are facts of observation; and as such, they cannot be ignored by anyone who is honestly trying to understand the world in which he lives.

It is difficult, it is all but impossible, to speak of mental events except in similes drawn from the more familiar universe of material things. If I have made use of geographical and zoological metaphors, it is not wantonly, out of a mere addiction to picturesque language. It is because such metaphors express very forcibly the essential otherness of the mind’s far continents, the complete autonomy and self-sufficiency of their inhabitants. A man consists of what I may call an Old World of personal consciousness and, beyond a dividing sea, a series

of New Worlds – the not too distant Virginias and Carolinas of the personal subconscious and the vegetative soul; the Far West of the collective unconscious, with its flora of symbols, its tribes of aboriginal archetypes; and, across another, vaster ocean, at the antipodes of everyday consciousness, the world of Visionary Experience.

If you go to New South Wales, you will see marsupials hopping about the countryside. And if you go to the antipodes of the self-conscious mind, you will encounter all sorts of creatures at least as odd as kangaroos. You do not invent these creatures any more than you invent marsupials. They live their own lives in complete independence. A man cannot control them. All he can do is to go to the mental equivalent of Australia and look around him.

Some people never consciously discover their antipodes. Others make an occasional landing. Yet others (but they are few) find it easy to go and come as they please. For the naturalist of the mind, the collector of psychological specimens, the primary need is some safe, easy and reliable method of transporting himself and others from the Old World to the New, from the continent of familiar cows and horses to the continent of the wallaby and the platypus.

Two such methods exist. Neither of them is perfect; but both are sufficiently reliable, sufficiently easy and sufficiently safe to justify their employment by those who know what they are doing. In the first case the soul is transported to its far-off destination by the aid of a chemical – either mescalin or lysergic acid. In the second case, the vehicle is psychological in nature, and the passage to the mind’s antipodes is accomplished by hypnosis. The two vehicles carry the consciousness to the same region; but the drug has the longer range and takes its passengers further into the *terra incognita*.

How and why does hypnosis produce its observed effects? We do not know. For our present purposes, however, we do not have to know. All that is necessary, in this context, is to record the fact that some hypnotic subjects are transported, in the trance state, to a region in the mind’s antipodes, where they

find the equivalent of marsupials – strange psychological creatures leading an autonomous existence according to the law of their own being.

About the physiological effects of mescalin we know a little. Probably (for we are not yet certain) it interferes with the enzyme system that regulates cerebral functioning. By doing so it lowers the efficiency of the brain as an instrument for focusing mind on the problems of life on the surface of our planet. This lowering of what may be called the biological efficiency of the brain seems to permit the entry into consciousness of certain classes of mental events, which are normally excluded, because they possess no survival value. Similar intrusions of biologically useless, but aesthetically and sometimes spiritually valuable material may occur as the result of illness or fatigue; or they may be induced by fasting, or a period of confinement in a place of darkness and complete silence.

A person under the influence of mescalin or lysergic acid will stop seeing visions when given a large dose of nicotinic acid. This helps to explain the effectiveness of fasting as an inducer of visionary experience. By reducing the amount of available sugar, fasting lowers the brain's biological efficiency and so makes possible the entry into consciousness of material possessing no survival value. Moreover, by causing a vitamin deficiency, it removes from the blood that known inhibitor of visions, nicotinic acid. Another inhibitor of visionary experience is ordinary, everyday, perceptual experience. Experimental psychologists have found that, if you confine a man to a 'restricted environment,' where there is no light, no sound, nothing to smell and, if you put him in a tepid bath with only one, almost imperceptible thing to touch, the victim will very soon start 'seeing things,' 'hearing things' and having strange bodily sensations.

Milarepa, in his Himalayan cavern, and the anchorites of the Thebaid followed essentially the same procedure and got essentially the same results. A thousand pictures of the Temptations of St Anthony bear witness to the effectiveness of restricted diet and restricted environment. Asceticism, it is evident, has a double motivation. If men and women torment their bodies, it is

not only because they hope in this way to atone for past sins and avoid future punishments; it is also because they long to visit the mind's antipodes and do some visionary sightseeing. Empirically and from the reports of other ascetics, they know that fasting and a restricted environment will transport them where they long to go. Their self-inflicted punishment may be the door to paradise. (It may also – and this is a point which will be discussed in a later paragraph – be a door into the infernal regions.)

From the point of view of an inhabitant of the Old World, marsupials are exceedingly odd. But oddity is not the same as randomness. Kangaroos and wallabies may lack verisimilitude; but their improbability repeats itself and obeys recognizable laws. The same is true of the psychological creatures inhabiting the remoter regions of our minds. The experiences encountered under the influence of mescalin or deep hypnosis are certainly strange; but they are strange with a certain regularity, strange according to a pattern.

What are the common features which this pattern imposes upon our visionary experiences? First and most important is the experience of light. Everything seen by those who visit the mind's antipodes is brilliantly illuminated and seems to shine from within. All colours are intensified to a pitch far beyond anything seen in the normal state, and at the same time the mind's capacity for recognizing fine distinctions of tone and hue is notably heightened.

In this respect there is a marked difference between these visionary experiences and ordinary dreams. Most dreams are without colour, or else are only partially or feebly coloured. On the other hand, the visions met with under the influence of mescalin or hypnosis are always intensely and, one might say, praeternaturally brilliant in colour. Professor Calvin Hall, who has collected records of many thousands of dreams, tells us that about two-thirds of all dreams are in black and white. 'Only one dream in three is coloured, or has sonic colour in it.' A few people dream entirely in colour; a few never experience colour in their dreams; the majority sometimes dream in colour, but more often do not.

'We have come to the conclusion,' writes Dr Hall, 'that colour in dreams yields no information about the personality of the dreamer.' I agree with this

conclusion. Colour in dreams and visions tells us no more about the personality of the beholder than does colour in the external world. A garden in July is perceived as brightly coloured. The perception tells us something about sunshine, flowers and butterflies, but little or nothing about our own selves. In the same way the fact that we see brilliant colours in our visions and in some of our dreams tells us something about the fauna of the mind's antipodes, but nothing whatever about the personality who inhabits what I have called the Old World of the mind.

Most dreams are concerned with the dreamer's private wishes and instinctive urges, and with the conflicts which arise when these wishes and urges are thwarted by a disapproving conscience or a fear of public opinion. The story of these drives and conflicts is told in terms of dramatic symbols, and in most dreams the symbols are uncoloured. Why should this be the case? The answer, I presume, is that, to be effective, symbols do not require to be coloured. The letters in which we write about roses need not be red, and we can describe the rainbow by means of ink marks on white paper. Textbooks are illustrated by line engravings and half-tone plates; and these uncoloured images and diagrams effectively convey information.

What is good enough for the waking consciousness is evidently good enough for the personal subconscious, which finds it possible to express its meanings through uncoloured symbols. Colour turns out to be a kind of touchstone of reality. That which is given is coloured; that which our symbol-creating intellect and fancy put together is uncoloured. Thus the external world is perceived as coloured. Dreams, which are not given but fabricated by the personal subconscious, are generally in black and white. (It is worth remarking that, in most people's experience, the most brightly coloured dreams are those of landscapes, in which there is no drama, no symbolic reference to conflict, merely the presentation to consciousness of a given, nonhuman fact.)

The images of the archetypal world are symbolic; but since we, as individuals, do not fabricate them, but find them 'out there' in the collective unconscious, they exhibit some at least of the characteristics of given reality and

are coloured. The non-symbolic inhabitants of the mind's antipodes exist in their own right, and like the given facts of the external world are coloured. Indeed, they are far more intensely coloured than external data. This may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that our perceptions of the external world are habitually clouded by the verbal notions in terms of which we do our thinking. We are for ever attempting to convert things into signs for the more intelligible abstractions of our own invention. But in doing so, we rob these things of a great deal of their native thinghood.

At the antipodes of the mind, we are more or less completely free of language, outside the system of conceptual thought. Consequently our perception of visionary objects possesses all the freshness, all the naked intensity, of experiences which have never been verbalized, never assimilated to lifeless abstractions. Their colour (that hallmark of givenness) shines forth with a brilliance which seems to us praeternatural, because it is in fact entirely natural – entirely natural in the sense of being entirely unsophisticated by language or the scientific, philosophical and utilitarian notions, by means of which we ordinarily re-create the given world in our own drearily human image.

In his *Candle of Vision*, the Irish poet A. E. (George Russell) has analysed his visionary experiences with remarkable acuity. 'When I meditate,' he writes, 'I feel in the thoughts and images that throng about me the reflections of personality; but there are also windows in the soul, through which can be seen images created not by human but by the divine imagination.'

Our linguistic habits lead us into error. For example, we are apt to say, 'I imagine,' when what we should have said is, 'The curtain was lifted that I might see.' Spontaneous or induced, visions are never our personal property. Memories belonging to the ordinary self have no place in them. The things seen are wholly unfamiliar. 'There is no reference or resemblance,' in Sir William Herschel's phrase, 'to any objects recently seen or even thought of.' When faces appear, they are never the faces of friends or acquaintances. We are out of the Old World, and exploring the antipodes.

For most of us most of the time, the world of everyday experience seems rather dim and drab. But for a few people often, and for a fair number occasionally, some of the brightness of visionary experience spills over, as it were, into common seeing, and the everyday universe is transfigured. Though still recognizably itself the Old World takes on the quality of the mind's antipodes. Here is an entirely characteristic description of this transfiguration of the everyday world.

'I was sitting on the seashore, half listening to a friend arguing violently about something which merely bored me. Unconsciously to myself, I looked at a film of sand I had picked up on my hand, when I suddenly saw the exquisite beauty of every little grain of it; instead of being dull, I saw that each particle was made up on a perfect geometrical pattern, with sharp angles, from each of which a brilliant shaft of light was reflected, while each tiny crystal shone like a rainbow.... The rays crossed and recrossed, making exquisite patterns of such beauty that they left me breathless.... Then, suddenly, my consciousness was lighted up from within and I saw in a vivid way how the whole universe was made up of particles of material which, no matter how dull and lifeless they might seem, were nevertheless filled with this intense and vital beauty. For a second or two the whole world appeared as a blaze of glory. When it died down, it left me with something I have never forgotten and which constantly reminds me of the beauty locked up in every minute speck of material around us.'

Similarly George Russell writes of seeing the world illumined by 'an intolerable lustre of light'; of finding himself looking at 'landscapes as lovely as a lost Eden'; of beholding a world where the 'colours were brighter and purer, and yet made a softer harmony.' Again, 'the winds were sparkling and diamond clear, and yet full of colour as an opal, as they glittered through the valley, and I knew the Golden Age was all about me, and it was we who had been blind to it, but that it had never passed away from the world.'

Many similar descriptions are to be found in the poets and in the literature of religious mysticism. One thinks, for example, of Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in Early Childhood*; of certain lyrics by George

Herbert and Henry Vaughan; of Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*; of the passage in his autobiography, where Father Surin describes the miraculous transformation of an enclosed convent garden into a fragment of heaven.

Praeternatural light and colour are common to all visionary experiences. And along with light and colour there goes, in every case, a recognition of heightened significance. The self-luminous objects which we see in the mind's antipodes possess a meaning, and this meaning is, in some sort, as intense as their colour. Significance here is identical with being; for, at the mind's antipodes, objects do not stand for anything but themselves. The images which appear in the nearer reaches of the collective subconscious have meaning in relation to the basic facts of human experience; but here, at the limits of the visionary world, we are confronted by facts which, like the facts of external nature, are independent of man, both individually and collectively, and exist in their own right. And their meaning consists precisely in this, that they are intensely themselves and, being intensely themselves, are manifestations of the essential givenness, the nonhuman otherness of the universe.

Light, colour and significance do not exist in isolation. They modify, or are manifested by, objects. Are there any special classes of objects common to most visionary experiences? The answer is: Yes, there are. Under mescalin and hypnosis, as well as in spontaneous visions, certain classes of perceptual experiences turn up again and again.

The typical mescalin or lysergic acid experience begins with perceptions of coloured, moving, living geometrical forms. In time, pure geometry becomes concrete, and the visionary perceives, not patterns, but patterned things, such as carpets, carvings, mosaics. These give place to vast and complicated buildings, in the midst of landscapes, which change continuously, passing from richness to more intensely coloured richness, from grandeur to deepening grandeur. Heroic figures, of the kind that Blake called 'The Seraphim,' may make their appearance, alone or in multitudes. Fabulous animals move across the scene. Everything is novel and amazing. Almost never does the visionary see anything

that reminds him of his own past. He is not remembering scenes, persons or objects, and he is not inventing them; he is looking on at a new creation.

The raw material for this creation is provided by the visual experiences of ordinary life; but the moulding of this material into forms is the work of someone who is most certainly not the self; who originally had the experiences, or who later recalled and reflected upon them. They are (to quote the words used by Dr J. R. Smythies in a recent paper in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*) 'the work of a highly differentiated mental compartment, without any apparent connection, emotional or volitional, with the aims, interests, or feelings of the person concerned.'

Here, in quotation or condensed paraphrase, is Weir Mitchell's account of the visionary world to which he was transported by peyote, the cactus which is the natural source of mescalin.

At his entry into that world he saw a host of 'star points' and what looked like 'fragments of stained glass.' Then came 'delicate floating films of colour.' These were displaced by an 'abrupt rush of countless points of white light,' sweeping across the field of vision. Next there were zigzag lines of very bright colours, which somehow turned into swelling clouds of still more brilliant hues. Buildings now made their appearance, and then landscapes. There was a Gothic tower of elaborate design with worn statues in the doorways or on stone brackets. 'As I gazed, every projecting angle, cornice and even the faces of the stones at their joinings were by degrees covered or hung with clusters of what seemed to be huge precious stones, but uncut stones, some being more like masses of transparent fruit.... All seemed to possess an interior light.' The Gothic tower gave place to a mountain, a cliff of inconceivable height, a colossal birdclaw carved in stone and projecting over the abyss, an endless unfurling of coloured draperies, and an efflorescence of more precious stones. Finally there was a view of green and purple waves breaking on a beach 'with myriads of lights of the same tint as the waves.'

Every mescalin experience, every vision arising under hypnosis, is unique; but all recognizably belong to the same species. The landscapes, the

architectures, the clustering gems, the brilliant and intricate patterns – these, in their atmosphere of praeternatural light, praeternatural colour and praeternatural significance, are the stuff of which the mind's antipodes are made. Why this should be so, we have no idea. It is a brute fact of experience which, whether we like it or not, we have to accept – just as we have to accept the fact of kangaroos.

From these facts of visionary experience let us now pass to the accounts preserved in all the cultural traditions, of Other Worlds – the worlds inhabited by the gods, by the spirits of the dead, by man in his primal state of innocence.

Reading these accounts, we are immediately struck by the close similarity between induced or spontaneous visionary experience and the heavens and fairylands of folklore and religion. Praeternatural light, praeternatural intensity of colouring, praeternatural significance – these are characteristic of all the Other Worlds and Golden Ages. And in virtually every case this praeternaturally significant light shines on, or shines out of, a landscape of such surpassing beauty that words cannot express it.

Thus in the Graeco-Roman tradition we find the lovely Garden of the Hesperides, the Elysian Plain, and the fair Island of Leuke, to which Achilles was translated. Memnon went to another luminous island, somewhere in the East. Odysseus and Penelope travelled in the opposite direction and enjoyed their immortality with Circe in Italy. Still further to the West were the Islands of the Blest, first mentioned by Hesiod and so firmly believed in that, as late as the first century B.C., Sertorius planned to send a squadron from Spain to discover them.

Magically lovely islands reappear in the folklore of the Celts and, at the opposite side of the world, in that of the Japanese. And between Avalon in the extreme West and Horaisan in the Far East, there is the land of Uttarakuru, the Other World of the Hindus. 'The land,' we read in the *Ramayana*, 'is watered by lakes with golden lotuses. There are rivers by thousands, full of leaves of the colour of sapphire and lapis lazuli; and the lakes, resplendent like the morning sun, are adorned by golden beds of red lotus. The country all around is covered

by jewels and precious stones, with gay beds of blue lotus, golden-petalled. Instead of sand, pearls, gems and gold form the banks of the rivers, which are over-hung with trees of fire-bright gold. These trees perpetually bear flowers and fruit, give forth a sweet fragrance and abound with birds.'

Uttarakuru, we see, resembles the landscapes of the mescalin experience in being rich with precious stones. And this characteristic is common to virtually all the Other Worlds of religious tradition. Every paradise abounds in gems, or at least in gemlike objects resembling, as Weir Mitchell puts it, 'transparent fruit.' Here, for example, is Ezekiel's version of the Garden of Eden. 'Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald and the carbuncle, and gold.... Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth ... thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.' The Buddhist paradises are adorned with similar 'stones of fire.' Thus, the Western Paradise of the Pure Land Sect is walled with silver, gold and beryl; has lakes with jewelled banks and a profusion of glowing lotuses, within which the Bodhisattvas sit enthroned.

In describing their Other Worlds, the Celts and Teutons speak very little of precious stones, but have much to say of another and, for them, equally wonderful substance – glass. The Welsh had a blessed land called Ynisvitrin, the Isle of Glass; and one of the names of the Germanic kingdom of the dead was Glasberg. One is reminded of the Sea of Glass in the Apocalypse.

Most paradises are adorned with buildings, and, like the trees, the waters, the hills and fields, these buildings are bright with gems. We are all familiar with the New Jerusalem, 'And the building of the wall of it was of jasper, and the city was of pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.'

Similar descriptions are to be found in the eschatological literature of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Heaven is always a place of gems. Why should this be the case? Those who think of all human activities in terms of a social and economic frame of reference will give some such answer as this: Gems are very

rare on earth. Few people possess them. To compensate themselves for these facts, the spokesmen for the poverty-stricken majority have filled their imaginary heavens with precious stones. This ‘pie in the sky’ hypothesis contains, no doubt, some element of truth; but it fails to explain why precious stones should have come to be regarded as precious in the first place.

Men have spent enormous amounts of time, energy and money on the finding, mining and cutting of coloured pebbles. Why? The utilitarian can offer no explanation for such fantastic behaviour. But as soon as we take into account the facts of visionary experience, everything becomes clear. In vision, men perceive a profusion of what Ezekiel calls ‘stones of fire,’ of what Weir Mitchell describes as ‘transparent fruit.’ These things are self-luminous, exhibit a praeternatural brilliance of colour and possess a praeternatural significance. The material objects which most nearly resemble these sources of visionary illumination are gem-stones. To acquire such a stone is to acquire something whose preciousness is guaranteed by the fact that it exists in the Other World.

Hence man’s otherwise inexplicable passion for gems and hence his attribution to precious stones of therapeutic and magical virtue. The causal chain, I am convinced, begins in the psychological Other World of visionary experience, descends to earth and mounts again to the theological Other World of heaven. In this context the words of Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, take on a new significance. There exists, he tells us, an ideal world above and beyond the world of matter. ‘In this other earth the colours are much purer and much more brilliant than they are down here.... The very mountains, the very stones have a richer gloss, a lovelier transparency and intensity of hue. The precious stones of this lower world, our highly prized cornelians, jaspers, emeralds and all the rest, are but the tiny fragments of these stones above. In the other earth there is no stone but is precious and exceeds in beauty every gem of ours.’

In other words, precious stones are precious because they bear a faint resemblance to the glowing marvels seen with the inner eye of the visionary. ‘The view of that world,’ says Plato, ’is a vision of blessed beholders’; for to see things ‘as they are in themselves’ is bliss unalloyed and inexpressible.

Among people who have no knowledge of precious stones or of glass, heaven is adorned not with minerals, but flowers. Praeternaturally brilliant flowers bloom in most of the Other Worlds described by primitive eschatologists, and even in the begemmed and glassy paradises of the more advanced religions they have their place. One remembers the lotus of Hindu and Buddhist tradition, the roses and lilies of the West.

'God first planted a garden.' The statement expresses a deep psychological truth. Horticulture has its source – or at any rate one of its sources – in the Other World of the mind's antipodes. When worshippers offer flowers at the altar, they are returning to the gods things which they know, or (if they are not visionaries) obscurely feel, to be indigenous to heaven.

And this return to the source is not merely symbolical; it is also a matter of immediate experience. For the traffic between our Old World and its antipodes, between Here and Beyond, travels along a two-way street. Gems, for example, come from the soul's visionary heaven; but they also lead the soul back to that heaven. Contemplating them, men find themselves (as the phrase goes) *transported* – carried away towards that Other Earth of the Platonic dialogue, the magical place where every pebble is a precious stone. And the same effects may be produced by artifacts of glass and metal, by tapers burning in the dark, by brilliantly coloured images and ornaments, by flowers, shells and feathers, by landscapes seen, as Shelley from the Euganean Hills saw Venice, in the transfiguring light of dawn or sunset.

Indeed, we may risk a generalization and say that whatever, in nature or in a work of art, resembles one of those intensely significant, inwardly glowing objects encountered at the mind's antipodes, is capable of inducing, if only in a partial and attenuated form, the visionary experience. At this point a hypnotist will remind us that, if he can be induced to stare intently at a shiny object, a patient may go into trance; and that if he goes into trance, or if he goes only into reverie, he may very well see visions within and a transfigured world without.

But how, precisely, and why does the view of a shiny object induce a trance or a state of reverie? Is it, as the Victorians maintained, a simple matter of eye

strain resulting in general nervous exhaustion? Or shall we explain the phenomenon in purely psychological terms – as concentration pushed to the point of monoideism and leading to dissociation?

But there is a third possibility. Shiny objects may remind our unconscious of what it enjoys at the mind's antipodes, and these obscure intimations of life in the Other World are so fascinating that we pay less attention to this world and so become capable of experiencing consciously something of that which, unconsciously, is always with us.

We see then that there are in nature certain scenes, certain classes of objects, certain materials, possessed of the power to transport the beholder's mind in the direction of its antipodes, out of the everyday Here and towards the Other World of Vision. Similarly, in the realm of art, we find certain works, even certain classes of works, in which the same transporting power is manifest. These vision-inducing works may be executed in vision-inducing materials, such as glass, metal, gems or gemlike pigments. In other cases their power is due to the fact that they render, in some peculiarly expressive way, some transporting scene or object.

The best vision-inducing art is produced by men and women who have themselves had the visionary experience; but it is also possible for any reasonably good artist, simply by following an approved recipe, to create works which shall have at least some transporting power.

Of all the vision-inducing arts that which depends most completely on its raw materials is, of course, the art of the goldsmith and jeweller. Polished metals and precious stones are so intrinsically transporting that even a Victorian, even an Art Nouveau jewel is a thing of power. And when to this natural magic of glinting metal and self-luminous stone is added the other magic of noble forms and colours artfully blended, we find ourselves in the presence of a genuine talisman.

Religious art has always and everywhere made use of these vision-inducing materials. The shrine of gold, the chryselephantine statue, the jewelled symbol or image, the glittering furniture of the altar – we find these things in contemporary

Europe as in ancient Egypt, in India and China as among the Greeks, the Incas, the Aztecs.

The products of the goldsmith's art are intrinsically numinous. They have their place at the very heart of every Mystery, in every holy of holies. This sacred jewellery has always been associated with the light of lamps and candles. For Ezekiel, a gem was a stone of fire. Conversely, a flame is a living gem, endowed with all the transporting power that belongs to the precious stone and, to a lesser degree, to polished metal. This transporting power of flame increases in proportion to the depth and extent of the surrounding darkness. The most impressively numinous temples are caverns of twilight, in which a few tapers give life to the transporting, other-worldly treasures on the altar.

Glass is hardly less effective as an inducer of visions than are the natural gems. In certain respects, indeed, it is more effective, for the simple reason that there is more of it. Thanks to glass, a whole building – the Sainte-Chapelle, for example, the cathedrals of Chartres and Sens – could be turned into something magical and transporting. Thanks to glass, Paolo Uccello could design a circular jewel thirteen feet in diameter – his great window of the Resurrection, perhaps the most extraordinary single work of vision-inducing art ever produced.

For the men of the Middle Ages, it is evident, visionary experience was supremely valuable. So valuable, indeed, that they were ready to pay for it in hard-earned cash. In the twelfth century collecting-boxes were placed in the churches for the upkeep and installation of stained-glass windows. Suger, the Abbot of St Denis, tells us that they were always full.

But self-respecting artists cannot be expected to go on doing what their fathers have already done supremely well. In the fourteenth century colour gave place to grisaille, and windows ceased to be vision-inducing. When, in the later fifteenth century, colour came into fashion again, the glass painters felt the desire, and found themselves, at the same time, technically equipped, to imitate Renaissance painting in transparency. The results were often interesting; but they were not transporting.

Then came the Reformation. The Protestants disapproved of visionary experience and attributed a magical virtue to the printed word. In a church with clear windows the worshippers could read their Bibles and prayer books and were not tempted to escape from the sermon into the Other World. On the Catholic side the men of the Counter-Reformation found themselves in two minds. They thought visionary experience was a good thing, but they also believed in the supreme value of print.

In the new churches stained glass was rarely installed, and in many of the older churches it was wholly or partially replaced by clear glass. The unobscured light permitted the faithful to follow the service in their books, and at the same time to see the vision-inducing works created by the new generations of baroque sculptors and architects. These transporting works were executed in metal and polished stone. Wherever the worshipper turned, he found the glint of bronze, the rich radiance of coloured marble, the unearthly whiteness of statuary.

On the rare occasions when the Counter-Reformers made use of glass, it was as a surrogate for diamonds, not for rubies or sapphires. Faceted prisms entered religious art in the seventeenth century, and in Catholic churches they dangle to this day from innumerable chandeliers. (These charming and slightly ridiculous ornaments are among the very few vision-inducing devices permitted in Islam. Mosques have no images or reliquaries; but in the Near East, at any rate, their austerity is sometimes mitigated by the transporting glitter of rococo crystal.)

From glass, stained or cut, we pass to marble and the other stones that take a high polish and can be used in mass. The fascination exercised by such stones may be gauged by the amount of time and trouble spent in obtaining them. At Baalbek, for example, and, two or three hundred miles further inland, at Palmyra, we find among the ruins columns of pink granite from Aswan. These great monoliths were quarried in Upper Egypt, were floated in barges down the Nile, were towed across the Mediterranean to Byblos or Tripolis and from thence were hauled, by oxen, mules and men, uphill to Homs, and from Homs southward to Baalbek, or east, across the desert, to Palmyra.

What a labour of giants! And, from the utilitarian point of view, how marvellously pointless! But in fact, of course, there was a point – a point that existed in a region beyond mere utility. Polished to a visionary glow, the rosy shafts proclaimed their manifest kinship with the Other World. At the cost of enormous efforts men had transported these stones from their quarry on the Tropic of Cancer; and now, by way of recompense, the stones were transporting their transporters halfway to the mind's visionary antipodes.

The question of utility and of the motives that lie beyond utility arises once more in relation to ceramics. Few things are more useful, more absolutely indispensable, than pots and plates and jugs. But at the same time few human beings concern themselves less with utility than do the collectors of porcelain and glazed earthenware. To say that these people have an appetite for beauty is not a sufficient explanation. The commonplace ugliness of the surroundings in which fine ceramics are so often displayed is proof enough that what their owners crave is not beauty in all its manifestations, but only a special kind of beauty – the beauty of curved reflections, of softly lustrous glazes, of sleek and smooth surfaces. In a word, the beauty that transports the beholder, because it reminds him, obscurely or explicitly, of the praeternatural lights and colours of the Other World. In the main the art of the potter has been a secular art – but a secular art which its innumerable devotees have treated with an almost idolatrous reverence. From time to time, however, this secular art has been placed at the service of religion. Glazed tiles have found their way into mosques and, here and there, into Christian churches. From China come shining ceramic images of gods and saints. In Italy Luca della Robbia created a heaven of blue glaze, for his lustrous white madonnas and Christ children. Baked clay is cheaper than marble and, suitably treated, almost as transporting.

Plato and, during a later flowering of religious art, St Thomas Aquinas maintained that pure, bright colours were of the very essence of artistic beauty. A Matisse, in that case, could be intrinsically superior to a Goya or a Rembrandt. One has only to translate the philosophers' abstractions into concrete terms to see that this equation of beauty in general with bright, pure colours is absurd.

But though untenable as it stands, the venerable doctrine is not altogether devoid of truth.

Bright, pure colours are characteristic of the Other World. Consequently works of art painted in bright, pure colours are capable, in suitable circumstances, of transporting the beholder's mind in the direction of its antipodes. Bright pure colours are of the essence, not of beauty in general, but only of a special kind of beauty, the visionary. Gothic churches and Greek temples, the statues of the thirteenth century after Christ and of the fifth century before Christ – all were brilliantly coloured.

For the Greeks and the men of the Middle Ages, this art of the merry-go-round and the wax-work show was evidently transporting. To us it seems deplorable. We prefer our Praxiteleses plain, our marble and our limestone *au naturel*. Why should our modern taste be so different, in this respect, from that of our ancestors? The reason, I presume, is that we have become too familiar with bright pure pigments to be greatly moved by them. We admire them, of course, when we see them in some grand or subtle composition; but in themselves and as such, they leave us untransported.

Sentimental lovers of the past complain of the drabness of our age and contrast it unfavourably with the gay brilliance of earlier times. In actual fact, of course, there is a far greater profusion of colour in the modern than in the ancient world. Lapis lazuli and Tyrian purple were costly rarities; the rich velvets and brocades of princely wardrobes, the woven or painted hangings of mediaeval and early modern houses, were reserved for a privileged minority.

Even the great ones of the earth possessed very few of these vision-inducing treasures. As late as the seventeenth century, monarchs owned so little furniture that they had to travel from palace to palace with wagon-loads of plate and bedspreads, of carpets and tapestries. For the great mass of the people there were only homespun and a few vegetable dyes; and, for interior decoration, there were at best the earth colours, at worst (and in most cases) 'the floor of plaster and the walls of dung.'

At the antipodes of every mind lay the Other World of praeternatural light and praeternatural colour, of ideal gems and visionary gold. But before every pair of eyes was only the dark squalor of the family hovel, the dust or mud of the village street, the dirty whites, the duns and goose-turd greens of ragged clothing. Hence a passionate, an almost desperate, thirst for bright, pure colours; and hence the overpowering effect produced by such colours whenever, in church or at court, they were displayed. Today the chemical industry turns out paints, inks and dyes in endless variety and enormous quantities. In our modern world there is enough bright colour to guarantee the production of billions of flags and comic strips, millions of stop signs and tail lights, fire engines and Coca-Cola containers by the hundred thousand, carpets, wallpapers and non-representational art by the square mile.

Familiarity breeds indifference. We have seen too much pure, bright colour at Woolworth's to find it intrinsically transporting. And here we may note that, by its amazing capacity to give us too much of the best things, modern technology has tended to devaluate the traditional vision-inducing materials. The illumination of a city, for example, was once a rare event, reserved for victories and national holidays, for the canonization of saints and the crowning of kings. Now it occurs nightly and celebrates the virtues of gin, cigarettes and toothpaste.

In London, fifty years ago, electric sky signs were a novelty and so rare that they shone out of the misty darkness 'like captain jewels in the carcanet.' Across the Thames, on the old Shot Tower, the gold and ruby letters were magically lovely – *une féerie*. Today the fairies are gone. Neon is everywhere and, being everywhere, has no effect upon us, except perhaps to make us pine nostalgically for primeval night.

Only in floodlighting do we recapture the unearthly significance which used, in the age of oil and wax, even in the age of gas and the carbon filament, to shine forth from practically any island of brightness in the boundless dark. Under the searchlights Notre-Dame de Paris and the Roman Forum are visionary objects, having power to transport the beholder's mind towards the Other World.

Modern technology has had the same devaluating effect on glass and polished metal as it has had on fairy lamps and pure, bright colours. By John of Patmos and his contemporaries walls of glass were conceivable only in the New Jerusalem. Today they are a feature of every up-to-date office building and bungalow. And this glut of glass has been paralleled by a glut of chrome and nickel, of stainless steel and aluminium and a host of alloys old and new. Metal surfaces wink at us in the bathroom, shine from the kitchen sink, go glittering across country in cars and trains.

Those rich convex reflections, which so fascinated Rembrandt that he never tired of rendering them in paint, are now the commonplaces of home and street and factory. The fine point of seldom pleasure has been blunted. What was once a needle of visionary delight has now become a piece of disregarded linoleum.

I have spoken so far only of vision-inducing materials and their psychological devaluation by modern technology. It is time now to consider the purely artistic devices, by means of which vision-inducing works have been created.

Light and colour tend to take on a praeternatural quality when seen in the midst of environing darkness. Fra Angelico's Crucifixion at the Louvre has a black background. So have the frescoes of the Passion painted by Andrea del Castagno for the nuns of Santa Apollonia at Florence. Hence the visionary intensity, the strange transporting power of these extraordinary works. In an entirely different artistic and psychological context the same device was often used by Goya in his etchings. Those flying men, that horse on a tightrope, the huge and ghastly incarnation of Fear – all of them stand out, as though floodlit, against a background of impenetrable night.

With the development of chiaroscuro, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, night came out of the background and installed itself within the picture, which became the scene of a kind of Manichean struggle between Light and Darkness. At the time they were painted these works must have possessed a real transporting power. To us, who have seen altogether too much of this kind of thing, most of them seem merely theatrical. But a few still retain their magic.

There is Caravaggio's *Entombment*, for example; there are a dozen magical paintings by Georges de Latour; there are all those visionary Rembrandts where the lights have the intensity and significance of light at the mind's antipodes, where the darks are full of rich potentialities waiting their turn to become actual, to make themselves glowingly present to our consciousness.

In most cases the ostensible subject-matter of Rembrandt's pictures is taken from real life or the Bible – a boy at his lessons or Bathsheba bathing; a woman wading in a pond or Christ before His judges. Occasionally, however, these messages from the Other World are transmitted by means of a subject drawn, not from real life or history, but from the realm of archetypal symbols. There hangs in the Louvre a *Méditation du Philosophe*, whose symbolical subject-matter is nothing more or less than the human mind, with its teeming darknesses, its moments of intellectual and visionary illumination, its mysterious stairways winding downwards and upwards into the unknown. The meditating philosopher sits there in his island of inner illumination; and at the opposite end of the symbolic chamber, in another, rosier island, an old woman crouches before the hearth. The firelight touches and transfigures her face, and we see, concretely illustrated, the impossible paradox and supreme truth – that perception is (or at least can be, ought to be) the same as Revelation, that Reality shines out of every appearance, that the One is totally, infinitely present in all particulars.

Along with the praeternatural lights and colours, the gems and the ever-changing patterns, visitors to the mind's antipodes discover a world of sublimely beautiful landscapes, of living architecture and of heroic figures. The transporting power of many works of art is attributable to the fact that their creators have painted scenes, persons and objects which remind the beholder of what, consciously or unconsciously, he knows about the Other World at the back of his mind.

Let us begin with the human or, rather, the more than human inhabitants of these far-off regions. Blake called them the Cherubim. And in effect that is what, no doubt, they are – the psychological originals of those beings who, in the theology of every religion, serve as intermediaries between man and the Clear

Light. The more than human personages of visionary experience never ‘do anything.’ (Similarly the blessed never ‘do anything’ in heaven.) They are content merely to exist.

Under many names and attired in an endless variety of costumes, these heroic figures of man’s visionary experience have appeared in the religious art of every culture. Sometimes they are shown at rest, sometimes in historical or mythological action. But action, as we have seen, does not come naturally to the inhabitants of the mind’s antipodes. To be busy is the law of *our* being. The law of *theirs* is to do nothing. When we force these serene strangers to play a part in one of our all too human dramas, we are being false to visionary truth. That is why the most transporting (though not necessarily the most beautiful) representation of ‘the Cherubim’ are those which show them as they are in their native habitat – doing nothing in particular.

And that accounts for the overwhelming, the more than merely aesthetic, impression made upon the beholder by the great static masterpieces of religious art. The sculptured figures of Egyptian gods and god-kings, the Madonnas and Pantocrators of the Byzantine mosaics, the Bodhisattvas and Lohans of China, the seated Buddhas of Khmer, the steles and statues of Copan, the wooden idols of tropical Africa – these have one characteristic in common: a profound stillness. And it is precisely this which gives them their numinous quality, their power to transport the beholder out of the Old World of his everyday experience, far away, towards the visionary antipodes of the human psyche.

There is, of course, nothing intrinsically excellent about static art. Static or dynamic, a bad piece of work is always a bad piece of work. All I mean to imply is that, other things being equal, a heroic figure at rest has a greater transporting power than one which is shown in action.

The Cherubim live in Paradise and the New Jerusalem – in other words, among prodigious buildings set in rich, bright gardens with distant prospects of plain and mountain, of rivers and the sea. This is a matter of immediate experience, a psychological fact which has been recorded in folklore and the

religious literature of every age and country. It has not, however, been recorded in pictorial art.

Reviewing the succession of human cultures, we find that landscape painting is either non-existent, or rudimentary, or of very recent development. In Europe a full-blown art of landscape painting has existed for only four or five centuries, in China for not more than a thousand years, in India, for all practical purposes, never.

This is a curious fact that demands an explanation. Why should landscapes have found their way into the visionary literature of a given epoch and a given culture, but not into the painting? Posed in this way, the question provides its own best answer. People may be content with the merely verbal expression of this aspect of their visionary experience and feel no need for its translation into pictorial terms.

That this often happens in the case of individuals is certain. Blake, for example, saw visionary landscapes, ‘articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce’ and ‘infinitely more perfect and minutely organized than anything seen by the mortal eye.’ Here is the description of such a visionary landscape, which Blake gave at one of Mrs Aders’ evening parties: ‘The other evening, taking a walk, I came to a meadow and at the further corner of it I saw a fold of lambs. Coming nearer, the ground blushed with flowers, and the wattled cote and its woolly tenants were of an exquisite pastoral beauty. But I looked again, and it proved to be no living flock, but beautiful sculpture.’

Rendered in pigments, this vision would look, I suppose, like some impossibly beautiful blending of one of Constable’s freshest oil sketches with an animal painting in the magically realistic style of Zurbaran’s haloed lamb now in the San Diego Museum. But Blake never produced anything remotely resembling such a picture. He was content to talk and write about his landscape visions, and to concentrate in his painting upon ‘the Cherubim.’

What is true of an individual artist may be true of a whole school. There are plenty of things which men experience, but do not choose to express; or they may try to express what they have experienced, but in only one of their arts. In

yet other cases they will express themselves in ways having no immediately recognizable affinity to the original experience. In this last context Dr A. K. Coomaraswamy has some interesting things to say about the mystical art of the Far East – the art where ‘denotation and connotation cannot be divided’ and ‘no distinction is felt between what a thing “is” and what it “signifies.”’

The supreme example of such mystical art is the Zen-inspired landscape painting, which arose in China during the Sung period and came to new birth in Japan four centuries later. India and the Near East have no mystical landscape painting; but they have its equivalents – ‘Vaisnava painting, poetry and music in India, where the theme is sexual love; and Sufi poetry and music in Persia, devoted to praises of intoxication.’

‘Bed,’ as the Italian proverb succinctly puts it, ’is the poor man’s opera.’ Analogously, sex is the Hindu’s Sung; wine, the Persian’s Impressionism. The reason being, of course, that the experiences of sexual union and intoxication partake of that essential otherness characteristic of all vision, including that of landscapes.

If, at any time, men have found satisfaction in a certain kind of activity, it is to be presumed that, at periods when this satisfying activity was not manifested, there must have been some kind of equivalent for it. In the Middle Ages, for example, men were preoccupied in an obsessive, an almost maniacal way with words and symbols. Everything in nature was instantly recognized as the concrete illustration of some notion formulated in one of the books or legends currently regarded as sacred.

And yet, at other periods of history men have found a deep satisfaction in recognizing the autonomous otherness of nature, including many aspects of human nature. The experience of this otherness was expressed in terms of art, religion or science. What were the mediaeval equivalents of Constable and ecology, of bird watching and Eleusis, of microscopy and the rites of Dionysos and the Japanese Haiku? They were to be found, I suspect, in Saturnalian orgies at one end of the scale and in mystical experience at the other. Shrovetides, May Days, Carnivals – these permitted a direct experience of the animal otherness

underlying personal and social identity. Infused contemplation revealed the yet otherer otherness of the divine Not-Self. And somewhere between the two extremes were the experiences of the visionaries and the vision-inducing arts, by means of which it was sought to recapture and re-create those experiences – the art of the jeweller, of the maker of stained glass, of the weaver of tapestries, of the painter, poet and musician.

In spite of a Natural History that was nothing but a set of drearily moralistic symbols, in the teeth of a theology which, instead of regarding words as the signs of things, treated things and events as the signs of biblical or Aristotelian words, our ancestors remained relatively sane. And they achieved this feat by periodically escaping from the stifling prison of their bumptiously rationalistic philosophy, their anthropomorphic, authoritarian and non-experimental science, their all too articulate religion, into non-verbal, other than human worlds inhabited by their instincts, by the visionary fauna of their mind's antipodes and, beyond and yet within all the rest, by the indwelling Spirit.

From this wide-ranging but necessary digression, let us return to the particular case from which we set out. Landscapes, as we have seen, are a regular feature of the visionary experience. Descriptions of visionary landscapes occur in the ancient literature of folklore and religion; but paintings of landscapes do not make their appearance until comparatively recent times. To what has been said, by way of explanation about psychological equivalents, I will add a few brief notes on the nature of landscape paintings as a vision-inducing art.

Let us begin by asking a question. What landscapes – or, more generally, what representations of natural objects – are most transporting, most intrinsically vision-inducing? In the light of my own experiences and of what I have heard other people say about their reactions to works of art, I will risk an answer. Other things being equal (for nothing can make up for lack of talent), the most transporting landscapes are, first, those which represent natural objects a very long way off, and, second, those which represent them at close range.

Distance lends enchantment to the view; but so does propinquity. A Sung painting of far away mountains, clouds and torrents is transporting; but so are the closeups of tropical leaves in the Douanier Rousseau's jungles. When I look at the Sung landscape, I am reminded (or one of my not-I's is reminded) of the crags, the boundless expanses of plain, the luminous skies and seas of the mind's antipodes. And those disappearances into mist and cloud, those sudden emergences of some strange, intensely definite form, a weathered rock, for example, an ancient pine tree twisted by years of struggle with the wind – these too, are transporting. For they remind me, consciously or unconsciously, of the Other World's essential alienness and unaccountability.

It is the same with the closeup. I look at those leaves with their architecture of veins, their stripes and mottlings, I peer into the depths of interlacing greenery, and something in me is reminded of those living patterns, so characteristic of the visionary world, of those endless births and proliferations of geometrical forms that turn into objects, of things that are forever being transmuted into other things.

This painted closeup of a jungle is what, on one of its aspects, the Other World is like, and so it transports me, it makes me see with eyes that transfigure a work of art into something else, something beyond art.

I remember – very vividly, though it took place many years ago – a conversation with Roger Fry. We were talking about Monet's 'Water Lilies.' They had no right, Roger kept insisting, to be so shockingly unorganized, so totally without a proper compositional skeleton. They were all wrong, artistically speaking. And yet, he had to admit, and yet.... And yet, as I should now say, they were transporting. An artist of astounding virtuosity had chosen to paint a closeup of natural objects seen in their own context and without reference to merely human notions of what's what, or what ought to be what. Man, we like to say, is the measure of all things. For Monet, on this occasion, water lilies were the measure of water lilies; and so he painted them.

The same nonhuman point of view must be adopted by any artist who tries to render the distant scene. How tiny, in the Chinese painting, are the travellers

who make their way along the valley! How frail the bamboo hut on the slope above them! And all the rest of the vast landscape is emptiness and silence. This revelation of the wilderness, living its own life according to the laws of its own being, transports the mind towards its antipodes; for primeval Nature bears a strange resemblance to that inner world where no account is taken of our personal wishes or even of the enduring concerns of man in general.

Only the middle distance and what may be called the remoter foreground are strictly human. When we look very near or very far, man either vanishes altogether or loses his primacy. The astronomer looks even further afield than the Sung painter and sees even less of human life. At the other end of the scale the physicist, the chemist, the physiologist pursue the closeup – the cellular closeup, the molecular, the atomic and subatomic. Of that which, at twenty feet, even at arm's length, looked and sounded like a human being no trace remains.

Something analogous happens to the myopic artist and the happy lover. In the nuptial embrace personality is melted down; the individual (it is the recurrent theme of Lawrence's poems and novels) ceases to be himself and becomes a part of the vast impersonal universe.

And so it is with the artist who chooses to use his eyes at the near point. In his work humanity loses its importance, even disappears completely. Instead of men and women playing their fantastic tricks before high heaven, we are asked to consider the lilies, to meditate on the unearthly beauty of 'mere things,' when isolated from their utilitarian context and rendered as they are, in and for themselves. Alternatively (or, at an earlier stage of artistic development, exclusively), the nonhuman world of the near-point is rendered in patterns. These patterns are abstracted for the most part from leaves and flowers – the rose, the lotus, the acanthus, palm, papyrus – and are elaborated, with recurrences and variations, into something transportingly reminiscent of the living geometries of the Other World.

Freer and more realistic treatments of Nature at the near-point make their appearance at a relatively recent date – but far earlier than those treatments of

the distant scene, to which alone (and mistakenly) we give the name of landscape painting. Rome, for example, had its closeup landscapes. The fresco of a garden, which once adorned a room in Livia's villa, is a magnificent example of this form of art.

For theological reasons, Islam had to be content, for the most part, with 'arabesques' – luxuriant and (as in visions) continually varying patterns, based upon natural objects seen at the near-point. But even in Islam the genuine closeup landscape was not unknown. Nothing can exceed in beauty and in vision-inducing power the mosaics of gardens and buildings in the great Omayyad mosque at Damascus.

In mediaeval Europe, despite the prevailing mania for turning every datum into a concept, every immediate experience into a mere symbol of something in a book, realistic closeups of foliage and flowers were fairly common. We find them carved on the capitals of Gothic pillars, as in the Chapter House of Southwell Minster. We find them in paintings of the chase – paintings whose subject was that ever present fact of mediaeval life, the forest, seen as the hunter or the strayed traveller sees it, in all its bewildering intricacy of leafy detail.

The frescoes in the papal palace at Avignon are almost the sole survivors of what, even in the time of Chaucer, was a widely practised form of secular art. A century later this art of the forest closeup came to its self-conscious perfection in such magnificent and magical works as Pisanello's *St Hubert* and Paolo Uccello's *Hunt in a Wood*, now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. Closely related to the wall paintings of forest closeups were the tapestries, with which the rich men of northern Europe adorned their houses. The best of these are vision-inducing works of the highest order. In their own way they are as heavenly, as powerfully reminiscent of what goes on at the mind's antipodes, as are the great masterpieces of landscape painting at the furthest point – Sung mountains in their enormous solitude, Ming rivers interminably lovely, the blue sub-Alpine world of Titian's distances, the England of Constable; the Italies of Turner and Corot; the Provences of Cézanne and Van Gogh; the Île de France of Sisley and the Île de France of Vuillard.

Vuillard, incidentally, was a supreme master both of the transporting closeup and of the transporting distant view. His bourgeois interiors are masterpieces of vision-inducing art, compared with which the works of such conscious and so to say professional visionaries as Blake and Odilon Redon seem feeble in the extreme. In Vuillard's interiors every detail however trivial, however hideous even – the pattern of the late Victorian wallpaper, the Art Nouveau bibelot, the Brussels carpet – is seen and rendered as a living jewel; and all these jewels are harmoniously combined into a whole which is a jewel of a yet higher order of visionary intensity. And when the upper middle-class inhabitants of Vuillard's New Jerusalem go for a walk, they find themselves not, as they had supposed, in the department of Seine et Oise, but in the Garden of Eden, in an Other World which is yet essentially the same as this world, but transfigured and therefore transporting.

I have spoken so far only of the blissful visionary experience and of its interpretation in terms of theology, its translation into art. But visionary experience is not always blissful. It is sometimes terrible. There is hell as well as heaven.

Like heaven, the visionary hell has its praeternatural light and its praeternatural significance. But the significance is intrinsically appalling and the light is 'the smoky light' of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the 'darkness visible' of Milton. In the *Journal d'une Schizophrène*, the autobiographical record of a young girl's passage through madness, the world of the schizophrenic is called *le Pays d'Éclairement* – 'the country of lit-upness.' It is a name which a mystic might have used to denote his heaven.

But for poor Renée, the schizophrenic, the illumination is infernal – an intense electric glare without a shadow, ubiquitous and implacable. Everything that, for healthy visionaries, is a source of bliss, brings to Renée only fear and a nightmarish sense of unreality. The summer sunshine is malignant; the gleam of polished surfaces is suggestive, not of gems, but of machinery and enamelled tin; the intensity of existence which animates every object, when seen at close range and out of its utilitarian context, is felt as a menace.

And then there is the horror of infinity. For the healthy visionary, the perception of the infinite in a finite particular is a revelation of divine immanence; for Renée, it was a revelation of what she calls ‘the System,’ the vast cosmic mechanism which exists only to grind out guilt and punishment, solitude and unreality.’

Sanity is a matter of degree, and there are plenty of visionaries who see the world as Renée saw it, but contrive, none the less, to live outside the asylum. For them, as for the positive visionary, the universe is transfigured – but for the worse. Everything in it, from the stars in the sky to the dust under their feet, is unspeakably sinister or disgusting; every event is charged with a hateful significance; every object manifests the presence of an Indwelling Horror, infinite, all-powerful, eternal.

This negatively transfigured world has found its way, from time to time, into literature and the arts. It writhed and threatened in Van Gogh’s later landscapes; it was the setting and the theme of all Kafka’s stories; it was Géricault’s spiritual home; it was inhabited by Goya during the years of his deafness and solitude; it was glimpsed by Browning when he wrote *Childe Roland*; it had its place, over against the theophanies, in the novels of Charles Williams.

The negative visionary experience is often accompanied by bodily sensations of a very special and characteristic kind. Blissful visions are generally associated with a sense of separation from the body, a feeling of deindividualization. (It is, no doubt, this feeling of deindividualization which makes it possible for the Indians who practise the peyote cult to use the drug not merely as a short cut to the visionary world, but also as an instrument for creating a loving solidarity within the participating group.) When the visionary experience is terrible and the world is transfigured for the worse, individualization is intensified and the negative visionary finds himself associated with a body that seems to grow progressively more dense, more tightly packed, until he finds himself at last reduced to being the agonized consciousness of an inspissated lump of matter, no bigger than a stone that can be held between the hands.

It is worth remarking, that many of the punishments described in the various accounts of hell are punishments of pressure and constriction. Dante's sinners are buried in mud, shut up in the trunks of trees, frozen solid in blocks of ice, crushed beneath stones. The *Inferno* is psychologically true. Many of its pains are experienced by schizophrenics, and by those who have taken mescalin or lysergic acid under unfavourable conditions.

What is the nature of these unfavourable conditions? How and why is heaven turned into hell? In certain cases the negative visionary experience is the result of predominantly physical causes. Mescalin tends, after ingestion, to accumulate in the liver. If the liver is diseased, the associated mind may find itself in hell. But what is more important for our present purposes is the fact that negative visionary experience may be induced by purely psychological means. Fear and anger bar the way to the heavenly Other World and plunge the mescalin taker into hell.

And what is true of the mescalin taker is also true of the person who sees visions spontaneously or under hypnosis. Upon this psychological foundation has been reared the theological doctrine of saving faith – a doctrine to be met with in all the great religious traditions of the world. Eschatologists have always found it difficult to reconcile their rationality and their morality with the brute facts of psychological experience. As rationalists and moralists, they feel that good behaviour should be rewarded and that the virtuous deserve to go to heaven. But as psychologists they know that virtue is not the sole or sufficient condition of blissful visionary experience. They know that works alone are powerless and that it is faith, or loving confidence, which guarantees that visionary experience shall be blissful.

Negative emotions – the fear which is the absence of confidence, the hatred, anger or malice which exclude love – are the guarantee that visionary experience, if and when it comes, shall be appalling. The Pharisee is a virtuous man; but his virtue is of the kind which is compatible with negative emotion. His visionary experiences are therefore likely to be infernal rather than blissful.

The nature of the mind is such that the sinner who repents and makes an act of faith in a higher power is more likely to have a blissful visionary experience than is the self-satisfied pillar of society with his righteous indignations, his anxiety about possessions and pretensions, his ingrained habits of blaming, despising and condemning. Hence the enormous importance attached, in all the great religious traditions, to the state of mind at the moment of death.

Visionary experience is not the same as mystical experience. Mystical experience is beyond the realm of opposites. Visionary experience is still within that realm. Heaven entails hell, and ‘going to heaven ’is no more liberation than is the descent into horror. Heaven is merely a vantage point from which the divine Ground can be more clearly seen than on the level of ordinary individualized existence.

If consciousness survives bodily death, it survives, presumably, on every mental level – on the level of mystical experience, on the level of blissful visionary experience, on the level of infernal visionary experience, and on the level of everyday individual existence.

In life, even the blissful visionary experience tends to change its sign if it persists too long. Many schizophrenics have their times of heavenly happiness; but the fact that (unlike the mescalin taker) they do not know when, if ever, they will be permitted to return to the reassuring banality of everyday experience causes even heaven to seem appalling. But for those who, for whatever reason, are appalled, heaven turns into hell, bliss into horror, the Clear Light into the hateful glare of the land of lit-upness.

Something of the same kind may happen in the posthumous state. After having had a glimpse of the unbearable splendour of ultimate Reality, and after having shuttled back and forth between heaven and hell, most souls find it possible to retreat into that more reassuring region of the mind, where they can use their own and other people’s wishes, memories and fancies to construct a world very like that in which they lived on earth.

Of those who die an infinitesimal minority are capable of immediate union with the divine Ground, a few are capable of supporting the visionary bliss of

heaven, a few find themselves in the visionary horrors of hell and are unable to escape; the great majority end up in the kind of world described by Swedenborg and the mediums. From this world it is doubtless possible to pass, when the necessary conditions have been fulfilled, to worlds of visionary bliss or the final enlightenment.

My own guess is that modern spiritualism and ancient tradition are both correct. There *is* a posthumous state of the kind described in Sir Oliver Lodge's book, *Raymond*; but there is also a heaven of blissful visionary experience; there is also a hell of the same kind of appalling visionary experience as is suffered here by schizophrenics and some of those who take mescalin and there is also an experience, beyond time, of union with the divine Ground.

APPENDIX I

TWO OTHER, LESS effective aids to visionary experience deserve mention – carbon dioxide and the stroboscopic lamp. A mixture (completely non-toxic) of seven parts of oxygen and three of carbon dioxide produces, in those who inhale it, certain physical and psychological changes, which have been exhaustively described by Meduna. Among these changes the most important, in our present context, is a marked enhancement of the ability to 'see things,' when the eyes are closed. In some cases only swirls of patterned colour are seen. In others there may be vivid recalls of past experiences. (Hence the value of CO_2 as a therapeutic agent.) In yet other cases carbon dioxide transports the subject to the Other World at the antipodes of his everyday consciousness, and he enjoys very briefly visionary experiences entirely unconnected with his own personal history or with the problems of the human race in general.

In the light of these facts it becomes easy to understand the rationale of yogic breathing exercises. Practised systematically, these exercises result, after a time, in prolonged suspensions of breath. Long suspensions of breath lead to a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the lungs and blood, and this increase in the concentration of CO_2 lowers the efficiency of the brain as a reducing valve and permits the entry into consciousness of experiences, visionary or mystical, from 'out there.'

Prolonged and continuous shouting or singing may produce similar, but less strongly marked, results. Unless they are highly trained, singers tend to breathe out more than they breathe in. Consequently the concentration of carbon dioxide in the alveolar air and the blood is increased and, the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve being lowered, visionary experience becomes possible. Hence the interminable 'vain repetitions' of magic and religion. The chanting of the *curandero*, the medicine-man, the shaman; the endless psalm-singing and sutra-

intoning of Christian and Buddhist monks; the shouting and howling, hour after hour, of revivalists – under all the diversities of theological belief and aesthetic convention, the psychochemico-physiological intention remains constant. To increase the concentration of CO_2 in the lungs and blood and so to lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve, until it will admit biologically useless material from Mind-at-Large – this, though the shouters, singers and mutterers did not know it, has been at all times the real purpose and point of magic spells, of mantrams, litanies, psalms and sutras. ‘The heart,’ said Pascal, ‘has its reasons.’ Still more cogent and much harder to unravel are the reasons of the lungs, the blood and the enzymes, of neurones and synapses. The way to the superconscious is through the subconscious, and the way, or at least one of the ways, to the subconscious is through the chemistry of individual cells.

With the stroboscopic lamp we descend from chemistry to the still more elementary realm of physics. Its rhythmically flashing light seems to act directly, through the optic nerves, on the electrical manifestations of the brain’s activity. (For this reason there is always a slight danger involved in the use of the stroboscopic lamp. Some persons suffer from *petit mal* without being made aware of the fact by any clear-cut and unmistakable symptoms. Exposed to a stroboscopic lamp, such persons may go into a full-blown epileptic fit. The risk is not very great; but it must always be recognized. One case in eighty may turn out badly.

To sit, with eyes closed, in front of a stroboscopic lamp is a very curious and fascinating experience. No sooner is the lamp turned on than the most brilliantly coloured patterns make themselves visible. These patterns are not static, but change incessantly. Their prevailing colour is a function of the stroboscope’s rate of discharge. When the lamp is flashing at any speed between ten to fourteen or fifteen times a second, the patterns are prevailingly orange and red. Green and blue make their appearance when the rate exceeds fifteen flashes a second. After eighteen or nineteen, the patterns become white and grey. Precisely why we should see such patterns under the stroboscope is not known.

The most obvious explanation would be in terms of the interference of two or more rhythms – the rhythm of the lamp and the various rhythms of the brain's electrical activity. Such interferences may be translated by the visual centre and optic nerves into something, of which the mind becomes conscious as a coloured, moving pattern. Far more difficult to explain is the fact, independently observed by several experimenters, that the stroboscope tends to enrich and intensify the visions induced by mescalin or lysergic acid. Here, for example, is a case communicated to me by a medical friend. He had taken lysergic acid and was seeing, with his eyes shut, only coloured, moving patterns. Then he sat down in front of a stroboscope. The lamp was turned on and, immediately, abstract geometry was transformed into what my friend described as 'Japanese landscapes' of surpassing beauty. But how on earth can the interference of two rhythms produce an arrangement of electrical impulses interpretable as a living, self-modulating Japanese landscape unlike anything the subject has ever seen, suffused with praeternatural light and colour, and charged with praeternatural significance?

This mystery is merely a particular case of a larger, more comprehensive mystery – the nature of the relations between visionary experience and events on the cellular, chemical and electrical levels. By touching certain areas of the brain with a very fine electrode, Penfield has been able to induce the recall of a long chain of memories relating to some past experience. This recall is not merely accurate on every perceptual detail; it is also accompanied by all the emotions which were aroused by the events when they originally occurred. The patient, who is under a local anaesthetic, finds himself simultaneously in two times and places – in the operating room, now, and in his childhood home, hundreds of miles away and thousands of days in the past. Is there, one wonders, some area in the brain from which the probing electrode could elicit Blake's Cherubim, or Weir Mitchell's self-transforming Gothic tower encrusted with living gems, or my friend's unspeakably lovely Japanese landscapes? And if as I myself believe, visionary experiences enter our consciousness from somewhere 'out there' in the infinity of Mind-at-Large, what sort of an *ad hoc* neurological pattern is created

for them by the receiving and transmitting brain? And what happens to this *ad hoc* pattern, when the vision is over? Why do all visionaries insist on the impossibility of recalling, in anything even faintly resembling its original form and intensity, their transfiguring experiences? How many questions – and, as yet, how few answers!

APPENDIX II

IN THE WESTERN world visionaries and mystics are a good deal less common than they used to be. There are two principal reasons for this state of affairs – a philosophical reason and a chemical reason. In the currently fashionable picture of the universe there is no place for valid transcendental experience. Consequently those who have had what they regard as valid transcendental experiences are looked upon with suspicion, as being either lunatics or swindlers. To be a mystic or a visionary is no longer creditable.

But it is not only our mental climate that is unfavourable to the visionary and the mystic; it is also our chemical environment – an environment profoundly different from that in which our forefathers passed their lives.

The brain is chemically controlled, and experience has shown that it can be made permeable to the (biologically speaking) superfluous aspects of Mind-at-Large by modifying the (biologically speaking) normal chemistry of the body.

For almost half of every year our ancestors ate no fruit, no green vegetables and (since it was impossible for them to feed more than a few oxen, cows, swine and poultry during the winter months) very little butter or fresh meat, and very few eggs. By the beginning of each successive spring, most of them were suffering, mildly or acutely, from scurvy, due to lack of vitamin C, and pellagra, caused by a shortage in their diet of the B complex. The distressing physical symptoms of these diseases are associated with no less distressing psychological symptoms.

The nervous system is more vulnerable than the other tissues of the body; consequently vitamin deficiencies tend to affect the state of mind before they affect, at least in any very obvious way, the skin, bones, mucous membranes, muscles and viscera. The first result of an inadequate diet is a lowering of the efficiency of the brain as an instrument for biological survival. The

undernourished person tends to be afflicted by anxiety, depression, hypochondria and feelings of anxiety. He is also liable to see visions; for when the cerebral reducing valve has its efficiency reduced, much (biologically speaking) useless material flows into consciousness from ‘out there,’ in Mind-at-Large.

Much of what the earlier visionaries experienced was terrifying. To use the language of Christian theology, the Devil revealed himself in their visions and ecstasies a good deal more frequently than did God. In an age when vitamins were deficient and a belief in Satan universal, this was not surprising. The mental distress, associated with even mild cases of pellagra and scurvy, was deepened by fears of damnation and a conviction that the powers of evil were omnipresent. This distress was apt to tinge with its own dark colouring the visionary material, admitted to consciousness through a cerebral valve whose efficiency had been impaired by underfeeding. But in spite of their preoccupations with eternal punishment and in spite of their deficiency disease, spiritually minded ascetics often saw heaven and might even be aware, occasionally, of that divinely impartial One, in which the polar opposites are reconciled. For a glimpse of beatitude, for a foretaste of unitive knowledge, no price seemed too high. Mortification of the body may produce a host of undesirable mental symptoms; but it may also open a door into a transcendental world of Being, Knowledge and Bliss. That is why, in spite of its obvious disadvantages, almost all aspirants to the spiritual life have, in the past, undertaken regular courses of bodily mortification.

So far as vitamins were concerned, every mediaeval winter was a long involuntary fast, and this involuntary fast was followed, during Lent, by forty days of voluntary abstinence. Holy Week found the faithful marvellously well prepared, so far as their body chemistry was concerned, for its tremendous incitements to grief and joy, for seasonable remorse of conscience and a self-transcending identification with the risen Christ. At this season of the highest religious excitement and the lowest vitamin intake, ecstasies and visions were almost a commonplace. It was only to be expected.

For cloistered contemplatives, there were several Lents in every year. And even between fasts their diet was meagre in the extreme. Hence those agonies of depression and scrupulosity described by so many spiritual writers; hence their frightful temptations to despair and self-slaughter. But hence too those ‘gratuitous graces,’ in the form of heavenly visions and locutions, of prophetic insights, of telepathic ‘discernments of spirits.’ And hence, finally, their ‘infused contemplation,’ their ‘obscure knowledge’ of the One in all.

Fasting was not the only form of physical mortification resorted to by the earlier aspirants to spirituality. Most of them regularly used upon themselves the whip of knotted leather or even of iron wire. These beatings were the equivalent of fairly extensive surgery without anaesthetics, and their effects on the body chemistry of the penitent were considerable. Large quantities of histamine and adrenalin were released while the whip was actually being plied; and when the resulting wounds began to fester (as wounds practically always did before the age of soap), various toxic substances, produced by the decomposition of protein, found their way into the bloodstream. But histamine produces shock, and shock affects the mind no less profoundly than the body. Moreover, large quantities of adrenalin may cause hallucinations, and some of the products of its decomposition are known to induce symptoms resembling those of schizophrenia. As for toxins from wounds – these upset the enzyme systems regulating the brain, and lower its efficiency as an instrument for getting on in a world where the biologically fittest survive. This may explain why the Curé d’Ars used to say that, in the days when he was free to flagellate himself without mercy, God would refuse him nothing. In other words, when remorse, self-loathing and the fear of hell release adrenalin, when self-inflicted surgery releases adrenalin and histamine and when infected wounds release decomposed protein into the blood, the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve is lowered and unfamiliar aspects of Mind-at-Large (including psi phenomena, visions and, if he is philosophically and ethically prepared for it, mystical experiences) will flow into the ascetic’s consciousness.

Lent, as we have seen, followed a long period of involuntary fasting. Analogously, the effects of self-flagellation were supplemented, in earlier times, by much involuntary absorption of decomposed protein. Dentistry was non-existent, surgeons were executioners and there were no safe antiseptics. Most people, therefore, must have lived out their lives with focal infections; and focal infections, though out of fashion as the cause of *all* the ills that flesh is heir to, can certainly lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve.

And the moral of all this is – what? Exponents of a Nothing-But philosophy will answer that, since changes in body chemistry can create the conditions favourable to visionary and mystical experience, visionary and mystical experience cannot be what they claim to be – what, for those who have had them, they self-evidently are. But this, of course, is a *non sequitur*.

A similar conclusion will be reached by those whose philosophy is unduly 'spiritual.' God, they will insist, is a spirit and is to be worshipped in spirit. Therefore an experience which is chemically conditioned cannot be an experience of the divine. But, in one way or another, *all* our experiences are chemically conditioned, and if we imagine that some of them are purely 'spiritual,' purely 'intellectual,' purely 'aesthetic,' it is merely because we have never troubled to investigate the internal chemical environment at the moment of their occurrence. Furthermore, it is a matter of historical record that most contemplatives worked systematically to modify their body chemistry, with a view to creating the internal conditions favourable to spiritual insight. When they were not starving themselves into low blood sugar and a vitamin deficiency, or beating themselves into intoxication by histamine, adrenalin and decomposed protein, they were cultivating insomnia and praying for long periods in uncomfortable positions, in order to create the psycho-physical symptoms of stress. In the intervals they sang interminable psalms, thus increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the lungs and the bloodstream, or, if they were Orientals, they did breathing exercises to accomplish the same purpose. Today we know how to lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve by direct chemical action, and without the risk of inflicting serious damage on the psycho-physical

organism. For an aspiring mystic to revert, in the present state of knowledge, to prolonged fasting and violent self-flagellation would be as senseless as it would be for an aspiring cook to behave like Charles Lamb's Chinaman, who burned down the house in order to roast a pig. Knowing as he does (or at least as he can know, if he so desires) what are the chemical conditions of transcendental experience, the aspiring mystic should turn for technical help to the specialists – in pharmacology, in biochemistry, in physiology and neurology, in psychology and psychiatry and parapsychology. And on their part, of course, the specialists (if any of them aspire to be genuine men of science and complete human beings) should turn, out of their respective pigeon-holes, to the artist, the sibyl, the visionary, the mystic – all those, in a word, who have had experience of the Other World and who know, in their different ways, what to do with that experience.

APPENDIX III

VISION-LIKE EFFECTS AND vision-inducing devices have played a greater part in popular entertainment than in the fine arts. Fireworks, pageantry, theatrical spectacle – these are essentially visionary arts. Unfortunately they are also ephemeral arts, whose earlier masterpieces are known to us only by report. Nothing remains of all the Roman triumphs, the mediaeval tournaments, the Jacobean masques, the long succession of state entries and coronations, of royal marriages and solemn decapitations, of canonizations and the funerals of Popes. The best that can be hoped for such magnificences is that they may 'live in Settle's numbers one day more.'

An interesting feature of these popular visionary arts is their close dependence upon contemporary technology. Fireworks, for example, were once no more than bonfires (and to this day, I may add, a good bonfire on a dark night remains one of the most magical and transporting of spectacles. Looking at it, one can understand the mentality of the Mexican peasant, who sets out to burn an acre of woodland in order to plant his maize, but is delighted when, by a happy accident, a square mile or two goes up in bright, apocalyptic flame). True pyrotechny began (in Europe at least, if not in China) with the use of combustibles in sieges and naval battles. From war it passed, in due course, to entertainment. Imperial Rome had its firework displays, some of which, even in its decline, were elaborate in the extreme. Here is Claudian's description of the show put on by Manlius Theodorus in A.D. 399.

Mobile ponderibus descendat pegma reductis
inque chori speciem spargentes ardua flammas
scaena rotet varios, et fingat Mulciber orbis
per tabulas impune vagos pictaeque citato

ludant igne trabes, et non permissa morari
fida per innocuas errent incendia turres.

‘Let the counterweights be removed,’ Mr Platnauer translates with a straightforwardness of language that does less than justice to the syntactical extravagances of the original, ‘and let the mobile crane descend, lowering on to the lofty stage men who, wheeling chorus-wise, scatter flames. Let Vulcan forge balls of fire to roll innocuously across the boards. Let the flames appear to play about the sham beams of the scenery and a tame conflagration, never allowed to rest, wander among the untouched towers.’

After the fall of Rome, pyrotechny became, once more, exclusively a military art. Its greatest triumph was the invention by Callinicus, about A.D. 650, of the famous Greek Fire – the secret weapon which enabled a dwindling Byzantine Empire to hold out for so long against its enemies.

During the Renaissance fireworks re-entered the world of popular entertainment. With every advance in the science of chemistry, they became more and more brilliant. By the middle of the nineteenth century pyrotechny had reached a peak of technical perfection and was capable of transporting vast multitudes of spectators towards the visionary antipodes of minds which, consciously, were respectable Methodist, Puseyites, Utilitarians, disciples of Mill or Marx, of Newman, or Bradlaugh, or Samuel Smiles. In the Piazza del Popolo, at Ranelagh and the Crystal Palace, on every Fourth and Fourteenth of July, the popular subconscious was reminded by the crimson glare of strontium, by copper blue and barium green and sodium yellow, of that Other World, down under, in the psychological equivalent of Australia.

Pageantry is a visionary art which has been used, from time immemorial, as a political instrument. The gorgeous fancy dress worn by Kings, Popes and their respective retainers, military and ecclesiastical, has a very practical purpose – to impress the lower classes with a lively sense of their masters’ superhuman greatness. By means of fine clothes and solemn ceremonies, *de facto* domination is transformed into a rule not merely *de jure*, but positively, *de jure divino*. The

crowns and tiaras, the assorted jewellery, the satins, silks and velvets, the gaudy uniforms and vestments, the crosses and medals, the sword hilts and the croziers, the plumes in the cocked hats and their clerical equivalents, those huge feather fans which make every papal function look like a tableau from *Aida* – all these are vision-inducing properties, designed to make all too human gentlemen and ladies look like heroes, demigoddesses and seraphs, and giving, in the process, a great deal of innocent pleasure to all concerned, actors and spectators alike.

In the course of the last two hundred years the technology of artificial lighting has made enormous progress, and this progress has contributed very greatly to the effectiveness of pageantry and the closely related art of theatrical spectacle. The first notable advance was made in the eighteenth century, with the introduction of moulded spermaceti candles in place of the older tallow dip and poured wax taper. Next came the invention of Argand's tubular wick, with an air supply on the inner as well as the outer surface of the flame. Glass chimneys speedily followed, and it became possible, for the first time in history, to burn oil with a bright and completely smokeless light. Coal gas was first employed as an illuminant in the early years of the nineteenth century, and in 1825 Thomas Drummond found a practical way of heating lime to incandescence by means of an oxygen-hydrogen or oxygen-coal gas flame. Meanwhile parabolic reflectors for concentrating light into a narrow beam had come into use. (The first English lighthouse equipped with such a reflector was built in 1790.)

The influence on pageantry and theatrical spectacle of these inventions was profound. In earlier times civic and religious ceremonies could only take place during the day (and days were as often cloudy as fine), or by the light, after sunset, of smoky lamps and torches or the feeble twinkling of candles. Argand and Drummond, gas, limelight and, forty years later, electricity made it possible to evoke, from the boundless chaos of night, rich island universes, in which the glitter of metal and gems, the sumptuous glow of velvets and brocades were intensified to the highest pitch of what may be called intrinsic significance. A recent example of ancient pageantry, raised by twentieth-century lighting to a higher magical power, was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. In the motion

picture of the event, a ritual of transporting splendour was saved from the oblivion which, up till now, has always been the fate of such solemnities, and preserved it, blazing praeternaturally under the floodlights, for the delight of a vast contemporary and future audience.

Two distinct and separate arts are practised in the theatre – the human art of the drama, and the visionary, other-world art of spectacle. Elements of the two arts may be combined in a single evening's entertainment – the drama being interrupted (as so often happens in elaborate productions of Shakespeare) to permit the audience to enjoy a *tableau vivant*, in which the actors either remain still or, if they move, move only in a non-dramatic way, ceremonially, processionally or in a formal dance. Our concern here is not with drama; it is with theatrical spectacle, which is simply pageantry without its political or religious overtones.

In the minor visionary arts of the costumier and the designer of stage jewellery our ancestors were consummate masters. Nor, for all their dependence on unassisted muscle power, were they far behind us in the building and working of stage machinery, the contrivance of 'special effects.' In the masques of Elizabethan and early Stuart times, divine descents and irruptions of demons from the cellarage were a commonplace; so were apocalypses, so were the most amazing metamorphoses. Enormous sums of money were lavished on these spectacles. The Inns of Court, for example, put on a show for Charles I which cost more than twenty thousand pounds – at a date when the purchasing power of the pound was six or seven times what it is to-day.

'Carpentry,' said Ben Jonson sarcastically, 'is the soul of masque.' His contempt was motivated by resentment. Inigo Jones was paid as much for designing the scenery as was Ben for writing the libretto. The outraged laureate had evidently failed to grasp the fact that masque is a visionary art, and that visionary experience is beyond words (at any rate beyond all but the most Shakespearean words) and is to be evoked by direct, unmediated perceptions of things that remind the beholder of what is going on at the unexplored antipodes of his own personal consciousness. The soul of masque could never, in the very

nature of things, be a Jonsonian libretto; it *had* to be carpentry. But even carpentry could not be the masque's whole soul. When it comes to us from within, visionary experience is always praeternaturally brilliant. But the early set designers possessed no manageable illuminant brighter than a candle. At close range a candle can create the most magical lights and contrasting shadows. The visionary paintings of Rembrandt and Georges de Latour are of things and persons seen by candlelight. Unfortunately light obeys the law of the inverse squares. At a safe distance from an actor in inflammable fancy dress, candles are hopelessly inadequate. At ten feet, for example, it would take one hundred of the best wax tapers to produce an effective illumination of one foot-candle. With such miserable lighting only a fraction of the masque's visionary potentialities could be made actual. Indeed, its visionary potentialities were not fully realized until long after it had ceased, in its original form, to exist. It was only in the nineteenth century, when advancing technology had equipped the theatre with limelight and parabolic reflectors, that the masque came fully into its own. Victoria's reign was the heroic age of the so called Christmas pantomime and the fantastic spectacle. 'Ali Baba,' 'The King of the Peacocks,' 'The Golden Branch,' 'The Island of Jewels' – their very names are magical. The soul of that theatrical magic was carpentry and dressmaking; its indwelling spirit, its *scintilla animae*, was gas and limelight and, after the 'eighties, electricity. For the first time in the history of the stage, beams of brightest incandescence transfigured the painted backdrops, the costumes, the glass and pinchbeck of jewellery, so that they became capable of transporting the spectators towards that Other World which lies at the back of every mind, however perfect its adaptation to the exigencies of social life – even the social life of Mid-Victorian England. Today we are in the fortunate position of being able to squander half a million horsepower on the nightly illumination of a metropolis. And yet, in spite of this devaluation of artificial light, theatrical spectacle still retains its old compelling magic. Embodied in ballets, revues and musical comedies, the soul of masque goes marching along. Thousand-watt lamps and parabolic reflectors project beams of praeternatural light, and praeternatural light evokes, in everything it

touches, praeternatural colour and praeternatural significance. Even the silliest spectacle can be rather wonderful. It is a case of a New World having been called in to redress the balance of the old – of visionary art making up for the deficiencies of all too human drama.

Athanasius Kircher's invention – if his, indeed, it was – was christened from the first *Lanterna Magica*. The name was everywhere adopted as perfectly appropriate to a machine, whose raw material was light, and whose finished product was a coloured image emerging from the darkness. To make the original magic lantern show yet more magical, Kircher's successors devised a number of methods for imparting life and movement to the projected image. There were 'chromatropic' slides, in which two painted glass discs could be made to revolve in opposite directions, producing a crude but still effective imitation of those perpetually changing three-dimensional patterns, which have been seen by virtually everyone who has had a vision, whether spontaneous or induced by drugs, fasting or the stroboscopic lamp. Then there were those 'dissolving views,' which reminded the spectator of the metamorphoses going on incessantly at the antipodes of his everyday consciousness. To make one scene turn imperceptibly into another, two magic lanterns were used, projecting coincident images on the screen. Each lantern was fitted with a shutter, so arranged that the light of one could be progressively dimmed, while the light of the other (originally completely obscured) was progressively brightened. In this way the view projected by the first lantern was insensibly replaced by the view by the second – to the delight and astonishment of all beholders. Another device was the mobile magic lantern, projecting its image on a semi-transparent screen, on the further side of which sat the audience. When the lantern was wheeled close to the screen, the projected image was very small. As it was withdrawn, the image became progressively larger. An automatic focussing device kept the changing images sharp and unblurred at all distances. The word 'phantasmagoria' was coined in 1802 by the inventors of this new kind of peepshow.

All these improvements in the technology of magic lanterns were contemporary with the poets and painters of the Romantic Revival, and may perhaps have exercised a certain influence on their choice of subject-matter and their methods of treating it. *Queen Mab* and *The Revolt of Islam*, for example, are full of Dissolving Views and Phantasmagorias. Keats's descriptions of scenes and persons, of interiors and furniture and effects of light, have the intense beamy quality of coloured images on a white sheet in a darkened room. John Martin's representations of Satan and Belshazzar, of Hell and Babylon and the Deluge, are manifestly inspired by lantern slides and *tableaux vivants* dramatically illuminated by limelight.

The twentieth-century equivalent of the magic lantern show is the coloured movie. In the huge, expensive 'spectaculars,' the soul of masque goes marching along – with a vengeance sometimes, but sometimes also with taste and a real feeling for vision-inducing phantasy. Moreover, thanks to advancing technology, the coloured documentary has proved itself, in skilful hands, a notable new form of popular visionary art. The immensely magnified cactus blossoms, into which, at the end of Disney's *The Living Desert*, the spectator finds himself sinking, come straight from the Other World. And then what transporting visions, in the best of the nature films, of foliage in the wind, of the textures of rock and sand, of the shadows and emerald lights in grass or among the reeds, of birds and insects and four-footed creatures going about their business in the underbrush or among the branches of forest trees! Here are the magical close-up landscapes which fascinated the makers of *mille-feuille* tapestries, the mediaeval painters of gardens and hunting scenes. Here are the enlarged and isolated details of living nature out of which the artists of the Far East made some of the most beautiful of their paintings.

And then there is what may be called the Distorted Documentary – a strange new form of visionary art, admirably exemplified by Mr Francis Thompson's film, 'NY, NY.' In this very strange and beautiful picture we see the city of New York as it appears when photographed through multiplying prisms, or reflected in the backs of spoons, polished hub caps, spherical and parabolic mirrors. We

still recognize houses, people, shop fronts, taxi cabs, but recognize them as elements in one of those living geometries which are so characteristic of the visionary experience. The invention of this new cinematographic art seems to presage (thank heaven!) the supersession and early demise of non-representational painting. It is used to be said by the non-representationalists that coloured photography had reduced the old-fashioned portrait and the old-fashioned landscape to the rank of otiose absurdities. This, of course, is completely untrue. Coloured photography merely records and preserves, in an easily reproducible form, the raw materials with which portraitists and landscape painters work. Used as Mr Thompson has used it, coloured cinematography does much more than merely record and preserve the raw materials of non-representational art; it actually turns out the finished product. Looking at 'NY, NY,' I was amazed to see that virtually every pictorial device invented by the Old Masters of non-representational art and reproduced *ad nauseam* by the academicians and mannerists of the school, for the last forty years or more, makes its appearance, alive, glowing, intensely significant, in the sequences of Mr Thompson's film.

Our ability to project a powerful beam of light has not only enabled us to create new forms of visionary art; it has also endowed one of the most ancient arts, the art of sculpture, with a new visionary quality which it did not previously possess. I have spoken in an earlier paragraph of the magical effects produced by the floodlighting of ancient monuments and natural objects. Analogous effects are seen when we turn the spotlights on to sculptured stone. Fuseli got the inspiration from some of his best and wildest pictorial ideas by studying the statues on Monte Cavallo by the light of the setting sun, or, better still, when illuminated by lightning flashes at midnight. Today we dispose of artificial sunsets and synthetic lightning. We can illuminate our statues from whatever angle we choose, and with practically any desired degree of intensity. Sculpture, in consequence, has revealed fresh meanings and unsuspected beauties. Visit the Louvre one night, when the Greek and Egyptian antiquities are floodlit. You will meet with new gods, nymphs and Pharaohs, you will make the acquaintance, as

one spotlight goes out and another, in a different quarter of space, is lit up, of a whole family of unfamiliar Victories of Samothrace.

The past is not something fixed and unalterable. Its facts are re-discovered by every succeeding generation, its values re-assessed, its meanings re-defined in the context of present tastes and preoccupations. Out of the same documents and monuments and works of art, every epoch invents its own Middle Ages, its private China, its patented and copyrighted Hellas. Today, thanks to recent advances in the technology of lighting, we can go one further than our predecessors. Not only have we reinterpreted the great works of sculpture bequeathed to us by the past; we have actually succeeded in altering the physical appearance of these works. Greek statues, as we see them illuminated by a light that never was on land or sea, and then photographed in a series of fragmentary close-ups from the oddest angles, bear almost no resemblance to the Greek statues seen by art critics and the general public in the dim galleries and decorous engravings of the past. The aim of the classical artist, in whatever period he may happen to live, is to impart order to the chaos of experience, to present a comprehensible, rational picture of reality in which all the parts are clearly seen and coherently related, so that the beholder knows (or, to be more accurate, imagines that he knows) precisely what's what. To us this ideal of rational orderliness makes no appeal. Consequently, when we are confronted by works of classical art, we use all the means in our power to make them look like something which they are not, and were never meant to be. From a work, whose whole point is its unity of conception, we select a single feature, focus our searchlights upon it and so force it, out of all context, upon the observer's consciousness. Where a contour seems to us too continuous, too obviously comprehensible, we break it up by alternating impenetrable shadows with patches of glaring brightness. When we photograph a sculptured figure or group, we use the camera to isolate a part which we then exhibit in enigmatic independence from the whole. By such means we can de-classicize the severest classic. Subjected to the light treatment and photographed by an expert cameraman, a Pheidias becomes a piece of Gothic expressionism, a Praxiteles is

turned into a fascinating *surréaliste* object dredged up from the ooziest depths of the subconscious. This may be bad art history, but it is certainly enormous fun.

APPENDIX IV

PAINTER IN ORDINARY first to the Duke of his native Lorraine and later to the King of France, Georges de Latour was treated, during his lifetime, as the great artist he so manifestly was. With the accession of Louis XIV and the rise, the deliberate cultivation, of a new Art of Versailles, aristocratic in subject-matter and lucidly classical in style, the reputation of this once famous man suffered an eclipse so complete that, within a couple of generations, his very name had been forgotten, and his surviving paintings came to be attributed to the Le Nains, to Honthorst, to Zurbaran, to Murillo, even to Velasquez. The rediscovery of Latour began in 1915 and was virtually complete by 1934, when the Louvre organized a notable exhibition of 'The Painters of Reality.' Ignored for nearly three hundred years, one of the greatest of French painters had come back to claim his rights.

Georges de Latour was one of those extroverted visionaries, whose art faithfully reflects certain aspects of the outer world, but reflects them in a state of transfigurement, so that every meanest particular becomes intrinsically significant, a manifestation of the absolute. Most of his compositions are of figures seen by the light of a single candle. A single candle, as Caravaggio and the Spaniards had shown, can give rise to the most enormous theatrical effects. But Latour took no interest in theatrical effects. There is nothing dramatic in his pictures, nothing tragic or pathetic or grotesque, no representation of action, no appeal to the sort of emotions which people go to the theatre to have excited and then appeased. His personages are essentially static. They never *do* anything; they are simply *there* in the same way in which a granite Pharaoh is there, or a Bodhisattva from Khmer, or one of Piero's flat-footed angels. And the single candle is used, in every case, to stress this intense but unexcited, impersonal thereness. By exhibiting common things in an uncommon light, its flame makes

manifest the living mystery and inexplicable marvel of mere existence. There is so little religiosity in the paintings that in many cases it is impossible to decide whether we are confronted by an illustration to the Bible or a study of models by candlelight. Is the ‘Nativity’ at Rennes *the* nativity, or merely a nativity? Is the picture of an old man asleep under the eyes of a young girl merely that? Or is it of St Peter in prison being visited by the delivering angel? There is no way of telling. But though Latour’s art is wholly without religiosity, it remains profoundly religious, in the sense that it reveals, with unexampled intensity, the divine omnipresence.

It must be added that, as a man, this great painter of God’s immanence seems to have been proud, hard, intolerably overbearing and avaricious. Which goes to show, yet once more, that there is never a one-to-one correspondence between an artist’s work and his character.

APPENDIX V

AT THE NEAR-POINT Vuillard painted interiors for the most part, but sometimes also gardens. In a few compositions he managed to combine the magic of propinquity with the magic of remoteness by representing a corner of a room, in which there stands or hangs one of his own, or someone else's, representation of a distant view of trees, hills and sky. It is an invitation to make the best of both worlds, the telescopic and the microscopic, at a single glance.

For the rest, I can think of only a very few close-up landscapes by modern European artists. There is a strange 'Thicket' by Van Gogh at the Metropolitan. There is Constable's wonderful 'Dell in Helmingham Park' at the Tate. There is a bad picture, Millais' 'Ophelia,' made magical, in spite of everything, by its intricacies of summer greenery seen from the point of view, very nearly, of a water rat. And I remember a Delacroix, glimpsed long ago at some Loan Exhibition, of bark and leaves and blossom at the closest range. There must, of course, be others; but either I have forgotten, or have never seen them. In any case there is nothing in the West comparable to the Chinese and Japanese renderings of nature at the near-point. A spray of blossoming plum, eighteen inches of bamboo stem with its leaves, tits or finches seen at hardly more than arm's length among the bushes, all kinds of flowers and foliage, of birds and fish and small mammals. Each small life is represented as the centre of its own universe, the purpose, in its own estimation, for which this world and all that is in it were created; each issues its own specific and individual declaration of independence from human imperialism; each, by ironic implication, derides our absurd pretensions to lay down merely human rules for the conduct of the cosmic game; each mutely repeats the divine tautology: I am that I am.

Nature at the middle distance is familiar – so familiar that we are deluded into believing that we really know what it is all about. Seen very close at hand, or at a

great distance, or from an odd angle, it seems disquietingly strange, wonderful beyond all comprehension. The close-up landscapes of China and Japan are so many illustrations of the theme that Samsara and Nirvana are one, that the Absolute is manifest in every appearance. These great metaphysical, and yet pragmatic, truths were rendered by the Zen-inspired artists of the Far East in yet another way. All the objects of their near-point scrutiny were represented in a state of unrelatedness, against a blank of virgin silk or paper. Thus isolated, these transient appearances take on a kind of absolute Thing-in-Itselfhood. Western artists have used this device when painting sacred figures, portraits and, sometimes, natural objects at a distance. Rembrandt's 'Mill' and Van Gogh's 'Cypresses' are examples of long-range landscapes, in which a single feature has been absolutized by isolation. The magical power of many of Goya's etchings, drawings and paintings can be accounted for by the fact that his compositions almost always take the form of a few silhouettes, or even a single silhouette, seen against a blank. These silhouetted shapes possess the visionary quality of intrinsic significance, heightened by isolation and unrelatedness to praeternatural intensity.

In nature, as in a work of art, the isolation of an object tends to invest it with absoluteness, to endow it with that more-than-symbolic meaning which is identical with being.

But there's a tree – of many, one –
A single *field which I have looked upon:*
Both of them speak of something that is gone.

The something which Wordsworth could no longer see was 'the visionary gleam.' That gleam, I remember, and that intrinsic significance were the properties of a solitary oak that could be seen from the train, between Reading and Oxford, growing from the summit of a little knoll in a wide expanse of ploughland, and silhouetted against the pale northern sky.

The effects of isolation combined with proximity may be studied, in all their magical strangeness, in an extraordinary painting by a seventeenth-century Japanese artist, who was also a famous swordsman and a student of Zen. It represents a butcher bird, perched on the very tip of a naked branch, ‘waiting without purpose, but in the state of highest tension.’ Beneath, above and all around is nothing. The bird emerges from the Void, from that eternal namelessness and formlessness, which is yet the very substance of the manifold, concrete and transient universe. That shrike on its bare branch is first cousin to Hardy’s wintry thrush. But whereas the Victorian thrush insists on teaching us some kind of a lesson, the Far Eastern butcher bird is content simply to exist, to be intensely and absolutely *there*.

APPENDIX VI

MANY SCHIZOPHRENICS PASS most of their time neither on earth, nor in heaven, nor even in hell, but in a grey, shadowy world of phantoms and unrealities. What is true of these psychotics is true, to a lesser extent, of certain neurotics afflicted by a milder form of mental illness. Recently it has been found possible to induce this state of ghostly existence by administering a small quantity of one of the derivatives of adrenalin. For the living, the doors of heaven, hell and limbo are opened, not by 'massy keys of metals twain,' but by the presence in the blood of one set of chemical compounds and the absence of another set. The shadow-world inhabited by some schizophrenics and neurotics closely resembles the world of the dead, as described in some of the earlier religious traditions. Like the wraiths in Sheol and in Homer's Hades, these mentally disturbed persons have lost touch with matter, language and their fellow beings. They have no purchase on life and are condemned to ineffectiveness, solitude and a silence broken only by the senseless squeak and gibber of ghosts.

The history of eschatological ideas marks a genuine progress – a progress which can be described in theological terms as the passage from Hades to Heaven, in chemical terms as the substitution of mescalin and lysergic acid for adrenolutin, and in psychological terms as the advance from catatonia and feelings of unreality to a sense of heightened reality in vision and, finally, in mystical experience.

APPENDIX VII

GERICAULT WAS A negative visionary; for though his art was almost obsessively true to nature, it was true to a nature that had been magically transfigured, in his perceiving and rendering of it, for the worse. ‘I start to paint a woman,’ he once said, ‘but it always ends up as a lion.’ More often, indeed, it ended up as something a good deal less amiable than a lion – as a corpse, for example, or as a demon. His masterpiece, the prodigious ‘Raft of the *Medusa*,’ was painted not from life but from dissolution and decay – from bits of cadavers supplied by medical students, from the emaciated torso and jaundiced face of a friend who was suffering from a disease of the liver. Even the waves on which the raft is floating, even the overarching sky are corpse-coloured. It is as though the entire universe had become a dissecting room.

And then there are his demonic pictures. ‘The Derby,’ it is obvious, is being run in hell, against a background fairly blazing with darkness visible. ‘The Horse startled by Lightning,’ in the National Gallery, is the revelation, in a single frozen instant, of the strangeness, the sinister and even infernal otherness that hides in familiar things. In the Metropolitan Museum there is a portrait of a child. And what a child! In his luridly brilliant jacket the little darling is what Baudelaire liked to call ‘a budding Satan,’ *un Satan en herbe*. And the study of a naked man, also in the Metropolitan, is none other than the budding Satan grown up.

From the accounts which his friends have left of him it is evident that Géricault habitually saw the world about him as a succession of visionary apocalypses. The prancing horse of his early *Officier de Chasseurs* was seen one morning, on the road to Saint-Cloud, in a dusty glare of summer sunshine, rearing and plunging between the shafts of an omnibus. The personages in the ‘Raft of the *Medusa*’ were painted in finished detail, one by one, on the virgin

canvas. There was no outline drawing of the whole composition, no gradual building up of an over-all harmony of tones and hues. Each particular revelation – of a body in decay, of a sick man in the ghastly extremity of hepatitis – was fully rendered as it was seen and artistically realized. By a miracle of genius, every successive apocalypse was made to fit, prophetically, into a harmonious composition which existed, when the first of the appalling visions was transferred to canvas, only in the artist’s imagination.

APPENDIX VIII

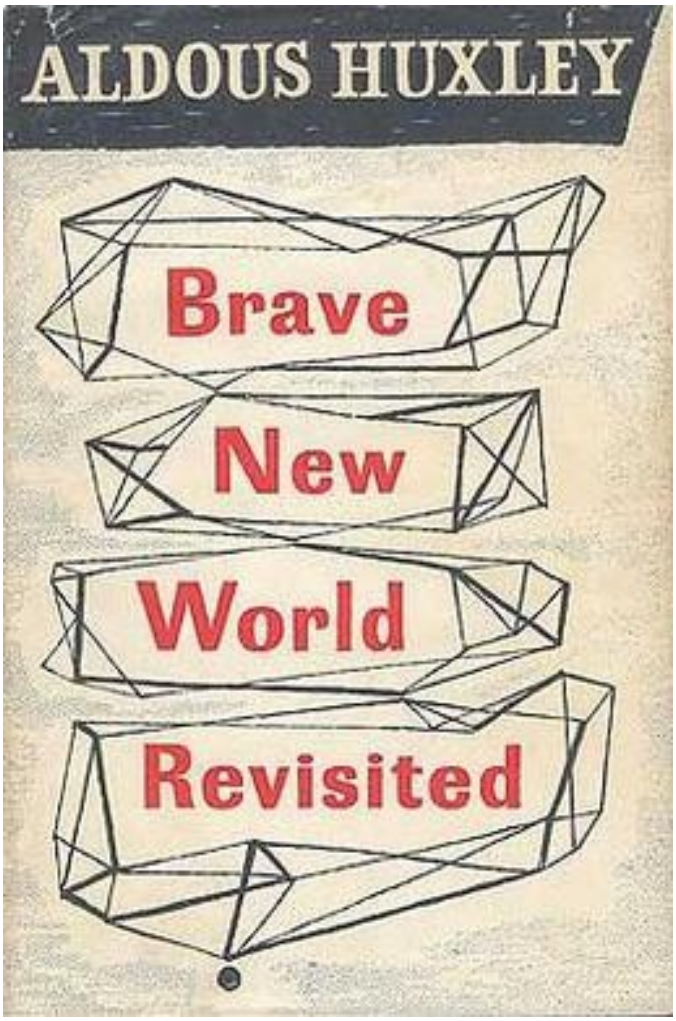
IN *SARTOR RESARTUS* Carlyle has left what (in *Mr Carlyle, my Patient*) his psycho-somatic biographer, Dr James Halliday, calls ‘an amazing description of a psychotic state of mind, largely depressive, but partly schizophrenic.’

‘The men and women around me,’ writes Carlyle, even speaking with me, were but Figures; I had practically forgotten that they were alive, that they were not merely automata. Friendship was but an incredible tradition. In the midst of their crowded streets and assemblages I walked solitary; and (except that it was my own heart, not another’s, that I kept devouring) savage also as the tiger in the jungle.... To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility; it was one huge, dead immeasurable steam-engine, rolling on in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb.... Having no hope, neither had I any definite fear, were it of Man or of Devil. And yet, strangely enough, I lived in a continual, indefinite, pining fear, tremulous, pusillanimous, apprehensive of I knew not what; it seemed as if all things in the Heavens above and the Earth beneath, would hurt me; as if the Heavens and the Earth were but the boundless jaws of a devouring Monster, wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured.’ Renée and the idolater of heroes are evidently describing the same experience. Infinity is apprehended by both, but in the form of ‘the System,’ the ‘immeasurable Steam-Engine.’ To both, again, all is significant, but negatively significant, so that every event is utterly pointless, every object intensely unreal, every self-styled human being a clockwork dummy, grotesquely going through the motions of work and play, of loving, hating, thinking, of being eloquent, heroic, saintly, what you will – the robots are nothing if not versatile.

Brave New World Revisited

This 1958 essay, written almost thirty years after the novel *Brave New World*, considers whether the world has moved toward or away from Huxley's initial vision of the future. He states when he wrote the original novel that it was a reasonable guess as to where the world might go in the future. In fact, Huxley concludes that the world is becoming like *Brave New World* much faster than he had originally thought.

Huxley analyses the causes of this, including overpopulation, as well as all the means by which populations can be controlled. Once again, he is particularly interested in the effects of drugs and subliminal suggestion. This essay is distinctly different in tone from the earlier text, partly due to his conversion to Hindu Vedanta in the interim between the two works. The last chapter proposes action that could be taken to prevent a democracy from turning into the totalitarian world described in *Brave New World*.



The first edition

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Foreword

THE SOUL OF wit may become the very body of untruth. However elegant and memorable, brevity can never, in the nature of things, do justice to all the facts of a complex situation. On such a theme one can be brief only by omission and simplification. Omission and simplification help us to understand — but help us, in many cases, to understand the wrong thing; for our comprehension may be only of the abbreviator's neatly formulated notions, not of the vast, ramifying reality from which these notions have been so arbitrarily abstracted.

But life is short and information endless: nobody has time for everything. In practice we are generally forced to choose between an unduly brief exposition and no exposition at all. Abbreviation is a necessary evil and the abbreviator's business is to make the best of a job which, though intrinsically bad, is still better than nothing. He must learn to simplify, but not to the point of falsification. He must learn to concentrate upon the essentials of a situation, but without ignoring too many of reality's qualifying side issues. In this way he may be able to tell, not indeed the whole truth (for the whole truth about almost any important subject is incompatible with brevity), but considerably more than the dangerous quarter-truths and half-truths which have always been the current coin of thought.

The subject of freedom and its enemies is enormous, and what I have written is certainly too short to do it full justice; but at least I have touched on many aspects of the problem. Each aspect may have been somewhat oversimplified in the exposition; but these successive over-simplifications add up to a picture that, I hope, gives some hint of the vastness and complexity of the original.

Omitted from the picture (not as being unimportant, but merely for convenience and because I have discussed them on earlier occasions) are the mechanical and military enemies of freedom — the weapons and "hardware"

which have so powerfully strengthened the hands of the world's rulers against their subjects, and the ever more ruinously costly preparations for ever more senseless and suicidal wars. The chapters that follow should be read against a background of thoughts about the Hungarian uprising and its repression, about H-bombs, about the cost of what every nation refers to as "defense," and about those endless columns of uniformed boys, white, black, brown, yellow, marching obediently toward the common grave.

BRAVE NEW WORLD REVISITED

I. Over-Population

IN 1931, WHEN *Brave New World* was being written, I was convinced that there was still plenty of time. The completely organized society, the scientific caste system, the abolition of free will by methodical conditioning, the servitude made acceptable by regular doses of chemically induced happiness, the orthodoxies drummed in by nightly courses of sleep-teaching — these things were coming all right, but not in my time, not even in the time of my grandchildren. I forget the exact date of the events recorded in *Brave New World*; but it was somewhere in the sixth, or seventh century A.F. (After Ford). We who were living in the second quarter of the twentieth century A.D. were the inhabitants, admittedly, of a gruesome kind of universe; but the nightmare of those depression years was radically different from the nightmare of the future, described in *Brave New World*. Ours was a nightmare of too little order; theirs, in the seventh century A.F., of too much. In the process of passing from one extreme to the other, there would be a long interval, so I imagined, during which the more fortunate third of the human race would make the best of both worlds — the disorderly world of liberalism and the much too orderly Brave New World where perfect efficiency left no room for freedom or personal initiative.

Twenty-seven years later, in this third quarter of the twentieth century A.D., and long before the end of the first century A.F., I feel a good deal less optimistic than I did when I was writing *Brave New World*. The prophecies made in 1931 are coming true much sooner than I thought they would. The blessed interval between too little order and the nightmare of too much has not begun and shows no sign of beginning. In the West, it is true, individual men and women still enjoy a large measure of freedom. But even in those countries that have a tradition of democratic government, this freedom and even the desire for this freedom seem to be on the wane. In the rest of the world freedom for

individuals has already gone, or is manifestly about to go. The nightmare of total organization, which I had situated in the seventh century After Ford, has emerged from the safe, remote future and is now awaiting us, just around the next corner.

George Orwell's *1984* was a magnified projection into the future of a present that contained Stalinism and an immediate past that had witnessed the flowering of Nazism. *Brave New World* was written before the rise of Hitler to supreme power in Germany and when the Russian tyrant had not yet got into his stride. In 1931 systematic terrorism was not the obsessive contemporary fact which it had become in 1948, and the future dictatorship of my imaginary world was a good deal less brutal than the future dictatorship so brilliantly portrayed by Orwell. In the context of 1948, *1984* seemed dreadfully convincing. But tyrants, after all, are mortal and circumstances change. Recent developments in Russia and recent advances in science and technology have robbed Orwell's book of some of its gruesome verisimilitude. A nuclear war will, of course, make nonsense of everybody's predictions. But, assuming for the moment that the Great Powers can somehow refrain from destroying us, we can say that it now looks as though the odds were more in favor of something like *Brave New World* than of something like *1984*.

In the light of what we have recently learned about animal behavior in general, and human behavior in particular, it has become clear that control through the punishment of undesirable behavior is less effective, in the long run, than control through the reinforcement of desirable behavior by rewards, and that government through terror works on the whole less well than government through the non-violent manipulation of the environment and of the thoughts and feelings of individual men, women and children. Punishment temporarily puts a stop to undesirable behavior, but does not permanently reduce the victim's tendency to indulge in it. Moreover, the psycho-physical by-products of punishment may be just as undesirable as the behavior for which an individual has been punished. Psychotherapy is largely concerned with the debilitating or anti-social consequences of past punishments.

The society described in *1984* is a society controlled almost exclusively by punishment and the fear of punishment. In the imaginary world of my own fable punishment is infrequent and generally mild. The nearly perfect control exercised by the government is achieved by systematic reinforcement of desirable behavior, by many kinds of nearly non-violent manipulation, both physical and psychological, and by genetic standardization. Babies in bottles and the centralized control of reproduction are not perhaps impossible; but it is quite clear that for a long time to come we shall remain a viviparous species breeding at random. For practical purposes genetic standardization may be ruled out. Societies will continue to be controlled postnatally — by punishment, as in the past, and to an ever increasing extent by the more effective methods of reward and scientific manipulation.

In Russia the old-fashioned, *1984*-style dictatorship of Stalin has begun to give way to a more up-to-date form of tyranny. In the upper levels of the Soviets' hierarchical society the reinforcement of desirable behavior has begun to replace the older methods of control through the punishment of undesirable behavior. Engineers and scientists, teachers and administrators, are handsomely paid for good work and so moderately taxed that they are under a constant incentive to do better and so be more highly rewarded. In certain areas they are at liberty to think and do more or less what they like. Punishment awaits them only when they stray beyond their prescribed limits into the realms of ideology and politics. It is because they have been granted a measure of professional freedom that Russian teachers, scientists and technicians have achieved such remarkable successes. Those who live near the base of the Soviet pyramid enjoy none of the privileges accorded to the lucky or specially gifted minority. Their wages are meager and they pay, in the form of high prices, a disproportionately large share of the taxes. The area in which they can do as they please is extremely restricted, and their rulers control them more by punishment and the threat of punishment than through non-violent manipulation or the reinforcement of desirable behavior by reward. The Soviet system combines elements of *1984*

with elements that are prophetic of what went on among the higher castes in *Brave New World*.

Meanwhile impersonal forces over which we have almost no control seem to be pushing us all in the direction of the Brave New Worldian nightmare; and this impersonal pushing is being consciously accelerated by representatives of commercial and political organizations who have developed a number of new techniques for manipulating, in the interest of some minority, the thoughts and feelings of the masses. The techniques of manipulation will be discussed in later chapters. For the moment let us confine our attention to those impersonal forces which are now making the world so extremely unsafe for democracy, so very inhospitable to individual freedom. What are these forces? And why has the nightmare, which I had projected into the seventh century A.F., made so swift an advance in our direction? The answer to these questions must begin where the life of even the most highly civilized society has its beginnings — on the level of biology.

On the first Christmas Day the population of our planet was about two hundred and fifty millions — less than half the population of modern China. Sixteen centuries later, when the Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth Rock, human numbers had climbed to a little more than five hundred millions. By the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, world population had passed the seven hundred million mark. In 1931, when I was writing *Brave New World*, it stood at just under two billions. Today, only twenty-seven years later, there are two billion eight hundred thousand of us. And tomorrow — what? Penicillin, DDT and clean water are cheap commodities, whose effects on public health are out of all proportion to their cost. Even the poorest government is rich enough to provide its subjects with a substantial measure of death control. Birth control is a very different matter. Death control is something which can be provided for a whole people by a few technicians working in the pay of a benevolent government. Birth control depends on the co-operation of an entire people. It must be practiced by countless individuals, from whom it demands more intelligence and will power than most of the world’s teeming illiterates

possess, and (where chemical or mechanical methods of contraception are used) an expenditure of more money than most of these millions can now afford. Moreover, there are nowhere any religious traditions in favor of unrestricted death, whereas religious and social traditions in favor of unrestricted reproduction are widespread. For all these reasons, death control is achieved very easily, birth control is achieved with great difficulty. Death rates have therefore fallen in recent years with startling suddenness. But birth rates have either remained at their old high level or, if they have fallen, have fallen very little and at a very slow rate. In consequence, human numbers are now increasing more rapidly than at any time in the history of the species.

Moreover, the yearly increases are themselves increasing. They increase regularly, according to the rules of compound interest; and they also increase irregularly with every application, by a technologically backward society of the principles of Public Health. At the present time the annual increase in world population runs to about forty-three millions. This means that every four years mankind adds to its numbers the equivalent of the present population of the United States, every eight and a half years the equivalent of the present population of India. At the rate of increase prevailing between the birth of Christ and the death of Queen Elizabeth I, it took sixteen centuries for the population of the earth to double. At the present rate it will double in less than half a century. And this fantastically rapid doubling of our numbers will be taking place on a planet whose most desirable and productive areas are already densely populated, whose soils are being eroded by the frantic efforts of bad farmers to raise more food, and whose easily available mineral capital is being squandered with the reckless extravagance of a drunken sailor getting rid of his accumulated pay.

In the Brave New World of my fable, the problem of human numbers in their relation to natural resources had been effectively solved. An optimum figure for world population had been calculated and numbers were maintained at this figure (a little under two billions, if I remember rightly) generation after generation. In the real contemporary world, the population problem has not been solved. On the contrary it is becoming graver and more formidable with every

passing year. It is against this grim biological background that all the political, economic, cultural and psychological dramas of our time are being played out. As the twentieth century wears on, as the new billions are added to the existing billions (there will be more than five and a half billions of us by the time my granddaughter is fifty), this biological background will advance, ever more insistently, ever more menacingly, toward the front and center of the historical stage. The problem of rapidly increasing numbers in relation to natural resources, to social stability and to the well-being of individuals — this is now the central problem of mankind; and it will remain the central problem certainly for another century, and perhaps for several centuries thereafter. A new age is supposed to have begun on October 4, 1957. But actually, in the present context, all our exuberant post-Sputnik talk is irrelevant and even nonsensical. So far as the masses of mankind are concerned, the coming time will not be the Space Age; it will be the Age of Over-population. We can parody the words of the old song and ask,

Will the space that you're so rich in
Light a fire in the kitchen,
Or the little god of space turn the spit, spit, spit?

The answer, it is obvious, is in the negative. A settlement on the moon may be of some military advantage to the nation that does the settling. But it will do nothing whatever to make life more tolerable, during the fifty years that it will take our present population to double, for the earth's undernourished and proliferating billions. And even if, at some future date, emigration to Mars should become feasible, even if any considerable number of men and women were desperate enough to choose a new life under conditions comparable to those prevailing on a mountain twice as high as Mount Everest, what difference would that make? In the course of the last four centuries quite a number of people sailed from the Old World to the New. But neither their departure nor the returning flow of food and raw materials could solve the problems of the Old

World. Similarly the shipping of a few surplus humans to Mars (at a cost, for transportation and development, of several million dollars a head) will do nothing to solve the problem of mounting population pressures on our own planet. Unsolved, that problem will render insoluble all our other problems. Worse still, it will create conditions in which individual freedom and the social decencies of the democratic way of life will become impossible, almost unthinkable. Not all dictatorships arise in the same way. There are many roads to Brave New World; but perhaps the straightest and the broadest of them is the road we are traveling today, the road that leads through gigantic numbers and accelerating increases. Let us briefly review the reasons for this close correlation between too many people, too rapidly multiplying, and the formulation of authoritarian philosophies, the rise of totalitarian systems of government.

As large and increasing numbers press more heavily upon available resources, the economic position of the society undergoing this ordeal becomes ever more precarious. This is especially true of those underdeveloped regions, where a sudden lowering of the death rate by means of DDT, penicillin and clean water has not been accompanied by a corresponding fall in the birth rate. In parts of Asia and in most of Central and South America populations are increasing so fast that they will double themselves in little more than twenty years. If the production of food and manufactured articles, of houses, schools and teachers, could be increased at a greater rate than human numbers, it would be possible to improve the wretched lot of those who live in these underdeveloped and over-populated countries. But unfortunately these countries lack not merely agricultural machinery and an industrial plant capable of turning out this machinery, but also the capital required to create such a plant. Capital is what is left over after the primary needs of a population have been satisfied. But the primary needs of most of the people in underdeveloped countries are never fully satisfied. At the end of each year almost nothing is left over, and there is therefore almost no capital available for creating the industrial and agricultural plant, by means of which the people’s needs might be satisfied. Moreover, there is, in all these underdeveloped countries, a serious shortage of the trained

manpower without which a modern industrial and agricultural plant cannot be operated. The present educational facilities are inadequate; so are the resources, financial and cultural, for improving the existing facilities as fast as the situation demands. Meanwhile the population of some of these underdeveloped countries is increasing at the rate of 3 per cent per annum.

Their tragic situation is discussed in an important book, published in 1957 — *The Next Hundred Years*, by Professors Harrison Brown, James Bonner and John Weir of the California Institute of Technology. How is mankind coping with the problem of rapidly increasing numbers? Not very successfully. “The evidence suggests rather strongly that in most underdeveloped countries the lot of the average individual has worsened appreciably in the last half century. People have become more poorly fed. There are fewer available goods per person. And practically every attempt to improve the situation has been nullified by the relentless pressure of continued population growth.”

Whenever the economic life of a nation becomes precarious, the central government is forced to assume additional responsibilities for the general welfare. It must work out elaborate plans for dealing with a critical situation; it must impose ever greater restrictions upon the activities of its subjects; and if, as is very likely, worsening economic conditions result in political unrest, or open rebellion, the central government must intervene to preserve public order and its own authority. More and more power is thus concentrated in the hands of the executives and their bureaucratic managers. But the nature of power is such that even those who have not sought it, but have had it forced upon them, tend to acquire a taste for more. “Lead us not into temptation,” we pray — and with good reason; for when human beings are tempted too enticingly or too long, they generally yield. A democratic constitution is a device for preventing the local rulers from yielding to those particularly dangerous temptations that arise when too much power is concentrated in too few hands. Such a constitution works pretty well where, as in Britain or the United States, there is a traditional respect for constitutional procedures. Where the republican or limited monarchical tradition is weak, the best of constitutions will not prevent ambitious politicians

from succumbing with glee and gusto to the temptations of power. And in any country where numbers have begun to press heavily upon available resources, these temptations cannot fail to arise. Over-population leads to economic insecurity and social unrest. Unrest and insecurity lead to more control by central governments and an increase of their power. In the absence of a constitutional tradition, this increased power will probably be exercised in a dictatorial fashion. Even if Communism had never been invented, this would be likely to happen. But Communism has been invented. Given this fact, the probability of over-population leading through unrest to dictatorship becomes a virtual certainty. It is a pretty safe bet that, twenty years from now, all the world's over-populated and underdeveloped countries will be under some form of totalitarian rule — probably by the Communist party.

How will this development affect the over-populated, but highly industrialized and still democratic countries of Europe? If the newly formed dictatorships were hostile to them, and if the normal flow of raw materials from the underdeveloped countries were deliberately interrupted, the nations of the West would find themselves in a very bad way indeed. Their industrial system would break down, and the highly developed technology, which up till now has permitted them to sustain a population much greater than that which could be supported by locally available resources, would no longer protect them against the consequences of having too many people in too small a territory. If this should happen, the enormous powers forced by unfavorable conditions upon central governments may come to be used in the spirit of totalitarian dictatorship.

The United States is not at present an over-populated country. If, however, the population continues to increase at the present rate (which is higher than that of India's increase, though happily a good deal lower than the rate now current in Mexico or Guatemala), the problem of numbers in relation to available resources might well become troublesome by the beginning of the twenty-first century. For the moment over-population is not a direct threat to the personal freedom of Americans. It remains, however, an indirect threat, a menace at one

remove. If over-population should drive the underdeveloped countries into totalitarianism, and if these new dictatorships should ally themselves with Russia, then the military position of the United States would become less secure and the preparations for defense and retaliation would have to be intensified. But liberty, as we all know, cannot flourish in a country that is permanently on a war footing, or even a near-war footing. Permanent crisis justifies permanent control of everybody and everything by the agencies of the central government. And permanent crisis is what we have to expect in a world in which over-population is producing a state of things, in which dictatorship under Communist auspices becomes almost inevitable.

II. Quantity, Quality, Morality

IN THE BRAVE New World of my fantasy eugenics and dysgenics were practiced systematically. In one set of bottles biologically superior ova, fertilized by biologically superior sperm, were given the best possible prenatal treatment and were finally decanted as Betas, Alphas and even Alpha Pluses. In another, much more numerous set of bottles, biologically inferior ova, fertilized by biologically inferior sperm, were subjected to the Bokanovsky Process (ninety-six identical twins out of a single egg) and treated prenatally with alcohol and other protein poisons. The creatures finally decanted were almost subhuman; but they were capable of performing unskilled work and, when properly conditioned, detensioned by free and frequent access to the opposite sex, constantly distracted by gratuitous entertainment and reinforced in their good behavior patterns by daily doses of soma, could be counted on to give no trouble to their superiors.

In this second half of the twentieth century we do nothing systematic about our breeding; but in our random and unregulated way we are not only over-populating our planet, we are also, it would seem, making sure that these greater numbers shall be of biologically poorer quality. In the bad old days children with considerable, or even with slight, hereditary defects rarely survived. Today, thanks to sanitation, modern pharmacology and the social conscience, most of the children born with hereditary defects reach maturity and multiply their kind. Under the conditions now prevailing, every advance in medicine will tend to be offset by a corresponding advance in the survival rate of individuals cursed by some genetic insufficiency. In spite of new wonder drugs and better treatment (indeed, in a certain sense, precisely because of these things), the physical health of the general population will show no improvement, and may even deteriorate. And along with a decline of average healthiness there may well go a decline in average intelligence. Indeed, some competent authorities are convinced that such

a decline has already taken place and is continuing. “Under conditions that are both soft and unregulated,” writes Dr. W. H. Sheldon, “our best stock tends to be outbred by stock that is inferior to it in every respect.... It is the fashion in some academic circles to assure students that the alarm over differential birth-rates is unfounded; that these problems are merely economic, or merely educational, or merely religious, or merely cultural or something of the sort. This is Pollyanna optimism. Reproductive delinquency is biological and basic.” And he adds that “nobody knows just how far the average IQ in this country [the U.S.A.] has declined since 1916, when Terman attempted to standardize the meaning of IQ 100.”

In an underdeveloped and over-populated country, where four-fifths of the people get less than two thousand calories a day and one-fifth enjoys an adequate diet, can democratic institutions arise spontaneously? Or if they should be imposed from outside or from above, can they possibly survive?

And now let us consider the case of the rich, industrialized and democratic society, in which, owing to the random but effective practice of dysgenics, IQ’s and physical vigor are on the decline. For how long can such a society maintain its traditions of individual liberty and democratic government? Fifty or a hundred years from now our children will learn the answer to this question.

Meanwhile we find ourselves confronted by a most disturbing moral problem. We know that the pursuit of good ends does not justify the employment of bad means. But what about those situations, now of such frequent occurrence, in which good means have end results which turn out to be bad?

For example, we go to a tropical island and with the aid of DDT we stamp out malaria and, in two or three years, save hundreds of thousands of lives. This is obviously good. But the hundreds of thousands of human beings thus saved, and the millions whom they beget and bring to birth, cannot be adequately clothed, housed, educated or even fed out of the island’s available resources. Quick death by malaria has been abolished; but life made miserable by undernourishment and over-crowding is now the rule, and slow death by outright starvation threatens ever greater numbers.

And what about the congenitally insufficient organisms, whom our medicine and our social services now preserve so that they may propagate their kind? To help the unfortunate is obviously good. But the wholesale transmission to our descendants of the results of unfavorable mutations, and the progressive contamination of the genetic pool from which the members of our species will have to draw, are no less obviously bad. We are on the horns of an ethical dilemma, and to find the middle way will require all our intelligence and all our good will.

III. Over-Organization

THE SHORTEST AND broadest road to the nightmare of Brave New World leads, as I have pointed out, through over-population and the accelerating increase of human numbers — twenty-eight hundred millions today, fifty-five hundred millions by the turn of the century, with most of humanity facing the choice between anarchy and totalitarian control. But the increasing pressure of numbers upon available resources is not the only force propelling us in the direction of totalitarianism. This blind biological enemy of freedom is allied with immensely powerful forces generated by the very advances in technology of which we are most proud. Justifiably proud, it may be added; for these advances are the fruits of genius and persistent hard work, of logic, imagination and self-denial — in a word, of moral and intellectual virtues for which one can feel nothing but admiration. But the Nature of Things is such that nobody in this world ever gets anything for nothing. These amazing and admirable advances have had to be paid for. Indeed, like last year's washing machine, they are still being paid for — and each installment is higher than the last. Many historians, many sociologists and psychologists have written at length, and with a deep concern, about the price that Western man has had to pay and will go on paying for technological progress. They point out, for example, that democracy can hardly be expected to flourish in societies where political and economic power is being progressively concentrated and centralized. But the progress of technology has led and is still leading to just such a concentration and centralization of power. As the machinery of mass production is made more efficient it tends to become more complex and more expensive — and so less available to the enterpriser of limited means. Moreover, mass production cannot work without mass distribution; but mass distribution raises problems which only the largest producers can satisfactorily solve. In a world of mass production and mass

distribution the Little Man, with his inadequate stock of working capital, is at a grave disadvantage. In competition with the Big Man, he loses his money and finally his very existence as an independent producer; the Big Man has gobbled him up. As the Little Men disappear, more and more economic power comes to be wielded by fewer and fewer people. Under a dictatorship the Big Business, made possible by advancing technology and the consequent ruin of Little Business, is controlled by the State — that is to say, by a small group of party leaders and the soldiers, policemen and civil servants who carry out their orders. In a capitalist democracy, such as the United States, it is controlled by what Professor C. Wright Mills has called the Power Elite. This Power Elite directly employs several millions of the country's working force in its factories, offices and stores, controls many millions more by lending them the money to buy its products, and, through its ownership of the media of mass communication, influences the thoughts, the feelings and the actions of virtually everybody. To parody the words of Winston Churchill, never have so many been manipulated so much by so few. We are far indeed from Jefferson's ideal of a genuinely free society composed of a hierarchy of self-governing units— "the elementary republics of the wards, the county republics, the State republics and the Republic of the Union, forming a gradation of authorities."

We see, then, that modern technology has led to the concentration of economic and political power, and to the development of a society controlled (ruthlessly in the totalitarian states, politely and inconspicuously in the democracies) by Big Business and Big Government. But societies are composed of individuals and are good only insofar as they help individuals to realize their potentialities and to lead a happy and creative life. How have individuals been affected by the technological advances of recent years? Here is the answer to this question given by a philosopher-psychiatrist, Dr. Erich Fromm:

Our contemporary Western society, in spite of its material, intellectual and political progress, is increasingly less conducive to mental health, and tends to undermine the inner security, happiness, reason and the capacity for love in the individual; it tends to turn him into an automaton who pays for his human failure

with increasing mental sickness, and with despair hidden under a frantic drive for work and so-called pleasure.

Our “increasing mental sickness” may find expression in neurotic symptoms. These symptoms are conspicuous and extremely distressing. But “let us beware,” says Dr. Fromm, “of defining mental hygiene as the prevention of symptoms. Symptoms as such are not our enemy, but our friend; where there are symptoms there is conflict, and conflict always indicates that the forces of life which strive for integration and happiness are still fighting.” The really hopeless victims of mental illness are to be found among those who appear to be most normal. “Many of them are normal because they are so well adjusted to our mode of existence, because their human voice has been silenced so early in their lives, that they do not even struggle or suffer or develop symptoms as the neurotic does.” They are normal not in what may be called the absolute sense of the word; they are normal only in relation to a profoundly abnormal society. Their perfect adjustment to that abnormal society is a measure of their mental sickness. These millions of abnormally normal people, living without fuss in a society to which, if they were fully human beings, they ought not to be adjusted, still cherish “the illusion of individuality,” but in fact they have been to a great extent deindividualized. Their conformity is developing into something like uniformity. But “uniformity and freedom are incompatible. Uniformity and mental health are incompatible too.... Man is not made to be an automaton, and if he becomes one, the basis for mental health is destroyed.”

In the course of evolution nature has gone to endless trouble to see that every individual is unlike every other individual. We reproduce our kind by bringing the father’s genes into contact with the mother’s. These hereditary factors may be combined in an almost infinite number of ways. Physically and mentally, each one of us is unique. Any culture which, in the interests of efficiency or in the name of some political or religious dogma, seeks to standardize the human individual, commits an outrage against man’s biological nature.

Science may be defined as the reduction of multiplicity to unity. It seeks to explain the endlessly diverse phenomena of nature by ignoring the uniqueness of

particular events, concentrating on what they have in common and finally abstracting some kind of “law,” in terms of which they make sense and can be effectively dealt with. For examples, apples fall from the tree and the moon moves across the sky. People had been observing these facts from time immemorial. With Gertrude Stein they were convinced that an apple is an apple is an apple, whereas the moon is the moon is the moon. It remained for Isaac Newton to perceive what these very dissimilar phenomena had in common, and to formulate a theory of gravitation in terms of which certain aspects of the behavior of apples, of the heavenly bodies and indeed of everything else in the physical universe could be explained and dealt with in terms of a single system of ideas. In the same spirit the artist takes the innumerable diversities and uniquenesses of the outer world and his own imagination and gives them meaning within an orderly system of plastic, literary or musical patterns. The wish to impose order upon confusion, to bring harmony out of dissonance and unity out of multiplicity is a kind of intellectual instinct, a primary and fundamental urge of the mind. Within the realms of science, art and philosophy the workings of what I may call this “Will to Order” are mainly beneficent. True, the Will to Order has produced many premature syntheses based upon insufficient evidence, many absurd systems of metaphysics and theology, much pedantic mistaking of notions for realities, of symbols and abstractions for the data of immediate experience. But these errors, however regrettable, do not do much harm, at any rate directly — though it sometimes happens that a bad philosophical system may do harm indirectly, by being used as a justification for senseless and inhuman actions. It is in the social sphere, in the realm of politics and economics, that the Will to Order becomes really dangerous.

Here the theoretical reduction of unmanageable multiplicity to comprehensible unity becomes the practical reduction of human diversity to subhuman uniformity, of freedom to servitude. In politics the equivalent of a fully developed scientific theory or philosophical system is a totalitarian dictatorship. In economics, the equivalent of a beautifully composed work of art is the smoothly running factory in which the workers are perfectly adjusted to

the machines. The Will to Order can make tyrants out of those who merely aspire to clear up a mess. The beauty of tidiness is used as a justification for despotism.

Organization is indispensable; for liberty arises and has meaning only within a self-regulating community of freely co-operating individuals. But, though indispensable, organization can also be fatal. Too much organization transforms men and women into automata, suffocates the creative spirit and abolishes the very possibility of freedom. As usual, the only safe course is in the middle, between the extremes of *laissez-faire* at one end of the scale and of total control at the other.

During the past century the successive advances in technology have been accompanied by corresponding advances in organization. Complicated machinery has had to be matched by complicated social arrangements, designed to work as smoothly and efficiently as the new instruments of production. In order to fit into these organizations, individuals have had to deindividualize themselves, have had to deny their native diversity and conform to a standard pattern, have had to do their best to become automata.

The dehumanizing effects of over-organization are reinforced by the dehumanizing effects of over-population. Industry, as it expands, draws an ever greater proportion of humanity's increasing numbers into large cities. But life in large cities is not conducive to mental health (the highest incidence of schizophrenia, we are told, occurs among the swarming inhabitants of industrial slums); nor does it foster the kind of responsible freedom within small self-governing groups, which is the first condition of a genuine democracy. City life is anonymous and, as it were, abstract. People are related to one another, not as total personalities, but as the embodiments of economic functions or, when they are not at work, as irresponsible seekers of entertainment. Subjected to this kind of life, individuals tend to feel lonely and insignificant. Their existence ceases to have any point or meaning.

Biologically speaking, man is a moderately gregarious, not a completely social animal — a creature more like a wolf, let us say, or an elephant, than like

a bee or an ant. In their original form human societies bore no resemblance to the hive or the ant heap; they were merely packs. Civilization is, among other things, the process by which primitive packs are transformed into an analogue, crude and mechanical, of the social insects' organic communities. At the present time the pressures of over-population and technological change are accelerating this process. The termitary has come to seem a realizable and even, in some eyes, a desirable ideal. Needless to say, the ideal will never in fact be realized. A great gulf separates the social insect from the not too gregarious, big-brained mammal; and even though the mammal should do his best to imitate the insect, the gulf would remain. However hard they try, men cannot create a social organism, they can only create an organization. In the process of trying to create an organism they will merely create a totalitarian despotism.

Brave New World presents a fanciful and somewhat ribald picture of a society, in which the attempt to re-create human beings in the likeness of termites has been pushed almost to the limits of the possible. That we are being propelled in the direction of Brave New World is obvious. But no less obvious is the fact that we can, if we so desire, refuse to co-operate with the blind forces that are propelling us. For the moment, however, the wish to resist does not seem to be very strong or very widespread. As Mr. William Whyte has shown in his remarkable book, *The Organization Man*, a new Social Ethic is replacing our traditional ethical system — the system in which the individual is primary. The key words in this Social Ethic are "adjustment," "adaptation," "socially orientated behavior," "belongingness," "acquisition of social skills," "team work," "group living," "group loyalty," "group dynamics," "group thinking," "group creativity." Its basic assumption is that the social whole has greater worth and significance than its individual parts, that inborn biological differences should be sacrificed to cultural uniformity, that the rights of the collectivity take precedence over what the eighteenth century called the Rights of Man. According to the Social Ethic, Jesus was completely wrong in asserting that the Sabbath was made for man. On the contrary, man was made for the Sabbath, and must sacrifice his inherited idiosyncrasies and pretend to be the kind of

standardized good mixer that organizers of group activity regard as ideal for their purposes. This ideal man is the man who displays “dynamic conformity” (delicious phrase!) and an intense loyalty to the group, an unflagging desire to subordinate himself, to belong. And the ideal man must have an ideal wife, highly gregarious, infinitely adaptable and not merely resigned to the fact that her husband’s first loyalty is to the Corporation, but actively loyal on her own account. “He for God only,” as Milton said of Adam and Eve, “she for God in him.” And in one important respect the wife of the ideal organization man is a good deal worse off than our First Mother. She and Adam were permitted by the Lord to be completely uninhibited in the matter of “youthful dalliance.”

Nor turned, I ween,
Adam from his fair spouse, nor Eve the rites
Mysterious of connubial love refused

Today, according to a writer in the *Harvard Business Review*, the wife of the man who is trying to live up to the ideal proposed by the Social Ethic, “must not demand too much of her husband’s time and interest. Because of his single-minded concentration on his job, even his sexual activity must be relegated to a secondary place.” The monk makes vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. The organization man is allowed to be rich, but promises obedience (“he accepts authority without resentment, he looks up to his superiors” — *Mussolini ha sempre ragione*) and he must be prepared, for the greater glory of the organization that employs him, to forswear even conjugal love.

It is worth remarking that, in *1984*, the members of the Party are compelled to conform to a sexual ethic of more than Puritan severity. In *Brave New World*, on the other hand, all are permitted to indulge their sexual impulses without let or hindrance. The society described in Orwell’s fable is a society permanently at war, and the aim of its rulers is first, of course, to exercise power for its own delightful sake and, second, to keep their subjects in that state of constant tension which a state of constant war demands of those who wage it. By

crusading against sexuality the bosses are able to maintain the required tension in their followers and at the same time can satisfy their lust for power in a most gratifying way. The society described in *Brave New World* is a world-state, in which war has been eliminated and where the first aim of the rulers is at all costs to keep their subjects from making trouble. This they achieve by (among other methods) legalizing a degree of sexual freedom (made possible by the abolition of the family) that practically guarantees the Brave New Worlders against any form of destructive (or creative) emotional tension. In *1984* the lust for power is satisfied by inflicting pain; in *Brave New World*, by inflicting a hardly less humiliating pleasure.

The current Social Ethic, it is obvious, is merely a justification after the fact of the less desirable consequences of over-organization. It represents a pathetic attempt to make a virtue of necessity, to extract a positive value from an unpleasant datum. It is a very unrealistic, and therefore very dangerous, system of morality. The social whole, whose value is assumed to be greater than that of its component parts, is not an organism in the sense that a hive or a termitary may be thought of as an organism. It is merely an organization, a piece of social machinery. There can be no value except in relation to life and awareness. An organization is neither conscious nor alive. Its value is instrumental and derivative. It is not good in itself; it is good only to the extent that it promotes the good of the individuals who are the parts of the collective whole. To give organizations precedence over persons is to subordinate ends to means. What happens when ends are subordinated to means was clearly demonstrated by Hitler and Stalin. Under their hideous rule personal ends were subordinated to organizational means by a mixture of violence and propaganda, systematic terror and the systematic manipulation of minds. In the more efficient dictatorships of tomorrow there will probably be much less violence than under Hitler and Stalin. The future dictator's subjects will be painlessly regimented by a corps of highly trained social engineers. "The challenge of social engineering in our time," writes an enthusiastic advocate of this new science, "is like the challenge of technical engineering fifty years ago. If the first half of the twentieth century was

the era of the technical engineers, the second half may well be the era of the social engineers" — and the twenty-first century, I suppose, will be the era of World Controllers, the scientific caste system and Brave New World. To the question *quis cusodiet custodes?* — Who will mount guard over our guardians, who will engineer the engineers? — the answer is a bland denial that they need any supervision. There seems to be a touching belief among certain Ph.D.'s in sociology that Ph.D.'s in sociology will never be corrupted by power. Like Sir Galahad's, their strength is as the strength of ten because their heart is pure — and their heart is pure because they are scientists and have taken six thousand hours of social studies.

Alas, higher education is not necessarily a guarantee of higher virtue, or higher political wisdom. And to these misgivings on ethical and psychological grounds must be added misgivings of a purely scientific character. Can we accept the theories on which the social engineers base their practice, and in terms of which they justify their manipulations of human beings? For example, Professor Elton Mayo tells us categorically that "man's desire to be continuously associated in work with his fellows is a strong, if not the strongest human characteristic." This, I would say, is manifestly untrue. Some people have the kind of desire described by Mayo; others do not. It is a matter of temperament and inherited constitution. Any social organization based upon the assumption that "man" (whoever "man" may be) desires to be continuously associated with his fellows would be, for many individual men and women, a bed of Procrustes. Only by being amputated or stretched upon the rack could they be adjusted to it.

Again, how romantically misleading are the lyrical accounts of the Middle Ages with which many contemporary theorists of social relations adorn their works! "Membership in a guild, manorial estate or village protected medieval man throughout his life and gave him peace and serenity." Protected him from what, we may ask. Certainly not from remorseless bullying at the hands of his superiors. And along with all that "peace and serenity" there was, throughout the Middle Ages, an enormous amount of chronic frustration, acute unhappiness and a passionate resentment against the rigid, hierarchical system that permitted no

vertical movement up the social ladder and, for those who were bound to the land, very little horizontal movement in space. The impersonal forces of over-population and over-organization, and the social engineers who are trying to direct these forces, are pushing us in the direction of a new medieval system. This revival will be made more acceptable than the original by such Brave-New-Worldian amenities as infant conditioning, sleep-teaching and drug-induced euphoria; but, for the majority of men and women, it will still be a kind of servitude.

IV. Propaganda in a Democratic Society

"THE DOCTRINES OF Europe," Jefferson wrote, "were that men in numerous associations cannot be restrained within the limits of order and justice, except by forces physical and moral wielded over them by authorities independent of their will.... We (the founders of the new American democracy) believe that man was a rational animal, endowed by nature with rights, and with an innate sense of justice, and that he could be restrained from wrong, and protected in right, by moderate powers, confided to persons of his own choice and held to their duties by dependence on his own will." To post-Freudian ears, this kind of language seems touchingly quaint and ingenuous. Human beings are a good deal less rational and innately just than the optimists of the eighteenth century supposed. On the other hand they are neither so morally blind nor so hopelessly unreasonable as the pessimists of the twentieth would have us believe. In spite of the Id and the Unconscious, in spite of endemic neurosis and the prevalence of low IQ's, most men and women are probably decent enough and sensible enough to be trusted with the direction of their own destinies.

Democratic institutions are devices for reconciling social order with individual freedom and initiative, and for making the immediate power of a country's rulers subject to the ultimate power of the ruled. The fact that, in western Europe and America, these devices have worked, all things considered, not too badly is proof enough that the eighteenth-century optimists were not entirely wrong. Given a fair chance, human beings can govern themselves, and govern themselves better, though perhaps with less mechanical efficiency, than they can be governed by "authorities independent of their will." Given a fair chance, I repeat; for the fair chance is an indispensable prerequisite. No people that passes abruptly from a state of subservience under the rule of a despot to the completely unfamiliar state of political independence can be said to have a fair

chance of making democratic institutions work. Again, no people in a precarious economic condition has a fair chance of being able to govern itself democratically. Liberalism flourishes in an atmosphere of prosperity and declines as declining prosperity makes it necessary for the government to intervene ever more frequently and drastically in the affairs of its subjects. Over-population and over-organization are two conditions which, as I have already pointed out, deprive a society of a fair chance of making democratic institutions work effectively. We see, then, that there are certain historical, economic, demographic and technological conditions which make it very hard for Jefferson's rational animals, endowed by nature with inalienable rights and an innate sense of justice, to exercise their reason, claim their rights and act justly within a democratically organized society. We in the West have been supremely fortunate in having been given our fair chance of making the great experiment in self-government. Unfortunately it now looks as though, owing to recent changes in our circumstances, this infinitely precious fair chance were being, little by little, taken away from us. And this, of course, is not the whole story. These blind impersonal forces are not the only enemies of individual liberty and democratic institutions. There are also forces of another, less abstract character, forces that can be deliberately used by power-seeking individuals whose aim is to establish partial or complete control over their fellows. Fifty years ago, when I was a boy, it seemed completely self-evident that the bad old days were over, that torture and massacre, slavery, and the persecution of heretics, were things of the past. Among people who wore top hats, traveled in trains, and took a bath every morning such horrors were simply out of the question. After all, we were living in the twentieth century. A few years later these people who took daily baths and went to church in top hats were committing atrocities on a scale undreamed of by the benighted Africans and Asiatics. In the light of recent history it would be foolish to suppose that this sort of thing cannot happen again. It can and, no doubt, it will. But in the immediate future there is some reason to believe that the punitive methods of *1984* will give place to the reinforcements and manipulations of *Brave New World*.

There are two kinds of propaganda — rational propaganda in favor of action that is consonant with the enlightened self-interest of those who make it and those to whom it is addressed, and non-rational propaganda that is not consonant with anybody's enlightened self-interest, but is dictated by, and appeals to, passion. Where the actions of individuals are concerned there are motives more exalted than enlightened self-interest, but where collective action has to be taken in the fields of politics and economics, enlightened self-interest is probably the highest of effective motives. If politicians and their constituents always acted to promote their own or their country's long-range self-interest, this world would be an earthly paradise. As it is, they often act against their own interests, merely to gratify their least creditable passions; the world, in consequence, is a place of misery. Propaganda in favor of action that is consonant with enlightened self-interest appeals to reason by means of logical arguments based upon the best available evidence fully and honestly set forth. Propaganda in favor of action dictated by the impulses that are below self-interest offers false, garbled or incomplete evidence, avoids logical argument and seeks to influence its victims by the mere repetition of catchwords, by the furious denunciation of foreign or domestic scapegoats, and by cunningly associating the lowest passions with the highest ideals, so that atrocities come to be perpetrated in the name of God and the most cynical kind of *Realpolitik* is treated as a matter of religious principle and patriotic duty.

In John Dewey's words, "a renewal of faith in common human nature, in its potentialities in general, and in its power in particular to respond to reason and truth, is a surer bulwark against totalitarianism than a demonstration of material success or a devout worship of special legal and political forms." The power to respond to reason and truth exists in all of us. But so, unfortunately, does the tendency to respond to unreason and falsehood — particularly in those cases where the falsehood evokes some enjoyable emotion, or where the appeal to unreason strikes some answering chord in the primitive, subhuman depths of our being. In certain fields of activity men have learned to respond to reason and truth pretty consistently. The authors of learned articles do not appeal to the

passions of their fellow scientists and technologists. They set forth what, to the best of their knowledge, is the truth about some particular aspect of reality, they use reason to explain the facts they have observed and they support their point of view with arguments that appeal to reason in other people. All this is fairly easy in the fields of physical science and technology. It is much more difficult in the fields of politics and religion and ethics. Here the relevant facts often elude us. As for the meaning of the facts, that of course depends upon the particular system of ideas, in terms of which you choose to interpret them. And these are not the only difficulties that confront the rational truth-seeker. In public and in private life, it often happens that there is simply no time to collect the relevant facts or to weigh their significance. We are forced to act on insufficient evidence and by a light considerably less steady than that of logic. With the best will in the world, we cannot always be completely truthful or consistently rational. All that is in our power is to be as truthful and rational as circumstances permit us to be, and to respond as well as we can to the limited truth and imperfect reasonings offered for our consideration by others.

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free," said Jefferson, "it expects what never was and never will be.... The people cannot be safe without information. Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe." Across the Atlantic another passionate believer in reason was thinking about the same time, in almost precisely similar terms. Here is what John Stuart Mill wrote of his father, the utilitarian philosopher, James Mill: "So complete was his reliance upon the influence of reason over the minds of mankind, whenever it is allowed to reach them, that he felt as if all would be gained, if the whole population were able to read, and if all sorts of opinions were allowed to be addressed to them by word or in writing, and if by the suffrage they could nominate a legislature to give effect to the opinions they had adopted." *All is safe, all would be gained*! Once more we hear the note of eighteenth-century optimism. Jefferson, it is true, was a realist as well as an optimist. He knew by bitter experience that the freedom of the press can be shamefully abused. "Nothing," he declared, "can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper." And yet, he insisted (and we can

only agree with him), “within the pale of truth, the press is a noble institution, equally the friend of science and civil liberty.” Mass communication, in a word, is neither good nor bad; it is simply a force and, like any other force, it can be used either well or ill. Used in one way, the press, the radio and the cinema are indispensable to the survival of democracy. Used in another way, they are among the most powerful weapons in the dictator’s armory. In the field of mass communications as in almost every other field of enterprise, technological progress has hurt the Little Man and helped the Big Man. As lately as fifty years ago, every democratic country could boast of a great number of small journals and local newspapers. Thousands of country editors expressed thousands of independent opinions. Somewhere or other almost anybody could get almost anything printed. Today the press is still legally free; but most of the little papers have disappeared. The cost of woodpulp, of modern printing machinery and of syndicated news is too high for the Little Man. In the totalitarian East there is political censorship, and the media of mass communication are controlled by the State. In the democratic West there is economic censorship and the media of mass communication are controlled by members of the Power Elite. Censorship by rising costs and the concentration of communication power in the hands of a few big concerns is less objectionable than State ownership and government propaganda; but certainly it is not something of which a Jeffersonian democrat could possibly approve.

In regard to propaganda the early advocates of universal literacy and a free press envisaged only two possibilities: the propaganda might be true, or it might be false. They did not foresee what in fact has happened, above all in our Western capitalist democracies — the development of a vast mass communications industry, concerned in the main neither with the true nor the false, but with the unreal, the more or less totally irrelevant. In a word, they failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.

In the past most people never got a chance of fully satisfying this appetite. They might long for distractions, but the distractions were not provided. Christmas came but once a year, feasts were “solemn and rare,” there were few

readers and very little to read, and the nearest approach to a neighborhood movie theater was the parish church, where the performances, though frequent, were somewhat monotonous. For conditions even remotely comparable to those now prevailing we must return to imperial Rome, where the populace was kept in good humor by frequent, gratuitous doses of many kinds of entertainment — from poetical dramas to gladiatorial fights, from recitations of Virgil to all-out boxing, from concerts to military reviews and public executions. But even in Rome there was nothing like the non-stop distraction now provided by newspapers and magazines, by radio, television and the cinema. In *Brave New World* non-stop distractions of the most fascinating nature (the feelies, orgy-porgy, centrifugal bumblepuppy) are deliberately used as instruments of policy, for the purpose of preventing people from paying too much attention to the realities of the social and political situation. The other world of religion is different from the other world of entertainment; but they resemble one another in being most decidedly “not of this world.” Both are distractions and, if lived in too continuously, both can become, in Marx’s phrase, “the opium of the people” and so a threat to freedom. Only the vigilant can maintain their liberties, and only those who are constantly and intelligently on the spot can hope to govern themselves effectively by democratic procedures. A society, most of whose members spend a great part of their time, not on the spot, not here and now and in the calculable future, but somewhere else, in the irrelevant other worlds of sport and soap opera, of mythology and metaphysical fantasy, will find it hard to resist the encroachments of those who would manipulate and control it.

In their propaganda today’s dictators rely for the most part on repetition, suppression and rationalization — the repetition of catchwords which they wish to be accepted as true, the suppression of facts which they wish to be ignored, the arousal and rationalization of passions which may be used in the interests of the Party or the State. As the art and science of manipulation come to be better understood, the dictators of the future will doubtless learn to combine these techniques with the non-stop distractions which, in the West, are now

threatening to drown in a sea of irrelevance the rational propaganda essential to the maintenance of individual liberty and the survival of democratic institutions.

V. Propaganda Under a Dictatorship

AT HIS TRIAL after the Second World War, Hitler's Minister for Armaments, Albert Speer, delivered a long speech in which, with remarkable acuteness, he described the Nazi tyranny and analyzed its methods. "Hitler's dictatorship," he said, "differed in one fundamental point from all its predecessors in history. It was the first dictatorship in the present period of modern technical development, a dictatorship which made complete use of all technical means for the domination of its own country. Through technical devices like the radio and the loudspeaker, eighty million people were deprived of independent thought. It was thereby possible to subject them to the will of one man.... Earlier dictators needed highly qualified assistants even at the lowest level — men who could think and act independently. The totalitarian system in the period of modern technical development can dispense with such men; thanks to modern methods of communication, it is possible to mechanize the lower leadership. As a result of this there has arisen the new type of the uncritical recipient of orders."

In the Brave New World of my prophetic fable technology had advanced far beyond the point it had reached in Hitler's day; consequently the recipients of orders were far less critical than their Nazi counterparts, far more obedient to the order-giving elite. Moreover, they had been genetically standardized and postnatally conditioned to perform their subordinate functions, and could therefore be depended upon to behave almost as predictably as machines. As we shall see in a later chapter, this conditioning of "the lower leadership" is already going on under the Communist dictatorships. The Chinese and the Russians are not relying merely on the indirect effects of advancing technology; they are working directly on the psychophysical organisms of their lower leaders, subjecting minds and bodies to a system of ruthless and, from all accounts, highly effective conditioning. "Many a man," said Speer, "has been haunted by

the nightmare that one day nations might be dominated by technical means. That nightmare was almost realized in Hitler's totalitarian system." Almost, but not quite. The Nazis did not have time — and perhaps did not have the intelligence and the necessary knowledge — to brainwash and condition their lower leadership. This, it may be, is one of the reasons why they failed.

Since Hitler's day the armory of technical devices at the disposal of the would-be dictator has been considerably enlarged. As well as the radio, the loudspeaker, the moving picture camera and the rotary press, the contemporary propagandist can make use of television to broadcast the image as well as the voice of his client, and can record both image and voice on spools of magnetic tape. Thanks to technological progress, Big Brother can now be almost as omnipresent as God. Nor is it only on the technical front that the hand of the would-be dictator has been strengthened. Since Hitler's day a great deal of work has been carried out in those fields of applied psychology and neurology which are the special province of the propagandist, the indoctrinator and the brainwasher. In the past these specialists in the art of changing people's minds were empiricists. By a method of trial and error they had worked out a number of techniques and procedures, which they used very effectively without, however, knowing precisely why they were effective. Today the art of mind-control is in process of becoming a science. The practitioners of this science know what they are doing and why. They are guided in their work by theories and hypotheses solidly established on a massive foundation of experimental evidence. Thanks to the new insights and the new techniques made possible by these insights, the nightmare that was "all but realized in Hitler's totalitarian system" may soon be completely realizable.

But before we discuss these new insights and techniques let us take a look at the nightmare that so nearly came true in Nazi Germany. What were the methods used by Hitler and Goebbels for "depriving eighty million people of independent thought and subjecting them to the will of one man"? And what was the theory of human nature upon which those terrifyingly successful methods were based? These questions can be answered, for the most part, in Hitler's own words. And

what remarkably clear and astute words they are! When he writes about such vast abstractions as Race and History and Providence, Hitler is strictly unreadable. But when he writes about the German masses and the methods he used for dominating and directing them, his style changes. Nonsense gives place to sense, bombast to a hard-boiled and cynical lucidity. In his philosophical lucubrations Hitler was either cloudily daydreaming or reproducing other people's half-baked notions. In his comments on crowds and propaganda he was writing of things he knew by firsthand experience. In the words of his ablest biographer, Mr. Alan Bullock, "Hitler was the greatest demagogue in history." Those who add, "only a demagogue," fail to appreciate the nature of political power in an age of mass politics. As he himself said, "To be a leader means to be able to move the masses." Hitler's aim was first to move the masses and then, having pried them loose from their traditional loyalties and moralities, to impose upon them (with the hypnotized consent of the majority) a new authoritarian order of his own devising. "Hitler," wrote Hermann Rauschning in 1939, "has a deep respect for the Catholic church and the Jesuit order; not because of their Christian doctrine, but because of the 'machinery' they have elaborated and controlled, their hierarchical system, their extremely clever tactics, their knowledge of human nature and their wise use of human weaknesses in ruling over believers." Ecclesiasticism without Christianity, the discipline of a monastic rule, not for God's sake or in order to achieve personal salvation, but for the sake of the State and for the greater glory and power of the demagogue turned Leader — this was the goal toward which the systematic moving of the masses was to lead.

Let us see what Hitler thought of the masses he moved and how he did the moving. The first principle from which he started was a value judgment: the masses are utterly contemptible. They are incapable of abstract thinking and uninterested in any fact outside the circle of their immediate experience. Their behavior is determined, not by knowledge and reason, but by feelings and unconscious drives. It is in these drives and feelings that "the roots of their positive as well as their negative attitudes are implanted." To be successful a

propagandist must learn how to manipulate these instincts and emotions. “The driving force which has brought about the most tremendous revolutions on this earth has never been a body of scientific teaching which has gained power over the masses, but always a devotion which has inspired them, and often a kind of hysteria which has urged them into action. Whoever wishes to win over the masses must know the key that will open the door of their hearts.” ... In post-Freudian jargon, of their unconscious.

Hitler made his strongest appeal to those members of the lower middle classes who had been ruined by the inflation of 1923, and then ruined all over again by the depression of 1929 and the following years. “The masses” of whom he speaks were these bewildered, frustrated and chronically anxious millions. To make them more masslike, more homogeneously subhuman, he assembled them, by the thousands and the tens of thousands, in vast halls and arenas, where individuals could lose their personal identity, even their elementary humanity, and be merged with the crowd. A man or woman makes direct contact with society in two ways: as a member of some familial, professional or religious group, or as a member of a crowd. Groups are capable of being as moral and intelligent as the individuals who form them; a crowd is chaotic, has no purpose of its own and is capable of anything except intelligent action and realistic thinking. Assembled in a crowd, people lose their powers of reasoning and their capacity for moral choice. Their suggestibility is increased to the point where they cease to have any judgment or will of their own. They become very excitable, they lose all sense of individual or collective responsibility, they are subject to sudden accesses of rage, enthusiasm and panic. In a word, a man in a crowd behaves as though he had swallowed a large dose of some powerful intoxicant. He is a victim of what I have called “herd-poisoning.” Like alcohol, herd-poison is an active, extraverted drug. The crowd-intoxicated individual escapes from responsibility, intelligence and morality into a kind of frantic, animal mindlessness.

During his long career as an agitator, Hitler had studied the effects of herd-poison and had learned how to exploit them for his own purposes. He had

discovered that the orator can appeal to those “hidden forces” which motivate men’s actions, much more effectively than can the writer. Reading is a private, not a collective activity. The writer speaks only to individuals, sitting by themselves in a state of normal sobriety. The orator speaks to masses of individuals, already well primed with herd-poison. They are at his mercy and, if he knows his business, he can do what he likes with them. As an orator, Hitler knew his business supremely well. He was able, in his own words, “to follow the lead of the great mass in such a way that from the living emotion of his hearers the apt word which he needed would be suggested to him and in its turn this would go straight to the heart of his hearers.” Otto Strasser called him “a loudspeaker, proclaiming the most secret desires, the least admissible instincts, the sufferings and personal revolts of a whole nation.” Twenty years before Madison Avenue embarked upon “Motivational Research,” Hitler was systematically exploring and exploiting the secret fears and hopes, the cravings, anxieties and frustrations of the German masses. It is by manipulating “hidden forces” that the advertising experts induce us to buy their wares — a tooth-paste, a brand of cigarettes, a political candidate. And it is by appealing to the same hidden forces — and to others too dangerous for Madison Avenue to meddle with — that Hitler induced the German masses to buy themselves a Fuehrer, an insane philosophy and the Second World War.

Unlike the masses, intellectuals have a taste for rationality and an interest in facts. Their critical habit of mind makes them resistant to the kind of propaganda that works so well on the majority. Among the masses “instinct is supreme, and from instinct comes faith.... While the healthy common folk instinctively close their ranks to form a community of the people” (under a Leader, it goes without saying) “intellectuals run this way and that, like hens in a poultry yard. With them one cannot make history; they cannot be used as elements composing a community.” Intellectuals are the kind of people who demand evidence and are shocked by logical inconsistencies and fallacies. They regard over-simplification as the original sin of the mind and have no use for the slogans, the unqualified assertions and sweeping generalizations which are the propagandist’s stock in

trade. “All effective propaganda,” Hitler wrote, “must be confined to a few bare necessities and then must be expressed in a few stereotyped formulas.” These stereotyped formulas must be constantly repeated, for “only constant repetition will finally succeed in imprinting an idea upon the memory of a crowd.” Philosophy teaches us to feel uncertain about the things that seem to us self-evident. Propaganda, on the other hand, teaches us to accept as self-evident matters about which it would be reasonable to suspend our judgment or to feel doubt. The aim of the demagogue is to create social coherence under his own leadership. But, as Bertrand Russell has pointed out, “systems of dogma without empirical foundations, such as scholasticism, Marxism and fascism, have the advantage of producing a great deal of social coherence among their disciples.” The demagogic propagandist must therefore be consistently dogmatic. All his statements are made without qualification. There are no grays in his picture of the world; everything is either diabolically black or celestially white. In Hitler’s words, the propagandist should adopt “a systematically one-sided attitude towards every problem that has to be dealt with.” He must never admit that he might be wrong or that people with a different point of view might be even partially right. Opponents should not be argued with; they should be attacked, shouted down, or, if they become too much of a nuisance, liquidated. The morally squeamish intellectual may be shocked by this kind of thing. But the masses are always convinced that “right is on the side of the active aggressor.”

Such, then, was Hitler’s opinion of humanity in the mass. It was a very low opinion. Was it also an incorrect opinion? The tree is known by its fruits, and a theory of human nature which inspired the kind of techniques that proved so horribly effective must contain at least an element of truth. Virtue and intelligence belong to human beings as individuals freely associating with other individuals in small groups. So do sin and stupidity. But the subhuman mindlessness to which the demagogue makes his appeal, the moral imbecility on which he relies when he goads his victims into action, are characteristic not of men and women as individuals, but of men and women in masses. Mindlessness and moral idiocy are not characteristically human attributes; they are symptoms

of herd-poisoning. In all the world's higher religions, salvation and enlightenment are for individuals. The kingdom of heaven is within the mind of a person, not within the collective mindlessness of a crowd. Christ promised to be present where two or three are gathered together. He did not say anything about being present where thousands are intoxicating one another with herd-poison. Under the Nazis enormous numbers of people were compelled to spend an enormous amount of time marching in serried ranks from point A to point B and back again to point A. "This keeping of the whole population on the march seemed to be a senseless waste of time and energy. Only much later," adds Hermann Rauschning, "was there revealed in it a subtle intention based on a well-judged adjustment of ends and means. Marching diverts men's thoughts. Marching kills thought. Marching makes an end of individuality. Marching is the indispensable magic stroke performed in order to accustom the people to a mechanical, quasi-ritualistic activity until it becomes second nature."

From his point of view and at the level where he had chosen to do his dreadful work, Hitler was perfectly correct in his estimate of human nature. To those of us who look at men and women as individuals rather than as members of crowds, or of regimented collectives, he seems hideously wrong. In an age of accelerating over-population, of accelerating over-organization and ever more efficient means of mass communication, how can we preserve the integrity and reassert the value of the human individual? This is a question that can still be asked and perhaps effectively answered. A generation from now it may be too late to find an answer and perhaps impossible, in the stifling collective climate of that future time, even to ask the question.

VI. The Arts of Selling

THE SURVIVAL OF democracy depends on the ability of large numbers of people to make realistic choices in the light of adequate information. A dictatorship, on the other hand, maintains itself by censoring or distorting the facts, and by appealing, not to reason, not to enlightened self-interest, but to passion and prejudice, to the powerful "hidden forces," as Hitler called them, present in the unconscious depths of every human mind.

In the West, democratic principles are proclaimed and many able and conscientious publicists do their best to supply electors with adequate information and to persuade them, by rational argument, to make realistic choices in the light of that information. All this is greatly to the good. But unfortunately propaganda in the Western democracies, above all in America, has two faces and a divided personality. In charge of the editorial department there is often a democratic Dr. Jekyll — a propagandist who would be very happy to prove that John Dewey had been right about the ability of human nature to respond to truth and reason. But this worthy man controls only a part of the machinery of mass communication. In charge of advertising we find an anti-democratic, because anti-rational, Mr. Hyde — or rather a Dr. Hyde, for Hyde is now a Ph.D. in psychology and has a master's degree as well in the social sciences. This Dr. Hyde would be very unhappy indeed if everybody always lived up to John Dewey's faith in human nature. Truth and reason are Jekyll's affair, not his. Hyde is a motivation analyst, and his business is to study human weaknesses and failings, to investigate those unconscious desires and fears by which so much of men's conscious thinking and overt doing is determined. And he does this, not in the spirit of the moralist who would like to make people better, or of the physician who would like to improve their health, but simply in order to find out the best way to take advantage of their ignorance and to exploit

their irrationality for the pecuniary benefit of his employers. But after all, it may be argued, “capitalism is dead, consumerism is king” — and consumerism requires the services of expert salesmen versed in all the arts (including the more insidious arts) of persuasion. Under a free enterprise system commercial propaganda by any and every means is absolutely indispensable. But the indispensable is not necessarily the desirable. What is demonstrably good in the sphere of economics may be far from good for men and women as voters or even as human beings. An earlier, more moralistic generation would have been profoundly shocked by the bland cynicism of the motivation analysts. Today we read a book like Mr. Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders*, and are more amused than horrified, more resigned than indignant. Given Freud, given Behaviorism, given the mass producer’s chronically desperate need for mass consumption, this is the sort of thing that is only to be expected. But what, we may ask, is the sort of thing that is to be expected in the future? Are Hyde’s activities compatible in the long run with Jekyll’s? Can a campaign in favor of rationality be successful in the teeth of another and even more vigorous campaign in favor of irrationality? These are questions which, for the moment, I shall not attempt to answer, but shall leave hanging, so to speak, as a backdrop to our discussion of the methods of mass persuasion in a technologically advanced democratic society.

The task of the commercial propagandist in a democracy is in some ways easier and in some ways more difficult than that of a political propagandist employed by an established dictator or a dictator in the making. It is easier inasmuch as almost everyone starts out with a prejudice in favor of beer, cigarettes and iceboxes, whereas almost nobody starts out with a prejudice in favor of tyrants. It is more difficult inasmuch as the commercial propagandist is not permitted, by the rules of his particular game, to appeal to the more savage instincts of his public. The advertiser of dairy products would dearly love to tell his readers and listeners that all their troubles are caused by the machinations of a gang of godless international margarine manufacturers, and that it is their patriotic duty to march out and burn the oppressors’ factories. This sort of thing,

however, is ruled out, and he must be content with a milder approach. But the mild approach is less exciting than the approach through verbal or physical violence. In the long run, anger and hatred are self-defeating emotions. But in the short run they pay high dividends in the form of psychological and even (since they release large quantities of adrenalin and noradrenalin) physiological satisfaction. People may start out with an initial prejudice against tyrants; but when tyrants or would-be tyrants treat them to adrenalin-releasing propaganda about the wickedness of their enemies — particularly of enemies weak enough to be persecuted — they are ready to follow him with enthusiasm. In his speeches Hitler kept repeating such words as “hatred,” “force,” “ruthless,” “crush,” “smash”; and he would accompany these violent words with even more violent gestures. He would yell, he would scream, his veins would swell, his face would turn purple. Strong emotion (as every actor and dramatist knows) is in the highest degree contagious. Infected by the malignant frenzy of the orator, the audience would groan and sob and scream in an orgy of uninhibited passion. And these orgies were so enjoyable that most of those who had experienced them eagerly came back for more. Almost all of us long for peace and freedom; but very few of us have much enthusiasm for the thoughts, feelings and actions that make for peace and freedom. Conversely almost nobody wants war or tyranny; but a great many people find an intense pleasure in the thoughts, feelings and actions that make for war and tyranny. These thoughts, feelings and actions are too dangerous to be exploited for commercial purposes. Accepting this handicap, the advertising man must do the best he can with the less intoxicating emotions, the quieter forms of irrationality.

Effective rational propaganda becomes possible only when there is a clear understanding, on the part of all concerned, of the nature of symbols and of their relations to the things and events symbolized. Irrational propaganda depends for its effectiveness on a general failure to understand the nature of symbols. Simple-minded people tend to equate the symbol with what it stands for, to attribute to things and events some of the qualities expressed by the words in terms of which the propagandist has chosen, for his own purposes, to talk about

them. Consider a simple example. Most cosmetics are made of lanolin, which is a mixture of purified wool fat and water beaten up into an emulsion. This emulsion has many valuable properties: it penetrates the skin, it does not become rancid, it is mildly antiseptic and so forth. But the commercial propagandists do not speak about the genuine virtues of the emulsion. They give it some picturesquely voluptuous name, talk ecstatically and misleadingly about feminine beauty and show pictures of gorgeous blondes nourishing their tissues with skin food. “The cosmetic manufacturers,” one of their number has written, “are not selling lanolin, they are selling hope.” For this hope, this fraudulent implication of a promise that they will be transfigured, women will pay ten or twenty times the value of the emulsion which the propagandists have so skilfully related, by means of misleading symbols, to a deep-seated and almost universal feminine wish — the wish to be more attractive to members of the opposite sex. The principles underlying this kind of propaganda are extremely simple. Find some common desire, some widespread unconscious fear or anxiety; think out some way to relate this wish or fear to the product you have to sell; then build a bridge of verbal or pictorial symbols over which your customer can pass from fact to compensatory dream, and from the dream to the illusion that your product, when purchased, will make the dream come true. “We no longer buy oranges, we buy vitality. We do not buy just an auto, we buy prestige.” And so with all the rest. In toothpaste, for example, we buy, not a mere cleanser and antiseptic, but release from the fear of being sexually repulsive. In vodka and whisky we are not buying a protoplasmic poison which, in small doses, may depress the nervous system in a psychologically valuable way; we are buying friendliness and good fellowship, the warmth of Dingley Dell and the brilliance of the Mermaid Tavern. With our laxatives we buy the health of a Greek god, the radiance of one of Diana’s nymphs. With the monthly best seller we acquire culture, the envy of our less literate neighbors and the respect of the sophisticated. In every case the motivation analyst has found some deep-seated wish or fear, whose energy can be used to move the consumer to part with cash and so, indirectly, to turn the wheels of industry. Stored in the minds and bodies

of countless individuals, this potential energy is released by, and transmitted along, a line of symbols carefully laid out so as to bypass rationality and obscure the real issue.

Sometimes the symbols take effect by being disproportionately impressive, haunting and fascinating in their own right. Of this kind are the rites and pomps of religion. These “beauties of holiness” strengthen faith where it already exists and, where there is no faith, contribute to conversion. Appealing, as they do, only to the aesthetic sense, they guarantee neither the truth nor the ethical value of the doctrines with which they have been, quite arbitrarily, associated. As a matter of plain historical fact, the beauties of holiness have often been matched and indeed surpassed by the beauties of unholiness. Under Hitler, for example, the yearly Nuremberg rallies were masterpieces of ritual and theatrical art. “I had spent six years in St. Petersburg before the war in the best days of the old Russian ballet,” writes Sir Nevile Henderson, the British ambassador to Hitler’s Germany, “but for grandiose beauty I have never seen any ballet to compare with the Nuremberg rally.” One thinks of Keats— “beauty is truth, truth beauty.” Alas, the identity exists only on some ultimate, supramundane level. On the levels of politics and theology, beauty is perfectly compatible with nonsense and tyranny. Which is very fortunate; for if beauty were incompatible with nonsense and tyranny, there would be precious little art in the world. The masterpieces of painting, sculpture and architecture were produced as religious or political propaganda, for the greater glory of a god, a government or a priesthood. But most kings and priests have been despotic and all religions have been riddled with superstition. Genius has been the servant of tyranny and art has advertised the merits of the local cult. Time, as it passes, separates the good art from the bad metaphysics. Can we learn to make this separation, not after the event, but while it is actually taking place? That is the question.

In commercial propaganda the principle of the disproportionately fascinating symbol is clearly understood. Every propagandist has his Art Department, and attempts are constantly being made to beautify the billboards with striking posters, the advertising pages of magazines with lively drawings and

photographs. There are no masterpieces; for masterpieces appeal only to a limited audience, and the commercial propagandist is out to captivate the majority. For him, the ideal is a moderate excellence. Those who like this not too good, but sufficiently striking, art may be expected to like the products with which it has been associated and for which it symbolically stands.

Another disproportionately fascinating symbol is the Singing Commercial. Singing Commercials are a recent invention; but the Singing Theological and the Singing Devotional — the hymn and the psalm — are as old as religion itself. Singing Militaries, or marching songs, are coeval with war, and Singing Patriotics, the precursors of our national anthems, were doubtless used to promote group solidarity, to emphasize the distinction between “us” and “them,” by the wandering bands of paleolithic hunters and food gatherers. To most people music is intrinsically attractive. Moreover, melodies tend to ingrain themselves in the listener’s mind. A tune will haunt the memory during the whole of a lifetime. Here, for example, is a quite uninteresting statement or value judgment. As it stands nobody will pay attention to it. But now set the words to a catchy and easily remembered tune. Immediately they become words of power. Moreover, the words will tend automatically to repeat themselves every time the melody is heard or spontaneously remembered. Orpheus has entered into an alliance with Pavlov — the power of sound with the conditioned reflex. For the commercial propagandist, as for his colleagues in the fields of politics and religion, music possesses yet another advantage. Nonsense which it would be shameful for a reasonable being to write, speak or hear spoken can be sung or listened to by that same rational being with pleasure and even with a kind of intellectual conviction. Can we learn to separate the pleasure of singing or of listening to song from the all too human tendency to believe in the propaganda which the song is putting over? That again is the question.

Thanks to compulsory education and the rotary press, the propagandist has been able, for many years past, to convey his messages to virtually every adult in every civilized country. Today, thanks to radio and television, he is in the happy

position of being able to communicate even with unschooled adults and not yet literate children.

Children, as might be expected, are highly susceptible to propaganda. They are ignorant of the world and its ways, and therefore completely unsuspecting. Their critical faculties are undeveloped. The youngest of them have not yet reached the age of reason and the older ones lack the experience on which their new-found rationality can effectively work. In Europe, conscripts used to be playfully referred to as “cannon fodder.” Their little brothers and sisters have now become radio fodder and television fodder. In my childhood we were taught to sing nursery rhymes and, in pious households, hymns. Today the little ones warble the Singing Commercials. Which is better— “Rheingold is my beer, the dry beer,” or “Hey diddle-diddle, the cat and the fiddle”? “Abide with me” or “You’ll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent”? Who knows?

“I don’t say that children should be forced to harass their parents into buying products they’ve seen advertised on television, but at the same time I cannot close my eyes to the fact that it’s being done every day.” So writes the star of one of the many programs beamed to a juvenile audience. “Children,” he adds, “are living, talking records of what we tell them every day.” And in due course these living, talking records of television commercials will grow up, earn money and buy the products of industry. “Think,” writes Mr. Clyde Miller ecstatically, “think of what it can mean to your firm in profits if you can condition a million or ten million children, who will grow up into adults trained to buy your product, as soldiers are trained in advance when they hear the trigger words, Forward March!” Yes, just think of it! And at the same time remember that the dictators and the would-be dictators have been thinking about this sort of thing for years, and that millions, tens of millions, hundreds of millions of children are in process of growing up to buy the local despot’s ideological product and, like well-trained soldiers, to respond with appropriate behavior to the trigger words implanted in those young minds by the despot’s propagandists.

Self-government is in inverse ratio to numbers. The larger the constituency, the less the value of any particular vote. When he is merely one of millions, the individual elector feels himself to be impotent, a negligible quantity. The candidates he has voted into office are far away, at the top of the pyramid of power. Theoretically they are the servants of the people; but in fact it is the servants who give orders and the people, far off at the base of the great pyramid, who must obey. Increasing population and advancing technology have resulted in an increase in the number and complexity of organizations, an increase in the amount of power concentrated in the hands of officials and a corresponding decrease in the amount of control exercised by electors, coupled with a decrease in the public's regard for democratic procedures. Already weakened by the vast impersonal forces at work in the modern world, democratic institutions are now being undermined from within by the politicians and their propagandists.

Human beings act in a great variety of irrational ways, but all of them seem to be capable, if given a fair chance, of making a reasonable choice in the light of available evidence. Democratic institutions can be made to work only if all concerned do their best to impart knowledge and to encourage rationality. But today, in the world's most powerful democracy, the politicians and their propagandists prefer to make nonsense of democratic procedures by appealing almost exclusively to the ignorance and irrationality of the electors. "Both parties," we were told in 1956 by the editor of a leading business journal, "will merchandize their candidates and issues by the same methods that business has developed to sell goods. These include scientific selection of appeals and planned repetition.... Radio spot announcements and ads will repeat phrases with a planned intensity. Billboards will push slogans of proven power.... Candidates need, in addition to rich voices and good diction, to be able to look 'sincerely' at the TV camera."

The political merchandisers appeal only to the weaknesses of voters, never to their potential strength. They make no attempt to educate the masses into becoming fit for self-government; they are content merely to manipulate and exploit them. For this purpose all the resources of psychology and the social

sciences are mobilized and set to work. Carefully selected samples of the electorate are given “interviews in depth.” These interviews in depth reveal the unconscious fears and wishes most prevalent in a given society at the time of an election. Phrases and images aimed at allaying or, if necessary, enhancing these fears, at satisfying these wishes, at least symbolically, are then chosen by the experts, tried out on readers and audiences, changed or improved in the light of the information thus obtained. After which the political campaign is ready for the mass communicators. All that is now needed is money and a candidate who can be coached to look “sincere.” Under the new dispensation, political principles and plans for specific action have come to lose most of their importance. The personality of the candidate and the way he is projected by the advertising experts are the things that really matter.

In one way or another, as vigorous he-man or kindly father, the candidate must be glamorous. He must also be an entertainer who never bores his audience. Inured to television and radio, that audience is accustomed to being distracted and does not like to be asked to concentrate or make a prolonged intellectual effort. All speeches by the entertainer-candidate must therefore be short and snappy. The great issues of the day must be dealt with in five minutes at the most — and preferably (since the audience will be eager to pass on to something a little livelier than inflation or the H-bomb) in sixty seconds flat. The nature of oratory is such that there has always been a tendency among politicians and clergymen to over-simplify complex issues. From a pulpit or a platform even the most conscientious of speakers finds it very difficult to tell the whole truth. The methods now being used to merchandise the political candidate as though he were a deodorant positively guarantee the electorate against ever hearing the truth about anything.

VII. Brainwashing

IN THE TWO preceding chapters I have described the techniques of what may be called wholesale mind-manipulation, as practiced by the greatest demagogue and the most successful salesmen in recorded history. But no human problem can be solved by wholesale methods alone. The shotgun has its place, but so has the hypodermic syringe. In the chapters that follow I shall describe some of the more effective techniques for manipulating not crowds, not entire publics, but isolated individuals.

In the course of his epoch-making experiments on the conditioned reflex, Ivan Pavlov observed that, when subjected to prolonged physical or psychic stress, laboratory animals exhibit all the symptoms of a nervous breakdown. Refusing to cope any longer with the intolerable situation, their brains go on strike, so to speak, and either stop working altogether (the dog loses consciousness), or else resort to slow-downs and sabotage (the dog behaves unrealistically, or develops the kind of physical symptoms which, in a human being, we would call hysterical). Some animals are more resistant to stress than others. Dogs possessing what Pavlov called a “strong excitatory” constitution break down much more quickly than dogs of a merely “lively” (as opposed to a choleric or agitated) temperament. Similarly “weak inhibitory” dogs reach the end of their tether much sooner than do “calm imperturbable” dogs. But even the most stoical dog is unable to resist indefinitely. If the stress to which he is subjected is sufficiently intense or sufficiently prolonged, he will end by breaking down as abjectly and as completely as the weakest of his kind.

Pavlov’s findings were confirmed in the most distressing manner, and on a very large scale, during the two World Wars. As the result of a single catastrophic experience, or of a succession of terrors less appalling but frequently repeated, soldiers develop a number of disabling psychophysical

symptoms. Temporary unconsciousness, extreme agitation, lethargy, functional blindness or paralysis, completely unrealistic responses to the challenge of events, strange reversals of lifelong patterns of behavior — all the symptoms, which Pavlov observed in his dogs, reappeared among the victims of what in the First World War was called “shell shock,” in the Second, “battle fatigue.” Every man, like every dog, has his own individual limit of endurance. Most men reach their limit after about thirty days of more or less continuous stress under the conditions of modern combat. The more than averagely susceptible succumb in only fifteen days. The more than averagely tough can resist for forty-five or even fifty days. Strong or weak, in the long run all of them break down. All, that is to say, of those who are initially sane. For, ironically enough, the only people who can hold up indefinitely under the stress of modern war are psychotics. Individual insanity is immune to the consequences of collective insanity.

The fact that every individual has his breaking point has been known and, in a crude unscientific way, exploited from time immemorial. In some cases man’s dreadful inhumanity to man has been inspired by the love of cruelty for its own horrible and fascinating sake. More often, however, pure sadism was tempered by utilitarianism, theology or reasons of state. Physical torture and other forms of stress were inflicted by lawyers in order to loosen the tongues of reluctant witnesses; by clergymen in order to punish the unorthodox and induce them to change their opinions; by the secret police to extract confessions from persons suspected of being hostile to the government. Under Hitler, torture, followed by mass extermination, was used on those biological heretics, the Jews. For a young Nazi, a tour of duty in the Extermination Camps was (in Himmler’s words) “the best indoctrination on inferior beings and the subhuman races.” Given the obsessional quality of the anti-Semitism which Hitler had picked up as a young man in the slums of Vienna, this revival of the methods employed by the Holy Office against heretics and witches was inevitable. But in the light of the findings of Pavlov and of the knowledge gained by psychiatrists in the treatment of war neuroses, it seems a hideous and grotesque anachronism. Stresses amply

sufficient to cause a complete cerebral breakdown can be induced by methods which, though hatefully inhuman, fall short of physical torture.

Whatever may have happened in earlier years, it seems fairly certain that torture is not extensively used by the Communist police today. They draw their inspiration, not from the Inquisitor or the SS man, but from the physiologist and his methodically conditioned laboratory animals. For the dictator and his policemen, Pavlov's findings have important practical implications. If the central nervous system of dogs can be broken down, so can the central nervous system of political prisoners. It is simply a matter of applying the right amount of stress for the right length of time. At the end of the treatment, the prisoner will be in a state of neurosis or hysteria, and will be ready to confess whatever his captors want him to confess.

But confession is not enough. A hopeless neurotic is no use to anyone. What the intelligent and practical dictator needs is not a patient to be institutionalized, or a victim to be shot, but a convert who will work for the Cause. Turning once again to Pavlov, he learns that, on their way to the point of final breakdown, dogs become more than normally suggestible. New behavior patterns can easily be installed while the dog is at or near the limit of its cerebral endurance, and these new behavior patterns seem to be ineradicable. The animal in which they have been implanted cannot be deconditioned; that which it has learned under stress will remain an integral part of its make-up.

Psychological stresses can be produced in many ways. Dogs become disturbed when stimuli are unusually strong; when the interval between a stimulus and the customary response is unduly prolonged and the animal is left in a state of suspense; when the brain is confused by stimuli that run counter to what the dog has learned to expect; when stimuli make no sense within the victim's established frame of reference. Furthermore, it has been found that the deliberate induction of fear, rage or anxiety markedly heightens the dog's suggestibility. If these emotions are kept at a high pitch of intensity for a long enough time, the brain goes 'on strike.' When this happens, new behavior patterns may be installed with the greatest of ease.

Among the physical stresses that increase a dog's suggestibility are fatigue, wounds and every form of sickness.

For the would-be dictator these findings possess important practical implications. They prove, for example, that Hitler was quite right in maintaining that mass meetings at night were more effective than mass meetings in the daytime. During the day, he wrote, "man's will power revolts with highest energy against any attempt at being forced under another's will and another's opinion. In the evening, however, they succumb more easily to the dominating force of a stronger will."

Pavlov would have agreed with him; fatigue increases suggestibility. (That is why, among other reasons, the commercial sponsors of television programs prefer the evening hours and are ready to back their preference with hard cash.)

Illness is even more effective than fatigue as an intensifier of suggestibility. In the past, sickrooms were the scene of countless religious conversions. The scientifically trained dictator of the future will have all the hospitals in his dominions wired for sound and equipped with pillow speakers. Canned persuasion will be on the air twenty-four hours a day, and the more important patients will be visited by political soul-savers and mind-changers just as, in the past, their ancestors were visited by priests, nuns and pious laymen.

The fact that strong negative emotions tend to heighten suggestibility and so facilitate a change of heart had been observed and exploited long before the days of Pavlov. As Dr. William Sargant has pointed out in his enlightening book, *Battle for the Mind*, John Wesley's enormous success as a preacher was based upon an intuitive understanding of the central nervous system. He would open his sermon with a long and detailed description of the torments to which, unless they underwent conversion, his hearers would undoubtedly be condemned for all eternity. Then, when terror and an agonizing sense of guilt had brought his audience to the verge, or in some cases over the verge, of a complete cerebral breakdown, he would change his tone and promise salvation to those who believed and repented. By this kind of preaching, Wesley converted thousands of men, women and children. Intense, prolonged fear broke them down and

produced a state of greatly intensified suggestibility. In this state they were able to accept the preacher's theological pronouncements without question. After which they were reintegrated by words of comfort, and emerged from their ordeal with new and generally better behavior patterns ineradicably implanted in their minds and nervous systems.

The effectiveness of political and religious propaganda depends upon the methods employed, not upon the doctrines taught. These doctrines may be true or false, wholesome or pernicious — it makes little or no difference. If the indoctrination is given in the right way at the proper stage of nervous exhaustion, it will work. Under favorable conditions, practically everybody can be converted to practically anything.

We possess detailed descriptions of the methods used by the Communist police for dealing with political prisoners. From the moment he is taken into custody, the victim is subjected systematically to many kinds of physical and psychological stress. He is badly fed, he is made extremely uncomfortable, he is not allowed to sleep for more than a few hours each night. And all the time he is kept in a state of suspense, uncertainty and acute apprehension. Day after day — or rather night after night, for these Pavlovian policemen understand the value of fatigue as an intensifier of suggestibility — he is questioned, often for many hours at a stretch, by interrogators who do their best to frighten, confuse and bewilder him. After a few weeks or months of such treatment, his brain goes on strike and he confesses whatever it is that his captors want him to confess. Then, if he is to be converted rather than shot, he is offered the comfort of hope. If he will but accept the true faith, he can yet be saved — not, of course, in the next life (for, officially, there is no next life), but in this.

Similar but rather less drastic methods were used during the Korean War on military prisoners. In their Chinese camps the young Western captives were systematically subjected to stress. Thus, for the most trivial breaches of the rules, offenders would be summoned to the commandant's office, there to be questioned, browbeaten and publicly humiliated. And the process would be repeated, again and again, at any hour of the day or night. This continuous

harassment produced in its victims a sense of bewilderment and chronic anxiety. To intensify their sense of guilt, prisoners were made to write and rewrite, in ever more intimate detail, long autobiographical accounts of their shortcomings. And after having confessed their own sins, they were required to confess the sins of their companions. The aim was to create within the camp a nightmarish society, in which everybody was spying on, and informing against, everyone else. To these mental stresses were added the physical stresses of malnutrition, discomfort and illness. The increased suggestibility thus induced was skilfully exploited by the Chinese, who poured into these abnormally receptive minds large doses of pro-Communist and anti-capitalist literature. These Pavlovian techniques were remarkably successful. One out of every seven American prisoners was guilty, we are officially told, of grave collaboration with the Chinese authorities, one out of three of technical collaboration.

It must not be supposed that this kind of treatment is reserved by the Communists exclusively for their enemies. The young field workers, whose business it was, during the first years of the new regime, to act as Communist missionaries and organizers in China’s innumerable towns and villages were made to take a course of indoctrination far more intense than that to which any prisoner of war was ever subjected. In his *China under Communism* R. L. Walker describes the methods by which the party leaders are able to fabricate out of ordinary men and women the thousands of selfless fanatics required for spreading the Communist gospel and for enforcing Communist policies. Under this system of training, the human raw material is shipped to special camps, where the trainees are completely isolated from their friends, families and the outside world in general. In these camps they are made to perform exhausting physical and mental work; they are never alone, always in groups; they are encouraged to spy on one another; they are required to write self-accusatory autobiographies; they live in chronic fear of the dreadful fate that may befall them on account of what has been said about them by informers or of what they themselves have confessed. In this state of heightened suggestibility they are given an intensive course in theoretical and applied Marxism — a course in

which failure to pass examinations may mean anything from ignominious expulsion to a term in a forced labor camp or even liquidation. After about six months of this kind of thing, prolonged mental and physical stress produces the results which Pavlov's findings would lead one to expect. One after another, or in whole groups, the trainees break down. Neurotic and hysterical symptoms make their appearance. Some of the victims commit suicide, others (as many, we are told, as 20 per cent of the total) develop a severe mental illness. Those who survive the rigors of the conversion process emerge with new and ineradicable behavior patterns. All their ties with the past — friends, family, traditional decencies and pieties — have been severed. They are new men, recreated in the image of their new god and totally dedicated to his service.

Throughout the Communist world tens of thousands of these disciplined and devoted young men are being turned out every year from hundreds of conditioning centers. What the Jesuits did for the Roman Church of the Counter Reformation, these products of a more scientific and even harsher training are now doing, and will doubtless continue to do, for the Communist parties of Europe, Asia and Africa.

In politics Pavlov seems to have been an old-fashioned liberal. But, by a strange irony of fate, his researches and the theories he based upon them have called into existence a great army of fanatics dedicated heart and soul, reflex and nervous system, to the destruction of old-fashioned liberalism, wherever it can be found.

Brainwashing, as it is now practiced, is a hybrid technique, depending for its effectiveness partly on the systematic use of violence, partly on skilful psychological manipulation. It represents the tradition of *1984* on its way to becoming the tradition of *Brave New World*. Under a long-established and well-regulated dictatorship our current methods of semiviolent manipulation will seem, no doubt, absurdly crude. Conditioned from earliest infancy (and perhaps also biologically predestined), the average middle-or lower-caste individual will never require conversion or even a refresher course in the true faith. The members of the highest caste will have to be able to think new thoughts in

response to new situations; consequently their training will be much less rigid than the training imposed upon those whose business is not to reason why, but merely to do and die with the minimum of fuss. These upper-caste individuals will be members, still, of a wild species — the trainers and guardians, themselves only slightly conditioned, of a breed of completely domesticated animals. Their wildness will make it possible for them to become heretical and rebellious. When this happens, they will have to be either liquidated, or brainwashed back into orthodoxy, or (as in *Brave New World*) exiled to some island, where they can give no further trouble, except of course to one another. But universal infant conditioning and the other techniques of manipulation and control are still a few generations away in the future. On the road to the Brave New World our rulers will have to rely on the transitional and provisional techniques of brainwashing.

VIII. Chemical Persuasion

IN THE BRAVE New World of my fable there was no whisky, no tobacco, no illicit heroin, no bootlegged cocaine. People neither smoked, nor drank, nor sniffed, nor gave themselves injections. Whenever anyone felt depressed or below par, he would swallow a tablet or two of a chemical compound called soma. The original soma, from which I took the name of this hypothetical drug, was an unknown plant (possibly *Asclepias acida*) used by the ancient Aryan invaders of India in one of the most solemn of their religious rites. The intoxicating juice expressed from the stems of this plant was drunk by the priests and nobles in the course of an elaborate ceremony. In the Vedic hymns we are told that the drinkers of soma were blessed in many ways. Their bodies were strengthened, their hearts were filled with courage, joy and enthusiasm, their minds were enlightened and in an immediate experience of eternal life they received the assurance of their immortality. But the sacred juice had its drawbacks. Soma was a dangerous drug — so dangerous that even the great sky-god, Indra, was sometimes made ill by drinking it. Ordinary mortals might even die of an overdose. But the experience was so transcendently blissful and enlightening that soma drinking was regarded as a high privilege. For this privilege no price was too great.

The soma of *Brave New World* had none of the drawbacks of its Indian original. In small doses it brought a sense of bliss, in larger doses it made you see visions and, if you took three tablets, you would sink in a few minutes into refreshing sleep. And all at no physiological or mental cost. The Brave New Worlders could take holidays from their black moods, or from the familiar annoyances of everyday life, without sacrificing their health or permanently reducing their efficiency.

In the Brave New World the soma habit was not a private vice; it was a political institution, it was the very essence of the Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. But this most precious of the subjects' inalienable privileges was at the same time one of the most powerful instruments of rule in the dictator's armory. The systematic drugging of individuals for the benefit of the State (and incidentally, of course, for their own delight) was a main plank in the policy of the World Controllers. The daily soma ration was an insurance against personal maladjustment, social unrest and the spread of subversive ideas. Religion, Karl Marx declared, is the opium of the people. In the Brave New World this situation was reversed. Opium, or rather soma, was the people's religion. Like religion, the drug had power to console and compensate, it called up visions of another, better world, it offered hope, strengthened faith and promoted charity. Beer, a poet has written,

... does more than Milton can
To justify God's ways to man.

And let us remember that, compared with soma, beer is a drug of the crudest and most unreliable kind. In this matter of justifying God's ways to man, soma is to alcohol as alcohol is to the theological arguments of Milton.

In 1931, when I was writing about the imaginary synthetic by means of which future generations would be made both happy and docile, the well-known American biochemist, Dr. Irvine Page, was preparing to leave Germany, where he had spent the three preceding years at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, working on the chemistry of the brain. "It is hard to understand," Dr. Page has written in a recent article, "why it took so long for scientists to get around to investigating the chemical reactions in their own brains. I speak," he adds, "from acute personal experience. When I came home in 1931 ... I could not get a job in this field (the field of brain chemistry) or stir a ripple of interest in it." Today, twenty-seven years later, the non-existent ripple of 1931 has become a tidal wave of biochemical and psychopharmacological research. The enzymes which

regulate the workings of the brain are being studied. Within the body, hitherto unknown chemical substances such as adrenochrome and serotonin (of which Dr. Page was a co-discoverer) have been isolated and their far-reaching effects on our mental and physical functions are now being investigated. Meanwhile new drugs are being synthesized — drugs that reinforce or correct or interfere with the actions of the various chemicals, by means of which the nervous system performs its daily and hourly miracles as the controller of the body, the instrument and mediator of consciousness. From our present point of view, the most interesting fact about these new drugs is that they temporarily alter the chemistry of the brain and the associated state of the mind without doing any permanent damage to the organism as a whole. In this respect they are like soma — and profoundly unlike the mind-changing drugs of the past. For example, the classical tranquillizer is opium. But opium is a dangerous drug which, from neolithic times down to the present day, has been making addicts and ruining health. The same is true of the classical euphoric, alcohol — the drug which, in the words of the Psalmist, “maketh glad the heart of man.” But unfortunately alcohol not only maketh glad the heart of man; it also, in excessive doses, causes illness and addiction, and has been a main source, for the last eight or ten thousand years, of crime, domestic unhappiness, moral degradation and avoidable accidents.

Among the classical stimulants, tea, coffee and maté are, thank goodness, almost completely harmless. They are also very weak stimulants. Unlike these “cups that cheer but not inebriate,” cocaine is a very powerful and a very dangerous drug. Those who make use of it must pay for their ecstasies, their sense of unlimited physical and mental power, by spells of agonizing depression, by such horrible physical symptoms as the sensation of being infested by myriads of crawling insects and by paranoid delusions that may lead to crimes of violence. Another stimulant of more recent vintage is amphetamine, better known under its trade name of Benzedrine. Amphetamine works very effectively — but works, if abused, at the expense of mental and physical health. It has been reported that, in Japan, there are now about one million amphetamine addicts.

Of the classical vision-producers the best known are the peyote of Mexico and the southwestern United States and *Cannabis sativa*, consumed all over the world under such names as hashish, bhang, kif and marihuana. According to the best medical and anthropological evidence, peyote is far less harmful than the White Man's gin or whisky. It permits the Indians who use it in their religious rites to enter paradise, and to feel at one with the beloved community, without making them pay for the privilege by anything worse than the ordeal of having to chew on something with a revolting flavor and of feeling somewhat nauseated for an hour or two. *Cannabis sativa* is a less innocuous drug — though not nearly so harmful as the sensation-mongers would have us believe. The Medical Committee, appointed in 1944 by the Mayor of New York to investigate the problem of marihuana, came to the conclusion, after careful investigation, that *Cannabis sativa* is not a serious menace to society, or even to those who indulge in it. It is merely a nuisance.

From these classical mind-changes we pass to the latest products of psychopharmacological research. Most highly publicized of these are the three new tranquillizers, reserpine, chlorpromazine and meprobamate. Administered to certain classes of psychotics, the first two have proved to be remarkably effective, not in curing mental illnesses, but at least in temporarily abolishing their more distressing symptoms. Meprobamate (alias Miltown) produces similar effects in persons suffering from various forms of neurosis. None of these drugs is perfectly harmless; but their cost, in terms of physical health and mental efficiency, is extraordinarily low. In a world where nobody gets anything for nothing tranquillizers offer a great deal for very little. Miltown and chlorpromazine are not yet soma; but they come fairly near to being one of the aspects of that mythical drug. They provide temporary relief from nervous tension without, in the great majority of cases, inflicting permanent organic harm, and without causing more than a rather slight impairment, while the drug is working, of intellectual and physical efficiency. Except as narcotics, they are probably to be preferred to the barbiturates, which blunt the mind's cutting edge

and, in large doses, cause a number of undesirable psychophysical symptoms and may result in a full-blown addiction.

In LSD-25 (lysergic acid diethylamide) the pharmacologists have recently created another aspect of soma — a perception-improver and vision-producer that is, physiologically speaking, almost costless. This extraordinary drug, which is effective in doses as small as fifty or even twenty-five millionths of a gram, has power (like peyote) to transport people into the other world. In the majority of cases, the other world to which LSD-25 gives access is heavenly; alternatively it may be purgatorial or even infernal. But, positive or negative, the lysergic acid experience is felt by almost everyone who undergoes it to be profoundly significant and enlightening. In any event, the fact that minds can be changed so radically at so little cost to the body is altogether astonishing.

Soma was not only a vision-producer and a tranquillizer; it was also (and no doubt impossibly) a stimulant of mind and body, a creator of active euphoria as well as of the negative happiness that follows the release from anxiety and tension.

The ideal stimulant — powerful but innocuous — still awaits discovery. Amphetamine, as we have seen, was far from satisfactory; it exacted too high a price for what it gave. A more promising candidate for the role of soma in its third aspect is Iproniazid, which is now being used to lift depressed patients out of their misery, to enliven the apathetic and in general to increase the amount of available psychic energy. Still more promising, according to a distinguished pharmacologist of my acquaintance, is a new compound, still in the testing stage, to be known as Deaner. Deaner is an ammo-alcohol and is thought to increase the production of acetyl-choline within the body, and thereby to increase the activity and effectiveness of the nervous system. The man who takes the new pill needs less sleep, feels more alert and cheerful, thinks faster and better — and all at next to no organic cost, at any rate in the short run. It sounds almost too good to be true.

We see then that, though soma does not yet exist (and will probably never exist), fairly good substitutes for the various aspects of soma have already been

discovered. There are now physiologically cheap tranquillizers, physiologically cheap vision-producers and physiologically cheap stimulants.

That a dictator could, if he so desired, make use of these drugs for political purposes is obvious. He could ensure himself against political unrest by changing the chemistry of his subjects' brains and so making them content with their servile condition. He could use tranquillizers to calm the excited, stimulants to arouse enthusiasm in the indifferent, halluciants to distract the attention of the wretched from their miseries. But how, it may be asked, will the dictator get his subjects to take the pills that will make them think, feel and behave in the ways he finds desirable? In all probability it will be enough merely to make the pills available. Today alcohol and tobacco are available, and people spend considerably more on these very unsatisfactory euphorics, pseudo-stimulants and sedatives than they are ready to spend on the education of their children. Or consider the barbiturates and the tranquillizers. In the United States these drugs can be obtained only on a doctor's prescription. But the demand of the American public for something that will make life in an urban-industrial environment a little more tolerable is so great that doctors are now writing prescriptions for the various tranquillizers at the rate of forty-eight millions a year. Moreover, a majority of these prescriptions are refilled. A hundred doses of happiness are not enough: send to the drugstore for another bottle — and, when that is finished, for another.... There can be no doubt that, if tranquillizers could be bought as easily and cheaply as aspirin, they would be consumed, not by the billions, as they are at present, but by the scores and hundreds of billions. And a good, cheap stimulant would be almost as popular.

Under a dictatorship pharmacists would be instructed to change their tune with every change of circumstances. In times of national crisis it would be their business to push the sale of stimulants. Between crises, too much alertness and energy on the part of his subjects might prove embarrassing to the tyrant. At such times the masses would be urged to buy tranquillizers and vision-producers. Under the influence of these soothing syrups they could be relied upon to give their master no trouble.

As things now stand, the tranquillizers may prevent some people from giving enough trouble, not only to their rulers, but even to themselves. Too much tension is a disease; but so is too little. There are certain occasions when we ought to be tense, when an excess of tranquillity (and especially of tranquillity imposed from the outside, by a chemical) is entirely inappropriate.

At a recent symposium on meprobamate, in which I was a participant, an eminent biochemist playfully suggested that the United States government should make a free gift to the Soviet people of fifty billion doses of this most popular of the tranquillizers. The joke had a serious point to it. In a contest between two populations, one of which is being constantly stimulated by threats and promises, constantly directed by one-pointed propaganda, while the other is no less constantly being distracted by television and tranquillized by Miltown, which of the opponents is more likely to come out on top?

As well as tranquillizing, hallucinating and stimulating, the soma of my fable had the power of heightening suggestibility, and so could be used to reinforce the effects of governmental propaganda. Less effectively and at a higher physiological cost, several drugs already in the pharmacopoeia can be used for the same purpose. There is scopolamine, for example, the active principle of henbane and, in large doses, a powerful poison; there are pentothal and sodium amytal. Nicknamed for some odd reason “the truth serum,” pentothal has been used by the police of various countries for the purpose of extracting confessions from (or perhaps suggesting confessions to) reluctant criminals. Pentothal and sodium amytal lower the barrier between the conscious and the subconscious mind and are of great value in the treatment of “battle fatigue” by the process known in England as “abreaction therapy,” in America as “narcosynthesis.” It is said that these drugs are sometimes employed by the Communists, when preparing important prisoners for their public appearance in court.

Meanwhile pharmacology, biochemistry and neurology are on the march, and we can be quite certain that, in the course of the next few years, new and better chemical methods for increasing suggestibility and lowering psychological resistance will be discovered. Like everything else, these discoveries may be

used well or badly. They may help the psychiatrist in his battle against mental illness, or they may help the dictator in his battle against freedom. More probably (since science is divinely impartial) they will both enslave and make free, heal and at the same time destroy.

IX. Subconscious Persuasion

IN A FOOTNOTE appended to the 1919 edition of his book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud called attention to the work of Dr. Poetzl, an Austrian neurologist, who had recently published a paper describing his experiments with the tachistoscope. (The tachistoscope is an instrument that comes in two forms — a viewing box, into which the subject looks at an image that is exposed for a small fraction of a second; a magic lantern with a high-speed shutter, capable of projecting an image very briefly upon a screen.) In these experiments "Poetzl required the subjects to make a drawing of what they had consciously noted of a picture exposed to their view in a tachistoscope.... He then turned his attention to the dreams dreamed by the subjects during the following night and required them once more to make drawings of appropriate portions of these dreams. It was shown unmistakably that those details of the exposed picture which had *not* been noted by the subject provided material for the construction of the dream."

With various modifications and refinements Poetzl's experiments have been repeated several times, most recently by Dr. Charles Fisher, who has contributed three excellent papers on the subject of dreams and "preconscious perception" to the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. Meanwhile the academic psychologists have not been idle. Confirming Poetzl's findings, their studies have shown that people actually see and hear a great deal more than they consciously know they see and hear, and that what they see and hear without knowing it is recorded by the subconscious mind and may affect their conscious thoughts, feelings and behavior.

Pure science does not remain pure indefinitely. Sooner or later it is apt to turn into applied science and finally into technology. Theory modulates into industrial practice, knowledge becomes power, formulas and laboratory experiments undergo a metamorphosis, and emerge as the H-bomb. In the

present case, Poetzl's nice little piece of pure science, and all the other nice little pieces of pure science in the field of preconscious perception, retained their pristine purity for a surprisingly long time. Then, in the early autumn of 1957, exactly forty years after the publication of Poetzl's original paper, it was announced that their purity was a thing of the past; they had been applied, they had entered the realm of technology. The announcement made a considerable stir, and was talked and written about all over the civilized world. And no wonder; for the new technique of "subliminal projection," as it was called, was intimately associated with mass entertainment, and in the life of civilized human beings mass entertainment now plays a part comparable to that played in the Middle Ages by religion. Our epoch has been given many nicknames — the Age of Anxiety, the Atomic Age, the Space Age. It might, with equally good reason, be called the Age of Television Addiction, the Age of Soap Opera, the Age of the Disk Jockey. In such an age the announcement that Poetzl's pure science had been applied in the form of a technique of subliminal projection could not fail to arouse the most intense interest among the world's mass entertainees. For the new technique was aimed directly at them, and its purpose was to manipulate their minds without their being aware of what was being done to them. By means of specially designed tachistoscopes words or images were to be flashed for a millisecond or less upon the screens of television sets and motion picture theaters during (not before or after) the program. "Drink Coca-Cola" or "Light up a Camel" would be superimposed upon the lovers' embrace, the tears of the broken-hearted mother, and the optic nerves of the viewers would record these secret messages, their subconscious minds would respond to them and in due course they would consciously feel a craving for soda pop and tobacco. And meanwhile other secret messages would be whispered too softly, or squeaked too shrilly, for conscious hearing. Consciously the listener might be paying attention to some such phrase as "Darling, I love you"; but subliminally, beneath the threshold of awareness, his incredibly sensitive ears and his subconscious mind would be taking in the latest good news about deodorants and laxatives.

Does this kind of commercial propaganda really work? The evidence produced by the commercial firm that first unveiled a technique for subliminal projection was vague and, from a scientific point of view, very unsatisfactory. Repeated at regular intervals during the showing of a picture in a movie theater, the command to buy more popcorn was said to have resulted in a 50 per cent increase in popcorn sales during the intermission. But a single experiment proves very little. Moreover, this particular experiment was poorly set up. There were no controls and no attempt was made to allow for the many variables that undoubtedly affect the consumption of popcorn by a theater audience. And anyhow was this the most effective way of applying the knowledge accumulated over the years by the scientific investigators of subconscious perception? Was it intrinsically probable that, by merely flashing the name of a product and a command to buy it, you would be able to break down sales resistance and recruit new customers? The answer to both these questions is pretty obviously in the negative. But this does not mean, of course, that the findings of the neurologists and psychologists are without any practical importance. Skillfully applied, Poetzl's nice little piece of pure science might well become a powerful instrument for the manipulation of unsuspecting minds.

For a few suggestive hints let us now turn from the popcorn vendors to those who, with less noise but more imagination and better methods, have been experimenting in the same field. In Britain, where the process of manipulating minds below the level of consciousness is known as "strobonic injection," investigators have stressed the practical importance of creating the right psychological conditions for subconscious persuasion. A suggestion above the threshold of awareness is more likely to take effect when the recipient is in a light hypnotic trance, under the influence of certain drugs, or has been debilitated by illness, starvation, or any kind of physical or emotional stress. But what is true for suggestions above the threshold of consciousness is also true for suggestions beneath that threshold. In a word, the lower the level of a person's psychological resistance, the greater will be the effectiveness of strobonically injected suggestions. The scientific dictator of tomorrow will set up his

whispering machines and subliminal projectors in schools and hospitals (children and the sick are highly suggestible), and in all public places where audiences can be given a preliminary softening up by suggestibility-increasing oratory or rituals.

From the conditions under which we may expect subliminal suggestion to be effective we now pass to the suggestions themselves. In what terms should the propagandist address himself to his victims' subconscious minds? Direct commands ("Buy popcorn" or "Vote for Jones") and unqualified statements ("Socialism stinks" or "X's toothpaste cures halitosis") are likely to take effect only upon those minds that are already partial to Jones and popcorn, already alive to the dangers of body odors and the public ownership of the means of production. But to strengthen existing faith is not enough; the propagandist, if he is worth his salt, must create new faith, must know how to bring the indifferent and the undecided over to his side, must be able to mollify and perhaps even convert the hostile. To subliminal assertion and command he knows that he must add subliminal persuasion.

Above the threshold of awareness, one of the most effective methods of non-rational persuasion is what may be called persuasion-by-association. The propagandist arbitrarily associates his chosen product, candidate or cause with some idea, some image of a person or thing which most people, in a given culture, unquestioningly regard as good. Thus, in a selling campaign female beauty may be arbitrarily associated with anything from a bulldozer to a diuretic; in a political campaign patriotism may be associated with any cause from *apartheid* to integration, and with any kind of person, from a Mahatma Gandhi to a Senator McCarthy. Years ago, in Central America, I observed an example of persuasion-by-association which filled me with an appalled admiration for the men who had devised it. In the mountains of Guatemala the only imported art works are the colored calendars distributed free of charge by the foreign companies whose products are sold to the Indians. The American calendars showed pictures of dogs, of landscapes, of young women in a state of partial nudity. But to the Indian dogs are merely utilitarian objects, landscapes are what

he sees only too much of, every day of his life, and half-naked blondes are uninteresting, perhaps a little repulsive. American calendars were, in consequence, far less popular than German calendars; for the German advertisers had taken the trouble to find out what the Indians valued and were interested in. I remember in particular one masterpiece of commercial propaganda. It was a calendar put out by a manufacturer of aspirin. At the bottom of the picture one saw the familiar trademark on the familiar bottle of white tablets. Above it were no snow scenes or autumnal woods, no cocker spaniels or bosomy chorus girls. No — the wily Germans had associated their pain-relievers with a brightly colored and extremely lifelike picture of the Holy Trinity sitting on a cumulus cloud and surrounded by St. Joseph, the Virgin Mary, assorted saints and a large number of angels. The miraculous virtues of acetyl salicylic acid were thus guaranteed, in the Indians' simple and deeply religious minds, by God the Father and the entire heavenly host.

This kind of persuasion-by-association is something to which the techniques of subliminal projection seem to lend themselves particularly well. In a series of experiments carried out at New York University, under the auspices of the National Institute of Health, it was found that a person's feelings about some consciously seen image could be modified by associating it, on the subconscious level, with another image, or, better still, with value-bearing words. Thus, when associated, on the subconscious level, with the word "happy," a blank expressionless face would seem to the observer to smile, to look friendly, amiable, outgoing. When the same face was associated, also on the subconscious level, with the word "angry," it took on a forbidding expression, and seemed to the observer to have become hostile and disagreeable. (To a group of young women, it also came to seem very masculine — whereas when it was associated with "happy," they saw the face as belonging to a member of their own sex. Fathers and husbands, please take note.) For the commercial and political propagandist, these findings, it is obvious, are highly significant. If he can put his victims into a state of abnormally high suggestibility, if he can show them, while they are in that state, the thing, the person or, through a symbol, the cause

he has to sell, and if, on the subconscious level, he can associate this thing, person or symbol with some value-bearing word or image, he may be able to modify their feelings and opinions without their having any idea of what he is doing. It should be possible, according to an enterprising commercial group in New Orleans, to enhance the entertainment value of films and television plays by using this technique. People like to feel strong emotions and therefore enjoy tragedies, thrillers, murder mysteries and tales of passion. The dramatization of a fight or an embrace produces strong emotions in the spectators. It might produce even stronger emotions if it were associated, on the subconscious level, with appropriate words or symbols. For example, in the film version of *A Farewell to Arms*, the death of the heroine in childbirth might be made even more distressing than it already is by subliminally flashing upon the screen, again and again, during the playing of the scene, such ominous words as “pain,” “blood” and “death.” Consciously, the words would not be seen; but their effect upon the subconscious mind might be very great and these effects might powerfully reinforce the emotions evoked, on the conscious level, by the acting and the dialogue. If, as seems pretty certain, subliminal projection can consistently intensify the emotions felt by moviegoers, the motion picture industry may yet be saved from bankruptcy — that is, if the producers of television plays don’t get there first.

In the light of what has been said about persuasion-by-association and the enhancement of emotions by subliminal suggestion, let us try to imagine what the political meeting of tomorrow will be like. The candidate (if there is still a question of candidates), or the appointed representative of the ruling oligarchy, will make his speech for all to hear. Meanwhile the tachistoscopes, the whispering and squeaking machines, the projectors of images so dim that only the subconscious mind can respond to them, will be reinforcing what he says by systematically associating the man and his cause with positively charged words and hallowed images, and by strobonically injecting negatively charged words and odious symbols whenever he mentions the enemies of the State or the Party. In the United States brief flashes of Abraham Lincoln and the words

“government by the people” will be projected upon the rostrum. In Russia the speaker will, of course, be associated with glimpses of Lenin, with the words “people’s democracy,” with the prophetic beard of Father Marx. Because all this is still safely in the future, we can afford to smile. Ten or twenty years from now, it will probably seem a good deal less amusing. For what is now merely science fiction will have become everyday political fact.

Poetzl was one of the portents which, when writing *Brave New World*, I somehow overlooked. There is no reference in my fable to subliminal projection. It is a mistake of omission which, if I were to rewrite the book today, I should most certainly correct.

X. Hypnopaedia

IN THE LATE autumn of 1957 the Woodland Road Camp, a penal institution in Tulare County, California, became the scene of a curious and interesting experiment. Miniature loud-speakers were placed under the pillows of a group of prisoners who had volunteered to act as psychological guinea pigs. Each of these pillow speakers was hooked up to a phonograph in the Warden's office. Every hour throughout the night an inspirational whisper repeated a brief homily on "the principles of moral living." Waking at midnight, a prisoner might hear this still small voice extolling the cardinal virtues or murmuring, on behalf of his own Better Self, "I am filled with love and compassion for all, so help me God."

After reading about the Woodland Road Camp, I turned to the second chapter of *Brave New World*. In that chapter the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning for Western Europe explains to a group of freshman conditioners and hatchers the workings of that state-controlled system of ethical education, known in the seventh century After Ford as hypnopaedia. The earliest attempts at sleep-teaching, the Director told his audience, had been misguided, and therefore unsuccessful. Educators had tried to give intellectual training to their slumbering pupils. But intellectual activity is incompatible with sleep. Hypnopaedia became successful only when it was used for *moral* training — in other words, for the conditioning of behavior through verbal suggestion at a time of lowered psychological resistance. "Wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behavior required by the State. For that there must be words, but words without reason" ... the kind of words that require no analysis for their comprehension, but can be swallowed whole by the sleeping brain. This is true hypnopaedia, "the greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time." In the Brave New World, no citizens belonging to the lower castes ever gave any trouble. Why? Because, from the moment he could speak and

understand what was said to him, every lower-caste child was exposed to endlessly repeated suggestions, night after night, during the hours of drowsiness and sleep. These suggestions were “like drops of liquid sealing wax, drops that adhere, incrust, incorporate themselves with what they fall on, till finally the rock is all one scarlet blob. Till at last the child’s mind is these suggestions and the sum of these suggestions is the child’s mind. And not the child’s mind only. The adult’s mind too — all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides — made up of these suggestions. But these suggestions are *our* suggestions — suggestions from the State....”

To date, so far as I know, hypnopaedic suggestions have been given by no state more formidable than Tulare County, and the nature of Tulare’s hypnopaedic suggestions to lawbreakers is unexceptionable. If only all of us, and not only the inmates of the Woodland Road Camp, could be effectively filled, during our sleep, with love and compassion for all! No, it is not the message conveyed by the inspirational whisper that one objects to; it is the principle of sleep-teaching by governmental agencies. Is hypnopaedia the sort of instrument that officials, delegated to exercise authority in a democratic society, ought to be allowed to use at their discretion? In the present instance they are using it only on volunteers and with the best intentions. But there is no guarantee that in other cases the intentions will be good or the indoctrination on a voluntary basis. Any law or social arrangement which makes it possible for officials to be led into temptation is bad. Any law or arrangement which preserves them from being tempted to abuse their delegated power for their own advantage, or for the benefit of the State or of some political, economic or ecclesiastical organization, is good. Hypnopaedia, if it is effective, would be a tremendously powerful instrument in the hands of anyone in a position to impose suggestions upon a captive audience. A democratic society is a society dedicated to the proposition that power is often abused and should therefore be entrusted to officials only in limited amounts and for limited periods of time. In such a society, the use of hypnopaedia by officials should be regulated by law — that is, of course, if hypnopaedia is genuinely an instrument of power. But is it in fact an instrument

of power? Will it work now as well as I imagined it working in the seventh century A.F.? Let us examine the evidence.

In the *Psychological Bulletin* for July, 1955, Charles W. Simon and William H. Emmons have analyzed and evaluated the ten most important studies in the field. All these studies were concerned with memory. Does sleep-teaching help the pupil in his task of learning by rote? And to what extent is material whispered into the ear of a sleeping person remembered next morning when he wakes? Simon and Emmons answer as follows: "Ten sleep-learning studies were reviewed. Many of these have been cited uncritically by commercial firms or in popular magazines and news articles as evidence in support of the feasibility of learning during sleep. A critical analysis was made of their experimental design, statistics, methodology and criteria of sleep. All the studies had weaknesses in one or more of these areas. The studies do not make it unequivocally clear that learning during *sleep* actually takes place. But some learning appears to take place in a special kind of waking state wherein the subjects do not remember later on if they had been awake. This may be of great practical importance from the standpoint of economy in study time, but it cannot be construed as *sleep learning*.... The problem is partially confounded by an inadequate definition of sleep."

Meanwhile the fact remains that in the American Army during the Second World War (and even, experimentally, during the First) daytime instruction in the Morse Code and in foreign languages was supplemented by instruction during sleep — apparently with satisfactory results. Since the end of World War II several commercial firms in the United States and elsewhere have sold large numbers of pillow speakers and clock-controlled phonographs and tape recorders for the use of actors in a hurry to learn their parts, of politicians and preachers who want to give the illusion of being extemporaneously eloquent, of students preparing for examinations and, finally and most profitably, of the countless people who are dissatisfied with themselves as they are and would like to be suggested or autosuggested into becoming something else. Self-administered suggestion can easily be recorded on magnetic tape and listened to,

over and over again, by day and during sleep. Suggestions from the outside may be bought in the form of records carrying a wide variety of helpful messages. There are on the market records for the release of tension and the induction of deep relaxation, records for promoting self-confidence (much used by salesmen), records for increasing one's charm and making one's personality more magnetic. Among the best sellers are records for the achievement of sexual harmony and records for those who wish to lose weight. ("I am cold to chocolate, insensible to the lure of potatoes, utterly unmoved by muffins.") There are records for improved health and even records for making more money. And the remarkable thing is that, according to the unsolicited testimonials sent in by grateful purchasers of these records, many people actually do make more money after listening to hypnopaedic suggestions to that effect, many obese ladies do lose weight and many couples on the verge of divorce achieve sexual harmony and live happily ever after.

In this context an article by Theodore X. Barber, "Sleep and Hypnosis," which appeared in *The Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* for October, 1956, is most enlightening. Mr. Barber points out that there is a significant difference between light sleep and deep sleep. In deep sleep the electroencephalograph records no alpha waves; in light sleep alpha waves make their appearance. In this respect light sleep is closer to the waking and hypnotic states (in both of which alpha waves are present) than it is to deep sleep. A loud noise will cause a person in deep sleep to awaken. A less violent stimulus will not arouse him, but will cause the reappearance of alpha waves. Deep sleep has given place for the time being to light sleep.

A person in deep sleep is unsuggestible. But when subjects in light sleep are given suggestions, they will respond to them, Mr. Barber found, in the same way that they respond to suggestions when in the hypnotic trance.

Many of the earlier investigators of hypnotism made similar experiments. In his classical *History, Practice and Theory of Hypnotism*, first published in 1903, Milne Bramwell records that "many authorities claim to have changed natural sleep into hypnotic sleep. According to Wetterstrand, it is often very easy to put

oneself *en rapport* with sleeping persons, especially children.... Wetterstrand thinks this method of inducing hypnosis of much practical value and claims to have often used it successfully." Bramwell cites many other experienced hypnotists (including such eminent authorities as Bernheim, Moll and Forel) to the same effect. Today an experimenter would not speak of "changing natural into hypnotic sleep." All he is prepared to say is that light sleep (as opposed to deep sleep without alpha waves) is a state in which many subjects will accept suggestions as readily as they do when under hypnosis. For example, after being told, when lightly asleep, that they will wake up in a little while, feeling extremely thirsty, many subjects will duly wake up with a dry throat and a craving for water. The cortex may be too inactive to think straight; but it is alert enough to respond to suggestions and to pass them on to the autonomic nervous system.

As we have already seen, the well-known Swedish physician and experimenter, Wetterstrand, was especially successful in the hypnotic treatment of sleeping children. In our own day Wetterstrand's methods are followed by a number of pediatricians, who instruct young mothers in the art of giving helpful suggestions to their children during the hours of light sleep. By this kind of hypnopaedia children can be cured of bed wetting and nail biting, can be prepared to go into surgery without apprehension, can be given confidence and reassurance when, for any reason, the circumstances of their life have become distressing. I myself have seen remarkable results achieved by the therapeutic sleep-teaching of small children. Comparable results could probably be achieved with many adults.

For a would-be dictator, the moral of all this is plain. Under proper conditions, hypnopaedia actually works — works, it would seem, about as well as hypnosis. Most of the things that can be done with and to a person in hypnotic trance can be done with and to a person in light sleep. Verbal suggestions can be passed through the somnolent cortex to the midbrain, the brain stem and the autonomic nervous system. If these suggestions are well conceived and frequently repeated, the bodily functions of the sleeper can be improved or

interfered with, new patterns of feeling can be installed and old ones modified, posthypnotic commands can be given, slogans, formulas and trigger words deeply ingrained in the memory. Children are better hypnopaedic subjects than adults, and the would-be dictator will take full advantage of the fact. Children of nursery-school and kindergarten age will be treated to hypnopaedic suggestions during their afternoon nap. For older children and particularly the children of party members — the boys and girls who will grow up to be leaders, administrators and teachers — there will be boarding schools, in which an excellent daytime education will be supplemented by nightly sleep-teaching. In the case of adults, special attention will be paid to the sick. As Pavlov demonstrated many years ago, strong-minded and resistant dogs become completely suggestible after an operation or when suffering from some debilitating illness. Our dictator will therefore see that every hospital ward is wired for sound. An appendectomy, an accouchement, a bout of pneumonia or hepatitis, can be made the occasion for an intensive course in loyalty and the true faith, a refresher in the principles of the local ideology. Other captive audiences can be found in prisons, in labor camps, in military barracks, on ships at sea, on trains and airplanes in the night, in the dismal waiting rooms of bus terminals and railway stations. Even if the hypnopaedic suggestions given to these captive audiences were no more than 10 per cent effective, the results would still be impressive and, for a dictator, highly desirable.

From the heightened suggestibility associated with light sleep and hypnosis let us pass to the normal suggestibility of those who are awake — or at least who think they are awake. (In fact, as the Buddhists insist, most of us are half asleep all the time and go through life as somnambulists obeying somebody else’s suggestions. Enlightenment is total awakeness. The word “Buddha” can be translated as “The Wake.”)

Genetically, every human being is unique and in many ways unlike every other human being. The range of individual variation from the statistical norm is amazingly wide. And the statistical norm, let us remember, is useful only in actuarial calculations, not in real life. In real life there is no such person as the

average man. There are only particular men, women and children, each with his or her in-born idiosyncrasies of mind and body, and all trying (or being compelled) to squeeze their biological diversities into the uniformity of some cultural mold.

Suggestibility is one of the qualities that vary significantly from individual to individual. Environmental factors certainly play their part in making one person more responsive to suggestion than another; but there are also, no less certainly, constitutional differences in the suggestibility of individuals. Extreme resistance to suggestion is rather rare. Fortunately so. For if everyone were as unsuggestible as some people are, social life would be impossible. Societies can function with a reasonable degree of efficiency because, in varying degrees, most people are fairly suggestible. Extreme suggestibility is probably about as rare as extreme unsuggestibility. And this also is fortunate. For if most people were as responsive to outside suggestions as the men and women at the extreme limits of suggestibility, free, rational choice would become, for the majority of the electorate, virtually impossible, and democratic institutions could not survive, or even come into existence.

A few years ago, at the Massachusetts General Hospital, a group of researchers carried out a most illuminating experiment on the pain-relieving effects of placebos. (A placebo is anything which the patient believes to be an active drug, but which in fact is pharmacologically inactive.) In this experiment the subjects were one hundred and sixty-two patients who had just come out of surgery and were all in considerable pain. Whenever a patient asked for medication to relieve pain, he or she was given an injection, either of morphine or of distilled water. All the patients received some injections of morphine and some of the placebo. About 30 per cent of the patients never obtained relief from the placebo. On the other hand 14 per cent obtained relief after *every* injection of distilled water. The remaining 55 per cent of the group were relieved by the placebo on some occasions, but not on others.

In what respects did the suggestible reactors differ from the unsuggestible non-reactors? Careful study and testing revealed that neither age nor sex was a

significant factor. Men reacted to placebo as frequently as did women, and young people as often as old ones. Nor did intelligence, as measured by the standard tests, seem to be important. The average IQ of the two groups was about the same. It was above all in temperament, in the way they felt about themselves and other people that the members of the two groups were significantly different. The reactors were more co-operative than the non-reactors, less critical and suspicious. They gave the nurses no trouble and thought that the care they were receiving in the hospital was simply "wonderful." But though less unfriendly toward others than the non-reactors, the reactors were generally much more anxious about themselves. Under stress, this anxiety tended to translate itself into various psychosomatic symptoms, such as stomach upsets, diarrhea and headaches. In spite of or because of their anxiety, most of the reactors were more uninhibited in the display of emotion than were the non-reactors, and more voluble. They were also much more religious, much more active in the affairs of their church and much more preoccupied, on a subconscious level, with their pelvic and abdominal organs. It is interesting to compare these figures for reaction to placebos with the estimates made, in their own special field, by writers on hypnosis. About a fifth of the population, they tell us, can be hypnotized very easily. Another fifth cannot be hypnotized at all, or can be hypnotized only when drugs or fatigue have lowered psychological resistance. The remaining three-fifths can be hypnotized somewhat less easily than the first group, but considerably more easily than the second. A manufacturer of hypnopaedic records has told me that about 20 per cent of his customers are enthusiastic and report striking results in a very short time. At the other end of the spectrum of suggestibility there is an 8 per cent minority that regularly asks for its money back. Between these two extremes are the people who fail to get quick results, but are suggestible enough to be affected in the long run. If they listen perseveringly to the appropriate hypnopaedic instructions they will end by getting what they want — self-confidence or sexual harmony, less weight or more money.

The ideals of democracy and freedom confront the brute fact of human suggestibility. One-fifth of every electorate can be hypnotized almost in the twinkling of an eye, one-seventh can be relieved of pain by injections of water, one-quarter will respond promptly and enthusiastically to hypnopaedia. And to these all too co-operative minorities must be added the slow-starting majorities, whose less extreme suggestibility can be effectually exploited by anyone who knows his business and is prepared to take the necessary time and trouble.

Is individual freedom compatible with a high degree of individual suggestibility? Can democratic institutions survive the subversion from within of skilled mind-manipulators trained in the science and art of exploiting the suggestibility both of individuals and of crowds? To what extent can the inborn tendency to be too suggestible for one's own good or the good of a democratic society be neutralized by education? How far can the exploitation of inordinate suggestibility by businessmen and ecclesiastics, by politicians in and out of power, be controlled by law? Explicitly or implicitly, the first two questions have been discussed in earlier articles. In what follows I shall consider the problems of prevention and cure.

XI. Education for Freedom

EDUCATION FOR FREEDOM must begin by stating facts and enunciating values, and must go on to develop appropriate techniques for realizing the values and for combating those who, for whatever reason, choose to ignore the facts or deny the values.

In an earlier chapter I have discussed the Social Ethic, in terms of which the evils resulting from over-organization and over-population are justified and made to seem good. Is such a system of values consonant with what we know about human physique and temperament? The Social Ethic assumes that nurture is all-important in determining human behavior and that nature — the psychophysical equipment with which individuals are born — is a negligible factor. But is this true? Is it true that human beings are nothing but the products of their social environment? And if it is not true, what justification can there be for maintaining that the individual is less important than the group of which he is a member?

All the available evidence points to the conclusion that in the life of individuals and societies heredity is no less significant than culture. Every individual is biologically unique and unlike all other individuals. Freedom is therefore a great good, tolerance a great virtue and regimentation a great misfortune. For practical or theoretical reasons, dictators, organization men and certain scientists are anxious to reduce the maddening diversity of men's natures to some kind of manageable uniformity. In the first flush of his Behavioristic fervor, J. B. Watson roundly declared that he could find "no support for hereditary patterns of behavior, nor for special abilities (musical, art, etc.) which are supposed to run in families." And even today we find a distinguished psychologist, Professor B. F. Skinner of Harvard, insisting that, "as scientific explanation becomes more and more comprehensive, the contribution which

may be claimed by the individual himself appears to approach zero. Man's vaunted creative powers, his achievements in art, science and morals, his capacity to choose and our right to hold him responsible for the consequences of his choice — none of these is conspicuous in the new scientific self-portrait." In a word, Shakespeare's plays were not written by Shakespeare, nor even by Bacon or the Earl of Oxford; they were written by Elizabethan England.

More than sixty years ago William James wrote an essay on "Great Men and Their Environment," in which he set out to defend the outstanding individual against the assaults of Herbert Spencer. Spencer had proclaimed that "Science" (that wonderfully convenient personification, of the opinions, at a given date, of Professors X, Y and Z) had completely abolished the Great Man. "The great man," he had written, "must be classed with all other phenomena in the society that gave him birth, as a product of its antecedents." The great man may be (or seem to be) "the proximate initiator of changes.... But if there is to be anything like a real explanation of these changes, it must be sought in that aggregate of conditions out of which both he and they have arisen." This is one of those empty profundities to which no operational meaning can possibly be attached. What our philosopher is saying is that we must know everything before we can fully understand anything. No doubt. But in fact we shall never know everything. We must therefore be content with partial understanding and proximate causes including the influence of great men. "If anything is humanly certain," writes William James, "it is that the great man's society, properly so called, does not make him before he can remake it. Physiological forces, with which the social, political, geographical and to a great extent anthropological conditions have just as much and just as little to do as the crater of Vesuvius has to do with the flickering of this gas by which I write, are what make him. Can it be that Mr. Spencer holds the convergence of sociological pressures to have so impinged upon Stratford-upon-Avon about the twenty-sixth of April, 1564, that a W. Shakespeare, with all his mental peculiarities, had to be born there? ... And does he mean to say that if the aforesaid W. Shakespeare had died of cholera

infantum, another mother at Stratford-upon-Avon would need have engendered a duplicate copy of him, to restore the sociologic equilibrium?”

Professor Skinner is an experimental psychologist, and his treatise on “Science and Human Behavior” is solidly based upon facts. But unfortunately the facts belong to so limited a class that when at last he ventures upon a generalization, his conclusions are as sweepingly unrealistic as those of the Victorian theorizer. Inevitably so; for Professor Skinner’s indifference to what James calls the “physiological forces” is almost as complete as Herbert Spencer’s. The genetic factors determining human behavior are dismissed by him in less than a page. There is no reference in his book to the findings of constitutional medicine, nor any hint of that constitutional psychology, in terms of which (and in terms of which alone, so far as I can judge) it might be possible to write a complete and realistic biography of an individual in relation to the relevant facts of his existence — his body, his temperament, his intellectual endowments, his immediate environment from moment to moment, his time, place and culture. A science of human behavior is like a science of motion in the abstract — necessary, but, by itself, wholly inadequate to the facts. Consider a dragonfly, a rocket and a breaking wave. All three of them illustrate the same fundamental laws of motion; but they illustrate these laws in different ways, and the differences are at least as important as the identities. By itself, a study of motion can tell us almost nothing about that which, in any given instance, is being moved. Similarly a study of behavior can, by itself, tell us almost nothing about the individual mind-body that, in any particular instance, is exhibiting the behavior. But to us who are mind-bodies, a knowledge of mind-bodies is of paramount importance. Moreover, we know by observation and experience that the differences between individual mind-bodies are enormously great, and that some mind-bodies can and do profoundly affect their social environment. On this last point Mr. Bertrand Russell is in full agreement with William James — and with practically everyone, I would add, except the proponents of Spencerian or Behavioristic scientism. In Russell’s view the causes of historical change are of three kinds — economic change, political theory and important individuals. “I

do not believe," says Mr. Russell, "that any of these can be ignored, or wholly explained away as the effect of causes of another kind." Thus, if Bismarck and Lenin had died in infancy, our world would be very different from what, thanks in part to Bismarck and Lenin, it now is. "History is not yet a science, and can only be made to seem scientific by falsifications and omissions." In real life, life as it is lived from day to day, the individual can never be explained away. It is only in theory that his contributions appear to approach zero; in practice they are all-important. When a piece of work gets done in the world, who actually does it? Whose eyes and ears do the perceiving, whose cortex does the thinking, who has the feelings that motivate, the will that overcomes obstacles? Certainly not the social environment; for a group is not an organism, but only a blind unconscious organization. Everything that is done within a society is done by individuals. These individuals are, of course, profoundly influenced by the local culture, the taboos and moralities, the information and misinformation handed down from the past and preserved in a body of spoken traditions or written literature; but whatever each individual takes from society (or, to be more accurate, whatever he takes from other individuals associated in groups, or from the symbolic records compiled by other individuals, living or dead) will be used by him in his own unique way — with *his* special senses, *his* biochemical makeup, *his* physique and temperament, and nobody else's. No amount of scientific explanation, however comprehensive, can explain away these self-evident facts. And let us remember that Professor Skinner's scientific portrait of man as the product of the social environment is not the only scientific portrait. There are other, more realistic likenesses. Consider, for example, Professor Roger Williams' portrait. What he paints is not behavior in the abstract, but mind-bodies behaving — mind-bodies that are the products partly of the environment they share with other mind-bodies, partly of their own private heredity. In *The Human Frontier* and *Free but Unequal* Professor Williams has expatiated, with a wealth of detailed evidence, on those innate differences between individuals, for which Dr. Watson could find no support and whose importance, in Professor Skinner's eyes, approaches zero. Among animals,

biological variability within a given species becomes more and more conspicuous as we move up the evolutionary scale. This biological variability is highest in man, and human beings display a greater degree of biochemical, structural and temperamental diversity than do the members of any other species. This is a plain observable fact. But what I have called the Will to Order, the desire to impose a comprehensible uniformity upon the bewildering manifoldness of things and events, has led many people to ignore this fact. They have minimized biological uniqueness and have concentrated all their attention upon the simpler and, in the present state of knowledge, more understandable environmental factors involved in human behavior. “As a result of this environmentally centered thinking and investigation,” writes Professor Williams, “the doctrine of the essential uniformity of human infants has been widely accepted and is held by a great body of social psychologists, sociologists, social anthropologists, and many others, including historians, economists, educationalists, legal scholars and men in public life. This doctrine has been incorporated into the prevailing mode of thought of many who have had to do with shaping educational and governmental policies and is often accepted unquestioningly by those who do little critical thinking of their own.”

An ethical system that is based upon a fairly realistic appraisal of the data of experience is likely to do more good than harm. But many ethical systems have been based upon an appraisal of experience, a view of the nature of things, that is hopelessly unrealistic. Such an ethic is likely to do more harm than good. Thus, until quite recent times, it was universally believed that bad weather, diseases of cattle and sexual impotence could be, and in many cases actually were, caused by the malevolent operations of magicians. To catch and kill magicians was therefore a duty — and this duty, moreover, had been divinely ordained in the second Book of Moses: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” The systems of ethics and law that were based upon this erroneous view of the nature of things were the cause (during the centuries, when they were taken most seriously by men in authority) of the most appalling evils. The orgy of spying, lynching and judicial murder, which these wrong views about magic made

logical and mandatory, was not matched until our own days, when the Communist ethic, based upon erroneous views about economics, and the Nazi ethic, based upon erroneous views about race, commanded and justified atrocities on an even greater scale. Consequences hardly less undesirable are likely to follow the general adoption of a Social Ethic, based upon the erroneous view that ours is a fully social species, that human infants are born uniform and that individuals are the product of conditioning by and within the collective environment. If these views were correct, if human beings were in fact the members of a truly social species, and if their individual differences were trifling and could be completely ironed out by appropriate conditioning, then, obviously, there would be no need for liberty and the State would be justified in persecuting the heretics who demanded it. For the individual termite, service to the termitary is perfect freedom. But human beings are not completely social; they are only moderately gregarious. Their societies are not organisms, like the hive or the anthill; they are organizations, in other words *ad hoc* machines for collective living. Moreover, the differences between individuals are so great that, in spite of the most intensive cultural ironing, an extreme endomorph (to use W. H. Sheldon's terminology) will retain his sociable viscerotonic characteristics, an extreme mesomorph will remain energetically somatotonic through thick and thin and an extreme ectomorph will always be cerebrotonic, introverted and over-sensitive. In the Brave New World of my fable socially desirable behavior was insured by a double process of genetic manipulation and postnatal conditioning. Babies were cultivated in bottles and a high degree of uniformity in the human product was assured by using ova from a limited number of mothers and by treating each ovum in such a way that it would split and split again, producing identical twins in batches of a hundred or more. In this way it was possible to produce standardized machine-minders for standardized machines. And the standardization of the machine-minders was perfected, after birth, by infant conditioning, hypnopaedia and chemically induced euphoria as a substitute for the satisfaction of feeling oneself free and creative. In the world we live in, as has been pointed out in earlier chapters, vast impersonal forces are

making for the centralization of power and a regimented society. The genetic standardization of individuals is still impossible; but Big Government and Big Business already possess, or will very soon possess, all the techniques for mind-manipulation described in *Brave New World*, along with others of which I was too unimaginative to dream. Lacking the ability to impose genetic uniformity upon embryos, the rulers of tomorrow's over-populated and over-organized world will try to impose social and cultural uniformity upon adults and their children. To achieve this end, they will (unless prevented) make use of all the mind-manipulating techniques at their disposal and will not hesitate to reinforce these methods of non-rational persuasion by economic coercion and threats of physical violence. If this kind of tyranny is to be avoided, we must begin without delay to educate ourselves and our children for freedom and self-government.

Such an education for freedom should be, as I have said, an education first of all in facts and in values — the facts of individual diversity and genetic uniqueness and the values of freedom, tolerance and mutual charity which are the ethical corollaries of these facts. But unfortunately correct knowledge and sound principles are not enough. An unexciting truth may be eclipsed by a thrilling falsehood. A skilful appeal to passion is often too strong for the best of good resolutions. The effects of false and pernicious propaganda cannot be neutralized except by a thorough training in the art of analyzing its techniques and seeing through its sophistries. Language has made possible man's progress from animality to civilization. But language has also inspired that sustained folly and that systematic, that genuinely diabolic wickedness which are no less characteristic of human behavior than are the language-inspired virtues of systematic forethought and sustained angelic benevolence. Language permits its users to pay attention to things, persons and events, even when the things and persons are absent and the events are not taking place. Language gives definition to our memories and, by translating experiences into symbols, converts the immediacy of craving or abhorrence, of hatred or love, into fixed principles of feeling and conduct. In some way of which we are wholly unconscious, the reticular system of the brain selects from a countless host of stimuli those few

experiences which are of practical importance to us. From these unconsciously selected experiences we more or less consciously select and abstract a smaller number, which we label with words from our vocabulary and then classify within a system at once metaphysical, scientific and ethical, made up of other words on a higher level of abstraction. In cases where the selecting and abstracting have been dictated by a system that is not too erroneous as a view of the nature of things, and where the verbal labels have been intelligently chosen and their symbolic nature clearly understood, our behavior is apt to be realistic and tolerably decent. But under the influence of badly chosen words, applied, without any understanding of their merely symbolic character, to experiences that have been selected and abstracted in the light of a system of erroneous ideas, we are apt to behave with a fiendishness and an organized stupidity, of which dumb animals (precisely because they are dumb and cannot speak) are blessedly incapable.

In their anti-rational propaganda the enemies of freedom systematically pervert the resources of language in order to wheedle or stampede their victims into thinking, feeling and acting as they, the mind-manipulators, want them to think, feel and act. An education for freedom (and for the love and intelligence which are at once the conditions and the results of freedom) must be, among other things, an education in the proper uses of language. For the last two or three generations philosophers have devoted a great deal of time and thought to the analysis of symbols and the meaning of meaning. How are the words and sentences which we speak related to the things, persons and events, with which we have to deal in our day-to-day living? To discuss this problem would take too long and lead us too far afield. Suffice it to say that all the intellectual materials for a sound education in the proper use of language — an education on every level from the kindergarten to the postgraduate school — are now available. Such an education in the art of distinguishing between the proper and the improper use of symbols could be inaugurated immediately. Indeed it might have been inaugurated at any time during the last thirty or forty years. And yet children are nowhere taught, in any systematic way, to distinguish true from

false, or meaningful from meaningless, statements. Why is this so? Because their elders, even in the democratic countries, do not want them to be given this kind of education. In this context the brief, sad history of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis is highly significant. The Institute was founded in 1937, when Nazi propaganda was at its noisiest and most effective, by Mr. Filene, the New England philanthropist. Under its auspices analyses of non-rational propaganda were made and several texts for the instruction of high school and university students were prepared. Then came the war — a total war on all the fronts, the mental no less than the physical. With all the Allied governments engaging in "psychological warfare," an insistence upon the desirability of analyzing propaganda seemed a bit tactless. The Institute was closed in 1941. But even before the outbreak of hostilities, there were many persons to whom its activities seemed profoundly objectionable. Certain educators, for example, disapproved of the teaching of propaganda analysis on the grounds that it would make adolescents unduly cynical. Nor was it welcomed by the military authorities, who were afraid that recruits might start to analyze the utterances of drill sergeants. And then there were the clergymen and the advertisers. The clergymen were against propaganda analysis as tending to undermine belief and diminish churchgoing; the advertisers objected on the grounds that it might undermine brand loyalty and reduce sales.

These fears and dislikes were not unfounded. Too searching a scrutiny by too many of the common folk of what is said by their pastors and masters might prove to be profoundly subversive. In its present form, the social order depends for its continued existence on the acceptance, without too many embarrassing questions, of the propaganda put forth by those in authority and the propaganda hallowed by the local traditions. The problem, once more, is to find the happy mean. Individuals must be suggestible enough to be willing and able to make their society work, but not so suggestible as to fall helplessly under the spell of professional mind-manipulators. Similarly, they should be taught enough about propaganda analysis to preserve them from an uncritical belief in sheer nonsense, but not so much as to make them reject outright the not always

rational outpourings of the well-meaning guardians of tradition. Probably the happy mean between gullibility and a total skepticism can never be discovered and maintained by analysis alone. This rather negative approach to the problem will have to be supplemented by something more positive — the enunciation of a set of generally acceptable values based upon a solid foundation of facts. The value, first of all, of individual freedom, based upon the facts of human diversity and genetic uniqueness; the value of charity and compassion, based upon the old familiar fact, lately rediscovered by modern psychiatry — the fact that, whatever their mental and physical diversity, love is as necessary to human beings as food and shelter; and finally the value of intelligence, without which love is impotent and freedom unattainable. This set of values will provide us with a criterion by which propaganda may be judged. The propaganda that is found to be both nonsensical and immoral may be rejected out of hand. That which is merely irrational, but compatible with love and freedom, and not on principle opposed to the exercise of intelligence, may be provisionally accepted for what it is worth.

XII. What Can Be Done?

WE BE EDUCATED for freedom — much better educated for it than we are at present. But freedom, as I have tried to show, is threatened from many directions, and these threats are of many different kinds — demographic, social, political, psychological. Our disease has a multiplicity of co-operating causes and is not to be cured except by a multiplicity of co-operating remedies. In coping with any complex human situation, we must take account of all the relevant factors, not merely of a single factor. Nothing short of everything is ever really enough. Freedom is menaced, and education for freedom is urgently needed. But so are many other things — for example, social organization for freedom, birth control for freedom, legislation for freedom. Let us begin with the last of these items.

From the time of Magna Carta and even earlier, the makers of English law have been concerned to protect the physical freedom of the individual. A person who is being kept in prison on grounds of doubtful legality has the right, under the Common Law as clarified by the statute of 1679, to appeal to one of the higher courts of justice for a writ of *habeas corpus*. This writ is addressed by a judge of the high court to a sheriff or jailer, and commands him, within a specified period of time, to bring the person he is holding in custody to the court for an examination of his case — to bring, be it noted, not the person's written complaint, nor his legal representatives, but his *corpus*, his body, the too too solid flesh which has been made to sleep on boards, to smell the fetid prison air, to eat the revolting prison food. This concern with the basic condition of freedom — the absence of physical constraint — is unquestionably necessary, but is not all that is necessary. It is perfectly possible for a man to be out of prison, and yet not free — to be under no physical constraint and yet to be a psychological captive, compelled to think, feel and act as the representatives of

the national State, or of some private interest within the nation, want him to think, feel and act. There will never be such a thing as a writ of *habeas mentem*; for no sheriff or jailer can bring an illegally imprisoned mind into court, and no person whose mind had been made captive by the methods outlined in earlier articles would be in a position to complain of his captivity. The nature of psychological compulsion is such that those who act under constraint remain under the impression that they are acting on their own initiative. The victim of mind-manipulation does not know that he is a victim. To him, the walls of his prison are invisible, and he believes himself to be free. That he is not free is apparent only to other people. His servitude is strictly objective.

No, I repeat, there can never be such a thing as a writ of *habeas mentem*. But there can be preventive legislation — an outlawing of the psychological slave trade, a statute for the protection of minds against the unscrupulous purveyors of poisonous propaganda, modeled on the statutes for the protection of bodies against the unscrupulous purveyors of adulterated food and dangerous drugs. For example, there could and, I think, there should be legislation limiting the right of public officials, civil or military, to subject the captive audiences under their command or in their custody to sleep-teaching. There could and, I think, there should be legislation prohibiting the use of subliminal projection in public places or on television screens. There could and, I think, there should be legislation to prevent political candidates not merely from spending more than a certain amount of money on their election campaigns, but also to prevent them from resorting to the kind of anti-rational propaganda that makes nonsense of the whole democratic process.

Such preventive legislation might do some good; but if the great impersonal forces now menacing freedom continue to gather momentum, they cannot do much good for very long. The best of constitutions and preventive laws will be powerless against the steadily increasing pressures of over-population and of the over-organization imposed by growing numbers and advancing technology. The constitutions will not be abrogated and the good laws will remain on the statute book; but these liberal forms will merely serve to mask and adorn a profoundly

illiberal substance. Given unchecked over-population and over-organization, we may expect to see in the democratic countries a reversal of the process which transformed England into a democracy, while retaining all the outward forms of a monarchy. Under the relentless thrust of accelerating over-population and increasing over-organization, and by means of ever more effective methods of mind-manipulation, the democracies will change their nature; the quaint old forms — elections, parliaments, Supreme Courts and all the rest — will remain. The underlying substance will be a new kind of non-violent totalitarianism. All the traditional names, all the hallowed slogans will remain exactly what they were in the good old days. Democracy and freedom will be the theme of every broadcast and editorial — but democracy and freedom in a strictly Pickwickian sense. Meanwhile the ruling oligarchy and its highly trained elite of soldiers, policemen, thought-manufacturers and mind-manipulators will quietly run the show as they see fit.

How can we control the vast impersonal forces that now menace our hard-won freedoms? On the verbal level and in general terms, the question may be answered with the utmost ease. Consider the problem of over-population. Rapidly mounting human numbers are pressing ever more heavily on natural resources. What is to be done? Obviously we must, with all possible speed, reduce the birth rate to the point where it does not exceed the death rate. At the same time we must, with all possible speed, increase food production, we must institute and implement a world-wide policy for conserving our soils and our forests, we must develop practical substitutes, preferably less dangerous and less rapidly exhaustible than uranium, for our present fuels; and, while husbanding our dwindling resources of easily available minerals, we must work out new and not too costly methods for extracting these minerals from ever poorer and poorer ores — the poorest ore of all being sea water. But all this, needless to say, is almost infinitely easier said than done. The annual increase of numbers should be reduced. But how? We are given two choices — famine, pestilence and war on the one hand, birth control on the other. Most of us choose birth control — and immediately find ourselves confronted by a problem that is simultaneously a

puzzle in physiology, pharmacology, sociology, psychology and even theology. “The Pill” has not yet been invented. When and if it is invented, how can it be distributed to the many hundreds of millions of potential mothers (or, if it is a pill that works upon the male, potential fathers) who will have to take it if the birth rate of the species is to be reduced? And, given existing social customs and the forces of cultural and psychological inertia, how can those who ought to take the pill, but don’t want to, be persuaded to change their minds? And what about the objections on the part of the Roman Catholic Church, to any form of birth control except the so-called Rhythm Method — a method, incidentally, which has proved, hitherto, to be almost completely ineffective in reducing the birth rate of those industrially backward societies where such a reduction is most urgently necessary? And these questions about the future, hypothetical Pill must be asked, with as little prospect of eliciting satisfactory answers, about the chemical and mechanical methods of birth control already available.

When we pass from the problems of birth control to the problems of increasing the available food supply and conserving our natural resources, we find ourselves confronted by difficulties not perhaps quite so great, but still enormous. There is the problem, first of all, of education. How soon can the innumerable peasants and farmers, who are now responsible for raising most of the world’s supply of food, be educated into improving their methods? And when and if they are educated, where will they find the capital to provide them with the machines, the fuel and lubricants, the electric power, the fertilizers and the improved strains of food plants and domestic animals, without which the best agricultural education is useless? Similarly, who is going to educate the human race in the principles and practice of conservation? And how are the hungry peasant-citizens of a country whose population and demands for food are rapidly rising to be prevented from “mining the soil”? And, if they can be prevented, who will pay for their support while the wounded and exhausted earth is being gradually nursed back, if that is still feasible, to health and restored fertility? Or consider the backward societies that are now trying to industrialize. If they succeed, who is to prevent them, in their desperate efforts to catch up and keep

up, from squandering the planet's irreplaceable resources as stupidly and wantonly as was done, and is still being done, by their forerunners in the race? And when the day of reckoning comes where, in the poorer countries, will anyone find the scientific manpower and the huge amounts of capital that will be required to extract the indispensable minerals from ores in which their concentration is too low, under existing circumstances to make extraction technically feasible or economically justifiable? It may be that, in time, a practical answer to all these questions can be found. But in how much time? In any race between human numbers and natural resources, time is against us. By the end of the present century, there may, if we try very hard, be twice as much food on the world's markets as there is today. But there will also be about twice as many people, and several billions of these people will be living in partially industrialized countries and consuming ten times as much power, water, timber and irreplaceable minerals as they are consuming now. In a word, the food situation will be as bad as it is today, and the raw materials situation will be considerably worse.

To find a solution to the problem of over-organization is hardly less difficult than to find a solution to the problem of natural resources and increasing numbers. On the verbal level and in general terms the answer is perfectly simple. Thus, it is a political axiom that power follows property. But it is now a historical fact that the means of production are fast becoming the monopolistic property of Big Business and Big Government. Therefore, if you believe in democracy, make arrangements to distribute property as widely as possible.

Or take the right to vote. In principle, it is a great privilege. In practice, as recent history has repeatedly shown, the right to vote, by itself, is no guarantee of liberty. Therefore, if you wish to avoid dictatorship by referendum, break up modern society's merely functional collectives into self-governing, voluntarily co-operating groups, capable of functioning outside the bureaucratic systems of Big Business and Big Government.

Over-population and over-organization have produced the modern metropolis, in which a fully human life of multiple personal relationships has

become almost impossible. Therefore, if you wish to avoid the spiritual impoverishment of individuals and whole societies, leave the metropolis and revive the small country community, or alternatively humanize the metropolis by creating within its network of mechanical organization the urban equivalents of small country communities, in which individuals can meet and co-operate as complete persons, not as the mere embodiments of specialized functions.

All this is obvious today and, indeed, was obvious fifty years ago. From Hilaire Belloc to Mr. Mortimer Adler, from the early apostles of co-operative credit unions to the land reformers of modern Italy and Japan, men of good will have for generations been advocating the decentralization of economic power and the widespread distribution of property. And how many ingenious schemes have been propounded for the dispersal of production, for a return to small-scale "village industry." And then there were Dubreuil's elaborate plans for giving a measure of autonomy and initiative to the various departments of a single large industrial organization. There were the Syndicalists, with their blueprints for a stateless society organized as a federation of productive groups under the auspices of the trade unions. In America, Arthur Morgan and Baker Brownell have set forth the theory and described the practice of a new kind of community living on the village and small-town level.

Professor Skinner of Harvard has set forth a psychologist's view of the problem in his *Walden Two*, a Utopian novel about a self-sustaining and autonomous community, so scientifically organized that nobody is ever led into anti-social temptation and, without resort to coercion or undesirable propaganda, everyone does what he or she ought to do, and everyone is happy and creative. In France, during and after the Second World War, Marcel Barbu and his followers set up a number of self-governing, non-hierarchical communities of production, which were also communities for mutual aid and fully human living. And meanwhile, in London, the Peckham Experiment has demonstrated that it is possible, by co-ordinating health services with the wider interests of the group, to create a true community even in a metropolis.

We see, then, that the disease of over-organization has been clearly recognized, that various comprehensive remedies have been prescribed and that experimental treatments of symptoms have been attempted here and there, often with considerable success. And yet, in spite of all this preaching and this exemplary practice, the disease grows steadily worse. We know that it is unsafe to allow power to be concentrated in the hands of a ruling oligarchy; nevertheless power is in fact being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. We know that, for most people, life in a huge modern city is anonymous, atomic, less than fully human; nevertheless the huge cities grow steadily huger and the pattern of urban-industrial living remains unchanged. We know that, in a very large and complex society, democracy is almost meaningless except in relation to autonomous groups of manageable size; nevertheless more and more of every nation's affairs are managed by the bureaucrats of Big Government and Big Business. It is only too evident that, in practice, the problem of over-organization is almost as hard to solve as the problem of over-population. In both cases we know what ought to be done; but in neither case have we been able, as yet, to act effectively upon our knowledge.

At this point we find ourselves confronted by a very disquieting question: Do we really wish to act upon our knowledge? Does a majority of the population think it worth while to take a good deal of trouble, in order to halt and, if possible, reverse the current drift toward totalitarian control of everything? In the United States — and America is the prophetic image of the rest of the urban-industrial world as it will be a few years from now — recent public opinion polls have revealed that an actual majority of young people in their teens, the voters of tomorrow, have no faith in democratic institutions, see no objection to the censorship of unpopular ideas, do not believe that government of the people by the people is possible and would be perfectly content, if they can continue to live in the style to which the boom has accustomed them, to be ruled, from above, by an oligarchy of assorted experts. That so many of the well-fed young television-watchers in the world's most powerful democracy should be so completely indifferent to the idea of self-government, so blankly uninterested in freedom of

thought and the right to dissent, is distressing, but not too surprising. “Free as a bird,” we say, and envy the winged creatures for their power of unrestricted movement in all the three dimensions. But, alas, we forget the dodo. Any bird that has learned how to grub up a good living without being compelled to use its wings will soon renounce the privilege of flight and remain forever grounded. Something analogous is true of human beings. If the bread is supplied regularly and copiously three times a day, many of them will be perfectly content to live by bread alone — or at least by bread and circuses alone. “In the end,” says the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky’s parable, “in the end they will lay their freedom at our feet and say to us, ‘make us your slaves, but feed us.’” And when Alyosha Karamazov asks his brother, the teller of the story, if the Grand Inquisitor is speaking ironically, Ivan answers, “Not a bit of it! He claims it as a merit for himself and his Church that they have vanquished freedom and done so to make men happy.” Yes, to make men happy; “for nothing,” the Inquisitor insists, “has ever been more insupportable for a man or a human society than freedom.” Nothing, except the absence of freedom; for when things go badly, and the rations are reduced, the grounded dodos will clamor again for their wings — only to renounce them, yet once more, when times grow better and the dodo-farmers become more lenient and generous. The young people who now think so poorly of democracy may grow up to become fighters for freedom. The cry of “Give me television and hamburgers, but don’t bother me with the responsibilities of liberty,” may give place, under altered circumstances, to the cry of “Give me liberty or give me death.” If such a revolution takes place, it will be due in part to the operation of forces over which even the most powerful rulers have very little control, in part to the incompetence of those rulers, their inability to make effective use of the mind-manipulating instruments with which science and technology have supplied, and will go on supplying, the would-be tyrant. Considering how little they knew and how poorly they were equipped, the Grand Inquisitors of earlier times did remarkably well. But their successors, the well-informed, thoroughly scientific dictators of the future will undoubtedly be able to do a great deal better. The Grand Inquisitor reproaches Christ with

having called upon men to be free and tells Him that “we have corrected Thy work and founded it upon miracle, mystery and authority.” But miracle, mystery and authority are not enough to guarantee the indefinite survival of a dictatorship. In my fable of *Brave New World*, the dictators had added science to the list and thus were able to enforce their authority by manipulating the bodies of embryos, the reflexes of infants and the minds of children and adults. And, instead of merely talking about miracles and hinting symbolically at mysteries, they were able, by means of drugs, to give their subjects the direct experience of mysteries and miracles — to transform mere faith into ecstatic knowledge. The older dictators fell because they could never supply their subjects with enough bread, enough circuses, enough miracles and mysteries. Nor did they possess a really effective system of mind-manipulation. In the past free-thinkers and revolutionaries were often the products of the most piously orthodox education. This is not surprising. The methods employed by orthodox educators were and still are extremely inefficient. Under a scientific dictator education will really work — with the result that most men and women will grow up to love their servitude and will never dream of revolution. There seems to be no good reason why a thoroughly scientific dictatorship should ever be overthrown.

Meanwhile there is still some freedom left in the world. Many young people, it is true, do not seem to value freedom. But some of us still believe that, without freedom, human beings cannot become fully human and that freedom is therefore supremely valuable. Perhaps the forces that now menace freedom are too strong to be resisted for very long. It is still our duty to do whatever we can to resist them.

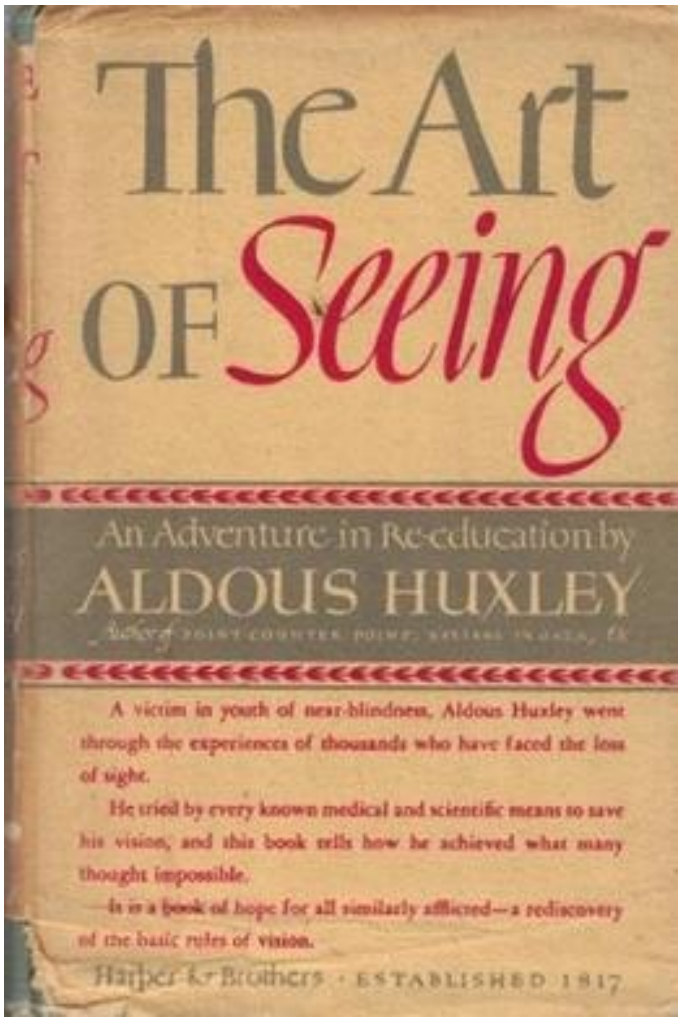
The Memoir

Huxley in 1947

The Art of Seeing

In 1911, when Huxley was only sixteen, he developed keratitis, a disorder that can result in scarring to the eye's surface. He was left with severely impaired vision for several years and he suffered from poor eyesight throughout his life. Accounts detailing the extent to which his vision was impaired as an adult have varied from reports of almost complete loss of sight to claims that he had been able to regain his vision. Two years after he had immigrated to California, Huxley's sight started to deteriorate further and he sought help from Margaret Corbett, an advocate and teacher of the Bates Method for improved eyesight.

The Bates Method was based on the work of Dr. W. H. Bates, who released a book in 1920 titled, *Perfect Sight Without Glasses*, which argued that glasses were actually harmful to those with impaired vision, as well as being highly impractical for some wearers. *The Art of Seeing* (1942) is predominantly a description of the techniques of the Bates Method which involved performing a series of eye exercises. Bates maintained and Huxley endorsed his claims, that his method could cure a plethora of eye conditions and diseases. Bates' book had received a hostile reception from ophthalmologists, who dismissed his assertions as untrue and his exercises as absurd. Twenty years later, when Huxley released *The Art of Seeing*, it was greeted with an equal level of disdain and frustration from medical experts.



The US first edition cover of the book

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William H. Bates

PREFACE

AT SIXTEEN, I had a violent attack of *keratitis punctata*, which left me (after eighteen months of near-blindness, during which I had to depend on Braille for my reading and a guide for my walking) with one eye just capable of light perception, and the other with enough vision to permit of my detecting the two-hundred-foot letter on the Snellen Chart at ten feet. My inability to see was mainly due to the presence of opacities in the cornea; but this condition was complicated by hyperopia and astigmatism. For the first few years, my doctors advised me to do my reading with the aid of a powerful hand magnifying glass. But later on I was promoted to spectacles. With the aid of these I was able to recognize the seventy-foot line at ten feet and to read tolerably well — provided always that I kept my better pupil dilated with atropine, so that I might see round a particularly heavy patch of opacity at the centre of the cornea. True, a measure of strain and fatigue was always present, and there were occasions when I was overcome by that sense of complete physical and mental exhaustion which only eye-strain can produce. Still, I was grateful to be able to see as well as I could.

Things went on in this way until the year 1939, when, in spite of greatly strengthened glasses, I found the task of reading increasingly difficult and fatiguing. There could be no doubt of it: my capacity to see was steadily and quite rapidly failing. But just as I was wondering apprehensively what on earth I should do, if reading were to become impossible, I happened to hear of a method of visual re-education and of a teacher who was said to make use of this method with conspicuous success. Education sounded harmless enough and, since optical glass was no longer doing me any good, I decided to take the plunge. Within a couple of months I was reading without spectacles and, what was better still, without strain and fatigue. The chronic tensions, and the occasional spells of complete exhaustion, were things of the past. Moreover, there were definite

signs that the opacity in the cornea, which had remained unchanged for upwards of twenty-five years, was beginning to clear up. At the present time, my vision, though very far from normal, is about twice as good as it used to be when I wore spectacles, and before I had learnt the art of seeing; and the opacity has cleared sufficiently to permit the worse eye, which for years could do no more than distinguish light from darkness, to recognize the ten-foot line on the chart at one foot.

It is, first of all, to repay a debt of gratitude that I have written this little book — gratitude to the pioneer of visual education, the late Dr. W. H. Bates, and to his disciple, Mrs. Margaret D. Corbett, to whose skill as a teacher I owe the improvement in my own vision.

A number of other books on visual education have been published — notably Dr. Bates's own, *Perfect Sight Without Glasses* (New York, 1920), Mrs. Corbett's *How to Improve Your Eyes* (Los Angeles, 1938) and *The Improvement of Sight by Natural Methods*, by C. S. Price, M.B.E., D.O. (London, 1934). All have their merits; but in none (of those, at least, that I have read) has an attempt been made to do what I have tried to do in the present volume: namely, to correlate the methods of visual education with the findings of modern psychology and critical philosophy. My purpose in making this correlation is to demonstrate the essential reasonableness of a method, which turns out to be nothing more nor less than the practical application to the problems of vision of certain theoretical principles, universally accepted as true.

Why, it may be asked, have orthodox ophthalmologists failed to make these applications of universally accepted principles? The answer is clear. Ever since ophthalmology became a science, its practitioners have been obsessively preoccupied with only one aspect of the total, complex process of seeing — the physiological. They have paid attention exclusively to eyes, not at all to the mind which makes use of the eyes to see with. I have been treated by men of the highest eminence in their profession; but never once did they so much as faintly hint that there might be a mental side to vision, or that there might be wrong ways of using the eyes and mind as well as right ways, unnatural and abnormal

modes of visual functioning as well as natural and normal ones. After checking the acute infection in my eyes, which they did with the greatest skill, they gave me some artificial lenses and let me go. Whether I used my mind and be-spectacled eyes well or badly, and what might be the effect upon my vision of improper use, were to them, as to practically all other orthodox ophthalmologists, matters of perfect indifference. To Dr. Bates, on the contrary, these things were not matters of indifference; and because they were not, he worked out, through long years of experiment and clinical practice, his peculiar method of visual education. That this method was essentially sound, is proved by its efficacy.

My own case is in no way unique; thousands of other sufferers from defects of vision have benefited by following the simple rules of that Art of Seeing which we owe to Bates and his followers. To make this Art more widely known is the final purpose of the present volume.

SECTION I

CHAPTER I

Medicine and Defective Vision

MEDICUS CURAT, NATURA SANAT — the doctor treats, nature heals. The old aphorism sums up the whole scope and purpose of medicine, which is to provide sick organisms with the internal and external conditions most favourable to the exercise of their own self-regulative and restorative powers. If there were no *vis medicatrix naturae,* no natural healing powers, medicine would be helpless, and every small derangement would either kill outright or settle down into chronic disease.

When conditions are favourable, sick organisms tend to recover through their own inherent powers of self-healing. If they do not recover, it means either that the case is hopeless, or that the conditions are not favourable — in other words, that the medical treatment being applied is failing to achieve what an adequate treatment ought to achieve.

ORDINARY TREATMENT OF DEFECTIVE SIGHT

In the light of these general principles let us consider the current medical treatment of defects of vision. In the great majority of cases the only treatment consists in fitting the patient with artificial lenses, designed to correct the particular error of refraction which is held to be responsible for the defect. *Medicus curat*; and in most cases the patient is rewarded by an immediate improvement in vision. But in the meanwhile, what about Nature and her healing process? Do glasses eliminate the causes of defective vision? Do the organs of sight tend to revert to normal functioning as the result of the treatment with artificial lenses? The answer to these questions is, No. Artificial lenses neutralize the symptoms, but do not get rid of the causes of defective vision. And so far

from improving, eyes fitted with these devices tend to grow progressively weaker and to require progressively stronger lenses for the correction of their symptoms. In a word, *medicus curat, natura NON sanat.* From this we can draw one of two conclusions: either defects in the organs of seeing are incurable, and can only be palliated by mechanical neutralization of symptoms; or else something is radically wrong with the current methods of treatment.

Orthodox opinion accepts the first and more pessimistic alternatives, and insists that the mechanical palliation of symptoms is the only kind of treatment to which defective organs of vision will respond. (I am leaving out of account all cases of more or less acute disease of the eyes, which are treated by surgery and medication, and confining myself to those much more commonplace visual defects now treated by means of lenses.)

CURE OR PALLIATION OF SYMPTOMS?

If orthodox opinion is right — if the organs of vision are incapable of curing themselves, and if their defects can only be palliated by mechanical devices — then the eyes must be totally different in kind from other parts of the body. Given favourable conditions, all other organs tend to free themselves from their defects. Not so the eyes. When they show symptoms of weakness, it is foolish, according to orthodox theory, to make any serious effort to get rid of the causes of those symptoms; it is a waste of time even to try to discover a treatment which will assist nature in accomplishing its normal task of healing. Defective eyes are, *ex hypothesi*, practically incurable; they lack the *vis medicatrix naturae*. The only thing that ophthalmological science can do for them is to provide them with the purely mechanical means for neutralizing their symptoms. The only qualifications to this strange theory come from those who have made it their business to look into external conditions of seeing. Here, for example, are some relevant remarks taken from the book *Seeing and Human Welfare* by Dr.

Matthew Luckiesh, Director of the General Electric Company's Lighting Research Laboratory. Eye-glasses (those 'valuable crutches,' as Dr. Luckiesh calls them) 'counteract effects of heredity, age, and *abuse;* they do not deal with causes.'

'Suppose that crippled eyes could be transformed into crippled legs. What a heart-rending parade we would witness on a busy street! Nearly every other person would go limping by. Many would be on crutches and some on wheel chairs. How many of these defects of the eye are due to poor conditions for seeing, that is, to indifference towards seeing? Statistics are not available, but a knowledge of seeing and its requirements indicates that most of them are preventable and most of the remainder can be improved or arrested by adequate and proper conditions.' And again, 'even the refractive defects and other abnormalities of eyes induced by abuses are not necessarily permanent. When we become ill, Nature does her part, if we do ours, towards getting well. Eyes have various recuperative powers, at least to some degree. Reducing their abuse by improving seeing conditions is always helpful, and there are many cases on record where great improvement has followed on this procedure. Indeed, without correction of the abuse, the disorder generally becomes progressively worse.' These are encouraging words that leave us with the hope that we are to be given a description of some new and genuinely aetiological treatment of visual defects, to take the place of the purely symptomatic treatment at present in vogue. But this hope is only imperfectly fulfilled. 'Poor lighting,' Dr. Luckiesh goes on, 'is the most important and universal cause of eye-strain, often leading to progressive defects and disorders.' His whole book is an elaboration of this theme. Let me hasten to add that, within its limitations, it is an admirable book. To those suffering from defects of vision the importance of good lighting is very great indeed; and one can only be grateful to Dr. Luckiesh for his scientific clarification of the meaning 'good lighting' in terms of standard, measurable entities such as foot-candles. One's only complaint is that foot-candles are not enough. In treating other parts of the organism doctors are not content to ameliorate merely the external conditions of functioning; they also seek to

improve the internal conditions, to work directly on the physiological environment of the sick organ as well as on the physical environment outside the body. Thus when legs are crippled, doctors refuse to let their patients rely indefinitely on crutches. Nor do they consider that the laying down of rules for avoiding accidents constitutes sufficient treatment for the condition of being crippled. On the contrary, they regard the use of crutches as merely a palliative and temporary expedient, and while paying attention to external conditions, they also do their best to improve the internal conditions of the defective part, so that nature may be helped to do its work of healing. Some of these measures, such as rest, massage, applications of heat and light, make no appeal to the patient's mind, but are aimed directly at the affected organs, their purpose being to relax, to increase circulation and to preserve mobility. Other measures are educational and involve, on the patient's part, a co-ordination of mind and body. By means of this appeal to the psychological factor astonishing results are often obtained. A good teacher, using the right technique, can often educate a victim of accident or paralysis into gradual recovery of his lost functions, and through that recovery of function, into the re-establishment of the health and integrity of the defective organ. If such things can be done for crippled legs, why should it not be possible to do something analogous for defective eyes? To this question the orthodox theory provides no answer — merely takes it for granted that the defective eye is incurable and cannot, in spite of its peculiarly intimate relationship with the psyche, be re-educated towards normality by any process of mind-body co-ordination.

The orthodox theory is, on the face of it, so implausible, so intrinsically unlikely to be true, that one can only be astonished that it should be so generally and so unquestioningly accepted. Nevertheless, such is the force of habit and authority that we all do accept it. At the present time it is rejected only by those who have personal reasons for knowing it to be untrue. I myself happen to be one of these. By the greatest of good fortune I was given the opportunity to discover by personal experience that eyes do not lack the *vis medicatrix naturae*, that the palliation of symptoms is not the only treatment for defective vision, that

the function of sight can be re-educated towards normality by appropriate body-mind co-ordination, and finally that the improvement in functioning is accompanied by an improvement in the condition of the damaged organ. This personal experience has been confirmed by my observation of many others who have gone through the same process of visual education. It is therefore no longer possible for me to accept the currently orthodox theory, with its hopelessly pessimistic practical corollaries.

CHAPTER II

A Method of Visual Re-Education

IN THE EARLY years of the present century Dr. W. H. Bates, a New York oculist, became dissatisfied with the ordinary symptomatic treatment of eyes. Seeking a substitute for artificial lenses, he set himself to discover if there was any way of re-educating defective vision into a condition of normality.

As the result of his work with a large number of patients he came to the conclusion that the great majority of visual defects were functional and due to faulty habits of use. These faulty habits of use were invariably related, he found, to a condition of strain and tension. As was to be expected from the unitary nature of the human organism, the strain affected both the body and the mind.

Dr. Bates discovered that, by means of appropriate techniques, this condition of strain could be relieved. When it had been relieved — when patients had learnt to use their eyes and mind in a relaxed way — vision was improved and refractive errors tended to correct themselves. Practice in the educational techniques served to build up good seeing habits in place of the faulty habits responsible for defective vision, and in many cases function came to be completely and permanently normalized.

Now, it is a well-established physiological principle that improved functioning always tends to result in an improvement in the organic condition of the tissues involved. The eye, Dr. Bates discovered, was no exception to this general rule. When the patient learnt to relax his tenseness and acquired proper seeing-habits, the *vis medicatrix naturae* was given a chance to operate — with the result that, in many cases, the improvement of functioning was followed by a complete restoration of the health and organic integrity of the diseased eye.

Dr. Bates died in 1931, and up to the time of his death he continued to perfect and develop his methods for the improvement of visual function. Furthermore, during the last years of Dr. Bates's life and since his death, his pupils, in various parts of the world, have devised a number of valuable new applications of the general principles which he laid down. By means of these techniques large numbers of men, women and children, suffering from visual defects of every kind, have been successfully re-educated into normality or towards normality. For anyone who has studied a selection of these cases, or who has himself undergone the process of visual re-education, it is impossible to doubt that here at last is a method of treating imperfect sight which is not merely symptomatic, but genuinely aetiological — a method which does not confine itself to the mechanical neutralization of defects but aims at the removal of their physiological and psychological causes. And yet, in spite of the long period during which it has been known, in spite of the quality and quantity of the results obtained through its employment by competent instructors, Dr. Bates's technique still remains unrecognized by the medical and optometrical professions. It is, I think, worth while, before going any further, to enumerate and discuss the principal reasons for this, to my mind, deplorable state of things.

REASONS FOR ORTHODOX DISAPPROVAL

In the first place, the very fact that the method is unrecognized and lies outside the pale of orthodoxy is a sufficient invitation to the petty adventurers and charlatans who hang upon the skirts of society, ever ready and eager to take advantage of human suffering. There exist, scattered about the world, some scores or perhaps hundreds of well-trained and thoroughly conscientious teachers of Dr. Bates's method. But there are also, unfortunately, a number of ignorant and unscrupulous quacks, who know little more of the system than its name. The fact is deplorable, but not at all surprising. The number of those who

fail to obtain relief from the current symptomatic treatment of visual defect is considerable, and the Bates Method has a high reputation for effectiveness in such cases. Moreover, the technique is unorthodox; therefore no standards of competence are legally imposed upon its teachers. A large potential clientele, a desperate need of help, and no questions asked as to knowledge, character and ability! These are the ideal conditions for the practice of charlatanism. What wonder, then, if certain unscrupulous people have taken advantage of the opportunities thus offered? But because *some* unorthodox practitioners are charlatans, it does not logically follow that *all* must be. I repeat that it does not logically follow; but, alas, as the history of almost any professional group clearly demonstrates, orthodox opinion would always very much like it to follow. That is one of the reasons why, in this particular case, the unwarranted assumption that the whole business is mere quackery is widely accepted, in spite of all evidence to the contrary. The cure for charlatanism is not the suppression of an intrinsically sound method, but proper education for, and control of, its teachers. Proper education and control are equally the cure for that licensed charlatanism among opticians, which has been described and denounced in articles appearing in *The Reader's Digest* (1937) and the New York *World-Telegram* (1942).

The second reason for the non-acceptance of the method may be summed up in three words: habit, authority and professionalism. The symptomatic treatment of defective sight has been going on for a long time, has been carried to a high degree of perfection, and, within its limitations, is reasonably successful. If it fails in a certain proportion of cases to provide even adequate palliation of the symptoms, that is nobody's fault, but a condition inherent in the nature of things. For years, the highest medical authorities have all asserted this to be the case — and who will venture to question a recognized authority? Certainly not the members of the profession to which the authority belongs. Every guild and trade has its own *esprit de corps*, its private patriotism, which makes it resent all rebellion from within and all competition or criticism from without.

Next there is the matter of vested interest. The manufacture of optical glass is now a considerable industry, and its retail sale, a profitable branch of commerce,

to which access can be had only by persons who have undertaken a special technical training. That there should be, among these licensed persons, a strong dislike to any new technique, which threatens to make the use of optical glass unnecessary, is only natural. (It is perhaps worth remarking that, even if the value of Dr. Bates's technique were generally recognized, there would be small likelihood of any immediate or considerable decline in the consumption of optical glass. Visual re-education demands from the pupil a certain amount of thought, time and trouble. But thought, time and trouble are precisely what the overwhelming majority of men and women are not prepared to give, unless motivated by a passionate desire or an imperious need. Most of those who can get along more or less satisfactorily with the help of mechanical seeing-aids, will continue to do so, even when they know that there exists a system of training which would make it possible for them, not merely to palliate symptoms, but actually get rid of the causes of visual defect. So long as the art of seeing is not taught to children as a part of their normal education, the trade in artificial lenses is not likely to suffer more than a trifling loss by reason of the official recognition of the new technique. Human sloth and inertia will guarantee the opticians at least nine-tenths of their present business.)

Another reason for the orthodox attitude in this matter is of a strictly empirical nature. Oculists and optometrists affirm that they have never witnessed the phenomena of self-regulation and cure described by Bates and his followers. Therefore they conclude that such phenomena never take place. In this syllogism the premises are true, but the conclusion is unsound. It is quite true that oculists and optometrists have never observed such phenomena as are described by Bates and his followers. But this is because they have never had any dealings with patients who had learnt to use their organs of vision in a relaxed, unstrained way. So long as the organs of vision are used under a condition of mental and physical tension, the *vis medicatrix naturae* will not manifest itself, and the visual defects will persist, or actually become worse. Oculists and optometrists will observe the phenomena described by Bates as soon as they begin to relieve the strain in their patients' eyes by means of Bates's method of visual education. Because the

phenomena cannot occur under the conditions imposed by orthodox practitioners, it does not follow that they will not occur when these conditions are changed, so that the healing powers of the organism are no longer hindered, but given free play.

To this empirical reason for rejecting the Batesian technique must be added one more — this time in the realm of theory. In the course of his practice as an oculist, Dr. Bates came to doubt the truth of the currently accepted hypothesis regarding the eye's power of accommodation to near and distant vision. This matter was for long the subject of heated debate, until finally, a couple of generations ago, orthodox medical opinion decided in favour of the Helmholtz hypothesis, which attributes the eye's power of accommodation to the action of the ciliary muscle upon the lens. Working with cases of defective vision, Dr. Bates observed a number of facts which the Helmholtz theory seemed powerless to explain. After numerous experiments on animals and human beings, he came to the conclusion that the principal factor in accommodation was not the lens, but the extrinsic muscles of the eyeball, and that the focussing of the eye for near and distant objects was accomplished by the lengthening and shortening of the globe as a whole. The papers describing his experiments were printed in various medical journals at the time, and have been summarized in the opening chapters of his book, *Perfect Sight Without Glasses.*

Whether Dr. Bates was right or wrong in his rejection of the Helmholtz theory of accommodation, I am entirely unqualified to say. My own guess, after reading the evidence, would be that both the extrinsic muscles and the lens play their part in accommodation.

This guess may be correct; or it may be incorrect. I do not greatly care. For my concern is not with the anatomical mechanism of accommodation, but with the art of seeing — and the art of seeing does not stand or fall with any particular physiological hypothesis. Believing that Bates's theory of accommodation was untrue, the orthodox have concluded that his technique of visual education must be unsound. Once again this is an unwarranted conclusion, due to a failure to understand the nature of an art, or psycho-physical skill.

THE NATURE OF AN ART

Every psycho-physical skill, including the art of seeing, is governed by its own laws. These laws are established empirically by people who have wished to acquire a certain accomplishment, such as playing the piano, or singing, or walking the tight rope, and who have discovered, as the result of long practice, the best and most economical method of using their psycho-physical organism to this particular end. Such people may have the most fantastic views about physiology; but this will make no difference so long as their theory and practice of psycho-physical functioning remain adequate to their purpose. If psycho-physical skills depended for their development on a correct knowledge of physiology, then nobody would ever have learnt any art whatsoever. It is probable, for example, that Bach never thought about the physiology of muscular activity; if he ever did, it is quite certain that he thought incorrectly. That, however, did not prevent him from using his muscles to play the organ with incomparable dexterity. Any given art, I repeat, obeys only its own laws; and these laws are the laws of effective psycho-physical functioning, as applied to the particular activities connected with that art.

The art of seeing is like the other fundamental or primary psycho-physical skills, such as talking, walking and using the hands. These fundamental skills are normally acquired in early infancy or childhood by a process of mainly unconscious self-instruction. It takes apparently several years for adequate seeing habits to be formed. Once formed, however, the habit of using the mental and physiological organs of vision correctly becomes automatic — in exactly the same way as does the habit of using the throat, tongue and palate for talking, or the legs for walking. But whereas it takes a very serious mental or physical shock to break down the automatic habit of talking or walking correctly, the habit of using the seeing organs as they should be used can be lost as the result

of relatively trivial disturbances. Habits of correct use are replaced by habits of incorrect use; vision suffers, and in some cases the mal-functioning contributes to the appearance of diseases and chronic organic defects of the eyes. Occasionally nature effects a spontaneous cure, and the old habits of correct seeing are restored almost instantaneously. But the majority must consciously re-acquire the art which, as infants, they were able to learn unconsciously. The technique of this process of re-education has been worked out by Dr. Bates and his followers.

BASIC PRINCIPLE UNDERLYING THE PRACTICE OF EVERY ART

How can we be sure, it may be asked, that this is the correct technique? The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the first and most convincing test of the system is that it works. Moreover, the nature of the training is such that we should expect it to work. For the Bates Method is based upon precisely the same principles as those which underlie every successful system ever devised for the teaching of psycho-physical skill. Whatever the art you may wish to learn — whether it be acrobatics or violin playing, mental prayer or golf, acting, singing, dancing or what you will — there is one thing that every good teacher will always say: Learn to combine relaxation with activity; learn to do what you have to do without strain; work hard, but never under tension.

To speak of combining activity with relaxation may seem paradoxical; but in fact it is not. For relaxation is of two kinds, passive and dynamic. Passive relaxation is achieved in a state of complete repose, by a process of consciously ‘letting go.’ As an antidote to fatigue, as a method of temporarily relieving excessive muscular tensions, together with the psychological tensions that always accompany them, passive relaxation is excellent. But it can never, in the nature of things, be enough. We cannot spend our whole lives at rest, consequently cannot be always passively relaxing. But there is also something to

which it is legitimate to give the name of dynamic relaxation. Dynamic relaxation is that state of the body and mind which is associated with normal and natural functioning. In the case of what I have called the fundamental or primary psycho-physical skills, normal and natural functioning of the organs involved may sometimes be lost. But having been lost, it may subsequently be consciously re-acquired by anyone who has learnt the suitable techniques. When it has been re-acquired, the strain associated with impaired functioning disappears and the organs involved do their work in a condition of dynamic relaxation.

Mal-functioning and strain tend to appear whenever the conscious ‘I’ interferes with instinctively acquired habits of proper use, either by trying too hard to do well, or by feeling unduly anxious about possible mistakes. In the building up of any psycho-physical skill the conscious ‘I’ must give orders, but not too many orders — must supervise the forming of habits of proper functioning, but without fuss and in a modest, self-denying way. The great truth discovered on the spiritual level by the masters of prayer, that ‘the more there is of the “I,” the less there is of God,’ has been discovered again and again on the physiological level by the masters of the various arts and skills. The more there is of the ‘I,’ the less there is of Nature — of the right and normal functioning of the organism. The part played by the conscious ‘I’ in lowering resistance and preparing the body for disease has long been recognized by medical science. When it frets too much, or is frightened, or worries and grieves too long and too intensely, the conscious ‘I’ may reduce its body to such a state that the poor thing will develop, for example, gastric ulcers, tuberculosis, coronary disease and a whole host of functional disorders of every kind and degree of seriousness. Even decay of the teeth has been shown, in the case of children, to be frequently correlated with emotional tensions experienced by the conscious ‘I.’ That a function so intimately related to our psychological life as vision should remain unaffected by tensions having their origin in the conscious ‘I’ is inconceivable. And, indeed, it is a matter of common experience that the power of seeing is greatly lowered by distressing emotional states. As one practises the techniques

of visual education, one discovers the extent to which this same conscious ‘I’ can interfere with the processes of seeing even at times when no distressing emotions are present. And it interferes, we discover, in exactly the same way as it interferes with the process of playing tennis, for example, or singing — by being too anxious to achieve the desired end. But in seeing, as in all other psycho-physical skills, the anxious effort to do well defeats its own object; for this anxiety produces psychological and physiological strains, and strain is incompatible with the proper means for achieving our end, namely normal and natural functioning.

CHAPTER III

Sensing+Selecting+Perceivings=Seeing

BEFORE UNDERTAKING A detailed description of the techniques employed by Dr. Bates and his followers, I propose to devote a few pages to a discussion of the process of seeing. Such a discussion will serve, I hope, to throw some light on the underlying reasons for these techniques, some of which might otherwise appear inexplicable and arbitrary.

When we see, our minds become acquainted with events in the outside world through the instrumentality of the eyes and the nervous system. In the process of seeing, mind, eyes and nervous system are intimately associated to form a single whole. Anything which affects one element in this whole exercises an influence upon the other elements. In practice, we find that it is possible to act directly only upon the eyes and the mind. The nervous system which connects them cannot be influenced except indirectly.

The structure and mechanism of the eye have been studied in minute detail, and good descriptions of these things can be found in any text-book of ophthalmology or physiological optics. I will not attempt to summarize them in this place; for my concern is not with anatomical structures and physiological mechanisms, but with the process of seeing — the process whereby these structures and mechanisms are used to provide our mind with visual knowledge of the external world.

In the paragraphs that follow I shall make use of the vocabulary employed by Dr. C. D. Broad in *The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, a book which, for subtlety and exhaustiveness of analysis and limpid clarity of exposition, takes rank among the masterpieces of modern philosophical literature.

The process of seeing may be analysed into three subsidiary processes — a process of sensing, a process of selecting and a process of perceiving.

That which is sensed is a set of *sensa* within a field. (A visual *sensum* is one of the coloured patches which form, so to say, the raw material of seeing, and the visual field is the totality of such coloured patches which may be sensed at any given moment.)

Sensing is followed by selecting, a process in which a part of the visual field is discriminated, singled out from the rest. This process has, as its physiological basis, the fact that the eye records its clearest images at the central point of the retina, the macular region with its minute *fovea centralis*, the point of sharpest vision. There is also, of course, a psychological basis for selection; for on any given occasion there is generally something in the visual field which it is in our interest to discriminate more clearly than any other part of the field.

The final process is that of perceiving. This process entails the recognition of the sensed and selected *sensum* as the appearance of a physical object existing in the external world. It is important to remember that physical objects are not given as primary data. What is given is only a set of *sensa;* and a *sensum*, in Dr. Broad's language, is something 'non-referential.' In other words, the *sensum*, as such, is a mere coloured patch having no reference to an external physical object. The external physical object makes its appearance only when we have discriminatively selected the *sensum* and used it to perceive with. It is our minds which interpret the *sensum* as the appearance of a physical object out in space.

It is clear from the behaviour of infants that we do not enter the world with full-fledged perceptions of objects. The newborn child starts by sensing a mass of vague, indeterminate *sensa*, which it does not even select, much less perceive as physical objects. Little by little, it learns to discriminate the *sensa* that have, for its particular purposes, the greatest interest and significance, and with these selected *sensa* it gradually comes, through a process of suitable interpretation, to perceive external objects.

This faculty for interpreting *sensa* in terms of external physical objects is probably inborn; but it requires, for its adequate manifestation, a store of

accumulated experiences and a memory capable of retaining such a store. The interpretation of *sensa* in terms of physical objects becomes rapid and automatic only when the mind can draw on its past experience of similar *sensa* successfully interpreted in a similar way.

In adults, the three processes of sensing, selecting and perceiving are for all intents and purposes simultaneous. We are aware only of the total process of seeing objects, and not of the subsidiary processes which culminate in seeing. It is possible, by inhibiting the activity of the interpreting mind, to catch a hint of the raw *sensum,* as it presents itself to the eyes of the newborn child. But such hints are very imperfect at the best, and of brief duration. For the adult, a complete recapture of the experience of pure sensation, without perception of physical objects, is possible, in most cases, only in certain abnormal conditions, when the upper levels of the mind have been put out of action by drugs or disease. Such experiences cannot be introspected while they are going on; but they can often be remembered, when the mind has recovered its normal condition. By calling up these memories, we can provide ourselves with an actual picture of those processes of sensing, selecting and perceiving, which culminate in the end-process of seeing physical objects in the external world.

AN ILLUSTRATION

Here, by way of example, is an account of an experience of my own, while ‘coming out’ of an anaesthetic administered in the dentist’s chair. Returning awareness began with pure visual sensations completely devoid of significance. These, as I can remember them, were not of objects existing ‘out there’ in the familiar, three-dimensional world of everyday experience. They were just coloured patches, existing in and for themselves, unrelated not only to the external world, but also to myself — for the knowledge of self was still wholly lacking, and these meaningless and unattached sense impressions were not *mine;*

they simply *were*. This kind of awareness lasted for a minute or two; then as the effect of the anaesthetic wore off a little further, a notable change took place. The coloured patches were no longer sensed merely as coloured patches, but became associated with certain objects ‘out there’ in the external three-dimensional world — specifically, the façades of houses seen through the window facing the chair in which I was reclining. Attention travelled across the visual field selecting successive parts of it and perceiving these selected parts as physical objects. From being vague and meaningless, the *sensa* had developed into manifestations of definite things belonging to a familiar category and situated in a familiar world of solid objects. Thus recognized and classified, these perceptions (I do not call them ‘my’ perceptions, for ‘I’ had not yet made my appearance on the scene) became immediately clearer, while all sorts of details, unnoticed so long as the *sensa* lacked significance, were now perceived and evaluated. That which was now being apprehended was no longer a set of mere coloured patches, but a set of aspects of the known, because remembered, world. Known and remembered by whom? For a time there was no indication of an answer. But after a little while, imperceptibly, there emerged myself, the subject of the experience. And with this emergence there came, as I remember, a further clarification of vision. What had been at first raw *sensa* and had then become, by interpretation, the appearances of known varieties of objects, underwent a further transformation and became objects consciously related to a self, an organized pattern of memories, habits and desires. By becoming related to the self, the perceived objects became more visible, inasmuch as the self, to which they had now entered into relation, was interested in more aspects of external reality than had been the merely physiological being which had sensed the coloured patches, and the more developed, but still un-self-conscious being which had perceived these *sensa* as appearances of familiar objects ‘out there’ in a familiar kind of world. ‘I’ had now returned; and since ‘I’ happened to take an interest in architectural details and their history, the things seen through the window were immediately thought of as a member of a new category — not merely as houses, but as houses of a particular style and date, and as such

possessed of distinguishing characteristics which, when looked for, could be seen even by eyes as inadequate as my own then were. These distinguishing characteristics were now perceived, not because my eyes had suddenly improved, but simply because my mind was once more in a condition to look for them and register their significance.

I have dwelt at some length on this experience, not because it is in any way remarkable or strange, but simply because it illustrates certain facts which every student of the art of seeing must constantly bear in mind. These facts may be formulated as follows.

Sensing is not the same as perceiving.

The eyes and nervous system do the sensing, the mind does the perceiving.

The faculty of perceiving is related to the individual's accumulated experiences, in other words, to memory.

Clear seeing is the product of accurate sensing and correct perceiving.

Any improvement in the power of perceiving tends to be accompanied by an improvement in the power of sensing and of that product of sensing and perceiving which is seeing.

PERCEPTION DETERMINED BY MEMORY

The fact that heightened powers of perception tend to improve the individual's capacity for sensing and seeing is demonstrated, not merely under such abnormal circumstances as I have described, but in the most ordinary activities of everyday life. The experienced microscopist will see certain details on a slide; the novice will fail to see them. Walking through a wood, a city dweller will be blind to a multitude of things which the trained naturalist will see without difficulty. At sea, the sailor will detect distant objects which, for the landsman, are simply not there at all. And so on, indefinitely. In all such cases improved sensing and seeing are the result of heightened powers of perceiving, themselves

due to the memory of similar situations in the past. In the orthodox treatment of defective vision attention is paid to only one element in the total process of seeing, namely the physiological mechanism of the sensing-apparatus. Perception and the capacity to remember, upon which perception depends, are completely ignored. Why and with what theoretical justification, goodness only knows. For in view of the enormous part which mind is known to play in the total process of seeing, it seems obvious that any adequate and genuinely aetiological treatment of defective vision must take account, not only of sensing, but also of the process of perceiving, as well as that other process of remembering, without which perceiving is impossible. It is a highly significant fact that, in Dr. Bates's method for re-educating sufferers from defective vision, these mental elements in the total process of seeing are not neglected. On the contrary, many of his most valuable techniques are directed specifically to the improvement of perception and of that necessary condition of perception, memory.

CHAPTER IV

Variability of Bodily and Mental Functioning

THE MOST CHARACTERISTIC fact about the functioning of the total organism, or of any part of the organism, is that it is not constant, but highly variable. Sometimes we feel well, sometimes we feel poorly; sometimes our digestion is good, sometimes it is bad; sometimes we can face the most trying situations with calm and poise, sometimes the most trifling mishap will leave us irritable and nervous. This non-uniformity of functioning is the penalty we pay for being living and self-conscious organisms, unremittingly involved in the process of adapting ourselves to changing conditions.

The functioning of the organs of vision — the sensing eye, the transmitting nervous system and the mind that selects and perceives — is no less variable than the functioning of the organism as a whole, or of any other part of the organism. People with unimpaired eyes and good habits of using them possess, so to speak, a wide margin of visual safety. Even when their seeing organs are functioning badly, they still see well enough for most practical purposes. Consequently they are not so acutely conscious of variations in visual functioning as are those with bad seeing habits and impaired eyes. These last have little or no margin of safety; consequently any diminution in seeing power produces noticeable and often distressing results.

Eyes can be impaired by a number of diseases. Some of these affect only the eye; in others, the impairment of the eye is a symptom of disease in some other part of the body — in the kidneys, for example, or the pancreas, or the tonsils. Many other diseases and many conditions of mild, chronic disorder cause no organic impairment of the eye, but interfere with proper functioning — often, it would seem, by a general lowering of physical and mental vitality.

Faulty diet and improper posture may also affect vision.

Other causes of poor visual functioning are strictly psychological. Grief, anxiety, irritation, fear, and indeed any of the negative emotions may cause a temporary or, if chronic, an enduring condition of malfunctioning.

In the light of these facts, which are matters of everyday experience, we are able to recognize the essential absurdity of the average person's behaviour, when there is a falling off in the quality of his seeing. Ignoring completely the general condition of his body and his mind, he hurries off to the nearest spectacle shop and there gets himself fitted for a pair of glasses. The fitting is generally done by someone who has never seen him before and who therefore can have no knowledge of him either as a physical organism or as a human individual. Regardless of the possibility that the failure to see properly may be due to temporary malfunctioning caused by some bodily or psychological derangement, the customer gets his artificial lenses and, after a short, sometimes a long, period of more or less acute discomfort, while they are being 'broken in,' generally registers an improvement in vision. This improvement, however, is won at a cost. The chances are that he will never be able to dispense with what Dr. Luckiesh calls those 'valuable crutches,' but that, on the contrary, the strength of the crutches will have to be increased as his power of seeing progressively diminishes under their influence. This is what happens when things go well. But there is always a minority of cases in which things go badly, and for these the prognosis is thoroughly depressing.

In children, visual functioning is very easily disturbed by emotional shock, worry and strain. But instead of taking steps to get rid of these distressing psychological conditions and to restore proper habits of visual functioning, the parents of a child who reports a difficulty in seeing, immediately hurry him off to have his symptoms palliated by artificial lenses. As light-heartedly as they would buy their little boy a pair of socks or their little girl a pinafore, they have the child fitted with glasses, thus committing him or her to a complete life-time of dependence upon a mechanical device which may neutralize the symptoms of faulty functioning, but only, it would seem, by adding to its causes.

DEFECTIVE EYES CAPABLE OF HAVING FLASHES OF NORMAL VISION

At an early stage in the process of visual re-education one makes a very remarkable discovery. It is this. As soon as the defective organs of vision acquire a certain degree of what I have called dynamic relaxation, flashes of almost or completely normal vision are experienced. In some cases these flashes last only a few seconds; in others, for somewhat longer periods.

Occasionally — but this is rare — the old bad habits of improper use disappear at once and permanently, and with the return to normal functioning there is a complete normalization of the vision. In the great majority of cases, however, the flash goes as suddenly as it came. The old habits of improper use have re-asserted themselves; and there will not be another flash until the eyes and their mind have been coaxed back towards that condition of dynamic relaxation, in which alone perfect seeing is possible. To long-standing sufferers from defective vision, the first flash often comes with such a shock of happy amazement that they cannot refrain from crying out, or even bursting into tears. As the art of dynamic relaxation is more and more completely acquired, as habits of improper use are replaced by better habits, as visual functioning improves, the flashes of better vision become more frequent and of longer duration, until at last they coalesce into a continuous state of normal seeing. To perpetuate the flash — such is the aim and purpose of the educational techniques developed by Dr. Bates and his followers.

The flash of improved vision is an empirical fact which can be demonstrated by anyone who chooses to fulfil the conditions on which it depends. The fact that, during a flash, one may see with extreme clarity objects that, at ordinary times, are blurred or quite invisible, shows that temporary alleviation of mental

and muscular strain results in improved functioning and the temporary disappearance of refractive error.

VARIABLE EYES VERSUS INVARIABLE SPECTACLES

Under changing conditions, the defective eye can vary the degree of deformation imposed upon it by habits of improper use. This capacity for variation which may be towards normality or away from it is mechanically diminished or even inhibited altogether by the wearing of artificial lenses. The reason is simple. Every artificial lens is ground to correct a specific error of refraction. This means that an eye cannot see clearly through a lens, unless it is exhibiting exactly that error of refraction which the lens was intended to correct. Any attempt on the part of the spectacled eyes to exercise their natural variability is at once checked, because it always results in poorer vision. And this is true even in cases where the eye varies in the direction of normality; for the eye without errors of refraction cannot see clearly through a lens designed to correct an error it no longer has.

It will thus be seen that the wearing of spectacles confines the eyes to a state of rigid and unvarying structural immobility. In this respect artificial lenses resemble, not the crutches to which Dr. Luckiesh has compared them, but splints, iron braces and plaster casts.

In this context it seems worth while to mention certain recent and revolutionary advances in the treatment of infantile paralysis. These new techniques were developed by the Australian nurse, Sister Elizabeth Kenny, and have been successfully used in her own country and in the United States. Under the old method of treatment the paralysed muscle groups were immobilized by means of splints and plaster casts. Sister Kenny will have nothing to do with these devices. Instead, she makes use, from the first onset of the disease, of a variety of techniques aimed at relaxing and re-educating the affected muscles,

some of which are in a spastic condition of over-contraction, while others (incapable of moving owing to the spasm in neighbouring muscle groups) rapidly ‘forget’ how to perform their proper functions. Physiological treatment, such as the application of heat, is combined with an appeal to the patient’s conscious mind, through verbal instruction and demonstration. The results are remarkable. Under the new treatment, the recovery-rate is from seventy-five to one hundred per cent., depending on the site of the paralysis.

Between the Kenny method and the method developed by Dr. Bates there are close and significant analogies. Both protest against the artificial immobilization of sick organs. Both insist on the importance of relaxation. Both affirm that defective functioning can be re-educated towards normality by proper mind-body co-ordination. And, finally, both work.

CHAPTER V

Causes of Visual Mal-Functioning: Disease and Emotional Disturbances

IN THE PRECEDING chapter I spoke of the impairment of visual functioning due, first, to diseases having their seat in the eye itself or elsewhere in the body and, second, to psychological derangements connected with the negative emotions of fear, anger, worry, grief and the like. It goes without saying that in these cases the restoration of perfect functioning is contingent upon the removal of its physiological and psychological causes of dysfunction. Meanwhile, however, very considerable improvement can almost always be made by the acquisition and practice of the art of seeing.

It can be laid down as a general physiological principle that improvements in the functioning of a part of the body always tend to be followed by organic improvements within that part. In the case of diseases which have their seat in the eye itself, old habits of improper functioning are very often a causative or predisposing factor. Consequently, the acquisition of new and better habits often leads to rapid improvement in the organic condition of the impaired eye.

Even in those cases where the impairment of the eye is only a symptom of a disease having its seat in some other part of the body, the acquisition of habits of proper use will generally produce a certain improvement in the organic condition of the eye.

It is the same with psychological disorders. Perfect functioning can scarcely be expected so long as there is a persistence of the condition of negative emotion which produced the dysfunction. Nevertheless, consistent practice of the art of seeing can do much to improve functioning, even while the undesirable psychological condition persists; and without practice of the art of seeing it will be very difficult, even when the disturbing conditions have passed, to get rid of

the habits of improper use contracted while these conditions were present. Moreover, improvement of visual function may react favourably upon the disturbing condition of mind. Most kinds of improper functioning result in nervous tensions. (In the case of long-sighted persons, especially those having a tendency to outward squint, the nervous tension is often extreme, and the victim may be reduced to a condition of almost insane restlessness and agitation.) Such nervous tensions aggravate the disturbing psychological conditions. The intensification of the disturbance increases the dysfunction and so heightens the tensions; the heightened tensions further aggravate the disturbing conditions. And so on, in a vicious circle. But luckily there are also virtuous circles. Improvement of functioning relieves the tensions associated with dysfunction, and this relief of tension acts favourably upon the general conditions. Relief of tension will not, of course, get rid of the disturbing conditions; but it may help to make them progressively more bearable and less harmful in their effects on visual function.

The moral of all this is clear. Where there is reason to believe that improper visual functioning is caused, wholly or in part, by disease or disturbing emotional conditions, take all necessary steps to get rid of these causes; but in the meanwhile learn the art of seeing.

CAUSES OF VISUAL MAL-FUNCTIONING: BOREDOM

Another common impediment to good seeing is boredom, which lowers the general bodily and mental vitality, including that of the organs of vision. From a paper by Joseph E. Barmack, entitled ‘Boredom and Other Factors in the Physiology of Mental Effort’ and published (New York, 1937) in the *Archives of Psychology*, I select a couple of passages which have a certain relevance to our present subject.

‘Reports of boredom are accompanied very frequently by reports of increased appreciation of such distracting stimuli as pains, aches, eye-strain, hunger.’

The increased appreciation of eye-strain leads to an increased effort to see; and this increased effort, coupled with the increased effort to fix the attention in spite of being bored, results (in a manner which will be explained in the next section) in a lowering of vision and consequent enhanced sense of eye-strain.

In regard to the effect of mental states upon the condition of the body, Mr. Barmack writes as follows:

‘Where there is boredom, the situation seems unpleasant, because one is responding to it with inadequate physiological adjustments, caused in turn by inadequate motivation.’

The converse of this statement is also true. Inadequate physiological adjustments, due to organic or functional defects (in this instance of the organs of seeing), react unfavourably upon motivation by diminishing the individual’s desire to perform a given task, because it is so difficult for him to do it well. This in turn enhances the inadequacy of physiological adaptation, and so on in a vicious circle, boredom increasing functional defect and functional defect increasing boredom. The process is clearly illustrated in children suffering from defective vision. Because the hyperope finds reading uncomfortable, he tends to be bored with close work, and his boredom increases the mal-functioning which makes him long-sighted. Similarly, the myope is handicapped when playing games or associating with people, whose faces he cannot clearly see at more than a short distance; consequently, he is bored with sports and social life, and the boredom reacts unfavourably on his visual defect. An improvement in vision changes the quality of motivation, and reduces the field in which boredom is experienced. Diminished boredom and improved motivation result in improved physiological adjustments and so help forward the improvement of vision.

Once more, the moral is plain. Avoid, if possible, being bored yourself or boring others. But if you can’t help being bored or boring, learn the art of seeing for your own benefit, and teach it to your victims for theirs.

CAUSES OF VISUAL MAL-FUNCTIONING: MISDIRECTED ATTENTION

All the above-mentioned physical and psychological factors making for improper visual functioning are factors that lie, so to speak, outside the process of seeing. We have now to consider an even more fertile source of dysfunction lying within the seeing-process, namely improperly directed attention.

Attention is the indispensable condition of the two mental elements in the total process of seeing; for without attention there can be no selection from the general sense-field and no perception of the selected *sensa* as the appearances of physical objects.

As with all other psycho-physical activities, there is a right way of directing attention, and there is also a wrong way. When attention is directed in the right way, visual functioning is good; when it is directed in the wrong way, proper functioning is interfered with, and the ability to see falls off.

Much has been written on the subject of attention, and many experiments have been performed with a view to measuring its intensity, its span, its effective duration, its bodily correlations. Only a few of these general considerations and particular facts are relevant to our present subject, and I shall therefore confine myself solely to these.

Attention is essentially a process of discrimination — an act of separating and isolating one particular thing or thought from all the other things in the sense-field and thoughts in the mind. In the total process of seeing, attention is closely associated with selection; indeed, it is almost identical with that activity.

The various kinds and degrees of attention may be classified in a number of different ways. So far as seeing is concerned, the most significant classification is that which divides all acts of attention into the two main classes of spontaneous attention and voluntary attention.

Spontaneous attention is the kind of attention we share with the higher animals — the unforced act of selective awareness which is determined by the

biological necessities of keeping alive and reproducing the species, or by the exigencies of our second nature, in other words, of our habits and established patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour. This kind of attention involves no effort when it is shifting and transitory and not much effort when it is prolonged — for spontaneous attention may be prolonged, even in the animals. (The cat lying in wait beside a mouse hole is an obvious example.)

Voluntary attention is, so to speak, the cultivated variety of the wild, spontaneous growth. It is found only in man, and in animals subjected by human beings to some form of training. It is the attention associated with intrinsically difficult tasks, or with tasks which we have to perform, even though we don't particularly want to. A small boy studying algebra exhibits voluntary attention — that is, if he exhibits any attention at all. The same boy playing a game exhibits spontaneous attention. Voluntary attention is always associated with effort, and tends more or less rapidly to produce fatigue.

We must now consider the bodily correlations of attention, in so far as these affect the art of seeing. The first and most significant fact is that sensing, selecting and perceiving cannot take place without some degree of bodily movement.

'Without motor elements,' writes Ribot, in his classical study, *The Psychology of Attention*, 'perception [and it is clear from the context that he includes under this term sensing and selecting as well as perceiving] is impossible. If the eye be kept fixed upon a given object without moving, perception after a while grows dim, and then disappears. Rest the tips of the fingers upon a table without pressing, and the contact at the end of a few minutes will no longer be felt. But a motion of the eye or of the finger, be it ever so slight, will re-arouse perception. Consciousness is only possible through change; change is only possible through movement. It would be easy to expatiate at great length upon this subject; for although the facts are very manifest and of common experience, psychology has nevertheless so neglected the role sustained by movements, that it actually forgot at last that they are the fundamental condition of cognition in that they are the instrument of the fundamental law of

consciousness, which is relativity, change. Enough has now been said to warrant the unconditional statement that, where there is no movement, there is no perception.'

It is more than fifty years since Ribot enunciated this important truth about the connection between movement and perception. In theory, everyone now agrees that Ribot was right; and yet orthodox ophthalmologists have made no effort to discover how this principle could be applied in practice, so as to improve visual functioning. That task was left to Dr. Bates, in whose system the fundamental importance of movement as an aid to seeing is continually stressed.

Meanwhile the researches of the experimental psychologists have confirmed Ribot's categorical conclusion, and furnished theoretical justification for many of the practices and techniques taught by Dr. Bates and his followers.

In the paper already cited, Dr. J. E. Barmack lays it down that 'freely shifting attention is an important prop of vital activity. If attention is restricted to an inadequately motivating task, vital activity is apt to be depressed.' And the importance of mobility is similarly stressed by Professor Abraham Wolf, in his article on 'Attention' in the last edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* 'The concentration of attention upon some object or thought may continue for a considerable time among normal people. But what is commonly called an object or a thought is something very complex, having many parts or aspects, and our attention really passes from part to part, backwards and forwards all the time. Our attention to what may be seriously called a single thing, affording no opportunities for the movement of attention from part to part, say a small patch of colour, cannot be held for more than about a second, without serious risk of falling into a hypnotic trance, or some similar pathological condition.' Where seeing is concerned, this continuous movement of attention from part to part of the object under inspection is normally accompanied by a corresponding movement of the physical sensing-apparatus. The reason for this is simple. The clearest images are recorded in the macular area in the centre of the retina, and particularly at the minute *fovea centralis.* The mind, as it selects part after part of the object for perception, causes its eyes to move in such a way that each

successive part of the object is seen in turn by that portion of the eye which records the clearest image. (Ears have nothing corresponding to *the fovea centralis;* consequently the indispensable shifting of attention within the auditory field does not involve any parallel shifting of the bodily organ. The discriminating and selecting of auditory *sensa* can be done by the mind alone, and do not require corresponding movements of the ears.)

We have seen that, to be effective, attention must be continuously on the move, and that, because of the existence of *the fovea centralis*, the eyes must shift as continuously as the attention of the mind controlling them. But while attention is always associated, in normal subjects, with continuous eye movements, it is also associated with the inhibition of movements in other parts of the body. Every bodily movement is accompanied by a more or less vague sensation; and when we are trying to pay attention to something, these sensations act as distracting stimuli. To get rid of such distractions, we do what we can to prevent our bodies from moving. If the act of attention is accompanied by manual or other activities connected with the object being attended to, we strive to eliminate all movements except those strictly necessary to our task. If we have no task to perform, we try to inhibit all our movements, and to keep our bodies perfectly still. We are all familiar with the behaviour of an audience at a concert. While the music is being played, the people sit without stirring. As the last chord dies away, there breaks out, along with the applause (or apart from it, if the intermission is between two movements of a symphony), a positive tornado of coughs, sneezes and random fidgetings. The explosive intensity of this outburst is an indication of the strength and completeness of the inhibitions imposed by attention to the music. Francis Galton once took the trouble to count the number of bodily movements observable in an audience of fifty persons who were listening to a rather boring lecture. The average rate was forty-five movements a minute, or one fidget, more or less, for each member of the audience. On the rare occasions when the lecturer deviated into liveliness, the fidget-rate declined by upwards of fifty per cent.

Inhibition of unconscious activities goes hand in hand with that of conscious movements. Here are some of the findings in regard to respiration and heart beat, as summarized by R. Philip in a paper on *The Measurement of Attention* published (1928) by the Catholic University of America.

'In visual attention respiration is decreased in amplitude, but the rate is sometimes quickened, sometimes slowed; in auditory attention, the rate is always slowed, but the effect upon amplitude is variable. Restricted breathing often gives a slower heart rate, particularly in the first moments of attention. This slowed rate is to be explained from inhibited breathing, rather than from direct influence of attention.'

Continuous movement of the eyes, inhibition of movement in the rest of the body — such is the rule where visual attention is concerned. And so long as this rule is observed, and there is no disease or psychological disturbance, visual functioning will remain normal. Abnormality sets in when the inhibition of movement, which is right and proper in the other parts of the body, is carried over to the eyes, where it is entirely out of place. This inhibition of the movement of the eyes — a movement of which we are mainly unconscious — is brought about by a too greedy desire to see. In our over-eagerness we unconsciously immobilize the eyes, in the same way as we have immobilized the other parts of the body. The result is that we begin to stare at that part of the sense-field which we are trying to perceive. But a stare always defeats its own object; for, instead of seeing more, a person who has immobilized his sensing-apparatus (an act which also immobilizes the closely correlated attention) thereby automatically lowers his power of seeing, which depends, as we have learnt, upon the uninterrupted mobility of the sensing eyes and of the attending, selecting and perceiving mind associated with the eyes.

Moreover, the act of staring (since it represents an effort to repress movements which are normal and habitual) is always accompanied by excessive and continuous tension, and this, in its turn, produces a sense of psychological strain. But where there is excessive and continuous tension, normal functioning becomes impossible, circulation is reduced, the tissues lose their resistance and

their powers of recovery. To overcome the effects of impaired functioning, the victim of bad seeing habits stares yet harder, and consequently sees less with greater strain. And so on, in a descending spiral.

There is good reason to suppose that improperly directed attention, resulting in the immobilization of the eyes and mind, is the greatest single cause of visual mal-functioning. The reader will notice, when I come to describe them in detail, that many of the techniques developed by Dr. Bates and his followers are specifically aimed at restoring to the eye and mind that mobility, without which, as the experimental psychologists all agree, there cannot be normal sensation or perception.

SECTION II

CHAPTER VI

Relaxation

IN THIS SECOND section, I shall describe in some detail a number of beneficial techniques developed by Dr. Bates and other exponents of the art of seeing. Printed instructions can never replace the personal ministrations of a competent teacher; nor is it possible, in a short book, to indicate exactly how much stress should be laid on any given technique in any given case of visual mal-functioning. Every individual has his or her own particular problems. Equipped with adequate knowledge, any individual can discover the solution of those problems. But (especially in difficult cases) a gifted and experienced teacher will certainly make the discovery much more expeditiously, and be able to apply his knowledge much more effectively, than the sufferer can do for himself. And yet, in spite of all this, printed instructions still have their use. For the art of seeing includes a number of techniques which are profitable to all, whatever the nature and degree of their mal-functioning. Most of these techniques are extremely simple; consequently there is very little danger of their being misunderstood by those who read descriptions of them. A text-book can never be as good as a competent teacher; but it can certainly be better than nothing.

PASSIVE RELAXATION: PALMING

Relaxation, as we have seen, is of two kinds, passive and dynamic. The art of seeing includes techniques for producing either kind — passive relaxation of the visual organs during periods of rest, and dynamic relaxation, through normal and natural functioning in times of activity. Where the organs of vision are

concerned, complete passive relaxation can be achieved, but is less beneficial than a mixed state, combining elements of both kinds of relaxation.

The most important of these techniques of (predominantly) passive relaxation is the process which Dr. Bates called ‘palming.’ In palming the eyes are closed and covered with the palms of the hands. To avoid exerting any pressure upon the eyeballs (which should never be pressed, rubbed, massaged or otherwise handled) the lower part of the palms should rest upon the cheek bones, the fingers upon the forehead. In this way light can be completely excluded from the eyes, even though the eyeballs remain untouched.

Palming can be done most satisfactorily when one is seated with the elbows resting upon a table, or upon a large, solidly stuffed cushion laid across the knees.

When the eyes are closed and all light has been excluded by the hands, people with relaxed organs of vision find their sense-field uniformly filled with blackness. This is not the case with those whose visual functioning is abnormal. Instead of blackness, these people may see moving grey clouds, darkness streaked with light, patches of colour, all in an endless variety of permutations and combinations. With the achievement of passive relaxation of the eyes and the mind associated with them, these illusions of movement, light and colour tend to disappear, and are replaced by uniform blackness.

In his book, *Perfect Sight Without Glasses*, Dr. Bates advises the candidate for relaxation to ‘imagine black,’ while palming. The purpose of this is to come, through imagination, to an actual seeing of black. The technique he describes works satisfactorily in some cases; but in others (and they probably constitute a majority of all sufferers from defective vision) the attempt to imagine black frequently leads to conscious effort and strain. Thus the technique defeats its own object, which is relaxation. Towards the end of his life, Dr. Bates modified his procedure in this matter, and the most successful of his followers have done the same. The person who palms his eyes is no longer told to imagine blackness, but to occupy his mind by remembering pleasant scenes and incidents out of his own personal history. After a period more or less long, according to the intensity

of the strain involved, the field of vision will be found to be uniformly black. Thus, the same goal is reached as is done by imagining black — but without risk of making efforts or creating tensions. Care should be taken, when remembering past episodes, to avoid anything in the nature of a ‘mental stare.’ By fixing the mind too rigidly upon a single memory image, one may easily produce a corresponding fixation and immobilization of the eyes. (There is nothing surprising or mysterious in this; indeed, in view of the unitary nature of the human organism, or mind-body, this is just the sort of phenomenon one would expect to happen.) To avoid mental staring, with its concomitant fixation of the eyes, one should always, while palming, remember objects that are in movement.

For example, one may wish to revisit in imagination the scenes of one’s childhood. If this is done, one should imagine oneself walking about through the remembered landscape, noticing how its constituent parts change their aspects as one moves. At the same time, the scenes thus evoked may be peopled with human beings, dogs, traffic, all going about their business, while a brisk wind stirs the leaves of the trees and hurries the clouds across the sky. In such a world of phantasy, where nothing is fixed or rigid, there will be no danger of immobilizing the inward eye in a fixed stare; and where the inward eye moves without restraint, the outward, physical eye will enjoy a similar freedom. By using the memory and imagination in the way I have described it is possible to combine, in the single act of palming, the beneficial features of both passive and dynamic relaxation — rest and natural functioning.

This, I believe, is one of the principal reasons why palming is better for the organs of vision than any form of wholly passive relaxation. When the activities of the memory and imagination are completely inhibited, such wholly passive relaxation can be carried, after some practice, to the point where the eyelids and the eyeball itself lose their tone and go soft. This condition is so remote from the normal state of the eyes that its attainment does little or nothing to help in improving vision. Palming, on the contrary, keeps the mental powers of attention

and perception at work in the effortless, freely shifting way which is natural to them, at the same time as it rests the eyes.

The other main reasons for the efficacy of palming are of a physical nature. There is refreshment in the temporary exclusion of light, and comfort in the warmth of the hands. Moreover, all parts of the body carry their own characteristic potentials; and it is possible that the placing of the hands over the eyes does something to the electrical condition of the fatigued organs — something that re-invigorates the tissues and indirectly soothes the mind.

Be this as it may, the results of palming are remarkable. Fatigue is rapidly relieved; and when the eyes are uncovered, vision is often noticeably improved, at any rate for a time.

When there is strain and when vision is defective, there can never be too much palming. Many who have experienced its benefits deliberately set aside regular periods for palming. Others prefer to take such opportunities as each day may casually offer, or as their own fatigue may make it urgently necessary for them to create. In even the busiest lives there are blank and unoccupied intervals, which may profitably be used to relax the eyes and mind, and so to gain improved vision for further work. In all cases, the important thing to remember is that prevention is better than cure, and that, by devoting a few minutes to relaxation, one may spare oneself many hours of fatigue and lowered visual efficiency. In the words of Mr. F. M. Alexander, we all tend to be greedy ‘end-gainers,’ paying no attention to our ‘means-whereby.’ And yet it must be obvious to anyone who will give the subject a moment’s thought, that the nature of the means employed will always determine the nature of the end attained. In the case of the eyes and the mind controlling them, means that involve unrelieved strain result in lowered vision and general physical and mental fatigue. By allowing ourselves intervals of the right sort of relaxation, we can improve the means-whereby and so arrive more easily at our end, which is, proximately, good vision and, ultimately, the accomplishment of tasks for which good vision is necessary.

‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest shall be added.’ This saying is as profoundly true on the plane of the psycho-physiological skills as it is upon the planes of spirituality, ethics and politics. By seeking first relaxed visual functioning of the kind that Nature intended us to have, we shall find that all the rest will be added to us, in the form of better sight and heightened powers of work. If, on the contrary, we persist in behaving as greedy and thoughtless end-gainers, aiming directly at better vision (through mechanical devices for neutralizing symptoms) and increased efficiency (through unremitting strain and effort), we shall end by seeing worse and getting less work done.

Where circumstances make it difficult or embarrassing to assume the attitude of palming, it is possible to obtain a certain measure of relaxation by palming mentally — that is, by closing the eyes, imagining that they are covered with the hands and remembering some pleasant scene or episode, as suggested in an earlier paragraph. This should be accompanied by a conscious ‘letting go’ of the eyes — a ‘thinking of looseness’ in relation to the strained and tired tissues. Purely mental palming is not so beneficial as palming, which is both mental and physical; but it is a good second-best.

CHAPTER VII

Blinking and. Breathing

IT IS HARD to say whether the kind of relaxation achieved through the techniques described in the present and subsequent chapters is predominantly passive or predominantly dynamic. Luckily, it is of no practical importance how we answer the question. The significant facts about them are that all of them are designed to relieve strain and tension; that all may and should be practised as relaxation drills in periods specially set aside for the purpose; and that all may and should be incorporated into the everyday business of seeing, so as to produce and maintain the state of dynamic relaxation associated with normal functioning. I shall begin with a brief account of blinking, and its importance in the art of seeing.

NORMAL AND ABNORMAL BLINKING HABITS

Blinking has two main functions: to lubricate and cleanse the eyes with tears; and to rest them by periodically excluding light. Dryness of the eyes predisposes them to inflammation, and is often associated with blurring of vision. Hence the imperative need for frequent lubrication — that is to say, for frequent blinking. Moreover, dust (as everyone knows who has ever cleaned a window) will stick to even the smoothest surface, and render the most transparent material opaque. The eyelids, as they blink, wash the exposed surfaces of the eyes with tears, and prevent them from becoming dirty. At the same time, when blinking is frequent, as it should be, light is excluded from the eyes during perhaps five per cent, or more of all the waking hours.

Eyes in a condition of dynamic relaxation blink often and easily. But where there is strain, blinking tends to occur less frequently, and the eyelids work tensely. This would seem to be due to that same misdirection of the attention, which causes the improper immobilization of the sensing-apparatus.

The inhibition of movement, natural and normal in the other parts of the body, is carried over, not only to the eyes, but to their lids as well. A person who stares closes the eyelids only at long intervals. This fact is a matter of such common observation that, when novelists write about a stare, they generally qualify the word with the epithet, ‘unwinking.’

Movement, as the psychologists have long been insisting, is one of the indispensable conditions of sensing and perceiving. But so long as the eyelids are kept tense and relatively immobile, the eyes themselves will remain tense and relatively immobile. Consequently, anyone who wishes to acquire the art of seeing well must cultivate the habit of frequent and effortless blinking. When mobility has been restored to the eyelids, the restoration of mobility to the sensing-apparatus will be comparatively easy. Also, the eyes will enjoy better lubrication, more rest, and the improved circulation that is always associated with unstrained muscular movement.

Those who blink too little and too tensely — and they comprise a majority of the sufferers from defective vision — must consciously acquire, or re-acquire, the habit of blinking often and easily. This can be done by pausing every now and then to perform a brief blinking-drill — half a dozen light, butterfly-wing blinks; then a few seconds of relaxed closure of the lids; then more blinks, and another closing. And so on for half a minute or a minute. Repeated at frequent intervals (say, every hour or so) these drills will help to build up the habit of frequent blinking during the rest of the day. A person who has become ‘blinkconscious’ will also be conscious of his own tendencies to immobilize the eyes and lids, and will be able to check the incipient stare by frequent and easy closures of the lids. Frequent blinking is especially important for those engaged in any form of difficult and detailed work, requiring close attention. When busy with such tasks, it is fatally easy to fix the eyes and lids, with resulting strain,

fatigue, dryness of the cornea, inflammation and impairment of vision. Frequent and easy blinking will often bring a measure of relief that seems out of all proportion to the simplicity of the means employed.

Besides blinking, one may, with advantage, periodically squeeze the eyes tight shut, reinforcing the action of the lids with that of the other facial muscles. This should be done on all occasions when one is tempted to rub the eyes — a barbarous and brutal method of doing with the knuckles what the beautifully adjusted eyelids can do much more safely and just as effectively. It may also be done occasionally, even when there is no itching or other discomfort in the eyes — merely to increase local circulation and stimulate the secretion of tears.

Massage of the eyes themselves is always undesirable; but a gentle rubbing of the temples will often be found soothing and refreshing. Eye fatigue may also be relieved by rubbing and kneading the muscles of the upper part of the nape of the neck. (In certain cases of defective vision, appropriate treatment by a capable osteopath will often produce excellent results.) People who are subject to eye-strain may profitably use this rudimentary kind of massage upon themselves two or three times a day and follow it up by a period of palming.

NORMAL AND ABNORMAL BREATHING HABITS

As was pointed out in the first section of this book, experimental psychologists have noted a fairly regular correlation between the state of attentiveness and a modification of the normal rate and amplitude of breathing. To put it more simply, they have noticed that, when we look at something attentively, we tend either to hold our breath for many seconds at a stretch, or alternatively, if we do breathe, to breathe less deeply than at ordinary times. The reason for this is that, when we are trying to concentrate our attention, we find that the sounds and the sense of muscular movement, associated with breathing, are sources of distraction. We try to get rid of these distractions, either by breathing less

deeply, or by suspending our breathing altogether during relatively prolonged periods of time.

In their strained effort to see, people with defective vision tend to carry this normal interference with breathing to entirely abnormal extremes. Many of them, when paying close attention to something they are particularly anxious to see, behave almost as if they were diving for pearls, and remain for incredibly long periods without drawing breath. But vision depends-to a remarkable extent upon good circulation; and circulation can be described as good only when it is sufficient in quantity (which it is not when the mind is under strain and the eyes are in a condition of nervous muscular tension), and at the same time of good quality (which it certainly is not when restricted breathing has left the blood imperfectly oxygenated).

The quantity of circulation in and around the eyes may be increased by means of relaxation, passive and dynamic. The quality can be improved by learning consciously to breathe, even while paying attention. Some of the techniques of relaxation have already been described, and I shall have occasion, later on, to mention several others. In this sub-section our concern is only with breathing.

In correcting abnormal breathing habits, the first thing to do is to become aware that they *are* abnormal. Impress upon yourself the fact that, among persons with defective sight, there is a regular correlation between attentive looking and a quite unnecessary, indeed positively harmful, interference with breathing. Kept in the back of the mind, this thought will periodically pop out into consciousness; and if it does this at a time when you are paying close attention to something, the chances are that you will catch yourself behaving as though you were a pearl fisher ten fathoms under the surface of the sea. But you are not a pearl fisher, and the element in which you live is not water, but life-giving air. Therefore, fill your lungs with the stuff — not violently, as though you were doing deep-breathing exercises, but in an easy, effortless way, expiration following inspiration in a natural rhythm. Continue, while breathing in this way, to pay attention to the thing you want to see. (In later chapters of this book I shall describe the proper way of paying attention.) You will find it

possible, after a little practice, to be just as concentratedly attentive when breathing normally, or even rather more deeply than at ordinary times, as it is when behaving like a pearl fisher. In a little while, you will find that breathing while paying attention has become habitual and automatic. Any improvement in the quality of circulation is reflected immediately in better vision; and when, through relaxation, quantity has also been increased, this improvement in vision will be even greater.

In cases of failing sight, due to old age or other causes, and in certain pathological conditions of the eye, some doctors, particularly those of the Viennese school, make successful use of mechanical methods for increasing local circulation. Temporary hyperaemia of the regions round the eye is produced by dry cupping of the temples, or by the application of leeches, or sometimes by fastening round the neck a specially made elastic collar, so adjusted as to permit the blood to flow freely into the head through the arteries, while reducing the amount to return by slightly constricting the veins. None of these procedures should be tried out, except under expert medical advice; nor, indeed, is it necessary in most cases that they should be tried. Relaxation and proper breathing will bring about an equal improvement in circulation, more slowly indeed, but more safely and naturally, and by methods which are entirely under the control of the person employing them. Moreover, the resulting improvement in visual functioning and in the organic condition of the eyes will be the same, whichever means of increasing circulation are employed. The mechanical methods are no better than the self-directed, psycho-physical methods here described. Indeed, in so far as they *are* mechanical, they are intrinsically less satisfactory. If I mention them at all, it is merely in order to corroborate the assertion that vision and the organic health of the eyes depend upon adequate circulation.

The extent of this dependence can be demonstrated in a very simple way. As you read, draw a deep breath and then exhale. While the air is being breathed out, you will notice that the print before your eyes becomes perceptibly clearer, blacker and more distinct. This temporary improvement of vision is due to a

slight temporary hyperaemia in the head; and this, in turn, is due to the slight constriction of the veins in the neck caused by the act of expiration. More than the usual amount of blood is present in and around the eyes — with the result that the sensing-apparatus does its work more efficiently, and the mind is given better material with which to do its perceiving and seeing.

CHAPTER VIII

The Eye, Organ of Light

IN INSECTS AND fishes, in birds and beasts and men, eyes have been developed with the express purpose of responding to light waves. Light is their element; and when they are deprived of light, either wholly or in part, they lose their power and even develop serious diseases, such as the nystagmus of coal miners. This does not mean, of course, that eyes must be perpetually exposed to light. Sleep is necessary to the mind that perceives, and for seven or eight hours at least out of the twenty-four, darkness is necessary to the sensing-apparatus. The eyes do their work most easily and efficiently when they are allowed to alternate between good solid darkness and good bright light.

THE CURRENT FEAR OF LIGHT

In recent years there has grown up a most pernicious and entirely unfounded belief that light is bad for the eyes. An organ which, for some scores of millions of years, has been adapting itself very successfully to sunshine of all degrees of intensity, is now supposed to be incapable of tolerating daylight without the mitigating intervention of tinted goggles, or lamplight, except when diffused through ground glass or reflected from the ceiling. This extraordinary notion that the organ of light perception is unfitted to stand light has become popular only in the last twenty years or so. Before the war of 1914 it was, I remember, the rarest thing to see anyone wearing dark glasses. As a small boy, I would look at a be-goggled man or woman with that mixture of awed sympathy and rather macabre curiosity which children reserve for those afflicted with any kind of unusual or

disfiguring physical handicap. Today, all that is changed. The wearing of black spectacles has become not merely common, but creditable.

Just how creditable is proved by the fact that the girls in bathing suits, represented on the covers of fashion magazines in summer time, invariably wear goggles. Black glasses have ceased to be the badge of the afflicted, and are now compatible with youth, smartness and sex appeal.

This fantastic craze for blacking out the eyes had its origin in certain medical circles, where a panic terror of the ultra-violet radiations in ordinary sunlight developed about a generation back; it has been fostered and popularized by the manufacturers and vendors of coloured glass and celluloid spectacle frames. Their propaganda has been effective. In the Western world, millions of people now wear dark glasses, not merely on the beach, or when driving their cars, but even at dusk, or in the dim-lit corridors of public buildings. Needless to say, the more they wear them, the weaker their eyes become and the greater their need for ‘protection’ from the light. One can acquire an addiction to goggles, just as one can acquire an addiction to tobacco or alcohol.

This addiction has its origin in the fear of light — a fear which those who have it feel to be justified by the discomfort they experience when their eyes are exposed to too intense a brightness. The question arises: why this fear and this discomfort? Animals get on very happily without goggles; so do primitive men. And even in civilized societies, even in these days when the virtues of coloured glass are everywhere persuasively advertised, millions of people face the sunlight without goggles and, so far from suffering any ill effects, see all the better for it. There is every reason to suppose that, physiologically, the eyes are so constructed that they can tolerate illuminations of very high intensity. Why, then, do so many people in the contemporary world experience discomfort when exposed to light even of relatively low intensity?

REASONS FOR THE FEAR OF LIGHT

There seem to be two main reasons for this state of things. The first is connected with the silly craze for shutting out the light, described in an earlier paragraph. Medical alarmists and the advertisers, who exploit the opinions of these learned gentlemen for their own profit, have convinced large sections of the public that light is harmful to the eyes. This is not true; but the belief that it is true can cause a great deal of harm to those who entertain it. If faith can move mountains, it can also ruin vision — as anyone may see for himself who has watched the behaviour of light-fearing people when suddenly exposed to sunshine. They *know* that light is' bad for them. Consequently, what grimaces! What frowns! What narrowings of the lids! What screwings-up of the eyes! In a word, what manifest symptoms of strain and tension! Originating in a false belief, the purely mental terror of light expresses itself physically in terms of a strained and thoroughly abnormal condition of the sensing-apparatus. Eyes in such a condition are no longer capable of reacting as they should to the external environment. Instead of accepting the sunlight easily and as a blessing, they suffer discomfort and even develop an inflammation of the tissues. Hence more pain and a heightening of fear, a confirmation of the false faith that light is harmful.

There is also another reason for the discomfort which so many people now experience when exposed to light. They may not start with any *a priori* terror of light; but because their seeing organs are strained and defective, owing to habits of wrong use, their eyes and mind may be incapable of reacting normally to the external environment. Strong light is painful to the tense, strained seeing organs. Because it is painful, a fear of light develops in the mind; and this fear becomes, in its turn, a cause of further strain and discomfort.

CASTING OUT FEAR

The fear of light, like all other kinds of fear, can be cast out of the mind; and the physical discomfort experienced when the sensing-apparatus is exposed to light can be prevented by means of suitable techniques. When this has been done, it will no longer be necessary to black out the eyes with tinted goggles.

Nor is this all. In the process of learning to react to light in a normal and natural way, defective seeing organs can do much to relieve the strain that impairs their visual power. Acquiring normal reactions to light is one of the essential procedures in the art of seeing. Appropriate drill in connection with sunlight will produce a valuable kind of passive relaxation; and the power so acquired of dealing easily and effortlessly with the strongest illuminations can be carried over into active life, to become an element in that dynamic relaxation of the seeing organs, without which there can never be perfect vision.

In all cases where light causes discomfort, the first thing to do is to cultivate an attitude of confidence. We must bear steadily in mind that light is not harmful, at least in any degree of intensity we are ever likely to meet with; and that, if in fact it produces discomfort, the fault is ours for being afraid of it, or for having habitually used our eyes in the wrong way.

PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

Confidence in the harmlessness of light should be translated into practice by a process of gradual habituation. If the eyes shrink from sunlight when open, start by accustoming them to sunlight when they are closed. Sitting comfortably, lean back and, ‘letting go and thinking looseness,’ close the eyes and turn them towards the sun. To avoid internal staring and the possibility of too prolonged an exposure to the light of any given portion of the retina, move the head gently but fairly rapidly from side to side. A lateral swing of a few inches will be quite sufficient, so long as it is kept up continuously.

In some persons sunning of the eyes will produce discomfort even when the lids are closed. Where this is the case, it will be as well to start by directing the eyes at the sky, and not directly at the sun. When the light of the sky seems tolerable, one may turn for short periods to the sun. As soon as any discomfort is felt, one should turn away, palm the eyes for a little, and then start again. The closed lids may be sunned for several minutes at a stretch (with brief interruptions for palming, if the need of it is felt); and the process should be repeated several times in the course of the day.

After a very little while most people will find that they can, without discomfort, take the sunlight upon the open eyes. The most satisfactory procedure is as follows. Cover one eye with the palm of the hand and, taking care to swing the head from side to side as before, allow the other eye to travel back and forth three or four times across the sun, blinking rapidly, lightly and easily as you do so. Then cover the eye that has been exposed to the sunlight and repeat the same process with the other eye. Alternate for a minute or so; then palm until the after-images disappear. When the eyes are uncovered, it will generally be found that vision has distinctly improved, while the organs feel relaxed and suffused with a warm sense of well-being.

When the open eyes are sunned one at a time, in the manner described above, the light seems far less dazzling than when both are sunned simultaneously. Because the illumination seems more intense, simultaneous sunning of both eyes may result in involuntary shrinking, which is then overcome by an effort of will that results, in its turn, in a state of tension. This condition may postpone the achievement of the complete relaxation which should normally follow the process of sunning. Nevertheless, those who wish to sun both eyes simultaneously may do so in moderation without any fear of harm. It may be noted that the process is accompanied, at first, by a copious discharge of tears and followed by after-images brighter and more lasting than those which attend the sunning of each eye separately. The tears are refreshing, and the after-images soon disappear with palming. On the whole, however, the method of sunning one eye at a time is to be preferred.

HARMLESSNESS OF SUNNING

The enemies of Dr. Bates's method are fond of telling hair-raising stories about the effects of sunning the eyes. Those who do it are solemnly warned that they will go blind, either at once or (when in fact this doesn't happen) at some future date. From personal experience, as well as from fairly extensive enquiries among people who have taught and practised the technique, I am convinced that these stories are wholly untrue. When the eyes are sunned in the manner described in the preceding paragraphs, no harmful effects ever follow. On the contrary, the organs are agreeably relaxed, circulation is speeded up, and the vision is improved. Moreover, many forms of inflammation, both of the eye and its lids, tend to clear up very rapidly when the eyes are sunned. There is nothing particularly surprising about these facts. Sunlight is a powerful germicide and, used in moderation, it acts as a valuable therapeutic agent when directed on the human body. There is no reason why it should not act upon the eyes in the same beneficial way as it acts on other external organs.

The sun produces harmful effects upon the eyes only when people stare fixedly at it. For example, after following the phases of an eclipse, many persons report a temporary impairment of vision, mounting sometimes to partial or even complete blindness. In almost all cases, the condition disappears after a short time, leaving the sufferer none the worse. Among the many thousands who have used the technique developed by Dr. Bates and his followers, a very few have had a similar experience. Neglecting their teachers' advice to keep the head continuously swinging from side to side, they have stared fixedly at the sun. If the results are bad, they have only themselves to blame.

The truth of the matter is that, like everything else in the world, sunlight is good for us in reasonable quantities, bad when taken to excess or in the wrong way. If people are foolish enough to eat ten pounds of strawberries at a sitting, or

swallow a quart of castor oil, or take a hundred aspirin tablets, they will have to suffer for their folly. Nevertheless, strawberries, castor oil and aspirin are freely sold. The fools must take their chance. It is the same with sunlight. Every summer a great many silly people sun-bathe to the point of burning their skin, running a high fever and even enlarging their spleens. Nevertheless, sun-bathing is permitted and encouraged, because it is pleasant and beneficial for people who do it reasonably. So too with the eyes. In spite of all the good advice that may be given, some imbeciles will stare fixedly at the sun and so temporarily impair their vision. This is no reason for discouraging those who have the sense to sun their eyes wisely from undertaking a practice which will certainly do them good.

Those who have learnt to take the sun on the closed and open eyes, will note a progressive diminution of their susceptibility to glare and bright illuminations. The fear of light and the discomfort caused by light will vanish, and along with them will go the tinted goggles, the frowns and grimaces, and the strain that is always associated with fear and discomfort.

To maintain normal reactions to light, one should carry over into active life a modified version of the sunning technique, which is practised during periods specially set aside for the purpose. If the light seems unpleasantly bright when one goes out of doors, one should close the eyes for a moment, ‘let go and think looseness,’ then re-open as gently and relaxedly as possible. After this the eyes should be raised to the sun, which may be taken for a few seconds on the closed lids and afterwards (always with a swing of the head) on the open eyes. When one looks down again, the brightness of the world around will seem very tolerable, and there will be no sense of strain or tension. These procedures should be repeated at frequent intervals when one is out of doors on a bright day. They will help to keep the eyes in a state of dynamic relaxation and to improve the vision.

At night one may use a bright source of artificial light in lieu of the sun. For this purpose, as well as for reading, I have found a 150-watt spot-or flood-light very useful. These bulbs, which are like self-contained head-lamps, with a curved and silvered back and a circular transparent front, through which the

concentrated beam of light is projected, will give a thousand foot-candles at three or four feet. Using the same procedure as with the sun, one may take this light on the closed and open eyes. Improved relaxation, circulation and vision follow exactly as with the sun. Those who wish to increase the illumination may do so by reflecting the light from a spot-lamp into their eyes by means of a convex shaving mirror. At the focus of the mirror there will be warmth and illumination not greatly inferior to that of the sun itself, when looked at on a bright summer’s day.

CHAPTER IX

Central Fixation

IN THE PRESENT chapter and the two which follow I shall give an account of certain procedures designed to encourage mobility in the defective organs of vision. For more than half a century, as we have seen, experimental psychologists have proclaimed that adequate cognition of the external world depends upon movement. This fact is, obviously and on the face of it, enormously significant for vision. And yet, for some inexplicable reason, orthodox ophthalmologists have never paid the smallest attention to it. As a class, they have been, and still are, content to prescribe crutches for the mechanical palliation of symptoms, and to leave the matter at that. The first person to devote any serious thought to this manifestly important problem was Dr. W. H. Bates — and all he got for his pains was the professional cold shoulder and the reputation of being a crank, or even a quack.

Before describing any of the procedures designed to encourage habits of mobility, I shall give a brief account of the mental and physiological conditions which make such procedures necessary. As explained in the first section of this book, attention is naturally mobile, and shifts continually from one part of the apprehended physical object to another part, one aspect of the thought under consideration to another aspect. Where seeing is concerned, this continuous shifting of the mind is normally accompanied by continuous shifting of the sensing-apparatus. The reason for this must be sought in the structure of the eye, which records perfectly clear images only at the central portion of the retina known as the *macula lutea,* with its point of sharpest precision, the *fovea centralis.*

This rule, that we see best only that small area at which we are looking directly, out of the centre of sight, has one important exception. At night, when there is a minimum of light, we do our best and clearest sensing with the outer portions of the retina. This fact was discovered centuries ago by the astronomers, who found that, when looking directly at a constellation, they could see only the brighter stars, whereas, when they looked somewhat to one side of it, they could detect other stars of smaller magnitude. In the words of the eminent French physicist, François Arago, ‘in order to see a very dimly lighted object, it is necessary not to look at it.’ For this reason, when trying to find your way in the dark, you should not look straight ahead; for then you will not see the dimmer objects immediately in front of you. If, on the contrary, you turn your head, first to one side, then to the other, you will see what is directly in front of you ‘out of the corner of your eye.’

Exactly the opposite is the case where vision in the daytime, or under bright artificial illumination, is concerned. In these circumstances (and all that follows applies to vision under good illumination), one senses and sees best only that portion of the visible environment which throws its image upon the *macula* and *fovea:* images recorded by the outer portions of the retina are less distinct as to form, and less accurate as to colour, than those recorded by the minute central area.

At average reading distance from the eyes — say fourteen inches — one can easily see the whole page of a book. But the area seen with greatest clarity will be a circle of about half an inch in diameter, while the maximum degree of precision will be confined to a single letter at the centre of that circle. This single letter represents that part of the total visible environment whose image falls, at a given moment, upon the *fovea centralis;* the halfinch circle, that part whose image falls upon the *macula* surrounding the *fovea centralis.* All the rest of the printed page gets recorded by the outer portions of the retina, and is consequently, sensed less clearly.

Because of the existence of this central area of clearer sensing, the mobility of attention necessarily entails a corresponding mobility of the eyes. For, as the

mind shifts its attention to a given part of the regarded object, the eyes are moved automatically and unconsciously, so that the part being attended to shall be the part most clearly sensed — or, to put the matter in physiological terms, so that the light rays reflected from the part that is being attended to shall fall directly upon the *macula* and *fovea centralis.* When this happens we are said to be sensing with central fixation. In order to sense every part of an object with central fixation, or in other words, with maximum clarity, the eye must make an enormous number of minute and rapid shifts from point to point. When it fails to shift, it fails to see all parts of the object with central fixation and therefore with maximum clarity.

Mobility, then, is the normal and natural condition of the selecting and perceiving mind; and, because of the need for central fixation, mobility is also the normal and natural condition of the sensing eye. During infancy and childhood, most people learn unconsciously to keep their eyes and mind in this condition of mobility, and to do their sensing with central fixation. But unfortunately, for any one of a great variety of reasons, the habits of proper use may be lost. In one way or another, the conscious ‘I’ interferes with natural and normal functioning. The result is that attention comes to be directed fixedly, instead of with a continuous easy movement from point to point, while the eyes cease to shift, and develop a stare. Malfunctioning produces mental and physical strains, which, in their turn, produce more malfunctioning. Owing to strain and malfunctioning, the sensing-apparatus undergoes distortion, and errors of refraction and other undesirable physical conditions result. Vision deteriorates, and as the bad habits of use become ingrained with time, the eyes (above all, when fitted with spectacles) lose more and more of their power of self-regulation and resistance to disease.

That staring should always be accompanied by strain and an impairment of vision is not in the least surprising. For when people stare, they try to achieve the impossible; they try to see every part of a large area as clearly as every other part. But the structure of the eye is such that it *cannot* sense every part of the area as clearly as it senses that one small part which is being looked at with

central fixation — in other words, that part whose image falls upon the *macula* and *fovea centralis.* And the nature of the mind is such that it *cannot* do a proper job of perceiving, unless its attention is continually shifting from point to point of the regarded object. To stare is to ignore these necessary conditions of normal sensing and normal seeing. In his greedy anxiety to achieve his end, which is to do the greatest possible amount of good seeing in the shortest possible time, the starer neglects the only means whereby this end can be achieved. Instead, he tries to do the impossible. The results are just as bad as one would expect them to be — strain, with consequent errors of refraction and poor vision.

Occasionally, the habit of central fixation is never acquired, most often owing to diseases of the eye during infancy. In the great majority of cases, however, it is acquired, along with the other habits of normal use, and only lost at a later date — owing, generally, to the interference of the conscious 'I,' whose fears and worries, whose cravings and griefs and ambitions are for ever interfering with the normal functioning of the physical organs, the nervous system and the mind. When the habit of central fixation has been lost for some time, the *macula* and *fovea* seem to lose some of their natural sensibility through disuse. At the same time the habit of trying to sense objects equally clearly with all parts of the retina leads to an over-stimulation of some or all of the eccentric areas, which do their best to increase their sensibility in order to respond to this stimulation. Sometimes this process goes so far that a person will, so to speak, manufacture for himself a false *macula* somewhere on the outer edges of his retina. When this happens, he gets his clearest vision, not when looking straight in front of him, but only when the object is regarded at an angle. This sideways vision can never be anything like so clear as normal vision in the central, macular area.

But owing to the *maculas* loss of sensibility through disuse, and to the strength of long-established bad habits, it is the best vision that such an eye and mind can have.

In the majority of cases, however, the loss of the good habits of mobility and central fixation, and the acquisition of the bad habit of staring, or trying to see every part of a large area equally well, do not result in this extreme degree of

eccentric fixation. The starer still looks straight ahead. But because he tries to see everything equally well, he reduces the sensibility of his *macula* and *fovea* and builds up an undesirable and abnormal relationship between the perceiving mind and the peripheral areas of the retina, which are now used for sensing as much as, or more than, the central areas. Eccentric fixation is diffused over the whole retina, instead of being confined, as in the extreme cases, to a false *macula* at one particular point.

Without central fixation and mobility there cannot be normal vision. Hence the great importance of procedures which teach the normal-sighted person how to preserve the good habits, on which (though he generally does not know it) his good sight depends, and which help the person with defective vision to overcome the bad habits, responsible for his bad sight. For those who have never learnt central fixation, and for those whose eccentric fixation is extreme, the services of a skilled and experienced teacher will probably be indispensable. The rest, if they are shown how, can do much to help themselves. It is for them that I describe the simple, but effective, techniques which follow.

CHAPTER X

Methods of Teaching the Eyes and Mind to Move

CENTRAL FIXATION CAN be taught directly, by methods which permit the pupil to experience the fact that he cannot see every part of a large area with equal clarity. Or it may be taught indirectly, by methods which build up habits of mobility — methods which compel the mind to shift its attention and the eye to shift its area of greatest sensitivity from point to point of the regarded object.

Use of the direct method entails a certain danger of increasing the strains from which the pupil already suffers. It seems best, therefore, to approach the goal indirectly. Just as, in the case of palming, the best way to see black is not to try to see it, but to remember pleasant scenes and events out of the past, so the best way to achieve central fixation is not to try to see one small area better than all others, but to cultivate the mobility which is the necessary condition for seeing successive small areas of an object with maximum clarity. Accordingly, I shall begin by describing a number of procedures for increasing the mobility of the eyes and mind; and only when this has been done shall I give an account of methods aimed directly at making the pupil conscious of central fixation. Those whose sight is defective will be well advised to follow the same order in their educational practice. First learn to keep the eyes and the attention in constant easy movement; then, when movement has re-activated them, learn consciously to recognize the manifestations of central fixation and, by recognizing them, to increase their intensity.

SWINGING

Whenever we move, objects in the external world appear to move in the opposite direction. Those which are nearest to us seem to move most rapidly, and the rate of apparent movement diminishes with the increase of distance from the eyes, so that objects at a great distance seem to be almost stationary, even when viewed from an express train or a speeding car.

The various procedures, to which Dr. Bates gave the name of ‘swinging,’ are primarily designed to make the person who practises them aware of this apparent movement of external objects and, by this means, to encourage a condition of free mobility in the sensing-apparatus and the controlling mind. Where such mobility exists, psychological and ocular tensions are relaxed, staring is replaced by rapidly shifting central fixation, and there is a marked improvement in vision.

It is possible to invent and practise a great number of swings; but all of them are variations on one or other of a few fundamental types, which alone will be described.

The Short Swing should be performed while standing in front of a window, or in a doorway, or anywhere else where one can arrange to look past some near-by object at some more distant object. For example, the upright bar of a window frame may serve as the near-by object, while a tree or part of a house on the other side of the street will serve as the more distant object. Inside a room, the near-by object can be a tall standard lamp, or a piece of string hanging from the ceiling light, while a picture on the wall or an ornament on the mantelpiece will do for the more distant object. Standing with the feet about eighteen inches apart, one should swing the body, regularly, gently and not too rapidly, from side to side, throwing the weight on to each foot alternately. The swing should not be wide — less than a foot in all is quite sufficient — and the head should not be turned in relation to the shoulders, but should remain looking straight ahead, moving in unison with the trunk. As one swings to the right, the near-by object (say the window bar) will appear to move to the left across the more distant object. As one swings to the left, it will appear to move to the right. This apparent movement should be noted during a number of swings; then the eyes should be closed. Still swinging from side to side, visualize the apparent

movement of the window bar across the tree at the end of the garden or the house across the street. Then open again and, during a few more swings, watch the real bar as it moves back and forth. Close again and visualize. And so on for a minute or two, or longer.

This procedure has several advantages. It makes the mind aware of movement and, so to say, friendly to it. It helps to break the defective eye's bad habit of staring. It produces automatically a shifting of attention and of the *fovea centralis.* All these contribute directly to the dynamic relaxation of the organs of seeing. An indirect contribution to the same result comes from the rhythmic movement of swinging, which acts upon mind and body in the same soothing way as do the movements of the cradle and the rocking-chair.

To these soothing effects of the Short Swing, the Long Swing adds direct and beneficial action upon the spine by gentle and repeated twisting. When practising this swing, one stands with the feet apart, as before; but instead of confining the movement of the body to a pendulum-like short sway, one swings in a wider arc, turning the trunk upon the hips and the head upon the shoulders as one does so. As one swings to the left, the weight is thrown on to the left foot, while the heel of the right is lifted. Conversely, the left heel is lifted as one turns to the right. The eyes, as they travel from one side to the other, cover an arc of one hundred and eighty degrees, or even more, and the external world seems to oscillate back and forth in a wide sweep. No attempt should be made to pay attention to anything in the eyes' moving sense-field. The attitude of mind, while one is practising this swing, should be one of complete passivity and indifference. One just 'lets the world go by' without caring, without even making any effort to perceive what it is that is going by. The selecting and perceiving mind is out of action, and one is down to pure sensing — a physiological organism taking a holiday from the conscious 'I.'

Such a holiday from the self is extremely restful. Moreover, since it is generally the conscious 'I' that is responsible for poor seeing (either through harbouring negative emotions, or through misdirecting its attention, or in some other way ignoring nature's rules for normal visual functioning), this temporary

inhibition of the self's activities is helpful in breaking the old habits of improper use and clearing the ground for the building up of new and better habits. In the Long Swing, the sensing-apparatus temporarily escapes from its bondage to a mind that misuses it by immobilizing it into a rigid stare, and learns once more how to function in a condition of free and unstrained mobility.

A variant of the Short Swing, which may be practised while sitting and in an inconspicuous manner, has been called the Pencil Swing. In this swing, the near-by object is a pencil (or one's own forefinger will do just as well) held vertically about six inches in front of the nose. Swinging the head from side to side, one notes the apparent movement of the pencil across the more distant features of one's environment. The eyes should be closed from time to time, and this apparent movement, should be followed with the inward eye of the imagination. When the eyes are opened, they may be focussed alternately on the pencil and on the more distant objects across which it seems to pass.

Swinging can and should be carried over from the periods specially set aside for it into the activities of daily life. Perfect vision is impossible without continuous movement of the sensing-apparatus and the attention; and it is by cultivating an awareness of the apparent movements of external objects that the staring eyes and immobilized mind can most easily and rapidly be educated out of their sight-impairing habits. Hence, for those with defective vision, the importance of applying the principle of the swing in every variety of visual situation.

To begin with, whenever you move, let the world go by and be aware of its going by. Note, as you walk or travel by car or bus, the approach and passing of trees, houses, lamp-posts, pavements. Indoors, when you turn your head, be conscious of the way in which near-by objects move across more distant objects, By becoming conscious of the seeming mobility of the environment, you increase the mobility of the eyes and mind and so create the conditions for better vision.

OTHER AIDS TO MOBILITY

Swinging is of fundamental importance in the re-establishment of normal visual functioning, and should be practised as much as possible. But there are also other procedures for cultivating habits of mobility and, indirectly, of central fixation. Here are a few of them.

Throw up a rubber ball with the right hand, and catch it, as it falls, in the left. Or, better, take a ball in either hand, throw up that in the right hand and, while it is in the air, transfer the ball in the left hand to the right hand, then use the left hand to catch the other ball as it comes down. By means of this rudimentary form of juggling one can impart to simple ball throwing a continuous easy rhythm, not present when a single ball is used. The eyes should be on the ball as it is thrown up by the right hand, should follow it up to the top of its trajectory and down again till it is caught by the left hand. (They should *not* stare up into the sky, waiting for the ball to appear within their field of vision.) After a long spell of close work, a brief interlude of this simple juggling will do much to loosen and relax the eyes.

Out of doors, this procedure can be used, not only to remind the eyes to move, but also to establish habits of light tolerance. Start by throwing the ball up against a dark background, such as a tree. Then move so that the ball has to be watched as it traverses the less brightly illuminated portions of the sky. ‘Think looseness’ as you watch it rise and fall, and blink frequently. Then, as the eyes and mind become accustomed to the light, move again, so that the ball has a yet brighter background. The last two or three throws may be made while one is almost facing the sun.

TEACHING THE EYES AND MIND TO MOVE

Dice and dominoes may also be used to restore to eyes and mind the mobility without which there can be no proper central fixation and, consequently, no normal seeing.

Take three or four dice, throw them on a table, glance quickly from one to another and then, after a second, turn away or close the eyes and name the numbers appearing on their upper faces. If the game is played by two people (as it always must be in the case of children), the instructor should throw the dice, give the pupil a second in which to glance from one to the other, then cover them with his hand and ask for the numbers. This procedure encourages rapid shifting of the attention and the eyes, and at the same time stimulates the interpreting mind in ways which will be described when we come to the subject of ‘flashing.’

Dominoes can also be used to break the habit of staring, and to spur the eyes and mind into the indispensable condition of mobility. Procure a set of dominoes — preferably a set which goes up to double nine, or even to double twelve. Arrange a random selection of the dominoes in, say, three rows of eight or ten each, within the lid of a cardboard box. Wedge them tightly, or glue them into place, so that the lid may be handled without upsetting the dominoes. Stand the lid on edge upon a table, so that the mosaic of dominoes faces you, as you sit at a convenient distance regarding them. Alternatively, if distant vision is beyond your powers, hold the lid in your hand, where the dominoes can be easily seen, increasing the distance as vision improves. Now, as rapidly as you can, name the numbers in the upper halves of the first row of dominoes; then in the lower halves; then in the upper and lower halves, successively, of the other rows. Do this without any thought of test-passing, with mind relaxed and eyes easily moving from domino to domino, and blinking at frequent intervals. Close the eyes for a few seconds between each row. Then start again, and name the number of dots, first, in each horizontal line of every figure on the upper and lower halves of the dominoes, next in each vertical line, next, in the diagonals. Then complicate the procedure a little by counting the total number of dots in the vertical lines of the upper and lower figures of each domino taken together.

Valuable in all case? of defective vision associated with strain and staring, these domino drills, together with the others which will be described in the chapter on ‘flashing,’ are particularly useful in cases of astigmatism.

Astigmatism occurs when the radius of curvature of the cornea is not the same in all meridians. Light rays passing through this distorted medium are focussed in an irregular way. In many sufferers, the condition shows a considerable measure of variability. Spectacles tend to fix the cornea rigidly in that particular condition of distortion present at the moment of the oculist’s examination. Consequently there is little hope of recovery, so long as one wears artificial lenses. But if the astigmatic person will discard his artificial lenses, learn the art of passive and dynamic relaxation, and cultivate habits of mental and ocular mobility, he can do much to diminish, or even altogether eliminate his disability. Dominoes are very easy to see; consequently the rapid shifting of eyes and mind, encouraged by the domino drills, is almost effortless. Tension is relaxed, and at the same time, as the eyes move from dot to dot, an enormous number of acts of sensing are performed, in this relaxed condition, through every part of the cornea. This seems to have the effect of ‘ironing out’ the distortions in the cornea. Exactly how, we do not know. But if, as seems likely, the disability was originally due to mental and muscular tensions, there is no cause for surprise if the disability should disappear when the sufferer has learnt the art of sensing and perceiving without tension. Anyhow, the fact remains that astigmatic persons see distinctly better after the domino drills than before. As old habits of visual functioning are broken down and replaced by new and better habits, the improvement tends to become permanent.

The ‘ironing-out’ process can often be accelerated by a procedure which may be described as a kind of concentrated or streamlined version of the domino drills. Take the lid, in which the rows of dominoes have been firmly fixed, and, holding it in both hands three or four inches before the face, move it backwards and forwards horizontally. This side-to-side movement should not be greater than six or eight inches, and should be accompanied by a corresponding movement of the head in the opposite direction. Thus, when the lid is moved to

the left, the head should be turned slightly to the right, and vice versa. No effort should be made to see the numbers on the individual dominoes, and the combined movement of lid and head should be just great enough to create the illusion that one is not looking at separate dots, but at more or less continuous lines, created by the apparent running together of the dots. After a minute or two of this horizontal swinging, the direction of movement should be changed to the vertical plane. Hold the lid with its long axis at right angles to the floor, and move it up and down, accompanying the movement of the hands with a movement of the head in an opposite direction, exactly as in the horizontal swing.

These exercises may seem rather odd, undignified and pointless. But the significant thing about them is that (in conjunction with the other procedures here described) they have helped many astigmatic people to improve their vision, first temporarily and later permanently.

CHAPTER XI

Flashing

THE PROCEDURE WHICH Dr. Bates called ‘flashing’ is important for what it does to foster mobility, and to increase the powers of the perceiving and interpreting mind.

Flashing may be described as the antithesis of staring. Instead of fixing the object with one’s regard, instead of immobilizing eyes and mind, and straining to see all parts of it equally well at the same time, one glances quickly at it (flashes it), then closes the eyes and remembers what has been sensed in the course of this rapid dart into the unknown.

After a little practice in flashing, one makes the interesting discovery that the sensing-apparatus takes in a good deal more than the perceiving mind is aware of — especially when the perceiving mind has built up bad habits of strain and effort. There is a sense in which we see without knowing it. It will be worth while, I think, to devote a few paragraphs to the discussion of this ‘unconscious vision’; for the subject is of considerable theoretical interest, as well as of great practical importance.

UNCONSCIOUS VISION

‘Unconscious vision’ is a somewhat inaccurate expression, which is applied to several distinct classes of phenomena.

There is, to begin with, the ‘unconscious vision’ we have when we make a rapid reflex movement to avoid some danger, which the eyes sense and the muscles react to, before the mind has had time to interpret the menacing *sensum*

as a potentially dangerous external object. In such cases the nervous system works more quickly than the mind, which does not perceive and consciously see until after the danger-avoiding reaction has been initiated. During a fraction of a second, there has been unconscious vision and unconscious muscular activity.

Of a similar nature is the kind of ‘unconscious vision’ exhibited by a man who threads his way through traffic, or walks across difficult country, while engaged in conversation or sunk in thought. He has no distinct conscious awareness of the objects around him, and yet his body behaves as though he were aware — stopping and going, turning and avoiding obstacles, just as it would do, if his mind were on the problem of walking with safety, instead of being on his talk or his thoughts. In this case, the mind is in a position at any moment to become fully aware of what is being sensed, and occasionally it actually does become aware. In the intervals, however, there is a measure of unconscious vision — of sensing with a minimum of perceiving.

Finally, there is that most normal and commonplace kind of unconscious vision, which we have, at any given moment, of all those parts of the sense-field which we do not select for the purpose of perception. The world is filled with an infinity of objects; but at any given moment our concern is only with a very few of them. From the total visual field we select those *sensa* which happen to interest us, and leave the rest unattended to and unperceived. Where vision is normal, it is always physiologically and psychologically possible for us to select the *sensa* which in fact we do not choose to attend to or perceive. This type of unconscious vision is, in the last analysis, voluntary; if we don’t consciously see, it is simply because we don’t want to see, because it doesn’t suit us to see.

There are other cases, however, in which the unconsciousness is involuntary, in which the mind is incapable of making itself aware of what the eyes are sensing. When this happens, we look, but do not see. This may be due to the fact that nothing is sensed, or that the *sensa* are so extremely indistinct that they cannot possibly be interpreted. But this is by no means always the case. Sometimes sensing takes place, and the *sensa* are sufficiently distinct to be used for perceiving with. But in fact they are not so used; and though theoretically we

might see what we look at, actually we do not see it. In such cases there is always a measure of ocular and mental strain, which is often related (primarily as cause and secondarily as consequence) to some habitual error of refraction. It is true that the unperceived *sensa* belonging to persons in such a condition of strain are more or less faint and indistinct. Nevertheless they *can* be interpreted and perceived as appearances of external objects. The fact that they are not so interpreted and perceived is due to the condition of strain, which interposes a kind of barrier between the sensing eyes and the perceiving mind.

Now, *sensa* (as Dr. Broad has concluded after considering all the available evidence) always leave ‘mnemic traces’ of the kind that may subsequently be revived and give rise to a memory-image. (Concerning the nature of these mnemic traces, or ‘engrams,’ nobody as yet knows anything at all. They may be purely physical, or purely psychological, or simultaneously physical and psychological. The only thing we are justified in assuming about them is that they exist and can give rise, under favourable conditions, to memory-images.)

The experience of those who have undertaken a course of visual re-education adds further weight to the evidence for the hypothesis that *sensa* leave traces, and can therefore be remembered, even when, at the time, they were unperceived by the conscious mind. When people with defective vision take a flashing glance at some object, it often happens that they do not see it at all, or see it only as a dim blur. But on turning away and closing the eyes, they frequently discover that they have a memory-image of what was sensed. Often this image is so extremely tenuous, that they are hardly conscious of its being there at all. But if they stop anxiously trying to bring it up into consciousness, and just make a random guess at its nature, it very frequently turns out that the guess is correct. From this we may conclude that it is possible for us to remember what we sensed, but did not see, provided always that the mental tensions associated with the conscious ‘I’ are relaxed, either through hypnosis, or by other, less drastic methods.

This final proviso is of the highest practical significance. Strain, as I have said, erects a barrier between the sensing eyes and the perceiving mind. But if the strained organs of vision are relaxed, as they can be by palming, sunning and

swinging, the barrier is lowered; and though it may not be possible at first to perceive what the sensing-apparatus takes in, as it regards a given external object, it becomes increasingly easy, when the eyes are closed, to make a correct guess at the nature of the memory-image arising from the traces left by the act of sensing.

A good teacher can do much to help one in bringing up into consciousness the memory-images of what was merely sensed, not actually seen. Children, who are less self-conscious than their elders, respond particularly well to such a teacher's suggestions and encouragements. For example, a child is shown some object, say a domino, or a printed letter, or word, from a distance at which he cannot normally see it. He is told to take a flashing glance at it, then close his eyes and 'reach up into the air for it.' The child obeys the order quite literally, raises a hand, closes it on emptiness, then lowers it, opens it, looks into his palm and gives the correct answer, as though he were reading from notes.

After a certain amount of practice, the barrier between sensing and perceiving (always present in persons with defective vision) is so far lowered that unconscious vision (or the revival through memory of the traces left by sensing) gives place to conscious vision (or the perceiving of what is sensed in the same moment as it is sensed). In the early stages, there is generally a rather long interval between the act of sensing and the act of perceiving. Several seconds may elapse before the person can say what he has seen. The psychological barrier interposed by strain between the eyes and the mind has been lowered, indeed, but not yet completely eliminated. But as time goes on the interval is progressively shortened, until at last sensing and perceiving take place as they normally should, almost simultaneously.

TECHNIQUES OF FLASHING

Flashing, like swinging, can be practised during the activities of everyday life. For those whose vision is defective, the temptation to stare is always strong.

Resist it, and acquire instead the habit of taking rapid glances at things, then averting or momentarily closing the eyes and remembering what was sensed. Billboards and shop-fronts provide excellent material on which to practise flashing, as one walks or is carried past them in car or bus. The mental attitude of one who is looking at the world in quick, brief flashes should be one of easy indifference. Just as, while swinging, one lets the world go by without making any effort to get to know it in detail, so, while flashing, one should rid one's mind of any over-anxious desire to see, and just be content to glance, first outwards at the physical object, then inwards at the memory-image of it. If the inward image corresponds with the outward object, as seen at a second and nearer glance, well and good. If it fails to correspond, but is merely a blur, that also is well and good. Nothing is so unfavourable to seeing as the competitive, prize-winning, test-passing spirit. Efforts on the part of the conscious 'I' defeat their own object. It is when you stop trying to see that seeing comes to you.

Casual flashing should be supplemented by drills during periods specifically set aside for the purpose. The objects used in these drills should be fairly small, simple, clear-cut and familiar. Here, for example, are some effective procedures, in which use is made of a set of dominoes.

Relax the eyes by palming for a few moments; then pick up a domino at random, hold it out at arm's length, pass the eyes across it in a quick glance and immediately close them. Even if the dots were not distinctly seen, it is probable that they were sensed, and that the sensing will have left a trace which can be revived as a memory-image. With the eyes still closed tell yourself what you remember to have made out of the upper half of the domino, then of the lower half. Open the eyes and, if necessary, bring the domino nearer for a verification of your guess. If the guess was right, well and good. If it was wrong, well and good. Take another domino and start again.

A more elaborate version of the same procedure is as follows. Take a dozen dominoes and stand them in a row along the edge of a table. Seat yourself in front of them at the limit of convenient seeing. Swing your eyes from left to right along the row, counting the dominoes as rapidly as you possibly can. (This sets

the immobilized eyes and attention shifting at unaccustomed speed, and is a most salutary exercise in itself.) Then bring the eyes back to the first domino and, closing the lids, name the numbers in the upper and lower halves respectively. Open the eyes again and verify your guess. Then count the whole row once again and, glancing back to the second domino, flash, close, and name the numbers. Continue counting and flashing, until you reach the end of the line.

If your eyes are myopic, and it is hard to see at anything but short range, perform this drill for the first time within easy seeing distance; then move back and repeat. Familiarity with the dominoes will eliminate mental hazards and make the more distant seeing easier. It is possible in this way gradually to stretch the range of vision.

Where distant vision is easy, and difficulty is experienced only at the near point, this process should be reversed. Begin at some distance away; then move closer and go through the drill again.

CHAPTER XII

Shifting

PRIMARILY DESIGNED TO encourage mental and ocular mobility, the exercises described in the preceding chapters also serve, indirectly, to teach the art of central fixation. Having learnt, by means of them, to keep the eyes and attention in constant movement, and being therefore less subject than before to the vice of mental and physical staring, we may safely proceed to a somewhat more direct approach to central fixation. Even now, however, the approach will not be completely direct. Before attempting to become fully conscious of the fact that we always see one small area more distinctly than all the rest, we shall be well advised to take some simple lessons in the art of continuous and concentrated looking. Swinging encourages the eyes and mind to make movements of considerable amplitude, and flashing teaches rapidity of motion and interpretative reaction. It is now necessary to teach ourselves small-scale shifting; for it is upon this small-scale shifting of eyes and mind that continuous, concentrated and attentive seeing depends. As I have pointed out before, the structure of the eyes and the nature of the mind are such that normal vision simply cannot take place without incessant small-scale shifting.

When regarding any object continuously and attentively, people with normal vision keep their eyes and attention shifting unconsciously in a series of almost imperceptibly small movements from point to point. People with defective vision, on the contrary, greatly reduce the number of such movements and tend to stare. It is therefore necessary for them to build up consciously the habit of small-scale shifting which they acquired unconsciously during childhood and subsequently lost.

ANALYTICAL LOOKING

The best way to do this is to learn to ‘look analytically’ at any object you wish to consider with close attention. Do not stare; stop trying to see all parts of the object equally clearly at the same time. Instead, deliberately tell yourself to see it piece-meal, sensing and perceiving, one at a time, all the more significant parts of which it is composed.

For example, when looking at a house, note the number of windows, chimneys and doors. Follow with your eyes the outline of its silhouette against the sky. Let your glance run horizontally along the line of the eaves, and vertically up and down the wall spaces between the windows. And so on.

This kind of analytical looking is recommended in all systems designed to improve the powers of memory and concentration. It enables the looker to form clear mental concepts of what he has seen. Instead of staring and vaguely recording an image, to which he gives the name of ‘house,’ the person who does his looking analytically will be able to tell you a number of interesting and significant facts about that house — that it has, let us say, four windows and a front door on the ground floor and five windows above, one chimney at either end, and a tiled roof. This detailed knowledge of the house, which is the result of analytical looking, will tend to improve the vision of the same object when regarded on subsequent occasions. For we see most clearly things which are familiar; and an increase in our conceptual knowledge of an object always tends to facilitate the sensing of that object in the future. Thus we see that analytical looking not merely improves vision there and then, by compelling the eyes and mind to shift continuously from point to point; it also helps to improve vision at all later dates, by increasing our conceptual knowledge of the object regarded, and so making it seem more familiar and therefore easier to sense and perceive.

The process of analytical looking can be profitably applied even to such extremely familiar objects as letters, numerals, advertising slogans and the faces

of one’s relatives and friends. However well we may think we know such things, we shall almost certainly find, if we take to looking at them analytically that we can get to know them a good deal better. When you look at letters or numerals, run the eyes over their outlines-observe the shapes of the pieces of background in contact with them, or included within them; count the number of corners on a block capital letter or large numeral. If you do this, the eyes and attention will be forced to do a great deal of small-scale shifting, which will improve the vision; and at the same time you will learn a great many hitherto unrecognized facts, the knowledge of which will help you to do a better and more rapid job of sensing on future occasions.

Persons with defective sight tend to do some of their intensest and most rigid staring when conversing with their fellow humans. Faces are very important to us, since it is by observing their changes of expression that we acquire much of our most valuable information about the thoughts, feelings and dispositions of those with whom we come in contact. To obtain this information, people with defective vision make the most strenuous efforts to see the faces of those who surround them. In other words, they stare harder than usual. The result is discomfort and embarrassment for the persons stared at, and poorer vision for the starer. The remedy is analytical looking. Do not stare at faces, in the vain hope of seeing every part of them as clearly as every other part. Instead, shift the regard rapidly over the face you are looking at — from eye to eye, from ear to ear, from mouth to forehead. You will see the details of the face and its expression more clearly; and at the same time, to the person you are looking at, you will not seem to be staring — merely looking in a relaxed and easy way, with eyes to which your rapid, small-scale shifting imparts the brilliancy and sparkle of mobility.

Habits of continuous and small-scale shifting should be deliberately cultivated on all occasions, during the day’s activities, when there is need for prolonged and concentrated seeing, either at the near or the far point. There are also-certain drills, which it is well to practise during periods specially set aside for the purpose.

Teachers of the art of seeing have devised a considerable number of shifting drills, all of them effective if properly practised. In this place I shall mention only one — a particularly good example of its kind — developed by Mrs. Margaret D. Corbett, and described in her book, *How to Improve Your Eyes*.

The only piece of material needed for the practice of this drill is a sheet from one of those large, tear-off calendars, in which the current month is printed in large type across the upper part of the page, while the previous and succeeding months appear below in much smaller type. Inasmuch as it offers type of different sizes, such a sheet possesses most of the advantages of the graduated Snellen Chart, used by oculists for testing vision. Inasmuch as a row of consecutive numbers presents no mental hazards, it possesses none of the Snellen Chart's disadvantages — unfamiliarity and the intent to confuse and deceive, almost always present in the minds of those who design such devices for testing vision. Since our aim is not to test, but to improve sight, we shall do well to make use of the most familiar, and therefore the most visible and confidence-creating objects upon which to exercise. A calendar fulfils these conditions perfectly, and possesses the further merit of not having the unpleasant associations of the Snellen Chart. Most children and many adults dislike having their eyes examined, and become so nervous, when tested, that they see much worse than at ordinary times. Consequently, the Snellen Chart is apt to be surrounded, for them, by a kind of aura of disagreeableness, which makes it one of the least visible of objects. That is why Snellen Charts should be used for visual self-education only by those to whom they are emotionally neutral, and only when the user is completely familiar with every line of graduated type, from the big two-hundred-foot letter at the top to the tiny ten-foot letters at the bottom of the card. If these conditions are not fulfilled, the Snellen Chart may easily prove a source of anxiety and strain. A good teacher will note his pupil's tendency towards strain and take steps to prevent it from coming to a head. Consequently, it is always safe for a good teacher to make use of the Snellen Chart as an instrument of visual training. The self-instructed will do better to start, at any rate, with other training material.

THE CALENDAR DRILL

In working with the calendar, we begin by loosening up the staring mind and eyes by means of a procedure very similar to that employed in one of the domino drills. Hang the calendar on a wall, at a level with your eyes when you are seated. See that the sheet is well illuminated, either by direct or reflected sunlight, or (if the sun is not shining) by ordinary daylight or a strong lamp. Draw up a chair, and sit down in front of it, at a point from which the larger print can be seen without difficulty. Palm the eyes for a little, then set to work in the following way.

Turn the head to the left, as though you were glancing over your shoulder; then swing it back, gently and not too fast, until the eyes rest on the figure ‘one’ of the large-type calendar. Take note of the figure, then close the eyes and breathe deeply and easily, swinging your head a little as you do so, in order to keep the rhythm of your movement unbroken. After a few seconds turn to look over the right shoulder, re-open the eyes and swing them back until they rest on the figure ‘two.’ Close again as before, turn to the left and swing back to the ‘three.’ And so on.

When swinging down the line towards the selected figure, always let the regard travel in the white space immediately below the print. A blank surface, such as the background to printed words or numerals, presents no difficulties to the interpreting mind and cannot, therefore, be a source of strain. Consequently, when the regard is made to move along the white space immediately under the line of type, the mind reaches its objective in a state of relaxation — with the result that the attention and the eyes can do their work of rapid, small-scale shifting and central fixation under the best possible conditions.

After going through the whole month, or as much of it as you have time for, palm the eyes for a little, and proceed to the next phase of the drill. As this

procedure demands a more attentive kind of looking than the preceding exercise, you will find yourself more than ordinarily tempted to hold the breath. Resist the temptation and, during all the time you are at practice, keep the breathing going consciously at a little more than its average amplitude.

Glance at the figure ‘one’ in the large-type calendar, then drop the eyes to the corresponding figure in the small-type calendar at the bottom of the sheet to the left. Look at it only for a moment, then close and relax for a few seconds. Open the eyes once more on the figure ‘one’ in the large-type calendar, and drop to the ‘one’ in the small-type calendar to the right. Close the eyes again in an easy, relaxed way, and keep the breathing going. Then re-open — this time on the large ‘two.’ Drop to the small ‘two’ on the left. Close, breathe, re-open on the large ‘two,’ and drop to the small ‘two’ on the right. Close again, breathe, and continue with the other numbers in the same way, either to the end of the month or, if the drill seems tiring, to the end of the first week or fortnight.

At first there may be difficulty in seeing the small-type numerals. If there is, do not linger over them, or make an effort to see them. Instead of that, adopt the technique described in the chapter on flashing. Glance easily and unconcernedly at the small number; then, in the brief period during which the eyes are closed, note whether there is any memory-image of it. You will be aided in this search for the indistinct image of the smaller numeral by your clearer memory of the larger but otherwise exactly similar numeral. Knowing just what it is you should have seen, you will soon find yourself seeing it — at first, perhaps, unconsciously, as the memory-image of something only dimly sensed; then consciously and with increasing clarity, at the moment of sensing.

After an interval of palming, proceed to the next phase of the drill. With eyes closed, think of any number between one and thirty-one. Let us assume that you begin by thinking of the number ‘seventeen.’ Open the eyes and, as quickly as you possibly can, locate ‘seventeen,’ first on the large-type calendar, then on the small calendar on the left. Close and breathe. Then re-open on the large ‘seventeen’ and drop to the corresponding small number on the right. Close once

more, breathe, think of another number, and go through the same procedure. After ten or a dozen repetitions, you will be ready to go on to the next phase.

In this drill we return to the small-scale shift, which we learn to practise systematically, with a very short rhythmic swing, on such objects as letters and numerals. Look at the large ‘one.’ Pay attention first to the top of the numeral, then to the base; then shift the eyes and mind once more to the top and again to the base. Up and down, up and down, two or three times. When you have done this, close the eyes in a relaxed way and breathe deeply but gently. Then re-open the eyes and repeat the procedure on the large ‘two.’ After going through half the month in this way, drop to one of the small-type calendars and begin again, drawing your chair a little nearer, if necessary.

The procedure should be varied by sometimes making the shift horizontally, swinging from one side of the numeral to the other side, instead of up and down, in a vertical direction. Furthermore, do not confine yourself exclusively to the numerals. Work also on letters — the SUN., MON., TUE., and so on, of the abbreviated days of the week. Do the small-scale swinging shift from top to bottom of these letters, and from side to side, and, in the case of the broader and more angular ones, from corner to corner, diagonally. Letters and numerals are among the most familiar objects in our artificial world, and among the objects which it is most important for us to see clearly. It is therefore specially desirable that we should acquire the habit of small-scale shifting when we regard these objects. Conscious practice of the swinging shift, just described, will end by building up a beneficent automatism. Whenever we regard a letter or numeral, we shall tend, unconsciously and automatically, to practise the small-scale shift, which compels the eyes and mind to do their work by central fixation and, in this way, improves our sensing, our perceiving and that end-product of sensing and perceiving, our vision. In the chapters dealing with the mental side of seeing, I shall describe procedures in which this technique of the small-scale swinging shift is combined with techniques for the development of memory and imagination, and so rendered still more valuable. But even in its simple form, as I have described it in the preceding paragraphs, the procedure is remarkably

effective. While practising these calendar drills you will constantly be struck by the way in which vision improves when the small-scale swinging shift is made use of. The numeral or letter, which appeared so dim and hazy when you first looked at it, will come up into clear definition as you shift your attention a few times from top to base, or from side to side. The same technique should be carried over into the ordinary activities of life. When confronted by letters or numerals you cannot clearly distinguish, try the small-scale swinging shift on them, and they will tend to brighten and grow more definite.

This particular kind of shifting is simply analytical looking with a regular rhythm. Regular rhythmic movement is always relaxing, even when repeated only a few times, and this is why the small-scale swinging shift is so effective in promoting good vision. It is, unfortunately, impracticable to use this swinging shift on all classes of objects. On such small, clearly demarcated and thoroughly familiar objects as numerals and letters it is easy to perform the swinging shift. But where the object is large, relatively unfamiliar, indeterminate or in motion, it is not feasible, for the simple reason that either there are no known and definite land-marks, no clearly outlined boundaries, between which to do the repeated shift, or, if there are such land-marks and boundaries, the area covered by the eyes, as they shift back and forth from one to the other, will be so small in comparison with the total area of the object that an improved knowledge of that area will not necessarily give an improved knowledge of the whole. Consequently, in the case of large, indeterminate and unfamiliar objects, the best technique of looking remains the rapid analytical regard, without repetitive rhythm. The effectiveness of this analytical regard may be enhanced by counting the salient features of the object. If there are many such features, do not try to count them with pedantic accuracy. What is important is not to know the correct total, but to make the attention realize that large numbers of such features exist and must be noted. So count only the first three or four; then skim over the rest and make a guess at the total, not caring whether your guess is correct or not. Your goal is to see more clearly, and that goal will have been achieved, if the

pretence at counting stimulates the eyes and attention to do their work of rapid, small-scale shifting, in act after act of central fixation.

And now, having learnt the means whereby central fixation may be rendered habitual and automatic, let us take the last step in this long series of exercises, and make ourselves fully conscious of the fact that we see best only a small part of what we are looking at. For many of those who have undertaken the exercises, there will be no need to take this step, for the good reason that they have already acquired that awareness. It is hard to look at things analytically, or to practise the small-scale swinging shift, without discovering the fact of central fixation.

Those who have not yet observed the phenomenon may now, without any serious risk of strain or effort, take the following steps to convince themselves of its regular occurrence. Hold up the forefingers of either hand about two feet from the face and about eighteen inches apart. Look first at the right forefinger. It will be seen more distinctly than the left, which appears at the extreme edge of the field of vision. Now turn the head and pay attention to the left finger, which will at once be seen more clearly than the right. Now bring the fingers closer together. Look from one to the other when they are a foot apart, then six inches, then three inches, then one inch, then when they are actually touching. In all cases, the finger regarded by the eyes and attended to by the mind, will be seen more distinctly than the other.

Repeat the same process on a letter — say a large E from a frontpage newspaper headline. Pay attention first to the top bar of the E, and notice that it seems clearer and blacker than the other two bars. Then shift attention to the bottom bar, and note how *that* is now the clearest of the three. Do the same with the middle bar. Next pick out a smaller E from some less strident headline and repeat the process. You will find, if the eyes and mind have lost their old bad habit of staring, that even in the smaller letter there is a perceptible difference in distinctness between the bar which is actually being attended to and the bars which are not being attended to. As time goes on, it will be possible to observe differences in distinctness between the upper and lower part even of a small

twelve-point or eight-point letter. The more perfect the sight, the smaller the area which can be seen with maximum distinctness.

To confirm the fact of central fixation, one may reverse the process described above and do one's best to see every part of a large letter, or every feature of a friend's face, equally clearly at the same time. The result will be an almost immediate sense of strain and a lowering of vision. One cannot with impunity attempt to do the physically and psychologically impossible. But that, precisely, is what the person with defective sight is perpetually doing when he peers with such an anxious intentness at the world around him. Once you have convinced yourself experimentally of this fact, and of the other, complementary fact that good vision comes only when the eyes and mind make innumerable successive acts of central fixation, you will never again be tempted to stare, to strain, to try hard to see. Vision is not won by making an effort to get it; it comes to those who have learnt to put their minds and eyes into a state of alert passivity, of dynamic relaxation.

CHAPTER XIII *The Mental Side of Seeing*

THE eyes provide us with the visual sense impressions, which are the raw materials of sight. The mind takes these raw materials and works them up into the finished product — normal vision of external objects.

When sight is sub-normal, the defect may be due to causes belonging to one or other of two main categories, physical and mental. The eyes, or the nervous system connected with them, may suffer accidental injury, or be affected by disease — in which case the supply of the raw materials of vision will be cut off at the source. Alternatively, the efficiency of the mind, as the interpreter of crude *sensa*, may be impaired, owing to any one of a great number of possible psychological maladjustments. When this happens, the efficiency of the eye as a sensing-apparatus is also impaired; for the human mind-body is a single unit, and psychological mal-functioning is reflected in physiological mal-functioning. With the impairment of the physiological functioning of the eye, the quality of

the raw materials, which it furnishes, falls off; and this in turn increases the inefficiency of the mind as a worker-up of such materials.

Orthodox ophthalmologists are content to palliate the symptoms of poor sight by means of ‘those valuable crutches,’ artificial lenses. They work only on the sensing eye and ignore completely the selecting, perceiving and seeing mind. It is a case of *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. Obviously and on the face of it, any rational, any genuinely aetiological treatment of defective vision must take account of the mental side of seeing. In the method of visual re-education developed by Dr. W. H. Bates and his followers, due attention is paid, not merely to the provider of raw materials, but also to the producer of the finished article.

Of the psychological factors which prevent the mind from doing a good job of interpretation, some are closely related to the process of perceiving and seeing, while others are not. In the latter category we must place all those negative emotions which are so fruitful a source of mal-functioning and, finally, of organic disease in every part of the body, including the eyes. To the former belong certain negative emotions specifically related to the act of seeing, and certain mal-functionings of the memory and imagination — mal-functionings which lower the mind’s efficiency as an interpreter of *sensa*.

To treat of the methods by which negative emotions may be avoided or dispelled is beyond the scope of this little book. I can only repeat in different words what was said in the opening section. When the conscious T’ is afflicted to excess by such emotions as fear, anger, worry, grief, envy, ambition, the mind and body are likely to suffer. One of the important psychophysical functions most commonly impaired is that of vision. Negative emotions impair vision, partly through direct action upon the nervous, glandular and circulatory systems, partly by lowering the efficiency of the mind. It is literally true that people become ‘blind with rage’; that fear may make the world ‘go black’ or ‘swim before the eyes’; that worry can be so ‘numbing’ that people cease to be able to see or hear properly, and are therefore frequently involved in serious accidents. Nor are the effects of such negative emotions merely transient and temporary. If

they are intense enough and sufficiently protracted, negative feelings such as worry, disappointed love and competitiveness, can produce in their victims serious organic derangements — for example, gastric ulcer, tuberculosis and coronary disease. They can also produce lasting mal-functioning of the seeing organs, mental and physical — mal-functioning that manifests itself in mental strain, nervous muscular tension and errors of refraction. Anybody who wants normal vision should therefore do everything possible to avoid or get rid of these pernicious negative emotions, and in the meanwhile should learn the art of seeing, by means of which the disastrous effects of such emotions upon the eyes and mind can be completely or partially undone.

This seems to be all that can be usefully said, in this place at any rate, about those mental obstacles to normal vision which are not immediately connected with the act of seeing. For a full discussion of negative emotions, and for methods of dealing with them, one must turn to the psychiatrists, the moralists and the writers on ascetical and mystical religion. In a brief introduction to the art of seeing, I can only mention the problem, and pass on.

We have now to consider those mental obstacles to normal vision which are intimately bound up with the actual seeing process. Certain negative emotions, habitually associated with the act of seeing by people with sub-normal vision, have already been discussed. Thus, I have described the fear of light, and the means by which that fear may be cast out. I have also mentioned that greed for vision, that over-anxiety to see too much too well, which results in misdirection of attention and in mental and physical staring; and I have dwelt at great length on the procedures, by means of which these bad habits may be changed, and the undesirable emotions, responsible for them, dispelled.

We have now to consider another fear, intimately connected, in the minds of those suffering from defective vision, with the act of seeing, and responsible in some degree for the perpetuation of visual mal-functioning. I refer to the fear of not seeing properly.

Let us trace the genealogy of this fear. The art of seeing in a normal and natural way is acquired unconsciously during infancy and childhood. Then,

owing to physical disease or more often, to mental strain, good seeing habits are lost; normal and natural functioning is replaced by abnormal and unnatural functioning; the mind loses its efficiency as an interpreter, the physical conformation of the eye is distorted and the net result is that vision is impaired. From sub-normal vision there springs, in most cases, a certain chronic apprehension. The person who is used to seeing badly is afraid that he will see badly next time. In the minds of many afflicted men and women, this fearful anticipation amounts to a fixed, intense, pessimistic *conviction* that, for them, normal seeing is henceforth impossible.

Such an attitude is paralysing to the minds and eyes of those who entertain it. They go into every new seeing-situation afraid that they won't see, or even convinced in advance that they can't see. The result, not unnaturally, is that they don't see. Positive faith enables a man to move mountains. Conversely, negative faith can prevent him from lifting a straw.

In seeing, as in all other activities of mind and mind-body, it is essential, if we are to do our work adequately, that we should cultivate an attitude of confidence combined with indifference — confidence in our capacity to do the job, and indifference to possible failure. We must feel sure that we can succeed some time, if we use the proper means and exercise sufficient patience; and we must not feel disappointed or annoyed if in fact we don't succeed this particular time.

Confidence untempered by indifference may be almost as disastrous as the lack of confidence; for if we feel sure that we are going to succeed, and are distressed and affronted every time we fail, confidence will only be a source of negative emotions, which will, in their turn, increase the probability of failure.

For the person whose sight is sub-normal, the correct mental attitude may be expressed in some such words as these. 'I know theoretically that defective vision can be improved. I feel certain that, if I learn the art of seeing, I can improve my own defective vision. I am practising the art of seeing as I look now, and it is likely that I shall see better than I did; but if I don't see as well as I

hope, I shall not feel wretched or aggrieved, but go on, until better vision comes to me.’

CHAPTER XIV

Memory and Imagination

THE CAPACITY FOR perception depends, as I have shown in an earlier chapter, upon the amount, the kind and the availability of past experiences. But past experiences exist for us only in the memory. Therefore it is true to say that perception depends upon memory.

Closely related to memory is imagination, which is the power of recombining memories in novel ways, so as to make mental constructions different from anything actually experienced in the past. The mind's ability to interpret *sensa* is affected by the imagination as well as the memory.

The extent to which perception and, consequently, vision are dependent upon memory and imagination is a matter of everyday experience. We see familiar things more clearly than we see objects about which we have no stock of memories. And when, under emotional stress or excitement, our imagination is more than ordinarily active, it often happens that we interpret *sensa* as manifestations of the objects with which our imagination is busy, rather than as manifestations of the objects actually present in the external world.

The old sempstress, who cannot read without glasses, can see to thread her needle with the naked eye. Why? Because she is more familiar with needles than with print.

In the book he is reading, a person with normal vision comes upon a strange, polysyllabic, technical word, or a phrase in some foreign language of which he is ignorant. The letters of which these words are composed are precisely similar to those in which the rest of the book is printed; and yet this person finds it definitely harder to see them. Why? Because the rest of the book is in plain

English, while the illegible words are in German, shall we say, or Russian, or the Graeco-Latin jargon of one of the sciences.

A man who can work all day at the office without undue fatigue of the eyes, is worn out by an hour at a museum, and comes home with a splitting headache. Why? Because, at the office, he is following a regular routine and looking at words and figures the like of which he looks at every day; whereas, in the museum, everything is strange, novel and outlandish.

Or take the case of the lady who is terrified of snakes, and who mistakes what to everyone else is obviously a length of rubber tubing for an enormous viper. Her vision, as tested on the Snellen Chart, is normal. Why, then, does she see what isn't there? Because her imagination had been in the habit of using old memories of snakes to construct alarming images of the creatures, and because, under the influence of her imagination, her mind misinterpreted the *sensa* connected with the rubber tubing in such a way that she vividly 'saw' a viper.

Such examples, which could be multiplied almost indefinitely, leave no doubt that perception and therefore vision depend upon memory and, to a lesser degree, imagination. We see best the things about which, or the likes of which, we have a good stock of memories. And the more accurate these memories are, the more thorough-going and analytical the knowledge they embody, the better (all other things being equal) will be the vision. Indeed, the vision may be better, even when other things are not equal. Thus, the veteran microscopist may have worse sight, as measured on the Snellen Chart, than the first-year undergraduate whom he is instructing. Nevertheless, when he looks through his instrument, he will be able, thanks to his accurate memories of similar objects, to see the slide much more clearly than the novice can.

The truth that perception and vision are largely dependent upon past experiences, as recorded by the memory, has been recognized for centuries. But, so far as I am aware, the first person ever to pay any serious thought to what I may call the utilitarian and therapeutic corollaries of this truth was Dr. W. H. Bates. He it was who first asked the question: 'How can this dependence of perception and vision upon memory and, to a lesser degree, imagination be

exploited so as to improve people's sight?' And having asked the question, he did not rest until he had found a number of simple and practical answers. His followers have been working for many years on the same problem, and they too have produced their quota of devices for improving vision by working on the memory and imagination. Here, I shall give an account of some of the more effective of these procedures. But first a few more words about certain significant characteristics of that most mysterious mental activity, remembering.

Perhaps the most important fact about memory, in its relation to perception and vision, is that it will not work well under strain. Everyone is familiar with the experience of forgetting a name, straining to recapture it and ignominiously failing. Then, if one is wise, one will stop trying to remember and allow the mind to sink into a condition of alert passivity; the chances are that the name will come bobbing up into consciousness of its own accord. Memory works best, it would seem, when the mind is in a state of dynamic relaxation.

Experience has taught the great majority of people that there is a correlation between good memory and dynamic relaxation of mind — a condition which always tends to be accompanied by dynamic relaxation of the body as well.

They have never formulated the fact explicitly to themselves; but they know it unconsciously, or, to be more precise, they consistently act as though they knew it unconsciously. When they try to remember something, they instinctively 'let go,' because they have learnt, in the course of innumerable repetitions of the act of remembering, that the condition of 'letting go' is the most favourable for good memory. Now, this habit of 'letting go' in order to remember persists, in many cases, even when bad habits of mental and physical tension have been built up in relation to other activities, such as seeing. Consequently it often happens that, when people start remembering, they automatically and unconsciously put themselves into that condition of dynamic mental relaxation which is propitious, not only for memory, but also for vision. This would seem to be the explanation of the fact (first observed, so far as I know, by Dr. Bates, but easily observable by anyone who is ready to fulfil the necessary conditions)

that the simple act of remembering something clearly and distinctly brings an immediate improvement of vision.

In some cases of defective vision, the state of mental and physical tension is so extreme, that the sufferers have lost the habit of ‘letting go,’ even when remembering. The result is that they have the greatest difficulty in recalling anything. Experienced teachers of the Bates Method have told me of pupils who came to them, incapable of remembering, ten seconds after the event, whether they had been looking at letters, numerals or pictures. As soon as the eyes and mind had been somewhat relaxed by means of palming, sunning, swinging and shifting, the power to remember returned. The imperfect vision and the state of virtual imbecility, into which the inability to remember had plunged these unfortunate people, were due to the same fundamental cause — improper functioning, associated with a high degree of mental and nervous muscular strain.

Fortunately, such cases are not common; and the majority of those who suffer from defects of vision, due to, or aggravated by, mental and physical strain, still preserve the good habit, acquired unconsciously through the teachings of everyday experience, of ‘letting go’ whenever they make an act of remembering. That is why it is possible, with most individuals, to make use of memory as an aid to mind-body relaxation and, through mind-body relaxation, to vision. A person with defective sight looks, let us say, at a printed letter and fails to see it distinctly. If he closes his eyes, ‘lets go’ and remembers something which it is easy for him to remember — remembers it clearly and distinctly — he will find, on re-opening his eyes, that his vision has perceptibly improved.

Because it is impossible to remember anything clearly without ‘letting go,’ improvement of vision will follow the act of remembering any object or episode, even one totally unconnected with the thing which, at the moment, it is desired to see. But if the memory is actually of this thing, or of some similar thing seen in the past, then the act of remembering will be doubly effective in improving vision; for it will result, not only in producing a beneficent relaxation of the mind-body, but also in an increased familiarity with the object under

consideration. But we see most clearly those things with which we are most familiar. Consequently, any procedure which makes us more familiar with the object we are trying to see makes it easier for us to see it. But every act of remembering that object, or another one like it, increases our familiarity with it, and so improves our vision of it. It is because of this fact that several of the most important memory and imagination drills are concerned with the detailed remembering or visualizing of the letters and figures which we are so constantly being called upon to see, both at the near point and in the distance.

In the light of these preliminary explanations it will be easy, I hope, for the reader to understand the various procedures now to be described.

MEMORY AS AN AID TO VISION

The value of what I have called analytical looking can be enhanced by supplementing this procedure with deliberate acts of memory. Look at objects in the way described in an earlier chapter — shifting the attention rapidly from point to point, following the outlines and counting the salient features of what you are looking at. Then close your eyes, ‘let go’ and conjure up the clearest possible memory-image of what you have just seen. Re-open the eyes, compare this image with the reality, and repeat the process of analytical looking. Close the eyes, and once more evoke the memory-image of what you have seen. After a few repetitions, there will be an improvement in the clarity and accuracy both of the memory-image and of the visual image recorded when the eyes are open.

It is a good thing to practise these acts of analytical looking and remembering in relation to the objects of one’s everyday environment, such as the furniture of the rooms in which one lives and works, the shops and billboards, trees and houses of the streets one ordinarily frequents. This will have three good results: it will break up the habit of staring, and encourage central fixation; it will compel the mind to put itself into the state of alert passivity, of dynamic

relaxation, which alone is conducive to accurate remembering, and, incidentally, to clear vision; and it will greatly increase the mind's knowledge of and familiarity with the objects it must see most frequently, and, by doing so, will greatly facilitate the task of seeing these objects.

Nor is this all. The procedure outlined above is also beneficial inasmuch as it teaches a proper co-ordination between the mind and its sensing-apparatus. Too many of us spend altogether too much of our time looking at one thing and thinking of another — seeing just enough to avoid running into trees or under buses, but at the same time day-dreaming so much that, if anyone were to ask us what we had seen, we should find it almost impossible to answer, for the good reason that, though we had sensed a great deal, we had consciously perceived almost nothing. This dissociation of the mind from its eyes is a fruitful cause of impairment of vision, particularly when, as is very frequently the case, the day-dreaming person sits with open eyes, staring fixedly and unblinkingly at one point. If you must day-dream, close your eyes, and, with your inward vision, consciously follow the wish-fulfilling episodes fabricated by the imagination. Similarly, when engaged in logical thought, do not stare at some external object unconnected with the problem under consideration. If the eyes are kept open, use them to do something relevant to the intellectual processes going on within the mind. For example, write notes which the eyes can read, or draw diagrams for them to study. Alternatively, if the eyes are kept closed, resist the temptation of immobilizing them — a temptation which is always strong when one is making an effort at mental concentration. Let the inward eye travel over imaginary words, diagrams or other constructions relevant to the thought process which is taking place. The aim at all times should be to prevent the occurrence of dissociations between mind and sensing-apparatus. When the eyes are open, make a point of seeing and of being conscious of what you see. When you don't want to see, but to dream or think, make a point of associating the eyes with your dreaming or thinking. By allowing the mind to go one way and the eyes another, you run the risk of impairing your vision, which is a product of the co-operation

between a physical sensing-apparatus and a selecting and perceiving intelligence.

IMPROVING THE MEMORY OF LETTERS

For good as well as for evil, reading has now become one of the principal occupations of civilized humanity. Inability to read easily, whether at the near point or at a distance, is a serious handicap in the contemporary world. The art of reading will be discussed at length in one of the later chapters of this book. Here, I shall describe certain procedures, by means of which the forces of memory and imagination can be mobilized for the improvement of our vision of those basic constituents of all literature and science, the twenty-six letters of the alphabet and the ten numerals.

One of the curious facts discovered by teachers who undertake the re-education of sufferers from defective vision is that very large numbers of people do not have a clear mental image of the letters of the alphabet. Capitals, it is true, are familiar to almost everyone — perhaps because it is upon capital letters that the young child first practises the art of reading. But lower-case letters, though looked at hundreds of times each day, are so imperfectly known that many persons find it hard to reproduce them exactly, or to recognize a given letter from its description in words. This widespread ignorance of the forms of letters bears eloquent witness to the dissociation between eyes and mind, described in the preceding paragraphs.

In this matter of reading, we are such greedy end-gainers that we neglect to consider, not merely the psycho-physical means whereby we may accomplish the task most effectively, but also the external, objective means, upon which the whole process of reading depends, namely the letters of the alphabet. There can be no improvement in our ability to read until we have made ourselves thoroughly familiar with the letters, of which all reading matter is composed.

Here again it is a question of combining analytical looking with acts of remembering.

Examine a letter, not with a fixed stare, but easily and with a rapid shift of the attention from one point to another. Close the eyes, ‘let go’ and evoke the memory-image of what you have seen. Re-open the eyes, and check the accuracy of your memory. Repeat the process until the memory-image is thoroughly accurate, distinct and clear. Do the same with all the letters — and, of course, all the numerals as well. The exercise may be repeated occasionally, even when you think you know all the letters perfectly. Memory can always be improved; besides, the act of remembering brings relaxation, and this relaxation, combined with the heightened familiarity which comes of better memory, will always tend to improve the vision.

When looking at letters, with the aim of familiarizing oneself with their forms, it is well to pay attention, not only to the black print, but also and above all to the white background immediately surrounding the letters and included within them. These areas of whiteness around and within letters and numerals have curious and striking shapes, which the mind enjoys getting to know and, because of its interest in them, remembers easily. At the same time, there is less possibility of mental strain involved in considering the blank background than in considering the black marks upon that background. It is often easier to see a letter when it is regarded as an interruption to the whiteness of the paper than when it is looked at without conscious reference to the background, merely as a pattern of straight and curved black lines.

This process of familiarizing oneself with letters, by analytical looking and remembering, may profitably be supplemented by a drill involving the systematic use of imagination. Examine the letter as before, paying attention to the shapes of the background around and within it. Then close the eyes, ‘let go,’ evoke a memory-image of the letter and then deliberately imagine that the white background around and within it is whiter than it was actually seen to be — as white as snow or sunlit cloud or porcelain.

Re-open the eyes and look again at the letter, shifting as before from background-shape to background-shape, and trying to see these shapes as white as you imagined them with your eyes shut. In a little while you will find that you can, without difficulty, create this beneficent illusion. When you succeed in doing so the black of the printer's ink will seem blacker by contrast, and there will be a perceptible improvement in vision.

Sometimes, by way of change, one may use the imagination in an analogous way upon the black letter itself. Seated before the calendar, pay attention first to the top of a numeral or letter, then to the base (or first to the left side and then to the right). After a few repetitions, close the eyes, 'let go' and continue to do the same thing to your memory-image of the numeral or letter. Then, in imagination, apply two spots of intenser blackness, one to the top and the other to the base, or one on the left and the other on the right. If you find it helpful, imagine yourself applying these spots with a fine paint brush impregnated with India ink.

Shift from one blacker spot to the other several times; then open the eyes and try to see the same blacker spots at the top and base, or on the left and right sides, of the real letter. This will not be difficult, because, owing to central fixation, you actually will see that part of the letter or numeral, which you are attending to, more clearly than the rest. But imagine the spots to be even blacker than central fixation warrants. When you succeed in doing this, the whole letter will seem blacker than before, and will therefore be seen more clearly and remembered more distinctly for future reference.

These two procedures — shifting first in imagination, then in reality, from one area of whiter-than-actual whiteness to another area of whiter-than-actual whiteness, and from one more intensely black dot to another more intensely black dot at the opposite end of the letter — are particularly helpful in improving vision, and should be used (in conjunction, if possible, with palming and sunning) whenever the print of a book, or a distant billboard or notice, shows signs of blurring.

Certain other procedures involving imagination have also proved their worth in visual education. The first three closely resemble the small-scale swinging

shift — indeed, *are* swinging shifts, but of an exclusively mental kind.

Imagine yourself seated at a writing-table, with a pad of thick white notepaper before you. Still in imagination, take a pen or a fine paint brush, dip it in India ink and, at the centre of the first sheet of paper, make a round black dot. Now pay attention to the white background immediately adjoining the right side of the dot, then to that immediately adjoining the left, and repeat, swinging rhythmically back and forth. As in reality, the imaginary dot will appear to move to the left, when you shift attention to the right, and to the right, when you shift attention to the left.

The following variant on the single dot may be used if desired. On another sheet of imaginary paper inscribe two dots, about four inches apart, and between them, but about an inch below them, a circle of about half an inch in diameter. Imagine this circle very black, and the white space within it intensely white. Then shift the inward eye from the dot on the right, to the dot on the left, and repeat the action rhythmically. The movement of the circle will be in the opposite direction to that of the attention.

Next, in your imagination, take another sheet of paper and trace upon it a giant colon, composed of two big dots about half an inch apart, and next to it, half an inch to the right, a semi-colon of the same proportions. Now, shift the attention from the upper dot of the colon to the upper dot of the semi-colon; then down to the comma of the semi-colon; then, left, to the lower dot of the colon; and from that, vertically, to the upper dot. Repeat this rhythmic shifting round and round the square composed by the three round dots and the comma. As the mind’s eye travels to the right, the constellation of punctuation marks will appear to move to the left; as the attention descends, it will seem to go up; as it shifts to the left, the apparent movement will be to the right; and as it moves up to its original starting point, the dots will seem to descend.

These three procedures combine the merits of the small-scale swinging shift with those of the imagination drill. The mind has to relax enough to be able to mobilize its memory-images of punctuation marks, and combine them into simple patterns, while the attention (and consequently the physical eyes) is made

to cultivate the sight-producing habit of the small-scale swinging shift — a shift which, in the third procedure, becomes a rhythmic version of the analytical regard.

The following procedure was devised by a Spanish follower of Dr. Bates, and the author of a book and various articles on the method, Dr. R. Arnau.

It is a kind of imaginary shifting swing — but a shifting swing with a difference, inasmuch as it seems to involve the physical apparatus of accommodation in ways which the ordinary swinging shift does not.

Imagine yourself holding between the thumb and forefinger a ring of stout rubber or wire, sufficiently rigid to retain its circular shape when not interfered with, but sufficiently elastic to assume, when squeezed, the form of an ellipse. Close the lids, and regard this imaginary ring, running the inward eye all around it. Then, with your imaginary hand, gently squeeze the ring laterally, so that it is deformed into an ellipse with the long axis running vertically. Look at this ellipse for a moment, then relax the pressure of your hand and allow the ring to return to its circular form. Now, shift the position of the thumb and forefinger from the sides of the ring to the top and bottom, and squeeze. The ring will be distorted into an ellipse with the long axis running horizontally. Relax the pressure, watch the ellipse re-transform itself into a circle, shift the position of thumb and forefinger to the sides of the ring and repeat the whole procedure ten or fifteen times, rhythmically. Exactly what happens, physiologically, as one watches, in imagination, the successive transformations of circle into vertically orientated ellipse, vertically orientated ellipse into circle, circle into horizontally orientated ellipse, and horizontally orientated ellipse into circle, it is hard to say. But there can be no doubt, from the sensations one feels in and around the eye, that considerable muscular adjustments and re-adjustments are continually taking place as one goes through this cycle of visualizations. Subjectively, these sensations seem to be the same as those experienced when one shifts the attention rapidly from the distance to a point very near the eyes and back again. Why the apparatus of accommodation should come into play under these conditions, it is not easy to understand. But the fact remains that it seems to do

so. It is found empirically that this drill, while valuable in all forms of visual defect, is particularly useful in cases of myopia.

Another excellent procedure, which is simultaneously an exercise in mind-body co-ordination, an imagination drill, and a small-scale shift, is ‘nose-writing.’ Sitting down comfortably in an easy chair, close your eyes and imagine that you have a good long pencil attached to the end of your nose. (Lovers of Edward Lear will remember his pictures of the ‘Dong.’) Equipped with this instrument, move your head and neck so as to write with your protracted nose upon an imaginary sheet of paper (or, if the pencil is thought of as being white, on an imaginary blackboard) eight or nine inches in front of your face. Begin by drawing a good-sized circle. Since your control over the movements of the head and neck is less perfect than your control of the hand, this circle will certainly look a bit angular and lopsided to the eyes of your imagination. Go over it half a dozen times, round and round, until the thickened circumference comes to look presentable. Then draw a line from the top of your circle to the bottom, and go over it six times. Draw another line at right angles to the first and go over that in the same way. Your circle will now contain a St. George’s Cross. Superimpose upon it a St. Andrew’s Cross, by drawing two diagonals, and finish off by jabbing with your imaginary pencil at the central meeting-place of the four lines.

Tear off your scribbled sheet of paper, or, if you prefer to work in white on a blackboard, visualize yourself wiping away the chalk with a duster. Then, turning the head gently and easily from one shoulder to the other, draw a large infinity sign — a figure of eight, lying on its side. Go over it a dozen times, paying attention, as the inward eye travels with the imaginary pencil, to the way in which the successive repetitions of the figure coincide or diverge.

Wipe the blackboard once more, or prepare another clean sheet of paper, and, this time, use your pencil to do a little writing. Begin with your own signature. Because your head and neck move so jerkily, it will look like the signature of an alcoholic illiterate. But practice makes perfect; take a new sheet and begin again. Do this four or five times; then write any other word or phrase that appeals to you.

Like some of the other procedures described above, these drills may seem rather silly, childish and undignified. But this is not important. The important thing is that they work. A little nose-writing, followed by a few minutes of palming, will do wonders in relieving the fatigue of a strained mind and staring eyes, and will result in a perceptible temporary improvement of defective vision. This temporary improvement will become permanent, as the normal and natural functioning fostered by nose-writing and the other procedures described in this book, becomes habitual and automatic.

Mind and body form a single unitary whole. Consequently, such mental processes as remembering and imagining are facilitated by the performance of bodily movements conformable to the objects of our thoughts — the kind of movements we would make if, instead of merely remembering and imagining, we were actually at work upon the things we are thinking about. For example, when remembering or imagining letters or numerals, it is often helpful to place the ball of the thumb in contact with the forefinger and, with it, to print the letters you are working on. Or, alternatively, they may be printed in nose-writing. Or again, if you prefer a more realistic gesture, you may pick up an imaginary pen and trace the signs upon an imaginary notebook.

The aid of the body may also be enlisted through speech. As you remember or imagine a letter, form its name with your lips, or even utter it aloud. The spoken word is so intimately associated with all our processes of thought that any familiar movement of the mouth and vocal cords tends automatically to evoke an image of the thing represented by the articulate sound, which is the product of that movement. Consequently, it is always easier to see what one is reading, when one pronounces the words aloud. People for whom reading is a novelty or a rather difficult and infrequent task — such as children, for example, and the imperfectly educated — realize this fact instinctively. In order to sharpen their vision for the unfamiliar symbols on the page before them, they habitually read aloud. People with defective vision are people whom their disability has reduced, so to speak, to the cultural ranks. However great their learning, they have become like children or illiterates, for whom the printed word is something

strange and hard to decipher. This being so, they should, while re-acquiring the art of seeing, do the same as the primitives do — form the words they read with their lips and point at them with their fingers. The movement of the organs of speech will evoke auditory and visual images of the words associated with them. Memory and imagination will be stimulated, and the mind will do its work of interpretation, perception and seeing with increased efficiency. Meanwhile the pointing finger (particularly if it is kept almost imperceptibly moving beneath the word which is being looked at) will help to keep the eyes centralized and rapidly shifting over a small area of maximum clarity of vision. In his own way and for his own purposes, the child is eminently wise. When disease or mal-fimctioning has reduced us, so far as reading is concerned, to the child’s level, we should not be ashamed to avail ourselves of this instinctive wisdom.

CHAPTER XV

Myopia

ALL PERSONS SUFFERING from defective vision will derive benefit from practising the fundamental techniques of the art of seeing described in the preceding chapters. In the present chapter and that which follows I shall indicate ways in which certain of these fundamental techniques may be adapted to the needs of persons suffering specifically from short sight, long sight, astigmatism and squint, and shall also give an account of some new procedures, particularly effective in these various manifestations of disease, hereditary idiosyncrasy and, above all, mal-functioning.

ITS CAUSES

Myopia is almost invariably an acquired condition, which makes its appearance during childhood. It has been attributed to the close work which school children are compelled to perform; and great efforts have been made in all civilized countries to reduce the amount of such work done within a given period, to enlarge the type of textbooks and to improve lighting conditions in schools. The effects of these reforms have been entirely disappointing. Myopia is even commoner today than it was in the past.

This deplorable state of things seems to be due to three principal causes. First, the attempt to improve the environmental conditions prevailing in schools have failed, in certain respects, to go far enough. Second, in other respects, the reforms carried out have been misguided. And third, the reformers have almost

completely neglected the psychological reasons for defective vision — a neglect which is particularly serious in the case of children.

It is in the direction of better lighting that the reformers have as yet not gone far enough. Dr. Luckiesh has demonstrated experimentally that visual tasks become easier, and that muscular nervous tension declines, as the intensity of illumination on a given task is increased from one to a hundred foot-candles. He made no experiments with higher intensities, but considers that there is every reason to suppose that muscular nervous tension (the index of strain and fatigue) would continue to fall off with a further increase of illumination to a thousand foot-candles. Now, a child in a well-built, well-lit modern school may think himself extremely lucky if he gets as much as twenty foot-candles of illumination to work with. In many schools he will be given as little as ten or even five. There is reason to believe that many boys and girls might be saved from myopia if they were given sufficient light. In existing conditions, only children with the most perfect seeing habits can hope to get through their schooling without straining their organs of vision. But strain is the principal cause of mal-functioning, and this, so far as many children are concerned, means myopia.

In their attempt to improve lighting, the reformers have not gone far enough. In their attempt to improve the typography of school books they have gone too far in a wrong direction. For the purposes of clear, unstrained seeing, the best print is not necessarily the largest. Large print, it is true, has a specious air of being very easy to read; but precisely because it seems so easy, it lures the eyes and mind into temptation. They try to see whole lines of this all too legible print with equal clarity at the same time. Central fixation is lost, the eyes and attention cease to shift, habits of staring are developed and, instead of being improved, vision is actually impaired. For good seeing, the best print is one that is not too large, but fairly heavy, so that there is plenty of strong contrast between the black letters and their background. When confronted by such print, the mind and its eyes are not tempted by any obvious excess of legibility to try to see too much too well. Instead, the smaller type encourages them to read with central

fixation and in a state of dynamic relaxation. Dr. Bates, indeed, made use of the smallest available print for re-educating defective vision. He would give his pupils not merely diamond type to read (the smallest that a printer can set up), but even those microscopic reductions of print which can only be made by the camera. This microscopic type cannot be read except when the eyes and mind are in a state of complete dynamic relaxation, and are doing their looking with perfect central fixation. With a good teacher to help him, a person with even very serious defects of sight (I speak here from personal experience) can be got into the condition in which he can read words printed in microscopic type. And the result is not eye-strain or fatigue, but a marked temporary improvement of vision for other objects. Working with microscopic type without a teacher is not too easy, and the unwary enthusiast may be tempted to set about it in the wrong way. Consequently I have not included any detailed description of this procedure. If I mention it here, it is merely to show that the correlation between large print and good seeing is not the obvious and self-evident thing which the designers of school books have commonly imagined it to be.

By neglecting the psychological reasons why school children develop defects of vision the reformers have absolutely guaranteed at least a partial failure of their efforts. Even if the lighting of schools were improved out of all recognition, even if the best possible print were used in all the primers and textbooks, large numbers of children would still undoubtedly develop myopia and other defects of vision. They would do so because they are often bored and sometimes frightened, because they dislike sitting cooped up for long hours, reading and listening to stuff which seems to them largely nonsensical, and compelled to perform tasks which they find not only difficult, but pointless. Further, the spirit of competition and the dread of blame or ridicule foster, in many childish minds, a chronic anxiety, which adversely affects every part of the organism, not excluding the eyes and the mental functions associated with seeing. Nor is this all; the exigencies of schooling are such that children must constantly be given novel and unfamiliar things to look at. Every time a new mathematical formula is inscribed on the blackboard, every time the class is set the task of learning a

new page of Latin grammar, or to study a new set of features on a map, every child concerned is being forced to pay close and concentrated attention to something completely unfamiliar — that is to say, something which it is peculiarly difficult to see, something which sets up a certain amount of strain in the eyes and minds even of those who have the best of seeing habits.

About seventy per cent, of children are sufficiently stolid and well balanced to be able to go through school without visual mishap. The rest emerge from the educational ordeal with myopia or some other defect of vision.

Some of the psychological reasons for bad sight can probably never be eliminated from the school; for they seem to be inherent in the very process of herding children together and imposing upon them discipline and book learning. Others can be got rid of — but only by a rare combination of good will and intelligence. (For instance, until all teachers become angels and geniuses, how are you going to prevent a considerable number of children in every generation from being frightened and bored?)

There is, however, one field in which the reasons for bad seeing can be eliminated fairly certainly and without much difficulty: it is possible to mitigate the ocular and mental strain, caused by the constant recurrence of situations in which children are called upon to look at something unfamiliar. The extremely simple technique for achieving this end was devised by Dr. Bates, and for some years was used successfully in a number of schools in different parts of the United States. Owing to changes in the administration of these schools and to pressure exerted by organized orthodoxy, the practices suggested by Dr. Bates were gradually abandoned. The fact is regrettable; for there is evidence that they actually did good in preserving the children’s vision, while the nature of the practices was such that it was absolutely impossible that they should ever do anyone any harm.

Dr. Bates’s technique for relieving the strain caused by constantly looking at unfamiliar objects was exceedingly simple. It consisted merely in hanging a Snellen Chart in some conspicuous position in the schoolroom, and instructing the children, as soon as the chart was thoroughly familiar, to look at it for a few

moments whenever they had any difficulty in seeing the blackboard, or a map, or the pages, say, of a grammar or geometry book. Because the chart was an old friend, the children had no difficulty in seeing its graduated letters. The act of reading gave them new faith in their own powers and relieved the strain caused by having to pay concentrated attention to something strange and unfamiliar. Strong in their newfound confidence and relaxation, the children then turned back to their work and found that their power of seeing it had markedly improved.

The Snellen Chart possesses, as we have seen, certain disadvantages. Therefore it will probably be advisable to substitute for it a large commercial calendar of the kind described in an earlier chapter. Alternatively, children may be instructed to turn, whenever vision falls off or fatigue sets in, to one of the notices or mottoes which generally hang in schoolrooms. All that is necessary is that the words, letters or numerals regarded shall be perfectly familiar; for it is by familiarity that the ill effects of unfamiliarity are neutralized.

I need hardly add that there is no reason why this procedure should be confined to the schoolroom. A calendar or any other perfectly memorized piece of printed matter is a valuable addition to the furniture in any room, where people have to do concentrated work involving the seeing of unfamiliar objects, or strange combinations of familiar elements. Incipient strain may be very rapidly relieved by looking — analytically, or with a small-scale swinging shift — at the well-known words or numerals. Add an occasional period of palming and, if possible, of sunning — and there is no reason why the incipient strain should ever mature into fatigue and impairment of vision.

TECHNIQUES OF RE-EDUCATION

From this long, but not irrelevant, digression, let us return to a consideration of the procedures for re-educating the myope towards normality. In the more

serious cases, the help of a capable teacher will probably be necessary, if any considerable improvement is to be achieved. But all can derive benefit, often a great deal of benefit, from following the fundamental rules of the art of seeing, particularly as these rules are adapted to the special needs of the short-sighted.

Palming, which the myope should practise as often and as long as he possibly can, may be made doubly valuable if the scenes and episodes remembered, while the eyes are closed and covered, are so chosen that the inward eye has to range from near to far over considerable distances. At one time or another, most of us have stood on railway bridges watching the trains as they approached and receded again across the landscape. Such memories are very profitable to the myope; for they stimulate the mind to come out of its narrow world of short sight and plunge into the distance. At the same time, the apparatus of accommodation, which is closely correlated with the mind, is set unconsciously to work.

Friends approaching along familiar roads, horses galloping away across fields, boats gliding along rivers, buses arriving and departing — all such memories of depth and distance are valuable. Sometimes, too, it may be profitable to supplement them with scenes constructed by the fancy. Thus, one may imagine oneself rolling billiard balls down an enormously long table, or flinging a stone onto the ice of a great lake and watching it skim away into the distance.

Sunning and swinging require no special modification for the myope. The drills designed to cure the bad habit of staring and to foster mobility and central fixation can also be performed without modification, except in the case of the calendar drill, which may be adapted to the needs of the short-sighted person in the following ways.

Begin by doing the drills at the distance from which the large numerals can be seen most easily. Do them first with both eyes together, then (covering one eye with a patch or handkerchief) with each eye separately. If one eye does its work of sensing less well than the other, give it more work — but lengthen the periods of palming between drills, so as to avoid fatigue. After a few days, when the

eyes and mind have become accustomed to doing a certain amount of seeing without the aid of spectacles (which will still have to be worn in times of emergency, or of potential danger to oneself or others, as when driving a car or walking in crowded streets), move the chair a foot or two further from the calendar and repeat the drills at that distance. In a few weeks it should be possible to increase very considerably the distance from which things can be clearly seen.

Myopic eyes should be given plenty of practice in changing the focus from the near point to the distance. To do this, procure a small pocket calendar of the same model as the commercial calendar on the wall — that is to say, with one month printed in large type, and the preceding and succeeding months in smaller type below. Hold the pocket calendar a few inches in front of the eyes, glance at the figure ‘one’ on the large-type month, then look away and locate the ‘one’ on the large-type month of the wall calendar. Close the eyes and relax. Then proceed to do the same with the succeeding figures. All the steps of the drill may be done in this way on the two calendars, with both eyes together and each eye separately and at progressively greater and greater distances from the wall calendar. Short-sighted people will find this a pretty strenuous exercise, and should therefore be particularly careful to interrupt the drill at frequent intervals for periods of palming and, if possible, sunning. If a small pocket calendar does not happen, on some occasion, to be available, the face of a watch may be used instead. Hold it close to the eyes, glance at the ‘one’ and then away to the corresponding numeral on the wall calendar. Close the eyes, relax and go on in the same way round the whole dial.

Myopes can read without glasses, but at a point abnormally close to the eyes. It is possible for them, however, to read without undue strain at points an inch or two further away. Practice in reading at these further points will gradually eliminate any slight feeling of discomfort associated with the more distant vision — provided always, of course, that attention be properly directed and staring (the great vice of the short-sighted) avoided. At the end of every page, or even of every paragraph, the myope should look up for a few seconds to glance at some

thoroughly familiar object at a distance, such as a calendar on the wall, or the view out of the window. Further hints on the art of reading will be given in the chapter especially devoted to that subject.

When travelling by bus or car, myopes should take the opportunity provided of glancing with quick, ‘flashing’ regards at the lettering on billboards, shop-fronts and the like. No attempt should be made to ‘hold’ the words so regarded, until they are clearly seen. Glance for a moment, and close the eyes. Then, if the movement of the vehicle permits it, glance again. If you see, well and good; if you don’t see, that also is well and good — for there is every reason to believe that you will see better some time.

A few hints on the art of seeing movies will be given in a later chapter. Here, I will only remark that, for anyone who can bear to look at a picture more than once, the movie theatre may be made to provide material for a valuable exercise. On your first visit, look at the picture from a place in one of the front rows. On the next, take a seat twenty feet further back. Because of its familiarity, the picture will be more visible than it was the first time; and you will see it well even at the increased distance. Yet greater familiarity will, on a third visit, permit of a further retreat towards the back of the theatre. And, of course, if your courage, time and money are sufficient, you can view the picture for a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, a seventy times seventh time, creeping further and further away from the screen on each occasion.

CHAPTER XVI

Long Sight, Astigmatism, Squint

LONG SIGHT IS of two main types — hyperopia, often found in young people and persisting into later life; and presbyopia, which commonly makes its onset in later middle age. All forms of long sight can be re-educated into or towards normality.

Hyperopia often causes discomfort and pain, and when associated (as it not infrequently is) with a very slight degree of outward squint in one of the eyes, may bring on frequent severe headaches, giddiness, fits of nausea and vomiting. The neutralizing of hyperopic symptoms by means of artificial lenses sometimes puts a stop to these painful disabilities; but sometimes it fails to do so, and the migraines and nausea persist until such rime as the sufferer learns the art of seeing.

Presbyopia is commonly regarded as one of the inevitable results of ageing. Like the bones of the skeleton, the lens of the eye hardens with age, and this hardening is supposed to prevent all elderly eyes from being able to accommodate at the near point. Nevertheless, many old people continue to accommodate up to the day of their death; and when sufferers from presbyopia undertake a suitable course of visual re-education, they soon learn to read at a normal distance, without the aid of spectacles. From this we may conclude that there is nothing inevitable or predestined about the long sight of old age.

Palming, sunning, swinging and shifting will do much to relieve the discomfort associated with hyperopia, and will put the mind and eyes into the condition of dynamic relaxation which makes normal seeing possible. These should be supplemented by imagination drills, which are particularly valuable in improving the longsighted person’s ability to read.

Print seems grey and blurred when the hyperope looks at it.

This state of things can be improved indirectly by a constant practice of the fundamental procedures of the art of seeing — palming, sunning, swinging and shifting; and, directly, through memory and imagination. The hyperope should look at one of the large numerals on his calendar, and then with closed eyes, ‘letting go,’ remember the intense blackness of the ink and reflect at the same time that exactly the same ink is used for printing the small letters, which he sees as grey and misty. Next, calling imagination into play, he should remember one of these smaller letters, imagine a blacker dot at its base and another at the top. After shifting from dot to dot with the inward eye, he should look at the real letter and do the same on that. It will soon blacken and, for a few seconds, he will be able to see it and the other letters on the page quite distinctly. Then all will blur again, and he will have to repeat his acts of memory and imagination.

After paying attention for a little to the blackness of the letters, he should consider the whiteness of the background within and around the letters, and should exercise himself in first imagining and then, with the aid of the imagination, actually seeing it whiter than it is in reality. The vision for reading and other close work may be markedly improved in this way. This is not surprising; for between the eyes and the mind there exists a two-way connection. A mental strain will cause strain and physical distortion in the eyes; and physical distortion in the eyes will cause the mind to perceive an imperfect image of the external object, and so increase its strain. But, conversely, if the mind is able, through memory and imagination, to form within itself a perfect image of an external object, the existence of this perfect image in the mind will automatically improve the condition of the strained and distorted eyes. The more perfect the image in the mind, the greater the improvement in the physical condition of the eyes. For the eyes will tend to assume the physical conformation, which eyes must have, if they are to transmit the sort of *sensa* that a mind can perceive in terms of a perfect image of an external object. Not only is the connection between eyes and mind a reversible, two-way connection; it is also a connection for mutual benefit as well as for mutual harm. This is a very important fact to

remember; for we tend, for some curious reason, to think only of the mischief that the eyes can inflict upon the mind and the mind upon the eyes — of blurred vision, due to strain and refractive error, and of visual delusions produced by the imagination, of temporary failures of vision caused by sudden outbursts of rage or grief, and of diseases of the eyes brought on by chronic negative emotion. But if eyes and mind can harm, they can also help one another. An unstrained mind has undistorted eyes, and undistorted eyes do their work so well that they never add anything to the burdens of the mind. Moreover, when, through mental strain or for some other reason, a distortion of the eyes has been produced, the mind can help to remedy this distortion by doing the right, the beneficial thing at its end of the two-way communication line. It can perform acts of remembering, which are always accompanied by the condition of relaxation that permits the eyes to return to their normal shape and normal functioning. And it can call up, by imagination, representations of external objects more perfect than those it ordinarily sees on the basis of the poor *sensa* transmitted by the distorted eyes. But when the mind has a perfectly clear image of an object, the eyes tend automatically to revert to the condition which would enable them to furnish the proper raw materials for making such an image. Just as the emotions and their outward physical expression (in the form of gesture, metabolic change, glandular activity and so forth) are indissolubly connected, so too there is an indissoluble connection, for good as well as for evil, between the visual image, whether produced by memory, imagination or the interpretation of *sensa*, and the physical condition of the eyes. Impair or improve the mental image, and you automatically impair or improve the condition of the eyes. By means of repeated acts of memory and imagination it is possible to improve, temporarily at first, then permanently, the quality of the mental images of external objects. When this has been achieved, there is first a temporary, then a permanent improvement in the physical condition of the eyes. Hence the value of memory and imagination drills in conditions, such as hyperopia, in which *sensa* and the perceptions based upon them are of poor quality.

Exercises which compel the mind and eyes to change their focus rapidly from distance to the near point are as useful to the hyperope as to the myope. Such drills have already been described in the chapter on short sight.

Presbyopia is essentially an inability to accommodate the eyes, so that they will do clear and accurate sensing at the near point. This failure to accommodate seems to be the result of a habit, to the building up of which middle-aged and elderly people are predisposed by the hardening of the lens. This habit can, as experience shows, be modified, even though the physical condition of the lens may remain, as it presumably does, unchanged. Like all other sufferers from defects of vision, presbyopes should follow the fundamental rules of the art of seeing, adapting them to their own particular needs and, where necessary, supplementing them. To the procedures which are helpful to all longsighted persons, they should add the following techniques for improving their reading.

Print can be read without undue strain somewhat nearer to the eyes than the point of maximum comfort and habitual usage. The presbyope can coax his eyes and mind to get used to seeing at this nearer point, provided always that he interrupts his reading to keep the visual organs relaxed by means of palming, swinging and sunning. Little by little, the reading distance can be considerably shortened in this way, while the eyes and mind acquire a renewal of flexibility.

Oliver Wendell Holmes records the case of an old gentleman of his acquaintance who, ‘perceiving his sight to fail, immediately took to exercising it on the finest print, and in this way fairly bullied nature out of her foolish habit of taking liberties at five-and-forty, or thereabout. And now the old gentleman performs the most extraordinary feats with his pen, showing that his eyes must be a pair of microscopes. I should be afraid to say how much he writes on the compass of a half-dime — whether the Psalms or the Gospels, or the Psalms and the Gospels, I won’t be positive.’

This old gentleman had evidently discovered for himself what Dr. Bates was later to re-discover and proclaim to the world — the value, for people with defective sight, of very small and even microscopic print. Oliver Wendell Holmes is wrong, however, in saying that he fairly bullied nature out of her

habit’ of giving people presbyopia. The sensing eyes and the perceiving mind cannot successfully be bullied. Any attempt to force them to sense and perceive always results, within a very short time, not in the improvement of vision, but its impairment. The old gentleman who trained his eyes to become a pair of microscopes, cannot possibly have bullied; he must have coaxed them. And provided they do the same, all presbyopes may profitably follow his example.

Procure a specimen of very small print. (In any second-hand bookshop you may find thick little duodecimos of the early nineteenth century, containing the complete works of the great and the forgotten, and printed in a diamond type so small that our ancestors must indeed have had good vision to get through whole volumes of it.) Take the sunlight on the closed eyes, or, if there is no sun, bathe them in the light of a strong electric lamp. Palm for a few minutes, and then give the closed eyes a few more seconds of light. Thus relaxed, you can set to work on your small print. Holding the page either in full sunlight, or in the best possible substitute for sunlight, look at it easily, effortlessly, breathing and blinking as you do so. Make no attempt to see the words, but let the eyes wander back and forth along the white spaces between the lines of print. No mental hazards are involved in looking at a plain surface; consequently, there will be no temptation to strain, if you keep the eyes and attention shifting on the white spaces between the lines. From far out, move the page to within a foot of the eyes, still paying attention to the white spaces rather than the print, and still taking care to breathe and blink, so as to prevent the attention from becoming unduly fixed and immobile. (By changing the outward expression of an undesirable mental state, one acts upon the mental state itself. Attention cannot be misdirected, if we take pains to correct the external symptoms of misdirected attention.) Interrupt this procedure at frequent intervals to palm and take the sun. This is essential; for, as we have seen, there can be no bullying of the sensing eyes and the perceiving mind. If they are to co-operate in doing a good job of seeing, they must be relaxed and coaxed into working as they should.

After a little time devoted to this drill, it will generally be found that individual words and whole phrases of the small-type reading matter will come

up almost suddenly into distinct visibility. Do not allow yourself to be tempted by these first successes into trying to read continuously. Your aim at this time is not to reach the immediate and obvious goal of reading the page before you; it is to acquire the means whereby this and similar goals may be reached in the future, without strain or fatigue, and with enhanced efficiency. Do not, I repeat, attempt to read, but go on effortlessly regarding the page, and especially the white spaces between the lines, at varying distances from the eyes. From time to time, when a word in the small type has come up into visibility, pick up a book with print of ordinary dimensions and read a paragraph or two. It is quite likely that you will find you can read it more easily and closer to the eyes than you could before starting your work on the smaller print.

ASTIGMATISM AND SQUINT

Defects of vision, due to astigmatism, can be markedly diminished or even eliminated by anyone who will diligently practise the art of seeing and thereby learn how to get his mind and eyes to function naturally and normally. Procedures specially valuable for the astigmatic have already been described in the paragraphs devoted to the domino drills. It is therefore unnecessary to go any further into the matter here.

Sufferers from any of the more serious kinds of squint will find it extremely difficult to re-educate themselves into normality, and should seek the assistance of an experienced teacher, who will show them how to achieve dynamic relaxation, how to strengthen the sight of the weaker eye, and (final and most difficult step) how to re-acquire the mental faculty of fusing the two sets of *sensa* delivered by the two eyes into a single representation of an external object.

For those who suffer from slight muscle imbalance — and even an almost imperceptible divergence of one or both eyes may be the source of extreme

discomfort and often of serious disabilities — the following simple ‘double-image drill’ will prove of considerable benefit.

Relax the eyes and mind by palming; then hold a pencil at arm’s length, the tip pointed towards your nose. Bring the pencil towards you, blinking as you do so. When the pencil is close to the face, change its position from horizontal to vertical, holding it upright immediately in front of, and about three inches away from, the tip of the nose. Focus on the pencil; but, to avoid staring, shift the attention rapidly from top to bottom. Do this half a dozen times; then look away, just above the top of the pencil, to some distant object at the other end of the room. When the eyes are focussed on this distant object, the pencil at the near point will seem to become two pencils. To eyes in perfect alignment, these two pencils will look as though they were about three inches apart. But where there is muscular imbalance, the distance separating the two images will appear to be a good deal less. (And if the squint is pronounced, the phenomenon will not be observed at all.) Should the two images be seen too close together, shut the eyes, ‘let go’ and imagine yourself still looking at the distant object, but with the two images of the near-by pencil somewhat further apart than they were when you actually saw them. When we distinctly imagine a normal image, our eyes will tend automatically to put themselves into the condition, in which they would have to be, in order to supply our mind with the materials for seeing such an image. Consequently, when you re-open the eyes and look once more in reality at the distant object, the two pencils at the near point will seem, if your visualization has been clear and distinct, perceptibly further apart than they were. Close the eyes again and repeat the visualizing process, this time imagining the pencils to be yet a little further apart than before; then re-open and verify. Go on doing this, until you have pushed the two images to something like their normal distance one from the other. When this has been achieved, start to swing the head very gently from side to side, blinking and breathing easily as you do so — and, of course, still looking at the distant object. The two images of the pencil will appear to move back and forth in the opposite direction to the head, but will still keep their positions relative to one another.

Provided that this drill be prepared for by palming and accompanied by easy blinking and breathing, it may be repeated at frequent intervals throughout the day. The immediate result will be, not fatigue, but relaxation and de-tensioning; and the long-range consequences will be the gradual correction of old-established habits of muscular imbalance.

DISEASES OF THE EYES

The art of seeing is not primarily a therapy. It does not, that is to say, aim directly at the cure of pathological conditions of the sensing-apparatus. Its purpose is to promote normal and natural functioning of the organs of vision — the sensing eyes and the selecting, perceiving and seeing mind. When normal and natural functioning has been restored, it generally happens that there is a marked improvement in the organic condition of the tissues involved in that functioning.

In this particular case, the tissues involved are those of the eyes and the nerves and muscles connected with them. When people have learnt the art of seeing and conscientiously follow its simple rules, their eyes, if these are diseased, tend to get better. Even when the disease has its origin in some other part of the body, normal and natural visual functioning will often bring a certain amelioration in the local condition of the eyes. It cannot, of course, eliminate the condition altogether; for the simple reason that the sickness of the eyes is only a symptom of another sickness having its seat elsewhere. It can, however, help the eyes while the cause of their disorder is being treated, and may do much to prevent the vision from suffering permanent impairment.

In cases where the pathological condition of the eyes is not a symptom of a disease in some other part of the body, the re-establishment of normal and natural functioning may lead indirectly to a complete cure. This, as I have said before, is only to be expected; for habitual mal-functioning results in chronic

nervous muscular tension and reduction in the volume of circulation. But any part of the body in which circulation is inadequate is particularly susceptible to disease; furthermore, once disease has set in, the innate capacity of the organ to regulate and heal itself will be abnormally reduced. Any procedure which restores normal functioning to the psycho-physical organs of vision will tend to reduce nervous muscular tension, increase circulation and bring back the *vis medicatrix naturae* to its normal potency. Experience shows that this is what in effect generally occurs when persons suffering from such conditions as glaucoma, cataract, iritis, detachment of the retina, learn how to use their eyes and minds properly instead of improperly. The art of seeing, I repeat, is not primarily a therapy; but, at one remove and indirectly, it results in the relief or cure of many serious diseases of the eyes.

CHAPTER XVII

Some Difficult Seeing-Situations

IN THE PRESENT chapter I propose to discuss the ways in which the fundamental rules of the art of seeing may be applied to certain common situations, which persons with defective vision are apt to find particularly trying.

READING

When we read, we are assailed, if our vision is at all defective, by particularly strong temptations to use our eyes and mind in the wrong way. Our interest in what we read intensifies our all too human proclivity towards end-gaining. We are so greedy to see the greatest possible amount of print in the shortest possible time, that we utterly neglect the normal and natural means whereby such an end may be achieved. Improper functioning becomes habitual with us, and our vision is further impaired.

The first thing we have to do is to realize that end-gaining is self-stultifying, and that, where reading is concerned, we ourselves are end-gainers. The next is to inhibit, whenever we read, the manifestations of our impatience and our intellectual gluttony.

In the early stages of visual re-education, clear and effortless reading cannot be accomplished without plenty of rest and relaxation. In other words, relaxation is one of the principal means whereby we can achieve our end, which is to see as much print as possible, in the shortest possible time, with the least possible fatigue and the highest degree of intellectual efficiency. Consequently, when we inhibit the manifestations of our impatience and greed, this should be done, first

of all, for the sake of giving our eyes and minds the relaxation which they so urgently need, but of which they are perpetually depriving themselves through their habits of improper use.

To provide the eyes and mind with adequate relaxation, one should, while reading, adopt the following simple procedures:

First: Close the eyes for a second or two at the end of every sentence, or every other sentence. ‘Let go’ and visualize the last word you have read and the punctuation mark by which it is followed. When you open your eyes again, look first at this remembered word and punctuation mark, which will seem to be perceptibly more distinct than they were when originally read. Then go on to the next sentence.

Second: At the end of every page or two, interrupt yourself for a couple of minutes to palm the eyes. To greedy end-gainers, this will seem the most intolerable hardship. But let them reflect that these interruptions will bring them more easily and expeditiously to their goal. Also that this ‘mortification’ of their impatience will probably be very good for their characters!

Third: If sunlight is available, take the sun on the closed and open eyes before palming, and again, on the closed lids, after. If there is no sun, bathe the eyes in the light of a strong electric lamp.

Fourth: While reading, sit where you can see a calendar or other perfectly familiar piece of large-type reading matter hanging on a distant wall. Raise your eyes from your book occasionally and look analytically at the letters or numerals. If you are reading by daylight, look out of the window sometimes into the far distance.

Fifth: Memory and imagination can be enlisted in the service of better reading. Pause from time to time, ‘let go’ and remember a single letter or word recently regarded. See it with the inward eye in terms of the white background surrounding it and contained within it. Then imagine the whiteness of the background as being whiter than you actually saw it. Re-open, look at the whiteness around and within the real letters and try to see it as white as the imaginary background you visualized with your eyes shut. Close the eyes once

more, and begin again. After two or three repetitions, palm for a little while and then go on reading.

As an alternative exercise, close your eyes, remember a recently seen letter, take an imaginary pen and place a dot of intenser blackness at its top and base, or at its left-hand and right-hand extremities. Shift the attention from dot to dot half a dozen times; then open the eyes and, imagining that you see similar dots of intenser blackness of the real letter, do the same. Repeat this procedure several times, palm, and continue your reading.

Sixth: In the chapter on long sight, I gave an account of the way in which presbyopes could improve their reading vision by looking effortlessly at very small print — more especially at the white spaces between the lines. The benefits of this drill are not confined to elderly people with failing sight. Anyone who has difficulty in reading may profitably make use of this procedure at the beginning of a period of study, and at intervals during the period.

So much for the simple relaxation techniques, by which a session with book or newspaper should be prefaced and interrupted. Let us now consider the proper way of performing the act of reading itself.

Here, as in all other seeing-situations, the great enemies of normal vision are strain, misdirected attention, staring. In order to overcome these enemies, one must be careful, while reading, to obey the following simple rules:

First: Do not hold your breath or keep the eyelids rigid and unmoving for long periods. Blink frequently and breathe regularly, gently and fully.

Second: Do not stare or try to see every part of a whole line or phrase equally well. Keep the eyes and attention continually moving, and so bring central fixation into play. This is best accomplished by making the eyes hurry continuously back and forth in the white space immediately under the line of print which is being read. Words and letters are thus caught, as it were, between a succession of short swings. At first this technique of reading by rapid movements of the eyes in the white spaces between the lines may seem somewhat disconcerting. But after a little time we shall discover that it contributes not a little to clear and effortless reading. Letters and words are seen

more easily when they are, so to speak, on the wing than when immobilized by a fixed stare — more easily, too, when they are considered as interruptions to a plain white background than when looked at as things existing in their own right and requiring to be deciphered.

Third: Do not frown when you read. Frowning is a symptom of the nervous muscular tension produced in and around the eyes by misdirected attention and the effort to see. With the achievement of dynamic relaxation and normal functioning, the habit of frowning will disappear of itself. But its departure may be accelerated, and the physical and mental tensions relieved, by frequent and deliberate acts of inhibition. In the midst of reading, suddenly turn round upon yourself and catch your facial muscles at their tricks. Then close the eyes for a moment, ‘let go’ and deliberately smooth the brows.

Fourth: Do not half-close the eyelids when you read. Unlike frowning, this procedure has a purpose. By half-closing the eyelids, we reduce the size of the normal visual field and, in this way, eliminate some of the distracting stimuli and diffused illumination coming to the eyes from those parts of the page which are not being looked at. Most persons with defects of vision do their reading through a narrow loophole between their eyelashes; but the tendency is especially marked among those who have opacities in the cornea or other normally transparent tissues of the eyes. Such opacities act in much the same way as do the particles of water vapour suspended in the air on an autumn morning: they disperse the light in a kind of luminous fog, through which it is hard to see distinctly. Partial closure of the lids has the effect of cutting off much of the illuminated field and so reducing the density of the fog caused by the scattering of light.

But the narrowing of the aperture between the lids demands a continuous muscular effort. This effort increases the tension in and around the eyes, and is reflected by an intensification of the psychological tensions in the mind. Looking between half-closed lids is undoubtedly a way of getting an immediate improvement of vision; but this immediate improvement must be paid for in the future — for it can be had only at the high cost of increased strain and fatigue,

and a progressive further impairment of the power of seeing. It is therefore very important to find a method for correcting this most undesirable tendency. Conscious relaxation of the lids, so that they remain untensed and open at their normal span, will not be sufficient. Indeed, it is likely to result in our seeing a good deal worse than before, so that, in mere self-protection, we shall have to turn back to our old bad habits.

Fortunately, however, there is a very simple mechanical method for getting the results achieved by half-closing the eyes. Instead of cutting out distractions and unneeded illumination at the receiving end, that is to say, in the eye, we cut them out at the source — on the printed page. All that is needed is a sheet of stout black paper, a ruler and a sharp knife. Take as much of the black paper as will cover, say, half an average page of print. Across the centre of this cut a slot slightly longer than the average line of print and wide enough to take in about two lines. (The width of the slot may be varied to suit individual tastes and to fit different sizes of type. This can be done by taking a strip of black paper, drawing it down across the top edge of the slot until the aperture is of the width desired, and fastening it into place by paper clips.)

When everything is ready, hold the black paper flat on the page with the lower edge of the slot about an eighth of an inch below the line you are reading. When you have come to the end of the line, move the slot down to the next line. And so on.

This absurdly simple little device will be found helpful by all who have any difficulty in reading. For those who suffer from corneal or other opacities, it may double the clarity of their reading vision — and this when the eyelids are fully open and relaxed.

Reading through a slot facilitates that anti-stare technique, of which I have already spoken — the rapid shifting to and fro on the white space immediately under the print. The straight edge of the black paper acts as a sort of railway track, along which the eyes travel easily and smoothly. Furthermore, the task of imaginatively seeing the white spaces between lines as whiter than they really

are is facilitated, when these white spaces are regarded (and afterwards remembered) in contact with a contrasting black frame.

In certain cases, the habit of trying to see clearly too much print at the same time may be rapidly corrected by making use of a small slot, not more than three-quarters of an inch long. Such a slot will permit its user to see only so much of any given line as can be taken in by the *macula lutea;* and rapid shifting within this confined space will bring th*e fovea* into play. In this way the central area of the retina will be stimulated and set to work as it never was when the impossible attempt was made to see whole phrases and lines equally well at the same time. The short slot will have to be moved rapidly from word to word along the line, and reading with its aid will probably be found rather exasperating, at any rate in the beginning. To minimize this inconvenience, alternate between the long slot and the short. It is easy to put up with brief annoyances, particularly if one reflects that, by doing so, one is building up profitable habits of corneal visual functioning.

LOOKING AT UNFAMILIAR OBJECTS

This is perhaps the most trying of all seeing-situations and also one of frequent occurrence. We are called upon to look intensively at unfamiliar objects every time we go shopping, visit a museum, search for books in the shelves of a library, hunt through drawers and cupboards for some lost article, tidy up a box-room or attic, pack and unpack baggage, or repair a machine. The problem is how to avoid or reduce the strain and fatigue that ordinarily follows such looking.

First of all, make sure, if this is in your power, that what you are looking at is brightly illuminated. Draw back curtains, turn on lights, use a flash-lamp. However, if the looking has to be done in some public place, you will have to

put up with the lighting, which others consider sufficient, but which will almost certainly be inadequate.

Second, resist the temptation to stare, and do not try to see clearly more than a small part of the total visual field. Look analytically at what is before you, and keep the eyes and attention continuously shifting.

Third, do not hold your breath, and blink your eyes frequently.

Fourth, rest as often as you can, either closing the eyes, ‘letting go’ and remembering some familiar object, or, preferably, palming. If possible sun the eyes from time to time, or bathe them in the light of an electric lamp.

If these simple rules are followed, it should be possible to come through the ordeal without serious fatigue, discomfort or strain.

MOVIES

For many people with defective vision, a visit to the pictures may be the cause of much fatigue and discomfort. There is no need for this. Looked at in the right way, movies do not strain the eyes and, indeed, may be made to pay handsome dividends in improved vision. Here are the rules which must be followed, if an evening at the picture theatre is to be a pleasure, not a torture.

First: Refrain from staring. Do not try to see the whole of the screen equally well. Do not try to ‘hold’ any detail. On the contrary, keep the eyes and attention continuously on the move.

Second: Do not forget to breathe and blink regularly.

Third: Take the opportunity offered by boring sequences to rest, by closing the eyes for a few seconds and ‘letting go.’ Even during the more exciting parts of the picture, you can find time occasionally to glance away for an instant into the darkness surrounding the illuminated screen. Use any intermission for palming.

One way in which the movies may be used for improving vision has already been described in the chapter on myopia. Movies are also helpful in other ways, above all by making it possible for us to become familiar with objects and situations which are frequently met with in real life.

In an essay on the relationship between life and art, Roger Fry has written a passage which casts a very interesting light on the way in which the movies can be used to improve defective vision. ‘We can get a curious side glimpse,’ he writes in *Vision and Design*, ‘of the nature of the imaginative life from the cinematograph. This resembles actual life in almost every respect, except that what the psychologists call the conative part of our reaction to sensations, that is to say, the appropriate resultant action, is cut off. If, in a cinematograph, we see a runaway horse and cart, we do not have to think of getting out of the way, or heroically interposing ourselves.’ The result is that, in the first place, we *see* the event much more clearly; see a number of quite interesting but irrelevant things, which in real life could not struggle into our consciousness, bent, as it would be, entirely upon the problems of our appropriate reaction. I remember seeing in a cinematograph the arrival of a train at a foreign station, and the people descending from the carriages; there was no platform, and to my intense surprise, I saw several people turn right round, after reaching the ground, as though to orientate themselves; an almost ridiculous performance, which I had never noticed in all the many hundred occasions on which such a scene had passed before my eyes in real life. The fact being that, at a station, one is never really a spectator of events, but an actor engaged in the drama of luggage or prospective seats; and one actually sees only so much as may help to the appropriate action.’

These lines express a very important truth: there is a fundamental psychological difference between a spectator and an actor, between looking on at a work of art and looking on (which can rarely be done without intervening) at an episode of real life. Spectators see more, and more clearly, than do actors. Owing to this fact, it is possible to make use of the movies to improve our vision for objects and events in real life. Because you are not a participant in the drama,

you will be able to see, more clearly than you could in real life, the way in which people on the screen perform such ordinary acts as opening a door, getting into a cab, helping themselves to food and so forth. Make yourself conscious of seeing more on the screen than you are normally able to do in real life, and, after the show, deliberately call back the memory-images of what you saw there. This will make such ordinary actions seem more familiar than before; and this increased familiarity will cause similar actions to be more visible to you, when they occur at some future date in real life.

Close-ups provide a means whereby persons with defective vision may overcome one of their most embarrassing handicaps — the inability to recognize faces, or to catch the fine shades of meaning which people normally convey through facial expression. In real life, faces sixteen feet high and eight feet wide are unknown; but on the screen they are one of the most ordinary of phenomena. Exploit this fact in such a way as to improve your vision for real faces of ordinary dimensions. Look carefully at the gigantic face. Carefully, but always analytically. Never fix a greedy stare upon a close-up, even if it should belong to your favourite star. Examine it in all its details, noting the structure of the bones, the way the hair grows, and how the head moves on the neck and the eyes within their orbits. And when the colossal face registers grief, desire, anger, doubt and the rest, follow the workings of lips and eyes, of the muscles of cheek and brow, with the closest attention. The more carefully and analytically you observe these things, the better and clearer will be your memories of the commoner facial expressions, and the easier will it be, at some later date, to see similar expressions on the faces of real people.

CHAPTER XVIII

Lighting Conditions

PEOPLE WITH NORMAL vision, who consistently do their sensing and perceiving in a condition of dynamic relaxation, can afford in large measure to disregard the external conditions of seeing. Not so the men and women whose sight is defective. For them, favourable external conditions are of the greatest importance, and the failure to secure such favourable conditions may do much to increase their disability, or, if they have undertaken a course of visual re-education, to retard their progress towards normality.

The most important of all the external conditions of good seeing is adequate illumination. Where lighting is poor, it is very hard for people with defective vision to get better, very easy for them to get worse.

The question now arises, what *is* adequate illumination?

The best illumination we have is full sunshine on a clear summer's day. If you read in such sunshine, the intensity of the light falling upon the page of your book will be in the neighbourhood of ten thousand foot-candles — that is to say, the light of direct summer sunshine is equal to the light thrown by ten thousand wax candles placed at the distance of one foot from the book. Move from full sunlight to the shade of a tree or house. The light on your page will still have an intensity of about one thousand foot-candles. On overcast days, the light reflected from white clouds has an intensity of several thousand foot-candles; and the weather must be very gloomy for general outdoor intensities to fall as low as a thousand foot-candles.

Indoors, the light near an unobstructed window may have an intensity of anything from one hundred to five hundred foot-candles, depending upon the brightness of the day. Ten or fifteen feet away from the window the illumination

may fall to as little as two foot-candles or even less, if the room is papered and furnished in dark colours.

The intensity of illumination diminishes as the square of the distance. A 60-watt lamp will provide about eighty foot-candles at one foot, about twenty at two feet, about nine at three feet, and, at ten feet, only four-fifths of one foot-candle. Owing to this rapid falling off in intensity with increase of distance, most parts of the average artificially lighted rooms are very poorly illuminated. It is common to find people reading and doing other forms of close work under an illumination of one or two foot-candles. In public buildings, such as schools and libraries, you will be lucky if you get as much as five foot-candles of illumination.

That it should be possible to do close work under illuminations so fantastically low compared with those which are met with out of doors in daytime is a remarkable tribute to the native endurance and flexibility of the sensing eyes and the perceiving mind. So great is this flexibility and endurance that a person whose eyes are unimpaired, and who uses them in the way that nature intended them to be used, can submit for long periods to bad lighting conditions and suffer no harm. But for a person whose eyes have undergone some organic impairment, or whose habitual functioning is so unnatural that he can only see with effort and under strain, these same conditions may be disastrous.

In his book, *Seeing and Human Welfare*, Dr. Luckiesh has described some very interesting experiments, which demonstrate the undesirable consequences of poor lighting. These experiments were designed to measure nervous muscular tension (an accurate indicator, as Dr. Luckiesh points out, of strain, fatigue, wasted effort and internal losses') under varying conditions of illumination. The task assigned to the subjects of these experiments was reading; and the amount of nervous muscular strain was recorded by a device which measured the pressure exerted by two fingers of the left hand resting upon a large flat knob.

The subjects were kept unaware of the nature and purpose of the investigation — indeed, were deliberately thrown on a wrong scent. This eliminated the

possibility of any conscious or voluntary interference with the results. A very large number of tests showed conclusively that, in all cases, ‘there was a large decrease in nervous muscular tension as the intensity increased from one to one hundred foot-candles. The latter was the highest intensity investigated, because this is far above prevailing levels of illumination in the artificial world. There was impressive evidence that this tension would continue to decrease if the level of illumination were increased to one thousand foot-candles.’ In other tests the subjects were exposed to improperly placed lights that threw a glare in their eyes. This glare was not excessive — just the average, moderate glare that millions of human beings habitually work and play by. Nevertheless it was quite sufficient to increase the tell-tale nervous muscular tension to a marked degree.

There is, so far as I know, only one kind of electric light bulb from which one can obtain a thousand foot-candles of illumination without excessive consumption of current. That is the 150-watt spotlight, described in the chapter on sunning. The parabolic and silvered back of this bulb acts as a reflector, and the light issues in a powerful beam, in which reading, sewing and other tasks requiring close attention and precise seeing can be performed in the best possible conditions.

During the daytime, people with defective sight should always make use of the best illumination available. Whenever possible, close work should be done near a window or out of doors. I myself have derived great benefit from reading for long periods at a stretch in full sunlight, either falling directly on the page, or, if the weather was too hot, reflected by means of an adjustable mirror, so that it was possible to sit in the shade, or indoors, and to enjoy the advantage of seven or eight thousand foot-candles upon the book. For some months, indeed, after giving up the wearing of spectacles, it was only in full sunlight, or under a spot lamp, that I could read comfortably for any length of time. But as vision improved, it became possible for me to make use of less intense illuminations. I still, however, prefer the spotlight to all others, and frequently work in full sunlight.

When reading in full sunlight, it is necessary to keep the eyes thoroughly relaxed by means of periodical brief sunnings and palmings. Many people will also find it easier to read if they make use of a slot cut in black paper, as described in an earlier chapter. When these precautions are taken, reading under ten thousand foot-candles can be very helpful to those whose vision is defective. Falling upon the centre of sight, the image of the intensely illuminated print stimulates a *macula* which has become sluggish and insensitive through habitual wrong use of the organs of seeing. At the same time, the clarity and distinctness of the sunlit letters exercise a most wholesome influence upon the mind, which loses its habitual strained anxiety about seeing and acquires instead an easy confidence in its ability to interpret the *sensa* brought to it by the eyes. Thanks to this confidence and to the stimulation of the sluggish *macula*, it becomes possible, after a time, to do one's seeing no less effectively under lower intensities of illumination. Ten thousand foot-candle reading is a preparation and an education for hundred foot-candle reading.

Owing sometimes to organic defects of the eyes, sometimes to ingrained habits of improper functioning, sometimes to generalized ill-health, certain persons are peculiarly sensitive to intense light. For these it would be unwise to plunge directly into ten thousand foot-candle reading. Following the techniques described in the chapter on sunning, they should gradually accustom themselves to tolerate greater and greater intensities of illumination, not only directly on the closed and open eyes, but also on the printed page before them. In this way, they will come by slow degrees to be able to enjoy the advantages of good lighting — advantages from which their organic or functional photophobia had previously cut them off, forcing them to strain for vision in a perpetual twilight.

In conclusion, it seems worth while to say a few words about the fluorescent lighting, now so extensively used in factories, shops and offices, on account of its cheapness. There is good evidence that this kind of lighting adversely affects the vision of a minority of those who have to do close work under it. One reason for this must be sought in the composition of the light itself, which does not come from an incandescent source, as does natural sunlight or the light from a

filament bulb. Nor is this all. Fluorescent lighting throws almost no shadows. Consequently the element of contrast, so immensely important to normal seeing, is conspicuously absent from rooms illuminated by fluorescent tubes. Shadows, moreover, help us in our estimation of distances, forms and textures. When shadows are absent, we are deprived of one of our most valuable guide-posts to reality, and the accurate interpretation of *sensa* becomes much harder. This is one of the reasons why the organs of vision tire so much more easily on a day of uniform high cloud than on one of bright sunshine. Fluorescent lighting produces an effect somewhat similar to that produced by the diffused glare reflected from high thin clouds. To eyes that have been evolved to adapt themselves to light proceeding from an incandescent source, and to minds that have learnt to make use of shadows as guides to correct interpretation, perception and judgment, fluorescent lighting cannot but seem strange and baffling. The wonder is that it is only a minority of people who react unfavourably to such lighting.

If you happen to belong to the unlucky ten or fifteen per cent, of the population which cannot work under fluorescent light without suffering from bloodshot eyes, swollen eyelids and lowered vision, the best thing you can do, of course, is to find a job which permits you to work out of doors, or by the light of incandescent filament lamps. The next best thing is to palm frequently, and get out of the fluorescence as often as possible for a few minutes of sunning. At night, as a substitute for sunning, take the light of a strong incandescent filament lamp upon the closed and open eyes. The movies constitute another excellent therapeutic measure for those who suffer in this way. Looked at in the proper way, they can be wonderfully restful and refreshing to eyes which react badly to the peculiar composition of fluorescent light and to minds which are baffled by the shadowless world of low contrasts, in which that light compels them to work.

APPENDIX I

AFTER I had completed the manuscript of this book, a correspondent sent me a copy of the following article, which appeared as an unsigned editorial annotation in the *British Medical Journal* of September 13th, 1941.

PERFECT SIGHT WITHOUT GLASSES

A letter in this week's *Journal* from Dr. J. Parness draws attention to a statement recently broadcast by Dr. Julian Huxley on the practice of correcting visual defects without the use of glasses. Before condemning such a practice it would be as well to examine the evidence in support of it. There are a variety of methods based on hypotheses of varying degrees of tenuity. The system expounded by W. H. Bates in his *Cure of Imperfect Sight by Treatment Without Glasses* (New York, 1920) has the advantage over competitive systems in that its principles are publicly stated. Bates holds that the refractive state is dynamic and is constantly changing. The changes in refraction are produced by the nerves and tissues of the extraocular muscles, the lens itself playing no part in accommodation. Defective vision is a psychic phenomenon, affection of the brain centres first disturbing the *macula* and then the whole retina. Treatment aims at inducing 'cerebral relaxation,' for when the mind is at rest vision is normal. In thirty years' work on refraction Bates found few people who could maintain 'perfect sight' for more than a few minutes at a time, and he often saw 'the refraction change half a dozen times or more in a second, the variation ranging all the way from twenty dioptres of myopia to normal.' As no ophthalmologist has the necessary skill and speed to observe half a dozen or more changes in refraction in the space of a second ('blitz retinoscopy,' as it might be called), no one is in a position to contradict this basic tenet of Bates. And ophthalmologists still cling to the theory, based upon physiological evidence, that accommodation is brought about by the changing curvature of the lens. Bates illustrates the influence of the mind on refraction by the effect of strain. Since strain implies mental unrest, changes in refraction occur in all conditions inducing such unrest. Thus 'a patient 25 years old had no error of refraction when he looked at a blank wall without trying to see *(i.e.* under

complete relaxation and total absence of strain); but if he said he was 26, or someone else said he was *26*, he became myopic (as shown by Bates's rapid retinoscopy). The same thing happened when he said or tried to imagine that he was 24. When he stated or remembered the truth his vision was normal, but when he stated or imagined an error he had an error of refraction.' There is also the case of the little girl who told a lie. The retinoscope revealed a change towards myopia the moment she replied 'No' to the question, 'Did you have an ice-cream?'; while she was giving truthful answers 'the retinoscope indicated no error of refraction.' This appears to be, so to say, a physical expression of the inward eye of the conscience.

A queer assortment of evidence is brought forward to prove that the refractive changes in the eye are produced by the extraocular muscles. There is, for example, the 'proof' that aphakic patients are able to read small type with distance glasses. That the daily experience of ophthalmologists is to the contrary is perhaps of some significance, though obviously not as significant as the few instances Bates records, for which, incidentally, perfectly good explanations are available, as anyone acquainted with the literature knows. There is, indeed, an extensive and controversial literature on the actual mechanism whereby the contour of the lens changes during accommodation; the facts themselves are not disputed — except by Bates, who produces experimental evidence that in the fish removal of the lens does not interfere with accommodation. The fish experiment is amply illustrated by photographs, but there is no reference to the fact that accommodation in the fish is different physiologically and anatomically from that of the mammal. Mammalian experiments, mainly on the rabbit and cat, are recorded, and here the rather startling point emerges that a nerve or muscle cut across and tied up again will carry an impulse on being tied, though physiologists would not expect any such result before days or weeks had elapsed. Mammalian anatomy is also illuminated in these experiments. Apparently the standard teaching that the cat is endowed with a superior oblique muscle is not correct. It should be added that this is only an incidental observation; but that pharmacologists err in believing that atropine acts only on

unstriped muscle is part of the general argument, for Bates found that this drug will paralyse the extrinsic muscles which produce accommodation. One experiment, illustrated in fig. 23, appears to show that the dead fish still has a living mind; its brain is pithed to induce relaxation.

The treatment based on these revolutionary observations aims at mental relaxation, and the pithed fish appears to be its prototype. The Bates system of treatment seems to have many devotees, and one incident may be worth noting. In 1931 the Republican Ministry of Public Health of Prussia warned against this method as a form of quackery, but in Hitlerite Germany a voluminous literature on the subject has spread the cult and there is apparently no lack of practitioners and patients.

It will be noticed that this article contains two main lines of argument.

First: Bates's method of visual education cannot be sound, because it is used by Germans.

Second: Bates's method of visual education cannot be sound, because certain experiments devised to confirm the hypothesis, by which Bates sought to explain the success of his method, were not conducted properly.

The first argument is exactly like that which was used, more than a century ago, to discredit the stethoscope. Readers of John Elliotson's papers will recall his account of this ludicrous episode in the history of English medicine. Owing to anti-French prejudice, it was twenty years or more before Laennec's invention came into general use among English physicians.

In precisely the same way, owing to prejudice against magnetizers and mesmerists, hypnotism was under the ban of official British medicine for an even longer period. For half a century after Braid had formulated his classical hypothesis and Esdaile had performed scores of major operations under hypnotic anaesthesia, the British Medical Association officially held that there was nothing in hypnotism but fraud and quackery.

Medical history has a dismal way of repeating itself in these matters, and it looks as though visual education were to suffer the same fate as hypnotism and

the stethoscope.

I may add that the argument from nationalism hardly seems justified in the present instance. The art of seeing was worked out by an American physician and is extensively taught at the present time in the United States and England. ‘Seeing-schools’ have also existed for many years in Germany. Some of these schools were doubtless bad and deserved the censure of the Republican Health Ministry; but others, as it would appear from an article contributed in 1934 by an army surgeon to the *Deutsche Medizitnische Wochenschrift*, must have been excellent. In this article, Dr. Drenkhahn records that, in many cases of refractive error among army recruits, he found that marksmanship was better when the men wore no corrective glasses, but underwent a course of visual training at a seeing-school. To those who notice any falling-off of vision, Dr. Drenkhahn gives the following advice: not to go immediately to an eye specialist, who will generally prescribe glasses, but to consult the family physician and, when he has taken steps to correct the general physical and psychological condition, to go to a seeing-school and learn the proper way to use the eyes and mind.

So much for the first line of argument. The second is equally irrelevant, being based, not on prejudice this time, but on mental confusion and bad logic. For, incredible as it may seem, the writer of the article entirely fails to distinguish between two totally different things: the primary evidence confirming the existence of certain phenomena, and the secondary evidence adduced to substantiate the hypothesis, in terms of which those phenomena are explained. The phenomena, which Bates sought to explain in terms of his unorthodox theory of accommodation, were those marked improvements in vision which regularly followed the practice of certain educational techniques. The evidence for the occurrence of such phenomena can be supplied by the thousands of persons who, like myself, have derived benefit from following the procedures in question, and by the scores of conscientious and experienced instructors who teach the method. If the writer really wanted to know about this evidence, he would get in touch with a few reliable teachers, ask permission to watch them at work and, if his own vision is defective, take a course of visual re-education.

Instead of that, he seeks to discredit the whole idea of visual re-education by denying the validity of the experiments used by Bates to support his explanatory hypothesis.

Needless to say, the idea of visual education emerges unscathed from this hopelessly misdirected attack. For it is obvious that, even if this secondary evidence were untrustworthy, even if the hypothesis supported by that evidence could be proved to be incorrect, this would make absolutely no difference to the facts which that hypothesis was originally intended to explain. In the history of human effort, effective arts have always preceded correct explanatory hypotheses. Thus, an art of metallurgy existed for several thousands of years before the formulation, in the present century, of satisfactory hypotheses to account for the phenomena of tempering and alloying. According to the view expressed in the article, the incorrectness of their hypotheses should have made it impossible for the old smiths and founders to possess an art of metal working. Again, if the writer's argument made sense, there could be no such thing as modern medicine. Our knowledge of the human mind-body is limited and patchy, and our theories about it are admittedly inadequate. Nevertheless, an effective art of medicine exists, in spite of the fact that many medical hypotheses will, in the future, certainly be proved false, while new hypotheses will be formulated, of which contemporary physicians cannot even dream. Bates's theory of accommodation may be as incorrect as were the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century explanations of the efficacy of lime-juice in cases of scurvy. Nevertheless scurvy was cured by lime-juice, and Bates's method of visual education actually works.

APPENDIX II

IN myopes especially, posture tends to be extremely bad. This may be directly due in some cases to the short sight, which encourages stooping and a hanging of the head. Conversely, the myopia may be due in part at least to the bad posture. F. M. Alexander records cases in which myopic children regained

normal vision after being taught the proper way of carrying the head and neck in relation to the trunk.

In adults, the correction of improper posture does not seem to be sufficient of itself to restore normal vision. Improvement in vision will be accelerated by those who learn to correct faulty habits of using the organism as a whole; but the simultaneous learning of the specific art of seeing is indispensable.

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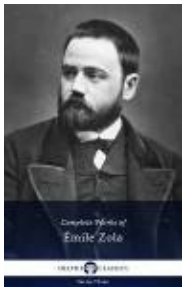

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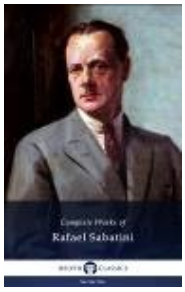
William Morris 

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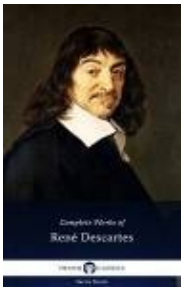

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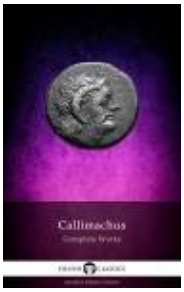

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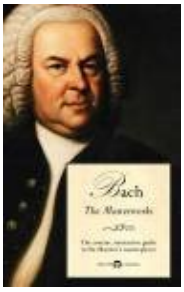
Wassily Kandinsky 

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Huxley is buried with his parents at Watts Cemetery Chapel in Compton, Surrey

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